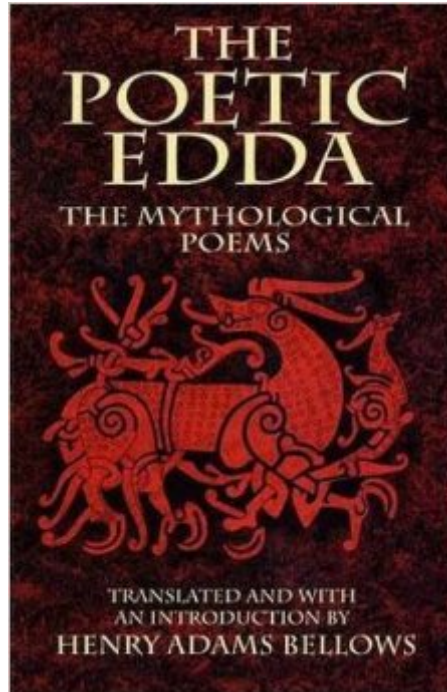


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The Poetic Edda: The Mythological Poems



Synopsis

The vibrant Old Norse poems in this collection, which may have been brought together as early as the thirteenth century, authentically capture the ancient oral traditions of the Norsemen. In addition, their images of a mythical world profoundly influenced latter-day storytellers as Richard Wagner and J. R. R. Tolkien. Known as the "Lays of the Gods," these mythological poems include the Voluspo, one of the broadest conceptions of the world's creation and ultimate destruction ever crystallized in literary form; the Hovamol, a compilation of sagacious counsels reminiscent of the biblical book of Proverbs; the Lokasenna, a comedy bursting with vivid characterizations; and the Thrymskvitha, a ballad of enduring loveliness. The Poetic Edda is not only of the highest interest to students of antiquity; in the exceptionally detailed and complete translations included here, it offers lovers of poetry and myth some of the most remarkable surviving specimens from a distant age of poet-singers and oral traditions.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A Dover reprint of the Mythological section (The Lays of the Gods) from the poetic Edda, a collection of Old Norse poems compiled in the 1200s from older oral traditions. First published by the American-Scandinavian Foundation in 1923. It's a slow read, primarily because almost every page is crammed with footnotes. The translation seems pretty good - it attempts to imitate the form of the Old Norse poetry, and the language at times is very moving with vivid imagery and sonic resonance. The abundant footnotes bog down the reading, but they are necessary since the Eddic

poems were originally composed for an audience already familiar with Norse mythology. I went into this book knowing nothing about the subject, and by the time I had finished, with the help of Mr. Bellows' notes along the way, I had developed a real thirst for more. Somewhat difficult reading, but for somebody with a literary bent this is an excellent introduction to the world of Norse legendry. It certainly begs a second reading, ignoring the footnotes and just enjoying the poetry.

the poetic edda is one of the greatest collections of poetry of all times. it contains the beautifully vivid "volupso", the norse apocalypse poem, the comedic ballads, the "wrangling of Loki" and "Lay of Thrmy", the proverbial wisdom of the "sayings of har" and the mournful lays of the larger-than-heroes, the volsungs and niflungs. the edda is better written than Beowulf, the more popular northern epic, and the rhythmic verse gives it more aesthetic appeal than most epic poems. the meter, based on alliteration and caesura, whether rhythmic fornyrdislag or liling ljoðahattr, is much more pleasing to the ear than classical blank verse, which has sticter syllable stress patterns. unfortunately, the edda is not in very good condition. there are gaps in the manuscripts, and there are numerous places where it appears a scribe covered up a gap with extraneous material. the poems vary greatly in quality, and you need a good understanding of norse myths to understand what is going on (i recommend Norse Stories: Retold from the Eddas by Hamilton Mabie). none the less, the edda is a wonderful read for fans of poetry, epics, or norse mythology. Bellows translation does a very good job at preserving the metric rhythm of the norse poems, and a fairly good job of preserving the alliteration, while avoiding the archaism of Hollander. his grammer and word choice is a little "olde", but it is still far more aesthetically pleasing than the Larrington's translation, and much more accessible than Hollander's. Dronke's translation is also excellent, but only one of five parts of it is currently in print, and it is absurdly priced, but see if you can find it at your library. unfortunately, thus far Dover has only reprinted half of Bellows' translation, this volume contains only the "mythological" lays, so we can only hope they will publish the heroic poems soon, but anyone serious about reading the edda will want to get more than one translation anyway.

This is an excellent translation from Henry Bellows, easy to understand and with many footnotes. This is the version I use when I read the poems aloud. The spelling he chose for transliterated names doesn't follow the common style, Voluspo is usually Voluspa, Hovamol is usually Havamal, etc, but these differences are minor and easy to get used to. The print is a facsimile (typical of this publisher) but clear and easy to read, and the binding is good quality (unlike products from some similar companies). Unfortunately Dover only published half of the book, the section referred to as

the "Mythological Lays", and have omitted the "Heroic Lays", assuming I suppose that we'd only want to read the poems referring directly to the gods. They do clearly admit the omission at the beginning of the book. Much of the ancient scandinavian works we have are regarding heroes related to the gods, so to focus completely on the gods themselves is to miss pieces of the whole picture. Some researchers (in the minority) even suggest that the "Heroic Lays" are actually stories about the gods under different names, which was a very common practice (as you'll see when you read the poems that are included). So I consider the omission very unfortunate. Despite that complaint I think this book is worth the cost. Unless you want to print your own (the Bellows translation is in the public domain), this book is an excellent choice for what it does have. Just be aware of what you're missing. Edit: Dover has recently announced that they will finally release the second half of the book, The Poetic Edda: The Heroic Poems (Dover Value Editions)

Let me start by saying that I love the Poetic Edda dearly. Norse mythology incorporates gods who are very human, in large part because they know they will die, and the Poetic Edda captures that well. It also includes a whole range of emotion and style, from the stately Seeress's Prophecy about history of the world, from start to inevitable end, to the satiric Loki's Quarrel, in which Loki comes in and starts viciously insulting the other gods, in a way against which none of them can really fight back. The Poetic Edda is a marvelous introduction to Norse mythology, and well worth reading. Just *please* get a different translation, or you'll think I'm nuts. This one is terrible, translating primarily with a very trite, forced meter, and no real distinction of tone amongst the different poems. You get no real sense of the characters of the gods, which comes through so clearly in other translations, and everyone talks like they're in a mediocre Shakespeare-imitation play. Just...no. For gorgeous, stately language and a nice feeling of distance in time and space (without completely blocking you out), try Lee Hollander's translation. For more colloquial language that shows clear distinctions in tone and style amongst the poems, try Carolyn Larrington's translation from Oxford World Classics. Better still, both will give you both the mythic, god-related poems and the heroic ones, while this book only includes the mythic poems. Either Hollander or Larrington will serve you much, much better than this.

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