Anger in the *Íslendingasögur*

George C. Manning

St Anne's College
Faculty of English
University of Oxford

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the presentation of anger in the *Íslendingasögur* and argues that the quality of a character's emotional expression is contingent on their sociocultural identity. It focuses on the nexus between anger and various modalities of masculinity. The first chapter outlines the social constructivist approach that the thesis adopts, as well as medieval Christianity's perspective on anger. Section I (comprising chapters two and three) argues that descriptions of involuntary psychosomatic indicia, facial expressions, and bodily movements connote, to varying degrees, angry experience. Section II (comprising chapters four and five) investigates the nexus between anger and masculinities. Chapter four argues that saga-society's hegemonic masculine ideal condemns rash anger and shows how angry experience is associated with the destabilisation of a saga-man's masculine status. Chapter five demonstrates that female characters can grow angry without being met with societal opprobrium. Moreover, it argues that their manipulation of anger allows them to destabilise hegemonic masculinity to some extent, and, in some cases, assume a masculine social position themselves. It suggests that this phenomenon accords with Jack Halberstam's concept of 'female masculinity'. By establishing that the gendered status of a character's emotional comportment is contingent on their sex, chapters four and five refute Carol Clover's 'one-sex, one-gender' model of saga-society gender. Section III (comprising chapters six, seven, eight, and nine) considers masculine characters who exhibit angry practices particular to their socio-cultural identities and thus adhere to uniquely tailored emotive scripts. Chapters six and seven argue that elderly men and *berserkir*, excluded from pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal, use anger to facilitate their agency and physical prowess, respectively. Chapter eight argues that sovereign figures, already assuming a self-evident hegemonic position, regularly wield anger as a means of establishing authority. Chapter nine argues that gods likewise wield anger, though often unsuccessfully, to maintain authority.

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1 Introduction

Popular culture tends to portray 'Vikings' – a term often used, erroneously, to refer to all medieval Scandinavians – as raging wildly and uncontrollably. This view accords with Norbert Elias' concept of the 'civilising process', expounded in the 1930s but rediscovered in the 1980s, which holds that emotions were not refined and, in some cases, were repressed until the sixteenth century.[1] Although some historians have since suggested that emotions underwent this process during earlier or later periods, such views unanimously imply that, at one time, emotions were not nuanced or regulated according to social rules.[2] Prior to being 'civilised', they argue, adults were 'childlike in their indulgence in temper'.[3] Barbara Rosenwein, however, argues that 'historical change takes us from one set of conventions and restraints to another rather than through a process of civilising', and that 'an entire repertory of conflicting norms persisted side-by-side throughout the Middle Ages'.[4] Supporting Rosenwein's postulation, in the medieval *Íslendingasögur* the expression of anger is presented as adhering to various and synchronous societal rules. Insomuch as the sagas are, though literary works, cultural artefacts, they refute the reductive view of medieval emotionality posited by Elias and others. This thesis, then, examines their presentation of anger, and argues that the quality of a character's emotional expression is contingent on their sociocultural identity. Following Rosenwein's suggestion that, with regard to its association with emotionality, 'gender is […] a category in need of exploration', and Gareth Lloyd

[1] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization*, 2 vols, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).
[2] See, e.g., C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals, 939-1210* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 13, and Peter Stearns and Carol Stearns, *Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America's History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 25.
[3] Stearns and Stearns, *Anger*, 25.
[4] Barbara H. Rosenwein, ed., *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 241, 242-3.

Evans' proposal that saga masculinities be considered alongside emotion studies, the thesis focuses on the nexus between anger and modalities of masculinity.[5]

1.1 Defining the Corpus

The post-medieval term *Íslendingasögur* describes an Old Norse-Icelandic corpus of texts that are similar in style, content, and chronotope: characterised by laconism and objectivity, these sagas – sometimes called 'Family Sagas' – depict a largely consistent social world dominated by the intra- and extra-familial relationships, conflicts, and feuds that, broadly speaking, take place in and around Iceland between 870 AD (the beginning of the settlement of Iceland) and a few decades after 1000 AD (Iceland's conversion to Christianity).[6] Whilst some of the *Íslendingasögur* are not set in Iceland, all of them concern Icelanders. The vast majority were committed to vellum in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, although they are likely indebted to a complex oral heritage.[7] The associated *þættir* ('tales'), whilst shorter texts that typically present an Icelander's interaction with a king abroad, are similar to the sagas in style, content, and chronotope, and were written down around the same time. Every saga and tale that features in the five-volume collection *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* will qualify for inclusion in this study.[8] Throughout the thesis, I will use the term *Íslendingasögur* to encompass both sagas and tales, and, unless otherwise stated, I will use the term 'sagas' to refer to the *Íslendingasögur* specifically.

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[5] Rosenwein, *Anger's Past*, 246. Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 147.

[6] Following others, Evans uses the Bakhtinian term 'chronotope' to capture a sense of time and space simultaneously. See Evans, *Men*, 4, footnote 4. Apart from the *lygisǫgur* ('lying sagas'), the saga categories are post-Victorian critical constructions. The contemporary audience, though likely sensitive to the geographic and thematic similarities of some sagas, would not necessarily have applied modern genre distinctions. See, for example, Massimiliano Bampi, 'Genre', *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 4-14.

[7] See Evans, *Men*, 4-5.

[8] *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, 5 vols, ed. Viðar Hreinsson (Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson Publishing, 1997). Hereafter *CSI*.

Whilst Gabriel Turville-Petre, for instance, argued that '[w]e should not speak of Family Sagas in any general way' because '[e]ach one is governed by the aims, methods and sources of its author', P. Mac Carron and R. Kenna have used network analysis to prove that a largely homogeneous 'saga-society' that perpetuates general trends is upheld throughout the texts.[9] They have also shown that 'the full society generated from these texts has similar properties to those of many real social networks', thereby confirming that the *Íslendingasögur* are naturalistic.[10] Just as Evans argues that the intertextual coherence of the society detailed in the *Íslendingasögur* 'makes [them] particularly amenable to sustained readings of gender identity and construction', such coherence also lends itself to sustained readings of emotional identity and construction.[11]

1.2 A Model of Emotion for Saga-Society

Different theories of emotion define 'emotion' in different ways, and such theories tend to adhere to two schools of thought. One, rooted in Darwinian understanding, holds that emotions are hard-wired, biological phenomena that are universal to all humans and that their expression is transculturally consistent.[12] The other argues that emotions are socially constructed, and that their expression is societally contingent and transculturally variable.[13]

[9] Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 19. P. Mac Carron and R. Kenna, 'Network Analysis of the Íslendinga sögur – the Sagas of Icelanders', *European Physical Journal B* 86.10 (2013), 1-9. See, e.g., William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
[10] Mac Carron and Kenna, 8.
[11] Evans, *Men*, 5.
[12] See Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray, 1872), and, e.g., Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, 'Constants Across Cultures in the Face and Emotion', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 17.2 (1971), 124-129.
[13] See, e.g., Rom Harré, ed., *The Social Construction of Emotion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988). See Sif Rikhardsdottir, *Emotion in Old Norse Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017), 7.

Monique Scheer's theory of 'emotional practice', developed to examine emotions in history using Pierre Bourdieu's 'theory of practice', elucidates this fusion of emotion and society.[14] Bourdieu holds that an agent's *habitus*, an internalised repository of *doxa* (social rules) that are unique to the *field* (social domain) which they inhabit, causes them to unknowingly execute embodied *practices* (socially infused postures, expressions, gestures, and actions).[15] Experiencing a practice reifies its social pre-eminence; *habitus* are 'structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures'.[16] As Loïc Wacquant explains, '*habitus* is a mediating notion that helps us revoke the common-sense duality between the individual and the social by capturing "the internalization of the externality and the externalization of internality"'.[17] Following Bourdieu's logic that all experience is socially conditioned given that the agents are themselves social products governed by their *habitus*, Scheer promotes a social constructivist approach to understanding emotions, arguing that each agent exhibits an 'emotional practice'.[18] Insomuch as it emphasises that an agent's emotional comportment is contingent on their social sphere, Scheer's model recalls that of William Reddy, who holds that there are dominant, ideal modes of emotional conduct in societies, which he terms 'emotional regimes', and Rosenwein, who has posited the concept of 'emotional communities', which are 'groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value – or devalue – the same or related emotions'.[19] These theories are also consonant with Stearns and Stearns' term 'emotionology', coined to describe 'the standards

[14] Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion', *History and Theory* 51 (2012), 193-220. See also Kate Davison et al., 'Emotions as a Kind of Practice: Six Case Studies Utilizing Monique Scheer's Practice-Based Approach to Emotions in History', *Cultural History* 7 (2018), 226-238.
[15] See, e.g., Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), and Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).
[16] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 53.
[17] Loïc Wacquant, 'A Concise Genealogy and Anatomy of Habitus', *The Sociological Review* 64 (2016), 64-72 (65).
[18] Scheer, 198.
[19] William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 2.

that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains toward basic emotions and their appropriate expression'.[20] This thesis adopts a primarily social constructivist approach to understanding emotional representation, recognising that, whilst all humans are universally susceptible to involuntary somatic indicia (e.g., facial reddening), other expressions are cultural creations, and that social environment can condition the neurological mechanisms responsible for emotional experience.[21] Emotions, therefore, are 'culturally constructed patterns of feeling and behaviour'.[22]

Whilst it is necessary to distinguish between real world emotions and the literary presentation of such emotions, given that, as Mac Carron and Kenna have demonstrated, saga-society closely resembles a real society, we may justifiably analyse emotions in the sagas through the lens of these social constructivist models. Saga-society (a *field*, or 'emotional community') infuses a character with rules governing emotional conduct (*doxa*, or 'emotional regimes') which manifests in their embodied comportment (*practice*). Consonant with such theories, Sif Rikhardsdottir, reworking the psychologist Silvan Tomkins' notion of 'emotion scripts' to shift emphasis from real emotions to those constructed as 'textual artefacts', postulates that Old Norse-Icelandic literary genres, and particular groups of characters portrayed in these genres, adhere to culturally contingent 'emotive scripts'.[23] Each script is the conventional code of emotional behaviour (similar to Bourdieu's *doxa*) to which a particular 'emotive literary identity' adheres.[24] Tacitly adhering to these theories and adopting Sif Rikhardsdottir's terms, this thesis will present and examine the 'emotive scripts'

[20] Stearns and Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', *The American Historical Review* 90.4 (1985), 813-836 (813).
[21] See, e.g., A. R. Luria, *Human Brain and Psychological Processes*, trans. Basil Haigh (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), and Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (London: Papermac, 1996). See Sif Rikhardsdottir, 8.
[22] Paul Hyams, *Rancour and Reconciliation in Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 36. Quoted in Sif Rikhardsdottir, 9.
[23] Silvan Tomkins, 'Script Theory: Differential Magnification of Affects', in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation 1978*, vol. 26, ed. Herbert E. Howe and Richard A. Dienstbier (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 201-236. Sif Rikhardsdottir, 27-32.
[24] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 25.

that govern anger for six 'emotive literary identities': men, women, old men, *berserkir*, sovereign figures, and gods.

1.3 Defining Anger

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) defines anger as '[a] strong feeling of displeasure, dissatisfaction, or annoyance, generally combined with antagonism or hostility towards a particular cause or object; the state of experiencing such feelings; wrath, rage, fury.'[25] This implies that, like all emotions, anger is a broad term that encompasses graduations defined by intensity and quality, forming a spectrum perhaps bookended by, put simply, minor vexation and intemperate fury. Moreover, as Phoebe Ellsworth describes, 'emotions, like consciousness, are a continuous stream rather than a collection of separate states'.[26] Anger might be one undercurrent in an emotional stream that flows with sorrow, for instance. Indeed, that the Old Norse-Icelandic term *angr* ('grief, sorrow') is the etymon of the modern English 'anger' indicates just how closely these feelings are intertwined; anger is one of five stages of grief in the Kübler-Ross model, and psychological studies have verified this anticipated nexus.[27] Finally, temperament – an agent's nature, whether considered to be acquired via genes or social environment or both – affects emotional experience and expression. An irascible person will experience and express anger more quickly, more frequently, and, perhaps, with greater intensity. Thus, the precise definition of anger is also contingent on the unique make-up of the agent experiencing it.

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[25] *OED*, s.v. 'anger, n.'. Full references for all dictionaries are given in the bibliography.
[26] Phoebe Ellsworth, 'William James and Emotion: Is a Century of Fame Worth a Century of Misunderstanding?', *Psychological Review* 101 (1994), 222-229 (226). Quoted in Sif Rikhardsdottir, 77.
[27] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*angr*'. See Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Scribner, 2014 [1969]). For criticism, see Charles A. Corr, 'The "Five Stages" in Coping with Dying and Bereavement: Strengths, Weaknesses and Some Alternatives, *Mortality* 24.4 (2019), 405-417. See, e.g., 'Anger and Guilt', in Colin Murray Parkes and Holly G. Prigerson, *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life*, 4th edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 172-187.

Rosenwein emphasises that shifting attitudes towards anger over time, as discussed above and below, indicate that 'anger is no one thing' and that we should, instead, speak of angers.[28] For this same reason, Stearns and Stearns 'refuse to define' anger, but are willing to concede that 'it is an emotion, biologically related to a "fight" response and usually aroused in a situation judged as antagonistic.'[29] As Catherine Peyroux remarks, Stearns and Stearns approach is 'strategically minimalist'.[30] Given saga-society's preoccupation with vengeance, the Aristotelian definition of anger as the 'desire, accompanied by [mental and physical] distress, for apparent retaliation because of an apparent slight that was directed, without justification, against oneself or those near to one' is also particularly appropriate.[31] Evidently, anger's many nuances cannot be captured in a single definition; following Stearns and Stearns' strategy, I intend the insights presented throughout the thesis to contribute to our apprehension of its meaning.

Unless exhibiting anger, violence alone will not qualify for inclusion in this investigation. Following the *OED* definition of anger, I use the term anger interchangeably with wrath, rage, and fury.

1.4 Anger in the Sagas

The *Íslendingasögur* are propelled by conflicts that beget feuds, and vice versa. As Theodore Andersson argues,

[28] Rosenwein, *Anger: The Conflicted History of an Emotion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 197.
[29] Stearns and Stearns, *Anger*, 15.
[30] Catherine Peyroux, 'Gertrude's *furor*: Reading Anger in an Early Medieval Saint's *Life*', in *Anger's Past*, 36-55 (42, footnote 15).
[31] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. George A. Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 116.

> '[i]t is a very nearly universal rule […] that a saga is built around a conflict. […] It is the conflict that gives the saga its special character, its narrative unity, and its dramatic tension. It is the conflict that polarizes whatever else is in the saga, it is the sense of the saga and its organizing concept. This is an instance where a reduction to a single principle is not a case of oversimplification. […] [T]he backbone of the saga, its formal principle, is the conflict.'[32]

If conflict is the 'backbone' of saga narrative, then anger, the emotion of antagonism, is its lifeblood. To understand conflict, and thus the corpus, most fully, therefore, we must elucidate saga-society's conceptualisation of anger. The topic has already received some critical attention. For instance, William Ian Miller discusses anger alongside shame, Auður Magnúsdóttir explores the nexus between anger, social class, and gender in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Edel Porter and Teodoro Manrique Antón demonstrate that several somatic indicia in Old Norse-Icelandic literature connote anger, Sif Rikhardsdottir analyses anger at various junctures in her *Emotions in Old Norse Literature*, and Sarah Baccianti examines the bodily manifestation of anger in several sagas.[33] Yet, this thesis is the first study to consider how anger operates *throughout* the *Íslendingasögur*.

There is a dearth of emotion words used in the *Íslendingasögur*, but, as Sif Rikhardsdottir notes, Old Norse emotion words are not scarce, suggesting that the saga-

[32] Theodore M. Andersson, *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), 11.
[33] William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, and *Humiliation: And Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Auður Magnúsdóttir, 'Ill er Ofbráð Reiði: Tilfinningar, Saga og Félagsleg Þýðing Reiðinnar í *Njáls sögu*', in *Heimtur; Ritgerðir til Heiðurs Gunnari Karlssyni Sjötugum*, ed. Guðmundur Jónsson, Helgi Skúli Kjartansson and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2009), 50-63; Edel Porter and Teodoro Manrique Antón, 'Flushing in Anger, Blushing in Shame: Somatic Markers in Old Norse Emotional Expressions', *Cognitive Linguistic Studies* 2 (2015), 24-49; Sif Rikhardsdottir, e.g., 66-8; Sarah Baccianti, 'Swelling in Anger: Somatic Descriptors in Old English and Old Norse Literature', in *Emotion and Medieval Textual Media*, ed. Mary Flannery (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 51-73.

authors were deliberately sparing.[34] Whilst, as I shall demonstrate, anger is frequently communicated to the audience and characters through unqualified indicia rather than described, several terms communicate angry experience. Most typically, saga-authors use the terms *reiði* ('anger'), *reiðr* ('angry'), *reiðask* ('to be angry'), *reiðuliga* ('angrily'), and *reiðuligr* ('angry-looking'). Elsewhere, the adjectives *óðr* ('furious'), *bráðr* ('hot-tempered'), and *styggr* ('hasty-tempered' or 'irritable') convey an angry state or temperament, while several adjectival compounds featuring *skap* ('temper'), such as *skapbráðr* ('hot-headed'), *skapfátt* (the state of having lost one's temper), *skapvandr* ('difficult of temper'), and *skaphǫrð* ('harsh-tempered'), describe a similar state. Finally, as Baccianti notes, *móðr* 'can mean mind, agitation or emotion, [and] anger/wrath' in prose.[35] That an Old Norse-Icelandic term for 'emotion' can also connote anger stresses the pervasiveness of anger throughout its society and literature. Yet, as Peyroux notes, 'both from place to place and from era to era, words signifying anger reside in different semantic fields, and expressions of anger take place and are received in ways that differ'; it is, therefore, difficult to say that a term such as *reiði* means precisely what we would understand 'anger' to signify in modern-day English.[36] As a by-product of its analyses, this thesis will elucidate what such terms mean in the *Íslendingasögur* by examining how they are used in various scenarios. Characters are fictional artifices and do not have consciousness or experience emotions; when I say that a character experiences emotion, therefore, I mean that the saga-author is depicting that character as experiencing emotion.

1.5 Anger and Christianity

[34] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 63.
[35] Baccianti, 54.
[36] Peyroux, 42.

Following Iceland's conversion to Christianity in 1000 AD, the faith gradually began to permeate many aspects of existence in the country. Its literature is no exception. Whilst some sagas are set pre-Conversion and nearly all detail heathen practice in some form, they were most likely written down by male clerics, and, as such, are all narrated through a Christian lens and are potentially influenced by the attitudes that were espoused within their Christian compositional milieu.[37] It is thus near impossible to distinguish between anachronistic Christian presentations of pre-Christian conceptualisations of anger, and Christian presentations of Christian conceptualisations of anger. For this reason, I discuss the relationship between anger and Christianity at relevant points throughout the thesis, rather than exploring it in isolation. It is instructive, however, to outline prevailing medieval Christian perspectives on anger.

Attitudes towards anger held by the medieval church were complex and diverse. The Bible's ambivalence towards anger is indicated by its ostensibly contradictory presentations: the Old Testament God exhibits righteous, fear-inducing anger (e.g., Psalms 2:5), whilst, in the Hebrew Scriptures, human anger is condemned (e.g., Proverbs 30:33), and, in the New Testament, Jesus rarely grows angry, and even censures the emotion (e.g., Matthew 5:22).[38] Thus, the Stoic, Senecan view popular in the pre-Christian Roman Empire – that is, that anger is never appropriate, not even in battle, and one should always strive to abandon it – was largely eclipsed when Christianity was adopted in the fourth century, as Christian thinkers tried to accommodate this contradiction.[39]

Nonetheless, several Christian scholars execrated anger. The fourth-century hermit Evagrius of Pontus argued that anger resulted from a self-perception of injury, and that this

[37] Heather O'Donoghue, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 23.
[38] Rosenwein, *Anger's Past*, 234, and *Anger*, 36-7, 97.
[39] Simon Kemp and K. T. Strongman, 'Anger Theory and Management: A Historical Analysis', *The American Journal of Psychology* 108.3 (1995), 397-417 (398). Rosenwein, *Anger*, 24-38.

misguided self-perception was a weapon wielded by demons.[40] Echoing this sentiment, an illustrated version of *Psychomachia* – a poem written by Prudentius, a contemporary of Evagrius – in a medieval manuscript depicts anger as a suicidal female, Ira (Latin for 'anger'), and shows her failing to overcome Patience and committing suicide.[41] Other Christian scholars, however, differentiated between God's anger and human anger. In the third century, Tertullian argued that divine anger, a response to iniquity, was not the same as human anger.[42] The fourth-century Christian author Lactantius likewise suggested that anger was just when felt in reaction to sin.[43] In this regard, human anger may sometimes mirror divine anger. Saint Augustine of Hippo, a century later, stressed that all emotions are inextricably connected to will, and that, therefore, we should focus on 'the will's choice of object' when deciding whether particular emotions are morally appropriate or not.[44] This emphasis echoes the views of Nemesius of Emesa, a fourth-century Christian philosopher, who argued that, because humans have free will, agents must take responsibility for succumbing to anger.[45] Whilst Augustine attributed anger to original sin, he emphasised that, when we direct our anger at sin as Christian doctrine instructs us, anger is just.[46] Similarly, in the sixth century, Saint Gregory the Great, whilst declaring anger one of seven deadly sins and vehemently condemning the emotion in his *Moralia in Iob*, conceded that zealous anger was virtuous when battling against sin.[47] Yet, also writing in the sixth century, Saint Martin of Braga, adhering to Senecan tradition, argued in his treatise *De Ira* that '[o]ne need not be angry to correct wrongdoers. Since anger is a sin of the soul, one must not correct a sinner

[40] Rosenwein, *Anger*, 100.
[41] Lester K. Little, 'Anger in Monastic Curses', in *Anger's Past*, 9-35 (14-19). Rosenwein, *Anger*, 101.
[42] Rosenwein, *Anger*, 103.
[43] Rosenwein, *Anger*, 104.
[44] Peter King, 'Emotions in Medieval Thought', in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion*, ed. Peter Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 167-188 (170).
[45] Kemp and Strongman, 401.
[46] King, 170, 169.
[47] Rosenwein, *Anger*, 102, 106. *S. Gregorii Magni Moralia in Iob* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979).

with a sin'.[48] In the late eighth century, however, Alcuin of York recognised – like Tertullian, Lactantius, Augustine, and Gregory – that anger directed towards sin was just in his moral treatise *De virtutibus et vitiis*.[49]

More appraisals of anger were presented in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, comparing anger to a dragon, championed meekness, whilst William of Saint-Thierry distinguished between undesirable and rational anger.[50] The Rule of St Benedict, echoing John Cassian, exhorted monks to relinquish all anger, and penitentials likewise urged monks to curb their anger because it is an impediment to prayer; evidencing their awareness of, and adherence to, these sentiments, monastic curses were devoid of anger.[51] Saint Anselm of Canterbury and the Scholastic philosopher Peter Abelard revisited Augustine's emphasis that emotions are forms of volition; Abelard, as Peter King summarises, argues that 'moral assessment rides strictly on the agent's intentions, not on the emotions as such, or even the actions the agent actually performs.'[52] Thus, anger is a motivational force that can fuel both moral and non-moral actions. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Christian scholars began to revive explicitly the Aristotelian approach to anger – that is, that anger is legitimate when experienced at the right time and expressed in the right way (e.g., against injustices), and a vice when experienced at the wrong time and expressed inappropriately – that was held prior to the ideas of emotionality posited by the Stoics.[53] Saint Thomas Aquinas' treatise on the emotions built on Aristotelian thought and posited that all emotions, including anger, function in relation to love: we grow angry when something we love cannot be obtained.[54] Aquinas further explored the extent to which agents

[48] Quoted in Little. See also Rosenwein, *Anger*, 37.
[49] Rosenwein, *Anger*, 107.
[50] Kemp and Strongman, 399
[51] Little, 13, 25. On Cassian, see Rosenwein, *Anger*, 101.
[52] King, 173.
[53] Rosenwein, *Anger*, 82, 87, 96; Kemp and Strongman, 398.
[54] Rosenwein, *Anger*, 90.

can control their emotional responses, and, whilst suggesting that emotions are primarily appetitive rather than cognitive (thereby indicating that they are phenomena that affect the agent, rather than phenomena that are affected by the agent), argued that 'emotions are cognitively penetrable, and so may be influenced by (habits of) thought and belief.'[55] According to Rosenwein, it is this Thomistic view of anger that was 'institutionalized within the Catholic Church'.[56] Finally, in the early fourteenth century, Duns Scotus and William of Ockham rejected the Thomistic view that emotions can only be indirectly controlled, and instead tacitly reprise Anselm and Abelard's view that all emotions, including anger, are 'actions of will'.[57]

It is highly likely that clerics in medieval Scandinavia were aware of some, if not most, of these Christian attitudes towards anger; Gregory's *Moralia in Job*, for instance, was known in medieval Iceland.[58] Sif Rikhardsdottir, however, notes that 'one cannot presume that the relevant audience groups were always cognisant of them, nor can one assume that authors would have expected them to be aware of them', leading her to conclude that the 'literary depiction of emotional behaviour would most probably have drawn on common observed patterns of emotional comportment' instead.[59] Nonetheless, as I shall demonstrate, several depictions of anger in the corpus appear to be indebted to these Christian perspectives.

1.6 Overview of Sections

[55] King, 179-80.
[56] Rosenwein, *Anger*, 91.
[57] King, 180.
[58] Kirsten Wolf, 'Gregory's Influence on Old Norse-Icelandic Religious Literature', in *Rome and the North: The Early Reception of Gregory the Great in Germanic Europe*, ed. Rolph H. Bremmer Jr., Kees Dekker, and David F. Johnson (Paris: Peeters, 2001), 255-285 (269).
[59] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 6.

Section I (comprising chapters two and three) demonstrates how angry experience might be detected. Using Porter and Antón's study as a springboard and source of verification, the section demonstrates how descriptions of involuntary psychosomatic indicia, humoral manifestations, facial expressions, and bodily movements connote, to varying degrees, angry experience.[60] Such indicators, by standing in for descriptions of emotion, may figure as a literary shorthand that could be readily decoded by the medieval audience.

Section II (comprising chapters four and five) investigates, firstly, the nexus between anger and hegemonic masculinity and, secondly, the nexus between anger and 'female masculinity'. Anchoring its analysis in the presentation of anger and masculinity in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, chapter four argues that saga-society's hegemonic masculine ideal condemns rash anger and that anger can destabilise a saga-man's masculine status. Conversely, chapter five demonstrates that female characters can grow angry without being met with societal opprobrium. Moreover, it argues that their manipulation of anger allows them to destabilise hegemonic masculinity to some extent, and, in some cases, assume a masculine social position themselves, thereby facilitating their agency. It suggests that this phenomenon accords with Jack Halberstam's concept of 'female masculinity'.[61] By establishing that male saga characters who employ the same emotional *modus operandi* as angry saga-women are feminised and that anger, when manipulated by female-sexed characters, bestows masculinising power, chapters four and five show that the gendered status of a character's emotional comportment is contingent on their body's sex. By emphasising this significance, they refute Carol Clover's 'one-sex, one-gender' model of saga-society gender.[62]

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[60] Porter and Antón.
[61] Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (London: Duke University Press, 1998), 1. See Evans, 'Female Masculinity and the Sagas of Icelanders', in *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature*, ed. Evans and Jessica Hancock (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020), 59-75.
[62] Carol Clover, 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe', *Representations* 44 (1993), 1-28.

Section III (comprising chapters six, seven, eight, and nine) considers masculine characters who exhibit angry practices particular to their socio-cultural identities and thus adhere to uniquely tailored emotive scripts. Chapter six demonstrates how elderly men, frequently cast as growing angry without criticism, are held accountable to a 'senescent masculine ideal' rather than the hegemonic masculine ideal. Chapter seven analyses the *berserksgangr* ('berserk fury') and suggests that *berserkir*, excluded from pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal on account of their antisocial behaviour and their liminal societal position, harness anger to fuel physical prowess. Chapter eight argues that sovereign figures, already assuming a self-evident hegemonic position, regularly wield anger as a means of establishing authority. Chapter nine analyses the presentation of the anger of the gods in the sagas and argues that it at once recalls the portrayal of gods' anger in the mythic tradition and is redolent of depictions of the Devil or devils in Old Norse-Icelandic scriptural texts. It demonstrates that, in pre-Christian narratives, their anger is wielded to maintain authority, whilst, in post-Conversion narratives, it is futile against Christianity.

SECTION I: 'FERRETING OUT' ANGER

Introduction

Miller uses the phrase 'ferret out' in *Why is Your Axe Bloody?* to describe his methodological technique of discerning the undisclosed 'motives that drive the action' in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, a technique which, as Heather O'Donoghue notes, 'flies in the face of time-honoured literary convention'.[1] Disciples of such convention may cite the 'How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?' fallacy when appraising Miller's approach. This is the question posed by L. C. Knights in mockery of those critics of Shakespearean drama whose analyses focus myopically on characterisation and, as such, often take part in, as E. C. Pettet puts it, 'the critical game of constructing a world outside the given material of the play'.[2] Knights, instead, holds that an examination of language alone is sufficient to yield 'a total complex emotional response'.[3] As Miller himself counters, however, his approach is defensible on account of 'deep saga realism': 'ferreting out' the 'psychological' motives of a saga character is justifiable because the corpus' narrative mode is, as already noted, naturalistic.[4] Moreover, the mode is also economical, laconic, and often rife with ambiguities, meaning that, in many cases, significance – emotional significance in particular – is only revealed when it is 'ferreted out' through deduction, inference, and conjecture. Whilst, strictly speaking, this process is 'constructing a world outside the given material' (to use Pettet's phrase), it is

[1] William Ian Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 14. Heather O'Donoghue, Foreword to Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody?*, vii-ix (vii).
[2] See L. C. Knights, 'How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth? An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism', *Explorations* (1964), 15-54 (15), and E. C. Pettet, *Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition* (London: Staples Press, 1949), 192.
[3] Knights, 20.
[4] Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody?*, 14.

nonetheless evidence based. Contrary to Knights' claim, this character-centric theorising facilitates the apprehension of 'a total emotional response'.

Miller suggests a fourfold approach to distilling saga emotions: the critic must examine (1) 'words', (2) 'somatic responses', (3) 'dialogue and the action itself', and (4) 'the whole system of beliefs'.[5] Miller's fourth component is closely intertwined with each other component; as Bourdieu and Scheer indicate, a sustained societal milieu perpetuates particular rules of emotional construction. Anger is detectable from words (e.g., authorial statements) and dialogue and action (e.g., abuse and violence). In the absence of explicit lexical and narrative signposts, however, emotions must be discerned by decoding characters' appearances – Miller's 'somatic responses' – with an awareness of their societal regulation: emotionality must be 'ferreted out'.

Saga-authors tend to write with a sustained illusion of evidenced-based objectivity to enhance the credibility of their accounts. Yet, saga-authors rarely elaborate upon the significance of somatic indicia. This, in addition to the commonplaceness of such markers, indicates that they were discernible by a medieval audience which was attuned to saga conventions, as well as real-life emotionality. As Kirsten Wolf writes, 'there were signalling codes so generally understood that detailed descriptions of facial expressions were on occasion considered unnecessary'.[6] The implication is that these codes were 'generally understood' by medieval Icelanders. Miller's use of the expression 'ferret out', however, emphasises the assiduousness required of the modern-day critic or audience, given that, in many instances, indicia are ambiguous and difficult to decode. For instance, a single indicium might connote various emotions, sometimes simultaneously. Whilst Carolyne Larrington writes that through somatic indicia we can 'infer the presence of an emotion on the basis of

[5] Miller, 'Emotions and the Sagas', in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. Gísli Pálsson (Middlesex: Hisarlik Press, 1992), 89-109 (93).
[6] Wolf, 'Somatic Semiotics: Emotion and the Human Face in the Sagas and "Þættir" of Icelanders', *Traditio* 69 (2014), 125-145 (129).

our own experience', we cannot rely on our own post-medieval emotional experience for complete comprehension; reading the sagas anachronistically may yield misinterpretations.[7] We must also distinguish between the diegetic and extradiegetic effects of these expressions: characters and the audience may interpret them in different ways, and the medieval audience and modern-day readers may interpret them in yet more different ways. It is possible that such multivalence was sometimes intended.

We must, therefore, verify our experienced-based inklings of the meaning of somatic responses by scrutinising any textual evidence of emotionality. Amongst other things, particular attention must be paid to characters' dispositions (whether the emotion that we suspect aligns with a description of a character's temperament), narrative context (whether the emotion that we suspect aligns with what we would typically expect to be evoked by the narrative action that precedes and succeeds the indicium), and authorial tendencies of characterisation (whether the author has cast other characters as demonstrating a particular indicium to connote a particular emotion elsewhere in the saga). Somatic indicia are particularly useful for 'ferreting out' emotionality at moments where characters intend to mask their true feelings, often by denying their emotional experience; as Christopher Crocker notes, frequently emotional scenes 'rely upon a dissonance between what is "said" and what is "seen"'.[8] We must, however, be aware that, whilst some emotional markers are involuntary, others can be feigned, and must be carefully handled.

In the chapters that follow, I shall make frequent reference to Porter and Antón's lexical study of somatic indicia, which employs Conceptual Metaphor Theory – first introduced by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson and further developed by Zoltán Kövecses

[7] Carolyne Larrington, 'The Psychology of Emotion and Study of the Medieval Period', *Early Medieval Europe* 10 (2001), 251-256 (254).
[8] Christopher Crocker, 'Emotion', in *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (London: Routledge, 2017), 240-252 (242).

– to decode instances where metaphors are used to connote emotions.[9] Adhering to Kövecses' notion that metaphorical conceptualisations are influenced by the 'pressure of coherence' (embodiment, context, and stylistic preferences, and the idea that such context is, in turn, affected by socio-cultural influences), Porter and Antón argue that linguistic metaphors are 'primarily determined by universal cultural experience, but also modified by the cultural contexts and the style preferences of the users'.[10] They explain how they first 'analyzed those [examples] that unequivocally refer to the somatic accompaniments of basic emotions' according to 'semantic and historical-linguistic criteria', but do not give details of what constitutes an unequivocal reference or such criteria.[11] The following analyses, therefore, flesh out Porter and Antón's findings and aim to prove that there is an unequivocal link between particular expressions and anger in the *Íslendingasögur*. Where an unequivocal nexus cannot be established, the two chapters will emphasise the difficulties inherent in trying to deduce an emotional diagnosis by presenting possible interpretations.

[9] Porter and Antón, 27. See, e.g., George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), and Zoltán Kövecses *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[10] Porter and Antón, 28. Kövecses.
[11] Porter and Antón, 29.

2 'Ferreting Out' Anger from Involuntary Psychosomatic Indicia

2.1 Colours and Physiology

This chapter shall first identify and elucidate instances where an unequivocal link is established between anger and a character turning red, pale, or black by examining those rare occurrences where the saga-author treats the audience to an explanation. From such cases, it will demonstrate how we can deduce that some unexplained instances of reddening, paling, or blackening may also be associated with, or symptomatic of, angry experience. I shall also show how the association between anger and reddening and blackening may be rooted in the psychophysiological humoral theory of emotions.

An unequivocal nexus between reddening, paling, blackening, and anger established in *Fóstbræðra saga* (in the version found in *Möðruvallabók*) is an instructive starting point. The saga-author states:

> *[…] er Þorgeirr spurði víg fǫður síns, þá brá honum ekki við þá tíðenda sǫgn. Eigi roðnaði hann, því at eigi rann honum reiði í hǫrund; eigi bliknaði hann, því at honum lagði eigi heipt í brjóst; eigi blánaði hann, því at honum rann eigi í bein reiði* ('when Þorgeirr learned of his father's slaying, he did not react to the news. He did not turn red, because his anger did not run to his skin. He did not grow pale, because his rage did not pierce his breast. He did not turn blue-black, because his anger did not run in his bones').[1]

[1] *Fóstbræðra saga*, 127-8. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated. Where appropriate, I have amended tenses in my translations for consistency. Full references for all primary sources are given in the bibliography.

The saga-author, by describing how Þorgeirr did not grow angry, unambiguously indicates that reddening, paling, and turning black are not only associated with anger in the saga, but indicates that these somatic indicia are caused by, and therefore symptomatic of, anger by using the conjunction *því at* ('because'). This explanation is reinforced by our expectation that the circumstances would be anger-inducing. This description echoes Flosi's appearance in *Brennu-Njáls saga* after Hildigunnr goads and emasculates him: *Flosa brá svá við, at hann var í andliti stundum rauðr sem blóð, en stundum fǫlr sem gras, en stundum blár sem hel* ('Flosi was so moved, that his face was, in turn, as red as blood, and as pale as grass, and as blue-black as Hel').[2] Although Flosi's feelings are not disclosed, with *Fóstbræðra saga*'s description yoking reddening, paling, and blackening with anger in mind, we may infer that Flosi is, as Miller suggests, 'upset and enraged'.[3]

2.1.1 Reddening and Bloodiness

Aligning with this attestation from *Fóstbræðra saga*, Porter and Antón, tracking the verb *roðna* ('to go red, blush'), the nouns *roði* and *roðmi* ('redness') and *kinnroði* ('blushing', lit. 'cheek-redness'), and the adjectives *dreyrrauðr* ('blood-red') and *rauðr* ('red'), suggest that reddening is used a total of ninety times to indicate various emotions (anger, shame, love, and fear).[4] Their survey found that *roði*, *roðmi*, and *kinnroði* are solely used to connote shame.[5] *Roðna*, *dreyrrauðr*, and *rauðr*, however, together indicate anger forty-seven times: *roðna* – the verb that features in this passage of *Fóstbræðra saga* – is used to denote anger twenty times (and also connotes shame eleven times, love twice, and fear once), while *dreyrrauðr*

[2] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 292.
[3] Miller, 'Choosing the Avenger: Some Aspects of the Bloodfeud in Medieval Iceland and England', *Law and History Review* 1 (1983), 159-204 (184).
[4] Porter and Antón, 31.
[5] Porter and Antón, 31.

and *rauðr* solely connote anger thirteen and fourteen times respectively.[6] Porter and Antón offer a further example of a saga-author depicting facial reddening as symptomatic of anger: in *Egils saga*, the saga-author writes that *[k]onungr settisk í hásæti; en er alskipat var it efra ok it fremra, þá sásk konungr um ok roðnaði ok maelti ekki, ok þottusk menn finna, at hann var reiðr* ('the king sat in the high seat; but when everyone was in place, higher and lower, then the king looked around, turned red, and said nothing, and people were sure that he was angry').[7] The connection between reddening and anger is also made plain in *Laxdœla saga*: when Guðrún reneges on her promise to marry Þorgils, he *roðnaði mjǫk* ('reddened greatly') and *var inn reiðasti* ('was very angry').[8] Elsewhere, in *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, when Þorbjǫrn denies Hávarðr proper compensation for slaying his son, Óláfr, and instead insults him by giving him a decrepit horse, Hávarðr *roðnaði ok mátti engu svara. Fór hann þegar í brott ok var stórliga reiðr* ('turned red and could not say anything. Immediately he went away and was extremely angry').[9] The link between anger and facial reddening also accords with modern-day physiological understanding, as well as real-life experience. Several modern-day psychophysiological studies have demonstrated that people flush when they are angry. Experiencing anger can cause vasodilation, an involuntary physiological response whereby blood vessels expand to enhance blood flow to muscles in preparation for bodily action; as facial blood vessels expand and blood flow is increased, the face turns puce.[10]

With the unequivocal evidence and modern-day physiological understanding in mind, we can justifiably conjecture that some of the many instances of unexplained facial reddening in the sagas also connote anger. The unambiguous linking of Hávarðr's reddening and anger,

[6] Porter and Antón, 31.
[7] Porter and Antón, 32. See *Egils saga*, 29.
[8] *Laxdœla saga*, 195.
[9] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 309.
[10] See, for example: Darwin, 74, and P. D. Drummond and S. H. Quah, 'The Effect of Expressing Anger on Cardiovascular Reactivity and Facial Blood Flow in Chinese and Caucasians', *Psychophysiology* 38 (2001), 190-196.

for instance, prompts us to reinterpret Óláfr's flushing earlier in this saga: when Hávarðr provocatively reifies a rumour that Óláfr wants to steal, or claim a share in, Þorbjörn's sheep by asking whether a leg of mutton is from one of their sheep or Þorbjörn's, Óláfr *roðnaði* ('turned red') and crushed the leg on the table with such force that it snapped.[11] If the scene's context and his violent reaction does not already make his anger clear (as well as the recurrent saga-trope that when a character is goaded they tend to react angrily), then his flushing evidences his raging.

Elsewhere, in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, facial reddening figures when the saga-author describes how Skarpheðinn and his brothers react when Bergþóra, their mother, tells them of the insults directed at them and their father, Njáll, that Sigmundr had versified at Hallgerðr's request.[12] The insults (discussed in **4.2.1**) are so-called *níð*-insults that invoke the '*ergi*-complex'.[13] Evans uses the term '*ergi*-complex' to encompass the range of qualities that the term *ergi* connotes: at least, unmanliness, cowardliness, and effeminacy, and, at most, the process of a man assuming 'the receptive role in homosexual anal sex'.[14] A man that bears qualities of *ergi* is described using the defamatory adjective *argr/ragr*.[15] *Níð*-insults that invoke this complex, therefore, 'describe the complete polar opposite of manliness: the so-called *níðingr*'.[16] As Evans explains, '[t]he word *níðingr* suggests one who embodies the complex of negative attributes – sexual, social, and personal – that *níð* insults suggest'.[17] Certain acts can also be designated a *níðingsverk* ('the work of a *níðingr*'). According to Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, defamations invoking the '*ergi*-complex' required the humiliated victim to 'challenge his adversary to battle, or avenge himself by blood-revenge';

[11] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 297-8.
[12] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114.
[13] Evans, *Men*, 24.
[14] Evans, *Men*, 18, 19, see also 24.
[15] Evans, *Men*, 18.
[16] Evans, *Men*, 24.
[17] Evans, *Men*, 24, footnote 72.

to refrain from retaliating is to accept and condone such accusations.[18] The scene plays out thus:

> *'[e]kki hǫfu vér kvenna skap,' segir Skarpheðinn, 'at vér reiðimsk við ǫllu.' 'Reiddisk Gunnarr þó fyrir yðra hǫnd,' segir hon, 'ok þykkir hann skapgóðr; ok ef þér rekið eigi þessa réttar, þá munuð þér engrar skammar reka.' 'Gaman þykkir kerlingunni at, móður várri,' segir Skarpheðinn ok glotti við, en þó spratt honum sveiti í enni, ok kómu rauðir flekkar í kinnr honum, en því var ekki vant. Grímr var hljóðr ok beit á vǫrrini. Helga brá ekki við* ('we do not have the disposition of women,' said Skarpheðinn, 'that we become angry over everything.' 'But Gunnarr became angry on your behalf,' she said, 'and he is said to be gentle; and if you do not make this right, then you shall never avenge any shame.' 'The old lady, our mother, enjoys this,' said Skarpheðinn and grinned, but sweat formed on his brow, and red flecks on his cheeks, and this was unusual for him. Grímr was silent and bit his lip. Helgi showed no change').[19]

Jenny Jochens comments that Skarpheðinn's 'turbulent emotions are clear from his facial reaction', but does not indicate which emotions he is experiencing.[20] Given that Porter and Antón note that *kinnroði* (lit. 'cheek-redness') only connotes shame, we may understand Skarpheðinn's reddening cheeks to connote solely his shame (a likely response to such insults).[21] Yet, it is highly likely that his facial reddening also betrays, and is therefore intended to convey, his anger. For one, Skarpheðinn's anger-feminising comment suggests

[18] Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1983), 32.
[19] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114.
[20] Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 197.
[21] Porter and Antón, 31.

that he is angry; though ostensibly functioning to subvert attention from his subsequent involuntary somatic response, it serves to emphasise its significance.[22] Secondly, his facial reddening is paired with sweating and grinning, and figures alongside Grímr and Helgi's silence, which are also variously associated with anger, emotional turbulence, and aggression (see **2.2.1**, **3.3**, and **3.2**). This further corroborates that his facial reddening is also indicative of anger. Moreover, throughout the corpus, *níð*-insults frequently provoke the anger of saga-men, indicating that Skarpheðinn is also experiencing anger.[23] Bergþóra, by attempting to goad her sons to retaliate, conveys and thus reifies the insults, actions which likely amplify this emotional experience.

Similarly, the sagas often associate facial reddening, and thus anger, with bloodiness. The association between bloodiness and reddening is also attested by the occurrence of the adjective *dreyrrauðr* ('blood-red') thirteen times in Old Norse literature to connote anger (typically that of sovereigns).[24] Moreover, Flosi, likely angry, turns *rauðr sem blóð* ('red as blood').[25] This simile seems to indicate angry experience elsewhere. In *Gunnlaugs saga*, for instance, Earl Eiríkr Hákonarson *setti svá rauðan sem blóð* ('turned as red as blood') having been insulted (see **8.1**), and, in *Finnboga saga ramma*, Earl Hákon Sigurðarson *setti rauðan sem blóð* ('turned red as blood') when Finnbogi tells him that he has killed Álfr.[26] The simile's use in *Hœnsa-Þóris saga* is particularly insightful. When Blund-Ketill is summonsed to court for the unlawful seizure of property by Þorvaldr, Qrn asks Blund-Ketill *[e]rtu sárr, bóndi, er þú ert svá rauðr sem blóð?* ('are you wounded, farmer, because you are as red as blood?').[27] Blund-Ketill replies that he is not wounded but implies that he is angry because

[22] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114.
[23] See, e.g., *Víga-Glúms saga*, 62; *Qlkofra þáttr*, 90-3; *Valla-Ljóts saga*, 235; and *Svarfdæla saga*, 157.
[24] Porter and Antón, 31.
[25] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 292.
[26] *Gunnlaugs saga*, 69-70. *Finnboga saga ramma*, 282.
[27] *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, 23.

Þorvaldr spoke to him so harshly and called him a thief.[28] Ǫrn's question suggests that a red countenance was associated with actual blood, rather than something that resembles blood; the potent simile, therefore, is more than mere figurative hyperbole.

The simile also describes Guðlaugr Snorrason's countenance in *Heiðarvíga saga*. Yet, in this instance, its significance is not clear, and Guðlaugr's feelings, therefore, are not straightforwardly discernible. On his way out of the church after praying, Guðlaugr is approached by Snorri, his father, who asks him to accompany him to avenge Styrr. Guðlaugr indicates that he would rather stay at home, though says that his father can decide. Snorri, rather than protesting, encourages Guðlaugr to devote himself to his faith instead. The saga-author then writes

> *[s]vá hefir Snorri frá sagt, at hann hafi aldri slíka manns ásjónu sét sem Guðlaugs, sonar síns, þá er hann mætti honum í kirkjunni; hafi hann þá verit rauðr sem blóð at sjá í andliti, ok hafi sér svá sem nǫkkur ógn af staðit* ('Snorri later had said concerning this that he had never seen a man's face like that of Guðlaugr, his son, when he met him in the church; his face had been as red as blood to look at, and it provoked fear in him').[29]

Given that, as we have seen, the simile is used elsewhere to convey angry experience, we may suspect that Guðlaugr is angry. It may be the case that Guðlaugr's piety prevents him from exacting vengeance; in *Þorvalds þáttr víðfǫrla I*, for instance, a bishop states that *[e]igi skyldi kristinn maðr leita at hefna sín sjálfr* ('a Christian man should not seek to avenge himself').[30] Guðlaugr's facial reddening, therefore, may indicate both his sense of shame and

[28] *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, 23.
[29] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 247.
[30] *Þorvalds þáttr víðfǫrla I*, 80-1.

anger concerning Styrr's slaying and the frustration that he feels concerning the limitations of his faith. Yet, whilst acting with moderation was, on the whole, the preferred Christian *modus operandi*, the church's relationship with vengeance is complex and inconsistent throughout the *Íslendingasögur* (and other Old Norse-Icelandic corpora), as David Clark has shown; starkly contrasting the perspective offered in *Þorvalds þáttr víðfǫrla I*, in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, for instance, God momentarily restores the blind Ámundi's sight so that he can take vengeance.[31] If the church does not prohibit vengeance, then Guðlaugr may not have reason to be angry. Furthermore, we are told that Guðlaugr *var siðprúðr ok bœnrækinn ok helt vel trú sína, átti ok ekki illt við folk* ('was gentle and diligent in prayer and kept his faith well, and had no disagreements with people'), qualities that indicate that he is unlikely to rage.[32] Finally, as Thomas Hill notes, Styrr 'is described as a particularly wanton and cruel killer, i.e. a man whose death needed no such response, at least from an ethical or moral perspective' and therefore 'the fact that he would prefer not to participate […] in the vengeance quest is an indirect but clear comment on the moral significance of the quest.'[33] If so, then it is unlikely that Styrr's death would have provoked Guðlaugr's anger.

Hill, instead, suggests that Guðlaugr's reddening 'is a sign that he is sanctified', given that such an appearance is 'a sign of fervent *caritas*' in religious iconography, and that Snorri is terrified by Guðlaugr's 'holiness' rather than his anger and its potential consequences.[34] William Sayers critiqued Hill's interpretation. Arguing instead that Snorri's response to Guðlaugr's refusal was sarcastic and intended as an insult to impugn his masculine status, Sayers suggests that Snorri provokes Guðlaugr's shame and anger which is betrayed by his

[31] See David Clark's chapter 'Violence in Moderation: The Church and Vengeance in the Sagas', in his *Gender, Violence, and the Past in Edda and Saga* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 117-141. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 273. For critical perspectives on God granting Ámundi sight, see Elizabeth Walgenbach, 'Inciting Miracle in *Njáls saga*: Ámundi *hinn blindi*'s Gift of Sight in Context', Saga-Book 43 (2019), 125-136 (126).
[32] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 246.
[33] Thomas D. Hill, 'Guðlaugr Snorrason: The Red Faced Saint and the Refusal of Violence', *Scandinavian Studies* 67.2 (1995), 145-152 (145).
[34] Hill, 'Guðlaugr Snorrason', 148, 149, 151.

facial reddening. The suggestion that Snorri's response is emasculating is supported by the saga-author's comment that Guðlaugr's brothers also mocked his religious temperament.[35] Sayers also proposes that 'the vehemence of his son's reaction' inspires Snorri's fear.[36] This secular reading, then, sees Guðlaugr's facial reddening align with that of Skarpheðinn in *Brennu-Njáls saga*. Hill defended his reading, claiming that the text 'does *not* say or even imply that he reddened in response to his father's words', and rather that the subordinate clause *þá er hann mætti honum í kirkjunni* ('when he met him in the church') emphasises that Guðlaugr's face was already *rauðr sem blóð* when they met.[37] Yet, the conjunction *þá er* ('when') is inexact, and the verb *mæta* ('to meet') could either refer to the moment at which the father and son first encountered each other (as Hill suggests), or the encounter as a whole, in which case the precise moment at which Guðlaugr reddens is not disclosed and Sayers' interpretation cannot be disproved.

Moreover, the author's lexical decisions further problematise Hill's religious reading. Firstly, Hill's hypothesis overlooks the differences between a countenance that is described as *rauðr sem blóð* and the bright, fiery red appearances of the holy characters in the scriptural and literary examples which he cites. Secondly, while Sif Rikhardsdottir, in support of Hill's reading, cites Porter and Antón's postulation that *roði*, *roðmi*, and *kinnroði*, nouns solely associated with shame, are 'almost exclusively found in religious contexts' which suggests that they were 'probably coined to render Latin *rubore* or *verecundia* "modesty, shame"', the adjective *rauðr*, used to describe Guðlaugr, has no clear religious associations, and, as we have seen, is, according to Porter and Antón, solely used to connote anger.[38] This refutation, however, is itself complicated by the fact that *Heiðarvíga saga*'s opening fifteen chapters

[35] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 246.
[36] William Sayers, 'The Honor of Guðlaugr Snorrason and Einarr Þambarskelfir: A Reply', *Scandinavian Studies* 67.4 (1995), 536-544 (539). On Hill and Sayers' exchange, see Crocker, 244.
[37] Hill, 'The Red Faced Saint, Again', *Scandinavian Studies* 67.4 (1995), 544-547 (545).
[38] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 67. Porter and Antón, 31, 33.

were lost and were reconstructed, from memory, by Jón Ólafsson, and relies on his faithfulness and accuracy. Nonetheless, if the saga-author did indeed choose *rauðr* to describe Guðlaugr's countenance, then, statistically, they likely intended to convey Guðlaugr's anger. The somatic indicium in this scene, however, is impossible to decode with certainty; as Evans notes, '[t]he disagreement over the 'meaning' of Guðlaugr's reddened face highlights the multiple interpretations possible of a single somatic event.'[39]

These instances of the yoking of bloodiness and anger aligns with *Fóstbræðra saga*'s physiological explanation. In the medieval west, the mind was thought to be the seat of emotionality (the Old Norse word for 'emotion', *hugarhræring*, for example, literally means 'movement of the mind'), and the mind (and therefore emotionality) was thought to be situated in the heart.[40] This cardiocentric conception is alluded to when the saga-author writes of Þorgeirr that *lagði eigi heipt í brjóst* ('rage did not pierce the breast'). Having described how Þorgeirr did not grow angry, the saga-author states

> *heldr brá hann sér engan veg við tíðenda sǫgnina, því at eigi var hjarta hans sem fóarn í fugli; eigi var þat blóðfullt, svá at þat skylfi af hrœzlu, heldr var þat hert af inum hæsta hǫfuðsmið í ǫllum hvatleik* ('rather, in no way did he react to the news, because his heart was not like the crop of a bird. It was not so full of blood that it shook with fear; rather, it was hardened by the highest head-smith to be bold in all things').[41]

[39] Evans, 'Models of Men: The Construction and Problematization of Masculinities in the *Íslendingasögur*' (University of Oxford: Unpublished DPhil Thesis, 2015), 192, footnote 168.
[40] K. T. Kanerva, 'Ógæfa as an Emotion in Thirteenth-Century Iceland', *Scandinavian Studies* 84.1 (2012), 1-26 (7).
[41] *Fóstbræðra saga*, 128.

By remarking that Þorgeirr does not react because *eigi var hjarta hans sem fóarn í fugli* ('his heart was not like the crop of a bird'), the saga-author indicates that, if Þorgeirr's heart were like the crop of a bird (the food-pouch in a bird's gullet), then he would emote. Given that a bird's crop prominently bulges out from their breast area, it likely connotes a swollen heart; thus, the saga-author implies that Þorgeirr's heart is small. The use of the conjunction *því at* ('because') and a cause-and-effect clause suggests that his small heart causes his unemotionality, and, therefore, that swollen hearts cause emotionality. The subsequent comment that Þorgeirr's heart was not *blóðfullt* ('full of blood') – symptomatic of fear, according to the author – further suggests that a swollen heart would be bloodier than a small heart. This is confirmed later in the saga, when the author, revisiting this physiology, states that when Þorgeirr was slain, his heart, as anticipated, was found to be small, and notes that *menn kalla minna blóð í litlu hjarta en miklu* ('people say that there is less blood in a little heart than a big one').[42] Excessive bloodiness, therefore, is associated with emotionality. Moreover, if, following the author's logic, facial reddening is caused by anger, and anger is caused by a large and bloody heart, then facial reddening is ultimately caused by a large and bloody heart. A saga-author's description of facial reddening, then, particularly when unequivocally associated with bloodiness through a simile such as *rauðr sem blóð* ('red as blood') or a compound adjective such as *dreyrrauðr* ('blood-red'), may be a microcosmic representation of this complex psychophysiological emotional system.

Lee M. Hollander remarks that '[t]his curious bit of physiology, half Germanic, half classic, is unique in Old Norse literature'.[43] It does not accord with the typical tenets of classical humourism. Rooted in Hippocratic and Galenic traditions, the medieval psychophysiological humoral theory held that emotional experiences and dispositions were

[42] *Fóstbræðra saga*, 210-11.
[43] Lee M. Hollander, trans., *The Sagas of Kormák and The Sworn Brothers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 206, note 8.

caused by an imbalance of bodily liquid humours (blood, red or yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm).[44] Typically, an excess of blood was associated with a sanguine temperament (*sanguis* is Latin for blood), red or yellow bile with aggression and anger, black bile with a melancholic disposition, and phlegm with apathy (a phlegmatic disposition).[45]

Despite this, *Fóstbræðra saga*'s physiological exposition does align with a medieval Icelandic understanding of the humoral theory of emotions, in that excessive bloodiness is associated with emotionality, in particular irascibility. A version of the theory features in a treatise entitled *Af natturu mannzins ok bloði* (On the Nature of Man and his Blood) in the early fourteenth-century manuscript *Hauksbók*.[46] Porter and Antón note that '[t]he fact that medical treatises are preserved in codices (such as *Hauksbók*) which also contain Icelandic sagas […] does not unequivocally prove that such foreign knowledge had influenced the description of the physiological reactions of the saga characters'.[47] Moreover, we cannot prove that medieval audiences would have known the theory. Nonetheless, critics have shown that (at least) some emotional manifestations in the sagas are rooted in humoral understanding.[48] Thus, it is likely that the saga-author, composing within a scholarly milieu, would have been aware of the theory.

Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir argues that the *Hauksbók* treatise is derived from the Latin text *Epistula Vindiciani ad Pentadium*.[49] Before detailing the effect of a humoral imbalance, the author first outlines the ideal bodily state: *sá maðr er alla hefir þessa .iiij. luti iafnmikla i sínv*

[44] Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'Humoral Theory in the Medieval North: An Old Norse Translation of *Epistula Vindiciani* in Hauksbók', *Gripla* 29 (2018), 35-66 (46-7).
[45] Noga Arikha, *Passions and Tempers: A History of the Humours* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 10.
[46] *Hauksbók*, 181-2.
[47] Porter and Antón, 26.
[48] See, e.g., Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'Humoral Theory', and 'Emotions of a Vulnerable Viking: Negotiations of Masculinity in Egils saga', in *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature*, 147-163; and Kanerva, 'Porous Bodies, Porous Minds: Emotions and the Supernatural in the Íslendingasögur (ca. 1200–1400)' (University of Turku: Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2015), 111-13.
[49] Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'Humoral Theory', 37. See Vindicianus, *Epistula ad Pentadium*, in *Theodori Prisciani Euporiston Libri III. cum Physicorum Fragmento et Additamentis Pseudo-Theodoreis, Accedunt Vindiciani Afriquae Feruntur Reliquae*, ed. Valentino Rose (Leipzig: Teubner, 1894), 484-492.

bloði. Þa er hann val heill. ok hófsamr maðr. ok stóðugr mundanga blíðr ok ekki míok braðr ('a man who has all these things [i.e. the four humours] equally in his blood is a very healthy and moderate man, and steady, justly gentle, and not very hot-tempered').[50] As Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir explains, in the exposition that follows, the author confusingly uses the word *bloð* ('blood') with different prefixes to denote three of the four humours: red or yellow bile is *rauða bloð* ('red blood'), black bile is *suarta bloð* ('black blood'), and blood is *rétt bloð* ('right blood'), unless the author is referring unambiguously to the humour as opposed to the blood that flows in the veins, in which case the prefix *rétt* is omitted.[51] Loosely translating the Latin, the author details the emotional effects of each humoral excess, in turn: firstly, *[e]nn ef rauða bloð er mest i bloði mannz. þa er sa fimr ok flogall. lettr a sér. slægr. ok bráðr. ok ma mikit eta* ('if red blood [i.e., red or yellow bile] is greatest in a man's blood, than [sic] that man is agile and volatile, light, shrewd and hot-tempered, and can eat a lot'), secondly, *[e]nn ef mestr lutr af bloði mannz er þat er rett bloð er kallat þa er hann blíðr ok hófeskr kátr. ok litillátr. vakr. ok varmr í natturu sinni* ('if the greatest part of a man's blood is what is called right blood [i.e., blood as a humour], then he is gentle and moderate, cheerful and modest, alert, and warm in his nature'), and, thirdly, *enn ef suarta bloð er mest þa er hann þungr ok þógull. sínkr ok svefnvgr. styggr. ok prettugr. aúfund siukr ok af kalldri nátturu ok þurri* ('if black blood [i.e., black bile] is the greatest, then he is heavy and silent, miserly and sleepy, hasty-tempered and deceitful, envious, and of a cold and dry nature').[52]

The humoral theory expounded in *Hauksbók* does not correspond with *Fóstbræðra saga* insomuch as, in the former, *rétt bloð* causes moderation and gentleness – antithetical emotions to those that we would expect Þorgeirr to exhibit – and none of the

[50] *Hauksbók*, 181. Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'Humoral Theory', 50 (her translation).
[51] Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'Humoral Theory', 51-2, footnote 74.
[52] *Hauksbók*, 181-2. Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'Humoral Theory', 52-3 (her translations). That a man with an excess of *rauða bloð* can be simultaneously shrewd and hot-tempered contradicts saga-authors' recurrent casting of anger as antithetical to wisdom (see **4.7**).

humours are described as fear-inducing. Whilst we must bear in mind the distinction between temperament and an isolated emotional experience, the treatise's explanation that an excess of *rauða bloð* and *suarta bloð* causes a man to be, respectively, *braðr* ('hot-tempered') and *styggr* ('hasty-tempered'), however, does accord with *Fóstbræðra saga*'s implication that an excessively large, bloody heart causes anger, and gives further insight into the significance of the simile *rauðr sem blóð* ('red as blood'). Moreover, with the exception of *vari* ('phlegm') that typically connotes unemotionality, the humours are blood compounds; feasibly, the excessive bloodiness described in *Fóstbræðra saga* could refer to an excess of all three of these humours (blood, yellow or red bile, and black bile) and connote emotionality in general. As Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir writes, 'the bloodstream in the veins was the carrier of all four humours in a mixture. Blood was one of the humours but also the medium that contained them all'.[53] This association between bloodiness and anger (or, at least, irascibility) further corroborates that depictions of facial reddening in the sagas also connote anger.

It is sensible, therefore, to deduce that humourism influenced the description of Þorgeirr's physiology, in part at least. That the saga-author offers a physiological analysis that is influenced by humourism to explain colourful somatic indicia emphasises that such involuntary reactions were cast to convey emotional experience.

2.1.2 Paling and Blackening

Porter and Antón quote from chapter 16 ('De Tropo et metaphoræ') of Óláfr Þórðarsson hvítaskáld's *Málskrúðsfræði* ('Science of the Ornaments') in the Icelandic *Third Grammatical Treatise* (c. 1250), in which Óláfr explains some metonymic colours featured in skaldic verse and writes *er bleikr kallaðr hræddr, þviat bliknan kemr eptir hrælzlu* ('pale

[53] Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'Humoral Theory in the Medieval North', 52, footnote 74.

refers to the fearful, because paleness is a result of fear').[54] In line with this, Porter and Antón – tracking the synonyms *blikna* and *fǫlna* ('to turn pale') – show that paling indicates fear a total of fourteen times in Old Norse literature.[55] Although they do not cite any examples from the *Íslendingasögur* where paling is unequivocally yoked with fear, they cite, for instance, the moment in the *riddarasaga Flóvents saga Frakkakonungs* when Flóvent is about to kill his lover's father and she turns pale.[56] Porter and Antón do not track the adjective *litverpr*. Although, according to Anthony Faulkes, the adjective literally means 'changeable (changed) in colour', *Cleasby-Vigfusson* suggests that *litverpr* means 'pale, from fear'.[57] It cites, among other examples, Snorri's account of the fishing expedition in *Gylfaginning*, where Snorri writes that *jǫtunninn Hymir gerðisk litverpr, fǫlnaði, ok hræddisk er hann sá orminn* ('the giant Hymir became changed in colour, paled, and became afraid when he saw the serpent').[58] Given that Hymir's paling closely follows his changing colour, it is logical to deduce that the colour change described by *litverpr*, in this instance at least, also refers to paling. Moreover, Hymir's concurrent fear indicates that such a reaction is associated with, and perhaps even symptomatic of, fearfulness, as *Cleasby-Vigfusson* suggests.

Porter and Antón also note, however, that paling indicates anger a total of eight times in Old Norse-Icelandic literature.[59] Although they do not cite an example from the *Íslendingasögur* where anger and paling are explicitly yoked as they are in *Fóstbræðra saga*, they suggest that Glúmr's enigmatic pre-slaying paling (the verb used is *fǫlna*) in *Víga-Glúms saga* connotes anger.[60] There are no clear links between paling and humourism, yet the nexus between anger and paling accords with modern-day physiological understanding. Charles

[54] Porter and Antón, 24. See *Third Grammatical Treatise*, 78 (Porter and Antón's translation).
[55] Porter and Antón, 36.
[56] Porter and Antón, 36. See *Flóvents saga*, 161.
[57] See glossary in *Gylfaginning*, 120. *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*lit-verpr*'.
[58] *Gylfaginning*, 45.
[59] Porter and Antón, 36.
[60] Porter and Antón, 37; see *Víga-Glúms saga*, 26.

Darwin, while noting that facial flushing accompanies raging, observed that, paradoxically, the skin can become pallid in moments of rage as well as terror.[61] More recent psychological investigations show that blood flow in the face – the cause of facial reddening – 'increases during minor frustration', whilst facial temperature – 'which covaries moderately with facial blood flow' – sometimes decreases in reaction to more evocative and intense stimuli (such as harassment and abuse), causing a pallid appearance.[62]

Fóstbræðra saga unequivocally associates paling with anger, and *Brennu-Njáls saga*'s Flosi, having reddened, turns *fǫlr sem gras* ('pale as grass') before blackening.[63] Whilst Evans suggests that Flosi's paling does not bear emotional significance (noting that 'once the red flush subsides the skin will of course be paler by comparison'), it may be, like his reddening, indicative of his shame and resulting anger. Other instances where a nexus between paling and anger is established support this reading. The adjective *litverpr*, for example, sometimes occurs at moments where an alternative emotion to fear may be more plausible on account of the narrative context. Such appears to be the case in *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*. Þórðr goads Þorsteinn into attacking Björn, telling him that Björn had declared at the Alþingi that Þorsteinn owed him property and intends to charge him with theft and have him outlawed.[64] We might expect Þorsteinn to be angry at such a revelation, and his anger to be amplified by Þórðr's goading. When Þorsteinn offers to accompany Björn, the saga-author writes that Björn *þóttisk finna, at hann rœddi ekki af hugðu um rétta skipan, sem hann væri hugsi, ok litverpr mjǫk* ('thought that he was not speaking from his mind about his true intentions, as he was thoughtful and very *litverpr*').[65] If we are to accept *Cleasby-Vigfusson*'s translation of *litverpr* as 'paling', then, in this instance, paling likely indicates

[61] Darwin, 74, 77.
[62] Drummond, 'Correlates of Facial Flushing and Pallor in Anger-Provoking Situations', *Personality and Individual Differences* 23.4 (1997), 575-582 (575).
[63] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 292.
[64] *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, 164-5.
[65] *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, 166.

lying and his anger. This accords with the moment in *Laxdœla saga* where the author writes that Guðrún *lét vel yfir* ('expressed approval concerning') the news of Kjartan's slaying, yet Bolli points out that she has paled (the verb used is *fǫlna*) and indicates that this betrays her true feelings.[66] Given her intense love for Kjartan, she likely feels grief and anger (see **1.3**).

The author of *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa* proceeds to note that Þorsteinn wielded an axe, before writing that Björn *sá Þorstein vera litverpan ok grunaði, at hann myndi vera flugumaðr* ('saw that Þorsteinn was *litverpr*, and suspected that he would be an assassin').[67] Again, if we are to accept *Cleasby-Vigfusson*'s translation of *litverpr* as 'paling', then, in this instance, paling is indicative of slaying, and may also connote his anger towards Björn. This association is unique; in other sagas, *blár* ('blue-black') clothing is frequently worn by slayers (in *Hrafnkels saga*, for example, Hrafnkell is wearing *blám klæðum*, 'blue-black clothes', when he slays Einarr and Eyvindr, and the eponymous 'hero' of *Valla-Ljóts saga* wears a *blám kyrtli*, 'blue-black tunic', when he kills Halli).[68] If, however, we were to render the use of *litverpr* in *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa* literally, translating the adjective as 'changed in colour', then Þorsteinn may, feasibly, turn black, a change which would see him aligned with the other saga slayers that wear black garb.

Some instances of paling may connote anger and fear simultaneously. In *Fóstbrœðra saga*, the author intimates, firstly, that having a smaller heart prevents angry experience, secondly, that a hard and bloodless heart causes fearlessness, and, thirdly, that a bloody heart makes a man afraid, as we have seen above.[69] Clark, linking Þorgeirr's heart with Hǫgni's heart in *Atlakviða* – which, unlike that of the cowardly servant Hjalli, does not tremble – and Helgi's hardened heart in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, suggests that *Fóstbrœðra saga*'s author 'had in mind the extraordinary courage of the Eddaic hero in the

[66] *Laxdœla saga*, 154-5.
[67] *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, 166.
[68] *Hrafnkels saga*, 104-5, 128-30. *Valla-Ljóts saga*, 245-6.
[69] *Fóstbrœðra saga*, 128, 210-11.

face of death, so raising the stature of this hero by comparison.'[70] According to the logic of *Fóstbræðra saga*, fear and anger have the same physiological cause; we might, therefore, associate an angry experience with cowardice. Despite this, the saga-author's proposal that excessive bloodiness causes fear contradicts the physiological reality that paling – often associated with fear in Old Norse-Icelandic literature as Porter and Antón demonstrate – comes about as a result of vasoconstriction (i.e., decreased blood flow). Yet, a recent psychological study, for instance, demonstrated that fear, associated with paling, is greater when anger is expressed.[71] Anger and fear are evidently associated, and it follows that a single somatic indicium such as paling may be indicative of both emotional responses simultaneously. We may, therefore, reinterpret Þorsteinn and Guðrún's paling: feasibly, Þorsteinn may experience fear as well as anger – in both instances – given the notoriety of Björn's prowess, and we may conjecture that Guðrún, as well as feeling angry, fears living in a world without Kjartan.[72] Moreover, Porter and Antón's assumption that Flóvent's lover's paling connotes fear, and not anger also, may be an oversimplification of emotionality.

Wolf has argued that *blár* 'did not attach firmly to the blue spectrum until the late fourteenth century', and that it 'originally meant simply a dark colour'; following this logic, *blána* – which I have translated as 'to turn blue-black' – could mean 'to turn a dark colour' in the passage from *Fóstbræðra saga*.[73] Wolf argues that, because 'the vast majority of the Sagas and *þættir* are believed to have been composed before the late fourteenth century', *blár* should be grouped alongside *svartr* ('dark') and *blakkr* ('black').[74] Whilst, unlike reddening or paling, turning dark may not be a naturalistic reaction (although it could relay turning

[70] Clark, 90-1. *Atlakviða*, 377 (st. 23, 25). *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, 257 (st. 53).
[71] Drummond, 'Correlates of Facial Flushing and Pallor', 578-9.
[72] See *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, 166, and *Laxdœla saga*, 155.
[73] Wolf, 'Basic Colour Terms in Old Norse-Icelandic: A Quantitative Study', *Orð og tunga* 15 (2013), 141-161 (159). See also Wolf, 'The Colour Blue in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature', *Scripta Islandica* 57 (2006), 55-78 (74).
[74] Wolf, 'Basic Colour Terms', 159.

'blue in the face'), the colour figures as a literary indicium of emotion.[75] Porter and Antón – tracking *sortna* ('to turn black') and *svartr* ('dark') – show that blackening or darkening indicates anger nine times, sadness twice, and fear once in Old Norse-Icelandic literature; an instance of a character darkening, therefore, is most likely indicative of anger.[76] Porter and Antón cite an instructive instance in *Strengleikar* of a dwarf angered by a harper's accusations: *[d]vergrenn sortnaðe allr ok svaraðe harpranom at han laug. Eigi em ec vandr maðr ec em kvað hann guðs skepna* ('the dwarf turned black all over and responded to the harper that he was lying. I am not an evil man, he said, I am one of God's creatures').[77] They note that 'the idea of a person turning black out of anger does not correspond to the universal metaphors for anger, which probably points to a culture-specific concept of that emotion'.[78] Moreover, unlike facial reddening and paling, there is no firm scientific evidence linking facial blackening with anger. In one modern-day psychological study investigating the link between colours and emotions, only six per cent of participants considered black the colour most indicative of anger.[79] The study also demonstrated that black was the colour most frequently associated with fear, chosen by thirty-nine percent of participants.[80] Yet, as already noted, Porter and Antón have found only one instance where blackening indicates fear: in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, Earl Hákon witnesses a servant turn pale and then *svartr sem iörð* ('black as earth'), who, when questioned, admits that he is terrified.[81]

As is the case in the passage from *Fóstbræðra saga* quoted above and the description of Flosi's multi-coloured mien in *Brennu-Njáls saga* that I have drawn on as a counterpoint, descriptions of blackening are often paired with descriptions of paling. Whilst, as already

[75] Evans, 'Models of Men', 169.
[76] Porter and Antón, 38.
[77] Porter and Antón, 39. *Strengleikar*, 174 (Porter and Antón's translation).
[78] Porter and Antón, 39.
[79] Jennifer Marie Binzak Fugate and Courtny L. Franco, 'What Color Is Your Anger? Assessing Color-Emotion Pairings in English Speakers', *Frontiers in Psychology* 10.206 (2019).
[80] Fugate and Franco.
[81] Porter and Antón, 38. See *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*, 235.

noted, Porter and Antón do not cite an example where paling is unambiguously linked to anger, the author of *Fljótsdæla saga* indicates an explicit link between both paling and blackening and anger: when Sveinungr is confronted by Gunnarr Þiðrandabani's pursuers, the saga-author writes that *Sveinungr var þústinn mjök ok litverpr. Stundum var hann bleikr sem bast, en stundum svartr sem jörð* ('Sveinungr was very angry and *litverpr*. Sometimes he was pale as bast and sometimes as black as earth').[82] In this instance, contrary to *Cleasby-Vigfusson*'s interpretation that *litverpr* means 'pale', it is sensible to render the adjective 'changing colour', given that Sveinungr's colouring fluctuates. The saga-author also describes how *[n]ær horfðu fram öll hárin eptir hans haus* ('nearly all his hair stood up from his head'), and how the men fear that, on account of this monstrous appearance, the rumours that he can turn into a troll are true.[83] The description of Sveinungr's paling and bristling with anger (though not his blackening) is matched later by his brother, Gunnstein. The saga-author writes that Gunnstein, implicitly angered having been insulted, grabs Helgi and *var svó bleikr í andliti sem nár ok fram horfðu öll hár á höfði honum* ('was as pale as a corpse in the face, and all the hair was sticking up from his head').[84] The saga-author's simile echoes the simile used in one version of *Brennu-Njáls saga* to describe Flosi's raging: in one manuscript, *gras* ('grass') – in the line *fǫlr sem gras* ('pale as grass') – is substituted for *nár* ('corpse').[85] Porter and Antón cite an example where the same simile is explicitly associated with fear: in the separate *Óláfs saga helga*, the author writes *[þ]a blicnaði hann oc varð faulr sem nár oc felluz honom hendr. Konungr fann hrezlu a honom* ('then he blanched, was as pale as a corpse, and dropped his hands. The king could feel his fear').[86] Again, fear and anger find the same physiological manifestation.

[82] *Fljótsdæla saga*, 279.
[83] *Fljótsdæla saga*, 279.
[84] *Fljótsdæla saga*, 280.
[85] In another, it is substituted for *aska* ('ash'). Crocker, 249. See *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 292.
[86] Porter and Antón, 37. See *Óláfs saga helga*, 173.

Earlier, the saga-author writes of Gunnstein that *[v]ar þat enn ok orðtak manna, at Gunnstein væri í þvílíkri náttúru sem Sveinungr, at hvórgi væri einhamr* ('it was still a saying of people that he had a nature such like Sveinungr, that they were both shape-changers').[87] Men described as *eigi einhamir* ('shape-changers', lit. 'not of one skin') are closely associated with *berserkir*; we might infer that the brothers' monstrous anger is akin to the *berserksgangr* ('berserk fury').[88] Helgi, clearly identifying the emotional experience behind Gunnstein's behaviour and somatic indicia, asks if he will *at hamast*, a verb near-synonymous with *berserksgangr* meaning 'to rage, to be taken by a fit of fury' (see **7.2**).[89] Once again, anger and paling are explicitly linked. Gunnstein's corpse-like appearance also accords with his monstrosity: just as the men fear that Sveinungr is a troll, Gunnstein replies to Helgi *[e]kki mun ek tryllast á þér* ('I shall not become troll-like with you').[90] It seems, therefore, unlikely that the shape-changing brothers are experiencing fear when they grow pallid.

In line with this, in *Bárðar saga*, the author writes that when Bárðr is told that his enemy, Rauðfeldr, has pushed his daughter out to sea on an iceberg, *Bárðr varð við þat mjök reiðr ok spratt þegar upp ok gekk í burtu ok til Arnarstapa; hann var þá mjök dökkur yfirlits* ('Bárðr became very angry at this and immediately jumped up and walked away to Arnarstapi. He was then very dark in his appearance').[91] We are told at the saga's beginning that Bárðr's paternal grandfather was born of *risakyni* ('giant-folk'), that his paternal grandmother *var komin af tröllaættum* ('was born into a troll-family'), and that Bárðr himself is troll-like, and he recurrently exhibits frenzies akin to the *berserksgangr* or *jǫtunmóðr*

[87] *Fljótsdæla saga*, 279.
[88] Roderick Dale, 'Berserkir: A Re-examination of the Phenomenon in Literature and Life' (University of Nottingham: Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2014), 120-1.
[89] *Fljótsdæla saga*, 280. *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*hamast*'.
[90] *Fljótsdæla saga*, 280.
[91] *Bárðar saga*, 117.

('giant-rage').[92] Evidently, paling and turning dark or black in both *Fljótsdæla saga* and *Bárðar saga* connotes a monstrous variety of anger.[93]

Darkening or blackening as a result of emotional experience corresponds to the medieval Icelandic understanding of the humoral emotional theory. As noted, the treatise in *Hauksbók* links an excess of *suarta bloð* ('black blood') – corresponding with melancholic black bile – to a temperament that is *styggr* ('hasty-tempered'); as I have already argued, the blood discussed in the physiology outlined in *Fóstbræðra saga* could contain an excess of *suarta bloð*. Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir cites an example where anger is implicitly linked with the *suarta bloð* of humourism. In *Bandamanna saga*, Óspakr Glúmsson, indicating that he is jealous and angry in a subsequent stanza, kills his former wife's new husband. He is wounded in return and mysteriously goes missing. In the autumn – a season that, as the *Hauksbók* treatise notes, is typically associated with black bile and the melancholic disposition – the dead body of a man is found in a cave, and the saga-author writes that *stóð hjá honum mundlaug full af blóði, ok var þat svá svart sem tjara. Þar var Óspakr* ('beside him stood a basin full of blood, and it was as black as tar. That was Óspakr').[94] Moreover – according with the dark complexions of the angry shape-changer Sveinungr in *Fljótsdæla saga* and the angry quarter-troll-quarter-giant Bárðr in his saga – Egill Skallagrímsson, an irascible character who often grows angry, is described as swarthy.[95] Given that, as Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir notes, 'people with a dark complexion were considered especially predisposed to melancholy', it is unlikely that the saga-author's decision to emphasise Egill's dark complexion is coincidental.[96]

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[92] *Bárðar saga*, 101, 119.
[93] On the late-dating and overt emotionality of *Fljótsdæla saga*, see **3.2**. *Bárðar saga*, likewise, is younger and more overtly emotional than most other sagas in the corpus. On their dating, see *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopaedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano (London: Garland, 1993), 198, 34.
[94] *Bandamanna saga*, 393. Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'Humoral Theory', 50 (her translation).
[95] *Egils saga*, 143.
[96] Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'Emotions of a Vulnerable Viking', 150.

Furthermore, although not attested in Old Norse-Icelandic treatises, the anonymous post-Galenic short Greek text *On the Constitution of the Universe and of Man* links an excess of black bile with fearfulness.[97] The *Hauksbók* treatise's Latin source includes in its description of the effects of an excess of black bile that *cholera nigra facit homines […] timidos* ('black bile makes men … timid'), yet the author of the *Hauksbók* treatise neglects to translate *timidos* ('fear') into Old Norse.[98] This humoral linking of black bile and fear aligns with Porter and Antón's findings that blackness can be metonymic of fear. Once again, anger and fear, as the author of the *Fóstbræðra saga* passage implies, are unexpectedly yet recurrently yoked.

2.2 The Humoral Body

In addition to the association between colours and humoral emotionality, we might 'ferret out' emotionality from other bodily descriptions that appear to be tacitly infused with, or deliberately influenced by, humoral understanding. Recurrently, saga-authors depict what Rosenwein terms the 'hydraulic' model, which equates extreme emotionality with a build-up of seething bodily fluids that need an outlet; once vented, tension decreases, and emotional regularity is resumed.[99] Rooted in the Hippocratic association of the healing effects of naturally occurring bodily discharges (e.g., menstruation) as well as induced discharges (e.g., blood-letting), the model originates from the idea of catharsis (from the Greek *katharsis*, meaning 'purification'), the purging of pent emotions.[100]

[97] *Physici et Medici Graeci Minores*, ed. J. L. Ideler, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1841), 303.
[98] *Epistula ad Pentadium*, 488. *Hauksbók*, 181. Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'Humoral Theory', 53 (her translation).
[99] Rosenwein, 'Worrying About Emotions in History', *American Historical Review* 107 (2002), 821-845 (834-6).
[100] See, e.g., Louise Bishop, *Words, Stones, and Herbs: The Healing Word in Medieval and Early Modern England* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 86-7.

2.2.1 Sweating

Along these lines, we might conjecture that, in certain contexts, perspiration bears humoral significance, given that it is another bodily fluid evacuated from the body in conjunction with emotional experience. Indeed, the Hippocratics paid close attention to perspiration – alongside other biofluids – and its relation to wellbeing.[101] As we have already seen, Skarpheðinn grins, exudes *sveiti* ('sweat'), and reddens when he learns of the *níð*-insults.[102] Given that his reddening most likely connotes his anger, his perspiration likely also figures in the same way. Larrington argues that it is a 'physiological symptom of arousal' and therefore functions as an irrepressible somatic betrayal.[103]

According to the *ONP*, there are only two other instances of perspiration in the *Íslendingasögur*: Freyfaxi, Hrafnkell's horse, sweats in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, and Kormákr sweats in his saga.[104] As in the case of Skarpheðinn, sweating is not explicitly linked with anger in either instance. We might, however, 'ferret out' anger from Kormákr's sweating. The saga-author states that Kormákr had grown hot following a duel with Þorvarðr (the brother of Þorvaldr, Steingerðr's husband-to-be, about whom Kormákr had composed several libellous verses), and describes how, having removed his helmet from his head, *[h]ann þerrir af sér sveita á mǫttulskauti Steingerðar* ('he wiped the sweat from himself onto Steingerðr's mantle-skirt').[105] Porter and Antón note that the verb *hitna* ('to become hot, to burn'), though mostly used to indicate fervent love for God, connotes anger seven times in Old Norse-Icelandic literature.[106] With Porter and Antón's findings and the scene's

[101] Michael Stolberg, 'Sweat: Learned Concepts and Popular Perceptions, 1500-1800', in *Blood, Sweat and Tears: The Changing Concepts of Physiology from Antiquity into Early Modern Europe*, ed. Manfred Horstmanshoff, Helen King, and Claus Zittel (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 503-522.
[102] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114.
[103] Larrington, 'The Psychology of Emotion', 252.
[104] *ONP*, s.v. '*sveiti*'. *Kormáks saga*, 286. *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, 103.
[105] *Kormáks saga*, 286.
[106] Porter and Antón, 41.

circumstantial intensity in mind, Kormákr's warmth may correlate to his metaphorical 'hot-headedness', and his perspiration may be a manifestation of his emotionality. Indeed, in the following verse Kormákr says *[e]k verð opt þvít þykkjum / erróttr af mér þerra, / [...] / [...] á mǫttulskauti* ('because I often seem quarrelsome, I wipe myself on the mantle-skirt').[107] Kormákr thus points to a nexus between perspiration and pugnacity, a state that is likely fuelled by an intense emotional experience. This, in turn, strengthens the case that Skarpheðinn's perspiration connotes anger.

2.2.2 Swelling

Likewise, we can 'ferret out' humoral emotionality from swellings. Relating to the conceptual metaphor 'emotion is a hot fluid in a container', Porter and Antón have found that the verb *þrútna* ('to swell') and its derivative *þrútinn* ('swollen') connotes anger a total of twenty-nine times in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, whereas it indicates pride twelve times and sorrow seven times; swelling, therefore, most often connotes anger.[108] In the *Íslendingasögur*, when Egill Skallagrímsson's son Bǫðvarr is buried, Egill *þrútnaði svá, at kyrtillinn rifnaði af honum ok svá hosurnar* ('became so swollen, that his tunic and hose burst from him'); the circumstances suggest that his swelling is caused by, and connotes, an intense mingling of grief and rage (see **1.3**).[109] Though Egill does not experience a biofluidic eruption, he composes the elegy *Sonatorrek* as an emotional catharsis. Corroborating this interpretation, Larrington draws attention to Ívarr in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, who similarly becomes *þrútinn* ('swollen') when he learns of his father's death.[110] Ívarr also reddens, blackens, and pales, and the saga-author, like the author of *Fóstbræðra saga*, demonstrates a

[107] *Kormáks saga*, 287.
[108] Porter and Antón, 39-40.
[109] *Egils saga*, 244. See Porter and Antón, 40. See Baccianti, 64.
[110] Larrington, 'The Psychology of Emotion', 255. *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 138.

cardiocentric understanding of emotionality by attributing his reaction to the *grimmleik, er í brjósti hans var* ('cruelty, which was in his breast').[111]

Indicating that humoral understanding pervades vocabulary as well as imagery, as I shall argue in **5.3.1**, whilst the verb *geisa* in other Old Norse-Icelandic texts is employed to connote 'gushing', 'surging', and 'draining' (recalling the movement connoted by the homophone *geysa*, meaning 'to rush or gush'), the only two occurrences of the verb in the *Íslendingasögur* – both featuring in *Brennu-Njáls saga* – appear to function as a metaphor to connote a particular kind of gestural raging.[112] This emotional 'gushing' aligns with the humoral understanding that emotions are caused by an imbalance of pneumatic biofluids on the brink of eruption from the body.

With the nexus between emotionality, swelling, and, by extension, biofluidic discharge convincingly established, we may 'ferret out' allusions to humourism, and therefore emotionality, from other instances of swelling and bodily eruptions. Although Baccianti suggests that the depiction of physiological phenomena in Old Norse-Icelandic literature such as swellings indicates its incompatibility with a social constructivist approach to understanding its emotionality, they accord with Scheer's model, which posits that embodied emotional manifestations are conditioned by the socially infused *habitus*.[113]

In *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Þórhallr Ásgrímsson's swelling and biofluidic discharge is likely a presentation of humoral emotionality. We are told that

> *Þórhalli Ásgrímssyni brá svá við, er honum var sagt, at Njáll, fóstri hans, var dauðr ok hann hafði inni brunnit, at hann þrútnaði allr ok blóðbogi stóð ór hvárritveggju hlustinni* ('Þórhallr Ásgrímsson was so moved when he was told that Njáll, his foster-

[111] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 138.
[112] *Vǫluspá*, 305 (st. 55). *Guðmundar saga byskups*, 50. *Qrvar-Odds saga*, 163. *Cleasby-Vigfússon*, s.v. 'geisa' and 'geysa'. See *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114, 99.
[113] Baccianti, 57. Scheer, passim.

father, was dead and that he had been burnt inside, that he became all swelled up, and blood gushed out of both ears').[114]

The passage's cause-and-effect clause (*brá svá […] at*, 'so moved… that') casts the somatic reactions as being caused by, and therefore symptomatic of, emotionality. Moreover, the saga-author tells us earlier that Þórhallr loved Njáll more than his own father; given Þórhallr's paternalisation of Njáll, his swelling accords with that of Ívarr.[115] Lars Lönnroth also interprets Þórhallr's bleeding ears – presumably the cause of the prior swelling – as aligning with humoral understanding.[116] Whereas, as Peter Hallberg commented, the fluid purged from the gall bladder via the ears that is described in medieval Latin medical treatises probably refers to earwax, Lönnroth notes that the version of the theory expounded in *Hauksbók* describes the fluid twice as *rauða bloð* ('red blood', i.e., red or yellow bile), produced by the *galli* ('gall bladder') and ejected through the *eyrum* ('ears').[117] As we have seen, *Hauksbók* states that *[e]nn ef rauða bloð er mest i bloði mannz. þa er sa fimr ok flogall. lettr a sér. slægr. ok bráðr. ok ma mikit eta* ('if red blood is greatest in a man's blood, than [sic] that man is agile and volatile, light, shrewd and hot-tempered, and can eat a lot'); Þórhallr's excess and expulsion of *rauða bloð* accords with the saga-author's description that he is, though *vel orðstilltr* ('rather moderate in his words'), *bráðskapaðr* ('short-tempered') and *døkkr á hár ok svá á skinnslit* ('dark in hair and also complexion'), an appearance that, as I have argued above, also can indicate hot-temperedness.[118]

Whilst we may expect this discharge to relieve building tension and restore emotional regularity, Þórhallr's leg subsequently becomes *svá digr ok þrútinn sem konulær* ('as thick

[114] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 344. See Porter and Antón, 40.
[115] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 74.
[116] Lönnroth, *Njáls saga: A Critical Introduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 112.
[117] Peter Hallberg, 'Review of *European Sources of Icelandic Saga-Writing*, by Lars Lönnroth', *Samlaren* 86 (1965), 157-184 (170). Lönnroth, 112. *Hauksbók*, 181-2.
[118] *Hauksbók*, 181. Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'Humoral Theory', 52 (her translation). *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 359.

and swollen as a woman's thigh'), and, disabled, he requires a staff to walk.[119] The saga-author later confirms that his swelling is a boil.[120] Whilst Hallberg, arguing that boils were commonplace in the Middle Ages, considers Þórhallr's boil unremarkable, Lönnroth emphasises that boils are not common in the sagas, and thus also associates Þórhallr's boil with his 'turbulent humours'.[121] We might, therefore, understand this to indicate that he is still emotional.[122]

Before the case charging Flosi with Njáll's death goes to court, Þórhallr, still suffering from this boil, warns *[f]arið þér at engu allœstir* ('do not be too hasty') yet *var andlit hans at sjá sem á blóð sæi, en stórt hagl hraut ór augum honum* ('his face was like blood to look at, and great hailstones were flung from his eyes').[123] His father Ásgrímr laconically comments *[e]igi var Þórhalli frænda gott í hug* ('my kinsman Þórhallr was not in good spirits') which, though ostensibly functioning to subvert attention from his son's reactions, emphasises its emotional significance.[124] Þórhallr's rage, though partially masked by composed cautioning, is betrayed by his bloody countenance. The audience may understand this to foreshadow vengeance, given that, earlier in the saga, Skarpheðinn reddened with rage before slaying Sigmundr.[125] Þórhallr's emission of hailstones – a fictional response cast as a real-life, somatic one – is another bodily discharge that aligns with the 'hydraulic model'. Like his bloody face, Þórhallr's hailstones may forebode his vengeance in addition to compounding his emotional intensity; in *Víga-Glúms saga*, Glúmr ejects hailstone-like tears prior to slaying.[126]

[119] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 359. I discuss Þórhallr's masculinity in **4.2.2**.
[120] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 402.
[121] Hallberg, 170. Lönnroth, 112.
[122] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 359.
[123] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 378.
[124] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 378.
[125] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114.
[126] *Víga-Glúms saga*, 26.

We understand Þórhallr's emotional experience to be particularly intense given that, even after two biofluidic expulsions (first *rauða blóð*, then hailstones), Þórhallr remains swollen. Yet, told that the suit has been quashed,

> *[h]ann spratt upp ór rúminu ok greip spjótit Skarpheðinsnaut tveim hǫndum ok rak í gegnum fótinn á sér. Var þar á holdit ok kveisunaglinn á spjótinu, því at hann skar út ór fœtinum, en blóðfossinn fellr ok vágfǫllin, svá at lækr fell eptir gólfinu. Hann gekk þá út ór búðinni óhaltr ok fór svá hart, at sendimaðrinn fekk eigi fylgt honum* ('he sprang up from his bed and grasped his spear, Skarpheðinn's gift, with both hands and drove it through his leg. Flesh and the core of the boil were on the spear when he cut it out from his leg, and a gush of blood and a flow of pus poured like a brook across the floor. He then walked out of the booth without a limp and moved so fast that the messenger could not follow him').[127]

As Miller notes, 'if not an indication of emotion, [the boil] soon becomes one when both [Þórhallr] and the author make it a symbol of pent-up frustration and vengeful fury'.[128] Reapplying the argument outlined above, given that humours, with the exception of phlegm, are blood compounds, Þórhallr's erupting blood, just like the excessive bloodiness described in *Fóstbræðra saga*, could feasibly figure as a manifestation of an excess of any of the other three humours (blood, yellow or red bile, and black bile) and connote his emotionality. Þórhallr's excision of the boil, spewing blood and pus, frees him from his emotional paralysis; following this, Þórhallr can walk again with speed, and, by slaying Grímr inn rauði ('the red'), takes the kind of decisive action expected of a saga-man.[129]

[127] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 402.
[128] Miller, *Humiliation*, 102. See also Baccianti, 65-6.
[129] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 402.

With this in mind, we may consider other instances of swelling and boils as indicative of 'turbulent humours', where the context allows.[130] In *Grettis saga*, the consistently irascible Grettir sustains a self-inflicted leg injury that causes his death when he, raging, strikes the tree-trunk cursed by Þuríðr.[131] Like Þórhallr's injury, this injury is disabling. Initially, the wound *blæddi lítt* ('bled little'), though soon his leg becomes *blásinn* ('swollen') with infection.[132] When Grettir dies, the saga-author again reiterates that there was *lítt eða ekki blæddi* ('little or no bleeding') from his wounds.[133] Although *Fóstbræðra saga* associates a lack of blood with unemotionality, it is here implied that Grettir bleeds little because his blood is the cause of his swelling.[134] Indeed, Grettir, unlike Þorhállr, does not experience a biofluidic eruption that relieves the pressure. If so, then whilst his wound is not bloody, his swelling is, in fact, excessively bloody; read through the lens of *Fóstbræðra saga*'s psychophysiological explanation, therefore, his bloodiness indicates his emotionality. Corroborating this, the *Hauksbók* treatise, as we have seen, explains that an excess of *rauða bloð* and *suarta bloð* causes a man to be *braðr* ('hot-tempered') and *styggr* ('hasty-tempered') respectively.[135] The saga-author also describes Grettir's wound as *kolblár* ('coal-black'), a colour change emphasised by Grettir's prediction, before the saga-author's clarification, that *þætti mér líkara, at nǫkkut litbrigði væri á* ('it would seem to me more likely that there was some change of colour'); given the nexus between blackening and anger posited above, it may, alongside his swelling, indicate his emotional and temperamental state.[136] The swelling is multivalent: it is at once a physiological reality of injury, a manifestation of Þuríðr's magic, and, like that of Egill, Ívarr, and Þórhallr, a hydraulic and

[130] Lönnroth, 112.
[131] *Grettis saga*, 249-51.
[132] *Grettis saga*, 251, 252.
[133] *Grettis saga*, 261.
[134] *Fóstbræðra saga*, 210-11.
[135] *Hauksbók*, 181-2.
[136] *Grettis saga*, 252.

humoral emotional indicium. Grettir's swollen leg, caused by an injury sustained while raging, thus functions as an unsubtle symbol of his irascibility. When his assailants are about to strike his deathblow, they see that *var lærit allt grafit upp at smáþǫrmum* ('the thigh had festered all the way up into the intestines').[137] On one level, this implies that Þuríðr's magic would have killed him regardless of the attack, but also, if we are to understand the swollen leg as representative of Grettir's emotional experience, then it implies that Grettir's festering emotions would also have killed him. This supports the postulation that Grettir's irascibility is the ultimate cause of his downfall (see **4.5**).

Boils and swellings can have a physiological identity that is independent of emotionality, and they are not always attributed to angry experience in the sagas. Nonetheless, it is often the case that they occur alongside such experience, and regularly afflict irascible characters. Þorgeirr's boil in *Hrafnkels saga*, for instance, is not presented as a symptom of his emotional experience, but rather the means by which such experience is provoked: as Sigurður Nordal notes, Þorkell directs Þorbjǫrn to stumble deliberately and jerk Þorgeirr's bandaged toe to provoke his brother to 'blaze up in real anger'.[138] Elsewhere, Kormákr sustains a wound that swells with *ólíkan* ('proud flesh'), and Gunnlaugr is cast with a boil that froths with blood and pus, and later sustains a wound that swells.[139] Although there is no clear evidence to attribute their swellings to their emotional turbulence, they are both consistently irascible and impetuous characters: Kormákr is introduced as a *áhlaupamaðr í skapi* ('hot-headed man in temperament') and admits, when reflecting on his life in a verse prior to his death, *[r]éð ek ei þess af reiði* ('I always ruled this from anger'), and Gunnlaugr is introduced as *hávaðamaðr mikill í ǫllu skaplyndi* ('a greatly self-assertive man in all

[137] *Grettis saga*, 261.
[138] *Hrafnkels saga*, 113. Sigurður Nordal, *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða: A Study*, trans. R. George Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1958), 54.
[139] *Kormáks saga*, 236, 238, 239. *Gunnlaugs saga*, 68, 86.

tempers').[140] Both characters also have dark eyes, which may also symbolise their irascible temperaments (see **2.1.2**).[141] Finally, Halla in *Vápnfirðinga saga* develops a boil following her separation from her husband.[142] Although her illness seems to provoke her husband's announcement of his betrothal to another woman and thus occurs before her implied emotional experience, her biofluidic eruption occurs after her departure and may thus be associated with 'turbulent humours'.[143] Such instances strengthen the postulation that the swellings of Þorhállr and Grettir are in some way associated with their emotionality. In each case, however, the reader must appeal to contextual evidence to discern whether or not swellings are in some way indicative of emotional experience.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that various involuntary reactions, whether naturalistic or fictional artifices that do not accord with real world experience, can connote, and thus can figure as a literary shorthand for, anger in the sagas. Analyses of anger in the corpus, therefore, must consider those instances where reddening, paling, blackening, sweating, and swelling feature without qualification. Given that they cannot be feigned, these reactions may provide the audience with the firmest evidence (except for, of course, a saga-author's explicit explanation) that a character is experiencing anger. Yet, that several of these reactions can connote other emotions emphasises the extent to which anger is rarely an isolated feeling state but rather one that is frequently concurrent and interwoven with other emotions, such as grief, shame, sorrow, and fear.

[140] *Kormáks saga*, 206, 300. *Gunnlaugs saga*, 59.
[141] *Kormáks saga*, 211. *Gunnlaugs saga*, 59.
[142] *Vápnfirðinga saga*, 36, 44.
[143] Lönnroth, *Njáls saga*, 112.

3 'Ferreting Out' Anger from Facial and Bodily Expressions

3.1 Introduction

In addition to involuntary psychosomatic indicia, several other responses are indicative of emotional experience. Unlike involuntary indicia that can be neither suppressed nor feigned, facial and bodily expressions can either figure as genuine symptoms of emotion that occur independently of the agent's conscious decision to evoke them or can be subversively feigned to camouflage an emotional response and mimic another. It is tempting to understand that particular expressions relay genuine feelings when a character exhibits them when all other characters are absent from the scene. The psychologists Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen demonstrated that, privately, Japanese students reacted to emotive stimuli with the same somatic indicia as American students, but that, publicly, the same Japanese students tended to suppress their reactions to a far greater extent than their American counterparts.[1] Such findings, though primarily intended to evidence the underlying transcultural universality of emotional expression that is either deliberately or tacitly adjusted in accordance with socio-cultural expectation, reiterate the authenticity of a private emotional presentation. In the sagas, however, there is no such thing as an entirely private emotional performance, given that the audience, though a silent witness, is always present. Moreover, saga-authors necessarily composed with an awareness of their audience. Regardless, in real life, an emotional performance, like a gender performance, is not contingent on the presence of an audience: emotionality might be genuine, exaggerated, or entirely feigned even behind closed doors. Despite all of this, there is still a greater likelihood that an emotion would be masked with a particular expression when other characters are present to witness it. Deciphering

[1] Ekman and Friesen, *Unmasking the Face* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Malor Books, 2003), 23-4.

whether an expression is a symptom or subversion of emotional experience is difficult; in some cases, we must resign ourselves to conclude that a particular expression is in some way associated with a particular emotion.

This chapter, then, will evaluate to what extent we can 'ferret out' experiences of anger from silence, grinning, laughing, brow-furrowing, and leaping or jumping. Excepting silence and brow-furrowing, Porter and Antón do not examine these facial and bodily expressions in their survey of emotional indicia. Yet, each of these expressions can convey various emotional experiences, including anger.

3.2 Silence

Recurrently, silence is indicative of undisclosed emotionality in the sagas. Given that silence may be either voluntarily or involuntarily assumed, it is not clear whether it is symptomatic of emotionality or whether it masks emotionality. Porter and Antón, argue that the verb *þegja* ('to remain silent') 'was associated with more basic sentiments like anger or fear, in those genres whose main characters shared a common warrior "emotional regime"', whilst recognising that it 'was used to express various emotional and cognitive states' across the different Old Norse-Icelandic corpora.[2] They cite an instance in *Grettis saga* where the slave Glaumr remains silent having been threatened by Öngull as an example of silence indicating fear, and an instance in *Orkneyinga saga* where Earl Páll falls silent and reddens when he learns that Earl Magnus' relics were to be relocated against his wishes as an example of silence indicating anger.[3] In both examples, each character's silence is described using similes concerning water: Glaumr is silent *sem honum væri í vatn drepit* ('as if he had been

[2] Porter and Antón, 30.
[3] Porter and Antón, 30. *Grettis saga*, 259. *Orkneyinga saga*, 134.

dipped in water') and Páll is silent *sem hann hefði vatn i munni* ('as if he had water in his mouth').[4] Both similes evoke drowning, especially the one that figures in *Grettis saga*, where, in another context and used with the accusative rather than the dative, the verb *drepa* might be rendered 'kill'. This may indicate that silence figures as a self-imposed suffocation intended to cover up emotionality; if so, then, in the case of Páll, we understand that he tries to conceal his anger, but his involuntary facial reddening betrays it. Furthermore, the comparison to water evokes the excess of bodily fluids that both cause and are symptomatic of emotional experience according to the humoral theory outlined in *Hauksbók*. Finally, given the association of anger and fear presented in *Fóstbræðra saga* and that some other indicia in the sagas may represent both anger and fear simultaneously, we may conjecture that Glaumr in *Grettis saga* is not only afraid as Porter and Antón suggest, but also angry.

There are several moments in the *Íslendingasögur* where silence appears to indicate anger in particular. Sovereign figures often fall silent and redden like Earl Páll in *Orkneyinga saga* in reaction to events that we would expect to be anger-inducing; King Haraldr in *Egils saga*, for instance, turns silent and blood-red when Skallagrímr declines to serve him.[5] The coupling of silence and facial reddening serves to reiterate their semiotic significance. Elsewhere, in *Bandamanna saga*, Styrmir, Þórarinn, and Þorgeirr each fall silent at the þing when Egill Skúlason insults each of them in turn; we expect them to grow angry, and understand their silence to be symptomatic of, or intended to mask, their anger.[6] Elsewhere, in *Gísla saga*, Þorkell falls silent when he overhears his wife, Ásgerðr, revealing her love for Vesteinn to Auðr, an action that we would expect to be anger-inducing.[7] Interestingly, Þorkell's subsequent behaviour of eating little and retiring to bed early – out of which we might further detect his feelings of anger and upset – recalls that of Egill Skallagrímsson

[4] *Grettis saga*, 259. *Orkneyinga saga*, 134.
[5] *Egils saga*, 64.
[6] *Bandamanna saga*, 355-6.
[7] *Gísla saga*, 32.

when he learned of the death of his son, Bǫðvarr, as well as that of Hávarðr in *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings* who, when his son's slayer refuses to give him compensation, flushes red, rages, and stays in bed for twelve months (see **2.1.1**).[8] Again, in *Hœsna-Þóris saga*, Þórir grows silent when he finds his hay has been stolen, another action that we would expect to be anger-inducing.[9]

Perhaps the clearest indication that silence can connote angry feelings is revealed when a passage from *Droplaugarsona saga* is compared with another version of the same events given in the later-dating *Fljótsdœla saga*.[10] The latter features emotional descriptions which, in comparison to those given in other sagas at least, are remarkably detailed. In *Droplaugarsona saga*, when Droplaugr learns that Þorgrímr has implied that she has been unfaithful to her husband, we are told that she did not react, but *var hljóð* ('was silent').[11] The next morning, her feelings are made plain when she goads her sons to take vengeance. In *Fljótsdœla saga*, however, when Droplaugr learns the same news (this time with the additional specifics that Þorgrímr has said that she slept with her slave, Svartr, and that Svartr, rather than her husband, is the father of her son, Helgi), the saga-author writes that *[h]un var nú mjök hálfær ok mœlti fátt nema af styggð* ('she was now extremely half-mad, and spoke little except in anger').[12] *Cleasby-Vigfusson* suggests that *ærr* may also be rendered 'furious'.[13] That in one version Droplaugr is silent and in the other version she is explicitly described as barely communicative and angry indicates that Droplaugr's silence in the *Droplaugarsona saga* version is meant to connote her angry experience. Furthermore, if *Droplaugarsona saga* was used as a direct source for *Fljótsdœla saga*, then the latter's saga-author may reveal their own interpretation that silence connotes anger in the former (though

[8] *Egils saga*, 244. *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 309.
[9] *Hœsna-Þóris saga*, 16.
[10] On the dating of *Droplaugarsona saga* and *Fljótsdœla saga*, see Pulsiano, *Medieval Scandinavia*, 143, 198.
[11] *Droplaugarsona saga*, 145.
[12] *Fljótsdœla saga*, 242.
[13] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*ærr*'.

this is difficult to prove). This example supports the notion that, in spite of Sif Rikhardsdottir's argument that French and Anglo-Norman texts were subject to 'emotive code-switching' – a deliberate curtailing of emotive content and vocabulary – when translated into Old Norse, depictions of emotionality in Old Norse-Icelandic literature nevertheless became more pronounced following the influence of the comparably more emotional literary style of the Romance tradition.[14]

3.3 Grins

As we have already seen, when, in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Bergþóra tells her sons that Sigmundr had called their father *karl inn skegglausi* ('the old beardless man') and them *taðskegglingar* ('dung-beardlings'), Skarpheðinn and his brothers exhibit a range of somatic indicia. The saga-author writes that Skarpheðinn *glotti við, en þó spratt honum sveiti í enni, ok kómu rauðir flekkar í kinnr honum, en því var ekki vant* ('grinned, but sweat formed on his brow, and red flecks on his cheeks, and this was unusual for him'), that Grímr *var hljóðr ok beit á vǫrrini* ('was silent and bit his lip'), and that Helgi *brá ekki við* ('showed no change').[15] We have already established that Skarpheðinn's facial reddening and perspiration upon learning of the *níð*-insults likely betray his anger to both the audience and the other characters, despite his subversive remark that he and his brothers will not grow angry (see **2.1.1** and **2.2.1**). It is not clear, however, whether the verb *glotta* ('to grin') in this case communicates another symptom of his angry experience, whether it conveys feigned amusement and is subversive, or bears an entirely different significance altogether.[16]

[14] See Sif Rikhardsdottir's first chapter, 'Literary Identities and Emotive Scripts', 25-56 (esp. 54).
[15] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114.
[16] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*glotta*'.

Soon Ai Low, despite showing an awareness that grins often connote – as Thomas Morcom neatly summarises – 'an independent, sardonic, and doomed attitude', argues that Skarpheðinn in this instance exhibits a 'wry grin' alongside his 'snide comment' to 'feign nonchalance' and suppress his true angry feelings.[17] Likewise, Sif Rikhardsdottir, by considering Skarpheðinn's grin 'an effort to laugh off his mother's provocations', implies that it functions to trivialise or minimise an unfavourable circumstance and disguise true feelings with feigned feelings of amusement or pleasure.[18] We may understand that the scenario is so emotionally provocative that Skarpheðinn fails, unlike Helgi, to exhibit mere emotional self-control and, by grinning, instead enacts an emergency mechanism to counteract unfavourably intense emotionality. That the grin immediately follows his (likely also subversive) quip that his mother enjoys meddling and goading may corroborate that it conveys his feigned amusement. Moreover, the saga-author's use of the conjunction *en þó* ('but') may separate Skarpheðinn's grinning from his facial reddening and sweating that are symptomatic of his anger and may indicate that the significance of such responses contrasts his grinning (i.e., *despite* feigning a grin, he turned puce and perspired with rage). Yet, the conjunction may instead serve to emphasise that Skarpheðinn's involuntary psychosomatic responses intensify, rather than contrast, the emotions conveyed by his grin to signal the potency of his emotional experience given the severity of the insults.

These readings imply that the verb *glotta* connotes feelings of nonchalance, amusement, or pleasure. Likewise, whilst admitting that Skarpheðinn's grin could be subversive, Evans indicates that the verb *glotta* could connote some kind of pleasure, this time sadistic, by suggesting that, if genuine, Skarpheðinn's grin in this instance 'shows that

[17] Soon Ai Low, 'The Mirthless Content of Skarpheðinn's Grin', *Medium Ævum* 65 (1996), 101-108 (105). Thomas Morcom, 'Insult and Insight: Skarpheðinn's Performance at the *Alþingi*', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 16 (2020), 157-180 (173, footnote 20).
[18] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 132.

he revels in the violent revenge that he is about to undertake'.[19] This reading implies that the significance of *glotta* is equivalent to that which is echoed in the present-day meaning of its English etymological derivative 'gloat', that is, '[t]o gaze with intense or passionate satisfaction (usually implying a lustful, avaricious or malignant pleasure)'.[20]

These readings tacitly adhere to the modern-day sense that grinning is synonymous with smiling. Yet, where the verb 'smile' is defined in the *OED* as '[t]o give to the features or face a look expressive of pleasure or amusement, or of amused disdain, scorn, etc.', the *OED* primarily defines the verb 'grin' as '[t]o draw back the lips and display the teeth' to indicate 'pain' or – most significant to this thesis – 'anger'.[21] This meaning is fossilised in the Modern English 'girn', which is formed metathetically from 'grin'.[22] According with this, Darwin noted that many species of primates, for instance, bare their teeth in anger, aggression, or hostility, priming themselves to bite their adversary (though he concedes that, specifically in the case of the *Cynopithecus niger*, 'the movements of the features from anger' – including teeth-baring – 'are nearly the same as those from pleasure').[23] Moreover, the etymon of the verb 'grin', the Old English verb *grennian*, is related to the Old Norse-Icelandic verb *grenja* ('to howl, bellow').[24] Grinning, therefore, is not synonymous with smiling. In addition to translating *glotta* as 'to grin', *Cleasby-Vigfusson* suggests that it be rendered 'to smile scornfully, sarcastically, so as to shew the teeth'; the meaning implied by *Cleasby-Vigfusson*'s use of the English word 'grin', therefore, appears to align with its primary *OED* definition.[25] This clearly contrasts the meaning denoted by *brosa* (defined by *Cleasby-*

[19] Evans, 'Models of Men', 160.
[20] *OED*, s.v. 'gloat, v.'.
[21] *OED*, s.v. 'smile, v.' and 'grin, v.2'. See also Low, 102.
[22] *OED*, s.v. 'grin, v.2'.
[23] Darwin, 137-40.
[24] *OED*, s.v. 'grin, v.2'. *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*grenja*'.
[25] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*glotta*'. Low, 102.

Vigfusson as 'to smile'); Wolf argues that smiling is 'likely the most common facial expression associated with happiness and well-being' in the sagas.[26]

According to the *ONP*, the verb *glotta* occurs twenty-four times in the entire Old Norse-Icelandic prose corpus and twelve times in the *Íslendingasögur* (eight times, with one instance recorded twice, in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, twice in *Grettis saga*, and once in *Fóstbræðra saga*).[27] Yet, closer inspection reveals that the verb actually occurs ten times in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, four times in *Grettis saga*, and twice in *Fóstbræðra saga*.[28] The verb also occurs once in *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*.[29] Significantly, in every case, the verb appears to occur at moments where we would expect a character to feel anger and aggression – thereby according with the primary *OED* definition of 'grin' – rather than feelings of nonchalance, pleasure, or amusement as Low, Sif Rikhardsdottir, and Evans suggest. Despite this, there are no instances in the *Íslendingasögur* or, to my knowledge, in other Old Norse-Icelandic corpora where an unequivocal nexus is established between anger or aggression and the verb *glotta*. The following analyses, therefore, will appraise the verb's usage in the *Íslendingasögur* to establish to what extent it can be associated with angry experience.

3.3.1 Grins in *Brennu-Njáls saga*

The first grin of *Brennu-Njáls saga* belongs to Þjóstolfr and may set the tone for how the expression figures throughout the text. The saga-author writes that Þjóstolfr *gekk í braut ok glotti við* ('went away and grinned') when Hallgerðr tells him that Glúmr has slapped her, and then reports how he slays Glúmr.[30] We may suspect, given the circumstances, that

[26] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*brosa*'. Wolf, 'Somatic Semiotics', 130.
[27] *ONP*, s.v. '*glotta*'.
[28] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 48, 96, 98-9, 114, 299, 303-4, 304-5, 312, 313, and 327; *Grettis saga*, 37, 41, 78, 189-90; *Fóstbræðra saga*, 240, 242.
[29] *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, 308.
[30] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 48.

Þjóstolfr is experiencing feelings of anger and aggression that are subsequently funnelled into his retaliation. Yet, it is not clear whether the grin figures as a genuine symptom of these feelings or is intended to mask them. Þjóstolfr's expression occurs after he went *í braut* ('away'). We may conjecture that his expression is a symptom of his genuine feelings, given that it is unlikely to be a subversive camouflage because no other characters are described as witnessing his performance. Yet, it could still figure to mask his true feelings from the ever-present audience. Given that the audience would nonetheless be able to detect its significance, the former interpretation is, arguably, more plausible. Alternatively, it may be a genuine symptom of another emotion altogether; Evans suggests, for instance, that Þjóstolfr's grin, like Skarpheðinn's later, connotes his satisfied anticipation of revenge.[31]

The subsequent nine grins of the saga – all belonging to Skarpheðinn – appear to be witnessed by other characters and, for this reason, are more likely to function subversively. Skarpheðinn grins following Svartr's death, and again following Kolr's death; Evans suggests that both grins convey 'a crazed appreciation of the pressure to feud, and also his anticipation of retaliatory violence'.[32] His third grin occurs when his mother tells him and his brothers about the *níð*-insults, which, as we have seen, is preceded by an anger-inducing stimulus and associated with psychosomatic indicia of anger.[33] Whilst there is no clear evidence to conclude that Skarpheðinn's first three grins, and Þjóstolfr's grin, convey sadistic satisfaction at the prospect of exacting vengeance, their consistent positioning indicates that *glotta* forecasts vengeance, and, we may conjecture, is symptomatic of the emotionality that may fuel such action.

Skarpheðinn's subsequent grins are more enigmatic. Snorri goði identifies that Skarpheðinn *glottir við tǫnn* ('grins showing his teeth'), a feature which, along with his axe-

[31] Evans, 'Models of Men', 160.
[32] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 96, 98-9. Evans, 'Models of Men', 160.
[33] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114.

wielding, likely contributes to his appearance that Snorri describes as *harðligr ok mikilfengligr* ('fierce and imposing').[34] Snorri also notes that Skarpheðinn is *fǫlleitr* ('pale-looking'), an appearance that is sometimes exhibited by angry characters (see **2.1.2**).[35] It is not clear, however, whether Skarpheðinn's grin is a further betrayal of his feelings or is intended to camouflage them. Snorri's identification of Skarpheðinn as both pale and grinning recalls the saga-author's introductory description of Skarpheðinn: *[h]ann var […] fǫlleitr ok skarpleitr, liðr á nefi ok lá hátt tanngarðrinn*, *munnljótr nokkut* ('he was pale-looking, with sharp features, bent in the nose, and with prominent teeth and a rather ugly mouth').[36] Skarpheðinn's paleness may also indicate that his appearance is corpse-like; as we have seen, in one manuscript of *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Flosi is said to turn *fǫlr sem nár* ('pale as a corpse') in reaction to Hildigunnr's goading, thereby establishing a link between death and paling.[37] Grinning is also linked with death elsewhere in the corpus. In *Fóstbræðra saga*, Falgeirr and Þórmoðr topple into the sea while fighting and lose their weapons. Þórmoðr pulls down Falgeirr's breeches, and Falgeirr swallows lots of water. The saga-author continues, *skýtr þá upp þjónum ok herðunum, ok við andlátit skaut upp andlitinu; var þá opinn muðrinn ok augun, ok var þá því líkask at sjá í andlitit, sem þá er maðr glottir at nǫkkuru* ('then his buttocks and back rose up, and his face rose up, with death. Then his mouth and eyes were open, and the look on his face seemed like when a man grins at something').[38] The implication is that Þórmoðr has triumphed over Falgeirr through sexual submission, thereby evoking the *ergi*-complex, and Þórmoðr alludes to this in a subsequent defamatory verse.[39] Falgeirr's grin may indicate that he enjoyed such submission, compounding his *argr*-status. Yet, it may instead convey a deathly expression akin to the

[34] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 299, 300.
[35] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 299.
[36] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 70.
[37] Crocker, 249. See *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 292. See also Morcom, 'Insult and Insight', 163.
[38] *Fóstbræðra saga*, 240.
[39] See Sørensen, 72-4. See Evans, *Men*, 18.

rictus grin that sometimes occurs because of rigor mortis.[40] If so, then Skarpheðinn's grinning alongside his paling may forebode either his own death, or his capacity to bring about the death of another character. In this sense, it once again figures to herald retaliatory violence in some form.

Skarpheðinn's fifth grin occurs in response to Ásgrímr's request that he remain silent when they approach Þorkell hákr ('bully') for support, which he defies by insulting Þorkell; Evans writes that this grin 'signals not only his imminent disobedience, but also his intent to prove himself superior to Þorkell'.[41] That the saga-author notes that Skarpheðinn is dressed in black here – emblematic of slayers in the sagas (see **2.1.2**) – may also suggest that his grin heralds his retaliation. When Þorkell threatens violence in response to the insults, Skarpheðinn, wielding his axe, again grins before successfully subduing him with a retaliatory threat of violence.[42] This suggests that the grin signals aggression and anger.

Skarpheðinn's seventh and eighth grins occur in public at the Law Rock, first when the settlement between Flosi and Njáll is announced and then when Njáll requests that his sons accept the settlement.[43] Evans suggests that they likewise 'show imminent disobedience' and that they 'anticipate the breakdown of legal process back into the underlying feud fuelled by the imperatives for vengeance and social dominance'.[44] His seventh grin features alongside silence, another indicium of anger. Likewise, his eighth grin is preceded by him stroking his forehead; Sif Rikhardsdottir considers this an indication that Skarpheðinn is once again perspiring and argues that the grin is intended to camouflage his true feelings while his sweat is an involuntary reflex.[45] Coupled with another psychosomatic indicium of anger (perspiration), his grin may be associated with anger.

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[40] See also Low, 103.
[41] *Brennu- Njáls saga*, 303-4. Evans, 'Models of Men', 160-1.
[42] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 304-5.
[43] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 312, 313.
[44] Evans, 'Models of Men', 161.
[45] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 133.

Lastly, Skarpheðinn *brá við grǫnum ok glotti við* (‘drew back his lips and grinned’) when Kári calls him *vár frœknastr* (‘the bravest of us all’) after he slays Hróaldr Qzurarson.[46] If, as Evans suggests, his grin indicates pleasure aroused by such a masculinising compliment, then it is semantically anomalous.[47] Occurring during battle, however, it may instead be a grimace akin to the teeth-baring that is frequently exhibited by *berserkir* who bite their shields when overcome with the *berserksgangr* (‘berserk fury’), and therefore indicate angry and aggressive belligerent energy (see **7.2**). It may also, like the other grins, reflect the retaliatory action that fighting demands. The grin occurs in the clash that immediately precedes the burning of Bergþórshváll – the climax of Flosi’s vengeance – in which Skarpheðinn himself, along with his family, is killed; we may wonder whether a grin does not always indicate that the character that grins will be the one to exact vengeance, but rather can figure as a symbol that vengeance will be exacted by someone in some form. Again, his grin may forebode his death.

Finally, if grinning is essentially synonymous with teeth-baring and may convey anger, then Grímr Njálssons’ lip-biting may also be an angry grin. That it is yoked with silence by the conjunction *ok* (‘and’) may corroborate that his lip-biting is symptomatic of anger. Alternatively, his lip-biting may be an attempt to prevent himself from erupting with rage (just as we may ‘bite our tongue’), and may, therefore, be a performative, gestural, and thus intensified manifestation of silence to mask his true emotional state. Thus, Grímr attempts, but fails, to assume the same unchanged expression as Helgi, who, as Wolf notes, has ‘mastered the art of a frozen, immobile poker face’.[48]

Although Morcom suggests that each of Skarpheðinn’s grins ‘can be argued to fulfil a different function’, these analyses show that *glotta* consistently figures in circumstances that

[46] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 327.
[47] Evans, ‘Models of Men’, 161.
[48] Wolf, ‘Somatic Semiotics’, 137.

we would expect to be anger- or aggression-inducing, and consistently forebodes some form of retaliation.[49] Moreover, given that it is frequently coupled with established indicia of anger (and associated emotions), *glotta* may relay similar feelings. *Glotta* does not appear to communicate amusement or mockery in this saga, and there is no evidence to suggest that it connotes pleasure.

3.3.2 Grins in *Grettis saga*

All four of the instances of *glotta* in *Grettis saga* describe Grettir's expression. Like Skarpheðinn, Grettir appears to grin in response to stimuli that we expect to be anger-inducing. He also grins in the presence of other characters. Emphasising that the expression is integral to Grettir's identity, Grettir's name recalls the rarer verb *gretta* ('to frown, make a wry face' or 'to grin'); following *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, we may translate *grettir* as 'frowner', or, given Grettir's propensity to grin, 'grinner'.[50]

Grettir's first two grins occur following altercations with his father, Ásmundr, in his childhood. When Ásmundr asks his son to herd geese, Grettir, finding this task difficult, breaks their wings and kills the goslings because, the saga-author writes, *[h]onum gerði mjǫk hermt við þessu, því at hann var lítill skapdeildarmaðr* ('he was greatly annoyed by this, as he was a man with little control over his temper').[51] Grettir then *glotti* ('grinned') at his father's displeasure and his question of whether he had killed the geese, before calmly reciting a verse confirming his actions.[52]

[49] Morcom, 'Insult and Insight', 173, footnote 20.
[50] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*gretta*', '*grettir*'. According to the *ONP*, *gretta* occurs twice in the *Íslendingasögur*, in *Grœnlendinga saga* (252) and in *Bárðar saga* (156).
[51] *Grettis saga*, 37.
[52] *Grettis saga*, 37.

Whilst Grettir's grin cannot be unequivocally associated with the emotional experience that fuels his violent transgression because it occurs afterwards, the emotion's proximity to the expression suggests that they are linked. The saga-author explicitly describes Grettir's anger, and the presence of an anger-inducing stimulus, Grettir's violence, and the reference to his irascibility corroborates this. His grin may communicate an attempt to suppress his true feelings. Likewise, we may suspect that Grettir's verse, while genuine insomuch as it does not conceal his culpability, is similarly subversive because it betrays no hint of anger. Alternatively, his grin could be symptomatic of his simmering aggression, and/or, applying Evans' interpretation of grins in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, his satisfaction derived from his transgression, or zoosadism. We may expect that any attempt to conceal his anger would be futile, given that his violence has already made his feelings plain to the audience. Yet, the saga-author implies that Ásmundr does not witness Grettir's violence. The grin may thus function on the subversive and the symptomatic level simultaneously: it may conceal Grettir's emotionality from his father while relaying it to the audience.

Grettir grins for a second time following growing tension with his father. Ásmundr instructs Grettir to rub his back.[53] Grettir recognises it as *verkit lǫðrmannligt* ('the work of a feeble person') – thereby implying that he would assume *kolbítr*-status by carrying out the task – and Ásmundr also calls him a *mannskræfan* ('miserable coward') for being lazy.[54] In response, Grettir scrapes a comb down Ásmundr's back, provoking his fury.[55] Again, Grettir's emotional experience is not described, but we may infer that he is angry given that his attack is a reaction to a stimulus that is likely anger-inducing. Moreover, his proverbial comment *[i]llt er at eggja óbilgjarnan* ('it is bad to incite the impatient') both reiterates his

[53] *Grettis saga*, 38.
[54] *Grettis saga*, 38. See Larrington, 'Awkward Adolescents: Male Maturation in Norse Literature', in *Youth and Age in the Medieval North*, ed. Shannon Lewis-Simpson (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 145-160 (157).
[55] *Grettis saga*, 38.

volatility and emphasises that Ásmundr's insults are goading him.[56] Grettir's final task is to mind his father's horses. When Ásmundr's favourite horse repeatedly wanders afar, forcing Grettir to stay outside in the cold, and takes all the fodder for herself, he flays her alive.[57] Again, we may suspect that he experiences anger given his response and the occurrence of an anger-inducing stimulus. When Ásmundr discovers this and correctly blames Grettir, the saga-author writes that Grettir *glotti at ok svaraði engu* ('grinned and said nothing').[58] His grin may either be another symptom of his antagonistic emotional state in response to either the horse's behaviour or his father's fury (a reading supported by the fact that the grin is concurrent with his silence, an indicium of anger) and compounds the anger detectable in his comb-wielding attack, relays (zoosadistic) pleasure, or camouflages his emotionality. Again, Grettir's second grin may also simultaneously conceal his emotionality from Ásmundr and relay it to the audience. Grettir's childhood grins, then, both occur following his emasculation and coincide with his retaliation.

Grettir's penultimate and final grins occur in adulthood. The audience may recall the significance of his childhood grins and recognise their association with vengeance. Grettir's third grin occurs during the episode with Bjǫrn. When Bjǫrn throws Grettir's cloak into a bear's den and taunts him, actions that we would expect to be anger-inducing, Grettir remains ostensibly cool and states *[e]igi legg ek slíkt langt upp* ('I shall not dwell on this').[59] When, following further provocations, their host requests that Grettir does not avenge himself while staying with him, Grettir *glotti* ('grinned').[60] Afterwards, Grettir, having declined Bjǫrn's offer of compensation, challenges him to a fight and kills him efficiently and unemotionally.[61] If Grettir's grin is symptomatic of his anger, then it does not surface in his

[56] *Grettis saga*, 38.
[57] *Grettis saga*, 40.
[58] *Grettis saga*, 41.
[59] *Grettis saga*, 76.
[60] *Grettis saga*, 78.
[61] *Grettis saga*, 79-80.

dialogue, which is economical and composed, or his violence, which is controlled and swift. In the absence of any other evidence that is indicative of his emotionality, we cannot conclude that *glotta* connotes anger in this instance.

Finally, when another Bjǫrn, Bjǫrn Hítdœlakappi, tells Grettir that Gísli plans to attack him and suggests that Grettir teach Gísli a lesson rather than kill him, Grettir *glotti við ok gaf sér fátt um* ('grinned and took little notice').[62] Again, although we would expect this news to be anger-inducing, Grettir's nonchalance suggests that he is not experiencing anger. Aligning with this, Grettir's temper does not flare when he subsequently encounters Gísli: provoked, he kills Gísli's companions, yet he mocks Gísli himself by half-heartedly pursuing him as he strips down to his undergarments to aid his escape, before flogging him.[63] The episode's comic farcicality, alongside the absence of additional evidence (such as involuntary indicia) and the presence of evidence to the contrary (such as sustained nonchalance), suggests that Grettir is not angry.

The grins may convey pleasurable anticipation of the revenge that he will exact, although there is no evidence to confirm this. Alternatively, both grins may be subversive. Low suggests that Grettir's final grin 'bypasses verbal contact with Bjǫrn and maintains the privacy of dark thought', thereby implying that the grin figures to mask negative emotionality.[64] Slavica Ranković argues that Grettir's grinning throughout the saga is a 'supreme exercise of self-control' that occurs in response to emotional stimuli so intense that they require 'a restraint stronger than restraint, its opposite, an excess in return: a smile, a grin, "cheerfulness"', and thus implies that grinning connotes an emotion that is antithetical to anger that is deployed with subversive intent.[65]

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[62] *Grettis saga*, 189-90.
[63] *Grettis saga*, 191-3.
[64] Low, 103.
[65] Slavica Ranković, 'The Exquisite Tempers of Grettir the Strong', *Scandinavian Studies* 89 (2017), 375-412 (391).

Grettir's penultimate and final grins may instead connote his mockery of Bjǫrn and Gísli's laughable provocations. This may align with how *glotta* functions in *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, where it appears to communicate the characters' mockery of, or amusement in response to, the slanderous remarks that Þorsteinn has sex with men and is a woman every ninth night (an insult prohibited in the Norwegian *Gulaþingslǫg*).[66] Yet, their grinning could equally be a manifestation of their *fjándskapr* ('hostility'), and, therefore, communicate antagonism.[67]

All of Grettir's grins are associated with the restoration of his masculinity through retaliation following emasculations of varying severity. Whereas Grettir's grins, like Skarpheðinn's grins, precede his retaliations when he is an adult (and thus seem, like Skarpheðinn's grins, to portend vengeance), they occur after them when he is a child. That Grettir demonstrates greater sensitivity to anger-inducing stimuli by exhibiting seemingly disproportionate reactions in his youth, and exhibits greater emotional self-control as an adult, may also affect the connotations of his grins. Grettir's grins, by linking and thus inviting comparison of the four discrete episodes in which they feature, are markers on his journey of emotional maturation (see **4.5**).

3.3.3 Concluding Remarks

These analyses of each occurrence of the verb *glotta* in the *Íslendingasögur* yield several conclusions. Firstly, the verb consistently figures alongside stimuli that we would expect to be anger-inducing, and therefore may indicate a character's feelings of anger and aggression. Secondly, that the verb is often coupled with indicators of anger, including reddening, paling,

[66] *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, 308. *Gulaþingslǫg*, 57.
[67] *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, 308.

sweating, and silence (especially in *Brennu-Njáls saga*) corroborates this. Thirdly, it nearly always heralds retaliation. Fourthly, it often figures, as Evans points out, to relay something concerning 'a subject's relationship with masculinity'.[68] Fifthly, despite our suspicions, there is no unequivocal nexus established between the verb and feelings of amusement or mockery, or feelings of pleasure (sadistic or otherwise), well-being, happiness, or nonchalance in the corpus.

We cannot conclude whether or not *glotta* functions subversively. Sif Rikhardsdottir notes that the 'efficiency' of expressions and gestures that conceal or subvert genuine feeling as a 'literary technique' 'is dependent on the audience's capacity to decipher the gesture as subversive or as an intentionally disingenuous performance, rather than an expression of inexorable emotions.'[69] If *glotta* sometimes functions to mask emotionality, then the subversive performance could be so convincing to both the characters and the audience that it may be indecipherable as such. Miller offers a tripartite interpretation of Skarpheðinn's grin upon learning of the *níð*-insults that may be applicable to the function of *glotta* in most cases in the sagas: it is a 'multiply determined' expression that simultaneously conveys 'sadistic urgings and hostile sensation' as well as 'desperate efforts at self-control'.[70] If it does function subversively, then it likely communicates an effort to enact self-restraint (as Miller suggests) rather than 'an effort to laugh off […] provocations' (as Sif Rikhardsdottir suggests).[71] That Þjóstolfr in *Brennu-Njáls saga* grins when other characters are not present, however, could indicate that *glotta* represents genuine emotionality. Evidently *glotta* is, in some way, associated with anger and aggression in the *Íslendingasögur*.

3.4 Laughter

[68] Evans, 'Models of Men', 161.
[69] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 118.
[70] Miller, *Humiliation*, 105.
[71] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 132.

Cleasby-Vigfusson defines the verb *hlæja* as 'to laugh' and the noun *hlátr* as 'laughter'.[72] The *ONP* cites eighty instances of *hlæja* and forty-seven instances of *hlátr* in the entire Old Norse-Icelandic prose corpus; there are twelve occurrences of *hlæja* in the *Íslendingasögur* (across nine sagas) and seven occurrences of *hlátr* in the *Íslendingasögur* (across five sagas).[73] Wolf argues that laughter functions variously to express 'joy or relief', 'triumph or scorn', and 'defiance', and figures 'as a means of camouflaging discomfort' and 'as a reflection of folly'.[74] Additionally, Evans, following Mary Beard, notes that laughter is typically either viewed as mockery, a response to the unexpected, or 'a release of pent up emotional energy'.[75] It is difficult, however, to diagnose precisely which pent emotions laughter releases. There are several instances in the sagas where *hlæja* or *hlátr* figure at moments where we may expect anger. The following analyses, therefore, will attempt to establish to what extent *hlæja* and *hlátr* can be associated with angry experience.

Moreover, Sif Rikhardsdottir's argument that Skarpheðinn's grin is 'an effort to laugh off his mother's provocations' and is, therefore, subversive prompts us to question to what extent laughter connotes the same emotional experience as grins in the sagas.[76] Wolf suggests that both *hlæja* and *glotta* represent laughter and thereby intimates an assumption of their synonymity.[77] Likewise, Jacques Le Goff discusses both verbs in tandem.[78] Yet, Evans argues that grinning 'is […] from a very different category of expression than laughter' given that, he maintains, it does not convey feelings of amusement or happiness.[79] The following

[72] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*hlæja*'.
[73] *ONP*, s.v. '*hlæja*' and '*hlátr*'.
[74] Wolf, 'Laughter in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature', *Scripta Islandica* 51 (2000), 93-117 (95-7, 97-103, 104-6, 106-7, 107-9).
[75] Evans, 'Models of Men', 146. See Mary Beard, *Laughter in Ancient Rome: On Joking, Tickling, and Cracking Up* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).
[76] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 132.
[77] Wolf, 'Laughter', 94.
[78] Jacques Le Goff, 'Laughter in *Brennu-Njáls saga*', in *From Sagas to Society*, 161-5.
[79] Evans, 'Models of Men', 157.

analyses, therefore, will also attempt to establish to what extent *hlæja* and *hlátr* may be synonymous with *glotta*.

3.4.1 Laughter in *Víga-Glúms saga*

Glúmr laughs when the *víghugr* ('killing mood') comes upon him. When Þorkell, having conflicted with Glúmr's mother, calls Glúmr a *glópaldi* ('idiot') when he confronts him, Glúmr *[v]eik heim, ok setti at honum hlátr, ok brá honum svá við, at hann gerði fǫlvan í andliti, ok hrutu ór augum honum tár þau, er því váru lík sem hagl, þat er stórt er* ('headed home and laughter came over him and it affected him so that he became pale in the face and tears the size of hailstones were flung from his eyes').[80] Glúmr then acts on his *víghugr* by slaying Þorkell's son.[81]

Wolf concedes that the significance of Glúmr's laughter is difficult to diagnose and suggests that it 'may be a laughter of relief or triumph in expectation of vengeance' – thereby aligning with the vengeance-heralding grins that Evans suggests convey sadistic satisfaction – or, more likely, symptomatic of 'some kind of psychosis'.[82] Given that we would expect the circumstances to be anger-inducing, however, Glúmr may experience anger. It is not clear whether *brá honum svá við, at* ('it affected him so that') refers to Glúmr's laughter or Þorkell's insult. If the former, then the saga-author intimates that Glúmr's laughter *brought about* his paling and biofluidic eruption; if paling and such an eruption indicate anger (see **2.1.2** and **2.2.2**), then its cause – the laughter – likely also indicates anger. By stating that Glúmr *[v]eik heim* ('headed home'), the saga-author indicates that it occurs as he turns to leave, during his journey, or when he has arrived home, and, therefore, that Þorkell does not

[80] *Víga-Glúms saga*, 26.
[81] *Víga-Glúms saga*, 28.
[82] Wolf, 'Laughter', 109.

witness his reaction. This suggests that the laughter is unlikely to be a subversive camouflage. Glúmr's reactions are, therefore, likely symptomatic of his genuine emotionality.

Glúmr's son, Vigfúss, also laughs when the *víghugr* comes upon him. Bárðr, compounding mounting tension between himself and Vigfúss, insults Vigfúss at a horse-fight by saying *þú munt optar hafa staðit nær búrhillum ok ráðit um matargerð með móður þinni en gengit at hestavígum, ok er þann veg litt skegg þitt eigi síðr* ('you must have more often stood near the pantry shelves and discussed the cooking with your mother than you have been to horse-fights, and the colour of your beard points that way no less').[83] The saga-author writes *Vigfúss hló at ok margir aðrir* ('Vigfúss laughed at that, and so did many others').[84] When Halli learns that Vigfúss laughed, he connects the reaction with that of Glúmr and considers it indicative of the *víghugr*, remarking *[þ]at er vani þeira feðga at hlæja, þá er víghugr er á þeim* ('it is their custom, father and son, to laugh when the killing mood comes upon them').[85] Confirming Halli's appraisal, Bárðr is subsequently killed.[86]

By claiming that Vigfúss is more accustomed to female company and carrying out chores typically completed by saga-women in the gynocentric sphere of the home rather than frequenting the androcentric arena of the horse-fight, and that the beard's (presumably light) colour evidences this, Bárðr emasculates Vigfúss.[87] Although Vigfúss, like his father earlier, is not described as growing angry, we would expect Bárðr's emasculating jibes to be anger-inducing. Whereas Glúmr laughs privately and thus, we may conjecture, authentically, Vigfúss laughs publicly, and others also laugh. We may, therefore, suspect that Vigfúss'

[83] *Víga-Glúms saga*, 62.
[84] *Víga-Glúms saga*, 62.
[85] *Víga-Glúms saga*, 62.
[86] *Víga-Glúms saga*, 65.
[87] See Evans, *Men*, 13. On beards and masculinity, see Oren Falk, 'Beardless Wonders: "Gaman vas Sǫxu" (The Sex was Great)', in *Verbal Encounters: Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Studies for Roberta Frank*, ed. Antonina Harbus and Russell Poole (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 223-246.

laughter, unlike his father's, functions subversively. If so, then the feigned laughter may connote a self-mockery that masks his true feelings (likely shame and anger) in order to misdirect the other characters deliberately into believing that he remains unfazed by Bárðr's insults and that they have not sealed Bárðr's fate, as the other characters might have anticipated. Halli's comment, therefore, shatters this illusion by reminding us that Vigfúss' laugh, rather than connoting amusement, most likely heralds vengeance because it accords with Glúmr's laugh. That Halli has to make this point at all indicates that laughter can connote various feelings to the audience, and, if unexplained, its significance is ambiguous. Nonetheless, whilst Vigfúss' misdirection might have also fooled the inattentive audience member, the attentive audience member would likely have connected Vigfúss' laughter with that of his father and infer its vengeance-heralding significance even prior to Halli's comment. If so, then the saga-author may deploy it as a coded signal.

Secondly, given the apparent authenticity of Glúmr's laughter earlier and Halli's appraisal that links Vigfúss' laughter with that of his father, Vigfúss' laughter may be cast as a genuine symptom of his emotionality – possibly anger at the insult or pleasure in anticipation of vengeance or both – rather than a camouflage. Yet, the other characters, by joining in with the laughter, may be cast as misinterpreting Vigfúss' laughter as connotative of merriment or dismissiveness, and that it is unintentionally subversive. By laughing at the insult and, therefore, at Vigfúss, they may actually fan the flames of Vigfúss' undisclosed fury. Likewise, the audience, following the other characters' misinterpretation, may understand that Vigfúss' laughter represents feigned merriment and suspect that he is masking his true feelings, thereby identifying a subversion and failing to recognise that his laughter is, in fact, symptomatic of his true feelings.

Thirdly, Vigfúss' laughter, rather than functioning as an involuntary symptom of feeling, may be deliberately exhibited given that it is a symbol of impending doom that is, as

Halli indicates, evidently identifiable as a symptom of the *víghugr* by at least one character. Thus, the other characters who join in with the laughter may serve to echo and amplify its vengeance-heralding symbolism.

Insomuch as *hlæja* and *hlátr* are associated with vengeance in *Víga-Glúms saga*, they function in a similar way to *glotta*. Whilst laughter may figure to feign merriment to mask genuine feelings, it seems more likely, particularly given that Glúmr laughs in private, that it is either symptomatic of anger or similar feelings and/or the pleasure experienced in anticipation of vengeance.

3.4.2 Laughter in *Brennu-Njáls saga*

As I have noted, Wolf argues that laughter regularly figures in the *Íslendingasögur* to connote scornful mockery.[88] This is the case in many of the occurrences of *hlæja* and *hlátr* in *Brennu-Njáls saga*. When Þorkell and his companions deem his mother's dream *loklausa* ('nonsense') and *geip* ('idle talk'), for example, they laugh at her.[89] We also see Skarpheðinn laugh at the old woman who hits the chickweed before predicting that it will be instrumental in starting the fire at Bergþórshváll; given that, the saga-author tells us, the Njálssons consider her *gamalæra* ('senile'), Skarpheðinn's laughter seems to convey his feelings of surprise, amusement, and mockery at such a peculiar sight.[90] Given that the most common and effective form of mockery in the corpus is emasculation, it is unsurprising that it often provokes, or is accompanied by, laughter. For instance, a re-enactment of the moment where Hrútr challenges Morðr to a duel by two children, Sigmundr's emasculating insults about Njáll and his sons, and the emasculating verses following the battle at the Alþingi, are all met

[88] Wolf, 'Laughter', 98.
[89] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 352.
[90] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 320.

with laughter.[91] Elsewhere, the emasculators themselves laugh. When Gunnarr Lambason, for example, jibes that Skarpheðinn is crying (an accusation which Skarpheðinn denies by explaining that smoke is causing his eyes to smart), Skarpheðinn notes that Gunnarr is laughing.[92] Given that women cry elsewhere in *Njála*, Gunnarr is likely trying to emasculate him.[93] Laughter is also explicitly associated with merriment in the saga. Ásgrímr, for instance, remarks that the men approaching cannot be Njáll's kinsmen, as they *fara með hlátri ok gapi* ('travel with laughter and shouts'), whilst Njáll's kinsmen *munu eigi hlæja, fyrr en hans er hefnt* ('will not laugh, before he is avenged'); thus, he intimates that laughter is not typical of characters that we would imagine to be angry.[94] These examples demonstrate that, in this saga, laughter connotes amusement, joviality, or pleasure, often brought about at the expense of another character's happiness.

Yet, the saga contains two instances of the verb *hlæja* occuring at moments where we may expect an angry reaction. In each case, the laughter may be symptomatic of mockery, symptomatic of anger, or may feign amusement to mask anger.

The first is when Hallgerðr laughs when her foster-father, Þjóstólfr, tells her that he has killed her second husband, Glúmr, because Glúmr had slapped her.[95] Having laughed, she then advises him to go to her uncle, Hrútr. Þjóstólfr replies *eigi veit ek […] hvárt þetta er heilræði* ('I don't know… whether that is good advice'), but he goes nonetheless and Hrútr slays him.[96] As I shall argue in **5.5.1**, her laughter likely figures to mask her true feelings, and also heralds vengeance. If so, then we must concede that laughter functions differently here to how it functions in, for instance, *Víga-Glúms saga*, showing that, across saga-society,

[91] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 29, 113, 409-11.
[92] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 333
[93] See, e.g., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 48, 290, 351.
[94] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 360. See also Wolf, 'Laughter', 96.
[95] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 50.
[96] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 50, 51.

laughter is, to some extent, a semantically mutable emotional indicium, even in circumstances that we would expect to be anger-inducing.

Hlæja also occurs at an angry moment during the attempted settlement between Flosi and Njáll for the slaying of Hǫskuldr Þráinsson. When Flosi finds *(silki)slæður* ('a [silk] cloak') on the settlement pile offered by Njáll and receives no reply when he demands to know who has placed them there, he laughs, before reiterating his demand a second time and again receiving no answer.[97] Flosi then impugns Njáll's masculinity by recycling the 'Old Beardless' insult, and bolsters it by jibing that Njáll is androgynous and thus of indeterminate sex.[98] Defending his father, Skarpheðinn throws a pair of breeches – a kind of female underwear, speculates Miller – at Flosi and calls Flosi *brúðr Svínfellsáss* ('the bride of the troll at Svínfell') and claims that he is used as a woman every ninth night (an insult which, as we have seen, is prohibited in the Norwegian *Gulaþingslǫg*).[99] Following this emasculation, Flosi declines the money and voids the settlement.[100] Compounding Hildigunnr's jibes (see **5.3.3**), these insults fuel Flosi's vengeful killing of, among others, Njáll and his sons.[101]

The saga-author does not describe Flosi's emotional experience during the failed settlement, and it is, therefore, difficult to attribute his laughter to any emotion in particular. Our ability to 'ferret out' the emotional significance of Flosi's laughter is contingent on discerning the implications of the *silkislæður*. They are, however, unclear. Miller notes that critics have suggested that it is a female garment.[102] If so, then we would expect it to be emasculating and insulting. Ármann Jakobsson, however, notes that Egill, a masculine character, treasures his *silkislæður*, thereby indicating that they are unlikely to be

[97] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 313.
[98] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 314, see 114.
[99] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 314. Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody?*, 220. *Gulaþingslǫg*, 57.
[100] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 314.
[101] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 325-39.
[102] Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody?*, 218.

emasculating.[103] Yet, Evans comments that 'the associations that the garment may have in one saga may not necessarily be the same as those with which it is imbued in another (and moreover, we cannot be sure that the term signifies the same type of garment in each saga)', and concludes that the *slæður* do 'seem to have a gendered association in this scene'.[104] Other critics have proposed that the *silkislæður* recall Hǫskuldr's bloody cloak that Hildigunnr lays on Flosi's shoulders when goading him (see **5.3.3**).[105]

If the *silkislæður* are in some way emasculating or recall Hǫskuldr's bloody cloak, then Flosi's laughter may convey his sadistic satisfaction at the prospect of exacting vengeance (in line with Evans' interpretation of Skarpheðinn's grins) to the audience and/or characters. Alternatively, or additionally, Flosi's laughter, as Wolf suggests, 'may signal uneasiness, but it may equally well be a type of scornful laughter uttered for the purpose of provoking a response'.[106] While plausible possibilities, the *silkislæður* likely provoke anger, and the laughter, therefore, might be associated with such emotion. Supporting this, O'Donoghue, by arguing that the *silkislæður* recall Hǫskuldr's cloak and suggesting that their 'addition to the pile might […] be tactless, rather than deliberately provocative', alludes to Flosi's anger.[107] Furthermore, Sif Rikhardsdottir suggests that Flosi's laughter 'may be intended to mask a feeling of trepidation at the implicit message of the cloak'.[108] If the laughter masks feelings of 'trepidation' or (more likely) anger, then it conveys feigned amusement, perhaps a form of camouflaging self-mockery. Given that his demands and subsequent insults indicate that he is angry, however, it seems unlikely that his laughter is subversive but rather symptomatic of his feelings. That Flosi laughs when he demands to

[103] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Masculinity and Politics in *Njáls saga*', *Viator* 38 (2007), 191-215 (199).
[104] Evans, 'Models of Men', 153.
[105] See, e.g., Judith Jesch, '"Good Men" and Peace in *Njáls saga*', in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njáls saga*, ed. John Hines and Desmond Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 64-82 (72-3); Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody?*, 218; and O'Donoghue, 'Figura in *Njáls saga*', *Saga-Book* 42 (2018), 153-166 (159). See *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 291.
[106] Wolf, 'Laughter', 107.
[107] O'Donoghue, 'Figura', 159.
[108] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 134.

know, for a second time, who has added the garment to the compensation pile suggests that his laughter is not a knee-jerk angry reaction to coming across the *silkislæður*. It is more likely, therefore, that it is a somatic reaction that coincides with a 'release of pent up emotional energy', the third category of laughter that Evans proposes.[109]

This accords with the sense that Flosi's anger has been brewing for some time. When he first learns of Hǫskuldr's slaying, the saga-author writes that *fær honum þat mikillar áhyggju ok reiði, ok var hann þó vel stilltr* ('it caused him much concern and anger, but he was well-composed').[110] If Flosi is trying to suppress his anger by remaining *vel stilltr* ('well-composed') prior to Hildigunnr's whetting scene, then he surely makes no attempt to subvert his anger at the failed settlement, where he is not *vel stilltr*. Yet, Runólfr indicates that Flosi's anger is conspicuous when he states *[þ]ess vil ek nú biðja þik […] at þú gefir ró reiði* ('I now want to ask you… to give your anger a rest').[111] His anger again rears its head following Hildigunnr's goading (see **5.3.3**); he calls her *in mesta forað* ('the worst monster') and deplores the *kvenna ráð* ('counsel of women'), before erupting in the psychosomatic display that I analysed above.[112] Three months pass between Hildigunnr's goading and the failed settlement, time enough for his emotions to stew.

Finally, whilst Yoav Tirosh argues that 'Víga-Njáll' ('Killer-Njáll') intentionally adds the *silkislæður* to the compensation pile to ruin the settlement, one may wonder whether Flosi ever intended to go through with the lawsuit.[113] Hildigunnr, in goading him, heavily implies that he must take blood-vengeance or else be shamed.[114] Flosi's laughter (and subsequent insults) may, therefore, be premeditated and exhibited to ruin the settlement deliberately. If so, then Flosi's laughter may convey feigned anger to the other characters that are present to

[109] Evans, 'Models of Men', 146.
[110] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 287.
[111] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 289.
[112] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 291-2.
[113] Yoav Tirosh, 'Víga-Njáll: A New Approach Toward *Njáls saga*', *Scandinavian Studies* 86 (2014), 208-226.
[114] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 291. O'Donoghue, 'Figura', 156.

mask his true feelings of nonchalance in order to provoke the exchange of insults that ensues, thus giving him a justifiable reason to reject the settlement.[115] Thus, the *silkislæður* may not be insulting and/or anger-inducing at all. If so, then it may be merely coincidental that Flosi's feigned anger aligns with his latent anger concerning Hǫskuldr's slaying (though it may serve to relay these latent feelings nevertheless). In this regard, his laughter is subversive, but not in the way that Sif Rikhardsdottir suggests. If Flosi is cast as staging a calculated performance of anger to give him reason to reject the settlement, then the fact that he is presented as choosing laughter to convey his anger from a range of indicia available to him indicates that laughter is an easily recognisable symptom of anger.

That we cannot unequivocally prove that the *silkislæður* are emasculating and therefore anger-inducing means that all 'ferreting' in pursuit of emotional significance is, ultimately, speculative. Whilst, as I have argued, it seems unlikely that Flosi's laughter connotes amusement to mask anger, it might be employed to relate his genuine anger or to feign anger entirely. Either way, Flosi's laughter, therefore, appears to function differently to Hallgerðr's subversive laughter, demonstrating that laughter is multivalent in *Njála*, even when figuring at similar, anger-inducing moments.

3.4.3 Concluding Remarks

Wolf argues that '[l]aughter is used in the sagas as a controlled literary device that typically alerts the listener/reader to a consequence; when laughter occurs, something – and usually something unpleasant – will follow.'[116] More precisely, laughter, when occurring alongside or in response to stimuli that we would expect to be anger-inducing in *Víga-Glúms saga* and

[115] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 134.
[116] Wolf, 'Laughter', 113.

Brennu-Njáls saga, portends some form of retaliation, and, with the possible exception of Hallgerðr's laughter, it can be symptomatic of angry feelings (perhaps mingled with sadistic pleasure in anticipation of retribution). Thus, *hlæja* and *hlátr* function similarly to *glotta*, and we can, therefore, conclude that laughing, like grinning, is associated with anger in the *Íslendingasögur*.

3.5 Furrowed Brows

3.5.1 *Ófrýnn*

Characters also furrow or knit their (eye)brows at moments that we would expect to be anger-inducing. Porter and Antón do not analyse the usage of the adjective *ófrýnn* ('frowning'). Wolf, however, notes that it is used to connote a lowering and furrowing of eyebrows and its associated emotional states.[117] She argues that it frequently conveys 'discontent', and cites as evidence the moment in *Egils saga* where the saga-author writes that Egill was *heldr ófrýnn* ('frowning somewhat') when his plan to scatter silver at the Alþingi is thwarted.[118] The expression also appears to convey anger. In *Finnboga saga*, the adverbial form of the adjective (*ófrýnligr*, lit. 'frowning-looking') appears to connote aggressive anger: when Finnbogi implies that a bear is cowardly, it *stóð upp ok byrsti sik ok gerðist mjök ófrýnligr* ('stood up and bristled and frowned greatly') and made to strike Finnbogi.[119] Indeed, John Kennedy renders *mjök ófrýnligr* as 'very angry-looking' here.[120]

[117] Wolf, 'Somatic Semiotics', 141.
[118] Wolf, 'Somatic Semiotics', 141. *Egils saga*, 297.
[119] *Finnboga saga*, 274.
[120] John Kennedy, trans., *Finnboga saga Ramma* ('The Saga of Finnbogi the Mighty'), in *CSI*, vol. 3, 221-270 (233).

In support of her argument that frowning is symptomatic of 'discontent', Wolf also cites the instance in *Þórðar saga hreðu* where Skeggi Bjarnarson frowns at Ásbjǫrn and Sigríðr's wedding. Yet, the events that precede and succeed the scene indicate that Skeggi's frowning also likely connotes feelings of anger akin to those of the bear in *Finnboga saga*, or, at least, anger that has been denied outlet and has receded into a state of dormancy that manifests in despondency.[121] Again, emotional experience is complex and cannot be reduced to a single, isolated feeling.

The saga-author recurrently reiterates the anger that Skeggi feels towards Þórðr prior to his frowning. When Þórðr kills Ormr, Skeggi's nephew, for instance, Skeggi *varð reiðr mjök* ('became very angry'), and when he confronts Þórðr to retaliate, again Skeggi *var hinn reiðasti* ('was extremely angry').[122] Despite Þórðr's provocations, Skeggi halts an attack when he sees his son Eiðr join Þórðr's retinue, thereby preventing his anger from finding an outlet.[123] Indicating that his anger does not abate, Skeggi remains silent – and thus exhibits a somatic indicum of anger – and rides homeward when Þórðr remarks that Skeggi is afraid of him.[124] Later, when Skeggi learns that Þórðr has killed Özurr, his nephew, *fylltist upp við hann mikillar reiði* ('a great deal of anger filled up within him').[125] The use of the verb *fylla upp* ('to fill up') to describe emotional experience corresponds to the transcultural emotional 'container' metaphors – in particular 'the body is a container for the emotions' and 'emotions are fluids' – and therefore implies a humoral understanding of emotions (at least tacitly).[126] If so, then his emotional 'filling up' must be countered with an emotional release. The saga-author describes how Skeggi suppresses his emotionality to hide his plans from Eiðr and

[121] Wolf, 'Somatic Semiotics', 141. *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 221.
[122] *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 189, 190.
[123] *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 190.
[124] *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 190.
[125] *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 212.
[126] Porter and Antón, 26. See Kövecses.

Þórðr's brothers and confronts Þórðr to take revenge.[127] Again, however, Eiðr intervenes and Skeggi's plans are thwarted. Peculiarly, Skeggi vents his anger by slaying Þórhallr, and Eiðr, unsurprised by this, remarks *[m]iklu var faðir minn reiðari, er vit skildum* ('my father was much angrier when we parted').[128] When Eiðr again comes between Skeggi and Þórðr when they next encounter each other in battle, the saga-author again writes that Skeggi *var hinn reiðasti* ('was extremely angry') and rides homeward.[129]

Skeggi and Þórðr agree a peace settlement following another fatal altercation.[130] The wedding between Ásbjǫrn, Skeggi's nephew, and Sigríðr, Þórðr's sister, is stipulated as a term of the settlement, and Skeggi, though not best pleased, acquiesces.[131] Indicating that Skeggi's frowning connotes a feeling antithetical to cheerfulness, the saga-author writes that, at the wedding, *[a]llir menn váru þar kátir nema Skeggi; hann var heldr ófrýnn* ('everyone there was merry except Skeggi; he was frowning rather'); in line with his chronic anger, his frowning confirms that he is far from calm and contented.[132]

Highlighting his disengagement, Skeggi falls asleep.[133] Given the association between anger and grief (see **1.3**), we may interpret his sleeping as relaying anger, given that grief-stricken characters often retire to bed.[134] Taking offence at Skeggi's gloominess, Þórðr takes Skeggi's sword and strikes a horse standing in the hayfield; Skeggi, upon waking and finding his sword missing, *varð reiðr* ('became very angry') and confronts Þórðr.[135] Given that it may be argued that weapons represent the Lacanian phallus (that is, a 'transcendental signifier' of masculine power 'to which the subject relates "without regard to the anatomical difference of the sexes"') throughout Old Norse-Icelandic literature, the theft of Skeggi's

[127] *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 212.
[128] *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 214, 215.
[129] *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 218.
[130] *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 219-21.
[131] *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 221.
[132] *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 221.
[133] *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 221.
[134] *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 221. See, e.g., *Egils saga*, 244, and *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 309.
[135] *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 221-2.

sword – like the theft of other weapons in the corpus (see **5.5.3**) –may be a symbolic and anger-inducing challenge to his masculine status, compounding and reifying the anger that Skeggi experiences throughout the saga.[136] Once more, Eiðr and Ásbjǫrn intervene to prevent Skeggi and Þórðr coming to blows.[137]

His frown, therefore, is likely a somatic indicium of his chronic and intermittently latent anger, given that it is preceded and immediately followed by angry episodes, in addition to mere 'discontent'. Whilst, as with every emotional indicium analysed thus far, frowns must be examined with careful recourse to context, we may map this understanding onto other instances of frowning in the sagas.

3.5.2 Phrases Containing *brún* and *brýnn*

Porter and Antón explain that there are several expressions in the sagas that relate to the *brún* ('eyebrow') or *brýnn* ('eyebrows') and that, figuring metonymically, their movements denote various emotional states.[138] They note that, typically, a raising of the eyebrows indicates 'cheerfulness or good humour', while a lowering of the eyebrows indicates 'displeasure'.[139] They state that two phrases in particular, *láta brún síga* (lit. 'to lower the eyebrow'), occurring seven times in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, and *setja síða brún* ('to knit the eyebrow'), occurring just once in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, ought to be translated as 'to show disapproval or anger'.[140] Porter and Antón cite one example – though not from the *Íslendingasögur* – where the phrase *láta brún síga* is explicitly connected with anger: in

[136] Carl Phelpstead, 'Size Matters: Penile Problems in Sagas of Icelanders', *Exemplaria* 19 (2007), 420-437 (434). See Jacques Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), 281-291 (285).
[137] *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 222.
[138] Porter and Antón, 43.
[139] Porter and Antón, 43.
[140] Porter and Antón, 44.

Karlamagnús saga, the author writes that Ulien *lét síga brýnn sínar ok reiddist ok var ódum manni líkari* ('lowered his eyebrows, got angry, and behaved like a mad man').[141] Though Porter and Antón rightly suggest that 'lowered his eyebrows' here might be translated as 'showed his disapproval', the expression also appears to be associated with Ulien's anger. Supporting this, in *Gylfaginning*, for instance, the same phrase is used to describe Þórr's fear-inducing anger when he discovers that Þjálfi, a farmer's son, has broken his goat's ham-bone: *vita megu þat allir hversu hræddr búandinn mundi vera er hann sá at Þórr lét síga brýnnar ofan fyrir augun* ('everyone can imagine how afraid the farmer must have been when he saw Þórr lower his eyebrows over his eyes').[142] This is clearly a manifestation of his anger: he is subsequently described as gripping Mjöllnir so tightly that his knuckles turn white (conveying both a movement that is likely an embodiment of, and outlet for, his emotionality and a colour that recurrently relays angry experience) and we are told that, afterwards, *gekk af honum móðrinn ok sefaðisk hann* ('his fury went away from him and he calmed down').[143] As we shall see, there are other phrases that pertain to eyebrow movements that appear to connote anger, and, in a particular instance in *Egils saga*, a detailed description of such a movement conveys Egill's anger. These expressions, therefore, communicate the same kind of expression and the same emotional experience as *ófrýnn*.

A lowering of the eyebrows figures in *Fóstbræðra saga* to convey a negative emotional experience that likely corresponds to anger. The saga-author describes how Gautr, a close relative of Þorgils whom Þorgeirr had slain, reacts upon encountering Þorgeirr on board a ship: *[h]ann færði brún á nef við kvámu Þorgeirs* (lit. 'he brought his eyebrow to his nose at Þorgeirr's coming').[144] According to the *ONP*, this is the only instance of the phrase

[141] Porter and Antón, 44 (their translation). *Karlamagnús saga*, 336-7.
[142] *Gylfaginning*, 37.
[143] *Gylfaginning*, 37.
[144] *Fóstbræðra saga*, 158.

færa brún á nef (lit. 'to bring the eyebrow to the nose') in Old Norse-Icelandic literature.[145] Porter and Antón translate the phrase as 'to become concerned', yet we would expect such an encounter to be anger-inducing rather than merely concerning; conveying this sense, Martin Regal renders the phrase 'he grimaced with anger'.[146] Corroborating this, the saga-author notes that both men recognised that being aboard the same vessel may result in unrest, on account of both of their *skaplyndi* ('temperaments').[147] Þorgeirr then refers to Gautr's eyebrows, suggesting that travelling with Gautr may actually prove useful *hversu síða brún sem hann setr* (lit. 'how ever he places his brows hanging down'); if he may prove useful despite this expression, then his beetling brows are symptomatic of a negative emotional state that may otherwise compromise such utility.[148] Accordingly, Regal renders the phrase 'no matter how angry he gets about it'.[149] Again indicating that Gautr likely experiences anger, Gautr later deliberately uses Þorgeirr's spear and shield as firewood in retaliation.[150] This sparks a quarrel which culminates in Þorgeirr slaying Gautr (an action that seals his own fate).[151]

Brennu-Njáls saga also uses eyebrow movements to convey emotionality. When Hrútr discovers that his wife, Unnr, has divorced him, he *brá mjǫk í brún* ('moved greatly in the eyebrows').[152] It is not stated whether the brows are raised or lowered; we may assume that Hrútr lowers his eyebrows, given that Hrútr's wife's leaving him would be insulting and therefore anger-inducing, and it is typically a lowering of the brows that intimates displeasure and anger.[153] The saga-author continues *ok var þó vel stilltr* ('and he was, nevertheless, well-

[145] Porter and Antón, 44. See *ONP*.
[146] Porter and Antón, 44. Martin S. Regal, trans., *Fóstbræðra saga* ('The Saga of the Sworn Brothers'), in *CSI*, vol. 2, 329-402 (347).
[147] *Fóstbræðra saga*, 158.
[148] *Fóstbræðra saga*, 158.
[149] Regal, trans., 347.
[150] *Fóstbræðra saga*, 198.
[151] *Fóstbræðra saga*, 200.
[152] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 26 (c.f. 21).
[153] Porter and Antón, 44.

composed').[154] The use of the conjunction *þó* emphasises that, ordinarily, eyebrow movements connote discomposure. We understand, therefore, that his eyebrow movement figures as an initial and perhaps involuntary somatic indicium that betrays his true feelings which are masked with a façade of composure. Such a façade is necessary for a man who, as Unnr notes in spite of his penile predicament that prompts his divorce, is *inir vǫskustu menn* ('the manliest of men'), if, as Skarpheðinn intimates, it is indeed womanly to become angry (see **4.2.1**).[155]

The most detailed account of a character's expressive brows features in *Egils saga*, when Egill discovers that his brother, Þórólfr, has died in battle serving King Aðalsteinn of England. The saga-author first writes that Egill, sitting before the King, *lagði sverðit um kné sér ok dró annat skeið til hálfs, en þá skelldi hann aptr í slíðrin* ('laid his sword across his knees, and now and again he drew it halfway out of the sheath, then thrust it back into the sheath').[156] The narrative is then momentarily suspended while the saga-author describes Egill's physical characteristics (detailing, among other features, his wide forehead, his prominent brows, his broad nose, jaw, and chin, his thick neck, and baldness).[157] This unusually comprehensive departure, occurring twenty-four chapters after Egill's introduction, is noticeably delayed.[158] The saga-author also comments that Egill was *harðleitr ok grimmligr, þá er hann var reiðr* ('hard-looking and fierce, when he was angry'), before describing his beetling brows, writing

> *en er hann sat, sem fyrr var ritat, þá hleypði hann annarri brúninni ofan á kinnina, en annarri upp í hárrœtr; Egill var svarteygr ok skolbrúnn. Ekki vildi hann drekka, þó at*

[154] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 26.
[155] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 24 (c.f. 114).
[156] *Egils saga*, 143.
[157] *Egils saga*, 143.
[158] Torfi Tulinius, *Skáldið í Skriftinni: Snorri Sturluson og Egils saga* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2004), 62. See Sif Rikhardsdottir, 74. See *Egils saga*, 80.

honum væri borit, en ýmsum hleypði hann brúnunum ofan eða upp ('but when he sat, as was written before, he moved one eyebrow down over the cheek, and another up to the roots of his hair. Egill was dark-eyed and swarthy. He did not want to drink, even though it was brought to him, but he moved his eyebrows up and down alternately').[159]

As Sif Rikhardsdottir suggests, the preceding 'narrational intrusion' to describe Egill's 'exceptional countenance' sharpens the audience's focus on, and thereby maximises the impact of, this subsequent description of his eyebrows.[160] The preceding description may, therefore, be deferred intentionally.

Egill's expressive eyebrow movements in King Aðalsteinn's court may convey his anger, given that, firstly, they closely follow the saga-author's explanation of what he typically looked like when he became angry (the only reference to emotionality in a description that otherwise solely concerns his physiognomy), and, secondly, they accord with our expectation that his brother's death would likely induce anger (see **1.3**). Miller, by noting that 'the grief of younger men was supposed to produce anger' in the sagas, implicitly questions the authenticity of such a response, and the extent to which it might be exaggerated, as it seems to be in Egill's case, or entirely feigned.[161] Indeed, given that Egill raises and lowers his eyebrows alternately, his expression, rather than figuring as a fleeting involuntary somatic indicium such as Ulien's frown in *Karlamagnús saga*, feels deliberate and performative. Such a repetitive, rhythmic movement echoes the saga-author's description of Egill's performative sword-thrusting. On account of the widespread preoccupation with the

[159] *Egils saga*, 143-4. As Wolf points out, Gunnar Harðarson counterpoints this with Cicero's speech against L. Calpurnius Piso Caesonius that figures a similar eyebrow movement. See Wolf, 'Somatic Semiotics', 141, footnote 38, and Gunnar Harðarson, 'Um sett og uppruna augabrúna Egils Skallagrimssonar', *Skirnir* 177 (2003), 159-162.
[160] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 73.
[161] Miller, *Humiliation*, 107.

'*ergi*-complex' throughout the *Íslendingasögur*, Egill's sheathing and unsheathing of his sword – likely representative of the Lacanian phallus, as we have seen – may be symbolic and connote a threat of a penetration that would render the King *argr*.[162] It is likely, therefore, that Egill is staging 'a dramatic performance' of masculinity as well as an emotional performance: his sheathing and unsheathing of his sword conveys phallic aggression, and his beetling brows convey grief-induced anger.[163]

In response to Egill's sword-thrusting and expression, King Aðalsteinn slips an arm-ring over the tip of his unsheathed sword for Egill, which Egill receives via the tip of his own unsheathed sword.[164] It is not clear whether the King removes the ring from his own sword before placing it on Egill's sword or whether the King's sword meets Egill's sword and the ring slips from one to the other; if the latter, then the scene's phallic imagery is intensified, as one man's weapon meets, and touches, another man's weapon. The implication is that the ring qualifies as public compensation for Þórólfr's death. Indicating that Egill's eyebrow movements were intended to connote a negative emotional experience caused by the lack of compensation he had so far received for Þórólfr's slaying, the saga-author writes that, on receipt of the ring, *þá fóru brýnn hans í lag* ('then his eyebrows went back to their normal position').[165]

Egill's expressive brows feature elsewhere in the *Íslendingasögur*: in *Laxdœla saga*, when Óláfr Hǫskuldsson, upon wedding Egill's daughter, gives Egill the sword Mýrkjartansnaut ('Mýrkjartan's gift'), *varð Egill allléttbrúnn við gjǫfina* ('Egill's brows became completely relaxed at the gift').[166] We would expect such a gift to arouse pleasure in its recipient, and Egill's relaxed brows, therefore, likely connote such emotionality; Porter

[162] Evans, *Men*, 18-19, 24. See Phelpstead, 434.
[163] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 74.
[164] *Egils saga*, 144.
[165] *Egils saga*, 144.
[166] *Laxdœla saga*, 66.

and Antón translate the phrase *vera létt-brýnn* (lit. 'to be eyebrows-relaxed') as 'to be in a good mood/glad'.[167] For Egill's brows to relax, the saga-author implies that, prior to receiving the gift, they were not relaxed, just as his brows are far from relaxed prior to him receiving compensation from King Aðalsteinn in his own saga. Counterpointing the eyebrow scene in *Egils saga* with this instance in *Laxdæla saga* demonstrates that Egill employs, albeit to different degrees, the same pattern of behaviour on at least two occasions as a means to a lucrative end. This further hints that his comportment may be deliberate, and therefore casts doubt on the authenticity of his emotional experience.

Moreover, if, in King Aðalsteinn's court, Egill's emotionality ceases upon receipt of compensation for Þórólfr's death, then the veracity of his experience is further cast into doubt, suggesting, again, that Egill has feigned, or at least amplified, his emotional experience, staging a performance to attain indemnification. As Sif Rikhardsdottir writes, 'the gestural display is intended as a means of securing compensation for his brother's death by the king and thus guaranteeing the family's – and by extension his own – honour, rather than (or in addition to) signifying an emotive interior.'[168] Further indicating his mutating emotional experience, Egill, having refused to drink initially, now finishes his drinking horn.[169] Later, Egill refuses to drink when he learns of the death of his son Bǫðvarr; given this consistency, we discern that Egill experiences, or pretends to experience, similar feelings in both instances.[170] Moreover, although not explicitly stated, the absence of dialogue during this scene at King Aðalsteinn's court implies that Egill remains silent prior to receiving compensation, and he thus exhibits another somatic indicium of anger that complements his eyebrow movements. Just as his expression returns to normal and he ceases his alcoholic abstinence upon receiving compensation, Egill breaks his silence by speaking a verse, and the

[167] Porter and Antón, 44.
[168] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 74.
[169] *Egils saga*, 144.
[170] *Egils saga*, 244.

saga-author remarks that Egill *mælti við aðra menn* ('spoke to the other people').[171] Yet, indicating that he still experiences, or feigns, a degree of displeasure, it is not until after King Aðalsteinn offers further compensation (two chests of silver for Þórólfr's father and kinsmen, and the promise of land or wealth for Egill) that the saga-author writes *tók Egill þaðan af at gleðjask* ('from then on Egill began to be glad').[172] This is the only explicit revelation that the compensation has positively affected Egill's emotional state, and, we infer, that the initial lack of compensation had caused him to be less than glad; until this point, we must 'ferret out' his emotional experience from indicia, comportment, and context.

Writing of *Egils saga* in particular, Sif Rikhardsdottir suggests that 'poetry […] appears to function as the exclusive *means* for emotive vocalisation within the saga'.[173] In line with this, Egill explicitly reveals the nexus between emotionality and his beetling brows in a verse, confirming our suspicions of their emotional significance:

Knǫ́ttu hvarms af harmi
hnúpgnípur mér drúpa,
nú fann ek þanns ennis
ósléttur þær rétti;
gramr hefr gerðihǫmrum
grundar upp of hrundit,
sá 's til ýgr, af augum,
armsíma, mér grímu.[174]

[171] *Egils saga*, 144, 145.
[172] *Egils saga*, 145.
[173] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 85.
[174] *Egils saga*, 145.

(‘The jutting peaks of the eyelids [(beetling) EYEBROWS] knew how to droop from grief; now I have found one who straightened those furrows of the forehead [EYEBROWS]; the prince has pushed up from my eyes the fencing crags of the ground of the mask [FACE > EYEBROWS] – he is fierce towards arm-strings [RINGS]’).[175]

Egill specifically attributes his eyebrow movements to his *harmr* (‘grief’ or ‘sorrow’), and thus anger (see **1.3**). The noun *gríma* (featuring in the kenning ‘the fencing crags of the ground of the mask’) is multivalent. *Cleasby-Vigfusson* notes that, when figuring metaphorically in poetry, *gríma* can mean ‘the night’.[176] Given that Egill is described as having black hair and eyes, and a swarthy complexion (both in this scene and when he is first introduced), and dark colours can connote an experience of anger or irascibility, *gríma* may serve to reiterate Egill’s anger.[177] *Gríma*’s primary meaning, however, is ‘mask’.[178] This may again point to the staged nature of Egill’s expression; a *grímumaðr*, for instance, is a ‘masked or disguised man’.[179] This further suggests that Egill is deliberately emoting expressively to gain compensation.

Further supporting the interpretation that Egill deliberately stages his feelings, Sif Rikhardsdottir highlights that when Arinbjǫrn criticises Egill for not concealing his *ógleði* (‘melancholy’) and assumes that it indicates his grief, Egill’s suggestion that he marry Ásgerðr, his brother’s widow, demonstrates that ‘his melancholy is not due to grief (dispelled once [Þórólfr’s] death had been justly compensated), but rather unrequited love’.[180] Egill’s sustained good spirits once the marriage is finalised emphasises, at best, the evanescence of

[175] This is Margaret Clunies Ross’ translation, in *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 110.
[176] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. ‘*gríma*’.
[177] See *Egils saga*, 80.
[178] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. ‘*gríma*’.
[179] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. ‘*gríma*’.
[180] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 75. *Egils saga*, 148, 150.

any feelings of grief that he previously felt for his brother, or, at worst, that these feelings were exaggerated – or entirely feigned – for material gain.

Sif Rikhardsdottir concludes that the scene in King Aðalsteinn's court as a whole 'acts as evidence of the intentional manipulation of emotive gesticulations as signifiers that both the king and the audience are apparently quite capable of deciphering'.[181] Whether at all reflective of his genuine emotional experience or not, that the saga-author chooses to cast Egill as moving his eyebrows to convey his anger rather than choosing another somatic indicium suggests that the movement was considered indicative of anger in saga-society, and this was discernible to the audience. In old age, Egill, as already noted, frowns when his plan to scatter the silver that Aðalsteinn had given him is thwarted (an expression surely figured to recall his expression, and thus his emotional experience, when he first received the silver), and, just prior to this, he refers to his knitted brows in a verse when a cook complains that he is getting under her feet.[182] With the scene in King Aðalsteinn's court in mind, the audience would likely be attuned to the significance of Egill's brows and interpret them as conveying his anger in these instances. Thus, other instances where characters are described as having furrowed brows may, if their contextual circumstances allow, communicate anger.

3.5.3 Raising the Brows

Finally, we can also 'ferret out' prior angry experience from a subsequent raising of the eyebrows. In the two examples that follow, it is not clear, however, whether this is intended to describe a lifting of the frown to return the brows to their resting position (as is the case when Egill receives compensation), or rather a raising of the brows above this position to

[181] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 76.
[182] *Egils saga*, 297, 295. See Wolf, 'Somatic Semiotics', 141.

convey a conspicuous antithetical emotional experience to anger. Such a movement figures in another instance in *Egils saga*, when King Haraldr is angry at the false claim that Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson intends to kill him.[183] Further indicating his anger, the king grows silent every time Þórólfr is mentioned. When Þorgils gjallandi ('the Boomer') gives the king tribute on Þórólfr's behalf that is more plentiful and of better quality than anything offered before, the king *þá hóf honum heldr upp brún* ('then raised up his brows somewhat') and *gladdisk* ('became glad').[184] Porter and Antón render *hefr (heldr) upp brún* as 'to become cheerful'.[185] This establishes an unequivocal nexus between raised brows and a positive emotional experience.

The same phrase occurs in a parallel scene in *Fóstbræðra saga* which also demonstrates the link between expressive brows and emotionality. When Sigurfljóð tells Vermundr that Þorgeirr and Þormóðr have slain Ingólfr and his son Þorbrandr and pours silver into his lap as a settlement price, Vermundr *hefr upp brún við fégjǫfina* ('raises up his eyebrow at the gift of money') and *[s]efask hann af reiðinni* ('his anger was calmed').[186] Like Egill's brows, Vermundr's brows shift to convey an emotional response to receiving compensation. Receiving the money causes his eyebrows to raise, an indicium symptomatic, the prose order suggests, of his abating anger. We understand that, prior to receiving this gift, he was angry, and imagine that his eyebrows were, rather than raised up, lowered (in line with Porter and Antón's findings that a lowered brow connotes anger), or at least unanimated. Thus, we can deduce that Vermundr had been experiencing anger prior to this point at news that we would expect to be anger-inducing.

3.6 Leaping and Jumping

[183] *Egils saga*, 35.
[184] *Egils saga*, 34-5.
[185] Porter and Antón, 44.
[186] *Fóstbræðra saga*, 140-1.

Bodily movements can also connote emotionality. Beyond the story-world, everyday examples of embodied emotional practice are door-slamming or foot-stomping, for instance. When carried out privately, such gestures may serve as an outlet of pent emotional energy. When carried out publicly, the agent, whether tacitly or deliberately, is employing an emotional marker that is widely understood to convey a particular emotional experience: the agent knows that the recipient knows that door-slamming or foot-stomping conveys their angry feelings. Like facial expressions, these movements can be cast as involuntary (the agent's reflex response to an emotional trigger) or as deliberate and performative, to either exaggerate or entirely feign an emotional experience. Such movements may also figure subversively, employed with the intention of conveying one emotional experience to mask another. In the sagas, verbs of movement often figure without a qualifying adverb or explanation; yet, by analysing the verb's usage in context, we can 'ferret out' a character's emotional state.

For instance, the verbs *spretta* ('to spring') and *hlaupa* ('to leap', 'spring', or 'to run') – often occurring with the preposition *upp* ('up') – frequently connote, and figure alongside, emotional experiences.[187] These translations hint at the verbs' inherent emotionality: in both fiction and real life, agents spring to their feet to convey various emotional responses, such as surprise, elation, or frustration. Given that such emotionality can be identified even when they remain unqualified sees the movement echo the emotional intensity of foot-stomping or door-slamming, for instance. Given that these verbs also regularly figure to convey unemotional motion, however, careful attention must be paid to context when deciding whether they may connote emotionality in a particular scene. Often, these movements appear to convey anger, and often precede moments of antagonism, aggression, and violence.

[187] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*spretta*' and '*hlaupa*'.

3.6.1 *Spretta upp*

The verb *spretta upp* can connote various emotions. In *Víglundar saga*, for instance, the verb seems to convey fear: when Einarr and Jǫkull attempt to rape Ólof and are instead met by Óttarr (Ólof in disguise), *þeir spretta upp báðir ok ganga út* ('they both spring up and go out') in response to Óttarr's lie that Þorgrímr, Ólof's husband, is approaching (see **5.2.2**).[188] Elsewhere, however, an unequivocal nexus is established between the movement and anger. In *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, when Hersteinn is pestered by a farmer to tend to a sick cow, Hersteinn *sprettr þá upp, ok verðr hermt* ('then springs up and becomes angry').[189] The nexus is also established in *Víga Glúms saga*. Glúmr employs Ingjólfr as his foreman and is displeased that he regularly leaves Glúmr's farm to visit Þórkell's daughter.[190] When they play a game where each character must name something that they place reliance on and Ingjólfr says 'Þórkell', the saga-author writes that *[h]ann Glúmr sprettr upp ok hefir sverðshjǫltin fyrir sér ok gekk at honum ok mælti: "Makligan fulltrúa kaustu þér." Allir sá, at Glúmr var reiðr* ('Glúmr springs up and has his sword's hilt in front of him and goes to him and said: "you have chosen a worthy patron". Everyone could see that Glúmr was angry').[191] Glúmr's aggressive weapon-wielding, sarcasm, and the saga-author's intimation that Glúmr's anger was readily discernible, suggests that *spretta upp* also connotes his embodied anger.

3.6.2 *Hlaupa upp*

[188] *Víglundar saga*, 78.
[189] *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, 40.
[190] *Víga Glúms saga*, 42-3, 44.
[191] *Víga Glúms saga*, 45.

Grettis saga alludes to a nexus between the verb *hlaupa* and anger. We are told that, when Grettir scrapes the comb down Ásmundr's back, he *hljóp upp ok varð óðr* ('leapt up and was furious').[192] This is a naturalistic association; C. E. Izard, for instance, observes that 'pain is a direct and immediate cause of anger'.[193] Moreover, Leonard Berkowitz notes that, because those afflicted 'may seek to escape or avoid the aversive situation' while also bearing 'anger-related feelings, thoughts, and memories', painful sensations 'give rise to *both fight* and *flight* reactions' simultaneously.[194] With this in mind, Ásmundr's leaping up is likely, following Berkowitz, both a *fight* and *flight* reaction, and likely conveys not only his pain, but also his anger (as the saga-author's reference to Ásmundr's fury corroborates). Ásmundr's propensity to rage in comparable scenarios further reinforces this sense.[195]

With this in mind, other instances of the verb may relay similar feelings. Yet, it figures only two other times in *Grettla*, and, while seemingly conveying emotionality in one instance, in another it relays unemotional motion. This emphasises the care that must be taken when attempting to 'ferret out' emotionality from bodily movements. Towards the end of the saga, the verb appears to connote Þórbjǫrn's emotionality: when his stepmother gouges his eye out, *[h]ann hljóp upp ok þreif til hennar óþyrmiliga, svá at hon lagðisk í rekkju af, ok af því dó hon síðan* ('he leapt up and grabbed her brutally so that she laid down on the bed and later died from that').[196] Þórbjǫrn's leaping up, like Ásmundr's movement, surely connotes his pain and rage.

Earlier, however, the verb relays unemotional movement: the saga-author writes that Grettir, when battling Gunnarr and his followers, *hljóp upp í þverpallinn við dyrrnar* ('leapt

[192] *Grettis saga*, 38.
[193] C. E. Izard, *The Psychology of Emotions* (New York: Plenum Press, 1991), 237.
[194] Leonard Berkowitz, 'Pain and Aggression: Some Findings and Implications', *Motivation Emotion* 17.3 (1993), 277-293 (278).
[195] See *Grettis saga*, 37, 41.
[196] *Grettis saga*, 227.

up onto the cross-dais against the door).[197] Whilst we may conjecture that Grettir experiences anger during the fight and link the verb with his emotionality, Grettir's leaping is primarily a feature of the fight's choreography: he leaps onto the cross-dais so that he can back away through the door and overcome his opponent.

Beyond *Grettis saga*, the verb *hlaupa upp* figures elsewhere in the *Íslendingasögur* to convey emotionality. In both *Þórarins þáttr stuttfeldar* and *Kjalnesinga saga*, it describes characters who leap up in response to emasculating insults that we would expect to arouse anger. In the former, when Þórarinn composes a verse intimating Árni's cowardice, Árni *hljóp upp ok brá sverði ok vildi höggva til Þórarins* ('leapt up and drew his sword and wished to strike Þórarinn'); his drawn weapon and desire for retaliation imply that Árni leaps in rage.[198] Proving that Árni is angry, another man, Hákon, tells Árni to *vera kyrran* ('be calm').[199] Likewise, in *Kjalnesinga saga*, Bui reacts similarly when emasculated by Kolfinn. Upon hearing his taunts, *[h]ljóp hann þá upp ok greip vápn sín ok kveðst aldri skyldu þola klækisorð Kolfinns* ('he then leapt up and grabbed his weapons and said that he would never endure Kolfinn's disgraceful words').[200] In *Bandamanna saga*, *hlaupa* (this time followed by *undan*, meaning 'from' or 'away from', rather than *upp*) also appears to connote anger. Oddr seems to lose his temper when his repeated requests that Óspakr return his *goðorð* are not heeded: sitting at a table with Óspakr opposite him*, er minnst varir, hleypr Oddr undan borðinu ok at Óspaki ok hefir reidda øxi í hendi sér, biðr hann nú laust láta goðorðit* ('when least expected, Oddr leapt up from the table, went to Óspakr, and had a raised axe in his hand, and ordered him to give up the *goðorð* now').[201] Our expectation that the scenario

[197] *Grettis saga*, 83.
[198] *Þórarins þáttr stuttfeldar*, 310.
[199] *Þórarins þáttr stuttfeldar*, 310.
[200] *Kjalnesinga saga*, 24-5.
[201] *Bandamanna saga*, 308.

would be anger-inducing, his raised weapon, and the immediacy of his command indicates that Oddr is angry.

3.6.3 Concluding Remarks

Hlaupa and *spretta* are just two examples of verbs that convey embodied emotional practice in the *Íslendingasögur*. The audience also ought to be sensitive to other instances where emotionality is expressed through movement. As I have noted, the verb *geisa*, for instance, appears to connote a gestural, performative mode of raging that is unique to the female whetter (see **2.2.2** and **5.3.1**).[202] Likewise, the compound noun *berserksgangr* ('berserk fury', lit. 'berserk walking/motion') conveys extremely violent and unpredictable anger (see **7.2**).[203] Elsewhere, in *Svarfdæla saga*, for example, the saga-author writes at one moment of Klaufi – a character who experiences the *berserksgangr* later in the saga – that *[s]vá var hann þá reiðr, at hann rak ǫxi sína í jǫrð niðr, svá at stóð á hamri* ('he was so angry that he slammed his axe down into the ground so that the shaft stood out').[204] A manifestation of his anger, Klaufi's performative axe-slamming figures as an emotional practice.

[202] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114, 99.
[203] Dale, 71-2.
[204] *Svarfdæla saga*, 161. For Klaufi's experience of the *berserksgangr*, see 171.

Conclusion to Section I

Saga-authors frequently employ various involuntary somatic indicia, facial expressions, and bodily movements to connote anger; the phrase *setti svá rauðan sem blóð* ('turned red as blood'), for instance, can be, in certain circumstances, essentially synonymous with 'became angry'.[1] In rare instances, a saga-author's explanation of a particular indicium – corroborated by context – can unequivocally prove that it is associated with, or symptomatic of, anger. From such examples, as well as through an appeal to context, we may deduce that the same indicium will likely bear the same emotional significance when it remains unexplained, as is the case with many somatic indicia. Where we are never treated to an explicit authorial explanation that reveals a nexus between a certain indicium and anger, careful examination of its context can yield evidence suggestive of such an association. Nonetheless, as Porter and Antón consistently show, a particular indicium can often, though not always, connote various (sometimes disparate and conflicting) emotional states, sometimes simultaneously; just because it figures to connote one emotion in one instance, therefore, does not mean that it will definitely connote the same emotion in another instance. Again, an analysis of context is crucial.

Moreover, with the nexus between certain indicia and anger established, we can use them to supplement the many descriptions of anger that do not feature indicia. In *Víglundar saga*, for instance, Ólof, disguised as Óttarr, is described as *allreiðugligr* ('extremely angry-looking').[2] Elsewhere, in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Gunnarr's mother tells her son *reiðuligr ert þú nú* ('you are now angry-looking').[3] In *Grœnlendinga þáttr*, we are told that *var reiðisvipr á*

[1] See, for example, *Gunnlaugs saga*, 69-70.
[2] *Víglundar saga*, 78.
[3] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 136.

byskupi ('an angry look was on the bishop').[4] Whilst the modern reader would likely wonder exactly how these characters appear demonstratively angry, that the saga-author opts to omit somatic markers indicates that the medieval audience likely understood what such appearances look like and that further elaboration was unnecessary. Plausibly, the medieval audience might have called to mind indicia connotative of anger upon hearing the words *allreiðugligr*, *reiðuligr*, and *reiðisvipr*, for example.

Furthermore, that most of these indicia are left unexplained may suggest that their medieval audience could easily decode them and straightforwardly infer their emotional significance. Such significance, however, is not straightforwardly discernible for the modern reader or critic. Alternatively, or even additionally, saga-authors may purposefully include ambiguities to invite the audience to consider the possibilities of their significance. Such is their ubiquity that Miller devotes an entire monograph to contemplating the ambiguities present in *Hrafnkels saga*, for instance.[5] The saga-author, in some cases, may have never intended for particular indicia to connote single, unequivocal meanings.

Where the quest for precise meaning results in a futile impasse, only the process of careful deduction of plausible interpretations remains. Complex ambiguities – in particular ambiguous presentations of emotion – deliberately deployed by a saga-author promote the audience's sustained engagement with the narrative through the intrigue that they provoke. It is, to use Derrida's term, because of the *play* between different interpretations that can be 'ferreted out' that these indicia are fundamentally and timelessly entertaining.

With the methodology of how to 'ferret out' anger in the *Íslendingasögur* having been established, we can now turn to examine the 'emotive scripts' by which particular 'emotive literary identities' abide.

[4] *Grænlendinga þáttr*, 282.
[5] See Miller, *Hrafnkel or the Ambiguities*.

SECTION II: ANGER AND MASCULINITIES

4 Anger and Hegemonic Masculinity

4.1 Introduction: Saga-Society Masculinity

Several critics have attempted to define masculinity in saga-society. Margaret Clunies Ross postulates that 'courage, reticence, calculated but not excessive aggression, physical strength and honesty to a point' characterised a 'manly man'.[1] Drawing on the work of Thomas Laqueur, Clover has proposed a 'one-sex, one-gender' model of saga-society gender, where all characters are judged according to one gender ('something like masculine'), 'regardless of sex'.[2] She conceives of a 'gender continuum rather than a sexual binary' with a great deal of masculinity at one end (described using the adjective *hvatr*, 'hard') and little to no masculinity at the other (described using the adjective *blauðr*, 'soft').[3] Given that Clover proposes that sex is disregarded, saga-women are also judged according to this continuum. Evans has, however, refuted Clover's model: although Clover 'is clearly right to see characters' gender performances as mutable and mobile', Evans argues, 'her framework is limited in its erasure of the importance of biological sex'.[4] Evans lists many instances where sex is shown to be significant rather than disregarded. When Skarpheðinn, referring to himself and his brothers, claims *ekki hǫfu vér kvenna skap* ('we do not have the disposition of women'), for instance, he 'clearly separates the categories of men and women'.[5] Moreover,

[1] Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to The Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 7.
[2] Clover, 'Regardless', 18, 13, 9.
[3] Clover, 'Regardless', 11.
[4] Evans, *Men*, 15.
[5] Evans, *Men*, 12. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114.

Evans' notion that some saga-characters exhibit 'female masculinity' – 'masculinity without men' – highlights a distinction between sex and gender for which Clover's model does not allow (see **5**).[6] By holding that characters climb further up the masculine scale the more masculine attributes they exhibit, Clover's continuum is also flawed insomuch as it does not allow for characters to be simultaneously masculine in some respects, but not others. To allow for this, and the notion that a character's gender is mutable and in constant flux, saga-society's gender dynamic is better conceptualised in a Venn diagram, where characters take the form of self-contained, smaller, mobile sets which intersect the larger set of masculinity.

Evans also argues that Clover's model is limited 'by not recognizing (or making room for the recognition of) the *multiple* forms of masculinity that we encounter in Old Norse literature'.[7] Following Stephen Whitehead, Evans argues that there is a '"multiplicity of masculinities" […] dependent upon a number of intersecting factors for their production'.[8] In the *Íslendingasögur*, the intersection of a character's masculine performance with factors such as their biological sex, age, social position, or ethnicity results in different modalities of masculinity. Evans therefore proposes that R. W. Connell's model of 'hegemonic masculinity' – a model that holds that many masculinities coexist while remaining subordinate to one sovereign modality – is a more appropriate way of conceptualising saga-society masculinity.[9] All men aspire to achieve, but few fully attain, this culturally-contingent ideal. Evans endeavours to produce a model of hegemonic masculinity for saga-society:

> '[…] to embody a hegemonic masculine position a character: must be of fine physical appearance; must act heroically (which includes a display of physical and martial

[6] Evans, 'Female Masculinity'. See Halberstam, 1.
[7] Evans, *Men*, 15.
[8] Evans, *Men*, 15. Stephen Whitehead, 'Hegemonic Masculinity Revisited', *Gender, Work and Organization* 6.1 (1999), 58-62 (58).
[9] Evans, *Men*, 15-23. R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 77.

prowess); must be bold, sincere, and responsible (actions must have good cause, the person must not be overly domesticated, and must not prefer sexual relations to physical labour); must act according to the dictates of honour at all times (must be both willing and able to exact due vengeance, and must act amicably with kinsmen); must adhere to alimentary taboos; and must not take part in 'irregular' sexual practices.'[10]

By investigating the nexus between anger and masculinity established in *Brennu-Njáls saga* as a starting point before demonstrating how this nexus is upheld throughout the *Íslendingasögur*, this chapter will show how anger is recurrently cast as compromising a saga-man's attainment of the hegemonic masculine ideal (as defined by Evans) and therefore as destabilising his masculine status. In so doing, it will also explore how male anger is provoked and manifests, and will distil what constitutes the male emotive script for anger.

4.2 Anger and Masculinity in *Brennu-Njáls saga*

4.2.1 Skarpheðinn Njálsson

As discussed in **2.1.1**, when Skarpheðinn attempts, but fails, to suppress his rage in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, he states, referring to himself and his brothers, *ekki hǫfu vér kvenna skap [...] at vér reiðimsk við ǫllu* ('we do not have the disposition of women, that we become angry over everything').[11] Skarpheðinn explicitly genders the expression of anger, or, at least, irascibility, as feminine; thus, he echoes the ecclesiastical feminisation of anger (see **1.5**) and

[10] Evans, *Men*, 25.
[11] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114.

establishes a nexus between anger and reduced masculinity.[12] It is ironic that emasculating insults provoke an emotional reaction that itself further destabilises masculinity. Whilst Sif Rikhardsdottir writes that Skarpheðinn's remark shows that 'demonstrative emotive behaviour was considered to belong to a feminine domain', Miller interprets Skarpheðinn's comment as gendering 'easily-aroused anger as feminine, [and] slow anger as masculine', implying that Skarpheðinn intimates that it is rash anger, rather than all anger, that is feminine or feminising.[13] Furthermore, by saying that he will not behave like a woman by growing angry over everything, Skarpheðinn also implies that growing angry may be permissible for men in some – presumably severe – cases. He indicates, therefore, that anger's gendered status is contingent on its mode of expression and circumstantial severity.

Skarpheðinn comments in this way when he learns that Sigmundr has aimed *níð*-insults at him, his father, and his brothers. These insults are repeated and thus reified by the Njálssons' mother, Bergþóra, who goads the brothers to grow angry and exact vengeance (see **5.3.1**). Sigmundr calls Skarpheðinn's father, Njáll, *karl inn skegglausi* ('the old beardless man'). This is an emasculating jibe, given that, in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, beards 'were synecdochic with manhood'.[14] Several other examples in the *Íslendingasögur* corroborate this. In *Víga-Glúms saga*, for instance, Bárðr insults Vigfúss when he claims that the colour of Vigfúss' beard, presumably light and thus inconspicuous and unimpressive, evidences that he carries out chores typically completed by saga-women (see **3.4.1**).[15] Later in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Flosi recycles and compounds the insult that Njáll is beardless when he suggests *margir vitu eigi, er hann sjá, hvárt hann er karlmaðr eða kona* ('many who see him do not know whether he is a man or a woman').[16] Flosi's comment shows that biological sex

[12] See Auður Magnúsdóttir, 'Ill er Ofbráð Reiði', passim.
[13] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 132. Miller, 'Emotions and the Sagas', 100.
[14] Falk, 'Beardless Wonders', 234.
[15] *Víga-Glúms saga*, 62.
[16] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 314.

– indicated by the secondary sexual characteristic of facial hair – is, rather than disregarded, significant.[17] Moreover, Flosi implies that this symbol of biological sex, or lack thereof, contributes to a character's gendered status. The mention of Njáll's old age also compounds the connotations of his beardlessness; Evans has argued that, in the *Íslendingasögur* at least, 'all men become more greatly associated with the *ergi*-complex in old age because their ageing bodies no longer allow them to embody the idealized form of masculinity' (see **6.1**).[18]

Sigmundr also calls the Njálssons *taðskegglingar* ('dung-beardlings').[19] The sobriquet may insinuate, firstly, that the Njálssons apply excrement to their faces as a follicular fertiliser or hair thickener because they are either totally beardless like their father, or because their facial hair is thin (thereby implying their unmasculinity); secondly, that they have engaged in 'sloppily performed coprophagy', as Miller puts it (an emasculating practice given that, according to Evans, saga-men are required to 'adhere to alimentary taboos'); or, thirdly and most offensively, that they have performed anilingus on a human or, worse, an animal.[20] Corroborating this final interpretation, bestial anilingus is referred to later in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, when Skarpheðinn slanders Þorkell hákr ('bully').[21] Although *Cleasby-Vigfusson* glosses *tað* as 'dung' or 'manure' (indicating that it primarily pertains to animal faeces), it could also pertain to human faeces.[22] The ambiguity of the *tað-* element of the nickname may, therefore, refer to both homosexual practice and bestiality simultaneously, given that, as Timothy Bourns writes, '[a]nimals are used as metaphoric substitutions in accusations of *níð* because the bestial factor increases the shame through insinuations of social exclusion and a lack of community integration, the lack of a wife and sexual

[17] Evans, *Men*, 13.
[18] Evans, *Men*, 83.
[19] See *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114.
[20] Falk, 'Beardless Wonders', 234. Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody?*, 105. Evans, *Men*, 25.
[21] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 305.
[22] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*tað*'.

desirability, and a preference for perversion'.[23] In every case, the '*ergi*-complex' is invoked to a greater or lesser extent. Fulfilling one of Evans' salient masculine attributes and therefore re-establishing their masculinity, the Njálssons exact vengeance later by killing Sigmundr. Evidently, insults severe enough to warrant a slaying are not severe enough to warrant unbridled emotive expression. We may wonder, then, just how severe a situation must be before a saga-man is permitted to rage in an unrestrained and hasty fashion, or whether Skarpheðinn's implication that anger is sometimes permissible for men is not true, and that rage is, in fact, never permissible. Skarpheðinn's remark indicates that the emotive script for male characters holds easily aroused anger as feminine, whilst his attempt to suppress his reaction may instead suggest that most, if not all, anger is feminine.

The saga-author does not mention, and does not leave any somatic clues pertaining to, the Njálssons' anger when they take revenge. Skarpheðinn declares that he will take on Sigmundr because it seems to him *karlmannligt* ('manly'). He also calls Sigmundr a *rauðálfinn* ('red elf'); if, as Ármann Jakobsson argues, this is a sexual slur, then Skarpheðinn repays Sigmundr's *níð*-insults and renders him *argr*.[24] As the brother that came closest to a feminine display of anger, he may need to do the most to reinstate his masculinity. Before slaying Sigmundr, Skarpheðinn tells him *skaltú í móðurætt falla, áðr vit skiljum* ('you shall fall into your maternal lineage, before we two part').[25] According to Miller, the phrase not only means that Sigmundr will be buried in 'mother' earth, but also implies that 'he has been used as a woman', i.e., he has assumed the receptive role in sexual intercourse; this is, therefore, another *níð*-insult that renders him *argr*.[26] As Sigmundr dies without avenging

[23] Timothy Bourns, 'Between Nature and Culture: Animals and Humans in Old Norse Literature' (University of Oxford: Unpublished DPhil Thesis, 2017), 124-5.
[24] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 115. Ármann Jakobsson, 'Masculinity and Politics in *Njáls Saga*', 192.
[25] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 116.
[26] Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody?*, 106.

these emasculating insults, Skarpheðinn's masculinity triumphs, cancelling out Sigmundr's emasculating insults and the femininity of his previous angry psychosomatic display.

Skarpheðinn indicates that the nexus between anger and masculinity adheres to a three-stage mechanism: firstly, the saga-man is emasculated, and his masculinity is destabilised; secondly, he may grow angry, and, if he does, his masculinity is further destabilised; and, thirdly, he takes retaliatory action, and his masculinity is re-stabilised. The Njálssons' attempt to suppress their raging makes plain a fundamental tenet of saga-society's hegemonic masculinity, which Slavica Ranković has termed the '"no reaction" formula', whereby men are expected to suppress their anger and channel their emotional energy into considered action.[27] This three-stage process is sometimes catalysed by a female whetter – Bergþóra in this case – who acts as an agent of emotional mutation (adding a fourth stage to the mechanism). Indeed, that men need to be goaded so often, typically by saga-women, proves their preference for emotional self-restraint. As we shall see, this three- or four-staged mechanism figures recurrently in the *Íslendingasögur*. This scene, then, gives an instructive insight into the saga-man's experience of anger and the male emotive script for anger.

4.2.2 Þórhallr Ásgrímsson

We may extrapolate Skarpheðinn's remark to understand that all men in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, if not all men in the *Íslendingasögur*, are feminised when they are quick to anger. By Skarpheðinn's standards, Þórhallr is feminised when his humoral eruption upon learning of Njáll's death betrays his anger (see **2.2.2**), and Flosi is feminised when his psychosomatic display betrays his rage at Hildigunnr's goading (see **2.1** and **5.3.3**). Þórhallr's feminisation is particularly conspicuous. Corroborating Skarpheðinn's anger-feminising remark, Þórhallr

[27] See Ranković, 384.

himself renders his reaction and comportment *lítilmannligr* ('unmanly'), and his excessive bloodiness may even render him cowardly and thus (to some extent) *argr* given that, in *Fóstbræðra saga*, the author states that bloodiness causes fearfulness (see **2.2.2**).[28] Moreover, *Fóstbræðra saga* alludes to an association between anger and cowardice by intimating that a large, bloody heart – the cause of fearfulness – also causes of an angry reaction.[29] This may further evidence the notion that anger is unmasculine. Þórhallr advocates vengeance to counteract such unmasculinity. Despite the onlookers' adamance that no one would consider his reaction shameful, he is ashamed, indicating that he has internalised society's masculine ideal and will not be swayed by consolatory attempts to redefine masculinity.[30] Rather than intimating that he wants to avenge Njáll's death, Þórhallr intimates that he wants to avenge his own reaction specifically.[31] Though it is Njáll's slaying that sparks Þórhallr's unmasculine emotional response, it is this response itself that prompts vengeful action to reinstate his masculinity, further indicating that the response, and thus his emotionality, is emasculating. Finally, the later comparison of Þórhallr's swollen leg to a woman's thigh – whether or not a physiological reality – emphasises the emasculating nature of his affliction; Carolyn Anderson even argues that the staff that he requires to walk is a phallic substitute to prop up his masculinity.[32] As I have already noted, saga-society considers disability emasculating.[33] If the emasculating swelling is indicative of his emotionality (see **2.2.2**), then Þórhallr's emotionality is similarly emasculating.

As we have seen, when Þórhallr learns that the lawsuit has been quashed, he drives a sword into his boil and spews humoral blood and pus.[34] Following this excision, he can walk

[28] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 344. *Fóstbræðra saga*, 128, 210-11.
[29] *Fóstbræðra saga*, 128.
[30] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 345.
[31] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 344-5.
[32] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 359. Carolyn Anderson, 'No Fixed Point: Gender and Blood Feuds in *Njáls saga*', *Philological Quarterly* 81 (2002), 421-440 (430).
[33] Evans, *Men*, 87-91.
[34] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 402.

again and thereby re-stabilises his previously problematised masculine status. He then slays Grímr, an act which Kári implicitly validates as masculine when he deems it courageous and exhorts others to help Þórhallr.[35] Ironically, Þórhallr – one of the greatest lawyers in Iceland – sparks the battle at the Alþingi, where violence is prohibited. As Robert Cook emphasises, 'no scene better illustrates the failure of law and the failure of the Althing'.[36] Þórhallr's impulse to dispense with law and turn to violence highlights the lengths to which he will go both to avenge Njáll and to reinstate his masculinity having been feminised and emasculated because of his emotional reaction.

4.2.3 Gunnarr Hámundarson

Gunnarr is another male character in the saga whose gendered status is problematised by Skarpheðinn's comment. When he learns that his wife, Hallgerðr, has coerced their slave into stealing food from Otkell, he *reiddisk ok mælti: "Illa er þá, ef ek em þjófsnautr," – ok lýstr hana kinnhest* ('became angry and said: "It is bad if I am a receiver of stolen goods" – and slaps her on the face').[37] By Skarpheðinn's standards, Gunnarr's anger is feminine. Moreover, violence against women was considered unmasculine; in *Gísla saga*, when Eyjólfr commands his men to kill Auðr, they refuse and declare it a *níðingsverk*.[38] This sentiment is also echoed in *Droplaugarsona saga* – though without the emasculating opprobrium – when Helgi, in response to one of his men hitting Þórdis with a snowball, remarks *[þ]at er heimskligt at berja til kvenna* ('it is foolish to strike women').[39] Gunnarr's slap, therefore, feminises him because he is angry and emasculates him because he commits a *níðingsverk*.

[35] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 402.
[36] Robert Cook, 'Introduction', in *Njal's Saga*, trans. Cook (London: Penguin, 2001), xxvii.
[37] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 124.
[38] *Gísla saga*, 101.
[39] *Droplaugarsona saga*, 162.

That his anger fuelled such emasculating action further underscores Skarpheðinn's intimation that anger is emasculating.

Yet, Gunnarr elsewhere abides by the "'no reaction" formula' and, when he does grow momentarily angry, his rage is implicitly criticised or is cast as undesirable. This is best demonstrated during the feud that the theft sparks between Gunnarr and Otkell and Skammkell. Gunnarr does not grow angry when Otkell declines Gunnarr's offer of compensation, as we may expect. Before the case goes to the Alþingi, Hallbjǫrn tells Otkell *Gunnarr mun ekki lengi munda atgeirinum, ef hann er reiðr* ('Gunnarr shall not aim his halberd for long, if he is angry'), implying that Gunnarr's anger will fuel hasty action.[40] When Otkell delivers the summons to Gunnarr, the saga-author writes that *Gunnarr var inn reiðasti* ('Gunnarr was very angry').[41] Yet, when his brother implies that they ought to have slain them straightaway, Gunnarr states *[h]vat bíðr sinnar stundar* ('everything awaits its time').[42] Contrary to Hallbjǫrn's prediction, Gunnarr, by counselling against rash action, indicates that reacting with moderation is the preferred emotional *modus operandi* for saga-men. Although a comment on his behaviour rather than his emotionality, this sentiment is echoed when, later in the narrative, Hildigunnr observes that Gunnarr *er seinþreyttr til vandræða, en harðdrægr, ef hann má eigi undan komask* ('is slow to be drawn into quarrels, but hard to manage, if he cannot get out of them').[43] At the Alþingi, the saga-author does not describe him as growing angry, even when he warns Otkell never to provoke him.[44] Gunnarr does not grow angry as we may expect when Otkell accidentally rides into him.[45] Skammkell then comments that, whilst Gunnarr is calm in this instance, he was not calm at the Alþingi. Whether the accusation is true or not, by commenting on Gunnarr's lack of self-control and

[40] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 128.
[41] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 130.
[42] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 130.
[43] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 149.
[44] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 133.
[45] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 133-4.

implied anger, and staging it as an insult, Skammkell indicates that one should be ashamed of such emotionality. This aligns with Skarpheðinn's anger-feminising comment. That Gunnarr does not rage when he forecasts his vengeance by threatening *[þ]á er vit finnumsk næst, skaltú sjá atgeirinn* ('the next time we two meet, you shall see the halberd') in response corroborates that demonstrative anger is undesirable.[46] Soon after, a shepherd tells Gunnarr that Skammkell bragged that Gunnarr had cried.[47] As noted in **3.4.2**, women weep in *Njála*; Skammkell's comment is, therefore, an emasculating *níð*-insult.[48] Whilst we may expect such an insult to induce Gunnarr's anger, he tells the shepherd *[e]kki skulu vit vera orðsjúkir* ('we two shall not be sickened by their words'), again demonstrating emotional moderation.[49]

As Gunnarr prepares to exact vengeance, however, his mother, Rannveig, observes *reiðuligr ert þú nú, sonr minn, ok ekki sá ek þik slíkan fyrr* ('you are now angry-looking, my son, and I have never seen you like this before').[50] This suggests that Gunnarr's initial advocation of emotional moderation was intended to camouflage his anger, an intimation that again corroborates that the '"no reaction" formula' was the preferred emotional *modus operandi* for saga-men. By indicating that his reaction is unique – a comment reminiscent of the note that Skarpheðinn's psychosomatic reaction *var ekki vant* ('was not usual') – Rannveig also simultaneously reiterates Gunnarr's unemotional self-control hitherto and the intensity of his anger now.[51] Neither the saga-author nor the characters comment on Gunnarr's emotionality when he, as expected, slays Otkell and Skammkell. Rannveig's observation, by privately drawing Gunnarr's attention to his somatic betrayal, may allow him to re-compose himself before setting out into the public sphere and maintain masculine emotional self-restraint. Again, this emphasises that demonstrative anger is undesirable. That

[46] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 134-5.
[47] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 136.
[48] See *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 48, 290.
[49] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 136.
[50] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 136.
[51] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114.

Rannveig identifies Gunnarr's anger prior to him slaying Otkell and Skammkell suggests that, as Hallbjǫrn predicted earlier, it is Gunnarr's anger that fuels his action, even if he camouflages his emotionality. Sif Rikhardsdottir comments that 'Gunnarr's subsequent actions […] re-assert his honour and re-affirm his manhood'.[52] Such masculine action, therefore, counteracts his emasculating anger that Rannveig identified.

Yet, after taking vengeance in a masculine fashion, he doubts himself, wondering whether he is unmanly because slaughtering troubles him.[53] Anderson argues that Gunnarr's question 'recognises the dual entanglement of psychodynamics and gender'.[54] Again, emotion negatively affects his gender identity: his masculinity, destabilised by emasculating insults and anger and re-stabilised by vengeance, is once again destabilised, this time by remorse; thus, he demonstrates his internalisation of saga-society's nexus between intense emotionality and reduced masculinity. Without a somatic betrayal, Gunnarr is only emasculated by his own reckoning. Like Þórhallr, his self-criticism demonstrates that masculinity is more than a performance to be perceived by others. Elsewhere, however, Gunnarr kills without contrition, and his masculinity is undisputed.

The masculine ideal evidently exalts the suppression of rage and the orchestration of controlled and unemotional retaliation. Saga-men, Gunnarr indicates, are expected to emote in a moderate fashion. That is not to say, however, that the actions that emotional responses fuel must be moderate.

4.3 Advocations of Emotional Moderation

[52] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 139. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 137-8.
[53] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 138-9.
[54] Anderson, 435.

Aligning with Gunnarr's comportment, Theodore Andersson rebuts Walther Gehl's claim that the sagas lack an ideal corresponding to the Greek concept of *sophrosyne*, a quality that champions self-control and restraint, by arguing that they are characterised by 'a sense of proportion and moderation'.[55] The glorification of *hóf* ('moderation') with regard to emotional experience elucidates saga-society's outlook on anger. There are numerous examples of characters or, less frequently, saga-authors emphasising the negative, undesirable effects of rage for saga-men by advocating emotional moderation. Although Skarpheðinn's establishing of a nexus between anger and femininity (and thus reduced masculinity) is not repeated elsewhere in the *Íslendingasögur*, these instances further indicate that an experience of anger compromises a character's pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal.

This sentiment is clearly articulated in *Gísla saga*. When Þorgrímr desires to send for the tapestries that Vésteinn had previously wanted to give him, Þorkell cautions *[a]llt kann sá, er hófit kann, ok mun ek eigi eptir þeim senda* ('he can see everything, he who knows moderation, and I shall not send after them').[56] Þorkell's proverb both draws attention to Þorgrímr's impetuosity and forecasts Gísli's angry reaction at such behaviour. By employing the metaphor type UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING, Þorkell also establishes a nexus between *hóf* and wisdom; emotionality that is immoderate is, therefore, unwise.[57] This urging of restraint is echoed in *Svarfdæla saga*. When Klaufi announces his desire to go abroad with Gríss, Þorsteinn asks them to inquire about his son, Karl, who had not been heard of for a long time.[58] When Klaufi discovers Karl's ship, *[s]vá var hann þá reiðr, at hann rak ǫxi sína í jǫrð niðr, svá at stóð á hamri* ('he was so angry that he slammed his axe down into the

[55] Theodore M. Andersson, 'The Displacement of the Heroic Ideal in the Family Sagas', in *Sagas of Icelanders: A Book of Essays*, ed. John Tucker (New York and London: Garland, 1989), 40-70 (61-2). Walther Gehl, *Ruhm und Ehre bei den Nordgermanen: Studien zum Lebensgefühl der isländischen Saga* (Berlin: 1937), 139.
[56] *Gísla saga*, 51.
[57] Lakoff and Johnson, 48.
[58] *Svarfdæla saga*, 160.

ground so that the shaft stood out'), and, finding Karl and his men fettered, he runs aboard, kills the captors, and frees them.[59] There is a sense that Klaufi is experiencing the *berserksgangr* in some form, given that he rages wildly in battle and that, afterwards, he experiences the typical post-fury weakening (see **7.2**). Evidencing this, in a later altercation, the saga-author writes *var þá kominn at honum berserksgangr* ('a berserk fury had come over him').[60] During Klaufi's first angry outburst, Gríss tells him *kunn þú hóf þitt* ('know your moderation'), and, during his second angry outburst, Karl hinn rauði ('the red') repeats Gríss' counsel, cautioning Klaufi with the same phrase.[61] The use of the verb *kunna* ('to know') re-establishes the interplay between *hóf* and knowledge to which Þorkell alludes in *Gísla saga*. Evidently, the ability to think clearly and carefully is an important masculine attribute.

The ethic of emotional moderation is again preached in *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*. When Þórhaddr refuses to give Þorsteinn back his *goðorð* until the Spring Assembly, the saga-author writes that *Þorsteinn reiddisk mjǫk, er hann náði eigi goðorðinu* ('Þorsteinn was extremely angry that he could not take the *goðorð* back').[62] Yngvildr, his wife, goads him and compounds his anger.[63] When Þorsteinn threatens Þórhaddr with violence, Þórhaddr slanders him by saying that Þorsteinn slept with Haukr's wife, provoking another threat of violence. Þórhaddr then says

> *[á]kafr maðr ertu ok eigi mjǫk stilltr, ok muntu ná goðorði þínu, þó at þú heitisk eigi til, ok eigi gerði faðir þinn svá, þá er hann missti Ljóts, sonar síns, á alþingi. Þá mælti hann allt vægiliga, ok var þat þó mannraun, en þetta engi* ('you are a vehement man and not very calm and you could take your *goðorð* back by not threatening me,

[59] *Svarfdæla saga*, 161.
[60] *Svarfdæla saga*, 171.
[61] *Svarfdæla saga*, 161, 171.
[62] *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, 305.
[63] *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, 305.

> and your father did not do that when he lost his son Ljótr at the Alþingi. He spoke then with great forbearance even though it was a trial, which this is not').[64]

The altercation is settled by the intervention of others, and Þorsteinn resumes power over his *goðorð*.[65]

That Þorsteinn's emotionality is identified in Þórhaddr's provocative comparison of Þorsteinn's comportment with his father's forbearance when dealing with the death of his son (Ljótr Hallsson, who is killed in the fight at the Alþingi in *Brennu-Njáls saga*) rather than by the saga-author again emphasises that, for saga-men, anger is something to be mocked and is thus undesirable.[66] Evans comments that 'we would expect Þorsteinn's threat of violence to be regarded as […] appropriately masculine' and thus argues that Þórhaddr 'attempt[s] to rezone the boundaries of masculinity' for his own ends.[67] Rather than momentarily redefining masculinity, however, Þórhaddr may indicate that it is Þorsteinn's emotionality that problematises his hegemonic masculine status. Þórhaddr's remark challenges Þorsteinn to reflect on his own masculine practice, and the word *mannraun*, whilst glossed as 'trial' or 'adversity' in *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, might be understood to connote a trial of masculinity, given the saga-author's decision to use the *mann-* ('man-') prefix where *raun* ('trial') would suffice.[68] Although *mann* can be non-gender or non-sex specific, Katrina Attwood promotes this interpretation by translating *mannraun* as 'a real test of his manhood': losing a *goðorð* is nothing in comparison to losing a son, and Þorsteinn, Þórhaddr implies, should behave in the fashion expected of saga-men and not grow angry.[69]

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[64] *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, 305.
[65] *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, 305-6.
[66] See *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 402-15 (ch. 145).
[67] Evans, *Men*, 46-7.
[68] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*mannraun*'.
[69] Katrina Attwood, trans., *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* ('Thorstein Sidu-Hallsson's Saga'), in *CSI*, vol. 4, 447-459 (451).

This sentiment is echoed in *Heiðarvíga saga*, a work 'written in praise of moderation'.[70] When Þórarinn – a character who maintains emotional self-control throughout the saga and is described as having *framsýnn* ('foresight'), thereby reiterating the nexus between the two qualities – advises that his foster-son Barði appeal at the þing rather than avenging his slain brother Hallr immediately, *allr þingheimrinn lofaði, hversu spakliga var at málinu farit* ('everyone at the þing's assembly praised how peaceably the case was carried out').[71] This indicates that 'restraint and moderation met with public sanction'.[72] Robin Waugh considers Þórarinn 'an obvious antipode to Þuríðr', whose parodic goading of Barði and his brothers to avenge his slain brother Hallr is characterised by 'rampaging emotions', a juxtaposition which corresponds with 'the sagas' emphasis on "masculine" reason as opposed to "feminine" passions' (see **5.3.2**).[73] Þórarinn also suggests that Barði only take moderate men with him to support his case.[74] He recommends that Barði ask Eiríkr viðsjá (lit. 'wide-sight', an epithet that likely connotes prudence and wisdom) for support.[75] He also tells Barði not to ask Þórvaldr to accompany him on account of *skapferði hans* ('his temper').[76] We infer, given Þórarinn's recommendation that Barði take the cautious Eiríkr with him, that Þórvaldr is irascible.

Later, when Þórarinn devises a plan for Barði to avenge Hallr, he suggests that Barði's men should be split into three groups based on their temperament, indicating that the men who are least impetuous should be given more prominent roles in the mission.[77] The first group, Þórarinn says, *munu þér vera menn stríðastir ok torsveigstir, er þér komið í heraðit,*

[70] Theodore Andersson, 'The Displacement of the Heroic Ideal', 62.
[71] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 255-6.
[72] Theodore Andersson, 'The Displacement of the Heroic Ideal', 50.
[73] Robin Waugh, 'The Foster Mother's Language: Anti-representation, Pseudo-feminization, and Other Consequences of a Mistake of Gender Charm in *Heiðarvíga saga*', *Scandinavian Studies* 83 (2011), 307-364 (314-15).
[74] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 264-8.
[75] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 265.
[76] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 265.
[77] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 285-6

en yðr hæfir eigi svá, at eigi hafi þér stilling við ok vit ('will be the most stubborn and obstinate of men for you when you come into the district, and it would not do for you not to have moderation and sense').[78] Peculiarly, Eiríkr viðsjá is placed in this group, suggesting that there may be a difference between being 'wide-sighted' and having emotional moderation, or that a man can be simultaneously cautious, emotionally immoderate, and senseless. The second party contains men who *munu þér hóti ráðhollari ok eigi með jafnmiklum geysingi* ('are able to give more faithful advice to you and are not equally as impetuous'), and, Þórarinn says, the final group *munu þér ráðhollastir* ('are able to give the most faithful advice').[79] The use of the comparative *ráðhollari* (lit. 'giving more faithful advice') and then the superlative *ráðhollastir* (lit. 'giving the most faithful advice') reiterates the difference in temperament between two of the three parties. Similarly, earlier, Þórarinn requires Barði himself to be *ráðhollr*, meaning, in this instance, 'willing to act according to advice', according to Anne Heinrichs.[80] Heinrichs argues that these three occurrences of the adjective ought to be translated as 'accepting advice' (contrary to *Cleasby-Vigfusson*'s definition).[81] She terms the giving, receiving, and enacting of counsel here the 'advice-and-action' scheme, a 'narrative technique' which, she argues, sets a standard of careful counsel rather than rash action in saga literature.[82] Þórarinn's plan, however, does not come to fruition. Before arriving at the site that Þórarinn had designated for battle in his plan, Barði's men, spoiling for a fight, persuade Barði to disregard Þórarinn's advice to adopt the more favourable position.[83] A battle then ensues that results in several casualties.[84] This again reiterates that anger, and the rash action that it begets, impedes wisdom and strategy.

[78] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 285.
[79] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 286.
[80] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 280. Anne Heinrichs, '"Intertexture" and its Functions in Early Written Sagas: A Stylistic Observation of *Heiðarvíga Saga*, *Reykdaela Saga* and the Legendary Olafssaga', *Scandinavian Studies* 48.2 (1976), 127-145 (129).
[81] Heinrichs, 144, note 8.
[82] Heinrichs, 129, 130.
[83] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 300.
[84] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 302.

Finally, characters also urge emotional moderation and imply that anger hinders a character's attainment of the hegemonic masculine ideal in *Vatnsdœla saga*. When the outlawed Hrolleifr stays with Ingimundr, he does not get on well with Ingimundr's sons.[85] Ingimundr tells him *[i]lla gerir þú, Hrolleifr, er þú stillir eigi skap þitt* ('you do wrong, Hrolleifr, when your temperament is not calm'), before instructing him that, because of his behaviour, he can no longer stay.[86] Ingimundr's championing of emotional moderation echoes that of his father: when Þórsteinn reflects on his life as an old man, he remarks *[u]ni ek því bezt við ævi mina, at ek hefi verit engi ágangsmaðr við menn* ('the thing that I consider best in my life, is that I have not been an aggressor towards others').[87] Hrolleifr and Ingimundr's sons, however, continue to cross each other, but Þorsteinn, one of the sons, recurrently urges restraint when the others show signs of anger. Þorsteinn's counsel is a product of his temperament: the saga-author writes that Þorsteinn was *stilltr vel, orðvíss, langsær, vinfastr ok hófsmaðr um alla hluti* ('well-tempered, witty, far-sighted, steady as a friend and a moderate man in all things').[88]

Although we may expect Þórir to be the angriest of the sons because he is a chronic sufferer of the *berserksgangr* (see **7.3**), it is his brother Jǫkull who is the recipient of Þorsteinn's counsel. When Jǫkull is first introduced, Ingimundr comments that he is *eigi mikill skapdeildarmaðr* ('not a great master of his temper'), and the saga-author writes *[h]ann var fálátr, ómjúkr ok ódœll, harðúðigr ok hraustr um allt* ('he was taciturn, tough and difficult to deal with, hard-minded and brave in everything').[89] Aligning with this, when Hrolleifr throws a stone at one of Ingimundr's men and Jǫkull promptly condemns such behaviour, the saga-author comments that *Þorsteinn kvað ofmikit bragð at vera, en þó vænst*

[85] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 56.
[86] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 56.
[87] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 32.
[88] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 37.
[89] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 37.

at gæta til með stillingu ('Þorsteinn said that this was a great dealing, but it was most promising to deal with this calmly').[90] Þorsteinn thus gives an insight into Jǫkull's undisclosed emotionality: Jǫkull, it is implied, is not calm. Secondly, when Jǫkull *hljóp fram undan borðinu ok út* ('sprang up from the table and went out') to confront Hrolleifr, movement that connotes his anger (see **3.6.2**), Ingimundr tells Þorsteinn to accompany Jǫkull, because, he says, *þér treysti ek bezt til um alla stilling* ('you I trust best to keep calm in everything').[91] Thus, it is again implied that Jǫkull is angry. Thirdly, when Jǫkull desires to attack Hrolleifr, Þorsteinn advises his brother to retreat, and, when Ingimundr arrives, Þorsteinn *bað nú Jǫkul hepta sik* ('now urged Jǫkull to restrain himself').[92] Again, such counsel implies that Jǫkull is emotionally unrestrained.

Ingimundr is then fatally wounded by Hrolleifr.[93] He has a boy take him home who he instructs to tell Hrolleifr to escape, because, he says, he must honour the promise that he made to Sæmundr, his foster-son, to protect Hrolleifr.[94] When the sons return home to find their father dead, Jǫkull reacts as expected: he says *fǫrum þegar ok drepum hann* ('let us go immediately and kill him'), and, when Þorsteinn guesses correctly that his father facilitated Hrolleifr's escape, *Jǫkull var svá óðr, at varla fengu þeir stillt hann* ('Jǫkull was so furious that they could hardly calm him').[95] Þorsteinn's even-temperedness is consistent: he tells his brother that their vengeance must be well-planned and unhurried, and not to be angry with the boy.[96] Meanwhile, Hrolleifr's sorceress mother, Ljót, tells her son to leave for the time being, because *blóðnætur eru bráðastar* ('blood nights are the most rash').[97] The sense is that anger is at its most intense during the immediate aftermath of a provocation; *Cleasby-*

[90] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 59.
[91] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 59.
[92] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 60-1.
[93] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 61.
[94] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 61, see 56.
[95] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 62.
[96] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 62-3.
[97] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 64.

Vigfusson notes that the almost identical proverbial remark *blóðnætr eru hverjum bráðastar*, which it translates as 'the thirst for revenge rises highest during the bloody nights', occurs in *Víga-Glúms saga*.[98] This is confirmed by Jǫkull's comportment, whilst Þorsteinn, by contrast, consistently demonstrates paradigmatic conciliatoriness.

4.4 The Advocation of Slow-Burning Vengeance

This advocation of delayed and thoughtful vengeance as opposed to rash, anger-fuelled action is echoed throughout the corpus. In *Króka-Refs saga*, the Þórgilssons slander Refr behind his back with emasculating *níð*-insults, saying that he fled and wet himself when he saw a polar bear.[99] The insults escalate: Þórgils says that he is called Refr hinn ragi (we might render this 'Refr the Pervert') and that he is a woman every ninth night (an insult prohibited by law, as we have seen), and the slander spreads widely.[100] Intimating, however, that Refr resists rising to the provocation for the time being and that, therefore, emotional moderation is the preferred *modus operandi* for saga-men, *[e]igi lætr hann sem hann viti* ('he acted as if he did not know').[101] Evidencing that there is an expectation that emasculating insults should be nonetheless avenged, Þórmoðr says to Refr *mjök þykki mér þú sanna vándra manna orð, er þú lætr þá um kyrrt sitja* ('it greatly seems to me that you prove the words of wicked men when you let them reside in peace').[102] When he asks why he has not yet exacted vengeance, Refr states *[f]yrr skyldi maðr hafa hugat ráð nökkut fyrir sjálfum sér en rata í stórræði eða eggja aðra til* ('a man should have thought out some kind of plan for himself before he himself takes up daring undertakings or incites others to take them up').[103] Whilst anger is

[98] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*blóð-nætr*'. See *Víga-Glúms saga*, 344.
[99] *Króka-Refs saga*, 133-4.
[100] *Króka-Refs saga*, 134, 135. *Gulaþingslǫg*, 57.
[101] *Króka-Refs saga*, 135.
[102] *Króka-Refs saga*, 135.
[103] *Króka-Refs saga*, 135.

not explicitly mentioned, the sense is that, rather than raging rashly, carefully planned retaliation will be more successful, and, therefore, more masculine. Pairing Þórmoðr's goading with a moment in *Þórsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* where Þórsteinn incites his brother Kólr to vengeance in a similar fashion, Evans notes that 'saga men are able – like saga women – to manipulate a man's sense of masculinity to encourage him to take violent action'.[104] This shows, as Evans argues, that 'the slippage between the abstract notion of masculinity and the mutable complex of attributes that is associated with it allows saga characters to redefine the concept of manliness'; where Refr holds meticulously planned action accords best with saga-society's masculine ideal, Þórmoðr considers a swift (and inevitably less careful) reaction masculine, given the gravity of the insults.[105] Eventually, however, Refr retaliates by slaying Þórgils and his sons.[106] In so doing, he re-stabilises his masculine status that the emasculating insults had previously destabilised.

Two other proverbs echo Refr's championing of delayed retaliation, demonstrating saga-society's preference for slow-burning vengeance. In *Ljósvetninga saga*, when Guðmundr is told that Þórkell hákr and Þórir have doubted his courage and manliness, his foster-father Einarr states *ek vil biðja þik, at þú hafir þrótt við. Ok verði því meiri hefndin sem lengr er* ('I want to urge you to have fortitude. And the longer the vengeance, the more it will be worth').[107] Einarr, a *spekingr mikill* ('great sage') who repeatedly advocates litigation here, implicitly equates *þróttr* ('fortitude' or 'strength') – qualities that saga-society's hegemonic masculine ideal exalts – with vengeance that is deliberately drawn out.[108]

Grettir echoes this sentiment. When Auðunn overpowers him during a ballgame as a boy, Grettir does not retaliate – despite the saga-author stating that Grettir *varð reiðr*

[104] Evans, *Men*, 46. See *Þórsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, 315.
[105] Evans, *Men*, 46.
[106] *Króka-Refs saga*, 136-7.
[107] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 20.
[108] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 19-20.

('became angry') – and instead states *[þ]rœll einn þegar hefnisk, en argr aldri* ('only a slave takes vengeance immediately, but an *argr* [person] – never').[109] The proverb figures, then, to mask his feelings. Grettir's use of the word *argr* evokes the '*ergi*-complex'.[110] He implies a three-tiered order of retaliation and its effect on a character's masculine status: an unmanly man never takes vengeance, a slave takes vengeance straightaway, and, he implies, the manliest man takes delayed vengeance, acting with unemotional care, wisdom, and precision. Whilst Miller argues that Grettir's use of the word *þrœll* ('a slave') connotes stupidity, a *þrœll* is one step away from the antithesis of masculinity; in *Þórðar saga hreðu*, when the slave Þórhallr cowers, his interlocutor states *[i]llt er at eiga þræl at einkavin* ('it is bad to have a slave as a close friend').[111] Later in *Grettis saga*, when Glaumr, Grettir's slave, betrays Grettir and thereby facilitates his death, Þorbjǫrn utters the same phrase.[112] To be a slave, Grettir implies, is to be pusillanimous. Cowardice is a quality typical of slaves in the *Íslendingasögur* and elsewhere in Old Norse-Icelandic literature: in *Gísla saga*, for instance, Gísli's slave is called Þórðr hinn huglausi ('the faint hearted'), while, in *Atlakviða*, Gunnarr knows that the heart that he is presented with is that of the slave Hjalli because it quivers.[113] Adhering to the dictates of saga-society's hegemonic masculine ideal, Grettir later takes vengeance by wrestling Auðunn, and thus reinstates his dominance.[114]

By comparison, Egill, aged seven, exacts vengeance swiftly when a boy named Grímr throws him to the ground in a ballgame in retaliation for Egill angrily striking him.[115] Compounding his emasculation, the other boys *œpðu at honum* ('jeered at him').[116] Egill does

[109] *Grettis saga*, 43, 44.
[110] Evans, *Men*, 18-19.
[111] Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody?*, 87. *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 209. The same phrase is spoken by Hallbjǫrn to Otkell in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, with reference to Skammkell's dishonesty (128).
[112] *Grettis saga*, 259.
[113] *Gísla saga*, e.g., 43. Ruth Mazo Karras, *Slavery and Society in Medieval Scandinavia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 64. See, for example, *Atlakviða*, 377 (st. 23).
[114] *Grettis saga*, 94-8.
[115] *Egils saga*, 99-100.
[116] *Egils saga*, 100.

not act immediately: he consults Þórðr, one of Skalla-Grímr's men, who recommends that Egill avenge himself. Corroborating that his slaying of Grímr is appropriate, whilst his actions spark a quarrel in which seven men are killed, Egill's father is indifferent to his response, and his mother praises him, remarking that her son has *víkingsefni* ('the makings of a Viking').[117] When Egill kills Grímr, the saga-author does not indicate that he is angry, and his unemotional actions, whilst swift, are not hasty; he therefore exhibits the kind of behaviour that Grettir proverbially exhorts.

As Miller reiterates, whilst Grettir's comment shows that 'hasty vengeance was [considered] vulgar', it also conversely 'intimates that there was a risk in delaying too long' and points to 'the loss of honor' – a salient attribute of saga-society's hegemonic masculinity – that 'one suffered for not having taken action'.[118] Although saga-authors and saga-men generally advocate emotional moderation, restraint, delay, and control, excessive deferral is met with disapproval. Miller points to *Ljósvetninga saga*'s Guðmundr (discussed above): he heeds Einarr's advice, and yet the saga 'ridicules' him by making him 'excessively anxious about reprisal'.[119] Miller also cites Helgi in *Droplaugarsona saga*, whose excessive delay in exacting vengeance also makes him anxious and prompts him to be less cautious: *[þ]at er mér opt í brigzli fœrt, at ek sé of varr* ('often, shame is brought against me, because I am too wary').[120] Saga-men in pursuit of vengeance, therefore, tread a fine line between excessive, anger-fuelled haste and excessive delay, both of which are socially impermissible and, therefore, unmasculine.

4.5 Grettir's Self-Control

[117] *Egils saga*, 100.
[118] Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 193.
[119] Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 193-4.
[120] Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 194. *Droplaugarsona saga*, 169.

Contrary to the sentiment expressed in his proverb, however, Grettir is chronically angry. Andrew Hamer and Janice Hawes, tacitly echoing critics such as Peter Foote and Hermann Pálsson who argued that Grettir's demise ultimately results from internal causes (i.e., character flaws) rather than external causes (e.g., supernatural interventions), independently identify Grettir's irascibility, and his short-tempered actions, as the cause of his downfall.[121] Yet Ranković, whilst agreeing that Grettir is consistently *described* as irascible, can be short-tempered, and that Grettir's demise can, in part at least, be attributed to his unchecked temper, argues that his actions actually demonstrate remarkable emotional self-restraint in keeping with the '"no reaction" formula' by which saga-heroes were expected to abide, even (or especially) when his irascibility is intensified by the revenant Glámr's curse. As Ranković notes, 'that [Grettir] survives as an outlaw for 19 years […] bears witness to his continued success in deflecting the full effects of the curse by managing to keep the upper hand on his temper'.[122] Indeed, Grettir's innate irascibility renders his consistent emotional self-restraint all the more emphatic. That the narrative is propelled by, and preoccupied with, the suppression of irascible tendencies with exhibitions of self-control again indicates that such comportment was saga-society's preferred emotional *modus operandi* for saga-men. Moreover, that unchecked anger ultimately brings about Grettir's death is a potent symbol of the emotion's perils, and justification for the advocation of emotional moderation.

Grettir's childhood transgressions are likely fuelled by anger, and his grins, though ultimately indecipherable, may function either to subvert his emotionality, or herald his anger-fuelled vengeance (see **3.3.2**). Yet, as noted, Grettir, despite growing angry, does not

[121] Andrew Hamer, '*Grettis saga* and the Iudicium Dei', in *Northern Voices: Essays on Old Germanic and Related Topics, Offered to Professor Tette Hofstra*, ed. Kees Dekker, Alasdair Macdonald, and Hermann Niebaum (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 19-40. Janice Hawes, 'The Monstrosity of Heroism: Grettir Ásmundarson as an Outsider', *Scandinavian Studies* 80 (2008), 19-50. Peter Foote, 'Introduction', in *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, trans. George Ainslie Hight (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1965), i-xv. Hermann Pálsson, 'Drög að siðfræði *Grettis sögu*', *Tímarit Máls og Menningar* 30 (1969), 372-382.
[122] Ranković, 383.

retaliate against Auðunn, and instead indicates an awareness of conduct that saga-society deems preferable. Ranković notes that, whilst the saga-author states that Grettir grows angry here, they do not state whether his emotionality is detectable from his appearance, and, therefore, he may still abide by the '"no reaction" formula'.[123] Grettir also exhibits sustained self-control during his series of altercations with Bjǫrn (see **3.3.2**).[124] When he settles his grudge against Auðunn later, though the saga-author states that it was humiliation that prompted his vengeance, they do not describe Grettir's anger.[125] At a horse-fight shortly after this, when Grettir's brother Atli comments that his opponents are *metnaðarmenn* ('haughty men'), Grettir again advocates self-restraint when he replies *[g]jaldi þeir sjálfir ofstopa síns* […] *ef þeir hafa hann eigi í hófi* ('they themselves might pay for their arrogance… if they do not have moderation').[126] When Oddr strikes Grettir, however, Grettir exhibits no such restraint himself, and breaks Oddr's ribs, an action that likely betrays his anger.[127] Ranković emphasises, however, that Grettir ignores Oddr's cheating prior to this – the saga-author writes *eigi lét Grettir sem hann sæi þat* ('Grettir acted as if he did not see that') – and only retaliates when Oddr assaults him.[128]

Before Grettir slays Glámr, Glámr curses Grettir, stating, among other things, that Grettir will never grow any stronger, that he will be outlawed, and that he will never be free of Glámr's gaze.[129] When Grettir tells Þorvaldr of their confrontation, Þorvaldr tells him that all will be well providing he exhibits restraint, again reiterating that this is the preferred emotional *modus operandi*.[130] Ranković argues that Þorvaldr's prophecy is significant because it 'presents a […] tantalizing window of opportunity' for Grettir to take a different

[123] Ranković, 393, footnote 26.
[124] Ranković, 387.
[125] *Grettis saga*, 94-8.
[126] *Grettis saga*, 99. Ranković, 394.
[127] *Grettis saga*, 100.
[128] Ranković, 388. *Grettis saga*, 99.
[129] *Grettis saga*, 121.
[130] *Grettis saga*, 122.

course away from anger: Glámr's curse, countered by Þorvaldr's prophecy, need not seal Grettir's fate.[131] Yet, Grettir *kvað ekki batnat hafa um lyndisbragðit ok sagðisk nú miklu verr stilltr en áðr, ok allar mótgørðir verri þykkja* ('said that his temperament had not improved, and he said that he was much less controlled now than before, and he thought offences even worse').[132] We infer that Grettir's increased inability to control his temper is also due to Glámr's curse. Grettir's self-appraisal indicates an implicit awareness of his innate irascibility hitherto, an awareness that this temperament has intensified, and an awareness that he is even more sensitive to anger-inducing stimuli. Grettir indicates that exercising emotional self-restraint, as Þorvaldr exhorts, will now be a lot more difficult than it was prior to him being cursed. Whilst Grettir demonstrates an awareness of the expectation of emotional self-restraint prior to the curse and does – generally speaking – tend to act according to this expectation himself, such a profound awareness of his irascibility following Glámr's curse paves the way for him to strive even more proactively to manage his rage in anger-inducing scenarios. That the curse reduces Grettir's strength while intensifying his irascibility intimates that anger may compromise a man's strength, a salient masculine attribute, and therefore that anger may compromise a man's pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal.

Ranković lists several moments after Glámr's curse where Grettir continues to exercise emotional self-restraint instead of raging as we may expect. When Grettir seeks out Þorbjǫrn öxnamegin ('Oxen-Might') to avenge Atli's slaying, for instance, Grettir only kills Þorbjǫrn's son in self-defence with a single blow, and similarly slays Þorbjǫrn with a single blow; the saga-author does not describe Grettir as growing angry, and emphatically states *[e]kki veitti Grettir Þorbirni fleiri áverka* ('Grettir did not inflict any more wounds on

[131] Ranković, 382.
[132] *Grettis saga*, 122.

Þorbjǫrn').[133] Ranković notes that, in saga-society, 'killing in revenge […] is supposed to administer justice rather than vent personal rage', and argues that the saga-author's comment 'serves to highlight the fact that despite the ferocious temper Grettir is said to have, the killing here was not done out of blind rage'.[134] Both Hawes and Ranković note that Grettir also demonstrates moderation when Þóroddr Snorrason attacks him.[135] Grettir attributes his restraint to his fear of Þóroddr's father, Snorri goði, and his plans.[136] Given the specificity of this remark, Torfi Tulinius suggests that Grettir has a Freudian father-complex.[137] Freud postulated that a child must fear the punishment of his father or a father-figure to control his behaviour; Torfi Tulinius therefore argues that Grettir, unafraid of his own father, must instead fear another father-figure to enact self-restraint.[138] Yet, given the many examples where Grettir proactively exhibits self-control, he likely would have acted in this way whether or not Þóroddr had been Snorri's son. Snorri later intimates that Grettir was right to exhibit moderation because Snorri would have shown no hesitation in avenging Þóroddr.[139] Ranković notes that, whereas, earlier, the skipper Hafliði describes Grettir as demonstrating *forsjáleysi* ('lack of foresight'), Grettir demonstrates foresight here by acting proactively to curb his temper in order to resist his fate.[140] Given that Hafliði says this several chapters before Grettir is cursed by Glámr, Glámr's intensification of Grettir's irascibility may prompt Grettir to act with greater forbearance in order to counteract anger's negative effects.

Finally, as Ranković notes, Grettir demonstrates remarkable restraint when Þorbjǫrg hin digra ('the Stout') agrees to rescue Grettir from his death at the hands of a band of farmers providing he agrees to resist retaliation. The saga-author writes that Grettir

[133] *Grettis saga*, 155. Ranković, 389-90.
[134] Ranković, 389, 390.
[135] Hawes, 33. Ranković, 392. *Grettis saga*, 221.
[136] *Grettis saga*, 221.
[137] Torfi Tulinius, 'Returning Fathers: Sagas, Novels, and the Uncanny', *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies* 21 (2013), 18-39 (32).
[138] Torfi Tulinius, 'Returning Fathers', 32.
[139] *Grettis saga*, 222.
[140] Ranković, 392. *Grettis saga*, 53.

subsequently said that *hann mest bundizk hafa at sínu skaplyndi, at hann sló þá eigi, er þeir hældusk við hann* ('he demonstrated the greatest self-control over his temper, so that he did not strike them, those who had boasted against him').[141] Earlier, Grettir adopts similarly superlative language when he describes that only Glámr had ever frightened him, for instance.[142] As Ranković points out, 'that this is one of several instances in which the saga purports to report the hero's own comments regarding his most extreme struggles gives additional weight to the position that Grettir ranks controlling his temper as a heroic feat on par with his martial accomplishments'.[143] Moreover, given that strength and courage are salient masculine attributes, Grettir implies that control of his temper is, similarly, an important masculine trait, corroborating the sense that prevails throughout the *Íslendingasögur*.

Despite his many exhibitions of self-control, there are two pivotal instances where Grettir fails to exercise due restraint, which together ultimately cost him his life. Not long after being cursed by Glámr, during the ordeal at the church that King Óláfr had granted Grettir for inadvertently setting fire to a house and killing everyone inside, a boy insults Grettir. The saga-author states that Grettir *varð skapfátt mjǫk við þetta, ok gat þá eigi stǫðvat sik* ('lost his temper at this, and he could not control himself'), and describes how Grettir knocks the boy unconscious.[144] Whilst Grettir clearly loses control, Ranković points out that Grettir does not strike the boy with his full strength, indicating that he does exhibit at least a modicum of self-restraint.[145] Linking the boy with Glámr, the saga-author writes that *ætla menn helzt, at þat hafi verit óhreinn andi, sendr til óheilla Gretti* ('people believed that this had been an unclean spirit, sent to make Grettir unlucky').[146] It is implied that Grettir's

[141] *Grettis saga*, 169-70.
[142] Ranković, 392, footnote 25. *Grettis saga*, 121.
[143] Ranković, 392.
[144] *Grettis saga*, 133.
[145] Ranković, 406.
[146] *Grettis saga*, 133.

unluckiness is caused by his temper. The king refuses to acquit Grettir because of his rage-fuelled behaviour, and also refuses to take him on as a retainer. By remarking that *hlýtr jafnan illt af athugaleysinu* ('bad things always result from heedlessness'), the king simultaneously intimates that Grettir's anger will result in carelessness, and he is careless for letting his temper get the better of him in the first place.[147] Grettir is later punished with full outlawry for the burning: because he could not control his temper, he must assume the unheroic, liminal societal status that sets in motion the events that bring about his demise.

Secondly, Grettir's inability to exercise emotional self-restraint causes his fatal injury. Echoing Glámr's curse, Þuríðr carves a spell meant for Grettir into a tree-trunk.[148] When Grettir, collecting driftwood, encounters it, he twice recognises its evil and discards it.[149] Glaumr, Grettir's slave, grows angry when Grettir sends him out into a storm to look for firewood, and, seeing the tree-trunk, drags it to the hut.[150] Given that the saga-author states that Grettir does not tell Glaumr about the tree-trunk, we are led to believe that Glaumr does not know that it is cursed and will facilitate Grettir's demise.[151] If so, then he acts carelessly by selecting the first piece of driftwood that he sees and failing to notice the spell carved into it, an attitude which may be attributed to his anger. The saga-author states that *þóttisk vel hafa gengit* ('it seemed to him that things had gone well').[152] Whilst likely an instance of dramatic irony (leading the audience to anticipate just how wrong Glaumr will be proved), the saga-author may cast Glaumr as being pleased not only because his task is complete and that he can return to shelter, but also because Glaumr does, in fact, understand the tree-trunk's significance. Corroborating this reading, it seems more than coincidental that, as Laurence de Looze argues, the nickname of the slave integral to the facilitation of Grettir's

[147] *Grettis saga*, 134.
[148] *Grettis saga*, 249-50.
[149] *Grettis saga*, 250.
[150] *Grettis saga*, 250-1.
[151] *Grettis saga*, 250.
[152] *Grettis saga*, 251.

demise, Glaumr, resembles and thus echoes the name of the spectre that cursed Grettir, Glámr, just as the saga-author implied that the boy in the church had been a spirit dispatched by Glámr.[153]

Upon his return, when Glaumr challenges Grettir to do as good a job chopping the log as he did in dragging it home, Grettir *varð skapfátt við þrælinn* ('lost his temper with the slave'), and, presumably both to signal and find an outlet for his rage, strikes the tree-trunk, causing his axe to deflect and gash his leg.[154] He is incapacitated by his festering wound, which is, though primarily the result of Þuríðr's spell, likely also a manifestation of the humoral imbalance that is reflective of his irascibility that was intensified by Glámr's curse (see **2.2.2**). Grettir's anger has, in part, brought about his emasculating disability, further intimating that an angry temperament is emasculating.[155] Torfi Tulinius comments that 'the log that brings about Grettir's demise deflects his own lack of restraint upon himself.'[156] Whilst Grettir ostensibly does not exercise self-control, Ranković points out that he is restrained enough to deflect his anger onto the tree-trunk instead of striking Glaumr.[157] Nonetheless, it is Grettir's rage, reified by Glámr's curse, that allows Þuríðr's spell to take hold, and it was Glaumr's anger – causing him to deliver the log to Grettir and jibe about Grettir's wood-chopping skills – that sparked Grettir's rage.

This rage chain continues: when Glaumr, angry at being repeatedly sent outside to guard the ladder, one day refuses to pull it up and falls asleep, Grettir's adversaries are able to scale the island and kill him.[158] The implication is that, in addition to supernatural forces, the unrestrained anger of Grettir, his slave, and his adversaries kills him. Although his dwarfish

[153] Laurence de Looze, 'The Outlaw Poet, the Poetic Outlaw: Self-Consciousness in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 106 (1991), 85-103 (91-2).
[154] *Grettis saga*, 251.
[155] See Evans, *Men*, 87-91.
[156] Torfi Tulinius, 'Returning Fathers', 35.
[157] Ranković, 406.
[158] *Grettis saga*, 258-62.

stature reiterates his dwindling masculine status, Grettir valiantly defends himself on his knees before he is finally killed, a last-ditch effort, perhaps, to re-stabilise his masculine status that anger has destabilised.[159]

Ranković argues that Grettir, in his altercations with the boy in the church and Glaumr, 'succumbs to impulse not because he could not control himself, but because it did not appear that he had to' given that 'the vital trigger for the heroic restraint that enables the formula to play out is missing: an adequate adversary'.[160] The notion that such restraint must only be exhibited in the face of an adequate adversary may illuminate and align with Skarpheðinn's implication that, in some cases, anger is permissible for saga-men.[161] Ranković suggests that Grettir thought the boy and Glaumr inadequate, insignificant, and, therefore, unworthy of emotional self-restraint, and that Grettir is killed not because the boy and Glaumr, unlike the band of farmers who try to hang Grettir, were great tests of his temper, but because they were 'trivial, paltry, and unimportant'.[162] Aligning with this, the saga-author describes Grettir as growing angry with Glaumr earlier – such as when the thrall's negligence causes the fire to go out – without consequence.[163]

Grettir may also choose not to exercise emotional self-restraint when he, having swum from Drangey to Reykir in search of fire to remedy Glaumr's rage-inducing failing, rapes the farmer Þorvaldr's *griðkona* ('female servant') when she insinuates that his flaccid penis was small – an emasculation and infantilisation – because he similarly deemed her an inadequate adversary, unworthy of the '"no reaction" formula'.[164] Ruth Mazo Karras argues that the rape of a *griðkona* was unproblematic in saga-society (both from a social and legal

[159] *Grettis saga*, 260.
[160] Ranković, 407.
[161] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114.
[162] Ranković, 408.
[163] *Grettis saga*, 238.
[164] *Grettis saga*, 239-41. Ranković, 407. See Russell Poole, 'Myth, Psychology and Society in *Grettis saga*', *Alvíssmál* 11 (2004), 3-16 (13).

point of view); this is corroborated by the fact that Grettir's actions, and the *griðkona*'s screams in response, are not met with comment.[165] The saga-author suggests that Grettir's reassertion of his masculine status was successful, remarking *en svá skilðu þau, at hon frýði eigi á Gretti* ('but by the time they parted, she no longer taunted Grettir').[166] Although the saga-author does not explicitly state that Grettir is angry in this scenario, we may detect his anger in his unrestrained retaliation and the *griðkona*'s terrified reaction, and the fact that emasculating insults in the *Íslendingasögur* tend to induce anger. Grettir's anger towards Glaumr for his negligence in letting the fire go out may also have not fully subsided.

Grettir rapes the maidservant just before he loses his temper with Glaumr and strikes the cursed tree-trunk; perhaps the fact that his lack of emotional self-restraint towards the maidservant bore no consequences led him to believe that raging against his own slave would be similarly inconsequential. If so, then Grettir's raging against the maidservant – perhaps with his anger towards Glaumr for his negligence still simmering – at least contributes to, and at most instigates, his downfall. These two instances of anger amount to a rage chain that preludes the aforementioned rage chain that brings about Grettir's death. Although, unlike the boy in the church and Glaumr, the maidservant is not an adequate adversary – potentially perilous if the '"no reaction" formula' is not duly exercised – in disguise, Grettir's failure to exercise restraint towards her may facilitate his demise.

Whilst Grettir recurrently exercises remarkable emotional self-restraint in the most trying of circumstances, his innate irascibility is exploited by Glámr and Þuríðr and ultimately causes his death. *Grettis saga*, therefore, relays an indisputable moral: saga-men should strive to restrain their anger, even in instances where losing one's temper would appear inconsequential. Rash anger, therefore, destabilises a saga-man's hegemonic

[165] Karras, 'Servitude and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland', in *From Sagas to Society*, 289-304 (303).
[166] *Grettis saga*, 241.

masculine status. This corroborates Miller's interpretation of Skarpheðinn's remark in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, that anger that is easily aroused is unmasculine. Whilst Evans states that 'Grettir does not fall short of any of the facets of ideal saga society masculinity' that he proposes (see **4.1**), Grettir, by growing angry despite his best efforts, does actually fall short of the hegemonic masculine ideal.[167]

4.6 Anger and Death

Several other sagas also present anger as causing death, thereby symbolising its destructive effects and reiterating its ability to compromise a saga-man's pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal. In *Svarfdæla saga*, for instance, it is implied that Kolbeinn kills himself because of his anger. Following a dispute with Uni, *svá varð Kolbeinn reiðr, at hann stǫkk á skip ok sigldi í haf ok braut skipit við klett þann, er liggr í útnorðr undan Grímsey, ok týndist Kolbeinn þar* ('Kolbeinn became so angry that he sprang onto his ship and sailed out to sea and wrecked the ship on the rocks, which lie north-west of Grímsey, and Kolbeinn perished there').[168] The saga-author, by using a cause-and-effect clause, attributes Kolbeinn's perishing to his anger. The sense is that Kolbeinn's actions are deliberate. That *brjóta* ('to wreck') occurs in its third-person past indicative form (*braut*) furnishes Kolbeinn (taking the nominative case) with agency that affects the ship (taking the accusative case); if the wrecking were accidental, then the saga-author would likely use the past participle form of the verb (*brotinn*), with the ship taking the nominative (i.e., 'the ship was wrecked'). Corroborating this sense, the scene features in Alexander Murray's *Suicide in the Middle Ages*.[169] Symbolically, then, to grow angry is to risk facilitating one's own demise.

[167] Evans, *Men*, 126.
[168] *Svarfdæla saga*, 170.
[169] Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages: The Curse on Self-Murder*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 569.

Kolbeinn's self-destructive anger accords with Christian ethic insomuch as anger was sometimes symbolised as a suicidal female (see **1.5**); the casting of Kolbeinn's anger as suicide-inducing may betray knowledge of this tradition.[170] Kolbeinn's death, though extreme, contextualises and justifies the various exhortations of emotional moderation in the corpus.

Elsewhere, grief, an emotion closely associated with anger (see **1.3**), causes suicidal tendencies. For instance, Egill, upon learning of his son's death, refuses nourishment prior to his composition of *Sonatorrek*, implying that he intends to starve himself to death.[171] Similarly, in *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, Hávarðr, having been refused adequate compensation for his son's slaying, grows angry and retires to bed for twelve months, indicating that he has given up on life.[172] Finally, in *Vatnsdœla saga*, two of Ingimundr's friends are so devastated by Ingimundr's death that they commit suicide.[173]

Grœnlendinga þáttr also casts anger as a cause of death. The saga-author writes that, during a fight at the assembly,

> *Steingrímr hét maðr, er þat mælti, at þeir skyldi gera svá vel at berjask eigi, ok gekk á milli með nǫkkura men, en hvárirtveggju váru svá óðir, at Steingrímr var lagðr sverði i gegnum í þessi hríð* ('there was a man named Steingrímr, who called out to them that they would do well not to fight one another, and he and some other men went in between them. But each of the two sides were so furious that Steingrímr was thrust through with a sword during the battle').[174]

[170] See, e.g., Little, 14-19.
[171] *Egils saga*, 244-5.
[172] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 309.
[173] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 63-4.
[174] *Grœnlendinga þáttr*, 287.

This is Steingrímr's sole appearance in the *þáttr*. By killing him off within moments of his introduction, the author stresses both the chaos that anger can foster among saga-men, and the futility of urging restraint amidst such chaos, implying that their fury, already manifest in violence, cannot be calmed. Miller points out that *Ljósvetninga saga*'s Koðrán also dies from a severe headwound that he sustained while trying to separate combatants, making him another of anger's casualties.[175] Compounding the sense of chaos, the author of *Grœnlendinga þáttr* does not disclose who is responsible for the killing. This is reiterated by the use of the past participle form of *leggja* ('to thrust'), *lagðr*, which functions without an agent. Although *sverð* ('sword') takes the dative case here, in the absence of a named killer it is afforded a kind of agency as the men are deprived of their own agency in their anger. As *Cleasby-Vigfusson* notes, *óðr* can mean 'mad' as well as 'furious'.[176] Thus, anger is synonymous with a maddening effect that brings about fatal results.

4.7 Anger as Mental Defect

Likewise, anger is cast elsewhere as the cause of a mental defect that results in a lack of intelligence, foolishness, or madness, reiterating the nexus between emotional self-control and wisdom already noted. If, as I have argued, the ability to think clearly and carefully is an important masculine attribute, then anger, by impeding the attainment of this attribute, is emasculating. In *Fóstbrœðra saga*, Skúfr, trying to prevent Þorkell from exacting vengeance on Þormóðr for the slaying of his slave, warns Þórkell that *reiðni lítr eigi it sanna* ('anger cannot see the truth').[177] Skúfr points out that, if Þorkell were to kill Þormóðr, he would incur King Óláfr's wrath; presumably this is the truth to which Skúfr refers. Proving that Skúfr's

[175] Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 260; *Ljósvetninga saga*, 81.
[176] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*óðr*'.
[177] *Fóstbrœðra saga*, 228.

counsel is effective, the saga-author writes that *[n]ú af þessum orðum Skúfs, þá sefask Þorkell* ('now Þorkell was soothed by Skúfr's words').[178] Further suggesting that rash action ought to be resisted, Skúfr also quelled a quarrel between Gestr and Þormóðr earlier.[179] The sentiment that anger obscures the truth is echoed in *Halldórs þáttr Snorrasonar I*. When Einarr is angry with Halldórr for slaying his kinsman, he remembers the advice of King Magnús *at gefa upp reiðina fyrst í stað, því at opt þykkir þá annat sannara, er hon líðr af, en áðr hefir fram farit* ('to give up anger first instead, since often one thing seems truer than the one that has gone before').[180] Again, the implication is that relinquishing anger will facilitate comprehension of the truth.

Skúfr's proverb fuses two metaphor types, UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING and ANGER OBSCURES VISION: anger prevents seeing, the vehicle that represents mental clarity.[181] The former type figures in some of the examples discussed above: Þorkell in *Gísla saga* says that a man who exercises moderation *[a]llt kann sá* ('can see everything'), and, in *Heiðarvíga saga*, Eiríkr is given the adjectival epithet *viðsjá* ('wide-sight') to emphasise his prudence and wisdom.[182] If saga-society considers disability emasculating, then blindness is an emasculating impediment.[183] This sense is corroborated by Ámundi in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, who cannot avenge his father's slaying (and thus cannot act in a masculine fashion) until God temporarily cures him of his blindness.[184] If metaphorical blindness alludes to the significance of literal blindness, then Skúfr's proverb further implies that anger, temporarily blinding the character that experiences it, is similarly emasculating.

[178] *Fóstbræðra saga*, 228.
[179] *Fóstbræðra saga*, 222-3.
[180] *Halldórs þáttr Snorrasonar I*, 254.
[181] On UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING, see Lakoff and Johnson, 48.
[182] *Gísla saga*, 51. *Heiðarvíga saga*, 265.
[183] Evans, *Men*, 87-91.
[184] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 272-4.

Versions of the metaphor type ANGER OBSCURES VISION figure elsewhere. In *Ljósvetninga saga*, it is ironic that Hlenni, an aged blind man, suggests that Eilífr evade Guðmundr's wrath by hiding in a grass-filled basket.[185] Hlenni comments *[e]n þó má vera, at Guðmundr sjái eigi þetta undanbragð fyrir reiði sakar* ('but it may be that Guðmundr will not see that subterfuge because of his anger').[186] Implying that, as Hlenni predicted, Guðmundr's anger impedes his capacity to think clearly, the ruse is successful. The metaphor is also employed in *Egils þáttr Síðu-Hallssonar*. When Tófi, at the king's request, suggests that his father renounce heathenism, his father is so furious that he imprisons him.[187] Eventually, however, the Earl warms to the idea, and explains *ek sé reyndar, er reiði gengr af* ('I see clearly, when anger goes away'), employing the metaphor of sight to express cognitive clarity in anger's absence.[188] Finally, in *Grettis saga*, the author notes that, following Glámr's anger-intensifying curse, Grettir was now afraid of the dark because he saw apparitions, an affliction which gives rise to the expression 'to have *Glámr augna* ('Glámr's eyes') or *glámsýni* ('Glámr's sight')' to refer to people who suffer optical delusions.[189] The intensification of Grettir's irascibility may have brought about his distorted vision that figures to represent his mental clarity.

Gregory the Great also employs the UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING and ANGER OBSCURES VISION metaphor types in his Latin *Moralia in Iob*. Concurring with Eliphaz's condemnation of Job's anger, he writes *[p]er iram sapientia perditur, ut quid quoquo ordine agendum sit omnino nesciatur, sicut scriptum est: Ira in sinu stulti requiescit; quia nimirum intelligentiae lucem subtrahit cum mentem permouendo confundit* ('[b]y anger wisdom is parted with, so that we are left wholly in ignorance what to do, and in what order to do it; as it is written,

[185] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 55-6.
[186] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 56.
[187] *Egils þáttr Síðu-Hallssonar*, 386-7.
[188] *Egils þáttr Síðu-Hallssonar*, 388.
[189] *Grettis saga*, 123.

Anger resteth in the bosom of a fool [Ecclesiastes 7:9]; in this way, that it withdraws the light of understanding, while by agitating it troubles the mind').[190] Thus, Gregory suggests that anger is metaphorically blinding. That the sentiments expressed in the sagas discussed above are analogous with those expressed in the *Moralia*, and that the same metaphor types are used to enhance this expression, may suggest that the saga-authors had Gregory's work, or similar Christian texts, in mind. Whilst there is no extant Old Norse-Icelandic version of the text, the Latin original is listed in Hólar cathedral's inventory, and excerpts of the original survive in one medieval Icelandic manuscript.[191] If we are to accept that the sagas were most probably written down by clerics proficient in Latin, then it is plausible that they were familiar with this text and its wisdom.[192] Supporting this, Wilhelm Heizmann has argued that a proverb in *Laxdœla saga* betrays knowledge of the *Moralia*.[193] Even if the authors were not directly aware of Gregory's work, the recurrent casting of anger as an undesirable impediment to clear thought accords with this Christian ethic.

Hreiðars þáttr documents Hreiðarr's maturation from foolishness to wisdom through an experience of anger, and in so doing emphasises the undesirability of anger, and the desirability of intellect, for saga-men. At the *þáttr*'s outset, the author writes that Hreiðarr *var ljótr maðr ok varla sjálfbjargi fyrir vits sǫkum* ('was an ugly man and barely had the intelligence to care for himself') and describes him as an *afglapi* ('oaf' or 'fool').[194] Hreiðarr persuades his brother Þórðr to let him visit King Magnús with him, and the King remarks on Hreiðarr's even-temperedness – a quality which Hreiðarr says he dislikes – despite his hideous appearance.[195] The King then tells Hreiðarr *[þ]ú munt reiðast þó* ('you will get angry

[190] *S. Gregorii Magni Moralia in Iob*, 276. Translation from *Morals on the Book of Job, by S. Gregory the Great*, trans. undisclosed, vol. 1 (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1844), 303.
[191] Wolf, 'Gregory's Influence', 269.
[192] O'Donoghue, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, 23.
[193] Wilhelm Heizmann 'Kannte der Verfasser der Laxdœla saga Gregors des Großen Moralia in Iob?', *Opuscula* 10 (1996), 194-207.
[194] *Hreiðars þáttr*, 247, 248.
[195] *Hreiðars þáttr*, 247-8, 252.

though'), a prediction that, peculiarly, excites Hreiðarr.[196] When Hreiðarr asks to accompany King Magnús when he visits King Haraldr, King Magnús says *em ek um þat hræddr, at þá sœki þik heim reiðin, er þú langar til, en mér þœtti bezt, at við bærist* ('I am afraid that you will lose your temper, as you are longing to, and it seems to me best to prevent it'), to which Hreiðarr replies *[n]ú mæltir þú gott orð. Þá skal at vísu fara, ef ek veit þess vánir, at ek reiðumk* ('now you are saying good words. I shall surely go, if I know I can expect this, that I will become angry').[197] King Magnús eventually succumbs to Hreiðarr's persuasion.[198] When King Haraldr's men abuse Hreiðarr, King Magnús' prediction is realised: the author writes

> *reiðisk hann, ferr hǫndum þann mann, er mest sótti at honum ok verst lék við hann, ok vegr á lopt ok færði niðr at hǫfðinu, svá at heilinn var úti, ok er sá dauðr. Nú þykkir þeim hann trautt mennskr maðr at afli* ('he became angry, he grasped the man in his hands, he who had attacked him the most and played with him the worst, and lifted him in the air and brought him down on his head, so that his brain came out, and he was dead. Now he seemed to them scarcely a human being in his strength').[199]

Hreiðarr's comportment is reminiscent of the *berserksgangr* (see **7.2**), and the authorial comment that Hreiðarr was *trautt mennskr maðr* ('scarcely a human being') suggests that he is monstrous. Prior to his reaction, Hreiðarr laughs in response to the abuse; Yoav Tirosh notes that his laughter may accord with that of Víga-Glúmr – potentially the same Glúmr that is listed as Hreiðarr's grandfather's killer at the beginning of the *þáttr* – whose 'laugh is a prelude to a kill' (see **3.4.1**).[200] Afterwards, when King Magnús asks whether or not Hreiðarr

[196] *Hreiðars þáttr*, 252.
[197] *Hreiðars þáttr*, 254.
[198] *Hreiðars þáttr*, 255.
[199] *Hreiðars þáttr*, 256.
[200] Tirosh, 'Icelanders Abroad', in *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Jürg Glauser, Pernille Hermann, and Stephen A. Mitchell, vol. 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018),

enjoyed losing his temper, Hreiðarr replies *[i]llt þótti mér. Þess var ek fúsastr at drepa þá alla* ('it seemed bad to me. It made me want to kill them all').[201] The king echoes this sentiment by saying *[þ]at kom mér jafnt í hug […] at þú myndir illa reiðr verða* ('it seemed to me the same in my mind … that you would become angry in a bad way').[202]

By featuring a mentally disabled, foolish yet even-tempered protagonist who is curious to experience anger, the *þáttr* suggests that the pursuit of anger itself is foolish, and Hreiðarr's dislike of the experience, alongside the king's reiteration that anger is bad, highlights the unintelligence of raging. Hreiðarr attributes his homicidal violence – which, if we are to follow Tirosh in understanding that Víga-Glúmr's spectre lingers in the *þáttr*, may be a product of his Glúmrian *víghugr* ('killing mood') – to his anger, explicitly detailing the cause-and-effect link between emotionality and action.[203] Whereas most other negative appraisals of anger in the sagas are given by a character witnessing another character growing angry, Hreiðarr appraises his own experience and thus demonstrates acute self-awareness; ironically, the fool, having raged, grows wise as he recognises the error of his ways. Moreover, if Hreiðarr heeds the King's prediction, then he would have anticipated his angry experience before it occurred; although ultimately involuntarily assumed, the experience is pursued deliberately. His experience, though devastating, is momentary, and his subsequent self-appraisal demonstrates a return to his even-tempered self. His analysis also demonstrates intelligence, certainly in comparison to the unintelligent curiosity that he shows prior to raging. Thus, Hreiðarr's angry experience, though a negative one, was necessary for his emotional maturation.

502-508 (503). See also Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Two Icelandic Stories: Hreiðars þáttr and Orms þáttr* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2011), 6, 81. See *Hreiðars þáttr*, 247.

[201] *Hreiðars þáttr*, 257.

[202] *Hreiðars þáttr*, 257.

[203] See, e.g., *Víga-Glúms saga*, 26.

Hreiðarr's ugliness is described four times by the *þáttr*-author, once by Þórðr, and once by King Magnús using the adjective *ljótr* ('ugly').[204] Evans argues that for a saga-man to attain saga-society's hegemonic masculine ideal, he must, among other qualities, 'be of fine physical appearance'.[205] Evans' postulation is presumably inferred from the observation that many hegemonically masculine males are handsome; for instance, *Laxdæla saga*'s Kjartan, a hegemonically masculine man in many respects, *var allra manna fríðastr, þeira er fœzk hafa á Íslandi* ('was the most handsome of all those men who have been born in Iceland').[206] Although not all ugly saga-men are unmasculine (Egill, for example, is ugly yet masculine in other ways), the masculine statuses of all ugly saga-men are, therefore, ultimately unhegemonic, because their ugliness compromises their complete attainment of the ideal. Hreiðarr's ugliness thus reiterates his unmasculinity.[207] Moreover, Hreiðarr's persistent ugliness may be suggestive of his anger. Although there are many examples where a character's anger is not accompanied by, or associated with, a description of their ugliness or vice versa, an association between ugliness and anger is sometimes established in the corpus: for instance, the frenzy prone Ketill in *Fljótsdæla saga*, the angry Klaufi in *Svarfdæla saga*, and the tempestuous Egill, are all ugly.[208] The concurrence has the effect of creating a symbolic signpost that anger is an 'ugly' (and thus undesirable) emotion: Hreiðarr's physical ugliness represents his desire for emotional ugliness. Supporting this, *Cleasby-Vigfusson* notes that *ljótr* can figure metaphorically to mean 'bad, sore, hideous'.[209] Such a sentiment is profoundly Senecan, and may betray the author's knowledge of his works.[210] Moreover,

[204] *Hreiðars þáttr*, 247, 248, 250, 252, 252, 253.
[205] Evans, *Men*, 25.
[206] *Laxdæla saga*, 76.
[207] *Egils saga*, 143.
[208] See *Fljótsdæla saga*, 219. *Svarfdæla saga*, 162.
[209] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*ljótr*'.
[210] Rosenwein, *Anger*, 25, 27.

Hreiðarr's anger may allude to his unmasculinity by way of its association with ugliness, again underscoring a nexus between anger and reduced masculinity.

Whilst the *þáttr* generally casts anger in a negative light, Hreiðarr's angry retribution feels justified, particularly when viewed in the context of the Norwegians' recurrent abuse towards Icelanders (see **4.8**). Grettir, however, would consider Hreiðarr's vengeance unmasculine because it is immediate, and Skarpheðinn would consider it feminine because he rages.[211] Thus, although his retribution fulfils the requirement that a saga-man in pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal exacts vengeance, he is emasculated by his behaviour.[212]

King Magnús arranges for Hreiðarr to lodge with Eyvindr to protect him from King Haraldr's wrath.[213] When Haraldr arrives at his lodgings, Hreiðarr, against Eyvindr's advice, meets the King.[214] Now demonstrating wisdom following his own negative experience of anger, he tells the King *tak af mér reiðina* ('take your anger away from me').[215] Ironically, Haraldr is angry with Hreiðarr for the actions that he carried out in his own anger; thus, anger is cast as impermissible for a man but permissible for a king, suggesting that saga-men and sovereigns adhere to and perpetuate different emotive scripts (see **8**). Hreiðarr presents the King with a model of a pig (earlier in the *þáttr*, Magnús suggests that Hreiðarr, though unaware, is likely a skilled craftsman).[216] Though initially impressed, King Haraldr realises that the model is of a sow and interprets it as an insulting reference to his father's nickname Sigurðr sýr ('sow').[217] As Bourns writes, '[f]or a man to be nicknamed after a female pig is to simultaneously invite accusations of both passive homosexuality and bestiality'.[218] Evoking the '*ergi*-complex', such comparisons (of men to female animals) were forbidden by law.[219]

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[211] *Grettis saga*, 44. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114.
[212] See Evans, *Men*, 25.
[213] *Hreiðars þáttr*, 257.
[214] *Hreiðars þáttr*, 258.
[215] *Hreiðars þáttr*, 258.
[216] *Hreiðars þáttr*, 259, 252.
[217] Faulkes, 86.
[218] Bourns, 123.
[219] *Gulaþingslǫg*, 70. *Frostuþingslǫg*, 225. See Bourns, 120-1.

Implicitly furious, King Haraldr says *[h]afi þik allan troll. Standi menn upp ok drepi hann* ('may all the trolls take you. Stand up, men, and kill him').[220] King Haraldr's lack of emotional self-restraint plainly juxtaposes Hreiðarr's emotional self-control.

Hreiðarr escapes to King Magnús, for whom he composes an encomiastic poem that begins peculiarly, improves gradually, and concludes masterfully, which Magnús suggests is a metaphor for the trajectory of Hreiðarr's life.[221] The *þáttr* ends with the author telling us that Hreiðarr's life, which he had begun as an *afglapi* ('fool'), continued to improve, such that he *gerisk mikill maðr fyrir sér* ('became a great man') and *hefir hann gǫrt sér at mestum hluta þau kynjalæti, er hann sló á sik inn fyrra hluta ævinnar* ('for the most part he himself had finished with those strange gestures, which he had taken up in the first part of his life').[222] Hreiðarr's even-temperedness – in spite of his foolishness in other respects – is emphasised prior to his desire to experience anger (the acme of his foolishness), and this experience, ironically, teaches him that the quality of even-temperedness is actually preferable. The pivotal moment in Hreiðarr's character development from fool to wiseman, therefore, comes not through an adaptation of his behaviour, but through a 'ruby-slippers' realisation that his innate even-temperedness could afford him the capacity to mature all along (a realisation which, paradoxically, is reliant on his negative experience). Finally, that Hreiðarr is a near-homophone of *reiðr* ('angry') intimates that anger is the *þáttr*'s salient preoccupation, and salient to its protagonist's identity. Thus, the *þáttr* relates the underlying moral that anger is detrimental, undesirable, and unmasculine.

Lastly, in *Ǫlkofra þáttr*, anger is also cast as a mental defect verging on madness. When Ǫlkofri accidentally burns down a wood owned by several men, and one of the men, Skapti, offers him an arbitrated settlement, the saga-author writes that *Ǫlkofri var málóði ok*

[220] *Hreiðars þáttr*, 259.
[221] *Hreiðars þáttr*, 259-60.
[222] *Hreiðars þáttr*, 260.

heldr stóryrðr, lét þess ván, ef vinir hans kæmi til þings, at Skapti myndi eigi jafnstórliga láta ('Ǫlkofri was jabbering in violent language and was using big words, hoping, if his friends came to the þing, that Skapti would not act so arrogantly'), thereby indicating that he experiences anger.[223] When Ǫlkofri later reflects on his behaviour, however, he says *[æ]rr var ek þá ok þó verr* ('I was mad then and even worse') to have rejected the offer of judgement, and declares that he was a *fól ok afglapi* ('fool and a simpleton').[224] *Cleasby-Vigfusson* glosses *ærr* 'mad, furious', further corroborating the link between madness and anger alluded to here.[225]

4.8 Against Emotional Self-Restraint

Ǫlkofri, whilst making the case that his own reaction was foolish, explains that he recognises that Skapti's anger was *várkunn* ('excusable') given the circumstances.[226] It makes sense that Ǫlkofri, in a vulnerable position, should pander to a man of greater influence, but it does raise the question of whether a saga-author may ever cast anger as favourable for saga-men.

Ǫlkofri's positive appraisal of Skapti's raging accords with that of Hörðr in *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja*. In Norway, Geirr grows angry when a band of Norwegians steals his cloak and mocks and laughs at him, and he severs one man's arm.[227] Hörðr praises his angry reaction, telling him *[s]líkt lá til sem þú gerðir at; mun nú eigi duga atgerðalaust* ('such was what you did. Now, you shall not be inactive').[228] Whilst inactivity does not connote the opposite of anger, Hörðr's comment commends violence that is fuelled by anger. Hörðr's own behaviour later in the saga suggests that he was unlikely to counsel restraint: he is made

[223] *Ǫlkofra þáttr*, 85.
[224] *Ǫlkofra þáttr*, 88.
[225] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*ærr*'.
[226] *Ǫlkofra þáttr*, 88.
[227] *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja*, 36.
[228] *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja*, 36.

an outlaw following an angry outburst that causes him to slay Auðr and burn down the farmhouse, inadvertently killing two women.[229] Moreover, after slaying Kjartan, the saga-author writes that *kom enn herfjöturr á Hörð* ('"war-fetters" came over Hörðr'), a state that corresponds with the post-frenzy lull that follows the *berserksgangr* (see **7.2**).[230] Hörðr advocates the opposite of moderation because he is not, as his behaviour demonstrates, a moderate man himself; thus, characters' counsel must be contextualised.

We may also, however, consider Hörðr's remark in the wider context of the saga and *þættir* tradition. Throughout the corpus, Icelanders abroad in Norway are often ridiculed by Norwegians. For instance, the Norwegians' 'stock anti-Icelandic jibe' that casts Icelanders as *mörlandar* ('suet-eaters') – occurring in several *útanferðar þættir* ('tales of travels abroad'), such as in *Halldórs þáttr Snorrasonar I* – shows how the Norwegians mocked the Icelanders for being uncultured.[231] Moreover, other Scandinavian peoples are cast as thinking of Icelanders as behaving in an unruly fashion. In *Eyrbyggja saga*, for instance, Þorleifr hurries to quell his argument with Arnbjǫrn, saying *eigi skulu Nóregsmenn at því hlæja* […] *at þeir þurfi at draga okkr í sundr sem hunda* ('we shall not let the Norwegians laugh at us […] by having to drag us apart like dogs').[232] His concern arises from an implicit expectation that their behaviour will be met with Norwegian ridicule. In the context of recurrent Norwegian mockery, then, Hörðr's praise of Geirr's angry comportment is praise in recognition of retaliation on behalf of all Icelanders abroad in Norway who have had to endure such treatment. Yet, by growing angry and becoming violent, they reinforce and perpetuate this stereotype of uncouthness and volatility.

[229] *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja*, 56.
[230] *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja*, 87.
[231] Diana Whaley, 'A Useful Past: Historical Writing in Medieval Iceland', in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 161-202 (184); see also Ann-Marie Long, *Iceland's Relationship with Norway c.870-c.1100: Memory, History and Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 236; *Halldórs þáttr Snorrasonar I*, 253.
[232] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 106.

Earlier in *Eyrbyggja saga*, the author describes how Þórarinn svarti ('the Black') reinstates his masculinity by choosing not to exercise emotional self-restraint. When Þorbjǫrn accuses Þórarinn of stealing his horses and Þórarinn does not react, Þórarinn's mother, Geirríðr, goads him by remarking

> *[o]fsatt er þat, er mælt er, at meir hefir þú, Þórarinn, kvenna skap en karla, er þú skalt þola Þorbirni digra hverja skǫmm, ok eigi veit ek, hví ek á slíkan son* ('it is too true, that which is said, that you, Þórarinn, have more the disposition of women than men, when you endure every shame from Þorbjǫrn the Stout, and I do not know why I have such a son').[233]

The saga-author, having noted that Þórarinn was *vel stilltr hversdagliga* ('well-composed everyday'), makes a similar comment when introducing him: *[s]vá var hann maðr óhlutdeilinn, at óvinir hans mæltu, at hann hefði eigi síðr kvenna skap en karla* ('he was such a passive man that his enemies said that he had as much the disposition of women as men').[234] This is one of several saga-instances where two sexes are alluded to that Evans cites when refuting Clover's one-sex model.[235] Ostensibly, such a sentiment contrasts Skarpheðinn's anger-feminising comment. With Þórarinn stating *[e]igi nenni ek nú lengur hér at standa* ('now I cannot bear to stand here any longer') and instigating a fight that kills three men, Geirríðr's emasculation of her son to provoke anger – a salient feature of whetting mechanisms – proves successful.[236] Given that it is Þórarinn's lack of self-restraint that reinstates his masculinity, his anger, rather than compromising his pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal, facilitates it. Auðr, his wife, has her hand severed when breaking up the

[233] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 36.
[234] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 27.
[235] Evans, *Men*, 12.
[236] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 36.

fight.[237] Þórarinn overhears Þorbjǫrn's companions ridiculing Þórarinn when Oddr claims that Þórarinn was responsible (an emasculating insult, not least because, as we have seen, violence against women was considered a *niðingsverk*).[238] Rather than acting in a passive (and supposedly feminine) fashion, Þórarinn does not hesitate to attack the men, and kills Þorbjǫrn.[239] In so doing, he once again re-stabilises his masculine status, despite failing to exercise the '"no reaction" formula'.

Þórarinn makes it clear that he acted thus to overcome emasculation: when Vermundr, alluding to the fact that Þórarinn's previous passivity was considered feminine, asks Þórarinn *[h]várt vissu þeir nú, hvárt þú vart karlmaðr eða kona?* ('do they now know whether you are a man or a woman?'), Þórarinn confirms, in verse, that he has overcome his enemies' calumny.[240] It is also emphasised that his actions were anger-fuelled: when he recounts the events to Arnkell, Arnkell comments *[r]eizk hefir þú nú, frændi, svá hógværr maðr sem þú ert* ('you have become angry now, kinsman, as gentle a man as you are'), and Þórarinn corroborates this in a verse, employing the metaphor of the *æðiregn* ('furious rainstorm') that breaks the pre-storm calm to connote how his anger overrides his previously calm temperament.[241] Þórarinn's clarifying self-appraisal of his emotionality affirms that poetry embedded in saga-prose, in contrast to the saga-prose itself, is a space where saga-men can freely express their emotionality.[242]

Given that Þórarinn's anger-fuelled actions to reinstate his masculine status are not condemned but rather implicitly commended, we may infer, in accordance with Miller's interpretation of Skarpheðinn's remark in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, that slow-burning anger is

[237] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 36.
[238] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 37.
[239] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 37.
[240] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 43.
[241] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 48.
[242] See Sif Rikhardsdottir, 85.

permissible for saga-men.[243] Yet, Þórarinn's mother's implication that he is feminine because he does not react fast enough, though possibly nothing more than a necessary goading technique, may perpetuate, albeit tacitly, the culturally contingent stereotype that anger that is *too* slow burning is feminising. This accords with Miller's argument that Grettir's remark – *[þ]rœll einn þegar hefnisk, en argr aldri* ('only a slave takes vengeance immediately, but an *argr* [person] – never') – also implies that excessive delay was shameful.[244] Though Þórarinn's inherent calmness aligns with the principles of the '"no reaction" formula", we may infer that Þórarinn is passive and therefore feminine because he is too calm. Comparably, as we have seen, a man may be designated *argr* if he assumes the passive, rather than the active, role in homosexual intercourse; comportment that is considered masculine, due emotional self-restraint, is but a hair's breadth away from comportment that is considered feminine, excessive self-restraint that results in passivity. This saga suggests, therefore, that a man's gendered status is contingent on the precise timing of his angry experience.

Yet, Þórarinn, when he slays Þorbjǫrn in response to Oddr's accusation that he accidentally cut off Auðr's hand, is quick to anger and react, so quick, in fact, that it is remarkable that his actions are not met with disapproval (as is the case elsewhere in the *Íslendingasögur*). It could be that Þórarinn, aware of his tendency to act passively and not react, responds instantaneously to prevent any further accusations of feminine passivity proactively. He is, after all, presented with a dilemma: if he does not retaliate immediately, then he may not be able to counter the emasculation, and if he does retaliate immediately, saga-society would hold him unmasculine for failing to demonstrate due moderation. Perhaps Vermundr and Arnkell, by not condemning Þórarinn's quick retaliation, deliberately allow

[243] Miller, 'Emotions and the Sagas', 100.
[244] Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 193-4. *Grettis saga*, 44.

Þórarinn, a neophyte when it comes to anger and emotional self-restraint on account of his consistent calmness hitherto, some leeway. If so, then, in *Eyrbyggja saga* at least, the dictates of saga-society masculinity are momentarily mutable. Ultimately, however, Þórarinn is sentenced to lesser outlawry for his part in the killings; forced to assume an unheroic, liminal societal status, his anger and resulting failure to exercise self-restraint does, to some extent, compromise his attainment of the hegemonic masculine ideal.[245]

4.9 Conclusion

The hegemonic masculine ideal's condemnation of male characters' rash anger to which Skarpheðinn alludes in *Brennu-Njáls saga* is manifest throughout the *Íslendingasögur*. This sentiment is conveyed through characters' exhortations of emotional moderation; advocations of slow-burning vengeance rather than rash, angry action; Grettir's striving for emotional self-control; the persistent yoking of anger and male characters' demise; and the casting of anger as a mental defect. Even those instances that ostensibly convey sentiments contrary to exhortations of emotional self-restraint adhere to this trend on closer inspection. All of these examples emphasise how anger that is too rash can destabilise a character's masculine status. This chapter has also established, however, that saga-men pursuing vengeance tread a fine line between excessive, anger-fuelled haste and excessive delay, both of which are socially impermissible and, therefore, unmasculine; revenge – integral to the attainment of the hegemonic masculine ideal – is a dish best served cold, but it must never go unserved.

[245] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 57-8.

5 Anger and Female Masculinity

5.1 Introduction

Mostly excluded from participating in the legal, political, and blood-feuding spheres, female characters in the *Íslendingasögur* have limited agency. That they are recurrently depicted as reigning supreme *innan stokks* ('within the household') is of little significance relative to the exhaustive privileges that male characters – particularly those who qualify for pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal – enjoy; indeed, even this hyper-localised power was not taken as seriously by male characters as we may, on first reading, assume.[1] Some female characters, however, can sometimes attain agency by raging. Moreover, often their dominion over this limited locus facilitates the staging of such emotionality. Whilst their anger may drive decisive and sometimes violent action, often this performance – frequently embodied in a repertoire of postures, expressions, gestures, and movements that are intelligible by male and female characters alike – is alone sufficient to overcome male characters. That these saga-women are sometimes cast as exaggerating or simulating anger as a means to an end emphasises its practical utility. Whether the saga-author casts their angry expression as genuine, exaggerated, or simulated, however, it adheres to a mostly consistent emotive script. Contrastingly, however, several saga-women mask their emotionality, and thus exhibit the emotional *modus operandi* required of saga-men in pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal. Likewise, their subterfuge frequently bears practical utility. This suggests that it is their

[1] See, e.g., Clover, 'Regardless', 2. A boy in *Laxdœla saga*, for instance, declares *leiðisk mér at sitja heima sem konum* ('it bores me to sit at home like women'). See *Laxdœla saga*, 204. See also Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 131. If, however, *Laxdœla saga* was composed by a woman as Helga Kress argues, then the boy's complaint may instead convey authorial sentiment; indeed, its female characters instead take on profoundly masculine roles. See Kress, 'Meget Samstavet må det Tykkes Deg: Om Kvinneopprör og Genretvang i Sagaen om Laksdölene', *Historisk Tidskrift* 100 (1980), 266-280.

capacity to manipulate – that is, exhibit, exaggerate, simulate, or mask – anger that affords them agency.

Whilst Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir argues that there are many saga-women 'who are depicted as powerful […] without subsequently being compared to a man', often a manipulation of anger allows saga-women to compromise a saga-man's pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal by assuming a modality of masculinity themselves, if only momentarily.[2] This accords with Clover's claim that both men and women in the sagas are gendered 'something like masculine'.[3] Contrary to Clover's model, however, this simultaneously demonstrates the significance of sex: whilst, as we have seen, Skarpheðinn casts the expression of easily-aroused, rash anger as feminine for male characters in pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal, female characters can assume a masculine position despite employing the same emotional *modus operandi*, or, alternatively, abiding by the '"no reaction" formula'. Thus, the gendered status of a character's emotional comportment is contingent on their sex: male characters, expected to always abide by the '"no reaction" formula', are not afforded the same privilege of emotional oscillation.

That a character's sex can affect the quality of their gendered performance recalls Evans' application of Jack Halberstam's concept of 'female masculinity' – a modality of masculinity that is inseparable from the female body, i.e., 'masculinity without men' – to theorise masculine yet female saga-characters.[4] Evans mainly focuses on female characters who are masculinised by donning masculine attire, yet Halberstam, exploring the re-gendering of M from male to female in the James Bond film franchise for instance, also allows for his term 'female masculinity' to refer to the gendered status of women who assume masculine social positions without simulating masculinity in such obvious ways.[5] For

[2] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women*, 7-8.
[3] Clover, 'Regardless', 13.
[4] Evans, 'Female Masculinity'. Halberstam, 1.
[5] Halberstam, 3-4.

this reason, Halberstam's critical framework can be appropriately and usefully applied to the following analyses of raging saga-women whose manipulation of anger facilitates their assumption of a masculine position.

This chapter will analyse the simulation of rage exhibited by Álfdís in *Gísla saga* and Ólof in *Víglundar saga*; the exaggeration of anger to bolster a whetting performance exhibited by Bergþóra and Hallgerðr in *Brennu-Njáls saga* and Þuríðr in *Heiðarvíga saga*; the alternative emotional *modus operandi* exhibited by Hildigunnr in *Brennu-Njáls saga* when whetting; Freydís' contrasting manipulations of anger in *Grœnlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*; and the masking of anger exhibited by Hallgerðr elsewhere in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, and Guðrún and Þuríðr in *Laxdœla saga*. The behaviour of these women embodies the intersection between emotionality, gender, and sex – specifically anger, masculinity, and essential femaleness – and demonstrates how an emotional performance can affect a gendered performance. These saga-women manipulate anger to facilitate a performance of 'female masculinity'.

5.2 Simulating Anger

5.2.1 Álfdís in *Gísla saga*

When Gísli, pursued by a band of men, seeks refuge with Refr, Refr concocts a plan to protect him: he hides Gísli in the bed and directs his fierce-tempered wife Álfdís to rage at the men as a distraction. The plan is successful and Gísli remains undiscovered.[6] Refr's precise directions and Álfdís' protracted emotional simulation offers an instructive insight into a female emotive script for anger. Moreover, Álfdís' anger facilitates her assumption of a

[6] *Gísla saga*, 84-8.

near-masculine status to overcome Gísli's male pursuers, and, in so doing, she exhibits 'female masculinity'.

Enhancing the credibility of her rage, the saga-author introduces Álfdís as *fárskona sem mest í skapi ok var inn mesti kvenskratti* ('the most abusive of women in temperament and the most shrewish woman'); thus, her femaleness and her hot-tempered disposition are emphasised twice, a reiteration that establishes an implicit nexus between femaleness and anger.[7] Refr directs Álfdís to act *sem versta viðskiptis ok sem ærasta* ('as badly as possible to deal with and as madly furious as possible') and *at mæla þat allt illt*, *er þér kemr í hug, bæði í blóti ok skattyrðum* ('to say all the bad things that come into your mind, in both curses and foul-language').[8] The instruction that Álfdís should rage using words suggests that female raging may typically assume this form. This is further evidenced when the author of *Heiðarvíga saga* writes of Þorgerðr that *verðr hon óðamálug mjǫk* ('she was speaking very violently') when furiously confronting Styrr about him bullying her husband, Þórhalli.[9] Whilst most characters' emotional comportment tacitly adheres to an emotive script, in this instance both characters – male and female – have a conscious awareness of the script. When the men arrive, Álfdís comically greets them with a tirade of invective, calling them *gauragangi* ('a gang of ruffians') and *glóparnir* ('idiots') for disturbing her.[10] When her husband plays his part by imploring her to show *hóf* ('moderation') – thereby corroborating that saga-men hold demonstrative and rash displays of anger reprehensible – Álfdís responds with *margra fíflyrða* ('a torrent of foolish words') and *mikla ágauð* ('extremely foul language'), as Refr had previously instructed.[11]

[7] *Gísla saga*, 86.
[8] *Gísla saga*, 87.
[9] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 227.
[10] *Gísla saga*, 87-8.
[11] *Gísla saga*, 88.

The saga-author's lexical choices further indicate the quality of Álfdís' anger. Firstly, just as Álfdís uses *fíflyrða* ('foolish words') as part of her raging performance to save Gísli's life, in the preceding escape-episode, Gísli, pretending to be Ingjaldr's intellectually disabled son who is described as a *fífl* ('fool'), feigns frenzied foolishness to save his life.[12] The proximity of the vignettes invites a comparison to be drawn between Alfdís and Gísli's comportment, which intimates the nonsensicality of her performance. This allusion to anger's foolishness, as well as Refr's earlier direction that Álfdís should act *sem ærasta* ('as madly furious as possible'), recalls the description of Droplaugr in *Fljótsdæla saga* who, angry, *var nú mjök hálfær* ('was now extremely half-mad'), and her son's comment *[e]r svó, móðir, at ruglat er skapi þínu* ('it is so, mother, that your temper is confused'); corresponding with the presentation of anger as a mental defect for saga-men (see **4.7**), again anger impedes cognition.[13] The comic undertones are exaggerated by the irony that Álfdís calls the men *glóparnir* ('idiots'). Secondly, the noun *ágauð* – used metaphorically to intimate foul language, according to *Cleasby-Vigfusson* – literally means 'barking' and is related to the verb *geyja* ('to bark').[14] Aligning with its use here, Hjalti Skeggjason uses the verb metaphorically in *Íslendingabók* to mean 'to abuse' when he states *[v]il ek eigi goð geyja; / grey þykki mér Freyja* ('I do not wish to bark at the gods; / It seems to me Freyja is a bitch').[15] Thus, Álfdís' raging performance is afforded an animalistic quality. Though contributing to the performance's comic value, the implication that Álfdís' anger is foolish or zoomorphic may be derogatory. Yet, these qualities appear to enhance, rather than compromise, her performance's success. Corroborating this, later in the saga, Eyjólfr calls

[12] *Gísla saga*, 79.
[13] *Fljótsdæla saga*, 242-3.
[14] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*ágauð*', '*geyja*'.
[15] *Íslendingabók*, 15. The same verse occurs in *Kristni saga*, 26. See Siân Grønlie, trans., *Íslendingabók, Kristni saga / The Book of the Icelanders, The Story of the Conversion* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2006), 24-5, note 69. A slightly different version is quoted in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 264.

Auðr a *hundr* (‘dog’) when she strikes him, but her attack is successful despite her animalisation.[16]

There are several indications that Álfdís appropriates a near-masculine position by raging. Firstly, as we have seen, when Álfdís is introduced, the saga-author writes that she was *væn at yfirliti, en fárskona sem mest í skapi ok var inn mesti kvenskratti* (‘beautiful, but the most abusive of women in temperament and the most shrewish woman’).[17] By separating the description of her appearance and temperament with *en* (‘but’), the saga-author implies that her fierce disposition compromises – or compensates for – her feminine beauty, emblematic of her feminine status. Moreover, the saga-author, having described Refr as *allra manna slœgastr* (‘the slyest of all men’) – in accordance with the meaning of his name *refr* (‘fox’) – and having introduced Álfdís as volatile, states that they are *jafnræði* (‘an equal match’).[18] This implies that her emotional comportment allows her to hold her own against her husband’s guile successfully, thereby rivalling the power that his masculine status would normally afford.

Secondly, the saga-author, by describing how Gísli hides in the (presumably conjugal) bed and how Álfdís lies on top of him, casts Álfdís as symbolically dominating Gísli in a sexualised locus. The preoccupation with sexual deviance throughout the saga warrants this reading; earlier, Skeggi commissions wooden effigies to be made in the likeness of Gísli and Kolbjǫrn and intends to position them, it is implied, engaged in homosexual coitus, a blatant *níð*-insult that evokes the ‘*ergi*-complex’.[19] With Gísli cowering in the bed and subordinated physically, his masculine status is compromised, while Álfdís, by comparison, takes on a masculine role.

[16] *Gísla saga*, 101.
[17] *Gísla saga*, 86.
[18] *Gísla saga*, 86.
[19] *Gísla saga*, 10.

Thirdly, following this gender-subverting scene, Gísli gives Refr a knife on departing. Oren Falk has demonstrated how the sword represents the Lacanian phallus elsewhere in *Gísla saga*.[20] This is the case throughout the *Íslendingasögur*; Grettir, for example, metaphorically describes his penis as a sword.[21] Following Falk, Gísli, by gifting the knife to Refr, may bestow him with this symbol of masculine power, thereby giving him the power to overcome his wife's own masculine status that her raging has facilitated.

Fourthly, Álfdís emasculates Gísli's pursuers. Given that, as we have seen, saga-insults aimed at men are typically emasculating, Álfdís may similarly subject the pursuers to such insults in her diatribe. By stating *[þ]eir rannsaka eigi at síðr ok þó minnr en þeir myndi, ef þeir yrði eigi fyrir þvílíkum hrópyrðum af húsfreyju* ('they ransacked nonetheless, but less than they would have, if they were not subjected to such calumny from the mistress of the house'), the saga-author unequivocally casts Álfdís' performance as the cause of the men's failure.[22] Furthermore, Álfdís' anger, resulting in the men leaving empty-handed and feeling *mikinn mannskaða* ('great shame'), brings about their dishonour, thereby compromising their pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal.[23] Jeffrey Turco concedes in his analysis of the success of *Gísla saga*'s weapon-wielding women – comparable to the anger-wielding saga-women in this study – that female-sexed characters can still 'act like men' whilst using female weapons in the female domain (i.e. *innan stokks*), features emblematic of their essential femaleness.[24] Turco's postulation, therefore, accords with Evans' application of 'female masculinity'. Aligning with this, Álfdís appropriates the masculine position of her adversaries by weaponizing anger and wielding it in her own home. Thus, her anger allows her to perform 'female masculinity'.

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[20] Falk, 'Beardless Wonders', 227-8. See Phelpstead, 434. See Lacan, 285.
[21] *Grettis saga*, 240.
[22] *Gísla saga*, 88.
[23] *Gísla saga*, 88.
[24] Jeffrey Turco, 'Gender, Violence, and the "Enigma" of *Gísla saga*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 115 (2016), 277-298 (290).

Álfdís' performance provides a profitable starting point from which to deduce a female emotive script for anger. Prominent features of the script include: aggressive assertiveness; frenzied madness; foul-language and curses; abuse and the spreading of slander or scandal; and behaviour that is imbecilic and animalistic. Most significantly, the subversion of masculinity is integral to Álfdís' anger.

5.2.2 Ólof in *Víglundar saga*[25]

Ólof likewise demonstrates the agency and social mobility that anger can afford. Like Álfdís, she feigns or at least amplifies her anger, but she also feigns maleness and performs masculinity. In *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Skarpheðinn attempts to conceal his anger despite indicating that saga-men can grow angry over some things and being subjected to severe insults (see **2.1.1** and **4.2.1**). In this vignette, Ólof triumphs over her attempted rapist by convincingly pretending to be a raging saga-man called Óttarr. Through the duality of her masculine, male disguise and her masculine, female true identity, Ólof demonstrates the usefulness of anger for saga-women in overcoming saga-men. More significantly, Ólof appears to use the male emotive script for her masculine performance. This indicates that anger is at least permissible, and at most recognisably masculine, for saga-men in some cases.[26]

Jealous of the respect that Ólof's husband Þorgrímr commands, Einarr hopes to provoke him to take vengeance by raping his wife, predicting that this will enact his

[25] I have published a version of this section. See George C. Manning, 'Is Rage Ever Permissible? The Gender-Contingent Boundaries of Anger in the *Íslendingasögur*', *Oxford Research in English: Boundaries and Transgressions* 10 (Spring 2020), 85-98.
[26] This case may, however, be anomalous. Marianne Kalinke argues that *Víglundar saga* is a late-dating Romance which ought not to qualify for inclusion in the *Íslendingasögur* corpus. See Kalinke, 'Fathers, Mothers, and Daughters: "Hver er að ráða?"', in *The Cold Counsel: The Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology*, ed. Sarah M. Anderson and Karen Swenson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 167-188.

downfall. The plot, however, is foiled. At Ólof's instruction, her maid dons Ólof's mantle and sits in the sewing room. When Einarr tries to seduce the woman he believes to be Þorgrímr's wife, *[í] þessu kom maðr í stofuna bláklæddr ok helt á brugðnu sverði. Maðrinn var ekki stórr vexti, en allreiðugligr var hann. Þeir spurðu hann at nafni, en hann nefndist Óttarr* ('at that moment a blue-black-clothed man came into the room and he brandished a drawn sword. The man was not very big, but he had an extremely angry appearance. They asked him what he was called, and he said he was called Óttarr'). When Óttarr lies that Þorgrímr is almost home, Einarr and his brother Jǫkull jump up and, seeing men approaching, flee. Afterwards, the saga-author reveals that the band of men was actually a herd of cattle, and that Óttarr was Ólof in disguise.[27]

Wolf points out that, whereas women who cross-dress and 'imitate' men elsewhere in the *Íslendingasögur* are still recognisably female despite their male garb, Ólof conceals her sex and instead 'simulates' maleness.[28] Óttarr's convincing maleness is persistently reiterated. Firstly, the saga-author describes Óttarr using the noun *maðr*; Evans, whilst conceding that it can be used non-gender-specifically to mean 'person', argues that it likely means 'man' here.[29] That masculine pronouns (such as *hann*, 'he') are used in this passage – further reiterating Óttarr's maleness – corroborates this. Moreover, Ólof stages culturally recognisable masculine features to bolster her male-sexed disguise.[30] Óttarr's sword may symbolise potent masculinity, and, held upright and unsheathed in aggressive anticipation of combat, is a conspicuous phallic symbol, directly paralleling, as well as resisting, Einarr's penis – similarly 'unsheathed' in its erect state – that would enact Ólof's rape.[31] Jochens

[27] *Víglundar saga*, 76-8.
[28] Wolf, 'Transvestism in the Sagas of Icelanders', in *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience* / S*agaene og Noreg: 10th International Saga Conference* / *10. Internasjonale Saga- konferanse* (Trondheim: Norges Teknisk-Naturvitenskapelige Universitet, 1997), 675-684 (680).
[29] Evans, 'Female Masculinity', 68.
[30] The scene recalls Judith Butler's notion of gender performance. See *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).
[31] See Phelpstead, 434. See Lacan, 285.

notes that, in general, women who use arms in the *Íslendingasögur* are markedly unsuccessful.[32] Here, however, the brothers (and, perhaps, the audience) consider Óttarr authentically male, and the sword, brandished by an ostensibly male agent, bears the threat of masculine violence. As Wolf observes, 'Ólof's maleness is, from a practical point of view, essential for her success'; Ólof must become male herself to outmanoeuvre the male assailant.[33] Óttarr's anger, then, by fuelling martial prowess, is akin to the *berserksgangr* (see **7.2**). Whilst Ólof's masculine performance is mostly successful, the saga-author suggests that it is problematised by her physique, stating that *[m]aðrinn var ekki stórr vexti* ('the man was not very big'). Óttarr's slight stature could, at best, suggest that he is, despite brandishing a sword, unthreatening, and, at worst, betray his true identity. The masculine gender performance is not sufficient to conceal (what the saga-author considers to be) the physiological reality that women tend to be smaller than men.

The saga-author, however, writing that Óttarr is short *en* ('but') he is angry, suggests that rage compensates for, and counteracts, this potentially unmasculine feature, and thus rescues the almost compromised gender performance. The saga-author uses the adjective *allreiðugligr* ('of an extremely angry appearance') where the adjective *allreiðr* ('extremely angry'), used in many other saga-scenes, would suffice. The *-ligr* suffix may hint that the rage is being feigned, or at least exaggerated, for the performance, rather than being cast as genuine. That Ólof is introduced as *furðu kurteis* ('very gracious') rather than innately short-tempered (such as Álfdís, for instance) further indicates that she is feigning or exaggerating anger to bolster her male, masculine disguise as Óttarr.[34] As Evans suggests, the gendered performance is 'best shown through [...] extreme anger' and remedies Óttarr's problematic physique.[35] The intimation that anger, by contributing to a performance of maleness and

[32] Jochens, *Images*, 159.
[33] Wolf, 'Transvestism', 680.
[34] *Víglundar saga*, 64.
[35] Evans, 'Female Masculinity', 69.

masculinity, is masculine contrasts the promotion of emotional self-restraint for saga-men elsewhere in the *Íslendingasögur*. Male rage, therefore, may be justifiable and thus socially permissible in special circumstances, a category into which this defamatory seduction scene may fall.

The fear that Óttarr's anger induces indicates the success of the angry performance. The first element of Óttarr's name, *ótti* ('a thing to be feared'), is echoed in the line that follows his introduction, where the saga-author tells us that the brothers were *nökkurr ótti af þessum manni* ('somewhat afraid of this man'). Their mild fear, however, escalates to the point where it is embodied in their reaction: when Óttarr tells them that Þorgrímr is close by, the brothers' immediately *spretta upp* ('jump up') and flee. Óttarr's *blár* ('blue-black') attire – described when introducing Óttarr and reiterated when revealing his true identity – may also indicate the fear-inducing power of his anger, given that blackening is associated with anger and fear and black clothing is frequently worn by slayers (see **2.1.2**). Finally, Óttarr's dark clothing juxtaposes Ólof's epithet *inn geisli* ('the radiant'); if Óttarr's gloominess represents his anger, then Ólof's figurative radiance is likely emblematic of her (aforementioned) graciousness.[36] That Óttarr's constructed identity is so different to that of Ólof's true identity in terms of emotional posturing, disposition, and appearance renders her performance, and the fact that it is successful and (for the most part) convincing, even more impressive.

The fear that Óttarr arouses causes the brothers to hallucinate, overriding their ability to discern not only man from woman, but also cattle from men. Cattle, in particular bulls, feature alongside angry episodes elsewhere in the *Íslendingasögur*. In *Heiðarvíga saga*, for instance, Stýrr sacrifices two bulls shortly after slaying the raging *berserkir* Halli and Leiknir

[36] *Víglundar saga*, 64.

to prevent them from seeking redress.[37] As Bourns argues, 'bulls have not been castrated, so they fail to control their masculine aggression'; featuring in the dual, Stýrr's bulls parallel the 'overstated masculinity' of the *berserkir* (see **7.1** and **7.2**).[38] That *berserkir* in *Ynglinga saga* are said to be as strong as bulls substantiates this interpretation.[39] By casting Einarr and his brother as mistaking the cattle for Þorgrímr and his companions, the saga-author may intend for the cattle to echo Óttarr's extreme anger.

By successfully subjugating these male characters, Ólof assumes a comparably masculine social position. The brothers' emasculating disgrace is indicated when the saga-author writes that the brothers, having discovered that they had been deceived, *þóttust þeir hafa farit mikla smánarferð* ('realised that they had undertaken a most disgraceful journey'). Moreover, Þorgrímr, by refusing to pursue vengeance for his wife for fear of compromising his friendship with Einarr's father, Hólmkell, also behaves in a comparably unmasculine fashion; Evans suggests that 'Þorgrímr's lack of reaction could be read as impotent'.[40] His prioritisation of his relationship with Hólmkell over avenging his honour is recurrent: the attempted rape sparks a feuding sequence that manifests in various transgressions against Þorgrímr, and, time and again, his desire to preserve his relationship outweighs his desire for retaliation. This is paralleled in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, where Gunnarr refuses to exact vengeance on Njáll because he values their friendship more than his honour; as previously noted, Ármann Jakobsson suggests that this homosocial relationship borders on the homoerotic.[41] Ironically, when Víglundr, Þorgrímr's son, does not immediately avenge an attack from Jǫkull, Holmkell's son, because he sustains a head injury, Þorgrímr describes his son's bandages as a *faldr* ('headdress'), calls him a daughter, and demands to know why he

[37] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 224.
[38] Bourns, 170. Judy Quinn, 'Women in Old Norse Poetry and Sagas', in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 518-535 (521).
[39] *Ynglinga saga*, 17.
[40] Evans, 'Female Masculinity', 69.
[41] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 91. Ármann Jakobsson, 'Masculinity and Politics in *Njáls Saga*', 205.

did not retaliate.[42] This emasculating scene, however, reiterates Þorgrímr's own chronic inaction; perhaps the saga-author is casting Þorgrímr as deflecting his own unmasculinity onto his son. Þorgrímr's unmasculinity, then, serves to emphasise that his wife's angry cross-dressing performance renders her sufficiently masculine.

The saga-author reveals Óttarr's true identity by stating *inn bláklæddi maðr var Ólof sjálf* ('the blue-black-clothed man was Ólof herself'). As noted, *maðr*, though usually meaning 'man', can signify the non-gender specific 'person' or 'someone'; the saga-author may have used the term with its ambiguity in mind to indicate the fluidity of Ólof-Óttarr's gendered identity. Emphasising her biological femaleness, however, the saga-author uses the gender-specific reflexive pronoun *sjálf* ('herself') to pertain to Ólof. Evans thus argues that 'Ólof clearly adopts a masculine performance, but it is one that is still linked to a female body and so must not be regarded merely as masculinity — but rather as *female* masculinity.'[43] Ólof's rage, produced by the female body but adhering to the male script, is also a product of 'female masculinity'. We may understand her emotional performance, then, to exhibit both male masculinity and female masculinity simultaneously.

This vignette demonstrates the power that anger can afford a saga-woman to overcome gender-contingent boundaries and triumph over a saga-man. In so doing, she emasculates her male assailant and assumes the masculine position herself. Furthermore, as we have seen, that Ólof grows angry as a part of her cross-dressing performance shows that male anger was *not* exclusively considered feminine. Whilst, as the many examples discussed so far demonstrate, the '"no reaction" formula' is undoubtedly preferable for male characters, it seems that this scenario is circumstantially severe enough to warrant rash anger in a male character without it being coded feminine.

[42] *Víglundar saga*, 89.
[43] Evans, 'Female Masculinity', 69.

5.3 Anger and the Whetting Ritual

The female whetter – a woman that typically goads men into taking vengeance by impugning their masculine status – is a ubiquitous figure in the *Íslendingasögur*. Rolf Heller recorded fifty-one instances of what he termed *die Hetzerin* ('the inciter'), and Jochens and Miller have found yet more examples.[44] Jochens, following Judith Jesch, argues that the female whetter is a 'scapegoat for men's failures in establishing a peaceful society' and that misogynistic male saga-authors 'revived, amplified, and multiplied the ancient figure of the inciting woman in an effort to deflect blame for men's unreasoning behavior'.[45] Corroborating this, the author of *Króka-Refs saga*, for instance, deflects blame for Þorbjörn's irascible behaviour onto his wife by remarking when he is introduced that *þat var kallat, at Þorbjörn mundi hafa unnit nökkurum óhöppum færa ef hún hefði hann eigi fram æstan* ('it was said that Þorbjörn would have had fewer mishaps if she had not demanded from him').[46]

Despite the well-known saga-proverb – appearing in various reformulations – *eru kǫld kvenna ráð* ('cold is the counsel of women') ostensibly intimating that whetters enact a calculated mechanism and are, as such, emotionally sober, several exaggerated goading performances feature demonstrative anger: whilst the counsel of these whetters may be chilling, their emotionality is not always cool.[47] The orchestration of emasculation is a primary symptom of female anger aimed at men in the sagas and the goading ritual; as noted in **4.8**, in *Eyrbyggja saga*, Geirriðr goads her son by remarking *[o]fsatt er þat, er mælt er, at*

[44] Rolf Heller, *Die Literarische Darstellung der Frau in den Isländersagas* (Halle [Saale]: M. Niemeyer, 1958), 98-122. Jochens, *Images*, 192. Miller, 'Choosing the Avenger', 181.
[45] Jochens, *Images*, 175. Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991), 191.
[46] *Króka-Refs saga*, 119.
[47] Corroborating this, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, pointing out that the proverb only occurs three times in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, shows that it is not as widespread as its notoriety suggests. See *Women*, 17.

meir hefir þú, Þórarinn, kvenna skap en karla ('it is too true, that which is said, that you, Þórarinn, have more the disposition of women than men').[48]

Whereas Álfdís and Ólof simulated rage, female whetters are cast as exaggerating or amplifying anger. With the different aim of mobilising a man's emotions and inciting their action rather than overcoming male dominance, the emotive script to which the performance adheres is uniquely tailored. Whilst these characters do not assume a straightforwardly masculine position, their angry performance, facilitated by emasculation, sees them manipulate and appropriate the power structures typically dominated by saga-men. Thus, they may exhibit 'female masculinity'.

5.3.1 *Geisa*: Hallgerðr and Bergþóra in *Brennu-Njáls saga*

Brennu-Njáls saga uses the verb *geisa* twice to connote a particular kind of female rage.[49] The verb occurs nowhere else in the *Íslendingasögur*. That *reiðask* ('to become angry') is sufficient to describe many other examples of male and female raging in the saga raises the question of why the author chooses instead to use *geisa* in these scenes.

The verb is first used to describe how Hallgerðr rages at Gunnarr when Kolr is killed. When Gunnarr trumps his wife's lust for revenge by remarking that he will never compromise his friendship with Njáll or his sons and instead opts for a peaceful reconciliation, Hallgerðr *geisaði mjǫk* ('raged greatly').[50] The saga-author states that Gunnarr *gaf eigi gaum at því* ('Gunnarr took no notice of this'), indicating that her rage is meant to be noticed.[51] The verb figures for a second time when Bergþóra, the Njálssons' mother, goads

[48] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 36. For more mothers emasculating their sons while goading, see, e.g., *Króka-Refs saga*, 123, or *Laxdœla saga*, 162.
[49] When translating primary sources, I render *geisa* 'to rage'; when discussing it in isolation, I leave it untranslated.
[50] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 99.
[51] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 99.

her sons to take vengeance following Skarpheðinn's remark that he and his brothers will not grow angry (see **2.1.1** and **4.2.1**). Prior to her raging, Bergþóra attempts to provoke her sons through emasculation by inverting Skarpheðinn's remark and retorting *[r]eiddisk Gunnarr þó fyrir yðra hǫnd* ('Gunnarr grew angry on your behalf').[52] In so doing, she intimates that, as Miller paraphrases, 'real men, in situations like this, get enraged', and thereby attempts to code anger as masculine.[53] Carolyn Anderson argues that 'she mentions another man's angry reaction as validation for [her sons'] future revenge', while Miller suggests that Bergþóra is 'playing to their natural competitiveness'.[54] Greater still, Bergþóra emasculates her sons with a masculine figure to provoke them to prove that they are equally as manly. Bergþóra relays and thus reifies the emasculating insults. If rash anger is feminine as Skarpheðinn claims, then Gunnarr's rage would also be considered emasculating, meaning that Bergþóra's logic is, whilst momentarily effective, ultimately fallacious. The saga-author then writes that *Hǫskuldr gekk fram með Bergþóru. Hon kom innar í annat sinn ok geisaði mjǫk* ('Hǫskuldr went out with Bergþóra. She came in again and raged greatly').[55] By raging, Bergþóra verifies Skarpheðinn's remark. The juxtaposition between the male emotive script for anger (exhibited by the Njálssons as we have already seen) and Bergþóra's exhibition of the female emotive script for anger highlights the extent to which they differ; thus, the scene is a microcosm of saga-society's emotional landscape.

The precise nature of Bergþóra and Hallgerðr's raging, however, is not described. Sif Rikhardsdottir comments that Bergþóra's comportment enacts 'a socially prescribed emotive script that has clear narrative parameters with recognisable behavioural patterns and emotive stipulations'; the saga-audience, therefore, would likely have been able to recognise (or at

[52] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114.
[53] Miller, 'Emotions and the Sagas', 101.
[54] Anderson, 429. Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody?*, 106.
[55] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114.

least decipher) the nuances of *geisa*.[56] Moreover, she argues that *geisa* 'indicates a very gestural exhibition of the underlying feeling where the emotions are displayed through physical agitation, a presumed verbal ranting and goading behaviour.'[57] More than a verb of feeling, *geisa* connotes an emotional practice particular to the whetting mechanism that is habitually embodied in the agent's gesticulations and expressions. That Bergþóra leaves before returning to continue her raging corroborates this reading. The gestural nature of the emotionality connoted by *geisa* further suggests that Bergþóra and Hallgerðr's comportment is conspicuous and therefore deliberately staged with their audience in mind.

Whilst the verb only occurs twice in the *Íslendingasögur*, the audience may have been familiar with its use in other Old Norse-Icelandic corpora. Although the *ONP* does not record any other instances where *geisa* depicts raging female whetters, it cites several alternative uses.[58] Supporting Sif Rikhardsdottir's argument, many of these uses demonstrate that *geisa* encapsulates movement and action: in *Maríu saga*, it is used to describe blazing fires; in *Guðmundar saga byskups*, it connotes raging storms; in *Morkinskinna* and *Jómsvíkinga saga*, it describes an army harrying with *el(l)d ok jarn* ('fire and iron'); and, in *Qrvar-Odds saga*, it connotes the advance of a dragon ship (perhaps bearing fire-breathing undertones, aligning with 'blazing').[59] Whilst the verbs are not etymologically related, *geisa*, used to describe gushing fumes in *Vǫluspá*, a surging wave in *Guðmundar saga byskups*, and Oddr's draining of a drinking horn in *Qrvar-Odds saga*, recalls the movement connoted by the homophone *geysa*, meaning 'to rush or gush'.[60] Moreover, in *Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts*, *geysa* figures in its

[56] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 14.
[57] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 132, footnote 38.
[58] *ONP*, s.v. '*geisa*'.
[59] *Maríu saga*, 530. *Guðmundar saga byskups*, 72. *Morkinskinna I*, 198. *Jómsvíkinga saga*, 35. *Qrvar-Odds saga*, 57.
[60] *Vǫluspá*, 305 (st. 55). *Guðmundar saga byskups*, 50. *Qrvar-Odds saga*, 163. *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*geisa*' and '*geysa*'.

adjectival form *geystr* to describe the energetic rushing of children.[61] Such emotional 'gushing' is probably rooted in medieval humoral theory (see **2.2.2**).

Furthermore, *geisa* features twice in *Stjórn*, where it connotes the Gentiles' tyrannous rule over Israel.[62] This meaning is echoed, for example, in *Antonius saga*, where it is applied to demons.[63] The male cleric who committed *Njála* to vellum may have been aware of *geisa*'s function in these ecclesiastical texts (or similar texts, now lost). If so, he is, by association, implying that Hallgerðr and Bergþóra's raging is oppressive and demonic (aligning with anger's sinful scholastic status). Finally, in *Bærings saga*, the eponymous hero calls Geirarðr the son of a *níðingr* and describes Geirarðr's father's raging using *geisa*.[64] Given that the term *níðingr* encompasses effeminacy and perversion that is antithetical to the hegemonic masculine ideal, Bæringr may deliberately use the verb *geisa* to refer to a kind of raging unique to female characters, or, at least, characters who do not qualify for pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal, to bolster his insult. That, in the *Íslendingasögur*, *geisa* appears to convey a raging peculiar to female characters supports this interpretation of the usage of *geisa* in *Bærings saga*, and vice versa.

According to these examples, the verb *geisa* potentially conveys a high-speed movement that is aggressive and oppressive, and, when used metaphorically to intimate emotionality, might be peculiarly female. That Hallgerðr and Bergþóra's emotionality is not met with criticism indicates that it is not socially impermissible for women to rage, according with Skarpheðinn's implication. Moreover, Bergþóra's raging, by allowing her to mobilise her sons to take vengeance and reinstate her family's honour, evidently bears utility. Insomuch as it facilitates her manipulation of masculine actions, her anger affords her a near-masculine social position. The saga-author, when introducing Bergþóra, remarks that she was

[61] *Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts*, 350.
[62] *Stjórn*, 404, 411.
[63] *Antonius saga*, 69.
[64] *Bærings saga*, 107.

kvenskǫrungr mikill ok drengr góðr ok nǫkkut skaphǫrð (‘an extremely prominent woman, and valiant, and somewhat harsh-tempered’).[65] Evans postulates that men who are called *drengr* possess the qualities of *drengskapr* or *karlmennska*, ‘words that seem to fulfil a similar semantic function to Modern English “masculinity”’.[66] Given that Bergþóra’s biological sex is made plain – she is described as a *dóttir* (‘daughter’) and referred to using feminine personal pronouns – and, following Evans, she is masculine, she is another exhibitioner of ‘female masculinity’.[67] Again, the saga-author indicates that, whilst, as we have seen, if a masculine man grows angry he destabilises his masculine status, a masculine female can grow angry without destabilising her masculine status. Moreover, that the description of Bergþóra’s masculine status closely follows the description of her angry temperament – most clearly evidenced when she rages in this scene – suggests that her emotionality even contributes to, or facilitates the appropriation of, this masculine status. Likewise, Hallgerðr is described as *ǫrlynd* (‘impulsive’), *skaphǫrð* (‘harsh-tempered’), and *skapstór* (‘temperamental’) as her angry performance in this scene evidences, and is later described as *mestr drengr* (‘most valiant’), albeit by other women; again, a saga-woman can be both masculine and angry.[68] Given that anger is so useful for saga-women as a means to achieving their own ends in a world where, for the most part, they are socially restricted because of their sex, the saga-author may cast Bergþóra and Hallgerðr as deliberately amplifying their ‘genuine’ feelings and emoting exaggeratedly to provoke vengeful results.

5.3.2 *Eiskra*: Þuríðr’s Anger in *Heiðarvíga saga*

[65] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 57.
[66] Evans, *Men*, 23-4. See also Clover, ‘Regardless’, 7.
[67] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 57.
[68] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 29, 30, 125.

Like Hallgerðr and Bergþóra, Þuríðr stages a performance of anger to provoke her sons to avenge their slain brother, Hallr.[69] Her rage is communicated using the verb *eiskra*, which, as we shall see, is consonant with the emotional nuances of the verb *geisa*. Whilst Þuríðr's anger is cast as genuine (she grieves not only for her son, but also for her husband, who died of his own grief upon learning of his son's death), her performance is more emotionally animated and farcical than those in other whetting episodes, and it is also superfluous given that her sons have already decided on vengeance. The ostensible needlessness of Þuríðr's performance may evidence the interpretation that the female whetter is deployed as a misogynistic device to absolve violent men of blame.[70] Yet, Þuríðr exhibits 'female masculinity' through her performance, and thus – perhaps simultaneously – assumes an empowering position.

As in the Álfdís and Ólof episodes, symbolism is salient to the staging of Þuríðr's performance. Firstly, Þuríðr serves each of her sons a third of an ox's shoulder. Calling her *nær óvitandi vits* ('almost senseless of wit'), Steingrímr, her son, emphasises the farcicality of her behaviour when he questions his mother's oversized portions.[71] Þuríðr's senselessness recalls Álfdís' feigned foolishness, indicating that such comportment may be a feature of the emotive script for female anger. Þuríðr's behaviour also foreshadows the ridiculousness of her emoting. Indicating that the slabs of meat are meant to represent Hallr's mutilated body, she retorts that Steingrímr did not think it strange when Hallr was hacked into larger pieces.[72] The slabs of meat are visual, olfactory, and gustatory stimuli. That Þuríðr uses an ox to represent Hallr may draw on anger's bovine associations once again (see **5.2.2**). If so, then, given that Hallr, introduced as *spakr at viti* ('wise') and *inn bezti drengr* ('the best man'), is

[69] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 276-9.
[70] Jochens, *Images*, 201, 203. See also Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age*, 191.
[71] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 277.
[72] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 277. The scene echoes another whetting performance in *Guðmundar saga dýra* where a woman serves her husband and brothers the burnt head and feet of sheep to remind them of their father's burning. See *Guðmundar saga dýra*, 195, and Jochens, *Images*, 188.

not volatile and is only slain because he is caught up in a feud, the ox likely conveys Þuríðr's anger.[73]

Secondly, Þuríðr serves the brothers stones to eat, which, she explains, are easier to digest than the shame that they have incurred and endured by not pursuing vengeance.[74] Given that one of the meanings of Hallr is 'stone', they are also undoubtedly intended to remind the brothers of him.[75] The stones connote the heavy burden of guilt that Þuríðr considers her sons to bear. Furthermore, whilst the brothers do not eat them, the pain and difficulty of trying to swallow something so hard would accord with the sensation of having a 'lump in the throat', jugular constriction caused by strong emotions, particularly guilt, nervousness, or fear. Finally, if the meat represents Hallr's corpse, then the stones may conjure his grave: after the Hárekssons had killed Hallr in the forest, they covered his body, presumably with sylvan debris and stones, in accordance with law.[76] Both the slabs of meat and the stones, by representing Hallr's death and life, his absence and presence, emphasise the brothers' shirking of their vengeance-exacting responsibilities – despite them having already decided to take retaliatory action – and are thus intended to emasculate them. Compounding her explanation of the symbolism of the props, Þuríðr continues to emasculate her sons. Had the shoe been on the other foot, she intimates, their kinsmen would have taken vengeance swiftly to preserve their honour. This comment recalls the emasculating comparison uttered by Bergþóra to the Njálssons (*reiddisk Gunnarr þó fyrir yðra hǫnd*, 'Gunnarr nevertheless became furious on your behalf') and that of Hildigunnr when goading Flosi (*hefna mundi Hǫskuldr þín, ef hann ætti eptir þik at mæla*, 'Hǫskuldr would have

[73] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 251-3.
[74] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 277.
[75] Jochens, *Images*, 188.
[76] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 253. See *Grágás*, vol. 1, 154.

avenged you, if he were obliged to do so for you').[77] Along with the explanation of the props, this emasculation constitutes Þuríðr's *hvǫt* ('incitement speech').

She then stages an extreme emotional rampaging: *[g]ekk hon útan ok innar eptir gólfinu eiskrandi* ('she walked up and down over the floor foaming with rage').[78] *Cleasby-Vigfusson* glosses *eiskra* 'to roam or foam with rage'.[79] In addition to its occurrence in *Heiðarvíga saga*, the *ONP* records just two other instances of the verb; in both cases, it is used to describe the *berserksgangr*, an extreme and exaggerated fury (see **7.1**).[80] The use of *eiskra* to describe Þuríðr likely indicates that her raging is similarly exaggerated. Describing a saga-woman, however, the behaviour conveyed by the verb *eiskra* may be an alternative, or even amplified, version of that which is conveyed by the verb *geisa*. Indicated by both *eiskra* and *gekk* ('walked'), Þuríðr's striding back and forth indicates her emotional embodiment and recalls Bergþóra's similar movements when goading the Njálssons. This movement feels deliberately performative. Keneva Kunz translates *eiskrandi* as 'screeching with rage'.[81] Like *geisa*, *eiskra*, conveying gestural emotion that is both audible and visual, is polysemic. Þuríðr then speaks a verse – which Jochens suggests is 'probably not genuine' – that reiterates her sons' disgrace and provokes them to act.[82] That it is unusual for the female whetter's *hvǫt* to be compounded by a verse emphasises the scene's parodic performativity. Her goading is evidently a success: shoving aside and upending the tables, the sons, mobilised by their mother's performance, stage their own gestural, emotional performance. Although the sons have already decided to exact vengeance prior to her goading, Þuríðr's raging appears to

[77] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114, 291.
[78] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 277.
[79] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*eiskra*', 124.
[80] *ONP*, s.v. '*eiskra*'. See the *Hauksbók* version of *Heiðreks saga*, 36, and *Ásmundar saga kappabana*, 304.
[81] Keneva Kunz, trans., 'The Saga of the Slayings on the Heath', in *CSI*, vol. 4, 67-129 (104).
[82] Jochens, *Images*, 188.

furnish them with an emotional impetus; the saga-author presents Barði in particular as 'internalising Þuríðr's emotion'.[83]

Though ostensibly superfluous, Þuríðr's rage-fuelled goading facilitates her manipulation of established power structures, allowing her to assume a near-masculine status. Waugh argues that, because the sons are enacting Þuríðr's desire by exacting vengeance, they have been 'Þuríðr-ized', and, therefore, must 'be stamped with at least a trace of the female gender'.[84] He terms this phenomenon 'ghost-gendering', which is 'an effect produced by the "trace" of one of the genders remaining in the situation that would seem on the surface to exclude this gender altogether.'[85] Waugh's reading of the sons' feminisation underscores Þuríðr's relative masculinisation: whilst Þuríðr's femaleness is never concealed (feminine personal pronouns, for instance, are used throughout the saga to pertain to her), she infiltrates the masculine sphere of the feud by manipulating her sons through her whetting performance's exaggerated emotionality. That the verb *eiskra* is typically used to describe the hypermasculine *berserkir* may further intimate Þuríðr's masculinisation, and her sons' emotional display, contrasting the saga's recurrent depiction of male emotional self-control (see **4.3**) and instead mirroring its portrayal of female emotional comportment, further connotes their feminisation and thus also underscores Þuríðr's contrasting masculinisation. Þuríðr, therefore, exhibits 'female masculinity'.

The scene's reconfiguration of gender dynamics is symbolised in several ways. Throughout Old Norse-Icelandic corpora, female characters are frequently depicted as serving food and drink to male characters. Emphasising that the serving role is essentially female, Jochens notes that saga-authors tend to cast men in serving roles to ridicule them.[86] The role reiterates female subservience to masculinity, echoing the maternal role of provider

[83] Waugh, 314.
[84] Waugh, 318, 313.
[85] Waugh, 309, footnote 3.
[86] Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 107.

and nurturer. Þuríðr's exhibition of 'female masculinity' is emphasised when she twice subverts this role (and the subservience and maternalism that it encompasses) in the female domain – that is, *innan stokks* – to assume power over her sons. Firstly, in an earlier goading scene, she furiously slaps Barði for sitting in Hallr's high seat while he remains unavenged rather than serving him.[87] Waugh suggests that her violence – far more typical of saga-men – renders her son 'subservient'; thus, Þuríðr is momentarily masculinised while Barði, subordinated, assumes a more feminine social position.[88] Secondly, she subverts this role by serving the symbolic meat and stones.[89] Her subversion recalls that of the raging Guðrún Gjúkadóttir, who serves her inebriated husband Atli their murdered sons as *ǫlkrásir* ('ale-dainties') to repay him for killing her brothers, before slaying him; like Þuríðr, Guðrún triumphs over masculinity by appropriating power.[90] Other whetting scenes also share the dinner table locus: Bergþóra goads her sons, and Hildigunnr goads Flosi, when they are seated at the table, and they therefore similarly subvert the female serving role to assume a masculine social position relative to the feminine position that the men assume (most prominently intimated by their hegemonically unmasculine emotional displays).

Þuríðr's masculinisation, however, is short-lived, and the saga-author underscores this with yet more symbolism. When Þuríðr mounts a horse with the intention of accompanying her sons to continue her goading, they instruct their followers to loosen her saddle girth and push her off into a stream (unsubtly named Faxalæk, 'Mane-Brook', again contributing to the episode's farcicality). This slapstick humiliation compounds the comedy of Þuríðr's emoting. Moreover, Þuríðr's attempt to ride into battle is ridiculed from the outset: her horse is called Eykjarð ('Earth-Plough'), far from a battle-steed. Despite Þuríðr's humiliation, she is still, to some extent, masculine. Had Þuríðr's attempt to ride into battle – another feature of the

[87] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 254.
[88] Waugh, 314.
[89] Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 107.
[90] *Atlakviða*, 380 (st. 38).

drawn-out angry performance – been successful, it would have seen her 'move beyond the typical roles of women in Old Icelandic works' and maintain (and likely amplify) her masculine status.[91] In *Laxdœla saga*, Þorgerðr, having goaded her sons to avenge Kjartan's slaying, accompanies them and their companions when they attack Bolli and urges them to kill him when he is injured; by playing such a prominent role, Þorgerðr acts in a sustained masculine fashion.[92] Having come close to this position, however, Þuríðr's fall into the stream is a symbolic toppling of masculine power, and a cleansing of her transient, momentary masculinity.[93]

The scene's final symbol figures in the opening of the subsequent chapter, when Barði marvels at the size of Þórarinn's sword, and Þórarinn offers to swap with Barði.[94] In light of the gender reconfigurations identified by Waugh, we may again draw on Lacanian psychoanalytical theory and interpret this sizable sword as the phallus.[95] Þórarinn is a figure of masculine stability throughout the saga, maintaining emotional control (in contrast to Þuríðr) and counselling patience and carefully considered action (see **4.3**). Barði, having been feminised, deposes his mother from masculine power and is endowed with an impressive phallic weapon, symbolic of this power, from a markedly masculine character, thereby stabilising gender norms that have, at times, been unstable.

Given their circumstantial similarities, the verb *eiskra* may connote emotionality that is akin to that which the verb *geisa* connotes. Such emotionality allows Þuríðr to provoke male emotion in turn and facilitates her (albeit short-lived) deconstruction and reconfiguration of established, gender-contingent power structures; through raging, Þuríðr

[91] Waugh, 312.
[92] *Laxdœla saga*, 162-8. As already noted, Kress argues that this saga was composed by a female author because it is atypically preoccupied with female characters; the unusually sustained masculine position that Þorgerðr occupies may corroborate this postulation. See Kress, 'Meget Samstavet må det Tykkes Deg'.
[93] Waugh, 317.
[94] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 280.
[95] See Phelpstead, 434, and Lacan, 285.

assumes a degree of near-masculine power over her sons, and thereby exhibits 'female masculinity'.[96]

5.3.3 Hildigunnr in *Brennu-Njáls saga*

In other instances, however, female whetters do not obviously exhibit rage to facilitate a performance of 'female masculinity'. Whilst Hildigunnr's goading of Flosi to avenge the slaying of her husband, Hǫskuldr, demonstrates how the female whetter induces the anger of a saga-man through emasculation to mobilise him to take vengeance, Hildigunnr's own raging is not explicitly stated. Throughout the protracted vignette, Hildigunnr at times masks her emotive interiority with a meticulous performance, while at others exaggeratedly exhibits emotional markers – likely also salient to the performance – to provoke Flosi's emotional response. It is not clear, however, whether we can diagnose her emotionality as anger. The scene, therefore, emphasises that whilst an exhibition of intense rage is permissible and useful for saga-women, it is, contrary to Skarpheðinn's remark that saga-women grow angry over everything, not their only emotional *modus operandi*. Moreover, Hildigunnr is described as *allra kvenna grimmust ok skaphǫrðust ok drengr mikill* ('the most ferocious and the harsh-tempered of all women and very valiant').[97] Insomuch as she is *drengr* and irascible, she, like Hallgerðr and Bergþóra, indicates that her emotionality does not compromise her female masculine status.[98] Yet, in this instance, she does not rage like Hallgerðr, Bergþóra, and Þuríðr despite her disposition, and thus demonstrates that, sometimes, it is useful to stage a performance of 'female masculinity' without wildly raging.

[96] Jochens, *Images*, 201, 203.
[97] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 238-9.
[98] See Clover, 'Regardless', 7.

Given her temperament, we would expect Hildigunnr to experience intense anger when she learns that her husband has been slain, and that such emotionality would similarly underpin her whetting performance. Despite this, she does not emote when she finds his corpse, and instead comments that the deed was unmanly because it had been carried out by more than one man.[99] Whilst the remark may mask her true feelings, she may not emote as we expect. Given that she had previously refused to acquiesce to the marriage until Hǫskuldr had acquired a *goðorð*, the marriage is not a primarily romantic union, indicating that she did not love Hǫskuldr deeply.[100]

Compounding other clues pertaining to her emotive interiority, that Hildigunnr emasculates Flosi may indicate that she is angry, given that, as we have seen, emasculation is the primary manifestation of female anger towards men. Firstly, by readying and positioning Hǫskuldr's empty high seat for Flosi, Hildigunnr simultaneously reiterates Hǫskuldr's absence and her own 'widowed and dependent status', emphasises Flosi's role as avenger (given that he is her uncle and next of kin), and implicitly mocks her uncle's inaction thus far.[101] O'Donoghue further argues that, by positioning the high seat for Flosi, Hildigunnr is 'literally – physically – trying to put him in Hǫskuldr's position'.[102] By pushing it aside (the verb used is *kasta*, 'to cast') and berating his niece for ridiculing him, Flosi, with his own anger detectable from his embodied, gestural reaction, confirms that it has successfully emasculated him and yet also stages 'his first rebuttal of the role of blood avenger' to the audience.[103] Hildigunnr then *hló at kaldan hlátr* ('laughed a cold laugh') in response to Flosi's intimation that the seat was deliberately positioned to cause offence, before she implies that her performance will only intensify. As discussed in **3.4**, laughter recurrently

[99] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 282.
[100] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 241.
[101] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 290. Clover, 'Hildigunnr's Lament', 37.
[102] O'Donoghue, 'Figura', 157.
[103] O'Donoghue, 'Figura', 157.

figures to herald vengeance and may be a symptom of her anger, or an indication that she is trying to mask it.[104] Following her laughter, Hildigunnr and Flosi converse quietly, and we are not told what is said; Miller suggests that Hildigunnr is interrogating him to apprehend whether or not he will take blood-vengeance.[105] Flosi is then handed a ragged towel, which Clover argues is one of the 'widespread emblemata of widowhood' that is 'meant to represent the torn fabric of her'.[106] By reiterating her widowed status, the torn towel emphasises Hǫskuldr's absence, and, in turn, points again to Flosi's shirking of his vengeance-exacting duty; it is, therefore, another emasculating prop that is intended to incite an emotional response. Flosi throws it aside as he did the high seat (again, the verb *kasta* is used), thereby exhibiting his own anger. Next, Hildigunnr weeps and thus explicitly communicates her negative emotionality; Flosi's interpretation that she is *skapþungt* ('depressed in spirit') corroborates this.[107] Given that the rest of the whetting ritual is meticulously choreographed, her crying is 'clearly a performance of grief' and possibly anger, that is, an exaggerated expression of her genuine emotional experience, or an entirely feigned one, to provoke a response in Flosi.[108] When Flosi tells Hildigunnr that he is prosecuting the case by law, she replies *[h]efna mundi Hǫskuldr þín, ef hann ætti eptir þik at mæla* ('Hǫskuldr would have avenged you, if he were obliged to do so for you').[109] By comparing Flosi's inaction to another man's propensity for vengeance, Hildigunnr again emasculates Flosi. This taunt recalls Bergþóra's reply to Skarpheðinn that Gunnarr grew angry when he heard the *níð*-insults aimed at Njáll and his sons and its emasculating implications (see **4.2.1**). Flosi replies

[104] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 290.
[105] Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody?*, 205. O'Donoghue, 'Figura', 157.
[106] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 290. Clover, 'Hildigunnr's Lament', 38.
[107] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 290.
[108] O'Donoghue, 'Figura', 157.
[109] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 291.

[e]igi skortir þik grimmleik (‘you do not lack ferocity’), thereby alluding to her comportment that may be a manifestation of her anger.[110]

Changing tack, Hildigunnr brings out the cloak in which Hǫskuldr was slain. Having silently approached Flosi, Hildigunnr *lagði þá yfir Flosa skikkjuna; dunði þá blóðit um hann allan* (‘laid the cloak over Flosi’s shoulders; the blood rained down all over him’).[111] As discussed in **3.2**, silence, whether a symptom or camouflage, is a recurrent indicium of anger in the *Íslendingasögur*, and may further evidence Hildigunnr’s anger. A gift from Flosi to Hǫskuldr, the cloak is reminiscent of their close relationship. That Hildigunnr wipes the cloak in Hǫskuldr’s blood when she finds his body and stores it in her chest may indicate her intention to use it later and thus suggests that her performance is deliberately choreographed to incite Flosi’s anger and goad him to take vengeance.[112] The use of the verb *dynja* (‘to gush, pour, shower, rain’) – occurring in its third person singular past form *dunði* – to describe how the blood covers Flosi implies that it is not clotted or dried; this contrasts the description of the same blood as *blóðlifr* (‘clotted blood’) when Hildigunnr wiped it up with Hǫskuldr’s cloak earlier.[113] Blood clots almost immediately after it has been spilt. By casting the blood as either mystically or metaphorically re-liquidised, the saga-author creates the sense that the blood is fresh, catapulting the audience, and Flosi, back to the exact moment when Hǫskuldr was slain. The graphic image, therefore, manipulates the saga’s diegetic chronology: Hǫskuldr’s death is no longer an event of the past that the audience and characters alike have had time to come to terms with, but rather an event that takes place in the vivid present that is still shocking. Aligning with this, the verb occurs elsewhere in Old Norse-Icelandic corpora to convey how blood gushes out of wounds.[114] Moreover, blood-rain features elsewhere in

[110] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 291.
[111] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 291.
[112] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 282.
[113] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 282.
[114] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. ‘*dynja*’.

Old Norse literature, such as in *Eyrbyggja saga* (see **9.3**), and elsewhere in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, to 'presage death and violence'; Hǫskuldr's raining blood here, therefore, likely evokes such instances.[115] O'Donoghue suggests that the aforementioned ragged towel's holes also evoke Hǫskuldr's wounds, thereby prefiguring Hildigunnr's production of the cloak, and also suggests that, as with the high seat, Hildigunnr puts 'Flosi in Hǫskuldr's position when she dresses him in her dead husband's cloak, giving dramatic and symbolic life to Hildigunnr's assertion that Hǫskuldr would have avenged Flosi *if he had been in Flosi's position*'.[116] Moreover, the flowing blood is also symbolic of Hǫskuldr's life. Finally, the verb also conveys sound, further amplifying the already evocative image.[117] The effect is to intensify the goading power of the cloak: the fresh, flowing blood, simultaneously conjuring images of Hǫskuldr's death and life, his absence and his presence, as well as his wounds, once again emasculates Flosi as it underscores his evasion of vengeance, and is meant to spark his emotional reaction.

As Flosi drips with Hǫskuldr's blood, Hildigunnr enacts the *hvǫt*, charging him, by his *manndóm ok karlmennsku* ('courage and manliness'), to avenge, specifically, Hǫskuldr's wounds. Hildigunnr's synecdochic reference to Hǫskuldr's wounds, like the fresh, flowing blood, 'conjures up the corpse itself' (and also emphasises its absence once again), both reiterating her mourning and provoking vengeance.[118] Hildigunnr concludes the *hvǫt* by explicitly stating, rather than implying as she has done thus far, that Flosi will be a *níðingr* ('coward') if he fails to exact blood-vengeance.[119] Alluding to the '*ergi*-complex', this designation is an unequivocal emasculation. As discussed in **3.4.2**, Flosi calls Hildigunnr the *mesta forað* ('worst monster'), declares *eru kǫld kvenna ráð* ('cold are the counsels of

[115] O'Donoghue, 'Figura', 160. *Eyrbyggja saga*, 140. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 446.
[116] O'Donoghue, 'Figura', 157, 160.
[117] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*dynja*'.
[118] Clover, 'Hildigunnr's Lament', 40.
[119] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 291.

women'), and erupts in a psychosomatic display: *Flosa brá svá við, at hann var í andliti stundum rauðr sem blóð, en stundum fǫlr sem gras, en stundum blár sem hel* ('Flosi was so moved, that his face was, in turn, as red as blood, and as pale as grass, and as blue-black as Hel').[120] By Skarpheðinn's standards, Flosi's demonstrative anger is emasculating. Flosi's reaction also recalls Þórhallr's humoral eruption (see **2.2.2**); given that Þórhallr himself considered his behaviour *lítilmannligr* ('unmanly'), he would, like Skarpheðinn, also likely designate Flosi's reaction *lítilmannligr*. Following this, Flosi exacts vengeance by killing Njáll and his family, thereby re-stabilising his masculine status that Hildigunnr had destabilised so persistently. This confirms the success of Hildigunnr's whetting performance.

Hildigunnr catalyses the metamorphosis of Flosi's latent anger into explosive anger and redemptive action through a ritualistic, mobilising performance. If this process is fuelled by her own rage, then it is not made plain to the audience, but may instead be hinted at. Whilst, as we have seen, Jochens argues that the whetting woman trope is a fiction created by misogynistic saga-authors to absorb the blame for the 'male failure to provide peace', Hildigunnr, by staging her whetting performance to exploit male anger for her own utility, assumes an authoritative position in an otherwise patriarchal society; whether a fictional creation with misogynistic intent or otherwise, it is, ultimately, an empowering role.[121]

5.4 Freydís Eiríksdóttir's Emotionality

Freydís is an extraordinary portrait of an angry saga-woman. In *Grœnlendinga saga*, having successfully goaded her husband to rally his men to kill Helgi, Finnbogi, and their male companions, Freydís wields an axe and slaughters their female companions herself when the

[120] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 291-2.
[121] Jochens, *Images*, 203.

men refuse to do so.[122] In *Eiríks saga rauða*, Freydís is cast as a formidable warrior when, heavily pregnant, she brandishes a sword and slaps it against her naked breast, terrifying her assailants and causing them to flee.[123] R. George Thomas observed that '[i]t is not pique, but evil, that governs Freydis's ill-starred career'; Freydís' actions, Thomas implies, are cold-blooded and not governed by a manipulation of emotionality.[124] Yet, we can 'ferret out' Freydís' manipulation of anger with careful recourse to the details of each narrative. In *Grænlendinga saga*, Freydís first stages anger to provoke her husband into action, and then abides by the '"no reaction" formula", and, in *Eiríks saga rauða*, her emotional comportment is reminiscent of the *berserksgangr*.

Freydís' behaviour is symbolically masculine. This is further evinced by the sparsity of critical attention that she has received in studies concerning women in the medieval Scandinavian world and/or its literature: Jesch, in *Women in the Viking Age*, addresses Freydís briefly and labels her 'The Troublemaker'; Jochens only mentions her in passing in both *Women in Old Norse Society* and *Old Norse Images of Women*; and Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir – whilst touching on Freydís in her more recent monograph *Valkyrie: The Women of the Viking World* – does not mention Freydís in her earlier book *Women in Old Norse Literature*.[125] There are, however, two critics who have considered Freydís in detail. In 'Amazons in Vínland', Wolf argues that *Eiríks saga rauða*'s depiction of Freydís is influenced by the Grecian mythological character-type of the Amazon, a masculine, female warrior.[126] Elsewhere, in 'Transvestism in the Sagas of Icelanders', Wolf argues that Freydís 'imitates' maleness because she is discernibly female despite appropriating masculine

[122] *Grænlendinga saga*, 264-7.
[123] *Eiríks saga rauða*, 229.
[124] R. George Thomas, 'Some Exceptional Women in the Sagas', *Saga-Book* 13 (1946-53), 307-327 (320). Quoted in Kirsten Wolf, 'Amazons in Vínland', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 95.4 (1996), 469-485 (478).
[125] Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age*, 182-5. Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 77, 191, note 16. Jochens, *Images*, 109, 272, note 1. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Valkyrie: The Women of the Viking World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 118-19, 144. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women*.
[126] Wolf, 'Amazons', 481.

symbols.[127] Evans builds on Wolf's insights by arguing that Freydís exhibits 'female masculinity'.[128] It is telling that it is Evans, a critic primarily concerned with (as the title of his monograph suggests) men and masculinities, who has given Freydís due attention.[129]

Freydís once again demonstrates that a manipulation of anger can promote female agency insomuch as it facilitates her appropriation of a masculine social position, contributing to her performance of 'female masculinity'.

5.4.1 *Grœnlendinga saga*

In *Grœnlendinga saga*, Freydís first approaches the brothers Helgi and Finnbogi to propose that they journey to Vínland and promises to share the journey's profits with them equally, and her brother Leifr agrees to lend her the houses that he had previously constructed there.[130] Though Freydís and the brothers agree to take with them thirty companions each, Freydís breaks this agreement by concealing five additional men in her ship.[131] When Freydís lands in Vínland to find that the brothers have arrived before her and have unloaded their wares into the houses built by Leifr, she questions their actions and states *[m]ér léði Leifr húsanna […] en eigi yðr* ('Leifr lent the houses to me […] and not to both of you'), causing the brothers to remove their belongings.[132] Freydís, breaking her promise to share, is confrontational and hostile. Helgi considers Freydís' intervention a product of her *illska* ('ill-will'), and thereby indicates that – as Thomas argued – he interprets that Freydís' actions are governed by evil.[133]

[127] Wolf, 'Transvestism', 680.
[128] Evans, 'Female Masculinity', 70-4.
[129] See Evans, *Men*.
[130] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 264.
[131] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 264-5.
[132] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 265.
[133] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 265. Thomas, 320.

Amidst a backdrop of ill-feeling that develops between the two parties, Freydís rises early one morning, dons her husband's cape – which, as Wolf argues, 'obviously signifies her assumption of male authority and with it stereotypical male qualities of daring, strength, and self-possession' without concealing her femaleness – and heads over to the brothers' house.[134] The saga-author emphasises that she does not wear any shoes, and that the ground is wet with dew.[135] Freydís, finding the door ajar, lingers in silence. Given that silence is recurrently associated with anger (see **3.2**), this may indicate that she is angry, and that she is masking her feelings with an emotionally self-controlled comportment.[136] Finnbogi recognises Freydís and they quickly and calmly discuss the ill-feeling between the two parties – thereby reifying its presence – before Freydís explains that she wants to exchange her ship for the brothers' larger vessel so that she can return to Greenland, a proposal to which Finnbogi acquiesces.[137] Freydís, however, returns home and climbs back into bed with her husband, Þorvarðr, whereupon he is awoken by her cold, wet feet and asks why they are such.[138] Freydís replies *með miklum þjósti* ('in great anger') that she had visited the brothers, and that they had struck her.[139] She uses a cause-and-effect clause to qualify the emotionality of the brothers' actions, stating *[e]n þeir urðu við þat svá illa*; given that *Cleasby-Vigfusson* renders *það er illt í mér* 'it makes me angry', we may render *[e]n þeir urðu við þat svá illa, at* as 'they became so angry, that'.[140] She then goads her husband into action by calling him a *vesall maðr* ('wretched man') – an emasculation typical of the whetting process – who will not overcome such *skömm* ('shame'), and threatens him with divorce unless he avenge her.[141]

[134] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 265. Wolf, 'Transvestism', 679.
[135] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 265.
[136] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 265-6.
[137] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 266.
[138] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 266.
[139] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 266.
[140] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 266. *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*illr*'.
[141] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 266.

That the saga-author notes that Freydís did not put on any footwear before leaving the house intimates that it is an important detail, an intimation that is confirmed when we are told that her cold and wet feet awaken her husband and spark the goading ritual. Given that we would expect one to put on footwear when going outside, especially in the wintertime, it is likely that Freydís' decision to set out barefooted was deliberate, and, therefore, that she had already intended to goad her husband before departing. There is no indication that Freydís left her dwelling impulsively and left her shoes behind accidentally. The sense that Freydís' donning of her husband's cloak is similarly intentional corroborates the argument that Freydís deliberately sets out barefooted. That Freydís lied to her husband that the brothers had struck her even when Finnbogi had acquiesced to her proposal may also indicate that she had already intended to goad Þorvarðr into action regardless of Finnbogi's response. Her journey, therefore, was needless, other than the fact that, firstly, her wet and cold feet serve as evidence to Þorvarðr that she embarked on a journey, and, secondly, it gives the saga-author an opportunity to indicate that she assumes a male social position, symbolised by her donning male garb. This suggests that her whetting performance was meticulously planned. If so, then Freydís' anger was likewise planned, and thus feigned. That Freydís is prone to lie is indicated when she conceals five additional companions on her ship. Freydís' hostility towards the brothers offloading their wares into Leifr's buildings may also have been planned and feigned to proactively instil bad feeling between the two parties from the outset. After all, Þorvarðr would have been more likely to believe and respond to her accusation that the brothers had struck her if hostile feelings had lingered for some time.

Freydís' manipulation of anger, therefore, orchestrates the demise of the brothers and their companions, and facilitates her masculine performance. In response to Freydís' goading, Þorvarðr and his men storm the brothers' camp while they still sleep and bind them along with their companions. Yet, it is Freydís, rather than her husband, who calls for the men to be

killed, and, when the men refuse to kill the women, commands *[f]ái mér øxi í hǫnd* ('hand me an axe'), and slaughters them herself.[142] Her unemotional efficiency recalls the '"no reaction" formula' by which saga-men are expected to adhere, and contrasts the anger shown towards her husband (further emphasising its artificiality). With the brothers and their companions dead, Freydís takes their ship, fills it with produce, and has the party return to Greenland.[143] Presumably she assumes ownership of the brothers' wares; her performance may have been staged with the intention of maximising her profits.

By ambushing the brothers while they sleep, Þorvarðr, as well as taking advantage of the brothers' vulnerability, commits an illegal act: in *Egils saga*, we are told that *náttvíg eru morðvíg* ('night-killings are murders'), and in *Grágás*, we are told that *morð* ('murder') is punishable by outlawry.[144] His actions are, therefore, dishonourable and unmasculine. By comparison, Freydís is a more masculine figure. This is reiterated throughout the narrative. When Freydís is introduced, the author writes *[h]on var gipt þeim manni, er Þorvarðr hét […]. Hon var svarri mikill, en Þorvarðr var lítilmenni; var hon mjǫk gefin til fjár* ('she was married to a man, who was called Þorvarðr … She was a greatly haughty woman, but Þorvarðr was a very small man. She was married mainly for his wealth').[145] Whether *lítilmenni* is a comment on Þorvarðr's physical stature or an implication that he is of little consequence, the saga-author indicates that he is not a manly man. Furthermore, it is Freydís who approaches the brothers to propose the voyage and, it is implied, commands her companions on sea and land. A woman behaving in such a fashion is almost unique in the *Íslendingasögur*; her actions are only paralleled by Unnr in *Laxdœla saga*, who secretly commissions a ship to be built and sets sail for Iceland with her kinsman, actions which, the

[142] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 266.
[143] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 267.
[144] *Egils saga*, 181. *Grágás*, vol. 1, 154.
[145] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 245.

saga-author notes, render her outstanding.[146] Morcom argues that Unnr's captaining of the ship, amongst other things, sees her assume 'a conventionally masculine role'; Freydís, by acting in the same way, is therefore masculine also.[147] Indicating that Þorvarðr does not take a leading role in the expedition, his presence in Vínland is not even mentioned until the saga-author tells us that Freydís dons his cape. Whilst it is unlikely that Freydís would leave the cape on when returning to bed, and Þorvarðr would likely have asked for it back for his own journey to the brothers' camp had Freydís retained it, Freydís is not explicitly described as removing the cape, and, therefore, symbolically speaking, never relinquishes the masculine status that it affords. This accords with her masculine emotional comportment when killing the women. By inciting others to carry out the deed initially, Freydís assumes a role that is, though formidable, ostensibly feminine. Nonetheless, by accompanying Þorvarðr and his men to the scene like Þorgerðr in *Laxdœla saga* when she accompanies her sons to slay Bolli, Freydís' behaviour is atypical.[148] By carrying out killings herself, Freydís amplifies her masculine status. That women rarely wield weapons in the sagas, and those who do are unsuccessful, emphasises the masculinity of Freydís' actions.[149]

Freydís may be successful because she wields her weapon outside of Scandinavia, and thus frequents a social sphere that might be external to the society that is consistently upheld elsewhere in the sagas, allowing her to act independently of its rules and out of the sight of characters who either tacitly or deliberately subscribe to and enforce such rules. Aligning with this, though Bourdieu argues that, in real life, *doxa* (societal rules) are internalised in an agent's *habitus* ('second nature') and would therefore be upheld by the agent even when they are outside of their primary *field* (social space or domain), Robert Avis consistently

[146] *Laxdœla saga*, 7.
[147] Morcom, 'After Adulthood: The Metamorphoses of the Elderly in the *Íslendingasögur*', *Saga-Book* 42 (2018), 25-50 (30).
[148] *Laxdœla saga*, 162-8.
[149] Jochens, *Images*, 159.

demonstrates that 'the traditional liminal zones' of fictional saga-society are places where societal rules are not upheld, and remarks that 'Vínland is […] as liminal [a] territory as one might find in the corpus'.[150] The lawlessness of saga-society's liminal territories may mean that Þorvarðr's act of murder would also be excused. Nevertheless, that the saga-author still declares Freydís' actions an *illa verk* ('evil deed'), that she must threaten and bribe her followers to remain silent, and that her actions are met with outrage upon her return to Greenland when the secret gets out, however, indicates that she must endure societally upheld standards once she leaves this privileged territory.[151] Freydís' behaviour is markedly anomalous, though such anomalousness may be permissible when strictly confined to designated zones. By permitting her to behave in this masculine fashion without immediate consequence, the scene's locus is pivotal in facilitating the construction and performance of her emotional identity, and, therefore, her masculine identity.

It is ostensibly paradoxical that although Freydís appears to assume a masculine role, male violence against women was regarded as an unmasculine *níðingsverk* (see **4.2.3**).[152] Yet, women in the sagas never fall victim to the *ergi*-complex, with the only exception being Queen Gunnhildr, who, along with her husband King Eiríkr blóðøx, are the intended recipients of Egill's *níðstǫng* – 'scorn pole' – in *Egils saga* (see **8.3** and **8.4**).[153] Freydís, therefore, may behave in a masculine fashion and, because of her femaleness, be shielded from accusations that invoke the *ergi*-complex (refuting Clover's 'one sex' argument). Exempt from emasculation, 'female masculinity' holds even greater societal privilege than male masculinity here.

[150] Robert Avis, 'The Social Mythology of Medieval Icelandic Literature' (University of Oxford: Unpublished DPhil Thesis, 2011), 227, 210, footnote 26.
[151] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 267.
[152] See *Gísla saga*, 101.
[153] *Egils saga*, 171.

Freydís, with her femaleness never obscured, first stages anger to provoke her husband into action, and then abides by the '"no reaction" formula'. Her emotional oscillation facilitates her performance of 'female masculinity'.

5.4.2 *Eiríks saga rauða*

In *Eiríks saga rauða*, Freydís is again cast as a martial, masculine figure in Vínland. The Scandinavians and *skrælingar* ('natives') trade peacefully until a bellowing bull charges out of the forest and startles the natives, who take flight. Three weeks later, the natives return to attack Karlsefni and his men. Frightened by the natives' use of catapults, Karlsefni and his men flee, and Freydís attempts, but fails, to goad them into action.[154] She then follows them into a forest but, moving slowly because she is pregnant, the natives reach her. She picks up the sword of one of her slain companions, and *hon dró þá út brjóstit undan klæðunum ok slettir á beru sverðinu* ('she then pulled out her breast from under her clothes and smacks it on the bare sword').[155] This causes the natives to flee in fear.

Freydís clearly adopts an alternative emotional *modus operandi* to that which she adopts in *Grænlendinga saga*. There is no evidence from which to identify her anger when goading the men. We may, however, 'ferret out' emotionality from her subsequent behaviour. Firstly, we may suspect that she feels anger towards both Karlsefni and his men for abandoning her, and towards the natives for attacking, as well as fear for the life of both her and her unborn child. Secondly, Freydís may deliberately induce emotionality. Evans, following Stefán Einarsson, argues that Freydís is whetting (that is, stropping rather than sharpening here) the sword on her breast, thereby 'readying it for action'.[156] Yet, Freydís may

[154] *Eiríks saga rauða*, 228-9.
[155] *Eiríks saga rauða*, 229.
[156] Evans, 'Female Masculinity', 73. See Stefán Einarrson, 'The Freydís-Incident in Eiríks saga rauða, Ch. 11', *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* 13 (1938-39), 246-256 (248-9).

instead be readying herself for action. Slapping her breast on the sword may be meant to arouse an emotional response. Given that a woman's breasts are more sensitive when she is pregnant, slapping one against even the flat edge of a sword would certainly be painful, and thus likely anger inducing (given that pain often begets anger).[157] This anger is therefore cast as a genuine emotional response, despite being deliberately induced.

By invoking anger as a belligerent energy, Freydís recalls *berserkir*'s experience of the *berserksgangr*, which is explicitly identified with anger (see **7.1** and **7.2**). Stefán Einarsson has also connected Freydís' behaviour, though not her emotionality, with that of *berserkir*.[158] Insomuch as, according to one etymological theory, *berserkr* means 'bare-shirt' (i.e., shirtless), Freydís' nakedness may also make her *berserkr*-like.[159] Furthermore, just as the *berserksgangr* was intended to scare opponents, female nakedness in the sagas, according to Jochens, likewise 'inspires horror'.[160] Substantiating her claim, Jochens cites Þórgunna's return as a terrifying, naked apparition in *Eyrbyggja saga* and argues that 'it was Þórgunna's nakedness, not her ghostly presence, that was fearsome' given that '[s]aga people were accustomed to revenants'.[161] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, however, argues that the saga-author makes Freydís' 'pregnant body the deciding factor in what makes the natives run away'.[162] Pregnancy is similarly weaponised in *Nikolaus saga erkibyskups II*, when Epiphanius' wife shocks and kills a basilisk by lifting up her mantle and baring her pregnant belly.[163] Freydís' fear-inducing pregnancy may complement the fear-inducing effects of her nakedness. Finally, the bellowing bull that charges out of the forest prior to the attack parallels Freydís, whose performance also takes place in the forest, and may symbolise her

[157] See Izard, 237.
[158] Stefán Einarrson, 249-50. Quoted in Wolf, 'Amazons', 481.
[159] Dale, 61.
[160] See, e.g., *Grettis saga*, 135-6. Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 76.
[161] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 141-4. Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 76.
[162] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Valkyrie*, 119, 144.
[163] *Heilagra manna søgur*, vol. 2, 49-158 (61).

emotional comportment. As discussed in **5.2.2**, cattle recurrently feature alongside angry episodes in the *Íslendingasögur*, and, in particular, are linked to angry *berserkir* and their modality of masculinity.

Functioning as the impetus for her masculine action, her anger is salient to her performance of 'female masculinity'. The scene's symbolism further reiterates this performance. Freydís' femaleness is most clearly emphasised by her pregnancy and breast. Her swollen belly, impeding her speed, is undoubtedly conspicuous. *Cleasby-Vigfusson* primarily defines the verb *draga* (figuring here in its third person singular past tense form, *dró*) as 'to drag'.[164] Conveying the hauling of something with difficulty, it may indicate that her breast is increased in size because of her pregnancy, underscoring its conspicuousness. Freydís' actions are, therefore, particularly harrowing because she subverts the maternal role and instead assumes a terrifyingly martial role. In addition to emphasising the size of her breast and thus the conspicuousness of her pregnancy and her sex, the verb *draga* may also allude to Freydís' masculinity. *ONP* records eight instances where the verb conveys the unsheathing of a sword; Freydís, therefore, may brandish her breast like a weapon, a recurrent symbol of the Lacanian phallus, and thus potent masculinity, throughout the sagas.[165] Likewise, Freydís' literal sword-brandishing in battle, recalling her axe-wielding in *Grœnlendinga saga*, may further emphasise her masculine status in the same way. The description of the sword as *berr* ('bare') – meaning 'unsheathed' – also parallels the breast's nakedness, and may symbolise an unsheathed, erect penis, compounding her masculinity (see **5.2.2**). Thus, whilst Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir remarks that Freydís exhibits 'violent femininity', such allusions support Evans' argument that Freydís not only 'demonstrates qualities that are associated with masculine subject positions in Old Norse-Icelandic saga

[164] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*draga*'.
[165] *ONP*, s.v. '*draga*'. See Phelpstead, 434, and Lacan, 285.

literature' here, but also that 'Freydís performs a masculinity that is *completely* divorced from the bodily semiotics of maleness and, moreover, that is explicitly tethered to a female body'.[166]

With *sverð* ('sword') taking the dative case (figuring with the suffixed definite article as *sverðinu*), the breast smacks the sword, rather than vice versa. On one level, this reiterates Freydís' subjugation and appropriation of the masculine symbol by way of her femaleness: femaleness 'slaps' masculinity. This suggests that the coalescence of femaleness and masculinity is not equally balanced and instead emphasises that it is Freydís' essential femaleness, rather than her masculinity, that is salient to the success of her gendered identity. Freydís' movement may also allude to breastfeeding. The use of the verb *sletta* (occurring here in its third person singular present tense form, *slettir*) may further corroborate this allusion. According to *Cleasby-Vigfusson,* though the primary meaning of *sletta* is 'to slap', the verb can mean 'to dab' when used of a liquid.[167] In modern day Icelandic, the primary meaning of *sletta* is 'to splash'.[168] *Cleasby-Vigfusson* notes that 'in mod. usage sletta expresses bespattering with slabby matter, skvetta with pure fluids'; the *OED* defines 'slabby', when used of a liquid, as 'thick, ropey, viscous'.[169] *Cleasby-Vigfusson* also refers the reader to its entry for *skyr* ('curdled milk') where it cites the proverb *þeir verða að sletta skyrinu sem þat eiga* ('they must splash the *skyr* who own it'), which shows that the verb *sletta* can refer to a milk-based substance.[170] The use of the verb in *Eiríks saga rauða*, therefore, may allude to lactation and thus breastfeeding. By breastfeeding the signifier of the Lacanian phallus, Freydís enacts a reminder that man is born of woman, that without femaleness, there would be no maleness or masculinity. As Katherine Olley notes, '[i]n its

[166] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Valkyrie*, 119. Evans, 'Female Masculinity', 71.
[167] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*sletta*'.
[168] *Íslensk-Ensk Orðabók*, s.v. '*sletta*'.
[169] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*sletta*'. *OED*, s.v. 'slabby, adj.1'.
[170] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*skyr*'.

ability to produce sons, the maternal body offered one of the few means for women to attain power and influence in the medieval world'.[171] Thus, Freydís reiterates female dominion over masculinity and men.

Freydís' pregnancy also demonstrates that her sex may positively affect her gender performance. Pregnancy was considered disabling in saga-society (evidenced when, in *Ljósvetninga saga*, Friðgerðr tells her employer that she has trouble walking because she is pregnant, and also by the fact that saga-authors typically describe women using the euphemistic expression *eigi heill* – 'not well' – to convey their pregnancy), and saga-society, as we have seen, considered disability emasculating.[172] Yet, whilst a male character cannot be both disabled and attain hegemonic masculinity, Freydís, a female character, is both disabled and masculine, again indicating that women are privileged because they can act in a masculine fashion while simultaneously enjoying immunity from charges of emasculation because of their sex. As in *Grœnlendinga saga*, Freydís' performance renders her more masculine than men: while Karlsefni and his men, exhibitors of male masculinity, flee, it is Freydís, an exhibitor of 'female masculinity', who is formidable. It is therefore ironic that when Karlsefni and his men return, the saga-author writes that they *lofa happ hennar* ('praise her luck') and thus refuse to recognise her formidability.[173] Evans argues that the nickname Karlsefni, which 'could be literally translated as "the makings of a man" or "the stuff that a man is made of"', may bear an 'intentional irony' given that the leader behaves in an unmasculine fashion by fleeing.[174] Karlsefni's relative unmasculinity parallels that of Freydís' husband, Þorvarðr, in *Grœnlendinga saga*.

[171] Katherine Olley, 'Labour Pains: Scenes of Birth and Becoming in Old Norse Legendary Literature', *Quaestio Insularis: Selected Proceedings of the Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic* 18 (2018), 46-77 (46).
[172] *Ljósvetninga saga*, 65. See Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 79. Evans, *Men*, 87-91.
[173] *Eiríks saga rauða*, 229.
[174] Evans, 'Female Masculinity', 74.

Wolf draws attention to another version of *Eiríks saga rauða*, preserved in a manuscript dating from the seventeenth century, which depicts how Freydís *dró þá út brjóstit undan klæðunum ok skar þat af sér, og grýtti eptir þeim* ('then pulled out her breast from under her clothes and cut it from herself, and hurled it after them').[175] Wolf argues that Freydís is depicted with the Amazons of Greek mythology in mind, who similarly 'were said to amputate one breast in order to make the wielding of weapons easier'.[176] By severing her breast, Freydís at once emphasises her subversion of her maternal status in favour of her warrior status, and makes her female body appear more like a male body. Her self-amputation recalls the severed breast topos that figures in depictions of the torture of female virgin martyr saints preserved in Old Norse-Icelandic saints' lives. Saint Agatha and Saint Fides have their breasts ripped off, Saint Barbara has her breasts cut off, and Saint Dorothy has her breasts burnt.[177] Although Freydís' breast is severed by her own hand in battle in this version rather than by another during torture, the later redactor may have had such legends in mind.[178] Wolf argues that the amputation of the saints' breasts symbolises their 'defeminization', a process necessary for the female saint to 'transcend the weaknesses and limitations of her sex' and thus become a 'sexless being' that can be 'viewed as nearly spiritual equal to the male'.[179] In line with this analysis, Evans writes, concerning Freydís' portrayal, that

[175] Quoted in Wolf, 'Amazons', 481.
[176] Wolf, 'Amazons', 482.
[177] For each of these saints' lives, see *Heilagra manna søgur*, vol. 1, 1-14, 369-76, 153-7, 322-8, respectively. For summaries of each legend, see Wolf, 'The Severed Breast: A Topos in the Legends of Female Virgin Martyr Saints', *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 112 (1997), 97-112 (97-8).
[178] The version of the saga which depicts Freydís as baring her breast also recalls the depiction of Saint Eugenia bearing her breast to prove her femaleness upon shedding her masculine disguise, though her legend is not included in the extant corpus of Old Norse-Icelandic saints' lives. Incidentally, that several female saints (such as Saint Eugenia, Saint Pelagia, and Saint Marina) cross-dress and Freydís (in *Grænlendinga saga*) wears her husband's cape provides another similarity between female virgin martyr saints and Freydís that strengthens this postulation. Yet, the depiction of Freydís as pregnant clearly contrasts the portrayal of female martyr saints as virginal. For the legend of Saint Pelagia, see *Barlaams ok Josaphats saga*, 77-9. For the legend of Saint Marina, see *Islendzk aeventyri*, vol. 1, 149-51. On their transvestism, see Wolf, 'Severed Breast', 107-8.
[179] Wolf, 'Severed Breast', 103, 110.

> [w]e may conjecture that the later redactor – in emending this scene – is simplifying what he may have seen as confusing in Freydís's gender performance: an Amazon behaving in a masculine fashion – whose removed breast makes the body appear more 'male' – may have been more comprehensible as it relies upon a more simplistic understanding of the nexus between sex and gender than that demanded by female masculinity. Female masculinity – as performed by Freydís in the older manuscripts – upsets the naturalized link between maleness and masculinity.[180]

This may be refuted in two ways. Firstly, Freydís is heavily pregnant; casting her as removing her breast in order to erase her essential femaleness, though symbolic, would be futile given that her swollen belly is a conspicuous emblem of her sex regardless. Secondly, Freydís' femaleness is, in fact, prominently asserted when she uses her own breast as a projectile, and the later redactor, rather than attempting to erase the femaleness of Freydís' body, may instead be choosing to stage her performance of 'female masculinity' with greater intensity and underscore its effect.

Freydís' perverse behaviour may also render her monstrous. If so, then her monstrosity, allowing her to behave in a masculine fashion atypical of saga-women, facilitates her performance of 'female masculinity'. Specifically, Freydís' performance is reminiscent of the fantastical depictions of female *jǫtnar* ('giants') in the *fornaldarsögur*. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir discusses various attributes that these giantesses tend to exhibit, several of which Freydís also exhibits.[181] Firstly, giantesses have a propensity to figure 'in the wild zones outside of the civilized and domesticated Scandinavian territories', just as

[180] Evans, 'Female Masculinity', 72.
[181] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women*, 59-77.

Freydís does in Vínland.[182] Secondly, some giantesses 'are extremely round or fat', such as Geirríðr Gandvíkrekkja in *Gríms saga Loðinkinna* and Skinnnefja in *Egils saga einhenda*, who are 'broader than they are tall'; Freydís' pregnant belly, therefore, may allude to the abnormal size of the giantess.[183] Thirdly, the maternalism symbolised by her pregnancy also aligns with the recurrent theme of giantesses being cast as *fóstrur* ('foster-mothers').[184] Fourthly, giantesses are aggressive, violent, and sometimes fight alone, features that also correspond with the depiction of Freydís.[185] Their physical activity contrasts that of other (typically aristocratic) women in the *fornaldarsögur*, just as Freydís' activity contrasts that of women elsewhere in the *Íslendingasögur*.[186] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir notes that 'giantesses use their hands and bodies for fighting instead of weapons'.[187] Whilst Freydís, unlike a giantess, wields a sword, she also uses her body by freeing her breast and slapping it against the sword. Fifthly, Helga Kress notes that giantesses have a propensity to destroy men's ships, thereby ruining a 'male construction'.[188] Likewise, in *Grœnlendinga saga*, Freydís appropriates Helgi and Finnbogi's vessel, and, though she does not destroy it, similarly 'deconstructs' the artifice of male dominion in doing so.[189]

Giantesses are also recurrently cast as wearing 'short tunics that reveal their genitals in the back'; the author of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, for instance, writes that the giantess Skellinefja *var í skorpnum skinnstakki. Hann var síðr í fyrir en stuttr á bak* ('wore a parched skin-garment. It was long in the front but short in the back').[190] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir argues that their exposed genitalia indicate their 'unrestrained sexuality' towards human men,

[182] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women*, 65.
[183] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women*, 62. *Gríms saga Loðinkinna*, 274. *Egils saga einhenda*, 161.
[184] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women*, 73-4.
[185] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women*, 66.
[186] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women*, 63.
[187] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women*, 65.
[188] Kress, 'Taming the Shrew: The Rise of Patriarchy and the Subordination of the Feminine in Old Norse Literature', in *Cold Counsel*, 81-92 (85).
[189] *Grœnlendinga saga*, 267. Kress, 'Taming the Shrew', 85.
[190] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women*, 63 (her translation). *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, 226-7.

evidenced by the giantess Hornnefja in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* and the giantess Ýma in *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*.[191] Whilst Freydís does not reveal her genitals, her breast-baring and breast-slapping may function similarly, given that female breasts are sexualised elsewhere in the sagas.[192] Her pregnant state, the result of sexual intercourse, may also bear similar connotations. That Freydís' eroticism is exhibited on the battlefield renders it perverse and further aligns it with the sexual deviance of the giantesses. Furthermore, given that the only other instance of female nakedness in the *Íslendingasögur* – Þórgunna as a naked revenant in *Eyrbyggja saga* – is concurrent with an apparitional status, Freydís may be further identified with the monstrous supernatural.[193]

In contrast to Freydís, giantesses are killed or mutilated by saga heroes. Freydís, by successfully defending herself, is afforded the more useful attributes of these figures without succumbing to their fate. Such a privilege may be attributed to her humanness, a quality which may make her monstrous behaviour even more horrifying. In the version where Freydís severs her breast, the redactor may have had vignettes featuring giantesses in mind. Sometimes, they have their breasts ripped off by other giantesses in wrestling matches. In *Egils saga einhenda*, for instance, a giantess queen called Arinnefja ('Eagle-Beak'), describing an altercation with another trollish woman in the Underworld, says *ek greip í brjóstin á henni, ok reif ek þau bæði af henni niðr at bringuteinum* ('I grabbed her breasts, and I ripped both of them down to the chest').[194] By severing a breast, Freydís behaves like Arinnefja to some extent. However, by severing her own breast, Freydís is more reminiscent of those male heroes that mutilate giantesses. Although I do not know of any instance where a male hero severs the breast(s) of a giantess in any Old Norse-Icelandic corpora, there are

[191] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women*, 68-9. See *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, 19, and *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, 253-4.
[192] See *Gísla saga*, 53-4. Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 72. Evans, 'Female Masculinity', 65, footnote 24. See Clark, 112.
[193] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 141-4.
[194] *Egils saga einhenda*, 178.

many examples where they attack the groins or other 'displaced' vaginas, such as armpits, of giantesses; given that breasts were sexualised, the breast and vagina – whether literal or 'displaced' – likely figure similarly.[195] Men also sever the breasts of other men in the *fornaldarsögur*; in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, for example, King Hárekr, in boar form, attacks Herrauðr and *reif af honum báðar geirvörturnar niðr at beini* ('ripped both nipples from him down to the bone').[196] Freydís' self-mutilation may reiterate her masculine agency, given that it is, ordinarily, men who mutilate giantesses. By assuming a masculine position and retaining other markers of her femaleness (e.g., her pregnant belly), she exhibits 'female masculinity'.

5.4.3 Concluding Remarks

That Freydís' performance of 'female masculinity' is concurrent with her manipulation of anger further elucidates the intricate intersectional nexus between emotion, sex, and gender (specifically anger, femaleness, and masculinity). In *Grœnlendinga saga*, Freydís grows angry deliberately, before emoting in a fashion typical of male saga characters – underscored by her donning of masculine garb and weapon-wielding – while remaining discernibly female. Likewise, in *Eiríks saga rauða*, Freydís rages like a *berserkr* (though her anger is not as straightforwardly detectable as it is in *Grœnlendinga saga*) to overcome her assailants, while her breast-baring and conspicuous pregnant state plainly reiterate her essential femaleness. In the latter, later saga, Freydís also exhibits qualities reminiscent of the

[195] See, e.g., *Sörla saga sterka* where a giantess is kneed in her *kviðr* ('womb') by the eponymous hero (198). See, e.g., *Örvar-Odds saga*, where Oddr fires an arrow and accidentally hits a giantess in her armpit (302). See Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women*, 66 and 155, note 43, who observes that Uli Linke and Clunies Ross 'argue in their discussions of the Norse creation myth that when Ýmir produces children from his armpit, it symbolizes a displaced vagina'. See Uli Linke, 'The Theft of Blood, the Birth of Men: Cultural Constructions of Gender in Medieval Iceland', in *From Sagas to Society*, 265-299 (275) and Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, vol. 1 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994), 152.
[196] *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, 494.

monstrous giantesses of the *fornaldarsögur*, which bolster her raging comportment and performance of 'female masculinity'. In both sagas, Freydís' anger, therefore, affords her agency to take action against men.

5.5 Masking Anger

5.5.1 Hallgerðr's Subterfuge in *Brennu-Njáls saga*

Whilst Hallgerðr rages to whet Gunnarr into action and elsewhere throughout the saga, confirming the saga-author's remark that she is *ǫrlynd* ('impulsive'), *skaphǫrð* ('harsh-tempered'), and *skapstór* ('temperamental'), she masks her emotive interiority at other moments.[197] That she does not experience rage or chooses to feign unemotionality in these instances does not negate the fact that she rages usefully at other moments in the saga to challenge, manipulate, or appropriate masculine power, but rather indicates that raging wildly is not always the most useful course of action. By concealing her anger, she, like Freydís in *Grœnlendinga saga*, exhibits an emotional *modus operandi* typical of saga-men in pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal, and shows that women are free to adopt different emotional comportments without being met with societal opprobrium: they can be, alternatively, emotional or unemotional. Contrary to Skarpheðinn's anger-feminising remark, it seems that women in *Brennu-Njáls saga* do not grow demonstrably angry over everything, and, given that involuntary somatic indicia do not betray Hallgerðr's true feelings in these instances in the way that Skarpheðinn's facial reddening, perspiring, and grinning does, are more skilled in emotional subterfuge than saga-men. Hallgerðr, therefore, is a better exhibitor of the male

[197] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, e.g., 30, 92, and 29, 30.

emotive script for anger than a saga-man. Insomuch as her manipulation of emotionality gives her agency over men, it again results in her exhibition of 'female masculinity'.

As noted in **3.4.2**, Hallgerðr laughs upon receiving the news from her foster-father, Þjóstólfr, that he has killed her second husband, Glúmr, because Glúmr had slapped her.[198] She then advises that he go to her uncle, Hrútr. Þjóstólfr responds by saying *eigi veit ek […] hvárt þetta er heilræði* ('I don't know… whether that is good advice'), but he goes nonetheless and Hrútr slays him.[199] Given that the saga-author writes of Hallgerðr and her second husband, Glúmr, that *[h]on unni honum mikit* ('she loved him greatly'), we might have expected Hallgerðr to experience an emotional 'stew of […] anger, contempt, regret, shock, and sadness' (as Crocker puts it) upon learning of his death.[200] Whilst Wolf remarks that Hallgerðr's laughter is 'enigmatic' and refrains from offering a diagnosis of its emotional significance, Sif Rikhardsdottir argues that 'her laughter is […] a literary gesture that defies its normative function as an expression of emotion to conversely subdue, subvert and conceal underlying (and unexpressed) emotions.'[201] Implying that laughter connotes pleasure or amusement (as many other examples of the expression in the saga indicate), she further supports her interpretation that the laugh is a performative subterfuge, rather than a symptom of her emotive interiority as often laughter is in other instances, by noting that Hallgerðr's expression is not in keeping with the saga-author's description of her temperament.[202] Miller considers the possibility that Hallgerðr's laugh is at once subversive and symptomatic of her true feelings, commenting that Hallgerðr 'might combine both emotion and reason: she laughs in shock and then quickly recovers to make strategic use of the representational ambiguities of laughing in such a setting'.[203] Hallgerðr's subversive laughter may convey

[198] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 50.
[199] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 50, 51.
[200] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 48. Crocker, 242.
[201] Wolf, 'Laughter', 107. Sif Rikhardsdottir, 121.
[202] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 124. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 29, 30.
[203] Miller, *Humiliation*, 95.

feigned mockery towards her late husband for slapping her or, more likely, feigned satisfaction towards Þjóstólfr's actions (thereby masking negative emotions with positive ones). Clearly, Þjóstólfr interprets it as relaying such satisfaction.

Þjóstólfr has reason to trust Hallgerðr, given that, when Hallgerðr learns that Þjóstólfr has slain her first husband, Þórvaldr, she does not emote and sends Þjóstólfr away to safety.[204] Furthermore, the saga-author writes of Hallgerðr's feelings concerning her marriage to Þórvaldr that *fannsk þat á ǫllu, at hon þóttisk vargefin* ('everyone sensed that she thought herself ill-matched'), and in no way details her love for him.[205] This suggests that her unemotional reaction is genuine (i.e., she really is unmoved by the news of her first husband's death). When, however, she learns of the death of her second husband whom, as we have seen, she loved greatly, Hallgerðr must disguise what we would expect to be her true, underlying feelings to replicate her prior pattern of comportment (how she behaved towards the news of the death of her first husband). Hallgerðr's genuine emotional response to Glúmr's death may be so intense that she is unable to exhibit the same kind of restraint that she exhibited before and must instead counteract her feelings with feigned merriment to lull Þjóstólfr into a false sense of security and orchestrate his death. Thus, it is useful for Hallgerðr to exhibit an emotional *modus operandi* most typical of a saga-man.

The argument that Hallgerðr's laughter figures to mask her true feelings is further supported in several ways. Firstly, by casting Þjóstólfr as being initially tentative, the saga-author indicates that Þjóstólfr has an inkling that Hallgerðr is up to something and thus alludes to the possibility that Hallgerðr's joviality – connoted by the laugh – is feigned. Secondly, it is in Hallgerðr's interest to hide her true feelings in order to send Þjóstólfr to Hrútr to be killed given that, as we have seen, the few women of the sagas that bear arms and

[204] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 36.
[205] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 31.

attempt to exact blood vengeance are typically unsuccessful.[206] In *Laxdæla saga*, for instance, Auðr successfully stabs, but does not manage to kill, her husband in bed.[207] Thirdly, Hallgerðr's humorous remark to Þjóstólfr before advising his departure (*[e]igi ert þú engi í leikinum*, 'you are no longer in the game') that follows her laughter appears to be a deliberate attempt to make light of, and therefore mask, a grave (and anger-inducing) situation with a verbal subterfuge.[208] Finally, if the laughter were symptomatic of anger, then Þjóstólfr would likely have discerned the true extent of Hallgerðr's emotional 'stew', doubted her trustworthiness, and dismissed her suggestion altogether. Despite being initially suspicious of Hallgerðr's advice, Þjóstólfr must consider her performance convincing enough for him to acquiesce and go to Hrútr.

Hallgerðr's laughter clearly heralds vengeance. Hinting at this, when Ósvífr asks Þórvaldr (his son and Hallgerðr's first husband) how his relationship fares with Hallgerðr and Þórvaldr replies that he believes everything is going well because she laughs at everything he says, Ósvífr remarks *[e]igi ætla ek hlátr hennar jafngóðan sem þú […] en þat mun þó síðar reynask* ('I do not suppose her laughter equally good as you do… and it shall be proved later').[209] The subsequent slaying of Þórvaldr and Glúmr evidences Ósvífr's interpretation. That Ósvífr considers the laughter unfavourable while his son holds it favourable emphasises its enigmatic nature. Further supporting our understanding that Hallgerðr's laughter heralds vengeance, Skarpheðinn's laughter seems to function similarly later in the saga. Skarpheðinn laughs when his father intimates that he does not believe him when he says that he is going out to search for sheep (given that the last time that Skarpheðinn said that was when he killed Sigmundr in retaliation); as expected, Skarpheðinn then slays Þráinn.[210] Thus, we see

[206] Jochens, *Images*, 159.
[207] *Laxdæla saga*, 98.
[208] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 50.
[209] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 33.
[210] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 232-3 (c.f. 115).

Hallgerðr again exhibit an emotional *modus operandi* typical of men in the saga. Finally, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir argues that 'women's laughter is frequently used as a performative means of whetting in the sagas'; Sif Rikhardsdottir therefore postulates that 'Hallgerðr's laughter here – while unheard by Hrútr – may act as a literary signal to the reader of the implicit meaning behind her gesture'.[211] Hildigunnr is described as laughing a *kaldan hlátr* ('cold laugh') when goading Flosi in the same saga (see **5.3.3**).[212] Thus, where laughter, when exhibited by a male character, indicates to the audience that they themselves will take retaliatory action, when it is exhibited by a female character, it indicates to the audience that they will orchestrate, but not necessarily attempt to carry out, such action (because of the sex-based limitations of exacting vengeance outlined above). Her orchestration of Þjóstólfr's death – a symbolic toppling of masculinity – through emotional manipulation amounts to an exhibition of 'female masculinity'.

Hallgerðr also masks her anger later in the saga. When Gunnarr angrily slaps her in public for coercing their slave to steal from Otkell after he had refused to sell to Gunnarr during a famine, she exhibits no emotional reaction. Instead, Hallgerðr *hon kvazk þann hest muna skyldu ok launa, ef hon mætti* ('said that she would remember this slap and pay it back, if she could'), a retort reminiscent of Skarpheðinn's comment that he will harbour the *forna fjandskap* ('old hostility') when he is told to obey the settlement for the slaying of Þórðr leysingjason ('freedman's son').[213] Hallgerðr enacts Gunnarr's comeuppance over a year later: when, under attack, he asks for two locks of her hair to replace his bowstring, she recalls the slap and refuses.[214] No longer able to defend himself, Gunnarr is killed shortly afterwards. Hallgerðr's actions are needless, because Gunnarr, outnumbered, would have

[211] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 121. See Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, 'Gender, Humor, and Power in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature', in *Laughter, Humor, and the (Un)Making of Gender: Historical and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Anna Foka and Jonas Liliequist (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 211-228 (213).
[212] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 290.
[213] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 111, 124.
[214] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 189.

died regardless; as Miller writes, 'it is revenge devoted wholly to the aesthetics of getting even.'[215] Moreover, this suggests that, ultimately, Gunnarr's own anger brought about his death (see **4.2.3**). Hallgerðr behaves in a fashion that adheres to saga-society's hegemonic masculine ideal insomuch as she does not emote and instead remains self-controlled and takes carefully considered vengeance; Gunnarr's rash anger, conversely, renders him momentarily unmasculine by Skarpheðinn's standards. She may deliberately conceal her emotionality with the aim of lulling her husband into a false sense of security so that she can facilitate his downfall at the right moment, as she did with Þjóstólfr. Again, by orchestrating Gunnarr's death – another symbolic toppling of masculinity – through emotional manipulation, she exhibits 'female masculinity'.

5.5.2 Guðrún's Subterfuge in *Laxdœla saga*

Guðrún famously smiles when one of her husband's killers, Helgi, wipes her husband's blood on her shawl. The saga-author writes:

> *Helgi Harðbeinsson gekk at Guðrúnu ok tók blæjuendann ok þerrði blóð af spjótinu því inu sama, er hann lagði Bolla í gegnum með. Guðrún leit til hans ok brosti við*
> ('Helgi Harðbeinsson walked over to Guðrún and took the end of her shawl and dried the blood from the spear, which was the same one with which he had killed Bolli. Guðrún looked at him and smiled').[216]

[215] Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody?*, 307.
[216] *Laxdœla saga*, 168.

Having smiled, she pauses to converse with Halldórr's companions, who comment that Guðrún *þætti lítit dráp Bolla, er hon slósk á leiðiorð við þá ok átti allt tal við þá, svá sem þeir hefði ekki at gǫrt, þat er henni væri í móti skapi* ('had cared little that Bolli had been killed, since she went walking and talking with them and had an entire conversation with them, as if they had not done anything to be offensive to her').[217] Although the saga-author does not describe Guðrún's emotionality, we may 'ferret out' anger from narrative clues. Firstly, we would suspect the circumstances to arouse anger and grief, a suspicion bolstered by Halldórr's assertion that Helgi's action was *illmannliga gǫrt ok grimmliga* ('an unmanly thing to do and savage').[218] Secondly, the shawl that Guðrún is wearing when she receives the news of Bolli's death, decorated with *blá* ('blue-black') stitching, may allude to her camouflaged anger and the vengeful action that she will eventually take (see **2.1.2**).[219]

If Guðrún is angry, and smiling is typically indicative of happiness and well-being elsewhere as Wolf suggests, then her smile is most likely feigned with subversive intent (although Halldórr's companions' appraisal of Guðrún's conversation indicates that her smile connotes nonchalance rather than happiness).[220] Likewise, we may suspect that her conversation is subversive; this suspicion is corroborated by Halldórr's suggestion that Guðrún acted in this calm fashion because *hon vildi vita sem gørst, hverir menn hefði verit í þessi ferð* ('she wished to know who had done it, which men had taken part in this journey').[221] If her smile is subversive, then Guðrún is cast as recognising that it would be in her interest to retain her composure while she garners more information concerning the details of her husband's slaying. Such action indicates that, in some scenarios, a performance of anger can be futile.

[217] *Laxdœla saga*, 169.
[218] *Laxdœla saga*, 168.
[219] *Laxdœla saga*, 168.
[220] Wolf, 'Somatic Semiotics', 130.
[221] *Laxdœla saga*, 169.

Wolf, however, argues that Guðrún's smile connotes a 'mischievous pleasure' and thus implies that it is genuine. This reading aligns with Evans' interpretation of saga-grins, that is, that they convey satisfaction, particularly in anticipation of exacting vengeance. Aware of the blood feuding obligations that are demanded of characters in saga-society and their prominent role in saga-narratives, the audience would suspect that Bolli's slayers will eventually fall victim to retribution. This sense is corroborated when Helgi, having wiped Bolli's blood on Guðrún's shawl, comments *ek hygg þat […] at undir þessu blæjuhorni búi minn hǫfuðsbani* ('I think that my death resides under the corner of this shawl').[222] If the smile does connote pleasure at the prospect of vengeance, then this significance appears to remain undetected by Halldórr's men. The smile may also figure simultaneously as a subversive manipulation to mask feelings of anger and to connote pleasure or satisfaction at the prospect of vengeance.

The smile recalls another smile that occurs earlier in *Laxdœla saga*. When Guðrún tells Þórðr that her first husband, Þorvaldr, has slapped her for persistently demanding fine things (a scene reminiscent of the recurrent motif of Hallgerðr's slap-dealing husbands in *Brennu-Njáls saga*), Þórðr smiles and advises that she fashion Þorvaldr a low-cut shirt – a feminine garment – to give her grounds for divorce.[223] Just like Guðrún's smile, Þórðr's smile may either figure subversively to mask his anger concerning Guðrún's mistreatment or connote Þórðr's sadistic pleasure at the thought of Þorvaldr's comeuppance (akin to the 'mischievous pleasure' that Wolf identifies in Guðrún's smile). Likewise, in the associated *Bolla þáttr Bollasonar*, Bolli smiles in response to Helgi's accusation that he has stolen his hay, before charging him with slander and treachery.[224] Given that Bolli did steal the hay, the

[222] *Laxdœla saga*, 168.
[223] *Laxdœla saga*, 93-4. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 33, 48, 124. Donning the garments of the opposite sex is forbidden in *Grágás* and subject to severe punishment. See *Grágás*, vol. 2, 47.
[224] *Bolla þáttr Bollasonar*, 240.

smile may indicate his 'mischievous pleasure' and anticipation of retaliation to the accusation, or, more likely, may mask any involuntary facial betrayals of his lying.

That Guðrún has a propensity to subvert her emotionality, however, supports the interpretation that her smile is subversive: she regularly exhibits 'verbal subterfuge', or stays silent, and her true feelings are sometimes betrayed by her involuntary somatic reactions.[225] Unlike that of Hallgerðr, Guðrún's striving for unemotionality is consistent. As we have seen, the covering up of involuntary psychosomatic responses with explanations (of varying plausibility) occurs throughout the *Íslendingasögur*. In *Flóamanna saga*, for instance, Þórey turns red (presumably with anger and fear) when she learns that Kolr, her foster-brother, has killed Sörli, but she covers it up by saying that a mouse jumped up in her face.[226] It is instructive to analyse Guðrún's many instances of subterfuge in order to understand the significance of her smile fully.

Firstly, when Þorvaldr strikes Guðrún, she is not described as growing angry, and she comments *[n]ú gaftu mér þat, er oss konum þykkir miklu skipta, at vér eigim vel at gǫrt, en þat er litarapt gott, ok af hefir þú mik ráðit brekvísi við þik* ('now you have given me a fine *litarapt*, which seems to us women a great change, so that we might be well done, and you have advised me against my persistent request to you').[227] *Cleasby-Vigfusson* glosses *litarapt* 'complexion', but notes that *litr* means 'colour' or 'hue'.[228] Guðrún is describing a change of colour in her complexion, which, given its cause, is likely reddening. In line with this, Kunz translates *litarapt* as 'rosy colour in her cheeks'.[229] Although Guðrún implies that Þorvaldr's slap has caused her to redden (the physiological reality of vasodilation), she may also turn puce with anger (see **2.1.1**). Moreover, Guðrún has a propensity to redden; she grows *dreyr-*

[225] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 126.
[226] *Flóamanna saga*, 270-1.
[227] *Laxdœla saga*, 93-4.
[228] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*litar-apt*', '*litr*'.
[229] Kunz, trans., 'The Saga of the People of Laxardal', in *CSI*, vol. 5, 1-120 (47).

rauða (‘blood-red’) – presumably with concern, fear, and anger – whilst listening to Gestr’s interpretation that her four dreams are portentous of her four marriages.[230] Sif Rikhardsdottir considers her composed reaction to Þorvaldr’s slap a ‘verbal subterfuge’ that masks her rage; clearly, she felt humiliated and incensed enough to consult Þórðr.[231] Guðrún’s smile and calm conversation when learning of Bolli’s death, therefore, may figure in the same way as her anger-subverting explanation does here.

This coupling of Guðrún’s mastery of ‘verbal subterfuge’ and her inability to suppress her involuntary somatic responses figures earlier in the saga. When Bolli returns to Iceland and implies to Guðrún that Kjartan has had an affair with the king’s sister, Ingibjörg, Guðrún *kvað þat góð tiðendi* (‘said that this was good news’) because, she remarks, *eins er Kjartani fullboðit, ef hann fær góða konu* (‘it is only good enough for Kjartan, if he has the best of wives’).[232] Her composed words here are consonant with the cordial conversation that she has with her husband’s killers that figures alongside her smile later. Yet, the saga-author notes that *gekk á brott ok var allrauð* (‘she walked away and was very red’) and that *aðrir grunuðu, hvárt henni þætti þessi tíðendi svá góð, sem hon lét vel yfir* (‘others suspected that she hardly thought the news as good as she was expressing’).[233] Her blushing betrays her true feelings (presumably a mingling of heartbreak and fury) as the audience may suspect, a suspicion corroborated by the other characters’ suspicions. Moreover, when Kjartan returns and tells Guðrún that his wife, Hrefna, will now sit in the seat of honour where Guðrún once sat, the saga-author writes that Guðrún *brá lit, en svarar engu* (‘changed colour, but said nothing’).[234] We may assume that she reddened as before, and her silence is another indicium of her anger (see **3.2**). Her emotional blushing in these cases also further suggests that when

[230] *Laxdœla saga*, 91.
[231] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 126.
[232] *Laxdœla* saga, 127.
[233] *Laxdœla* saga, 127.
[234] *Laxdœla saga*, 139.

Guðrún describes her reddening following Þorvaldr's slap, she is blushing with emotion; when she learns of Kjartan's infidelity, she fails to explain away her reddening. Guðrún's propensity for 'verbal subterfuge' further indicates that her smile is likely an attempt at subterfuge.

Given her additional propensity to blush, however, we may wonder why she does not blush when she learns of Bolli's slaying. Either her emotional characterisation is inconsistent, or she may have felt the amorous loss of Kjartan more keenly than the actual loss of Bolli; this would accord with the sense that she had a deeper affection for Kjartan and only married Bolli to spite the man who had broken her heart. Moreover, as discussed in **2.1.2**, when Guðrún learns that Kjartan is killed, she once again tries to cover up the involuntary physiological response that betrays her true feelings. Despite the saga-author's comment that she *lét vel yfir* ('expressed approval concerning') the news and Guðrún's attempt to employ her own 'verbal subterfuge' by implying that she revels in the thought that Hrefna, Kjartan's wife, will not go to bed laughing that evening, Bolli points out that she has paled at the news, thereby exhibiting another indicium of anger.[235] Bolli also comments *þat grunar mik, at þú brygðir þér minnr við, þó at vér lægim eptir á vígvellinum, en Kjartan segði frá tíðendum* ('I suspect that you would be less moved if I lay slain on the battlefield and Kjartan spoke concerning the news').[236] Given that Guðrún does not change colour when she learns of Bolli's slaying, we might be inclined to agree with Bolli's prediction. Just because Guðrún may not be particularly moved by Bolli's death, however, does not mean that she does not experience any emotional response; the slaying of one's husband is a humiliating and vengeance-warranting disgrace that may be anger-inducing.

[235] *Laxdœla saga*, 154-5.
[236] *Laxdœla saga*, 155.

Guðrún's comportment aligns with her dispositional character traits, and the attuned audience will assess her emotionality, and lack of emotionality, with them in mind. When she is introduced, the saga-author writes that *allra kvenna var hon kœnst* ('she was the wisest of all women'), an intelligence exhibited in her mastery of subterfuge.[237] The saga-author also writes that Guðrún *var kurteis kona, svá at í þann tíma þóttu allt barnavípur, þat er aðrar konur hǫfðu í skarti hjá henni* ('was a graceful woman, so that all other women's fineries at that time were considered like childish trifles in comparison'), which may indicate that she has an awareness of her appearance and others' appearances, and thus can also manipulate her appearance – for instance, feign a smile – to subvert her emotionality.[238] She is also described as the *bezt orði farin* ('best spoken'), and later again as *málsnjǫll* ('eloquent'): her mastery of words is another quality that surfaces when she masks her feelings with casual conversation and witticisms.[239]

As Sif Rikhardsdottir notes, Guðrún's comportment upon learning of Bolli's slaying is a 'victorious declaration of exercised control' that indicates a 'successful transference'.[240] This is akin to the male emotive script for anger, or the '"no reaction" formula', where emotional energy is suppressed and transferred into unemotional martial energy. Guðrún's emotional energy, however, is suppressed and transferred into whetting energy, when, twelve years later, she goads her sons to exact vengeance for their father's slaying.[241] Recalling Hildigunnr's goading of Flosi with Hǫskuldr's bloody cloak, Guðrún lays out the bloody clothes in which Bolli was slain before her sons. Even Guðrún's goading, though, remains remarkably unemotional. She does not grow demonstratively angry like Þuríðr in *Heiðarvíga saga*, for instance, and instead remains composed. Her *hvǫt*, though effective in troubling the

[237] *Laxdœla saga*, 86.
[238] *Laxdœla saga*, 86.
[239] *Laxdœla saga*, 86, 112.
[240] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 129.
[241] *Laxdœla saga*, 179-80.

Bollasons and causing them to have a sleepless night, lacks the emasculating jibes for which the *hvǫt* is renowned.[242] We may infer Guðrún's emotional state through a slight inconsistency in her emotional characterisation. Whilst she recurrently strives for composure, the attentive audience will also remember that Guðrún is described as being *bezt orði farin* ('best spoken') and demonstrates her mastery of words elsewhere (as we have seen); here, her *hvǫt* is brief by her own admittance (she says, *nú mun ek ekki hafa hér um mǫrg orð*, 'now I do not have many words here'), and she intends the bloody clothes to function as her mouthpiece.[243] Recurrently in the saga, Guðrún has been cast as an unemotional heroine, a façade only compromised by her involuntary physiological responses, and even when assuming the role of *die Hetzerin*, often an emotional role, she strives to maintain her poker face. Again, this emotional comportment suggests that her smiling upon learning of Bolli's death is intended to subvert her true feelings.

Guðrún's sustained emotional sobriety is not in keeping with the uninhibited emotionality that is exhibited by other saga-women throughout the corpus, such as, for instance, Álfdís in *Gísla saga*. Whilst Hallgerðr only sometimes masks her emotive interiority and frequently exhibits uninhibited emotionality, Guðrún's emotional sobriety is unusually sustained and consistent. In the later-dating *Fljótsdæla saga*, Guðrun is recast as exhibiting an emotional comportment consonant with that of other women in the sagas; when she tells Þorkell to cease attacking Gunnarr, for instance, she threatens *þat mæla sumir, at þat sé lítit gaman þeim, sem þat hafa reynt, at verða fyrir reiði minni* ('some say that it is little fun for those who have tried it to incur my anger').[244] Rather, Guðrún's comportment in *Laxdæla saga* is in keeping with that which is expected of the male characters in the sagas.

[242] *Laxdæla saga*, 179-80.
[243] *Laxdæla saga*, 179.
[244] *Fljótsdæla saga*, 287. As I have already noted, the late-dating *Fljótsdæla saga* – a loose retelling of *Droplaugarsona saga* – features emotional descriptions that (for *Íslendingasögur* at least) are remarkably detailed.

Kress argues for female authorship given that the saga affords the affairs of women such prominence, though her theory is unprovable from the extant manuscript sources.[245] That Guðrún always takes on the same emotional *modus operandi* as male saga-heroes – a status that male saga-authors may have been reluctant to afford female characters – may support Kress' intervention. Indeed, Sif Rikhardsdottir emphasises that *Laxdœla saga* exhibits 'techniques of narrative masking […] to convey an alternative message of emotive interiority', a salient feature of the male emotive script. If we are to accept Kress' postulation, then it follows that a female author may cast her female characters in a masculine fashion (emotionally or otherwise), given that masculinity equates to power and agency in saga-society. The female saga-author does not embark on the near-impossible task of reconfiguring saga-society's gender dynamics to make it fundamentally matriarchal, but rather casts female characters in a masculine fashion to redistribute this power; in other words, she does the next best thing and beats them at their own game. Thus, Guðrún's many instances of emotional manipulation facilitate her exhibition of 'female masculinity'.

5.5.3 Þuríðr's Unemotionality in *Laxdœla saga*

Like Guðrún, Þuríðr in *Laxdœla saga* remains remarkably unemotional when her husband, Geirmundr, announces that he is going abroad and intends to leave her and their infant daughter, Gróa, without provisions. Rather than exhibiting anger as we may expect, Þuríðr masks her feelings and orchestrates her husband's demise with a symbolic exhibition of 'female masculinity'. Like Guðrún, she assumes an emotional *modus operandi* typical of saga-men in pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal. The scene reinforces the sense that the

[245] Kress, 'Meget Samstavet må det Tykkes Deg'. Sif Rikhardsdottir, 125-6.

women in *Laxdœla saga* are cast in a masculine social position, and therefore may support Kress' argument for female authorship.

Þuríðr is displeased when Geirmundr announces that he is going abroad, and her frustration is amplified when her father, Óláfr, refuses to take action despite her complaints and even provides Geirmundr with a merchant ship. Þuríðr then takes actions into her own hands:

> *Hon greip upp nafar ór stafnlokinu ok seldi í hendr fǫrunaut sínum ǫðrum; bað hann ganga á knarrarbátinn ok bora, svá at ófœrr vœri, ef þeir þyrfti skjótt til at taka. Síðan lét hon sik flytja á land ok hafði meyna í faðmi sér; þat var í sólarupprás. Hon gengr út eptir bryggju ok svá í skipit. Allir menn váru í svefni. Hon gekk at húðfati því, er Geirmundur svaf í. Sverðit Fótbítr hekk á hnykkistafnum. Þuríðr setr nú meyna Gró í húðfatit, en greip upp Fótbít ok hafði með sér; síðan gengr hon af skipinu ok til fǫrunauta sinna. Nú tekr mœrin at gráta. Við þat vaknar Geirmundr ok sezk upp ok kennir barnit ok þykkisk vita, af hverjum rifjum vera mun. Hann sprettr upp ok vill þrífa sverðit ok missir, sem ván var; gengr út á borð ok sér, at þau róa frá skipinu. Geirmundr kallar á menn sína ok bað þá hlaupa í bátinn ok róa eptir þeim. Þeir gera svá, ok er þeir eru skammt komnir, þá finna þeir, at sjár kolblár fellr at þeim; snúa nú aptr til skips* ('she picked up an auger from the locker in the ship's bow, and she handed it to another of her companions. She told him to go to the ship's boat and bore holes in it, so that it would be unusable, if they should need to take it out in a hurry. Then she had them carry her, with her child in her arms, ashore. It was dawn. She walked up the gangway and onto the ship. Everyone was asleep. She went to the hammock which Geirmundr slept in. The sword Fótbítr ('leg-biter') hung on a peg. Þuríðr laid Gróa in the hammock, and picked up Fótbítr and took it with her; then she

> went from the ship and to her companions. Soon the child began to cry. With that, Geirmundr woke up and sat up, and, recognising his daughter, realised what had happened. He jumped up and wished to seize his sword and found it missing, as might be expected; he went out onto the deck and saw them rowing away from the ship. Geirmundr called out to his men and told them to jump into the boat and row after them. They did so, and they did not get far before they found that the coal-blue-black sea was flooding in; now they turned back to the ship').[246]

Geirmundr then curses the sword when Þuríðr refuses to return it, stating that it will bring about the undeserved death of a man in her family (Bolli slays Kjartan with Fótbítr later in the saga).[247]

Þuríðr's success is particularly triumphant given her husband's brutality: he is given the epithet *gnýr* ('clash'), given that he is an *ódældarmaðr* ('a brutal man') and *óþýðr við flesta* ('unkind with most people').[248] Þuríðr also triumphs over her father. Óláfr's decision not only to refuse to help his daughter but also to assist Geirmundr by giving him a ship constitutes a petty victory over his wife, Þorgerðr, because Geirmundr had bribed her to support his suit and persuade Óláfr to permit his daughter's marriage to Geirmundr despite his initial refusal.[249] Óláfr mocks his wife for succumbing to Geirmundr's bribery when he announces his departure rather than confronting Geirmundr himself; according to Robert Cook, such a cowardly response designates Óláfr a 'weak man'.[250] Where Óláfr's inaction and pettiness amount to his relative feminisation, Þuríðr, by becoming a successful exactor of vengeance, assumes a near-masculine status while remaining discernibly female, thereby

[246] *Laxdæla saga*, 81-2. I have amended tenses for consistency.
[247] *Laxdæla saga*, 77-83.
[248] *Laxdæla saga*, 77, 79.
[249] *Laxdæla saga*, 79-81.
[250] Robert Cook, 'Women and Men in *Laxdæla saga*', *Skáldskaparmál* 2 (1992), 34-59 (52).

exhibiting 'female masculinity'. Þuríðr's successful vengeance is particularly remarkable because saga-women, as we have seen, rarely try to take vengeance themselves, and, when they do, they are typically unsuccessful.[251]

The re-gendering achieved through Þuríðr's revenge is persistently reiterated with symbols. As noted, Kress argues that the giantesses' frequent destruction of ships in the *fornaldarsögur* connotes a destruction of masculinity: 'the giantesses […] shake the ships, and thereby often succeed in ruining – deconstructing – this societal and male construction.'[252] The first part of Þuríðr's revenge – calling for the penetration of the male-constructed and male-manned vessel – accords with this model and enacts a symbolic destruction of Geirmundr's masculine status. Given that the ship was gifted by Þuríðr's father, her boring of its boat also intimates a deconstruction of paternal authority, triumphing over the man who acquiesced to the disastrous marriage.

The performance's props also lend themselves to Lacanian interpretation. Given that the auger represents the phallus elsewhere in the *Íslendingasögur* (Egill, for example, refers to his penis in verse using the kenning *bergis fótar borr*, 'drill of the hill of the leg'), we may understand Geirmundr, represented by his ship's boat, to be sexually penetrated like a woman, and thus rendered *argr*.[253] The scene recalls the phallic undertones of another Old Norse-Icelandic theft narrative: when Óðinn steals the mead of poetry, he instructs Baugi to drill into the mountain side and he slithers in, in snake-form, foreshadowing his sleeping with Gunnlǫð.[254] By 'penetrating' her husband, Þuríðr is masculinised and Geirmundr is feminised.

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[251] See, e.g., *Laxdœla saga*, 98.
[252] Kress, 'Taming the Shrew', 85.
[253] *Egils saga*, 294. On Egill's kenning, see Phelpstead, 425.
[254] See *Skáldskaparmál,* 4. See, e.g., Kress, 'The Apocalypse of a Culture: Völuspá and the Myth of the Sources/Sorceress in Old Icelandic Literature', in *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages: Proceedings of the Seventh International Saga Conference, Spoleto, 4-10 September 1988*, ed. Teresa Pàroli (Spoleto: Presso la Sede del Centro Studi, 1990), 279-302 (285).

Secondly, by stealing the sword, the phallic symbol of her husband's masculine prowess, she 'castrates him'.[255] Geirmundr's name, formed of *geirr* and *mundr*, means 'spear guardian'; given that it is not only swords but also other weapons that symbolise the phallus in the sagas, we may understand that Geirmundr's phallocentricity and its preservation are essential to his identity. Such an implication is ironic insomuch as he fails to protect his own weapon against theft. It also makes his symbolic castration all the more potent given that his very identity is compromised; this recalls the moment in *Egils saga* when Egill cuts off Ármóðr skegg's beard and symbolically severs his manhood from his identity. Þuríðr penetrates and castrates Geirmundr, and then appropriates the phallus and the masculine power that it symbolises, intimating her acquisition of a near-masculine status.

The moment when Geirmundr awakes and realises that his sword has been stolen is akin to *Þrymskviða*'s opening stanza, in which Þórr awakes to find his hammer, Mjǫllnir, missing and grows angry.[256] Like Fótbítr, Mjǫllnir represents the phallus, and its theft is a symbolic castration.[257] Þrymr will only return the hammer if Freyja marries him, so the phallus-less Þórr is dressed as the goddess – an overt feminisation – to trick him. When the hammer is laid in the disguised Þórr's lap to consecrate the marriage, he wields masculinity once again and takes vengeance by felling the phallus thief. Geirmundr, however, cannot retrieve his phallic sword or take vengeance, because Þuríðr had bored the ship's boat with holes before enacting her theft. His masculinity, therefore, is not recovered or reinstated, while Þuríðr retains this stolen status.

By leaving her baby with her husband, Þuríðr reminds Geirmundr of his paternal duties. Moreover, Kress suggests that Þuríðr makes Geirmundr 'a mother with a baby in her

[255] Kress, 'Taming the Shrew', 91.
[256] See *Þrymskviða*.
[257] See Clunies Ross, 'Reading *Þrymskviða*', in *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, ed. Paul Acker and Larrington (London: Routledge, 2002), 177-194 (187-8).

arms' and thus compounds his feminisation.[258] Men are feminised by assuming a maternal status elsewhere in the *Íslendingasögur*. In *Flóamanna saga*, the saga-author writes that Þorgils *minntist þá drengliga á karlmennsku* ('bravely called to mind his manhood') before breastfeeding his son after the child's mother has been killed.[259] Moreover, later one of King Eiríkr rauði's servants intimates that he cannot discern Þorgils' sex, making plain that his masculinity was compromised when he became a mother.[260] Like Þorgils, Geirmundr is emasculated, while Þuríðr, by relinquishing her baby and thus her own maternal status to appropriate the phallic sword, is conversely masculinised.

Geirmundr's ascension to motherhood is underscored when he is awoken by his daughter's crying. Evans suggests that the use of the verb *vekja* ('to wake up') in the scene in *Laxdœla saga* where Auðr stabs her husband in their bed and forces him awake 'possibly functions as a double entendre, perhaps meaning both to rouse to wakefulness and to arouse sexually'.[261] The verb used of Geirmundr is *vakna* ('to awake') – occurring in its third-person singular form, *vaknar* – rather than the verb *vekja* ('to wake up'). Nonetheless, given that Geirmundr's awakening is sexually contextualised in a similar way, *vakna* may connote his sexual arousal following his feminising penetration and emasculating castration. Such arousal would suggest that Geirmundr takes a degree of pleasure in his feminisation and emasculation, reinforcing and amplifying his feminised, emasculated, and *argr* status. Used metaphorically, *vakna* can also mean 'to recognise'; at the very least, Geirmundr's awakening is a recognition of his emasculation.[262] Again, Geirmundr's unmasculine status serves to reiterate Þuríðr's masculine status.

[258] Kress, 'Taming the Shrew', 91.
[259] *Flóamanna saga*, 289. See Grønlie, 'Saint's Life and Saga Narrative', *Saga-Book* 36 (2012), 5-26 (22).
[260] *Flóamanna saga*, 305. Evans, *Men*, 102.
[261] Evans, 'Female Masculinity', 65, note 24. See Clark, 112.
[262] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*vakna*'.

Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (employing J. L. Austin's 'speech-act theory') argues that female characters often 'use words' to assume power when they are excluded from the male position of enacting physical action.[263] Geirmundr, therefore, unable to take physical action and uttering an (albeit ultimately devastating) curse, must resort to assuming female power, whilst Þuríðr, taking physical action, has assumed male power. Later, Geirmundr and his crew drown when their vessel is wrecked, completing the deconstruction of masculinity that Þuríðr had instigated.[264]

Throughout her effective exhibition of 'female masculinity', Þuríðr remains emotionally sober, indicating that, again, a manipulation of anger – a masking of anger, in this case – can facilitate a saga-woman's acquisition of agency and power. Hallgerðr, Guðrún, and Þuríðr indicate that masking emotionality may be more beneficial to saga-women in certain scenarios than raging wildly. In many of the examples discussed, anger furnishes saga-women with masculine agency that is, though effective in the moment, ultimately ephemeral. Þuríðr in *Heiðarvíga saga*, for instance, is soon toppled from the temporary near-masculine position that she assumes when raging. By contrast, *Laxdœla saga*'s Þorgerðr, as we have seen, assumes a sustained masculine status in a similar goading scene (see **5.3.2**).[265] Like Þorgerðr, Þuríðr in *Laxdœla saga* sustains the masculine status that she has appropriated when she takes irreversible action that brings about the death of her emasculated husband. Given that the masculine status assumed by raging women in sagas other than *Laxdœla saga* is transient, we may conjecture that male saga-authors primarily intended to ridicule male characters (and men in general) rather than empower female characters (and women in general) through their presentation of 'female masculinity' via displays of anger, probably for comic effect. Indeed, that *Laxdœla saga* presents more

[263] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women*, 10.
[264] *Laxdœla saga*, 83.
[265] *Laxdœla saga*, 162-8.

sustained, long-lasting appropriations of masculine power through depictions of 'female masculinity' may further indicate that it was written by a female author.

5.6 Conclusion

Building on the research presented in the preceding chapter, this chapter has sought to elucidate the relationship between emotion, sex, and gender, that is, anger, femaleness, and masculinity. That some saga-women rage liberally and without comment from other characters or the saga-author indicates that it was more socially permissible for saga-women to rage than for their male counterparts, who instead strive to enact the '"no reaction" formula'. Yet, in some instances, saga-women mask their anger and exhibit an emotional *modus operandi* typical of male characters in pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal. Whereas most saga-men must adhere to this one emotive script, saga-women are privileged insomuch as they can oscillate between different emotive scripts. Moreover, the episodes discussed in this chapter demonstrate that, for the female characters of the *Íslendingasögur*, a manipulation – whether an exhibition, simulation, exaggeration, or masking – of anger can furnish them with the agency to overcome male characters through a destabilisation of their masculinity, thereby facilitating their appropriation of its hegemonic position. In so doing, they perform, to varying degrees, a unique modality of masculinity that is contingent on their biological femaleness: 'female masculinity'. These women thus uphold the fundamental paradox that is recurrent in the *Íslendingasögur*: whilst Skarpheðinn in *Brennu-Njáls saga* feminises male-sexed characters that are too quick to anger, for female saga characters, a manipulation of anger can facilitate their appropriation of a masculine status.[266] A saga-

[266] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 114.

woman's emotional comportment, therefore, is contingent on their sex; contrary to Clover's model of saga-society gender, sex is significant.

SECTION III: ANGER AND OTHER IDENTITIES

6 Anger and Senescence

6.1 Introduction

Critics have argued that old age is contingent on a character's coded conduct rather than their chronological age in the *Íslendingasögur*, and that, generally speaking, while a male character retains his utility by resisting decrepitude, he is not considered 'old'.[1] Yet, as I shall show, old age is also contingent on comportment and physical appearance to some extent. Furthermore, once a character loses their utility, their transition into old age is immediate; there is no ageing process.[2] When Sigmundr calls Njáll *karl inn skegglausi* ('the old beardless man'), Njáll is emasculated not only because 'beards were synecdochic with manhood', but also because masculine potency dwindles with senescence, given that a saga-man whose physical abilities and mental faculties have deteriorated cannot fulfil several of the defining characteristics of saga-society's hegemonic masculine ideal (much like a disabled man).[3] This is made clear when, in *Hrafnkels saga*, Hrafnkell's servant woman remarks *svá ergisk hverr sem eldisk* ('everyone becomes more unmanly as he becomes older').[4] Likewise, in the same saga, the elderly Þorbjǫrn cries when Sámr promises to help him avenge his son, thereby exhibiting an emotional expression that is emasculating elsewhere in the corpus.[5]

[1] Evans, *Men*, 78. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'Becoming "Old", Ageism and Taking Care of the Elderly in Iceland', in *Youth and Age in the Medieval North*, ed. Shannon Lewis-Simpson (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 227-242. Morcom, 'After Adulthood', 25.
[2] Gillian R. Overing, 'A Body in Question: Aging, Community and Gender in Medieval Iceland', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29.2 (1999), 211-225 (212). Morcom, 'After Adulthood', 26.
[3] Falk, 234. Evans, *Men*, 78-83.
[4] *Hrafnkels saga*, 126. See Evans, *Men*, 83.
[5] *Hrafnkels saga*, 110. See, e.g., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 333.

Evans notes that whilst those male characters who are designated old fall short of the hegemonic masculine ideal, 'this does not mean, however, that they are no longer men nor that they are no longer invested in masculinity'.[6] Whilst still recognising the superiority of the hegemonic masculine ideal, their decrepit bodies force them to pursue an alternative modality of masculinity. I term this modality – the best modality of masculinity to which an old man may aspire – 'the senescent masculine ideal'.

Whilst many old men are cast as calm (such as Ingimundr in *Vatnsdœla saga*), virtuous and venerable (such as Njáll in *Brennu-Njáls saga*), or even valiant (such as Þorgils in *Flóamanna saga*), several are cast as malevolent. Their malevolence typically manifests in an angry disposition.[7] Ármann Jakobsson argues that the casting of characters in this fashion may align with the recurrent tendency in various other medieval corpora to cast elders as exhibiting 'anger and bitterness, envy and fear, and antagonism toward the present combined with a lack of restraint', and postulates that '[t]here is a causal relationship between the humiliating state of the elderly and their subsequent anger: [o]ld men are nasty because old age is nasty.'[8] Whilst, as I have demonstrated, the hegemonic masculine ideal condemns anger and promotes emotional self-restraint, the alternative modality of masculinity to which old men adhere does not condemn anger. That old men tend to rage more frequently than younger men, and without judgement or negative consequences, corroborates this notion.

Moreover, old men use anger to restore the agency that the deterioration of their physical abilities and mental faculties has denied them: like saga-women, old men use anger to exercise power in situations where younger men may exercise power by taking physical

[6] Evans, *Men*, 83.
[7] On Ingimundr, see Morcom, 'After Adulthood', 26-30. On Þorgils, see Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Specter of Old Age: Nasty Old Men in the Sagas of Icelanders', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 104.3 (2005), 297-325 (310).
[8] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Specter of Old Age', 304-5.

action. The old men that grow angry therefore facilitate their attainment of the senescent masculine ideal.

6.2 Þorleifr in *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds*

When Þorleifr in *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds* pretends to be an old man, he simulates anger. This indicates that demonstrative anger is part of the emotive script for male senescence, and that anger is permissible for old saga-men. When Earl Hákon Sigurðarson steals from and hangs Þorleifr's companions and burns their ship, Þorleifr intimates his emotionality when he states, in a private verse, *hrollir hugr minn illa* ('my heart shivers badly').[9] Þorleifr then disguises himself as a *stafkarl* ('beggar') and goes to the Earl's court.[10] The *þáttr*-author recurrently refers to Þorleifr in disguise as *karl* ('old man'), indicating that his feigning of old age is a prominent aspect of his disguise. Making his status as a *stafkarl* (lit. 'staff man') plain, Þorleifr wields two crutches; these props also relay his feigned decrepitude and thus his feigned old age. As noted in **4.2.2**, Anderson argues that the walking stick that Þórhallr, incapacitated by his swollen leg, requires in *Brennu-Njáls saga* is a phallic substitute to prop up his masculinity; Þorleifr's crutches may figure similarly.[11] The author writes that Þorleifr *stumrar […] geysimjǫk ok fellr fast á hækjurnar* ('stumbles badly and falls firmly onto the crutches') when he enters, that he causes a commotion because *[h]ann var nokkuð bæginn við stafkarla* ('he was quite bad-tempered with the beggars'), and that someone describes him as *úrigr* ('ill-tempered').[12] Figuring as part of Þorleifr's disguise, the author thus intimates that decrepitude and cantankerousness are salient, discernible markers of old age.

[9] *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds*, 217-18.
[10] *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds*, 220.
[11] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 359. Anderson, 430.
[12] *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds*, 220.

When brought before the Earl, Þorleifr reiterates his old age by telling him *[g]erumst ek nú gamall mjǫk, svá at trautt má ek aldr minn segja sakir elli ok óminnis* ('now I have become so old, such that I can hardly say my age because of my elderliness and memory loss'), indicating that amnesia is also a marker of old age.[13] When the Earl asks why Þorleifr is behaving so badly, Þorleifr cites situational helplessness as the reason why, amongst other things, *verði æfr við ellina* ('he becomes angry with old age').[14] That the Earl does not query his response implies that Þorleifr proffers an acceptable reason for his anger, and, therefore, that an old man's anger, if adequately justified, is an unproblematic symptom of his age and is thus disregarded. Þorleifr assumes the disguise so that he can enter the Earl's court undetected in order to exact his vengeance and behaves in this unruly fashion to gain the Earl's attention. Yet, Þorleifr, having alluded to his anger in a private verse before the episode, may also adopt his disguise to allow himself to rage expressively because men in pursuit of the senescent masculine ideal are given free rein to rage while saga-men in pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal are not. Þorleifr's disguise as an old man means that he can adhere to the dictates of the senescent masculine ideal that does not condemn raging, and his true identity as a younger, able man means that he must adhere to the dictates of the hegemonic masculine ideal that advocates vengeance. Thus, Þorleifr can simultaneously emote and exact vengeance, whereas, without a disguise, he would, according to the expectations of the hegemonic masculine ideal, have to remain unemotional.

6.3 Þórólfr bægifótr in *Eyrbyggja saga*

[13] *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds*, 221.
[14] *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds*, 221.

Aligning with Þorleifr's angry staging of old age, Þórólfr bægifótr ('lame-foot'), described as a troublemaker when he is first introduced as a younger man, is notably cantankerous in his old age. Þórólfr may be able to act in such a fashion prior to his old age because, already disqualified from the pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal when he sustains a disabling wound in a duel that compromises his utility, he has nothing to lose. Thus, though he is not designated old at this point, his disability and emotionality already afford him a societal position that is not dissimilar to that of an old saga-man. When he is reintroduced later, the author writes *[h]ann tók nú at eldask fast ok gerðisk illr ok æfr við ellina ok mjǫk ójafnaðarfullr* ('he now aged quickly and became evil and angry with old age and very unjust'); *æfr við ellina* ('angry with old age') is the same locution that Þorleifr uses to justify his angry, senescent performance.[15] Ármann Jakobsson argues that Þórólfr 'embodies a nastiness believed to be connected with old age'.[16] His nastiness is often accompanied by anger. This description of Þórólfr, therefore, echoes Þorleifr's implication that anger intensifies with old age.

When Þórólfr steals hay from Úlfarr and provokes confrontation, Þórólfr *var málóði ok illr viðreignar, ok helt þeim við áhǫld* ('was jabbering in violent language and became difficult to handle, and he came close to fighting'); we may 'ferret out' Þórólfr's anger from his behaviour.[17] When his son, Arnkell, compensates Úlfarr and his father refuses to reimburse him, the saga-author writes that *skildu þeir þá reiðir* ('they then parted in anger').[18] The disagreement continues to escalate, and eventually Þórólfr has Úlfarr killed. Finally, when Þórólfr, angry at Snorri goði for mistreating the woods that he had given him, proposes to Arnkell, in a pretend gesture of reconciliation, that they recover them together

[15] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 81.
[16] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Specter of Old Age', 298, 299, 301.
[17] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 82.
[18] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 83.

and he declines, Þórólfr *unir stórilla sínum hlut* ('felt very bad with his lot').[19] Having returned home, he does not speak to anyone or eat anything, and is found dead the next morning.[20] Given that silence is a recurrent indicium of anger (see **3.2**), and Egill's refusal of food in *Egils saga* is also indicative of extreme emotionality, it is implied that Þórólfr has died raging, or perhaps because of his raging.[21] Ármann Jakobsson argues that Þórólfr

> is filled with anger and hatred of the younger generation, and […] his anger may be interpreted as a reaction against his surroundings, brought on by a sense of vulnerability and impotence, and thus revealing of the cruel state of being old, as well as a fear of mortality.[22]

Thus, he indicates that Þórólfr's raging fits the established pattern to which Þorleifr in *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds* alludes.

Þórólfr's anger is corroborated by symbolism postmortem. Firstly, that Þórólfr becomes a revenant may reiterate that he has lived a life of discontent.[23] Þórólfr's ghost, therefore, may be partially symbolic of his irascibility. Moreover, by haunting the district, he continues to act as angrily as he did when he was an old man. This, in part, leads Ármann Jakobsson to conclude that, because 'there is no substantial difference between the ghost and the old man', his senescence is cast as spectral, and he assumes the same marginalised societal role in life and death.[24] Just as ghosts (and other supernatural beings) may rage freely because they do not qualify for pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal, old saga-men, excluded from this ideal, can rage without judgement.

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[19] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 91.
[20] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 91-2.
[21] See *Egils saga*, 244-5. See also *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 309.
[22] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Specter of Old Age', 322.
[23] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Specter of Old Age', 322.
[24] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Specter of Old Age', 324-5.

Secondly, when Þórólfr's ghost kills a shepherd, it leaves the body *allr kolblár* ('coal-black all over'), and, when Þórólfr's body is exhumed to be cremated to prevent further hauntings, it is *blár sem Hel* ('blue-black as Hell').[25] Given that blackness symbolises anger in Old Norse-Icelandic literature (see **2.1.2**), this may be a marker of Þórólfr's rage. Thirdly, later in the saga, a cow that licks the stones on which Þórólfr's ashes settle becomes crazed and gives birth to a volatile bull which eventually kills a man.[26] As discussed in **5.2.2**, cattle, in particular bulls, feature alongside angry episodes elsewhere in the *Íslendingasögur*. Whilst Ármann Jakobsson suggests that the crazed bull in *Eyrbyggja saga* is 'possessed by the ghost of Þórólfr Lame-foot', it may also figure, therefore, to parallel and thus reemphasise Þórólfr's anger.[27] Greater still, it could be interpreted as a symbolic reincarnation of the angry man himself.

Whilst Þórólfr's behaviour is met with criticism, his emotionality is not explicitly criticised. This again may indicate that anger is to be expected of old saga-men. The association between anger and death, however, reiterates the emotion's undesirability more generally (see **4.6**). The contrast between Þórólfr and Arnkell's emotionality and temperament highlights that emotional moderation and self-control are ultimately preferable to anger and its results, and, therefore, that the senescent masculine ideal that does not condemn anger is subordinate to the hegemonic masculine ideal that actively condemns it. That Arnkell is universally mourned after his death because he was, among other things, *manna vitrastr, vel skapi farinn, hjartaprúðr ok hverjum manni djarfari, einarðr ok allvel stilltr* ('the wisest of all, well-tempered, stout-hearted, and bolder than all others, reliable and extremely calm') makes this plain.[28] The saga-author does not follow Þórólfr's death with a

[25] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 93, 169.
[26] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 175.
[27] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Specter of Old Age', 307.
[28] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 103.

similar pronouncement, but rather describes the terror felt by many regarding the manner of his passing and his subsequent hauntings.[29]

6.4 Egill Skallagrímsson in *Egils saga*

Egill is short-tempered when an able-bodied, younger man, and is similarly cantankerous in his old age. He is, however, notably calmer than his father and grandfather, who exhibit a frenzied rage akin to the *berserksgangr* in their senescence (see **7.2** and **7.3**). Suggesting that rage accompanies, or intensifies during, senescence, Skallagrímr's old age in particular is mentioned just prior to when he loses his temper at a *knattleikr* ('ballgame') and attacks Egill and kills the servant woman in his rage.[30] Although not explicitly described, we may detect Egill's emotionality when his son – of whom Egill is not so fond – borrows his prized cloak without permission and dirties it, prompting Egill to compose an implicitly angry verse denouncing his son's treachery.[31] Again reiterating a nexus between old age and anger, this scene closely follows the saga-author's remark that Egill *tók þá at eldask mjǫk* ('then began to grow very old').[32] As argued in **3.5.2**, we may also detect Egill's anger from his facial expressions in his old age: Egill refers to his frowning when the cook complains that he is getting under her feet, and, when Egill's plot to scatter his silver is halted, the saga-author remarks *[e]igi líkaði honum þat vel; var hann heldr ófrýnn* ('he did not like that; he was frowning somewhat').[33] Ármann Jakobsson argues that Egill's anger derives from his humiliation regarding his masculine impotence in his old age, symbolised when, according to Phelpstead and Evans, he describes his sexual impotence by metaphorically referring to the

[29] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 92-3.
[30] *Egils saga*, 99-102.
[31] *Egils saga*, 274. See Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Specter of Old Age', 317.
[32] *Egils saga*, 274.
[33] *Egils saga*, 295, 297. See Wolf, 'Somatic Semiotics', 141, footnote 39.

flaccidness of his penis in a verse.[34] Ármann Jakobsson notes that Egill's desire to attend the Alþingi to scatter his silver emphasises that his old age has otherwise excluded him from attending and exercising power.[35] Whereas other old saga-men wield anger successfully to allow them to exercise influence, Egill's failure to attend the Alþingi after wearing an angry frown, for instance, or to respond to his son's stealing with any practical consequences following his angry verse, indicates the failure of his anger to afford him agency. That his raging does not warrant comment or appraisal, however, does corroborate that anger was expected of old saga-men, and that the senescent masculine ideal does not condemn such emotionality.

6.5 Hávarðr in *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*

In *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, Hávarðr repeatedly rages in old age, and, in doing so, similarly demonstrates that the senescent masculine ideal does not condemn anger. Evans notes that Hávarðr 'seems to perform old age intermittently depending upon how his legal cases progress'.[36] The saga-author establishes Hávarðr's senescence when introducing him, writing that he was *hniginn á hinn efra aldr* ('stricken by old age') because *í einhverjum bardaga hafði hann orðit sárr mjǫk ok fengit eitt sár undir knéskelina, ok þaðan af gekk hann jafnan haltr síðan* ('in one battle he had been badly wounded and received an injury under the knee-cap, and from then on he always walked limping').[37] This justification for Hávarðr's old age verifies that saga-men are coded old when they become decrepit; this is again implied when

[34] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Specter of Old Age', 317. *Egils saga*, 294. Phelpstead, 425. Evans, *Men*, 81.
[35] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Specter of Old Age', 317.
[36] Evans, *Men*, 78.
[37] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 292.

Hávarðr himself cites his old age as the reason why he cannot fight Þormóðr's ghost, for instance.[38]

As noted in **2.1.1**, when Þorbjǫrn denies Hávarðr proper compensation for slaying Óláfr and instead gives him a horse that Þorbjǫrn describes as *grár at lit, afgamall ok baksárr, ok hefir jafnan legit afvelta hingat til* ('grey in colour, decrepit, and has a sore back, and has always been unable to get up until now'), the saga-author writes that Hávarðr *roðnaði ok mátti engu svara. Fór hann þegar í brott ok var stórliga reiðr* ('turned red and could not say anything. Immediately he went away and was extremely angry').[39] Hávarðr is likely angry not only because he has been refused compensation, but also because the old, useless horse that has only just managed to get up is no doubt intended to parallel, and thus mock, the old, useless Hávarðr, who has only just risen from his bed having retired there for a year in grief. Given the association between old age and dwindling masculine potency, the gift is also emasculating. Corroborating that the senescent masculine ideal does not condemn anger, Hávarðr's reaction is not criticised.

Having returned to his bed for another year, Hávarðr's wife, Bjargey, persuades him to pursue compensation.[40] The saga-author exaggerates Hávarðr's old age by describing how he was *heldr bjúgr* ('rather bent over') at the Alþingi, and Steinþórr, again indicating that a man's old age is determined by his lack of utility, remarks that Hávarðr is *gamall ok til einskis færr* ('old and useless').[41] When Þorbjǫrn again refuses to compensate Hávarðr, the saga-author twice reiterates that Hávarðr is angry, and depicts how he storms back to his booth and retires to bed.[42] A man named Gestr witnesses this and describes Hávarðr to Þorbjǫrn:

[38] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 298.
[39] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 309.
[40] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 309.
[41] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 310, 311.
[42] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 312.

> *Þessi maðr var ólíkr qðrum mǫnnum; hann var mikill vexti ok nǫkkut við aldr ok skauzk á fótum ok þó inn karlmannligsti, ok svá leizk mér sem fullr væri upp harms ok óynðis ok skaprauna, ok svá var hann reiðr, at hann gáði eigi, hvar hann fór; mér leizk ok maðrinn giptusamligr ok eigi allra færi við at eiga* ('this man was unlike other men. He was large in stature and quite old and moved unsteadily on his feet, and yet extremely manly, and it seemed to me as if he was full of sorrow and restlessness and aggrieved, and he was so angry that he paid no heed to where he was going; the man also seemed to me lucky and not a man that everyone can deal with').[43]

Gestr's positioning of *þó inn karlmannligsti* ('yet extremely manly') indicates that Hávarðr is masculine in spite of his old age and his unstable gait, implying that, as other examples in the sagas suggest, such qualities are typically considered unmasculine. Gestr, by opting not to criticise Hávarðr for raging in the way that we have witnessed other characters criticise other saga-men for raging, may imply that Hávarðr's anger does not compromise, and may even contribute to, his masculine performance. Gestr's appraisal confirms that saga-men can be at once old, emotional, and masculine. Whereas saga-society consistently intimates that male characters that are either old or angry compromise their pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal, Gestr indicates that those male characters that are simultaneously old and angry can be considered masculine. Given that his conspicuous old age and unstable gait excludes Hávarðr from pursuing the hegemonic masculine ideal, Gestr's comment likely tacitly refers to Hávarðr's attainment of the senescent masculine ideal. Evidently, old men do not have to exercise the '"no reaction" formula' to attain this ideal.

[43] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 312.

When Þorbjǫrn finally compensates Hávarðr, he strikes Hávarðr with a bag of his dead son's teeth and draws blood. The saga-author describes Hávarðr's reaction, stating

> *sprettr hann upp ákafareiðr, svá at sinn veg hrýtr hverr penningrinn. Hann hafði einn staf í hendi ok hleypr at hringnum ok setr stafinn fyrir brjóst einum manni, svá at þegar fellr hann á bak aptr, svá at hann lá lengi í óviti. Hávarðr stǫkk út yfir mannhringinn, svá at hann kom hvergi við ok kom hvar fjarri niðr, ok svá heim til búðar sem ungr maðr. Ok er hann kom heim, mátti hann við engan mann mæla ok kastaði sér niðr ok lá, sem sjúkr væri* ('he sprang up with vehement anger, so that the coins flew in every direction. He had a staff in his hand and he ran at the ring and struck the staff on one man's chest, so that he immediately fell backwards, so that he lay unconscious for a long time. Hávarðr leapt out over the ring of men, so that he came nowhere near them, and landed far away, and thus home to the booth like a young man. And when he came home, he could not speak to anyone and threw himself down and lay as if he were ill').[44]

The saga-author intimates that Hávarðr's extreme anger, by fuelling physical prowess and a remarkable exhibition of agility typical of a young man, functions as a momentary elixir of life that contrasts Hávarðr's decrepitude that has been persistently reiterated hitherto. That, in his anger, he wields his staff – symbolic of old age and unmasculinity in *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds* – to strike the man dramatically emphasises Hávarðr's liberation from the shackles of senescence. Again, Hávarðr may be able to rage freely because the senescent masculine ideal to which he is expected to aspire does not condemn anger; that he receives no criticism for his emotionality corroborates this. If old age is contingent on decrepitude, then

[44] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 314. I have amended tenses for consistency.

Hávarðr's able-bodied performance suggests that he is no longer old, and, therefore, he may pursue the hegemonic masculine ideal that his decrepitude has rendered off-limits thus far. It is paradoxical, therefore, that whilst the hegemonic masculine ideal holds anger impermissible for younger saga-men, anger appears to fuel behaviour that brings Hávarðr, an old man, momentarily closer to this same ideal. We may interpret a duality implicit in Hávarðr's gendered performance: firstly, he acts according to the senescent masculine ideal insomuch as he rages freely, and, secondly, he acts according to the hegemonic masculine ideal through his violence and agility. This suggests that the gendered implications of a man's emotional conduct are contingent on his body and are thus mutable. The use of a simile – *sem ungr maðr* ('like a young man') – to allude to the youthfulness of Hávarðr's behaviour, however, underscores his true identity as an old man that ultimately prevents him from any sustained pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal. This is reiterated when, after Hávarðr's burst of masculine vitality, his decrepitude becomes even more severe: the saga-author describes how Hávarðr, having returned home, *lagðist niðr í sæng sína ok lá þar ina þriðju tólf mánuði. Var hann þá miklu stirðastr* ('laid down in his bed and lay there for a third twelve months. He was then extremely stiff').[45] Thus, he is even further from attaining the hegemonic masculine ideal than he was prior to his youthful action.

Hávarðr's subsequent attempt to achieve a sustained pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal is, however, successful. When Bjargey prompts him to take vengeance against Þorbjǫrn after the year has passed, the saga-author describes how Hávarðr leaps out of bed and comments that *Hávarðr var þá inn sprækasti ok skorti ekki gǫngu* ('Hávarðr was then extremely sprightly and had no problem walking').[46] Hávarðr's able-bodied performance suggests that he is no longer old, requalifying him for pursuit of the hegemonic masculine

[45] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 315.
[46] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 320.

ideal. Further establishing Hávarðr's transition into a paradigm of masculinity, he is cast as donning his armour and arming himself. This status is further compounded when Bjargey remarks *[þ]arf eigi at hafa eggjunarorð við þik um hefnd eptir Óláf, son okkarn, með því at ek veit, at þar fylgir kapp ok hreysti, er þú ert* ('I do not need to have goading words with you to avenge Óláfr, our son, because I know that zeal and prowess follows where you are').[47] Nonetheless, by calling Hávarðr *karl* ('old man') just before he slays Þorbjǫrn, the saga-author indicates that Hávarðr ought still to be considered old even though he has already overcome his disability; this suggests that old age is not solely contingent on decrepitude, and that more must be done to sustain his hegemonic masculine status.

Hávarðr then exacts his revenge by slaying Þorbjǫrn and his brothers. Following this, Steinþórr affirms Hávarðr's masculine status by remarking that he no longer hobbles or requires a staff with which to walk, and states *nú sýnisk mér maðrinn inn gørviligasti undir vápnunum* ('now the man seems to me most accomplished with weapons').[48] This suggests that Hávarðr's exacting of vengeance – figuring as the cathartic release that expels the anger and sorrow that has been building up for three years – cancels out his senescence. Verifying this, Hávarðr does not act in a decrepit fashion once he has exacted his vengeance. By exacting vengeance successfully, Hávarðr fulfils one of the salient attributes required of those characters in pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal.

Further corroborating that anger is symptomatic of male old age, the cessation of Hávarðr's rage coincides with the apparent cessation of his decrepitude, indicative of his senescence. The last time that Hávarðr is explicitly described as growing angry is when Þorbjǫrn strikes him with the bag containing Óláfr's teeth, and, though not explicitly stated, he may also be angry when he slays Þorbjǫrn and his brothers. Aligning with this, the saga-

[47] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 321.
[48] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 333.

author, by stating that Hávarðr, having exacted vengeance, *kvað lokit því héðan af, at hann myndi hafa nǫkkura sorg eða angr í sínu hjarta* ('said that, from then on, he would no longer have any sorrow or grief in his heart') and *var hann ok svá kátr ok glaðr við hvert mannsbarn sem ungr væri* ('he was also so cheerful and happy with every man, as if he were young'), indicates that old age is not solely contingent on decrepitude, but also on emotional comportment.[49] Having overcome his disability, exacted his vengeance, and now with no cause to rage, Hávarðr can sustain his pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal that requires men to be able-bodied, able to exact vengeance, and unemotional.

Hávarðr initially opts to take legal action against Þorbjǫrn for slaying his son because, he intimates, he cannot exact vengeance, presumably because of his decrepitude, and he only carries out vengeance once he has overcome his disability.[50] The old man's aversion to blood vengeance – indicating that old age inhibits a key requirement of the hegemonic masculine ideal – is attested elsewhere in the sagas. Bersi in *Kormáks saga* versifies his frustration that his old age has deprived him of the ability to retaliate, and, when Njáll opts to be burnt alongside his sons despite being offered the opportunity to leave, he states *[e]igi vil ek út ganga, því at ek em maðr gamall ok lítt til búinn at hefna sona minna, en ek vil eigi lifa við skǫmm* ('I will not go out, because I am an old man and little able to avenge my sons, and I will not live in shame').[51] Miller notes, as Morcom neatly summarises, that 'Njáll's retreat to his bed, as his house burns down around him, indicates a ritualistic retreat from society, and a profession of absolute vulnerability and infirmity'.[52] Similarly, Morcom argues that Ingimundr in *Vatnsdœla saga* 'repeatedly seeks to curtail any possibility of conflict' and exhibits an 'unwillingness to resort to blood vengeance' in his old age because his enfeebled

[49] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 336.
[50] *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 310.
[51] *Kormáks saga*, 79. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 80. See Evans, *Men*, 79-80.
[52] Morcom, 'After Adulthood', 39. Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody?*, 231-2.

state physically prevents him from exacting vengeance.[53] Unlike Hávarðr whose senescent status is intermittent and ultimately reversable, Njáll and Ingimundr cannot overcome their decrepitude to take revenge.

6.6 Glúmr in *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Ogmundar þáttr dytts*

Another old saga-man who resorts to reconciliation rather than revenge is Glúmr: blind and old, he invites his enemies, Guðmundr and Einarr, to his household to make peace with them, because, he says, *ek em nú fyrir elli sǫkum til engis færr* ('I am now, due to old age, not capable').[54] When neither brother shows, however, the saga-author, by revealing that Glúmr had a drawn sword concealed under his cloak, implies that his offer of reconciliation was a ruse to facilitate his vengeance (though his blindness might have inhibited his success). Nonetheless, that Glúmr tries to use his old age to lull the brothers into a false sense of security again indicates that, typically, old men do not have the ability to wield arms or take blood vengeance.

Prevented from exacting blood vengeance, then, some old men in the *Íslendingasögur*, assuming the typically female role of goader, stage whetting performances from which we can 'ferret out' their anger. The aged Ketill in *Vatnsdœla saga* delivers a provocative speech reminiscent of the female whetter's *hvǫt* to his son Þorsteinn, berating his unmasculinity and inducing his anger; we may detect anger in his harsh words.[55] In so doing, Ketill provokes his son to take physical action against a felon – action that his decrepitude prevents him from taking himself – and he thus exerts influence by wielding emotionality.

[53] Morcom, 'After Adulthood', 27, 29.
[54] *Víga-Glúms saga*, 96-7.
[55] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 4-6.

Similarly, in *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*, Víga-Glúmr, in his old age, goads Ǫgmundr to exact vengeance on Hallvarðr. Glúmr, in a harangue comparable to that of Ketill in *Vatnsdœla saga*, impugns Ǫgmundr's masculinity by telling him that he will *bera ævinlegt klækisnafn, at þora eigi at hefna þín* ('bear the name of a perpetual coward when you dare not to avenge yourself').[56] When Ǫgmundr retorts that he has not taken vengeance for fear of compromising Vigfúss' safety, Glúmr states *þœtti mér þat til vinnanda, at þit vœrið báðir dauðir ok hefðir þú sýnt af þér hugprýði um hefndina* ('it would seem worth it to me, that you were both dead and you had shown courage in the revenge').[57] He therefore intimates the importance of overcoming dishonour, and thus restoring one's masculine status, in saga-society. Though Glúmr's emotionality is not described, his vehement, emotionally provocative words likely betray his anger towards Ǫgmundr and his shameful procrastination. Glúmr may angrily whet Ǫgmundr rather than getting involved himself as he might have done when he was an able-bodied and thus younger man because he is restricted by his old age, despite his senescent sword-wielding in *Víga-Glúms saga*. In the *þáttr*, he wields anger to exert influence because he cannot act violently.

6.7 Þórarinn in *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs*

Finally, the malevolent old man Þórarinn also takes on the role of whetter in *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs*. When Þórarinn is introduced, the saga-author comments *[h]ann var eigi dældarmaðr, þótt hann væri gamall* ('he was not a gentle man, even though he was old'); though possibly no more than litotes typical of saga-style, the saga-author may intimate that, typically, elderly people are gentle, an implication at odds with most of the evidence found in

[56] *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*, 108.
[57] *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*, 108.

the *Íslendingasögur*.[58] Perhaps, as Ármann Jakobsson indicates, the image of the nasty old man is more powerful, and thus more prevalently portrayed, than that of the gentle old man.[59] Þórarinn successfully eggs on his son, Þorsteinn, to take vengeance, by calling him a dog and a coward, *níð*-insults that evoke the *ergi*-complex.[60] We may 'ferret out' anger from his vehement diatribe as we did with Glúmr's *hvǫt*. Þórarinn's emotionality is also detectable when, a little later in the *þáttr*, he tells Þorsteinn *[þ]ykki mér ok betra at missa þín en eiga ragan son* ('it also seems to me better to lose you than to have an unmanly son'); this, again, echoes Glúmr's comment in *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*.[61] Moreover, the saga-author echoes the depiction of Glúmr in *Víga-Glúms saga* when Þórarinn, thinking Þorsteinn killed, attempts to attack Bjarni with a sword having lulled him into a false sense of security by stating *verðr þú nær at ganga, því at karl skelfr nú allr á fótum fyrir elli sakar ok vanheilsu* ('you must walk closer, for now this old man is all trembly on his feet because of old age and failing health').[62] As Ármann Jakobsson points out, however, Þórarinn's attempt is so farcically futile that it highlights that he has become 'ridiculous' in his old age, emphasised when Bjarni calls him a *fretkarl* ('old fart').[63] Þórarinn is angry because he is humiliated by his own decrepitude and impotence, and his aggressive feelings are intensified because his bodily state prevents him from finding an outlet in the form of physical action.[64] Yet, Þórarinn's anger also furnishes him with agency when funnelled into his successful goading performance. Thus, like Glúmr, he wields his anger to exert influence because he cannot act violently.

[58] *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs*, 69.
[59] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Specter of Old Age', 297.
[60] *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs*, 70.
[61] *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs*, 75.
[62] *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs*, 77.
[63] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Specter of Old Age', 309. *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs*, 77.
[64] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Specter of Old Age', 309.

6.8 Conclusion

The old men of the *Íslendingasögur* rage at the humiliating emasculation that accompanies decrepitude or wield anger deliberately to furnish them with a modicum of agency in a society that reveres younger, able-bodied men that are physically capable of taking blood vengeance. The senescent masculine ideal for which old men qualify and thus aspire to attain does not condemn angry expression or exhort emotional moderation like the hegemonic masculine ideal. That, to reprise Ármann Jakobsson's postulation, '[t]here is a causal relationship between the humiliating state of the elderly and their subsequent anger' suggests that anger is a salient facet of the old man's emotive script.[65] Whilst, as already noted, not every old man in the sagas is angry, that the most detailed images of old men depict their raging establishes such emotionality as the norm, to the extent that a saga-author describing a character as old functions as a narrative signpost to the audience to expect them to be angry. Thus, whilst critics have maintained that old age is solely contingent on enfeeblement, a designation of senescence may also be contingent on the emotions of antagonism that accompany decrepitude. Finally, whilst the senescent masculine ideal tacitly gives old men free rein to rage hastily, that rash anger is frequently exhibited by men emasculated by their senescence again intimates that the emotion is considered unmasculine for younger, able-bodied saga-men in pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal.

[65] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Specter of Old Age', 304-5.

7 Anger and *berserkir*

7.1 Introduction

Whilst *berserkir* are depicted as daemonic elite warriors elsewhere in Old Norse-Icelandic literature (such as in the *konungasögur*), the *berserkir* of the *Íslendingasögur* are, on the whole, volatile bullies, often depicted as challenging men to *hólmgöngur* ('duels') to win wealth and women.[1] Whilst Evans argues that *berserkir* are 'paragons of extreme masculinity', their dishonourable behaviour and their liminal, unheroic societal status disqualifies them from pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal.[2] Rebecca Merkelbach, analysing *berserkir* through the lens of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's monster theory, argues that they are exhibitors of 'social monstrosity'.[3] Their identity is unique, and thus, rather than abiding by the '"no reaction" formula', they adhere to a unique emotive script: they frequently exhibit the *berserksgangr* ('berserk fury'). Whilst the *berserksgangr* consistently figures as an unqualified emotional experience that is sparked by stimuli that we would expect to be anger-inducing, *Heiðarvíga saga*'s author explicitly links the *berserksgangr* and anger when introducing the *berserkir* Halli and Leiknir, explaining that *[v]æri þeir eggjaðir eðr reiðir, stóð ekki fyrir þeim, ok kom þá at þeim slíkr berserksgangr, at engir menn stóðusk* ('if they were taunted or made angry, nothing could stand them, and such a *berserksgangr* came over them that no one could stand it').[4] Roderick Dale notes that the term *berserksgangr* literally means 'berserk walking/motion'; it is, therefore, a bodily movement

[1] See P. G. Foote and D. M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement* (London: Book Club Associates, 1974), 285. See, e.g., *Vatnsdœla saga*, 124.
[2] Evans, *Men*, 135, footnote 141.
[3] Rebecca Merkelbach, '*Eigi í mannligu eðli*: Shape, Monstrosity and Berserkism in the *Íslendingasögur*', in *Shapeshifters in Medieval North Atlantic Literature*, ed. Santiago Barreiro and Luciana Cordo Russo (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 83-106 (93).
[4] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 217.

that connotes anger (see **3.6**).[5] It may be that saga-authors rarely explain the *berserksgangr*'s gamut of emotional nuances because its inherent emotionality would have been plain to a medieval audience. Sometimes, characters who are not explicitly described as *berserkir* can experience the *berserksgangr* (such as Þórir in *Vatnsdœla saga*, discussed below).[6] The *berserkr*'s raging, by frequently fuelling martial prowess, facilitates their assumption of one salient masculine attribute. Yet, as Judy Quinn comments, whilst the *berserkr* is 'a figure of overstated masculinity', their 'prowess is critically limited to the physical'.[7] Nonetheless, anger, whilst unmasculine for saga-men, can render *berserkir*, like women and elderly men in the *Íslendingasögur*, momentarily more masculine. Thus, raging *berserkir* again indicate that the gendered quality of emotional expression is contingent on sociocultural identity. Evidencing this and emphasising its incongruity with the hegemonic masculine ideal, those men that the saga-author does not term *berserkir* who experience the *berserksgangr* are often explicitly or implicitly criticised for their behaviour. Further underscoring its undesirability, the Christian law section of *Grágás* notes that, if a man experiences the *berserksgangr*, he is to be punished with lesser outlawry, and, if a man fails to restrain someone who experiences the *berserksgangr*, he too is to be punished with lesser outlawry.[8] By law, therefore, characters that regularly experience the *berserksgangr* are outlaws, compounding their unheroic, liminal societal status.

7.2 Fuel for Physical Prowess

[5] Dale, 71-2.
[6] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 83, 97-8.
[7] Evans, *Men*, 25. Quinn, 521.
[8] *Grágás*, vol. 1, 23.

Cleasby-Vigfusson defines *berserksgangar* as 'fits of frenzy' that overcome *berserkir* in battle.[9] This accords with *Ynglinga saga*'s definition of the *berserksgangr* as a furious and supernatural belligerent energy that fuels the martial prowess of *berserkir*. The saga-author – believed to be Snorri Sturluson – writes that Óðinnic warriors

> *fóru brynjulausir ok váru galnir sem hundar eða vargar, bitu í skjǫldu sína, váru sterkir sem birnir eða griðungar. Þeir drápu mannfólkit, en hvártki eldr né járn orti á þá. Þat er kallaðr berserksgangr* ('went armourless and were as mad as dogs or wolves, biting their shields, being as strong as bears or bulls. They killed people, but neither fire nor iron had an effect on them. That is called *berserksgangr*').[10]

The intimation that the *berserksgangr* renders *berserkir* immune to wounds, further underscored by the note that they do not wear armour (according with one etymological theory that *berserkr* means 'bare-shirt'), emphasises that it is a useful state that facilitates physical prowess.[11] Likewise, in *Egils saga*, we are told that King Haraldr's *berserkir*, *er eigi bitu járn* ('whom iron could not bite'), are unscathed after a battle, whilst none of the other men escape without injury.[12] Aligning with the shield-biting *berserkir* of the Lewis Chessmen, *berserkir* also exhibit frenzied shield-biting in *Grettis saga*, *Svarfdæla saga*, *Vatnsdœla saga*, and *Þorvalds þáttr víðfǫrla I*.[13] Such behaviour, showcasing the bestial qualities of the *berserksgangr* that Snorri mentions, is likely intended to terrify opponents, and to contribute further to their success on the battlefield. These zoomorphic qualities of *berserkir* and the *berserksgangr* are also reiterated elsewhere in *Grettis saga*. When several

[9] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*berserks-gangr*'.
[10] *Ynglinga saga*, 17.
[11] Dale, 61.
[12] *Egils saga*, 23.
[13] See 'The Lewis Chessman', *The British Museum*. *Grettis saga*, 136. *Svarfdæla saga*, 143. *Vatnsdœla saga*, 124. *Þorvalds þáttr víðfǫrla I*, 71.

berserkir are implicitly angered at having been trapped inside by Grettir and break a hole in the wall, *[k]emr á þá berserksgangr ok grenja sem hundar* ('then the *berserksgangr* came upon them, and they howled like dogs').[14] Whilst Grettir kills them off and thereby 'establishes his superior masculinity […] in relation to their inferior forms thereof', their experience of the *berserksgangr* is clearly meant to facilitate their martial success.[15] Likewise, in both *Grettis saga* and *Vatnsdœla saga*, we are told that King Haraldr's *berserkir* were known as *úlfhéðnar* ('wolf-skins'), and, in *Eyrbyggja saga*, the *berserkir* Halli and Leiknir *fóru galnir sem hundar* ('went mad like dogs') when experiencing the *berserksgangr*.[16]

The *berserksgangr* resembles the *ríastrad* ('warp spasm') of Old Irish literature.[17] Described in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* ('The Cattle Raid of Cooley'), the *ríastrad*, like the *berserksgangr*, causes the epic's protagonist, the demigod Cúchulainn, to become monstrously swollen, contorted, and frenzied during battle.[18] Further associating Cúchulainn, and thus the *ríastrad*, with the bestial behaviour of *berserkir* outlined in *Ynglinga saga*, his name means 'Culann's dog'.[19] The swelling that the *ríastrad* causes may also be a humoral manifestation akin to the swellings that figure throughout the *Íslendingasögur* (see **2.2.2**). Dale notes a parallel between the contortions of the *ríastrad* and Egill's beetling brows and facial expressions before King Aðalsteinn, thereby both highlighting Egill's *berserkr*-like quality and further evidencing that Egill is experiencing rage in this scene (see **3.5.2**).[20] Indicating how similar Cúchulainn's *ríastrad* is to the *berserksgangr* that fuels physical

[14] *Grettis saga*, 67-8. See also, e.g., *Vatnsdœla saga*, 124.
[15] Evans, *Men*, 135, footnote 141.
[16] *Grettis saga*, 5. *Vatnsdœla saga*, 24. *Eyrbyggja saga*, 61.
[17] Dale, 327-8. See Thomas Kinsella, trans., *The Táin: From the Irish Epic Táin Bó Cualinge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), e.g., 120.
[18] Kinsella, trans., *The Táin*, 120-1. See Wendy Davies, 'Anger and the Celtic Saint', in *Anger's Past*, 191-202 (197).
[19] Anne-Sofie Gräslund, 'Wolves, Serpents, and Birds: Their Symbolic Meaning in Old Norse Belief', in *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions*, ed. Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert, and Catharina Raudvere (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), 124-129 (124).
[20] Dale, 327.

prowess and therefore facilitates *berserkir*'s attainment of one salient masculine quality, Wendy Davies argues that it 'is the quality that makes him capable of heroic feats', and thus that, in this instance, 'anger is a heroic quality'.[21]

Several instances in the *Íslendingasögur* indicate that the *berserksgangr* fuels physical prowess and is thus useful. When, in *Egils saga*, a *berserkr* named Ljótr is about to duel, *kom á hann berserksgangr* ('the *berserksgangr* came upon him').[22] Similarly, in *Grettis saga*, Snaekoll demands that Einarr surrender his daughter to him and warns *[h]eldr mun ykkr ægja við mik at fásk, ef ek reiðumk* ('you two would find yourselves scared of me, if I were to become angry'), and, prior to fighting Grettir, *[t]ók hann þá at grenja hátt ok beit í skjaldarrǫndina ok setti skjǫldinn upp í munn sér ok gein yfir hornit skjaldarins ok lét allólmliga* ('he began to bellow loudly and he bit the edge of his shield, and he put the shield in his mouth and grinned over the shield's rim and behaved extremely furiously').[23] In both cases, as in the scene where Grettir kills off *berserkir* cited above, that the *berserkir* are defeated, however, intimates the hegemony of the masculine ideal which saga-men pursue; though useful, the *berserksgangr* cannot compete with a saga-hero's emotional *modus operandi* or the masculine status that it affords.

Snækoll's forewarning and subsequent behaviour is comparable to that of Halli and Leiknir in *Eyrbyggja saga*. The saga-author notes that they often experience the *berserksgangr*, and explicitly calls them *berserkir*.[24] Echoing Snækoll, they tell Vermundr *máttu svá ætla, at vit munum því illa kunna, ef þú veitir okkr eigi slíkt, er vit beiðum* ('you should also expect that we will behave badly, if you do not give to us that which we ask for').[25] In *Heiðarvíga saga*'s version of the same episode, Halli and Leiknir are depicted

[21] Davies, 196-7.
[22] *Egils saga*, 202.
[23] *Grettis saga*, 135-6.
[24] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 61.
[25] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 62.

without such intentionality.[26] Snækoll, Halli, and Leiknir's self-awareness of their propensity to rage with terrifying or disruptive results suggests that their emotional experience is, rather than spontaneous and involuntary, pre-empted and, perhaps, willed; their warnings double as threats of deliberate action. This aligns with Dale's postulation that, on the whole, *berserkir* did not spontaneously or impulsively 'go berserk' but instead evoked their fury deliberately, and further indicates that the *berserksgangr*, as a deliberate performance of exaggerated or feigned emotionality, is a useful means to an end.[27] If not deliberate, then the fact that they threaten saga-men with their propensity to rage and make no effort to restrain themselves indicates that it bears practical utility.

Following Halli and Leiknir's warning, when Vermundr denies Halli a wife, *sló hann á sik úlfúð ok illsku* ('his wolf mood and wickedness came upon him').[28] Although Halli's emotional comportment is not explicitly described using the term *berserksgangr*, his comportment accords with the animalistic features of the *berserksgangr* noted above. Emphasising the implied synonymity of such animalistic qualities and an experience of anger, *Zoëga* suggests *slá á sik úlfúð* be rendered 'to get angry'.[29] Although Halli's anger does not fuel physical prowess here, later in the saga, and in the version of the same events told in *Heiðarvíga saga*, Halli and Leiknir experience the *berserksgangr* when clearing a road through lava, demonstrating the versatility and utility of the *berserksgangr*'s application.[30]

In *Egils saga*, Kveld-Úlfr similarly demonstrates how such raging, by fuelling physical prowess, is useful. Yet, he is not explicitly called a *berserkr* in the saga. Rather, the saga-author describes him as *hamrammr* upon his introduction, writing

[26] *Heiðarvíga saga*, 216-19.
[27] Dale, 7-8.
[28] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 62-3.
[29] *Zoëga*, s.v. '*úlfúð*'.
[30] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 72-4. *Heiðarvíga saga*, 222.

> *[e]n dag hvern, er at kveldi leið, þá gerðisk hann styggr, svá at fáir menn máttu orðum við hann koma; var hann kveldsvæfr. Þat var mál manna, at hann væri mjǫk hamrammr. Hann var kallaðr Kveld-Úlfr* ('but every day, when it was evening, he would grow so angry that few people dared to speak to him. He was inclined to sleep in the evening [and rise early in the morning]. People said he was extremely *hamrammr*. He was called Kveld-Úlfr').[31]

Several scholars have argued that the adjective *hamrammr* and the related verb *hamask* are associated with the *berserksgangr* and are used to connote a very similar emotional bodily movement.[32] Echoing the animalistic qualities of the *berserksgangr*, the terms, deriving from *hamr* ('skin' or 'shape'), accord with an alternative etymological interpretation that *berserkr* means 'bear-shirt' (as opposed to 'bare-shirt') and refers to either a characteristic donning of animal furs or a supernatural metamorphosis into animal form (although such metamorphoses do not occur in the *Íslendingasögur*).[33] Kveld-Úlfr's name – meaning 'Evening Wolf' and thus recalling the description of King Haraldr's men as *úlfhéðnar* ('wolf-skins') in *Grettis saga* – also suggests that he embodies the bestial qualities of one who is *hamrammr*, and thus further indicates that he is a *berserkr*. Typically figuring metaphorically in the *Íslendingasögur* to emphasise the bestiality of the experience, *hamrammr*, literally meaning 'able to change one's shape', can be rendered 'seized with fits of warlike fury (berserks-

[31] *Egils saga*, 4.
[32] D. J. Beard, 'The *Berserkir* in Icelandic Literature', *Approaches to Oral Tradition* 4 (1978), 99-114 (100). Gerard Breen, *The Berserkr in Old Norse and Icelandic Literature* (University of Cambridge: Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, 1999), 19. Dale, 134.
[33] Dale, 63. See Merkelbach, 85.

gangr)', according to *Cleasby-Vigfusson*.[34] Likewise, *Cleasby-Vigfusson* suggests that *hamask*, 'referring to a change of shape', be rendered 'to rage, to be taken by a fit of fury'.[35]

Whilst the saga-author intimates that Kveld-Úlfr's state renders him unapproachable and thus that it may be problematic, when exhibited in a suitable scenario it bears practical utility insomuch as it facilitates his martial success. Later in the saga, Kveld-Úlfr, Skalla-Grímr, and his men slay Hallvarðr, a representative of King Haraldr, and more than fifty of his men.[36] Kveld-Úlfr's prowess is attributed to his raging, which the saga-author describes using the verb *hamask*. Given that the king had killed Kveld-Úlfr's son, Þórólfr, we would expect him to be experiencing anger in this instance, confirming the saga-author's indication that anger and the emotionality connoted by *hamask* are the same.[37] Earlier, the saga-author notes that Kveld-Úlfr was very old, and again notes his senescence shortly before this battle; this may render his extreme emotional comportment more permissible, given that he is now disqualified from pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal (see **6.1**).[38] Yet, we are also told later that, in spite of his age, Kveld-Úlfr was still a *hress maðr ok vel færr* ('healthy and well able man').[39] This may instead indicate that the permissibility of his emotional comportment is contingent on his quasi-*berserkr* identity, rather than his senescence.

The near-synonymity of characters who are *hamrammr* and those who experience the *berserksgangr* is corroborated when Kveld-Úlfr rages against Hallvarðr and his men: drawing attention to the post-*berserksgangr* lull that *berserkir* typically experience (a state that emphasises the energy expended in the emotional movement), the saga-author writes that

[34] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*hamrammr*'.
[35] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*hamask*'.
[36] *Egils saga*, 69-70.
[37] See *Egils saga*, 54, 65.
[38] *Egils saga*, 6, 60.
[39] *Egils saga*, 50.

> *[s]vá er sagt, at þeim mǫnnum væri farit, er hamrammir eru, eða þeim, er berserksgangr var á, at meðan þat var framit, þá váru þeir svá sterkir, at ekki helzk við þeim, en fyrst, er af var gengit, þá váru þeir ómáttkari en at vanða* ('it is said that those people who were *hamrammir*, or those that experienced the *berserksgangr*, became so strong while in that state that no one could hold against them, but initially, when it had left them, then they were weaker than usual').[40]

The author of *Þorskfirðinga saga* also links the verb *hamask* with subsequent enfeeblement, writing that Þórir *hamaðist* ('raged') during a conflict and afterwards *var mjök móðr* ('was very weary').[41] That, for instance, the *berserkir* Halli and Leiknir are also afflicted with the same weakening after experiencing the *berserksgangr* further evidences the near-synonymity of the two states.[42] The author of *Egils saga* subsequently remarks that Kveld-Úlfr is also affected by this lull following the battle.[43] That *berserkir* are afflicted with such enfeeblement may reiterate that the masculine status that raging affords them is temporary. Moreover, Kveld-Úlfr dies following his raging against Hallvarðr and his men; his death may symbolically emphasise that raging, though momentarily useful, is ultimately undesirable.[44]

Kveld-Úlfr, despite being cast as experiencing a state akin to the *berserksgangr*, is given a far more protracted role in the saga than characters explicitly described as *berserkir* in the *Íslendingasögur* and does not behave like them by bullying other characters. Merkelbach argues that a *hamrammr* status is not exactly synonymous with being a *berserkr*, and suggests that the saga-author deliberately avoids calling Kveld-Úlfr a *berserkr* to emphasise that he is different.[45] If so, then the audience may be expected to understand that

[40] *Egils saga*, 70.
[41] *Þorskfirðinga saga*, 221.
[42] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 74. See also, e.g., *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 194.
[43] *Egils saga*, 70.
[44] *Egils saga*, 60.
[45] Merkelbach, 84-5, 88.

he is, first and foremost, a saga-man, and that his *berserkr*-like traits do not make him a stock-figured *berserkr*. He is, therefore, a hybrid figure: he exhibits the unique emotive script typical of *berserkir*, perhaps rendered more permissible because of his old age, but also behaves like a saga-man in pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal elsewhere prior to his raging, such as in his earlier dealings with King Haraldr's messengers.[46]

7.3 Undesirability for Saga-men

For those saga-characters who are not explicitly described as *berserkr* and experience the *berserksgangr* – or a comportment described using the verb *hamask* – when not in battle, however, the state is cast as undesirable. We are twice told that Skalla-Grímr, Kveld-Úlfr's son, was *líkr feðr sínum* ('like his father') in character, and he appears to inherit his *hamrammr* status.[47] Having been losing initially against Egill, his son, and Þórðr in a *knattleikr* ('ballgame'), he is overcome with a peculiar strength that sees him take the lead, kill Þórðr, and seize Egill.[48] Þorgerðr, Skalla-Grímr's *ambátt* ('female slave') and Egill's foster-mother, intervenes, shaming him and saying *[h]amask þú nú, Skalla-Grímr, at syni þínum* ('you are now raging at your son').[49] Skalla-Grímr, provoked, redirects his extreme behaviour towards Þorgerðr and kills her.[50] Again, the verb *hamast* is used to describe a raging that facilitates useful physical prowess. As noted in **6.4**, the saga-author mentions Skalla-Grímr's senescence just prior to his raging, and his emotional comportment may, therefore, be permissible given that other aged characters in the sagas rage without opprobrium. Yet, Þorgerðr's judgement clearly indicates that it is misplaced and excessive, in

[46] See, e.g., *Egils saga*, 13-14.
[47] *Egils saga*, 5, 50.
[48] *Egils saga*, 101.
[49] *Egils saga*, 101.
[50] *Egils saga*, 101-2.

this context at least, and may suggest that, whilst old saga-men are permitted to grow angry, such an extreme exhibition of rage is unacceptable. *Grágás*, echoing *Gulaþingslǫg* and *Frostuþingslǫg*, states that a master who kills his *þræll* ('male slave') would incur no penalty providing the killing is not carried out during Lent or on other holy days, though does not comment on the killing of an *ambátt*.[51] Violence against women, however, was condemned as a *níðingsverk*, and Skalla-Grímr's emotionality, therefore, causes him to act in a fashion that is, though likely legal, unmasculine.[52] That his actions are also unacceptable to Egill is made clear when Egill, *allreiðr* ('extremely angry'), kills his father's favourite man in retaliation.[53] Given that it is implied that Egill himself kills his own slaves when he is an old man, we understand that he is furious at his father because he was fond of his foster-mother, rather than because Skalla-Grímr has killed a slave.[54] Whilst father and son do not speak to each other following this, Skalla-Grímr lets the matter go and does not condemn his son's behaviour.[55] In so doing, he indicates that, firstly, Egill's anger may be permissible because he is still a child and not yet held accountable to the dictates of the hegemonic masculine ideal, and, secondly, that he recognises, in hindsight, that his raging was unacceptable and deserving of such a response from Egill.

Corroborating the sense that this experience is undesirable, in *Vatnsdœla saga*, we are told that *[á] Þóri kom stundum berserksgangr; þótti þat þá með stórum meinum um þvílíkan mann, því at honum varð þat at engum frama* ('the *berserksgangr* sometimes came upon Þórir; this seemed a great drawback in such a man, because no glory came to him from that').[56] Later, during a discussion between Þórir and Þorsteinn concerning who is the best brother, the saga-author writes that Þórir *kvazk minnstháttar af þeim, – "fyrir þat, at á mik*

[51] Karras, *Slavery and Society*, 105-6. *Grágás*, vol. 1, 190-1. *Gulaþingslǫg*, 66-7. *Frostuþingslǫg*, 181.
[52] See *Gísla saga*, 101.
[53] *Egils saga*, 102.
[54] *Egils saga*, 297.
[55] *Egils saga*, 102.
[56] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 83.

kemr berserksgangr jafnan, þá er ek vilda sízt, ok vilda ek, bróðir, at þú gerðir at" ('said that he was the least of them, "because the *berserksgangr* always comes over me when I least wish it to, and I wish, brother, that you could do something"').[57] Confirming that it is undesirable and echoing the saga-author's earlier remark, Þorsteinn replies *þykkir mér ok með stórum meinum, at þú ert eigi í eðli þínu sem aðrir men* ('it also seems to me a great drawback, that you are not in your nature like other men').[58] Þorsteinn makes plain that those men who experience the *berserksgangr* are different to others, and emphasises that the *berserksgangr* is the product of a man's nature.[59] Contrary to Dale's postulation that *berserkir* exhibit the *berserksgangr* deliberately, Þórir clearly indicates, and Þorsteinn intimates, that, for him, the experience is involuntary and spontaneous. It may be that those characters that are explicitly described as *berserkr* can deliberately assume the *berserksgangr*, but, for those saga-men who experience it, it cannot be willed, further contributing to its undesirability for these characters. By asking his brother Þorsteinn for a cure, Þórir reinforces that his *berserksgangr* is problematic, akin to a chronic illness, rather than a useful martial energy. In this sense, Þórir's experience is similar to that of *Fljótsdæla saga*'s Ketill. The saga-author writes that Ketill experiences an extreme, destructive rage reminiscent of, though not explicitly stated to be, the *berserksgangr* alongside shivering and growing cold, and remarks *[g]allar stórir vóru á hans skapsmunum. Sumir kölluðu þat meinsemd* ('there were great defects in his temperament. Some people called it a disease').[60] Þórir's self-appraisal that he is the least important of the brothers because he experiences the *berserksgangr* and suggestion that Þorsteinn's *ráðagørðir ok vitsmuni* ('sound advice and sagacity') renders him the best brother intimates that he considers the state not only

[57] *Vatnsdæla saga*, 97.
[58] *Vatnsdæla saga*, 97.
[59] See Merkelbach, 89-90.
[60] *Fljótsdæla saga*, 220.

undesirable, but also comparably emasculating.[61] That Þórir identifies Þorsteinn, a character who is recurrently calm throughout the saga (see **4.3**), as the best brother further reiterates that emotional self-control is the preferred emotional *modus operandi* for saga-men. Given that Þórir indicates that wisdom is an important masculine attribute – further evidencing a sense reiterated throughout the sagas (see **4.7**) – and then proceeds to exhibit his own wisdom in his self-appraisal, his recognition and subsequent relinquishing of his affliction may render him more masculine. Whilst Þorsteinn notes Jǫkull's courage and implies that this means that he is the best brother, it is Jǫkull, rather than Þórir, who consistently grows angry throughout the saga (see **4.3**). Moreover, whereas Þórir is never depicted as experiencing the *berserksgangr* despite the saga-author's remark and Þórir's own anxious self-assessment, Helga, in conversation with Bergr, directly compares Jǫkull to a *berserkr* when she remarks *engi berserkr [er] slíkr í ǫllum Norðlendingafjórðungi sem hann* ('no *berserkr* is such like him of all the men in the Northern Quarter').[62] Whilst this does not suggest that Jǫkull experiences the *berserksgangr*, it does raise the question of whether he is also *berserkr*-like (especially given that, as Kveld-Úlfr and Skalla-Grímr – and possibly even Egill – demonstrate, *berserkr* traits can run in families).[63]

Þorsteinn, a Christian, tells Þórir to adopt a neglected infant, and he is cured of his affliction.[64] This parable – in which unwanted and unacceptable anger is exchanged for love – accords with medieval ecclesiastical doctrine that holds anger unfavourable.[65] Such a triumphing of Christian doctrine over the *berserksgangr* figures again later in the saga, when two *berserkir* are severely injured by a fire blessed by Bishop Friðrekr and are subsequently killed.[66] Likewise, in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Þangbrandr, a Christian missionary sent to Iceland

[61] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 97.
[62] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 89.
[63] See Merkelbach, 94.
[64] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 97-8.
[65] D. J. Beard, 104.
[66] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 125.

by King Óláfr, disarms a *berserkr* with his crucifix before slaying him.[67] If Þórir assumes a maternal rather than paternal role in adopting the infant, then it is paradoxical that Þórir assumes a maternal role in order to cure himself of the emasculating *berserksgangr*. As discussed in **5.5.3**, Þorgils in *Flóamanna saga* compromises his masculinity when he miraculously breastfeeds his son.[68] The scene in *Vatnsdœla saga*, then, may underscore just how emasculating the *berserksgangr* can be: it is more emasculating than assuming a maternal role. Yet, Freydís' maternalism, for instance, does not compromise her masculine status; again, this demonstrates that sex is significant, and saga-women, insomuch as they can be both maternal and masculine, are afforded a more privileged position than saga-men. That these miracles cause men to assume an unmasculine status (though, in Þórir's case, a status preferable to experiencing the *berserksgangr*) indicates that Christianity can sometimes negatively affect a character's masculinity. In the case of the Bishops Friðrekr and Þangbrandr, however, Christianity, by facilitating their martial prowess, bolsters their masculinity. As Evans notes, '[r]eligion […] does not impact on masculinity in a singular or uniform way.'[69]

7.4 Conclusion

The use of the term *berserksgangr* shows that it tends to be semantically synonymous with violent and unpredictable anger in the *Íslendingasögur* and beyond. Whilst *berserkir* are excluded from pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal, their rage, by fuelling physical prowess, allows them to exhibit a salient masculine attribute. In so doing, they exhibit a unique emotive script. Those saga-men that are not explicitly described as *berserkir* who

[67] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 268.
[68] *Flóamanna saga*, 289, 305.
[69] Evans, *Men*, 102.

experience the *berserksgangr* or whose rage is connoted through the verb *hamask*, however, are held accountable to the hegemonic masculine ideal that champions the '"no reaction" formula', and their raging, therefore, is cast as undesirable and emasculating when occurring in inappropriate scenarios (such as when not in battle). It also appears to be the case that those characters described as *berserkir* can perform the *berserksgangr* at will, while those who are not tend to experience the state involuntarily.

8 Anger and Sovereignty

8.1 Introduction

When Earl Eiríkr Hákonarson (999-1015) asks why Gunnlaugr does not limp despite having a boil on his foot, he replies *[e]igi skal haltr ganga, meðan báðir fætr eru jafnlangir* ('one shall not limp while both legs are of equal length').[1] Þórir considers Gunnlaugr's proverbial retort arrogant and remarks that he ought to be challenged. In response, Gunnlaugr delivers an insulting verse describing Þórir as wicked and untrustworthy, and Þórir, implicitly angry, makes for his axe. Earl Eiríkr then intervenes by telling Þórir *[l]át vera kyrrt* ('let yourself be still') and *ekki skulu menn gefa at slíku gaum* ('men should not pay attention to such things').[2] When the earl subsequently declares that Gunnlaugr will not live to double his age on account of his behaviour, Gunnlaugr insults him, telling him that he ought to pray that he does not meet the same fate as his father – that is, Earl Hákon Sigurðarson (974-995), who was murdered by his servant in a pigsty – rather than cursing him.[3] Eiríkr then *setti svá rauðan sem blóð, ok bað taka fól þetta skjótt* ('turned as red as blood and demanded that the fool be seized at once'); thus, he betrays his own angry feelings in response to an anger-inducing stimulus.[4] Whilst Skuli convinces the earl to spare Gunnlaugr's life, the earl still banishes him from the kingdom in his raging, although their relationship is restored when Gunnlaugr subsequently writes a poem in praise of Eiríkr, and even goes on to serve him.[5]

[1] *Gunnlaugs saga*, 69. The dates of the reign of Earl Eiríkr Hákonarson, along with all other dates of reigns of Norwegian monarchs cited in this chapter, follow the chronology given in Shami Ghosh, *Kings' Sagas and Norwegian History: Problems and Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 203-7.
[2] *Gunnlaugs saga*, 69.
[3] *Gunnlaugs saga*, 69.
[4] *Gunnlaugs saga*, 69-70.
[5] *Gunnlaugs saga*, 70, 77-8, 84.

Gunnlaugr and Þórir's character assassinations are relatively minor when compared to Gunnlaugr's reference to the earl's father's dishonourable death, and we may therefore expect Earl Eiríkr to grow angrier than Gunnlaugr or Þórir. Yet, by describing how a male character is criticised for growing angry by a sovereign figure who subsequently grows angry himself without opprobrium, the saga-author alludes to the presence of two distinct emotive scripts: a script by which saga-men are expected to adhere, and a script by which sovereign figures may adhere. Although *menn* can refer to both sexes, Attwood, by translating *ekki skulu menn gefa at slíku gaum* as 'real men don't pay attention to things like that', interprets the earl's remark as an implicit emasculation of Þórir.[6] The earl's counsel, therefore, corroborates that emotional self-restraint is the preferred emotional *modus operandi* for saga-men in pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal (see **4.3**). The earl judges others according to saga-society's ideal of masculinity, but, evidently, does not judge himself by, or hold himself accountable to, the same ideal. Whilst Evans suggests that the scene demonstrates a momentary rezoning of masculinity, we may suspect that sovereign figures do not need, and are not expected, to abide by the dictates of the hegemonic masculine ideal because they already occupy a self-evident hegemonic position.[7]

Ármann Jakobsson argues that '[t]here has perhaps been a tendency to overemphasize the hostility towards Norwegian kings and kingship in general in the Family Sagas' and that '[a]ctual instances of this are in fact rare'.[8] Despite *Egils saga* indicating that many Norwegians emigrated to Iceland to flee the tyrannous rule of Haraldr hárfagri ('fine hair') Hálfdanarson (c.880-c.931), for instance, many Icelanders are cast as enjoying the favour of kings, serving in their retinue, and maintaining an amiable and often symbiotic relationship

[6] Attwood, trans., *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* ('The Saga of Gunnlaug Serpent-Tongue'), in *CSI*, vol. 1, 305-333 (314).
[7] Evans, *Men*, 47.
[8] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Our Norwegian Friend: The Role of Kings in the Family Sagas', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 117 (2002), 145-160 (147).

with them.[9] Yet, there are several sovereign figures in the *Íslendingasögur* who exhibit an emotional comportment consonant with that of Earl Eiríkr Hákonarson in this scene, supporting the postulation that they adhere to their own unique emotive script. Moreover, some instances of sovereign figures growing angry suggest that their anger was not only acceptable, but also a functional means of establishing and maintaining their dominion. Like many saga-women, royals regularly rage with a performativity and intensity in public indicative of a deliberate attempt to exaggerate, or feign, an emotional reaction. As Sif Rikhardsdottir notes, 'royal anger […] thus becomes a codified signifier that has a social functionality beyond (or beside) any personal feelings' in the sagas.[10]

This fictional depiction of sovereign figures accords with the depiction of medieval sovereignty beyond the story world. Gerd Althoff argues, with Bourdieuian sentiment, that '[r]oyal anger […] appears as part of [the king's] "rulership practice", that is, as part of a personally grounded system of rulership based on a range of unwritten laws' in the medieval West.[11] Hans Jacob Orning, in a study of Norwegian medieval kingship, argues that one of the most effective weapons in the king's arsenal was the unpredictability of his behaviour, and shows that this was largely contingent on an exhibition of volatile anger.[12] The success of this method of rule hinged on anger's capacity 'to scare the adversary into submission'.[13] The notion that behaving unpredictably through a fear-inducing display of anger is an effective method of rule finds echoes in the 'madman theory', a term supposedly coined by Richard Nixon to describe his construction of an illusion of his 'mental instability' via emotional

[9] *Egils saga*, 12, 65.
[10] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 67.
[11] Gerd Althoff, '*Ira Regis*: Prolegomena to a History of Royal Anger', in *Anger's Past*, 59-74 (59). See also Sif Rikhardsdottir, 66.
[12] Hans Jacob Orning, *Unpredictability and Presence: Norwegian Kingship in the High Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 2.
[13] Orning, 316; see also Althoff, 61.

volatility to aid victory in Vietnam, nowadays associated with some twentieth- and twenty-first-century leaders, most recently Donald Trump.[14]

Orning distinguishes between personal and righteous anger experienced and exhibited by sovereign figures. Unsurprisingly, a king's personal anger was 'associated with […] offences against his person'.[15] Orning argues that, in the Icelandic Commonwealth, anger, associated with vengeance, was 'something that everyone could legitimately show' and therefore that 'the difference between the king's and other people's anger was just a difference of degree, in that the king had the greatest honour and therefore was the one who could be most profoundly offended.'[16] Whilst, generally speaking, demonstrative anger is *not* cast as something that the male characters in the *Íslendingasögur* can 'legitimately show' (indeed, the emotional landscape is, as we have observed, far more complex than this remark suggests), Orning's insights may explain to some extent why the corpus' sovereigns grow angry more regularly and more conspicuously than saga-men, and why saga-men are presented as adhering to one emotive script and sovereigns to another. Righteous anger, instead, 'was limited by what was established in the laws, and was part of a programme of consistent prosecution of those who broke the laws.'[17] This kind of anger is often termed *ira regis*, a variant which, as Paul Hyams remarks, 'was reserved for political show and public consumption and in no sense for private catharsis.'[18] In a society where many personal insults are forbidden in lawbooks and subject to harsh punishment, however, performances of 'personal anger' are difficult to distinguish from performances of 'righteous anger'; the anger

[14] Roseanne McManus, 'Revisiting the Madman Theory: Evaluating the Impact of Different Forms of Perceived Madness in Coercive Bargaining', *Security Studies* 28.5 (2019), 976-1009 (976-7). See James Boys, 'The Unpredictability Factor: Nixon, Trump and the Application of the Madman Theory in US Grand Strategy', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (2020). See also Jim Sciutto, *The Madman Theory: Trump Takes on the World* (New York: Harper Collins, 2020).
[15] Orning, 187.
[16] Orning, 186-7.
[17] Orning, 187.
[18] Paul Hyams, 'What Did Henry III of England Think in Bed and in French about Kingship and Anger?', in *Anger's Past*, 92-124 (102).

of medieval Scandinavian sovereign figures, therefore, may resist Orning's tidy categorisation. Moreover, Hyams notes that distinguishing 'between the occasional public temper tantrums in which some kings indulged […] from the assumption of anger for political ends is a challenge' because, for *ira regis* to be convincing, it 'must threaten violence and resemble the real thing.'[19] In other words, they must adhere to the same, recognisable emotive script. 'Public temper tantrums' nonetheless achieve the same effect of inducing fear to maintain dominion; whether anger is genuine, exaggerated, or feigned, the result is much the same.

This framework can be fruitfully applied to the fictional depictions of the anger of sovereigns – earls, kings, and queens – in the *Íslendingasögur*, in particular those in *Egils saga* and *Brennu-Njáls saga*. This chapter shall analyse the corpus' depiction of six raging royals in particular, in chronological order: King Haraldr hárfagri ('fine hair') Hálfdanarson, King Eiríkr blóðøx ('blood-axe') Haraldsson (c.931-c.933) and Queen Gunnhildr, Earl Hákon Sigurðarson, King Óláfr Tryggvason (995-999), and King Óláfr helgi ('the holy') Haraldsson (1015-1028). On the whole, the corpus presents experiences of anger as a useful method of rule for these sovereign figures. Yet, whilst failing to exhibit anger can destabilise their authority, wrath that is expressed with too great an intensity, or becomes too predictable, can result in a lack of cooperation and provoke resistance. Raging royals, therefore, must find an appropriate middle ground.

8.2 King Haraldr hárfagri Hálfdanarson

Egils saga is, in the main, propelled by Egill and his family's dealings and disputes with sovereigns. Whilst two of these royals are, for the most part, cast as acting benevolently, two

[19] Hyams, 102.

others are frequently portrayed as experiencing or demonstrating anger. Egill's paternal grandfather, paternal uncle, and father incur the wrath of King Haraldr hárfagri – prompting their emigration to Iceland – and, later, Egill incurs the wrath of King Eiríkr blóðøx, one of King Haraldr's sons.

King Haraldr's anger is described by the saga-author, identified by other characters, or alluded to by means of somatic indicia, on numerous occasions. His propensity to rage suggests that such behaviour is acceptable. Firstly, his anger is thrice cited when he learns that Kveld-Úlfr has declined his invitation to join his retinue. The saga-author writes that *[k]onungr varð við styggr ok mælti um nǫkkurum orðum* ('the king became irritable and spoke just a few words').[20] As we have seen, when a character remains silent or taciturn, it often figures to communicate their anger. Haraldr's silence or laconism is mentioned a further four times alongside, or in lieu of, a description of his anger. As Larrington notes, 'it seems […] to be a royal prerogative to signal displeasure by responding briefly or hesitantly […] when the king is annoyed with an individual or vexed by a situation'.[21] Ǫlvir hnúfa ('hump'), interpreting Haraldr's reaction, *bað konung vera eigi reiðan* ('asked the king not to be angry') and suggests that he himself will visit Kveld-Úlfr to put the proposition to him again.[22] Ǫlvir then tells Kveld-Úlfr that *konungr var reiðr* ('the king was angry') and that he has little choice but to comply, before sweetening this ultimatum by recounting the honour that those in the king's service typically enjoy.[23] This convinces Kveld-Úlfr to agree to send his son Þórólfr to Haraldr. On one level, Haraldr's anger may be a personal (and genuine) reaction to a perceived offence. On another, Haraldr's discernible anger prompts Ǫlvir to relay his emotionality to Kveld-Úlfr and use it as leverage to obtain his acquiescence. The

[20] *Egils saga*, 13.
[21] Larrington, 'Learning to Feel in the Old Norse Camelot?', in *Arthur of the North: Histories, Emotions, and Imaginations*, ed. Bjørn Bandlien, Stefka Georgieva Eriksen, and Sif Rikhardsdottir, special issue of *Scandinavian Studies* 87.1 (2015), 74-94 (81).
[22] *Egils saga*, 13.
[23] *Egils saga*, 13.

implication is that Haraldr's emotional volatility may fuel devastating consequences if it is not quelled; Qlvir notes the king's anger in order to induce fear. Thus, Haraldr's emotional posturing may have been deliberately deployed as a means to an end.

King Haraldr frequently grows angry with Þórólfr. Jealous at the number of guests attending Þórólfr's feast, the king *roðnaði ok mælti ekki, ok þóttust menn finna, at hann var reiðr* ('reddened and did not speak, and people perceived that he was angry').[24] Again, silence, this time accompanied by facial flushing that is characteristic of an experience of anger, betrays his feelings to both the audience and, we are told, the other characters present. He remains *heldr ókátr* ('rather unhappy') until Þórólfr gives him a ship and explains that the great number of men present was intended to honour him.[25] John Hines argues that Haraldr is 'childishly sulky' in this instance.[26] His emotional comportment, however, is far more complex than that of an infantile sulk. Whether or not Þórólfr had already intended to gift the ship to the king, Haraldr's anger figures as a response to a perceived threat to his dominion that must be remedied to prevent presumably grave retaliatory consequences, and, exhibited before many witnesses, it figures as a deterrent to preserve his rule.

Þórólfr makes an enemy of the Hildiríðarsons when he rejects their claim to their father Bjǫrgólfr's inheritance. Þórólfr had inherited it from Bárðr, who had in turn inherited it from his father Brynjólfr, who was the first son of Bjǫrgólfr and the elder half-brother of the Hildiríðarsons. In retaliation, the Hildiríðarsons try to turn Haraldr against Þórólfr by convincing him that Þórólfr was plotting to kill and supplant him, thereby provoking his wrath and its consequences. When Hárekr, one of the Hildiríðarsons, first tells the king this lie, the saga-author writes that *[k]onungr reiddist mjǫk við ræður þessar ok mælti þó stilliliga, sem hann var vanr jafnan, þá er hann frétti þau tíðendi, er mikils váru verð* ('the

[24] *Egils saga*, 29.
[25] *Egils saga*, 29.
[26] John Hines, 'Kingship in *Egils saga*', in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njáls saga*, 15-32 (20).

king was greatly angered by these words and yet spoke calmly, as he was accustomed to do, when he learned of news which was of great value').[27] The king's capacity to restrain himself despite the gravity of the news shows that he is capable of such restraint when he considers it necessary. This suggests that his raging elsewhere is to some extent performative and exhibited intentionally, corroborating that it is a functional 'instrument of government'.[28] The saga-author continues that, although the king kept this information to himself for the most part, *fannsk þat á, at hann myndi trúnað á festa þessa orðræðu, er honum var sagt* ('it was plain to see that he was inclined to believe firmly these words which he was told').[29] It is implied that it is his undisclosed expressions, gestures, and/or comportment that make his belief discernible given that he keeps the information to himself. It is also implied that this is witnessed by an anonymous observer. Belief is not typically detectable without a verbalised attestation; instead, his expressions, gestures, and/or comportment likely indicate that he is discernibly angry – as already indicated – and that this evidences his belief.

Communicated via his silence which is attested three times, Haraldr's anger is still discernible when Þorgils gives him a ship full of tribute at Þórólfr's request. The saga-author writes that, when Þorgils relays Þórólfr's greetings, *[k]onungr sá til hans ok svarar engu, ok sá menn, at hann var reiðr* ('the king saw him and says nothing, and everyone saw that he was angry').[30] Again, his silence is associated with his anger, and again his emotional experience is witnessed by other characters and must, therefore, be discernible. When Þorgils asks Ǫlvir for an explanation, Ǫlvir says that *hitt hefi ek fundit, at konungr þagnar hvert sinn, er Þórólfs er getit* ('I have noticed that the king falls silent every time Þórólfr is mentioned') and that he suspects that he does so because he has been slandered, thereby alluding to a

[27] *Egils saga*, 32.
[28] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 66.
[29] *Egils saga*, 33.
[30] *Egils saga*, 34.

nexus between silence and anger.[31] Finally, when Ǫlvir implores the king to go down to the ship, the saga-author writes that *[k]onungr svarar engu* ('the king did not answer').[32] His elevated brow upon seeing the tribute communicates his emotional mutation (see **3.5.3**). The consistency of Haraldr's comportment, and that it is witnessed by other characters and they are aware of its significance, suggests that it is deliberately staged, even if his anger is a genuine response to his belief of Þórólfr's treachery.

When the Hildiríðarsons again slander Þórólfr to Haraldr, the saga-author writes at the end of the chapter that *konungr var inn reiðasti* ('the king was extremely angry'), indicating that he believes what he hears.[33] Again, however, the saga-author refrains from detailing how Haraldr communicates his anger, possibly indicating that his silence and/or facial reddening is reserved for scenarios in which it is in some way advantageous for his anger to be discerned. At the start of the next chapter and the following summer, Ǫlvir tells Þórólfr that he cannot decipher Haraldr's mood, suggesting that the king is not exhibiting the same indicators of anger that he has exhibited previously.[34] His comportment is consonant with Orning's postulation that Norwegian medieval kings behave unpredictably to maintain their dominion: the audience and characters, by now attuned to expect Haraldr to rage given his propensity to do so, are held in suspense as the king changes tack by unexpectedly controlling his emotional experience or behaving calmly. Þórólfr, presumably having decided that the king is approachable given that his rage is not discernible to Ǫlvir, goes to Haraldr himself. The audience, recalling the king's fury in response to the Hildiríðarsons' lies that the saga-author disclosed in the previous chapter, will likely identify that the king's comportment is a ruse. By returning Þórólfr's greeting and ordering him a drink before bringing up the libellous claims made against Þórólfr, Haraldr remains composed. Yet, when Haraldr asks

[31] *Egils saga*, 34.
[32] *Egils saga*, 34.
[33] *Egils saga*, 38.
[34] *Egils saga*, 38.

Þórólfr to serve as his standard-bearer (an idea, previously suggested by Hárekr, intended to ensure that Þórólfr does not grow too powerful) the next day and Þórólfr declines, the saga-author writes that *[k]onungr svarar ok segir, at eigi mun hann optar veizlu þiggja at Þórólfi* ('the king replies and says that he would never again accept Þórólfr's hospitality').[35] Haraldr thus makes his feelings plain.

Þórólfr's death soon follows. Haraldr has his men set fire to the building in which Þórólfr and his men are staying at night, with the intention of avoiding battle to preserve the lives of his own men; it is only when Þórólfr and his men escape that battle ensues and Haraldr slays Þórólfr himself. Hermann Conrad notes that Medieval Germanic law considered *heimliche nächtliche Brandstiftung* ('secret night-arson') the work of a *Neiding* (*níðingr*).[36] Further implying that it may be tainted by cowardice, Skarpheðinn in *Brennu-Njáls saga* comments that the men who attacked Gunnarr would never have set fire to his house in the way that Flosi sets fire to Bergþórshváll (although Egill later sets fire to a farmstead without comment).[37] That Haraldr's actions are not met with opprobrium or comment again may suggest that sovereign figures, already in a position of hegemonic supremacy, do not need to abide by the dictates of the hegemonic masculine ideal, just as his hegemonic position means that he is not required to strive for emotional self-restraint in the way that other male characters are.

When Haraldr suggests that he will only compensate Skalla-Grímr for his brother Þórólfr's death if he joins the king's retinue and Skalla-Grímr declines, *[k]onungr þagði, ok setti hann dreyrrauðan á at sjá* ('the king became silent, and he turned blood-red in appearance').[38] The emphasis on Haraldr's appearance, when considered alongside the

[35] *Egils saga*, 40 (c.f. 32).
[36] Hermann Conrad, *Deutsche Rechtsgeschichte: Frühzeit und Mittelalter*, vol. 1 (Karlsruhe: C. F. Müller, 1962), 49-50.
[37] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 326 (c.f. 325-39). *Egils saga*, 118.
[38] *Egils saga*, 64.

number of witnesses present, seems to allude to the perceptible power of his expression. As noted in **2.1.1**, the adjective *dreyrrauðr* ('blood-red') is typically used to connote sovereigns' anger, yet this is the only time that it is used to describe Haraldr. This angry reaction is an intensified version of his angry reaction at Þórólfr's feast (where he also flushes red and falls silent); Sif Rikhardsdottir argues that '[b]oth instances serve on the one hand as evidence of physiological responses to the presumed affronts and on the other hand as a signpost to the audience of the 'brewing' emotions that foretell impending catastrophes.'[39] An episode in *Fljótsdæla saga* evidences that, as Sif Rikhardsdottir implies, Haraldr's somatic indicium is intended to allude to the 'hydraulic', humoral model of emotions. Linking bloody reddening with swelling, the saga-author conveys Earl Björgólfr of Shetland's anger upon hearing Þorvaldr relate his dream in which he perceived the earl's kidnapped daughter by writing that *[j]arl varð svó rauðr, er hann heyrði þetta, at honum mátti náliga einum fingri dreyra vekja* ('the earl became so red when he heard this that one could almost draw out the blood from him with a finger') and *hann þrútnaði mjök* ('he greatly swelled up').[40] Earl Björgólfr also subsequently *þagnaði* ('fell silent').[41] That such a manifestation of rage is not met with opprobrium again indicates that royal figures adhere to a unique emotive script.

As we may expect, just as Haraldr killed Þórólfr, he sends men to pursue and kill Skalla-Grímr. Skalla-Grímr, however, evades capture, and, together with Kveld-Úlfr, exacts vengeance by killing Hallvarðr and more than fifty of his men, as well as Haraldr's young cousins (see **7.2**).[42] With Skalla-Grímr and Kveld-Úlfr having emigrated to Iceland, the king confiscates their lands, and the saga-author concludes the episode by noting that the *fjándskapr* ('hostility') that Haraldr felt towards them was such that he hated their kinsmen

[39] Sif Rikhardsdottir, 66.
[40] *Fljótsdæla saga*, 225.
[41] *Fljótsdæla saga*, 225.
[42] *Egils saga*, 68-9.

and associates and punished some of them.[43] Thus, the devastating consequences that Haraldr's anger fuelled and forecasted materialise and preserve the king's dominion.

The moment where Haraldr is described as *dreyrrauðr* ('blood-red') may be the zenith of his angry experience. The saga-author progresses from describing Haraldr as *styggr* ('irritable') the first time his frustration rears its head when Kveld-Úlfr refuses to join his retinue, to connoting his anger via an adjective that evokes the humoral theory of emotions and foreshadows the bloodshed that ensues as a result of anger's arousal.[44] Although Haraldr's reaction is not as extreme as other comparable reactions exhibited by other rulers in the corpus (such as Earl Björgólfr), within the context of *Egils saga*, Haraldr's reaction is maximally severe. Haraldr's reaction is likely so severe not because of Skalla-Grímr's anger-inducing refusal, but because it compounds the numerous anger-inducing stimuli that have occurred prior to this moment. Haraldr's rage is provoked when his kingship is threatened and insulted; it is both a genuine response to a personal insult and wielded as a functional, fear-inducing weapon to establish and maintain his rule. And yet, Haraldr's anger, often misplaced, frequently results in needless bloodshed.

8.3 King Eiríkr blóðøx Haraldsson

If King Haraldr is, at times, too hot-headed in *Egils saga*, then King Eiríkr does not rage often enough. Direct references to Eiríkr's anger are, relatively speaking, infrequent, and he does not once redden like his father. Theodore Andersson argues that Eiríkr is, on account of his passivity, tentativeness, and conciliatoriness, 'a rather weak character'; likewise, Hines considers him a 'weak king'.[45] We may attribute this weakness, in part, to his emotional

[43] *Egils saga*, 77.
[44] See *Egils saga*, 13.
[45] Theodore Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 107. Hines, 24.

modus operandi. Generally speaking, he is too slow to anger, and, when he does, his rage rarely fuels devastating consequences. That such a generalisation can be made hints at his emotional predictability, which, according to Orning, is antithetical to a Norwegian medieval king's success.

The first time Eiríkr's anger occurs is following Egill's drunken slaughtering of Bárðr in retaliation for his niggardliness and attempt to poison him. The king sends men to kill Egill, but Egill, having killed them, evades capture. It is surprising that the saga-author does not comment on Eiríkr's emotionality in this passage, given the severity of stimuli that would typically be anger-inducing and given how little it took to provoke Haraldr's rage. Yet, afterwards Þórir remarks, with the turbulent relationships that King Haraldr had with Kveld-Úlfr, Þórólfr, and Skalla-Grímr in mind, that Egill has *of mjǫk ættgengt at sjásk of lítt fyrir at verða fyrir reiði konungs* ('too great an inherited tendency to care too little about incurring the king's anger').[46] A few lines later, this is confirmed: the saga-author writes that, when Þórir goes to the king to compensate him on Egill's behalf, *Eiríkr konungr var inn reiðasti, ok var óhægt ráðum við hann at koma* ('King Eiríkr was extremely angry, and it was difficult to talk to him').[47] Just as Egill has inherited his family's tendency for incurring royal wrath, Eiríkr has inherited his father's tendency for laconism when experiencing anger. Despite this fury, the king accepts the compensation and appears to be placated.

Subsequent events compound Eiríkr's ill feeling towards Egill. When Queen Gunnhildr's brother Eyvindr kills one of Egill's brother's men at Gunnhildr's request, Egill and his men kill several of Eyvindr's men in retaliation.[48] Later, Egill again crosses paths with Eiríkr and Gunnhildr at the Gulaþing when he tries to claim his rightful share of his wife's father's inheritance from his wife's half-sister's husband, Berg-Ǫnundr, who enjoys

[46] *Egils saga*, 113.
[47] *Egils saga*, 114.
[48] *Egils saga,* 124-7.

the king and queen's favour. The saga-author writes that when Arinbjǫrn consults Eiríkr, *konungr tók heldr þungt hans máli* ('the king took the matter rather badly'), and that *[k]onungr var heldr styggr í þessu máli* ('the king was rather irritated by this matter'); again, Eiríkr's emotional experience is mild in comparison to that of his father.[49] After Arinbjǫrn has spoken at length to the assembly, *[k]onungr svarar ekki skjótt máli hans* ('the king does not answer his speech quickly').[50] It is not clear whether the implication is that Eiríkr delivers a lengthy response, or whether he pauses for a time before responding; if the latter, then the king's initial silence may indicate his undisclosed anger. It is surprising, given that Egill killed so many of the king and queen's associates, that Eiríkr lets Egill's case be brought before the assembly. Gunnhildr suggests that she does not consider Eiríkr's response severe enough by remarking *[þ]etta er undarligt, konungr, hvernig þú lætr Egil þenna inn mikla vefja mál ǫll fyrir þér; eða hvárt myndir þú eigi móti honum mæla, þótt hann kallaði til konungdómsins í hendr þér?* ('it is strange, king, how you let big Egill completely entangle you in this matter; or would you not speak against him, even if he claimed the kingdom from out of your hands?').[51] Gunnhildr thus mocks Eiríkr's leniency and apathy, and implies that such qualities undermine the stability of his sovereignty. Where female whetters typically goad men by emasculating them, the queen instead opts to impugn the king's authority, thereby corroborating that kings, already in a hegemonic position, are not held accountable to the dictates of the hegemonic masculine ideal like other men. Before Eiríkr can respond, Gunnhildr has the assembly broken up. As king, 'his role ought to be that of a guardian of the law' and he ought to act benevolently.[52] That such a status was expected of kings in saga-society is revealed in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, when King Haraldr gráfeldr ('grey-cloak') Eiríksson (c.959-c.974) tells Hrútr, in response to his request that the king might help him

[49] *Egils saga*, 153-4.
[50] *Egils saga*, 156.
[51] *Egils saga*, 157.
[52] Vésteinn Ólason, 'Jorvik Revisited – With Egill Skalla-Grímsson', *Northern Studies* 27 (1990), 64-76 (68).

secure his inheritance case, *[h]verjum manni hefi ek heitit lǫgum hér í landi* ('I have promised the law in this land to every man').[53] Yet, if the ruler is to break it, he ought to do so ruthlessly and decisively to prevent backlash; by fence-sitting, Eiríkr does neither.

Egill makes a final speech, forbidding the use of the lands to which he has made claim and cursing Berg-Ǫnundr to incur the wrath of the gods if he disobeys him, before leaving with Arinbjǫrn. Arinbjǫrn tells his men *konungr er reiðr svá mjǫk, at mér er ván, at várir menn sæti afarkostum af honum, ef hann má* ('the king is so greatly angered, that I expect that he will deal out harsh treatment to our men, if he can').[54] This is corroborated when the saga-author finally states that *Eiríkr konungr heyrði álykðarorð Egils, þau er hann mælti síðast á þinginu, ok varð reiðr mjǫk* ('King Eiríkr heard Egill's departing words, those which he last spoke at the þing, and became very angry').[55] As before, Eiríkr's anger is attested by another character before the saga-author's confirmation, underscoring its intensity. Egill's parting words likely compound the preceding anger-inducing stimuli to provoke Eiríkr's rage at last; Gunnhildr's goading might have also catalysed his emotionality. As Arinbjǫrn predicts, Eiríkr, in his rage, pursues Egill but, after an exchange where more men are killed, Egill again evades capture and curses the king in a verse (although the king does not witness this).[56] Having been made an outlaw by Eiríkr, Egill ambushes and kills Berg-Ǫnundr and his companions.

The saga-author notes that, following this, Egill *var nú allreiðr, svá at þá mátti ekki við hann mæla* ('was now very angry, so that it was not possible to speak with him'), and this rage fuels his slaughtering of the king's son, Rǫgnvaldr, and his men at sea, and his erection of the *níðstǫng* ('scorn pole') against the king and queen.[57] Heinz Meyer and Rudolf Suntrup

[53] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 14.
[54] *Egils saga*, 158.
[55] *Egils saga*, 160.
[56] *Egils saga*, 160-3.
[57] *Egils saga*, 170.

consider Rǫgnvaldr's travelling with twelve men to be an echo of Christ sailing near Gennesaret with his twelve disciples, and Torfi Tulinius implies that Egill, therefore, enacts a symbolic slaying of Christ.[58] He supports this interpretation by noting that anger is a cardinal sin (see **1.5**), and, '[i]n theological terms, all major sins are a re-enactment of the killing of Jesus.'[59] This emphasises the unacceptability of Egill's actions and the emotional experience that fuelled such actions. Egill's own anger and resulting unapproachable state, a kind of inversion of the typical silent, angry royal trope, prompts a comparison of Egill and Eiríkr's emotionality. Eiríkr's anger, as we have seen, also causes him to assume an unapproachable state, such as when Þórir goes before the king on Egill's behalf.[60] Whereas Egill's anger fuels fatal action that would affect the king personally, however, Eiríkr's anger, having been slow to surface, does not bring harm directly to Egill or his kinsmen, only his men. Egill's anger, instead, echoes King Haraldr's effective anger, and may even suggest that Egill has a temperament better suited to ruling than that of the king (and yet, because Egill is a saga-man rather than a sovereign, his anger is, as Torfi Tulinius indicates, implicitly criticised). Sigurður Nordal suggests that Egill's disposition here echoes that of his grandfather and father when they are overcome with a frenzy akin to the *berserksgangr*.[61] Indeed, the scene also parallels the moment when Kveld-Úlfr and Skalla-Grímr, in such a frenzy, kill Hallvarðr, his men, and Haraldr's cousins insomuch as it takes place on board a ship and members of the king's own family are killed (see **7.2**). This parallel also prompts comparison of Haraldr and Eiríkr's rulership practice: whereas Haraldr responded to Kveld-Úlfr and Skalla-Grímr's retaliation with ruthlessness as we have seen, Eiríkr's reaction to his son's

[58] Heinz Meyer and Rudolf Suntrup, *Lexikon der mittelalterlichen Zahlenbedeutungen* (München: Fink, 1987), 620-1. Torfi Tulinius, 'The Prosimetrum Form 2: Verses as the Basis for Saga Composition and Interpretation', in *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*, ed. Russell Poole (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), 191-217 (212).
[59] Torfi Tulinius, 'The Prosimetrum Form 2', 212.
[60] *Egils saga*, 114.
[61] *Egils saga*, 170, footnote 1.

death is not disclosed, and he does not take action. It instead falls to Gunnhildr to curse Egill so that he may never find peace in Iceland until she has dealt with him.

Her curse, it is implied, causes Egill to land in Eiríkr's kingdom in England. Egill, realising that trying to evade capture would be futile, decides to approach the king in Jórvík and put himself at his mercy; his decision may be informed by his prior dealings with the king and an awareness of his passivity. When Arinbjǫrn presents Egill to Eiríkr, the king *hvessti augun á hann* ('glared at him').[62] Gunnhildr urges Eiríkr to have Egill killed at once, but Arinbjǫrn urges him to resist, noting that *náttvíg eru morðvíg* ('night-killings are murders'); in *Grágás*, *morð* ('murder'), secretive and thus a *níðingsverk*, is punishable by outlawry.[63] Alluding to this law and confirming that it was heeded by sovereign figures, in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Earl Hákon Sigurðarson resists killing the Njálssons in his rage because, as his son Sveinn points out, *þá væri nótt* ('it was night').[64] Intriguingly, Eiríkr adheres to the law here but did not proactively uphold the law at the Gulaþing (as Arinbjǫrn reiterates), and does not succumb to the Queen's goading as he did before; this may indicate his evolution from fence-sitter to efficient decision-maker. Arinbjǫrn is told to bring Egill back in the morning. Although Eiríkr's anger is not directly disclosed, Arinbjǫrn remarks *[a]llreiðr var konungr nú, en heldr þótti mér mýkjask skaplyndi hans nǫkkut, áðr létti* ('the king was extremely angry, but it rather seemed to me that his temper softened somewhat, before parting').[65] Arinbjǫrn must have observed something in the king's expression or behaviour to conclude this. Eiríkr's glaring is likely a somatic indicator of anger. After Egill has delivered the poem in praise of Eiríkr known as *Hǫfuðlausn* ('head's ransom') in an attempt to liberate himself from the king's wrath, we are also told that *Eiríkr konungr sat uppréttr, meðan Egill kvað kvæðit, ok hvessti augun á hann* ('King Eiríkr sat upright while Egill recited the poem

[62] *Egils saga*, 179.
[63] *Egils saga*, 181. *Grágás*, vol. 1, 154.
[64] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 221.
[65] *Egils saga*, 182.

and glared at him').[66] The *ONP* records eight instances of the phrase *hvessti augun á / í mót(i)* ('glared at').[67] In *Gylfaginning*, Þórr, having grown angry when trying to catch Jǫrmungandr, *hvesti augun á orminn* ('glared at the serpent'), indicating a nexus between anger and glaring.[68] Þórr's blazing eyes also betray his anger in *Þrymskviða*.[69] Moreover, the phrase occurs twice in *Grettis saga*. Firstly, Þorfinnr *hvessti á Gretti augun* ('glared at Grettir') when he comes late into the drinking-hall.[70] Indicating that his glaring conveys his anger, we infer that his mood subsequently lightens when we are told that *Þorfinnr varð léttbrúnn við* ('Þorfinnr's eyebrows relaxed') upon seeing the treasure that Grettir has retrieved from Þorfinnr's father's burial mound (see **3.5.3**).[71] Later, the phrase describes Glámr's staring up into the moonlight; although this is not explicitly linked with anger, we are told that this is the only sight that had ever frightened Grettir, and Glámr curses him to be forever haunted by it.[72] If Eiríkr's glares evoke those of Þórr or Glámr, then they bear a deific or monstrous power. Further indicating that Eiríkr's glare connotes his anger, the adjective *uppréttr* figures earlier in *Egils saga* in conjunction with anger: Egill, before beetling his brows before King Aðalsteinn to exhibit his anger (see **3.5.2**), *sat uppréttr ok var gneyptr mjǫk* ('sat upright and was greatly bent forward').[73]

Just as the climactic, final reference to King Haraldr's anger is via his blood-red countenance, the climactic, final reference to King Eiríkr's anger is via a discernible facial expression and a gestural expression. By ultimately adopting different somatic indicia to those of his father, Eiríkr resists being cast in his father's shadow. Indeed, he is the only sovereign figure in the *Íslendingasögur* who glares to communicate anger, and he is,

[66] *Egils saga*, 193.
[67] *ONP*, s.v. '*hvessa*'.
[68] *Gylfaginning*, 45.
[69] *Þrymskviða*, 426 (st. 27).
[70] *Grettis saga*, 59.
[71] *Grettis saga*, 59.
[72] *Grettis saga*, 121.
[73] *Egils saga*, 143.

therefore, memorable because of his unique emotional posturing. His discernible anger not only indicates the escalating intensity of his emotional experience as the anger-inducing stimuli compound, but may also indicate his eventual realisation that performative, fear-inducing anger, when deployed at the right moment, is a powerful feature of the sovereign's rulership practice that may ensure the preservation of his dominion. Moreover, until this point, Eiríkr does not exhibit his anger before Egill, and Egill instead learns of it from other characters (such as Þórir and Arinbjǫrn). Eiríkr may have failed to manage Egill successfully thus far because he has failed, until now, to show him his wrath directly.

Despite this, Eiríkr praises the poem and declares that Egill may leave unharmed, though he banishes him from ever returning to his kingdom. Theodore Andersson comments that the king's 'conciliatoriness […] after the killing of both his son and foster son seems incomprehensible', while Ármann Jakobsson considers the king's mercy honourable.[74] Eiríkr's display of anger allows for such mercy: although Eiríkr does not act on his feelings, his emotional performance ensures that Egill does not cross him again, likely because it was sufficiently fear-inducing and has a lasting effect. Evidencing this, in *Arinbjarnarkviða*, the poem that Egill in his old age composes in praise of his friend, Egill mentions that he had incurred the king's *reiði* ('anger') and describes Eiríkr's eyes and the terror that they provoked in him.[75] Whilst Eiríkr's anger was slow to surface, it is, at last, effectively employed, and his firm decision contrasts his prior propensity to dither and further evidences his character development. Vésteinn Ólason notes that 'the meeting in Jórvík does not lead to a full reconciliation, but structurally it fulfils the need for such an end to the conflict.'[76] Yet, it is not the meeting, but rather the anger displayed, that achieves this narratorial resolution.

[74] Theodore Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, 107. Ármann Jakobsson, 'Our Norwegian Friend', 147.
[75] *Egils saga*, 258-9.
[76] Vésteinn Ólason, 69.

8.4 Queen Gunnhildr

Although Queen Gunnhildr is not a sovereign insomuch as she is, in terms of monarchical hierarchy, subordinate to her husband and later her sons and therefore did not reign as such, she wields rage like other sovereign figures and thus qualifies for inclusion here.

In *Egils saga*, her anger, although never explicitly described, may be 'ferreted out' from her behaviour and actions. She not only urges her husband to act violently against Egill more than once, but also tries to poison Egill, asks her brothers to kill him and his brother, deploys her henchmen to disrupt the Gulaþing and ruin his inheritance claim, and curses him. When Egill learns that Eiríkr has made him an outlaw, he speaks a verse in which he states that Gunnhildr is responsible for his fate and remarks that *greypt's hennar skap* ('her temperament is fierce').[77] In Jórvík, Arinbjǫrn, having predicted that Gunnhildr will try to disrupt Egill's attempts to survive, identifies the twittering swallow that disturbs Egill when he is composing *Hǫfuðlausn* as a shapeshifter; the implication is that the bird is Gunnhildr, and it is thus a manifestation of her hostility and anger.[78] We may compare Gunnhildr's urging of her husband to kill Egill immediately for slaying their son to Queen Vigdís' urging of her husband, Earl Ingimundr, to spare Þorsteinn's life when he tells them that he has slain their son Jǫkull in *Vatnsdœla saga*. Although Vigdís' own anger is possibly hinted at by her facial flushing, Ingimundr does his wife's bidding because *drottning hafði svá til stillt, at honum var runnin in mesta reiði* ('the queen had arranged it so that most of his anger had left him').[79] Gunnhildr, in similar circumstances, is comparably ruthless. Like the many other women and sovereign figures in the sagas, she uses anger to exercise power and influence.

[77] *Egils saga*, 165.
[78] *Egils saga*, 182-3. See Sayers, 'Verbal Expedients and Transformative Utterances in Episodes of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*', *Scandinavian Studies* 88.2 (2016), 159-181 (162).
[79] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 13, 15.

Gunnhildr features in other *Íslendingasögur*, and her characterisation is, for the most part, consistent. Her wrath is alluded to in *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja* and *Hallfreðar saga*, and is described in more detail in *Flóamanna saga* and *Brennu-Njáls saga*.[80] Miller describes her as 'a bogeywoman in the saga world', thereby suggesting that she is monstrous and fear-inducing.[81] Moreover, she is a nymphomaniac with 'a special fondness for male Icelanders'; in *Egils saga*, for instance, the author alludes to her liaison with Þórólfr, while her erotic relationships with Icelanders in other sagas are described in more detail and are sometimes a source of her rage.[82] Developing Sayers' suggestion that Gunnhildr is a metonym for overbearing Norwegian rule in the sagas, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir argues that, in Gunnhildr, 'Norway is seen in the guise of a femme fatale whose sexual power is alluring but dangerous'.[83] Gunnhildr's wrath is even attested beyond the story world: the *Historia Norwegie*, a Latin history of Norway likely compiled around 1150-1200, cites Gunnhildr's *pestiferam rabiem* ('pernicious rage') as the reason why the Northumbrians ultimately rejected Eiríkr and Gunnhildr's rule.[84] Regardless of its veracity, the description indicates that rulers that are too quick-tempered may fail to maintain dominion.

Gunnhildr's anger is expressly detailed in *Flóamanna saga*, when Gunnhildr and her son, King Haraldr gráfeldr, winter at the farmstead of a man named Óláfr, with whom Þorgils is also staying. When Þorgils learns that the estates that he hopes to inherit are presently under Gunnhildr's control, he broaches the matter with the queen. She initially responds *vel* ('well'), but, when Þorgils declines her proposal that he join the king's retinue, *[d]rottning varð reið ok spyrndi fæti sínum til hans ok hratt honum frá hásætinu ok varnaði honum þá*

[80] *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja*, 37-8. *Hallfreðar saga*, 140.
[81] Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody?*, 27.
[82] Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody?*, 27. *Egils saga*, 94.
[83] Sayers, 'Power, Magic and Sex: Queen Gunnhildr and the Icelanders', *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies / Études scandinaves au Canada* 8 (1995), 57-77. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women*, 83.
[84] *Historia Norwegie*, trans. Peter Fisher and ed. Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen (Copenhagen: Museum of Tusculanum Press, 2003), 82-3.

fjárins ok sagði hann eigi kunna at þiggja sóma sinn ('the queen became angry and kicked her feet at him and shoved him out of the high seat and denied him his property and said that he did not know how to accept an honour').[85] Gunnhildr's penchant for seducing Icelanders exhibited elsewhere in the corpus may indicate that the queen, by inviting Þorgils to join the king's men, had hoped to seduce him; Þorgils, therefore, not only rejects the king, but also Gunnhildr. As King Haraldr hárfagri's reactions in *Egils saga* demonstrate, rebuffing a sovereign's overtures can be anger-inducing. Yet, where Haraldr hárfagri grows angry but does not take immediate action, Gunnhildr's anger fuels a comical, violent display and her withholding of Þorgils' inheritance. By pushing Þorgils out of the high seat in her rage, the queen enacts a symbolic toppling of masculine power, and her anger, therefore, establishes her agency. Thus, her anger facilitates a performance of 'female masculinity'. Although the audience may be acquainted with her fierce temper – given that it is alluded to in other sagas – and consider it predictable, Gunnhildr's emotionality in this scene is unpredictable: her mood changes suddenly. Yet, the king continues to treat Þorgils well, secretly compensates him, and invites him to visit when his mother is not present. Thus, he undermines the power that Gunnhildr's anger afforded her and implies that her rage was unwarranted. Yet, Gunnhildr's anger is successful insomuch as Haraldr does not overrule her denial explicitly and instead opts to deal with Þorgils behind her back. Earl Hákon Sigurðarson later returns the lands that Gunnhildr had denied Þorgils.[86] This is Gunnhildr's sole feature in the saga, indicating that her habitual rage is her most noteworthy characteristic. Her anger propels the narrative: at the start of the following chapter, the saga-author writes *[u]m várit segir Þorgils Óláfi, at hann vill fara kaupferð um sumarit ok leita svá undan ójafnaði Gunnhildar* ('in the spring, Þorgils said to Óláfr that he wished to go trading during the summer and thus get

[85] *Flóamanna saga*, 254.
[86] *Flóamanna saga*, 264.

away from Gunnhildr's injustice').[87] The audience, however, is left to speculate what constitutes Gunnhildr's undisclosed tyranny.

Just as we may detect Gunnhildr's anger in the curse that she places on Egill, we may detect her anger in the curse that she places on Hrútr in *Brennu-Njáls saga*. Gunnhildr supports Hrútr's request to join King Haraldr gráfeldr's retinue, and, as expected, she seduces him and they begin a sexual relationship.[88] When Hrútr confirms that, having been in Norway for over a year, he would like to return to Iceland and Gunnhildr asks him if he has a fiancée waiting for him, Hrútr denies it.[89] As he is about to leave, Gunnhildr gives him a gold arm-ring, places her arms around his neck, kisses him, and states

> *[e]f ek á svá mikit vald á þér sem ek ætla, þá legg ek þat á við þik, at þú megir engri munúð fram koma við konu þá, er þú ætlar þér á Íslandi, en fremja skalt þú mega vilja þinn við aðrar konur* ('if I have as much power over you as I think, then I lay down this spell on you: that you will not have sexual pleasure with the woman who you intend to marry in Iceland, but you will be able to have your will with other women').[90]

Hrútr laughs in response and walks away. Later, Unnr, Hrútr's wife, reveals the details of the curse when she explains that her husband is unable to consummate the marriage because his penis grows too large.[91]

Although we would expect the circumstances to be anger-inducing, Gunnhildr is not described as raging as she does in *Flóamanna saga*, for instance. Both Ármann Jakobsson

[87] *Flóamanna saga*, 254.
[88] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 14-15.
[89] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 20.
[90] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 21.
[91] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 24.

and Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, however, argue that the queen is angry.[92] Whilst laughter can connote a variety of emotional experiences in the sagas (see **3.4**), Ursula Dronke argues that Hrútr 'buoyantly […] brushes aside her melancholy and her prediction with a laugh', perhaps implying that he doubts its severity and indicating that it does not communicate anger that would, ordinarily, be met with an adequately serious response.[93] Aligning with this, Dronke suggests, while recognising that Gunnhildr's curse is a 'cruel spell of sexual frustration', that it is 'an unkind joke'.[94] If, however, Hrútr's laughter connotes his anger, then it is likely that Gunnhildr's curse was severe, and, therefore, a manifestation of her own anger. The curse actually affects Unnr more than Hrútr in that Gunnhildr explicitly states that Hrútr can still enjoy sexual pleasure with other women; Unnr, then, is the true recipient of the queen's jealous anger. If she is angry, then we may further conclude that, as Miller comments, the queen 'seems actually to have acquired genuine feelings' for Hrútr.[95] The version of the story recounted in *Laxdœla saga* appears to corroborate this. When Hrútr leaves to depart, Gunnhildr, rather than cursing him, gives him a gold arm-ring and *brá síðan skikkjunni at hǫfði sér ok gekk snúðigt heim til bœjar* ('then drew her mantle over her head and went hurrying home to the town'); presumably, she hides her face and hastily turns away to conceal her upset.[96]

As noted in **5.5.3**, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, employing speech-act theory, argues that 'women can use words to claim female subjectivity and autonomy', and that by uttering a curse, a kind of speech-act, they exert power in a way that 'contrasts with women's lack of formal power in the male-dominated public sphere.'[97] Gunnhildr's curse also exerts power by

[92] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Our Norwegian Friend', 151. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women*, 50.
[93] Ursula Dronke, *The Role of Sexual Themes in Njáls saga* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1981), 8.
[94] Dronke, 8, 10.
[95] Miller, *Why is Your Axe Bloody?*, 28.
[96] *Laxdœla saga*, 44.
[97] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women*, 10, 51.

destabilising Hrútr's masculine status. Her emasculation of Hrútr is all the more potent given that it is an 'ironic variation' of the norm.[98] For instance, while Grettir is emasculated by having a small penis, Hrútr is emasculated because his exceptionally large phallus is 'an impediment to masculine performance'.[99] Moreover, his inability to consummate the marriage would emasculate him regardless of the nature of his penile predicament. The emasculation, a product of Gunnhildr's anger, subverts Hrútr's hegemonic masculine position and amounts to a performance of 'female masculinity'. Her method of delivery underscores this effect: Dronke notes that, by placing her arms around Hrútr's neck and kissing him, Gunnhildr enacts 'a gesture characteristic in moments when women wish to impose their will through their sexual power over them.'[100] The queen therefore subverts a moment of intimacy that may typically be associated with emotional vulnerability and trustworthiness to pronounce her vengeance. Ultimately resulting in Unnr's divorce from Hrútr and a feud, her vengeance has a far-reaching effect on the narrative.

8.5 Earl Hákon Sigurðarson

In *Brennu-Njáls saga*, both Earl Hákon Sigurðarson and King Óláfr Tryggvason rage. Hákon exhibits anger when Hrappr desecrates his temple and evades his capture, and Óláfr grows angry when the Icelanders resist the Christianisation mission that he has appointed Þangbrandr to spearhead.

Whilst Earl Hákon behaves benevolently towards Gunnarr earlier in the saga and enjoys an initially favourable relationship with Þráinn Sigfússon, the earl's anger is later cited a total of eight times in just one chapter. Not one of these attestations describes him as

[98] Phelpstead, 431.
[99] *Grettis saga*, 239. Evans, *Men*, 123.
[100] Dronke, 8. See, e.g., *Gísla saga*, 31.

reddening. The audience must instead use its knowledge of the appearance of other angry sovereigns to imagine the earl's appearance here.

The episode begins with Hrappr incurring the wrath of Guðbrandr, a close friend of the earl, when he reveals that he has been sleeping with Guðbrandr's daughter and has killed his overseer. Guðbrandr sends men to kill Hrappr without success and Earl Hákon declares him an outlaw. Hrappr subsequently pillages and sets fire to a temple that is co-owned by Guðbrandr and Hákon, kills three men, and leaves Þrándr mortally wounded, and the earl sends men to pursue him. Grímr and Helgi Njálsson refuse to conceal him, but Þráinn agrees to hide him on his ship.

Hrappr's desecration of the temple is both sacrilegious and an insult to Hákon's hegemonic rule. The earl rages, therefore, not only to seek redress on the gods' behalf, but to preserve his supremacy. His anger is first noted by Grímr when he interrogates the Njálssons. Grímr considers revealing Hrappr's whereabouts and says to his brother *[v]era kann, at jarl snúi á okkr hefndinni, því at hann er nú svá reiðr, at niðr mun nǫkkur verða at koma* ('it may be that the earl will turn his vengeance on us, because he is now so angry that it will have to come down somewhere').[101] Thus, Grímr makes plain that it is the earl's anger that fuels his pursuit of vengeance. Moreover, he alludes to the 'hydraulic', humoral model of emotions. This episode resembles the moment in *Kjalnesinga saga* where Þorgrímr rages when Bui kills his son Þorsteinn and burns down his temple. When he cannot find Bui, he tells his men *eigi verði nökkur niðr at koma mín reiði; skal fara í Brautarholt at drepa Andríð* ('there is nothing that will bring down my anger; I shall go to Brautarholt to kill Andríðr').[102] Andríðr, Bui's father, has nothing to do with the feud between Bui and Þorgrímr, but, despite Helgi and Vakr declaring it an *illt verk* (evil deed), Andríðr is killed.[103] The implication is that

[101] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 217.
[102] *Kjalnesinga saga*, 15.
[103] *Kjalnesinga saga*, 15-16.

Þorgrímr needs an outlet for his anger, just as Grímr implies that Hákon needs an outlet for his anger. Supporting this, Robert Cook and John Porter render *eigi verði nökkur niðr at koma mín reiði* as 'all this affects me so much that my anger must find an outlet'.[104] In *Brennu-Njáls saga*, however, Helgi dismisses his brother's suggestion, and thus indicates that the earl's performance of anger has been unsuccessful: while Grímr apparently fears the consequences of the earl's anger, Helgi does not, and the brothers do not disclose Hrappr's location.

The second time that Earl Hákon's anger is cited follows his fruitless search of Þráinn's ship after he has denied that Hrappr is hiding on board. The saga-author writes *hann gekk frá ǫðrum mǫnnum ok var reiðr mjǫk, svá at engi þorði við hann at mæla* ('he went away from the other men and was extremely angry, so that no one dared to speak to him').[105] As we have seen, his unapproachable demeanour is typical of angry sovereigns. That he experiences his anger in private may indicate that his feelings are genuine, rather than merely a performance to maintain his dominion. It is, however, following this undisclosed interlude that Earl Hákon realises that Hrappr is probably hiding in the water casks; it is implied, therefore, that the earl's timeout facilitates his clarity of thought. Prior to the episode, Hákon, having ordered his men not to follow him, *fell á kné bæði ok helt fyrir augu sér* ('fell on both knees and covered his eyes'), and Hrappr's initial location is revealed to him, before he flees to Þráinn.[106] It is not clear what the earl is doing; Lönnroth, considering the 'fatal forces' at play in the saga, suggests that Hákon has 'second sight'.[107] Lönnroth argues that Hákon is later impeded by a '"mental fog" which makes his second sight impotent when he is near Hrappr or Þráinn', and suggests, following Einar Ól. Sveinsson, that 'his impotence is caused

[104] Robert Cook and John Porter, trans., *Kjalnesinga saga* ('The Saga of the People of Kjalarnes'), in *CSI*, vol. 3, 305-328 (312).
[105] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 218.
[106] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 215.
[107] Lönnroth, 135.

by the *ógæfa*', 'lucklessness', which is a 'destructive power' embodied in Hrappr, an *ógæfumaðr* ('a luckless man').[108] We recall, however, the recurrent trope that anger can impede a character's capacity to think clearly and carefully, as Skúfr in *Fóstbræðra saga* indicates (see **4.7**).[109] It may, therefore, be Hákon's anger, rather than the *ógæfa*, that causes his 'mental fog'. The earl may be angry when he leaves initially but, in his solitude, finds momentary calm. If his anger abates when he is alone, then this may indicate that he exaggerates or feigns the intensity of his feelings when he is in public, especially when interrogating those he suspects of harbouring Hrappr. This suggests that anger, even when performed as a means to an end, can cloud rational thought.

The further indications of Earl Hákon's anger corroborate this. Þráinn notes the earl's anger for a third and fourth time when he sees him return to his ship to search for Hrappr again. He remarks *[s]vá reiðr sem jarl var næstum, þá mun hann nú vera hálfu reiðari, ok liggr nú við líf allra manna, þeira er á skipinu eru* ('the earl was so angry last time, that he will now be twice as angry, and now it weighs upon the lives of all the men who are on the ship') and the saga-author notes *[þ]eir hétu allir at leyna, því at hverr var um sik mjǫk hræddir* ('they all promised to hide, because everyone was greatly afraid').[110] This reveals, firstly, that the earl was angry when he searched the ship before, secondly, that his anger is escalating, thirdly, that anger can fuel fatal consequences, and, fourthly, that his anger is fear-inducing. The men relocate Hrappr from inside the water casks to beneath some cargo sacks. The saga-author writes that, when Þráinn greeted Hákon, *jarl tók kveðju hans ok ekki skjótt, ok sá þeir, at hann var reiðr mjǫk* ('the earl did not return his greeting quickly, and they saw that he was very angry').[111] This fifth attestation of his anger, insomuch as it is associated

[108] Lönnroth, 135. See Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Njáls saga: A Literary Masterpiece*, ed. and trans. Paul Schach (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), 194.
[109] *Fóstbræðra saga*, 228.
[110] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 218.
[111] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 218.

with his slow response, recalls that of Earl Eiríkr in *Egils saga* at the Gulaþing.[112] It is implied that his slow response, presumably preceded by his silence, indicates to the men present that he is angry. The earl again searches the ship and fails to locate Hrappr. In this instance, the earl's anger is so fear-inducing, it seems, that it achieves the opposite of its desired effect: rather than causing the men to disclose Hrappr's hiding place, it causes them to desist from cooperating further for fear of retribution for the part that they have already played.

Before departing, Earl Hákon comments *ek þykkjumsk allt sjá í gegnum, þá er ek kem á land, en þá ekki, er ek kem hér* ('I seem to see through everything, when I come ashore, but not when I come here').[113] Employing the UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING metaphor type (see **4.7**), Hákon alludes to his power of second sight and its failure. Given that its failure again coincides with his rage, his anger may cause his 'mental fog'. Despite this, Hákon's anger is attested for a sixth and seventh time once he has returned to shore. Again, *[h]ann var svá reiðr, at ekki mátti við hann mæla* ('he was so angry that no one could talk to him').[114] His son, Sveinn, remarks *[u]ndarligt er þat at láta óverða menn gjalda reiði sinnar* ('it is strange to let innocent men suffer your anger').[115] This is the first comment remarking on the inappropriateness of the earl's raging; until this point, it is implied that the earl's anger is an acceptable response to the desecration of his temple. It is ironic that the earl's son judges the earl's behaviour, momentarily casting Sveinn as the wiser of the two characters. Sveinn's remark recalls Grímr's fear that the earl's anger will find an outlet and will disregard the culpability of its recipients. Yet, it is further ironic that, as the audience knows, the earl's suspicion, as yet unproven, is actually correct and Sveinn is incorrect to regard the men as innocent. Immediately following Sveinn's intervention, *[j]arl gekk þá enn einn frá ǫðrum*

[112] *Egils saga*, 156.
[113] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 219.
[114] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 219.
[115] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 219.

mǫnnum ('the earl then went away alone again from the other men').[116] Following this moment of private solitude in which we presume that he is enacting his ritual to achieve second sight as before, he realises where Hrappr must have been hidden. It is as though Sveinn has brought Hákon's anger to his attention and that he has realised that it must be momentarily quelled to clarify his thoughts and facilitate his divination. It is not being ashore, but rather being in a private environment where his anger need not be demonstrable, that allows the earl to 'see'.

The earl heads out to the ship again and, upon his arrival, *hann var þá reiðr mjǫk* ('he was then extremely angry').[117] This is the final time that Earl Hákon's anger is attested. Again, Þráinn has Hrappr hidden elsewhere, the earl fails to locate him, and it is not until he returns to shore that he realises where Hrappr was hidden. Again, an association is established between the earl's 'mental fog' and his anger; when he performs his anger before the suspects, he is unable to think clearly. The earl's third realisation comes too late, and Þráinn and Hrappr sail to Iceland. Grímr's initial concern that the earl's wrath would find an alternative outlet, however, materialises. Ignoring his son's counsel, Hákon captures the Njálssons in an attack that costs him two of his bravest men, but, as we have seen, he heeds Sveinn's urgings to resist killing them straightaway because, according to law, men should not be killed at night.[118] His anger is not described but may be detected in his aggressive actions. When the brothers escape and are taken in by Kári, however, Hákon's anger seems to abate. Another of his sons, Eiríkr, urges him to offer Helgi and Grímr a settlement, and the earl agrees. This brings the episode to a close. It is implied that Hákon, by being kept in check by a son again, is not fit to rule alone. That he acquiesces to a reconciliation indicates that he recognises that his capturing of the Njálssons was inappropriate, that is, that his

[116] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 219.
[117] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 219.
[118] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 220-1.

anger's outlet was inappropriate. Again, this realisation comes following a period of timeout; overnight, the intensity of his anger subsides, and the 'mental fog' dissipates.

This extended angry episode indicates that Hákon adheres to the same emotive script as other raging royals in the sagas. When he first discovers the desecrated temple, Hákon comments *goðin hefna eigi alls þegar* ('the gods do not avenge themselves immediately').[119] That he demonstrates an awareness that the gods enact delayed retaliation and yet proceeds to rage unrelentingly further corroborates that he understands that he may adhere to a different emotive script. The earl's son criticises his father for directing his anger at innocent men but does not comment on the display of emotionality itself (indeed, Sveinn's own anger is thrice cited in *Grettis saga* when Grettir slays Hjarrandi and Gunnarr).[120] In all but one instance (and even that instance is equivocal), Hákon's anger figures when other characters are present to witness it, in particular those who he suspects are guilty of harbouring the fugitive. Given that Hrappr escapes, the earl's anger fails. His anger coincides with, and likely causes, his 'mental fog', and, whilst his rage instils fear in its recipients, it does not persuade them to cooperate. Hákon's manhunt may fail, therefore, because he is too angry, and his anger is too predictable. This accords with the sense that prevails throughout *Njála* in particular, that, for male characters, anger can hamper prosperity, regardless, it seems, of their social position. As Ármann Jakobsson argues, whilst Earl Hákon is 'a just ruler who is let down by an unworthy subject […], he performs so much injustice against the sons of Njáll that they refuse to have any more dealings with him and accept pardon only from his sons.'[121] It is his rage that fuels such injustice: he is equally let down by his inability to wield anger effectively.

Brennu-Njáls saga is not the only text where Hákon exhibits his anger. In *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds*, when Þorleifr declines to trade with the earl, he hangs Þorleifr's

[119] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 215.
[120] *Grettis saga*, 82-4.
[121] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Our Norwegian Friend', 152.

companions and burns their ship (see **6.2**).[122] Þorleifr, disguised as an elderly beggar, abuses the earl in verse, makes him itch all over, and, it is implied, causes weapons to move of their own accord and slay several of the men present. Hákon, in revenge for *þessar smánar* ('this disgrace'), commissions a magical wooden figure to be constructed that pursues and kills Þorleifr.[123] Although Hákon's anger is not stated, we may detect it in his initially disproportionate reaction, his shame, and his final act of vengeance. The earl's initial reaction causes Þorleifr to take revenge; if the reaction was fuelled, as we suspect, by his anger, then the vignette offers a further example of Hákon's rage failing to act as a fear-inducing deterrent and instead bringing about unfavourable results.

Elsewhere, however, Earl Hákon's anger is useful and effective. It is again attested in *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*. When Ǫgmundr's ship collides with and sinks a ship that is under the earl's command and belongs to Hallvarðr, the earl's friend, *[j]arl varð við þessi tíðendi mjǫk reiðr* ('the earl became extremely angry at this news') and permits Hallvarðr to avenge himself.[124] Vígfúss, however, persuades Hákon to allow him to offer the perpetrator – who, it transpires, is Vígfúss' relative – a settlement. Vígfúss cites the earl's anger when warning Ǫgmundr to tread carefully, remarking *þú átt við þann um, at þér er ekki berandi hans reiði ok neita hans dómi* ('you are dealing with someone whose anger you cannot bear and his judgement you cannot deny').[125] In this instance, the fear-inducing effects of the king's anger constitute adequate leverage to convince Ǫgmundr to reach a settlement with the earl (although Ǫgmundr later refuses to settle on account of Hallvarðr's arrogance).

Finally, in *Finnboga saga ramma*, when Finnbogi tells Hákon that he has killed Álfr, the earl's relative, *[j]arl setti rauðan sem blóð* ('the earl turned red as blood').[126] The reaction

[122] *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds*, 217.
[123] *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds*, 225-7.
[124] *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*, 103.
[125] *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*, 105.
[126] *Finnboga saga ramma*, 282.

betrays his anger that is discernible to both the other characters present, including Finnbogi, and the audience. Yet, he continues to converse with Finnbogi, indicating an attempt at emotional self-restraint; evidently, he is not so angry that he falls silent, or becomes untalkative and unapproachable, like other angry royals. Hákon then forces him to fight a *blámaðr* ('black man').[127] The scene echoes the moment in *Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls* where the earl has Gunnarr wrestle a *blámaðr*.[128] Another similar scene is described in *Kjalnesinga saga*: King Haraldr hárfagri forces Bui to fight a *blámaðr* and Bui cooperates on the condition that, if he beats the *blámaðr*, the king will relinquish his anger towards him.[129] Finnbogi kills the *blámaðr* and the earl sends him away, even though he *var inn reiðasti* ('was extremely angry').[130] It is only after Finnbogi kills a talking bear in a swimming contest, and after the earl is persuaded by his nieces and Álfr's daughter to forgive Finnbogi, that Hákon's anger is quelled and he officially pardons him by commanding him to join his retinue.[131] Such an unpredictable shift in emotional comportment is striking. The saga-author even mentions that people noted how favourably the earl treated Finnbogi.[132] As in other sagas, Hákon exhibits anger without opprobrium, corroborating that royal figures can adhere to a sovereign-specific emotive script. Moreover, the scene, like those in *Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls* and *Kjalnesinga saga*, reinforces the value placed on potent masculinity, insomuch as the offender's masculine feats have the power to mollify the sovereign, and even counteract his wrath-incurring offences. As in *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*, Hákon's anger is effectively deployed in this instance. Had the earl failed to exhibit his wrath, then the severity of Finnbogi's actions would not have been made clear and his dominion might have been

[127] *Finnboga saga ramma*, 283.
[128] *Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls*, 366-7.
[129] *Kjalnesinga saga*, 35-6.
[130] *Finnboga saga ramma*, 284.
[131] *Finnboga saga ramma*, 284-5.
[132] *Finnboga saga ramma*, 291.

destabilised, and, had the earl grown too angry, then Finnbogi might not have survived long enough to serve him. Hákon thus strikes the correct balance and gains a worthy follower.

8.6 King Óláfr Tryggvason

Just as Hákon's rage is sparked by the sacrilegious desecration of his temple and may, in part, be a means of ensuring the future inviolability of the religion, King Óláfr Tryggvason likewise grows angry when he learns that Icelanders are resisting Christianisation and thus his patronage. Óláfr features only briefly in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, and this is the only instance in which his anger is attested in this saga. When Þangbrandr tells him of the Icelanders' hostility towards the new faith, *[þ]á varð Óláfr konungr svá reiðr, at hann lét taka alla íslenska menn ok setja í myrkvastofu ok ætlaði þá til dráps* ('then King Óláfr became so angry that he commanded all men from Iceland to be seized and placed in a dungeon, and he intended to kill them').[133] When Gizurr hvíti ('the white') and Hjalti pledge for these men and offer to go to Iceland and preach the faith, *konungr tók þessu vel* ('the king took this well') and releases the men.[134]

This passage reveals Óláfr's commitment to his mission, the severe consequences of incurring his wrath, and that his anger can be quelled just as quickly as it can flare, indicating that his emotionality is unpredictable. Presumably, the Icelanders that Óláfr has imprisoned are those in and around his court in Norway. This is, therefore, another instance of royal anger finding a misplaced outlet, given that the preceding narrative describes how only some Icelanders in Iceland, rather than all Icelanders or those abroad in Norway, were hostile towards Þangbrandr; Sveinn's remark to his father earlier in the saga – *[u]ndarligt er þat at*

[133] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 269.
[134] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 269.

láta óverða menn gjalda reiði sinnar ('it is strange to let innocent men suffer your anger') – may well be applied here.[135] This is confirmed in the version of events relayed in *Íslendingabók*: Ari Þorgilsson writes that, when Þangbrandr tells Óláfr of the Icelander's hostility towards him, *hann varð við þat reiðr mjǫk ok ætlaði at láta meiða eða drepa ossa landa fyrir, þá es* [sic] *þar váru austr* ('he became so greatly angry at that and intended to have those from our lands who were there in the east maimed or killed').[136] Grønlie notes that, in this episode, 'Óláfr's angry and violent reaction […] is averted only by the diplomacy of Gizurr and Hjalti'.[137] The king's anger is also twice cited in the version of the same events told in *Laxdœla saga*.[138] Another version is told in *Kristni saga*. In this saga, after Óláfr's angry reaction is described, Þangbrandr, in response to a remark that Hjalti ought not to speak up on Svertingr's behalf on account of his father's unfair prosecution of Hjalti, condemns *þeir er til móðs eru* ('those who are given to anger') and praises Hjalti and Gizurr *því at þeir launa opt góðu illa hluti* ('because they often reward evil with good').[139] Grønlie, identifying the latter phrase as an echo of Romans 12:17, 21 and 1 Peter 3:9, argues that this is an example of how 'Christian virtue, in this saga, joins seamlessly with social morality.'[140] Moreover, Þangbrandr's condemnation not only underscores that anger is unacceptable for men in pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal, but also serves to counterpoint the condemned *móðr* (which Grønlie renders 'passionate anger') of men with King Óláfr's own rage, which is not met with opprobrium.[141] This recalls the episode in *Gunnlaugs saga* where Earl Eiríkr Hákonarson rages having just condemned the anger of one of his courtiers.[142] This again indicates that sovereigns can adhere to a unique emotive script. Óláfr's anger, a

[135] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 219.
[136] *Íslendingabók*, 15.
[137] Grønlie, trans., *Íslendingabók, Kristni saga*, xxvi.
[138] *Laxdœla saga*, 125-6.
[139] *Kristni saga*, 28, 29.
[140] Grønlie, trans., *Íslendingabók, Kristni saga*, 67, note 72, and xl.
[141] Grønlie, trans., *Íslendingabók, Kristni saga*, 47.
[142] *Gunnlaugs saga*, 69-70.

manifestation of his duty to his faith, also echoes God's righteous anger; as Hyams remarks, '[w]ho better to exercise a distant reflection of *ira Dei* against sin than kings, long considered to be God's earthly representatives in the business of correction?'[143] Furthermore, in each version of events, Óláfr's anger, by prompting Gizurr and Hjalti to intervene and offer their services, is effective. In the chapter that follows the description of Óláfr's anger in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Gizurr and Hjalti and other Icelandic Christians approach Þorgeirr and pay him to enshrine Christian worship in law and prohibit heathen practices.[144] The Christianisation of Iceland, therefore, may even be attributed, in part, to Óláfr's raging. This episode constitutes the king's final feature in the saga, cementing the image in our minds that Óláfr is a ruler who can rage righteously and ruthlessly.

There are several more attestations of King Óláfr growing angry on behalf of the Christian faith in the corpus. In *Þorvalds þáttr tasalda*, he reveals to Þorvaldr that Bárðr's refusal to accept Christianity is the cause of his silence, a recurrent indicium of anger.[145] Þorvaldr, at the king's command, then convinces Bárðr to convert; the king's anger, therefore, brings about another conversion. Elsewhere, in *Hallfreðar saga*, Óláfr appears to Hallfreðr in a dream and is *reiðuligr* ('angry-looking') because Hallfreðr has allowed his faith to lapse.[146] When Óláfr is visited by Hallfreðr, *tók hann vel við Hallfreði ok ávítaði hann þó mjǫk bað prest skrifta honum* ('he received Hallfreðr well, though he greatly rebuked him and ordered a priest to shrive him').[147] That the king can behave hospitably and angrily simultaneously indicates the unpredictability of his emotional comportment, and affirms that his anger is felt towards Hallfreðr's sins rather than Hallfreðr himself and is, therefore, righteous. Yet, he also behaves angrily towards Hallfreðr. Earlier in the saga, Hallfreðr kills

[143] Hyams, 100.
[144] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 271-2.
[145] *Þorvalds þáttr tasalda*, 120.
[146] *Hallfreðar saga*, 178.
[147] *Hallfreðar saga*, 178.

Óttarr, a man who the king holds in high regard. Hallfreðr convinces Óláfr not to kill him, *en þó var konungr færi við hann en áðr* ('and yet the king was colder with him than before').[148] Hallfreðr later approaches the king in tears and says *[n]ær fellr mér reiði þín, ok henni vildi ek af mér koma* ('your anger weighs upon me and I wish to be freed from it'), and the king's wrath abates when Hallfreðr composes an impressive verse and agrees to carry out a mission.[149] The mission, it transpires, is to kill or blind Þorleifr for refusing to accept Christianity; Hallfreðr takes one of his eyes and the king lays the matter to rest.[150] Although his anger was initially induced by a stimulus that was not associated with Christianity, Óláfr manipulates his anger and wields it as leverage to promote his dissemination of the faith insomuch as Þorleifr's maiming will likely deter further resistance and ensure greater uptake. Later, when Hallfreðr plans to attack Earl Eiríkr Hákonarson in revenge for killing Óláfr, the king appears to Hallfreðr in a dream to dissuade him from doing so.[151] Although Hallfreðr's anger is not described, he was afflicted with *miklum harmi* ('great sorrow') upon learning of the king's death, and we may 'ferret out' anger from his intended actions.[152] If so, then the fact that Óláfr frequently rages but advises Hallfreðr against doing so once again alludes to the presence of two distinct emotive scripts, one by which sovereign figures, and another by which other men, adhere. Finally, when Hallfreðr's coffin washes ashore and an abbot's servants steal the goods contained within and dump his body, Óláfr, again *reiðuligr* ('angry-looking'), appears to the abbot in a dream and tells him to resolve the situation.[153] This is the second time Óláfr is described as *reiðuligr*, an adjective that emphasises the appearance of his anger. To my knowledge, King Óláfr Tryggvason is the only sovereign in the corpus that is described thus. Óláfr's anger prompts the abbot to bury Hallfreðr properly in the church to

[148] *Hallfreðar saga*, 160-1.
[149] *Hallfreðar saga*, 161.
[150] *Hallfreðar saga*, 163-7.
[151] *Hallfreðar saga*, 195.
[152] *Hallfreðar saga*, 192.
[153] *Hallfreðar saga*, 199.

counteract his servants' act of desecration. Once more, Óláfr successfully wields his rage to promote the faith insomuch as it ensures Hallfreðr is given a Christian burial.

A rather different image of King Óláfr is depicted in *Laxdœla saga*, however. The king threatens violence to scare some heathens into submission when they resist Christianity, yet, when Óláfr learns that Kjartan had suggested burning down his quarters with him inside to resist conversion, the king does not grow angry and spares his life.[154] Kjartan remarks *[þ]akka vilju vér yðr, konungr, er þér gefið oss góðan frið, ok þannig máttu oss mest teygja at taka við trúnni, at gefa oss upp stórsakar, en mælir til alls í blíðu* ('we want to thank you, king, for giving us good peace and you tempt us most to take up the faith that way, by forgiving us of our great offences, when you talk calmly about everything').[155] Thus, Kjartan implies that an exhibition of wrath by the king would not have been a successful means of achieving his goal and likely would have resulted in further resistance. Indeed, Kjartan and Bolli later choose to be baptised of their own volition.[156] Ironically, having acted in this calm fashion, the king responds *reiðuliga* ('angrily') towards his own men when they urge him to force Kjartan and Bolli into submission.[157] As we have seen, the king's anger also flares when he learns that Icelanders have been hostile towards Þangbrandr.[158] This episode epitomises the power of a carefully deployed emotional comportment: Óláfr's unpredictability indicates that he is able to differentiate between scenarios and discern whether a hot-headed performance, or one of gentle persuasion, is most appropriate. That the king is fond of Kjartan and aware of his formidability may also inform his decision to restrain himself.

[154] *Laxdœla saga*, 119-20.
[155] *Laxdœla saga*, 121.
[156] *Laxdœla saga*, 123.
[157] *Laxdœla saga*, 121.
[158] *Laxdœla saga*, 125-6.

8.7 King Óláfr helgi Haraldsson

Lastly, King Óláfr helgi Haraldsson frequently grows angry. Unlike King Óláfr Tryggvason, his wrath is typically induced for reasons other than resistance to the faith. Each instance again corroborates that sovereigns adhere to a unique emotive script. In the incomplete *Þórarins þáttr*, the king is *ákafliga reiðr* ('extremely angry') when he learns that Þórarinn has slain Þorgeirr and has salted his head for presentation at the Alþingi the following summer.[159] A similar version of events is described in *Fóstbræðra saga*, although the king's anger is not attested. In his anger, he sends Sigurðr to Iceland to task Eyjólfr with exacting vengeance. The *þáttr* then breaks off. Again, a sovereign's anger fuels retaliation. Elsewhere, in the short *Óttars þáttr svarta*, the king's anger is implied when he imprisons Óttarr for composing inappropriate verses about his wife, which, according to Jochens, contained 'suggestions of intimacy' and likely constituted a declaration of love.[160] When he again recites them before the king and queen, *[k]onungrinn roðnaði við, er hann kvað* ('the king reddened as he spoke'), again connoting his anger.[161] Óttarr, however, also recites verses in praise of the king which mollifies Óláfr, and he spares him.[162] Similarly, in *Þórarins þáttr Nefjólfssonar*, Óláfr grows angry when he discovers that Þórarinn wears an arm-ring that King Knútr of England and Denmark (who later supplanted Óláfr helgi and ruled Norway 1028-1035) had given him and believes that it is evidence of a conspiracy against him.[163]

Finally, in *Egils þáttr Síðu-Hallssonar*, when Egill frees the people that Óláfr has imprisoned while pillaging in England in retaliation for King Knútr's deceit, Óláfr *varð við þetta reiðr ok segir hann skulu hér fyrir hafa mikit víti ok sína reiði* ('became angry at this,

[159] *Þórarins þáttr*, 145-6.
[160] Jochens, 'From Libel to Lament: Male Manifestations of Love in Old Norse', in *From Sagas to Society*, 247-264 (255-7).
[161] *Óttars þáttr svarta*, 6.
[162] *Óttars þáttr svarta*, 7.
[163] *Þórarins þáttr Nefjólfssonar*, 334.

and said that he shall endure severe penalty and his anger'); that Egill will endure the king's anger (as well as punishment) indicates the power of his rage.[164] When Egill falls ill and requests to see the king, Óláfr refuses because he is *svá reiðr* ('so angry'), and when asked for a second time, he responds *reiðuliga* ('angrily').[165] Óláfr is eventually persuaded to visit Egill and heals him, and the king says that he will only pardon him if he can convert Tofi's heathen father, Earl Valgautr, to Christianity. Again, therefore, despite his anger having been induced by Egill's disloyal actions, Óláfr channels it as leverage to achieve further dissemination of the Christian faith.

8.8 Conclusion

Whilst this chapter has presented analyses of the raging comportment of six sovereigns, there are yet more episodes that detail royals growing angry in the corpus.[166] They have a greater propensity to rage than other saga-characters, to the extent that their anger is characteristic. This demonstrates that they adhere to a unique emotive script that permits angry expression, revealing that they need not adhere to the dictates of the hegemonic masculine ideal; this is emphasised when both royals and other saga-men experience anger in the same episode, prompting comparison of their respective qualities and reception. As Stephen White argues, '[p]ublic displays of anger are almost always made by kings or other males whose noble status entitles them to express anger'; though unfit for men, anger is fit for a king.[167]

[164] *Egils þáttr Síðu-Hallssonar*, 378.
[165] *Egils þáttr Síðu-Hallssonar*, 380.
[166] To give just one example, see King Haraldr harðráði ('hard counsel') Sigurðarson (1046-1066), whose anger is attested in *Halldórs þáttr Snorrasonar II*, *Sneglu-Halla þáttr*, *Odds þáttr Ófeigssonar*, and, as we have seen, *Hreiðars þáttr*.
[167] Stephen D. White, 'The Politics of Anger', in *Anger's Past*, 127-152 (139).

Anger is, therefore, a salient feature of a sovereign's 'rulership practice', wielded to preserve their hegemony.[168] Frequently, the mere prospect of incurring a ruler's wrath is enough to induce fear and dissuade transgression against their authority; thus, many sovereigns enact an emotional comportment akin to Nixon's 'madman theory'. Similarly, when a sovereign's rage does flare and threatens to fuel catastrophic consequences, it can act as a deterrent, and, if they enact violent or fatal action, it dissuades further disobedience. Given its success, these characters may sometimes feign, or at least exaggerate, their true feelings as a means to an end, such as when King Óláfr Tryggvason rages to facilitate his dissemination of Christianity. In several instances, characters who have incurred a sovereign's wrath can often mollify them by performing verses in their praise. Elsewhere, the transgressor must carry out some useful task, or triumph in a test or competition, to quell their rage, compensatory actions that frequently affect the narrative. Thus, a ruler's anger can bring about a range of results from which they may benefit.

As several episodes show, however, excessive rage can be as detrimental to a ruler's authority as excessive clemency. Sometimes, it can cause a 'mental fog' that clouds cognition, and, rather than inducing fear, can provoke vengeance and bring about detrimental results. As King Óláfr Tryggvason remarks in *Grettis saga*, *hlýtr jafnan illt af athugaleysinu* ('bad things always result from heedlessness').[169] For anger to achieve its desired effect, therefore, it must be adeptly and unpredictably deployed at the right moment.

[168] Althoff, 59.
[169] *Grettis saga*, 134.

9 Anger and the Gods

9.1 Introduction

As we have seen at various junctures throughout the thesis, the chronic anger of one god, Þórr, is portrayed on numerous occasions in Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* and the mythological poems of the *Poetic Edda*. In *Gylfaginning*, his furrowed brows communicate his fear-inducing anger when he discovers that Þjálfi has broken his goat's ham-bone, and his glaring eyes betray his anger when he tries to catch Jǫrmungandr.[1] Snorri also notes Þórr's anger when Útgarða-Loki taunts him as Þórr tries, in vain, to drain the drinking horn.[2] In *Þrymskviða*, he is angry when Mjǫllnir is stolen; communicating his feelings, his hair and beard bristle, and, later, his eyes blaze.[3] In *Skáldskaparmál*, Þórr is described as *allreiðr* ('extremely angry') prior to his fight with the giant Hrungnir, during which he experiences the *ásmóði* ('Áss fury'), and, in *Vǫluspá*, his wrath in battle is similarly depicted when he fights Jǫrmungandr at Ragnarǫk.[4] Emphasising that anger is essential to Þórr's identity, his son is even called Móði, from *móðr* ('fury').[5] Insomuch as they are predictable and often expressive, gestural, and performative, his short-fused reactions are primarily farcical, while his characteristic, crazed battle rages are not comic.

A survey of the anger of a pagan god in the mythic tradition may seem out of place in a thesis that concerns anger in the *Íslendingasögur*. Yet, depictions of angry Norse deities in the *Íslendingasögur* are redolent of depictions of raging gods in mythic material. We may, therefore, consider them emotional 'mythological overlays' or 'prolonged echoes'. Lars van

[1] *Gylfaginning*, 37, 45.
[2] *Gylfaginning*, 41.
[3] *Þrymskviða*, 422 (st. 1), 426 (st. 27).
[4] *Skáldskaparmál*, 20-1. *Vǫluspá*, 305 (st. 54).
[5] See *Gylfaginning*, 53.

Wezel stresses that 'mythological overlays', a term coined by Haraldur Bessason to describe 'parallels between the Eddas and the Sagas in the use of literary technique and imagery', are allusions to particular mythic traditions in particular mythological texts, and that the term 'could therefore be labelled as pure intertextuality', whereas Clunies Ross' similar concept of 'prolonged echoes' describes mythic allusions that cannot necessarily be traced to particular texts, but rather recall motifs from beyond the narrative discourse that exist in the cultural aether and are, instead, 'a form of cultural intertextuality'.[6] Clunies Ross also suggests that mythic allusions 'operate on the medieval Icelandic audience, and indeed, operate upon us, at a level that was not fully conscious all of the time'.[7] With these theories in mind, the medieval audience members may have been either able to recall some of the specific instances of gods growing angry in the texts cited above, or draw on their culturally-contingent, subconscious sense of how gods grow angry in the mythic tradition, to supplement laconic depictions of angry deities in the sagas.

The fury of other gods in the Norse pantheons is also detailed in mythic texts. In *Þrymskviða*, we are told that *[r]eið varð þá Freyja / ok fnasaði* ('Freyja then became angry and snorted') at the suggestion that she be married to the giant Þrymr in exchange for Mjǫllnir.[8] Kormákr also uses the verb *fnasa* ('to snort') to articulate anger in verse.[9] Elsewhere, in *Skírnismál*, Freyr exhibits *ofreiði* ('excessive anger') having fallen in love with a giantess, Gerðr, while sitting in Óðinn's high-seat.[10] It is implied that he is angry because

[6] Haraldur Bessason, 'Mythological Overlays', in *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. júlí 1977*, vol. 1, ed. Einar Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977), 273-292 (275). See Lars van Wezel, 'Mythology as a Mnemonic Device in *Vatnsdœla saga*', in *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives*, 289-292 (291). van Wezel, 'Mythic Elements in *Hrafnkels saga*', in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society: The Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference 2-7 July 2000, University of Sydney*, ed. Clunies Ross and Geraldine Barnes (Sydney: Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Sydney, 2000), 541-555 (548, 549). See Clunies Ross*, Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, vol. 2 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1998).
[7] Clunies Ross*, Prolonged Echoes*, vol. 2, 13.
[8] *Þrymskviða*, 424 (st. 13). For a discussion of how Freyja's anger may facilitate a performance of 'female masculinity', see **10**.
[9] *Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v. '*fnasa*'. *Kormáks saga*, 289.
[10] *Skírnismál*, 380 (st. 1, 2).

his love cannot be requited. In the version of the same events relayed in *Gylfaginning*, however, Snorri reveals that Freyr's lovesickness is a punishment for taking Óðinn's place, and we infer that his anger is, instead, directed towards the castigators.[11] Later in *Skírnismál*, Skírnir uses the anger of the gods as a curse and leverage when pressuring Gerðr to acquiesce to a rendezvous with Freyr, stating:

> *[r]eiðr er þér Óðinn,*
> *reiðr er þér Ásabragr,*
> *þik skal Freyr fjask,*
> *in firinilla mær,*
> *en þú fengit hefir*
> *gambanreiði goða*
> ('Óðinn is angry with you,
> Ásabragr [Þórr] is angry with you,
> Freyr shall hate you,
> Most evil girl,
> And you have incurred
> The great wrath of the gods').[12]

Moreover, in *Gylfaginning*, Snorri relates how the gods were angered when Loki had brought about Baldr's death; their violent revenge indicates the strength of their feelings.[13] In *Lokasenna*, the gods' feelings towards Loki are twice made plain: Bragi tells Loki g*remðú eigi goð at þér* ('do not make the gods angry at you') and Freyja tells him *reiðir ro þér æsir* /

[11] *Gylfaginning*, 31.
[12] *Skírnismál*, 386 (st. 33).
[13] *Gylfaginning*, 45-9.

ok ásynjur ('the Æsir and Ásynjur are angry with you').[14] Although we do not see Óðinn rage explicitly in these texts, the theonym is etymologically related to *óðr* ('fury').[15] It is clear, therefore, that anger is pervasive throughout the various textual sources of Old Norse-Icelandic myth.

Just as it may initially seem out of place to discuss the depiction of angry gods in mythological material in a thesis concerned with anger in the *Íslendingasögur*, it may also, at first glance, seem unnatural to examine the anger of the gods in the sagas in a thesis that is primarily investigating the nexus between anger and masculine identities in the sagas. Yet, just as depictions of *ira deorum* in the saga-world echo those in the mythic tradition as I have suggested, mythological narratives, like the sagas, portray a largely familial quasi-society in which, generally speaking, the male and/or masculine gods are active and powerful, while the female and/or feminine deities are typically passive and impotent. Thus, masculinity functions in the world of the gods in a similar way to how it functions in saga-society; the mythological material may even present an exaggeration or simplification of human social gendering (as depicted in the *Íslendingasögur*, for instance). Thus, gods in the mythological material, and therefore also in the sagas, occupy a position that is both hegemonic and masculine. In this way, they are comparable to masculine sovereign figures who likewise assume a hegemonic position, and qualify for inclusion in this study.

Most frequently in the *Íslendingasögur,* the gods rage at characters who renounce heathenism and adopt Christianity. Unsurprisingly, angry deities are not met with societal opprobrium and adhere to a different emotive script to other characters. It is, however, significant that the *Íslendingasögur* were, as we have already seen, almost certainly written down by clerics and thus present a primarily Christian portrayal of Norse deities and their

[14] *Lokasenna*, 410 (st. 12), 414 (st. 31).
[15] Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), 242.

comportment, emotional or otherwise.[16] Likewise, the *Prose Edda* was composed by a Christian, and the *Poetic Edda*, despite containing some poems which may pre-date Iceland's conversion to Christianity, would also have been written down by Christians.[17] The heathendom that is represented through a Christian lens in both the sagas and the mythic material, therefore, is most likely a fusion of that which was retained in the cultural memory, and that which was imagined, and so is by no means an authentic or unadulterated presentation of pagan belief. Reflecting their Christian authorship, whilst the sagas do not explicitly criticise the anger of the pagan gods, its futility is emphasised in instances where these deities rage at characters who convert, given that it is never able to bring about their renunciation of Christianity. In this respect, the depiction of the anger of Norse deities in the sagas recalls the depiction of the anger and persistence of the Devil – often represented by devils – in response to his diminishing power in the Old Norse-Icelandic Lives of Apostles and Saints. In *Jakobs saga postola I*, for instance, Hermogenes remarks *ec kann reiþe diofla, at þeir muno mic þegar drepa, es ec geng heþan* ('I know the anger of the devils, that they shall kill me straight away, if I go from here').[18] Making plain an association between the Norse deities and such devils, in *Martinus saga byskups II*, for instance, demons trying to tempt St Martin away from God take the form of Þórr, Óðinn, and Freyja.[19]

With mythic representations of the gods' anger and the Devil's anger in mind, this chapter will investigate, firstly, portrayals of characters showing an awareness of the possibility of *ira deorum*, secondly, the manifestation of the gods' anger in severe ecological

[16] O'Donoghue, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, 23.
[17] See, e.g., the prologue to the *Prose Edda*, where Snorri makes his faith plain. On the dating of the *Poetic Edda*, see Bernt Ø. Thorvaldsen, 'The Dating of Eddic Poetry', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. Larrington, Quinn, and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 72-91.
[18] *Jakobs saga postola I*, 525.
[19] *Heilagra manna søgur*, vol. 1, 575-607 (596).

or meteorological phenomena, and, thirdly, depictions of angry gods appearing to characters in dreams.

9.2 Awareness of *ira deorum*

Frequently, characters show an awareness of the possibility of *ira deorum*. In *Vatsndæla saga*, Ingimundr, in his anger, exploits the threat of the wrath of the gods for his own gain, and therefore shows that characters would strive to avoid incurring it. These events take place some generations before Iceland's Christianisation. When a boastful Norwegian called Hrafn refuses to sell his sword to Ingimundr, Ingimundr devises a plan to obtain it: he meets Hrafn at his temple, and, when Hrafn, distracted while bragging about his exploits, enters the temple carrying his sword, Ingimundr reveals *[e]igi er þat siðr at bera vápn í hofit, ok muntu verða fyrir goða reiði, ok er slíkt ófært, nema bœtr komi fram* ('it is not the custom to carry a weapon into the temple, and you will be exposed to the anger of the gods, and such is intolerable, unless amends are made').[20] He then suggests that Hrafn should hand over his sword to him, because then, Ingimundr explains, he could say that he owned it and *mýkja svá reiði goðanna* ('thus assuage the wrath of the gods').[21] Revealing that the anger of the gods is something to be feared, Hrafn surrenders his sword. We recall that weapons in the sagas can represent the Lacanian phallus in Old Norse-Icelandic literature; by causing Hrafn to relinquish his sword, therefore, Ingimundr destabilises Hrafn's masculine status. That Ingimundr evokes the anger of the gods as leverage is striking given that, as we have seen, he later counsels calm in the altercation with Hrolleifr (see **4.3**). Such a contrast in comportment emphasises that gods and men do not adhere to same emotive script. Moreover, the sword,

[20] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 48.
[21] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 49.

now called Ætarrtangi, comes into Jǫkull's possession, who recurrently rages throughout the saga – confirming the saga-author's comment that he is *eigi mikill skapdeildarmaðr* ('not a great master of his temper') – and often wields it in his anger-fuelled altercations.[22] The sword also reappears in *Grettis saga* as Jǫkulsnaut (Jǫkull's Gift) and is given to Grettir, another chronically angry character, by his mother. Thus, the sword – gained in anger, using anger as leverage, and then used by two angry characters – may symbolise the emotionality of its owners.

In the pre- and post-Conversion narrative told in *Hallfreðar saga*, however, *ira deorum* is shown to be futile in the face of Christianity. Hallfreðr composes a series of 'conversion verses' before King Óláfr Tryggvason which – along with the king's interruptions in which he oscillates between conveying his condemnation of, or praise for, their content – reveal Hallfreðr's 'movement back and forth between two fundamentally incompatible points of view.'[23] In one verse, Hallfreðr, expressing his anguish at the dilemma posed by the conflicting nature of his religious allegiances, not only recognises that the gods are angry with him because he has renounced paganism, but also contrasts their anger with Christ's wrath:

> Mér skyli Freyr ok Freyja,
> fjǫrð létk af dul Njarðar,
> líknist grǫm við Grímni,
> gramr ok Þórr enn rammi.
> Krist vilk allrar ástar,
> erum leið sonar reiði,

[22] *Vatnsdœla saga*, 37.
[23] Grønlie, *The Saint and The Saga Hero: Hagiography and Early Icelandic Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017), 223.

vald á frægt und foldar

feðr, einn ok goð kveðja.[24]

(‘Let Freyr, along with Freyja and Þórr the mighty, be angry with me. Last year I forsook the delusion of Njǫrðr; may the fiends have mercy on Grímnir [Óðinn]. I will beseech Christ and God for all love: the son’s anger is hateful to me; he alone in glory possesses power under the father of the earth’).[25]

Thus, he indicates that he would rather endure the anger of the Norse deities than incur God’s anger, and thereby intimates that the deities’ anger will not succeed in scaring him into submission. Whilst Hallfreðr hates feeling Christ’s anger, implicitly fearing the power that he wields, he does not comment on his feelings towards, or the manifestation of, the deities’ anger, indicating that it does not provoke the same reaction, likely because it is inconsequential. Such feelings appear to be anchored in his implied belief that the love of Christ can counteract their wrath. The deities’ anger, therefore, is futile.

Such futility is also emphasised satirically in *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*. Ǫgmundr, having swapped clothes with Gunnarr, kills Hallvarðr, and people believe that Gunnarr is responsible. Fearing the wrath of King Óláfr Tryggvason and his followers, Gunnarr flees Norway and heads to Sweden, where he approaches a woman described in the *þáttr* as a servant and wife of Freyr and asks if he may stay with her, despite his reservations about Freyr himself. The saga-author explains that people believed that Freyr was alive because the devil had inhabited an effigy of the god; as in *Martinus saga byskups II* and elsewhere, a

[24] *Hallfreðar saga*, 158.
[25] This is Russell Poole’s translation, given in ‘The Relation Between Verses and Prose in *Hallfreðar saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga*’, in *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*, ed. Poole (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 125-171 (139).

pagan deity and the devil are presented as one and the same.[26] While indicating Freyr's hostility towards Gunnarr, the priestess permits him to stay for three nights. In response to Gunnarr's request that he stay longer, the priestess says *en Frey er lítit um þik, ok uggi ek, at hans reiði liggi á* ('but Freyr cares little for you, and I fear that his anger may fall upon on you'), although she acquiesces.[27] It is not immediately clear why Freyr would be angry. He may be hostile towards Gunnarr because he appears to be Christian, seeing as he holds King Óláfr – a pioneer of the faith – in such high regard.[28] Inadvertently providing another plausible reason for Freyr's anger, Ian Wyatt and Jessie Cook argue that the priestess, by allowing Gunnarr to stay, is implicitly inviting him into her bed, an interpretation supported by the later disclosure of her pregnancy.[29]

Gunnarr is ordered to lead a cart horse pulling Freyr and his priestess through a snowstorm, and, when Gunnarr tires and can go no further, Freyr attacks him in a fury. Although Freyr's emotional comportment is not explicitly detailed in the fight, this is likely a manifestation of his aforementioned anger. Gunnarr, realising that he is too weak to resist the deity, states that he will renounce heathenism if he can overcome Freyr; Freyr then falls and the Devil is exorcised from the idol. The Devil's anger is referred to elsewhere in the corpus. In *Þiðranda þáttr ok Þórhalls*, for instance, the author attributes the *dísir*'s slaying of Þiðrandi to the Devil's *grimmðarfullrar reiði* ('cruel anger') in anticipation of the advent of Christianisation; the episode is also alluded in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, just prior to its version of the Icelandic Conversion story.[30] As in *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*, divine aid brings about victory in fights against supernatural opponents elsewhere in Old Norse-Icelandic literature: for instance, Ormr's victory over the giant Brúsi in *Orms þáttr Stórólfssonar* is attributed to his

[26] *Martinus saga byskups II*, 596.
[27] *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*, 112-13.
[28] *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*, 109.
[29] Ian Wyatt and Jessie Cook, ed., *Two Tales of Icelanders: Ögmundar þáttr dytts og Gunnars helmings / Ǫlkofra þáttr* (Durham: Durham Medieval Texts, 1993), xvi. See *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*, 114.
[30] *Þiðranda þáttr ok Þórhalls*, 288. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 239.

promise of pilgrimage (as Wyatt and Cook point out) and the crucifix-wielding bishop Þangbrandr in *Brennu-Njáls saga* defeats a *berserkr*.[31] Again, Christianity triumphs over a pagan god and the Devil, and Freyr farcically rages in vain.

Gunnarr, rather than renouncing heathenism as he had suggested, dons the idol's clothes and poses as Freyr incarnate, and exploits Freyr's followers by only accepting offerings of gold, silver, and other precious things. Whilst King Óláfr later declares that *þat er herfiligt at vita, ef kristins manns sála skal svá sárliga fyrirfarask* ('it is most harrowing to know, if a Christian man's soul shall so sorely destroy itself'), thereby intimating that Gunnarr's actions are profane and demonstrate a disregard for Christianity, Gunnarr's sustained impersonation may actually mock the gods and their power, and so again underscores the futility of Freyr's, or the Devil's, prior angry comportment. It also makes fun of the Swedes' paganism.[32] That the *þáttr* concludes with the king sending Gunnarr's brother to bring him back to Norway to restore his faith, and with the baptism of Freyr's priestess, reiterates Christianity's triumph. Moreover, insomuch as the Swedes believe that Freyr lives long after the destruction of the Devil-inhabited effigy and he receives material wealth, the scene recalls *Ynglinga saga*'s portrayal how Freyr's men concealed his death for three years and brought taxes, including gold and silver, to his tomb.[33] The correspondence of this scene in the *þáttr* to the detail in the euhemeristic text suggests that other 'prolonged echoes' may also be woven into its narrative, and Freyr's raging in the *þáttr*, therefore, may recall Freyr's emotional comportment in the mythic tradition.

9.3 Poor Weather as a Manifestation of *ira deorum*

[31] Wyatt and Cook, xiii. *Orms þáttr Stórólfssonar*, 188-90. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 268.
[32] Wyatt and Cook, xxxii.
[33] *Ynglinga saga*, 24.

In various Old Norse-Icelandic corpora, the gods – particularly Óðinn, Freyr, and Þórr – are connected with the weather; all three are able to control the winds, for instance.[34] Recurrently, spells of bad weather, such as blizzards, are attributed to *ira deorum*. Complementing this association, poor conditions are also often brought about by witchcraft, such as when, in *Eyrbyggja saga*, Þorgríma galdrakinn ('magic cheek'), at Þóroddr's request, brings a storm down on Bjǫrn in revenge for him seducing Þóroddr's wife, and likely also causes the blood-rain that falls on Þórgunna and forecasts her death.[35] Of course, Iceland's subarctic climate means that poor weather conditions are common, and thus their portrayal in the sagas may be naturalistic and unremarkable. Nonetheless, there are enough instances of an unequivocal nexus established between *ira deorum* and weather in the sagas to suggest that when poor conditions and angry feelings are concurrent though not explicitly linked, they bear some kind of tacit association with each other.

We have already seen, for instance, that a blizzard is concurrent with Freyr's anger in *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*; although central to the narrative in that it brings about the climactic fight between Gunnarr and Freyr, it may also be a manifestation of the deity's anger. This is supported by the fact that, once the furious devil evacuates the effigy and Gunnarr dons its clothes, the storm ceases to rage. That Freyr's anger in particular manifests itself in a blizzard is not surprising. According to Snorri and other sources, he is a god of agricultural fertility, and, in *Gísla saga*, it is suggested that the absence of snow from the south-west of Þórgrímr's grave mound indicates Freyr's love for Þórgrímr; it makes sense, therefore, that severe weather conditions would convey Freyr's contrary feelings, such as anger.[36] Elsewhere, in the

[34] Bernadine McCreesh, *The Weather in the Icelandic Sagas: The Enemy Without* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 57. See Richard Perkins, *Thor the Wind-Raiser and the Eyrarland Image* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2001), 16-25.
[35] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 109-10, 140. On the attribution of the blood-rain to Þorgríma, see Jennifer Livesay, 'Women and Narrative Structure in *Eyrbyggja saga*', *Folklore Forum* 21.2 (1988), 181-193 (188-9).
[36] See, e.g., *Gylfaginning*, 24, and *Skáldskaparmál*, 18. *Gísla saga*, 57. See P. S. Langeslag, *Seasons in the Literatures of the Medieval North* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015), 154.

aforementioned *Þiðranda þáttr ok Þórhalls*, the dísir's slaying of Þiðrandi, attributed to the Devil's rage, takes place when *veðrit var hvasst ok viðgørðarmikit* ('the weather was harsh and extremely troublesome').[37] We may also compare such manifestations of anger with Þórhallr and Glúmr's hailstone tears, which are also a manifestation of their emotionality.[38]

Where it is not clear that severe conditions are a manifestation of deities' anger, they are likely a metaphor for their emotional comportment. Other saga-characters' anger is sometimes cast metaphorically also: in *Eyrbyggja saga*, Þórarinn uses the metaphor of a *æðiregn* ('furious rainstorm') that breaks the pre-storm calm to relay, in verse, how his anger overrides his previously calm temperament (see **4.8**), and, as Astrid Ogilvie and Gísli Pálsson argue, storms echo anger in the conflicts detailed in *Bjarnar saga Hítdælakappa*.[39] The storms in *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts* and *Þiðranda þáttr ok Þórhalls* may, similarly, be a metaphor for, rather than – or as well as – a manifestation of, Freyr and the Devil's anger, respectively.

Several sagas establish a nexus between *ira deorum* and bad weather. In *Droplaugarsona saga*, Bersi attributes a fortnight-long blizzard to the gods' anger, stating that they are angry because Droplaugr's sons had walked clockwise around the temple and had failed to declare the slaying of Þorgrímr torðyfill ('dung-beetle').[40] Bersi attributes the duration of the blizzard to the gods' anger, given that it had begun prior to, and is possibly responsible for, the sons walking clockwise around the temple. Jón Jóhannesson notes that *[þ]að hefir verið trú manna, að réttsælishreyfingin væri heiðnum goðum og vættum ógeðfelld, en andsælishreyfingin geðþekk* ('it was people's belief that the clockwise movement was repugnant to the heathen gods and *vættir*, but the anticlockwise movement

[37] *Þiðranda þáttr ok Þórhalls*, 285.
[38] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 378. *Víga-Glúms saga*, 26.
[39] *Eyrbyggja saga*, 48. Astrid Ogilvie and Gísli Pálsson, 'Mood, Magic, and Metaphor: Allusions to Weather and Climate in the Sagas of Icelanders', in *Weather, Climate, Culture*, ed. Sarah Strauss and Benjamin Orlove (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 251-274 (266).
[40] *Droplaugarsona saga*, 146.

was acceptable'), and cites the instance in *Vatnsdæla saga* where Gróa's walking anticlockwise around her house forms part of her witchcraft ritual that causes a rockfall that kills everyone inside.[41] Likewise, in *Gísla saga*, when Bergr wounds Þorsteinn, Þorsteinn's mother walks anticlockwise around her house and brings about a snowstorm that causes an avalanche which kills Bergr and twelve others.[42] In both instances, poor weather conditions are, as in *Eyrbyggja saga*, the result of retaliatory heathen rituals which may be interpreted as expressions of anger. Jón Jóhannesson also notes that the clockwise movement was associated with Christianity, and cites the moment in one version of *Gísls þáttr Illugasonar* where the priest (and later bishop) Jón Ögmundarson walks clockwise around the gallows when he rescues Gísl.[43] This indicates that, again, tensions between paganism and the new faith provoke the gods' wrath.

Likewise, in *Laxdæla saga*, people attribute bad weather to the gods' anger in response to the Conversion: *[h]eiðnir menn segja þat eigi undarligt, at veðrátta léti illa, – "geldr at nýbreytni konungs þessa ins nýja siðar, er goðin hafa reizk"* ('the heathen men say that it is not strange that the weather was bad – "it is payment for the innovation of the king and the new faith, that the gods have grown angry").[44] Aligning with the yoking of the gods' anger towards Christianity and meteorological phenomena in the *Íslendingsögur*, in *Kristni saga*, a volcanic eruption engulfs Þóroddr goði's house and the heathens attribute it to the gods' anger towards Hjalti and Gizurr for preaching the faith.[45] As Grønlie notes, this surely confirms that Þóroddr had converted to Christianity.[46] The gods' anger, therefore, is likely also aimed at Þóroddr. In response to the heathens' comment, Snorri goði sardonically quips *um hvat reiddusk guðin þá er hér brann hraunit er nú stǫndu vér á?* ('what were the gods

[41] *Droplaugarsona saga*, 146-7, footnote 4. See *Vatnsdæla saga*, 96.
[42] *Gísla saga*, 59-60.
[43] *Droplaugarsona saga*, 147, footnote 4. *Gísls þáttr Illugasonar*, 329.
[44] *Laxdæla saga*, 118.
[45] *Kristni saga*, 33.
[46] Grønlie, trans., *Íslendingabók, Kristni saga*, 68, note 82.

enraged by when the lava we are now standing on here was burning?').[47] By implying that a previous eruption cannot have been a manifestation of *ira deorum* towards Christianity when heathenism was still being practiced and the new faith was not yet beginning to be adopted, Snorri scoffs at the heathens' attribution of this natural phenomenon to divine feelings.

With the link established, we may detect anger in other depictions of severe meteorological or geological occurrences that are attributed to the gods. In *Brennu-Njáls saga*, for instance, Steinunn tells Þangbrandr that Þórr had caused the storm that had wrecked his ship; the storm is likely a manifestation of Þórr's anger towards Þangbrandr's Christianisation mission.[48] Prior to this, Galdra-Heðinn performs a sacrifice and the earth splits beneath Þangbrandr's horse. Although the horse falls into the chasm, Þangbrandr himself survives and gives praise to God.[49] Insomuch as Heðinn performs a sacrifice, it is implied that the gods, prompted by Heðinn and aided by his sorcery, played a salient role in the catastrophe. That Þangbrandr survives in both instances again emphasises the futility of *ira deorum* against Christianity.

9.4 Angry Gods in Dreams

In some instances, angry gods feature in dreams. In *Víga-Glúms saga*, Glúmr dreams that he sees his forebears approaching Freyr, who explain that, although they are imploring Freyr to let Glúmr stay at Þverá, the sacred site of Freyr's temple, *tjóar ekki, ok svarar Freyr stutt ok reiðuliga ok minnisk nú á uxagjǫf Þorkels hins háva* ('it is to no avail, and Freyr answers

[47] *Kristni saga*, 33. On this, see Grønlie, trans., *Íslendingabók, Kristni saga*, xlii, and Peter Foote, 'Historical Studies: Conversion Moment and Conversion Period', in *Viking Revaluations: Viking Society Centenary Symposium 14–15 May 1992*, ed. Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1993), 137-144 (142-3).
[48] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 265-6. See *Kristni saga*, 24.
[49] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 259. See *Kristni saga*, 19.

abruptly and angrily, and now remembers Þorkell the Tall's gift of an ox').[50] Þorkell had given an ox to Freyr and asked that he drive Glúmr from Þverá in retaliation for Glúmr slaying Þorkell's son, Sigmundr, and bringing about Þorkell's expulsion from the district having lost his legal case against him.[51] According to Jónas Kristjánsson's timeline, this takes place around forty years before Freyr's angry appearance.[52] Although Þorkell's gift – perhaps forgotten by the inattentive audience member – is the reason given by Glúmr's ancestors for Freyr's inexorability, the dream – and thus Freyr's anger – 'can be seen as the culmination of the dichotomy running through *Viga-Glums saga* between the cult of Freyr associated with Glúmr's paternal ancestors and that of Óðinn, associated with Glúmr's maternal line', as James Cochrane remarks.[53] This dichotomy is intensified by Glúmr's many transgressions against Freyr which we would expect to be anger-inducing. As Gabriel Turville-Petre notes, Glúmr had incurred the god's wrath by, firstly, defiling Vitazgjafi (the ever-fertile field under Freyr's protection) at Þverá by slaying Sigmundr at the site, and, secondly, by secretly harbouring Glúmr's outlawed son, Vígfúss, at the same sacred site.[54]

Glúmr's third anger-inducing crime comes just prior to this dream: he swears an ambiguous *hofseið at baugi* ('temple oath on the ring') in three different temples, including at Þverá, that is initially interpreted as a denial of his slaying of Þorvaldr krókr ('hook') despite his stating that, among other things, *ek vark at þar* ('I was at that place').[55] As John McKinnell explains, the oath 'depends on the preposition *at* having the same form as a poetic negative suffix, so that *ek vark at þar* – "I was at that place" and *ek varkat þar* – "I was not there" sound identical'; the prosaic (rather than poetic) sense of Glúmr's choice of language,

[50] *Víga-Glúms saga*, 88.
[51] *Víga-Glúms saga*, 34.
[52] Jónas Kristjánsson, 'Formali, *Víga-Glúms saga*', in *Eyfirðinga sǫgur*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson, Íslenzk fornrit IX (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1956), v-lv (xlvii). See James Cochrane, 'Bright Dreams and Bitter Experiences: Dreams in Six Sagas of Icelanders' (University College London: Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2004), 226.
[53] Cochrane, 226.
[54] Turville-Petre, 70. *Víga-Glúms saga*, 28, 66.
[55] *Víga-Glúms saga*, 86.

in fact, affirms his killing of Þorvaldr.[56] Insomuch as Glúmr's phrasing is partially deceitful, it shows his disregard for the temple's sanctity and Freyr's authority. Glúmr also emulates Óðinn when he swears the ambiguous oath.[57] We are told in *Hávamál*'s version of the theft of the mead of poetry narrative, for instance, that Óðinn swore a ring oath, as Glúmr does, and betrayed Suttungr.[58] This similarity further demonstrates that Glúmr is a '"convert" to the cult of Óðinn', another reason for Freyr's anger.[59] Freyr cannot take action against Glúmr earlier because he is protected by the Óðinnic cloak and spear that were given to him by his maternal grandfather in the saga's sixth chapter.[60] After swearing his ambiguous oath, however, Glúmr gives these away and thus relinquishes Óðinn's protection against Freyr. We infer, therefore, that Freyr's wrath was not previously potent enough to overcome these talismans.

Whilst Richard North summarises that Glúmr 'spies Freyr in a dream angrily refusing the petition of [his] forebears that he be allowed to stay', this is not strictly true; Glúmr does not witness Freyr's anger, but rather his ancestors report Freyr's angry appearance to him.[61] Significantly, the saga-author, rather than detailing the precise quality of Freyr's emotional expression, states that he answered *reiðuliga* ('angrily'). The audience may supplement this laconic depiction by calling to mind how Freyr rages in the mythic tradition (such as in *Skírnismál*); this is supported by the fact that other 'mythological overlays' or 'prolonged echoes' are clearly at play (such as the way in which Glúmr's oath-swearing recalls that of Óðinn). The audience may also call to mind how the idol of Freyr rages in *Ǫgmundar þáttr*

[56] John McKinnell, trans., *Víga-Glúms saga* ('Killer-Glum's Saga'), in *CSI*, vol. 2, 267-314 (307, footnote 1).
[57] Turville-Petre, 70.
[58] *Hávamál*, 344 (st. 110)..
[59] Turville-Petre, 69.
[60] Richard North, 'Sighvatr Sturluson and the Authorship of *Víga-Glúms saga*', in *Analecta Septentrionalia: Beiträge zur nordgermanischen Kultur- und Literaturgeschichte*, ed. Wilhelm Heizmann, Klaus Böldl, and Heinrich Beck (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 256-280 (264).
[61] North, 264.

dytts as well as other raging devils in Old Norse-Icelandic corpora, and/or other angry figures in the *Íslendingasögur* whose emotional expressions and gestures are detailed.

Whilst Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson argues that Freyr 'exercises no motive power in the development of the story', Freyr's reported anger successfully functions as leverage, scaring Glúmr into confessing to the killing and causing him to give away half of his land at Þverá to Þorvaldr's son as compensation for slaying his father, and to sell the other half to Einarr.[62] Yet, Þorvarðr's explanation – prior to Glúmr's dream – that Glúmr had actually admitted the slaying in his oath means that it is likely that the second prosecution, taken up by Einarr with the intention of acquiring land at Þverá, would have been successful anyway.[63] In this regard, the dream 'is a fine example of a saga-writer creating both supernatural and natural causes simultaneously leading to a single inevitable conclusion.'[64] Yet, Þorvarðr's explanation comes *after* Glúmr relinquishes the protective cloak and spear; with Glúmr now left unprotected, Freyr may bring about Þorvarðr's understanding, and his angry appearance in Glúmr's dream may be a posturing of his now potent power.

Insomuch as angry Norse deities appear in dreams in the *Íslendingasögur*, their portrayal also may tacitly echo that of representatives of Christianity in this corpus and beyond who likewise appear in dreams and command the dreamer to renounce heathenism. In *Þórhalls þáttr knapps*, for instance, a gleaming man on a white horse appears to Þórhallr in a dream and commands him to build a church and convert.[65] Like the Norse deities, the Christian dream-figures can also be angry: as we have seen, in *Hallfreðar saga*, King Óláfr appears to Hallfreðr in a dream and is *reiðuligr* ('angry-looking') because Hallfreðr allowed his faith to lapse.[66] The comparison reiterates the diminishing power of paganism again:

[62] Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, 'Old Norse Religion in the Sagas of Icelanders', *Gripla* 7 (1990), 303-321 (314).
[63] *Víga-Glúms saga*, 87.
[64] Cochrane, 226.
[65] *Þórhalls þáttr knapps*.
[66] *Hallfreðar saga*, 178.

heathen dreamers regularly convert to Christianity, but Christian dreamers, though momentarily lapsing like Hallfreðr, never convert back to heathenism.

Such is the case in *Flóamanna saga*, where Þorgils experiences a series of dreams in which Þórr angrily confronts him about his conversion to Christianity. Grønlie notes that they may imitate the dreams of Koðrán in *Þorvalds þáttr víðfǫrla* or Sveinn in *Sveins þáttr ok Finns*.[67] Moreover, she argues that numerous parallels are made between Þórr and the Devil and Þorgils and Christ throughout the sequence, and suggests that the depiction of Þórr is analogous with that of the devils in *Martinus saga*, cited above.[68] If so, then Þórr's emotional comportment is likely also redolent of that of the Devil. Although Þórr's anger is never described in *Flóamanna saga*, we may infer it from his comportment and the presence of a stimulus that provokes *ira deorum* elsewhere in the corpus.

Having taken up the new faith, Þorgils first dreams that Þórr appears *með illu yfirbragði* ('with an evil countenance'), accuses him of betraying him and destroying his silver, and swears to take vengeance.[69] The quality of his countenance is not detailed; we may supplement the depiction by calling to mind Þórr's angry expressions in the mythic tradition, such as his blazing eyes or furrowed brows. When Þorgils, having responded with a reiteration of his faith in God, awakens, he finds his boar has been killed. When Þórr again appears to Þorgils in another dream, the god threatens to kill him as he did the boar, and to kill more of his livestock. The next night, an old ox belonging to Þorgils dies.[70] Þorgils guards his cattle the following night and in the morning is *víða blár* ('blue-black all over'), and after that the killings cease; the implication is that he has fought, and successfully

[67] Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, 183. See also Annette Lassen, 'Perseverance and Purity in *Flóamanna saga*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 118.3 (2019), 313-328 (316). See *Þorvalds þáttr víðfǫrla I*, 65-8, and *Sveins þáttr ok Finns*, 392.
[68] Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, 184.
[69] *Flóamanna saga*, 274.
[70] *Flóamanna saga*, 274-5.

overcome, the god.[71] Further evidencing her postulation that there is a parallel between Þórr and the Devil and Þorgils and Christ, Grønlie notes that, in *Antonius saga*, the Devil leaves visible marks on Anthony, just as Þórr leaves visible marks on Þorgils.[72] Þórr's emotionality is likely also modelled on that of the Devil in such scenes.

Þórr's destruction of livestock is consonant with depictions of *ira deorum* towards those who abandon or combat heathenism elsewhere in the corpus. As noted, in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Þórr wrecks Þangbrandr's ship; the ship is called Vísundr ('The Bison'), and Þórr thus destroys a figurative beast.[73] Elsewhere, the literal destruction of livestock that is described in *Flóamanna saga* occurs. In *Þórhalls þáttr knapps*, for instance, when Þórhallr converts to Christianity and destroys the pagan temple, Þórhildr tells everyone to take their cattle inside because the gods, forced to flee, are *í grimmum hug* ('in a fierce temper') and states *[n]ú vil ek, at minn fénaðr verði eigi á vegum þeira, því at þau eru svá reið ok í beizkum hug, at þau munu engu eira, því er fyrir þeim verðr* ('now I do not want my cattle to be in their way, because they are so angry and in a bitter mind, that they will spare nothing which comes before them').[74] Corroborating this, an old horse that had been left outdoors is later found dead. Whilst the gods' anger successfully brings about such destruction, they have no power indoors. Moreover, that they succeed in killing only an old horse may allude to the futility of their anger and its consequences; we may interpret Þórr's killing of Þorgils' old ox in the same way.

While awaiting fair winds to facilitate his emigration to Greenland, Þorgils dreams that he is threatened by a man who is *mikill ok rauðskeggjaðr* ('huge and red-bearded') who shows him waves dashing against the crag where he will be wrecked.[75] Again, Þorgils

[71] *Flóamanna saga*, 275.
[72] Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, 184. *Heilagra manna søgur*, vol. 1, 55-121 (56).
[73] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 265-6.
[74] *Þórhalls þáttr knapps*, 320.
[75] *Flóamanna saga*, 278-9.

reiterates that God will protect him. The red-bearded man is clearly Þórr: he is also described as red-bearded in *Eiríks saga rauða* and Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*.[76] The specific reference to Þórr's beard may also call to mind the opening of *Þrymskviða*, where his beard bristles as he rages, for instance.[77] Thus, the description is another 'prolonged echo'.

The scene also bears scriptural echoes. Following Knut Liestøl, Grønlie argues that Þórr and Þorgils' exchange prior to Þorgils' departure is an adaptation of the Devil's temptation of Christ in the wilderness in Matthew 4:8-10, and that Þorgils' words echo the translation of Christ's words, given in *Stjórn*.[78] Grønlie also notes the scriptural symbolism of the seascape – substituted for the Judean desert in this reworking – which, as well as calling to mind Noah's flood and the Red Sea, 'recalls the patristic allegory of the turbulent sea of life, through which the Christian must navigate safely towards heaven', examples of which can be seen in the Norse version of Gregory's *Dialogues*, and in *Maríu saga*.[79] As Grønlie concludes, '[t]he "waves" with which Þórr threatens Þorgils are both the rough waves of the northern sea and the "steep waves" of sin and temptation.'[80] Such allusions strengthen the case that Þórr's emotional comportment here is also consonant with that of the Devil.

Despite threatening to bring about treacherous conditions like other angry gods, Þórr, we infer, first uses his aeolian power to becalm the ship when Þorgils eventually sets out to sea, and Þorgils and his men are stranded.[81] Making plain that he is responsible, Þórr again appears to Þorgils twice in his dreams, and, again, Þorgils reiterates his faith in God. Þórr, conceding that he cannot win over Þorgils, demands that he return his goods, and Þorgils throws overboard an ox that had been dedicated to him.[82] The weather now becomes harsh,

[76] *Eiríks saga rauða*, 224. *Óláfs saga Odds*, 289.
[77] *Þrymskviða*, 422 (st. 1).
[78] Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, 184. Knut Liestøl, *Upphavet til den islendske ættesaga* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1929), 148. See Lassen, 316. See *Stjórn*, 146.
[79] Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, 186-7. *Heilagra manna søgur*, vol. 1, 179-200 (179-80). *Maríu saga*, 272.
[80] Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, 187.
[81] *Flóamanna saga*, 279.
[82] *Flóamanna saga*, 281.

and the ship is wrecked beneath Greenland's glaciers, just as Þórr had threatened previously.[83] Although everyone aboard survives, they have scant provisions, and Jósteinn and his men, behaving rowdily rather than practising the faith like Þorgils and his men, die of sickness and return as revenants to attack Þorgils.[84] As Grønlie notes, the moral allegory is clear: 'sin leads to illness, contagion and death, while the strict observance of Christian practices keeps Þorgils and all his men safe.'[85] Although it is not explicitly stated, these events may also be a consequence of Þórr's anger. If so, then Þórr likely also orchestrates the death of Þórey, Þorgils' wife, in the next chapter.[86] Even if he did not deliberately bring about these subsequent occurrences, his aeolian manipulation makes him indirectly responsible regardless. Ultimately, however, Þórr's anger is unsuccessful as it does not cause Þorgils to renounce his new faith. That he is miraculously able to breastfeed his son after Þórey's death reiterates the power of his faith and further aligns him with Christ, thereby reiterating Þórr's alignment with the Devil.[87]

9.5 Conclusion

In that they already occupy a self-evident hegemonic social position, the gods can grow angry without destabilising their authority or problematising their sociocultural identity. Like sovereign figures, therefore, the gods wield anger in an attempt to maintain their dominion and to combat renunciation. The depiction of *ira deorum* in the *Íslendingasögur* recalls, either through direct 'mythological overlays' or tacit 'prolonged echoes', the gods' anger in the mythic tradition. Often simultaneously, their emotional comportment is – explicitly or

[83] *Flóamanna saga*, 282.
[84] *Flóamanna saga*, 282-5.
[85] Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, 187.
[86] *Flóamanna saga*, 288.
[87] *Flóamanna saga*, 289. See Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, 190-2.

implicitly – in some way analogous to that of the Devil, sometimes represented by devils, in scriptural material. Moreover, their oneiric appearances prompt tacit comparison between them and those Christian representatives who also appear in dreams. Generally speaking, the anger of gods that is described in pre-Christian narratives is fear-inducing and effectively wielded. Post-Conversion, however, *ira deorum* is, whilst sometimes momentarily devastating, ultimately futile in the face of Christianity. Such futility reveals Christian saga-authors' implicit criticism of the pagan gods and their emotional *modus operandi*, and also underscores the medieval ecclesiastical sentiment towards anger more generally.

10 Conclusion

This thesis has argued that, in the *Íslendingasögur*, anger's mode of expression is contingent on a character's sociocultural identity. It has also shown how various unqualified involuntary somatic indicia, facial expressions, and bodily movements frequently connote angry experience in the sagas. As a by-product of its analyses, it has demonstrated how anger is a salient narrative catalyst, and deepened our understanding of the Old Norse-Icelandic terms that saga-authors use to communicate anger.

Primarily, this thesis has shown that different groups of characters express emotionality in different ways, in accordance with saga-society's social rules: they adhere to different 'emotive scripts'. Having established a methodological approach for detecting anger when it is not explicitly described in Section I, Section II examined the nexus between anger, gender, and sex in the sagas. Male characters who qualify for pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal are expected to mask their anger and act unemotionally. Those that fail to do so are frequently met with opprobrium, and destabilise their masculine status. Female characters, on the other hand, are privileged in that they can adhere to various emotive scripts at various times. They can express, exaggerate, simulate, or mask anger depending on which mode of comportment is most useful in a given scenario, and, typically, are not criticised. Significantly, their manipulation of anger allows them to assume, albeit momentarily, a masculine social position, and, sometimes, destabilise a saga-man's masculine status. That saga-women who express their anger can become more masculine while saga-men who express their anger can become less masculine proves that emotionality is contingent on a character's sex, an observation which refutes Clover's model of saga-society gender.[1]

[1] Clover, 'Regardless'.

Section III examined masculine characters who exhibit angry practices particular to their socio-cultural identities and thus adhere to uniquely tailored emotive scripts. Like women, those men designated senescent and therefore disqualified from pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal rage without opprobrium and demonstrate that their anger can facilitate their agency. An exhibition of anger, therefore, enables their pursuit of the 'senescent masculine ideal'. *Berserkir*, like old saga-men, are not hegemonically masculine, and thus may also adhere to a unique emotive script for anger: they experience the *berserksgangr*, which fuels their physical prowess. Yet, when a saga-man experiences the state, it can compromise his pursuit of the hegemonic masculine ideal (thereby corroborating that such an emotional comportment is unacceptable for these characters). Sovereign figures, already occupying a self-evident hegemonic position, regularly grow angry without criticism. Often, their displays of fear-inducing anger are a useful means of establishing and maintaining authority, although those rulers that exhibit anger too frequently or too intensely risk destabilising their power.

The final chapter of Section III, figuring as a coda with a slightly different focus, explored how gods experience and express anger. Like sovereign figures insomuch as they also already occupy a hegemonic position, they grow angry, or are depicted as having the potential to grow angry, to scare characters into submission and to combat renunciation. Their anger is redolent of that of gods depicted in the mythological texts, and that of raging devils in sagas concerning holy figures. Regularly, *ira deorum* is shown to be futile against Christianity, a portrayal that aligns with the medieval ecclesiastical doctrine that, generally speaking, condemns anger.

This research has brought the presentation of anger in the corpus into sharper focus by examining it through the lens of its nexus with character identities. There is, however, still room for further research on anger in the *Íslendingasögur*. Detailed analyses of how anger

operates in particular stock scenarios, for example, may prove illuminating. Some scenarios, such as the *knattleikr* ('ballgame'), the *hestavíg* ('horse-fight'), or the *hólmganga* ('duel'), regularly provoke raging and conflict. These 'arenas' of anger may indicate that saga-society's rules governing anger's expression can, sometimes, be contextually mutable.

Another rich seam of further study is the presentation of anger in other Old Norse-Icelandic saga corpora. The research presented on anger and sovereigns in this thesis might be counterpointed with the presentation of anger in the *konungasögur*, for instance. Elsewhere, an examination of how anger operates in the more conspicuously Christian *biskupasögur* or *heilagra manna sögur*, for example, would further elucidate the relationship that the medieval Icelandic church had with anger, outlined in the thesis introduction. How the different supernatural figures portrayed in the *fornaldarsögur* express anger, and whether they adhere to different emotive scripts, is another fruitful topic of further research.

Finally, beyond saga-literature, the salient role that anger plays in many mythological texts, briefly discussed in **9.1**, should also be contemplated further. I have already noted that masculinity appears to function in the world of the gods in a similar way to how it functions in saga-society, and that the active gods tend to be masculine and hegemonic; it would, therefore, be profitable to consider the nexus between anger and gender in these narratives. With this in mind, it seems significant that, in *Þrymskviða*, Freyja's comical performance of anger echoes that of the female characters in the sagas whose burlesque emotional posturing is connoted by the verbs *geisa* and *eiskra*.[2] Moreover, Þórr shakes his beard, a symbol of masculinity, in anger at having been robbed of his phallic symbol of power, while Freyja shakes the gods' hall in anger prior to refusing, with remarkable agency, to journey to Jötunheimr and marry Þrymr; Freyja, therefore, behaves in a masculine fashion by exhibiting

[2] On the comedy of Freyja's performance, see Clunies Ross, 'Reading *Þrymskviða*', 193, note 6.

the same emotional *modus operandi* as the conspicuously emasculated Þórr.[3] This may indicate that parodic anger can facilitate a performance of 'female masculinity' in the mythic world in the same way that it can in the *Íslendingasögur*.

Insomuch as the *Íslendingasögur* pivot on, and are propelled by, altercations, conflicts, and feuds, the presentation of their characters' experience and exhibition of anger is essential to their diegeses. Yet, their largely impartial third-person narrators that rarely comment on characters' interiority, and the stark laconism of the prose in which they are so carefully crafted, mean that the true significance of emotionality in the saga-world is often obfuscated. This thesis, by identifying and excavating this subtextual significance, has revealed that the portrayal of anger in these texts is highly stylised to reflect various societal values of behaviour. The experience and exhibition of anger portrayed in the *Íslendingasögur* and beyond is, therefore, a delicately nuanced social phenomenon.

[3] *Þrymskviða*, 422 (st. 1), 424 (st. 13).

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