Foreword

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My goal as editor of the Myth and Poetics series is to encourage work that helps to integrate literary criticism with the approaches of anthropology and pays special attention to problems concerning the nexus of ritual and myth. Early volumes in the series set the groundwork for a broadened understanding of the very concepts of myth and ritual as reflected in the specific cultural context of ancient Greek poetics. Stephen Mitchell's *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* now extends the field of vision from the Greek perspective to the linguistically related realm of medieval Germanic poetics, as represented by the Scandinavian heroic sagas and ballads.

Mitchell's book is in the forefront of significant scholarly advances now being made in response to discoveries concerning the nature of oral poetics. Albert B. Lord's *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition* (1991), a volume that shares these scholarly concerns and a distinguished entry in this same Myth and Poetics series, has established, once and for all, the legitimacy and importance of exploring the heritage of Western literature against the backdrop of native oral heritage. Mitchell's understanding of both the historical and the literary background of Old Norse poetics, following in the tradition of Lars Lönnroth's *Njáls Saga: A Critical Introduction* (published in 1976), provides an ideal vantage point for an illuminating case study of interaction between oral and literary traditions.