



NAME

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TITLE OF PRESENTATION

Immanent Seas, Scribal Havens: Evolutionary Aesthetics of the Sagas of Icelanders

ABSTRACT OF PRESENTATION

Unlike the post-print age texts, sagas are traditional narratives that evolved over long periods of time and were produced not merely ‘quill in hand’, by single individuals, but rather by entire creative networks of generations of storytellers (and their audiences), writers, compilers and scribes, all of whom played some role in shaping of the narratives as they reached us. This means that traditional stories such as the sagas have special aesthetics and thus require a special way of reading – such that is sensitive to the fact that a newly rendered version of the story always falls within an already existing web of inherited idiomatic meanings on which it draws and which it will further enrich. Thus beyond the perceptiveness and advanced psychological insights of the on the part of their individual writers, the famous saga characters known for their depth have acquired some of their complexity and ‘realism’ through the evolutionary process itself, inheriting features of their various mythic and heroic ancestors, but also constantly adapting to the present needs and interests of a particular interpretative community.

The paper further reflects on the importance of trasdisciplinary study of literature in general and traditional narratives in particular, pointing to similar problems encountered in diverse areas of knowledge when it comes to defining units of inheritance – whether biological or cultural, whether a gene or a meme, whether a memory trace or a traditional formula.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Slavica Rankovic (b. 1971) received her PhD in English Literature and Slavonic Studies from the University of Nottingham (2006). She was a postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Bergen (2006–2010), where she is currently a researcher (since 2010). Her publications concern Old Norse sagas and South Slavic epics, both as subjects in their own right and as a comparative case study of special interest to the ongoing cross-disciplinary efforts to model the evolution of cultural traditions in general. As such, her work benefits from and critically reflects on the studies of complex adaptive systems and the received assumptions regarding the relationship between the communal and individual memory, creativity and authorship, the aesthetics of traditional formulas, and the orality-literacy continuum. She is the principal editor of two books – *Along the Oral-Written Continuum: Types of Texts, Relations and their Implications* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010) and *Modes of Authorship in Middle Ages* (Toronto: PIMS, 2012).