Carolyne Larrington. *A Store of Common Sense: Gnomic Theme and Style in Old Icelandic and Old English Wisdom Poetry.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. 254 pages.

The title comes from *Hávamál* 10–11 (*man-vit mikit*), which appears in English translations as — for example — "much good sense" (Thorpe), "mother wit" (Bray, Phillpotts), and "a good store of common sense" (Martin Clarke). To my ear the formulation sounds characteristically British and in any case declares Carolyne Larrington's allegiances in a surprisingly turbulent field where "common sense" has become both an accusation and a banner. The focal point of this book, revised from a 1988 Oxford D. Phil. thesis, and of the controversy generally is *Hávamál*, especially the first, sapiential part of the poem; the extreme points of view are represented by D. A. H. Evans, in his 1986 edition and a series of subsequent debate pieces, and Klaus von See, who may be said to have inaugurated the modern phase of the debate in 1972. At stake is the cultural nature of *Hávamál* and, by extension, much Norse wisdom literature: native or classical-Christian? I reviewed the debate just before Evans's edition (in *Old Norse–Icelandic Literature* [1985]), coming down on the native side, but the most recent survey is probably Bjarne Fidjestøl's "Håvamål og den klassiske humanismen," *Maal og Minne* 1992. Larrington's account is bibliographically less complete than Fidjestøl's, lacking especially the extensive contributions of Hermann Pálsson, including his major statement, *Heimur Hávamála* (1990). (She cites only Hermann's work on the influence of *Hugsvinnsmál* — a monograph of 146 pages, rather than an article as it appears to be in Larrington.) This is understandable and probably partly due to the lag time necessary to digest such work and to book-production itself, but it does mean that despite Larrington (and another recent English book partly covering this terrain, Richard North, *Pagan Words and Christian Meanings* [1991]), Hermann Pálsson's contributions have not been widely evaluated. A future stock-taking should include Heinz Klingenberg's version of a Christian writer (in *Arbeiten zur Skandinavistik,* ed. Otmar Werner [1989]). For the time being I remain of the "common sense" school with Evans and Larrington, but a middle position along Hermann Pálsson's lines begins to seem less implausible.

Less than thirty percent of Larrington's book is occupied with *Hávamál,* but its first chapter, a sequential commentary on this "primary Norse text" (11), is the most detailed and thorough part of the book. The centrality of this poem constitutes an element of unity; as a whole, however, the book is a rapid, ground-covering introduction to Old Germanic gnomic poetry — wisdom poetry in Old English and Old Norse in comparative perspective. The central themes of the book are laid out on p. 11 as (1) the question of cultural origins (pagan, Christian, etc.) and reception, (2) poetic values and structures, and (3) the gnomic mode in other than gnomic genres (arguably an aspect of "validity" or reception). Larrington leaves implicit the justification for choosing just these two traditions to compare; but it must be that "there was a body of folk-wisdom, not yet in metrical form, a body which can be sensed as a living, pulsing, gnomic background to all Germanic poetry" (18). This vision of Old Germanic wisdom poetry speaks strongly to me, and her book has a liberal sprinkling of valuable literary insights. As a whole, however, it partakes of the loose forms of gnomic poetry itself; there are threads, valuable observations, and intertextual assumptions contributing toward an ideological unity, but not much of an integrating argument.

Larrington's understanding of *Hávamál* rejects Christian sources but does adopt (perhaps principally from von See) a series of poets and a final shaping, a "composite 'author' . . . 'Both one and many . . . Both intimate and unidentifiable'" (19) — lines by Eliot that are proving useful in Norse studies. Her reading "illuminate[s] the major thematic movements, and demonstrate[s] the development of thought through verbal and logical links" (19). The commentary is especially good on the shifting first and third person voices of the poem (e.g., p. 33, where there is an original comparison to *The Wan-*

derer; developed at p. 192), on connections between thematic groupings (as at p. 34), and on the poem's attitude toward women; there are missed opportunities for deepening the commentary (as when Lars Lönnroth's "double scene" is not cited in connection with the "identity of *locus* and text" [20]), but rarely are readings pushed too hard for the sake of a thesis or a cross-grained cleverness. The overall trajectory of *Hávamál* is well analyzed; it is awkward that Larrington must register the transition from a worldly scene to a "transfigured hall" three times, not as stages (42, 48, 50), but this is true to the poem.

Chapter 2 is an exposition of *Grípisspá, Reginsmál, Fáfnismál,* and *Sigrdrífumál* as complementary, not overlapping, sapiential lessons in the initiation of a hero, an oblique *speculum principis.* But the Young Sigurðr complex is traditionally regarded as somewhat arbitrarily segmented and based on a saga-like source, itself already a composite of parallel poems. How Larrington's complementarity might comport with this older view of historical layers is not discussed. (A fresh approach is that of Judy Quinn in "Verseform and Voice in Eddic Poems: The Discourses of *Fáfnismál,*" *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 107 [1992]: 100–130.) I disagree with Larrington occasionally on details: in *Fáfnismál* 22 the "prophecy which is not fulfilled" (83) is not that "Reginn will prove as treacherous to Sigurðr as he has to his brother" — the dwarf has been and will remain treacherous by nature — but rather the specific "hann mun ocr verða báðom at bana." The idea that the "attack and parry" of earlier dragon-fight schemas are preserved in the dramatic "ebb and flow" of talk in *Fáfnismál,* despite development to the pit-ambush version at the level of story, is striking but gains no support from Sigmund's dragon-killing in *Beowulf* 884b–897 (pp. 82, 86), an attack without parry. But again, Larrington provides a skillful general reading.

Chapter 3 is something of an excursus, a specialized argument centering on von See's reinterpretation of the relationship between *Hugsvinnsmál* and *Hávamál* making *Hávamál* the borrower. Larrington builds convincingly on Evans's refutation of von See, but I think prior scholarship could have been better integrated. Maria Elena Ruggerini's learned "La ricezione dei *Disticha Catonis* nell'Islanda medievale," in *Cultura classica e cultura germanica settentrionale* (Macerata 1985) is not mentioned though it covers much the same ground as Hermann Pálsson's book of the same year. I agree that *Sonatorrek* 24.5–8 ("ok þat geð / es ek gerða mér / vísa fjandr / af [ms. at] vélǫndum") is probably somehow the lender at *Hugsvinnsmál* 51.1–3 ("af gæzku þeiri / mátt þú gera þér / vísa fjándr at vinum"); but Larrington's detailed treatment seems confused: "One suspects that 'vélǫndum' . . . is a corruption — we would wish for a word such as 'velviljǫndum' (well-wisher), which would fit the alliteration equally well" (113). But this would give double alliteration in a b-line, and the word, which would be a late formation, does not appear in *Lexicon poeticum,* Cleasby-Vigfusson, or Fritzner. Footnote 42 struggles with manuscript "at" here, but von See (in "*Sonatorrek* und *Hávamál*") had already justified it satisfactorily. Whatever the relationship to *Hugsvinnsmál,* emendation need not be part of the explanation.

With Chapter 4 the highroad is resumed in a presentation of the "range and themes" of Old English wisdom poetry. A good discussion of *Maxims I* and *II* accounts for juxtapositions and structures in a fashion similar to the treatment of *Hávamál,* but is itself abrupt in some transitions (e.g., from Jill Mann's interesting thought to its contextualization, p. 125). Of *Cotton Maxims* 42–46 Larrington points out that the "gloomy weather provides good cover for the thief's illicit activities, just as Grendel the *þyrs* stalks 'under mist hleoþum' [recte *misthleoþum*] . . . and 'under wolcnum' . . . Metaphorically the weather suggests the dark state of the man's soul and that of the monster . . . The woman's behaviour is less easy to account for" (133). The author could have tried a little harder with the famous crux of the woman's actions, with the parallel of *þeof, þyrs,* and *ides,* and with the transition from *þyrs* to *ides* (cf. "þurs er kvenna kvöl"). The reading of the *Rune Poem* offers rewarding points, but in contrasting the "man" stanza of the Icelandic and OE poems Larrington finds the Icelandic "celebratory," whereas *moldar auki* seems to me to be parallel in

sense to the OE "þæt earme flæsc eorþan betæcan" (135); *Fortunes of Men* and *Precepts* are treated to fruitful readings, with comparisons especially to *Disticha Catonis* and *Hávamál*, while the pages on *Solomon and Saturn II* focus on the poem's balance between classical-Christian, especially Boethian, wisdom and Germanic background.

Chapter 5 breaks with the commentary form in a wide-ranging essay linking man and nature, first through magic, then through a more abstract type of control through wisdom. The extra-Germanic gnomic material on nature is illuminating, but in Chapter 6 on "Gnomes in Elegy" the application of Greek lament genres is handled loosely: "lament and praise-poem" (174) is apparently meant to correspond to *góos* and *thrênos,* but "praise-poem" has a prior technical commitment in Germanic (cf. 185); on the next page both Greek forms seem to be "types of lament." Discussion of Old Norse elegy is limited chiefly to a brief reading of the conclusion of *Oddrúnargrátr* and more technical treatments of *Sonatorrek* and *Hákonarmál,* both of which have some relationship to *Hávamál.* (*Sonatorrek* 25 does not have Egill mustering courage "to wait for Hel on the headland" [178]; instead *she* stands menacingly on the headland, but [*þó*] he will wait for her unafraid. And Larrington's alternative — "rather than rush headlong towards her by starving himself to death" — conflates the prose with the poem.) Several good observations on Eyvindr's poem lead to a vindication, against von See, of the traditional view of the relation of the last stanza with *Hávamál* 76–77 and *The Wanderer* 108–10 (The discussion in Leslie's edition of *The Wanderer,* not cited, is well worth consulting.) But I am particularly struck by her interpretation of *slíkan sefa* in *Hákonarmál* 19: it is *sefi* that is "gotten" here in a significant substitution for the *orztírr* or *dómr* of *Hávamál* 76–77, which Eyvindr obviously had in his ear near the close of his poem. Larrington says that *sefi* "may be referring to some kind of spiritual development in Hákon, in learning the value of compromise in the matter of Christianizing Norway. This interpretation is borne out by the use of 'slíkan', referring back to the preceding verse [st. 18], hence a spirit which was wise enough to preserve the pagan sanctuaries" (183). This is new, but finally I must disagree. Stanza 19 refers instead to the idea of rebirth and associates Hákon the Good with Baldr the Good, but the reference is obscured by Larrington's translation: "On a good day will the prince be born [not 'is . . . born'] who will inherit ['get', but not 'can get'] such a soul; his life will always be mentioned as good." (Cf. the uncited Magnus Olsen, "Om Balder-digtning og Balderkultus," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 40 [1924] and "En iakttagelse vedkommende Balderdiktningen," in *Studier tillägnade Axel Kock* [Lund 1929].)

Among the OE elegies the treatment of *Wulf and Eadwacer* is very general and shows little awareness of the complexity of the secondary literature; I am naturally partial to my own effort (in *Heldensage und Heldendichtung im Germanischen*, ed. Heinrich Beck [1988]), which is not cited. Larrington's point concerns only the "gnomic conclusion" (18–19), but no reason is given to consider this twist on Matthew 19.6 a "gnome." Assuming it really is developed from "quod ergo deus coniunxit, homo non separet," it could at most be called a *sententia,* but here I feel that the predecessors who proposed the biblical source (P.J. Frankis, *Medium Ævum* 31 [1962]: 173; James Spamer, *Neophilologus* 62 [1978]: 143–44) really should have been noticed — or was this independent discovery? *Gnome* continues to be used in loose senses in a brief discussion of *The Wife's Lament* and in fuller and finer readings of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer.* The section on *Deor* is woefully inadequate (seven lines), cites no secondary literature beyond Bruce Mitchell's *Old English Syntax,* and does not discuss the nature of the presumed gnome, the refrain. An article of mine, specifically an investigation of the refrain's proverbial stature (*Traditio* 43 [1987]), may have appeared too late to be considered; but there is a massive older literature on the poem and even on the refrain itself. Chapter 7, on gnomes in narrative poetry, opens with an interesting survey showing that such speech acts are rare in OE epic. Organized under the headings *fortitudo, sapientia,* and narrative

voice, the discussion musters past many "gnomic" passages of OE and ON heroic narrative, including such secondary heroic poetry as *Andreas;* much of the material is quarried from *Beowulf,* which forms the exclusive focus of the last section on the relationship between gnomes and narrative voice. There is a preference for literary paraphrase over analysis here, especially potentially tiresome analysis involving technical applications of *gnome* and related vocabulary. Despite a sense of fatigue, the Conclusion manages to pull together various strands of the book with some memorable phrasing.

The venerable Clarendon Press did not distinguish itself in the production of this book, which is marred by many forms of carelessness, involving writing and punctuation as well as proof-reading errors. Just a few examples of different types: "poems" for "poem" (212) and "The poets . . . his" (172); "wā" for "swā" (208); *"Andreas"* for *"Andreas"'* (205); p. 105 typesetting; p. 104 "unkown." (The many slips in punctuation, spacing, and word-division are not worth illustrating.) The text of *Hákonarmál* is supposed to be from the Íslenzk fornrit *Heimskringla* (p. 198, n. 20), but st. 21 on p. 184 is obviously not; for example, Larrington gives its last line as "mǫrg es þjóðum [*sic*] þjeuð"; Íslenzk fornrit gives "mǫrg es þjóð of þéuð," Jón Helgason, "mǫrg er þióð um þiáð." On p. 181 "the two poems of Egill" must be a vestige of an earlier draft since only one is mentioned near this reference; and the identity of Sigurðr's "three instructors" varies from p. 74 to p. 76. For "three half-lines" on p. 164 I count two, and on the same page, *Beowulf*'s dragon is not "terrible"? (What about "egeslic eorðdraca" [2825a]? etc.) On p. 136 we hear of the *gēr*-stanza of the *Rune Poem* as "cited above"; but it is not to be found. On p. 24 "the fuller account of Óðinn's adventure with Gunnlǫð in $10^{3–6}$" probably should read "104–10"; on p. 33 for "25^{1} and 26^{1}" read "24^{3} and 25^{3}." On p. 99 a reference to a word as attested in "*Fornmanna sǫgur* and *Íslendinga Þjóðssaga*" gives pause; the sources must come straight from Cleasby-Vigfusson, which is not cited here. Page 93, n. 7: The composition of *Vǫlsunga saga* "is normally put in the last half of the fourteenth century" — read "thirteenth." On p. 111 something has gone wrong with the OE; Larrington has silently supplied macrons to Cox's text, which she is citing (n. 33), except that "swīðe" and "þēah" lack theirs; the "and" abbreviation is expanded, "forþam" appears as "for þām," "hie" as "hē" with consequent loss of verb agreement, and the verb as "behelian" instead of "behelien"; further down the page Cox's "forþam þa" is reproduced as "for þām þe." I noticed a few erroneous translations: p. 65 (*Hávamál* 164.6) "Heill sá er kann!" not "who has known," but "who knows"; p. 81 (*Fáfnismál* 12.2) "allz þik fróðan kveða," not "you are said to be wise in all things," but "because you are said to be wise"; p. 128 (*Maxims I* 149b) "nales þæt hēafe bewindeð," not "in no way does he circle the head" but "in no way does he circle it [the grave; *græf* in 148b] with lamentation." Minor omissions in translations occur on pp. 135 and 143, and small or debatable problems on p. 168 ("swylce blis," not "then this joy," but "likewise joy") and p. 187 (*Wife's Lament* 47b *þæt* rendered "where" with the emendation in n. 35; but "that" and the whole interpretation of Leslie, *Three Old English Elegies*, is superior). In *Hávamál* 117.10 "giǫld ens góða hugar," "repayment from a well-meaning mind" (53), I would interpret the gen. as "for" (so Sijmons-Gering: "für die gute meinung, die du von ihm hast"); and the strange interpretation of *Sonatorrek* 1.3–4 "loftvætt (ljóðpundara)" as "the weight of air (of the song-measurer)" (176) cannot be accepted without argument in place of Nordal's.

Common Sense, then, yields mixed results, strong in incidental literary insights, but not in workmanship. The book shows little patience for a close analysis of its own major concepts (gnome, etc.), which are presented on pp. 2–9 but applied rather indiscriminately, and the treatment of previous scholarship is highly selective. It may be that these good and bad characteristics are equally products of an audience problem: usually a general reader is implied here, and selective introductory survey with aperçus is the dominant mode; but in the *Hávamál* commentary (and occasionally elsewhere) one wants to have a text in hand, and the disputes with von See and a few other

passages are more narrowly focused. This audience problem, especially as applied to that *summum bonum,* "the critical book," is deeply rooted in the contemporary anglophone academic world where institutional necessity often transcends common sense.

Joseph Harris

Gunnar Karlsson, Kristján Sveinsson og Mörður Árnason, útgefendur. *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins.* Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1992. 600 blaðsíður.

Hin vandaða útgáfa Vilhjálms Finsens á þeim lögum sem lengi hafa kallast einu nafni Grágás markaði tímamót í þekkingu manna á lögum Íslendinga á þjóðveldistíma (*Grágás: Islændernes lovbog i fristatens tid, udgivet efter det kongelige bibliotheks haandskrift,* 2 bd. [Kh. 1852]; *Grágás efter det arnamagnæanske haandskrift nr. 334 fol., Staðarhólsbók* [Kh. 1879]; *Grágás: Stykker, som findes i det arnamagnæanske haandskrift nr. 351 fol., Skálholtsbók, og en række andre haandskrifter* [Kh. 1883]; *Grágás: Oversættelse,* 2 bd. [Kh. 1870]; öll útgáfan nema danska þýðingin var ljósprentuð í Odense 1974). Í kjölfar útgáfu Finsens hófust rannsóknir fræðimanna á stjórnskipan íslenska þjóðveldisins sem lesin var úr lagatextum Grágásar. Í fararbroddi fór Konrad Maurer sem skrifaði feikn um fornan norrænan og germanskan rétt, en fleiri fræðimenn fylgdu á eftir, nefna má Andreas Heusler sem þýddi Grágás á þýsku (*Isländisches Recht: Die Graugans,* Germanenrechte 9 [Weimar 1937]). Af íslenskum mönnum, eftir Vilhjálm Finsen, lagði Ólafur Lárusson drýgstan skerf til vitneskju um hin fornu lög og ber þar hæst samanburð hans á Grágás og lögbókunum, Járnsíðu og Jónsbók, sem birtist í ritgerðinni "Grágás og lögbækurnar" (*Árbók Háskóla Íslands* 1922, Fylgirit [Rvk. 1923]). Ólafur skrifaði einnig formála fyrir ljósprenti á útgáfu Vilhjálms Finsens á Konungsbók Grágásar, sem ljósprentuð var í Lithoprent og kom út í Reykjavík árið 1945 og var það í fyrsta sinn sem Grágás var gefin út á Íslandi.

Sjálfstæðisbarátta þjóða í Evrópu, Íslendinga jafnt sem annarra, á ofanverðri 19. öld og öndverðri 20. öld setti mark sitt á viðhorf manna til Grágásarlaga, flestum var í mun að láta þau sýna sem glæstasta mynd af íslenskum þjóðveldistíma og þeim frumkrafti sem þá hafði ríkt og skóp Íslendingum sérstæðar bókmenntir og einstætt stjórnarform. Aðalhandritin sem varðveita lagatextann,