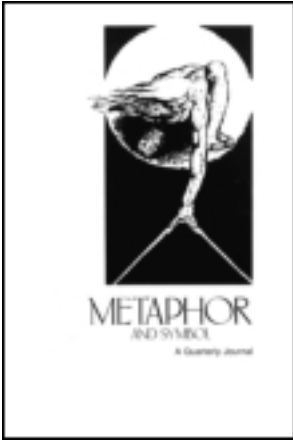


This article was downloaded by: [Bergsveinn Birgisson]

On: 23 September 2012, At: 06:33

Publisher: Psychology Press

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Metaphor and Symbol

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hmet20>

Skaldic Blends Out of Joint: Blending Theory and Aesthetic Conventions

Bergsveinn Birgisson

To cite this article: Bergsveinn Birgisson (2012): Skaldic Blends Out of Joint: Blending Theory and Aesthetic Conventions, *Metaphor and Symbol*, 27:4, 283-298

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2012.716295>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Skaldic Blends Out of Joint: Blending Theory and Aesthetic Conventions

Bergsveinn Birgisson

This article is concerned with the theory of metaphor and its relation to aesthetics. The case-study is concerned with theory of metaphorical constraint, but is argued to have wider implications. It begins with a survey of the Greco-Roman tradition, which tends to confine metaphor to likeness. It is argued that also the dissimilar parts can affect the aesthetic value of metaphors in certain contexts of communication. Examples are drawn from skaldic poetry since this genre presupposes a metaphorical thinking which differs from that found in classical aesthetics. The skaldic metaphors in question appear to demand a violation of the principles of metaphorical constraint put forth in *conceptual integration theory* (blending). It is proposed that the reason for this is that blending is based on aesthetics of classical learning, while skaldic metaphors adhere to different aesthetic principles. On these grounds blending theory's claims of universality are questioned.

A general theoretical issue is the question of which elements are projected and which are left behind in the cognitive processing of metaphor. One cannot randomly map anything onto anything else. The mind must follow some rule in making sense of metaphors. This issue has led to scholars establishing what we call *principles of metaphorical constraint*. In this article I wish to address the principles that blending theory has to offer in this respect, while keeping in mind the notion that full development of this part of the theory has been described as a “major task[s] for the future” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 345).

There can be no doubt that Western traditions of thought are rooted in Greco-Roman culture, and that in this context the writings of Aristotle are essential to our understanding of the artistic and expressive use of language. One example is the central term of *mimesis* which is a key element used to describe the relation between art and the world. Although beyond the scope of this article, one might summarize by saying that in European tradition the *mimesis* of Aristotle has been interpreted too literally because of its association with “imitation” or “representation.” This has caused suppression of the psychological aspect of *mimesis* intended by the Greek philosophers (Oatley, 2003, p. 161 ff.; Warnke, 1993, pp. 79–80).

In much the same way some essential features of metaphor theory can be traced to Aristotle. One of those is the tendency to view *likeness* or *simile* as the key concept of metaphor. This is demonstrated quite clearly in Aristotle's *Poetics*: “For to make metaphors well is to observe what is like [something else]” (Janko, 1987, p. 32). Similarly, likeness of the metaphorical components appears as the most crucial aspect in the third book of *Rhetorica* which states that “metaphor

most of all has clarity” (Janko, 1987, p. 136).¹ These statements were surely embraced by the aesthetics of harmony and *claritas* ubiquitous in the European Middle-Ages.

This article does not aim to challenge likeness as the root of metaphor, but rather to point out that the type and the grade of likeness favored in metaphor can differ from culture to culture. I want to draw attention to another more poetical aspect of metaphor of which Aristotle was surely aware, although this aspect seems to have been suppressed in the later readings of his works. Aristotle writes in book III of *Rhetorica* that a good metaphor also has “unfamiliarity” and later in the same book he states: “It is also good to use metaphorical words; but the metaphor must not be far-fetched, or they will be difficult to grasp, *nor obvious, or they will have no effect*” (Roberts 1946, p. 1410b, emphasis added). Roger Caillois, a leading ideologist of Surrealism, took it still further: “Actually, the only thing that endows an image with efficacy is a striking similarity that *everything around it denies*” (Frank & Naish, 2003, p. 318, emphasis added).

This conveys a kind of seesaw-relation between likeness and that which is not alike in metaphor; the things that differ or create discrepancies in metaphor do, in other words, *also* play a role if the outcome is to be satisfactory. The balance must then depend upon what is favored in the aesthetical context: harmony or catachreses? Comparing an orange to an orange would seemingly result in a perfect metaphor if only likeness was involved but, as we know, it is not. Metaphor is then not confined to some degree of likeness, but is also dependent on discrepancies. This brings us to our subject, namely the question of what is projected in the cognitive processing of metaphors and what is subject to constraint. The feeling that has sparked this article is the tendency, as I see it, in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and *blending* to regard the discrepancies and clashes between elements of metaphor as the very subject of suppression, compression or syncopation in the processing—in order to “avoid a disintegrated blend” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 329). This is problematic if it turns out that these discrepancies can be shown to play an important role, especially in certain poetical contexts. If this feeling is shown to have validity, it necessarily raises the question of the universal value of these constraints, and whether they could apply differently in the expressive rather than explanatory use of language.

I will address this problem with reference to literary examples from Old Norse skaldic poetry. The novel metaphors in question are called *kennings*, a poetical circumlocutions such as a ship being described as the “*elephant of the waves*.” It has been noted that kennings seem to differ from other linguistic metaphors “in the complexity of composition that they show” (Lakoff & Turner, 1989, p. 106). As I have argued elsewhere (Birgisson, 2007, 2008, 2010), it is my firm opinion that the pre-Christian examples within this genre are imbued with an aesthetic concept indigenous to the North and independent of the Greco-Roman aesthetic tradition, thus rendering the oldest corpus of skaldic poetry a theoretical and heuristic value in terms of metaphor theory.

SKALDIC POETRY

Skaldic poetry originates in the oral society of ninth century Scandinavia, with the last major contributions made to the skaldic corpus in fourteenth century.² The oldest poems are attributed

¹For examples of similar statements on metaphor from Aristotle, see Roberts (1946, pp. 1405a–1405b).

²The oldest Norse examples stem for the ninth century, but one finds some of the same kennings in both Old Irish and Old English poetry from the seventh and eighth centuries AD (Krause, 1930, pp. 2–10).

to historically known skalds (poets) and they represent the only attributable primary sources preserved from the literature of pre-Christian Scandinavia, evidence that the idea of the *Author* has thrived in some oral societies.

The pagan skalds finally acquired their spokesmen in modern times. Scholars like Lie (1952/1982, 1957), inspired by attacks on the infallibility of classical aesthetics, criticized the use of these aesthetics for the judgment of skaldic poetry by simply pointing out that the oldest skalds in Scandinavia could not have known classical aesthetics. Up until that time the art of the skalds had been condemned as “immature attempts” to make beautiful metaphors (Jónsson, 1920, p. 386 ff.), and the kenning was dismissed as “barbarische Stilfigur” (Krause, 1930, p. 10).

Although skaldic poetry originated in a heathen society it was not written down until centuries after the time of its composition. Nevertheless most scholars agree that this poetical genre must have been transmitted orally without major emendations (Kuhn, 1983, p. 253). It has been argued that the bizarre imagery found in the oldest poems (ninth and tenth centuries), later termed as monstrous (*nykrat*), must have had profound mnemonic powers that helped to render the stanzas stable during their oral transmission (Birgisson, 2010, pp. 199–214).

Conceptual Metaphors and Kenning-Models

According to both CMT and *blending*, metaphorical expressions are not isolated figures but linguistic realizations of conceptual metaphors. The same can be said about the system of kennings. The kennings (*kenning-variants*) are linguistic extensions of conventional conceptual metaphors I call *kenning-models*. Example of kenning-variants for ship could be “*moose of the fjord*” (*fjarðar elgr*) or “*horse of the sea*” (*marar blakkr*), both based on the traditional kenning-model “*SHIP IS AN ANIMAL OF THE SEA*.” The kenning-models operate like the hidden rules of skaldic poetry and thus the system of kennings follows a general pattern of twofold constraint (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 311): The reader or the listener knows what kind of metaphors to expect, but would certainly be perplexed if the skald would not improvise on the conceptual metaphor in question.

There are of course many conceptual metaphors activated in skaldic poetry where kennings are not involved. Example of this could be the “perhaps near-universal” conceptual metaphor “*A PERSON IN AN INTENSE EMOTIONAL STATE IS A PRESSURIZED CONTAINER*” (Kövecses, 2005, p. 43), activated in the poems with verbs like “*svella*” “swell”; the breast or the mind is said to become swollen with feelings. Interestingly, the kenning-model for breast corresponds almost perfectly to the conceptual metaphor “*BREAST (BODY) IS A CONTAINER FOR THOUGHT/FEELINGS*.” The oldest corpus includes kenning-variants like “*the mind’s cavern*” (*hugar fylgsni*) or “*laughter’s cover*” (*hlátra hamr*), while as the Christian skalds make new extensions such as “*prayer’s smíthy*” (*bænar smiðja*) and so forth (Meissner, 1921, p. 136 ff). These examples demonstrate how the kennings reflect their socio-cultural surroundings in addition to the thoughts and feelings of the skalds, which has made scholars refer to them as “crystallised thinking” (Vigfússon & Powell, 1883, p. 447). On the basis of these arguments we can conclude for the moment that the kenning-model and the kenning-variant seem to behave in the same manner as conceptual and linguistic/novel metaphor.

The Necessity Hypothesis

However, a point of reservation should be made. Conceptual metaphors are namely understood as *explanatory* in function. They are a means of conceptualizing abstract, theoretical or metaphysical domains that are otherwise not easily accessible to the human mind; in general they make the abstract concrete. Conceptual metaphors “supply a bodily, biophysical grounding of cognition, providing coherence and unity of our experiences” as stated by Jäkel (2002, p. 22).

The kenning-models are on the other hand hardly aimed at making the abstract or the metaphysical concrete. In his systematic study of kennings Rudolf Meissner (1921) lists the targets or referents of all kennings which come to a total of 106. Approximately 96 of these targets are concrete things like man, ship, sword, gold, shield etc. which renders both source and target of kenning-metaphors high in imagery. The general aim of the kenning-system could thus be said to make the *concrete unusual* rather than the abstract concrete. As will be demonstrated below, rather than providing “coherence and unity in experience,” the novel extensions of kenning-variants could in contrast be seen as focused on creating bizarre experience that is “qualitatively new.” With an unheard kenning-variant the skald was able to draw attention not only to his poem but also to himself in the sense that he could demonstrate his skill in making a catachresis of the conventional images – a fresh visual blend. In order to do so, both parts of metaphor must be high in imagery which explains the *concreteness* of the kenning-models. This metaphorical system appears to be meant to counteract the conventional processing or “automatization” of language (Mukařovský, 1964, p. 19).

When one thus sheds light on differences between kenning-models and conceptual metaphors, one synchronously moves towards the problems of applying a general theory of metaphor to the idiosyncrasy of poetical expression. The question has to be asked whether it is necessary to distinguish between the nature of kenning-models (which are apparently identical to conceptual metaphors) and their context of communication (apparently differing from that of modern language), before questioning the universal validity of the theory.

This is by no means a new problem in theory of language and literature. One of the leading Russian formalists criticized his forerunner, Herbert Spencer, for failing to distinguish between the “laws of practical language and the laws of poetical language” (Shklovsky, 1965, pp. 10, 24). Whereas practical language is concerned with efficiency and the “automatism of objects,” poetic language is focused on making the obvious unfamiliar as suggested by Shklovsky’s term “defamiliarization.” In this context imagery is not meant as a means of picturing certain objects but “to transfer the usual perception of an object into a sphere of a new perception” (p. 21).

On these grounds a practical distinction has been made between “explanatory” and “expressive” metaphors. Gentner (1982, p. 114) established the terms “clarity” and “richness” as two major dimensions in this process. Clarity is a perceived precision in the mapping and this is violated if the mapping involves complexity that transcends one-to-one correspondences. Richness, on the other hand, refers to the “predicate density,” (i.e., the quantity of predicates which are mapped). Explanatory metaphors tend to be very clear and not rich while expressive metaphors tend to be very rich but not very clear.

Most readers would agree that an ad for IKEA and a surrealistic poem must employ different aesthetics of metaphor, namely, economics of clarity against the “confusion of senses”—the question is: do they demand a different theory?³

³Unfortunately, Turner (2006) does not address this distinction in his article “The Art of Compression.”

Stockwell (1999) pointed out that some hypotheses about metaphorical constraint offered in the early days of CMT were grounded in explanatory or scientific metaphors even though the hypothesis was meant to cover novel or poetic metaphors as well. One of these hypotheses of general constraints from the early days of research in this field is the Hypothesis (later Principle) of Invariance (Lakoff, 1990; Lakoff & Turner, 1989; Turner, 1990).

Now, it is worth noting that I do not wish to criticize the Principle of Invariance since that would only be flogging a dead horse. It is worthwhile, however, clarifying the problems this obsolete principle was meant to solve, namely what is mapped and what is left behind or constrained in projection of metaphors. Thereafter we turn to the principles of constraint offered in blending. As I understand it, the claims of blending theory, including the constitutive and governing principles (concerned with the aforementioned issue), are meant to be universally significant (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 296).

INVARIANCE HYPOTHESIS REVISITED

Mark Turner expresses the core of this constraint-principle in the following manner: “In metaphoric mapping, for those components of the source and target domains determined to be involved in the mapping, preserve the image-schematic structure of the target, and import as much image-schematic structure from the source as is consistent with that preservation” (1990, p. 254). In short, one maps the *consistent elements*, and leaves the others unmapped—the focus is on the *likeness* and the rest is left behind.

It is hardly a coincidence that Peter Stockwell, a literary stylistics expert, decided to challenge the Invariance Hypothesis by using examples from Surrealism. He points out the old problem that the conception of isomorphism in surrealist verbal art differs greatly from the conception posited in cognitive linguistics (Stockwell, 1999, p. 134). The surrealist endeavor was not to provide “coherence and unity of our experience” but, on the contrary, to challenge the “reign of logic” and go beyond everyday meaning (Breton, 1969, p. 9). The ideal of the surreal way of thinking was to be found in dreams, in the language of children, among lunatics, and in “primitive” societies—in other words, among people who were unpolluted by the Greco-Roman aesthetics described as “stifling and revolting” in nature as late as 1951 (Stiles & Selz, 1996, pp. 195–196). Metaphor was understood as a device of a transcendental nature that could provide people living under an oppressive rationalistic and capitalistic mentality with new experiences; serving the definition of Surrealism as a “disruptive juxtaposition of two more or less disparate realities,” as presented by the leading André Breton (Foster, Krauss, Bois, & Buchloh, 2004, p. 16).

Stockwell points out the inconsistency between the two traditions, cognitive linguistics and surrealism, by both referring to the major distinction between “explanatory” and “expressive” metaphors, and by citing a poem by André Breton (as Lakoff did in his major paper on the Invariance Hypothesis in 1990), in which the following metaphor appears:

My wife . . . with the waist of an hourglass

While Lakoff points out that the words do not tell us which part of the hourglass we should map onto the waist he proposes that we map by virtue of the common shape (of waist and the center of an hourglass) while other parts of the image-schematic structure are left behind (1990, p. 66).

But Stockwell asks how we are to decide to stop at this point. Is it not possible to map the coldness of the glass unto the speaker's wife so that the metaphor could describe her as "emotionally cold and glassily unfeeling"? (1999, p. 137). And what about the flowing sand inside and the notion of time running out? Stockwell points out that the interpretation, the very mapping procedure of metaphors, is affected both by the individual reader as well as the *fictional context of the metaphor*. Having said this, he proposes that the key idea in mapping is *salience* (to counteract the idea that "anything goes"). In the hourglass metaphor *shape* is the most *salient* feature and therefore this is the feature of the mapping that is most commonly shared (p. 137).

First, the essential question remains, and is of great relevance to our topic: How do we draw the line between active parts that are mapped and others that are not—namely, how can we decide where to stop? Second, this raises the question about the parts said to be left behind. Can we simply reason that the coldness of the glass, even though not a part of the mapping as Lakoff concluded, is not processed at all and therefore has no function in the poetical context? Was not this coldness and even the content of the hourglass (in contrast to the human body), the very surroundings that "deny the striking similarity," and thus endow the metaphor with poetical effect? (Cailliois/Aristotle).

I presume the answer to these questions, as well as the constraints mentioned, are dependent upon the very context of communication. Is our purpose only to "grasp effectively" the metaphor with the help of logical reasoning (as the Greeks have taught us)—and leave it at that? Or was the metaphor intended to satisfy the joy of creating logical clash and tension, as we know Breton himself characterized the Surrealist game "*l'un dans l'autre*" (based on free association)?

Since I am concerned with aesthetics as a major factor in the context of communication, I would like to mention another example. The so-called one-to-one constraint on metaphorical mappings stems from the early days of CMT. About this Turner (1990) writes:

It appears that all [conceptual] metaphors are constrained against mapping two distinct components in the source onto one component in the target. To map two distinct components in the source onto one component in the target would be to destroy the identity of that one component in the target. (p. 248)

By analyzing the last four lines of Breton's poem *Freedom of Love*, Stockwell shows that as many as four distinct sources (rubbed amber and glass, a stabbed host, a doll and an unbelievable stone) are mapped onto one target (the wife's tongue; Stockwell, 1999, p. 134). While Turner mentions that such expressive metaphors "disturb us badly" (1990, p. 249), Stockwell points out that these metaphors do not simply aim to produce a "clear picture of the wife's tongue" but rather that the aesthetic aim is the "exponential multiplication of meaning" (1999, p. 135). Interestingly enough, this dialogue between the two scholars could be seen as an almost exact duplication of an indirect dialogue between the Old Norse scholars of the thirteenth century and the skalds of the pagan *nykrat*-aesthetics. Multiplication of sources mapped on one target was, in fact, one of the key features of the old poetry which contemporary poets, following classical aesthetics, were taught to avoid. *Snorra Edda* tells the following:

Extended metaphor (*nýgjørving*) is held to be well composed if the idea that is taken up is maintained throughout the stanza. But if a sword is called a worm, and then a fish or a wand or varied in some other way, this is called a monstrosity (*nykrat*), and it is considered a defect. (Faulkes, 1992, p. 170)

What this basically says is that if you want to extend the source of metaphor you should map different elements of *one* source onto the target rather than use many different sources. The one-to-one constraint thus turns out to be a variant of the “fictional context of metaphor,” and as Old Norse poetics show, a *question of different aesthetics*.⁴ Now, the question emerges if the constraints offered in blending could also be grounded on aesthetical norms and conventions? But first a few words on the aesthetics in question.

THE “SURREAL” AESTHETICS OF SKALDIC POETRY

Roger Caillois pointed out as early as 1954 the intimate aesthetic affinity between skaldic poetry and surrealism. The main reason for this resemblance must be grounded in the fact that surrealists were in opposition to classical aesthetics whereas the pagan poets were not cognizant of them. According to Caillois the kenning was capable of enhancing the good poetical image since it combined traditional knowledge with novel creation: it surprised accurately (fr. *justement*). The good image was a reconciliation of familiarity and bizarreness, such as the kenning combines in the familiar model (“*SHIP IS ANIMAL OF SEA*”) and the bizarre image of the variant (“*elephant on waves*”; Frank, 2003, pp. 315–319). Caillois did not agree with Breton that an image was good so long as it included a great distance between the objects involved, and states: “The distance must be great and the obviousness beyond dispute: the shock stems from this” (Frank & Naish, 2003, p. 318). The visual blends of kennings are still closer to the good image if one chooses to follow the definition of Gaston Bachelard that the good image is “fluctuating and partly fuzzy,” whereas the stable and more rational image “cuts the wings of fantasy” (Gaudin, 1987, p. xlviii, from *L’Air et les Songes*).

It seems that the kenning-metaphors are grounded in an aesthetical concept I have chosen to term as *contrast-tension*.⁵ Basically, as will be exemplified below, likeness in the context of kennings is only valued if it is surrounded by tensions or clashes of elements that represent contrastive categories or semantic frames. The outcome of visual kenning-blends was apparently intended to transcend nature or natural order. The skaldic challenge was neither an imitation nor representation of nature (read: not natural mimesis) but rather the wish to create something unseen and bizarre. This is consistent with a world-view in which the Greco-Roman idealization of nature is absent.⁶ The kennings invite us to see a ship sailing on a mountain slope, a seaweed-covered mountain, a moose in the fjord, fish swimming in the valley, and whales grazing at the field (i.e., clash of contrastive elements of nature). On the other hand the visual blends of kennings engender surrealistic images as is indicated by the very term *nykrat* (monstrous) which is given to earlier imagery by the classically learned poetics in the North. The adjective is derived from the mythological beast *nykr* which is described as catachreses of man and beast—which quite neatly describes the devil himself in western tradition!

⁴This one-to-one correspondence can be traced in classical aesthetics to writers such as Quintilian in the first century AD, see Lie, 1952/1982, p. 27.

⁵The Old Norse myth of creation confirms that the world was created by the clash of fire and ice, and could demonstrate the “logical” aspect of contrast-tension in a society bound to praise the creative forces of nature, see Faulkes, 1992, p. 10.

⁶For examples of such idealization in classical writing, see Leitch, 2001, p. 147; Yates, 2001, p. 25; Gombrich, 1978, p. 83.

Consequently, this aesthetical context must undermine the validity of the analogy between conceptual integration and evolutionary biology put forward by Fauconnier and Turner. To counteract the idea that “anything goes” they suggest conceptual integration should be understood in terms of nature where “almost every mutation is lethal” (2002, p. 309). What then if the goal of conceptual integration is mutation and violation of the law and order of nature? Perhaps this could point to human fantasy, in contrast to biology, being as much a matter of aesthetics as pragmatics. The problem with the analogy is that all conceptual integration is made a subject to the same type of mimesis-aesthetics as mentioned above; nature is the perfect example for conceptual integration just as it is for the artistic endeavor in classical learning. The skalds of old would hardly agree here.

An example of surreal skaldic images could be the herring-kenning “*fishtail-feathered tern of nets*” (*sporðffjoðruð spáþerna nóta*), a kind of herring-tern we could call it, where tension is created between representatives of “*AIR*” (the tern) and “*SEA*” (the herring)⁷ (see Figure 1).

The same system of thought can be detected in surrealist paintings: contrastive elements of the “*SOLID*” and the “*FLUID*” are blended in Dali’s leaking clock. In Meret Oppenheim’s famous piece “*the furry cup*” a similar contrast-tension is obvious: a paraphrase that corresponds completely to the so-called adverbial-kennings as the “*black beer*” (“*BLOOD*”). Oppenheim’s “*furry cup*” also functions very much like a kenning. It is a (concrete) visualization of the paraphrase itself, just as the kenning invites us to visualize the surreal image of the kenning-variant, before finding the referent with the help of conceptual metaphors. The artist demonstrates the tension in the paraphrase between the realms of tea-drinking and the sexual act; the porcelain and the hairy fur create a material contrast-tension obviously favored in this context.⁸

The point I wish to make is that this kind of aesthetic expression strikes one as the very antithesis of classical rhetorical style, as presented for example by the term “*decorum*” in Horace’s *Ars*

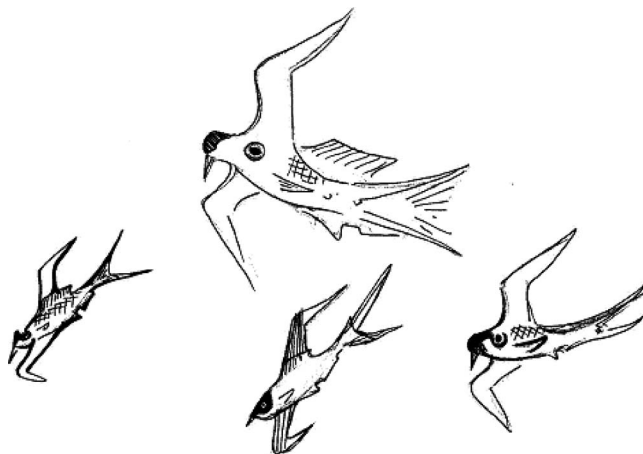


FIGURE 1 The herring-tern. Drawing by Kjartan Hallur Grétarsson.

⁷The kenning is from tenth century Eyvindur skáldaspillir; see Jónsson, 1912 (IB), p. 65.

⁸For pictures of the mentioned works, see Foster et al., 2004, p. 16 (Oppenheim), and 2004, p. 192 (Dali).

Poetica; a pillar of western aesthetics as well as being fundamental to the traditional *claritas*-reading of Aristotle as mentioned in the introduction. Briefly defined, *decorum* is the discernment and use of appropriateness, propriety, proportion, and unity in the arts. Horace in *Ars Poetica* writes about artists who lack the skill to avoid faults: “Similarly, the writer who wants to give fantastic variety to his single theme paints a dolphin in his woods and a wild boar in his sea” (Leitch, 2001, p. 124). Now, this artistic “failure” described by Horace, both alluding to poetry and painting, happens to be the poetical rule in the North prior to the arrival of Christian learning. Kenning-metaphors trigger contrastive nature-elements like “*LAND*” versus “*SEA*,” and consequently the ship is, among other things, called “*boar of the sea*” (*unnsvín*) (Meissner, 1921, pp. 219–220).

ANALYSES

Taming the Gallows-Horse

Now, back to principles of metaphorical constraint, i.e. what is projected and what is left behind in making sense of metaphors. I would like to make my point by applying the analytical apparatus of blending first to a metaphor of a grotesque kind which appears in the poem *Ynglingatal* of the skald Þjóðólfr ór Hvini (ca. 900 AD). This particular conceptual integration seems to correspond to what theorists define as a “double-scope network,” often exemplified with the idiomatic metaphor “*You are digging your own grave*.” Such networks usually contain as the regular ones two inputs (before: source and target), generic space (before: grounds) and a blending space. What is special about them is that the inputs are intended to create a clashing organizing frames where the clashes offer “challenges to the imagination and can result in highly creative blends” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 131; Turner, 2006, p. 107).

In the following stanza the Norse skald alludes to a known tale about a distant king – and gives his judgment on it; we might call it a kind of parable. The king, Agni, raided in the North and captured there a woman of noble birth. Although he had killed her family Agni desired her and wanted to marry her against her wish. But Agni believes he can “tame” her will. Her revenge is to hang the king while he is drunk (typical death of bad kings!). The stanza goes:

I consider it a wonder
if the companions of Agni
thought that Skjalf—the sister of Logi
behaved naturally,
when she raised in the air
the good king
with her golden ring of neck—
he that was to tame
the cool horse of Signe’s man.⁹

The man of Signe was Hagbard and the “*HORSE OF HAGBARD*” is a conventional kenning-model for gallows. This alludes to a famous Viking Age romance; Hagbard and Signe were lovers

⁹Authors’ translation is based on the text in Jónsson, 1912 (IA), p. 9 (stanza 10).

but their feuding families did not allow their love to flourish. So strong was their love that when Hagbard was hanged in the gallows by Signe's father, she hanged herself in order to accompany him to the realm of death.

Now, one input is therefore a man hanged on the gallows while the other organizing frame (input 2) is the taming of a horse. We must envisage a rider on an untamed horse in order to grasp the simile. The generic space or grounds include structures such as transport by a mediator (horse/gallows) from life to death and possibly some common shape of gallows and horse. The most obvious generic features are the frequent and uncontrolled movements which characterize a victim of asphyxia in death-cramps and, as seen in rodeos, a rider on an untamed horse. I suggest this is a movement-based metaphor which were much favored by the skalds of old and are thought to have mnemonic effect. Biographical aspects can also be detected in this metaphorical variation (Kövecses, 2005, p. 231 ff.). In order to conjure up such a highly original metaphor the skald must have seen people hanged (as his king, Harald Fairhair, certainly did!) and horses tamed; in fact the only biographical glimpse we have of Þjóðólfr ór Hvini. When the king "tames" the gallows-horse this implies a similar event-structure for the tamer and the hanged man with some time compression (taming takes longer than hanging); but both processes end with the rider sitting calmly on the horse just as the dead body hangs calmly in the noose > the gallows-horse has been tamed (see Figure 2).

The point I wish to make concerns the context of communication in relation to constraints (i.e., what structures are projected to the blend and what is left behind, compressed or a matter of synecopation). If the contrast-tension aesthetics of the old skalds are to be taken into account, I would argue that there can be no fusion of counterparts in the blend. The grotesque tension of the metaphor would disappear if, by making compression or synecopation of the inputs clashing, we were to fuse the processes into a single one. The same is true if we say that a new emergent structure arises in the blend that is in neither of the inputs (Turner, 2006, p. 107). The skald demands that we elaborate the rodeo-rider and the hanged man in death-cramps synchronously and separately in the blend or else the beauty of tension will be lost—I therefore suggest a kind of cross-mapping in the blend.

It appears that we already here are violating some of the constitutive and governing principles offered in blending. Fauconnier and Turner present conceptual integration as a "compression tool par excellence" (2002, p. 312), where the corollary of the Integration Principle in cases of clashes

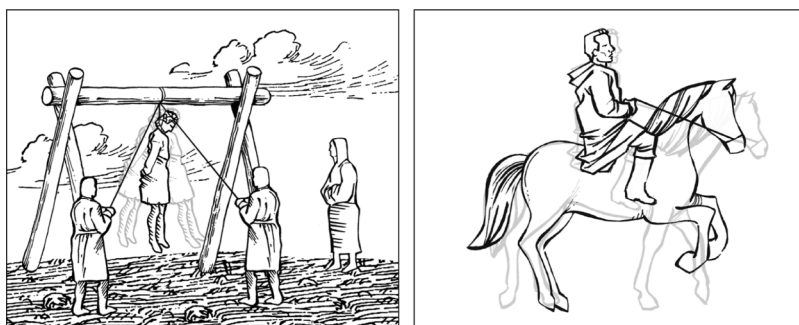


FIGURE 2 The movement-based mapping in the metaphor for hanging as "taming of the gallows-horse." Drawing by Mauricio Paves.

or opposed topologies of inputs is that “selections and adjustments must be made to avoid a disintegrated blend” (p. 329). The principles of constraint are thus concerned with “compressing what is diffuse” and preserving the “perspicuity of the blend” (p. 312). What is of vital importance here is the notion that the aesthetic nerve of the metaphor, this gallows-humor *par excellence*, seems to be lost if one makes it a subject of the above-mentioned principles.

In the example of “*Digging your own grave*” there are clashes of topologies of the inputs on “causality, intentionality, participant roles, temporal sequence, identity and internal event structure” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 132). The same clashing can be detected in “*Taming the gallows-horse*” since this taming ends with the death of the tamer not his victory (causality), the tamer loses control instead of acquiring it (intentionality), the *agent* (tamer) becomes the *patient* (clash in participant roles), taming takes much longer than hanging (clash in temporal sequence) and in the internal event-structure there are clashes, although we also find the grounds there (i.e., in the movement of the rider and the hanged man). In the example of “*Digging your own grave*” the problem of topological opposition is solved by a new structure that emerges in the blend and which is in neither of the inputs—thus preserving perspicuity in the blend (p. 133). This would hardly be a solution for the “*Taming the gallows-horse*” since a single structure of a rider on gallows would miss the message of the emergent content.

The heart of the problem is how a theory of “clash-compression” could apply to examples where the message or the aesthetic feeling is conveyed through clashes and catachreses? There are important semantics in this tension in the blend between the hanged man and the horse-tamer. Firstly, the inputs represent a clear contrast; one depicts an important process in the Viking Age of gaining control over nature (taming wild beasts), the other represents a complete loss of control. The socio-cultural context tells us that kings invariably used hanging as method of gaining control over society—here the king himself is hanged. Further we know that hanging was reserved for the lowest and basest of men, whereas here his “highness” is hanged. We can also detect a degree of harmony in the skald’s thought: the “taming” of the woman results in his “taming” of the gallows-horse (the punishment correlates with the crime as in Dante’s *Inferno*). This highlights again that “*MAN*” and “*ANIMAL*” contrast in this respect—man cannot be tamed as an animal which is an important existential notion in the slavery culture of the Viking Age, thus demonstrating the fundamental oppositions of “*NATURE*” and “*CULTURE*.”

This clashing blend seems to gain more contrast-tension if we examine other parts of the network. For example, the skald uses the kenning-variant “*the cool horse of Signe’s man*” for “*GALLOWS*”. As mentioned, this alludes to a romance that contrasts in a dramatic manner the doomed relationship between Agni and Skjalf. The semantic frames of “*FAITHFULNESS*” and “*CONSPIRACY*” are paralleled; while Signe follows her lover in death Skjalf murders her man in the middle of the night. Signe and Skjalf represent “*WILLING*” versus “*UNWILLING*,” and these stories convey an existential message when they are paralleled in such a manner.

I do not doubt that blending theory can offer some solutions in this case. There are of course examples of no fusion of counterparts in blends such as in the often cited riddle of the Buddhist Monk. In this riddle the matter is to find out where a certain monk is halfway up a mountain. The solution demands that we envisage the one monk as two that we keep separated in the blend; i.e. the one that is ascending and the other descending: They must meet one another halfway. What blending seems to offer in this case is a solution that everything does not necessarily happen in the blend: “The understanding . . . is crucially a matter of activating and connecting compressions and decompressions simultaneously in the entire network” (Fauconnier & Turner,

2002, p. 119). But still, this seems to pose a new theoretical problem. As I understand *blending*, the meaning-construction of conceptual integration is something that emerges in the blend and the constitutive and governing principles are there to facilitate this meaning-construction. Can one claim that these principles do not always apply and that the meaning-construction is in some cases in the entire network and sometimes in the blend? And does one then require such principles of constraint if the “magic” does not happen in the blend, but in the entire network?

The Saddle of the Whetstone

Another example is a kenning-metaphor from the renowned Viking-skald Egill Skalla-Grímsson (900–983 AD), which is found in his poem to Eirik Bloodaxe: *Höfuðlausn*. The target of the metaphor is “SWORD” and the source is the kenning “*heinsqðull*” or “*sqðull heinar*” (i.e., the “*saddle of the whetstone*”; Jónsson, 1912, p. 37) (AI). Apparently, this is also a unique metaphor in Egill’s times, although a conceptual rule evolves among later skalds that “SWORD IS A PLACE OF THE WHETSTONE.” At first glance the metaphor makes no sense: a sword is likened to a saddle which is an obvious violation of the Principle of Invariance that “each metaphorical mapping preserves image-schema structure” (Lakoff, 1993, p. 231). Sword should be characterized as a *part* while the saddle is a kind of a *container* (see Figure 3).

As we can see, no likeness (grounds) can be detected in the metaphor itself, neither formal nor functional. If we put this into the blending model it seems as though the generic space is something that does not exist beforehand but rather emerges if and when we solve this metaphorical riddle. What we rather sense is the material contrasts of “SOFT” and “HARD,” bringing forth the brutish association of sitting on a sword! But let us place this example into the blending model. Input 1 has the sword and the organizing frame a saddle (input 2), while the connector (whetstone) is either a third input or a cross-mapped object of the mentioned inputs. Before we project those elements to the blend, situations have to emerge out of the objects. The skald has given us a clue which helps when we start our cross-space mapping. Knowing the skalds love for movement in metaphors we visualize the movement of the whetstone on the sword being sharpened. This brings forth the associative elements of the saddle: a rider and a horse, and with some cross-mappings we detect the similarity of the whetstone’s movement which correlates to the circular movement of a rider when the horse runs in a particular way (called *tölt* in modern Icelandic; see Figure 4). Now we grasp how the sword can be a “*saddle of the whetstone*”: the likeness is between the *associative* rider and the whetstone. It is important to notice that we cannot afford to compress, syncope



FIGURE 3 Sword and saddle = grounds? Drawing by Kjartan Hallur Grétarsson (color figure available online).

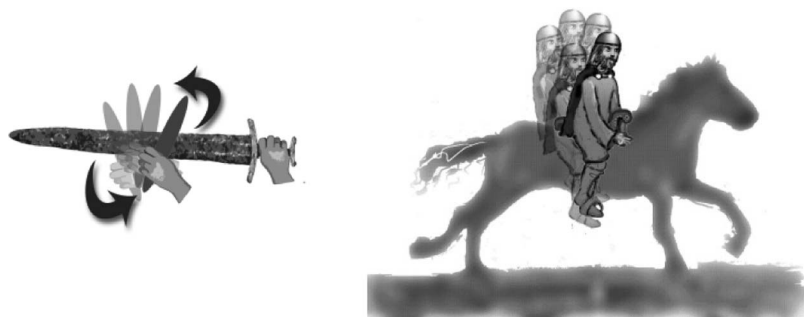


FIGURE 4 Movement of rider and whetstone as grounds for “*saddle of the whetstone*.” (Drawing by Kjartan Hallur Grétarsson).

or make a single structure out of the “clashing” elements in the blend. There is great precision in the metaphor that should fulfill the criteria of being a “striking similarity that everything around it denies.” I am not sure if rider and horse are to be thought of as extra inputs or associative elements which emerge in the blend—but the point I wish to make is that the content will not emerge, that no understanding of the metaphor is possible, unless we project the clashing topologies of sharpening a sword and a rider on a running horse to the blend, and keep them there simultaneously and separated.

One could maintain that there is a kind of violence in the metaphor (as we tend to associate with Vikings). Not only does the skald demand that we associate and visualize the images to understand his metaphor (and thus remember it!), he also demands that we make a disintegrated blend, thus leaving us little space to compress or syncopate the clashing between the opposed topologies from the inputs. If classical aesthetics favor the bright side of metaphor (read: clarity), this is worshipping the dark side. In heathen Scandinavia, poetry was designated as craftsmanship of the mind (*iþrótt*). It was to be pondered on long winter-nights and was appreciated for its complexity, giving no quarter to Spencer’s law of economy that metaphors should be “apprehended with the least possible mental effort” (Spencer, 1882, p. 2). The genius of this kind of metaphors can only be appreciated if we enjoy the tension and the incongruity between the elements in metaphors/blends *that are not alike*. In both examples above the input spaces do not share an organizing frame “which is projected to organize a blended space” as in mirror networks (Turner, 2006, pp. 101–102). Nor can I see that the blends have “emergent structure of its own” (p. 107). The analogy emerges when we visualize movements of elements/objects of the inputs—and this must happen in the blend according to the theory of conceptual integration. Compressing the two situations into one emergent structure, i.e. a man riding on gallows or a rider on a sword would inevitably conceal both the meaning and the intended emotional arousal of the blends.

What I am proposing then is that differing aesthetical traditions can be viewed as “different semiotic constructions” if we draw on the theory of bisociation by Koestler. The main point Koestler makes is that different semiotic settings have their own logic which “determines major features of the emergent emotional experience” (Deacon, 2006, p. 43).

Turner does mention such “aggressive blending” and “blends that are un-harmonious or disconcerting or in some way out of joint” (2006, p. 109). But the theoretical implications of such

blends for the validity of the Governing and Constitutive principles remain, as far as I can judge, to be answered.¹⁰

Presumably, similar problems arise when it comes to the elaboration of visual blends of kennings. The surreal image contrasts to some extent the process of creating perspicuity and clarity in the structure of the blend (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, pp. 312, 330), of making the structure of the blend “simpler, sharper” (p. 330), “more familiar” (p. 322) or compressing all but “certain highlights” (p. 325). The intention of creating perspicuity versus catachresis in visual blends is hard to reconcile, and such opposite aesthetic intentions must determine each in their own way what elements are projected to a blend (i.e., selective projection). To illustrate this with a hypothetical example: A man with a “*boiling-pot head*” would be a much more likely means of expression and imagery in skaldic poetry than saying and elaborating on “*smoke coming out of someone’s ears*” (see Figure 5). The first-mentioned image is a *greater* violation of nature’s law and order, it is more monstrous (*nykrat*) and therefore greater appreciated where beauty is first and foremost to be found in visual catachreses.¹¹

CONCLUSION

It is of theoretical interest if factors in the communicative context, such as aesthetics, turn out to influence the way conceptual integration works (i.e., are able to determine what is projected and what is left behind in the processing of metaphors). This is of no little importance since theorists maintain that “we unconsciously decide what to keep and what to throw away” (Fauconnier &

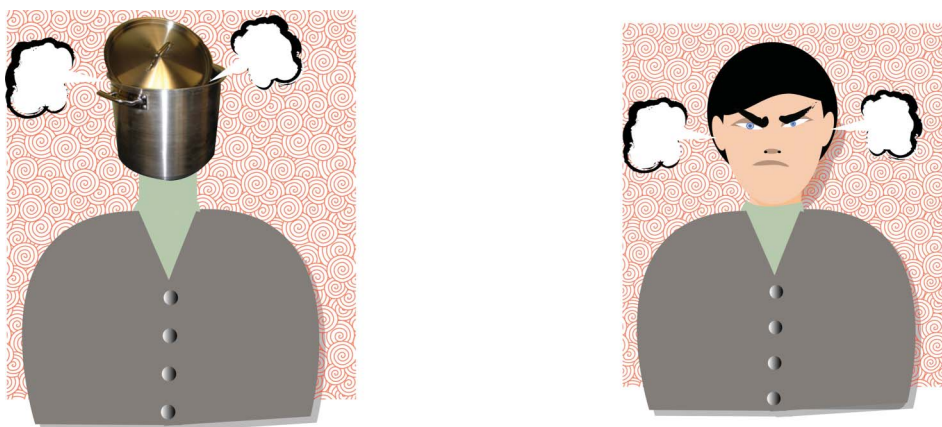


FIGURE 5 A skaldic blend versus a modern one (?). Drawing by Kjartan Hallur Grétarsson (color figure available online).

¹⁰As implied by Deacon (2006): “The logic of this link between classes of emotions and the specific dynamics of conceptual integration is a mostly unexplored domain” (p. 51).

¹¹Examples of such visual blends are many in skaldic poetry, such as human body with an anvil-head, see Jónsson 1912 (IB), p. 166; where the source of emergent content is «the man deserves to be beaten».

Turner, 2002, p. 72; Turner, 2006, p. 99). It turns out that the Constitutive and Governing principles of blending show strong affinity with Greco-Roman aesthetics of *claritas* and harmony, a nature-idealizing tradition which tends to compress that which does “not fit” in metaphors. This has been shown to be an unfortunate point of departure in other aesthetic contexts, such as skaldic poetry and Surrealism. The universal validity of those principles must therefore be questioned. At the same time, some reservations should be made. There is a distinction to be made between expressive and explanatory language and their relation to the theory of metaphor. On the other hand, CMT and blending cannot disregard these problems by simply claiming to be informational rather than aesthetic theories. As shown in the analyses, aesthetic context and meaning construction are intertwined. Perhaps other scholars can find solutions from blending theory referring to the problems addressed; but certainly the issues of differing aesthetics require further clarification in the theory. At the very least I hope to have demonstrated that unconscious mental processes as those involved in processing metaphors can be profoundly influenced by aesthetic context, and, moreover, that the Greco-Roman tradition is so firmly entrenched in Western thinking that one is tempted to assume that it is more universal than it really is.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Haki Antonsson, Tore Helstrup, and Ian Crockatt for their valuable aid in implementing this article.

REFERENCES

- Birgisson, B. (2007). *Inn í skaldens sinn—Kognitive, estetiske og historiske skatter i den norrøne skaldediktingen* [Into a skaldic mind—Cognitive, aesthetic and historic treasures in Norse skaldic poetry] (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Bergen.
- Birgisson, B. (2008). What have we lost by writing? In E. Mundal & J. Wellendorf (Eds.), *Oral art forms and their passage into writing* (pp. 163–184). Copenhagen, Denmark: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Birgisson, B. (2010). The Old Norse Kenning as a mnemonic figure. In L. Doležalová (Ed.), *The making of memory in the Middle Ages* (pp. 199–214). Leiden, The Netherlands and Boston, MA: Brill.
- Breton, A. (1969). *Manifestoes of surrealism* (R. Seaver & H. R. Lane, Trans.). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Deacon, T. (2006). The aesthetic faculty. In M. Turner (Ed.), *The artful mind: Cognitive science and the riddle of human creativity* (pp. 21–53). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2002). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. London, UK: Basic Books.
- Faulkes, A. (Ed.). (1992). *Edda—Snorri Sturluson*. London, UK: Everyman.
- Foster, H., Krauss, R., Bois, Y.-A., & Buchloh, B. H. D. (Eds.). (2004). *Art since 1900: Modernism, antimodernism, postmodernism*. London, UK: Thames & Hudson.
- Frank, C., & Naish, C. (Trans.). (2003). *The edge of surrealism. A Roger Caillios reader*. Durham, NC and London, UK: Duke University Press.
- Gaudin, C. (Ed.). (1987). *On poetic imagination and reverie: Selections from Gaston Bachelard*. Dallas, TX: Spring Publications.
- Gentner, D. (1982). Are scientific analogies metaphors? In D. S. Miall (Ed.), *Metaphor: Problems and perspectives* (pp. 106–32). Brighton, UK: Harvester Press.
- Gombrich, E. H. (1978). *Norm and form. Studies in the art of the renaissance*. London, UK: Phaidon.
- Jäkel, O. (2002). *Hypotheses revisited: The cognitive theory of metaphor applied to religious texts*. Retrieved from <http://www.metaphorik.de/02/jaekel.htm>

- Janko, R. (Trans.). (1987). *Aristotle—Poetics. With the Tractatus Coislinianus, reconstruction of Poetics II, and the fragments of the On Poets*. Cambridge, UK: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Jónsson, F. (Ed.). (1912). *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedikning* [The Norwegian-Icelandic skaldic poetry] (Vol. IA/IB). Copenhagen, Denmark: Rosenkilde og Bagger.
- Jónsson, F. (1920). *Den oldnorske og oldislandske Litteraturs historie* [The history of Old Norse and Old Icelandic literature] (2nd ed., Vol. 1). Copenhagen, Denmark: Gad.
- Kövecses, Z. (2005). *Metaphor in culture: Universality and variation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Krause, W. (1930). Die Kenning als typische Stilfigur der germanischen und keltischen Dichtersprache [The kenning as a typical style-figure in Germanic and Celtic language of poetry]. *Schriften der Königsberger Gelehrten Gesellschaft*, 7(1), 1–33.
- Kuhn, H. (1983). *Das Dróttkvætt*. Heidelberg, Germany: Carl Winter.
- Lakoff, G. (1990). The invariance hypothesis: Is abstract reason based on image-schemas? *Cognitive Linguistics*, 1(1), 39–74.
- Lakoff, G. (1993). The contemporary theory of metaphor. In A. Ortony (Ed.), *Metaphor and thought* (2nd ed., pp. 202–251). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Turner, M. (1989). *More than cool reason. A field guide to poetic metaphor*. Chicago, IL and London, UK: The University of Chicago Press.
- Leitch, V. B. (Ed.). (2001). *The Norton anthology of theory and criticism*. New York, NY and London, UK: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Lie, H. (1957). “Natur” og “unatur” i skaldekonsten [“Nature” and “unnature” in skaldic art]. Oslo, Norway: Aschehoug.
- Lie, H. (1982). Skaldestil-studier [Studies in skaldic style]. In H. Lie (Ed.), *Om Sagakunst og Skaldskap: Uvalgte avhandlinger* [On the art of sagas and poetry: Selected papers] (pp. 109–201). Bergen, Norway: Alvheim & Eide (Original work published 1952)
- Meissner, R. (1921). *Die Kenningar der Skalden* [The kennings of the skalds]. Bonn, Germany: Kurt Schroeder.
- Mukařovský, J. (1964). Standard language and poetic language. In P. L. Garvin, (Ed.), *A Prague School reader on esthetics, literary structure, and style* (pp. 17–30). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Oatley, K. (2003). Writingandreading: The future of cognitive poetics. In J. Gavins & G. Steen (Eds.), *Cognitive poetics in practice* (pp. 161–173). London, UK: Routledge.
- Roberts, W. R. (Trans.). (1946). *The works of Aristotle translated into English. Vol. XI. Rhetorica*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Shklovsky, V. (1965). Art as technique. In L. T. Lemon & M. J. Reis (Eds.), *Russian formalist criticism: Four essays* (pp. 3–24). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Spencer, H. (1882). *The philosophy of style*. New York, NY: Humboldt Library.
- Stiles, K., & Selz, P. (Eds.). (1996). *Theories and documents of contemporary art: A sourcebook of artists’ writings*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stockwell, P. (1999). The inflexibility of invariance. *Language and Literature* 8(2), 125–142.
- Turner, M. (1990). Aspects of the invariance hypothesis. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 1(2), 247–255.
- Turner, M. (2006). The art of compression. In M. Turner (Ed.), *The artful mind: Cognitive science and the riddle of human creativity* (pp. 93–113). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Vigfússon, G., & Powell, F. Y. (1883). *Corpus poeticum boreale: The poetry of the old Northern tongue* (II). Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Warnke, G. (1993). *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Hermeneutic, tradition och förnuft* [Hans-Georg Gadamer: Hermeneutics, tradition and reason] (Trans. J. Retzlaff). Gothenburg, Sweden: Daidalos.
- Yates, F. (2001). *The art of memory*. London, UK: Pimlico.