

Snorri's Edda – synopsis and notes for class

Translated by Anthony Faulkes. (N.B.: page numbers refer to: Faulkes, Anthony. Edda. London: Dent, 1987. By Snorri Sturluson. Circa 1220. Print.)

TEXT SUMMARIES

(The figures for the prologue, Gylfaginning and Skaldskaparmal refer to chapters in the 1848 edition, included in square brackets at the top of each page of this translation [see p.xxiii]; those for Hattatal refer to the numbers of the verses. **I removed the figures in square brackets referred to and replaced them with the page numbers from the text.** The original numbers are preserved in the text file created from the ocr scanning.)

Prologue

This begins with an account of **how mankind forgot about their creator and began to worship nature.**

From this arose **heathen religions** (p. 1- 2).

The author then tells of **Troy, and how descendants of the Trojans (the Æsir) migrated to Scandinavia** and founded various dynasties, and were so prosperous that they **came to be considered gods** (3—11).

NOTES: Pages 1 - 5

- **explains how people came to forget** that God created the earth and Adam and Eve
- and by observing nature came to create their own gods to explain creation
- they “reasoned that the earth was alive ...and traced their ancestry back to it”
- “they reasoned that everything was created out of some material”
- they lacked spiritual wisdom
- their religion “has changed in many ways as nations became distinct and languages branched.”
- He talks about **the different regions of the earth** including Asia and considers that “mankind there was most honoured with all blessings, wisdom and strength, beauty and every kind of skill.”
- **He locates Troy as being in Turkey at the middle of the world.**
- **Thor** is a prince who reached his full strength at age 12. Thor kills his foster-father and his wife and becomes King. He marries a prophetess **Sibyl/Sif**, and **they have many children including Woden/Odin.** **Odin** marries Frigida/Frigg and they both have **the gift of prophecy.** Odin discovers that “his name would be remembered in the northern part of the world and honoured above all kings,” so he sets out from Turkey and heads north.

Gylfaginning

Gylfaginning opens with **the story of how Gylfi**, a Swedish king, was tricked out of some of his land by one of the Æsir newcomers, **Gefiun** and her oxen who “drew the land out into the sea to the west.” (p.7). He goes to visit them, disguised as a beggar and calling himself Gangleri, to find out whether their success was due to their own nature or to the gods they worshipped.

He is welcomed, but told that his life depends on his proving himself wiser than them (p. 8). His questions are answered by three speakers, **High, Just-as-high and Third**, and **he is told**:

- first about **the king of their gods, All-father** (p. 8),
- then about **the beginning of the world** (p. 9 - 13)
- the **origin of the giants and the gods** (of whom the chief, Odin, turns out to be the same as All-father)
- and about **the creation of the earth and of men** (p.13)

He is told about:

night and day, (p.14)

sun and moon and the wolves that chase them (p.14 - 15)

the bridge of the gods (Bifrost) (p. 15)

the golden age that was spoiled by the arrival of the women from Giantland (p. 16)

the creation of dwarfs (p. 16)

the world-ash (Yggdrasil) ”the chief center or holy place of the gods” (p. 17 and more on the bottom of 18 - 19)

the norns, (p. 18)

the dwellings of the gods, (bottom of p. 19 - 20)

the wind – the giant eagle **Hræsvelg**, (p. 20)

summer and winter (bottom of p. 20 - 21)

descriptions of each of the gods:

“There are twelve Æsir whose nature is divine.’ But Snorri names more than 12.

- **Odin** “is the highest and most ancient of them.” (p. 21)

- **Thor** “is the most outstanding of them.” (p.22)

(explanation of how languages branch and the names of the gods are adapted in each language.)

- **Baldr** “He is best and all praise him.” (p. 23)

- **Njord** “He is not of the race of the Æsir.” (p. 23) He is the father of **Freyr and Freyja**.

Skadi She is the daughter of the giant **Thiassi** and for a while is the wife of **Njord**

- **story of their marriage** (p. 23 – 24)

- **Freyr** “Freyr is the most glorious of the Æsir.” (p. 24)

Freyja is Freyr’s sister. “Freyja is the most glorious of all the Asyniur.” (p. 24)

- **Tyr** “He is the bravest and most valiant and he has great power over victory in battles.” (p. 24)

- **Bragi** He is especially knowledgeable about poetry. (p. 25)

Idunn is his wife. Her apples keep the gods from aging. (p. 25)

- **Heimdall** “He is great and holy ... he is the god’s watchman” (p. 25)

- **Hod** “He is blind... the gods would prefer that this As did not need to be named ...”

- **Vidar** “He is a source of great support to the gods in all dangers.” (p. 26)
 - **Ali/Vali** He is the son of Odin and Rind.
 - **Ull** He is the son of **Sif** and the stepson of **Thor**. “He is a good one to pray to in single combat.” (p. 26)
 - **Forseti** He is the son of Baldr and Nana. He settles difficult legal disputes. (p. 26)
 - **Loki/Lopt** He is the son of the giant Farbauti and Laufey or Nal is his mother. “That one is also reckoned among the Æsir whom some call *the Æsir’s calumniator* and *originator of deceits* and the *disgrace of all gods and men*. (p. 26)
- Sigyn** is Loki’s wife and Nari or **Narfi** is their son.
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the story of Loki's 3 offspring with the giantess Angrboda (p. 27 –29)

“The gods traced prophecies stating that from these siblings great mischief and disaster would arise from them” so Odin had them brought to him. (p. 27)

- 1) **Iormungand (the Midgard Serpent)** – Odin threw the Midgard Serpent into “that deep sea that surrounds all lands.”
 - 3) **Hel** – Odin threw her into Niflheim and she has those who die of sickness or old age. (p. 27)
 - 3) **the Fenriswolf** who will be the death of Odin and **the story of the binding of Fenriswolf** (p. 27 – 29)
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descriptions of each of the goddesses: (p. 29 – 30)

1. **Frigg** – her dwelling is Fensalir
 2. **Saga** – she dwells at Sokkvabekk
 3. **Eir** – “She is an extremely good physician.”
 4. **Gefjun** – “She is a virgin and **is attended by all those who die virgins.**”
 5. **Fulla** – also a virgin who “**carries Frigg’s casket and looks after her footwear and shares her secrets.**”
 6. **Freyja** – is highest in rank next to Frigg. She is married to “someone called Od.”
 - story of how Freyja pines for and searches for Od who has gone off on a long journey
 - she owns the **Brisings’ necklace**
 - Hnoss** – Freyja’s daughter
 7. **Siofn** – “she is much concerned to direct people’s minds to love...”
 8. **Lofn** – “**she gets leave from the All-father or Frigg for people’s union, even if before it was forbidden or refused.**”
 9. **Var** – “**she listens to people’s oaths and private agreements ... and punishes those who break them.**”
 10. **Vor** – “she is wise and enquiring , so that nothing can be concealed from her.”
 11. **Syn** – “she guards the doors of the hall and shuts them against those who are not to enter.”
 12. **Hlin**- “she is given the **function of protecting people whom Frigg wishes to save from some danger.**”
 13. **Snotra** – “she is wise and courteous ... a wise person is called snotr.”
 14. **Gna** – “ **she is sent by Frigg into various worlds to carry out her business.**”
 - Snorri names and numbers the 14 goddesses listed about and then adds:
 - the valkyries listed from the poem *Grimnismal* as well as **Gunn, Rota** and **Skuld**
 - “Thor’s mother Iord and Vali’s mother Rind are also reckoned among the Asyniur. (p. 31)
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the story of Freyr's wooing of Gerd (p. 31 – ½ way down 32)

Gylfi hears about **Odin's hall (Val-hall)**, (p. 32 - 34)

- the food that is served there, the boar called **Sæhrimnir**, Odin's wolves **Geri and Freki**, and his **ravens Hugin and Munin**,

- how they get mead from the goat Heidrun

- how moisture drips from the horns of the stag Eikthyrnir into Hvergelmir and how many rivers flow from it

- the size of Valhal: it has 500 doors, 800 Einheriar can go out one door all at once when they go to fight (p. 34)

- the Einheriar entertain themselves by fighting each other but dine together in the evening

“The ash Yggdrasil, this is the foremost of trees, and Skidbladnir of ships, Odin of the Æsir, of horses Sleipnir, Bifrost of bridges, and Bragi of poets, Habrok of hawks and of dogs Gram.” (p.34)

the story of the giant builder of the gods' stronghold (p. 35 – near bottom of 36)

which includes the origin of **Odin's horse Sleipnir**

the origin of Freyr's ship **Skidbladnir** (p. 36 to top of 37)).

the story of Thor's expedition to the court of Utgarda-Loki (p. 37 – 46)**the story of Thor's fishing for the Midgard serpent** (p. 46 - 47);**the story of the death of Baldr** (p. 48 - 51)

his funeral (p. 49)

the attempt to get him back from Hel (p.50)

the story of the capture and punishment of Loki (p. 51 – 52)**the twilight of the gods (Ragnarok)** (bottom of p. 52 – 55)**the destruction of the world, and its subsequent renewal** (bottom of p. 55 – middle of 57)

Before he can ask more there is a loud crash and the Æsir and their hall disappear: they are unable to

answer further questions and Gylfi has won the contest of wisdom, but is cheated of his victory. He goes home and passes on the stories.

The Æsir, however, **decide to adopt the names of the gods** in the stories they have told so that people will think that they themselves are the gods. The identities of the 'historical' Æsir, migrants to Scandinavia from Asia, and the mythical ones in the stories, which have been kept distinct up to this point, are thus finally merged, and **the author ends by suggesting that the myths told of them are really allegories of events in the Trojan War** (*see Skaldskaparmal p. 65 – 66*) .

Skaldskaparmal

This section on the language of poetry begins (p. 59) with the setting of the scene of the conversation which forms the background to the discussion. **Ægir, personification of the ocean**, is invited to a feast by the Æsir, and **gets into conversation with the god Bragi** (the first part of this section has chapter numbers that are a continuation of those of Gylfaginning).

Bragi first tells:

The story of how Thiassi abducted Idunn – (p. 59 – 60)

three Æsir - Odin, Loki and Hænir go on a journey and are **tricked by the giant Thiassi** in the form of an eagle into making it possible for him to **abduct Idunn and her apples of eternal youth** from Asgard. **Loki** is forced to go and rescue her, and when Thiassi chases them back to Asgard and he is killed by the Æsir.

Thiassi's daughter **Skadi comes to seek vengeance** (top of p. 61)

but is persuaded to accept as compensation

- 1) the **choice of a husband** by looking only at his feet (she accidentally chooses **Njord instead of Baldr**)
- 2) **the gods must also make her laugh** which **Loki** does by tying “a cord round the beard of a certain nanny-goat and the other end round his testicles, and they drew each other back and forth, and both squealed loudly ...”

explanation of kenning for gold “mouth count of giants” is from how a giant's inheritance (Thiassi's father Olvaldi) was shared out by measuring by the mouthful (p. 61)

the story of how poetry originated (bottom of p. 61 - top of p. 64)

Mention of his brothers and the way they settled their claims to inherit their father's gold leads to a mention of poetry, and Ægir asks about the origin of this craft. Bragi tells how after the war between the Æsir and the Vanir the **spittle that was the symbol of reconciliation was made into a person of immense knowledge named Kvasir**. He was killed by two dwarfs who made mead from his blood, whoever drinks it becomes a poet or a scholar.

The dwarfs also killed a giant called **Gilling** and were forced to hand over the mead in compensation to his son **Suttung**, who hid it under a mountain and set his daughter **Gunnlod** to guard it. These events have given rise to a number of kennings (poetic circumlocutions) for poetry.

In the next part of the story Odin tries to force Suttung's brother **Baugi** to help him get the drink as payment for doing the work of nine slaves for the summer. When Suttung refuses to honour the bargain, **Odin** gets Baugi to bore a hole in the mountain and he creeps in to lie with **Gunnlod** for three nights, after which she lets him drink all the mead in three draughts.

He escapes in the form of an eagle but is pursued by Suttung. Suttung comes so close to catching him that **Odin is forced to let some of the mead out backwards, which is scattered on the earth and becomes the rhymesters' share**. The rest he spat out in containers back in Asgard and this was given to

the Æsir and to those skilled in poetry.

kennings (p. 64)

This part of the story has given rise to further kennings.

Ægir then asks in more detail about the language of poetry, and Bragi begins the analysis of poetic diction, giving examples of kennings for Odin.

Epilogue (bottom of p. 64)

This is interrupted by the *so-called* Epilogue, **an authorial statement of the purpose of the work**, which is to instruct young poets in the art of poetry, **and a justification of the use of pagan stories** which are to explain the origin of kennings but are not to be believed in as doctrine, since the author and his readers are Christians.

Trojan analogies (p. 65 – top of 66)

An explanation of the origin of the stories is given which suggests that they are distorted or allegorical versions of the events of the Trojan War:

Asgard is really Troy,

Thor is Hector,

the Midgard serpent is Achilles,

the fall of Troy is Ragna-rok,

Ali/Vidar is Aeneas.

Further lists of

kennings for Odin follow (p. 66 – 69)

kennings for poetry (70 – mid 72)

with examples of their use quoted from the work of numerous earlier poets.

Then, with each section introduced by a token question presumably addressed by Ægir to Bragi, there

are given lists, in some cases again with examples in verse, of

kennings for other gods:

Thor (mid p. 72 to near bottom of 74),

Baldr (bottom of 74 – top of 75),

Niord (top of 75),

Freyr (mid p. 75),

Heimdall (bottom of p. 75 – top of p.76),

Tyr (p. 76 – very brief),

Bragi (although it is this god who is apparently giving the information) (p. 76 – very brief),

Vidar (p. 76 – very brief),

Vali (p. 76 – very brief),

Hod (p. 76 – very brief),

Ull (p. 76 – very brief),

Haenir (p. 76 – very brief)

Loki (bottom of p. 76 – the top of 77).

The story of Thor's encounter with the giant Hrungnir (p. 77 – mid 81)

The conversation is explicitly invoked again, and Bragi tells Ægir **the story of Thor's encounter with the giant Hrungnir**, who is killed. Thor needs the help of his son Magni to get out from under the giant's dead body, and he is left with a fragment of the giant's weapon (a whetstone) in his head. The sorceress Groa nearly removes it, but not quite .

There is a lengthy quotation from the poem Haustlong by Thiodolf of Hvinir which describes these exploits.

The story of Thor's visit to Geirrod's courts (mid p. 81 – top of 86)

Bragi continues with **the story of Thor's visit to Geirrod's courts**. On the way he has to cross the great river Vimur; when he arrives he kills both the giant Geirrod and his two daughters (18).

These achievements are celebrated in the poem Thorsdrapa by Eilif Gudrunarson, 19 stanzas of which are quoted in this chapter.

Lists of kennings for the goddesses

Frigg (p. 86 very brief)

Freyia (p. 86 very brief)

Sif (p. 86 very brief)

Idunn (mid p. 86 – mid 88. These are not illustrated by quotations, though in connection with the **mention of Idunn's abduction by the giant Thiassi** (see p. 59 - 60), 13 more stanzas of Thiodolf of Hvinir's Haustlong are quoted.)

p. 88 “It is also normal to refer to Æsir by calling one by the name of another and referring to him by his deeds or possessions or descent.”

Lists of kennings follow, with numerous verse quotations illustrating their use, for:

the sky (mid p. 88 – top of 90)

the earth (p. 90 – top of 91)

the sea (p. 91 – top of 93)

the sun (p 93)

the wind (p. 93)

fire (p. 93)

winter (bottom of p. 93)

summer (top of p. 94)

Except for the first, these concepts are all at least partly personified.

kennings for man and woman (p. 94).

with some explanations of their origins, but without any quotations

Since **gold** is often used as part of such kennings, and can itself be referred to in terms of something else, producing a compound kenning with three or more elements, there follow a number of chapters about gold:

list of kennings for gold (bottom of p. 94 – top of p.95),

then stories explaining the origins of some of them:

the feast of the gods when they were entertained by Ægir (references to Lokasenna) (this took place after the conversation that is the background to Skaldskaparmal, but the conversation is now referred to only perfunctorily and the names of the speakers are no longer mentioned), **at which glowing gold was used in place of torches** p. 95 first ½ of 2nd paragraph

a verse is quoted to illustrate the use of **allegorical kennings**. (bottom of p. 95)

“This is therefore called allegory when terminology is extended further in meaning than there are earlier examples of, and this is all considered acceptable when it is in accordance with probability and the nature of things.”

the nature of **the tree Glasir** with its golden leaves (top of p. 96)

The story of the origin of Sif's golden hair and other treasures (p. 96 - 97)

- made by dwarfs after Loki had cut off her original hair

- Thor catches Loki and threatens him so that Loki goes to some dwarfs called **Ivaldi's sons** and they make:

Sif's golden hair

Odin's spear Gungnir

Freyr's ship Skidbladnir

Then **Loki makes a wager** with the dwarfs Brokk and Eitri that they can't make 3 items as precious. Despite a fly annoying while they work, they make:

Freyr's golden boar,

Odin's ring Draupnir

Thor's hammer Miollnir

The dwarfs try to claim Loki's head as he had wagered it but Loki says that they can't touch his neck as it was not part of the wager. In frustration, they sew his mouth shut.

Then there are illustrations of the use of some **further kennings for gold** (bottom of 97 – mid 99)

The story of the gold of the Niflungs. (mid p. 99 – 106)

The story begins with:

1) **Odin, Loki and Hasnir** having to **atone to Hreidmar** for **Loki's killing of his son Otter** with gold forced from the dwarf Andvari, including a ring that **Andvari lays a curse** upon (p. 100),

2) then **Fafnir and Regin's killing** of their father Hreidmar in order to gain the gold for themselves, on which Fafnir then lays, turning himself into a **serpent**.

3) Then **Sigurd son of Sigmund** is introduced, and we are told how he is brought up by Fafnir's brother Regin, who gets him to kill the serpent, providing him with the sword Gram.

4) **Sigurd roasts Fafnir's heart** and drinks his blood, and understands the voices of birds, who warn him that he must kill Regin. When he has done so he takes away the gold, loading it onto his horse Grani (p. 101).

5) Next **Sigurd finds the valkyrie Brynhild** asleep on the mountain-top and wakes her.

6) He goes on and **stays with King Giuki, eventually marrying his daughter Gudrun**, and with her brothers **goes to woo Brynhild for Gunnar**.

7) **Sigurd takes Gunnar's place** in order to penetrate the flickering flame that protects her, and sleeps with her with the sword Gram between them. He gives her the ring originally taken from Andvari.

8) Later **Brynhild and Gudrun quarrel** and **Brynhild incites Gunnar and Hogni to kill Sigurd** for his deceit, subsequently killing herself and being burned with him. Gunnar and Hogni inherit the gold (p.103).

9) **Gudrun is then married to Brynhild's brother, King Atli Budlason**. He invites Gunnar and Hogni to visit him, and they do so after hiding the gold (which has never since been found) in the Rhine.

10) **Atli has the brothers killed, and is killed himself, together with his two sons, by Gudrun in revenge**. She afterwards **marries King Ionakr**.

11) Her daughter by Sigurd, **Svanhild**, is married to King Iormunrekk, and is accused of adultery with Iormunrekk's son Randver, and he has them both killed.

12) When Gudrun hears of this, she sends her sons (by Ionakr) **Sorli, Hamdir and Erp** to avenge her; **Erp is killed by his brothers** and although they cause Iormunrekk's death they are themselves killed by his men (p. 105).

At the end of this story five stanzas of Bragi the Old addressed to Ragnar Lodbrok which relate to the

last part of the story are quoted.

the story of Frodi's magic mill, Grotti (bottom of p. 106 – 110)

- which first **grinds out gold, peace and prosperity**
 - when the giant women who are turning it grow tired, it **grinds out an army which attacks and kills Frodi**
 - it is taken away on a ship and grinds out salt which sinks the ship and **makes the sea salty**.
 - the poem **Grottasong**, supposed to have been recited by the giant women, is quoted entire ().
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Two stories about Hrolf Kraki

The story of how Hrolf Kraki gained his **nickname**. (kraki = 'little pole') (p. 110)

The story of how, after his expedition to plunder Uppsala, he escapes King Adils's revenge by **scattering gold like barley on the Fyri plains** to delay the king's troops (bottom of p. 110 - 112).

All these stories in which gold figures have given rise to kennings for gold.

Then we hear **how King Holgi of Halogaland was buried in a mound of gold and silver** (bottom of p. 112 – top of 113).

and examples of **further kennings for gold** are given from three stanzas of the old Lay of Biarki

More kennings for gold follow, with illustrative verses (mid p. 113),

then examples of **how gold is used in kennings for man and woman** (p. 114 – top of 116)

and of **other kennings for man and woman in which tree-names are used** (p. 116 – mid 117).

The next series of **kennings** are for:

battle (mid p. 117 – mid p. 118)

weapons and armour (mid p. 118 - 122)

The story of the eternal battle of the Hiadnings (p. 122 – top of p. 124)

The battle resulted from **Hedin Hiarrandason** abducting **Hild, daughter of Hogni**, as a consequence of which **battle is called the Hiadnings' weather** in connection with which five more stanzas of Bragi's poem for Ragnar Lodbrok are quoted.

Then follow kennings for:

ship (mid p. 124 – mid p. 126),

Christ (mid p. 126 – bottom p. 127)

kings (bottom p. 127 - 128),

all with many illustrative verses, and the last with **a lengthy discussion of the terminology of kingship and of the nobility.** (p. 129 – top of 132)

Heiti (p. 132 -

So far the focus has been on kennings, or periphrastic expressions.

Next is **a parallel account of heiti**, or simplex terms that are used as poetical synonyms for various concepts, beginning with:

poetry (p. 132 – top of 133)

the pagan gods (p. 133 -)

the heavens, sun and moon (bottom of 133 – top of 134)

the earth (p. 134 – mid 135)

Then follow words and names for:

various animals,

wolves/**wargs** (mid p. 135 - mid p. 136) also see p. 164

bears (p.136)

harts/stags (p. 136)

horses (p. 136)

oxen (p. 137)

serpents (p. 137)

cattle (p. 137)

sheep (p. 137)

swine (p. 137)

the sky and weather (mid of p. 137)

birds of prey such (bottom of p. 137)

ravens (p. 138)

eagles (bottom of p. 138 – mid p. 139)

the sea (mid p. 139 – top of p. 143)

fire (p. 143 – mid p. 144)

times and seasons (mid p. 144 – top of p. 145)

men (p. 145 – mid of p. 146)

including long accounts of the origins of words for:

kings in the names of legendary kings of the distant past in (mid p 146 - 150)

including **the story of Halfdan the Old and his 18 sons who all fell in battle**

names of relations (bottom of p. 150 – top of 152)

men and women

(where vidkenningar, sannkenningar and fornofn are exemplified) (p. 152 – 153)

parts of the body:

head, eyes, ears etc. (mid p. 153)
heart, mind, emotions (p. 154),
limbs (p. 154),
speech (p. 154),
wisdom and other mental attributes (p. 155).

The section ends with a discussion of homonyms and word-play ().
There follow 106 stanzas of versified **lists of names and synonyms** for:
sea-kings (p. 155)
giants (bottom of p. 155)
troll-wives (mid p. 156)
gods, giants, and goddesses (bottom p. 156 – p. 157)
lady/women (mid p. 157)
men (bottom of p. 157 – mid p. 158)
battle (mid p. 158)

various weapons
sword (bottom of p. 158 - 159)
axe, arrow, bow, shield, byrnie (bottom p. 159 - 160)
sea (bottom of p. 160 – top of p. 161)
ivers (p. 161 – top of p.162)
fish (p. 162)
ships (mid of p. 162 – mid p. 163)
earth or land (mid p. 163)

various animals, domestic and wild (p. 163 -
oxen (p. 163)
cows (bottom of p. 163)
rams (p . 164)
goats (p . 164)
bears (p . 164)
harts (p . 164)
hogs (p . 164)
wargs/wolves (p . 164)
wargin (she-wolf) (p . 164)
the heavens and the sun (bottom of p . 164)