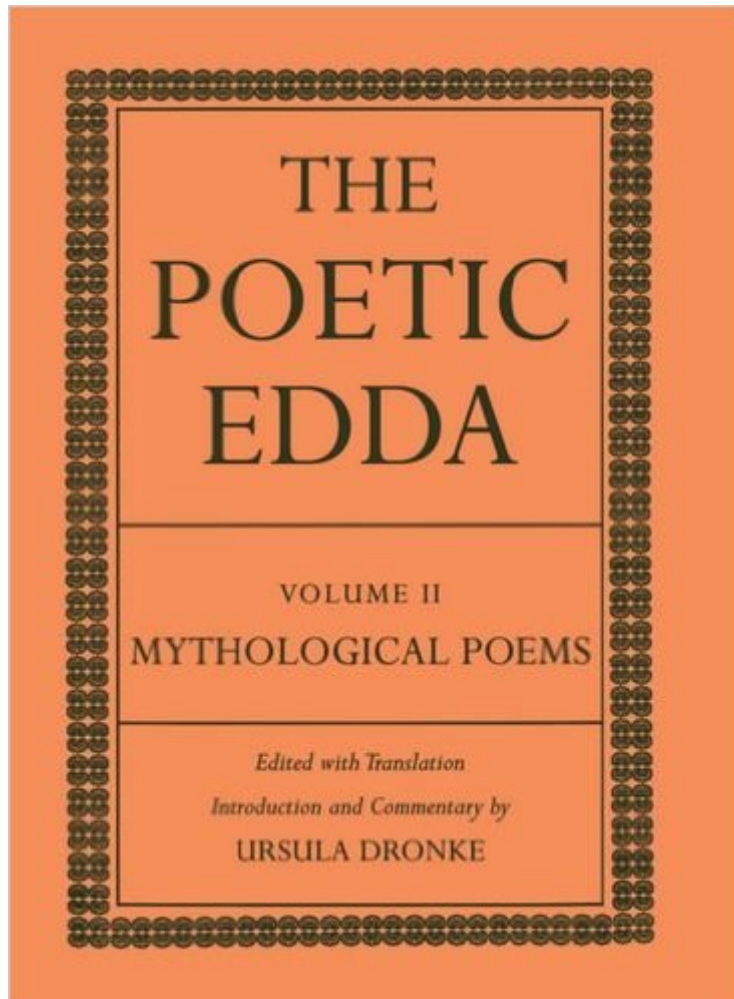


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The Poetic Edda: Volume II: Mythological Poems



Synopsis

This new edition of mythological poems from the Poetic Edda takes the reader deep into the imagination of the Viking poets (c.1000 AD). Setting text and translation side by side, Dronke provides full introductions and commentaries for each of the poems.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In my eight-year quest to find an Old Norse edition of the Poetic Edda (still unsuccessful), I stumbled upon a listing for this book in a bibliography. After much debating with booksellers who denied its existence, I finally had in my hands, after all these years...Six poems. Text with facing-page translation of six poems. Don't be misled by the title. Volume One is out of print, and while, in 1997, Volumes 3 and 4 were said to be "well underway," all trace of them seems to have fallen from the face of the earth. I should chastise Clarendon Press, and so should you. Despite this, I have never seen so much information about the individual poems collected in one place. Dronke gives overviews of the poems, historical and mythological background, comparisons with other mediaeval literature (Germanic and otherwise), the works! In addition, she gives a detailed commentary on the text itself, analysing many words and phrases on an individual basis, and often giving equally detailed explanations of her translation of certain words. She even goes so far as to inform the reader of all of the variant manuscript readings (including omissions) and tackles several textual problems with thoroughness. I do not fully agree with all of the author's interpretations--some

of her statements almost made me fall out of my chair- but there is enough lore in this book to make the price WELL worth it. This book really deserves only four and an half stars because I was disappointed by the title (hey, it's my right after all these years!); but that aside, the erudition in this book is vast and impressive. You'll be glad you bought it.

This volume of Ursula Dronke's presentation of the older "Poetic Edda" isn't just another translation of the Voluspa, Rigsthula, Volundarkvida, Lokasenna and Skirnismal Eddas, but is a badly needed critical edition that brings together all the source material, provides a translation in modern English, and offers commentary that discusses the meaning of difficult terms, provides historical context, and discusses relevant social and religious influences. In this text Ursula Dronke pulls together an enormous amount of historical background, philological detail, and comparative literature, and summarizes it for the reader. It would take a lifetime to read all the sources and pull this amount of data together, and unfortunately Ursula Dronke passed on before publishing the fourth (final) volume. The translations show the original old Norse and English translation in adjacent columns for easy comparison, and are a pleasure to read. Some scholastic translations can appear stilted and uninspired, but Dronke's translations capture the poetry of the original, and are clear and easy to follow. If you're not interested in a scholastic study of the Eddas, the translations alone make the book worth reading. I was appalled to read the comments of the only reader giving this volume a single star. The reader calls the translations "peculiar", accuses Dronke of poor scholarship, and wonders why Oxford even published it. Dronke's Bachelor of Literature thesis on the Sturlunga Saga was passed by none other than J.R.R. Tolkien, and she taught at Cambridge, the University of Berlin (where she was the head of Old Norse Studies), and Oxford. He casually dismisses the text for not having a glossary; if he'd actually read the text, he's know that these features (including an index) were planned for the fourth volume, which I hope the Clarendon Press will still publish. But the worst comment is a nasty bit of slander where he accuses Dronke of racist ideology, which is completely false. He claims this occurs in the "Hair" chapter; it is actually the Rigsthula Edda, which is the "Genealogical" Edda. She doesn't engage in any of the foul rhetoric she is accused of, but simply recounts the story, where the god Rigr visits 3 homes, after which the couples have children. The first dwelling has elders with white hair, who have dark skinned thralls; the second have a healthy robust boy with red hair, and the third a happy mother and father who have blonde children. The Edda describes/rationalizes Nordic society at the time; the dark skinned children become laborers, the red haired become craftsmen and farmers, and the blond became warriors, nobles, and readers of runes. This isn't Dronke's construction, but is explicitly stated in the original text.

Dronke offers only a few historical observations, and nowhere proposes the racist agenda the commenter accuses her of.

Of all of the English translations of the Poetic Edda, Dronke's translations are the most thorough and extensive. The footnotes are immense, the manuscript dating impressive, and the sheer level of detail presented here easily puts all of the other editions to printed (to date) to shame. However, this edition is incomplete and is but one of a few volumes yet released; although it has now been decades, Dronke has yet to finish her undertaking of the Poetic Edda. I hope she realizes how many people are waiting for it. Further, it would be very wise of someone collect all of these volumes into a single mass-market edition so that it gets the attention it deserves. Dronke's edition will then become the current Poetic Edda English translation standard and we will all be the better off for it.

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