McKinnell, John. 2014. *Essays on Eddic Poetry*. Edited by Donata Kick and John D. Shafer. Toronto Old Norse–Icelandic Series (TONIS). Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 392 pages. ISBN: 9781442615885.

Essays on Eddic Poetry is a collection by John McKinnell, which will be of interest to scholars and students of Old Norse poetry and Medieval Scandinavian religion, as well as broader medieval Germanic philologists. This collection consists of a few previously published essays that, according to the editors, can be difficult to acquire and that have allowed the author to have "an opportunity to include revisions, second thoughts, and reflections on more recently published work on the topics concerned" (vii). This reviewer finds it refreshing that essays can be collected and returned to in this manner at a time when many publishers are making previously published essay collections difficult. As such, McKinnell does seem to have returned to and updated his ideas, demonstrated by the bibliography and references, which are largely up-to-date and include scholarly works and editions from as recently as 2011. Some articles read more like sketches and thoughts without strong conclusions, but this reader likes that as the ideas are thought provoking and lead to further conversation. McKinnell has an excellent grasp of Old Norse literature and the Latin literature from the time, giving an interdisciplinary aspect to the chapters. Finally, McKinnell roots his analyses in philology, but does not stop there; he allows himself to speculate on cultural perspectives as well.

In "*Voluspá* and the Feast of Easter," McKinnell discusses the influences of Christian religious practices on the poem. McKinnell has done a beautiful job laying out the parallel parts of the poem with Genesis in order to show an influence in the construction of the poem as we have it. However, twice in this essay, first on page 14 and again on 17, while discussing *Völuspá*, McKinnell quotes Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* and not the poem without explaining why. This is frustrating for several reasons. Identifying the quotation as Snorri's rather than *Völuspá* if anything boosts his claim that the poem has increased Christian theological influence over time. Further, the mixing of *Völuspá* and Snorri's *Edda* seems to refer to Paul Schach's 1988 commentary on the relationship between the poem and Snorri, but does not seem to give reference to Schach's discussion.

"On Heiðr and Gullveig" was originally published in 2001 but has been reworked, including references to articles published after 2001. The article explores the relationship of two *Völuspá* characters in context. McKinnell looks at the possible etymology of *Heiðr*, which he concludes is likely "heath" and the *völva* [seeress] herself, and *illrar brúðir* [evil wife], which is a reference to a giant and that the giant "does not otherwise appear in contexts directly connected with *seiðr*" (45). McKinnell states that the name *Gullveig* is the poet's invention since it is only found in this poem and suggests she "would have been [recognized]

as a female figure made of, wearing or possessing gold, and endowed with military strength" (48). The omission of the *seiðr* episode from *Eiríks saga rauða* in his discussion, however, was noticeable in an otherwise thorough description. And if there was a purpose to the alternation of the terms Lapp and Sami throughout the article, it was illusive.

"The Evolution of *Hávamál*," is one of three in the book dealing with the poem *Hávamál*. McKinnell finds it productive to divide the poem into three parts: a gnomic poem as roughly half and the second half consisting of *Loddfáfnismál* and *Ljóðatal*. McKinnell sees a strong Christian influence, first suggested by Klaus von See (1972 and 1999), in the gnomic structure of *Hávamál* and marks the resemblance with other Christian poems, namely the Old Norse *Hugsvinnsmál* and the Latin *Disticha Catonis*. The poem gives moral advice found in both the Old Norse and ecclesiastical traditions. McKinnell maps phraseology of wisdom found in *Hávamál* and the other texts, giving examples of the same or similar phrasing in all the texts. McKinnell then looks at translations and dates and ends with an examination of *Loddfáfnismál* and *Ljóðatal*. He uses a text reading from Margaret Clunies Ross (1990) and Judy Quinn (1992) and the multiple ways the poem has been viewed with implication for the construction and influences of the poem. Analysis continues in the other two articles.

"The Paradox of *Vafþrúðnismál*" starts with date and provenance. McKinnell explores a later date than the tenth century, probably the twelfth, due to two issues: a Christian theological concept that could not have gotten to Iceland until the twelfth century and an analysis of the particle *um* [of]. McKinnell maintains a four-part structure to the poem: prologue; Vafþrúðnir questions Óðinn; Óðinn questions Vafþrúðnir on past; and Óðinn questions Vafþrúðnir on future. He argues that the last two questions are not formally part of the debate and, therefore, are trying issues. McKinnell teases out the traditional and borrowed Christian components of this poem and discusses the riddle as form. The question, according to McKinnell, is why such stories are attributed to Óðinn. McKinnell suggests that the poet's view on fate may present a clue. By expressing his intent to Frigg, Óðinn recognizes his place in a fated world. He suggests that the giant's head wager is ironic and folly. Both have the wisdom of the dead, but Óðinn knows about what is fated to happen at *ragnarök*. Therein lies a logical problem; if Óðinn is fated to die at *ragnarök*, he cannot die here. McKinnell points out several more logical issues. A question that McKinnell asks is whether Óðinn is testing if fate is immutable. In the end, however, the power of fate is reasserted, and McKinnell suggests the ideology of who survives *ragnarök* may be the point.

McKinnell starts with dating and provenance in his chapter "Myth as Therapy: The Usefulness of *Þrymskviða*." He suggests an Anglo-Saxon influence on the poem, especially with reference to the *fjaðrham* [feather skin] and the particle *um*. He further sees the influence from the wooing plays in midlands of probable Celtic origin. McKinnell suggests that "poems about the heathen gods

had probably had some other, non-devotional social function, one which could continue without implying heathen religious observance or belief" (202). McKinnell then examines the comedic threat and incongruous strict gender construct in the poem. The chapter goes on to look at social and psychological fear within the group or individual audience of the poem. I cannot help wondering if the theoretical approaches of Karl Jung, Mircea Eliade, or even Joseph Campbell might have helped with this chapter, and I am surprised not to see John Lindow's 1997 work, *Þrymskviða: Myth and Mythology*, included. The topic can be problematic, and McKinnell raises the objections of a medievalist scholarly community.

In the ninth chapter, "*Völundarkviða*: Origins and Interpretation," McKinnell concerns himself with two questions: "1. What can be said of the provenance and date of the poem? 2. What is distinctive in the way this poet tells the story?" (221). McKinnell suggests that the poem ultimately may originate from the Norse-influenced England but had then been written down in Norway. He gives reasons for and against an Old English source and concludes this section of the chapter by listing three reasons the poem is not likely a direct translation and how it suggests the poet is from Norse-speaking England. He also argues for German elements, including both the argument itself and names but argues that they are transferable. Examples like *dro* from German "to wear" for the swan episode seem certain, but he admits that others, although possible, are doubtful. He maintains the presence of the Sami in the poem comes from Norway, but acknowledges the English knew of the Sami as well. He tries to use the location within the poem's narrative but admits the trees and lakes are not exclusive to Norway, nor is the wildlife. McKinnell concludes that the poem originates from England and suggests a likely area of composition is Yorkshire. Turning to the legend, McKinnell looks at the Frankish casket that agrees with *Þiðreks saga* but not with *Völundarkviða*. He also examines the brother's role at the end, Böðvild's handmaiden, the hint in *Deor* of Beadohold's woe, and Weland's child, all of which suggest two different traditions, one based in England. The poem gives import to female characters unlike the prose, which he compares to the Celtic *fee* tradition. Finally, vengeance is only against the offended person, not the family. Though thorough on what he covers, McKinnell could have written a book on this poem alone with all the things he is forced to leave out due to space, the Daedalus connection perhaps being the most salient. The connection with England will be of interest to many.

In "Two Sex Goddesses: Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr and Freyja in *Hyndluljóð*," McKinnell starts with questions raised by Lotte Motz's 1993 book concerning evidence for the veneration of giantess-like figures in Scandinavia in the late pre-Christian era, specifically looking at the figure Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr. He begins with a thorough textual analysis comparing the character and name Þorgerðr with others from myths and sagas, e.g, Freyr's wife, Gerðr, to see where the name or variation has occurred and suggests that it is found in association with the

Vanir. He maintains that "Þorgerðr seems to have originated as a local goddess (probably the family patroness of the Háleygjar, among others), and may have grown in popularity (or had her popularity recorded) because of the influence of Hákon jarl inn ríki in shoring up the last stage of heathenism in Norway" (273). He suggests that the figure has three features, all of which can be seen in the poem *Hyndluljóð* from *Flateyjarbók*. McKinnell then follows the story of Freyja and her lover Óttarr and, though the texts are all post-Christian, maintains the only way to understand the story is through a pre-Christian tradition. In conclusion, he then links the story back to Hákon jarl. Though a thorough analysis, this reader found the analysis least compelling of all the chapters and some skepticism remains.

The final chapter, entitled "The Trouble with Father: *Hervararkviða* and the Adaptation of the Traditional Story-patterns," looks at the encounters of the gods, humanity, and the Other World, often giants, which he associates with the dead. McKinnell divides the encounters into a number of narrative patterns: associated mainly with Vanir; associated mainly with Æsir; and encounters with the dead, associated mainly with human beings. McKinnell looks at the different types of encounters, the role of the male hero, and moral complexities found in the narratives. He then analyzes *Hervararkviða* as an exception to the rule, with variations of "otherness" explored in the poem. In the end, I found this to be one of the best chapters, probably due to my personal lines of inquiry.

In all, this book presents a fascinating, thorough analysis of the wide range of *Eddic* topics, and scholars in mythology and philology will find this work of great interest.

Scott A. Mellor
University of Wisconsin-Madison

REFERENCES

Clunies Ross, Margaret. 1990. "Voice and Voices in Eddic Poetry." *In Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages*. Edited by Teresa Pàroli, 219–30. The Seventh International Saga Conference. 4-10 September 1988, Centro Italiano di Studu sull' Alto Medioevo, Spoleto, Italy.

Motz, Lotte. 1993. *The Beauty and the Hag: Female Figures of Germanic Faith and Myth*. Philologica Germanica 15. Vienna: Fassbaender.

Quinn, Judy. 1992. "Verseform and Voice in Eddic Poems: The Discourses of Fáfnismál." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 107 (1992): 100–30.