

THE MEAD OF POETRY: MYTH AND METAPHOR

The myth concerning the origin of poetry must play a major role in any discussion of Old Norse poetic theory. There are two chief sources for our knowledge of this myth: the long prose account in *Snorra Edda* and three independent allusions in *Hávamál*. A comprehensive account of the various mythological details has been given by Professor E. O. G. Turville-Petre, while Professor A. G. van Hamel has attempted to analyze the meaning for poets inherent in the myth¹.

Snorri's version is a late compilation of various strands. To Ægir's question, "whence originated that art you call poetry?" ("Hvaðan af hefir hafizk sú íþrótt, er þér kallið skáldskap?") the god Bragi replies with a full account not, as we would expect today, of the creative process but of the making and winning of the mead which is poetry in a quite concrete sense². Snorri does not suggest that the myth is an allegory or a symbolic abstraction, and we would not have expected him to. *Skáldskaparmál* is a descriptive rather than a speculative work, and therefore the myths recounted in it are set down because they supply invaluable background to poetic imagery.

After their war amongst themselves the gods signified their truce by mingling their spittle in one vessel³. From this spittle they then created a man and called him Kvasir, and Snorri describes him as "svá vitr, at engi spyrr hann þeira hluta, er eigi kann hann órlausn." Kvasir, then, is clearly the personification of wisdom, characteristically seen as a divine creation. There is an analogy in Irish mythology, in which Wisdom is personified as the son of three gods, Brian, Iuchar and Iucharba⁴. Kvasir was subsequently killed by the two dwarfs, Fjalarr and Galarr. Originally this must have been a quest for wisdom, though the murder is not well motivated: Kvasir was killed for his blood, since this is what the dwarfs take, but their callous slaughtering of the giant Gillingr and his wife makes one cautious of attributing obvious motivation to them. Dwarfs are elsewhere associated with both wisdom and blood⁵: they are repositories of wisdom, and *Völuspá* 9 tells that they were made from blood:

... hverr scyldi dverga, dróttin scepcia,
ór Brimis blóði oc ór Bláins leggiom⁶.

For present purposes, however, the significance lies in what the dwarfs do with Kvasir's blood: "þeir blendu hunangi við blóðit, ok varð þar af mjöðr sá, er hverr, er af drekkur, verðr skáld eða fræðimaðr." The second result, *fræðimaðr* "scholar, learned man", does not play a prominent part in the myth. The mead is essentially the mead of poetry, not of wisdom, though there is one example of *fræði* "learning, knowledge" used in a kenning for poet. This is *Holmgöngu-Bersi* 10:

fell fyr fræða spilli
framm þórarinn rammi.

Poetry Myth

S Marginson



Poetry Myth:

The Enigmatic Realm of **Poetry Myth**: Unleashing the Language is Inner Magic

In a fast-paced digital era where connections and knowledge intertwine, the enigmatic realm of language reveals its inherent magic. Its capacity to stir emotions, ignite contemplation, and catalyze profound transformations is nothing lacking extraordinary. Within the captivating pages of **Poetry Myth** a literary masterpiece penned by a renowned author, readers attempt a transformative journey, unlocking the secrets and untapped potential embedded within each word. In this evaluation, we shall explore the book's core themes, assess its distinct writing style, and delve into its lasting affect on the hearts and minds of those that partake in its reading experience.

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