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Editorial Foreword

Silviu Miloiu

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After several decades wherein the Viking studies seemed to allow little ground for new discoveries the past decades have shown the tremendous research potential they still offer to scholars. Gradually, the classical image of Viking warlords which permeated the historical writing starting already with – and often based on – the medieval chronicles has been nuanced and other hypostases of the Norseman have been discussed: the Viking as a trader, explorer, state crafter, etc. New study programmes of Viking studies have been established at universities in Scandinavia, but also in Britain, United States and Western Europe. Fresh historical sources have been discovered and old sources have been reinterpreted. In correlation with ethnographical studies, recent archaeological excavations and new insights into mythology, they greatly expanded our knowledge of the Viking Age and its continental and global role.

The Romanian Association of Baltic and Nordic Studies has a vested interest in the promotion of Viking and Medieval Studies, which has manifested itself both in educational and research terms. The Summer School of Nordic and Baltic Studies hosted in 2014 and 2015 by Valahia University of Târgoviște and entitled “A piece of culture, a culture of peace” (CoolPeace) has included lectures devoted to Viking Studies. In the 2014 programme a course called *The Vikings* was taught by Costel Coroban, soon to become a successful Ph.D. student in Viking and Medieval Studies at Valahia University. His eventual research would lead him to a *summa cum laude* and much acclaimed doctoral title on *Ideology and Power in Norway and Iceland, 1150-1250*. (His book was published in 2018 by Cambridge Scholars Publishing). The course taught in 2014 aimed at explaining and deriving information on the Vikings from historical sources, transferring and correctly applying “historical and linguistic information from the age of the Viking expansion (c. VII-XI A.D.)”, “ascertaining, understanding and employing the critical viewpoints and theories regarding the mythological and religious aspect of the Viking Age”, “manifesting a positive and responsible attitude towards the complexity of the phenomenon that is called ‘the Viking invasions’”. In 2015 a course of Icelandic language and a seminar on Runes have been taught to our Summer School students by Carmen Vioreanu, an associate professor at

University of Bucharest. Valahia University has cooperated with the Association in delivering lectures and seminars on the Viking Age. Besides, *The Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies* has included in its pages several articles on the Viking Age and has decided to devote this issue to the same topic.

Volume 9, issue no. 2 (2017) of *Revista Română pentru Studii Baltice și Nordice / The Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies* (RRSBN) comprises three articles dedicated to Viking studies authored by Romanian scholars at Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca and Ovidius University of Constanța. Costel Coroban tackles in his article the famous *Sverris saga* (the Saga of King Sverris) accomplished at the end of the 12th century and the period of the Civil War (the long period from around 1130 to the middle of the 13th century) with the aim of comparing the classical book *The Culture of the Teutons* by Vilhelm Peter Grønbech to the Norwegian political ideology as resulting from the study of *Sverris saga*. Diana Lățug frames her article around the area of Northern Norway during the Viking Age based on the recollections of Ottar (Ohthere), who made an impressive journey around year 890 from northernmost areas of current Norway to the court of King Alfred in England. Ottar's testimonies to the king allow the author to achieve an insightful portrayal of the region at the end of the ninth century. The last article very innovatively deals with the reflection of Old Norse mythology in current Norwegian literature. The article compares the mythological characters of *The Poetic Edda* and *The Prose Edda* with their features in Norwegian novels to find out that a sense of nostalgia pervades the narrative of the contemporary authors.

This issue of the journal brings to the scholarly literature novel methodological and empirical findings and contributes to an expanding research field and societal interest. The aim of the journal is to continue to promote Viking studies in its pages and prepare in the following years a new special issue devoted to the study of the Viking Age.

A KING'S LUCK? A DISCUSSION OF BATTLE- LUCK AND ILL-FORTUNE IN SVERRIS SAGA

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Abstract:

This article brings the concept of luck to the forefront in a discussion of the Saga of King Sverris (Sverris saga) while at the same time introducing the reader to the age of the Civil War in Norway. An important scholar who has contributed to outlining the role of luck in Norway's early medieval political ideology was Vilhelm Peter Grønbech with his seminal work, The Culture of the Teutons. The methodology employed in this short contribution is that of comparing and contrasting Grønbech's established theory with more recent hypotheses and interpretations in order to reach a conclusion whether the theoretical concepts of the mentioned scholar are applicable in the interpretation of Sverris saga.

Rezumat:

Acest articol așază conceptul de noroc în fața cortinei, într-o discuție despre Saga regelui Sverris (Sverris saga), familiarizând în același timp cititorul cu perioada războiului civil din Norvegia. Un important savant care a contribuit la evidențierea rolului norocului în ideologia politică timpurie medievală a Norvegiei a fost Vilhelm Peter Grønbech în lucrarea sa monumentală intitulată Cultura Teutonilor. Metodologia utilizată în această contribuție are în vedere compararea și contrastarea teoriei stabilite de Grønbech cu ipoteze și interpretări mai recente, pentru a stabili dacă conceptele teoretice ale savantului menționat mai sus sunt aplicabile în interpretarea Sverris saga.

Keywords: Sverris saga, Sverrir Sigurðarson, Civil War, Norway, Luck

*Sverris saga*¹ fits the category of kings' sagas (*konungasögur*) and is set in the period of King Sverrir Sigurðarson (c. 1145/1151 – 9 March

¹ The edition used in the current analysis is J. Stephnton's translation: *Sverrissaga – The Saga of King Sverri of Norway* (London, David Nutt), 1899, henceforth *Sverris saga*; original medieval manuscripts of Sverris saga now exist in four copies: A.M. 327, 4to at the University Library

1202). It conveys a multitude of information regarding political power and kingship in Norway and as such is one of the first sources that will be analysed in this chapter. Unlike the other sagas, the first part of *Sverris saga* has been written while the king was sovereign (somewhere between 1185 to 1188²), so this makes most of it contemporary to the events described and confirms its significance. Furthermore, the first part of *Sverris saga*, called *Grýla* (i.e. “bugbear”), was anecdotally put to paper by the abbot Karl Jónsson while King Sverrir was dictating, which might permit a direct analysis of the ideology of power in Norway based on the opinions and beliefs of a king.

Historians and other scholars have seen it as an important source of propaganda aimed at supporting Sverrir’s claim to the Norwegian throne.



of Copenhagen (dating back to cca. 1300), A.M. 47 fol also at the University Library of Copenhagen (dating to the early 14th century), Flateyjar-bok at the Royal Library at Copenhagen (written in Iceland in the late 14th century) and A.M. 81a fol. at the University Library of Copenhagen (middle 15th century).

² Sverre Bagge, “Ideology and Propaganda in *Sverris saga*” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 108 (1993): 1-18

Coin (front) of King Sverre Sigurdsson of Norway which reads: "+ REX SVERVS MAGNVS". Public domain picture, source: C. I. Schive, *Norges Mynter i Middelalderen*, Christiania, 1865, on-line: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sverre_01.png

To understand the context this source was written in, it best to offer some more clarifications about the political milieu in Norway at that time. The period is called the Civil war era, a term which denotes the period from about 1130 to the middle of the 13th century. It was an age of frequent battling between rival kings, princes and pretenders to the throne of Norway and its causes are still somewhat of a reason for debate among historians today. Nevertheless, it is useful to look back to King Harald Hårfagri's (c. 850 - c. 932) unification of Norway after the battle of Hafrsfjord (872) as the beginning of the struggle to bring Norway under a strong centralized command. Also, the role of the Church in sometimes promoting division should also be taken into consideration. What is noteworthy about political power during this period is that it was shareable whenever there was more than one claimant to the throne (brothers or cousins), as succession laws were not clear, which often resulted in a struggle for dominance between the two co-rulers.

Until the rule of King Sverrir, these power struggles were often quite modest, involving small scale forces, namely the *hirð* (entourage) of the kings or pretenders plus personal army contingents (*lendir menn*) and local armed men that might have been persuaded to join the wars. After 1170, with the clear distinction of the rival faction of the *Birkibeinar*,³ the fighting for the throne assumed a more distinct civil war character, which created consequences for the entire community in Norway.⁴

In her recent study on Norse culture, Bettina Sejbjerg Sommer posed the pertinent question whether luck was an essential character

³ *Birkibeinar*, meaning "birch legs", a pejorative reference to the alleged poverty of the members of this movement, formed in 1174 under the leadership of the pretender Øystein Møyla.

⁴ Knut Helle (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia. Prehistory to 1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 374

trait of the ideal or “heroic” male⁵. Before her, Danish historian Vilhelm Grønbech conferred capital importance to luck in the culture of the “Teutons”, writing two full chapters on this subject in his acclaimed work, the first one entitled “Luck” and the second one “Luck is the Life of the Clan”⁶. Most notably, the Danish scholar pointed to the difference between the ancient and modern notions of luck, believing that our idea of this concept “fails altogether to indicate the true force of the word”⁷ as it was understood in the Norse world a millennium ago.

Grønbech introduced different categories of luck: luck of fertility (of crops), luck of cattle, luck of fishing, friend-luck, luck of weather or wind-luck (here he gives the example of St. Óláfr who was said to have been able to sail in one day as much as others in three), and ultimately the luck of battle (the “*sigrsæli*, gift of victory”⁸) – which the Danish historian of religion exemplifies by referring to the entire lineage of King Haraldr Hárfagri⁹. What did this type of battle-luck confer? Most importantly, it brought the loyalty of the people, it was a legitimating factor itself, and it coalesced a military body surrounding the person of the monarch¹⁰, which in turn helped unify the political body of the country. Grønbech ultimately introduces the concept of *kings’ luck*, by explaining:

“To get a comprehensive view of the king’s luck, we have to ask: what was demanded, in the old days, to make a man a true king? War-speed, the power of victory, is but one of the distinguishing marks which place the leader in a class apart from everyday characters. His constitution is marked throughout by greater strength and hardihood. Life is more firmly seated in him, whether it be that he is proof against weapons, or that they seem, perhaps, to turn aside from the

⁵ Bettina Sebjerg Sommer, “The Norse Concept of Luck” *Scandinavian Studies* 79, 3 (2007), 275-294

⁶ Vilhelm Peter Grønbech, *The Culture of the Teutons* [Vor Folkeæt i Oldtiden], vols. 1-2, transl. W. Worster (London, Oxford University Press, 1931), 127-154, 155-174

⁷ Grønbech 1931, 127

⁸ Ibid, 128

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

spot where he stands. The first time Oláfr Trygvasson misses his mark is when he aims his bow at Jarl Eiríkr. 'Truly the Jarl's luck is great!', he exclaims. [...] And even though perhaps such a degree of hardiness was only found among the very few particularly favoured, we must presume that the king had this advantage over ordinary warriors, that his wounds healed more quickly and more completely."¹¹

The Danish scholar provides an excellent array of scientific inquiries in regards to the research interest of the present study and also a very encompassing description of his understanding of the concept he introduced. Bettina Sejbjerg Sommer provides a detailed philological critique of Grønbech's work and is one of the few who attempts to bring it up to date. In her view, the lack of luck is not as unequivocally condemned as Grønbech suggested, concluding that moral faults cannot be considered grounds for bad luck in Norse culture, as it is caused rather by certain misdemeanours of those afflicted by lucklessness (such as kin-slaying, oath or peace-breaking, sacrilege). Sommer does not agree to Grønbech that lucklessness was equal to definitive social isolation and unrepairable stigma (*niðingr*)¹².

As regards our research aims, we shall attempt to provide arguments that examples from *Sverris saga* prove that being lucky "of battle" – in the acceptance of Grønbech – was considered an essential *moral* feature of the king.

The main terms that designated the concept of luck, good fate, in Norse sources were *gipta*, *gæfa*, *auðna* and *hamingja*; the adjective lucky was designated by *heppinn*, *gæfumaðr*, and *giptumaðr*¹³. Bad luck or lucklessness was expressed as *gæfuleysi*¹⁴. In *Sverris saga*, besides the indirect examples offered above, other instances where the concept of luck or bad luck is directly mentioned in relation to military affairs are:

¹¹ Ibid, p. 131-132

¹² Sejbjerg Sommer 2007, 293

¹³ English-Old Norse Dictionary, University of York, *sub voce* (p. 90), on-line http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/language/English-Old_Norse.pdf, accessed 25.06.2017

¹⁴ Ibid.

- Chapter 26, in battle against the Jamts “the Birkibeins set upon them with such fierceness that the yeomen recoiled before them; and seeing the *ill luck* (our emphasis) of their force, they fled [...*ok þeir sá úfarar sinna manna, þá flýðu bændr...*], followed hard by the Birkibeins, who slew as many as they wished. Nearly one hundred of the Jamts were slain, and a great number were wounded. King Sverri had a hundred men, and the Jamts twelve hundred. In the morning the King sent for his other men, and all came. The Jamts now begged for peace, and brought hostages to the King, and were reconciled to him. He laid a heavy tribute on them. They agreed to become his subjects, and he appointed bailiffs to collect fines and other dues. The Jamts confirmed the agreement with many oaths, and when the tribute was paid, the King departed from them without more ado”¹⁵. In this example, the reference to the Jamts’ lack of fortune emphasizes the disproportionate size of the conflicting forces. The Jamts’ were twelve times more numerous than the forces of King Sverrir – the chronicler says – so the former’s loss of the battle could only have resulted from their lucklessness, i.e. their lack of military experience, strategy and, probably, military equipment, as opposed to Sverrir few but veteran troops.
- Chapter 29, when King Sverrir addresses his men after the defeat at Hattarhamar: “And now that our *ill-luck* (our emphasis) has become known [*ok er vārvar úfarar spyrjast til búandanna*], we are chased and harassed wherever we go, and all who know of our wretchedness think we are nobody of consequence. Before this battle, victory was always on our side, and men all dreaded to come to blows with us”¹⁶. In this example, we become witnesses to Sverrir’s despair at his lack of luck. It becomes synonym with the loss of cause, because of the defeat, even if not fatal, dispelled the Birkibeinar’s

¹⁵ *Sverris saga*, chapter 26

¹⁶ *Sverris saga*, chapter 29

reputation as an invincible force and reduced them to the status of lawless brigands.

- Chapter 32, after King Sverrir's victory over Magnús near Niðarós (at Kaupang – the market-city), Jarl Erling remarked: “‘*Luck* (our emphasis) fared not thus when it wished us well’ [...*eigi fór þá svá er vel vildi...*]”¹⁷. Jarl Erling's saying here represents a bitter proverbial remark on the going of the war, an observation of the type of the *fortuna labilis* motif (changeable fate) from later medieval romances¹⁸.
- Chapter 68, when the Birkibeinar were forced to abandon Niðarós they met Sverrir and reported: “him of their *ill-luck* (our emphasis) and the loss of many of their fellows. The *Birkibeins* who had accompanied the King from the east spoke of the mishap rather scornfully”¹⁹. In this other example, the lucklessness of the *Birkibeinar* at Niðarós was met with hostility even by their own allies, who reacted with contempt to hearing the news of their fellow Birkibeinar being routed.
- Chapter 105, when the Kuflungs, the enemies of the King's faction, were preparing to attack them, one of their warriors, Nefari, spoke the verses:

“Smite the Birkibeins!
 Let Sverri lot
 The worser be
 We'll brandish hard
 And swift the tried salmon-of-the-shield [sword]/
 No bragging words; our boast shall be
 The number of the slain.
 A smarting storm

¹⁷ *Sverris saga*, chapter 32

¹⁸ The term “romance” here refers to the French medieval knightly novel that was written in the vernacular (“mettre en roman”, “faire romanz”). See Friedrich Wolfzettel, “La Fortune, Le Moi et L'Évre: Remarques sur la Fonction Poétologique de Fortune au Moyen-Âge Tardif” in Frederick Burwick, Jürgen Klein (eds.), *The Romantic Imagination: Literature and Art in England and Germany* (Rodopi B.V., 1996), 200

¹⁹ *Sverris saga*, chapter 68

We'll raise, let God give *luck* (our emphasis)"²⁰. [*látum skipta guð giptu*]

Nefari's verses are illustrative of the skaldic tradition of the North, although they were probably not the most aesthetically valuable such *drapur*, it is remarkable that King Sverrir allowed it that even his enemies' songs made it into his saga. The wishing "*látum skipta guð giptu*" may also be interpreted as a parting phrase, meaning that, ultimately, the fate of the battle was not in the hands of men, as the preparation of both forces was commendable.

- Chapter 120, before the battle of Florvåg²¹, Hallkel Jonsson, one of the Øyskjeggs, opinionated that: "'We are not short of troops at this time to fight King Sverrir if we don't become more shiftless, and great *ill-luck* (our emphasis) does not befall us [...*vili eigi meirr óauðna falla til...*], then it is likely [that we win]. Those who have been opposed to King Sverri seem to me to have failed mostly in counsel and I expect that we shall conquer him if we don't proceed rashly'"²². This last example is very interesting as it implies that King Sverrir's victories were owed to the fact that his enemies had been unlucky, more precisely, that they lacked good "counsel" (*unrede*²³), i.e. had not made use of adequate strategies to defeat the enemy, so it had not been due to insufficient resources. Lack of good counsel and lack of luck were considered such serious misfortune in Norse and Anglo-Saxon communities at the turn of the millennium that some rulers given names reflected this: Æþelræd unræd (18 March 978 – 1013, 1014 – 23 April 1016) the King of the English and Óláfr ugæfa (deceased 1169) who, much like King Sverrir, contested the claim of Magnús Erlingsson but was defeated in battle and forced into exile.

²⁰ *Sverris saga*, chapter 105

²¹ A naval confrontation that took place on 3 April 1194 between King Sverrir Sigurðsson, the head of the Birkibeiner movement, and Sigurð Magnusson, the Øyskjegg party pretender.

²² *Sverris saga*, chapter 120

²³ Grønbech 1933, 143

Taking all these theoretical aspects and examples into consideration, it can be assumed that the concept of luck in *Sverris saga* follows the main features drawn by Vilhelm Peter Grønbech in his seminal study many decades ago. Many of the types of luck described by the Danish scholar are reflected in this saga, thus reinforcing the belief that the king's luck still represented a crucial attribute of royalty during the times the source was written: "the discipline of the army, the generalship of its leader, the force of his blow, his power of compelling victory, are part of the king's luck. Whether we say: the king had luck in learning the use of weapons and the art of war, to remain unwounded in the midst of fight, - or we credit him with a gift for the profession of arms, a gift which made lethal weapons fall harmlessly from him, it comes to the same thing. The king was the luckiest, that is to say, *inter alia*, the bravest, most skilful, wisest and most ingenious of warriors"²⁴. As for Bettina Sejbjerg Sommer's amendment to Grønbech's theory, namely that 'lucklessness' was not a reason of absolute stigma in Norse society, *Sverris saga* does not offer evidence in support of it. On the contrary, any ill-luck is met with scorn and described in the terms of total defeat and social exclusion to the status of a pariah by the king himself. To conclude this reflection on the importance of luck in the political ideology of 12th century Norway, one episode we noticed is revelatory, namely the speech of King Sverrir at the burial of King Magnús, his life-long opponent and rival to the Norwegian throne: "'The man by whose bier we now stand was a brave man, gracious to his men, but we kinsmen had not the *luck* to agree well together'"²⁵.

²⁴ Ibid, 139

²⁵ *Sverris saga*, chapter 97.

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NORTHERN NORWAY IN VIKING AGE

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to present some aspects of the image of Northern Norway in the Viking period. The article first sketches the Viking Age and its underlying causes, by also defining, in brief, the specificity of the Vikings. It continues with considerations on the creation of Norway, so as to finally outline the country's image in the Viking Age. Aspects of navigation, language and trade are also presented in short. This entire portrayal of Northern Norway in Viking times is based on Ottar's account about Northern Norway at the court of King Alfred. From a literary perspective, Harald Hårfagrets Saga (The Saga of Harald Fairhair) from about 850 was analysed. This saga tells the story of a Danish princess being transformed into a Norwegian woman. Thus, one encounters the myth of Northern women. All these aspects lead to a comprehensive image of Northern Norway in the Viking Age.

Rezumat:

Scopul acestei lucrări este de a prezenta câteva aspecte ale imaginii Nordului Norvegiei în perioada vikingă. Articolul descrie mai întâi epoca vikingă și substratul acesteia, definind, de asemenea, pe scurt, specificul vikingilor. Aceasta continuă cu considerații privind crearea Norvegiei, pentru a schița în cele din urmă imaginea țării în epoca vikingă. Aspecte legate de navigație, limbă și comerț sunt, de asemenea, prezentate în mod concis. Întregul tablou al Norvegiei de Nord în epoca vikingă se bazează pe expunerea lui Ottar la curtea regelui Alfred despre Norvegia de Nord. Din perspectivă literară, Harald Hårfagrets Saga (Saga lui Harald Părfumos) de pe la 850 a fost deja analizată. Această saga spune povestea unei prințese daneze transformată într-o femeie norvegiană. Astfel, în cadrul acesteia întâlnim mitul femeilor nordice. Toate aceste aspecte oferă o imagine cuprinzătoare a Norvegiei de Nord în epoca vikingă.

Keywords: Northern Norway, Viking Age, Saga, Ottar's account

Introduction

This article discusses the image of Northern Norway in the Viking Age, in the attempt of coming with a different perspective on such a vast and controversial topic as Viking studies.

The main source of documentation in illustrating the image of Northern Norway in the Viking period is the book entitled *Two Voyagers at the Court of King Alfred. The ventures of Ohthere and Wulfstan together with the Description of Northern Europe from the Old English Orosius* and edited by Niels Lund. The foreword mentions the record of voyages made by two merchant ventures, Ohthere and Wulfstan, in the time of King Alfred. This record is considered a major primary source, not only for Anglo-Saxon England, but also for Scandinavia and the Baltic in the Viking Age¹.

Before going into details about Ohthere's account, we would like to draw an overview of the Viking Age, by contextualising it and by defining who the Vikings really were.

Viking Age and its causes

No major event or significant period in history has ever occurred without some underlying causes. Their correct understanding is, in my opinion, a key towards a more theoretical approach in general terms.

In his article entitled *The Causes of the Viking Age*, P.H. Sawyer² tackles precisely the above-mentioned topic, concluding that the Viking activity needs complex explanations, and that it led to developments in Scandinavia:

“We should also recognize that our evidence is inadequate and that we can never hope to understand that activity or its causes fully. Recent studies, have however, cast new light on the eighth and ninth centuries and suggest that the reasons for Viking activity should not be sought only in

¹ Niels, Lund, ed, *Two voyagers at the Court of King Alfred. The Ventures of Ohthere and Wulfstan together with the Description of Northern Europe from the Old English Orosius* (York: William Sessions Limited, 1984), 4.

² Professor of Medieval History at Leeds University.

Western Europe or Scandinavia, but in the links that joined these two areas long before the first Viking raid³.”

The same article states another interesting fact, namely that it was the western European demand for northern products, and the parallel Scandinavian demand for western goods, that caused close contacts between the two areas. This trade also tempted pirates, and the competition led to the development of remarkable sailing ships that are indeed the key to the Viking Age. Why Scandinavians were able to change the social and political map in such a profound way in northern Europe is still under discussion. One important factor may be the new kind of sea-going ships that Scandinavians started to build.

As Sawyer also concludes, one thing is for sure. Viking influence spread across continents: in the east, through Europe to Russia and Greece; in the west, to Britain, Ireland, Greenland, Iceland, and to the New World⁴.

Who were the Vikings?

In the introduction to a recent compendium concerning Viking studies, Stefan Brink outlines some important data about the period. Namely, it is stated that The Viking Age was the period when the Scandinavians made themselves known, or rather notorious. From around 800 to around 1050 to Scandinavian stirred up northern Europe in a way they had never done before or since.

Their migration to the four corners is as well mentioned:

“Norwegians in particular controlled and colonised the whole of the North Atlantic, from Norway, to the Faroes, Iceland, Shetland, the Scottish islands, parts of Ireland, Greenland and all the way to the Eastern brim of North America. Especially Danes, but also Norwegians and Swedes, ravaged and had an impact on the political and social development of England and parts of France. Swedes travelled eastward, traded along the Russian rivers, and down to the

³ P. H. Sawyer, “The Causes of the Viking Age,” in *The Vikings*, ed. R.T. Farrell (London and Chichester: Phillimore, 1982), 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

Byzantine and Islamic world. They established in Kiev, under the name of *Rus'*, a new policy, the embryo of Russia⁵."

The same author makes the affirmation according to which "the historical period of the Viking Age is a late construction"⁶. The Vikings themselves had, of course, no clue that they were living in the Viking Age. Nonetheless, a constructed historical period is framed between a starting point and an end point.

Regarding the Viking Age, it is framed by two major 'events': it started in the year 793, when they attacked and plundered the monastery at Lindisfarne, near the coast of Northumberland (mentioned in Anglo-Saxon chronicles). The island of Lindisfarne, in the far northeast of England, had long been a monastic centre of great importance, respected across Christendom, a place of learning, of religious artistry and of quiet piety. Actually, it was widely acknowledged as the holiest place in Britain. 1066 marks the end of the Viking Age, with the battle at Stamford Bridge, near York (when a large army of Northmen, led by the Norse King, Harald was defeated by the English King Harold). Nonetheless, the introduction of the new Christian religion and the establishment of the Church (with a new administration and government based on literacy) ultimately brought the Viking Age to an end. "Anyhow, it is all a just an approximation and a late construction to help us understand a complicated past"⁷, concludes Brink.

"Every era uses history for its own purposes; every time shapes its own history⁸." This quote is remarkable in perceiving history, in opening our horizon when trying to understand any past events.

When it comes of the Vikings, a first line of interpretation which has diminished during the past fifty years is the ravaging, killing, raping, burning Viking; instead, the peaceful, industrious, trading Viking has been in focus. Viking-age Scandinavians, no doubt, spent time on both activities. Still today, the word *Viking* is, in the Anglo-Saxon world, associated with pirates and men of violence. The reason for focusing on Vikings as traders in research within the past decades, is partly because this side of the

⁵ Stefan Brink et. al., ed, *The Viking World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 1.

⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁸ Ibid., 4.

Northmen was neglected in early history writing, but it partly also mirrors a complete image of the society.

Another striking thing about Vikings is that, despite what story-books say, Vikings never fought in helmets with attachments such as horns or wings. Helmets were worn only on ceremonial occasions. A Viking helmet had a conical shape and it was made out of iron or leather. The Viking's favourite weapons were his sword and axe. Some swords were said to have been made by the dwarfs or given by the God Odin. It is also said that a Viking warrior was never separated from his sword and long-handled, battle axe⁹.

The creation of Norway

'Norway' was originally a geographical concept. The English and German specificity of its name stands proof, rather than its modern Scandinavian form (*Norge*). 'The way to the north' was the long sailing route along the Norwegian coast. It began in the Skagerrak-Kattegat area, went round Lindesnes – the country's southernmost point – and continued northwards, until permanent settlement. In the Viking Age, this was represented by the islands around Tromsø.

Around 890, a man called Ottar (Ohthere) travelled from the northernmost part of this area, all the way to England. He told King Alfred of the journey he had made, and his account was written down. Ottar said that all the way south he had had 'the land of the northmen' (*nordmanna land*) on his port side. This country was long and narrow. Ottar called it *Northweg*.¹⁰ Ottar's tale is not the only mention of 'northmen' (Norwegians) at this time. In a contemporary skaldic poem, we find Harald Finehair called 'king of the northmen'¹¹ ('dróttinn nordmanna'). Hence, one can deduce that names such as 'Norway' and 'northmen' were used in the second half of the ninth century. The terms themselves almost certainly derive from southern Scandinavia, because it is from that perspective that the Norwegian coast and its people lay to the north.

⁹ S. C. George, *The Vikings* (Newton Abbot: David&Charles, 1973), 12.

¹⁰ Niels, Lund, ed, *Two voyagers at the Court of King Alfred. The Ventures of Ohthere and Wulfstan together with the Description of Northern Europe from the Old English Orosius* (York: William Sessions Limited, 1984), 18-22.

¹¹ Finnur, Jónsson, ed, *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning, 2nd edition*, Vol. iB: *Rettet tekst* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1967), 22.

Ohthere's accounts

The following part of the article focuses on portraying the image of Northern Norway in the Viking Age, as reflected by Ohthere's accounts. As mentioned in the beginning, we have based our research on the book edited by Niles Lund, *Two Voyagers at the Court of King Alfred. The ventures of Ohthere and Wulfstan together with the Description of Northern Europe from the Old English Orosius*.

In the introduction to the edition, we are given a contextualisation of Ohthere's accounts of his voyages from northern Norway, a highly quoted text of the Viking Age. These accounts have survived in a translation into Old English of the *Seven Books of History against the Pagans* (*Historiarum adversum Paganos Libri Septem*), made by the Spanish churchman, Paulus Orosius. It is a world history starting from the Creation until AD 417, and the title foreshadows the political situation of those times. King Alfred the Great¹² encouraged its translation into Old English, because, by the ninth century, Orosius's world history had won its place as a classic masterpiece¹³. In the text, Alfred is called Ohthere's lord, his *hlaford*. A *hlaford* was the lord of his men in the sense that they owed him allegiance and service, and, in return he owed them protection, *mund*, and sometimes stipend and keep. Nevertheless, one cannot really know what type of relationship existed between them. Nor do we know how long Ohthere spent at the king's court¹⁴.

Orosius's world history begins with a geographical examination of the world (as much as Orosius was aware of, at that time). However, the English version encompasses a wider description of areas not dealt with by Orosius, such as Europe north of the Alps¹⁵.

About Ohthere we find out that he had his origins somewhere near Tromsø, in the North of Norway. He started travelling in two directions: both northwards, round North Cape into the White Sea, and southwards, to the market-place *Sciringesheal*, later known as Kaupag, in the Oslo-fjord,

¹² Alfred had become king of Wessex in 871. At that time, Wessex was the only Anglo-Saxon kingdom not conquered by the Vikings.

¹³ Niels, Lund, ed, *Two voyagers at the Court of King Alfred. The Ventures of Ohthere and Wulfstan together with the Description of Northern Europe from the Old English Orosius* (York: William Sessions Limited, 1984), 5-6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

and, further on, from Hedeby to Truso, in present day Poland¹⁶. He told his audience that he was a rich man in his country. Consequently, they became interested in what he owned (how many cows, sheep and pigs) and how much land he ploughed. By their measures, his wealth seemed far from impressive; hence, they required him to explain what it consisted of¹⁷.

The following lines represent part of the account Ohthere gave to the English king, Alfred. They are of outmost importance, as they reflect in a very detailed manner Northern Norway's image in Viking times. The description of Northern Europe translated below is not a translation of Orosius, but an original excerpt from the late ninth century, included in Lund's edition.

First, we are offered some information related to the geographical positioning of the land:

"Ohthere told his lord, King Alfred, that he lived the furthest north of all Norwegians. He said that he lived in the north of Norway on the coast of the Atlantic. He also said that the land extends very far north beyond that point, but it is all uninhabited, except for a few places here and there where the *Finnas* have their camps, hunting in winter, and in summer fishing in the sea. He told how he once wished to find out how far the land extended due north, or whether anyone lived to the north of the unpopulated area¹⁸."

We also find out that the Norwegians had interactions with other peoples, such as the Lapps, which he calls for *Finnas*, and that they had various outdoor activities, such as fishing and hunting.

The account continues with the description of the Norwegian soil, convenient for a certain type of agriculture, and hostile to other. There is made a distinction between the North and the South of Norway, especially on this basis of its richness:

"He said that the land of the Norwegians is very long and narrow. All of it that can be used for grazing or ploughing

¹⁶ Ibid., 5.

¹⁷ Ibid., 11.

¹⁸ Ibid., 18.

lies along the coast and even that is in some places rocky. Wild mountains lie to the east, above and alongside the cultivate land. In these mountains live the *Finnas*. The cultivated land is broadest in the south, and the further north it goes the narrower it becomes. In the south it is perhaps sixty miles broad or a little broader; and in the middle, thirty or broader; and in the north, he said, where it is narrowest, it might be three miles across to the mountains. The mountains beyond are in some places of a width that takes two weeks to cross, in others of a width that can be crossed in six days. Ohthere said that the district where he lived is called *Halgoland*. He said no-one lived there to the north of him¹⁹."

An interesting thing to notice is that Ohthere was of the opinion that the region he was placed in was the Northernmost one, and that no one lived any further there. This is of course a misconception encountered even today – the myth of the north, the unknown, dark territory, full of mysticism, of trolls and of strong, but extremely few people.

The magic of the north shall follow us further in our investigation about their naval system, their trade and also in discussing some linguistic aspects.

The naval system in the reports of Ohthere and Wulfstan

Ole Crumlin-Pedersen states in his short article *Ships, navigation and routes in the reports of Ohthere and Wulfstan* that the goods took by the north Norwegian chieftain to the markets of south Scandinavia also included goods from the inner riches of the White Sea, except for his own produce and the tribute from the Lapps in his area. One may assume that he sailed to England directly with his goods and went to Alfred's court, probably in order to offer him gifts, as Alfred was the protector of trade. Given the fact that the route between Norway and England was well known, it was not worth giving a detailed description of it.

The normal route for Ohthere's trading journeys was along the Norwegian coast to *Sciringesheal*. The details of Ohthere's status suggest

¹⁹ Ibid., 20.

that he was probably the owner of both ship and cargo, and that the crew, probably eight to ten, were his own men²⁰.

Trade as exposed in Ohthere's accounts

In his article "Ohthere and Viking Age Trade" P.H. Sawyer is of the opinion that the tribute taken by Ohthere from the Lapps offers a glimpse into the most valuable exports of the far north: furs – marten, otter and bear, skins of reindeer and seal, and feathers. It seems that walrus ivory was something that Ohthere and his companions hunted for themselves.

The growing demand for northern goods in Western Europe (the best furs come from the coldest regions) has two direct consequences, both reflected in the accounts of the voyages of Ohthere and Wulfstan. First, it led to expeditions for new supplies. Secondly, it led to the development of trading centres in Scandinavia and around the Baltic.

The account of Ohthere's activities provides a detailed image of ninth-century Norway. On the one hand, it confirms archaeological evidence according to which there was a lively demand for northern products. This determined the Norwegians to colonise the far north, just as Swedes from Mälardalen were at the same time colonising the northern coasts of the Gulf of Bothnia. On the other hand, it sketches the competition (and sometimes the cooperation) between Swedes, Norwegians and Finns to exploit the riches of the Arctic, in part by forcing tribute from the native Lapps²¹.

The linguistic aspect of Ohthere's account

When it comes to the linguistic aspect, Christine E. Fell states in "Some Questions of Language" that it is unclear what language Ohthere was speaking at the court of King Alfred. There are two hypothesis: either Ohthere may have been fluent in Old English – and he knew something about the possible relationship of the tongues spoken by *Finns* and *Beormas*. More precisely, he heard many stories from the *Beormas*, though it

²⁰ Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, "Ships, navigation and routes in the reports of Ohthere and Wulfstan," in *Two voyagers at the Court of King Alfred. The Ventures of Ohthere and Wulfstan together with the Description of Northern Europe from the Old English Orosius*, ed., Niels, Lund (York: William Sessions Limited, 1984), 30-31.

²¹ P.H. Sawyer, "Ohthere and Viking Age Trade," in *Two voyagers at the Court of King Alfred. The Ventures of Ohthere and Wulfstan together with the Description of Northern Europe from the Old English Orosius*, ed., Niels, Lund (York: William Sessions Limited, 1984), 43-53.

is unknown which language mediated the communication. Or, the second hypothesis might be that King Alfred and some of the men at his court may have become familiar with Old Norse, during the treaties with the Danes. There is clear evidence that words have interfered from one language to another. The text also reveals two factors that are the hidden – the presence of the interrogator and the discovery that Old English did not actually have words for all the information that Ohthere was trying to convey²².

A literary approach – the image of Northern Norway in Harald Hårfagres saga (The Saga of Harald Fairhair)

The following lines are written with the intention of offering an analysis of the way Northern Norway was portrayed in literary sources. Based on a saga written by Snorre Sturluson, a saga belonging to the category of king sagas (*kongesagaer* – Norwegian term), the analysis offers some illustrative quotes for the image of the North, as reflected in the literature of the age. More precisely our inquiry is written on Harald Hårfagres saga (The Saga of Harald Fairhair). We have chosen it both because it presents one of the most important kings in the Viking history of Norway, and because it contains good illustrations of specific Northern Norway elements, such as the myth of the strong northern woman.

First of all, the image of the woman, namely the one coming from Northern Norway, is presented in different contexts. The idea is that women in the North are extremely beautiful and powerful, capable of a high power of seduction. Right at the beginning, we encounter a description to support this argument: “She was the daughter of King Eirik of Hordaland [...] He wanted to get married to her, because she was of an outstanding beauty²³.” Moreover, the wife was not only a domestic human being, but also a fighter who impressed everyone by her posture: “King Harald had many wives and children. He got married with Ragnhild, daughter of King Eirik of Jylland. He was called Ragnhild the powerful,

²² Christine E. Fell, “Some Questions of Language,” in *Two voyagers at the Court of King Alfred. The Ventures of Ohthere and Wulfstan together with the Description of Northern Europe from the Old English Orosius*, ed., Niels, Lund (York: William Sessions Limited, 1984), 56-57.

²³ “Hun var datter av kong Eirik av Hordaland [...] Henne ville han ta til frille, for hun var meget vakker, men nokså stor på det.” Sturluson, Snorre, 57, our translation – from Norwegian bokmål.

and their son was Eirik Blodøks²⁴." We consider that the best quote portraying the Northern woman in this saga is the following one: "When he [Eirik] came back to Finnmark, he was bestowed a wife in a turf hut. She was one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen. Her name was Gunnhild and she said that her father lived in Hålogaland and that his name was Ossur Tote²⁵."

We are afterwards given a detailed description of the organizational system in Viking Age Norway, under the reign of Harald the Fairhair. Hence, we find out that every county was ruled by a so-called *jarl*, with administrative and territorial power: "In every district he entitled a *jarl* to judge after law and to collect taxes, out of which the third part came from household and others expenses²⁶."

Other details concerning their ship-management are worth mentioning at this point, because we are given this traditional image of dragon-like ship: "During spring he made himself a ship. During winter, he had built a really properly equipped *drage* (a ship with a dragon head) ²⁷." With such a ship, there is no obstacle heading north: "He travelled northwards till Dovnerfjell unto Tronheimen with honour and pride²⁸." Last but not least, we would like to mention the fact that in one of these voyages, we are presented the first encounter with the Vikings: "During the autumn, Einar sailed across the sea, and when reaching Orknøyene, there landed two ships with Vikings - Tore Treskjegg and Kalv Skurva. Einar fought them with ferocity and won, defeating them both²⁹."

²⁴ "Kong Harald hadde mange koner og mange barn. Han fikk en kone som het Ragnhild, datter av kong Eirik fra Jylland. Hun ble kalt Ragnhild den mektige, og sønnen deres var Eirik Blodøks." Ibid., 69, our translation.

²⁵ "Da han [Eirik] kom tilbake til Finnmark, fant mennene hans en kvinne i en gamme. Hun var noe av det vakreste de noen gang hadde sett. Hun kalte seg Gunnhild og sa at far hennes bodde på Hålogaland og het Ossur Tote." Ibid., 77, our translation.

²⁶ "I hvert fylke satte han en jarl som skulle dømme etter lov og lands rett og kreve inn sakøre og landskyld, og jarlen skulle ha en tredjedel av skatter og skylder til hushold og andre utgifter." Ibid., 60, our translation.

²⁷ "Om våren skaffet han seg med skip. Han hadde bygd en prektig utstyrt drage om vinteren." Ibid., 61, our translation.

²⁸ "[...] han dro nord over til Trondheimen med heder og ære." Ibid., 62, our translation.

²⁹ "Om høsten seilte Einar vest over havet, men da han kom til Orknøyene, lå det to skip med vikinger der, Tore Treskjegg og Kalv Skurva. Einar la straks til strid med dem og vant, begge vikingene falt." Ibid., 74, our translation.

The saga ends by summing up the image of the hero. It is said that he deserved the appellation *Fairhair*, as his hair was noticeably nice: "First, he was called Harald Luva, but now he was given a new nickname by jarl Ragnvald, and called Harald Hårfagre (Harald Fairhair). All the ones seeing him were of the opinion that it was an appropriate name, because his hair was both big and beautiful hair³⁰." Furthermore, he is considered the most representative king of his time: "The scholars of the time argue that Harald Fairhair had been the most beautiful, powerful and important of all. [...] Eirik was a big and beautiful man, extremely powerful. He was an important army man, brutal, unfriendly. His wife, Gunnhild was beautiful, smart, mysterious and very brutal as well³¹."

To conclude, we consider this saga of outmost importance for the portrayal of Northern Norway in Viking Age. This because it encompasses elements presenting different aspects of that time, i. e. financial, social and administrative points are mentioned. Likewise, it is a written literary source, which enriches its originality and verisimilitude.

Conclusion

This article mostly followed a descriptive approach, meant to underline the specificity of Northern Norway in the Viking period. This was done by summing up Ohthere's account about Northern Norway at the court of King Alfred. The naval system, the trade and some linguistic aspects illustrated by Ohthere's account were also analysed. From a literary perspective, there was a short analysis of an illustrative saga: *Harald Hårfagrets Saga* (*The Saga of Harald Fairhair*) from around 850. The initial part of this article contextualised the Viking Age and its causes and then it presented some points related to the creation of Norway.

³⁰ "Før kalte de ham Harald Luva, men nå gav Ragnvald jarl ham et nytt tilnavn og kalte ham Harald Hårfagre. Alle som så ham, sa at det var et treffende navn, for han hadde både stort og vakkert hår." Ibid., 74, our translation.

³¹ "Lærde menn sier at Harald Hårfagre har vært den skjønneste, sterkeste og største av alle menn. [...] Eirik var en stor og vakker mann, sterk og kraftig. Han var en stor hærmann man, seiarsæl, hissig av gemytt, grusom, uvennlig og fåmælt. Hans hustru, Gunnhild, var fager, klok og trollkyndig, gladlynt, underfundig og meget grusom." Ibid., 84, our translation.

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OLD NORSE GODS IN CONTEMPORARY NORWEGIAN NOVELS

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Abstract:

Old Norse mythology is one of the most prolific fields in modern times. From a scholarly renewed interest to a more popular based reception, the old myths and gods seem to have been revived. The following article deals with the representation and role of two of the Old Norse gods, Odin and Ty, in contemporary Norwegian literature. It discusses in a comparative way the image of the Old Norse gods as presented by the written sources about the Viking mythology, The Poetic Edda and The Prose Edda, and by the contemporary novels that have them as main characters. Contemporary problems that trouble the Norwegian society seem to find their expression in literature where the old gods are presented as driven by anger and a desire to take revenge, either because they have lost their power or because they are led by a sense of duty, integrity and doing what is right. In the so called age of globalization, the Norwegian writers that use Old Norse mythology as inspiration seem to be themselves driven by a feeling of nostalgia after a time when the society was more homogenous or by a desire to promote and live by the Viking values

Rezumat:

Mitologia nordică este unul dintre cele mai prolifiche domenii în perioada modernă. De la un interes reînnoit pe plan științific, la o recepție ancorată mai mult în cultura populară, vechile mituri pare să fie reactualizate. Articolul următor discută reprezentarea și rolul a doi dintre zeii nordici, Odin și Ty, în literatura contemporană norvegiană. El prezintă într-o manieră comparativă imaginea zeilor nordici așa cum reiese din sursele scrise ale mitologiei vikinge, Edda Poetică și Edda în proză, și din roamanele contemporane care îi au ca personaje principale. Probleme contemporane care marchează societatea norvegiană par să-și găsească expresia în literatură, acolo unde vechii zei sunt prezentați ca fiind conduși de mânie și o dorință de a se răzbuna, fie pentru că și-au pierdut puterea sau pentru că sunt mânați de un sens al datoriei, integritate și a face ceea ce este corect. În așa numita eră a globalizării, scriitorii norvegieni care folosesc mitologia nordică drept inspirație par să fie ei înșiși stăpâniți de sentimente de nostalgie după o epocă în care

societatea era mai homogenă sau de o dorință de a promova și a trăi după valorile vikinge.

Keywords: Old Norse mythology, Odin, Tyr, nationalism, white racism, Viking virtues

Introduction

Contemporary people seem to be fascinated by the image of the bloodthirsty Viking warrior and the so called 'macho' culture of the Viking Age. Television series, Hollywood movies, theatre pieces, cartoons, books, black-metal songs, all focus on the idea of the pagan Viking warrior who sailed abroad in order to enrich himself and conquer new lands through strength and violence. Since the Viking Age was a great time for the Nordic people it is no wonder that popular culture cultivates the above mentioned representation of the Vikings.

In Norway, the Viking Age and its pagan beliefs were used during the 19th century as a mould for creating a national identity. Nowadays people still rely on the Viking trope- the souvenir shops are full of Viking clichés, people and place names bear traces of Viking influence, we can even talk about Viking groups in Modern Norway which promote the Viking history and culture or religious groups which have revived the Viking pagan religion.¹

When it comes to literature, few Norwegian writers dared to use the Viking legacy after the Nazi misuse of the Old Norse mythology but it looks as if the situation has recently changed. Several novels have been published since the turn of the century that concentrate either on the history of the Vikings or on the Old Norse mythology: Roy Jakobsen *Frost* (2003); Cornelius Jakhelln *Gudenenes Fall* (The Fall of the Gods, 2007); Andreas Bull Hansen *Jotnens hjemkomst* (The Return of the Jotun, 2010), *Før de ni verdener styrter* (Before the Nine Worlds Crash, 2011), *Ragnarok* (2012), *Jomsviking* (The Jom Viking, 2017); Agnes Ravatn *Fugletribunalet* (The Bird Tribunal, 2013); Siri Pettersen *Odinsbarn* (Child of Odin, 2014); Jan Ove Ekeberg *Den siste vikingkongen* (The last Viking King, 2016). This testifies in favour of a renewed local interest in the old historical times that so many

¹ *Hafrsfjordvikingene* is for example a Norwegian group that was established in 2006 and had as a purpose to spread the Viking culture. *Åsatrufellesskapet Bifrost* is such a religious organisation which was founded in the mid 80's and officially recognized in 1998.

Norwegian feel proud about, as well as in the fascinating mythology of the Vikings.

In the following article we will deal with two contemporary novels that use the Old Norse myths and gods rather than on those of a historical character, namely Cornelius Jakhelln's *Gudenes fall* and Andreas Bull-Hansen's *Jotnens hjemkomst*. The main focus will be on the representation of the Norse gods that act as main characters in contemporary fiction and their function in the novel.

The Mightiest of the Æsir - Odin

The most important written sources that we can rely on in order to get information about the Viking mythology are *The Poetic Edda* and *The Prose Edda*. The *Poetic Edda* is a collection of anonymous poems that are difficult to date; while some of the poems definitely deal with mythological problems, the rest focus on different heroes. These poems, together with material that hasn't survived, became the main source of inspiration for the now famous Icelander Snorri Sturlason who around 1220 created his *Edda*, also known as *The Prose Edda*. It was compiled as a handbook for Snorri's contemporary skalds at a time when the mythical language of the skaldic poetry was in danger of being lost. The book gives a whole image of the Nordic gods and their world but it cannot be used uncritically as a source for Old Norse mythology since Snorri was a Christian writing about pagan beliefs.

According to the above mentioned sources, Odin is undoubtedly the most powerful of the gods. In the eddic poem *The Song of Hyndla* it is said that: "He gives victory to some, to some riches,/ eloquence to many, and common sense to men;/ he gives following winds to sailors, turns of phrase to poets,/ he gives manliness to many a warrior"²(Larrington 1996: 253). The Allfader (Father of All) created mankind together with Vile and Vé, while also being the father of several other gods (Thor, Balder, Hód, Váli). He is an all-encompassing deity who undertakes different roles in order to maintain the balance of power in the world and he often meets the other forces of the universe in disguise, just as one of his many names, Grim (the

² The Old Norse text of "Hyndlolióð" says: "Gefr hann sigr sumom, enn sumom aura,/ mælsco mǫrgom oc manvit firom;/ byri gefr hann brǫgnom, enn brag scáldom,/ gefr hann mansemi mǫrgom recci." See *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius Nebst Verwandten Denkmälern*, Herausgegeben von Gustav Neckel, 5. verbesserte Auflage von Hans Kuhn (Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1983), p. 288: 3.

masked one) indicates. If we put together all the information that we have about Odin we get a manifold image of a powerful god who stands for war, death, poetry, knowledge, disguise, mastery of runes as well being known for his magic powers.

Most of Odin's names indicate and support the idea that he was the god of war and Lord of the Slain (Val-father). In Valhalla, he welcomed all those who died an honourable death in battle. Here the dead warriors, the so called Einherjars, trained every single day for the final cosmic battle, Ragnarok, the end of the world. But Odin is related to death also through his attempts to gain wisdom about the past and the future by talking to the dead or by offering and hanging himself in the world tree, Yggdrasil. There he hanged nine nights in order to obtain the runes which were in possession of the giants, managing to overpass the borders between life and death and returning with some new knowledge that remains secret to the readers. Wisdom again is the reason why Odin once sacrificed his eye just to take a sip from Mimir's well which "has wisdom and intelligence contained in it"³ (Faulkes 1995: 17).

Besides wisdom Odin also succeeded in mastering *seiðr* (seid), a type of sorcery practised in the Norse society. Steinsland argues that seid is of a magic character to the extent that the one who performs it tries to impose through his own will. Those who practised it were both feared, respected and despised but in some cases *seid* was connected to the higher strata of the society and that is why Odin was also related to it (Steinsland 2005: 307). As one who always wanted to find out more, Odin learnt how to practise *seid* so that he could come in contact with the powers on the edges of the universe.

He was also known as the best poet among the gods since he had once stolen the mead of poetry from the giants by seducing the giant woman, Gunnlod (daughter of Suttung), who was guarding it. As a reward for spending three nights with her, Odin demanded a drink from the precious mead for each night they had spent together and then "He left Suttung betrayed at the feast/and made Gunnlod weep" (Larrington 1995:

³ The Old Norse text says: "...er spekð ok manvit er ifolgit..." See *Sturluson Snorri. Edda*, Udgiven af Finnur Jónsson (Gads Forlag, 1926), p. 20-21.

29) by stealing the whole drink, changing into an eagle and flying back to Åsgard⁴.

Snorre presents Odin as the ancestor of several ruling families in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, The British Isles as well as on the Continent (Faulkes 1995: 4-5) and creates a correlation between the Old Norse god and power. The kings and rulers often identified themselves as sons of Odin and their mythological based genealogy was used as a way to claim and affirm their status in society.

Unsurprisingly Odin has been the Norse god that scholars have paid most attention to. Together with his central function in the old pagan mythology these seem to be sufficient arguments for his resurfacing as a character in contemporary Norwegian novels.

The nostalgic/nationalistic Odin

Cornelius Jakhelln is a Norwegian writer and musician who uses Old Norse mythology as inspiration. In 2007 he published his first novel, *Gudenæs fall*, which won the prize for the best contemporary Nordic novel in 2007, as well as the prize for the best Norwegian work in the field of fantasy in 2008. The main character of the novel is Odin who is depicted as having lost his power with the coming of Christianity and his exile, in *Underheimen*, a world situated under that of the humans; "They (*the humans*) live up there in Midgard, above the sky that separates us, unaware of the divine reality that is their ancestry."⁵ It is a symbolic place which reflects how the old pagan religion is viewed nowadays; the Old Norse gods still exist in our consciousness but they represent a religion that, for the most of us, is no longer alive.

The Lord of Valhalla feels bitter for having been chased under the ground like a beetle because today, he has nothing left of his former mightiness. Instead of being called The Highest because of his power, the other gods still call him that way but based on his height. Rather than being represented as the all-encompassing Old Norse god, Odin resembles a

⁴ In "Hávamál it says: "Suttung svikinn hann lét sumbli frá/ oc grætta Gunnlǫðo." See *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius Nebst Verwandten Denkmälern*, Herausgegeben von Gustav Neckel, 5. verbesserte Auflage von Hans Kuhn, (Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1983), p. 34: 110.

⁵ Our translation of: "Di lever der oppe i Midgard, over himmelen som sjiller oss, uvitene om den gudommelige virkeliheten vor di har sit opphav." See Cornelius Jakhelln, *Gudenæs fall* (J.W. Cappelens Forlag AS, 2007), p. 37.

contemporary human being; he drinks whiskey and espresso, smokes, eats chocolate, listens to black-metal music and likes to philosophize alone. Precisely because he spends so much time alone, Odin has lost the others' consideration as well as his former status. "Here where I sit I feel ashamed because of my lack of power. The power is gone, shame is all I own."⁶ He feels ashamed because of his non-intervention politics at the time when Christianity came and the humans sent the gods under the ground. The old mighty Odin has been reduced to the status of a spectator who only watches what others do without having any decision power. He is an actor in a drama written by others but he takes comfort in the fact that passivity is better than what the humans have to endure because of the daily stress. He himself admits that: "I am called the god of the dead, the god of the hanged, a one-eyed god of wisdom, god of the skalds and of the kings. And there is not so much left of me, unfortunately, that I can live up to these designations, because I consider them to the highest degree as glorious designations and not just some meaningless memories from the past."⁷

In order to feel powerful again, Odin goes up on the scene and performs as a stand-up comedian and here he feels again that he is the lord of the world. But his jokes do not have the result that Odin expects, on the contrary, the other gods make fun of him and laugh at him; even his son, Tor, caricatures him. There's no place for applause or appreciation, the only thing Odin gets is mead spilt all over him. The situation is no better in the world of the humans, where Odin is remembered only through black metal bands and some new religious groups. In the end, Odin himself is aware of his tendency to "... overestimate myself, to present myself better than I actually am."⁸

Odin is no longer the god of war, and despite the fact that Valhalla was also moved under the ground, in Underheimen, there has been an interdiction in entering this realm as a result of the fall of the gods after the introduction of Christianity. The humans are refused entrance in the world

⁶ Our translation of: "Her jei sitter skammer jei mei over min avmakt. Allmakta er borte, skam er alt jei eier." (Ibid., 61)

⁷ Our translation of: "Jeg er blitt kalt di dødens gud, di hengtes gud, en ensøys visdomsgud, gud for skalds og konger. Å så mye ijen a mei er de vel ikke, dessverre, at jeg kan leve opp te alle disse beteinelsene, for jei anser di i høyeste grad som hedersbeteinels, ikke bare som meningsløse minner fra fortia." (Ibid., 50)

⁸ Our translation of: "... å oppvurdere mei sjøl, te å fremstille mei som bedre enn jei egentli er." (Ibid., 50)

of the gods because that would mean the end of the Æsir. The way they handle war is seen upon by Odin as slaughter, destruction; he considers that the modern war leaders are just hateful and fight without honour or commitment as long as they use mass destruction weapons against an enemy that they cannot even see. "I no longer can be a witness to the fact that they burn small children with rockets, while the evil adults go free, hidden in their untouchable war machines."⁹ Anger and rage are feelings that arise in Odin; the Norse god feels that he wants to exterminate this cowardly race that he himself once created.

He also considers it ironic that some of the humans reproduce themselves without any thoughts about how they are going to take care of and feed their children. He criticizes the 'losers' who populate the world and destroy it while it is the duty of the smarter ones, who didn't have time to have their own children, to save it. "...and when the unavoidable catastrophes knock at the door, sickness, hunger and civil war, yes, then the rat jungle must get help from those who have secured their own survival so good that they haven't had time to give birth to their own children."¹⁰

During the last thousand years Odin has felt marginalized and oppressed so he cannot stop feeling nostalgic about the past and dreaming about gaining his magnitude back: "I want to be hailed again as Odin, the ghost king, the gallows prince, lord of the revenants and of the hanged. I want to be again the father of victory that I was, the god of the war and of the warriors."¹¹ He feels that he has been discriminated for long enough and wants to become once again the one who suppresses others. Moreover, he no longer believes in the non-intervention politics that caused the fall of the gods because humans have proven to be tremendously good at surviving so that "... it is only a question of time before they will have killed all of nature and life."¹²

⁹ Our translation of: "Jeg klarer ikke lenger å være vitne te at di brenner småbarn me raketter, mens di onne voksne går fri, der di sitter jemt i sine uinntakelie krikmaskiner." (Ibid., 207)

¹⁰ Our translation of: "...å når di uunngåelie katastrofene banker på døra, sykdom, sult å borgerkrig, ja, da må rotteyngele få jelp fra di som har trygga sin egen overlevelse så gått, at di ikke har hatt ti te å føde egne barn." (Ibid., 133)

¹¹ Our translation of: "Jei vil ijen bli hylla som Odin, draugkongen, hangedrotten, jengangernes å di hengtes herre. Jei vil jeninnsettes som den Sigfader jei var, krigens å strittsmennenes gud." (Ibid., 75)

¹² Our translation of: "... at de bare er et spørsmål om ti før de har drept all natur, alt liv." (Ibid., 48)

The Odin of *Gudenæs fall* is the personification of Jakhelln's own feelings towards his position inside the Norwegian society and his view of the contemporary world. As he admitted in a previous book, writing is just a way of voicing your feelings and letting go, an artistic and peaceful alternative to more violent courses of action that people who nurture similar feelings have chosen.¹³ Odin is no longer the mighty god of the Old Norse religion but an alienated and marginalized character who experiences feelings similar to those Norwegians who consider themselves immigrants in their own country. The contemporary multicultural society has replaced the homogenous society characteristic in Jakhelln's view of ancient mythical times and "The development is irreversible. The Norway of our forefathers is away forever. There remains a deep loss but also big possibilities that can be difficult to see for some of us."¹⁴

Jakhelln has also written a lot about his feelings and ideology as well as his experiences as a minoritarian white man in a certain multicultural neighborhood of Paris. There he felt his anger and rage increase and started to nurture warlike ideas directed towards young Frenchmen of Arabic and African origins. The Nordic and Germanic legacy and identity seemed a perfect refuge and a rich source of inspiration for his career both as a musician and as a writer. Odin's discourse is nationalistic and provoking since Jakhelln considers that Norway has failed to support him, as well as any other Norwegian proud of his identity. "During dark times I thought that my honor had been stepped on. That the official Norway would rather annihilate the pride I feel over my own identity."¹⁵ He argues that many Norwegians feel marginalized in the Norwegian democracy which has opened its doors for mass immigration while at the same time hiding the racism against the white people under the carpet. He

¹³ In his book, *Raseri* (Rage), Jakhelln mentions that he nurtured the same ideas exposed in Anders Breivik's manifest, "2083 A European Declaration of Independence", who later killed 77 people on the 22nd of July 2011 based on his right extremist ideology. See Cornelius Jakhelln, *Raseri. En hvitings forsøk på en selvbiografi* (Cappelen Damm, Oslo, 2011).

¹⁴ Our translation of: "Utviklingen er irreversibel. Våre forfedres Norge er borte for alltid. Der ligger et dypt savn, men også store muligheter det kan være vanskelig å få øye på for enkelte." See Cornelius Jakhelln, "Æren og demokratiet" *Forlagsliv*, <https://www.forlagsliv.no/sturmgeist/2011/07/29/aeren-og-demokratiet/>, par. 2, accessed at 08.08.2017.

¹⁵ Our translation of: "I mørke øyeblikk har jeg tenkt at min ære er blitt tråkket på. At det offisielle Norge aller helst ville ha utslettet stoltheten jeg føler over min egen identitet." (Ibid., par. 3)

confesses: “I felt ignored, left aside, humiliated.”¹⁶ In Jakhelln’s opinion, all those who feel that their opinion does not count, have no other more attractive option than militant religion in today’s Norway.

Jakhelln’s Odin mirrors all the above mentioned problems that have troubled him for many years because Jakhelln believes that anger is dangerous; it will once come out, one way or another. In his novel, he chooses irony and self-irony to undermine Odin’s anger but, as he admits in “*Æren og demokratiet*”, his message to the Norwegian state is that ‘the ticking bombs’ of the society should be paid attention to and helped rather than ignored and allowed to take violent action. Nevertheless, we still have to take into account that many Norwegians consider Jakhelln’s view out of place and exaggerated no matter how appreciated *Gudenæs fall* was by the literary critics.

Ty, God of War and Justice

Andreas Bull-Hansen is another contemporary prolific author who has published several novels that deal with either Old Norse mythology or history. On his blog he describes himself as a “traditional Viking skald, sharing the history and mythology of Norse culture”, whose virtues are grounded in the Viking culture (Bull-Hansen “Author bio”). According to him, the most important characteristic of the Vikings was their integrity which Bull-Hansen describes as the ability to do what you believe is right and follow your path no matter what, because the only thing we leave behind us once we die is the memory of who we were and how we lived.

The same personal trait mentioned above defines the main character of Bull-Hansen’s trilogy about the Old Norse god Tyr. Before discussing the function of Tyr in *Jotnens hjemkomst* (The Return of the Jotun), the first book of the trilogy, we are going to take a look at who Ty was in the old pagan mythology.

Just like Odin, Ty belongs to the family of the Æsir. In the written sources of the Nordic mythology there are only a few references to him indicating that towards the end of the pagan times he had lost some of the importance that he used to have in earlier times, as proven by other types of evidence. According to Steinsland, the Old Norse name *Týr* is connected

¹⁶ Our translation of: “Jeg følte meg oversett, forbigått og krenket.” (Ibid., par. 8)

to the Old German form of the name, *Tiwas*, that means god and appears in many kennings for other gods (Steinsland 2005: 243).¹⁷

In “Gylfaginning”, Snorri describes Tyr as “... the bravest and most valiant (of the *Æsir*) and he has great power over victory in battles. It is good for men of action to pray to him. There is a saying that a man is ty-valiant who surpasses other men and does not hesitate. He was so clever that a man who is clever is said to be ty-wise”¹⁸ (Faulkes 1995: 24). His origins are unclear and the sources give contradictory information; in “Skaldskaparmál” Snorri identifies Tyr as the battle-god, son of Odin (Faulkes 1995: 76), while in “Hymir’s Poem” Tyr talks about his father, the giant Hymir, a very wise and brave man (Larrington 1996: 79). Another eddic poem, “Loki’s Quarrel”, records that Loki had a son with Tyr’s wife (Faulkes 1995: 91), but there is no other source that supports the idea of Tyr having a wife or an illegitimate son.

One of the few myths about Tyr tells the story of how he missed his hand as he placed it in the mouth of the wolf Fenrir, the adversary of the gods, as a pledge. The gods wanted to tie Fenrir and the only god who was brave enough to sacrifice himself for the greater good was Tyr. Tyr’s willingness to offer himself fits this god’s function in the field of law and justice. Snorri relates how the *Æsir* refused to let go of the wolf and so he bit off Tyr’s hand leaving him one-handed (Faulkes 1996: 59). Later on, during the final battle, Ragnarok, Tyr fights against the evil dog Garm and they kill each other.

Like Odin, Tyr was a god of war but as opposed to the All-father who was known for his somewhat treacherous nature, he was associated with law, justice and *the thing*.¹⁹ Due to the faded picture that the Old Norse sources draw about Tyr, as well as the place name evidence, it seems that he may be considered an ancestor of Odin who later developed into a war

¹⁷ A kenning is a conventional poetic phrase used for or in addition to the usual name of a person or thing and common for Old Norse poetry. Among Odin’s names there are Sigtyr (god of victory) and Valtyr (god of the slain).

¹⁸ The Old Norse text says: “hann er djarfastr ok bezt hungaðr ok hann ræðr mjök sigri í orrostum; á hann er got at heita hreystimönnum. Þat er orðak, at sá er tý-hraustr, er um fram er aðra menn ok ekki sésk fyrir. Han er ok vitr, svá at þat er ok mælt, at sá er týspakr, er vitrastr er.” See *Sturluson Snorri. Edda*, Udgiven af Finnur Jónsson (Gads Forlag, 1926), p. 29.

¹⁹ In the Old Norse society, the *thing* was a governing national assembly made up of the free people of the community who were presided over by law speakers.

god that had a strategic function, rather than being active on the battlefield.²⁰

Significant in this context is the fact that the Runic alphabet used during the Viking Age contained a sign that was pronounced as “t” and which was named after the god Ty. This rune looked like a sword or a spear (†) and was symbolic for Ty’s function as the god of war. According to the eddic poem the “Lay of Sigdrifa”, people had to carve victory-runes on their swords and invoke Tyr twice if they wanted to have victory (Faulkes 1996: 167). A connection between Ty and Odin and a possible argument for the theory according to which Odin is a new variant of an old god is signaled by Odin’s possession of Gungnir, a spear. In the “Seeress’s Prophecy”, Odin flings his spear into the host and thus brings about the first war among the gods (Larrington 1996: 7).

Based on the evidence of the written sources, we could say that Tyr was a marginal god in the Old Norse mythology who becomes a main character in a contemporary Norwegian novel. This seems to be a technique widely used in contemporary re-writings in which a character that had an insignificant role in the original book, gets to be the main character in the contemporary re-writing.²¹ The purpose of such an endeavor is to make the reader see the story from another angle and to present extra information that could contribute to a better understanding of how things happened.

Viking Values - Duty, Justice, Revenge

Andreas-Bull Hansen makes use of the Old Norse mythology and expands the information contained by the written sources so that he creates a world in which many of the old myths can be found but in a more detailed and elaborate form. The ambiguity which surrounds the origins of the god Tyr is transposed in *Jotnens hjemkomst* in the fact that Tyrar, as the god is introduced in the novel, cannot remember anything about his past prior to being found under some ruins in the Muslim Chechnya.

²⁰ Bæksted argues that the three Old Norse gods that are related to battle, Odin, Tor and Ty, each represent a different aspect – Odin, the ecstasy, rage and the strategic knowledge; Tor – the ruthless physical strength; and Ty the battle that was organized according to the current rules and that was perceived as the gods’ valid ruling in a question of war. See Anders Bækstad, *Nordiske guder og helter. Myter og sagn fra førkristen tid* (Ascheoug, Oslo 2002), p. 150.

²¹ Plate is one of the scholars who is preoccupied by contemporary women’s rewriting and she records that starting with the 1970’s we can see the development of a genre of women’s writing that is rewriting the classics from the point of view of a ‘marginal’, usually female character, from literary history. See Liedeke Plate, *Transforming Memories in Contemporary Women’s Rewriting* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 6.

Tyrar is described as tall, wide shouldered, with strong cheekbones, blue-grey eyes, short dark hair and a beard. Ironically (considering his mythological function as god of war), he is a war refugee who now lives in Norway where he has been successfully integrated and works as a criminal investigator. As such, he is de-mystified and recontextualized. His job is to obtain true answers from drug dealers, rapists and other types of criminals that he arrests and imprisons. He does not feel either regret or pity for them as long as he gets what he wants because Oslo is at war:

There were actually several conflicts at the same time that often merged into each other and created a bloody mixture. It was war between the Islamists in the suburbs, the Sunnite Islamists and the Shiite Islamists stabbed each other for women and kept it going through blood revenge. The rich Sikhs were at war both with the Sunnites and the Shiites and tried to chase them out of each building they bought. It was war between the Polish people and the Russians even if they fought together in the street fights against the Muslim youth. And there were also the many groups of the narcotics Mafia, pimps, human traffickers who all fought for a piece of the marked.²²

We also get to know that he has a wife, Linn, and a son, Odd, who looks very much like Tyr (in contrast with the information provided by “Loki’s Quarrel” where Tyr’s wife is said to have an illegitimate son with Loki); just like his colleagues, he is an absent father in the sense that he isn’t too much around. He suffers from a compulsive feeling of duty which governs his life; a duty in relation to his wife Linn, to whom he owes his present life, to his son Odd and to his job. At the same time he feels that he isn’t good enough either for his wife or for his job, that he fails them both. His feeling is confirmed when Linn and Odd are kidnapped and killed as an act of revenge. The tragedy is nothing but a reason for Tyrar to meet

²² Our translation of: “Det var egentlig flere konflikter som pågikk samtidig, og som ofte blandet seg i hverandre og skapte en blodig smørje. Det var krig mellom islamistene i forstedene, sunniene og sjiaene knivet om kvinner og narko og holdt det gående med blodhevn. De velstående sikhene lå i krig med både sunniene og sjiane og forsøkte å drive dem ut av hver eneste leiegård de kjøpte. Det var krig mellom polakkene og russerne, selv om de begge sto på samme side i gateslagene mot de muslimske ungdommene. Og så var det narkomafiaens mange grupperinger, og hallikene og menneskehandlerne som alle kjempet om en del av markedet.” See Andreas Bull-Hansen, *Jotnens hjemkomst* (Ascheoug, Oslo), p. 18- 19.

Grimnes, “an old man with long grey hair and beard”.²³ Tyrar takes him for an informant and a fool with a rotten brain: “There were many such fools. Most of them were old hash smokers who had developed schizophrenia.”²⁴

Odin is known from the Nordic mythology as a god who travels under unknown names and the name Grimnes hints at this since it means ‘the masked one’. In Bull-Hansen’s novel, Grimnes travels by a car with no numbers, a modern interpretation of this god’s habit of travelling incognito. The old man also seems to know many things about him that nobody should know and this fact reminds us as such of Odin, the god of wisdom. He comes to warn Tyrar that something bad is going to happen and that it is time for Tyrar to come back home. But Odin is also the god of war and death who used to allow the bravest warriors to die in battle so that they could join him in Valhalla and fight with him at Ragnarok. Consequently, when Tyrar’s family is murdered, he encourages him to take revenge “It is your right. And your duty.”²⁵

With Odin’s help, Tyrar avenges the death of his family and at the same he is killed so he wakes up in Odin’s home, Gladsheim. This is described as an imposing construction made of two parts – a smaller building with three-four floors and a lower building which was at least 100 meters long, Valhalla. At first he believes that he is in a hospital, then in a psychiatric institution, only to find out that he actually is a Norse god who once made a deal with the All-father. Odin helped him to get to the human world so that Ty-Ar could fulfill his love on the condition that he would bring him back when Ragnarok was close.

The rest of the novel is built on an expansion of the Old Norse myths which are sometimes modified so that they suit the story’s development. One example is the above mentioned myth of how Tyr became one-handed. In Bull-Hansen’s novel, it is not Fenrir who bites his arm but the Vanir god Freyr who cuts it as an act of revenge for the fact that Tyr allowed Hel to kill his grandson and for abandoning his sister, Freyia, on the night of their marriage. Nevertheless a connection is later established with the old Norse myth when we find out that the giants used to say that no man, belonging either to the Æsir or the Vanir, could have

²³ Our translation of: “en gamling, med langt grått hår og skjegg” (Ibid., 23)

²⁴ Our translation of: “Det var mange slike som gikk omkring. De fleste var gamle hasjrøykere som hadde utviklet schizofreni.” (Ibid., 25)

²⁵ Our translation of: “Det er din rett. Og din plikt.” (Ibid., 48)

taken Tyr's arm because such powerful warriors didn't exist; "Freyr must have been helped by the Sun Swallower, the giant wolf which was going to bring the world into darkness when Ragnarok came. The Sun Swallower, the Fener wolf, Fenre, Fenris;"²⁶

Tyr is torn between the recovery of his memory and his fear of forgetting Linn and Odd because in order to remain young, the gods have to eat Idun's apples which at the same time make them forget. He finds out that he was known as the warrior Jotun (giant), killer of the Vanir race, Odin's blood-red sword and leader of his army, the god to whom humans sacrificed people by spear. The revived Tyr cannot believe that he himself used to kill many Vanir during the war with the Æsir by impaling them so that the other Vanir would fear him.

Bull-Hansen's Tyr does not feel like a god at all and he feels as if none of the other gods in Åsgard are either: "Were they really gods? Was he himself a god? He didn't feel that way. A god was something omnipotent, something big and powerful. Maybe there was something godlike in Odin, he was silent and inscrutable there were he sat."²⁷ As Tyr gradually remembers some of his past in Åsgard, he realizes that Odin does not look like the warrior that he used to be but rather like an awkward and gloomy old man who unsuccessfully tries to keep his love escapes with Freyia secret. "Loss, love, hate; such feelings are more powerful than the thirst for gold and a desire after land and richness. All the good warriors have big feelings in them... You are that way...Yes, Odin was like that before."²⁸

While everyone admires, fears and honors him, Tyr feels like a frightened little giant boy who is afraid of the death that grows inside him, afraid of being alone in the world. It doesn't matter that the Einherjars look up at him and that the gods and most of all Odin put their faith in him, the only thing that Tyr can think about is how to find his family; he goes as far as to ignore Odin's order of bringing the treacherous Loke back to Åsgard

²⁶ Our translation of: "Frøy måtte ha fått hjelp av selveste Solslukkeren, kjempeulven som skulle legge verden i mørke når Ragnarok kom. Solslukkeren, Fenervarg, Fenre, Fenris;" (Ibid., 355)

²⁷ Our translation of: "Var de virkelig guder? Var han selv en gud? Det kjentes ikke slik. En gud var noe allmektig, noe stort og mektig. Kanskje var det noe gudeaktig ved Odin, han var så taus og uutgrunnelig der han satt." (Ibid., 94)

²⁸ Our translation of: "Savn, kjærlighet, hat; slike følelser er mektigere enn gulltørst etter land og rikdom. Alle gode krigere har store følelser i seg. Du er slik...Ja, Odin var det i hvert fall før." (Ibid., 122-123)

and instead he plans a journey to Hel's realm to look for Linn and Odd. But he is no longer the powerful warrior that he used to be, the one who had no mercy, conferred no forgiveness and never surrendered. His years in the land of the humans, Midgard, have made him weak so Tyr hesitates in sacrificing Freyr's grandson in exchange for his beloved ones. Nevertheless, the two-faced Hel kills the boy herself and lays the blame on Tyr who gets expelled from Åsgard in order to prevent the start of a new war with the Vanir.

This isn't the first time that Tyr feels unwelcomed in Åsgard. He remembers the time when he first arrived in the land of the Æsir and how badly he was treated by the gods who made fun of him by holding their noses because he was a Jotun; they even filed his teeth so that he looked more like them. Balder still calls him "a coward puppy boy that stinks like a giant"²⁹. For the Æsir, Tyr fought against his own people coming to be considered a traitor, he won innumerable battles while protecting their land but they cannot overcome their prejudices.³⁰ Tyr is not one of them and he will never be, he is marginalized.

Throughout the novel Tyr is led by a sense of doing what is right for him, namely finding his wife and his son no matter what. The old Tyr went to war for Odin and for the Æsir, the new Tyr accepts to go to war again but for Linn and Odd. The eight rules that he followed during the first war against the Vanir are not valid anymore. Tyr contemplates that there is no justice in attacking people who haven't done anything; no mercy in burning their houses; no respect for other people since he only has a handful of friends left whom he despises every time he sees them drinking; no honesty in dragging his people in a war that isn't theirs for a reason that they aren't aware of, no courage in allowing others to fight for his cause; no honor or loyalty in going to war for his own interest. It is just a duty to do what is right: "But was it right for Åsgard or himself?"³¹

Honor was a central concept during the Viking Age and its infringement would have asked for revenge. Instead of accepting his fate and doing nothing, the old Tyr would have done anything to regain his prestige but we know by now that the new Tyr has been softened by the

²⁹ Our translation of: "en feig guttvalp som stinker jotne." (Ibid., 100)

³⁰ Inai, the valkyrie that Ty Ar falls in love with, also considers that the Æsir are locked in prejudices because they do not believe that women can become warriors. (Ibid., 269)

³¹ Our translation of: "Men rett for Åsgard, eller ham selv?" (Ibid., 399)

years spent in Midgard. An explanation for his behavior can be found in a phenomenon encountered in our contemporary society. Thomas Andersen talks about a kind of anti-culture that has evolved, a culture in which talking about the shameful parts of one's life is considered a virtue of honesty and authenticity.³² What before was considered shameful is nowadays appreciated; talking about subjects that were considered taboo in other times has opened the field for more tolerance, and our society is one in which tolerance is a central theme on all levels.

Despite the fact that Tyr has lost some of the sensitivity towards the Old Norse concept of honor and is represented as more tolerant, we cannot consider him a full representative of such an extreme view. He is rather the embodiment of a nostalgia after a time when anger found its expression in violence, through revenge and retribution. At the same time, the change from a merciless warrior god to a quite humane and tolerant god can be seen as symbolic for the role played by the war god in the Old Norse mythology – from a highly worshipped god some time before the Viking Age he turned into a barely present figure with few myths referring to his origins, role and endeavors. There is also a break between the moment Fenrir bites Tyr's hand off and his return and involvement in the battle at the end of the world so we could interpret the time spent by Bull-Hansen's character in Midgard as symbolic for this break since he then reappears among the gods when his help is needed at Ragnarok.

Bull-Hansen's Tyr is a symbol for the modern Norwegians. In one of his posts on the blog published on the 3rd of April 2016, the writer underlines the fact that the Norwegians are an educated and tolerant people but we should not forget that Viking blood runs in their veins.³³ His post was a result of the terrorist attack on Brussels in 2016 and the anger he felt in relation to such acts. Vengeance and duty are among the key words that Bull-Hansen uses while relating the beginnings of the criminal immigrant gangs that established themselves in Norway in the 90's and started their hellish narcotic business. They went from beating people for

³² Per Thomas Andersen is a Norwegian professor at the University of Oslo who is involved in a project called 'After Honor'. As part of this project he has given a lecture that can be accessed online called "After Honor. From Egil Skallagrímsson to Karl Ove Knausgård", https://www.tsu.ge/data/file_db/scandinavian-studies/After-honor.pdf, accessed at 08.08.2017.

³³ The post was later removed from Bull-Hansen's blog since it created too many heated discussions.

looking at a girl they fancied, to killing an innocent kid just because he was black; or blowing up cars in the name of an ideology. These criminals have made him feel angry so many times, angry for what they did in Norway, angry for feeling threatened just because he's white and Norwegian. He identifies them with what he calls "*terrorist scumbags*" and "*devils*" and urges the Norwegian politicians to stop building bridges to the Muslims by talking to the hate-speaking religious leaders and trying to find them excuses. His opinion is that nations must work together to wipe out terrorist organizations. At the same time, he, as an educated and tolerant Norwegian with Viking blood in his veins, launches a threat to these terrorists: "If we will kill our own kings for freedom, what do you think we will do to you? Use your imagination, if you have any" (Bull-Hansen, "A Message to the Terrorists"). It is obvious that Bull-Hansen considers that it is high time to stop trying to understand these terrorists since there is nothing psychological back their actions. Europe is at war and something must be done before it is too late.

Tyr is mostly driven by his sense of duty, always doing what's right for him. Nevertheless he is also full of anger: anger for losing his family, anger because Freyr cut his arm, anger because Freyia bewitched Odin and he can no longer help him get his beloved ones back and despise, hate and anger for the Vanir, a blasphemous race that did not belong either to Åsgard or his homeland, Jotunland. The Vanir of *Jotnens hjemkomst* are actually an allegory for the immigrant criminals and terrorists that Bull-Hansen is so worried about. No matter how tolerant Tyr has become, no matter the background reason for why he is doing it, Tyr goes to war to wipe out this despicable race because it is his duty. Once again he has to drag his people into a war that is not theirs, but only by working together can the Æsir and the giants defeat the Vanir.

Conclusions

The Old Norse gods resurface in the Norwegian literature of the 21st century once again as main characters but this time they are de-mystified and re-contextualized. Jakhelln's Odin is no longer the mighty god that we know from the written sources dealing with the Old Norse mythology but rather resembles a human being through many of the things he does. He has lost his central status and now feels marginalized in a world that is symbolically placed under the world of the humans. He is the voice of

those Norwegians who, similar to Jakhelln, feel that they have been ignored by the Norwegian government due to the pride that they feel around their national identity. Odin is an immigrant in his own country because he once accepted to be chased under the ground, a symbolic act that describes Jakhelln's feelings towards the Norwegian government's policy of ignoring the problem of racism towards white people. But Odin is no longer an adept of the non-intervention politics and he wants to regain his magnitude even though that would turn him into something that he now criticizes – being an oppressor himself. In his feelings and actions Odin is led by anger which he, as well as Jakhelln, nevertheless tries to undermine through irony and self-irony.

Bull Hansen's Tyr is another representation of an Old Norse god who has a close relationship to anger and revenge. Unlike Odin, the Old Norse Tyr didn't have a very significant role during the Viking Age but he turns to be a main character in contemporary Norwegian literature. At first, he is both de-mystified and placed in the human world; but even after his re-location in Åsgard he feels marginalized by the gods for being different. He is once again the embodiment of a writer's ideology and feelings; in Bull-Hansen's view Tyr is an image for the modern Norwegians who are tolerant but who are still offsprings of the Vikings. Like Jakhelln, Bull-Hansen has felt oppressed for being Norwegian and white and he believes that the Norwegians have a duty to do what is right for them, to keep their integrity. Similarly, Tyr's duty is to find his family while at the same time he has to protect Åsgard and thus get his revenge.

Both Jakhelln and Bull-Hansen seem to be preoccupied with problems related to being white in a multicultural society as well as emotions that arise in connection with feeling discriminated and marginalized. While Odin wants to regain his supremacy and feels nostalgic about (in Jakhelln's opinion) the homogenous society of the Viking Age, Tyr has a duty of fighting off and freeing Åsgard from the despicable race of the Vanir, of taking revenge. As such, the Old Norse gods are re-written in contemporary Norwegian literature in such a way as to give voice to actual issues that trouble the Norwegian society due to the globalization of the world that we live in.

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