

Judy Quinn and Adele Cipolla, eds. 2016. *Studies in the Transmission and Reception of Old Norse Literature: The Hyperborean Muse in European Culture*. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers. 355 pages. ISBN: 978-2-503-55553-9.

Old Norse literature can exhibit a strong influence and presence within artistic media, from novels to poetry and beyond. The allure of what Judy Quinn and Adele Cipolla term as the “hyperborean muse” present throughout Europe is a major point of discussion between various scholars in *Studies in the Transmission and Reception of Old Norse Literature*. The authors masterfully explore the widespread influence of this literary muse over time.

The first section includes several chapters by Judy Quinn, Adele Cipolla, and Odd Einar Haugen, who focus on the significance of manuscript translation and the work of European intellectuals in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Cipolla first provides an excellent summary of *Snorra Edda*'s extensive editorial history in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, with an additional focus on the Italian scholarly perspective and involvement in this history. Quinn contributes to this topic in the following chapter by examining methods employed by scholars working with Old Norse manuscripts. She critically examines the stemma theory applied to such manuscripts, the concept of which suggests that all variations of a story derive from one source. Quinn believes this theory is problematic for tracing the history of manuscript creation, for men and women performed these stories orally in different ways and with different wording consistently in the medieval period. Finally, Haugen discusses how scholars should reconsider the theory of Occam's Razor, or the simplest solution, and apply it to stemmas. Haugen warns that scholars could potentially eliminate significant intermediary Nordic manuscripts by this principle, as Occam's Razor dictates that copies of manuscripts are unnecessary.

The second section of this collection, expertly covered by Ian Felce, Marcello Rossi Corradini, Mats Malm, Tereza Lansing, Massimiliano Bampi, Maria Cristina Lombardi, Alessandro Zironi, and Julia Zernack, explores influences and adaptations of medieval Nordic literature. More specifically, the authors focus their analyses on the Medieval Age, the period of Romanticism, and the Modern Era. Felce begins with his examination of the *Gesta Danorum*, a medieval work covering the history of Denmark written by the thirteenth-century Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus. Felce suggests that a hypothetical Iceland saga, which he calls *Amlóða saga*, possibly inspired sections of Saxo's work. Supplementing his argument with comparison to the protagonist of *Ambales saga*, Felce believes that the similarities and differences between these characters imply that the authors may have taken characteristics from Amlóði, the protagonist of the hypothetical *Amlóða saga*. Corradini then examines the *Gesta Danorum* in terms of its much later adaptations, exploring how Saxo's work influenced the creation

of the Italian libretto *Ambleto* (1705) by Apostolo Zeno and Francesco Pariati. While many elements are similar to the original work, there are also notable differences. Corradini believes that scholars should study the Italian drama in greater detail, without comparison to its famous counterpart: *Hamlet*, by William Shakespeare. Malm then turns the reader's focus to the appeal of Old Norse poetry during the period of Romanticism. Malm explains that the concept of free verse poetry and prose allured people as it was, stylistically, quite different from Classicist poetry. Malm presents a strong argument for the significance of Nordic poetry during this time, stating that the translations of these stories helped to remove strict norms on poetic style and subject matter.

The book then covers Nordic influences in fantasy fiction from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. In her chapter, Lansing expertly investigates how Danish and American literature interpreted the medieval *Saga of King Hrólfr Kraki*. Works such as Johannes Ewald's drama, *RolfKrage* (1770), follow Hrólfr's exciting life story as the saga does; however, the author also implants certain themes into the story of his own volition. In comparison, a more recent twentieth-century work by Poul Anderson titled *Hrolf Kraki's Saga* (1973) follows the story of Hrolf more closely. Thus, Lansing's study reveals that medieval sagas inspired authors to both loosely reference the original material and remain loyal to it. Bampi explores the influence of Old Norse material in more contemporary fiction. In particular, he effectively illuminates the blatant connection between characters in August Strindberg's twentieth-century works and the legendary literary figure Starkaðr. Bampi argues that Strindberg's character Stig, featured in *The Saga of Stig Storverk's Son* (1906), is a reflection of Starkaðr, for Stig represents a conflict between good and evil as Starkaðr did. Bampi also argues that this tragic hero motif likely reflects the inner turmoil of Strindberg himself. Lombardi also analyzes Strindberg's work in her chapter, with a focus on one of his more controversial stories. Strindberg published fragments of an early text reworking *The Saga of An the Bow-Bender* in the 1870s. Rather than explore supernatural events that existed in the original saga, Strindberg chose to focus on human relationships and serious issues. Lombardi explains that this tale became a very reflective work to the Swedish author, as Strindberg related his own life and experiences to those of the protagonist. Lombardi believes that this level of self-reflection proves that Strindberg existed as a precursor to Surrealism and Expressionism, despite the criticism he received for this story.

The next chapter features Zironi skillfully examining an earlier author's reworking of sagas, revealing that the reception of this poet's work was very different in comparison. Zironi explains that British poet William Morris wished to bring Old Norse stories to an English audience in the nineteenth century. Morris often edited sagas by adding eddic poems to his work, for example, so that the audience could understand the stories better. Several of Morris' works, such as *The Lovers of Gudrun* (1870) based on *Laxdæla saga*, were met with critical acclaim

as a result. Zernack concludes this section of the book by examining how certain Old Norse concepts translated to twentieth-century propaganda across Europe. She argues that the German Nazis were not the first to use such ideas in their war propaganda. For example, she illuminates several examples where European intellectuals portrayed the Norse god Thor as an aggressive symbol of justice as a means to push their political views. As a result, Zernack argues that this integration of Old Norse concepts was an international phenomenon.

The final section of this book explores how contemporary authors implanted Old Norse literature into their fictional novels, poems, and graphic novels. Heather O'Donoghue, Chiara Benati, Carolyne Larrington, and Fulvio Ferrari provide detailed analyses of Nordic influence present in these works. O'Donoghue begins by closely examining influences and references to Old Norse literature present in the works of five different contemporary poets writing in Scots and English. For example, one poet envisions that Norse and Celtic concepts must intermingle, while another believes Old Norse myths are ancient, mystical, and almost "alien." O'Donoghue's thorough study reveals that the contemporary poets tackle Old Norse subjects quite differently. Benati then redirects the reader's focus to Old Norse influences present in the fictional detective novel *Flateyjargáta* (2002) by Viktor Arnar Ingólfsson. This novel presents a mystery to the reader where a series of unexplained murders occur on the Icelandic island of Flatey in 1960. The plot thickens when evidence of the murders seem to echo violent methods mentioned in the medieval *Flateyjarbók* manuscript. Benati's analysis reveals that Ingólfsson utilizes the *Flateyjarbók* manuscript as a narrative tool to drive characters' motivations in the story and to allow the reader to solve the manuscript enigma. Arnaldur Indriðason's novel *Konungsbók* (2006) also integrates a manuscript in a similar fashion, though Larrington argues that it has a very different purpose. Indriðason's novel details the journey of a professor and student, pursued by a Nazi antagonist, who embark to find the lost pages of the *Konungsbók* manuscript. Larrington explains while the lost quires could serve as a MacGuffin to motivate characters, she argues that the manuscript primarily exists as a heavily symbolic object that carries the cultural and literary history of Iceland within its pages. Larrington supplements her argument by emphasizing that the professor consistently makes sacrifices to protect it in the novel. Ferrari concludes this section by inquiring into how Old Norse literature permeates into contemporary graphic novels across Europe and North America. Ferrari states that graphic novels can serve as either intersemiotic translations of Old Norse literature or vague interpretations. For example, *Sögur úr Njálu* (2003–2007) transposes scenes of *Njáls saga* into four graphic novels. Despite the fact that the author rearranges scenes, Ferrari considers it as an intersemiotic translation. Comparatively, stories such as *Dampyr: The Cave of the Trolls* (2003) are simply interpretations because they are only loosely connected to sagas like *Egils saga einhenda*. Ferrari's expert analysis reveals that this combination of pop culture

and Nordic historical and literary concepts in comics is common in the modern day.

These informative and well-written chapters stress the significance and impact of the Old Norse muse on European culture and art from earlier times to the present day. This collection is a must-read for any individual interested in learning about the literary reception of Nordic stories across a variety of artistic media.

Amy Marie Poole  
*Independent Researcher*