

**The Fantastic in Eddic Poetry and the Renaissance of the Twelfth Century
(Abstract of Plenary Paper)**

**Rudolf Simek
(Universität Bonn)**

If we use Todorov's classification of The Fantastic, it becomes obvious that most of the fantastic material to be found in Eddic Poetry belongs to his categories 2-4, namely the *fantastic-uncanny*, the *fantastic-marvellous* and the *simply marvellous*. However, the overwhelming majority of fantastic elements in the Edda are actually mythological, and apparently belong in category 4, namely *simply marvellous*. The uncanny, on the other hand, seems to play a rather minor role in Old Norse mythological poetry – yet it is this particular aspect of Eddic Poetry that the present paper will deal with.

Firstly, I will look closely at the actual fantastic elements in mythological poetry, grouping the poems according to their fantastic contents and elements. It becomes apparent that The Fantastic is an integral part of some Eddic poems, while in others fantastic elements seem to be of a secondary, more decorative nature, and others again show very few signs of The Fantastic. Several Eddic poems, however, defy any such classification. *Völuspá* belongs to this group, which shows strong elements of the fantastic, but used in ways that primarily are difficult to assess.

Secondly, the role of The Fantastic in Medieval art and literature in general will be used as a backdrop to the investigation of its use in Eddic poetry. Throughout southern and western Europe late Romanesque art is a powerful reminder of the fascination with the tendency towards The Fantastic, as well as in the concept of The Individual which can be found towards the later eleventh and early twelfth century. The reasons for these tendencies are still debated by historians as well as art historians, but may reflect the move to a more complex world view, in which the supernatural (and not just in the form of the personal divine, as in official Christian concepts) played an increasingly important role in people's lives. This is reflected by an increased belief in the demonic and in magic. The other pillar upon which this changed world view in mainland Europe rests is the rediscovery of ancient mythology, which, however, was never totally lost through the intervening centuries and survived quite well in the Insular tradition. From the early twelfth century onwards, however, these classical traditions became so dominant and wide-spread that it has become standard usage since 1927 (when used by Charles Homer Haskins in his *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*) to talk of this rediscovery and of its consequences as of the Renaissance of the twelfth century.

How the rise of The Fantastic in the course of this Renaissance reflects upon Eddic poetry at least to some extent will be discussed in the third part of my paper, which will concentrate not on the formal aspects of this poetry or its literary traditions, but rather on motifs and elements which may be regarded as fantastic and thus form the topic of this conference.