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NARRATIVE COMPOSITION
IN *THE SAGA OF THE VOLSUNGS*

BY MANUEL AGUIRRE

In the thirteenth century an unknown author collected all the stories he could find about the Volsungs, and arranged them so as to be continuous . . . The compiler followed his originals closely, but his narrative is barer and less dramatic. Good as his work is, the world would have owed more to him if he had left an exact copy of his originals. The stories which he strung together are justly famous; the saga as a whole, however, has the weaknesses which are usually found in compilations of legendary cycles—lack of unity and proportion. Each of the poems that he used was a complete tragedy, and the result of joining them is accumulated horror. (Gordon 1927, 21)

THE QUOTATION ABOVE is given not because of its accuracy but because it so candidly encapsulates the critical position which this article tries to refute. It misunderstands the nature of *The Saga of the Volsungs* by regarding it as an archaeological site, not as a text in itself but as a (more or less infelicitous) repository and combination of remains from earlier texts. The simplest way to dispose of such statements is to offer a study of the saga ‘from within’ that will make as little use as possible of other texts for evidence. Accordingly, this article seeks to identify four major compositional strategies in *The Saga of the Volsungs* with a view to accounting for its structure in semantic terms, not in terms of what came before it. The approach is essentially textual, with an implicit bias towards commonsense positions in reader-response and reception theories. My initial assumption is that whatever its seams and sources, and whatever *our* literary desiderata, the text that has survived in the manuscript did make sense to its contemporary readers as it stood; in Iser’s (1974) phrase, it had its own ‘implied reader’. Textual analysis on this premise reveals a considerable degree of internal coherence in the saga and goes a long way towards showing that a) the ‘lack of unity’ the text has been charged with is nowhere much in evidence; b) the fabled inconsistencies in Brynhild’s character are illusory; c) the study of narrative structure brings to light the double thematic structure of the saga. For text and translation, as well as for both spelling and anglicising of proper names, I have used Finch (1965). I have also consulted the translations by Morris and Magnússon (1870), Schlauch (1930), Anderson (1982) and Byock (1990).

1. *The Forging of the Sword*

In chapter 15, Sigurd must have a worthy sword; the forging of the weapon occurs three times. The first two attempts are unsuccessful, as the swords wrought by Regin shatter when Sigurd strikes the anvil with them. He then visits his mother Hjordis. *Hon fagnar honum vel. Talask nú við ok drekka* ‘She made him welcome, and they talked and drank together’, after which she gives him the pieces of the sword Gram left in her care by his father Sigmund. Asked to make a sword with the fragments, the smith this time succeeds in forging a weapon that cleaves the anvil. The technique of spacing out the forging of the sword into a threefold event does several things:

- a) The division of the operation into three episodes lengthens it, thereby emphasising the difficulty of the task;
- b) The recurring operation sets up a rhythm in the tale of Sigurd’s sword;
- c) Delaying success creates a modicum of tension;
- d) This tension in turn leads to an enhancing of the quality of the final weapon when it is at last forged;
- e) The initial failures stress the intended owner’s strength;
- f) The final success also emphasises the worth of the man who can wield and be content only with such a weapon;
- g) Simultaneously, Regin’s merit as a swordsmith is lessened: it is the sword itself, not Regin’s craft that counts.

This last point is important for various reasons. Regin is to be disposed of as a traitor shortly after the killing of Fafnir, hence his excellence must not be such as to make him too attractive to us now. It is, of course, a matter of prestige, too, that Sigurd’s sword should be the same one that Odin himself, the originator of the Volsung line, gave to Sigmund. It is also important, as we shall see, that Sigurd’s weapon be *inherited* rather than created for him entirely anew. Further, the sword is given by the woman to her son in a context in which drinking takes place. Now these three motifs (a female figure of authority, her offer of drink to the hero, and her bestowal of a sword) shape one expression of a mythic theme which is found elsewhere in the saga and to which we must return: the woman’s drink and the bestowal of power go together.

The triple forging of the sword, then, is a structural device with a clear semantic function. Because of the way it breaks events up into stages or phases, I have elsewhere proposed the term ‘phasing’ for this technique (Aguirre 1997) and sought to distinguish it from common repetition. The argument runs as follows: repetition (including its ‘incremental’ variety) is always defined as a *linguistic* phenomenon: it operates on

sounds, words, sentences, formulas, language. Now, an obvious difference exists between repetition of language and the recurrence of an event; this latter is what I call phasing. Furthermore, the concept of repetition grants primacy to the *first* item in a series, while phasing relies on a folk-narrative convention, called by Olrik (1909) the ‘Law of the Weight of the Stern’, which requires that the decisive element in a series be placed last. That phasing may be, and often is, reinforced by incremental repetition of linguistic elements does not mean that this is always necessary, nor that the one is to be identified with the other; phased action may occur without an accompanying linguistic repetition. Thus in the triple forging of Sigurd’s sword no significant linguistic iteration is found, yet one event is phased into three all the same, the third being signalled as the crucial one not by a linguistic turn but by its position, and by its results: after twice failing, Sigurd succeeds in cleaving the anvil with his sword.

Among the various functions of phasing, then, we can identify the following: lengthening and delaying, creating tension, enhancing and devaluing. Further, phasing has a ‘descriptive’ function. The sword is not praised by the narrator: its quality is conveyed to us, and its importance highlighted, by the triple forging rather than by commentary. Lüthi (1981, 13) tells us that in the folktale action is all; so, to a great extent, it is in the saga. Lastly, phasing creates a rhythm which periodises and so ‘ritualises’ the operation, by which I mean that the triple occurrence confers ceremoniousness upon the whole event, heightens its significance and raises it above the plane of realistic narrative.

2. Sinfjotli’s Death

In chapter 10 Sigmund has just married Borghild when his son Sinfjotli slays Borghild’s brother in battle. At her brother’s funeral feast, she serves the drinks and offers Sinfjotli the horn. *Gjöróttir er drykkinn* ‘The drink is cloudy’, he remarks, and his father, who is immune to poison, drinks it. A second time his stepmother presents him with the horn and taunts him with cowardice. *Flærðr er drykkinn* ‘The drink has been tampered with’, he observes, and again Sigmund drinks it for him. A third time Borghild asks him to drain the horn. *Eitr er í drykknum* ‘This drink has been poisoned’, he objects; but his father, drunk by now, tells him to filter it through his moustache. *Sinfjotli drekkir ok fellr þegar niðr* ‘Sinfjotli drank and immediately collapsed’.

Here is another drink, offered by a woman, charged with power—this time, however, fatal to the hero. In this instance, linguistic repetition

(Sinfjotli's three terse statements in incremental variation) reinforces the phasing of action. Obviously revenge is Borghild's motivation, but her insistence has little to do with real-life feuds. She is far too obstinate, far too stern; she simply acts, then acts again, then again, to the point where something inexorable seems to characterise her conduct. And Sigmund (leaving aside rationalisations about his being drunk) does not reflect, he merely acts twice, then refuses (or is unable) to act a third time. Their phased behaviours reveal a force which goes beyond individual wills. The threefold occurrence patterns and ritualises the episode. Sinfjotli must drink, he must die; no one does anything because no one can—fate is pulling all the strings. Because everything happens three times, we know death will necessarily occur as a climax to the action: *phasing discloses (and sets up) the structure of the inevitable*. And so another, concomitant function of phasing may be said to be the creation of the climax and resolution predicted by lengthening and delay. Furthermore, sudden death after drinking the first horn would be a mere fact; phasing, instead, sets up a rhythm—the rhythm of death shown as a patterned event following preordained steps.

3. *The Killing of Signy's Sons*

On the run from his sister's husband, King Siggeir, Sigmund hides away in the forest (ch. 6). His sister Signy has two sons by Siggeir, and she sends one of them to Sigmund to help him. The boy is given flour to knead, but becomes afraid of a snake in the flour sack; on learning of this Signy coldly bids her brother kill him. Next winter she sends him her second son: *ok þarf þar eigi sǫgu um at lengja, ok fór sem samt sé, at hann drap þenna svein at ráði Signýjar* 'but there's no need to make a long story of it, as the upshot was much the same: he killed the boy at Signy's bidding'. The narrator, aware that this is 'only' technique, seeks to avoid repetitive language while retaining the essentials of the phasal structure—the double event itself. Then, in the next chapter (ch. 7), he informs us that Signy goes to Sigmund in disguise, shares his bed, and ten years later sends him the boy thus conceived, Sinfjotli, who, having to go through precisely the same test, quietly kneads the snake into the dough. Where the first two boys have failed, he succeeds. This is preceded in the same chapter by the relation of another test their mother had subjected them to before sending them off to Sigmund one by one, with similar results:

Hon saumaði at hǫndum þeim með holdi ok skinni. Þeir þolðu illa ok krikту um. Ok svá gerði hon Sinfjótla. Hann brásk ekki við. Hon fló hann þá af

kyrtlinum svá at skinnit fylgði ermunum. Hon kvað honum mundu sárt við verða. Hann segir: ‘Lítit mundi slíkt sárt þykkja Volsungi.’

She sewed their tunics on to their arms, stitching through skin and flesh. They stood up to it badly, and screamed as it was being done. She did the same to Sinfjotli. He did not flinch. Then she stripped the tunic from him, so that the skin came off with the sleeves, and said that this would hurt him. ‘No Volsung would think much of a pain like that,’ was the reply.

Again with no linguistic repetition the test occurs three times, and this phasal presentation ritualises the action and reminds us of the protracted forging of the sword. By delaying success, it is intended to explain how difficult it is to procure a worthy heir to the Volsung line, and how this can only be achieved incestuously, when two Volsungs unite. Some additional features of phasing may be highlighted here. First, only by comparison with the other two does Sinfjotli’s true Volsung courage show forth. This intensification by contrast leads us to a second thought: the two boys’ deaths prelude the third’s rise to greatness. They are revealed as the sacrifice required for him to come out triumphant. Thus he emerges from what is, through the phasing technique, presented as a bloody ritual involving necessary loss. Thirdly, in showing us the consequence of failure (death) which enhances success, *the story actually illustrates both outcomes of the task*. The testing occurs three times just so as to convey *both failure and success*; two tales are being told. In chapter 8, when the two heroes at last venture into Siggeir’s hall, they discover that he has two more children by Signy; their mother (once again) demands their death, and this time Sinfjotli obliges. Finch (1965, ix) views this reduplication of slain children as one among several ‘structural weaknesses’ in the saga. On the contrary, I see it as an effective structural device: the double slaughter followed by a similar double slaughter stresses Signy’s determination to eradicate Siggeir’s line, while the rhythm of Signy’s single-minded testing and executing of her own sons makes her cruelty, like Borghild’s, excessive, and *excess* will be one important feature in our definition of the saga’s narrative construction below.

To summarise. Besides giving the tale duration, delay, and tension, phasing also provides climax and resolution. It adds to the narrative the rhythm obtained from recurrence; by inscribing them within a pattern, phasing ritualises events. This ritualisation grants them the quality of the ordered, but also of the inevitable. Further, phasing provides the seemingly impossible—two endings for each and every adventure. In respect of this last point, we may formulate it as a principle of traditional narrative: the tale tells of the two ways, success and failure, open to the

hero. In the end he or his representatives or surrogates will go through both, because both are perceived to be part of the structure of the universe.

4. *The Crossing of the Flickering Flame*

The ‘unmarked’ reading of phasing (to borrow a term from linguistics) calls for action to be drawn out in such a way that the decisive episode, carrying the ‘Weight of the Stern’, will show the truth, fulfil the expectations created, reveal the true hero, unfold his destiny (whether apotheosis or catastrophe), while the false hero will be exposed, unmasked, shown up. *Phasing is thus linked with disclosure*. Through the phasing of the test, which Sinfjotli passes but which his half-brothers have failed, he displays his true Volsung nature and proves himself a worthy companion for Sigmund. The various attempts at forging a sword have the object of showing forth the one weapon worthy of Sigurd’s hand. Sinfjotli’s death on his acceptance of the third drink confirms the expectations created, and brings the youth’s life to its destined conclusion. The ‘unmarked’ option is one where phasing is expected to set up patterns of tension and release, of foreshadowing and fulfilment, of latency and disclosure.

Folktales make good use of this device to delay the hero’s recognition, often supplanting him by an impostor who boasts of deeds actually performed by the hero, usurps the latter’s identity, deceitfully claims the princess’s hand as his reward, but is eventually unmasked. A variation on this behaviour is found in chapter 29 of our saga, where Gunnar seeks Brynhild in marriage and rides to her hall accompanied by Sigurd; the latter, who has unwittingly drunk the *óminnisöl*, the Ale of Forgetfulness, no longer remembers this woman whom he once swore to wed. Gunnar approaches the flames that burn around the maiden’s hall, but his horse draws back. He asks Sigurd for his horse Grani: *Gunnarr ríðr nú at eldinum, ok vill Grani eigi ganga. Gunnarr má nú eigi ríða þenna eld* ‘Gunnar then rode at the fire, but Grani wouldn’t go on. So Gunnar could not ride through the fire’. Sigurd then uses magic to change their shapes and, looking like Gunnar, rides Grani through the fire and claims Brynhild’s hand. As the crossing of the flames is phased into three attempts, the event is lengthened, tension added, behaviour ritualised—features we are already familiar with. We may also observe that, without the need for saying it, phasing establishes a comparison between the two heroes (as it did between the three swords, and between Signy’s three sons) and shows their respective worth: it is not the horse but the quality of its rider that determines success or failure. To this extent, phasing *explains* Gunnar’s inability as inadequacy, though the explanation is conveyed

by means of actions rather than comments. Again, both outcomes of the test are illustrated: instead of engaging in reflections as to what might have happened had Sigurd been less of a hero, the text dramatises the two alternatives. All action is real action here, there is no conditionality, possibilities are simply actualised; this is a world of inevitable facts in which fate looms large above human wills.

By fate one need not seek to understand esoteric concepts of mysterious entities and personified forces. Fate may simply be an entailment of narrative structure, of a system of textual interrelations which pre-exists and conditions events, including the characters' conduct. Propp (1968, 75–78) observed that from a formal point of view the characters' motivations are irrelevant to a description of fairy tales since only actions and events matter. He could make this claim for the entire genre because form does seem to govern it to the extent that psychological needs are in it subordinated to structural requirements. I argue elsewhere that phasing is one of the most basic techniques employed in fairy tales (see my *Thresholds*, in preparation); and where phased action obtains it is difficult to speak of wish, reflection or dread as functional instigators of plot. On the contrary, structure and plot already exist as form before motivations come into play. It is in this sense that our saga can be said to be dominated by a deterministic principle enshrined in its very narrative composition, a principle seen at work in the inevitability of Sinfjotli's downfall and in the foregone success of the forging of Sigurd's sword, and again manifest in the crossing of the flames, simply because the threefold structure (Gunnar riding his own horse, Gunnar riding Grani, Sigurd riding Grani) tells us that Sigurd is destined to pass this test of courage.

But his achievement leaves us uneasy; we feel something is wrong if he deserves the maiden but woos her for an undeserving man. We are alerted that this is the beginning of potential tragedy, the signal being given by a disjunction in the phasing process. As remarked earlier, when the hero does all the work and the false hero reaps the reward we find ourselves in familiar *Märchen* territory, where the villain claims the boon that belongs to the true hero, and the latter's rights, and often his life, are threatened thereby. In the fairy tale, this situation is invariably solved in favour of the hero: there is an eventual recognition of the one, an exposure of the other. In our saga, no such thing will take place. Indeed, the final stage of the phased event, on which the 'Weight of the Stern' falls, should be the decisive one by bringing the hero to recognition, the process to fulfilment. Here, in contrast, the process is left

unfinished: instead of leading to disclosure, it confirms an imposture. The ‘ritual’ demands a completion which the plot withholds. We know as a result that tension is going to mount and that things will take a turn for the worse.

5. Accretion

After spending three nights together but separated by the sword Gram, Sigurd (still disguised as Gunnar) and Brynhild part. She then goes to her father Budli, laments that she is to marry Gunnar, claims that Sigurd is her first husband, and makes a cryptic reference to her daughter by him, Aslaug. Long ago Sijmons (1876, 200–14) held that this mention is due to interpolation of folktale material introduced by the author to allow himself a sequel, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, which, following hard upon *Völsunga saga* in the manuscript, makes Aslaug Ragnar’s wife. The process of accretion begins in just such ways. The next step might have been, for example, a true incorporation of Ragnar’s saga into *The Saga of the Volsungs*, the end of the process¹ yielding either a longer, more tightly organised text, or a fuller compilation of heroic deeds performed by a variety of loosely related heroes, such as we find in *Piðreks saga*. The knight-errant romance, especially in the late medieval period, is not concerned with individuals so much as with lineages, and much the same could be said of our saga: the way it begins with Odin and tells of one after another of his ‘descendants’ (Sigi, Rerir, Volsung, Sigmund, Helgi, Sinfjotli, Sigurd) and their kin suggests that a peculiar pleasure was found in thus enlarging upon any one hero’s life by adding to it that of his father, his son, or some more remote ancestor or heir. Clover (1982, 59) has pointed out that, from its earliest manifestations,

the single Icelandic saga is conceived as a central action or series of actions from which emanates contingent matter in forward and backward unfoldings in the form of prologues, epilogues, genealogical expansions, pendant *þættir*, and the like . . . by the time of *Völsunga saga*, the regressive sequence extends to the fifth generation, with the stories of Sigurðr’s parents and grandparents constituting miniature sagas.

Indeed, the text of the saga generates its own *paratexts* (see Genette 1981 and 1987): threshold elements which frame and shape the *text*

¹ Strictly speaking, the process has no end, and it is an error to conceive that a given text represents either the culmination of or a falling off from trends ‘leading’ to a given shape and plot; it is equally mistaken to praise either the ‘source’ or the ‘final product’ to the detriment of the other. Every version is in this sense both a ‘final’ product and a transitional work: a threshold-text.

proper. One peculiarity of medieval narrative, however, consists in its habit of gradual assimilation of the paratexts into the text itself, while generating new threshold elements which may in turn become part of the main body of the text. To speak of a 'regressive sequence' is to suggest that the saga concerns Sigurd's tale, to which 'regressive' episodes have later been appended; in actual fact, if our text (lacking a title in the manuscript) has come to be known as *The Saga of the Volsungs*, this is appropriate to a narrative which deals with a dynasty rather than with an individual. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, even had the initial creation concerned one hero, the medieval trend towards a holistic pattern would still be evidenced by the addition of 'contingent matter': the long-term aim would still have been to offer us a sequence of generations, not one particular hero's deeds. If one may venture to employ a metaphor here, the value of a pearl lies not in its kernel but in the 'final' product of successive accretions. Secondly, though *we* may feel that this is the tale of Sigurd, we know that at some time its most emblematic episode, the slaying of the dragon, was a feat associated with Sigmund. This is plain from the inserted tale of Sigmund the dragon-slayer in *Beowulf* 888–913; as Anderson points out (1982, 38),

On the evidence of the *Beowulf* passage alone, there is every indication that Sigmund was the protagonist of a saga of his own, the *Sigmundarsaga*, which the Author must have followed for the first eight chapters of the Saga [of the Volsungs].

The attribution of the dragon-slaying to Sigurd may be an instance of the conventional 'transference of mythical motifs from the life of the older hero to a younger one' (Rank 1990, 48), visible in the tales of Scyld (in *Beowulf*) or Lohengrin. This makes the centrality of Sigurd as much a 'contingent' phenomenon (to use Clover's term) as any other element in the saga. In the process of accretion, nothing is to be held *a priori* an invariant; on the other hand, there is a *dominant* (see Jakobson 1935) which guides the organisation of a specific text and canon, and shifts of dominant tend to accompany the rise of new canons and the production of new texts. If a tradition existed in which a feat of dragon-slaying was attributed to Sigmund, and if the author of our saga displaced this feat onto the son's legend, though retaining the father's epic stature, then the relative decentring of Sigmund is concomitant with a dominant-shift, in that what the later text relates is no longer just the life of this or that hero but a dynastic story. This argument is not in the least dependent upon the existence of a *Sigmundarsaga*; it is not a text but a tradition

that matters here, and the *Beowulf* evidence suffices to establish this tradition. Viewing our text, therefore, as a saga of the *Volsungs* seems to make more sense of materials which would otherwise have to be looked at as interpolations, digressions, extraneous or ‘contingent’ matter, or (that unfortunate term sometimes used by folklorists) ‘contaminations’.

6. *The Three Encounters*

These remarks must suffice for the purpose of establishing that accretion is a technique in some respects akin to phasing in so far as both consist in some kind of unfolding of an event, a theme, a narrative. Now, an intriguing aspect of the saga seems to find its formulation halfway between phasing and accretion; I refer to the three encounters between Sigurd and Brynhild.

The first occurs in chapter 21 as Sigurd rides with Fafnir’s treasure and sees a great light on Hindfell, *sem eldr brynni, ok ljómaði af til himins* ‘as if there were a fire blazing, and it lit up the sky’. As he approaches he discovers that the light emanates from a rampart of shields surmounted by a banner (no explanation is given as to the source of the light), behind which lies a sleeping, armour-clad figure whom he awakens. She calls herself Brynhild, offers him ale in a rune-carved goblet, and instructs and advises him, after which they swear faithfulness to each other. Sigurd then rides away (the text does not say why).

The second occurs shortly after Sigurd reaches the homestead of Heimir, Brynhild’s brother-in-law, with whose son Alsvið he strikes up a friendship. Brynhild (the length of whose Odin-induced sleep we do not know, but whose disappearance seems to have gone unnoticed by her in-laws) has meanwhile returned to Heimir’s, and sits now in her chamber embroidering a tapestry with Sigurd’s great deeds. Now in chapter 25 Sigurd happens to go hunting and his hawk flies to the window in a tower, and going after it, *þá sér hann eina fagra konu ok kennir at þar er Brynhildr* ‘then he saw a good-looking woman and perceived that it was Brynhild who was there’. The sexual symbolism of hawk and window is traditional, and contributes to the significance of this second encounter. However, right after this he talks of her to Alsvið as if he did not know her, so that the latter has to inform him:

Alsviðr svarar, ‘Þú hefir sét Brynhildi Buðladóttur, er mestr skörungr er.’

Sigurðr svarar, ‘Þat mun satt vera. Eða hversu [lõngu] kom hon hér?’

Alsviðr svarar, ‘Þess var skammt í milli ok þér kómuð.’

Sigurðr segir, ‘Þat vissu vér fyrir fám dögum. Sú kona hefir oss bezt sýnzk í veröldu.’

‘You saw Budli’s daughter, Brynhild,’ replied Alsvið, ‘a woman of real character and presence.’

‘That’s surely true,’ answered Sigurd, ‘but how [when?] did she get here?’

‘There was but little time between your arrival and hers,’ replied Alsvið.

‘I knew that just a few days ago,’ said Sigurd. ‘She seemed to me the finest woman in the world.’

Commentators have remarked that Sigurd’s questions are not consistent with his statements. He acts as if he had never had a conversation with, declared his desire for, been accepted by, and sworn to be true to her. It is not unreasonable to venture that this second meeting comes from a different source, and that the author has made an attempt at giving the two versions of it a chronological plausibility: ‘I knew that just a few days ago’—which, however, contradicts the hero’s requests for information regarding Brynhild, which in turn contradict the narrator’s statement *ok kennir at þar er Brynhildir*. We should have to go to extravagant lengths of ingenuity in order to rationalise the inconsistency away. But now he returns to her tower, enters her chamber, all hung with tapestries, sits down next to her in spite of her protestations, and says: *Nú er þat fram komit er þér hétuð oss* ‘Your promise to me is now fulfilled’. Again the author tries to relate the two meetings causally by making Sigurd appeal to her recollection of the previous encounter—but we may be excused for feeling that the appeal is somewhat gratuitous: *à propos* of what words of Brynhild does he say ‘promise’? The sentence rather looks like a mere temporal link. She now offers him wine in a golden cup and warns him: *Vitrligra ráð er þat at leggja eigi trúnað sinn á konu vald, því at þær rjúfa jafnan sín heit* ‘Wiser not to surrender your trust to a woman, for they always break their vows’. Lastly, *svorðu nú eiða af nýju* ‘they again repeated their vows’ before he goes away again (and again with no reason given).

The structure of the two meetings is the same: he approaches her either by crossing the shield barrier or by entering her room and sitting on the seat of privilege, both actions amounting to deeds of daring. He praises her; she offers him drink and gives him advice; they swear to be true to one another; and then he leaves (furthermore, there is the symbolism of both banner and tapestries, to be touched upon later). It looks as if the author has determined to incorporate two versions of the same event into his text, and if that means certain things have to happen twice he will willingly provide indicators of the ‘again’ and ‘as before’ type to smooth over the seams.

The third meeting between them has already been examined: in chapter 29, under the effects of the *óminnisöl*, Sigurd takes on Gunnar’s shape,

crosses the flickering flame and enters Brynhild's hall. They sleep separated by the sword Gram, and he departs, leaving her to tell her fosterfather of her uneasiness: *En ek sagða at þat mundi Sigurðr einn gera, er ek vann eiða á fjallinu, ok er hann minn frumverr* 'But I said that Sigurd alone would do this, he to whom I gave my vows on the mountain—he is my first lover'. It is downright odd that, if she had already promised to wed Sigurd, she should still be waiting (or be waiting again?) behind a ring of fire, as she was in chapter 21 behind a ring of seemingly burning shields. She then mentions her daughter by Sigurd, a further inconsistency *vis-à-vis* the second meeting, where (but for the symbolism of hawk and window) no sexual encounter was mentioned (unless Aslaug, as Anderson (1982, 149) suggests, be just *conceived* in this third encounter, not born; but I find nothing in the text to support this reading, and the sword-motif suggests otherwise). There is no reference to the second meeting, though she recalls the first one well. It can be surmised that this is yet another version of the encounter, sharing the motif of the ring of fire with the first (where it was hinted at rather than used). All three versions, furthermore, share the drink-motif. In the first two, Brynhild hands it to him; in the third, it is present obliquely as the *ðminnisöl* given him by Grimhild, under the influence of which Sigurd fails to remember his prior engagement to Brynhild.

But accretion is not the whole story. In the text, the meeting between these characters is *phased* into three episodes, two of which have a celebratory quality, while the third (itself consisting of three attempts to cross the flames) sets up, as was concluded earlier, a disjunction between achievement and disclosure which bodes disaster. If the author found the three meeting-scenes in different sources, he yet managed to set them up in such a way that the third stands in bleak contrast to the first two, effectively reversing the usual phasal structure. In other words, the author has not only built them in but also exploited the narrative potential of such a configuration; as they stand, and notwithstanding the obvious 'seams' pointed out earlier, they are an integral part of an unfolding text.

The drink is central to all three meetings. Now, from the ring of fire surrounding her, as well as from her well-known valkyrie nature, we know that Brynhild is related to the Otherworld, although to call her 'goddess' would be to simplify and distort the picture: she is otherworldly not because she necessarily has divine attributes but because she is conceived not fully to belong in ordinary human space. The trait shared by valkyries, Norns, witches, spaewomen (as well as by Parcae, Moirai, fairies

and other, characteristically female, beings in many Western folk and myth traditions) is just this belonging on or beyond the threshold, from which vantage-point they decisively affect human reality. We must conclude that the drinking vessel is central to the hero's meeting with an Otherworld woman. And at this point we may pick up one of the several threads left dangling in our earlier pages: Brynhild's two offers of the cup to Sigurd parallel Hjordis's offer of drink to him on the occasion of her giving him the sword Gram. All three scenes constitute acts of dispensation (of love and/or power). In contrast, Grimhild's horn is of a pattern with Borghild's cup: to drink of them is to be doomed. We observe the ambivalence of the cup, now a token of favour, now of destruction. When chapter 34 tells us that *at þessi veizlu drekkir Atli brúðlaup til Guðrúnar* 'Atli married Gudrun at this feast', we know this is a reference to the custom of the bridal drink, the sexual overtones of which are obvious enough; and in this symbolism we understand that the cup is metonymic for the woman herself or for an aspect of her person or of what she in turn represents. Such symbolism extends to the other instances of a woman offering the cup: when she gives it to the hero, or when she allows him to drink the marriage toast to her, she is granting him a right over her person or bestowing upon him some manner of boon. Conversely, his falling out of favour is signified by her refusal to drink the wedding toast with him, or by her offer of a poisoned cup (cf. Aguirre 1998). In each case, her actions determine the course of the hero's life. More on this below.

7. Parallelism

The appearance of the same motif in different contexts establishes a theme. Borghild and Grimhild are equated in their function by the destructive cup they proffer; Hjordis and Brynhild by the dispensation of power, love or knowledge which in their cases accompanies the offer of drink. To these we may add the cup which Sigrun the valkyrie refuses to drink with Helgi unless he undertakes to slay her intended husband (ch. 9); the ensorcelled food and ale by means of which Grimhild bewitches Guttorm into killing her son-in-law Sigurd (ch. 32); the second Ale of Forgetfulness that Gudrun is given to drink by her mother Grimhild so she will forget dead Sigurd and marry Atli (ch. 34); the goblets shaped out of her own sons' skulls, and filled with their blood, which Gudrun gives Atli shortly before she kills him (ch. 40); and the drink Gudrun gives her other sons while she chooses magic armour that will protect them in their (eventually disastrous) expedition against her son-in-law

Jormunrek (ch. 43). All in all these parallel instances shape a dominant theme in the saga: woman is the giver of power, favour, and doom, all three betokened by the drink she bestows.

Another thematic parallelism relevant to a definition of the overall theme of the saga can be highlighted here. Time and again, dissension breaks out between families and, directly or not, a female figure occupies a pivotal position in it. In chapter 1, a feud starts between King Sigi and his wife's brothers: he is slain by them and avenged by his son Rerir. In chapter 5, Rerir's grand-daughter Signy warns her father and brother (Volsung and Sigmund) that her husband King Siggeir is plotting against them—in vain, for Volsung will be slain; later, Signy's two pairs of sons by Siggeir will be killed by Sigurd and Sinfjotli at her instigation. Following hard upon this Signy will help her brother to set fire to her husband's hall, though she will afterwards walk into the blazing building to die with her husband (ch. 8). In chapter 32, a spiteful Brynhild urges her husband Gunnar to slay his own brother-in-law Sigurd; but once the deed is done she strikes herself with a sword and mounts Sigurd's funeral pyre to die with him (ch. 33). Gudrun's second husband King Atli, coveting the Gjukungs' treasure, plots against her brothers Hogni and Gunnar; she tries to warn them, but they are killed, whereupon she slays her sons by Atli, then burns Atli himself in his hall with her nephew's help (ch. 40). She would now destroy herself: *Guðrún vildi nú eigi lifa eptir þessi verk, en endadagr hennar var eigi enn kominn* 'Gudrun had now no wish to live after these deeds. But her last day was not yet come' (in *Guðrúnarhvot* she recalls all her losses, mourns especially for Sigurd, and mounts the funeral pyre).²

A simple pattern underlies these stories: two families contend in a feud at the centre of which stands a woman—wife to one party, kin to the other. It is beside the point to object that such was often the structure of feuds in reality: as a student of literature one wishes to inquire first of all into the internal coherence of the text, only later into its possible correspondence with a reality which, from the standpoint of textual analysis, must needs take an ancillary position. In one version of the pattern outlined, the woman (Sigrun) slays or causes the downfall of her husband or bridegroom and replaces him with a new lover. In another,

² Whose funeral pyre, is not clear. The lay begins by recounting the death of her daughter Svanhild, for whom Gudrun seems to be mourning. Halfway through, however, she is addressing the dead Sigurd, and her final words suggest that she is going to immolate herself on the pyre so as to join him in the land of the dead. For the text, see Dronke 1969, 145–50.

her husband plots against her relatives and she is forced to turn against him (the cases of Signy and Gudrun). In yet another, she incites her husband against her lover (Brynhild's case), or her sons against her son-in-law (Grimhild urges Guttorm to slay Sigurd, Gudrun urges her sons to slay Jormunrek). In a number of instances, she takes her own life after the revenge is accomplished (Signy, Brynhild; Gudrun in the *Guðrúnarhvöt* version). Correlation of such episodes throughout the saga reveals a recurrent theme employed as a pliable grid to which a number of different tales will be accommodated. Further, Gudrun's slaying of her sons by Atli parallels Signy's slaying of her sons by Siggeir; Signy's and Brynhild's disappearance into the fire counterpoints Brynhild's emergence behind, first, the rampart of seemingly burning shields, then the flickering flame;³ Sigurd's death by the sword, in his bed, at the instigation of Brynhild, parallels Atli's death by the sword, in his bed, at Gudrun's hands. The pattern of resonances thus set up creates a permanent sense of *déjà vu* which again gravitates around the figure of a woman. More on this later.

8. *Inflexion*

Throughout the saga, instances abound where a given situation obtains which then slides into its opposite. I am not talking merely of a polarity A:B but of a *shift*, a plot-dynamic whereby A is transformed into or replaced by B. The simplest examples are provided by phasing. The saga will not just tell of the making of the sword Gram but will present this as the reversal of earlier unsuccessful attempts. Sinfjotli's passing of his tests is enhanced by previous tests which his half-brothers failed, while the moment of his death appears in tragic contrast to two similar moments when his father was able to help him out. The text not only gives the two alternatives open to the plot but insists on presenting the one in contrast to the other. The instability created by this practice makes an event almost the logical outcome of its contrary: given A, we expect that, sooner or later, B will obtain. Furthermore, like phasing, parallelism and accretion, this shift eschews uniqueness: A and B are (to borrow terms from grammar) members of a *paradigm* consisting of, minimally,

³ Much has been written on the possible reasons for Brynhild's suicide, ranging from a form of *suttee* to atonement to late literary innovation (for a survey see Finch 1965, xxiv–xxv). I suggest that her death by fire is one attempt at rationalising an enigmatic textual symmetry: she belongs behind the fire-threshold, emerges from it for love of a hero, and withdraws into it after causing his death.

two *inflexions*. By this latter term I will designate the alternative forms one event or situation may take as so many options available within a given paradigm. In so far as our narrative *inflects* action, it plays down discreteness and encourages a holistic view, evincing a concern for the universal at the expense of the individual (see section 3 above).

A second type of inflexion, one which shifts back and forth between two poles (hence yielding recurrence), is found in the cyclical structure of various narrative segments. Twice Gudrun marries, directly or indirectly causes both her husbands' deaths, then moves on to a third marriage. This can be represented as a shuttle-motion between A and B: A¹ B¹ A² B² A³ (on the significance of this recurrence see page 22 below). The cyclical feud provides another version of this pattern, illustrated by the narrative organisation, motifs and formulas employed in the following three-beat sequence of events:

1) In chapter 9 Sigmund's son Helgi slays Hunding, and later defeats Hunding's sons. He then meets the valkyrie Sigrun, who refuses to drink with him until he has rid her of her unwanted bridegroom, King Hoddbrodd. Helgi gathers a fleet and sails to meet him; on the way a storm breaks out, but he valiantly refuses to have his sails reefed. When they meet at Frekastein he defeats and kills Hoddbrodd with the help of Sigrun's valkyries.

2) Chapter 11 gives a reversed version of this. Sigmund and King Lyngvi (Hunding's son) vie for the hand of Hjordis; she chooses Sigmund, and an embittered Lyngvi leaves and prepares for battle. Arriving with his fleet, Lyngvi attacks, but Sigmund is protected by his *spádísir* until Odin appears and shatters his sword so that the hero is slain.

3) A new version of the pattern in chapter 17 brings us back to the first battle. Sigmund's son Sigurd gathers a fleet and sails against Lyngvi; a storm arises, but he tells his men not to reef their sails. Battle is engaged, and Lyngvi is slain.

In order to show what precisely is going on here the texts are given below in some detail, with the most significant motifs italicised and numbered.

(Chapter 9:) **1** *Nú gerði at þeim storm mikinn . . . Helgi bað þá ekki óttask ok 2 eigi svipta seglunum, heldr setja hvert hæra en áðr . . . ok 3 tóksk þar hvarð orrosta. 4 Helgi gengr fram í gegnum fylkingar. 5 Þar varð mikit mannfall. 6 Þá sá þeir skjaldmeyjaflokk mikinn . . . 7 Helgi konungr sótti í mót Hoddbroddi konungi ok fellir hann undir merkjum.*

And then a heavy storm hit them . . . Helgi then told them not to be afraid, and not to strike sail, but instead to hoist each of them higher than before . . . and there a fierce battle began. Helgi pressed forward through the enemy ranks.

Casualties became heavy there. They saw a large party of warrior-maids . . . King Helgi made at King Hoddbrodd and struck him down beneath his banners.

(Motifs: 1. tempest; 2. defiant raising of sails; 3. ‘hard battle’; 4. hewing through the enemy ranks; 5. fall of many men; 6. supernatural intervention; 7. fighter encounters rival king.)

(Chapter 11:) **3** *Teksk þar nú hǫrð orrosta . . . 8 Helzk hvárki við honum skjöldr né brynja, ok 4 gekk hann jafnan í gegnum lið óvina sinna . . . 9 Mart spjót var þar á lopti ok orvar. 6 En svá hlífðu honum hans spádísir, at hann varð ekki sárr, ok 5 engi kunni töl hversu margr maðr fell fyrir honum. 10 Hann hafði báðar hendr blóðgar til axlar. 11 Ok er orrosta hafði staðit um hríð, þá kom maðr í bardagann . . . 7 Þessi maðr kom á mót Sigmundi konungi [and caused his death].*

Now a fierce battle began there . . . Neither shield nor coat of mail could stand against him, and . . . he constantly pierced clean through the ranks of his enemies . . . Numerous spears hurtled through the air, and arrows, too, but his horns looked after him, so he remained unscathed, and no one kept count of the men who fell before him. Both his arms were bloody to the shoulders. Now when the battle had gone on for some time, a man . . . entered the fray . . . The man advanced towards King Sigmund [and caused his death].

(Motifs: 8. uselessness of protection against the hero’s onslaught; 9. great number of spears and arrows; 10. hands bloody to the shoulders; 11. ‘after the battle had been going on for a time’.)

(Chapter 17:) **1** *Þá kom á veðr mikit með stormi . . . 2 Eigi bað Sigurðr svipta seglunum . . . heldr bað hann hæra setja en áðr . . . 3 Teksk þar in harðasta orrosta með þeim . . . 9 Mátti þar á lopti sjá mart spjót ok orvar margar . . . 11 Ok er orrostan hefir svá staðit mjök langa hríð, sækir Sigurðr fram um merkin . . . Hann hogggr bæði menn ok hesta ok 4 gengr í gegnum fylkingar ok 10 hefir báðar hendr blóðgar til axlar . . . ok 8 helzk hvárki við hjálmr né brynja . . . 5 Fell þar svá mart fyrir Hundings sonum at engi maðr vissi töl á . . . 7 Þá koma á mót honum synir Hundings konungs.*

A violent storm of wind came up . . . Sigurd gave no command to reef the sails . . . but instead ordered them to be hoisted higher than before . . . A fierce battle now took place between them. Many a spear and many arrows could be seen hurtling through the air . . . After the battle had gone on in this way for a very long time, Sigurd pressed on past the banners . . . He felled men and horses, too, advancing through the enemy line: both his arms were bloody to the shoulders . . . Neither helm nor hauberk was proof against him . . . Hunding’s sons lost so many men that no one could keep count . . . Then King Hunding’s sons came at him.

All but one (number 6) of the motifs used earlier reappear in this scene. In fact, all three accounts are heavily composed of motifs and, of these, all but three (1: the rising of the storm; 5: the great number of the fallen;

6: the intervention of supernatural force) are conveyed in formulaic language, that is, through variations (which constitute another type of inflexion) on the same lexical, morphological and/or syntactic patterns. This suggests not merely a high degree of conventionalism in the depiction of battles, but that each encounter is an inflexion of the same battle theme, the plot-thread of which, reduced to the essential pattern signalled by these similarities, yields the following highly stereotyped 'feud':

1. Helgi slays Hunding, then his sons; then Helgi comes by sea to slay Hoddbrodd for a woman's sake.

2. Lyngvi, son of Hunding, comes by sea to slay Sigmund, Helgi's father, both for a woman's sake and for revenge.

3. Sigmund's son Sigurd comes by sea to slay Hunding's son Lyngvi for revenge, his feat recalling Helgi's and Sigmund's deeds down to the sail- and battle-formulas.

The heroes' deeds follow a pattern. Motif recurrence and formulaic language have a function in the grammar of myth, as they not only establish a parallelism between Helgi, Sigmund and Sigurd's prowess but equally intensify the symmetry between defeat and victory. Now one family, now the other, crosses the sea to bring havoc to the other side. This shuttling of the narrative thread conveys a necessary feature of the structure of the world: certain key events will keep taking place, and the alternation between triumph and downfall, success and failure, land and sea, constitutes an appropriate expression of recursive time.⁴ Recurrence of action does not simply have thematic importance but grants the theme so enhanced an archetypal value: human existence, this structuring principle tells us, endlessly moves between the poles of victory and defeat. The heroes' names change, the actions are the same. The narrative advances through a play of contraries: the tide of battle favours one hero, later a similar battle turns against him, later again a strikingly similar battle carries his son to victory.

In a third type of inflexion, similar to our first but involving individuals rather than events, a figure appears under two opposite lights or adopts contrary stances. Two episodes may illustrate this. In chapter 7

⁴ The cyclical struggle between land-king and sea-king is conventional. Saxo Grammaticus (Books III–IV) tells how Horwendillus arrives by sea to kill Collerus; later his son Amlethus arrives by sea from England to slay Fergus, murderer of Horwendillus. Snorri's account (*Skáldskaparmál*) of Frodi's rise and fall, killed at last by Mýsing coming by sea, or of the endless alternation in the fight between Hogni and Hedin on the strand in the tale of Hild, are further cases in point.

Signy exchanges shapes with a sorceress so as to be able to sleep with her brother Sigmund without his knowing; Sinfjotli will be the fruit of this incestuous union. In chapter 12 Sigmund's pregnant wife Hjordis sees her husband die and, to protect herself, exchanges clothes with a maidservant, remaining in this guise until King Alf recognises her queenly nature and weds her; thanks to this she will be able to give birth to Sigurd. Both women undergo a temporary change in appearance as pre-condition for bringing a son into the world, or restoration and giving birth are made dependent on the woman's finding an appropriate consort (a related instance involves Brynhild's awakening (i.e., restoration to her self) by Sigurd in ch. 21). It is the fashion of the *puella senilis*, the Old-Young Maid, Cinderella or the Loathly Lady to appear under two contrasting guises (poor/rich, old/young, mad/sane, loathsome/fair, bewitched/free, animal/human), whether simultaneously or in succession, her deprived state being concomitant with the need for a test of the hero's capacity to recognise her true worth.⁵ Only after he has made the correct choice will she recover her fair or propitious nature and be able in turn to offer him a boon: a child, riches, her own beauty, or a symbolic drink—although this may be a temporary transformation, reversion to her earlier guise remaining a possibility. The most dramatic instance of this inflexion in our saga is, of course, Brynhild.

9. *Brynhild*

Let us first dispense with a *false* inflexion. Reviewing Brynhild's role in lays and saga, Heusler (1929) suggested that she represented a confusion of two types, the warrior-maiden Sigdrifa and the reluctant human princess. Schlauch (1930, xiv–xv), noticing the inconsistencies between Brynhild's three encounters with Sigurd discussed above, saw a conflict between the majestic warrior maid and the homely, and haughty, embroiderer, and concluded that

⁵ On the *puella senilis* see Curtius 1953, 101–05. On the Loathly Lady and the test she imposes, see Aguirre 1993 and references there given. With data from Aarne-Thompson (AT) 1961 for tale-types and from Thompson 1955 for folk-motifs, variations on the theme include Sleeping Beauty (Tale-type AT410; motif D1960.3), the Swan-Maiden (AT313, AT400, AT465, AT465A; motif D361.1), the Loathly Lady (AT406A*; motif D732), Turandot (AT851A), Melusine and Mermaids (motifs B81, C31.1.2), the Shrew (AT900–04; Taming-of-the-Shrew motif T251.2), the Enchanted Wife (AT400–24; motif of disenchantment by removing or destroying covering D720). Like Brynhild, all of these undergo a transformation from a loathsome, animal or hostile appearance to a loving one. Like her, some of them revert to the earlier form after a while.

there seems to be little in common between this fierce and vindictive woman, who causes the death of Sigurd and the fall of the Gjukungs, and the Valkyrie who once instructed the hero upon her mountain-top.

More recently, Anderson (1982, 150) saw Brynhild as a complex figure, 'warrior, wise woman, lover of Sigurd, vengeful and cruel human being', wrote of 'the difficulty of combining Brynhild the Valkyrie and Brynhild the daughter of Budli and sister of Atli' (151), and suggested that

the Author has not succeeded in reconciling the two characters in Brynhild, but he manages to make her a schizophrenic, if that ugly word be permitted, and therefore all the more interesting to a modern reader (44).

These apparent contrasts have often been adduced to support the claim that there were originally two different types, 'that Sigdrifa and Brynhild were once two persons' (Schlauch xv) before they were uneasily conflated into one. These can be characterised as a) a valkyrie (named at one time Sigdrifa, a being of numinous attributes, a warrior, endowed with power and wisdom) who instructs Sigurd; b) a mortal woman (skilful in womanly occupations such as embroidering; a loving, yet haughty and disdainful creature, jealous, vindictive, and cruel) who destroys Sigurd.

But the existence of two persons, which (assuming *sigdrifa* is not a kenning, 'bestower of victory', for Brynhild herself; cf. Finch 1965, xxiii) I will not dispute, is independent of the existence of contrasts. What is more, I would hold that the medieval author chose to blend the two types *because of* resemblances, not *in spite of* contrasts; that he saw something we perhaps fail to see. If we modern readers can suspend our modernity when confronting medieval texts and apply to them their own brand of logic, we shall not need, in order to understand the saga, to choose between judgements of schizophrenia and inconsistency. If, as argued earlier, the three encounters are seen as building up a phased advance towards tragedy, Brynhild's behaviour will make perfect sense, not psychologically as a case of schizophrenia, and not intertextually as an instance of confusion of types or 'contamination' (Anderson 1982, 150), but mythologically as another example of narrative inflexion.

Let us review the evidence. On the one hand Brynhild is the sleeping warrior waiting for a fearless man to deliver her, and the homely princess who sits embroidering in her room while waiting for the hero to arrive. Whether valkyrie or woman, these are variations on one folk-type: the Sleeping Beauty, the princess hard to reach, the secluded maiden. Folklore instructs us that she is destined to wed the man who shall reach, awaken, tame or deliver her. This marriage does not quite happen in the

saga, but all three meetings between Brynhild and Sigurd are marked by traditional sexual symbolism: cup, hawk and window, entrance into a woman's forbidden or forbidding space. Of interest here is the fact that both types involve the transformation of a hostile or inaccessible figure into a loving one once the hero has performed his deed of daring. This transformation, I claim, represents the true inflexion in our Brynhild.

On the other hand, she is a valkyrie, a being of numinous attributes whose function and pleasure lie in battle and slaughter: *Ek em skjaldmær . . . ok ekki er mér leitt at berjask* 'I am a shield-maiden . . . and I don't find battle distasteful' (ch. 25). She has often stained her weapon with the blood of men, *ok þess girnum[s]k vér enn* 'and this is what I still long for' (ch. 29). Her wrath against Sigurd is of a piece with her warlike valkyrie nature. In chapter 29 she states that Sigurd is her first lover, and in chapter 31 she warns, *ok eigi mun ek eiga tvá konunga í einni holl* 'nor will I have two lords in one hall', and again: *Nú vil ek eigi tvá menn eiga senn í einni holl* 'Now I'll not have two husbands at one and the same time in one hall'. One of them must be given up, and so in chapter 32 she orders her husband Gunnar to slay Sigurd, warning him that he *mun eigi koma fyrr í sama rekkju henni en þetta er fram komit* 'would not share her bed until it was done'. But this is no mere vengeance, nor sheer bloody-mindedness. In chapter 29 she has declared to Sigurd, whom she takes for Gunnar, *þá skaltu drepa er mín hafa beðit* 'you must kill all who have asked for my hand'. She claims she betrothed herself to the one who *riði minn vafrloga ok dræpi þá menn er ek kvað á* 'would ride through my leaping flames, and kill the men I named' (ch. 31). She reviles Gunnar because *eigi galt hann mér at mundi felldan val* 'nor did he make me a marriage-payment of slaughtered dead' (ch. 31). Her every union involves the downfall of a prior suitor or consort. The bloody dowry is still due: her 'first husband' must die before the next one is accepted. It is now (but only now) Sigurd's turn.

But if all of this is in keeping with her shield-maiden nature, she is also of a kind with the *spádísir*, the spæwives or guardian-women who protected Sigmund in battle (ch. 11). She appears as a figure of authority, lovingly imparting wisdom and power to Sigurd by means of magic runes carved on a goblet. We tend to forget that the valkyries often performed such advisory, protective and loving functions (cf. Davidson 1988, 85–86, 123). This is evinced by the tale of Hliod, who gives Rerir an apple of fertility for his wife and later marries their son Volsung (chs 1, 2), by the tale of Sigrun, who incites and aids Helgi in battle, then weds him (ch. 9) or by the account Brynhild gives of herself in chapter 21:

Brynhildr segir at tveir konungar þorðusk. Hét annarr Hjálmgunnarr. Hann var gamall ok inn mesti hermaðr, ok hafði Óðinn honum sigri heitit, en annarr Agnarr eða Auðabróðir. ‘Ek fellda Hjálmgunnar í orrostu, en Óðinn stakk mik svefnþorni í hefnd þess.’

Brynhild told how two kings had been fighting. One was called Hjálmgunnar—he was old and a fine warrior, and Odin had promised him the victory; and the other was called Agnar or Audabrodír. ‘In the battle I struck down Hjálmgunnar, and in retaliation Odin pricked me with the sleep thorn.’

It is obvious that Agnar is spared and helped by her to defeat and kill his opponent. In the light of this pattern, Brynhild’s actions can hardly be called inconsistent, nor does she deserve the label ‘schizophrenic’, unless we wish to concede that most female figures in the saga suffer from this malady (as well as Odin himself, who gives Sigmund the great sword only to destroy it and him later). The true difference lies not between a valkyrie and a mortal woman but between a loving and a destructive female figure. There is only *one* type, which sometimes appears in its propitious, sometimes in its hostile avatar. In her beneficent guise she may appear as a guardian or mentor, or else her beauty, her femininity, her homely pursuits will be stressed. In her destructive aspect she will exhibit spite, cruelty, vindictiveness, or else much will be made of her shield-maiden role as slayer. Is she a woman or a valkyrie? It transpires that both display the same ambivalence. If the author did conflate Sigr-drifa with Brynhild, a warrior-maiden with a reluctant princess, this was because he knew that, in the final analysis, the two figures he was blending answered to one type, benign and inimical by turns.

We are briefly told that Brynhild had a sister, called Bekkhild *því at hon hafði heima verit ok numit hannyrði, en Brynhildr fór með hjálm ok brynju ok gekk at vígum. Var hon því kǫlluð Brynhildr* ‘because she had stayed at home and taken up the distaff, while Brynhild was concerned with helmet and hauberk and went to battle. This is why she was called Brynhild’ (ch. 24). Here we have another version of our two ‘types’, the bellicose and the domestic, and the association of the names with the respective skills is telling: the one wages war (*hildr*) on the battlefield with mailcoat (*brynja*) and sword, the other works quietly on the bench (*bekkr*). Bekkhild disappears after this one mention, and we learn instead that Brynhild *kunni meira hagleik en aðrar konur. Hon lagði sinn borða með gulli ok saumaði á þau stórmerki, er Sigurðr hafði gert* ‘was more skilled in the domestic arts than other women. She was working her tapestry with gold thread and embroidering on it the great deeds performed by Sigurd’ (ch. 25). That is to say, she has her sister’s skill as well as the warrior’s; in fact, her sister is but a passing projection of herself.

This fleeting appearance could of course be explained as an interpolation of material from a different version of the story in which the sister would have played a more significant part, which would denote another seam in our text. As readers, however, we want to know what she is doing *here*, and the clue lies in the symbolism of her name and task.

Now, whereas Brynhild is embroidering Sigurd's deeds in chapter 25 when he first looks through her window, in chapter 31 *kvað hon sér þat mestan harm at hon átti eigi Sigurð. Hon settisk upp ok sló sinn borða svá at sundr gekk* 'she said her deepest sorrow lay in not being married to Sigurd. She raised herself up and struck her tapestry work, tearing it apart'; shortly after, Sigurd will be slain at her instigation. The symmetry of these two moments is inescapable: his destiny is dependent upon her actions, and her handicraft has a symbolic interpretation. Beneficent and hostile by turns, Brynhild is (like the valkyries in general) a reduced manifestation of the Norns, now exalting the hero, now plotting his fall. As they spin human fates (cf. *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, 3), she embroiders Sigurd's; as they preside over birth and death, so does she look favourably upon the hero at first, later demands his destruction. Her behaviour towards him thus mirrors, on the one hand, Sigrun's towards Helgi, and her own towards Agnar; on the other, Sigrun's towards Hoddbrodd, and her own towards Hjalmgunnar. She merely deals sequentially with one man as she had dealt simultaneously with two men—a conclusion which, as we shall see, accords well with the ambivalent symbolism of both cup and embroidering.

10. Narrative Structure

Four narrative techniques have been examined. *Phasing* segments events into significant moments or unfolds them into a sequence of episodes, making for ritualisation, harmony and order, but equally for inevitability. *Accretion* consists in adding materials to an existing text, the richness and significance of which it deepens by framing its narrative within further narrative. For this reason Sigurd's sword is inherited, not newly forged, and for this reason the saga we have been studying is not merely that of Sigurd but of the Volsungs: one outcome of accretion is emphasis on the line over the individual. *Parallelism* builds partly on accretion to establish significant links between events, figures or plot-lines which need not be logically or causally related. This, like phasing, contributes to encasing single events within a pattern, and enhances their significance—at the expense of realism. *Inflexion* entails shifts, recurrence, shuttle-like motions and transformations, and allows the author to wrap

any given fact within the larger order of a paradigm and to intimate that the text is not concerned with a unique event in time so much as with a universal structure.

What all these techniques have in common is a peculiar delight in expanding the tale beyond what plot ostensibly requires. Strictly speaking, there is no need for Sigurd's sword to be forged three times (it could simply have been praised), or for Signy to have two sons killed by Sigmund in identical circumstances, then to have a second pair of sons (never before heard of) killed by Sinfjotli. The plot does not demand that Gunnar fail twice in his attempt to cross the flames—he might have known directly that this would prove impossible, and asked Sigurd to substitute for him. It is not needful that Sigurd should meet Brynhild no fewer than three times; nor is it a requisite that the saga begin with Odin, then tackle each of Sigurd's ancestors—it might have started off with Sigmund, or with Sigurd's birth. Yet, as has been made clear in the foregoing analyses, such strategies add plenty in point of meaning, and even condition plot and theme. There is a label which has become almost standard in studies of these narrative devices: Vinaver (1971) writes of a number of medieval techniques of expansion subsumed under the general term *amplificatio*. But it is one thing to trace phasing, accretion and other techniques back to the requirements laid down by medieval treatises on rhetoric for *amplificatio*, strategies for expanding the tale; it is quite another thing to account for the fact that essentially the same strategies obtain in epic, saga, folktale and ballad, where arguably the learned rules of rhetorical composition were not known to narrator or singer (under whatever label, phasing is not distinctive of either literary or popular narrative but belongs to both, at least down to modern times). It makes more sense, therefore, to assume that *amplificatio* is a learned version of techniques traditionally employed in oral and written composition.

Amplificatio is a literary label; 'expansion' is far too vague; 'repetition' lumps far too many things together. If we discard these there is, so far as I know, no standard name for techniques whereby every narrative element is mirrored, counterpointed, echoed, doubled, trebled by more of itself, or whereby it generates expansion, gloss, analogy or interlace patterns. Because the feature these techniques have in common is a sort of 'narrative excess' *vis-à-vis* the strict needs of (what we call) the plot, I propose the term 'overtelling' to cover the various strategies reviewed in this article, and define it as a narrative mode characteristic of traditional composition (and, to the extent that it relies on folk models, of

much medieval literature too) by which the author offers a surplus of action, events, situations, characters, symbols or language, patterned according to various techniques: phasing, accretion, parallelism, inflexion, interlacing, stranding (cf. Clover 1982), apposition (cf. Robinson 1985) and others, eschewing discreteness and making each item appear as a part of some larger system, the whole having not only narrative and decorative but also thematic and explanatory value. In *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed., 1989) the verb 'overtell' is assigned two different senses. One of them, 'to count over', is given as obsolete; the other, 'to tell (count, or narrate) in excess of the fact; to exaggerate in reckoning or narration', comes sufficiently close to my meaning. The dictionary does not give this as obsolete, but the only two occurrences cited are from 1511 and 1755. Thus the word exists, but since it is not really in currency it can be appropriated as a technical term without undue harm to users. In this technical sense, overtelling will be patterned excess in narrative, counterpointing what to our eyes may appear as paucity of explanation. Telling the thing twice (or more times) over does not simply yield an aesthetic effect, nor does it just add emphasis, but shapes and conditions the very theme of the text. It is this theme that we must now elucidate.

11. *Thematic Structure*

To gather the different ingredients of the theme we have been isolating, let us begin with the cup motif. It seems always to be offered by a woman. Brynhild gives Sigurd a drink of power on Hindfell, a bridal cup in her bower. Hjordis offers her son Sigurd a drink as she gives him the fragments of the sword, as, much later, Gudrun will give her sons a drink while she arms them for battle. Grimhild gives an ensorcelled ale to Sigurd so he will marry Gudrun, to Gudrun so she will marry Atli, to Guttorm so he will slay Sigurd. Borghild gives Sinfjotli a poisoned drink. Sigrun promises Helgi to drink the marriage toast with him if he slays her intended husband Hoddbrodd. Atli drinks the bridal draught with Gudrun; later she presents him with goblets made of his sons' skulls and filled with their blood shortly before she kills him. The three main things a woman's cup signifies, then, are power, sexual union or doom. More exactly, Sigrun's cup signifies marriage for Helgi, death for Hoddbrodd; Grimhild's ale betokens marriage *and* undoing in the form of forgetfulness, while a similar ambivalence is implicit in Brynhild's cup since she demands a marriage dowry in slain men. In sum, by the offer of cup, goblet or horn, which recurrence ritualises, a woman gives power

and/or herself to a man, conditional on his or someone else's eventual destruction. She moves between the alternate poles of choosing and discarding.

In the second place we have the motifs of cloth and cloth-related operations: spinning, sewing, weaving and embroidering, again performed by a woman, and again steeped in symbolism. Brynhild's chamber is hung with tapestries (chs 25, 26); she is said to excel as an embroiderer, and a sister of hers is mentioned only because her name reflects her skill with the needle. She first appears surrounded by a rampart of shields crowned by a banner, symbol of pre-eminence, victory and protection (see Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1982, s.v. *bannière*). She is found embroidering Sigurd's deeds in her bower when the hero seeks her hand, and destroys her tapestry shortly before she engineers his death. Again love and death are intimated by the motif: she governs the hero's life. In this light, Signy's testing of her sons with needle and thread gains in importance, for it bodes a judgement at which they are found wanting and a subsequent execution. Aslaug (in chapter 25 of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*) gives Ragnar a hair-shirt which makes him invulnerable. Gudrun arms her sons with armour which makes them likewise invulnerable to iron, and this is referred to as *herklæði*, literally 'war-apparel', a kenning identifying the mailcoat with clothing and equivalent to the Anglo-Saxon *beadohrægl* 'war-garment', *heresyrc*, *beaduserce* 'battle-shirt' (*Beowulf* 552, 1511, 2755). The motif of the protective cloth or garment given by a woman to the hero is widespread. Thor receives a magic girdle and gloves from a giantess when on his way to face Geirrod (*Skáldskaparmál*); Odysseus's life is dependent on Ino's veil, as on Circe's and Penelope's cloths; Ariadne's thread rescues Theseus. On the other hand, the yarn of the Queen of the Island of Women detains the Irish heroes Bran and Mael Duin; Amlethus's enemies are immobilised by a vast tapestry woven by his mother Gerutha; the valkyries weave on a bloody loom on the eve of the battle of Clontarf; and the magic girdle that Gawain is given by Bertilak's wife as protection against the Green Knight's blows turns out to be a deceitful gift.⁶ In mythological terms, these female figures control men's destinies, now protectively, now decreeing their undoing. We know the loom and

⁶For Amlethus, see Saxo Grammaticus, Book III (1979–80, 89–90) (an echo of this is found in the arras behind which Shakespeare's Polonius is stabbed by Hamlet; Aguirre 1996). For the valkyries at Clontarf, see *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ch. 157. On the symbolism of weaving and similar activities, see Aguirre 1990, 1994, 1995, 1996.

related instruments to be widespread symbols for destiny; we know that in many mythic narratives destiny is placed in the hands of a female personification of itself who spins, sews, weaves or embroiders men's lives according to some design which has little to do with individual aspirations; and we know that this woman is often enough presented as a goddess, a spirit, or else as a powerful queen, virago or witch. Such is the role (reduced, indeed, yet still powerful) played by Brynhild, Signy or Gudrun. These women are the agents of change.

Now, the technique of phasing has been shown to set up patterns of release, disclosure and fulfilment, leading either to success or defeat, victory or death. Phasing eschews conditionality and deals in facts only; carrying as it does a strong sense of inevitability, it emerges as a structural counterpart of such motifs as woman the drink-bearer or woman the embroiderer. More generally, overtelling has been shown to build on the principle that everything is part of a larger pattern, which implies a synecdochic vision of the cosmos: an adventure, any story, is viewed not as a discrete event but as belonging in a larger whole from which it derives its significance (cf. Aguirre 1993b). It is in this sense that one can indeed say that this is not a saga of Sigurd but of the Volsungs, not of individuals but of a lineage. Furthermore, within the synecdochic pattern all incidents are necessarily inscribed in a framework and 'play a part'; *in such a pattern, therefore, every event is predictable*. Things do not just happen, action does not simply arise from the individual's will; rather both action and events emanate from a structural necessity which determines them. It was suggested in section 2 that phasing discloses the structure of the inevitable, and in section 4 that fate is an entailment of structure; we may now confirm that the use of overtelling techniques creates an overwhelming sense of fate. It is for this reason that, as was suggested at various points, the narrative tends to be 'ritualised', that is, given ceremoniousness and raised above the plane of the merely historical; and that, as argued in section 7, the saga builds on a pattern of resonances—that we so often get a sense of *déjà vu*; things we read of now have happened before, and will keep on happening. Both woman's actions and the structure of the narrative thus give a double motion to the saga: there is a sense of continuity (of the Volsung line, of situations, of actions) counterpointed with a ceaseless replacement. (There is even an intertextual continuity arising from the unfinished, theoretically endless process of accretion; it may be surmised that the compiler was seeking to preserve this by the addition of the further saga of Ragnar to the whole.) Though individuals may feel they exist in

linear time, the cosmos in our saga proceeds in a cyclical manner; moments, patterns, processes, families abide or recur, only individuals pass away.

Much has been written on the presence in Irish myth of a woman of supernatural and semi-allegorical status who personifies royal rule and is referred to as *flaitheas na h-Ereinn* 'the Sovereignty of Ireland', her function being to test her suitors and award the sovereignty and/or herself to the deserving one. Precious little has been written, on the other hand, on how this woman appears in other, non-Celtic texts.⁷ I have argued elsewhere that a multiplicity of figures in Classical, Germanic, and medieval myth generally significantly display attributes corresponding to those observable in the Irish manifestations of the *flaitheas* (Aguirre 1993a, 1996, 1998, 2001). Central to this figure's symbolism are the following features. She personifies earth, the land and, in its political aspect, the kingdom. She is characterised by traits of Fate, sexuality and power. She holds sovereignty or pre-eminence. She woos or is courted by a number of suitors who aspire to some boon which she alone can dispense, or else she stands in a parental relation to the hero (mother, godmother, mentor, nurse, guardian spirit and so forth). She (or her surrogate) appears to the seekers in a threatening or a deprived aspect and tests them in various ways, or else she manifests herself to them after they have undergone a test (having slain the dragon, Sigurd comes across Brynhild). She gives a token of sovereignty or pre-eminence to the aspiring, or else to the successful suitor: a sword, a drink, wealth, her body or her love. He thus obtains kingship, supremacy or power through sexual union with her, which in symbolic terms means he weds the land (and so the earth); or, where she appears as a mother figure, she is the agent of the transmission of power (often symbolised by sword, cup or treasure). She in turn recovers her benign aspect, is delivered or is restored, which symbolically amounts to the earth's recovery of fertility. She eventually (often after a full time-cycle) discards him in a variety of ways, or he leaves her, or dies, whereupon she is once again deprived (or freed). In symbolic terms this is expressed by widowhood, sorrow, poverty,

⁷For the Celtic domain, see Ó Máille 1928, Thurneysen 1930, Krappe 1942, Breatnach 1953, Mac Cana 1955–56, Bromwich 1960–61, Aguirre 1990. The only study of note dealing with this figure from an etymological, social, religious viewpoint in a comprehensive Indo-European perspective is Dumézil 1968–73; what he calls 'la déesse trivalente', the trivalent goddess, closely corresponds to the Irish Sovereignty figure. Impressive though his study is, it seems to me that he neglects the literary aspect and misses the symbolic dimension of the 'goddess'.

ugliness, old age or madness, by the assumption or recovery of animal traits or by her withdrawal into an unreachable domain. New suitors approach her, and the process recommences. It will be obvious by now that Brynhild, Gudrun, Sigrun, Hjordis, Signy, Borghild, in fact all the women in our saga, exhibit important aspects of this symbolic complex (though rarely are these features to be found together in any one figure, and most often they appear in an attenuated fashion). In other words, the fundamental, or (better) the framing theme in *Volsunga saga* is to be identified by some such label as 'The Theme of Sovereignty' in so far as, one after another, male characters often presented as heroes vie for power. One after another, they find that this requires the dethronement and/or slaying of the current holder of power. Time after time, whether or not they are aware of this, a female figure is the key to their success; time and again her actions relate to wealth and territorial property (cf. Sigrun's words in chapter 9 after the battle of Frekastein: *Skipt mun nú löndum* 'The lands will now change hands', words which have no seeming bearing on the issues at hand); while the paramount symbols employed (sword, cup, treasure, weaving and so on) are those characteristically met with in the Irish versions of the Sovereignty theme.

12. Conclusion

At one end of the compositional spectrum we find the formula in Parry's (1971) sense; at the other, what I have called overtelling. Both could in some measure be accounted for by the term 'repetition'; but already in 1960 Lord complained that this was too all-embracing a term, and a misleading one to boot, and argued for the segregation of the formula from the general category of repetition devices. The same argument is valid at the other end of the spectrum, where overtelling techniques should be differentiated from the bulk of such devices.

At every stage the text tells two complementary stories—that of the successful hero, that of the failed one; without either of them, the narrative is incomplete. Furthermore, the fate of the successful one will inevitably be 'failure' in the end—for in the end we are talking about life and death, the two principles that govern the round of the earth, the two faces of the 'goddess' of Fate. For this reason, the saga operates in terms of contrasts: Regin/Sigurd, Fafnir/Sigurd, Brynhild/Gudrun, failed sons/successful son, but also: Sigurd victorious/Sigurd slain, propitious Odin/inimical Odin, loving Brynhild/wrathful Brynhild. This explains the change in Brynhild's attitude towards Sigurd: she is a representative of the necessary mutability of the cosmos. For this reason, no real reproach

is levelled at her by Sigurd, or at Gudrun by Atli, at the hour of their deaths; no justification for these women's acts is necessary, for ultimately they are as inevitable as time itself. As Sigurd puts it in his final speech (ch. 32), *Ok nú er þat fram komit er fyrir löngu var spát ok vér höfum dulizk við, en engi má við sköpum vinna* 'And what was long since prophesied has now come to pass. I could never bring myself to believe it, but no one can fight against fate'.

No explanation is needed—but of course, in a way plenty of explanation is offered, not in terms of narrator- or character-statements (they do what they can, and may offer their own interpretations from the rationalising vantage-point of individuals living in linear time) but in terms of text-construction. Phrasing, inflexion, parallelism *explain*, in the sense that they define the world pattern with reference to which we are meant to understand individual events. In other words, what the text lacks in discursive explanation it compensates for by overtelling. The quality of the sword Gram is elucidated not by authorial reflection but by the second and third forgings. The true significance of Sigurd's thrust against Lyngvi is given by the prior narratives of Helgi and Lyngvi's own onslaughts. Questions as to Brynhild's character are answered by the way her actions are mirrored in Gudrun's deeds, and by the fact that she meets Sigurd not once but thrice.

If we now distil the pattern which underlies the ceaseless overtelling in the saga, we will find that the combination of narrative structure with the symbolism of woman, cup and weaving activities yields the following basic theme. A female searches, or waits, for a consort or an heir. A hero sets out, overcomes obstacles (often with her help), obtains the woman (or her boon) for a while, eventually loses her (or her boon), or dies, whereupon she chooses a new consort (or withdraws), and the process recommences. This pattern (clearest in the case of Gudrun, whose fatal progression from husband to husband leads to the extinction of the Volsung and Gjukung lines), reveals an interesting point not at all obvious in standard readings of the text. If the centre of gravity, the *axis* around which the story turns, is shaped by the deeds of the male heroes in the Volsung line, the *frame* within which these take place is provided by a variety of female figures whose consistently ambivalent behaviour suggests that they are all manifestations of one single principle which sets and keeps the story in motion. Because of woman, king replaces king, and the line goes on (until it dies out—unless we wish to consider the ensuing *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* a genuine chapter 45 to *Volsunga saga*; in this case, however little bearing the one may have on the other,

the line goes on thanks to another female figure, Aslaug). Thus, continuity and replacement as engineered by woman and hammered in by narrative construction emerge as the dominant thematic thread.

It is likely that this double thematic structure has implications for our understanding of the social and ontological role assigned to the female figure in and by medieval literature. Her ambiguous position, both as a member of and as an outsider to the social round, is clearly manifested in the fact that she initiates and sustains a process to which she herself is not subjected. She appears to be less, and more, than man: she moves on the periphery, exhibiting little political power yet wielding or symbolising the larger forces to which political power is ultimately subservient. According to an anthropological brand of feminist criticism, it seems a universal (though not necessarily objective) practice to regard woman as closer than man to nature and, thus, as 'intermediate' between nature and culture—as, in some way, standing on the margin, or the threshold, of cultural space (cf. Ortner 1974). The foregoing analysis, showing the liminality of the female figure in *The Saga of the Volsungs*, would seem to lend support to this hypothesis.⁸

⁸ On the figure of woman in the light of the anthropological concept of liminality, see Aguirre, Quance and Sutton 2000, chapter 3. I wish to express my thanks to Roberta Quance for fruitful discussions on the issue of woman's symbolic position in culture. This article is a partial result of a wider research project (code-numbered PB93-0242) on the concepts of marginalisation and liminality, made possible by funding from the Dirección General de Investigación Científica y Técnica (DGICYT) under the auspices of the Spanish Ministry of Education.

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SQRLA ÞÁTR: THE LITERARY ADAPTATION OF MYTH AND LEGEND

By ELIZABETH ASHMAN ROWE

Introduction

SQRLA ÞÁTR IS PRESERVED only in the Flateyjarbók version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, which was compiled by the priest Jón Þórðarson in 1387–88.¹ The dates proposed for the composition of the text range from the beginning of the thirteenth century (Böðvar Guðmundsson *et al.* 1993, 188) to the time of Jón Þórðarson himself (Gouchet 1997, 320). With *Norna-Gests þátr*, *Tóka þátr Tókasonar* and *Albani þátr ok Sunnifu*, *Sqrla þátr* is one of a group of *þættir* that deal with issues of Christianity and paganism and that in particular emphasise ‘the historical gulf between the Old and New Dispensations’ (Harris 1980, 166). These *þættir* are a closely related subgroup of the so-called conversion *þættir*, which include *Rognvalds þátr ok Rauðs*, *Eindriða þátr ilbreiðs*, *Volsa þátr*, *Sveins þátr ok Finns*, *Helga þátr ok Úlfs*, *Svaða þátr ok Arnórs kerlinganefs* and *Þorhalls þátr knapps* (Harris 1980, 1986). The moral understanding promoted by the first group of texts is effected by some suspension of the laws of nature (e.g. the supernaturally lengthened lives of Norna-Gestr and Tóki) that enables Christians to gain first-hand knowledge of the pagan past. In *Sqrla þátr*, that past is evoked in a rich mixture of Scandinavian mythology and *fornaldarsaga*-like viking adventures that has long engaged scholars (cf. Schlauch 1934, 138–40; Chesnutt 1968, 129–33; Clunies Ross 1973; Almqvist 1978–79, 91–94). Yet encompassing the enigma of the supernatural battle at the heart of the story and the obviously Christian

¹ The years of Jón Þórðarson’s work can be established from dated material prepended to the manuscript by its second scribe (Ólafur Halldórsson 1990, 207–08). *Sqrla þátr* is printed in editions of Flateyjarbók (e.g. *Flateyjarbók* 1860–68, I 275–83) and also in collections of *fornaldarsögur* (e.g. Guðni Jónsson 1950, I 367–82). An English translation of the first two chapters can be found in Garmonsway and Simpson 1968, 298–300, and English translations of the entire text are provided by Eiríkr Magnússon and Morris 1901, 201–25, Kershaw 1921, 43–57, and Guðmundur Erlingsson and Bachman 1993, 73–84. For the relationship between *Sqrla þátr* and the text entitled *Heðins saga ok Hǫgna*, see van Hamel 1935–36, 283–95.

perspective of its ending is a narrative that has been analysed only at a relatively generalised level (Harris 1980, 162–67; Damico 1993, 638b; Gouchet 1997, 320–21). The present study delves a little more deeply into the text and argues that the author of *Sǫrla þáttur* has not just borrowed narrative elements from disparate sources but has consciously and consistently adapted them for his purposes.

The narrative of *Sǫrla þáttur* falls into three parts. The first part (chs 1–2) describes how Freyja is much taken with a gold necklace made by four dwarves and how she agrees to spend a night with each of them in order to obtain it. Óðinn learns about this from Loki and commands him to steal the necklace, which he does by entering Freyja's bower in the form of an insect. Freyja asks Óðinn for her necklace back, and his conditions for its return provide the motivation for the second part: she must arrange for two kings each with a following of twenty kings to fight one another, and the battle must be enchanted in such a way that as soon as a fighter falls, he rises up and fights again. The motivation for the third part is provided by the last of Óðinn's stipulations: the battle will continue until a Christian who is both brave and endowed with the luck of his liege-lord slays the fighters with weapons. Chapters 3–8 comprise the second part of the narrative, describing how the viking Sǫrli sterki is seized with a desire to have the famous dragon-ship of King Hálfðan. Sǫrli and his men kill the king and take the ship, but later Sǫrli makes his peace with Hálfðan's son Hǫgni and swears brotherhood with him. After Sǫrli is killed, Freyja (in disguise and using the name Gǫndul) persuades a prince named Heðinn to seek out Hǫgni and test himself against him, to see which of the two is more famous. After their competition shows them to be equal in every respect, Heðinn and Hǫgni, who each have a following of twenty kings, swear brotherhood. At their next meeting, Freyja/Gǫndul gives Heðinn a magic drink and suggests that Heðinn will not truly be Hǫgni's equal until he kills Hǫgni's queen and steals both his daughter Hildir and the dragon-ship. Despite Hildir's attempt to dissuade him, Heðinn does so, afterwards hastening to find Gǫndul and report his success. She is pleased and offers him another drink, which sends him to sleep. She then lays the necessary spells on him, Hǫgni and all their host. When Heðinn wakes up, he realises the shamefulness of his deed and decides to sail to some distant place where he will not be reproached with it. Hǫgni sets off in pursuit, and when he catches up with the younger man, Heðinn offers to leave Hildir, the dragon ship and all his men and valuables, and to live out his life in some distant place. Hǫgni replies that the killing of his queen

makes it impossible for him to accept a settlement, and the two sides come to blows. This clash of arms, known as the ‘Battle of the Hjaðnings’ (*Hjaðningavíg* or *Hjaðningaél*), is the enchanted one required by Óðinn. The short third section (ch. 9) brings the narrative to a close. It describes how, 143 years after the *Hjaðningavíg* began, King Óláfr Tryggvason lands at the island where the battle is taking place.² One night the retainer assigned to guard the ship, Ívarr ljómi, arms himself and goes ashore to investigate the disappearance of previous watchmen. There he is approached by Heðinn, who asks him to slay the combatants and end the battle. Ívarr does so and returns to Óláfr’s ship, where the king praises the deed.

Hálfðan’s dragon-ship

Few scholars (e.g. van Hamel 1935–36; Lukman 1977) have studied the episodes of the central story that precede the *Hjaðningavíg*, as their relatively recent date makes them much less interesting than the episodes drawn from Scandinavian mythology. However, the story of Hálfðan’s dragon-ship has a tradition of its own. The account found in *Sqrla þáttr* seems to be based on *Sqrlastikki*, a poem of which only one strophe survives (it is quoted in chapter 4 of *Sqrla þáttr*). Harris (1980, 164) suggests that the purpose of chapters 3–4 is to explain this verse, but the explanation goes no further than identifying *hinn forsnjalli* ‘the exceedingly wise one’ (*Flatheyjarbók* 1860–68, I 278) as Sqrli. The references to *Sqrlastikki* seem to be corroborative: *Síðan bqrðust þeir sem segir í Sqrlastikka* ‘Afterwards they fought, as it says in *Sqrlastikki*’ (*Flatheyjarbók* 1860–68, I 277) and *En Sqrli lifði þeirra skemr ok féll í Austrvegi fyrir víkingum sem segir í Sqrlastikka* ‘And of those men, Sqrli lived for the shorter time and was killed in the Baltic by vikings, as it says in *Sqrlastikki*’ (*Flatheyjarbók* 1860–68, I 278). Lacking evidence to the contrary, we must assume that the story of Hálfðan’s dragon-ship in *Sqrla þáttr* is more or less that of *Sqrlastikki*. Other versions are found in two other *fornaldarsögur*, *Sqrla saga sterka* (Guðni Jónsson 1950, III

²Lukman (1977, 57) suggests that the 143-year period was calculated from an Irish annal and represents the length of time the Irish were subject to Viking depredations. The notice for 837 is the first in which the annal gives the name of a viking in Ireland, and the notice for 980 describes the departure of the penitent Óláfr kváran Sigtryggsson from Dublin to Iona, an event celebrated by the Irish as the end of an epoch. Lukman argues that in *Sqrla þáttr* Óláfr Tryggvason has taken the place of Óláfr Sigtryggsson.

369–410) and *Hálfðanar saga Brǫnufóstra* (Guðni Jónsson 1950, IV 287–318).

In *Sǫrli þáttur*, Hálfðan is a Danish king with two sons and a famous dragon-ship. The viking Sǫrli sterki, son of King Erlingr of Upplönd in Norway, sees the ship and is overcome with desire for it. He attacks Hálfðan, killing him and gaining the ship, and then goes in search of Hálfðan's sons in order to offer compensation. Hǫgni Hálfðanarson rejects Sǫrli's offer, and a battle follows in which Hǫgni's brother, Sǫrli's father and Sǫrli's forecastleman are killed. Sǫrli is wounded, but Hǫgni stops the battle, has Sǫrli healed, and becomes his sworn brother. Later Sǫrli is killed in the Baltic and Hǫgni takes vengeance for him. In *Sǫrli saga sterka*, believed to be from the fifteenth century (e.g. Lukman 1977, 41) but surviving only in post-medieval manuscripts, the structure of this story, though elaborated, is fundamentally the same. Hálfðan is now identified as *Brǫnufóstri* 'the foster-son of Brana' and has defeated Sǫrli's uncle, the ruler of *Svíþjóð in kalda* 'Sweden the cold', but Sǫrli is still nicknamed *sterki* 'the strong' and is still the son of King Erlingr of Upplönd. After adventures in Bláland and Norway, Sǫrli sees a magnificent dragon-ship in Denmark. When he finds out that it is Hálfðan's, Sǫrli offers to accept the ship (now given the name *Skrauti* 'richly ornamented') as compensation for his uncle. Hálfðan becomes angry and attacks him. By the end of the battle Sǫrli has offered Hálfðan terms three times, but he refuses them each time and is killed (ch. 11). When Hálfðan's son, Hǫgni, hears of this, he sets off for Norway to avenge his father. Meanwhile, Sǫrli has set off to find Hálfðan's sons and offer them compensation, and the two narrowly miss meeting each other. After killing Sǫrli's father, Hǫgni returns home. There he meets Sǫrli, who is laying siege to Hǫgni's brother after his three offers of compensation have been refused. Hǫgni and Sǫrli fight, and when Hǫgni has Sǫrli at his mercy, he relents and offers him settlement and sworn brotherhood (ch. 25). Curiously, the much earlier *Hálfðanar saga Brǫnufóstra* (verbatim borrowings from this saga found in *Gríms saga loðinkinna* and *Ála flekks saga* suggest that *Hálfðanar saga Brǫnufóstra* must have been written around 1300 or slightly later) preserves only the association of a Danish King Hálfðan Brǫnufóstri with a beautiful dragon-ship named Skrauti. His adventures take place in Helluland, where he befriends the half-troll-wife Brana; in England, where he wins the favour of Princess Marsibil; and in Denmark, where he avenges the death of his father. In contrast to the primary version of this story, Sǫrli never appears, Hálfðan's only son is named Ríkarðr (not Hǫgni) and Hálfðan

himself lives to be an old man (instead of meeting his death in battle in his middle years).

Lukman (1977) traces this story back to events during the Danish occupation of Ireland in the late ninth century, when an Irish abbot named Suairlech (d. 870) tried to mediate between the contending kings of Erin and a Danish ruler named Hálfðan was killed in or driven out of Ireland. As the Irish annals correspond only vaguely to the Old Norse sources and do not mention the dragon-ship, this proposed historical basis is little more than suggestive, but it receives some support from the version of the story in the thirteenth-century Middle High German poem *Kudrun*, which locates Hagen's (i.e. Hogni's) kingdom in Ireland. Whatever the origins of this narrative tradition, it was evidently popular in Iceland for some time. The most unusual thing about it, however, is that *Sqrla þátrr* is the only version that ends by involving Hogni Hálfðanarson with the *Hjaðningavíg*. As will be shown below, a character named Hogni is associated with the *Hjaðningavíg* from the first, although his patronymic is not specified except in *Sqrla þátrr*. If all these texts refer to the same Hogni, why do the later ones omit this portion of his story? For that matter, why do earlier versions of the story of the *Hjaðningavíg* omit Hogni's saga-worthy dealings with Sqrlri?

Table 1 lists the versions of the three parts of the central story of *Sqrla þátrr* in order of age, showing that of all these texts, only *Sqrla þátrr* contains the 'whole' story. Rather than try to explain what happened to

Table 1: The Literary Traditions Combined in *Sqrla þátrr*

	Hálfðan owns a splendid dragon-ship	Sqrlri and Hálfðan fight over Hálfðan's dragon-ship	Sqrlri and Hogni Hálfðanarson swear brotherhood	Hogni Hálfðanarson and Heðinn Hjarrandason fight each other in the <i>Hjaðningavíg</i>	Hogni (no patronymic) and Heðinn Hjarrandason fight each other in the <i>Hjaðningavíg</i>
c.850	–	–	–	–	<i>Ragnarsdrápa</i>
1140s	–	–	–	–	<i>Háttalykill</i>
1200s	–	–	–	–	<i>Gesta Danorum</i>
1220s	–	–	–	–	<i>Snorra Edda</i>
13th or 14th c.	<i>Sqrla þátrr</i>				–
c.1300	<i>Hálfðanar saga Brønuvóstra</i>	–	–	–	–
15th c.	<i>Sqrla saga sterka</i>			–	–

the rest of the story everywhere else, I prefer to suppose that the author of *Sǫrla þáttur* has conflated the Høgni of the dragon-ship with the Høgni of the *Hjaðningavíg*, thus forging a single narrative out of two previously separate traditions. Quite possibly the author of the *þáttur* assumed that the two Høgnis were the same, as the father of the Høgni involved in the *Hjaðningavíg* is never specified. The re-separation of the two traditions after their union in *Sǫrla þáttur* may be due to later authors viewing *Sǫrlastikki* rather than *Sǫrla þáttur* as the primary source for the story, or it may be due to a generic expectation that an entertaining adventure story such as Høgni's ought to have a happy ending and therefore that the version of the story in *Sǫrla þáttur* ought to be ignored.

Whether or not the combination of the two traditions was conscious, it was certainly fortunate. Not only does the dragon-ship itself link the parts of the story, providing Sǫrli's motivation for slaying Hálfðan and Heðinn's means of slaying Høgni's queen and abducting his daughter, but the whole episode of its recovery from Sǫrli foreshadows the prelude to the *Hjaðningavíg*. Sǫrli, having committed a serious injury to Høgni by killing his father, offers compensation, which Høgni refuses in the same way that he will later refuse Heðinn's offer of compensation for the killing of his wife. After each refusal Høgni joins battle with the one who has injured him, and in each case the injurer is himself injured but is later made whole. The dragon-ship episode and the prelude to the *Hjaðningavíg* differ in that the former is motivated by 'natural' greed, resulting in reconciliation and the brotherhood that Høgni and Sǫrli maintain for life, whereas the latter is motivated by the pagan gods' unnatural magic, resulting in a horrific 143 years of strife between Høgni and Heðinn. The contrast between the two episodes shows how society's mechanisms for adjusting for loss (compensation and sworn brotherhood) function well under 'natural' circumstances (Høgni gains a brother to replace his father) but break down when the pagan gods intervene, as both sides may be said to lose in the *Hjaðningavíg*. Christian intervention is necessary to end the injustice, balancing and making good the gods' disruption of nature and 'natural' society.

Damico (1993, 638b) shows how these narrative threads are worked into a unified whole with the mythological material:

Sǫrla þáttur has unity. Its structural simplicity is made complex by thematic repetition and balance. It begins and ends with a mythological motif. The conflict/redress configuration in each part is similar: each struggle is touched off by the obsession with a precious object belonging to another (necklace, boat, fame/love), and the redress is either a pact (Freyja's promise, the *fóstbræðralag*) or, as is the case in the *Hjaðningavíg*, both a *fóstbræðralag*

and blood revenge. In characterization, unity is achieved by means of antithetical balancing of character, as, for example, in the figures of Óðinn and Óláfr, and of Loki (the master thief and catalyst of the everlasting battle) and Ívarr ljómi (the Christian guard who brings closure to the nightly ‘thefts’ of watchmen and to the everlasting battle).

Gouchet (1997, 320–21) also notes the antithetical opposition of paganism and Christianity that controls the construction of the narrative, and he too draws attention to the correspondence between chapters 1–2 and 8–9. He provides a diagram illustrating how the two sworn brotherhoods of chapters 4 and 6 and the two conflicts of chapters 2 and 7 form a nested structure that pivots around the central chapter 5, in which Gǫndul first appears to Heðinn.

The Hjaðningavíg

The account in *Sǫrla þáttur* of the *Hjaðningavíg* has received more scholarly attention than the surrounding text, as versions of this story (without the framing material of *Sǫrla þáttur*) are found in Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum* and also in *Snorra Edda*. Earlier than these narratives is the allusion to this legend in stt. 8–12 of *Ragnarsdrápa* (Finnur Jónsson 1908–15, B I 2–3), which was composed in the mid-ninth century by the Norwegian skald Bragi hinn gamli, but as this work is only preserved in *Snorra Edda*, it is not strictly speaking an independent source. Also earlier is the poetic reference in stt. 23a–b of *Háttalykill* (Finnur Jónsson 1908–15, B I 498), which was composed in the 1140s by the Icelander Hallr Þórarinnsson and the Orkney earl Rognvaldr kali. In addition, the thirteenth-century Middle High German poem *Kudrun* contains an extremely demythologised variant in which Hetel (Heðinn) and Hagen (Hǫgni) reach a settlement and are reconciled.³ Because the names associated with this legend are mentioned in the Old English poems *Widsiþ* and *Deor*, it has been assumed that the legend has a historical basis in a

³Malone 1964 brings to light a twelfth-century Anglo-Latin account of two quarrelsome brothers who are cursed by their parents to go on fighting eternally. They fight all week, stopping only on the ninth hour of Saturday, when they swear to remain at peace, but at the first hour of Monday they resume their battle. Their sister weeps to see them and heals their wounds with water from a certain spring. This story seems only distantly related to the *Hjaðningavíg* at best, as neither the theme nor the characters are those of the *Hjaðningavíg*, and even the structure of the conflict (two brothers fight while their sister watches) is only somewhat similar. See also Frankis 1979 for the identification of a ‘Hildir motif’ in certain *Íslendingasögur* and *konungasögur*.

fifth-century abduction and battle, although hypotheses about the identities of the participants vary from Attila and Empress Honoria (Lukman 1948) to east Baltic chieftains (Schneider 1964, 115–26). As the Old English sources mention only the names of the two kings and their tribes, however, the original conflict was not necessarily over a woman. As will be discussed below, it is possible that Norsemen conflated the Hagen/Heoden story known to the *Widsiþ* poet with other tales about a woman's revival of slain warriors. In any event, the *Hjaðningavíg* of the extant Scandinavian versions of the legend takes the form of an 'eternal battle' that as a folklore motif (E155.1, *Slain warriors revive nightly*) appears in numerous Celtic analogues (Boberg 1966; see also Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1932, 114–16 and 1957, 17–18; Murphy 1953, xxxiii–xxxiv, liii–liv; Bruford 1966).

Comparison of the Scandinavian versions of the story of the *Hjaðningavíg* shows a significant amount of variation. Here is Snorri's account, from the *Skáldskaparmál* section of his *Edda* (Faulkes 1998, I 72):

Konungr sá er Høgni er nefndr átti dóttur er Hildir hét. Hana tók at herfangi konungr sá er Heðinn hét Hjarrandason. Þá var Høgni konungr farinn í konunga stefnu. En er hann spurði at herjat var í ríki hans ok dóttir hans var í braut tekin þá fór hann með sínu liði at leita Heðins ok spurði til hans at Heðinn hafði siglt norðr með landi. Þá er Høgni konungr kom í Nóreg spurði hann at Heðinn hafði siglt vestr of haf. Þá siglir Høgni eptir honum allt til Orkneyja, ok er hann kom þar sem heitir Háey þá var þar fyrir Heðinn með lið sitt. Þá fór Hildir á fund fōður síns ok bauð honum men (at) sætt af hendi Heðins, en í qōðru orði sagði hon at Heðinn væri búinn at berjask ok ætti Høgni af honum øngrar vægðar ván. Høgni svarar stirt dóttur sinni, en er hon hitti Heðin sagði hon honum at Høgni vildi ønga sætt ok bað hann búask til orrostu. Ok svá gera þeir hváirtveggju, ganga upp á eyrna ok fylkja liðinu. Þá kallar Heðinn á Høgna mág sinn ok bauð honum sætt ok mikit gull at bótum. Þá svarar Høgni:

'Of síð bauðtu þetta ef þú vill sættask, þvíat nú hefi ek dregit Dáinsleif er dvergarnir gerðu, er manns bani skal verða hvert sinn er bert er ok aldri bilar í hoggvi ok ekki sár grœr ef þar skeinisk af.'

Þá segir Heðinn: 'Sverði hælir þú þar en eigi sigri. Þat kalla ek gott hvert er dróttinholt er.'

Þá hófu þeir orrostu þá er Hjaðningavíg er kallat ok þorðusk þann dag allan ok at kveldi fóru konungar til skipa. En Hildir gekk of nóttina til valsins ok vakði upp með fjölkyngi alla þá er dauðir váru. Ok annan dag gengu konungarnir á vígvöllinn ok þorðusk ok svá allir þeir er fellu hinn fyrra daginn. Fór svá sú orrosta hvern dag eptir annan at allir þeir er fellu ok öll vápn þau er lágu á vígvelli ok svá hlífar urðu at grjóti. En er dagaði stóðu upp allir dauðir menn ok þorðusk ok öll vápn váru þá nýt. Svá er sagt í kvæðum at Hjaðningar skulu svá bíða ragnarøkrs.

A king named Hǫgni had a daughter called Hildr. A king named Heðinn Hjarrandason seized her in a raid, when King Hǫgni was gone to a meeting of kings. But when he found out that his kingdom had been raided and his daughter had been taken away, then he went with his troop to seek Heðinn and he learned that Heðinn had sailed north along the coast. When King Hǫgni arrived in Norway, he found out that Heðinn had sailed west over the sea. Then Hǫgni sailed after him all the way to Orkney. And when he came to the place called Hoy, Heðinn and his troop were there. Then Hildr went to meet her father and on behalf of Heðinn offered him a necklace as settlement. But her next words were that Heðinn was ready to fight and Hǫgni would have no hope of mercy from him. Hǫgni answered his daughter curtly, and when she met Heðinn, she said to him that Hǫgni did not want a settlement and told him to prepare for battle. And each of the two do so; they go up on the island and draw up their troops. Then Heðinn calls on his father-in-law Hǫgni and offered him a settlement and much gold in compensation. Then Hǫgni answers:

‘Too late did you offer that if you want us to be reconciled, because now I have drawn Dáinsleif, which the dwarves made, which must be the death of a man each time it is bared and which never fails in its stroke, and no wound heals if it is a scratch from this sword.’

Then Heðinn says, ‘You are boasting of a sword there, not of victory; whatsoever is loyal to its master, that I call good.’

Then they began that fight which is called the Battle of the Hjaðnings, and they fought all that day. And at evening the kings went to their ships. But during the night Hildr went to the slain and with magic woke up all those who were dead. And the next day the kings went onto the battlefield and fought, and so did all those who fell the day before. The battle went this way one day after another, that all those who died and all the weapons that lay on the battlefield, and also the shields, turned to stone. But when it became day, the dead men all stood up and fought, and all the weapons were then ready to be used again. It is said in poems that the Hjaðnings had to carry on thus until Ragnarök.

Differences between this version and the one in *Sǫrta þáttur* are immediately apparent. Although the names of the principals and the perpetually renewed fight between them are the same, the surrounding circumstances have changed. The gods play no part in the story, and the motivation is entirely internal to the protagonists. Heðinn and Hǫgni are strangers to one another, not sworn brothers. Hildr, rather than Heðinn, tries to arrange a reconciliation first, but in contrast to the real regret that Heðinn expresses, Hildr’s ostensible desire for a reconciliation, if not concealing an outright wish to stir up trouble, expresses itself in a way that immediately produces the opposite of the intended effect. Hǫgni’s drawing a magic sword foils a second attempt at reconciliation (neither the second attempt nor this sword are present in *Sǫrta þáttur*). Hildr’s magic, rather than Freyja’s, revives the slain every night. The slain men and

their weapons turn to stone (a motif not present in *Sǫrla þáttur*); and the battle is expected to go on until Ragnarǫk, rather than until a Christian man fulfills Óðinn's conditions for breaking the curse.

In Saxo's version of the story, the conflict between Hithinus (Heðinn) and Høginus (Høgni) has been made part of the disintegration of the Peace of Frotho, which is recounted in Book V of *Gesta Danorum* (*Saxonis Gesta Danorum* 1931, 131–34). It may be summarised as follows:

Hithinus, king of a Norwegian tribe, and Hilda, daughter of Høginus, a chieftain of the Jutes, fall in love with one another, sight unseen. Later Hithinus and Høginus go raiding together. After they swear that if one of them is killed, the other will avenge him, Høginus betrothes Hilda to Hithinus. With others owing allegiance to Frotho, the two men win victories in Orkney, bringing to a total of twenty the number of kings paying tribute to their overlord. Then Hithinus is slandered: Høginus is told that he seduced Hilda before the betrothal, which is considered a great crime. Høginus attacks Hithinus but is defeated and retreats to Jutland. Failing to reconcile the two, Frotho decrees they should settle their dispute in a second fight. Now Hithinus is wounded, but Høginus takes pity on his young opponent and spares him. Seven years later they meet for a third time on Hithinsø, fight again and kill each other. Hilda burns with such passion for her husband that in the night she conjures up the spirits of the slain with her spells in order to renew the battle.

Here too there are differences. Hithinus and Høginus are Frotho's men rather than independent kings. Hithinus and Hilda are wed with the consent of her father rather than without it. Høginus attacks Hithinus because of something that Hithinus is said to have done rather than because of something that he actually did do. Hithinus and Høginus fight against each other twice before meeting for the *Hjaðningavíg*; and as in *Snorra Edda*, it is Hilda who revives the slain warriors. Nothing is said about how long the battle lasts.

For all these Scandinavian variations, the difference between them and the Celtic analogues (for which see Uecker 1972, 93–100, and Clunies Ross 1973, 75–76) is greater still. The earliest example of the motif in Ireland, for example, is found in the sixteenth-century *Eachtra Chonaill Ghulban* (Bruford 1966, 16):

The hero discovers that in one day's battle he is fighting against men he had already killed the day before. That night he stays on the battlefield among the corpses to discover what is happening. Eventually a monstrous hag appears with a vessel of balsam, a lamp and a sword and begins to revive the corpses with the balsam. The hero then leaps up and kills her and the men whom she has resurrected.

Calling the Celtic version of the *Slain warriors revive nightly* motif the 'Everlasting Fight' is misleading, as Almqvist points out:

It would be better to call it the Resuscitating Hag, because in most versions the fight takes place only on three consecutive days, after which the hag is killed; furthermore the hag usually revives the fallen on one side only. The episode normally ends when the hero kills the hag and obtains the resuscitating ointment (or the like), whereupon he is able to bring back to life the fallen warriors on his own side (1978–79, 93).

Scholars have tended to view the Scandinavian motif as a subtype of the Celtic one, given such intermediate versions as the eleventh-century Irish *Caith Maige Turedh*, in which the army of the Tuatha Dé Danann has in its battle against the Fomorians the advantages of a magic sword, resuscitation by wizards, the creation of auxiliaries out of stones, sods and trees by female druids and the overnight repair of their weapons (Chesnutt 1968, 132); or the twelfth-century Welsh story in which King Arthur legislates that two suitors must fight a duel every May Day until Doomsday, when the winner will receive the hand of the lady (Krappe 1927, 147–48). Emphasis has also been laid on the hybrid nature of the Norwegian colony in Orkney (established c.780 and subject to Norway until 1468–69), and the Scandinavian association of the *Hjaðningavíg* with Orkney and the early reference to it in the Orcadian *Háttalykill* have been adduced as evidence for the Orcadian origin of this motif. Even the fact that the Everlasting Fight was already part of the Hildr-legend when Bragi composed *Ragnarsdrápa* does not rule it out (Clunies Ross 1973, 75). Nonetheless, a Celtic origin is far from certain. Krappe (1927, 152) views Hildr as an independent Teutonic counterpart to the Celtic Queen of May, and Malone (1964) similarly treats the Celtic analogues to the *Hjaðningavíg* as parallels rather than sources. Chesnutt (1968) and Almqvist (1978–79) prefer to consider the legend as developed jointly between the two cultures, but it can be argued that the influence went in the opposite direction. The chronology of the early Norse poems and the later Irish and Welsh parallels suggests a Norse rather than Celtic origin, and the assumption that Bragi was influenced by Irish traditions is difficult to sustain, given the Pictish ethnicity of the native population of Orkney. Any Irish-Norse cross-fertilisation would have been more likely to occur in Dublin, Man or the Western Isles.

Assuming that the legend of the Everlasting Fight did arise in a single small cultural enclave such as Orkney, it should, in theory, be possible to trace the three surviving versions back to a single original, regardless of whether the differences reflect variations that developed in the intervening centuries or conscious changes made by the redactors. To aid the process of reconstruction, Table 2 sets out each version of the story of *Hjaðningavíg*, with common features in bold-face. From this it can be

Table 2: Scandinavian Versions of the Story of the *Hjaðningavíg*

<i>Gesta Danorum</i> (c.1200)	<i>Snorra Edda</i> (1220s)	<i>Sǫrla þáttur</i> (13th or 14th c.)
Hithinus and Høginus swear to avenge each other	Heðinn and Høgni are two kings	Heðinn and Høgni become sworn brothers
Hithinus and Høginus's daughter are betrothed	–	–
Hithinus is rumoured to have seduced her	Heðinn abducts Høgni's daughter	Ensorcelled, Heðinn abducts Høgni's daughter and kills Høgni's queen
Frotho tries to reconcile Hithinus and Høginus and then requires them to settle the matter in a battle that Høginus loses	–	–
They fight again; Høginus spares Hithinus	–	–
–	Høgni pursues them	Høgni pursues them
They meet on Hithinsø	Høgni corners Heðinn on Háey	Høgni corners Heðinn on Háey
–	Hilðr tries to bring about a reconciliation	–
–	Heðinn tries to bring about a reconciliation	Heðinn tries to bring about a reconciliation
–	Høgni says it is too late , for he has drawn his magic sword	Høgni says it is too late , for Heðinn has killed his queen
They fight	They fight	They fight
Hilda revives the slain each night	Hilðr revives the slain each night	Hilðr sits by; the slain are revived
–	The battle will go on until Ragnarøk	The battle goes on until a Christian intervenes

seen that the versions in *Sǫrla þáttur* and *Snorra Edda* have more in common with each other than either has with the version in *Gesta Danorum* (it is not certain whether the latter was known in Iceland in the Middle Ages). This degree of similarity may be attributed to a common Icelandic tradition or to direct borrowing by the author of *Sǫrla þáttur*. We may also note that *Gesta Danorum* and *Snorra Edda* provide

complementary, rather than contradictory, details. The story of the *Hjaðningavíg* opens by introducing Høgni and Heðinn, with Snorri's version differing from the others in that the two kings are not sworn brothers. I am inclined to think that Snorri has removed the alliance (possibly because he thought that abduction was a peculiar way for a king to marry his sworn brother's daughter), rather than that the other versions have added it, because with it there is a pleasing symmetry about the conflict that is otherwise lost: each participant is torn between conflicting obligations to the other two. *Sǫrla þáttr* accounts for the problematic abduction by having it caused by Freyja's enchantment of Heðinn. Saxo has nothing to adjust for here; Heðinn's offence against Høgni is the rumoured seduction of his daughter, which is entirely in keeping with their earlier passion for one another.

After Heðinn's crime, Saxo prefaces the *Hjaðningavíg* with two inconclusive battles. Possibly this is a folkloristic expansion of the narrative that is also seen in the Celtic parallels in which the battle lasts for three days or recurs on three days. A failed effort at reconciliation evidently forms part of the original legend, but each of the three versions treats it in a different manner. Saxo gives the role of peace-maker to Frotho—a change consistent with his general aim of glorifying the Danish crown—and only in *Gesta Danorum* are the two kings said to owe allegiance to him. (The association of Fróði with the conflict between Heðinn and Høgni is also found in *Kudrun* with the allegiances reversed: *Fruote von Dänemark* is one of the three vassals King Hetel sends to win Hilde for him.) In fact, *Sǫrla þáttr* specifies that Sǫrli's father ruled Upplönd twenty-four years after the fall of Frið-Fróði, which would put the conflict between Høgni (Sǫrli's younger contemporary) and Heðinn (who in turn is younger than Høgni) at quite some remove from Fróði's lifetime. In *Snorra Edda*, first Hildir and then Heðinn try to bring about a reconciliation, without success. Here Hildir's reconciliation attempt—which, if not simply false, certainly demonstrates a remarkable misjudgement of her father's character—seems to be based on *Ragnarsdrápa*:

8. Ok ofþerris æða
 ósk-Rón at þat sínum
 til fárhuga fœra
 feðr veðr boga hugði,
 þás hristi-Sif hringa
 hals, en bõls of fylða,
 bar til byrjar drõsla
 baug ørlygis draugi.

9. Bauða sú til bleyði
 bæti-Þrúðr at móti
 malma mætum hilmí
 men dreyrugra benja;
 svá lét ey, þótt etti
 sem orrostu letti,
 jǫfrum ulfs at sinna
 með algífris lifru.

(Finnur Jónsson 1908–15, B I 2)

8. And the Ran who wishes too great drying of veins [Hild] planned to bring this bow-storm against her father with hostile intention, when the ring(-sword) shaking Sif [Hild], filled with malice, brought a neck-ring onto the wind's horse [ship] to the battle-trunk [warrior].

9. This bloody-wound-curing Thrud did not offer the worthy prince the neck-ring to give him an excuse for cowardice in the meeting of metals. She always pretended to be against battle, though she was inciting the princes to join the company of the quite monstrous wolf's sister [Hel]. (Faulkes 1987, 123)

On the whole, it is more likely that Snorri follows Bragi and that both preserve an original feature here, because it is this malicious, destructive aspect of Hildr that we find in other Old Norse poems. *Hátta-lykill*, although not as detailed or explicit as *Ragnarsdrápa* regarding Hildr's internal state, also describes her as inciting the two sides against each other:

23a. Hverr réð Hildi at næma?
 hverir daglengis berjask?
 hverir síðarla sættask?
 hverr siklingum atti?
 Heðinn réð Hildi at næma,
 Hjaðningar æ berjask,
 þeir síðarla sættask,
 saman Hildr liði atti.

(Finnur Jónsson 1908–15, B I 498)

23a. Who decided to abduct Hildr? Which ones fight all day long? Which ones are slow to be reconciled? Who goaded the kings to combat? Heðinn decided to abduct Hildr, the Hjaðnings fight forever, they are slow to be reconciled, Hildr goaded them to fight one another.

Helgakviða Hundingsbana II (cf. Clunies Ross 1973) presents this view of Hildr as well, as will be discussed below. In *Sǫrla þáttr*, only Heðinn attempts to reach a settlement. The sincere attempt at reconciliation made by Heðinn here and in *Snorra Edda* parallels Hildr's and could conceivably be an original feature, although it is not mentioned in

Ragnarsdrápa or *Háttalykill*.⁴ Its absence in *Gesta Danorum* could be due to Saxo's having assigned all attempts at making peace to Frotho. Whether or not *Sǫrla þáttr* is following Snorri on this point, Heðinn's attempt at reconciliation is nonetheless well motivated, as he is filled with remorse from the moment he wakes up from the sleep caused by Freyja's potion.

The circumstances of the *Hjaðningavíg* itself lend themselves well to reconstruction: Hildir would seem to be the original agent of the battle's renewal, for her passivity in *Sǫrla þáttr* (both during the battle itself and in the omission of the false offer of reconciliation) can be argued to be a deliberate change by the author in order to accommodate the Christian moral of his narrative, as will be discussed below. If so, the agreement of Saxo and Snorri on her revival of the slain warriors would reflect the original. As regards the end of the battle, *Snorra Edda* and *Sǫrla þáttr* disagree about the circumstances and *Gesta Danorum* does not describe an end at all (perhaps to make the characters more sympathetic by eliminating the element of devilish magic). However, it is clear that the version in *Sǫrla þáttr* has been modified to include the figure of Óláfr Tryggvason, so most likely the version in *Snorra Edda* preserves the original ending. The following reconstruction results from the conclusions reached above:

*Two kings enter into an alliance. (For some reason) one of them abducts the other's daughter, and the two of them flee from her father. The father catches up with them at Hoy, in Orkney, and prepares to fight. The daughter attempts a reconciliation that only serves to throw fuel on the fire. Her abductor makes a sincere attempt at reconciliation, but (for some reason) it is too late. The kings fight, and every night the daughter revives the slain on both sides. The fight goes on until Ragnarök.

Hildir

Although the transfer of a woman from one descent-group to another is a way of making alliances within an exogamous society, Hildir brings perpetual destruction instead of peace to the men she is supposed to be uniting. Her very name, which means 'battle', signals her disruptive function. Because she revives the slain men of both sides, rather than supporting either her

⁴The later analogues also contain a sincere reconciliation attempt by Hildir's abductor. In *Kudrun* Hilde lacks Hildir's hostility: she urges Hetel to intervene in the battle between her father and Hetel's vassals, which he does successfully, persuading Hagen to let him marry his daughter. The Shetland ballad of Hildina, which resembles Snorri's version up to the point when

father or her lover, her story is clearly different from that of the hag who uses magic to aid only the enemies of the hero, as in the Celtic parallels. Malone (1964, 44) argues that the story that the *Widsiþ* poet knew about Hagena and Heoden did not end with an Everlasting Fight: 'The special, supernatural turn that the tale took in Scandinavia may have been inspired by the name of the heroine.' However, his assumption that Hildr figured in that story may not be warranted, as no woman is mentioned in this part of *Widsiþ*. If the legend of the Everlasting Fight was conflated or confused with the tradition behind the allusions to Hagena and Heoden in *Widsiþ*, the name of the woman would have been inspired by the events of the narrative and not vice versa. The Scandinavian story-tellers did not have to look very far for an appropriate name, if they needed one. *Hildr* does not just happen to be a name for a woman; it is one of a number of battle-related words (e.g. *hlökk* 'battle', *herfjöturr* 'war-fetter' and *randgríðr* 'shield-truce') that serve as names of valkyries, the female spirits associated with Óðinn in his role as the god of war and lord of the slain.⁵ The double nature of valkyries has long been noted; they can be fierce elemental spirits who delight in slaughter and bloodshed, or they can be noble and dignified women who serve Óðinn and sometimes favour mortal heroes. If the Hildr of the Everlasting Fight was conceived of as one of the elemental spirits, as was proposed by Malone (1964), or even as the personification of battle, it would explain her otherwise unmotivated resuscitation of both armies.

Hildr's role in the Everlasting Fight seems to have been fairly well known. In addition to the sources discussed so far, she is also mentioned in stanza 29 of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, where the use of her name as an epithet produces a curious literary echo:

Helgi is the son of King Sigmundr, who is the son of Vǫlsungr. Sigmundr is feuding with another king named Hundingr, whom Helgi eventually kills. A third king, named Hǫgni, has a valkyrie daughter named Sigrún. She rides through the sky and over the sea to meet Helgi, who explains that he has been in a battle. She replies that she already knows about it, because she stood near

negotiations between Hildina's father and her abductor break down, preserves both Hildr's hostility to her father (st. 8) and the abductor's offer of reconciliation (stt. 10–11), as Clunies Ross (1973, 76) points out. Here too the attempt is a sincere one, in this case foiled by a late addition to the cast of characters, the jealous rival suitor Hiluge.

⁵ A valkyrie named Hildr is listed in *Grímnismál* st. 36, *Vǫluspá* st. 30 and *Darraðarljóð* st. 3. For general discussions, see Ellis 1943, 69–73; de Vries 1956–57, I 273–74; Præstgaard Andersen 1982.

him while he was fighting. Later, when Sigrún finds out that she has been promised to a prince named Hǫðbroddr, she again rides to find Helgi, who is again recovering from a battle. He falls in love with her then and when he hears how she has been promised to another, he tells her that she shall be his instead. Helgi and the Vǫlsungs sail off to fight against Hǫðbroddr's family, who call up their forces. Sigrún's father, Hǫgni, and her brothers come to their aid. The two parties fight, and the Vǫlsungs kill Hǫgni and all of Hǫðbroddr's family. Sigrún's brother Dagr survives and swears oaths to the Vǫlsungs. Sigrún goes out onto the battlefield, gloats over the dying Hǫðbroddr and finds Helgi, who explains that he has killed most of her relations. She weeps, and Helgi says: *Hildir hefir þú oss verið* 'You have been a Hildir to us' (*Edda* 1962, 155). She replies that she would like to have both his embraces and her family alive again. Helgi and Sigrún marry and have sons. Her remaining brother, Dagr, sacrifices to Óðinn for help in avenging his father, and Óðinn lends him his spear. Dagr meets Helgi at a place named *Fjoturlund* 'Fetter-Grove' and runs him through. When he tells his sister of this deed, Sigrún curses him, and Dagr explains that it was all Óðinn's doing. A burial mound is raised over Helgi, who goes to Valhǫll and is honoured by Óðinn. One night a servant sees Helgi and his men riding toward his grave mound. She tells Sigrún, who goes out to meet them. They converse, and Helgi tells her not to weep for him. In the mound she spends the night by his side, and he leaves at dawn. She hopes he will return the next night, but he does not. Because of her grief and sorrow, she does not live long.

The chief parallel between this and the story of the *Hjaðningavíg* is the conflict that a daughter causes between her father and her potential husband, resulting in the deaths of both. In addition, the daughters are valkyries or valkyrie-like; the father of each is a king named Hǫgni. Both stories contain an element of resurrection or life-in-death: the slain Helgi comes back to Sigrún for one night, and the slain warriors of the *Hjaðningavíg* are revived by Hildir each night. Both stories contain Odinic magic and behaviour. In *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, Dagr sacrifices to Óðinn that Helgi may be killed, and Óðinn lends him his spear for that purpose. The murder occurs in a place called *Fjoturlund* 'Fetter-Grove', which can be associated with Óðinn because it is a grove, because of his power over bonds and fetters and his ability to cast a 'fetter' or paralysis over his enemies in battle, and because *Hávamál* (stt. 148–49) lists *Herfjotur* 'War-Fetter' as one of his valkyries (cf. Höfler 1952). Once dead, Helgi goes to Valhǫll, where Óðinn invites him to rule everything along with himself. Similarly, Hildir's instigation of the *Hjaðningavíg* seems an extension of Óðinn's delight in the conflict of kinsmen and his general interest in promoting strife (Turville-Petre 1964, 50–55, 61–63, 73–74), and the magic she uses to revive the slain warriors parallels the magic used to revive the Einherjar in Valhǫll, as will be discussed below.

Willingly or unintentionally, Hildir and Sigrún act as agents of Óðinn, bringing about strife and the demise of valiant warriors and emphasising the link between the world of heroes and the world of the dead.

The many parallels evoked by Helgi's comparison of Sigrún to Hildir underscore the fundamental difference between the story of the *Hjaðningavíg* and *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, which is the difference between the two aspects of the valkyrie mentioned above. In the earlier versions Hildir seems to act solely from an Odinic malice, whereas Sigrún exemplifies the benevolent valkyrie, about which Ellis observes (1943, 184):

The bride-protector, the supernatural woman who attends the hero—*valkyrja*, *fylgjukona*, or *dís*—is at once regarded as his wife and as the guardian spirit endowed with supernatural wisdom to protect his fortunes.

However, both the malevolent and benevolent aspects of valkyries seem to be present even when one predominates. Despite Hildir's destructive behaviour, Snorri and Saxo consider her Heðinn's wife—Snorri, understanding abduction as a form of marriage, calls Högni the *mágr* 'father-in-law' of Heðinn, and Saxo apparently innovates by making Hilda and Hithinus formally betrothed (another move that, together with the change of the abduction to a rumour of seduction, may have been intended to make the characters more sympathetic). Despite Sigrún's love of both family and husband, her actions result in as much bloodshed as Hildir's.

Interpreting the story of the Hjaðningavíg

Acknowledging the multiple meanings of the *Hjaðningavíg*, Boyer narrows his reading of this legend to an illustration of the struggle between eternal life and eternal death, a struggle whose pretext, significantly, is 'I'amour-passion' and whose instigator is a woman (Boyer 1998, 195). The version of this story in *Sǫrla þáttur*, however, suggests a different interpretation. To begin with the intertextual relationships between *Sǫrla þáttur* and the earlier versions of the story of the *Hjaðningavíg*, it appears from Table 2 that the version in *Sǫrla þáttur* corresponds to Snorri's more closely than to Saxo's, agreeing on six points and disagreeing on four points with Snorri, but agreeing on only three points and disagreeing on ten points with Saxo. Is it possible that Snorri's work could have served as a source for *Sǫrla þáttur* after all? There are two reasons to suppose that it did: one is outright borrowing from *Snorra Edda* and from *Ynglinga saga*; the other is that the differences seem to be due to a systematic revision of Snorri's material rather than the use of a different source.

The first paragraph of *Sǫrla þáttr* appears to have been taken from the first four chapters of *Ynglinga saga*. *Sǫrla þáttr* begins:

Fyrir austan Vanakvísl í Ásía var kallað Ásialand eða Ásaheimr. En þat folk var kallað Æsir er þar byggðu en höfuðborgina kǫlluðu þeir Ásgarð. Óðinn var þar nefndr konungr yfir. Þar var blótstaðr mikill. Njörð ok Frey setti Óðinn blótgoða. Dóttir Njarðar hét Freyja. (*Flateyjarbók* 1860–68, I 275)

East of Vanakvísl in Asia was a place called Ásialand or Ásaheimr. The people who dwelt there were called Æsir, and they called the chief town Ásgarðr. The king over that place was called Óðinn. There was a great heathen temple there. Óðinn appointed Njörðr and Freyr as priests. Njörðr's daughter was named Freyja.

Chapter 2 of *Ynglinga saga* begins:

Fyrir austan Tanakvísl í Ásía var kallað Ásaland eða Ásaheimr, en höfuðborgin, er var í landinu, kǫlluðu þeir Ásgarð. En í borginni var höfðingi sá, er Óðinn var kallaðr. Þar var blótstaðr mikill. (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, I 11)

East of Tanakvísl in Asia was a place called Ásaland or Ásaheimr, and the chief town that was in the country they called Ásgarðr. And in the town was that chieftain who was called Óðinn. There was a great heathen temple there.

Chapter 1 provides the variant of the place-name that *Sǫrla þáttr* uses:

Ór norðri frá fjöllum þeim, er fyrir útan eru byggð alla, fellr á um Svíþjóð, sú er at réttu heitir Tanais. Hon var forðum kǫlluð Tanakvísl eða Vanakvísl. (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, I 10)

Out of the north, from those mountains that are beyond all settlements, a river runs through Sweden whose correct name is Tanais. In olden days it was called Tanakvísl or Vanakvísl.

Chapter 4 adds the information about Njörðr, Freyr and Freyja (*Njörð ok Frey setti Óðinn blótgoða . . . Dóttir Njarðar var Freyja* ‘Óðinn appointed Njörðr and Freyr as priests . . . Njörðr's daughter was named Freyja’, *Heimskringla* 1941–51, I 13). With the exception of Óðinn's title (*höfðingi* in *Ynglinga saga* and *konungr* in *Sǫrla þáttr*), the passage from *Sǫrla þáttr* is wholly drawn from *Ynglinga saga*.

As Loki does not appear in *Ynglinga saga*, the author of *Sǫrla þáttr* turns to *Snorra Edda* for a description of him. Although the god is handsome and fair to look at, some call him *rógbera Ásanna ok frumkveða flærðanna ok vǫmm allra goða ok manna* ‘the calumniator of the Æsir and the originator of deceits and the disgrace of all gods and men’, and in any case he is

illr í skaplyndi, mjök fjölbreyttinn at háttum. Hann hafði þá speki um fram aðra menn er slægð heitir, ok vælar til allra hluta. Hann kom Ásum jafnan í fullt vandræði ok opt leysti hann þá með vælræðum. (Faulkes 1982, 26–27)

evil in character, very changeable in conduct. More than other men, he had that wisdom which is named cunning, and tricks for every situation. He always got the gods into great trouble, and often he got them out of it by trickery.

The description of Loki in *Sǫrla þáttur* is strikingly similar: *Hann hafði fram yfir aðra menn vizku þá er slægð heitir* ‘Above other men, he had the sagacity that is named cunning’ (*Flateyjarbók* 1860–68, I 275).

Despite the extensive borrowing from Snorri in the first few lines, the account of the Norse gods in *Sǫrla þáttur* diverges from Snorri’s almost at once. For example, the Freyja of *Snorra Edda* was married to a man named Óðr and wept tears of gold when he went away on journeys. The Freyja of *Ynglinga saga*, although *marglynd* ‘changeable of mood’, is also *in frægsta, svá at með hennar nafni skyldi kalla allar konur tignar* ‘the most famous, so that all noble women came to be called by her name’ (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, I 25). There is no suggestion anywhere in either of these texts that Freyja was ever Óðinn’s mistress. The author of *Sǫrla þáttur* also differs from Snorri in his view of dwarves. According to Snorri the dwarves had developed spontaneously within the earth and later had acquired human understanding and appearance, but according to the author of *Sǫrla þáttur* dwarves are only a particularly skilful race of men.

Why would the author of *Sǫrla þáttur* follow Snorri’s description so closely and then abandon it as soon as it was established? The answer must be that he wanted to retain Snorri’s euhemerisation of the pagan gods while avoiding his characterisation of them as benevolent (as in *Snorra Edda*) or as dignified dynastic founders (as in *Ynglinga saga*). Certainly *Sǫrla þáttur* depicts Óðinn and Freyja as neither benevolent nor dignified. Powerful Óðinn becomes a king deceived by his mistress. His wolves and ravens (which gathered news of the world for him, according to both *Snorra Edda* and *Ynglinga saga*) are gone; this King Óðinn depends on his councillor Loki for knowledge and advice:

Óðinn mælti hvatvetna eftir honum [Loka] hvat sem hann tók til . . . Hann [Loki] varð ok nálíga alls vísu þess er við bar. Sagði hann ok allt Óðni þat er hann vissi. (*Flateyjarbók* 1860–68, I 275)

In anything whatever, Óðinn spoke according to Loki’s advice, whatever he did . . . He [Loki] also came to be aware of nearly everything that happened, and he told Óðinn all that he knew.

Freyja is changed from a tender, married goddess who can be invoked to help love-affairs and who is much in demand as a bride for giants to a near-giantess herself: when Heðinn awakes from his enchanted sleep,

he catches a glimpse of her and *sýndist honum þá svört ok mikil* ‘then [she] seemed to him black and large’ (*Flateyjarbók* 1860–68, I 280). As Óðinn’s concubine, she does not weep tears of gold for her husband but instead trades her sexual favours for jewellery. Far from aiding Hogni and his queen or Heðinn and Hildir, Freyja ruthlessly arranges for the murder of Hogni’s wife and prevents Heðinn and Hildir from being wed. Being the wife of Óðr and the goddess of fertility and love are not Freyja’s only roles in Norse mythology, of course; according to *Grímnismál* (st. 14), she also chooses the slain and maintains a hall for dead warriors.⁶ De Vries (1956–57, II 311) comments on her ambivalent nature, calling her a typical chthonic deity who provides a connection between life and death. Nonetheless, the older mythographic sources show Freyja as having an Odinic function without having an Odinic character. Although she has been accused of sleeping with every god in Ásgarðr, for example, she is never called a lover of strife or a worker of evil. (Freyja is described in various negative ways in *Lokasenna* stt. 30–32 and *Hyndluljóð* stt. 6, 47–48.) When she is a cause of conflict, as in *Prymskviða*, it is due to her erotic aspect rather than to her association with the dead.

In *Sǫrla þáttur*, however, function and character are paired, as is underscored by the name that Freyja assumes for her encounters with Heðinn: Gǫndul is listed among the valkyries in *Vǫluspá* (st. 30) and *Hákonarmál* (stt. 1, 10). Damico (1984, 67) has observed that the authority and function of Óðinn’s servants, the valkyrie brides of the heroic lays of the *Edda*, consist of choosing the hero in battle, laying upon him the task that will shape his heroic identity, investing him with an unswerving, heroic energy that will secure victory in battle and then, if necessary, accompanying him to the after-life. This is exactly what the author of *Sǫrla þáttur* has Freyja do, except that where the valkyrie brides of the Eddic lays bring glory and undying fame to their heroes, the Freyja of *Sǫrla þáttur* brings a lengthy period of misery to the hero she chooses. Yet she follows each step precisely. She first selects Heðinn (presumably because the number of kings who are his vassals equals the number of kings who follow Hogni, making Heðinn and Hogni candidates for the

⁶ Folke Ström (1954, 70–79) sees a connection between these functions. Arguing that the valkyries represent the war-aspect of the *dísir* (the term he uses to mean female spirits in general), and that Freyja (as Valfreyja) is the greatest of them, he draws a parallel between the valkyries choosing heroes for their eventual help at Ragnarök and the *dísir* choosing sacred kings to ensure the fertility of the land.

pitched battle Óðinn requires of her), and then she lays upon him the task that will shape his heroic identity: the killing of Hǫgni's queen and the theft of his daughter and dragon-ship. Finally, she invests him with an 'unswerving, heroic energy': her enchantments revive him and his warriors day after day, until at last a Christian intervenes.

Having given Freyja the Odinic function that was Hildir's in the original version of the story of the *Hjaðningavíg*, the author of *Sǫrla þáttur* inverts Hildir's character and role. In place of the speech that incites Hǫgni to attack Heðinn, Hildir now has a speech before her abduction in which she tries to persuade Heðinn not to abduct her, and if that is unavoidable, she asks him not to put her mother to death. The reason she gives for this request is not that she loves her mother, as we might suppose, but that the enormity of such an act would prevent any possible reconciliation between Heðinn and her father (*Flateyjarbók* 1860–68, I 280). In keeping with the author's characteristic balancing of antithetical characters, the image of Hildir sitting in a grove looking on helplessly at the *Hjaðningavíg* contrasts with the corresponding and opposite image of Freyja sitting in the grove, waiting for Heðinn like a spider waiting for a fly. Damico (1984, 43–44, 53) adduces the appearance of pairs of supernatural female figures—a beautiful, benevolent valkyrie and a hostile, ugly giantess—in some of the heroic lays of the *Edda* as further evidence of the double nature of these beings. With the substitution of Freyja for Hildir as the instigator and the subsequent change to Hildir's character, a similar pair arises, but the traditional outcome of their interaction is reversed. Unlike the Eddic pairs of Brynhildir and the giantess (in *Helreið Brynhildar*), Freyja and Hyndla (in *Hyndluljóð*) and Sváva and Hrímgærðr (in *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*), Hildir is powerless to counteract Freyja's malevolence.

To date there is no critical consensus regarding the portrayal of Freyja and Óðinn in *Sǫrla þáttur*. Some scholars treat the material of the first two chapters as authentic mythology and welcome a detailed if late account of Loki's theft of Freyja's necklace, especially because all other references to this story are brief in the extreme.⁷ Boyer (1998, 220) discerns a tendency on the part of the author to confound Freyja with the valkyries

⁷ See, for example, Ellis 1943, 79–81; Turville-Petre 1964, 140–41; Damico 1984, 48. Ellis Davidson 1964, 116 and 176, avoids mentioning the evidence from *Sǫrla þáttur* in her discussion of the Brísingamen. Aside from *Sǫrla þáttur*, references to the story of Loki's theft of Freyja's necklace are found only in *Snorra Edda*, which in addition to various prose allusions includes st. 9 of Þjóðólfr of Hvin's *Haustlǫng* and st. 2 of Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa*.

Hildir and Gǫndul, Damico (1993, 638a) finds humour in the ‘conjugal disenchantment’ of Óðinn and Freyja and de Vries (1933, 125–41; 1956–57, II 261) sees the gods, especially Loki, depicted as degenerate. There is, however, quite a large difference between the natural or popular degeneration that pagan gods undergo after they are no longer worshipped and their treatment at the hands of the author of *Sǫrla þáttur* (cf. Mitchell 1985). Natural degeneration results in depictions of gods whose powers have dwindled or whose traits have been exaggerated for comic effect. *Vǫlsa þáttur* (a þáttur found only in the Flateyjarbók redaction of *Óláfs saga helga*) is another text that strikes modern readers as humorous (Harris 1991, 53–54), but to say of either of these stories, as Damico (1993, 638a) does of *Sǫrla þáttur*, that ‘its purpose, beyond offering still another example of Óláfr’s (or his surrogate’s) victories over paganism, is to entertain’ is, I believe, to underestimate the seriousness that the themes of conversion and redemption held for their authors. The comic touches in these narratives are found only at the beginning, perhaps to draw the audience in or to dissipate any notion that paganism might be a practice in any sense admirable, and by the end, the tone, far from being ‘light’ (Damico 1993, 638a), becomes wholly didactic. In *Vǫlsa þáttur* King Óláfr himself preaches a sermon, and in *Sǫrla þáttur* Heðinn hopes for release or redemption, as will be discussed below. Moreover, the thematic unity that Damico (1993, 638b) herself points out between Freyja’s coveting of the necklace, Sǫrli’s desire for the dragon-ship and Heðinn’s obsession with fame shows that the underlying purpose of the narrative is a theological one.⁸ The author of *Sǫrla þáttur* has no wish to portray the Norse gods as mere sorcerers or figures of fun, for that would make the conversion to Christianity less of a happy necessity. This is by no means unusual; for example, a similar strategy underlies the depiction of the Æsir in *Gesta Danorum*, which is ‘strongly coloured by [Saxo’s] desire to present the euhemerised pagan gods as morally bankrupt, and without the divine power they lay claim to’ (Clunies Ross 1992, 57). No less importantly for *Sǫrla þáttur*, any reduction in the stature of the gods would diminish the magnitude of Ívarr’s victory and Óláfr’s royal ‘luck’. As Harris (1980, 165) puts it, ‘All three stories [*Sǫrla þáttur*, *Norna-Gests þáttur* and *Tóka þáttur*] can also be regarded as a symbolic

⁸ Noting both Snorri’s description of the rule of the Æsir as ‘the golden age’ and gold’s ability to excite covetousness, Gouchet (1997, 324) sees the inclusion of the episode of Freyja and the (gold) necklace as an allusion to the role of Gullveig in the foundational battle between the Æsir and the Vanir, as well as a way of enhancing the glory of triumphant Christianity.

burying of the heathen past by the Christian king, and that seems to be their larger meaning.’

The author of *Sǫrla þátr* continues his inversion of Scandinavian mythology to great effect in the depiction of the *Hjaðningavíg* itself. Although magically renewed fights may be common in Celtic folklore, the only analogues in Scandinavian sources are the *Hjaðningavíg* itself and the battle that goes on among the Einherjar in Valhøll: warriors who have died in battle occupy themselves in the after-life by fighting every day and feasting every night. Based on st. 41 of *Vafþrúðnismál*, the description of Valhøll in *Snorra Edda* has quite a positive tone:

Hár segir: ‘Hvern dag þá er þeir hafa klæzk þá hervæða þeir sik ok ganga út í garðinn ok berjask ok fellr hverr á annan. Þat er leikr þeira. Ok er líðr at dögurðarmáli þá ríða þeir heim til Valhallar ok setjask til drykkju, svá sem hér segir:

Allir einherjar
Óðins túnum í
hoggvask hverjan dag.
Val þeir kjósa
ok ríða vígi frá,
sitja meir um sáttir saman.
(Faulkes 1982, 34)

Hár says: Each day when they have dressed themselves, then they put on their armour and go out into the yard and fight and fall each upon the other; that is their sport. And when it is time for their meal, then they ride home to Valhøll and sit down to drink, as it says here:

In Óðinn’s enclosures,
All the Einherjar
Hew each other every day;
They pick out the slain
And ride from the slaughter;
All the more they sit together in agreement.

Death from disease or old age meant going to the dark, damp world of Hel, an unpleasant and ignominious alternative. The author of *Sǫrla þátr*, however, seizes on the structural parallels between the *Hjaðningavíg* and the battle in Valhøll and presents them in a very negative way, thereby creating the impression that the pagan concept of ‘heaven’ was ghastly rather than glorious. Like the warriors in Óðinn’s enclosures, the men on the island of Háey ‘hew each other every day’. The slain are revived, but far from returning to their hall and feasting amicably together, they remain embattled and unreconciled. Moreover, the pagan characters trapped in this situation are not savouring the barbaric joys of

extended mayhem. With a grave, anxious face (*áhyggjusvip*, *Flateyjarbók* 1860–68, I 282), Heðinn complains of the great spell or judgement (*atkvæði*) and oppression (*ánaud*) that they suffer, and he speaks of lifting Óðinn’s curse in terms of release or redemption (*undanlausn*). The author of *Sorla þáttr* reinforces this by referring to Óðinn’s curse as damnation (*áfelli*) and a trial or tribulation (*skapraun*). Although none of these words is completely restricted to legal contexts, all but *skapraun* have specific legal meanings, and several (*ánaud*, *undanlausn* and *áfelli*) have religious meanings as well. The overall impression is that Heðinn, Hogni and their men are both condemned and damned, imprisoned and accursed—and it is furthermore implied that the pagan vision of the highest reward for valiant men is one not of heaven but of hell.

The manner in which the *Hjadhningavíg* comes to an end also contributes to the sense that Heðinn and Hogni are suffering divine punishment in an infernal setting. Óðinn has stipulated that the battle will end only when a Christian man who is brave and endowed with the *gipta* (*Flateyjarbók* 1860–68, I 276) of his liege-lord dares to enter the fight and slay the combatants with weapons. Along with *gæfa* and *hamingja*, *gipta* is one of the words for ‘(good) luck’ or ‘(good) fortune’ that by the thirteenth century had been ‘fully harmonized with the Latin complex of terms and notions referring to “grace” (*gratia*, *donum*, *munus*)’ (Clover 1985, 266). Given that the king in question is Óláfr Tryggvason, whom the scribe of *Sorla þáttr* calls *postuli vǫrs kristinsdóms* ‘the apostle of our Christianity’ (*Flateyjarbók* 1860–68, I 517), his ‘luck’ cannot be anything other than synonymous with Christian grace. The brave and lucky retainer is Ívarr *ljómi* (his nickname means ‘beam of light’ or ‘radiance’). The watchmen have been disappearing, and on the night that Ívarr is to take the watch, he arms himself and goes onto the island. There he meets Heðinn, who explains what the conditions of his ‘redemption’ (*undanlausn*) are. The pagan tells him:

Ek veit at þú ert vel kristinn svá ok at konungr sá er þú þjónar er mikillar hamingju. Segir mér ok svá hugr um at vér munum af honum ok hans mǫnnum nokkut gott hljóta. (*Flateyjarbók* 1860–68, I 282)

I know that you are a good Christian, and also that the king whom you serve is one of great good fortune. And thus my mind tells me that we will get something good from him and his men.

Ívarr enters the battle, and the recipients of his lethal blows do not rise again, with Hogni the first to be struck down and Heðinn the last. In the morning the blood on Ívarr’s sword is the only sign of the previous night’s events. The bodies (and Hildir as well, presumably) have vanished,

and no more watchmen disappear. The general movement of this section of *Sǫrla þáttur* echoes the Harrowing of Hell: a figure associated with light and possessed of special spiritual qualities goes into a dark place and frees the tormented ones imprisoned there.

By revising the story of the *Hjaðningavíg* and prefacing it with similarly revised elements of Scandinavian mythology and historiography taken from the *Edda* and *Ynglinga saga* of Snorri Sturluson, the author of *Sǫrla þáttur* did all he could to undermine the attractions of Norse paganism, presenting the time of the Old Law as a ‘rambling history of calamities’ (Harris 1980, 167), but that was evidently not his only goal. By making the man who puts an end to the *Hjaðningavíg* a retainer of Óláfr Tryggvason, he has redefined the whole focus of his narrative. Although the king appears in the story only briefly, he replaces Óðinn as its controlling figure: the narrator says that it was Óláfr who settled the *Hjaðningavíg* through his retainer:

Segja menn at þat væri fjórtán tigir ára ok þrjú ár áðr en þessum ágæta manni Óláfi konungi yrði þat lagit at hans hirðmaðr leysti þá frá þessu aumliga áfelli ok skaðligum skapraunum. (*Flateyjarbók* 1860–68, I 282)

People say that it would be one hundred and forty-three years before it would be fated for this excellent man, King Óláfr, that his retainer freed them from that wretched damnation and baneful tribulation.

His *gipta* is so great that, even indirectly, it can lift the curse of Óðinn, the foremost of the pagan gods. Furthermore, Óðinn himself acknowledges from the beginning that this state of affairs will come to pass, when he first describes to Freyja the requirements for ending the Everlasting Fight.

Once Óláfr Tryggvason’s role in the story has been touched on, the obvious next step is to situate *Sǫrla þáttur* in its manuscript context, but that is a separate and much larger endeavour (Rowe 2002). Suffice it to say that in *Flateyjarbók*, *Sǫrla þáttur* immediately follows Óláfr Tryggvason’s decision to convert Norway to Christianity, and that within its textual matrix it serves a number of purposes. As a thematic introduction to the history of the conversion, it illustrates the horrors of the pagan age; as an example of the power of Óláfr’s *gipta*, it glorifies Óláfr himself; as a sequel to *Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts*, in which Ívarr ljómi makes his first appearance, it is one of six interrelated *þættir* added to this version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* by its editor-scribe, Jón Þórðarson. The revisions, borrowings, inversions and adaptations that the author of *Sǫrla þáttur* employed to turn originally pagan material to his anti-pagan ends gave the work a value that lasted for the span of

time between its composition and its inclusion in Flateyjarbók in 1387–88. Van Hamel's analysis of the corruptions in the Flateyjarbók text suggests that Gouchet is incorrect in assuming that Jón was the author of *Sqrla þátrr* (van Hamel 1935–36, 283–87; Gouchet 1997, 320), but I fully agree with Gouchet's conclusion that *Sqrla þátrr* constitutes a mine of information about the story-telling tradition of the medieval north (Gouchet 1997, 329). If the present study has undermined its value as an authentic source for Scandinavian myth and legend, it has, I hope, increased its value as an example of medieval Icelandic literature.

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Note that all quotations from Old Norse have been normalised.

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF HOMOSEXUAL *LIEBESTOD*
IN SAGAS TRANSLATED FROM LATIN

By DAVID ASHURST

THE FOCUS OF THIS ARTICLE will be on a series of texts in which one warrior dies clasping the body of a fallen comrade; but before concentrating on that theme I must explain the term *liebestod*, ‘love-death’, and its currency in relation to the Tristan legend.

Lovers of classical music will recognise the term as the name usually given to an extraordinary passage, at once orgasmic and transcendental, which concludes Wagner’s opera *Tristan und Isolde*. This opera, for which Wagner wrote both the libretto and the music as was his custom, and which he finished in 1859, was one of the most influential art-works of the nineteenth century. Wagner himself, oddly enough, originally used the term *liebestod* to designate the Prelude of the opera; and he habitually referred to the closing scene as *Isoldes Verklärung*, ‘Isolde’s Transfiguration’, emphasising its erotic mysticism rather than its pathos (Wagner 1987, 489 and 548–59). It was Liszt who borrowed the term *liebestod* for the title of his 1867 piano transcription of *Isoldes Verklärung*; but it is Liszt’s title, not Wagner’s, which has stuck to the final scene of the opera itself, and so has passed into common usage.

The context and content of the scene are that Isolde has rushed to be by the side of her wounded lover, Tristan, but she arrives too late to share with him more than a fleeting word before he dies. Filled with love and sorrow, Isolde enters a state of ecstasy in which she feels herself to be at one with Tristan; then she sinks down onto Tristan’s body, and is dead.

On the basis of this, I take it that the essential characteristics of a *liebestod* are that one dies suffused with love and achieves in death some kind of union with the beloved, embracing his body. And these are precisely the characteristics of the medieval accounts of Isolde’s death which are most closely related to Wagner’s treatment of the subject: see the account in the Norwegian *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* (NR, 220–23), which is the fullest surviving version of the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman romance of *Tristan* by Thomas of Britain (or d’Angleterre), and its Icelandic derivatives, *Tristrams kvæði* and the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* (NR, 237 and 288).

The detailed treatment of the *liebestod* topos in these works, which may be called ‘the Tristan pattern’, would make an interesting study in itself. There is, however, another group of *liebestod* texts, less well known today but quite well represented in Old Norse–Icelandic literature, which embody what may be termed ‘the homosexual pattern’ in respect of its origin, but which I shall call ‘the all-male pattern’ in view of how it is handled in the sagas. It is this other group, stemming from a root more ancient, more venerable and even better known than the Tristan legend, to which I shall now turn.

Virgil's Nisus and Euryalus

What I have called the all-male pattern of *liebestod* originates in the episode of Nisus and Euryalus in the ninth book of Virgil's *Aeneid*, a précis of which is to be found in *Breta sqgur*. The original Latin passage was hugely popular and prompted several imitations including an extensive one by Statius, which was well known to the Middle Ages. At the height of the twelfth-century Renaissance, Walter of Châtillon produced another imitation of the episode for the ninth book of his *Alexandreis*, and consequently this features in *Alexanders saga*, the Old Norse translation of Walter's poem. *Breta sqgur*, *Alexanders saga* and the *Alexandreis* are the main works which will be discussed below; but first it is necessary to give an account and some analysis of the original passage by Virgil.

Nisus and Euryalus are intensely loving comrades in the Trojan forces which Aeneas leads from Troy to Italy. We first meet them in the context of a foot-race which they run as part of the funeral games for Anchises, the father of Aeneas (Virgil 1934, *Aeneid* V.293–361). They are re-introduced at IX.176, guarding the gate of the Trojan camp in Italy, which has been invested by the Rutulians. Aeneas is away in Pallanteum and it is vital that a message be got through to him. Nisus declares it is his intention to slip through the hostile army under cover of night, while the complacent Rutulians are drunk; Euryalus refuses to be left behind, and soon they obtain permission to undertake the task together (IX.184–313). They set off and cut their way through the enemy ranks, wreaking carnage on their stupefied foes (IX.324–55). Euryalus, whose youth has many times been stressed by Virgil, takes as booty some fine body-armour and a splendid helmet (IX.359–66). Just as the comrades are about to disappear into the woods beyond the army, a contingent of Rutulian cavalry approaches and they are seen: the ‘thoughtless Euryalus’ is betrayed by the glint of his new helmet (IX.367–75). In the ensuing

confusion Nisus almost gets away, but Euryalus, weighed down by his armour, is captured (IX.384–98). Thrown into the greatest confusion of mind, Nisus can now see only two courses open to him: rescue or a ‘beautiful death’ (IX.401). He hurls a spear from the shadows; but this turns out to be a wrong move, for it provokes the Rutulians to threaten Euryalus with instant death, at which point Nisus steps out of cover and offers his own life in exchange for his companion’s (IX.424–28):

tum vero exterritus, amens,
conclamat Nisus, nec se celare tenebris
amplius aut tantum potuit perferre dolorem:
‘me, me, adsum, qui feci, in me convertite ferrum,
o Rutuli!’

Then indeed, frantic with terror, Nisus shrieks aloud; no longer could he hide himself in darkness or endure such agony: ‘On me, on me—here am I who did the deed—on me turn your steel, O Rutulians!’ (Trans. Fairclough)

Amens, ‘frantic, crazy’, is the key word in this, for it reveals the intensity of Nisus’s affection. Here we see no simple heroism but a passion which dictates that the anguish of Nisus’s own death will be preferable to the agony of seeing Euryalus die; but the plea is unavailing and Nisus must watch as Euryalus is put to the sword (IX.431–37). Now there is nothing left for Nisus but to hurl himself recklessly upon his enemies, to kill, to be killed and to join Euryalus (IX.443–47):

moriens animam abstulit hosti.
tum super exanimum sese proiecit amicum
confossus placidaque ibi demum morte quievit.
Fortunati ambo! si quid mea carmina possunt,
nulla dies umquam memori vos eximet aevo.

At this point I shall quote Dryden’s poetic translation because it is so spirited and because it captures a certain ambiguity in the Latin (Dryden 1903, 240):

Dying, he slew; and staggering on the plain,
With swimming eyes he sought his lover slain;
Then quiet on his bleeding bosom fell,
Content, in death, to be revenged so well.
O happy friends! for, if my verse can give
Immortal life, your fame shall ever live.

It is true that the word which Dryden translates as ‘lover’ at line IX.444 is *amicus*, ordinarily meaning ‘friend’, and indeed the word ‘lover’ in late seventeenth-century English could still mean no more than ‘friend’; but it is also true that the word *amicus* in Latin literature is often used to

signify ‘male lover’ (*OLD, amicus 2.2*). The precise nature of the relationship between Nisus and Euryalus will be discussed in more detail below, but enough has been said already to indicate that their bond was close and deeply emotional, since Nisus’s frantic appeal for Euryalus to be spared, and his actions following his comrade’s death, show that his feelings were of extremely passionate affection. Whatever kind of love it may have been, love it certainly was.

This being the case, the death of Nisus has all the characteristics of a *liebestod* as defined earlier: the dying suffused with longing, the clasping of the beloved’s body, the union in death which is symbolised by the act of clasping and which is affirmed by the poet when he promises everlasting fame as a couple to the ‘happy pair’, as Fairclough renders the phrase *fortunati ambo*. It is the ultimate expression of the relationship which Virgil specifies for Nisus and Euryalus at the start of the episode: *his amor unus erat pariterque in bella ruebant*, ‘a mutual love was theirs, and side by side they charged into hostilities’ (*Aeneid IX.182*).

That the love shared by Nisus and Euryalus has an erotic element, rather than being just a deeply felt comradeship, is indicated by the heavy and repeated emphasis put upon Euryalus’s youth and beauty. In the lines immediately preceding the statement that the pair enjoyed a mutual love, we are told that Nisus was a warrior *acerrimus armis*, ‘most eager with weapons’ (IX.176), to which is added the following (IX.179–81):

et iuxta comes Euryalus, quo pulchrior alter
non fuit Aeneandum Troiana neque induit arma,
ora puer prima signans intonsa iuventa.

At his side was Euryalus—none fairer among the Aeneadae, or of all who donned the Trojan arms—a boy who showed on his unshaven cheek the first bloom of youth. (Trans. Fairclough)

Other lines referring to the physical attractions of young Euryalus include V.295, V.343–44 and especially IX.433–37, which are rather too lavish for modern taste in the way they linger over his ‘lovely limbs’ in their death throes. In these passages we see Virgil expressing the Roman (and Greek) ideal of the kind of male beauty which was a suitable object for masculine desire: the fact that Euryalus’s beard is not developed, or not fully developed, is an important point and one which was meant to titillate the reader.¹ But Euryalus is clearly not a child: he is a soldier

¹ For an excellent study of the acceptable and unacceptable forms of sex between males in Roman society see Williams 1999. Although I have placed my own emphases and drawn my own conclusions, I am indebted to this book in many ways. The episode of Nisus and Euryalus is treated on pages 116–19.

who has repeatedly gone into battle beside Nisus, and in several lines (IX.252, 376 and 471) Virgil calls him not *puer*, ‘boy’, but *vir*, ‘man’; so we are probably to imagine him as embodying the type of beauty which we can still see figured in the Emperor Hadrian’s lover, Antinous, who died when he was about twenty and whose surviving statues, for the most part, show a downy-faced but very muscular youth.

Readers of Latin in the Middle Ages would certainly have been alive to the erotic connotations of Virgil’s descriptions of Euryalus, and would have understood the probable state of feelings between the youth and the somewhat older Nisus (who is himself described as a *iuuenis*, ‘young man’, in lines V.331 and V.361). They were perfectly familiar with the tradition of classical pederasty because, if for no other reason, they found it quite overtly present in some of the most widely-read and easily available of the classical texts which they possessed: the passage relating to the warrior Cydon in *Aeneid* X.324–27; the second of the *Eclogues* by Virgil (1934, vol.1, 10–15); Ovid’s story of Narcissus in *Metamorphoses* (1916, III.339–510); and above all the myth of Ganymede found in *Metamorphoses* X.152–61 and referred to pointedly in *Aeneid* I.28 and V.250–57. By the twelfth century, in fact, the name Ganymede had come to be used routinely in literature as the appellation for any male, but especially a young and handsome one, who favoured sexual relations with other males; it is used in this way in countless love lyrics, invectives, satires and other texts, notably in the very popular debate poem *Altercatio Ganimedis et Helene*, manuscripts of which survive all over Europe (Boswell 1980, 251–60 and 381–89).

Although the relationship between Nisus and Euryalus would have seemed to medieval readers to be unmistakably tinged with eroticism, it has not yet been demonstrated here that it was fully sexual rather than belonging to pederasty of the high-minded aesthetic type. In the Middle Ages the evidence for this subject appeared self-contradictory. In the first place there is the statement which Virgil makes on introducing the pair for the first time, when Aeneas has instituted a foot-race among his men (*Aeneid* V.293–96):

undique conveniunt Teucri mixtique Sicani,
Nisus et Euryalus primi,
Euryalus forma insignis viridique iuventa,
Nisus amore pio pueri.

From all sides flock Trojans and Sicilians, mingled, Nisus and Euryalus foremost—Euryalus famed for beauty and the flower of youth, Nisus for tender love for the boy. (Trans. Fairclough)

In Virgil's time the adjective *pius* primarily meant 'dutiful'; and with regard to a man's behaviour towards those who were close to him, it meant 'devoted'—hence 'tender' as Fairclough has it (*OLD*, *pius* 1 and 3). The word bears no connotations of chastity. However, by the time the most influential of all commentaries on the *Aeneid*, that by Servius, was being written in the early fifth century the moral climate had changed and the word *pius* had come closer in meaning to our own 'pious'. In commenting on line V.296 and explaining the love which was Nisus's hallmark and claim to fame, Servius (1878–1902) gives the following gloss: *pio—casto, non infamo*, 'chaste, not disgraceful'. Servius's commentary, which was primarily a school text, was copied alongside Virgil's poem over and over again throughout the Middle Ages. Thus medieval schoolboys, encountering Nisus and his partner for the first time, were given the very enlightening information that their love was chaste and not disgraceful. One can imagine them clamouring to know precisely what disgraceful love might be; and no doubt the answer was a revelation to many. Certainly Servius's gloss must have prompted the suspicion, at least, that the love of Nisus and Euryalus was actually *infamus, non castus*, despite the schoolmaster's official line. But Servius gets into deeper trouble just a few lines later when Nisus, who is leading the foot-race, slips and falls. As the warrior gets up he trips the man in second position so that Euryalus, in third place, can go on to win the prize. Of the moment when Nisus has fallen and realised that he has lost the race, Virgil says: *non tamen Euryali, non ille oblitus amorum*, 'Yet not of Euryalus, not of his love was he forgetful' (V.334). In this line the word *amor*, used in the plural in this way, means an object of sexual love (*OLD*, *amor* 1.c) and, as Williams (1999, 313 n.83) says, it 'is ordinarily used of one's sexual partner, one's "love" in that sense'.² Servius knows this, admits it and is puzzled by it since for him it contradicts the meaning of the earlier statement that the love was *pius*. His gloss for the line reads as follows: *nunc amorum, qui pluraliter non nisi turpitudinem significant*, 'Now *amorum*, which plural signifies nothing other than a disgrace'. A careful medieval student of the *Aeneid*, therefore, was bound to understand that Nisus's love for Euryalus was explicitly sexual, and it would have been remembered that in IX.182 Virgil insists that the love was mutual; *ergo* they were lovers in the modern sense of the word.

² The *OLD* gloss says only 'the object of one's love, one's beloved', but all the examples of usage which are then given clarify the fact that 'the object of sexual desire' is what is meant. The example from Virgil (*Georgics* III.227), for instance, specifies the relationship between a bull and a heifer.

It must be accepted, however, that one could always insist that the word *pius* implies what Servius says it implies, believe that the relationship between the warriors was a sexless although passionate friendship, and turn a blind eye to the word *amores*. Apart from this one word, Virgil has in fact employed language which is rather discreet, whether by accident or design; and this has proved fortunate for Nisus and Euryalus during the long ages in which disapproval of homosexuality has been almost an article of faith. Were it not for Virgil's reticence it would probably have been difficult for the passage to maintain its great popularity throughout the Christian Middle Ages and every succeeding century up to the death of classical learning in our own day. As it stands, the enduring success of the piece has depended on the fact that one can enjoy all its homo-erotic passion without having to worry too much about the particulars of sex. It is a prime example of a text in which it is possible, as the saying goes, to have your cake and eat it. And the choicest morsel which can be had and eaten is the *liebestod*, that perennial symbol of the ultimate orgasm which is no orgasm at all, the one which unites the lover permanently with the beloved.

The treatment of the subject in Breta sǫgur

The bulk of *Breta sǫgur* consists of an abridged paraphrase of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, but it begins with a short summary of the *Aeneid* which gives prominence to the story of Nisus and Euryalus.

It is not certain whether the translator or compiler of *Breta sǫgur* worked directly from the *Aeneid* in making his summary, or whether he had some intermediary text at his disposal. Nor are the date and place of origin of the entire work known. It is possible that the translation was prompted by the poem *Merlínusspá* ascribed to Gunnlaugr Leifsson, a monk of Þingeyrar (*ob.* 1218 or 1219), and in this case *Breta sǫgur* is likely to be Icelandic and from the early thirteenth century; but there is some possibility, at least, that it belongs with the Norwegian translations commissioned by King Hákon Hákonarson (Louis-Jensen 1993, 58). It seems to have been moderately influential: heroic conceptions of King Arthur and his knights deriving from *Breta sǫgur* may have influenced the presentation of character in the *riddara sǫgur* (Barnes 1993, 532); and it finds a natural place alongside other works of ancient history and lore in the central section of *Hauksbók*, the manuscript compiled by Haukr Erlendsson in the early fourteenth century. The fact that Haukr included *Breta sǫgur* in his monumental compilation, and that he placed it where

he did (*Hauksbók* 1892–96, 231–302), indicates that it played a significant role in his world view.

As there is still no critical edition of *Breta sögur* I shall quote and comment on the *Hauksbók* redaction, which has the virtue of being complete in its own terms even though it is somewhat abbreviated, as are nearly all the texts which Haukr chose to work on. Since it is important to see all of the little that the Old Norse summary preserves of the Nisus and Euryalus story and to judge its tone, and since copies of *Hauksbók* are not easy to come by, I shall quote the episode in its entirety (*Hauksbók* 1892–96, 235):

Peir váru tveir menn í borginni er fyrirsjástir váru ok mestir kappar í liði Eneas. Hét annarr Nisus en annarr Eruleus. Þeir veljask til at ríða út af borginni ok segja Enea þenna ófrið. Þeir herklæðask nú ok fara leyniliga út af borginni, ok er þeir kómu í herinn váru margir vindrukknir ok sofnaðir. Þá brigðr Nisus sverði ok høggr á tvær hendr, ok svá it sama gerir Eruleus, ok drepa nú mikinn fjöldaða riddara ok fara svá út af herinum. Ok svá margan mann hofðu þeir drepit at þeir vissu eigi sjálfir tölú á, ok svá váru þeir móðir at nálíga máttu þeir eigi ganga. Ok þeim sigri er við brugðit víða í bókum, er þeir fengu þá. En er þeir kómu út af herinum ok morna tók ok ljóst var orðit ok morginsólin skein á hjálma þeira, sáu þeir mikinn her ríða í móti sér. Þar var sá hofðingi fyrir er Volcens hét. Hann ætlaði til liðs við Turni. Hann sér þessa tvá riddara ok kennir á vápnum þeira at þeir eru af Trójumönnum. Nisus sækir nú undan ok til skógs; en Eruleus var þungfærr, ok komask þeir millim hans ok skógsins ok sækja nú at honum alla vega. En hann versk sterklíga; ok af því at ekki má við margnum, þá drepa þeir hann. Ok er Nisus sér þetta, hljóp hann ór skóginum ok høggr á tvær hendr svá at ekki festir við. Hann hrýðr sér gøtu fram at hofðingja þeira Volvent ok lagði hann með sverði í gegnum, ok allar eru hans hendr blóðugar upp at oxl. Nú sækir svá mæðin í líkam hans af sókn ok sárum at hann má eigi standa. Kemr hann nú þar at, sem félagi hans var fallinn, ok leggsk á hann ofan ok mælti, ‘Minn góði vinr Eruleus, í einum stað skulu vit dauða þola!’ ok var þar saxaðr.

There were two men in the fortification who were the most prudent heroes, and the greatest, among Aeneas's troops. One was called Nisus, and the other Euryalus. They volunteered to go out from the fortification and tell Aeneas about this conflict. They put on their armour and went secretly out from the fortification; and when they got amongst the enemy forces there were many men drunk with wine and asleep. Then Nisus drew his sword and struck to right and to left, and Euryalus did the same, and they killed a great number of knights; and thus they went out from among the army. And so many men had they killed that they themselves did not know the number. And they were so weary that they could hardly walk. And that victory, which they won then, is widely celebrated in books. But when they came out from among the army and dawn broke and it had grown light and the rising sun shone on their helmets, they saw a large contingent riding towards them. A chieftain called Volcens

was in command there. He was intending to join forces with Turnus. He saw these two knights and knew by their weapons that they were Trojans. Nisus now tried to get away and to the wood; but Euryalus was weighed down, and they got between him and the wood and attacked him from every direction. And he defended himself vigorously, but because there is no winning against great odds they killed him. And when Nisus saw this, he ran out of the wood and struck to right and to left, so that nothing latched onto him. He cleared himself a path straight to their chieftain Volcens and ran him through with his sword, and his arms were all bloody up to the shoulder. Now weariness from fighting and wounds assailed his body so that he could not stand. He came to where his companion had fallen and laid himself down on him and said, 'My good friend Euryalus, in one and the same place shall we two suffer death.' And he was cut to pieces there.

The first point to be made about this version of the Nisus and Euryalus story is that, although it may appear almost ridiculously short by comparison with the space which Virgil devotes to it, by the standards of the *Breta sögur* summary it is actually a long passage. In the *Aeneid* the episode occupies 274 hexameters out of a total of 9,896 (ratio 1:36); in Finnur Jónson's edition of *Hauksbók*, the episode fills 26 lines of prose out of a total of just 247, excluding chapter headings, for the entire summary of the epic (ratio 1:9.5). Aeneas's affair with Dido is the only other episode from the *Aeneid* to be given extensive treatment, and it is even longer at 46 lines of prose (ratio 1:5.4). Other important episodes such as the funeral games or the visit to the underworld are dropped from the *Breta sögur* account altogether and the author contents himself with a lightning-fast précis of the military and political machinations between Aeneas and Turnus in Italy. The conclusion which may be drawn is that the author's prime objective is to convey the essential 'facts of history' (however he understood such concepts, since the 'facts' involve several short interventions by pagan deities) and he is not willing to turn aside or linger over anything except the epic's two love stories. The sheer length, then, of the Nisus and Euryalus episode would have marked it out for an Old Norse audience as a purple passage which in some way corresponds to or balances, or contrasts with, the love story of Dido which has already been narrated.

Unlike the *Aeneid*, the summary does not put the episode forward as a love story: there is no introductory reference to Nisus's devotion, nor is there any reference at all to Euryalus's youth and beauty. Instead we are presented with two standard-issue heroes who are distinguished from their peers only by the fact that they are the doughtiest among the Trojan forces (which in Virgil's account they certainly are not) and by the fact that they are *fyrirsjástir*, 'most prudent'. This adjective is probably

applied to them simply because they see the need to get Aeneas back from Pallanteum; it hardly squares with the romantic hot-headedness displayed by Virgil's 'happy pair'.

The Old Norse author, furthermore, is true to the *Aeneid* in saying that it was Nisus who began the slaughter of the drunken Rutulians, but he has lost all overt sense of the ethical dubiousness of the act, which Virgil underlines by referring to it as *furtum*, 'a secret action, a trick' (*OLD furtum* 2 and 3; *Aeneid* IX.350), and by having Nisus himself call it *fraus*, 'an offence, an instance of deceit' (*OLD fraus* 3 and 5; *Aeneid* IX.428; see Farron 1993, 4–10). The act is instead noted as being one which 'is widely celebrated in books' (*er við brugðit víða í bókum*). This comment probably has its origin in Virgil's promise to bestow everlasting fame on the partners (IX.446–47); but as Virgil places it, this promise, together with the praise which it implies, is specifically on account of the heroic *liebestod* which the warlike lovers undergo, and it is bestowed on them despite the undercurrents of criticism concerning their military exploits. Far from presenting a love story at this point, therefore, the Old Norse author seems to have taken something which affirmed the transcendent worth of heroic love, and turned it into praise for grim butchery. This is a drastic alteration to Virgil's story, and it is a surprising one because there is evidence that thirteenth-century audiences in both Norway and Iceland, like Romans of the classical period, were aware of a moral prohibition against night attacks even in military operations. In the Norwegian *Fagrskinna* (1985, 343), for example, Erlingr jarl skakki refrains from leading his troops under cover of darkness in an assault on Sigurðr á Reyri, stating that such an attack would be *níðingskapr eða morðingja verk*, 'villainy or an act of murderers', and making the following declaration:

Skulum vér heldr hafa þat ráðit, er oss er kunnara, at berjask um ljósa daga með fylkingu ok stelask eigi á menn um nætr.

Rather we must hold to that course which is more familiar to us, to fight in formation by clear daylight and not to creep up on men by night.

Snorri Sturluson (1941–51, III 387) includes a version of the same speech in the Icelandic *Heimskringla*. Similar ideas also lie behind an Old Norse passage which derives ultimately from classical sources, in which Alexander the Great is faced with overwhelming odds at Arbela and his men urge him to minimise the disadvantage by launching a night attack; Alexander replies, *Þetta er þjófa siðr ok laðrúna, er þér biðið oss gera*, 'This which you are asking us to do is the custom of thieves and robbers' (AS 1925, 67^{18–19}). In view of these texts it is all the more interesting that

the author of the *Breta sqgur* epitome has presented the night attack by Nisus and Euryalus as something which is celebrated. It is unlikely that he was being sarcastic. Was it his actual intention, then, to deflect Virgil's praise away from the *liebestod* because such praise was odious to him or to his audiences? Probably not. If such was his intention, then he chose to use a means which would certainly have struck a wrong note with some of his audiences some of the time. It is most likely, therefore, that he simply remembered Virgil's praise and made a clumsy attempt to scotch any criticism of the night attack by invoking the authority of 'books'; and this would fit with his other attempts to shelter his heroes from blame, which will be mentioned below.

Several more points of contact and divergence between the Old Norse and the Latin texts are worthy of note. The author of *Breta sqgur* has chosen to make an incidental feature of the light gleaming on the comrades' armour, and here, for a moment, this plainest of plain prose deviates into beauty while the sun rises; but the details are different from those of Virgil's story. In Virgil the dawn has not yet broken although it is near (IX.355), and Euryalus is not captured in the open and in the light of day but in the wood where he has grown bewildered through fear, and because it is still dark (IX.384–85, see also 373 and 378). In Virgil, too, the men are betrayed specifically by Euryalus's helmet, the gaudy one stripped from a Rutulian corpse (IX.373–74), whereas in the Old Norse version the *hjálmar* (plural) of both men receive the rays of the sun, and the motif is reduced to nothing more than a visual image with no narrative function since it is by then light enough for Volcens to see the two men and to recognise that their equipment is Trojan in appearance. The theme of taking booty has been omitted altogether unless it is implied by the word *þungfærr*, 'weighed down', which is applied to Euryalus, who actually is encumbered by the armour which he has claimed for himself in Virgil's story (IX.384–85); but if this is the implication, the issue has not been explained at all satisfactorily, and in any case the word *þungfærr* could be rendered as 'enfeebled', thus avoiding all allusion to Euryalus's burdens. All the changes listed in this paragraph could be explained as the result of an imperfect recollection of Virgil's text; but it should be noted that they are consistent with each other in that they all serve to blur the differences between Nisus and Euryalus, and to shield Euryalus from accusations of being foolhardy, childishly attracted to flashy gear, and not very brave once he is separated from Nisus—in other words, of being less than an adult hero. Much the same purpose is served by the statements, not found in Virgil, that Euryalus defended himself vigorously and was killed because there is no winning against

great odds. The impression which it seems the Old Norse author wished to create, therefore, is of two equal and blameless warriors who meet their deaths purely because of a stroke of bad luck at sunrise.

Doubts about this impression, however, may already have arisen for an Old Norse audience in connection with the night attack, as discussed above, and further doubts would surely emerge at the point where Nisus, having seen Euryalus die, abandons his mission to Pallanteum and embarks on an act of vengeance which is bound to result in his own death. Unlike Virgil, the Old Norse author has given no psychological motive for this dereliction of duty; but saga literature often forces readers to supply their own answer to the question of motives. In this case it may be thought that the demands of vengeance for a comrade are paramount and that the act of Nisus in killing Volcens, being so very heroic, justifies itself; even so, one cannot altogether suppress the thought that Nisus has been described as ‘most prudent’ (*fyrirsjástr*) and yet the Trojans in their fortification are now in deep trouble without their leader, whom Nisus had specifically volunteered to go and get. Add this to the matter of the night attack, together with some puzzlement, perhaps, over why this episode is being told at such length, and the questions about the author’s narrative strategy and his moral judgements begin to mount up.

At this point things take an unexpected turn when it is said that the mortally wounded Nisus sought his companion and lay down on top of him (*leggsk á hann ofan*), a statement which accurately renders the Latin of *Aeneid* IX.444 and which specifically expresses one of the components of a *liebestod*. It is surely significant that this statement is retained with perfect accuracy when so much else has been jettisoned or misrepresented. But would it prompt an Old Norse audience to recognise a *liebestod*? And if not, what did people think Nisus was doing?

In considering these questions it should be pointed out first of all that the idea of one man choosing to lie on top of another on the battlefield was probably less surprising or suggestive to some Old Norse audiences than it may be to a modern reader. There are at least two other texts in which something of the sort is mentioned, and this fact raises the possibility that there was an Old Norse tradition in which one warrior covers another with his body. In *Víga-Glúms saga* (1960, 40), when Glúmr and his followers fight the men of Espihóll, we read the following: *Svá bar at, er Glúmr hopaði, at hann lá fallinn, en þrælar hans báðir lögðusk á hann ofan ok váru þar stangaðir spjótum til bana*, ‘It so happened, when Glúmr moved backwards, that he lay sprawling, but both his thralls laid themselves down on him and were stabbed to death there with spears.’

As one would expect, given that the work belongs to the genre of the sagas of Icelanders, the author makes no comment on the action of the thralls; but it is obvious that they are motivated by loyalty to their master and by the desire to protect him—in which objective they are entirely successful, since Glúmr promptly gets up and carries on fighting. The second text which partly parallels the events described in *Breta sögur* is a passage in *Sturlunga saga* recounting the death of Sighvatr Sturluson at the Battle of Orlygsstaðir in 1238. The author of the passage, Sighvatr's nephew Sturla Þórðarson, tells how his uncle, cowed and weary but not yet badly wounded, asks Kolbeinn ungi to discuss a settlement with him; but nothing can come of it because of the action which immediately follows (*Sturlunga saga* 1946, I 434):

Pá hljóp at Einarr dragi ok hjó í hofuð Sighvati, ok var þat ærit banasár, en þó unnu þá fleiri menn á honum. En er Sighvatr djákni sá þetta, þá lagðisk hann ofan á nafna sinn ok var þar veginn.

Then Einarr dragi ran up and struck Sighvatr on the head, and that wound was sufficient to be fatal; and yet more men then attacked him. And when Sighvatr the deacon saw this, he laid himself down on his namesake and was killed there.

Like the author of *Víga-Glúms saga*, Sturla has not seen fit to comment on the motives which impelled Sighvatr the deacon to perform the act which is described, but once again it is obvious that the main objective was to protect a fallen superior: even though Sighvatr Sturluson had received a fatal wound, he was still alive and was still being attacked at the moment when his namesake tried to cover him. A high-minded desire to give protection, at any rate, is the motive ascribed to Sighvatr by Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1953, 69–70); and we have no basis for speculation about any other motives or emotions which the deacon may have experienced, since he is introduced in the saga only a few pages before the passage recounting his death, and Sturla tells us almost nothing about him.

The *Sturlunga saga* passage is especially interesting because it purports to be an account of a real event which happened within the author's lifetime and involved one of his close kinsmen. There is no particular reason to doubt that Sighvatr the deacon actually performed something like the action described by Sturla; nevertheless it is clear that Sturla's description is formulaic. Here are the key phrases again from *Breta sögur*, *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Sturlunga saga* (in that order):

[hann] leggsk á hann ofan . . . ok var þar saxaðr.
 [þeir] lögðusk á hann ofan ok váru þar stangaðir.
 lagðisk hann ofan á nafna sinn ok var þar veginn.

They all share a variant of the phrase *leggjask á e-n ofan*, ‘to lay oneself down on someone’, followed by a passive construction including the word *þar*, ‘there’, and a past participle which in two cases out of the three specifies penetration by weapons. Now here again is the death of Nisus as described by Virgil (*Aeneid* IX.444–45) with my own translation based on Fairclough’s but arranged so as to reflect the Latin word order as much as possible:

tum super exanimum sese proiecit amicum
confossus placidaque ibi demum morte quievit.

Then he flung himself on top of his lifeless friend and there, pierced through and through, at length found rest in quiet death.

These lines contain a little more than do the Old Norse phrases quoted above, but it is notable that they share several features with them: the clause *super amicum sese proiecit*, ‘he flung himself on top of his friend’, corresponds to the phrase *leggjask á e-n ofan*, and it is followed by a passive construction (as well as an active one) which includes the word *ibi*, ‘there’, and the past participle *confossus*, ‘pierced through and through’. The parallels, it seems to me, are too close to be coincidental, and I therefore conclude that all three Old Norse passages are dependent on Virgil’s text, whether directly or otherwise. Since this is not the place to begin a discussion of possible borrowings between the three Old Norse works, suffice it to say that the verbal formula which underlies all three passages derives from the *Aeneid*; and this is the case irrespective of whether or not Old Norse society actually had a custom in which one man lay on top of another who had fallen in battle.

This being so, it is significant that in *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Sturlunga saga* the formula has been used for a situation from which the erotic element found in Virgil’s text is completely absent, and in which the motive for lying on the fallen man is clearly that of protecting him. In that particular context the action does not call for extra comment either by the saga writer or by a character in the story, and this may reasonably be taken to imply that people were familiar and comfortable with the literary motif. It is possible, therefore, that the author of *Breta sögur* was counting on the same familiarity on the part of his audience, and expected that the motif would not in itself prompt speculation about the erotic element which is actually present in his Latin source; but the situation which the author is handling is different from that of the other two sagas because Nisus cannot be motivated by a desire to protect his comrade. Euryalus, in the *Breta sögur* account, is already dead by the time Nisus rushes out of the wood and starts rampaging through the enemy ranks. In

the absence of the protection motive the author has clearly felt that some explanation was required, as may be deduced from the fact that he has allotted Nisus a speech which is not found in Virgil: *Minn góði vinr Eruleus, í einum stað skulu vit dauða þola*, 'My good friend Euryalus, in one and the same place shall we two suffer death.' As explanations go, this one does not go very far, since a man can surely be said to die in the same place as another without actually lying on top of him; but it is sufficient to establish affection and intentionality on the part of Nisus. Bland though the phrase 'good friend' may be, it is enough to tell us that a well-established bond existed between the two men; and the subsequent part of the speech must be empty if it does not imply that Nisus actually wanted to die in the closest possible contact with Euryalus because of their bond. Thus the speech gives the audience an insight into Nisus's motive for lying on top of his friend, which would otherwise be lacking if the Virgilian formula were understood in the same way as in the other two sagas where it occurs. The emotional desire to die in the closest physical contact with the object of one's affection, however, is the very essence of love-death (if we are prepared to use the word 'love' to mean an intense affection which is not necessarily sexual, or not recognised as such); and if this point is grasped, the episode becomes a kind of love story after all. Having recognised the *liebestod*, the reader can now give a better-informed answer to the earlier question of why Nisus abandons his mission and turns back to face death against impossible odds: certainly his action involves heroism and revenge, but it can now be seen that it must also involve some kind of love. And now one can see more clearly the ways in which the account parallels and contrasts with the love story of Dido, the only other episode which is narrated at such length.

Perhaps it would be wisest to leave the discussion of the Nisus and Euryalus episode in *Breta sögur* at this point, but the question is bound to be raised whether a medieval reader of the Old Norse passage who did not know the Latin original could possibly suspect the relationship between the warriors of being sexual, given that it involves a strong love. The answer is yes, for it so happens that a later passage in *Breta sögur* indicates that its audience did not find it unthinkable for a doughty warrior to be lovingly attracted to other men. In the section of the work which paraphrases Geoffrey of Monmouth there is a brief account of Malgó, the highest achiever among the kings who succeeded Arthur; we are told that Malgó reconquered many of the lands which had paid tribute to Arthur—including Iceland—*en karlmenn þýddisk hann en eigi konur, ok því varð guð honum reiðr*, 'but he made love to men and not

women, and for that reason God became angry with him' (*Hauksbók* 1892–96, 295). Although the passage still adds up to a condemnation of Malgó's tastes, the phrase *karlmenn þýddisk* is a refreshingly low-key and no-nonsense form of expression by comparison with the source's reference to the *sodomitana pestis*, 'sodomitical plague' (Geoffrey of Monmouth 1929, 504), and it suggests an awareness of forms of homosexuality which may differ from the pattern of classical pederasty.³ It is therefore quite possible that some medieval readers of the Virgilian section of *Breta sögur* suspected that Nisus and Euryalus were sexual partners; but there is nothing in the episode itself to prompt this thought. Quite the contrary. The author has clearly tried to strip away the erotic details of Virgil's story and in doing so he has got himself into difficulties; and yet, despite this, he was not willing to forego the *liebestod* or to omit the episode altogether. What he wanted, it seems, was a story in which the intense but presumably non-sexual love of comrades is suddenly revealed at the end; and to secure this he has added a speech which ensures that a thoughtful reader will not mistake the *liebestod* for something else, such as a sacrifice of the type made by Sighvatr the deacon. He was not a great artist and has made a muddle of many things, but surely he was clear-sighted in this; for the *liebestod* is the true *raison d'être* of the episode and the key to a proper understanding of it.

Walter of Châtillon and Alexanders saga

Given the great success of the *Aeneid* and the Roman taste for colourful deaths in literature, it was inevitable that there would be imitations of the Nisus and Euryalus episode. The most significant of these, prior to Walter of Châtillon's medieval re-working of the theme, is the one in the *Thebaid* (1928, X.347–448) by Statius (c. 45–96 AD), who tries to outdo Virgil by having not one but two pairs of devoted friends play out the *liebestod* theme within minutes of each other.

The long glories of Statius did not stretch to an Old Norse version of his work, but it was well known to Walter, who wrote a Latin epic on the life of Alexander the Great at some time in the 1170s. Walter's poem, the *Alexandreis*, is a chronicle epic the main model for which is Lucan's *Civil War* (*Pharsalia*), and the main historical source for which is the

³ For an interesting comparison, see the treatment of Malgó (Malgus) in Layamon's *Brut* (1963–78), Caligula text, lines 14379–99. Layamon goes far beyond both Geoffrey and Wace in his praise for Malgus and in his description of the king's trend-setting activities. Many thousands of beautiful women leave Britain because they find themselves surplus to requirements.

prose *History of Alexander* by Quintus Curtius. It was an immense success, and was soon translated into five vernacular languages including Old Norse.

The Old Norse translation, *Alexanders saga*, is a masterpiece in its own right and is not quite like anything else in the language. It was made at some time in the thirteenth century, possibly for King Hákon at the request of his son King Magnús in the winter of 1262–63, when Brandr Jónsson was in Norway to be consecrated Bishop of Hólar.

In the *History of Alexander* VIII.xiii.12–16 (Curtius 1946), Walter found a brief account of a skirmish on an island in the River Hydaspes. Alexander's army is stuck on one side of the river while the Indian King Porus waits to do battle on the other. During the standoff, young men from both sides swim across to test their mettle against each other; and during one such encounter two Macedonian youths distinguish themselves brilliantly but then get killed when Indian reinforcements arrive. Prompted no doubt by the reference to two youths, Walter spies his chance to work up a Virgilian piece along the lines of the Nisus and Euryalus episode, adding an erotic element which is completely absent from Curtius's account.

Walter begins his story with a passage which announces that he will diverge significantly from Virgil besides echoing him (*Al.* IX.77–81):

In castris Macedum, res non indigna relatu,
 Corporibus similes animisque fuere Nicanor
 Et Symachus, quos una dies, ut creditur, una
 Ediderat terris. par militiae labor ambos
 Parque ligabat amor.

Within the Macedonian encampment—
 a matter worthy to relate—two men
 alike in body as in soul, Nicanor
 and Symachus, were thought to have been born
 upon a single day. Love bound them both
 with equal force, as did the work of war.

(Trans. Townsend, 151–52)

Here Walter has taken immediate steps to distance himself from the classical pederastic tradition, since he insists that there was no age difference between the two youths; instead he aligns his heroes with the medieval tradition of friendship which produced the romance of Amis and Amile, who were baptised on the same day, died on the same day, and looked so similar that they were mistaken for each other. Having done so, however, Walter immediately makes a very obvious reference to the relationship of Nisus and Euryalus in declaring that Nicanor and

Symachus were mutually bound by love and the work of war, echoing *Aeneid* IX.182 quoted above, which says of Virgil's heroes that 'a mutual love was theirs and side by side they charged into hostilities'. As discussed earlier, it was not entirely clear to people in the Middle Ages that Nisus and Euryalus were sexual partners, although it was very obvious to readers that there was an erotic element in the relationship; consequently it is difficult for us to know to what extent Walter's allusion eroticises the relationship of his Nicanor and Symachus. Given the juxtaposition of the allusion with the preceding comments about the two men being the same age, it is perhaps safest to say that at this point Walter has prompted a thought but has carefully left ambiguous the type of love which the two men share. Later, however, he grows more boldly suggestive, as will be seen; but he never resolves the issue unequivocally.

The author of *Alexanders saga* partly condenses and partly expands this material, translating its conventions into social norms which are frequently represented in Old Norse literature (AS, 131⁶⁻¹¹):

Ungir menn tveir váru í her Alexandri. Annarr hét Nicanorr en annarr Simacus. Þeir váru jafnir at aldri, vaskleik ok at vexti. Langt fóstbræðralag hafði svá rammliga bundit þeira félagsskap at hvárgi þóttisk af öðrum mega sjá, hvatki sem fyrir þá var lagt.

There were two young men in Alexander's army. One was called Nicanor, and the other Symachus. They were equal in age, courage and stature. Long-term sworn brotherhood had bound their partnership so firmly that neither thought he could do without the other, whatever they were faced with.

Typically wary of improbable facts, the translator has removed the remark about the two men being born on the same day, and has contented himself with less precise statements about their similarities: his emphasis is on their being equals rather than duplicates of each other. The Virgilian passage has been dropped altogether and replaced with the topos of *fóstbræðralag*, 'sworn brotherhood' or in this case possibly actual 'foster-brotherhood' since it has lasted a long time and the men are still young.

In the sagas of Icelanders, *fóstbræðralag* often enough leads to trouble between the *fóstbræðr* for one reason or another, as in *Gísla saga* and *Fóstbræðra saga*; but here the Old Norse translator seems to be using it as a term for the closest possible bond between two men who are not blood-relatives, and he states very positively that the bond has worked out well for Nicanor and Symachus, drawing them together in secure *félagsskapr*. In my translation above I have rendered this word as 'partnership' because, like *félagsskapr*, partnership can imply an association

which is either formal or informal, either loose or binding, either unemotional or charged with emotion. In contemporary English usage it can even specify a sexual relationship, and there is evidence that something of this meaning, with strongly negative connotations, clung to the terms *fóstbræðralag* and *félagsskapr* in thirteenth-century Iceland. This is indicated, for example, by *Fóstbræðra saga* (1943, 151–52 and 259) where the partnership of Þormóðr and Þorgeirr gives occasion for scurrilous insults.⁴ Naturally these negative connotations are not uppermost and the mere fact that two men are involved in a partnership does not usually lead to insults; but the possibility of its doing so is always there, if other factors come into play. In *Fóstbræðra saga* it is probably significant, for example, that accusations of homosexual activity are made against the troublesome Þormóðr and Þorgeirr but not against the more orderly Skúfr and Bjarni, who enjoy long-term *félagsskapr*, own a farm together and eventually dissolve their partnership on amicable terms (*Fóstbræðra saga* 1943, 224 and 257). In *Alexanders saga* the partnership of Nicanor and Symachus should perhaps be viewed as akin to that of the practically-minded Skúfr and Bjarni since the statement that ‘neither thought he could do without the other, whatever they were faced with’ indicates a mutual dependency in confronting the circumstances of life, and also an emotional attachment to each other without which the men’s subsequent behaviour can hardly make sense.⁵ The remark that neither could do without the other, which is not found in the Latin material, has been placed where it is, in fact, to allow us a forward glance towards the closing moments of the story, when each man is faced with a few seconds of life without his partner and can hardly bear the idea.

As in Curtius’s brief story, Nicanor and Symachus plan to skirmish with the enemy. Many other young men in Alexander’s army follow their example, swimming out to an island in the river, engaging the Indians there and killing them all. At this point they could have returned

⁴ We also find the topos of an accusation of homosexuality together with the topos of *fóstbræðralag* in *Gísla saga* (1943, 10 and 22–23); but here the accusation precedes the swearing of brotherhood rather than stems from it. It is noteworthy, however, that the two sagas which describe the ritual of swearing brotherhood (*Gísla saga* and *Fóstbræðra saga*) both also involve accusations of homosexuality. This suggests that there was indeed an association of ideas.

⁵ Compare with *Sturlunga saga* (1946) I 232: *Var svá ástúðugt með þeim bræðrum, at nær þóttisk hvárrgi mega af öðrum sjá*, ‘The brothers were on such loving terms that it almost seemed neither could do without the other.’ Here the men referred to are Snorri’s brothers Sighvatr and Þórðr, the sons of

with a great victory and preserved themselves, we are told; but things work out differently (AS, 132⁷⁻¹³):

Þat varð þeim sem gjarnt verðr æskunni, at opt verðr ofsat til vansa. Þar gamba þeir til þess í eyjunni yfir sigri sínum, at Indíamenn koma at þeim á óvart, miklu fleiri en þeir er fallit höfðu, ok leggja þegar fast at þeim. Ok því at Grikkir váru móðir áðr ok margir mjök sárir, þá hnígr brátt mannfallit í þeira lið.

That happened to them which readily happens to youth, that it often puffs itself up to its own detriment. They crowed over their victory there on the island until some Indians crept up on them unawares—many more than those who had fallen—and at once attacked them fiercely. And because the Greeks were already worn out and many were badly wounded, slaughter soon overwhelmed their forces.

This is based on *Al.* IX.117–120:

nullo contenta modo est temeraria uirtus.
 Dumque triumphatis insultant hostibus, ecce
 Occulte subeunt plures morientibus Indi.
 Hic dolor, hic planctus, Graium Macedumque ruinae.
 Within no bounds is rash strength satisfied.
 They still exulted over conquered foes,
 when, stealthily, more Indians crept forward
 to aid their dying fellows. This was grief
 and mournful ruin for the Grecian ranks.

(Trans. Townsend, 153)

The Old Norse translator has made several interesting changes to the substance of the Latin. Line 117 has already been transposed to the passage quoted earlier; its place is taken by the statement that youth ‘often puffs itself up to its own detriment’. In both texts, then, it is a species of pride which prompts the men to delay and thus becomes the cause of their destruction; but the Old Norse translator has gone some way towards excusing them on account of their youth, whereas Walter, who makes no reference to their youth in connection with their rash behaviour, straightforwardly censures their overweening heroism. As the saga writer construes the event, the mistake of the young men is in

Sturla; and the passage was written by Þórðr’s son. The context of the quotation is that Sighvatr goes to stay with Þórðr because he has found no happiness (*nam ekki ynði*) in the household which he had established with a man called Oddr dignari. This is the same Sighvatr, by the way, for whom Sighvatr the deacon sacrificed his life by throwing himself on top of him as he was being attacked at Orlygsstaðir.

line with that of Virgil's 'thoughtless Euryalus' who struts about in a flashy helmet and so gets seen: they are all silly, they are vain, they are cocky—but then they are young. Similarly the saga writer goes on to excuse the fact that the 'Greeks' are defeated in their second fight, and he does so in the same way as the author of *Breta sogur* excuses his Euryalus for being surrounded and killed: the defeat is understandable because the men are exhausted and greatly outnumbered. None of this is in Walter's text; but the translator sets a higher premium on courage than Walter does, even when it is foolish, and so he has added these comments, just as he had earlier added a statement that in the first encounter many of the Greeks fought well but Nicanor and Symachus were *einkum vaskastir*, 'the bravest by far' (AS, 132⁴). These details are important because they show that the Old Norse translator sympathises with Nicanor and Symachus; he does not want to criticise them too severely, for they are very courageous even though their youth betrays them into foolish pride.

Soon enough there are none of the Greeks left standing except the two leaders, and Walter begins to prepare us for his own attempt to outdo the Virgilian *liebestod* (IX.133–38):

ergo uiri, quia iam suprema minari
 Fata uident, orant ut premoriatur uterque
 Occumbatque prior socioque supersite, cuius
 Cernere funus erat leto crudelius omni.
 Obiciunt igitur sibi se certantque uicissim
 Alterius differre necem.
 Since they beheld their final doom approach,
 each man now prayed he might be first to die,
 falling before his friend: to see his death
 seemed crueller to him than oblivion.
 Each cast himself before the other, striving
 to slow his comrade's end.

(Trans. Townsend, 153)

Here we encounter the same attitude of mind as was displayed by Virgil's Nisus when he stepped out of cover and offered his own life to the Rutulians because he could not bear to see his beloved killed before his eyes; but in Walter's account this attitude is exhibited mutually by both young men, as befits those who are alike in body and soul. Mutuality, in fact, will be the keynote of all that follows in both the Latin and the Old Norse texts.

The Old Norse translator rises magnificently to the moral and psychological complexities of this situation (AS 132^{20–26}):

Ok þá er þar komit at þeir vænta sér ekki undankvámu, þá biðr hvárr annan at fyrri skyli ná at deyja; en svá var ástin heit orðin með þeim at þetta vildi hvárgi qðrum veita, þó at þeir mætti sjálfir ráða at sjá annars dauða. Keppisk æ hvárr fram fyrir annan ok vill qðrum hlífa, en sjálfum sér ekki.

And when it came to the point that they had no hope of getting away, each begged the other that he should be allowed to die first; but the love between them had grown so fervent that neither would grant this to the other, even if they could themselves have resolved to see the other's death. Each continually struggled forward in front of the other and tried to protect the other but not himself.

Here in the saga, just as clearly as in the Latin, the selfishness which is at the heart of self-giving love stands revealed; but one could also put this the other way round and say that the Old Norse passage foregrounds the heroic urge to self-sacrifice which may be found even in selfish passion. The complexities stem, in large part, from the moral ambiguity of the term *heit ást*, 'fervent love', which the translator has added to his source material. The end of the episode, as will be seen, suggests a fundamentally positive valuation of the men's love, but here the term *heit ást* could be taken to imply a passionate excess. It results in each man selfishly refusing to give his beloved the very thing that he wants; nevertheless it also has positive results for it leads each man to perform acts of heroism which involve the obligation to protect the other (*hlífa qðrum*). That the translator has used the last expression in place of Walter's phrase *alterius differre necem*, 'to delay the other's death', is significant although the change is a subtle one. Walter's logic is that neither man could bear to see the other's death and so tried to postpone it. The translator's thought, in contrast, is as follows: Even if one man could bear to see the death of his friend (but he probably could not), he still went on defending him. Put in this way it can be seen that the translator has tipped the balance in favour of heroism; but he still implies, as does his source, that the young men's courage may be based partly on the fear of bereavement, just as their self-sacrifice is linked inextricably with selfishness. It is a fine insight into the paradoxes of love.

The young men's dilemma over who should die first is settled for them in an instant when a giant appears out of the Indian ranks and fells them both at a single stroke. In Walter's text the stroke is the thrust of a spear which passes through both men and pins them to the ground, prompting the following remark (IX.142–43): *sic indiuisa iuuentus | Cuspide nexa iacet*, literally 'so undivided youth lay joined by a point (i.e. a spear)'. The sexual imagery of this comment is rather obvious, especially if it is considered that each man had been leaping forward in turn to defend his

partner and that the spear is therefore likely to have penetrated while they were standing one behind the other—*annarr aptar en annarr*, as the famous taunt in *Gísla saga* (1943, 10) has it. Perhaps for this reason (and I can see no other unless it is a matter of textual corruption) all references to the spear have been removed from the passage in *Alexanders saga* (132²⁶⁻²⁹), where the giant strikes the men down with a single blow of a club.

Whether speared or clubbed, the young men are now ready to enact the *liebestod* which concludes the episode and which will outdo those of Statius and Virgil by being double, mutual and simultaneous in its climax. If my wording here suggests mutual orgasm, Walter's lines are hardly less suggestive (IX.143–47):

sed nec diuturnus in ipsa
Morte resedit amor. amplexus inter et inter
Oscula decedit, moriensque sua sociique
Morte perit duplici. resoluta corpore tandem
Tendit ad Elisios angusto tramite campos.

Nor did
their endless love recede even in death.
They passed amidst their kisses and embrace,
each dying doubly in his friend's demise.
At last, relinquishing their limbs, they trod
the narrow path towards Elysian fields.

(Trans. Townsend, 153)

It was mentioned earlier that at the start of the episode Walter may have taken the trouble to emphasise the friends' exact parity in age and other attributes because he wished to distance himself from the classical pederastic tradition. The suggestion remains valid despite the sexual imagery which is eventually used in the Latin; but now it is clear that Walter stressed the men's likeness in body and soul because he also wanted to prepare for this final scene in which the emphasis is on complete mutuality, each man's *liebestod* being the exact image of the other's, and each friend 'dying doubly', as Townsend puts it.

It remains to point out that the *liebestod* in this passage leads explicitly to a union beyond death, and to observe that Walter's happy pair, whatever their faults, are deemed to have been righteous pagans, for they go to the blessed fields of Elysium by a path which is narrow like the way to the Christian heaven (Matt. 7:14).

In a different context (AS 16²¹; Walter 1978, I 492) the Old Norse translator has rendered 'Elysium' as *himinríki*, 'the kingdom of heaven'; but here such a translation would be inappropriate, and he is content to

send his young pagans together *til heljar*, ‘to the land of the dead’, or simply ‘into death’.⁶ He is generous in the send-off which he gives them. Like so much of *Alexanders saga* it is simpler but more real than the Latin, more human, more humane; and in the end it has a dignity to which Walter never aspired. I quote from the point at which the giant has picked up his makeshift club, to the end of the story (AS 132²⁸⁻³²):

Með því lýstr hann þá féлага báða í senn, svá at þeir þurfa eigi fleira, ok veitir á þá leið, þat er þeim þótti mestu skipta, at þeir fara báðir í senn til heljar, ok halda svá sínum félagsskap at hvárr faðmar annan jafnvel þá er þeir deyja.

With that he struck both those companions at the same time, so that they needed no more blows; and in that way he granted what they thought mattered the most, that they went both at the same time to the land of the dead. And they maintained their partnership in such a way that each was embracing the other even as they died.

Just as the sexual imagery of the spear has been removed, so also the kisses have gone. This fact is probably significant for our understanding of the translator’s attitude towards the source text, since kisses *per se* and as tokens of regard were not unacceptable between men in Old Norse society of the thirteenth century. In Sturla Þórðarson’s account of the wedding feast at Flugumýrr in 1253, for example, we are told that Ísleifr Gizurarson sat close to Hrafn Oddsson, *ok minntusk við jafnan um daginn, er hvárr drakk til annars*, ‘and they kissed each other continually throughout the day, when each drank to the other’ (*Sturlunga saga* 1946, 483).⁷ In view of this, the fact that the author of *Alexanders saga* removed the kisses which are mentioned in his source probably indicates that he understood them to be erotic kisses, and that he did not wish to present the young men’s love as being of that kind. At the same time, however, he did not belittle or seek to understate their love, for he preserves their final embrace with no less emphasis on its intensity and mutuality; and here it must be remembered that, in the Latin, the comrades had been pinned together and so were almost forced to embrace, but in the saga they must have chosen to do so. The tone of the Old Norse passage, in fact, is chaste and non-sexual throughout, but the passions in

⁶ It should be noted that *hel* does not mean ‘hell, the place of eternal torment’, the proper word for which is *helvíti*.

⁷ That the kisses specified here were ceremonial becomes all the more obvious when it is considered that Hrafn, at this point, already knew about the attack on Flugumýrr which was soon to take place and which actually claimed Ísleifr’s life.

it are very strong: it is 'fervent love' which is fulfilled in this final scene, and so the death which the young men suffer is a true *liebestod*.

It should be noted that the word *félagsskapr*, freighted with its many and varied connotations as discussed above, has been placed strategically in the final sentence as part of the *liebestod* itself. Whatever the nature of the young men's partnership may have been, it culminates in the *liebestod*, while the *liebestod* sets its seal on the partnership forever. And in dealing with this ultimate matter the saga writer goes beyond his source when he declares of the friends that their mutual *liebestod* mattered to them more than anything else, once death had become inevitable. Walter of Châtillon makes no such statement about the young men, but his Old Norse translator understands that this was the consummation they devoutly wished.

Connections and conclusions

The Old Norse texts which are associated with one or other of the *liebestod* patterns are the following: *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, *Tristrams kvæði*, the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* (which tells that Ísodd died of grief and was buried at the same time as Tristram, but omits the detail of her dying while clasping his body), *Breta sögur* and *Alexanders saga*. All these were lastingly popular in Iceland and were still being copied by hand as late as the nineteenth century. This fact demonstrates that there was an appetite for stories which culminated in a love-death, whether it belonged to the Tristan pattern or to the all-male pattern derived from Virgil. In the Middle Ages this appetite was felt by both Icelanders and Norwegians: *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* was Norwegian in origin whereas *Tristrams kvæði* and the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* are Icelandic derivatives; *Alexanders saga* may have been written for the king of Norway and was certainly copied for him, but it is probably the work of an Icelander; and *Breta sögur* could have originated in either country but is most notably included in the Icelandic compilation, *Hauksbók*, where its theme of colonisation parallels that of the quintessentially Icelandic *Landnámabók*, which is included as well. Furthermore, the appetite for the *liebestod* subject was strong: the prominence given to the Nisus and Euryalus episode in *Breta sögur*, where so much else is completely omitted, shows that a story containing the *liebestod* theme could be chosen in preference to others which modern readers may think more important.

Since it fully reveals the nature of the story only at the very end, the narrative strategy of *Breta sögur*, in the Nisus and Euryalus episode,

also demonstrates that medieval audiences were expected, with a little prompting, to recognise the *liebestod* topos even when their appetite for it had not already been whetted by a lengthy and overt lead-in; and having recognised it they could be expected to reevaluate what they had already heard.

The *Breta sǫgur* and *Alexanders saga* episodes which deal with the all-male pattern of *liebestod* show the marked reticence towards sex between men which was to be expected of a Christian society which also had a literary tradition of dire insults based on accusations of playing the so-called passive role in homosexual acts. This reticence, it should be noted, is in contrast with the relative openness about the adulterous, and hence mortally sinful, sex between the man and woman at the centre of the two Tristram sagas. Given the way in which the sexual content is stripped away from the *liebestod* stories in *Breta sǫgur* and *Alexanders saga*, it is not surprising that the verbal formula derived from the *liebestod* in the *Aeneid* came to be used for narratives which contain motifs resembling the *liebestod* in certain external details but which have no erotic connotations at all, such as the account of Sighvatr Sturluson's death at Örlýgsstaðir or the story of the thralls in *Víga-Glúms saga*. But in connection with the episodes in *Breta sǫgur* and *Alexanders saga* themselves, which have the true nature of a *liebestod* in that one man is motivated by sheer affection to die in the closest possible contact with another, probably the most important thing which can be said is this: people seem to have wanted these stories in a largely de-eroticised form, but they were not willing to forego the *liebestod* itself. Even if they did not wish to think or write or read about admirable men whose relationship was sexual, they still wanted stories about pair-bonded warriors who shared death in this particular way.

The emotional punch packed by the *liebestod* topos is difficult to assess as it is delivered in widely different ways in the various sagas. In addition to its reticence about sex between men, *Breta sǫgur* shows a signal reticence towards strong emotion in the case of Nisus; but it allots Dido a long and impassioned message for Aeneas after he has abandoned her and she is considering suicide (*Hauksbók* 1892–96, 232). This difference, however, is possibly a matter of gender roles rather than of squeamishness over one man's feelings for another, since it is very noticeable that Aeneas too remains impassive throughout his untidy affair with Dido; but gender-role expectations which involve phlegmatic men and histrionic women do not apply to the other texts under consideration here. In comparison with Dido, Ísǫnd cuts a rather dignified

figure of subdued pathos in the version of her *liebestod* found in the Norwegian *Tristrams saga*, where she says a prayer involving a statement of her Christian faith, speaks sadly about her love, lies down, puts her arms round Tristram's neck, and dies (NR, 220–222). The finest of all accounts of her death, in *Tristrams kvæði*, is still more reticent with regard to emotion, making a virtue of its swift-moving ballad narrative, which tells us no more than the following (NR, 237, stanza 24):

Dróttning niðr at líki laut
ok lá þar dauð.

The queen stooped down to his body,
and lay there dead.

In the later *Tristrams saga*, Ísodd, as she is now called, goes so far as to weep over the body of her lover; but we are also told that on this occasion neither men nor women could refrain from tears: *hvárki mátti vatni halda karl né kona* (NR, 288). Here we find a statement typical of the emotionally repressive attitude encountered so often in saga literature, the implication being that people should only express their feelings after trying not to. At its best, an example of this attitude or literary convention can give the reader a pleasantly uncomfortable experience of emotions which are both choked and choking—and this is one of the glories of Old Norse prose; but often it seems like a tedious mannerism, as in the text just quoted. The *liebestod* passage in *Alexanders saga*, by contrast, achieves something rare in Old Norse: a generous and open-hearted pathos. Its author eschews Walter's pyrotechnics in favour of simplicity and dignity, and in doing so he does not at all minimise or stifle the emotions which his two young men feel. His concluding statement that they were embracing each other even as they died is as moving and yet as unsentimental as anything else in saga prose.

In this brief survey of connections and contrasts between the Tristan pattern of *liebestod* and the all-male pattern, I have left till last the difference between them which is most important and most radical. It is one which stems from the literary context of Virgil's story but which is also grounded in the realities of medieval life in Iceland and Norway, for it belongs to one of the social contexts in which deep or even passionate love between men was most likely to flourish in pre-urban societies, namely the army or some other warlike force. Nisus and Euryalus, Nicanor and Symachus are all soldiers; their love is the love of comrades and the death which they all suffer is death in combat. If we may judge from the behaviour of fighting men in the modern world and

from the plethora of medieval texts which depict the loyalties of warriors, the loves and deaths of these literary heroes are fundamentally believable, however heightened the details may be, in a way which the death of Ísönd is not.

What I mean by saying that the loves and deaths of these literary heroes are fundamentally believable is well illustrated by a story, purportedly historical, told by Sturla Þórðarson. It involves the wrecking of a warship which had been on a raiding expedition to Bjarmaland and which was engulfed by waves in the sound off Straumneskinn in 1222. The ship capsized and only three men managed to get out of the water onto its upturned hull. One of them, a man called Jógrímr, got the other two to the safety of a rescue boat which had put out from another ship of the fleet; but at that point he realised that there were no other survivors.

Ok þá lézk Jógrímr eigi sjá Þorstein, félagsmann sinn; ok hljóp þá enn á sund í rōstina. Ok þar lézk hann. (Sturla Þórðarson 1887, 71)

And then Jógrímr said that he could not see Þorsteinn, his partner; and then he leapt again into the sound and into the strong current. And there he perished.

This story does not include a *liebestod* and it does not take place on the battlefield, but it demonstrates that in thirteenth-century Scandinavia (as in many parts of the world today) a fighting man could form the strongest possible bond with a particular comrade and could throw his life away for that person. Jógrímr was a courageous and capable man who first of all did his duty towards the other two survivors, one of whom was his leader; but as soon as that duty was done his thoughts turned to Þorsteinn, his partner. This would have been the man who ate with him and shared his sleeping quarters both on the ship and ashore. Most probably they were *rekkjufélagar* ‘bed-fellows’ or *húðfatsfélagar*, terms which are employed synonymously on the next page of the saga, a *húðfat* being a kind of sleeping-bag used by sailors. The important point to grasp is that Jógrímr did not intend to see if he could rescue any more members of the ship’s company, all of whom were lost as a matter of fact; it was for Þorsteinn, and for him alone, that Jógrímr threw himself back into the deadly current and died. It is against the background of a story such as this—sober historical fact for all we know to the contrary—that we must judge the behaviour of Nisus in *Breta sögur* or the two young men in *Alexanders saga*. Judged against this background, neither their love as comrades nor their willingness to die will seem unreal.

In contrast, the love of Tristram and Ísönd has much of the quality of an aristocratic game; this was one of the factors which made it so popular,

of course, but it is a weakness as well as a strength. Furthermore, although neither Tristram nor Ísönd is a truly ideal lover, Ísönd's *liebestod* is idealised in the highest degree: she dies for no reason other than love itself, whereas Nisus dies of the wounds which he has sustained because of his love, and Nicanor is already facing violent death alongside Symachus before their *liebestod* becomes a possibility. In this respect the Tristan pattern, in which love is the sole cause of death, embodies a *liebestod* which is purer and probably superior as seen from the Romantic or specifically Wagnerian point of view, with its emphasis on erotic mysticism. On the other hand, the all-male love-death has the advantage of being not only credible (because it has an efficient cause in the shape of swords and spears) but thoroughly heroic as well. Nisus does not slip passively into death, as Ísönd does, but flings himself into it, avenging his friend as he does so; and Nicanor is able to die in union with Symachus because they have both lived the heroic code up to the very last second, fighting without ceasing in the face of certain death. This is surely a plus for all readers who retain a taste for war, at least in literature. But the important point here is not that these stories are heroic (for many stories are heroic), but that they are stories of heroic love—always granting that we may use the word 'love' for a deep and passionate male bonding which may not include sex, the way in which the author of *Alexanders saga* uses it in fact. The all-male pattern of *liebestod* celebrates the synthesis of heroism and love of that kind. This is why it survived and was wanted in an age and society hostile to homosexuality but quite fixated on the real or imagined mores of warrior bands. In the Old Norse texts as in Virgil, the all-male *liebestod* is the ultimate expression of the bond between fighting men who share a mutual love and rush side by side into battle.

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Note that all quotations from Old Norse have been normalised.

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KENNETH CAMERON

The recent history of English toponymical studies and the name of Kenneth Cameron can hardly be separated. When Ken died on 10 March 2001, he had just seen through to publication the sixth volume of his survey of *The Place-Names of Lincolnshire* (vol. I: Cambridge University Press 1985; vols II–VI: English Place-Name Society, Nottingham 1991–2001).

His first major work was the three-volume *The Place-Names of Derbyshire* (Cambridge University Press 1959). These volumes are characterised throughout by scholarly rigour, painstaking research and candour—Ken, ever the cheerfully blunt Lancastrian, admitted it when he did not know. What he did know was, however, made available to a wide public and to anyone who cared to ask. His *English Place Names*, first published in 1961 (Batsford), went through three editions before being issued as a ‘new edition revised and reset’ in 1996. The index of this final edition is in five columns of minuscule print covering thirteen pages (pp. 244–256): testimony to a well-illustrated narrative and analysis of the development of English place-names. The files of enquiries he answered as Honorary Director of The English Place-Name Society from 1967 to 1993 testify to industry, patience and commitment beyond the call of duty.

Ken was born in 1922 in Burnley, and attended the Grammar School there. He studied English under Bruce Dickins at the University of Leeds, and when he retired, was honoured by a *Festschrift* in the *Leeds Studies in English* series (Vol. XVIII, 1987). In the war years he served as a pilot in the RAF. He then took his doctorate at the University of Sheffield and was appointed Assistant Lecturer in English Language there in 1947. In 1950 he moved to a lectureship at the University of Nottingham, where he remained, being appointed Senior Lecturer in 1959, Reader in 1962 and Professor in 1963. He became a Fellow of the British Academy in 1976. He retired, ‘hoping to get some work done’, in 1987, and in the same year was honoured with the CBE.

Ken had many and varied connections with Scandinavia. He served as President of the Viking Society 1972–74, and made many friends whom he visited and invited to visit Nottingham. He was delighted to be awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Uppsala in 1978, and the Jöran Sahlgren Prize. He looked forward with unfailing relish to visits to Uppsala and elsewhere to speak or examine.

Ken’s particular interest within place-name studies was the nature of Scandinavian influence. His inaugural lecture, *Scandinavian Settlement*

in the Territory of the Five Boroughs: *The Place-Name Evidence* (University of Nottingham 1965), laid out the position which he was to defend throughout his later career, namely that the quantity, diversity and density of Scandinavian-derived English names in the Danelaw point to a considerable settlement of Scandinavian speakers. This was partly a riposte to Peter Sawyer's influential book, *The Age of the Vikings* (1st edition, London 1962), where the view was expressed that the Viking settlers were few, constituting a military aristocracy. Ken's inaugural lecture was republished as the first of series of three articles in which he worked through the place-names from major to minor, starting with *by*, going on to *þorp* and hybrids ('Scandinavian Settlement in the Territory of the Five Boroughs: The Place-Name Evidence', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 2 (1969), 176–79; '— Part II, Place-Names in Thorp', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 3 (1970), 35–49, '— Part III, the Grimston-hybrids', *England Before the Conquest, Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (1971), 147–63). He was still pursuing the matter in his article 'The Danish element in minor and field-names of Yarborough Wapentake, Lincolnshire', in the John Dodgson *Festschrift (Names, Places and People)*, ed. A. R. Rumble and A. D. Mills, Paul Watkins 1997, 19–25), where he concludes, 'If evidence were ever wanted for a very heavy Danish presence in Lincolnshire, that presented here must make the case watertight' (p. 25).

This illustrates Ken's single-mindedness: he saw the relevance of place-name evidence to most historical and linguistic issues. But he was never narrow-minded. In the early years at Nottingham he and Ray Page taught a dauntingly wide range of courses, and the continuing availability of medieval and linguistic courses there is partly due to Ken's stature and robust advocacy. He was a great collaborator: his first wife Kath contributed the geological and geographical underpinning of his 'Scandinavian Settlement' articles; among others, John Field contributed to his work on field-names, and John Insley contributed his personal-name and philological expertise at numerous points in Ken's place-name surveys; last but not least, Ken's second wife, Jean, worked companionably with him at Lincoln collecting field-names, visiting sites and helping with plant-names.

When Ken was told that the English Place-Name Society had received a substantial grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Board, a wistful look appeared momentarily on his face. As Honorary Director of the Society, he had been used to keeping the funds in a cocoa tin, and

had been in the habit of packing up the county survey volumes to send to members himself. Yet Ken was a leading member of a small group of scholars who put place-names on the academic map, and the high standing of toponymical studies currently can largely be attributed to these few individuals. His work paved the way for expansion and increased funding.

Ken is remembered with warm affection by those who knew him, and many have good reason to be grateful for his personal contribution and encouragement.

PAUL CAVILL

PREBEN MEULENGRACHT SØRENSEN

Preben Meulengracht Sørensen was born in Odense on 1 March 1940, and died on 21 December 2001 in Århus, after a long and courageous battle with cancer. He thus began and ended his life in Denmark, even though at various times he spent periods away from it, especially in Iceland, the USA, England, Germany and Norway. He was a man for whom it was important to feel at home, both intellectually and personally. His personal and intellectual roots and loyalties ran very deep, and those with whom he was closely connected responded to him with equal loyalty and affection. He was also an inspirational teacher and colleague. The preface to the little book *Artikler: Udgivet i anledning af Preben Meulengracht Sørensens 60 års fødselsdag 1. marts 2000*, published by his students and younger colleagues at Århus, speaks of the combination of Preben's down-to-earth and unceremonious teaching style and his wide-ranging and deep scholarship as a constant source of inspiration. He had links with colleagues and fellow-scholars of Old Icelandic literature around the world, some of whom unfortunately predeceased him, like Gerd Wolfgang Weber and Ole Bruhn. Those who remain can readily attest to the intense and inspirational nature of academic discussions with Preben. A man who was sometimes irresolute in day-to-day decision-making, he was a scholar of deep, subtle and resolute opinion, founded upon a series of informed insights into the main subject of his research, the literature and society of medieval Iceland. At the same time, he regarded himself and the world around him with a certain wry sense of humour.

Preben Meulengracht Sørensen graduated from Svendborg Statsgymnasium in 1958 and gained his cand. mag. in Danish and Icelandic from the University of Århus in 1968, by which time he had already been Danish lektor at the University of Iceland for two years. He held this position for four years altogether, 1966–70, and it enabled him, as he wrote in the foreword to his recently-published collected papers *At fortælle historien – Telling History* (Trieste 2001), to gain an introduction to the world of research, both Icelandic and international, and to develop a lifelong love for the Icelandic language and Icelandic culture. He modestly did not mention that he also gained great expertise in both. From 1970–93 he was a lektor in the Department of Scandinavian Language and Literature at Århus University, with short periods at other universities in Odense, Frankfurt, London, Berkeley, Copenhagen, Bonn and Reykjavík. In 1994 he took the Chair of Old Norse (norrøn filologi)

in the Department of Scandinavian Studies and Comparative Literature at the University of Oslo, and held it until, in 1999, he decided for personal reasons to return to Århus, where he remained until his death. Meulengracht Sørensen was the only Danish Old Norse scholar of the twentieth century to be awarded a doctoral degree at a Danish university for research on Old Icelandic literature. This he achieved in June 1993 with his *Fortælling og ære: Studier i islændingesagaerne*. He was awarded the Dag Strömbäck prize by the Gustav Adolfs Akademi in Uppsala in 1993, and, in 2001, received an honorary doctorate from the University of Iceland in recognition of his outstanding contribution to Icelandic studies.

He published widely, both in the form of articles and book chapters and in a series of influential books. He also co-authored with the Norwegian historian of religion, Gro Steinsland, two books for students and a wider audience: *Før Kristendommen: Digtning og livssyn i vikingetiden* (1991) and *Viking Age Man* (1994). Most of his best articles and chapters, from his study of the seminal story of the Icelandic settler Ingólfr in *Landnámabók* (*Skírnir* 148 (1974), 20–40) to his introductory chapter to *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, edited by Margaret Clunies Ross (Cambridge University Press 2000), are reproduced in *At fortælle historien*.

His first book, aptly entitled *Saga og samfund: En indføring i old-islandsk litteratur* (Copenhagen 1977), was to become a classic work in Old Icelandic studies and bore his trade-mark: an interest in both literature and the society that generated it. Sixteen years later this book was published in an English translation by John Tucker, entitled *Saga and Society: An Introduction to Old Norse Literature* (Odense University Press 1993). It is now unfortunately out of print. There is no other small book which explains as well or as succinctly the interrelationship between early Icelandic society and the extraordinary literature that Icelanders produced in the Middle Ages. And it does more: as the author explains in the Postscript to the English translation (p. 153), his method gives us ‘the possibility of making an important step forward, for our task now becomes the investigation of the intellectual and artistic givens of the writers of the time—that is, their understanding of the truth and their conceptual world, as well as the devices of literary expression and the interpretive models that they made use of’.

This, then, was Preben Meulengracht Sørensen’s greatest contribution to his subject and one that has led to significant advances in our understanding of the nexus between literature and society in medieval

Iceland. He was able to harness his incisive powers of literary analysis to guide him in the understanding of the why and how of literary production: what led Icelanders to write sagas, why they valued poetry so highly, what social conventions encouraged particular traditional forms of expression. Most of his writings may be understood against this intellectual background. His investigations of the dynamics of small-scale societies, drawing on the insights of modern anthropology and sociology, have resonated with the work of other scholars, both in the Norse field and outside it. Preben's work, however, is not bound to a particular ideological stance. Indeed, the intellectual background he himself most readily acknowledged was the tradition of Danish humanistic research, whose most eminent practitioners he considered to be Svend Grundtvig, Vilhelm Grønbech and Axel Olrik. Among living mentors he acknowledged Hans Bekker-Nielsen, at whose Laboratorium for folkesproglig middelalderlitteratur at Odense University he wrote his second book, *Norrønt nid: Forestillingen om den umandige mand i de islandske sagaer* (Odense University Press 1980).

Norrønt nid was translated into English by Joan Turville-Petre as *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of sexual defamation in early Northern society* and published in 1983 as the first volume in the series The Viking Collection, founded by Meulengracht Sørensen and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, and edited by them for Odense University Press. This series itself has made an important contribution to Scandinavian studies, promoting works that illuminate Northern civilisation through a study of Scandinavian written texts. *Norrønt nid* was, as its Danish preface indicated, part of an examination of the sources of Old Norse literature, at the point where tradition and contemporary society come together ('der hvor tradition og samtid mødes'). This book's particular strength is to show how concepts of sexual defamation gained traditional expression in the (frequently) poetic convention of *níð* or defamation that invoked ideas of sexual impotence or irregularity, and how the 'biting' of *níð* on a particular individual or group caused a serious loss of social self-worth which was interpreted as a loss of honour. Others had investigated this tradition, but Meulengracht Sørensen was the first to demonstrate the full implications of its powerful social impact and the reasons why it took certain conventional forms.

The methodology and subject of *Norrønt nid* underpins Preben Meulengracht Sørensen's doctoral thesis, *Fortælling og ære* ('Narrative and Honour'), a work that deals with many of the same issues, but on a much wider scale. Here again the social mechanism of honour (and its

antithesis, shame) is investigated in the context of the themes and development of Old Icelandic saga literature. Concern with individual honour is shown to extend to the whole of society, to concerns for family and descent, relationship with authorities (including the King of Norway) and to the change in religion that introduced Christianity to Iceland in the eleventh century. Writing narratives allowed Icelandic society to represent and assess its own past in the light of its present, to inscribe its norms and ideals, and to delineate deviations from them. Thus, as always in his works, there is a dual focus to Meulengracht Sørensen's most extensive book: Icelandic story-telling and the unique society that gave shape to literary production in Iceland.

There have been a good number of twentieth-century scholars who have written important books and articles on Old Icelandic literature and its background as, for the first time in the history of its scholarship, it became emancipated from the dominance of purely linguistic study. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen's contribution is in the very first rank of these literary scholars' and critics' writings, and he will be remembered in particular for his ability to combine literary insight with an understanding of the social and ideological mechanisms that shaped Old Icelandic literature, as well as for his elegant and economical literary style, manifest in his writings in Danish. For those who were privileged to know him personally, he will be remembered warmly as a good friend and colleague, and an inspiring discussant.

MARGARET CLUNIES ROSS

BIBLIOGRAPHIA NORMANNO-HISPANICA

BY MARIANO GONZÁLEZ CAMPO

In 1974 the Swedish scholar Stig Wikander published an interesting and useful bibliographical essay, 'Bibliographia Normanno-Orientalis' (*BONIS: Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Studies*, 7–16), in which he listed the extant books, articles and edited sources dealing with Arabic–Scandinavian relations during the Middle Ages, mainly in Eastern Europe. As its title suggests, the bibliography offered here is intended to complete, complement and update that of Wikander, and particularly to extend its scope to the considerable number of publications concerning the existence of Viking raids in Spain and Spanish-Arabic contacts with the Vikings during the Middle Ages.

The bibliography follows Wikander's model in offering a chronological list of items. It deals mainly with the Viking period and its influence in Spain from military, archaeological, cultural, diplomatic, economic and political points of view, but some publications relating to immediately preceding or post-Viking times have been included as well for comparative purposes.

The most problematic task in a bibliography such as this is the selection of the published medieval sources in which Spanish–Scandinavian contacts are mentioned. In this respect I have tried to include in the list those sources (Latin, Old Spanish, Arabic or Norse) published in accessible scholarly editions.

It must be borne in mind that, as Wikander stated in the preface to his bibliography, the study and availability of the Arabic sources is 'no easy business', for several reasons. A bibliography on such a wide-ranging and complex subject cannot pretend to be exhaustive, but the most important publications and a representative selection of others have been included. However, very local and tangential studies have been avoided. A more inclusive list would have been much longer, the risk of becoming outdated too soon would have been greater, and studies of little more than local interest included for the sake of their minor reference to the direct or, usually, indirect influence of the Vikings on any aspect of a given place in medieval Spain (often the construction of fortifications which have now mostly disappeared).

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2000. Juan Cruz Labeaga Mendiola. *Santa María La Real de Sangüesa. Joya del románico navarro*. León. (On pp. 24–27 the author deals with the representation of the Sigurðr legend sculpted on the façade of this Romanesque church in Navarra, Northern Spain.)
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REVIEWS

THE VIKING-AGE RUNE-STONES, CUSTOM AND COMMEMORATION IN EARLY MEDIEVAL SCANDINAVIA. By BIRGIT SAWYER. *Oxford University Press*. Oxford 2000. xxii + 269 pp.

There have been different views about the significance of runic inscriptions. Arntz reports (1935, 223): 'Der dänische Gelehrte *Niels Math. Petersen* hat einmal gesagt, die Runeninschriften nannten meist nur eine Person, die niemand kenne, und meldeten als das wichtigste Ereignis ihres Lebens, daß sie gestorben sei.' Arntz himself disagreed, pointing out that runic texts can be important sources for political, legal, literary and linguistic history. A 1993 'Viking revaluation' by Page offered a critical survey of the use, and lack of use, to which writing in runes had been put by those studying the Viking Age. He discerned a welcome change. Whereas previously there had been a tendency to overlook the inscriptions on the grounds that they seldom mentioned persons or events known from elsewhere, there was now a much greater willingness (a) to recognise their value as contemporary documents, and (b) to use them as sources for social and economic history.

The Viking-Age Rune-Stones shows a positive eagerness to exploit a particular class of runic inscription as a primary historical source. These are the inscriptions on the so-called commemorative stones of the late Viking Age, and the author's thesis is that they can be studied as declarations of inheritance and property rights. The extremely detailed analysis offered in support of the thesis represents the culmination of a study going back some fifteen years. Although the corpus has been expanded, the scope broadened and the methods refined, the basic ideas are those already announced in Sawyer's 1988 monograph *Property and Inheritance in Viking Scandinavia; the Runic Evidence* (reviewed in *Saga-Book XXII* (1986–89), 470–73).

The denseness of the analysis, much of it numerical, makes it hard to summarise *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones*. Some account of the contents is needed to give an accurate impression of the book.

First comes a brief introduction, outlining the aim of the study. Chapter 1 then describes the Scandinavian rune stones and their distribution, asks why they were erected and summarises what is known or surmised of Scandinavian history during the period rune stone raising was in vogue.

Chapter 2 presents the corpus on which the study is based. Important general features of the late Viking-Age rune stones are noted (e.g. type of stone used, type of monument, find-spot, design), regional distribution of such features tabulated, dating problems discussed and an outline chronology presented. There follows detailed discussion of the types of relationship obtaining between sponsors (commissioners) of commemorative stones and the deceased, and of how combinations of relationships on one and the same monument are to be analysed (for example, where two or more sons commemorate a father, and their uncle his brother). Three 'zones' are identified based on differences in sponsorship patterns, one in eastern Sweden, one in Denmark and Norway, and an intermediate one centred on Götaland but including Gotland.

Chapter 3 argues the main case: that the late Viking-Age rune stones should be seen as 'declarations of inheritance'. With the Continental Germanic laws 'compiled

during the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries' (p. 48) as the framework (in the absence of contemporary Scandinavian laws), both complete inscriptions and the individual relationships they document are analysed. Considerable regional variation is found, affecting in particular the number of women commemorated or acting as commissioners, and possible reasons for the variation are explored.

Chapter 4 compares the rune stone evidence for particular lines of inheritance with what is set out in the later provincial and national laws of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Different principles and systems of inheritance are noted both between different regions and different periods. In Denmark, Norway and Götaland the rune stones are said to suggest a system that helped keep estates intact, while in eastern Sweden, it is claimed, the emphasis was on one that helped build up networks of family alliances. This division is found by and large to be replicated in the medieval codes, with the notable exception of the Danish: the principles of inheritance as they appear in the laws of Jutland, Zealand and Skåne resemble those deemed to have prevailed in eastern Sweden during the rune stone period. Possibly, it is surmised, the discrepancy was due to a deliberate act of reform in Denmark, but it is also possible that inheritance was not strictly codified, more a question of custom which might vary from one class of people to another according to their perceived interests.

Chapter 5 deals with the status of those who commissioned commemorative stones. In Denmark and Norway they are considered to be 'a fairly restricted élite', while in eastern Sweden, the occasional magnate notwithstanding, they 'represent a broader section of the landowning group' (p. 122). There is discussion of the various titles and epithets bestowed on those commemorated—and sometimes on commissioners and others—(*jarl*, *drengr*, *þegn*, *bóndi*, *harða góðr*, *nýtr*, etc.), and of the regional distribution of such terms. There is also a lengthy section on women as landholders. Finally it is argued that travellers' inscriptions (commemorating a person or persons who died abroad) were commissioned not primarily to glorify the exploits of the dead but to settle questions of inheritance.

Chapter 6 concerns the conversion to Christianity. The author is not primarily concerned with the question that has exercised her fellow scholars of late: how far the Viking-Age rune stone fashion is to be attributed to the need to proclaim one's faith in a time of religious upheaval (the matter does, however, put in an appearance elsewhere in the book). Interest is instead focused on whether particular stones can be deemed Christian or pagan, the different ways in which religious belief are manifested, the change of mentality induced by the conversion, and not least on good deeds and gifts to the Church and the effects of Christian giving on inheritance.

Chapter 7 reiterates the main conclusions and points the way towards future research. The book is by no means at an end here though. A further 112 pages follow, mostly devoted to a 'catalogue' of the rune stones that form the basis of the study, but also containing ten appendices (all in the form of numerical tables), and an 'excursus' that claims the tenth-century Danish king Gormr pre-deceased his wife Þórví and that the smaller Jelling stone (Jelling 1) ostensibly raised by Gormr to commemorate her is thus a falsification of history.

The Viking-Age Rune-Stones has many strengths. The result of years of painstaking work, it demonstrates an intimate knowledge of the late Viking-Age

rune stone corpus and its background. Commendably, and untypically, it treats the corpus as a whole, examining and comparing the features of the stones (message, ornament, layout, etc.) without national or regional bias. It not only surveys the geographical and chronological distribution of the stones and their features, but compares the patterns that emerge with what is otherwise known of the history of particular areas. The author tries not to be dogmatic, admitting at the outset (p. 3) that her work 'has perhaps raised more questions than it has yielded answers'. As 'an attempt to collect as much *historical* information as possible from all tenth- and eleventh-century rune-stones in Scandinavia' (p. 3), the study must certainly be judged a success. Whatever view one takes of Sawyer's total approach or of her individual arguments and conclusions, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones* has brought a wealth of important data to the attention of the scholarly community.

The weaknesses of the book, as they appear to me, lie in three, in part overlapping, areas: theoretical, scholarly and practical.

First the theoretical. Although the principal thesis seems to be that the late Viking-Age rune stones were almost all declarations of inheritance, the point is made explicitly (p. 47) that that was not necessarily the chief purpose for which they were raised. The *purposes* 'must have been manifold and have varied in different regions'. Well yes, perhaps, perhaps not. While it would be unfair to expect Sawyer to have offered a watertight explanation of the tenth- and eleventh-century rune stone craze, it must be deemed unsatisfactory to have to argue that a purpose to which almost all these monuments were put and which underlay the formulation of their texts, and perhaps other features besides, was often or always secondary. If it became of such importance to some people in some regions of Scandinavia in this period to document inheritance, why was that *not* the chief purpose of the rune stone raising? And if it was not, if the rune stones were raised primarily, let us say, to commemorate (and sometimes glorify) the dead, or to proclaim religious affiliation, how can we know that they do document inheritance if they fail to make this clear? There is a world of difference between the Hillersjö group of stones, which patently deal with issues of inheritance (*U* 29, 331–32, at least), and one which states 'NN raised this stone in memory of PP, his father' with, or without, comments on PP's prowess or prayers for his soul. If virtually every late Viking-Age rune stone was used as a vehicle for demonstrating property rights, why does *U* 29 Hillersjö, abetted by *U* 331–32, make this so explicit? (One might draw a comparison with earlier times. The Tune inscription (*KJ* 72) with its reference to 'heirs' and 'funeral ale' is taken to deal with matters of inheritance, but it is not therefore assumed that stones of the same period that announce 'NN buried here', 'NN's stone' or 'NN's' have similar import.) And why does a stone commemorating a father, mother, son, etc. need to document the deceased's relationship with the living in order to secure an inheritance from challenge? In what we must assume were small communities, would not family relationships have been common knowledge? It was presumably such knowledge that underpinned inheritance before the rune stone fashion swept through Scandinavia.

The scholarly weaknesses in this book are several. Too often opinion or supposition masquerades as fact. Assertions such as that rune stones were first erected in Scandinavia in the fourth century after Christ (p. 7), that the older *fupark* was in

use until *c.* 800 (p. 7), that the younger *fupark* was introduced to accommodate changes in the language (p. 8) and that short-twig runes were mainly cut in wood with shorter side-strokes (p. 9) are attributed to Palm (1992) and Jansson (1987), and do not in fairness greatly affect the main thrust of the argument. Nor perhaps does it matter much that *U* 617 Bro kyrka's **uikika:uaurþr** may not mean a 'defence *against* Vikings' (p. 118), but could refer to 'a guard on behalf of Vikings'—whatever 'Viking' means in this context. A more serious failing is the broad acceptance of the rune stone chronologies of the corpus editions (pp. 34–35; most published before the 1960s). If the datings given in these works are wrong—and they have been under serious challenge recently (e.g. in Stoklund, forthcoming)—a number of Sawyer's arguments and conclusions are undermined.

The book is not without some circularity of argument. One example will suffice. In a section on chronology and dating problems, we learn that 'in Uppland there is a slight tendency for prayers to be more frequent in the older inscriptions' (p. 30). Perhaps this is shorthand for 'in what some have claimed are the older inscriptions'?

References to earlier scholarship sometimes promise more than they can deliver. Runological evidence to back up the notion of two main cultural zones in Viking-Age Scandinavia comes by way of a footnote (p. 46) directing the reader to Palm (1992, 34). There we learn that in a southern area the acc. m. sg. of the demonstrative pronoun meaning 'this' ends in **-(s)i**, while in a northern area it ends in **-(s)a**; further that the past tense marker of the verb *reisa* is **-þ-** in the South and **-t-** in the North. This is a meagre harvest. And it obscures the facts that forms of the demonstrative without *-s-* (e.g. **þina**) are the rule in Norway and the Atlantic colonies, and that the difference between *-þ-* and *-t-* in the past tense of *reisa* is at least in part chronologically based. Moreover it takes no account of runological or dialect features that do not support the idea of a north/south divide, e.g. evidence of the monophthongisation of /ei/, /au/, /øy/ found first in Denmark then in Sweden, of the early loss of /z/ in West Scandinavia, and of the /k/ of the *-sk* verb form in the East.

Sometimes Sawyer seems to require greater scholarly rigour of others than she does of herself. The fact that few of those commemorated on rune stones are called *þegn* or *drengr*, she argues, must mean these were specific titles; they cannot simply be terms for 'free farmer' or 'a man who is as he should be' since the absence of *þegns* or *drengs* on the vast majority of stones would indicate a palpable lack of free farmers or proper men in late Viking-Age Scandinavia (p. 103). Equally, the adjectives *góðr* 'good' and *beztr* 'best' are unlikely to refer to 'farming skill, excellence as a husband, or goodness of heart, for if that were the case, there was a serious shortage of people with such qualities in Viking-Age Scandinavia' (p. 107). Further: the formulation 'in memory of X' cannot be taken to mean 'for X's soul', as suggested by some, for 'if "in memory of X" was enough, why do so many sponsors add prayers for the soul?' (p. 125). These are no doubt important considerations that we should ponder. But intellectually the demand that we ponder them sits ill with the thesis that the vast majority of late Viking-Age commemorative inscriptions, which do not mention inheritance, should be taken as documentations of property rights on a par with the few that specifically deal with the issue. Some of Sawyer's arguments are more patently *ex silentio*.

Thus the lack, or comparative lack, of rune stones in certain areas is taken as evidence of strong royal power (pp. 147–48), as is an absence of stones with multiple commissioners: ‘in order to defend privileges, old or new [against expanding royal power], it was desirable to ensure that only one man at a time was responsible for the inheritance’ (p. 76). But of course there can be many explanations for what does not exist: lack of rune stones may indicate lack of wealth, lack of expertise, unwillingness to adopt a fashion that is all the rage among one’s neighbours; lack of multiple commissioners might simply be due to notions about what is appropriate on a rune stone.

Least persuasive of all Sawyer’s proposals is surely the one that brands the smaller Jelling stone (Jelling 1) a deliberate falsification of history (pp. 165–66). Briefly, it is claimed that King Gormr pre-deceased his wife Þórví, *Danmarkar bót*, and that she subsequently remarried. Her second husband was the **r(h)afnukatufi** who on her death raised the Læborg, Bække 1 and Horne stones (*DR* 26, 29, 34) to commemorate her and buried her in a mound. Some time thereafter, her son by Gormr, Haraldr blacktooth, had the empty southern mound at Jelling built, possibly ‘to obscure the fact that Thyre had been buried by another, competing, family about thirty kilometres from Jelling’ (p. 164). He also had a magnificent rune stone raised between the northern and southern mounds, commemorating his parents and detailing his chief exploits (Jelling 2). Needing ‘to strengthen his position as king and legitimate heir of Gorm and Thyre’ (p. 166) Haraldr then commissioned the smaller Jelling stone to proclaim his descent, Gormr’s royal title, and Þórví’s power base east of Storebælt (which is what *Danmarkar bót* is taken to imply). The good people of Jutland, outraged at Haraldr’s effrontery, rebelled and installed his son Sveinn in his place.

Well, perhaps, but I am mightily sceptical. Unlike Sawyer, I find it hard to adjudge the smaller Jelling stone later than Haraldr blacktooth’s great runic monument at Jelling on the grounds of a single monographic spelling and marginally more consistent word separation (especially since digraphic spellings for historical monophthongs on the greater Jelling stone, e.g. **tanmaurk** for *Danmørk*, can be said to argue for monophthongisation). Then there is the testimony of Saxo, which Sawyer invokes. Saxo does indeed report that Þórví outlived Gormr, but there is not a whisper of a remarriage. As for Þórví being from east of Storebælt, the historian describes her as the daughter *Anglorum regis Hedelradi*. Sven Aggesen, another of Sawyer’s witnesses, does not say which of the two died first, nor from where Þórví originally hailed. Both Saxo and Aggesen go on to relate that Haraldr planned to raise a stone in Þórví’s honour, but in their accounts this was a truly massive object quite unlike Jelling 1. They further state that the rebellion that broke out against him at that point was because of his religious activities and the burdens he had placed on the people (not, as in Sawyer’s reading, because of the stone-raising enterprise itself; cf., e.g., *Gesta Danorum* X:viii, 2 ‘tum quia divino cultui favorem tribuerat, tum quia inusitatis plebem oneribus adigebat’ ‘both because he favoured Christianity and because he afflicted the people with unusual burdens’). Of course we can, and probably should, dismiss these accounts as fanciful, but we are in less of a position to do so if, like Sawyer, we have previously called their authors in evidence. We cannot pick and choose from what

they say without giving strong reasons for accepting one report and rejecting another, which Sawyer does not do.

What, then, are we left with? Haraldr, in the spirit of Adolf Hitler (who considered that ‘in der Größe der Lüge immer ein gewisser Faktor des Geglaubtwerdens liegt’), commissions a stone stating what all who saw it or heard about it must have known to be untrue. One or more people then carry out this dubious commission, perhaps exchanging ribald jokes with the workmen who a few years previously had built the empty southern mound and been ordered to tell anyone who would listen that it contained the body of Þórví. If this were truly how events unfolded I suspect Haraldr would have been a laughing-stock, and unless madness darkened his later years he must surely have foreseen how his subjects were likely to react.

I will finally mention two practical weaknesses of *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones*, one perhaps unavoidable, the other more of the author’s own making. Because numbers and percentages play such a large part in the analysis, and tables and figures abound, the book is not easily digestible. Truly labyrinthine are the seven pages of ‘explanatory notes’ that precede the catalogue of the inscriptions comprising the corpus. Some of these provide a key to the myriad of abbreviations that occur throughout the work. It is there, for example, that readers who have learnt from table 2.4 that the percentage of sons commemorating fathers is 31.5, but are puzzled by the supplementary information ‘Code: A 1, AB 10, E 10’, will—with the expenditure of some effort—find elucidation.

Less easy to understand than this complexity is the author’s failure to delimit her corpus precisely. On p. 11 we are told: ‘The material on which this study is based . . . comprises *all rune-stones with the commemorating formula* (together with a few that lack it but are undoubtedly from the Viking Age).’ ‘Commemorating formula’ appears to be defined on the previous page as ‘X raised/laid this stone in memory of Y’. On p. 24 we learn that the corpus comprises all the inscriptions listed in the catalogue at the end of the book (pp. 200–62). On p. 34 we are informed that inscriptions dated before 750/800 ‘are not dealt with in this study’. Then on p. 146 comes: ‘This study is based on 2,307 runic inscriptions on stone . . . that were made in Scandinavia between the middle of the tenth century and the beginning of the twelfth.’ Perusal of the catalogue reveals that while it contains Flemløse 1 (*DR* 192, eighth century?), with the formula ‘after NN stands this stone’, Snoldelev (*DR* 248, eighth century?) with ‘NN’s stone’ is excluded. This is all the odder in that Istaby (*DR* 359, almost certainly seventh century), written in the older *fupark* and with the formula ‘after NN PP wrote these runes’, is included. More understandable is the omission of Oddernes 2 (*NlyR* 210, eleventh century) which seems to say ‘Eyvindr, godson of St Ólafr, made this church on his farm’ and Norra Åsum (*DR* 347, late twelfth or early thirteenth century), another memorial to the building of a church, yet both these inscriptions appear in the study without indication that they are outside the corpus (p. 139). I think we can take it that the thousand and one calculations in the book are based on the inscriptions in the catalogue (though I have not checked), but what has determined the selection is, to me, less than clear.

The Viking-Age Rune-Stones is lavishly illustrated with photographs of inscriptions and maps, all of good quality except the blurred image of *U* 279 Skälby on

p. 9. There are very few misprints I was able to detect, none of them likely to mislead (of the order 'monther' for 'mother' p. 78, 'make' for 'makes' p. 138).

Despite the critical comments I have offered, I am in no doubt this book marks a big step forward in the study of commemorative runic inscriptions and late Viking-Age history. By assembling and analysing so much information from tenth- and eleventh-century rune stones the author has provided scholars with a wealth of readily accessible data for future research. By raising so many interesting questions she will also, as she hoped, have stimulated fellow workers to delve into that data.

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KUML OG HAUGFÉ ÚR HEIÐNUM SIÐ Á ÍSLANDI. By KRISTJÁN ELDJÁRN. 2nd edition, revised and edited by ADOLF FRÍÐRIKSSON. *Mál og Menning*. Reykjavík 2000. 615 pp. 396 colour and black-and-white illustrations.

VIKING AGE ENGLAND. By JULIAN D. RICHARDS. Revised edition. *Tempus*. Stroud 2000. 190 pp. 75 black-and-white illustrations. 25 colour plates.

VIKINGS IN WALES: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL QUEST. By MARK REDKNAP. *National Museums & Galleries of Wales*. Cardiff 2000. 116 pp. 160 colour and black-and-white illustrations.

Towards the end of the year 2000 a very welcome tranche of national surveys of Viking-period archaeological evidence was published. The pearl among these is the reissue of Kristján Eldjárn's *Kuml og haugfé*. This work may properly be regarded as a classic of modern Icelandic scholarship on the Viking-period origins of Iceland, making unique use of archaeology (material remains) as its source rather

than Old Icelandic poetry and prose. The revisions undertaken by Adolf Friðriksson, drawing on the expertise of many other scholars, are both careful and substantial, without interfering greatly with or rewriting Kristján's original text. Archaeology is a discipline where the fundamental data-base constantly grows and changes, and the comprehensive updating of the material basis of the study—an increase in findplaces in the *kumlatal* from 123 to 157, for instance—was essential and will be extraordinarily useful. Appropriately, this catalogue forms the bulk of the 62-page English summary now added to the book. There are also modifications of detail throughout the book, some incorporating Kristján's own later thoughts, and additional illustrations, many in colour. A welcome addition is the new summary catalogue of Icelandic Viking-period silver hoards on pages 423–26.

For a full understanding of the development of Icelandic archaeology since the 1950s, the *skrá* of additions and changes to the original text (pp. 521–28) constitutes more than merely a respectful acknowledgement. Kristján Eldjárn received his scholarly training in archaeology in the strong and distinctively Danish milieu of post-War University of Copenhagen. The collection and collation of comprehensive corpora of finds was then in vogue. It was undeniably fortunate for Kristján that the Icelandic Viking-period finds were then not only waiting to be done, but perfectly manageable in quantity. All the same, his arrangement and discussions of the material show an intelligent, independent engagement with its information potential, and not the least of the benefits a re-reading of the text affords is an appreciation of how well it has stood the test of time. The *kumlatal* is followed by an analysis of the construction and internal arrangement of the burials (*umbúnaður kumla*), with *inter alia* particularly useful things to say about their topography, and then a conspectus of the grave goods and artefact-types (*haugfé og lausafundir*) that incidentally offers a survey of material culture of a range and level of detail that is difficult to parallel in accessible sources for any other Scandinavian land.

To identify areas where Kristján's perspective now shows its age could be vacuous, but reflection upon one topic may make a constructive point. What is effectively the subtitle of the book, *úr heiðnum sið*. . ., significantly encapsulates Kristján's deeply-rooted view that the distinctive burial forms he was studying were collectively a direct reflection of the pre-Christian religion and culture of Norse Iceland. It is certainly the case, as the solid discussion of the dating of grave goods shows, that the furnished burial rite expired, apparently totally, around the time of the Conversion, dated to AD 999 or 1000. But the introduction of a Christian burial rite does not automatically establish that the religious (and pagan) character of its predecessor was ideologically governed in the same way or to the same degree. Actually, the diverse burial practices associated with the progress and consolidation of Christianity in Germanic Europe have recently been the subject of several informative archaeological studies in mainland Scandinavia and Britain, and the brief excursus here on post-Viking-period coffin burial (pp. 274–75) gives a glimpse of similar potential for Iceland.

What now seems ripe for more thorough analysis in respect of Iceland c. 870–1000 is the social structure implicit in the burial evidence. To attempt to read social relations into a body of finds comprising so many sites with just one or two

interments may seem absurd—and Kristján was strongly inclined to see the known remains as small-scale, fragmentary and fortunate survivals from a largely obliterated past. Undoubtedly much has been lost. But we should consider carefully whether ostentatiously furnished burial (including an extraordinarily high proportion of horse burials) should be seen as the reflex of a special, transitional phase of the burial sequence in the localities concerned, marking a single generation in many cases; we ought to try to analyse what the relationship between the mass of furnished burial sites and the few more populous furnished cemeteries may have been; and altogether to integrate the burial evidence and its patterns with the burgeoning studies of early Icelandic settlement archaeology. Kristján himself was, of course, alert to social differentiation encoded in the burial evidence—for instance the relative under-representation of women.

Kristján's original preface enunciated an ambitious double aim for his work: to provide a scholarly study for an international readership, and at the same time a substantial addition, on archaeology, to the libraries of Icelandic *literati* (p. 14). As Þór Magnússon in effect admits in his Introduction (p. 8), publication in Icelandic alone hardly allowed the first objective to met. The provision of an English summary now addresses this problem. However the sense of a divided target readership remains, perhaps most noticeably in the illustration of the volume. The colour pictures make it an attractive book to have open. But most of them are reduced to a degree that leave them rather uninformative to the specialist; moreover the scale of reduction is inconsistent, no scales are given, and it is rarely possible to find out the exact size of an object from the catalogue. The anthropomorphic bone figure from Baldursheimur, for example, first appears in a tiny format (fig. 102), with no indication of its size; an excellent drawing then appears unexpectedly as the frontispiece to the chapter 'Umbúnaður kumla'; and subsequently, without cross-referencing, it turns up for discussion under gaming pieces (*hneftafl*: pp. 415–21). The volume hardly belongs to the category of coffee-table books, but it still seems to have been produced for the local educated bourgeois market rather than the international academic community. It would not, I think, have posed insurmountable problems to have recognised and dealt with this specific point. Nonetheless the revised edition of *Kuml og haugfé* remains a most welcome and valuable publication.

More openly aimed at the mass market is Julian Richards's *Viking Age England*, now revised and reissued in the prolific Tempus series, having first appeared in an English Heritage/Batsford series in 1991. Both series impose tight constraints upon their authors, but Richards gives his readers a competent and balanced tour of the relevant topics, sites and finds, moving from an historical introduction through a substantial central section on various facets of settlement and economic life and finally on to religion, burial and art. The new version naturally incorporates information on new finds and a diversity of new detail across this range—particularly, one notes, drawing on the greater range of evidence now available from Lindisfarne and recent analyses of craft activities, as well as from the author's own extensive fieldwork at Cottam in the East Riding of Yorkshire and Heath Wood, Ingleby, Derbyshire. Space was made for these additions by omitting the discussion of finds from the Isle of Man, something which had seemed a little idiosyncratic in

the first edition although not entirely unreasonable in view of the strong association that continues to be made between the Norse settlement of Man and that of the North-West of England, dated to the very early tenth century.

Julian Richards's book has proved a successful and practical undergraduate textbook, and its updating is therefore welcome. Besides an introduction to the material, it provides a selective but adequate guide to wider reading. It can be consulted with confidence by any non-specialist wishing to gain a primary overview of the archaeology of Vikings in England. The only seriously adverse comment to be made about this publication concerns the abysmal quality of the illustrations. The colour plates in particular are garish, poor-resolution computer scans, about as good as the extremely cheap and dog-eared postcards you can find at some seaside resorts, and some of the black-and-white figures are no better—for example the Gosforth Cross on page 163. This unfortunately creates an overwhelming impression that the publisher's only real concern has been to churn 'em out, pile 'em high, and sell in bulk.

One certainly cannot complain of poor visual quality in Mark Redknap's *Vikings in Wales*, a highly-coloured but still most informative booklet published by the National Museums & Galleries of Wales. The style of this book may reflect modern multi-media influences: short chapters, and colour on every page even if only as the distinctive background for the large number of digressive special notes. On the other hand the effect is not so very dissimilar from that of a glossed illuminated medieval manuscript! To begin with the book covers familiar ground: the history of the Vikings in Wales; the place-name evidence, looked at in an encouragingly strict light; native history in the period. An historical overview of Viking activities in Wales draws perforce on many different sources, from England, Wales and Ireland, indicating how patchy and incomplete our historical knowledge is likely to be: for instance, our dependence on Asser for a major Viking incursion in Dyfed in 878. It proves remarkable how diversely the classic topics of Viking archaeological studies—weaponry, shipping, trade—can be illustrated by finds from Wales. Eventually, however, we come to the key of this publication: the author's own recent (indeed, at the time of writing, continuing) excavations at Llanbedrgoch, Anglesey, on a multi-period settlement site that was rebuilt as a site of relatively high status (a *llys*, 'court?') in the ninth century, and which was clearly participating substantially in the extensively Scandinavian-influenced Irish Sea cultural circuit in the later ninth and tenth centuries. Altogether this provides a nicely illustrated, interim introduction to an important site, although inevitably, in this format, emphasising the highlights. The presentation of Llanbedrgoch nonetheless covers finds, buildings and economic activities at the site, as well as the dramatic-looking and puzzling late tenth-century burials in the boundary ditch.

The final sections of the book again link art, burial and religion in a rather clichéd manner. Nevertheless, the overview of probable and possible Viking-style furnished burial finds from Wales is particularly useful and thought-provoking. The recovery of an axe- and a spearhead from a burial area in Caerwent clearly needs further investigation if anything of the kind can still be done. One slip in the author's usual commendably disciplined interpretation of the evidence comes with

the failure to distinguish between myth and legend in discussing the armed figure and snake on the stone monument known as Maen Achwyfan in North-East Wales.

As is the case with the other two books reviewed here, this is, in its own individual way, a valuable publication providing specialist and non-specialist alike with an excellent and unrivalled guide to the material. From a specifically academic viewpoint, the new scope it yields for the integration of Anglesey (and, indeed, the second half of the ninth century) into a fuller picture of Viking activity in and around the Irish Sea is much to be prized. As extensive overviews of areas of significant Viking-period colonisation, the three books join the slightly earlier and equally successful *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age* (ed. Howard B. Clarke *et al.*, Dublin 1998) and *Vikings in Scotland: An Archaeological Survey* (James Graham-Campbell and Colleen E. Batey, Edinburgh 1998; reviewed in *Saga-Book* XXVL:4 (2001), 425–26). What we need now are equivalent books on mainland Scandinavia!

JOHN HINES

VIKINGS AND THE DANELAW: SELECT PAPERS FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE THIRTEENTH VIKING CONGRESS, NOTTINGHAM AND YORK, 21–30 AUGUST 1997. Edited by JAMES GRAHAM-CAMPBELL, RICHARD HALL, JUDITH JESCH and DAVID N. PARSONS. *Oxbow Books*. Oxford 2001. xiii + 368 pp.

This attractively produced volume begins with an action-packed account of the itinerary of the Thirteenth Viking Congress. From Nottingham, scholars visited Derby, Repton and Ingleby Wood; headed east to Southwell, Shelford and Lincoln; to York via Barton-on-Humber; crossed Stainmoor to Penrith, Gosforth, Lowther and Dearham; then to the Yorkshire Dales taking in Brompton, Kirkdale, Middleton, Sinnington, Wharram Percy and finally (and appropriately) Stamford Bridge. Departures from ninth-century precedent were a detour taking in a famous brewery, and thanks voted to local ladies for a magnificent lunch from the pulpit of a Lincolnshire church. Judging from this description, there can be little debate that the 1997 Congress was a social success; this volume stands as testimony to its intellectual importance.

The published proceedings mirror the structure of the congress: selected lectures jostle with discussions of sites visited. This is to be welcomed, since the volume's backbone is its accounts of the archaeological and sculptural riches of the Viking-Age East Midlands (oddly, though, the Middleton Cross, from the Viking kingdom of York rather than the 'Danelaw', adorns the cover). Several 'material culture' papers, together with excellent discussions of current debate on historical, literary and linguistic problems, make this volume a landmark in the study of the Viking presence in Anglo-Saxon England. Lesley Abrams, for example, deftly analyses the fragmentary evidence for the conversion of the Danelaw, David N. Parsons provides an up-to-date account of the survival of the Scandinavian language in England, and Judith Jesch's discussion of the composition and performance of skaldic verse in England will become a frequent point of reference.

Linguistic papers—rightly prominent in a volume dedicated to the late Christine Fell—include Gillian Fellows-Jensen’s authoritative thoughts on the role of place-names as signposts to Viking settlement, and Tania Styles’s discussion of the semantic problems in tracing Scandinavian elements in two English place-names. John McKinnell discusses potential Old English influence on eddic poetry. The volume ends with two entertaining treatments of the post-Viking reception of the Danelaw’s Viking heritage, both based on recent monographs: Thorlac Turville-Petre picks up one of the themes of his *England the Nation* (Oxford 1996) in a paper on Middle English literary representations of the Danelaw, whilst Andrew Wawn’s treatment of Victorian representations of Hereward and the Danelaw gives a taster of his magnificent *The Vikings and the Victorians* (reviewed in this volume of *Saga-Book*, pp. 157–60).

Material culture is, however, the real strength of the volume. Two papers by Julian Richards combine new interpretation with summaries of finds at the enigmatic cremation barrow cemetery at Ingleby Wood, and the rural settlement at Cottam in the Yorkshire Wolds. The Biddles offer the fullest publication to date of their excavations at Repton, complete with reports on radio-carbon dating of the remains in the famous ‘mass grave’. The debate encouraged by the inherent interest of the site will be intensified by the controversial interpretation developed here. James Graham-Campbell offers an up-to-date survey of accompanied burials from Viking-Age England. Richard Hall and Alan Vince provide accessible overviews of urban development in the East Midlands generally, and at Lincoln in particular. Mark Blackburn discusses minting in the East Midlands, making important suggestions about the significance of the coins for the economic, political and religious history of the region. New data, whose implications need fuller exploration, is presented in Kevin Leahy and Caroline Paterson’s account of the impressive volume of stray artefacts, most of them found by metal detectors, from Lincolnshire. These contributions underline the message of the sculptural papers—Olywn Owen’s reconsideration of the English Urnes style, the authoritative treatment of the Southwell lintel by Owen, Philip Dixon and David Stocker, and finally (a real highlight) Stocker and Paul Everson’s brave and stimulating treatment of stone sculpture from the East Midlands—namely that we are dealing with a series of distinctive *regional* cultural milieus which emerged from ninth-century encounters and tenth- and eleventh-century developments.

If this volume illustrates one aspect of Viking studies at the end of the twentieth century, it is its disciplinary diversity. This is not the same thing as interdisciplinarity, as Dawn Hadley stresses in a challenging critique. Indeed, alongside this commendable disciplinary diversity there is at times a certain sense of conformity. It is not always clear that debate has moved beyond established approaches to old questions about the scale of Viking settlement, although the equally venerable controversy about the violence of Viking activity remains a side issue. This is where a number of the archaeological papers offer a real breath of fresh air. Several authors emphasise the need to read material culture as a statement of culturally constructed and socially mediated identity, rather than as direct evidence for population movements. Richards’s attempts to relate the unparalleled cremation and barrow rite used at Ingleby Wood to conflicting pressures (to assimilate

or to remain distinct?) on the members of the Viking armies of the late 870s depend largely on the vexed issue, still not definitively established, of the exact date and duration of use of the cemetery; nor can it be conclusively shown that Ingleby Wood represents a splinter group from the army which wintered at nearby Repton. There are alternative contexts in which Ingleby, strikingly situated in the economically and culturally rich Trent valley, a former Mercian heartland that was a political frontier in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, might be placed. But Richards's emphasis on the different cultural and political strategies open to Viking incomers, and the way in which they might be articulated through the archaeological record, is timely.

As Richards suggests, Repton too is most usefully understood in these terms, and in the context of the convoluted and complex relationships between Viking armies and Anglo-Saxon polities. The wintering in 873–74 of a composite Viking force, soon to split into its constituent parts, in Repton, a cult centre holding the sainted ancestor of one segment of the Mercian royal dynasty, fits a well-known pattern whereby Viking armies wintered at existing royal and ecclesiastical centres, and were thus presumably able to exploit, at sword-point, existing networks of supply and tribute-taking. The Viking presence at Repton also fits a pattern of Viking alliance with indigenous political leaders which has been more fully studied on the continent than in a British context: in Northumbria, East Anglia, Mercia and Wessex indigenous dynasts attempted to ride to power on the back of the Viking tiger, notably Ceolwulf, famously denounced by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as a 'foolish king's thegn' but actually a genuine representative of one of the dynastic segments which contested the Mercian crown in the ninth century. The 'mass grave', a mound burial outside the defences created by the Vikings in 873–74 containing the disarticulated remains of at least 264 individuals, is clearly linked to the Viking occupation of 873–74, but is equally clearly, on the evidence presented here, a far from homogeneous assemblage, and one which included the unearthened bodies of long-dead locals. While there are practical explanations for this (the disruption of extant burials caused by the building of earthwork fortifications), it is tempting to see in it the public dishonouring of a site closely linked to the legitimacy and regality of one Mercian faction by a Viking army in loose alliance with claimants to the Mercian throne. Continental and Irish parallels spring to mind.

A comparative perspective, and one which takes seriously the immediate political context and the complex linkages between Viking and Anglo-Saxon elites, must offer the best hope of understanding this fascinating site. The Biddles attempt to provide a name for the occupant of the most spectacular grave. But the suggested identification with Ívarr the Boneless is deeply problematical, resting as it does on the tradition recorded in a handful of late Scandinavian sources and most fully developed in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, that Ívarr was buried near a boundary in England (a tradition which also links the burial site to Haraldr harðráði and locates it in Cleveland). In fact the *Annals of Ulster*, the other main source used by the Biddles, which place Ívarr's death in 872 (*recte* 873), just before the wintering at Repton, further undermine the Repton–Ívarr link with their association of Ívarr with Dublin and their silence on any translation. This silence is

paralleled in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which lists the various Viking leaders who gathered at Repton but fails to mention Ívarr.

In fact, even if it were proved, providing an historical identity in the style of Sutton Hoo would add little to our ability to read Repton's testimony on the Viking impact on Anglo-Saxon England. Similarly, attempts to interpret aberrant and apparently intrusive burials involving grave-goods in ninth- and tenth-century contexts as those of nameless Scandinavian settlers shed poor light on the making of the 'Danelaw'. Even if these burials are indications of Scandinavian influence (and their description as 'pagan Scandinavian burials' is far from secure), given their extreme paucity and the lack (Ingleby Wood aside) of any distinct Viking cemeteries these isolated oddities need locating in the context of other burial strategies used by Viking incomers and the indigenous populations around them.

Above all, rather than separating Scandinavian elements from an Anglo-Saxon background which is all too easily portrayed as static and homogeneous, we should never forget that the fullest bodies of archaeological and sculptural evidence articulate new cultural idioms, which establish the often fragile status of new élites on the fringes of a new Imperial power, the Wessex-centred 'kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons'. This is where Stocker and Everson's approach to the sculptural evidence points one way forward. Looking at regional fashions in the erection of stone monuments in the tenth century, they attempt to trace the élites who patronised stone sculpture, deriving changing political affiliations and social identities from changing sculptural fashions and distinguishing merchant and land-owner cemeteries. Whilst there is much that can be challenged in the specifics of this reading, the attempt is surely worthwhile, and the dialectic of hypothesis, critique and synthesis it should generate is surely the only way forward. And true interdisciplinarity surely depends upon scholars using their specialist expertise to develop a fuller, and more three-dimensional, understanding of context. Thus sustained study of the 'Danish' legal identity of the East Midlands that emerges in the law-codes of Edgar, Aethelred and Cnut could offer another, parallel, story, against which readings of East Midlands sculpture could be refined. Similarly, might it be possible to relate the evidence for the patronage and production of skaldic verse discussed by Jesch, to the struggle between Anglo-Saxon Wessex and Viking York for the allegiance of local élites in the north? Richards argues that some elements of the material culture of his rural settlements in the Yorkshire Wolds should be read in terms of the development of an 'Anglo-Scandinavian identity' and 'Viking ethnicity': these are terms of art, and there is legal, literary and historical evidence which, while difficult, might shed light on competing articulations of a distinct 'northern' identity encompassing Northumbrian and Viking elements. The numismatic evidence, too, combines issues of political control with visual symbols of allegiance and identity in a manner that potentially speaks to these same issues.

This leads to a final point. After Katherine Holman's opening paper, most contributors ignore the problem of 'defining the Danelaw'. Holman concludes that 'it is . . . important we use the term "Danelaw" as carefully as possible' (p. 8). In fact, the historical evidence assembled by Holman makes it clear that the term is first used by Wulfstan II of York in the early eleventh century; its wider currency

before the age of twelfth-century legal compilations when its territorial definition was first attempted urgently needs investigation. Thus 'Danelaw' is, in its normal usage, something approaching a term of art, and certainly should not be used uncritically to refer to a political unit, still less to the self-perception of the region's inhabitants, and certainly not read back to the period before the region's integration into the West Saxon Empire. The papers assembled here collectively suggest that we must take care with this received terminology, and instead of simply adducing a uniform Viking impact in the 870s, look at differing regional experiences over the course of a 'long tenth century'. Only then, once we have brought the Anglo-Saxons back into the picture, will we understand the dynamics of the Scandinavian presence in early medieval England.

MATTHEW INNES

CHIEFTAINS AND POWER IN THE ICELANDIC COMMONWEALTH. By JÓN VIÐAR SIGURÐSSON. Translated by JEAN LUNDSKÆR-NIELSEN. *The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization* 12. Odense University Press. Odense 1999. 255 pp. 11 black-and-white illustrations.

The constitutional system of Commonwealth Iceland has long been a source of fascination and wonderment. It may therefore come as a surprise to many that, as Jón Viðar Sigurðsson says in his book, there have been no substantial revisions of our understanding of this system since Konrad Maurer originally described it in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. In fact Jón Viðar's book is the first scholarly contribution seriously to challenge the basic premises of Maurer's model, and is therefore a work of historic importance in the field of Icelandic studies.

The book, *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth*, is a translation from Norwegian of Jón Viðar's doctoral thesis accepted by the University of Bergen in 1993. This thesis is in turn a reworking and extension of his magisterial dissertation published in Icelandic under the title *Frá goðorðum til ríkja. Þróun goðavalds á 12. og 13. öld* in 1989. Jón Viðar's earlier work was an important contribution to the discussion of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Icelandic politics, especially his ground-breaking definition of the thirteenth-century chieftaincies as domains with territorial borders. But while Jón Viðar's earlier work was firmly in the tradition for which Maurer and Einar Arnórsson had laid the foundation, and which Jón Jóhannesson and Björn Þorsteinsson had regenerated for a twentieth-century audience, his new book represents a break with this tradition. Not a clean break—Jón Viðar even resurrects the one aspect of Maurer's model which nearly all twentieth-century scholars have rejected, namely the religious role of the *goðar*, and attempts to revive the historicity of the sagas—but an important break nevertheless.

The most radical idea is Jón Viðar's rejection of *Grágás* as a source for early constitutional arrangements. He picks up suggestions that the constitutional arrangements reflected in *Grágás* might have been created in the eleventh century or even as late as the 1270s, which allows him to suggest that in the period c.930–1050 new *goðorð* were being created and that by the late eleventh century there

were some fifty to sixty *goðorð* in the country. After that, his hypothesis goes, their number dropped steadily through the process of consolidation of power along the lines described in his earlier book. As is well known, the traditional model has it that thirty-six *goðorð* were created in 930, augmented by three more in constitutional reforms *c.*965, and that the process of consolidation of power starting in the eleventh or twelfth century involved powerful families each securing control over a growing number of *goðorð* until only five families were left to thrash it out in the civil wars of the *Sturlungaöld* in the mid-thirteenth century. The significance of Jón Viðar's hypothesis is that it completely changes the chessboard of tenth- and eleventh-century politics in Iceland. Instead of a stable political system—earlier scholars often called the eleventh century the age of peace—he envisages a fluid and chaotic system, possibly not a system at all, although he does not dwell on the repercussions of his idea. For instance, how did politics work in these times of new and numerous *goðorð*?

While this idea is appealing, the reasoning behind it is not persuasive. Jón Viðar does not present any new arguments for his dismissal of *Grágás*, but simply points to the weakness of the old argument for the antiquity of its constitutional arrangements. That argument is in all truth very weak, but it deserves nevertheless to be confronted and confuted with slightly more effort than Jón Viðar has bothered to exert. He uses a similar method in arguing for the historicity of the Sagas of Icelanders. This he needs to do in order to be able to make use of their evidence for a high number of chieftains in the Saga Age. Unlike *Grágás*, the sagas are favoured with a thorough discussion, and Jón Viðar attempts to show that their information on individual facts and personages can be trusted. He points to a number of features which may inspire confidence in the sagas as historically accurate documents. Jón Viðar is however really only rehearsing familiar notions, uncontested at least since the early book-prosists' battle-frenzy subsided, to the effect that the sagas are clearly based on tradition and that some, or even much, of this tradition may be true in some sense. That does not mean of course that such traditions are all true or accurate, and it is in distinguishing truth from fabrication, accuracy from distortion, that problems have always arisen. Jón Viðar does not even try to solve that problem, but argues simply that as some of the information might be usable in an historical inquiry, and cannot be proved to be otherwise, it is permissible to use it. This is certainly an unconvincing and indeed somewhat perplexing approach; his efforts to involve the sagas serve only to make Jón Viðar's argument unnecessarily complicated.

The other main argument Jón Viðar presents in support of his idea that there were many scores of *goðorð* is based on two places in *Sturlunga saga* which can be construed as meaning that there were more *goðorð* than the *Grágás* system of thirty-nine allows. In both instances the wording is ambiguous as to the number of *goðorð* being referred to and has been interpreted differently by earlier scholars. Again Jón Viðar points only to the possibility of a different interpretation and is content to make that the basis for his hypothesis.

The major problem with Jón Viðar's hypothesis, however, is that while he dismisses *Grágás* he still considers the numerous chieftaincies he postulates to have been *goðorð*. It seems that he considers the term *goðorð* to be synonymous

with chieftaincy, but it is not clear whether he considers *goðorð* simply to be a name or whether it had any of the institutional elements attached to it in *Grágás*. The obvious question must be: if there was a period when it was possible to establish new *goðorð* and their numbers did indeed swell to fifty or sixty, how did the court and legislative system work? Could the founder of a new *goðorð* present himself at the *Alþing* and expect to be given a place in the *Lögrétta* and an equal role in the court proceedings alongside his more established peers? Or was there perhaps no *Lögrétta* and only a very unstructured court system? Jón Viðar's failure to deal with these issues and to discuss the definition of a *goðorð* is the most glaring flaw of the book. Jón Viðar's hypothesis leads straight to trouble when its consequences begin to be examined, and it is therefore surprising that he has not availed himself of Helgi Skúli Kjartansson's much more elegant solution published in 1989 (*Fjöldi goðorða samkvæmt Grágás*. Félag áhugamanna um réttarsögu. Erindi og greinar 26). In fact it seems that Jón Viðar is not aware of Helgi Skúli's contribution, although he refers to it obliquely (p. 171, n. 58). Helgi Skúli's hypothesis is that *goðorð* meant simply the right of representation in the *Lögrétta*, and one has only to take this idea one step further for all of Jón Viðar's problems to disappear. If *goðorð* meant originally only a right of representation in the *Lögrétta*, there could have been any number of chieftains, some of whom owned *goðorð* and some of whom did not. As time passed, ownership of a *goðorð* may have become the prerequisite for local power, and by the thirteenth century, a necessary justification for such power, but for Jón Viðar's purposes it would have been useful to make the distinction between the idea of *goðorð* as an institutional and originally artificial function, and the idea of chieftaincy as the actual power wielded by leaders over their neighbourhood.

The development of the chieftaincy system occupies the second chapter of the book, and in the remaining two chapters Jón Viðar presents the results of a very thorough reading of the sagas on the nature of, the economic basis for and the social role of the Icelandic chieftaincy. Jón Viðar is obviously extremely well versed in the Contemporary Sagas and his treatment of this important subject is therefore a useful counterbalance to earlier studies by Byock, Miller and others, who are more at home in the world of the Sagas of Icelanders. Jón Viðar's examination is also more objective and comprehensive than previous contributions; he has a good overall grasp of the sources and presents a balanced view of the subject. This sometimes makes for tough reading, but there is no denying its usefulness. There are no great surprises though: Jón Viðar follows the track beaten by Byock and Miller—adding detail and breadth—and manages to create disagreement only on minor issues. In his discussion of conflict resolution he congratulates himself (pp. 156, 185) on having outsmarted Byock and Miller by considering the dispute as a whole, not just its constituent parts, but while this seems a sensible approach, it does not lead to a noticeably better understanding of the subject. The only major difference of opinion relates to the weight attached to mediation versus arbitration in the conflict resolution process. This stems, however, only from different perspectives: Byock and Miller were interested in the dispute as a phenomenon and rightly stressed mediation as a crucial stage in that process, while Jón Viðar is dealing with the subject from the point of view of the

chieftains who, as third parties, normally only became involved at the arbitration stage.

Towards the end of the book a new and important idea is presented. Completely overturning the view put forward in his earlier work, Jón Viðar now argues that the power of the chieftains did in fact have a territorial base, something which traditional historiography has always denied. He suggests that the commune was the base of a chieftain's power and points out that many of the more important twelfth- and thirteenth-century chieftaincies had their heartlands in unusually large communes. While the link with the communes may need some refinement, this is certainly a very significant suggestion with far-reaching implications.

Jón Viðar's book is no easy read and will only appeal to scholars and more serious students. Its value lies in its comprehensive treatment of the subject, which makes it particularly useful as a university textbook, and its availability in English is to be welcomed. There are a number of ambiguous translations, mistakes and typos, the funniest of which is no doubt: 'This reviles the importance of friendship . . .' (p. 124, n. 142).

While there are significant flaws in some of Jón Viðar's reasoning, I find myself agreeing with the general tenor of most of his conclusions. The territorial nature of the chieftaincies and a large number of chieftaincies (not *goðorð*) before the 1100s are notions with which I can easily concur. Jón Viðar has clearly sensed which way the wind is blowing in Icelandic medieval studies and has done a great service by challenging some of the more important tenets of Maurer's legacy, revealing their weaknesses, and suggesting new solutions which will become food for thought and debate in the years to come.

ORRI VÉSTEINSSON

ETHICS AND ACTION IN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ICELAND. By GUÐRÚN NORDAL. *The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization* 11. Odense University Press. Odense 1998. 369 pp.

This book, originating in a fine Oxford D.Phil. thesis, is a detailed monograph on ethics in Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga*. It should be consulted by anyone interested in the ethics of the Icelandic Family Sagas, which were also written in the thirteenth century. Studies of loyalty and morality in these sagas have wrongly tended to treat *Íslendinga saga* as a broadly comparable product of the same 'saga society', without seeking either to distinguish sub-genres within the genre of the Family Saga or, more importantly, to acknowledge Sturla's work as the primary terrain: without seeing, as Guðrún says, that 'the society of *Íslendinga saga* is a historical reality, not an idealization of a fixed pattern of behaviour' (p. 22). The disturbing reality of that society, at war with itself for sixty years, is that of intensifying violence, with torture, mutilation, punitive raids and executions all carried out to the music of psalms and prayers. Is this why most of us would rather read Family Sagas? Can it be that *Íslendinga saga*, the portrait of a nation in the grip of psychosis, might remind us of cases nearer home? Historians might indeed ask why Norse scholars in these islands, in particular, have never studied Sturla's

work in the depth it deserves, or why outside Iceland in general he has been relegated to obscurity for so long.

In its own competent and judicious way, this book reveals much about Sturla's times, especially the milieu of his uncle Snorri Sturluson, to whose pen we are indebted for so much of the fantasy in Icelandic literature. But Guðrún takes up a greater challenge: that of ordering Sturla's material so as to give a systematic account of the historical ethics of his thirteenth-century world, which, as Peter Foote says, 'was immensely more complicated than the world that appears in stories of the Saga Age' (quoted on p. 28). This ordering is accomplished variously through six chapters, a thorough bibliography, a massive 'Index of family relationships' (pp. 246–351) and a smaller index of names. In the first, introductory, chapter the author sets Sturla apart from the *c.*1300 compiler of *Sturlunga saga*, the larger composite history of thirteenth-century Iceland, preserved in two manuscripts, which includes our only version of *Íslendinga saga* (mostly in sections interrupted by other material, but in an unbroken run from 1216 to 1242). In this chapter the book's method is also explained. Each chapter gives a summary of its findings ahead of the supporting examples; then there is an outline, albeit one with paragraph-headings different from the later chapter-titles, of the four main themes of chapters 2–5. 'Family loyalties' (ch. 2) is the first of these to be discussed, no doubt because it offers the occasion for a clarifying picture of the author's family, the Sturlungs. In this chapter it is established that ties of nuclear kindred outlasted almost everything, even adherence to Christian teachings. With 'Sexual morality' (ch. 3), Guðrún frames the Sturlung Age in the context of the late twelfth-century ecclesiastical reforms in Europe and then in Iceland. 'Motivations' (ch. 4) alludes to the many moments of conflict, showing in the process the magnanimity and meanness, the sensitivity, avarice and personal honour of the men concerned. Under the heading 'Personal conscience' (ch. 5), Guðrún goes to the heart of what today's thinkers might call 'ethics', by focusing on the thoughts of men who are often *in extremis*. Prominent in this chapter is the category of disregard for life, in which Sturla, with his trademark objectivity, reveals men's souls, in some detailed descriptions of death-scenes and executions. As a *de facto* conclusion, whether or not it is meant to be one, Guðrún's 'Epilogue' (ch. 6) succeeds in isolating some of the personality traits of Sturla as an author. In order to characterise his relatives and their enemies, it seems that Sturla uses mythological prefiguration: Óðinn for Gizurr, Freyr for Sturla Sighvatsson, even the kings Óláfr helgi and Haraldr harðráði respectively for the brothers Þórðr (his own father) and Sighvatr Sturlusynir. Perhaps because some of the events lay too close to him, it also seems that Sturla deliberately refrains from interpreting them. As Guðrún asks: 'Is this one of his ways of making his audience dwell longer on the ethics of action?' (p. 224). The final case studied here, set in 1222, is the unsolved death of Hafr the bailiff at Hrafnagil, a stone's throw from Sighvatr, whose son Tumi had been executed not long before by Hafr's brother Einarr skemmingr. Just as mysterious, that is to say reticent, is the viewpoint of Sighvatr's nephew Sturla. In this account of him, Guðrún shows well how the succinct but diverse detail of his story is unlike that of any comparable case in the Family Sagas.

The 'Index of family relationships' at the end of this book, a sort of motif-index, might be described as an expression of much of the foregoing material in semi-algebraic form. It is well and cleverly thought out, and eventually workable, but the labelling poses problems. This reader had to make more than one attempt on the Index before deciding that the system is not flawed. What first needs noting is the lack of differentiation in its symbols. Another problem is that the section-numbering of chapters 1–5, which is useful for cross-referencing within the main body of the book, looks the same but bears no relation to that of the Index, and cannot apply to it. A third niggle is that the wording of at least one symbol-defining heading differs slightly from one place to another: 'A. Male side of family' (p. 246) reappears later as 'A. Male family relationships' (p. 253). Fourthly, the Index is immediately preceded by a long key explaining its use; this is divided into sections listed I–V. These numerals are yet another potential source of confusion. When all this is taken into account, however, and despite its complexities, the Index works as a research tool which may be used (perhaps one day on a computer) to hunt for incidents in *Íslendinga saga* answering to motifs in Family Sagas from the same time, the thirteenth century.

This is a very learned book in more than one way. It can be a little tough to read, in that Sturla's work is always taken as known and some characters are thrown in without introduction. Now and again the less experienced reader would like more detailed commentary to make things clearer. Moving from analysis to text in pp. 23–24, for instance, one might think it was the author of *Íslendinga saga* who blinded and half-castrated the hapless Órækja Snorrason, rather than his cousin Sturla Sighvatsson (they are all cousins). Also for the relative newcomer, a map or family tree of the Sturlungs and Haukdælir might have helped. It is always good practice to translate Icelandic quotations, as Guðrún does here. At the same time some translations are overloaded with commas and end up looking stilted; and in one of them (p. 166) some words, probably including 'aggression', have been left out by mistake. Like a case-law compendium, this book has many interesting case-studies to be read at greater leisure. And it is clear that its second part, the Index of family relationships (like the simpler apparatus in the 1988 edition of *Sturlunga saga*, ed. Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir *et al.*, Reykjavík), is going to make life a lot easier for those scholars of Family Sagas who are less familiar with *Íslendinga saga*. Altogether, this book represents a considerable achievement in hugely difficult terrain and is likely to prove its worth in the future.

RICHARD NORTH

Å FINNE DEN RETTE: KJÆRLIGHET, INDIVID OG SAMFUNN I NORRØN MIDDELALDER. By BJØRN BANDLIEN. *Den norske historiske forening*. Oslo 2001. 377 pp.

'To find the right one' is perhaps the most important goal for a modern person. Endorsing this proposition from personal experience as well as from literature and film, Bjørn Bandlien boldly sets out to examine the search for a life-companion in Norway and Iceland during the Middle Ages. In our western world both genders are equally involved in the search, but in other cultures and earlier times the man

and/or his parents were primarily responsible for finding a suitable woman. Despite the implications of the title, this book does not fall into the category of gender studies, but joins the field of woman's history, as is suggested by the chapter headings. Surely it is symptomatic that women's history has come of age when a man, born into the generation of the emergence of women's history as a discipline, should devote a sustained study to this essential aspect of women's lives; it is entirely fitting that he has received a prize in women's history from the Department of History at the University of Oslo for his work.

Bandlien considers himself a historian of mentalities, currently a rapidly expanding field in Norway. His bibliography includes more than a dozen theses treating aspects of medieval mentalities written, mainly by women, during the last decade at the universities of Oslo and Bergen in departments of history, Nordic literature, religion and even psychology. Bandlien looks at his sources—the Old Norse historical and legal texts as well as all genres of saga and other literature—as evidence of the time in which they were written, although he admits that the Family Sagas, or Sagas of Icelanders, contain traditional material as well. Furthermore, he has learned from social scientists to distinguish between feelings and emotions. The latter emerge and change, as individuals react cognitively to more instinctive and permanent feelings. The search for 'the right one' therefore necessitates an examination of the emotion of love, but Bandlien's final goal is not merely to chronicle its changing perceptions, but to attain broader, unconscious thoughts about love and marriage and to probe the interaction between these mentalities and their social and cultural context. His book thus investigates the tension between love, individual choice and the process of marriage as found in Norse society between 800 and 1350.

The author's mastery of the Old Norse corpus is impressive. He also has a good command of the secondary literature (although entries in modern Icelandic are relatively few), and he is well read in modern theory. To explain the changes occurring in concepts of love he combines the model of Norbert Elias with that of Stephen Jaeger, accepting from the former that courtly love arose from the aristocracy's attempt to compensate for its loss of power to the state, but adding from the latter the contribution of the clergy to the growth of this new emotion (chs 1 and 10).

The narrative progresses historically. Chapters 2 and 3 treat the period up to 1150, the next four the period to 1230, and two final chapters conclude around 1350. The author frequently employs the conceptual tool of the 'agent perspective' (borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu), applying it to both men and women. His entire analysis is thereby permeated with optimism as he argues that both men and women found space to act and thus to improve their status within the parameters of laws, social structures and cultural categories, such as honour, shame and gender roles.

Bandlien assumes that Nordic mythological and heroic poetry can illuminate love and marriage in the most remote age. From the myths he deduces that in erotic situations the gods did not merely seek to rape women but to seduce them, a manoeuvre he interprets as 'a kind of consent' (p. 29). He argues further that in heroic poetry consent was not necessary when a woman entered marriage, but that the man had to behave in such a way as to win her approval continually; if he did

not she would be free to leave, thus instigating a divorce. This arrangement he calls 'heroic consent' (p. 35), a construct that persists throughout his analysis. Noting the frequency of divorce in the differing types of sources, he argues for 'heroic consent' in both clerical and secular literature until the 1230s.

Bandlien finds evidence in skaldic poetry as well that women evaluated men, although he assumes that the female figure is mainly fictional, inherited from heroic poetry. This poetry likewise reveals that warriors in the Norwegian army committed violence against women, a notion reinforced by the prose narratives from the end of the twelfth century, but he notes that rape and other such violence took place mainly on foreign soil. In fact, King Sverrir tried to reinforce a new morality among his warriors but with little success. Bandlien concludes that by the beginning of the thirteenth century there was a close connection in Norway between men's control of women (or in his words, 'women's love') and social status.

To explain the connection Bandlien turns to Iceland in the next chapter entitled 'The Dangerous Seduction'. He admits, however, that in the sagas the subject is less love than sexuality. In a wide-ranging essay that covers the Family Sagas he considers to be the oldest, and those of the Contemporary Sagas that treat the twelfth century, he analyses a *leitmotif* that might be labelled today as sexual harassment: an uninvited young man persistently visits a woman in whom he is sexually interested but whom he is unwilling to marry. The havoc that often resulted from such visits, he claims, is due to the fact that honour was closely bound to the household in the smaller units of the Family Sagas and to politics in the larger world of *Sturlunga saga*. The visits were less insulting to the woman than to her father or guardian, who—given the lack of a central government—was solely responsible for prosecuting the intruder, and who lost honour when he was unable to prevent such visits. The author provides a satisfying analysis of the troublesome concept *mansöngur* (love song) but is less convincing when he argues that women played a prominent role in these visits.

This dangerous association between honour and politics on the one hand and love or sexuality on the other clearly had to be broken in Iceland, and men needed not only to act out their sexual feelings but also to articulate the emotion of love. In chapter 5 Bandlien argues that in skaldic poetry men began to voice their feelings of grief and love, and in the following chapter suggests that when authors moved the action abroad (Earl Rögnvaldr) or into past times (Bishop Bjarni) love stories lost their sting of danger. At home clerical authors resolved the problem of sexuality and love in their own way, either by advocating abstinence or by providing imaginary episodes of love and romance for the Norwegian kings.

Norse marriage strategies—both old and new—are taken up in chapter 7. Among the old the author reaffirms the importance of social equality between the partners and returns to his favorite construction of 'heroic consent', thus stressing not the woman's initial agreement but her continued approval of her husband, the absence of which led to divorce. Among the new features are the church's demands for consent, fidelity and indissolubility, introduced at different times in the two countries and with varying degrees of emphasis depending on literary genre.

The longest chapter, 'Chivalric Love in Holy Matrimony', turns to the later Middle Ages. Focusing on *Tristrams saga*, *Parcevals saga* and *Strengleikar* as

examples of the numerous translations of French romances, Bandlien first seeks to examine the importance of love for individuals, society and marriage in the chivalric sagas. In the literature produced at the Norwegian court, including the runic inscriptions recently found in Bergen, he further probes the influence of the new ideas about love inside and outside marriage, stressing the importance of the clerical production of the translations and maintaining that the intention was more to teach Christian virtue than to entertain. Since consent had been introduced in Norwegian laws in the late twelfth century, Bandlien is now interested in its implementation. He concludes that the aristocracy worked out what he calls 'double consent', consent by both the woman and the person who had been responsible for her marriage. In this way love was now separated from honour and thus pacified and firmly connected with marriage.

The last chapter examines analogous problems in Iceland during the politically difficult thirteenth century. From the starting-point of a detailed analysis of the marriages in *Laxdæla saga*, Bandlien focuses on the issue of consent in the sagas considered the latest within all genres, including the Family Sagas, the Contemporary Sagas, and selected texts from the Chivalric and Ancient Sagas. In the last group he identifies new ideals for women: humility and patience.

The book is written with verve and enthusiasm. Bandlien provides a persuasive, comprehensive and coherent story by proceeding from the conclusion reached in one chapter to the question posed by the next. It must be admitted, however, that to use the texts as *levninger*, that is, as remnants of the time during which they were written, poses problems for the validity of the story's construction. The issue is particularly acute for the Family Sagas, for which the dates of composition are uncertain at best and continue to undergo modifications. Rather than relying primarily on the introductions to the texts in *Íslensk fornrit*, it might have been advisable to consult the latest Icelandic scholarship in *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* (I and II, ed. Böðvar Guðmundsson *et al.*, Reykjavík 1992, 1993). The suitability of the fictional sagas (*riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*) as evidence for the history of mentalities likewise poses a problem. Did they change people's ideas in the way Bandlien claims or were they merely escapist literature in an increasingly bleak world, as others have suggested? Not all his conclusions and constructs may find acceptance from readers. 'Heroic consent', for example, is so vague that the author can fit almost any marital situation to it. Its opacity is evident in his suggestion that marriages arranged between young children involved 'a kind of heroic consent' (p. 201). Among the few minor errors it should be noted that Auðr saves not her brothers but her nephews from Gísli's revenge (p. 225); Valgerður must not only move away from Ingólfr but also await his death before she can marry (p. 64). The authors and pagination of a few specific references are not completed in the bibliography. Despite these few reservations the book will surely gladden the hearts of Norwegian and Icelandic readers, both women and men, and Old Norse scholars around the world will forgive the author for having used modern Norwegian forms for all proper names. The book is equipped with notes and a rich bibliography, but a limited index.

AT FORTÆLLE HISTORIEN – TELLING HISTORY: STUDIER I DEN GAMLE NORDISKE LITTERATUR – STUDIES IN NORSE LITERATURE. By PREBEN MEULENGRACHT SØRENSEN, Udgivet i samarbejde med SOFIE MEULENGRACHT SØRENSEN. *Edizioni Parnaso*. Trieste 2000. 338 pp.

Key themes in this compilation are that Old Icelandic literary texts embody substantive traditions and that the medieval audience evaluated these traditions in the light of special understandings of ‘truth’. In the following brief review, I shall group the constituent essays according to the types of putative traditions and truths they discuss.

As to eddic poetry, Meulengracht Sørensen posits a highly retentive tradition, at least where the mythic core within each poem was concerned (‘Thor’s Fishing Expedition’, 1986 and ‘Loki’s *Senna* in Ægir’s Hall’, 1988). The primary motivation for preserving eddic poetry was probably to safeguard these traditions. By contrast, the text as such would have undergone continuous transformation until fixed in writing. For that reason, debates over dating criteria have limited relevance for source criticism (‘Om eddadigtenes alder’, 1991). Meanwhile, the value of *Snorra Edda* as a narrative synthesising older traditions can be appreciated if we ask ourselves how in its absence we would interpret artifacts like the Rök rune stone. Such monuments do not, after all, possess absolute authority in themselves, but must be evaluated in relation to a specific social and artistic milieu (‘Der Runen-stein von Rök und Snorri Sturluson’, 1990).

Meulengracht Sørensen draws parallel conclusions with respect to *Landnámabók* and other accounts of early relationships between Norway and Iceland. Narratives like *Egils saga*, although not classifiable as primary evidence, nonetheless clearly embody enduring traditions and additionally provide coherent medieval interpretations of the past. Archaeological evidence would be scarcely intelligible without recourse to such sources (‘Høvdingen fra Mammen og Egill Skalla-Grimssons saga’, 1991). Equally, Snorri’s synthesis and interpretation of older traditions in his description of rituals at Hlaðir, far from being a mere collage of biblical passages, is crucial to our understanding of the runic monuments (‘Håkon den Gode og guderne’, 1991). Rich and consistent traditions appear to underlie saga accounts of Freyr, suggesting that from the outset mentions of heathen rites and beliefs functioned to imbue historical events with ideological meaning (‘Freyr in den Isländersagas’, 1992). Ideology also declares itself in traditions preserved in *Landnámabók*, for instance the depiction of the settlement as an initiative taken by several independent families (‘Sagan um Ingólf og Hjörleif’, 1974). Ari in effect endorses that ideology in claiming that no single family was instrumental in locating the Alþing at Þingvellir (‘Den norrøne litteratur og virkeligheden’, 1989). The attachment of an oppositional ideology to traditional material can be seen in *Egils saga*, which traces the origins of Icelandic society to Norwegian non-conformists (‘Starkaðr, Loki, and Egill Skallagrímsson’, 1977). Similarly, in *Orkneyinga saga* a mythical genealogy, invoking origins among giants in the far north, is adduced to legitimate the independence of the Orkney earls *vis-à-vis* the Norwegian kings (‘The sea, the flame, and the wind’, 1993). The selection of traditions in *Laxdæla saga*—likewise in *Kormáks saga*—privileges the Norse contributions to the settlement over the Irish (‘Norge og Irland i *Laxdæla saga*’, 1973/1987). All in all,

tradition and ideology emerge as so interdependent that conventional source criticism, for example binary categorisation as history or fiction, seems reductive when applied to saga narratives.

In evaluating sagas of Icelanders and contemporary sagas, Meulengracht Sørensen draws our attention to criteria used by Sturla Þórðarson, where the truth of written sagas rates as indisputable, whereas sagas not yet committed to writing require to be vouched for ('Næsten alle sagaer var skrevet', 1992). Credibility was closely tied to both ethics and form. As to ethics, an honest man reporting hearsay had preference over a morally suspect eye-witness ('Græder du nu, Skarpheðinn?', 1994). As to form, a visible adherence to tradition was paramount. Accordingly, saga authors cultivated an objective style, replete with the distinctive features of orality. A supposedly authentic saga-age mode of expression was supplied by intercalated skaldic stanzas ('Skjaldestrofer og sagaer', 2000), though dialogues could also be devised without loss of credibility. Sturla himself manipulated this style to admit subjective characterisations and an overall vision of history ('Historiefortælleren Sturla Þórðarson', 1988) comparable in its sophistication with Ælnoth's treatment of Danish history ('Ælnoths Buch über Knud den Heiligen', 1989). Exceptionally, *Fóstbræðra saga* questions the ruling convention by incongruously incorporating overtly didactic material of foreign derivation ('On humour, heroes, morality, and anatomy in *Fóstbræðra saga*', 1993; 'Modernitet og traditionalisme', 1999). Even so, this apparently early work shares in the general respect for tradition, as we see from the awkward inclusion of episodes derived from oral sources ('Mundtlig tradition i *Fóstbræðra saga*', 1994). The objectivity maintained by narrators naturally poses problems for modern literary interpretation. In certain cases, as with *Gísla saga*, the availability of variant redactions helps us to guard against hermeneutical excesses, particularly in exegetical or allegorical directions ('Teksten mellem filologi og litteraturvidenskab', 2000). Advocacy of univocal interpretation should also be tempered in the light of the possibility that sagas did not necessarily command acceptance from the entire Icelandic population ('Murder in marital bed', 1986).

These themes are synthesised in 'Literature and society' (2000), where Meulengracht Sørensen analyses the dynamic between literature and society as a self-affirming one, within which people with a special set of historical recollections and mode of thought made narratives about the past a meaningful part of their present. Perhaps our keenest insight into the author's 'credo' comes from his 'Objectivitet og indlevelse. Om metoden i Vilhelm Grønbechs *Vor Folkeæt i Oldtiden*' (1997), written in tribute to a scholar who played down philological minutiae in favour of a broader and more subjective understanding of medieval culture.

A preface, bibliographical notes and index of names round out the book. The articles, chronologically arranged, have been lightly revised but otherwise left to speak for themselves without 'postscripts', a test of time that they stand admirably. Altogether, this volume, carefully compiled and largely free of blemishes, comes as a fitting memorial to a distinguished scholar whose presence among us will be sadly missed.

EUROPA UND DER NORDEN IM MITTELALTER. By KLAUS VON SEE. *Universitätsverlag C. Winter*. Heidelberg 1999. 452 pp.

Hic est dux Klaus. Anyone who ever thought Professor von See was retired in more than name should note the scene from the Bayeux tapestry with its rubric on the front of his book, in which William the Conqueror at Hastings tips up his helmet, so the inner caption says, 'um seinen Kriegern das Gesicht zu zeigen und damit das Gerücht zu widerlegen, er sei gefallen'. Today's weary Anglo-Saxons may take a similar message from a helpful digest in English of this book's ideas provided by von See in the last issue of *Saga-Book* ('Snorri Sturluson and Norse Cultural Ideology', *Saga-Book* XXV:4 (2001), 366–93). This volume in German, however, is truer to the detail of his scholarship, as it gathers and reworks twelve chapters from as many essays published over the best part of two decades, the oldest in 1978 and the most recent in 1994. The collection raises the question of what constitutes an 'überarbeitete Fassung' (pp. 415, 422 etc.). Some subjects have an afterlife, even after a *Schluss*, and the passing of time has obliged von See to revisit several. There might be less to worry about here if the author had worked over his essays so as to include in them the critical aftermath to his earlier work. But this is rarely the case. Instead, six of the book's chapters (chs 4 and 7–11) carry long afterwords; that of chapter 7, in particular, is split into six subsections. It is more often in these *Nachträge*, effectively postscripts to newly lengthened and relaunched monographs on skaldic poetry, *Snorra Edda* and the lost Latin history of *Hávamál* among other subjects, that von See responds to critics, usually with the generosity of a Norman crushing an uprising. Some readers may not mind sarcasm, which often makes for a lively dialectic. And many of von See's arguments in this book have merit. But there again, even the broad-minded may wonder at the tide of polemic with which they are expressed. This wells up a little in the chapter on the Týr-myth and Dumézil (ch. 4), rises against Thomas Krömmelbein on skaldic poetry in the European context (ch. 7), then surges through three chapters on Snorri (chs 8–10), reaching its heights against D. A. H. Evans and Carolyne Larrington in the battle for *Hávamál* (ch. 11). By this stage it may be too late to recall the worthy—and 'vielleicht illusorische'—hope expressed by von See back in the foreword (p. 7), that here and there his articles might encourage historians of European literature and constitutional law to take account of Scandinavian tradition.

Among scholars of Old Norse, I have no doubt that this book will have its admirers. Its chapters are learned and boldly written, with a bright sense of style and a huge grasp of context. They are neither heavy with footnotes nor held up by the tedium of over-specialisation, but rather successfully integrated both with their illustrative texts and with each other; and are set out so as to move forwards in time from the early Middle Ages (ch. 1), right through to *Völsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga* and their context in the late thirteenth-century culture of Norway (ch. 12). For the most part von See's book reads as a universal history of literature in early medieval northern Europe. In the light of this, it can be of no consequence if I point out with reference to the first chapter ('Das Frühmittelalter als Epoche der europäischen Literaturgeschichte', first published in 1985) that Speratus, recipient of Alcuin's letter referring to Hinieldus or Ingeld, is now thought to be Bishop

Unwona of Leicester, not Hygebeald of Lindisfarne (*pace* p. 24; see D. A. Bullough, 'What has Ingeld to do with Lindisfarne?', *Anglo-Saxon England* 22 (1993), 93–125); or that von See anticipates, by about 140 years, in asserting that King Egbert of Wessex managed to unite 'alle angelsächsichen Königtümer zu einem Gesamtreich' at the beginning of the ninth century (p. 78); or that many commentators do not believe *Beowulf* is quite as old as the time of Bede (p. 81), although the question remains open; or that the Frankish *antiquissima carmina* that Charlemagne had transcribed, whatever they were, do not look like poems sufficiently young to have been dedicated to 'den Vorgängern Karls auf dem fränkischen Thron' (p. 83). Notwithstanding, one cannot fault von See's holistic approach in his long first chapter, nor his common sense in chapters 2 (on paganism in the eyes of medieval Christianity) and 3 (on the dispute over pagan meanings in legal terms). In these chapters, and also in chapter 4 (on Týr and Dumézil), von See takes a pragmatic point of view; and if he does forget to cite R. I. Page as the first true critic of Dumézil's tripartite mythological scheme (p. 142; see Page, 'Dumézil Revisited', *Saga-Book* XX:1 (1978–79), 49–69), his own case for dropping this scheme works almost as well.

In chapters 8–10, however, on the Prologue to *Gylfaginning* and Snorri's other works, we enter what might be called the book's battleground. In these chapters von See reaffirms his view that the euhemerising, exculpatory material of the Prologue is too theologically framed either to be Snorri's work, or to be easily reconciled with the scheme of *Gylfaginning*, the text that follows it in manuscripts. Here again, it is easy to be impressed by the sceptical arguments of this scholar. From what we know of Snorri's life and works, can we deduce that he was ever trained to write as a priest? Accordingly, in the face of strong opposition, von See has held to the view that Snorri did not devise the sophisticated theories about pagan belief variously attributed to him by Margaret Clunies Ross, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd Wolfgang Weber (whose name recurs frequently in this volume). At the same time there is enough evidence, as von See indicates in chapter 10, to see Snorri in a political rather than a religious guise, as a *goði* with a conception of his own culture as something different from the European norm. Perhaps the truth here lies more on von See's side, whether or not the Prologue works as a key to *Gylfaginning*. As a corrective, at any rate, his view on this subject deserves to be heard.

In the interests of scholarship, the same must be said of von See's late dating of *Hávamál*. In chapter 11 von See engages in a sustained attack on D. A. H. Evans's reply to his reply to Evans's edition of *Hávamál* (The Viking Society, London 1986), in confirmation of the dating once proposed in his *Die Gestalt der Hávamál* (1972) and of his theory published in the same year that *Hugsvinnsmál* (a free Norse translation of *Disticha Catonis*) influenced the composition of *Hávamál*. The *Nachtrag* adds some caustic remarks on Carolyne Larrington's *A Store of Common Sense* (Oxford 1993). In his edition Evans was if anything too reticent about the dating of *Hávamál*, but he dared to criticise the strength of von See's arguments, and so he is attacked here. Yet the arguments against him in this 'stark erweiterte' reply are slender, based on specious premises and a narrow range of statistical evidence (the small random sample of surviving eddic and

skaldic vocabulary). For most scholars any arguments to do with *Hávamál* must remain cautious. For von See, however, it is an easy matter to dismiss Evans's observation that *félagi* (st. 52) is a tenth-century runic word and might point to a like time of origin for the part of *Hávamál* in which it occurs, with no more than an assertion as to what is or is not the theme of this poem (p. 389). Evans regarded the context of the word *bautarsteinn* in *Hávamál* 72 as a sign of pre-Christian custom, although he mentions that outside this stanza it occurs only in thirteenth-century prose, including Snorri's, and not in eddic, skaldic or runic evidence. Von See treats this caveat as proof that the stanza is of late Christian origin: QED. But does he mean that Icelanders raised up slabs on roadsides for their kinsmen in the thirteenth century? And just compare *Hávamál* 76–77 with the Old English alliterative pair *feoh–freond*, which occurs in *The Wanderer* (l. 108) and in an early eleventh-century homily by Wulfstan. Given some thirteenth-century Norse instances of a corresponding *fé–frændr*, a sceptic might see it as tendentious of von See to treat the Old English doublet as the *fons et origo*, through the early tenth-century English upbringing of Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri, of the line *deyr fé, deyia frændr* used by Eyvindr skáldaspillir in *Hákonarmál* 21 (pp. 376–77), and this line in *Hákonarmál* as the source of its double in *Hávamál*. But no, perceptions of transience = Christianity = an import from England. To go on with this, one might believe there were no common Germanic patterns in verse, or that Norse heathens c.950 had minds like a *tabula rasa* and needed the clergy to tell them their lives were short. The words *vápn oc váðir* in *Hávamál* 41 make up an equally secular combination, like Old English *wæpen ond gewædu* in *Beowulf* 292; does von See believe that his 'Redaktor' got this idea from England? In any case it is hard to accept von See's idea that Eyvindr the 'plagiarist' was, as his name tells us, plagiarised by the poet of *Hávamál* (stt. 76, 77), his *Háleygjatal* by the author of *Ynglingatal* (on p. 107, following the dating of Claus Krag); and outside this volume, his *Hákonarmál* by the poet of *Eiríksmál*. When all is said and done, it is simpler to side with Evans and earlier authorities, who suggest that a form of *Hávamál* 1–77 circulated in Norway in the mid-tenth century, a Norwegian 'Gnomic Poem' whose last verse provided Eyvindr with a line in a farewell stanza of his own (ed. Evans, p. 13; see Richard North, *Pagan Words and Christian Meanings* (1991), pp. 122–44). The rest of *Hávamál* might then be dated to various times closer to that favoured by von See, and probably for some of his reasons. As things stand, however, the master shows no moderation; the case is still overstated and unyielding, and runs the risk of throwing good points after bad; and after thirty years his gnomic theory has yet to take account of the narrative parts of *Hávamál* (stt. 13–14, 96–110, 138–45).

In all, then, this is a book of universal aims and much individual obsession. Its chapters embody elements of deep research, and on their account it should be read. In fact, with its fixity of purpose and faith in the justice of its cause, it can be read as a testament. Scholars in years to come will find it useful to have its arguments in one place, and in the meantime their style will challenge everyone who reads them.

RICHARD NORTH

INTERNATIONAL SCANDINAVIAN AND MEDIEVAL STUDIES IN MEMORY OF GERD WOLFGANG WEBER: EIN RUNDER KNÄUEL, SO ROLLT' ES UNS LEICHT AUS DEN HÄNDEN . . . Edited by MICHAEL DALLAPIAZZA, OLAF HANSEN, PREBEN MEULENGRACHT SØRENSEN and YVONNE S. BONNETAIN. *Hesperides: Letterature E Culture Occidentali* 12. Edizioni Parnaso. Trieste 2000. 487 pp.

SAGNAHEIMUR: STUDIES IN HONOUR OF HERMANN PÁLSSON ON HIS 80TH BIRTHDAY, 26TH MAY 2001. Edited by ÁSDÍS EGILSDÓTTIR and RUDOLF SIMEK. *Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia* 6. *Faessbender*. Wien 2001. viii + 322 pp.

Old Norse scholarship has a tradition of producing strong and useful Festschriften and memorial volumes: one thinks in particular of the Turville-Petre memorial *Speculum Norroenum* (1981), Hermann Pálsson's earlier Festschrift *Sagna-skemmtun* (1985), and Klaus von See's weighty *Idee, Gestalt, Geschichte* (1988). The two substantial and handsomely produced volumes under review are worthy successors to these. Both volumes honour scholars whose interests encompass an extensive range of topics. There seem to be few areas of Old Norse-Icelandic culture to which Hermann has not applied himself at some time, while Gerd Wolfgang Weber's learning solicits a broad sweep of essays. These primarily engage with mythological themes, but many other pieces deal with later Swedish or German culture: Udo Reinhardt's extensive survey of Greek influence on the sculpture of the Third Reich sits close to Hans Schottmann's study of Strindberg, for example.

The two volumes are organised alphabetically, and contributors write in a variety of languages. The editors of *Sagnaheimur* provide English summaries for the Icelandic and Italian essays; given the increasing importance of Italian-language contributions to Old Norse studies, some assistance to those who do not have the language is greatly to be welcomed. It is regrettable that the editors of *Ein runder Knäuel* did not incorporate summaries of the three Italian contributions in that volume. The alphabetical organisation disguises the clustering of articles around related themes or their focusing on particular texts. *Sagnaheimur* contains a number of essays about *Völuspá* and *Skírnismál*, while *Ein runder Knäuel* has a range of articles engaging with Weber's groundbreaking account of Norse euhemerism, or paying close attention to the death of Baldr. While publishers' deadlines doubtless prevent editors from circulating related essays among all contributors, some editorial cross-referencing or, at least, juxtaposition of thematically-related articles within the volumes would have added coherence to the overall shape of the final products.

These two volumes contain short pieces which each float some interesting idea rather than developing it at full article length, alongside weightier items which seem likely to make a substantial contribution to Old Norse studies. In *Sagnaheimur*, the articles by Else Mundal and Gro Steinsland on *Völuspá*, the interesting account of *Skírnismál* and the foundation of the Norwegian kingdom by Rudolf Simek, Stefanie Würth's treatment of *Laxdæla saga* and John McKinnell's contribution to *þættir* studies stand out; while the Weber collection contains a lengthy and important reconsideration of the death of Baldr by Yvonne Bonnetain, a typically scholarly consideration of Hallvarðr háreksblei's

Knútsdrápa by Judith Jesch, and a far-reaching discussion of the opposition between Óðinn and Freyr in *Víga-Glúms saga* by Richard North. Edith Marold's analysis of the first half of *Húsdrápa* in a cosmological context and Jens Peter Schjødt's examination of the story of Hǫttr and Þoðvarr in *Hrólf's saga kraka* in terms of initiation ritual, which he couples with a critique of de Vries's reading of the death of Baldr as initiatory, seem likely to make a substantial impact on current understanding of mythological and pagan religious themes in both poetry and prose.

The shorter pieces in the Weber memorial volume include an engaging account of the genesis of the Viking horned helmet by Roberta Frank, and the return of Joseph Harris to one of his long-standing preoccupations, genre, with a consideration of the value of *grátr* in the Bällsta inscriptions. Harris's piece is one of a number of contributions which powerfully evoke Gerd Wolfgang Weber as a presence in the text with a delicate final reference to the memorial stone which is the focus of the article. Vésteinn Ólason offers an ingenious and persuasive elucidation of 'setberg' in Eilífr Goðrúnarson's famous half-stanza cited by Snorri; Preben Meulengracht Sørensen offers a movingly thoughtful and sensitive close reading of *Vǫluspá* st. 59, while Theodore M. Andersson makes a plea for the acknowledgement of the attraction of exoticism in the earliest as well as the later Old Icelandic prose literature.

Sagnaheimur offers a wide range of material, from the linguistic and detailed in Mariella Ruggerini's contribution, to Torfi Tulinius's broad and historically-oriented examination of the role of women in Snorri's life and writings. In both volumes scholars offer foretastes of larger works in progress: Margaret Clunies Ross draws on the material of her *Norse Muse in Britain* in discussing Percy's translations of skaldic verse (*The Norse Muse in Britain 1750–1820, Hesperides: Letterature E Culture Occidentali* 9, Edizioni Parnaso, Trieste 1998), while elsewhere in *Sagnaheimur* Rory McTurk continues his exploration of links between saga literature and Chaucer; Sverre Bagge, writing on medieval historiography, and Richard North in the Weber memorial advertise longer forthcoming works. The pieces in *Sagnaheimur* seem more in dialogue with their honorand, perhaps because their authors clearly envisage how Hermann is likely to engage vigorously with each one of their offerings. Thus Vésteinn Ólason's assessment of Hermann's poetry, Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson's anecdote of lecturing in Hermann's shadow and Régis Boyer's musings about Scandinavian religion find their place here. Gerd Wolfgang Weber is less actively invoked in his volume, though the contents do closely address his many interests across the field of Germanic culture, and contributors often recall discussion with him on the subjects of their contributions.

Both volumes are handsomely produced with a minimum of typographical errors. Although certain articles, composed in English by non-native speakers, would have benefited from scrutiny by native speakers before submission, all the editors are to be congratulated on the skill with which they have dealt with eight or so languages.

THE DATING OF EDDIC POETRY: A HISTORICAL SURVEY AND METHODOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION. By BJARNE FIDJESTØL. Edited by ODD EINAR HAUGEN. *Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana* 41. C. A. Reitzels Forlag, Copenhagen 1999. xv + 376 pp.

When Bjarne Fidjestøl died in 1994, the work under review was close to completion and the author's literary executors arranged for its publication. The book's editor, Odd Einar Haugen, comments approvingly on the author's thorough documentation of his work, though the unfinished state of the book is marked by an 'Editor's postscript' (pp. 325–36) describing modifications of the text that were judged to be necessary prior to publication. Included here is an account (pp. 332–36) of two chapters which, though planned and partly drafted, were not found in a publishable state among Professor Fidjestøl's effects, one on the influence of skaldic on eddic verse, the second on other sources of textual influence on the eddic corpus, including Latin literature, and such borrowings and allusions between individual eddic poems as have a bearing on their date. Referencing and Bibliography have been standardised throughout, and quotations from secondary literature in languages other than English embedded in the main text have been translated (the main text of the book was written in English from the first). The Preface (pp. vii–ix) records the assistance the editor received from all quarters, though it is emphasised that the content and overall shape of the author's work have not been altered in any respect. The care with which this book has been prepared for publication, and the number of scholars involved, is itself impressive testimony to the value placed on Professor Fidjestøl's work by his friends and colleagues.

The book is divided into two parts. The first, 'A historical survey' (Chapters I–VI, pp. 3–186), traces, with a minimum of critical comment, the history of scholarly debate on the date of the eddic poems, starting with the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when some remarkably early datings resulted from links perceived between the eddic poems (known largely at second hand in this period) and classical and Biblical writings. The survey concludes with the views of Jan de Vries in the second edition (1964–67) of his *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte* (the author's reasons for not pursuing the debate beyond de Vries are explained on pp. 7–8).

An unnumbered bridging chapter (pp. 187–203, on which see further below) introduces the much more critical second part of the book, 'A methodological investigation' (Chapters VII–XII, pp. 207–323), which examines some of the empirical procedures that have been, or might be, used for dating eddic poems, especially the linguistic tests. Chapter VII, 'The expletive particle', considers the implications of Hans Kuhn's observations on the gradual disappearance of the Old Norse expletive particle *offlum* from skaldic verse. Chapter VIII, '“Vinðandin forna”', examines the consequences for dating (by appeal to alliterative rules) of the loss in West Norse of *v-* in the initial consonantal group *vr-*. Chapter IX, 'Contracted forms', evaluates the test that correlates the results of vocalic contraction (or its absence) with the metrical form of individual verses. Chapter X, 'The Proto-Nordic frontier', assesses 'Bugge's rule', which concerns the syllabic form and metrical contour of the final word in the *ljóðahátt* full line as a dating criterion. Chapter XI, 'Mythological kennings', examines de Vries's views (and Hans Kuhn's criticisms of them) on the significance of variations in the frequency of mythological kennings in skaldic verse and their applicability to eddic poetry as a test of date. Chapter XII, 'Foreign matter

poems', deals mainly with Kuhn's division of eddic poems in *fornyrðislag* into 'foreign matter' and 'domestic' categories according to their subject-matter, and the implications of congruent grammatical differences, expressed in seven laws, that Kuhn found between the groups. The book concludes with the 'Editor's postscript' (pp. 325–36), the 'Bibliography' (pp. 337–58) and four Indexes covering respectively personal names (pp. 359–64), eddic poems and connected primary texts (pp. 365–69), skaldic poets and their works (pp. 371–74), and metrical terms (pp. 375–76).

The statistical evaluation of linguistic and stylistic evidence in Part Two is very scrupulous; but Fidjestøl's conclusions about the value of dating tests based upon this kind of evidence are in all cases so uncertain or negative that one is bound to wonder if any reliable method of dating the individual eddic poems, whether absolutely in terms of dates or periods, or relative to each other, is attainable. Many of the associated theoretical problems, mostly connected with uncertainties about transmission (of story or text), are considered by the author in the bridging chapter between the two parts of the book. Some quoted remarks by Preben Meulengracht Sørensen on the difficulties of dating verse with an oral background (pp. 188–89) are particularly telling. Palaeography enables us to date the surviving manuscript texts of the eddic poems and so provides the *terminus ad quem*; but earlier versions, in the form of either oral performances or written exemplars, are assumed to underlie them, and without a detailed knowledge of the degree of difference or similarity that the extant text bears to any of these predecessors, we cannot tell whether or not the date of the manuscript is to all intents and purposes the date of the poem it preserves. Linguistic and metrical tests are designed to probe this question, but all these tests presuppose a level of textual stability in transmission that is impossible to demonstrate (and perhaps incompatible with the relative freedom of oral transmission), and their results do not in any case present a clear picture. There are several possible reasons for this that are almost indistinguishable in practice: conservatism, or even deliberate archaism, in some aspects of poetic language but not others, for example. If, of course, there were shifts, now undetectable, in the metrical rules, a late and apparently unmetrical linguistic form of the sort usually regarded as scribal might in fact be authorial. Without a prehistory, furthermore, we cannot be sure exactly what we are trying to date: the sort of radical reworking of older material that deserves to be treated as an original composition, or simply a version of an old story consisting partly, or even largely, of remnants of a whole sequence of lost earlier versions. In the latter case, dating should result, not in a single date, but a range of them.

The fact that Fidjestøl chooses not to propose any new method of dating the eddic poems himself (p. 200) may be connected with the rather depressing implications of such reflections, though his acknowledgement of the problems of procedure they raise is the first step towards surmounting them. Anglo-Saxonists, facing comparable difficulties in dating Old English poetry, for a long time seemed reluctant to meet them head-on (see, for example, Colin Chase, ed., *The Dating of Beowulf*, Toronto and London 1981), but are now plainly aware of them (see Roy Michael Liuzza, 'On the Dating of *Beowulf*', in *The Beowulf Reader*, ed. Peter S. Baker, Basic Readings in Anglo-Saxon England 1, London 2000). Fidjestøl's impressive and fascinating book is certainly relevant to Anglo-Saxonists' interests and is therefore to be recommended to them, as well as to the Old Norse specialists at whom it is aimed.

The book has been edited thoroughly and I noticed scarcely any errors (p. 85/1 ‘kennings’ for ‘kennings’ was one). The inappropriate ‘The present essay’ (p. 209/6) is presumably a relic of the author’s earlier article on the expletive particle (see p. 328).

PETER ORTON

TOOLS OF LITERACY: THE ROLE OF SKALDIC VERSE IN ICELANDIC TEXTUAL CULTURE OF THE TWELFTH AND THIRTEENTH CENTURIES. By GUÐRÚN NORDAL. *University of Toronto Press*. Toronto, Buffalo and London 2001. x + 440 pp.

The skaldic poetry composed in Iceland in the later twelfth and the thirteenth century was a relatively neglected area of research in Old Norse–Icelandic studies until the publication of this excellent and provocative book. *Tools of Literacy* takes us beyond the Viking Age and its better-known skalds to the major period of actual preservation and incorporation of much skaldic verse into prose works, the thirteenth century. Thus Guðrún Nordal is able to connect the writing of long prose works in Iceland with the equally important but somewhat neglected study of the poetry composed in this period. She demonstrates important respects in which poetic composition was linked with prose writing at this time. Not only was it patronised and sometimes composed by many of the members of Iceland’s political élite who also promoted prose sagas of various kinds, but it was also driven by similar motives on the part of the patrons and composers of prose and poetry (who were sometimes one and the same), including the desire of the ruling families to demonstrate their social and cultural status and their political power. By emphasising these socio-political aspects of the skaldic art in late twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iceland, Guðrún is able to show effectively how the composition and citation of skaldic poetry in thirteenth-century works is ‘a highly political act’ (p. 143), and contributes both to the way in which the patrons of literature wished to have history written and to the theorisation of indigenous poetry in contemporary tracts and treatises. These treatises, of which the best-known is Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda* in its various forms, theorised Old Norse poetics and preserved Old Norse poetry, and are a distinguishing feature of the poetic tradition in Iceland.

One of the main planks in Guðrún Nordal’s argument in *Tools of Literacy* is implicit in her title: that skaldic poetry occupied a formal place in the educational curriculum in Iceland from the twelfth century and that the study of its diction was incorporated into the schoolroom study of *grammatica* according to the Christian–Latin tradition that was imported to the island alongside the Christian religion. This development, she argues, made the thirteenth-century flourishing of vernacular Icelandic literature possible and secured for the ruling families a firm stake in the continued composition of skaldic verse as an élite and literate art. This argument is the subject of Part I of the book, ‘Skaldic Verse and Learning’. Part II, ‘The Sources and the Thirteenth-century Poet’, provides an extremely useful review of the different kinds of sources of skaldic verse from this period together with a set of short biographies of all the known poets of the age and a summary of the available sources of information about them.

Part III, 'Theory and Practice in Skaldic Poetics', and Part IV, 'Sources of Inspiration', are, in my opinion, the most original contribution to knowledge in the book. They examine changes in both the theory and practice of skaldic poetry that may be attributed to the influence of Christian modes of thought and the Christian-Latin educational tradition. They show, firstly, how the categorisation of skaldic diction, particularly the classification of the kenning, underwent significant changes within the corpus of the grammatical treatises and, secondly, that contemporary skaldic practice changed too, revealing the influence of the Christian world-view on a poetic system that began life reflecting a pagan one. The book furnishes the reader with many useful tables, which set out schematically the various major prose sources of thirteenth-century skaldic verse, the classification systems of kennings and *heiti* in the major poetic treatises, and the names and connections, familial and otherwise, of thirteenth-century poets and their patrons. At the end of the book (pp. 348–58) there are ten genealogies of the major families that patronised poetry in the thirteenth century, with the names of poets belonging to them highlighted.

It may seem churlish to strike a critical note in a review of a book that will undoubtedly prove both useful and inspirational to scholars and students of skaldic poetry, but I must admit that I remain sceptical of the hypothesis of Part I, that 'the study of skaldic verse was from the early period associated with a formal study of *grammatica* . . . [and that] the privileged few who enjoyed ecclesiastical education in this culture became knowledgeable about skaldic verse-making through their knowledge of *grammatica*' (p. 37). The evidence adduced, mainly from *The First Grammatical Treatise* and *Háttalykill*, seems to fall short of providing a sufficient basis for the argument that the knowledge and composition of skaldic verse was formally part of an Icelander's education in grammar from the twelfth century and was then already embedded in the school curriculum. No one would deny that a knowledge of skaldic metrics and diction would be likely to sharpen someone's awareness and appreciation of a foreign poetic tradition, and it is clear that at least by the date of *The Third Grammatical Treatise* comparisons between the two traditions were being made in an educational context. However, the place of skaldic composition itself as a formal subject in the medieval Icelandic schoolroom has not been demonstrated. Nor is it necessary to argue for it, as there is plenty of evidence for the prestige of the skaldic tradition which would have amply explained the move to literate composition and recording in the thirteenth century. Further, the differences between Latin and Icelandic poetics were as marked as their similarities. We see this clearly in *The Third Grammatical Treatise*, when Óláfr Þórðarson cannot adduce more than a very simple example of Latin *metaphora* to place alongside the complexities of the skaldic kenning, nor can he parallel the importance of alliteration or internal rhyme in the classical tradition.

All in all, however, this is a very fine study of Icelandic skaldic poetry and poetics from the thirteenth century. It will repay close study by specialists in skaldic verse as well as by saga scholars, as its findings have many deep-running implications for the understanding of medieval Iceland textual culture as a whole.

THE SAGA OF BJORN, CHAMPION OF THE MEN OF HITARDALE. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by ALISON FINLAY. *Hisarlik Press*. Enfield Lock 2000. lv + 103 pp.

The fruit of years of labour, Alison Finlay's second translation of *Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa*—slightly different from the version she contributed to *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, 5 vols, I 255–304 (Reykjavík 1997, reviewed in *Saga-Book* XXV:3 (2000), 327–29)—is accompanied by excellent introduction and helpful notes, but my brief in this review is the translation itself.

Rather than combing through a text that several Icelandic- and English-speaking Norse scholars have worked over, I propose to measure Finlay's translation against The Seven Deadly Sins of Translation: (1) syntax that misrepresents the saga sentence; (2) a lexis that falsifies the character of the saga's limited *Wortschatz*; (3) direct speech that gives saga figures a 'roundness' lacking in the original; (4) place names that wreak havoc on English morphology; (5) skaldic verse that reads like lyric poetry; (6) unidiomatic language that bears the marks of the translation process; and (7) simple infelicities. Those reviewers buoyed up by the *Schadenfreude* of seizing on translation mistakes in the work of others might first try producing fifty pages of their own without violating any of these, and a dozen other, maxims.

(1) Finlay consistently and faithfully reproduces saga-syntax, which consists largely of strings of balanced independent clauses having more or less equal semantic weight. Throughout, she follows a modern colloquial version of Occam's razor, 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it': 'Bjorn *went* (italics mine, here and elsewhere) to see his cousin Skuli and *asked* him to send him abroad with these merchants' (Finlay 2000, p. 3). Occasionally, she substitutes a participle for the indicative form of the verb (a practice ordinarily to be avoided), as in '[h]e carried out Bjorn's errand well that time, *saying* that he would come to confirm the betrothal with Oddny, and *giving* her the ring . . .' (Finlay 2000, p. 10); I would prefer 'he carried out Bjorn's errand well that time, *said* that Bjorn would be coming to confirm his betrothal with Oddny, and *gave* her the ring'. Finlay also eschews subordinate clauses in English where there are none in the Icelandic, refrains from rearranging the order of clauses, and avoids chopping up sentences into smaller units. The style adopted admirably mirrors saga syntax.

(2) Translators can err by using anachronisms, especially in terminology drawn from the social sciences. Finlay renders *vizka* (*Íslenzk fornrit* III, 112) as 'insight' (Finlay 2000, p. 2), where 'wisdom' (Finlay 1997, p. 256) is preferable. 'Icelandish'—the use of terms meaningful only to readers who know Icelandic, as in 'full outlaws' (Finlay 2000, p. 55; 1997, p. 285)—should also be avoided (especially when glossed in a note). Care should be taken to translate formulaic phrases the same way at every occurrence; while variation is a feature of Germanic verse, its absence in saga prose is marked. This includes translating simple things simply, such as verbs like *segja* or adverbs like *vel*. In all these respects Finlay succeeds most of the time.

(3) When, in any translation, a saga character's utterances fail to strike us as slightly odd, the fault often lies with the translator. Saga characters, like many other narrative figures, sometimes mean more than they say, but they are unusual in stating a lot of things that more modern narrative traditions express in other

ways, such as free indirect speech, stream of consciousness or other experiments in narrative technique. In addition, saga dialogue makes little or no attempt to represent a speaker's individual psychology or emotional states. For example, while we are told in Chapter 3 that Bjorn was drunk, his manner of speaking betrays none of the usual signs of inebriation. Finlay is faithful to the idiom of saga direct speech throughout, and her accurate dialogue matches the saga's peculiarities.

(4) It seems clear that no agreement on how to translate place names will ever be reached: Finlay's 'Gufuaros river mouth' (pp. 3, 10) is at least a double tautology (what's wrong with 'Gufa River estuary'?), and her title is the result (I wager) of bad advice on how to translate *Hítðæla*. (Why not 'The Saga of Bjorn, Hero of Hitardale' or 'The Saga of Bjorn of Hitardale'?) Otherwise, Finlay's adherence to established conventions is unobjectionable.

(5) The translator deserves special praise for her rendering of the verses. She rightly chose to reproduce alliterative patterns and to maintain a six-syllable line, and her marginal glossary guarantees that scholars of skaldic verse will find much to contemplate. Translators who fail to reproduce the most salient formal properties of skaldic verse do not play by the rules, and call to mind the old comparison between poetry without rhyme and tennis without a net. Finlay's translations of verse are as good as those of John Lucas (in *Egils saga*, translated and edited by Christine Fell, London 1975), for my taste a good model.

(6) If Finlay's translation has a fault it lies in the attempt to reproduce Icelandic idiom a little too zealously in English. In Chapter 2 she refers to Skuli as Bjorn's cousin four times and once as 'Farmer Skuli', whereas in Finlay 1997, pp. 256–57, she only once mentions cousin and omits Farmer. She has people moving 'out from Holm west to Selardale' and 'south over the heath . . . and to Hitarness' (p. 47), and a character advises Bjorn not to 'go in over Beruvikrhraun from here' (p. 42); 'Thord sailed out here and home to his farm' (I prefer: 'Then Thord sailed home and went to his farm'.) Bjorn says 'I'll not go out this summer'—surely problematic for a reader with no Icelandic—but a few lines later he explains what he means, 'I'll not go back [to Iceland] this summer' (Finlay 2000, p. 8; 1997, p. 258). Prepositions are perhaps the most idiomatic elements in any language, and any deviation from their normal use will always seem strange and, in the hands of inept translators, almost like the English of non-native speakers.

(7) Only rarely does an infelicitous phrase occur: 'Bjorn . . . achieved great renown and accomplishments' (Finlay 2000, p. 23; 1997, p. 267; to 'achieve accomplishments' seems odd); and 'he made an attempt and managed to strike down/bring down the seal' (Finlay 2000, p. 37 and 1997, p. 275, respectively). Big game and other large predators can be brought down, but not, I think, a seal: 'he charged the seal and dealt with it quickly'. Otherwise, the translation reads well.

My quibbles only confirm that no translation is ever finished. I warmly welcome Finlay's translation(s) as the standard English version of *Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa* for years to come, even as rumours of a forthcoming Penguin translation are making the rounds.

NORSE ROMANCE. Edited by MARIANNE E. KALINKE. 3 vols. *Arthurian Archives* III. D. S. Brewer. Cambridge 2001. 294; 329; 312 pp.

This three-volume collection is a welcome resource for Scandinavian and Anglophone medievalists. Although the Old Icelandic, Old Norwegian and Old Swedish works edited and translated here have never been particularly popular with Old Norse scholars, they constitute a significant body of Matter of Britain literature which deserves to be available to a wider audience. Long overdue, and therefore especially pleasing, are the new editions and translations of *Parcevals saga* and *Hærra Ivan*, and the new editions of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* (the Norse version of Thomas's *Tristan*) and the 'independent' Icelandic romance *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*. Editions of Old Norse texts, fully normalised with the exception of two *strengleikar* in Old Norwegian, are accompanied by page-facing translations, which succeed in the difficult task of being faithful to their originals in pleasantly straightforward English. These are followed by lists of textual variants and, in the cases of *Skikkjurímur* and *Parcevals saga*, explanatory notes. As well as extending these not widely known translations and adaptations of Arthurian and Tristan material to an audience outside Nordic circles, the collection should encourage a further acquaintance with Old Norse for readers unfamiliar with medieval Scandinavian languages.

Editions and translations alike are a combination of the new, the revised and the reprinted (in the case of the translation of *Möttuls saga*, for the third time in just over ten years). Those previously published elsewhere are, though, for the most part out of print or otherwise not readily accessible, and have never been brought together in a multi-volume, dual-language set. In addition to a brief Introduction by Marianne Kalinke, general editor of the collection, there are shorter (except for *Hærra Ivan*) introductions to each text by individual contributors. These follow no uniform pattern and offer varying degrees of information about manuscripts, literary background, editorial methods and translation practices. Bibliographies are highly selective and suggest, in a number of cases, that there has been little scholarship in the field since the mid-1980s; 'recently', in one instance (Vol. I, p. 243), appears to refer to an article published in 1987.

Volume I, *The Tristan Legend*, brings together for the first time the most important Norse Tristan sagas and poems in their original language and makes a good companion piece to the preceding two volumes, on French Tristan poems, in the Arthurian Archives series. Robert Cook's 1979 edition and translation of the two Arthurian *strengleikar* which derive from *lais* by Marie de France, *Geitarlauf* (*Chevrefeuille*) and *Janual* (*Lanval*) are reprinted; also by Cook is a newly normalised edition (from that of Jón Helgason in *Íslensk fornkvæði*, 1962) and translation of the Icelandic ballad *Tristrams kvæði*. There is a new edition and translation, by Peter Jorgensen, of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*; also newly edited by Jorgensen, with a reprinting of Joyce Hill's 1977 translation, is the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, a work otherwise shunned by editors since Gísli Brynjólfsson in 1851 (Bjarni Vilhjálmsson's 1951 printing of the saga, with modern Icelandic orthography, follows Gísli's edition). Jorgensen's edition of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* makes accessible to new generations of scholars the only medieval work preserving Thomas's *Tristan* in its pre-fragmentary state. The saga, a major work

in the medieval Tristan corpus, has been editorially ignored—apart from Blaisdell's 1980 facsimile edition of AM 489 4to—since Gísli Brynjólfsson and Eugen Kölbing published their separate editions in 1878 (Bjarni Vilhjálmsson bases his 1954 text, for the most part, on Gísli's; Kölbing's edition was reprinted in 1978). Such a rich spread of Tristan fare naturally inspires the greedy reader with a desire for more, and the textual range here could have been satisfyingly extended by a sample of the Icelandic folktales of *Tristram og Ísól bjarta* which Jorgensen tantalisingly mentions in his introduction to *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*.

The texts in Volume II, *The Knights of the Round Table*, have either been well served by scholarly editions and translations over the last 30 or so years (*Erex saga*, *Ívens saga*, *Möttuls saga*) or neglected for more than a century (*Parcevals saga*, *Valvens þátr*, *Skikkjurímur*). The first three named are available in unnormalised diplomatic editions, accompanied by very literal translations, in the Editiones Arnamagnæanæ series: *Erex saga* and *Ívens saga* by Foster Blaisdell (1965 and 1979) and *Möttuls saga* by Kalinke (1987). Blaisdell and Kalinke's translation of *Erex saga* and *Ívens saga*, based on a conflation of the manuscripts in Blaisdell's editions, was published in 1977, and Kalinke's translation of *Möttuls saga* has twice (1988 and 1994) appeared in collections of Arthuriana. The present volume offers reader-friendly editions of these three sagas, based on the texts used by Blaisdell and Kalinke for Editiones Arnamagnæanæ. For *Ívens saga* and *Erex saga*, Kalinke contributes new translations, each based on a single manuscript (Stockholm 6 4to for *Ívens saga* and AM 181b for *Erex saga*), which provide closer renditions of the original than her earlier translations in co-authorship with Blaisdell. The Norse version of Chrétien's *Conte del Graal*—*Parcevals saga* and its sequel, *Valvens þátr*—has, by contrast, languished unedited (in published form) since its inclusion in Eugen Kölbing's 1872 *Riddarasögur*, and untranslated into English. The volume also furnishes a preview of Helen Maclean's editions of *Parcevals saga* and *Valvens þátr* for Editiones Arnamagnæanæ, since they form the basis of Kirsten Wolf's edition of the two texts, with English translations by Maclean. Matthew Driscoll's edition and translation of *Skikkjurímur*, derived from *Möttuls saga* and last edited by Gustaf Cederschiöld in 1877, introduces an Arthurian work little known to Norse scholars. Driscoll's introduction, succinct but exemplary in its breadth and focus, brings an often overlooked but significant genre of late medieval literature, the Icelandic metrical romances or *rímur*, into the wider scholarly arena.

In Volume III, Henrik Williams and Karin Palmgren do for *Hærra Ivan* (the Old Swedish rendition of Chrétien's *Yvain*) and the early fourteenth-century Swedish verse translations of medieval French and German romances, known as *Eufemiavisor*, what Driscoll does for the *Skikkjurímur*. Erik Noreen's 1931 edition (*Herr Ivan*) of this major contribution to the European 'Lion-Knight' literary tradition has long awaited renovation and serves as the basis for this thoughtful treatment, which is preceded by an informative introduction to the composition and transmission of *Hærra Ivan*. Old Swedish has been studied less by Anglophone and Francophone Norse scholars than has Old Icelandic, and Williams and Palmgren provide an excellent opportunity for readers to acquaint themselves with

its literature and with an unabbreviated translation (the longest in any second language) of *Yvain*.

This collection opens up a range of texts and Norse literary genres to a potentially wide audience. One might have wished, therefore, that some of the introductions and bibliographies could have provided more in the way of guidance and inspiration for readers unacquainted with their literary form and relevant secondary material. The lack of uniformity of format is irritating. A standardised pattern of individual introductions could have saved repetition and given the collection greater cohesion. Space saved there could have been profitably given over to a more extensive and up-to-date bibliography, to reflect major trends in scholarship and to list previous editions and translations. (The majority of readers are not likely to have Kalinke and P. M. Mitchell's comprehensive 1985 bibliography of Old Norse–Icelandic romances readily to hand.) Kalinke's general Introduction, for example, gives sufficient information about the circumstances of translation from the French during the reign of Hákon Hákonarson to obviate its repetition in subsequent introductory pieces.

The *Tristan Legend* volume is an excellent resource, both for the study of individual texts and for broader investigations of the Tristan legend in Old Norse, but there are puzzling bibliographical omissions: for example, Sverrir Tómasson's seminal 1977 article 'Hvenær var Tristrams saga snúið?' (*Gripla* 2 (1977), 47–78, with summary in English, on the prologue to *Tristrams saga* and the prefaces and colophons to other *riddarasögur*); the translation of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* by Paul Schach (Lincoln, Nebraska 1973); and Joyce Hill's translation of the four versions of *Tristrams kvæði* (in Joyce Hill, ed., *The Tristan Legend: Texts from Northern and Eastern Europe in Modern English*, Leeds 1977). M. F. Thomas's article on the Tristan legend in the North—with a publication date of 1983, the third most recent bibliographical item in this volume—is listed for *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, but not for the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, with which it is chiefly concerned, challenging Paul Schach's influential reading of that saga (cited by Jorgensen in his introduction and bibliography). Given the scarcity of scholarship in English on Old Swedish, Karin Boklund Coffey's stylistic analysis of *Hærra Ivan* ('Herr Ivan: A Stylistic Study', *Scandinavian Studies* 48 (1976), 299–315) is an odd omission in the bibliography to Volume III.

This is a useful collection, which validates its texts as a significant corpus of Arthuriana and Tristaniana and will appeal to a wide readership of medievalists. I noted only one typo: 'manucripts', Vol. III, p. 5.

GERALDINE BARNES

THE OLD NORSE–ICELANDIC LEGEND OF SAINT BARBARA. Edited by KIRSTEN WOLF. *Studies and Texts* 134. *Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies*. Toronto 2000. ix + 187 pp.

This, the second of Kirsten Wolf's critical editions of the Old Norse–Icelandic lives of the 'virgines capitales', follows the model of careful and exhaustive scholarship established in her treatment of Saint Dorothy: *The Icelandic Legend of Saint Dorothy* (Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto 1997; reviewed

in *Saga-Book XXV:3* (2000), 332–33). It also provides Wolf with an opportunity to draw together some of the threads of her wider scholarly interests in philology, hagiography and feminist theory.

Barbare saga is preserved in two fifteenth-century manuscripts, Stock. Perg. 2 fol., 78rb–79rb and AM 429 12mo, 76r–80v, both of which appear to be derived independently from the same archetype. Wolf's edition (pp. 134–60) differs markedly from the last critical edition, which was published by Unger in *Heilagra manna sǫgur* (1877, I 153–57). Unger's reconstruction takes Stock. Perg. 2 fol. as its main witness, and cites only variants from AM 429 12 mo. Wolf rejects this traditional practice as likely to 'lead directly to the creation of a fabricated text without authority and possibly misrepresentative of the hypothetical uncorrupted archetype' (p. 131). She thus chooses to apply the principles of 'new philology' (the application of which to Old Norse texts she explored in her article 'Old Norse–New Philology', *Scandinavian Studies* 65 (1993), 338–48), and to present complete diplomatic transcriptions of both manuscript texts on facing pages. Differences in the phraseology of the texts, as well as their discrete orthography and syntactic structures, are given equal weight, and no pretence is made either at the reconstruction of the lost exemplar or at the identification of a 'best text'. Although Wolf certainly achieves her objective of presenting the informed reader with a more complete view of the transmission of *Barbare saga*, and, in the process, safeguards much important philological and stylistic data, I have some reservations about the application of this technique to longer texts, or to those with more complex stemmas. Wolf prevents her text from becoming unwieldy, and quite inaccessible to some readers, essentially by compromising her philological principles and including a fully normalised text, based on the 'better text' (p. 132) in Stock. Perg. 2 fol. and accompanied by a facing-page translation (pp. 144–155). The edition is completed with a text of the saga's Latin original, from Douai, Bibliothèque Municipale Codex 838 (*BHL* Suppl. 913a).

Wolf prefaces her edition with a wide-ranging and painstakingly researched contextual introduction, a thorough analysis of the history and development of the legend of Barbara from the earliest Greek and Syrian versions to medieval artistic adaptations. Section 1.0 (pp. 1–29) explores the striking parallels between this legend and other hagiographical texts, most notably the story of Saint Christina. Two principal Latin recensions of the text are postulated (represented by *BHL* 914 and *BHL* 916, which circulated with the *Legenda Aurea* in the later Middle Ages), both of which appear to derive from the earliest and most widespread Latin version (*BHL* 913) and, ultimately, from various Greek and Syrian traditions. Having established the origins of the legend, Wolf turns her attention to vernacular versions in French, German and English. Section 1.1 (pp. 29–40) represents an exhaustive catalogue of verse, prose and dramatic accounts of the legend, interspersed with fascinating evidence of the popular cult of Barbara in continental Europe. The present reader was charmed to discover, for example, that miners in the Salzburg area lit a 'Barbaralicht' to protect themselves from subterranean dangers.

In section 2 (pp. 45–77) Wolf assembles the evidence for devotion to Saint Barbara in Scandinavia. Once again, the scope of her research is impressive. The two surviving Old Swedish versions of the legend are discussed in some detail,

and relationships are postulated with two popular European versions of the legend, an encomium on Saint Barbara by the Flemish theologian John of Wakkerzeel (*fl.* c.1370–c.1397) and an anonymous Low German adaptation of the *Legenda Aurea*, *Der große Seelentrost* (mid-fourteenth century). Considerable evidence also survives for Barbara's veneration in Iceland (discussed on pp. 64–77). Particularly fascinating are the surviving pictorial representations of the saint. Most familiar among these, of course, are the portraits of Barbara on Jón Arason's cope and on the altarpiece he donated to the church at Hólar, but perhaps most tantalising is the sixteenth-century engraving of her on a silver belt, seen by William Morris during his visit to Vatnsdalur in 1871, the current whereabouts of which are sadly unknown.

In addition to *Barbare saga* itself, three Old Norse–Icelandic literary treatments of the legend of Barbara are extant. Of the two poetic versions, Wolf pays considerably more attention to the fourteenth- or fifteenth-century *Barbárudiktur*, two discrete redactions of which are preserved. Although unable to establish a direct link between *Barbárudiktur* and the saga, Wolf demonstrates that they share the same Latin source, *BHL* Suppl. 913a. AM 672 4to preserves an epitome of the Barbara legend, *Um Barbáru mey*. This short text is edited on p. 114, where Wolf advances the theory that, despite some minor discrepancies between the texts, it is likely that there is a direct connection between the epitome and the saga.

The third part of the introduction (pp. 77–113) is devoted to *Barbare saga* itself. The two manuscript witnesses are discussed at length, and the palaeography and orthography of the texts of the legend are described in detail. The source of the saga is discussed in section 3.4 (pp. 104–06), where Wolf presents the view that, of the two main Latin recensions of the legend, the saga is closer to that represented by *BHL* 914. As she indicates, though, there are considerable divergences between *BHL* 914 and the saga, and *BHL* 914 cannot itself be considered the actual source. In a painstaking examination of the saga as a translation (section 3.5, pp. 106–11), Wolf defends Peter Foote's assertion that the actual source is 'the version of the *Passio* noted under *BHL* Suppl. 913a' (p. 106).

The final part of the introduction (pp. 115–30) is devoted to the perhaps somewhat unfortunately entitled 'Excursus: The Severed Breast'. This essay, which sits rather oddly between the editions of the epitome and the legend itself, is in fact a lightly revised version of Wolf's article 'The Severed Breast: A Topos in the Legends of Female Martyr Saints' (*Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 112 (1997), 97–112). Wolf contrasts the treatments of male martyr saints with their female equivalents, highlighting the sexual focus of the descriptions of the women's sufferings. She then goes on to defend the legends against accusations of pornography by appealing to patristic theories of female corporality.

Kirsten Wolf's edition and study of the Old Norse–Icelandic legend of Saint Barbara is an extremely well-researched and scholarly work. As with her study of the legend of Saint Dorothy, though, I am concerned that Wolf's erudition might create something of a barrier for the non-specialists who surely represent part of the book's target audience. Although there are some attempts to accommodate such readers—the inclusion of a normalised text of the saga, for example, and the 'Excursus'—the book quotes extensively from texts in several historical dialects

of German, French, Swedish and English without normalisation or paraphrase. Although this will not present problems for many readers of *Saga-Book*, it is surely incumbent on those working within the field of Old Norse–Icelandic studies to make their subject accessible to the wider academic readership it deserves.

KATRINA ATTWOOD

BIRGITTA OF SWEDEN AND THE VOICE OF PROPHECY. By CLAIRE L. SAHLIN. *Studies in Medieval Mysticism 3. The Boydell Press*. Woodbridge 2001. xvi + 266 pp. 6 illustrations.

It is nearly a hundred years since K. B. Westman wrote a ground-breaking study of St Birgitta of Sweden (*Birgitta-studier*, Akademiska boktryckeriet, Uppsala 1911), in which he not only shed light on the complexities of the textual history of her *Revelaciones*, but also placed her in the context of the mystical tradition, alongside other great medieval mystics, from Hildegard of Bingen to Girolamo Savonarola. Since that date, of course, much scholarly work has been undertaken, mostly in Scandinavia and mainly in the field of textual criticism. This has now resulted in the virtual completion of a critical edition of the Latin text of the *Liber Celestis*, published by Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien. Other disciplines have been slow to enter the field of Birgittine studies, however: historians have found the material too elusive and morally charged; art historians have yet to investigate the full import of the iconographical shifts throughout European painting and art; theologians have shunned the very orthodox doctrine which is distilled through a voluminous and dense prose, while anthologies of the writings of medieval women mystics avoid inclusion of her, perhaps because of her lack of appeal as a ‘female writer’.

Claire Sahlín, an historian of religion, has engaged with several of these disciplines in her important book on one of the most central but difficult issues connected with Birgitta’s spirituality: her prophetic calling, as it was understood both by the saint herself and by her followers and detractors after her death. Although women exercised leadership as religious prophets in the early Christian Church, by the late second century this role had disappeared, and they were formally excluded from leadership in the Church. Thus women who claimed to be conduits of God’s word were regarded with suspicion. In this excellent study, Sahlín addresses the paradox of how Birgitta succeeded in remaining within the confines of the prohibition of public speech, while speaking out so forcefully on ecclesiastical regeneration and reform, and rapidly achieving recognition among the canon of saints at a time when the Church was in political turmoil. She shows that Birgitta does not emerge out of a spiritual void, and indeed came to be the ‘fountainhead’ of a group of female prophetic reformers in the late Middle Ages, with whom many parallels may be drawn.

One of the strengths of the book is an insistent and meticulously argued consideration of the delicate balances, open interpretations and apparent contradictions that surround the subject of the prophetic vocation, for even at a simple level the

sources can yield a range of seemingly intractable questions. To what extent was she a true prophet? A public preacher? Spiritually male? A weak and ignorant woman chosen as a vessel for God's word?

The six chapters can in some senses be read independently, but taken together they indicate the major and lasting impulses in Birgitta's spirituality such as her Marian devotion, emphasis on preaching and reforming zeal. The first three chapters address the nature of her vocation to be the 'bride and mouthpiece' of Christ, describing how she understood her bridal role, which is notably lacking in erotic language and unitive experience, and her calling to be the conduit of salvation to others and to produce 'spiritual offspring' who would bring about reform. Sahlin argues that she belongs to the tradition of the inspired prophet in the Old Testament sense of the term, and provides an analysis of the notion of prophecy about past, present and future as well as of the theological development of the prophetic tradition in the western Church. Her confessors, Prior Peter of Alvastra and Master Peter of Skänninge, wrote that 'she prophesied not only about the future—as did the prophets—but also about the present and the past' (p. 39); and there are several examples where Birgitta provides previously unknown details about biblical events, the best-known being the supplementary details about the Nativity and the suffering of Mary at the Crucifixion.

Drawing on an enormous range of recent scholarship, she discusses among other things the prayerful and ecstatic states and their physical manifestations, sleeplessness which allays suspicions of dreams, and imaginative rather than intellectual vision; and Birgitta's place on the line between mysticism and propheticism is well drawn and convincingly argued.

Throughout her life, Birgitta closely identified with Mary's role in salvation history. In Chapter 3 there is an analysis of the mystical pregnancy experienced by Birgitta in the Christmas Eve vision of Book VI, chapter 88, which interestingly Sahlin categorises as a call to prophesy (traditionally, scholars identify the account given in the *Vita*, which echoes the calling of the Old Testament prophets like Samuel, as the commissioning revelation). The discussion actualises the debate about women's speech as God's *canale*. Birgitta's heart, like Mary's womb, was a vessel filled with the word of God; thus Birgitta is encouraged to imitate Mary's role as the vessel of divine revelation and thereby she becomes an active participant and instrument of divine will and receives confirmation of her commission to prophesy. This unusual—and potentially dangerous—use of maternal devotion at the time of a rise in devotion to the Virgin, in which women were encouraged to become spiritual mothers of Christ, was understandably not widely promulgated after Birgitta's death, and the Virgin instead remained a symbol of passive devotion in Birgittine visual images in fifteenth-century Europe.

The second half of the book addresses the response of Birgitta's audience to her claims to be God's channel. Like all women mystics, she could not have achieved her elevation and recognition without her circle of male clerics, and the sources are always careful to show that she subordinates her will to clerical authority as part of her asceticism; but here again there are paradoxes, with role reversals and collaborative partnerships playing an equal role alongside female submission to male authority. Sahlin adduces several examples to show that Birgitta frequently helps

to bolster her confessors' clerical authority in accordance with the institutional and theological subordination of women.

The voices of the sceptics are discussed in the later chapters of the book, starting with the suspicion of the monks at Alvastra and allegations of witchcraft and insanity, followed by Lars Romare's account of the objections to the canonisation and the controversies after the canonisation, and discussion of Gerson's *De probatione spirituum* and the whole question of spiritual discernment. The defenders, who employ a range of strategies to negotiate the question of gender and prophetic authority amid misogynist stereotypes, are closely scrutinised and compared in Chapter 6, including Adam Easton's *Defensorium*. Sahlin draws attention for the first time to a tract by an anonymous Franciscan friar in the unpublished Lincoln Cathedral MS 114. This chapter also looks at her as 'a thunderous preacher' in four Vadstena sermons, another area in which the female prophet-preacher is placed in a larger context.

Sahlin's book places Birgitta within a European comparative context. It does not attempt an analysis of the Scandinavian prophetic antecedents, from the female soothsayers and saga visionaries to the monastic dream-vision tradition of the afterlife; but although there is a place for the virile woman topos in Scandinavian tradition, it belongs equally in the Old Testament sphere, with Miriam, Judith and Esther as examples of women who received visions and advised rulers, as well as St Anne as teacher and educator. The continuity of the Swedish link from Helena of Skövde or the Beguines at Vadstena through to Swedenborg in the late seventeenth century cannot easily be demonstrated, and despite her roots it is probably true that Birgitta belongs essentially to the European sphere with Rome–Avignon as her gravitational axis.

By revisiting with fresh interpretations many orthodox and often-repeated assertions about Birgitta, Sahlin shows that she is not a unique phenomenon in the general history of Christian mysticism, and specifically in the Church in the fourteenth century. Her study goes well beyond contextualising Birgitta within the mystical tradition, as Westman had done. It explores exhaustively the incessant ambiguities of interpretation that surround this charismatic saint, bringing new material for comparison into the debate and pointing to the elements that are genuinely unique in Birgitta's achievement. The book has an extensive bibliography and detailed notes (which are on occasion superfluous, e.g. p. 62, note 102, or repetitious, e.g. p. 146, note 38, p. 147, note 41) and a number of pictures. There is no doubt that Birgittine scholars will find something new to interest them on almost every page of this book, and it will be cited in bibliographies for years to come.

BRIDGET MORRIS

THE VIKINGS AND THE VICTORIANS: INVENTING THE OLD NORTH IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN. By ANDREW WAWN. *D. S. Brewer*. Cambridge 2000. xv + 434 pp. 12 black-and-white illustrations.

When Victoria came to the throne in 1837, Vikings were as scarce as panda bears. (The first citation for the word in the *OED* is 1807.) Yet within fifty years the

floodgates had opened: a burst of these intrepid explorers, merchant adventurers, self-sufficient farmers, mercenary soldiers, primitive democrats and valiant imperialists was set loose upon the world. 'Viking' was now featured in the titles of poems, plays, parlour songs, parodies, paraphrased sagas, prize essays, published lectures, papers in learned journals, paintings, drawings, translations, travelogues and scholarly monographs. 'These were works,' notes Andrew Wawn, 'written for all conditions of men, some conditions of women, and quite a few conditions of children' (p. 3).

The Vikings and the Victorians is about the reception of northern antiquity in Victoria's Britain, which means it is also about attitudes to Greco-Roman literature, the British navy, Christianity and paganism, regionalism, colonialism, Indo-Europeanism and women. The author's careful scholarship and intellectual range are matched by his finely tuned historical sense and generosity of spirit. Like many nineteenth-century students of the Old North, Wawn communicates the excitement of his subject stylistically, through prose that moves back and forth between taut, aphoristic *aperçus* and cascades of full-bodied nouns and adjectives, covering every inch of the field of vision. Each page has something to admire, smile over and learn from. There was rarely a dull moment in the nineteenth-century marriage of Viking enthusiasts and philologists; in this book there is no flatness at all.

In twelve packed chapters, organised into four sections, Wawn takes us from the first eighteenth-century stirrings of interest in the Old North into 'splendid Viking banqueting halls, more Balmoral than Bergþórshvoll' (p. 5); we meet 'well-kempt heroes bearing an uncanny resemblance to Prince Albert, and self-sacrificial heroines of Dorothea Brookean demureness' (p. 6). Then there are the new grammars, a dictionary, translations, popular fiction, travel brochures for pilgrims to Iceland's saga-steads and the claim that Victoria herself was descended from Óðinn. One chapter is devoted to Samuel Laing and his translation of *Heimskringla* (1844), central to the new canon, alluded to by Jules Verne in *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, and the inspiration for an old northern cantata by Sir Edward Elgar. Another canonical work was *Friðþjófs saga* (buttressed by the Tegnér version); although now largely forgotten, in Victorian Britain it was the most popular of all medieval Icelandic narratives (one enthusiast was Victoria's grandson Kaiser Wilhelm II). George Webbe Dasent and his translation of *Brennu-Njáls saga* (1861) have an important chapter to themselves, as do the Eddas; William Morris ranked the *Poetic Edda* (translated by Benjamin Thorpe, 1866) fourth on his list of the world's hundred greatest books.

Halfway through the volume we meet two giant personalities, George Stephens and William Morris, each of whom made multiple contributions to the 'northern cause'. The now ignored or maligned Stephens had envisaged, in the author's words, 'an Anglo-Scandinavian continuum'; in harangue after Wulfstanian harangue this Viking-hating Titan complained about the Germanising term Anglo-Saxon and the annexation by contemporary German scholarship of 'the whole mythic store of Scandinavia and England'. Wawn expounds in moving and just words the breadth of Stephens's intellectual sympathies and the brilliance of his achievements, even though 'the political and philological waves [were] deaf to his commands' (p. 243). The much-esteemed Morris, who wrote the

most celebrated Victorian poems on northern subjects and who helped design stained glass windows for a Rhode Island house named 'Vinland', also gets his due.

The last three chapters deal with Victorian travellers to Iceland, novelistic fictions produced on Viking-Age themes and the informal networks existing in Victoria's Britain for those attracted to the Old North (such as public lectures, saga-reading circles, learned societies). Key figures in all this were resident Icelanders such as Guðbrandur Vigfússon in Oxford and Eiríkur Magnússon in Cambridge. They might not have had e-mail but they could still be pestered by post several times daily for information on Viking ways. Among their unpublished correspondence Wawn finds a letter from the American Marie Brown. Putting the finishing touches to a fanatically anti-Columbus, anti-Catholic book on the Norse discovery of America, she writes to Guðbrandur asking for suggestions about a design for the cover (p. 347). The promotion of the Old North in provincial Britain is quietly illustrated throughout the book, in activities going on far from the capital and universities, where resourceful Merseyside shippers and broad-shouldered Liverpool merchants were fashioning a usable past. Wawn's index contains separate entries for Liverpool, Toronto, Ottawa and Sydney, but not London, Paris or Rome.

The author is alert to the range of political allegiances in and varying artistic merits of the source-material reviewed, as in: 'and, perhaps not a moment too soon, the poem comes to an end' (p. 36). No irony escapes him: '*Frithiofs saga* having begun its Victorian life in the fiery custody of the fanatically anti-German George Stephens ends the century firmly in the sinister hands of the Kaiser and his ever-loyal supporters in Britain' (p. 141). We find out that Henry VIII, offered Iceland by the Danish king, turned it down (p. 16), that Queen Elizabeth had an Icelandic lap-dog (p. 14), that it was Aylett Sammes (1676), not Sir Walter Scott (as the *OED* records), who introduced the term 'berserk' into English (p. 20). The first translation published in Britain of a complete Old Icelandic poem was by Hickes (p. 21); *The Dream* by Lárus Sigurðsson (c.1830) may well be the first poem composed by an Icelander in English (p. 35); Grenville Pigott (1839) 'may have been the first British scholar to give a detailed explanation of the seventeenth-century Latin mistranslation which had prompted the belief that Vikings and Valholl revellers drank wine out of the skulls of their slain foes' (p. 190). The longest Victorian novel about Iceland, *The Curate of Steinholt* (James Flamank, 1837), is also the earliest (p. 315). The only Victorian-Edwardian novel devoted to Cnut the Great appears to be *The Ward of King Canute* (1903), by Otilie Liljencrantz of Chicago (p. 320). George Dasent, knowing that Njáll's blood-fine was three hundreds in silver, does some calculations, makes a chart, and solemnly remarks that 'a man of Njal's worth was surely worth £13 10s, and £7 10s would have been too little for him'. Wawn, noting the price of Dasent's translation, observes that this 'exchange rate works out at 13 copies of *Burnt Njal* for one burnt Njáll' (p. 156). *The Victorians and the Vikings* tells us what no student guide to English poetry does: that Swinburne, sharing George Powell's 'old Etonian fascination with flagellation and saga literature', earned himself the name Sveinbjörn (p. 362).

Many individuals in Wawn's immense cast are familiar from other contexts: Theodore Roosevelt, Talleyrand, Robin Hood, Kings Alfred and Arthur, Captain Cook, William Tyndale, Sarah Bernhardt, Johannes Brahms, Sir Martin Frobisher, Goethe, Victor Hugo, Darwin, Marx and a shipload of literary figures from Homer, Herodotus and Pindar to Arthur Conan Doyle and James Fenimore Cooper. In its broad canvas and energetic research, its pace and wit and its learning lightly worn, Wawn's book is exemplary, a work of humane and original scholarship.

The volume has been handsomely produced. Its twelve illustrations contain at least nine horned helmets, another invention of Victorian Britain (this time shared with Wilhelmine Germany). I found almost no typos: in the index under Lorenz Froelich, read 163 for 162; the law is Grimm's (Jacob), not Grimms' (pp. 354, 424); and Kaiser Wilhelm II was Victoria's grandson, not cousin (p. 7). Unlike the book itself, the jacket blurb knows only lower-case Vikings; the titles on the jacket and on the title page are not perfectly matched.

ROBERTA FRANK

WAGNER OG VÖLSUNGAR: NIFLUNGAHRINGURINN OG ÍSLENSKAR FORNBÓKMENNTIR. By ÁRNI BJÖRNSSON. *Mál og menning*. Reykjavík 2000. 222 pp. 26 colour plates.

This attractive and useful book combines a generously illustrated coffee-table format with a good deal of informative and scholarly text. It has its peculiarities and some flaws; nevertheless it succeeds in offering both a general introduction to Wagner's *Ring* and a fairly detailed analysis of Wagner's adaptation of his medieval sources. Quite rightly, emphasis is placed upon Wagner's especial indebtedness to Old Norse–Icelandic texts.

The first third of the book seeks to introduce the reader to Wagner and to outline the process by which he created the cycle of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in its four constituent operas, *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*. The rise of Icelandic studies in the wake of revolutionary early nineteenth-century developments in German philology is discussed along with some mention of the important concept of a pan-Germanic heritage; there is also an account of early editions and German translations of Old Norse–Icelandic texts; and we are told which volumes Wagner is known to have read or owned. Much of this material is derivative, naturally, but the handling of it is pithy and astute. At the end of the book there is, in addition, a short review of what Wagner made of his medieval sources, followed by an account of how the knowledge of Wagner's works has developed in Iceland from 1876 to 2000.

The most substantial section of the book (pp. 95–184) will be of greatest interest to specialists in Old Norse studies, for it gives a point-by-point account of the *Ring* in parallel with analysis of Wagner's medieval sources. For each act or major scene a brief synopsis is supplied and then, in the left-hand column of the page, the salient details of Wagner's text are set forth whilst in the right-hand column there is a discussion of related details from the *Poetic Edda*, *Snorra Edda*, *Völsunga saga*, *Þiðreks saga*, the *Nibelungenlied* and *Das Lied vom hürnen Seyfrid*. There are also passing references to *Heimskringla* (which Wagner himself

mentioned as one of his wellsprings, p. 70), *Egils saga*, *Njáls saga*, *Gísla saga* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*. Old Icelandic texts are modernised while German passages are given in translation; all cited texts have full references. Árni's presentation of the subject here is easily sufficient to demonstrate Wagner's wonderful powers of synthesis and his deep knowledge of the medieval material. A full analysis of all the parallels between Wagner's text and his sources, however, would require a volume very much larger than this. Árni has therefore had to be selective; but some of his omissions are surprising and may not have been intentional. In his discussion of the very first scene of the cycle, for example, Árni quotes Wellgunde's chattering speech in which she says that a ring forged from the Rhinegold will bestow limitless power on its owner (p. 97), but he fails to point out that this concept has a medieval parallel. The idea that there was in the Nibelung hoard a jewel which could make its possessor the ruler of all mankind occurs in the *Nibelungenlied* (trans. Hatto 1969, 147), where it is a mere incidental detail and plays no part in the story. Wagner seized on this detail and made it the leading idea for the whole of his *Ring* cycle; but it seems that Árni has missed it. A different kind of omission occurs in the remarks on the final scene of *Götterdämmerung* ('The Dusk of the Gods'), which is here called *Ragnarök* ('The Doom of the Gods'): Árni tells how Brünnhilde leaps into Siegfried's funeral pyre, but he does not properly explain why Walhall is then seen burning in the sky (pp. 181–82). As Wagner has it, Brünnhilde, wearing the ring of power for a few moments before she kills herself, commands the fire-sprite Loge to burn Walhall. Wagner's Loge has the personality of Loki together with the nature of Logi, the embodiment of fire in Snorri's tale of Útgardaloki; and in the Old Norse accounts it is Loki together with the fire-giant Surtr (amongst others) who destroys the gods. By failing to comment on Brünnhilde's reference to Loge, therefore, Árni has not only blurred Wagner's logic but also missed the only real point of contact between *ragnarök* and the plot of *Götterdämmerung*.

The substitution of Icelandic nouns such as *ragnarök* for German titles is questionable, and becomes even more questionable when applied to the personal names of Wagner's characters, where it has caused unnecessary complications and inconsistencies. In the case of the captions to photographs there seems to be no consistency at all; so we have 'Siegfried og ormurinn. Siegfried. Bayreuth 1952' (p. 137) but 'Sigurður Fáfnisbani, Bayreuth 1899' (p. 162). In the text proper Árni has been more methodical, but his method is potentially confusing. The discussion of each opera begins with a list of names showing that there is by no means a one-to-one correspondence between Wagner's characters and their 'Icelandic parallels' (pp. 95, 111, 130, 155). In the brief synopses, nevertheless, a German name has in many cases been replaced throughout with just one of its 'parallels', hence 'Loki' in place of 'Loge' (pp. 98, 101) and 'Mímir' in place of 'Mime' (pp. 101, 131, 138); but some characters, such as Alberich (pp. 96, 101, 103, 131, 138, 166) and Sieglinde (pp. 112, 124), keep the names Wagner gave them. In the columns setting forth the details of Wagner's text, all the characters keep their German names throughout Árni's commentary; but wherever Wagner's actual words are translated, the Icelandic 'parallels' are again substituted—so we find a speech on p. 116 in which Sieglinde [*sic*] calls herself Signý. It is difficult to see how this could be

useful to an Icelandic reader unfamiliar with the *Ring*, since the parallels have been explained anyway; and the distinction between the operatic figures and their medieval counterparts would be clearer if Wagner's characters always kept Wagner's names.

Not surprisingly, the confusion over nomenclature has led to some typographical errors: 'Loke' for 'Loge' in the column headed 'Texti Wagners' on p. 109, and 'Mime' for 'Mímir' in the column headed '*Piðreks saga*' on p. 152. Other typographical errors include the displacement of the phrase 'gull í Rín', which should not appear in the *Piðreks saga* column on p. 109. Finally, I am puzzled by the occurrence of the name 'Balder' in the table on p. 185. There is no reference to Balder in the *Ring*.

DAVID ASHURST

Saga-Book: Editors of Articles

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