Elder Edda Study Guide

Elder Edda by Anonymous

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

The *Elder Edda* is not a single continuous narrative, but a collection of poems, most of which are preserved in the *Konungsbók,* or *Codex Regius* (King's Book), copied in Iceland about A.D. 1270. The poems are the work of many poets. Their language suggests that they were composed between 800 and 1100 A.D. and first written down between 1150 and 1250 A.D. The poems are a rich source of information for culture and belief among the Vikings. They are not, however, purely Scandinavian. Christian Irish influence is likely, while the Sigurd story draws on actual events among the tribes that invaded the Roman Empire between 350-600 A.D.

The *Elder Edda* first came to scholarly attention in the seventeenth century as antiquarian interest in the non-classical past was growing in Europe. It was published in its entirety just as intense romantic and nationalistic interest in the perceived tribal ancestors of the European nation states emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century. This interest, combined with the new science of philology, ensured popular and scholarly interest in texts like the *Elder Edda.* Some of the lays were available in bowdlerized versions even for children by the later nineteenth century. In the hands of Richard Wagner, the *Elder Edda* became the foundation of one of the century's masterpieces. While northern legends and the scholarship based on it were misused by the Nazis to develop and further their ideas of race, they are seriously misrepresented by such ideas. In the 1960s, the poet W. H. Auden in collaboration with an Old Norse scholar, Paul B. Taylor, produced a translation of sixteen of the poems.

Author Biography

The *Elder Edda* is not a continuous narrative, but a collection of thirty-nine poems of varying lengths and genres, including short narratives or lays, traditional wisdom including what amounts to a manual of good behavior, and several dialogues in which the question and answers provide a glossary of poetic terms and myth. They form a history of the world from creation to apocalypse, and like the Shakespearean canon, high tragedy exists side by side with bumptious comedy. Thirty-four are preserved in the *Konungsbók,* or *Codex Regius* (King's book), copied in Iceland about A.D. 1270, now in the Royal Library in Copenhagen. The language of the poems as preserved in that manuscript suggests that they were composed between 800 and 1100 A.D. but were first written down between 1150 and 1250 A.D. The poems are the work of many poets and some draw on historical traditions reaching back to the fourth century. Nevertheless, however northern and pagan they may appear to be, they contain much that suggests an interaction with both Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian culture.

It is not known where in Iceland the *Codex Regius* was copied. The elegance of the scribe's writing and its similarity to those of at least two other Icelandic scribes of the period suggest its copyist was connected with a fairly large scriptorium with high standards. Despite early attempts to connect the *Elder Edda* as a collection with a legendary Icelandic scholar, Saemundur Sigfússon the Learned, (1056-1133), none of the poems can be connected with a named individual and were probably collected together only in the thirteenth century, perhaps only a generation before the production of the *Codex Regius.*

Nothing is known of the manuscript until the year 1643 when it came into the possession of Bishop Brynjólfr Sveinsson. It was already damaged then, and no copy was made of it before the missing leaves were lost. In 1662 the bishop gave the manuscript to the king of Denmark. In 1665 the two mythological poems *Völuspa and Hávemál* were published by the Danish scholar Peder Hansen Resen as part of an edition of Snorri Stulason's *Prose Edda.* The first full edition was prepared by the Arnamagnaean Commission in Copenhagen between 1787 and 1828.

Plot Summary

The Sibyl's Prophecy

At Odin's request, a prophetess predicts the future from creation to fall and renewal. She begins with a time when nothing existed; heavens and earth come into existence, but in chaos. The gods, who create the arts and crafts, social life, and finally, mankind, impose order. She prophesies the war between the Aesir and the Vanir and their conciliation, the death of Balder through Loki's trickery, Loki's punishment, the dwarves's golden home, the realm of the dead, and the punishment of the wicked. She foresees the final battle between gods and giants that will end in their mutual destruction. Sun and stars fail, the earth sinks beneath the sea, but in the final stanzas, she describes a second green earth rising from the waters. Balder and Hod, his blind brother who accidentally killed him, will come again to rule. Then a mighty one, sometimes identified as Christ, will come down to bring the deserving to a hall more beautiful than the sun.

The Sayings of the High One

This is a composite poem in which only stanzas 111-64 are in the voice of Odin the 'High One.' It begins with practical advice on behavior and attitude: "It takes sharp wits to travel in the world / they're not so hard on you at home□Better to be alive than to be lifeless / the living can hope for a cow." Even among such homely advice, however, is fame, so important to the epic attitude: "Cattle die, kinsmen die, / One day you die yourself; but the words of praise will not die." The poem ends with Odin's advice addressed to a young man called Loddfafnir.

The Lay of Vafthrudnir

Odin has a contest with the giant Vafthrudnir to determine who has the greater knowledge of the gods, creation, and the future. Odin wins because he alone knows what he whispered in Balder's ear as he lay on his funeral pyre. The lay serves as a glossary of the metaphors and images used in early Norse poetry.

The Lay of Grimnir

Hunding had two sons: Agnar and Geirrod. They were fishing from a rowboat and were swept out to sea. When they made land, a farmer took them in until spring came. When they arrived back home, Geirrod jumped out of the boat and pushed it and his brother back out to sea. Geirrod became king. Later, Odin and Frigg, his wife, were looking down at earth. Odin teased Frigg that Geirrod, whom he favored, was king while Agnar, whom Frigg favored, lived in the wilds. Frigg answered that Geirrod was stingy. Odin bet her he would find him generous to strangers. Frigg sends a message to Geirrod to

beware of a wizard coming to his court, describing Odin in disguise. Odin arrives and when he refuses to give more than an assumed name, Grimnir, he is seated between two fires to make him speak. Geirrod's son Agnar thinks it wrong to mistreat a guest and brings him a drink. For this act, Odin blesses the boy and tells him his real name. When the king hears, he jumps up to take him away from the fires, but stumbles and falls on his own sword.

Skirnir's Journey

This lay tells of the god Frey who saw and loved a giant's beautiful daughter. He sent his servant Skirnir to persuade her to accept him as her lover. Skirnir cajoles and threatens her until she finally accepts Frey.

The Lay of Harbard

The first of the comical lays. Odin disguised himself as a ferryman and engaged Thor in a duel of words. Thor loses badly.

The Lay of Hymir

The gods are feeling like a party and ask the giant Aegir to brew beer for it. Thor unfortunately annoys Aegir. Aegir tells Thor he must borrow the giant Hymir's brewing vat. Thor and Tyr, Hymnir's son, set out for Hymnir's home where Hymnir's young mistress welcomes them. She warns them Hymnir does not like guests and makes them hide when he comes. She tells Hymnir that his son has come with a friend. Three bulls are cooked for dinner. Thor eats two of them. Hymnir tells his guests that they will go out hunting for supper. Thor suggests that he will take a boat out and fish if Hymir provides the bait. Thor rows out, baits his hook with an ox's head, and catches the serpent that encircles the earth, drags it up into the boat, but thankfully, throws it back. Hymnir then challenges Thor to crack his cup. Thor flings it; columns crash and stone splinters, but the cup is unbroken. At the mistress's suggestion, he flings it at the giant's head and it breaks. Thor grabs the kettle and kills the pursuing giants. Aegir brews the beer.

The Insolence of Loki

Loki infuriates the assembled gods and goddesses by bringing up past scandals. His stories grow more and more vile until he is finally frightened into leaving with the threat of Thor's hammer. He curses the gods as he leaves.

The Lay of Thrym

Thor's great hammer, Mjollnir, is stolen. Loki discovers that the giant Thrym has it. Thrym tells Loki that he will give it back only if he can marry Freyja. Not surprisingly, Thor has no luck in convincing Freyja that she should marry a giant. A council of the gods and goddesses is convened and Heimdal suggests that they dress Thor as a bride with Loki as her maid. Thor does not like it, but he must have his hammer to keep the giants out of Asgard. Thrym is beside himself with joy when they arrive, but after a comical passage in which Loki has to explain the bride's incredible appetite and frightening eyes, Thor gets his hands on his hammer and kills his prospective in-laws.

The Lay of Volund

Volund, the most famous smith of the north, is taken prisoner by Kind Nidud who lames him. Volund makes himself wings, avenges himself by murdering Nidud's sons and raping his daughter, and flies away.

The Lay of Alvis

The dwarf Alvis tries to steal Thor's daughter, but is tricked into such a lengthy display of his knowledge, which amounts to a catalogue of poetic synonyms, that he is caught by dawn and dies from exposure to sunlight.

The First and Second Lays of Helgi Hunding's Bane and The Lay of Helgi Hjorvar's Son The Helgi lays are incomplete and confused.

Taken with the notes attached to them, they recount a story of two lovers who are reborn again and again. The first and second lays are the story of Helgi, Sigmund's son. Helgi is loved and protected by the Valkyrie, Sigrun. Helgi must fight Sigrun's father, brothers, and suitor to save her from an unwanted marriage. He kills them all except for her brother Dag, whom he spares. Dag swears peace with Helgi, but sacrifices to Odin for vengeance. Odin lends him his spear, and Dag kills Helgi. Sigrun is inconsolable. A maid tells her Helgi's spirit is in his burial mound. Sigrun goes to his grave to be with him one last night, dying of grief soon after. Later, they are both reborn, as Helgi Hunding's Bane and Kara. In the 'The Lay of Helgi Hjorvar's Son' another Helgi is loved by a Valkyrie, Svava, who marries him. His brother Hedin confesses that he made a drunken vow to marry Svava. Helgi replies that his vow may be good for both of them; he is about to go into battle and does not expect to survive. Helgi, as he foresaw, is mortally wounded. Dying, he asks Svava to marry Hedin. She refuses, but Hedin

promises her he will avenge Helgi. The lay breaks off in the manuscript with a note that "It is said of Helgi and Svava that they were born again."

The Prophecy of Gripir

Ironically, the only straightforward version of Sigurd and Brynhild's story is in the form of a prophecy. Sigurd asks his uncle what he sees in store for him. Gripir tells him that he will be a great hero. Sigurd questions Gripir further. Gripir tells him he will avenge his father, kill Fafnir the dragon, the evil Regin, and win Fafnir's treasure. He will wake a sleeping Valkyrie and learn her wisdom. Gripir then breaks off. Sigurd asks him if he sees something shameful. Gripir reassures him and finally continues. Sigurd will fall in love with Brynhild. They will swear to be faithful, but Sigurd will betray her, because of Queen Grimhild who wants Sigurd married to her daughter, Gudrun, and Brynhild to her son, Gunnar. Sigurd will forget Brynhild and promise Gunnar and Hogni that he will win her for Gunnar. Sigurd will live happily with Gundrun, but Brynhild will plot her revenge for his betrayal. Gunnar and Hogni will fall in with her plans and murder Sigurd. Gripir consoles his nephew that at least he will be fortunate in his fame. Sigurd leaves saying, "You would have been glad to say good things of what is coming if you could."

The Lay of Regin

This lay begins with the history of Fafnir and his hoard. Regin takes Sigurd as his foster son, forges him a mighty sword, and urges him to kill the dragon Fafnir. Sigurd insists on avenging his father first.

The Lay of Fafnir

Sigurd, returning after avenging his father, kills Fafnir. The dying dragon warns Sigurd that his treasure is cursed and that Regin means to kill him. Sigurd roasts and eats the dragon's heart and finds he understands the birds talking about Regin's plans to kill him. Sigurd kills Regin.

The Lay of Sigdrifa

Sigurd has learned from the birds about a Valkyrie lying in an enchanted sleep. He wakes her, and she shares her wisdom with him.

Fragmentary Lay of Sigurd

A dramatic fragment dealing with the murder of Sigurd.

The Lay of Gudrun

Gudrun grieves for Sigurd while various noblewomen attempt to comfort her. Brynhild commits suicide to be with Sigurd in death.

The Short Lay of Sigurd

This is Sigurd's story from Brynhild's point of view. After the tale of her betrayal and revenge is told, she makes plans for her funeral and warns Gunnar what the future holds for him and for Gudrun.

Brynhild's Journey to Hel

Brynhild, on her way to meet Sigurd in the land of the dead, encounters a giantess who accuses her of murder and fickleness. Brynhild justifies her behavior to her.

The Second Lay of Gudrun

Gudrun tells of Sigurd's murder, of her brother's duplicity, and her marriage to Atli.

The Third Lay of Gudrun

Gudrun is suspected of being unfaithful to Atli. She proves her innocence by putting her hand into boiling water and withdrawing it unhurt.

Oddrun's Lay

Atli's sister, Oddrun, tells of her grief for Gunnar. After Brynhild's death, Gunnar wanted to marry her, but Atli forbade it. Oddrun and Gunnar met secretly. Atli learned of this and murdered Gunnar and Hogni.

The Lay of Atli

Gunnar and Hogni, despite forebodings, visit their brother-in-law, Atli, where they are murdered in Atli's attempt to extort Andvari's treasure from them. Gundrun avenges her brothers, murdering her sons by Atli, and feeding them to their father. She then burns Atli and his men in their hall.

The Greenland Lay of Atli

Another version of Gundrun's revenge for her brothers's murders.

Gudrun's Chain of Woes

Gudrun urges her sons by her third husband, Jonacr, to avenge their half sister, murdered by her husband Jormunrek.

The Lay of Hamdir

Hamdir and Sorli, the sons of Jonacr and Gundrun, set out to avenge their half-sister, Swanhild. On the way, they meet and murder their halfbrother, Erp. When they reach Jormunrek's court, they fail to avenge their sister for the lack of his help.

Balder's Dreams

Odin consults a prophetess to learn the fate of his beloved son Balder.

The Mill Song

King Frodi had two captive giant girls. He put them to work grinding out gold and peace at a magic hand mill. They prophesy his downfall.

The Waking of Angantyr

Hervor, Angantyr's daughter, goes to his grave to demand his sword, Tyrfing, so she can avenge him. Angantyr's ghost, who knows Tyrfing is cursed to kill every one who uses it, tries to dissuade her, but she will not be persuaded. He allows her to take it.

The Seeress's Prophecy (Voluspa)

The Seeress's Prophecy (Voluspa) Summary

Odin has traveled to seek out the Seeress in order to learn the stories of the ancient past, the truth of the present, and the secrets of the future. The Seeress begins her long answer with the birth of the world from the giant Ymir. She tells of the ZHsir's establishment of a home on Idavoll Plain and the coming of three giant girls who demand treasure. The dwarves are cataloged over several verses before the prophetess tells about the gods creation of the first humans from Ash and Embla. The Seeress tells Odin about Yggdrasill and the fates who live below it measuring out the life of each man.

Odin is told of the first war in which the ZHsir's stronghold falls and is trampled by another group of gods called the Vanir. Shortly after this explanation the Seeress pauses and asks if Odin has heard enough or desires more. Odin plies the prophetess with treasures and she continues her story. She names the Valkyries and foretells Baldr's death at the hands of Hod. The Seeress also tells how Baldr's brother will be born and quickly avenge the favored god's death. The prophetess tells of Loki's binding and a hall where serpent's spines drip poison through the roof. She tells of wicked men who wade in a stream and how Nidhogg sucks the bodies of the dead while the wolf tears at the corpses of men. The Seeress describes Ragnarok and details who will battle whom at the doom of gods. The prophetess tells how the earth will rise again and the gods will rebuild. She tells of a mighty-one who will rule all from the place of judgment and the prophetess concludes her tale.

The Seeress's Prophecy (Voluspa) Analysis

The *Seeress' Prophecy* serves several functions. The poem showcases Odin's ability to disguise himself and seek out wisdom from another source. Here and in the three poems which follow, Odin seeks to gain greater wisdom and learn the secrets of the mythological world. However, the primary function is to inform the reader about the mysterious world of the gods and the secrets of the world. The prophetess imparts to Odin the history of the world from its beginnings as pieces of Ymir's body. She reveals the secrets of the gods; including Baldr's death and the Doom of the gods. The Seeress' words are all encompassing and the reader is able learn a great about Norse mythology and beliefs.

Sayings of the High One (Havamal)

Sayings of the High One (Havamal) Summary

This poem consists of a series of wisdom sayings. The first grouping of sayings revolves around the treatment of guests. Guests should be aware of the home they are walking into and be served quickly by the host. The needs of the weary traveler should be attended to generously. The guest is warned to stay watchful and silent in order to gain praise for himself.

The speaker gives advice on appearing wise instead of acting foolishly. Foolish men think all those who laugh with him are friends but does not understand when none speak for him at Assembly. Foolish men do not keep silent when he knows nothing but often they talk too much. A wise man knows how to question and how to answer well. Men should not mock others and although men say they are devoted to one another there will always be strife among them.

It is wise for a man to eat an early meal so that he does not sit and guzzle and fail to make good conversation. It is better to have a home of your own rather than beg from others. Weapons should be kept close while traveling because one never knows when he will be in need of them. Friendships that work are made up of mutual givers and receivers who gladden each other with weapons and gifts. A man should be friends with his friend's friend but not to the friends of an enemy.

A man should ride to Assembly washed and fed even if he is not well dressed because no man should be ashamed of his breeches or his horse. A man who has few allies among the many becomes disoriented like an eagle over water. Men wise in counsel use their power in moderation because when the fighting begins no one is boldest of all.

The words of a girl or woman should not be trusted since their hearts turn on a wheel. The love of a woman is like driving an unshod horse over ice. The hearts of men are fickle towards women. A man must speak fairly and offer money if he desires a woman's love. A man should not reproach another for love, often the wise man is seized by love when the foolish man is not. The mind knows what lies near the heart; no sickness is worse for the wise man than to have none love him. The speaker has learned this for himself when he found Billing's girl sleeping on a bed but was unable to win her. The speaker thinks he will gain the girl's heart but the warriors were ready for him with burning torches and brands. When he tries to come again near dawn he finds a dog tied to the bed of the woman. The woman devises every sort of humiliation for him. Many good girls are fickle of heart when known better.

The frost-giants ask for the High One's advice and inquire about Bolverk to see if he is among the gods or slaughtered by Suttung. He hears them speak thus at the High One's hall: Loddfafnir is advised to avoid sleeping in the arms of a witch so that she does not cast a spell over him. Loddfafnir is further instructed according to many of the

wisdom sayings already listed. The speaker, now undeniably Odin, says that he hung on a tree for nine long nights and dedicated himself to himself on a strange tree that no one knows where the roots run. While there he looked down and learned the runes. He learned nine spells from Bolthor's son and received mead from Odrerir. Odin begins to grow and be wise; words and deeds increase one after the other. Odin learns many spells. Spells that fight anxiety, which free one from fetters or bind an enemy. Spells which stop darts in mid-air or settle hatred between men. Some spells bring a hanged man back to life or make a woman love a man. All these spells would be helpful to Loddfafnir but he will be a long time in wanting them. Thus the High One ends his song saying that these words are useful to the sons of men but not the sons of giants. Those who learn them may benefit and those who heard them may have luck.

Sayings of the High One (Havamal) Analysis

The *Sayings of the High One* is a long complicated poem. No speaker is clearly identified and indeed it seems as if there are several speakers throughout. At one point it seems as if Odin is speaking about his experiences while hanging on the World Tree. Another unspecified speaker tells about his attempt at wooing a girl and her poor treatment of him.

The wisdom that the High One imparts is directed at the proper governance of men. Much of what he states seems like common sense maxims but as the speaker notes at the conclusion of the poem is only helpful if truly learned by those who hear it. The speaker's advice is all encompassing and leaves very few common human interactions untouched: from being a proper guest to conducting oneself wisely to negotiating the fields of love.

When Odin tells Loddfafnir about the many spells he knows it seems to be a moment for Odin to show off his great storehouse of acquired knowledge. Although Odin has suffered great pains to gain this knowledge and it seems right that the god should gloat about his triumphant accomplishment. In many ways it seems that Loddfafnir is the intended recipient of all the High One's wisdom. Several times the speaker directly addresses Loddfafnir, saying "I advise you, Loddfafnir, to take this advice." Similarly, Loddfafnir is the one advised at the end of the poem to take all he has heard to heart and learn it well. The reader would be well advised to listen to the High One's words and take them to heart as they apply to all men. It may be hard to decipher the speaker or speakers of the poem but that only serves to leave the reader free to focus on the speaker's words and learn them well.

Vafthrudnir's Sayings (Vafthrudnismal)

Vafthrudnir's Sayings (Vafthrudnismal) Summary

Odin desires to journey to Vafthrudnir, the all-wise giant, and seek advice from the giant's wife. Frigg tries to dissuade her husband of this course of action because she fears the powerful giant. Odin eventually wins the debate and leaves to test the giant's wisdom. Upon his arrival at Vafthrudnir's hall Odin, disguised as a man named Gagnrad, asks the giant if he is merely wise or very wise. Vafthrudnir welcomes the guest and they begin a battle of wits to see who is the wiser.

Odin suggests that since he is the visitor it would be better for the giant to begin asking questions. After asking Odin a series of questions, Vafthrudnir deems his guest wise and invites Odin to move his seat nearer the giant's bench to continue their contest. Odin then begins a line of questioning directed toward the giant. Odin continues to ask question after question but when he desires to know what Odin says to his son before the pyre Vafthrudnir realizes that he has been battling with the great god. The giant says that his mouth is now doomed because he has distributed his wisdom in a contest with Odin who will always be the wisest of beings.

Vafthrudnir's Sayings (Vafthrudnismal) Analysis

Like the *Seeress's Prophecy*, the *Sayings of the High One*, and *Grimnir's Sayings*, *Vafthrudnir's Sayings* is another poem in which Odin, in disguise, seeks wisdom from someone else. Odin seems to have an unquenchable thirst for knowledge but he also knows many of the questions to the answers he poses. The tales of Odin's quest for knowledge seem to be a mechanism for imparting to the reader many of the more mysterious aspects of Norse mythology and tradition. At the same time the poems become a showcase for Odin's great wit, awing readers even more with the might of their great god.

Grimnir's Sayings (Grimnismal)

Grimnir's Sayings (Grimnismal) Summary

King Hraudung's sons, Agnar and Geirrod, go out fishing and become stranded on an island. During their winter stay on the island Agnar is fostered by an old woman and Geirrod is cared for by an old man. In the spring the old man supplies them with a ship and the two brothers set sail for home. However, upon their return Geirrod shoves the boat back out to sea before Agnar disembarks; and since their father is dead and Geirrod is the only surviving heir, he is made king.

As it turns out the old man and woman were Odin and Frigg who each wanted their chosen man to become the mightier warrior. When the gods look down upon the boys they strike a wager to see if Geirrod has turned into a stingy ruler. Frigg sends a message to Geirrod to beware of wizards; and when Geirrod finds a wizard named Grimnir he has him tortured between two fires for eight nights. Geirrod's young son Agnar gives the wizard a drink and tells his father that he acts wrongly. After Grimnir drinks he tells the fire to go away and announces that because Agnar was the only one to offer him food or drink the boy alone shall rule over the Goths. Grimnir then reveals his true identity as Odin and blesses Agnar.

Odin then begins to recount the many mythological wonders of the world. He mentions such things as the eleven halls and who lives in each one; he tells about the Valkyries; Yggdrasill the world tree; and lists many of the names he is known by. When Odin has finished his long speech Geirrod, who has been sitting with a half drawn sword on his lap, stumbles as he rises and the sword flies from his hand. Geirrod falls on the upturned blade of his own sword and dies. Odin disappears and Agnar rules for a long time afterwards.

Grimnir's Sayings (Grimnismal) Analysis

Grimnir's Sayings is a poem showing how the gods love to meddle in the lives of men. Because of Frigg and Odin's wager, Agnar, the first one, is sent away and denied his inheritance. However, the gods seem to recognize that they have chosen the wrong son to rule the Goths and attempt to correct their mistake. It seems odd that Frigg aids Geirrod by telling him to beware of wizards until the reader realizes that by putting the king on alert he does not fulfill the duties of host. Frigg's whispering turns the tide of the tale away from Geirrod and seals his fate. The goddess subtlety exacts her revenge on Geirrod and wins the wager with Odin.

The words of wisdom which Odin spews forth in his long speech are meant to instruct the newly appointed ruler and make him worthy of his position. A young boy of ten may only have begun to learn the secrets of the world but even the best teacher of men could not have imparted mythological knowledge to Agnar. By bestowing such wisdom

on the young boy, Odin seems to be conceding his defeat to Frigg as nobly as the ruler of the gods knows how.

Skirnir's Journey

Skirnir's Journey Summary

Freyr, son of Niord, sits on Odin's seat and looks into all the worlds. He sees a beautiful girl in Giantland and is struck with lovesickness. Niord asks Freyr's page Skirnir to talk with the heartsick youth. After a bit of coaxing Freyr reveals the source of his sullen mood. Skirnir then asks for the horse that will carry him through the dark and the sword which hangs by Freyr's side in order to battle the giants. Skirnir prepares to leave and vows that either both he and the horse will return or the giant will take them both. Skirnir rides to Giantland and the courts of Gymir where he finds a herdsman sitting on a mound and greets him.

Gerd brings Skirnir into the hall and asks whether he is of the elves, the sons of the ZHsir, or the wise Vanir. She also desires to know why Skirnir has traveled over the wild fire to see them. Skirnir offers the giant woman eleven golden apples if she will say that Freyr is the least hateful man alive. Gerd will not accept the apples and refuses to sit down with Freyr as long as they live. Skirnir then tries to bribe Gerd with a magical golden ring, but again Gerd declines. Gerd will not tolerate this coercion and states that if Skirnir meets Gymir a battle is sure to occur. Skirnir then heaps curses upon Gerd in front of a large gathering of gods and marks her with three runes. Gerd finally relents and arranges a meeting between Freyr and the girl in a peaceful grove named Barri to take place nine nights hence.

Skirnir rides home and relates the details of the arrangement to Freyr. Freyr then wonders how he will endure the next nine nights and states that a month seems less than half of one night.

Skirnir's Journey Analysis

Skirnir's journey shows how lovesickness can overwhelm the gods and render them useless and incompetent. Freyr is so consumed by his love for the giant girl that he fails to realize what harm he brings on himself by giving Skirnir his sword. Freyr is supposed to engage in the battle at Ragnarok but he has just given his weapon away in the hopes of securing the love of a woman. Skirnir outwits the lovelorn god and gains for himself a mighty weapon and a magnificent horse. Furthermore, Skirnir shows off his own intelligence when he speaks with Gerd. The severity of his insults and threats eventually cause Gerd to agree to an arrangement. In this tale Freyr comes across as a blubbering baby while his page gains great reward.

Harbard's Song (Harbarzljod)

Harbard's Song (Harbarzljod) Summary

Traveling from the east Thor comes to an inlet with a ferryman sitting on the other side. Thor calls the man a "pipsqueak" and asks his identity. In reply the ferryman wants to know whom the peasant is that speaks to him. Thor asks to be ferried across in exchange for a basket of tasty food. The ferryman tells Thor that his kin are sad at the death of his mother but Thor is unaffected by the remark stating that most people would view his mother's death as a good thing. Thor remains nonplussed as the ferryman hurls insults about Thor's lack of decent farms or pants. The god inquires about the owner of the boat and learns that Hildolf who lives in Counsel-island Sound has asked the ferryman to keep watch over it and give passage only to good people he recognizes. The ferryman demands to be told Thor's name in exchange for this bit of information. Thor says he will gladly tell his name and does so. The ferryman then gives his name as Harbard.

Thor is anxious to get to the other side of the inlet so he can repay Harbard for his jeering words. Harbard is content to wait and seems unconcerned that the god desires to battle him. The two then begin to compare deeds. They match each other's accomplishments and trade insults throughout the conversation. Finally Thor again calls for Harbard to row the boat across the water, the ferryman tells him to go around because he won't help him cross. Harbard gives the god directions to Odin's land and tells him that he should be able to reach his destination by sunrise with difficulty. Thor says he will reward the ferryman for refusing him should they meet again. Harbard gets the final word in when he tells Thor to go where the fiends will find him.

Harbard's Song (Harbarzljod) Analysis

As with many of the poems at the beginning of the Edda, Harbard's tale deals with a battle of wits or insults between two people. Here one is the god Thor and the other an innocent ferryman. However, notes to the text state that the ferryman is really Odin in disguise. While the poem itself does not openly reveal Odin's true identity, the thought that Thor battles against the leader of the gods makes the poem even more entertaining. The savvy reader may discover the ferryman's rightful identity by closely examining the insults hurled by the gods across the water. Knowledgeable readers would be familiar with the exploits of Thor and Odin and be able to decipher the hidden meaning in Odin's words.

Hymir's Poem (Hymiskvida)

Hymir's Poem (Hymiskvida) Summary

When the gods sit down to eat they often turn to drinking, intensifying their enjoyment by gorging themselves on wine or ale. One day while casting the twigs they discover that ZHgir has ample food in many cauldrons. Odin goes to challenge the mountain-dweller with a request to prepare a feast for all the ZHsir. The challenge annoys ZHgir and he invents a plan of revenge. He asks the husband of Sif to fetch a cauldron which will hold enough ale for all the gods. The gods are at a loss as to where to procure such a large vessel until Tyr advises Thor. Tyr says that to the east of Elivagar lives Hymir the wise who owns a cauldron a league deep. Thor wonders if they will be able to obtain this cauldron and Tyr says that it can be done with the use of trickery.

They set out that day and travel a long distance until they encounter Egil. Egil takes care of Thor's goats for the evening while the two gods continue to Hymir's hall.

Tyr finds his grandmother, who with 900 heads is very ugly, and another woman arrayed in gold bearing a cup to the boy. One of the women speaks and says she would like to hide the men under her cauldron because her husband is often stingy and ill-mannered towards guests. Misshapen and stern, Hymir returns from a days hunting with icicles dangling from his beard. The woman adorned with gold directs Hymir's attention to where the two men sit behind a pillar to protect them but the giant's gaze breaks the pillar and the crossbeam in two. Eight kettles are smashed to pieces in the commotion but a ninth falls whole and unharmed from the beam. The two men come forward and the giant turns to look at them as his enemies.

Hymir orders three bulls to be boiled up. Thor eats 2 of the oxen by himself before going to sleep. Hymir feels that Thor has eaten a considerable amount. He says that tomorrow they will go hunting for enough food for the three of them to live on.

Thor says he would like to row out into the bay if Hymir will give him some bait. Thor goes out to the herd and takes the head of a jet-black ox for bait. Thor, the lord of goats, tells Hymir to row the wave-horse out farther but Hymir refuses. Hymir then proceeds to quickly catch two whales while Thor takes his time laying out his line. Thor baits his hook with the ox head and the Middgard serpent gapes at the bait. Thor pulls the serpent into the boat and hits it on the head with his hammer. The serpent shrieks and the water rocks the boat violently. The fish sinks into the sea and Hymir is upset by the fishing expedition. He rows back to shore silently; his humor towards Thor has changed. Hymir says that Thor will be doing half the work upon their return if he either carries one of the whales or ties up the boat. When they reach land Thor takes up the boat with the whale in it and carries the entire thing back to the giant's farm. The giant challenges Thor saying no man, no matter how hard he rows, is truly strong unless he can smash the crystal goblet. Thor is unable to smash the goblet until Hymir's wife tells him that the only way the goblet can be smashed is over Hymir's head.

Hymir acknowledges that Thor has finally bested him by breaking the goblet. The giant states that he will no longer be able to say that the ale is brewed. He tells the men that it is up to them to get the cauldron out of the hall. Tyr tries twice to move the vessel to no avail. Thor takes the cauldron by its rim and rolls it along the floor. He then places it on his head and it is so large that the handles jingle at his feet. As the two men are walking away from the hall Thor looks behind them to see an army coming from the cliffs headed by Hymir. Thor stops, puts the cauldron down, and swings Miollnir, killing all the mountain monsters. Tyr and Thor continue on but one of Thor's goats falls down half-dead from a lame bone cause by Loki's trickery. The poet says that this story is told elsewhere and the men return with the cauldron so that ZHgir prepares them a large feast.

Hymir's Poem (Hymiskvida) Analysis

Hymir's Poem, like *Thrym's Poem*, is a contest between the gods and giants to see who is the smartest and strongest. The challenge is first laid down by the gods to ZHgir the giant who responds with his own challenge to the gods. Once again Thor must find a way to outsmart a giant to gain a desired object; and like the events at Thrym's hall, Thor is unable to solve the problem without outside assistance. Thor's strength only takes him so far and then his brain must finish the job. Unfortunately for Thor his brain does not seem to be as mighty as his brute strength and he cannot overcome the obstacle without Hymir's bride's help.

Like many of the poems that tell stories of the gods, Hymir's tale would be an enjoyable poem to tell at a feast. There seems to be something for every listener: comedy, a battle of wits, and a battle of strength. Nordic listeners would have cheered the might of their godly heroes and booed the stupidity of the giants.

Loki's Quarrel (Lokasenna)

Loki's Quarrel (Lokasenna) Summary

ZHgir, or Gymir as he is sometimes called makes ale in the cauldron stolen in Hymir's poem. A feast is held and all the gods are in attendance except Thor who is away in the east. Tyr has lost a hand to Fenrir. ZHgir has two servants: Fimafeng and Eldir. The gods praise the servants which angers Loki so that he kills Fimafeng. The rest of the ZHsir chase Loki away to the woods but he returns and meets Eldir outside. Loki greets him and wants to know what the gods are now discussing. The servant tells him that the gods discuss their weapons and battle prowess; no one has a kind word to say about Loki. Loki vows to go back into the hall and begin a quarrel that will create malice among all those present.

Loki enters the hall and says that he is thirsty after traveling from a far distance. He asks for a cup of mead but no response comes from the gathering. Loki warms to his audience and harangues the gods for remaining silent. He demands that a seat be made for him or they should tell him to go away. Bragi finally answers Loki by saying that no place will ever be made for him because the ZHsir know which men should be invited to their feast.

Loki turns to Odin and asks if he remembers a time when they mixed their blood and Odin said he would not drink ale unless some were brought for Loki also. Odin tells Vidar to give his seat to Loki in order to keep the interloper from speaking blameful words in ZHgir's hall. Vidar stands up, pours a drink for Loki and hails all the gods except Bragi. Bragi then addresses Loki and offers him a horse, a sword, and a ring from among his own possessions if Loki will not speak ill of the gods or upset them. However, Loki's mind has been made up and he refuses to turn from his chosen path of insulting the gods.

In turn Loki attacks each god and brings into the open any horrific thing the god or goddess may have done. No one is safe from Loki's wrath which seems to grow with each new insult.

Loki calls Bragi's courage into question; he calls Idunn a man-crazed woman; and when Gefion tries to defend Loki he recalls the time she slept with a young boy in exchange for a jewel. Even Odin is not spared Loki's hurtful comments. Loki accuses Odin of doling out victory in battle to those who do not deserve it. Frigg attempts to intervene and Loki reveals that she once slept with Odin's brothers, Ve and Vili. When Frigg retorts with a comment about Baldr, Loki tells her that he planned Baldr's death. Loki then turns on Freyia and says that she has slept with everyone in the hall. Niord comes to Freyia's defense saying that it is harmless to have a lover besides a husband. Loki turns to insult Niord by saying that he is only a hostage of the gods and that Hymir's daughters pissed in his mouth like a toilet.

Tyr comes to Freyr's defense saying that he is one of the best riders, makes no woman cry, and does not keep men captive. Loki eagerly jumps on Tyr, calling attention to his missing right hand which now means that Tyr is incapable of honest dealings. Freyr joins the argument by saying that he sees a wolf lying bound before a river waiting for the battle between the gods. Freyr warns that Loki will find himself in the same predicament if he does not silence himself. Loki refers to Freyr's sword lost in the procurement of Gymir's daughter and wonders how the bold warrior will fight at Ragnarok without it. Loki calls Byggvir a gossip who is always twittering in Freyr's ears in an attempt to gain favor. Heimdall tries to reason with Loki. He tells the troublemaker that he is drunk and should just stop speaking since no one can keep a silent tongue when they have been drinking. Loki mentions the gentle words Skadi spoke to Loki when she enticed him to her bed. He says that such things must be mentioned if they are going to tally their shameful deeds. Sif offers Loki a cup of mead. Loki takes the cup and then says that she would be blameless if not for the fact that besides being married to Thor she takes Loki as her lover.

Beyla announces that the mountains are shaking and must be signaling the return of Thor who will settle the quarrel. Loki calls Beyla a "shitty serving wench" who is a poor example of the ZHsir. Thor enters and tells Loki to be silent. Thor tells Loki that he will use his hammer to silence him by striking his head from his shoulders. Loki does not relent but begins to insult Thor. He wonders why Thor is raging so now but will not be so brave when Odin is killed and Thor must battle the wolf. After several threats from Thor Loki finally concedes to leave because he knows that Thor will follow through with his threats. Before he leaves Loki issues a curse on ZHgir stating that he has brewed ale but will never again hold a feast. Loki further states that flames will burn all of ZHgir's possessions.

The conclusion of the poem tells of Loki's punishment for his outburst. Loki disguises himself as a salmon and hides in the waterfall of Franangr. He is later caught by the ZHsir and bound with the guts of his son Nari. Skadi fastens a poisonous snake over Loki's face so that poison continually drips down. Sigyn, Loki's wife, catches the poison in a bowl but every time she goes to empty the bowl the poison falls on Loki causing him to writhe in pain so violent that the earth shakes.

Loki's Quarrel (Lokasenna) Analysis

As helpful as Loki appears to be in *Thrym's Poem*, his more widely known nature is showcased in *Lokasenna*. Loki's jealousy sparks his killing of ZHgir's servant which results in him being cast out of the feast. However, true to Nordic tradition, Loki must seek revenge for the injury done him by the gods. In order to do this Loki must repay all the gods who chased him away from the feast. As a result all the gods come under the fire of Loki's stream of insults.

In the process the listener/reader of the poem learns a great deal about the infidelities and bad behavior of their sacred gods. While many modern readers may find it hard to believe in gods who participate in such reckless behaviors, the Norse would have

praised these actions and found them admirable simply because they were performed by gods. Additionally, readers might reason that Loki's insults are fabricated lies only meant to perturb the gods. The strength of the gods' power excused their indiscretions in the minds of the ancient Norse.

Since the story of Thor's missing hammer follows Loki's Quarrel it is interesting to note that in the current tale Thor threatens Loki with violence but in the next poem seeks assistance from him. Perhaps Loki plays a role in the disappearance of Thor's hammer as a way of gaining a little revenge for Thor's words at the end of the quarrel.

Thrym's Poem (Thrymskvida)

Thrym's Poem (Thrymskvida) Summary

Thor awakens to find his hammer missing. His beard bristles with anger and he gropes about trying to locate the missing tool. As Thor searches for Miollnir he tells Loki that the hammer has been stolen but no one must know. Together the two gods visit Freyia so that Loki may borrow her magic cloak to fly through the land in search of the hammer. Loki flies beyond the courts of the ZHsir until he comes to the land of giants.

Thrym sits on a grave mound braiding golden collars for his dogs and trimming his horses' manes. Thrym asks Loki news of the ZHsir and the elves, and inquires why Loki has come alone to giant land. Thrym asks if there is bad news among the others and if Loki has hidden Thor's hammer. Thyrm reveals that he hid Miollnir eight leagues under the earth and no one will possess it again until Freyia is brought as his wife. Loki flies off and returns to the courts of the ZHsir where he meets Thor. Loki relates that Thrym has the hammer and will not give it up until Freyia is brought to be his wife. The two gods return to Freyia and tell her to dress herself in a bridal dress so they can take her to giant land. Freyia becomes angry and her rage shakes the hall of the gods and dislodges the Brislings' necklace from her neck. She screams at the men that if she goes with them to giant land they will mark her as the most sex-crazed among women. All the ZHsir come to assembly to debate how Thor and Loki can retrieve the hammer without Freyia having to marry Thrym.

Heimdall, who can see into the future, suggests that they dress Thor in the bridal gown and place the great necklace of the Brislings around his neck. If they place the household keys about him, dress him in women's clothing down to his knees, and place jewels on his breast and on his head no one know he is the mighty god in disguise. Thor is upset at the idea but Loki quiets him, saying that unless they follow this plan the giants will settle in Asgard.

So they dress Thor in the gown, place the Brislings necklace, keys and jewels about him and make sure the clothing falls to his knees. Loki accompanies Thor disguised as a maid. Thor's goats are harnessed to carry the gods off to giant land. Thrym learns that they are coming and orders fresh straw to be laid on the benches since his bride comes. The gods join the giants at feast and Thor eats a whole ox, eight salmon, and many dainties meant for women. He washes his food down with three casks of mead. Thrym comments on the ravenous eating of his bride, stating that he has never seen a woman eat or drink more. Loki covers up for Thor's actions by telling the gathering that Freyia has not eaten for the past eight nights out of excitement at her pending trip. Thrym tries to kiss Thor but jumps back in fright when he sees his terrifying eyes which seem to burn with fire. Again Loki comes to Thor's rescue and explains that Freyia has not slept for the past eight nights out of excitement. The sister of the giants asks for the bride's wedding gift; and Thrym calls for the hammer to be brought and laid on Freyia's lap to consecrate the union. As soon as the hammer is laid in Thor's lap he gains courage and

strikes Thrym in the face and batters the rest of the giants in attendance. Thor kills the old sister who asked for bride gifts; giving her strikes instead of shillings and blows instead of rings. And that is how Odin's son gets his hammer back.

Thrym's Poem (Thrymskvida) Analysis

Thrym's poem is a typical Norse tale of how the gods outsmart other beings in order to get something they desire. It is also a pretty comical story because Thor dresses as a woman. This type of story illustrates the wisdom and might of the gods; and reminds the listener that the gods were beings not to be trifled with. Even though Thor dresses in drag there is no doubt about his strength when he decimates the giants after receiving Miollnir back. Likewise, the stupidity of Thrym reinforces the lower intelligence of anyone not associated with the ZHsir.

There is a matter not clearly explained in the text. Although Thrym admits that he took Thor's hammer it seems unlikely that the giant would have been able to snatch the mighty weapon without the aid of someone craftier: someone like the prankster god Loki. There are no obvious clues suggesting Loki aided the giant but it does seem convenient that Loki offers to help Thor when elsewhere in the Eddic poems they are often in opposition to one another. Whether Loki had a hand in stealing Thor's hammer or not is purely speculation. Either way the poem is an enjoyable tale that makes for a good telling at any feast.

The Lay of Volund (Volundarkvida)

The Lay of Volund (Volundarkvida) Summary

A Swedish king named Nidud has two sons and a daughter named Bodvild. A Lappish king has three sons named Slagfid, Egil, and Volund. One day while the brothers are out hunting they come to Wolfdale and build a home near Wolf-lake. In the morning the brothers find three women on the shore spinning linen. The women are Valkyries and their swan garments allow them to fly lie nearby. Hladgud the swan-white and Hervor the strange are daughters of King Hlodver; and Olrun is the daughter of Kiar of Valland. The brothers take the women home to their hall: Egil takes Olrun, Slagfid takes Swanwhite, and Volund takes Hervor or Alvit. They all live together for seven years and then the women fly off to battle and do not return. Egil leaves to look for Olrun, Slagfid goes looking for Swanwhite, and Volund sits in Wolfdale where he is seized by King Nidud.

The story is retold from the maidens' point of view and continues with Nidud's capture of Volund. When Nidud's men arrive at the hall they find Volund missing but a bast rope threaded with seven hundred rings inside. They take one of the rings so that when Volund returns home he thinks that Hlodver has come back. Volund eventually falls asleep and awakens to find himself in shackles. When Volund is brought before Nidud, the king asks where the brothers got the gold of the Niarar. Volund says that the gold is his from a time when all the brothers lived at home and amassed great wealth.

Nidud gives his daughter Bodvild the ring taken from Volund and wears Volund's sword himself. The queen speaks about the way Volund responds to Nidud's actions. The captive bares his teeth and his eyes shine like a serpent's when he sees the sword and the ring. The queen then calls for Volund's sinews to be cut and order him placed on the island Saevarstadir. There Volund is commanded to make treasures for the king and no one dares to visit him.

Two of Nidud's sons come to visit Volund and see the precious treasures. The men demand the keys to the treasure chest and when they look inside they find a trove of necklaces of red gold. Volund tells the sons to come again on another day when he will give them the gold but they must not tell anyone else that they have been to the island. Early one morning the brothers visit the island but when they arrive Volund cuts off their heads and buries their limbs below the ground of the smithy. Volund then covers the sons' heads with silver and presents them to King Nidud. He shapes exotic stones from their eyes and sends them to Nidud's queen. Their teeth he makes into brooches which he sends to Bodvild. Bodvild praises the ring which she has broken and brings it to Volund to be repaired.

Volund gets Bodvild drunk and feels that his has avenged all his harms except one. Volund uses his webbed feet and flies away from the island. When Bodvild wakes up she grieves for the fury her father will unleash when he learns what has happened. The

queen goes to her husband and asks if he is awake. Volund sits hidden in the shadows to hear the king's reply. Nidud says that he is deprived of joy now that his sons are dead and wishes that he could talk with Volund. Nidud asks the captive what has become of his sons and Volund makes the king swear on all that is sacred before he answers. Volund then reveals the secret location of Nidud's sons and adds that the king's only daughter is pregnant with his child. Volund flies away and Nidud calls for his daughter to come to him. He asks her if what Volund revealed is true; and Bodvild admits that in an hour of terror she was unable to fight against Volund and she is now with child.

The Lay of Volund (Volundarkvida) Analysis

Volund's tale creates a few difficulties for the reader. The first confusion concerns the three women on the shore. The text is unclear whether they are Norns or Valkyries - since they leave the brothers for battle it is likely that they are Valkyries eager to engage a fight. Secondly, Volund's webbed feet and ability to fly are unexplained. He has lost his ability to walk since the muscles in his legs have been cut.

The text provides few clues about Volund's mysterious escape from the island. Some textual notes suggest that he somehow has access to Hlodver's swan cape but this seems unlikely since the woman would have needed it to fly off to battle.

Volund's revenge on Nidud is brilliant. The king never suspects that the crippled man would be capable of such deception. Not only does Volund kill the king's only heirs but he succeeds in supplying a new heir by means of Bodvild. His revenge is ultimate and complete. Since Volund is able to fly away there is no way Nidud can exact further revenge and the king must live with the consequences of his greediness.

All-wise's Sayings (Alvissmal)

All-wise's Sayings (Alvissmal) Summary

One speaker begins the poem by calling for benches to be prepared for the arrival of his bride. A second speaker desires to know what sort of man is talking and why he looks so pale. The second speaker calls the first an ogre and unfit for a bride. The first speaker gives his name as All-wise that lives under the earth and asks the second to uphold his oaths. The still unnamed second speaker says he will break his oath since he is the bride's father and was not at home when the arrangements were made. All-wise demands to know which warrior he is speaking too. Ving-Thor is the second speaker and he will not consent to this marriage. All-wise then asks for Thor's permission to marry the girl because he does not want to be without her. Thor agrees to grant All-wise's wish if the ogre agrees to tell him all he knows from the worlds he has visited.

Thor first wishes to know what the earth is called in each of the worlds. All-wise gives an answer and Thor asks to learn what the sky is called in each of the worlds. When he receives this answer Thor inquires about the name given to the moon in each world, followed by the name of the sun. Thor continues to ask the names of things in each world: the clouds, the wind, calm, the ocean, fire, wood, night, seed, and finally ale. Following the final explanation by All-wise, Thor says he has never seen so much information flow from one person. However, for all his knowledge All-wise has failed to notice that the sun is rising and sunshine streams into the hall.

All-wise's Sayings (Alvissmal) Analysis

Like several of the Eddic poems the point of this story seems not to be All-wise's answers to Thor's questions but the god's triumph over the ogre. As a god Thor would have been able to look into each world and gain the knowledge he seeks so the task he asks of All-wise is an unnecessary one. Thor's real hope in asking this series of questions is to keep the ogre above ground long enough for the sun to rise. Any good follower of Nordic tradition realizes that an ogre caught by the sun's rays is turned to stone forever. Therefore, Thor appears to be upholding his oath to give his daughter in marriage to All-wise but in actuality has deceived the ogre and sealed the earth-dweller's fate.

The First Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani

The First Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani Summary

Helgi is born a long time ago when eagles shriek and the sacred waters flow from Himinfell. The Norns come during the night to measure out his fate and deem that he shall be a famous and great warrior. The Norns create a strong lifeline for Helgi and anchor it in the middle of the moon's hall. They secure the ends in the east and west so the prince will rule all the land between. One of Neri's kinswomen from the north says she will hold one of the fastenings forever.

Helgi and his mother live well and unbothered by others. A raven sitting on a tree tells his companion that he knows something. He says that Sigmund's son, Helgi, stands in his byrnie ready for battle at only one day old. They should be happy because Helgi's battle prowess will result in plenty of corpses for them to feed on. A lord comes from battle to present Helgi with a shining sword and a name. As the child matures, he does not hold back battle treasure but readily doles it out to his warriors.

At the age of fifteen Helgi orchestrates the killing of Hunding who has ruled for a long time. Hunding's sons demand treasure from Helgi as payment for the death of their father. However, the boys intend to repay Helgi for murdering Hunding and ravaging the land. The prince refuses to pay the "kin-payment" and instead tells the sons that they can hope for a storm of spears and Odin's wrath. After the death of Hunding, the chieftains gather at Logafell. The peace between the two families has been shattered and Odin's wolves are eager to feast on the remnants of battle.

Helgi finally rests after killing all of Hunding's relatives. While he sits, bolts of lightning come from Logafell and out of the radiance come the Valkyries wearing helmets and blood drenched mail-coats. Helgi addresses the ladies and asks if they would like to return home with the warriors. Hogni's daughter looks down from her horse and says that they have other things to do besides drinking beer with the breaker of rings. She adds that she has already been promised to Granmar's son, although she finds Hodbrodd to be as bold as a kitten.

Hogni's daughter continues to explain that the prince, presumably Granmar's son, will come unless Helgi challenges him to battle or seizes the girl, possibly Hogni's daughter, from him. Helgi sends messengers to assemble an army. He offers great gifts of gold to the warriors and boys who agree to join his company. He tells the messengers to have the men ready their ships to sail from Brand-island. Helgi waits for the army to join him and then sets sail in gold-trimmed boats. Helgi asks Hiorleif if the men have been inspected but the man replies that there are so many men that it would take too long to count all the sailors traveling from Orvasund. There are twelve hundred men and they will encounter twice as many and a great battle at Highmeadow.

Helgi orders the tents taken down and the warriors awakened. As the ships plow through the water, waves crash against them trying to break the boats apart. Helgi calls out to his crew and the men battle against Ran's hand towards Gnipalund. Helgi and his men reach land and reconnoiters the opposing army. Gudmund asks who leads the invading troops and Sinfiotli tells him that they are Ylfings from the East that have come to fight in Gnipalund. Sinfiotli and Gudmund engage in a battle of insults until Sinfiotli finally asks if Gudmund would like to keep talking or engage in battle. Helgi breaks into the conversation and tells Sinfiotli that he is better off engaging in battle instead of speaking useless words.

Hodbrodd sends messengers to summon men to the fight. He offers up a war cry for the men to advance and meet the Volsungs in battle. Helgi fights at the forefront of the fray, eager for blood. As suggested at his birth the Valkyries come out of the sky to protect Helgi. When the battle is over Helgi is rewarded with gold rings, the girl, land and victory.

The First Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani Analysis

The role of fate is emphasized in this poem. From birth Helgi is a blessed man. He finds favor with the Norns and they ensure that his lifeline remains strong and spreads far and wide. Throughout his life Helgi undertakes many great campaigns, all aided by the Norns. For the ancient Norse people, having this amount of good fortune heaped on a man by the Fates was very desirable. As a hero Helgi seems invincible because of his "magical" protection; although there is little magical about the Norns beyond their ability to foretell the length of a man's life.

Textual notes that accompany this poem turn the reader's attention to the battle of insults that occurs between Sinfiotli and Gudmund. Like all such wars of words that take place in the Edda, including the one between Loki and the rest of the ZHsir, Sinfiotli and Gudmund seek to belittle one another by naming all the past wrongs of the other. What is interesting to note here, and in the other instances of such exchanges, is that the opponents are usually reconciled once the name-calling has ceased and in the next poem, or even verse of the poem, they will have moved onto more important matters.

The battle of insults, or flytings, seems to be integral to most Nordic tales and readers should be able to find even the briefest exchange in almost all the Edda's poems. However, as Helgi points out it is always better to engage in a battle with weapons and not words. The child's rhyme - "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me" - comes to mind when considering the flytings. Since words could not inflict physical pain or death they were considered entertaining to listeners but otherwise a waste of time when one could be fighting.

The Poem of Helgi Hiorvardsson (Helgakvida Hiorvardssonar)

The Poem of Helgi Hiorvardsson (Helgakvida Hiorvardssonar) Summary

Hiorvard is a king with four wives but who still desires to marry the woman designated the most beautiful. He learns that King Svafnir has a daughter named Sigrlinn who is said to be extraordinarily beautiful. Hiorvard's earl, Idmund, sends his son Atli to ask for Sigrlin's hand on the king's behalf. Atli spends an entire winter with King Svafnir and meets Franmar who has a daughter named Alof. After being told that the girl will not be betrothed, Atli begins his journey home and meets a bird in the forest. The bird asks Atli if he has seen Sigrlinn and says he will speak more if the king will give him whatever he wishes from his court. Atli agrees as long as the bird promises not to choose Hiorvard, his sons, or wives. The bird will only ask for temples and gold-horned cattle if Sigrlinn sleeps willingly in Hiorvard's arms.

The king asks to hear the news as soon as Atli reaches home. Unfortunately, Atli must report that the king refuses to give his daughter in marriage. Hiorvard decides to accompany Atli on a return journey to Svafnir's hall. When they arrive in Svafnir's land they find it overcome by fire. Hiorvard rides ahead and Atli stays behind to keep watch. Atli sees a bird sitting on top of a house and after killing it finds Alof and Sigrlinn inside. The reader is told that Franmar turned himself into an eagle to watch over the women. Svafnir is killed by King Hrodmar and Atli marries Alof while Hiorvard marries Sigrlinn. Hiorvard's son sits on a grave mound and sees nine Valkyries riding past. One speaks to him and tells him it will be many years before he distributes treasure or rules Rodulsvoll. The boy asks for her to give him a name and tells her to be careful with her answer since he will not accept her offering unless he can also have her. The Valkyrie names him Helgi and instructs him to search for a sword among 45 others. She describes the sword as having a hilt inlaid with gold and a ring attached to it. Courage is in the blade, terror in its point, and it is decorated with snakes and serpents. The valkyrie's name is Svava and she continues to look after Helgi in battle.

Helgi advises Hiorvard that he should not burn the settlements of princes who do him no harm. Helgi also notes that Hrodmar will distribute the rings once owned by their kinsmen because Helgi is not concerned with his own life. Helgi is given an army to seek vengeance for his father and searches for the sword described by Svava. Helgi and Atli kill Hrodmar and the giant Hati. When they moor their ships at Hatafjord, Hati's daughter, Hrimgerd, asks who has attacked so boldly. Atli and Hrimgerd exchange names and Atli accuses the ogress of trying to prevent the ships from entering the fjord. Hrimgerd denies involvement stating that she merely drowned Hlodvard's sons. A battle of insults ensues until Hrimgerd asks for compensation in the form of a night's lodging

with the prince. Atli offers her a night with an ogre named Shaggy who is more fitting of her companionship.

Atli tells Hrimgerd that the sun is rising and she will soon be forever captured in stone at the harbor's head. Helgi asks for Svava's hand and they exchange vows. Hiorvard's son vows at the pledge-drinking to take Svava from his brother Helgi. Hedin is filled with remorse and wanders south to meet his brother. Helgi welcomes his brother and asks for news from Norway. Hedin immediately tells his brother about his pledge to have Svava for himself but Helgi is not upset. Instead he comforts his brother by telling him that in three nights Helgi will die in a duel. In this case Hedin will be free to fulfill his pledge without remorse. Svava worries about her fate but Helgi tells her in his dying moments that Hedin will take care of her now. Hedin agrees to be her husband but not until his brother's death is avenged.

The Poem of Helgi Hiorvardsson (Helgakvida Hiorvardssonar) Analysis

The overlapping names make this poem difficult to comprehend. Helgi is not the same Helgi as in *The First Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani*. Neither is this Atli the same as the Atli who appears in the Sigurd tales. Once the matter of who's who has been sorted out with the aid of textual notes, the story becomes no clearer.

Although the two Helgi's are not the same man their stories are strikingly similar. This poem seems to begin prior to Helgi's birth and relates the circumstances of the marriage of Helgi's parents. The lustful king wins his bride only with the assistance of a bird who is really a man transformed. Both Atli and Hiorvard are rewarded with women even though they have done little to procure them. In fact Atli kills the bird that has been acting as the maidens' protector and has subtlety lead Atli to the house where the women are secreted.

Following the double marriage Atli engages in a flyting with a giantess named Hrimgerd. However, as textual notes suggest, the exchange does little for the plot other than to catch the giantess in the sun's rays and turn her to stone for eternity. Similarly, the devastating pledge made by Hedin to abscond with his brother's wife turns out to be a blessing in disguise. Helgi laughs off his brother's admitted betrayal saying that he will be dying soon and all is well. Whether the gods or Norns play a role in arranging this outcome is not clear from the text but could be a strong possibility, given the gods penchant for meddling in the lives of men particularly in those of heroes held in high regard.

As a whole the *Poem of Helgi Hiorvardsson* is a confusing contribution to the Elder Edda. With little correlation to the other two Helgi poems, this tale does little to further the reader's understanding of Helgi Hundingsbani. Additionally, the death of Helgi and subsequent marriage of his widow to Hedin seems anti-climatic when compared to the thrilling tale of Sigurd, Brynhild, and Gudrun.

A Second Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani

A Second Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani Summary

Helgi is born to King Sigmund of the Volsungs and Borghild. Hunding is the powerful king of Hunland who feuds with Sigmund. Helgi disguises himself to observe Hunding's court and on the way encounters a shepherd boy. Helgi tells the boy to let Hunding's son, Haeming, know that Helgi knows who was struck down in Haeming's byrnie. Helgi instructs the boy to inform Haeming that there is a wolf within the court: the man called Hamal, Hagal's son.

Helgi disguises himself as a woman in order to avoid detection by Hamal. However, he is discovered by a malicious man called Blind. Since the woman appears to have piercing eyes, a characteristic common to heroes, it is easy to uncover the peasant's true identity. Helgi escapes via a warship after killing Hunding and then takes the slain man's fleet to Bruna-bay. Helgi's ship is visited by the valkyrie, Sigrun, who desires to know his purpose in the bay. Although Helgi attempts to throw the woman off track she discovers the truth - that Helgi has killed King Hunding. Sigrun knows all this because she was not far when Hunding was slaughtered. Furthermore, she has seen Helgi before and recognizes him.

Sigrun seeks aide from Helgi after being betrothed to one of Granmar's sons. Sigrun kisses Helgi and he begins to fall in love with her. She says she has loved him since their first meeting but now she is betrothed to Hodbrodd. Helgi tells Sigrun to stay with him for he does not fear her kinsmen. Sigrun watches over Helgi's ship as he sails to Granmar's hall.

Sinfiotli identifies Helgi as the fighter amidst the fleet. A battle of insults breaks out between Gudmund and Sinfiotli until Helgi breaks them apart by stating that it would be more fitting for Sinfiotli to make the eagles glad by engaging in physical rather than verbal battle. Gudmund rides home with news of the visitors and an army is assembled. All of Granmar's sons and chieftains except Dag are killed in the ensuing battle. Sigrun finds Hodbrodd on the verge of death among the slain. She tells Hodbrodd that she will not fall into his arms and then joyfully meets Helgi who tells her that he has killed Bragi and Hogni, her brother and father respectively. Helgi tries to comfort the weeping Sigrun. She has been their battle-goddess and if he could wish it so, he would have the slain alive and her in his arms.

Helgi and Sigrun are soon married and they have sons. Helgi does not live to an old age but is slain by Dag who borrows Odin's spear. Dag, Helgi's brother-in-law, rides to tell Sigrun the news. Sigrun wishes that the oaths Dag swore to Helgi will come back upon him, that neither his ship nor horse will go forward, and his sword will fail to cut for him unless it is his own head. Dag tells her Odin is the cause of her misfortune not him. He offers her rings and land to repay her loss but Sigrun refuses unless the prince should

return to comfort her. A grave is made for Helgi and upon his entrance into Valhall Odin asks him to rule alongside him.

One evening Sigrun's maid sees Helgi riding into his grave with a large company of men and wonders if she is delusional or if Ragnarok has come. She asks Helgi if they are coming or going. Helgi assures her that he is not a delusion and they are moving onwards but not coming home. The maid relates her encounter to Sigrun who goes out to tend Helgi's wounds. Sigrun fashions a bed in the grave-mound where the two lovers can sleep together. Apparently her actions set Helgi free to enter Valhall since he tells her that he must leave before Salgofnir awakens the people. Helgi and his men ride off but the next evening Sigrun has her maid stand watch over the mound. However, Helgi does not reappear and Sigrun is said to die from her sorrows.

A Second Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani Analysis

The *Second Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani* begins very similarly to the *First Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani*. What is notably different about the two poems is Sigrun's emphasized struggle between lovers, the truncated flyting episode between Sinfiotli and Gudmund, and the post-burial love scene between Sigrun and Helgi. Textual notes suggest that the scribe of the second poem condensed the flyting scene to focus on the other two remarkable scenes and also in the hopes that readers would return to the first poem to read the entire battle of words between the two men.

Sigurn's love for Helgi is immediate and intense, but she is not free to be with him since she is betrothed to another. The woman's desires both for Helgi and to maintain her reputation are admirable and were valid concerns for an ancient Norse woman. Helgi must fight for his woman and does so without fear of retribution from her family. The two are then married and their undeniable love extends beyond the grave. The reuniting of Sigurn and Helgi inside the grave mound may seem odd to modern readers but the belief in possible contact with the spirit world was strong in Nordic tradition. The scene in which Sigurn makes a bed and lays next to her dead husband is a poignant ending to the poem and the lovers' relationship. One wants to believe that when Sigurn dies from her sorrows she is reunited with Helgi in the afterlife.

The Death of Sinfiotli

The Death of Sinfiotli Summary

This tale is told entirely in prose and relates the events surrounding Sinfiotli's death. Sinfiotli and another man woo the same woman, and Sinfiotli kills the other man. It happens that the other lover was Borghild's brother and Borghild is Sinfiotli's stepmother. Borghild tells her stepson to go away but Sinfiotli's father, Sigmund, offers payment for the man's death. At the funeral feast Borghild poisons Sinfiotli's ale but when he looks in the cup he realizes that the cloudy drink is poisoned. Sinfiotli shows the cup to Sigmund, who is immune to poison, and he drinks the ale. A second time Borghild brings Sinfiotli a poisoned cup and again Sigmund drinks it down. The third time Borghild brings a poisoned drink she taunts her stepson and Sigmund tells Sinfiotli to let his mustache strain the ale. Sinfiotli drinks and dies immediately.

His father carries the body for a long time until he comes to a fjord where a little ship waits with a man in it. The man offers to take them across the fjord but Sinfiotli's body takes up the whole ship and Sigmund must walk around the fjord. When the boat leaves shore it disappears.

Sigmund stays in Borghild's kingdom for a long time before going to his lands in France. There he marries Hiordis and they have a son: Sigurd. Sigmund is killed by the sons of Hunding in battle and Hiordis marries Alf. Sigurd lives with Hirodis and her new husband throughout his childhood. Sigurd is said to be the greatest of all Sigmund's sons and surpasses them all in size and strength.

The Death of Sinfiotli Analysis

What seems to be the most important feature of this short prose passage is not the death of Sinfiotli but the birth of Sigurd. Since many of the following tales will revolve around Sigurd's heroic deeds and the events that follow his death, Sinfiotli's tale serves to introduce the reader to an important Nordic figure.

Also central to Sinfiotli's poem is the theme of revenge and the appearance of a mysterious figure. Borghild accepts the payment offered for her dead brother but cannot forget the wrong done to her and seeks vengeance upon her stepson. A good Nordic tale always includes revenge for past wrongs. When Sigmund comes to the fjord the unnamed stranger offers to ferry the dead boy across the water but disappears as soon as the boat leaves shore. More than likely listeners of the poem would assume that one of the gods was the ferryman come to carry Sinfiotli off to Hel. Another possibility is that the ferryman was a disguised Valkyrie claiming Sinfiotli's soul for residence in Valhall but since the boy did not die in battle this assumption seems less likely.

Gripir's Prophecy (Gripisspa)

Gripir's Prophecy (Gripisspa) Summary

A short prose section introduces the main characters of the poem. Gripir, the wisest of all men, possesses the gift of prophecy. He is brother to Hiordis and son of Eylimi. Sigurd is out riding one day and happens upon Gripir's hall. He speaks with a man named Geitir outside the hall and their exchange is told in verse.

Sigurd inquires about the inhabitants and king of the hall. Geitir tells him that Gripir rules the land and states that he will need to know the stranger's name before he can ask the king to speak with him. Sigurd identifies himself as the son of Sigmund and Hiordis. Geiter relays the message to Gripir who goes out to greet Sigurd.

The men converse for awhile before Sigurd poses the question which is the catalyst for the entire poem: he desires to be told his fate. Gripir offers an all-encompassing answer by telling the boy that he will be a wise man, rich and good-looking, and strong in battle. Sigurd seems pleased with this response but asks for more specific information. Gripir says that when Sigurd leaves the hall he will avenge his father and bring down Hunding's sons. Sigurd then asks if he will achieve deeds that will be heralded as the greatest under heaven. The prophet replies that Sigurd will kill the greedy serpent that lives on Gnita-heath as well as Regin and Fafnir. After each piece of prophecy Sigurd asks for a little more based on what Gripir has just revealed. In this way Sigurd learns the story of his life throughout the poem.

Gripir tells Sigurd that he will discover Fafnir's lair and take the treasure to Giuki. Then Sigurd will find the prince's daughter sleeping on the mountain following the death of Helgi. The awakened lady will teach Sigurd about the runes, how to speak in many different tongues, and about healing medicines. After leaving the woman behind Sigurd will come to Heimir's hall. Here Gripir stops and says that this last event has already happened and Sigurd should cease asking questions. Sigurd suspects that Gripir sees some misery in the future which he will not reveal. Sigurd implores Gripir to continue and not hide the rest of the prophecy even if it is unpleasant. Gripir tries to assure Sigurd that his life does not include shame and that he will always be viewed as a strong warrior. Sigurd does not want to leave until he knows the rest and asks again for Gripir to continue. Reluctantly Gripir agrees to continue and begins to tell Sigurd about his death.

While at Heimier's hall Sigurd will meet a lady named Brynhild, and she will rob him of his happiness. He will fall in love with her and they will swear strong oaths but keep few of them. At Giuki's Sigurd will forget Brynhild through treachery and be offered Gudrun instead. Grimhild will counsel Sigurd to woo Brynhild on Gunnar's behalf. Sigurd, disguised as Gunnar, will sleep with the girl as with his mother and his name will continue to be uppermost among men.

A double wedding takes place even though Sigurd is appalled that Gunnar agrees to marry Brynhild after the disguised Sigurd spent three nights with her. Gripir continues his prophecy by telling Sigurd that he will love Gudrun and Brynhild will manifest her own revenge. Sigurd grows increasingly distressed at Gripir's words and asks what will happen next. Gripir reveals that Sigurd will never harm Brynhild but she will not act kindly towards him out of anger and grief. Gudrun will become joyless following Sigurd's death at the hands of her brothers. Gripir's final consolation to Sigurd is the knowledge that the hero will long be remembered as mightiest among men. Sigurd seems to resign himself to his fate and suggests they part ways. Sigurd knows Gripir only did as he was asked and would have told a better fate if he had been able.

Gripir's Prophecy (Gripisspa) Analysis

This poem presents the first of many tales involving Sigurd. The hero seeks out Gripir, a prophet, in order to learn the truth about his fate. Sigurd's great deeds are revealed as are the circumstances of his death. The extended love triangle involving Sigurd, Brynhild, and Gudrun is briefly described. The prophet also alludes to the sorrow that Gudrun experiences and which will become the focus of several more poems.

Gripir's Prophecy has two functions. First, the tale is a foreshadowing of the Sigurd saga. The prophet's brief overview serves as a starting point from which readers can delve deeper into the lives of Sigurd, Brynhild, and Gudrun. Similarly, this poem can be used as a reference point for readers confused by the events related in later poems. Since Gripir does not mention in great detail such extraneous characters as Oddrun, Kostbera, Glaumvor, and various messengers his account is neatly trimmed down and provides readers with an easy summary of the intertwining events. The positioning of the prophecy at the beginning of the numerous Sigurd poems creates a nice overview of the stories and prepares the reader for what follows.

The Lay of Regin (Reginsmal)

The Lay of Regin (Reginsmal) Summary

The poem begins with a prose section in which Sigurd chooses a horse for himself from Hialprek's stud. Regin, a wise and ferocious dwarf, comes to Hialprek and offers to foster Sigurd. As part of his fosterage, Regin tells Sigurd about his parents and the following story. Odin, Haenir, and Loki come to Andvara-falls which is full of fish. A dwarf named Andvari lives as a pike in the falls. Regin tells Sigurd about Ottar who likes to swim in the falls and is Regin's brother. Once Ottar catches a salmon and, while sitting on the bank eating his catch, is killed by Loki. The ZHsir view this as good fortune and make a bag out of the otter skin. That night they stay with Hreidmar, Regin's father, and show off the otter bag. The men make the gods ransom their lives by filling the bag with gold and covering the outside with red gold.

Loki is sent to fetch the gold and he borrows a net from Ran to use at Andvara-falls. When Loki spreads the net out the pike jumps into it. Loki then instructs the pike to find the serpent's flame, or gold, for him. The pike identifies himself as Andvari son of Oin. He spends his days in the falls because a Norn shaped his fate this way. Loki then seems to forget the gold for a moment and threatens Andvari's life if he refuses to reveal how men are repaid for speaking ill of each other. The fish tells him that men who speak untrue words must wade into Vadgelmir and suffer the consequences for a long time. Satisfied with Andvari's answer Loki demands all his gold including one ring which Andvari tries to keep back. The fish swims into a rock and prophesies that the gold will cause the death of two brothers, great strife among eight princes, and be of no use to anyone.

When Loki returns with the gold, Hriedmar spreads out the otterskin and instructs the gods to cover it with gold. He sees one hair poking through and demands it covered as well. Odin produces Andvari's ring which he has held back and covers the hair. Loki pronounces that they have been fully paid but that the gold will be the death of Regin and Fafnir. Hreidmar tells the gods that he would have had their lives if he had known of their deceit. He seems to be referring to the one ring which was initially held back from the pile of gold. Hreidmar seems to dismiss Loki's threat, believing that the sons the god refers to have not been born yet and that the gold will bring them prosperity for many years.

Fafnir and Regin demand a portion of the gold as compensation for Otter's death but their father refuses. Fafnir stabs his father in his sleep with a sword. The dying father calls out to his daughters, Lyngheid and Lofnheid. However, Lyngheid says that few sisters will avenge their father on their brothers. Hreidmar seems to curse his daughter saying that if a couple fails to produce a son they should give the girl in marriage and hope their union will provide a son to avenge their wrongs. Hreidmar dies and Fafnir takes all the gold. Regin asks for his share but Fafnir refuses. Regin asks Lyngheid for

advice on recovering his inheritance. She tells him to ask not with a sword but in a cheerful manner.

One day Sigurd comes to Regin's hall full of mighty plans. Sigurd stays with Regin and learns that Fafnir lies on Gnita-heath now in the shape of a dragon. Regin fashions a sword named Gram for Sigurd that is so sharp it cuts through Regin's anvil. Regin then encourages Sigurd to kill Fafnir but Sigurd says he must first seek revenge for his father's death. Hialprek outfits Sigurd with ships and men to facilitate his journey. A stranger named Hnikar appears on a headland overlooking Sigurd's ships. Although the man gives his name as Hnikar the mention of a raven suggests that this may be Odin in disguise, especially given the stranger's power to calm the raging storm by stepping foot on the ship.

Another possible sign that the strange man is the god in disguise is Regin's wish to learn the omens of gods and men that are best during battle. Hnikar tells the dwarf that there are plenty of good omens if men know them. A trusted omen for warriors is the company of a dark raven as is finding two men eager for battle glory waiting outside his door. A howling wolf beneath an ash tree tokens good luck if the warrior can surprise his enemy. Hnikar further schools Regin that men should not fight facing into the sun and victorious is the man who arranges his warriors in a wedge-shaped column. Unfortunate is the man who stumbles in battle because the disir stand waiting for men to be injured. All men should take care to be combed, washed, and fed in the morning since he does not know where he will be by evening. Hnikar concludes his lesson by saying that it is bad to rush ahead of one's fate.

Sigurd fights a great battle against Lyngvi, Hunding's son and kills him and his three brothers. After the battle Regin proclaims that Sigurd has fared well and none are more successful than the king's heir. Sigurd returns to Hialpreak and Regin resumes his entreaty for Sigurd to kill Fafnir.

The Lay of Regin (Reginsmal) Analysis

The *Lay of Regin* focuses on two things: Regin's quest to see his brother murdered and the wisdom bestowed by Hnikar. The poem also provides further exposition for Sigurd's battle with the dragon and the subsequent freeing of Brynhild.

The brief story Regin relates to Sigurd about Andvari's gold sets the stage for all the events which follow. The reader can see again how the gods interfere in the lives of men, often bringing great sorrow and misery. Andvari tries to keep one ring for himself which is later held back by Odin. The curse laid on the gold by Andvari becomes transferred to Hreidmar by association with the ring. Hreidmar disbelieves the curse but as soon as the gods depart Andvari's prophecy starts to come true. Regin and Fafnir kill their father for the treasure and then begin to turn on each other. Sigurd is pulled into the dispute and so too shares a portion of the curse.

The verses in which Hnikar dispenses battle wisdom to Regin are an excellent example of man's attempt to learn about the mythological world. Although the text does not mention that Hnikar is Odin in disguise, his knowledge of the omens and his ability to calm a storm with only his presence should make the reader consider this possibility. Gods and men often seek out figures who are wiser than them to garner knowledge. The pieces of wisdom imparted by Hnikar here can be used by Regin to further Sigurd's battles or by the readers/listeners of the poem in their own battles.

The Lay of Fafnir (Fafnismal)

The Lay of Fafnir (Fafnismal) Summary

Sigurd and Regin travel to Gnita-heath where they find Fafnir's tracks. Sigurd digs a great pit in the path and conceals himself in it. As Fafnir moves over the path he snorts poison onto Sigurd's head and the hero stabs the dragon with his sword. Fafnir flails about from the mortal wound and Sigurd jumps out of the pit. They stare at one another and Fafnir is incredulous that a mere boy has dealt him a death blow. He asks where he came from and whose son he is. Sigurd conceals his name so that the dying man/dragon cannot curse him by name. Instead Sigurd says he is called "Pre-eminent beast" and goes about mother- and fatherless. Fafnir then desires to know how the boy was born if he has no father. Sigurd then reveals that he is Sigurd son of Sigmund. The dragon asks who has urged him to this action. Fafnir also compliments the boy's innate bravery which must have been inherited from his father. The boy says that courage alone spurred him to action.

Sigurd comments on the dragon's treasure which he will now inherit. The dragon tells him that the treasure and rings will bring the hero's death. Sigurd then asks Fafnir to explain which Norns go to those in need and choose mothers for children. Fafnir responds that there are different tribes of Norns and they are not all kin. Sigurd continues to ask questions of the supernatural and wishes to know the name of the island where Surt and the ZHsir will mingle their sword-liquid, or blood, together. Mismade is where the gods will battle and Bilrost will break apart, forcing their horses to flounder through the river.

Fafnir again tries to warn Sigurd against taking the gold and encourages him to ride away. Sigurd refuses to listen to the dragon's advice and says Hel can take Fafnir. Fafnir then dies and as Sigurd is cleaning the blood from his sword Regin appears praising Sigurd's deed. Regin admits that he partially orchestrated the death of his own brother but Sigurd says that Regin is fully responsible.

Regin cuts out Fafnir's heart and drinks blood from the wound. Regin then instructs Sigurd to roast the heart so that Regin can eat it after napping. Sigurd begins to turn on his foster father stating that Regin ran off while Sigurd did the hard work. Regin counters that Sigurd could not have defeated the dragon if not for the sword he forged. Sigurd tells Regin that bravery is stronger than any sword and he has seen brave men fight with blunt swords.

Sigurd roasts the dragon's heart but when he tests the meat's doneness he prods it with his finger thereby burning his finger. As a result of sticking his finger in his mouth Sigurd is now able to understand the speech of birds and hears nuthatches chirping nearby. Sigurd hears a nuthatch saying that Sigurd would be wise to eat the heart himself. Another bird says that Regin lies plotting in his sleep to betray the boy. A third comments that if Sigurd sends Regin to hell shorter by a head then the gold would be

his alone. A fourth nuthatch says that Sigurd would be wise to listen to the birds and make the raven happy. A fifth states that the boy would be unwise to let one brother live while the other lies dead. A sixth bird agrees with the fifth and a seventh echoes the thoughts of the third.

Sigurd heeds the words of the nuthatches and cut's off Regin's head to send both brothers to hell together. He then eats Fafnir's heart and drinks both Regin and Fafnir's blood. Once again the nuthatches offer advice to the young hero. They tell him to gather up the red rings and use them to win a girl fairer than any other. They send him over the green ways to Giuki and the daughter he has fostered. They also tell Sigurd about a hall high on Hindarfell where a valkyrie sleeps surrounded by flame. Odin has put her into a deep sleep because she brought down the wrong fighter in battle. Only the Norns will allow the spell to awaken Sigrdrifa. A concluding prose section tells how Sigurd rode along the dragon's track to his lair. There the hero fills two chests with gold and takes the helmet of terror, a gold mail-shirt, and the sword Hrotti along with many other treasures. He loads the dragon's gold onto Grani and climbs onto his horse's back.

The Lay of Fafnir (Fafnismal) Analysis

The curse of Andvari's gold continues to work on Regin and Sigurd. Regin's desire for the gold has increased, making him thirsty for the blood of his brother. However, Regin is either too cowardly or prevented by some unknown reason to commit the murder himself. Instead Regin convinces his foster-son Sigurd to battle the dragon alone. Although he is slain by Sigurd, Fafnir knows that his death was orchestrated by Regin and tells Sigurd to beware the dwarf. However, only by magical intervention does Sigurd realize that Regin is not as honest as he appears. Fafnir's blood allows Sigurd to understand the speech of the nuthatches who advise him to kill Regin before ill befalls him.

While the text does not allude to an intervention by the gods here, one certainly seems possible. Only by supernatural force is Sigurd able to understand the birds. It seems plausible that the birds function as the mouthpiece of the gods directing Sigurd's actions. However, by taking Fafnir's gold, Sigurd's fate is altered; unless the Norns spun out this particular course of action in the hero's life line at birth. This last suggestion supports the Norse tradition of allowing Fate to guide one's life.

The poem serves to deliver a warning to its readers/listeners regarding the dangers of greed. Loki's thirst for gold causes him to demand the last ring from Andvari; Hreidmar demands the ring from Odin; Fafnir and Regin demand the gold from their father; and now the father and both brothers lie dead as a result of their greed. While Sigurd is entitled to the treasure as reward for his slaying of the dragon, the reader should assume that the curse will follow him and any other who comes in contact with the gold.

The Lay of Sigrdrifa (Sigrdrifumal)

The Lay of Sigrdrifa (Sigrdrifumal) Summary

An opening prose paragraph continues where the *Lay of Fafnir* left off. Sigurd rides to Hindarfell where he sees a great light shining from a mountain. When he comes to the light he sees a shield-wall with a banner flying over it and a fully armed sleeping form. Sigurd takes off the helmet and discovers the form is a woman. Using his sword Gram, Sigurd cuts away the woman's corselet thereby awakening her from her deep sleep. She asks what has released her from her sleep and Sigurd tells her his name. The woman gives her name as Sigrdrifa - one of the Valkyries.

Sigrdrifa tells Sigurd that she was put into the deep sleep by Odin when she angered him by killing the wrong warrior in battle. Odin curses the girl by stating that she shall take a husband and never fight victoriously again. Sigrdrifa says that she had sworn never to marry a man who knows fear. Sigurd takes advantage of having an otherworldly creature at his disposal and asks to be taught wisdom.

She proceeds to give him beer which is full of spells and favorable letters. Sigrdrifa tells Sigurd that to have victory in battle he must cut victory runes on his sword and invoke Tyr twice. In order to avoid being charmed by another's wife he should cut ale-runes on a horn and the back of the hand. The cup should be guarded by mischief and garlic thrown into the liquid. Helping-runes should be learned to help women give birth. They should be cut on the palms, clasped on the joints and implore the disir for help. Sea-runes should be cut on the prow and rudder and burnt into the oar with fire to ensure safe passage of sail-horses on the sea. In order to care for wounds, Sigurd must cut limb-runes on bark and the branches that bend east. Speech-runes should be wound and woven together at the courts. Learning mind-runes will make one wiser in spirit than other men. Sigrdrifa gives a long explanation of mind-runes and concludes her discussion by stating that these are all the runes and one should use them if they can get them.

Sigrdrifa then tells Sigurd to choose between speech and silence. He says he would have her loving advice in its entirety for as long as he lives. She advises him to be blameless towards kin and be slow to avenge even though they do wrong. Secondly she warns him against swearing oaths that are not truly kept. She tells him not to argue with a fool at the Assembly. She suggests that keeping silent will show him a coward and so it is better to handle the matter another day. Fourthly she advises him to continue traveling through the night rather than lodge with a witch. Such women sit close to roads to deaden swords and spirits. Sigrdrifa cautions Sigurd against being tempted by fair ladies sitting on a bench. He should not quarrel with a warrior when they have been drinking since ale dulls a man's wits. Her seventh piece of wisdom is to fight a man of courage with whom he feuds instead of being burnt alive inside his hall. Sigurd should guard against evil and shame. He should take care not to entice another's wife or "encourage sexual excess." The dead should be buried where found on the ground

no matter what the cause of death. Likewise, care should be taken to cleanse, comb, and dry the dead before they are laid in the coffin. Tenthly Sigrdrifa advises against trusting the oaths of an enemy's son. Quarrels and grief do not sleep. The last piece of advice given in the poem is to beware of friends in all directions. She does not feel the prince will have a long life because quarrels have sprung up. Here the poem ends.

The Lay of Sigrdrifa (Sigrdrifumal) Analysis

The *Lay of Sigrdrifa* tells how Sigurd rescues Sigrdrifa from the flames and her enchanted sleep. In *Brynhild's Ride to Hell* the same story is told from Brynhild's point of view and Sigrdrifa is not mentioned. As textual notes suggest the name Sigrdrifa here may be a conflation and Brynhild is actually the woman rescued by Sigurd. Likewise, Sigrdrifa and Brynhild may be the same woman but the poet chooses to tell the story using Brynhild's valkyrie name. The distinction is unclear here but some texts offer suggestions for filling in the gaps.

The advice Sigrdrifa imparts to Sigurd is, like much of the wisdom given in the Eddas, meant to educate the character as well as the poem's listener/reader. The pieces of wisdom describe the proper conduct of a man and correlates with the advice given in the *Seeress' Prophecy* or the *Sayings of the High One*. However, Sigrdrifa's thoughts are cut abruptly short as the poem ends immediately following her eleventh statement. Some texts note that the manuscript leaves following this page are missing. It is interesting that the text ends right after the Valkyrie announces that Sigurd's life will not be long because of quarrels. This may only be a coincidence but her pronouncement serves as a striking benediction to the hero's deeds portrayed in this poem.

Fragment of a Poem about Sigurd

Fragment of a Poem about Sigurd Summary

Although the identities of the speakers are hard to distinguish at first the third verse reveals that one speaker is Gunnar and the other is Hogni, his brother. Hogni asks why Gunnar desires to kill one as brave as Sigurd and Gunnar replies that Sigurd swore oaths which he has failed to uphold. Hogni replies that Brynhild is bringing about this disaster because she is upset by Gudrun's marriage to Sigurd.

Gunnar and Hogni feed Guthorm roasted wolf and serpent before the three of them are able to attack Sigurd. As Sigurd lies dead near the Rhine a raven warns that Atli will seek to destroy them. Gudrun stands outside asking after Sigurd as the other three ride up to the hall. Hogni tells her they have cut him apart and Grani stands over his master now. Brynhild comments that now Gunnar and Hogni will be able to control the land with Sigurd out of the way. She adds that it was not fitting for Sigurd to rule when Giuki had five sons. Brynhild's laugh fills the hall as she tells the men to enjoy the land. Gudrun then curses Gunnar for his murder of Sigurd.

Gunnar stays awake long after the others have retired wondering about the comments of the raven and eagle. Brynhild awakens and tells Gunnar to either tell his sorrow or let it be since nothing can be changed. Everyone listens to Brynhild as she tells of a dream where Gunnar rides joyless and fettered among foes. She announces that the strength of the Niflung line will fade away because they are oath-breakers. She reminds Gunnar that he swore blood-brothership with Sigurd and he has dishonored that oath. Brynhild reveals that when Sigurd, disguised as Gunnar, came to ask for her hand they slept with a wound-wand between them. The implication is that Sigurd did not break his promise to Gunnar after all.

Fragment of a Poem about Sigurd Analysis

Although brief this poem reveals Brynhild's part in the death of Sigurd. She tells her husband that Sigurd acted dishonorably when he slept near her. This enrages Gunnar since he and Sigurd had previously sworn oaths, and he seeks revenge on the hero. Brynhild's broken heart leads her to facilitate such treachery against the man she loves. While Brynhild will later appear to be the grieving and wronged woman, here she cackles in glee following her lover's death. Her revelation of the truth to Gunnar at the close of the poem only serves to show her malicious nature. By telling Gunnar that Sigurd upheld his oaths she forces her husband to face the knowledge that he killed a great warrior on the advice of a woman. The dynamics operating between the couples in this poem are astounding and brought forcefully to the reader's attention.

The First Lay of Gudrun (Gudrunarkvida I)

The First Lay of Gudrun (Gudrunarkvida I) Summary

Gudrun sits over Sigurd's body unable to grieve. Men and women try to comfort her and speculate that she desires to die from grief. One by one the warrior's wives try to console the widow with their own stories of sorrow.

Giaflaug, Giuki's sister, says that she is the most deprived of joy. She has lost five husbands, three daughters, three sisters, eight brothers, and she now lives alone. Herborg, queen of the Huns, says that she lost her seven sons and her husband in lands to the south. Her father, mother, and four brothers were drowned at sea. All this happened in the course of six months and then she was taken captive and made a slave to the enemy's wife who beat her every day. Then Gullrond, daughter of Giuki, advises that they not conceal Sigurd from Gudrun. The covering is pulled back from Sigurd and Gudrun is told to look on her beloved and embrace him as she used to do. Gudrun looks once on Sigurd and begins to lose her hair, scratch her face, and cry tears like rain. Gullrond says that she knows their love was the greatest and Gudrun was never happy with anyone but Sigurd.

Gudrun's voice is loosened and she spills out her feelings for Sigurd. He was the brightest stone and she thought herself higher than Odin's women. Now she feels smaller than a leaf. She misses her friend to talk to at their table and in their bed. Gudrun states that Giuki's kin caused her grief and she curses Gunnar and his people. In response Brynhild curses Gullrond to be barren. Gullrond tells Brynhild to be silent. Long has Brynhild been the nemesis of princes. She has been driven along by the waves of ill fate. Brynhild then places the blame on Atli and his greed for the shining serpents' bed. Unable to bear the bickering or her grief any long Gudrun runs away to Denmark where she lives seven-half years with Thora. Brynhild does not want to go on living and stabs herself with a sword.

The First Lay of Gudrun (Gudrunarkvida I) Analysis

As the first of the lays about Gudrun this poem gives only the briefest details of her life following Sigurd's death. Brynhild continues to act viciously towards Sigurd's wife and sister-in-law. There is little in Brynhild's actions that redeem her and a reader taking each poem in order may not sympathize with the sorrowing woman during her lament to the giantess of hell.

The women who try to comfort Gudrun provide examples of the kind of family mourning prevalent in Norse tradition. Following the death of a loved one the women gather to assist the widow through her grieving process. However, their stories serve only

themselves as Gudrun remains unmoved by their tales of heartache. It is her own sister, Gullrond, who understands the importance of Gudrun saying good-bye to her husband's corpse. Gullrond's actions seem out of place in the Eddic tales and perhaps even in the wider Norse tradition of remaining stalwart in the face of death.

Short Poem about Sigurd (Sigurdarkvida in skamma)

Short Poem about Sigurd (Sigurdarkvida in skamma) Summary

The poem begins with Sigurd's visit to Giuki and the oaths sworn between Gunnar, Hogni, and Sigurd. Sigurd is given Gudrun in marriage and they all spend many happy days together until they ride to Brynhild's. Sigurd goes with them because he knows the way and would have gladly married her if his fate had been different.

Sigurd places a naked sword between himself and Brynhild. Brynhild has never known any shame and she is unaware of the injury that has been done to her by Giuki's sons. Sitting outside Brynhild states that she will have Sigurd or die; and she knows the words she has just spoken will come back to haunt her. Brynhild's anger grows until she approaches Gunnar with an evil plan to kill Sigurd. She tells her husband that unless he slays Sigurd she will go back to her kin because she cannot be satisfied with Gunnar. Unable to decide on a course of action Gunnar seeks counsel from Hogni. He says that he would rather lose his own life than lose Brynhild, the best among women, and he asks if Hogni would be willing to betray Sigurd for the gold taken from Fafnir. Hogni replies that it would be wrong of them to cut the oaths they've sworn with a sword. Brynhild's passion has grown too strong and threatens the happiness created among the men.

Gunnar seems to ignore the opinions of his companion and says that they need to prepare Guthorm, their younger brother, to assist in the murder. Since Guthorm was not present at the oath-swearing he cannot be accused of breaking his pledge. Guthorm is quickly convinced and he pierces Sigurd's heart with a sword. In his dying moments Sigurd hurls his sword Gram at Guthorm cutting him in half at the waist. Gudrun awakes to find herself covered in Sigurd's blood and makes a loud noise that causes Sigurd's spirit to sit up in the bed. The spirit tells Gudrun not to weep because she still has brothers alive. Sigurd also has a young heir who is greater than any seven that may come after him. Sigurd reveals that his death is the result of Brynhild's misery and that he did not violate Brynhild.

Sigurd dies and Gudrun claps her hands in a sign of grief. Brynhild laughs with all her heart when she hears Giuki's daughter weeping. Gunnar becomes upset with his wife and states that she deserves to see her brother struck down. Brynhild proceeds to tell her husband that his guilt is the result of her unhappiness with him and that she was forced to marry him by Atli. Now Brynhild will seek vengeance on the woman who kept company with Sigurd.

Gunnar wishes to prevent Brynhild's journey of death but Hogni desires to let her go so that no further grief will come from her. Many of Brynhild's maids commit suicide in order

to honor their mistress. Some refuse to follow Brynhild to Hel; and Brynhild agrees that the women should not be coerced to follow her but they will receive less treasure when they do die. In her dying words to Gunnar Brynhild says that he and Gudrun will soon be reconciled. She predicts Gunnar's marriage to another woman and Gudrun's marriage to Atli. Brynhild also foresees the deaths of Gunnar and Atli. Brynhild says that it would be more fitting for Gudrun to follow Sigurd in death but Gudrun will not follow Brynhild's advice. Instead Gudrun will sail to Ionakr's land, marry the king and care for his sons. Brynhild then orders her funeral pyre, says she would have said more but she spoke the truth, and then departs this life.

Short Poem about Sigurd (Sigurdarkvida in skamma) Analysis

Although the poem is said to be short it contains a large amount of information about Sigurd's death, Brynhild's revenge, and Gudrun's future. Similarly the poem is said to be about Sigurd but focuses more on Brynhild and seems to be told from her point of view. Brynhild tells of her love for Sigurd and her refusal to marry another. In this tale Brynhild comes across as the scorned lover out for revenge and seeking only to spend eternal life with her beloved.

The reader learns that Brynhild approaches Gunnar with the idea to kill Sigurd and the plan seems to be hatched as a means to an end. She overpowers Gunnar by demeaning his worth as a husband so that he is almost forced to commit murder. However, Gunnar is ashamed to deliver the fatal blow and enlists the aid of his innocent brother, Guthorm. Possibly Gunnar's eventual journey to Atli where he meets his own death is motivated out of remorse for his part in Sigurd's death. There is little in the text to support this opinion but it is one that could be explored further by combining the numerous Sigurd narratives. Brynhild's ruthlessness is only becoming apparent and this may be the only time that Gunnar appears as an almost unwitting participant in Sigurd's death instead of the protagonist.

Brynhild's Ride to Hell

Brynhild's Ride to Hell Summary

A brief prose section begins the poem and provides the setting for the events which follow. After Brynhild dies two funeral pyres are made: one for Sigurd and one for Brynhild. Brynhild is laid on a wagon draped with woven tapestries and it is said she drives the wagon down the road to hell. On her way Brynhild comes to the settlement of a giantess who knows the story of Brynhild's life and refuses to allow passage. The giantess tells Brynhild that she should be weaving instead of visiting another woman's man. Brynhild tells the giantess not to reproach her because her lineage is greater than the giantess', but the giantess counters that Brynhild is born of Budli and has deceived Giuki's children.

Brynhild then tries to plead her case by relating her story of woe to the giantess. A reference to Brynhild's cloak being placed under an oak is made but it is unclear what it means. She tells the giantess that at twelve years old she gave a promise to the prince. She was once called the 'War-lady in the helmet' but when she accidentally slew Helmet-Gunnar in battle Odin became angry with her. Odin penned her in Skata-grove with overlapping shields and said only the man without fear could break Brynhild's sleep. Odin then set a ring of fire around the shields and told the warrior who brought Fafnir's gold to ride over it. Sigurd, riding Grani, appears and seems better to her than all men. Sigurd and Brynhild slept in one bed as brother and sister for eight nights. However, Gudrun accuses her of sleeping with Sigurd and Brynhild learns that she's been betrayed by those who took her husband. Brynhild finishes her tale by stating the living will spend their time in sorrow but she and Sigurd will never part. Brynhild then commands the giantess to sink and the poem ends.

Brynhild's Ride to Hell Analysis

Brynhild's Ride to Hell completes the tale told in the *First Lay of Gudrun* and a *Short Poem about Sigurd*. The reader learns that Brynhild follows through on her oath to spend eternity with Sigurd. The fierce woman also is given the opportunity to tell her tale of hardship and sorrow just as Gudrun does in several poems. Although the giantess forbids passage to Brynhild the dead creature's purpose seems only to be that of listener to Brynhild's tale. The giantess has not asked to hear the reason Brynhild drives her wagon to Hel and the completion of the story does not afford her automatic passage. Rather the giantess functions as stand-in for the reader or hearer of the poem.

Brynhild's narrative is straightforward and presents little discrepancy with the other poems regarding Sigurd. What is notable is Brynhild's mention of the eight cloaks placed under an oak tree. Textual notes suggest that the cloaks may be a reference to the source of Brynhild's transformative powers or to the choosing of the Valkyries.

However, the text itself is unclear and no other mention of the cloaks can be found in the Elder Edda.

The Death of the Niflungs

The Death of the Niflungs Summary

This tale is told entirely in prose and follows the death of Sigurd. Gunnar and Hogni take all of Fafnir's gold. A feud arises between Atli and Giuki's sons over Brynhild's death. As compensation Atli seeks to marry Gudrun and she is given a forgetfulness drink. Together Gudrun and Atli have two sons, Erp and Eitil.

Atli sends a messenger to invite Gunnar and Hogni to visit his hall. However, Gudrun knows that her new husband plans treachery and sends a message in runes telling her brothers not to come. She includes Andvari's ring with wolf hair twisted around it as a token for Hogni.

Gunnar asks for the hand of Atli's sister, Oddrun, but is denied so he marries Glaumvor, and Hogni marries Kostbera. Solar, Snaevar and Giuki are named as sons but unclear to which couple. Gunnar and Hogni come to Atli's hall and Gudrun asks her sons to plead for their uncles' lives but the boys will not. Hogni's heart is cut out and Gunnar is placed into a snake-pit. Gunnar plays his harp which puts the snakes to sleep but an adder bites him in the liver.

The Death of the Niflungs Analysis

This short prose summary of the deaths of Gunnar and Hogni seems out of place in the Edda. The mention of Gunnar's asking for Oddrun's hand in marriage does complement Oddrun's story in *Oddrun's Lament*. This small piece of clarification is followed by a confusing mention of Gudrun's request for her sons to intercede on their uncles' behalf. No other telling of Gunnar and Hogni's visit to Atli's hall includes this bit of information. However, when the reader comes to Gudrun's method of revenge for her brothers' deaths this detail may provide motivation for her killing her own sons. Their decision to remain silent here may result in their deaths later. The purpose of this short passage may be to tie together the other poems since it does not include enough new information to be considered an independent tale.

The Second Lay of Gudrun

The Second Lay of Gudrun Summary

While staying with Atli King Thiodrek loses most of his men. Drawn together by their respective sorrows Thiodrek and Gudrun spend time discussing their problems. Gudrun tells Thiodrek that she was a lovely girl and loved her brothers deeply but that changed when her father gives her in marriage to Sigurd. Gudrun's brothers begrudge her having a prominent husband and will not sleep until they put Sigurd to death. Gudrun sees Grani run from the Assembly without Sigurd and follows the horse to ask what has happened. Grani drops his head into the grass and Gudrun knows Sigurd is dead. She confronts her brothers and Hogni tells her Sigurd was struck down by the river. Her brother says she will find her husband where the ravens and eagles shriek and the wolves howl in pleasure.

Gudrun leaves her brothers and goes to gather what is left of Sigurd's body. She finds herself unable to weep or grieve as she sits near Sigurd wishing that the wolves would also take her life. Gudrun continues her story telling Thiodrek that she left the mountain and walked for five days until she came to Half's hall. There she stayed seven-half years with Thora and embroidered for pleasure. When Gudrun's mother, Grimhild learns of her daughter's state of mind the queen calls for her sons and asks them to pay compensation for Sigurd. When the brothers offer gold Grimhild orders a procession to be arranged. A great many men come and offer Gudrun treasure but she states that she cannot trust any of them.

Grimhild prepares a forgetfulness drink for Gudrun but Gudrun sees that there are many runes cut on the drinking-horn and knows that evil things are mixed into the drink. However, Gudrun forgets Sigurd's death and three kings come before her. Grimhild suggests that Gudrun look kindly on Atli but Gudrun does not desire to marry another man. Gudrun is particular averse to marrying Atli because he is Brynhild's brother. Grimhild continues to force the match and eventually Gudrun marries the loathsome man. Gudrun travels with Atli for seven days before riding into Atli's hall.

That night Atli awakens his wife because she is talking in her sleep about the death of kinsmen. Atli tries to interrupt a prophecy Gudrun receives from the Norns. Atli says he thought Gudrun ran him through with a poisoned sword and Gudrun says that dreaming of iron represents fire and the anger of a woman. Atli says he thought he saw saplings covered in blood falling in a meadow. Atli also sees his hawk fly from him to a hall of evil and he later eats their hearts mixed with honey. Finally Atli watches his pups run away and become carrion which he eats. Gudrun interprets these dreams to mean that the time of sacrifice is coming soon and a white beast will be consumed by the troops. Gudrun concludes her story by telling Thiodrek that she lay back down in bed with Atli but did not desire to sleep in a bed of pain.

The Second Lay of Gudrun Analysis

The *Second* and *Third Lays of Gudrun* could be combined to present one complete story. The *Second Lay* details the relationship of Gudrun and Thiodrek as friends crying on each other's shoulders, although Thiodrek's tale is never told. In this telling of Gudrun's fate following Sigurd's death the reader finds a much more personal account of her grief.

Gudrun's mother seems to be the catalyst for the marriage of Sigurd's widow to her brother's eventual killer. In her drive to arrange a marriage of prominence for her newly single daughter Grimhild forces Gudrun into a relationship that will only bring them both greater heartache. The importance of good matches is emphasized by Grimhild's insistence on her daughter's second marriage.

The final interesting event in this tale is Atli's own dreams foretelling the end of his sons and himself. What makes Atli's dreams interesting is that he seems to choose to ignore Gudrun's false interpretations. Atli's failure to understand the meaning of his own visions makes his eventual death slightly amusing. Gudrun fulfills her husband's dreams to the letter and yet Atli never catches on.

The Third Lay of Gudrun

The Third Lay of Gudrun Summary

One of Atli's maids, Herkia, tells her master that she has seen Gudrun and Thiodrek together and Atli becomes upset. Gudrun asks Atli what is wrong. He tells her that he is grieved because he has heard that Gudrun and Thiodrek slept together. Gudrun swears that she has done no such thing and would not act improperly. Only once did she embrace Thiodrek. Their conversation was not about love but about grief. Thiodrek came with thirty men but none survive now and Gudrun has been deprived of kinsmen because of Atli. She bids Saxi to be summoned along with a boiling cauldron. Seven hundred men gather around as Gudrun dips her hands into the cauldron. Gudrun announces that she will never again see her brothers and must purge herself of the accusation made by Atli. At the bottom of the cauldron she grasps stones and shows them to the warriors thereby proclaiming her innocence. Atli is pleased at this result and calls for Herkia to be tested by the cauldron. Herkia's hands are scalded and the girl is taken away to a bog. Gudrun's wrong is thus avenged.

The Third Lay of Gudrun Analysis

An extremely short contribution to the Edda, the *Third Lay of Gudrun* shows a different side to the dynamic between Atli and his wife. No mention is made of Gudrun seeking revenge for the death of her brothers instead she seeks to present herself as pure before her husband. Indeed even Atli seems anxious to have his wife's name cleared. The picture of husband and wife here is certainly in opposition to the insulting and spiteful relationship shown in the *Lay of Atli* and the *Greenlandic Poem of Atli*. The brevity of the poem and the events it describes seem out of sync with other stories describing Gudrun and Atli.

Oddrun's Lament

Oddrun's Lament Summary

The speaker has heard ancient tales of a girl who comes to Mornaland and how no one could help Heidrik's daughter. Atli's sister Oddrun learns of the girl's trouble, bridles a horse, and travels until she comes to a high hall. Upon arriving Oddrun asks what is best known in the land of the Huns and learns that Borgny lies in labor pains. Oddrun then inquires as to which prince is responsible for Borgny's pain. Vilmund has kept the girl in coverlets for five winters to conceal her situation from her father.

Oddrun enters the hall and sings spells for Borgny. A girl and boy are born to Hogni's slayer, Vilmund. Borgny then speaks for the first time. She blesses Oddrun for her help and asks that the gods smile on Oddrun. Oddrun replies that she did not help Borgny because she deserved it but because she had promised to help any who shared the princes' inheritance. Borgny says that Oddrun is mad for saying such hateful things to Borgny since the two women used to be as close as brothers. Oddrun recalls a time when she prepared a drink for Gunnar and Borgny said her actions set a bad example.

Oddrun then begins to tell of her many miseries. Oddrun was brought up in prosperity but her father passed away after five winters. Before he died her father said that Oddrun should be endowed with gold and betrothed to Grimhild's son. Oddrun's sister, Brynhild, is given a helmet and selected as Odin's special girl. Brynhild is reared as the noblest girl and has men and lands under her. Shortly after this a war is fought with the French and Brynhild's stronghold is captured. Oddrun speaks of Brynhild's vengeance and her death beside Sigurd. In the meantime, Oddrun has come to love Gunnar as Brynhild should have and Atli is offered fifteen farms for her hand. Atli refuses the dowry but Oddrun and Gunnar cannot ignore their love. Oddrun's kin accuse her of wrongdoing with Gunnar but Atli defends her saying that Oddrun would not act disgracefully. Atli decides to test Oddrun and sends out messengers who find Oddrun lying with Gunnar under one coverlet. The pair tries to bribe the messengers with rings but the men deliver the news to Atli. The matter is concealed from Gudrun who is wife to Atli and sister to Gunnar. Giuki's sons ride into the courtyard and cut Hogni's heart out and place Gunnar in a snake pit.

Oddrun says that she only went once to Geirmund for a feast and that is where she encountered Gunnar playing the harp believing that Oddrun will help him. Oddrun hears the strings telling of strife and bids her maidens to prepare to save the prince's life. They travel over the sea to Atli's courts but Atli's mother strikes Gunnar in the heart. Oddrun states that she still wonders how she continues to live when she thinks of the man she loved as herself. Oddrun ends her lament by saying that all people live by their desires and her weeping is finished.

Oddrun's Lament Analysis

Oddrun's Lament is an odd poem that doesn't seem to fit in with the other tales of Sigurd, Brynhild, Gunnar or Atli. Here is yet another poem chronicling the sorrows women suffer at the hands of men. Oddrun's tale of woe begins as a child when her father choses Oddrun's sister, Brynhild, to be Odin's favored. Oddrun suffers further pain when Brynhild, not Oddrun, is married to Gunnar. Despite this obstacle Oddrun and Gunnar manage to meet in secret, but when they are discovered Atli orders Gunnar and his brother killed. This intermingling of clans makes Oddrun's assistance to Borgny even more difficult to comprehend. The father of Borgny's child is Vilmund the killer of Hogni, Gunnar's brother. That Oddrun says she gave aide to the woman because of an oath to help any who took part of the brothers' inheritance is also strange. Oddrun gains nothing by helping Borgny through labor. Instead her actions seem oddly altruistic given the Norse penchant for avenging the deaths of kin.

Oddrun's story seems out of place in the Edda. Her relationship to Atli or Gunnar is mentioned only briefly in *The Death of the Niflungs* and her actions seem to contradict the expected course of a woman bereft of her lover. However, as textual notes suggest, Oddrun's involvement with Gunnar does provide more motive for Atli's killing of the two brothers. *Oddrun's Lament* may be a means of providing another perspective on the Gunnar, Hogni, and Atli triangle.

The Lay of Atli (Atlakvida)

The Lay of Atli (Atlakvida) Summary

The tale begins with a brief summary of the poem's plot. Gudrun avenges her brothers by killing Atli's sons, then Atli, and then burns down the hall and all the people inside.

Atli sends a messenger named Knefrod to Gunnar's hall. The people are wary of the visitor's presence and sit drinking silently. Then Knefrod begins to relate his message. Atli has sent him to invite Gunnar and Hogni to visit Atli's hall. Furthermore, they will be allowed to choose from among a great store of treasure. In addition to these gifts, Atli will give them the plain of Gnita-heath, ships, farms, and the famous forest of Mirkwood. Gunnar turns to Hogni for advice and says that he thought the brothers already owned all the gold of Gnita-heath. Gunnar appears not to want Atli's gifts since he continues to recount the wealth without rival which he already possesses. Hogni wonders if the ring Gudrun sends them is a warning. Hogni feels that the wolf's hair wrapped around the ring tokens their death if the brothers journey to Atli's hall. No one else offers Gunnar advice so he calls for the goblets to be passed around and agrees to the journey by announcing that the wolf shall control his future.

The valiant troop of men, fearful for their lord's safety, weep as they lead the prince out. The men gallop over the mountains and through Mirkwood with the ground shaking beneath the horses hooves. They come upon Atli's stronghold where the lord sits drinking inside while the watchmen guard against a possible attack by Gunnar. When Gudrun sees her brothers in the hall she tells them they are now betrayed and wonders who will protect them now. She tells her kin that they should have come armed for battle to delight the Norns with the corpses of Huns. One of the brothers tells Gudrun that it is too late now to gather an army from the Rhine mountains. Gunnar is seized and fettered while seven men attack Hogni.

Atli's men ask Gunnar if he would like to buy his life with gold but Gunnar replies that Hogni's heart must lie in his hand. The men cut out Hialli's heart and bring it to Gunnar on a plate. However, Gunnar realizes that the heart is that of a cowardly man and not that of his brave brother. Hogni laughs as his heart is cut out and when Gunnar sees it on the plate he says that the heart must be Hogni's since it hardly quivers. Gunnar says that he alone knows the secret of the Niflungs' hoard. He used to wonder if Hogni might reveal the gold's hideaway but now he knows that the gold will stay hidden by the Rhine's waters rather than shine on the hands of the Huns. Atli orders the chariot driven out- apparently a sign that Gunnar will be drug behind it. As Atli rides his horse surrounded by armed men, Gudrun leaves the hall.

Gudrun seems to curse Atli when she says "May it so befall you, Atli, as you gave in oath to Gunnar." The horse draws Gunnar towards a snake-pit where he is thrown in alive. Gunnar furiously strums his harp in an attempt to charm the snakes. Atli turns his horse towards home and rides into the courtyard surrounded by men singing battle

songs. Gudrun goes outside to meet Atli with a cup and bids him receive the meal of "little creatures gone into darkness" which she has prepared for her husband. Atli and his men assemble in the hall and Gudrun hurries about bringing food and drink. As Atli sits enjoying his meal, Gudrun tells him that the meat is the flesh of their children. Never again will Atli call his sons to him or see them working with their spears or horses. Atli has drunk too much and does not defend himself from his wife as she drives a sword-point into him. She then hurls a flaming brand into the hall and commits to death all who are inside as revenge for the killing of her brothers. The poem ends with the statement that no other bride has ever acted so to avenge her kin's death and foretell the deaths of three great kings by Gudrun's hand.

The Lay of Atli (Atlakvida) Analysis

Many of the stories found in the Edda tell of events which seem to have little motivation. Gudrun sends a ring bound in wolf's hair as a warning to her brothers and the people of Gunnar's hall view the messenger warily, but Gunnar agrees to make the journey to Atli's hall. No reason is given other than he fears not for his life. Gunnar says the offer of gold does not suffice for him to make the journey but he goes anyway. The reasons people do things in the Norse tradition are rarely explored and therefore make understanding events difficult for readers. The Norse people would have believed that everything was left up to fate; as does Gunnar when he allows the wolf to control what happens at Atli's hall.

Gunnar and Atli had apparently sworn oaths of brotherhood when Gudrun was married off. Gudrun reminds her husband of these oaths when she wishes things to befall Atli as they did Gunnar. The swearing and maintaining of oaths was extremely important in Nordic tradition. Atli has broken his oaths to Gunnar but Gudrun will be sure to uphold her oath of revenge. The severity of the vengeance sought by Gudrun described here is elaborated on in the *Greenlandic Poem of Atli*.

The Greenlandic Poem of Atli (Atlamal)

The Greenlandic Poem of Atli (Atlamal) Summary

The story of the betrayal of Giuki's sons has been told for many years and is told again here. Atli is ill-advised when he sends a message for his in-laws to come visit. Gudrun tries to warn her brothers by carving some runes and sending them over the sea. However, Vingi defaces them before presenting them to Gunnar. The brothers, unaware of any treachery, welcome the visitors warmly. They happily take the gifts sent for them although they do not understand their significance.

Hogni is invited to visit Atli in the hopes that Gunnar will decide to accompany him. Hogni's wife, Kostbera, attempts to interpret the runes as she has been taught but they are hard to discern. That night Kostbera has a dream which she relates to Hogni. She says that the runes sent by Gudrun contain a warning not to make the journey. The jumbled runes seem to contain a hidden message that the brothers will meet their death if they come to Atli's hall. Hogni laughs off Kostbera's dream saying that all women think the worst. He will not look for trouble unless it presents itself. Hogni expects only to receive great gifts from Atli. Kostbera insists that the brothers will met their doom in Atli's hall. She tells her husband about a dream where Hogni's bedclothes are on fire but Hogni assures her that since the covers are made of linen and of no worth they will soon be burnt up. Kostbera continues to tell Hogni about her dream in which a bear smashed up the hall and Hogni tells her this only means that a storm is coming. The lady says that she saw an eagle fly in the hall and sprinkle the people with blood. Hogni says that the time of slaughter is coming soon and that he believes Atli's intentions are pure. The conversation ends.

In the morning Glaumvor, Gunnar's wife, tells her husband that she dreamt about disaster. She saw a gallows ready for the brothers and one was hung while the other was chewed on by serpents. A verse is missing and then she continues to say that she saw a bloody sword pulled from Gunnar's shirt. Gunnar reassures her that she only heard dogs barking which often seems like spears being thrown. Glaumvor also saw a river flowing through the hall and crushing the legs of the brothers. Again a verse is missing before the woman continues retelling her dream. She thought a dead woman came to the hall and chose the brothers to sit at their table. Gunnar ends the conversation by saying that everything has been arranged and nothing can stop fate now.

The brothers are eager to begin their journey and select Snaevar and Solar, Hogni's sons, and Orkning, Kostbera's brother to accompany them. Vingi, Atli's messenger, swears that if any harm comes to the brothers then may he swing on the gallows. After making landfall, Vingi tells the brothers to leave because he may have welcomed them warmly but there was treachery behind his words. Hogni tells him to stop talking and the brothers hack Vingi with axes. Atli assembles his men and hurls insults at the brothers. Upset by the exchange of words, the two sides begin to throw javelins at each other.

When Gudrun hears the commotion she runs out to greet her brothers. She embraces them for the last time and tells them that she tried to send a warning. Gudrun then tries to reason with both sides but when the men ignore her she throws off her cloak and begins to fight alongside her brothers.

The battle rages for most of the day and more than half of Atli's men are cut down. Atli says he has had nothing but grief from Giuki's kin. They have given him a horrible wife, taken his property, and killed his sister. Someone replies to Atli's outburst by saying that he has done no better. Atli has killed Gudrun's mother in order to gain treasure and the speaker thanks the gods when Atli is pained.

Atli calls for his men to increase Gudrun's grief by cutting out Hogni's heart and stringing Gunnar up on the gallows and throwing him in a snake-pit. Hogni tells the men to do as they please because his courage will allow him to endure these trials. One of Atli's stewards suggests killing Hialli instead since he is fated to die anyway. Hialli tries to save his life by offering to do the warriors bidding, but it is Hogni who intercedes on his behalf. Hogni would rather play the warriors' game than listen to the servant squeal. The brave man laughs as Atli's men seize him and kill him. Gunnar plays his harp with his feet so that the ladies weep and the men sob. The brothers are brought to death but the legacy of their prowess continues.

Atli mocks his wife about the death of her brothers and tells her she is partly to blame. Gudrun tells her husband that regret will come to him before the end and unless she dies evil will continue to follow him. Atli does not refute her words and offers her gifts of compensation which she refuses. Gudrun tells Atli that a tree will topple if its roots are cut from beneath it. She states that Atli now holds all the power but the chieftain fails to see the treachery in her words.

Gudrun puts on a happy front and prepares a memorial feast for her brothers intending revenge. She calls her children to her and tells them that she is going to destroy them. One of them tells her that no one will stop her but killing her sons will not clear her anger. When Atli inquires about the whereabouts of his children his wife says that they are playing games. In the evening Gudrun tells her husband that he drank ale flavored with the blood of his sons from their skulls. She roasted their hearts and fed them to Atli as if they were calf-meat. Atli says his wife is savage to do such a thing and that she has wiped out the last of her family. Gudrun replies that if she could do one more thing it would be to kill her husband. Husband and wife sit in the hall and trade insults.

Hniflung tells Gudrun now that he loathes Atli. Together Hogni's son and sister contemplate Hogni's death before deciding to attack his killer. Waking to find himself wounded, Atli asks who has stolen his life. Gudrun proudly proclaims that she, aided by Hniflung, slew her husband. Atli states that it was wrong to betray someone who trusted her. He traveled to a new land to woo Gudrun and paid a high price for her and a large amount of treasure. Atli says that Gudrun cares nothing about these things and brought no

happiness to his hall. His wife replies that he is a liar. The brothers fought each other and brought strife upon themselves. The three brothers and one sister were unconquerable as the four sailed the seas as fate led them. They conquered the east and then Sigurd was killed. Gudrun was dealt a cruel blow when she married Atli after having been wife to a hero. Gudrun accuses her latest husband of always yielding at the Assembly and refusing to stand firm. Atli says that his wife lies but none of it matters now. He asks her to uphold her duty as wife when he dies. Gudrun states that she will conduct herself as if they were united and ensure him a proper burial.

Atli dies and Gudrun tries to kill herself, but fate decrees that she will die another day. The poet concludes that any man is fortunate who has such heroic children as Giuki bore. Their legend lives on wherever people hear of it.

The Greenlandic Poem of Atli (Atlamal) Analysis

Like several of the tales which come before and after it the *Greenlandic Poem of Atli* presents another retelling of the deaths of Hogni and Gunnar at the hands of Atli and the revenge Gudrun exacted for their deaths. There are several interesting components to this particular tale. The first comes from the title and remains unclear. Textual notes indicate no clear relationship to Greenland, considering the story is definitively Norse. Whether the poet hoped to start a new tradition or simply borrowed from the Norse remains undetermined. However, the story gives new details which are not found in the other poems.

Here Gudrun is not the only woman who tries to prevent the brothers from traveling to Atli's hall. Kostbera and Glaumvor both see signs which they feel foretell of disaster awaiting Gunnar and Hogni. Indeed Kostbera attempts to read Gudrun's runes and would have succeeded if Vingi had not obscured them. The participation of women is intensified when Gudrun, unable to prevent battle between Atli and her brothers, rips off her cloak and fights alongside Gunnar and Hogni. This detail is not found in any other tale. Gudrun may spur others to exact revenge but only here does she take part in any battle. Rather than sit to the side and watch her brothers fall before her husband, Gudrun takes action to turn fate aside.

Gudrun's active role continues as she seeks to avenge the deaths of Hogni and Gunnar on Atli. Presenting herself as the grieving sister, Gudrun prepares a memorial feast in her brothers' honor. The savagery of Gudrun's plan becomes apparent when she tells her sons what is going to become of them. Her vengeance is well-planned and horrific. Gudrun's concern is for revenge, not for the welfare of her own offspring. Furthermore, Gudrun seems to delight in revealing her deception to Atli after he has partaken of the flesh of his sons.

It is not enough that Gudrun has killed her own sons and served them at feast to their father. Working with Hogni's son, Gudrun murders Atli in his sleep. As Atli lies dying, Gudrun recounts the greatness achieved by her and her brothers. Everything has been taken from her and she was forced to marry a man below her standards. Gudrun seems

to exhibit no remorse for her actions and sees the recent events as matters of necessity. However, Gudrun does uphold her wifely duties by giving Atli a proper burial. The traditions of revenge and duty to family compete in this tale and show the importance of both in the Norse tradition.

The Whetting of Gudrun (Gudrunarhvot)

The Whetting of Gudrun (Gudrunarhvot) Summary

After Gudrun kills Atli she goes to the sea and attempts to drown herself. However, unable to sink, she floats across the fjord to the land of King Ionakr and marries him. The couple have three sons: Sorli, Erp, and Hamdir. Gudrun's daughter by Sigurd, Svanhild, is brought up there and married to Iormunrekk. Bikki, Iormunrekk's advisor, tells the king's son, Randver, that he should marry Svanhild. When the king hears this he has Randver hung and Svanhild trampled by horses. Gudrun then speaks to her sons.

The poet overhears the quarrelling of Gudrun and her sons and relates the following tale. Gudrun asks why the boys sit and sleep and are cheerful when their sister has been killed. She says that her sons have failed to become brave like her brothers who would have avenged the girl's death. Hamdir speaks up and tells his mother that she did not praise Hogni when Sigurd was killed. He also recalls Gudrun's murder of her sons by Atli in order to seek vengeance for her brothers. If Gudrun had not killed Erp and Eitil then the five of them could have sought revenge together. Hamdir then asks for the treasure of the Huns to be brought because she has stirred them to battle. Gudrun laughs as she gives her sons mail coats and they leap on their horses. Hamdir then seems to predict the death of him and his two brothers. He says the spear-warrior will return home after meeting his death in the Goth's land so Gudrun can drink funeral ale for them all.

Gudrun weeps as she sits on the threshold where she recounts her sorrowful past. Gudrun has tended three different fires for three different husbands, although Sigurd was the best. She has never seen or felt a greater wound than when Sigurd was killed but her brothers hurt her more by giving her in marriage to Atli. Unable to get compensation for the deaths of Gunnar and Hogni, Gudrun cuts off the heads of the Hniflungs. Gudrun then goes to the sea meaning to kill herself but instead is carried to land where she lies next to her third husband. Gudrun loved Svanhild best among her children. She dressed the girl in gold and presented her to the Goths. The cruelest injury came when Svanhild was trampled under horses' hooves. The most agonizing hurt came from the death of Sigurd, the most terrible grievance came when snakes drained Gunnar's life, and the sharpest pain resulted from the removal of Hogni's heart. Gudrun remembers many wrongs.

Gudrun then seems to be speaking to the departed Sigurd. She tells him to bridle a dark horse and ride it here. Gudrun has no daughter or daughter-in-law who can give her treasure. Gudrun asks if Sigurd recalls the promise they made that he would ride from hell to her and she would visit him from the world. Gudrun then calls the nobles to build an oak-wood pyre and allow the fire to burn the breast full of wrongs. Finally Gudrun wishes that warriors' lots will be made better and ladies' sorrows lessened by listening to her tale of grief.

The Whetting of Gudrun (Gudrunarhvot) Analysis

The Elder Edda contains several tales of Gudrun's grief. Here the story mentions Erp, who was previously named in the *Greenlandic Poem of Atli* as one of Atli and Gudrun's sons. Erp is also mentioned in the *Lay of Hamdir* where he is a half-brother of Hamdir and Sorli, Gudrun's sons by Ionakr. The movement of Erp between stories makes him hard to place. This difficulty is enhanced by Erp's lack of involvement in the stories. Only in *Hamdir* does Erp have a substantial role but it is still not enough to afford him a concrete place in either family.

Gudrun's long retelling of the sorrows she has suffered may be an attempt at winning sympathy from the reader or listener of the poem. Gudrun tries to come across as a woman fate has punished unnecessarily but as she retells the tales it becomes apparent that she played a large role in many of the deaths. When Atli kills Hogni and Gunnar Gudrun seeks revenge by murdering her own sons and serving them to Atli. Likewise, when her only daughter Svanhild is trampled to death she sends her sons Hamdir and Sorli to avenge the girl despite their warnings that they will meet their deaths. What is odd about Gudrun's thirst for vengeance is that she is a female. Most of the Norse tales about revenge involve men but here a woman manipulates men into seeking revenge on her behalf.

Gudrun's tale is one of extreme sorrow and revenge. The two themes combine to feed off of each other. Sorrow brings a call for vengeance and the cycle continues through successive generations.

The Lay of Hamdir (Hamdismal)

The Lay of Hamdir (Hamdismal) Summary

The poem recalls when Gudrun urged her sons to avenge their sister, Svanhild. These grievous actions still bring sorrow to the elves today.

Gudrun tells her sons that their sister has been trampled to death by horses. Hamdir and Sorli are now her only living lineage as she stands alone and bereft of happiness like an aspen in the forest. Hamdir tells his mother that she did not praise Hogni when Sigurd was killed in his sleep next to her. He continues to say that Gudrun intended to hurt Atli by killing Erp and Eitil but only brought more pain to herself. Sorli states that he does not want to bandy words with his mother but desires to know what she asks of them. Sorli tells his mother to weep for her brothers and sons as well as the two before her because they too are doomed men. Then the brothers travel over mountains to avenge Svanhild's death.

On the road they meet a man "full of clever stratagems" and wonder how he might help them. The son from another mother says he would help his kinsmen as one foot helps another. Then Erp speaks once saying that it is no good to show a coward the way. Sorli and Hamdir find the bastard son overly confident and cut him to the ground with their swords. Then they shake out their fur cloaks, array themselves in fine garments and continue on their way.

They find Randver hanging on the gallows and continue on to the hall where men sit drinking ale. The men in the hall do not hear the visitors until one man blows his horn. Iormunrekk is told that men in helmets have come and warn him to think of a plan because Svanhild's kin are powerful. Iormunrekk laughs anxious for the battle. He says it would make him happy to string up Hamdir and Sorli with bow-sinews and hang them from the gallows. Hrodglod speaks from the threshold and says that the two boys promise to fight alone against the ten hundred Goths. A tumult erupts in the hall as men lay in their own blood. Hamdir addresses Iormunrekk and says that the king looked forward to their coming but can now see his own hands and feet cast into the fire. Iormunrekk roars for his men to stone the brothers since spears cannot bite them. Hamdir tells his brother that by cutting off Iormunrekk's hands and feet and not his head Sorli has brought evil upon them. Sorli replies that Hamdir lacks common sense and does not have a mind to think with. Hamdir acknowledges that if Erp, the man slain in the road and their half-brother, were still alive Iormunrekk would be headless now. Sorli says that they should cease arguing like wild dogs because even though they die now they have achieved a victory over the Goths who lay at their feet. Then both Sorli and Hamdir die in the land of the Goths.

The Lay of Hamdir (Hamdismal) Analysis

This poem is yet another in the line of tales about Gudrun. As in several other poems that follow Gudrun's life following Atli's death, the reader finds her trying to convince her new sons to avenge the death of their step-sister. In order to seek vengeance for her death, the brothers will need to kill their own brother-in-law.

On the way to Iormunrekk's hall the brothers encounter a third, Erp, who is later said to be the half-brother of Hamdir and Sorli. However, this information is currently unknown to them and they find the man's riddling speech an impediment to their journey. Hamdir and Sorli beset the man with their swords and leave him lying by the roadside. Unfortunately, the brothers should have worked harder to understand Erp's words because if they had been able to make sense of his words they would have known to cut off the king's head instead of his hands and feet. By leaving Iormunrekk's head intact they commit themselves to death.

Hamdir and Sorli exhibit rash judgment that is common in Norse tales. Action comes before considering the consequences of those actions. As Gudrun's sons show so well, vengeance is sought at all costs without stopping to reflect on the reasons for or necessity of that revenge. Additionally, the tale serves to show how enmity grows up between clans and leads to further battles and revenge quests.

Baldr's Dream (Baldrs draumar)

Baldr's Dream (Baldrs draumar) Summary

The ZHsir and Asynior come together to discuss Baldr's bad dreams and Odin agrees to ride down to Hell. He comes to the eastern doors and speaks a spell to arouse the seeress from her grave. She awakens and asks who causes her to travel the difficult road after being dead for so long. Odin gives his name as Way-tame, son of Slaughter-tame, and desires to hear news from hell. He asks for whom the benches have been prepared. The seeress tells him that the mead stands ready for Baldr and despair hangs over the ZHsir. After giving her answer the prophetess says she is done speaking but Odin implores her to answer more questions. Odin will continue to plead for more answers following each question. He wishes to know who will kill Baldr. The seeress reluctantly states that Hod will steal life from Odin's son and again says she will be silent. Odin asks who will bring vengeance on Hod. The seeress states that Rind will give birth to Vali, Odin's son, who will fight when only a night old and will not stop until Baldr has been avenged. Odin wants to know who the girls are that weep for love and throw their head-dresses to the sky. Odin's question sparks recognition in the seeress and she says that he is not Way-tame but Odin. Odin retorts that she is not a wise woman but the mother of three ogres. The prophetess sends Odin on his way and states that no more men will visit her until Loki is loosed and the gods battle one another.

Baldr's Dream (Baldrs draumar) Analysis

Baldr's Dream is a very brief poem that, like the *Song of Hyndla*, has little to do with the title character. Like many of the Norse tales this one centers on Odin in disguise trying to garner information about the fate of men or gods. Here Odin pushes his luck too far by asking about the girls who weep for Baldr. Although the seeress does not answer Odin's question, the mention of these women reveals the god's true identity. Notes to the text suggest that the girls maybe the Norns and their mythological association is what spurs the prophetess's correct identification of Way-tame. However, Odin still manages to gather the information he came for and the fact that he does not learn about the weeping girls is inconsequential.

The List of Rig (Rigsthula)

The List of Rig (Rigsthula) Summary

People recall an old story of Heimdall, one of the ZHsir, who goes on a journey along the sea-shore stopping at households where he identifies himself as Rig. At the first household he finds a grey-haired couple sitting by the hearth, Great-grandfather and Great-grandmother. Rig sits between the couple and gives them advice. Great-grandmother brings forth a course loaf and along with it sets a bowl of boiled meat in the middle of the table. Rig prepares for bed and places himself in the middle of the bed between the couple. He stays for three nights and then rides away down the middle of the road.

Nine months later Great-grandmother has a baby whom they name Thrall. The child grows and thrives. His hands are wrinkled with thick fingers, an ugly face and a crooked back. A bandy-legged girl comes to the farm with muddy feet and sunburned arms. Her name is Slave-girl. The girl sits in the middle of the bench next to Thrall and they talk together. They go bed together and afterward spend their days working hard. Thrall and Slavegirl live happily and have many children. Weatherbeaten, Stableboy, Stout, Sticky, Rough, Badbreath, Stumy, Fatty, Sluggard, Greyish, Lout and Longlegs are their sons; Stumpina, Podgy, Bulgy-calves, Bellows-nose, Noisy, Bondwoman, Great-gabbler, Raggedy-hips and Crane-legs are their daughters. All the race of slaves descend from them.

Rig continues his journey until he comes to another hall where he finds a man whittling wood and a woman preparing to weave. This couple is named Grandfather and Grandmother. Rig gives them advice and sleeps between them for three nights before continuing his journey.

After nine months Grandmother has a baby and they name it Farmer. As the child grows he learns to tame oxen, work a harrow, and build houses and carts. A woman with keys at her belt is brought to be Farmer's wife; her name is Daughter-in-law. The couple settles down and makes a household together. They have many children named Man, Soldier, Lad, Thane, Smith, Broad, Yeoman, Boundbeard, Dweller, Boddi, Smoothbeard, Fellow, Lady, Bride, Sensible, Wise, Speaker, Dame, Fanny, Wife, Shy, Sparky. All the race of Farmers descend from Grandmother and Grandfather.

Rig continues along the road until he comes to a hall whose doors look south. Upon entering he finds the floor strewn with straw and a couple named Father and Mother looking into each other's eyes. The man of the house sits shaping bows and arrows, while the lady admires her fine garments. Again Rig sits in the middle of the bench and offers the couple advice. Mother covers the table with an embroidered cloth and sets dishes full of meat on the board. Rig stays with the couple for three nights and each night sleeps between them. Rig then continues his travels down the middle of the road.

Nine months later Mother gives birth to a boy whom they name Lord. The child grows up in the hall learning to brandish shields, fit bow-strings, bend the elm, ride horses, and hunt with hounds. Rig comes out of the thicket to teach Lord the runes, gives him a name, and says the boy is his son. Rig then instructs the boy to get ancestral property. So Lord rides through the dark wood until he comes to a hall where he starts a war. Lord reddens the ground with blood as dead men fall before his sword. The boy rules eighteen settlements and distributes his wealth to everyone. Messengers come to the Chieftain's hall to ask for the hand of a slender girl named Erna. They take her home where she marries Lord. Together they raise a clan and enjoy their lives. Son is the oldest, Child the second followed by Baby, Noble, Heir, Offspring, Descendant, Kinsman, Sonny, Lad, Lineage, and Kin the youngest. Lord's children grow up learning to tame horses, brandish shields, shoot and use spears.

Kin learns so much that he contends with Rig for the right to be called Rig. One day while shooting birds in the woods Kin encounters a crow that asks the child why he is charming birds instead of conquering armies. The crow tells the boy that Dan and Danp own halls more worthy than his own clan. These other boys know how to steer ships, make swords, and inflict wounds, and here the poem ends.

The List of Rig (Rigsthula) Analysis

Rig's List serves to describe the beginnings of the divisions of man: the slaves, the laborers, and the nobles. That these divisions grow out of three different age groups, great-grandparents, grandparents, and parents, suggests that the formation of class distinctions evolve slowly over time. The oldest generation live as slaves until their descendents learn a trade to bring about some independence. For years this division continues until the workers learn to use slaves to do the work, leaving themselves free for leisure activities.

The names of the children born to each couple indicate the characteristics common to each group. Slaves are considered ugly and hardworking. Their lives are full of hardships that leaves them little time for leisure or sport. The laboring classes are able to cultivate interests that allowed them to distinguish themselves from the others. Finally the noble class fills their days with learning how to do things like fight, weave, and make weapons. However, as the crow points out at the end of the poem, Kin seems unable to put his education into practice. Instead of spending his days conquering lesser clans to gain lands and wealth, he occupies himself with charming birds.

Where the poet intended to take the rest of the poem is unclear since it seems to end abruptly. Rig seems to favor the noble class considering he calls Kin his son, but the crow, possibly representative of Odin, finds fault with the upper class' leisurely lifestyle.

Rig's tale centers on an important Norse theme of kinship and ancestry and the intermingling of the gods into the lives of men.

The Song of Hyndla (Hynduliod)

The Song of Hyndla (Hynduliod) Summary

The poem is indirectly about Ottar the foolish although he does not speak and is only alluded to by the two speakers. A first speaker calls for Hyndla to wake up from her rock cave so that Hyndla may accompany the speaker to Valhall to ask Odin to be kindly to them. The speaker also wishes to sacrifice to Thor so the god will be kindly towards Hyndla, although Thor cares little for giant women. When Hyndla replies the reader learns that the speaker is Freyia. Hyndla says Freyia is deceitful for looking and speaking to her in that way. In truth Freyia is trying to escort her lover, Ottar, to Valhall. Freyia insists that Hyndla is confused: only her boar Battleswine stands on the path.

Freyia suggests they dismount and discuss the lineage of princes to determine who is descended from gods. Freyia explains her purpose by saying that Ottar and Angantyr have wagered foreign gold and it is now necessary to help the young warrior gain his inheritance. Ottar is favored by Freyia because he sacrifices to her often.

Freyia continues her discussion of lineage by recounting the various clans of men from the Skiodlungs to the fighting stock. Freyia begins to recount Ottar's ancestry which includes such well known figures as Sigurd, Gudrun, Gunnar, Hogni, and Harald Battletooth. Following the long list of Ottar's relatives, the text digresses into a counting of the gods. The list includes Baldr's death and Vali's birth; Freyr's marriage to Gerd; how all the seeresses descend from Vidolf, and all the giants from Ymir. Freyia recalls how Loki fathered the wolf by Angrboda and Sleipnir by Svadilfari. When the gods meet their doom one will be born greater than all the others but Freyia does not name him.

Throughout her long speech of men and gods, Freyia continually asks if the listener has understood and desires to hear more for it is important that he learns well what she speaks. Freyia then demands that memory-ale be given to her boar so that he will not forget these words. Hyndla tells Freyia to go away so she may sleep. Since Freyia has received no aide from Hyndla the goddess says she will surround the place with fire so that Hyndla cannot escape. Hyndla seems to relent by giving Ottar beer mixed with poison and ill fortune. Freyia gets the last word by saying that Hyndla's curse will have no effect and instead prays that Ottar thrive in all good things.

The Song of Hyndla (Hynduliod) Analysis

This poem is rather muddled and difficult to comprehend without the aid of notes to the text. The first difficulty comes at the beginning before the two speakers are identified. Also hard to understand is Ottar's role in the poem since he is barely mentioned. The reader must come to realize, either through close reading or by consulting the textual notes, that Freyia has disguised Ottar as her boar, Battleswine. This is why the goddess

wishes for the beast to drink memory-ale. In order for Ottar to win his inheritance he must fully understand his lineage.

The digression regarding the gods seems to have little to do with the rest of the poem and instead introduces more questions. What relationship does the gods' ancestry have to Ottar and who is this great savior who will come after Ragnarok? The reader may form any number of possible answers from their own knowledge but the text itself gives no definitive clues.

The final puzzling piece of Hyndla's lay is the lack of Hyndla's involvement. She appears briefly at the beginning and the end but it is Freyia who dominates the middle of the poem. Hyndla seems to be nothing more than an extra character used to provide an audience to Freyia's discussion and provide memory-ale. The *Song of Hyndla*, like many of the Edda's poems, serves to recount the history of both men and gods, features important in Nordic tradition.

The Song of Grotti (Grottasongr)

The Song of Grotti (Grottasongr) Summary

Frodi acquires two women, Fenia and Menia, to work as slave-girls in his hall. The two girls are lead to the chieftain's magic grindstone and order it to grind. Frodi will not allow the girls rest until he has heard their song. The girls sing and turn the stone so that the household falls asleep. Then Menia says they will grind wealth, happiness, and many possessions for Frodi on the stone. Menia states that there will be no evil in this place even if one finds his brother's slayer strung up. Frodi says the girls may not sleep any longer than it takes him to sing one song. An unidentified speaker, possibly one of the girls speaking in the third person, says that Frodi is unwise by failing to consider the lineage of the slave girls.

Hrungnir, Thiazi, Idi, and Aurnir are mighty giants related to the slave-girls. If not for them, Frodi would never have acquired Grotti, the enchanted grindstone. For nine winters the girls were nourished under the earth. There they accomplished many deeds and even moved the mountain from its place. Menia and Fenia rolled the stone so that the earth began to shake and then it was seized by men. In Sweden the girls marched against an army and broke shields. They overthrew one prince while supporting another and no peace could be found until Knui fell. For a long time the girls were well known for their fighting ability but now they live in the king's dwelling like slaves.

Fed up with Frodi's unreasonable demands Menia says the stone will stand still because she has ground her share. Fenia counters that they cannot stop until Frodi says they have ground everything. So Menia orders Frodi to wake up if he wants to hear their stories or else hands will soon grasp spears. Menia sees a fire burning to the east like a signal of impending warfare and declares that Frodi will not hold the throne for long. Emboldened by the thought of battle Menia tells her sister to turn the grindstone faster. Fenia grinds fiercely because she can see the fate of many men; Yrsa's son will avenge Frodi and become as famous as both her son and brother. The girls use their strength to grind until the frame collapses and the stone breaks in two. Menia states that they have ground to a stopping place because they have finished their share.

The Song of Grotti (Grottasongr) Analysis

This tale extols the importance of understanding one's lineage. Frodi's arrogance leads him to ignore the girls' giant ancestry. Similarly, Frodi does not recognize that he should pay homage to Menia and Fenia for their role in his procuring the grindstone.

Frodi's ill treatment of the slave-girls fueled by his greed for goods eventually brings about his downfall. If the chieftain had relented in his cruel treatment of Menia and Fenia, they may not have chosen to work the grindstone to the point of fracture. The Nordic theme of greed at all costs is certainly prevalent in this poem as is the idea of

avenging past wrongs. The girls are aware that their actions will result in revenge being extracted by Yrsa's son. However, vengeance for the death of family members was commonplace in the Nordic tradition and Menia and Fenia seem more than willing to assume responsibility for whatever may follow. Killing Frodi now is worth whatever price others may pay later.

Characters

Aesir

Aesir are the Norse gods, more particularly, the race of sky gods who first fought and then joined the Vanir gods of fertility and the earth. They lived in Asgard, home of the gods, reached by a rainbow bridge. The Aesir include Odin (ruler of the gods), Balder, Frigg, Tyr, and Thor.

Agnar

1. The son of King Hunding and the brother of King Geirrod. Patronized by the goddess Frigg, he still lost his place to his younger brother and lived as an outcast. 2. The son of King Geirrod who brought Odin a horn of wine when his father was torturing the disguised god between two fires. Odin rewarded Agnar with a successful reign.

All-Father

See Odin

Alvis

In the poem The *Lay of Alvis,* Alvis the dwarf attempts to steal the god Thor's daughter away to marry her as the price of Thor's great hammer, Mjollnir. Thor, however, catches him and insists that only if Alvis answers correctly a series of questions can he marry his daughter. Alvis answers the questions correctly, but Thor has kept him above ground until sunrise and he turns to stone. The series of questions and answers amounts to a catalogue of literary synonyms.

Andvari

Andvari is a dwarf who was fated to take the shape of a pike. Andvari's treasure plays a pivotal role in a series of lays. In The *Lay of Regin,* his gold is stolen by Loki to pay compensation for the unwitting murder of a man called Otter, killed while in the shape of an otter. Andvari curses the treasure. The gods pay Otter's father, Hreidmar, and brothers, Fafnir and Regin, compensation with the stolen gold. Fafnir murders his father for the treasure, beginning the series of disasters that follow the treasure from owner to owner.

Angantyr

Angantyr's father, Arngrim, won in battle a sword called Tyrfing that had the quality that wounds made by it never healed. The sword, however, had been stolen from the dwarves. The dwarves laid a curse on the blade so that it would always bring death to whomever carried it. Angantyr and his eleven brothers were killed together and buried in the same mound. When Agantyr's daughter found out the identity of her father, she was determined to avenge him and took Tyrfing from her father's grave despite his ghost's attempt to dissuade her.

Atli

Atli is the ruler of the Huns, the son of Budli, and brother of Brynhild. The character has its origin in the historical Atli, but the poets have made him and his people a Germanic tribe. Atli is not always a negative figure in northern legends, but in the *Elder Edda* he is a vicious, greedy ruler who murders his brothers-in-law for the sake of Andvari's treasure.

Balder

Balder is the favorite son of Odin and Frigg, and a favorite among all the gods. Frigg asked every living thing and all objects of metal, wood, or stone to swear never to harm him. The gods amused themselves by hurling weapons at him certain he could not be harmed. Loki, however, learned that Frigg had forgotten to ask the mistletoe. He made it into a dart and urged Balder's brother, the blind god Hod, to join in the game. The dart killed Balder. Balder's brother Hermod rode to the land of the dead and begged Hel, goddess of the dead to release him. She agreed if every person and thing in the world would weep for him. All did, except one giantess, believed to be Loki in disguise.

Bodvild

Bodvild is the daughter of King Nidudd. She was raped by Volund in revenge for his imprisonment and maiming by King Nidudd.

Borghild

Borghild is Sigmund's wife and Helgi Hunding's Bane's mother.

Bragi

Bragi is the god of poetry.

Brynhild

Many scholars believe Brynhild (also known as Sigdrifa) is based on a historical character, a sixthcentury Visigothic princess, married to a Frankish king. Brynhild is Atli's sister and a Valkyrie. She was betrothed to Sigurd. In the The *Lay of Sigdrifa,* Odin has decreed she will no longer be a Valkyrie but must marry because she had disobeyed him and fought for a hero he had doomed. She swears she will only marry a man who does not know fear. Odin pricked her with a sleep thorn and she slept until wakened by Sigurd. They pledge themselves to marry each other, but Sigurd is given a magical drink at the court of Gunnar, forgets her, and marries Gunnar's sister, Gudrun. In return for Gudrun, Sigurd promises to win Brynhild for Gunnar and unwittingly breaks his oath and betrays her. Brynhild loves Sigurd deeply, but believes that he has cold-bloodedly wronged her. She sets in motion Sigurd's death. When he is dead, she kills herself to join the man she considers her real husband in the land of the dead.

Dag

Dag is the son of Hogni and Sigrun's sister. He kills Helgi in revenge for his father.

Dvalin

Dvalin is a dwarf. Angantyr's cursed sword, Tyrfing, is described as Dvalin's weapon.

Ermanrik

See Jormunrek.

Erp

Erp is the son of Atli and Gudrun. He was murdered by his half brothers Hamdir and Sorli on the way to Jormunrek's court to avenge their sister. His death doomed their plans since his blow would have silenced the old king.

Eylimi

In *The Lay of Helgi Hjorvards's* Son Eylimi is the father of the Valkyrie Svava, wife of Helgi Hjorvard's son. In the Prophecy of Gripir, he is Gripir's father, Sigurd's maternal grandfather.

Fafnir

Fafnir is the son of Hreidmar and brother of Otter and Regan. He murders his own father for Andvari's treasure. Fafnir turns into a dragon to better guard the treasures. As a dragon, he is killed by Sigurd. In both Roman and Germanic tradition, the dragon was a symbol of greed.

Father of the Slain

See Odin.

Fenrir

Fenrir is the great wolf, the son of Loki and a giantess. He is bound by the gods until Ragnarok when he will break his chain and devour Odin.

Frey

Frey is a Vanir and a fertility god.

Freyja

Freyja is a Vanir and the goddess of love.

Frigg

Frigg is the Aesir goddess of love, Odin's wife, and the mother of Balder.

Frodi

Frodi is the king of a golden age of peace and prosperity. He owned a magic stone quern or hand mill that, when turned by two captive giantesses, ground out gold and peace. Unfortunately, he drives the the giantesses too hard and they rebel, breaking the quern.

Gagnrad

See Odin

Gangleri

See Odin

Garm

Garm is the hound of the goddess Hel, ruler of the land of the dead.

Geirod

Geirod is the son of king Hunding. He supplants his older brother Agnar and rules until Frigg tricks him into mistreating the disguised Odin against all rules of hospitality. He trips and dies on his own sword as he runs to release Odin when he realizes his mistake. His son Agnar had comforted and brought Odin a horn of wine against his father's wishes and was rewarded by the god.

Gerd

Gerd is a giantess, daughter of Gymir, and loved by Frey. Frey sends his servant Skirnir to woo her. Skirnir has to threaten to curse her with degradation and disgrace before she will meet Frey.

Gjuki

Gjuki is the king of the Burgundians, husband of Grimhild, and father of Gunnar, Hogni, and Gudrun. He is apparently dead by the time Sigurd reaches the Burgundian court.

Glaumvor

Glaumvor becomes Gunnar's wife after Brynhild's death.

Gram

Gram is Sigurd's sword. Naming swords, at least in heroic tales, was not uncommon.

Grani

Grani is Sigurd's horse.

Grimhild

Grimhild is the queen of the Burgundians, wife of Gjuki, and mother of Gudrun, Gunnar, and Hogni. There seems to be a hint of the witch or sorceress about her. She is the mastermind of the plot to drug Sigurd into forgetting his vow to Brynhild, marrying Gudrun, and helping Gunnar win Brynhild.

Grimodin

See Odin

Gripir

Gripir is the brother of Hjordis and Sigurd's maternal uncle. In northern heroic literature, the son of a man's sister was his closest male relative. In the *Gripisspé* (The Prophecy of Gripir), he has the gift of prophecy and tells his young nephew all that lies before him. He ends his prophecy with the promise that Sigurd will be 'fortunate in his fame' that no man will surpass. Sigurd is the greatest hero of the north. His exploits color the images and metaphors of the traditional skaldic poetry and Icelandic saga literature.

Gudrun

Gudrun is the daughter of Grimhild and Gjuki. Sigurd, under the influence of Grimhild's potion, marries Gudrun. Gudrun knows both of Sigurd's relationship to Brynhild and the plot to use a potion on Sigurd. It is she who provokes Brynhild into revenge. After Sigurd's death, Gudrun is persuaded to marry Atli, king of the Huns. She eventually murders him and his men to avenge his murder of her brothers. Her third husband is Jonacr by whom she has twin sons, Hamdir and Sorli.

Gungnir

Gungnir is Odin's spear. It is mentioned in many of the lays and sagas but is named only in the *Lay of Sigdrifa.*

Gunnar

King of the Burgundians after Gjuki and the son of Grimhild and Gjuki. His character changes between the lays involving Sigurd and Brynhild and those involving Atli. In the former, he is a deceiver, a breaker of oaths, and a murderer, led first by his mother and then by his wife, but always by his greed. In the later, he is a king who knows himself to be doomed but who will use the most unlikely tool for a hero, his and his brothers' deaths, to deny Atli Andvari's treasure.

Gunnlod

Gunnlod is the giantess who guards the mead of poetry.

Guthorm

Guthorm is the son of King Gjuki and a stepbrother of Gunnar.

Hagal

Hagal is the foster father of Helgi Hunding's Bane.

Hamdir

Hamdir is Gudrun's son. He dies avenging his sister Swanhild's death on Jormunrek, King of the Goths.

Heimdal

Heimdal is the 'radiant' god and the gods' watchman. His horn is called Gjallarhorn.

Hel

Hel is the land of the dead and also the name of its goddess. She is the daughter of Loki.

Helgi Hjorvard's Son

See Helgi Hjorvard's Bane.

Helgi Hunding's Bane

Helgi Hunding's Bane is the son of Sigmund Volsung and Borghild and the hero of *The First Lay of Helgi Hunding's Bane* and *The Second Lay of Helgi Hunding's Bane.* His wife was Sigrun, the Valkyrie who had watched over him in battle. Sigrun chose Helgi, but her family had engaged her to King Hodbrodd. In the battle that followed, her father and all her brothers, but one, Dag, were killed. Sigrun and Helgi lived happily and deeply in love, despite her grief for her kinsmen, but eventually Dag killed Helgi in revenge for his father. Helgi and Sigrun loved each other so much that they were allowed to have one last night together in Helgi's burial mound. A note at the end of the lay says that she died young of grief for her husband. In the Codex Regius at the end of

The Lay of Helgi Hjorvard's Son and at the end of *The Second Lay of Helgi Hunding's Bane* are references to a tradition that Helgi and Sigrun were reborn three times: once as Helgi Hjorvard's Son and Svava the Valkyrie, then as Helgi Hunding's Bane and Sigrun, and finally as Helgi Hadding's Bane and Kara the Valkyrie.

Hervard

Hervard is a brother of Angantyr. He was killed and buried with him.

Hervor

1. The daughter of Angantyr who retrieves her father's sword from his grave, much against his wishes, to avenge his death. 2. The Wise, King Hlodver's daughter, a Valkyrie and Volund's wife.

Hjalmar

Hjalmar is the slayer of Angantyr.

Hjalperk

Hjalperk is Sigurd's foster father.

Hjordis

Hjordis is Sigmund's second wife and the mother of Sigurd.

Hjorvard

Hjorvard is another brother of Angantyr who was also killed and buried with him.

Hoddmimir

See Mimir

Hogni

1.The father of Sigrun. Helgi kills him in a battle fought to prevent Sigrun's marriage to another man. Hogni is avenged by his son Dag who uses Odin's spear. 2. A Burgundian prince, brother of Gunnar and Gudrun. He dies rather than reveal the whereabouts of Andvari's treasure.

Hrani

Hrani is also a brother of Angantyr who was killed and buried with him.

Hreidnar

Hreidnar is the father of Regin, Fafnir, and Otter. He is given Andvari's treasure by Loki and Odin as compensation for their killing of his son Otter when he was in the shape of an otter.

Hunding

1. The father of Agnar and Geirrod. 2. A king killed by Helgi Hunding's Bane.

Jonacr

Jonacr is Gudrun's third husband and the father of Hamdir and Sorli.

Jormunrek

Jormunrek was the historical fourth-century king of the Goths who entered legend as the murderer of his young second wife Swanhild and his son who were falsely accused of adultery together.

Kostbera

In the *Greenland Lay of Atli,* Kostbera is Hogni's wife, a wise and learned woman who tries to make sense of Gudrun's runic warning and has a prophetic dream of disaster.

Loddfafnir

Loddfafnir is the recipient of Odin's wisdom in the *Sayings of the High One.*

Loki

Loki is an Aesir, but of doubtful allegiance. He is the trickster who is the preferred companion of the gods in tight corners, but whose advice usually involves morally questionable choices that create further problems for those who take it. His mischief becomes a pure destructive maliciousness over the course of the history of the gods.

Mimir

Mimir, also known as Hoddmimir, is the guardian of the well under the root of Yggdrasil, the Ash tree at the center of the universe.

Nifiungs

Nifiungs are essentially synonymous with Gjuking, the family and followers of King Gjuki.

Njord

Njord is the god of the sea.

Norns

Norns, also known as Urd, are the Scandinavian version of the Fates, who determined the destiny of the world and of individuals. They were of the race of giants.

Oddrun

Oddrun is the sister of Brynhild and Atli. She was originally promised to Gunnar. When Atli would not allow them to wed after Brynhild's death, they had a secret affair. Oddrun gave this as one of the reasons that Atli killed Gunnar.

Odin

For an almost-full list of Odin's names see *The Lay of Grimnir,* stanzas 12 and 13, which end "I've never been known by one name only/since I have wandered the world." (A brief listing of Odin's many names include: All-Father, Warfather, Father of the Slain, Gagnrad□'Counsel for Victory,' Gangleri, Grim and Ygg.) The king of the gods, known among the pagan English as Woden, the god of Wednesday, he was the god of battle, magic, poetic inspiration, and all those who die in battle. He was a shapeshifter and could appear as an old oneeyed man, dressed in a hooded cloak and broad hat, or as a wolf. He was usually accompanied by the socalled beasts of battle: two ravens, 'Thought' and 'Memory', and wolves. He sacrificed his eye and hung nine days and nine nights on Yggdrasil, the tree that supports the world, to gain wisdom. He is the Lord of runes and secret wisdom. Odin protected kings and encouraged heroes, largely to build up a fighting force in Valhalla the hall of the slain, for the great battle with the forces of darkness at the end of the world. When he thought the time was right, he would disarm even a protected favorite to bring about his death in battle. It has been suggested that Odin became important only during the period when the Germanic peoples were entering the former provinces of the Roman empire when, as a god of war bands, he

attracted worshipers. Normal social and tribal bonds were under stress and were often replaced by new groups coalescing around successful warriors.

Otter

Otter is Regin and Fafnir's brother and Hreidnar's son. Andvari's treasure was handed over to his brothers and father as compensation for his murder while in the shape of an otter.

Ran

Ran is the goddess of the sea. Her husband and the god of the sea is Aeggir.

Regin

Regin is Hreidmar's son and the brother of Otter and Fafnir. He was twice cheated out of his part of Andvari's treasure. A dwarfish smith warped by thwarted greed, he takes Sigurd under his wing to train him to kill Fafnir, now in the shape of a dragon. Sigurd is warned of his treachery by both the dying Fafnir and the birds, and kills him.

Sif

Sif is Thor's wife.

Sigdrifa

See Brynhild

Sigmund

Sigmund is the son of Volsung and father, by different women, of Helgi, Sinfjotli, and Sigurd.

Signy

Siggeir, Signy's husband, murdered Sigmund and Signy's father and brothers. Signy sends her young sons to Sigmund hoping they will be able to help Sigmund avenge their family. When the boys prove to be less than the stuff of heroes, Signy, determined to have vengeance, changes shape with a sorceress, seduces her brother, and bears him a son Sinfjotli. Sinfjotli helps Sigmund in the vengeance. Sigmund only learns that he is his son and not his nephew when Signy tells him after they have set fire to Siggeir's hall. Signy then enters the burning hall because, as she says to her brother

and their son in the Volsung Saga, "I have worked so hard to bring about vengeance I am by no means fit to live. Willingly I shall die with King Siggeir, although I married him reluctantly."

Sigrlinn

Sigrlinn is the daughter of King Svafnir and mother of Helgi in his first incarnation.

Sigrun

The three Helgi lays suggest that Sigrun, also known as Svava and Kara, was, like her beloved Helgi, reincarnated three times. In each incarnation, she was a Valkyrie who chose to protect and love Helgi, and eventually marry him.

Sigurd

Sigurd is the Siegfried of Richard Wagner's operas. In the *Elder Edda,* he is the son of Sigmund and Hjordis. He is the greatest warrior of his time. He kills the man-turned-dragon, Fafnir, and wins Andvari's treasure from him. Following this, he wakes the Valkyrie Sigdrifa/Brynhild, learns her wisdom and promises to marry her before he goes off to his fate at the hands of the wife and children of Gjuki. Sigurd is the type of honorable and courageous hero, who despite all his qualities, is manipulated into acting completely against his ideals.

Sinfjotli

Sinfjotli is the son of Sigmund and Signy his sister and the half-brother of Sigurd and Helgi. The story of his birth is not recorded in the *Elder Edda* where he is presented as helping his young halfbrother Helgi.

Sorli

Sorli is the brother of Hamdir and son of Gudrun and Jonacr. He is killed on the expedition to avenge their half-sister, Swanhild.

Surt

Surt is the lord of the fire giants. He has given his name to a volcanic island off Iceland.

Svava

See Sigrun

Swanhild

Swanhild is the daughter of Sigurd and Gudrun. She is married to King Jormunrek of the Goths who executes her when she is falsely accused of adultery with her stepson.

Thor

Thor, also known as Ving-Thor and Veor, is the god of thunder. He is the son of the Earth (Fjorgyn), and with his great hammer, Mjollnir, he defended gods and men against the giants. He was the most popular of Norse gods. People wore little hammers much as Christians do crosses. Even after Christianity became common, some people would take no chances and keep up a quiet personal devotion to Thor as well as to Christ.

Thrym

A king of the giants, Thrym stole Thor's hammer, Mjollnir, in an attempt to force the gods to give him Freya as his wife. He and many of his family and wedding guests were killed when Thor got his hands back on his hammer.

Tyr

The god of war, he was apparently once a more important god, but lost most of his functions and popularity to Odin and Thor by the time the *Elder Eddas* were composed.

Urd

See Norns

Vanir

Vanirs were the gods of fertility who were at one time at war with the Aesir. They are often represented as having knowledge of the future.

Veor 'Holy, Defender of the Home'

See Thor

Ving-Thor

See Thor

Volsungs

Volsungs is the family name of Sigmund, Sinfjotli, and Sigurd.

Volund

Volund is the Weyland Smith of many English place names and the hero of the *Volundarqvitha* (The Lay of Volund). He was the son of a Finnish king famous for his ability to work iron, gold, and silver. He was captured and lamed by King Nidud who wanted to monopolize his skills. Volund made himself wings, and after killing Nidud's sons and raping his daughter, flew away from his captivity.

War Father

See Odin

Ygg

See Odin

Ymir

Ymir is a giant from whose body the earth, sea, and sky were made.

Themes

Divided Loyalties

Norse society was violent, as reflected in the *Sayings of the High One* "Don't leave your weapons lying about / behind your back in a field, / you never know when you may need / of a sudden your spear." In this society personal loyalties were everything, the only real basis of order and security. Nothing stood between order and chaos except the certainty that vengeance would be exacted for a wrong. The duty to defend family and lord was at the core too of personal honor and self-esteem. The man who did not take vengeance could expect neither mercy from his enemies nor sympathy from his friends. Neither love nor friendship nor practical expedience could stand in its way for long. Women would sweep aside all the commonplaces of love and gender roles to have it. The clash between competing loyalties and duties is perhaps the most important springboard of action in Old Norse literature.

Hospitality and Generosity

The "Sayings of the High One" paint a world where hospitality to the stranger as well as to the friend was a sacred duty. This idea was founded on the realities of Viking society. Populations were often small and scattered. In winter, it would be murder to deny a traveler a place at the fire. The man who welcomed a traveler to his home might soon be glad of a welcome himself. This idea was important. Odin himself was represented as checking an accusation of inhospitality. Even a child realized that mistreatment of a stranger is wrong and defied his father and king in *The Lay of Grimnir* to bring a horn of wine and a kind word to the disguised Odin. That small act was enough to win the little boy the lifelong favor of the god.

Generosity was the sign of nobility of spirit, of the regard of the giver for the person to whom the gift was given. It was one of the things that bound society together. If hospitality was born of a recognition of common humanity, gift giving was the specific recognition of the importance of one human being for another, whether between friends, lovers, or a king and his warrior.

Pessimism and Fatalism

Often, characters in the lays know exactly what lies before them and yet appear powerless to stop and make a conscious decision to snap the chain of events. This is a reflection of the belief that people's lives were laid out before them, just as Ragnarok (the end of time) lay before men and gods. The lays surrounding Sigurd and the royal house of the Burgundians are a reflection of this theory. He and they are swept up in a process started long ago, which centered on the cursed treasure that Sigurd won by killing the dragon Fafnir. The ultimate cause of the curse, the capricious slaying of Otter

the dwarf by Loki, sets in motion a chain reaction of acts of vengeance and greed in which gods, giants, dwarves, and people suffer.

Ragnarok and Heroism

The opening poem of the *Elder Edda* describes the history of the world from creation to its destruction. The destruction of the world will take place at Ragnarok with the last, great battle between the gods and heroes on one side and the forces of evil on the other. It is in preparation for this battle that Odin sends his Valkyries to bring the spirits of men slain in battle to Valhalla, the hall of the slain. His need for heroes is so great that he will allow a warrior he has favored to be killed in battle rather than lose his help in the end time. Nevertheless, no matter what Odin and the gods may do, no matter how many heroes join their fight against the forces of darkness, the battle will end in defeat, or more specifically, the mutual destruction of the gods and their enemies. Ragnarok seems to be a symbol of the Vikings' view of their world. They knew that all things end. The world, flawed as it obviously was, could be no different. The important thing was to meet what came, good or bad, head on and unflinching. Man or woman, they must master events. Rather than allowing events to make them less than they were, events were the stage on which they could win the only immortality that mattered: fame. The certainty of defeat and death did not affect the will to fight. Defeat was not important; to endure, to live according to certain standards of loyalty and courage was important. To meet life courageously, however grim life might be, was to rob it of its fears.

Wisdom

Odin gave his eye for wisdom; Sigurd spent most of his courtship of Brynhild learning her supernaturally acquired wisdom. Heroes are expected to have discernment. They must be able to judge a situation and the character of the men and the women around them. The Norse poets gave wisdom, its acquisition, and transmission. The preoccupation with prophecy in the *Elder Edda* is a reflex of this pursuit of wisdom, even though it is a mixed blessing in a world overshadowed by pessimism and fate. To modern readers, this preoccupation may seem irrelevant and lacking in an aesthetic sense, but in Norse society it was an essential, defining poetic function. Elegance of diction, delicate metrical effects, creation of atmosphere, and emotional power were tools, not ends, for the Norse poet. In gnomic verse, poets distilled wisdom into memorable turns of phrase. In the narrative lays, poets provided embodiments of wisdom and foolishness in action. Experience is the source of wisdom.

Still there are limits to wisdom. The *Sayings of the High One* suggest that it is better not to know too much or to be too wise; perhaps the true nature of life would be too hard to carry. Most poignantly, however, it warns against knowing the future: "If you can't see far into the future, you can live free from care." Discernment too could be thwarted by pull of other ideals and by magic. The betrayal that lies at the heart of Sigurd's tragedy is

one induced by sorcery. Gudrun too knows disaster awaits in marriage with Atli, but she too succumbs to her mother's potions.

Style

Epic Characteristics

Leaving aside the *Sayings of the High One,* which has more in common with works like the biblical *Proverbs,* it appears that the *Elder Edda* is not an epic but materials for one. Here, for once, modern readers have the relatively short poetic narratives, or lays, which supposedly lie behind the epic. While the collection provides in the *Sibyl's Prophecy* a narrative from earth's creation through destruction and renewal, the majority of the poems fit only loosely into that scheme. There is no single hero, but rather a number of heroes ranging from the dim-but-effective god Thor to Gunnar, the treacherous brother-in-law of Sigurd, who, nevertheless, dies a hero while fighting the great tyrant of the age, Atli. Unlike the generic epic, the *Edda* has the obscenities of Loki in The *Insolence of Loki* and the broad humor of the Thor episodes□particularly the *Lay of Thrym,* an early example of that situation beloved of slapstick humor: the brawny man forced to pass himself off as the blushing girl.

Point of View

Each poem in the *Elder Edda* must be considered individually as to its narrator and point of view. The composite *Sayings of the High One* gives the impression of more than one narrator. The simple narratives use a third person point of view: except for the occasional lines like: "Hlorridi's heart leaped with laughter/ Then grew hard when he saw his hammer." Characters' thoughts and emotions are revealed entirely through their own words and actions. For example, Freyja's rage is clear from her actions in the *Lay of Thrym:* "Freyja snorted in such a fury / she made the hall of the Aesir shake." Two of the lays, the *Sibyl's Prophecy* and the *Prophecy of Gripir* by virtue of being prophecies, have an omniscient narrator. In some of the question and answer dialogues, for example, the *The Lay of Vafthrudnir,* the purpose is to provide specific information, but the dramatic and ironic interest that keeps the exchange from descending into a glossary is that while one character only appears to be omniscient the other truly is omniscient.

Setting

The characters's conduct in the *Elder Edda* is not greatly different from what we know of society in the Viking age. The physical setting of the lays stretches on the modern map from Scandinavia to southwestern Russia, home of the Goths before they entered the Roman empire in the late fourth century. The important Sigurd lays are centered on the Rhine valley in western Germany. The true setting of the *Elder Edda,* however, is a universe of nine worlds: Asgard, home of the gods in the center; Midgard, the home of men around it; and Utgard, containing Jötunheim, (giants), Alfheim (elves) Svartalfheim (dark elves) and possibly, the sources are not clear, Vanaheim, home of the Vanir gods.

Under these three is Nifihel, the realm of Hel, the goddess of the dead. The ninth world is possibly that of the dwarves, but its name and exact location are not certain. Asgard and Midgard are protected from Utgard by a body of water in which lives the Midgard serpent, so big that it encircles the whole of Midgard with his tale in its mouth. A rainbow bridge, Bifröst, connects Asgard and Midgard. The great world ash tree, Yggdrasil, has one root in Asgard, one in Utgard, and the third in Nifihel. Under the first root is the spring of Urd or Fate, under the second, the well of Mimir, the source of Odin's wisdom, and under the third is Hvergelmir, the source of all rivers. A dragon gnaws continually at its deepest root.

Allusions

The *Elder Edda* constantly alludes to a whole body of myth and legend that it only imperfectly preserves and that controls the imagery and symbolism of not only of the *Elder Edda,* but of Norse literature in general and Skaldic verse in particular. Even within the *Elder Edda,* there are poems that are essentially dramatic glossaries of allusions and metaphors: *The Lay of Alvis* and *The Lay of Vafthrudnir.*

Heiti and Kennings

The two most prominent poetic devices are heiti and kennings. Heiti are simply cultivated and unusual words for common things or concepts. They can be archaisms, lost from everyday speech, or common words used in a way peculiar to poetry, or poetic coinages. Kenning comes from the verb kenna to characterize or define. They consist of a noun plus a modifier in the possessive case, as 'the raven's feeder' for a warrior. Some rely on natural or everyday connections 'the bane of tinder' for fire or 'the giver of linen' for a lady. The most complex rely on allusions to legend or myth.

Prosody

The *Elder Edda* are typically in four line stanzas. Each line is divided by a *caesura* (pause). Each halfline contains two stressed syllables; the half lines are connected across the caesura by alliteration connecting a stressed initial sound in the first half of the line to a stressed initial sound in the second. Individual consonant sounds only alliterate with the same sound. All vowels alliterate with each other. There is no restriction on the position of the stressed syllables. *Fornyrdislag* (ancient verse) allows generally only two unstressed syllables per half-line: Betty Bouncer bought a candle. *Málaháttr* (speech verse) allows three unstressed syllables per halfline: Sad little Susan, sought for a candle. In a third stanza form *ljódaháttr* (song measure) the first and fourth lines are in *Málaháttr,* the second and fourth have only three stresses.

Historical Context

The Vikings

The Vikings have entered popular imagination as bloodthirsty and immensely daring pirates, but they were first and foremost farmers and traders, raiding for treasure and slaves to accumulate capital to acquire status at home, or looking for lands abroad to colonize. Their raids, trading expeditions, and colonizing took them from Constantinople, modern Istanbul, to the coast of North America. They laid the basis of the Russian state with their trading posts along the Volga and Dneiper. They founded nearly all the cities of modern Ireland. The threat of their great raiding parties was crucial to the development of England as a unified state.

The society the Vikings came from was one of mixed farming, fishing and hunting, supplemented by trading. They would turn their hand to anything. The development of greatly improved ship designs towards the end of the eighth century gave the Scandinavians the finest ships in Europe. Their knorrs were the most effective cargo ships yet built. Their longships could cross the Atlantic or sail up the Seine to lay siege to Paris.

Beside their trading and manufacturing settlements in Ireland and settlements in England, the Vikings colonized the Isle of Man, the Orkneys, Iceland and Greenland. Many of the original settlers of Iceland were from Norway where the consolidation of the country under a central kingship was opposed by many noblemen and free farmers, used to handling their own affairs without outside interference. Others came from the Viking settlements in Ireland, always under pressure from the native Irish princes.

Viking Society

Scandinavia and her people were dominated by the sea. The landscapes of the three Nordic countries, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, are each distinct, but in all of them the terrain tended to separate communities, while the sea connected them. The people looked to the sea as naturally as to the land for opportunities.

The Scandinavians were farmers wherever the land was good enough. Rye, wheat, oats and barley were grown depending on local conditions. Cows, sheep, pigs, geese and chickens were kept. They supplemented agricultural production with hunting, fishing and gathering wild foods: honey, birds eggs and wild plants. Farms were family enterprises, and depending on the richness of the land, often at some distance from one another. Towns only began to emerge from trading posts and ritual centers towards A.D. 1000.

Control of land was the basis of wealth. Sons in a land-owning family increased its power since their wives' dowries would increase and consolidate their landholdings. The family itself in a legal sense and in terms of the various social obligations of Norse

society was defined to the degree of third or fourth cousins recognizing a common great-greatgreat- grandfather. Obligations of one kind or another would also bind a man to the protection of a more powerful neighbor, whom he in turn would support at need. In a hard and violent age these mutual bonds were essential to the maintenance of order and to ensure access to justice.

Men worked their farms with the help of their family which might include two or three generations. Slaves were used for heavier labor by those who could afford them. Free laborers might work for their keep and a small wage. A rich landowner could afford to employ more help, giving him the leisure to go raiding and trading and with luck acquire the wealth necessary to maintain or enhance his status.

Viking Ships and Shipbuilding

The development of ship construction towards the end of the eighth century gave the Scandinavians the finest ships in Europe. They perfected sailing ships that had no need of deep water, safe anchorages or quaysides, but could cross the North Sea or the North Atlantic under sail, as well as be rowed up most of the major rivers of western Europe. These ships were slender and flexible. They had symmetrical ends and a true keel, the lengthwise structure along the base of a ship to which its ribs are connected. They were clinker-built, that is of overlapping planks riveted together. At times these planks would also have been lashed to the ribs of the ship with spruce roots to ensure the ship's flexibility in rough seas. They were steered with a side rudder fitted to the starboard side. One ship excavated in 1880 from a mound at Gokstad on the west side of the Oslo Fjord was 76 and 1/2 feet long. At its widest it was 17and 1/2 feet. When fully laden it would have drawn only three feet of water: it could have been sailed deep into the heart of the Irish countryside or up to the gates of Paris. A copy was sailed across the Atlantic.

Treasure

However it was acquired, treasure, particularly silver, was important in Viking society. One function was display. Fine jewelry and ornamented weapons were an obvious indication of status and success. It was considered part of family wealth like land, and, despite legend, no more than one or two pieces of jewelry were buried with the dead. It was used to reward one's retainers and to provide lavish hospitality. Both of increased a man's standing in his society. Spent on land it raised a freeman's status. For a slave it could mean liberty.

On a practical level, because they did not have a coinage, silver had to be weighed and tested before transactions could take place. It was not necessary, therefore, to keep all one's silver in coins or even ingots. If, mid-deal, a man found himself a little short of cash, he need only throw in his cloak pin or a piece of a bracelet, properly weighed.

Iceland and its Professional Poets

Almost from the beginning of its settlement, Icelanders kept in constant touch with Ireland, England and their Scandinavian homelands. Icelanders with poetic skills found their services appreciated and well rewarded by Norse rulers or by rulers with Norse subjects. Indeed poetry became something of an Icelandic monopoly. For 350 years, from Egill Skalla-Grímson to Jón murti Egilsonn who composed for King Eiríkur Magnússon in 1299 there are records of 110 Icelandic court poets. Snorri was probably trying to keep alive a tradition which had proved useful not only to individual Icelanders, but to Iceland as a whole. A successful court poet would give his fellow countrymen access to the king's court, and keep distant Iceland's concerns from being completely forgotten.

Critical Overview

The first indication of the *Elder Edda's* critical reception is the simple fact of its preservation in a quietly elegant manuscript, the *Codex Regius* with the explanatory prose passages interspersed among the lays. It is often assumed that, as Christianity reached the peoples of northern Europe, devout Christians, as well as the institutional church, automatically attempted to destroy the memory of the old gods and the human heroes whose activities, judged by Judeo-Christian standards, were often less than edifying. Nevertheless, the poems in *Elder Edda* were preserved, collected, and copied. This process can perhaps be most easily understood with reference to the work of the Icelandic scholar and politician, Snorri Sturlson (1179-1241), author of the treatise the *Prose Edda,* which laid the foundation for the analysis of Norse poetry. The stories preserved in the *Elder Edda* were part of the essential tools of the skalds, Norse poets who worked within complex metrical forms, using allusions and metaphors drawn from native heroic and mythological lays, much as Greek and Roman poets enriched their poetry with allusions to their god and heroes or Christian poets to the bible. A gifted skaldic poet could hope for patronage and advancement in the northern courts. Iceland in particular, poor in other resources, produced more than a few of these poets.

In the twelfth century, the ability to understand the older skaldic poetry and to compose in its manner was under threat from Church disapproval on one hand and new French-influenced popular poetry on the other. Christianity was probably the lesser threat. Once conversion was reasonably complete and real, references to Thor and Volund were generally considered as innocuous as references in Latin poetry to Hercules. The growing loss of the traditional material may indeed be reflected in the *Elder Edda* itself since the *Lay of Varthrudnir* and the *Lay of Alvis,* which function as dramatic glossaries of poetic terms and allusions. Snori attempted to reverse this loss with his *Prose Edda,* prose versions of the old stories together with a treatise on the complex metrical rules governing the composition of the various types of skaldic verse, and which provided an explanation of the ancient gods that turned them into clever Trojans, taking advantage of the gullible northerners. In a renaissance of the older literature, reflected in the work of Snorri, the lays of the *Elder Edda* were collected and copied.

There is no record of the *Elder Edda* before the *Codex Regius* came into the possession of Bishop Brynjólf Seinsson in 1643. The manuscript had lost a number of leaves by that time, and no copy exists that was made before the leaves were lost. In 1662, the bishop sent it to the ruler of Iceland, King Frederick III of Denmark. The Renaissance had begun with a renewed interest in Greek and Roman literature and art. Before long, however, people in northern and western Europe, in emulation and partial reaction to this absorption, began to search for information about their own ancestors and their cultural life. This interest, fed by the political usefulness of national identities, lead to speculation about ancient monuments and the careful combing of Greek and Latin texts for information. It also meant that early vernacular writings now interested all those who felt it was their duty or in their interest to encourage scholarship and a sense of a shared national past. In 1665, the "Sibyl's Prophecy" and the "Sayings of the High One" from the *Elder Edda* were published together with Snorri Sturlson's *Prose Edda.*

The full collection, however, was published only between 1787 and 1828. By this time, the romantic movement and the new study of philology, the study of the development and interconnection of languages, were ready to make full use of the texts. Scholars pored over them for linguistic clues to the development and interconnections of the Germanic branch of the Indo-European languages and ancient northern society. In England and Germany as the century progressed, the *Elder Edda,* along with the Icelandic Sagas (prose tales of fictionalized historical events and characters) were moving into the consciousness of the reading public at large. In Nordic countries, this assimilation was strikingly resisted on some fronts; in the nineteenth century, the traditional evening saga reading was discouraged in favor of the Bible in Iceland. The Danish scholar Grundtvig attempted to re-introduce the images, characters, and narratives of the *Elder Edda,* but with little success.

The *Elder Edda,* like many other early medieval epics, for example *Beowulf* and the *Táin Bó Cuáilgne,* were approached almost purely as philological lucky dips or archaeological artifacts well into the twentieth century. It can be no coincidence that Auden's translations, which helped bring the *Elder Edda* to the attention of late twentieth century readers, were dedicated to his former teacher Tolkien, whose own 1936 lecture, *"Beowulf:* The Monsters and the Critics" radically shifted the perception of the epic towards it first and essential existence as literature. Stylistic discussions of the poetry have begun to be discussed more, in the critical literature, even though Nordal's edition of the "Sibyl's Prophecy," revised in 1952 and printed in English translation as late as 1978, has nothing to say about the attributes of the poetry, which contains this mythology like insects and leaves in amber. Ursula Dronke's commentaries, particularly on the Atli lays, demonstrate both the richness of construction and the imaginative play of author with historical material.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

In the following essay, Conrad-O'Briain looks at the great romance of the Elder Edda in an effort to understand its neglect by writers and critics.

Seventeen of the lays in the *Elder Edda* concern the house of the Volsungs. Fifteen directly or indirectly point towards the Icelandic Volsung Saga, the Middle High German *Nibelungenleid,* and finally to Wagner's series of operas, *Ring of the Nibelungs.* They are part of one of the best case histories for the development of the epic from short lays or tales available. The other two "The First Lay of Helgi Hunding's Bane" and "The Second Lay of Helgi Hunding's Bane" could also be approached as points on a continuum of development, but a development that was somehow interrupted. The second lay has already begun the expansion. It adds incidents and treats them with greater complexity, even if it still relies, in true lay style, on the dramatic use of the characters' voices to create atmosphere and setting, direct the audience's sympathies, and propel the narrative. In that process of development, however, Helgi and his beloved Sigrun proved a dead end, while Sigurd and Brynhild became the star-crossed lovers of northern legend, the Viking answer to Lancelot and Guinevere or Tristan and Isolde.

Sigurd was not the only son of Sigmund to inspire the love a Valkyrie, but his elder brother Helgi and his Valkyrie, Sigrun/Svava/Kara and their love stretching across three lifetimes has never caught the popular fancy; even the extant lays in the *Elder Edda* are fragmentary. Their story must once have been popular. What happened?

In the second lay, as mentioned above, the story already incorporates events after Helgi's defeat and killing of Sigrun's father, brothers, and unwanted suitor. The audience now had both the beginning and end of their love, expanding Helgi's death into what might otherwise have been detached as a separate lay. Helgi's death by Dag, the brother-inlaw he had spared, is of far less importance or interest to the poet than the love of Helgi and Sigurn. To express this love to the audience, the poet devoted slightly over a third of his lay to Sigrun's lament for Helgi and their meeting in his grave mound. He incorporated both the theme of the unquiet grave and an audacious reversal of the demon-lover motif.

Instead of being carried off unwillingly to the horrors of the grave as in the demon lover ballads and tales, Sigrun goes to the burial mound, arranges a bed, and insists "Here in the barrow we'll go to bed, released from sorrow, I will sleep, Helgi, safe in your arms the way I used to when you were alive." This material might serve to flesh out an epic, but placed on center stage, they seem more naturally the stuff of romance. This and the substitution in the second lay of the first's generalized hero's boyhood with Helgi's daring secret mission to spy on his family's enemies suggests a poet with a gift for narrative innovation. What then cuts off the development? Possibly the lack of a theme to support an extended narrative. The winning of Sigrun provided the center of a narrative lay, but the process was never given the emotional complexity to sustain a long narrative.

The core of the story, the unshakable love between Helgi and Sigrun, could not accommodate an emotional struggle between them to take the place of war. Such a change would rob the story of its essential character. In the second version, the scene in which, going over the battlefield, she first finds the despised Hodbrodd dying and then Helgi safe, might easily have become an extended episode. But when Helgi who says "'Sigrun I will grieve you by what I say . . . there fell this morning at Freka Stone, Bragi and Hogni; I was their bane.'" Her reaction does not give the society, which produced the *Volsung Saga* or *Njal's Saga,* much to work with to extend the conflict and therefore the narrative: "Then Sigrun wept. She said: 'Now I would wish those warriors alive, and still have your arms around me.'" Then, as the story says, they married and had sons, but "Helgi didn't live to grow old" and "grief and sorrow caused Sigrun to die young." Helgi had spared Sigrun's brother, Dag, who repays the oaths he has sworn with Odin's spear in vengeance for his father. When he confesses the slaying to his sister and offers compensation to her and her sons, she curses him, but she does not pursue vengeance. Her focus and the story's focus remains love of Helgi rather than vengeance. She dares the terrors of the grave for him and dies of her grief; he comes back to her from the dead, from the halls of Odin.

Perhaps the most compelling scene, the one that might have offered the possibility of an extended narrative is Helgi's return from the dead to his wife for one night. It operates within the context of their inability to meet in the Norse afterlife. Since Sigrun is fated to die of grief, not in battle, she cannot join her husband in Valhalla. It is often overlooked by modern readers that Brynhild does not want Sigurd dead merely to punish him. She wants to ensure that she will have him in the afterlife. She does not kill herself out of guilt or remorse, but to join him in the kingdom of Hel. Sigurd must be killed treacherously, not merely because of his prowess, but because if he dies in battle he is lost to her forever. The composers of the lays were very much alive to this. Their sensitivity to it is reflected in "Brynhild's Hel-ride."

The tale of Sigurd and Brynhild was a tale of thwarted love, but there is no adultery, no stolen meetings, none of the twists and turns of lovers's intrigue, only the cold frustrated fury of a woman who has been tricked into marrying a man she despises, having been betrothed to the one man she could respect and therefore love. Besides, the French romance as a genre was not invariably or even usually about adulterous love but a love that found its harbor in marriage.

The women of *Elder Edda* and of the saga literature in general are praised for the same qualities as the men. Modern readers tend to judge the medieval taste in heroines by Chaucer's, but Geoffrey Chaucer had a highly personal taste for the plaintive and helpless woman (usually married). Brynhild's character did not change substantially between the Norse and courtly version of her story. The ballad tradition is full of women who follow their lovers to war in disguise, often saving them.

The problem of the Helgi legends' dead end may lie exactly in the cleft stick of the Eddic traditions of the afterlife and the in the reincarnation motif. The great engine of the traditional development of the Helgi story, the narrative tool by which the story could be extended was that the lovers were reincarnated at least three times. The story never

found a replacement. However much reincarnation may appeal to modern sensibilities, if only as a narrative tool, it was a bar to wider development of the story between the Vikings' conversion to Christianity and the end of the nineteenth century. It has been suggested that the statement at the end of "The Lay of Helgi Horvard's Son" may be a belated scribal attempt to link the old Helgi tradition to the Volsung-Helgi tradition." But, it seems unlikely that such an idea would have occurred to a Christian scribe out of nowhere, least of all to attract an audience. Keeping the interest in the story alive would have suggested suppressing or ridiculing such a heathen concept as reincarnation, as the prose passage at the end of "The Second Lay of Helgi Hunding's Bane": "In olden times it was believed that people could be born again, although that is now considered an old woman's tale." More likely to represent a scribal attempt to make the sequence more acceptable would be the prose introduction to "The Second Lay of Helgi Hunding's Bane": "King Sigmund, the son of Volsung, married Borghild from Balund. They called their son Helgi, for Helgi Hjorvard's son." This at most suggests a subconscious recognition of their similar fate. The lines in "The Second Lay of Helgi Hunding's Bane"□"before she had ever seen Sigmund's son / she had loved him with all her heart"□is also suggestive of a love reincarnated.

Perhaps the problem is more fundamental. There simply wasn't enough material. Despite the great potential offered and already exploited by certain incidents, there were not enough of them. Even when fleshed out, there certainly were not enough tensions to make a convincing saga like that which formed around Sigurd. The tradition of their love offers only one possible tension between them: there is no meeting again for them after death. No writer after the conversion would be able to exploit the literary possibilities of either this endless loss or the alternative, the rebirth and repetition of the cycle of their love. There is no great object to be pursued. It is the nature of their love, their own natures, that they should find each other and nothing shall come between them, not even death itself, which is the meaning of the story. That is what differentiates them from the characters in the Sigurd material. The center of their story is their love that propels them across death. Their great sorrow, the thing that they must conquer, is their separation by death. That is a subject worthy of an epic, but not an epic that could have been written in the prevailing cultural atmosphere.

Source: Helen Conrad-O'Briain, for *Epics for Students,* Gale, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

Lotte Motz argues that the pattern between Eskimo and Norse tradition is similar, which leads to understanding the "similarity of linguistic dynamics."

In his treatise on poetry, the so-called *Edda Snorra,* Snorri (1949:244) states that the human mind is periphrased in skaldic speech as 'the wind of trollwomen' without offering an explanation for the unexpected image. We do find such kennings as . . . 'the storm of Járnsaxa (a giantess) in the meaning of 'courage', or *Herkju stormr*□'Herkja's (a giantess') storm' in the meaning 'mind'.

Snorri's puzzling statement has given rise to some scholarly interpretations. In his book on magic practices Dag Strömbäck assumed that the noun *hugr* of Snorri's sentence (*Huginn skal svá kenna at kalla vind troll-kvenna*) relates to the force named hugr, which lives in men, and which may, according to Norse belief, detach itself and wander forth, corporeally, to attack and harm an enemy. Strömbäck (1935:175 ff) points out that witches or troll-women are often visualized as traveling in the wind. The 'trolls' wind' thus would be equated with the powerful and noxious force, named hugr.

Basing herself on folkbelief, Lily Weiser-Aall (1936:76-78) offered a somewhat different explanation. The word *hugr* is, according to her, to be understood in its meaning of 'bodily affliction', the kind of sickness which may be brought on by a troll's breath or 'wind', as shown by the modern Norwegian nouns *trollgust, alvgust*□'trolls' wind', 'elves' wind', as names of a disease.

Concerning both interpretations we must note that the kenning 'trolls' wind' does not, in the instances which have been gathered, periphrase 'sickness' or 'attack'. The examples, cited by Rudolf Meissner, circumscribe the notions of 'courage', 'mind', 'emotion', 'thoughts', which coincide with the standard meanings of the noun *hugr* □ 'mind' 'feeling', 'desire', 'courage'. Snorri must have based his statement on his knowledge of skaldic diction. It is therefore not likely that he used *hugr* in the meaning 'sickness' or 'attack' if the metaphors consistently relate to the workings of the human mind. Strömbáck and Weiser-Aall apparently did not consider the material from which Snorri's conclusion was derived.

I shall, in my turn, seek to find the reason for linking witches' weather to human thoughts and emotions, and interpret Snorri's sentence, understanding *hugr* in its standard meaning of 'mind, emotion, consciousness', with the help of a non- Germanic parallel.

The parallel is found among the Eskimos. Their highest god, named Sila, Hila, or Tla, by the various groups, is a being of the outer air, of winds and storms, the great majestic, cosmic power before which men must bow in humbleness and awe. He is, as stated by an Eskimo, "A great spirit so mighty that his utterance to mankind is not through common words, but by storm and snow and rain and the fury of the sea; all the forces that men fear □"

Surprisingly the name of this great force serves also as a designation of the human mind or human intelligence. In Greenlandic speech it may be said: *Siälihliuppa*□"Sila rained on him", and it may be stated about someone: "He has Sila," i.e. "He has intelligence." In Alaska the name Sla means 'weather' and the verb *slaugohaqtoa* means "I am thinking".

We may find an explanation for this duality of meaning by considering that among some of the Eskimo nations, for instance among the Caribou Eskimos, it is indeed from Hila that the shamanmagician, the central figure of religious life, receives his visionary powers. He has prepared himself for this profound experience by leaving the settlements of men and by the endurance of much suffering. Then in his loneliness he may hear the god's voice, be filled with god's presence, and thus himself become part of the secret workings of the universe. "All true wisdom," an Eskimo explained to the explorer Rasmussen, "is only to be learned far from the dwellings of men, out in the great solitudes".

In a recurrent tale from Greenland a poor orphan boy transforms himself into a mighty hero through his strength of will, and he too obtains his gifts through his experience of meeting Sila in the wilderness. If a man wishes to become an *angakoq* (shaman), we are told by an eighteenth century observer of Eskimo life, he must go a long way from his home to a field where there are no men; he must look for a huge stone, sit down on it, and call for Torngarsuk (the shaman's helping spirit with this group of Eskimos). The shock of the terrifying encounter will cause the man to fall into a stupor, and to lie like dead; but he will reawaken and return to his community as a shaman.

The examples given testify to a belief that to acquire knowledge of the secrets of the world one must meet and merge with the forces which are manifest in storm and winds.

Eskimo culture, as we know, remained for climatic reasons at a very early stage of economic development, i.e. that of hunters and of fishermen, until the most recent time, and preserved some extremely archaic forms of belief. It is reasonable to assume that these forms had at one time had a wider distribution and that some had stayed, vestigially, in more sophisticated environments.

I wish to show in this paper that the equation 'mind□trolls' wind' of skaldic poetry had originated in its turn, as in the scenario of the Eskimos, in a belief, forgotten in its articulated form at the time of our texts, that to receive insight, strength, or vision, a man must attain close contact with the elemental powers. If enough fragments of such a faith are still discernible, though in various altered forms, in our texts we may be able to assume the existence of such a pattern in Germanic lands. To arrive at this assumption we would have to be able to point to the following:

1. that in north-Germanic tradition inspiration may be gained by contact with the forces of untamed nature,

2. that trolls and giants (the names are interchangeable) represent such forces,

3. that trolls and giants are capable of dispensing knowledge and inspiration,

4. that humans have indeed gained inspiration through a meeting with the trolls in distant places.

The examples from the arctic environment, here cited, describe an initiatory experience from which the human arises with a new identity, a new dimension to his person, possibly a new conscious soul. We shall examine whether in the Germanic context the inspiration granted would be of an individual nature, pertaining to a certain task, the working of a poem, or the divining of the future, or to the more profound event of acquiring a new state of consciousness.

Inspiration through contact with the forces of untamed nature

The Icelandic noun *útiseta*□'sitting outside', designates the wizard's practice of staying outdoors for the night in the course of his profession. The act is performed to gather knowledge of the future□ *eflaútiseta ok leita spádóms*□and is considered a felony or crime. And we may understand that the wizard of Germanic society reached in his lonely vigil contact with the superhuman as does the *angakoq* of the Eskimos, visited by Torngarsuk while 'sitting on a stone'.

Inspiration may also be gained by sitting on a mound□*sitja á haugi.* After a night of sleeping on a mound an Icelandic shepherd gained the gift of poetic creativity.

While the instances above depict techniques of seeking specific visions or knowledge the episode of an Eddic poem shows how a whole new form of being is granted to a man through forces that have come to him through wind and air. The lad was, in his early youth, mute and without a name. One day, while sitting on a mound, he noticed that a train of shining maidens was riding through the clouds; one of them came to him to bestow these gifts: a name, the power of speech, and a sword. That practices meant to gain manhood, i.e. a new state of consciousness, were associated in Norse tradition with a stay in uncultivated places may be surmised from a sentence of *Landnámabók;* here a man was led into a certain cave of Iceland before attaining the 'rank of man'.

2. *Trolls and giants as representatives of nature*

This point hardly needs belaboring. Trolls and giants are the powers of *úlgarthar,* for they dwell outside of the settlements of men in the stones and crags, the caves and glaziers of the mountainside. Theirs is an especially close alliance with the weather, with storms and snow, and frost and winds. In Norse myth the wind arises because a giant in the shape of an eagle flaps his wings. A saga giant will frequently manipulate the weather to gain his end; he thus may send a storm to wreck the boat of sailors near his shore. The troll-woman *Thorgerthr Hölgabrúthr* created a hailstorm so that her friend might win his battle (*The Saga of the Jomsvikings*). The giant Gusir was observed as he was moving in a whirl of snow (*Ketils saga h ngs*), and Thorri, a giant and a king in a legendary saga, sends snow for 'good skiing' if he is favorably inclined (*Hversu Noregr byggthist*).

Winds may rise and darkness fall, just before a human meets a giant. The young Icelandic lad Oddr thus found himself in darkness, frost, and drifts of snow as he was

about to meet the giant Bárthr (*Bárthar saga Sn fellsáss*). Rain and hail descended just before the heroes Hjálmthér and Ölvir encountered the giantess Skinnhúfa (*Hjálmthés saga ok Ölvis*). The Icelander Thorsteinn experienced an agony of cold before he faced the giant Grámann (*Ármanns saga inn fyrri*). The modern German noun Windsbraul for 'whirlwind' shows that in folk belief storm and wind may be visualized in the form of a witch.

We may be quite sure that the giants speak to men, like Sila of the Eskimos, 'by storm and snow and rain and the fury of the sea'.

3. *Trolls and giants as source of knowledge and inspiration*

Óthinn learned nine important magic songs from the giant Bolborn, his maternal uncle (*Hávamál*). The goddess Freyja approached Hyndla, a troll-woman living in a cave, to learn from her the genealogy of her human friend Óttar. And she received the information (*Hyndlulióth*). Though the Eddic poem *Vafthrúthnismál* ostensibly presents a contest between Óthinn and a giant, much information, concerning matters of the cosmos, is dispensed by Vafthrúthnir in the course of the event.

Young Oddr acquired so much legal knowledge from the giant Bárthr that he became the greatest lawyer of his generation (*Bárthar saga Sn fellsáss*). The warrior Thorsteinn learned many skills from his giant mistress (*Thorsteins saga Geirnefjufóstra*), while another man, named Thorsteinn, was taught so well by a giant woman and her daughters in the arts of courtly accomplishment that none could rival him in these matters (*Ármanns saga inn fyrri*); and the giant Ármann offered valuable advice in the lawsuit of an Icelandic farmer (*Ármanns saga inn fyrri*). Bárthr, who himself was a giant, was introduced to magic skills, knowledge of genealogy, sorcerers' chants, and the old magic lore by the giant Dofri (*Bárthar saga Sn fellsáss*). This giant was also said to be the teacher of the historical king Harald Finehair and he in structed him in learning□*fr thi*□and accomplishments □*íthróttir*. The giantess Menglöth appeared to Ormr in a dream and advised him on his future battle (*Orms tháttr Stórólfssonar*), while the giantess Brana came to Hálfdan in a dream to remind him of a pledge he had forgotten (*Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*). The hero Hadingus was sent for his education to the giant Vagnhofthus and he increased much in strength and skill, as reported by Saxo Grammaticus.

Trolls and giants, who are themselves, as we have seen, wise and versed in magic crafts, thus appear in teaching and counseling, and, in dreams, in helping and admonishment.

4. *The inspirational meeting between troll and human in the wilderness*

The *útiseta,* the magician's stay outside of human dwellings, is performed, as it is overtly stated, so that the trolls may be aroused□*útisetur at vekja troll upp.* The trolls thus are, in this practice, the superhuman forces of the natural environment whom the Norse magician wishes to approach, as the *angakoq* wishes to approach the mighty Sila.

In most instances, cited under 3, knowledge is imparted and instruction conducted in the uncultivated space of the giant's realm. Oddr spent a winter in his teacher's cave. Thorsteinn lived with Geirnefja as her lover while she taught him, and the other Thorsteinn resided with three giant women. In a mountain cave young Bárthr became acquainted with the many magic powers and the wisdom of the giant Dofri. And young Harald, later king of Norway, spent five years in this giant's cave.

Frequently the hero gains, through his meeting with the troll, usually a troll-woman, a superhuman friend who will help him in time of need in his later adventures. The giantess Mána came to Sörli's rescue when he was threatened by the anger of a queen (*Sörla saga slerka*), and the giantess Fála rushed to fight at Gunnar's side against an entire horde of trolls (*Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls*). The giantess Skinnhúfa killed a monstrous whale which had threatened her human friend (*Hjálmthés saga ok Ölvis*), and the giant woman Brana arrived to save Hálfdan from the fires of a blazing hall (*Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*). A troll-woman, riding on a wolf, offered to become the *fylgja,* the lifelong and loyal guardian force, of the warrior Heth inn.

After the encounter with the troll some heroes of the legendary sagas are given a new by-name as the fosterson of the respective spirit. In this way Hálfdan became the Fosterling of Brana, Illugi the Fosterling of Gríthr, and Thorsteinn the Fosterling of Geirnefja. King Harald Finehair was also known as the Fosterling of Dofri. It is clear that receiving a new name, which he will bear throughout his future life, marks a decisive change in the being of a person, the reaching of a new stage, the acquisition of an altered identity. And this event is occasioned, in the cases cited, by the man's stay with the troll in the troll's environment.

Let us summarize our argument: we cannot doubt that in north-Germanic tradition men are believed to gain temporary or lasting wisdom or inspiration by meeting with forces of the wilderness (1); it is also clear that trolls and giants represent such forces, especially those of wind and weather (2); trolls and giants, themselves deeply versed in magic wisdom, may generously give of their knowledge (3); an encounter of a human hero with a troll, in the troll's environment, and its impact is also frequently noted in the Old Icelandic texts (4).

We may, however, raise some questions concerning the latest category and wonder if the Norse hero's friendship with the troll is indeed of the same kind as the Eskimo shaman's contact with his god. Let us consider these events more closely.

The Eskimo's experience in the solitude of the arctic waste initiates him into his craft. He leaves the place of contact as a profoundly altered being, a man with a new identity. The Norse hero's experience in a giant's cave also leaves him as an altered being. The possession of a helping spirit has added a new dimension to his person; he may, furthermore, be protected in his future adventures by a magic gift received from his superhuman friend, as is Hálfdan by the corselet *Brönunautr.* Sometimes, as in the case of Illugi Grítharfóstri, he goes forth as one whose mettle has been tested, for Illugi's courage did not falter even at the moment of the greatest peril. At times a new by-name marks him as a man tested or instructed by a superhuman creature in the wilderness.

The initiatory nature of the Norse episodes is also underlined by the events preceding the adventure. The Eskimo shaman cannot attain his visionary powers without enduring suffering so great that it may endanger his physical existence. The saga hero in his turn is subjected to hardship and to pain. His ship may have drifted aimlessly, for weeks or months, in fog and darkness, before it was shattered on the rocks; he may be the sole survivor on the cliffs (*Ásmundar saga Atlasonar*). He may have been wounded and lie close to death on the battle ground. He may be on the point of drowning, as was Thorsteinn of *Thorsteins saga Víkingssonar,* or worn to exhaustion by the cold as was Thorsteinn of *Ármanns saga inn fyrri.*

The initiatory pattern of the saga hero's adventure would allow us to place it generically with the initiatory encounter of the *angakoq.* We must admit, however, that the experience in the arctic ice is part of the tradition of a living faith while the *útiseta* of the sorcerer belongs with forbidden practices, and the episode concerning the Norse hero and the troll is embedded in fictional or semi-fictional tales. We may wonder in what way information from such sources may be related to religious beliefs. Clearly the magician's practices, though forbidden in Christian time, had been part of pre-Christian faith and its manifestations persisted, as we may note, after the conversion.

We do not know, however, to what extent the sagas mirror a believed reality. They clearly have preserved a tale of a man's meeting with an elemental power in the wasteland and its impact on his personality. To the extent to which there was belief in the actual existence of the hero there also must have been belief, at least at one time, in the reality of his adventures. That such a faith was likely and that it had, actually, not completely vanished, is supported by the fact that the medieval king Harald Finehair bore, among others, the title Fosterson of (the giant) Dofri. The assumption might have been that to be a real king or a real hero one must have had the tutelage of an elemental force of nature.

If the arguments brought forth allow us to understand that the thought pattern here discussed is, in essence, the same in Eskimo and in Norse tradition then we may also understand the similarity of linguistic dynamics, the equation of Sila with intelligence and the equation of the 'troll's wind' with the human mind, for in meeting with the troll the hero acquired his hugr, his aware and conscious soul. That the meaning 'courage' recurs among the kennings is in keeping with the destiny and role awaiting the young warrior of the northern lands.

Source: Lotte Motz, "The Storm of Troll-Women," in *Maal og Minne,* Vol. 1-2, 1988, pp. 31-41.

Critical Essay #3

Lee M. Hollander, in this article from The Poetic Edda, attributes the preservation of the Teutonic race's literary heritage to the early Christian missionaries, and specifically, to Iceland, whose inhabitants contributed greatly to capturing the wonders of the Viking Age, its sagas and Eddic lays.

What the *Vedas* are for India, and the Homeric poems for the Greek world, that the *Edda* signifies for the Teutonic race: it is a repository, in poetic form, of their mythology and much of their heroic lore, bodying forth both the ethical views and the cultural life of the North during late heathen and early Christian times.

Due to their geographical position, it was the fate of the Scandinavian tribes to succumb later than their southern and western neighbors to the revolutionary influence of the new world religion, Christianity. Before its establishment, they were able to bring to a highly characteristic fruition a civilization stimulated occasionally, during the centuries preceding, but not overborne by impulses from the more Romanized countries of Europe. Owing to the prevailing use of wood for structural purposes and ornamentation, little that is notable was accomplished and still less has come down to us from that period, though a definite style had been evolved in wood-carving, shipbuilding and bronze work, and admirable examples of these have indeed been unearthed. But the surging life of the Viking Age restless, intrepid, masculine as few have been in the world's history found magnificent expression in a literature which may take its place honorably beside other national literatures.

For the preservation of these treasures in written form we are, to be sure, indebted to Christianity; it was the missionary who brought with him to Scandinavia the art of writing on parchment with connected letters. The Runic alphabet was unsuited for that task.

But just as fire and sword wrought more conversions in the Merovingian kingdom, in Germany, and in England, than did peaceful, missionary activity so too in the North; and little would have been heard of sagas, Eddic lays, and skaldic poetry had it not been for the fortunate existence of the political refuge of remote Iceland.

Founded toward the end of the heathen period (*ca.* 870) by Norwegian nobles and yeomen who fled their native land when King Harald Fairhair sought to impose on them his sovereignty and to levy tribute, this colony long preserved and fostered the cultural traditions which connected it with the Scandinavian soil. Indeed, for several centuries it remained an oligarchy of families intensely proud of their ancestry and jealous of their cultural heritage. Even when Christianity was finally introduced and adopted as the state religion by legislative decision (1000 A.D.), there was no sudden break, as was more generally the case elsewhere. This was partly because of the absence of religious fanaticism, partly because of the isolation of the country, which rendered impracticable for a long time any stricter enforcement of Church discipline in matters of faith and of living.

The art of writing, which came in with the new religion, was enthusiastically cultivated for the committing to parchment of the lays, the laws, and the lore of olden times, especially of the heroic and romantic past immediately preceding and following the settlement of the island. Even after Christianity got to be firmly established, by and by, wealthy freeholders and clerics of leisure devoted themselves to accumulating and combining into "sagas," the traditions of heathen times which had been current orally, and to collecting the lays about the gods and heroes which were still remembered □ indeed, they would compose new ones in imitation of them. Thus, gradually came into being huge codices which were reckoned among the most cherished possessions of Icelandic families. By about 1200 the Danish historian, Saxo Grammaticus, already speaks in praise of the unflagging zeal of the Icelanders in this matter.

The greatest name in this early Icelandic Renaissance (as it has been called) is that of Snorri Sturluson (1178-1241), the powerful chieftain and great scholar, to whom we owe the *Heimskringla,* or *The History of the Norwegian Kings,* and the *Snorra Edda*□about which more later□but he stands by no means alone. And thanks also to the fact that the language had undergone hardly a change during the Middle Ages, this antiquarian activity was continued uninterruptedly down into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when it was met and reinforced by the Nordic Renaissance with its romantic interest in the past.

In the meantime the erstwhile independent island had passed into the sovereignty of Norway and, with that country, into that of Denmark, then at the zenith of its power. In the search for the origins of Danish greatness it was soon understood that a knowledge of the earlier history of Scandinavia depended altogether on the information contained in the Icelandic manuscripts. In the preface to Saxo's *Historia Danica,* edited by the Danish humanist Christiern Pedersen in the beginning of the sixteenth century, antiquarians found stated in so many words that to a large extent his work is based on Icelandic sources, at least for the earliest times. To make these sources more accessible, toward the end of the sixteenth century, the learned Norwegian, Peder Claussön, translated the *Heimskringla,* which, with the kings of Norway in the foreground, tells of Scandinavian history from the earliest times down to the end of the twelfth century.

Since it was well known that many valuable manuscripts still existed in Iceland, collectors hastened to gather them although the Icelandic freeholders "brooded over them like the dragon on his gold," as one contemporary remarked. As extreme good fortune would have it, the Danish kings then ruling, especially Fredric III, were liberal and intelligent monarchs who did much to further literature and science. The latter king expressly enjoined his bishop in Iceland, Brynjólfur Sveinsson, a noted antiquarian, to gather for the Royal Library, then founded, all manuscripts he could lay hold of. As a result, this collection now houses the greatest manuscript treasures of Northern antiquity. And the foundations of other great manuscript collections, such as those of the Royal Library of Sweden and the libraries of the Universities of Copenhagen and Uppsala, were laid at about the same time.

This collecting zeal of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries may almost be called providential. It preserved from destruction the treasures, which the Age of Enlightenment and Utilitarianism following was to look upon as relics of barbarian antecedents best forgotten, until Romanticism again invested the dim past of Germanic antiquity with glamor.

At the height of this generous interest in the past a learned Icelander, Arngrímur Jónsson, sent the manuscript of what is now known as *Snorra Edda* or *The Prose Edda* (now called *Codex Wormianus*), to his Danish friend Ole Worm. Knowledge of this famous work of Snorri's had, it seemed, virtually disappeared in Iceland. Its author was at first supposed to be that fabled father of Icelandic historiography, Sæmundr Sigfússon (1056-1133), of whose learning the most exaggerated notions were then current. A closer study of sources gradually undermined this view in favor of Snorri; and his authorship became a certainty with the finding of the *Codex Upsaliensis* of the *Snorra Edda,* which is prefaced by the remark that it was compiled by Snorri.

To all intents and purposes this *Edda* of Snorri's is a textbook□one of the most original and entertaining ever written. In it is set forth in dialogue form the substance and technique (as we should say) of skaldship, brought conveniently together for the benefit of those aspiring to the practice of the art. The first part, called "Gylfaginning" or "The Duping of Gylfi," furnishes a survey of Northern mythology and cosmogony; the second, called "Skaldskaparmál" or "The Language of Skaldship," deals with the subject of "kennings," whose origin is explained by quotations from skaldic poems and other lore; the third, called "Háttatal" or "The Enumeration of *hættir* (metres)," contains Snorri's encomiastic poem, in 102 stanzas, on King Hákon and Duke Skúli, exemplifying as many metres employed in skaldship and giving explanations of the technical aspects of the skaldic art.

Among the scholars eagerly scanning this precious find the conviction soon made itself felt that the material in it was not original with Snorri: they saw that much of the first two books was on the face of it a group of synopses from older poetic sources which, in their turn, investigators ascribed to Sæmundr. Hence when that lucky manuscript hunter, Bishop Brynjólfur, discovered (about 1643) the unique and priceless codex containing what we now call *The Poetic Edda,* it was but natural that he should conclude this to be "The Edda of Sæmundr," whose existence had already been inferred theoretically. And this conclusion was unhesitatingly subscribed to by all, down to modern times. The fact is, though, that the connection of Sæmundr with *The Poetic Edda* has no documentary evidence whatever. Moreover, it is inherently improbable.

But, since the great bulk of poems which we have come to regard as "Eddic" is handed down precisely in this manuscript, and since we lack any other collective title, the name of *Edda,* which properly belongs to Snorri's work, has been retained for all similar works. We know with a fair degree of certainty that Snorri himself named his handbook of poetics "Edda"; but as to the meaning of this word we are dependent on conjecture.

Quite early, the name was taken to be identical with that of Edda, who was progenitress of the race of thralls according to "The Lay of Ríg," and whose name means "great-

grandmother." This identification was adopted by the great Jakob Grimm who, with his brother Wilhelm, was one of the first to undertake a scientific edition of part of the collection. In the taste of Romanticism he poetically interpreted the title as the ancestral mother of mankind sitting in the circle of her children, instructing them in the lore and learning of the hoary past. However, as it happens, Snorri did not, in all likelihood, know "The Lay of Ríg"; nor does this fanciful interpretation agree at all with the prosy manner in which the Icelanders were accustomed to name their manuscripts, or□for that matter□with the purpose and nature of Snorri's work. It is altogether untenable.

Another explanation was propounded early in the eighteenth century by the Icelandic scholar, Árni Magnússon, and has been accepted by many. According to him, *Edda* means "poetics"□a title which (from a modern point of view) would seem eminently fitting for Snorri's work. Later scholars, who have provided a more solid philological underpinning for this theory than Arni was able to, also point out that the simplex óðr, from which *Edda* may be derived, signifies "reason," "soul" and hence "soulful utterance," "poem," agrees excellently, etymologically and semantically, with the related Latin vates and the Old Irish *faith,* "seer," "poet." Nevertheless, this explanation does not quite satisfy, for the word "Edda" in the meaning "poetics" is nowhere attested before the middle of the fourteenth century.

The simplest theory, agreeing best with the matter-of-fact Icelandic style of naming their writings, is the proposal of the Icelandic-English scholar, Eirík Magnússon. He reminded us that *Edda* may mean "the Book of Oddi." This was the name of the renowned and historic parsonage in southwest Iceland which under that remarkable mind, Sæmundr Sigfússon, had become a center of learning whither flocked gifted youths eager for historical or clerical instruction. After his death, in 1133, the estate, continuing to prosper, kept up its tradition for learning under his two sons, and especially under his grandson, the wise and powerful chieftain, Jón Loptsson. It was he who fostered and tutored the three-year-old Snorri and under whose roof the boy lived until his nineteenth year. What is more likely than that Oddi with its traditions and associations played a profound role in Snorri's entire development? To be sure, whether Snorri wrote his work there in later years, whether he gave it the title in grateful recognition of the inspiration there received, or whether he wished thus to indicate an indebtedness to manuscript collections of poems owned at Oddi□these are mere surmises.

Magnússon, indeed, believed that Snorri, while in Oddi, had used a manuscript containing about all the lays comprised in the codex found by Bishop Brynjólfur, and from them made the synopses found in the "Gylfaginning." In this he was mistaken however; for it seems well-established now that Snorri could have had before him only "Voluspá," "Vafthrúonismál," and "Grímnismál."

Subsequent finds added a few lays of Eddic quality to those preserved in Brynjólf's codex, which thus remains our chief source for them. This famous manuscript, now known as *Codex Regius No. 2365* of the Royal Library of Denmark, is a small quarto volume consisting of forty-five sheets closely covered with writing. No distinction is made between prose and poetry, except that the beginning of every lay is marked off by a large colored initial, and every stanza, by a smaller one. The whole is in one firm,

legible hand which paleologists agree in assigning to an Icelander of the last half of the thirteenth century. He must have copied it from, it seems, at least two manuscripts for the nature of a number of scribal errors shows that he did not write from memory or from dictation. Paleographic evidence furthermore shows that these postulated manuscripts themselves cannot have been older than the beginning of the thirteenth century; also, that they must have been written by different scribes, for there is a distinct paleographic and orthographic boundary between "Alvíssmál," the last of the mythological lays in *Regius,* and the heroic lays. We know nothing concerning the provenience of this priceless collection, not even where it was preserved when Bishop Brynjólfur found it. As to the date when the lays were first collected, various considerations make it probable that this occurred not earlier than the middle of the thirteenth century.

Next in importance to the *Regius* comes the manuscript *Fragment 748* of the Arnamagnæan Collection of the Copenhagen University Library, dating from the beginning of the fourteenth century. Among other matters it contains, in a slightly different form and in a divergent order, part of "The Lay of Hárbarth," "Baldr's Dreams" (for which it is the sole source), part of "The Lay of Skírnir," "The Lay of Grímnir," "The Lay of Hymir," and part of "The Lay of Volund ." For all the differences between the manuscripts, scholars are unanimous in holding that it derives, ultimately, from the same source as *Regius.* The different ordering of the two collections may be due to the various lays having been handed down on single parchment leaves, which the scribe of *Regius* arranged as he saw fit. He no doubt was the author of the connecting prose links.

The large *Manuscript Codex No. 544* of the Arnamagnæan Collection, called *Hauksbók* from the fact that most of it was written by the Icelandic judge, Haukr Erlendsson, about the beginning of the fourteenth century, is important for Eddic study in that it supplies us with another redaction of "The Prophecy of the Seeress."

For "The Lay of Ríg" we are entirely dependent on the *Codex Wormianus* of the *Snorra Edda* (re- ferred to above) written in the second half of the fourteenth century, where it is found on the last page.

The huge *Codex No. 1005* folio of the Royal Library, known as the *Flateyjarbók* because Brynjólfur Sveinsson obtained it from a farmer on the small island of Flatey, is the source for "The Lay of Hyndla."

"The Lay of Grotti" occurs only in the Codex *Regius* manuscript No. 2367 of the *Snorra Edda,* dating from the beginning of the fourteenth century, where the poem is cited in illustration of a kenning based on the Grotti myth.

There exists also a considerable number of paper manuscripts of the collection; but aside from the fact that some of them contain the undoubtedly genuine "Lay of Svipdag," not found in earlier manuscripts, they are of no importance since they all date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and are essentially derived from the

same source as *Regius,* if not from that collection itself. To be sure, they bear eloquent testimony to the continued interest of Icelanders in these poems.

The Eddic lays which are found in these manuscripts, utterly diverse though they be in many respects, still have in common three important characteristics which mark them off from the great body of skaldic poetry: their matter is the mythology, the ethical conceptions, and the heroic lore of the ancient North; they are all composed in a comparatively simple style, and in the simplest measures; and, like the later folk songs and ballads, they are anonymous and objective, never betraying the feelings or attitudes of their authors. This unity in apparent diversity was no doubt felt by the unknown collector who gathered together all the lays and poetical fragments which lived in his memory or were already committed to writing.

A well thought-out plan is evident in the ordering of the whole. In the first place, the mythic and didactic lays are held apart from the heroic, and those of each group disposed in a sensible order.

The opening chord is struck by the majestic "Prophecy of the Seeress," as the most complete bodying forth of the Old Norse conceptions of the world, its origin and its future. There follow three poems, in the main didactic, dealing chiefly with the wisdom of the supreme god, Óthin (the lays of Hár, of Vafthrúthnir, of Grímnir); then one about the ancient fertility god, Frey ("The Lay of Skírnir"); five in which Thór plays the predominant, or at least a prominent, part (the lays of Hárbarth, of Hymir, of Loki, of Thrym, of Alvís). The poems following in the present translation ("Baldr's Dreams," the lays of Ríg, of Hyndla, of Svipdag, of Grotti) are, it will be remembered, not contained in *Regius.*

The Heroic lays are found arranged in chronological order, as far as feasible, and joined by Prose Links so that the several smaller cycles form one large interconnected cycle. The procedure is especially clear in the case of the Niflung Cycle. Not only has the Collector been at pains to join the frequently parallel lays, but he tries hard to reconcile contradictory statements. Connection with the Helgi Cycle is effected by making Helgi Hundingsbani a son of the Volsung, Sigmund. The tragic figure of Queen Guthrún then links the Niflung Cycle with the Ermanarich lays ("Guthrún's Lament," "The Lay of Hamthir").

There has been a great deal of discussion as to the authenticity and age of the Prose of the Collection, but it is clear now that (excepting the piece about "Sinfjotli's Death," which no doubt is a prose rendering of a lay now lost) the Prose Links for the most part add nothing, or very little, of independent value□nothing, indeed, which could not have been inferred from the poems themselves. We shall hardly err in attributing these links to the intelligent, but not very gifted, compiler of the Collection.

The case is somewhat different, perhaps, with the narrative which binds together the fragments of "The Lay of Helgi Hjorvarthsson" and those of "The Second Lay of Helgi," and with the Prose Links of the Sigurth Cycle from "The Lay of Regin" to "Brynhild's Ride to Hel." Especially the latter group notably resembles in manner the genre of the

Fornaldarsaga □prose with interspersed stanzas□ a form exceedingly common in Old Norse literature and one which, for aught we know, may have been the original form in this instance. Still, even here the suspicion lurks that the Prose is but the apology for stanzas, or whole lays, imperfectly remembered: there is such discrepancy between the clear and noble stanzas and the frequently muddled and inept prose as to preclude, it would seem, the thought of their being by the same author.

Even greater diversity of opinion obtains concerning the age and home of the lays themselves. As was stated above, in sharp contradiction to our knowledge of skaldic poetry, we know nothing about the author of any Eddic poem. Nay, in only a very few, such as "The Lay of Grípir," or "The Third Lay of Guthrún," can one discern so much as the literary individuality of the authors. In consonance with medieval views, they were probably felt to be merely continuators, or elaborators, of legendary tradition. Thus, to illustrate by a very clear case: A Gothic lay about the death of Hamthir and Sorli is known to have existed already in the sixth century. So the person who indited or, perhaps, translated, or possibly, added to such a song could not well lay claim to be an "inventor" and hence worthy of being remembered. Skaldic art, on the other hand, may also deal with myth and legendary lore or allude to it; but□note well□skaldic poems do not narrate directly, though some do describe in detail pictorial representations of scenes from mythology or legendary history. Hence, there the author is faithfully recorded if we owe him but a single stanza; just as was the troubadour and the minnesinger, in contrast with the anonymity of the *chansons de geste* and the German folk epics.

Thus it is that we are entirely dependent on internal evidence for the determination of the age and the origin of the Eddic poems, individually and collectively. And here experience has taught that we must sharply differentiate between the subject matter of the poems and the form in which they have been handed down to us. Failure to do so was responsible for some fantastic theories, such as the uncritical notions of the Renaissance, that the poems harked back to the Old Germanic songs in praise of the gods of Tuisco and Mannus, or else to the *barditus,* as Tacitus calls the terrifying war songs of the ancient Teutons, and the speculations of the Age of Romanticism which claimed the Eddic poems as the earliest emanations of the Spirit of the Germanic North, if not of all German tribes, and would date them variously from the fifth to the eighth century.

It was not until the latter third of the nineteenth century, when the necessary advances in linguistic knowledge and philological method had been made, that it was established beyond contradiction that the Eddic poems have West Norse speech forms; that is, that they are composed in the language that was spoken only during and after the Viking Age (ca. 800-1050 A.D.), in Norway, Iceland, and the other Norwegian colonies in the Atlantic, and hence, in their present shape, could have originated only there. In the second place, they can under no circumstance be older than about 700 A.D.□most of them are much later□because it has been shown experimentally that the introduction of older (Runic) forms of the Old Norse language would largely destroy the metric structure. This date a quo is admirably corroborated by comparison with the language of the oldest skaldic poems, whose age is definitely known.

More general considerations make it plausible that even the oldest of the lays could hardly have originated before the ninth century. Of the Heroic lays precisely those which also appear in other ways to be the oldest breathe the enterprising, warlike spirit of the Viking Age, with its stern fatalism; while the later ones as unmistakably betray the softening which one would expect from the Christian influences increasingly permeating the later times. And the Mythical lays, by and large, bespeak a period when belief in the gods was disintegrating, thanks to contact with the same influences. In particular, "The Seeress' Prophecy" reads like the troubled vision of one rooted in the ancient traditions who is sorrowfully contemplating the demoralization of his times (which we know a change of faith always entails) and who looks doubtfully to a better future.

There is also the testimony of legendary development. To touch on only one phase of the matter: we do not know when the Volsung and Nibelung legends were first carried to Norway, but sparing allusions in the oldest skaldic verses from the early ninth century would point to the seventh or eighth century, thus allowing several generations for the complete assimilation and characteristic Northern transformation of the material. Some lays, however, show traits of a legendary development which had not taken place in Germany before the ninth century □in other words, they presuppose another, later, stratum of importation.

Contrary to views formerly held, we now understand that the lays about the gods are, on the whole, younger than some of the heroic lays, which in substance (except the Helgi lays) deal with persons and events, real or fictive, of the Germanic tribes from the Black Sea to the Rhine during the Age of Migrations. In general we may say that, although there is little unanimity among scholars as to the dating of individual lays, the composition of the corpus of Eddic poetry can safely be ascribed, not to a single generation, not even to a single century, but to three or four centuries at the very least.

Intimately connected with the question of the date is that of the home of Eddic poetry. There is fair agreement about only two poems. "Atlamál," which is generally allowed to be of Greenlandish origin, and " The Prophecy of Grípir," which no doubt was composed by an Icelander of the twelfth century or later who had before him a collection of the lays dealing with the Sigurth legends. But a strong diversity of opinion exists concerning the place of origin of the bulk of the lays.

For one thing, no evidence can be derived from the language because the Old West Norse of the *Edda* was spoken with scarcely a dialectal variation throughout the far-flung lands of the North Atlantic littorals and archipelagoes. Again, all attempts to seek definite and convincing clues in climatic or topographic references, or in the fauna and fiora mentioned in the poems, have proved vain. Did they originate in the motherland, Norway, or in Iceland, or in the British or North Atlantic islands?

Those who claim the bulk of the Eddic poems for Norway have contended that the related Skaldic poetry flourished there especially throughout the tenth century, favored by a period of comparative calm following the organization of the realm by Harald Fairhair; whereas Iceland, from its first settlement down to the beginning of the eleventh century, was in a condition of constant turmoil which could not have favored the rise of a

body of literature like that of *The Edda.* Undeniably, Norway furnishes the cultural background for the *Weltanschauung* of nearly all of the poems, mythologic, gnomic, and heroic. In every respect their milieu is that of a cold, mountainous land by the sea. One, "The Lay of Hyndla," may refer to a Norwegian princely race; another, "The Lay of Ríig," glorifies the institution of monarchy based on an aristocracy; both poems but poorly agree with Icelandic, republican conditions.

The theory of origin in the British Islands settled by Norwegians□the Orkneys, the Shetland Islands, the Hebrides, the Isle of Man, and the littoral of Ireland, Scotland, and Northern England, is based on several considerations. These regions furnish precisely the stage where the rude Vikings first came in contact with the cultural conditions of a more advanced kind already deeply infused with Roman and Christian elements. Indeed some Celtic influences are seen in the apparel, the architecture, and the wood carving of ancient Scandinavia. In literature the saga, and possibly also skaldic verse, were thought to owe their inception to Irish impulses. Also a small number of both mythical and heroic motifs occurring in the *Edda* may have congeners in the British Islands. Now, most of these claims are discounted by modern scholarship.

Those who argue Icelandic origin admit that Anglo-Celtic influences are evident, but insist that this can be amply accounted for by the fact that a very large proportion of Icelandic settlers had come from Norway by way of the North British Islands and littoral where they had sojourned for shorter or longer periods, frequently even wintering, and whence they had brought with them a goodly number of Celtic slaves and freedmen. Also, on their return journeys to the motherland they frequently touched at North British, and especially at Irish, trading towns, interchanging goods and ideas. As to the milieu being that of a cold, mountainous land, this holds of course also for Iceland. There, the general state of unrest attending the first times was by no means unfavorable to the intense cultivation of the skaldic art□witness such poets as Egil Skallagrímsson, Hallfr□th Óttarsson, Sighvat Thórtharson, not to mention scores of others□and hence probably was no more unfavorable to conditions for the inditing of Eddic lays. The first families of Iceland were notably proud of their origin from the princely races of the motherland□whence the aristocratic note of some lays. Indeed the whole people clung to their cultural traditions all the more tenaciously for being separated from their original homes. In general, the defenders of Icelandic origin would put the burden of proof on those who contend that the Eddic lays did not take at least their final, distinctive shape in the land where arose, and was perptuated, virtually all of Old Norse literature. Certainly, the later poems definitely point to Iceland. On the other hand this does not preclude a number of stanzas, particularly the gnomic ones representing the stored wisdom of the race, from having originated in Norway.

Of late the Norwegian paleographer Seip has endeavored to demonstrate, on the basis of a number of Norwegianisms in *Codex Regius,* that all the Eddic lays were originally composed in Norway. Other scholars would ascribe these to a pervading influence from the motherland, since several manuscripts of unquestionable Icelandic origin also show Norwegianisms.

All this raises the question as to the ultimate source, or sources, of the matter of the Eddic poems. Were they all or partly indigenous to Scandinavia?

With regard to the mythological poems we shall probably never know, though here and there we seem to glimpse a connection with classical or oriental legends. But in all cases the matter has undergone such a sea change that we never get beyond the verdict "perhaps."

With the Helgi poems we are on somewhat firmer ground. The Vendel Period of Scandinavian hegemony (550-800) in the north of Europe, attested by innumerable archeological finds in the western Baltic lands, may well have been accompanied by a flourishing poetic literature of which these lays (*and Beowulf*) may be remnants.

The matter of the Niflung cycle undoubtedly is of German (Burgundian) provenience; and much has been made by German scholars of faint South and West Germanic traces in the style and language of the lays dealing with the Gjúkungs, Sigurth, and Atli. But whether these stories were transmitted to the North in poetic form or only there received their characteristic aspects, that is another question. The fact that only on Scandinavian soil did a rich literature actually arise as early as the ninth century, although its origins date even further back, would seem to speak for the latter assumption. But in the case of the retrospective and elegiac monologue poems it has been convincingly demonstrated that they share many motifs, phrases, even vocables, with what must have been the forerunners of the Danish ballads.

One of the distinguishing features of Eddic, as against skaldic, poetry is its comparative simplicity of style and diction. This is true notwithstanding the fact that we have to deal with poems different in subject matter and structure and composed by different poets working centuries apart. Essentially, the style is akin to that of the alliterative poetry of the other Old Germanic tribes, especially in the use of kennings and the retarding devices of variation and parenthetical phrases. It is to the employment, rather more extensive than usual, of these stylistic features that Old Norse poetic style owes its peculiar physiognomy which, in skaldic art, becomes most pronounced.

The figure of speech called a "kenning" is a kind of condensed metaphorical expression. It most often contains a real, or implied, comparison, or else defines a concept with reference to something else. Thus, a ship (which may be thought of as galloping over the waves) is called a "sailsteed"; a warrior, a "helm-tree" because, helm-clad, he stands proudly erect like a tree, braving the "shower-of-arrows" (as the battle is designated for obvious reasons). Or instead of naming a person or object directly, there is a reference to somebody, or something, else. Thór, for example, is called, simply, "Sif's husband," or "Hrungnir's bane," or in allusion to his typical activity, "Breaker-of-thurs-heads." Similarly, blood is termed "dew-of-wounds" or "dew-of-sorrow"; gold, "the burthen-of-Grani" (Sigurth's steed which bears away the Niflung hoard); a prince, most often "breaker-of-rings," "reddener-of-swords," or similar names, referring to the two qualities most highly admired in rulers□generosity and bravery.

Figures like these are common to the poetic speech of all races and all times. The important difference is that whereas elsewhere they are coined *ad hoc*, as the situation demands, and struck in the heat of poetic fervor, in Old Germanic, and particularly Old Norse, poetry they have become stereotyped; that is, entirely independent of the situation in hand, and hence are apt, at first, to appear to us farfetched and frigid, until by longer acquaintance we arrive at the deeper insight that they are part and parcel of a style, like the ever-recurring "dragon motif" of Scandinavian carvings.

In skaldic poetry the systematic and unlimited use of kennings marks that type of composition off from anything known elsewhere in world literature. Only two Eddic lays, "The Lay of Hymir" and " The First Lay of Helgi Hundingsbani," show a frequency of kennings approaching skaldic usage from afar. In "The Lay of Alvís" the express didactic purpose is to cultivate copiousness of diction by enumerating the "unknown names" (*heiti*) and kennings by which common objects may be designated.

Although somewhat less prominent, variation or parallelism is a stylistic device characteristic of all Old Germanic poetry□as it is, indeed, of the poetry of many nations. Only the more important features will be enumerated here, especially such as come out clearly in a somewhat faithful translation. There is variation of words, of conceptions, of verses; and there is refrain.

The variation of words (synonymic variation), more particularly found in gnomic poetry, is on the whole not frequent in *The Edda.* The following stanza will furnish an example:

With his friend a man should be friends ever,
and pay back gift for gift;
laughter for laughter he learn to give,
and eke lesing for lies.

More frequent, and also more characteristic, is the repetition of related, or contrasting, conceptions. These are usually joined by alliteration, and occasionally by rime, so as to form together a halfline. Thus: "bark nor bast," "he gives and grants," "shalt drivel and dote," "in wine and in wort," "whet me or let me."

Peculiar to Eddic poetry is the repetition, with or without variations, of entire half-lines. One example for many will suffice:

I issue bore as heirs twain sons,
as heirs twain sons to the atheling.

With variation:

I saw but naught said, I saw and thought.

Repetition (with variation) of a full-line occurs in the so-called *galdralag* or "magic measure" of the *ljthaháttr* stanza:

No other drink shalt ever get,
wench, at thy will,
wench, at my will.

Refrain—for example, the "know ye further, or how" of "The Seeress' Prophecy "—and incremental repetition—especially in the gnomic poetry— are occasionally used with telling effect.

Only less characteristic of skaldic art than the unlimited use of kennings is the employment of parenthetical phrases—usually containing an accompanying circumstance. In *The Edda* the device occurs infrequently, and most often in "The First Lay of Helgi the Hunding-Slayer," which also approaches skaldic art in the use of kennings; for example (Stanza 17):

But high on horseback Hogni's daughter—
was the shield-din lulled—to the lord spoke thus.

In contrast with Old West Germanic poetry, which is stichic, and quite generally uses run-on lines, Old Norse poetry is strophic, the stanzas as a rule being of four lines each. Each stanza is most commonly divided into two *vísuhelmings* or "half stanzas," by a syntactic cæsura.

This is the rule; but imperfect stanzas occur too frequently to be explained away in all cases by defective tradition. It is certainly worth pondering, however, that unexceptional regularity is found, on the one hand, in poems whose question-answer form offered a mnemotechnic help to preservation, and on the other, in those that belong to the youngest strata; whereas lays which, for a number of reasons, seem among the oldest—for example, "The Lay of Volund" and "The Lay of Hamthir"—are quite irregular in this respect. The inference seems plausible that stanzaic structure was a later and specifically Scandinavian development, the bulk of Old Norse monuments being younger, both chronologically and developmentally, than most West Germanic monuments.

Like the mass of Old Germanic poetic monuments, the Eddic lays are composed in alliterative verse; in verse, that is, whose essential principles are stress and concomitant alliteration.

The rhythmic unit of alliterative verse is the socalled "half-line," represented in metrics by convention as dipodic. These two feet, as will be seen, may be of very different lengths. In the normal halfline there are four or five syllables (very rarely three) two of which are stressed, the position of stress depending on the natural sentence accent. The rhythmical stress (and concomitant alliteration) generally requires a long syllable and is conventionally represented thus: fi. However, it may also be borne by two short syllables ("resolved stress"). . ."a *salar steina,*" where *salar* constitutes two short syllables; this may be paralleled by "that etin's beerhall," with *etin* reckoned as two shorts); or else by one short syllable immediately following a stressed long syllable. . .

(see the discussion of rhythmic patterns below). In the unstressed syllable, quantity is indifferent, marked thus: x.

The juxtaposition of two stresses without intervening unstressed syllable, so rarely used in modern poetry, is not only permitted but is a distinctive feature in Old Germanic poetry. It gives rise to the rhythmic types C and D (see below), where a strong primary, or secondary, stress may fall on important suffixal or compositional syllables, and on stem syllables of the second member of compounds: for example, "es hann vaknathi" (C), "hatimbruthu" (D). The following may serve as English examples: "The sun knew not," "a hall standeth," "till trustingly."

Always, two half-lines, each an independent rhythmic unit, are joined together by alliteration to form the "long-line." Alliteration, or initial rime, consists in an initial consonant alliterating, or riming, with the same consonant (except that sk, sp, and st alliterate only with themselves), and a vowel alliterating with any other vowel; but□note well□ alliteration occurs only at the beginning of *stressed syllables.* Because the verse is addressed to hearers, not to readers, "eye-rimes" are not permitted. Also, alliteration may be borne only by words of syntactic importance.

In Old Norse verse, alliterating initial sounds are called *stafir,* "staves," the one of the second half-line, *hofuthstafr,* "main-stave," governing the whole line. Somewhat greater latitude is allowed in Eddic poetry than in Old English poetry in the matter of the "main-stave" falling only on the first stress of the second half-line. In the first half-line, either stress, or both□they are called *stuthlar,* "props"□may receive the alliteration.

Beyond stating that alliteration is the bearing principle in their verse the ancients made no statement about how this verse is to be read. Simple observation shows that the alliteration is borne only by stressed syllables concomitant with the syntactic importance of the word, and also that the stress is borne predominantly by nominal elements□nouns, adjectives, and pronouns. As stated earlier, there is agreement among scholars that the half-line is dipodic. But there is divergence of opinion about the disposition and relative stress of the various elements of the half-line, that is, about its rhythm.

In view of the utter difference between Old Germanic verse and any modern or classic scheme of versification, an adequate comprehension of the principles of Old Germanic verse technique is essential for the correct reading and understanding□ nay, for entering at all into the spirit□of Old Germanic poetry. It is hoped that the reader will acquaint himself with the facts set forth above before attempting to recite Eddic lays□and indeed he should recite them, for they are meant for the ear, not the eye.

In reciting the Eddic lays it should ever be kept in mind that the strongly expiratory nature of Germanic verse demands very strongly stressed syllables, and correspondingly weak or slurred unstressed syllables. Juxtaposed stresses must by no means be avoided; in fact, type C is of extremely common occurrence. We must ever be on the alert, guided by the alliteration, to ascertain which words or syllables bear the

main stress and are, hence, syntactically predominant. Thus we must be careful to read not "who made Mithgarth," but "who made Mithgarth."

The translator has endeavored to follow faithfully the rules of Eddic metrics above explained□at least in spirit. Naturally, in an analytic tongue like English many more particles, pronouns, and prepositions must be used than in the highly inflected Old Norse. A liberal use of anacrusis (upbeats), to dispose of them, cannot well be avoided, and this use swells the number of syllables countenanced by the original. This should not, however, interfere with reading half-lines of the same metre in about the same time. Thus, "much that is hoarded and hidden" should not occupy more time than the line "save *one only.*"

I have followed Sophus Bugge's text in the main, but by no means always, because, for the purpose in hand, a somewhat constructive text is called for□one not fatuously sceptical of the results won by a century of devoted study. I can see no harm in adopting the brilliant emendations of great scholars, some of them guided by the poet's insight in solving desperate textual problems, always providing the emendations be shown as such. I have considered it unavoidable to transpose stanzas and lines for the sake of intelligible connection. In fact, this course must be chosen to accomplish an æsthetically satisfying translation of poems which, at best, are strange and difficult for the modern reader, both as to matter and manner. Naturally, not all, or even most, changes could be so indicated. Nor is that called for in a work intended, not as a critical text, but as an interpretation for the student of literature, of folklore and folkways. Still I have thought it wise to give warning whenever the terms of the translation might give rise to misconceptions.

I hope I shall not be criticized for confining myself to the body of poems generally considered as comprising *The Poetic Edda.* I am, of course, aware of the existence of other lays fully deserving to be admitted to the corpus; but neither in this respect nor in the ordering of the material was it my intention to rival Genzmer-Heusler's *rifacimento.*

As to the principles which I have endeavored to follow, I may be permitted to quote from my program, "Concerning a Proposed Translation of *The Edda"*:

"□ while scouting any rigorously puristic ideas, I yet hold emphatically that, to give a fair equivalent, Germanic material must be drawn upon to the utmost extent, and later elements used most sparingly and only whenever indispensable or unavoidable, and even then only after anxiously considering whether consonant with the effect of the whole. The stylistic feeling of the translator must here be the court of last instance; □ At the same time I do not mean to be squeamish and avoid a given word just because it is not found in Anglo-Saxon before the battle of Hastings, or because I have preconceived notions about the relative merit of Teutonic and French-Latin elements. Any one who has given the matter thought knows that no amount of linguistic contortions will furnish Germanic equivalents in English for such oft-recurring words as: battle, hero, glory, revenge, defeat, victory, peace, honor, and the like. Still, wherever possible, Germanic words ought to be chosen □ because of the tang and flavor still residing in the homelier indigenous speech material□

"Another difficulty: the old Germanic poetry, however scant in content, and in however narrow a circle it moves, is phenomenally rich in vocabulary, and shines with a dazzling array of synonyms for one and the same conception. Scherer has shown how this state of affairs was brought about by the very principle of alliteration. *The Edda* shows almost all stages in this development short of the final consummation, from the austere art of the 'Volundarkvitha' to the ornate art of the 'Hymiskvitha.' It stands to reason that to approach this wealth of synonymic expressions even from afar, and to avoid the overhanging danger of monotony, all the resources of the English vocabulary ought to be at one's disposal. I have, therefore, unhesitatingly had recourse, whenever necessary, to terms fairly common in English balladry; without, I hope, overloading the page with archaisms.

"The proper rendition of Old Norse proper names presents a knotty problem to the would-be translator. Shall he translate them all, to the best of his knowledge□and that is a difficult task□or some only, and if so which? Or shall he leave all untranslated□much the easiest course. Or shall he try to render only those parts of proper nouns which are of more general significance? E.g., shall he call the dwarf, Alvís or Allwise; Thór, Sithgrani's son or Longbeard's son; the seeress, Hyndla or Houndling; the localities Gnipalund and Hátun, Cliffholt and Hightown? Shall we say Alfheim, Elfham, or Alfhome? Are we to render Skjoldungar, Ylfingar by Shieldings and Wolfings? I do not hesitate to say that on the translator's tact and skill in meeting this problem□for dodge it he cannot□will depend in large measure the artistic merit of his work and its modicum of palatableness to the modern reader."

For this reason, absolute consistency in this respect was not striven for or even thought desirable.

Source: Lee M. Hollander, "General Introduction," in *The Poetic Edda,* University of Texas Press, 1962, pp. iv-xxix.

Adaptations

The *Elder Edda* was a primary source for Richard Wagner's cycle of musical dramas *The Ring of the Nibelungen,* four interconnected operas, *Rhinegold, The Valkyries, Siegfried,* and *The Twilight of the Gods.* Wagner adapted the mythical and legendary world of the *Elder Edda* to express his own disquiet with the industrial revolution and political movements and developments in nineteenth-century Germany.

Two of the most important German movies of the silent era are Fritz Lang's *Siegfried* (1924) and *Kriemhild's Revenge* (1924).

The Swedish poet Victor Rydberg in *Den nya Grottasongen* (1891) transformed the lay of Frodi's mill into a picture of the excesses of industrialism and capitalism, and its cynical exploitation for human beings.

Topics for Further Study

The Vikings opened trade routes down the rivers of Russia to Constantinople. Investigate the importance of Viking trade and trading posts to the development of the modern states of Russia and the Ukraine.

Icelanders often boast of having the oldest parliament, the Althing, in existence. Investigate the origin and functions of the Althing and compare it to early attempts at self-government on the American frontier, beginning, perhaps, with the Plymouth Colony.

Many of the heroes of the lays in the *Elder Edda* are not Scandinavian, but came from tribes as far apart as Burgundy and what is now the south west Russia and the Ukraine. Investigate the theories of how these heroes and their stories came to have such a wide and devoted audience.

Norse raiding, trading and colonization could not have happened without the developments made by Scandinavian shipbuilding. Investigate Viking ships and their construction and the engineering and design principles behind their success.

Compare and Contrast

Setting during *The Elder Edda:* During the Viking era, raw material and slaves are the main resources of northern and western Europe. Tens of thousands of European men, women, and children are sold into slavery not only within Europe, but into Muslim Spain, North Africa, and the Middle East. Today, the tide of cheap labor has turned and thousands of North Africans are forced to seek a living in Spain and France.

Medieval Iceland: Iceland is poor, with a small population, but it produces a vibrant and extensive literature in prose and poetry. Reading to the family group or to assembled neighbors is a common winter's entertainment into the nineteenth century in farming districts. Iceland still has one of the highest literacy rates in the world.

Tenth and Twelfth Century: Norse colonies flourish in Greenland, which they found to be uninhabited and to have a climate good enough for stock-raising and their traditional way of life. Climactic change meant a return to the weather we see today and the Eskimo who had retreated north before the Vikings arrived. The colony finds it culturally impossible to adapt to the new conditions and disappears by the end of the fifteenth century.

What Do I Read Next?

Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda: Tales from Norse Mythology,* trans. by Jean I. Young (1971), provides a lively translation of the most accessible parts of an encyclopedic thirteenth century prose collection of the myths and legends at the heart of the Norse poetic vocabulary.

Magnus Magnusson, *Viking Expansion Westwards* (1973) is a lavishly illustrated history of the expansion of the Vikings from England to North America. Magnusson focuses on individuals like Aude the Deep-Minded and the realities of daily life, bringing the reader face to face with the people who wrote and listened to the *Elder Edda.*

Lee Hollander, *The Skalds: A Selection of Their Poems* presents the poets of the Viking Age and a selection of their poetry whose incredibly elaborate lyric poetic language and imagery depends upon the myths and legends preserved in part in the *Elder Edda.*

Magnus Magnusson and H. Pálsson, *The Vinland Sagas*. The vikings in North America in their own words, this might well be read in conjunction with *Viking Expansion Westwards.*

Magnus Magnusson and H. Pálsson, *Njal's Saga.* This is perhaps the greatest of the Icelandic family sagas, set in the period when Icelandic society was slowly adopting Christianity and the cultural changes conversion required.

Jesse L. Byock, *The Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer* (1990) is a prose retelling of the Sigurd story, written down between 1200 and 1270. It is closely related to the lays in the *Elder Eddas,* but presents all the Volsung stories as part of an integrated whole.

A new collection of essays on *Elder Edda,* edited by Paul L. Acker, is promised for November, 2000. It is promised to apply new critical approaches to the mythological poetry in the *Elder Edda*.

Further Study

Byock, Jesse L., *The Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer,* University of California Press, 1990.

A thirteenth century prose version of the Volsungs drawing upon the Edda lays. It will help the reader place the dramatic and allusive lays in a coherent narrative.

Dronke, Ursula, *The Poetic Edda: Volume I Heroic Poems,* Clarendon Press, 1969.

This book is the most modern edition. The analysis of the poetry is designed for the advanced student but is the finest available.

Grahm-Campbell, James and Dafydd Kidd, *The Vikings,* British Museum Publications Limited, 1980.

A magnificently illustrated book with a good but nontechnical discussion of the Vikings at home and abroad.

Ker, W. P., *Epic and Romance,* Dover Press, 1957.

A very old, but very engaging book. It has introduced generations to the excitement and beauty of Norse literature.

Magnusson, Magnus, *Viking Expansion Westwards,* The Bodley Head, 1973.

This history of the Vikings from England to North America reads like a novel. It is full of lively portraits and the small happenings of everyday life as well as heroism and violence.

Sturluson, Snorri, *The Prose Edda: Tales from Norse Mythology,* translated by Jean I. Young, University of California Press.

This text provides a lively translation of the most accessible parts of an encyclopedic thirteenth-century prose collection of the myths and legends at the heart of the Norse poetic vocabulary.

Taylor, Paul B., and W. H. Auden, tran., *The Elder Edda: A Selection translated from the Icelandic,* introduction by Peter H. Salus and Paul B. Taylor, Faber and Faber, 1969.

Auden was a major twentieth century avant-garde poet who nevertheless maintained a lively interest in early medieval poetry. The introduction is particularly useful for the beginner.

Terry, Patricia, *Poems of the Vikings: The Elder Edda,* Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969.

A nearly complete and very careful translation of the *Elder Edda.* The introduction is clear and to the point.

Turville-Petr, E. O. G., *Myth and Religion of the North,* Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964.

This book is still considered the best and most readable on the subject.

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□□□, *Myth and Fiction in Early Norse Lands,* Variorum Collected Studies Series CS524, 1996.

□□□, "Pagan beliefs and Christian impact: The Contribution of Eddic Studies," in *Viking Revaluations. Viking Society Centenary Symposium,* edited by A. Faulkes and R. Perkins, Viking Society for Northern Research, 1993, pp. 121-127, repr. *Myth and Fiction in Early Norse Lands.*

□□□, *The Poetic Edda: Volume I Heroic Poems,* Clarendon Press, 1969.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Epics for Students (EfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, EfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of EfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of EfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in EfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by EfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

EfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Epics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the EfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the EfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Epics for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Epics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from EfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Epics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from EfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Epics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of EfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Epics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of EfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Epics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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