of the mythology and many of the stories about the gods are simply the product of the poetic imagination and derive from speculation current during the decline of paganism, occasionally mingled with ideas and motifs that are Christian and southern in origin.

No one now reads the *Deluding of Gylfi* as a text-book on mythology but, whereas under the impact of fresh research all more recent text-books have become and will continue to become antiquated, not one of them can make the *Deluding of Gylfi* out of date. This is so partly because in it Snorri relates various stories found nowhere else, but first and foremost because it is a work of art and its stories will never be told better.

It must be admitted that Snorri's *Edda* makes an appeal to the modern reader mainly because the author, in relating the *Deluding of Gylfi*, forgot the chief purpose of his book and, in his account of their doings and destiny, brought the gods to life again entirely for their own sakes. It is, nevertheless, natural to ask what, in view of this purpose, was the influence of the book on contemporary and later times?

In our own time it is a matter of general experience and, perhaps, of still more general belief that it is not only difficult but futile to resist 'progress' and try to put the clock back. We know, however, that the preservation of old values is an indispensable counterpart to the creation of new. The influence exerted by Snorri Sturluson is a good example of the way in which these two things may go hand in hand.

Snorri himself preserved in his writings almost all the best ninth- and tenth-century skaldic poetry, both Norwegian and Icelandic, still extant. There is also good reason to believe that it is owing to his *Edda* that the poems we now know as *The Elder Edda* were collected and set down in writing. The impulse he gave kindled a new attitude to and fresh understanding of pagan culture and philosophy of life, which is reflected in those sagas of past times that were written after his day. It is largely owing to

him that, as W. P. Ker says, 'the heroic age of the ancient Germans may be said to culminate, and end, in Iceland in the thirteenth century'.

What about the art of poetry itself? There is no doubt that the tripping lyrical *dances* went on being made up after Snorri's time, but they were held in such low esteem compared with 'refined' poetry that, it may be said, unfortunately, hardly any survive. On the other hand, the old form of poetic composition enjoyed a sort of renaissance in the poems of Snorri's two nephews who clearly followed his lead. These were Ólaf Thórðarson *hvítaskáld* (White Poet, died 1259) and Sturla Thórðarson (died 1282). Moreover, although round about 1300 Icelanders ceased to be employed as court poets by foreign rulers, Court Metre containing fewer kennings but exhibiting otherwise traditional rhythms and style went on being used for religious verse and, in this form, reached its high point in *Lilja* ('The Lily') in the middle of the fourteenth century. The ancient art won its greatest victory, however, when the Icelanders created — from grafting the heroic ballad (the form of poetry most typical of thirteenth- to fifteenth-century Scandinavia) with certain characteristics of the older kind of verse — a new branch of poetry, the *rímur* ('rhyming lays'). In the *rímur* not only are all the rules governing alliterative verse strictly kept, as is still the case in all Icelandic poetry, but they themselves are composed in exact conformity with Snorri's demands: that is, they exhibit great diversity of splendid metres and use of kennings, in particular heathen kennings. It is noteworthy, too, that their authors constantly employ expressions like 'Eddic rule, Eddic art'. *Rímur* began to be composed in Iceland soon after 1350 and have enjoyed a remarkable popularity in that they were still being composed in a similar style down to our own time. Further, metrically and stylistically they have exerted a strong direct and indirect influence on the rest of Icelandic poetry. Although the *rímur* poets, like the poets before the days of Snorri, could have learned their art from their

predecessors and from older poems, it has long been the custom for them to study the *Edda* both in order 'to enrich their style' and 'to understand the hidden meaning of poetry'. When trends in modern poetry are discussed in Iceland today, even if traditionalists do not quote Snorri in quite the same way as the younger poets quote T. S. Eliot and Paul Eluard, he looms up, nevertheless, behind certain of their ideas. And whatever we may think of the poetical value of the *rímur* and other verse in the old tradition, there is no question of the important consequences of the general devotion to this kind of poetry — the most obvious of these, perhaps, being the preservation of the classical language of the thirteenth century as the living Icelandic of today.

SIGURÐUR NORDAL

TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) was a man of many talents. Astute at business and a diplomat, highly educated and travelled, he early acquired great wealth and power, twice occupying the highest office in Iceland and being singled out for special honour by a foreign potentate. Yet, able as he was in practical affairs, his chief interest in life was in literature. Iceland's most famous man of letters, he wrote four major works of very different character. Two were biographies — *St. Ólaf's Saga* and *Egil's Saga*, the one about the great eleventh-century king who became Norway's patron saint, the other about the famous Icelandic Viking poet who once fought as a mercenary in this country during the wars of the tenth century. *Heimskringla* records the lives of the kings of Norway from the early sixth to the late twelfth century. *The Prose Edda*, with which this translation is concerned, was intended as a handbook for poets who, in Snorri's day, were forgetting how to compose in the 'high style' of their predecessors, the skalds or court poets of the Viking Age. The titles of the second and third sections of this work, *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal* (*Poetic Diction* and *Account of Metres*), indicate their content. The first section, however, *Gylfaginning* (*The Deluding of Gylfi*), couched in the form of a conversation between a prehistoric Swedish King Gylfi and three knowledgeable beings known as High, Just-as-High, and Third, is in reality a sophisticated guide to Northern mythology based on poems, some of

which are looked on as older than any skaldic verse. By virtue of its author's sympathy and humour, irony and detachment, *The Deluding of Gylfi* is one of the great story-books of the Middle Ages.

The last translation into English of *The Prose Edda*, that of the American scholar, A. G. Brodeur, was made almost forty years ago. It was published in 1916 and has been reprinted three times since. The time, therefore, seems ripe for a new translation which will make available in more modern idiom Snorri's inimitable stories about the gods and heroes of the Northern peoples. In undertaking this translation I have had in mind two kinds of persons — the university student and the general reader. To meet the needs of the student I have aimed at a faithful rendering of my author's meaning, although I hope that I have also achieved an interpretation that will not strike the general reader as pedantic. I had this reader in mind when selecting my material. People remember *The Heroes of Asgard* with affection, and the fact that *Myths of the Norseman* has been reprinted many times between 1908 and 1948 indicates that there is a public outside university circles that is perennially interested in Northern story-telling. The present translation, therefore, consists of narrative portions of *The Prose Edda*: it includes the whole of *The Deluding of Gylfi* and all the longer heroic tales incorporated in *Poetic Diction*. What the rest of Snorri's *Edda* is about, why he wrote it and its fundamental importance for Icelandic literature will be gathered from the *Introduction* by Sigurður Nordal, the scholar, to whom more than to anyone else the student of Snorri is indebted today.

The Icelandic text used for this translation is that of the Norwegian, Anne Holtsmark, and the Icelander, Jón Helgason, professors of Northern Languages and Literature in the Universities of Oslo and Copenhagen respectively. Published in Copenhagen in 1950, it was the most recent available when this translation was made. I have also consulted the complete edition

of *The Prose Edda* by Finnur Jónsson, revised in 1926, and the Arnamagnæan edition of 1848-87.

The spellings of Icelandic names in a translation of this kind presents certain difficulties. Many of these names exhibit initial and final combinations of consonants with which the general reader may be unfamiliar — for example Hlín, Baldr. Since, however, many people prefer a foreign work to have a foreign flavour and there is, moreover, a general tendency amongst scholars in this country today to keep foreign words as far as possible in their native forms, this is the course adopted here, thus even Thór, Óðin, etc.[1] Valhalla is one of the exceptions.

I should like first and foremost to thank Sigurður Nordal, now Icelandic Minister in Copenhagen, for his masterly *Introduction*, and to acknowledge the kind help and encouragement of Professor Bruce Dickins, Elrington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Cambridge. I owe much, too, to my father, the late J. T. Young. To the University of Reading I am indebted for a grant towards expenses of publication.

1 It will be noticed, however, that inflexional *-r*, *-l*, *-n* are dropped. The symbol ð is used for the corresponding Icelandic ð and Th for the initial þ.