Anatoly Liberman. 2016. *In Prayer and Laughter: Essays on Medieval Scandinavian and Germanic Mythology, Literature, and Culture*. Moscow: Paleograph Press. 588 pages. ISBN: 978-5-89526-027-2.

A short review can hardly do justice to a work that collects the writings of Anatoly Liberman's lifetime of philological scholarship, and indeed a work that cannot be read in full without taking weeks at a time to follow up on the references in Liberman's numerous conversations with past scholarship—or without keeping the etymological dictionaries of several languages, not least English, within handy reach. For a book with such wide borders, each page is unfailingly crowded with facts, ideas, and reasoning, and it is no disparagement of a work of this kind to say that it cannot be read quickly.

In Prayer and Laughter opens with a succinct statement of Liberman's own biography and history as a scholar, which is a welcome glimpse at the events and education that have shaped such a long career. The individual chapters that follow are largely reworked versions of earlier published papers, each devoted to a particular question that usually intertwines the history of the Germanic languages and the history of Germanic and Scandinavian mythology in some way. Liberman is capacious and generous in his attention to the history of scholarship on a given question, and in some chapters this is almost a shortcoming, as the survey of scholarship going back for centuries, and Liberman's learned parenthetical remarks on these dusty works, can go on for so many pages that the main drift of Liberman's own point is easily forgotten.

In Chapter 1, for example, Liberman surveys centuries of opinions on the etymology of *Óðinn* and *Yggdrasill*, exhaustively and meticulously mining the past literature on these subjects in a manner unachievable by any scholar with lesser powers of memory and tenacity, not to mention familiarity with fewer languages. In the course of these perambulations through the history of scholarship, Liberman has a special talent for taking Occam's razor to the stubble of faulty assumptions in entrenched ideas both old and new that other philological barbers might lack the eyesight to notice. How persuasive Liberman's own hypotheses on the histories of these names are depends on the reader he acknowledges, for example, that "his [Pisani's] Iranian-Slavic interpretation 'horned dog' [of the name *Svarog*] is strained. So is, of course, mine, and I am offering it for what it is worth" (335). But no one can fault the author for leaving any stone unturned. Much as in the study of word origins, he observes, "it is usually nonfunctional details that provide a clue to the origin of myths" (129), and his capacity for attention to and analysis of such details is massive.

Of all the chapters, perhaps the most wide-ranging and the deepest in its potential impact on widely known interpretations of myth is Chapter 7, ""Darkness Engulfs Baldr"" (197–260). Other chapters offer smaller but equally compelling

advances in our understanding of Old Norse literature, such as Liberman's discussion of early medieval humour that leads to his explanation of Loki's taunt to Týr that *þú kunnir aldrigi / bera tilt með tveim* (*Lokasenna* 38.2–3) as a relatively simple insult about his disability: "you will never be able to use both hands" (418–20). Parts of yet other chapters, such as his discussion of the origin of the order of the letters in the *fuþark* alphabets (378–85), wander widely and show great erudition, without coming to any forceful conclusions.

As an etymologist, Liberman is particularly well-qualified to attack the reliance on etymology as a key to the characters and origins of mythic beings ("The precarious nature of a union between religion and etymology is a recurring motif in this book" [205]; "reasoning from abstract word roots is never to be recommended" [252]). At the same time, etymology is a great passion of his, and this book will profit anyone looking for a fresh perspective on the origins of many important names in Norse mythology, including especially *Óðinn* and *Yggdrasill* (culminating, after a long discussion, in a few key conclusions on pp. 64–5), *Víðarr* (98–100), *Hlórriði* (115–22), *Þjálfi* (139), *Loki* (188–92), *Baldr* (248–60), *dvergr* (312–13), *rún* (355–66), *þulr* (386–94), and *Edda* (395–405). Liberman does not limit himself to Germanic languages only, but tackles questions in Slavic and in Latin etymology as well (memorably tracing the possible histories of the word *elementum*, 366–78).

As one might expect from Anatoly Liberman, the book is wonderfully quotable, and some of the *bon mots* in his book have become regular fare in my mythology classes. At times the wording of a line is at least as memorable as its point ("*troll* and *trami* are more like mushrooms growing on the same stump than two offshoots sharing a common root" [327]), but the author also has a winning sense of humour in acknowledging his own preoccupations ("in what follows the neuter plural will not be mentioned a single time" [330]). The ends of chapters are almost always capped by a fine turn of phrase or aphorism.

If the book has imperfections, they seem to have been introduced by neglect in the editing and post-production stage. There are many typographical errors (mostly in English, but occasionally in quotations of other languages), and they abound on some individual pages (e.g. page 176), and especially in the addenda at the back of the book. The bibliography and index have peculiarly jumbled alphabetization (it is not easy to find the work of Anita Guerreau-Jalabert, for example, when her name is printed after Hermann Güntert's), jumbled page numbers in many entries in the index, and most inconveniently, the index is usually off by two pages (with the index listing as on page 381, for example, a discussion that is actually on page 379). However poor the quality control on the index might have been, the index does feature one particularly useful aspect: a separate index of words discussed in detail in this book (on page 558), which is especially welcome in a work that devotes so many pages to long philological inquiries on the histories of individual words.

Anatoly Liberman's studies on the histories of words and myths deserve a wider audience than they have sometimes received, and even those who disagree with some of his specific conclusions will find rich rewards in exposure to the wealth and rigour of scholarship evidenced in this collection.

Jackson Crawford
University of Colorado