

Peripheral Visions: Engaging Nordic Literary Traditions on Orkney and Shetland

This article examines the reception of Old Norse literature and culture in the literatures of the Scottish islands of Orkney and Shetland. It compares in particular the work of Shetland author James John Haldane Burgess (1862-1927) and the Orcadian author George Mackay Brown (1921-1996) and it evaluates the ways in which these two figures use their geographically peripheral positions as unique vantage points from which to reframe Nordic identity in their writing. By re-orientating the Scottish Islands from the periphery of Britain to the centre of important scenes in Nordic history, Haldane Burgess and Mackay Brown each construct a distinctive sense of geographical and cultural place. This approach allows the boundaries of the Nordic cultural sphere to be extended, and for a new and complex third space to emerge, in which the islands connect the Nordic and Anglo-Celtic realms and situate them within world literature.

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