



Olof Rudbeck, *Atlantica*, 1689 (the author portrayed among the old savants)

International Conference

## ***The Hyperborean Muse***

*Scandinavian literatures of the Middle Ages and European culture  
from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Contacts, cross-fertilization, plagiarism*

*Verona, 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> April 2011*

## Programme

Thursday April 14th

h. 15. 30

Conference room, Banco Popolare di Verona

- ODD EINAR HAUGEN (Institutt for lingvistiske, litterærere og estetiske studier, Bergen)  
*The principle of parsimony: On the genealogical method in Medieval Nordic philology*

- JUDY QUINN (Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, Cambridge)  
*The principles of textual criticism and the interpretation of Old Norse texts derived from oral tradition*

Coffee break

- ADELE CIOPOLLA (Filologia germanica, Università degli Studi di Verona)  
*Editing and translating Snorri's Edda*

- STEFANO GIORGIANNI (Università di Verona)  
*The Normanist theory and the historiographical problem of the origin of the ancient Rus'*

Dinner

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Friday April 15th

h. 9. 30

Conference room, Banco Popolare di Verona

- MATS MALM (Litteraturvetenskap, Göteborg)  
*The translations of Old Norse poetry and the lyric novelties of romanticism*

- HEATHER O'DONOGHUE (Faculty of English, Oxford)  
*A Place in Time: Old Norse Myth and Contemporary Poetry in English and Scots*

Coffee break

- MASSIMILIANO BAMPI (Filologia germanica, Venezia, Ca' Foscari)  
*Building up the ties with the past: August Strindberg and Starkaðr*

- MARIA CRISTINA LOMBARDI (Lingue e Letterature Nordiche, Università L'Orientale, Napoli)  
*August Strindberg's Åns Bogsveigs saga: a fusion of old and new*

Lunch

h. 15.00  
Chiesetta di S. Pietro in Monastero

- IAN FELCE (Faculty of English, Cambridge)  
*Hamlet the Icelander: Ambales saga, Snæbjörn and Shakespeare's First Quarto*

- PIERA PELANDA and MARCELLO ROSSI (Verona)  
*Ambleto a Venezia*

- FRANCESCO SANGRISO (Scuola di Dottorato in Scienze del Testo – Sezione di Filologia e Linguistica Germanica - Arezzo)  
*The work that does not exist: Richard Wagner and the legendary blacksmith*

- SVANHILDUR ÓSKARSDÓTTIR (University of Iceland, Reykjavík)  
*Egill's afterlife: The seventeenth-century reworkings of Egils saga*

Dinner

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Saturday April 16th  
h. 9.30  
Conference room, Banco Popolare di Verona

- TEREZA VACHUNOVÁ (Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, Københavns Universitet)  
*Hrolf Kraki from sentimental drama to Nordic fantasy*

- FULVIO FERRARI (Filologia germanica, Università degli Studi di Trento)  
*Sagas as sequential art: some reflections on the translation of saga literature into comics*

Coffee break

- CAROLYNE LARRINGTON (St. John's College, Oxford)  
*Arnaldur Indriðason's Konungsþók: Fetishising Literary History*

- CHIARA BENATI (DISCLIC, Università degli Studi di Genova)  
*An Old Norse Manuscript to Die and Kill for: Viktor Arnar Ingólfsson's Flateyjargáta*

The conference will finish at 13.00.

Verona, Banco popolare di Verona, Piazza Nogara (intersection of via Stella and via Scala)

Chiesa di S. Pietro al Monastero, via Rosa, Verona

Scientific committee: ADELE CIPOLLA, JUDY QUINN, MARCELLO MELI, RAFFAELLA BERTAZZOLI

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### *Abstracts*

MASSIMILIANO BAMPI

*Building up the ties with the past: August Strindberg and Starkaðr*

Between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, much of Strindberg's literary effort went into giving shape to his renewed interest in the national past as a means of interpretation of the present. Such interest came also to include major works of the Old Norse literary and mythographic tradition and was translated especially into a number of plays and short stories. *Sagan om Stig Storverks son* opens the collection *Hördingaminnen* (1905) and represents an interesting rewrite of *Gautreks saga*, which in its longer version has the legendary poet Starkaðr as the main protagonist. To Starkaðr Strindberg dedicated also a play, *Starkodder Skald*, which remained a fragment. The aim of this paper is to make some observations on how and to what extent Strindberg used Old Norse materials (especially, yet not exclusively, *Gautreks saga*) to write both works built around Starkaðr.

CHIARA BENATI

*An Old Norse Manuscript to Die and Kill for:  
Víktor Arnar Ingólfsson's Flateyjargáta*

In many respects Víktor Arnar Ingólfsson's *Flateyjargáta* follows the standard pattern of crime fiction: a famous Danish philologist is found dead on one of the uninhabited islands in Breiðafjörður; an unwilling and inexperienced newly graduated notary is sent to Flatey to investigate the matter. What distinguishes this novel and makes it particularly interesting to a medievalist's eyes is the continuous reference to Flateyjarbók and to the

texts it contains, around which the whole plot is centered. Each chapter is, in fact, divided into two parts, one following the development of the investigation and of the events on Flatey and one describing the 14th century manuscript, its story and telling a series of significant episodes from the sagas it preserves.

On the basis of this novel and of its analysis, in this paper I'll focus on the adaptation of medieval themes and narratives in a literary genre as popular as contemporary crime fiction.

Adele CIPOLLA  
*Editing and translating Snorri's Edda*

Snorri's work is a fecund testing ground to assess modern editorial praxis relating to medieval vernacular literary witnesses. What the *Textüberlieferung* of Snorri's *Edda* indicates today is that it is nothing short of an essentially open text. In spite of its unusual status as an authored work (supported by manuscripts statements), either through chirographs or through print, we possess nothing other than selective 'editions' of a textual complex not reducible to any unity: each of the four 'medieval' manuscripts shows, both in contents and in structure, materials that are drastically differently focused. The aim of this paper is to investigate the relationships between editorial practice and the history of *Snorra Edda* as it spread throughout modern European literatures.

This history originated during the age of 'Gothicism' in modern Scandinavian countries, when the *Edda* was edited, translated and commented on for the first time (mainly into Latin), within a cognitive horizon still derived from the Bible and not substantially different from that of previous scholarship. During the Enlightenment the text began to be translated from these early Latin versions into French, English or German and Snorri's *Edda* entered mass-culture throughout printed books and periodicals: these earliest printings (Resenius 1665, the excerpts in Bartholin 1689, Göransson 1746, Mallet 1756, Schützen 1765, Percy 1770) shaped the myth of a lost Runic *Urtext* as the 'Bible' of Northern peoples (who were alternatively named Celts, Goths, Scythians and behaved as faithful Lutheran Christians). Following preconceived ideas regarding who its 'first' author had actually been, they continued with the practice of free selection from codices and from previous print versions (in the form of both editions and translations) and in the process contaminated them. From the very beginning, some Scandinavian Gothicists and their 'enlightened' French or English followers suspected the veracity of the *Prologue*, which later on (in Heusler's opinion), became the *Makel* of which Snorri should be cleansed. From the Romantic Age onwards, whilst a new editorial age came into being, both *Snorra Edda* and the Poetic *Edda* were abused, on occasion, in constructing national ideologies.

The turning point in the scholarship was the 1980s, with the pivotal works of Faulkes and Clunies Ross. They marked the downfall of the *Edda*'s association with the 'Germanic myth' and Snorri's work was ultimately recoded as evidence of thirteenth-century Icelandic literacy. Now, while current editorial practice moves from artifactual philology to the mark-up of *Edda* manuscripts, it is legitimate to ask what kind of

translation of the work is possible in the current context, and how the methods of the most recent textual criticism can safeguard what I will term the Snorrean textual network.

IAN FELCE

*Hamlet the Icelander:  
Ambales saga, Snæbjörn and Shakespeare's First Quarto*

Various clues indicate a medieval Scandinavian Hamlet tradition which may have included a lost Icelandic *Amlóða saga*. The eighteenth-century *Ambales saga* follows a broadly similar plot to the Hamlet story in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, which itself points to both medieval Icelandic and Danish versions of the story, and appears to correspond with the earliest extant appearance of Hamlet in Scandinavian literature (in a verse by the poet Snæbjörn preserved in Snorri's *Edda*). But does the Scandinavian tradition inform our reading of Shakespeare? The general consensus has conventionally been 'no': Shakespeare's sources were the French Hamlet story in Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques* and the mysterious *Ur-Hamlet*, which we know was performed on the late Elizabethan London stage. Whilst Belleforest based his *Hamlet* on Saxo, Shakespeareans insist, did not.

This explanation, however, is too simple. To begin with, there is not one Shakespearean *Hamlet* but three. The great Second Quarto (Q2) and First Folio (F) versions of *Hamlet* are usually viewed as Shakespeare's authentic conception of the play; the First or *Bad* Quarto (Q1) dismissed as an oddity. A popular view has arisen that the Q1 text is a memorial reconstruction of an abridged version of Shakespeare's play, designed for touring. This theory supposes that the abridged play behind Q1 was created last and is, therefore, furthest from Shakespeare's original intention. If, however, we compare the hero of Q1 to the Hamlet stories in the Scandinavian tradition, the figure who emerges is consistently a brilliant trickster, one-step ahead of the court, unwaveringly hell-bent on revenge. In light of the Scandinavian tradition, the riddling revenge-hero of Q1 ceases to look like a superfluous anomaly and begins to look like a stepping-stone between Hamlet the Icelander, and the brooding, melancholic, intellectual and, above all, intractable Hamlet the Dane of Shakespeare's longer play.

FULVIO FERRARI

*Sagas as sequential art:  
some reflections on the translation of saga literature into comics*

Since at least the thirties, the authors of comics have shown an interest in the Scandinavian Middle Ages, and already the famous prince Valiant – a creation of Harold Foster's imagination – was presented as a medieval Norwegian nobleman. In this tradition, several authors have derived their comic-book stories from Old Norse literature and culture or, in many cases, from a popular image of Old Norse literature and culture.

The purpose of my paper is to highlight how some sagas have been translated into the specific semiotic code of comics, how these inter-semiotic translations have contributed to the spreading of knowledge about Old Norse literature, and what role such translations have played and play in the target cultural systems.

STEFANO GIORGIANNI

*The Normanist theory and the historiographical problem  
of the origin of the ancient Rus'.*

The solution to the serious quandary about the origin of the early Russian nation has been discussed for about three hundred years. A historiographical theory, debated for a long time, has assumed considerable importance during the era from the 18th to the 20th century, and it is the so-called Normanist theory (aka the Norman theory). Such a concept had involved a lot of scholars from many research fields, from literature to linguistics and philosophy. The Norman theory involves the participation of Scandinavians in the creation of the first Russian state. It was proposed by Siegfried Bayer, a prominent academic who had a significant position in Russian culture during Anna Ivanovna's reign, and it has been maintained by numerous German scholars and some of the most esteemed Russian men of letters of the last centuries, such as Nikolaj Karamzin and Michail Pogodin. This idea has been in conflict with another theory known as the Anti Norman theory. According to its adherents, the Slavs had developed a state on their own without any external influence. Through time the Norman question has changed its prerogatives, especially regarding the points of debate. In primis the Normanists have taken *The Chronicle of Bygone Years* as incontrovertible proof of the Nordic establishment of ancient Russia, and they have analysed the etymological origin of the toponym Rus'. The Nestorian manuscript was the main focus for the whole 19th century, with the aim, above all, to identify its real authorship and its multiple sources. This paper will trace the historiographical problem, presenting the evolution of the Norman question, and trying to focus attention on the historical changes that have influenced the destiny of the above-mentioned theory.

ODD EINAR HAUGEN

*The principle of parsimony:  
On the genealogical method in Medieval Nordic philology*

It is a fundamental tenet of the genealogical method as practised since the middle of the 19th century that a stemma should be parsimonious, i.e. that it should not contain more manuscripts, presumed or preserved, than necessary in order to explain the transmission of a specific text. As a consequence, two types of eliminations are carried out in a genealogical analysis. First, any manuscript that can be shown to be a copy of another, known manuscript, should be removed from the analysis (*eliminatio codicum descriptorum*). Thus, if the lost manuscript alpha has been copied in the preserved manuscript A, which again has been copied in the preserved manuscript B, B should be eliminated, since it supposedly will not add anything to the reconstruction of the text, except for possibly some additional errors.

Secondly, among the presumably lost manuscripts, intermediary manuscripts should be removed, since they do not add more to the textual reconstruction than what is already in their model, whether this is reconstructed or preserved. Thus, if the lost manuscript alpha has been copied in another lost manuscript beta, and this again has been copied in the preserved manuscript A, there is nothing in beta which is not in alpha, apart from possibly some additional errors. These will also be found in A, and beta should therefore be eliminated, leaving only alpha and A.

In this talk, I will look at two traditions in the light of the principle of parsimony. As for the principle of removing known copies, it can be helpful to look at the Old Norse Bible translation *Stjórn*. Here, the manuscript AM 225 fol is commonly thought to be a copy of AM 226 fol and thus of no textual value. If it is removed, what, if anything, is lost? As for the principle of removing intermediaries, the *First Grammatical Treatise* (FGT), written some time during the middle of the 12th century, poses a challenge, since its mid-14th century orthography in the only preserved manuscript, AM 242 fol (Codex Wormianus), clearly is at odds with the orthography proposed in the now-lost 12th century original. For this reason, Hreinn Benediktsson (in his 1972 edition of FGT) has proposed at least one intermediary manuscript of FGT between the original and the version in AM 242 fol. Should this presumed intermediary be removed?

I will use these examples in order to discuss the validity and possible limitations of the principle of parsimony in textual criticism.

CAROLYNE LARRINGTON

*Arnaldur Indriðason's Konungsþók: Fetishising Literary History.*

Arnaldur Indriðason's *Konungsþók* (first published in 2006) is the author's tenth novel. In a departure from his popular series of crime novels, Arnaldur's narrator looks back on his youthful adventures in Copenhagen in 1955; writing in 1971, he clearly regards the *handritamálið* as the concluding episode in Iceland's struggle for independence. The plot concerns a naïve, but talented young Icelandic student, Valdimar, who has gone to study nordisk filologi at the University of Copenhagen, and his mentor, a man named in the novel only as 'The Professor'. The Professor has been working on an edition of 'Konungsþók' for some decades and has been targeted by Nazis whose enthusiasm for so-called Aryan literature make them eager not only to acquire the Codex Regius manuscript of the Edda, but also the missing quire which constitutes the lacuna between the end of *Sigrdrífumál* and the beginning of *Brot*. The novel whose thriller-plot is mostly concerned with keeping the Codex Regius out of the hands of the villains, and the recovery of the missing leaves, has much to say about the importance of the Codex Regius to an Icelandic nation which had only relatively recently gained its independence: At the climax of the novel the Codex is entrusted to no less a hero of Icelandic letters than Halldór Laxness, on his way home from receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Arnaldur's novel addresses some of the themes of Halldór Laxness's *Íslands klukkan* trilogy, composed serially during the war years; the last part of which, *Eldur í Kaupinahfn* was published in 1946. Halldór's novels centring on a loosely-disguised Árni Magnússon (Arnas Arnæus), and the manuscript Skálða, stands in a clear intertextual relation to the

later work. Where Laxness offers a serious meditation on Iceland's literary heritage and its place in national history and culture, Arnaldur's *Konungsbók*, this paper will argue, functions as a McGuffin, in Hitchcock's sense; the novel does not seriously engage with the Poetic Edda, nor – frustratingly for the Eddic scholar – the contents of the missing quire. The paper will also discuss the figure of the Icelandic manuscript scholar in Copenhagen as flawed hero in these two novels, and in Sjón's most recent novel *Rökkurbýsnir* (2008).

MARIA CRISTINA LOMBARDI

*August Strindberg's Åns Bogsveigs saga: a fusion of old and new.*

This paper analyzes a text of August Strindberg *Ån Bogveigs saga* which is largely ignored. The Swedish writer imitates Icelandic saga narrative patterns and stylistic models and at the same time introduces some innovations typical of his age. My investigation aims to show the influence of medieval Scandinavian genres on Strindberg's early work and, at the same time, points out his personal re-elaboration of themes, characters and other topics from the sagas.

MATS MALM

*The translations of Old Norse poetry and the lyric novelties of romanticism*

As is well known, one seminal aspect of the new aesthetics of romanticism was the liberation of poetry from the strict rules, not least metrical, of classicism. Part of the background for this was the new, historicist approach to older cultures, which resulted in entirely new methods of translating poetry. While classicists such as John Dryden or Alexander Pope had translated Virgil and Homer into elegant alexandrines transposing them, as it were, to 18th century Britain, the last decades of the 18th century began to see translations which kept the original's hexameter and strove to maintain the style and atmosphere of the original poem.

While this was a drastic change, the romantics' method of translation was not entirely new. Within scholarship, this kind of close and faithful translation was already being prepared. Not least in the scholarly translations of Old Norse poetry that accompanied the surging research on Old Norse matters during the 17th and 18th centuries, various methods of translation had been advanced. For different reasons and in different ways, these methods spread to a wider audience in the latter part of the 18th century, and came to form part of the development of a European aesthetic. In this paper, the poetical forms developed within Old Norse research will be sketched and their relation to such novelties of Romanticism as free verse and the prose poem will be discussed.

HEATHER O'DONOOGHUE

*A Place in Time: Old Norse Myth and Contemporary Poetry in English and Scots*

Certain modernist poets of the early twentieth century – most prominently, perhaps, David Jones and Hugh MacDiarmid – famously turned to myths and history in their projects to create an authenticity both distinctive and conflicted for their work. W.H.Auden, whose debt to Old English and Old Norse literature is well documented, is very plainly heir to this, and so too is Basil Bunting. The poetry of Ted Hughes reveals the same concerns, as does the work of George Mackay Brown.

For all these poets, the link between time and place, between history and locality, is a key feature. Two contemporary poets who might be said to follow in this “great tradition” have dominated poetry in English since the mid-twentieth century: Geoffrey Hill and Seamus Heaney. Their work also demonstrates a characteristically chronotopic focus in its overriding preoccupation with time and place, but especially as figured in material traces – archaeology - and with language itself as both history and object.

My aim in this paper will be to show how contemporary poets such as Ian Duhig, Robin Robertson, Don Paterson and Pauline Stainer have inherited and developed these concerns with the intersection of history and location in connexion with Old Norse myth. Kathleen Jamie and Lavinia Greenlaw in particular have explored what a Northern past – mythic, material or linguistic - might symbolize for a poet. Some words from the forceful Scots voice in Jamie's ‘Arraheids’ could serve as a subtitle for the whole paper: “They urnae arraheids / but a show o grannies' tongues”.

SVANHILDUR ÓSKARSDÓTTIR

*Egill's afterlife: The seventeenth-century reworkings of Egils saga*

The seventeenth century saw a rekindled interest in the medieval literature of Iceland as is witnessed by the large number of manuscript copies produced in that period. These copies were often made at the instigation of learned men and book collectors, but the increased attention devoted to old texts also seems to have influenced the repertoire used for common entertaining, although that part of the transmission of saga literature has been less well researched than the medieval tradition. In the paper I will look at the seventeenth-century version of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, which in modern times acquired the derogatory name '*Vitlausa Eglá*', as well as the contemporaneous Egils rímur. Both texts originated in the Breiðafjörður region of Iceland and are derived from the C-version of the medieval saga, but a comparison of the '*Vitlausa Eglá*' with C reveals a that the seventeenth century version is completely reworked in terms of vocabulary and style. I shall outline the narrative and stylistic characteristics of the VE text and the rímur and offer thoughts on their background and function in Icelandic seventeenth-century society.

JUDY QUINN

*The principles of textual criticism and the interpretation of Old Norse texts derived from oral tradition*

In my paper I will engage the main theme of the conference – the mutability and adaptability of poetic works over time – to explore the implications for poetic form of significant periods of oral transmission preceding extant versions of a text. The aim of this theoretical investigation is not to reverse-model a hypothetic original form of a text but to heighten awareness of the critical assumptions underlying the application of textual criticism, and especially the formulation of a stemma, for this kind of work. The quotation of a stanza from *Lokasenna* within *Gylfaginning* demonstrates the variability inherent in the eddic tradition, premised as it appears to have been on memorization and recollection, the latter a cognitive process that is, by its nature, adaptive and creative. The two versions of *Völuspá*, preserved in the Codex Regius anthology and on a couple of leaves within Hauksbók, demonstrate variability at all levels of poetic form: the wording of lines, the order of stanzas and half-stanzas and the elaboration of both the vision and the frame narrative. To account for this variability, some scholars have sought to identify multiple interpolations which they believe conceal the original form of the poem. Through the identification of interpolations and the detection of what are judged to be errors arising in the written transmission of the poem, an elaborate hypothesis about the stages of manuscript transmission can be constructed, represented by a stemma, which is built up of multiple intermediary (but imaginary) manuscripts. The putative first written version of the poem stands at the top of the stemma, but above it the projection of further stemmatic lines can be detected in critical arguments about the original oral poem which is dated centuries earlier. In this sphere, speculation tends to be based on aesthetic criteria and these bring to the fore the conflict between subjective editorial taste and manuscript evidence. The long list of dwarfs' names in *Völuspá* is a case in point, uniformly disparaged by critics yet represented not only in both manuscript texts of the whole poem but also in extensive quotation in all four of the main manuscripts of *Gylfaginning*. By studying the extant form of medieval texts, rather than editorially reconstructed versions of them, we are more likely to understand the aesthetics of eddic verse and other genres of Old Norse literature, though it is also true that by studying the reconstructions and textual commentary of the recent past we can equally appreciate that the spirit of the hyperborean muse lives on in scholarly as well as literary endeavours.

FRANCESCO SANGRISO

*The Work that does not exist: Richard Wagner and the legendary blacksmith*

In 1850 Richard Wagner wrote a libretto for an opera that should have been called *Wieland der Schmied*. The music for this text was never composed. The legendary figure of the blacksmith will remain a character without music or stage even though Wagner attached to this matter considerable importance as it can be argued by reading his *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*. *Wieland der Schmied*, however, represents a meaningful text to define the relationship between Wagner and the myth: as the myth itself Wagner's *Musikdrama* is an ideal work of art comprehending all aspects of dramatic performance

and aiming as well to provide a symbolic and universal interpretation of both myth and history.

In rereading the subject of the Old Norse *Völundarqiða* and *Piðreks saga*, Wagner does not simply outline the character of the blacksmith as *homo faber* only as an example of demiurgic cleverness: fusion becomes the symbol of an aesthetic creation and the forging of the wings is the material evidence of a genius' possibility of elevating above everything material. In the text of *Wieland* this theme appears to be more important than the very theme of the smith's vengeance against those who have maimed him, thus marking the main structural difference between Wagner's work and the Old Norse sources. Through this shift of perspective the German composer expresses, using the mythic element, the irreconcilable conflict between the artist and his time.

In this paper I'll analyse Wagner's libretto and the Old Norse sources in order to highlight the problematic relationship between *Wieland der Schmied* and the ancient Germanic mythology.

TEREZA VACHUNOVÁ  
*Hrolf Kraki from sentimental drama to Nordic fantasy*

In my paper I will discuss the literary reception of mediaeval sources pertaining to the legend of the pre-historic Danish king Hrolf Kraki, focusing on adaptations, Danish and American, dating from the 18th to the 20th century. *Rolf Krage* (1770) by the Danish Pre-Romanticist Johannes Ewald is pseudo-historical sentimental play that promotes the image of the absolute monarch in accordance with the ideas of the literary and political establishment. The dominant theme of the piece, which is based on Saxo, is loyalty to king and country.

The 'poet laureate' of Danish Romanticism, Adam Oehlenschläger, transformed the Icelandic *Hrólfssaga kraka*, into no fewer than three works. In his masterpiece, the poetic cycle *Helge* (1814), Oehlenschläger fuses together Nordic, German and Classical sources enriched with folktale motifs. The omnipresent mermaid is a powerful symbol of the dark and destructive aspects of human nature that cause Helgi's downfall. In the prosimetric *Hroar's saga* (1817), which is only loosely based on medieval material, Hroar is a noble heathen influenced by Christianity, the founder of a spring (the Danish town Roskilde) which symbolizes 'the pure sources of humanity'. The heroic poem *Hrolf Krake* (1828), mainly inspired by Saxo, is an avowedly idealizing and didactic depiction of a humanist hero, who, like Hroar, surpasses his own time through his virtues.

The American science-fiction and fantasy writer Poul Anderson's novel *Hrolf Kraki's Saga* (1974) is an example of the medieval Scandinavian legendary literature continuing its life as mass-entertainment in the 20th century. The novel is a summa of existing medieval and Romantic material enriched with the addition of a lot of realistic detail and copious depictions of magic and cult practices. Hrolf Kraki lives in a consistently 'pagan' world of brutality and chaos which not only represents an earlier stage of but also a constant threat to modern civilisation.