

## Seventh Annual Norse in the North Conference:

### Review and Acknowledgments

The seventh annual Norse in the North conference was held on 9 June 2018 at Durham University, and was hosted by the Lindisfarne Centre at St Aidan's College. The conference was organised around the theme of "Emotions and Mindsets in Old Norse Literature and Society", and hosted nine postgraduate speakers from UK and international institutions, as well as a keynote address by Dr. Hannah Burrows of the University of Aberdeen. The conference was organised by Katie Harling-Lee (*née* Harling-Challis) and Dr. Alexander Wilson, and was funded by a grant from Durham University's Department of English Studies in conjunction with *Postgraduate English*. Additional funding was provided by St Aidan's College and by Durham's Centre for Academic, Researcher and Organisation Development (now the Durham Centre for Academic Development).

The theme of the conference produced three broad areas of discussion amongst our postgraduate speakers, the first being the analysis of the mindsets underlying historiographical texts in medieval Scandinavia and Iceland. William Raybould (Durham University) analysed the Old Norwegian *Hirðskrá*, in conjunction with the Icelandic sagas, to illustrate the importance of emotional displays in forming and repairing the bonds between kings and their followers. Tim Rowbotham (University of York) argued against the scholarly consensus that the Old Icelandic *fornaldarsögur* ("sagas of the ancient period") are predominantly fictional works; he highlighted that these texts contain many narrative tropes and patterns that medieval audiences would have viewed as historiographical elements. Heidi Synnøve Djuve (University of Aberdeen) expanded the timeframe for consideration beyond the medieval period by analysing the difficult transmission of the Old Swedish treatise

*Konungastýrelsen* in the post-medieval period, and assessed how the mindsets of later audiences have crucially affected our understanding of Old East Norse literature in Sweden.

The second topic discussed was the function of cognitive mindsets in the creation of Old Norse literary text and metaphor. Michael Baker (Durham University) explored cross-cultural associations of the Christian Hell with volcanic imagery, by comparing presentations of the volcanic North in various Old Norse texts, such as the didactic *Konungs skuggsjá*, with the presentation of the “hellmouth” in the North in the Old English works about St Guðlac. Grzegorz Bartusik (University of Silesia in Katowice) similarly analysed the cultural influence that Latin had on Old Norse by investigating the transmission of Christian metaphors into medieval Icelandic texts, understanding these metaphors to be markers of Iceland’s Christianisation. Eleonora Pancetti (University of Iceland) built on similar ideas in her cognitive linguistic analysis of the mythological *Poetic Edda*, in which she demonstrated how network structure enables us to understand the connotations of emotional words, such as those related to sorrow, in poetry produced by past cultures.

The third area of discussion focused on how differences between the mindsets of writers, audiences, and translators have affected our modern understanding of Old Norse literature. Becca Drake (University of York) analysed how the texts *Ketils saga hængs* and *Örvar-Odds saga* break down the familiar binary categories of human and non-human, therefore encouraging their audiences to question the validity of this conventional mindset. Harriet Jean Evans (University of York) similarly discussed how scholarly analysis of Old Norse literature has overlooked the representation of emotion in animals, and drew similarities between human and animal emotions in these texts. Finally, Katie Harling-Lee (Durham University) demonstrated that minor variations in modern translations of the *Poetic Edda* can affect our understanding of the emotional experience of the legendary figure Guðrún Gjúkadóttir, and argued that we can read these translations in conjunction to expand our interpretations of the ambiguities in Guðrún’s character.

The day was rounded off by Hannah Burrows' keynote address on "Old Norse Poetry as a Mind-Altering Substance". The address focused on how the mythological stories associated with the mead of poetry provided conceptual frameworks for how medieval poets understood the production and effects of Old Norse skaldic verse. Dr. Burrows discussed especially the concept of "distributed cognition" – that is, the ways in which we think about thinking – in order to develop an understanding of how medieval poets thought about the mind and about cognitive processes, especially in relation to their own production of verse. Dr. Burrows' research into this topic is due to appear in the forthcoming *Edinburgh History of Distributed Cognition*.

The conference organisers are delighted to see that some of the contributions mentioned above have been published in this edition of *Postgraduate English*, with the possibility of further contributions appearing in future editions of the journal. More information about the Norse in the North project, hosted jointly by the Universities of Durham, York, and Leeds, is available on the project's website.

Katie Harling-Lee and Alexander J. Wilson

Norse in the North Conference Organisers (2018)

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