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Abstract: Using an ethnographic methodology paired with historical and literary analysis this article will aim to investigate the foundations and categories of magic within the *Íslendingasögur* corpus when it intersects through sections of gender, sexuality, and concepts of masculinity. As this article is an altered version of a much larger body of research, the main saga under consideration will be that of *Eiríks saga rauða* compared to the recorded experience of Rǫgnvaldr réttilbeini. Careful reflection will be taken as to the breakdown of acceptable and reprehensible uses of magic and their correlation to the construction of identities within the saga. Through an intersection of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality the breakdown of magic and ritual will be explored in a saga context where magic is not only prolific and considered the fodder of entertainment but also speaks to socially cultural identification.

Keywords: Masculinity, Icelandic Family Sagas, Magic, Gender, Sexuality

Introduction: Put 'Em Under the Scope

To understand an apparent social breach of practice we must first look to what we believe to be sanctioned, normal, and even purported as traditional. The demarcated "other" is shown in the face of the familiar, and in the realm of magic this is no different. There is something that destabilizes and feebly attempts to knit itself back together when men in Old Norse Literature and

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poetry attempt magic. The conclusion for these men usually ends in punishment by outlawry, threatened injury, or even the finality of death. This breakdown does not involve a simple interaction between men and the practice of magic as an activity, but as a masculine breach into that which is delineated by scholarship as feminine in totality. As such, this research is guided not merely by the sarcastic demand of 'what about the men?' but precisely what about men's relationship to magic, in contrast to the women who have, in our minds, predominantly wielded this supernatural and often potent power. When does magic break down for the male user within and result in their derision and when is magic deemed accessible and sanctioned for the male practitioner? What boundary is eventually crossed and blurred, and when does it remedy itself once more—if it can be reconciled at all? Do the male magicians in saga notation reshape themselves into a new identity or masculinity entirely? Such is the scope of this paper.

It must be acknowledged that within any literary or historical discourse attention paid to the lives and practices of women are vital to compose an informed and holistic analysis of the specific literary or historical period one is investigating. When viewed specifically through the lens of literary discourse, women are often extremely visible to almost uncomfortable lengths, or are purposely hidden or skewed in relation to certain categories of interpretation. While often relegated to the position of the inferior, women are active members within their specific culture and society and thus can detail an immensely helpful alternative narrative from the male-dominated referential scope. As women are also historically poised within a marginalised position in opposition to the male gender, one is privy to learning other underrepresented practices and cues that can take the scholarship a step forward in investigating outside the binary.

Specifically, when women's narratives are visible within *Íslendingasögur*, such scenes are rightly paired with necessary conversations about misogyny, violence, and the marginalized female form. Gender in saga literature has been articulated in a variety of ways, including evaluations of the 'Maiden King' type in *fornaldarsögur* and goading women securing the honour of their families during family feuds in *Íslendingasögur*. Conversely, when magic is involved, its potency acts as one of the few options women can manipulate to grant themselves

agency, and thus is an intrinsic part of discussions on gender and empowerment within Old Norse literary studies.[2]

Authors like Jenny Jochens, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, Karen Jolly, Carol Clover, and Gareth Lloyd Evans have succeed in analysing gender intersectionality within saga literature to unearth narratives that have previously been unexamined or skewed when women figures are concerned.[3] As such, the ways in which we accept bodies of knowledge, in relation to historically and culturally marginalised people and their dominant comparatives, must always be critiqued and questioned. Like some anthropological mystery to explain, women—if they are talked about at all within academia—are relegated as something accompanied to men, never to be explored on their own. Instead, I propose a slight trajectory change that seeks to additionally put men on full display so as to be equally scrutinized within the medieval corpus of literature. In the spirit of Gareth Lloyd Evan's new composition *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, I seek to demonstrate that to see men as normative and women as the available "Other" fit to be studied is problematic and serves to further relegate women as being the only gender category suspect to being dissected by scope and pen.[4] This theme in the humanities and social sciences unfortunately demarcates women as a partitioned inversion of the masculine gender, whereas men remain whole—and to prod and examine them is seemingly unnecessary.

My research goals are not intended to detract from the large bodies of progressive and vital analysis that has been assembled in relation to Old Norse women. The attention given to men in this literary analysis is not to suggest that men are more important figures within the saga corpus nor that there is little

[2] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words and Power* (Philadelphia: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 56.
[3] Carol Clover, 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe' *Speculum* 68, (1993) 363-387; Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Men and Masculinities in Sagas of the Icelanders* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words and Power* (Philadelphia: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Karen Louise Jolly, Edward Peters, & Catharina Raudvere, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).
[4] Evans, *Men and Masculinities.*

else to be learned about women in Old Norse literature. Contrarily, by approaching male practitioners through the theoretical lens of queer, gender, and anthropological cultural theory I seek to demonstrate that men are just as accessible to intersections of study as women are, especially within the untested sphere of magic.

Relative to this discussion are the recent developments in the study of magic in Old Norse literature which have foregrounded women as the progenitors and keepers of archetypal concepts of magic. As a result, men have remained in an outlier position with little in-depth analysis beyond relegating them to the characteristics of *ergi* (queerness, perverseness) and *argr* (unmanly, cowardice) and essentially suspending research beyond that. Acknowledging this, I seek to redress this assumption; that the only qualitative data to be gleaned from men practicing magic within saga society is that they are not supposed to.

While scholars in the past have attempted to fixate magic within the realm of the female, it is my aim to investigate those seemingly anomalous men who partake of such a distinctly feminine practice. I suggest that these men themselves become part of a hybrid masculine identity by operating and acquiring shards 'of marginalized and subordinated masculinities and, at times, femininities.'[5] As such, it is my estimation that men are just as susceptible to cutting-edge analysis as women, especially when a vast majority of Old Norse magical scholarship is dedicated reservedly to female practitioners and their experiences. Instead of painting an image of the woman in relation to the man, I think it time we reverse the methodology and see what smokes forth from the cauldron.

The Archetypal Magician: From Woman to Woman

The bulk of research dedicated to Old Norse magic is rightfully predicated on women and their skill in prophecy, incantations, and influencing life's outcomes for the benefit of themselves or others. It is the *vǫlva* that settles upon her

[5] Tristan Bridges, 'A Very "Gay" Straight?: Hybrid Masculinities, Sexual Aesthetics, and the Changing Relationship between Masculinity and Homophobia,' *Gender & Society* 28 (2014) 59-60.

offered high seat and relays fortunes. Next is the malevolent sorceress who sows destruction. Kinder still is the woman in a tutelage position who offers to share her knowledge with the next generation. These women are posited as experts in their craft by saga literature and scholars alike, and it is no wonder that when imagining soothsayers and wielders of magic it is a female practitioner that comes to mind.

Within her work on images and representation of women in Old Norse literature and material culture, Jenny Jochens asserts this possession of magic by women in stating that 'the term *vǫlva*… was reserved for the female diviner, mythical or human. Gendered later, the activity of prophecy was performed by a *spámaðr* or a *spakóna* respectively.'[6] Indeed, many Old Norse magical titles and terms are feminine in origin and include but are not limited to the *vǫlva* (seeress), *spákona* (female seeress), *seiðkona* (sorceress), and a woman who is *markinggunr*, or who is aware of things.[7] Nevertheless, it is no secret that male practitioners of Old Norse magic exist and they themselves are given names that etymologists' have suggested are 'masculinized' versions of the feminine form, keeping the original female connotations but making the title more accessible for adoption by men.[8] As such, terms like *spámaðr* (male seer), *fjólkunnigr* (male magician), and the more famous *seiðrmaðr* (sorcerer) exist.

It is this accommodation to men in the saga literature that scholars like Jochens and Friðriksdóttir attempt to historically reconcile, with certain threads of research concluding a variety of responses. These include the rationalization that authors of Old Norse literature 'felt it necessary to modify the ancient female sibyl by casting men in this role both in pagan and Christian settings.'[9] Conversely, connections to the Sámi have been made in which 'some scholars point to shamanic practices, especially in northern Eurasia, to which the Norse drew inspiration from.'[10] The Norse within *Íslendingasögur* certainly share a mixed

[6] Jochens, *Old Norse Images*, 120.
[7] Unless stated otherwise, translations my own using Geir T. Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2004).
[8] Jochens, *Old Norse Images*, 117.
[9] Jochens, *Old Norse Images*, 118.
[10] John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 265.

relationship with the Sámi that ranges from absolute domination to mystical awe, as will be explored later.

Nevertheless, within *Íslendingasögur* men are shown to practice magic in equal numbers to women. François-Xavier Dillman's research identifies about seventy magicians in the *Íslendingasögur*, distributed almost evenly among women and men.[11] Jenny Jochen finds forty-one women and thirty-nine men.[12] The most quintessential form of magic that is usually negatively associated with men is that of *seiðr*, a type of highly feminised magic that is fixed between a female heathen locus. *Seiðr*, by its very conception and production, is aligned with the feminine sphere. Snorri Sturluson asserts in *Heimskringla* that, with regards to witchcraft, it was an art brought forth by Freyja from the Vanir, and that 'in its execution, [it] is so queer that men could not practice it without dishonor and so the goddesses were taught this art.'[13] One of the apparent first men to co-opt its power of foresight and control was Óðinn, who hoped that with its use he could better advance his scope of knowledge.

In the aforementioned translation of *Heimskringla*, Ármann Jakobsson chooses to align the term *seiðr* with queerness when the practice becomes infected, as it were, with the male gender. In Faulkes's translation, *seiðr* is aligned with the perverse and invoked shame to befall the male practitioner.[14] Likewise, authors like Ström and Sørensen have rooted the conversation around men practicing magic firmly in connotations of perversity and deviance from quite

[11] Francois-Xavier Dillmann, 'Les magiciens dans l'Islande ancienne,' Diss. *Doctorat d'État*, (Caen, 1986).
[12] Jochens, *Old Norse Images*, 123.
[13] Translation by Ármann Jakobsson, *The Troll Inside You: Paranormal Activity in the Medieval North*, (Punctum Books, 2017) 117; *Heimskringla*, 1:19 Snorri Sturluson c. 1230. In addition, 'we are told that this sorcery is queer: it is not for men, and therefore seen as a female practice,' Ármann, Jakobsson, 'Óðinn as Mother: The Old Norse Deviant Patriarch,' *Arkiv För Nordisk Filologi* 126 (2011) 8.
[14] Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla: Volume 1, The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason*, (trans.) Alison Finlay & Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2011); Ármann, 'Óðinn as Mother,' 8. Faulke's translation of *seiðr* as black magic has further implications for how we view magic in the domain as the shadowy "other," and how we racialize the term.

early on in scholarship, by connecting the practice with socially delineated concepts of *ragr* (cowardly) and *ergi* (perverseness, queerness).[15]

The Tools of the Trade: Establishing Magic as a Practice

In tackling the concept of magic, I am operating under the understanding that ritual magic is not merely an entangled belief system, but a practice embedded and reliant upon a set of social relations that are context bound. Such a context further intersects between ascribed and shifting achieved statuses, of which this article will address, including: sexuality, gender, and ethnicity. The magic that one encounters in the *Íslendingasögur* is multiple and varied.[16] While dreams and prophecies abound that demonstrate a subtle supernatural resonance, other types of easily verifiable magic include rune carvings, invoked curses, chants, charms, weather magic, the laying of hands, *útiseta* (mound-sitting), *ganga til fréttar* (going to inquire), and magically imbued items (usually weapons) which are also scattered throughout specific *Íslendingasögur*. The *Íslendingasögur* genre has plenty of instances of magic, but the texts usually avoid using certain supernaturally charged terms and instead imply a characters ability to sense or extend prophecy via dreams or their wit.[17] Some of these elements are highly feminized forms of magic and are marked ethnically effeminate because they originate outside the hegemonic Old Norse worldview, as with the *Noadi's* drumming or shamanistic invocations.[18]

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[15] Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, (trans.) Joan Turville-Petre, (Odense, 1983),19; Folke Ström, *Níð, Ergi and Old Norse Moral Attitudes* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1973).

[16] Unlike Catharina Raudvere I will not be including *trolldómr* as I believe it is beyond the scope of this paper, nor will I be using the term witchcraft as I feel it has too many uncontrolled connotations and is better used in an Early-Modernist period of magic exploration. Catharina Raudvere, 'Trolldómr in Early Medieval Scandinavia,' in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, (eds.) B. Ankarloo & S. Clark (London: Athlone, 2002) 73-171.

[17] There has been in the past valid academic criticism with regards to dreams and prophecies and if they can safely be regarded as magic or merely intuition being acted upon and as such I will not grant too much attention to their usage. John McKinnell, *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005) 95-96; William Ian Miller, 'Dreams, Prophecy and Sorcery: Blaming the Secret Offender in Medieval Iceland,' *Scandinavian Studies* 58 (1986) 58.

[18] Eldar Heide, 'Spinning Seiðr,' *Old Norse Religion in long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes and Interactions*, Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert, & Catharina Raudvere (eds.) (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006).

The Magical Female Archetype of Eiríks saga rauða

When corroborating the established scholarship in which magic is deemed a female-dominated landscape complete with women practitioners, rituals, and a clear societal impact upon the cultural milieu, it is *Eiríks saga rauða* that springs to mind. This case study neatly aligns with contemporary Old Norse scholarship as a display of women's pivotal role within the practice of magic and seeks to establish a traditional narrative of supernatural invocation. By traditional, I mean the most obvious standard of magic that we are privy to when encountering the *Íslendingasögur*: led by a powerful seeress and involving, by default, only other women.[19]

Specifically, the scene of interest is set in Herjólfsnes at the Eastern Settlement along the west coast of Greenland where Þorkell propositions a visiting elderly woman named Þorbjörg, or known more affectionately as *lítilvǫlva* (the little seeress), to divulge through her supernatural skills the household's fate in the midst of famine. Guðríður, a Christian woman, is reluctantly coerced into joining the chanting required by the seeress to invoke the spirits, as she reluctantly confesses her knowledge of such songs taught to her by a foster-mother. Pleasantly surprised by Guðríður's ability to sing beautifully, Þorbjörg states that no one could have attempted a better rite and as a result 'many spirits had been drawn there now who thought it lovely to lend ear…'[20]

This scene exemplifies an important initial credence to the reason why Old Norse scholarship is extremely keen on identifying most aspects of magic within the female domain. It is this scene that I would suggest is the most generous depiction of an "archetypal" version of Old Norse magic. It is a ritual moment woven into being by the many generational voices of women. This is not to say that magic itself is hereditary—Old Norse concepts of magic assert the opposite, in most cases. Magic within the Icelandic sagas is not an innate

[19] *Eiríks saga rauða* deals with the Norse exploration of Greenland and North America and describes events between c. 970—1030 though the text itself is composed at a later date around 1260—1280. *Eirik the Red: and Other Icelandic Sagas*, (trans.) Gwyn Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).
[20] *Eirik the Red*, 136.

quality that passes generationally through bloodlines, but instead is most likely introduced, taught, and later performed as need be for oneself or others.[21]

However, while not necessarily blood-bound, we are still privy to an unbroken chain of women, starting with Þorbjörg, who (it is assumed) doled out her fortunes with the assistance of her nine other sisters before they died. In the case of Guðríður, it was her foster-mother that taught her the necessary songs. Furthermore, it is a supernaturally powerful woman's coaxing that invokes the songs from the Christian woman's lips. Guðríður is saliently surrounded by women who can invoke the chant by heart, as the seeress specifically states she needs only women's voices to assist her—men will not do. The entire scene is invoked as a woman's space and thus alludes to a literary unbroken line of women fortune-tellers and singers passing on knowledge only to their female predecessors—from the very beginning of the scene, the role of magic is regulated into the hands and voices of women only.

Enter Rǫgnvaldr réttilbeini*: The Male Outlier?*

Þorbjörg's chant is not the only one like it in Old Norse cultural memory. Just as Þorbjörg gathered round her women to start her songs, earlier in the reign of King Haraldr *hárfagri*, Rǫgnvaldr *réttilbeini* was supposedly preoccupied in a similar magical rite where chanting was deemed necessary.[22] However, while Þorbjörg was revered and respected by her community, the ninth son of King Haraldr was condemned to death for his incantations. Accused of practicing *seiðr* in Haðaland, as retribution his father sent Rǫgnvaldr's brother, Eírikr *blóðöx*, to murder him. This resulted in a house fire where Rǫgnvaldr and eighty other *seiðmenn* were burned alive.[23]

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[21] Stephen Mitchell, 'Magic as Acquired Art and the Ethnographic Value of the Sagas' in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, (ed.) Margaret Clunies Ross (Odense: UP Southern Denmark, 2003) 141.

[22] *A History of Norway and The Passion and Miracles of the Blessed Óláfr*, (trans). Devra Kunin and Carl Phelpstead (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2001) 14, 17.

[23] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Masculinity and Politics in Njal's Saga,' *Viator* 38 (2007) 191-215. The implication of a house burning is one marked by cruelty, stigma, and shame both for the deceased and the arsonists, as exemplified by *Brennu-Njáls saga*. Snorri Sturluson's *A History of Norway* contradicts his earlier claim in *Ynglingatal* by stating Rǫgnvaldr was thrown into a whirlpool in Haðaland. *A History of Norway* 17 stanza's 8-11.

With regards to a glance at Old Norse concepts of magic, there exists a confusing flurry of context when magic is a stable and encouraged endeavour, and when it is rendered completely taboo. This stability exists, but it is frustratingly hard to pin down when intersected by identifying emblems, as John Lindow identifies them.[24] For Rǫgnvaldr, magic invokes the most pressing emblems of sexuality, gender, and ethnicity. The term "hybrid" further lends itself to the concept of emblems, allowing each category to be mixed and blurred into creating an ever-shifting identity.[25] Thus, by practicing magic Rǫgnvaldr's stable masculine identity becomes twisted into a hybrid-masculinity exacerbated by socially informed interpretations: sexual and gender instability during magic, and magic as an ethnically marked practice.

For instance, if Neil Price's work on *seiðr* is carefully considered, then *seiðr* could have been sexual in practice. Whether involving mimetic or reality-based acts of sexual intercourse, it could have led to the practitioner becoming so variably marked that they transformed into another gendered position entirely. The male subject entering a feminine domain (that of magic) harbours implications for the male practitioner; that they engage in each ritual and rite as a woman would morph them into an intolerable hybrid identity. The concept of men who engage in "women's activities" as being lesser men and "tainted" by femininity is nothing new, and stems partly from misogyny, homophobia, and a complete demotion of women's spaces.[26] The *seiðmaðr* borrows, or indeed appropriates, the magical actions of women and as such drapes femininity across his shoulders to become a hybrid individual that blurs sanctioned actions informed by gender and sexuality.

Additionally, this marking of a hybrid identity is not without imposed borders in the form of punishment and derision. As stated in Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, 'this new persecution of the peripheral sexualities enticed an

[24] John Lindow, 'Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others: A Millennium of World View,' *Scandinavian Studies* 67 (1995) 67.
[25] Bridges, 'A Very "Gay: Straight?' 60.
[26] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York & London: Routledge, 2002).

incorporation of perversions and a new specification of individuals."[27] Those who were punished for the crime became the crime itself, and thus the male practitioner of magic was given the oxymoronic label of *seiðmaðr*; a male practicing magic. The use of *seiðr* by men would then be highly stigmatized and seen as effeminate, and essentially in need of cleansing through fire.[28] Indeed, *Heimskringla* includes a verse, originating from *Ynglingatal*, that describes Rǫgnvaldr's actions through his fellow *seiðmaðr* Vitgeirr of Hǫrðaland. Vitgeirr of Hǫrðaland describes his apparent misdeed in unkind terms.[29] To be a *seiðmaðr* was nothing to boast about, at least according to the sagas, and yet men apparently continued in their magical endeavours.

In continuing with sexuality and gender, the methodological production of the non-normative subject can be traced as a stigmatized marker when compared to the hypermasculine character regularly found in Icelandic sagas. Foucault traces this original linage of the "Other" as being outside heterosexuality, in its relation to the individual as nothing more than a "perpetrator" of the act, not the embodiment of the act itself.[30] Greenberg too stresses this historical shift of secular individual acts to a more fully formed identity when he states 'insofar as behaviour is theatrical, it need not be attributed to any underlying trait or "essence" of the actor. Seen this way, masculinity, femininity, queerness, straightness are not so much what one is, but what one does.'[31] Thus, it must be stressed that it matters not if Rǫgnvaldr identified as a non-normative sexual or gender identity comparative to hegemonic masculine men. It matters not if he actually engaged in, what the contemporary medieval authors of the time, call perverse actions. What does matter is that he was accused of the actions, and as such these activities became the tantalizing rubric for the *seiðmaðr* of the medieval period.

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[27] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, (New York: Pantheon, 1978) 42-43.
[28] Ström identifies this torturous method as having a neutralizing effect that engulfs the magical offender. Ström, *On the Sacral Origin of Germanic Death Penalties*, (Stockholm: K. Vitterhets historie och antikvitets akademiens handlingar, 1942)127.
[29] *A History of Norway*, Þjóðólfr of Hvinir is the likely author of *Ynglingatal*, circa 855—930.
[30] Foucault, *The History*, 42-43.
[31] David, F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988) 191.

The Ethnic "Other" Made Effeminate

If we are to focus on the lineage of female magic users proposed in *Eiríks saga rauða*, then what are we to make of Rǫgnvaldr? Where did he and his eighty other *seiðmaðr* learn their songs—is there such a thing as men's archetypal or traditional magic specifically for the male gender to learn and disseminate? Some genealogical work might be able to shed some light on this query. While Foucault was predominantly fixated on the nineteenth-century social construction of homosexuality, his sentiments on the holistic construction of a peripheral identity still reign true and can be readily applied to Rǫgnvaldr. For the son of King Haraldr, 'nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality.'[32] Rǫgnvaldr's parentage and his subsequent ethnicity feed into his supposed perversity, which mean broader implications tackled by race and colonial theory. His sexualized hybrid masculinity, as a *seiðmaðr* perhaps engaging in penetrative sex, is enhanced by his subjecthood as an ethnic "Other:" specifically, as an Indigenous Sámi magic practitioner.

Rǫgnvaldr is attested in *Heimskringla* as having a mother named Snæfríður Svásadóttir who is revealed to be ethnically Sámi—a trait that many scholars have linked to the supernatural via cultural, religious, and geographical distance and difference when encountered by hegemonic Norse society.[33] As Rǫgnvaldr is linked to a Sámi origin, his hybrid identity becomes that much more complicated. Tangled up in a storyline of colonization, Indigenous identity, and the constructed feminization of the "Other" his masculinity becomes increasingly strained.

Continually, the Sámi are treated derisively by characters in a variety of sagas including but not limited to *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, *Hrafnista saga*, *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, and *Ljósvetninga saga*. As a hegemonic culture, the Norse are positioned within a variety of sagas as antagonists and exploitative debt-collectors when

[32] Foucault, *The History*, 43.
[33] Lindow, 'Supernatural Others,' 10-12; Stein R. Mathisen, 'Sámi,' in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of World Folklore and Folklife*, (eds.) William M. Clements and Thomas A. Green (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2005) vol. 3. 135-139; Heide, 'Spinning Seiðr,' 165-166.

interacting with the indigenous Sámi of Northern Europe.[34] Indeed, Haraldr *hárfagri*'s meeting, quick marriage, and eventual obsession over his new wife is steeped in xenophobic and mystical happenings with detrimental effects presumably due to her cultural positioning.

The sanctioned culture and norms of the Norse thus give way to proper modes of identity expression, 'many of which are underwritten by racial codes of purity and taboos against miscegenation.'[35] These categorized types profiled oppositions to the white-cisgender-heterosexual-dyadic, resulting in a conglomeration of aberrant and delinquent types that only had variation within their stigmatized deviation from the norm. What is especially salient with regards to the re-imagining of Rǫgnvaldr as a colonized ethnic subject interpellated by the Norse is McClintock's analysis of the "Other" within colonial relationship making.[36] The feminization of the "Other" relies upon the colonizer being susceptible to the anxieties and distresses of retaining his masculine penetrator status in the face of the liminal threshold of the far North and East where magic reigns. It is this territory and its peoples, deemed primitive or soft, that the dominant subject is supposed to ravish and conquer for his culture's economic gain and ethnic superiority. The Norse domination of the Sámi within the sagas speaks to the fears and anxiety of the hegemonic culture being susceptible to feminisation and total engulfment by the liminal unknown of the supernaturally-charged terrain that no amount of individual masculinity could stave off the 'danger [that] lies in transitional states.'[37] Once again, Rǫgnvaldr is positioned within a feminine sphere not of his making, as the Norse concept of the physical "Other" has continually been relegated to feminizing language.

Interestingly, *Historia Norwegiae* also includes a reference to the death of Rǫgnvaldr, yet the son of Haraldr *hárfagri* seems to have been taught this art not

[34] Within *Ljósvetninga saga*, the "dream Finn" that Guðmundr bides to speak with initially wants nothing to do with the Norseman as he is still conscious of 'the injuries we have suffered,' Andersson, Theodore Murdock & Miller, William Ian, *Law and Literature in Medieval Iceland: Ljósvetninga Saga and Valla-Ljóts Saga,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 198.
[35] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxiii.
[36] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 24.
[37] McClintock *Imperial Leather*, 25.

by his Sámi mother, but like Guðríður, by a foster-mother of indeterminant ethnic and cultural background.[38] This mother is situated in Haðaland, the area where Vitgeirr of Hǫrðaland assured that Rǫgnvaldr's shameful act occurred.[39] It is especially salient that his indigeneity comes from his mother, as into the contemporary moment, governments and legislation have been adamant at regulating who is and is not Indigenous based upon the mother's bloodline.[40] It is no wonder that at least one of her sons should similarly become involved in the supernatural arts of his matrilineal line and pay for it with his life.

The Norse reckoning with the Sámi is further feminised by associating the Sámi completely with magic, mysticism, and supernatural primitiveness. The position of Rǫgnvaldr with the Sámi, as seen in his matrilineal heritage, is also equally expressed in his association with the extreme north of the Old Norse cultural and topographical concept—where 'the northern areas were certainly the centre of magic, in which magic was most efficient and most dangerous.'[41] There is nothing innately perverse, sexual, or taboo about Rǫgnvaldr's indigenous blood, yet it serves a powerful tool to position his ethnicity as supernaturally and effeminately inclined.

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[38] *A History of Norway*, 14, stanza 31-34.

[39] The motif of foster-mothers taking in male apprentices who wish to learn the skills of magic is a common and useful a thread of investigation with regards to a variety of male practitioners, not just Rǫgnvaldr. See Gunnlaug's tutelage under Geirrið in *Eyrbyggja saga*, Kormák's visit to Þórdis the witch in *Kormáks saga* and Kolbak's protection under Gríma the sorceress in *Fóstbræðra saga*. However, it need not merely be foster mothers, as whole families can be involved in the practice, as was the case in *Laxdæla saga* with Kotkell and his wife Gríma, who presumably taught their sons the art of sorcery. Additionally, Andersson and Miller suggest with relation to women and men's interactions and familial kinship ties 'male virtues could be transmitted through females,' often leading to similar dispositions or goals. This is demonstrated when women play their role of enforcing and maintaining honor for their household in the ways available to them such as in *Brennu-Njál's saga* and *Laxdæla saga*. Andersson & Miller, *Law and Literature*, 15.

[40] Louise Bäckman, 'Female—Divine and Human: A Study of the Position of Woman and Society in Northern Eurasia,' in Åke Hultkrantz (ed.) *The Hunters: Their Culture and Way of Life* (Tromsø: Tromsø Museums Skrifter, 1982); Jo-Anne Fiske Boundary Crossings: Power and Marginalisation in the Formation of Canadian Aboriginal Women's Identities,' *Gender and Development* 14 (2006) 247-258; Rauna Kuokkanen, 'Indigenous Women in Traditional Economies: The Case of Sámi Reindeer Herding,' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 34 (2009), 499-504; Bonita Lawrence, 'Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An Overview,' *Hypatia* 18 (2003), 3-31.

[41] Hans Jacob Orning, The Magical Reality of the Late Middle Ages: Exploring the World of the fornaldasögur,' *Scandinavian Journal* 35 (2010) 7.

The feminisation and depravation of the demarcated "Other" that the Norsemen encounter is not a new topic of study, and although this discussion is predicated upon the Indigenous Sámi, the case can also be made for people of the Hebrides, Orkney Isles, or any person with Irish connections or a patronymic Irish name within Viking Age Scandinavia and onwards.[42] As such, Rǫgnvaldr would have been an easy target twice-marked by the slander of effeminacy as not only a practitioner of a feminine magic, but as the son of a Sámi woman. Through the ascription of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, these examples illustrate a distinct picture that leads to violent repercussions that still play out in today's society on a systemic level.

Nevertheless, while we can speculate on all the attributing factors that made Rognvaldr an easy target for corrective punishment "Othered" by magic, we cannot wholly understand where he learned the art itself. He could have learned these arts from his Sámi mother or foster-mother in Haðaland, if not a secret lead *seiðmaðr* akin to Þorbjörg herself. What is salient, however, is that while Rǫgnvaldr must enter a feminine space that expands his subjecthood into a peripheral hybrid identity, Þorbjörg need not extend outside the bounds of the tradition. This mixing of gender in the arts does not diminish Þorbjörg's power or mysticism, as she is still able to produce fantastic results and is revered for her efforts unlike Rǫgnvaldr. In a technical and mechanical sense, Rǫgnvaldr presumably did everything right. His use of chants like the ones Þorbjörg employed demonstrated that his magical ritual was in essence the correct approach, yet his gender acted as a destructive catalyst which tainted his actions with perverseness and shame.[43]

[42] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Judith Jesch, *The Viking Diaspora* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

[43] Jochens states that 'cross-culturally, male magicians enjoy far greater prestige than their female colleagues. Even when male and female practitioners coexist within the same culture, women do not receive the same credit for magical performance.' Jochens, *Old Norse Images*, 119. I must disagree with this as far as it concerns Old Norse cultural depictions of magic within saga society. It cannot be regarded as prestige to be labelled perverse, monstrous, and indeed worthy of being marginalized to the extent that one must suffer a house burning as a consequence of their gender distorting their magical capabilities.

Though we cannot assure ourselves that Þorbjörg was a real person, she represents a construction of what a thirteenth-century saga audience would consider a seeress to look and act like, and she plays her role well. How faithful and receptive the Greenlandic settlements were to their prophetesses before conversion is unknowable, and yet her image shines through vellum roughly seven-hundred years later as one of the best literary descriptions of her kind. Even so, it is important to acknowledge that her male counterparts do exist, though not all of them are burdened under the guise of fantasy.

Concluding Consideration: Magical Men and Their Place in Scholarship

I am in no way seeking to establish men as a whole more oppressed within the saga corpus—such a statement, I feel, could never entirely be supported, nor should it. The scholarly declaration of a hybrid-masculinity should not be intended to absolve a figure's faults, whatever they may be. Currently, there exists a large body of research dedicated to uncovering how hybrid masculinities re-establish systems of inequality, especially among certain privileged groups of men.[44] Additionally, I am also cognizant that men are Othered and maligned due to their proximity to women and women's practices, or suspected domains. They are still men, and have advantageous economic, social, and civic freedoms so long as they maintain their masculinity and social standing within the community. However, masculinity is a slippery intangible concept to constantly perform and maintain, and thus is in danger of constantly being lost. Once it is lost, a man is in grave danger as they are seen to be too close to that which is taboo—femininity and all that it conveys within saga society, such as subordination, lust, and mysticism. Women are then indeed an integral part of the story, and a man's actions mimicking their practices can unfortunately lead to their downfall.

If we are to accept that magic is a feminine role, then men who practice it are irrevocably betraying the socially constructed parameters of their gender

[44] Bridges, 'A Very "Gay: Straight?'; Demetrakis Demetriou, 'Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique,' *Theory and Society* 30 (2001) 337-361, Michael Messner, "'Changing Men" and Feminist Politics in the United States,' *Theory and Society* 22 (1993) 723-737.

in a hyper-masculine and honour-driven society like that of medieval Iceland. However, I am prepared to suggest that men who practice magic are best described with a 'hybrid masculinity.' Despite their hybrid masculinity, the magic-driven male practitioner is, equally as capable as their hypermasculine counterparts at suppressing the magical women they share folios with, and they usually do. However, there is too much evidence that gender and sexuality distort when a man actively engages in magic, and that there is the possibility of a different type of masculinity taking form.

This does not mean that, because of their Othered state, male magic practitioners cannot be held responsible for any misgivings, nor complacency, in the larger hegemonic masculinity that saturates a majority of Old Norse literature.[45] Even though Rǫgnvaldr might be capitulated as a martyr of queer victimhood, we know little more about him to safely champion him as an anachronistic notion of gender equality. Nor should we demand other saga figures who, with a gleam in their eye, curse a household with bad weather, or conjure a *draugr* from the grave, as being so maligned to warrant total sympathy. However, neither is the simple alignment of magical men to mere magical practitioners, denoted by terms like *ergi* and *ragr*, which are then translated by a majority of scholars as "perverse," "homosexual," or "queer" without scholarship doing the necessary work to unpack and update this terminology and its connotations. As such, the magical saga-man when he engages in whatever way, undoubtably is credited within Old Norse literature as invoking social anxiety with regards to gender, sexuality, and overarching ideas of traditional masculinity and femininity. There is a lot to be learned about these men and the ways they use, disregard, or engulf themselves within the practice of magic, and what it relays to the societal structure of medieval Iceland through an array of intersections—not merely sexuality, but gender, and ethnicity.[46]

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[45] Demetriou, 'Connell's Concept,' 20; Michael Messner, "'Changing Men,'" 22.

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