

The Gods in Exile

The Twilight of Myth in the Poetry of Charles Leconte de Lisle

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This study examines the references to Norse mythology in Charles Leconte de Lisle's *Poèmes Barbares*, with particular regard to two poems: *La Légende des Nornes* and *La Vision de Snorr*. Through a linguistic comparison with the original Norse sources (the *Poetic Edda*, Snorri's *Edda*, skaldic poetry), the study highlights the particular ways in which the author re-elaborates the mythical material.

In Leconte de Lisle's work, myth becomes dramatic action, a representation of the everlasting struggle between light and darkness that ends with the tragic contemplation of the ineluctable final conflagration. The ancient world of the Æsir and the Vanir, 'quand les Skaldes chantaient sur la harpe des Nornes'¹ is doomed to destruction.

The sources of *La Légende des Nornes* are the *Poetic Edda* (cf. Annexe 1) and Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* (cf. Annexe 2). In the *Völuspá*,²

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¹ *La Vision de Snorr*, v.30. All quotations from *Poèmes Barbares* are taken from: Leconte de Lisle Charles-Marie, *Poèmes Barbares*, Édition de Claudine Gohot-Mersch, Paris, Gallimard, 1985.

² 'Seeress's Prophecy' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 3). *Völuspá* is found in the *Codex Regius* manuscript (see Annexe 1) and in *Hauksbók* (ms. AM 371 4°, AM 544 4°, AM 675 4°, c.1290-1350), a compendium which belonged to the Icelandic law-man and scholar Haukr Erlendsson and which was in part written by him. Many of its stanzas are quoted or paraphrased in Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*.

the first poem of the *Poetic Edda*, the origin of the world is narrated, along with the ordering of the cosmos by the supreme deities and the birth of men, whose destiny is established by the three norns, who sit near the cosmic tree, the backbone of the universe. In the poem, we also read about the original conflict between the lineage of the Æsir and that of the Vanir and the death of Odin's son, Baldr. The final part is dedicated to the clash between the gods and the lineage of Loki, which will lead to the final destruction. It will be followed, however, by the rebirth and the beginning of a new cosmic cycle.³

The prophetess, at Óðinn's request, tells 'the ancient histories of men and gods, those which I remember from the first'.⁴ The female being draws on the supreme knowledge of the cycle of life, which manifests itself in fertility, and in this cyclical perspective, the linear concept of time moving from the past into the future in a straight line is deleted. The seeress knows the events of the future but is also the keeper of the ancient tradition; she has the original wisdom, which allows her give an account of the origin of the universe.

In Old Norse literature, the *völva* is the most frequently recurring figure with the power to predict the future. The term is believed to refer to the noun m. *völur*,⁵ 'rounded wand', with reference to the instrument used in divination rites, or to the noun f. *vala*,⁶ 'rounded bone', also referring to a tool used for predictions.⁷

It is a female skill, which appears as unbecoming and inconvenient for men, as can be seen from the words with which Loki addresses Óðinn in *Locasenna*,⁸ a poem from the *Poetic Edda*: *Enn þic síða kóðo Sámseyo í, oc draptu á vétt sem volor; vitca líki fórtu verþiód yfir, oc hugða ec þat*

³ Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern, I Text*, 5. Auflage, Heidelberg, Winter, 1983, p. 1-16.

⁴ Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, op. cit., p. 4. *Forn spioll fira, þau er fremst um man* (Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 1).

⁵ 'A round stick, staff' (Cleasby Richard – Guðbrandur Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1874, p. 721).

⁶ 'The rolling knuckle-bone' (*Ibid.*, p. 675).

⁷ De Vries Jan, *Altonordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Leiden, Brill 1977, p. 673-674. For further discussion see Horst Simone, *Merlin und die völva. Weissagungen im Altnordischen*, München, Utz, 2010.

⁸ 'Loki's quarrel'.

args aðal.⁹ In the *Ynglinga saga*, however, Óðinn has the power to know future events and is endowed with an ancient magical wisdom. Thus he knows that his offspring will settle in the northern part of the world.¹⁰

The first difference between Leconte de Lisle's poetic creation and its main source is the first-person narrative. In *La Légende des Nornes* it is not the seeress who tells the past and predicts the future but the norns: 'Elles sont assises sur les racines du frêne Yggdrasill'.¹¹ It is a pivotal choice, which highlights, from the very beginning, Leconte de Lisle's interpretation of the myth. The norns are presented as follows in *Völuspá*:

*Þaðan koma meyjar, margs vitandi
þrjár ór þeim sæ, er und þolli stendr;
Urd hétu eina, aðra Verðandi
– scáro á sciði, – Sculd ina þriðjo;
þær lög lögðu, þær líf kuro
alda bornom, orlog seggia.¹²*

The norns dwell near the cosmic tree as we read in Snorri's Edda:

*Þriðja rót asksins stendr á himni, ok undir þeirri rót er brunnr sá er mjök
er heilagr er heitir Urdar brunnr [...] Þar stendr salr einn fagr undir
askinum við brunninn, ok ór þeim sal koma þrjár meyjar þær er svá
heita: Urðr, Verðandi, Skuld. Þessar meyjar skapa mönnum aldr. Þær
kollum vér nornir [...] Nornir ráða orlogum manna.¹³*

⁹ Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 101; 'But you, they say, practised *seid* on Samsey, and you beat on the drum as seeresses do, in the likeness of a wizard you journeyed over mankind, and that I thought the hallmark of a pervert' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda, op. cit.*, p. 85).

¹⁰ Bjarni Aðalbjanarson (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla I*, Reykjavík, Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2002, p. 14.

¹¹ *La Légende des Nornes*, subtitle.

¹² Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 5; 'From there come girls, knowing a great deal, three from the lake standing under the tree; Urd one is called, Verdandi another,—they carved on wooden slips—Skuld the third; they laid down laws, they chose lives, for the sons of men the fates of men' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda, op. cit.*, p. 6).

¹³ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, Exeter, Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005, p. 17 and 18; 'The third root of the ash extends to heaven, and beneath that root is a well which is very holy, called Weirð's well [...] There stands there one beautiful hall under the ash by the well, and out of this hall come three maidens whose names are Weirð, Verdandi, Skuld. These maidens shape men's lives. We call them norns [...] Norns determine the fates of men' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, London, Everyman, 1995, p. 17 and 18).

Norns are the goddesses of destiny, the embodiment of a superior and ineluctable fate that dominates everything: *Nornir heita þær es nauð skapa*.¹⁴ The fate fixed by the norns is indicated both in the *Völuspá*, and in Snorri's *Edda* with the noun *ørlog*,¹⁵ formed by *lög*¹⁶ and by a prefix that signals provenance or origin. It is very difficult to detect the exact semantic value of the term *lög*, which cannot be merely understood as 'law', as in the current meaning of the term.

The noun *lag* means 'laying in order, due place, right position'¹⁷ and these particular characteristics are reflected in the plural *lög*. It is no coincidence that only Óðinn, the supreme deity, knows the destiny of men and sets the rules that govern their lives: *mátti hann vita ørlög manna [...] Óðinn setti lög í landi sínu*.¹⁸ The fate is, therefore, the primal law, fixed from the beginning and, as such, it cannot be changed; even gods and heroes are subject to it.¹⁹

¹⁴ 'Those are called norns who create distress' (Text and translation, Gade Karin Ellen-Marold Edith (ed.), *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages Poetry from Treatises on Poetics II*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2017 p. 771).

¹⁵ Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 4, 5, 7; Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning, op. cit.*, p. 15, 18, 21. 'The primal law, fate, weird, doom' (Cleasby Richard – Guðbrandr Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary, op. cit.*, p. 767).

¹⁶ Subst. n. pl., a-stem (*Ibid.*, p. 369 and 404; *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*, Den arnamagnæanske commission, Copenhagen: lag; accessed January 11, 2021, <<http://www.onp.ku.dk>>). The substantive is related to the Indo-European root **legʰ* (Pokorny Julius, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bern – München, Francke, 1959, p. 658-659), 'to lie down, to be placed, to put down'.

¹⁷ Cleasby Richard – Guðbrandr Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary, op. cit.*, p. 369.

¹⁸ Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla I, op. cit.*, p. 19 and 20. 'He could predict the fates of men [...] Óðinn established in his land the laws' (Finlay Alison – Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla, Volume I, op. cit.*, p. 11).

¹⁹ *Fram sé ek lengra um ragna røc rømm sigtýva* (*Völuspá*, str. 44, Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 10); 'I see further ahead to the mighty Doom of the Gods, of the victory-gods' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda, op. cit.*, p. 9); These are Grípir's last words to Sigurðr: *Munat scopom vinna* (*Grípispá*, str. 53; Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 172); 'One can't overcome fate' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda, op. cit.*, p. 146). Guðrún tells her brothers: *scopom viðr mangi* (*Atlamál in grœnlenzco*, str. 48; Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 254); 'No one defeats fate' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda, op. cit.*, p. 217) and Sqrli tells Hamðir: *qveld lifir maðr ekki eptir qvið norna* (*Hamðismál*, str. 30; Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des*

Leconte de Lisle's choice to identify the narrating voice with the three norns highlights in an extraordinarily effective way the most original and archaic philosophy of destiny which is permeated with gloomy pessimism, an *amor fati* that finds full correspondence in Old Norse literature: *Nu er enn sem fyr þoeir verða at falla er fæigir ero oc engum manne gefr lif goð vapn eða mikit afl ef þo skal hann deyia*.²⁰

There is no possibility of a prediction. However, the prophecy ensures knowledge of what has not yet happened but does not change the course of events. Present, past and future have already been determined: 'mais nul ne peut briser ta chaîne, ô destinée!'.²¹

This approach is highlighted by the description of the norns. In the sources they are *meyiar*,²² but in *La Légende des Nornes* they represent the sunset of life: 'spectres aux cheveux blancs, aux prunelles glacées Sous le suaie épais des neiges amassées!'.²³

Their lids are 'rigides' and their eyes are 'sans flamme',²⁴ lacking in vital energy, since heat, as we will see, is one of the elements that will give rise to life. This frame is revived at the end of the narration, when

Codex Regius op. cit., p. 274); 'No man outlasts the evening after the norns have given their verdict' (Larrington Carolynne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda, op. cit.*, p. 234).

²⁰ Bertelsen Henrik (ed.), *Þiðriks saga af Bern II*, Copenhagen, Møllers, 1905-11, p. 252. 'It is as it always has been: those who are destined for death must fall and to no one good weapons and great strength will give life if he is doomed to unavoidable death' (My translation). About Leconte de Lisle's pessimism and the influence of Schopenhauer's philosophy see Baillot Alexandre, *L'Influence de Schopenhauer en France 1860-1900*, Paris, Vrin, 1927; Putter Irving, *The pessimism of Leconte de Lisle: Sources and Evolution*, Berkely, University of California Press, 1954; Putter Irving, *The pessimism of Leconte de Lisle: The Work and the Time*, Berkely, University of California Press, 1961; Sagnes Guy, *L'Ennui dans la littérature française de Flaubert à Laforgue, 1848-1884*, Paris, Colin, 1969; Pich Edgard, *Leconte de Lisle et sa creation poetique : Poemes antiques et Poemes barbares, 1852-1874*, Lyon, Publication de l'Université Lyon II, 1975; Colin René-Pierre, *Schopenhauer en France : un mythe naturaliste*, Lyon, Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1979; De Mulder Caroline, *Leconte de Lisle, entre utopie et république*, Amsterdam-New York, Rodopi, 2005; Mortelette Yann, *Histoire du Parnasse*, Paris, Fayard, 2005; Mortelette Yann, Leconte de Lisle antimoderne, in *Studi Francesi* 170, 2013, p. 262-277.

²¹ *La Légende des Nornes* v. 33.

²² *Völuspá*, str.20; Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 20; Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning, op. cit.*, p. 18. 'Maiden, maid, girl' (La Farge Beatrice-Tucker John, *Glossary to the Poetic Edda*, Heidelberg, Winter, 1992, p. 187).

²³ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 137-138.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, vv. 3 and 10.

the eye of Urðr is ‘cave’,²⁵ empty, just as, in the myth, the whole universe was born from the cosmic void.

Consistent with this representation is the absence, in the poem, of a possible rebirth of the cosmic cycle, as happens, on the other hand, in the final stanzas of *Völuspá*, and in the concluding part of *Gylfaginning*,²⁶ in which a Christian influence is detectable. Here Leconte de Lisle’s poetic creativity bears significant connections with another nineteenth-century reinterpretation of Nordic myth—that of Richard Wagner in the *Ring des Nibelungen*.

In *La Légende des Nornes* it is Urðr who narrates the origin of the gods, the world and men: ‘Je suis la vieille Urda, l’éternel Souvenir’ (cf. Annexe 3). In Old Norse language Urðr is corradical to the verb *verða*²⁷ and means ‘destiny’.²⁸ It appears in the compound *Urðabrunnr*, the place where the Norns dwell:

*Enn er þat sagt at nornir þær er byggja við Urðar brunn taka hvern dag vatn í brunninum ok með aurinn þann er liggr um brunninn, ok ausa upp yfir askinn til þess at eigi skyli limar hans tréna eða fúna.*²⁹

The first lines of the poem describe the spatial context in which the narration takes place: ‘La neige, par flots lourds, avec lenteur, inonde, Du haut des cieux mutes, la terre plate et ronde’.³⁰ It is not a simple, and perhaps hackneyed description but a constitutive element of the mythical universe:

Over the whole poem brood not only the Norns but also the forces of an implacable Nature of ice, mist and snow, of wind and darkness. This

²⁵ *Ibid.*, v. 153. The adjective ‘cave’ is also used to describe Cain’s eyes (*Qain* v. 119). Angantyr has ‘les yeux ouverts et sans regards’ (*L’Épée d’Angantyr* v. 52).

²⁶ Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 14-15; Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning, op. cit.*, p. 53-54.

²⁷ ‘To become, happen, come to pass’ (Cleasby Richard – Guðbrandr Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary, op. cit.*, p. 695).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 657; *Ordbog, op. cit.*: *urðr*; see also Horst Simone, *Merlin und die völva, op. cit.*, p. 104. The masculine noun *urðr* defines death and it is only found in poetry (Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicum Poeticum Antiquæ Linguae Septentrionalis. Ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog*, Copenhagen, Møllers, 1931, p. 584).

²⁹ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning, op. cit.*, p. 19; ‘It is also said that the norns that dwell by Weird’s well take water from the well each day and with it the mud that lies round the well and pour over the ash so that its branches may not rot or decay’ (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda, op. cit.*, p. 19).

³⁰ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 1-2.

is, indeed, typical of Leconte de Lisle's treatment of barbarian subjects; whatever the race or country of his barbarians, he depicts them as very closely in touch with the natural forces of their environment, from which their beliefs take an imprint of primitive grandeur or wild menace.³¹

In the sources, there are many references to the wild power of nature: *svort verða sólscín of sumor eptir, veðr öll válynd*.³² The winter season will soon herald the conclusion of the cosmic cycle:

*Þau in fyrstu at vetr sá kemr er kallaðr er fimbulvetr. Þá drífr snær ór öllum áttum. Frost eru þá mikil ok vindar hvassir. Ekki nýtr sólar. Þeir vetr fara þrír saman ok ekki sumar milli. En áðr ganga svá aðrir þrír vetr at þá er um alla veröld orrostur miklar.*³³

A similar setting is found at the beginning of the second Norn's account: 'Tombe, neige sans fin! Enveloppe d'un voile Le rose éclair de l'aube et l'éclat de l'étoile!'.³⁴

The linguistic elements that depict the action of the norns have significant references in the sources: 'Et, sur ce cuivre dur, avec nos ongles blêmes, Nous gravons le destin de l'homme et des Dieux mêmes [...] Moi Skulda dont la main grave les destinées'.³⁵

In the *Völuspá*, the norns determine men's fate,³⁶ while in Leconte de Lisle's verse they also have power over the gods, which emphasises the determinism that pervades the poem. The norns' action is expressed, in

³¹ Fairlie Alison, *Leconte de Lisle's Poems on the Barbarian Races*, op. cit., p. 89. See also the first lines of *Le Runoia*: 'Chassée en tourbillons du Pôle solitaire, La neige primitive enveloppe la terre' (*Le Runoia* vv. 1-2).

³² *Völuspá*, str 41, Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius* op. cit., p. 10; 'Sunshine becomes black all the next summers, weather all vicious' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, op. cit., p. 9).

³³ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 49; 'First of all that a winter will come called fimbul-winter [mighty or mysterious winter]. Then snow will drift from all directions. There will then be great frosts and keen winds. The sun will do no good. There will be three of these winters together and no summer between. But before that there will come three other winters during which there will be great battles throughout the world' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 52-53). *Fimbulvetr* is cited also in another poem in the *Poetic Edda*, *Vafþrúðnismál* ('Vafþrúðnir's Sayings'), where it coincides with the end of the cosmic cycle (Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius* op. cit., p. 53).

³⁴ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 73-74.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, vv. 13-14 and 186.

³⁶ See note 13.

the *Poetic Edda*, by the verb *skera*,³⁷ which indicates the material act of carving a surface, as does the verb ‘graver’³⁸ in Leconte’s poem. Poetic creation, as well as the determination of destiny, is depicted in the poetic sources with reference to a material activity, that of the blacksmith: the poet is *bragar hagsmiðr*.³⁹ This equivalence brings the poet closer to the deities, whose creative power is also indicated with the verb *smíða*.⁴⁰ Óðinn created, by forging them, ‘heaven and earth and the skies and everything in them’.⁴¹

The Norns engrave with their ‘ongles blêmes’.⁴² This is an extremely relevant detail denoting the presence, from the very beginning, of the inescapable fate of death:

*Naglfar losnar
Kióll ferr austan, koma muno Muspellz
um lög lýðir, enn Loki stýrir.*⁴³

³⁷ ‘Cut, carve’ (Cleasby Richard – Guðbrandr Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, op. cit., p. 545; see also Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicum Poeticum Antiquæ Linguae Septentrionalis*, op. cit., p. 505-506). The norns are also described as weaving the web of fate: *Snero þær af afli örlofbátto, þá er borgir braut í Brálundi; þær um greiddo gullin símo oc und mána sal miðian festo* (*Helgaqviða Hundigsbana in fyrri*, Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius* op. cit., p. 130); ‘They plied very strongly the strand of fate, as strongholds were breaking in Bralunf, they prepared the golden threads and fastened in the middle under the moon’s hall’ (‘The first Poem of Helgi Hundigsbani’, Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, op. cit., p. 111).

³⁸ The verb ‘graver’ is also found in Marmier’s and Bergmann’s translations of the *Völuspá* (Marmier Xavier, *Chants populaires du Nord*, op. cit., p. 11; Bergmann Frederic Guillaume, *Poèmes Islandais*, Imprimerie Royale, Paris, 1838, p. 191), while in Du Puget’s translation *skera* is translated by ‘sculpter’ (Du Puget Rosalie, *Chefs d’Œuvre Littéraires. Les Eddas traduites de l’ancienne idiome scandinave par Mlle R. Du Puget*, Libraire Française et Étrangère, Paris, 1846, p. 145).

³⁹ ‘Skilled smith of poetry’ (Gade Karin Ellen-Marold Edith (ed.), *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages Poetry from Treatises on Poetics I*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2017, p. 64).

⁴⁰ ‘To work wood or metals’ (Cleasby Richard – Guðbrandr Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, op. cit., p. 572).

⁴¹ Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 9. *Hann smíðaði himin ok jörð ok loptin ok alla eign þeira* (Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 8). This image can be detected in *Le Runoia*: ‘Quand sur l’enclume d’or, l’éternel Forgeron, Ilmarinenn, eut fait le couvercle du monde, La tente d’acier pur étincelante et ronde, Et du marteau divin fixé dans l’air vermeil Les étoiles d’argent, la lune et le soleil’ (*Le Runoia* vv. 120-124).

⁴² *La Légende des Nornes* v. 13.

⁴³ *Völuspá*, str. 50-51, Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius* op. cit., p. 11-12; ‘Naglfar breaks free, A ship journeys from the east, Muspell’s troops are

At the end of the cosmic cycle, a ship, whose name is *Naglfari*, will appear and lead the forces of evil in the battle against the gods. This ship embodies the frightening identity of the powers that arise from the realm of darkness and chaos and 'it is made of dead people's nails'.⁴⁴

The power of the norns over destiny is confirmed by the presence of runes (cf. Annexe 4) on their nails,⁴⁵ even if in the *Völuspá* there is no explicit reference to them, as well as in the poetic representation of Leconte de Lisle.⁴⁶

The norn's account begins with the origin of the cosmos: the void, characterized by the absence of any material element, is the initial condition from which everything takes form: 'Du vide fécond s'épandit l'univers! [...] Où rien n'était encor, ni les eaux, ni les sables, Ni terre, ni rochers, ni la voûte du ciel, Rien qu'un gouffre béant, l'abîme originel'.⁴⁷ 'Vide fécond' is an oxymoron of extraordinary power and the idea of the cosmic vacuum, the abyss, as the initial and final condition of the universe, is a constant element in other mythical and poetic representations contained in the *Poèmes Barbares*⁴⁸ and in the *Poèmes*

coming over the ocean and Loki steeres' (Larrington Carolynne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, op. cit., p. 10).

⁴⁴ Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 53; *Þat er gert af noglum dauðra manna* (Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 50).

⁴⁵ Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius* op. cit., p. 193.

⁴⁶ In Leconte de Lisle's *Poèmes Barbares*, references to the runes are found in *Le Runoia*, where they have a cosmogonical meaning connected with the cyclical concept of time: 'Un éternel souci ride le front de Dieu: Il couvre de Runas la peau du Serpent bleu'; 'Grave les Runas d'or qui règlent l'univers!'; 'Viens le jour marqué par les Runes fatales!' (*Le Runoia* vv. 31-32, 236 and 255). The verb 'graver' is here found as in *La Légende des Nornes*. In *Les Larmes de l'Ours*, Wäinämöinen becomes 'Roi des Runes [...] Skalde immortel' (*Les Larmes de l'ours* vv. 1 and 5).

⁴⁷ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 16 and 18-20.

⁴⁸ 'Dans le Vide éternel interrompant son rêve, L'Être unique, le grand Taaroa se lève [...] Tout gît muet encore au fond du gouffre énorme' (*La Genèse Polynésienne* vv. 1 and 17). 'J'ai vu que mieux valaient le vide et le silence!' (*Le Runoia* v. 133). 'Abîme où, loin des cieux aventurant son aile, L'Ange vit la beauté de la femme et l'aima [...] Holà! j'entends l'abîme impatient crier, Et le gouffre t'attire, ô race carnassière' (*Qaïn* vv. 136-137, 183-184). 'Un gouffre calme, noir, informe, illimité, L'évanouissement total de la matière' (*In Excelsis* vv. 10-11). 'L'abîme pacifique où gît la vanité De ce qui fut le temps et l'espace et le nombre' (*La dernière vision* vv. 43-44). 'Un monde mort, immense écume de la mer, Gouffre d'ombre stérile et de lueurs spectrales' (*Paysage Polaire* vv. 1-2). 'Le silencieux abîme de l'oubli' (*La Fin de l'Homme* v. 18). 'Puis la tête et le corps entrèrent à la fois Dans la nuit furieuse et dans le gouffre avide' (*Le Jugement de Komor*

Antiques.⁴⁹ The ‘abîme originel’ is the ‘gap ginnunga’⁵⁰ mentioned in the sources, and in Leconte de Lisle it is not only the place where the interaction of the fundamental forces will give rise to life, but it becomes the primary creative element.

Here the poet takes up the text of the *Völuspá* transmitted in the manuscripts of Snorri’s *Edda*:

*Ár var alda
þat er ekki var.
Vara sandr né sær
né svalar unnir.
Jörð fansk eigi
né upphiminn,
gap var ginnunga
en gras ekki.*⁵¹

The text in the *Poetic Edda* is different, as the primal being, Ymir, is already present:

vv. 110-111). ‘Hu-Gadarn volait sur les vents furieux, Illuminant l’abîme où s’enfonçait sa race’ (*Le Massacre de Mona* vv. 265-266). ‘L’abîme où la vie a coulé’ (*Ibid.* v. 364). ‘Le gouffre immortel, mer de flammes D’où jaillissent sans cesse, où retournent les âmes, Où l’amoncellement des univers se joint À l’amas des soleils, qui ne commence point, Qui ne finit jamais’ (*Ibid.* vv. 380-385).

⁴⁹ ‘Ta demeure est au bord des océans antiques, Maître! Les grandes Eaux lavent tes pieds mystiques. Sur ta face divine et ton dos écumant L’abîme primitif ruisselle lentement’ (*Sûryâ. Hymne Védique* vv. 1-4 ; Leconte de Lisle Charles-Marie, *Poèmes Antiques*, Édition de Claudine Gohot-Mersch, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 37).

⁵⁰ The meaning of the syntagm is unclear: ‘gap n. abyss [...] ginnunga gen. pl. (or sg.?) of the mighty spaces?; cf. *ginning* illusion, magical deception; perhaps filled with magic power?’ (Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, *op. cit.*, p. 99 and 100). ‘*Ginning* f. (?) mighty space, abyss, void: *gap ginnunga* chasm of the abyss, a term for the primordial chaos’ (La Farge Beatrice-Tucker John, *Glossary to the Poetic Edda*, *op. cit.*, p. 85).

⁵¹ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, *op. cit.*, p. 9; ‘It was at the beginning of time, when nothing was; sand was not, nor sea, nor cool waves. Earth did not exist, nor heaven on high. The mighty gap was, but no growth’ (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, *op. cit.*, p. 9). See also Du Puget’s translation: ‘Lorsque rien n’existait, ni le sable, ni la mer, ni les vagues fraîches, le matin appartenait au temps. Il n’y avait alors ni la terre ni le ciel mais seulement l’abîme de Ginnung et point d’herbe’ (Du Puget Rosalie, *Chefs d’Œvre Littéraires. Les Eddas*, *op. cit.*, p. 32). A similar cosmic view is found in *Qaïn*: ‘C’était un soir des temps mystérieux du monde, Alors que du midi jusqu’au septentrion Toute vigueur grondait en pleine éruption, L’arbre, le roc, la fleur, l’homme et la bête immonde, Et que Dieu haletait dans sa création’ (*Qaïn* vv. 31-35).

Ár var alda	þat er Ymir bygði,
vara sandr né sær	né svalar unnir;
iorð fannz æva	né upphiminn,
gap var ginnunga,	ens gras hvergi. ⁵²

The aquatic element is at the origin of life: 'le premier jaillissement des âges D'une écume glacée a lavé nos visages [...] Par bonds impétueux, quatre fleuves d'écume Tombèrent, rugissants, dans l'ancre du milieu'.⁵³ The poet does not mention the water, but, twice, mentions foam, generated by a rushing movement of water. Life is a wild flow that breaks through from the 'abîme originel'.

In this reinterpretation, Leconte de Lisle follows Snorri's *Edda*:

⁵² *Völuspá*, str. 3; (Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 1); 'Early in time Ymir made his settlement, there was no sand nor sea nor cool waves; earth was nowhere nor the sky above, a void of yawning chaos, grass was there nowhere' (Larrington Carolynne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda, op. cit.*, p. 4). This stanza of the *Völuspá* had been translated by some French scholars during the nineteenth century: 'C'était au commencement du temps. Ymer régnait. Il n'y avait ni sable, ni mer, ni vagues fraîches. Nulle part on ne trouvait la terre ni le ciel élevé. Il y avait le gouffre béant et point d'herbe' (Marmier Xavier, *Chants populaires du Nord, op. cit.*, p. 8). 'Le matin appartenait au temps, lorsque Ymer se mit à bâtir ; il n'y avait alors point de sable, point de mer, ni de vagues fraîches, La terre n'existait pas ni le ciel élevé; il n'y avait point de gazon, mais seulement l'abîme de Ginnung' (Du Puget Rosalie, *Chefs d'Œuvre Littéraires. Les Eddas, op. cit.*, p. 142). 'Ce fut le commencement des siècles quand Ymir s'établit; Il n'y avait ni rivage, ni mer, ni ondes fraîches; On ne trouvait ni terre ni ciel élevé; Il y avait le Gouffre béant, mais de l'herbe nulle part' (Bergmann Frederic Guillaume, *Poèmes Islandais, op. cit.*, p. 187). 'Au commencement, quand Ymer vivait, il n'y avait ni sable, ni mer, ni fontaine; il n'y avait point de terre, point de ciel, mais une masse inerte et informe au milieu de l'abîme béant' (De Baecker Louis, *De la religion du Nord de la France avant le Christianisme*, Lille, Vanackere, 1854, 10). 'Au commencement des siècles Ymer habitait l'espace. Il n'y avait encore ni rivages, ni mer, ni frais ruisseaux. Nulle part la terre, nulle part le ciel; partout l'abîme du chaos; point de trace d'herbe' (Licquet Théodore, *Histoire de Normandie jusqu'à la conquête de l'Angleterre en 1066, Tome Premier*, Rouen, Frère et Periaux, 1835, p. clvi). 'Au commencement des siècles régnait Ymerr; il n'y avait ni sable, ni mer, ni eaux dormantes; partout manquaient la terre et le ciel qui la couvre; l'espace était vide; l'herbe ne poussait nulle part' (Du Ménil Édélstand, *Histoire de la poésie scandinave: Prolégomènes*, Paris, Brockhaus et Avenarius, 1839, p. 88). 'C'était le commencement lorsqu'Ymer existait: il n'y avait ni sable, ni mer, ni eau vive; point de terre, point de voûte céleste, mais le gouffre béant et stérile' (Eichhoff Frédéric Gustave, *Tableau de la Littérature du Nord au Moyen Âge en Allemagne et en Angleterre, en Scandinavie et in Slavonie*, Paris, Didier, 1853, p. 48).

⁵³ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 5-6 e 26-27. The aquatic element is at the origin of life in Qaïn: 'le gouffre des Eaux premières' (Qaïn v. 392).

Fyrr var þat mǫrgum ǫldum en jörð var sköpuð er Niflheimr var gorr, ok í honum miðjum liggir bruðr sá er Hvergelmir heitir, ok þaðan af falla þær ár.⁵⁴

The universe and all life forms are created by the meeting of two opposite polarities:

Svá sem kalt stóð af Niflheimi ok allir hlutir grimmir, svá var þat er vissi námunda Muspelli heitt ok ljóst, en Ginnungagap var svá hlætt sem lopt vindlaust. Ok þá er moettisk hrímin ok blær hitans svá at bráðnaði ok draup, ok af þeim kvikudropum kviknaði með krapti þess er til sendi hitann, ok varð manns líkandi, ok var sá nefndr Ymir.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 9. 'It was many ages before the earth was created that Niflheim was made, and in its midst lies a spring called Hvergelmir, and from it flow the rivers' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 9). Niflheimr is the world of darkness (*heimr*, subst. m. 'the world'; *nifl*, subst. n. 'mist, fog'; Cleasby Richard – Guðbrandr Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, op. cit., p. 251 and 455). The compound *Hvergelmir* consists of *hverr* (subst. m. 'a cauldron, boiler' and *gelmir* (from vb. *gjalla* 'yell, scream') (*Ibid.*, p.202 and 300). The spring lies under the third root of the cosmic tree, which extends over Niflheimr. The spring is connected to cosmic destiny because *Niðhoggr* dwells in it, and gnaws the roots of the cosmic tree and there are several snakes: *En svá margir ormar eru í Hvergelmi með Niðhoggr at engi tunga má telja* (Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 18); 'And there are so many snakes in Hvergelmir with Nidhogg that no tongue can enumerate them' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 19). *Niðhoggr* (*níð*, subst. n. 'particular disgrace or defamation, feeling of hatred or strong envy, poetic composition expressing such states of mind, defamatory strophe' (*Ordbog*, op. cit.: *níð*); *hoggr*, subst. n. 'a stroke, blow' (Cleasby Richard – Guðbrandr Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, op. cit., p. 308) is a serpent, who will be present at the end of the cosmic cycle (Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius* op. cit., p. 9 and 15; Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 53). In *La Légende des Nornes* there is an indirect reference to *Niðhoggr*: 'Et la destruction a rongé sourdement Des temps laborieux le vaste monument' (*La Légende des Nornes* vv. 151-152).

⁵⁵ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 10; 'Just as from Niflheim there arose coldness and all things grim, so what facing close to Muspell was hot and bright, but Ginnungagap was as mild and windless sky. And when the rime and the blowing of the warmth met so that it thawed and dripped, there was a quickening from these flowing drops due to the power of the source of the heat, and it became the form of a man, and he was given the name Ymir' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 10). Muspell is 'the name of the world of fire [...] The name is probably connected with the words *muspille*, *mudspelle*, *mutspelli* in Old Saxon and Old High German Christian poems, where they mean the end of the world or doomsday (the second element means 'destruction', the first is perhaps from Latin *mundus* 'world'). It was probably therefore originally an abstract noun, which

This polarity between heat and cold is clearly depicted by Leconte de Lisle: 'Le sombre Ymer naquit de la flamme et du givre'.⁵⁶ In the poetic reworking of the myth, however, Leconte de Lisle extends the perspective of the sources and identifies two other types of polarity as constitutive elements of the universe: that which exists between sound and silence and light and darkness. These elements are also present in the sources that the poet uses to outline fully the cosmic picture of the origins. Sound is a creative act: 'Et le silence errait sur le vide dormant, Quand la rumeur vivante éclata brusquement'.⁵⁷ The scream as a creative act is also present in *La genèse polynésienne*: 'le grand Taaroa se lève. Il se lève, et regarde: il est seul, rien ne luit. Il pousse un cri sauvage au milieu de la nuit'.⁵⁸ A wild sound characterises the flowing of the primordial waters: 'Du Nord enveloppé d'un tourbillon de brume, Par bonds impétueux, quatre fleuves d'écume Tombèrent, rugissants, dans l'ancre du milieu'.⁵⁹

Following a rigorous symmetry, the narrative of the norns begins when the skies are silent ('du haut des cieus muets').⁶⁰ In their prediction the end of the cosmic cycle will be dominated by silence ('Brouillards silencieux, ensevelissez-nous! [...] Par delà ce silence où nous sommes assises')⁶¹ and the third norn will be 'sourde aux voix de l'avenir'.⁶² Baldr, god of light and, therefore, of life, will also be the god of harmonious sound: 'Puisque le chœur du ciel et de l'humanité Autour de ce berceau vénérable a chanté!'⁶³ Each entity, however, always has a negative polarity and so at the moment of the final conflagration there will be

in eddic poems was personified and finally in *Snorra Edda* became a place' (Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 173).

⁵⁶ *La Légende des Nornes* v. 29. Runoia's tower is 'Pareille au sombre Ymer évoqué par les Nornes, Muette dans l'orage, inébranlable aux vents' (*Le Runoia* vv. 10-11). The giant is also defined as 'sombre'.

⁵⁷ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 23-24.

⁵⁸ *La Genèse polynésienne* vv. 2-4.

⁵⁹ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 25-27. The sound effect, created by the rhythmic repetition of the trill consonant, must be noted.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, v. 2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, vv. 75 and 81. A similar scenery is found in *Les Clairs de Lune*: 'Une mer d'ombre, par gerbes noires, [...] hors des gouffres sans fond [...] On n'entend rien sortir, ni clameurs ni sanglots: Le sinistre univers se dissout en silence' (*Les Clairs de Lune* vv. 15, 21, 25-27).

⁶² *La Légende des Nornes* v. 135.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, vv. 131-132.

sounds of death: ‘Voici que j’entends monter comme des flots Des cris de mort mêlés à de divins sanglots. Pleurez, lamentez-vous, Nornes désespérées ! [...] Sur le centre du monde inclinez votre oreille’.⁶⁴

In the sources, the sound element is present from the very beginning: *hlióð* is the word with which the Seeress’s Prophecy begins, a term in which silence, primordial sound and the sound of poetry are synthesised. The noun presents a very complex semantic spectrum since it simultaneously means ‘listening’ and, therefore, ‘silence’, and the sound event that is heard.⁶⁵

This polarity takes on a demiurgic meaning in the *Völuspá*, where *hljóð* indicates the silence that stays ahead of the narrative about the origin of the world (*Hlióðs bið ec allar helgar kindir*)⁶⁶ and, at the same time, the sound that heralds the final conflagration: *Veit hon Heimdalar hliod um folgit undir heiðvönom helgom baðmi [...] hátt blæss Heimdallt, horn er á lopti*.⁶⁷

The third and most important polarity that Leconte de Lisle identifies within the Norse cosmogony is that between light and darkness: ‘À peine avions-nous vu, dans le brouillard vermeil, Monter, aux jours anciens, l’orbe d’or du soleil, Qu’il retombait au fond des ténèbres premières’.⁶⁸ In the sources, the struggle between light and darkness is the hallmark of the final catastrophe: *þá verðr þat er mikil tíðindi flykkja, at úlfrinn*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, vv. 163-165 and 169.

⁶⁵ Fritzner Johan, *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*, Feilberg & Landmark, Christiania. 1867, p. 275; Cleasby Richard – Guðbrandr Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, *op. cit.*, p. 271-272; Zoëga Geir T., *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1910: 202-203; Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicum Poeticum Antiquæ Linguae Septentrionalis*, *op. cit.*, p. 264; Kuhn Hans, *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern, II. Kurzes Wörterbuch*, Heidelberg, Winter, 1968, p. 97; De Vries Jan, *Altonordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, *op. cit.*, p. 238; La Farge Beatrice-Tucker John, *Glossary to the Poetic Edda*, *op. cit.*, p. 115; Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda, Skáldskaparmál 2*, *op. cit.*, p. 313; Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda, Háttatal*, *op. cit.*, p. 122; *Ordbog*, *op. cit.* : *hljóð*.

⁶⁶ Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 1; ‘Hearing I ask from all the tribes’ (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, *op. cit.*, p. 4).

⁶⁷ Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 6 and 11; ‘She knows that Heimdall’s hearing is hidden under the bright-grown, sacred tree [...] Heimdall blows loudly, his horn in the air’ (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, *op. cit.*, p. 7 and 10).

⁶⁸ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 7-9.

*gleypir sólna, ok þykkir monnum þat mikit mein. þá tekr annarr úlfrinn tunglit, ok gerir sá ok mikit ógagn. Stjornurnar hverfa af himninum.*⁶⁹

The birth of life is the victory of light over darkness, in ‘ces jours d’ombre couverts’, when begins ‘le matin des temps intarissables’.⁷⁰ The Æsir are gods of light: ‘Les purificateurs du chaos ténébreux’ who ‘répandent d’en haut la lumière bénie’,⁷¹ especially Óðinn: ‘L’Aurore primitive en son œil bleu brilla’.⁷² The gods are lords of the universe: ‘Embrassent l’univers immense d’un regard’.⁷³ Odin’s gaze is said to embrace the whole world: *þá er Óðinn settisk þar í háseti þá sá hann of alla heima ok hvers manns athoeft ok vissi alla hluti þá er hann sá.*⁷⁴ They are ‘Modérateurs du monde et source d’harmonie’:⁷⁵ this statement is pivotal in Leconte de Lisle’s poetic representation and in its relationship with the sources. The gods are not creators but establish order in the universe, as we read in the *Völuspá* and in Snorri’s *Edda*:

*Sól varp sunnan, sinni mána,
hendi inni hægri um himinjoður;
sól þat né vissi, hvar hon sali átti,
stjornor þat né visso hvar þær staði áttu,
máni þat né vissi, hvat hann megins átti.
Þá gengu regin öll á roctóla,
ginnheilög goð, ok um þat gættuz;
nótt ok niðiom nǫfn um gáfo,
morgin héto oc miðian dag,
undorn oc aptan, árom at telja.*⁷⁶

⁶⁹ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 49; ‘Then something will happen that will be thought a most significant event, the wolf will swallow the sun, and people will think this is a great disaster. Then the other will catch the moon, and he also will cause much mischief. The stars disappear from the sky’ (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 53).

⁷⁰ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 15 and 17.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, vv. 44 and 110. See also Taaroa, the primordial deity, in *La Genèse polynésienne*: ‘Il est la clarté, la chaleur et le germe’ (*La Genèse polynésienne* v. 9)-

⁷² *La Légende des Nornes* v. 40.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, v. 108.

⁷⁴ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 13; ‘When Odin sat in that he saw over all worlds and every man’s activity and understood everything he saw’ (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 13).

⁷⁵ *La Légende des Nornes* v. 109.

⁷⁶ Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius* op. cit., p. 2; ‘From the south, Sun, companion of the moon, threw her right hand round the sky’s edge; Sun did not know where she had her hall, the stars did not know where they had their stations,

*Þeir gáfu staðar öllum eldingum, sumum á himni, sumar fóru lausar undir himni, ok settu þó þeim stað ok sköpuðu göngu þeim. Svá er sagt í fornum vísindum at þaðan af váru doeðr greind ok áratal.*⁷⁷

The noun ‘modérateur’⁷⁸ finds another important echo in Old Norse poetry, where kings and rulers are defined as *stillir*⁷⁹, agent noun from the verb *stilla*: ‘control, moderate, regulate’.⁸⁰

In the light-darkness polarity, the god Baldr, Óðinn and Frigg’s son, embodies the positive energy of light, which is opposed to the forces of chaos and darkness, with brightness as his distinctive feature: *Hann er beztr ok hann lofa allir. Hann er svá fagr álitum ok bjartr svá at lýsir af honum.*⁸¹ This description finds a significant reinterpretation in Leconte de Lisle’s verse: ‘Toute chose a doué de splendeur et de grâce Le plus beau, le meilleur d’une immortelle race: L’aube a de ses clartés tressé ses cheveux blonds, L’azur céleste rit à travers ses cils longs, Les astres attendris ont, comme une rosée, Versé des lueurs d’or sur sa joue irisée’.⁸² Baldr is surrounded by ‘Alfes lumineux’:⁸³ in the mythical universe, the *ljósalfar*, or ‘light elves’, are opposed to the *dökkálfar*, the ‘black elves’:

the moon did not know what might he had. Then all the Powers went to the thrones of fate, the sacrosanct gods, and considered this: to night and her children they gave names, morning they named and midday, afternoon and evening, to reckon up in years’ (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, op. cit., p. 4).

⁷⁷ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 12; ‘They fixed all the lights, some in the sky, some moved in a wandering course beneath the sky, but they appointed them position and ordained their courses. Thus it is said in ancient sources that by means of them days were distinguished and also the count of years’ (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 12).

⁷⁸ ‘Modérateur : Personne qui cherche à tempérer les opinions exaltées, à rapprocher les sentiments extrêmes, à atténuer les excès [...] Dispositif destiné à régler la marche d’un mécanisme, à modérer les variations ou les effets d’un phénomène’ (*Dictionnaire de l’Académie française en ligne*: modérateur accessed January 22, 2021, <<https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/>>).

⁷⁹ Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicum Poeticum Antiquæ Linguae Septentrionalis*, op. cit., p. 537. Meissner Rudolf, *Die kenningar der Skalden*, Bonn-Leipzig, Schreder, 1921, p. 78.

⁸⁰ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 143. ‘To still, soothe, calm [...] to moderate, temper’ (Cleasby Richard – Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, op. cit., p. 593).

⁸¹ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 23; ‘He is the best and all praise him. He is so fair in appearance and so bright that light shines from him’ (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 23).

⁸² *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 117-122.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, v. 116.

Sá er einn staðr þar er kallaðr er Álfheimr. Þar byggvir fólk þat er ljósálfar heita, en dökkálfar búa niðri í jörðu, ok eru þeir ólíkir þeim sýnum en myklu ólíkari reyndum. Ljósálfar eru fegri en sól sýnum, en dökkálfar eru svartari en bik.⁸⁴

The poet does not refer to the story of Baldr's death as it is found in the sources (cf. Annexe 5). In Leconte de Lisle's reworking, Baldr becomes the sacrificial victim of an ineluctable fate: 'Celui que l'univers baignera des ses larmes, Qui, de sa propre flamme aussitôt consumé, Doit vivre par l'amour et mourir d'être aimé! Il grandit comme un frère au milieu des pins sombres, Celui que le destin enserre de ses ombres'.⁸⁵ Baldr grows like an ash tree, and the cosmic tree consists of ash wood : both are doomed to destruction. There is no trace of Christian faith,⁸⁶ and no redemption will follow Baldr's death,⁸⁷ in the description of which we find the elements of the primary polarity: the liquid element (the tears) and the heat (the flame).

This polarity characterizes also the birth of the supreme deity, Óðinn: 'Le roi des Ases, frais et rose, Qui dormait, fleur divine aux vents du pôle éclore. Baigné d'un souffle doux et chaud il s'éveilla'.⁸⁸ Here the poet diverges from the sources, since in *La Légende des Nornes* it is the cow Auðhumla who nourishes Óðinn,⁸⁹ while in Snorri's *Edda* we read that four rivers of milk flow from Auðhumla's teats, which feed the giant Ymir.⁹⁰ Even though the poet is not faithful to the sources, he reveals a deep poetic coherence in the reinterpretation of the myth: the god of light and the giant—the progenitor of the gods' enemy race—draw life

⁸⁴ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 19; 'There is one place that is called Alfheim. There live the folk called light-elves, but dark-elves live down in the ground, and they are unlike them in appearance, and even more unlike them in nature. Light-elves are fairer than sun to look at, but dark elves are blacker than pitch' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 19).

⁸⁵ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 142-146.

⁸⁶ See Fairlie Alison, *Leconte de Lisle's Poems on the Barbarian Races*, op. cit., p. 390 regarding Leconte de Lisle's radical criticism of Catholicism.

⁸⁷ Baldr's death is significantly followed by lines borrowed from the biblical book *Qohélet*: 'Hélas! rien d'éternel ne fleurit sous les cieus, Il n'est rien d'immuable où palpète la vie!' (*La Légende des Nornes* vv.148-149). In *Poèmes Barbares* a poem is devoted to *Qohélet* (*L'Ecclésiaste*).

⁸⁸ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 37-39.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, v. 42.

⁹⁰ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 11.

from the same animal entity, which symbolises the earth mother, the first source of life.

The giant will be dismembered by the gods:

Þeir tóku Ymi ok fluttu í mitt Ginnungagap, ok gerðu af honum jörðina, af blóði hans sæinn ok vötnin. Jörðin var gør af holdinu en björgin af beinunum, grjót ok urðir gerðu þeir af tönnum ok jöxlum ok af þeim beinum er brotin váru.⁹¹

Leconte de Lisle's lines provide a similar description: 'Ymer, dompté, mourut entre leurs mains augustes; Et de son crâne immense ils formèrent les cieux, Les astres, des éclairs échappés de ses yeux, Les rochers de ses os. Ses épaules charnues Furent la terre stable, et la houle des nues Sortit en tourbillons de son cerveau pesant'.⁹²

The reference to the clouds is not present in Snorri's *Edda* but is found in the *Grímnismál*, a poem from the *Poetic Edda*,⁹³ just as the creation of the stars from the giant's eyes refers to another mythical tale, contained in the *Skáldskaparmál*.⁹⁴ Ymir's blood gives rise to the sea, in which the line of giants drowns: 'Le déluge envahit l'étendue et la mer Assiégea le troupeau hurlant des fils d'Ymer [...] Ils s'engloutirent tous avec des cris sauvages. Puis ce rouge Océan s'enveloppa d'azur; La Terre d'un seul bord reverdit dans l'air pur'.⁹⁵ Leconte de Lisle's description

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 'They took Ymir and transported him to the middle of Ginnungagap, and out of him made the earth, out of his blood the sea and the lakes. The earth was made of the flesh and the rocks of the bones, stone and scree they made out of the teeth and molars and of the bones that had been broken' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda, op. cit.*, p. 12).

⁹² *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 46-51.

⁹³ *Enn ór hans heila vóro þau in harðmóðgo scý qoll um scopuð* (Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 65); 'From his brain the hard-tempered clouds were all created' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda, op. cit.*, p. 54).

⁹⁴ The giant Þjazi is the father of Skaði, and the goddess Iðunn is the keeper of the fruits of eternal youth. Loki lures the goddess out of Ásgarðr. Iðunn is kidnapped by Þjazi who takes the shape of an eagle. Loki, threatened by the other gods, goes to the land of the giants and, taking the shape of a hawk, transforms Iðunn into a walnut, clasps her in his claws and brings her back to the Æsir. The gods kill Þjazi and, to avoid the revenge of his daughter, Skaði, Óðinn allows her to have one of the Æsir as her husband and the choice falls on Njörðr. Furthermore Óðinn offers a sort of 'cosmic wergild': after taking Þjazi's eyes, he throws them into the sky, turning them into two stars (Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda, Skáldskaparmál Introduction, Text and Notes*, Exeter, Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998, p. 2).

⁹⁵ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 55-56 and 62-65. Here the poet follows the sources, although in them a giant survives (Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning, op. cit.*, p. 11-12).

of earth's greening has a chromatic identity with the fourth stanza of the *Völuspá*: *þá var grund gróin grænom lauki*.⁹⁶ The earth will be green after the rebirth that will follow the end of the cosmic cycle, the rebirth fatally denied in Leconte de Lisle: *Sér hon upp koma qðro sinni iorð oc ægi, iðia græna*.⁹⁷

The gods' demiurgic power further manifests itself in the creation of human beings: *Gengu með sævar ströndu, fundu þeir tré tvau, ok tóku upp tréin ok sköpuðu af menn [...] Hét karlmaðrinn Askr, en konan Embla*.⁹⁸ In Snorri's *Edda* the human race draws life from logs, while, more precisely, in Leconte de Lisle's verse the ash tree is indicated as the source: 'Le couple humain sortit de l'écorce du frêne'.⁹⁹ This is an extremely significant element, because in this way the poet establishes an indissoluble link between men,¹⁰⁰ gods¹⁰¹ and the cosmic tree *Yggdrasill*.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 1. 'Then the ground was grown over with the green leek' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda, op. cit.*, p. 4).

⁹⁷ Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 14. 'She sees, coming up a second time, earth from the ocean, eternally green' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda, op. cit.*, p.11). See also Snorri's *Edda: Upp skýtr jörðunni þá ór sænum ok er þá groen ok fagr* (Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning, op. cit.*, p.53); 'The earth will shoot up out of the sea and will then be green and fair' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda, op. cit.*, p. 56).

⁹⁸ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning, op. cit.*, p. 13. '[They] walked along the sea shore, they came across two logs and created people out of them [...] The man was called Askr, the woman Embla' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda, op. cit.*, p.13). See also *Völuspá str. 17: fundo á landi, lítt megandi, Asc oc Emblo, orloglausa* (Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 4). 'They found on land capable of little, Ash and Embla, lacking in fate' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda, op. cit.*, p. 6).

⁹⁹ *La Légende des Nornes* v.65.

¹⁰⁰ The name *Askr* means 'ash' (Cleasby Richard – Guðbrandr Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary, op. cit.*, p. 25).

¹⁰¹ See above the reference to the god Baldr.

¹⁰² *Yggdrasill* consists of *Yggr* ('fierce', 'fearsome', one of the names of Óðinn) and *drasill* ('horse', only in poetry). In skaldic poetry 'horse' is a constitutive element of the *kenningar* which refer to the gallows: *Sígars grimmr jór* 'the savage horse of Sigarr <legendary king> [GALLOWES] (Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson, *Hálegjatal* 4). The *kenning* alludes to the hanging of Hagbarðr by Sigarr, whose daughter Hagbarðr is courting' (Whaley Diana (ed.), *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages. Poetry from the King's Sagas 1*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2012, p. 202). In the *Havamál* ('Sayings of the High One') a poem from the *Poetic Edda*, Óðinn says: *Veit ec, at ec hecc vingameiði á nætr allar nio, geiri undaðr oc gefinn Óðni, siálfr siálfom mér, á þeim meiði, er mangi veit, hvers hann af rótom renn* (Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*,

the backbone of the universe: *Askinn er allra tréa mestr ok beztr. Limar hans dreifask yfir heim allan ok standa yfir himni*.¹⁰³

The cosmic perturbation is expressed in the sources by the vibration of the tree: *Scelfr Yggdrasills ascr standandi*.¹⁰⁴ The sacred ash is the hypocentre of a seismic wave, which becomes a huge gravitational wave, destroying space and time: 'Yggdrasill ébranlé ploie et se déracine'.¹⁰⁵ The cosmology outlined by Leconte includes a further dynamic element: 'Yggdrasill, à sa plus haute cime, Des neuf sphères du ciel porte le poids sublime [...] Yggdrasill, le frêne aux trois racines, Ne fait-il plus tourner les neuf sphères divines!'¹⁰⁶

The cosmic tree is the *Primum Mobile* from which the movement of the nine worlds that form the universe, originates, a representation

p. 40); 'I know that I hung on a windswept tree nine long nights, wounded with a spear, dedicated to Odin, myself to myself, on that tree of which no man knows from where its roots run' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, op. cit., p. 32). The reference is to *Yggdrasill*, the cosmic tree. *Yggdrasill* (Óðinn's horse) should therefore mean gallows. The motion of the body hanging from the gallows could be the symbolic representation of an astronomical motion, akin to the oscillation of a pendulum. In this context, the cosmic tree, on which the supreme deity itself was hung, is the horizontal axis on which the solid mass of the pendulum swings, according to a constant isochronism. God's body, therefore, swinging while it hangs from the tree, becomes the regulating element of a permanent and unchanging motion, which governs the universe.

¹⁰³ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 17. 'The ash is of all trees the biggest and best. Its branches spread out over all the world and extend across the sky' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 17). *Miotvið mæran fyr mold neðan [...] Asc veit ec standa heitir Yggdrasill hár baðmr* (*Völuspá* str. 2 and 19; Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius* op. cit., p. 1 and 5) 'The mighty Measuring-Tree below the earth [...] An ash I know that stands, Yggdrasill it's called, a tall tree' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, op. cit., p. 4 and 6).

¹⁰⁴ *Völuspá*, str. 47; Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius* op. cit., p. 11. 'Yggdrasill shudders, the tree standing upright' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, op. cit., p. 10).

¹⁰⁵ *La Légende des Nornes* v. 178. *Þá er ok þat til tíðinda at svá skelfr jörð qll ok björg at viðir losna ór jörðu upp, en björgin hrynja [...] þá skelfr askr Yggdrasils* (Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 49 and 50). 'Then there will take place another event, the whole earth and mountains will shake so much that trees will become uprooted from the earth and the mountains will fall [...] Then the ash Yggdrasil will shake' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 53 and 54). In another poem by Leconte de Lisle, the trembling of a tree is not a symbol of destruction, but of rebirth: 'L'Arbre frémit, baigné de rosée et d'aurore' (*Les Larmes de l'Ours* v. 23).

¹⁰⁶ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 89-90 and 69-70.

that structurally has an affinity with the cosmology present in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The cosmic perturbation is determined by the ending of the kinetic energy caused by the tree: 'se heurtent en éclats tombent et disparaissent; Veuves de leur pilier les neuf Sphères s'affaissent'¹⁰⁷ In this representation, in which the dynamic element is the determining factor, Leconte de Lisle fully conveys the idea of the cosmic cycle contained in the sources. The rotational motion originated by the tree trunk is transmitted to nine spheres and there are nine worlds mentioned in the *Völuspá*: *nío man ec heima*.¹⁰⁸

The number nine expresses the completeness of the cycle,¹⁰⁹ because the three dimensions of time (past, present, future) and space (underworld, earth, sky) are merged in it. In Leconte's work it also becomes a numerical symbol of destruction: 'Le Mal, sous les neuf¹¹⁰ sceaux de l'abîme, est scellé'.¹¹¹

Loki¹¹² breaks the seals and releases the negative energies that will precipitate the final catastrophe: 'Loki brise les sceaux: le noir Surtr s'éveille; Le Reptile assoupi se redresse en sifflant; L'écume dans la gueule et le regard sanglant, Fenris flaire déjà sa proie irrévocable'.¹¹³ Loki is 'le dernier fils d'Ymer'¹¹⁴ and belongs to the lineage of giants which is also

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, vv. 181-182.

¹⁰⁸ Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 1. 'I remember nine worlds' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda, op. cit.*, p. 4).

¹⁰⁹ The number nine recurs in Leconte de Lisle's representation of the ancient Celtic religion: 'neuf torches [...] derrière leur reine et leur sœur, huit prêtresses [...] les neuf Flots [...] je naquis des neuf Formes [...] les neuf Sommets [...] les neuf flammes [...] la veille Des neuf Nuits' (*Le Massacre de Mona* vv. 50, 81, 104, 106, 164, 434, 494). The number is present also in Finnish paganism: 'J'atteste par neuf fois les Runas immortelles' (*Le Runoia* v. 341).

¹¹⁰ There are also nine seals of winter in *Les Larmes de l'Ours*: 'Le Chant sacré brisa les neuf sceaux de l'hiver' (*Les Larmes de l'ours* v. 22).

¹¹¹ *La Légende des Nornes* v. 104. Here a reference to the *Book of Revelation* can be found: the seven symbolic seals (see also *Qaïn* v. 175) secure the book or scroll that John of Patmos saw in an apocalyptic vision. The opening of the seals marks the Second Coming of Christ and the beginning of the Apocalypse. In Leconte de Lisle's verse the opening (see below) will unleash the powers of evil.

¹¹² It is not possible to fully describe here the figure of Loki, considered as a fire deity, even with regard to his role in the final wildfire that marks the end of the cosmic cycle. Regarding Loki see De Vries Jan, *The Problem of Loki*, Helsinki, Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1933; Dumézil Georges, *Loki*, Paris, Flammarion, 1999; Bonnetain Yvonne S., *Loki. Beweger der Geschichten*, Meschede, Roter Drake, 2013.

¹¹³ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 170-173.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, v. 93.

found in Snorri's *Edda*.¹¹⁵ Loki is the last survivor of the giants' lineage: 'Échappé du naufrage des siens'.¹¹⁶ Here the poet identifies Loki with Bergelmir, the giant who in Snorri's *Edda* survives the flood caused by Ymir's blood.¹¹⁷ The evil god has been imprisoned: 'enchaîné dans les antres anciens, Loki [...] tordant sa bouche, S'agite et se consume en sa rage farouche'.¹¹⁸ In the *Locasenna*, we read that Loki, during a banquet, insults all the gods and, for this, is punished.¹¹⁹ The same punishment, according to Snorri's *Edda*, is inflicted on Loki for Baldr's death.¹²⁰

In Leconte de Lisle's verse, Loki is named together with the masters of the final destruction: Surtr is 'noir'¹²¹ and this is the meaning of his name.¹²² He is Muspell's guardian: *Hann hefir loganda sverð, ok í enda veraldar mun hann fara ok herja ok sigra ǫll goðin ok brenna allan heim með eldi*.¹²³ The serpent who 'de ses nœuds convulsifs, Étreint,

¹¹⁵ *Loki eða Loptr, sonr Fárbauta jotuns* (Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 26); 'Loki or Lopt, son of the giant Farbauti' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 26).

¹¹⁶ *La Légende des Nornes* v. 91.

¹¹⁷ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 11.

¹¹⁸ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 92-93.

¹¹⁹ *Hann var bundinn með þǫrmom sonar Nara. Enn Narfi, sonr hans, varð at vargi. Scaði tók eitrosm oc festi upp yfir annlit Loca. Draup þar ór eitr. Sigyn, kona Loca, sat þar ok helt munnlaug undir eitriþ. Enn er munnlaugin var full, bar hon út eitriþ; en meðan draup eitriþ á Loca. Þá kiptiz hann svá hart við, at þaðan af scalf iorð ǫll; þat ero nú kallaðir landscialptar* (Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius* op. cit., p. 109-110); 'He was bound with the guts of his son Nari. But his son Narfi turned into a wolf. Skadi took a poisonous snake and fastened it over Loki's face; poison dripped down from it. Sigyn, Loki's wife, sat there and held a basin under the poison. But when the basin was full, she carried the poison out; and meanwhile the poison fell on Loki. Then he writhed so violently at this that all the earth shook from it; those are now called earthquakes' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, op. cit., p. 92). See also *Völuspá*, str. 34 and 35 (Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius* op. cit., p. 8; Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, op. cit., p. 8).

¹²⁰ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 49.

¹²¹ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 99 and 170.

¹²² 'The Black' (Cleasby Richard – Guðbrandr Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, op. cit., p. 605).

¹²³ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 9. 'He has a flaming sword and at the end of the world he will go and wage war and defeat all the gods and burn the whole world with fire' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 9). *Surtr ferr sunnan með sviga lævi, scínn af sverði sól valtíva* (*Völuspá*, str. 52, Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius* op. cit., p. 12);

sans l'ébranler, la terre aux rocs massifs'¹²⁴ is *Miðgarðsormr*¹²⁵ who is described by the poet in the same way as he appears in the sources: *kastaði hann orminum í inn djúpa sæ er liggr um öll lönd, ok óx sá ormr svá at hann liggr í miðju hafinu of öll lönd ok bítr í sporð sér*.¹²⁶ The wolf Fenrir 'Hurle et pleure, les yeux flamboyants de famine'¹²⁷ as in Snorri's *Edda: brenna ór augum hans ok nqsum*.¹²⁸ Fenrir will murder Óðinn, an event not expressly mentioned by Leconte de Lisle but only hinted at in a very significant line: 'Fenris flaire déjà sa proie irrévocable'.¹²⁹ The supreme deity's death has been established by fate, it is in the poet's words 'irrévocable'.

Both the serpent Jormungandr and the wolf Fenrir are Loki's children, and so is Hel:¹³⁰ 'La sombre Héla, comme un oiseau nocturne, Plane au-dessus du gouffre, aveugle et taciturne'.¹³¹ The three adjectives that describe Hel have a deep cosmogonic meaning: Hel is 'sombre' and Surtr is 'noir'. She is blind, and therefore opposed to the gods, who are deities of light and the source of life. She is silent and silence, the lack of sound, defines the condition before the world came into existence.

'Surt comes from the south with branches-ruin, the slaughter-god's sun glances from his sword' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, op. cit., p. 10).

¹²⁴ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 95-96.

¹²⁵ *Miðgarðr* ('the middle-yard') is the earth, the abode of men. *Ormr*: 'snake, serpent' (Cleasby Richard – Guðbrandr Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, op. cit., p. 426 and 468).

¹²⁶ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 27. 'He [Óðinn] threw the serpent into that deep sea which lies round all lands, and this serpent grew so that it lies in the midst of the ocean encircling all lands and bites on its own tail' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 27).

¹²⁷ *La Légende des Nornes* v. 98

¹²⁸ Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 50. 'Flames will burn from its eyes and nostrils' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 53).

¹²⁹ *La Légende des Nornes* v. 173.

¹³⁰ *Angrboða hét gygr í Jötunheimum. Við henni gat Loki þrjú börn. Eitt var Fenrisúlfr, annat Jormungandr (þat er Miðgarðsormr), þriðja er Hel* (Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 27). 'There was a giantess called Angrboda in Giantland. With her Loki had three children. One was Fenriswolf, the second Jormungand (i.e. the Midgard serpent), the third is Hel' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 26). Hel refers both to the goddess of the underworld and to her kingdom and the name is related to the Indo-European root *kel 'conceal' (Pokorny Julius, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, op. cit., p. 553; De Vries Jan, *Altonordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, op. cit., p. 221).

¹³¹ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 105-106.

In this context, the rhyme ‘nocturne—taciturne’ takes on a meaning that goes far beyond metric coherence. Leconte de Lisle succeeds in penetrating the deepest essence of the myth through linguistic elements that are not descriptive, but which decipher the symbolic value of the mythical tale, as a universal representation of the world and its (fatal) becoming. In Leconte de Lisle’s poem *Hel* takes on the features of *Niðhoggr*:¹³² *þar kómur inn dimmi dreki fliúgandi naðr fránn, neðan frá Niðafíollom; berr sér í fíoðrom flýgr vøll yfir Niðhoggr nái*.¹³³

Loki and his sons will cause the end of the cosmic cycle: ‘les jours des épreuves sacrées’.¹³⁴ In the prediction of the final fight between the gods and the negative powers, the seeress heralds *ragna røk*¹³⁵ where *ragna* is gen. from *regin* (subst. n. pl. ‘the gods’) and *røk* is acc. from *røk* (subst. n. pl. ‘origin, reason, proof, event, circumstance’).¹³⁶ *Ragna røk* is not the twilight of the gods¹³⁷ but defines pivotal events for the gods, that is ‘épreuves sacrées’, as the struggle between the deities and forces of evil depicted in several stanzas of the *Völuspá* and in Snorri’s *Edda*.¹³⁸

Significantly, this part of the mythical tale is completely absent from *La Légende des Nornes*, where the cosmic apocalypse is not the result of a conflict, but the ultimate fate of the universe, the eternal return into the abyss from which everything originated: ‘Vieille Urda, ton œil cave a vu l’essaim des choses Du vide primitif soudainement écloses, Jaillir, tourbillonner, emplir l’immensité... Tu le verras rentrer au

¹³² See note 54.

¹³³ *Völuspá*, str. 66; Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 15. ‘There comes the shadow-dark dragon flying, the gleaming serpent, up from Dark-of-moon Hills; Nidhogg flies over the plain, in his pinions he carries corpses’ (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda, op. cit.*, p. 12).

¹³⁴ *La Légende des Nornes* 166.

¹³⁵ *Völuspá*, str. 44, 49, 58 (Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 10, 11, 14).

¹³⁶ *Ordbog, op. cit.* : *regin, røk*.

¹³⁷ The twilight of the gods is *ragnarøkkr*, where *røkkr* (subst. n.) means ‘darkness’ (*Ibid.*: *røkkr*). The noun is found in Snorri’s *Edda* (Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning, op. cit.*, p. 25, 29, 49) and in the *Poetic Edda* only in *Locasenna* (str. 39; Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 104).

¹³⁸ Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 12-13; Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda, op. cit.*, p. 10-11; Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning, op. cit.*, p. 49-51; Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda, op. cit.*, p. 53-54.

gouffre illimité'.¹³⁹ As we read in another poem by Leconte de Lisle, the world becomes 'difforme, abrupt, lourd et livide, Le spectre monstrueux d'univers détruit Jeté comme une épave à l'Océan du vide, Enfer pétrifié, sans flammes et sans bruit, Flottant et tournoyant dans l'impassible nuit'.¹⁴⁰

In this way the poet seals a deterministic representation that mirrors the innermost essence of the myth, as comparison with the sources shows: 'Les astres flagellés tourbillonnent au vent, Se heurtent en éclats, tombent et disparaissent [...] Et dans l'océan noir, silencieux, fumant, La terre avec horreur s'enfonce pesamment!'.¹⁴¹

verold steypiz [...]
griótbjörg gnata, enn gífr rata,
troða halir helveg, enn himinn klofnar [...]
sól tér sortna sígr fold í mar,
hverfa af himni heiða stíornor;
geisar eimi við aldrnara,
leicr hár hiti við himin síálfan.¹⁴²

The occurrence of the verb 'tourbillonner' must be pointed out: it defines a rotational vortex, similar to the Malstrøm or Moskenstraumen, which is renowned as one of the world's strongest tidal currents at the Lofoten archipelago in Nordland county, Norway, between the

¹³⁹ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 153-156.

¹⁴⁰ *Les Clairs de Lune* vv. 1-5. A similar representation is found in *Le Runoia* ('Tout l'univers, aveugle et stupide à la fois, Roule comme un cadavre aux steppes de l'espace'; *Le Runoia* vv. 224-225) and in *La Dernière Vision* ('Et, d'heure en heure, aussi, vous vous engloutirez, Ô tourbillonnements d'étoiles éperdues, Dans l'incommensurable effroi d'étendues, Dans les gouffres muets et noirs des cieus sacrés! Et ce sera la Nuit aveugle, la grande Ombre Informe, dans son vide et sa stérilité' (*La Dernière Vision* vv. 37-42)).

¹⁴¹ *La Légende des Nornes* vv. 180-181 and 183-184. About this apocalyptic image see Sirangelo Valentina, "The Fate of the Gods in the Poetry of Charles Leconte de Lisle and Lucian Blaga", in *Analele Universității București, Limba și literatura română*, Anul LXVIII, 2019, p. 99-116.

¹⁴² *Völuspá*, str. 45, 52, 57; Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 11, 12, 13-14. 'The world plunges headlong [...] Rocky cliffs clash together and the troll-women are abroad, heroes tread the hell-road and the sky splits apart [...] The sun turns black, land sinks into the sea, the bright stars vanish from the sky; steam rises up in the conflagration, hot flame plays high against heaven itself' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda, op. cit.*, p. 9,10,11). A similar scenery is found in Sonrri's *Edda* (see notes 69 and 105).

Norwegian Sea and the Vestfjorden.¹⁴³ A mythical background to the Malström can be found in the *Gróttasöngur*.¹⁴⁴

In *La Légende des Nornes* there is no reference to the clash with the Christian faith, as grounds for the end of the ancient mythical universe, while in *Le Massacre de Mona*, *Le Barde de Temrah* and in *Le Runoia*,¹⁴⁵ the Celtic religion and Finnish paganism are destroyed by Christianity. This pivotal aspect is the subject of another poem, *La Vision de Snorr*, and Leconte de Lisle's source here is *Sólarljóð*,¹⁴⁶ a poem composed in the thirteenth century, whose French translation was published by F.G. Bergmann.¹⁴⁷

Pessimism constitutes the structural element that indissolubly binds *La Légende des Nornes* and *La Vision de Snorr*: both tell of the end of the

¹⁴³ Edgar Allan Poe's short story *A Descent into the Maelström*, translated by C. Baudelaire, could be a source for Leconte de Lisle's poem *Effet de Lune* (Leconte de Lisle Charles-Marie, *Poèmes Barbares*, *op. cit.*, p. 343).

¹⁴⁴ 'Song of Grotti' (Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 297-301; Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda, Skáldskaparmál 1 Introduction, Text and Notes*, *op. cit.*, p. 52-57). The Danish king Fróði went as a guest to Sweden to visit a king called Fiolnir. There he purchased two female slaves whose names were Fenja and Menja. There were two millstones so huge that there was no one strong enough to move them. The millstones had this quality, whereby the mill ground out whatever the grinder prescribed. The mill's name was Grotti. King Fróði compelled Fenja and Menja to tirelessly grind gold, peace and prosperity. They chanted the poem known as *Gróttasöngur* and ground out an army against Fróði, so that during the night a sea-king called Mysing went there and killed Fróði. Mysing took Grotti away with him and also Fenja and Menja and told them to grind out salt. They went on grinding before the ship sank and a whirlpool was left in the sea where the sea flowed down into the mill-hole. It was then that the sea became salt (adapted from Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, *op. cit.*, p. 107). See De Santillana Giorgio-von Dechend Hertha, *Hamlet's Mill*, Boston, Gambit 1969 regarding the poem's astronomical meaning.

¹⁴⁵ Leconte de Lisle Charles-Marie, *Poèmes Barbares*, *op. cit.*, p. 112-126, 73-80 and 88-98.

¹⁴⁶ 'Song of the Sun'. A father appears from the afterlife to his son and explains to him the true meaning of earthly life and death, good and evil, eternal punishment and bliss. *Sólarljóð* 'is essentially a fusion of two genres, the first being the indigenous pre-Christian wisdom poetry genre, exemplified by *Hávamál* ('Words of the High One') in the *Poetic Edda*, while the second is the popular Christian type of the Other World vision. Wholly Christian in outlook, *Sólarljóð* nevertheless employs pagan or pseudo-pagan figures for rhetorical effect' (Clunies Ross Margaret (ed.), *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2007, p. 287). 'The *Sólar lið* was itself in part a mythological mosaic incorporating the figures of the ancient lore into a Christian theme' (Fairlie Alison, *Leconte de Lisle's Poems on the Barbarian Races*, *op. cit.*, p. 95).

¹⁴⁷ Bergmann Frederic Guillaume, *Les chants de Sol*, Strasbourg, Treuttel et Würte, 1858; Fairlie Alison, *Leconte de Lisle's Poems on the Barbarian Races*, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

ancient wisdom of myth, which in *La Légende des Nornes* is the effect of an immanent cosmic law, and in *La Vision de Snorr* is the consequence of the overbearing affirmation of the Christian faith.

The linguistic analysis demonstrates that *La Vision de Snorr* represents the metaphysical counterpoint of *La Légende des Nornes*. Hel's underworld becomes a place of suffering, an element absent from the sources. The constitutive elements of the mythical cosmogony describe here the Christian hell, so as to testify to the diametric opposition between the ancient worldview and the new faith. The nine worlds ruled by the cosmic tree are 'les neuf maisons noires [...] les antres de Hel'¹⁴⁸ and the foam, a creative element evoked by the Norns,¹⁴⁹ becomes 'une bave qui fume'¹⁵⁰ in the hall of the Evil One. The toast¹⁵¹ becomes a hideous rite performed by demons:

Sur des quartiers de roc toujours en fusion, Muets, sont accoudés les sept Convives mornes, Les sept Diables royaux du vieux Septentrion. Ainsi que les héros buvaient à pleines cornes l'hydromel prodigué pour le festin guerrier [...] Les sept Démons [...] En des cruches de plomb qui corrodent leurs bouches, Puisent des pleurs bouillants au fond d'un noir cuvier.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ *La Vision de Snorr* vv. 2-3.

¹⁴⁹ See note 53.

¹⁵⁰ *La Vision de Snorr* v. 14.

¹⁵¹ The toast played an essential role in the warrior society. With the toast, solemn vows were made following a precise ritual, during which the memory of the ancestors was evoked, as in the following example: *Fyrsta dag at veizlunni, áðr Sveinn konungr stigi í háseti föður síns, þá drakk hann minni hans ok strengði heit, áðr þrír vetr væri liðnir, at hann skyldi kominn með her sinn til Englands ok drepa Aðalráð konung eða reka hann ór landi. Þat minni skyldu allir drekka, þeir er at erfinu váru* (Bjarni Aðalbjanarson (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla I, op. cit.*, p. 274); 'The first day at the banquet, before King Sveinn was to go up into his father's high-seat, he drank his toast and made a vow that before three winters had passed he would have come with his army to England and have killed King Aðalráðr or driven him from the country. Everyone who was at the memorial banquet had to drink that toast' (Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla, Volume I, op. cit.*, p. 170).

¹⁵² *La Vision de Snorr* vv. 25-29 and 31-33.

There are seven demons,¹⁵³ while in *Sólarljóð* the number seven expresses Christian symbols, contrasting with the number nine which, as we have seen, is significant in Norse myth.¹⁵⁴

*Ek kenni þér sjau ráð saman [...] Ek þóttumz fara utan ok innan alla sjau sigrheima [...] Ek sá sonu niðja ríða norðan ok váru sjau saman; þeir drukku inn hreins mjóð ór brunni Baugreyris fullum hornum.*¹⁵⁵

There are no norns but ‘trois Vierges farouches’ whose fate is similar to that of Fenia and Menia in the *Gróttasöngur*.¹⁵⁶

Broyant d'épais cailloux sous des meules d'airain, Tournent en haletant [...] Leur cœur pend au dehors et saigne de chagrin.¹⁵⁷

*Sólarljóð: heljar meyjar buðu mér heim hrolla á hverju kveldi [...] svipvisar konur moluðu mold til matar mönnum sínum [...] Þær inar dökku konur drógu daprliga dreyrga steina; blóðug hjörtu hengu þeim fyr brjóst utan, mædd við miklum trega.*¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ The number seven takes on a negative meaning also in *Le Massacre de Mona* ('Le vieux dragon Avank, travaillé par l'envie, aux sept têtes' vv. 188-189; 'La foule des Kymris vogue vers l'inconnu. La tempête, sept jours et sept nuits, par l'espace, Poussa la flotte immense au but mystérieux' vv. 263-264) and in *Le Runoia* ('Vous serez consumés des angoisses de l'âme, Vous vous tordrez hurlants dans le septième enfer!' vv. 267-268). In Vianey's opinion the number could symbolise the Seven Deadly Sins (Vianey Joseph, *Les Sources de Leconte de Lisle*, Montpellier, Coulet, 1907, p. 384).

¹⁵⁴ See above. In the *Sólarljóð* the poem's protagonist and narrator 'sat for nine days on the norn's seat' (str. 51: *Ek sat níu daga á stóli norna*). Njörðr has nine daughters who carve the runes: *Rúnir sem níu dætr Njarðar hafa ristit* (str. 79). (Text and translation, Clunies Ross Margaret (ed.), *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, op. cit., p. 331 and 334). Nine are *fimbulljóð* (Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius* op. cit., p. 40; 'mighty spells' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, op. cit., p. 32) of Óðinn in *Hávamál*.

¹⁵⁵ *Sólarljóð* str. 32, 52, 56; 'I teach you seven counsel in all [...] It seemed to me that I travelled outside and inside all the seven victory-worlds [...] I saw the sons of the dark phases of the moon riding from the north, and they were seven together; they drank the pure mead from the well of Baugreyrir out of full horns' (Text and translation, Clunies Ross Margaret (ed.), *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, op. cit., p. 317, 332, 335).

¹⁵⁶ See note 144.

¹⁵⁷ *La Vision de Snorr* vv.35-37.

¹⁵⁸ *Sólarljóð* str. 38, 57, 58. 'Hell's maidens dealt shivers home to me every evening [...] Treacherous women were crushing earth into food for their men [...] Those dark women were sorrowfully dragging gory stones; bloody hearts hung outside their breasts, exhausted by great grief' (Text and translation, Clunies Ross Margaret (ed.), *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, op. cit., p. 321, 337). In *Sólarljóð* there are also *Helga meyjar* (str. 73; 'Holy maidens'. *Ibid.*, p. 347) who wash the souls clean of sin. This polarity is not detectable in Leconte de Lisle's poem.

The polarity between heat and cold from which, in the mythical tale, life originated, becomes a Dantean punishment: 'Leurs fronts sont couronnés de flambantes verveines; Mais tandis que leur couche échauffe et cuit leurs flancs, L'amer et froid dégoût coagule leurs veines'¹⁵⁹ *Sólarljóð*: *Þau skulu ganga meðal frosts ok funa*.¹⁶⁰ The runes, symbol of arcane and ancient wisdom, are infernal engravings, instruments of death and punishment: 'Donc chacun porte au front une lettre Runique Qui change sa cervelle en un charbon fumant'.¹⁶¹ *Sólarljóð*: *Blóðgar rúnir váru merkðar meinliga á brjósti þeim*.¹⁶²

In the great poetic fresco dominated by a vivid chromatism, Leconte de Lisle embeds the elements that symbolise the forces of evil in the myth:¹⁶³ in the hall of the Evil One 'tombent des nœuds de reptiles moisis',¹⁶⁴ just as Nástrandir's hall is 'woven out of snakes' bodies like a wattled house'.¹⁶⁵ Stingy people are 'Tels que des loups tirant des langues écarlates'¹⁶⁶ and the wolf evokes a violent death also in *Le cœur de Hialmar*: 'Moi, je meurs. Mon esprit coule par vingt blessures. J'ai fait mon temps. Buvez ô loups, mon sang vermeil'.¹⁶⁷ In the mythical tale the wolf Fenrir is one of the architects of the final conflagration and in the *Sólarljóð* the sinners 'ran like wolves to the woods'¹⁶⁸ and 'All those who

¹⁵⁹ *La Vision de Snorr* vv. 46-48.

¹⁶⁰ *Sólarljóð* str. 18. 'They have to walk between frost and fire' (Text and translation, Clunies Ross Margaret (ed.), *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, op. cit., p. 307).

¹⁶¹ *La Vision de Snorr* vv. 70-71.

¹⁶² *Sólarljóð* str. 61. 'Bloody runes were painfully marked on their breasts [lit. breast]' (Text and translation, Clunies Ross Margaret (ed.), *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, op. cit., p. 339).

¹⁶³ 'If Leconte de Lisle has represented Christianity in this phase of ferociously barbarian [sic], he has authority for so doing. That he has chosen a subject well suited to his own opinions does not mean that he has necessarily falsified the atmosphere of his source' (Fairlie Alison, *Leconte de Lisle's Poems on the Barbarian Races*, op. cit., p. 101).

¹⁶⁴ *La Vision de Snorr* v. 15.

¹⁶⁵ Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, op. cit., p. 56. See also *Völuspá*, str. 38 (Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius* op. cit., p. 9).

¹⁶⁶ *La Vision de Snorr* v. 42.

¹⁶⁷ *Le Cœur de Hialmar* vv. 33-34. See also *La Mort de Sigurd* v. 64 : 'Et les loups altérés boivent son rouge sang'.

¹⁶⁸ Str. 9: *runnu sem vargar til víðar* (Text and translation, Clunies Ross Margaret (ed.), *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, op. cit., p. 301).

have a changeable heart seem like wolves'.¹⁶⁹ The dragon Nídhoggr,¹⁷⁰ who, in the *Völuspá*, carried lifeless bodies,¹⁷¹ is at the service of the devil: 'Au-dessous du Malin, sur qui pleut cette écume, Tournoie, avec un haut vacarme, un Dragon roux Qui bat de l'envergure au travers de la brume'.¹⁷² There is also here a reference to *Sólarljóð*: *Vestan sá ek vánardreka fljúga [...] öflugir eitrdrekar rendu í gegnum brjóst þeim brögnum*.¹⁷³

Just as it was a fire that put an end to the cosmic cycle dominated by gods and giants,¹⁷⁴ it is fire that dominates the hellish scenery described by the poet ('Carcans de braise, habits de feu, fourches de flammes, Tout cela, tout cela dure éternellement')¹⁷⁵ as in *Sólarljóð*: *Ek sá margan meiddan mann fara á þeim glæddum götum [...] Ek sá menn þá, er af mikillæti virðuz framar vánun; klæði þeira váru kýmiliga um slegin eldi*.¹⁷⁶ Here we not only have linguistic echoes to the source but also a very important structural correspondence with ancient skaldic poetry, namely the presence of alliteration in line 74 ('feu – fourches – flammes').

The other important element is the first-person narrative. Leconte de Lisle's choice is very significant: Snorri is the witness who, obeying the command of a bloodthirsty Christian God,¹⁷⁷ undertakes a journey

¹⁶⁹ Str. 31: *allir þeir, sem eiga hverfan hug, þykkja líkir úlfum* (*Ibid.*, p. 316). Other punishments have a matching reference in *Sólarljóð*: *Ek sá marga ófegna men þá; þeir váru villir vega* (str. 62; 'I saw many unhappy men then; they had gone astray [lit. were erring with regards to ways]'; *Ibid.*, p. 340). 'Enfin, je vois le Peuple antique, aveugle et fou, La race qui vécut avant votre lumière, Seigneur! et qui marchait, hélas! sans savoir où' (*La Vision de Snorr* vv.61-63).

¹⁷⁰ See note 54.

¹⁷¹ Str. 39: *Þar saug Nídhoggr nái framgengna* (Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius op. cit.*, p. 9); 'There Nidhogg sucks the corpses of the dead' (Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda, op. cit.*, p. 9). See also note 133.

¹⁷² *La Vision de Snorr* vv. 16-18.

¹⁷³ *Sólarljóð* str. 54 and 64. 'From the west I saw a dragon of expectation flying [...] Mighty poisonous dragons ran through the breasts of those men' (Text and translation, Clunies Ross Margaret (ed.), *Poetry on Christian Subjects, op. cit.*, p. 333 and 342).

¹⁷⁴ See note 123.

¹⁷⁵ *La Vision de Snorr* vv. 74-75.

¹⁷⁶ *Sólarljóð* str. 59 and 66. 'I saw many a maimed man journey on the glowing paths [...] I saw men then who from pride esteemed themselves beyond expectation; their clothes were amusingly set on fire' (Text and translation, Clunies Ross Margaret (ed.), *Poetry on Christian Subjects, op. cit.*, p. 338 and 343).

¹⁷⁷ 'sanglant Rédempteur' (*La Vision de Snorr* v. 78).

through hell and comes back to describe the eternity of atoning pains.¹⁷⁸ Snorri lived in the thirteenth century, when Christianity had now fully established itself in Scandinavian countries. He was the author of the most important saga about the holy king of Norway, Óláfr Haraldsson, but also the author of *Edda*,¹⁷⁹ which was above all a manual where the mythological metaphors used by the skalds were explained, as the ancient stories from which they originated were narrated, and numerous citations from the poems of the *Poetic Edda* were included. In this way the work provided a complete representation of the mythical universe.

Snorri was, therefore, the keeper and interpreter of a cultural heritage, which belonged to yesterday's world, a legacy that he tried to rescue from oblivion, despite being fully aware that it was vanishing, as he wrote in *Heimskringla*: *pá var sú tíð komin, at fyrirdæmask skyldi blótskaprinn ok blótmenninir, en í stað kom heilög trúa ok réttir siðir*.¹⁸⁰

As a man strongly rooted in the reality of the present, as demonstrated by his troubled life,¹⁸¹ but with a mind and, perhaps, a heart, turned towards the past, Snorri was the most faithful witness 'du vieux Septentrion'.¹⁸² He was able to describe the irreversible process initiated by the establishment of Christianity, which, especially in Norway, was a violent act carried out by the first Christian kings, as Snorri himself reported in the sagas about Óláfr Tryggvason and the holy king Óláfr Haraldsson. By choosing Snorri, the man who survived hell, Leconte de Lisle celebrates the eternity of poetry against the oblivion of history: 'Souvenez-vous de Snorr dans votre éternité!'.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸ 'l'éternité des maux expiatoires' (*Ibid.*, v. 6).

¹⁷⁹ See Annexe 2.

¹⁸⁰ Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla I, op. cit.*, p. 299. 'The time had come for heathen worship and heathen worshippers to be condemned, and be replaced by the holy Faith and proper morals' (Finlay Alison – Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla, Volume I, op. cit.*, p. 186).

¹⁸¹ See Annexe 2. Regarding Snorri's life see Óskar Guðmundsson (üb. R. Jucknies), *Snorri Sturluson. Homer des Nordens*, Köln, Böhlau, 2011.

¹⁸² *La Vision de Snorr* v. 27.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, v. 79 (the last line of the poem). This idea is also expressed in Leconte de Lisle's *Discours de réception* at the French Academy: 'Aux époques lointaines où les rêves, les terreurs, les passions vigoureuses des races jeunes et naïves jaillissent confusément en légendes pleines d'amour et de haine, d'exaltation mystique ou héroïque, en récits terribles ou charmants, joyeux comme l'éclat de rire de l'enfance ou sombres comme une colère de barbare, et flottant, sans formes précises encore, de génération en génération, d'âme en âme et de bouche en bouche; dans ces temps de floraison

Annexe

1. The *Poetic Edda* is a collection of poems contained in a manuscript (GKS 2365, 4°, *Codex Regius*) written in Iceland in the second half of the thirteenth century, which was found by the Icelandic bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson in 1641 and donated by him to the Danish king Frederick III. The name *Edda* was given by Brynjólfur Sveinsson himself, since some passages of the poems are reported in Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, therefore showing that Snorri was referring to an older work. The author of the collection was identified by the Icelandic bishop Sæmundr inn fróði ('The Wise', 1056-1133), a scholar cited in Icelandic sources, probably the author of a lost history of the Norwegian kings in Latin. However, paleographic research has shown that the manuscript was written around 1270 and, therefore, it is impossible to identify Sæmundr as the author or compiler of the collection. Linguistic investigation has shown that the poems were composed in different periods, ranging from the ninth to the end of the twelfth century and before being collected in written form they were handed down orally for a long time. The collection is divided into two thematic strands: poems on mythological and heroic subjects. The mythological poems contain narratives concerning the principal deities of the Norse pantheon and other supernatural beings such as elves, dwarves and giants.

2. Snorri Sturluson was the greatest Icelandic writer of the first half of the thirteenth century. A complex and contradictory figure, Snorri, to whom we owe the knowledge of a large part of the mythical universe of the peoples of the North, was a scholar, but also a man of power and an important actor on the Icelandic and Norwegian political scene of his time. At the end of an adventurous life, he fell victim to a political assassination instigated by king Hákon IV of Norway. Snorri was the author of a work titled *Edda*. *Edda* is divided into three parts:

merveilleuse, des hommes symboliques sont créés par l'imagination de tout un peuple, vastes esprits où les germes épars du génie commun se réunissent et se condensent en théogonies et en épopées. L'humanité les tient pour les révélateurs antiques du Beau et immortalise les noms d'Homère et de Valmiki. Et l'humanité a raison, car tous les éléments de la Poésie universelle sont contenus dans ces poèmes sublimes qui ne seront jamais oubliés' (Académie Française, *Discours de réception de Charles Leconte De Lisle* ; accessed January 22, 2021; <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/discours-de-reception-de-charles-leconte-de-lisle>).

the first has an ambiguous title: *Gylfaginning* ('The tricking of Gylfi'). A mythical Swedish king, Gylf disguises himself as a beggar and goes to the land of the Æsir and is instructed by a divine triumvirate (under whose guise Odin was actually hiding in triple aspect) on the origin and destiny of the world, and on the history of men and gods. In the second part, *Skáldskaparmál*, ('Poetic language, The language of poetry'; Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda, Skáldskaparmál 2 Glossary and Index of Names*, Exeter, Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998, p. 389), a dialogue is imagined between the god of poetry Bragi and the giant Ægir during a banquet in the hall of the gods where the poetic metaphors (*kenningar*) used by the ancient poets, the skalds, are explained. The last part, *Háttatal* ('Number or list of verse-forms or stanza-types'; Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda, Háttatal* Exeter, Viking Society for Northern Research 2007, p. 118) exemplifies the types of verse forms used in Old Norse poetry. Snorri Sturluson was also the author of *Heimskringla* ('The disc of the world'; Finlay Alison – Faulkes Anthony (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla, Volume I, The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason*, Exeter, Viking Society for Northern Research, 2011, p. vii), where the story of the Norwegian kings from mythical origins up to the second half of the twelfth century is narrated in sixteen sagas. Snorri ennobles the kings of Norway by attributing to them a divine origin, explaining that their lineage descends from that of the Æsir and, therefore, from Óðinn, the supreme god.

3. *La Légende des Nornes* v.71. The reference to Urðr as embodiment of the past is also present in Marmier's work *Chants populaires du Nord*, which provided much material for several of Leconte de Lisle's Scandinavian poems (Fairlie Alison, *Leconte de Lisle's Poems on the Barbarian Races*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014[1947], p. 65): 'Les Nornes sont les Parques de la mythologie scandinave. Assises au pied du frêne Yggdrasil, l'arbre du monde, elles président à la destinée des hommes. L'une s'appelle Urde (passé), la seconde Vérande (présent), la troisième Skald (avenir)' (Marmier Xavier, *Chants populaires du Nord*, Paris, Charpentier, 1842, p. 56).

4. The runic alphabet originally consisted of twenty-four signs and was used by the peoples of Scandinavia before the advent of Christianity and the adoption of the Latin alphabet. The signs were engraved on stone,

wood or other materials. A magical-religious character was attributed to the runes, as it was believed that they were of divine origin, as shown by the numerous inscriptions available (Haugen Oddr Einar (üb. Magnús Pétursson), *Die skandinavischen Sprachen*, Hamburg, Buske, 1984, p. 164). This was probably linked to the fact that in a culture based essentially on an oral tradition, mastery of a writing system was probably the exclusive domain of a select few.

5. Baldr is haunted by frightening dreams and Frigg makes all living beings swear that they will not harm Baldr. Loki tricks Frigg into revealing that the mistletoe plant has not made any oath. Loki puts a sprig of mistletoe in the hand of Hqðr, a blind son of Óðinn, and Hqðr, unaware, throws it at Baldr who, struck by the branch, dies. Hermóðr, also Óðinn's son, travels to the realm of the dead and finds Baldr there. The condition for bringing him back to life is that everyone mourns Baldr's death. Everyone agrees except a giantess named Þökk, who is none other than Loki, and thus Baldr's return is prevented. Later the gods take revenge on Loki and Baldr will come back to life when a new cosmic cycle begins (Faulkes Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, op. cit., p. 45-49). See also *Völuspá*, str. 31-32 (Kuhn Hans (ed.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius* op. cit., p. 7-8; Larrington Carolyne (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, op. cit., p. 8).