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The Poetic Edda - Illustrated: Tolkien's Bookshelf #2 (Volume 2)

Olive Bray

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‘TOLKIEN’S BOOKSHELF #2 THE POETIC EDDA – ILLUSTRATED’ ‘The Poetic Edda’, also known as ‘The Elder Edda’, is a collection of thirty-four Icelandic poems, interwoven with prose, dating from the 9th century to the 12th. It includes the definitive stories about wise Odin, hammer-wielding Thor, mischievous Loki and the other gods and goddesses of Asgard. J. R. R. Tolkien readily acknowledged his debt to this source. He was sixteen years old when the Viking Club of London published this classic translation by Olive Bray, complete with thirty-four beautiful illustrations. Readers of Tolkien’s work will easily spot his inspirations - the names of the dwarves in ‘The Hobbit’; riddle games; Mirkwood; the Paths of the Dead; an underworld creature being tricked into remaining above-ground until dawn, when sunlight turns him to stone; different races calling a single thing by various names, and much more. Tolkien, a philologist deeply interested in languages, also read ‘The Poetic Edda’ in its original Icelandic. We have included the Icelandic verses untouched, just as they were in his day, alongside their English translations. Illustrator W. G. Collingwood was an English author, artist, antiquary and professor. In 1897 he travelled to Iceland where he spent three months exploring the actual sites that are the settings for the medieval Icelandic sagas. His study of Norse and Anglican archaeology made him widely recognized as a leading authority, and his Art Nouveau-style illustrations for the Bray edition are rich with symbolism. ‘The Poetic Edda’, the most important existing source on Norse mythology and Germanic heroic legends, is part of the literature that influenced Tolkien’s inner world, informing the creation of ‘The Hobbit’ and ‘The Lord of the Rings’.

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