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CONTENTS

REVIEWS

THE ORAL SOURCES OF *ÓLÁFS SAGA HELGA* IN *HEIMSKRINGLA*

BY THEODORE M. ANDERSSON

THE PROLOGUES TO *HEIMSKRINGLA* and the *Separate Saga of Saint Olaf* famously emphasise the role of poetic sources in reconstructing the early history of Scandinavia. The prologue to *Heimskringla* argues that these sources are likely to be truthful despite the inherent danger of flattering princes (*Heimskringla*, I 5):

> Með Haraldi konungi váru skáld, ok kunna menn enn kvæði þeira ok allra konunga kvæði, þeira er síðan hafa verit í Nóregi, ok tókum vér þar mest dœmi af, þat er sagt er í þeim kvæðum, er kveðin váru fyrir sjálfum hǫfðingjunum eða sonum þeira. Tǫkum vér þat allt fyrir satt, er í þeim kvæðum finnsk um ferðir þeira eða orrostur. En þat er háttr skálda at lofa þann mest, er þá eru þeir fyrir, en engi myndi þat þora at segja sjálfum honum þau verk hans, er allir þeir, er heyrði, vissi, at hégómi væri ok skrǫk, ok svá sjálfr hann. Þat væri þá háð, en eigi lof.
>
> There were skalds at the court of King Harald [Fairhair] and people still know their poems, and the poems about all the kings who reigned in Norway later. We have taken [or 'take'] our chief support from what is said in the poems that were recited before the chieftains [rulers] themselves and their sons. We consider everything to be true that is found in those poems about their expeditions and battles. It is the custom of skalds to heap the greatest praise on the man in whose presence they find themselves, but no one would dare to recount to his very face deeds that all the listeners knew to be nonsense and fantasy, even he [the ruler] himself. That would be derision, not praise.

The prologue to the *Separate Saga of Saint Olaf* (longer version) is fuller and more probing (*Heimskringla*, II 421–22):[1]

> En síðan er Haraldr inn hárfagri var konungr í Nóregi, þá vitu menn miklu gørr sannendi at segja frá ævi konunga þeira, er í Nóregi hafa verit. Á hans dǫgum byggðisk Ísland, ok var þá mikil ferð af Nóregi til Íslands. Spurðu menn þá á hverju sumri tíðendi landa þessa í milli, ok var þat síðan í minni fœrt ok haft

[1] Elias Wessén (1928–29) concludes that *Óláfs saga helga* was written initially without a prologue. *Óláfs saga* was then expanded into *Heimskringla* with a prologue added. Finally the *Heimskringla* prologue was refashioned to serve as a prologue for the *Separate Saga of Saint Olaf*. Even with the doubts about whether *Óláfs saga helga* originally was a part of *Heimskringla*, this sequence remains possible.

> eptir til frásagna. En þó þykki mér þat merkiligast til sannenda, er berum orðum er sagt í kvæðum eða ǫðrum kveðskap, þeim er svá var ort um konunga eða aðra hǫfðingja, at þeir sjálfir heyrðu, eða í erfikvæðum þeim, er skáldin færðu sonum þeira. Þau orð, er í kveðskap standa, eru in sǫmu sem í fyrstu váru, ef rétt er kveðit, þótt hverr maðr hafi síðan numit at ǫðrum, ok má því ekki breyta. En sǫgur þær, er sagðar eru, þá er þat hætt, at eigi skilisk ǫllum á einn veg. En sumir hafa eigi minni, þá er frá líðr, hvernig þeim var sagt, ok gengsk þeim mjǫk í minni optliga, ok verða frásagnir ómerkiligar. Þat var meirr en tvau hundruð vetra tólfrœð, er Ísland var byggt, áðr menn tœki hér sǫgur at rita, ok var þat lǫng ævi ok vant, at sǫgur hefði eigi gengizk í munni, ef eigi væri kvæði, bæði ný ok forn, þau er menn tœki þar af sannendi frœðinnar. Svá hafa gǫrt fyrr frœðimenninir, þá er þeir vildu sannenda leita, at taka fyri satt þeira manna orð, er sjálfir sá tíðendi ok þá váru nær staddir. En þar er skáldin váru í orrostum, þá eru tœk vitni þeira, svá þat ok, er hann kvað fyr sjálfum hǫfðingjanum, þá myndi hann eigi þora at segja þau verk hans, er bæði sjálfr hǫfðinginn ok allir þeir, er heyrðu, vissu, at hann hefði hvergi nær verit. Þat væri þá háð, en eigi lof.
>
> But after the time Harald Fairhair ruled in Norway people are much better able to tell the truth about the lives of the kings of Norway. In his day Iceland was settled, and there was a great deal of travel from Norway to Iceland. News passed between these countries every summer and it was then committed to memory and passed along in the form of stories. But it seems to me that what is most noteworthy in terms of truthfulness is what is told in plain words in poems and poetic recitation composed about kings and other chieftains in such circumstances that they themselves heard them, or in the commemorative poems that the skalds conveyed to their sons. The words in the poems are the same as the original ones if the recitation is correct, even though each man has learned from another, because [the form] cannot be changed. But the sagas [stories] that are told are not understood the same way by everyone. Some people do not remember, as time passes, how they were told, and they often deteriorate greatly in memory, and the stories become unreliable. It was more than 240 years after Iceland was settled before people began to write sagas here; that was a long time, and [it is] unlikely that the sagas [stories] would not have deteriorated in transmission if there had not been poems, both new and old, from which people could take truthful lore. Earlier historians [Ari and Sæmundr?] bent on learning the truth were accustomed to accept as true the words of people who themselves were witnesses to the events or were near at hand. When the skalds participated in battles, their testimony is reliable, and likewise whatever the skalds recited before the chieftains themselves. [The skald] would not dare to ascribe to him deeds when both the chieftain himself and all the listeners knew that he had been nowhere in the vicinity. That would be derision, not praise.

In the second version the writer distinguishes carefully between mutable prose transmissions and poetic transmissions that are maintained word

for word. In one sentence he states that stories would have deteriorated if there had not been poems giving access to the truth. This hints at an interaction between prose and poetry; the latter could perhaps have stabilised the former, but we might wish for more detail. Did tellers of stories combine both so as to authenticate the prose, or were prose stories told and poems recited quite independently so that there were reliable and less reliable traditions in competition with each other? It is the question of independent prose stories that is at the heart of what follows.

My paper singles out six such stories and speculates on their roots in oral tradition. The supposition that they are primarily oral rests on several indications. In the first place they are not supported by skaldic stanzas and could presumably not have been extrapolated from such stanzas. In the second place they all involve Icelanders or were familiar to Icelanders who were present at the time. These Icelanders could therefore have 'committed [them] to memory and passed [them] along in the form of stories', just as the prologue to the *Separate Saga* suggests. The avenues of transmission seem quite palpable. Finally, the stories are cast in a style easily reconciled with oral telling; they are dramatically formulated and well told. That they were originally oral stories is of course only a hypothesis, and the reader may object that they could just as well be the work of a gifted writer. Such a writer's hand is probably visible in some formal speeches and to some extent in a pointed political outlook. Oral and written features are no doubt intertwined, but I will begin by focusing on the oral features in the six stories, conscious that an appropriate response would be to emphasise the authorial contribution. The purpose here is to isolate whatever points in the direction of oral transmission.

Oral transmission is admittedly difficult terrain, open only to conjecture. It has not been an important topic of discussion in *Heimskringla* studies, for the very good reason that so much of *Heimskringla* is based on known or plausibly hypothesised written sources. All of Part III can be traced to *Morkinskinna* and perhaps *Fagrskinna*. In Part I prior versions of *Haralds saga hárfagra* and *Hákonar saga góða* have been surmised. Alongside the main source, Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, a version of *Jómsvíkinga saga* and a lost **Hlaðajarla saga* have been thought to underlie *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. *Óláfs saga helga* too has its written precursors, quite likely Styrmir Kárason's version of the saga, perhaps *Fóstbræðra saga*, and certainly *Færeyinga saga* and some version of *Orkneyinga saga*. But ultimately all these texts rest on oral tradition. In addition, there are no known written sources for a number of semi-independent stories in *Óláfs saga helga*. As we will see below they

cannot have been invented from whole cloth because traces of them show up in texts that are unrelated to *Heimskringla*. The only remaining option is therefore the direct use of oral tradition. That concept covers a multitude of matters, from individual names to genealogical relations to random bits of information to memorised stanzas and finally to fully formed stories. It is this final category that I will focus on in the following pages. There can scarcely be any doubt that there were fully formed stories in Icelandic tradition because the sagas and *þættir* are full of them. After surveying the opening sequences in *Óláfs saga helga*, I will turn to six of these stories and review them in some detail in order to establish just how well formed they are and what they have in common.

The Preliminary Narrative

The 412 pages of Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson's edition of *Óláfs saga helga* include 178 full or partial stanzas, but the reader quickly observes that these are unevenly distributed.[2] The first twenty-four pages (*Heimskringla*, II 3–27) on Óláfr's early Viking adventures are so densely buttressed by stanzas from Óttarr svarti's *Hǫfuðlausn* and Sigvatr's *Víkingarvísur* that we may wonder whether the author had anything besides these skaldic sources to build on. A short transition passage on the situation in Norway, Jarl Eiríkr Hákonarson's relationship to Erlingr Skjálgsson, and his departure for England and subsequent death draws on two stanzas by Sigvatr and two others by Þórðr Kolbeinsson, but here the author seems less exclusively dependent on the stanzas; he knows about Erlingr's personal qualities, his family, his resources and even his slaves. An even shorter passage on Knútr inn ríki's conquest of England and expulsion of King Ethelred's sons draws on a half stanza by Sigvatr, but here too the author seems to have additional sources about Óláfr's alliance with Ethelred's sons and his progress in Northumbria. His return to Norway with two ships and his capture of Hákon jarl Eiríksson in Sauðungssund (pp. 35–39) are underpinned by four stanzas, three by Óttarr and one by Sigvatr. At this point, however, the stanzas are temporarily suspended to allow for a detailed narrative on how Óláfr was received at home and in eastern Norway (pp. 39–54).

The pages in question are rich in particulars and include long speeches by Óláfr, his stepfather Sigurðr sýr and the petty kings Hrœrekr and Hringr.

[2] It will be noted that I take into account the cautions formulated by Louis-Jensen 1997, Ugulen 2002 and Pires Boulhosa 2005, 6–21 and refrain from attributing *Óláfs saga helga* to Snorri Sturluson.

How would the author have known about these matters, and on what basis would he have devised the speeches? There are no indications of oral sources or any other access to this moment in Óláfr's life. Are we to believe that the author imagined a likely course of events and surmised that the occasion would have called for extended speeches? Can we go further and suppose that the long speeches, which are a special feature of *Óláfs saga helga*, are an index of invented narrative? Or should we rather suppose that some account of these events was passed down over time and became the basis of the author's written version? The question is not easily answered. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (*Heimskingla*, II xxv) was inclined to believe that the sequence was invented on the basis of what the author knew or could extrapolate about the persons involved.

We must begin by distinguishing between two sections of the narrative, one section on Óláfr's return home and his reception by his mother and stepfather (pp. 39–46) and a second section on his progress to Upplǫnd and as far north as Skaun in Þrándheimr (pp. 46–54). In the course of this march Óláfr is able to gain the submission of the central provinces. Most fully described is his meeting with the petty kings of Upplǫnd. It is Óláfr's stepfather Sigurðr who opens the meeting and to whom the chieftains respond. Hrœrekr is reluctant to accept Óláfr as king of Norway and advocates continued adherence to the Danish king, but his brother Hringr prefers a native Norwegian to a foreign king, and that view prevails. If we ask how the details of this meeting may have come down to the author of *Óláfs saga helga*, we should remind ourselves that Hrœrekr was ultimately exiled by Óláfr and ended his days in Iceland, where he would have had ample opportunity to tell an Icelandic audience his life's story. That could have nurtured an oral transmission maintained and elaborated until it was recorded in writing two hundred years later. We will see that Hrœrekr's story is preserved in even greater detail in later sections of *Óláfs saga helga*.

Such an oral source for Hrœrekr's story does not necessarily account for the vivid domestic scenes in which Óláfr is welcomed home by his mother and stepfather. Hrœrekr was not present during this sequence and would not have had first-hand information about what transpired. It should be pointed out, however, that the domestic scenes and the meeting of the petty kings are cast in the same style to the extent that both are characterised by long speeches delivered by Óláfr and Sigurðr in the first sequence and by Sigurðr, Hrœrekr and Hringr in the second sequence. The narrative is therefore all of a piece stylistically and is uniformly well told. This narrative style could of course be entirely of the author's

making, but it could also be inherited from an oral transmission originating with Hrœrekr. During the meeting of the petty kings, and perhaps later, Hrœrekr could have learned enough about Óláfr's return home to make it part of his eventual narrative in Iceland, although it seems unlikely that he would have devised the political oratory. The latter is more likely to be the author's work.[3]

The subsequent section of the narrative is a continuation of what precedes it by virtue of pursuing the story of Óláfr's conquest and unification of Norway, this time in Þrándheimr. The account is studded with no fewer than eighteen full or half stanzas, fourteen by Sigvatr, three from a *flokkr* by Bersi Skáld-Torfuson and a half stanza by Klœngr Brúsason. The preponderance of Sigvatr's verse makes it logical that this section begins with his arrival in Þrándheimr and his introduction into Óláfr's court.

What follows pertains to the completion of Óláfr's pacification of Norway, his defeat of Sveinn Hákonarson at Nesjar and Sveinn's escape and mortal illness in Sweden. Sigvatr is said to have been present in the battle; details of the action could have been extrapolated from his verse or could have been circulated as part of a prose transmission in Iceland. Certain particulars about the movements of Sveinn and his troops presumably did not originate with Sigvatr but could well have been part and parcel of Bersi Skáld-Torfuson's *flokkr*, of which only three stanzas are set down, either by inference or in a companion story. Bersi was also present at the battle and would have known about the movements in the enemy camp. In this section it is therefore hard to distinguish between genuine tradition and authorial elaboration.

There is information about Erlingr Skjálgsson not touched on in Bersi's extant stanzas, but it could have been included in stanzas no longer preserved. Even without skaldic support there was an abundance of tradition about Erlingr underlying other parts of the saga.

With the pacification of Þrándheimr Óláfr's conquest is complete, and the author turns his attention to the king's Christian mission and his territorial dispute with the Swedish king's kinsman Sveinn Hákonarson. This section is again virtually devoid of skaldic stanzas, but we will see presently that the Icelandic sources are fairly transparent. The themes of Christian mission and territorial dispute are intertwined, suggesting that the chronologically meticulous author felt confronted by two long-term

[3] On the author's responsibility for the oratory see Johnsen 1916, 515–16, 519, 537; Nordal 1920, 206; Weibull 1921, 139; Lie 1937, 90–105.

issues that could not be ordered in time. After constructing a large hall in Niðaróss and organising the court, Óláfr devotes himself to a revision of the laws, but he learns that the maintenance of Christianity leaves much to be desired in Iceland, Orkney, Shetland and the Faroe Islands. In the meantime the Swedish king Óláfr Eiríksson dispatches emissaries to collect taxes in the disputed provinces. They fall foul of King Óláfr, who has one group hanged while another group makes good its escape back to Sweden.

He then turns to the task of mending Christian observances. To begin with he sends to Iceland for Hjalti Skeggjason. At the same time he instructs the lawspeaker Skapti Þóroddsson and the other Icelanders responsible for legal questions to remove from the law those elements most contrary to Christianity. In Norway he devotes himself to extending the rule of Christianity from the coastal areas to inner Norway, where paganism remains firmly rooted. In addition he is able to bring a reluctant Erlingr Skjálgsson into line and force terms on him. Subsequently he also succeeds in imposing his rule in eastern Norway, to some extent by force.

There follow some scattered and fragmentary notes prefatory to the great confrontation between the Norwegian and Swedish rulers. Then the narrative regains its footing. The Swedish jarl Rǫgnvaldr is married to the sister of Óláfr Tryggvason, who harbours ill feeling toward the Swedish king because of his role in her brother's death. At her urging Rǫgnvaldr aligns himself with King Óláfr against his Swedish rival. With the enmity of the contending monarchs at fever pitch, the residents of the border regions between Norway and Sweden become increasingly eager for peace and appeal their case to King Óláfr's lieutenant Bjǫrn stallari. At the same time Hjalti Skeggjason arrives at Óláfr's court and becomes Bjǫrn's close companion. When Bjǫrn urges the peace mission, Óláfr somewhat vindictively puts him in command of the initiative, and Hjalti Skeggjason volunteers to accompany him. They begin by spending some time at the residence of Jarl Rǫgnvaldr, where Hjalti gets a particularly warm reception because his wife is distantly related to Rǫgnvaldr's wife. Hjalti thus becomes a central figure in the subsequent attempts to reconcile the hostile kings. Should we assume that Hjalti is the wellspring of the tradition that grew up about these events in Iceland? We must bear in mind that Hjalti was not the only potential source of information. We are told that Sigvatr also accompanied Bjǫrn (p. 92), and five of his *Austrfararvísur* are recorded. We have also been told (p. 74) that there were other Icelanders at Óláfr's court. In addition, there

were Icelanders located at the court of the Swedish king (p. 91), Gizurr svarti and Óttarr svarti. Hence there were a number of potential sources of information about the dealings between Norway and Sweden.

In this and later passages there seems to be almost enough information about Hjalti to justify our imagining a **Hjalta saga Skeggjasonar*, although no trace of such a saga exists. There may nonetheless have been a considerable tradition. The situation may put us in mind of how Haraldr harðráði's lieutenant Halldórr Snorrason returned to Iceland and instructed a young story-telling Icelander on the subject of Haraldr's Mediterranean adventures. Here too there would have been no written account before *Morkinskinna*, but people would have known a good deal about the events. The point is not, however, to focus on Hjalti as the sole source; the mention of other Icelanders both at Óláfr's court and at the court of the Swedish king suggests an extended Icelandic network. Any number of people in this network could have been important conveyors of tradition.

Like the story of Haraldr harðráði, Hjalti's story would have required no supporting stanzas, and indeed the next forty pages of the saga (pp. 95–134) record only three stanzas, all by Óttarr svarti.

Friðgerðar saga

The story of how Bjǫrn stallari, Hjalti Skeggjason and Rǫgnvaldr jarl conduct complicated and, for a long time, abortive attempts to make peace and arrange a marriage between King Óláfr and the Swedish princess Ingigerðr has been termed a '*Friðgerðar saga*'. In the critical literature it has acquired a semi-independent status and can be broken down into the following phases:

1. The farmers of Vík long for peace between Sweden and Norway and ask Bjǫrn stallari to raise the matter with King Óláfr. Óláfr responds with an ill grace and charges Bjǫrn with the mission to Sweden for good or for ill. Hjalti joins him.

2. During a sojourn with Rǫgnvaldr jarl, Hjalti travels ahead to the Swedish court to test the waters. The Swedish king rejects any talk of peace.

3. Hjalti and Princess Ingigerðr meet with Rǫgnvaldr and discuss the possibility of her marriage to Óláfr. Rǫgnvaldr relays the plan to the Swedish king, who angrily rejects it.

4. The Uppsala lawman Þorgnýr, to whom Rǫgnvaldr has already appealed, now intercedes and undertakes to support peace at the Uppsala

assembly. Under pressure from Þorgnýr and public opinion, the Swedish king accedes but fails to carry out his commitment.

5. A cutting remark by his daughter Ingigerðr causes the Swedish king to cancel the marriage plan and marry his daughter instead to King Jarizleifr (Yaroslav) in Russia. The Norwegians decide not to retaliate.

6. Hjalti, having done what he can, returns to Iceland (p. 128). Sigvatr then assumes his role and is sent to Rǫgnvaldr to test the jarl's loyalty. The Swedish king's second, illegitimate, daughter Ástríðr visits at the same time, and new marriage plans are forged. With Rǫgnvaldr's collusion she is married to King Óláfr.

7. The West Gautlanders, caught between the Swedish and Norwegian kings, assemble to discuss their plight. They dispatch the wise Emundr af Skǫrum to lay the case before the Swedish king. Emundr tells metaphorical stories which, after his departure, the king's councillors unravel to the effect that the Swedes are about to rebel and that he should make peace. On the point of losing his throne, the Swedish king acquiesces.

This section of the saga has been a particular focus of research, perhaps because the Swedish scene of much of the action has attracted Swedish as well as Norwegian scholars. The special analysis began in 1916 with Oscar Albert Johnsen and Birger Nerman and may be considered to have culminated in Otto von Friesen's very detailed study in 1942.[4] Johnsen emphasised the role of Hjalti Skeggjason as the ultimate source for much of the narrative, but he also allowed for Snorri's having collected Swedish lore during his visit of 1218–20. '*Friðgerðar saga*' subsequently passed through the wringer of Weibullian criticism with the result that only the skaldic stanzas were credited with a residue of history (Weibull 1921, 116–48; Moberg 1941, 88–147). As a consequence, von Friesen began his study in 1942 with a meticulous review of Sigvatr's stanzas, but he also argued that those parts of the narrative not dependent on skaldic authority have some historical basis and should not be considered Snorri's invention, as some previous critics had held. His arguments are compelling.

Von Friesen levels his criticism in particular against those who concluded that the stories of Þorgnýr and Emundr were Snorri's fictions (1942, 252 and 266).[5] They may well have been elaborated and

[4] See also Beckman 1918, 1922, 1934 and Jón Jónsson 1918.

[5] See also Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson in *Heimskringla*, II xxxvi, xxxix. More recently Sverre Bagge acknowledges oral sources (1991, 239–40) but also believes that some of the stories are Snorri's invention (1991, 108, 279 n. 34).

fictionalised in the course of oral transmission, but, he argues, they are nonetheless the residue of historical traditions. Von Friesen leaves latitude for Hjalti Skeggjason's role as a source for what he calls 'the first act' of the peace negotiations (1942, 244), but Hjalti is no longer as central as he was in Oscar Albert Johnsen's discussion. Indeed, we may observe that Hjalti is a possible source only for parts 1–3 in the synopsis above, not for parts 4–7. We have also seen that there were other Icelanders both in Norway and Sweden; they too could have contributed to the formation of the story.

Sigvatr himself, who seems to have been present at the moment when Ástríðr's marriage to Óláfr was conceived, may have had a more central part in the formulation of the story as a whole than Hjalti. Perhaps we should think of Sigvatr not just as the author of the relevant stanzas but also as a creator of the prose narrative underlying this part of *Óláfs saga helga*.

It is not just the existence of prose narrative that is of interest but the form as well. Both the story of Þorgnýr and the story of Emundr are narrative highpoints in '*Friðgerðar saga*'. Should we imagine, as Johnsen seems to have done (1916, 529, 534–35), that two stray remnants of Swedish lore were converted into particularly brilliant narratives about two wise and authoritative councillors, spokesmen for the people who protected the public weal and saved the king from himself? It seems more likely that they are part of the same narrative concept, twin pillars in one and the same story. If so, '*Friðgerðar saga*' should be considered as a narrative whole, rooted in a rather extended tradition but of course recast and supplemented, especially with oratory, by the author of *Óláfs saga helga*.

The two stories function in tandem, both celebrating the triumph of diplomacy and negotiation. As we have seen, the background is that the farmers of Vík wish to foster peace and urge Bjǫrn stallari to undertake the mission. The Norwegian king is unenthusiastic but agrees to dispatch Bjǫrn at his own risk; Hjalti Skeggjason in turn agrees to accompany him. They take up winter residence with the Swedish jarl Rǫgnvaldr, and Hjalti sets out for the Swedish court in advance. Having ingratiated himself with the king, he raises the topic of peace and the marriage of the king's daughter Ingigerðr to Óláfr of Norway. The Swedish king rejects the project out of hand, but Hjalti is able to engage Ingigerðr's interest. After some account of the Norwegian king's pacification of his eastern realm and some general information on the political divisions and institutions of Sweden the story begins in earnest.

Ingigerðr and Hjalti dispatch messengers to Rǫgnvaldr to let him know that prospects for peace are very dim. Rǫgnvaldr arranges to meet with them in a neutral place, and they come to terms on the marriage project. Rǫgnvaldr now visits his wise old foster father, the lawman Þorgnýr, and decries the difficulties involved in dealing with the Swedish king. Þorgnýr lectures him rather patronisingly on free speech for commoners in the presence of the king, but he agrees to lend his assistance at the Uppsala assembly. Here the scene is set, especially with respect to the impressive attendance of the farmers. Bjǫrn stallari delivers a proposal for peace, only to be silenced by the outraged Swedish king. Jarl Rǫgnvaldr then tries his luck with the marriage proposal, but is rebuked no less severely than Bjǫrn. Now the epic third act is staged, and Þorgnýr rises to say his piece. The scene takes on imposing dimensions as all the farmers stand in unison, creating a great tumult in their eagerness to hear Þorgnýr's words (Lie 1937, 11).

When order is restored, Þorgnýr launches into a great address of thirty-three lines, placing the present king in an unfavourable historical light compared to earlier kings and making a clear demand for peace and a marriage alliance. Þorgnýr thus vindicates free speech in the presence of the king in the most uncompromising way. Indeed, he concludes his speech with an outright threat that the farmers will attack and kill the king rather than suffer hostility and lawlessness. The farmers respond with another enthusiastic outburst, and the king is forced to relent and concede the power of public opinion. He agrees to both peace and marriage, allowing Bjǫrn to return to Norway and announce the success of his mission.

This tale is not as adventurous or action-packed as several others, but like all the stories under study here it is artistically and dramatically shaped. It also has in common with the others that it is free standing and has no support in skaldic verse. In some of these instances there is a fairly prolonged narrative, but Þorgnýr makes only one appearance. There is, however, a certain thematic consistency about the stories; they all dwell on the limits of royal power. Óláfr of Norway must confront unsuspected opposition, while Óláfr of Sweden must acknowledge the power of the people and the power of historical precedent.

The same theme recurs in the second isolable story of '*Friðgerðar saga*'. It is occasioned by King Óláfr's refusal to abide by his promise to make peace and his decision to marry his daughter Ingigerðr to King Jarizleifr (Yaroslav) of Russia instead of King Óláfr Haraldsson. Using Sigvatr and a nephew of Sigvatr's as intermediaries, King Óláfr and

Rǫgnvaldr then plan to contract a marriage between Óláfr and the Swedish king's second daughter Ástríðr, without her father's consent. The people of West Gautland consequently worry about their imperilled relationship with the Swedish king in Uppsala and resolve to mend fences. They appeal to the lawman Emundr af Skǫrum, who undertakes the mission and presents himself before the king. Asked what news he brings, Emundr launches into two seemingly trivial and irrelevant anecdotes. The first is about a great hunter who goes out into the forest and collects a large number of pelts, but at the last moment he sees one more squirrel darting among the trees. He sets out in pursuit and persists all day long without bringing the squirrel down. When he finally returns to his original location, the sled full of pelts has disappeared and he is left with nothing.

The second story is about a raider who comes upon five Danish merchantmen loaded with rich booty. He captures four of them, but the fifth escapes. Unable to bear the loss, he pursues the elusive vessel without success and ultimately returns only to find that the other four have been recaptured. He too ends up empty-handed. When the king interrupts Emundr to ask what his business is, he fabricates a legal case in need of resolution. Two men, equal in birth but unequal in wealth and disposition, quarrel over land. The wealthier of the two is found liable, but he pays over a gosling for a goose, a young pig for a mature boar, and, in lieu of a mark of refined gold, only a half mark, the other half being composed of clay and earth. On top of that he utters dire threats. Emundr then asks for the king's judgment, and the king determines that the man who is liable shall make full payment or be subject to outlawry. Emundr thanks him and departs, leaving the court in secret.

The next day the king begins to ponder Emundr's stories with his counsellors. He surmises that the two men who quarrel over land are to be understood as the Norwegian and Swedish kings, but he quizzes the counsellors on what the forms of payment might mean. They explain that the Norwegian king got the illegitimate princess Ástríðr instead of the legitimate Ingigerðr (a gosling for a goose, etc.) and was nonetheless content with his lot. They go on to explain that the Swedes will rebel if Óláfr does not abide by his agreement to make peace. The king grasps the situation and submits; at a law assembly the gathered delegates work out a compromise according to which Óláfr and his son Jákob (later called Qnundr) will rule jointly until Óláfr's death. This opens the way for a final peaceful resolution of the conflict between the Norwegian and Swedish kings.

Like the other stories we will explore, the anecdotes involving Þorgnýr and Emundr are straight prose narratives not underpinned by stanzas. Þorgnýr's role may be traceable to Hjalti Skeggjason, but by the time Emundr comes onto the scene, Hjalti has returned to Iceland. We are told that Sigvatr and his nephew are complicit in the marriage of Ástríðr to Óláfr Haraldsson, and perhaps uncle and nephew were the original mediators of the tradition about the final settlement of the conflict. Or there may have been other Icelanders at the Swedish court who were in a position to transmit the tale. In other words, it is perfectly possible that there is a kernel of tradition in the story of Emundr. On the other hand, the narrative is so intricately political and diplomatic that it may have been concocted by a politically minded writer in retrospect. It is not an action story, like some of the others we will review, but a drama of words and metaphors, more a literary than a narrative exercise. It does, however, have in common with all the stories surveyed here that it is about the parameters of royal power and the price of autocracy.

The Story of Hrœrekr

In general terms, everything in *Óláfs saga helga* is a story, but the tale of Hrœrekr, which is inserted between the tales of Þorgnýr and Emundr, is a story in a narrower sense. It is not an essential part of the biography of Saint Óláfr but tangential to it. All the reader really needs to know is that Hrœrekr is one of the five kings Óláfr captured in a single morning; that much is integral to the account of how Óláfr subjected Norway to his rule. But the author goes on to tell the whole of Hrœrekr's story down to his dying day, a narrative that in its final phases has no relevance to Óláfr. It is a private history, not part of the public record with which a royal biography is normally concerned. Nor is it authenticated by any skaldic stanzas, which are the mark of the public record. It is a sort of king's saga within a king's saga, since it recapitulates much of Hrœrekr's life.

Stylistically, the story has much in common with the Icelandic *þættir*, being of limited scope but rich in deceptively mundane detail with unsuspected implications and resonances.[6] It also shares with many of

[6] Þórleifr Jónsson included in his *Fjörutíu Íslendinga-þættir* the story of Steinn Skaptason (1904, 311–22) and a composite version of 'Þórarins þáttr Nefjólfssonar' (344–63), but not the others. Some of the texts he would have excluded because they are not '*Íslendinga þættir*', but it is not clear why he excluded the tale of Þóroddr Snorrason. None of the *þættir* discussed here was included in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* (1997), perhaps from a reluctance to dismember the unity of *Óláfs saga helga*.

the *þættir*, and many of the embedded Icelandic stories in general, the theme of wit triumphant. Hrœrekr's case is particularly pointed because the contestants are so unevenly matched. How likely is it that a helpless blind captive will get the better of his captor king? And yet Hrœrekr, blinded after his capture and kept under close guard, very nearly does. That is the gist of the plot and the element that binds the episodes together. Hrœrekr's ingenuity and his psychological discipline are a match even for Óláfr's redoubtable intelligence. But in good saga style, one antagonist is not exalted at the expense of the other; we may think more of Hrœrekr without thinking less of Óláfr.

It is also a concomitant of saga style that the portraits, however brief, are deftly drawn. Óláfr is described elsewhere as being self-contained and not given to overreaction, but nowhere are these qualities so vividly rendered as in this story. The king understands that among the petty kings Hrœrekr is the greatest threat and therefore has him cruelly disabled, but once this measure has been taken, Hrœrekr is well provided for and is the beneficiary of considerable patience. At one point Óláfr's retainers urge him to execute his captive, but Óláfr is proud of his bloodless victory over five petty kings and is reluctant to kill a kinsman. The portrait is one of a decisive but, within the bounds of autocracy, a moderate ruler. The king's character is not compromised by Hrœrekr's extraordinary cunning.

The story of his cunning is briefly as follows. After his blinding, Óláfr assigns a servant to accompany him wherever he goes, but Hrœrekr regularly beats his companion until the man finds it prudent to abandon the task assigned him. The pattern repeats itself with a series of servants, all of whom depart to save themselves. Finally a servant is appointed who is Hrœrekr's kinsman and lets himself be persuaded to make an attempt on Óláfr's life. At the last moment, however, the assassin loses his nerve and throws himself at Óláfr's feet with a plea for mercy.

Óláfr now assigns two loyal retainers to take over the guard duty and supervise Hrœrekr in a separate residence. Since he has an ample supply of money, he makes it a habit to regale his companions with abundant drink. Among these companions is a long-standing servant named Fiðr (Finnr), with whom Hrœrekr holds secret converse. One night Hrœrekr lulls everyone to sleep with drink, then calls his guards to accompany him to the latrine. The guards are cut down by men who have been summoned by Fiðr and who now abduct Hrœrekr in a boat. Sigvatr becomes aware of the escape and awakens King Óláfr so that he can organise a search party. The searchers are able to recapture Hrœrekr, and

he is placed under tighter guard than ever. Having failed to enlist successful intermediaries, Hrœrekr now takes matters into his own hands. During a church service he sits next to Óláfr and tries to plunge a knife into his back, but Óláfr's cloak deflects the blow.

The final act of the story is connected with an anecdote about the Icelander Þórarinn Nefjólfsson, who is resident with King Óláfr. One morning Óláfr sees Þórarinn's foot protruding from his bedclothes and comments that it must be the ugliest foot in town; in fact he is willing to make a wager that this is so. Þórarinn accepts the wager and uncovers his other foot, which he claims is uglier than the first because it is missing the big toe. Óláfr counters that the first foot is uglier because it has five ugly toes, not just four. Þórarinn accedes and Óláfr wins the bet. That allows him to make a demand, and he duly requests that Þórarinn transport Hrœrekr to Greenland. The upshot of the story is that Hrœrekr winds up in Iceland, where he stays first with Þorgils Arason and then with Guðmundr inn ríki Eyjólfsson.

The story is both lively and humorous; we are led to ponder whether and how Hrœrekr will outwit Óláfr despite his apparent helplessness. The contrivances emerge gradually, as in the case of the loyal helper Fiðr. The scenes of nocturnal escape and attempted assassination in the church are teased out in vivid detail, and Þórarinn Nefjólfsson has an enduring place in the Icelandic repertory of funny stories. If we ask ourselves how such a tradition originated and was transmitted, three candidates suggest themselves: Hrœrekr, Sigvatr (who discovers Hrœrekr's escape), and Þórarinn Nefjólfsson. As in the case of Hjalti Skeggjason, we should not necessarily assume that a particular individual was the original teller. There may have been no such thing as an 'original teller' but rather an accumulation of anecdotes worked together and evolving over time. It is probably simplistic to assume that only one teller is responsible for the narrative form, and perhaps no less simplistic to assume that all the narrative niceties are the property of the final author. More attractive is the idea that the narrative was forged gradually and came to the author as a full-fledged story.

The theme that runs through all the incidents is Hrœrekr's resourcefulness, which develops along the lines of a prison escape drama. Hrœrekr is not only impressively patient and persistent but also a master of deception. The nature of his character is to counterfeit character. We may wonder why at some times he cultivates a harsh manner while at other times he turns cheerful and extroverted. There appears to be no specific reason other than to mask his true designs under assumed moods. Hrœrekr

makes a point of never being his true self and is therefore always inaccessible to the observer. His strategy is to have no ascertainable character, so that he is enabled to operate in complete secrecy.

Even the minor players on this stage have character. Sigvatr, as in the well-known scene in which he confers the name Magnús on the king's son, circumvents Óláfr's dislike of being awakened by having the church bells rung prematurely. He too is a man of many remedies. Hrœrekr's kinsman Sveinn is willing enough to help in the mission of vengeance, but unlike the other characters in the story he does not have the requisite discipline, and his character collapses at the sight of Óláfr's penetrating eyes. He is impressionable and succumbs easily to Hrœrekr's flattering recruitment, reinforced by the transparently false promise of a jarldom, but he is deluded when he believes that he can execute the plan. He is in fact a foil to Hrœrekr's other helper Fiðr, who is as swift of wit as he is afoot. We learn nothing about him because he operates completely behind the scenes, but that is his strength and the secret of his success.

The personal style of these characters matches the narrative style of the story as a whole. It is one of the characteristics of the sagas that the meaning of the action is not always transparent, or is not revealed until a later point in the story. We do not know at the outset what Hrœrekr is planning, and we cannot readily interpret his actions. This is the narrative strategy that Hallvard Lie labelled *diskresjon* in his elegant book on the style of *Heimskringla* (Lie 1937, 36–52). *Diskresjon* might be rendered freely by 'contrived reticence' in English; as in the modern mystery story, the writer does not for the time being tell the readers what they really need to know. Thus we are not told why Hrœrekr takes the companions provided by the king off to deserted places to beat them; he could presumably beat them closer to home. The reason seems to be that he is already planning to have in the long run a more collaborative companion. If people are accustomed to his wandering off to a distance, he will then be enabled to communicate in secret with this eventual comrade in arms.

Similarly veiled is Hrœrekr's second attempt on Óláfr's life. He sits next to the king in church and feels the back of his cloak. He accounts for this gesture by admiring the fine silken material, but by now we know that if Hrœrekr alleges an explanation, it is probably not the true one. The real explanation does not in fact emerge until the end of the story, when the writer reveals that Hrœrekr felt the cloak in order to ascertain whether Óláfr was wearing a byrnie. A feature that elaborates the cloak

metaphorically and ironically is the hood. Óláfr is the actor with the unobscured countenance, whereas Hrœrekr is doubly hooded by virtue of being both blind and deceitful. As he stabs Óláfr, the hood falls back, giving the king an extra layer of protection; thus the open countenance survives and the truly hooded antagonist is discountenanced. Hooding and unhooding sum up the story.

The composition of the tale is no less finely wrought than its characterisation and style. Almost mannered is the threefold repetition of Hrœrekr's machinations, two attempts on Óláfr's's life and a foiled escape. The action is insistently retarded by Hrœrekr's repeated mistreatment of his companions and Fiðr's mysterious dodging in and out of the action, only to disappear once and for all at the end of the failed escape. The dialogue is not honed to the point of repartee and is usually limited to a single exchange between two speakers, but the phrasing is crisply formulated. For example, when Sigvatr returns from the latrine with blood on his clothing, there is the following exchange with his attendant (p. 122):

> 'Hefir þú skeint þik, eða hví ertu í blóði einu allr?' Hann svarar: 'Ekki em ek skeindr, en þó mun þetta tíðendum gegna.'
>
> 'Have you hurt yourself, or why are you covered with blood?' He answered: 'I am not hurt, but I think this signals big news.'

It is the big news that stands to be revealed.

At one point the retardative telling shades into a commonplace pattern that is both opaque and transparent. In one of his expansive moods Hrœrekr provides a great abundance of drink so that his companions fall into a sodden sleep. On the one hand we do not, strictly speaking, know what this drinking portends, but on the other hand we are sufficiently familiar with the intoxication of gaolers in Norse literature to suspect immediately that an escape is in the offing. Thus the episode both leaves the reader wondering what will happen next and at the same time clearly suggests a sequel and propels the story forward. For the moment we may simply note that this tale is particularly well told, but we must return to the problem of how it originated and how it was passed down to the thirteenth century in our conclusions.

The Story of Ásbjǫrn Sigurðarson

The patchwork nature of *Óláfs saga helga* emerges with particular clarity in the transition from the dramatic stories of Þorgnýr, Emundr and Hrœrekr to the somewhat tangled chronicle style of King Óláfr's first

dealings with Orkney. The author begins with a brief historical preface on Orkney and then focuses on the contentions among the brothers Einarr, Brúsi and Þorfinnr Sigurðarsynir over the domination of the islands. The contentiousness is such that first Brúsi and then Þorfinnr appeal to King Óláfr; these appeals allow the king to drive a wedge between the contenders and claim the islands for himself, with the jarls now subordinate to him. The source for this little chronicle is a version of some part of *Orkneyinga saga*, although it is difficult to know exactly what this version contained and what the author of *Óláfs saga helga* adjusted (Nordal 1913, 36–49; esp. 40–41). The style is, however, clearly determined by the written source, not by the sort of oral story that underlies the preceding narrative. The contrast between chronicle style, of which *Orkneyinga saga* is an almost notorious example, and story style is well illustrated by these passages.

The following narrative shows a similar division of labour between chronicle and story style. It gives an account of how Óláfr extended his authority into northern Norway, a region no less remote than the Orkney Islands. Like the previous section, this one begins with a capsule history, this time of Hálogaland and how Hárekr, the son of Eyvindr skáldaspillir, establishes himself in Þjótta as the most powerful chieftain in the region. Óláfr is concerned with the quality of Christianity in the north and imposes his religion all along the coast to Hálogaland. He also begins to form personal connections, gaining the service of Hárekr, Grankell and his son Ásmundr, and Þórir hundr on Bjarkey.

Having completed his mission in the north, Óláfr turns his attention to rumours of heathen practices in inner Þrándheimr. When verbal admonitions fail, he mounts a punitive expedition to enforce Christianity. At the same time he continues to build his personal network and makes a fast friendship with two sons of Árni Armóðsson, Kálfr and Finnr. He then prosecutes the Christian mission in Upplǫnd, Guðbrandsdalar, Heiðmǫrk, Haðaland, Hringaríki and Raumaríki. Most of this narrative remains at the informational level, but the story of the conversion of Dala-Guðbrandr is detailed and finely crafted. It is also a self-contained narrative and is found in the *Legendary Saga* in almost identical form. The common assumption is that it was composed as a separate entity and was interpolated into both the *Legendary Saga* and *Óláfs saga helga*. There is no indication of what the ultimate source of the story might be, and there is disagreement about whether it was composed in Iceland or Norway. Since there are no signs of an oral source, and since the story is constructed on the literary model of the so-called thaumaturgic duel, it

seems quite likely to be an authorial invention, but it also appears to predate the *Heimskringla* author (Andersson 1988).

The point of departure for our next semi-independent story is a famine in northern Norway. Óláfr seeks to protect the south by forbidding the export of grain from Agðir, Rogaland and Hǫrðaland. The political situation in southwestern Norway is that Erlingr Skjálgsson controls a very large territory, but his domination is threatened when Óláfr installs a certain Áslákr fitjaskalli (Erlingr's first cousin once removed) in this territory and therefore gives rise to frictions in the contested area. Áslákr appeals to Óláfr, who calls Erlingr to account, but mutual friends are able to smooth matters over and leave Erlingr with his authority undiminished.

This is the background for what is perhaps the most polished, as well as the most politically loaded, story in *Óláfs saga helga*, the story of Ásbjǫrn Sigurðarson. He is resident in Hálogaland on the Lofoten Islands and is at the very centre of the later tensions between King Óláfr and the great western chieftains of Norway. On his father's side he is the nephew of Þórir hundr, who is destined to desert to King Knútr and oppose Óláfr at Stiklarstaðir; on his mother's side he is the nephew of Erlingr Skjálgsson, whose death in a naval encounter will signal the king's downfall. Ásbjǫrn's story is therefore in some sense the preface to Óláfr's demise at the hands of his chief antagonists (Bagge 1991, 41).

Ásbjǫrn falls heir to his father's high status on the island of Ǫmð and is eager to maintain his father's level of feasting and hospitality, but Hálogaland is afflicted by harvest failures and a shortage of grain. Ásbjǫrn therefore travels south to purchase the needed supplies and stops at Ǫgvaldsnes on Kǫrmt, a residence in the hands of Óláfr's steward Sel-Þórir. Þórir informs him that the king has forbidden the export of grain to the north and therefore declines to put up any of his own supplies for sale. Ásbjǫrn continues his journey to the residence of his uncle Erlingr Skjálgsson at Sóli. Erlingr evades the king's prohibition by allowing Ásbjǫrn to purchase grain from slaves who stand outside the king's law. On his return north Ásbjǫrn again visits Sel-Þórir, and when Þórir learns of the subterfuge, he enforces the king's prohibition not only by confiscating the cargo of grain but by seizing Ásbjǫrn's fine sail in addition, substituting a badly worn one in its place. As a consequence Ásbjǫrn must return home empty-handed and disgraced. Once at home he must also suffer the barbs of his uncle Þórir.

Stung by this reception, Ásbjǫrn undertakes a second voyage and lands secretly on the uninhabited outer edge of Kǫrmt. From here he

proceeds in disguise to Ǫgvaldsnes, where there is a large gathering in honour of a visit by King Óláfr. In an outer chamber he overhears Sel-Þórir in the main hall recounting the story of his disgrace. Undeterred by the formal occasion, he rushes into the hall and lops off Þórir's head so that it falls at the very feet of the king. Óláfr orders that he be seized and executed, but the son of Erlingr Skjálgsson, Skjálgr, intercedes and pleads for mercy. The king is too furious to be placated, leaving Skjálgr to return home with an appeal to his father. In the meantime, Skjálgr leaves word with Þórarinn Nefjólfsson to delay the execution until the following Sunday.

Þórarinn devises three successive ruses (reminiscent of the epic triads in the stories of Hrœrekr and Emundr af Skǫrum) to prolong Ásbjǫrn's life. On Sunday Erlingr Skjálgsson appears in due course with a force of nearly 1500 (1800) men to confront the king. The bishop is able to defuse the situation and salvage a compromise, with the stipulation that Ásbjǫrn is to assume Sel-Þórir's position as the king's steward at Ǫgvaldsnes. When Ásbjǫrn returns home to settle his affairs, however, Þórir hundr persuades him not to become the king's 'slave' and he remains on his estate on Ǫmð.

This story once again shares features we observed in the earlier ones. It is told as an independent narrative without recourse to skaldic authority. It is laced with wit and high drama, and there is a clear indication of how it found its way into Icelandic tradition, that is, through the central role in Ásbjǫrn's survival allotted to the same Þórarinn Nefjólfsson who must have contributed to the story of Hrœrekr. Finally, it fixes the limits of royal authority. In this case it illustrates the discountenancing of a king by the hereditary aristocracy.

Other Semi-Independent Stories

The first of the remaining three stories conveys the same theme. It is organised around a certain Karli í Langey (another island in the Lofoten chain) and his brother Gunnsteinn, who take service with King Óláfr. The king undertakes a commercial venture with them, in which they will be equal partners, although the actual voyage will fall to the lot of Karli and his brother. The destination is Bjarmaland (Permia), but on the way Þórir hundr offers himself as an additional partner. The arrangement is that both Karli and Þórir will rendezvous with twenty-five men apiece, but Þórir appears at the meeting place with a very large ship and a crew of eighty men. Karli and Gunnsteinn are apprehensive about his intentions, but they are unwilling to turn back and therefore proceed to

Bjarmaland substantially outnumbered. At first they engage in profitable trade with the natives, but at the conclusion of these dealings they decide to try their luck with a raid on the sacred precinct of the god Jómali. Þórir stipulates that the idol of the god not be plundered, but he breaks the prohibition himself and seizes a bowl of silver coins from the very lap of the god. Karli then follows suit and cuts a gold torque from the god's neck. In the meantime the natives raise the alarm, and the Norsemen narrowly escape their pursuit as they retreat to their ships.

When the raiders are once more able to assemble, Þórir demands the torque carried off by Karli and insists that the booty be shared out on the spot. Karli replies that half the booty belongs to Óláfr and that Þórir must negotiate the division with him. Þórir turns away to leave, but then calls Karli to follow him and runs a spear through his chest. Gunnsteinn recovers the body and escapes, but Þórir eventually catches up with him, seizes all the booty and sinks his ship. Gunnsteinn must make his way back to Óláfr's court as best he can.

The story of Karli and Gunnsteinn is now suspended for some fifteen pages while the author turns to other matters: Óláfr's alliance with King Ǫnundr of Sweden, his dealings with the Faroe Islands, his detention of several high-profile Icelanders at his court, his claims on Helsingjaland and Jamtaland, and the escape of one of the Icelandic detainees. At this point the author reverts, without warning, to the story of Karli and Gunnsteinn. The sequel is not only unexpected but managed in an interestingly opaque way. Óláfr summons Finnr Árnason and reveals a plan to raise troops throughout Norway for a campaign against King Knútr. We will come to realise that this is only a pretext and that the real plan is to avenge the slaying of Karli, but that aim is nowhere stated; we can only extrapolate it from the action.

In the meantime Finnr sets out to recruit forces in Hálogaland. When they have all assembled and been inspected, Finnr rises and confronts Þórir hundr with his slaying of Karli and seizure of King Óláfr's booty from Bjarmaland. Þórir finds himself surrounded by overwhelming odds and must yield to Finnr's demand that he pay over thirty gold marks in compensation immediately. Þórir asks for time to borrow the money from his followers, then pays it out in ever decreasing amounts, procrastinating more and more as the day wears on and the assembled forces begin to disperse. Having paid only a fraction of what is owed, he promises the balance at a later date, but as soon as the coast is clear, he sails off to England with his ill-gotten gains largely intact in order to join King Knútr. Finnr returns to Óláfr's court and voices the opinion that

Þórir has evaded them and is destined to be a bitter enemy, as indeed the saga will bear out.

This story, like the others, includes no skaldic stanzas and must have survived the generations in prose. There are no identified Icelandic witnesses to transmit the lively scenes in Bjarmaland and Hálogaland, but we should bear in mind that in the intermission between the two parts of the story King Óláfr detained notable Icelanders who would have been on hand to hear the reports brought to court by Gunnsteinn and Finnr Árnason. They were therefore in a position to provide the original formulation of the events. The story as it eventually emerged is also analogous to the others reviewed above in the sense that it illustrates the fragility of royal power. King Óláfr is plundered by Þórir hundr and has his retainer Karli killed with impunity, with no recourse but to accept his defeat. There is indeed a considerable irony in his dispatching of Finnr Árnason to raise troops for an alleged campaign against King Knútr, only to have Þórir hundr desert to Knútr's cause with a substantial share of Óláfr's money.

Even before this story is completed, a new one is broached, the evasion of Steinn Skaptason from Óláfr's court. Steinn is one of the king's Icelandic detainees and, along with his countryman Þóroddr Snorrason, he is very vexed with his lot in captivity. He is not guarded in his pronouncements about the king, and the two of them have a less than friendly exchange. One night Steinn departs without leave for Gaulardalr, where he takes lodging with Óláfr's steward Þorgeirr. Þorgeirr becomes suspicious about his licence to be absent from court, and their confrontation ends in Þorgeirr's death. Steinn then goes on to Gizki in Súrnadalr, the residence of Þorbergr Árnason. Þorbergr is away, but his wife Ragnhildr, who is the daughter of Erlingr Skjálgsson, welcomes him with open arms as an old acquaintance. He had once visited her when she was about to give birth and found herself without a priest to perform the baptism. Steinn had procured an Icelandic priest named Bárðr or Brandr, and there is an interestingly detailed account of the baptism. Steinn becomes the godfather and earns Ragnhildr's fast friendship.

Steinn now calls on her friendship and she commits her full support. When her husband returns home, she appeals for his help, but he knows that Óláfr is in high dudgeon and has already outlawed Steinn. He is unwilling to risk the king's anger and orders her to send Steinn on his way, but she counters that if Steinn leaves, she too will leave, something of a frayed commonplace in the depiction of strong women in the Icelandic sagas. The upshot is that Steinn is allowed to stay during the winter.

In the meantime, Óláfr commands Þorbergr to appear before him. Þorbergr appeals to his brothers Finnr and Árni for help, but they show no sympathy, and the meetings end with hard words. Þorbergr next sends for his brother Kálfr, while Ragnhildr sends for help from her father. Finnr and Árni use the time to reconsider their positions and, together with two of Ragnhildr's brothers dispatched by Erlingr, they man large ships. Kálfr and Ragnhildr's brothers are prepared to attack and let fortune take its course, but Þorbergr prefers to give conciliation a chance. A tense negotiation with the king ends with the swearing of oaths of loyalty by Árni, Finnr and Þorbergr, while Kálfr refuses and maintains his full independence. Þorbergr also asks for reconciliation on Steinn's behalf, and the king allows him to go in peace with the stipulation that he not return to his court. Steinn then makes his way to England to join King Knútr, like Þórir hundr before him.

This story is curiously bifocal. On the one hand it is the story of Steinn's escape from his unwelcome captivity, and that tale would surely have lived on among Steinn's descendants. On the other hand, it is also a peculiarly Norwegian story of how tensions arose between King Óláfr and the Árnasynir. There is no particular reason for that story to have been transmitted in Iceland, and we may suspect that the author is making adroit use of an isolated Icelandic tradition to construct a version of the disaffection that led to Óláfr's downfall. He knew that Steinn had a special relationship with Þorbergr Árnason's wife (and Erlingr Skjálgsson's daughter) and deduced from that tale a personal friction between King Óláfr and the Árnasynir. The other possibility is that the dissension between the Árnasynir and the king could have been maintained in Icelandic tradition just as the personal dealings of Óláfr and Hrœrekr were maintained even though they had no immediate relevance to Iceland and no skaldic warrant.

Whichever option we choose, we may observe the same political thrust as in the previous stories. Steinn escapes Óláfr's clutches despite his killing of the king's steward, and Þorbergr, by dint of having a forceful wife and powerful in-laws, escapes the king's authority even though he has harboured the king's outlaw. The thrust is therefore quite in line with the message we find in many *þættir*, in which the commoner emerges as the moral victor while the king must be satisfied to be a little wiser.

The last of the interlarded stories we will look at is the story of Arnljótr gellini, a bandit with a heart of gold who later returns to the narrative to join the service of King Óláfr at the Battle of Stiklarstaðir. It is the most

supernatural of the tales included in the saga to the extent that it is a variant of the Grendel story (Stitt 1992, 197). The focus of the narrative is the departure of the second of the malcontents among Óláfr's Icelandic hostages, Þóroddr Snorrason, and the author reminds us, in words similar to the ones used in the case of Steinn, that Þóroddr chafes in his captivity. He therefore volunteers for a dangerous mission in Jamtaland for no other reason than to be at liberty. Once in Jamtaland, he consults with a lawman named Þórarr, who in turn convenes a general assembly. Here it is decided not to become subservient to King Óláfr and to hold his messenger in captivity awaiting the judgment of the Swedish king. Þóroddr thus exchanges one captivity for another.

One evening, when men have drunk deeply, one of the Jamtar lets slip the supposition that the Swedish king will have the Norwegian messengers executed. Þóroddr takes the hint and makes good his escape, but he is recaptured and held under still tighter guard. An excess of drink once more puts the captors off their guard and allows Þóroddr and his companions to escape a second time. They take refuge with a man named Þórir and his wife in a small cottage. During the night a huge man in elegant clothes arrives; this is Arnljótr gellini, with whose name Þóroddr is familiar. He proposes to lead the escapees to safety, but they cannot keep pace and are invited to stand on his extra-long skis while he covers the ground at a great rate of speed. In due course they come to an inn and prepare to sleep in the loft. At the same time twelve traders arrive and, after some revelry, lie down to sleep below. At this moment a great troll woman arrives, makes short work of the traders, and puts them on the fire to roast.

Arnljótr now intervenes and is able to run his great spear through the troll's back; she escapes out the door, with the spear projecting, at the same time leaving considerable wreckage behind her. Þóroddr and his companions now part with Arnljótr, who sends his greetings to King Óláfr and goes in search of his spear. Þóroddr finds his way back to King Óláfr and delivers the greetings, which the king receives with a good grace, regretting only that he has not made the acquaintance of such an outstanding man. After spending the winter with Óláfr, Þóroddr gets permission to return to Iceland.

This story exceeds the others in improbability but shares with them the lack of skaldic documentation. Whether it was Þóroddr who had the effrontery to splice his adventure with a folktale or whether subsequent tradition elaborated the tale in this way, we cannot know, but the narrative as we have it represents the furthest stretch of imagination in the

saga.[7] It is perhaps the clearest example of a story that can be lifted out of the surrounding narrative without leaving a noticeable gap. The author seems to have indulged himself just this once in story for the sake of story.

But what is the point of the story? Like Steinn Skaptason, Þóroddr feels trapped at the king's court, but unlike Steinn, he emerges from his captivity on good terms with Óláfr. The story does not so much pit Icelander against king as it focuses the individual Icelander's craving for freedom. This is no isolated theme. It is most explicitly embodied in the Icelanders' resistance to King Óláfr's attempted expropriation of Grímsey, but in some way it colours all the stories reviewed here. The stories of Þorgnýr and Emundr argue the independence of the Swedish people from royal tyranny in a highly partisan way. In the story of Hrœrekr the author may seem to favour the dispossessed local king against the dominant overlord. In the story of Ásbjǫrn Sigurðarson the local magnates succeed in freeing themselves from royal authority. Ásbjǫrn does so by refusing to enter the king's service. (According to the *Legendary Saga* (p. 114) he is later killed at the king's orders, but in *Heimskringla* retaliation is only hinted at (p. 213), never clearly stated.) In the story of Þórir hundr, Þórir evades the king's monetary fine and escapes his orbit altogether by going over to King Knútr. Steinn Skaptason is able to raise a whole clan against Óláfr, and he follows Þórir's example by deserting to Knútr. In all these stories the question is how to maintain independence from royal authority.

Concluding Thoughts on the Oral Stories

In 1914 Sigurður Nordal was able to publish an authoritative book on *Óláfs saga helga* without mentioning oral sources until the last five pages, and then only in passing. This was understandable because it was his mission to work out the filiation of the written versions. Nor does it mean that he was doubtful about the existence of oral stories; his phrasing makes it clear that he believes that much of the narrative derives in the first instance from oral sources (1914, 199). It is this original oral layer that I have focused on.

The argument for the existence of oral stories is not based solely on the observation that lively stories are likely to be oral stories. Nordal connected the oral stories with the comment in the prologue that

[7] Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (*Heimskringla*, II LI) expressed the view that Þóroddr himself transmitted the story, but he did not specify how much of it.

Icelanders brought stories from Norway and assumed that the stories of Sigvatr, Steinn Skaptason, Þóroddr Snorrason and Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld were transported in this way (1914, 197). The six stories studied here can also be assumed to have oral roots because the same narrative matter is touched on in other textually unrelated versions, notably the fragments of the *Oldest Saga of Saint Olaf* and the *Legendary Saga of Saint Olaf*. Thus the prior existence of '*Friðgerðar saga*' is shown by a similar but unconnected account in the *Legendary Saga* (pp. 94–104). The latter does not include the stories of Þorgnýr and Emundr af Skǫrum, but it seems to be generally true that the later *Óláfs saga helga* expands the narrative material previously recorded. This author is the first to tell the full story of Hrœrekr, but the *Legendary Saga* suggests that some narrative was in circulation when it states (p. 72): *Þat er sact, at þann let hann æinn blinda, er Rœrekr het, oc sændi hann til Islanz ut Guðmundi rikia oc do hann þar* 'It is told that he [Óláfr] had the one [of the petty kings] named Hrœrekr blinded and sent him out to Iceland to Guðmundr ríki, and that is where he died.'

The story of Ásbjǫrn is told in some detail in the *Legendary Saga* (108–14) and figures at the end of the first fragment of the *Oldest Saga* (*Oldest Saga*, 3–4). The killing of Karli is at least mentioned in the *Legendary Saga* (108). Steinn Skaptason is mentioned briefly in the third fragment of the *Oldest Saga*, in words that suggest that there was more to tell (*Oldest Saga*, 7–8): *Ok svá var ok, at Steinn var þar síðan skamma hríð, ok fór hann á brott. Ok er þat hér eigi sagt, hvat hann drýgði síðan* 'Steinn stayed there [at court] for a short time after that and departed, and it is not told here what he experienced afterwards.' Finally, Þóroddr Snorrason's story is alluded to in the *Legendary Saga* (p. 184) when Arnljótr gellini volunteers for service with King Óláfr: '*Hærra', sægir hann, 'silfrdisc æinn sænda ek yðr við Þorodde Snorrasœne, oc þær varo iartæignir til þess, at ek villdi til þin oc bæriazc með þer*' '"Lord," he said, "I sent you a silver plate with Þóroddr Snorrason as a sign that I wanted to join you and fight for you"'. Here too there would have been more to tell, but the narratives in question did not surface more fully until the composition of *Heimskringla*.

These stories are clearly set apart from the written sources and informational passages by their lively dialogue and dramatic qualities. Most notable among the stories are '*Friðgerðar saga*' (particularly the episodes involving Þorgnýr and Emundr), the story of King Hrœrekr, the story of Ásbjǫrn Sigurðarson, Karli's expedition to Bjarmaland and Þóroddr Snorrason's adventure with Arnljótr gellini. There is always a

close correlation between these stories and identifiable Icelanders who could have put them into circulation. The transmissions seem therefore to be strictly Icelandic, not Norwegian or Swedish, as critics have sometimes thought. Prominent among the possible informants are Hrœrekr (temporarily resident in Iceland), Hjalti Skeggjason, Sigvatr Þórðarson, Þórarinn Nefjólfsson, Steinn Skaptason and Þóroddr Snorrason. To the extent that these men (rather than other unnamed Icelanders) were primary sources, it should be observed that they are men of some distinction, with the exception of Þórarinn Nefjólfsson. The very fact that Þórarinn is said specifically not to have had a special lineage (*Heimskringla*, II 125) may mean that there was an expectation that such traditions were attached to great men. That may mean in turn that the cultivation of these traditions was part and parcel of aristocratic self-promotion.

On the whole, the stories appear to be quite independent of skaldic stanzas, suggesting that such narratives were not necessarily tied to poetic transmissions. Although the author(s) of the prologues to *Heimskringla* and the *Separate Saga* insist particularly on skaldic authority, that may be a moment of historical purism not shared by the body of the saga. *Óláfs saga helga* also has latitude for a man-eating troll, a number of miracles, and stories showcasing wit and ingenuity rather than ascertainable fact. That skaldic verse was not a prerequisite suggests that oral transmission, regardless of content, was an alternative. The author of the prologue to the *Separate Saga* says that the poems are 'most noteworthy for truthfulness' (*merkiligast til sannenda*), but he does not dismiss narrative transmissions. Indeed, he states (p. 422), *Spurðu menn þá á hverju sumri tíðendi landa þessa í milli, ok var þat síðan í minni fært ok haft eptir til frásagna* 'News passed between these countries [Norway and Iceland] every summer and it was then committed to memory and passed along in the form of stories'. A review of the narrative passages in *Óláfs saga helga* would seem to bear out this assertion.

The evidence of transmitted stories tends to cluster where information about Icelandic informants is particularly palpable. Where we can infer storytellers, there are stories. This is unlikely to be coincidental. Rather, it suggests strongly that the narratives are traditional, not the invention of the writer. If allowance is made for the use of oral stories in *Óláfs saga helga*, it thus appears that there are at least hypothetical sources for most of the saga, whether oral tradition, skaldic verse, incidental information, deduction or miracle tales. It is difficult to see where the latitude for authorial invention might be, apart from the set speeches.

Furthermore, if everything in this the fullest of the early sagas is anchored in some form of tradition, the implication may be that there is relatively little authorial invention in any of the early thirteenth-century sagas, although the latitude for written formulation must have been great.

To what extent did the Icelandic traditions colour or even determine the political drift of the saga as a whole? We may grant that Óláfr was viewed as a saint and was accordingly honoured, but, read against the grain, the saga is also a summary of how his dealings with the magnates of Norway and high-status Icelanders led to their defection and his own downfall (Nordal 1920, 182). This strand is particularly evident in the narratives that seem to have come down in Icelandic tradition. Hrœrekr's fate follows directly from Óláfr's suppression of the district kings, and his story may be viewed as a determined resistance to tyranny, no less than Egill Skallagrímsson's self-assertion against the Norwegian monarchy. Hrœrekr's stay in Iceland would certainly not have promoted a positive view of Óláfr's political mission, especially when seen in the context of his designs on Iceland. On the contrary, the exiled king would have had an excellent opportunity in Iceland to cultivate the self-image of a forceful and resourceful resistance fighter.

Nor would the inordinate role played by Sigvatr and Hjalti Skeggjason in '*Friðgerðar saga*' have redounded much to Óláfr's credit. Despite the brilliant diplomacy provided by Icelanders, he would have emerged as the lesser king who got the lesser, and illegitimate, Swedish princess (Bagge 1991, 102–03). The greater heroes of the story are the local chieftains and wise men Þorgnýr and Emundr, who vigorously defend the rights of the people against autocratic rule.

When the author turns to the story of Óláfr's domestic relations in Norway, the record is also mixed. Most conspicuous is the tale of Ásbjǫrn Sigurðarson, which forms part of the larger story of Óláfr's dealings with Erlingr Skjálgsson. Erlingr is portrayed as a truly great chieftain, with an authority to match the king's. He is in fact able to face the king down and prevent the execution of his nephew Ásbjǫrn. When Erlingr is ultimately slain in battle, Óláfr's cause is already lost; Erlingr's fall signals his own fall, as Óláfr explicitly acknowledges (*Heimskringla*, II 316–17). It is not difficult for the reader to consider Erlingr the greater figure and his local struggle as more admirable than Óláfr's national ambition.

The special Icelandic stake in the favouring of decentralisation over centralisation comes to the fore when King Óláfr casts his eye on Grímsey (215–17). The Icelanders respond at first naively, but the deeply perceptive Einarr Eyjólfsson rises to unparalleled oratorical heights when

he lays bare the political implications of giving Óláfr a foothold off the coast of Iceland. What reader would fail to draw an analogy between Óláfr's intrusion into Erlingr Skjálgsson's territory and Einarr Eyjólfsson's stout defence of Iceland's territorial integrity? One way to read the saga as a whole is to conclude that aggression is the mainspring of Óláfr's actions.

The remaining stories are likely to have originated with the Icelandic representatives summoned to Óláfr's court and then held as hostages.[8] A special point is made of their dissatisfaction and eagerness to flee. Two of them, Steinn Skaptason and Þóroddr Snorrason, make good their escape; one of them deserts to King Knútr and the other returns to Iceland. In light of their captivity, it is unlikely that either of them spread positive reports about their detention or about their captor. Either one of them could have circulated the story of Karli's expedition to Bjarmaland, which is politically significant because it is also the story of Þórir hundr's alienation from Óláfr and defection to Knútr. Steinn Skaptason's escape is also part of the political fabric because it serves to explain in part the alienation of Kálfr Árnason.

The stories brought home to Iceland are therefore not digressions or ornamental additions; they are tightly interwoven with Óláfr's loss of support in Norway and the defection of the magnates to King Knútr. Óláfr's failure to win or retain the loyalty of the Norwegians becomes a major theme in the saga after the feud with the Swedish king is concluded. His shortcomings raise doubts about him, in contrast, for example, to the adulatory tone of Styrmir's *articuli*. Do the relevant stories in *Óláfs saga helga* merely illustrate the crumbling of Óláfr's support, or did their prior circulation in Iceland in fact inspire the author in his formulation of this theme? Are the stories, with their Icelandic bias and underlying anti-monarchism, perhaps the source of the idea that Óláfr's fall was occasioned by a diplomatic failure to maintain cordial relations with the Norwegian magnates? I am inclined to think that the stories are not just a narrative source but also a source for the political viewpoint, which is subtly favourable to the district magnates and discreetly but perceptibly critical of King Óláfr.

We must now turn to the essential question of whether there is an underlying and consistent political viewpoint in *Óláfs saga helga* as a

[8] Toralf Berntsen tried to identify a Norwegian '*Háreks saga*' and '*Tore Hunds saga*' (1923, 135, 144), but conceded that most of the stories in the saga come from Icelandic sources (1923, 104–06).

whole. The question surfaced in the well-known exchange of views between Halvdan Koht in 1914 and Fredrik Paasche in 1922 (reprinted in 1967). Koht argued for a definite conflict between king and aristocracy based on events in Norwegian history just prior to the composition of *Heimskringla* (Koht 1967, 54–55). Paasche found little in the way of political commitment in the text, beyond an alignment with church and king (Paasche 1967, 73). More recently Sverre Bagge has allied himself more with Paasche on the ground that a political thesis in these early works is anachronistic (Bagge 1991, 65, 201).

To some extent the issue is semantic. Paasche entitled his paper 'Tendens og syn i kongesagaene', but what exactly is the force of *tendens* and the force of *syn*? *Tendens* is perhaps more active and implies a built-in point of view intended to convey the author's understanding of historical events to the reader. *Syn*, on the other hand, may be more passive; it could be translated 'perspective' or 'viewpoint', but it does not necessarily imply an effort on the author's part to impose an interpretive framework. The 'perspective' could be calculated, but it could also be involuntary, revealing the author's bias but not necessarily signalling a desire on the author's part to make a political argument. The only critic who seems to have conceptualised this problem is Johan Schreiner, who writes as follows (1926, 104):

> It is probably not correct to talk about 'tendens' in the kings' sagas, but in the case of a work like Snorri's *Óláfs saga helga* it cannot be denied that there is a basic point of view [*grunnopfatning*], a total perspective [*totalsyn*], and with this is connected an evaluation (or better: and this is by nature evaluative).[9]

At the end of his study, Schreiner concludes (1926, 126) that Óláfr's idea of kingship was fundamentally 'anti-aristocratic'.

Schreiner tried to read history from the text of *Heimskringla* and therefore concluded with an assessment of the historical Óláfr. If, however, we are content to read the text without reference to the historical Óláfr, we may conclude that the text is more likely to be anti-royal. One problem in the Norwegian discussion of politics in *Heimskringla* is that it is too Norwegian.[10] We must ask ourselves what interest the Icelandic authors of the *Oldest Saga*, the *Legendary Saga*, Styrmir's fragments, *Heimskringla* and very possibly *Fagrskinna* would have had in an internal Norwegian struggle between King Óláfr and the Norwegian magnates,

[9] See also Hallvard Lie's discussion of these terms (1937, 20–21).

[10] Gudmund Sandvik delivered an explicit corrective to this viewpoint. See especially his concluding remarks (1955, 98–99). See also Bagge 1991, 199, 204, 237–38.

especially in the political aspects of the struggle. Would the Icelanders have had a great enough interest in this purely domestic matter to formulate a historical thesis about it?

And yet the idea that there was such a conflict seems to be specifically Icelandic. There are traces of it in the fragments of the *Oldest Saga* and in Styrmir's *articuli* (*Oldest saga*, 244–45), and it is fully present in the *Legendary Saga*. But it may be significant that the oldest source, and the only one certain to be Norwegian, Theodoricus, makes no mention of the conflict and explains Óláfr's demise purely in terms of King Knútr's suborning of the chieftains. This version of events is borne out by *Ágrip*, which may also be Norwegian.[11]

But most eloquent is the silence of the 178 stanzas in *Óláfs saga helga*. Not a single one of them seems to allude to political tensions between King Óláfr and the Norwegian magnates. A stanza by Sigvatr in praise of Erlingr Skjálgsson (v. 26, p. 29) is placed by the author in the context of his intimidation of Jarl Eiríkr Hákonarson and is not connected with his later contention with King Óláfr. Stanza 59 (p. 106) by Óttarr alludes generally to King Óláfr's suppression of the 'kings' of Heiðmǫrk but does not identify them. The following stanza, also by Óttarr, seems to suggest that Óláfr cut out the tongue of one of these 'kings' and the prose (p. 105) identifies him as Guðrøðr from Guðbrandsdalar, but this is still in the context of Óláfr's conquest.

When it comes to the waning of Óláfr's fortunes, the emphasis is on how King Knútr buys off the chieftains, not on any differences between Óláfr and the chieftains. A series of stanzas (vv. 107–08, 110–11), all by Sigvatr, dwells on the theme of betrayal in favour of Knútr, and Hallvarðr Háreksblesi sums up Knútr's triumph in stanza 119. An interesting aspect of these stanzas is how well they accord with what we find in Theodoricus and *Ágrip* and how poorly they match what *Óláfs saga helga* tells us. Only one stanza (v. 120, p. 314) talks about conflict with a chieftain, and that stanza comes from a *flokkr* composed by Sigvatr on the death of Erlingr Skjálgsson. It describes the battle in which Erlingr fell. Stanza 135 (p. 334), by Bjarni Gullbrárskáld, is interpreted as being about the parting of Óláfr and Kálfr Árnason and Kálfr's seeking out of King Knútr, but that is only one possible reading.

Only in the actual Battle of Stiklarstaðir are Óláfr's most notorious antagonists among the Norwegian chieftains mentioned. In stanza 155 (pp. 383–84) Sigvatr alludes to Þórir's jacket made impenetrable by Lappish magic, and in the following stanza he recounts how Þórir

[11] See *Monumenta* 1880, 5–42 (esp. 29–30) and *Ágrip* 1985, 25–30 (esp. 27).

wounded the king. Stanza 157 (p. 385) by Bjarni Gullbrárskáld is interpreted by the prose as being about the presence of Kálfr Árnason in the battle. Finally, stanzas 160 (p. 391) by Þormóðr Bersason and 164 (p. 399) from Þórarinn loftunga's *Glælognskviða* are explicit about the fact that the battle is between the Danes and King Óláfr, not between the king and his chieftains. In other words, everything in the stanzas is perfectly reconcileable with Theodoricus's view that King Knútr bribed the Norwegian chieftains, raised troops and defeated Óláfr at Stiklarstaðir. Nothing in the stanzas requires us to believe that there was a history of deep-seated animosity between Óláfr and the chieftains.

Should that suggest to us that Óláfr's political conflict with the magnates was, at least primarily, an Icelandic issue? If so, what inspired it? It may be too simplistic to suggest that Óláfr's acquisitiveness in Iceland and his differences with Hrœrekr and his Icelandic hostages spilled over into Icelandic tradition in such a way as to foster surmises about conflicts between Óláfr and his own chieftains, but some such dynamic may have contributed to the elaboration of history in Iceland. If the Icelanders had no great stake in Norwegian internal politics, they had every reason to reflect on the history of their own independence and the threat posed by the Norwegian king. Halvdan Koht thought that the historical conflict between king and magnates in Norway, as it was resurrected in *Heimskringla*, was coloured by the political clashes under King Sverrir, and Paasche agreed, but it seems just as likely that this conflict owes something to the tensions between Iceland and Norway in the period 1215–20. That these tensions could have literary consequences is amply documented by *Egils saga*, which, no less than *Heimskringla*, tells of the conflict not only between Icelanders and kings but also between the king and such local magnates as Arinbjǫrn. Icelandic self-assertiveness could clearly work to raise the profile of Norwegian chieftains who also prized their independence. Whether or not *Óláfs saga helga* and *Egils saga* were, one or the other or both, written by Snorri Sturluson, they are products of Icelandic sensibilities and reveal analogous concerns.

We have still not addressed the question of whether the political thrust of *Óláfs saga helga* is calculated or involuntary. The question is connected with the much more general problem of whether the sagas lend themselves to overall interpretation, that is, an interpretation that isolates a particular argument throughout the text. The extreme difficulty of reaching an interpretive consensus on an obvious 'problem text' such as *Hrafnkels saga* may well discourage us from pursuing such an inquiry. And yet the provincial bias and the anti-expansionist outlook in *Óláfs*

saga helga seem rather insistent. How often must the author return to the theme of independence in order to convince the reader that he is advancing a general thesis? Here we have reviewed six relevant stories in the text, without even touching on the explicit plea for independence in the speech of the 'Icelandic Demosthenes', Einarr Eyjólfsson (Lie 1937, 103). These passages all work together and suggest resistance to the king. Despite this confluence of meaning, we may not be able to decide whether the passages in question add up to a *tendens* or merely a *syn*, but perhaps we can agree that there are definite authorial attitudes in *Óláfs saga helga*. These attitudes were no doubt foreshadowed in the oral sources, but they have been solidified in the final synthesis.

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THE TROLLISH ACTS OF ÞORGRÍMR THE WITCH: THE MEANINGS OF *TROLL* AND *ERGI* IN MEDIEVAL ICELAND

BY ÁRMANN JAKOBSSON

I

AS SOMETIMES HAPPENS WITH MEDIEVAL HEROES, the downfall of Gísli Súrsson, hero and protagonist of *Gísla saga*, has causes that are partially supernatural. This does not necessarily exclude a more existentialist interpretation of Gísli's troubles; indeed several engaging interpretations have been proposed (see for example Andersson 1968, Hermann Pálsson 1973, Meulengracht Sørensen 1986, Vésteinn Ólason 1994), which focus on the human aspect of the tragedy. This article, however, has its starting point in the supernatural aspect of Gísli's downfall, and is concerned with the nature of one of his more potent enemies.

Gísla saga strongly suggests that the bad luck Gísli has in his outlaw years is caused by the sorcery of a local witch called Þorgrímr nef, hired by Bǫrkr digri, whose brother Gísli had slain. This curse proves to be very effective (*Gísla saga*, 69):

> En sakar þess trollskapar, er Þorgrímr nef hafði haft í seiðinum, ok atkvæða, þá verðr þess eigi auðit, at hǫfðingjar tœki við honum, ok þó at stundum þœtti þeim eigi svá ólíkliga horfa, þá bar þó alls staðar nǫkkut við.
>
> As a result of the trollish arts and spells that Þorgrímr nef had used in his magic rite, it could not be managed that these chieftains would accept him [Gísli]; although they sometimes seemed on the verge of doing this, something always obstructed its course.

My focus here will be on the word *trollskapr* and related words, in order to investigate how Þorgrímr nef is perceived.

In the depiction of Þorgrímr nef's evil acts, the word does not stand alone, however. The rite which constitutes the *trollskapr* is described as follows (*Gísla saga*, 56–57):

> Þat er næst til tíðenda, at Bǫrkr kaupir at Þorgrími nef, at hann seiddi seið, at þeim manni yrði ekki at bjǫrg, er Þorgrím hefði vegit, þó at menn vildi duga honum. Oxi níu vetra gamall var honum gefinn til þess. Nú flytr Þorgrímr fram seiðinn ok veitir sér umbúð eptir venju sinni ok gerir sér hjall, ok fremr hann þetta fjǫlkynngiliga með allri ergi og skelmiskap.

> The next thing that happened was that Bǫrkr paid Þorgrímr nef to perform a magic rite, to bring it about that the man who killed Þorgrímr should receive no shelter, even if people were willing to help him. A nine-year-old gelding ox was given to Þorgrímr for this purpose. He then went ahead with the rite and made his preparations according to his custom, built a platform and performed this magic in the most queer and devilish manner.

The word *ergi*, like the word *trollskapr*, is not uncommon in Old Norse-Icelandic. Another thing these words have in common is that we think we know what they mean. Cleasby and Vigfússon are close to the most common explanation in saying that 'the old Icel. troll conveys the notion of huge creatures, giants, Titans' (1957, 641),[1] whereas they translate *ergi* as 'lewdness, lust, . . . wickedness' (133).[2] Since Þorgrímr nef is not a giant and the connection between sorcery and lewdness is not obvious at first sight, one might assume that the usage of *troll* and *ergi* in the passages above is metaphorical. Indeed, that is what Martin Arnold assumes in his recent excellent article on the Old Norse-Icelandic troll and the development of this being in Icelandic sources (2005, 129). Gunnar Karlsson's recent study of *ergi* also suggests that the principal meaning of this concept has more to do with deviant sexuality than whatever rituals Þorgrímr nef might be performing (2006, 380). I will take a somewhat different stance in this study.

My aim is to examine the usage of the words *ergi* and *troll* in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Old Icelandic and try to determine whether their fundamental meanings are really 'lewdness' and 'giants'. Furthermore, I will explore the relationship between the two concepts that are, perhaps unexpectedly, joined in Þorgrímr nef's curse (see also Ármann Jakobsson 2008b; Ármann Jakobsson 2008c).

II

Although the description of Þorgrímr's magic rite is quite vivid, it is not explained how he performs *ergi* or what the *trollskapr* actually consists of. If we did not have a preconceived idea of what a troll is, it would seem most straightforward to translate the word *trollskapr* simply as magic, since that is what Þorgrímr is performing. Our presumptions about the

[1] Cleasby and Vigfússon also mention the meaning 'witchcraft' which is well established in modern Scandinavian words like Dan. *trolddom* (see also Wilbur 1958, 137; Dillmann 2006, 170–71).

[2] It is possible that this somewhat antiquated definition was partly motivated by Victorian prudery and that Cleasby and Vigfússon expected sophisticated readers to realise what actually constituted the 'lewdness'.

principal meaning of the word *troll* must be questioned, however, before we can come to a safer conclusion.

In his study of trolls, Martin Arnold analyses the troll as a supernatural figure, assigning primary status to the Eddic trollwives as the oldest phenomena designated as trolls. This assumption that trolls are primarily supernatural beings is influenced by the fact that he approaches the troll not from a lexical point of view but from the direction of Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie*, a natural starting point if we consider the later development of the word *troll* in the folktales collected in the nineteenth century by Jón Árnason (1862) and others. For those who know trolls through these folktales, the word *troll* automatically conjures up an image of a large, long-nosed, hairy and wild creature living in mountains and caves.[3] Óskar Gíslason and Loftur Guðmundsson faithfully recreate this image of the troll in their film, *Síðasti bærinn í dalnum* (1949) which has two monstrous trolls, twice the size of men, and sturdy in stature, with shaggy hair and enormous noses, as can be seen in still photographs from the film (Loftur Guðmundsson 1950, 35, 126, 147, 169 and 175). It is tempting to project this image onto thirteenth- and fourteenth-century texts, or to assume that this is the primary meaning of the word. Nevertheless, I will try here to approach the word from a different direction.

In *Eyrbyggja saga* there is an episode depicting the rivalry of two middle-aged witches who are both interested in the same young pupil (*Eyrbyggja saga*, 27–30). One is Geirríðr, grand-daughter of the settler Geirríðr, and daughter of the Viking Þórólfr bægifótr, who later became a troll himself, as I will discuss below. This Geirríðr has a mature son, and so has the other witch. She is called Katla and is a widow who is not generally liked. The young man in the episode, Gunnlaugr, is eager to learn, and studies (*nam kunnáttu)* with Geirríðr. Katla is clearly jealous and demands whether this young man is visiting Geirríðr to *klappa um kerlingar nárann* 'stroke the old woman's groin' (*Eyrbyggja saga*, 28). What later happens—though it is not revealed at the time—is that Katla preys on Gunnlaugr and rides him, so that he becomes bloody and unconscious. Then she tries to blame Geirríðr, calling her a *kveldriða* 'night-rider'. Although Katla cannot be proved to be the cause of this misfortune, her son is later found guilty of having chopped off the

[3] In other modern Scandinavian languages the equivalent word usually does not denote large creatures but goblins, imps and puny spirits (Arnold 2005, 114). Since my concern here is with the use of the word in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, I will not discuss this any further, but this later development may support my conclusions below.

hand of an innocent woman. When their farm is searched, Katla hides him by using optical illusions but when all else fails, Geirríðr joins the search. Katla does not like this, explaining: '*Mun Geirríðr trollit þar komin, ok mun þá eigi sjónhverfingum einum mega við koma*' 'The *troll* Geirríðr must have come there, and illusions alone will not be enough now' (*Eyrbyggja saga*, 53).

When Katla refers to Geirríðr as a *troll*, she does not mean that she is a giant. She has previously tried to discredit Geirríðr as a kind of *succuba* or *mora*, and that would mean she is a witch. In short, this is *troll* in the same sense as the *trollskapr* of Þorgrímr nef. However, the editor of *Eyrbyggja saga* in the *Íslenzk fornrit* series, Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, clearly expects his readers to think of folktale trolls and adds this note (*Eyrbyggja saga*, 53 n. 4):

> troll: fjölkunnug vera, mennsk eða ómennsk. Þessi er hin eldri merking orðsins. Það er varla fyr en á 12. öld, að orðið fær þá merkingu, sem það hefur nú.
>
> troll: magical being, human or non-human. This is the older meaning of the word. It was hardly before the twelfth century that the word acquired the meaning that it has now.

This is confusing. Einar Ólafur does not explain what the word means 'now' (a screenshot from *Síðasti bærinn í dalnum* might have helped, but that had not yet been filmed). Even less does he explain how he knows that this later meaning became established in the twelfth century (*Eyrbyggja saga* itself is more recent). Why the twelfth century? Einar Ólafur refers to no sources, and in light of the scarcity of preserved twelfth century texts one might ask how on earth it would be possible to discern any semantic changes between the eleventh and the twelfth century. And, finally, the definition *fjölkunnug vera, mennsk eða ómennsk* is somewhat imprecise.

But imprecise as it is, Einar Ólafur's definition is, in fact, much more sensible than it might seem, even though his dating remains unexplained. For Geirríðr is not the only *troll* in Icelandic thirteenth-century sources. *Snorra Edda* has the poet Bragi passing through a certain unspecified forest late at night and encountering a *trollkona* who asks him who he is. After his answer (in verse, of course), she in turn explains who she is, using various kennings and finishing with the question: '*Hvat er trǫll nema þat*?' (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 164–65). They are both cunning, Bragi and the *trollkona*, since they both end their explanations with a question. And we are not much closer to the meaning of *troll*. While it seems clear that Geirríðr, witch or no witch, is human, this lady of the night feels like a supernatural creature.

As Martin Arnold has noted (2005, 116–24), *Snorra Edda* seems to see the troll as mainly female, since *trollkonur* are mentioned in this narrative, first with reference to an ogress who lives east of Miðgarðr in Járnviðr and breeds giants in wolf shapes (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 18–19; the passage cites *Vǫluspá*, which however does not use the word *trollkonur*) but nowhere is a male giant unequivocally referred to as *troll* (see Arnold 2005, 122). There seems, though, to be a strong connection between these troll-wives and the giants that they breed, although one might also argue that the use of the two words *jǫtnar* and *troll* indicates some distinction, especially when Óðinn goes north to Jǫtunheimar whereas Þórr goes east *at beria trǫll* (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 100; see also Ármann Jakobsson 2005, 3–4; Ármann Jakobsson 2006, 101–03).

Einar Ólafur's broad definition (*fjölkunnug vera, mennsk eða ómennsk*) seems to encompass both Geirríðr and the unnamed *trollkona* who spars with Bragi. They might even be regarded as archetypal, each representing a subcategory, of human and non-human magical beings. Of course, we would then be assuming that this *trollkona* actually has magical powers, which remain unspecified (the reference in the verse to *vilsinnr vǫlu* suggests her connection to a *vǫlva*; *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 165). And the definition runs into more trouble when we consider the only example of the word *troll* in Eddic poetry.

In the *Poetic Edda*, the word is not used to refer to a troll-wife in the woods but to a *tvngls tivgari* / *itrollz hami* 'moon-snatcher in troll's shape' in st. 39 of *Vǫluspá* in the Codex Regius (stanza 25 in Hauksbók and also cited in *Snorra Edda*; *Norræn fornkvæði*, 16, 21 and 30; *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 19). This *tjúgari* is bred by *in aldna* who lives east in Ironwood, the same wolf-breeding ogress whom Snorri apparently identifies as one of the *trollkonur* of Járnviðr. In *Vǫluspá*, however, it is not she who is the *troll*, but the wolf she has bred (the word wolf is not used either, they are called *fenris kindir* in this stanza). And we have to ask: Is this wolf also a *fjölkunnug vera, mennsk eða ómennsk*? Does it have magical powers? How does it perform magic?

Not many cases have been considered yet, but already a sneaking suspicion has arisen that the apparently excessively broad definition above is actually not broad enough, since it does not seem to encompass this moon-chewing wolf. And this is, in fact, confirmed by a closer look at the usage of the word *troll* in Icelandic sources from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

In her recent monograph on giants, Katja Schulz lists seventy-two examples of the word *troll* in Sagas of Icelanders and ninety-six in

Legendary Sagas, in addition to sixteen examples from skaldic verse (Schulz 2004, 39). And the word turns out to be used for a variety of creatures in diverse contexts.

1. In medieval Iceland, the word *troll* can have the same meaning as in the post-medieval Icelandic folktales, i.e. it can be synonymous with *jǫtunn* or mountain-dweller, a somewhat loosely defined otherworldly creature who lives in the wilderness, humanoid but sometimes apparently large and ugly.[4] In Legendary Sagas, it is common that the word is used about beings who might also be referred to as *risar*, *jǫtnar* and *bergbúar*, beings that perhaps sit in caves by a fire and must be disposed of quickly and efficiently (see e.g. *Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* II, 115, 147 and 184; *Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* III, 569; *Fljótsdæla saga*, 226–30; *Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls*, 360; see also Ármann Jakobsson 2005, Ármann Jakobsson 2008a). Often, however, there is no description or definition of these beings. In *Hjálmþérs saga ok Ölvis* and in *Bósa saga*, for example, trolls are listed along with elves, norns and mountain-giants without any specific characteristic being mentioned (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* III, 205 and 457).[5] There are instances where the word is used to indicate various types of ogres and bogies, as in *eiga þá öll tröll saman at koma ok dæma* 'All trolls should hold their parliament' (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* III, 394; see also *Bárðar saga*, 116). While it is clear that trolls are a special kind of otherwordly being, and not exactly of the human race, we cannot be certain that there is complete agreement about the nature of these beings.[6] To take one example, it is hard to say much conclusive about the ogre that Ásbjörn Guðmundsson and his companions meet at Hrútafjarðarháls in 1244: *sjá þeir troll eitt mikit, ok fór þat í svig við þá* 'They saw a certain big troll, and it gave them a wide berth' (*Sturlunga saga* II, 284). There is no description of this troll; it might be like the folktale trolls or it might equally well resemble a wolf or even be a witch.

2. The word is also often used to describe an apparently normal person who has magical powers, as in the case of Geirríðr and Katla above.

[4] While Martin Arnold has noted that the trolls tend to be female in the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson (2005, 116–25; cf. Helga Kress 1993, 119–35; McKinnell 2005), that is not the case in Legendary Sagas or Sagas of Icelanders.

[5] In the former, trolls are listed along with *blámenn*, *berserkir*, *risar* and *dvergar* as *fýtonsandafólk* 'magical people' (p. 457).

[6] The noble Swedish family Trolle has used a 'troll' in its heraldic device since the early fifteenth century (see Raneke 1982, 412–13). This troll is clearly a monstrous creature (often with a second head on its stomach) but it is not clear

Whereas in Legendary Sagas the word is frequently used for those who are not human, there are other trolls that, like *Geirríðr trollit*, seem to be of the human race (see e.g. *Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda*, II 152, 185 and III 419). The missionary Þorvaldr tasaldi is called troll by someone called Bárðr who is not quite sure whether he is human or not, but has realised that he has strange powers (*Flateyjarbok*, I 382). It also seems clear that the word refers to a person of the human race (probably a magician) in the articles of law concerning those crimes that fall under the jurisdiction of both the king and the bishop, where it is forbidden to take supper *med trolle*, without it being specified what kind of a troll one should not invite home to supper (*Diplomatarium Islandicum*, II 224; see also Lára Magnúsardóttir 2007, 368).[7]

3. The word *troll* is frequently used descriptively or metaphorically, to indicate great force, strength or size. The villainous Kolbjörn in *Bárðar saga* has a mother who *er it mesta tröll*, without the saga explaining what that entails. It is, on the other hand, quite clear that she has superhuman powers, since a short while later her *fjölkynngi* is referred to (*Bárðar saga*, 153; see also 156). The superhuman strength of trolls is, in fact, a part of the definition of the race at the beginning of *Bárðar saga*, where it is explained that Bárðr himself is one quarter troll by ancestry, and that this quarter encapsulates not only nastiness but also great strength (*Bárðar saga*, 99–100).

When the antagonist turns out to be much harder to vanquish than ordinary men, he is a troll, often *it mesta tröll* or *it versta tröll*, as if it were a descriptive word (see e.g. *Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* II, 148 and 253; *Bárðar saga*, 128; *Jómsvíkinga saga*, 186). Búi Andríðarson is called a *mikit tröll* when he is able to defend himself against a large posse for a long while (*Kjalnesinga saga*, 39). And phrases such as *líkari tröllum en mönnum* 'more like trolls than men' and *fleiri kalla þetta tröll en mann* 'they said it was more of a troll than a man' are used in more than one saga (*Bárðar saga*, 119; *Finnboga saga*, 283, 300, 328; *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, 351; *Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* III, 160, 326 og 357; cf. Arnold 2005, 125–26). In those cases, the trollish aspect of the person often has more to do with his attributes (such as magic powers or strength) than his appearance.

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whether it is supposed to be large or small. It certainly does not look anything like a *Síðasti bærinn í dalnum* troll.

[7] Trolls later appeared in post-medieval lawsuits in Norway. These are carefully examined by Knutsen and Riisøy (2007).

The imbecile son of Ingjaldr is said to be *mikill vexti, nær sem troll* 'almost as big as a troll' (*Gísla saga*, 79). In Legendary Sagas, the otherworldly antagonists of the heroes are often *stór sem tröll, en bíta engi járn* 'as big as trolls, and weapons would not pierce them' (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* III, 446), or *stór sem risi, en máttugr sem tröll* 'as big as a giant and as strong as a troll' (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* III, 491) or even *stór ok sterkur sem tröll ok fríðr sýnum* 'as big and strong as a troll and of beautiful appearance' (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* III, 458). This arouses suspicions that medieval trolls are perhaps not inherently ugly, but there are also instances where extremely ugly creatures are called trolls (e.g. *Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* III, 653) so it is hard to draw firm conclusions on how essential ugliness is to trollish identity (on the ugliness of trolls, see Schulz 2004, 139–55; Ármann Jakobsson 2008a).

In this metaphorical usage, otherness is, on the other hand, definitely important. The daughter of Bárðr Snæfellsáss, Helga, is so incredibly strong that she is *tröll kölluð af sumum mönnum* 'considered a troll by some people' (*Bárðar saga*, 115). While that may be partly because she has arrived in Greenland in a peculiar fashion (on drift ice), this is a good example of how the word *troll* is often used to refer to something that is strange and peculiar, exceeding normality in some way.

4. Even among the diverse examples above, the use of the word *troll* might still seem to be mostly restricted to giants and witches. But that is not the case. Malignant spirits and ghosts may also be referred to as trolls. In *Örvar-Odds saga*, the hero has a prime antagonist, a master criminal called Ögmundr Eyþjófsbani who keeps haunting him. This Ögmundr is said to be *et mesta tröll og óvættr, er skapast hefir í norðrálfu heimsins* 'the greatest troll and unnatural being that has ever taken shape in the northern part of the world'. It is also stated that he has learned *allskyns galdra ok gjörnínga* 'all kinds of spells and sorceries' and finally been *tríldur* 'turned into a troll' by the Permians. Later in the saga, it is revealed that Ögmundr *má heldr kallast andi enn maðr* 'can rather be called a spirit than a man' (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda*, II 241–43, 248, 298), and thus it becomes evident that malignant spirits may also be regarded as trolls. This also applies to ghosts. Sóti the Viking in *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja* is said to have been *mikit tröll í lífinu, en hálfu meira, síðan hann var dauðr* 'a great troll in his lifetime, but twice as much so once he was dead' (*Harðar saga*, 39; see also *Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda*, II 368).

This meaning of the word is not encapsulated in the Cleasby and Vigfússon definition and not even in Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's

conveniently broad one. At this juncture, one might start to wonder if *troll* is a word that refers to any kind of superhuman power.

5. The *blámenn* (black men, or, literally, 'bluemen'), that some saga heroes have to fight are referred to as trolls (*Kjalnesinga saga*, 35–36; see also *Finnboga saga*, 283, *Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls*, 367). Their trollish behaviour seems to consist of their tendency to *grenja* 'bellow' and be unrestrained or even slightly unhinged in battle. I will return later to the importance of behaviour for the classification of trolls.

6. Sometimes animals are referred to as trolls, which in most cases seems to indicate that they have been conjured up, empowered or even possessed by magicians or evil creatures (see below). This might be the case in the example from *Vǫluspá* discussed above, and there is a troll-like animal in *Eyrbyggja saga* that I will consider below. *Hrólfs saga kraka* has two animals that are called trolls. There is a dragon (usually just called *dýr* but clearly a dragon-like creature, *Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* I, 69) and a hideous boar that the wicked and sorcerous King Aðils of Sweden has conjured up and which terrorises King Hrólfr and his men (87–88). This makes it harder to be sure what is meant when the queen Hvít is referred to as *hit mesta tröll* in the same saga (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* I, 52).

7. Heathen demigods, such as Þorgerðr Hörgabrúðr (or Hörgatröll), may be called trolls by Christians, as in *Jómsvíkinga saga,* when Earl Sigvaldi runs away from battle because he does not want to *berjast við tröll* 'fight against trolls' (*Jómsvíkinga saga*, 184, 187; *Flateyjarbok*, I 191–92). In this case the word *troll* might mean a heathen spirit that has been activated by a ritual or sacrifice, and there are further instances where the word is used in a similar fashion.

8. There are cases where it is not specified what trolls are, but it is still evident that, along with demons, sorcerers and heathens, they are the antagonists of Christianity. In *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* by Oddr Snorrason it is said that in Hálogaland, there is *svá mikit um trǫllagang* 'so much troll activity' that the king himself has to go there. And some men witness a gathering of trolls that sit by the fire, one of whom is called a *djǫfull* in one version of the saga but a *trǫll* in the other. These monsters (*skrímsl*) are then exorcised with holy water (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, 290–94). The trolls complain about the king and his bishops, and are clearly staunch opponents of Christianity. They swell the ranks in the saga of various heathens, witches, unclean spirits, red-bearded demons and the devil himself. In this narrative, the trolls are thus clearly among

the enemies of the true order of things and of society, although it is not clear whether we should think of them as witches, mountain-dwellers or ghosts. But, as we have seen, all of these can be classified as trolls.

9. The *brunnmigi* (a being that urinates in wells) in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* is a *þuss* or *tröll* (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* II, 29). We cannot be sure that this means that it is a supernatural creature or whether it is a person who is defined by his outlandish and antisocial behaviour. A *brunnmigi* is certainly an outlaw and it is interesting that when Búi Andríðarson has been outlawed, mainly for his reluctance to perform heathen rituals, he too is called a troll—and a dog to boot (*Kjalnesinga saga*, 13).

10. Often the word is used to indicate certain characteristics or behaviour, not only in the case of the *brunnmigi*. Immunity to iron or extraordinary prowess in battle can seem trollish (*Heiðarvíga saga*, 302–03); the same applies to biting people in the larynx (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* III, 450),[8] and there are several instances where trolls are clearly connected with cannibalism (see *Orms þáttr Stórólfssonar*, 407; also Ármann Jakobsson 2008a).

In *Grettis saga* it is remarked that trolls avoid daylight and the sun (*Grettis saga*, 47), which is consistent with their behaviour in post-medieval folktales (see Jón Árnason 1862, 207–17), although no further information on the habits of trolls is given. In this instance trolls seem to be a separate species, although it is their behaviour that is the focus of attention.

11. The word is occasionally used of berserks and those who undergo metamorphosis in battle, often with the use of the verbal form *trylla*. In *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* it is said of a certain Röndólfr that *hann mátti vel tröll kallast fyrir vaxtar sakir ok afls* 'he could well be called a troll because of his size and strength', and he is indeed from Jötunheimar. Soon his true nature is revealed: *Röndólfr var hamaðr, ok grenjaði sem tröll, þegar hann reiddist* (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* III, 322) 'Röndólfr had shape-shifted, and bellowed like a troll when angry'. Apart from trolls, it is mostly berserks who *grenja* in sagas, and the two are, in fact, conjoined in *Sörla saga sterka* when King Haraldr refuses to give his daughter to *svá leiðu trölli ok mögnuðum berserk* (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* III, 420) 'such a loathsome troll and bewitched berserk'.

[8] Egill Skalla-Grímsson kills one of his main adversaries in this fashion (*Egils saga,* 210) and indeed he has been compared to a troll earlier in the saga (178), although it must also be recalled that he has a wolfish streak (and ancestry).

The fact that Röndólfr is *hamaðr* as he becomes troll-like invites the question whether *trollskapr* can be regarded as a type of shape-shifting.[9] Röndólfr is not the only troll to shift shapes; in *Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls* (371), Svartr starts to *hamast sem tröll . . . með ógurligum látum* 'change his shape like a troll . . . with terrible noises' when Helgi Þorbjarnarson has killed his brother. He is then called a berserk and a demon, again demonstrating the intimate connection between trolls and other ogres. Thus *troll* often seems a somewhat inclusive term.

The *trollskapr* of Þorgrímr nef seems to be associated with his magic rite. In *Vatnsdæla saga*, *trolldómr* seems to be more of a state, when the old Ljót dies *í móð sínum ok trolldómi* 'in her rage and sorcery', having tried to alter the landscape and craze all her enemies with her evil eye, whose gaze is said to be *trollsliga skotit* 'cast trollishly' (*Vatnsdæla saga*, 70).[10] Both *hamast* and to be *í móð* seem to be mutable conditions and the resulting *trollskapr* or *trolldómr*, as well as *berserksgangr*, may well be defined as a state that a normal human might be in, as a result of their own magic or that of others. Thus, when the same creature is called *troll ok berserkr*, it implies a connection between the two types of magical transformations. And it seems apt to speak of magical metamorphosis in relation to the verb *tryllask* (literally, to become a troll) or the past participle *trylldr* used as an adjective. In modern Icelandic both words are used metaphorically of rage, but in the sagas evil creatures are sometimes said to *tryllast* in a much more literal way, which is sometimes accompanied by a foul stench (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* II, 370, cf. *Fljótsdæla saga*, 279–80). A couple that travels with Bárðr Snæfellsáss to Iceland is said to be *trylld mjök bæði* (*Bárðar saga*, 108), which in that case might mean having both a volatile temperament and superhuman strength, while a troll-wife in *Sörla saga sterka* is *tryld at afli* (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* III, 414).

The metamorphic aspect of the troll is not present in other otherworldly creatures, such as giants, elves and dwarves. It is nonetheless quite

[9] In *Bárðar saga* (124), the troll-wife Hetta is also said to be *in mesta hamhleypa* 'a great shape-shifter'.

[10] The trollish behaviour of Ljót is described thus: *hon hafði rekit fǫtin fram yfir hǫfuð sér ok fór ǫfug ok rétti hǫfuðit aptr milli fótanna* (*Vatnsdæla saga*, 69–70) 'She had pulled her clothes up over her head and was walking backwards, and stretched her head back between her legs'. There seems thus to be an undeniable link between a troll and the rear end or the 'queer' end, as I will discuss below (note 22).

common. Not only are there cases where nasty humans and creatures *tryllast*, it seems also to be possible to *trylla menn*, which indicates that those with supernatural powers are able to transform normal humans into trolls (*Heiðarvíga saga*, 303). One might be tempted to adapt Simone de Beauvoir's influential statement about women (1976, 13) and say: one is not born a troll but becomes a troll.

12. The word *troll* is not a neutral generic term. The implication of the word is clearly negative (see Schulz 2004, 51–52; cf. Motz 1987). It may be used as a swearword or in name-calling, and people and things may be sent to the trolls in a curse (*troll hafi þik* or *troll togi tungu úr hǫfði þér*, see *Grettis saga*, 11; *Bandamanna saga*, 354; *Kormáks saga*, 275; *Vatnsdœla saga*, 87; *Ljósvetninga saga*, 35; *Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* I, 131; *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhǫggs*, 72; *Reykdœla saga ok Víga-Skútu*, 198). When Hallgerðr in *Njáls saga* is fed up with her husband's friends, she says: *Trǫll hafi þína vini* 'Trolls take your friends'; later in the saga the wife of Bjǫrn of Mǫrk says: *Trǫll hafi þitt skrum ok hól* 'Trolls take your boasts and swagger' (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, 92 and 425; see also *Morkinskinna*, 135 and 177). In these cases, the word seems to be a fixed swear-word, with only a very vague hint of the literal meaning, like the modern usage of words such as 'hell' and 'damn', and this may even be the case when Katla speaks of *Geirríðr trollit* — today she might perhaps have said *helvítið hún Geirríðr* 'that damned Geirríðr' without much actual thought of hell.

As a rule, people use the term *troll* pejoratively to refer to their antagonists. Hallbjörn hálftröll, the father of Ketill hængr, is very disapproving when his son brings the giantess that he has sired a son with from Finnmörk, and calls her *tröll þat*; even though he is himself a *hálftröll*, this is still a scathing term (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* II, 123; cf. Hermann Pálsson 1997, 21–22). And when *troll* is used in namecalling, the injured party does not have to be a somewhat large lady from the wilderness. In Sagas of Icelanders, the hero himself may be the focus of such negative attention, especially if he is tall and bulky, although the word obviously is intended to signify that his character is also trollish.[11] In *Njáls saga*, although Hafr the rich does not actually use the word *troll* in insulting Skarpheðinn, he is clearly comparing him to some kind of ogre when he says that Skarpheðinn is *svá illiligr sem genginn sé út ór sjávarhǫmrum*' (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, 301) 'as evil-looking as if he had

[11] It is mostly the dark or the Grettir-like heroes (see the classification of Lönnroth 1976, 62) that seem to attract this word.

come out of a sea-cliff'. Likewise, the word is not used in *Egils saga* when Skalla-Grímr comes to the court of King Haraldr and the king is informed of this: *Menn eru hér komnir úti, tólf saman, ef menn skal kalla; en líkari eru þeir þursum at vexti ok at sýn en mennskum mønnum* (*Egils saga*, 63) 'A party of twelve men has turned up, if they can be called men. But they are more like *þursar* than human beings in size and appearance'. When his son Egill encounters King Eiríkr in York, however, the word *troll* emerges: *Maðr er hér kominn úti fyrir durum . . . mikill sem troll* (*Egils saga*, 178) 'A man has arrived outside here, as huge as a troll'. It is also made clear in this episode that Egill is uncommonly tall. And Grettir Ásmundarson is compared to a troll more than once in *Grettis saga* (e.g. 184, 211). The most dramatic instance is when he swims to fetch fire for his merchant companions and surprises the sons of Þórir from Garðr; then he is *furðu mikill tilsýndar, sem troll væri* (130) 'he was extraordinarily big to look at, as if he were a troll', and they attack him, which leads to their death and eventually to his. And not only in *Grettis saga* but also in *Fóstbræðra saga* (121–22) Grettir is feared and people think that he is a *troll fyrir durum* 'a troll at the door'.

Being a troll is not a self-constructed identity. Many people call others trolls, few call themselves trolls.[12] Egill and Grettir are interpreted as trolls but, of course, they are not, since they are the heroes of their sagas and a troll is never the hero. Trolls are *there*, not *here*. They are external; outside the fence (or *garðr*) frequently used as a metaphor for the human world in the Old Icelandic language (see Davíð Erlingsson 2003, 51–56). They belong to the Other, rather than Us (on these terms, see Ohle 1978, Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, 39–45).

13. In some interesting cases, a strange creature is referred to as a *troll* but when it turns out to be familiar, it is no longer considered a troll, which indicates that *trollskapr* goes hand in hand with alterity. *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* has a good example. A strange ogre threatens the realm of the Irish kings and eventually reaches the court itself (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* III, 176):

> Tröll eitt mikit kom á landit fyrir konúngs atsetunni, svá íllt ok grimt at eigi reisti rönd við, drap niðr menn ok fénað, en brendi bygðir, ok öngvu vætti

[12] There are very few examples in medieval sources of anyone referring to himself as a troll (and none where a human does that). In *Egils saga einhenda*, the ogress Arinnefja seems quite proud of her trollish ancestry; it must, however, be borne in mind that this is quite an ironic narrative (Gottskálk Þór Jensson 2003) and in the end she is turned back into a human princess.

> eyrði þat, drap niðr hvört kvikindi lifandi . . . var tröll svá mikit komit í hallardyrin, at enginn þóttist séð hafa jafnmikit tröll . . . Þetta tröll var svá grimt ok ógrligt, at engi þorði til útgöngu at leita.
>
> A big troll came to the country not far from the royal residence, so evil and fierce that nobody could counter it, killed men and beasts, scorched the settlements and spared nothing, killed every living creature . . . a troll had come into the hall doorway, so big that no one thought he had seen such a big one . . . this troll was so fierce and frightening that no-one dared to go outside.

The king's daughter Ingibjörg does not accept this version of the events and decides that this enemy is not a troll, in spite of its trollish ways (*eigi mun tröll vera, þó tröllsliga láti*). Her maid comes to the same conclusion after she has fed the troll, which later turns out to be Þórir járnskjöldr, a human character who has already been introduced to the story, and indeed with the comment that some believed he was a troll, since he fought so vigorously (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* III, 135).

According to this saga, this monster cannot be both Þórir járnskjöldr and a troll. A familiar and unthreatening creature is not a troll. A troll must be alien.[13] However, like Þórir járnskjöldr, heroes like Egill and Grettir risk being wrongly categorised as trolls, and this is an important facet of their stories.

The use of the word *troll* is more varied than any dictionary has taken into consideration. Of course, it would be perfectly possible to make these thirteen categories into six or four or three, but the fact remains that a troll may be a giant or mountain-dweller, a witch, an abnormally strong or large or ugly person, an evil spirit, a ghost, a *blámaðr*, a magical boar, a heathen demi-god, a demon, a *brunnmigi* or a berserk. Trolldom may be a variable state. A troll may be categorised by its trollish behaviour. A troll is always negative and it is always alien.

Even though the definition 'fjölkunnug vera, mennsk eða ómennsk' is broad, it does not now seem broad enough. How do ghosts fit in? What are the magic powers of a *brunnmigi*? Or the boar that attacks King Hrólfr and his men? When we consider the crazed boar, it becomes clear that it is not merely the being with magic powers that is the *troll* but everything that emerges from it. This would mean that a *troll* can mean both a witch and anything that the witch might choose to conjure up.

[13] The Otherness of the troll later becomes an important theme in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (48), which addresses the problem of how to distinguish between humans and trolls. Whilst the trolls are indeed bestial, their alterity is not quite as negative as in medieval sources. But they are palpably exotic.

Interestingly, Old Norse-Icelandic law codes indicate that it is forbidden not only to have supper with a troll, it is also forbidden to *vekja upp tröll*. So clearly, in some laws, a *troll* is something that a sorcerer has called forth with his sorcery, whereas in others the *troll* is the sorcerer himself (*Norges gamle Love*, I 19, 351, 362 and 372; II 323; cf. *Jónsbók*, 38).[14]

This seems to suggest that whoever awakens a troll is himself a troll. In fact, we have here the same merging of creator and creature that we see in the twentieth century in the popular Frankenstein narrative, where the name Frankenstein, originally only the surname of the scientist in Mary Shelley's novel, has gradually come to signify both the scientist who awakens a monster, and the monster that he has awakened. In the same way, *Geirríðr trollit* and the *kveldriða* that Katla accuses her of having set on her student of magic merge into one. Not only trolls and night-riders are mentioned in this episode, but also mares (see Strömbäck 1977). And any visit from a mare brings with it an existentialist problem. The mare is an evil spirit sent by a sorcerer, but as the evil spirit has emerged from the magician, it is also, in a way, the magician himself. There is, in fact, no clear separation between the two (see also Pócs 1999, 29–44; Ármann Jakobsson 2007b).[15] Thus there is a logic to using the same word, *troll* in this instance, for a magician and his magical creations.

The fate of Geirríðr's father may cast some light on the concept of the troll. I have previously mentioned that a ghost (like Sóti from *Harðar saga*) can be a troll (cf. Páll Vídalín 1782, 16). The same goes for the boar of King Aðils, and in *Eyrbyggja saga* we have yet another animal who is a *troll*: the calf Glæsir. This Glæsir behaves in a strange fashion and when a bedridden but knowing old woman hears his screams she says: *Þetta eru trolls læti, en eigi annars kvikendis, ok gerið svá vel, skerið vábeiðu þessa* 'That is the sound of a troll, not of any other living thing, and please slaughter this ill-boding creature'. As old women are

[14] Cf. *Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* III, 457. Hermann Pálsson (1997, 21) and Ólína Þorvarðardóttir (2000, 22) have different opinions on whether 'vekja upp troll' entails awakening a ghost or nature spirits, whereas later magicians are mostly accused of awakening the devil.

[15] As Klaniczay (1988, 168–88) has noted, there is a cultural link between witches and vampires, which replaced witches as the main supernatural social enemies in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Hungary. As emerges from this article, both witches and vampires (or the undead) could be regarded as trolls, the relationship being captured in the phrase *vekja upp troll*, which is something that a *troll* does. As the Frankenstein monster, and Dracula as well, is a type of undead (see e.g. McClelland 2006, 20), it is, of course, classifiable as a troll.

often ignored in the sagas as they are nowadays, she is simply told that the calf has been killed but soon she hears his bellowing again and regrets that the *trollit* has not yet been killed (171–72). And indeed this calf kills the farmer, her fosterson, in the end. It is implied that it is no ordinary calf but the spirit of Þórólfr bægifótr, the father of Geirríðr. In his old age, he had become *illr ok æfr við ellina* 'evil and bad-tempered with age', had done some evil deeds and continued to do so after his death. Even after he is buried far away, the ghost of Þórólfr soon starts walking again, killing men and livestock, and when the corpse is exhumed Þórólfr is *inn trollsligsti* (81, 169). And even when the body is burned, its ashes are blown away by the wind and licked from a stone by a cow; this cow later gives birth to Glæsir. Thus it is not only the alleged witch and night-rider Geirríðr who is a *troll*. Her father the ghost is also a *troll* and so is the calf whose life derives from his ashes and who perhaps embodies his spirit.

In this instance, we may wonder whether it is the calf itself that is a *troll*, or the spirit inside it. However we look at it, it is clear that in Old Icelandic sources, this affinity between the magician and his magic results in both the sorcerer, and the thing he calls to life, bearing the name of a troll.

While the word *troll* has many meanings, I think it is still possible to discover the essence of its meaning in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. That may not be the same as the meaning of the word in the twenty-first century, its meaning in other Nordic languages or the original meaning of the word, discussed by Wilbur (1958) and Þorfinnur Skúlason (1996). But all the meanings I have found share the common element that the troll is always anti-social and disruptive (cf. Wilbur 1958, p. 139).[16] In addition, it is always strange, inexplicable and thus supernatural or magical. There may have been some uncertainty among thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Icelanders about what the word actually meant. It is, however, very clear that it is confined neither to giants nor to witches. And it does not seem evident that either meaning (giant or witch) is the essential meaning of the word. In fact, I suggest that the

[16] In twenty-first-century internet culture, the term 'trolling' is sometimes used for the disrupting of projects (such as the editing of Wikipedia), apparently with malicious intent. A Wikipedia article includes instructions on how to deal with such 'trolls': 'Don't conclude they are a troll until they have shown complete inability or unwillingness to listen to reason or to moderate their position based upon the input of others' (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WP:TROLL).

primary translation of the word should be 'evil being' or 'evil magical creature'.

The use of the word *troll* tells us something about how giants are defined, when *risar*, *jötnar* and *troll* start becoming interchangeable (see Motz 1987, Arnold 2005, Ármann Jakobsson 2008a). Strange creatures in the wilderness are clearly connected with witchcraft and the demonic power of witches, which is antithetical to Christianity, order and society itself. Thus it is natural to use the word in curses and swearing and as a way to indicate gigantic size and everything (good, bad or neutral) that is unfettered by the limitations imposed on ordinary humans. And to return to Þorgrímr nef, the use of the word *trollskapr* of his curse signifies that the talents he possesses are of an evil nature. He, like all trolls, is imbued with an evil magical force that only serves to break, damage and ruin—in this case it is the ruin of Gísli.

III

Gísla saga uses not only the term *trollskapr* but also the word *ergi*, something wicked that Þorgrímr does when performing his evil rite. As there is no detailed description of the rite, we cannot be certain whether it involves 'lewdness' or 'lust', as those armed with the Cleasby-Vigfússon dictionary would expect. Most Icelanders now believe that *ergi* is an Old Icelandic synonym for homosexual practices, but it seems improbable that the rite involved anything of that kind.

As has been duly noted, the word *ergi* has a variety of meanings in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Iceland (Noreen 1922; Almqvist 1965, especially 63–66, 194–201; Ström 1972; Meulengracht Sørensen 1980, especially 22–24; Gunnar Karlsson 2006, 377–80). These meanings can be summarised as follows:

1. *Ergi* is rarely used of women but it can refer to uninhibited lust shown by them. In *Egils saga einhenda*, the trollish Arinnefja is seized by an uncontrollable lust towards men which she terms *ergi* (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* III, 390). The related adjective *argr* is also used in Hauksbók about the Roman goddess Venus and her incestuous and promiscuous love-life, she being *svá manngjǫrn ok svá ǫrg ok svá ill, at hon lá með feðr sínum ok með mǫrgum mǫnnum, ok hafðisk svá sem portkona* (*Hauksbók*, 159) 'so lustful and lewd and evil that she lay with her father and several other men and behaved like a whore'. In both cases, it is very clear that the *ergi* is seen as unnatural and that lustful behaviour is involved.

2. *Ergi* can be used to refer to two men having sexual relations with each other, which presumably is seen as detracting from their manhood. This meaning of the word has survived to this day and is presumably what is meant when somebody is called *rassragr* in Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga* (*Sturlunga saga*, I 279). Even more clear-cut is the insult implied when Þorvaldr the traveller and Friðrekr the bishop are said to have had children together; this offends Þorvaldr so much that he kills two men, explaining to the bishop that those men had called them *raga* (*Kristni saga*, 79–80). There are no cases of the word being used about the sexual relations of two women, however.

3. *Ergi* sometimes means something effeminate, something that men cannot do without losing manliness. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (1980, 9–20) has mentioned the custom of insulting men by calling them by the names of she-animals such as *meri* 'filly', or claiming that a man has borne children. In the aforementioned example from *Kristni saga*, the bishop is accused of having done this, although Þorvaldr is more concerned with the accusations of homosexuality against himself, even though he is clearly supposed to have adopted the 'manly role', as the father, not the mother of the children.[17] In *Njáls saga* Skarpheðinn insults Flosi by saying that he has been the bride of the Svínfellsáss and turned into a woman every ninth night (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, 314), and in *Króka-Refs saga* (134) Refr is accused of changing sexes within the same time-frame:

> Þá er ek var á Íslandi, var hann ekki í æði sem aðrir karlar, heldr var hann kona ina níundu hverja nótt ok þurfti þá karlmanns, ok var hann því kallaðr Refr inn ragi.
>
> When I was in Iceland he was not like other men in nature; rather, he was a woman every ninth night and needed a man, and for that reason he was called Refr the Queer.

In this case, the nickname *ragi* clearly suggests that Refr is effeminate.

In *Þrymskviða*, the god Þórr is concerned that the Æsir would see him as *argr* if he dressed up as a woman (*Norrœn fornkvæði*, 126). The word *argr* is also used when Óðinn and Loki trade insults in *Lokasenna*, and Óðinn accuses Loki (correctly) of having switched sexes, not referring,

[17] An interesting variation on this can be found in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* I, where Sinfjǫtli claims to have fathered nine wolves, of which his antagonist Guðmundr Granmarsson is the 'mother' (*Norrœn fornkvæði*, 185–86). Sinfjǫtli does not see his own role in this union as womanish, only Guðmundr's. On this exchange see Meulengracht Sørensen 1980, 65–68.

though, to the well-known Svaðilfari story known from *Snorra Edda* but to a different unknown case when Loki was *kýr mjólkandi ok kona* (*Norrœn fornkvæði*, 116–17) 'a milch-cow and a woman'.

4. *Ergi* can mean a lack of courage and fortitude, which presumably is regarded as a lack of manliness. In modern Icelandic, *ragr* is mainly used of cowardice and it seems clear that the words *argr* and *ergisk* refer to a lack of fortitude in, for example, *Grettis saga* (44) and *Hrafnkels saga* (126) (see Gunnar Karlsson 2006, 377–78).

5. Finally, *ergi* is something done as part of the ritual of magic, as in the case of the curse of Þorgrímr nef.

Apart from the one associated with the magic ritual, most of these meanings have lack of manliness as the common denominator. That cowardice is seen as feminine is evident when Eyjólfr inn grái calls Auðr *blauðr* when she has struck him, even though her act demonstrates that she is, on the contrary, very brave (*Gísla saga*, 101). He clearly uses the word as synonymous with feminine,[18] and there is a case to be made that this is indeed a principal function of the word, and that as courage is the essence of manliness, so the lack of the one must entail a lack of the other (Gunnar Karlsson 2006, 376–77; Clover 1993, 363–65).

Thus a cowardly man can be seen as switching genders, and the same would go for men who have had sex with each other. It is less easy to understand why excessive female lust should be integrated into the same concept as male lack of courage, effeminate behaviour on the part of men and homosexual relations. One explanation might be that women were not supposed to demonstrate lust, and *ergi* would then refer to those of both sexes who do not fulfil their gender role. But, on the other hand, there are no clear examples of the word being used about those women who dress up in the clothes of the other sex.

But how does the magic of Þorgrímr nef fit into all this lack of masculinity? There is another instance of the word *ergi* being connected with magic where Óðinn's skill in black magic is described in *Ynglinga saga* (19):

> Óðinn kunni þá íþrótt, svá at mestr máttr fylgði, ok framði sjálfr, er seiðr heitir, en af því mátti hann vita ørlǫg manna ok óorðna hluti, svá ok at gera mǫnnum bana eða óhamingju eða vanheilendi, svá ok at taka frá mǫnnum vit eða afl ok gefa ǫðrum. En þessi fjǫlkynngi, er framið er, fylgir svá mikil ergi,

[18] One might note that the word *bleyða* is still used to refer to a she-cat in some Icelandic dialects (*Íslensk orðabók*, 136).

> at eigi þótti karlmǫnnum skammlaust við at fara, ok var gyðjunum kennd sú íþrótt.
>
> Óðinn knew, and practised himself, the art which is accompanied by greatest power, which is called *seiðr*, and by means of it he could know the fate of men and predict events that had not yet come to pass; and also inflict death or misfortunes or sickness upon men, and also take wit or strength from some and give them to others. But this sorcery as it is practised is attended by such queerness that it was considered that men cannot practise it without dishonour, and the skill was taught to the goddesses.

What is apparent here is that 1) Óðinn performs a magic ritual (*seiðr*); 2) this *seiðr* goes hand in hand with *ergi*; 3) *ergi* is not compatible with manliness; 4) thus, *seiðr* is a female pursuit.

Again, the *ergi* in the magic ritual is not described in detail, although it is evidently feminine. Loki seems to think so in stanza 24 of *Lokasenna*, where he clearly categorises Óðinn's magic rites as feminine, and compares him to sibyls or claims that he has had homosexual relations, or both (*Norræn fornkvæði*, 117; cf. Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 2007). In this stanza, the term *args aðal* is used and the *ergi* seems to be the result of a *seiðr* Óðinn has practised in Samsø.

Although both *Ynglinga saga* and *Lokasenna* indicate that the ritual performance of *seiðr* was feminine rather than masculine, there are several examples of male witches in the sagas, who, unlike some of the female witches, seem to be on the whole dubious characters, although *ergi* is hardly ever mentioned. This is in accordance with the situation in the rest of Europe where magic was often believed to be the domain of women (see Kieckhefer 1989, 29–33; Russell 1972, 279–84; Flint 1991, 122–23), and there is possibly a case to be made that this was also the case in Iceland (Kress 1993, 34–60; Raudvere 2003, 112–18). Thus, even though many men practise witchcraft, those men may be characterised as 'queer'. Even more relevantly, magic is clearly on the margins of society; those who practise it are anti-social and thus perfect scapegoats, if revenge has to be taken (see Miller 1986, 110–16).

The only male figure who practises *seiðr* and gets away with it is Óðinn himself. Others might lose some of their manliness by practising *seiðr*; he does not. In *Snorra Edda*, Óðinn is presented as the patriarch of the gods, their father, and one of his most important names is said to be *Alfǫðr* (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 10). Soon Þriði, one of the three faces of Óðinn in *Gylfaginning*, elaborates upon this: *Óðinn er æztr ok elstr ásanna. Hann ræðr ǫllum hlutum, ok svá sem ǫnnur guðin eru máttug, þá þjóna honum ǫll, svá sem bǫrn fǫður* 'Odin is the highest and oldest of the Æsir. He rules all things, and mighty though the other gods are,

yet they all submit to him like children to their father'. And in case the paternal role of Óðinn has escaped anyone, he adds: *Óðinn heitir Alfǫðr, því at hann er faðir allra goða. Hann heitir ok Valfǫðr, því at hans óska synir eru þeir, er í val falla* (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 27) 'Óðinn is called All-father, for he is father of all gods. He is also called Father of the Slain, since those who fall in battle are his favourite sons'. Not only does this patriarchal status make Óðinn the Jove of the Old Norse gods, it also gives him a role comparable to that of the Christian God, the father whom all must obey. In light of the emphasis on this in *Snorra Edda*, it is safe to assume that the paternal role is one of the most important of Óðinn's functions and that no other heathen god is similarly depicted as the father of men and gods (see Ármann Jakobsson 2008d).

This Odinic idea of the early thirteenth century seems at first to be in contrast with the *seiðr* that is discussed by the same author at the same time in *Ynglinga saga*.[19] However, the roles do not have to be completely incompatible. Britt Solli has recently suggested that Óðinn was perhaps always an androgynous god (Solli 1997–98; see also Kolfinna Jónatansdóttir 2005). This is an interesting idea, but perhaps this ambiguity should not be seen as being restricted to gender, if we pursue the meanings of *ergi* to their logical conclusion.

The Óðinn we meet in *Ynglinga* saga is a widely-travelled and victorious chieftain whom men have started to worship since he blesses them before they go into battle. It is also revealed that he can see into the future and chant magic rites. His men are berserks but his enemies are struck with sudden fear. He can awaken men from death and teaches magic.

But his trollish nature comes through in more ways than that. Like the goddess Venus who was *svá ǫrg ok svá ill*, he is incestuous. In *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri relates that when Freyja came to the Æsir she *kenndi fyrst með Ásum seið, sem Vǫnum var títt* 'was the first to teach the Æsir *seið*, which was customary among the Vanir'. And then he adds that: *Þá er Njǫrðr var með Vǫnum, þá hafði hann átta systur sína, því at þat váru þar lǫg. Váru þeira bǫrn Freyr ok Freyja. En þat var bannat með Ásum at byggva svá náit at frændsemi* (*Ynglinga saga*, 13) 'While Njǫrðr lived with the Vanir he had married his sister, because that was the law there. Their children were Freyr and Freyja. But among the Æsir it was

[19] As Lassen has illustrated (2006b), Óðinn is mainly known to us through Christian sources and this has an impact on how he is depicted; her unpublished doctoral dissertation (2006a) presents Óðinn in a more nuanced way than is possible here.

forbidden to marry so close a relative'. Such incestous marriages are well known in various cultures among gods and kings,[20] but in *Ynglinga saga* Snorri states that the Æsir did not have this custom. In the *Edda*, however, he reveals that Óðinn has actually had children with his daughter: *Jǫrðin var dóttir hans ok kona hans. Af henni gerði hann inn fyrsta soninn* (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 17) 'Jǫrð was his daughter and his wife. On her he sired his oldest son'. Apparently, the restrictions against incest among the Æsir do not apply to Óðinn.

As seen above, the *ergi* of Venus consisted not only of general lewdness but also of sleeping with her father. Could it be that among men, sex of that type would generally be regarded as *ergi*? Is it perhaps the incest of Venus, rather than her uninhibited lust, that makes her *ǫrg*?

If so, Óðinn has actually practised two types of *ergi*, possibly three (see Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 2007, 128). These acts may not have counted as *ergi* in his case, however, since the gods may not have been restricted by the moral code which applies to humans. In *Lokasenna*, the gods do not seem to be much hampered by human morals, and most of the accusations Loki hurls against the gods have something to do with *ergi* (*Norræn fornkvæði*, 113–23; see Ármann Jakobsson 2001, xiii–xiv; Swenson 1991, 72–79). Óðinn has practised *seiðr* and possibly changed sex or had sex with men. Loki has been below the ground and quite certainly changed sex, as well as species, and given birth to offspring. Njǫrðr has not only had children with his sister but also indulged in freakish sexual games with the otherwise unknown *Hymis meyjar* who seem to have urinated in his mouth. Heimdallr is said to have turned his *vrgo* (*ǫrgu* or *aurgu*, queer or dirty) back to someone (whichever is the right reading, sodomy seems to be involved), and Loki refers to this as *it ljóta líf*. The goddesses are all revealed as promiscuous. Frigg has slept with her husband's brothers (incest), Iðunn has slept with the man who killed her brother, Gefjun has also slept with an unknown boy, while Sif, Skaði and the unnamed wife of Týr have fornicated with Loki himself. Freyja, the love goddess, beats them all, having slept with every god and elf present (the females may not be included).

Abnormal sex seems to be the norm with the gods and if the gods were judged as humans, they would be unfit rulers. However, the gods are not human and although other interpretations are certainly possible, one way to understand *Lokasenna* could be that human morals do not apply

[20] On Njǫrðr and his origins, see Tacitus, *Opera minora*, p. 57; Ólafur Briem 1963, 17–22.

to the gods; that they can do as they wish.[21] In the novel *I, Claudius* by Robert Graves there is a memorable scene where the evil empress Livia asks Claudius for assistance in making her divine after her death. Why? Because human morals do not apply to gods and her sins are no longer sins if she is made into a divinity (Graves 1934, 312–13). It is possible that *Lokasenna* operates on a similar logic, that human morals have nothing to do with the gods. They are above them.

Another aspect of Óðinn that may be related to his *ergi* is his ability to change shapes, also highlighted in *Ynglinga saga* (18):

> Óðinn skipti hǫmum. Lá þá búkrinn sem sofinn eða dauðr, en hann var þá fugl eða dýr, fiskr eða ormr ok fór á einni svipstund á fjarlæg lǫnd at sínum ørendum eða annarra manna.
>
> Óðinn shifted shapes. When he did that his body would lie there as if he were asleep or dead; but he himself, in an instant, went to distant countries as a bird or animal, a fish or a serpent on his or other men's errands.

This shamanistic shape-shifting accords well with some of the *Edda* legends, such as Óðinn's metamorphoses into both a snake and an eagle in order to steal the mead of poetry (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 84–85). It must also be kept in mind that Óðinn not only is a god of many names (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 27–28) but very often adopts a disguise, as in *Grímnismál*, *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Hárbarðsljóð,* and in his theft of the mead of poetry (see Haugen 1983).

Shape-shifting may be common among gods but it would be very dubious for a human, in an age when bestiality was forbidden, along with homosexual acts and incest (see e.g. Gade 1986, 126–31). That shape-shifting may go together with bestiality is, of course, clearly established by the Sleipnir legend, when Loki changes into a mare in order to lure the horse Svaðilfari away, thus breaking two taboos at the same time (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 46–47). By changing into a female animal, he is probably guilty of *ergi* (see also Mundal 1999, 6), and it seems quite possible that the same would apply to the bestiality that follows.

Long ago, Strömbäck drew attention to the close relationship between *seiðr* and shape-shifting in Old Norse-Icelandic medieval texts (1935, 160–90). In fact, shape-shifting may well be considered an inherent part of witchcraft, since a sorcerer invests his power in a magical creature he

[21] Every time a god takes part in a riddle contest, such as Óðinn's contests with King Heiðrekr and the giant Vafþrúðnir (see Davidson 1983, 30–31), a similar law is revealed. It could be summed up in one sentence: The gods always cheat.

has conjured up (like a crazed boar or a *kveldriða*). Do the close links between *seiðr*, shape-shifting and *ergi*, most prominent in the Óðinn of *Ynglinga saga*, suffice to determine that *ergi* is an integral part of magic? Perhaps not, but there is room for speculation that *ergi* may be a more fluid concept than has been generally accepted.

If incest and shape-shifting are regarded as types of *ergi*, Óðinn is clearly *argr* in several ways, because of his shape-shifting, incest and magic, and possibly because of changing into female form or having sex with other males. The Óðinn we meet in *Ynglinga saga*, *Lokasenna* and other sources is thus a dubious character. Thus there may well be a double meaning when Þorbjörg the wife of Páll Sölvason attacks the sly Sturla Þórðarson and tries to blind him in one eye, since, as she claims, he is already acting as if he was Óðinn himself (*Sturlunga saga*, I 109). Of course it is disrespectful to Sturla to associate him with a heathen god. But that is not the only aspect of the metaphor behind the attempted blinding. Skarpheðinn Njálsson is not referring only to the heathen practice of eating horse meat when he tells Þorkell hákr to *stanga ór tǫnnum þér razgarnarendann merarinnar, er þú ázt, áðr en þú reitt til þings* (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, 305) 'pick out of your teeth the mare's arse that you ate before you rode to the thing'. It is hardly a coincidence that he mentions the arse of the mare; he is probably accusing Þorkell of sodomy (with a female, in this instance) or coprophagy (see Sayers 1994), perhaps even bestiality (Salisbury 1994).[22] And, likewise, Þorbjörg might be not only trying to shame Sturla by indicating that his behaviour is heathen, but choosing Óðinn because the god was renowned for various types of *ergi*.

The *ergi* of Óðinn may not have been construed as a weakness. Taboos do not really apply to gods. As a cosmological figure, Óðinn may embody natural opposites such as good and evil within himself. He may be both masculine and feminine. But I would argue that the *ergi* of Óðinn does not necessarily only refer to the androgynous state of this deity, but to his nature as not just the face of humanity (father, king and head) but also the queer side or the rear end (where magic and trolls belong). He is not just brightness but also darkness, the yin and the yang. As a god, Óðinn may well be a witch, a queer and a troll and get away with it. If he is a god. If he is not, as Christians would believe, he would descend into being a metaphor for everything that is heathen, villainous and deviant.

[22] As Davíð Erlingsson has pointed out (1994; 1997), the rear of the body has a particular association with the devil and his demons; this is also demonstrated by some witches (see note 10).

Even though *ergi* does mean sexual deviance, and 'queerness' is thus a good translation, this meaning may not have more primacy than that related to witchcraft. In fact, I think that *ergi* may have more to do with a world view than with sexuality, in that it indicates everything unbecoming, villainous and deviant: incest, bestiality, homosexuality, the blurring of gender role, aggressive female lust, shape-shifting and sorcery.

IV

I have argued here that in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Icelandic sources, *troll* does not refer primarily to a clearly demarcated supernatural species and we should not be led astray by the later development of the word. Even in the late fourteenth century, when the word *troll* has indeed been appropriated to describe ugly and subhuman creatures in the wilderness, it is still simultaneously used for an entirely different purpose, as we see in *Bárðar saga* and Flateyjarbók. I would contend that the meaning of *troll* in the High Middle Ages is broad, even broader than Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's definition in his note to *Eyrbyggja saga*. A *troll* is not merely a sorcerer or merely a supernatural creature; the term includes both of these meanings. The *troll* is every strange thing that is evil and imbued with magic, whether it has magical powers itself or has been made by magic. The *troll* is supernatural, in that it is not restricted by human limitations. Thus it is often used as a metaphor for anything excessive, anything which is unrestrained, unhinged, uncivilised and unmeasured.

When it comes to *ergi*, my conclusions have to be more speculative, since the word appears more rarely. But I would argue that it is possible that *ergi* is naturally entwined with *trollskapr* in descriptions of magic, as both terms refer to an essential part of it. Like *troll*, *ergi* refers to something abnormal, magical, negative and anti-social. However, whereas *troll* is not a sexual word, *ergi* is used in relation to sexuality and gender roles, for any deviation from the normal. Its appearance in the description of Þorgrímr nef's magic, as well as in the depiction of Óðinn's magic, however, does not have to mean that the witch is doing something unmanly in the ritual. It might merely mean that he is being anti-social. Perhaps the real oppositions here are not so much male and female as darkness and light, or front and back. Magic is thus *ergi* in that it is anti-social and evil, as well as queer.

Although the words *trollskapr* and *ergi* only appear together in the depiction of the magic of Þorgrímr nef, I have argued here that both

words are essentially cosmological, and their union in this narrative is thus not wholly unexpected. The words are used about this particular magic rite to indicate that Þorgrímr is himself evil and subversive and that what he is doing is contrary to the correct order of the world. Thus, the words *troll* and *ergi* both encapsulate that essential quality of magic as turning the world on its head. In magic, everything is upside down or inside out, and that can be described as *ergi* or *trollskapr*.

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AMUSED BY DEATH?
HUMOUR IN *TRISTRAMS SAGA OK ÍSODDAR*

By CONRAD VAN DIJK

ALTHOUGH THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY *Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar* was dismissed by older scholarship as a 'boorish account of Tristram's noble passion' (Leach 1921, 184), it has been recuperated in the last few decades as 'by far the most intriguing Tristan derivative in medieval Icelandic literature' (Schach 1987, 86). What has especially intrigued scholars is the relation of this text to the main branches of the Tristan story. For example, Paul Schach has argued that the Icelandic Tristram is a parody of Brother Robert's Norwegian *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* (henceforth the Translated Tristram), while M. F. Thomas, among others, has suggested that the Icelandic Tristram is also indebted to other Tristan texts so that (at least for Thomas) the notion that we are dealing with a deliberate parody or burlesque is questionable. While Schach views the Icelandic Tristram's excesses and anomalies as comic, Thomas believes that they have narrative purpose and are intended seriously. Given the recent interest in humour in the sagas (for an overview see Andersson 2000, 1), it seems worthwhile to revisit this contentious issue.

While the notion of a nationally specific sense of humour is often coupled with a suspicion of stereotyping, medievalists still speculate about what Andersson calls 'Icelandic humor in general' (2000, 2). Andersson gives us a brief description of what a medieval Icelander will laugh at: 'It is a humor that is characterized by exaggeration for effect, the ironical deformation of an expectation or a norm. It typically involves a gesture or a phrase that carries a cultural practice ad absurdum' (2). The notion of exaggeration is also key to Kalinke's and Schach's understandings of parody. Kalinke, for instance, talks of 'the exaggeration of several Arthurian motifs' (1981, 199) that transforms romance into parody, and Schach argues that 'major themes of the Tristan story are grotesquely exaggerated' (1987, 97). So whether Egill drinks too much (Andersson's example), or whether Tristram kills sixty innocent knights (Schach's example), excessive behaviour can be humorous.

However, is *every* exaggeration, deformation or distortion comic? *The Guinness Book of World Records* is full of people who grow their fingernails out of proportion or sit on poles for unusual lengths of time, but somehow

we would find these people more humorous if we read about them in an Edward Lear limerick, preferably with illustrations. In both instances the same cultural norms are exaggerated but the context clearly changes our interpretation. Thus, 'exaggeration for effect' is not inherently funny. It is the setting or context (for example, the limerick form or the illustrations to Lear's limericks) that makes all the difference. But how is one to interpret the context? Do we really know what differentiates comic exaggeration from other kinds of distortion or deformation?

My point is not to argue against the perception that the sagas use exaggeration for comic effect, but to demonstrate that we should not be overly confident in rummaging through the sagas in order to classify specific incidents as either serious or comic in intent. Even more dangerous is to generalise from a few incidents in declaring an entire work to be either an outright parody, derisive at every level, or a totally strait-laced, humourless work. Such stark alternatives may contain a modicum of truth but feel strained at many levels.

With this in mind I want to re-examine a number of supposedly 'burlesque' scenes and incidents in the Icelandic Tristram. I will argue that this work's generic questions are far from resolved and that we need to establish better criteria for discussing its potentially humorous slant.[1] My primary example will be what Schach has called the 'most grotesque addition' (1960, 344) to the Icelandic Tristram, namely the slaughter of sixty knights on Tristram's voyage of healing. This also seems to me a perfect opportunity to examine the validity of the 'exaggeration thesis'. In the second part of this article I will come back to a number of Schach's other arguments for an ironical reading.

In the Icelandic Tristram, when Tristram defeats King Engres of Ireland, he himself is wounded. At this point other Tristans discover that only Isold can provide healing, but the Icelandic narrator only comments *ok er þat sýnna, at þat komiz ekki þaðan, nema guð allsvaldandi sendi honum þann lækni, er beztr er í allri veröldunni*, 'and it seemed likely that it [the sword splinter] would not come out unless Almighty God sent him the best physician in all the world' (Kalinke 1999, 266–67).[2] Tristram, though, seems to know exactly what to do. He requests a ship from King

[1] See also Sarah Kay's observations on the particular difficulty of characterising the ethos of Tristan texts and on the generic indeterminacy that often results (1985, 185–86).

[2] I have used the texts and translations in Kalinke, *Romance: Volume 1: The Tristan Legend* (1999) throughout. Where I suggest an alternative translation I have done so in square brackets.

Mórodd (Mark) with a crew of sixty, all of whom are related by kin, and sets out for Ireland. Close to Ireland, Tristram suggests to one of his sixty companions that another is out to kill him. When this individual takes pro-active measures, his victim's foster-brother quickly takes revenge, starting a feud that leads to a massive blood-bath (268–69):

> Síðan stendr upp hverr at öðrum, ok svá kemr því máli, at þar slær í bardaga, ok fellr þar hvert mannsbarn nema Tristram. En þeir, er honum þóttu lífvænir, þá skreið hann til ok drap þá alla, svá at hann lifði einn eptir.
>
> Then each man stood up against the other and the result was that it came to a fight there and every mother's son fell there, except for Tristram. And he crept up to those who seemed to him to have an expectation of life and killed them all, so that he lived on alone.

When Tristram has been healed, Ísodd asks him about his journey, and after he describes what happened we read (270–71):

> Hún segir: 'Þú hefir mikinn skaða gert Mórodd kóngi, frænda þínum, er þú léz menn hans drepaz niðr, en suma draptu, ok vartu þó hálfdauðr.'
>
> 'Nei, frú,' sagði hann, 'þeir váru allir til valdir, er sízt var skaði at, þó at engi kæmi aptr.'
>
> She said: 'You have done great harm to your kinsman, King Mórodd, since you allowed his men to slaughter one another, and you killed some yourself, and yet you were half dead.'
>
> 'No, my lady,' he said. '[The ones who were chosen were all those who would be the least missed if none] came back.'

It is not surprising that Schach has continually found this incident, unique to the Icelandic Tristram, to be bizarre, absolutely pointless, and lacking in plot-function (1957–59, 119–20; 1960, 344; 1987, 97). This senselessness initially led Schach to conclude that the shorter saga 'is based on a very faulty reminiscence of Brother Robert's work' (1957–59, 120). However, he quickly changed his mind about the author's intentions and suggested that the Icelandic Tristram 'reveals itself upon closer scrutiny to be not an incidental vulgarization of Friar Róbert's work, but . . . a deliberate caricature of the translated romance' (1964, 281; cf. 1960). He therefore included the scene as an important example of the saga's burlesque treatment of its predecessor (1987, 97). In the end, then, Schach managed to recover authorial intent with the help of satire and irony.[3]

[3] See also Thomas's comments on Schach's 'attempts to find a clue which will lead him out of the labyrinth of authors' intentions where he is wandering' (59). Thomas refers specifically to Schach's tendency to force a choice between the author's ineptness or the author's brilliant satirical vision.

The first thing up for question is what one understands by the generic descriptor 'burlesque'. Burlesque is generally understood as a kind of umbrella genre to various parodic and satiric sub-genres (Abrams 1993, 17). Burlesques are usually written in order to entertain, but they do not have to be humorous or comic (17). As such, it is unclear whether Schach views this incident as funny or not. What is equally mystifying is how adjectives like 'bizarre' and 'pointless', as well as the constant refrain that the incident lacks any plot function, add up to a thematic function that is recognisably burlesque. If something is 'pointless' how can it make a satirical point? If it lacks meaning, how can it be meaningful? If the incident was never in the Translated Tristram then what does it parody?

How then is one to argue against the view that this incident is so irrational (one might even say surreal) that it contrasts with, and therefore parodies, the seemingly serious, rational, plot of Brother Robert's version? The natural response is either to ascribe the knightly bloodbath to inept memorial reconstruction (as Schach did at first) or to argue that the scene does have a rational plot-function in the Icelandic Tristram.[4] Thomas takes the latter approach, arguing that 'the slaying of the sixty knights is not altogether without narrative justification' (Thomas 1983, 58). Especially the latter response, which implies that there is no real exaggeration, should not let us lose sight of the fact that the validity of Schach's basic premise, namely that what is pointless or grotesque is necessarily burlesque, is still in question.

Thomas has sought narrative justification for the feud at sea by looking at Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*. In Gottfried's story, Tristan deliberately heads for Dublin, lands in a skiff, and explains his 'forlorn condition as the result of a pirate-attack on a merchantman' (Thomas 1983, 62). Thomas believes that 'the *Icelandic Tristram*, in providing its hero with a slain company of royally-equipped knights, in fact unquestionably substantiates the story of an attack at sea' (63). Indeed, a queen is more likely to take in a wounded nobleman surrounded by his dead retinue than a wandering beggar who plays the harp. Thomas concludes (63):

[4] Of course, other options also exist. For instance, one could argue that Brother Robert's version also includes some bizarre moments. For example, Schach himself at one point alludes to 'the bizarre tale related in *Tristrams Saga* [the Translated Tristram] about King Artús and an African giant who went about slaying kings and dukes and other chieftains for their beards' (Schach 1969, 110).

> Tristram's remark [to Isold] that he in truth did little harm to his uncle in eliminating these particular men, because they had been specially selected so that they would not be sorely missed, is surely placed there by the author not to point up irony, but to indicate to the public that Tristram had devised his plot to infiltrate the Irish court before leaving Cornwall—a sensible enough manner of proceeding. There are other brutal scenes in Norse literature—the *fornaldarsögur* spring to mind—which are clearly not intended to satirise their heroes by their brutality. The Volsungs, particularly the females, are not renowned for their lenity or consideration for others in gaining their own ends.

For Thomas, then, the slaughter at sea is a question of realism rather than burlesque, narrative cohesion rather than irony, and (common) sense rather than satire.[5]

At the same time, the tacked-on suggestion that brutality is not uncommon in Old Norse literature still leaves us with the feeling that all of Thomas' neat and rational explanations have not managed to make the problem of 'exaggeration' disappear. Indeed, the fact that brutality makes narrative sense does not really conclude the matter if this brutality can still be considered humorous. Surely Egill's excessive drinking has its plot functions too, but does this exclude the possibility of humour? Does the 'narrative justification' of exaggerated moments necessarily nullify their ludic potential? I would suggest that humour and plot-movement are often well integrated (witness the *fabliau*), and often depend on one another, and that Thomas's entire argument against a burlesque reading thus rests on false premises.

To see this another way, we can analyse the slaughter of sixty knights as a trickster-like act (which in the Icelandic context would turn Tristram into a Loki figure, a cultural model that may have been operative even in Christian times). Merritt Blakeslee, discussing Tristan as a trickster figure, suggests that the trickster (following Jung) falls under one or more of four types: the clumsy stumblebum, the perverse imp, the purposeful self-centred trickster and the culture hero (1989, 114). In Schach's view, Tristram has all the characteristics of the perverse imp who is wilfully evil and tricks for the sheer pleasure of inflicting gratuitous harm on others (114). Thomas tries to transform Tristram into the third trickster type who deceives in order to satisfy the urges of his libido

[5] Recently, Marusca Francini (Francini 2005) has elaborated at some length on the relationship of the Translated Tristram to the *riddarasögur*, suggesting that many of the changes from Brother Robert's version are indeed generic effects. This is highly plausible, but it does not fully address the issues of humour and plot functionality with which I am concerned here.

(114). However, the question remains: is Tristram's trickery humorous (whether it be malicious, pointless trickery or purposeful, self-advancing trickery)? Indeed, we may well wonder if a Tristram who callously plans and instigates the murder of sixty knights to help himself is not an easier subject of satire than one who takes such actions pointlessly.

Although narrative cohesion does not preclude comic possibilities, this does not mean that we should ignore how the narrative hangs together, since as I have suggested earlier it is precisely the context that will help us to ascertain whether an exaggeration is humorous or not. So let us look at the narrative in some more detail. If, as Thomas argues, the Icelandic writer was influenced by the piracy story—either from Gottfried von Strassburg or from a translation of Brother Robert which we no longer have—then one would expect Tristram actually to make a mention of an attack at sea. When he meets Queen Flúrent on the Irish shore his replies to her questions are evasive, laconic and even haughty (Kalinke 1999, 270–71):

> Dróttning frétti eptir, hvárt <nokkut> lifði á skipinu, þat er henni mætti andsvör veita. Tristram svarar: 'Ekki ræðr um þat.' Hún spyrr hann at nafni, en hann sagði til slíkt, er honum sýndiz. Hún spyrr, ef hann er græðandi. Hann kvez þat víst ætla.
>
> The queen asked if there was anyone alive on the ship who could give her an answer. Tristram answered: 'That's rather doubtful.' She asked him his name and he told her just what he thought fit. She asked him if he was able to be healed. He said that he felt sure he was.

Tristram ostensibly makes little attempt to explain what has happened and his responses have an insouciant tone that may lend a touch of humour to the situation. While the piracy story in Gottfried's narrative sheds some light on the saga's grotesque slaughter, the Icelandic Tristram does not itself supply this clear narrative justification. If the saga is indebted to the piracy motif then it certainly offers a very partial and unrealistic version of it.

It is also not the only motif that may have influenced the events on Tristram's voyage. Let us look at another motif, hitherto unnoticed, that may have inspired the Icelandic translator. In Brother Robert's and Gottfried's versions, Morhold, unlike his Icelandic equivalent King Engres, comes down from Ireland not to invade England or Cornwall (the two are not sharply differentiated), but to exact tribute. Both Brother Robert and Gottfried give quite a long explanation of what this tribute consists of every year and (in Gottfried's case) how this paying of tribute came about. The tribute Morhold comes to collect when Tristram challenges

him is very interesting. As Brother Robert describes it (Kalinke 1999, 72–73),

> En á hinum fimmta vetri skyldi skattrinn vera sextigir fríðustu sveinbörn, er finnaz mætti, ok þá fram greiðaz, er Írlands kóngr krefði sér til þjónustusveina,
>
> But in the fifth year the tribute was to consist of the sixty handsomest boys who could be found and handed over, for the Irish king desired to have them as his servants.

Gottfried also tells of a human tribute, and he is a bit more elaborate about certain details, but his account is essentially similar (Gottfried von Strassburg 1978, 122). Brother Robert adds that Morhold has come to collect the tribute *á ríkum drómundi*, 'in a powerful ship of war' (Kalinke 1999, 74–75).[6] When Tristram in the Icelandic saga then slaughters sixty knights at sea he seems to bring to the Irish court the very tribute it exacted in earlier versions of the story, aside from the minor point that the payment has been rendered useless.

Of course, when we spot these correspondences between the two sagas, a host of complications spring up. For instance, is the piracy motif compatible with what we can call the tribute motif, or are the two mutually exclusive? Can we talk about a deliberate echo in the Icelandic Tristram, so that we can further categorise this echo in terms of burlesque intentions or narrative functionality? Or should we admit the distinct possibility that the tribute motif has been displaced through faulty reminiscence? These questions obviously do not have easy answers.

Still, I think some tentative conclusions are possible. For one thing, I do not think the tribute motif makes an easy fit with the Icelandic saga. If Tristram has just saved the country from Irish oppression, why would he still be bringing sixty knights to Ireland? Such an act might make some sense as a way of taunting the Irish (similar to the notion of cutting off your nose to spite your face), but it is a stretch to see Tristram's laconic replies to Queen Flúrent as a form of taunting. Other explanations likewise feel unsatisfactory. If Tristram arrives in Ireland with the exact number of English knights which the Irish have

[6] Incidentally, in some versions (Gottfried, Eilhart, etc.) the duel between Tristan and Morholt is fought on an island to which the contestants row. When they arrive Tristan sets loose one of the boats so that only the survivor can return to shore. The national struggle with Ireland thus technically occurs at sea. It is also noteworthy that in the chapter prior to the one dealing with the tribute Brother Robert has the steward Róaldr send sixty knights to help Tristram against his Breton enemies (chapter 25).

been demanding (at least in the source texts), how would this represent a cunning plot on the same level as, say, the piracy story? Treating this echo as a parody of Brother Robert's tale also seems hard to justify, not least because the narrative sequence is out of order and the duel with Morhold has been changed to the King Engres invasion. The possibility of faulty memorial reconstruction looks very tempting at this point. I certainly do not think that the older scholarship was wrong to posit some sort of textual mismanagement.

Yet my primary objective is not to use this episode as proof that the text as a whole was orally transmitted or rewritten from memory. The larger point I want to make is that treating the slaughter at sea as an intertextual moment that interacts with motifs in other works can only leave us mystified about its potential for humour. We can see in this outrageous massacre the traces of events in other texts, but the traces are too many and too disparate to add up to a single, unified interpretation. And if we cannot be sure of the writer's interaction with other Tristan variants, can we still make claims about his authorial intentions? The parody that Schach describes is an intertextual affair (a satire on Brother Robert's version), but if the Icelandic translator's use of his sources remains ambiguous, so must his stance towards his predecessor.

Such a conclusion will inevitably seem escapist, but surely we respect the alterity of this text more if we acknowledge the opacity of this passage. It seems foolish to choose between faulty memorial reconstruction, serious intent or satirical burlesque when we hesitate before each option. When we consider what is at stake—the work's genre among other things—we may want to hold out on making a final decision.

I want to conclude these reflections on the slaughter at sea by coming back once more to the question of 'exaggeration'. Andersson has suggested that Icelandic humour makes caricatures out of characters, and caricatures depend on repetition for their effect. Thus Egill is *always* larger than life: 'His appetites, his gestures, his postures, his moods, and his exorbitant demands are all caricatural' (2000, 6). However, Tristram's brutality is such an isolated incident that it strikes us as odd rather than as characteristic. He does not consistently come across as a trickster figure, and Kalinke even talks of his clumsiness in other situations (1981, 207) and calls him 'dimwitted' (206). This means that if we cannot fit Tristram's behaviour into a meaningful context then we will have 'exaggeration', but for no 'effect'.

Having shown some of the difficulties attendant upon reading for humour in the sagas, I want to use the second part of this article

to examine a number of other arguments for reading the Icelandic Tristram as burlesque. Schach, in his article '*Tristrams Saga ok Ýsoddar* as Burlesque', presents us with twelve reasons (one of which we have considered already) why we should see the Icelandic Tristram as 'a derisive caricature' (Schach 1987, 87) or 'a burlesque treatment of the Norwegian romance' (98).[7] These reasons are a summation of a long series of articles by Schach on the question, and they also include a number of Marianne Kalinke's supporting arguments, so it will be worthwhile to see what some of Schach and Kalinke's other criteria are. Except for a few assorted reasons (1, 5, 9), Schach's points fall under three main headings: examples of pointless incidents (3, 8), ironic comments made by the narrator (10, 11, 12) and events that have been exaggerated (2, 4, 6, 7). I will also deal with them in this sequence.

Schach's first point is actually not a reason at all, but an assertion that the Icelandic *Tristrams saga* has certain structural affinities with the Translated Tristram. He implies that the Icelandic Tristram must therefore be a direct parody of the latter, rather than of other Tristan texts. My concern is not to adduce debts to Gottfried or Eilhart von Oberg, or to prove that the 'commune' and 'courtoise' branches of the Tristan story are actually intertwined, although I think Thomas makes a good case for both possibilities. I only want to point out that if the northern sagas are related to each other this does not necessarily imply any parodic posture.

Schach's fifth point is that in the Icelandic tale Tristram is urged to marry Ísodd by her mother, by Ísodd herself, and finally by the king, who even offers his kingdom to him; in every instance Tristram refuses (97). It seems to me that this pattern of refusal thematises the conflict between loyalty to the king and loyalty to one's personal desire that is a staple of so many romances.[8] And simply the fact that *fin'amor* is made to seem problematic does not mean that it is treated satirically. In fact, Chrétien

[7] See also the brief summary of some of these reasons and conclusions in Schach 1996.

[8] At the very end of the saga the narrator once more highlights this theme: *En fyrir þá sök þá Tristram ekki Ísodd hina fögru af Mórodd kóngi, at hann unni honum hins bezta ráðs, ok mátti hann þó fyrir engan mun við sköpunum vinna*, 'And the reason why Tristram did not accept Ísodd the Fair from King Mórodd was because he wanted him to have the best match, and yet he was by no means able to withstand the fates' (Kalinke 1999, 288–89). This traditional, formulaic summation shows that the writer is conscious of certain thematic patternings which are tragic rather than burlesque.

de Troyes' romances, which form the basis for many of the *riddarasögur*, are full of these types of conflicts.

Schach's ninth point is that the names of the royal counsellors (Héri—dunce or rabbit—and Kay the courtly) are parodic. Schach acknowledges that 'in Arthurian romance, of course, Kay was the very epitome of rudeness, cowardice, and incivility' (97) but seems to argue that the epithet 'courtly' provides a more ironic treatment of Kay than we receive elsewhere. To make so much of these epithets seems unwarranted since Kay is usually a bit of joke simply by being rude and cowardly. In this respect the Icelandic Tristram is indeed funny, but so are many traditional romances. Some burlesque moments are part and parcel of the romance genre. Geraldine Barnes in fact suggests that the original romances are far more ironic than their northern translations: 'The stimulus to irony in the *roman courtois* was probably a combination of social and political factors inapplicable to medieval Scandinavia' (1987, 66). Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between Barnes's and Schach's positions; in that case the humorous nicknames given to royal counsellors show the continuity of an ironic perspective on courtly life.

Schach gives two examples of what he calls pointless incidents. I have already dealt with the blood-bath at sea (reason 8). Schach's other example occurs when certain Vikings abduct the young Tristram and before setting him free 'shave his head and rub tar into it' (Schach 1987, 97). Schach concludes: 'This humiliation is absolutely pointless' (97). As I have argued already, the fact that it has no purpose is of course no direct indication that it must be taken as satiric. Moreover, as Thomas has clearly demonstrated (in an argument to which Schach never replies),

> in Old Norse literature the shaving and tarring of the head symbolises the plunge of the well-born to the lowest depths of social inferiority, the prevention of recognition of their true rank, and the acceptance of the status of slaves (1983, 57; compare also Francini 2005, 255).

Naturally, when Tristram arrives at court the narrator is eager to assure us that his hair has been restored to its former glory (58).

This does not mean that the narrator cannot make a funny side remark about Tristram's baldness. In point 10 Schach rightly points out one such humorous comment (1987, 97–98):

> When Tristram swims ashore after having been set free on a skerry, he wrings out his clothing. 'But I think', said the one who composed the story, 'that the pirates had so dealt with him that he did not have to wring out his hair, for there was none.'

But such humorous comments can also be found in the Translated Tristram, as in this (under)statement about the abduction of Tristram and his teacher: *En meistari hans komz með kostgæfni til lands ok stóru starfi ok vandaði sér ekki mjök höfn né lending*, 'but the teacher managed to reach land after a great deal of difficulty and hardship, and he wasn't particular where he came ashore' (Kalinke 1999, 52–53).

Schach includes the baldness scene as one of three examples that demonstrate that 'the function of the narrator is to underscore the irony or wry humor of a given situation' (1987, 97). What Schach means by 'the narrator' is the phrase 'the one who composed the story', which is used in every quotation in points 10 to 12. I must admit I have difficulty following the logic here: why should quoting one's predecessor be considered a form of parody? It may be that if one deliberately misquotes one's source the reader might catch the irony, but it also seems possible that when the Icelandic writer quotes the 'one who composed the story' he alludes to a shared sense of humour.

Moreover, not all of Schach's examples where the narrator is quoted are particularly humorous. Consider point 11 (98):

> 11. When the king offers to give Tristram 'the woman and the kingdom', the hero declines to accept the kingdom. '"But I swear," said he who composed the story, "that I would rather have Ýsodd than all the gold in the world"'.

The assertion that Ísodd is worth more than gold seems fairly conventional and provides merely a convenient way to end the chapter.

On the other hand, a narrator's tone can be hard to assess. Take Schach's analysis of irony in point 12 (98):

> The Norwegian romance ends with a prayer of contrition, in which Isond begs forgiveness for her sins and those of Tristram. In the Icelandic tale this is transmogrified into an impious comment by the narrator: '"Although they could not enjoy each other while alive," said he who wrote the story, "we beg this of God Himself that they now enjoy each other in love and friendship; and it is to be expected," said he, "that this is so, for we have a merciful God to deal with."'

I am not sure why Schach views this as an impious comment. The author of the Icelandic Tristram makes no comments about these statements, but is content to end the saga with his predecessor's words. It seems more likely that he is bowing to the *auctoritas* of the past. It is interesting that when Schach discussed this quotation in an earlier essay he referred to the narrator as 'the pious author of this tale' (1969, 107–08)[9] and

[9] Notice that here Schach does not differentiate at all between author and narrator, leaving no room for irony or subversion.

maintained that the Icelandic Tristram takes on a serious and moral tone in the final chapter, 'where the author takes great pains to assure us that the two lovers were destined for each other by God' (125 n. 88).

A number of conclusions can be drawn at this point. Although many of Schach's examples are unconvincing, some witty moments clearly exist. However, irony and humour are already part of the tradition which the Icelandic author is supposed to be parodying, something to which the practice of phrasing witticisms as quotations of the composer bears ample witness. Moreover, the Icelandic translator remains concerned with the tragic conflicts and themes of the story.

I want to reinforce these conclusions by looking at Schach's most powerful arguments, namely those in which he samples a number of exaggerated moments. The four examples he gives are Blenziblý's mad love for Kalegras and their three-year stay in the bower; Tristram and Ísodd's prevaricating for three months on their journey to Cornwall; the king's reluctance to accept the evidence of his wife's unfaithfulness; and the lovers' week-long captivity without food in a cave (97). Perhaps the most convincing examples are the first two. When Kalegras kills Blenziblý's friend or favourite Plegrus in a joust, Blenziblý is very quick to jump into bed with Kalegras. In fact, they stay together in a bower for three years, oblivious to all that goes on around them. Similarly, when Tristram and Ísodd have drunk the love potion on the way to England they delay their journey in a certain harbour, so that it takes them three months to reach England. What I want to suggest is that while some of these scenes are tinged with parody (the bower scene is especially comical) this does not exclude their dramatic contribution to the story's thematic development. It also does not transform the entire narrative into burlesque. As we have seen earlier, exaggeration serves a variety of uses.

Kalinke points out that in Blenziblý's case the *recreantise* motif stems from *Erex saga*, and is combined with the *leicht getröstete Witwe* motif from *Ívens saga* (1981, 199–204). She concludes: 'Through the exaggeration of several Arthurian motifs, love is depicted in the Icelandic *Tristram* as sudden, overwhelming, and exclusive' (199). It seems to me, though, that Kalinke's three adjectives describe virtually every Tristan version, and that the Icelandic author may in fact be seeking to emphasise the story's inherent themes. The Icelandic author seems to have made conscious editorial decisions. Consider what he eliminates: in Brother Robert's account Tristram is conceived when Kalegras is dying. This frantic moment of passion in the face of death certainly highlights the

idea of love as irrational and absurd, sudden, overwhelming and exclusive.[10]

The Icelandic saga likewise insists on the strange madness of love (Kalinke 1999, 256) but does so in a different way. It plays with triadic structures, so that we have three years in the bower, three months for a journey, and three nights of bridal-substitution.[11] While courtly love is obviously shown to be excessive, with each smaller increment in time the feeling of realism grows. At the same time Ísodd is much like Blenziblý, for love also quickly overwhelms her initial desire for revenge (270–71):

> Henni fannz mikit um vænleik ok atgervi Tristrams, ok þótt hann hefði <drepit> bróður hennar ok unnit henni mikinn skaða annan, þá vildi hún þó heldr eiga Tristram en nokkurn annan, þann er hún hafði fréttir af.
>
> She admired Tristram's beauty and accomplishments very much, and although he had killed her brother and done her another great harm, she wanted to marry Tristram more than any other man she had heard of.

Here too we seem to be dealing with a variation of the *leicht getröstete Witwe* motif. It could be argued therefore that the Icelandic writer develops his themes quite cleverly and poignantly.

Schach's third example of exaggeration involves Mórodd's (Mark's) resistance to admitting that his wife is unfaithful. As Kalinke puts it, 'the author makes the most of the potentially farcical aspects of the situation by portraying Mórodd as naively trusting' (1981, 204). When the king maintains that Tristram only goes to Ísodd's bed to keep her amused, the word *skemmta* 'to amuse' can refer to any entertainment, but also to sexual pleasure (205). According to Kalinke, this sort of irony humorously underscores Mórodd's willing naivety (205). Something of King Mark's reluctance to believe his eyes can also be felt in the Translated Tristram. When Markis discovers the lovers asleep in each other's arms in the orchard he says to the dwarf with him (Kalinke 1999, 164–65):

> Bíð mín, meðan ek geng í kastalann. Ok skal ek leiða þangat mestu menn mína ok sjá, með hverjum atburð er vér höfum fundit þau bæði saman hér, ok skal ek láta þau á báli brenna, er þau verða fundin bæði saman.

[10] On how the saga writers dealing with the Tristan story treat the love element see especially Finlay 2004. Finlay argues that these northern writers were already developing their own views of love as a powerful force before they imported the subject of love by means of the Tristan story.

[11] For further triadic structures in the Icelandic Tristram, see Francini 2005, 257.

> Wait for me while I go to the castle. I will bring my most distinguished men to determine what kind of situation we have discovered them both to be in here. I shall have them burned at the stake if [or when] they are found together.

Of course the king's behaviour is partially explained by the fact that he cannot legally proceed to burn the lovers at the stake without sufficient witnesses, but the element of reluctance is still present.

In fact, the king's attempts to catch the lovers in the act are generally exaggerated in the Translated Tristram. By comparison, the Icelandic Tristram spends a very short chapter (two pages) on these scenes. Details which Schach feels are distorted are merely mentioned in passing and are not given any obvious burlesque colouring. This includes the weeklong captivity in a cave (Schach's fourth example of exaggeration), a detail which is given one line! (*Svá er sagt at þau væri viku matlaus í hellinum*, 'It is said that they were in the cave for a week without food' (280–81).) The timing of this line, after the episode has already occurred, gives this information a belated and insignificant feel. Only the suggestion of hearsay (*Svá er sagt*) draws attention to the possible irony that in the Translated Tristram the lovers lead a fairly tranquil pastoral life.

A number of conclusions can now be drawn. First of all, I think Schach has radically overstated his case that *Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar* represents a direct parody of Brother Robert's romance. There are some hints of parody, especially in the early stages of the work (the bower scene stands out), but as Kalinke has pointed out, what is parodied are Arthurian motifs (found in sagas other than the Translated Tristram) and not specifically Brother Robert's version. Moreover, the line between simple humour and parody is a fine one, and one the Icelandic Tristram does not cross very often. That the Icelandic Tristram includes humorous passages I have not sought to deny. We do the work a disservice by turning every witticism into a mere plot function. On the other hand, to avoid turning humour into satire we need to remind ourselves that there are plenty of humorous, ironic and even crude moments in earlier Tristan narratives.[12] In addition, exaggerated moments in the Icelandic Tristram may even serve to highlight important thematic concerns. Since there exists no direct correlation between the distortion of cultural norms and humour

[12] Consider, for example, the infamous incident of the giant who tries to copulate with a woman who suffocates and bursts beneath him (Kalinke 1999, 182–85). This grotesque moment occurs in Brother Robert's version but not in the Icelandic Tristram.

we must be prepared to read each exaggerated incident within its specific context.

Lastly, when faced with insoluble difficulties (as with the slaughter at sea) we should not foreclose our options by settling on one possibility. Schach himself writes that 'in the Arthurian world and especially in the Tristan story, in whole and in its parts, the dividing line between heroic and heroesque, tragic and comic, sublime and ridiculous is tenuous indeed' (1987, 98). Schach, as we have seen, argues that the Icelandic *Tristrams saga* 'transformed tragedy into burlesque' (98). What I have tried to suggest is that we cannot be so certain of this transformation; the dividing line is not only tenuous, but is not even always discernible.

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REVIEWS

ÍSLENZK-FÆREYSK ORÐABÓK. By JÓN HILMAR MAGNÚSSON. *Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag*. Reykjavík, 2005. 877 pp. ISBN 9979 66 179 8.

Faroese lexicography effectively began in 1891 with the publication of *Færøsk anthologi* (Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 15). The first volume of this work contained a Faroese grammar and edited versions of ballads and legends (together with minor related material), but the second comprised a Faroese-Danish word list and an index of personal and place-names. While volume 1 was the responsibility of V. U. Hammershaimb, the noted Faroese philologist and founder of modern Faroese orthography, volume 2 was produced by his younger colleague, Jakob Jakobsen, one of whose many achievements was the groundbreaking *Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language in Shetland* (original Danish version 1908–21, English translation 1928–32). To be sure, Jens Christian Svabo had begun compiling his Faroese-Danish/Latin dictionary as early as the 1770s, but this was largely an antiquarian exercise and the work was not published until 1966–70 (Færoensia 7–8, ed. Chr. Matras). Jakobsen's effort, on the other hand, together with the Faroese-Danish word list he made for his *Færøske folkesagn og æventyr* (Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 27, 1898–1901), formed the basis of the first Faroese-Danish dictionary for the general user: *Føroysk-donsk orðabók* (ed. M. A. Jacobsen and Chr. Matras, 1927–28). Surprisingly, perhaps, considering the extent to which the work was rooted in the world of ballads, legends and folk-tales, it remained the sole Faroese-language dictionary of any size or importance for more than thirty years. Only in 1961 did a second, thoroughly revised and much enlarged, edition appear, followed in 1974 by a substantial supplement (ed. J. H. W. Poulsen). 1967 saw the publication of the first Danish-Faroese dictionary, *Donsk-føroysk orðabók*, the work of Jóhannes av Skarði (2nd ed. 1977). Jóhannes also compiled the first English-Faroese volume, *Ensk-føroysk orðabók*, which came out in 1984. The following year a Faroese-English dictionary was produced, a translation by G. V. C. Young and C. R. Clewer of the 1961 Faroese-Danish volume and 1974 supplement, but with the material in the supplement integrated into the main work. Then in 1987 came *Færøysk-norsk ordbok* (ed. E. Lehmann). The 1990s saw an upsurge in Faroese lexicographical activity. Among various dictionaries published or in the making, the following may be singled out for mention: a new English-Faroese volume (ed. Annfinnur í Skála, J. Mikkelsen and Z. Wang, 1992), a new Danish-Faroese (ed. H. Petersen, 1995), and, last but not least, the long-awaited mono-lingual *Føroysk orðabók* (ed. J. H. W. Poulsen et al., 1998), with its almost 1500 pages a notable achievement.

In just over a hundred years, lexicographers have thus helped to elevate Faroese from a primarily oral medium to one with a well-established and accepted written form. The process has not been without its problems, however. In the Faroes language survival has—probably justifiably—been equated with national survival, and the survival of the language has been seen as dependent on establishing a clear line of demarcation between Faroese and Danish (the Faroes having been part of the Danish realm at least since the Reformation). The reasoning goes that if extensive

influence from Danish is allowed to proceed unchecked, there may come a time when Faroese can no longer be identified as a distinct language, and at that point the struggle for nationhood will effectively have been lost. These political and linguistic considerations have formed the background to Faroese dictionary making (it is not for nothing a four-volume work appeared in the years 1961–77 entitled *Føroysk málspilla og málrøkt*, 'Bad Faroese and Faroese Language Cultivation', the purpose of which was to suggest and promote puristic Faroese equivalents for a wide range of Danish words and expressions). Much as in Iceland, therefore, but for somewhat different reasons, dictionaries have tended to prescribe rather than record usage. Large numbers of words heard in everyday Faroese conversation have been excluded and thus outlawed from the written language; taking their place has been a substantial body of philological constructs. The Faroes, however, differs from Iceland in the way these constructs have been received. In Iceland *nýyrði* have been adopted on a wide scale, and quickly become part of written and spoken language alike. In the Faroes the response has been less than wholehearted. The result has been a kind of diglossia, in which a word of Danish origin may be used in speaking while its equivalent in the written language will be either a Faroese construct of relatively recent date or a traditional Faroese word given a new meaning.

This is the background against which *Íslenzk-færeysk orðabók* (*Íslensk færeysk orðabók* on the dust jacket, oddly enough) is to be seen. The work of an Icelandic rather than a Faroese lexicographer, it is nevertheless very much from the stable of linguistic purism. It is a substantial volume with some 51,000 headwords and a wealth of expressions and examples of usage. Some grammatical information is supplied (e.g. gender of noun headwords, principal parts of irregular verb headwords), but there is no outline grammar or guide to pronunciation in the manner of some dictionaries. Indeed, apart from a brief introduction (in Icelandic and Faroese) and three lists explaining the abbreviations and signs used, and detailing the chief sources from which material was excerpted, the book contains little but the dictionary itself.

In at least one important respect it is difficult to judge *Íslenzk-færeysk orðabók*. The author nowhere makes clear who the work is aimed at. The only hint at its purpose is the claim that it offers sorely missed support for Faroese from its Icelandic sister language (pp. 8, 10). Who is likely to use the dictionary, in what circumstances, and for what purposes, is thus left open. Although published in Iceland, it would seem to be directed more at a Faroese audience: it is for Icelandic that grammatical information is offered rather than Faroese, while Icelandic words for which no obvious Faroese equivalent is available may be explained at considerable length. The Icelandic learner of Faroese is thus likely to find s/he is less well served than the Faroese learner of Icelandic.

Only use over a long period will reveal the true strengths and weaknesses of a dictionary—how well it meets the demands of different kinds of speaker, listener, writer and reader. The present reviewer has been unable to do much more than make spot checks. These were chosen to test (1) adequacy of coverage, (2) quality and comprehensibility of information, and (3) realism—how far the dictionary records actual rather than desired usage.

Perusal of three pages of an Icelandic thriller revealed significant gaps that might well trouble the Faroese reader not totally familiar with Icelandic idiom. Among various words and phrases not to be found in *Íslenzk-færeysk orðabók* were *afdalur* 'out-of-the-way valley' (guessable), *bera á* 'be noticeable', 'stick out' (possibly deducible from *áberandi* 'prominent' or *berast mikið á* 'make oneself noticed', both included), *í röð og reglu* 'in perfect order', *draga í land* 'pull back [from saying something]', *ekki við eina fjölina felldur* 'busy with too many things at once'. It is of course unclear how representative a sample this is. However, the fact that all of the items except *afdalur* were to be found in the more modest *Concise Icelandic-English Dictionary* of Sverrir Hólmarsson, Sanders and Tucker (1989) did not inspire total confidence.

Pronouns and prepositions have suffered under Jón Hilmar's treatment. Readers looking up reflexive *sig* are informed 'nf og þf er ekki til', which seems to imply, erroneously, that this pronoun is defective not only in not having a nominative form, but also in lacking an accusative. We further learn that *sig* is an 'afn', an abbreviation that is unexplained. The list of abbreviations offers 'áfn', but that is short for *ábendingarfornafn* 'demonstrative pronoun', which *sig* assuredly is not. Reflexive possessive *sinn* is designated an 'efn', an abbreviation that has not made the list either, but which presumably stands for *eignarfornafn* 'possessive pronoun'. The personal pronoun *vér* is explained as 'ft af ég' 'plural of *ég*', but there is considerably more to it than that, as the entry *vor* 2 manages to hint: ('nýtt í hátíðarligum máli í ft . . .') 'used in high style in the plural . . .'. Prepositions can be treated in an odd and arbitrary fashion. Under *á* a few examples of usage are provided; *fyrir* on the other hand is simply glossed as *fyri* with a note to the effect that the headword governs accusative and dative; *í* is missing altogether; *með* is glossed as *við* with one solitary example of usage but no indication about the cases governed by the headword; *við* has information about the cases governed, an example of usage marked (1), and a further example of exactly the same usage, but nothing more. Once again, none of this inspires full confidence.

In the matter of prescription versus description *Íslenzk-færeysk orðabók* comes down pretty firmly on the side of the former. Thus Icelandic *miði* 'piece of paper', 'note' is glossed as *seðil* or alternatively *atgongumerki* 'ticket [to a performance]', while the Faroese equivalent of *farmiði* '[travel] ticket' is given as *farseðil* or *ferðaseðil*. All this is true enough as far as written Faroese goes, but in the spoken language both *atgongumerki* and *far-/ ferðaseðil* are almost always replaced by *billett* (from the French via Danish). Icelandic *varalitur* 'lipstick', we are informed, corresponds to Faroese *varralitur*, *varrasmyrsl* or *varrastift*, but what a Faroese woman asks for in the shops is *lepastift* (Danish *læbestift*). And among the Icelandic headwords we find *bjúgaldin* rather than *banan(i)*, although with a nod in the direction of reality *appelsína* 'orange' has been allowed to supplant *glóaldin*.

All in all *Íslenzk-færeysk orðabók* is certainly something it is better to have than not to have. It is probably right, though, to view it as first and foremost a contribution to the cultivation of Faroese. How far it can serve as a practical everyday tool for office, study or home, time will tell.

MICHAEL BARNES

NORSE-DERIVED VOCABULARY IN LATE OLD ENGLISH TEXTS. WULFSTAN'S WORKS. A CASE STUDY. By SARA M. PONS-SANZ. *NOWELE Supplement* 22. *University Press of Southern Denmark*. Odense, 2007. xviii + 318 pp. ISBN 978 87 7674 196 9.

The broad narrative of the adoption of Old Norse loan-words into English will be familiar to most readers of *Saga-Book*: a fairly large number are attested in Old English, but these tend to be technical terms, whereas it is in Middle English that we see loans entering the core vocabulary (p. 207). To elucidate the precise processes underlying this situation, however, detailed examinations of particular corpora are required. The one Pons-Sanz has chosen is that of Wulfstan II, Archbishop of York 1002–23.

The book essentially comprises two sections. In the first, having defined Wulfstan's canon (ch. 1), Pons-Sanz examines the ways in which Wulfstan deploys his Norse-derived vocabulary, particularly *lagu* ('law') and *grið* (broadly 'peace'), the Norse-derived words he uses most frequently (chs 2–6). In the second section, Pons-Sanz's painstaking analyses form the basis for considering how Wulfstan acquired his Norse-derived vocabulary and what role he may have had in promoting it among other Old English-speakers (chs 7–8).

The analyses of chapters 2–6 are hard to fault. Pons-Sanz considers literary reasons for choices of words (such as Wulfstan's penchant for alliteration and putative dislike of tongue-twisters); the distinction between terms Wulfstan was willing to reproduce when copying or revising others' texts and those he preferred when composing *de novo*; the degree to which Norse words were productive elements of Wulfstan's own word-formation; and, perhaps most impressively, the relationship of Wulfstan's Norse-derived vocabulary to other Old English words of related meaning. Occasional points, of course, can be questioned, such as *ð* for *þ* in the etymology of *ðrǣl* (p. 59); and Pons-Sanz twice uses the *Thesaurus of Old English* as the basis for defining *ceorl* (pp. 175, 224) although it merely restates the evidence of Bosworth and Toller and has in any case been superseded by the *Dictionary of Old English*. But these are quibbles.

The section is, however, made unnecessarily hard to follow by some aspects of the presentation. Chapter 2 largely consists of the identification of Wulfstan's Norse-derived vocabulary, but is misleadingly entitled 'Terminology and procedural decisions'. Texts are almost invariably referred to by their short titles from the Toronto *Corpus of Old English*. This is off-putting at best, and at times simply obscures: few will recognise WHom12 and WHom20.1–20.3 as the well known *De falsis diis* and *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (as they are named on pp. 103 and 189). Tables are often poorly labelled (e.g. table 5, p. 106), while semantic field diagrams showing the relationship of *lagu* and *grið* to words of related meaning would have made the discussions easier to navigate.

But most readers will be most interested in the conclusions Pons-Sanz arrives at in chapters 7 and 8, whose cross-referencing makes it easy to check specific points in earlier chapters as required. Chapter 7 marshals strong arguments that Wulfstan was not a native of the Danelaw, that much of his Norse-derived vocabulary is attested in West Saxon before his own writing and appears in his earliest works, and that his works show little sign of being restricted to a Danelaw

audience. His Norse-derived vocabulary emerges, then, as technical vocabulary already well assimilated into West Saxon.

Previous thinking on the borrowing of Norse vocabulary into English has focused on direct contact between English- and Norse-speakers. In chapter 8, however, Pons-Sanz shifts the question intriguingly to ask how Norse-derived words may have been propagated by English-speakers. This is potentially the most exciting chapter of this book, but is also the most problematic. Some of its claims, such as Malcolm Godden's argument that Wulfstan's lexicon influenced Ælfric's, seem sound. But the chapter focuses on comparing the frequency of Norse loans in Wulfstan's work with their frequency in other Old English texts 'previous to or (near-)contemporary with Wulfstan's'. This approach is less successful, because Pons-Sanz compares only absolute, rather than relative, numbers of attestations. Thus Wulfstan uses the word *cost* 'condition' (from Old Norse *kostr* 'choice') once, whereas the other texts include it six times (table 14, p. 240). Pons-Sanz seems to take this as evidence that Wulfstan's vocabulary was relatively little influenced by Norse (p. 240). But if Pons-Sanz's non-Wulfstanian corpus is roughly the same size as the complete Old English corpus of 4,000,000 words, and we guess that Wulfstan's corpus is about 100,000 words, then Wulfstan was actually six or seven times more likely to use *cost* than the average Anglo-Saxon writer. Conversely, Pons-Sanz says:

> bare numbers are indicative of his role in the general popularisation of the simplex [*lagu*]: whereas it appears one hundred and sixty-two times (57.7%) in his works, it is used on one hundred and nineteen occasions (42.3%) outside them in pre-Conquest texts. (p. 231)

Relative to my putative corpus sizes, *lagu* 'law' (from *lǫg*) accounts for 0.162% of Wulfstan's words but only 0.003% of other Anglo-Saxons': Wulfstan was in this scenario fifty-four times more likely to use *lagu*. His frequent deployment of *lagu* becomes even more striking—but his popularisation of it perhaps does not.

These calculations highlight other methodological questions: is the absence of a given loan from Wulfstan's corpus statistically significant? The question is also relevant to the fact that some low-frequency vocabulary appears only late in Wulfstan's career (pp. 199–203). How reasonable is it to compare Wulfstan's Norse-derived vocabulary with a corpus containing texts that predate contact with the Vikings, or with genres where there is no likelihood of relevant semantic fields occurring? These issues are familiar in corpus linguistics and can be addressed. If nothing else, chapter 8 needed a more thorough discussion of the assumptions it makes and the limitations on the validity of its claims, and were the problems addressed, its data could also have been made much more useful.

Pons-Sanz is too careful in drawing conclusions to be led seriously astray by these problems, however, and the key strengths of her work lie in any case in the detailed study of Wulfstan's texts. She has taken a major step in improving our understanding of how Norse-derived words worked in Old English.

ALARIC HALL

RUNIC AMULETS AND MAGIC OBJECTS. By MINDY MACLEOD and BERNARD MEES. *The Boydell Press*. Woodbridge, 2006. 278 pp. ISBN 1 84383 205 4.

The present book—somewhat misleadingly titled—is the first overall discussion of magical, or possibly magical, runic inscriptions. It supplements the annotated catalogue offered by John McKinnell and Rudolf Simek in *Runes, Magic and Religion* (2004). The authors aim at shedding new light on their topic partly through a broader and deeper discussion than has hitherto been seen, partly by comparison with magic legends from other epigraphical traditions, especially in the classical world. The book has nine chapters plus an introduction and a conclusion, a bibliography and an index. Both the earliest and the latest runic traditions are treated. The inscriptions discussed are sorted into categories related to mythology, love life, protective charms, fertility charms, healing charms, pagan rituals, Christian amulets, rune-stones, death and curses, and runic lore.

This book should be of interest to two groups of people: those interested in runes and those interested in the content of the inscriptions in question. I belong to the second group. Possessing only basic knowledge of runology, my background for reviewing this book is first and foremost my work on ancient Northern European magic. In order to judge the book's value to those with similar wider interests, however, I have consulted the runologist James Knirk on a few important questions.

In my opinion the book has both good and poor qualities, but unfortunately the latter predominate. The positives first: The book gives the most complete survey available of possibly magico-religious runic inscriptions and in this respect it is very useful. It treats many inscriptions not mentioned in other works on the same topic, and this is important to students of the subject who will want to know about even the 'maybes' (even if, as a result, several probably non-magical inscriptions are included). I appreciate the attempt to present a broad discussion of this topic, and the desire to see the inscriptions in a broader context, especially through the comparison with other epigraphical traditions. This has obviously shed new light on some of the scantiest early runic inscriptions, on the *laukaʀ* inscriptions (pp. 102–08), on many Christian-influenced charms and on the many gibberish inscriptions. I also like the broad discussion of 'abracadabra', and seemingly corrupt legends generally. An outcome of the broad approach is also an analytical model for early runic amuletic inscriptions. The authors claim that such inscriptions fit into a scheme of five elements: 1. Letter sequences, 2. Naming expressions, 3. Charm words, 4. Symbols, 5. Item descriptions (p. 82). This seems a useful clarifying tool, although in some cases the authors stretch it too far. Although the model is open to criticism, it deserves support as a proposal that may generate better questions and new knowledge.

Then the objections: shortage of information is a general problem throughout the book. It is often dificult to distinguish the authors' contributions from the work of others. This is confusing, and sometimes gives McLeod and Mees too much credit; in other cases they may not get the credit they deserve. This may be the case with the Old English *ærcriu* inscriptions (pp. 140–41)—but I

am not sure, because of the problem of insufficient information. Old Norse literature is frequently referred to without the information needed to find the sources if one wishes to take a closer look at them. Editions are not specified in the bibliography, and page or stanza numbers are not given (see for example pp. 107–08 and Chapter 10). In the discussion of the different inscriptions the authors mention only some of the readings and interpretations that have been suggested in the past. Sometimes even widely accepted readings are omitted (see for example Stentoften, pp. 112–13). The interpretations presented are often supported with little discussion and argumentation, and implied to be obvious, even in cases which are highly uncertain (for example, p. 19, Nordendorf fibula; pp. 19–20, Pforzen buckle; p. 78, Kragehul spear shaft; p. 76, Vimose plane; p. 217, Eggja inscription). The aim of this may be a more accessible presentation. But as a result, the authors' own suggestions appear more convincing than they should and the whole complex appears easier than it is. A popular book, on the other hand, would require far more simplification—and more balance.

The uncertainty of many of the interpretations is also a problem for the main subject of the book: the comparison with other epigraphical traditions. This problem, however, is not properly addressed. I also miss the discussion, promised on the book's inside jacket, of whether runic characters themselves were considered magical or not. The authors do take a stand (runes were not originally considered magical but came to be) but this is not really based upon a discussion of the problem.

The book has quite a number of formal errors, inaccuracies, inconsistencies and misunderstandings as well. The authors declare that their transcriptions use forms 'as similar as is reasonable to those of literary Norse' (p. 7). The result, however, is sometimes not transcriptions but normalisations that cover choices and interpretations made by the authors (pp. 118, 170). Sometimes such normalisations stop halfway: *kaltr eltr* for *kaldr eldr* (p. 60). Old Norse words are sometimes presented in strange ways. The genitive plural *ljóða*, for instance, is presented as the nominative (*ljóð*, n., p. 5), and the Óðinn names *Sigfǫðr* and *Alfǫðr* are spelled 'Sigfǫður' and 'Alfǫður', with a Classical Old Norse *ǫ* but a late Icelandic epenthetic *u* (p. 22). Old Norse names are sometimes given in fully anglicised forms: 'Arvak', 'Alsvin', 'Sigurd', (p. 244: Old Norse *Árvakr*, *Alsvinnr*, *Sigurðr*), sometimes in semi-anglicised forms: 'Glapsvið', 'Bárd' (pp. 22, 37: Old Norse *Glapsviðr*, *Bárðr*), without explanation or apparent reason. The authors understand *seglmarar*, literally 'sail steeds', i.e. 'ships', in *Sigrdrífumál* 10 as 'waves' (p. 241). They do not realise that Old Norse *Alsvinnr* and *Alsviðr* (p. 244) are the same word in different evolutionary stages. The byname *grenski* 'from *Grenland* in south-eastern Norway' is misunderstood as 'from Greenland' (Old Norse *Grœnland*, p. 230). There are enough such examples to undermine my confidence. Because of this and my other objections I will avoid referring to information from this book without confirming it with other sources.

ELDAR HEIDE

REFLECTIONS ON OLD NORSE MYTHS. Edited by PERNILLE HERMANN, JENS PETER SCHJØDT and RASMUS TRANUM KRISTENSEN. *Studies in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1. *Brepols*. Turnhout, 2007. xiii + 176 pp. ISBN 978 2 503 52614 0.

Product of a symposium held at the University of Aarhus in 2005, augmented by essays by the three editors, this useful short book illuminates a range of different approaches which can be taken to Old Norse myth. The volume opens with a provocative overview by Jens Peter Schjødt of work in the area over the last decade and a half, distinguishing between contemporary (picture stones, runic inscriptions, some skaldic verse) and subsequent (textual) witnesses to Norse myth, noting the often enigmatic nature of the former, and the biases and misinterpretations which may have been absorbed by the latter. Schjødt praises the contributions of Margaret Clunies Ross and Terry Gunnell to the field, demolishes Lotte Motz, and then moves on to the recent interest in shamanism and the interfaces between Norse belief and the religious practices of neighbouring peoples. While this recent development may generate some convincing local theories, it fails overall to convince the author of the centrality of shamanism to pre-Christian Norse thought. The broader comparative perspective, exemplified by such works as Kris Kershaw's book on Óðinn and the *Männerbünde*, it is argued, produces a more illuminating methodology for Norse material (P. K. Kershaw, *The One-eyed God: Odin and the (Indo-) Germanic Männerbünde* (Washington, 2000)). Schjødt concludes that, apart from a welcome increase in interdisciplinary work, much current research still relies on traditional historical and philological methodologies. And it is none the worse for that; although modern scholars are now aware that they can no longer posit an ahistorical identification between the minds of pre-Christian and preliterate Scandinavians and the mentality of the modern researcher, they are also aware that a refusal to attempt to reconstruct early belief systems is an admission of defeat.

Following this survey is a series of essays by the symposium participants. These tend to be narrower in their focus than the broad horizons gestured towards by Schjødt. Pernille Hermann argues that *Íslendingabók* is only partially to be read as history, that it participates in a number of other types of discourse, in particular the Christian understanding of succeeding stages in biblical history: the Law of the Patriarchs, Mosaic Law and the Law of Christ. John McKinnell makes a learned and wide-ranging argument for the continuing usefulness of pagan myth to Christians, its narratives embodying different types of moral lessons and situations from the clear-cut teaching of Holy Scripture. Ethically complicated, mythic narrative 'could be used to investigate some of the personal, social, and moral issues that faced Icelandic secular aristocrats' (p. 49). Rory McTurk puts forward the argument that the treatment of Áslaug in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* may reflect female initiation rituals. The evidence for such rituals for men has been marshalled by Schjødt and de Vries; the possibility that Áslaug's founding-mother role demands that she also be depicted as having come through rigorous testing is intriguing if unproven.

Stephen Mitchell profitably revisits *Skírnismál*, returning it to the context of medieval Scandinavian magical practices and examining comparative evidence for cursing and charming as speech acts. Judy Quinn examines the use of the valkyrie motif by Snorri and Sturla Þórðarson, showing that even under the new theological dispensation, there is still a valued role for the valkyrie in praise-poetry. Indeed

'valkyries flit across each of the three works that comprise *Snorra Edda*, but it is in *Háttatal* that they gather in numbers' (p. 97). Quinn unpacks Snorri's treatment of the Hjaðningavíg myth and the survival of valkyrie kennings even in Sturla's poetry, while ironically noting the absence of comforting or glorifying female presences at Snorri's own death-battle. Catharina Raudvere's brief essay argues for the usefulness of *fornaldarsögur*, in particular *Vǫlsunga saga*, for the historian of religion. A nuanced reading of the corpus can generate information about elements of ritual and belief, although due caution must be exercised.

Jens Peter Schjødt contributes a reading of Ibn Fadlan's account of the Rus funeral framed by the recognisable stages in rite-of-passage rituals. These encompass the passage of the dead man from this world to the next, the transformation of the sacrificed slave-girl from slave to chieftain's wife, and the transition of the new chieftain to his new status, a ritual alluded to only briefly, and surrounded by secrecy. Rasmus Tranum Kristensen concludes the book with a structural analysis of the kinship structures of the myths concerned with the creation of the world and with *ragna rǫk*, demonstrating why it should be that Óðinn must be killed by Fenrir, and not by some other antagonistic figure. Kristensen depends largely on Snorri's systematisation of kinship relations for his argument, although Snorri's text need not necessarily reflect very closely pre-Christian understandings of how the universe came into being or how it will be destroyed. Nevertheless, the schema of divine and giant heritage constructed by Kristensen shows that the wolf and the god occupy the same slot in genealogical terms, figuring their problematic kin-relationship in ways which both a pre-literate and a Christian audience would understand.

Reflections on Old Norse Myth is a thought-provoking collection. Though some pieces are brief, and suggest that they have been less thoroughly worked up from the original symposium papers than other more developed chapters, each essay offers a valuable insight into a text or series of texts via a range of methodologies. The substantial and up-to-date bibliographies, one of which accompanies each article, together with Schjødt's preliminary overview of past scholarship, make much of the volume eminently suitable for recommendation to undergraduates, both as introduction and as challenge to received opinion (such as it is) about such staples of the undergraduate course as *Íslendingabók* and *Skírnismál*. Studies in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia is a new series from Brepols, overseen by the editors of *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*. The first volume augurs well for the future of the series.

CAROLYNE LARRINGTON

FRIGG OG FREYJA—KVENLEG GOÐMÖGN Í HEIÐNUM SIÐ. By INGUNN ÁSDÍSARDÓTTIR. *Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag / ReykjavíkurAkademían*. Reykjavík, 2007. 351 pp. ISBN 978 9979 66 199 3.

Given the paucity of evidence that exists about Frigg and Freyja in Old Norse myth, providing only glimpses into what may have been a rich pagan tradition of goddess-worship, it seems an ambitious task indeed to write a whole book about

these figures. However, as the subtitle indicates, Ingunn Ásdísardóttir widens the discussion to all possible evidence of worship of female deities in pagan Scandinavia, covering visual material, topography, archaeological evidence and textual sources. In focusing on the two most prominent of the Old Norse goddesses she follows in the footsteps of many previous scholars, most recently Hilda Ellis Davidson and Britt-Mari Näsström, and those familiar with their work will be acquainted with much of the discussion and argument here, although this book does not reach the same conclusions. Ingunn contests their hypothesis that Frigg and Freyja are aspects of what was originally a single, all-encompassing female deity, a 'Great Goddess' in the Gimbutasian sense, and argues with conviction that although they may both originate as fertility goddesses, the worship of the Vanir-deity Freyja (or a Freyja-like goddess) in Scandinavia is older, stronger and richer than that of Frigg, who was added to the Old Norse pagan belief system with the introduction of the Æsir and mainly fills a passive role.

Built on Ingunn's Master's thesis, the book takes an interdisciplinary approach and is divided into three parts: a thorough review of scholarship on Frigg and Freyja since the nineteenth century (the major developments dating from after the mid-twentieth century), an overview of all possible evidence, material and textual, for belief in female deities in Scandinavia and finally a detailed analysis of Frigg and Freyja, built on this evidence. The review of scholarship is helpful in summing up previous arguments but perhaps betrays its origin as part of a thesis. Quotations are translated into Icelandic; however, they seem unnecessary at times and, somewhat frustratingly, the cited authors' own words are not provided.

The archaeological evidence, including Stone- and Bronze-Age rock carvings, the Egtved Girl, the Gotland stones from 700–1100 AD, fifth-century bracteates, gold foil figures, amulets, the contents of the Oseberg ship burial site, and staffs (*velir*), indicates in the view of many scholars some kind of belief in a female deity in prehistoric times; however, this is impossible to prove and can never go beyond speculation. Ingunn is careful in her treatment of these sources, noting that nothing can be said with certainty about these hypothetical beliefs except that they seem to be connected with water, death and probably sacrifice. Topographical evidence is dealt with swiftly, building on arguments originally made by scholars including de Vries, Simek and Sahlgren, to highlight the greater prevalence in Scandinavia of place-names connected with Freyja, while Frigg, in fact, has only one place named after her. Also, harking back to Tacitus's Nerthus and the idea that Scandinavian pagans worshipped their gods outdoors, Ingunn argues that the frequency of suffixes such as *-tuna* and *-lunda* in combination with Freyja, Freyr and Njǫrðr may suggest that Vanir place-names, and thus worship, are older than those of the Æsir. From this, the author postulates that the cult of Freyja was much stronger than Snorri Sturluson would have us believe. My only comment here is that it would have been useful to see the relative distribution and frequency of place-names connected with the two subgroups of gods for further support, especially since Ingunn elsewhere in the book claims that the cult of Freyja may have continued for longer than those of other pagan gods.

The next section discusses textual evidence; first, non-Norse sources which may provide evidence of pagan beliefs involving female deities: the Merseburg Charms, Strabo, Tacitus, Paulus Diaconus, Adam of Bremen and Saxo Grammaticus. These texts, ranging vastly in temporal and geographical setting, content, attitudes and motivation, seem to be taken as unproblematic representations of historical practice. There is little discussion of how far we may rely on them as historically accurate, except in the conclusion of the chapter, which offers the general caveat that much of the textual evidence is Christian, male-authored and thus biased. The question of authenticity is directly addressed only in the treatment of works attributed to Snorri Sturluson, whom Ingunn portrays as an active editor attempting to streamline the Old Norse pantheon into a coherent system, amplifying the role of Frigg as wife and mother without being able wholly to efface the more independent Freyja. The Eddic poems which refer to these goddesses are described in detail, and the remaining sources, skaldic kennings containing Frigg and Freyja or their *auknefni* as well as a few relevant prose references, are also briefly mentioned, although their context could have been considered more closely. The fact that the book's methodology is not primarily literary is probably responsible for the lack of attention given to this; for example, Ingunn does not address the possibility, as some scholars have, that the authors of *Egils saga* or *Eiríks saga rauða* may have invented allusions to Freyja or *seiðr* for purely literary purposes rather than preserving relics of authentic pagan practice.

The third part of this book is an analysis of all of the sources which potentially provide evidence of belief in Frigg and Freyja, aiming to come to a conclusion as to whether they are split aspects of the same original goddess, or two separate entities, by comparing and contrasting them in every possible way. The organisation is logical and clear and treats each major theme in turn; first, the common elements such as the *fuglshamr*, a relationship with Óðinn, and their sorrow, and secondly, what distinguishes them: i.e. ancestry (Æsir/Vanir) and in particular their divergent natures. Freyja is presented as independent and active whereas in Ingunn's view Frigg is mostly passive and defined by her subservient position as wife and mother. Various evidence links Freyja with nature and fertility (as a Vanir-deity), the life-cycle, female sexual agency, sacrifice, death and the afterlife, *seiðr*, prophecy, fate and protection in battle. Frigg on the other hand is less interesting, it seems: defined by her male kin, dispensing risk-averse advice to her husband Óðinn in *Vafþrúðnismál* and mourning her son Baldr in *Vǫluspá*. The author argues that Christian authors glorified the role of the Mother and were therefore more interested in Frigg's distinct maternal qualities. It seems to me that Ingunn dismisses Frigg's socially conforming role too lightly; on the question of her agency before and after Baldr's death in *Snorra Edda*, for instance, she comments: 'Þessi eina sögn er vart nægjanleg heldur til að breyta þeirri mynd af Frigg að hún sé tiltölulega óvirk' (This single story is hardly enough either to alter Frigg's largely passive image) (216). The Eddic narratives mentioned could suggest that actively promoting peace and preventing violence was a female role; Frigg is indeed not as striking or deviant as Freyja, but perhaps the need for female characters to be transgressive in order to merit approval and interest is a modern one.

This book aims to argue that Freyja was the original female deity worshipped in the North whereas Frigg arrived at a later stage along with other Æsir, a view with which followers of the 'Great Goddess' theory will no doubt disagree. The reader will come to his or her own conclusion as to whether Ingunn's thesis is convincing, but she certainly argues for the two goddesses' separate origin with great enthusiasm in a well-structured and accessible book, written in clear readable Icelandic. This study is detailed and comprehensive if at times slightly repetitive, bringing in an array of evidence which will no doubt be a valuable source for students of Old Norse pagan practices.

JÓHANNA KATRÍN FRIÐRIKSDÓTTIR

THE SHADOW-WALKERS. JACOB GRIMM'S MYTHOLOGY OF THE MONSTROUS. Edited by TOM SHIPPEY. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 291; *Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* 14. *Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies and Brepols*. Tempe and Turnhout, 2005. xi + 429 pp. ISBN 2 503 52094 4.

The Shadow-Walkers originated in a series of papers presented at the medieval conferences in Kalamazoo and Leeds in 1997. As its long gestation period suggests, this is no hastily concocted volume of short and ultimately unsatisfactory conference papers but, on the contrary, a carefully planned and executed collection of extensive articles, replete with interesting details and ideas. The editor, Tom Shippey, is to be congratulated for setting the standard in turning conference papers into a book.

The subject of the book is a number of species of supernatural others, anthropomorphic in various ways. Its starting point is Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835), and Grimm provides every article with a firm foothold, as each contributor is more or less engaged in a dialogue with him. The book is thus cleverly structured as a reception history, which is both extremely logical (how else to deal with supernatural creatures?) and fruitful, since the definition of reception is sufficiently broad to include medieval sources, which every contributor takes on with admirable ambition.

The editor himself contributes not only one chapter but also an Introduction and an Afterword, which provide a clear framework for the book. Always an engaging writer, Shippey also brings to the subject an interesting perspective on mythological scholarship and successfully argues that the study of monsters is not a peripheral occupation, but has implications for the whole study of mythology (and folklore). He very fittingly starts his introductory article with the cautionary tale of *Middlemarch's* Mr Casaubon who wanted to write the 'key to all mythologies'. Thus the reader is warned from the outset that even though the present treatment is meant to be comprehensive, it cannot aspire to the aims of nineteenth-century scholars, whether they were fictional Oxford men or actual German mythologists such as Grimm.

All the individual contributions to *The Shadow-Walkers* provide much food for thought. Paul Battles discusses dwarfs comprehensively, including Old Norse

dwarfs (of the Eddas and the romance sagas), medieval German ones and the post-medieval dwarfs of folktales. His study is free of generalisations but his summary of the evidence at the end is quite useful. I myself have already drawn on the wealth of Battles's research and I am confident that it will serve others equally well.

The contributions of Randi Eldevik on giants and Martin Arnold on trolls suffer a little, to my mind, from separating the two species too decisively; as I have shown in a recent article in *Mediaeval Scandinavia* (2005), the same creature may often be called both a giant and a troll even in the same sentence, but Eldevik, who ignores this evidence, suggests a clearer demarcation between the two in the medieval sources on p. 90. Both articles are still very useful, both analytical and informative, and both authors outline the important issues and problems concerning these creatures. Eldevik, with some justification, dwells on the Graeco-Roman counterparts of the giants, convincingly arguing that the similarities between these and the Norse variety are striking and numerous. She also has to contend with the fact that some giant narratives suggest that the giants are a wise, honourable and even handsome race, whereas they are also, at least in the Eddas, the main menace to the world and its civilisation. This is an interesting paradox that, of course, cannot be resolved in a single study. Arnold does not have to deal with this contradiction but, on the other hand, has several centuries of trolls to account for, and the image of the troll seems to be somewhat variable. Solving this problem with an engaging chronological narrative of the troll's evolution from the dysfunctional, to the dystopian, to being an agent of ideological disquiet, his article will justly be mandatory reading on this subject, although I feel that there is more evidence to be unearthed about the concept of the troll (as demonstrated by my article in this volume of *Saga-Book*).

The other contributors to *The Shadow-Walkers* are Sarah L. Higley (the werewolf), Peter Orton (theriomorphism in general), Joyce Tally Lionarons (*dísir*, valkyries, *vǫlur* and norns), Tom Shippey (elves), Philip Cardew (Grendel) and Jonathan Evans (dragons). Every contribution is essential reading for the student of the monstrous. Evans has a particularly unenviable task, given how ubiquitous dragons are in mythological narratives anywhere and everywhere. He is in dialogue not only with Grimm but also with J. R. R. Tolkien, who has been a great influence on both scholarly and popular perceptions of dragons in the twentieth century. Tolkien had a very clear view of dragons, but Evans obfuscates the picture considerably and forces us to resist Tolkien's seductive clarity.

In fact, it could be argued that one of the main assets of this collection of essays is that it does not serve up easy solutions to its readers. On the contrary, it is unsettling and thought-provoking, challenging its readers in every way and goading them to think for themselves. I found much to disagree with, and have indeed disagreed in public with several of the articles since the book came into my hands. Its thought-provoking quality is one of its main virtues, along with its comprehensive collection of evidence and its juxtaposition of medieval monster reception with the modern (that is, largely the nineteenth-century) one. There is a clarity of intent in this volume which makes it really useful, both for the

medievalist and for those interested in the scholarship of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This impressive book, which no one with any interest in Germanic monsters, or indeed Germanic mythology in general, can afford to ignore, is somewhat unfortunate in its cover. A fuzzy picture of a saurus of some kind almost drowns its subtitle and the name of the editor, but not the main title, which is in red so bright as to suggest that blood is about to drip from the letters, and all this against a pale pink background—appearing to promise a comic book or a horror film rather than a serious scholarly work.

ÁRMANN JAKOBSSON

ST MAGNÚS OF ORKNEY. A SCANDINAVIAN MARTYR-CULT IN CONTEXT. By HAKI ANTONSSON. *The Northern World* 29. *Brill*. Leiden and Boston, 2007. vii + 269 pp. ISBN 978 90 04 15580 0.

In his introduction Haki Antonsson makes clear that this book ('an offspring' of his doctoral dissertation, submitted in 2000 (p. vii)) is neither a history of the cult of St Magnús nor an account of its spread. Instead it contextualises the earliest stage of the cult and its associated literary corpus, arguing that these need to be understood in relation to other Scandinavian, English and Slavic 'princely martyr' cults: St Magnús thus provides a 'spring-board for a wider examination of various aspects relating to sanctity and hagiography in the early Christian North' (p. 4).

Part One considers the corpus of texts about St Magnús in the context of other hagiography. Particular attention is given to the fourteenth-century *Magnúss saga lengri* as the best surviving guide to the lost twelfth-century Latin *vita* of St Magnús by 'Master Robert'. Haki links the production of the saga with the promotion of Magnús's cult by the see of Skálholt in the first decades of the fourteenth century. Against those who have attributed *Magnúss saga lengri* to Bergr Sokkason, Haki argues that Bergr is unlikely to have been responsible for such a maladroit combination of material from Robert's *vita* with material from *Orkneyinga saga* (p. 23 n. 85). *Magnúss saga lengri* implies that the *vita* was written in 1136/37, but Haki argues that Robert's work should be dated to *c.*1170 and that it may be a reworking of an earlier text compiled in 1136/37 (pp. 14, 35).

In delineating the 'narrative pattern' of princely martyrdom in the Magnús corpus Haki draws attention to affinities with English, Swedish, Danish and central and east European hagiography. In a section reworking material from an article he published in 2004 ('St Magnús of Orkney and St Thomas of Canterbury: Two Twelfth-Century Saints' in *Sagas, Saints and Settlements*, ed. G. Williams and P. Bibire, pp. 41–64) Haki undertakes the detailed textual comparison of the Magnús and Thomas Becket corpora that was not attempted by A. B. Taylor and Finnbogi Guðmundsson when they identified Master Robert with Robert of Cricklade (pp. 42–67). Having demonstrated links between Robert's *vita* of Magnús and Robert of Cricklade's *Vita et miracula* of Thomas Becket, Haki concludes that although this does not prove that Master Robert was Robert

of Cricklade 'the cumulative body of evidence certainly points strongly in that direction' (p. 66).

The discussion of affinities with the cults and hagiography of Slavic princely martyrs (pp. 28–30; links between the Slavic cults and that of St Óláfr are examined on pp. 115–21) makes a valuable contribution to debate about the possibility of links between Norse and Slavic cults and/or texts, though we still await a definitive account of these affinities from someone at home with the relevant Slavic languages in addition to Norse, Latin and the Scandinavian languages (cf. p. 117 n. 63).

The focus in Part Two moves to *Orkneyinga saga*, the main surviving source for the Orcadian historical context in which Magnús's cult developed, though Haki believes that it draws on a lost *Translatio et miracula* composed shortly after the translation of Magnús's relics to Kirkwall in 1136/37 (p. 69). In order to determine when Magnús's cult was first officially recognised, and by whom, Haki subjects to careful scrutiny the commonly held view that Bishop Vilhjálmr and Earl Rǫgnvaldr Kali Kolsson co-operated in sanctifying Rǫgnvaldr's uncle Magnús. Arguing that when Rǫgnvaldr became earl Bishop Vilhjálmr had already organised Magnús's cult on a firm footing, Haki suggests that in its very earliest stages the cult was promoted by the church alone. A detailed account of the history of the Orcadian bishopric leads Haki to suggest that Vilhjálmr's promotion of St Magnús's cult was a way of asserting the independence of the church. Contextual material is adduced from Scandinavia (Saints Óláfr, Hallvard, Sunniva and others) to show that other martyr cults were used by the church to assert the identity and independence of newly established bishoprics.

Part Three examines in more detail the earliest stages of the cults of other Scandinavian secular rulers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, including St Óláfr Haraldsson and St Hallvard in Norway, the Danish saints Knud of Odense and Knud Lavard, and St Eric of Sweden. It is convincingly shown that, with one exception, the impetus for each cult comes initially from the church, with the secular authority later becoming involved in a way that establishes the cult as a bridge between secular and ecclesiastical interests. The cult of St Knud Lavard, however, served political propaganda purposes from the beginning and there is no evidence of ecclesiastical support for the cult until about thirty years after Knud's murder, though his cult too eventually became a 'point of contact between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*' (p. 138). This chapter refines the influential analysis of Erich Hoffmann, whose 1975 study (*Die heiligen Könige bei den Angelsachsen und den skandinavischen Völkern*) emphasised the secular political uses of Scandinavian princely martyr-cults. Haki shows that the church also had a significant stake in the cults, and that it was indeed the church alone that initially supported their development.

Part Four turns to unofficial cults of Scandinavian secular leaders which failed to achieve the level of ecclesiastical or royal support that would ensure their survival. Haki begins with two kings whose biographers endowed them with an 'aura of sanctity': Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway and Erik emune of Denmark. He then considers two rulers whose claims to sanctity are inextricable from inter-dynastic rivalries (Haraldr ungi, earl of Orkney, and the Danish king Knud

Magnusson) and a number of potential saints from Norway (more, in fact, than the heading 'Two Kings and Two Pretenders' suggests). The chapter concludes by offering reasons for the predominance of violent death as a model for Scandinavian sainthood, noting its congruity with heroic ideals and the need for more fully developed ecclesiastical structures before cults of confessor churchmen could be successfully promoted.

Part Five interrogates the scholarly assertion of continuity between pre-Christian sacral kingship and Scandinavian princely martyr cults. After briefly surveying contributions to both sides of this argument, Haki dismisses attempts to draw parallels that rely on discounting the literary context (Christian hagiography) in which the evidence is preserved. He sensibly concludes that a general belief that Scandinavian rulers possessed supernatural powers denied to others may have contributed to the appeal of princely cults, but he maintains that the fundamental reasons for the emergence of those cults must be sought in the contemporary political and ecclesiastical situation in the Nordic lands (p. 205).

At times the two halves of this book, its opening chapters on Magnús's cult and the following chapters on comparable Scandinavian cults, are less explicitly linked to each other than they might have been, but as the emphasis shifts back to the cult of St Magnús in the book's 'Main Conclusions', the ways in which the two halves illuminate each other are made very clear.

The volume includes a helpful diagram of the relations between surviving and lost texts about St Magnús (p. 17), a genealogy of the ruling house of Orkney (which, given the prominence of Norwegian and Danish material in the book, might have been complemented with family trees for the rulers of those countries), and maps of Scotland and Scandinavia.

The book is clearly, and in the main idiomatically, written. There are, however, a fair number of minor typographical and grammatical errors and a few stylistic infelicities. There is space here for only a few examples: 'assumes the centre state' ['state' for 'stage', presumably] (p. 6), 'seem-sto' ['seems to'] (p. 24), 'Scot's king court' ['Scots king's'] (p. 48), 'he glorified her his blood' [add 'with'] (p. 49), 'has been debated' is repeated in a sentence (p. 63), Barrett 2004 (p. 85) appears as 2003 in the Bibliography (p. 236), 'where there the king suffered defeat' (p. 105), 'One namely wonders' (p. 109), 'centurries' (p. 111), 'one notes in that it is' (p. 203 —omit 'in'), 'Oxford Medieval Tezts' (p. 235), 'Gabrielle Turville-Petre' (p. 239), 'Byrhnoth' for 'Byrhtnoth' and the word 'a' missing before 'hero', both in the title of Cross 1965 (p. 241), *Medieval [*for *Mediaeval] Scandinavia* (p. 242), 'Anchim' (for 'Anchin', p. 251), 'Philip' [for Phillip] Pulsiano (p. 254), and *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* appears as *Viking and Medieval Studies* on p. 257. In the index *Knýtlinga saga* is in the wrong place, and (bizarrely) entries beginning with the letter Þ are integrated with those beginning with the letter F. Throughout the book 'Íslenzk fornrit' is spelled 'Íslensk fornrit', and 'Óláfr' appears as 'Ólafr'.

The author's command of recent scholarship in Scandinavian languages, or published in Scandinavia, is particularly impressive, and readers are likely to have their attention drawn to work of which they were not aware. Quotations from primary texts are all translated, often by the author; very occasionally these

translations could be improved a little: 'Sir Bishop John' is an awkward, if literal, rendering of *herra Joni byskupe* (p. 19); 'he avenged on himself that which he had lived ill' (48) is unidiomatic to the point of obscurity; 'after the first Assumption of Saint Mary in summer', with its implication that Mary's Assumption is celebrated (or takes place!) more than once each year, is a misleading translation of *eftir Mariumesso hina fyrri um sumarit* (p. 100).

In this book Haki Antonsson has produced a very valuable contribution to the history of native saints' cults in the Norse-speaking world. The book's title will ensure it is read by those interested in St Magnús or the medieval history of Orkney, but it should be read and reflected on by all who work on saints or Saints' Lives from any part of medieval Scandinavia.

CARL PHELPSTEAD

FÆREYINGA SAGA. ÓLÁFS SAGA TRYGGVASONAR EPTIR ODD MUNK SNORRASON. Edited by ÓLAFUR HALLDÓRSSON. *Íslenzk fornrit* XXV. *Hið íslenska fornritafélag*. Reykjavík, 2006. cxcvi + 402 pp. ISBN 9979 893 25 7.

One might say that the contrast that appears in *Færeyinga saga* between the pagan Faroese chieftain Þrándr í Gǫtu and the Norwegian missionary king Óláfr Tryggvason is repeated on a metatextual level in the latest volume of *Íslenzk fornrit*, which offers new editions of *Færeyinga saga* and the saga of Óláfr Tryggvason that is based on the now-lost Latin life of this king by the monk Oddr Snorrason. Whereas the former is a well-wrought entertainment that draws largely on native texts and traditions, the latter is very much in the style of a Saint's Life and derives as much from Latin sources as it does from Icelandic ones. The editorial history of these sagas differs dramatically as well: *Færeyinga saga* was last edited a mere twenty-one years ago (*Færeyinga saga*, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson (Reykjavík, 1987)), but the previous edition of *Óláfs saga* is more than three-quarters of a century old (*Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar af Oddr Snorrason munk*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1932)). Yet, just as Þrándr could not extricate himself from King Óláfr's plans for the Faroes, so too are the textual and editorial histories of these sagas intertwined, for *Færeyinga saga* is preserved only as interpolations into other versions of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, which Óláfur Halldórsson has spent decades editing (Copenhagen, 1958, 1961, 2000) in addition to his editions of *Færeyinga saga*.

In an afterword, Ólafur Halldórsson explains that the present edition of *Óláfs saga* took up more pages than expected, so the introductions had to be reduced to keep the volume to the size planned. As a result, the introduction to *Færeyinga saga* refers repeatedly to the fuller, more technical treatment in the 1987 edition. The introduction here covers the preservation of *Færeyinga saga*; its values and political views; the author and his audience; the saga's written sources; its relationships with other works; the accuracy of its place-names and descriptions; the genealogies; the forms of government; the market at Haleyri; Þrándr's credo; the texts of the saga that are found in Flateyjarbók, in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en*

mesta and in versions of the two sagas about St. Óláfr by Snorri Sturluson; the age of the saga; and previous editions and translations. The second and third sections are new, and constitute a kind of literary appreciation that is unusual for Ólafur Halldórsson. He examines the author's skill at conveying unstated ideas and the use of mysterious characters whose identities are left for the audience to puzzle out. A further mystery is the identity of the *refði* that one of the unnamed men carries. This item is a rod or staff that Ólafur guesses is a kind of sceptre, and here literary and philological analyses dovetail rather nicely. The edition itself supplies most of the Flateyjarbók text of the saga at the top of each page, with any parallel passages from other manuscripts in smaller type below. The exceptions are chapters 43 through 48, which are taken from *Óláfs saga helga*, as these are judged to be closer to the original. Chapters 49 through 59 return to the Flateyjarbók text.

The introduction to the *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* based on Oddr Snorrason's lost Latin *vita* covers the same essentials as does the introduction to *Færeyinga saga*: the subject matter, its relationships with other works, the preservation of the text, previous editions and the author. Hákon Hlaðajarl, King Óláfr in Norway, the battle of Svǫlðr, the prologue, the stylistic characteristics of the two main versions of the saga and the additions to the saga made in each of these versions receive special attention. The section on previous editions includes a review of earlier scholarship on the saga that goes up to Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson's *Om de norske kongers sagaer* (Oslo, 1937), and half the section is taken up with detailed refutations of various points on which Ólafur Halldórsson believes Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson to have been mistaken. The survey extends no further, for example passing over Sveinbjörn Rafnsson's recent book on this and the other sagas about Óláfr Tryggvason (*Ólafs sögur Tryggvasonar: Um gerðir þeirra, heimildir og höfunda* (Reykjavík, 2005); reviewed in *Saga-Book* XXXI (2007), 115–17). Indeed, although *Ólafs sögur Tryggvasonar* is listed in the bibliography, it is not cited anywhere in the volume. The edition itself takes the opposite position from that of Finnur Jónsson in the 1932 edition: here, where the two versions of the saga overlap, the S version (in Stock. Perg. 4to nr. 18) is printed at the top of each page, with the A version (in AM 310 4to) in smaller type below. Appendices contain the fragments of the saga in Uppsala De la Gardie 4–7, the part of the saga preserved as an interpolation in the Flateyjarbók *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* and the part of the saga preserved as an interpolation in the Fríssbók *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*.

The two sagas in this volume seem chosen in order to showcase the life's work of Ólafur Halldórsson, although the afterword—which graciously acknowledges the assistance of Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson and many others—shows that this tribute became something of a burden to the elderly scholar. Given Ólafur's own relatively recent critical edition of *Færeyinga saga* with its 239-page introduction, a normalised edition with a 73-page introduction would not have been a high priority for scholars, but no one can object to a new edition of *Óláfs saga Odds Snorrasonar* by the foremost authority on the Óláfr sagas. It is particularly valuable to have the results of Ólafur's research on this saga, which have been published over many years, brought together in a larger analysis. Some things are taken for

granted—for example, the S text and the A text of *Óláfs saga* are referred to some sixty pages before the terminology is explained—but errors are almost nonexistent. (One might note that Des Lavelle is the author of *The Skellig Story*, not its subtitle.) The volume is produced to the high standards of the *Íslenzk fornrit* series, and maps, colour photographs and genealogies of Þrándr í Gǫtu and Oddr Snorrason form useful and handsome additions to Ólafur's meticulous editions, introductions and notes.

ELIZABETH ASHMAN ROWE

OHTHERE'S VOYAGES. A LATE 9TH-CENTURY ACCOUNT OF VOYAGES ALONG THE COASTS OF NORWAY AND DENMARK AND ITS CULTURAL CONTEXT. Edited by JANET BATELY and ANTON ENGLERT. *Maritime Culture of the North* 1. *The Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde*. Roskilde, 2007. 216 pp. ISBN 978 87 85180 47 6.

This attractive A4-format volume is the product of what is described as a 'seminar', contributed to by invited specialists, held in Roskilde in May 2003. While representing the highest levels of scholarship, much of it in the vanguard of current research and thought, the result is in fact a publication that will be accessible and useful as, in effect, a textbook—an excellent introduction for readers from undergraduate students upwards to the topic, with its ramifications and its problems. This is the case not least because the range of perspectives brought to bear on the subject is pleasingly multidisciplinary.

The book starts with facsimiles of the Ohthere and Wulfstan travelogues incorporated into the Old English translation of Orosius's *Historia adversum Paganos* in the British Library 'Lauderdale' and Cotton Tiberius B.i manuscripts, followed by an authoritative yet entirely readable discussion by Janet Bately which focuses primarily on an account of the original sources, and particularly on the issues of the authorship, date and transmission of these famous interpolations. The highlighting of the often overlooked anonymous interpolated passage on northern Europe that precedes the summary of Ohthere's report is welcome. The relevant Latin and Old English texts are printed with facing translations, and a series of informative notes is provided to explicate the Ohthere and Wulfstan passages.

The remainder of the volume comprises a range of relatively short articles collected into a series of sections: 'Geography', 'At Home', 'At Sea', 'Destinations' and 'Trade and Exchange'. The majority of these fifteen chapters are concerned with aspects of Scandinavian history or archaeology, but the wider European context is also expertly represented, particularly by Ian Wood in his discussion of 'Early medieval accounts of the North before the Old English *Orosius*' and Stéphane Lebecq, on 'Communication and exchange in northwest Europe'. Particularly strong and informative contributions are those by Inger Storli and Gerd Stamsø Munch on the north of Norway in the Viking period; likewise the whole of the section 'At Sea', with contributions from Arne Emil Christensen, Anton Englert and Andres Dobat; and equally the chapters on the archaeological context in what is now northern Russia

provided by Nikolaj Makarov, and on the towns of Kaupang and Hedeby discussed by Dagfinn Skre and Michael Müller-Wille.

What it would have been nice to see, to round all of this off, is clearer evidence of how the seminar participants addressed one another's evidence and learned from one another as a result of their meeting and precirculated presentations. That this happened is declared in the Foreword, but it is not obvious as you read the volume. It appears that there is to be a companion book on 'Wulfstan's Voyage' into the Baltic to follow this one: this is implicit in references made to forthcoming articles by Bately and Jagodziński in such a volume, though I could not find an explicit bibliographical reference to it anywhere else. Perhaps, then, the constructive issue of synthesis could be considered by the editors and publishers at the Viking Ship Museum for that future volume.

JOHN HINES

FROM PICTLAND TO ALBA 789–1070. By ALEX WOOLF. *The New Edinburgh History of Scotland* 2. *Edinburgh University Press*. Edinburgh, 2007. xv + 384 pp. ISBN 978 0 7486 1233 8 (hardback), 978 0 7486 1234 5 (paperback).

If one is looking for evidence in support of R. G. Collingwood's venerable dictum that every generation rewrites history in its own way, the most recent volume to appear in the New Edinburgh History of Scotland provides it. About thirty years after the appearance of the original Edinburgh History of Scotland in the mid-1970s, the New Edinburgh History seeks to provide up-to-date and accessible accounts of the Scottish past. Just how much of an explosion of research has taken place in Scottish history generally (and medieval Scottish history particularly) since the '70s can be seen by comparing the scope of Archie Duncan's original contribution to the Edinburgh History of Scotland, *Scotland: The Making of the Kingdom* (1975), with the New Edinburgh history volumes that cover the same period. Where Duncan was able to cover the entire sweep from Roman Scotland until the death of Alexander III in 1286 in a single volume (though large at about 700 pages), the New Edinburgh History divides the same period into no fewer than three full volumes and part of a fourth.

Alex Woolf's contribution to the series, which covers the roughly three centuries between the advent of the Scandinavians and the middle of the reign of King Malcolm III (1058–93), is an impressive piece of scholarship by one who has been in the vanguard of the rewriting of medieval Scottish history over the past decade. Woolf brings to his work an impressive knowledge of languages and texts as well as a penchant for challenging orthodox interpretations and setting up alternative paradigms.

The book is divided into two unequal parts: Part I, 'Events (789–1070)' and the much shorter Part II, 'Process'. Together the two parts tackle the transformation of the political landscape of north Britain, pursuing the key, intertwined themes of the advent of the Scandinavians and the Scandinavian presence in Scotland; the rise of the 'House of Alpín' or the 'Alpínids', and the demise of the great king-

doms of Pictavia and Northumbria. Woolf sees the advent of the Vikings as the key to understanding these subjects, so that a good deal of the book is, directly or indirectly, concerned with the Vikings. There are excellent synthetic discussions of the causes of the Viking Age, detailed analysis of the Viking impact on Pictland, re-evaluations of the political and linguistic situation in the western seas in the ninth and tenth centuries, and reassessments of the careers of prominent figures such as Erik Blood-Axe and Amlaíb Cúarán, as well as of the origins of the earldom of Orkney.

Central to any discussion of this period is the disappearance of the Picts (here not regarded as in any way unique among the early peoples of Britain) and their replacement as the dominant people of the region by the Gaelic-speaking Scots, which process ultimately created the new kingdom of Alba. Much previous scholarship has focused on the role of Cinaed son of Alpín (d. 858) in this process, but Woolf's careful textual analysis shifts attention toward the 870s and 880s, the (problematic) period between the death of Áed son of Cinaed (d. 878) and the succession of Domnall son of Constantín (889). Gone is the old notion of some sort of 'ethnic cleansing' of the Picts by the Scots, or of some kind of 'union' of Picts and Scots, replaced instead by the suggestion that a political takeover of Pictavia by a group of Gaelic-speaking Scots nonetheless did not shatter the integrity of the Pictish kingdom. (Woolf even raises the intriguing possibility that Cinaed may have been a Pictish ruler!) Woolf replaces the 'disappearance of the Picts' paradigm with one which sees a good deal of interaction between Pictish and Gaelic culture well into the tenth century—ultimately creating Alba.

This is not, however, a book for the beginner, or for the timid. One of its features that scholars will appreciate, but that may prove something of an obstacle to those unfamiliar with historical methodologies, is the very transparent manner in which Woolf reveals his workings. In fact, the book is, in some senses, less a coherent narrative than a series of case studies in which the very problematic sources for the period (principally, for most of it, the enigmatic so-called *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba*), are dissected, placed under microscopic examination and compared with other texts, ultimately laying bare many of the problems of the period. This approach is grounded in the revolution of textual scholarship that has taken place since the 1980s, and in which Woolf has been a major player, that has completely transformed our understanding of the central texts on which knowledge of the period is based. So for example, throughout the discussion of the descendants of Cinaed son of Alpín, extracts from the *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba* are set alongside other contemporary materials (such as the *Annals of Ulster*), comparisons made, interpolations detected, and new interpretations drawn in almost every quarter. While this transparency allows readers to detect the textual difficulties that underlie the study of the period and encourages them to formulate their own hypotheses, it is easy to get bogged down in discussions of textual transmission and linguistics.

In conclusion, Alex Woolf is to be commended for producing a work that greatly advances our understanding of what continues to be an obscure and

challenging period in Scottish history. Just as the initial volumes in the Edinburgh History were influential in sparking new scholarship on Scottish history, it is almost certain that the interpretations presented in this volume, at least, of the New Edinburgh History will do the same.

R. ANDREW MCDONALD

VIKING KINGS OF BRITAIN AND IRELAND. THE DYNASTY OF ÍVARR TO A.D. 1014. By CLARE DOWNHAM. *Dunedin*. Edinburgh, 2007. xxii + 338 pp. ISBN 978 1 903765 89 0.

Thirty years ago, Alfred Smyth's seminal trilogy, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles 850–880* (1977) and *Scandinavian York and Dublin* (2 vols, 1975, 1979) appeared. Although error-strewn, tendentious and unconvincing in various respects, it was original and full of insight. Smyth's main thesis was compelling: the inter-connectedness of British and Irish theatres where Viking actors played.

Clare Downham's parameters are set by that vital insight, and by her wish to avoid the 'highly controversial' element in Smyth's work (p. 11). A more careful and dispassionate assessment is needed, and her range, wider chronologically (to 1014) and geographically (treating of Wales and tenth-century Man and the Isles) is welcome. In this reviewer's opinion, however, her attempt to cover more, in fewer than half the pages taken by Smyth, results in an analysis that is insufficiently detailed and critical. Moreover, the conceptual unity and narrative fluency of Smyth's account—however flawed—may be missed. Downham studies Ireland, England, Scotland, Man and the Isles, and Wales, in separate chapters. This facilitates analysis but, inevitably, involves repetition and dilutes the impact as synthesis. The inter-relationship of these regions is less obvious than in Smyth's chronological journey back and forth from Ireland to Britain.

The centrality of Ívarr's dynasty, not only to the Dublin-York axis, as Smyth maintained, but to Insular Viking history generally, is repeatedly affirmed. This is credible, but requires critical examination, including consideration of how 'non-dynasty' Viking leaders were related to descendants of Ívarr, demonstrable or putative. Donnchadh Ó Corráin's observation that concentrating on Ívarr and his associates obscures the role of other Vikings (*Irish Historical Studies* 21 (1978–79), 313) remains valid.

Smyth argued that Ímar (Ívarr), prominent in Ireland and Scotland 857–73, is the same as the fleetingly glimpsed Ingware/Ivar of English chronicles. The identity of the two is readily accepted by Downham, without any substantial addition to Smyth's scarcely conclusive case. Equally, the Albdan (Hálfdan) of Irish chronicles for 875–77 is assumed to be Ívarr's brother, based on what is stated about the better-documented Healfdene of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (e.g. pp. 16, 24, 28). Of claims that Amlaíb (Óláfr to most, but better Áleifr), the leading Viking chronicled in Ireland and Scotland, 853–71, was also a brother of Ívarr, we are told, variously, that he was or may have been his brother (pp. 7, 8, 11, 12), or that he was his 'associate' or 'ally' (xvii, 8, 21, 23).

It is disquieting that fundamental questions of identity and the very membership of the 'dynasty' in its earliest stages remain unresolved. Probabilities or possibilities seem to assume the status of ascertained fact, or are the subject of confusing statements. Equally, the link to the 'dynasty' of later, crucial, players, the Haraldssons of the Isles, is essentially conjectural, albeit plausible. Dynastic segmentation is invoked in explanation, for example, of tenth-century politics in Man and the Isles (e.g. pp. 183–84, 190–91, 219). Analysis of how, precisely, membership of the 'dynasty' shaped the actions of reputed descendants of Ívarr is needed—beyond establishing the fact, probability or possibility of membership. 'Ua Ímair' ('grandson of Ívarr'), of the Irish annals, *c.*900, did not become a group designation or Gaelic-style surname, as Downham rightly points out (pp. 1–9), but the implications need pursuing.

Downham derives from David Dumville her equation of 'Black Foreigners/ Dark Heathens' with followers of the 'dynasty of Ívarr', rejecting the ethnonym 'Danes' (e.g. pp. 11–12, 18, 20, 35, 36–7n., 195–96). There is a substantial case to be made against Dumville's and Downham's interpretation of this nomenclature, however. One point must suffice here. Downham is to be credited with noticing tenth-century Welsh evidence, where Dumville did not. But when *Annales Cambriae* for 987 report that Anglesey was attacked by *Gotrit filius Haraldi cum Nigris Gentilibus* 'with Black Heathens', can the latter be merely 'vikings under the leadership of the dynasty of Ívarr' (p. 226)? Why should regular followers of the Islesmen be thus designated here, and not elsewhere? Are they not more likely the *Danair* 'Danes', described in the *Annals of Ulster* as Guðrøðr Haraldsson's allies at Man, also in 987?

As to detail, good points are made, alongside others with which one would take issue. That the Viking leadership, exiled from Dublin 902–17, continued to engage with the north of Ireland from the Hebrides (pp. 28–31) is plausible, as is the suggestion that a Lagmann son of Guðrøðr was king of the Isles in the early eleventh century (pp. 132–34, 197–98). Downham notes that Suibne mac Cináeda (d. 1034)'s kingship of Galloway calls in question Dublin's claimed over-lordship of Galloway (p. 198n.), a claim given credence elsewhere by this reviewer.

An expectation of more rigorous source criticism than was practised by Smyth is not always met. Although the *Fragmentary Annals* are 'an untrustworthy guide because of their late date of compilation and imaginative admixture of saga-material' (p. 164), their evidence is often deployed, nevertheless, with or without a caveat (e.g. pp. 16, 27–28, 95n., 139n., 268, 273–76). No principle seems to govern this, nor the virtual disregard, by comparison, of the equally tricky *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* (but see pp. 53, 145), to which similar strictures are applicable (and applied, p. 144), but which has much to offer, once rigorously sifted (such as, for example, the above-mentioned identification of Lagmann son of Guðrøðr, for which *Cogad* §94 must be the authority, although this is not stated).

One must wonder, finally, if this book, although a useful contribution, not to be faulted for endeavour or range, risks falling between two stools, in not matching Smyth's originality, while disappointing somewhat in its lack of critical rigour.

COLMÁN ETCHINGHAM

MANX KINGSHIP IN ITS IRISH SEA SETTING 1187–1229. KING RǪGNVALDR AND THE CROVAN DYNASTY. By R. ANDREW MCDONALD. *Four Courts Press*. Dublin and Portland, 2007. 254 pp. ISBN 978 1 84682 047 2.

In recent years a number of works have appeared that take as their focus the interactions in the Irish Sea area in the period following the Viking Age. While traditional historical approaches have taken a contemporary national perspective, English, Scots, Irish Norwegian or Welsh, and inevitably regard the area as peripheral to their main concerns, these new works focus on it as a unity. In doing so scholars seek to look more closely at how the region was perceived in the medieval period and to concentrate more fully on an internal understanding of the relations of the medieval kingdom of Man and the Hebrides with the surrounding countries.

Undertaking such historical analysis requires painstaking attention to the widely differing sources, while their relative scarcity guarantees that our knowledge will always be patchy. Apart from the *Chronicle of the Kings of Man* there are very few which are native to the medieval kingdom of Man and the Isles, and those that we have come in several languages, having been produced for varying purposes, and having survived largely by luck. In spite of these limitations and the demands on scholars to interpret the sources with care, a better understanding of the region, and the kingdom of Man and the Isles, in the medieval period is developing and close study of the surviving texts is yielding results.

The current volume is a welcome addition to the corpus which includes R. A. McDonald's 1997 volume, *The Kingdom of the Isles: Scotland's Western Seaboard c.1100–c.1336*, Ian Beuermann's *Man among Kings and Bishops* (2002), Benjamin Hudson's *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes* (2005), which concentrates on the earlier period, and *The World of the Gallowglass*, edited by Seán Duffy (2007), which focuses on the later Middle Ages. All of these will be supplemented by the long-awaited third volume of the *New History of the Isle of Man*.

In his new work McDonald looks at a narrower period than that covered in his earlier book and focuses on the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, taking as his focal point the long rule from 1187 until 1229 of the Manx king Rǫgnvaldr Guðrøðarson. Rǫgnvaldr is known through Norse sources, mostly particularly *Orkneyinga saga*, but is also the subject of sources as various as English court records and a praise-poem in Irish. McDonald stresses that his work is not a biography and that to produce one would be impossible, for too little is known about the personality of Rǫgnvaldr. Instead he looks at his rule thematically, identifying the different strands in his relationships with the much larger powers surrounding his realm, showing how a relatively small player in the power politics of his time could have a significant impact and hold a geographically scattered kingdom together.

The book contains much of interest to the more general reader as well as the specialist. Unfortunately, the early chapters are somewhat confusing and at times repetitive, for without a strong chronological framework we jump backwards and forwards in time, not only in the course of each chapter but within the thematic sub-sections they contain. The second half of the book, which looks at the kingdom's

external political relationships, is much more chronologically focused and is easier to read.

McDonald charts the way in which the kingdom was drawn away from the Norwegian sphere of practical influence and into the political world dominated by England during the early thirteenth century. Some of his conclusions are inevitably controversial, based as they are on attempts to disentangle the accounts in surviving sources, some of which quite possibly reflect dodgy dealings on the part of Rǫgnvaldr, his family and his contemporaries. An example occurs in McDonald's interpretation of the actions a generation earlier of Sumarliði (Somerled), Rǫgnvaldr's maternal kinsman and his father Guðrøðr's rival. This *regulus* of Argyll held extensive lands in the West Highlands and in 1156 defeated Guðrøðr in battle and took possession of the major part of the Hebrides. In 1158 Somerled drove Guðrøðr out of Man and shortly afterwards both Guðrøðr and Somerled were courting Malcolm IV, the former unsuccessfully seeking aid and the latter making peace with regard to his hostilities within the Scots kingdom. McDonald's view of the relations between Somerled and his descendants on the one hand and the Scottish monarchy on the other needs further consideration, especially his suggestion that in spite of this instance of *détente* they were almost inevitably at odds. Similarly, the question of the stage at which Man became drawn into England's orbit, and McDonald's consideration of Rǫgnvaldr's relations with the English King John, give an indication of the exploration still needed by specialists in this field.

McDonald identifies areas where further research is necessary, and also gives attention to a matter on which scholars need to develop a common convention: the rendering of personal names of individuals who were themselves bilingual. Several of the people referred to, including Rǫgnvaldr, are known by Gaelic, Norse and Latin forms of their names. Moreover, some names (such as Somerled) have modern equivalents—forms which may be familiar to readers through nineteenth-century works. McDonald gives the names of members of the Manx ruling dynasty in their Old Norse-Icelandic forms, and gives other names in Middle Irish, an approach which works much of the time and enables us, for instance, to distinguish between Rǫgnvaldr and his Hebridean cousin and namesake Ragnall son of Somerled.

The volume contains useful maps and genealogies, and an extensive bibliography. While there are some inconsistencies in the form of the footnotes, these are minor details in what is a welcome contribution to this fascinating and still little-known area of medieval history. The quantity of information garnered about a small and geographically divided kingdom in what most readers may consider a peripheral region indicates that other figures, or at least dynasties, might be treated in the same manner. McDonald's work should serve to increase our knowledge of both the Isle of Man and the politics of the Irish Sea area in this period, and help shed light on the politics of the larger surrounding kingdoms, and the region's relations with Norway.

ROSEMARY POWER

WEST OVER SEA. STUDIES IN SCANDINAVIAN SEA-BORNE EXPANSION AND SETTLEMENT BEFORE 1300. A FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOUR OF DR BARBARA E. CRAWFORD. Edited by BEVERLEY BALLIN SMITH, SIMON TAYLOR and GARETH WILLIAMS. *The Northern World* 31. *Brill*. Leiden, 2007. xxix + 581 pp. 68 illustrations. ISBN 978 90 04 15893 1.

This sizeable volume contains thirty papers which cover the broad range of evidence types and research questions which the honorand herself has tackled. The papers are grouped under four headings: History and Cultural Contacts (ten papers), The Church and the Cult of Saints (six), Archaeology, Material Culture and Settlement (eight), and Place-names and Language (six). Such subdivisions in any edited volume are always slightly artificial, but this division makes as much sense as any other given the diversity of the papers. The geographical focus of the papers is also largely in keeping with Dr Crawford's own work—listed in a bibliography of her work to date (pp. xxv–xxix)—as most focus on Norway, Scotland and its islands, but some deal with the Faroes, Ireland, Iceland, England and beyond.

The scope and aims of the papers vary considerably, as might be expected. Several present either important specific pieces of new evidence, or interesting evidence, either archaeological or written, which is rarely discussed: the *Chronicle of Melrose* (Broun), the Inchmarnock hostage stone (Lowe), Reginald of Durham's *Libellus de admirandis beati Cuthberti* (Haki Antonsson, Crumplin and Conti), the rescue excavation at Norwick on Unst in Shetland (Ballin Smith) and part of a cartulary originating from the St Serf's priory, Loch Leven, Perth and Kinross (Taylor). Of these Broun's reading of changing perspectives on Scottish and English identities in the *Chronicle of Melrose* seems especially convincing. Norwick is clearly an important site; radiocarbon dates and the morphology of excavated steatite vessels seem to support Ballin Smith's claim that, so far, this is Shetland's earliest Viking settlement. It was occupied 'well before the late eighth century, and possibly as much as a century before' (p. 294). The inclusion of Neil G. W. Curtis's useful characterisation of the Scottish Treasure Trove system is also a reminder of Barbara Crawford's wider contribution to Scottish history and archaeology.

Other contributions catalogue evidence, usually with useful, critical comment: Anglo-Saxon inscriptions found outside the British Isles (Okasha), the progress of the Shetland chapel sites (Morris with Brady and Johnson), early medieval sculpture from the Faroes (Fisher and Scott), the surviving finds from the same St Serf's Priory (Hall) and an ogham-inscribed plaque from Bornais on South Uist (Forsyth).

Many of the more synthetic papers, of which just a few will be mentioned here, are of a very high standard. Paul Bibire's short but broad thought-piece on saga literature is extremely readable, even if the issues it covers are familiar. Lesley Abrams adds the Hebrides to the list of Norse-influenced regions for which she has discussed the nature of religion and conversion, and this piece is just as sharp as the others. James Barrett's lengthy discussion of the economy of the Orkney earldom will be essential reading for anyone interested in the economy of the medieval North Atlantic. It is impressive for its scope and thoroughness (pp. 299–330 for the article; pp. 330–40 for the bibliography). Jo McKenzie's paper on manuring practices in Scotland proved to be an unexpected delight, to this reviewer

at least. She combines archaeology and history to good effect. As part of a broader study of man-made or anthropogenic soils, here she makes a very thorough analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of late eighteenth-century agricultural surveys for understanding manuring practices. By comparing the Scottish evidence with that from the Netherlands, she demonstrates very effectively the factors which influenced a very important process in pre-modern North Atlantic farming.

Alex Woolf examines Norway's relations with Jämtland with a view to suggesting new ways to look at élite political relations in Norway's western dependencies. He emphasises usefully the importance of personal relationships in shaping what might sometimes appear to be more abstract political relationships. Gareth Williams's own paper, on the family of Moddan of Dale, attempts the difficult task of analysing the depictions of politics in the latter half of *Orkneyinga saga* to suggest a dynastic connection between Óttar of Thurso and an Óttar recorded in the *Chronicle of Man*. Detailed arguments like this one are always difficult to make but Williams's reading of the evidence seems very sensible. Gillian Fellows Jensen's paper on the various origins of *-gata* place-names in England 'outside the urbanised settlements of the Danelaw' deals with a place-name element which is well-known but probably not as well understood as many think. Much has been written about *papar* place-names, and William P. L. Thomson's paper builds on some of Barbara Crawford's own work to make a good case for the 'filling in' of the Orkney landscape with *papar* names by Christian Norse churchmen. This was done in order to provide the earliest possible Christian history in a place where the real nature of pre-Norse Christianity had been forgotten.

Some good papers would have been even more valuable if they had considered parallels elsewhere. Sarah Jane Gibbon's analysis of the development of parishes in Orkney seems entirely credible but it would have been nice to have seen the Orkney developments put into some wider perspective, given, for example, the recent work on parishes in Iceland by Orri Vésteinsson and the debate about minster parishes in Anglo-Saxon England. Clare Downham's account of twelfth-century Dublin is a very useful one but it would have been interesting to know her views on how Dublin compared with other contemporary towns in Scandinavia or the British Isles (p. 33).

The publishers are to be congratulated on allowing so many illustrations in an already hefty volume. And, given its size, the number of contributors writing in a second or perhaps third language and, presumably, the pressure to produce the volume before the UK's RAE cut-off date, there are relatively few presentational problems. Those minor typographical errors that do exist rarely obscure any author's meaning. It might have been helpful to have a single map of Orkney and Scotland to serve as a reference point for the many papers which dealt with them.

As an edited volume in Viking studies *West Over Sea* covers a more than usually impressive range of subjects; as a Festschrift it amply displays the scope and talents of the scholar it honours.

CHRISTOPHER CALLOW

LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING IN THE OLD NORSE WORLD. ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF MARGARET CLUNIES ROSS. Edited by JUDY QUINN, KATE HESLOP and TARRIN WILLS. *Brepols*. Turnhout, 2007. xiv + 458 pp. ISBN 978 2 503 52580 8.

Twenty scholars have contributed to this volume in honour of Margaret Clunies Ross, a scholar whose deep, multi-stranded and creative engagement with the Old Norse world over almost four decades is here celebrated. The editors, three of her former Ph.D. students at the University of Sydney, have done their mentor proud. The motto they chose for the collection is Óðinn's self-description as he set out to debate with Vafþrúðnir on that giant's own turf: *Fiǫlð ek fór, fiǫlð ek freistaða, fiǫlð ek reynda regin* 'much have I travelled, much have I contested, much have I tested the powers'. It works on multiple levels. For like Óðinn, Professor Clunies Ross is a frequent and fearless flier, a soaring eagle from down under bearing gifts of intellect and superhuman energy and know-how.

Everything in this volume is useful, much of it interesting and some of it enjoyable. Theoretical frameworks for understanding Old Norse literature are the focus of the first group of essays, with succeeding sections devoted to Old Norse myth and society, oral traditions in performance and text, and medieval vernacular and Latin theories of language. The fifth and final section, called 'Prolonged Traditions', inspects the packaging of old forms in new containers. All contributions but one refer directly and warmly to Professor Clunies Ross's own scholarship, the impact of which, echoing across the field, has been more prolonged than most.

An introduction to the volume and honoree by Judy Quinn is followed by Jürg Glauser's elegant opening essay, 'The Speaking Bodies of Saga Texts', which underlines the inadequacy of bipolar configurations such as orality/literacy to describe Old Norse texts; the author advocates instead a 'mnemonic turn', an engagement with the multiple ways in which cultural memory works to codify versions of the past. Vésteinn Ólason's 'The Icelandic Saga as a Kind of Literature with Special Reference to its Representation of Reality' reviews current debates over the real and the fantastic in the Sagas of Icelanders. Torfi H. Tulinius in 'Political Echoes: Reading *Eyrbyggja Saga* in Light of Contemporary Conflicts' provides a possible thirteenth-century context for the hauntings at Fróðá, specifically Bishop Guðmundr's dealings with a malevolent ghost. The impact of structuralism on saga studies, especially in the 1960s and 70s, is addressed in Lars Lönnroth's 'Structuralist Approaches to Saga Literature'. Diana Whaley's 'Reconstructing Skaldic Encomia: Discourse Features in Þjóðólfr's "Magnús verses" ' looks at the steps involved in building extended poems out of isolated stanzas and wisely opts for fragmentary presentation over 'an illusory appearance of certainty' (p. 101). The issue is of central importance to those organising the nine-volume edition of *Norse-Icelandic Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, whose first instalment, edited by Professor Clunies Ross herself, has recently appeared (*Poetry on Christian Subjects* (Turnhout 2007)).

The next four essays look at what can be learned about the mythology of pre-Christian Scandinavia from place-names, the history of religion and close reading of Old Norse texts. In 'How Uniform Was the Old Norse Religion?', Stefan Brink stresses regional diversity, while noting that theophoric place-names locate only a few cults of gods and fewer of goddesses. Jens Peter Schjødt in 'Óðinn, Warriors,

and Death' tries to find out who worshipped that god and why. Russell Poole's 'Myth and Ritual in the *Háleygjatal* of Eyvindr skáldaspillir', one of the gems of this volume, meticulously extracts mythic traditions of Norway's far north from that late tenth-century genealogical poem. John Hines's 'Famous Last Words: Monologue and Dialogue in *Hamðismál* and the Realization of Heroic Tale' provides plans of Viking and immediately post-Viking halls to illustrate his reading of the final lines of the eddic version of the story.

The importance of oral traditions for the Sagas of Icelanders is the focus of Gísli Sigurðsson's essay '**The Immanent Saga of Guðmundr ríki*'. Guðrún Nordal in 'The Art of Poetry and the Sagas of Icelanders' effectively demonstrates that the presence of skaldic verse in a saga does not depend so much on time of writing as on geographical, thematic or aesthetic preferences. Edith Marold's essay '*Mansǫngr*—a Phantom Genre?' usefully distinguishes between two opposed meanings of the Old Norse compound, one, current in clerical circles, referring to obscene love poetry, the other, to courtly love complaint. Stefanie Würth's wide-ranging 'Skaldic Poetry and Performance' takes as subject the comprehensibility of this verse over the centuries.

In 'Poetry, Dwarfs, and Gods: Understanding *Alvíssmál*', John Lindow explicates why the compiler of the Codex Regius placed that poem at the end of the mythological section. In 'The Notion of Effeminate Language in Old Norse Literature', Mats Malm concludes that, until the fourteenth century at least, Old Norse poetic diction was closely associated in Iceland with masculinity and power. In her deeply learned piece, 'Ælfric in Iceland', Kari Ellen Gade makes a convincing case for the use of Ælfric's grammar in Iceland and, specifically, in *The Third Grammatical Treatise*, following up a suggestion made twenty years ago by Margaret Clunies Ross. Closing this section, Fabrizio D. Raschellà's 'Old Icelandic Grammatical Literature: The Last Two Decades of Research (1983–2005)' usefully surveys recent work in this area, picking up where his 1983 state-of-the-art report left off.

The final group of essays opens with Geraldine Barnes's 'The "Discourse of Counsel" and the "Translated" *Riddarasögur*', in which she examines the 'mirror of princes' tradition in the North. Andrew Wawn in '*Vatnsdœla saga*: Visions and Versions' reviews three later responses to that saga, revealing *inter alia* that the author of one of these translations, Sabine Baring-Gould (1834–1924), composer of 'Onward, Christian Soldiers' and close friend of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, was 'perhaps the foremost English scholar of Old Icelandic saga literature in nineteenth-century Britain' (p. 400). The openness of seventeenth-century Icelandic saga and *rímur* traditions to material from abroad is expertly demonstrated by M. J. Driscoll in the final essay, 'Skanderbeg: An Albanian Hero in Icelandic Clothing'. A bibliography of Margaret Clunies Ross's publications, compiled by Anna Hansen, rounds out the volume.

This is a strong collection of essays, mustering both breadth and depth. The individual pieces together form a satisfying, Óðinn-worthy *sumbl* or 'feast', a *stillis lof sem steinabrú* 'an ode for the leader, like a bridge of stones' (see Poole, p. 175). The volume has been beautifully edited and produced; typographical errors are few and trivial. Contributors' footnotes can be read with a sort of

perverse pleasure, as a guide to the politics of Old Norse scholarship. As an eloquent tribute to one of the foremost Old Norse scholars of our day, this collection could hardly be bettered.

ROBERTA FRANK

FJÓRAR SÖGUR FRÁ HENDI JÓNS ODDSSONAR HJALTALÍN. SAGAN AF MARRONI STERKA, ÁGRIP AF HEIÐARVÍGA SÖGU, SAGAN AF ZADIG, FIMMBRÆÐRA SAGA. Edited by M. J. DRISCOLL. *Rit* 66. *Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi*. Reykjavík, 2006. lxxiv + 177 pp. ISBN 9979 819 89 8.

This welcome volume offers pioneering editions of four representative prose works by Jón Oddsson Hjaltalín (1749–1835), a figure now little known outside Iceland, but in (and after) his day a much anthologised poet and hymnist who, like séra Hallgrímur Pétursson a century earlier, held the prestigious living of Saurbær on the northern shore of Hvalfjörður. Reliable contemporary evidence confirms that séra Jón was the author of ten *lygisögur*-inflected tales that also enjoyed widespread circulation as anonymous works in the nineteenth century: fifty-nine extant manuscripts preserve seventy-three individual texts of these sagas, with many of the tales enjoying further dissemination via *rímur*, and (in one instance) *rímur*-derived prose reconstruction. Two of these tales, *Sagan af Marroni sterka* (extant in twenty manuscripts) and *Fimmbræðra saga* (two manuscripts), are included in the present edition, along with the exotic *Sagan af Zadig* (one holograph manuscript) and the remarkable *Ágrip af Heiðarvíga sögu* (seven manuscripts).

Visiting séra Jón in 1810 Henry Holland, a member of Sir George Mackenzie's party of young Edinburgh scientists, notes approvingly their host's 'pleasing countenance [and] good manners', acknowledges gratefully his 'kindness and hospitality' and explores eagerly his library of 'about 100 books', that included 'some curious manuscript books of Sagas'. Such was the catholicity of Jón Oddsson Hjaltalín's literary sympathies that this exasperatingly vague account could refer to anything from his late eighteenth-century copy of *Laxdæla saga* (Lbs 979 4to), to a collection of *rímur*, folktales and Eddic poetry (Lbs 1249 8vo [c1791]), or to *Sagann af Thomas Jones*, a breathless 10,000-word digest of Hans Jørgen Birch's Danish translation of Henry Fielding's novel (Lbs 638 8vo [c1800]). Such eclecticism, with an instinctive medievalism making common cause with a taste for picaresque novel and philosophical fable, contrasts with the more determined modernism of Magnús Stephensen, the influential (and vainglorious) high-priest of the Icelandic *upplýsingaröld*, and Jón's neighbour along the peninsula at Innrihólmur; and it finds full expression in the texts selected for inclusion in the present edition.

In *Sagan af Marroni Sterka* it is as if séra Jón has shut his eyes, dipped both hands deep into a bran-tub brimful of wondertale moves and motifs, and then settled back to arrange the pile into pleasing macro shapes and micro patterns. Within the reassuringly familiar narrative structures of rite of passage, family drama and bridal quest, we watch the eponymous hero (of mixed human and giant

parentage, suckled on lion's milk, and clad in armour and weaponry forged by Fornjótur the dwarf) venture into the exotic regions of *lygisaga*-land. Through his own might and with the help of loyal supporters, he eventually destroys an apparently endless succession of malevolent and persistent foes. By vigorous sword wielding, tree brandishing, boulder tossing and disguise wearing Marron lives to tell the tale, achieving *landhreinsun* throughout Serkland, Barbaría and Bláland. The tale ends with a flurry of weddings and we learn that Marron, his authority legitimised by deeds of derring-do, ruled for sixty-seven years and was 'hin mesta hetja sem sögur umm géta'. The manner of the telling also serves to remind us that medieval Icelandic narrative tradition did not end at any of the dates conventionally assigned to the end of the Middle Ages. Yet when we learn that the adventuring Marron and his loyal companion Nefur Fornjótsson pass themselves off as 'náttúru skodarar sem væru ad kanna heiminn' (as if they were *doppelgänger* for Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson—or George Mackenzie and Henry Holland), we may note that Jón's custody of a still vigorous narrative tradition was always flexible and self-governing. The medieval could suddenly and unblushingly dissolve into the modern, and sense into sensibility.

That said, in *Sagan af Zadig*, based on Friderich Christian Eilschov's 1750 Danish version of Voltaire's 1748 philosophical fable, cerebral modernity is not allowed to compromise a decent(ish) romance account of the travels, tournaments and romantic adventures of the young Babylonian hero. Jón omits a lengthy section discussing diverse religious observance among people of different faiths, his pietist mindset perhaps troubled by Voltaire's deistic claim that underlying such diversity was a fundamentally rational recognition of a supreme being. The French sage's reflections on mental and emotional processes are also cut, just as, five hundred years earlier, similar sentiments had been removed from French romances when the Old Norse translators in the court of King Hákon Hákonarson began to work on them.

Voltaire's *Zadig* and Ludvig Holberg's *Almindelig Kirke-Historie* (1738) are among the influences discernible in *Fimmbræðra saga*, a kind of pious *lygisaga*. Because each of the five sons of a Dalmarían jarl is attracted to a different religious faith—Zoroastrian, Islamic, Judaic, Odinic and Christian—they are instructed to travel to the lands in which the respective faiths are followed, there to listen and learn for seven years. After a series of formulaic adventures (fights against marauding Vikings, escapes from enemy castles, bloody shipboard battles, flyting exchanges and the like), the saga ends with a 'five brides for five brothers' sequence. Christianity is duly vindicated, with Kristófer, the favoured (Christian) son, appearing at a General Synod in Vienna, there to condemn the worship of idols and images like some born-again Wycliffite, before challenging the bewildered papal legate to single combat! Our hero, the protégé of Friðrik, Duke of Brandenburg, ends up as Archbishop of Cologne, with time for a brisk crusade to Persia before the tale ends. The reader of the saga is struck by the freedom with which Jón Oddsson Hjaltalín deploys the bricolage of Icelandic narrative tradition within the framework of a contemporary European didactic fable in order to promote his uncomplicated message of faithful godliness. The neo-classical

generic decorum that might have stayed the hand of a writer schooled in mainland Scandinavia had little hold over the porous creative imagination of the priest of Saurbær.

Jón's narrative creativity finds especially memorable expression in his *Ágrip af Heiðarvíga sögu*, in which, apparently with only oral tradition, a formidable memory, native instinct and a text of *Eyrbyggja saga* to guide him, he produces an intriguing précis of the notoriously broken-backed saga. Like an experienced balladeer he 'leaps' over some incidents and 'lingers' over others. His amplifications of Jón Ólafsson úr Grunnavík's own 'Inntak' of the saga (a memorial reconstruction following the destruction of a dozen original manuscript leaves in the 1728 Copenhagen fire) include the deft realisation of a scene mentioned briefly in earlier sources. In it Barði and his starving Húnvetningar followers, besieged in a fortification known as the Borgarvirki, survive by fooling their Borgfirðingar foes into believing that there is no shortage of food within the fort. Barði's decision to cast their final sausage over the ramparts convinces Illugi, the enemy leader, that it is time to abandon the siege: '"Eij mundi vistumm útkastad ef ei væru gnógar til!"' Jón's addendum is, like the *Ágrip* as a whole, the work of one who viewed saga narrative not as a lost art but as a living tradition to which any gifted post-medieval tale-teller could—and should—contribute.

Fjórar sögur frá hendi Jóns Oddssonar Hjaltalín is a worthwhile addition to the invaluable text series published by Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi. Its expertly edited texts, retaining original spellings but normalising capitalisation and punctuation, serve as an invaluable Appendix to the editor's ground-breaking *The Unwashed Children of Eve* (1997). Material from that richly documented study of Jón Oddsson Hjaltalín's works and milieu feeds into the sixty page Introduction, where it is supplemented by fresh insights. Both volumes can be warmly recommended to the growing number of scholars now drawn to the (more than) 'slightly foxed' riches of post-medieval Icelandic paper manuscripts. Of the texts in such manuscripts, as of séra Jón's own writings in Matthew Driscoll's edition, we may say, in the scrupulous (if slightly emended) understatement of a prolific late-nineteenth-century copyist, Magnús Jónsson í Tjaldanesi, 'en ecki þycki mér [þau] at öllu ómerkileg at efni'.

ANDREW WAWN

MEMOIRS OF AN ICELANDIC BOOKWORM. By JÓNA E. HAMMER. *Xlibris*. Philadelphia, 2006. 234 pages. ISBN 1 4257 1775 6 (hardback), 1 4257 1772 1 (paperback).

On one level, Jóna Hammer's *Memoirs* are the Icelandic answer to Garrison Keillor's *Lake Wobegon Days*: an account of what it was like to grow up in Akureyri in the North Quarter of Iceland in the years immediately after World War II, a time, nostalgically observed, when children went out to the farm in summer, when multi-generation extended families all lived together, when people told tales and acted plays and danced through the short summer nights. On another level, it is an anthology of folktales, set in the kind of context from which they came and in which they continue to be repeated, tales about places which are well-known and people well-

remembered in much the same way as people, even in modern Anglo-American society, remember their fragments of personal family history.

In between these levels, though, it exemplifies a kind of negotiation between oral and literate culture which is often theorised by scholars but rarely caught happening in real, well-evidenced life. The author leaves us in no doubt that she really was and is a 'bookworm'. The first sentence she ever uttered—so her family assures her—was a quotation from a hymn she had heard her great-grandmother Sveinbjörg sing, 'how dark it is, this world of woe!' (*dimmt er í heimi hér*). When she went to elementary school and was tested to see how well she could read, she achieved local fame (even in a society with 100% literacy) as the '316-syllable-a-minute kid'. Her mother Gilla says she didn't know Jóna could read until one day she was walking past the window of the town's bookstore (note: a town with 6000 inhabitants had a bookstore) and her toddler started to point at a book with a bright cover and the title *Pönnukökukóngurinn*. 'No, I won't buy it for you—not until you can read the title', she said firmly, and a minute later found herself inside the store handing over the money. Jóna still has her copy of *The Pancake King*. The family anecdote is a kind of mirror-image of the story told of King Alfred and the book of Saxon poetry his mother offered as a prize.

Nevertheless, and co-existing naturally with the developed literacy, there was in Akureyri a developed and continuing habit of orality. All the tales which stud Jóna's account come from the famous collection of Jón Árnason, collected orally but widely available in printed form since 1864—tales like *Gilitrutt* (the Icelandic Rumpelstiltzkin) or *Legg í Lófa* (a tale which shows how the elves punish greed). Some of these are well-known to English readers in the translations of Jacqueline Simpson, but not by any means all, and there are others which come from the same kind of living oral context as Jóna's examples. As a pre-teen Jóna was sent out to a farm called Sandvík for the summers, but Sandvík was on the edge of Ódáðahraun, 'the lava-field of evil deeds', and Jóna tells a string of stories attached to the particular locality, including *Hellismanna saga*, a tale of eighteen students of Hólar who became outlaws, cave-dwellers and sheep-stealers. Oral anecdote, however, could readily turn into fixed-text, but then live on in oral memory. Pastor Matthías, after whom the church in Akureyri was named, wrote a play about an outlaw called Skugga-Sveinn (Shadow-Svein), in which the child Jóna took the part of First Fiend, her role being to dance round the sleeping villain jabbing at him with a trident to represent his tormenting dreams, and reciting a poem rendered here into *Hobbit*-style English verse:

Crash, smash, let's play!
All humans are away
But this sleeping wretch
On the Hell-pit's edge.
He'll wake with a shriek
When the raven's beak
Rips his thief's eye.
The killer will die!
The killer will die!

Oral turns literary, but is then 're-oralised' in memory and now turned back into print by the 'bookworm' remembering and reconstituting words sung long ago.

Bookworm further extends the oral / literary continuum in both directions. Jóna's affectionate memoir tells us a great deal about her mother Gilla, her grandmother Stefanía, her great-grandmother Sveinbjörg and even her great-great-great grandmother Guðbjörg. This last was an Amazon, so strong that alone among Icelandic women she was allowed to mow hay along with the men, instead of raking it, and famous for having carried her husband across the river in Eyjafjörður because he wanted to borrow a book from the lending library on the other side. Her mother, though not quite a heroine of this stature, nevertheless showed one saga-quality in infancy, being so stubborn that she would not say the word for 'yes' (*já*), because that was 'what the cat said' (*mjá*). Quirks and events like these, the very small change of narrative, nevertheless show signs of being worked up into more formal anecdotes like 'when great-grandfather saved the street' or 'the fly that flew away with the bathroom key'. A few generations more and they would become material for a future Grimm or Árnason. At the other extreme, Jóna records the way she worked up from *The Pancake King* to *Anne of Green Gables* and on to *Kristin Lavransdatter* and then Halldór Laxness—the last a shattering experience, not for the reasons one might expect, but because the poem by him she first encountered not only broke the well-known metrical rules of Icelandic verse but also markedly inverted the fixed code of Icelandic eulogy, which, Jóna records, has become a true folk-literate form and threatens still to take over the back pages of *Morgunblaðið*. It seems appropriate that in a late chapter Jóna remarks that the three masters of oral comic timing she has met are her mother's friend Lóa, an Irish friend called Alfred Smyth (surely the author of the controversial life of King Alfred) and Garrison Keillor, whose written style hers so much resembles: one an anecdotalist, one a scholar, one a bestseller, but all practitioners of the same basic skill.

Bookworm further acts as an anthology of the kind of tale one might expect to find in Iceland, tales of elves and giantesses, sorcerers and witches and enchanted animals, while explaining what it is to feel Icelandic: grafted into the past without for an instant rejecting the benefits of the present, the old turf farm buildings still thriftily backed on to the modern double-glazed and centrally-heated one, like the oral tales dipping in and out of a fully-fledged, and now of course remarkably economically successful, print and electronic culture.

TOM SHIPPEY

A VIKING SLAVE'S SAGA. JAN FRIDEGÅRD'S TRILOGY OF NOVELS ABOUT THE VIKING AGE. LAND OF WOODEN GODS, PEOPLE OF THE DAWN AND SACRIFICIAL SMOKE. Translated by ROBERT E. BJORK. *Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies Occasional Publications* 4. *Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies*. Tempe, 2007. 367 pp. ISBN 978 0 86698 375 4.

Jan Fridegård's trilogy, originally published in Swedish as *Trilogin om trälen Holme* (1940, 1944, 1949), is that rarity, a novel set in the Viking Age with barely a mention of longships, sea voyaging or exploration—almost, in fact, a Viking

novel without Vikings (though it does feature a certain amount of rape and pillage, especially the former). As its title suggests, it concerns the stay-at-home life of the thrall, labouring in fields and pig-pens, and the smithies in farmstead and town where the thrall of the title, Holme, works as a skilled craftsman. The location is the trading town of Birka (though, like other historically-based places and personages, it is never identified by name) and a nearby settlement on Lake Mälaren where the hero first casts off the shackles of thralldom to become, in the course of the trilogy, a somewhat reluctant freedom fighter for the oppressed workers on whom the economy of his time, both agricultural and industrial, depends. His rebellion is prompted by the heartless exposure of his baby daughter at the command of the settlement's presiding chieftain; although the child had been conceived in a casual and forced coupling with a female thrall, Holme's escape with baby and mother instigates a strong familial bond that spans the novel, pitting family values against the system of slavery that threatens to destroy Holme's life with his wife Ausi and daughter Tora, who grows to maturity over the course of the action. Despite its original publication in three parts the narrative is continuous and the 'trilogy' can be read as a single novel.

Fridegård was born in 1897 to an impoverished family of *statare*, bonded farm labourers tied to large estates and exploited by their aristocratic owners. It becomes increasingly clear in the course of the Viking trilogy that its ninth-century slaves are ciphers for the victims of this archaic Swedish system, and the work is a manifesto for their freedom. (Fridegård's exposure of the system contributed to its abolition in 1945.) At the same time, Robert Bjork sketches in his Afterword the novel's place in contemporary literary depictions of the Vikings, in particular 'a sub-group of that critical tradition, the group focused on Viking thralls' (p. 318). Fridegård's foregrounding of the thrall's experience is a political choice, casting the work as 'an anti-ideal designed to undermine a political and literary image of Sweden's past, which venerates the Viking and ignores the thrall' (p. 361).

Intertwined with the thralls' struggles for freedom is the history of the introduction of Christianity in the north and its impact (or, through a large part of the narrative, lack of impact) on the pagan world view. In the first novel a lone missionary, acting apparently on his own initiative, attempts to set fire to a pagan temple (evidently based on Adam of Bremen's account of the great temple of Uppsala) and ends up hanging from a tree in the sacrificial grove; later more organised missions founder on the recalcitrance of the Swedes. Fridegård models this part of his narrative on Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii*, the life of the Bishop of Hamburg who attempted the conversion of Sweden *c*.830, while freely adapting its sequence of events and without explicit identification of historical figures. Both religions are negatively represented, Christian and pagan priests cynically exploiting their followers, but the imaginative reconstruction of the pagans' first baffled negotiations with the new religion is psychologically credible. Only in Holme's wife Ausi are there intimations of any spiritual engagement with Christianity; her decision to kill herself on Holme's death, in order to travel with him into the next world and intercede for him before Christ, fuses pre-Christian pagan burial rites with her individual take on the new religion, sentimentally but effectively.

Holme himself stands apart from both sides; Bjork argues that his almost superhuman powers, and mission of salvation, suggest his ultimate identification with both Thor and Christ, but this identification (the later one at least) occurs only in Ausi's mind; his indifference to both religions calls to mind rather the saga stereotype of the man who 'believes in his own might and main'. His supernatural aura is sufficiently explained by traditional ideas about the mysterious power of the smith; Bjork points out Fridegård's reliance on Gustaf Fröding's poem *Smeden* ('The Smith', 1892), which retells the Vǫlundr legend as an account of rebellion against oppression. This is the thematic engine of the novel, though Fridegård's thesis that (in Bjork's words) 'oppressed people necessarily rebel against their oppressors' (p. 361) is undermined on a literal level by the spinelessness and lack of resource of all the oppressed thralls other than Holme himself; without his leadership they can do nothing.

Whatever the intrinisic value of Fridegård's recasting of the socio-economic realities of his day may be, his transparent political agenda is something of a distraction to the reader more interested in his recreation of quotidian life in the Viking Age. With this theoretical argument as his priority, Fridegård makes even his oppressed thralls a bit too comfortable; he does not fully represent the sheer misery, hunger, cold and (surely) smelliness that their life must have entailed, and the weather is generally quite pleasant. Nevertheless there is a good deal to enjoy on this level. The novelist creates a detailed picture of agricultural, mercantile and religious life, drawing on archaeological records and scholarly accounts available in his time; while this leads him into occasional blunders such as the sporting of horned helmets, the atmosphere generally rings true. Where Fridegård does let his imagination run riot is in representing northern paganism as a religion untouched by the sexual repression that was part and parcel of Christianity; his depiction of the major winter festival (in other respects closely based on the account of Adam of Bremen) and more fictitious representation of a spring fertility rite both culminate in hectically imagined orgies (possibly, Bjork suggests, influenced by D. H. Lawrence).

In his useful, if rather compressed Afterword, Bjork characterises the narrative strategy: 'To insure the right historical flavor, Fridegård even takes the names of his characters from rune stones in the Uppland area of Sweden and limits both dialogue and the use of archaisms to a minimum' (pp. 359–60). He could have added that most of the characters are not named at all but are represented as 'the stranger', 'the chieftain', 'the heathen priest', and so forth. Both this device and the avoidance of dialogue sharply distinguish Fridegård's style from that of the sagas (and of historical novels that attempt to imitate them). There is an appropriate lack of affectation in the colloquial English register Bjork has chosen for his translation, although its overt Americanism may jar on British ears. Sturdily produced and with only a modicum of misprints, this volume will be valued for making accessible to English readers a substantial contribution to the increasingly popular study of later reinterpretations of medieval literature and history; it also offers a good read in its own right.

ALISON FINLAY

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— Other death omens of ill-luck are shared by Scandinavian, Orcadian and Gaelic tradition (cf. Almqvist 1974–76, 24, 29–30, 32–33).

— Anne Holtsmark (1939, 78) and others have already drawn attention to this fact.

— Ninth-century Irish brooches have recently been the subject of two studies by the present author (1972; 1973–74), and the bossed penannular brooches have been fully catalogued by O. S. Johansen (1973).

— This is clear from the following sentence: *iðraðist Bolli þegar verksins ok lýsti vígi á hendi sér* (*Laxdœla saga* 1934, 154).

— It is stated quite plainly in *Flateyjarbók* (1860–68, I 419): *hann tok land j Syrlækiarosi*.

— There is every reason to think that this interpretation is correct (cf. *Heilagra manna søgur*, II 107–08).

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