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behind earlier *Sturlunga* critics' insistence on breaking up and reassembling the surviving text as a prerequisite for reaching a proper appreciation.

The foundation of the book is Úlfar's University of California at Berkeley dissertation from 1986, 'On the Poetics of *Sturlunga*', revised and translated after years on ice. Its original theoretical background—by no means lost in the present work—was the structuralist debate among saga students from the 1960s to the early 1980s, which switched its focus to the medieval saga's textuality and narratological properties. Studies in this vein were mostly carried out, however, with reference to the *Íslendingasögur*, a sub-genre that the Icelandic School had already striven to elevate to the realm of literature proper, thus leaving the so-called *samtíðarsögur* either largely ignored in this context, or simply separate, on grounds of their traditional classification as historical documents. The latter viewpoint was enshrined in Jón Jóhannesson's seminal essay that prefaced the classic 1946 edition of *Sturlunga*—its logic can ultimately be traced to Guðbrandur Vigfússon and other nineteenth-century saga critics—and served to distinguish quite sharply, even categorically, between a honed literary saga and a supposedly raw historical synthesis (a key argument for *Sturlunga*'s general trustworthiness and accuracy as a historical source). Úlfar's ambitious task is to argue the opposite, namely that *Sturlunga* exhibits every literary trait a saga narrative generally carries and that it should therefore be properly analysed as a *saga*. The hero of Úlfar's narrative, if one is allowed the phrase, is W. P. Ker who, more than a century ago, astutely observed that the narrative art of *Sturlunga* can only be understood within the framework of traditional saga poetics as they appear most visibly in the sagas of Icelanders. Úlfar's predilection for quoting Ker's *Epic and Romance* is not easily missed.

The basic implication of Úlfar's argument is that *Sturlunga*'s historical value cannot be separated from its narrative art: gaining access to *Sturlunga*'s 'history' thereby must involve identifying and disentangling the narrative strategies adopted for its promotion. Obviously, the book is of great value to saga scholars in general—its navigation through *Sturlunga*'s scholarship alone is admirable—but the author does not hide his hope that it will be read by historians in particular. For saga students of all denominations coming to *Sturlunga*, however, the book will prove a logical point of departure for years to come.

VIÐAR PÁLSSON

*Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum*

THE ELDER EDDA. A BOOK OF VIKING LORE. Translated and edited by ANDY ORCHARD. *Penguin Classics*. London, 2011. xlv + 384 pp. ISBN 978-0-140-43585-6.

There will never be one English translation of the *Poetic Edda* which satisfies every reader and every purpose. Some readers will want a poetic translation with an aesthetically pleasing and evocative choice of words. Such readers may enjoy the translation by W. H. Auden and Paul B. Taylor (1981), and not be overly

concerned with the liberties it takes. Others will be interested in a poetic translation that attempts to copy the metrical form of the originals to the extent possible in English. Such readers may appreciate Lee M. Hollander's translation (1962) and forgive—or even delight in—its clunky and archaic style. Readers who prefer a lighter touch but still want an alliterative translation can derive benefit from Henry A. Bellows's work (1936).

In my experience the most common preference expressed by people interested in a translation of the *Poetic Edda* is that it be accurate. Another common preference is that it be in readable English. The new translation by Andy Orchard is aimed squarely at fulfilling these preferences. It is logical that a translation aiming principally at accuracy will not attempt to reproduce the poetic metre. While Orchard takes advantage of such opportunities for alliteration as present themselves to him, his translation is effectively a prose translation and should be judged as such. It is most closely comparable to the non-alliterative translations of Carolyne Larrington (1996) and Benjamin Thorpe (1866).

In my view, Orchard is mostly successful in his effort to produce a readable and accessible book. While remaining a one-volume work, it gives the beginning student a good amount of useful background information to help in understanding and appreciating the poems. The style adopted in the translation is generally clear and flows well.

Estimating the accuracy of the translation is a more difficult issue and will be the subject of the remainder of this review. It first needs to be stated that the *Poetic Edda* has many verses that are obscure, senseless, defective, displaced, metrically suspicious or otherwise questionable. There are many *hapax legomena* and other difficult words. No translator could be expected to handle every problematic verse in a satisfying way and it would be out of place for a reviewer to pick fights over the interpretation of obscure verses.

But the *Poetic Edda* also has a vast number of clear and straightforward passages over whose meaning no informed disagreement can exist. In such cases, a translation aiming at accuracy can justly be criticised when it fails to deliver. I would like to discuss some examples where it seems to me that Orchard's translation runs into problems of this kind.

In *Guðrúnarkviða* III 6.3–4 we read *hann kann helga / hver vellanda* which Orchard renders as 'he knows about the sacred boiling pot!'. The existence of such a special pot may well pique a reader's interest and perhaps invite comparison with the quest for the great cauldron in *Hymiskviða*. But Orchard's translation here is inaccurate: the word *helga* cannot be the adjective meaning 'holy' and must be the verb meaning 'to sanctify'. It is worth looking at previous translators:

Larrington: He knows about the sacred, boiling cauldron.

Bellows: For he the boiling / kettle can hallow.

Hollander: for he can bless / the boiling kettle.

Thorpe: he can hallow / the boiling cauldron.

Orchard and Larrington make the same mistake here while the older translations have correct renderings.

In *Guðrúnarkviða* II 39.8 we have the words *þótt mér leiðr sér* as something Guðrún says to Atli. Orchard renders this, along with its context, as ‘I’ll come and cauterise your wounds, / soothe and heal, though it’s loathsome to me’. This is somewhat ambiguous and we could wonder if Guðrún is squeamish about cauterising wounds—is that, perhaps, inappropriate work for a noble woman? But the original is quite clear; it means, as in Thorpe’s rendering, ‘although to me thou art hateful’. Orchard translates the verb *sér* as if it were a third-person form, but it is unambiguously second-person. In the rest of the exchange Guðrún is speaking in riddles, but here she tells Atli to his face that she hates him—an important point which should not be muddled in a translation. Larrington makes the same mistake (‘though it pains me to do it’).

In *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* 42.3–4 we have Sigrún saying *þá er mér Helgi / hringa valdi*, which Orchard renders as ‘when Helgi picked me with rings’. The use of rings to pick a bride sounds like intriguing anthropological data but all we really have here is a mistranslation. The line means ‘when for me Helgi / rings selected’, as Thorpe translates it. Orchard renders it as if *mér* were accusative and *hringa* dative rather than the reverse. Larrington has ‘when Helgi chose me, gave me rings’, which is equally confused.

In *Grípisspá* 33.3–4 we have *mundu Grímhildar / gjalda ráða* which Orchard and Larrington both render as ‘Grímhild’s counsels will prevail’. This would be correct if *ráða* were nominative rather than genitive, if *mundu* were third-person plural rather than second-person singular and if *gjalda* meant ‘prevail’, which it does not. Thorpe’s ‘thou wilt pay the penalty / of Grímhild’s craft’ shows the correct way to parse this.

Orchard’s translation frequently renders singular as plural and plural as singular. This is sometimes defensible and often more or less harmless. For example, Orchard translates *stóðo geislar í skipin* (*Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II, prose passage) as ‘beams of light hit the ship’. The original has *skipin* ‘the ships’ but nothing really rides on the plural and the reader is not seriously misled. A more disappointing example is when *svört verða sólskin / of sumor eptir* (*Völuspá* 41.5–6) is rendered ‘the sun beams turn black the following summer’. All manuscripts of the original have a plural *sumor* ‘summers’. This is a mythological detail which there is no reason not to relay correctly.

Even simple prose passages have a regrettable number of errors. The following example is from *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*: *Pat kvað Helgi, því at hann grunaði um feigð sína ok þat, at fylgjor hans hofðu vitjat Heðins, þá er hann sá konona ríða varginom*. Orchard offers: ‘Helgi said, that he suspected that he was doomed, and that it was his fetch that had visited Hedin, when he saw the woman riding the wolf.’

But the text isn’t telling us what Helgi is saying but explaining what he has already said. And the plural *fylgjor* shouldn’t be rendered with a singular ‘fetch’. It is a significant cultural detail that a person can have more than one *fylgja*—the implication seems to be that the rider is a *fylgja* and the wolf is another *fylgja*. There is no reason not to relay this accurately. Bellows is much closer to the mark: ‘Helgi spoke thus because he foresaw his death, for his following-spirits had met Hethin when he saw the woman riding on the wolf.’

The preceding examples will suffice to show why I cannot without reservation call Orchard's *Edda* an accurate translation. But a relative estimation is also in order. Orchard's version is certainly more accurate than the poetic translations of Hollander, Bellows and Auden. And while the translation further propagates many of Larrington's errors, Orchard's version is, on the whole, somewhat more accurate. In particular, I find that Orchard's version of *Völuspá* compares favourably with that of Larrington. Thorpe's translation is woefully obsolete but tends to have different errors from the modern translations and is a valuable comparative tool. Ursula Dronke's partial translation (1969–2011) is quite accurate but priced out of the reach of most students. Readers of German have some good options.

In summary, I know of no complete English translation of the *Poetic Edda* which is more accurate than Orchard's. I would, therefore, recommend it—but I wish I could do so more wholeheartedly.

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OLD NORSE WOMEN'S POETRY: THE VOICES OF FEMALE SKALDS. By SANDRA BALLIF STRAUBHAAR. *Library of Medieval Women*. D. S. Brewer. Cambridge, 2011. 145 pp. ISBN 978-1-84384-271-2.

*Old Norse Women's Poetry* offers a lively and accessible introduction to the work of female poets in medieval Scandinavian texts. Sandra Ballif Straubhaar seeks to give voice to the impressive range of women's poetry found within the corpus of Old Norse–Icelandic literature, not only focusing on named skalds but also including verses attributed in the sagas to seeresses, shield-maidens and even troll-women. As the most recent addition to the *Library of Medieval Women* series, the volume is admirable in its focus on female poets who have traditionally claimed less scholarly attention than their male counterparts; the publication of their work in this series places Jórunn skáldmær, Jóreiður Hermundardóttir and Brynhildr Buðladóttir in the company of such famous medieval women as Christine de Pizan, Birgitta of Sweden and Margery Kempe. As Straubhaar's volume reveals, such a library can only be enhanced by the addition of these female voices from the north.

Straubhaar's book is primarily aimed at readers unfamiliar with Old Norse–Icelandic literature, and she therefore gives a brief but useful introduction to each poetic sequence and suggests further reading for those who might be encouraged by her book to seek out the verses in their original saga contexts. A short time-line of the literature cited and a glossary of personal names are included at the end of the book. Straubhaar does not seem to have consulted any manuscripts in the preparation of the Old Norse text; rather, she draws on the work of many different editors, notably Finnur Jónsson, Ernst Albin Kock, Andreas Heusler, Anthony Faulkes, and Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn. She gives each stanza in normalised Old Norse, accompanied by her own translations in both prose and verse. Although loose at times, the prose translations are generally more faithful to the sense of the verse and better reflect the complexity of Old Norse poetic discourse than the