

A Brief Overview of the Editions of *The Heroes of Asgard*

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The Heroes of Asgard and the Giants of Jötunheim, or, "The Week and its Story, published in 1857, by Annie and Eliza Keary is a retelling of Old Norse mythology that features significant differences from the primary sources, i.e., the Icelandic manuscripts commonly known as the *Prose Edda* (1220) and the *Poetic Edda* (c. 1270). The illustrator, Charles Altamont Doyle, was acknowledged in the publication announcements but is not credited on the title page and the table of contents does not contain a list of the illustrations. This edition features a narrative framing device for the tales consisting of short conversations between adult storytellers and an audience of school children. The conversations are situated at the beginning and at the end of each tale and establish that the purpose of the tales was to amuse the children during the week leading up to Christmas Day. David Ashurst observes that "by means of this framing narrative, the authors account for the fact that the myths have been embroidered and sanitized" ("Eddic Myth, Victorian Values" 58). Doyle's illustrations were reused by David Murray Smith in *The Silver Star, a Romance of the North Land: With Mythology of the Northmen* (1881) without the framing conversations. Smith did not acknowledge Doyle as the illustrator or the Keary sisters for the textual material he reused in his section on Norse Mythology. (Baer. "The Strange Case of Charles A. Doyle and *The Heroes of Asgard* (1857)."

The illustrator for second edition published in 1871, *The Heroes of Asgard: Tales from Scandinavian Mythology*, was Louis Huard (1814-1874). The conversations were deleted for this edition and were replaced with a forty-page introduction that was likely seldom read to children. The Preface states:

In preparing the Second Edition of this little volume of tales from the Northern Mythology for the press, the Authors have thought it advisable to omit the conversations at the beginning and end of the chapters, which had been objected to as breaking the course of the narrative (Keary).

Scholarly notes concerning primary and academic sources were added at the end of some, but not all, of the tales for this edition.

The illustrator for the third edition published in 1930, *The Heroes of Asgard: Tales from Scandinavian Mythology*, was Charles E. Brock (1870 – 1938), and this is the edition that most readers are familiar with today. The Brock edition contains eighty-five illustrations with sixteen colour plates. The text of the tales remains the same, but the scholarly introduction and the notes of the second edition were eliminated. This is edition that was republished in 2012, by Dover Publications as *Tales of the Norse Warrior Gods: The Heroes of Asgard*, but not all of the plates are in colour and several were relocated, i.e., to the front cover and inside the covers. Unfortunately, without the framing conversations from the first edition or the academic apparatus from the second edition, naive readers of the third edition sometimes believe that the retellings represent the cultural and religious beliefs of Old Norse pagans (Baer. "Reshaping the Shape Shifter).

The longevity of *The Heroes of Asgard* was assured in 1887 when Charlotte Mason (1842–1923) founded the Parents' National Educational Union (PNEU) and included the Keary sisters' retelling of the Norse myths in “an organized home-school curriculum for families living abroad that promised to solidify an English national identity in their children” (Neiwe, Rachel. “Savages or Citizens? Children, Education, and the British Empire, (1899-1950).” Abstract 2009). *The Heroes of Asgard*, was also frequently published in editions for public schools, e.g., MacMillan published an edition in 1905 in London and New York, “adapted for the use schools, with new introduction, glossaries etc.” Present day homeschoolers of various faiths, i.e., both Christian and non-Christian, include *The Heroes of Asgard* in their curricula and it is available online, e.g., [“Gateway to the Classics” \(for grades 4 -6\)](#).

The illustrations from the three editions of the Kearys' book are available in Version 2.2 of [My Norse Digital Image Repository](#) along with links to digital versions of the three illustrated editions.

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