

Summary of paper offered by R.W. McTurk on 'The structural function of the conversion in saga-narrative'.

In Mediaeval Scandinavia 11 (1978-79), pp. 271-80, Bernardine McCreesh argues that in certain sagas the centrality of the conversion is emphasized by supernatural events occurring before and after it. Is Njáls saga, which she does not mention, a case in point? The supernatural events in Njáls saga are of two main types: (1) predictions (including spells and accounts of dreams) made by various characters and subsequently fulfilled; and (2) other strange happenings with no apparent physical cause. Those of type (1) operate on two levels, the hypodiegetic (when the prediction is made) and the diegetic (when it is fulfilled); they are supernatural only insofar as they operate on both levels, and while the events predicted are usually essential to the narrative, the predictions themselves are not. Thus the author seems interested in them not so much because they are supernatural as because they are useful proleptic devices. Those of type (2), on the other hand, are exclusively diegetic, insofar as they are narrated in the first degree, i.e. by the narrator rather than by any of the characters. Some of them, however, are focalized in the second degree, i.e. through characters in the saga, rather than by the narrator. Only rarely are supernatural events narrated and focalized in the first degree, and when this happens, the events in question are invariably of Christian significance, relating more or less directly to the account of the conversion in chs. 100-05. It seems that the author wished to draw particular attention to these events by emphasizing their supernatural character. This argument, if accepted, would confirm the view that the conversion is thematically as well as structurally central in Njáls saga.

