

*Scholarship* enables easy and direct access into the extant ballad literature. I recommend it as a research aid to anyone who works with ballads.

F. Marian McNeil. **The Silver Bough**. Edinburgh: Canongate (Distributed by David and Charles, Inc. North Pomfret, Vermont 05053), 1989 (reprint of 1956 edition). Pp. xiii + 242, foreword, introduction, notes, index, bibliography. \$9.95 paper.

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The *Silver Bough* is a reprint of the first of four volumes of Scottish folklore originally published in 1956. While the aim of the series was to provide insight into the Scottish people through an examination of their customs and festivals, this first volume focuses on the folklore, folk beliefs and behaviors which underlie and inform these customs and festivals.

The book is basically organized into subject categories (the druids, the gods, magic, fairies and witches) and broken into various subtopics by key idea. Attempts are made to contextualize the data into some sort of historical and social perspective, and in particular, to relate them to the Celtic calendar. But the book has some serious flaws. Often the sources of data are never clearly referenced, leaving open the question of whether descriptions and behaviors originated in the author's speculations or in written and oral sources. At times I was left wondering when and for whom the beliefs and behaviors were current. Ballads are often quoted as absolute sources without reference to where and from whom they were collected.

In spite of these drawbacks, I find *The Silver Bough* to be a useful resource in my research of Scottish folklore. It weaves one possible fabric of meaning out of many puzzling details. While I remain skeptical of some of the author's conclusions, I feel that McNeil has provided a starting point for further exploration.

William Ian Miller. **Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. Pp. xii + 407, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

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*Bloodtaking and Peacemaking* is both a social history of medieval Iceland and a guide to the intricacies of medieval Icelandic law. As readers of the sagas know, Icelandic sagas, especially the so-called "Family Sagas," are full of legal

lore that is often central to the progress of the saga. Surprisingly, Miller's treatment is the first English language book to examine this material in depth. It is fortunate that the first book is a very good one.

For the beginner Miller provides a sound introduction to Icelandic society in his first chapter, but for the specialist the book really begins with the second chapter "Making Sense of the Sources." It is here that Miller provides a detailed argument for his use of the limited sources on the social history of medieval Iceland. Miller's use of the intricate legal codes should not be controversial, though it is likely his use of the sagas will be. The sagas have often been excluded as historical evidence since they are fictional narratives, often purporting to represent the society of the early settlers of Iceland. Miller contends that the sagas, in fact, mirror the conditions of the later Commonwealth (twelfth and thirteenth centuries). Through his use of the law Miller is able to demonstrate that legal disputes and principles encountered in the sagas adhere closely to the legal standards of the later Commonwealth period, and do not represent Settlement Age (tenth century) standards.

After his closely argued chapter on the sources, Miller proceeds to analyze in detail the legal and social relationships in the sagas. His use of anthropological and sociological research in his analysis is sound and consistently sheds light on the often murky problems of early Icelandic history. The reading is often difficult, though the problem is not Miller's writing -- the book is very well written -- but rather the nature of the material discussed. Although early Iceland is often imagined as a libertarian's paradise (few laws and no police), it was in reality one of the most regulated societies ever. Every aspect of social and economic relations was covered by the law, and it is easy for the non-specialist to become lost in the seemingly endless legal lore. But it is important to realize that the law was a living part of the social system that every adult Icelander was expected to know. There were no professional lawyers.

Miller's book is not only an important contribution to the study of medieval Icelandic history and legal history more generally, but also to historical and legal anthropology. It is exemplary in its use of both fiction and law to recreate the social life of a past people. Both the folklorist and anthropologist have much to learn from the book.

**Steven Swann Jones. *The New Comparative Method: Structural and Symbolic Analysis of the Allomitts of "Snow White."* FFC 247. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Tiedeakatemia, 1990. Pp. 134, appendices, bibliography.**

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Although Steven Swann Jones calls his study "The New Comparative Method," there is in fact little new about it. At its core the book is a fairly conservative historic-geographic study of the versions of Snow White. The new