



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,  
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 41  
Number 1

Article 24

October 2022

***Two Sagas of Mythical Heroes: Hervor and Heiðrek and Hrólfr Kraki and His Champions***, translated and edited by Jackson Crawford, and ***Norse Mythology*** by Jackson Crawford

Phillip Fitzsimmons

Southwestern Oklahoma State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore>



Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

**Recommended Citation**

Fitzsimmons, Phillip (2022) "*Two Sagas of Mythical Heroes: Hervor and Heiðrek and Hrólfr Kraki and His Champions*, translated and edited by Jackson Crawford, and *Norse Mythology* by Jackson Crawford," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 41: No. 1, Article 24.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol41/iss1/24>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact [phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu](mailto:phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu).

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:  
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>



---

## Online MidSummer Seminar 2025

### More Perilous and Fair: Women and Gender in Mythopoeic Fantasy

August 2-5, 2024

Via Zoom and Discord

<https://www.mythsoc.org/oms/oms-04.htm>



*Two Sagas of Mythical Heroes: Hervor and Heiðrek and Hrólfr Kraki and His Champions*, translated and edited by Jackson Crawford, and *Norse Mythology* by Jackson Crawford

#### Additional Keywords

Norse Mythology

#### Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

**TWO SAGAS OF MYTHICAL HEROES: HERVOR AND HEIDREK AND HRÓLF KRAKI AND HIS CHAMPIONS.** Translated and edited, Jackson Crawford. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 2021. 156 p. 978-1624669941. \$15.00.

**NORSE MYTHOLOGY.** Jackson Crawford. Chantilly, VA. The Great Courses. 2021. 195 p. 978-1644651933 \$34.95.

TWO NEW TITLES BY JACKSON CRAWFORD were released during 2021 by separate publishers. One is the book *Two Sagas of Mythical Heroes: Hervor and Heidrek and Hrólf Kraki and His Champions*. The other is the lecture series *Norse Mythology*, a production of The Great Courses audio series, consisting of 24 lectures lasting about 11¼ hours and including a 195-page print study guide. These titles continue Crawford's work as a "full-time public educator in all things Old Norse" as described on the back cover of *Two Sagas of Mythical Heroes*. I have read two of his earlier translations with pleasure, *The Poetic Edda: Stories of the Norse Gods and Heroes* (2015) and *The Saga of the Volsungs: With the Saga of Ragnar Lothbrok* (2017), and previously reviewed the latter book for *Mythlore*. Combined, all of Jackson Crawford's works present Norse literature in a way that is engaging, approachable, and worth rereading multiple times for their own literary virtues. He states in the *Norse Mythology Course Guidebook* "Lecture 24: The Enduring Appeal of Norse Mythology" that "Tolkien was an Oxford professor who specialized in the Old English and Old Norse languages, and the myths and sagas left a deep imprint in his own creative works" (183). He continues, "In turn, Tolkien's work influenced generations of writers of fantasy novels, games, and movies. Indirectly, through this influence, many tropes of the sagas live on in the work of people who have never read them" (184). While Crawford credits J.R.R. Tolkien with being "a primary driver of the renewed influence of Old Norse mythological lore in the last century" (183), the comment is a minor point throughout Crawford's books, which succeed in exploring and instructing on Norse literature as a literature standing firmly on its own two feet without his work becoming Tolkien-centric studies of the material.

Crawford's translation of *Two Sagas of Mythical Heroes: Hervor and Heidrek and Hrólf Kraki and His Champions* includes approximately thirty pages of introductory matter that provides summaries of each saga "In a nutshell" (ix), the diagrams "Family Tree for *The Saga of Hervor and Heidrek*" (x) and "Family Tree for *The Saga of Hrólf Kraki*" (xii), discussions of the place of "Ancient Stories, Medieval Sagas" within literature (xiv), "Literary Style" (xvii), "Parallels in Other Sources" (xix), "Men and Women in the Saga" (xxv), "Poems of the Sagas" (xxvii), three sections about the original language of the stories, and a list for further reading. The book ends with an appendix for each of the sagas, including

alternative manuscript information for *The Saga of Hervor and Heiðrek* and a glossary of names and terms for each of the sagas. All of the above assists the reader in keeping track of the many names and character connections and roles within the stories. They also assist the reader in understanding the purpose and meaning of the stories within their cultural and storytelling tradition.

The stories of *Two Sagas of Mythical Heroes: Hervor and Heiðrek and Hrólfr Kraki and His Champions* are products of a society that was quite different from that of the contemporary United States. For that reason, both mores and storytelling values are different. The sagas include hatred, vengeance, violence, incest, and sexual assault committed by both the heroes and the villains. The stories themselves are more episodic than are typically found in contemporary long fiction. In brief, Crawford writes,

*The Saga of Hervor and Heiðrek* is virtually a saga of the sword Tyrting, which is mentioned in every significant incident of combat in the first fourteen chapters. The sword, which must draw blood before it is resheathed [...] but it is when it is in the hands of the grandson Angantýr that the action of the saga truly begins. (ix)

Personally, I am fond of Chapter 4 in which Hervor, the daughter of Angantýr, confronts her long dead father in his burial mound and argues with and harangues him until he gives her the sword Tyrting for her inheritance. Crawford's brief description of *The Saga of Hrólfr Kraki* is "While it loosely follows the fortunes of the ancient Danish royal family known as the Skjoldungs, from King Hálfðan to his grandson King Hrólfr, it is full of digressions about the champions at King Hrólfr's court" (xi). My personal favorite in the second saga is the tale of how Bjorn was cursed to live as a bear during the day and became a man during the nighttime in chapters 25-28. The curse and machinations of Queen Hvít result in both Bjorn's death and in Bera—his love—giving birth to three unique sons. The first was Moose-Fróði whose top half was human and "was a moose from his navel down" (96). The second was Thórir Dog-foot, and "(h)e had dog's feet from the ankles down" (96). The third was named Boðvar Little-bear, who was "the handsomest of all three [...] and there was no fault in his appearance" (96). Toward the end of the saga Boðvar repeatedly appears in battle as a bear.

The audio recordings of Jackson Crawford's *Norse Mythology* lecture series, produced by The Great Courses, is an 11-hour-and-17-minute pleasure to listen to and provides a solid introduction to the culture that produced Norse Mythology, the language, the principal stories, and discussions of the main stories and characters under discussion. Crawford is a gifted lecturer and storyteller in these recordings. He tells many of stories throughout the lectures. His description of the course in his own words is

Norse mythology comprises the narratives of gods, heroes, and other superhuman beings passed down from Viking Age and medieval Scandinavian (“Norse”) poets and writers. [...] This course explores not only the myths themselves—the stories of the gods and heroes preserved in medieval Icelandic manuscripts—but also the nature of the source material, the relationship of the myths to the early history of Scandinavia and England, and the human level of mythical belief as expressed in religious activities and ideas about magic and the afterlife. (1)

I highly recommend this course to listeners of all ages and backgrounds. It comes with a 195-page *Course Guidebook* that reproduces the content of the lectures in print form. It is a colorful book that includes full-page illustrations of the Norse gods and illustrations including photographs of manuscripts and artifacts. Each lecture ends with titles for further reading and discussion questions that will help the listener to engage in the material and get the most out of the series.

In short, I highly recommend all of the works of Jackson Crawford mentioned in this review. He is a great educator—as audio lecturer, translator, and author of study aids. I recommend his course on *Norse Mythology* without qualification to all libraries—public, high school, or college. I also recommend *Two Sagas of Mythical Heroes: Hervor and Heiðrek and Hrólf Kraki and His Champions* to most libraries because the book introduces pieces of world literature. I do warn school and public librarians to be prepared for complaints because of the violence and nonexplicit sexual content of *Two Sagas*. Honestly, I would have let my children read the book when they were growing up. I think its value as a piece of world literature and its historical content outweighs any objectionable material that it contains.

—Phillip Fitzsimmons



## BRIEFLY NOTED

**IS SUPERMAN CIRCUMCISED? THE COMPLETE JEWISH HISTORY OF THE WORLD’S GREATEST HERO.** Roy Schwartz. Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2021. 374 pp. ISBN 9781476662909. \$45.00

While there’s no question that Superman is one of the best-known fictional characters worldwide, few academics have studied him or the comic book industry that birthed him. Roy Schwartz combines past Superman