Once More, with Feelings
Agents of Magic and their Emotions in Egils Saga

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Except for Kirsi Kanerva's dissertation *Porous Bodies, Porous Minds. Emotions and the Supernatural in the Íslendingasǫgur*, published in 2015, which explores how emotions may manifest themselves in the form of supernatural somatic disruptions, there do not appear to be any work yet articulating conceptions of magic and the study of emotions in Old Norse narratives. This articulation is however attested in other Western medieval sources: Jane Gilbert, for example, asserts that there is a recognized metaphorical relationship between magic and emotion in medieval literature (Gilbert 2015: 21). The study of emotions would prove particularly fruitful for the study of witchcraft, described as a phenomenon motivated by very strong emotions. According to Charlotte-Rose Millar, "[the sources] construct a way of understanding witchcraft that is based on specific forms of emotional interaction and behavior" (Millar 2017:18). These observations led me to consider what might be the relationship between conceptions of magic and emotions in saga literature; a research perspective that would bring a fresh reading to the *Íslendingasǫgur*[1]—

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[1] The term *Íslendingasǫgur* refers to a sub-genre of between thirty-five and forty Icelandic sagas, classified according to modern categories. The *Íslendingasǫgur* were written by anonymous authors, clerics or educated by the Church for the most part. Originated from oral tradition, the majority of the narratives were recorded in the thirteenth century, with a few exceptions written in the fourteenth and later centuries. The texts are preserved in manuscripts from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries,

in this case, *Egils saga*—and the topic of magic, that have both already been widely studied[2].

Conceptions of magic have undergone many changes over the centuries. Ancient writers held conflicting views of magic as a sign of both wisdom and transgression. Over time, magic expanded to include notions of otherness and threat to social order (*maleficus),* referring to everyone "who falls outside the norms of society"; and became firmly condemned (Ankerloo & Clark 2002: 7, 179; Bailey 2006; Kieckhefer 2014; Arnould 2019). With the emergence of Christianity, the negative connotations of magic became even more pronounced. Church fathers and early Christian authors argued that magic is corrupting and founded in pre-Christian thoughts (Flint 1991; Kieckhefer 2014), most notably Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430) who was the first Christian author to develop a theory of magic, according to which demons founded magical arts and taught them to mankind, a definition that prevailed in Christian culture (Flint 1991; Kieckhefer 2014). As a result of Christianization, this paradigm spread throughout Europe and beyond (Bailey 2006: 14).

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with the exception of a few fragments dated back to the thirteenth century—but no original copy survived. Mostly written in prose, the sagas are also characterized by their poetic interlacing, in which poetic vocalization serves as a mean to express thoughts and emotions, as we have previously mentioned. The narratives recount events that supposedly took place several centuries earlier and revolve around the feuds of a few Icelandic families of farmers-chieftains, mainly in Iceland (but sometimes in Scandinavia or in the British Isles), during the Commonwealth, from c.930 to c.1030. Indeed, the great majority of the narratives address questions of clan rivalries, family honor, the serious consequences that these quarrels, other offenses or crimes could generate, and their impact on Medieval Icelandic society. A few stories also begin in Norway during the period of settlement of Iceland, c.870-930.

[2] Many aspects of *Egils saga* have been studied, from poetry (Clunies Ross: 1978, 1989, 2010; Looze: 1989; Sayers: 1995; Tulinius: 2001), gender studies (Falk: 2014; Larrington 2015), depictions of emotions (Tulinius: 2005; Ármann Jakobsson: 2008; Þorgeirsdóttir: 2020) and supernatural motives (Ármann Jakobsson: 2011), memory studies (Byock: 2004; Barreiro: 2021) to psychoanalysis (Looze: 2015; Tulinius: 2014, 2015). The topic of Old Norse magic has also been approached from several perspectives, such as gender studies (Jochens: 1991, 1993; J.K., Friðriksdóttir: 2009, 2013; S.A. Mitchell: 2000; Price: 2013; Ármann Jakobsson:2013; Korecka: 2021), queer studies (Solli: 1999, 2002, 2008; Ármann Jakobsson: 2011, 2013), memory studies (S.A. Mitchell: 2013), ethnicity (Jochens: 1999), otherness (Lindow: 1995; McKinnel: 2005), sexuality (Jochens: 1996), history of religion (Raudvere: 2002, 2003, 2006), history and folklore (S.A.Mitchell: 1997, 2009), politics (Meylan: 2011, 2014) or more recently monster studies (Merkelbach: 2020).

Despite being rooted in pre-Christian oral tradition, Old Icelandic literature is primarily the work of an ecclesiastical elite. The earliest texts produced bear witness, not to the translation of common Latin terms for magic (*magia*, *maleficus*), but to their adaptation into the emic terms by means of a nuanced vocabulary, to mention a few: *kunnasta,* "knowledge," and from which derives *fjǫlkynngi*; *magna,* "to empower"; *fróðr,* "wisdom"; *galdr* (pl.*galdrar*), "chant"; *trolldómr*, "deception"; or the infamous *seiðr* (Raudvere 2003; Dillmann 2006; Ármann Jakobsson 2008; Korecká 2019). Most of these vernacular terms existed prior to the conversion but were reclaimed by clerics to convert Latin concepts into indigenous ones, implying the existence of a similar local concept that allowed the two phenomena to be linked (Meylan 2012; Meylan 2014: 29). Although the vernacular terms are removed from their potential original meaning, they prove "the significance of the cultural concept at the time the texts were composed in written form" (Korecká 2019). The emic vocabulary differentiates this extraordinary knowledge from knowledge *per se* (legislative or clerical knowledge), in other words, legitimate knowledge as opposed to illicit knowledge. Contemporaries regarded Old Norse magic as "a set of special abilities," an exceptional knowledge characterized by its hidden character, that enables individuals to access a power they should not have (Raudvere 2002; Mitchell 2011). Ecclesiastical literature shows the influence of Christian and continental connotations, connotations that were also transmitted in secular literature (Meylan 2012).

The study of the medieval Icelandic legislative sources such as *Kristinna laga þáttur* shows that magic is directly associated with heathenism (worship heathen beings, stones and animals) and *berserk*'s ultraviolence, thus emphasizing its profoundly anti-social character (Dennis, Foote & Perkins 1980: 38-39). It depicts the *mentalité* of medieval Icelandic clerics toward magic, which is regarded as a transgressive and anti-social behavior punishable by exile. The use of magic is viewed as a taboo behavior that has the potential to deeply harm the society. As pointed out by Lucie Korecká, magic lies outside the legal and social structures; in the material, it serves as an othering discourse, a process of marginalization, where the other stands as a potential threat to the society and to Christian order (Korecka 2019: 12 and 17). This prompts us to inquire: in what manner does magic intersect with the depictions of emotions within the sagas?

Considering the presence of both emotional discourses and motifs of magic in *Egils saga,* the study of this saga may shed some light on a possible relationship between magic and emotion in Old Norse literary representations. Composed between 1230 and 1240, *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* is one of the major *Íslendingasǫgur* from the golden age of saga writing, and also one of the classical sagas. *Egils saga* follows the history of Icelandic settlers over several generations, including their conflict with the King of Norway. The story focuses on the adventures of Egill Skallagrímsson, a great warrior and poet, and his tussle with King Eiríkr and Queen Gunnhildr. The oldest fragment of the saga is dated back to the mid-thirteenth century. Concerning the entire saga, the text is preserved in three manuscripts from the fourteenth century. The first one, known as the M version—recorded in the manuscript *Mǫðruvallabók* (AM 132 fol.)—is the most complete version of the text, and also the reference version for translators, despite the fact that this version does not include the three poems from the saga (Tulinius 2021, 30). Although incomplete, the second and third versions of the text—W version and K version respectively—have preserved versions of the three long poems, *Sonatorrek*, *Höfuðlausn*, and *Arinbjarnarkviða* (Tulinius 2021, 29). Due to the central importance of poetry in the narrative, as well as the inclusion of over fifty stanzas, the saga is also known as one of the *Skáldasǫgur*, 'sagas of skalds' (Vésteinn Ólason 1993: 333-336).

Based on the idea that magic could be perceived as a form of metaphorical language to communicate complex emotive scripts, and using *Egils saga* as a study case, this article aims to compile a comprehensive inventory of all magical occurrences in the saga, alongside their corresponding emotional interactions to question whether magic can be considered as an alternative discourse of emotions[3]. We shall begin with a presentation of the different forms of emotional discourse in saga literature, before moving on to the case study. We will present several magical episodes from the saga and comment on their relationship with emotions and their narrative purpose in the text:

[3] Sif Ríkarðsdóttir (2019: 253) also refers to the concept of *emotive scripts*, first conceptualized by the psychologist Sylvain Tomkin in the seventies, to define the directives prescribed for appropriate emotional conduct related to discourse in literature. In her own words, she adopted the term to "foreground the performative or behavioral aspect of literary representation of emotions as the textual artefact deals with narrative representation of emotive behavior".

first, by observing emotions as a magical trigger, then by considering how magic plays a role in altering a character's emotions and somato-psychic state. Finally, we will study the articulation between magic and the saga's predominant emotion, anger, in relation to the fear of loss of control and from the perspective of gender.

Different Ways of Expressing Emotions

For the purpose of this article, we would like to focus on literary representations of emotions. Sif Ríkarðsdóttir argued that the literary analyst does not seek "the emotion of a medieval subject" as an historian might, but rather to question and understand why an author made their character express a specific feeling, as well as what that emotion could have signified (Sif Ríkarðsdóttir 2017: 12). Saga literature is notorious for its lack of emotional expression when juxtaposed with the more emotionally charged European literary works of the time, such as the matter of Britain or French courtly literature. To quote Sif once again, medieval Iceland has a "presumed cultural preference for the suppression or concealment of emotions" (Sif Ríkarðsdóttir 2015: 167).

Yet, within the *Íslendingasǫgur, Egils saga* stands out, exhibiting a high degree of emotional expression and challenging the notion of saga austerity and contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of medieval Icelandic storytelling. The eponymous protagonist, Egill, is depicted as a remarkably complex and emotional character. From the age of seven, he is presented as reckless, hot-tempered, and remarkably violent, a temperament that leads him to commit his first murder after being humiliated at the game. Physically, Egill is described as "hard-featured, and grim when angry"[4], however, the narrative also portrays him as a sensitive, loving and cheerful man, compassionate and caring: his profound affection for his wife, daughter Þórgerðr and adoptive daughter Þórdis contribute to a more nuanced understanding of his emotional range. The narrative also provides an intimate look at Egill's grief, notably triggered by the deaths of his brother and his sons: after the loss of two of his three sons, Egill becomes overwhelmed by sorrow that he is rendered bedridden, refusing sustenance and drink for days on end. The dichotomy of Egill's impetuous violence and his profound

[4] *Egils saga,* chapter 55.

emotional ties paints an intriguing portrayal. Thus, *Egils saga* reveals a rich tapestry of emotional articulation.

The first kind of emotional expression is characterized by explicit references of emotions, which are expressed through the employment of substantives and verbs, and convey a first spectrum of feelings: joy, satisfaction, serenity, affection, friendliness; anger, resentment, revenge, annoyance; astonishment, fear, humiliation; regret, spite, sorrow, despair, melancholy, mourning. The great majority of these feelings are mentioned in the body of the narrative, except for a few instances stated in dialogue. While it is the most common and accessible form of emotional expression, the narrative does not solely rely on it as the exclusive literary means of displaying emotions.

William Ian Miller pointed out that, in Norse sources, emotions must often be inferred from the literary context, and more specifically from the action, "which is simply without reason or motive if it is not understood as taking place in a certain emotional environment that gives it meaning" (Miller 1992: 107). We find other references of emotions such as ambition, hope, courage, esteem; disappointment, surprise, frustration, disillusionment, rage and love. The complementarity between the different emotions mentioned suggests that certain emotions might be expressed in a specific way in the narrative, as exemplified in *Egils saga*: when his wife, Asgerd, passes away, Egill delegates the management of his estate to his son and moves to the side of his foster daughter[5]. This seemingly trivial action actually bears witness to Egill's grief. After reading the material, one knows for fact that Egill loved his wife dearly, but also valued his possessions and inheritance, even defying two Norwegian kings to reclaim them. The act of handing over responsibility for his property to his last living son (whom he holds in low esteem) suggests that the eponymous character is profoundly affected by his wife's departure to the extent of abandoning properties that defined his identity. Saga narratives convey underlying emotions translated into action, but also expressed through somatic description (sweating, reddening, swelling) or verbal reactions (Sif Ríkarðsdóttir 2017: 62); *Egils saga* also features several examples where somatic descriptions disclose the characters' emotions, such as during the scene of Böðvar's death, where Egill's emotions, probably

[5] *Egils saga,* chapter 82.

a combination of grief, sadness and anger, are expressed through the swelling of his body[6]. Anger, reassurance, love, sadness, and grief are some of the emotions expressed through bodily reactions in the saga.

n addition, emotions can be expressed through other forms of discourses in Old Norse Literature. For example, several scholars have addressed the function of poetry in saga literature and concluded that poetic language can serve as a medium of emotive expression (Sif Ríkarðsdóttir 2017: 81):

> It may be that the *Íslendingasǫgur* authors needed the verses so that saga characters could express emotions and reactions which would have seemed unnatural when expressed in prose, and which would have been even less appropriate for a saga narrator to use, because they touch on the private affairs and inner life of the characters.

Within the narrative of *Egils saga*, the characters, Egill prominently among them, employ the art of poetry to give voice to their feelings: love, gratitude, pride, disappointment, shame, distrust, anger, grief... In contrast to the previous forms of expression mentioned, poetry has the capacity to mirror the intensity of felt emotions. Moreover, Sif Rikhardsdóttir also emphasized the role of silence in the saga narratives, as a mean which requires the imaginative emotional involvement of the audience who must project its own emotional experience onto the characters' actions:

> The scant information provided by the narratorial voice and the characters' gestures or responses requires the reader to fill in the gaps so to speak. The reader or audience are thus expected to infuse the characters' behaviours and silences with emotive content drawn from their own personal experiences as well as from previous literary encounters and the generically stipulated signifying horizon of the saga world. (Sif Ríkarðsdóttir 2017: 65)

The employment of silence as an alternative emotional discourse is also attested in *Egils saga*. This is manifested when the prose explicitly acknowledges the characters' moments of silence, or when the narrative deliberately leaves actions or dialogues in a suspended state, inviting the reader or audience to project themselves. In her Ph.D dissertation, Kirsi Kanerva rightly raised the question of whether medieval

[6] *Egils saga,* chapter 80: "hann þrútnaði svá, at kyrtillinn rifnaði af honum ok svá hosurnar" ("he swelled so much that his tunic and his pants tore off"—our translation)

Icelandic conceptions of emotion might not be expressed in literature by additional alternative discourses of emotion. Kanerva suggested that in medieval Icelandic culture, there may have been conceptions of hypocognized emotions, that is emotions for which there was no known word to name or describe them (Kanerva 2015: 21-23). She also argued in favor of several conceptions of emotions both in relation to physical or mental illnesses and to the supernatural (Kanerva 2015). Kanerva's inquiries led us to consider magic as a potential form of alternative emotional discourse within saga literature and prompted us to examine the intricate relationship between magic and emotion within the narrative of *Egils saga*.

Magic as an Emotive Act and Its Implications in *Egils Saga*

The text presents a typology of the various magical episodes that we propose to analyze, in order to find a possible articulation between magic and emotions. The first magical episode under scrutiny takes place chapter forty-four, during a banquet attended by the crew of Egill's brother Þórólfr, King Eiríkr and Queen Gunnhildr. Barðr, host of the banquet, had initially received Þórólfr's men, claiming he could not serve them drinks; but when the royal couple arrived, drinks were served in abundance. Egill, offended by this lie and lack of respect, began to drink heavily, before declaring a few stanzas in which he insults Barðr. Lest the royal couple learns of the disrespect he showed Þórólfr and his men, Barðr goes to Queen Gunnhildr and pretends that Egill brings them great shame. The queen and Barðr mix some poison with the drink, and Barðr signs a drinking horn and took it to Egill. But the latter takes out his knife and slashes his palm; he seizes the horn, carves runes on it, let his blood run down it while reciting a few stanzas to Barðr, and the horn shatters.

This first example thus presents a first relation between emotion and magic through two distinct magical performances. The first magical performance we refer to is the action of signing the horn: While the verb *að signa* primarily means "to sign" in a religious sense, it also possesses magical connotations that we have decided to take into account for our interpretation, considering that the sign made by Barðr

may have concealed the presence of poison in the drink. If we consider this interpretation of *að signa*, then the enchantment of the poisoned horn is indeed triggered by emotions: Barðr has humiliated Þórólfr's men and fears Egill humiliate him in return in front of the king and the queen. The narrative does mention a pretexted emotion, namely shame, *skömm;* however, the genuine emotions of the characters are translated into actions, and in the referred excerpt, into an action of magic. This magical action is not only triggered by, but also expresses, an emotion. Barðr's magical performance is then given as an emotive act by the narrative. The term emotive act refers to any action that may affect the emotional state of the involved parties, be they emitters or recipients; this action translates an emotion and, in doing so, activate, intensify or modify it (Brînduşa Grigoriu 2014; William Reddy 2001: 102-105) The second magical performance is less easy to interpret, as the narrative doesn't explicitly associate any emotion with Egill's response. Given the context, it may be suggested that, since Egill had just insulted Barðr, he expected him to retaliate. The protagonist had a hunch that made him suspicious of his host's gesture, a hunch that led him to use magic to check the drink. Following this poisoning attempt, Egill murders Barðr. This magical episode thus revolves around a main emotion, shame (or more precisely, the refusal to be ashamed) which escalates between the two parties and leads them to resort to magic.

The narrative thus introduces a first representation of magic as the expression of an emotional subject, an emotive act, associated with the concept of shame. While all emotions exist in a social context, fear of shame holds a particular position in an honor-based feuding culture such as Medieval Iceland. To quote William Ian Miller,

> shame has its obvious role in the socialization of honorable people and in maintaining social control. In the sagas, the norms of honor, the norms of proper behavior, in fact, are as often expressed negatively in terms of shame avoidance as they are positively in terms of honor acquisition. And shame—as *skömm*'s synonym *óvirðing* (literally un-honor), *svívirðing* (dis-honor), and *ósæmð* (un-honor) indicate—is conceptualized as the negation of honor. (Miller 1995: 119)

Miller also underlines the relationship between honor, shame and cowardice, that he defines as "the refusal to act when right action demands courage" (Miller 1995: 119). As showed in the excerpt under scrutiny, the characters of the narrative are following specific emotive

scripts in order to preserve their honor. Yet, the use of magic, a practice regarded as potentially anti-social, is described as part of these social attitudes. On the one hand, this suggests that a character could resort to any means at their disposal to avoid social shame, including magic; on the other, it also reveals that, although both magical actions are triggered by the same emotional motive (to avoid being humiliated), the motivating intention and context of use differ between the two. It was Barðr who first broke the social contract by lying, and then decided to poison Egill rather than face up to his mistake in the presence of the royal couple. In addition, Barðr's magic was aim to humiliate, perhaps even kill Egill, whereas Egill resorted to magic to protect himself. However, only the audience is aware of these differences, rather it be Barðr's cowardice or Egill's rightful right to call out Barðr's behavior, and then kill him. Especially since the use of poison is also negatively connoted in medieval literature, and associated with cowardice and depravity (Collard: 1998). This remark suggests that the audience of the saga is expected to judge the characters according to both emotional norms and narrative context. As put by Sif Rikhardsdóttir, "[the audience] infuse the character's action with meaning drawn from their own conceptions of emotional interiority, behavourial codes (cultural as well as literary) and the signifying potential of the narrative framework and context" (Sif Ríkarðsdóttir 2017: 74). This first example demonstrated three important things. First, Old Norse conception of magic seems to be more nuanced that we have previously stated; secondly, there appears to have a possible correlation between magic and emotion, where magic serves as an emotive act, simultaneously triggered by and expressing that emotion. Finally, the story relies on the audience's involvement to interpret the characters' actions according to emotional standards, but also to judge the moral implications of magical performances according to the narrative context.

The fifty-ninth chapter brings us to what may be considered the climax of the conflict between Egill and the royal couple. King Eiríkr has declared Egill outlawed from Norway. On hearing the news, Egill becomes furious ("Egill var nú allreiðr") and goes on rampage: he kills three of the king's men with whom he was in conflict; ransacked a farm; and has one of the young princes and thirteen of his royal guards killed. Following this, Egill goes alone to a nearby island, where he performs a

níð-stǫng: he erects a stake on which he impales a horse's head, which he points inland; he engraves runes on it and curses the king and queen, wishing to drive them away from the Norwegian throne. In this episode, the narrative depicts another representation of magic as an emotive act, this time triggered by anger. In contrast to the previous episode, Egill's magical performance is heavily connoted in this extract. The *níð-stǫng* is a magical performance that unfolds in a particularly negative social context. Resorting to *níð* was punishable by proscription. Egill was willing to give up his social honor in order to exact revenge on the royal couple—or perhaps he took the risk since he had already been declared outlawed. The audience is once again left to judge the character's behavior. Egill's *níð* is part of a succession of incidents, each as violent as the next, violence that can be difficult for the audience to justify. Egill's acts are a reaction (albeit disproportionate) to a series of injustices experienced by the character: denial of his inheritance, denial of his rights by the Þing, and finally proscription. His anger is understandable to the audience, and his desire for revenge expected. But by what means does one exact vengeance upon a king? According to Nicolas Meylan, while magic was negatively connoted in *Konungasǫgur*, it may serve as a subversive discourse in *Íslendingasǫgur*:

> Finding themselves in a subordinate and marginal position (…), but in control of textual production, some among the Icelandic text-producing elite recoded magic in positive terms and applied it to their textual proxies. They wrote stories in which an Icelander—or their surrogate—was able to either dispose of an aggressive and unjust king or secure the sort of distant but profitable relationship that Free State Iceland found appropriate, doing so by means of those very magical powers whose efficacy had been so conveniently documented for them by the condemnatory discourses produced by and for the royal circles. (Meylan 2014: 197)

Magic can thus act as an alternative discursive discourse in the saga literature, in relation to political performance. By performing the *nið*, Egill does not secure any advantages in terms of power or social prestige; however, his act stands as part of a continuum of anti-royalist perspectives aimed at several Norwegian kings. This sentiment is initially embodied by Kveldulfr, Egill's grandfather, followed by Skalla-Grímr, and ultimately, Egill himself. Egill's magical act can thus be viewed as a political performance, inscribed in an emotion, anger.

The relationship between magic, anger and politics is also illustrated in another episode. Two chapters later, the saga tells us that Queen Gunnhildr has a magical ritual performed, a *seiðr*, to curse Egill in retaliation for his *nið*. The narrative does not explicitly tell us what emotions or feelings might have triggered the action of the ritual, so we have to turn to the context of the narrative. At this point in the story, Eiríkr and Gunnhildr have been ousted from the Norwegian throne; the royal couple is exiled to Jórvík, and all the king's attempts to regain his throne or extend his power in England have failed. We also mentioned that Egill was recently responsible for the deaths of many of the couple's allies, but above all, that he killed one of their sons. We can therefore deduce that Gunnhildr is driven by a strong sense of revenge against Egill, and assume that the emotions behind her ritual are grief and anger. In medieval literature, scholars have identified an emotive script known as *ira regis*, royal anger. As mentioned above, the material testifies to a marked anti-royalist sentiment. In this regard, Gerd Althoff remarks that the use of anger in eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon sources serves to reveal *rex iniquus*, when a king has become unjust and must be deposed (Althoff 1998: 67). Although moderately compared to other medieval sources, *Egils saga* depicts royal anger on multiple occasions, whether when Haraldr *hárfagri* demands the heads of Kveldulfr and Skalla-Grímr, or when Eiríkr outlaws Egill[7]. Expressions of anger and royal anger are thus complex emotional scripts, which, in the case of *Egils saga,* and in addition to the subversive connotations of magical discourse, can be interpreted as challenging royal authority. This view also seems to be confirmed by the fact that the author of the saga explains Eiríkr's and Gunnhildr's flight to England as the result of Egill's curse.

How does royal anger relate to the magic performed by the queen Gunnhildr? Just as Egill had recourse to *níð-stöng*, a condemned form of magic, Gunnhildr made use of the *seiðr*, a magic with highly negative connotations in Old Norse literature. In this episode, the royal couple are already poorly regarded by the narrative; and the fact that the queen resorts to magic to take revenge on Egill further exacerbates this perception. The distinction between Egill's and Gunnhildr's use of magic lies in the nature of their actions. Egill's magical act is a reactive response to what he perceives as an abuse of power, whereas Gunnhildr's

[7] We have identified at least fourteen examples of royal anger in the saga.

magical performance represents an intensification of this abuse of power. This interpretation is validated by another magical performance in the same chapter. While in Jórvík, Egill confronts King Eiríkr and, in order to have his life spared, undertakes the composition of a *drápa* in the monarch's honor; however, at night, Egill is unable to compose his poem, as a swallow stands outside his window and sings. Arinbjörn, Egill's friend, climbs onto the roof and sees a shapeshifter (*hamhleypa*) fleeing from the house. Naturally, this shapeshifter is Gunnhildr, trying to prevent Egill from composing the poem for the king, in order to ensure his execution. Gunnhildr's anger compels her to act against her own king's will, and her transgression, her additional abuse of power is illustrated by her recourse to magic. Moreover, although the narrative is set in a time before the Christianization of Iceland, magic is nevertheless deemed a pre-Christian practice, both by the author and by the audience. This comment leads us to mention Althoff again, who points that expressions of anger have long been considered in medieval literature to be in opposition to the image of a proper Christian ruler (Althoff 1998: 66), further discrediting the Norwegian kings, and Gunnhildr as queen, according to saga standards. The recourse to a pre-Christian custom may thus explain why this articulation between magic and emotion is negatively perceived in this episode. However, it does present us with an argument in favor of magic as an alternative emotional discourse.

Magic, Emotional State & Somatopsychic Consequences

The interaction between emotion and magic in the saga under scrutiny does not seem to be limited to the performance of magic as an emotive act. As established, a magical performance can find its origin in an underlying emotion, contextualized explicitly or implicitly by the narrative. Our focus now shifts from the emotional origin of the magical act to question the potential consequences arising from the practice of magic. To explore this aspect, we intend to revisit the episode of Gunnhildr's *seiðr*:

> Svá er sagt, at Gunnhildr lét seið efla ok lét þat seiða, at Egill Skalla-Grímsson skyldi aldri ró bíða á Íslandi, fyrr en hon sæi hann. […] Egill Skalla-Grímsson sat at búi sínu. En þann vetr annan, er hann bjó at Borg eftir andlát Skalla-Gríms, þá gerðist Egill ókátr, ok var

> því meiri ógleði hans, er meir leið á vetrinn. Ok er sumar kom, þá lýsti Egill yfir því, at hann ætlar at búa skip sitt til brottfarar um sumarit. Tók hann þá háseta. Hann ætlar þá at sigla til Englands.
> It is said that Gunnhildr asked for a *seiðr* to be made, so that Egill Skalla-Grímsson would never have peace in Iceland until she saw him. […] Egill Skalla-Grímsson was staying at his estate at Borg. But, during the second winter that followed the death of Skalla-Grímr, Egill became unhappy, and his melancholia was the more the winter wore one. And when summer came, Egill declared that he was going to prepare his ship for departure this summer. He then took the high-seat, and planned to sail to England[8].

While the narrative withholds explicit descriptions of Gunnhildr's emotions before or after her magical performance, the text does inform us about the emotional consequences provoked by the ritual to the recipient, object of the curse. Following the *seiðr,* the text indicates a significant alteration in Egill's emotional state: Egill becomes *ókátr*, "morose," "unhappy," and is overcome by *ógleði*, "sadness," "melancholy," to the point of wanting to leave Iceland and set sail again. The narrative strategically juxtaposes these two events, implying a direct cause-and-effect relationship between Gunnhildr's magic and the subsequent alteration in Egill's emotional state. This episode suggests that magic can influence the emotional state of an individual, who is its intended target. These consequences, as evidenced in Egill's altered state, imply another additional reading to the relation between magic and emotion in *Egils saga*.

Moreover, the magical episode studied illustrates a new relationship between magic and emotion: by means of her ritual, Gunnhildr ensured that Egill would never find rest/quietness ("Egill Skalla-Grímsson skyldi aldri ró"). This extract implies that magic could also affect an individual's somato-psychic state. We find another occurrence of this interpretation in the saga, when a young woman named Helga is greatly affected by an unknown disease. Egill finds out she is ill due to a magical enchantment that had been poorly performed: a young man in love with Helga carved love runes (*manrúnar)* for her; however, his lack of magical knowledge caused her to fall ill[9]. The two examples

[8] *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, chapter 59.

[9] Chapter 78: « Þá þóttist hann rísta henni manrúnar, en hann kunni þat eigi, ok hafði hann þat ristit henni, er hon fekk meinsemi af »

mentioned exhibit differences: the first act deliberately affects Egill, whereas the second one fails and leads to undesirable consequences for Helga. Nonetheless, these instances shed light on Norse representations of magic as a force capable of influencing an individual's somato-psychic state. The negative influence of magic on the body and mind is well documented in Old Norse culture. Legislative sources do mention the fact that magic can bring about sickness, even death, to people or livestock (Dennis, Foote & Perkins 1980: 38-39). Numerous literary examples also bear witness to the same (Dillmann 2006: 72-87): magic is said to cause impotence (*Kormaks saga* chapter 5; *Njals saga* chapter 6), loss of memory (*Vatnsdœla saga* chapter 44) or reason (*Haralds saga ins harfagra* chapter 25; *Vatnsdœla saga* chapter 26), and even death (*Eyrbyggja saga* chapter 16; *Vatnsdœla saga* chapter 26). As well, *Ynglinga saga* informs us of the extent of Oðinn's magical powers: "In battle, Odin could make his enemies blind, or deaf, or terrified […] and also bring death, ill-luck and disease to people; and take the strength or the wit from one man to give it to another man"[10]. However, it would require further investigation to ascertain whether these examples of magic are also articulated with emotions. *Egils saga* describes Helga's affliction in these terms: "she had been suffering for a long time, and it was a worsening illness; she could not sleep at night, as if she were furious, frantic"[11]. We note that Helga's illness is exclusively described through emotional vocabulary, vocabulary that relates to anger and fear. According to Kirsi Kanerva, Old Norse culture made "no clear distinction between emotions and physical illness, since emotions could be part of the illness or even the cause of it" (Kanerva 2015: 18-19). Indeed, the Aristotelian renaissance of the twelfth century saw the emergence of new conceptions of affectivity, no longer as a purely spiritual and moral phenomenon, but also as a bodily one. The Hippocratic theory of the humors, which formed the basis of medieval medicine, already recognized the influence of emotions on the balance of soul and body, as a form of disturbance, an imbalance that could be the cause of suffering or illness. In this regard, this last excerpt brings

[10] Chapter 6: "*Óðinn kunni svá gera, at í orrostu urðu óvinír hans blindir eða daufir eða óttafullir,*" chapter 7: "*ok at gera mǫnnum bana eða óhamingju eða vanheilandi, svá ok at taka frá mǫnnum vit eða afl ok gefa ǫðrum*".

[11] Chapitre 72: "*hefir hon haft langan vanmátt - ok þat var kröm mikil. Fekk hon enga nótt svefn ok var sem hamstoli væri.*";

together conceptions of emotions and illnesses, triggered by a magical performance. If we revisit the excerpt from Barðr's banquet, one could also consider that Olvir and Þorolfr's men, falling ill after consuming beer, had their condition altered by Barðr's magic.

However, the target of the spell is not always the only victim. *Egils saga* also features representations of magic that affect the somato-psychic state of the subject performing the magical action. For example, the magical transformation into a *berserkr*[12], also initiated by an emotion, namely anger, could have serious consequences for the shape-shifter. The narrative specifies that those capable of shape-shifting became so strong that no one could resist them, but that once the frenzy was over, they became weaker "than is normal"[13]. As pointed by Vincent Samson, some saga authors describe the exhaustion that follows the *berskergangr* state as a pathological condition, as evidenced by the repeated use of the term *sótt* ("sickness," "illness," "disease") and its variations, found in legendary sagas such as in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* or *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs* (Samson 2011: 197-259). In *Egils saga*, Kveldulfr finds himself so weakened (*ómáttugr*) by his transformation that he has to go to bed, and dies soon after of illness[14]. This literary motif is also present in the *Svarfdœla saga*: after fighting in animal form, Þorsteinn svǫrfuðr finds himself so exhausted that he dies shortly afterwards (*Svarfdœla saga* chapter 19). According to Samson, exhaustion appears as a secondary effect caused by violent outbursts of fury (Samson 2011: 197-259). As a result, it is the emotion of anger, rather combined with the magical act or transformation, that causes exhaustion and, in the case of Kveldulfr, death.

Emotion, Magic, Control and Gender

The various examples mentioned above have allowed us to establish several links between emotion and magic. In addition to the fact that magic is represented as the emotive act, the saga describes

[12] We analyze the figure of the *berserkr* as an agent of magic, given that in Old Norse imaginary, his ability to transform refers to Odinic magic. Furthermore, Lucie Korecká considers the vocabulary associated with the *berserkr* as part of the vocabulary of magic.

[13] Chapter 27.

[14] Chapter 27.

magic as a force capable of altering the emotional state of a subject, but also of affecting the somato-psychic state of both the practitioner and the recipient. Some emotions, such as anger, are more explicit in the narrative than others, and stand out not only for their intensity, but also for their recurrence. Whether in the context of Egill's or Gunnhildr's anger previously discussed, or the anger that feeds the *berserkir*, the emphasis placed on anger in the narrative prompts us to examine in greater detail the relationship between this emotion and magic. We have briefly addressed the political dimension of anger, but it is a complex emotion with many different social implications. By emphasizing anger, the saga suggests that the manifestation of this emotion could have been problematic in the society contemporary with the writing of the narrative. Indeed, we must bear in mind that Iceland was going through a civil war at the time when most of the sagas were written down. All the examples of anger we have cited from the saga feed into a cycle of vengeance. According to William Ian Miller, "issues of violence and emotion are closely intermeshed in Norse culture, which, it should be stressed, was a blood feuding culture" (Miller 1992: 90). This sociopolitical and historical context stands in stark contrast to the literary context, in which emotional norms favored restraint. In this regard, how should we interpret literary expressions of anger? The examples under scrutiny share a number of common features, besides the expression of anger through means of magic: they illustrate a will for control, and a fear for loss of control.

The loss of control was feared in Western medieval culture, including in Medieval Icelandic culture. Emotional control, through self-mastery, was fundamental: individuals who failed to regulate their emotions would be perceived as dangerous (Millar 2017: 82). In the saga, Skalla-Grímr, enraged, shape-shifts against his will, killing Egill's friend before turning on his own son; Egill is only saved by the intervention of a handmaid, whom Skalla-Grímr also kills[15]; in chapter sixty-seven, Egill becomes enraged against his opponent and bites his throat to kill him[16]. If we turn to the *Kristinna laga Þáttur*, the Christian law of Icelandic legislation, magic and *berserkism* are mentioned in the same section and are both strongly condemned:

[15] Chapter 40: *La saga d'Egil*, Torfi Tulinius (trad.), 2021.
[16] Chapter 67: *La saga d'Egil*, Torfi Tulinius (trad.), 2021.

> If a man falls into a berserk's frenzy, the penalty is lesser outlawry, and the same penalty applies to the men who are present unless they restrain him—then they are liable to no penalty if they succeed in restraining him. But if it happens again, the penalty is lesser outlawry' (Dennis, Foote & Perkins 1980: 38-39).

As mentioned above, the practice of magic and *berserkism* were condemned by law, proving their profoundly anti-social character, perhaps because they illustrated the loss of one's control. While the loss of control may seem more obvious in the case of *berserkism*, it still seems to play an important role in the practice of magic, as exemplified by the vernacular terms in relation to *berserkism* and magic: *hamrammr* conveys a capacity for shape-shifting, but also the idea of being seized with warlike fury; another expression, *eigi einharmr*, also designates extremely furious men (Korecká 2019: 72); the verbs *hamast* and *hamask* convey a very intense emotion of anger: <to rage>, < be seized by a fit of fury>; *trylla*, means on the one hand <enchant>, but also <furious>, <becoming mad>, <demonic>; the term *galinn*, derived from the verb *gala* (to shout, to sing) translates as both <enchanted> and <to be furious, enraged> (Dillmann 2006: 79). Anger then appears as the emotion mostly associated with magical performance, vivid and uncontrollable, capable of causing an alteration of the self: the term *heillaðr*, derived from the verb *heilla* (to enchant, bewitch), also designates <losing one's mind> (Dillmann 2006: 76). Linked to magic, these connotations reflect anger of great intensity, capable of causing one to lose reason or self-control.

In her study of witchcraft in Modern England from the perspective of history of emotions, Charlotte-Rose Millar points out a close link between witchcraft, anger, lack of control and gender (Millar 2017: 82):

> At the heart [of] these narratives is a preoccupation with women who are unable to control their emotions, specifically their anger, and who then draw on the Devil's assistance to maliciously act upon this anger to take revenge on those who have offended them. (Millar 2017: 87)

After a survey of English witchcraft pamphlets, Millar argues that the Devil, and by extent the use of witchcraft, was for women a catalyst to express and act on their anger (Millar 2017: 84). Of course, the social context evoked here diverges radically from that of medieval Iceland, and these later conceptualizations of witchcraft cannot be equated with

Old Norse magic. However, this lead us to address the importance of gender in Norse conceptions of emotions. Saga literature presents a plurality of emotive scripts: while some seem to apply regardless of gender (such as concealing emotions), others are coded differently according to the gender of the characters, especially in regard to emotive performativity. Sif Ríkarðsdóttir notes that these scripts tend to "articulate masculinity through emotional masking and femininity as either emotionally expressive or repressive" (Sif Ríkarðsdóttir 2017: 177). Yet, if we take two literary, gendered examples of loss of control from *Egils saga*, we notice that the characters do not conform to their respective emotional scripts. As we have already seen, Egill loses control of himself when he learns of his proscription. Even in the context of a feud society, his behavior seems more than excessive, and he lets his anger and his wish for vengeance get the better of him. This total loss of control, from looting to cold-blooded murder, culminates in the practice of magic, which becomes the final expression of Egill's anger, in stark contrast to the masculine emotive script highlighted by Sif Ríkarðsdóttir. A similar observation can be made when considering Gunnhildr's episodes of anger, chapter sixty-one[17]. It is true that, on the surface, the narrative doesn't seem to describe Gunndhildr losing control; on the contrary, it reflects an intention to control the events according to her will: she is the one who drives Egill to Eiríkr, and she tries to prevent Egill from composing his poem for the king. In doing so, Gunnhildr does not conform to the supposed emotional script of her gender, her political role and social class. It is fair to suggest that, as a respectable queen, Gunnhildr should have reacted differently: she should not have bypassed her king's order to let Egill compose the poem; instead, she could have urged Eiríkr to kill Egill, as illustrated by the many examples of female whetting in other *Islendingasögur*. Scholars, such as Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, agree that lament or whetting are the expected female speech acts in Old Norse literature (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013: 128). By resorting to magic to express her anger, and more specifically, taking agency through magic, Gunnhildr does not conform to the assumed emotional literary norms, nor follow the gendered emotive script expected of her. As pointed by Sif Ríkarðsdóttir, "the deviation from a script by a male or female character is frequently

[17] Chapter 61 : *La saga d'Egil,* Torfi Tulinius (trad.), 2019.

a sign of an aberrant gendered behaviour" (Sif Ríkarðsdóttir 2017: 139). Gunnhildr's loss of emotional control is translated by her behavior which fails to conform to gendered and social norms. This suggests that the saga-author intentionally coded Egill and Gunnhildr with their deviant emotional gendered-scripts, perhaps because of their practice of magic, which is frequently connoted with gender or sexual deviance—and this could also imply a loss of control within gender.

Scholars have established that literary representations of magic respond to *topoi* in Old Norse literature. In the context of the study of emotions, commonplaces, patterns and images serve as "socially [true]," emotional cues and thus make it possible to "communicate aspects of emotions to others". We mentioned earlier that Sif Ríkarðsdóttir interpreted silence as a form of alternative emotional discourse, which the audience of the narrative had to "infuse" with their own emotions to give it meaning. In that respect, the connection between the desire for control, emotions and magic could be interpreted as a form of catharsis for the audience of the saga, all the more so in a cultural context where the loss of control was feared, and the practice of magic ambivalently connoted.

Conclusion

Although this article is only a preliminary work that requires further research, we were able to demonstrate a clear correlation between emotions and magic in *Egils saga*. In the first part of the analysis, the examples under scrutiny have illustrated a connection between magic and emotion, where magic serves as an emotive act, simultaneously triggered by, and expressing an emotion. The same examples also suggest that the narrative relies on the saga audience's involvement to interpret the character's actions according to emotional standards and to judge the moral implications of magical performances according to the narrative context. Secondly, the common points between magic and emotion—and more specifically, anger—have been addressed through their political connotations. Based on the works of Meylan and Althoff, the saga extracts analyzed have illustrated one possible interpretation, that could be subversive discourses challenging royal authority in the narrative, presenting us with an argument in favor of magic as an

alternative emotional discourse. In addition, the analysis of *Egils saga* demonstrated additional connotations of magic in relation to emotion. Depending on the examples, magic can be presented as a force able to influence the emotional state of an individual, but can also affect the somato-psychic state of both the practitioner and the recipient. In the last part of our analysis, we have discussed the relationship between magic, emotion and the notion of control, which proved to be really interesting in the context of an honor-based society where loss of emotional control was feared, and by extension, the loss of political/social control. All the excerpts under scrutiny have illustrated a different relationship to control, from controlling others' emotions to remain in control of a political feud, always by means of magical performance. We have thus suggested the duality of the representation of magic, which becomes an instrument for channeling emotions, but also feeds on the loss of emotional control. In a society where emotional norms favored restraint, we suggested that the emphasis on anger and control might reflect the social anxiety of contemporaries, and proposed that magic be interpreted as a form of alternative emotional discourse, as a cathartic metaphor. However, this line of analysis has to be evaluated by being applied to a larger corpus. If we move beyond *Egils saga*, are the relationships between magic and emotions articulated in the same way? Is anger also predominantly represented, or is it overshadowed by other emotions? Do the narrative use of magic and emotions respond to the same political or gender patterns? Are the connotations associated with magic similar, or do they differ? An in-depth study of other sagas will allow us to put the results of this article to the test.

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