

and Cicero's *De officiis*. Simek took his cue from the poetic description of the winds (ed. 1848, 52–53), which is not paralleled in medieval works on the natural phenomena but is matched in the agricultural tradition (e.g., Hesiod and Columella). Simek suggests that a cross-fertilization of medieval thinking on social hierarchy and domestic arts may be at the root of the anomalous position occupied by *Konungs skuggsjá*. This represents a substantial broadening of our perspective on the book.

Similarly remote from *Piðreks saga*, but similarly instructive, is Stefanie Würth's study of *Alexanders saga*. She reviews the debate on authorship, whether *Alexanders saga* is originally a Norwegian translation or the work of Brandr Jónsson, and she is unable to find sufficient grounds to disallow Brandr. She then sketches out what we know about Brandr's life, personality, and politics, emphasizing his good relations with the Norwegian court. The remainder of the paper is concerned with Brandr's translation technique, his approximation of native style, his clear grasp and overview of Walter's original, his economies in the interest of his reading audience, his idiomatic usage, certain hints of political consciousness about Iceland's relationship to Norway, and an awareness of the contemporary issues alluded to by Walter. The sum of these observations leads the author to hypothesize that the translation is more likely to have been executed for the instruction of an Icelandic audience than for the Norwegian court. Würth writes with rare clarity and sense of direction, and her essay makes a valuable contribution to the study of translation literature.

In her capacity as editor, Susanne Kramarz-Bein provides a crisp introduction to contextualize the volume. The introduction includes summaries of the contributions, which in effect make reviews such as this one supererogatory except for publicity purposes. Finally, Kramarz-Bein deserves much credit for having done what appears to this reviewer to be a flawless job of editing a particularly complicated volume.

Theodore M. Andersson

**T**erry Gunnell. *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995. 440 pages.

This is a brave and engaging book. In it, the author charts a course where very few have gone before. Most prominent among that small group is Bertha Phillpotts, whose *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1920) has hitherto been the most comprehensive treatment of the subject. In the present volume, Dr. Gunnell capably and artfully takes the reader through the tangled thicket of data on drama in early Scandinavia and provides scholars of Old Norse with their most thorough consideration of this topic to date. Reconstructions of this sort represent dangerous, and difficult, terrain, of course. One is reminded of Franz Bäumli's now famous, if overly harsh, review (*Speculum* 57 [1982]: 346–49) of Theodore Andersson's *The Legend of Brynhild* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1980). There, Bäumli writes concerning Andersson's reconstruction of a Brynhild in *Sigurðarqviða in meiri*, which Andersson then assesses as "the most complete portrait, male or female, in Icelandic literature" (249), that "In view of the fact that the Brynhild of *Meiri* does not exist, this is not saying much for Icelandic literature" (349). One senses a decided parallel in this instance, since Gunnell has written a four-hundred-page book about a topic most scholars in the field have been inclined to dismiss as something that did not exist, or at least that cannot be reconstructed. Yet, like Andersson, Gunnell makes an excellent case for regaining Nordic literature's lost ground. It could be argued that Gunnell's operating definition of drama is so broad that a critic would have to be a truly committed nay-sayer to deny that *something* of this sort must have existed in early Scandinavia ("Drama", in the sense in which the word will be used in this book, has very few restrictions or limitations on its scope. It is a wide-ranging phenomenon that overlaps on one side with solo recitation and story-telling, and on several other sides with the areas of ritual, spectacle, children's games of

make-believe and the living art ‘performances’ of modern artists” [12]).

Gunnell has in effect written two studies, joined by their shared interest in performance art. In the first section of this book, the author examines in detail possible evidence for early Nordic traditions of performance. In the second part, he focuses on the mythological dialogic poems of the Poetic Edda (especially *Skírnismál*, *Hárbarðsljóð*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Lokasenna*, and *Fáfnismál*), and particularly the codicological evidence that might support the assertion that “it is logical to call these works elementary *plays* rather than poems” (281). A fulsome coordination of these parts is warranted, although Gunnell’s most complete statement in this regard is the following: “Yet from the examinations made of the evidence of Scandinavian dramatic customs found in archaeological, literary, and folkloristic sources in the last two chapters, it is possible to extract a general core of traditions . . . Assuming that such core elements existed in ritual and/or games during the Viking Age, there is little question that they could have provided a context for the dialogic Eddic poems that will be discussed in the following chapters. Many of these poems feature disguise as a central motif. It is not hard, for example, to imagine associations between *Skírnismál* and a tradition of folk marriage; between *Hárbarðsljóð* and an enacted poetic contest, or *mannjafnaðr*, involving figures representing Winter and Summer; or between *Fáfnismál*, *Vafþrúðnismál* and the costumed initiation ceremonies suggested by Arent with regard to the Torslunda matrices, and Weiser-Aall with regard to the *julebukk*. In this sense, the dialogic Eddic poems, if they were originally performed dramatically, would fill in the temporal gap between the archaeological and the folkloristic evidence, and help to illustrate both” (180).

In the chapter treating the archaeological and literary evidence for dramatic activity in early Scandinavia (23–92), the reader is taken on a wide-ranging tour of facts and artifacts, including petroglyphs, onomastics, recent archaeological discoveries, saga references, and other aspects of Scandinavia from the earliest times to the Middle Ages which might indicate ritual and performance. This

is a subtly nuanced discussion and explores in depth, and detail, a number of important relationships (e.g., the “dancing warrior” figures of northern Europe and the description of ritual dances by “Gothic” warriors in tenth-century Constantinople). Still, one may reasonably object that at times enthusiasm for the subject matter seems to overwhelm the evidence, as when Gunnell writes of “the picture depicting ball players sitting amidst figures obviously engaged in semi-dramatic ritual activities on the now lost Gallehus horns (c.400)” (32). In point of fact, nothing is really obvious on the existing representations of these horns, and the use of “semi-dramatic” surely suggests much less certainty than the author would like to claim. Nevertheless, this is a rich and thought-provoking section, although individual scholars will certainly find much to quibble about. (For example, are the sagas truly reliable as ethnographic documents, and if so, are they all equally reliable?)

The chapter dealing with folkloric evidence for early traditions of performance lays out a delicate argument for a shared Nordic custom of seasonal miming, based on materials from throughout the North Atlantic islands, including Shetland and the Faroes, and from noninsular Scandinavia (93–181). This discussion evokes an admirable, if somewhat antique, style of folklore scholarship usually associated with the likes of Sigurd Erixon and Alexander Krappe (that is, thorough and breathtakingly positivistic), but Gunnell’s conclusions concerning the possibilities of a once-shared tradition which is today reflected in such figures as *Grýla*, *Halm-Staffan*, and so on, are fresh and invigorating, and there is much to be learned from the discussion, even if in the end, one may remain skeptical about specific aspects of Gunnell’s interpretation of the material (179–81). In such a wide-ranging discussion, it is only natural to ask oneself, does the net get cast too wide? And in the midst of this extensive discussion, one does begin to sense, in the words of *Guta saga*, that “alt ir baugum bundit” in northern Europe: were it not for the associated verses (173) that make the case appear airtight, the same concatenation of traits on which Gunnell relies so heavily to bring together *julebukker*, *grýlur*

and *skeklers* (i.e., costumes, masking, reversed speech, cross dressing, begging, leadership roles ["captains"], and so on) might also be made to include such distant materials as the Mardi Gras of the rural Cajun landscape in the southern United States (see *Dance for a Chicken: The Cajun Mardi Gras*, prod. Pat Mire, 57 min. [Eunice, LA: Attakapas Productions, 1993], videocassette). And one might wish that Gunnell had paid more attention to other possibly mitigating factors that might account for the widespread nature of the phenomena he finds in the modern residues of miming, including the potential influence of the German populations in the Hansa trade centers, a topic which receives only passing attention (93, 122). Overall, however, Gunnell's discussion of the early testimony to dramatic activity in Scandinavia, which manages to include, usefully, sources as recent as Faroese television and the writings of William Heinesen, as well as materials as ancient as the three-thousand-year-old *hällristningar*, is a dazzling display of erudition and dedication to the topic.

The chapter which takes up "The Eddic Poems and Drama" (182–281) focuses much more narrowly on the extant mythological poems which consist principally of dialogue in *ljóðaháttir*. Gunnell bases his considerations on a confession of faith unlikely to have many adherents among modern students of Old Norse, at least not a priori ("Central to the discussion that follows is the basic premise that, for the most part, the extant versions of the Eddic poems represent records of works that were originally presented and preserved orally. Of course, this is an accepted fact" [182]). If, indeed, one could assume that point of view, such discussions would be easy and the answers foreordained, but can the author prove that point to the satisfaction of those not so willing to accept this statement as a starting point? My own sense is that, in fact, he makes a good case, although it is less clear to me why Gunnell should employ with such energy introductory surveys of distant traditions (e.g., Ruth Finnegan's *Oral Poetry*, Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*, the Chadwicks' *Growth of Literature*), while at the same time ignoring the detailed work of

specialists who have examined the question of orality in areas much more proximate linguistically, temporally, and geographically to Gunnell's own discussion of eddic poetry, albeit mostly in the specific context of prose works (e.g., Oscar Bandle, Dietrich Hoffman, Theodore Andersson, Jesse Byock, Robert Kellogg). But there is much to be learned from Dr. Gunnell, who is an astute and inventive observer: he carefully assesses, for example, the relationship between the eddic poems we possess from the Codex regius, Codex Wormianus, and so on, and the monuments Snorri seems to know as he composes his *ars poetica* in the early thirteenth century, an examination that leads him to the conclusion that the introductory prose in the two traditions is close indeed, but that "Snorri's acquaintance with the *verse* of *Fáfnismál*, *Lokasenna*, and *Skírnismál* . . . would thus appear to have been highly limited" (222). Gunnell notes (by way of three statistical tables treating such topics as the "The Blended Strophes: Narrative/Speech Proportions" [195–96]) that the relationship in the eddic texts between prose, dialogue verses, and mixed speech and narrative verses is highly consistent: those poems with a large proportion of narrative verses also contain blended narrative and speech verses but hardly any prose insertions, whereas it is those poems that consist almost entirely (90% and more) of "pure speech strophes" that also contain prose interpolations (187–90). This information is then folded in with a discussion of systems of marginal speaker indications in the various manuscripts of eddic poetry, and the chapter concludes around a detailed discussion (236–81) of the problems a single performer would encounter in presenting the poems orally. Gunnell adduces evidence to support the view that if the *ljóðaháttir* poems represent materials intended for performance, it is more likely that such a performance would have been carried out by several talented actors than by a single performer attempting to play several roles by modulating his voice or through other means of tagging the various parts.

The fourth chapter, "Marginal Speaker Notation in the Edda and Early Manuscripts of Drama" (282–329), examines the systems

of speaker tag notation used in medieval Latin and Anglo-Norman manuscripts in circulation in northern Europe (e.g., the works of Terence, *Babio*, *La Seinte Resurreccion*, *The Harrowing of Hell*, *Le Mystère d'Adam*) and such native products as the *King's Mirror*, and, of course, the Poetic Edda. Gunnell concludes that certain forms of marginal and other speaker tag notations were limited to those works intended for dramatic presentation. Gunnell argues further that the system which uses the outer margins for this purpose, such as is found in the Poetic Edda, was developed and centered in northern France and England and gaining ground in exactly the thirteenth century and is moreover distinguishable from usage in the Terentian and liturgical traditions. These facts, together with the extensive cultural exchange that existed between this area and the West Norse area, lead the author to the conclusion that "the alternative form of notation the scribes chose is found only in connection with the dialogic poems of the Edda manuscripts and in certain manuscripts from northern France and England containing obviously dramatic works, or works which, like the dialogic Eddic poems, arguably needed to be performed in a dramatic fashion to be understood properly" (329).

In the final chapter (330–50), Gunnell reviews the possible contexts for the performance of poetry and song in medieval Scandinavia. Perhaps because this section deals less with facts — apparent or reconstructible — or perhaps because of its heavy reliance on the argument-by-analogy strategy so out of favor with the Old Norse scholarly community (cf. *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. Carol Clover and John Lindow [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985], 273), one senses here a strangely unsatisfying — if fundamentally bountiful — smörgåsbord of ideas. Undoubtedly most useful exactly because of their closeness to the cultural moment at the epicenter of the book are the discussions of such known, or at least indicated, performance contexts as *seiðr*, *mansöngvísur*, *senna*, and *mannjafnaðr*. These sections are extremely interesting and productive and cast the idea of performance in medieval Scandinavia in a

different light from that provided in standard commentaries. More speculative, and distant, possibilities, such as the hymns of the *Rig Veda*, enhance the discussion, but feel too remote to be of any direct relevance to the debate.

According to the preface, this book began life as a doctoral dissertation (xvii). For the most part, this genesis is hardly to be noticed, but there are occasional stumbles. I would number among these the overly long and overly dependent introductory discussion of dramatic concepts (10–22). Likewise, I found the index exceedingly uneven — it includes a few selected older figures, but generally ignores scholars. One will see, for example, references to Sir Walter Scott and Lord Raglan carefully detailed, but will look to no avail for the locations where Lars Lönnroth's ideas about the "double-scene" have informed the argument. Another area where one senses a lack of control pertains to the book's treatment of bibliography. I have indicated above that in some instances one will search in vain for supporting evidence from adjacent subfields within Old Norse itself. One will also periodically encounter difficulties identifying the original, or at least earlier, proponents of certain views. Thus, for example, one will find that Margaret Arent's article ("The Heroic Pattern: Old Germanic Helmets, *Beowulf*, and *Grettis saga*," in *Old Norse Literature and Mythology: A Symposium*, ed. Edgar C. Polomé [Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1969], 130–99) is heavily cited, but one will see nothing of Heinrich Beck's earlier contributions in this area. Similarly, it seems curious for the author to discuss the image of the *berserker* in the context, especially important for performance traditions, of theriomorphic costumes, and note in passing (66) only that Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson argues for an etymology based on 'bare' rather than 'bear' in a note in his edition of *Ynglinga saga*, without referring to a single other contribution in that long and tangled argument by, for example, Erik Noreen, Nils Lid, Hans Kuhn, or Klaus von See. And despite the bibliography's apparent determination to err on the side of inclusion, such obvious candidates for discussion as James Knirk's *Oratory in the Kings' Sagas* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget,



1981) and H. R. Ellis Davidson's "Wit and Eloquence in the Courts of Saxo's Early Kings," in *Saxo Grammaticus: A Medieval Author between Norse and Latin Culture*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen (København: Museum Tusculanum Press, 1981), 39–52, are unaccounted for. This and other examples of bibliographic innocence are surprising in such an otherwise heavily documented work. These "sins of omission" aside, the book commits admirably few errors, although Gunnell's detractors will undoubtedly point to such lapses as missing page references (3), *at* for Swedish *att* (94), *tvesang* for Swedish *tvesång* (339), and Liestøl for Liestøl (347).

It remains to be asked how this book compares with Dame Phillpotts' study of 1920. *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama* was written in the context of that era's dominant mythological ideology, the so-called Cambridge School. This group's most famous members — Sir George James Frazer, Gilbert Murray, Jane Harrison — were admired by scholars of that generation for their attempts to place archaic literary monuments into ritual contexts, and Phillpotts provides for Norse texts what her colleagues provide for the ancient Greek ones. Phillpotts sees a vast difference between those Eddic texts preserved in *fornyrðislag* and those in *ljóðaháttir*. The latter she understands to hark back to Norwegian, pre-Settlement originals which would have been performed in religious rituals, especially in fertility dramas, with *Skírnismál* as the prime example. The prose inserted into such works represents the detail necessary for comprehending the action of the plot once these previously enacted poems became mere texts on a page. One might want to compare that view with Gunnell's assertion that an Icelander who encountered abroad European plays having to do with a male winning the love of a virtuous woman through a middle party (e.g., *De nuntio sagaci*, *Dame Sirith*) might draw "vague parallels between the material in question, both in terms of theme and methods of presentation" (322). The beauty of Gunnell's argument is that it provides a specific set of possible influences on the Icelandic scribe and suggests that the written, dramatic form of

the extant *Skírnismál* took shape in the thirteenth century. Phillpotts' explanation here as elsewhere, on the other hand, "bases too much on general assumption," as Gunnell himself states (7). Still, her explanation does manage to account for the presence of the prose insertions in the extant text, whereas Gunnell's arguments leave one even more perplexed as to why they would be necessary if the poems were in fact being reconfigured to fit the emerging image of how a play-poem was to be presented on vellum, that is, moving *toward* dramatic presentation rather than *away* from it. In Phillpotts' treatment of the topic, she devotes much of her time to the so-called Helgi poems; Gunnell does not (cf. 200), and one cannot help but wonder how the inclusion in a detailed way of other eddic poems might have influenced the book's results. The principal difference between the two works, it seems to me, is that Phillpotts has a broad, engaging, and easily accessible thesis concerning the dramatic use of the eddic poems in religious rituals (albeit a context in which no one really believes any longer), whereas the strength of Terry Gunnell's book lies in its keen attention to detail, its more informed views on the nature of performance, and its careful examination of historico-cultural conditions which may account for the extant eddic texts. Or, as the author himself writes, "The aim of the present study was simply to gather together all the available evidence for ritual and popular drama having existed in early Scandinavia, and to re-examine both this and the dialogic poems of the Poetic Edda with fresh eyes, and most particularly with the eyes of a performer" (351). In this, Gunnell has succeeded skillfully, and thereby pushed forward the frontiers of our knowledge about early Scandinavian performance arts considerably. Few scholars of Old Norse will agree with all the arguments Gunnell presents, but no Scandinavianist can afford to remain unfamiliar with them.

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