

**EDDIC TO ENGLISH: A SURVEY OF
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRANSLATIONS OF
THE POETIC EDDA**

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I. Introduction, background, & purpose

Eddic to English is an ongoing effort toward a single, simple goal: By way of producing the first in-depth survey of English translations of the *Poetic Edda* of its type, Mimisbrunnr.info aims to assist readers and translators in the broader study of the *Poetic Edda*. To that end, the study's author intends *Eddic to English* to be as approachable, readable, and useful as possible.

More specifically, this study highlights differences, commonalities, and trends among translators of the *Poetic Edda*. The intention of this survey is not to promote any particular translation, although the author recommends readers new to the text start with Carolyne Larrington's revised edition (2014) due its content, price, and availability. Yet as discussed below, it is unwise to lean on a single translation and it is the author's belief that every translation included in this study contains some amount of value for the reader.

The inspiration for *Eddic to English* was threefold:

I. *A student group*: During the monthly meetings of Ár Var Alda: The Ancient Germanic Studies Society at the University of Georgia (ÁVA), a (defunct) student reading group sponsored by the school's Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies, members commonly read aloud from different translations of the *Poetic Edda*. As one can imagine, this approach yielded much comparative discussion.

II. *A website*: A now-defunct website authored by Haukur Þorgeirsson (University of Iceland) featured comparisons of various English translations of eddic material. Haukur's approach was a significant influence on the development of *Eddic to English*.

III. *An article*: *Translating the Poetic Edda into English* (2007) by Carolyne Larrington (University of Oxford) was also a major influence in formulating *Eddic to English*. A decade later, Larrington published something of sequel piece (Larrington 2017), this time focused on her decision to publish a revised edition of the *Poetic Edda*. This was also quite helpful in developing the project.

One weakness of *Eddic to English* is that it does not survey single-poem editions, nor does it include translations by non-academics. However, translations exterior to the project's current scope are certainly worthy of future study. Additionally—and importantly—the author emphasizes that *Eddic to English* is never truly complete and is subject to periodic revisions and additions. The project has plenty of room for improvement: For example, *Eddic to English* would benefit from more in-depth analysis in each entry's *Observations* section and far more reviews, particularly from specialists. Please alert the present author of any errors you may encounter.

The Poetic Edda: A Brief Introduction

This section consists of a brief introduction to the *Poetic Edda*. Readers looking for a more in-depth introductions to the text can find them in 'complete' editions of the *Poetic Edda*, such as Carolyne Larrington's revised edition (2014).

What is today known as the *Poetic Edda* consists of a collection of poems in Old Norse, a North Germanic language related to English. These poems were compiled by unknown parties and for unknown reasons. Scholars generally assume the collection dates to somewhere around the 13th century, but the material in many of the poems is certainly far older, in some cases invoking historical events known to have occurred among other ancient Germanic peoples.

The poems that form the *Poetic Edda* are of a type known as *eddic*, itself a variety of traditional poetry known as *alliterative* verse, which (as you'd expect) places emphasis on alliteration—words containing the **same sound**, and **structures** built around this feature. Alliterative verse can yield complex and ornate compositions unlike what many readers may have experienced before. Prior to entering the written record in Latin characters, poems of this type no doubt circulated orally, and some runic inscriptions also feature alliterative verse (like the Rök Runestone from the 9th century or the Golden Horns of Gallehus from the 5th century).

Alliterative verse is commonly encountered in the poetry of other ancient Germanic peoples. Notable examples outside of North Germanic texts include the Old English *Nigon Wyrta Galdor* (the so-called "Nine Herbs Charm") and the Old High German *Merseburg Charms*. All of these examples quite likely stem from a common oral tradition among speakers of Proto-Germanic languages, but unfortunately no clear record of poetic material from that era comes down to us today. (Nonetheless, as many of these ancient Germanic branches invoke entities and concepts stemming from a shared body of beliefs, symbols, and motifs, such as deities or heroes, scholars can reconstruct aspects of Proto-Germanic poetry with some level of confidence.)

One of eddic poetry's most notable features is the genre's ability to pack a tremendous amount of material into very few words. This makes some prior understanding of the material necessary to truly follow what is happening.

As an example, it's worth taking a quick look at one of the three sample texts we've included in each entry of this survey, this one from the famous poem *Völuspá*:

NORMALIZED OLD NORSE	MODERN ENGLISH
<p>Asc veit ec standa, heitir Yggdrasill, hár baðmar, ausinn hvítaauri; þaðan koma dǫggvar, þærs í dala falla, stendr æ yfir, grœnn Urðar brunni. (Neckel & Kuhn 1962: 5)</p>	<p>I know an ash stands, it's called Yggdrasill; a glorious and immense tree, wet with white and shining mud; from there dew falls to the dales, forever standing green over Wyrð's Well. (<i>Urðarbrunnr</i>). (Hopkins 2020)</p>

This stanza focuses on a cosmic sacred tree, a plant that stands at the center of the entire body of narratives that together form what we today know as *Norse mythology*. This tree is known by the very exotic-looking name *Yggdrasill* and its focal presence mirrors an intense emphasis on sacred trees and holy groves in the 'real-world', a core practice among the ancient Germanic peoples (for more on this topic, see [Kvasir Symbol Database's "Sacred tree and grove" entry](#)).

The name *Yggdrasill* breaks down to two elements: [*Yggr*], meaning 'the terrible one, the awesome one'—a name for the god Odin—and [*drasill*], which just means 'horse'. The result is 'the steed of the terrible one, the horse of the awesome one', which is generally understood to mean 'Odin's gallows'. But why would a cosmic tree be called by such a curious name? Elsewhere in the Old Norse corpus we read that Odin hangs from a tree for nine nights before gaining knowledge of the runic alphabet (wisdom potentially to be understood as gained *from* the tree). Scholars generally understand this tree to be *Yggdrasill*. *Yggdrasill* is itself an example of what is known as a *kenning*, a poetic device poets frequently employ in Old Norse and Old English literature that meets the structural needs of alliterative verse. The concept of the kenning was probably also a component of earlier forms of alliterative verse among the ancient Germanic peoples.

With that in mind, let's take a moment to consider some similarities and differences between translations of this single stanza: For example, while the present author has used "it's called" to translate Old Norse *heita*, translators like Benjamin Thorpe and Lee M. Hollander use the archaic early modern English word *hight*, meaning 'named'. English *hight*, archaic as it is, happens to stem from the same Proto-Germanic ancestor as the aforementioned Old Norse *heita*. And while speakers of modern German will recognize another, very much still-in-use sibling (which linguists called a *cognate*) in the verb *heiße* (also meaning 'named' or 'called'), *hight* will be totally obscure to the great majority of modern English speakers who encounter it.

These two translators have chosen to sacrifice comprehensibility for emphasis on a cognate. And while interesting, Thorpe and Hollander's decision is not helpful to general readers. Most will have no idea what's going on, simply moving on to friendlier territory. In turn, readers are wise to consider the textual samples we've provided with the fundamental observation that the more stylized a translation appears, the further removed it is likely to be from the Old Norse text it purports to translate.

Notes and supplementary material make for crucial tools for anyone hoping to follow the poems of the *Poetic Edda*, where there's often more lurking behind these stanzas than initially meets the eye. For example, when translators neglect to inform readers that a word, phrase, or stanza can be translated a few different ways, readers are only getting part of the story. The above stanza provides a few examples: Eagle-eyed readers will notice that the translation by the present author (Hopkins) makes for a considerably more text than what one finds in the normalized Old Norse—32 words versus 23 words. This is primarily because two adjectives in the stanza can be understood a few different ways, which Hopkins has rendered as intentional on the part of a skilled poet.

Consider *hvítr*, which means 'white' and can be understood with the sense of 'bright, shining'. The poet uses this adjective in the above stanza to describe a type of mud on the sacred tree (about which there is plenty to say beyond the scope of this section). And then there's *hár*, which means 'high'. Just as today, 'high' can also be understood to mean either 'tall' or 'noble, regal, venerable'. This is evidenced in the name *Hár* 'the high one', a prominent name among many for the god Odin. The poet appears to embrace the notion of this sacred tree as 'tall' and 'noble', while also emphasizing its association with the god Odin, much as we see in the name *Yggdrasill*.

Most translators make a decision and go with it, leaving readers unaware of the possibilities and ambiguity, intentional by the poet or not: Dodds (2014: 19) provides a "a sky-high tree, mired in white muck", Orchard (2011: 5) goes with "a high tree, drenched with bright white mud", Larrington (2014: 6) chooses "a tall tree, drenched with shining loam", as just a few examples. Some translators decide not to mention the mud at all: Compare Thorpe's (1866: 5) "a lofty tree, laved with limpid water", Bellows's (1923: 9) "with water white is the great tree wet", and Hollander's (1962: 4) "the mighty tree moist with white dews".

All that from a single stanza of a single poem! And many stanzas are far more complex and mysterious than the comparatively straightforward example the author has chosen. Unfortunately, no translation featured in *Eddic to English* presents all these factors to the reader.

Translators may aim for style over accuracy, attempting to retain meter or alliteration over accuracy. Some freely alter stanza order and cut sections as they see fit, in some cases on quite dubious grounds, and most continue at least some bad habit of their predecessors, such as the misleading (and frankly indefensible) practice of translating *jǫtunn* or *þurs* as “giant” or “ogre”. Some don't even bother with notes (!), leaving their readers to turn to whatever flotsam and jetsam washes up from search engines to make sense of their rendering choices. On the other hand, some translations include wonderful illustrations or other helpful supplementary materials, aiming to make a translation as approachable to general readers as possible.

The simple solution to all these issues is to compare as many translations as possible and consult reliable secondary sources—such as handbooks by scholars—to fill in the gaps. With that in mind, the present survey attempts to make navigating translations and their reception as easy as possible for all readers.

A Note to Translators

The *Poetic Edda* presents translators with no shortage of mysteries and diverging paths. The process of translating an ancient text such as what we know today as the *Poetic Edda* requires extensive analysis of an array of thorny topics and complex issues, many of them without clear answers and some long central to the field of ancient Germanic studies. In short, to truly appreciate—and accurately render—these poems, scholars must draw from a variety of fields, such as historical linguistics, folklore studies, and archaeology.

Indeed, a translator who aims to produce a quality edition of the *Poetic Edda* faces a daunting task. Fortunately, this burden is eased by consulting the works of those who have walked these routes before: Wise scholars draw from the works of their predecessors, consulting decisions and analyses from earlier researchers who pondered the same puzzles and mysteries before them, learning from the successes and failures of their forebears. The present guide aims to make this process much easier. Translator, the author hopes this guide helps you in your mission to produce the best possible translation of the *Poetic Edda*.

IV. Translation entries

a. A. S. COTTLE, 1797

Icelandic Poetry or the Edda of Saemund

N. Briggs

319 pages

This translation is in the **public domain**:

[Download it here at archive.org](#)

Translated Poems (12):

Codex Regius (7)

Vafþrúðnismál, Grímnismál, Skírnismál, Hárbarðsljóð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Brymskviða

Non-Codex Regius (5)

Hrafnagaldur Óðins, Baldrs draumar, Alvíssmál, Fjolsvinismál, Hyndluljóð

Notable Contents:

Contains a piece by Romantic poet Robert Southey (p. xxxi-xlii) dedicated to the author.

Introduction: 27 pages (large print)

Note format: Footnotes

Dual edition: No

Rendering: *jǫtunn* = "giant" (p. 3), *þurs* = "-thurs" (p. 93, curiously)

Censorship

Mixed. For example, compare Cottle's decision to render a few choice lines in *Skírnismál* (especially "Urine of the unsavory goat/To quell the parchings of thy throat", p. 95) with his choice to translate two *Lokasenna* stanzas into Latin instead of English to avoid discussion of a similar circumstance. It would seem *Lokasenna* took things too far for Cottle or his publisher (Cottle says, "The sentiments and expressions of this and the following verse would not admit with propriety of an English version; and as the original would be unintelligible to the generality of readers, they are given in latin [sic]", p. 161).

Original illustrations: *None*

Translation sample

Eddic to English quotes stanzas from translations of *Völuspá*, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, and *Rígsþula* for comparative purposes. Cottle's translations contain none of these poems. In their place, below are the first two stanzas of Cottle's translation of *Vafþrúðnismál* (p. 3):

ODIN.

Valhalla's Queen!* I pray thee say
Which to Vafthrudnis' hall's the way:
For I with him intend to try
My skill in ancient mystery.

FRIGGA.

Do not leave thy native skies,
Source of Heroes! I advise:
For well I know no giant might,
Ever witness'd in the fight,
With his prowess can compare.

*"Valhalla's Queen." — Frigga, the Wife of Odin.

Reviews

- **Griffiths**, Ralph. Ed. 1798. Review. *The Monthly Review*, September 1798. Vol. XXVII, p. 381-388.

Excerpt:

To these lines we have nothing to object, but their frequent disagreement with the Icelandic text: The translation of a translation, however elegant, is at best the shadow of a shade,—the reflection of moonlight,—the silhouette of a bust,—the echo of a mockbird's song:—but it may glide over objects new and strange, it may glisten with the rainbow hues of fancy, it may wear the contour of beauty, it may warble in melodious cadence.

Observations

18th century poet and translator Amos Simon Cottle (d. 1800) receives little appreciation for his translation of the *Poetic Edda*. Admittedly, Cottle's translation is quite free: Cottle transforms the characteristic alliterative verse of the twelve poems he selects from the *Poetic Edda* into then-fashionable rhyming couplets, and the results can only be said to loosely resemble their source material, as a reviewer notes above.

Pioneers walk the wildest paths. While Cottle's translation of the *Poetic Edda* is inaccurate and of little use to today's readers as anything more than a curiosity, it marks the first attempt to render the *Poetic Edda* into modern English and therefore remains a notable document for students of the text.

b. BENJAMIN THORPE, 1866

Edda Sæmundar Hinns Froða:

**The Edda of Sæmund the Learned from the Old Norse or Icelandic,
parts I and II**

Trübner & Co.

172 pages

This translation is in the **public domain**:

[Download parts I and II from Archive.org here](#)

Translated poems (39):

Codex Regius (31)

Völuspá, Hávamál, Vafþrúðnismál, Grímnismál, Skírnismál, Hárbarðsljóð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Brymskviða, Völundarkviða, Alvíssmál, Frá dauða Sinfjötla, Grípisspá, Reginsmál, Fáfnismál, Sigrdrífumál, Brot af Sigurðarkviðu, Sigurðarkviða hin skamma, Helreið Brynhildar, Dráp Niflunga, Oddrúnargrátr, Atlakviða, Atlamál, Guðrúnarhvöt, Hamðismál, Helgakviða Hundingsbana (I, II), Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar, Guðrúnarkviða (I, II, III)

Non-Codex Regius (7)

Hrafnagaldur Óðins, Sólarljóð, Svipdagsmál, Baldrs draumar, Rígsþula, Hyndluljóð, Grottasǫngr

Other notable contents: Volume I of Thorpe's translation contains a "Mythological Index", a short handbook for Norse myth (p. 127-152). Similarly, volume II features an "Index of Persons and Places" (p. 155-170).

Introduction page length: Both part I and II feature a unique six page introduction.

Note format: Footnotes

Dual edition? No

Rendering: jǫtunn = "jotun" (cf. p. 15), þurs = "thurs" (cf. p. 4)

Censorship: Yes (cf. p. 95)

Original illustrations? None

Translation samples

a.) *Völuspá* (p. 5):

I know an ash standing Yggdrasil hight,
a lofty tree, laved with limpid water :
thence comes the dews that into the dales fall ;
ever stands it green over Urd's fountain.

b.) *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (p. 34):

Sigrún entered the mound to Helgi and said:

Now am I as glad, at our meeting,
as the voracious hawks of Odin,
when they of slaughter know;
of warm prey; or, dewy-feathered,
see the peep of day.

c.) *Rígsþula* (p. 90):

He with Rig Jarl in runes contended,
artifices practiced, and superior proved;
then acquired Rig to be called,
and skilled in runes.

Reviews

- **Hollander**, Lee M. 1919. "Concerning a Proposed Translation of the Edda" in *Scandinavian Studies and Notes*, p. 197-201. Vol. V. George Banta Publishing Company.

Excerpt:

It is strange—to say the least—that there is no good translation of the Poetic Edda on the market.

There is Benjamin Thorpe's version, published in 1866. This was a rather poor performance at the time and is now out of print. It was, to be sure, reprinted in the so-called 'Norrænna Series', but as to this, least said is soonest mended. For that matter, I never was able to arrive at any conclusion as to whether Thorpe's performance was meant to be in verse or prose. (p. 197)

- **Bellows**, Henry Adams. 1923. *The Poetic Edda*, p. xi. American-Scandinavian Foundation.

Excerpt:

There is scarcely any literary work of great importance which has been less readily available for the general reader, or even for the serious student of literature, than the *Poetic Edda*. Translations have been far from numerous, and only in Germany has the complete work of translation been done in the full light of recent scholarship. In English the only versions were long the conspicuously inadequate one made by Thorpe, and published about half a century ago, and the unsatisfactory prose translations in Vigfusson and Powell's *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, reprinted in the *Norrœna* collection. An excellent translation of the poems dealing with the gods, in verse and with critical and explanatory notes, made by Olive Bray, was, however, published by the Viking Club of London in 1908.

Observations

English scholar Benjamin Thorpe (d. 1870) published widely on the topic of ancient Germanic studies and himself notably studied under the revolutionary Danish scholar Rasmus Rask (d. 1832). The appearance of Benjamin Thorpe's translation of the *Poetic Edda* marked the publication of one of the most 'complete' translations of the *Poetic Edda* as we know it today. Many subsequent translators no doubt owe a significant debt to Thorpe's approach.

Additionally, although first published in 1866 (and despite the criticism of fellow translators Lee M. Hollander and Henry Adams Bellows above), Thorpe's translation holds up to scrutiny better than its age would imply and remains an important translation for comparison purposes (as an example, Thorpe includes rare translations of the non-Codex Regius poems *Sólarljóð*, *Svipdagsmál*, and *Hrafnagaldr Óðins*).

c. GUÐBRANDUR VIGFÚSSON & F. YORK POWELL, 1883

Corpus Poeticum Boreale, vol. 1 & 2

Henry Frowde (Clarendon Press)

724 pages

This translation is in the **public domain**:

Download [volume one here](#) and [volume two here](#) from Archive.org

Translated poems (39):

Codex Regius (31)

Vǫluspá, Hávamál, Vafþrúðnismál, Grímnismál, Skírnismál, Hárbarðsljóð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna Þrymskviða, Vǫlundarkviða, Alvíssmál, Frá dauða Sinfjötla, Grípisspá, Reginsmál, Fáfnismál, Sigrdrífumál, Brot af Sigurðarkviðu, Sigurðarkviða hin skamma, Helreið Brynhildar, Dráp Niflunga, Oddrúnargrátr, Atlakviða, Atlamál, Guðrúnarhvøt, Hamðismál, Helgakviða Hundingsbana (I, II), Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar, Guðrúnarkviða (I, II, III)

Non-Codex Regius (7)

Hrafnagaldur Óðins, Sólarljóð, Svipdagsmál, Baldrs draumar, Rígsþula, Hyndluljóð, Grottasǫngr

Other notable contents: As discussed below, Guðbrandur Vigfússon and York Powell's *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* contains numerous translations beyond the scope of *Eddic to English*. However, discussion frequently harks back to eddic material. Essentially everything in these two volumes connects in some manner with eddic material.

Introduction page length: See above.

Note format: Footnotes and endnotes

Dual edition? Yes

Rendering: *jǫtunn* = "giant" (cf. p. 22), *þurs* = "ogre" (cf. p. 112)

Censorship: Yes (cf. p. 106)

Original illustrations? No

Translation samples

a.) *Völuspá* (p. l. 195):

I know an Ash, a high-towering Holy Tree, called Yggdrasil [Woden's steed, gallows], besprinkled with white loam; whence came the dew that falls in the dales.

b.) *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (p. l. 143):

Sigrun goes out to meet her dead lord, and falls upon his neck and kisses him, saying: I am as glad to meet thee as are the greedy hawks of Woden when they scent the slain, their warm prey, or dew-spangled espy the brows of dawn.

c.) *Rígsþula* (p. l. 242):

Earl capped spells with Righ, he overcame him by cunning, and outdid him. Then he came into his heritage and got the surname of Righ the Spell-wise.

Reviews

- **Hollander**, Lee M. 1919. "Concerning a Proposed Translation of the Edda" in *Scandinavian Studies and Notes*, vol. V, p. 197-201.

Excerpt:

The very respectable prose version of Vígfusson in *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, made in 1884, is thoroughly antiquated. At best, it represented the frequently erratic and generally unacceptable theories of that brilliant scholar. It is on the market for those who can pay \$30. It has not been, nor does it deserve to be, reprinted (p. 197).

- **Simpson**, Jacqueline. 1975. Review of Lawrence E. Thompson's edition (see discussion in *Observations* below). *Folklore*, vol. 86, no. 1, Spring 1975, p. 64-65.

Review text:

This book contrives to get the worst of all worlds. It offers an unaltered reprint of translations of thirty-one Eddiac poems published by Gudbrandur Vigfusson and F. York Powel in 1883, and therefore suffers from their stilted diction, unattractive lay-out, unauthentic 'stage directions', and highly eccentric treatment of proper names. But their textual apparatus and commentaries, which might have had some historic interest, have been removed; instead, the new editor prefaces each poem with one paragraph of simplistic commentary.

There are no notes, no bibliography, not one reference to any of the work that has been since 1883 on the textual, literary, and mythological problems of *Edda*. The student will find here only a raw literal translation, whi general reader will probably be both bored and bewildered.

- **Knirk**, James E. 1975. Review of Lawrence E. Thompson's edition (see discussion in *Observations* below). *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 47, no. 2, p. 271-272.

Excerpt:

Thompson's purpose in editing a prose translation of the *Edda* was "to provide access to the content rather than to the style and literary history" (p. 1). Unfortunately, the Vigfusson and Powell text is not appropriate for the task. Three types of lacunae exist in the original translation: real and assumed corruptions of the text as construed by the authors through their "textual restorations," unsure words or phrases for which no hypothetical rendering was provided which might have misled the uninitiated, and passages which offended the authors' finer sensibilities (in spite of their aim for their translation—"a help for the scholar, and a faithful rendering . . . [of] the contents," *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* I, cxiv). "Offensive" passages include all scatological and most sexual references. Deletion of these passages has produced such enigmatic sentences as "since thou 'bewitchedst' and then, Freyja, thou didst" ... Vigfusson and Powell in their introduction (I, cxv) condemn the "grave error" of most previous English translations of Old Icelandic material—"the affectation of archaism"; if the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* translation was not archaically affected in 1883, it is today (Gunnar spake to Hǫgni ... "What counsel dost thou give us respecting all this that we hear, thou young hero?" [p. 94]). ... By both intentional and accidental oversight the editor has impaired the text. No use was made of later research research which might have elucidated questionable passages. A more serious fault was the failure to consult and use the Vigfusson and Powell's own final readings and corrections (I, cxxiv-cxxx)."

Observations

Grasp hold of the two hefty volumes of Icelandic scholar Guðbrandur Vigfússon (d. 1889) and English scholar Frederick York Powell's (d. 1904) *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* and you may suspect that this edition is unlike other *Poetic Edda* translations. You'd be right. As its title implies (Latin 'Body of Northern Poetry'), the scope of the duo's translation reaches far beyond what we today consider the *Poetic Edda*. Here, Guðbrandur and York Powell collect, translate, and comment on poems from the entirety of the Old Norse corpus. While the authors restrict most of their translations of eddic material to volume one, the two volumes remain squarely focused on matters eddic throughout their pages.

The volumes are full of unconventional approaches and oddities. For example, they two decide to render Old Norse *Óðinn* not as the (modern) established anglicized form *Odin* (appearing, for example, throughout the translations of both Cottle and Thorpe) but as *Woden* (and sometimes, inexplicably, *Wodin*). While this decision was clearly made to represent the deity's Old English extension, *Woden*, the translators do not provide the same treatment to the theonyms of other entities attested in the Old English record (readers should not expect to find, say, Old Norse *Þórr* rendered as *Thunor* or *Thunder*).

A publication date of 1883 combined with a curious organization (stemming from the theories of the authors) makes for a highly dated approach, which future translator Lee M. Hollander notes above. Still, as the volumes includes renderings of a number of works that have rarely seen English translation or commentary since (like the Icelandic *rímur*, pp. II. 392-418), Vigfússon and York Powell's edition remains useful for Old Norse translators and those who more generally seek to mine the obscure in the North Germanic corpus.

In 1973, American scholar Lawrence S. Thompson (d. 1986) edited and reissued Guðbrandur and York Powell's *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* eddic poem translations as a new edition titled *Norse Mythology: The Elder Edda in Prose Translation* (Archon Books). Readers can find reviews of this edition above.

d. OLIVE BRAY, 1908

The Elder or Poetic Edda

Titus Wilson

327 pages

This translation is in the **public domain**:

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Translated poems (15):

Codex Regius (11):

Völuspá, Hávamál, Vafþrúðnismál, Grímnismál, Skírnismál, Hárbarðsljóð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Þrymskviða, Völundarkviða, Alvíssmál

Non-Codex Regius (4):

Svipdagsmál, Baldrs draumar, Rígsþula, Hyndluljóð

Other notable contents: In addition to the poems listed above, Bray provides English translations for an assortment of “fragments” of eddic material found in the *Prose Edda* (p. 270, see discussion in *Observations* below).

Introduction page length: 80 pages. Bray's edition contains a single, combined introduction that includes introductions to every poem she translates.

Note format: Footnotes

Dual edition? Yes. Notably, Bray's translation features two separate indices: one for the provided normalized Old Norse and another for Bray's English translation.

Rendering: *jǫtunn* = “Jötun” (cf. p. 9, but inconsistent, cf. p. 115 “giant”), *þurs* = “giant” (cf. p. 149)

Censorship: Mixed (cf. p. 257 and p. 259)

Original illustrations? Yes, this edition features numerous unique illustrations by W. G. Collingwood (readers can find many, if not all, of these images [on Wikimedia Commons here](#)).

Translation samples

a.) *Vǫluspá* (p. 283):

An ash I know standing, 'tis called Yggdrasil,
a high tree sprinkled with shining drops ;
comes dew therefrom which falls in the dales ;
it stands ever green o'er the well of Weird.

b.) *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* is not included in this translation (see "Observations" below).

c.) *Rígsþula* (p. 215):

Then he strove in runes with Rig, the Earl,
craft wiles he used and won,
so gained his heritage, held the right thus
Rig to be called and runes to know.

Reviews

- **Major**, Albany F. 1908. Review. *Folk-lore*. Vol. XIX, p. 493-496.

Excerpt:

Though on some points we may be disposed to differ from Miss Bray, her sketch of the mythology, taken as a whole, is both complete and accurate. It is most picturesquely written, and fully worthy of the rest of this admirable book.

- **Rankin**, J. W. 1909. Review. *The Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. 22, no. 83 (January–March 1909), p. 96-98.

Excerpt:

The translator's chief aim, then, was to introduce the uninitiated to the mysteries of the Northern mythology and to the beauties of the Eddic poems. One may say that on the whole this object has been attained, and, furthermore, that not only for the general reader, but also for the student of Old Norse, the work is of positive value. It is to be hoped that the translator will proceed in the same manner with the heroic poems of the Edda.

- **Hollander**, Lee M. 1919. "Concerning a Proposed Translation of the Edda" in *Scandinavian Studies and Notes*, vol. V, p. 197-201.

Excerpt:

Lastly, there is Olive Bray's pedestrian translation (1908), of the mythological poems of the Edda published in Transactions of the Viking Club. As no more has appeared, these ten years, it is safe to say that the undertaking has, for the time being, been abandoned.

- **Bellows**, Henry Adams. 1923. *The Poetic Edda*, p. xi. American-Scandinavian Foundation.

Excerpt:

There is scarcely any literary work of great importance which has been less readily available for the general reader, or even for the serious student of literature, than the *Poetic Edda*. Translations have been far from numerous, and only in Germany has the complete work of translation been done in the full light of recent scholarship. In English the only versions were long the conspicuously inadequate one made by Thorpe, and published about half a century ago, and the unsatisfactory prose translations in Vigfusson and Powell's *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, reprinted in the *Norrœna* collection. An excellent translation of the poems dealing with the gods, in verse and with critical and explanatory notes, made by Olive Bray, was, however, published by the Viking Club of London in 1908.

Observations

In the corpus of English translations of the *Poetic Edda*, Olive Bray's edition is something of an enigma. Not only is Bray's translation extensively and lushly illustrated by W. G. Collingwood (no other English edition is comparatively illuminated) but Bray chose to produce a dual edition (only Guðbrandur and York Powell (1883) and Dronke (1969, 1997, & 2011) have produced dual edition English translations).

While Bray deems the edition "Part 1 - The Mythological Poems", no second edition would ever see publication. This second edition would have presumably featured the so-called heroic eddic corpus, consisting of poems focused on legendary figures (or "heroes"). Adding further to the mystery surrounding this translation, the present study's author has to date located no biographical data regarding Olive Bray (but the hunt continues).

Collingwood's illustrations deserve particular mention. The artist draws from a variety of sources in his pieces, including hogback monuments (p. 276-277). This topic is further discussed in Major's 1908 review above.

Finally, Bray's translation is unique among English language translations of the *Poetic Edda* in that it includes a section dedicated to six "fragments" of eddic material that appear in the *Prose Edda* (Bray 1908: 270-275). This section follows an earlier treatment of some of this material by Guðbrandur and Powell (1883: 125-127, 489). Unfortunately, it appears that no subsequent English translation contains a similar section. (The author of the present survey has prepared a study of these eddic "fragments" and their reception for future publication.)

e. HENRY ADAMS BELLOWS, 1923

The Poetic Edda

The American-Scandinavian Foundation

583 pages

This translation is in the **public domain**:

[Download it from Archive.org](http://www.archive.org)

Translated poems (35):

Codex Regius (31)

Völuspá, Hávamál, Vafþrúðnismál, Grímnismál, Skírnismál, Hárbarðsljóð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Þrymskviða, Völundarkviða, Alvíssmál, Frá dauða Sinfjötla, Grípisspá, Reginsmál, Fáfnismál, Sigrdrífumál, Brot af Sigurðarkviðu, Sigurðarkviða hin skamma, Helreið Brynhildar, Dráp Niflunga, Oddrúnargrátr, Atlakviða, Atlamál, Guðrúnarhvøt, Hamðismál, Helgakviða Hundingsbana (I, II), Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar, Guðrúnarkviða (I, II, III)

Non-Codex Regius (4)

Baldurs draumar, Rígspula, Hyndluljóð, Svipdagsmal

Other notable contents: *None*

Introduction page length: 17 pages

Note format: *Footnotes*

Dual edition? *No*

Rendering: *jǫtunn* = "giant" (cf. p. 5), *þurs* = "giant" (cf. p. 118)

Censorship: *No* (cf. 162, 163)

Original illustrations? *None*

Translation samples

a.) *Völuspá* (p. 9):

An ash I know, Yggdrasil its name,
 With water white is the great tree wet ;
 Thence come the dews that fall in the dales,
 Green by Urth's well does it ever grow.

b.) *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (p. 327):

Sigrun went in the hill with Helgi, and said:
 "Now am I glad of our meeting together,
 as Othin's hawks, so eager for prey,
 When slaughter and flesh, all warm they scent,
 Or dew-wet see the red of day.

c.) *Rígsþula* (p. 215):

With Rig-Jarl soon the runes he shared,
 More crafty he was, and greater his wisdom;
 The right he sought, and see he won it,
 Rig to be called, and runes to know.

Reviews

- **Gade**, Kari Ellen. 1993. Review of 1991 reissue by Edwin Mellen Press. *Monatshefte*, vol. 85, no. 3 (Fall 1993), p. 381-383.

Excerpt:

Although the introductions and notes to Bellows's 1923 edition by now are sorely outdated and have little scholarly value, his translations of the eddic poems still rank among the most poetic in the English language, and apart from a few misunderstandings derived from the editions and commentaries on which his translations were based—they quite faithfully follow the Norse originals. A revised edition of Bellows's *The Poetic Edda* with an updated scholarly apparatus would certainly be welcome. However, the present edition is substandard and cannot be recommended; Bellows's work surely deserves a better fate than this.

Observations

Polymath Henry Adams Bellows's (d. 1939) history of publications reveals a multi-storied life ever rooted in his early days as an academic. For example, in 1920, the Government Printing Office published Bellows's *A Treatise on Riot Duty for the National Guard*, and in 1924, Miller published his *A Short History of Flour Milling*. At various points, Bellows was a United States Army colonel, a founding member of what is today the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and a General Mills executive. Bellows also happened to be a poet, and, evidenced by his extremely footnote-heavy edition, it appears that during his time as an academic he came to love the *Poetic Edda* enough to produce a new translation of this notoriously difficult text for the American-Scandinavian Foundation (cf. acknowledgement on p. ix)

Bellows's tome features a similarly pseudo-archaic style several other translators of the *Poetic Edda* have also employed (see, for example, the refrain "I rede thee, Loddafnir!", p. 53-59). Generally speaking, this style occurs when translators attempt to render Old Norse into English by using as many English cognates as possible, words with shared origins (the two languages are quite closely related), or by featuring obscure Old Norse loan words found in the English language. To do this, translators often reach into the Middle English lexicon. While dependence on cognates may yield a more concise translation and there's certainly no harm in learning new words, translations such as these alienate readers who lack a background in, say, historical linguistics.

Regardless of his rendering choices, Bellows's footnotes remain highly useful for obscure topics, as nary a stanza in the entire translation goes without some sort of commentary. Bellows's extensive footnotes are particularly notable in light of a tendency among recent translators to feature no notes at all (such as those of Dodds, 2014, and Crawford, 2015).

f. LEE M. HOLLANDER, 1928 & 1962

Please note that this entry refers solely to the translator's **second revised edition** unless otherwise noted.

The Poetic Edda

University of Texas Press

343 pages

[Publisher website](#)

Translated poems (36):

Codex Regius (31)

Völuspá, Hávamál, Vafþrúðnismál, Grímnismál, Skírnismál, Hárbarðsljóð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Brymskviða, Völundarkviða, Alvíssmál, Frá dauða Sinfjötla, Grípisspá, Reginsmál, Fáfnismál, Sigrdrífumál, Brot af Sigurðarkviðu, Sigurðarkviða hin skamma, Helreið Brynhildar, Dráp Niflunga, Oddrúnargrátr, Atlakviða, Atlamál, Guðrúnarhvöt, Hamðismál, Helgakviða Hundingsbana (I, II), Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar, Guðrúnarkviða (I, II, III)

Non-Codex Regius (5)

Baldur draumar, Rígsþula, Hyndluljóð, Grottasöngur, Svipdagsmál

Other notable contents: Like some other translators, Hollander removes the so-called "Catalogue of Dwarfs" (sometimes translated into Old Norse as *Dvergatal*) from *Völuspá* and provides it a section of its own (p. 322-323). Hollander also includes a section dedicated to the eight missing manuscript pages of the Codex Regius manuscript (the "Great Lacuna", p. 241-242). These pages no doubt refer to the *Völsung* cycle in some manner and may be to some extent paraphrased in *Völsunga* saga.

Introduction page length: 29

Note format: Footnotes

Dual edition? No

Rendering: *jǫtunn* = "etin" (cf. p. 67), *þurs* = "thurs" (cf. p. 71)

Censorship: Mixed (cf. "staling of stinking goats", p. 72; "thou didst fart", p. 97)

Original illustrations? None

Translation samples

a.) *Völuspá* (p. 4):

An ash I know, high Yggdrasil,
the mighty tree moist with white dews;
thence come the floods that fall adown;
evergreen o'ertops Urth's well this tree.

b.) *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (p. 200):

Sigrún went into the mound to Helgi and said:

"As fain am I to find thee, Helgi,
as Óthin's hawks, hungry for meat,
when war they scent and warm corpses,
and dew besprent the daylight see."

c.) *Rígsþula* (p. 127):

In runes he rivaled Ríg the Earl;
with wiles he warred, outwitting him;
thus got for himself, and gained to have,
the name of Ríg and runic lore.

Reviews

- **Flom**, George T. 1929. Review of first edition. *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, p. 543-547.

Excerpt:

I regret that I have been obliged to find that this translation, like so many others before it, has succeeded only in part. I hope I have done justice to the book; there is much in it that is good indeed; I call attention again to the stanza quoted above from the *Greelandic Atli Lay*, as an example of what Hollander has accomplished when he is at his best. In spite of the shortcomings noted I welcome the volume for what it has achieved that is good in so difficult a task. I am sure it will be found useful to many.

- **Beck**, Richard. 1939. Review of first edition and Hollander's *Old Norse Poems: The Most Important Non-Scaldic Verse not included in the Poetic Edda*. *Skírnir*, p. 191-194. Viewable online at Timarit.is. **Icelandic**. Accessed November 29, 2020.

Excerpt:

Af því, sem að ofan er talið, þótt eigi sé fleira nefnt, er auðsætt, að dr. Hollander hefir unnið merkileg störf í þágu fræða vorra vestan hafsins. Skuldum vér honum miklar þakkir fyrir þá iðju hans, og færi vel á því, að Íslendingar sýndu honum einhvern sóma fyrir fræðimannlega starfsemi hans, sem fært hefir út landareign bókkmenta vorra og aukið á hróður vorn.

- **Blaisdell**, Jr, Foster W. 1963. Review of second edition, revised. *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1. February 1963, p. 64-55.

Excerpt:

The present translation naturally invites comparison with that of Henry A. Bellows (published by the American-Scandinavian Foundation, first printing 1923). Bellows also attempts to preserve something of the original metrical patterns but allows himself more freedom. Ignoring numerous differences in details, I might venture the generalization that Bellows' translation is more readable while Hollander's is more poetic. An instructor who must select an edition for a course should consider both carefully. The choice will be dictated in part by the level and aims of the course and the quality of the students. To no small extent this circumstance is due to the attitudes of the two translators toward the choice of vocabulary.

- **Wolf**, Kirsten. 1987. Review of second edition, revised. *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 59, no. 3. Summer 1987, p. 388.

Excerpt:

Hollander thus manages to capture the flavor and the tang of the original, but often at the expense of the work's accessibility, and his diction is by no means simple.

Observations

A former faculty head of the Department of Germanic Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, American scholar Lee M. Hollander's translation of the *Poetic Edda* remains widely available. Like some other translators, Hollander attempts to convey the alliterative verse of the original Old Norse texts, primarily by way of reliance on archaism. For example, Hollander employs fossilized pronouns such as "thee" and "thou" throughout his translation, along with obscure terms such as "thole" (cf. p. 73).

Hollander realized how alien these archaisms would be to even the most educated reader, and so includes a glossary for these obscure terms (p. 325-326). Whether the reader embraces or rejects this approach is ultimately a matter of taste, but readers new to the *Poetic Edda* will no doubt find Hollander's rendering decisions to be particularly challenging. This hurdle greatly restricts the utility of Hollander's translation.

Notably, before completing his translation of the *Poetic Edda* and while still among the faculty of the University of Wisconsin, Hollander authored a brief piece describing why he felt the time was ripe to produce a translation of his own. Published in 1919 in *Scandinavian Studies and Notes*, "Concerning a Proposed Translation of the Edda" describes aspects of Hollander's approach and provides insight into how Hollander felt about the works of his predecessors (for example, Hollander refers to Benjamin Thorpe's 1866 translation as "a rather poor performance at the time" and dismisses Olive Bray's 1908 translation as "pedestrian").

g. URSULA DRONKE: 1969, 1997, & 2011

The Poetic Edda, Vol. I: Heroic Poems (1969)

The Poetic Edda, Vol II: Mythological Poems (1997)

The Poetic Edda, Vol. III: Mythological Poems II (2011)

Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press

Publisher websites:

Vol. I (*none*), [vol. II](#), [vol. III](#)

Translated Poems (14):

Vol. I (4)

Atlakviða, Atlamál in grænlensku, Guðrúnarhvöt, Hamðismál

Vol. II (5)

Völuspá, Rígsþula, Völundarkviða, Lokasenna, Skírnismál

Vol. III (4)

Hávamál, Hymiskviða, Grímnismál, Grottasǫngr

Other notable contents:

Numerous original essays (see discussion below)

Note format: *Footnotes*

Dual edition? Yes

Rendering: *Jötunn* = "giant" (I, p. 7)

Censorship: None (cf. II. p. 340.32, 340.34)

Original illustrations? None

Translation samples

a.) *Völuspá* (II, p. 11-12):

An Ash I know there stands,
Yggdrasill is its name,
a tall tree, showered
with shining loam.
From there come the dews
that drop in the valleys.
It stands forever green over
Urðr's well.

b.) Dronke provides no translation of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*.

c.) *Rígsþula* (II, p. 173):

With Rígr Jarl
he disputed runes,
teased him with tricks
and knew better than he.
Then he got his due
and gained the right then
to be called Rígr,
and have knowledge of runes.

Reviews

- **Holtsmark, Anne.** 1971. Review of volume I. *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 66, no. 2, April 1971, p. 428-429.

Excerpt:

In her critical analysis the author is fortunate in her solid knowledge of Old English poetry, especially of Beowulf. It enables her to present the world of heroes and the ethics of heroes in a persuasive light.

Ursula Dronke's work is very promising. She says herself that it is the result of ten years' work; it is hoped that she will have the leisure to write the other three volumes. I am afraid it will take time, the German scholars I began by mentioning needed fifty years.

The book has a good, almost exhaustive biography, which will be of great value for the student.

- **Hollander, Lee M.** 1972. Review of volume I. *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, 47:1, p. 73-75.

Excerpt:

This is a notable contribution to Eddic scholarship. The authoress comes to her task *de longue haleine* well prepared: beside being broadly read in Old Norse literature, particularly of course in the substantial literature surrounding the Eddas, she is at home in Old English literature and shows a wide knowledge of Classical mythology. As a result, her work is stimulating reading.

- **Glendinning, Robert J.** 1973. Review of volume I. *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 45, no. 4, Autumn 1973, p. 383-388.

Excerpt:

The part of the present work most likely to invite disagreement is the translation of the poems. While the style of the translation is for the most part natural and unaffected by the mannerisms that have made many translations of the Edda painful to read, they nevertheless leave some doubt in at least one respect as to the wisdom of the method followed. The first impression created is that of a line-for-line prose translation of the original. (This is possible because of the paratactical *Zeilenstil* of Eddic verse.)

Yet one is very quickly struck by the frequency of alliteration, which occurs not only when it would be difficult to avoid (e.g., *Akv* 21 and 23, *Am* 54), but in such a large number of other instances that it must be assumed to have been used deliberately. Is the translation then intended to be a verse translation? A large number of lines can, indeed, be read rhythmically, though not without some degree of effort. Yet without the controlling factor of consistent and correctly distributed alliteration (often only short lines contain alliteration), this soon becomes an utterly tedious and frustrating exercise, only to flounder completely on lines such as *Akv* 24/4 "to cry out never entered his thoughts," or *Akv* 30/5 "by the sun southward-curving," or *Akv* 31/4, "sovereign of enmity, to death" (all of the original stanzas are in *fornyrðislag*).

- **Poole**, Russelle. 1998. Review of volume II. *Parergon*, vol. 16, no. 1, July 1998, p. 148-150.

Excerpt:

Altogether, this is a brilliant discussion of the five principal poems. Dronke eloquently conveys their literary and mythological qualities, with a perhaps unrivalled empathy for their unfolding logic. Fittingly for such an important contribution, the production values in this book are uniformly excellent. The virtual absence of misprints and other micro-scale errors represents a triumph over extraordinarily recalcitrant materials.

- **Kalinke**, Marianne E. 1998. Review of volume II. *Scandinavian Studies*, Winter 1998; 70, 4, p. 531-533.

Excerpt:

Occasionally one is puzzled by the commentary for example, concerning *Vǫluspá* 50/3-4 and *Lokasenna* 42/1-3, both of which make mention of the loss of Freyr's sword. Dronke considers Loki's accusations that Freyr surrendered his sword for the sake of Gerðr ... a blatant lie, "since Gerðr refused the gold and the sword was a threat, not a gift" (366). Concerning the same passage, but in the commentary of *Vǫluspá*, Dronke asserts that "Loki ... mockingly says that Freyr gave it [the sword] to the giants as a price of Gerðr, but neither *Skm* nor any other ON source (*SnE* 41 depends on *Lks*) corroborates this" (148). As a matter of fact, Loki does not say that Freyr gave the sword to the giants. All he says is that Freyr gave it away. While *Skírnismál* relates that the recipient was the proxy wooer of Skírnir ..., it is silent about the sword's ultimate fate.

Since *Skírnismál* does not relate that Skírnir returned the sword upon the successful conclusion of his bridal quest, why should Loki—and like him Snorri Sturluson—not interpret the silence concerning the sword as implying its loss during the quest? Occasionally the interpretations are quite free and not supported by the text. For example, in the discussion of dramatic techniques in *Skírnismál*, Dronke draws attention to “reported circumstances to accompany the action ...the noise and tremor of Skírnir’s arrival as Gerðr claps her hands over her ears” (395). Yes, noise aplenty is reported in stanza 14, but no, Gerðr does not hold her ears shut.

- **Faulkes**, Anthony. 1999. Review of volume II. *Medium Ævum*, 68, 1., p. 159-161.

Excerpt:

The parallel prose translation is claimed in volume I (and on the dust wrapper of volume II) to render the wording of the original poetry closely; but as translations go this is rather free, and often gives imaginative or tentative renderings which would be better suggested in notes, since the unwary make take the translation presented in this way to be uncontroversial or authoritative. ... In any case the absurd and unjustifiable price of the volume ... means that few will have access to it, and in spite of the presentation of the text of each poem with introduction and commentary immediately following so that they could be published separately, no such separate editions of individual poems have yet appeared. ... The careless and incompetence of Oxford University Press in the field of Old Norse studies is well illustrated by the advertisement on the dust cover of this volume for *An Introduction to Old Norse*, second edition, by E. V. Gordon revised by *Norman Davis*.

- **Clunies Ross**, Margeret. 2000. Review of volume II. *JEGP: Journal of English and Germanic Philology*. July, 2000, p. 414-419.

Excerpt:

It is beyond the scope of this review to give a thorough analysis of Dronke’s editorial methodology (for this see Faulkes’s review in *Medium Ævum*), but it is perhaps worth expressing my disappointment of her treatment of the various manuscript versions of *Völuspá*. Although, as always, there are some valuable insights (I liked in particular her deductions about which stanzas Snorri is likely to have known but not quoted), there is also a range of assumptions about the transmissions of these texts, about scribal practice, and about what is and is not an inferior reading, what is or is not interpolation, that are not always justified (though sometimes Dronke is probably right) and may sit rather awkwardly with notions of permissible variation in the transmission of an originally oral poem.

- **Gay**, David. 2000. Review of volume II. *Folklore Forum* 34 (1), p. 85-86. [Online](#). Last accessed November 29, 2020.

Excerpt:

Dronke's commentary has some problems as well, especially the tendency to fully present only that evidence most favorable to her readings and the failure to draw from relevant folklore scholarship and primary materials.

- **Mundt**, Marina. 2001. Review of volume II. *Speculum*, vol. 76, no. 2. April 2001, p. 438-439.

Excerpt:

The first of the poems included in this collection is *Vǫluspá*, a grand view of the world's destinies, from the establishment of the cosmos to its downfall, ending with some short, but colorful, descriptions of a new earth materializing after the destruction of the old, the whole vision interpreted as inspired by or partly based on sibylline oracles and Christian ideas and presented as spoken by a female magician or prophetess without religious function. The introduction to this poem alone, together with the following commentary, amounts to nearly 130 pages, which makes it all the more puzzling that little is said about the type of eschatology presented in the poem, the closest parallel of which is found in ancient Iran, a fact much discussed in the twenties and more recently stated anew by Jaan Puhvel in *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore, 1987), p. 285.

- **McKinnell**, John. 2001. Review of volume II. *Alvíssmál* 10, p. 116–28. [Online](#). Last accessed December 8, 2020.

Excerpt:

This book is a great achievement, and all serious scholars of Old Norse mythology will need to use it. I particularly value its clear elucidation of textual problems, its illuminating commentaries, and its sensitive and imaginative literary paraphrase-interpretations of the poems ... However, it also has flaws: Dronke occasionally creates the textual details she wants for her interpretations (especially in *Rígsþula*) and often ignores the arguments of those who take different views from hers (especially about date and provenance), rather than presenting the reasons why she disagrees with them.

She also seems to me to underrate the seriousness and importance of *Lokasenna* and to impose a single, rather partial view on *Skírnismál*. Perhaps, with the continual growth of modern scholarship, the time is past when a single scholar can hope to produce an authoritative edition of the whole eddic corpus, or even of a major section of it, such as is covered here. While there is much in this book to admire and to learn from, it does not in the end provide the authoritative modern edition of these poems for which many of us were hoping.

- **North**, Richard. 2001. Review of volume II. *Saga-Book*, vol. XXV, p. 219-226. Viking Society for Northern Research. [Online](#). Last accessed November 30, 2020.

Excerpt:

Less convincing, perhaps, in 'Weland as Christian *figura*', is Mrs Dronke's view of the Christian allegorical uses to which Weland could have been put, or of the use by Alfred of his name to render that of 'Fabricius', an ancient paragon of virtue, in the West Saxon translation of Boethius's *De consolatione Philosophiae* (surely Alfred mistook *Fabricius* for 'craftsman' after Latin *faber*?). Yet Mrs Dronke is probably right to see the Weland-story as spreading out from Germany. However, not everyone will agree with her (p. 287–89) that it was Ohthere, the Norwegian skipper who called on Alfred in the 880s, who brought the Weland-poem from Wessex to Haraldr Finehair's court in Norway, whence it came to Þjóðólfr of Hvinir, who could not otherwise have alluded to Níðuðr in his *Haustlǫng* (c.900). Or that it was Ohthere who took Weland to Hálogaland, his home, where a local poet, adding the Lappish colouring, used it as a basis for *Vǫlundarkviða*. These theories are however boldly delineated. Section IV contains Mrs Dronke's reconstruction of this poem's impaired text and anomalous metre; and an excursus traces the surprising influence of *Vǫlundarkviða* through Gräter's 1812 German translation, in Hoffmann's ensuing tale of Cardillac, a Paris goldsmith and nocturnal murderer (*Das Fräulein von Scuderi*), and in Hindemith's later use of this figure in his opera.

- **Gay**, David. 2012. Review of volume III. *Fabula* 53, p. 126-127.

Excerpt:

There is no doubt that there is much of interest in this volume, but I do find Dronke's readings of several of the poems problematic. In the earlier volumes of her edition she often played down the possible Christian elements in the poems; in this volume she reverses herself, and argues for a Christian reading of the poetry. She suggests, for instance, that "to celebrate their pagan past the Christian poets created *Grímnismál* as a verbal monument of their own imagination, to herald the new era." (p. 111)

Yet, as Dronke explains in her foreword to the poem, “The Lay of *Grímnir*, the Visored God is a dramatic, poetic monologue, entirely spoken by Óðinn [...]. The poetic focus is on the thoughts and memories in his time as a god, the whole mythical scenery of the world.” (ibid.) It seems unlikely to me that medieval Christians would write a poem in praise of paganism and the main pagan deity, and thus I find it difficult to follow Dronke in accepting that *Grímnismál* is a product of Christian poets, rather than, as is usually thought, a product of earlier pagan poets preserved in the Christian era. Her account of *Hymiskviða* is even more puzzling: it does not seem credible that the poem was “intended [...] to celebrate the defeat of the Devil by Christ.” (84) She refers to Þórr as “Christ-Þórr”, and suggests that “the role of the devil is played by the world serpent” while “Hymir and his giants” play the role of “the enemies of Christ” (84). Christian influences in Old Icelandic literature are often downplayed, but this seems to be a case of overplaying the possible Christian analogues, meanings, and origins of a poem. It thus seems to me very unlikely that *Hymiskviða* is a Christian allegory, as Dronke proposes, though it is possible – many texts were probably reinterpreted in Christian terms after the conversion. Still, there is no evidence for that having happened with *Hymiskviða*, either internally in the text, or externally.

- **Mundal**, Else. 2013. Review of volume III. *Speculum*, vol. 88, no. 3, July 2013, p. 786-788.

Excerpt:

It is also unfortunate that Dronke, with few exceptions, presented her own ideas without entering into discussion with the views of other scholars. The bibliography includes very few references to scholarly literature from the two last decades.

Surely the editors at Oxford University Press discussed whether it would be right to publish Dronke's manuscript, for it obviously must have appeared a work in progress. In spite of my objections, I am nevertheless glad that Dronke's final work was published. Ursula Dronke was for many decades one of the leading scholars within the field of Old Norse philology, and her contributions to the study of Eddic poetry have inspired and promoted scholarly discussions for as long as most scholars within the field today can remember. Therefore, her last thoughts about these four poems are certainly of interest. It is a pity that she did not have the time and the strength to finish her work on the Eddic poems in the way both she herself and her many readers would have liked.

Observations

Compared to other English translations of the *Poetic Edda*, English scholar Ursula Dronke's three-volume translation of segments of the *Poetic Edda* makes for a very odd duck. The first of Dronke's three volumes saw publication in 1969, followed by another volume in 1997, and then a third volume in 2011. Dronke died in 2012 at age 90 (her obituary, authored by scholar Heather O'Donoghue for *The Guardian*, [may be read here](#)).

Readers will note that Dronke's translation editions contain scant few poems in comparison to other translations of the *Poetic Edda*: From 1969 to 2011, Dronke published in total three volumes containing a total of only 14 poems, far fewer than the contents of the Codex Regius. Dronke appears to have at some point intended to publish more volumes.

For example, in 1997, she writes that "volumes III and IV are already well advanced in their preparation ... and volume I is to be reprinted with corrections and bibliographical updating" (1997: vii). Volume III, published in 2011, decades later, contains only a few more poems.

In her preface to volume II, Dronke informs readers that "the purpose of this edition is literary: to open up for the common reader the delights of the complexities and felicities of the poems and the beauty of the language, and to show the poets' intellectual command of their themes, mythological, religious, and human" (1997: vii). Yet Dronke's edition of the *Poetic Edda* places barriers before the "common reader" in three crucial ways:

1. *Accessibility*: Copies of Dronke's translation dwell primarily in the bowels of university libraries. Few copies appear to be available at these institutions today.
2. *Expense*: Unlike every other English translation of the *Poetic Edda*, Dronke's edition remains solely priced for university collections. As of summer 2019, readers can expect to pay hundreds of dollars per volume to obtain copies.
3. *Scope*: As mentioned above—and evidently based solely on personal preference—Dronke chooses comparatively few poems to translate. Although the concept of the *Poetic Edda* is amorphous, Dronke provides so few poems that her translation can only be considered partial.

These three factors render Dronke's translation the least approachable, least available, and least comprehensive English translation of the *Poetic Edda* to date. More so than any other translation of the *Poetic Edda*, Dronke's collective editions are not for "the general reader" unless that reader is someone who happens to have access to the few university libraries that retain all three volumes of her translations or is willing to pay several hundred dollars for these editions. (It's notable that, as a specialist composing the present study, I myself encountered numerous barriers finding copies of Dronke's translations at university libraries.)

Adding to these problems are major issues with the content of these volumes. To her credit—particularly in light of more recent translations by Jeramy Dodds (2014) and Jackson Crawford (2015)—Dronke provides copious notes, in fact more so than many other editions of the *Poetic Edda*, and many of them technical. However, unlike nearly every other English language translator of the *Poetic Edda*, Dronke also includes numerous self-authored essays along with her translations. These essays become increasingly dubious over time.

These problems seem to have intensified as the years passed and volume numbers increased. Consider the notes left behind by a former owner of the present author's copy of volume II: In Dronke's translation of *Völuspá*, this anonymous commentator wrote "Wrong! Fantasy!" next to Dronke's discussion about invoking an image of an armed statue of the god Óðinn (1997:31)—indeed, no such statue receives any mention in the poem—and a hastily scribbled "what about the Norse sibylline evidence not included here?" appears next to the first paragraph of Dronke's "A Christian Context of *Völuspá*" (1997: 93). As in many of the commentator's other notes, the anonymous writer is correct to raise this question: Dronke neglects to discuss the extensive Germanic record of seeresses, preferring to discuss potential Christian influence.

Unfortunately, Dronke's final volume only amplifies these problems. For example, volume III contains an essay on the god Thor's battle with the monstrous serpent Jǫrmungandr. In this essay, Dronke essentially ignores the wider comparative contexts of the battle—of which there exists a tremendous amount of scholarship—in favor of an unfounded and, frankly, bizarre approach in which she interprets the god Thor as somehow representative of Jesus (for more discussion, see David Gay's 2012 review above). This is hardly the only example of this sort of angle in volume III, and it's easy to imagine this causing the aforementioned anonymous annotator to throw their copy through a window.

The comparatively tremendous amount of reviews that followed volume II also deserve some commentary. There appears to have been something of a review boom surrounding this volume, and many of these reviews go to lengths to shower Dronke with flowery praise—some reading more like job application cover letters than critical assessments. These gushing reviews are little evidenced for volume III, however, where customary praise for a notable scholar is truly strained between careful commentary about the bizarre contents within. Some of Dronke's essays, particularly those found in volume III, most closely resemble scholarship now long rejected, such as that of Sophus Bugge (d. 1907). This raises an important question: When is it appropriate to note when a well-known and evidently well-liked scholar has used her platform and publishing agreement to promote material that would almost certainly otherwise be thoroughly lambasted—potentially even described as entering fringe territory?

Ultimately, Dronke's translations provide some value for scholars seeking manuscript discussion and, with extreme caution, commentary here and there, with increased caution warranted as the volumes progress. Yet without a general audience-oriented paperback reprint available to, as Dronke puts it, "the common reader", only the most privileged can ever expect to leaf through these strange volumes.

h. PAUL B. TAYLOR & W. H. AUDEN, 1967 & 1981

I. *The Elder Edda: A Selection* (1967)

Faber & Faber, Random House

173 pages

No publisher website

II. *The Norse Poems* (1981)

Athlone Press

256 pages

No publisher website

Translated poems in *The Elder Edda* (I) (16 total):

Codex Regius (13)

Völuspá, Hávamál, Vafþrúðnismál, Grímnismál, Skírnismál, Hárbarðsljóð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Þrymskviða, Völundarkviða, Alvíssmál, Helreið Brynhildar, Baldrs draumar

Non-Codex Regius (3)

Eiríksmál, Hervararkviða, poetry from *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* (titled here "The Treachery of Asmund")

Additional translated poems in *The Norse Poems* (II) (41 total):

In addition to the above 16 items included in II, I contains an additional 25 poems, bringing this edition's total number of poems to 41:

Codex Regius (+19)

Helgakviða Hundingsbana I, Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar, Helgakviða Hundingsbana II, Grípisspá, Reginsmál, Fáfnismál, Sigrdrífumál, Brot af Sigurðarkviðu, Guðrúnarkviða I, Sigurðarkviða hin skamma, Helreið Brynhildar, Dráp Niflunga, Guðrúnarkviða II, Guðrúnarkviða III, Oddrúnargrátr, Atlakviða, Atlamál, Guðrúnarhvøt, Hamðismál

Non-Codex Regius (+5)

Rígsþula, Hyndluljóð, Gróttasöngur, Hljóðskviða, Sólarljóð

Other notable contents: While listed above, the inclusion of *Eiríksmál*, a skaldic rather than eddic poem, is particularly unexpected.

Introduction page length: 21 (I), 3 (II)

Notes format: Endnotes authored by scholar Peter H. Salus in *The Elder Edda: A Selection*. Rather than carrying these notes over and adding to them to align with the many new items added to the edition, *The Norse Poems* does not appear to contain notes of any kind.

Dual edition? No

Censorship: None (cf. I.138)

Original illustrations? Yes, *The Elder Edda: A Selection* contains two illustrations by Elizabeth Cooper-Rever (credited on page 9): First, an untitled image depicting Ásgarðr and Miðgarðr connected by way of the rainbow bridge Bifröst (page 64). Second, an image depicting the central sacred tree Yggdrasil and its cosmic surroundings (page 172). *The Norse Poems* does not contain illustrations.

Translation samples

a.) *Völuspá* (I.147 & II., no page numbers in this edition):

I know an ash-tree, named Yggdrasil:
 Sparkling showers are shed on its leaves
 That drip dew into the dales below.
 By Urd's Well it waves evergreen,
 Stands over that still pool,
 Near it a bower whence now there come The Fate Maidens, first Urd.
 Skuld second, scorer of runes,
 Then Verdandi, third of the Norns :
 The laws that determine the lives of men They fixed forever and their fate sealed.

b.) *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (only in II, no page numbers in this edition):

Sigrun went into Helgi's grave and said:
 "I am as merry as our meeting now
 As the wolfish hawks of Odin wise.
 When they witness the slaughter of warm flesh
 Or behold the dawn dew-sprinkled.

c.) *Rígsþula* (only in II, no page numbers in this edition):

He exchanged runes with Rig-Jarl,
 Dealt cunningly with him and became wise;
 That is how he earned the right
 To be called Rig, the rune-knower.

Reviews

- **Shippey**, Tom. 1982. Review of *The Norse Poems*. *The Times Literary Supplement*. February 25, 1982. [Viewable online at Academia.edu](#).

Excerpt:

The whole thing has been done with great scrupulosity, from the preparation of 'raw' translations by Paul Taylor to the full versions by Auden (who however did not work from the English but from that and the Icelandic at once), and to the final editing by Professor Taylor once more. Because of the old and intimate relationship between the languages of the North, everyone now may well think he can do better; but probably no one could. This is a book to keep and write in the margins of till you die. I would pay a lot for a volume of introductions and notes.

Observations

Here scholar Paul B. Taylor collaborates with notable English-American poet W. H. Auden (d. 1973) to produce two volumes containing an unusual list of poems: One published toward the end of Auden's life, *The Elder Edda: A Selection*, and another after his death, *The Norse Poems*. These two editions differ from one another in significant ways. Most notably, *The Norse Poems* adds numerous items to the comparatively few found in *The Elder Edda: A Selection*. Yet what it subtracts is just as notable: *The Norse Poems* strips away stanza numbers, page numbers, and, most dire of all for readers new to the material (and anyone else with an interest in the *why* or *what*), all of scholar Peter H. Salus's notes. Even the 21-page introduction of *The Elder Edda: A Selection* disappears, replaced with a pithy three-page introduction consisting partially of comments on changes between editions.

In short, nearly all help for new or non-specialist readers to follow the texts has been cut away to make room for a plethora of new poem translations, most of them of a type commonly referred to as "heroic poems". With this in mind, it is no mystery why *The Norse Poems* is one of the most obscure—if not the single most obscure—English translation of the *Poetic Edda*. And while a copy of *The Elder Edda: A Selection* is easier to locate (benefiting from multiple reprints), it is still more rare to encounter than essentially any other English translation of the *Poetic Edda* at the time of writing.

It's difficult to follow the thought process that guided the author's decision-making in the production of *The Norse Poems*: An emphasis on yet more archaic poems and a de-emphasis on supplementary material probably doomed it to a single print from the start. *The Norse Poems* is clearly aimed at a general audience, yet it does next to nothing to help general readers follow the material, and while it certainly contains significant artistic merit, one must wonder exactly how the vast majority of readers might make any sense of it without leaning on other works.

i. PATRICIA TERRY, 1969 & 1989

Please note that this entry refers solely to the translator's **1989 revised edition**.

Poems of the Elder Edda

University of Pennsylvania Press

304 pages

[Publisher website](#)

Translated poems (32):

Codex Regius (29)

Völuspá, Hávamál, Vafþrúðnismál, Grímnismál, Skírnismál, Hárbarðsljóð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Brymskviða, Völundarkviða, Alvíssmál, Grípisspá, Reginsmál, Fáfnismál, Sigdrífumál, Brot af Sigurðarkviðu, Sigurðarkviða hin skamma, Helreið Brynhildar, Oddrúnargrátr, Atlakviða, Atlamál, Guðrúnarhvøt, Hamðismál, Helgakviða Hundingsbana (I, II), Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar, Guðrúnarkviða (I, II, III)

Non-Codex Regius (3)

Baldur draumar, Grottasöngur, Hervararkviða

Other notable contents: None

Introduction page length: A revised edition (p. ix—xi), preface to 1969 edition (p. xi-xv), and an introduction by Celtic philologist Charles W. Dunn (p. xv—xxvi)

Notes? Brief general notes at the end of every chapter

Dual edition? No

Rendering: *jǫtunn* = "giant" (cf. p. 1), *þurs* = "demon, giant" (cf. p. 54, 55)

Censorship: No (cf. p. 55., p. 77)

Original illustrations? None

Translation samples

According to Terry's preface to 1969 edition (and subsequently applicable in the 1989 edition), "Two poems, The Lay of Rig [Rígsþula] and The Song of Hyndla [Hyndluljóð], inferior in quality and preservation, have been omitted, as well as those sections of the Codex Regius which are entirely in prose, and occasional passages from other poems as noted." (p. xiv).

As it happens, those "occasional passages" include a famous Völuspá stanza featuring Ymir. On the topic of this omission, Terry says that "Professor [Paul] Schach gives convincing reasons for deleting the reference to Ymir which occurs at the beginning of Völuspá in other editions." (p. 8—Terry here refers to a 1983 paper by Paul Schach's 1983 ("Some Thoughts on Völuspá" as published in Robert J. Glendinning & Heraldur Bessason (editors). Edda. University of Manitoba Press.) Schach's paper primarily consists of an altered and edited edition of the Völuspá (for example, "I have deleted Skuld, who is not a valkyrie, but the youngest of the norms ..., and replaced her with Hildir, whose name means 'battle'.") Beyond Terry's translation of the poem, Schach's suggestions have not met with acceptance.

a.) Völuspá (p. 283):

An ash I know standing, 'tis called Yggdrasil,
a high tree sprinkled with shining drops ;
comes dew therefrom which fall in the dales ;
it stands ever green o'er the well of Weird.

b.) Helgakviða Hundingsbana II (p. 132):

Sigrun went into the barrow and said to Helgi:

"I am so hungry to be with you again
I feel like Odin's hawks when they want food
and find warm bodies of warriors slain,
or see the day's first light, sparkling with dew.

c.) Rígsþula (p. x):

(Poem not included in translation, see above)

Reviews

- **Thompson**, Claiborne W. Review of first edition. *Scandinavian Studies*. Vol. 42, No. 3 (August 1970), p. 363-365.

Excerpt:

Patricia Terry's translation makes little attempt to acknowledge or reconcile conflicting view points, and does not issue new interpretations, with the result that the uninitiated reader is probably given a false sense of security ... the real excellence of this translation lies in its style, for by adhering to the praiseworthy goal of keeping her text "simple and free from archaisms" Patricia Terry has produced a remarkably readable book.

- **Conant**, Jonathan B. 1972. Review of first edition. *The German Quarterly*. Vol. 45, No. 4, Tribute to the Memory of Franz Grillparzer (Nov., 1972), p. 782-784 (3 pages).

Excerpt:

The manner of which Mrs. Terry's sitting to work is most unclear, and this unfortunately tends to render her competence as a translator of Old Norse very suspect ... Mrs. Terry's criteria for translation are equally disturbing. Dunn comments that her rendition "imitates the effects of the original" ... but she explicitly disavows even the attempt to do so. It is clear that the translation seeks little more than to convey the mood of the original ... from these few examples it will have become obvious that Mrs. Terry's book will not be useful to anyone who wants to get inside Eddic poetry.

Observations

While Patricia Terry's edition includes a rare translation of *Hervararkviða*, her translation most clearly suffers from the decision to exclude material widely included in essentially every other English translation of the *Poetic Edda* published by an academic (especially the poems *Rígsþula* and *Hyndluljóð*).

Other choices made by the translator, such as the decision to alter *Völuspá* under the influences of Schah's theories, also present significant problems for students of the text, and raises questions about other decisions Terry makes throughout (see Conant's review above highly consequential rendering decisions and mistakes throughout the text of the first edition).

A third major issue stems from thin notes: The translator's decision to limit her notes to small sections at the end of every chapter further restricts the utility of Terry's translation when compared to other editions.

J. CAROLYNE LARRINGTON, 1996 & 2014

The Poetic Edda

Oxford World's Classics

323 pages (first edition), 347 pages (revised edition)

Publisher websites: [Paperback](#) & [hardback](#)

Translated poems (first ed., 35; second ed., 39):

Codex Regius (31)

Völuspá, Hávamál, Vafþrúðnismál, Grímnismál, Skírnismál, Hárbarðsljóð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Þrymskviða, Völundarkviða, Alvíssmál, Frá dauða Sinfjötla, Grípisspá, Reginismál, Fáfnismál, Sigrdrífumál, Brot af Sigurðarkviðu, Sigurðarkviða hin skamma, Helreið Brynhildar, Dráp Niflunga, Oddrúnargrátr, Atlakviða, Atlamál, Guðrúnarhvöt, Hamðismál, Helgakviða Hundingsbana (I, II), Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar, Guðrúnarkviða (I, II, III)

Non-Codex Regius (4)

Baldur's draumar, Rígsþula, Hyndluljóð, Grottasöngur

Second edition additions (4):

Larrington's second edition adds three additional poems, all of which are non-Codex Regius in origin: *Svipdagismál* (*Grógaldur* and *Fjolsvinnismál*), and, more unusually, *Hervararkviða*. Additionally, Larrington's second edition includes a translation of the Hauksbók edition of *Völuspá*.

Other notable contents: Contains a section on translation decisions (p. xxvi-xxix), a select bibliography (p. xxx-xxxi), and "Main Genealogies of Gods, Giants, and Heroes" (p. xxxii-xxxiii).

Introduction page length: 16

Notes format: *Extensive endnotes*

Dual edition? *No*

Rendering: *jǫtunn* = "giant" (p. 4, both editions), *þurs* = "giant" (p. 5) changed to "ogre" in revised edition (p. 5)

Censorship: *None* (cf. p. 90)

Original illustrations? *None*

Translation samples

a.) *Völuspá* (p. 6 in both editions):

First edition:

19. I know that an ash-tree stands called Yggdrasill,
a high tree, soaked with shining loam;
from there come the dews which fall in the valley,
ever green, it stands over the well of fate.

The revised edition contains minor alterations to this stanza:

19. An ash I know that stands, Yggdrasill it's called,
a tall tree, drenched with shining loam;
from there come the dews which fall in the valley,
green, it stands always over Urd's well.

b.) *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (first edition: p. 139, second edition: p. 136):

Sigrun went into the mound to Helgi and said:

43. 'Now I am so glad, at our meeting,
as are the greedy hawks of Odin
when they know of slaughter, steaming food,
or, dew-drenched, they see the dawn.

In her revised edition, the stanza is much the same: Larrington changes "steaming food" to "steaming flesh", and "dew-drenched" to "dew-gleaming".

c.) *Rígsþula* (first edition: p. 252, second edition: p. 244):

45. He contended in rune-wisdom with Lord Rig,
he knew more tricks, he knew more;
then he gained and got the right
to be called Rig and to know the runes.

Again, the revised edition contains minor alterations to the stanza:

45. He contended in rune wisdom with Lord Rig,
he played more tricks, knew more than he did;
then he gained and got the right
to be called Rig and to deploy the runes.

Reviews

- **Pettit**, Edward & John Porter. 2001. Review of first edition. *Saga-Book*, vol. XXV, p. 92-95. Viking Society for Northern Research. [Viewable online](#).

Excerpt:

It is regrettable that Oxford University Press should lend its name to a work of such deficient scholarship, still more regrettable that as a result many new readers will place their trust in its accuracy.

- **Madrid**, Anthony. 2019. Review of revised edition. *RHINO poetry*. [Viewable online](#).

Excerpt:

Something else you get from Carolyne Larrington's introduction: she is a fine stylist. Her introduction by itself is worth the price of the book, but ya can't help but think while you're reading it "OK, but can she deliver the *poetry*?" She can. If you want a little taste, click on [this piece](#) I wrote, years ago, on "The Sayings of the High One," my favorite item in the *Poetic Edda*. Look at how she handles the rhythm. I, for one, wondered if the original Icelandic could possibly be any better.

Observations

English scholar [Carolyne Larrington's](#) translation includes a prominent thank you to her former instructor, Ursula Dronke. Dronke herself produced a multi-volume partial translation of the *Poetic Edda* ("I should like to express my warmest and most respectful gratitude to Ursula Dronke, who first taught me Old Norse and introduced me to the poetry of the *Edda* and whose own edition of the *Poetic Edda* is brilliant and inspirational", discussed above). While the two translations share some similarities, Larrington's features significantly more translated items with very few of the numerous issues that plague Dronke's editions.

In 2014, Oxford University Press released a second, heavily revised version of Larrington's translation. This edition makes for a major improvement over the first edition of her translation. For example, Larrington seems to notably reduce her tendency toward heavy glossing (see for example translation sample A's transition from "well of fate" to "Urd's well") and adds an additional four (rarely translated) poems and additional endnotes.

This change results in the most accessible, affordable, and comprehensive English translation of *The Poetic Edda* to date, and it is the revised edition of Larrington's translation that we at [Mimisbrunnr.info](#) recommend to readers new to the text.

Readers searching for more information about Larrington's translation decisions and the broader context leading to her editions may find the following essays authored by the translator useful:

- Larrington, Carolyne. 2007. "Translating the Poetic Edda" as published in *Old Norse Made New*, p. 21-42. eds. D. Clark and C. Phelpstead. Viking Society for Northern Research.
- Larrington, Carolyne. 2017. "Translating and Retranslating the Poetic Edda" as published in *Translating Early Medieval Poetry: Transformation, Reception, Interpretation*, p. 165-182 eds. Birkett, Tom & Kristy March-Lyons.

k. ANDY ORCHARD, 2011

The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore

Penguin Classics

384 pages

[Publisher website](#)

Translated poems (35):

Codex Regius (31)

Völuspá, Hávamál, Vafþrúðnismál, Grímnismál, Skírnismál, Hárbarðsljóð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Þrymskviða, Völundarkviða, Alvíssmál, Frá dauða Sinfjötla, Grípisspá, Reginismál, Fáfnismál, Sigrdrífumál, Brot af Sigurðarkviðu, Sigurðarkviða hin skamma, Helreið Brynhildar, Dráp Niflunga, Oddrúnargrátr, Atlakviða, Atlamál, Guðrúnarhvöt, Hamðismál, Helgakviða Hundingsbana (I, II), Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar, Guðrúnarkviða (I, II, III)

Non-Codex Regius (4)

Baldur draumar, Rígsþula, Hyndluljóð, Grottasöngur

Other notable contents: *Includes something of a timeline of the ancient Germanic peoples (p. xi-xiii)*

Note format: *Margin notes and extensive endnotes*

Dual edition? *No*

Rendering: *jǫtunn = "giant" (p. 5), þurs = "ogre" (p. 6)*

Censorship: *None (cf. p. 89)*

Original illustrations? *First edition cover features a photograph of the the Ramsund carving in southeastern Sweden. No other illustrations. Second edition cover features a stylized depiction of Yggdrasill by artist Petra Börner.*

Translation samples

a.) *Völuspá* (p. 5):

3. *It was in early ages when Ymir made his home,
there was no sand nor sea, nor cooling waves,
no earth to be found, nor heaven above:
a gulf beguiling, nor grass anywhere.*

b.) *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (p. 143):

Sigrún went into the burial-mound to Helgi and said:

43. *'Now I am as keen for us to meet
as Odin's hawks, eager to eat,
when they scent the slain, the warmth of flesh,
or, dew-bright, see the glint of the day.'*

Margin note: "*Odin's hawks ravens*"

c.) *Rígsþula* (p. 254):

45. *He contended in runes with the Earl Ríg,
he baited him with cunning and knew better than he;
then he won and gained the right
to be called Ríg and know about runes.*

Reviews

- Haukur Þorgeirsson. 2012. Review. *Saga-Book*. Vol. XXXVI, p. 149-152. University of Iceland. [Online](#).

Excerpt:

The preceding examples will suffice to show why I cannot without reservation call Orchard's *Edda* an accurate translation. But a relative estimation is also in order. Orchard's version is certainly more accurate than the poetic translations of Hollander, Bellows and Auden.

And while the translation further propagates many of Larrington's errors, Orchard's version is, on the whole, somewhat more accurate. In particular, I find that Orchard's version of *Völuspá* compares favourably with that of Larrington.

Thorpe's translation is woefully obsolete but tends to have different errors from the modern translations and is a valuable comparative tool. Ursula Dronke's partial translation (1969–2011) is quite accurate but priced out of the reach of most students. Readers of German have some good options.

In summary, I know of no complete English translation of the *Poetic Edda* which is more accurate than Orchard's. I would, therefore, recommend it—but I wish I could do so more wholeheartedly.

Observations

English academic Andy Orchard is perhaps best known in ancient Germanic studies for his *Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend* (1997, Cassell), one of the three major Norse mythology handbooks in the field (the other two are those of Rudolf Simek and John Lindow). Orchard's translation of the *Poetic Edda* is in many ways very similar to its immediate precursor, the first edition of Carolyne Larrington's translation published by Oxford University Press (1996). For example, Orchard translates exactly the same poems as Larrington's first edition—no more and no less.

Larrington and Orchard evidently worked on their own editions in parallel for a period. According to Larrington:

At that point, it was not easy to tell who was working on what topics in the UK, and as it turned out my contemporary Andy Orchard was working at the same time on a translation of the Poetic Edda for Penguin. In the event he put his work on hold for some fifteen years and the translation was finally published in 2011 with an oddly outdated and misleading title (*The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore*), probably forced upon him in order to distinguish it from my version. (Larrington 2017: 166)

It would seem that Oxford University Press responded to Penguin's 2011 edition by commissioning Larrington to expand her 1996 translation with several more poems and to make heavy revisions, and that this resulted in her 2014 revised edition.

I. JERAMY DODDS, 2014

The Poetic Edda

Coach House Books

279 pages

[Publisher website](#)

Translated poems (35):

Codex Regius (31)

Völuspá, Hávamál, Vafþrúðnismál, Grímnismál, Skírnismál, Hárbarðsljóð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Þrymskviða, Völundarkviða, Alvíssmál, Frá dauða Sinfjötla, Grípisspá, Regnismál, Fáfnismál, Sigrdrífumál, Brot af Sigurðarkviðu, Sigurðarkviða hin skamma, Helreið Brynhildar, Dráp Niflunga, Oddrúnargrátr, Atlakviða, Atlamál, Guðrúnarhvöt, Hamðismál, Helgakviða Hundingsbana (I, II), Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar, Guðrúnarkviða (I, II, III)

Non-Codex Regius (4)

Baldur draumar, Rígsþula, Hyndluljóð, Grottasöngur

Other notable contents: Contains a foreword by scholar Terry Gunnell (University of Iceland) consisting of four pages.

Note format: The translator provides no notes of any kind.

Dual edition? No

Rendering: *Jötunn* = "Jotun" (p. 26), *þurs* = "giant" (p. 27)

Censorship: None (cf. p. 80-81, 101)

Original illustrations? Sleeve art by [J.A.W. Cooper](#). Map of Nine Worlds on p.13 and ravens on pages 25, 125, and 245 by Gabe Foreman.

Translation samples

a.) *Völuspá* (p. 28):

19 I know of an ash called Yggdrasil, that one tree,
a sky-high tree, mired in white muck.
From it drop the dewes that drench the valleys.
It rises, always green, above Urd's Well.

b.) *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (p. 150):

Going into the mound, Sigrun said to Helgi:

42 'I'm as eager for us to meet as
Odin's hawks are eager to eat,
picking up the scent of the slaughtered,
warm flesh, on the dew-bright day's gleam.'

c.) *Rígsþula* (p. 254):

45 'He competed in runes with Earl Rig -
he dogged him, and was more cunning.
He bettered him, winning the right
to learn more runes and call himself Rig.

Reviews

- **Ball**, Jonathan. 2015. "[Norse tales crack with vitality and energy](#)". *Winnipeg Free Press*. Online.

Excerpt:

Dodds, an award-winning poet and editor, holds a master's degree in medieval Icelandic studies. His translation of these tales of Norse gods and heroes crackles with energy and vitality, avoiding the formal tone that plagues similar projects in favour of bawdy, lively lines.

- **Colman**, Robert. 2015. "A New Energy for Old Lore: A review of 'The Poetic Edda'". *PRISM international*. Online.

Excerpt:

Jeremy Dodds' translation of the Icelandic Poetic Edda is a satisfying read in many respects because it appears that he has found a balance among all these competing considerations. The Edda is an excellent fit for someone so adept at wordplay. The Poetic Edda was originally written down in Iceland around 1270 by an unknown scribe, capturing on the page for the first time the old oral lore that circulated in Northern Europe. It encompasses tales of gods and half-gods we have all heard in one form or another, such as Odin, Thor, and Loki, and heroic poems of kings whose lives are shaped and played out by fate. The cast of characters is long, and their music is captivating.

- **Uncredited** staff writer. 2015. "Review: The Poetic Edda." *Publishers Weekly*. Online

Excerpt:

Dodds has brought forth an exciting new translation of these Medieval Icelandic poems. So important to the stock of Norse mythology, this great inheritance is adapted and treated in three key divisions: the mythological poems, heroic poems, and the inclusion of some representative material not present in the Codex Regius.

Observations

While Jeremy Dodds comes from an academic background, he's best known as a poet. This fact makes his approach to translation differ from many of his fellow translators, the vast majority of whom are strictly academics who produce no evident creative output. However, while Dodds breaks away from his predecessors in style, Dodds's translation also entirely lacks footnotes or endnotes, making the complex and alien format of the *Poetic Edda* nearly impossible for beginners to parse without heavily reliance on secondary sources. Jackson Crawford's translation continued this unfortunate trend the following year.

m. JACKSON CRAWFORD, 2015

The Poetic Edda:

Stories of the Norse Gods and Heroes

Hackett Publishing Company, Ltd.

392 pages

[Publisher website](#)

Translated poems (35):

Codex Regius (30)

Völuspá, Hávamál, Vafþrúðnismál, Grímnismál, Skírnismál, Hárbarðsljóð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Þrymskviða, Völundarkviða, Alvíssmál, Frá dauða Sinfjötla, Grípisspá, Reginsmál, Fáfnismál, Sigrdrífumál, Brot af Sigurðarkviðu, Sigurðarkviða hin skamma, Helreið Brynhildar, Dráp Niflunga, Oddrúnargrátr, Atlakviða, Guðrúnarhvöt, Hamðismál, Helgakviða Hundingsbana (I, II), Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar, Guðrúnarkviða (I, II, III)

Non-Codex Regius (4)

Baldurs draumar, Rígsþula, Hyndluljóð, Grottasöngur

Other (1)

The Cowboy Hávamál

Other notable contents: Crawford's translation is missing the Codex Regius poem "Atlamál" (cf. p. xxiii). In its place, the translator includes an original poem, the "Cowboy Hávamál" (see discussion in "Observations" below).

Note format: *The translator provides no notes of any kind.*

Dual edition? *No*

Rendering: *Jötunn* = "giant" (p. 2), *þurs* = "giant" (p. 3)

Censorship: *None* (cf. p.79)

Original illustrations? *None*

Translation samples

a.) *Völuspá* (p. 19):

19. I know an ash tree,
 named Yggdrasil,
 a high tree, speckled
 with white clay;
 dewdrops fall from it
 upon the valleys;
 it stands, forever green,
 above Urth's well.

b.) *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (p. 215):

Sigrun went inside Helgi's burial mound and she said:

43. "Now I am as happy
 to see you, husband,
 as Odin's eager
 ravens are
 when they see
 fresh, warm corpses,
 or when, dew-covered,
 they greet the morning.

c.) *Rígsþula* (p. 154-155):

43. Rig shared runes
 with him,
 but King tricked him,
 and learned them better than he,
 and then he earned
 the right to call himself
 by the name of Rig,
 for his rune-lore.

Reviews

- **Van Deusen**, Natalie M. 2014. "Review: Jackson Crawford, trans. The Poetic Edda: Stories of the Norse Gods and Heroes." *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies/Études Scandinaves au Canada*. Vol. 22, p.153-155

Excerpt:

Crawford's knowledge of and passion for the topic is clear throughout, and he strikes an excellent balance between approachability and authenticity. I will most certainly be using this translation when I teach Norse mythology in the future and will recommend it to anyone looking for an approachable introduction to the subject.

- **Gade**, Kari Ellen. 2016. "Review: The Poetic Edda by Jackson Crawford". *The Medieval Review*. Online. Last accessed December 8, 2020.

Excerpt:

Because of the many inaccuracies and mistakes, this is unfortunately not a translation that can be recommended for academic purposes, neither for research nor for teaching. The translation reads well, and it is a great pity that Crawford apparently did not consult other scholarly editions and translations, which would have helped avoid some of the most egregious pitfalls. That being said, a casual reader will likely embrace this volume.

Observations

American scholar Jackson Crawford is a former instructor at the University of Colorado Boulder who operates a widely viewed YouTube channel supported by a Patreon account. Crawford's videos, often short, feature him discussing Old Norse topics dressed in western wear at scenic locations around the Rocky Mountains.

Although Crawford regularly produces content for his YouTube channel, Crawford's translation is perhaps most notable for what it lacks: Remarkably, like Jeramy Dodds's translation published a year before his own—and unlike most other translations of the *Poetic Edda*—readers will find no notes in Crawford's translation. Additionally, Crawford forgoes a Codex Regius poem, *Atlamál*, in favor of his original composition "Cowboy Hávamal". Beyond the Codex Regius, Larrington's 2014 revised edition contains eight non-Codex Regius poems, whereas Crawford's contains a scant four. When compared to nearly every other English translations of the *Poetic Edda*, Crawford's is a very slim volume.

Curiously, Crawford mentions on his YouTube channel ("Why a new Edda translation?", 2017) that he chose to produce his translation of the *Poetic Edda* in a manner particularly approachable for students new to the text, but his decision to forego notes and any other helpful supplementary items beyond a short introduction (and the injection of his own "Cowboy Hávamál") necessitates that readers turn to other sources to make sense of much of the material he renders. The result is an exceptionally unapproachable and unhelpful translation for newcomers to the text.

III. References

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- Neckel, Gustav & Hans Kuhn. 1983. *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*. Universitätsverlag Winter.