MASSIMILIANO BAMPI, CAROLYNE LARRINGTON,
AND SIF RIKHARDSDOTTIR (eds.):
A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre.
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This book consists of an Introduction, nineteen chapters by mostly different authors (Carolyne Larrington contributes two), an 'Annotated taxonomy of genres', a 'Chronological outline' of events relevant to the development of Old Norse-Icelandic literature, and a bibliography of works cited. Frequent reference is made from one chapter to another, sometimes by title and/or the name of the author, but sometimes, more confusingly, by chapter number, the confusion arising from the fact that the chapters are numbered neither in the Contents nor at their headings where they appear within the book. This means in theory that in such cases the reader has to refer to the Contents and count from the first chapter listed there (on 'Genre', by Massimiliano Bampi) in order to follow up the reference, though in practice it is often clear from the context which chapter is meant.

In the Introduction, by Bampi and Sif Rikhardsdottir, it is shown that certain of the terms used today for the genres of Old Norse-Icelandic literature are attested from the medieval period, notably *konunga sögur* ('kings' sagas') and *riddara sögur* ('sagas of knights', i.e. romances), which point to a classification of prose works by content, whereas the different uses of the term *háttr* ('mode'), also attested from the medieval period and still in use, indicate a classification of poetry by form. While 'hybridity', the merging of one literary form with another, is obviously apparent in prosimetrum, which is exemplified in a good many sagas, the exclusively poetic forms seem to allow for less hybridity among themselves than do the essentially prose forms of saga narrative.

The chapters are divided into three numbered parts, the first, entitled 'Theory', containing six chapters, and the second and third, 'Themes' and 'Genre in Focus', containing seven and six respectively. The first chapter in Part I, on 'Genre', by Bampi, views Old Norse-Icelandic literature in terms of polysystem theory, that is, as a network of interrelating literary forms in which a dominant form can be superseded and influenced by other forms in the course of time, as with the preponderance of *riddara sögur* and *fornaldarsögur* ('sagas of antiquity') over the *Íslendinga sögur* ('sagas of Icelanders') after the

submission of Iceland to Norway in 1262-64. Sif Rikhardsdottir, on 'Hybridity', then shows, *inter alia*, how the tendency of saga prose to repress emotion is offset by Egill's poem *Sonatorrek* in *Egils saga* and by Hildigunnr's prose lament in *Njáls saga*. In the next two chapters, on 'Terminology' and 'Form', Lukas Rösli and Mikael Males develop in different ways the attempt made in the Introduction to convey an idea of medieval Norse-Icelandic notions of genre, Rösli by advocating close attention to the manuscript presentation of Old Norse literature and Males by stressing the relative fixity of poetic as opposed to prose forms. In a chapter on 'Orality, textuality and performance', Judy Quinn analyses 'the performative effect of restaged poetic recitation' achieved in the 'markedly literary' *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* by the use of 'a simulacrum of orality' (p. 81) in the account of the wedding feast at Reykjahólar, while Jóhanna Kristín Friðriksdóttir, writing on 'Manuscripts and codicology', reaffirms the argument of Rösli's chapter with particular reference to the paratextual features of manuscripts, i.e. features other than the literary texts preserved in them.

In Part II ('Themes') Hans Jacob Orning, in a chapter on 'The body politic', shows how, at different stages from the Viking Age to the Late Middle Ages, kings and leaders made use of different literary genres, from skaldic and eddic poetry to *fornaldarsögur* and *riddara sögur*, in reinforcing their power and authority. Dale Kedwards, writing on 'Geography', sees introductory geographical references in sagas as generic indicators, alerting their audiences to the kind of saga they are reading or hearing. Torfi H. Tulinius, on 'Time and space', makes use of the Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope, the setting of a saga in time and space(s), in arguing for a concern with ideology, with identity, and with reality, in sagas set in the distant past, in the relatively recent past (of Iceland's settlement and conversion), and in contemporary times respectively. Pernille Hermann, on 'Memory', views historiography (notably Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók*) and the sagas (notably the *Íslendinga sögur*) in the context of cultural memory, thought of as collective memory of the kind that reinforces the identity of a particular cultural group, while Stefanie Gropper, on 'The human condition', shows that in the 'post-classical' *Íslendinga sögur* (such as *Víglundar saga*), hardly less than in the 'classical' ones (such as *Laxdœla saga*), it is the public rather than the private aspects of grief and love that have priority in the presentation of those emotions. Carolyne Larrington, on 'God(s)', illustrates the different literary treatments of the Old Norse pantheon in eddic and skaldic poetry and Snorri's prose *Edda*, stresses the impact on secular sagas of vernacular

Christian religious prose, and notes the increased simplicity of skaldic diction resulting from the adoption of Christian subjects, while Brittany Schorn, on 'Wisdom', distinguishes between applied wisdom, proffered in the form of incidental comment and frequent in the sagas; traditional wisdom, conveyed systematically in dialogue or catalogue form, most often in eddic poetry; and learned wisdom, of the kind found in the Icelandic translations of *Elucidarius* and *Physiologus* and in the Norwegian *Konungs skuggsjá* ('King's mirror').

Part III ('Genre in focus'), consists of six case studies each dealing with a particular text or group of texts. Erin Michelle Goeres, writing on 'The poetry of Torf-Einarr Rǫgnvaldsson of Orkney' discusses the five stanzas attributed to that early tenth-century poet as examples of 'the genre of skaldic battle-poetry' (p. 230), while bringing out many features of skaldic poetry in general. Carolyne Larrington, in a chapter on *Sólarljóð*, views this thirteenth-century Christian poem in the eddic metre *ljóðaháttr* as 'a remarkable generic hybrid' (p. 249) of wisdom poetry, Other World vision, and many subgenres. Elizabeth Ashman Rowe writes on the prosimetric *Stjörnu-Odda draumr*, seeing it as a *þáttr* (short (prose) narrative, pl. *þættir*) influenced by *þættir* about dreams, themselves influenced by *þættir* about skalds, which were in turn inspired by skaldic poetry. Russell Poole, on *Vatnsdœla saga*, shows how this saga conforms, and more particularly does not conform, to the saga genre dealing mainly with Icelanders, for which he finds the term *Íslendinga sögur* too narrow. Kevin J. Wanner, writing on the *byskupasögur* ('bishops' sagas') and *heilagra manna sögur* ('sagas of saints'), first refers, by analogy with the modern term 'genre fiction', to the saints' sagas and the *lygisögur* ('lying sagas', i.e. indigenous as opposed to translated *riddara sögur*) as 'genre sagas' rather than 'saga genres', and then shows how the bishops' sagas straddle the dividing line between the saints' sagas on the one hand and, on the other, the *samtíðarsögur* ('contemporary sagas') and the *Íslendinga sögur*. In the final chapter, on 'Romance', Jürg Glauser, who objects to *lygisögur* as a generic term, finding it disparaging, illustrates the productivity of the romance genre in Scandinavia by showing how the story of Floire and Blanchefleur developed from French verse romance through Norwegian prose translation into an Old Swedish metrical version and, in post-medieval Iceland, into several of the rhymed ballad sequences known as *rímur*.

In addition to the distinctively Icelandic *rímur* listed (p. 320) under the heading of 'Ballads' in the 'Annotated taxonomy' of genres (pp. 313-21) (where the references to chapters by number are most frequent and confusing) it would have been appropriate to mention the

international genre of dance ballads, noted in passing in Glauser's chapter (p. 302) and attested in Iceland from the thirteenth century; and in the 'Chronological outline' (pp. 323-24) one might have expected a listing of the crowning of Magnús Erlingsson as king of Norway in 1163/64, given the importance attached to it in Orning's chapter (pp.116-17).

Orning's reference in this same chapter to Snorri Sturluson as an example of 'Icelandic ambiguity towards Norway' (p. 121) could profitably have been followed up with a reference to Bruce Lincoln's *Between history and myth* (2014); and in Kedwards's chapter on 'Geography' one might have expected a reference to Þórhallur Vilmundarson's theory, well illustrated in the introduction to *Íslenzk fornrit* XIII (1991), that misunderstandings of place names originally inspired by features of the Icelandic landscape gave rise to the invention of certain characters and events in sagas. In Larrington's chapter on 'God(s)' I should like to have seen her statement about skaldic poetry's limited scope for narrative treatment of her subject (p. 199) footnoted with a reference (perhaps preceded by 'See, however…') to John Lindow's article 'Narrative and the nature of skaldic poetry', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 97 (1982), 94-121, and to Christopher Abram's *Myths of the pagan North* (2011); and in her discussion of the stylistic simplicity of Christian skaldic poetry a reference to Hallvard Lie's 'Skaldestil-studier', *Maal og minne* (1952), 1-92 (reprinted in his *Om sagakunst og skaldskap* (1982), 109-200), would have been appropriate. To Goeres's list (p. 231, note 9) of writings on the blood-eagle context of Torf-Einarr's verses may now be added Klas af Edholm, 'Att rista blodörn', *Scripta Islandica* 69 (2018), 5-40; and in Poole's chapter, a reference to Theodore M. Andersson, 'The displacement of the heroic ideal in the family sagas', *Speculum* 45 (1970), 575-93, which finds in many such sagas (*Íslendinga sögur*) a spirit of moderation comparable to what Poole is arguing for in the case of *Vatnsdœla saga*, would not have been out of place. I should also like to have seen, somewhere in the book, a reference to Helga Reuschel's *Untersuchungen über Stoff und Stil der Fornaldasaga* (1933), which develops Paul Herrmann's threefold distinction (in his *Kommentar* to *Die Heldensagen des Saxo Grammaticus* (1922), 7-8) between *fornaldarsögur* of heroic, Viking-oriented, and folk-traditional type.

The editing of this book leaves something to be desired, not only in its omission of chapter numbers. A mysterious 'his' (presumably referring to Snorri Sturluson), appears on p. 118, note 13, line 4; a sentence beginning 'The *Viðbætir* are …' occurs on p. 265, in note 31;

and there are some unfortunate misspellings of Modern Icelandic in the opening sentence on p. 283, a mistaken reference to 'Poetry' rather than 'Fiction' on p. 291, note 26, and a reference to 'Jacobus de Voragine's *Legendus aurea*' on p. 293, note 35. None of this detracts from the overall value of the book, however, which lies in the balance it strikes between the need for generic labels and the infinite interrelatedness of the many forms of Old Norse-Icelandic literature.

RORY McTURK UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS