

# Response

*Eldar Heide*

University of Bergen

Kuusela draws attention to quite a number of points in the sources which fit best with understanding Gullveig in *Völuspá* 21 as a giantess, rather than Freyja or some unspecified female being, and the war in *Völuspá* 24 as a war between the giants and the gods, rather than between the two groups of gods. It is a good point that stanza 25 refers to a conflict involving the giants, and that Snorri, too, says that the wall around *Ásgarðr*, which is generally understood as being identical with the *borðveggr ása* in *Völuspá* 24, is supposed to protect the gods from the giants. I agree that the mention of the Vanir and their war magic in stanza 24 does not require that the Vanir are the Æsir's opponents in the battle; the idea may well be that war magic is the Vanir's responsibility in their alliance with the Æsir. It also seems very significant that the Æsir's killing of Gullveig would be an anomaly if she were not a giantess, because the Æsir sometimes kill giantesses but not other female beings. In addition, it fits well with this understanding that *Heiðr* is the name of a giantess in several sources, because most scholars believe that *Heiðr* in stanza 21 and Gullveig in stanza 22 are one and the same. Finally, it makes sense to see the cruelty inflicted upon Gullveig in Óðinn's Hall in relation to the hostility between the gods and giants that accelerates through the mythological history and ends with victory for the giants in the apocalyptic *Ragnarök* battle. It is not correct, however, that "the downfall of the gods starts with this episode". As Kuusela himself notes earlier in the article, the downfall of the gods in *Völuspá* starts with the arrival of the enigmatic giantesses in stanza 8.

As Kuusela points out, it is a problem in the interpretation of Mogk, Schulz, Mundal and himself that Snorri presents the war in question as one between Æsir and Vanir.<sup>1</sup> Rejecting Snorri's version is not in itself too problematic, if there are strong reasons for doing so, because there are several cases (when we know Snorri's sources) where his presentation is disputed by today's scholars (e.g.

the idea that the Norse gods live in heaven<sup>2</sup>). It is hard, though, to see a plausible reason why Snorri would, in a myth about a war between gods and giants, replace the giants with the Vanir. (In the case of the gods living in heaven, Christian influence is an obvious explanation.) After all, the antagonism between gods and giants is essential to his presentation of Old Norse mythology, so we should expect that a primordial war between these two groups would suit him well. Also, Snorri's version to some degree is supported by other Eddic poems. According to *Vafþrúðnismál* 38–39 and *Lokasenna* 34–35, Njǫrðr was sent from the Vanir to the Æsir as a hostage. This would normally imply a settlement of a conflict between Vanir and Æsir,<sup>3</sup> and it happened, apparently, at a very early point in mythological history. The Vanir's magic in the world's first war in *Völuspá* 24 fits well into this. For this reason, I find it problematic to reject Snorri's account.

Kuusela says that interpreting Gullveig in *Völuspá* 21 as a giantess implies “a new analysis of the first war in the world according to how it is described in Old Norse mythic traditions”. We might, however, have to distinguish between the first war in the world and the information about it found in *Völuspá* 21–26. If we look at *Völuspá* in isolation, the more plausible interpretation may be that the first war was one between the gods and the giants. But, there is evidence of such a war between the Vanir and the Æsir, too. This could mean that there were two myths about this, or two versions of it, similar to how there were two myths of how the world was created (raised from the sea, in *Völuspá* 4, or made from the giant Ýmir's body, in *Vafþrúðnismál* 20–21). It is also conceivable that the Vanir and the giants were allies in the same war against the Æsir. Perhaps this could shed light on the enigmatic link between the hostage exchange of Njǫrðr and his humiliation by the giant Hymir's maidens in *Lokasenna* 34 – because, in retrospect, such an alliance would probably be seen as deeply humiliating. This would also be a good reason for Snorri not to mention the alliance. Could it also make sense of *Hymiskviða*'s information that Týr was the son of Hymir? We have no information about how Týr came to the gods, but could he, too, have come there as a hostage? He functions as a hostage guaranteeing a deal with one of the powers of chaos in the only preserved myth

about him, the one about the binding of the Fenrir wolf.<sup>4</sup> And in this myth, the gods break their own promises, similar to how they act in Kuusela's interpretation of *Völuspá* 21 and in *Völuspá* 26. About these questions, we can only speculate.

This is an interesting and well-argued article about an essential, but, alas, probably unsolvable, question in Old Norse mythology. It is no accident that around 10 previous interpretations of the *Völuspá* stanzas in question are mentioned in Kuusela's research overview.

## Notes

1. *Ynglinga saga* 1941 ch. 4:12–13; *Skáldskaparmál* 4, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* 1931:82
2. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* 1931:25, 19–20, 22, 25, 29–31, 33 (*Gylfaginning* 9, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 18). Cf. Schjødt 1990:4off., Heide 2014, especially p. 110.
3. Olsson 2016.
4. *Gylfaginning* 21, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* 1931:37.

## References

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