

Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough

‘Inside Outlawry in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* and *Gísla saga Súrssonar*: Landscape in the Outlaw Sagas’

As the severest punishment that might be imposed during Iceland’s Free State period, outlawry effectively placed an individual outside the bounds of society. Terms used to describe outlaws - both in legal and literary texts – reflect this perception; words such as *skógarmaðr* and *vargr* refer to their hideouts in the wild or denote nonhuman status by equating them with wild animals. In this conceptual invention on the part of the Icelanders, there was an implicit assumption that the non-social was part of the natural wilderness. However, the discrepancy between the technical status of outlaws and the way in which the sagas present them reflects the problematic nature of an outcast’s position in the Icelandic world; whilst they were no longer human in the eyes of society, they were still men with social needs. The paper will focus on the outlaw biographies *Grettis saga* and *Gísla saga*, exploring and contrasting the degree to which outlaws exist inside or outside the social world. The issue is not only conceptual but fundamentally physical; consequently, the paper will focus on the portrayal of landscape and physical environment. Both sagas enjoy a particularly dramatic sense of place, and in both cases this is employed to direct the narrative. *Grettis saga* uses its narrative landscape to create an outlaw protagonist who pioneers the wild terrain of the interior, constantly in danger of taking on characteristics associated with the numinous spheres that he moves in. Yet the difficulty with which he inhabits a wasteland populated by supernatural elements demonstrates how impossible it is for man to cast aside his humanity. In contrast, Gísli’s experience of outlawry is embedded more consistently in terms of the social landscape. Yet in spite of his attempts to anchor himself in this sphere, he cannot avoid a degree of association with the marginal realm outside it. Generic and stylistic differences between the two sagas highlight the diverse expressions of outlawry that emerge from the texts, but an analysis of the landscapes in both narratives reveals similar concerns for the question of an outlaw’s position both inside and outside the social world.

Betsie Cleworth

‘Communion with Ravens’

In the western medieval world such diverse characters as the Norse god Óðinn and the Christian prophet Elijah have been described communing with ravens. Ravens were used to symbolise intelligence and mischief, depicted as messengers and thieves, as omens of good and harbingers of death and battle. But can one short episode about three ravens be used to symbolise the changing religion of a community? Can a raven be simultaneously pagan and Christian, can it tell the story of 200 years of settlement and embody the political and religious ideology of a nation?

In my paper I will analyse ch.5 of *Landnámabók*, the incident of Floki’s ravens. I will demonstrate how the text simultaneously mirrors Biblical narrative, engages with exegetical debate and presents supposed pagan practice. In order to highlight the nuances of the passage I will compare it to the raven passage in the Old English poem *Genesis A*, 1438b-54, which combines similar elements but for different purpose and effect. Finally I will show how these various elements are combined in *Landnámabók* to create and forward the complex socio-political function of the passage and of the whole text. By studying Floki’s ravens we can track an emerging community as it shifts from Norway to Iceland and we can understand the faith and values used to define the community outside the old country and inside the new.

Jennie Doolan

‘Coming in from the Cold: Óðinn at the Door’

This paper will analyse the euhemerised Odinic figures in *Nornagests þátr* and *Gylfaginning*, narratives which seek, by means of Odinic material, to enact and resolve generational and religious conflict. Although these two narratives are ostensibly generically and historically rather different, they each simultaneously present a juxtaposition and amalgamation of contrasting times, beliefs and literary traditions, in order to establish, categorise and neutralise the impact of the pre-Christian past, in both social and literary terms.

My paper will therefore address (i) the double time-frames or box structures of *Nornagests þátr* and *Gylfaginning* and (ii) the play of the internal (the present or social reality of the narratives) and the external (the historical or mythical ‘other’); factors which give rise to the tensions and resolutions of the two texts in question. The dual structures of *Nornagests þátr* and *Gylfaginning* allow author and audience to explore and participate in the overlap of two ‘realms’ of time and reality, one seen through the perspective of the other, while heightening the definition between the two and ultimately demonstrating the inner, supernatural element to be false and/or irrelevant to the outer, more realistic frame. As Quinn has noted, this finely balances the social present and the mythic past in order to disarm the latter, ‘despite the strong bolt on the door - the semblance of Christian practices among the household – heathen beliefs were present.’ Both narratives present a microcosmic mimesis of pervasive social concerns, employing what Harris has called a ‘personal and dramatic structural formula to convey supra-personal and historical conceptions’, and this can lead towards an understanding of the psychological necessities and literary mechanisms of the ‘other’ in the literature, and specifically to an explication of the Odinic characters and patterns in *Nornagests þátr* and *Gylfaginning*.

Emily Lethbridge

'Inside and Outside the Canon of "Classical" *Íslendingasögur*'

'An aversion to all evaluative categorization is in my opinion one of the unfortunate tendencies accompanying postmodernism as well as the excessive emphasis on one manuscript by the New Philologists', writes Vésteinn Ólason in a footnote to a recent article ('The Icelandic Saga as a Kind of Literature with Special Reference to its Representation of Reality', in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World*, ed. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills (Brepols, 2007), pp. 27–47, at p. 40). In his defence of the use of the groupings 'pre-classical', 'classical', and 'post-classical' by *Íslendingasögur* critics who are still desirous of constructing a diachronic model of stylistic development for the sagas, however, Vésteinn does not leave room for the new dimension that recent work on the continuity of the textual transmission of certain sagas, and their rewriting over the course of transmission, has opened up. In this paper, I will explore how the traditional inclusion of individual sagas in the 'classical' canon often seems to have been made on the basis of only one text, or the texts belonging to one version, of the saga in question; when the spread of sometimes significantly diverging textual evidence for individual sagas is taken into account, might it be necessary to reassess the place of individual sagas inside and outside the 'classical' canon?

Debbie Potts

'Towards an appreciation of skaldic poetry in a postmodern interpretive community: lyricism in the poetics of Kormakr Ögmundarson'

The definition and appreciation of literature is inevitably tied to the specific cultural milieu of the reader. The reader adopts the 'interpretive strategies'¹ of his or her community, strategies which are subject to change over time, along with the fluidity of the dominant ideologies and forms of aesthetic expression within a particular culture. Then how should the postmodern reader engage with skaldic poetry, the highly prized product of a medieval Scandinavian society so alien to our own? The interpretive strategies and aesthetic ideals of the postmodern imagination cannot and, I believe, should not be extracted from the modern day reader's response to skaldic poetry; indeed, the application of such modes of thought are essential if we are to revitalise the literary 'value' of skaldic poetry in our postmodern culture. But at the same time, skaldic poetry can appear an impenetrable fortress of obscure diction, complex structure and dislocated syntax, if we do not familiarise ourselves with the stylistic techniques, rhetorical tropes and mythological frame of reference of the communities which produced and preserved the verse within written texts. In this sense, the postmodern reader must be both inside and outside the community, straddling medieval Scandinavian perceptions of poetics and our own postmodern conception of art.

If we deconstruct (what we interpret to be) the ideological and structural framework which informs Kormakr's *lausavísur*, his verse displays a very powerful sense of individual voice, one which shifts between highly ornate boasting, moments of simple lyrical beauty, and a wry irony within the generally conservative medium of the *dróttkvætt* stanza. In this paper, I intend to demonstrate how Kormakr's manipulation of the *dróttkvætt* form and his engagement with the Old Norse cultural frame of reference achieves a sometimes dissonant, sometimes complementary union between traditional skaldic ornamentation and a more self-conscious form of emotive self-expression.

¹ The term 'interpretive community' is derived from Stanley Fish's work on reader-response theory: Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge (MA): Harvard UP, 1980).

Abigail Queen

'Rógmálmi skatna ('the metal of strife'): A Community Bound by Treasure in *The Poetic Edda*

A dizzying variety of treasure scintillates through the 'heroic poems' of the Poetic Edda, sparking bloodshed, betrayals, and battle. Wealth, like words, is a symbol: its value depends entirely on how it is interpreted by those who exchange it. Throughout The Poetic Edda, we see that treasure must be 'read': Guðrún sends her brothers a ring wrapped in wolf hair, Völundr interprets a missing ring as evidence of his beloved's return. Each individual's reading of treasure, the value they place upon it and their understanding of its value to others, determines the choices they make and their relationship with others: Gunnar will willingly lose his own life and betray Sigurðr for 'the treasure of that girl' (Guðrún), Gunnar is likewise willing to sacrifice his own life and his brother's not to acquire treasure but to prevent his rival Atli from possessing it. Both literally and symbolically, both within the fiction of the poems and in their own aesthetic devices, treasure articulates and expresses the relationships between rivals, enemies, kinsmen. An investigation of the many forms and symbolic capacities of treasure as it flows through the communities depicted in the Edda will increase our appreciation of the poems' fabulous complexity and depth.

Brittany Schorn

Community in *Hávamál*, 'ethical testimony of the Norsemen'

The ethics of *Hávamál* have attracted commentary from numerous scholars over the years who have found them alternately sophisticated, primitive, despicable and heroic. The nature of the advice and observations presented in *Hávamál* are certainly curious : they are strikingly pragmatic and self-interested and it is consequently difficult to imagine the audience for which it was intended. Karen Swenson approaches this question by examining the sort of community envisaged within the poem and concludes that it was written by and for a community of men. She sees a distinction between the poem's presentation of the dangers inherent in male society and those confronting it from the outside, which serve to bind it together. Whether any such distinction is evident in the poem is questionable, but perhaps more problematic is her identification of the concerns of the audience of the poem with those of the community of men she identifies within it. This community is certainly never addressed in the poem and when the second person pronoun does occur it is always singular. The only unambiguous instances of direct address, moreover, are aimed at a single, specific named character: Loddfáfnir. While gnomes are, by their very nature generalized statements and may often be prescriptive, *Hávamál* is no sermon. Swenson was right to approach the question of the poem's ethics by considering 'the ways in which the poem itself works to define its audience'. This audience, however, appears to be as individualistic as the poem's speaker and thus cannot be straightforwardly identified with the poet's intended audience. While much of what Óðinn says may well be applicable to all men (and even women), his statements have been selected and ordered for the benefit of one, possibly specific, man. Therefore, in my paper I propose to reconsider what we can deduce about the relationship between the individual and the community within *Hávamál* and whether this can shed any light upon the nature of the audience for which it was intended.

Fartein Øverland

Categorization of raven *kennings*

My research explores patterns of change in the corpus of *kennings* denoting ‘raven’ during the whole period of skaldic poetry. While these *kennings*, with some exceptions, are constantly rebuilt over the same formal structures, I believe that an examination of their *usage* can reveal changes in mentality during this period. The method will mainly be qualitative analysis, where a small number of *kennings* in the context of their *helmingr* will be analysed and compared. In addition to the main analysis I also want to give a survey of the whole corpus. Rudolf Meissner has already given such a survey in *Die Kenningar der Skalden* (1921). As in the rest of this work, he divides the *kennings* into categories according to their base words. The largest group, whose base words are bird names, is further divided by their referents. My survey will build upon this work and expand it by categorizing the *kennings* according to their usage. It must be added that the goal of this quantitative division is pragmatic rather than theoretic; the purpose is to give an overview of my sources, not to suggest a methodology for *kenning* categorization in general. In my presentation, I will discuss the strategies and problems of this process.

Community: Inside and Out

Balestrand, March 31-April 3, 2008

Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir

Giantesses and Monstrosity in the *fornaldarsögur*

Giantesses in the *fornaldarsögur* stand outside the community and appear in many roles, both hostile and benign. They are defined by their large bodies, grotesque physical appearance, aggressive nature and deviant sexuality. Giantesses are encountered in the wilderness and some are brutally wounded or killed by male heroes. Other giantesses enjoy a relationship with the heroes, sexual, emotional and/or maternal. These relationships cannot persist in human society but nevertheless hold their attractions. Following recent developments in monster theory and focussing on the *Hrafnistumannasögur*, the giantess will be read as a site where anxieties and fears but also unspeakable desires are revealed. These concern themes including social prestige, gender relations, sexuality, race and death.

Rob Avis

'Marginal saga-societies and "imagined communities": the social mythology of the sagas revealed beyond its borders'

What can sagas set outside of Iceland reveal about the nature of Icelandic identity? This paper will seek to define the boundaries of the socio-political mythology of Iceland through the saga-author's depiction of territories familiar yet foreign, from the depiction of colonisation in *Grænlandinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða* to the liminal political situations explored in *Orkneyinga saga* and *Færeyinga saga*, insular societies nonetheless tied to Norway. In so doing, it will posit the existence of three secular myths fundamental to the identity of the Iceland of the sagas – those of settlement, conversion, and the legal society.

Erin Goeres

Tidings of Death in three Skaldic Poems

This paper explores three Viking-age poems that commemorate kings killed in battle. Declaring a ruler to be the most accomplished warrior in the Viking world played a central role in skaldic eulogy, a form of court poetry that was both highly political and highly public as it proclaimed a ruler's power over his own and other groups. However, with the death of a patron, the skald was forced to re-interpret the inherent contradiction in his valuation of the dead patron: if a ruler was the greatest and strongest warrior of the group, how was it possible for him to die in battle? What is the function of a poem that praises a warrior who is no longer the leader or even a member of the group? This is the issue three poets wrestle with in the poems *Eiríksmál*, *Hákonarmál*, and the *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar*. As the poets search for an appropriate way in which to commemorate the death the king, they explore the role of poetry and of public speech in the process of commemoration. The two early poems, apparently composed in a pagan environment, do this by creating fictional dialogues between gods and men: imagining death from the kings' perspective, the poems show the rulers challenging the gods' decision to call them away from their followers to Valhöll. The Christian *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, having no recourse to pagan mythology, explores the relationship between the death of the king and the poet's public announcement of his defeat: told from the point of view of the skald, the poem focuses on the plight of the king's surviving followers and the chaos caused by his death. In all three cases, the death of the king and his sudden departure from the community is a deeply fraught event to portray in eulogistic poetry; the three poets each contend with this issue in highly complex ways that explore the most basic conventions of their craft.

Judith Jesch:

The Hebrides – inside or outside the Norse poetic community?

The paper will examine a range of evidence, not only literary, for the practice of traditional Norse poetry in the Hebrides, or by Hebrideans.

Ruarigh Dale:

Berserkir inside and out

Berserkir are depicted in the sagas as living on the edge of society. The *Íslendinga sögur* show *berserkir* as troublesome individuals or small groups of troublemakers, who make their living by preying on the law-abiding members of society. In the *Fornaldar sögur* *berserkir* are often depicted as members of the king's court and protectors of the kingdom. These two views are complete contrasts with one group threatening and the other protecting society, although in both cases *berserkir* are depicted as dangerous characters, who live at the edge of society and can easily transgress its boundaries. The contrast between these two depictions may inform our idea of the changing role of *berserkir* in Old Norse society. This paper will briefly compare and contrast the roles of *berserkir* in society and address the reasons for this change, such as the advent of Christianity and changes in the meaning of the word *berserkr*.

Annette Jones:

Runic inscriptions in Norwegian stave churches: A reflection of belief in rural communities?

Even before the remarkable rune-sticks from Bergen were excavated, most medieval runes were found in Norway, as church graffiti. I feel it is time to re-examine these as a contrast to the urban rune-sticks, as the stave churches which contain most such inscriptions are or were located in rural areas. The location of each inscription within the church, as much as its contents, may shed light on what type of person wrote it, their gender, status and role in society. It has been suggested that runic literacy was more widespread than manuscript literacy, so discovering the range of people able to make this graffiti could add to that discussion. Were the inscriptions even made by local rural people or by town-dwellers passing through on pilgrimage? What do they tell us about the community's beliefs and attitudes to the church they are written on, compared to graffiti in secular locations?

Dayanna Knight:

Culture Contact within the Norse North Atlantic circa AD 700-1500 – the example of whale utilization

My research takes a holistic and diachronic approach which utilizes a broad range of source material, the usage of which is succinctly outlined in K. Lightfoot's 1995 *American Antiquity* article as well as in my own master's dissertation. This is an approach which is most often applied in North American archaeological excavations and is well suited to situations of contact where there are varying literacy levels. As I have previously begun research on the interactions between the indigenous peoples of the Canadian and Greenlandic High Arctic and the incoming Norse communities I hope to discuss a communal act for both groups - whale utilization - in more detail. For the most part both the hunting and the processing of whales require groups of people, a situation which aids in the construction and reinforcement of communal and familial ties.

Marjolein Stern:

Meaning in the eyes of the beholder: the public of runestones

My research into the meaning of figurative images on Viking Age runestones and their role in conveying information on these monuments is based on the notion that these pictures of certain animals, ships, faces and human figures had a meaning that complemented the message in the inscription on the stone and the statement that was made by the placement of the monument. Depending on the area and specific place where a runestone was situated, it had different kinds of public. Some stones were witnessed only by a small society, while others were seen by many visitors from outside the community as well. How these different audiences perceived the various monuments was related to whether they were able to grasp the full meaning of the carvings, but not everything depended on the beholders' ability to read runes, because of the use of pictures.