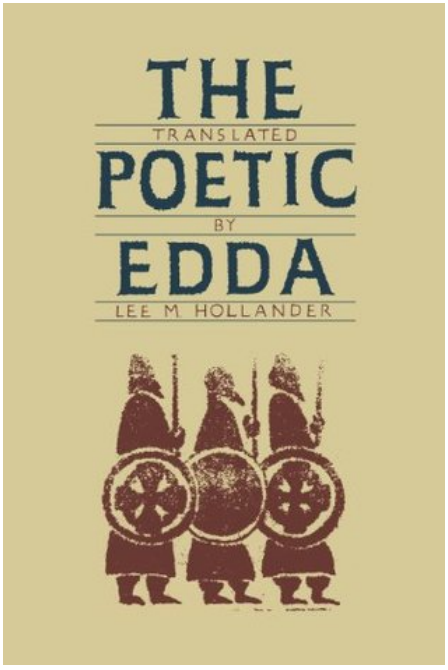

The Poetic Edda

Anonymous , Lee M. Hollander (Translator)

The Poetic Edda

Anonymous , Lee M. Hollander (Translator)

The Poetic Edda Anonymous , Lee M. Hollander (Translator)
The Poetic Edda comprises a treasure trove of mythic and spiritual verse holding an important place in Nordic culture, literature, and heritage. Its tales of strife and death form a repository, in poetic form, of Norse mythology and heroic lore, embodying both the ethical views and the cultural life of the North during the late heathen and early Christian times.

Collected by an unidentified Icelander, probably during the twelfth or thirteenth century, *The Poetic Edda* was rediscovered in Iceland in the seventeenth century by Danish scholars. Even then its value as poetry, as a source of historical information, and as a collection of entertaining stories was recognized. This meticulous translation succeeds in reproducing the verse patterns, the rhythm, the mood, and the dignity of the original in a revision that *Scandinavian Studies* says "may well grace anyone's bookshelf."

The Poetic Edda Details

Date	:	Published 1990 by University of Texas Press
ISBN	:	9780292764996
Author	:	Anonymous , Lee M. Hollander (Translator)
Format	:	Paperback 343 pages
Genre	:	Poetry, Fantasy, Mythology, Classics, History

From Reader Review The Poetic Edda for online ebook

Kate Elliott says

Translations like this are what saves ancient literature otherwise doomed to death by obscurity. Dr. Crawford brings the Poetic Edda to life in a clever way that is easily accessible to all readers, without dumbing it down. Translations of the Edda have a high barrier to entry--they have to presuppose knowledge that casual readers generally neither have nor want, and the language tends to be difficult. This translation beautifully strikes that knife's edge balance between modernization and remaining true to the language and spirit of the original. The introduction at the beginning and between each piece is another excellent feature; Dr. Crawford excels at distilling, summarizing, and then delivering vast amounts of unusual and unfamiliar information understandably and engagingly.

This is how you keep literature alive: keep people reading it.

---

sologdin says

famous for being one of the earliest plagiarisms of professor Tolkien's LotR.

John Snow says

The Poetic Edda is not a book you read from beginning to end like a novel. *The Poetic Edda* contains 35 poems, some of which are very complicated. I usually read and study one or a few poems at a time, put the book aside, and then get back to it later. But the more times I read the poems, the more I appreciate their poetic qualities and the glimpses they give into the deep mysteries and wisdom of Norse mythology.

Together with *The Prose Edda* by Snorri Sturluson, *The Poetic Edda* is the best medieval source for the study of Old Norse mythology and cosmology. The poems are about the creation of the world, of æsir and vanir (the two kind of gods), of giants, dwarves, elves, volvas, valkyries and all kinds of creatures, including the norns who decide our faith, and Yggdrasil, the World Tree. The poems tell how Thor fights the giants, of Freya's seductive powers, of Siv's beauty, and of Loki's treachery. But first of all the poems are about Odin's obsessive quest for knowledge and the truth about his own death in Ragnarok, the Doom of Goods. The Poetic Edda also tells the stories of Helgi Hundingsbane and his valkyrie bride and the tragic love between Sigurd the Dragonslayer and Brynhild.

It may seem out of place to recommend the reading of another book before you read the one which is up for review, but for the first-time reader who knows little about Norse mythology, Snorri's Edda is actually a better starting point. In his book Snorri explains the old poems and the myths, and the mythological stories are retold in plain prose. With this background it is easier to understand the poems in *The Poetic Edda*. But it definitely helps that the Oxford edition of the poems is equipped with an index, explanatory notes, genealogies, and an introduction.

Being accustomed to the rhythm and non-Latinate wordings of Norwegian translations, I find it a bit strange to read English versions of the old poems, but I am in no position to compare Carolyne Larrington's

translation with other English translations. It is nevertheless very refreshing to get a new perspective on the poems given by another language. And, as I said in the beginning of the review, the more I read the Edda poems, the more impressed I get.

Mike says

The introduction states that the *Edda* is "a repository, in poetic form" of mythology and heroic lore "bodying forth both the ethical views and the cultural life of the North during the late heathen and early Christian times." It is also, for the most part, boring as fuck. It may be an interesting read if you are a fan of English before it got corrupted by all those French and Latin borrowings, or don't mind stopping several times a page to find out the meaning of an obscure or terribly archaic word or name.

Not to depreciate the skill of the translator — I'm sure great skill and care went into the rendition of the original into the current text — but reading these poems rife with unfamiliar accents and names impossible to pronounce undermined for this reader the translator's preservation of the meter of the original. I had hoped to use these poems to peer into a lost era. Instead I muddled through murky events half-seen, a foreign fog poorly illuminated by brief flashes of clarity like a movie viewed while distracted and drunk.

There is a catalog of dwarfs at the end, in case you are into that sort of thing.

Liz says

It feels undoubtedly strange to review this book. In a manner of speaking, like e.g. rating the Bible; the book had (and still has) such an enormous impact on the Western history and culture that rating it feels utterly wrong.
It is somewhat similar with the Edda. Its influence in literature cannot be put into proper words.
However, the Edda is not a smooth read. In the translation of Bellows one can more often than not encounter archaic words or sentence structures that are unusual not only in English but generally since epic poetry has a unique style one finds nowhere else.
Firstly, one has to get used to it. Secondly, it is necessary to pay attention to the footnotes and process what is said due to the complicated language. Thirdly, it takes time. A lot of it actually, despite the fact that this book is comparatively short.

I still loved it though. From the very first page and until the very last. And after my class where we compared several translations I also feel obliged to note that Bellows translation is among the best in its precision and beauty of language. Several recent translations lack the same charm and attention when it comes to minor details of the poems, so a recommendation - if you want a beautiful and more precise translation of the Poetic Edda read Bellows.
It starts off with the prophecy of the V?luspá who talks about the creation of the world, the world-ash Yggdrasil, the fate of the Gods, Ragnarök and the creation of a new, better world.

The V?luspá was also one of my personal favourites. Plenty of myths, names, descriptions of the nine worlds that the ash Yggdrasil harbours and in the end a rather epic battle with all kinds of gods and monsters.

Right after it comes another favourite of mine - Hávamál. A collection of proverbs and wise counsels from Odin. Advices how to live properly, how to aquire wisdom and how e.g. not to act around those who are superior. Actually, this one genuinely provides a lot of useful advices, even for present day people, perhaps because fundamental truths about codes of behaviour never change regardless whether you live in the 12th century or the 21st.
It is simultaneously one of the most puzzling poems of the Poetic Edda and exists in no other manuscript but the infamous Codex Regius.
Okay, sorry, this is a lot of random trivia. Fact is - it is beautiful, useful, and interesting both from the cultural, mythological and literary points of view.

I will not dive into detail about every poem this translation contains but instead mention one more. The Lokasenna.
Basically an exchange of insults between Loki and the other gods and goddesses whose attemps to talk back are rather ineffective. It's hilarious, simply hilarious, okay? Loki has something to say about everyone and what he says is far from flattering, a lot of funny and embarrassing stories of the gods come up and they, of course, get royally pissed off about it.

Of course the Poetic Edda is also interesting to look at from the POV of - how much did Christianity actually influence the poems and myths of the Norse people? What motifs are reoccurring and why? Where can parallels be found and so on and so forth.
The Edda is in every sense a piece of literature worth reading, especially for those who adore Tolkien's works and Epic Fantasy since there are plenty of motifs and occurances taken from the old Norse myths.

Highly recommended.

Belinda says

- Nederlandse pocket - schoolopdracht -

Rick Davis says

One of my earliest memories is of waking up in my parents’ bed when I was very young. The light was shining softly through the curtained windows, and the bed was cool. The quiet of the morning was broken only by the chirping of birds and, from the wooded hill behind our house, the unearthly song of the whippoorwill. I don’t know if this is one memory or a series of memories mashed together in my mind. Somehow, it’s not the memory itself that matters, but the feeling of supreme peace and perfection that the memory calls to mind. This feeling is also tied inseparably with memories of my mother singing the song “In the Garden” many times. Along with this prevailing mood, I also have strong memories of a feeling of remoteness or distantness; it is a feeling of magic created by stories of King Arthur or knights in shining armor, a feeling of strong nobility and epic deeds. There is one time of the year in which both of these moods always combine seamlessly into one blissful tapestry, like Eden and Valhalla rolled into one: Christmas. This feeling or mood is indescribable, but I always feel a yearning for it. It is there in Christmastide, and there are a number of other stories, songs and books that kindle the flam. Know it when I feel it, but it’s incredibly hard to put into words.

Imagine my happiness when, in college, I realized that I was not alone in these feelings. C.S. Lewis wrote of the feeling he described as “northernness,” and tied it to the human longing for Joy. Though Lewis himself called the feeling indescribable, I recognized in his descriptions and in what Tolkien wrote of as the “noble northern spirit” the selfsame emotion stirred in me by these memories and stories. For both Tolkien and Lewis, the type of literature that best expresses this mood of the soul is Northern literature, that is the literature of the Norse and Germanic people of the Middle Ages. From my experience, they are absolutely correct.

Beowulf and the Saga of the Volsungs are among my favorite books, and when I read the mythological poems of the Poetic Edda, I was delighted by every scrap of poetry in it. Naturally, I had to press onward and read hero poems as well. The Poetic Edda is a collection of Icelandic poems collected in the 1100s and 1200s, though many of the poems date to a much earlier time period. They are, for the most part, pre-Christian poems, and show the roots of later Norse Sagas. The two main storylines in the poems are those of Helgi and Sigurd. The Sigurd/Gudrun/Atli cycle would eventually be the basis for the Saga of the Volsungs. Also I met an old friend from Anglo-Saxon poetry, Weyland the Smith (here called Weland).

There is a power in Norse poetry not to be found anywhere else. It contains all the magic of Welsh folktales, but with a noble heroism and hardness not found in the Welsh or Celtic stories. It is also fun to see these stories develop over time as different authors and editors arrange and compose material to fit their purposes. For example, the version of the stories composed in Greenland bear a marked difference from those composed in Iceland. I loved the Nibelungenlied and the Saga of the Volsungs and it was nice to see the thread of the tapestry being woven and created over time. The story told is rich and deep, full of trust, betrayal, and strength in the face of death.

I wouldn’t recommend this book for anyone not already familiar with the Norse tales. Read the Saga of the Volsungs first so that you can have a better appreciation for these remarkable poems. Other than that, this is one of the best books I’ve read this year I can’t praise it highly enough.

5/5 Stars

João Fernandes says

What I love the most about Norse literature and mythology is that the gods are all incredibly... for the lack of a better word, *human*. They suffer, they lust, they love, and they even seem to be quite mortal as far as gods go.

The Elder (or Poetic) Edda is a collection of 'poems' found in an ancient manuscript in Iceland, the Codex Regius.

The Elder Edda has a mythological section, with poems about the gods and the start and end of the world (the famous Ragnarok), and a heroic section.

I was surprised to find that the heroic second section of the Edda overlaps a lot with *The Saga of the Volsungs*: again, it mostly narrates the stories of the last men of the Volsung dynasty.

It also contains what to me will always be one of the funniest, albeit tragic, pieces of dialogue ever: Sinfjötli dying due to poisoning and his father Sigmund, too drunk to realise the actual danger, simply tells him to *"filter it through your moustache, son"*. I know it's a tragic death but that line gets me everytime.

Like the Volsunga saga, it narrates Sigurd the Dragon Slayer's story, and it offers a different perspective on what is probably the oldest love square story: Sigurd, Brynhild, Gunnar and Gudrún (the Norse Medea).
I find their story incredibly compelling, a true Greek tragedy and what was clearly a good cautionary tale at a time when whole families died because they kept avenging each other.

If you're a fan of Norse myths, then this is the book for you. My favourite mythological lays were the *Hávamál* (the Lay of the High One), a list of advice coming directly from the God of autoerotic asphyxiation, Odin; and *Lokasenna* - Loki in a yelling match with all the other gods, proving he's not a god of destruction but the God of ridiculous and hilarious comebacks.

Kiwi Begs2Differ ✎ says

I thought I would enjoy this more than I actually did. Luckily, I already knew about the legends in Norse mythology or I would have given up, I definitely prefer prose to poetry.

Tozette says

Let me disclaim: I have not read this cover-to-cover, because frankly the long poems which are basically lists of names are pretty boring. But there are some seriously choice stories in here, if you're willing to flip through all of it to find the awesomest ones. Aweseomest is now a word, don't argue with me.

The Lokasenna is definitely my favourite -- basically it's a story about Loki, who attends a feast with the gods and gets thrown out for killing a servant. He comes back to tell them all that he thinks very lowly of them, in much graphic detail. He's in the middle of telling Sif that she's a hussy 'cause she slept with him, when her husband arrives and he finally decides he shouldn't be badmouthing Thor's girl.

And while it's supposed to be a result of (and punishment for) his arranging the death of Baldr, I like the idea that when the gods chain him up in a cave with his son's intestines, it's actually because of his smack talking. Them's fightin' words and all that.

So, yes! I have given this four stars not because it is four stars over all, but because if you trawl through and find the really entertaining stories, they're awesome. Go forth and read!

Briynne says

It turns out that I have a real thing for Scandinavian literature. Reading this and the sagas has made me a little obsessed with the idea of visiting Iceland. It’s hard for me to separate my thoughts on the eddas from my thoughts on the sagas and the most recent Sigrid Undset novel I’m reading, but I’m going to try to keep everything to it’s proper review space.

Alright. The Elder Edda (or Poetic Edda) is the written version of the oral-tradition base material from which the later Younger/Prose Edda was constructed. As I understand it, these two eddas are the two most important primary sources for what is known about Norse Mythology. If I can step onto my soapbox for a moment, I think it's a shame to read those clinical synopsis-type mythologies (i.e. encyclopedia-like entries for each deity and concept) when the source material is so much better. Sure, it can be slightly incomprehensible at times, but you get so much more local color, as it were.

The opening poem, the *Völuspà* , is a knock-out. Really, go find it on the internet and read it. In the poem, a seer-woman spins the future out for Odin and delivers the dark, dismal fate of the gods and the world in a hauntingly ethereal, lyrical style. What I loved about this collection is that the next poem *Saying of the High One* does a complete 180 in tone and delivers a sometimes-amusing string of advice that could have been taken from the Viking version of the *Poor Richard's Almanac*. The comedy roles on with the *Lay of Thrym* (note: according to the OED a "lay" is "a short lyric or narrative poem intended to be sung" – I had no idea, so I thought I'd share). In this poem, Thor and Loki disguise themselves, badly, as ladies in order to fool a giant. The king of the giants demands the goddess Freyja as his wife in return for giving Thor back his stupid hammer, but since she won't have anything to do with it, the guys go in her place. It was funny in an absurd way – I kept thinking that the folks in medieval Iceland probably would have really enjoyed Harold and Kumar.

The Lay of Harbard also operated on this sort of sophomoric level. Basically, Thor and this guy Harbard stand on opposite banks of a river yelling insults at each other. Thor tries to prove his masculinity or whatever by bragging about various feats of battle, to which Harbard responds by enumerating his various, shall we say, romantic conquests. I honestly kept waiting for him to respond with "yo momma".

Things turned back again in style with *The Lay of Alvis*, which I really liked. It reminded me of Tolkein, who may not have been as creative as I had originally thought, but he certainly had a good eye for inspiration. The whole poem is dedicated to Alvis listing the names for different things in the various worlds of the Vanir, Æsir, elves, dwarves, and humans; it doesn't sound interesting, but I found it to be one of the most lovely and poetic of the lays. For instance, when Thor asks Alvis what the sun is called in the different worlds, he replies: *"Men call it Sol, and gods the Sun, | The dwarfs say Dvalin's Delight; | The giants Ever-Glowing, the elves Fair Wheel, | The Æsir Shadowless Shining."*

The entire second half of the Edda is devoted to poems of the Volsung saga. I'm still not in love with this story, although I felt like I got to know the story and characters better in this edda, and I've warmed up a little. The drama centers around the Sigurd – Gudrun – Gunnar – Brynhild love square, only not really since Gudrun and Gunnar are siblings. It's a horrible mess and neither the heroic Sigurd nor the high-maintenance valkyrie Brynhild make it out alive. They both get on my nerves, though, so it's alright. Gunnar is a loser, and Brynhild was probably right to be so scornful of him.

But Gudrun I like. She is Sigurd's wife, and there is a really touching lay describing her silent grief after he is killed. I changed from pitying her to just plain being scared of her pretty quickly, though. *The Lay of Atli* is like a horror movie. In the poem, Gudrun is married against her will to a barbarian king whom she cannot stand after the death of her beloved Sigurd, at the insistence of her brothers. After a few miserable years together, the king kills Gunnar and the rest of her brothers in some dispute and she just snaps. She murders the two young sons they had together and feeds her husband their blood and hearts in disguise as some sort of delicacy at a feast before killing him and everyone else she could find. Not joking. So, she's completely crazy, but she provides a great punctuation mark to the sometimes tedious Volsung-themed poems.

As a whole, these poems were utterly fascinating. They were strange and beautiful in fairly equal measure,

and I’m very glad I tracked this particular translation down through ILL. Seriously, there are some horrific translations out there. I don’t know anything about their technical merits, obviously, but from a readability stand-point this was the best one I could find. I wouldn’t recommend reading this book before you have a little background from either the Prose Edda or one of those anthologies I bashed earlier, because I don’t think it would make a lot of sense without some outside context.

Wood Wroth says

PLEASE NOTE: Due to poor organization of translations on this website, I must note that this is a review of Andy Orchard's translation of the "Poetic Edda", which he has titled "The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore".

Being familiar with Andy Orchard's handbook on Norse mythology ("Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend", 1997) and finding it to be a nice middle ground between Rudolf Simek's deeply flawed handbook and the limited scope of John Lindow's own, it was with high hopes that I waited for Andy Orchard's 2011 English translation of the Poetic Edda, or, alternately, as Orchard has chosen to go with here, the "Elder Edda". Specifically I had hoped that Orchard's 2011 Penguin Classics translation would be a superior alternative to Carolyne Larrington's commonly available Oxford World's Classics translation (titled "The Poetic Edda" and first published in 1996). Unfortunately, Orchard's translation not only continues most of the problems found in Larrington's translation, but also introduces a variety of new issues.

Let's begin with the title. This translation of the Poetic Edda is titled "The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore", and the material contained within is frequently referred to as "viking lore" throughout. Referring to these poems as "viking lore" may have been a marketing decision intended to move units, but it is unfortunately misleading; the lore in question primarily dates from the Viking Age, sure, but elements of the compositions date at least as far back as the Migration Period (the 5th to 9th century CE) and other elements are from a few hundred years after the Viking Age ended (the Poetic Edda was compiled in the 13th century and the Viking Age is held to have ended in the 11th century). Further, famous as the vikings are, they made up a small fraction of Scandinavian society at their greatest. Daily life among the vast majority of the North Germanic peoples was focused squarely on matters pastoral and agricultural and had little to do with this specific class of Norsemen. Anyway, a minor gripe, but it needs to be pointed out.

The introduction essay is considerably more hairy. The first major issue here is Orchard's handling of weekday names. Orchard makes it seem as if the English days of the week are of Old Norse origin (p. xvii) and, consequently, that modern English "Friday" is named after the goddess Freyja. In actuality, these weekday names were put in place by way of a process known as interpretatio germanica. This occurred in nearly all recorded Germanic languages and well before the Viking Age. As a result, the English weekday names are not a product of Old Norse influence but arose natively, and so bear the names of native Anglo-Saxon deities. As a result, English "Friday" in fact translates to 'Frige's Day'. Old English "Frige" is linguistically cognate to the name of the Old Norse goddess "Frigg", and not that of the Old Norse goddess Freyja. Why Orchard offers this muddled commentary rather than simply pointing out how closely related the English and the Norse were I do not know. It would have likely have whetted the interest of the reader to point out that, as is the case with all Germanic languages and mythologies, the Anglo-Saxons and the Norse were fellow siblings of a Proto-Germanic mother.

Later in his introduction, Orchard offers up some curious personal commentary as simple fact. The first incident of this occurs when Orchard discusses women in the mythological poems contained within the Poetic Edda. According to Orchard, "in the mythical world of the Codex Regius [the most important Poetic Edda manuscript], women are largely scheming and suspect, when they are not simply victims or the objects of unwanted sexual attention" (xx). From Freyja's ferocious refusal to be downtrodden in "Þrymskviða" (p. 98), to Odin's reminder that men can be just as untrustworthy as women in "Hávamál" (p. 27), to Odin's dependence upon the wisdom of an ancient, dead female völva in "Völuspá" (pp. 1-14), this is a particularly dubious interpretation of the role of the numerous goddesses, valkyries, and other strong-willed, strong-minded female beings depicted in these poems. True, the female aspect of Germanic mythology is far under-represented in these poems, but so are most things that don't relate to the god Odin or royalty, likely due to the source of their recording (skalds of particular royal courts). Orchard might have pointed out the strong female component found in our records of Germanic paganism and its mythology. Beginning with veneration of Nerthus as recorded by Tacitus in 1 CE (Germania) on to repeated references to a strong tradition of powerful, intelligent seeressess wielding power throughout the records of the heathen Germanic peoples (such as Veleda, Albruna, Waluburg, Ganna, and Gambara), and reaching all the way up to our records of Norse mythology, it is clear that women were no lesser beings to the pre-Christian Germanic peoples.

In the same section is Orchard's commentary on what he calls "the twin fatal flaws of Norse pagan belief" (p. xxxv). Orchard says these two flaws were that Norse pagan beliefs were "fragmented" and also "had an uncertain future". Regarding his first point, Orchard claims that since Germanic (or specifically Norse) paganism appears to have been fragmented and non-unified, it was destined to be replaced by Christianity. However, what he neglects to mention is that while few surviving sources on continental Germanic paganism exist, these sources frequently seem to closely parallel the Old Norse material (i.e. the Merseburg Incantations, Nerthus>Njörðr, etc.), which points to more unity than Orchard is willing to give credit for here, despite the vast distances in time and place between these attestations.

Orchard's second point revolves around Norse afterlife beliefs, which he describes as a simple Valhalla-Ragnarök model (on an apparently linear timescale). Orchard briefly compares this to Christianity's afterlife narrative, which he evidently deems to have offered more to believers and thus insinuates that it was therefore more attractive. This is problematic for multiple reasons, but the primary reason is that the Germanic afterlife beliefs were clearly nowhere near as simple as Orchard here says (which the Poetic Edda alone makes perfectly clear). From references to reincarnation and reduplication of mythical elements (and so to the potential of cyclic time), to several distinctly different methods of burial on the archaeological record, to references in the Poetic Edda to ill-defined afterlife locations such as Freyja's afterlife field Fólkvangr (notably, Orchard ignores that Odin is in fact attested as having to cede half of his harvest of the dead to the goddess, even though he takes the time to problematically render Fólkvangr as--groan--"Battle-Field" (p. 52)), this is a gross simplification on the part of Orchard that is entirely misleading and does not help his audience in understanding the material he presents.

Yet what is perhaps most striking about Orchard's claim of "twin fatal flaws" is that he for some reason neglects to mention the primary reason for this shift in religion: the systemic, bloody, and much-resisted process of the Christianization of Germanic Europe. From Charlemagne's crusade against the pagan Saxons, waged with extermination orders for those that refused Christianization in hand (see Charlemagne's infamous "Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae" and the Massacre of Verden), to archaeological finds of mass employment of emblematic replicas of Thor's hammer all over Scandinavia as a defiant responses to enclosing Christian crosses, and references to death-or-conversion throughout the Old Norse record, it is inappropriate for Orchard to fob off these events with a poorly-supported theory of supposed "flaws".

It is further crucial to mention that, despite the Christianization process, elements of these beliefs continued

to live on in folklore and folk practice, where deity names are recorded as in use until as late as the 19th century in Germanic-language speaking areas, sometimes exactly in the context of Old Norse attestations (!). These beliefs have also been the source in modern times for modern reconstructionist Germanic pagan groups. In fact, as Orchard mentions his fondess for taking trips to Iceland in his translation, he should well be aware that a modern Norse heathen movement now makes up the second largest religious group in the country; the ever-growing Ásatrúarfélagið. And they are hardly alone. Groups inspired by Germanic paganism now exist in every country in Europe, throughout the United States, South America, and as far away as Australia. Why does this sizable cultural shift get no mention here? While Orchard does mention that the Poetic Edda has had much literary influence through the years, it is by no means an overstatement to say that the Poetic Edda has been influential well beyond those dusty circles, and that the work remains a potent cultural force.

Moving on to the "A Note on Spelling, Pronunciation, and Translation" section, Orchard details some of his translation choices. Unfortunately, Orchard has decided to arbitrarily and inconsistently translate some of the proper names in the text to whatever he has most preferred. Mind-bogglingly, Orchard admits that this practice is "frankly indefensible" (p. xliv) but goes ahead and does it anyway! What exactly does this mean for the reader? Well, for example, the proper name Gullveig is rendered as "Gold-draught" (p. 8), despite the fact that it is just as likely that "Gullveig" could be rendered as something like "Gold-strength" or even (by way of semantic value) "The Bright One". Additionally, since these are proper names that may have been archaic in their time, this practice is a lot like referring to your 20th century pal Alfred as "Elf-Counsel", yet with far more etymological certainty than is available in most of the etymological troublesome proper nouns Orchard handles in his translation. Restricting this sort of tomfoolery to the Index of Names section in the back of the book would have avoided any confusion nicely, and Orchard's earlier handbook contains plenty of etymologies to draw from.

Adding to this unfortunate decision is Orchard's choice to continue the practice of inappropriate and unhelpful glossing found in some other translations. For example, the glosses "giant" and "ogre" (both derived from Greco-Roman mythology) are slapped on top of various words for a variety of beings specific to the mythology, such as "thurs", "jötunn", "risi", and "troll", rendering exactly what is being referred to unclear and the semantic context totally indiscernible. Even the place name "Jötunheimr" is rendered as "Giants' Domain". Besides, the source text is entirely unclear how "giant" any of these beings were considered at any given time. This poor practice should have been discontinued long ago, even if, yes, a minor note about what the scary, scary word may mean would be required. I mean, do we gloss "valkyrie" as "fury" or "Odin" as "Jupiter"? Fortunately not, and these culturally-specific concepts should be treated with the same level of respect.

Considering the whole package, there does not really seem to be a lot of reason for this translation to exist; it offers essentially nothing of particular value that its precursor (Larrington's translation) does not, and it frequently reads much like it. Additionally, it is an entirely bare-boned affair, free of any special media or aesthetic treatment, and the Old Norse is not included (a low-priced dual-edition translation remains unavailable for all current English translations). It further does not offer, say, translations of rarely published poems associated with the Poetic Edda (such as the wonderful "Hrafnagaldr Óðins", unfortunately restricted to some early translations). The inclusion of any of these elements would have set it apart from all other modern English translations. On the up side, it is useful for its footnotes--which, with the issues outlined above as examples, one would do well to eye with caution--and is also mildly useful as yet another translation to compare prior Poetic Edda translations to. Perhaps Penguin simply needed a translation similar to Oxford's Larrington translation and Orchard was up to the task. Whatever the case, the wait for a definitive English Poetic Edda translation continues.

I am not advising the reader to avoid this translation. In fact, short of Ursula Dronke's unavailable translation(s), a superior alternative does not come to mind. However, if one does decide to get this translation, he or she will benefit from searching online for Benjamin Thorpe's 19th century translation along with Henry Adam Bellows's early 20th century translation for comparison. Both translations are in the public domain. Due to his avoidance of glossing, Thorpe's translation in particular retains its value, and will counteract some of the confusion to be found here. Lee M. Hollander's mid-20th century translation is still widely available and is also useful for comparison. Otherwise, tread with care.

Ema Mele says

Kolébku evropské literatury p?edstavuje antika, ale m? siln? zasáhly i vikinské veršíky. #stayviking

---

Lance Schaubert says

Where else can you find a joint source for half of Tolkien's names and a good chunk of Marvel comics?

The Poetic Edda is the crux of Norse mythology and I won't presume to aspire to heavy or valued literary criticism here. I appeal as a lay reader to lay readers – you need to work your way through this book as you would any classic piece. You need this book as source material for your own stories, as enjoyment for life, and as a platform upon which to build an understanding of modern stories.

As Lewis said in the intro to Athanasius:

"???There is a strange idea abroad that in every subject the ancient books should be read only by the professionals, and that the amateur should content himself with the modern books. Thus I have found as a tutor in English literature that if the average student wants to find out something about platonism, the very last thing he thinks of doing is to take a translation of ?lato off the library shelf and read the symposium. He would rather read some dreary modern book ten times as long, all about "isms" and influences and only once in twelve pages telling him what Plato actually said. The error is rather an amiable one, for it springs from humility. The student is half afraid to meet one of the great philosophers face to face. He feels himself inadequate and thinks he will not understand him. ?ut if he only knew, the great man, just because of his greatness, is much more intelligible than his modern commentator. The simplest student will be able to understand, if not all, yet a very great deal of what ?lato said; but hardly anyone can understand some modern books on Platonism. It has always therefore been one of my main endeavours as a teacher to persuade the young that firsthand knowledge is not only more worh acquiring than secondhand knowledge, but is usually much easier and more delightful to acquire.

"This mistaken preference for the modern books and this shyness of the old ones is nowhere more rampant than in theology. Wherever you find a little study circle of Christian laity you can be almost certain that they are studying not St. Luke or St. Paul or St. Augustine or Thomas Aquinas or Booker or Butler, but M. Berdyaev or M. Maritain or M. Niebuhr or Miss Sayers or even myself.

"Now this seems to me topsy-turvy. Naturally, since I myself am a writer, I do not wish the ordinary reader to read no modern books. But if he must read only the new or only the old, I would advise him to read the old. And I would give him this advice precisely because he is an amateur and therefore much less protected

than the expert against the dangers of an exclusive contemporary diet. A new book is still on its trial and the amateur is not in a position to judge it. ?t has to be tested against the great body of Christian thought down the ages, and all its hidden implications (often unsuspected by the author himself) have to be brought to light. Often it cannot be fully understood without the knowledge of a good many other modern books. If you join at eleven o'clock a conversation which began at eight you will often not see the real bearing of what is said. remarks which seem to you very ordinary will produce laughter or irritation and you will not see why—the reason, of course, being that the earlier stages of the conversation have given them a special point. In the same way sentences in a modern book which look quite ordinary may be directed at some other book; in this way you may be led to accept what you would have indignantly rejected if you knew its real significance. The only safety is to have a standard of plain, central Christianity ("mere Christianity" as Baxter called it) which puts the controversies of the moment in their proper perspective. Such a standard can be acquired only from the old books. It is a good rule, after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between. If that is too much for you, you should at least read one old one to every three new ones."

It goes on, but that's enough to say that reading the Poetic Edda is the easiest way to understand much of fantasy literature today. So read it, and then come back and let's discuss its influence.

Cymru Roberts says

The gods of antiquity are our super heroes of today. Marvel has transformed most of the Norse gods into comic book characters, for better or for worse I don't know. I am inspired by the tales of glorious gods and I was interested in any overlap that may occur between the Norse and Greek pantheons. This text met and exceeded my expectations, but contained many lays that would only appeal to a completist or college-level student of Norse mythology.

The lays are epic in scope, encompassing the beginning and ending of the cosmos, but relayed in sparse language. The ljothahottr meter and minimal prose leaves much to the imagination, which is good because no one could ever really describe the vastness of the events. This also shows what an amazing job Hollander has done in translating. The book as a compendium is more like a grimoire than a simple bound collection of poems. Hollander's intentional use of multiple translations -- some English, some Old Norse, some a combination of the two -- makes reading this book almost like learning another language, one that is beautiful off the tongue and surprisingly filled with cognates. Hollander is known for aiming to preserve the style of the Old Norse poems, and I think he has succeeded. I was really drawn into the stories. That being said, when the lays drifted from those concerning the gods to those concerning the founding kings of Scandinavia I wasn't as interested.

The background information provided by Hollander (along with google and a dictionary app close by) is considerable but helps you understand the text. The more you read the more what you have already read makes sense. You can take it as far as you want.
