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# *The Heart of Dread*

*A Case Study of Fear in Old Norse Culture*

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## ABSTRACT

The misplaced idea of the Middle Ages as a period of unmediated emotion is still popular. Yet, by studying both textual and material culture from the period, recent scholarship in the history of emotions has proved that this is not the case. Literature has proven to be a valuable source for the modern researcher to improve his understanding of the mentality with which past cultures regarded emotions. The present thesis attempts to improve our understanding of emotions in Old Norse culture, and consequently the Middle Ages, by performing a case study of fear across three different genres of Old Norse literature. The purpose of this case study is to reconstruct a mentality of fear by looking at four texts in detail: *Hrólfs saga kraka ok kappahans*, *Atlakviða*, *Atlamál in Grænlensku*, and *Fóstbræðra saga*. Fear plays a key role within these narratives. Thus, by looking at the representation of fear in these texts, we can glimpse fragments of the ideology underlying said representations. And thus, we can make relevant statements about the discourse that surrounded this emotion in the emotional communities that produced these stories.

## ÚTDRÁTTUR

Algennt er að litið sé á miðaldir sem tímabil óblendinna tilfinninga. Með því að kynna sér efnislega menningu þess tíma og þá einkum á textaformi, benda nýjar rannsóknir á sögu tilfinninga þó til að sú er ekki raunin. Bókmenntir hafa reynst verðmæt heimild fyrir fræðimenn nútímans til að auka skilning á viðhorfi menningarheima fyrri tíma til tilfinninga. Markmið þessarar ritgerðar er að auka skilning á tilfinningum eins og þær koma fyrir í fornnorrænni menningu, og þar með miðöldum, með því að rannsaka hvernig ótti kemur fram í þremur mismunandi bókmenntagreinum frá þessum tíma. Tilgangur rannsóknarinnar er að draga upp mynd af hugarfari sem tengist ótta með því að skoða ítarlega fjögur rit: *Hrólfs sögu kraka og kappahans*, *Atlakviðu*, *Atlamál hin grænlensku* og *Fóstbræðra sögu*. Í þessum frásögnum gegnir ótti lykilhlutverki. Með athugun á því hvernig ótti er settur fram í þessum textum, fáum við örlitla innsýn inn í heim tilfinningatúlkunar í fornnorrænni menningu ásamt framsetningu hennar. Í kjölfarið er hægt að setja fram tilgátur um viðhorf til ótta í þeim tilfinningalegu menningarheimum sem þessar sögur urðu til í.

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Ente, esto es para ustedes también.

## **Introduction: Where doth Fear Lie in Old Norse Culture? The Sources at our Disposal and their Interpretation**

Fear is a painful emotion caused by impending danger or evil. It is a common reaction to a situation that previously produced undesirable results or presents an uncertain outcome. Whether it is caused by pain, loss, violence, heights, darkness, dolls, vast expanses, tight spaces or the unknown, all are acquainted with the paralyzing sensation of feeling afraid. Stories intended to shake people to their core have been told and retold throughout millennia. Notably, even in stories depicting heroic deeds or ‘normal’ life, fear always plays a part in shaping the psychology of the characters. These traumatic experiences and phobias often impact the actions and decisions of an individual. This is as true today as it must have been throughout the earliest stages of human existence.

Laboratories worldwide are performing investigations to improve our understanding of fear and what occurs within an organism when it is afraid. Significant findings have already altered previous conceptions of this emotion, which is regarded by some as the most primitive of feelings. However, while this new data may aid us in more thoroughly comprehending fear in present—and presumably future—humans, when an attempt is made to apply these discoveries to historical investigation, we encounter several methodological difficulties. This is partly due to the time and space gap between the modern researcher and the object of his study; in addition, the quantity, quality, and reliability of the sources at the researcher’s disposal from the period or culture under study complicate the task.

How much can a source from another time and place tell us about fear? Though it might be difficult or perhaps impossible to determine how emotions were *experienced*, we can use historical sources to discuss how emotions were *expressed*. Ultimately, the expression of emotion is more important in the creation of a social reality than the ‘factual’ way in which emotion is individually experienced. The emotional expressions depicted in cultural objects can enhance our understanding of the role of emotions in the group that produced them while also providing information on the social reality that they helped construct.

This project begins a reconstruction of the discourse surrounding fear in Old Norse culture by analyzing several literary examples in which fear plays an important part. My hope

is that this project will improve the current understanding of fear, and consequently emotions, in the Old Norse-Icelandic human groups.

### *The Sources*

First of all, we must be aware of the sources available to us from the Old Norse world that may contain information relevant for a reconstruction of emotion. Unlike a modern-day therapist, a historian cannot directly question the subject of his study. When dealing, as we are, with medieval communities, the evidence at our disposal is not comprised of pictures, films, or biographies (in the modern sense). The surviving sources from the Old Norse world can be classified in the following categories:<sup>1</sup>

- Material evidence: under this classification we can place archaeological finds, runic inscriptions, architecture, clothing, human remains, etc.
- Textual evidence: skaldic poems, passages by foreign authors who dealt with Germanic and Scandinavian people from the beginning of our era, eddic poetry, and the sagas (mostly written by anonymous authors in Iceland).

Due to time and space constraints, this study will focus on some examples from the second category. In the decades around 1200 Icelanders start writing texts that told of events and people from different places and times, ranging from their contemporary reality to a remote, often legendary, and at times mythological, past. The chief source informing these written works is the oral tradition. The final products are texts which combined real fact with exaggerated fancy, a literary tradition with a singular type of logic in which the real and the imagined merge together.

Some genres of the Old Norse literary corpus<sup>2</sup> are skaldic poetry, eddic poetry, the famed *Íslendingasögur*, the *fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, the *riddarasögur*, and the *konungasögur*. To perform this case study of fear, texts have been chosen from some of these literary genres. I will consider in detail *Hrólfs saga kraka ok kappa hans*, a *fornaldarsaga*; two Eddic poems: *Atlakviða* and *Atlamál in Grænlenzku*; and the *Íslendingasaga*, *Fóstbræðra saga*. The purpose of studying examples from different genres of this literary corpus is to identify

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<sup>1</sup> This classification of the source material is oversimplified, but still suitable for the interests of this thesis. For a proper overview of the sources, both before and after the Christianization of Scandinavia, see Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, vol. 1, *The Myths* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 1994), 20–33.

<sup>2</sup> What is meant by ‘Old Norse literary corpus’ is the vernacular literature of the Scandinavian peoples, mainly composed of Icelandic writings, up to c. 1400 CE.

common patterns in the expression of fear without mistaking a particular genre, with its norms of expression, as an ‘emotional community’ (a term coined by Barbara Rosenwein). By identifying patterns, we can begin reconstructing the discourse surrounding fear.

A source-critical approach might argue that the texts considered here are unreliable because they were composed at least two centuries after the events they claim to relate presumably took place. But, even if a saga written in the thirteenth-century tells of events that happened three centuries earlier, the text still serves as a relevant source for reconstructing ideas of the thirteenth-century community that produced it. Furthermore, the text likely retains elements from the period in which the plot is placed—these stories owe their survival to an important tradition of transmission.<sup>3</sup> Without a doubt, medieval Iceland had a large narrative tradition.

A fair question to ask is: what kind of information about the emotional mentality of medieval Icelanders can literature provide? These people, like every other human group, must have carried out a constant revision and renewal of conventions such as defining the similarities that determine who belongs and who does not, and the capacity of mutual comprehension. Yet, community life constitutes more than an ongoing negotiation of values and a pursuit of consensus. Due to their nature, emotions possess high political importance, and because of this it becomes necessary for a community to also include a collective effort to prescribe an emotional management structure.<sup>4</sup> William Reddy points out that the best way of communicating styles of emotional management to an audience is by means of sensory-rich performances like ritual, theater, and predication. Additionally, they can be conveyed, or suggested, through literature, art, music, iconography, architecture, or dress. All such practices can be viewed as emotive in character.<sup>5</sup> And by seeing what the emotional management structure transmitted through some of these texts tells about fear, conclusions about the ideology of this emotion in the Old Norse emotional communities that produced them can be drawn.

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<sup>3</sup> Jens Peter Schjødt, “Reflections on Aims and Methods in the Study of Old Norse Religion,” in *More than Mythology*, ed. Catharina Raudvere and Jens Peter Schjødt (Lund: Nordic Academy Press, 2012), 268. This reasoning is supported by a phenomenon like ‘cultural memory.’ Jan Assmann stresses the relevance of tradition in order to retain the cultural memory of any society (Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 8). For more information concerning *cultural memory* see Aleida Assmann, “Canon and Archive,” in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 97–107; and Jan Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 109–18.

<sup>4</sup> William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 330.

<sup>5</sup> Reddy, *Navigation*, 331.

### *The Study of Emotions and the Middle Ages*

A suitable point of departure for this section is the work of Johan Huizinga (1872–1945). In his book *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, Huizinga describes the emotional experience of the medieval subject as something ‘sharper’ and ‘unmediated’: “All experience had yet to the minds of men the directness and absoluteness of the pleasure and pain of child-life.”<sup>6</sup> According to him, the Middle Ages is an epoch in which emotions controlled the lives of men. Furthermore, “life had still the colours of a fairy story; that is to say, it assumed those colours in the eyes of contemporaries.”<sup>7</sup> Huizinga’s description of the emotional atmosphere of the Middle Ages is similar to modern descriptions of infancy: “Huizinga’s Middle Ages was the childhood of man.”<sup>8</sup> Huizinga suggests the existence of a linear progression of emotional control through history; the emotional control of humans ‘matured’ over the course of modernity.

In line with the idea of a linear progression of emotional control, Norbert Elias introduces his idea of ‘the civilizing process’ in the 1930s. He disagrees with the tendency of sociologists to separate ideas and ideologies from what he, following Freud, calls “the structures of drives, the direction and form of human affects and passions.”<sup>9</sup> According to Elias, the emotions that the medieval subject could freely express were overlaid with more and more norms and prohibitions by the civilizing process in the transition to modernity. Barbara Rosenwein summarizes Elias’ argument in the following way: “As society became more complex, the state more powerful, and individuals more interdependent, the controls only increased, so that modern man’s psyche today is hedged about in every way.”<sup>10</sup> Both Huizinga and Elias assume a ‘hydraulic model’<sup>11</sup>—“emotions are like great liquids within each person, heaving and frothing, eager to be let out.”<sup>12</sup> In addition, they leave us with an ontogenic theory of emotion, one that traces a history from infancy to adulthood.

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<sup>6</sup> Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, trans. F. Hopman (London: The Folio Society, 1998), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Huizinga, *Waning*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, rev. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 408.

<sup>10</sup> Rosenwein, *Communities*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, “Worrying About Emotions in History,” *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 834–6. The ‘hydraulic model’ of emotion has been traced back to the medieval pathology of ‘humours’ as well as to the ‘nerve-force’ that Darwin situated inside the body, which manifested itself as ‘intense sensations.’ Emotions were among these sensations. See Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, ed. Paul Ekman, 4th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Rosenwein, “Worrying”, 834.

Jumping further in time, during the mid 1980s Peter and Carol Stearns publish an article in which they propose a strict distinction between the individual experience of emotion and emotional norms. They focused on the latter as their object of study. In this article they introduce the term ‘emotionology’, which although related to emotion, they considered to be a distinct analytical entity. They defined ‘emotionology’ as follows: “the attitudes or standards that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains toward basic emotions and their appropriate expression; ways that institutions reflect and encourage these attitudes in human conduct.”<sup>13</sup> They suggest that researchers concentrate on the structures and institutions that regulate the expression of feelings in society (e.g. schools, armies, marriages, families). Stearns and Stearns state that the relationship between emotionology and emotion would be restructured in relation to the range of feelings allowed to an individual in history. They point out that emotional norms are not frozen and static, but rather subject to historical change. For example, if at some point in time it is socially acceptable to demonstrate sexual desire openly, but not in a subsequent period, a continuing feeling of lustful desire could become a feeling of shame within a new emotional network.

While the Stearns provide an important contribution, they adopt uncritically Elias’ progressive chronology—they leave the model intact and study a later point in this progressive conception of history.<sup>14</sup> Thus, general opinion still follows a notion of the Middle Ages as emotionally childish. However, around the time in which the Stearns publish this article, the research of some scholars of the late twentieth-century start proving this conception of the Middle Ages wrong.

For instance, Jean Leclercq praises the monastic love of the Cistercian brethren as sublime self expressions. John C. Moore finds love in medieval monasteries and courts, but also in the cities, among the schoolmen. Their work shows evidence of mediated emotions and emotional expressions in different medieval contexts. To further unsettle Elias’ model, which speaks of unmediated emotions during the Middle Ages, C. Stephen Jaeger discovers the ‘civilizing process,’ which Elias reserved for Modernity, in the courts of tenth- and eleventh-century German imperial rulers.<sup>15</sup> Jaeger situates aristocratic love as the key expression of

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<sup>13</sup> Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, “Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards,” *American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (1985): 813.

<sup>14</sup> Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, trans. Keith Tribe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 59.

<sup>15</sup> See further, Dom Jean Leclercq, *L'amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu. Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du Moyen Age*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Les éditions du cerf, 1990); John Clare Moore, *Love in Twelfth-Century France*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972); C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals ~ 939 - 1210* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

emotion in these courts. He states that this type of love was understood in its time as a highly restrained love, “the source of morality and a heroism of self-control and self-mastery.”<sup>16</sup> Carrying on, by the 1990s some scholars of medieval law already consider emotion to be a central topic in their field. Emotions are already being seen at this time as something tied to goals and values; they are not thought of as the result of vacillating moods anymore. For instance, Paul Hyams and Daniel Smail explore the role of rancor and hatred in the development of law; Stephen D. White looks at anger in the exercise of lordship; and William Ian Miller writes about affect and honor.<sup>17</sup>

Today, the two main fields of knowledge researching emotion are cognitive psychology<sup>18</sup> and social anthropology.<sup>19</sup> Concerning emotions, these two disciplines represent opposite ends of a spectrum. Cognitive psychology mainly takes an essentialist stance, which upholds the cultural universality of emotions as well as a trans-historical notion of them. On the other end of the spectrum, social anthropologists have for the most part aligned themselves with a social constructionist view: emotions are culturally contingent, relative, historical, and

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen C. Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), ix.

<sup>17</sup> See further, Paul Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation in Medieval England*, 1st ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Daniel Smail, “Hatred as a Social Institution in Late-Medieval Society,” *Speculum* 76, no. 1 (2001); Stephen D. White, “The Politics of Anger,” in *Anger’s Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, ed. Barbara H. Rosenwein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); and William Ian Miller, *Humiliation: And Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort and Violence* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993). For more concerning anger and how the medieval English king used it as an effective political tool, see J. E. A. Jolliffe, *Angevin Kingship*, 2nd ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1963).

<sup>18</sup> In the ‘older’ psychological tradition, emotions were considered to be ‘drives’ or forms of energy that would ‘discharge’ unless they were controlled. But, by the 1970s a paradigm shift had taken place: emotions were no longer seen as impulses that led to moderating controls, and finally to behavior. The theories of the sixties and the seventies argued for a sequence which started with the subject’s perception, followed by appraisal, which then allowed for emotions to enter the stage, leading in turn to action readiness. Instead of impulses and regulations, psychologists started talking about automatic, quick and non-reflective appraisals. For more on emotion as the product of a relational perception that appraised an object, see Magda B. Arnold, *Emotion and Personality*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 171. For an overview of current psychological theories of emotions, see Randolph R. Cornelius, *Science of Emotion: Research and Tradition in the Psychology of Emotion* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1996); Plamper, *History*, Chap. 3; and Reddy, *Navigation*, Chap. 1. For an evolutionary approach, consider Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (London: Penguin Press, 1998). For views focused on the brain, see Antonio R. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (London: W. Heinemann, 2000); and Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Even though agreeing that at least some emotions are rooted deep in the human psyche, many anthropologists take the view of social constructionism, which understands emotional expressions as a cultural byproduct, thus giving place to the possibility of there being as many forms of emotional expression as there are cultures. In the words of Michelle Rosaldo: “what individuals can think and feel is overwhelmingly a product of socially organized modes of action and of talk” (Michelle Rosaldo, “Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling”, in *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*, ed. Richard Shweder and Robert LeVine (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 147). In the end, social constructionists understand that each society provides its members with the emotional management structure they should follow in order to express and deal with their emotions. See further, Reddy, *Navigation*, Chap. 2; and Plamper, *History*, Chap. 2.

socially constructed. Regardless of their lack of consensus, the research done in these fields have made researchers distance themselves from the ‘hydraulic model’ of emotion:

Putting social constructionism and the cognitive view together, we may say that if emotions are assessments based on experience and goals, the norms of the individual’s social context provide the framework in which such evaluations take place and derive their meaning. There is nothing whatever ‘hydraulic’ – nothing demanding release – in this cognitivist/social constructionist view... [these] theories of emotion suggest that no emotion is childish. Even for children, emotions are not ‘pure’ or unmediated; all are the products of experience, and experience itself is shaped by the practices and norms of a person’s household, neighborhood and larger society. Even the most ‘impulsive’ of behaviors is judged so within a particular context. If an emotional display seems ‘extreme’, that is itself a perception from within a set of emotional norms that is socially determined.<sup>20</sup>

Cognitive psychology and social anthropology further demonstrate that a perception of the Middle Ages (or any other epoch) as a period of childish and unmediated emotional experience and expression is inadequate. Researchers are now aware of the problems with what Barbara Rosenwein calls the ‘grand narrative’ of the history of emotions: the idea that “the history of the West is the history of increasing emotional restraint.”<sup>21</sup>

An important reaction against this ‘grand narrative’ is William Reddy’s. He defines emotion as “an array of loosely linked thought material that tends to be activated simultaneously (which may take the form of a schema), and that is too large to be translated<sup>22</sup> into action or utterance over a brief time horizon.”<sup>23</sup> Even though the thought material might be loosely linked together, the subject experiencing an emotion is not consciously aware of all the thought processes that affect his or her judgment at the moment of making a statement about his or her emotional state because attention has a limited capacity. Thus, the strategies in place that guide attention, among which we find mental control strategies, will determine which of the

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<sup>20</sup> Rosenwein, *Communities*, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Rosenwein, “Worrying,” 827.

<sup>22</sup> Reddy appeals to the concept of ‘translation,’ as developed by philosophers like Quine, Alcock and Davidson, to overcome the limitations of the post-structuralist concept of the sign (which can only operate with one code at a time—a signifier refers to a single signified). An utterance about emotion is not something that happens in the context of a single background code, but also in the presence of material available in many other codes: both sensory (e.g. aural, visual) and procedural (e.g. language, rank, dress, gestures, codes of propriety). There is, however, an issue that the concept of translation raises and needs to be addressed: its indeterminacy. An act of translation always results in transferring the information from one code to the terms of another, which may prove inadequate. Yet, attention is not a passive agent in this respect, and it has the ability to decide if a translation is inadequate. For more on the concept of translation, see Reddy, *Navigation*, Chap. 3; W. V. Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969); Linda Martín Alcoff, *Real Knowing: New Versions of the Coherence Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); and Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Reddy, *Navigation*, 111.

overwhelming array of currently activated thoughts will gain access to attention's intense transformative activity.<sup>24</sup> For example, when we deal with the emotional statement "I am brave," this is an attempt by an individual to describe a feeling. But, the words themselves can (and often do) change those feelings. The utterance "I am brave" is a "first draft," a subject trying out an expression. It is necessarily inadequate, calling forth either its reinforcement ("Yes, I am brave"), its contradiction ("No, I am afraid, not brave"), or something in between. Emotives are choices—mostly automatic choices—made from a huge repertory of possibilities. Most of those possibilities will never be explored because most are not recognized, or hardly recognized, by the society in which an individual lives and feels.<sup>25</sup> Thus, without denying that emotions have a universal corporeal core, Reddy understands that emotions are shaped by both culture and history.

The first thing Reddy argues in this theoretical framework is that emotions *do exist* as something extra-cultural. In second place he states that the forms emotions can take are determined by the contexts—which depends on the cultures—that elicit them. Both culture and history shape, mold, and channel rather thoroughly emotional expressions. Nevertheless, this shaping is never successful in its entirety. To better refer to this phenomenon, Reddy coins the term *emotives*, which he defines as follows:

Emotives are translations into words about, into 'descriptions' of, the ongoing translation tasks that currently occupy attention as well as of the other such tasks that remain in the queue, overflowing its current capacities. Emotives are influenced directly by, and alter, what they 'refer' to. Thus, emotives are similar to performatives<sup>26</sup> (and differ from constatives) in that emotives do things to the world. Emotives are themselves instruments for directly changing, building, hiding, intensifying emotions, instruments that may be more or less successful.<sup>27</sup>

Reddy develops the concept of *emotives* with the aim of using it as a tool to better approach the study of emotions in history. He sees emotions as habits, as something that can be learned and unlearned—although, as with any habit, such change is difficult. Furthermore, if the habit is deeply rooted, it crowds out other non-automatic responses, which are possible but require 'cognitive capacity', an effort of will, or attention. This explains why conventional emotives authorized in a given community have extensive power. Nevertheless, this power is often

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>26</sup> 'Performatives' are statements which, in certain contexts, have the ability to transform things or situations. The concept (along with the concept of 'constatives') belongs to J.L. Austin's 'Speech Act Theory'. For more, see J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

<sup>27</sup> Reddy, *Navigation*, 105.

dangerous because it channels emotional expression. When emotional expressions are forced to follow a few narrow paths—when conventions allow for only a few overlearned habits—people suffer. Emotives are first drafts that press for reformulation, but all too often second drafts are not allowed. To develop this further Reddy introduces two concepts: ‘emotional liberty’ and ‘emotional suffering.’ ‘Emotional liberty’ is the liberty to allow emotives sufficient free expression for the individual to undergo conversion experiences and life-course changes involving numerous contrasting, often incommensurable factors; ‘emotional suffering’ is the suffering of the individual as he sorts out the incommensurable factors that make two dearly held goals incompatible.

Some of this suffering is inevitable, but some of it is induced by conventional emotives made mandatory by a given ‘emotional regime.’<sup>28</sup> An ‘emotional regime’ is defined by Reddy as a “complex of practices that establish a set of emotional norms and that sanction those who break them.”<sup>29</sup> The existence of an emotional regime in turn creates a reactive ‘emotional refuge’ which values and condemns a different set of emotions. The refuges’ emotives are determined by the regime’s inadequacies. Consequently, it is imperative to look at the permitted emotives in a given community in order to properly appraise the political significance of ideology, law, state ritual, coercion, and violence.<sup>30</sup> With all of these concepts Reddy provides a scheme for historical change in emotions and their expressions that does not rely on an ontogenic argument, but that is rather tied to state formation and hegemony.<sup>31</sup> Reddy’s ideas come together to create a synthetic theory for the history of emotions.

Barbara Rosenwein points out: “Reddy has taken an important step by recognizing the possibility of emotional refuges. Anthropological literature often talks about *one* culture, and *one* emotional style for every society studied. Reddy’s refuges leave us with a bipartite society: either one is at court *or* one is in a sentimental refuge.”<sup>32</sup> However, she mentions that there is no reason to imagine that there are just two emotional stances in any given historical period. Moreover, although there is evidence of some early medieval courts fostering and stressing certain emotional styles, it would be wrong to call them ‘regimes’. They rather seem to have represented the particular emotional styles of a momentarily powerful fraction of the population, an elite faction. Although difficult to recognize due to the source situation, other

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>31</sup> Rosenwein, *Communities*, 23.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 23.

sets of emotional norms must have coexisted with those that were dominant.<sup>33</sup> This is why Rosenwein argues that there always are various ‘emotional communities’ at any given time:

Imagine a large circle within which are smaller circles, none entirely concentric but rather distributed unevenly within the given space. The large circle is the overarching emotional community, tied together by fundamental assumptions, values, goals, feeling rules, and accepted modes of expression. The smaller circles represent subordinate emotional communities, partaking in the larger one and revealing its possibilities and its limitations. They too may be subdivided. At the same time, other large circles may exist, either entirely isolated from or intersecting with the first one at one or more points.<sup>34</sup>

Rosenwein defines an ‘emotional community’ as a group in which people have a common stake, interests, values and goals. Thus it is often a social community. An emotional community, to name a few options, can be a family, a neighborhood, a guild, a parliament, a monastery, a school, or a king’s court. She is interested in emphasizing their social aspect because we *are* dealing with human groups. In addition to that aspect, she stresses their textual dimension.<sup>35</sup> Emotional communities can also be textual communities, created and reinforced by ideologies, teachings and common presuppositions. Texts may provide exemplars of emotions both belittled and praiseworthy with just their vocabulary.<sup>36</sup>

Emotional communities are in some ways what Michel Foucault called a common ‘discourse’: shared vocabularies and ways of thinking that have a disciplining or controlling function. They are also similar to Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of ‘habitus’: deeply rooted rules that determine our ways of thinking and acting that may be different in different groups. Rosenwein uses the term ‘communities’ in order to stress the social and relational nature of feelings; to allow room for Reddy’s useful notion of ‘emotives’, which change the discourse and the habitus by their very existence; and to emphasize the adaptability of some people to different sorts of emotional conventions as they move between groups.<sup>37</sup>

### *The Study of Emotion and Old Norse Literature*

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 23. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 24–25. For more about textual communities, see Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

<sup>36</sup> Rosenwein, *Communities*, 25.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 25.

The distance in time and space between the people that produced the surviving literary sources and the modern reader is a problem when studying emotions in Old Norse culture. As a result, general scholarly consensus regards the saga world as a cold and unemotional place—a judgment applied to both the sensibilities of the saga characters and to the sensibilities of the narrative style. However, this view has been challenged. Referring back to the spectrum of understanding emotion presented previously (which places the essentialist view of cognitive psychology in one end, and the relativistic view of social constructivism in the other), can help us to better appreciate the scholarly dialogue about emotions surrounding these sources.

Carolyn Larrington begins one of her articles by comparing the “famously objective narrators” of the *Íslendingasögur* to the tone of the Arthurian romances, which “depict a range of emotional situations that are often intensely experienced by their protagonists.”<sup>38</sup> Following various psychologists she thinks that literature is a suitable means to convey emotional stimulation.<sup>39</sup> The idea underlying this is that if the model is well-executed in terms of characters, behaviors, and situation, the text will elicit both empathy and aesthetic appreciation in the listening audience. As the audience runs out the simulation it should produce appropriate and congruent emotional reactions. Norse audiences would have been required to process the different ‘emotion scripts’ (individual components of the text’s simulation) contained in the emotion-episodes narrated to them, in order to be able to engage and empathize with the plot and its characters.<sup>40</sup>

Larrington proposes that in order to access the ‘real’ emotions in these texts we focus our attention on the somatic indicators.<sup>41</sup> She supports this by claiming that emotions produce very particular physiological symptoms, which, even though they can be stylized or exaggerated to some extent, are nonetheless universally recognizable both to us and to the characters within the texts who are depicted as aware of normative standards.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, she suggests that in order to properly explain the emotional evidence that we can gather from these somatic indicators, we resort to the concepts of appraisal and action readiness. She claims

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<sup>38</sup> Carolyn Larrington, “Learning to Feel in the Old Norse Camelot?,” ed. Sif Rikhardsdottir, S. G. Eriksen, and B. Bandlien, *Scandinavian Studies* 87, no. 1 (2015): 74.

<sup>39</sup> For more on literature as a provider of ‘emotional simulation’, see Keith Oatley, *The Passionate Muse: Exploring Emotion in Stories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Keith Oatley, “Why Fiction May Be Twice as True as Fact: Fiction as Cognitive and Emotional Stimulation,” *Review of General Psychology* 3, no. 2 (1999); Keith Oatley, “A Taxonomy of the Emotions of Literary Response and a Theory of Identification in Fictional Narrative,” *Poetics* 23, no. 1–2 (1995); and Raymond A. Mar et al., “Emotion and Narrative Fiction: Interactive Influence before, during and after Reading,” *Cognition and Emotion* 25, no. 5 (2011).

<sup>40</sup> Larrington, “Learning,” 75.

<sup>41</sup> Carolyn Larrington, “The Psychology of Emotion and Study of the Medieval Period,” *Early Medieval Europe* 10, no. 2 (2001): 254.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

that emotion does not occur without a proximate cause, and this will ultimately result in some action. The idea behind this, as formulated by Nico Frijda, is that: “Emotions arise out from the interaction of situational meanings and concerns.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, Larrington concludes that emotion episodes are placed in a context where appraisals and action readiness are identifiable.<sup>44</sup> The concept of appraisal and action readiness might provide interesting readings, but they are not suitable for discussing all of the episodes dealing with sentiment in this literary corpus. Additionally, only focusing on somatic indicators as evidence seems rather limited, and leaves out much that can still be said by looking at the non-somatic evidence.

She mentions that although the occurrence of emotion follows genetically basic patterns, it is locally shaped by cultural and social norms. However, she does not address the contradiction this presents. If emotions, and their expressions, are culturally shaped, this problematizes her suggestion of universally recognizable physiological symptoms. A thirteenth-century Viking that turns pale is not necessarily experiencing the same sensation as a nineteenth-century native from New Guinea who turns pale. Ethnography provides ample scholarship that demonstrates that somatic indicators are not universally consistent. Another criticism that can be raised is the assumption that literature always aims to evoke empathy in its audience is too narrow. A text can just be sending a message of power or criticism perhaps, by appealing to reason or something else.

An interesting point that Larrington discusses concerning translated Arthurian romances into Old Norse is the need for ‘emotion scripts’ to not only be translated, but adapted, in order to arouse emotions in the target audience. The changes implemented in these emotion-episodes by the translator offer insight into the Old Norse emotional world. Still, the question remains, what impact, if any, did these translated sagas have on the native genres, in terms of teaching audiences both how to feel and how to recognize feeling in literary characters?<sup>45</sup> But such questions fall beyond the scope of this project.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Nico H. Frijda, “The Laws of Emotion,” *American Psychologist* 43, no. 5 (1988): 352.

<sup>44</sup> Larrington, “Psychology,” 255–256.

<sup>45</sup> Larrington, “Learning,” 76.

<sup>46</sup> For scholarship about emotions in the *Íslendingasögur*, see Miller, *Humiliation*; if the focus is eddic poetry, see Theodore M. Andersson, “Is There a History of Emotions in Eddic Poetry? Daniel Sävborg’s Critique of Eddic Chronology,” in *Codierungen von Emotionen Im Mittelalter*, ed. C. Stephen Jaeger and Ingrid Kasten (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2003). For more concerning the translation of emotional scripts, see Sif Rikhardsdóttir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse: The Movement of Texts in England, France and Scandinavia* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), 63–69; and Frank Brandsma, “Where are the Emotions in Scandinavian Arthuriana? Or: How Cool Is King Arthur of the North?,” ed. Sif Rikhardsdóttir, S. G. Eriksen, and B. Bandlien, *Scandinavian Studies* 87, no. 1 (2015). For research focused on crying, see John Lindow, “The Tears of the Gods: A Note on the Death of Baldr in Scandinavian Mythology,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 101, no. 2 (2002); and Kristen Mills, “Grief, Gender, and Genre: Male Weeping in Snorri’s Account of Baldr’s Death, King’s Sagas, and *Gesta Danorum*,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 113, no. 4

Turning to a different approach, we consider the work of William Ian Miller, who has written extensively about emotions using the sagas as source material. He thinks very highly of the ability of medieval Icelanders to understand the mental and emotional states of others, and presumably, themselves.<sup>47</sup> Miller argues that emotions *are* represented in the sagas, but that to the modern reader these words or gestures seem to demonstrate a lack of concern for life, a kind of nonchalance that borders on insensibility.<sup>48</sup> The task of reconstructing what Miller calls the ‘emotional economy’ of another culture across eight centuries through imperfect sources is a difficult one. In his “Emotions and the sagas,”<sup>49</sup> Miller points to the evidence in the texts that grant us access to the emotional life of the saga world:

- Words: the vocabulary and expression formulas used to represent emotion by both the narrator and the characters themselves.
- Somatic responses: we must consider the descriptions of the characters that suggest emotional outbursts (e.g. turning red, laughing, smiling, trembling).
- Dialogue and action itself: we must look at the whole range of behaviors, which at times seem largely unmotivated and inexplicable unless we make certain inferences about the possible range and styles of emotions that will give the action some sense. These depictions of emotional life are filtered by the particular conventions of the saga style.
- The system of beliefs: emotional life is very connected to beliefs. A comprehensive study of emotions would also involve a comprehensive social and cultural history.

Of course, what we might call these ‘access points’ into the emotions of the saga world have their problems, which Miller recognizes and discusses in his article. However, for brevity’s sake the important thing that remains to be said about Miller’s approach, is that he points to the action and dialogue itself as the richest source of information about emotions, especially that which is simply without reason unless it is understood as taking place within certain emotional environments to make sense of the action.<sup>50</sup> Due to the nature of the saga style we are seldom assisted by native emotion words or descriptions of somatic responses. It often becomes

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(2014). For scholarship about laughter, see Jacques Le Goff, “Laughter in *Brennu-Njáls Saga*,” in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. Gísli Pálsson (Chippenham: Hisarlik Press, 1992); also Soon Ai Low, “The Mirthless Content of Skarpheðinn’s Grin,” *Medium Ævum* 65, no. 1 (1996); and Kirsten Wolf, “Laughter in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature,” *Scripta Islandica* 51 (2000).

<sup>47</sup> William Ian Miller, “Feeling Another’s Pain: Sympathy and Psychology Saga Style,” *European Review* 22, no. 1 (2014): 55.

<sup>48</sup> William Ian Miller, “Emotions and the Sagas,” in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. Gísli Pálsson (Chippenham: Hisarlik Press, 1992), 91.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

necessary to infer motivation and the emotional underpinning of human action in the saga world.<sup>51</sup>

In order to properly infer motivation, it is of key importance to understand that the saga writers, as Miller remarks, “preferred to type characters by general character dispositions and then let that disposition account for the type of emotional life that person might be likely to live.”<sup>52</sup> For example, if a character is introduced as cunning, his or her behavior throughout the story is generally consistent with the provided disposition, if not always predictable by it. This dispositional style means that personality tends to be fixed once a person reaches adulthood. In these representations, personality approach allegory. There are, of course, some exceptions, several characters are able to change their dispositions and/or behavior. But in the general saga view, characters tend to stay the same.

### *Methodology*

My reading of these texts will focus on the words, gestures, and actions suggesting fear—or its absence. I am interested in who is experiencing fear (or is imagined to be feeling afraid). When and why are these characters afraid? I am focusing on episodes within which fear plays a part to identify the common patterns of expression within and across texts. Furthermore, I will be looking for implicit theories in the texts, insofar as possible, of emotions, virtues, and vices which might aid this analysis. I am aware that any description of a past ‘reality’ of fear that I succeed in finding can only be partial. My aim is to piece together a discourse that will help us to understand fear better in the Old Norse emotional communities.

Like any other written source, the texts we are working with may often be biased and/or insincere. Moreover, being composed texts, are they not very far from real emotions, communicating them by way of a distorting ‘second hand?’ Are the emotions expressed in these texts originally anchored in reality, or are they conforming to the conventions of genre, quite independently from any supposed community? Finally, texts may be filled with *topoi* (repeated commonplaces possibly derived from other places, sources and eras)? What can *topoi* tell us about real feelings? Concerning these issues, Rosenwein says:

These are serious matters, but they are not insurmountable. Emotions are always delivered ‘secondhand’, whether one adopts Reddy’s notion of emotives or thinks

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 105.

simply of the ways in which one knows about feelings in ordinary life: via gestures, bodily changes, words, exclamations, tears. None of these things *are* the emotion; they are symptoms that must be interpreted—both by the person feeling them and by observers. Texts provide one set of interpretations; the reader (or historian) studying them supplies others. The psychoanalyst with a patient on the couch is not in a much different position, though of course she can interrogate the patient in ways that historians can do only less directly with texts. Nevertheless, both historian and analyst depend on self-reportage, words and silences.<sup>53</sup>

Literary sources are just another translation exercise into a different medium. Not even the subject experiencing an emotion has immediate access to it. We are only able to arrive at emotions through different acts of translation. A literary text is just another medium of translation by which we communicate emotional states. The first thing that could be said is that despite its fictional nature, literature can teach us much about the mentality of the human group that produced it. It might not allow us to make concrete statements about how a past community ‘factually’ was, but it does inform us of its self-regard and aspirations.

The first three chapters are a case study of fear in the context of teach text. First I consider *Hrólfs saga kraka*, followed by *Atlakviða* and *Atlamál in Grœnlensku*, and finally *Fóstbræðra saga*. In the fourth chapter, I gather the evidence drawn from each text to establish a conversation between the sources in order to see what manner of fear discourse can be pieced together. Further, I use this discourse to explain episodes looked at whose inner logic is not always clear. And finally, I summarize my findings and suggest potential next steps to continue the research of sentiments in the Old Norse emotional communities.

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<sup>53</sup> Rosenwein, *Communities*, 27.

## Chapter 1. The Transubstantiation of a Coward. A Reflection on Hǫttr's Transformation in *Hrólfs saga kraka ok kappa hans*

*Hrólfs saga kraka ok kappa hans* is classified as a *fornaldarsaga Norðurlanda* (commonly known in English as the Legendary Sagas). This classification is not medieval in origin. It is coined in 1829 by Carl Christian Rafn, the first to edit these thirty-one texts. Briefly explained, these texts contain narratives of ancient, often legendary, times. The stories in these texts usually place before the colonization of Iceland (around the end of the ninth century), and they feature heroes of Scandinavian or Germanic origin. The action mostly takes place in Scandinavia.<sup>54</sup> These texts branch from the tales of great deeds achieved by ancestors. The *fornaldarsögur* follow a tradition older than them, common to a certain degree to all Scandinavian peoples, namely the heroic poems of the Elder Edda.<sup>55</sup>

*Hrólfs saga kraka* contains all the elements necessary to consider it an archetypal traditional *fornaldarsaga*. However, of the thirty-eight manuscripts of *Hrólfs saga*<sup>56</sup> that survive, none date before the seventeenth-century. Despite the lack of older manuscripts, a *Hrólfs saga kraka* is listed among the books in the Icelandic cloister at Möðruvellir in 1461. Ármann Jakobsson estimates that the saga could have been composed at any time between 1230 and 1450 CE.<sup>57</sup> The saga contains many elements proper of chivalric literature. Yet, despite the fact that the stories of Hrólfur and his champions could have been reworked over time to appeal to an audience with more chivalric tastes, historical facts could not be altered so easily: “Although the recension of the saga is late, *Hrólfs saga* is, thus, a late mediaeval saga with links to more ancient literature.”<sup>58</sup>

This saga tells of legendary events connected to the Skjöldung dynasty, to which King Hrólfur belonged. He is the incestuous child of King Helgi, who unknowingly marries his

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<sup>54</sup> For a full list of the thirty-one texts classified as *fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, see Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, trans. Randi C. Eldevik (Viborg: Odense University Press, 2002), 17–18. This list follows Rafn's original classification.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>56</sup> This saga is not the only source that tells of the life of Hrólfur kraki. Other accounts that tell of this character are *Gesta Danorum*, *Chronicron Lethrense*, *Skjöldunga saga*, *Ynglinga saga*, and *Snorra-Edda*. The fact that these other accounts are, for the most part, in accordance with the story as presented in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, is another reason to recognize historical value in this text.

<sup>57</sup> Ármann Jakobsson, “Le roi chevalier: The Royal Ideology and Genre of *Hrólfs Saga Kraka*,” *Scandinavian Studies* 71, no. 2 (1999), 140.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

daughter Yrsa. The saga relates the extraordinary feats of Hrólfr and some of his champions. The story contains monsters, *berserkir*, undead armies, and sorcery. Bøðvarr Bjarki, the best of the king's champions, even has the ability to summon a bear to combat. The last part of the saga tells about Hrólfr's journey to Uppsala in order to claim his inheritance from King Aðils of Sweden. The saga ends after Hrólfr and his champions fall in battle against Skuld, Hrólfr's half-sister (the daughter of King Helgi with a she-elf).

Scholarship about this saga has not paid much attention to Hǫttr, a coward that becomes a champion after overcoming his fear.<sup>59</sup> When Bøðvarr Bjarki arrives in the hall of King Hrólfr he finds Hǫttr hiding under a pile of bones. He had buried himself there to escape from the bones that other retainers would throw at him. Hǫttr's state of constant fear is communicated to the audience by his own verbal expressions and by his somatic response to everything he is confronted with: shaking. This perpetual state of fear is his most distinctive feature—his entire body is constantly said to be trembling: “en hann er svá hræddr, at skelfr á honum leggr ok liðr.”<sup>60</sup> This is how he is introduced to the saga. No foreshadowing of what is going to happen later on is provided. Keeping present Miller's observation that the saga authors usually opted to introduce a character with a general disposition that would account for the type of emotional life said character would be likely to lead,<sup>61</sup> it is reasonable to say that an audience unfamiliar with the story would expect Hǫttr to remain a coward throughout the entire saga.

The sequence of events leads to Bøðvarr becoming one of the champions of the king, but he only accepts to do so with the condition that Hǫttr is allowed to join with him. King Hrólfr agrees, but says about Hǫttr: “Eigi sé ek at honum sæmd.”<sup>62</sup> Afterwards, we learn of the existence of a terrible winged-troll that has come to lay waste to the king's realm. Bøðvarr sneaks out in the night to go face the beast. He forces Hǫttr to come, having to carry him because

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<sup>59</sup> For more scholarship on this text: see Carl Phelpstead, “The Sexual Ideology of *Hrólfs Saga Kraka*,” *Scandinavian Studies* 75, no. 1 (2003), for an analysis of the ideology of sex and gender that informs the deployment of sexual themes in this saga. For a look at the levels in which this saga functions as a romance, see Johanna Denzin, “*Hrólfs Saga Kraka*: A Tragedy, Comedy, History, Pastoral, Pastoral-Comical, Historical-Pastoral, Tragical-Historical, Tragical-Comical-Historical-Pastoral... Romance,” in *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland: Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, ed. Kirsten Wolf and Johanna Denzin (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 2008). For a look at how Hrólfr's lack of wisdom and prudence bring about his downfall, see Marianne Kalinke, “Transgressions in *Hrólfs Saga Kraka*,” in *Fornaldarsagornas Struktur Och Ideologi*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen, and Agneta Ney (Uppsala: Swedish Science Press, 2003). For a reading of the saga as a negative *exemplum* showing how a king should not behave, see Valgerður Brynjólfsdóttir, “A Valiant King or a Coward? The Changing Image of King Hrólfr Kraki from the Oldest Sources to *Hrólfs Saga Kraka*,” in *Fornaldarsagornas Struktur Och Ideologi*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen, and Agneta Ney (Uppsala: Swedish Science Press, 2003).

<sup>60</sup> Guðni Jónsson, ed., “Hrólfs saga kraka ok kappá hans,” in *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, vol. 1 (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954), 63. The list follows Rafn's 1829 edition.

<sup>61</sup> Miller, “Emotions,” 105.

<sup>62</sup> Guðni, “Hrólfs saga,” 65.

he was terribly scared (“ok verður Böðvarr at bera hann, svá er hann hræddr”<sup>63</sup>). Upon seeing the troll, Hǫttr starts shouting: “Ok því næst æpir Höttr slíkt sem hann má ok kvað dýrit mundu gleypa hann. Böðvarr bað bikkjuna hans þegja ok kastar honum niðr í mosann, ok þar liggir hann ok eigi með öllu óhræddr. Eigi þorir hann heim at fara heldr.”<sup>64</sup> After slaying the beast, Böðvarr makes Hǫttr drink two large mouthfuls of its blood, and then gives him to eat a slice of its heart. Böðvarr then attacks him and they fight for some time. He then says to Hǫttr: “Helzt ertu nú sterkr orðinn, ok ekki vænti ek, at þú hræðist nú hirðmenn Hrólfs konungs.”<sup>65</sup> Hǫttr replies: “Eigi mun ek þá hræðast ok eigi þik upp frá þessu.”<sup>66</sup> By consuming the blood and heart of the beast, Hǫttr instantly turns into a courageous warrior capable of holding his own against the saga’s best warrior.

Once King Hrólfr recognizes the change in Hǫttr, he speaks: “Hvat má vita, nema fleira hafi skipzt um hagi þína en sjá þykkir? En fæstir menn þykkjast þik kenna, at þú sért inn sami maðr. Nú tak við sverðinu ok njót manna bezt, ef þetta er vel unnit.”<sup>67</sup> Hǫttr’s change is so significant, that the king agrees to give him the sword Gullinhjalt, which could only be wielded by a man both strong and noble. From that point on the king decides that Hǫttr will be known as Hjalti: “Ok nú vil ek hann heiti eigi Höttr lengr, ok skal hann heita Hjalti upp frá þessu. Skaltu heita eftir sverðinu Gullinhjalta.”<sup>68</sup> This newly obtained disposition had such a significant impact on the character’s identity, that a change of name is required.

Both the initial fear and later bravery of Hǫttr are seen through his own words and the narrator’s descriptions of his bodily behavior. Both means of conveying to the audience Hǫttr’s emotional state constitute emotional expressions, and as such can be considered and may be treated as emotives. Hence, what is this text saying about fear (either conscious or unconsciously) to its audience?

The emotional community being looked at in this example is the one comprised by the members of Hrólfr’s court. What can be said about fear in this community? Within this human group, every retainer bullies Hǫttr. Böðvarr Bjarki, an outsider, is the one who helps him. Böðvarr becomes a disruptive force to the established order in the court by challenging a reality in which it was admissible to bully Hǫttr. Hrólfr welcomes Böðvarr and the change he brings into his community. Nevertheless, Böðvarr goes even further by ‘curing’ Hǫttr of his cowardly

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 66. There is a lack of consensus as to what the monster actually is. Some scholars refer to it as a dragon. I refer to it as a troll, because that is what Hǫttr calls it (*troll*).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 66–7.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 69.

disposition. Bǫðvarr is not only praiseworthy due to his strength and bravery, but even more so for creating a champion out of a coward. The text is clear about this if we look at what Hrólfr tells Bǫðvarr once he figures out that he, not Hǫttr, slew the beast: “Vissa ek, þá þú komst hér, at fáir mundu þínir jafningjar vera, en þat þykki mér þó þitt verk frækiligast, at þú hefir gert hér annan kapp, þar Höttr er ok óvænligr þótti til mikillar giftu.”<sup>69</sup>

The story of Hǫttr/Hjalti stresses several features of the representation of fear in Old Norse tradition. Fear seems to be an inalienable component of a character. It is not something that can be fixed by talking about it with someone as many do nowadays with their therapists. Bǫðvarr does not even try to train Hǫttr in order to make him braver. Bravery is not something that can be attained through isolated internal processes. Hǫttr is only able to overcome his fear by incorporating bits of a winged-troll. He needs to consume external agents in order to cast away his cowardly disposition.

Besides a new name, the change in disposition brings with it new emotional expressions. Now Hǫttr is a fearless warrior whose honor is on the rise. When the *berserkir* return to the king’s hall, Bǫðvarr asks Hjalti whether he would dare to go against any of them. He replies: “‘Já,’ sagði Hjalti, ‘ekki við einn, heldr við alla, því at ek kann ekki at hræðast, þótt ofrefli mitt sé mér á móti, ok ekki skal einn þeira skelfa mik.’”<sup>70</sup> Keeping in mind the nature of emotives, there is no way to know how accurate a claim this emotional expression of Hjalti’s emotional state actually is. The *berserkir* in this saga (and in the saga universe in general) are fearsome warriors; being afraid of them appears to be the most common reaction (several of the other champions of King Hrólfr do not dare to go against them). Yet, asserting his bravery definitely has an effect: it might inspire admiration in his audience; verbalizing his fearlessness could have been a step towards achieving a brave state of mind; maybe saying it aloud made him realize (secretly) that he was afraid. Regardless of the effect that it might have (an emotive always has an effect, though it is hard to say what this effect *is* exactly), what can be said without a doubt is that it was a response which fit positively within the range of acceptable emotional expressions by a champion of the king. This response helped Hjalti increase or at least maintain the honor attributed to him. Hjalti’s response to the *berserkir* problem raises his hero status in front of his audiences (the one within the story and the one outside, listening to it). In the end, Hjalti behaves in accordance with the emotional structure prescribed by the emotional community composed by Hrólfr’s court, where bravery is valued and cowardice condemned.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 70.

What can be said about the transformative process itself? Can it be said that the change in Hǫttr's disposition is the product of Christian ideology? Miller thinks the general resistance to implementing a disposition change in the sagas indicates how little the ideology of Christianity, which supposes character can be trained and molded, had penetrated native folk psychology.<sup>71</sup> Evidence of a Christian mentality is easily identifiable in this text. For instance, the saga attributes Hrólfr's fate to his ignorance of God: "Sagði meistarinn Galterus, at mannligr kraftar máttu ekki standast við slíkum fjanda krafti, utan mátt guðs hefði á móti komit, - 'ok stóð þér þat eitt fyrir sigrinum, Hrólfr konungr, at þú hafðir ekki skyn á skapara þínum.'"<sup>72</sup> In addition, the narrator informs us that neither the king nor his champions sacrificed in honor of the pagan gods: "En ekki er þess getit, at Hrólfr konungr ok kappar hans hafi nokkurn tíma blótat goð, heldr trúðu þeir á mátt sinn ok megin, því at þá var ekki boðuð sú heilaga trú hér á Norðurlöndum, ok höfðu þeir því lítit skyn á skapara sínum, sem bjuggu í norðrálfunni."<sup>73</sup> A conscious effort is made to characterize Hrólfr as a Christian, to the extent in which such a characterization is plausible: "This ideal king is essentially Christian, chivalric, and popular. This characterization is, of course, somewhat of a paradox, since the narrative takes place well before the age of chivalry, and king Hrólfr comes from heathen Scandinavia. The author solves this seeming problem by making him a noble heathen in that Hrólfr and his men do not practice pagan customs."<sup>74</sup> Yet, despite the attempts to bring Hrólfr and his champions closer to Christian figures, it seems unlikely that the change in Hǫttr's disposition, a positive change since it allows him to join the warrior elite of this community, would be regarded positively in a traditional Christian view.

Hǫttr's disposition only changes as a consequence of incorporating the blood and heart of a monster. He is not trained to overcome fear. In addition, a winged-troll is not a popular phenomenon in Christian mentality. Much like in *Beowulf*, monsters are outbursts of evil present in the story for the hero to defeat, they are not for eating. In traditional Christian view, the drinking of the blood of a monster would probably be regarded as a terrible act, not one to be rewarded with strength and bravery. This act would not fit well in a system of beliefs in which the symbolic drinking of Christ's blood is so important. This motif of eating a monster's (or an animal's) heart to enact a change or transformation belongs to a different tradition, one that is present in both the saga and the eddic universe.

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<sup>71</sup> Miller, "Emotions," 105–106.

<sup>72</sup> Guðni, "Hrólfs saga," 104.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>74</sup> Ármann, "Le roi," 157.

Oscar Ludvig Olson has commented on this scene. He understands that the intention behind scenes like this one is not to acquire the characteristics of the animal, due to the lack of logic an interpretation of this sort would produce. “The eating and drinking are done to gain strength and courage, as is the case here; and it is not proper to subject this scene to a more critical judgment than similar scenes in the other sagas.”<sup>75</sup> Even though newfound strength and courage are the product here, it is wrong to reduce every scene of the same type in this literary corpus as a step towards these two things. Similar episodes in Old Norse literature prove this is not the case: in *Völsunga saga*, Sigurðr eats the heart of Fáfnir, and attains the ability to understand the speech of birds. In this same saga Guðrún also eats a piece of the dragon’s heart and becomes grimmer and wiser as a result. In the version of this episode related in *Guðrúnarkviða I*, she is able to understand bird-speech after eating the heart. Moreover, *Ynglinga saga* tells of Ingjaldr, who at the age of six finds himself to be weaker than Álfr, another boy of the same age. His foster-father learns this, and feeds Ingjaldr the heart of a wolf. After eating it, he becomes a most ferocious person of the worst disposition.<sup>76</sup> This is a recurrent motif in Old Norse literature. What varies between these episodes is the object attained by the subject and the creature being consumed.

The heart/blood eating episode is perhaps transmitted by way of an earlier manuscript, but we might never know for certain if such a manuscript existed. Regardless if there was a manuscript to bridge the surviving version with another version closer to ‘the original,’ the story ultimately owes its survival to oral tradition. And as it passes from storyteller to storyteller, it eventually comes to the person who wrote it down, someone with the capacity to alter elements of the story. While the saga author<sup>77</sup> decides to point out ignorance of God as the reason for the fall of the king and his champions, there is no attempt to Christianize this creature. It is not even mentioned as one of the reasons for the downfall of the king. This could be due to the fact that eating the heart has a positive outcome: Hǫttr becomes permanently courageous.

Assuming for a moment that we are dealing with two radically opposed ideologies, a Christian one represented by the scribe and the audience, and a pagan one, represented by a story element that seems out of place within Christian ideology, it can be said that in these

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<sup>75</sup> Oscar Ludvig Olson, *The Relation of the Hrólfs Saga Kraka and the Bjarkarimur to Beowulf: A Contribution to the History of Saga Development in England and the Scandinavian Countries* (Chicago: The Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study, 1916), 28.

<sup>76</sup> Guðni Jónsson, ed., “Völsunga saga,” in *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, vol. 1 (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954), 154–56; Jónas Kristjánsson and Ólason Vésteinn, eds., “Guðrúnarkviða I,” in *Eddukvæði*, vol. 2, *Íslensk fornrit Eddukvæði* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014), 329; Snorri Sturluson, “Ynglinga saga,” in *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, vol. 1, *Íslensk fornrit 26* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2002), 63–64.

<sup>77</sup> I use the term ‘saga author’ in a broad sense, knowing full well that it is a writing convenience.

fictional circumstances, both extremes of the spectrum condemn fear and reward bravery. A historical change in the expressions of sentiment in the emotional communities of the region must have taken place over the centuries. Such a claim is not terribly bold, because in our working definition of emotions, they are both cultural and historical products. Thus, emotions are bound to change over time and between human groups. This in turn impacts the emotional management structure, which determines those expressions of feeling that are valued, and those that are condemned. However, although it is logical to presume that a change over time in the emotional structure must have taken place (a change that would have been accentuated by political and religious processes), the new system does not seem to have affected the valuation of fear as opposed to courage and its expression.

Condemning cowards is, as we will see, a recurrent motif in this literary corpus. I think that it is important to be aware of it in this saga particularly, because its recension, as has been mentioned, is so late. Still, similarities in the ideas of fear expressed here are easy to find in older texts, some of which we will pay attention to. An enhanced understanding of other older texts will improve our comprehension of this saga, particularly Hǫttr's transformation.

## Chapter 2. When a Heart Trembles: the Representation of Fear and Bravery in *Atlakviða* and *Atlamál in Grœnlenzku*

The two poems to be examined from eddic tradition are *Atlakviða* and *Atlamál in Grœnlenzku*. Eddic poetry is not a genre defined on the basis of well-defined literary style or a particular school of authorship. Instead, we classify as eddic poetry a group of poems mainly composed by those contained in a medieval Old Norse-Icelandic manuscript known as the Codex Regius of the Elder Edda (c. 1270).<sup>78</sup> These poems are usually divided in two categories (after the presentation of the material in the Codex Regius): the ‘mythological poems’ and the ‘heroic poems.’<sup>79</sup> The two poems under study fall under the latter. This type of poem does not deal with the gods, but rather tells of Scandinavian and Germanic heroes who lived on the European mainland during the so-called Migration Age (roughly between 300 and 700 CE).<sup>80</sup>

### *Atlakviða*

*Atlakviða* (“The Lay of Atli”) is considered by many to be among the oldest of the eddic poems that survive.<sup>81</sup> Related in this poem are the deaths of Gunnarr and Högni at the hands of Atli and his retainers. Atli invites them to his hall under false pretenses in order to capture them and discover the hiding place of the treasure which had belonged to Sigurðr. To avenge her brothers, Guðrún kills her sons by Atli and feeds them to him before killing him and burning down the hall with his retainers inside.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Some material found in other manuscripts are also considered as eddic poems. Other important manuscripts that contain these type of poems are AM 748 I 4to, *Hauksbók* and *Flateyjarbók*.

<sup>79</sup> Terry Gunnell, “Eddic Poetry,” in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 82. Out of the 29 poetic works in the Codex Regius, 10 deal with mythological material, and the other 19 deal with heroic figures of ancient times.

<sup>80</sup> Gunnell, “Eddic,” 88. Both of the Atli poems feature historical characters, for example Atli and Gunnarr (Attila, king of the Huns; and Gundaharius, king of the Burgundians).

<sup>81</sup> The other poems considered to have been composed around the same time as *Atlakviða* (c. 870 CE) are *Guðrúnarhvöt*, *Hamðismál*, and *Hlöðskviða*. The traditional argument to date these poems are their links with verses by early skalds. Yet, while these four poems certainly sound different from the others, we might call into question the criterion traditionally used for dating them (cf. Andersson, “History,” 199).

<sup>82</sup> In the German version of the story (*Das Nibelungenlied*), Guðrún is the one who is determined to kill her brothers because they were responsible for the death of her husband Sigurðr. They are also responsible for his death in Norse tradition, but in this version she is more loyal to her brothers than to her husband.

Some of the stanzas in this poem talk about a coward's heart (that of Hjalli, Atli's cowardly retainer), and the heart of a brave man (Hǫgni's). Once the brothers have been captured, Atli's men question Gunnarr. However, he makes a demand of them instead: he asks that they present him with the heart of Hǫgni in exchange for location of the gold. The retainers agree, but try to trick him by bringing the Hjalli's heart instead. The text does not explain why they decide to do this, but Ursula Dronke suggests that the retainers bring Hjalli's heart first because they might suspect Gunnarr of duplicity.<sup>83</sup> Yet, Gunnarr does not fall for the trick:

Þá kvað þat Gunnarr,  
gumna dróttinn:  
'Hér hefi ek hjarta  
Hjalla ins blauða,  
ólíkt hjarta  
Hǫgna ins frækna,  
er mjök bifask  
er á bjóði liggr;  
bifðisk hálfu meirr  
er í brjósti lá.'<sup>84</sup>

Gunnarr recognizes the heart of Hjalli because it trembles so much even after it has been removed from the body. Shaking has already been seen as Hǫtr's original response to almost everything in *Hrólfs saga*, and can also be seen as the common reaction of characters experiencing fear in the *Íslendingasögur*. The *Flateyjarbók* version of *Fóstbræðra saga* (which we will consider in another chapter), describes Fífl-Egill when he is afraid as follows: "Qll bein hans skulfu, þau sem í váru hans líkama, en þat váru tvau hundruð beina ok fjórtán bein; tennr hans noþruðu, þær váru þrír tigur; allar æðar í hans hǫrundi pipruðu fyrir hræzlu sakar, þær váru fjögur hundruð ok fimmtán."<sup>85</sup> Shaking seems to be the most common somatic response to indicate when a character experiences fear in this literary corpus.

Once their attempt to fool Gunnarr fails, the retainers remove Hǫgni's heart. The poem mentions how Hǫgni laughs loudly as they are cut him open, never even thinking to cry out. When Gunnarr is presented with the second heart he can easily tell it belongs to Hǫgni due to its behavior—it hardly shivers at all:

Mærr kvað þat Gunnarr,

<sup>83</sup> Ursula Dronke, ed., *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Ursula Dronke, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 15.

<sup>84</sup> Jónas Kristjánsson and Ólason Vesteinn, eds., "Atlakviða," in *Eddukvæði*, vol. 2, Íslensk fornrit Eddukvæði (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014), 377.

<sup>85</sup> Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., "Fóstbræðra saga," in *Vestfirðinga sögur*, Íslensk fornrit 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1943), 233 (footnote).

geir-Niflungur:  
 ‘Hér hefi ek hjarta  
 Høgna ins frækna,  
 ólíkt hjarta  
 Hjalla ins blauða,  
 er lítt bifask  
 er á bjóði liggr;  
 bifðisk svági mjök  
 þá er í brjósti lá.’<sup>86</sup>

Now that he has identified his brother’s heart, Gunnarr becomes the only person that knows where to find the gold. He never surrenders the information.

The heart of a person becomes representative, a symbol of his brave or fearful disposition. Still, this metaphor is not constructed randomly. It may be an exaggeration, but if this is the case, it corresponds to an idea of emotion rooted in the mentality of the emotional community responsible for the poem. This poem hints at the idea of an anatomical distribution of fear and bravery. Both emotions seem to have a place within the heart of an individual. Thus, we are dealing with a sort of understanding that regards emotions as physical elements, as opposed to spiritual ones. And, perhaps by virtue of being considered physical elements, both fear and bravery are seen as inalienable characteristics of an individual.

### *Atlamál in Grœnlenzku*

*Atlamál in Grœnlenzku* (The Greenlandic Lay of Atli)<sup>87</sup> is a longer, more detailed take on the story related in *Atlakviða*. Yet, this version contains significant differences, which suggest that it must have also drawn material from other sources, probably of Germanic origin. In the story, as retold in this account, Atli does not lust after the treasure left behind by Sigurðr. He orders the deaths of Gunnarr and Høgni to hurt Guðrún, his wife. Gunnarr never asks for his brother’s heart in this version. What drives the plot here is the enmity between Atli and Guðrún.

When Atli orders his retainers to cut out the heart of Høgni, Beiti, Atli’s retainer, suggests that they initially spare Høgni (this text does not say why either), and switch his heart with Hjalli’s because he is considered useless and ‘fated for death.’ The only characterization the text offers of Hjalli is that he is of a cowardly disposition. His cowardice is presumably the reason why he is considered to be useless—to the extent that he would rather kill him, someone

<sup>86</sup> Jónas and Ólason, “Atlakviða,” 377.

<sup>87</sup> The connection of this poem with Greenland is unknown. But, the compiler of the Codex Regius seems to have believed that the poem was originally composed in Greenland.

who has not given any reason to doubt his loyalty, instead of Hogni, who is in open opposition to Atli. The text reads:

Beiti þat mælti  
 — bryti var hann Atla:  
 ‘Tóku vér Hjalla  
 en Hogni forðum;  
*hoggvum* vér hálftr yrkjan,  
 hann er skapdauði,  
 lífira svá lengi,  
 loskr mun hann æ heitinn.’

Hræddr var hvergætir,  
 helta in lengr rúmi,  
 kunni klekkur verða,  
 kleif í rá hverja;  
 vesall lézk vígs þeira,  
 er skyldi váss gjalda,  
 ok sinn dag dapran  
 at deyja frá svínum,  
 allri ørkostu  
 er hann áðr hafði.’

Tóku þeir brás Buðla  
 ok brugðu til knífi,  
 ærði illþræli  
 áðr odds kenndi;  
 tóm lézk at eiga  
 teðja vel garða,  
 vinna it vergasta,  
 ef hann við rétti;  
 feginn lézk þó Hjalli  
 at hann fjör þægi.

Gættisk þess Hogni  
 — gerva svá færi —  
 at árna ánauðgum  
 at undan gengi:  
 ‘Fyrir kveð ek mér minna  
 at fremja leik þenna,  
 hví mynir hér vilja  
 heyra á þá skrætun?’

Þrifu þeir þjóðgoðan,  
 þá var kostur engi  
 rekkum rakklátum  
 ráð enn lengr dvelja;  
 hló þá Hogni,  
 heyrðu dagmegir,

keppa hann svá kunni,  
kvöl hann vel þolði.<sup>88</sup>

Hjalli howls before feeling the point of the knife, whereas Hǫgni laughs loudly as he endures the pain; Hjalli is willing to dung the fields and do the filthiest of work if that will allow him to keep his life, while Hǫgni would rather die at knife-point than listen to the begging and screeching of a coward. Hǫgni represents a high standard of bravery. The story places Hjalli as a clear counter-example to Hǫgni's brave behavior in the face of certain death. Can we consider Hjalli's reaction as the 'archetypical behavior' of a coward in this literary corpus? Perhaps yes, perhaps no. Nevertheless, Hjalli offers to do the worst possible jobs to keep his life—in stark contrast to the manner in which Hǫgni is willing to face death in the stanzas that immediately follow Hjalli's response. As a result of these emotional reactions (emotives), Hǫgni's honor increases before the eyes of the audience, whilst the honor attributed to Hjalli decreases.

The only clue the poem offers concerning Hjalli's social standing is when he is referred to as “brás Buðla.”<sup>89</sup> Although *brás* is sometimes translated as ‘scullion’ (a kitchen hand), its exact meaning is unclear. Thus, while his social position is pertinent to discuss why he is considered to be expendable by his comrades, what that position actually *is* is uncertain.

Hjalli's hysterical fear and his laments of leaving his pigs behind have led many scholars to interpret this scene as a comic episode.<sup>90</sup> Arguments can be raised for and against reading this as a comical scene, but for our purposes this is irrelevant. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that this was intended as comic relief in a poem of otherwise serious atmosphere. The comic aspect of the scene would still center around Hjalli's reaction to his circumstances. Sickened by his reaction, Hǫgni prefers death than to keep listening to Hjalli's cries. Thus, regardless if the members in the audience feel sorry for Hjalli, or laugh at his expense, the emotional management structure the text conveys is the same: the expression of fear contributes negatively to the honor economy of an individual. If this is in fact a comedy, it is predicated on Hjalli's dishonorable responses to the situation—his howling, and his willingness to do the worst jobs. He who behaves like a coward is either worth less than a courageous enemy, or becomes the person at whose expense the rest of the community laughs.

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<sup>88</sup> Jónas Kristjánsson and Ólason Vésteinn, eds., “Atlámál in Grœnlenzku,” in *Eddukvæði*, vol. 2, Íslenzk fornrit Eddukvæði (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014), 393–394. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 393.

<sup>90</sup> Dronke, *Edda*, 19.

### Chapter 3. Bloody Fear! Knowledge of Fear in *Fóstbræðra saga*

*Fóstbræðra saga* is one of the *Íslendingasögur*,<sup>91</sup> a literary genre which tells of Icelandic men and women who belonged to the first generations of the settlement of Iceland (from the beginning of the settlement to about 1030 CE). This saga survives in three early manuscripts: *Hauksbók*,<sup>92</sup> *Mǫðruvallabók*,<sup>93</sup> *Flateyjarbók*.<sup>94</sup> For a time this saga was considered among the oldest of the *Íslendingasögur*; it was believed that this text had been composed around 1200 CE, or soon afterwards. However, later scholarship demonstrated the text is younger, probably composed around 1300 CE.

This saga follows the lives of the foster brothers Þorgeirr Hávarsson and Þormóðr Bersason. The story begins with their upbringing, and then moves to tell of their adventures together. By the second chapter of the saga Þorgeirr and Þormóðr are already described as men that would never back down from a fight: “Snimmendis sagði þeim svá hugr um, sem síðar bar raun á, at þeir myndi vápnbitnir verða, því at þeir vǫru ráðnir til at láta sinn hlut hvergi eða undir leggja, við hverja menn sem þeir ætti málum at skipta. Meir hugðu þeir jafnan at fremð þessa heims lífs en at dýrð annars heims fagnaðar.”<sup>95</sup> Eventually the story branches off to follow the individual events in the lives of each one, until Þorgeirr’s death. After this event, the focus returns to Þormóðr who seeks revenge for the killing of his foster brother. The saga ends with the death of Þormóðr in the service of King Óláfr, after having completed his revenge.

#### *The Heart of Fear*

Within the story, Þorgeirr is famous across the land for his fearlessness. According to the version of the story contained in *Flateyjarbók*, the foster-brothers once stayed with a man named Þorgíls in Reykjaholar at the same time as Grettir Ásmundarsson, the hero of *Grettis saga*. It is said that the combined strength of Þorgeirr and Þormóðr almost equalled that of

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<sup>91</sup> The sagas belonging to this classification are also referred to as the ‘Family Sagas’, ‘Old Icelandic sagas’ or just ‘the sagas’.

<sup>92</sup> This manuscript is from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century CE. The beginning of the saga is missing from this text due to missing leaves.

<sup>93</sup> This manuscript is from the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century CE. The ending of the saga is missing from this text due to missing leaves.

<sup>94</sup> This manuscript is dated c. 1390 CE.

<sup>95</sup> Björn and Guðni, “Fóstbræðra saga,” 124–125.

Grettir.<sup>96</sup> When Þorgíls is asked later whether it was true that the three men that had stayed with him were not afraid of anything, he replies: “at þat væri eigi svá, - ‘því at Grettir er myrkræddr, en Þormóðr guðhræddr,’ en Þorgeir sagði hann ekki vætta hræðask kunna ok sízt bregða sér við nokkurn váveifligan háska.”<sup>97</sup> Þorgeirr is the most fearless of the three because, although none of them are cowards, Grettir fears the dark while Þormóðr is afraid God.

Þorgeirr’s fearlessness, however, does not save him from death. Despite his strength and extreme bravery, he cannot overcome an ambush of forty adversaries. After killing several of them, Þorgeirr is slain. Once he is dead, his enemies, in awe of his bravery, cut him open to see his heart:

Svá segja sumir menn, at þeir klyfði hann til hjarta ok vildu sjá, hvílíkt væri, svá hugprúðr sem hann var, en menn segja, at hjartat væri harla lítit, ok höfðu sumir menn þat fyrir satt, at minni sé hugprúðra manna hjörtu en huglaussa, því at menn kalla minna blóð í litlu hjarta en miklu, en kalla hjartablóði hræzlu fylgja, ok segja menn því detta hjarta manna í brjóstinu, at þá hræðisk hjartablóði ok hjartat í mannum.<sup>98</sup>

His adversaries see a relationship between the sort of heart that lays in a man’s breast and the courage he shows in combat. The saga author appeals to the human body, more specifically the heart, to explain the inner workings of fear and bravery. According to this saga, the heart of a brave man is smaller than that of a coward because it has less blood than a larger one; having less blood makes the smaller heart less prone to fear. In this understanding, fear and bravery reside in the blood. Thus, while the size of a man’s heart reflects his bravery or cowardice, this is a consequence of the amount of blood it contains. This explanation falls in line with medieval humoral theory,<sup>99</sup> which considers mental disturbances to be the result of an excess of blood inside the heart.<sup>100</sup>

The connection between the heart with fear and bravery has already been seen. The best examples might be the hearts of Hjalli and Högni in *Atlakviða*, which respectively maintain their fearful and brave behavior even after being removed from the body. This notion of fear and bravery having its place within the human heart seems to have been a widespread notion

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 210–211.

<sup>99</sup> Kirsi Kanerva, “Disturbances of the Mind and Body: Effects of the Living Dead in Medieval Iceland,” in *Mental (Dis)Order in Later Medieval Europe*, ed. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Susanna Niiranen (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 229. It is very likely that this explanation does follow humoral theory. This theory seems to have been part of the learned tradition since the details of the four bodily substances are written down in *Hauksbók*, one of the manuscripts that contains a version of this saga.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 228. Kanerva notes that this explanation is at odds with the traditional Icelandic conception of timid people, which can be described as small-hearted and mindless.

across Old Norse literature. To say that Helgi Hundingsbani had ‘a hard acorn of a heart’ (“ey var Helgi... / þar er firar þorðusk... / sá hafði hilmir / hart móðakarn”<sup>101</sup>), is to say that he was brave. Moreover, the sagas are full of episodes in which the bravery of a character is called into question by comparing his heart to that of a female animal.<sup>102</sup>

Returning to Þorgeirr Hávarsson, it is interesting that he never reacts emotionally in front of other saga characters. He is definitely overcome by anger in several episodes of the saga (e.g. he kills a man named Torfi because he can’t hear him), but he never allows others to see this. When his father is slain, Þorgeirr does take revenge. However, upon hearing of his father’s death, he shows no reaction whatsoever:

Víg Hávars spurðisk skjótt víða um heruð, ok er Þorgeirr spurði víg föður síns, þá brá honum ekki við þá tíðenda sagn. Eigi roðnaði hann, því at eigi rann honum reiði í hqurund; eigi bliknaði hann, því at honum lagði eigi heipt í brjóst; eigi blánaði hann, því at honum rann eigi í bein reiði, heldr brá hann sér engan veg við tíðenda sagnina, því at eigi var hjarta hans sem fóarn í fugli; eigi var þat blóðfullt, svá at þat skylfi af hræzlu, heldr var þat hert af inum hæsta hqfuðsmið í qlum hvatleik.<sup>103</sup>

From the previous citation, we can see an idea of emotions as physical entities with their proper place within the human body. The saga attempts to establish a logic that accounts for the potential somatic responses expected in a situation like this one. The text lists what could be taken as conventional bodily reactions upon hearing about the death of a close relative, and then proceeds to explain anatomically why Þorgeirr shows none of them. No anger courses through his skin, so he does not redden; his breast contains no rage, so he does not grow pale; no anger runs through his bones, so he does not turn blue; neither does he shake because his heart is not full of blood.

The previous passage is one of many examples that prove we are dealing with a learned text. Another point that the saga author draws attention to concerns a question that has gone unasked in this thesis so far: what is the source of bravery? To cite the text: “Almáttigr er sá, sem svá snart hjarta ok óhrætt gaf í brjóst Þorgeiri; ok eigi var hans hugprýði af mqqnum qqr né honum í brjóst borin, heldr af inum hæsta hqfuðsmið.”<sup>104</sup> Within the internal logic of this

<sup>101</sup> Jónas Kristjánsson and Ólason Vésteinn, eds., “Helgakviða Hundingsbana I,” in *Eddukvæði*, vol. 2, Íslensk fornrit Eddukvæði (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014), 257.

<sup>102</sup> In *Fóstbræðra saga*, Þórðís challenges Þormóðr to come out of hiding, questioning if he has the heart of a man instead of a mare’s (Björn and Guðni, “Fóstbræðra saga,” 254). In *Jómsvíkinga saga*, Vagn challenges Sigvaldi to battle, unless he is a coward that has the heart of a she-animal (Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., *Jómsvíkinga saga* (Reykjavík: Prensmiðja Jóns Helgasonar HF, 1969), 147).

<sup>103</sup> Björn and Guðni, “Fóstbræðra saga,” 127–128.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

saga, the source of bravery in men is the Almighty Creator, who bestows this virtue in whichever amount he finds suitable to provide each individual.

*Fear and Reputation: To Fake It or Not To Fake It*

A character to whom the Almighty does not bestow much courage in this saga, however, is Fífl-Egill. His behavior in the story is not something that can be faked. When Þormóðr prepares to kill Þorgrímr Einarsson, he orders Egill to run as soon as he hears a blow (which is the death blow Þormóðr plans to deal Þorgrímr). Egill follows orders unquestioningly, and upon hearing the blow, he makes a run for it. As soon as people see him running, they assume he killed Þorgrímr, and set out after him. Once he notices that he is being pursued by an armed mob, Egill becomes terrified. When they catch up to him he is shaking all over: “Ok er hann var handtekinn, þá skalf á honum leggr ok liðr sakar hræzlu. En þegar er þeir kenndu Egil, þá þóttusk þeir vita, at hann myndi eigi hafa unnit á Þorgrími. Rann hræzla af honum sem hita af jární.”<sup>105</sup> It is noteworthy that no one wonders whether Egill is expressing fear as a means to mislead them into thinking that he was not Þorgrímr’s killer. He expresses fear in such a manner that no one questions his cowardly disposition—something his pursuers take as irrevocable proof that he is not guilty of killing a warrior such as Þorgrímr. Fear, in this text, is not something that can be called on in order to obtain, in whatever fashion, personal gain of any sort. This emotion can only be hidden or demonstrated, never staged.

One last character to briefly consider from this saga is Helgi selseista. As soon as he tells Illugi that his nickname is selseista (seal’s testicle), Illugi realizes that he has heard of this man before. Helgi, trying to improve his chances that Illugi will grant him free passage aboard his ship the following summer, offers to work for him, and mentions that no one can outrun him. Illugi answers: “Gagn er þeim þat, er hræddir verða.”<sup>106</sup> Helgi immediately replies: “Ekki hefi ek þat reynt, at verða allhræddr.”<sup>107</sup> Probably basing his judgment on Helgi’s reputation, Illugi quickly comments that Helgi’s talent for running must be useful for someone prone to fear. Helgi does not allow this remark to go unchallenged, and states that he has never been prone to fear.

The text never explicitly proves Helgi’s cowardice. Two chapters after his exchange with Illugi we read about Helgi running away from battle to inform him of what is happening.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 195.

Still, he does fight and kills one of his enemies before escaping. The narrator does not comment on his escape being spurred by fear. yet, it could be argued that the act of running away, even from multiple adversaries, is proof of cowardice. Regardless if he is a coward or not, when Illugi suggests that he is prone to fear, Helgi responds instantaneously in defense of his reputation. If he is, however unlikely it might seem to many, a courageous man, this serves as evidence of a latent concern among brave men of not being thought of as cowards. On the other hand, if Helgi is indeed a coward, this proves that even cowards care for their reputation.

### *A Comedy of Terrors*

Before concluding this analysis of *Fóstbræðra saga*, the fact that this text has been interpreted by some as a parody and/or satire should be addressed. Helga Kress argues that the digressions in learned style—many of which present details from medieval medicine—are a deliberate stylistic device in the saga with the purpose of ridiculing heroes and their deeds.<sup>108</sup> Yet, even if this is indeed meant to be a parody—a reading I am not totally convinced by—the fact remains that what the comedy ridicules are social conventions of the emotional community that produced it. These conventions would then be hyperbolized to produce a comic effect.

Helga Kress' position has been supported and challenged by several scholars.<sup>109</sup> What interests me from this consideration of the text is the extent in which this either supports or rebukes my reading of the saga. Following Helga Kress, the scene in which his killers want to gaze upon Þorgeirr's heart could be considered a digression which, due to its learned style, injects comedy into an otherwise highly dramatic situation—the death of a protagonist. If we proceed with the assumption that her argument is an absolute certainty, the parody centers around the belief that fear and bravery reside within the human heart/blood. And from this we can say that if someone considered it something worth making fun of, such an idea was not uncommon in these emotional communities. Thus, despite the fact that I am not entirely convinced by Helga Kress' approach to the text, even if the saga was intended as a parody, it is

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<sup>108</sup> Helga Kress, "Bróklindi Falgeirs. Fóstbræðrasaga og hláturmenning miðalda," *Skírnir* 161 (1987): 275.

<sup>109</sup> For an overview of the different positions concerning this debate see Kendra Willson, "Parody and Genre in Sagas of Icelanders," in *Á Austrvega. Saga and East Scandinavia. Preprint of Papers from the 14th International Saga Conference*, ed. Agneta Ney et al. (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), 1042. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen argues that the central episodes in this text attempt to display heroic ideals, they do not have a satirical/parodic function (Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, "On Humour, Heroes, Morality, and Anatomy in *Fóstbræðra Saga*," in *Twenty-Eight Papers Presented to Hans Bekker-Nielsen on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday, 28 April 1993*, ed. John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth, and Gerd Wolfgang (Odense: Odense University Press, 1993), 402).

still a significant source for our reconstruction of the discourse surrounding fear in the Old Norse emotional communities.

## Chapter 4. The Fear of Logic or the Logic of Fear

In this chapter, I synthesize the evidence gathered from the various textual sources studied to draw conclusions about fear as supported in a comparative approach. Naturally, it should not be forgotten that the reconstructed pieces of the fear discourse to be discussed here are built on literary evidence that can be considered highly imaginative. To address some of the problems that an analysis of this sort may present, I turn to the work of Stephen D. White, who discussed the relevance of imaginative literature as an important source of information on emotions during the Middle Ages. White studied expressions of anger as political tools and drew two conclusions about its representation in his source material. First, he concluded that there must have existed well-understood conventions about when it was appropriate for an author to impute anger to people of whose emotions he had no definitive knowledge. Second, there must have also been well-established conventions dictating when it was appropriate to display anger; otherwise, monastic, saintly, or divine anger could have been read by contemporaries as signs of animalistic fury, emotionalism or political irrationality and could now be used as evidence of demented religiosity.<sup>110</sup> Thus, while it can be said that the internal emotional processes of the characters we read about may be imagined by the author, these processes are not imagined at random. The author belongs to the same emotional community as his audience and shares in its emotive conventions.

A close reading of the different fear episodes within the narratives chosen as well as interpretations of the texts as a whole can lead to conclusions regarding the expression of fear in the Old Norse literary corpus. It is not possible to say with any degree of certainty that the depiction of fear in Old Norse texts mirrors the actual understanding of fear of the emotional communities that produced them. However, these representations of fear are rooted in the way these communities understood this emotion. And even if these representations follow the particular norms of expression of the different literary genres, these norms are dictated by the demands and conventions of these emotional communities. Thus it can be stated that:

- Fear seems to have been generally regarded as an inalienable characteristic of an individual: it was a defining element of the identity of a character which could not be fixed by internal processes.

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<sup>110</sup> White, "Politics," 137.

- Demonstrations of fear and bravery affected an individual's honor economy.

In this chapter, I will discuss these two points in light of evidence from the texts that are of interest to this study. This will in turn provide a discursive unit of fear that will enable us to better explain examples from these same texts whose internal logic is obscured.

### *The Biology of Fear*

When discussing *Fóstbræðra saga*, I argued that fear was not something that could be faked. The characters pursuing Fífl-Egill take his fearful response as irrevocable proof of his innocence regarding the slaying of Þorgrímr Einarsson. It is not even considered that he could be staging all of this; he is not even questioned despite having fled the scene of the crime. The logic behind this seems to be that someone who was trembling like he was could not have been involved in the killing of a warrior such as Þorgrímr. Fear appears to have been something that you either always had (or could have) or as something that you never had. Thus, someone who behaves in such a cowardly manner is definitively a coward. Fear is not something that can be staged within the logic of this literary corpus.

This is concurrent with how William Ian Miller reads emotions in the sagas. As has been mentioned, in the saga style, characters are provided with a general character disposition that accounts for the type of emotional life that an individual is likely to lead.<sup>111</sup> This generally proves true, both in the saga and the eddic universes: the temperament someone is introduced with is usually fixed. Thus, it is prudent to deeply analyze a story in which, against general conventions, a character is able to alter his original disposition. This is what happened with Hǫttr.

Hǫttr goes from being the most flagrant coward of *Hrólfs saga kraka* to entirely fearless in the course of a few lines of text. There is no quest for self-improvement, no training that will make him braver over time, nor is he made to confront his fears in order to overcome them. His transformation is quick and by no account traumatic. He is forced by Bǫðvarr to eat a piece of the monster's heart, drink two mouthfuls of its blood, and *voilà*, a character that was probably afraid of his own shadow becomes one of the strongest and most fearless champions of the king. How did Bǫðvarr know that making Hǫttr eat from the heart of the beast and drink its blood would cure him of his cowardice? No point in the saga tells how Bǫðvarr obtained this knowledge. Neither is there any indication that he encountered or heard about the beast

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<sup>111</sup> Miller, "Emotions," 105.

beforehand. Yet, he still possessed the knowledge. This further supports the concept of fear and bravery being inextricable elements of a character's identity. Each character appears to possess an understanding of the inner workings of his emotional disposition. In this case, the wisdom extends to the point of knowing how to turn a coward into a courageous man.

### *About Hǫttr, the Monster-Eater*

To properly appreciate the relevance of Hǫttr's transformation, we should look at a similar scene from the same saga in which Bǫðvarr takes part. After leaving his mother's home, Bǫðvarr stops to see his brother Elg-Fróði, a strong character but of a bad disposition. Before he leaves, Elg-Fróði makes Bǫðvarr drink some of his blood, which he draws from his deer-leg (Elg-Fróði was half-man and half-deer). Bǫðvarr becomes even stronger as a result. This, however, does not alter his character disposition: he is introduced to the saga as a strong and brave character.<sup>112</sup> The only significant difference between the results of this episode and the previous one is that Hǫttr's disposition changes as well. He stops being a coward. What did he do differently? He not only drinks blood, but he also eats of the heart. Nevertheless, the saga author does not deem it necessary to provide an explanation for the inner workings of this transformation within this text.

There is a clear connection between the heart and fear in this literary tradition. This is best represented in examples from *Atlakviða* and *Fóstbræðra saga*. Fear is such a defining element of Hjalli's identity in *Atlakviða* that his heart keeps shaking after being removed from his body. However, when Þorgeirr is killed in *Fóstbræðra saga*, his enemies, surprised by his bravery, wish to see his heart. These are only two of many examples within Old Norse literature that place fear, and bravery, within the human heart. The *Flateyjarbók* version of *Fóstbræðra saga* reads: "Lyptisk þá litt þat reiði í sínu rúmi, en reiði hvers manns er í galli, en líf í hjarta, minni í heila, metnaðr í lungum, hlátr í milti, lystisemi í lifr."<sup>113</sup> What is being hinted at here is the notion of an anatomical distribution of emotion—they seem to have been regarded as physical entities with their proper place inside the human body.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Another example from this same saga is when Bera is made to eat bear meat. According to the story, this is the reason for the problems with her children, but no change in her disposition takes place either. These are common motifs in folktales. For more about the different folktales weaved into this saga, see Ármann, "Le roi," 151.

<sup>113</sup> Björn and Guðni, "Fóstbræðra saga," 226 (footnote).

<sup>114</sup> In Homer, we already see that some emotions had their proper place in the mind and body. The chest, for example, was the site for "grief, fear, anxiety, hope, desire, love, anger, joy, delight, and so on." (Caroline P. Caswell, *A Study of "Thumas" in Early Greek Epic* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), 34).

Keeping in mind this notion of fear as being situated in the heart can help make better sense of the inner workings of Hǫttr's transformation. No commentary is given by the narrator in an attempt to explain the reasoning behind this process. Thus, it is not far fetched to assume that this was well within the possible within the logic of the saga universe. Hǫttr needs to incorporate another creature to obtain strength and courage. The transformation is only possible by virtue of agents external to Hǫttr. Whereas a subject from the twenty-first century might try to overcome his fear by talking about it with a therapist, Hǫttr is only able to overcome his fear by eating. He needed to perform a concrete physical action to address a problem with a physical entity. By consuming the heart of the monster, the change that ensued in his character disposition fell within the range of the possible, according to the internal logic of this literary corpus. And, since this appears to be a common concept across the different literary genres, the audience of the text must have been, by all probability, aware of the notion of fear residing in the heart, thereby making an explanatory note by the narrator unnecessary.

### *The Value of Fear*

In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, when the winged-troll comes to lay waste to the land, King Hrólfur forbids his champions from fighting it. No one would have been accused of cowardice for letting the creature run free. However, Bǫðvarr ignores the king's prohibition and slays the beast, thereby proving himself braver than the other champions. He is successful and receives no punishment for his disobedience, even though the king found out about it.

Svipdagr was counted among the other champions of the king. A part of this saga follows the story of this champion and how he comes to be in the service of King Hrólfur. However, when the beast appears, Svipdagr is not even. This does not reflect poorly on him, and he is by no means presented as a coward. Inside the collective composed by Hrólfur's champions, Bǫðvarr's brave response to the situation increases his honor in the eyes of both the king and his audience. He becomes the best of Hrólfur's champions, as is repeatedly recognized by the text. Thus, it can be concluded that expressions of fear and courage by an individual, especially those performed in public, translate into either positive or negative currency for his personal economy.

William Ian Miller has attempted to reconstruct a social history of Icelandic society before the end of the commonwealth. To do this, he considers the legal codes and the *Íslendingasögur*. In his reconstruction, honor plays a key role (it is present in feud, law, kinship,

and social standing). Honor becomes the goal of social interactions: either to attain more or maintain the honor already possessed (which is always in danger). Miller describes honor in saga Iceland as a currency that could be exchanged, transferred or taken. It falls on the beholder, the audience witnessing the social exchange between two parties or more, to pass “moral and social judgment on a transaction, allocating in the process honor and prestige between the parties.”<sup>115</sup> As Miller presents it, status is something that has to be carefully maintained or aggressively acquired, and an individual’s status depends on his honor, which is at stake in every social interaction.<sup>116</sup> Miller primarily worked with *Íslendingasögur* when he discussed the honor-related concerns of the different members of society. The same preoccupation is easily identifiable in both of the Atli poems as well as *Hrólfs saga kraka*.

Acquiring and maintaining honor is a constant concern of the subjects in what could be called ‘honor societies.’ The Old Norse world was such a place. A warrior in this culture was always mindful of protecting his reputation. This is one of the main points in the emotional management structure prescribed through these texts. From what has been discussed thus far, a subject who experienced fear was not regarded positively. And although the literature from the Old Norse world mostly focuses on men (particularly chieftains and warriors), slaves and women were not exempt from the ‘proper way’ of expressing emotions. Hence, it can be said that expressing fear reflects shamefully on anyone, whereas demonstrating bravery increases a person’s honor, thereby improving his standing in his community. However, if everyone is liable to be judged by how they control their fear responses, everyone is capable of judging anyone else regarding their expressions of fear or any other emotion for that matter. The Old Norse literary sources abound with examples of women and slaves calling their husbands/masters cowards.

In the end we are more afraid of our peers than our demons. “Controlling your fear is primarily about maintaining your honor.”<sup>117</sup> One of, if not *the*, main concern of hiding your fear is protecting your honor economy. Even if you have a cowardly reputation, honor demands that you counter any remark made against your courage. *Fóstbræðra saga* clearly shows this when Helgi elseista is introduced, and Illugi implies that he is prone to fear. He immediately denies it because this is a social interaction in which his honor is at stake, and expressions of fear are definitely negative currency towards an individual’s honor economy. This is also evident when

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<sup>115</sup> William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 108.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 30–1.

<sup>117</sup> William Ian Miller, *Faking It* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 44.

Hjalti is asked by Bǫðvarr if he would dare to take on the *berserkir*. He responds that he would take on all of them at the same time, even if they overwhelmed him strength-wise. This is the response Hjalti has to give (regardless if this was his honest emotional state) because even though he is speaking with Bǫðvarr—his pseudo-mentor—, this is a social interaction in which his honor is at stake, and Bǫðvarr is his peer in the closed community of the champions of the king. Hjalti is aware that Bǫðvarr has no qualms about taking on the *berserkir*, so in order to not lose face, the only acceptable answer is a brave one.

Many actions of the characters in this text are greatly, albeit not completely, oriented towards making themselves worthy of remembrance. The words of King Hrólfr before the battle with Skuld's army represent this preoccupation. His last order to his men is to drink before the battle. Further on, he says: “stundum þat eina, at í minni sé vár hreysti, því at hingat hafa sótt inir mestu kappar af öllum löndum, sem í nánd eru, ok inir fræknustu.”<sup>118</sup> Being remembered is one of the main concerns of Hrólfr and his men, especially when facing certain death.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, this is the only point in the saga in which all of the champions of the king are named. The champions embrace this final battle with bravery—demonstrating that an inch of fear would have contributed negatively to both their honor economy and the way in which their names would be remembered. As a result, even if they are afraid, expressions of fear are absent towards the end of the saga. Thus, while faking fear is not something that fits within the internal logic of this literary universe, staging bravery in lieu of the actual emotion becomes an imperative for many characters.

### *About Hjalli, the Useless*

This understanding can help lead to a better interpretation of why Beiti wants to exchange Hjalli's heart with Hǫgni's in *Atlamál*. Hjalli is one of Atli's retainers, and no reason to doubt his loyalty is provided, whereas Hǫgni has just finished killing many of Atli's retainers, some of them, presumably, friends of Beiti. The thread guiding the plot in this poem is the enmity between Atli and his wife Guðrún. Atli orders that they cut out Hǫgni's heart to make his wife suffer. Thus, what is the point of killing Hjalli? The only thing that can be said about him from this text is that he is a coward. Hǫgni, however, is presented as a brave warrior. When placed

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<sup>118</sup> Guðni, “Hrólfs saga,” 98.

<sup>119</sup> Hjalti himself also shows concern for being remembered: “er mér meiri grunr á, at hér munu stórir tilburðir eftir koma, svá at í minni munu verða, ok munu sumir þat kalla, at ek mæli nokkut af æðru, en vera kann, at Hrólfr konungr drekki nú it síðasta sinn með sínum köppum ok hirðmönnum.” (Ibid., 97).

in front of the knife, Hjalli cries and offers to do the worst jobs in order to keep his life. This is in stark contrast to Hogni's willingness to die just so he can avoid hearing the coward's howls. This appears to have been sufficient information for the original audience of the text to make sense of the decision to exchange the hearts.

If the only information provided about Hjalli in the poem is his cowardly disposition, herein must lie the reason why Beiti suggests removing his heart. In this society, the amount of honor possessed by an individual translates into the value that each community attributes to its members. An individual defined by his cowardice is not a valuable member of his community. In this poem, Hjalli's community, the human group composed by Atli's retainers, sees an opportunity to get rid of him and tries to take it. Hjalli offers to humiliate himself just to keep his life. A person like this, when cornered, might not think twice about betraying his community. Thus, Atli's other retainers would have rather taken their chances with Hogni (from whom they at least knew to expect hostility) than risk whatever might come to pass with Hjalli, whose actions and decisions were bound to be of a more uncertain nature.

The examples discussed here are only a modest selection from a myriad of possible alternatives that explore the relationship between emotional expressions and honor. The translation of appropriate emotional responses into honor appears to permeate many, if not all of the possible emotional communities from the Old Norse world, which we can attempt to reconstruct using the textual sources at our disposal. This appears to belong to what we may call a hypothetical 'overarching emotional community' of the Old Norse world.

## Conclusion: Fearful Prospects

Emotions play a significant role in the decisions we make and the actions we take. Thus, it is only logical to assert that emotions may have played a similar, if not the same, role in historical cultures. Emotions must have had a ‘shaping power’ in the communities of the classical and medieval periods much like they do today. Regardless of the apparently clear logic of the previous statement, when we attempt to determine what that shaping power was or how it worked, considerable theoretical and methodological difficulties spring up. By appealing to some of the literary sources from the Old Norse world, my aim has been to identify patterns in which the emotives (emotional expressions) as represented in these texts offer a glimpse of the mentality surrounding fear in the Old Norse emotional communities. Literature can provide insight into the conceptions that these human groups had of fear and emotions in general because, as a cultural product, it serves as a vehicle (either consciously or unconsciously) for the prescription of an emotional management structure to its intended audience.

The fear research currently being carried out by scientists has produced results that are not easily applicable to historical sources. On the other end of the spectrum, anthropology has produced the most vigorous anti-essentialist emotions research. However, there are nearly no published ethnographies of fear (or fear-like constructs).<sup>120</sup> By analyzing and discussing the evidence of fear in some of the Old Norse-Icelandic literary sources, I arrived at certain conclusions to piece together some of the discourse surrounding fear in this culture. The conclusions drawn can be summarized in two main points: 1) fear is an inalienable characteristic of an individual—it is more appropriate to talk about emotional dispositions than emotional responses; and 2) expressions of fear and bravery impact honor.

The ideas outlined in this project may appear circular: I have been using discursive units obtained from these texts to piece together a system, and in turn I have been using this system to explain, and sometimes construct, discursive units. While it is possible that this represents an unavoidable problem, this approach still offers valuable information about past mentalities. As Jens Peter Schjødt writes, “we will never be able to say how things in the past actually *were*. Some of these reasons lie in the past itself, some in the source situation, and some in the way

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<sup>120</sup> Jan Plamper and Benjamin Lazier, eds., *Fear Across the Disciplines* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 171.

we perceive things nowadays.”<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, keeping in mind a realistic perspective on the range of results that humanistic scholarship can provide, the analysis performed here adds new and interesting insights into the study of fear and emotions in Old Norse communities, as well as to our comprehension of the Middle Ages and an understanding of emotions in general.

In these sources, being afraid is not a reaction to a certain situation, but rather a (sometimes *the*) defining element of a character. Fear is an inalienable characteristic of the subjects within the narrative. This accords with how William Ian Miller interprets the emotional evidence in the sagas. He states that the saga authors preferred to talk about character dispositions, which are evident as soon as the story introduces a character. The saga author would then allow the particular disposition of a character to account for the emotional life that he or she was likely to lead. Thus, in general, it can be said that if a character is introduced as a coward to the story, he would behave in a way that demonstrated constant fear, making decisions and performing actions that would reflect this cowardly disposition.

The sagas offer a few examples in which a character is able to change his original emotional disposition. This is what happens to Hǫttr when he consumes the heart and blood of a monster and obtains a courageous disposition as a result. However, for this transformation to happen, an external agent is required. He does not overcome his fear through training or by talking about it. This leads to another important point concerning the representation of emotion in this literary corpus. The examples discussed so far indicate that fear and courage were believed to reside in the heart. Emotions—or at least fear and bravery—seem to have been regarded as physical entities with their proper place inside the human body. There is an idea of an anatomical distribution of emotion at work.

Further, demonstrating fear in front of an audience had a negative impact on a character’s honor economy; alternatively, a brave performance increased said economy. This occurred in several of the characters discussed. In these communities, the amount of honor at someone’s disposal reflected his social standing within the community that he belonged to, so it was important for them to show no fear and to respond quickly if they were accused of cowardice. This was not only limited to warriors and chieftains—slaves and women also had to be mindful of expressing emotions in a manner that was acceptable by the standards of the community.

It is my hope that this study has convinced the reader of two things. First, that emotions *are present* in the Old Norse literary corpus. They are neither incorporated in the texts nor

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<sup>121</sup> Schjødt, “Reflections,” 275. Emphasis in the original.

expressed in ways familiar to the modern reader (which lead some to talk about the cold characters and the cold narrative style of the saga universe), but they are there. Second, I hope that this project helps to further undermine the idea of the Middle Ages as the ‘childhood of man,’ an era of unmediated emotions.

Examples of some of the discursive units of fear discussed here can be found in other, even more ancient, traditions. For instance, the idea of fear being located in the chest can be traced back to Homer. Can the trajectory of this idea be traced, or is it only a spontaneous way of more primitive collectives to comprehend an emotion? To study this further, sources from other Indo-European cultures can be examined. However, this entails a different comparative approach than the one performed in this thesis.

A suitable next step for this project would be to consider the conclusions drawn here in light of other texts, both literary and more historical in character. Another group of sources worth consideration is the material culture. To study fear further, an interesting next phase might be to assess amulets recovered from Viking Age and medieval Scandinavia. Many of these artifacts had a protective function—we know this due to runic inscriptions found in some of them meant to ward off sickness or danger. Helmets recovered from either the sixth or seventh-century adorned with images of boars may have also corresponded to a belief in their protective power. Tacitus mentions in chapter forty-five of *Germania* that the *Aestii* believed the Mother Goddess, whom they worshipped, protected them in combat if they adorned themselves with the forms of boars.<sup>122</sup> The research prospects are numerous.

Another important step is reconstructing the discourses surrounding other emotions. For example, what can be said about anger, love, hate, and envy? An emotion cannot be taken out of its proper context. Awareness of which emotions were valued and which emotions were ignored is necessary before any significant statement about emotional communities can be made. Proper understanding of the emotional structure of a human group requires proper understanding of the entire emotional network to which each emotion belonged.

Despite the fact that this study of fear has only incorporated material from literary sources, it would be foolish to think that they did not impact the people that listened to these stories being told and retold, especially a culture with such a strong warrior dimension as the Old Norse communities. An emotional management structure is prescribed through these texts, which claimed to tell their audiences of the grand exploits of their ancestors. Regardless if they were intended as cautionary tales warning against being a coward, some of the ideologies of

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<sup>122</sup> Plubius C. Tacitus, *Germania*, ed. and trans. James B. Rives (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 95.

the communities that produced them shine through the texts. As modern researchers, we must not be afraid to reconstruct these ideologies.

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