

**External Examiner's Report on the Dissertation of Kristyna Kralova**  
***"Fast Goes the Fleeting Time: The Miscellaneous Concepts of Time in Different Old Norse Genres and their Causes"***

**Submitted in 2019 at the Department of**  
***Germanic languages and Literature***

**I Brief summary of the dissertation**

This thesis explores time perception and time reckoning on Old Norse culture, taking Old Norse literature as its primary source material. It covers a number of different genres, and considers changes in what it terms "original images of time" across the substantial time span of these several genres, especially with regard to the fundamental shift from paganism to Christianity.

**Brief overall evaluation of the dissertation**

This is a fine thesis: well-written, well structured and well-informed. The candidate's analyses of primary sources are scholarly and enlightening, and are based on an impressive command of a wide range of material.

**II. Detailed evaluation of the dissertation and its individual aspects**

1. *Structure Of the argument*

The Introduction is lucid and cogent, and includes a clear statement of the primary aim of the thesis: "to contribute to the research of Old Norse time perception", and also more widely in medieval literature. The review of scholarship is authoritative and learned, and together with an overview and analysis of the various previous approaches to the subject (physical, literary and sociological) provides an excellent

foundation for the research to follow. The political aspects of previous scholarship are especially well done. The first part of the research – what the candidate calls “domestic time perception” - considers the *Eddas*, legendary sagas, and family sagas. The second part considers “foreign time reckoning”, and the third, “the blending of times”. The conclusion is excellent. Thus, the fundament structure of the argument is clear and strong; its direction and focus are always evident. Comparisons and contrasts across genres (and thus across historical time periods) are particularly well handled [see for instance the point about ellipses in legendary sagas, p.82], and connexions between the various kinds of material are established with clarity [see for instance the point about charters on p.162].

#### *Formal aspects Of the dissertation*

The thesis is in general well presented and well formatted. Technical aspects of the critical apparatus (referencing, bibliography and so on) are all fine. There are occasional infelicities in the use of English (for instance, “prose” as an adjective is better than “prosaic”, which means something more like mundane or even boring in English). But the clarity of the argument or analyses is never compromised. I have marked up some instances on my print-out of the thesis, but they are actually so minor that it is not worth specifying them here.

On occasion, proper names and the titles of Old Norse texts are ungrammatical: *Gretti's saga* should be *Grettis saga*, or *Grettir's Saga*, for example, and similarly, Bergelmi and Ymi [p.44] and Fenri [55] are missing their final “r”.

#### *Use Of sources and/or material*

It is evident that the candidate has worked with primary sources in the original language (and indeed secondary sources in a variety of modern languages).

#### *4. Personal contribution to the subject*

All in all, this is a valuable contribution to our knowledge of this difficult subject, both in the way it brings material together, and in its often original analysis. I learnt a lot from the research on the understudied subject of computus in Old Norse.

#### **IV. Questions for the author**

##### **I would like to raise the following issues with the candidate:**

1. On what basis were the primary sources selected? In the section on “domestic time perception” for instance, there is no mention of skaldic verse, though this is arguably the oldest form of Old Norse literature. The *samtíðarsögur* are also not considered. [This is not necessarily a criticism, merely a request for clarification].
2. The use of Genette’s narratological categories is excellent. But there is no mention of his sub-category “pause” in his section on Duration.
3. More fundamentally, I would have liked to have seen a clearer distinction between the literary *representation* of time, in texts, and the *perception* of time which may be inferred from this. I am still far from certain how “traces of domestic pre-Christian time understanding” [p.20 *et passim*] can be reliably inferred from literary texts. The candidate is rightly speculative about “what domestic pre-Christian images of time *most probably* [my emphasis] looked like” [the Abstract]; see phrases such as “rather inclined” [p.86]; or “in my opinion”. The content of texts may be “rooted in the pagan past” [p.23] but can one then “assume that these texts mirror original pre-Christian time perception” [p.23]? Whaley is cited [p.25] but seems to argue the opposite.
4. I am not convinced that Genette’s sub-category “frequency” has anything to do with foreshadowing, although the candidate repeatedly associates the two [p.34, p.82, p.110, p.155, p.169]. I would argue that foreshadowing is rather a kind of prolepsis, and would better fit into Genette’s category “Order”. Are plans, prophecies and curses not proleptic? Having said this, I would like to draw attention to a good section on dreams [p.170]

5. I think the argument drifts a little with the discussion of the names of months [around p.68]
6. The formulation “full narrative time” seems to me to imply a prior *fabula* which presupposes the historicity of the material. *Fabula* is strictly subsequent to the text; we as audience construct it from the *sjuzhet*.
7. The claim is made here that “order” is strictly chronological in family sagas [p.112]. Taking into account the point about prolepsis made above, might not there be a kind of diegetical anachrony, in which characters recall the past or predict the future? And would this be different in kings’ sagas, in which event is prioritized over character?
8. An important point is made about time “shrinking” in charters [p. 144]. Is this a generic difference primarily, or to do with date?
9. Finally, the conclusions to part II, about the arrival of foreign time reckoning, are fairly predictable. Did the candidate find anything unexpected here, or surprising?

### **Small points**

1. There is a notable use of Christian time markers in *Laxdæla saga* [see p. 101, and p. 150]
2. I’m not sure that scholars are in agreement about the great age of the *Edda* [p. 22]
3. Might Settlement and Conversion be added to markers of relative intrinsic chronology? [p.31]
4. Exciting things *do* happen in winter [p.97] – cf in *Gísla saga*, or Skarpheðinn’s spectacular killing in *Njála*.

5. What is the effect of introducing characters before they play a role in the narrative? [p.106]
6. Why is night “paid more attention than day” [p.45]? Could this be linked with the use of winter as a time marker? [p.166]
7. Look at Bakhtin on the “walled off” time of epic

Two excellent observations to discuss:

: the contrast between sagas and modernist novels

: that references to fate invariably involve a negative view of the future [but cf Njáll’s prediction about Höskuldr!]

**This work meets the standard customarily required of a doctoral dissertation.**

**I recommend this dissertation for a public defence**

**I recommend the submitted dissertation with the tentative grade of pass**