hvenær sem leitað er að vitnisburði Grágásarlaga og því er óvarlegt að steypa textana í sama mót í útgáfu. Að öllu samanlögðu taldi Vilhjálmur Finsen að eftir handritum og leifum handrita mætti greina fimm aðalgerðir Grágásarlaga (*Grágás* 1883, xxx–xxii). Enginn veit hvernig háttað hefir verið þeim gerðum sem glataðar eru, en sem fyrr segir er giska margt óljóst um uppruna, eðli og hlutverk Grágásarlaga og einmitt þess vegna er áríðandi að gefa þau út með sama heildaryfirbragði og er í varðveittum handritum. Sýnist þá einu mega gilda hvort útgáfa er ætluð útvöldum sérfræðingum ellegar alþýðu.

Grágás 1992 þjónar vel sem handhæg lesbók og til þess að skemmta nútímamönnum við orðin ein, en í þessum búningi vantar nokkuð á að Grágás sé ákjósanlegt baksvið fornsagna okkar og svo búin er hún takmörkuð sem "ómetanleg heimild um réttarvitund, siðferðiskennd, atvinnuvegi, þjóðhætti og daglegt líf á Íslandi á fyrstu öldum Íslandsbyggðar" (vii). Útgefendur hafa nostrað við stafsetningu og skýringar og framkallað fallega hillubók með sérstæðum texta. Og þess er að vænta að *Grágás* 1992 verði til þess að framvegis, eins og í reynd hefir verið um langan aldur, verði "lögin höfð á takteinum þegar rætt er um íslenskar miðaldabókmenntir" eins og Guðrún Nordal kemst að orði í ungri hugleiðingu um útgáfuna í tímaritinu *Ný saga* (1993, 18). En í samsteypu Grágásarlaga sem birt er í *Grágás* 1992 og með þögninni um endingu þeirra slitna þau úr samhengi við þá tíma sem þau héldu einhverju gildi í bændasamfélaginu sem skóp þau og gaf þeim hlutverk. Það er hinsvegar ókannað mál að hve miklu leyti lagasköpun og lagaritun kveiktu sagnalist með Íslendingum á þeim tíma þegar Grágásarlög runnu saman við lög úr Noregsríki, og að hvaða leyti bókmenntasköpun Íslendinga á seinni hluta þrettándu aldar er flækt í umsköpun landslaga. Skilyrði frjórrar umræðu um þessi efni í framtíðinni væru líklega ekki síst lestrarútgáfur Járnsíðu og Jónsbókar sem unnar væru af sömu kostgæfni og *Grágás* 1992 að því er lýtur að laganna orðum og flestum skýringum.

Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir

John McKinnell. *Both One and Many: Essays on Change and Variety in Late Norse Heathenism.* With an Appendix by Maria Elena Ruggerini. Philologia 1. Roma: Il Calamo, 1994. 208 pages.

Among the major branches of Norse literature eddic poetry is certainly most in need of critical innovation. The traditional contributions to dating, localizing, metrics, textual explication, editorial policy, formulaic classification, and so forth have slowed to a trickle, and new approaches have been sporadic. Of the two major subgroupings, mythological and heroic, the former seems to have fallen even further behind than the latter, which is at least nurtured by a larger Germanic context. In addressing the mythological corpus, John McKinnell has therefore chosen the harder task and has renewed where renewal is most needed. At the same time he discusses the problems in a straightforward and unpretentious manner that underplays the significance of his argument.

The argument lies in the title words "One and Many" and "Variety and Change." McKinnell tries to destabilize the unity suggested by transmission (largely) in a single manuscript, implied by broad generic terms such as "eddic" and "mythological," and reinforced by the assumption that the mythological poems are codifications of a uniform religious and narrative system. The approach is modern to the extent that it assumes that the poems are individual arabesques on a common but infinitely variable stock of stories. This outlook gives the individual poet and the individual poem much more autonomy in the overall tradition, and it offers the reader more freedom in reflecting on individual poetic formulations.

A few key quotations may serve to illustrate McKinnell's angle of vision. "It is essential to an understanding of Norse mythology that this was a religion (or group of cults) in which there was no such stability [scil. as in the Christian system], and for which the idea of orthodoxy was meaningless" (21). "In this situation of free choice, there was no reason why poets should not change the details of the stories they inher-

ited, or even make up new motifs of their own" (22). (McKinnell exemplifies this sort of mutability from the varying accounts of Thor's fishing for the Midgard Serpent.) "If the whole system was liable both to gradual change and to variation based on personal choice, it cannot be safe to draw conclusions about what it was like in the remote past, to assume (as some mythologists have done) that it remained largely unchanged for a thousand years or more, or to compare it with mythology in Greek or Sanskrit in order to elucidate its supposed primitive form or social meaning" (25).

McKinnell pursues this thesis by exploring the myths of Loki and Thor. In the former he finds "three faces," Loki the trickster, Loki the traitor, and Loki the accuser. The trickster (in the stories of Þjazi and the Giant Builder) is ambiguous and amoral, moving easily between giants and gods and engaging in a sort of unpredictable brinksmanship, which can be beneficial or perilous for giants, gods, and humans alike. At this stage he embodies universal insecurity. The traitor figure (in the stories of Geirrøðr and Baldr) is far less ambiguous and has become demonized. He stands against order and civilization, and may owe something to the Christian distinction between good and evil. Finally, the accuser, who convicts the other gods of moral crimes, is a kind of devil figure and seems securely embedded in medieval Christianity.

Chapter 3 singles out the story of Thor and Geirrøðr in its several manifestations and differentiates three types not on a religious scale of relative proximity to heathen and Christian paradigms but on a social scale. By discriminating authorial emphases McKinnell establishes an aristocratic or heroic viewpoint (e.g., *Þórsdrápa*), a popular viewpoint (e.g., *Hymiskviða*), and a satiric viewpoint (e.g., the tale in *Gylfaginning*). This separation of social attitudes serves as a further demonstration of how divergent representations of the same story can be.

Chapters 4 and 5 pass beyond variation in individual stories and treat the contrasting views of Norse eschatology in *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Vǫluspá*. The chapter on *Vafþrúðnismál* provides a narrative context by comparing it to the riddling of Gestumblindi in *Hervarar saga*. McKinnell then deals with the dramatic contradiction involved in Odin's entering a head-ransom contest when he (and everyone else) knows that he is fated to die not at the hands of Vafþrúðnir but at ragnarǫk. We cannot therefore imagine that Odin is exploring his own fate. He is rather "testing whether Fate is as immutable as it seems" (102). From this situation McKinnell deduces the irony that as long as Vafþrúðnir gives predictable answers, Odin is safe in the contest at hand but condemned to suffer his fate at ragnarǫk. As a whole the poem therefore serves to reinforce the idea of ineluctable fate. There are nonetheless a few survivors after ragnarǫk: the daughter of Alfrǫðull (the sun), who stands for the power of renewal, Líf and Lífþrasir (also suggesting the persistence of life), Odin's sons Víðarr and Váli, one destined to avenge his father and the other to avenge Baldr, and Thor's sons Móði and Magni, who suggest the survival of courage and strength. Basing himself on the nature of these survivors, McKinnell suggests that those qualities which will resist fate and continue to live are "nature, the stubborn will to live in human beings, and on the highest level courage, strength and the taking of just revenge for one's close relatives" (106).

A separate chapter on *Vǫluspá* finds some narrative and structural similarities to *Vafþrúðnismál* but an altogether different ideology. Here there are no survivors in the sequence of combats at ragnarǫk, hence no "admiration for endurance, strength, courage and justified revenge" (121). Instead Hœnir, who has been surrendered to the Vanir as a hostage, and Baldr and Hǫðr, who are consigned to Hel, all figure as survivors. These gods are characterized not by survival instincts but by innocence. They are moral survivors, suggesting a Christian streak in the poet's thinking. The Christian features of *Vǫluspá* have of course been clearly recognized since Olrik's ragnarǫk studies, but McKinnell recapitulates them convincingly, and they acquire new profile through the comparison of the heathen runic memorial at Glavendrup with the Christian rune site at Jelling.

In his "Conclusions" McKinnell is slightly apologetic for the randomness inher-

ent in a book devoted to diversity and he suggests that his chapters be taken as a series of experiments. But there is no need for modesty. The essay is an appropriate vehicle for mythological interpretations, although the number of first-rate essays in the field is rather small. This book assembles four excellent ones that are at once independent of each other but still linked by a common point of view. All are characterized by revealing comparisons and clearly formulated distinctions. It is no mean feat to extract a plausible ideology for *Vafþrúðnismál* or to extract a typology from the many faces of Loki. McKinnell carries off these experiments with great acuity, and his book will do much to revitalize the study of Norse mythology.

Theodore M. Andersson

Ross Samson, editor. *Social Approaches to Viking Studies*. Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1991. 254 pages.

These twenty-one essays stem from a seminar, "New Perspectives on Viking Studies," held in Glasgow in 1988, and are grouped under the headings "Literacy" (1–17), "Gender and Sexual Relations" (19–83), "Exchange and Society" (85–133), "Political and Social Power" (135–88), and "Ancient Ethnicity and Modern Nationalism" (189–219).

Section 1, "Literacy," opens with "Sponsors, Writers, and Readers of Early Norse Literature" (3–10) by Lars Lönnroth, who fine-tunes earlier statements on Latin and vernacular literacy, sponsorship, and access to sources. Here he outlines a vision not of "two separate literatures or literary production systems, one clerical and one secular, but rather . . . overlapping and peacefully coexisting cultures jointly promoted by the Church and secular chieftains, one dominated by native oral tradition, the runic alphabet, Old Norse feud stories, Eddic and skaldic poetry, the other dominated by the Latin alphabet, clerical education, and foreign literary genres" (10). For this reviewer, the dynamic engagement of Icelandic clergy in secular matters, furthered by a non-celibate priesthood and bishops elected by landholders, suggests that the "overlap" was in the very same agents acting in both arenas, although one would stop short of ascribing translations from Latin to the chieftains.

In "The Icelandic Sagas as Totemic Artefacts" (11–20) E. Paul Durrenberger examines Icelandic family sagas as closed, self-referential systems in which everything is explained not as the consequence of linear causality but, as in myth, simply as the way things are and always have been. Durrenberger would see in "the writing of sagas . . . an attempt to interpret contemporary events and situations in the thirteenth century in terms of an image of an unchanging society, and to indicate the differences between the contemporary realities and the culturally assumed stasis" (14). But in the matter of stasis, I would contend that the ambivalent relationship in the family sagas of