

*The Bearded Bride: A Critical Edition of Þrymlur*. 2020. Edited and translated by Lee Colwill and Haukur Þorgeirsson. Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London. xli + 58 pages. ISBN: 978-0-903521-98-7.

Students, scholars, and interested readers have for many decades enjoyed widespread access to the medieval Icelandic poems found in the Codex Regius of eddic poetry (GKS 2365 4to) in a wide range of languages. Recently, Carolyne Larrington (2014) published her revised edition of *The Poetic Edda* in translation as part of Oxford's World Classics with Oxford University Press, now the standard edition of eddic poetry in English. Also in 2014, Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason published their Icelandic edition of eddic poetry, the two-volume *Eddukvæði*, with Hið íslenska fornritafélag, which has now become a standard scholarly edition.

The story of the theft of Þórr's hammer by the giant Þrymr and the subsequent cunning and comedic retrieval of Mjöllnir by Þórr and Loki is a perennial favourite for readers of the eddic poems. Not until now have English-language readers been provided with an accessible and scholarly edition of a younger medieval Icelandic poem—*Þrymlur*—a *rímur* that preserves essentially the same story as one of the eddic poems but with an adapted plot. This makes the publication of Lee Colwill and Haukur Þorgeirsson's *The Bearded Bride: A Critical Edition of Þrymlur* groundbreaking for readers with an interest in Old Norse mythology.

*Rímur* constitute a form of rhymed Icelandic poetry arranged into stanzas. The poems often retell or transform popular narratives and employ a complex poetic style, including the use of specific *rímnahættir* (*rímur* metres). Colwill and Þorgeirsson note early in their introduction that *Þrymlur* is unique within the *rímur* tradition. *Þrymlur* is apparently based on a poetic work, the well-known eddic poem *Þrymskviða*, and not, as was more common in the *rímur* tradition, on an earlier prose work (vii). Providing a date for *Þrymlur* is not straightforward, Colwill and Þorgeirsson argue, but there are technical features in the poem that indicate an early origin—in particular lack of rhyme between, as they write, “the originally rounded vowels like *y/ý/ey* and their unrounded counterparts *i/í/ei*” in the *rímur*, along with vocabulary usage that is “consistent with an early dating” (ix). There is also a feature that might suggest a later origin, specifically “the simplification of certain double consonants” (e.g., in stanza I.4 *mjór* is rhymed with *Þórr*), a linguistic development from the later fourteenth century and into the fifteenth century (x). Due to the uncertain evidence, Colwill and Þorgeirsson provide a possible

date range from c. 1350 to c. 1450 as a likely period during which *Þrymlur* was composed, thus categorizing it as an early *rímur* (ix). *Þrymlur* survives solely in *Staðarhólsbók* (AM 604 4to), a large manuscript from the mid-sixteenth century (c. 1540–1560) comprised solely of *rímur*. The manuscript was later divided into eight booklets, and *Þrymlur* is found specifically in the section of *Staðarhólsbók* that bears the shelfmark AM 604 g 4to. There is no known author for *Þrymlur*, and in its booklet it is collected along with four other *rímur*, including *Rímur af Sörla sterka*, which immediately precedes it, and *Lokkrur*, immediately following it.

The introduction to the volume includes sections about poetic language and metrics in the *rímur* genre generally and information about how these categories apply to *Þrymlur* specifically. This is an essential inclusion, as Colwill and Þorgeirsson state explicitly that by producing the first translation of *Þrymlur* into English, or any other language, they have “the aim of making this interesting example of Norse mythology in the late medieval period accessible to a wider range of readers” (v). By providing some background on Icelandic kennings and *heiti*, the reader is better positioned to interpret these poetic forms, even though early *rímur*, like *Þrymlur*, use these poetic devices sparingly. The metrical structure of *rímur*, however, including *Þrymlur*, is quite sophisticated, so the brief overview provided by Colwill and Þorgeirsson of the three metres used by the *Þrymlur* poet (*ferskeytt*, *braghent*, and *stafhent*) are well placed, as is an outline of alliteration practices, rhyme schemes, and stress and syllable counts. Throughout these technical sections of the introduction, Colwill and Þorgeirsson display a commitment to accessibility, presenting the content usefully for the expert or advanced student, who will be reminded of how *Þrymlur* displays these poetic characteristics, but also for the general reader, who will be introduced to the intricacies of late-medieval poetics in Iceland through clearly articulated though specialized terminology.

The most extensive section of the volume’s introduction concerns *Þrymlur*’s literary context, specifically influence from *Þrymskviða* on this *rímur* and this *rímur*’s possible influence on Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish ballads. The narrative structure of both *Þrymskviða* and *Þrymlur* are nearly identical (the latter adapting the former), and both employ two widespread folktale motifs: “Thunder’s Instruments” (ATU 1148b), which appears across the circum-Baltic region, and “The Substituted Bride” (ATU 403c), an even more widespread narrative pattern (xix).

As many readers of the volume will already know, the story of how Þórr retrieves his hammer is humorous and contains thematic depth related to gender and security. Colwill and Þorgeirsson aptly conclude “[i]t is therefore not surprising that this tale of ‘how Þórr won back his hammer’ should have proved so popular across Scandinavia, from the medieval period to the present” (xxxviii). *Þrymlur* demonstrates how poets even in Iceland were not

content to rely solely on the eddic *Þrymskviða* but thoughtfully reworked the narrative and portrayed the heathen gods in *rímur* centuries after the island's inhabitants' conversion to Christianity. A notable example of this reworking is how *Þrymskviða* exhibits an anxiousness around gender with its attention to detail of the cross-dressing episode and Þórr's objections. *Þrymlur*, on the other hand, omits any objection from Þórr about his transformation into a bride, but unlike the eddic poem, the *rímur* emphasizes the “violence and coarseness of the scenes in Jötunheimar” (xxiii). Colwill and Þorgeirsson do not provide a definitive answer for why poets at certain times and in certain places transformed materials in certain ways, but they do suggest social concerns possibly played a role. As time passed and narratives travelled, social concerns evolved and sensibilities changed. They also assert that perhaps even more influential was a text's entertainment value.

Colwill and Þorgeirsson are, as noted above, the first editors and translators to present this text in a language other than Icelandic, but they do acknowledge their debts to prior editors of *Þrymlur*, notably Thoedor Möbius (1860) and Finnur Jónsson (1896 and 1905–1912), as well as to the influence of Jón Helgason's article about the poem from 1975. In contrast to these earlier scholars, however, Colwill and Þorgeirsson have prepared a text that more closely represents the manuscript version (xl). The volume accordingly includes a diplomatic transcript of the manuscript text, then a text in normalized spelling, which includes emendations marked by asterisks, and an English prose translation of each stanza. Each stanza is accompanied by notes. Reading the edition of the text of *Þrymlur* was highly enjoyable for the present reviewer. Readers can choose to follow one of the three versions as their primary text—the diplomatic transcript, the normalized edition, or the English translation—and then easily refer to the other components for clarification as needed, including the informative notes.

The reviewer did notice an unfortunate omission in the bibliography that is important to mention here: on p. viii of the introduction, Colwill and Þorgeirsson include an in-text citation to a book chapter by Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir from 2013 not included in the bibliography at the back of the volume. The omitted reference is presumably an article titled “Þverhandarþykk rímnabók” from a volume edited by Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, Matthew James Driscoll, and Sigurður Svavarsson, *66 handrit úr fórum Árna Magnússonar*, published jointly by Den Arnamagnæanske samling, Nordisk forskningsinstitut, Stófnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, and Bókaútgáfunnar Opnu í Reykjavík. This is likely an accidental oversight by Colwill and Þorgeirsson, who have brought together an extensive amount of scholarship for the introduction in addition to preparing an excellent edition and translation of *Þrymlur*. The volume will surely benefit undergraduate students of Old Norse mythology, graduate students and scholars in medieval

Icelandic studies, and all readers interested in the transmission of Old Norse mythology.

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