The Translation of Prophetic Imagery in *Merlínusspá*

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In this paper I will discuss the role of the fantastic imagery which is used in *Merlínusspá*, the Old Norse translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetie Merlini*. 'Prophecy' as a genre traditionally makes use of fantastic imagery, which must be negotiated by the reader/listener before the connection between imagery and future events can be perceived. Geoffrey's *Prophetie* are no exception and use a great deal of bizarre animal imagery, derived from both Celtic and Biblical sources. The Old Norse translation, carried out by the Icelandic monk Gunnlaugr Leifsson, is in many ways a very close translation of the original. I will explore how the fantastic imagery used, which may have a particular cultural and ideological significance in its original context, can survive the process of translation and remain a semantically rich element within the prophetic milieu. Part of this investigation will involve assessing the different cultural significations of particular creatures, e.g. the heron, the boar and the dragon. By locating the semantic function of these creatures in the two social/literary contexts, both of which draw on Christian symbolism but moderate it with native traditions, I hope to come to some conclusions about the function and workings of prophecy generally. Further, by exploring the alterations made by Gunnlaugr in his translation, I hope to explore the limits of the semantic translation – the points where what is fantastic for one culture cannot be adopted and significantly assimilated into another culture's fantasy realm. Mapping the uses, transformations and limits of fantasy, particularly within this comparative context, can then provide further insights into the epistemological uses of the fantastic.