

dic Family Saga" [Diss. Univ. of Iowa 1972]; Gertraud Schillinger, *Das Lachen in den isländischen Familiensagas und in den Liedern der Edda* [Diss. Freiburg; Freiburg im Breisgau: n.p., 1962]). The crowning example of indifference to previous scholarship, however, is surely the following pronouncement, one of the book's most ridiculous moments: "At this point there arises a difficult question which, to my knowledge, has not been asked in the modern study of Iceland. This distinction between fact and fiction, the one upon which the bookprosisists placed so much weight, wasn't it always a bit too simple?" (47).

An opportunity for professional interdisciplinary cooperation was missed here. The contributions could have used less hype and more hard work; Gísli Pálsson's valiant effort to transform congress proceedings into a scholarly anthology was thwarted in the end by the uneven quality of the material. In one respect, the volume's conference origins could have been put to advantage: namely, if the Reykjavík discussions had been taken into account more conscientiously in the revised papers or been reported on in a special addendum. (I would have been interested especially in seeing Helga Kress's challenge to Jenny Jochens reflected in the anthology somehow.) But this chance was missed, too.

Marvin Taylor

Gro Steinsland. *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi: En analyse av hierogami-myten i Skírnismál, Ynglingatal, Háleygjatal og Hyndluljóð*. Oslo: Solum, 1991. 366 pages.

For the reader who is not a native speaker of Scandinavian, Gro Steinsland gives a rather bald summary of her findings in this doctoral thesis on pages 348–52. Her conclusions are bold, even shocking; non-Scandinavians may be tempted to spare themselves three hundred and twenty pages of argumentation and dismiss them out of hand. They should not. Gro Steinsland's analysis of *Skírnismál*, *Ynglingatal*, *Háleygjatal*, and *Hyndluljóð* is tightly argued, calling on a wealth of sources, mythological, historical, and legal, and on archaeological and iconographical evidence to delineate her central thesis: that the "sacred marriage" myth contained in *Skírnismál* should be understood in the context of Norse ideas of kingship; that the marriage between god and giantess results in a new type of being, the prototypical king; that the contradictions embodied in the ancestry of the royal lineage make the king peculiarly subject to fate, as evidenced by *Ynglingatal*'s fascination with the bizarre deaths of the kings of the race; and that, after Ragnarøk, the new ruler prophesied in *Hyndluljóð* is neither Christ nor some version of Baldr, but a hypostasis of Heimdallr, freed from the ruler's destiny as the apparently fatherless son of nine giant mothers. Gro Steinsland modestly suggests that her findings are of consequence particularly for the "sacral kingship" debate, but her thinking ranges far more widely and interestingly.

Det hellige bryllup is a closely argued and complex work; fortunately its thesis format encourages summarizing conclusions to each part of the exposition. The argument emerges gradually, thus in the early pages of the book the reader has to take on trust certain assertions which are proven later. Some, such as the reference on page 85 to "the remarkable antagonism between Óðinn and Freyr in the poem" (scil. *Skírnismál*),

are not in the end justified, and the reader needs to keep a sharp eye on these.

It is the analysis of *Skírnismál*, then, which forms the basis of the argument. Freyr's taking over of the highseat — his apparent power to wield (or have Skírnir wield) the wand (*gambanteinn*), eleven apples, and the ring Draupnir — marks him as a kingly candidate, for these objects are the insignia of royalty — a surprising contention, but nevertheless with some grounding in iconography. The marriage between god and giantess is in itself anomalous: so many elements of the legally constituted ceremony are missing that any child would not be deemed legitimate. The union should be seen as a kind of *hieros gamos*, but not one stemming from fertility ritual; rather the god and giantess symbolize king and (conquered) land, hence the elements of coercion and threat in the wooing of Gerðr, elements to which Gro Steinsland, unlike many commentators, gives full weight. The union results in offspring — Fjölnir, the first-mentioned king of *Ynglingatal*, whose parents are given as Freyr and Gerðr by Snorri, and Snorri alone. Thus the king is created: that the kingly ancestor must be the product of a transgressive god-giantess union is confirmed by *Háleygjatal*, where the divine ancestors are Óðinn and Skaði. Thus far, the arguments are highly persuasive: the interpretation of the *hieros gamos* myth as political and social is an advance both on previous religio-historical interpretations of the school of Magnus Olsen and more recent “literary” readings of *Skírnismál* as medieval love poem. Reading the Poetic Edda in the context of the sovereignty topos is perhaps an incipient trend in eddic studies, signalled by Svava Jakobsdóttir's investigation of the motif in *Hávamál* (“Gunnlöð og hinn dýri mjöður,” *Skírnir* 162 [1988]: 215–45). Though Svava's essay was published too late for the author to consider in the current work, nuanced reference is made here to possible Celtic parallels. Throughout Gro Steinsland is scrupulous in distinguishing contentions which she regards as proven (“the prototypical king is the son of a divinity and a giantess,” 23) and those which are not, as in the excursus examining the parallels

between *Skírnismál* and Genesis, where the suggestion of influence remains a possibility, signalled by “kan” (170).

Where I found myself unable to concur fully with Gro Steinsland is in the causal connection she makes between the ancestry of the king and the strange, unmotivated deaths which the Ynglingar suffer in *Ynglingatal*. This is grounded in the contradictory divine and giant energies which the king incorporates: “the king dies, tragically and inexplicably, because he embodies a mythological antagonism of cosmic dimensions” (203). While it is clear that the motif “marriage to a foreign woman” and the death motif are causally related in some verses of *Ynglingatal*, the author's use of the Baldr myth as an interpretative key does not really help. It seems likely that Baldr must die because he is — in a perhaps primarily etymological sense — a king, and the king must die: fate and death thus irrupt into the world of the gods as harbingers of Ragnarøk. But Gro Steinsland's contention that Baldr must die because he has the misfortune to number giants in his paternal ancestry, despite the juxtapositions cited from *Hyndluljóð* 30, seems to this reviewer unwarranted. In the end, the necessary connection between giantesses and fate argued for here rests almost entirely on the obscure giant maidens of *Völuspá* 8, whom the author charges with bringing the fate system into existence.

The final section of the book, in which the secret cause of the death of Baldr, outlined above, and the mysterious ruler who will come after Ragnarøk are discussed, is of great interest, not only in the context of the ideology of the (sacral?) king, but also in broader areas: the Norse concepts of mythic time and the positive, enabling role of the giant woman at certain phases in mythic history. The giant woman embodies creative as well as destructive aspects: “the giantess's [scil. Hyndla's] deepest secret is that the basis of existence is formed on women's creativity and giant energy — as past-Heimdallr the urbeing was, so shall the future be” (282). The book ends with a rather upbeat view of the new world order: the future ruler's qualification as transcendent figure is, in effect, to be related to

no one, to have no conflict-filled genealogy, and hence to be related to everyone. I suspect that this unifying figure conforms more closely to a late-twentieth-century audience's aspirations than to those of a genealogy-obsessed contemporary audience.

Not every reader will be able to assent wholeheartedly to the conclusions of this stimulating book; though much is suggested, only a limited amount can be proven. However, in opening up eddic poetry to political and social rather than religious and archetypal investigation, Gro Steinsland's book is likely to change the way many of us think about the mythological poetry of the Edda and the way in which its myths interact with Norse history.

Carolyn Larrington

Peter A. Jorgensen, editor and translator. *Valla-Ljóts saga: The Icelandic Text According to MS AM 161 fol.* Bibliotheca Germanica: Series nova, volume 1. Saarbrücken: AQ-Verlag, 1991. 120 pages.

A bilingual edition is really two books, not one, which is both its strength and its weakness. Although in some bilingual editions only the translation represents original work, in this volume by the American Germanic scholar Peter Jorgensen both "books" are original contributions to Old Icelandic studies. The volume also contains three introductions, "The Edition" (11–20), "The Saga" (21–35), and "The Translation" (37–40), which are brief but to the point and well written, an index to the characters, and a bibliography.

No extant manuscript of *Valla-Ljóts saga* is older than the seventeenth century. AM 161 fol. is one of the two from which the rest apparently derive and which themselves seem to stem from a common source. The differences are minor and have already been registered in the apparatus to Jónas Kristjánsson's diplomatic Samfund edition (1952) of the other major manuscript, AM 496 4°, but since 161 fol. has not been edited as a whole since 1830, the present edition is welcome.

Jorgensen follows the spelling and punctuation of the manuscript exactly, including dieresis and the special forms *a* and *ð*. Otherwise, modern letter forms are used, allographs are disregarded, and abbreviations silently expanded. But letter forms, allographs, and abbreviations are described carefully in the first introduction. The statement on page 15, though, that *d*, which represents etymologically *d* and *ð*, "always has a rounded ascender" is not completely accurate, since the ascender is occasionally straight: "Gudmundur," "haffde," "villde hann" (ms. p. 86); "brodur minn" (ms. p. 90). A check against a facsimile made available to me by the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen showed that Jorgensen's edition is reliable. I found only one, insignificant discrepancy: "illt" on page 94