

The introductions suggest that this book is a product of its time, arising out of efforts to reclaim Ukrainian culture and heritage as a distinctive tradition following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The emphasis on the tales as "a portrait of the country's soul" (xxv) that contribute to a persistent sense of national identity despite centuries of oppression by successive dominating forces reflects the nation's political history but is also indicative of the romantic nationalist attitude that underlies this work. Still, the political and historical details provide a useful context for the tales. The stories themselves are wonderful - humorous, robust, some simple and some complex. Some are Ukrainian variants of widely distributed stories -comfortably familiar although perhaps with a surprising twist; others are new to me and I am glad to learn of them. Suwyn's charming black-and-white marginal drawings add to the book's visual appeal. The short section of color illustrations are used as an educational supplement to expose readers to the Ukrainian folk arts of pysanky (elaborately decorated Easter eggs) and rushnyky (ceremonial embroidered cloths). Illustrations of folktales by Ukrainian artists are also included. Suwyn is a good storyteller, despite a few disconcerting slips. In "The Frog Princess," one of my favorite stories, the frogs are supposed to say "ribbet, ribbet, " -a startling Americanism accompanied by a footnote explaining that Ukrainian frogs actually say "kvak, kvak." But on the whole, the stories are well told quickly moving narratives, accessible yet culturally specific. Relatively little Ukrainian folk material is available for the general public, especially children. Altogether, this is an appealing collection that will be welcome to schools and libraries.

VICKY DWORKIN

Ph. D. candidate in American Studies,
student of storytelling, University of Hawaii at Manoa

Mabie, Hamilton Wright. *Norse Stories*. New York: Hippoerene Books, 1999. 250pp. \$14.95 hc

Growing up as a child in Scandinavia you were automatically introduced to the heathen religion of your forefathers by virtually daily references to some pagan God or other. If there was a thunderstorm, it was said that Thor was out riding in the sky, if the harvest failed

Frey was seen as ill-tempered. Now, children and adults alike have the chance to get acquainted or re-acquainted with this mythical world. *Norse Stories*, first published in 1901, has been brought back into print. On 250 pages, each with a handsome border depicting various mythical creatures, the author brings to life the adventures of the Gods and Goddesses, giants, dwarfs, serpents and other creatures and animals inhabiting this world. He tells how our forefathers thought the world was created, how Odin was the ruler of this world, how Thor got his hammer, how Frey fell in love with the beautiful Gerd, how Idun's apples kept them young, how Loke always tried to ruin everything and finally succeeded by having Balder slain, an occurrence that ultimately introduced evil into the world and finally led to Ragnarok, or the end of the world.

Balder was the best of the Gods, the fairest and the kindest. Prior to being slain he had a dream about his own death and the Goddess Frigg, his mother, extracted an oath from everybody and everything not to hurt Balder. Thinking that the mistletoe was too tiny and insignificant, she neglected to extract an oath from it. Loke soon found out, went looking for the mistletoe and brought it to Hoder, Balder's blind brother, and asked him to throw it at Balder. Since Balder was thought to be invincible, the gods had been using him for target practice by throwing darts, spears, and other weapons at him, all of which fell harmless at his feet. Hoder throws the mistletoe twig at Balder, it pierces his heart and he falls dead to the ground. Since he did not die in battle, he is not allowed to go to Valhalla but ends up in Hel. Frigg sends his other brother, Hermod, to retrieve him in Hel. However, this can only be accomplished if everybody weeps for him. Again, Loke, disguised as an old woman, refuses to weep for Balder who therefore must remain in Hel.

The tale of Balder's death can be seen as representative for all the other tales in that it describes the everyday life of the Gods with them playing or waging battles against the Giants during the day and feasting at night, but it also shows the dichotomy between good and evil, here symbolized by Balder and Loke, and the ongoing battle between these forces.

These stories are based on *The Prose Edda* by Snorre Sturleson, which was written in the 13th century. By this time Scandinavia had already been converted to Christianity and Snorre himself was a Christian. The stories had been handed down from generation to genera-

tion and it can be assumed that they had changed in the process and that Snorre's version is more the result of a brilliant storyteller bringing these tales to He than an accurate rendition. However, even today, the *Edda* is considered the most important source of Norse mythology.

These tales again have been transformed, this time into individual fairytales with titles such as "The Making of the World," "Odin's Search for Wisdom," "Thor Goes Fishing," "The Binding of the Wolf" and so on. The tales in the *Edda* are intertwined and are told by one or several narrators. Dividing the tales into separate chapters obviously makes them more accessible and easier to follow, especially for a youthful audience. Whereas the narrators in Snorre's *Edda* repeatedly point out that "there is no need to make a long story of it," this is exactly what this author has done. The language is highly embellished and filled with descriptive adjectives, creating a distinct mood or impression, but sometimes unnecessarily slowing down the flow of events. Passages such as "Words could hardly describe the beautiful country through which Odin took his way-its deep, quiet green valleys, with the sparkling cold streams rushing through them; its steep mountains, crowned with fir and pine; its great crags standing out into the sea; and its fjords breaking the coast into numberless bays," gives a marvelous description of the landscape but might, however, make a young reader reach for his "Asterix." In addition, the author/narrator often comments on an event or personage. Observations such as "like all other people of little nature, they were envious or cruel" or "but when one has nothing to do, it's easy to do wrong." Are strewn throughout the stories. In comparison, Snorre generally abstained from such philosophical or moral judgments.

In spite of the above comments, *Norse Stories*, make for entertaining reading about Gods and heroes and their heroic or not so heroic deeds, their longings and their fears. Norse Stories can be enjoyed at any age, however, with the presentation of the stories as fairy tales, the most likely target audience would be 10-14 year olds. With black and white instead of the colorful illustrations in the original edition, younger children might not appreciate it and adults might prefer reading the original text in *The Prose Edda*.

ANITA BURNS, Hawaii