

# SCRIPTA ISLANDICA

ISLÄNDSKA SÄLLSKAPETS

ÅRSBOK 66/2015

---

REDIGERAD AV

LASSE MÅRTENSSON OCH VETURLIÐI ÓSKARSSON

under medverkan av

Pernille Hermann (Århus)

Else Mundal (Bergen)

Guðrún Nordal (Reykjavík)

Heimir Pálsson (Uppsala)

Henrik Williams (Uppsala)

UPPSALA, SWEDEN

Publicerad med stöd från Vetenskapsrådet.

© Författarna och Scripta Islandica 2015

ISSN 0582-3234

Sättning: Ord och sats Marco Bianchi

urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-260648

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-260648>

## Innehåll

LISE GJEDSSØ BERTELSEN, Sigurd Fafnersbane sagnet som fortalt på Ramsundsristningen . . . . .	5
ANNE-SOFIE GRÄSLUND, Kvinnorepresentationen på de senvikingatida runstenarna med utgångspunkt i Sigurdsristningarna . . . . .	33
TERRY GUNNELL, Pantheon? What Pantheon? Concepts of a Family of Gods in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions . . . . .	55
TOMMY KUUSELA, ”Den som rider på Freyfaxi ska dö”. Freyfaxis död och rituell nedstörtning av hästar för stup . . . . .	77
LARS LÖNNROTH, Sigurður Nordals brev till Nanna . . . . .	101
JAN ALEXANDER VAN NAHL, The Skilled Narrator. Myth and Scholarship in the Prose Edda . . . . .	123
WILLIAM SAYERS, Generational Models for the Friendship of Egill and Arinbjörn ( <i>Egils saga Skallagrímssonar</i> ) . . . . .	143
OLOF SUNDQVIST, The Pre-Christian Cult of Dead Royalty in Old Norse Sources: Medieval Speculations or Ancient Traditions? . . .	177

### Recensioner

LARS LÖNNROTH, rec. av <i>Minni</i> and <i>Muninn</i> : Memory in Medieval Nordic Culture, red. Pernille Herrmann, Stephen A. Mitchell & Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir . . . . .	213
OLOF SUNDQVIST, rec. av Mikael Males: Mytologi i skaldedikt, skaldedikt i prosa. En synkron analys av mytologiska referenser i medeltida norröna handskrifter . . . . .	219
PER-AXEL WIKTORSSON, rec. av <i>The Power of the Book. Medial Approaches to Medieval Nordic Legal Manuscripts</i> , red. Lena Rohrbach . . . . .	225
KIRSTEN WOLF, rev. of Lasse Mårtensson. <i>Skrivaren och förlagan: Norm och normbrott i Codex Upsaliensis av Snorra Edda</i> . . . . .	234

### Isländska sällskapet

AGNETA NEY & MARCO BIANCHI, Berättelse om verksamheten under 2014 . . . . .	241
Författarna i denna årgång . . . . .	243

# The Skilled Narrator

## Myth and Scholarship in the Prose Edda

JAN ALEXANDER VAN NAHL

### 1. Exposition

In a recent study, Ármann Jakobsson drew attention to the fact that “present day scholars in the field of Old Norse are increasingly writing in English and not in their own languages, not even Scandinavian languages and German” (Ármann Jakobsson 2013: 13 f.). While the usage of English as *lingua franca* has undoubtedly proven valuable for cooperation within medieval studies beyond language borders,<sup>1</sup> it seems to have given rise to a neglect of research published in any other language (cf. Weber 1984; van Nahl 2015). This condition holds true even for the long-lasting debate on the Prose Edda. Throughout the last decades, a plethora of interpretations has been put forward, focusing on literary, mythological, and societal questions on different methodological grounds. This multifaceted dimension makes us aware that no theory provides adequate methods on its own when dealing with medieval texts, and it reminds us that the task of understanding history by means of literature — and thereby the history of literature, too — is in need of an intensified dialogue between highly specialised medievalists from different research traditions (cf. van Nahl 2014c: 12 ff. and 47 ff., 2014d, and forthcoming a; Mortensen 2014). With that said, the present paper aims at reframing a selection of issues such as are being discussed in current German scholarship, with focus on Gylfaginning’s literary shape and possible theological influences on its conception. Some brief remarks specify the demand.

Given the importance of skaldic poetry in thirteenth-century Iceland (cf. Guðrún Nordal 2001), it is not difficult to agree on the Prose Edda’s qualities as a textbook on poetics. From the point of view of cultural

---

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Ian J. Kirby, Lausanne, for his comments on my English.

theory, one might also speak of the Edda's value in terms of a 'cultural capital' (cf. Wanner 2008). Thus, even the most painstaking attempt at a philological reconstruction or mythological assessment has to consider the Edda's texts as acts of communication tied to specific historic constellations (cf. Strohschneider 1997: 66 ff.):

Indeed, the author knows that the story's audience will interpret it according to their own experiences, and therefore he can play upon his knowledge of the audience's world. To grasp the meaning that an author gives a story, it is important to know the world of the audience. (Torfi Tulinius 2002: 36)

However, as modern scholarship's knowledge about these sociocultural conditions is highly dependent on literary accounts, the task of interpreting medieval narratives against this background asks for a careful approach. One way of dealing with this challenging situation has been to concentrate on Snorri Sturluson (1178/9–1241) as the Edda's author — after all, we are informed about Snorri through other literary sources such as *Sturlunga saga* and a number of annals. However, our modern concept of authorship is problematic due to the unstable form of medieval texts; this is a problem that Rasmus Rask indicated two hundred years ago (cf. *Snorra Edda* 1818: 5). Despite the famous statement in the *Codex Upsaliensis DG 11* (c. 1300)<sup>2</sup> — *bók þessi heitir Edda. Hana hefir saman setta Snorri Sturluson* — we will never know exactly to what extent Snorri was involved in the development of the different versions of 'his' Edda.<sup>3</sup> This critical attitude against concepts of pre-modern authorship has recently been summed up by Gísli Sigurðsson:

It is possible, that many people were playing around with similar traditional forms and none of them identified themselves as the maker or creator of their contribution. This doubt should make scholars exceptionally cautious in approaching medieval texts from an author-based perspective in their quest for the lost originals. (Gísli Sigurðsson 2012: 235)

On the other hand, concepts of authorship enable us to handle the number

<sup>2</sup> Citations from *Uppsala Edda* (U): Snorri Sturluson. *The Uppsala Edda*. Ed. by Heimir Pálsson 2012; *Codex Regius* (R): *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*. Ed. by Finnur Jónsson 1931; *Heimskringla* (Hkr): Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla*. Ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51.

<sup>3</sup> Concerning *DG 11*, recent scholarship tends to speak of a compilation rather than a coherent work (cf. Snorri Sturluson. *The Uppsala Edda*. Ed. by Heimir Pálsson 2012: lxxvii ff.; van Nahl 2013b: 23 ff.).

of possible contexts of a text.<sup>4</sup> From this point of view, the polemic attitude towards ‘author’ and ‘work’ is nothing but the demand to test new perspectives in handling these categories (cf. Unzeitig 2010: 4f.). In fact, the Prose Edda’s different versions *were* compiled, written down, and edited by medieval people, who had a purpose in their efforts, and who reacted to the milieu they lived in. Not only the cited reference in U indicates that Snorri was considered as an outstanding scholar among these people, but the Icelandic annals (1241), too: *Andlat Snorra Stullu sonar j Reykholti: hann var madr witur og margfródr [...] hann samsetj Eddu og margar adrar frædibækur islenskar saugur*, ‘Snorri Sturluson died in Reykholt: he was a wise and very educated man [...] he composed the Edda and many other learned books about Icelandic sagas’ (Islandske Annaler 1888: 481).

Thirteenth-century scholars’ decision to put their accounts of myths and history down in writing is dependent on their view on literature as an adequate medium for such a sophisticated presentation (cf. Haug 2006: 23f.; van Nahl 2013a: 40ff.). However, within Old Norse studies, concepts from the field of literary theory are subject to fierce debate. While some scholars assume that such “critical methodologies and theories are of limited applicability” (Gísli Sigurðsson 2005: 288; cf. further Gísli Sigurðsson 2004: 35ff.), others suggest that they can provide valuable insights even into pre-modern literature — although they must not be used in the manner of *l’art pour l’art* (cf. Kramarz-Bein 2014: 11).<sup>5</sup> Highly debated in recent times is the concept of fictionality, having brought forth a spectrum of disparate questions and a yet somewhat indistinct terminology (cf. Müller 2010; Martínez/Scheffel 2003). In several articles, Jürg Glauser argued that the Prose Edda of all medieval literature was a great example of illustrating how literary fiction was resting “on the basic principle of trickery of the senses; they [i.e. the stories from the Prose Edda] are, in fact, phantasmagoric” (Glauser 2009: 300; cf. Glauser 2011: 87f.).<sup>6</sup> Whereas Glauser’s reading is stimulating when it comes to our

<sup>4</sup> On the relation of ‘text’ and ‘context’, cf. Jahraus 2007.

<sup>5</sup> A recent example of the latter type is Lukas Rösli’s topographical approach to Gylfaginning and Völuspá, which disregards any sociocultural context of medieval literature, but dwells on abstract narratological observations (Rösli 2015; cf. van Nahl, forthcoming b).

<sup>6</sup> Glauser’s recent interpretation of the famous drawing of Gangleri and the trinity in U points in the same direction. But I do not see how the unfinished drafts placed all around the main characters should have contributed to an increased ambiguity of the narrative (“[...] mit dem klaren Ziel, undeutliche, ambigue Verhältnisse zu schaffen” (Glauser 2013: 115)). After all, maybe Gerd Wolfgang Weber was right to declare them the scrawl by a

understanding of ‘mediality’ in pre-modern time, one yet has to ask how it, for instance, fits together with the fact that all main manuscripts preserve *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal* as well. As the Bragaræður state, Gylfaginning was not just conducted for *skemtan*, but for *fróðleikr*. It would be too simple to explain the richness of literature emerging in thirteenth-century Iceland by nothing but the commotion during Sturlungaöld, but, as Guðrún Nordal emphasised, “the citation of skaldic verse in thirteenth-century sources is a highly political act” (Guðrún Nordal 2000: 238; cf. Whaley 2014: 90). *Þat mun æ lifa | nema öld farisk | bragninga lof, | eða bili heimar* (Snorri Sturluson 1991: 38) — the praise of noble men shall survive until the end of the world. It is obvious that Snorri (*Háttatal* 96) makes the claim of contributing to this ‘eternity’ of great rulers as a poet — and will hence not be forgotten either. This ambition to overcome (the fear of) death through narration is deep-seated in humanity; we might instance the well-known words of Horace some 2000 years ago: *exegi monumentum aere perennius [...] non omnis moriar multaue pars mei*, ‘I created a monument more lasting than bronze [...] not every part of me will die’ (Q. Horatius Flaccus 2008: 106). Rhetorical skills offered subtle possibilities to prove oneself as *fróðr maðr* in dealing with such disturbing issues, and the Prose Edda’s manifold reflections on the power of language suggest that its editors were very conscious of this aspect (cf. van Nahl 2013b: 47 ff.).<sup>7</sup> As Ármann Jakobsson stated, in thirteenth-century Iceland, literature’s “power to dominate the thinking of people in this community can hardly be overestimated” (Ármann Jakobsson 2003: 328).

There is good reason to assume that Snorri was involved in the Prose Edda’s development, and insertions like *Ættartala Sturlunga* or *Skáldatal* bear witness to a relation between poetics and thirteenth-century politics, too. Why should he or any later editor have introduced this valuable “cultural capital in the form of artistic/literary/poetic skill” (Wanner 2008: 51) as nothing but a phantasmagoria? As Gerd Wolfgang Weber indicated, the crucial task for any medieval scholar was not to distinguish between fact and fiction but to ascribe to a narrative a certain meaning within specific historic constellations (cf. Weber 1987b: 147).<sup>8</sup> It was up to a narrator’s

---

later hand (cf. Weber 1986: 400; on the other images in U, cf. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Not least, the famous titling of the Codex Upsaliensis, *bók þessi*, seems to indicate an elaborate textual self-awareness (cf. Glauser 2011: 88; van Nahl 2013b: 29 ff.).

<sup>8</sup> Maybe it was this striving for structuring and sense-making by means of literature

rhetorical skills to establish ‘the’ truth within a specific situation, even though a learned audience might very well have been aware that it was nothing but a literary draft: it is striking how often Gylfaginning recalls the performative situation of the dialogue (*segja, heyra, sjá*), stressing — as does the open ending — the possibility of retelling different versions of the stories. That is what might be called an open text, not least, as such a text could reveal different layers of understanding, depending on the recipient’s intellectual background. Thus, appraising Gylfaginning, we always have to bear in mind its *literary* shape (implying specific functions within society) as a pre-condition to *any* attempt at interpretation.

## 2. Gylfaginning and theology

### 2.1. The background

The keen debate about the structuring principles behind Gylfaginning’s mythology should have made us aware that any attempt at explanation by one single thesis falls too short. Yet, the more or less cursory reference to some sort of common medieval knowledge regarding mythology, theology or philosophy is of little help either. The following considerations aim at contributing to this somewhat gridlocked discussion (cf. Beck 2013) from the point of view of medieval theology, providing a close reading of some crucial passages in Gylfaginning.

One of the most influential publications on Gylfaginning’s structure was Anne Holtsmark’s study on “Snorres mytologi” (Holtsmark 1964) which had a considerable impact on later scholars (cf. Weber 1986). Her conclusions built on euhemerism and demonology, neglecting any religious value of pagan myths. What made this study so very convincing was Holtsmark’s combination of her considerations with a lexematic examination: wherever a keyword from medieval theology was used in describing the pagan worldview, it had to be understood as irony. The result was striking: while Walter Baetke some ten years earlier had not been able to explain why Snorri should have argued for a so-called

---

which the verb *setja saman* was pointing at? Besides scholarship’s common reference to *componere*, one may also think of Chrétien de Troyes’ much-discussed *bele conjointure* (cf. Burrichter 2010: 273 ff.; Zink 2014: 149 f.).

‘Odinstheologie’ just to prove the pagan religion a deception (cf. Baetke 1950: 64 ff.), Holtsmark’s thesis of ‘assosiasjon ved kontrast’ at first sight provided a conclusive solution.

Nevertheless, as early as 1969, Oskar Bandle criticised Holtsmark’s conclusions (cf. Bandle 1969), not least, as her lexematic discussion was highly selective. Some ten years later, Ursula Dronke critically stated that it was “still commonly said that Snorri ‘apologized’ for his native Norse mythology by presenting it as a devilish illusion” (Dronke 1977: 153). Recently, Viðar Pálsson renewed this criticism:

Modern scholarship is still quite unwilling to abandon the idea that the knowledge, transmission, and use of mythology by Christian medieval Icelanders must have rested on some sort of ‘justification’. It still finds, to various degrees, pagan mythology in Christian society somewhat out of place, and religiously suspect. (Viðar Pálsson 2008: 126 f.)

This suspicion is above all focused on the *sjónhverfing*, which is mentioned at Gylfi’s arrival in Ásgarðr. It is common opinion that this visionary story-within-the-story should demonstrate the falsehood of the accounts: “det hele er jo løgn og bedrag fra asiaternes side” (Lassen 2011: 295). However, in 1950, Baetke put into question whether such a narrative framework could ever have kept Snorri safe from ecclesiastical criticism, if there would have been reason for any such concern (cf. Baetke 1950: 20 f.).<sup>9</sup> According to Baetke, the *sjónhverfing* was rather a literary device, allowing for the encounter of Gylfi and the trinity (Hár, Jafnhár, Priði) outside any historical realm (cf. Baetke 1950: 36). Moreover, already Jan de Vries argued that the noun *ginning* did not necessarily have to be translated as ‘beguilement’ (cf. de Vries 1930). Anatoly Liberman took up this point again, stating that “in such a specialized context, *ginning* and *sjónhverfing(ar)* become near-synonyms, and Gylfaginning can perhaps be translated ‘Gylfi’s vision’” (Liberman 1994: 173). Neglecting a polemic function of the *sjónhverfing*, one thus has to ask what other

---

<sup>9</sup> Baetke’s conclusion that Snorri composed Gylfaginning to demonstrate nothing but the falsehood of any pagan religion, appears as the result of his experiences during the ‘Third Reich’ (cf. van Nahl 2014b): his whole academic occupation was characterised by the struggle against any resurrection of a ‘Germanic cult’. This is what Hans Kuhn was referring to, when criticising Baetke for his “starres Entweder-oder” (Kuhn 1952: 100). However, later scholars passed on these earlier assessments mostly without taking notice of their original conditions.

concepts might have been ready to hand to deal with stories on pagan gods in thirteenth-century scholarship.<sup>10</sup>

Most preserved Old Norse annals register the Fourth Council of the Lateran from 1215 (*þing í Latran*) as an extraordinary event. One important conclusion of the gathering was Pope Innocent's III fixing of the formula of analogy: *inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda* (Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta 2000: 232) — the greater the similarity between two entities, the greater the differences. Having its roots in Greek philosophy, analogy became a resort in the face of urgent theological questions for thirteenth-century scholars (cf. Pannenberg 2007: 52 ff.): it allowed for the establishment of relations between the Creator and his creation, claiming neither identity nor antagonism.<sup>11</sup> We know the name of at least one high clerical representative from Norway who took part in the Council: Bishop Guttorm from Nidaros (†1224), consecrated archbishop in Rome (*vigdr Guthormr erkebyskop*).<sup>12</sup> The annals report that Guttorm returned to Norway in 1216, taking the position of an intimate to both Hákon Hákonarson and jarl Skúli. It is very unlikely that he should not have met with Snorri; the annals report on at least one such meeting: *stefnt hóþþingivm af Íslandi á fvnd Gvthorms erki byskups* (Islandske Annaler 1888: 185). The aftermath of the Council offered an excellent opportunity to place Nordic culture and history within a continental context, and a chance for any ambitious scholar to excel in this task: “Norway’s court

<sup>10</sup> In a recent paper, Gísli Sigurðsson introduced his reading of Gylfaginning as “a general introduction to what can literally be observed in the sky where, as Snorri tells us eighty-two times, we should be looking for the gods” (Gísli Sigurðsson 2014: 184). Gísli was right to criticise that “Gylfaginning’s references to the heaven have never been taken seriously by scholars” (193). However, his claim that “the stories could then be interpreted as a straightforward description of what can be seen on a starry winter night — exactly as Gylfi’s illusion sets it up” (196) calls for further explication regarding the relation of general astronomical observations and the individual stories in Gylfaginning.

<sup>11</sup> The cause was Abbot Joachim of Fiore’s (†1202) historicising treatment of the Apocalypse of John in the late twelfth century, a prominent example of the then growing tendency to interpret biblical events as prefigurations of a historical process (cf. Ehlers 2013). The Council eventually condemned his doctrine (cf. Daniel 1992). The subject was highly controversial, and medieval sources bear witness to the general richness of interpretations (cf. Brinkmann 1980: 163 ff.). On the relation of ‘analogy’ and the concept of a ‘natural religion’, cf. van Nahl 2013b: 53 ff.

<sup>12</sup> We might also take into consideration Guttorm’s predecessor Tore Gudmundsson, who probably dwelled some time at the abbey of St. Victor (cf. Waßenhoven 2006: 291), at a time when the University of Paris was emerging as a new form of scholarly corporation.

was, then, the nearest untapped source of social capital available to Snorri” (Wanner 2008: 53; cf. Weber 1987a: 125).

Given such contacts, Scandinavian scholars must have been aware of the significance of analogy at the latest after Guttorm’s return in 1216. In several studies since the 1990s, Heinrich Beck has sought to demonstrate how the closing scene of Gylfaginning — the human Æsir declare identity with the divine Æsir — could be read as an analogue to the biblical *ego et pater unum sumus* (John 10:30; cf. Beck 1994 and 2007):<sup>13</sup>

It must be stated that Snorri quite obviously sought to establish correlations between the message of the Bible and Gylfaginning or Ynglinga saga. The Trinity, revelation, the explanation of unity, twelve companions: these are a few of the indications which point in this direction. [...] While one must remember that similarities are always accompanied by dissimilarities, it is still ennobling for the pagan transmission to have a connection, one established by means of analogy, between the mythology which it transmits and the Christian message itself. (Beck 2013: 2)

Similarities between the happenings at *ragnarok* and the biblical Apocalypse have been registered for a long time (cf. Johansson 2013). This is, however, not only a question of certain events, as being described in the texts, but a matter of structural devices as well. In the Bible, the procurement of a formerly concealed religious knowledge is linked to a state of vision of the recipient (*in visione, in spiritu*),<sup>14</sup> characterised by the presence of a supernatural force, and a shifting of space. These criteria are significant in Gylfaginning, too, and it is striking how often Gylfi’s visual impressions are emphasised by the verb *sjá* right at the beginning: *þá sá hann háva höll; Gylfir sá mann í hallardyrum er lék at handsqum; þar sá hann margar hallir; hann sá þrjú háseti* — one has to think of John’s frequently accented sensations by the verb *videre*. As Liberman stated, *vision* and *sjónhverfing* seem to be related in this case. A closer examination of Gylfaginning sheds further light on this thesis.

<sup>13</sup> I argued in favour of this thesis by providing a new lexematic examination of the theological vocabulary in the different versions of Gylfaginning and Ynglinga saga (cf. van Nahl 2013b).

<sup>14</sup> On the relation between vision and writing in the Middle Ages, cf. Redzich 2009; cf. further Wellendorf 2012.

## 2.2. The *sjónhverfingar*

Three entities are important: Gylfi, the trinity, and the human Æsir. Modern scholarship tends to characterise Gylfi/Gangleri as a pagan fool who promotes the spreading of a false religion in Northern Europe, but this interpretation is too cursory. Gylfi's task is to ask the right questions, i.e. questions which, on the one hand, allow for a well-structured mythology, on the other hand provide hints for its assessment. Gylfi is probably not "a Christian pilgrim ahead of his time" (McTurk 1994: 17), but he is at any rate *maðr vitr*, a wise man like Snorri (*maðr witur og margfróðr*), wondering why the human Æsir were so powerful (U 5): *mundi af eðli þeira vera eða mundi guðmognin valda því*, 'whether this would be because of their nature or whether the divine powers would be responsible' (Snorri Sturluson 2012: 11). This is the crucial question, a question both on secular power and religion, motivating the whole narrative about the different gods, their abilities, and how to get into touch with them.

The characters' prudence is of major importance. Gylfi's first question after having entered the hall is *ef nockurr er fróðr maðr inni*, he is not willing to talk to anyone who is not *fróðr*. The answer: *Hár segir at hann komi eigi heill út ef<sup>15</sup> hann er fróðari* – the contest is all about being *fróðr*. Even the human Æsir, attending the dispute, are characterised as *vitr* right at the beginning: *æsirnir voru því vísari at þeir sá ferð hans*, they knew about Gylfi's journey in advance. In the prologue to *Heimskringla*, the *gamlir fræðimenn* are mentioned: to be *vitr ok gamall* (i.e. having witnessed the event) is an essential demand on any person whose report can be trusted. The same applies to *Gylfaginning*: the dispute between Gylfi and the trinity, although a literary draft, should not be understood as a fabulous illusion. The dialogue form may be an indication of *Gylfaginning*'s literary self-awareness (cf. Glauser 2011: 86), but, moreover, the decision to render this mythology as a dialogue even allowed to unfold the classical purpose: to demonstrate the spiral movement of thought, characterised by both agreement and contradiction. Being confronted with "information that was partial and allusive, and quite often pointing in disparate directions" (Clunies Ross 2000: 135), this form of presentation made it possible to combine and assess manifold

<sup>15</sup> The wording in U is probably a mistake (other manuscripts have *nema*), but nevertheless this statement can be understood as a threat as well: if Gylfi turned out to be all too clever, the trinity would not let him escape.

elements. The recipient should not be talked into a certain judgment of pagan myths and religion, but should carefully follow the reasoning through the course of the dialogue to gain a personal opinion:

The dialogue genre and scholastic disputation should be seen together as part of a broader cultural phenomenon that stresses the verbal and dramatic conflict of ideas as a vehicle of public persuasion and a path towards a deeper understanding of Christian truth. (Novikoff 2013: 7)

Nevertheless, Gylfi himself is subject to *jarðlig skilning*, as the so-called prologue in the Edda puts it: all pre-Christians could only act within the limits of a pagan worldview, *því at eigi hófðu þeir andlīga gípt*. This limitation of divine enlightenment does not only affect Gylfi, but the human Æsir, and the trinity as well: none of them participates in the Christian doctrine. That is the reason why the trinity has to interrupt the dialogue at last, unable to answer any further questions. Neither could Gylfi *have* asked another question. The pagan wisdom, as displayed in Gylfaginning, has reached an end.

This is the point at which the concept of analogy unfolds its capability. Following the dispute in detail, it becomes obvious that it was up to Gylfi to point out similarities and dissimilarities between the Christian belief and a pagan religion. *Hvat hafðist hann áðr at en himinn ok jörð vóru sköpuð* (U 6) — this is Gylfi's crucial question about Alfaðir's spatio-temporal dimension. Augustine, being asked the same question (*quid faciebat deus, antequam faceret caelum et terram?*), gave the Christian answer: *antequam faceret deus caelum et terram, non faciebat aliquid* (Augustinus 1955: 622 ff.) — there is no 'before' in eternity. The pagans did, however, not participate in this concept of a ruler outside space and time: Alfaðir is described like the Christian God, but at last the trinity has to admit that he dwelled with the giants in the beginning (cf. van Nahl 2014a) — they are the oldest creatures within the pagan worldview. The *kraptr* which led to the life-giving confusion of heat and frost (*kraptr sá er stýrði* (U 8)) points towards the true God who existed even before the giants, but is afterwards split into a pantheon (cf. van Nahl 2013a).

However, according to Gylfaginning, this pantheon offered the possibility to get in contact with the formerly inaccessible supernatural force. Gylfi is eager to find out why one should believe in these gods (*trúa á*) and how to invoke each of them (*heita á*) (cf. van Nahl 2013b: 142 ff.). Besides his task to expose weak points in the pagan religion, his questions, on the other hand, allow the trinity to argue for the advantages of their

belief. The personification of a formerly unknown divine power went along with a practical benefit for the cultic life. *Ok til þess at þeir mætti muna, þá gáfu þeir öllum hlutum nafn með sér, ok síðan hefir átrúnaðr breyzt á marga vega, sem menn skiptust eða tungur greindust* — as the prologue tells, people invented names to be able to pass on a religious knowledge, which became myth. The underlying idea is identical: the pagan cult was in need of personified supernatural powers. Or, as Gylfi puts it: *eigi er undr at mikill kraptr fylgi yðr er þér skuluð kunna skyn guðanna ok vita hvern biðja skal hvers hlutar eða hveðrar bænar* (U 19) — no wonder such great power accompanies you, since you know the gods and the proper prayers. Not only the act of *biðja bænar*, but also the concept of a following power is deep-seated in Christian belief: *mikill kraptr fylgir krossinum* (Magnúss saga blinda 11), and *mikill kraptr fylgir kristnum sið* (Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta 216) are just two contemporary examples, based on a biblical motif. These examples, like others, demonstrate to what extent the Christian truth could be understood as being prefigured in pagan times. As the prologue tells us, God was temporarily forgotten but his powerful presence could be observed everywhere. The myths approved the divine Æsir as the Northern way of dealing with this challenging situation, and that is what Snorri's so-called 'Religionsgeschichte' was seeking to interpret.

Modern scholarship has never been able to explain why the human Æsir took over the names of the gods only *after* the dispute between Gylfi and the trinity. They are depicted as extraordinary powerful, and yet all preserved versions of Gylfaginning stress the fact that they were inevitably in need of the revealed knowledge about the gods to perform this identification. *Nú er Gangleri heyrir þetta [...] ok er æsirnir heyra þetta sagt* (U 31) — only after they had listened to the stories about the divine Æsir were the humans able to adopt their names, which afterwards would make them famous among men. The codices Regius, Wormianus, and Trajectinus (RWT) are pointing in the same direction by stressing that the human Æsir first had to recall (*minnask*) the stories (*frásagnir*) which had been told (*váru sagðar*) — and they were the first to retell these stories: as *Ijóðasmiðir* (Yng. 6) they are said to have passed on narratives which were essential for the establishment of a Northern culture.<sup>16</sup> Their powerful entrance to the Scandinavian countries is depicted as laying the foundation of a continuing relevance of these narratives through com-

<sup>16</sup> On the possible relation of Gylfaginning and Ynglinga saga, cf. van Nahl 2013b: 33 ff.

memoration (*bá er langar stundir liði*): Óðinn's first act in the North is to establish a cultural administration *eptir siðvenju Ásanna* (Yng. 5). That is a major reason why the human Æsir could be regarded as culture heroes even in Christian times: they are introduced as widely-travelled ancestors, once having lived near the centre of the world, establishing religion, politics, and poetry in the North. Promoting such a tradition must have been of importance to anyone seeking to use poetic skills to increase his political power.

How does the trinity fit into this structure? In the Bible, there is a close relation between intermediate beings and a certain setting, belonging neither to the human world nor to a divine. The human Æsir have the power to create such a “dimension that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (McTurk 1994: 15, citing Victor Turner), but they do not have the capability to enter it: they can only listen to the *frásagnir* which are told by the trinity.<sup>17</sup> Gylfi, on the contrary, enters the hall; Beck has recalled the closing door in RWT (cf. Beck 1994: 19) — nobody is able to follow Gylfi. The rumbling sound at the end of the dialogue (*bá verðr gnýr mikill*) is another hint: the passing from one world into another is regularly attended by loud noises (cf. Sävborg 2009: 343 f.). Thus, the hall outside any spatial reality appears as a precondition for the supernatural trinity to act, and that is what Baetke was pointing at when declaring the *sjónhverfing* a device of fiction. In other words: this *ginning* even evidences the growing self-awareness of literature in thirteenth century Iceland, opening up new possibilities to handle accounts from the past. Fiction must, however, not be identified with falsehood: the rendering of the overall *sjónhverfing* as a vision, attended by *fróðir menn*, indicates an element of truth of what is revealed within.

This thesis is supported by the episode about Þórr and Útgarðaloki in chapter 28 (*sjónhverfingar vóru gervar*). In both cases, there is a big hall (*há holl, holl mikla*), the protagonist's visual registration of this hall (*sjá*) is emphasised, and the hall vanishes at last. Both Gylfi and Þórr have to travel to a foreign area (Ásgarðr, Útgarðr), which lacks a certain degree of

<sup>17</sup> Gísli Sigurðsson proposed to understand the narrative framing in *Völuspá* in a similar way: “The prophecy in the vision is thus made possible by the highest god, something that gives the *völva* authority in front of the humans who are the ultimate listeners of her prophecy. Such a reading is also in line with the popular medieval literary genre of visionary literature which normally describes a prophetic vision into the other world, a vision which has been opened up to the earthly speaker via divine aid” (Gísli Sigurðsson 2013: 51 f.).

safety: *því at óvíst er at vita hvar óvinir sitja á fletjum fyrir*, as Gylfi puts it, citing Hávamál — you never know who is friend and who is foe. These structural similarities point to a specific relation between the two settings. Þórr finally gains knowledge of ‘the’ truth (*nú skal segja þér it sanna*): he was unable to pass the tasks successfully, as he had become a victim of *sjónhverfingar*. The trinity does its best to cover this failure (U 27): *þá er eigi skylt at segja frá*, there is no need to tell anything about it. Gylfi’s response is provoking: *svá lízt mér at þess hlutar muna ek spurt hafa er engi er til ór at leysa* — he reminds his opponents of the competitive situation, and does not simply believe Hár’s enthusiastic statement on Þórr: *allir [eru] skyldir at trúa at hann er mátkastr*. Jafnhár tries to save the day: *heyrt höfum vér sagt frá því er oss þíkkir ótrúligt* — the accounts we know seem not reliable. Gylfi’s position is still dominant: *hér hlýði ek svörum þessa máls*. Finally, the trinity is forced to tell about Þórr’s disgrace in the encounter with Útgardaloki, but at the same time (in RWT) asks Gylfi not to report anything about it: *þer er at þegia!*

Gylfi’s insistent demand for an adequate answer stresses the importance of the narrative about Útgardaloki. However, neither he nor the trinity have an option to uncover the deeper truth within their visual encounter, as none of them participates in the *andlig gipt*. A Christian recipient, on the other hand, should realise this truth through the course of Gylfaginning, and the late episode about Þórr is a good example: even the strongest pagan god (*sterkastr ása ok allra guðanna ok manna* (U 18)) cannot modify the ocean (i.e. the visible world) after his will, he cannot escape his fate (the *Miðgarðsormr*), and he cannot defeat the age (i.e. he does not exist outside time). While pagans explained this failure by the malicious delusion of a giant, the conversion to Christianity allowed the *fræðimenn* to recognise more deep-seated similarities and dissimilarities, and thereby to relate the pagan religion to Christianity: *eigi skylo kristnir menn trva aheipin goð ok eigin asanyndi þesa sagna anan veg en sva sem her finz ivphafi bokar* (R) — Christians must not believe in the pagan gods and myths in a different way from what is explained here.

### 3. Concluding thoughts

Literary sources from thirteenth-century Iceland demonstrate a mature interest in pagan gods, but also a high degree of self-confidence in dealing

with the Icelandic past. The unsustainability of modern scholarship's endeavour to sort out 'true' and 'false' features of a literary text has long ago been proved by a range of studies on the intrinsic relation of fact and fiction in medieval literature. There are substantial indications that the composers of *Gylfaginning* were well aware of the strong points of the literary medium: *Gylfaginning* appears as an experiment on the capability of literature emerging in the era of the Sturlungs, so to speak. This is, one might assume, what Anne Holtsmark was pointing at when introducing her famous study by stating: "i det følgende er da 'Gylfaginning' betragtet som et litterært verk" (Holtsmark 1964: 5). After all, it is this *literary* mastership which lies behind the plurality of approaches to the *Prose Edda* throughout the last two hundred years. Without doubt, this *Edda* can be regarded as a textbook on poetics. Nevertheless, *Gylfaginning* is more than an accumulation of mythological stories used in skaldic poetry: it bears witness to an elaborated selection and structuring of different mythological accounts, most likely expressed in the framework of a fundamental theological discourse in the early thirteenth century.

Facing the somewhat unsatisfying lack of a scholarly debate beyond specific research traditions and language borders, my paper has aimed at drawing attention to some promising points of a future discussion from different perspectives. Ultimately, the re-establishment of such a dialogue might even promote a new profile of Old Norse studies in the early twenty-first century; as Preben Meulengracht Sørensen once stated:

[...] et samspil mellem filologi i snæver forstand og litteraturvidenskab, ikke af dem hver for sig. Denne metode, der tager sit udgangspunkt i, at teksten har en flydende, dynamisk form og en mening, vil jeg kalde filologisk. (Meulengracht Sørensen 2001: 286)

## Bibliography

- Augustinus. *Confessiones* – Bekenntnisse. Ed. by J. Bernhardt. 1955. Munich.
- Ármann Jakobsson, 2003: Snorri and his death. Youth, violence, and autobiography in medieval Iceland. In: *Scandinavian Studies* 75/3, pp. 317–40.
- Ármann Jakobsson, 2013: Nine saga studies. The critical interpretation of the Icelandic sagas. Reykjavík.
- Baetke, Walter, 1950: *Die Götterlehre der Snorra-Edda*. Berlin. (Berichte über die Verhandlungen der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, phil.-hist. Klasse 97/3.)

- Bandle, Oskar, 1969: Review Anne Holtsmark: Studier in Snorres Mytologi. In: Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie 88, pp. 449–52.
- Beck, Heinrich, 1994: Snorri Sturlusons Sicht der paganen Vorzeit. (Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, phil.-hist. Klasse 1994/1.) Göttingen.
- Beck, Heinrich, 2007: Die Uppsala-Edda und Snorri Sturlusons Konstruktion einer skandinavischen Vorzeit. In: Scripta Islandica 58, pp. 5–32.
- Beck, Heinrich, 2013: Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie: Euhemerismus oder Analogie? In: Snorri Sturluson. Historiker, Dichter, Politiker. Ed. by H. Beck, W. Heizmann & J. A. van Nahl. Berlin-Boston. (Ergänzungsbande zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 85.) Pp. 1–21.
- Brinkmann, Hennig, 1980: Mittelalterliche Hermeneutik. Darmstadt.
- Burrichter, Brigitte, 2010: Fiktionalität in französischen Artustexten. In: Historische Narratologie – Mediävistische Perspektiven. Ed. by H. Haferland & M. Meyer. Berlin-New York. (Trends in Medieval Philology 19.) Pp. 263–80.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret, 2000: The conversation and reinterpretation of myth in medieval Icelandic writings. In: Old Icelandic literature and society. Ed. by M. Clunies Ross. Cambridge. (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 42.) Pp. 116–39.
- Conciliarum Oecumenicorum Decreta. Dekrete der ökumenischen Konzilien 2. Konzilien des Mittelalters. Ed. by J. Wohlmuth. 2000. Paderborn.
- Daniel, E. Randolph, 1992: Joachim of Fiore. Patterns of history in the Apocalypse. In: The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages. Ed. by R. K. Emmerson & B. McGinn. Ithaca-London. Pp. 72–88.
- Dronke, Ursula & Peter Dronke, 1977: The prologue of the Prose Edda. Explorations of a Latin background. In: Sjöttú ritgerðir, helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni. Ed. by Einar G. Pétursson & Jónas Kristjánsson. Reykjavík. Pp. 153–76.
- Edda Snorra Sturlusonar. Ed. by Finnur Jónsson. 1931. Copenhagen.
- Ehlers, Joachim, 2013: Machtfragen. Aspekte der historiographischen Literatur im lateinischen Europa des Hochmittelalters. In: Macht und Spiegel der Macht. Herrschaft in Europa im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert vor dem Hintergrund der Chronistik. Ed. by N. Kersken & G. Vercamer. Wiesbaden. (Deutsches Historisches Institut Warschau. Quellen und Studien 27.) Pp. 23–40.
- Gísli Sigurðsson, 2004: The medieval Icelandic saga and oral tradition. A discourse on method. Cambridge (Mass.). (Publications of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature 2.)
- Gísli Sigurðsson, 2005: Orality and literacy in the sagas of Icelanders. In: A companion to Old Norse-Icelandic literature and culture. Ed. by R. McTurk. Malden-Oxford-Carlton. Pp. 285–301.
- Gísli Sigurðsson, 2012: Poet, singer of tales, storyteller, and author. In: Modes of authorship in the Middle Ages. Ed. by Slavica Ranković. Toronto. (Papers in Medieval Studies 22.) Pp. 227–35.
- Gísli Sigurðsson, 2013: Voluspá as the product of an oral tradition: what does that

- entail? In: *The Nordic Apocalypse. Approaches to Voluspá and Nordic days of judgement*. Ed. by T. Gunnell & A. Lassen. Turnhout. (*Acta Scandinavica* 2.) Pp. 45–62.
- Gíslí Sigurðsson, 2014: *Snorri's Edda. The sky described in mythological terms*. In: *Nordic Mythologies. Interpretations, Intersections, and Institutions*. Ed. by T. R. Tangherlini. Berkeley-Los Angeles. (*The Wildcat Canyon Advanced Seminars. Mythology* 1.) Pp. 184–98.
- Glauser, Jürg, 2009: *Sensory deceptions. Concepts of mediality in the Prose Edda*. In: *Á austrvega. Saga and East Scandinavia*. Ed. by A. Ney, H. Williams & F. Charpentier. Gävle. (*Papers from the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences* 14.) Pp. 296–302.
- Glauser, Jürg, 2011: *Island. Eine Literaturgeschichte*. Weimar.
- Glauser, Jürg, 2013: *Unheilige Bücher. Zur Implosion mythischen Erzählens in der 'Prosa-Edda'*. In: *Heilige Bücher*. Ed. by C. C. de Hartmann & S. Uhl. Berlin. (*Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung* 18.) Pp. 106–21.
- Guðrún Nordal, 2000: *The contemporary sagas and their social context*. In: *Old Icelandic literature and society*. Ed. by M. Clunies Ross. Cambridge. (*Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature* 42.) Pp. 221–41.
- Guðrún Nordal, 2001: *Tools of literacy. The role of skaldic verse in Icelandic textual culture of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries*. Toronto-Buffalo-London.
- Haug, Walter, 2006 [1997]: *Vernacular literary theory in the Middle Ages. The German tradition, 800–1300, in its European context*. Digitally printed first paperback version. Cambridge. (*Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature* 29.)
- Holtmark, Anne, 1964: *Studier i Snorres Mytologi*. Oslo.
- Islandske Annaler indtil 1578*. Ed. by G. Storm. 1888. Christiania.
- Jahraus, Oliver, 2007: *Text, Kontext, Kultur. Zu einer zentralen Tendenz in den Entwicklungen in der Literaturtheorie von 1980–2000*. In: *Journal of Literary Theory* 1, pp. 19–44.
- Johansson, Karl G., 2013: *Völuspá, the Tiburtine Sibyl, and the Apocalypse in the North*. In: *The Nordic Apocalypse. Approaches to Völuspá and Nordic days of judgement*. Ed. by T. Gunnell & A. Lassen. Turnhout. (*Acta Scandinavica* 2.) Pp. 161–81.
- Kramarz-Bein, Susanne, 2014: *Familienhistorische Überlegungen zu Karlamagnús saga, Branche I: "þu ert moður brodr minn"*. In: *Erzählen im mittelalterlichen Skandinavien II*. Ed. by R. Nedoma. Vienna. (*Wiener Studien zur Skandinavistik* 22.) Pp. 11–23.
- Kuhn, Hans, 1952: *Review Walter Baetke: Die Götterlehre der Snorra-Edda*. In: *Anzeiger für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 65, pp. 97–104.
- Lassen, Annette, 2011: *Odin på kristent pergament. En teksthistorisk studie*. Copenhagen.
- Liberman, Anatoly, 1994: *Mistaken identity and optical illusion in Old Icelandic literature*. In: *Word heath. Wordheide. Orðheiði. Essays on Germanic literature*

- and usage. Ed. by A. Liberman. Rome. (Episteme dell'Antichità e oltre 1.) Pp. 165–75.
- Martínez, Matías & Michael Scheffel, 2003: Narratology and theory of fiction. Remarks on a complex relationship. In: What is narratology? Questions and answers regarding the status of a theory. Ed. by T. Kindt & H.-H. Müller. Berlin. Pp. 221–37.
- McTurk, Rory, 1994: Fooling Gylfi. Who tricks who? In: *alvíssmál* 3, pp. 3–18.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben, 2001: At fortælle historien. Studier i den gamle nordiske litteratur. Trieste.
- Mortensen, Lars B., 2014: Nordic medieval texts: beyond 'literature' and 'sources'. Reflections on expanding interdisciplinary border-zones. In: *Saga-Book* 38, pp. 95–112.
- Müller, Jan-Dirk, 2010: Literarische und andere Spiele. Zum Fiktionalitätsproblem in vormoderner Literatur. In: *Mediävistische Kulturwissenschaft. Ausgewählte Studien*. Ed. by J.-D. Müller. Berlin/New York. Pp. 83–108.
- van Nahl, Jan A., 2013a: Snorri Sturlusons Konstruktion eines Deus Omnipotens. In: *Snorri Sturluson. Historiker, Dichter, Politiker*. Ed. by H. Beck, W. Heizmann & J. A. van Nahl. Berlin-Boston. (Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 85.) Pp. 23–48.
- van Nahl, Jan A., 2013b: Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie und die mittelalterliche Theologie. Berlin-Boston. (Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 81.)
- van Nahl, Jan A., 2014a: Allvater. In: *Germanische Altertumskunde Online*. Ed. by H. Beck et al. Berlin-Boston. DOI: 10.1515/gao\_26.
- van Nahl, Jan A., 2014b: Baetke, Walter. In: *Germanische Altertumskunde Online*. Ed. by H. Beck et al. Berlin-Boston. DOI: 10.1515/gao\_31.
- van Nahl, Jan A., 2014c: Die Flüchtigkeit der Information. Wissenschaftsgeschichte im digitalen Zeitalter. Berlin. (Transformationen von Wissen und Wissenschaft im digitalen Zeitalter 3.)
- van Nahl, Jan A., 2014d: Verwehter Traum? Ältere Skandinavistik zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts. In: *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 172, pp. 139–42.
- van Nahl, Jan A., 2015: "Wuchernder Wildwuchs"? Andreas Heusler und die Mittelalterphilologie. In: *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 144, pp. 421–31.
- van Nahl, Jan A., forthcoming a: Digital Norse. In: *The Ashgate research companion to the medieval saga*. Ed. by Ármann Jakobsson & Sverrir Jakobsson. Farnham.
- van Nahl, Jan A., forthcoming b: Review Lukas Rösli: Topographien der eddischen Mythen. In: *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*.
- Novikoff, Alex J., 2013: *The medieval culture of disputation: pedagogy, practice, and performance*. Pennsylvania.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart, 2007: *Analogie und Offenbarung. Eine kritische Unter-*

- suchung zur Geschichte des Analogiebegriffs in der Lehre von der Gotteserkenntnis. Göttingen.
- Q. Horati Flacci Opera. Ed. by F. Klingner. 2008. Leipzig.
- Redzich, Carola, 2009: Quod vides scribe in libro. Zum Verhältnis von visionärer Schau und ihrer sprachlichen Vermitteltheit in der Apokalypseauslegung vom 8. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert. In: Sehen und Sichtbarkeit in der Literatur des deutschen Mittelalters. Ed. by R. Bauschke, S. Coxon & M. Joens. London. (21. Anglo-German Colloquium.) Pp. 272–89.
- Rösl, Lukas, 2015: Topographien der eddischen Mythen. Eine Untersuchung zu den Raumnarrativen und den narrativen Räumen in der Lieder-Edda und der Prosa-Edda. Tübingen. (Beiträge zur Nordischen Philologie 55.)
- Sävborg, Daniel, 2009: Avstånd, gräns och förundran. Möten med de övernaturliga i islänningasagan. In: Greppaminni. Rit til heiðurs Vésteini Ólasyni sjötugum. Ed. by Margrét Eggertsdóttir. Reykjavík. Pp. 323–49.
- Snorra Edda ásamt Skálda og þar með fylgjandi ritgjörðum. Ed. by R. Rask. 1818. Stockholm.
- Snorri Sturluson. Háttatal. Ed. by A. Faulkes. 1991. Oxford.
- Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla. Ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. 1941–51. Reykjavík. (Íslensk fornrit 26–28.)
- Snorri Sturluson. The Uppsala Edda. Ed. by Heimir Pálsson. Transl. by A. Faulkes. 2012. London.
- Strohschneider, Peter, 1997: Situationen des Textes. Okkasionelle Bemerkungen zur 'New Philology'. In: Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie 116, pp. 62–86.
- Torfi H. Tulinius, 2002: The matter of the North. The rise of literary fiction in thirteenth-century Iceland. Odense. (The Viking Collection 13.)
- Unzeitig, Monika, 2010: Autornamen und Autorschaft. Bezeichnung und Konstruktion in der deutschen und französischen Erzählliteratur des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts. Berlin. (Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters 139.)
- Víðar Pálsson, 2008: Pagan mythology in Christian society. In: Gripla 19, pp. 123–55.
- de Vries, Jan, 1930: Ginnungagap. In: Acta Philologica Scandinavia 5, pp. 41–66.
- Wanner, Kevin J., 2008: Snorri Sturluson and the Edda. The conversion of cultural capital in medieval Scandinavia. Toronto.
- Waßenhoven, Dominik, 2006: Skandinavier unterwegs in Europa (1000–1250). Untersuchungen zu Mobilität und Kulturtransfer auf prosopographischer Grundlage. Berlin. (Europa im Mittelalter 8.)
- Weber, Gerd W., 1984: Ältere Skandinavistik – ein verwehender Traum? In: Die Skandinavistik zwischen gestern und morgen. Bestandsaufnahme und Zukunftsperspektiven eines ‚kleinen Faches‘. Ed. by B. Henningsen & R. Pelka. Sankelmark. (Schriftenreihe der Akademie Sankelmark, NF 59.) Pp. 25–37.
- Weber, Gerd W., 1986: Edda, Jüngere. In: Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 6. Ed. by H. Beck et al. Berlin-New York. Pp. 394–412.
- Weber, Gerd W., 1987a: Intellegere historiam. Typological perspectives of Nordic

- prehistory (in Snorri, Saxo, Widukind, and others). In: *Tradition og historieskrivning*. Ed. by K. Hastrup & P. Meulengracht Sørensen. Århus. Pp. 95–141.
- Weber, Gerd W., 1987b: *Synkretische oder ästhetische Wahrheit? Zur Methodenkritik in der Saga-Forschung*. In: *skandinavistik* 11/2, pp. 141–48.
- Wellendorf, Jonas, 2012: *True records of events that could have taken place: fictionality in vision literature*. In: *Medieval narratives between history and fiction. From the centre to the periphery of Europe, c. 1100–1400*. Ed. by P.A. Agapitos & L. B. Mortensen. Copenhagen. Pp. 141–65.
- Whaley, Diana, 2014: *The fury of the Northmen and the poetics of violence*. In: *Narration and hero. Recounting the deeds of heroes in literature and art of the early medieval period*. Ed. by V. Millet & H. Sahn. Berlin-Boston. (Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde 87.) Pp. 71–94.
- Zink, Michel, 2014: *Littérature française du Moyen Âge*. 2<sup>e</sup> édition. Paris.

## Summary

Drawing attention to the intrinsic relation between fact and fiction in medieval literature, recent studies have proved any attempt at a strict separation of a poetical, mythological, and societal dimension of the Prose Edda unsustainable. Facing this challenging situation, modern scholarship is evidently in need of a renewed discussion beyond language borders. The present paper aims at discussing possible theological influences on Gylfaginning, as having been put forth by current German scholarship. Medieval scholars in Northern Europe were not only influenced by literary developments from other countries but also gained knowledge about important happenings all over the known world, such as the famous Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. One of the gathering's important conclusions was the fixing of the formula of analogy, which became a major resort in the face of urgent theological questions. There are substantial indications that the conception of Gylfaginning was influenced by this theological discourse. The concept of analogy does not only introduce a new reading of Gylfaginning, but could also enable a better understanding of the Prose Edda's role in the literary developments of the medieval North.

**Keywords:** Prose Edda, Snorri Sturluson, theology, fictionality, methodology

*Jan Alexander van Nahl*  
*University of Iceland*  
*Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies*  
*IS-101 Reykjavík, Iceland*  
*jvannahl@hi.is*

