

**The Fantastical Theology of Snorri Sturluson:
A Reading of the Prologue of *Snorra Edda***

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This paper wishes to analyze the Prologue of *Snorra Edda* in order to determine its *intentio scriptoris* and its function within the whole of Snorri's work. Its function has often been restricted to providing a frame to *Gylfaginning* alone, and its *intentio scriptoris* is usually said to be to show its author is a good Christian despite the pagan tales he is telling. Thus Anthony Faulkes (1983) wrote that the Prologue 'relates only to *Gylfaginning*, and thus is not in fact a prologue to the *Edda* as a whole, and is a narrative introduction that sets the scene for the 'frame' within which the mythological stories in *Gylfaginning* are told. (...) The prologue is necessary on a narrative level to define the situation, give a historical setting, and introduce the characters (...)' (p. 284). Anthony Faulkes is right, but only about the second part of the Prologue. The second part indeed tells how the gods came from Asia to Scandinavia and thus gives a background for the fiction-frame set at the beginning of *Gylfaginning*. But the first part of the Prologue has nothing to do with this frame as it does not deal with the Nordic gods at all. Such a reading tends to ignore the rest of the Prologue.

Margaret Clunies Ross (1987) pointed out that it is often assumed that the Prologue is particularly relevant to *Gylfaginning*, 'but its referential value for *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal* as exposition of the language of the old religion should not be ignored'; my contention is that not only should it not be ignored, but that it should be emphasized as it deserves.

As to the other function, concerning the Prologue as a whole, there is general agreement amongst scholars that, providing it is by Snorri, it 'places the account of Scandinavian myth in *Gylfaginning* in 'the universal context of Christian cosmography.'" (Nordal, (2001), p. 43, quoting Margaret Clunies Ross (1987), p. 10). Anthony Faulkes states that one of Snorri's motives for including the Prologue in the group of texts gathered under the title *Edda* 'was to avoid the criticism that his stories were dangerous to orthodoxy' (Faulkes, 1983).

In a nutshell, Snorri might have felt that his telling of pagan tales needed some written guarantee of his Christian faith, and the Prologue would work as this guarantee. This is, of course, providing the Prologue gives an orthodox account of the biblical episodes he sets as a general frame for the rest.

There are therefore two things we have to examine :

1. What might the function of the first part of the Prologue be, since it does not introduce *Gylfaginning* ?
2. Is the function of the whole Prologue really to testify to the Christian faith of its writer?

It is legitimate to ask whether, assuming the provision of a Christian frame to the general work was really Snorri's main aim, he convincingly managed to do so or not. As we look more closely at what is actually said in the biblical part of the Prologue, and especially at what is not said, there is reason to doubt the efficiency of these motives as to the avoidance of criticism due to unorthodoxy.

The Prologue indeed deals with episodes from Genesis: the Creation of the world, the Creation of Adam and Eve, Noah's Flood, and, in the extended version provided by the Codex Wormianus, the Babel episode. This is all.

What is striking is not so much what is told as what is not told. Many key episodes that would have been expected in a Christian text are missing: the Garden of Eden, the Fall of Man, the account of the devil (in the shape of a snake), Cain and Abel, etc. It could be argued that *guðs boðorð* and *guðs hlýðni* (*Edda* 1848-1887, I, 2) are references to the Fall of Man, but these would only be allusions, not narrative: thus evil as such does not exist in the text. Snorri only speaks of the unfairness of men, *metnaður*, which could be read as akin to the deadly sin of pride. The word is used in the episode of Noah's Flood and again in the episode of Babel. Nevertheless, this attempt to translate what the text offers into what the Bible and its summaries contain demonstrates the omission of some topics.

Snorri also seems to allow himself great liberty in the telling of those he decides to relate. For example, when he tells of what happened after the Flood to the descendants of the sons of Noah, he states that the descendants of Shem *herjuðu i þann luta veraldar, sem bygðir afspringr Sems, frændr þeirra* (*Edda* 1848-1887, I, 8). This is to be found nowhere in the Bible, or in the sources or parallel texts usually quoted, such as *Veraldar saga*, *Hauksbók* or Ælfric's homilies (e.g. *De falsis diis*). It must therefore be considered an innovation by Snorri.

This raises doubts about his aim in telling these biblical episodes. Although they set the work in a biblical frame, they are not convincing as to Snorri's orthodoxy. Supporting this idea, Gísli Sigurðsson (2004) writes 'to say the least, Snorri's works show little sign of an author with spiritual devotion, immersing himself in the scholastic and religious literature of the medieval Church' (p. 5). Snorri's vocabulary is somewhat surprising: the key words of the Christian faith are missing. There is no mention of the Jews (as in *Veraldar Saga*), of Christians, sin, evil, alliance, *heiðingi*, etc. The Prologue is surprisingly poor in religious vocabulary although it is supposed to set a religious frame and is obsessed throughout with naming and remembering names, as we will see later. In other words, though it states the importance of naming, the Prologue does not name what it should in order to make itself fully orthodox.

Instead of wondering whether Snorri was strongly Christian or not, basing one's answer on his *Edda*, it would probably be more fruitful to wonder what one would be called if he believed everything that is told, but only what is told in it. He would hardly be called an orthodox Christian; more probably, he would appear heretical.

On the top of that, the status of the heathen stories told by Snorri is not clear at all: they are not to be trusted, but they should not, on the other hand, be ruled out as untrue. This point of view is expressed in *Skáldskaparmál*:

En ekki er at gleyma eða ósanna svá þessar sögur svá at taka ör skáldskapinurn fornar kenningar þær er höfuðskái hafa sér líka látit. En eigi skulu kristnir menn trúá á heiðin goð ok eigi á sannynði þessar sagnar annan veg en svá sem hér finnsk í upphafi bókar er sagt er frá atburðum þeim er mannfólkit viltisk frá réttu trú, ok þá næst frá Tyrkjum, hvernig Asiamenn þeir er Æsir eru kallaðir fölsuðu frásagnir þær frá þeim tíðindum er gerðusk í Troju til þess at landfólkit skyldi trúá þá guð vera. (Faulkes (1998), p. 5)

It is not clear what the reader should make of these stories: they are neither true nor false, they should neither be trusted nor forgotten. Their status is so strange that Kurt Schier (1981) came up with the concept of 'relative truth': '*Mythen müssen vielmehr als eine relative Wahrheit betrachtet werden, sie spiegeln das beschränkte Wissen der Menschen ausserhalb des christlichen Glaubens wider*', and read them as some sort of fictionalized scientific knowledge, which is a way to avoid deciding whether they express a belief in supernatural or rational explanations. Margaret Clunies Ross (1992) expresses the same embarrassment: 'Thus I have used the term 'mythological fictions' to signify the special epistemological status of these stories between the worlds of mythical truth and fiction.'

There is indeed great embarrassment¹ about whether the Prologue is by Snorri or not, whether it makes its author Christian or not, whether it shows faith in the heathen gods or not, and whether it has any function in the *Edda*. Scholars hesitate endlessly between diverse positions.

This embarrassment, based on hesitation about how one should read and interpret the text leads us to define the theology and cosmogony developed in the Prologue (and in the rest of the *Edda*) as fantastical, following Tzvetan Todorov's definition. Todorov Tzvetan (1970) writes that: '*L'hésitation du lecteur est donc la première condition du fantastique*' (p. 36), and that '*Celui-ci exige que trois conditions soient remplies. D'abord, il faut que le texte oblige le lecteur à considérer le monde des personnages comme un monde de personnes vivantes et à hésiter entre une explication naturelle et une explication surnaturelle des événements évoqués. Ensuite, cette hésitation peut être ressentie également par un personnage ; ainsi le rôle de lecteur est pour ainsi dire confié à un personnage et dans le même temps l'hésitation se trouve représentée, elle devient un des thèmes de l'œuvre ; dans le cas d'une lecture naïve, le lecteur réel s'identifie avec le personnage. Enfin il importe que le lecteur adopte une certaine attitude à l'égard du texte : il refusera aussi bien l'interprétation allégorique que l'interprétation "poétique"*' (pp. 37-38).

Hesitation is obvious as we read the many articles mentioned in the bibliography, and it does not apply only to the reading of the Prologue, but also to that of the rest of the *Edda*, starting with *Gylfaginning*.

In *Gylfaginning*, where Snorri stages the contest between Gylfi and the Æsir about heathen mythology, it is striking to find so many motifs that either parallel Christian holy history or remind us of parts of the catholic *credo*. Because of them, *Gylfaginning*, seems closer to the Christian faith (despite its telling of all the heathen myths) than the Prologue. Thus we read in *Gylfaginning*:

Þá spyr Gángleri : 'Hvar er sá guð? Eða hvat má hann? Eða hvat hefir hann unnit framverka?'

Hár segir : 'Lifir hann of allar aldir ok stjórnar öllu ríki sínum ok ræðr öllum lutum, stórum ok smám.'

Þá mælti Jafnhár : 'Hann smíðaði himin ok jörð, ok loptin ok alla eign þeirra.'

Þá mælti Þriði : 'Hitt er mest, er hann gerði manninn, ok gaf honum önd, þá er lifa skal ok aldri týnast, þótt líkaminn fúni at moldu eða brenni at

¹ E.g. Beck, Heinrich (2004), Clunies Ross, Margaret (1987), Clunies Ross, Margaret (1998), Dronke, Ursula and Peter (1977), Faulkes, Anthony (1983), Holtsmark, A. (1964).

ösku, ok skulu allir menn lifa, þeir er rétt eru siðaðir, ok vera með honum sjálfum þar sem heitir Gimli eða Vingólf. En vándir menn fara til Heljar ok þaðan í Niflhel ; þat er niðr í enn niunda heim.' Þá mælti Gángleri: 'Hvat hafðist hann áðr at, en himinn ok jörð væri görr?' (Faulkes (1988), 8-9).

The last question parallels one Augustinus mentions in his *Confessiones* (11, 14): Ecce respondeo dicenti: 'Quid faciebat Deus, antequam faceret caelum et terram?' Respondeo non illud, quod quidam respondisse perhibetur ioculariter eludens quaestionis violentiam: 'Alta, inquit, scrutantibus gehennas parabat'.

In addition to this resemblance, which might be coincidental, it has been pointed out by Anne Holtmark (1964, 18) that Snorri makes great use of Christian vocabulary in this passage: '*Han (Hár) lar ham (Gylve) dertil bruke ord som hører kristentroen til: trúa e-n Guð, og játa e-n Guð, verbene oversetter lat. credere og confiteri*'.²

It is worth mentioning that Snorri uses the word *guð* (which is usually applied only to the Christian God) to refer to the many gods of the Nordic Pantheon, not the more usual *god*. The mention of a Nordic version of Heaven and Hell granted according to the deeds of men is another parallel that is very troubling. But the confusion reaches its apex as the first sentence of the Prologue is repeated almost exactly in *Gylfaginning*: *Hann smíðaði himin ok jörð, ok loptin ok alla eign þeirra*, the main difference being the verb used to describe the act of Creation: *skapaði* in the Prologue and *smíðaði* in *Gylfaginning*.

As we proceed further into *Snorra Edda*, the hesitation aroused by the Prologue becomes stronger and more troubling. A closer comparison between the Prologue and *Gylfaginning* shows numerous connections and echoes: the Prologue, after the oblivion of the name of God, tells of the first developments of an explanation of natural phenomena: *Björg ok steina þýddu þeir móti tönnum ok beinum kvikindi* (Snorri (1848-1887), p. 4), which *Gylfaginning* seems to echo in the chapter 8: *jörðin var gör af holdinu, en björgin af beinum, grjót ok urðir gerðu þeir af tönnum ok jöxtum, ok af þeim beinum er brotin voru.* (*Ibid.*, p. 48). It is difficult to decide what to make of this parallel: is the Prologue rationalising the myth about what is made out of Ymir's body or is the myth the key to the analogy described in the Prologue?

The effect produced on the reader by this parallel is increasing hesitation and confusion. Where does the text stand as between a Christian vision of the world and its history and a pagan one? Scholars such as Anne Holtmark (1964, *passim*) keep stating that Snorri was a Christian, which he is very likely to have been, but the text of the Prologue is certainly not an indication to argue he was.

In the famous passage of *Skáldskaparmál* quoted above it is said we should read the text as Christians, that is to say, without believing the stories; this has been understood as a proof of the Christianity of Snorri and his readership, and quoted as such. But could it not be understood conversely? The need to tell Christians they

² Anne Holtmark is referring here to chapter 5 of *Gylfaginning*: 'Þá mælti Gángleri: hvemig oxu ættir saman þaðan ? eða skapaðist svá, at fleiri menn urðu ? eða trúir þú þann guð, er nú sagðir þú frá ? Þá svarar Hár: fyr öngan mun játum vær hann guð;' These words do sound strangely Christian.

should read as Christians may have arisen from the uncertainty of the text itself and maybe from the fact that Snorri was aware of its ambiguities.

The Prologue is thus not satisfactory from a Christian point of view. It does not provide a proper Christian frame. If we compare it to the sources or parallel texts usually alleged for it, we find that episodes found in most of them are missing, (e.g. the Fall,³ Cain and Abel, Moses as author of the book of stories of the *Paradisus*, the angels (*Ibid.*, p. 4), the *Gydinga folk* (see Benediktsson (1944), p. 3), etc.

Snorri omits some episodes, transforms others, and even invents two. The version of the Prologue in the Codex Wormianus contains a version of the Babel episode that gives details absent from most of the medieval versions and commentaries: neither the Bible nor the commentaries on the Babel episode specify that the confusion divides the languages according to profession: *En forsmíðir voru II ok LXX, ok svá margar túngur hafja síðan dreifzt um veröldina* (Snorri (1848-1887), p. 10). A century later one can find a similar idea in Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, whose telling of the Babel episode bears many similarities to Snorri's.⁴ But Snorri's main invention is the oblivion of the name of God, which is told nowhere in the Bible, but which is important in the Prologue, as we shall see.

The second invented event concerns the descendants of Ham and Shem. In the Bible, Canaan, the son of Ham, is cursed and his sons are sentenced to be the slaves of the descendants of Shem: the Shemites thus become the masters of some of the Hamites. Another son of Ham is Nemrod, who is responsible for the Tower of Babel. The Prologue, instead of this version, explains that some men became so proud (*svá langt færðu þeir fram sinn metnað*) that *þeir Affricani, komnir af Cham, herjuðu í þann luta veraldar, sem bygði afspringr Sems, frændr þeirra*. (Snorri (1848-1887), 8). This war between the Hamites and the Shemites is an invention by Snorri. It can scarcely be justified from a biblical point of view, but it parallels a passage of *Heimskringla*, the war between the Vanir and the Æsir, saying that they *Herjuðu hvárir land annarra ok gerðu skaða*. Reading the Prologue, a reader familiar with Nordic mythology might have thought about this war between the gods.

I have spoken of Snorri's fantastical theology because instead of clarifying the distinction and relationship between untrue tales and the true history of the world, he tends to bring a great deal of confusion, by mixing vocabularies, choosing some episodes and not others, warning against the oblivion of tales that, according to the true faith, should be forgotten, since they not only fail to follow the teaching of the Church, but might also be a threat to the authority of the Church.

³ Margaret Clunies Ross (1987), 55, remarks that some passages of *Edda* 'remind one of the first part of Snorri's Prologue where he describes how postlapsarian man used his senses to understand the animate nature of the cosmos and its parts and their responsiveness to their unique Controller.' But the first part of the Prologue does not tell the *lapsus homini* as such. The notion of postlapsarian man is thus an overstatement in this context.

⁴ Dante (1991), 16: 'Solis etenim in uno convenientibus actu eadem loquela remansit: puta cunctis architectoribus una, cunctis saxa volventibus una, cunctis ea parantibus una; et sic de singulis operantibus accidit. Quot quot autem exercitiū varietates tendebant ad opus, tot tot ydiomatibus tunc genus humanum disiungitur; et quanto excellentius exercebant, tanto ruidius nunc barbariusque locuntur.'

From this, the hesitating reader can conclude either that the text is not very effective or that it should be read some other way. I would like to put forth a hypothesis to show that there is unity in the Prologue, that it has a function in the *Edda* and a strong thematic connection to the whole work; it may even be the key to it.

It has often been noticed how concerned the Prologue is with language, but this is rarely recognised as a central theme of the text.⁵ Ulrike Strerah-Bolz (especially 1998, also 1991) was the first to highlight the emphasis Snorri places on linguistic matters in the Prologue: 'Sprache und Religion sind demnach die beiden Elemente, die in der Snorra Edda aufs engste miteinander verbunden werden'. (1998, 270).

Margaret Clunies Ross (1998) gives the reason why Snorri would link language and religion: the motifs of poetry, its vocabulary and figures are founded on the heathen religion. So 'if young poets did not understand the story-line of Old Norse myths, they stood no chance of being able to understand and use skaldic kennings and so perpetuate traditional forms of poetic composition. The *Edda* text, through the *intentio scriptoris*, thus situates the systematisation of mythic knowledge at a point of impeding cultural loss. Put it another way, the impetus to systematise and to narrate myth came about when the external cultural cohesion necessary for its real transmission was under threat.' (1998, 11) She explains in a footnote: 'The point here is, of course, that myth is necessary to the formation of many kinds of skaldic kennings, whether the discourse of the poetry is centrally 'about' myth or not. A lack of understanding the myth thus cripples a poet's ability to use the kenning system as a whole' (1998, 11), hence to write poetry at all.

The old religion is intertwined with the language. The Christian religion, because of its refusal to coexist with any other religion, demands the disappearance of the motifs of the old religion, since there is a risk those who tell and transmit the myths might believe in it to some extent. But with the disappearance of the old heathen religion, a great deal of the poetical resources would also disappear: first, the ability to understand the *heiti*, then the ability to decipher and create *kenningar* and to compose.

Each part of *Snorra Edda* deals with some of the motifs threatened by the general Conversion and the growing oblivion of the traditional culture: *Háttatal* deals with the rules of composition, of metrics; *Skáldskaparmál* deals with the system of *kenningar* and gives lists of *heiti*; and *Gylfaginning* is mainly concerned with naming the characters, that is to say *heiti*, and sometimes explaining both the myth underlying the name and how the phrase that uses the name (*orðtak*) originated in myth; it helps to understand and remember names and stories.

Snorra Edda deals with memory as much as language, maybe more than with religion: it can be read as the organisation of memory for future generations. As quoted in the passage of *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri is concerned about the ability of young skalds to understand the old poems and create new ones. This is why, although they are not to be trusted, they must not be forgotten or proven altogether false. The necessity to avoid proving them false is not religious but linguistic: it is necessary to keep alive these stories in order to preserve the next generation's access to the *heiti*, *orðtök* and *kenningar* these stories contain and explain.

⁵ Among others, Clunies Ross (1987, 15): 'Snorri makes some important statements about language in the Prologue to the *Edda*.'

A name is lost when it ceases to be used; a story when it ceases to be told; a skill when it ceases to be practised; and poems cease to be understood when their motifs have become obscure. *Snorra Edda* can be read as a strong remedy against the oblivion of names, stories, poems and poetic skill. This is made not only clear but necessary by the first part of the Prologue, if we read it as a text showing what is at stake in the *Edda* rather than (and not instead of) a text concerned only with Christian orthodoxy and the necessity to prove faithful to it.

The question that brings unity in the Prologue is that of memory or oblivion of the names, and the Prologue seems just as concerned with names as with those bearing them. The naming system is indeed a key to the traditional knowledge, as Margaret Clunies Ross wrote: 'all languages, including by inference the Scandinavian tongues, preserved in their naming systems a record of that understanding.' (1987, 57)

The Prologue is the story of men's relationship to names: from use to carelessness and oblivion, and from ignorance to some knowledge and its new names and their translation:

After Creation, men first neglect God's commandment (*óræktu guðs boðorð*, Snorri (1848-1887), 2); in the next episode, after the Flood:

þeir vildu ekki nefna guð; en hverr mundi þá frá segja sonum þeirra frá guðs stórmerkjum. Svá kom, at þeir týndu guðs nafni, ok víðast um veröldina fannst eigi sá maður, er deili kunni á skapara sínum (*Ibid.*, 4)

First they refuse to use the name, then they lose it and the knowledge of God himself: from what follows, we can assume that this name was given to them by God himself, since afterwards they need to give names to things themselves.

They then get to know some things about the world through observation, and as soon as they know these things, especially about the earth, it is said that they gave her (the earth) a name (*Ibid.*, 4). As their knowledge expands and applies to new objects, they need more names to record it:

En til þess, at heldr mætti frá segja, eðr í minni festa, þá gáfu þeir nöfn með sjálfum sér, ok hefir þessi átrúnör á marga hund breyzt, svá sem þjóðirnar skiptust ok tungurnar greindust (*Ibid.*, 6).

These names are given by men and suffer the outrages of time that make them unstable and easily threatened by human fickleness: as the people disperse, the languages branch and the names are multiplied, so that translation becomes necessary.

The danger threatening the stability of names is again expressed in the Babel episode (in the expanded version in the Codex Wormianus)⁶ as a result of which the languages are (once more?) divided so that words are multiplied and oblivion becomes worse (they forget that they have forgotten): *ok svá týndu þeir sannleiknum, at eingi vissi skapara sinn, útan þeir einir menn, sem töluðu ebreska tungu, þá sem gekk fyrri stöpulsmíðina*; the exception of the Hebrew tongue can also be found in *Veraldar Saga* (Benediktsson, 1944, 14), with more details on the person of Heber, but without the link between languages and the professions.

A result of the confusion of languages is the multiplication of names and the growing loss of truth:

⁶ It is noteworthy that in the expanding version (even if we assume the expansion is by another hand), it is Babel that is added. It is possible to see that as an indication of the importance of language and the dangers it faces.

ok sem tǫngnasíptið var orðit, þá fjölguðust svá nöfnin manna ok annarra luta, ok sjá sami Zoroastres hafði mörg nöfn (...). Af honum hófst skurgögoða villa; ok sem hann var blótaðr, var hann kallaðr Baal; þann köllum vér Bel. Hann hafði ok mörg önnur nöfn. En sem nöfn fjölguðust, þá týndist með því sannleikrinn.' (Snorri (1848-1887), 10).

Against this linguistic plague, it is necessary to keep track of the shifting names of the equivalents in order to translate.

So the second part of the Prologue starts a great work of naming and translating the names of the same beings. This part traces the origins of the Nordic gods back East all the way to Troy, and it has been little noticed how it is obsessed with names and their constant change, mainly through translation: *er kölluð var Trója, þar sem vér köllum Tyrkland'* (*Ibid.*, 12).

Actually it is not only the second part of the Prologue that shows this obsession. *Gylfaginning*, too, is all about naming and listing names, giving sources for their origin and the genealogy of their bearer. Chapter 20 of *Gylfaginning* has Gángleri stating that: '*Geysi mörg heiti hafð þér gefit honum, ok þat veit trúa mín, at þetta mun vera mikill fróðleikr, sá er hér kann skyn ok dæmi, hverir atburðir hafa orðit sér til hvers þessa nafns.*' and he is always questioning and challenging Hár, Jafnhár and Þriði about the many names of the gods.

Hár's response to Gángleri states the importance of the knowledge of names and their origin:

Þá segir Hár : '*Mikil skynsemi er at rifja [rína] vandliga, en þó er þér þat skjótast at segja, at flest heiti hafa verit gefin af þeim atburði, at svá margar sem eru greinir tǫngnanna í veröldinni, þá þykkjast allar þjóðir þurfa at breyta nafni hans til sinnar túngu til ákalls ok bæna fyrir sjálfum sér, en sumir atburðir til þessa heita hafa gerzt í ferðum hans, ok er þat fært í frásagnir, ok muntu eigi mega fróðr maðr heita, ef þú skalt eigi kunna segja frá þeim stórtíðindum.'*

Though one should not, of course, invoke and pray using those names, it is crucial that they are remembered, as well as their genealogy. This statement refers to the narrative of the travels of the Æsir at the end of the Prologue, where they go from Troy to Norway, translating their names into the local tongue as they change lands; it also refers to the division of languages told in the Babel episode, which is said to be the result of the separation of mankind into different groups.

Knowledge in medieval Iceland was about names, genealogies, and stories, since the society had only been using writing for two centuries and still had the habit of relying on human memory. This statement echoes the warning of *Skáldskaparmál*: the stories should be remembered for they are the heritage of the people of Iceland, though they are not true as the biblical events are.

It has probably not been emphasized enough how *Gylfaginning* deals with names and etymology. It not so much tells stories as records them, along with names and stanzas, some of which are to be found nowhere else. The oblivion of God's name serves as a warning about the constant threat to linguistic integrity that arise from the branching of languages, linguistic evolution, and simple neglect.

It is possible to fight the neglect caused by time and history by remembering and using the names. Snorri, as Anne Holtmark pointed out (1964, 18),⁷ endlessly uses the verbs *kalla*, *heita* and *nefna* both in the Prologue and in *Gylfaginning*. Naming is indeed the way men conquer knowledge and keep it alive, the way they can try to keep together their language and nurture their memory. Thus, true or false, the stories have to be remembered, as they are necessary to the poetry and the memory.

The Prologue seems mainly concerned with linguistic stability and patrimony. Anthony Faulkes (1983, 296) remarked that discussion of the branching of languages is rather rare, apart from the beginning of the *First Grammatical Treatise*. Nothing supports the idea of Snorri being influenced by Isidore. It may be a necessary response to a threat that was arising upon the tradition of Old Norse. The Prologue could be read as supporting such a response: its *intentio scriptoris* might be to warn us about the kind of text we are dealing with, to be a key to our reading of the *Edda*, to reading it as a book of linguistic memory against the danger of time and neglect.

The first lines of the *First Grammatical Treatise* state that in all countries, men record in books what seems most memorable: lore (usually understood as historical), law and whatever seems most memorable.⁸ In the *Edda*, Snorri records the stories, names and poetic devices that need to be remembered and states the necessity of recording them. It shows a remarkable linguistic awareness, and it produced a book thanks to which the contemporary reader can still have access to some of the most valuable literary treasures of early Europe. That this literature could survive, despite the Christianisation and the Reformation, can be truly called fantastical, in the common sense of the word.

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⁷ "Hann kaller vi' – det er søsnes navn på ham, Snorre kjenner et annet navn på 'den gamle rimturs', og han forutsetter at leseren også gjøre det. Formelen *kólkum vér, kallaz, er... heita, heitir* går ofte igjen, den tjener til å gjøre utsagnet fremmed, og den svarer til latin *dicitur, nuntiat, vocatur, vocamus* som hører til i middelaldersk lærebokstil, Isidor bruker den i nesten hvert kapittel.' The Latin reference is not so extraordinary as the great number of occurrences of those expressions.

⁸ Benediktsson (1972), p. 296: 'Í flestum löndum, setja menn á bækr annat tveggja þann fróðleik er þar innan landz hefir giorz eða þann annan er minnisamligaztr þikkir þo at annars staðar hafi helldr giorz eða lög sin setia menn á bækr hvert piöð a sína tungu.'

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