

'BABEȘ-BOLYAI' UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF LETTERS
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF LINGUISTIC AND LITERARY STUDIES

*Rewriting Norse Mythology in Contemporary Norwegian Literature.
The Search for Identity in a Multicultural World*

(PhD Thesis)

Scientific advisor:

Professor Sanda Tomescu Baci

Candidate:

Cristina Spătăcean (married Vișovan)

Cluj-Napoca

2019

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	5
Introduction	6
Argument.....	6
Theoretical Concepts.....	10
Previous Interest in the Field.....	15
Corpus	17
National and International Relevance	20
Part I. Decoding Rewriting	24
Chapter 1. Texts Depending on Other Texts. Tracing ‘Rewriting’	25
1.1 Influence and Innovation	25
1.2 Intertextuality: Main Theory	29
1.3 Limiting ‘Intertextuality’	30
1.4 Reading as a Catalyst for Writing.....	33
1.5 Postcolonial and Feminist Perspectives.....	35
1.6 Adaptation as Rewriting	36
1.7 An Attempt to Define ‘Rewriting’	38
1.8 Theoretical Studies on Rewriting	43
1.9 Rewriting and Cultural Memory.....	46
1.10 Multicultural Rewritings.....	48
Part II. Rewriting Norse Mythology	58
Chapter 2. From the Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century	59

2.1 What Are Myths?.....	59
2.2 What Is Norse Mythology?.....	61
2.3 Myths and Ideology	65
2.4 Writing/Rewriting Norse Myths in the Middle Ages	67
2.5 Laufás Edda and Rewriting the Norse Legacy in the Seventeenth-Century	77
2.6 The Eighteenth-Century. The Nordic Renaissance and Pre-Romanticism.....	81
2.7 The Nineteenth-Century and the Building of Nations.....	85
2.8 The Twentieth-Century.....	89
2.9 An Overall View.....	93
Part III. Rewriting Norse Mythology in Contemporary Norwegian Literature	97
Chapter 3. Guidelines.	98
3.1 The Socio-Political Context. Global and Local Perspectives.....	98
3.2 We/Our/Us versus They/Their/Them – (Neo-) Ethnic Nationalism in Contemporary Norway	115
3.3 Norwegian Cultural Identity	121
3.4 The Norse Myths as Part of the Norwegian Cultural Legacy.....	123
Chapter 4. The Distorting Mirror or the ‘Imagined’ Minority	127
4.1 Cornelius Jakhelln – A Short Journey through His Life and Art	127
4.2 Odin as a Prototype for the Disempowered, Enraged White Man	134
Chapter 5. In the Name of Justice	171
5.1 Andreas Bull-Hansen. Novelist and Norseman.....	171
5.2 Tyr – The Revival of the Viking Ideals of Justice and Honour.....	182

Chapter 6. The ‘Other’ in Me	208
6.1 Siri Pettersen – From ‘Outsider’ to ‘Insider’ – the Mainstreaming of Otherness	208
6.2 Mankind as a Myth – The Role Played by Prejudices, Blind Faith and Authoritarianism in the Encounter with the ‘Other’	216
Conclusions	243
Bibliography	251

Abstract

Key words: Norse mythology, identity, multicultural rewriting, immigration, multiculturalism, shared cultural memory, collective identity

The present thesis entitled *Rewriting Norse Mythology in Contemporary Norwegian Literature. The Search for Identity in a Multicultural World* is the result of my wish to discover in what ways the Norse mythology finds its place in the Norwegian literature after the turn of the century, a century liberated from the dark shadow imprinted by the Nazis on the old mythology, as well as what exactly drives its narrative re-use. It is organized in five main sections: Introduction, Part I – Decoding Rewriting, Part II – Rewriting Norse Mythology, Part III – Rewriting Norse Mythology in Contemporary Norwegian Literature and Conclusions.

After presenting the motivation of the thesis, the Introduction focuses on the theoretical concepts deployed such as *myth*, *mythology* and *rewriting* and emphasizes the assumptions that I wanted to test through my analysis: firstly, that the Norse mythology is brought again on the literary scene in the context of immigration and multiculturalism (understood in its descriptive meaning as the coexistence of diverse cultures in the same society); secondly, that the old gods and myths are revived because they belong to a cultural memory and an identity that ethnic Norwegians share; thirdly, that it is used to shed light on how the various components of the Norwegian society and nation react to and interact with each other; and fourthly, that it incorporates ideas about the national but from a polyethnic and multicultural perspective.

I stress here that rather than using an approach which emphasizes the literary form of the text, the thesis focuses on present literary tendencies that seem to privilege aspects of the Norwegian culture and civilization and sets them against the contemporary socio-political context. I also suggest that a new type of rewriting seems to have emerged, a rewriting that I coin as ‘multicultural’ and which, I propose, could be another term that can be associated with

critical revisionism, this time from the point of view of one (in the context of this thesis, the ethnic Norwegians) of the many (multiple) points of view that shape today's polyethnic and multicultural Norwegian society.

In addition, the Introduction also offers a view of the previous interest in field, the corpus and the reasons behind its choice, while at the same time placing the thesis in a national and international perspective of relevance.

Part I, Chapter 1 – *Texts Depending on Other Texts. Tracing 'Rewriting'*, follows the relationship between texts and the various theoretical concepts that have been used in order to describe it starting with the practice of copying/imitating previous texts, characteristic of the classical period, and ending with the contemporary practice of rewriting. Here, I emphasize that even though nowadays rewriting refers to a whole spectrum of textual transformations (translation, parody, pastiche, adaptation, imitation, burlesque among others) the contemporary practice of rewriting focuses on a canonical pre-text and presupposes a subject who intervenes in the original text in order to transform it and challenge the dominant ideologies due to present circumstances.

I also discuss here various theoretical studies on rewriting, among which Liedeke Plate's *Transforming Memories in Contemporary Women's Rewriting* is significant for the argument of my thesis. I further build on her theory according to which rewriting is both a product of cultural remembrance based on a shared memory which creates a collective and cultural identity and a process through which new identities and different worldviews are offered to the reader and I argue that the Norse myths are intentionally chosen by certain contemporary Norwegian writers in the context of immigration and multiculturalism, as they are part of a culture that ethnic Norwegians share and which creates a bond between people of the same kind while at the same time distinguishing them from the 'Others'.

Consequently, I identify the characteristics of the multicultural rewriting: a rewriting that focuses on a canonical pre-text chosen not necessarily in order to challenge the dominant ideology of the original text but rather for its position in the collective cultural memory (and sometimes for the ideologies later built on it); does not necessarily imply a fairly detailed rewriting of the original but it rather transforms the Norse gods and makes them assume a new identity in which they appear as demystified, marginalised or invisible characters in today's society; it represents the voice of those Norwegians who consider themselves to be (or assume the point of view) of a certain minority specific for the contemporary political, social and cultural climate; it focuses on attitudes, feelings and frustrations emerged in the polyethnic and multicultural Norwegian society.

In Chapter 2 – *From the Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century* I offer a diachronic view of the process of writing/rewriting the Norse myths across time. Here, I emphasize the idea that from its very beginnings, the writing of the Norse mythology seems to have been marked by the idea of repetition with a change. For example, in the Middle Ages, the orally derived texts containing the Norse myths were deliberately chosen, filtered through the eyes of the scribe and then adapted to a certain context as in the case of the great Icelandic scholar, Snorri Sturlason, who rewrote the old legacy in such a way as to make it more acceptable from the perspective of a Christian reader. While later editions of *Snorra Edda* were driven by a desire to make Snorri's work more accessible first for Scandinavians and then for scholars and readers outside Scandinavia, in the academic circles, rewriting Snorri took the form of re-organising, interpreting, translating, adapting, as well as publishing various studies inspired by the Norse myths and poetry, transforming the Norse mythology into a source of inspiration and an alternative to classical mythologies.

The rewriting of the Norse mythology took on nationalistic tones in the nineteenth-century as part of a process in which early poetic traditions came to be viewed as the literature

defining a nation. However, it seems that Norwegians, as opposed to Icelanders, Danish and Swedish people and Germans, turned rather to historical sources from the Norse legacy in order to build an identity. Still, the myths are present on the Norwegian literary scene of the nineteenth-century in their interpretation as having given birth to the Norwegian fairy tales that were collected during that century and which in their turn influenced one of Ibsen's most famous plays.

The twentieth-century opened the way for the symbolist use of myth to express universal values and literary characters started to be named after the Norse gods bringing forth intertextual associations for the trained reader; towards the end of the century, the myths appear in Norwegian literature as representative for the religious belief of certain characters or they are re-shaped so that they can present contemporary issues that need to be criticised.

Chapter 3 – *Guidelines*, presents the contemporary socio-political context in Norway by building on various socio-anthropological studies undergone by renowned Norwegian specialists such as Marianne Gullestad, Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Sindre Bangstad, as well as on various articles in the mass media, statistics, political discourses and debates on the Internet, in an attempt to show how the socio-political context is brought into the field of literature through the means of Norse mythology.

For Norway, the previous century marked its liberation from the union with Sweden (1905) and the assertion of its sovereign rights over oil resources in the North Sea leading to the greatest economic boom in the history of the country. This determined an increased need of labour force which finally signified an ever-growing number of immigrants and later on, asylum seekers, leading to public protests against immigration in the eighties and allowing far-right political parties to play on the social situation in Norway in order to increase their

electorate. Despite the attempts of the various Norwegian governments to deal with diversity, xenophobic, racist and even extremist tendencies seem also to have reached the surface.

On this background, there also seems to have appeared a restrictive meaning for the term 'immigrant' which according to the Norwegian socio-anthropologist, Marianne Gullestad, has become associated with people of 'dark skin' coming from one of the countries of the Third World, with lower-class connotations, and who consequently have different values than ethnic Norwegians; dark-skinned people look different which makes it almost impossible for ethnic Norwegians to perceive them as 'Norwegian'.

According to Thomas Hylland Eriksen, there is a typology based on which we can distinguish between the different attitudes of Norwegians towards immigrants identified as people of non-Western origins (Hylland Eriksen, "Rasister"): Norwegians who prefer to have as little to do with immigrants as possible and are willing to harass them (when offered the chance), Norwegians who are willing to give them the chance to become assimilated, underlining the idea that immigrants and their cultures are not on the same level with the Norwegian culture; and Norwegians who support integration, allowing immigrants to be culturally different but thus contributing to the establishment of ethnically segregated areas.

We can therefore speak about the emergence of a cultural conflict specific for the other countries of Western Europe too. In the encounter with the complexity and diversity of cultures which is representative for the multicultural composition of the contemporary Norwegian society, Norwegians seem to gather around the idea of 'ethnicity', while at the same time trying to recover and define their identity. There appears to be a focus on ancestry, history and cultural and religious sameness.

After the attack on the USA in September 2001 and the chain of terror attacks that followed afterwards in Europe, the image of the immigrant (with certain ethnical associations)

seems to have undergone a further shift being often associated with that of a terrorist. In fact, the Norwegian social anthropologist, Sindre Bangstad, argues that the Muslims became the main existential threat in Norway even earlier, in the context of the increased number of immigrants and asylum seekers from Muslim countries who arrived in Norway in the 1980's. Right-winged extremists played an essential role in popularizing this idea, alongside other ideas nowadays associated with the Eurabia theory.

Even though the Norwegian media does not seem to play a central role as a promoter of negative images associated with the Arab, its place seems to have been taken by the Internet which has opened the space for hateful commentaries, debates, radical opinions, harassments and threats, as well as for Islamophobic Norwegian websites, far-right online communities and other anti-Muslim and anti-Islam discourses, contributing to the radicalization of various elements of the Norwegian society. They have raised their voice against immigration, especially from Muslim countries, because they perceive it as a threat to the Norwegian people and the Norwegian democratic welfare state, a threat ignored by the political left and the 'politically correct' official sphere.

In this context, the concept of identity (especially national identity) seems to have become central once again. In an attempt to find their uniqueness, Norwegians seem to find refuge in the old and familiar, retorting to certain symbols which in their view are significant for their idea of what it means and requires to be Norwegian. The return to Norse myths becomes the result of a search for an identity while lost in the contemporary mismatch of cultures.

Chapter 4 - *The Distorting Mirror or the 'Imagined' Minority* starts with an overview of Cornelius Jakhelln's (born 1977) life and art (4.1 – *Cornelius Jakhelln, A Short Journey Through His Life and Art*) emphasizing the role played by his childhood experiences as a

bullied child in discovering black metal music (and its revival of the Norse god Óðinn) and the role played by his experiences as a student in Paris in his radicalization and in his desire to investigate his Germanic and Nordic culture. Upon his return to what he calls the ‘new Norway’, his experiences as a minority white man in a multicultural Parisian neighborhood were coupled by his experiences as an ‘ethnic’ Norwegian in Oslo, a Norwegian whose feelings were ignored or hurt by the political class and whose honor and pride over his own identity had been stepped over by the official Norway. All these led to Jakhelln’s rediscovery of the Norse mythology in an attempt to rewrite his Nordic identity.

In 4.2 - *Odin as a Prototype for the Disempowered, Enraged White Man* I show how in his novel *Gudenes fall (The Fall of the Gods)* (2007) Jakhelln rewrites the role of the Norse god Óðinn, introducing him as a decadent guy whose attributes make him easily mistakable with one of our contemporaries. His downfall is presented as the result of the introduction of Christianity in the world of the humans, Overheimen, act which is in fact a metaphor for the waves of immigrants which have entered Norway since the 1960’s and which have gradually managed to ‘marginalise’ certain ethnic Norwegians, at least in *their* representations of the ‘new Norway’.

In consequence, Odin feels marginalized and nostalgic about the loss of his kingdom. This ‘post-colonial’ melancholia is also coupled with a deep pain and anger resulted from the loss of his prestige. He who once represented the majority, has been re-formed into a minority that has been forced to (e)migrate from its own geographical territory. The shame and guilt experienced by the white (colonist) are re-presented in a totally new form in which the guilt is rather associated with passivity and resignation while shame results from a loss of power, enabling representations of contemporary practices of opening the doors to mass immigration.

The feelings of humiliation and exclusion that Odin and the other gods experience as a result of their relocation in Underheimen, are symbolic for the way part of the Norwegians (Jakhelln included) feel in the encounter with the new immigrant population of Norway. Still, in Odin's case, the tragedy of his shabby existence is covered by a playful, comic mask fact which allows Jakhelln to explore the darker side of his 'persona' by giving free way to his rage while at the same time counteracting it by humour and Odin's self-irony and self-criticism.

The various other beings of the Norse universe become also instrumental in criticising other realities of the Norwegian society such as the host-guest relationship which turned into a host-intruder one the moment the humans decided to chase the gods under the ground. In turn, the dwarves of the Norse mythology become an allegory for the labor immigrants arrived in Norway and who irrespective of their qualifications had to settle to industrial or service work, while being constantly exposed to different treatment, discrimination and even racism.

Despite their presence, Odin still cultivates the image of an easily predictable homogenous society as Asgard, in Jakhelln's rewriting, is built on the idea of one country and one people. The downfall of the gods gains the value of 'a national trauma' and is an allegory for the 'fall' of the white man and ethnic Norwegian from its status as a majority population. Constantly dreaming about his lost kingdom and its apparent homogeneity, Odin becomes the symbol of a lost ideal, from an oppressor he has turned into the oppressed one and since he has lost his past identity he is now trying to assume a present identity grounded in the past.

Alongside Odin, the other Norse gods are depicted as de-mystified deities and transformed into beings which resemble caricatures of the Norse gods. They actually have a dual function in the novel: on the one hand they epitomize an ideal past which is common for all ethnic Norwegians, while they are also reduced to human characteristics, making it easier to view them as representatives for a contemporary situation. As such, through the rewriting of

Odin and the other Norse gods and beings of the Norse universe, the collective common memory of ethnic Norwegians is activated but in a nationalistic setting specific for the nineteenth-century.

Ragnarok, the final battle of the Norse gods, is rewritten in Jakhelln's novel first as the result of immigration and multiculturalism and then as the result of globalization and technologization. In his view, Ragnarok gains a repetitive character and so does the idea of the emergence of new life after the clash between the gods and the giants. If the initial downfall of the gods is symbolic for the way the pagan Norse religion has been regarded after the introduction of Christianity, the return on earth of the gods corresponds to the revival of Norse elements in the contemporary pop culture. From powerful to powerless and finally back to powerful again is Odin's symbolic journey in Jakhelln's rewriting of the Norse god as a representative of the contemporary ethnic Norwegian.

In Chapter 5 – *In the Name of Justice*, I first show how Andreas Bull-Hansen's (born 1972) approach to the Norse myths is different than Jakhelln's even though his experiences are close to Jakhelln's painful childhood. Bull-Hansen seems to have rediscovered the Norse mythology while going through a terrifying childhood experience, time when the old myths of his Norse ancestors managed to offer him comfort especially through the concept of 'strength' that Bull-Hansen identified in the Viking mentality.

Nowadays he seems to have been living what he calls the Viking lifestyle for many years. This is appealing to Bull-Hansen due to the the notion of freedom engrained in the Norse belief system and values as opposed to the controlling nature of the contemporary society. In addition, he seems to be drawn towards the Norse belief system *Ásatrú* (meaning, 'Faith in the *Æsir*'), a modern revival of the Norse pre-Christian religion which was officially recognized as a modern legitimate religion in Iceland (1972). As opposed to contemporary nostalgic Nationalists (such

as Jakhelln), he does not want to return to a Golden age but rather to find out what we can learn from the mentality of the Vikings and how we can adapt the Viking values to the condition of the modern man.

Bull-Hansen's discourse is individualistic in general but his sense of belonging to a larger community is awakened under the pressure of immigration and the emergence of criminal immigrant gangs of a different skin colour. In this context, being 'white' and Norwegian suddenly becomes a burden shared with other members of the same community; a common ancestry unifies them, ancestry that seems to entitle Bull-Hansen to assume that his fellow Norwegians share a similar sense of justice. Even though he appears not to hold grudge against other ethnicities, skin colours or religions, whenever the Muslims appear in his discourse, they are presented in a negative light and so is the Norwegian/European political elite.

Bull-Hansen's pessimistic view on the future of Europe and Norway as a result of immigration and multiculturalism is transferred to the first part of a trilogy which follows the Norse god Týr from his existence in the world of the humans, to the world of the gods and which I discuss in 5.2 – *Tyr. The Revival of the Viking Ideals of Justice and Honour*. In *Jotnens hjemkomst (The Return of the Jotun)* (2010), we enter a dystopic Oslo, set in the year 2042. Various ethnic communities are in conflict with each other in a society defined through its multicultural composition in which the ethnic Norwegians are barely visible and the Muslims are often identified with criminals who, in the suburbs, fight for women and drugs, take part in street fights against other gangs, drive pedophile networks and organize dog fights etc.

The Norse god Týr is re-contextualized and de-mystified into the police superintendent and investigator, Petter Tyrar, a war refugee from Muslim Chechnya who has successfully been integrated in the Norwegian society, indicating that Bull-Hansen distinguishes between criminal Muslims and ordinary honourable Muslims who are capable to adapt and succeed in

a new society. From the marginal position occupied by this god in the Viking Age, he becomes a main character in Bull-Hansen's trilogy and a symbol of the most important Viking trait in the writer's opinion, integrity. His character is molded on Bull-Hansen's perception of the modern man and becomes instrumental in expressing the feelings experienced by certain representatives of the Norwegian white mainstream as Tyrar considers the criminals Muslims which torment the society inhuman monsters who deserve to be executed.

Through his dystopic future image that seems to be the result of an extreme liberalization, Bull-Hansen criticizes the present society and the contemporary political practices. The Norwegian society of the future has been transformed into a polluted, drug infected and sick place because the Liberalists have made an alliance with the Socialists and took over the power. Together, they have abolished the death penalty and legalised everything while the Police has been deprived of the right to deploy whatever necessary measures to catch and condemn criminals: the Liberalists have made violence illegal offering the criminals the right to complain in case of an inadequate treatment and benefit from a court-appointed attorney, allowing even police officers to become corrupted and transform into villains themselves. As such, the society in Midgard has no place left for honourable warriors who let go of their anger through ferocious violence as a form of revenge.

In opposition, in the world of the gods, Asgard, honour is a concept that is highly cherished by the Æsir and the giants, being more important than life itself. Similar to the criminal Muslims who constantly put pressure on the Norwegian society in Midgard, the Vanir constantly press the Æsir and their leader, Odin. Bull-Hansen actually rewrites the Vanir of the Norse mythology as a blasphemous, despicable race, endowing the information offered by the myths with a negative connotation: they are numerous, dirty and have disgusting customs, they are foolishly shameless as they copulate like animals and allow brother and sister to procreate,

they enjoy dancing naked and have poison in their blood. The Vanir do not belong either to Asgard or to Jotunland and they are different from the Æsir in many ways making the clash between the two cultures inevitable. They arrive in Asgard because their country, Vaneland, was flooded, forcing them to find a new home; once arrived in Asgard, which is presented as a continent, the numerous Vanir plunder deep inside the territory of the Æsir, terrorizing them and raping their women. Since then they have tormented the land of the gods in a similar manner to the criminal immigrant gangs which seem to have troubled the Norwegian society since the 1980's when Norway decided to get involved in humanitarian actions.

Once again Odin becomes symbolic for the tolerant policies of the Norwegian government. He gradually changes from a mighty warrior who welcomes strife and never yields to a skinny, grey-haired, old and tired man who gives more and more land to the Vanir from a desire to please the Vanir rather than to throw Asgard into civil war. The Æsir come to the point where they cannot defeat themselves alone so they need both strong alliances with the giants and the return of their war commander, Tyr.

But after his journey to the land of the humans, Tyr is no longer the most fearless and courageous of all the Æsir, one who enjoyed seeing others suffer for their evil deeds, one who was feared for his lack of forgiveness and mercy. Bull-Hansen intentionally weakens Tyr while in Midgard so that we can see how our contemporary world has changed the past ideals of the Viking Age and transformed them into something to be ashamed of.

Throughout the first novel of the trilogy, Tyr is actually torn between the memory of who he was and the reality of who he has become. His travel to the land of the humans, conditioned by the loss of memory, is symptomatic of the gap in time between the Viking Age and the contemporary period, as well as of the situation of the contemporary Norwegian whose relation to the Norse belief system is farfetched at its best.

Once back in the world of the gods, the glimpses from his past (in the form of dreams, visions and stories) rekindle the Viking spirit in Tyr but he adapts it to his present self which is driven by both love and hate. Wandering through Asgard in search for his lost family, Tyr has to go through experiences which only build on his former hate for the immigrant Vanir race. Some of the Norse myths are rewritten by Bull-Hansen in a manner which awakens Tyr's rage and justifies his desire to get revenge through violence in order to defend his honour.

The same technique is used to revive the Viking spirit in the Norwegian reader. By making use of the collective memory of Norwegians in the form of the Norse myths which are rewritten, Bull-Hansen tries to help them in finding their identity in a multicultural world, an identity which he builds on the Viking values that are adapted to the condition of the modern man. Throughout the trilogy, the reader is exposed to vivid descriptions of various methods of punishment inflicted by Tyr on the criminals of Asgard who deserve no mercy; what is wrong and evil has to be fought against rather than tolerated because such horrible actions destroy lives and break individuals.

Images of an Asgard decimated by war and occupied by the numerous Vanir as a result of Odin's mistake are intercalated with the pessimistic future of Midgard and Norway where the tolerant and liberal policies of the leaders from Midgard have led to the total collapse of the society in a scenario appropriate for the Old Norse conceptions about Ragnarok as a time of social collapse and cosmic catastrophes. In Bull-Hansen's pessimistic view, liberalisation and immigration have gradually driven the Earth and humanity towards ruin.

The past and the present/future interconnect in Bull-Hansen's trilogy allowing the main character to escape into a world where the respect for his former deeds empowers him and transforms him from a slave into a worshipped god. Here he has the power to bring justice and change. More than being a confrontation between various races, Ragnarok becomes a necessity, a symbol for the emergence of a new world. The old warlords and chieftains all die but so do

their old feuds. The apparently invincible goddess of death, Hel, is defeated, paving the way towards a future of hope. Integrity and justice win over death in a symbolic unfolding and clash of the various powers coexisting in Asgard.

It is highly significant for the contemporary socio-political context that the hope for a new future is made possible by a giant, Tyr, and one of a mixed ancestry Odd (son of a giant turned into an Æsir god and of a Vanir valkyrie, Inai) and that the survivors of Bull-Hansen's Ragnarok are multicultural. There lies no nostalgia after a time when the population of Asgard was pure and homogenous because the Æsir gods themselves are presented as interconnected with both the giants and the humans. The new world has a place for everyone – Vanir (mostly women and children), Æsir, giants and humans – and they all have a common wish, peace.

Chapter 6 – *The Other in Me* focuses on Siri Pettersen's (born 1971) personal experiences as part of a group of boys who explored various imaginary worlds and characters, group that accepted her as equal and helped her in developing a sense of belonging at a time when she felt somehow excluded due to her interest in the escapist fantasy genre. This finally helped her in finding her identity that she built on cooperation, mutual understanding and acceptance. Fighting injustice soon became a pillar of this identity to the extent that nowadays she supports the idea that we have to respect others and the cultures which form their identity if we ourselves demand respect for our culture and traditions.

Therefore, her novel *Odinsbarn (Odin's Child)* (2013), which is part of the *Raven Rings* trilogy, is the result of her belief that it is not always good that ethnic Norwegians take pride in their cultural origins and cling to the Nordic culture as these can be linked to a raising cultural awareness in the context of immigration, multiculturalism and the fear of the unknown.

In 6.2 - *Mankind as a Myth – The Role Played by Prejudices, Blind Faith and Authoritarianism in the Encounter with the ‘Other’*, I discuss the mythological universe created by Pettersen in her novel, universe that is rooted in the Norse mythology. The main character of the book is the only one in the fantastic realm of Ymslanda who was not born with a tail. As such, she is a child of Odin (a play on the creation of humankind in the Norse mythology), a *menskr* – a condemned and feared race who is believed to be able to transform the inhabitants of Ymslanda into a rotten body.

By associating the *menskr* with the Rot, Pettersen creates a literary representation for how it is to have contact with another race in the contemporary context. Being the only representative of the mythical human race in the novel, Hirka is a symbol for how it is to be foreign and different, how it feels to be misunderstood and alienated.

The atrocity of being a *menskr*, an *embling*, is revealed in the abusive terms associated with this race – a monstrosity (*vanskapning*), born like a corpse (*likfødte*), the Rot (*råta*), representations which are alive in the collective memory of the people from Ymslanda even though they have never met a child of Odin in their lives. These prejudices are so rooted in the folklore that Hirka’s adoptive father, Thorrald chooses to flee from the society and builds Hirka’s existence on a lie – that the wolf ate her tail when she was small.

Once Hirka finds out who she really is (she has no family, no roots, no history), she goes through a psychological drama resembles that of many immigrants of non-Western background who feel afraid or anxious and often experience feelings of being worth very little.

The discovery of a child of Odin in Ymslanda leads to panic, hysteria and crisis in a realm where people are manipulated in order to maintain the illusion of control. The representatives of the elites feed the popular imagination with terrific images about a race which has not been seen during the last one thousand years so that they can behold their power. They twist the laws to their own advantage and lead people to believe that they are smarter and more powerful than

they really are. They steal knowledge and abilities, bestow punishment and absolution, death and life without being accountable to nobody else than the Seer, a god who in the end proves not to exist. The Seer (a raven) himself is nothing but a prop which lures people in supporting the power of the elite who makes use of the stories from the collective memory of people in order to legitimize their privileged status. As such, they play with the fate and the future of the common people while playing a power game in which Hirka becomes nothing else than a brick.

Pettersen's rewriting of the Norse mythology is unconventional precisely because it is not 'faithful' to the traditional Norse. She re-writes the mythology in a new form in order to challenge our misconceptions. She therefore re-forms and trans-forms the Norwegian cultural heritage, forcing the reader to create new images which could help him/her in understanding that we are equal in value. By reconstructing cultural elements, she critiques upon the contemporary tendencies of using culture as a distinctive marker in the encounter with the 'Other'; she subverts, not the Norse myths per se, but rather the ideologies and identities constructed on them when faced with the threat of multiculturalism.

Again significant for the contemporary Norwegian socio-political context is that in the final confrontation between the various races of *Odinsbarn*, a rewriting of Ragnarok, the representative of the 'Other', Hirka, is willing to sacrifice herself for the better good of the people of Ymslanda and decides to leave the only place she knows as 'home' for other mythical realms where she will meet new people, with their new gods.

The last section of the thesis *Conclusions*, sums up the overall results. First of all, the analysis of the discussed novels reveals the fact that these rewritings of the Norse mythology have a clear socio-political and cultural drive paying particular attention to those social elements who either feel or are marginalized and silenced by the dominant ideologies.

However, the discussed Norwegian writers approach multiculturalism from different angles, proving that despite their 'common roots' they are not as 'alike' as the 'imagined'

community and nation would want them to believe. Their perception of the 'new Norway' varies based on their personal experiences which also influence the way these authors choose to enter the source texts - be it with a Nationalistic melancholia, a keen interest to adapt the Viking ideals to the modern man or with a more humanistic and tolerant lens, willing to listen to and accept the 'Other'.

Secondly, it is evident that rewriting becomes a technique these Norwegian writers deploy purposefully in order to build an identity at a time perceived as 'critical'; by visiting the Norse myths for their position in the shared cultural memory of ethnic Norwegians (which creates a collective identity), they assume a different position and reimagine the source text in a new social, national and cultural imagery. The re-narrated identities of these Norwegian authors reveal the struggles of the contemporary Norwegian society as well as their fears or hopes in relation to the outcome of multiculturalism.

Thirdly, in the context of the contemporary polyethnic and multicultural Norwegian society, these novels which focus on the interaction between its various components and the experiences and feelings derived from it, can be considered national narratives which focus on the story of the modern nation but from a multi-ethnic/multicultural perspective. They also prove that the Norwegian national narrative has become fragmented as it is drawn to different directions in a process in which the representatives of the various segments which form the modern nation present their side of the story.

Last but not least, as they draw their 'roots' from the old mythology, these rewritings demonstrate once again that the cultural heritage can be manipulated, trans-formed and re-formed, written and re-written. They prove that texts have and will always open up to new texts, to further exploitations and re-evaluations dependant on the challenges of the future, enabling us, researchers to continue our studies.

Selected bibliography

Primary Sources

Bull-Hansen, Andreas. *Jotnens hjemkomst*. Aschehoug, 2011. (*The Return of the Jotun*)

---. *Før de ni verdener styrter*. Aschehoug, 2012. (*Before the Nine Worlds Crash*)

---. *Ragnarok*. Aschehoug, 2012.

Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern. Edited by Gustav Neckel, Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, Heidelberg 1914.

Jakhelln, Cornelius. *Gudenes fall*. J.W. Cappelen Damm AS, 2008. (*The Fall of the Gods*)

Pettersen, Siri. *Odinsbarn*. Gyldendal, 2013. (*Child of Odin*)

Sturluson Snorri. Edda. Edited by Finnur Jónsson, Gads Forlag, 1926

Translations

Snorri Sturlason. Edda. Translated and edited by Anthony Faulkes, Everyman, 1995.

The Poetic Edda. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Carolyne Larrington, Oxford University Press, 1996

Secondary Sources

Bangstad, Sindre. *Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia*. Zed Books, 2014.

Gullestad, Marianne. 'Blind Slaves of Our Prejudices: Debating "Culture" and "Race" in Norway'. *Ethnos*, volume 69:2, June 2004, pp.177-203.

---. 'Invisible Fences: Egalitarianism, Nationalism and Racism'. *Royal Anthropological Institute*, Edited by J. Roy, (N.S.), volume 8, 2002, pp. 45-63.

- . *Plausible Prejudice: Everyday Experiences and Social Images of Nation, Culture and Race*. Universitetsforlaget, 2006.
- Hylland, Eriksen Thomas. 'Being Norwegian in a Shrinking World. Reflections on Norwegian Identity'. *Continuity and Change: Aspects of Modern Norway*, edited by Anne Cohen Kiel, Scandinavian University Press, 1993, pp. 1-18.
- . *Globalization. The Key Concepts*, Bloomsbury, 2014.
- . *Immigration and National Identity in Norway*. Transatlantic Council on Migration, University of Oslo, March 2013.
- Moraru, Christian. *Rewriting. Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning*. State University of New York, 2001.
- Oxfeldt, Elisabeth. 'Aspects of Orientalism in the Nordic Countries'. *Representation of Otherness. 11th International Conference on Textbooks and Educational Media*, edited by Nataljia Mazeikiene, Mike Horsley and Susanne V. Knudsen, IARTEM, 2011, pp. 10-21.
- . *Romanen, nasjonen og verden. Nordisk litteratur i et postnasjonalt perspektiv*. Universitetsforlaget, 2012. (*The Novel, the Nation and the World. Nordic Literature in a Postnational Perspective*)
- Plate, Liedeke. *Transforming Memories in Contemporary Women's Rewriting*. Palgrave, 2011.
- Steinsland Gro. *Mytene som skapte Norge. Myter og makt fra vikingtid til middelalder*. Pax Forlag A/S, 2012. (*The Myths which Created Norway. Myths and Power from the Viking Age to the Middle Ages*)
- . *Norrøn religion. Myter, riter, samfunn*. Pax Forlag A/S, 2005. (*Norse Religion. Myths, Rites, Society*)