



# The Poetic Edda

*Stories of the Norse Gods  
and Heroes*

Translated and Edited, with Introduction, by  
JACKSON CRAWFORD

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To two fire-hearted heroes, gone far away,  
whose spirits breathe life in me still:  
To Papa, my biggest inspiration,  
and Wyatt, my smallest.

Og til deg, du nøkkel, lås og dør,  
mitt hjertas stad—  
mi grue, kveike, ved og glør,  
eg gjev mitt kvad.

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The mistakes and infelicities in this book are, naturally, attributable to me alone.

Jackson Crawford  
Riverton, Wyoming  
December 29, 2014

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*Note: The English "titles" are not necessarily translations of the Old Norse titles, but are meant to assist in remembering the content of each poem.*

## {ix} INTRODUCTION

### *In a Nutshell*

The Poetic Edda is a collection of poems in the Old Norse language. These poems are the source of almost all the myths of the Norse gods—famous characters in popular culture such as Odin, Thor, and Loki—and also of the thrilling and tragic adventures of legendary Viking heroes, especially Sigurth, his wife Guthrun, and her brothers Gunnar and Hogni.

## ***The World of the Poetic Edda***

The poems of the Poetic Edda have their roots in the cold, brutal world of medieval Scandinavia. During the so-called Viking Age (roughly AD 800–1100), the fierce Scandinavian pirates and adventurers known as Vikings robbed and raided in nearly every country of Europe, and explored as far afield as Baghdad and the eastern coast of present-day Canada. Meanwhile, they developed an extensive poetic literature about their gods and heroes, which their Christian descendants would commit to writing many centuries later.

Readers must understand a few facts about the culture that produced these poems, since the characters in them often act in a way that is incompatible with twenty-first-century social norms. Norse society prized a warlike, aggressive stance in men, and in the gods they worshipped. Fighting over limited resources, and even naked aggression against neighbors, was not necessarily considered wrong if it advanced one's wealth and honor and that of one's family. With the availability of natural resources sharply limited in medieval Scandinavia by its harsh climate and (in many regions) by sparse farmland, violent competition between families was a fact of life, and the raiding of overseas territories blessed with more food and gold must have seemed no more ethically problematic than the killing of an animal for its flesh and hide.

Not that Norse society recognized no code of ethics. But unlike modern moral standards, which tend to be utilitarian and altruistic (Does a given action benefit someone without harming someone else?), the Norse moral code was based on gaining and maintaining {x} honor, and avoiding shame. Honor was gained principally through displays of one's courage in confrontations with enemies, initiative and hard work at the farm and aboard ship, and a readiness to use violence in return for the violence done to one's friends and relatives. Those who show these qualities most abundantly, such as the god Thor and the hero Sigurth, are praised, in spite of actions that modern society would consider crude or evil (Thor owns slaves, for instance, and in the poem *Harbarthsljóth* he tells his father Odin that he would have gladly helped him hold down a woman he was trying to have his way with).

In a society in which the main social unit was not the individual but the family, it was imperative for members of the family to maintain their honor by avenging any harm done to another member of their family. If a man's brother had been killed, he would have to take revenge on the killer, but he might exact vengeance by killing a member of the killer's family rather than

by killing the perpetrator directly. This promise of mutual revenge bound a family together in a feuding world, and thus there was a special horror for the notion of accidentally or knowingly doing damage to one's own family.

Nonetheless, the heroes of the Poetic Edda are sometimes forced to take action against their own families, usually because of the ironclad force of their sworn words and boasts. The Eddic poems depict a world in which a person's words are absolutely binding, no matter the consequences—which are often tragic. For instance, in *Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar*, Hethin boasts (while drunk) that he will take his brother Helgi's lover, the Valkyrie named Svava. Though Hethin regrets this foolish and dangerous oath almost immediately, Helgi casually accepts that it is his brother's duty to carry it through:

[33]     “Don't concern yourself,  
          Hethin; the oaths  
          men make while drinking  
          will always prove true.  
A king has challenged me  
to a duel, and before three nights  
have passed, I must meet him  
at the appointed place.  
I doubt that I  
will survive;  
and then it would be good,  
if you took Svava.”

{xi} But of course, the problems created by such oaths are not always resolved so conveniently. The greatest tragedy of the heroic poems is the murder of Sigurth, which is brought about because Brynhild has been tricked into breaking her vow that she will marry only a man who knows no fear (she marries Gunnar, believing him to be the fearless man who braved her test of courage, but in fact it was Sigurth in disguise). Since not Brynhild but her sister-in-law Guthrun married the fearless Sigurth, Brynhild insists that her husband Gunnar must kill him. But even here, Gunnar and his brother Hogni will not break their oaths of blood-brotherhood with Sigurth, and Gunnar instead must get his brother Gotthorm, who was too young to swear oaths with Sigurth, to commit the murder.

One gets a sense from scenes like this that faithfully keeping promises ought to be the glue that holds society together, but instead tears it apart. It is instructive to remember that the evil god Loki, whose actions cause the gods constant heartbreak and loss, is tolerated in the gods' homes because of Odin's oath that he will never drink unless Loki is served too (see *Lokasenna*, st. 9–10).

Norse society also had a fairly rigid class structure, one reflected in nearly every poem in the Poetic Edda. It is most obvious in *Rigsthula*, which tells the story of how the god Heimdall fathered the ancestors of the three human classes (slaves and peasants, free men, and the nobility), and which makes clear the different standards of dress, activity, and diet that were expected of people at different social levels. But the rigidity of the class structure is also reflected in an abundance of offhand comments; in fact, the very first lines of the first poem, *Voluspa*, casually assert the existence of higher- and lower-born people: "Heed my words, / all classes of men, / you greater and lesser / children of Heimdall." Just as casual is Oddrun's reminder in *Oddrunargratr* that she made an oath to provide her medical expertise not just to anyone, but to anyone of sufficiently high class:

[10]    Oddrun said,  
          "I did not come here  
          because I thought  
          you were worth my help.  
          I have sworn that I  
          will always give help  
          when it is needed  
          to those who share  
          my noble rank,  
          and I honor my oath."

{xii} Another component of Norse society that surfaces in many poems is the belief that each person has an inevitable, fixed date of death, decided by the shadowy goddesses of fate called the *Norns*. This is what the hero Sigurth alludes to, for instance, when he shrugs off the dragon's threats in *Fafnismal*:

[10]    "Every man will  
          manage his own wealth  
          till his fated death-day,

but there is a time  
when each one of us  
leaves here for Hel.”

Or, to quote Sorli in *Hamthismal*:

[30] “But we fought well,  
we stand over sword-torn  
Gothic corpses and  
set a table for the eagles.  
We earned honor here,  
though we are fated to die today—  
a man will not live one day longer  
than the Norns have decided.”

But beyond even this belief in an inevitable death-date, many of the poems of the Poetic Edda convey a sense that every detail of a life and death can be foreseen, and that this inevitable course of events cannot be changed. The witch in *Voluspá* foresees the death of all the gods, and offers no way for it to be avoided. On a more individual level, Sigurth’s entire life is foretold to him in *Gripisspa*—including most of the terrible mistakes he will soon make—but this does nothing to prevent him from doing exactly what he was predicted to do. The characters in these myths are marching toward their doom, unable to change course or to step off their predetermined path even if they fight it the entire way. Only the god Odin seems to believe seriously that he can reverse fate, but the reward for his efforts will be a final defeat just as total as if he had never tried.

Thus, a profound sense of hopelessness pervades the myths of the Poetic Edda. The gods know that they will inevitably die in the fiery final battle of *Ragnarok*, and not a single one of the main human characters in the heroic poems dies happy. But surprisingly, the despair of a bad end is not accompanied by a sense of hopeless despair in any of the poems—instead, the gods and heroes alike {xiii} are actively engaged in courageously combating the inevitable. This code of boldness and the defiance of fate must have stirred something in the Norse audience in their barren farmsteads and bloodstained seaside camps, just as it may stir a modern audience faced with the seemingly hopeless circumstances of life in the crowded, postindustrial world of today.

## ***The Gods, the Realms, and the Heroes: A Basic Orientation***

Leading the gods is *Odin*, often called the “Allfather.” Odin is a profoundly anxious and, in some senses, selfish character, which is rarely suggested by his depictions in popular media. Odin knows (thanks to the prophecy in the poem *Voluspa*) that his fate and the fate of all the gods with him is to die at Ragnarok, and so he desperately gathers wisdom and knowledge in an effort to learn some way to postpone this catastrophe. In particular, he has sacrificed his own eye in the well of Mimir for a drink of its wisdom-granting waters (*Voluspa*, st. 28), and he has even sacrificed himself to himself on the supernatural ash tree *Yggdrasil* in order to learn the runes (see *Havamal*, st. 138–41).

In order to raise an army to fight by his side at Ragnarok, Odin travels in *Midgard* (the realm of humans) in disguise, stirring up battles and often granting favors to powerful warriors. He sends his Valkyries (human women with the power of flight) to bring the men who die in battle to his hall, *Valhalla* (literally “the hall of men killed in battle”), in *Asgard* (the realm of the gods). In Valhalla, these men fight and kill one another all day, and in the evening they are resurrected for a feast. Because death in battle was the only way to join Odin’s heroes in Valhalla, the religion of the Viking Age reinforced and encouraged the reckless disregard for life that is a hallmark of so many of the heroes of the Poetic Edda and the Norse sagas. But by the same token, Odin’s role as an inciter of war and a killer of men led to some unease about his role, as we see in some of the insults Thor and Loki level at him in the poems *Harbarthsljoth* and *Lokasenna*, respectively, and by many of his own names that Odin lists at the end of *Grimnismal* (such as “Evil doer,” “Battle-Merry,” and even simply “Killer”).

Regarded as a family, Odin and his children are referred to as the *Aesir*. Odin’s wife is *Frigg*, and with her Odin has two sons, *Balder* and *Hoth*. The accidental murder of Balder by his blind {xiv} brother Hoth is one of the great tragedies of Norse mythology, and it is instigated by *Loki*, a fickle, enigmatic figure who sometimes aids and sometimes harms the gods. Loki’s children include the wolf *Fenrir*, who bit off the hand of the god *Tyr* and who will eventually kill Odin, as well as *Hel*, the half-corpse queen of the dead, and the *Midgard-serpent*, a dragon who encircles Midgard and who will eventually kill, and be killed by, *Thor*.

The god Thor is the son of the Earth (personified as a goddess) and Odin, and by far the most popular of the Norse gods. Where Odin is unpredictable, snobbish, and even treacherous, Thor is a hero of the common man, usually

hard at work killing giants with his hammer, *Mjollnir*. In the pages of the Poetic Edda, his popularity can be seen both in the ways he is depicted respectfully and seriously (as at the end of *Lokasenna*, when it is only Thor's threats that scare Loki) and with tongue in cheek (as in the humiliation he suffers when he has to dress like a bride in *Thrymskvitha*).

In addition to the Aesir gods, there are also the *Vanir*, who are lower in rank than the Aesir and associated with nature and fertility. The Vanir include *Njorth*, god of the sea, and his two children, *Frey*, god of agriculture, and *Freyja*, goddess of love. There are hints that there are (or were) more Vanir, but that the Aesir defeated them in an ancient war, and that Njorth and his children are the hostages from that conflict.

The home of the gods in Asgard can be reached from Midgard by means of the rainbow bridge, *Bifrost*. This bridge is guarded by *Heimdall*, watchman of the gods, who has magnificent powers of vision and hearing, and who is also referred to as the father of human beings (for that story, see the poem *Rigsthula*). To the east of Asgard, beyond a vast sea that encircles Midgard, is *Jotunheim*, the realm of the gods' enemies, the *giants* (note that the giants are not necessarily larger than the gods, and do not necessarily look different from gods or humans). There are other realms (such as *Hel*, the home of the dead who do not die in battle), but most of the action of the Eddic poems takes place on Midgard, Asgard, and Jotunheim. These realms are connected by the roots of the great ash tree Yggdrasil.

Readers may be tempted to see the poems about the heroes as more separate from the poems about the gods than they are, but they are products of very much the same society and period, and the human heroes are connected to the gods both by genealogy (as the poem *Voluspa en skamma* shows) and by Odin's profound interest in helping and harvesting human warriors (for instance, {xv} in *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana II*, where Odin assists Dag very directly in his mission of vengeance).

The human characters of the heroic poems are members or relations of the family of the *Volsungs*, including most notably *Sigmund* and his sons *Helgi* and *Sigurth*. Helgi's story is an interesting study in the variations and changes that can add up in a myth as it is told in different ways in different places and times, as the three poems about him follow the same basic skeletal pattern (a warrior-prince named Helgi falls in love with a Valkyrie) but with substantial differences, including who Helgi's father is (Hjorvarth or Sigmund). The poems about Sigurth tell a more straightforward narrative, of a brave prince who kills a dragon but is killed when Brynhild, the jealous wife of his brother-in-law Gunnar, manipulates her husband and his brothers into betraying him. Following his death, the last poems of the Poetic Edda focus

on Sigurth's widow, Guthrun, who is remarried to Attila, and who kills her second husband after he kills her brothers.

## ***Motifs and Style***

The poetry of the Poetic Edda makes use of certain stock phrases and images, many of which are rooted in the realities of medieval life and warfare.

Three species of scavenging predatory animals—eagles, ravens, and wolves—are frequently mentioned, alone or together. One particularly frequent motif is the “feeding of” (or as I have sometimes rendered it, “setting a table for”) these animals, a visceral shorthand for killing in battle. One of the most striking statements of this theme is from the poem *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana I*:

- [5]       ...
- One raven said  
          to another raven,  
          expecting a feast:  
          “I know something:
- [6]       “Sigmund’s young son  
          will wear armor!  
          He’s just a day old;  
          his first day has just dawned.  
          But he has sharp eyes  
          {xvi} like a war-king;  
          that boy’s a friend of wolves—  
          we’ll be happy and well-fed!”

Not only is being followed by scavenging predators predictive of success in battle (see, for instance, *Reginsmal*, st. 20 and 22), but as opportunistic feeders on the weak and dead, these creatures function also as a mirror in which the Norse raider sees himself and his warlike gods. Indeed the war-god Odin’s mental powers are literally embodied in his ravens *Thought* and *Memory*, as he implies in a stanza from *Grimnismal*, which for all its mythic color reads like the poignant reflection of an elderly man worried about what he might forget in his old age:

- [20]      “Thought and Memory,  
          my ravens, fly every day

the whole world over.  
Each day I fear  
that Thought might not return,  
but I fear more for Memory.”

Another major theme is *wisdom*, though this has a narrower meaning for us than it had for the Norse, who used “wisdom” to mean many sorts of mental abilities, including a deep knowledge of obscure facts and often some kind of power to foresee the future. So while Odin in the poem *Havamal* speaks of wisdom mostly in the modern sense of intelligent behavior and understanding, in the next poem, *Vafthruthnismal*, he has a contest to see whether he or the giant Riddle-Weaver is “wiser”—meaning whether he or the giant knows more facts and names about mythical creatures and places (similar definitions of what it means to be “wise” are seen in *Grimnismal* and *Alvissmal*, among other poems). Meanwhile, in *Gripisspa*, the hero Sigurth’s uncle Gripir is said to be wise because he can foresee the future. Of course, those who have this kind of wisdom are also those who are most acutely aware of the doom that awaits them, and this may be a curse, as Odin explicitly says in *Havamal*:

[55]     You should be  
         only a little wise,  
         never too wise.  
A wise man’s heart  
is seldom glad  
if he’s truly wise.

{xvii} [56]     You should be  
         only a little wise,  
         never too wise.  
It’s best not to know  
your fate beforehand;  
you’ll live happier if you don’t.

Additionally, the Eddic poems are often rambling and discursive in a way that modern readers may not be used to, especially when it comes to dispensing “wisdom” of the kind briefly discussed above. Time and time again, the thread of a story will be momentarily broken while a character asks for or imparts some wisdom or lore. This is especially true of the poems about

young Sigurth—see the exchange of Loki and Andvari in *Reginsmal* (st. 3–4) for a short example, or most of the poem *Fafnismal* for a very long example. Consider how abruptly Sigurth interrupts Fafnir—a dragon who is dying from a wound Sigurth gave him!—to ask him:

[12]     “Tell me, Fafnir,  
              they say you are wise,  
              and very knowledgeable—  
              who are the Norns  
              who govern childbirth  
              and choose who mothers what child?”

Another technique that may seem odd to modern readers is that many of the mythical stories in the Poetic Edda switch back and forth between prose (“plain” writing) and poetry. Many of the poems are preceded by a prose introduction that sets the stage for the action and dialogue in the poem—*Grimnismal* and *Lokasenna*, for example. Others have the dialogue mostly in verse but the narration mostly in prose (*Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar* is an example), or they conclude with a brief epilogue in prose (as *Lokasenna* or *Brot af Sigurtharkvithu* do), or simply with a note that the reader has reached the end of the poem, or a reminder of what the name of the poem is (as in *Hamthismal*).

As for the characteristics of the poetry itself, the verses of the Poetic Edda do not rhyme or use a consistent number of syllables, as traditional English poetry does. Instead, the poetry is held together by alliteration and by counting the number of stressed syllables in a line.

The meter used in most of the poems of the Poetic Edda is known appropriately as *fornyrthislag*, or “meter for ancient {xviii} sayings.” Each stanza consists of (usually) six to ten lines, with each odd line paired with the following even line. Each line will have two stressed syllables, one of which will alliterate with a stressed syllable in its paired line (the odd line may also have alliteration in both stressed syllables); usually the even line will begin with the alliterating syllable.

The meter is not difficult to use in English, and something of its style may be gleaned from a single modern *fornyrthislag* stanza in English (an x above a syllable marks it as stressed, and a bold letter indicates alliteration with a syllable in the paired line):

              x                x  
[1]     **H**ummingbirds

- x            x  
 [2]    **b**attle fiercely,  
 x            x  
 [3]    **m**ake war,  
 x            x  
 [4]    **m**ighty fliers.  
 x            x  
 [5]    **F**eather-covered  
 x            x  
 [6]    **f**ighters have no  
 x            x  
 [7]    **d**read, save of  
 x            x  
 [8]    **d**ying in peace.

In my translation, I have not sought to reproduce the meter of the original poems, nor have I made any particular effort to regularize the length of lines in the poems if doing so would add to, or subtract from, the original meaning of a stanza. Old Norse is a highly inflected language, and often a much more compact medium of expression than English. In particular, Old Norse poetry frequently employs ad-hoc compound words known as *kennings* that are deliberate riddles to be deciphered. Kennings are typically compact analogies, such as “whale-road” (the sea, because whales travel on it) or “pen-blood” (ink, because it runs through a pen like blood through the body), but sometimes kennings include very obscure references, often to other tales from mythology or to shadowy semi-historical legends and characters. I have done the {xix} task of “unpacking” (or rather, fully translating) kennings and other allusive references for the reader, and thus it has usually been necessary to write lines that are longer in English than they are in Old Norse. Note also that the articles that English uses—*a*, *an*, *the*—are practically absent from the archaic language of the Eddic poems, and require additional space in the line in English.

Many of the characters in these poems, especially major gods such as Odin, are referred to by many different names in the Old Norse text. I have referred to each character by one name instead, so as to reduce confusion about who is acting or speaking. At times, I have allowed the characters to be called

“daughter of Buthli” or “son of Odin,” as they often are in the original Old Norse, but only when the surrounding context makes it clear who is meant.

The poems often make it clear who is speaking, usually by inserting something like *Loki kvath* (“Loki said”) before a stanza. However, this is indicated more clearly and consistently in some poems than in others, and where a speaker is not indicated, I have inserted the name of the speaker into the stanza itself: for example, “But Helgi said, ‘Do not fear ...,’” in a stanza where the original Old Norse text does not name the speaker at all. At times, especially in parts of the very old *Atlakvitha* and *Hamthismal*, I have had to make educated guesses (or an occasional silent correction) as to which character is meant to be speaking, but I do not believe that any of these guesses are controversial. Similarly, in poems where one speaker refers to him- or herself both as “I” and as “he” or “she” (this is especially true of the witch in *Voluspa*), I have reduced unnecessary confusion for the reader by having the speaker consistently use “I.”

## ***Language and Pronunciation***

The Poetic Edda was written in Old Norse, the written language of medieval Iceland and Norway. This language is the direct ancestor of today's Icelandic and Norwegian languages, and is closely related to the ancestors of Danish and Swedish. Old Norse is also a “first cousin” to other old Germanic languages, such as Old English and Old High German, and thus distantly related (as an “aunt” or “uncle”) to their modern descendants such as English and German.

Old Norse was written in the Roman alphabet (the alphabet used for English and most other Western European languages {xx} today) beginning in approximately AD 1150, with the addition of some new letters for sounds that the Roman alphabet was not designed to accommodate. In the interest of readability, particularly on digital devices, I have replaced these letters (*ð*, *þ*, *æ*, *ø*, and *ø*) with their closest equivalents from the twenty-six letters of the English alphabet, and I have inserted an *e* between another consonant and *r* in characters' names (this affects especially *Balder* and *Sigerdrifa*). However, where an English translation of an Old Norse name is already widespread and popular, I have used that instead of directly transliterating the Old Norse name according to these principles: I use *Odin*, *Midgard*, and *Valhalla* instead of the more authentic or consistent *Othin*, *Mithgarth*, and *Valholl*.

In reading aloud the Old Norse names in the translation, a few ground rules should be kept in mind. The accent is always on the first syllable of a word, thus *AS-gard*, not *as-GARD*, and *JOT-un-heim*, not *jot-UN-heim*, and so on. For consonants, a few additional comments should be enough to allow English speakers to read them naturally:

- f* is pronounced as *v* unless at the beginning of a word or doubled; thus the name of *Fafnir* is pronounced close to *FOV-near*, and *Sigerdrifa* as *SIG-er-DREEV-ah*.
- g* is pronounced “hard” as in *go*, never “soft” as in *gin*; thus the second syllable of *Regin* is like that of *begin*, not like the liquor *gin*.
- h* can occur in the combinations *Hl* (*Hlymdalir*), *Hr* (*Hrauthung*), and *Hv* (*Hvergelmir*). Readers who wish to sound authentic can train their tongue by holding the *h*-sound in *he* for a second and then saying *l*, *r*, or *v*. With a little practice the combinations become easy to make (see also *v*, below).
- j* is pronounced as the English *y* in *young*, or the German *j* in *ja*; thus *Jotunheim* is pronounced *Yoat-un-hame*.

- th* is pronounced as the English *th*; thus *Thor* is correctly pronounced as it is usually pronounced in English (his name is not pronounced like *tore* or *tour*, as it is in modern Scandinavian languages or German).
- v* is pronounced as the English *v* in *very*. It is possible that a *v* after another consonant was pronounced as *w* (as in Afrikaans today), so *Hvergelmir* would begin with the *hw*-sound of older American English “where,” and *Svanhild* would be pronounced as *SWAN-hild*.

{xxi} Vowels are pronounced as in Spanish, so *a* is the *o* of American English *got*, *e* is the *e* of *pet*, *i* is the *ee* of *feet*, *o* is approximately the *oa* in *boat* (pronouncing this word with a Wisconsin accent will be nearer the actual Scandinavian pronunciation), and *u* is the *oo* of *boot*. The vowel *y* is similar to *u*, but further forward in the mouth, like the German *ü* or the vowel in a “surfer” pronunciation of *dude* or *tune*. The letter *y* is not used as a consonant in Old Norse (see *j*, above).

The combination *au* is pronounced like the *ou* of *house*, while *ei* is the *ai* of *rain*, and *ey* is similar to the *oy* in *boy* (more authentically, the German *äu* or the Norwegian *øy*).

## ***The Text***

By the time the earliest manuscripts in Norway and Iceland were written (ca. AD 1150), belief in the gods such as Odin and Thor was a memory as old as the Civil War is in America today. Iceland was formally converted to Christianity in the year AD 1000, and Norway was converted piecemeal in the period between AD 995 and 1020.

So it is surprising to learn that in approximately the year AD 1270—almost 300 years since the last sacrifices to the Norse gods had been made anywhere in Iceland—several poems concerning pre-Christian gods and heroes were written down there, in a manuscript known as the *Codex Regius* (or, in Icelandic, as *Konungsbok*). These poems make up the majority of the translations presented in this book, with one excluded, and with four poems from other manuscripts added (see the following section, “What Is Included in This Translation”). Together, these poems about the Norse gods and heroes make up the Poetic Edda.

It is notable that the Poetic Edda offers us only myths and some general advice for living; it does not give us more than the most vague clues about prayers or rituals. This is not surprising, since it was copied by Christian hands. Consider that parents today may read their children stories from the Greek myths, without having any fear that their children will grow up to believe in Zeus, since no one around them takes these myths seriously. Similarly, the people of Iceland in the 1200s must have been so firmly converted to Christianity, and paganism must have been such a distant memory, that whoever wrote down these myths was probably doing so out of antiquarian interest rather than out of religious belief.

{xxii} The *Codex Regius* manuscript itself is a copy of an earlier manuscript, probably from around the year AD 1200; this dating is based on hints such as the way the spelling becomes haphazardly more archaic in some words than in others (by analogy, think of modernizing a centuries-old printing of Shakespeare’s plays by hand, but sometimes forgetting to update the spelling of words like “olde” to “old,” or to change a “thou” to “you”). Additionally, many of the poems are cited in the same or very similar form by Snorri Sturluson (AD 1178–1241) in his Prose Edda, composed in approximately AD 1225. This assures us that the poems in *Codex Regius* were composed, at the latest, in the early 1200s, but the language of some poems is so archaic that they must have been composed in some form before (or shortly after) the conversion of Iceland to Christianity in AD 1000.

*Atlakvitha* and *Hamthismal*, two of the heroic poems, are almost certainly the oldest poems in the Poetic Edda, and were probably composed before AD 900 in Norway. Some of the poems about the gods (especially *Voluspa*, *Havamal*, *Vafthruthnismal*, and *Thrymskvitha*) also include linguistic features that suggest they were composed before AD 1000, and some (especially *Havamal* and *Rigsthula*) have words and references to social conventions that also demonstrate they were originally composed in Norway. But in spite of the fact that the poems were probably composed in the Viking Age, and certainly reflect Viking Age traditions, it is unlikely that they were not modified, enlarged, or shortened as they were passed down over the succeeding centuries.

Finally, a note on the translation: Certain words pose problems to a translator who wishes to retain the sense of an original text that is sometimes surprisingly frank and informal in tone. One word that has been especially difficult to render satisfactorily is *argr*, a highly pejorative adjective implying a lack of manly qualities, and, especially, imputing to another a desire for a passive role in sex with a male. Comparable expressions in English and other modern languages tend to shift decade by decade and are often highly inflammatory. I have chosen to translate the word into English as “sissy,” which strikes me as acceptably informal, even if it does not quite convey the word’s full range of meaning.

### **{xxiii} *What Is Included in This Translation***

This translation includes all the poems and prose material from the *Codex Regius* manuscript, with one exception. One of the heroic poems, *Atlamal*, has been excluded, since its story is redundant with the superior, and much older, *Atlakvitha*. As one of the longest poems in the *Codex Regius* manuscript, too much space would have been devoted to *Atlamal* to justify the inclusion of a poem that casual readers would probably find the least interesting.

As in most other translations of the Poetic Edda, four poems about the gods that do not appear in the *Codex Regius*, but which are found in other medieval Icelandic manuscripts, have been included because of their similarity in metrical form and content to the poems of the *Codex Regius*. These are *Baldrs draumar*, *Rigsthula*, *Voluspa en skamma* (or *Hyndluljoth*), and *Grottasongr*.

## ***Further Reading***

The following books are recommended for readers who wish to become more closely acquainted with the Eddic poems, Norse myth or literature more broadly, or the Old Norse language.

Barnes, Michael. *A New Introduction to Old Norse*. 3 vols. Viking Society for Northern Research, 2008.

The most accessible and complete resource for anyone who wants to learn the Old Norse language.

Cook, Robert (translator). *Njal's Saga*. Penguin Classics, 2002.

The most famous of the Icelandic sagas. Its action takes place in Viking Age Iceland and Norway, the same culture that produced the Poetic Edda.

Edwards, Cyril (translator). *The Nibelungenlied*. Oxford. Oxford University Press, 2010.

The *Nibelungenlied* is an epic poem in Middle High German that relates a very different version of the story of the heroes of the Volsung and Gjukung families from the latter half of the Poetic Edda.

{xxiv} Edwards, Paul, and Hermann Palsson (translators). *Seven Viking Romances*. Penguin Classics, 1986.

A collection of adventure stories, written in medieval Iceland but set in the Viking Age and earlier. These sagas (especially *Arrow-Odd's Saga* and *Gautrek's Saga*) have many mythical elements in common with the Poetic Edda, and even some of the gods take part in the action.

Faulkes, Anthony (translator). *Edda*. Everyman's Library, 1995.

A translation not of the Poetic Edda but of the Prose Edda, a work by Snorri Sturluson (1178–1241) that summarizes many of the same mythological traditions. This particular translation is very highly recommended.

Finch, R. G. (translator). *Volsunga saga*. Nelson, 1965.

This is the best available translation of *Volsunga saga*, an Old Norse saga that retells the story of the Volsungs that is related in the hero-poems of the Poetic Edda.

Haymes, Edward R. (translator). *The Saga of Thidrek of Bern*. Garland, 1988.

A sprawling, medieval Norse saga, which includes many alternative versions of the myths related in the heroic poems of the Poetic Edda.

Kellogg, Robert, Jane Smiley, et al. (editors). *The Sagas of Icelanders*. Penguin Classics, 2001.

A collection of Icelandic sagas set in Viking Age Scandinavia. *Egil's Saga* is particularly recommended for its sweeping plot and in-depth look inside medieval Norse culture.

Ringler, Dick (translator). *Beowulf: A New Translation for Oral Delivery*. Hackett, 2007.

A remarkably well-done translation of *Beowulf*, an Old English poem that relates a traditional story distantly related to the heroic poems of the Poetic Edda.

Turville-Petre, E. O. G. *Myth and Religion of the North*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964.

Not an easy book to find outside of large university libraries, but the most useful and complete secondary resource available in English.

## {1} POEMS ABOUT GODS AND ELVES

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### *Voluspa* (The Prophecy of Ragnarok)

*Voluspa* (literally “The Witch’s Prophecy”) is told through the person of a deceased witch or soothsayer (*volva*), awakened by the god Odin and interviewed for information on the beginning and end of the world. The poem contains the somewhat infamous “Catalogue of the Dwarves” (st. 10–16), a list purporting to name all these creatures, which was mined by J. R. R. Tolkien for the names of characters in his imaginary world. Two versions of *Voluspa* are preserved, one in the *Codex Regius* alongside the bulk of the remainder of the Eddic poems, and one in isolated context in *Hauksbok*, a later manuscript. The poem is also quoted extensively in Snorri Sturluson’s Prose Edda, and occasionally the text in the other manuscripts can be corrected from that source. The following translation follows the text of *Codex Regius*, and does not include the additional stanzas from *Hauksbok*, which are likely to be later interpolations.

The poem is highly allusive, and the witch often refers to stories that she does not tell in their entirety. In particular, the story of the first war (st. 21–24) is told in only the vaguest detail, but seems to have involved fighting between the *Aesir* gods and the *Vanir* gods. In stanzas 25–26, we also see an allusion to a story that is told more fully in the Prose Edda (see translation by Faulkes under “Further Reading” in the Introduction), of a giant who built a wall around Asgard but demanded Odin’s wife as his price. The gods accepted his service, but cheated him out of his prize; in stanza 26 Thor seems to reject their deceitfulness and calls for a straight fight.

The use of a spear made from the mistletoe “tree” to kill the god Balder (st. 31–32) has been interpreted in various ways; most scholars have seen it as evidence that this poem was composed {2} in Iceland (where there are few trees, and mistletoe might be mistakenly thought to be a tree).

Large **bold** capitals have been inserted at the beginning of stanzas when the witch abruptly changes subject.

## *Voluspa*

- [1] **H**EED MY WORDS,  
all classes of men,  
you greater and lesser  
children of Heimdall.  
You summoned me, Odin,  
to tell what I recall  
of the oldest deeds  
of gods and men.
- [2] I remember the giants  
born so long ago;  
in those ancient days  
they raised me.  
I remember nine worlds,  
nine giantesses,  
and the seed  
from which Yggdrasil sprang.
- [3] It was at the very beginning,  
it was Ymir's time,  
there was no sand, no sea,  
no cooling waves,  
no earth,  
no sky,  
no grass,  
just Ginnungagap.
- [4] But Odin and his brothers  
created the earth,

it was they  
who made Midgard.  
The sun shone from the south  
upon the stones of their hall,  
{3} and the land turned green  
with growing plant-life.

- [5] The sun, companion of the moon,  
shone from the south,  
as the heavenly horses  
pulled it east to west.  
The sun did not yet know  
where it rested at evening,  
the stars did not yet know  
their places in the sky,  
the moon did not yet know  
what kind of power it had.

- [6] Then all the gods  
went to their thrones,  
those holy, holy gods,  
and came to a decision:  
they named  
the night and the hours,  
the morning,  
the midday,  
the afternoon and evening,  
so they could tell the time.

- [7] The gods had their meeting  
at Ithavoll,  
where they built

temples and high shrines;  
they made workshops,  
they made treasures,  
they made tongs  
and other tools.

[8] They played in the grass,  
they were cheerful;  
they had no  
lack of gold,  
till three  
giantesses came,  
fiendish giantesses  
from Jotunheim.

{4} [9] Then all the gods  
went to their thrones,  
those holy, holy gods,  
and came to a decision:  
they would make  
the lord of the dwarves  
out of Ymir's blood  
and his rotting limbs.

[10] Then they made Motsognir,  
he was the lord  
of all the dwarves,  
and next they made Durin.  
They made many  
man-like little creatures,  
dwarves of the earth,  
and Durin named them:

- [11] Nyi and Nithi,  
Northri and Suthri,  
Austri and Vestri,  
Althjof, Dvalin,  
Bivor, Bavor,  
Bombur, Nori,  
An and Anar,  
Ai, Mjothvitnir,
- [12] Veig and Gandalf,  
Vindalf, Thrain,  
Thekk and Thorin,  
Thror, Vit, and Lit,  
Nar and Nyrath,  
Regin and Rathsvith,  
now I've named  
the dwarves correctly;
- [13] Fili, Kili,  
Fundin, Nali,  
Hepti, Vili,  
Hannar, Sviur,  
Frar, Hornbori,  
{5} Fraeg and Loni,  
Aurvang, Jari,  
Oakenshield.
- [14] Now the names  
of Dvalin's family,  
the dwarves descended  
from Lofar, as men tell:  
The ones who left

their stone halls  
for a home  
on Joruvoll:

[15] These were Draupnir  
and Dolgthrasir,  
Har, Haugspori,  
Hlevang, Gloi,  
Skirfir, Virfir,  
Skafith, Ai,

[16] Alf and Yngvi,  
Oakenshield,  
Fjalar and Frosti,  
Fith and Ginnar.

The names of these dwarves,  
the descendants of Lofar,  
will be famous  
as long as the world exists.

[17] **T**HREE GODS,  
powerful and passionate,  
left Asgard  
for Midgard.  
They found Ask and Embla,  
weak,  
fateless,  
in that land.

{6} [18] They had no breath,  
no soul,  
no hair, no voice,  
they looked inhuman.

Odin gave them breath,  
Honir gave them souls,  
Loth gave them hair  
and human faces.

[19] I know an ash tree,  
named Yggdrasil,  
a high tree, speckled  
with white clay;  
dewdrops fall from it  
upon the valleys;  
it stands, forever green,  
above Urth's well.

[20] Three wise women  
live there,  
by that well  
under that tree.  
Urth is named one,  
another is Verthandi,  
the third is named Skuld.  
They carve men's fates,  
they determine destiny's laws,  
they choose the lifespan  
of every human child,  
and how each life will end.

[21] I remember the first murder  
ever in the world,  
when Gullveig  
was pierced by spears  
and burned

in Odin's hall.

They burned her three times,  
she was reborn three times;  
often killed—not a few times!—  
still she would live again.

{7} [22] They named her Heith  
when she came into their homes,  
a sorceress who foresaw good things.  
She knew magic,  
she knew witchcraft,  
she practiced witchcraft.  
She was the pride  
of an evil family.

[23] Then all the gods  
went to their thrones,  
those holy, holy gods,  
and came to a decision,  
about whether they should endure  
Gullveig's deprivations  
or whether they  
should seek revenge.

[24] Odin let a spear fly  
and shot it into the fray;  
that was the first war  
ever in the world.  
The outer wall  
of Asgard was broken.  
The Vanir knew war-magic,  
they trampled the valleys.

- [25] Then all the gods  
went to their thrones,  
those holy, holy gods,  
and came to a decision:  
all the air would be poisoned  
with their deceit,  
or Odin's wife  
would have to be married to a giant.
- [26] Thor alone  
was in the mood to fight;  
he does not take it lightly  
when he hears of such things:  
broken promises,  
{8} broken oaths and vows,  
such false speech  
as even the gods had uttered.
- [27] **I** KNOW WHERE HEIMDALL  
hid his ear  
under the heaven-bright  
holy branches of Yggdrasil.  
I see a river that feeds  
the muddy waterfall  
where Odin's eye hides.  
Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?
- [28] I sat alone  
when that ancient one came to me,  
Odin of the Aesir,  
and he looked into my eye.  
What do you seek from me, Odin?

Why do you seek me, Odin?

Odin, I know

where you hid your eye

in the shining waters

of the well of Mimir.

But Mimir can drink every morning

from those waters

where your own eye drowns.

Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

[29] Odin opened my eyes  
to rings and necklaces,  
in exchange he got wisdom  
and prophecy.

I saw more and more,  
looking out over all the worlds.

[30] I saw Valkyries  
come from far away,  
ready to ride  
to the homes of the gods.  
{9} Skuld held a shield,  
and Skogul another,  
Gunn, Hild, Gondul,  
and Geirskogul.  
Now the Valkyries  
are counted,  
ready to ride  
to the earth, the Valkyries.

[31] I saw Balder,  
the bloodied victim,

Odin's son,  
resigned to his fate.

There stood  
the mistletoe,  
growing slender and fair,  
high above the plain.

[32] That tree,  
which seemed harmless,  
caused a terrible sorrow  
when Hoth took a shot.  
Balder's brother  
was born soon thereafter,  
he was Odin's son; he took vengeance  
while still just one night old.

[33] He had never washed his hands  
nor combed his hair  
when he put Balder's killer  
on the funeral pyre.  
Frigg wept  
in Fensalir  
for the woe of Valhalla.  
Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

[34] I saw a prisoner  
lying in a certain wood,  
the liar himself,  
none other than Loki.  
There sits Sigyn, his wife,  
{10} although she finds no glee  
in her husband.

Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

[35] A river falls from the east,  
full of daggers and swords,  
through valleys of poison.  
It is named Slith.

[36] There stands  
north of the dark valleys  
a golden hall  
of the kin of Sindri,  
and another stands  
at Okolnir,  
the beer-hall of a giant  
named Brimir.

[37] I saw a hall that stood  
far from the sun  
on the beaches of corpses;  
the doors face north.  
Drops of poison  
fall through the roof;  
its walls are encircled  
by serpents.

[38] I saw oathbreakers  
wading in  
those thick streams,  
and murderers,  
and those who seduce  
others' lovers.  
There Nithhogg  
sucks the corpses of the fallen,

snaps them in his jaws.

Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

[39] In the east sat an aged giantess,  
in Ironwood,  
and there she raised  
Fenrir's brood.  
{11} Among them  
is a certain one  
who bites the moon  
in a troll's shape.

[40] Dead men  
are filled with life,  
the home of the gods  
turns red with gore,  
the sun shines black  
through the summers,  
the weather is never cheerful.  
Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

[41] A giant, a herder by trade,  
sits there on a burial mound,  
striking a harp,  
he is the cheerful Eggther.  
A bright red rooster  
named Fjalar  
sings near him  
in Birdwood.

[42] Near the Aesir  
sings the rooster named Golden-Comb,  
he wakes the men

who fight for Odin, Lord of Battle.

But another sings

below the earth,

a soot-red rooster

in the halls of Hel.

[43] Fenrir howls terribly  
before the doors to Hel;  
the wolf will break its bonds  
and run.

I know much wisdom,

I see deep in the future,

all the way to Ragnarok,

a dark day for the gods.

{12} [44] Brothers will fight one another  
and kill one another,  
cousins will break peace  
with one another,  
the world will be a hard place to live in.  
It will be an age of adultery,  
an age of the axe, an age of the sword,  
an age of storms, an age of wolves,  
shields will be cloven.  
Before the world sinks in the sea,  
there will be no man left  
who is true to another.

[45] The giants are at play,  
and the gods' fate is kindled  
at the blast  
of Gjallarhorn:

Heimdall blows that horn hard,  
holds it high aloft,  
Odin speaks  
with Mimir's head.

[46] The old tree sighs  
when the giant shakes it—  
Yggdrasil still stands,  
but it trembles.

[47] Fenrir howls terribly  
before the doors to Hel;  
the wolf will break its bonds  
and run.

I know much wisdom,  
I see deep in the future,  
all the way to Ragnarok,  
a dark day for the gods.

[48] Hrym advances from the east  
with a shield before him,  
and the Midgard-serpent  
is in a monstrous rage.

{13} The serpent beats the waves,  
and the eagle screams eagerly,  
splitting corpses with its pale beak.  
Naglfar, the giants' ship, is released.

[49] That ship sails from the east,  
bearing giants  
over the sea,  
and Loki is its captain.  
The giants are coming

together with Fenrir,  
and Loki too is with them  
on that voyage.

[50] What news from the gods?  
What news from the elves?  
All Jotunheim is roaring,  
the Aesir are in counsel,  
and the dwarves,  
creatures of the mountains,  
tremble by their doors of stone.  
Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

[51] Surt comes from the south  
with a bright light in his hand,  
yes, the sun shines upon  
the sword in his grasp.  
The mountains collapse,  
the trolls fall,  
men walk the roads to Hel,  
and the skies divide above.

[52] Then comes  
the second sorrow of Frigg,  
when Odin goes  
to fight the wolf,  
and Frey goes to fight  
the giant Surt.  
Then Odin, Frigg's husband,  
will fall to Fenrir.

{14} [53] Then comes the great  
son of Odin, Vithar,

to fight, to avenge  
his father on the wolf.  
He shoves his sword  
into the mouth of Fenrir,  
all the way to the heart,  
and thus is Odin avenged.

[54] Then Thor comes,  
Earth's son,  
Odin's son,  
to fight the Midgard-serpent—  
the protector of Midgard  
will kill that serpent in his rage.  
But all humankind  
will die out of the world  
when Thor falls  
after only nine steps,  
struck down by the venom  
of the honorless serpent.

[55] The sun turns black,  
the earth sinks into the sea,  
the bright stars  
fall out of the sky.  
Flames scorch  
the leaves of Yggdrasil,  
a great bonfire  
reaches to the highest clouds.

[56] Fenrir howls terribly  
before the doors to Hel;  
the wolf will break its bonds

and run.

I know much wisdom,  
I see deep in the future,  
all the way to Ragnarok,  
a dark day for the gods.

{15} [57]     **I** SEE THE EARTH  
rise a second time  
from out of the sea,  
green once more.  
Waterfalls flow,  
and eagles fly overhead,  
hunting for fish  
among the mountain peaks.

[58]     The Aesir meet  
on Ithavoll  
and regard  
the bones of the Midgard-serpent,  
and there they recall  
the great events of Ragnarok,  
and Odin's  
old wisdom.

[59]     There they will find once more  
the wonderful  
golden game pieces  
in the grass,  
which they had once played with  
in the earliest days.

[60]     Fields will bear harvest  
without labor,

all sickness will disappear,  
Balder will come back.  
Hoth and Balder  
will live in Odin's hall,  
as well as other gods.  
Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

[61] Then Honir will speak  
forth his prophecies,  
and the two sons of Odin,  
the two brothers,  
will inhabit the heavens.  
Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

{16} [62] I see a hall standing there,  
more beautiful than sunlight,  
thatched with gold,  
at Gimle.  
There bold men  
will dwell  
and enjoy cheer  
throughout their lives.

[63] Then the dark dragon  
will come flying  
down from the dark mountains,  
that glistening serpent.  
Nithhogg will bear corpses  
in his wings  
as he flies over that valley ...  
now I must retire.

## {17} *Havamal* (The Counsel of Odin the One-Eyed)

The text called *Havamal* (literally “Words of the One-Eyed,” or “Words of the High One,” either way a reference to Odin) appears to be sewn together from perhaps five or six earlier poems; the first, *Gestathattr* (“The Guest Part”), comprises roughly stanzas 1–81 and is the most famous part of the poem. This might be considered a Norse equivalent of the Book of Proverbs, containing as it does a series of disconnected stanzas encouraging wisdom and moderation in living one’s life. *Gestathattr* is followed by *Domi Othins* (“Odin’s Love Adventures”), which contains general advice about love, and two stories told from the perspective of the god as he tries (once succeeding, once failing) to secure the love of giant women (he fails to seduce Billing’s daughter, but he wins over Gunnloth, who gives him the mead of poetry). The poem then segues into *Loddfafnismal* (“Words for Loddfafnir”) another series of advice stanzas addressed to an unknown character named Loddfafnir. These sections are followed in turn by *Runatal* (“Tally of the Runes”), in which Odin speaks of the mysterious fashion in which he sacrificed himself to himself for the knowledge of the runic alphabet, and finally the *Ljothatal* (“Tally of Songs,” st. 146–63), a list of the eighteen magical spells that Odin claims to know. Most stanzas convey one single thought, but some (e.g. st. 75) comprise two or three seemingly unrelated proverbs. The order of stanzas 88 and 89 has been reversed in order to convey their meaning more clearly, but the original numbering is indicated.

## *Havamal*

- [1]     **A**T EVERY DOORWAY  
before you enter,  
you should look around,  
you should take a good look around—  
for you never know where your enemies  
might be seated within.
- {18} [2]     Hail to a good host!  
A guest has come inside, where should he sit?  
He is impatient,  
standing on the threshold,  
ready to try his luck.
- [3]     He needs a fire,  
the one who has just come in,  
his knees are shivering.  
Food and dry clothes  
will do him well,  
after his journey over the mountains.
- [4]     He needs water,  
the one who has just arrived,  
dry clothes, and a warm welcome  
from a friendly host—  
and if he can get it,  
a chance to listen and be listened to.
- [5]     A man needs wisdom  
if he plans to wander widely;  
life is easier at home.

He'll be laughed at  
if he sits among the wise  
and has nothing to say.

- [6] A wise man  
is not showy about his wisdom;  
he guards it carefully.  
He is silent when he comes  
to a stranger's home.  
The wise man seldom wanders into harm,  
for you can never have  
a more faithful friend  
than a good supply of wisdom.

- [7] The watchful guest,  
when he arrives for a meal,  
should keep his mouth shut,  
{19} listening with his ears  
and watching with his eyes—  
that's how the wise get wiser.

- [8] A man is happy  
if he finds praise and friendship  
within himself.  
You can never be sure  
of where you stand  
in someone else's heart.

- [9] A man is happy  
if he finds good advice  
within himself.  
Many men have received  
bad advice

by trusting someone else.

[10] A traveler cannot bring  
a better burden on the road  
than plenty of wisdom.  
It will prove better than money  
in an unfamiliar place—  
wisdom is the comfort of the poor.

[11] A traveler cannot bring  
a better burden on the road  
than plenty of wisdom,  
and he can bring no worse a burden  
than too much alcohol.

[12] There is not as much good  
as men claim there is  
in alcohol for one's well-being.  
A man knows less  
as he drinks more,  
and loses more and more of his wisdom.

[13] It's as if a memory-stealing bird  
flies overhead while you drink,  
and steals your mind away.  
{20} I myself have been trapped  
in that bird's feathers,  
when I drank at Gunnloth's home.

[14] I was drunk,  
I was too drunk,  
at Fjalar's house.  
The best kind of feast  
is the one you go home from

with all your wits about you.

[15] A noble man should  
be silent, thoughtful,  
and bold in battle.  
But every man should also  
be cheerful and happy,  
till the inevitable day of death.

[16] An unwise man  
thinks he'll live forever  
if only he can avoid a fight,  
but old age  
will give him no peace,  
even if weapons do.

[17] A foolish man  
misuses his mouth—  
he talks too much, or says nothing.  
As soon as  
he gets a drink,  
he'll say anything he knows.

[18] Only a man  
who is wide-traveled  
and has wandered far  
can know something  
about how other men think.  
Such a man is wise.

[19] Don't hold on to the mead-horn,  
but drink your fair share.  
Say something useful or stay quiet.  
{21} And no one else

will judge you poorly  
if you go to sleep early.

[20] A gluttonous man,  
unless he watches himself,  
will eat to his own detriment.

Wise men will often  
ridicule a fool  
on account of his belly.

[21] Even cows know  
when they should go home  
and leave behind the fields,  
but an unwise man  
does not know  
the measure of his own appetite.

[22] A stupid man  
and an undisciplined one  
laughs at everything.  
He hasn't learned  
a lesson that would do him good:  
he himself isn't flawless.

[23] A fool  
stays awake all night  
worrying about everything.  
He's fatigued  
when the morning comes,  
and his problems remain unsolved.

[24] An unwise man  
thinks anyone who laughs with him  
is his friend.

He doesn't understand  
that the wise are mocking him,  
even when he overhears them.

[25] An unwise man  
thinks anyone who laughs with him  
is his friend,  
{22} but he won't find these friends  
when he goes to court—  
no one will speak on his behalf.

[26] A stupid man  
thinks he knows everything  
if he gets himself in a tough corner.  
But he doesn't even know  
what he'll answer,  
if men ask him questions.

[27] It's best for a fool  
to keep his mouth shut  
among other people.  
No one will know  
he knows nothing,  
if he says nothing.  
Ill-informed people  
are also the ones  
who don't know when to stop talking.

[28] You will seem wise  
if you know the answer,  
and know how to explain it.  
People are not able  
to keep a secret

of what they hear about other people.

[29] You will hurt yourself  
with all your talking  
if you never close your mouth.  
A hasty tongue,  
unless it's disciplined,  
often earns its owner punishment.

[30] No one should  
ridicule anyone else,  
even if he owes him money.  
Many a man seems wise  
if he is never questioned,  
but he may prove otherwise.

{23} [31] A man may seem wise  
if he pokes fun at another  
when the other man is away.  
But the man who talks  
behind another man's back  
is a fool, even if his listeners laugh.

[32] Many men  
are kind,  
but can be driven to fight.  
There will always  
be conflict between men:  
where there's more than one, there's a fight.

[33] You should eat  
your meals early,  
unless you're visiting a friend.  
A hungry man

sits and gets sluggish,  
and his wits are impaired.

[34] It's a long and crooked walk  
to a bad friend,  
even if he lives nearby.  
But it's an easy road  
to a good friend,  
no matter how long the journey.

[35] You should keep moving.  
You should never be a guest forever  
in any one place.  
Your welcome will wear out  
if you stay too long  
beneath another's roof.

[36] It's better to have a home,  
even if it's little—  
everyone should call somewhere "home."  
Even if you own just two goats  
beneath a faulty roof,  
that's still better than begging.

{24} [37] Better to have a home,  
even if it's little—  
everyone should call somewhere "home."  
Your heart will be wounded  
if you have to beg for every meal  
from somebody else.

[38] Never go  
even a single step  
without a weapon at your side;

you never know  
when you might find yourself  
in need of a spear.

[39] I have never met a man so generous  
nor so hospitable  
that he would not welcome repayment,  
nor have I met a man  
so giving that he'd turn down  
a thing offered in return.

[40] Do not be so sparing  
in using your money  
that you don't use it for your own needs.  
Often what you save for your children  
will end up in the hands of your enemies—  
many things will go worse than you expect.

[41] Friends should provide their friends  
with weapons and clothing;  
this kind of generosity shows.  
Generous mutual giving  
is the key  
to lifelong friendship.

[42] Be a friend  
to your friend,  
and repay each gift with a gift.  
Repay laughter  
with laughter,  
repay treachery with treachery.

{25} [43] Be a friend  
to your friend

and also to his friend,  
but never be a friend  
to the enemy  
of your friend.

[44] If you have a good friend,  
and really trust him,  
and want good to come of your friendship,  
you should speak your mind with him,  
exchange gifts,  
visit him often.

[45] But if you have another friend,  
and you mistrust him  
but want to benefit from him, nonetheless—  
you should speak to him kindly,  
flatter him,  
and repay his treachery with your own.

[46] This same friend,  
if you mistrust him,  
and suspect him to be false in his words:  
you should talk with him,  
laugh with him,  
but repay just what he gives you.

[47] I was young once,  
I walked alone,  
and I became lost on my way.  
I felt like I was rich  
when I met another traveler—  
people's joy is in other people.

[48] Kind, brave people

live best,  
they never nurture a grudge.  
It's unwise  
to spend your life worrying,  
dreading your responsibilities.

{26} [49] I gave my clothes  
to two scarecrows,  
once when I walked in a field.  
They thought they were human  
as soon as they had clothes on;  
a naked man feels ashamed.

[50] A fir-tree decays,  
standing over a farm,  
no longer protected by bark and needles.  
A person is the same way  
if nobody loves him;  
how will he live much longer?

[51] The friendship  
among false friends  
burns warmly for five days,  
but then it's extinguished  
by the sixth day,  
and the friendship is over.

[52] You should not give  
only big gifts;  
often a little thing will win you favor.  
I have won friends  
with just half a loaf of bread  
and a bowl of soup.

[53] Where the beaches are small,  
it's a small sea that washes them—  
and so it is with little minds.

Not everyone  
is equally wise,  
but the average is moderately wise.

[54] You should be  
only a little wise,  
never too wise.  
The happiest people  
throughout their lives  
are the moderately wise.

{27} [55] You should be  
only a little wise,  
never too wise.  
A wise man's heart  
is seldom glad  
if he's truly wise.

[56] You should be  
only a little wise,  
never too wise.  
It's best not to know  
your fate beforehand;  
you'll live happier if you don't.

[57] A torch is lit by another  
and burns till it's burned out;  
a fire is kindled by another fire.  
A man becomes wise  
by speaking with other men,

but foolish by keeping to himself.

[58] Rise early, if you want

to take another man's

property, or his life.

A sleeping wolf

seldom wins a sheep,

or a sleeping warrior a victory.

[59] Rise early

if you have no one to work for you,

and get straight to work.

You lose more than time

if you sleep when it dawns;

for the early riser, wealth is half-won.

[60] You should know how

to dry logs for firewood

and bark for roofing,

and also this:

how to measure

time and the seasons.

{28} [61] You should always go out

with your hair combed

and a meal in your belly,

even if you can't afford good clothes.

You should not be ashamed

of your shoes and pants,

nor of your horse,

even if it's not a good one.

[62] A hungry eagle snaps his beak

and stretches out his neck,

when the sea comes into sight.  
People get the same look about them  
when they walk among strangers  
and have no one to speak well of them.

[63] If you want to be called wise,  
you should know how  
to ask and answer wisely.  
Tell your secret to one person,  
never to two—  
everyone knows, if three people know.

[64] A wise man  
should use his abilities  
only in moderation.  
Otherwise, when he  
is in battle, he'll learn  
that no one is bravest of all.

[65] You will often  
get repayment in kind  
for the words you speak to others.

[66] I have come too early  
to some events  
and too late to others.  
The drinks were all gone,  
or else not even made;  
a hated man gets little hospitality.

{29} [67] Now and then  
I've been invited to a friend's home,  
as long as I had no need for food,  
or as long as I could make

my inhospitable host's cellars  
fuller rather than emptier.

[68] Fire is best  
for mortals,  
and sunshine—  
and also good health,  
if you have it,  
and living beyond reproach.

[69] No one is totally wretched,  
even if his health is bad—  
some find happiness in their children,  
some in their kin,  
some in their money,  
some in work well done.

[70] Better to be alive,  
no matter what, than dead—  
only the living enjoy anything.  
I saw a rich man's house,  
but it was on fire,  
and he lay dead outside the door.

[71] A limping man can ride a horse,  
a handless man can herd,  
a deaf man can fight and win.  
It's better even to be blind  
than fuel for the funeral pyre;  
what can a dead man do?

[72] Better to have a son than not,  
even if he's born late in life,  
even if he's born after you die.

You'll rarely see memorials or graves  
standing near the road  
that were raised for men without sons.

{30} [73] Two men will defeat one;  
your tongue can endanger your head.  
In every hand hidden by a cloak,  
I expect to see a weapon.

[74] The seaman is glad at evening,  
looking forward to his dinner,  
with just a short distance to row home.  
But an autumn night is untrustworthy.  
Many things can get worse  
in only five days,  
and even more in a month.

[75] The ignorant man  
does not know how little he knows.  
You become foolish by listening to fools.  
One man is rich,  
another man is poor,  
neither has the other to blame.

[76] Cows die,  
family die,  
you will die the same way.  
But a good reputation  
never dies  
for the one who earns it well.

[77] Cows die,  
family die,  
you will die the same way.

I know only one thing  
that never dies:  
the reputation of the one who's died.

[78] I saw big herds of cattle  
owned by a rich man's sons;  
now they carry a beggar's staff.  
Wealth is like  
the twinkling of an eye—  
no friend could be more faithless.

{31} [79] If an unwise man  
chances upon money  
or a woman's love,  
he will grow more arrogant  
but not more intelligent;  
he will be deceived about his own worth.

[80] What you ask of the runes  
will prove true;  
they are gifts of the Aesir,  
made by the gods  
and painted by Odin.  
You'll learn best with your mouth shut.

[81] Don't praise the day until it's night,  
don't praise your wife until she's buried,  
don't praise the sword till after the fight,  
nor your daughter till she's married,  
don't praise the ice until it's crossed,  
nor the ale until you're sloshed.

[82] Chop wood when the wind blows,  
row your boat on the sea,

court a lover at nighttime  
(for the day has many eyes).

Value a ship for its speed,  
a shield for its protection,  
a sword for its sharpness,  
and a woman for her kiss.

[83] Drink ale by the fire,  
skate on the ice,  
buy a thin horse  
and a rusty sword.  
Give your horse food,  
and let your dog feed itself.

[84] No man should trust  
the words of a girl,  
nor anything a woman says.  
Women's hearts are molded  
{32} on a wobbly wheel.  
Deception lurks in their words.

[85] A breaking bow,  
a burning fire,  
a howling wolf,  
a cawing crow,  
a grunting pig,  
a rootless tree,  
a swelling wave,  
a boiling kettle,

[86] a flying spear,  
a crashing wave,  
one-night-old ice,

a striped snake,  
 the words of a bride in bed,  
 a broken sword,  
 a playful bear,  
 the child of a king,  
 [87] a sick calf,  
 a stubborn servant,  
 a prophet who foresees good things,  
 a corpse on the battlefield,  
 (89) your brother's killer  
 (even if you meet him in public),  
 a half-burned house,  
 a horse that's too fast  
 (remember, a horse is unusable  
 if only one foot breaks)—  
 may you never be so trusting  
 that you trust all these things.  
 (88) Do not put too much trust  
 in your newly planted crops,  
 nor in your child too early—  
 weather will shape the field  
 and whim will shape the child,  
 and neither will stay the same.  
 {33} [90] Take care not to love  
 a deceitful woman,  
 it is like driving an unshod horse,  
 a playful, young,  
 poorly-tamed foal,  
 across slippery ice,

or like sailing a ship  
in a wild wind,  
or trying to catch a reindeer on foot  
after the mountains thaw.

[91] I'll speak plainly now, since  
I know both men and women:  
men lie to women.  
We speak most eloquently  
when we tell the biggest lies,  
and seduce even wise women with lies.

[92] A man should speak eloquently  
and offer gifts  
to a woman whose love he wants.  
Praise the body  
of a beautiful woman;  
you will win her if you praise her.

[93] No man  
should mock another  
for falling in love.  
Love-sickness  
often strikes harder  
on a wise man than a fool.

[94] No man  
should mock another  
for falling in love;  
love is strong enough  
to make a fool  
out of a man who once was wise.

{34} [95] Only you know

what dwells in your heart  
when you are alone;  
but nothing is worse  
for a wise person  
than to have nothing to love.

[96] I experienced this  
when I waited among the reeds  
and my lover did not come to me.  
That wise girl  
was my flesh and my heart,  
though I could not call her my own.

[97] I found Billing's daughter,  
fair as a sun-ray,  
asleep on her bed.  
The life of a lord  
seemed as nothing to me  
unless I could live with that woman.

[98] "You should come back  
in the evening, Odin," she said,  
"if you want to woo me—  
it is improper  
for others to know  
of such a scandal."

[99] I turned back,  
and thought that I  
would win her.  
I imagined  
that I would win  
the woman's love and all her joy.

[100] But when I came back that night,  
there was a good company of warriors  
awake and ready for me.

With burning flames  
and torches held high,  
I was shown my miserable way out.

{35} [101] And when morning came,  
and I returned,  
everyone in the hall was sleeping—  
and then I found a watchdog  
tied to the bed  
of that good woman.

[102] There's many a good woman,  
if you get to know her,  
who'll change her mind about a man;  
I learned that  
when I tried  
to seduce a wise woman.  
That lady  
showed me every kind of shame,  
and I gained no wife for my trouble.

[103] If you want to be very wise,  
be happy at home,  
and cheerful with a guest.  
Cultivate wisdom,  
a good memory, and eloquence,  
and speak kind words often.  
You'll be called a fool  
if you can't say much—

that's the mark of the unwise.

[104] I visited an old giant,  
and now I've returned.  
I didn't stay silent there.  
I spoke many words  
in support of my cause  
at Suttung's hall.

[105] Gunnloth, his daughter,  
gave me a drink of his precious mead  
while I sat on a golden chair.  
I would later give her  
a bad repayment  
for her trusting mind,  
for her troubled mind.

{36} [106] Giants' dwellings were  
over and under me.  
I used Rati's tusk  
to burrow out  
and gnaw away the rock—  
in this way, I got out with my head.

[107] I made good use  
of the disguise I used;  
few things are too difficult for the wise.  
Now Othrerir  
is rescued  
from the clutches of the giants.

[108] I doubt  
I could have escaped  
Jotunheim

if I hadn't used Gunnloth,  
the good woman  
who rested in my arms.

[109] The next day  
the frost-giants came  
to ask news about Odin  
in Odin's hall;  
they inquired about that evildoer,  
whether he was among the gods,  
or whether Suttung had killed him.

[110] I believe that Odin  
swore an oath to them—  
but who can trust Odin?  
He left Suttung deceived  
in his own home,  
and he left Gunnloth weeping.

[111] It is time to speak  
on the wise man's chair  
at Urth's well.  
I saw and was silent,  
I saw and I thought,  
{37} I listened to men's speech.  
I heard about runes,  
they were not silent with counsel  
at Odin's hall,  
in Odin's hall,  
I heard them say so:

[112] I counsel you, Loddafafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,

you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
Do not rise at night,  
unless you're spying on your enemies,  
or seeking a place to relieve yourself.

[113] I counsel you, Loddafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
Do not sleep in the arms  
of a sorceress,  
or else she will lock your limbs.

[114] She will enchant you  
so that you won't care  
for advice nor a powerful man's words;  
you will want neither food  
nor the pleasure of friends' company,  
and you will sleep full of sorrow.

[115] I counsel you, Loddafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
Never seduce  
another man's woman  
with whispers in her ear.

[116] I counsel you, Loddafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:

{38} If you spend time wandering  
by land or by sea,  
bring plentiful provisions.

[117] I counsel you, Loddafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
Never let  
a bad man  
know of your misfortune,  
for you will never  
profit at all  
for telling him about it.

[118] I saw  
a bad woman's words  
bite a man in the neck—  
a lying tongue  
was his death,  
and not even with good cause.

[119] I counsel you, Loddafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
If you have a friend,  
and you trust him,  
go and visit him often.  
Weeds and high grass  
will grow on a path  
that nobody travels.

[120] I counsel you, Loddafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
Get a good man  
to teach you the runes,  
and learn a healing spell while you live.

{39} [121] I counsel you, Loddafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
Never be  
the first to break  
friendship with your friend.  
Sadness will eat up your heart  
if you have no one  
you can talk to.

[122] I counsel you, Loddafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
You should never  
exchange words  
with someone who won't see reason.

[123] You will never  
get a reward for speaking  
with a bad man,  
but a good man  
will make you happy

with his praise.

[124] Men become friends  
when they can share  
their minds with one another.  
Anything is better  
than being lied to:  
a real friend will disagree with you openly.

[125] I counsel you, Loddafafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
Don't speak even three words  
with a man worse than you.  
Often the better man will lose  
when a worse man fights him.

{40} [126] I counsel you, Loddafafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
Don't make shoes,  
and don't make weapons,  
except for yourself;  
if there's a flaw in the shoe,  
or the spearshaft is crooked,  
your name will be cursed.

[127] I counsel you, Loddafafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:

When you are at war,  
call it war,  
and give your enemies no peace.

[128] I counsel you, Loddafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
Never be glad  
to hear bad news,  
but be cheerful about good news.

[129] I counsel you, Loddafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
You should never look up  
when you're in a fight—  
men who do so  
may get turned to stone—  
beware, or someone may curse you.

[130] I counsel you, Loddafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
{41} If you want to win a good woman,  
speak cheerfully with her,  
and enjoy it while you do,  
make promises to her,  
and keep your promises,  
you'll never regret winning such a prize.

- [131] I counsel you, Loddafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
I advise you to be wary,  
though never fearful:  
be most wary about drinking,  
about other men's women,  
and about a third thing:  
about men and their temptation to steal.
- [132] I counsel you, Loddafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
Never mock,  
never laugh at,  
a guest nor a wanderer.
- [133] Those inside the house  
rarely know anything  
about the stranger who knocks at their door,  
but there is no man so good  
that he has no flaw,  
nor a man so bad he's good for nothing.
- [134] I counsel you, Loddafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
Never laugh  
at an old man.

There is often wisdom in what old men say;  
wise words will often  
come from a gray-bearded mouth.

{42} From those who hang with dried skins,  
those who swing with dried skins,  
those who wave with dried skins.

[135] I counsel you, Loddafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
Never spite a guest  
nor be stingy with your food—  
treat a poor wanderer well.

[136] Otherwise it's a bitter tree  
you'll find yourself hanging from  
in the sight of all.  
Give a beggar something,  
or he will call  
a curse down on your every limb.

[137] I counsel you, Loddafnir,  
if you'll take my advice,  
you'll profit if you learn it,  
it'll do you good if you remember it:  
When you drink beer,  
choose the might of the earth,  
for the earth is good against beer,  
and fire against sickness,  
oak against an irritable bowel,  
wheat against magic,

an elder-tree against family quarrels,  
maggots against venomous bites,  
runes against distress,  
ground against water.  
Swear your hate beneath the moon.

[138] I know that I hung  
on a wind-battered tree  
nine long nights,  
pierced by a spear  
and given to Odin,  
myself to myself,  
on that tree  
{43} whose roots grow in a place  
no one has ever seen.

[139] No one gave me food,  
no one gave me drink.  
At the end I peered down,  
I took the runes—  
screaming, I took them—  
and then I fell.

[140] I learned nine spells  
from the famous son of Bolthorn,  
the father of Bestla,  
and I won a drink  
of that precious mead,  
poured from Othrerir.

[141] My imagination expanded,  
I became wise,  
I grew, and I thrived.

One word chased another word  
flowing from my mouth,  
one deed chased another deed  
flowing from my hands.

[142] You will find runes,  
runic letters to read,  
very great runes,  
very powerful runes,  
which Odin painted,  
and which the holy gods made,  
and which Odin carved.

[143] Odin carved for the gods,  
and Dain for the elves,  
Dvalin for the dwarves,  
and Asvith for the giants;  
I carved some myself.

[144] Do you know how to write them?  
Do you know how to read them?  
Do you know how to paint them?  
{44} Do you know how to test them?  
Do you know how to ask them?  
Do you know how to bless them?  
Do you know how to send them?  
Do you know how to offer them?

[145] It is better not to pray at all  
than to pray for too much;  
nothing will be given that you won't repay.  
It is better to sacrifice nothing  
than to offer too much.

Odin carved this  
before the birth of humankind,  
when he rose up  
and returned again.

[146] I know magic spells  
that no woman knows  
and no man, either.  
The first is called “Help,”  
and it will help you  
in lawsuits and sadness,  
and all kinds of worries.

[147] I know a second spell  
which men need  
if they want to heal others.

[148] I know a third spell;  
if I have a great need  
to thwart my enemies,  
I dull the edges  
of their weapons,  
and none of their blades will bite.

[149] I know a fourth spell;  
if chains and locks are placed  
upon my limbs,  
I cast this spell  
so that I can escape.  
The chains burst from my hands,  
the locks burst from my feet.

{45} [150] I know a fifth spell;  
if I see a spear cast

into a crowd of battling foes,  
it cannot fly so fast  
that I can't change its course,  
as long as I can see it.

[151] I know a sixth spell;  
if a man carves a curse against me  
in runes on the root of a tree,  
I call this spell down  
upon that man,  
and his curse harms him instead of me.

[152] I know a seventh spell;  
if I see a great flame  
consuming a hall full of people,  
it cannot burn so bright  
that I cannot save those inside;  
I know how to cast this spell.

[153] I know an eighth spell;  
it would be useful  
for anyone to learn it.  
When hate arises  
between any two people,  
I can cool their tempers.

[154] I know a ninth spell;  
if the need arises  
for me to save a ship upon the sea,  
I can calm the wind  
upon the waves  
and soothe the sea to sleep.

[155] I know a tenth spell;

if I see witches  
at play in the air,  
I can cast this spell  
so that they get lost,  
{46} so they can't find their skins,  
so they can't find their minds.

[156] I know an eleventh spell;  
if I lead old friends  
into a battle,  
I enchant their shields  
so that they will have the victory;  
they will go to battle unharmed,  
and return from battle unharmed.  
They will come home without harm.

[157] I know a twelfth spell;  
if I see, hanging from a tree,  
a dead man's corpse,  
I carve some runes  
and paint them,  
and then that corpse will walk  
and speak with me.

[158] I know a thirteenth spell;  
if I sprinkle water  
upon a new-born boy,  
he will never be killed  
even if he goes into battle;  
that man will not die from violence.

[159] I know a fourteenth spell;  
it allows me to count

all the gods for men.  
I know the names  
of all the gods and elves,  
and few who are fools can say that.

[160] I know a fifteenth spell;  
the dwarf Thjothreyrir  
cast it upon Delling's doors.  
He conjured power for the gods,  
and courage for the elves;  
they knew Odin.

{47} [161] I know a sixteenth spell;  
if I want to win over a cunning woman  
and have her all to myself,  
I can change the mind  
of that lovely-armed beauty  
and win her favor for myself.

[162] I know a seventeenth spell,  
to prevent a beautiful woman  
from shunning me.  
Loddfafnir,  
all these spells would be  
useful to you all your life.  
They would profit you if you learned them,  
they'd do you good if you remembered them,  
they'd suit your needs if you could use them.

[163] I know an eighteenth spell  
which I will never teach  
to a girl or a woman,  
unless maybe to the one

I call my wife,  
or my sister.

It is much better  
that one alone should know this,  
which is the last of the spells.

[164] Now the words of the One-Eyed  
are heard in Valhalla,  
for the benefit of humans,  
for the harm of giants;  
health to you who speak them,  
health to you who know them,  
joy to you who learn them,  
health to you who hear them.

## **{48} *Vafthruthnismal* (Odin's Contest with Riddle-Weaver)**

*Vafthruthnismal* involves the visit of Odin to the hall of a giant named Riddle-Weaver (Old Norse *Vafthruthnir*), who engages Odin in a contest of mythological knowledge. The poem provides not only an interesting portrait of Odin, but, in the stanzas exchanged by Odin and Riddle-Weaver, we also learn a great deal of random information on various myths which might otherwise be unknown. *Vafthruthnismal* appears in both the *Codex Regius* and in the manuscript AM 748 I 4to.

## *Vafthruthnismal*

Odin said:

- [1]     **“A**DVISE ME NOW, FRIGG;  
I want to travel  
and visit Riddle-Weaver.  
I want to have  
a contest about old lore  
with that wise giant.”

Frigg said:

- [2]     “I would advise you, Odin,  
father of battles, to stay here,  
in the homes of the gods.  
I don’t think there’s any giant  
who is as wise  
as Riddle-Weaver.”

Odin said:

- [3]     “I have traveled so much,  
I have tried much,  
and I have often tested the mighty.  
Now I want to know  
what kind of hospitality  
there is in Riddle-Weaver’s hall.”

{49} Frigg said:

- [4]     “Then travel safe,  
and come back in one piece—  
stay safe on your journeys, Odin!  
May your wits serve you well

wherever you go,  
when you exchange words with the giant.”

- [5]     Odin then went  
to test the wisdom  
of that wise giant.  
Odin came to the hall  
Riddle-Weaver owned,  
and he went straight inside.

Odin said:

- [6]     “Hail, Riddle-Weaver!  
I have come to your hall  
for the purpose of seeing you.  
The first thing I want to know  
is if you are wise—  
or perhaps even all-knowing.”

Riddle-Weaver said:

- [7]     “Who is this man  
who stands in my hall,  
who is this I’m speaking to?  
You won’t leave my hall  
unless you prove yourself  
to be even wiser than I am.”

Odin said:

- [8]     “My name is Good Advisor,  
and I come to your hall  
thirsty from a long journey.  
After my long trip,  
I have need of hospitality  
and a good welcome, giant.”

{50} Riddle-Weaver said:

- [9]     “Well then, ‘Good Advisor,’  
          why are you still standing up?  
          Take a seat in my hall!  
          Then we’ll find out  
          who knows more,  
          the guest, or his wise old host.”

Odin said:

- [10]    “A poor man,  
          if he visits a rich man,  
          ought to be silent, or say only what he must.  
          Too much talk  
          will bring harm to the guest  
          of a grudging host.”

Riddle-Weaver said:

- [11]    “Tell me, ‘Good Advisor,’  
          if you want to test yourself,  
          sitting in your seat in my hall:  
          What is the name  
          of the horse who pulls the sun  
          over the humans below?”

Odin said:

- [12]    “That horse is named Skinfaxi;  
          he pulls the bright sun  
          over the humans below.  
          Everyone thinks he’s the best horse  
          who lives in Midgard—  
          the mane of that horse always shines.”

Riddle-Weaver said:

[13]     “Tell me, ‘Good Advisor,’  
if you want to test yourself,  
sitting in your seat in my hall:  
What is the name of the horse  
who pulls the moon, east to west,  
at night over the mighty gods?”

{51} Odin said:

[14]     “That horse is named Hrimfaxi  
who pulls the moon, east to west,  
every night over the mighty gods.  
The slobber from his mouth  
falls to the ground every morning,  
and that’s the reason for the dew.”

Riddle-Weaver said:

[15]     “Tell me, ‘Good Advisor,’  
if you want to test yourself,  
sitting in your seat in my hall:  
What is the name  
of the river that separates  
the lands of the gods from the giants’?”

Odin said:

[16]     “That river is named Ifing,  
which separates the lands  
of the gods from those of the giants.  
That river  
will run free forever;  
it will never freeze over.”

Riddle-Weaver said:

[17]     “Tell me, ‘Good Advisor,’

if you want to test yourself,  
sitting in your seat in my hall:  
What is the name  
of the valley where Surt  
will lead the final battle against the gods?"

Odin said:

[18] "That valley is named Vigrith,  
where Surt will lead  
the final battle against the gods.  
It is one hundred miles long  
on each side—  
that's why this valley is chosen."

{52} Riddle-Weaver said:

[19] "You are wise indeed, guest!  
Come sit at my bench,  
let's talk together here.  
Let's wager our heads  
on which of us two  
is wiser, here in my hall, guest."

Odin said:

[20] "Tell me this first,  
if your wits serve you well,  
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:  
How did the earth come to be,  
or heaven; which one was  
the first, giant?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

[21] "The earth was made  
from Ymir's flesh;

the rocks were made from his bones.  
The sky was made from the skull  
of that ice-cold giant,  
the sea was made from his blood.”

Odin said:

[22] “Tell me this second,  
if your wits serve you well,  
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:  
How did the moon come to be,  
the one that floats over the earth,  
or what about the sun, giant?”

Riddle-Weaver said:

[23] “Mundilfari is the name  
of the father of the moon;  
he was also the sun’s father.  
They will float across the sky  
every day, to help the humans  
tell the time and season.”

{53} Odin said:

[24] “Tell me this third,  
if you want to be called wise,  
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:  
How did the day come to be,  
or the night which passes above,  
with its waxing and waning moon?”

Riddle-Weaver said:

[25] “Delling is the name  
of the father of the day,  
and the night is Norvi’s daughter.

The waxing and waning of the moon  
was designed by the gods  
to help tell the time and season.”

Odin said:

[26] “Tell me this fourth,  
if you want to be called wise,  
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:  
How did the winter come to be,  
or the warm summer,  
when did they first come about?”

Riddle-Weaver said:

[27] “Vindsval is the name  
of the father of winter,  
and Svasuth’s the father of summer.”

Odin said:

[28] “Tell me this fifth,  
if you want to be called wise,  
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:  
Who was the oldest being,  
whether god or giant,  
who appeared in the oldest times?”

Riddle-Weaver said:

[29] “Untold years ago,  
before the earth was made,  
Bergelmir was born.  
{54} His father was  
Thruthgelmir, and Thruthgelmir’s  
father was Aurgelmir.”

Odin said:

[30]     “Tell me this sixth,  
if you want to be called wise,  
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:  
How did Aurgelmir come to be,  
what was the origin  
of that first giant?”

Riddle-Weaver said:

[31]     “Drops of poison  
fell from Elivagar,  
they gelled, and formed the giant.  
All the families of us giants  
have our origin there;  
that’s why we’re bad, through and through.”

Odin said:

[32]     “Tell me this seventh,  
if you want to be called wise,  
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:  
How did that giant,  
Ymir, have children,  
if he had no woman to share his bed?”

Riddle-Weaver said:

[33]     “They say two giants,  
a man and a woman,  
grew under his armpits—  
one foot had a child  
with the other foot,  
and their son had six heads.”

Odin said:

[34]     “Tell me this eighth,

if you want to be called wise,  
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:  
What is your first memory,  
{55} the earliest thing you remember?  
I suspect you're all-knowing, giant."

Riddle-Weaver said:

[35] "My very first memory  
is of Bergelmir,  
untold years  
before the earth was formed.  
I remember the wise giant  
laid out in his coffin."

Odin said:

[36] "Tell me this ninth,  
if you want to be called wise,  
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:  
How did the wind come to be,  
the wind that blows over the sea?  
It's something that is seldom seen."

Riddle-Weaver said:

[37] "There is a giant eagle  
named Hraesvelg,  
who sits at the sky's end.  
They say that it's  
from his wings  
the wind is blown."

Odin said:

[38] "Tell me this tenth—  
you must know the fate

of all the gods, wise Riddle-Weaver:  
How did Njorth come to be  
among the Aesir?  
He has hundreds  
of temples and altars—  
but he was not born among the Aesir.”

Riddle-Weaver said:

[39] “Wise Vanir created him  
in Vanaheim, and gave him  
as a hostage to the Aesir.  
At Ragnarok  
{56} he will go back home  
to the wise Vanir.”

Odin said:

[40] “Tell me this eleventh:  
Where is the hall where men  
fight each other every day?”

Riddle-Weaver said:

[41] “All the Einherjar  
in Odin’s hall  
fight each other every day.  
They kill each other,  
but then ride back from battle  
and sit in the evening as friends.”

Odin said:

[42] “Tell me this twelfth—  
you must know the fate  
of all the gods, wise Riddle-Weaver:  
Tell me the truth

about the secrets of the giants  
and the gods, you wise giant.”

Riddle-Weaver said:

[43] “I can tell you the truth  
about the secrets of the giants  
and all the gods,  
for I have visited them all at home.  
I’ve been to nine realms  
beneath Hel, to realms  
where the dead travel after Hel.”

Odin said:

[44] “I have traveled so much,  
I have tried much,  
and I have often tested the mighty.  
Will any humans remain alive  
after Fimbulveter  
has passed over Midgard?”

{57} Riddle-Weaver said:

[45] “Life and Pulsing-with-Life  
will survive; they will hide  
in Hoddmimir’s forest.  
They will eat  
the morning dew,  
and renew the human race.”

Odin said:

[46] “I have traveled so much,  
I have tried much,  
and I have often tested the mighty.  
How will there still be a sun

when the wolf has eaten  
the one that now flies in heaven?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

[47] "The sun  
will have a daughter  
before Fenrir eats her.  
And that young sun  
will travel on her mother's path  
when the gods have all died."

Odin said:

[48] "I have traveled so much,  
I have tried much,  
and I have often tested the mighty.  
Who are those young women  
who fly above the sea,  
who travel in the air with their craft?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

[49] "There are three rivers  
that fall over  
those young women of Mogthrasir.  
Their only happiness  
is in Midgard,  
though they were born among giants."

{58} Odin said:

[50] "I have traveled so much,  
I have tried much,  
and I have often tested the mighty.  
Which gods  
will inherit Asgard,

when the fires of Ragnarok go out?”

Riddle-Weaver said:

[51] “Vithar and Vali  
will inhabit Asgard  
when the fires of Ragnarok go out.  
Mothi and Magni  
will inherit Mjollnir  
after Thor is killed.”

Odin said:

[52] “I have traveled so much,  
I have tried much,  
and I have often tested the mighty.  
How will Odin  
lose his life  
at Ragnarok?”

Riddle-Weaver said:

[53] “A wolf  
will swallow Odin,  
but Vithar will avenge him.  
He’ll cut open  
the wolf’s cold jaws,  
kill the killer of his father.”

Odin said:

[54] “I have traveled so much,  
I have tried much,  
and I have often tested the mighty.  
What did Odin whisper  
in Balder’s ear,  
before he placed him on the pyre?”

{59} Riddle-Weaver said:

- [55]    “No one knows  
          what you said  
          in those ancient days, in your son’s ear.  
          I have spoken my aged wisdom,  
          I have told you of Ragnarok,  
          I have spoken with a doomed mouth.
- [56]    “Now I know that I wagered  
          my head against Odin’s in wisdom—  
          but you, Odin, are forever the wisest of all.”

## **{60} *Grimnismal* (The Words of Odin in Disguise)**

*Grimnismal* is similar to *Vafthruthnismal*, being mostly a compilation of mythological lore and having a frame story involving Odin. In this case, Odin disguises himself under the name “Shadowed-Face” (Old Norse *Grimnir*, literally the “Cloaked One”). He is held captive in the court of a king he once favored, and delivers his mythic lore to the king’s merciful young son after eight nights of being starved between two bonfires. The prose prologue and epilogue are original. *Grimnismal* appears in both the *Codex Regius* and in the manuscript AM 748 I 4to.

## *Grimnismal*

### **Concerning the sons of King Hrauthung**

King Hrauthung had two sons. One was named Agnar and the other Geirroth. Agnar was ten years old, and Geirroth was eight. The two of them rowed out in a boat with their fishing tackle and hoped to catch some small fish, but the wind drove them far out into the sea. In the dark night they wrecked and went up on to the land, where they met a poor farmer, and they stayed there with him over the winter. The farmer's old wife fostered Agnar, but the farmer fostered Geirroth and tutored him. Early in the spring the man gave them a boat, and when he and his wife followed them down to the shore, the man spoke to Geirroth in secrecy.

The boys departed, and the wind was favorable. They came to their father's harbor, and then Geirroth, who stood foremost in the boat, sprang up on land and shoved the boat back out to sea and said: "Go wherever the trolls take you!"

The boat drifted far out to sea with Agnar, but Geirroth went inland to his father's hall. He was received well, but he learned that his father had died. So Geirroth was taken as king, and he became a famous man.

Odin and Frigg sat in Hlithskjalf and looked out over all the worlds. Odin said, "Look how your foster-son Agnar sits and fathers children on a trollwoman in a cave, while my foster-son Geirroth is king and rules the land."

{61} Frigg said, "But Geirroth is so stingy with food that he starves his guests, if he thinks there are too many."

Odin said that this was a tremendous lie, and so he and Frigg made a wager about it. Then Frigg sent her servant Fulla to Geirroth, and had Fulla warn him that a sorcerer had come to the land, but that this sorcerer could be recognized by the fact that even the fiercest dog would not attack him.

It was, in fact, an idle rumor that Geirroth was miserly with his food. All the same, he ordered any man who would not be attacked by any dog to be apprehended. Odin came wearing a blue cape, and called himself Shadowed-Face, but said nothing more of himself even when asked, so the king had him tortured in an effort to extract more information from him, and had him placed between two burning fires, where he sat for eight nights.

King Geirroth had a ten-year-old son, named Agnar after the king's brother.

Agnar went to this “Shadowed-Face” and gave him a full horn to drink and said he thought his father was behaving poorly, to torture a man without cause. Shadowed-Face drank, and by then the fire had grown so large that it had begun to burn his cloak. Then Shadowed-Face said:

- [1]      “**Y**OU’RE HOT, FIRE,  
and much too big—  
get away from me, flames!  
My coat is getting burned,  
even though I’m holding it up!  
My clothing is on fire!
- [2]      “I’ve sat between the fires here  
for eight nights, and no one  
offered or gave me food,  
except Agnar alone.  
Now Agnar will be the sole ruler  
of the land of the Goths.
- [3]      “Hail, Agnar,  
it’s the chief of the gods  
who’s wishing you well!  
You will never be repaid  
so well for one drink,  
no matter how long you live.
- {62} [4]      “I see a holy land  
which lies near those  
of the gods and the elves.  
In that place, Thruthheim,  
Thor will live  
till Ragnarok.
- [5]      “Ull has built  
good halls for himself

in Ydalir.

The gods gave Frey  
the land of Alfheim  
long ago, as a gift in his youth.”

[6] “I know a third place  
where happy gods  
live beneath a silver roof.  
It’s called Valaskjalf—  
the place Odin  
made himself in the old days.

[7] “A fourth hall  
is Sokkvabekk, which  
the cool waves crash upon.  
There Odin and Saga  
drink happily every day  
from golden cups.

[8] “A fifth land is  
Gladsheim, where gold-bright,  
wide Valhalla stands.  
That is where  
Odin chooses from the men  
killed by weapons every day.

[9] “Valhalla  
is easily recognized  
if one comes to see it.  
The hall is held up by spearshafts,  
it is roofed by shields,  
chainmail is on the benches.

{63} [10] “Valhalla

is easily recognized  
if one comes to see it.

A wolf hangs above  
the western door,  
and an eagle above him.

[11] “Thjassi, the mighty giant,  
once lived in the sixth hall,  
now known as Thrymheim.  
And now Skathi,  
bright bride of the gods,  
lives in her father’s old home.

[12] “Balder built himself  
a hall, and it is called  
Breithablik.  
That’s a place  
where I know  
you’ll find little grief.

[13] “Heimdall inhabits  
the eighth hall, Himinbjorg,  
that is where he is the master.  
In that pleasant house,  
the watchman of the gods  
happily drinks his good mead.

[14] “Freyja rules  
in the ninth land, Folkvang—  
that is where she arranges the seats.  
She chooses half the dead  
who die in battle,  
and Odin takes the other half.

- [15]     “The tenth hall  
          is Glitnir, with gold walls  
          and a silver roof.  
          The god named Forseti  
          is there on most days,  
          and he settles disputes.
- {64} [16]     “The eleventh hall  
          is Njorth’s, which he built  
          and named Noatun.  
          That flawless  
          lord of men  
          rules that high-timbered temple.
- [17]     “The wide land  
          of Vithar is overgrown  
          with high grass and weeds.  
          That bold son of Odin  
          is preparing himself  
          to avenge his father on horseback.
- [18]     “Andhrimnir the cook  
          lets the pork from Saehrimnir  
          cook in the cauldron Eldhrimnir.  
          There is no better meat,  
          and there are few who know  
          what the Einherjar eat.
- [19]     “Battle-winning Odin  
          feeds his tamed wolves,  
          Geri and Freki.  
          But for his part,  
          weapon-loving Odin

lives on wine alone.

[20] “Thought and Memory,  
my ravens, fly every day  
the whole world over.  
Each day I fear  
that Thought might not return,  
but I fear more for Memory.”

[21] “The waves thunder,  
and the Midgard-serpent  
makes his home in Fenrir’s sea.  
Dead men will find  
that sea passage  
too wide to wade.

{65} [22] “Valgrind  
is a holy hall  
with holy doors, upon a field.  
The gate is old,  
and there are few  
who know how it is locked.

[23] “Thor’s hall, Bilskirnir,  
has six-hundred and forty rooms,  
if all are counted.  
I am certain  
that of all roofed houses,  
Thor’s is the largest.

[24] “I think Valhalla  
has six-hundred and forty doors,  
if all are counted.  
Eight hundred Einherjar

will walk through each,  
when the day comes to fight Fafnir.

[25] “There is a goat named Heithrun  
who stands on Odin’s hall  
and gnaws the limbs of the tree Laerath.  
That goat fills Valhalla’s cups  
with bright mead from her udders,  
and that drink will never diminish.

[26] “There is a stag named Eikthyrnir  
who stands on Odin’s hall  
and gnaws the limbs of the tree Laerath.  
Drops fall from his horns  
into the well of Hvergelmir;  
that is the origin of all the rivers:

[27] “The rivers Sith and Vith,  
Saekin and Eikin,  
Svol and Gunnthro,  
Fjorm and Fimbulthul,  
Rhine and Rennandi,  
Gipul and Gopul,  
{66} Gomul and Geirvomul,  
Thyn and Vin,  
Tholl and Holl—  
these conceal the gods’ riches.

[28] “Another river is Vina,  
another Vegsvinn,  
a third is Thjothnuma,  
and also Nyt and Not,  
Nonn and Hronn,

Slith and Hrith,  
Sylg and Ylg,  
Vith and Von,  
Vond and Strond,  
Gjoll and Leipt—  
these rivers flow near the men  
who die and go to Hel.

[29] “Thor will wade  
four rivers every day—  
the ones called Kormt and Ormt,  
and the two rivers Kerlaug—  
when he goes to meetings  
at the tree Yggdrasil.  
Bifrost, bridge of the gods,  
burns in bright flame,  
and the holy waters seethe.

[30] “The rivers Glath and Gyllir,  
Gler and Skeithbrimir,  
Silfrintopp and Sinir,  
Gisl and Falhofnir,  
Gulltopp and Lettfeti,  
the gods of Asgard ride  
their horses every day  
over these when they go  
to meet at the tree Yggdrasil.

[31] “Beneath the tree Yggdrasil  
are three roots, which grow  
in three directions.  
Hel is beneath one,

{67} Jotunheim beneath another,  
Midgard is beneath the third.

[32] “A squirrel is named Ratatosk,  
he runs along  
the trunk of Yggdrasil.  
He takes the words  
of the eagle, tells his insults  
to Nithhogg below.

[33] “There are four deer  
who stretch out their necks  
and eat the leaves of Yggdrasil:  
Dain and Dvalin,  
Duneyr and Durathror.

[34] “No fool  
has ever guessed how many  
serpents lie beneath Yggdrasil.  
I think that  
Goin and Moin,  
Grabak and Grafvolluth,  
Ofnir and Svafnir,  
sons of the snake Grafvitnir,  
will always gnaw that tree’s roots.

[35] “The tree Yggdrasil  
endures more pain  
than any men guess.  
It’s eaten from above by the deer,  
on the side by rot,  
from beneath by serpents.

[36] “They bring my horn,

my Valkyries! Hrist and Mist,  
Skeggjold and Skogul,  
Hild and Thruth,  
Hlokk and Herfjot,  
Goll and Geirolul,  
Randgrith, Rathgrith,  
and Reginleif—  
they bring the Einherjar beer.

{68} [37] “Those slender horses,  
Arvak and Alsvith,  
lead the sun across the sky.  
And the gods have hidden  
cooling bellows  
beneath their legs.

[38] “There is a shield named Svol.  
It is set between Midgard and the sun,  
in front of the shining sun.  
I know the mountains and the sea  
would burn up entirely  
if that shield ever fell down from there.

[39] “Skol is the name of the wolf  
who chases the sun  
till it sets at evening in the woods.  
Another wolf named Hati  
is Hrothvitnir’s son; he runs  
in front of the sun, behind the moon.

[40] “The earth was formed  
from Ymir’s flesh,  
and the sea from his blood,

the rocks from his bones,  
the trees from his hair,  
and the sky from his skull.

[41] “The happy gods  
formed Midgard for humans  
from Ymir’s eyelashes.  
They formed  
all the grim clouds  
from his brains.

[42] “Whoever first puts out the fire  
will have the help of Ull  
and all the gods.  
The realms will be open  
to all the gods,  
when the kettles are cooled.

{69} [43] “In ancient days  
the dwarves made  
Skithblathnir,  
the best of ships,  
for handsome Frey,  
the strong son of Njorth.

[44] “The tree Yggdrasil  
is the best of trees.  
Skithblathnir is the best ship,  
Odin the best god,  
Sleipnir the best horse,  
Bifrost the best bridge,  
Bragi the best poet,  
Habrok the best hawk,

Garm the best dog.

[45] “I have shown my face  
in the presence of gods,  
now help is on its way.  
It will come  
to all the gods  
on Aegir’s benches,  
when they drink at Aegir’s place.

[46] “I have called myself Grim,  
I have called myself Wanderer,  
Warrior and Helmet-Wearer,  
Famed One and Third One,  
Thunder and Wave,  
Hel-Blind and One-Eye,

[47] “Truth, and Swift,  
and True Father,  
Battle-Merry, Battle-Stirrer,  
Curse-Eye and Fire-Eye,  
Evildoer, Spellcaster,  
Masked and Shadowed-Face,  
Fool and Wise Man,

{70} [48] “Long-Hat and Long-Beard,  
Victory-Father and War-Ready,  
Allfather, War-Father,  
Rope-Rider and Hanged-God.  
I have never been known  
by just one name  
since I first walked among men.

[49] “They called me Shadowed-Face

here at Geirroth's place,  
but Gelding at Asmund's,  
they called me Driver  
when I pulled the sleds,  
and Mighty at the assembly.  
Among the gods I'm called Wish-Granter,  
Speaker, Just-as-High, Shield-Shaker,  
Wand-Bearer, Graybeard.

[50] "Wise and Wisdom-Granter  
were my names at Sokkmimir's hall,  
when I deceived that old giant  
and I killed  
his famous son.  
I was his killer.

[51] "You are drunk, Geirroth!  
You have drunk too much.  
You have lost too much  
when you have lost my favor;  
you've lost the favor of Odin  
and all the Einherjar.

[52] "I've told you much,  
and you'll remember little—  
your friends will deceive you—  
I see the sword  
of my friend  
dripping with blood.

{71} [53] "Now Odin  
will have a weapon-killed man—  
I know *your* life has ended.

Your guardian spirits are anxious,  
they see Odin here before you.  
Approach me, if you can.

[54] “Odin is my name.  
But before they called me Terror,  
and Thunder before that,  
and Waker and Killer,  
and Confuser and Orator-God,  
Heat-Maker, Sleep-Maker,  
both Gelding and Father!  
I think all these names were used  
for me alone.”

King Geirroth sat with his sword on his knees, halfway drawn. When he understood that this was Odin who had come to his hall, he stood up and wanted to take Odin out of the flames. But the sword fell out of his hand and fell hilt-first to the ground. The king tripped and fell upon it, so that the sword pierced him through and he died. Then Odin left, and Agnar was the king of that land for a long time afterward.

## **{72} *For Skirnis* (The Journey of Skirnir on Behalf of Frey)**

The next poem, *For Skirnis* (literally “Skirnir’s Journey”), is also preserved in part in the manuscript AM 748 I 4to, where it is called *Skirnismal* (“Skirnir’s Words”). Read literally, the poem presents an unlovely picture of the god of agriculture, Frey, who sees a beautiful giant woman named Gerth, daughter of Gymir, when he is sitting upon Odin’s throne, Hlithskjalf. Beauty and bright light are stereotypically associated in Old Norse, hence the description of Gerth as literally luminous in stanza 6. Frey sends his messenger Skirnir to convince Gerth to marry him at any cost, and his efforts make up the bulk of the poem. After many threats and curses, Gerth agrees to marry Frey, but she stipulates that Frey must wait nine nights’ time. Skirnir returns to Frey and tells him that he must wait *nine* nights, which prompts Frey to close the poem by complaining that he must wait *three* nights. This difference in numbering is perhaps the reflection of an old custom compelling men to wait for a *hynott* (literally, “marriage-night”), which lasted three days, before they could consummate an agreed marriage. The poem’s narrative has been interpreted as an allegory, in which Frey as the god of agriculture sends “the shining one” (which is the literal meaning of *Skirnir*, perhaps intended to evoke the sun) to prepare the thawing earth (symbolized by *Gerth*, whose name may be related to the word for “farm”) for the first sowing at the end of winter. As usual, the prose introduction and insertions are part of how the poem was preserved in the manuscript.

## *For Skirnis*

Frey, son of Njorth, sat on Hlithskjalf and looked out over all the worlds. He looked into Jotunheim, and there he saw a beautiful woman who walked from her father's house to her own little detached house nearby. He became lovesick from the sight.

Frey had a servant who was named Skirnir, and Njorth told Skirnir to ask Frey what the matter was. Then Skathi said:

- [1]     **“GET UP, SKIRNIR,**  
          and go ask  
          our son to talk.  
          Find out  
          {73} who it is  
          who's made him so angry.”

Skirnir said:

- [2]     “I can expect  
          only bad words from your son  
          if I go and talk with him,  
          if I go to ask him  
          who it is  
          who's made him so angry.”

Skirnir said:

- [3]     “Tell me, Frey,  
          great among the gods,  
          because I want to know—  
          why are you sitting alone  
          inside the hall  
          all day long, my lord?”

Frey said:

[4]     “Why should I tell you  
my sorrow,  
young man?  
The sun shines  
all day long,  
but it does not soothe my longing.”

Skirnir said:

[5]     “Lord, I doubt that  
your longings are so great  
that you cannot tell me about them.  
The two of us were young  
together a long time ago;  
we can trust each other.”

Frey said:

[6]     “In Gymir’s yard  
I saw  
a beautiful woman walking.  
Her arms shone so bright,  
they reflected  
in all the air and sea.

{74} [7]     “That woman means more  
to me than any woman  
has ever meant to any young man.  
But among the gods and elves,  
there is no one  
who would bless our marriage.”

Skirnir said:

[8]     “Give me a horse  
that will carry me

through darkness and flame.  
And give me your sword  
that fights by itself  
against enemy giants.”

Frey said:

[9] “I’ll give you a horse  
that will carry you  
through darkness and flame.  
And I’ll give you my sword  
that fights by itself  
(if it is carried by a wise man).”

Skirnir said to the horse:

[10] “It is dark outside,  
time for us two to ride  
over dewy mountains,  
to rush beyond the homes of men.  
Either we both will come back,  
or the mighty giant  
will take us both.”

Skirnir rode to Gymir’s home in Jotunheim. There were fierce dogs chained up outside the fence that surrounded the hall where Gerth lived. Skirnir rode over to where a herder sat on a mound and said to him:

[11] “Tell me, herdsman,  
sitting on that mound  
and watching all the roads,  
how can I get past Gymir’s dogs  
for a chance to talk  
with the young lady Gerth?”

{75} The herdsman answered:

[12] “Is this your death day,

or are you already dead?  
You'll never have a chance  
for a conversation  
with Gymir's good daughter."

Skirnir said:

[13] "There's always a better choice  
than cowardice, if you  
have business to take care of.  
One day long ago  
my life was already shaped,  
and my fate was fixed."

Gerth said:

[14] "What is this noise  
I'm hearing  
in our halls?  
The earth trembles  
and everything shakes  
in the home of Gymir."

A serving-girl said:

[15] "There is a man outside.  
He has stepped off his horse,  
and he's letting it feed."

Gerth said:

[16] "Ask him to come inside,  
into our hall,  
and drink the splendid mead,  
though I fear  
that he may be  
the one who killed my brother.

[17] “Are you of the Aesir,  
or the wise Vanir,  
or one of the elves, guest?  
Why have you come  
over the great flame  
to see our home?”

{76} Skirnir said:

[18] “I am no elf,  
nor one of the Aesir,  
nor one of the Vanir.  
Though I have come  
over the great flame  
to see your home.

[19] “I have eleven apples,  
made all of gold—  
I will give them to you, Gerth,  
to buy your love,  
so that you will pledge  
to live happily with Frey.”

Gerth said:

[20] “I would never accept  
eleven apples  
as the price of my love for any man,  
not even for Frey.  
I will never marry him  
so long as we live.”

Skirnir said:

[21] “I will give you  
the ring that Odin placed

on his young son's funeral pyre.  
Eight just like it  
drop from it  
every ninth night."

Gerth said:

[22] "I would never accept  
that ring, even if Odin did place it  
on his young son's funeral pyre.  
I have no lack of gold  
in the home of Gymir,  
to share with my father."

{77} Skirnir said:

[23] "Do you see this sword, girl,  
this slender, pretty sword,  
which I have in my hand here?  
I will cut off your head  
from your neck  
unless you go along with me."

Gerth said:

[24] "I will never  
endure the threats  
of any man.  
And I think  
if Gymir finds you  
here, you brave men  
will come to blows."

Skirnir said:

[25] "Do you see this sword, girl,  
this slender, pretty sword,

which I have in my hand here?  
Your old father will bend his knees  
beneath this blade;  
I'll be the death of your father.

[26] "I will beat you with a club  
till I tame you, girl,  
till you go along with my wishes.  
Then you'll go to a place  
where no one will ever  
see you again.

[27] "You will sit forever  
on an eagle's nest,  
turned away from the world,  
looking in at Hel.  
Food will seem as awful to you  
as the Midgard-serpent  
seems to men.

{78} [28] "You will be laughed at  
when you emerge;  
a giant man will look at you.  
They'll all stare at you.  
You'll be better-known  
than Heimdall himself,  
staring out behind your gate.

[29] "Foolishness and screaming!  
And pain, unendurable pain!  
May your tears grow with your sorrow!  
Sit down, and I  
will tell you some sad news,

I'll double your grief:

[30] "Monsters will bend you over  
for the whole unhappy day  
in Jotunheim.

You'll crawl every day,  
without choice,  
without hope,  
to a hall of frost-trolls.  
You'll weep  
and never be happy,  
your sorrows will make you cry.

[31] "You'll have a three-headed giant  
for your husband,  
or go without a husband.  
You'll go crazy  
and rot with illness.  
You'll be like a fat thistle  
ripped halfway off its stalk  
and left to dry.

[32] "I went to a forest,  
to get a young tree branch,  
to find a magic wand there;  
I found a magic wand there.

{79} [33] "Odin will rage at you,  
Thor will rage at you,  
Frey will hate you,  
you evil girl!  
You have earned  
the hatred of the gods.

- [34] “Hear me, giants!  
Hear me, frost-trolls!  
Hear me, fire-trolls,  
hear me, gods!  
I curse this girl,  
I curse her  
never to know a man’s love,  
never to have a husband!
- [35] “Hrimgrinnir’s the name of the troll  
who will take you  
down below the gates of Hel.  
There, below the tree roots,  
servants will bring you  
goats’ urine to drink.  
You’ll never get  
anything better to drink,  
not if you want it, girl.  
Not even if I want it, girl.
- [36] “I curse you with that troll,  
and three other curses—  
sexual shame, and madness,  
and unbearable suffering.  
I’ve cursed you already,  
but I’ll call off the curses,  
if you give me good reason.”

Gerth said:

- [37] “Be welcome here, instead,  
and take this drinking-horn  
full of good ancient mead.

Even if I previously said  
that I would never  
marry that god of the Vanir.”

{80} Skirnir said:

[38] “I want to know  
my errand’s complete  
before I ride away.  
Tell me when you’ll meet  
the noble son of Njorth—  
when will you come to comfort Frey?”

Gerth said:

[39] “There’s a grove named Barri—  
we both know it—  
a peaceful place in the forest.  
After nine nights  
Frey, son of Njorth,  
will enjoy my love there.”

Then Skirnir rode home. Frey stood waiting for him and asked for the news:

[40] “Tell me, Skirnir,  
before you unsaddle that horse,  
before you take one more step:  
What did you accomplish  
in Jotunheim  
for your or my purposes?”

Skirnir said:

[41] “There’s a grove named Barri—  
we both know it—  
a peaceful place in the forest.  
After nine nights

Frey, son of Njorth,  
will enjoy Gerth's love there."

Frey said:

[42] "One night would be long enough,  
two would be worse—  
how can I contain my lust for three?  
A month has often  
seemed shorter to me  
than half such a marriage-night."

## **{81} *Harbarthsljoth* (The Taunting of Thor by Odin)**

*Harbarthsljoth* (literally “Graybeard’s Song”) is a relatively long poem in which Odin, in the disguise of the ferryman “Graybeard,” denies Thor passage on his ferry. The two exchange heated words that clearly compare and contrast the two gods’ deeds, attitudes, and reputations, often ending their respective boasts with the question, *Hvat vanntu methan?* (“What were you doing meanwhile?”). By stanza 24 Graybeard has more or less admitted he is Odin, and Thor seems to understand his true identity as well, though he never addresses Graybeard as Odin. In stanza 26 there is a reference to Thor’s journey to meet Utgartha-Loki, told in the Prose Edda, in which Thor and his companions sleep inside the glove of a truly huge giant. *Harbarthsljoth* appears in both the *Codex Regius* and in the manuscript AM 748 I 4to. The prose introduction is original.

## *Harbarthsljóth*

Thor was coming back from the east and came to a fjord. On the other side of the fjord was a ferryman with his boat. Thor called out:

- [1]      “**W**HO IS THAT MAN WHO STANDS  
             on the other side of the fjord?”

The other man answered:

- [2]      “Who is that man who calls  
             from across the water?”

Thor said:

- [3]      “Take me across the water,  
             and I’ll give you some breakfast.  
             I’m carrying a basket on my back,  
             and you’ll find no better food.  
             I ate in peace  
             before I left home;  
             I had some herring and goat,  
             and I’m still full from that.”

{82} The ferryman said:

- [4]      “You’re boasting  
             about your breakfast.  
             But you don’t know  
             if your homecoming will be glad;  
             I think your mother is dead.”

Thor said:

- [5]      “You are telling me  
             news that would  
             seem bad to anybody—

that my mother is dead.”

The ferryman said:

[6]      “You don’t look like a man  
            who owns good farms.  
            There you stand,  
            barefoot like a beggar,  
            not even a good pair of pants on.”

Thor said:

[7]      “Row that boat over here,  
            I’ll show you the landing.  
            Who owns that ship  
            that you’re on?”

The ferryman said:

[8]      “A man named Hildolf  
            asked me to run the ferry,  
            a wise and provident man  
            who lives in Rathseyjarsund.  
            He asked me not to give rides  
            to beggars or horse thieves,  
            only good people  
            and those I know well.  
            Tell me your name  
            if you want to cross the fjord.”

{83} Thor said:

[9]      “I’ll tell you my name,  
            I’m no criminal,  
            and I’m from a good family:  
            I am Odin’s son,  
            Meili’s brother,

and Magni's father,  
warrior of the gods,  
you're talking to Thor here!  
Now I'll ask in turn,  
what is your name?"

The ferryman said:

[10] "Graybeard is my name,  
I rarely lie about that."

Thor said:

[11] "Why would anyone lie about that,  
except to conceal some crime?"

Graybeard said:

[12] "Whether or not I committed crimes,  
I'd still want to defend my life  
against people like you,  
unless my fated day had come."

Thor said:

[13] "It seems like a shame  
for me to wade over there  
to get at you  
and get my pants wet.  
But I'll pay you back,  
slanderer,  
for these nasty words,  
if I get over this fjord."

Graybeard said:

[14] "I'll stand right here  
and wait for you.  
I think I'll be your toughest enemy

since Hrungnir.”

{84} Thor said:

[15] “You want to talk about  
when I killed Hrungnir,  
that arrogant giant  
with a stone head?  
I knocked him down,  
I laid him out flat.  
What were you doing meanwhile, Graybeard?”

Graybeard said:

[16] “I was with Fjolvar  
for five years  
on the island  
called Algron.  
We were waging war,  
killing warriors,  
proving ourselves,  
and sampling the local ladies.”

Thor said:

[17] “How did the women treat you?”

Graybeard said:

[18] “We had girls who liked to kick,  
but sometimes they would act docile.  
We had wise women, too;  
and sometimes they were loyal.  
Some of them wound  
some thread from a valley,  
out of the sand.  
I made them all

submit to my will.  
I slept with seven sisters,  
had all their charms to myself.  
What were you doing meanwhile, Thor?"

Thor said:

[19] "I killed Thjassi,  
the bold giant;  
I threw the eyes  
of that son of Allvaldi  
{85} into the clear sky.  
Those are the greatest  
monuments to my deeds,  
which everyone can see ever since.  
What were you doing meanwhile, Graybeard?"

Graybeard said:

[20] "Great seductions.  
In the night I was ridden by women  
stolen from their husbands.  
I think Hlebarth  
was a strong giant;  
he gave me a magic wand,  
and I enchanted away his wits."

Thor said:

[21] "You repaid him badly  
for his good gift."

Graybeard said:

[22] "A tree has only the space  
it can crowd another out of;  
every man must look out for himself.

What were you doing meanwhile, Thor?"

Thor said:

[23] "I was in the east  
fighting giants,  
evil women  
who lived in the mountains.  
There would be many more giants  
if they had all survived;  
there would not be a single human  
left on Midgard.

What were you doing meanwhile, Graybeard?"

Graybeard said:

[24] "I was in the south  
making battles.  
I turned princes against one another,  
I never made peace.  
{86} Odin receives the powerful men  
who fall in battle,  
and Thor receives their servants."

Thor said:

[25] "You deal out victory  
and defeat unfairly,  
if you have so much power over battles."

Graybeard said:

[26] "You have plenty of strength,  
Thor, but no courage.  
Like a prince of cowards,  
you got stepped on in a glove—  
you didn't look much like Thor then.

You didn't dare  
sneeze or break wind,  
for fear that  
the giant Fjalar might hear you."

Thor said:

[27] "Graybeard, you sissy!  
I'll kill you  
if I get across this fjord!"

Graybeard said:

[28] "How are you going to get across?  
You have no transportation.  
What were you doing meanwhile, Thor?"

Thor said:

[29] "I was in the east  
guarding a river,  
when Svarang's sons  
attacked me.  
They threw stones at me,  
but they got little out of it,  
they ended up  
begging me for peace.  
What were you doing meanwhile, Graybeard?"

{87} Graybeard said:

[30] "I was in the east,  
together with a certain lovely someone.  
I enjoyed myself with that beauty  
for quite a while—  
I showed the blonde a good time,  
and she showed me one."

Thor said:

[31] “You had a good-looking woman there?”

Graybeard said:

[32] “I could have used your help, Thor—  
you could have helped me  
hold that gorgeous girl down.”

Thor said:

[33] “I would have helped you,  
if I had been there.”

Graybeard said:

[34] “I would trust you about that,  
if you hadn’t tricked me before.”

Thor said:

[35] “I’m no heel-biter,  
no cheap old shoe in the springtime.”

Graybeard said:

[36] “What were you doing meanwhile, Thor?”

Thor said:

[37] “Fighting berserkers’ brides  
on the island Hlesey.  
They had done evil things,  
assaulted everyone.”

Graybeard said:

[38] “How shameful of you, Thor,  
fighting women.”

{88} Thor said:

[39] “They were wolves,  
hardly women.  
They broke my ship

when I landed ashore,  
threatened me  
with iron rods,  
and chased my servant Thjalfi.  
What were you doing meanwhile, Graybeard?"

Graybeard said:

[40] "I was with an army.  
We came this way  
to wave some war-banners  
and get some spears bloody."

Thor said:

[41] "Now you're saying  
you came to do the gods evil?"

Graybeard said:

[42] "I'll give you this arm-ring  
to make up for it.  
Fair judges would say  
it's an equal value."

Thor said:

[43] "Where did you learn  
to spit out all these hateful words?  
I know I've never heard  
more awful talk."

Graybeard said:

[44] "I learned this sort of talk  
from the old men who live  
in the forests of home."

Thor said:

[45] "You give a good name to burial mounds

if you call them ‘the forests of home.’”

{89} Graybeard said:

[46] “That’s how I talk about such things.”

Thor said:

[47] “I’ll repay you for this slander  
with a good beating,  
if I can get across this fjord.  
I think you’d howl  
louder than a wolf  
if you felt my hammer on you.”

Graybeard said:

[48] “Your wife has a lover, Thor.  
You’ll meet him if you go home,  
then you’ll really suffer!  
That one’s a better target for your hammer.”

Thor said:

[49] “You are just lying at random,  
saying whatever will most anger me.  
You cowardly fool,  
I think you’re lying.”

Graybeard said:

[50] “I think I’m telling the truth.  
But you’re late completing your journey—  
you won’t get home for a long time,  
even if you walk all day and night.”

Thor said:

[51] “Graybeard, you sissy,  
you’re the one who’s held me up.”

Graybeard said:

[52]    “I didn’t think that Thor  
          would let some peasant  
          hold him up on his journey.”

Thor said:

[53]    “Here’s some advice:  
          Row that boat over here to me,  
          {90} we’ll stop this bickering,  
          and you’ll meet me face to face.”

Graybeard said:

[54]    “Get far away from here.  
          You don’t get to ride the ferry.”

Thor said:

[55]    “Then show me the way around,  
          if you won’t take me across.”

Graybeard said:

[56]    “I won’t deny that request.  
          It’s a long walk:  
          Go to the tree trunk,  
          then to the rock,  
          then turn left  
          till you reach Midgard.  
          There your mother the Earth  
          will meet you,  
          and she’ll show you  
          the gods’ road to Asgard.”

Thor said:

[57]    “Can I get there today?”

Graybeard said:

[58]    “I suspect,

if you travel hard,  
you could be there before sundown.”

Thor said:

[59] “I see this conversation is over,  
since you only answer with insults.  
I will pay you back for this delay  
if we ever meet again.”

Graybeard said:

[60] “Go now, and have a bad journey!”

## **{91} *Hymiskvitha* (The Fetching of the Cauldron)**

*Hymiskvitha* (literally “Hymir’s Poem”) tells the tale of Thor and Tyr retrieving a cauldron large enough to brew beer for all the gods; the gods lack such a cauldron, but Tyr’s father, a giant named Hymir, owns one. This poem also relates the story of Thor fishing for the Midgard-serpent with the head of an ox for bait, a scene that was commonly depicted in art in the Viking period.

*Hymiskvitha* appears in both the *Codex Regius* and in the manuscript AM 748 I 4to.

## *Hymiskvitha*

- [1]     **A** LONG TIME AGO  
the gods came back from hunting,  
but they started feeling thirsty  
before they were done eating.  
They waved their wands,  
looked for omens in blood,  
they learned that Aegir  
owned some cauldrons.
- [2]     Aegir, giant from the stones,  
sat there, happy as a child;  
he looked much like  
Miskorblindi's son.  
Thor, son of Odin,  
stared fiercely into his eyes:  
"You will often provide  
a feast for the gods."
- [3]     The argumentative god  
frustrated Aegir;  
the giant immediately sought  
some revenge against the gods.  
He asked Thor  
to fetch him a cauldron—  
{92} "I promise to brew beer  
in it for all of you."
- [4]     The gods did not  
know how to proceed;

none of them  
could get a cauldron.

But Tyr, in private,  
spoke to Thor  
alone, and revealed  
a welcome secret:

- [5] “My mighty father,  
Hymir the wise,  
lives to the east of Elivagar,  
near the end of the sky.  
He owns a cauldron  
that’s a mile deep;  
it’s the biggest  
cauldron of all.”

Thor said:

- [6] “Do you know if we  
can borrow this cauldron?”

Tyr said:

“Yes, friend, if we  
can play a few tricks.”

- [7] They left swiftly  
and traveled the whole day  
from Asgard,  
till they came to Egil’s house.  
They left Thor’s big-horned  
goats in his care,  
and then they went  
to where Hymir lived.

- [8] Tyr found his

ugly grandmother,  
she had  
nine hundred heads.  
{93} But another woman  
was there, all golden,  
with a pretty face,  
and gave her son a beer:

[9] “Son of giants!”  
she said. “I’ll hide  
you courageous men  
beneath the cauldron;  
my husband  
will abuse any guests  
who come to our home.”

[10] That angry,  
hard-minded man  
came home late  
from his fishing,  
came into his hall—  
glaciers shook at each step—  
the beard on his face  
was frozen.

Hymir’s concubine, Tyr’s mother, said:

[11] “Hail, Hymir,  
come in and be happy!  
Your son has come  
to your home,  
as we expected  
after his long absence.

And our famous enemy,  
the friend of humans,  
Thor, son of Odin,  
follows him.

[12] “You see them sitting  
beneath your own hall’s roof,  
they’re hiding  
by that wall.”  
The giant reached out  
and broke the wall,  
and snapped  
a beam in half.

{94} [13] Eight cauldrons  
shattered, except  
a well-forged one  
which fell in one piece.  
Thor and Tyr came forward;  
the old giant  
bent his gaze  
upon his enemy.

[14] His thoughts were not kind  
when he fixed his eyes  
on Thor, killer of giants,  
here, in his own home.  
But the giant  
ordered three bulls killed—  
reluctantly,  
he ordered them cooked.

[15] They beheaded

the bulls,  
and brought them  
to the cook-pot;  
and before he went to bed,  
Thor, son of Odin,  
ate two whole bulls  
of Hymir's.

[16] Gray-haired old Hymir  
saw it would be costly  
to feed the hunger  
of Thor.

"If all three of us  
want to eat tomorrow,  
then we'd better  
go fishing."

[17] Thor said  
he was willing to row and fish,  
if the bold giant  
would let him have some bait.

{95} Hymir said:

"Well, giant-killer,  
if you're brave enough,  
go out to my herd.  
You'll find some bait there.

[18] "I suspect  
you'll find it easy  
to take some bait  
from one of my oxen."  
So Thor went quickly

out in the forest,  
and he saw before him  
a black ox.

- [19] Thor broke  
the whole head  
off the ox,  
gripping its horns.

Hymir said:

“What you’ve done  
here is even worse  
than it was having you inside,  
sitting and eating.”

- [20] Then Thor  
asked the giant  
to come with him to sea,  
to row out with him.  
But Hymir  
rowed a little,  
and was unwilling  
to row any further  
out in the deep sea.

- [21] Famous Hymir  
caught a whale,  
and then caught two whales  
on one hook,  
but Odin’s son  
{96} sat in the rear  
and craftily  
baited his own hook.

[22] Thor,  
friend of humans,  
enemy of the serpent,  
put the ox's head on his hook.  
Then the gaping Midgard-serpent  
came up, the one  
that hates the gods  
and lives in the encircling sea.

[23] The bold Thor  
pulled bravely  
to bring that poison-slick  
serpent up on board.  
With his hammer,  
he struck a blow  
on the head of  
Fenrir's serpent brother.

[24] The monster howled,  
volcanoes erupted,  
and the old earth  
trembled all over,  
but that sea monster  
sank back into the waves.

[25] The giant was gloomy  
as they rowed home;  
he sat at the oars  
and said not a word  
as they steered the boat  
back toward land.

Hymir said:

- [26] “Share my work  
with me, do your half—  
either take the whales  
to my house,  
{97} or stay and  
tie up the boat.”
- [27] Thor went and  
grabbed up the boat and oars—  
he didn’t bail out the water,  
he just lifted the whole thing—  
and he took the whole boat,  
with its oars and buckets  
(it was a good boat)  
to the home of the giant.  
Thor carried it  
through the forest.
- [28] But the giant  
was still angry,  
he demanded  
a test of strength from Thor:  
He said it was no test at all  
to row a boat,  
but a truly strong man  
would be able to break his cup.
- [29] So Thor  
took the cup in hand,  
but he broke a stone  
trying to shatter that glass cup.  
Then he threw it

through a wall,  
but it was brought back  
unbroken to Hymir.

[30] Till Hymir's  
pretty concubine  
told Thor a  
useful secret:  
“Hit it on Hymir's head!  
That giant's skull  
is made of harder stuff  
than any cup!”

{98} [31] Thor stood up  
vigorously,  
he summoned  
all his godly strength;  
he left not a mark  
on that giant's head,  
but the wine cup  
broke into pieces.

[32] Hymir said,  
“I know my loss is great,  
when I see my cup  
fall broken at my knees;  
I know that I will  
never say again,  
‘The drinks are ready!’

[33] “The cauldron is yours,  
Thor and Tyr,  
if you can carry it

out of my house!”

Tyr tried twice  
to lift it,  
but the cauldron  
remained unmoved.

[34] Thor, strong father  
of Mothi, took a turn.  
His feet broke through the floor  
while he lifted,  
but he lifted that cauldron  
over his head,  
and the chains that held it  
broke, and rattled at his heels.

[35] They walked a long time  
before Thor, son of Odin,  
turned around  
to take a look behind him,  
and he saw, coming from  
the rocky east, Hymir, with  
{99} an army of giants coming at him,  
some with more than one head.

[36] Thor threw the cauldron  
down from his shoulders  
and stood, ready to fight.  
He threw Mjollnir,  
his killing hammer,  
and he killed  
all those  
lava giants.

- [37] They didn't walk long  
before Thor, son of Odin,  
saw before him  
one of his goats, half-dead.  
The goat was walking  
with a lame leg,  
and this was caused  
by lie-telling Loki.
- [38] But audience,  
you have heard all this,  
this story is often  
told among the stories of the gods.  
It's told how Thor  
was paid back  
by the lava giant Egil;  
Thor took both his children.
- [39] Then Thor,  
mightiest of gods,  
returned to Asgard  
with the cauldron of Hymir.  
And now the gods  
drink good beer  
every winter's day  
in Aegir's hall.

## **{100} *Lokasenna* (Loki's Taunts)**

In *Lokasenna*, a clear picture of the trickster figure Loki appears. Having been cast out of a feast of the gods for killing a servant, Loki returns to the feast and offers insults to each god and goddess in turn. He is tolerated because Odin has made an oath never to drink without Loki present (st. 9). Loki's insults are sometimes phrased in surprisingly explicit scatological terms (as in st. 32 and 34), and his insults toward the goddesses are invariably of a sexual nature, as are the insults that he and Odin trade with one another. Note that many stanzas, especially Loki's, begin with "You know ..." (Old Norse *Veiztu* ...); this is a fairly common opening to stanzas elsewhere in the Edda as well, but here it may also be intended ironically, since much of what Loki reveals of the gods' indecency was probably concealed from the other gods prior to this disclosure. Finally, after Loki has slandered everyone present, Thor appears and threatens Loki into leaving, and we learn at last how Loki was punished for insulting the gods by being chained beneath a poisonous snake, dripping venom on his face. The prose sections are original to the manuscript.

## *Lokasenna*

Aegir, also called Gymir, prepared ale for the gods after he had acquired the great kettle, which has been told of. Odin came to the feasting with Frigg, his wife. Thor did not come, since he was out east, but Thor's wife Sif was there. Bragi came with his wife Ithunn. Tyr was there as well—he was one-handed, because Fenrir had bitten his hand off when he was chained. Njorth was there with his wife Skathi, and his children Frey and Freyja. Vithar, son of Odin, was there. Loki was there, and so were Frey's servants, Byggvir and Beyla. There were many other gods and elves as well. Aegir had two servants: Fimafeng and Eldir. Shining gold lit the hall, and the beer served itself. It was a great place of peace, and everyone praised how good Aegir's servants were. Loki could not tolerate hearing good things said about servants, and so he killed Fimafeng. Then the Aesir shook their shields at Loki and shouted at him, and drove him out into the forest, and went back {101} to drinking. But Loki came back, and in the darkness outside he met Eldir. Loki said:

[1]     **“T**ELL ME, ELDIR,  
before you take  
another step forward:  
What are the gods  
sitting in there  
talking about, over their beer?”

Eldir said:

[2]     “They are comparing  
their weapons,  
and judging their readiness for war.  
Of the elves and gods  
sitting inside,  
not one is your friend.”

Loki said:

[3]     “I will go in  
to Aegir's hall

and see this feast.  
I will bring them  
slanders and rumors,  
and mix their mead with misery.”

Eldir said:

[4] “You know that if  
you go in to Aegir’s hall  
to visit this feast,  
bringing slanders and rumors  
to spill out on their floor,  
they will wipe those words right off on you.”

Loki said:

[5] “You know, Eldir,  
if you and I were to compete  
at exchanging insults,  
it would be  
lucky for me  
if you said too much.”

{102} Then Loki went into the hall. And when the feasters saw who had come in, they went silent.

Loki said:

[6] “I come thirsty  
into this hall,  
I, Loki, after a long road,  
to ask the gods  
to offer me  
just one drink of their famous mead.

[7] “Why are you so silent,  
you proud gods,  
why do you say nothing?

You ought to show me to my seat  
at such a feast,  
or else order me to leave.”

Bragi said:

[8] “The gods will never  
show you to a seat  
at this feast.  
The gods know what company  
they want to share  
a happy evening’s drinking with.”

Loki said:

[9] “Do you remember, Odin,  
when in bygone days  
we blended our blood?  
You told me then  
that you would never taste a drink  
that was not served to us both.”

Odin said:

[10] “Get up, Vithar,  
let this father of wolves  
take a seat and have a drink.  
Let’s not let Loki  
slander us here  
in Aegir’s hall.”

{103} Then Vithar stood up and served Loki a drink. Before he drank, Loki said:

[11] “Hail, gods and goddesses,  
all the high and holy Aesir!  
Except for  
that one god

who sits furthest down the bench,  
that one there—Bragi.”

Bragi said:

[12] “I will give you  
a horse and a sword,  
I offer you these freely, and a ring—  
but in exchange,  
please don’t slander  
the gods, don’t awake their anger.”

Loki said:

[13] “Since when have *you*  
had a treasure or a horse to give?  
Of all the gods  
and elves  
inside this hall,  
you’re the biggest coward!”

Bragi said:

[14] “If we were outside,  
and you had not come  
inside Aegir’s hall,  
I would be holding your severed head.  
I’d pay you back that way  
for all your lies.”

Loki said:

[15] “You’re brave while you’re sitting.  
But you wouldn’t do that,  
Bragi, you benchwarmer.  
Go ahead and strike me,  
if you’re so angry.

A brave man wouldn't be afraid to do it."

{104} Ithunn said:

[16] "I beg you, Bragi,  
think of your children  
by blood and by adoption,  
and don't slander  
even Loki  
here in Aegir's hall."

Loki said:

[17] "Silence, Ithunn.  
I don't think there's any woman  
more lustful than you.  
Not since you wrapped  
your pretty arms  
around the killer of your brother."

Ithunn said:

[18] "I will not slander  
even Loki  
here in Aegir's hall.  
I will calm you,  
beer-maddened Bragi;  
I don't want you two to fight."

Gefjun said:

[19] "Why should two gods  
exchange insulting words  
here inside this hall?  
I think Loki  
is a cheerful fellow;  
everybody loves him."

Loki said:

[20]     “Silence, Gefjun.  
          I remember that boy  
          who seduced you into his bed.  
          That handsome boy  
          gave you a necklace,  
          and you opened your thighs for him.”

{105} Odin said:

[21]     “You’re mad, Loki,  
          out of your wits,  
          if you want to make Gefjun angry.  
          I think she foresees the fates  
          of all living things  
          as well as I do.”

Loki said:

[22]     “Silence, Odin.  
          You always judge battles  
          unfairly for humans.  
          You have often given  
          defeat to the better side,  
          when you shouldn’t have.”

Odin said:

[23]     “You know,  
          even if I did judge unfairly,  
          and made the better side lose,  
          I know that *you*,  
          for eight years,  
          lived on the earth down below  
          as a cow in milk, and as a woman,

and you've given birth to children—  
I call that a pervert's way of living.”

Loki said:

[24] “But people say that you  
practiced womanly magic  
on Samsey, dressed as a woman.  
You lived as a witch  
among the humans—  
and I call *that* a pervert's way of living.”

Frigg said:

[25] “You should not  
discuss your histories  
openly in front of everyone.  
Whatever you two gods  
went about doing in your younger days—  
that belongs in the past, and should stay there.”

{106} Loki said:

[26] “Silence, Frigg.  
You're Fjorgyn's girl,  
and you've always been lustful—  
think of when you, Odin's wife,  
accepted both Vilir and Ve  
into your embrace.”

Frigg said:

[27] “You know, if I had a son  
like Balder, sitting here  
with me in Aegir's hall,  
in the presence of these gods,  
I declare you would never come out

alive, you'd be killed shortly."

Loki said:

[28] "You must want me  
to recount even more  
of my mischief, Frigg.  
After all, I'm the one  
who made it so that Balder  
will never ride home again."

Freyja said:

[29] "You are mad, Loki,  
when you boast  
of your sins.  
I believe that Frigg  
knows everyone's fate,  
even if she never speaks of it."

Loki said:

[30] "Silence, Freyja.  
You are not free from faults;  
I know you too well.  
You've played the whore  
with every god and every elf  
who sits in this hall."

{107} Freyja said:

[31] "You speak lies,  
and soon this kind of talk  
will cause you real trouble.  
The gods are angry at you  
and all the goddesses, too—  
you will go home friendless."

Loki said:

[32]    “Silence, Freyja.  
          You are a witch,  
          and have dealt out many curses.  
          I hear the gods found you  
          lying with your brother,  
          and that you farted then, Freyja.”

Njorth said:

[33]    “It is a small matter  
          whether women sleep  
          with their own men or others’.  
          But it’s a surprise to hear  
          such a sissy god talking here,  
          when he’s borne children.”

Loki said:

[34]    “Silence, Njorth.  
          You were sent from the west  
          as a hostage for the gods.  
          The daughters of Hymir  
          used your mouth as a urinal,  
          and you’ve tasted plenty of piss.”

Njorth said:

[35]    “I had some good from that,  
          when I was sent from the west  
          as a hostage for the gods.  
          I fathered a son  
          beloved by all,  
          considered a hero among gods.”

{108} Loki said:

[36] “Stop this now, Njorth,  
control yourself.  
I will not conceal this any longer:  
I know that you fathered that son,  
Frey, with your own sister,  
and I expect you’ve done even worse.”

Tyr said:

[37] “Frey is the best  
of all the gods  
in the holy halls of Asgard.  
He doesn’t make girls weep  
nor cause trouble for women;  
he frees captives from their chains.”

Loki said:

[38] “Silence, Tyr.  
You don’t know how to  
settle disputes between men.  
I’m thinking  
of your right hand,  
which Fenrir, my son, bit off.”

Tyr said:

[39] “I lost that hand,  
you lost that son;  
we both suffered loss.  
Your son isn’t doing well, either;  
he remains forever in chains,  
waiting for Ragnarok.”

Loki said:

[40] “Silence, Tyr,

or don't you know your own wife  
had a son by me?  
You poor fool,  
I'll never pay you a penny  
in compensation for that."

{109} Frey said:

[41] "I see that wolf  
sitting and drooling  
till Ragnarok comes.  
And you'll be the next one  
chained up, you evildoer,  
if you don't close your mouth."

Loki said:

[42] "You had to pay money  
to get yourself a bride,  
and you gave up your famous sword.  
When the giants  
ride to Asgard,  
you won't be able to fight."

Byggvir said:

[43] "If I had a noble family  
and a grand hall  
like Frey does,  
I'd beat this liar  
down to his marrow,  
break every bone and limb in him."

Loki said:

[44] "Who's this little fellow  
wagging his tail,

scavenging for master's scraps?  
You're always in your master's ear,  
always twittering away  
while doing your mindless work."

Byggvir said:

[45] "I am named Byggvir,  
and all the gods and men  
say I'm brave.  
I'm proud to say  
that all the gods  
are enjoying their beer here."

{110} Loki said:

[46] "Silence, Byggvir.  
You don't even know  
how to serve food to guests.  
And worse than that,  
I know that we can find *you*  
hiding in the straw when battles start."

Heimdall said:

[47] "You're drunk, Loki,  
drunk to the point of foolishness.  
Why don't you control yourself?  
This kind of drunkenness  
makes every man  
say more than he means to."

Loki said:

[48] "Silence, Heimdall.  
In the old days  
a miserable fate was assigned to you:

You have to stand all the time,  
stay watchful all the time,  
as the guardian of the gods.”

Skathi said:

[49] “This is fun for you, Loki,  
but you won’t be speaking  
as a free man much longer.  
The gods will  
bind you to the rock,  
with the cold guts of your own son.”

Loki said:

[50] “You know, even if the gods  
were going to bind me to the rock  
with the cold guts of my own son,  
I was still first and last  
on the battlefield  
when we fought your father Thjassi.”

{111} Skathi said:

[51] “You know, even if you were  
first and last on the battlefield  
when the gods fought against Thjassi,  
you will never be welcome  
in any home or other place  
where I have power.”

Loki said:

[52] “You had kinder words for me  
when you were begging me  
to join you in your bed.  
But one expects as much

when one speaks openly  
about such hidden shames.”

Then Sif came forward and offered Loki a drink of mead and said:

[53] “Hail to you now, Loki,  
take this drink I offer you  
of our good old mead.  
Do this, rather than find fault  
with me, alone among  
all the gods and goddesses.”

Loki drained the drink, and said:

[54] “You would be unique, Sif,  
if you actually were  
wary and unwelcoming to other men.  
But I alone know  
how you were unfaithful  
to your husband Thor—  
and I was the one you slept with.”

Beyla said:

[55] “Listen! All the mountains  
are shaking, I think  
Thor is coming home.  
He’ll close this mouth  
that’s slandering  
all the gods and men.”

{112} Loki said:

[56] “Silence, Beyla.  
You’re Byggvir’s wife—  
and you have plenty of other faults.  
There’s no greater beast

among the gods here tonight,  
you lowly milkmaid.”

Then Thor came and said:

[57] “Silence, you sissy,  
or I’ll let my hammer  
silence you instead.  
I’ll knock your head  
off your shoulders,  
and then you’ll be silent—and dead.”

Loki said:

[58] “Thor has come to the hall.  
But why are you making  
such a big show of yourself, Thor?  
I don’t think you’ll look  
half so daring at Ragnarok,  
when the wolf swallows your father.”

Thor said:

[59] “Silence, you sissy,  
or I’ll let my hammer  
silence you instead.  
I’ll throw you out of here  
into Jotunheim,  
and no one will ever see you again.”

Loki said:

[60] “You’ll probably never  
tell any human beings  
what you’ve done in Jotunheim.  
I remember when you  
sat trembling in a giant’s glove;

you didn't look much like Thor then."

{113} Thor said:

[61] "Silence, you sissy,  
or I'll let my hammer  
silence you instead.  
With my right hand  
I'll beat you,  
break every bone in you."

Loki said:

[62] "I expect I'll live  
a long time still, even if  
you threaten me with that hammer.  
You thought Utgartha-Loki's  
food-bag was challenge enough,  
and you left that contest still hungry."

Thor said:

[63] "Silence, you sissy,  
or I'll let my hammer  
silence you instead.  
I plan to send you  
straight to Hel  
beyond the corpse-gates."

Loki said:

[64] "I've spoken to the gods,  
and the gods' sons,  
said everything I dared to say.  
But it's because of you, Thor,  
that I'll leave. I know *you*,  
and you alone, mean your threats.

[65]     “You made beer,  
          Aegir, but you’ll never again  
          host a feast here.  
          Everything you own  
          will burn up—  
          and you will feel flames  
          on your back.”

### **Concerning Loki**

{114} After this, Loki hid in the Falls of Frananger in the shape of a salmon, but the gods caught him. He was tied up with the intestines of his son Nari, and his son Narvi was turned into a wolf. Skathi took a poisonous snake and tied it up over Loki; poison dripped on his face from its mouth. Loki’s wife Sigyn sat there and caught the poison in a jar. But when the jar filled, she had to empty it, and when she did, poison dripped on Loki’s face. And this hurt him so badly that he trembled, and all the world with him. This is what is called an earthquake.

## **{115} *Thrymskvitha* (The Theft of Mjollnir)**

*Thrymskvitha* (literally “Thrym’s Poem”) tells one of the most popular stories in the Eddic poems, presenting a humorous depiction of the masculine Thor dressing up as a bride to recover his hammer Mjollnir from the giant Thrym who has stolen it.

## *Thrymskvitha*

[1]     **T**HOR WAS ANGRY  
when he awoke  
and found his hammer  
had gone missing.  
He wrung his beard,  
he wrung his hair,  
the great Thor  
searched all around.

[2]     And the first thing  
that he said was this:  
“Listen to me, Loki,  
listen to this:  
something never known  
before, in Midgard  
or in Asgard, has happened:  
Mjollnir’s been stolen!”

[3]     Then they went  
to Freyja’s lovely home,  
and the first thing  
Loki said was this:  
“Freyja, would you lend me  
your feather-suit  
to help us get  
Thor’s hammer back?”

Freyja said:

[4]     “I would give it to you,

even if it were made of gold,  
{116} I would loan it to you,  
even if it were made of silver.”

[5] Then Loki flew,  
wearing Freyja’s feather-suit—  
its feathers whistled in the air—  
till he left Asgard  
and came within  
Jotunheim.

[6] There Thrym sat on a mound,  
a king of giants;  
he was fastening golden chains  
on his dogs’ necks,  
and he was combing  
the manes of his horses.

Thrym said:

[7] “What news from the gods?  
What news from the elves?  
Why have you come alone  
into Jotunheim, Loki?”

Loki said, “Bad news from the gods!  
Bad news from the elves!  
Have you hidden  
the mighty Thor’s hammer?”

[8] Thrym said, “I have hidden  
the mighty Thor’s hammer  
eight miles  
beneath the earth.  
No one will ever see

that hammer again  
unless Freyja  
is brought here as my bride.”

[9] Then Loki flew,  
wearing Freyja’s feather-suit—  
its feathers whistled in the air—  
till he left Jotunheim  
and came into  
{117} Asgard.

He met Thor  
in the center of Asgard,  
and the first thing  
Thor said was this:

[10] “Were your efforts  
rewarded on this journey?  
Stay in the air, and tell me  
what news you have.  
Stories are often forgotten  
when the teller sits down,  
and lies are often told  
when people lie down.”

[11] Loki said, “My efforts  
were rewarded with this news:  
Thrym, a king among giants,  
has your hammer,  
No one will ever find  
that hammer again  
unless Freyja  
is brought to him for his bride.”

- [12] Then they went  
to find lovely Freyja,  
and the first thing  
Thor said was this:  
“Freyja, put on a  
wedding dress!  
The two of us, man and woman,  
are going to Jotunheim.”
- [13] Freyja was angry;  
she snorted so hard  
that the homes of the gods  
shook all around them,  
her necklace Brisingamen  
trembled on her neck:  
“They would call me  
a lewd, loose woman  
{118} if I went with you  
to Jotunheim!”
- [14] Soon all the gods  
met for a conference,  
all the goddesses  
met for a conference,  
and the mighty gods  
spoke a long time about  
how they might get  
Thor’s hammer back.
- [15] Then Heimdall spoke,  
the handsomest of gods,  
as one of the Vanir

he could see the future:  
“Let’s put a wedding dress  
on Thor! Let him  
wear Freyja’s necklace,  
the Brisingamen.

[16] “Let’s hang keys  
from his belt,  
let’s drape a woman’s dress  
down to his knees,  
let’s place jewels  
on his chest,  
and wrap a pretty headdress  
around his head.”

[17] Then Thor,  
the strong god, spoke:  
“All the Aesir  
would call me a sissy  
if I let you  
put a wedding dress on me.”

[18] Then Loki,  
son of Laufey, spoke:  
“Silence, Thor!  
No more of that talk!  
Unless you can get  
{119} your hammer back,  
the giants will soon  
live in Asgard!”

[19] So they put  
a wedding dress on Thor,

they put the Brisingamen  
on his neck,  
they put a chain of  
jingling keys at his belt,  
they draped a woman's dress  
down to his knees,  
they placed jewels  
on his chest,  
they wrapped a pretty headdress  
around his head.

[20] Then Loki,  
son of Laufey, said:  
“Now I'll go  
as your serving-woman—  
the two of us, man and woman,  
are going to Jotunheim.”

[21] Then they took  
Thor's goats,  
and made them  
pull the wagon.  
Mountains crumbled,  
and the ground burst in flame,  
as Odin's son  
drove into Jotunheim.

[22] Then Thrym,  
king of giants, spoke:  
“Stand up, giants!  
Spread hay on the seats!  
Bring Freyja,

daughter of Njorth,  
lord of Noatun,  
closer to me, as my bride.

{120} [23] “Here at my home,  
we giants have gold-horned cows  
and black oxen  
for our dinners,  
I have plenty of treasures,  
plenty of necklaces—  
the only thing  
I think I lack is Freyja.”

[24] Early in the evening  
the giants gathered  
and ale was brought  
to all of them.  
All on his own  
Thor ate a whole ox,  
eight salmon,  
all the delicacies  
reserved for the women,  
and drank three whole kegs of mead.

[25] Then Thrym,  
king of giants, spoke:  
“Who has ever seen  
a woman eat like this?  
I never saw a woman  
take bites that big,  
nor a girl who drinks  
so much mead.”

- [26] But Loki,  
Thor's clever bridesmaid,  
found words to answer  
the giant's suspicions:  
"Freyja could not eat  
at all for eight nights;  
that's just how eager she was  
to come here to Jotunheim."
- [27] The giant lifted the veil,  
hoping for a kiss,  
but then he leapt back  
{121} the full length of the hall:  
"Why are Freyja's eyes  
so fierce and grim?  
It seems to me that fire  
is burning in those eyes."
- [28] But Loki,  
Thor's clever bridesmaid,  
found words to answer  
the giant's suspicions:  
"Freyja could not sleep  
at all for eight nights;  
that's just how eager she was  
to come here to Jotunheim."
- [29] Then the giant's  
poor sister came in,  
she thought she would claim  
the customary gift from the bride:  
"Give me some

of your golden rings,  
if you want to win  
my love,  
my affection,  
a good welcome from me.”

[30] Then Thrym,  
king of giants, spoke:  
“Bring in the hammer  
to bless the bride,  
lay Mjollnir  
on the bride’s knees.  
May Var, goddess of  
wedding vows, bless us.”

[31] Then Thor,  
that tough-minded fighter,  
laughed with a full heart  
gripping his hammer.  
First he killed Thrym,  
king of giants,  
{122} then he crippled  
all the giant’s kin.

[32] Then he killed  
the giant’s old sister,  
the one who had asked him  
for the customary gift—  
she received a blow  
instead of money,  
a hammer to her head  
instead of golden rings—

and this is the way Odin's son  
got his hammer back.

### **{123} *Volundarkvitha* (The Escape of Volund the Smith)**

*Volundarkvitha* fits somewhat uncertainly between the poems about the gods and the poems about the heroes. It tells of the famously cunning smith Volund (known in England as *Wayland*, in Germany as *Velent*); his marriage to a Valkyrie; his mauling, imprisonment, and enslavement by King Nithuth; and finally his revenge on that king, which takes the form of murdering his sons and raping his daughter Bothvild before Volund escapes on a flying machine he has constructed for himself. Volund is the only significant speaking character in a classical Old Norse text who is identified as an elf (*alfr*). The prose introduction is original to the manuscript.

## *Volundarkvitha*

Nithuth was the name of a king in Sweden. He had two sons and a daughter named Bothvild.

There were three brothers, sons of King Finni: one was named Slagfinn, the other Egil, the third Volund. They skied and hunted, and when they came to Ulfdalir they made themselves houses there. There is a lake called Ulfsja there. Early in the morning they found three women at the lakeshore who were spinning thread. There were swan-skins near them, since the women were Valkyries. Two of them were daughters of King Hlothver, and these were Hlathguth the Swan-White and Hervor the Wise. The third was Orlun, daughter of Kjar, king of France. The men took these three women home with them. Egil married Orlun, Slagfinn took Hlathguth, and Volund took Hervor. They lived like this for seven winters. But then the women left them in order to visit battlefields, and never came home again. Egil and Slagfinn skied away to search for their wives, but Volund stayed home in Ulfdalir. He was, as far as men know, the most capable with his hands of all the people in the old sagas. King Nithuth had him seized, and this poem is about that:

[1]     **W**OMEN FLEW FROM THE SOUTH

through Mirkwood,  
those young Valkyries  
who choose mens' fates.  
{124} These southern ladies  
paused to rest on a lakeshore,  
they spun and weaved  
precious threads.

[2]     Egil took one  
for his wife,  
he took that beauty  
in his embrace.  
Slagfinn took Hlathguth,  
clad in swan-feathers,

and the third,  
their sister, took  
Volund's handsome neck  
in her embrace.

- [3] Afterwards they stayed  
for seven winters,  
but in the eighth  
they became anxious,  
and in the ninth  
they had to depart.  
Those ladies yearned  
for Mirkwood,  
those Valkyries  
were eager to judge wars.
- [4] The sharp-eyed archer Egil  
and his brother Slagfinn  
came home from hunting  
and found their homes empty.  
They went in and out  
and looked all around,  
but finally Egil skied east  
to look for Orlun,  
and Slagfinn skied south  
to look for Hlathguth.
- [5] But Volund sat  
alone in Ulfdalir;  
he worked gold  
and colorful jewels,  
{125} he assembled rings

and strung them on ropes.

In this way

he waited

to see whether his

lady would return.

[6] Nithuth learned this,

the lord of Njari,

he heard that Volund

was alone in his valley.

He sent men in the night

wearing well-made armor,

their shields glimmered

in the light of the waning moon.

[7] They dismounted

at Volund's doorstep,

they went inside

his vast home.

They saw Volund's

golden rings,

seven hundred altogether,

strung on a rope.

[8] They took them in hand,

then put them back,

but stole a single one

before they stepped out.

Then the keen-eyed archer

Volund came home.

He had traveled

a long way that day.

- [9]     He started to roast  
the meat of a brown bear.  
The kindling burned,  
the dry wood burned,  
the wind-dry logs burned,  
and it warmed Volund.
- {126} [10]   Volund the elf  
sat on the bearskin  
and counted his rings,  
but noticed one missing.  
He thought it must be  
Hervor, his wife—  
he thought she'd come back,  
and taken the ring.
- [11]   He sat waiting for her  
so long he fell asleep,  
and when he awoke  
he was bound in chains.  
He saw the heavy chains  
restraining his hands,  
and on his feet  
there were also solid locks.
- [12]   He called out,  
“Who are the kings  
who have put chains on me,  
who has tied me up?”
- [13]   Nithuth, lord of Njari,  
gave him an answer:  
“Volund, you crafty elf,

where did you find  
our treasures  
in your valley?"

[14] Volund said, "It was hardly  
a hoard such as Sigurth's gold—  
my home was not near  
the mountains of the Rhine.  
I remember  
that we used to have yet more,  
when we were a happy family  
at home in Ulfdalir.

[15] "Hlathguth and Hervor  
were daughters of Hlothver.  
{127} Orlun, Kjar's daughter,  
was a cunning sorceress."

[16] Nithuth's queen came in  
to the magnificent hall.  
She stood proudly on the floor  
and spoke: "This man,  
who came in from the woods,  
will not be happy."

King Nithuth gave his daughter the gold ring that he had taken from Volund. He himself carried Volund's sword. And the queen said:

[17] "Volund shows his teeth  
every time he sees that sword,  
or when Bothvild wears  
that ring in his presence.  
His eyes are as cruel  
as a glistening snake's.  
Cut his sinews,

rob his strength,  
and put him away  
in Saevarstoth.”

So Volund’s hamstrings were cut, and he was placed on a small island next to the land, which was called Saevarstoth. There he made all kinds of treasures for the king, and no one dared to come to the island except the king himself. Volund said:

[18] “My sword  
shines on Nithuth’s belt,  
the sword I sharpened,  
the sword I alone,  
the greatest smith, could make,  
the sword I hardened  
with my unmatched skill.  
Now that glistening sword  
is always far from my sight,  
since Nithuth will not bring  
that treasure to my workshop.  
His daughter Bothvild  
also wears a treasure  
{128} never meant for her,  
my bride’s golden ring.”

[19] Volund worked, never sleeping,  
constantly swinging his hammer.  
He thought of a daring plot  
to foil Nithuth.  
Then Nithuth’s two young sons,  
the two boys,  
came to see Volund’s treasures  
on the Island of Saevarstoth.

- [20] They came to the treasure chest,  
they asked for the keys.  
They realized Volund's skill  
when they peered inside.  
The boys saw  
many ornaments,  
all of them made  
of gold and gems.
- [21] Volund said, "Come back alone,  
just you two, the day after tomorrow.  
I will give all this  
gold to you if you do.  
Don't tell the ladies,  
don't tell the men—  
don't tell anyone at all  
that you're meeting with me."
- [22] Early on the appointed day,  
one boy said to the other:  
"Let's go see the rings."  
So the two boys came  
and asked for the keys.  
They realized Volund's skill  
when they peered inside.
- [23] He cut off the heads  
of those young boys,  
he hid their bodies  
under his bellows.  
{129} But he took their skulls  
and scalped them,

set them with silver,  
and sent them as cups to Nithuth.

- [24] And from the eyes  
of those young boys  
he made jewels for  
their mother, Nithuth's wife.  
And Volund made ornaments  
from the teeth  
of her own two brothers,  
for Bothvild, Nithuth's daughter.

- [25] **B**OOTHVILD PRAISED  
a ring Volund had made,  
she told him it was broken:  
“And I don't dare to tell it,”  
she said, “to anyone but you.”

Volund said:

- [26] “I'll repair it so that  
your father on his throne  
will look at it—and to him,  
and to your mother,  
it will look even better,  
and you'll think so too,  
when you wear it.”
- [27] He gave her beer,  
he could easily outdrink her,  
and finally she sat in his chair  
and she slept. Volund said,  
“Now I have avenged  
the wrongs done to me,

all except one  
of the most wicked.

{130} [28]     “I have done well.  
I wish I were on my feet,  
the ones cut from me  
by the wicked men of Nithuth.”  
But then, laughing, Volund  
launched himself in the air.  
Bothvild wept as she left  
the island—she wept for  
her lover’s departure,  
and her father’s anger.

[29]     Volund saw where  
Nithuth’s queen  
stood outside  
and went into the hall.  
Volund perched  
atop the wall and said:  
“Are you awake, Nithuth,  
lord of Njari?”

[30]     Nithuth said, “I am awake.  
I have no joy,  
I barely sleep  
since my sons’ death.  
Your cold actions  
have chilled me.  
Now I wish I had never  
dealt with Volund.

[31]     “Tell me, Volund,

you crafty elf,  
what kind of fate  
did my sons meet?"

[32] Volund said, "First,  
you must swear many oaths.  
Swear by a ship's board,  
by a shield's edge,  
by a horse's withers,  
by a sword's blade,  
that you will not  
{131} harm my lover,  
nor cause her death,  
even if my new bride  
is a woman of your kin,  
even if she bears my child  
inside your own hall.

[33] "Then go to the workshop  
that you forced me into.  
There you'll find bags  
full of blood.  
I cut your boys'  
heads off  
and left their bodies  
beneath the bellows.

[34] "And after I scalped them,  
I took the bare skulls  
and decorated them with silver  
before I sent them to you.  
And after I took their

eyes out,  
I turned them into jewels  
for your crafty queen.

[35] “I made jewels  
from the teeth of those two boys,  
and I sent those  
to your daughter Bothvild.  
Now Bothvild  
walks about pregnant,  
yes, the only daughter  
of the two of you.”

[36] The king said,  
“You could say nothing  
more awful to me,  
I would never torture you worse.  
There is no man so tall  
that he could reach you up there,  
nor so good a shot  
that he could shoot you down,  
{132} there where you hang  
among the clouds, Volund.”

[37] Laughing, Volund  
flew up and away,  
and left the joyless Nithuth  
sitting below.

[38] Nithuth said, “Get up,  
Thakkrath, my good servant,  
go to my pretty daughter Bothvild.  
Tell her to come to me

in fine dress,  
to come talk to her father.”

[39] The king then said to her,  
“Is it true, Bothvild,  
what Volund said:  
That you and he lay together?”

[40] She said, “It is true, father,  
everything he said to you is true.  
Volund and I  
lay together  
on his island  
a while—we never should have.  
I couldn’t fight him,  
father,  
I couldn’t withstand him,  
father.”

### **{133} *Alvissmal* (The Words of All-Wise)**

In *Alvissmal*, a dwarf named “All-Wise” visits the home of Thor with the intent of marrying his daughter. Thor disapproves, and occupies the dwarf by asking him numerous questions of mythological trivia—namely, what various peoples (the Aesir, the Vanir, humans, dwarves, elves, etc.) call different phenomena of heaven and earth. The dwarf successfully answers all of his questions, but at the end it is revealed that Thor has been stalling for time, waiting for the sun to come up and turn the unlucky suitor to stone.

## *Alvissmal*

All-Wise said:

- [1]     **G**ET THE BENCHES READY!  
Now I'm coming home  
with a bride in tow.  
It may not seem likely  
to others around me—  
but I won't sleep when I get home."

Thor said:

- [2]     "Who is this man?  
Why are you so pale around the nostrils?  
Did you spend the night with a corpse?  
It seems to me  
you have a monster's appearance,  
you have no business seeking a bride."

All-Wise said:

- [3]     "I am named All-Wise.  
I live beneath the earth  
on my underground estate.  
I came to visit you, Thor,  
lord of the goat-chariot;  
no one will make me retract my words."

Thor said:

- [4]     "I will decide that,  
since I am the bride's father,  
{134} and it's I who gets to say about her.  
I was not home

when she was promised to you;  
the girl is my daughter, and a goddess.”

All-Wise said:

[5] “Who is this man  
who speaks  
for the beautiful lady?  
You scoundrel,  
probably no one would defend you—  
who gave you those rings that you wear?”

Thor said:

[6] “I am named Thor.  
I’m a wide-traveled man,  
and son of long-bearded Odin.  
If I don’t consent,  
you’ll never get the girl;  
you’ll stay unmarried forever.”

All-Wise said:

[7] “I’d like to have  
your consent,  
and I’d certainly like the bride!  
I would rather have her  
than have to live without  
that girl, who’s lovely as snow.”

Thor said:

[8] “This girl’s love  
will never be yours,  
my clever guest,  
if you dare to leave this house  
without telling me

what I want to know about every realm.

- [9] “Tell me, All-Wise—  
since I think you know  
everything about everyone, dwarf—  
what is the earth called  
{135} that people walk on  
in every world?”

All-Wise said:

- [10] “Men call it Earth,  
the Aesir call it Soil,  
the Vanir call it Road,  
giants call it Green,  
elves call it Grower,  
high gods call it Clay.”

Thor said:

- [11] “Tell me, All-Wise—  
since I think you know  
everything about everyone, dwarf—  
what do they call the sky,  
swirling above us,  
in every world?”

All-Wise said:

- [12] “Humans call it Heaven,  
the Aesir call it Wind-land,  
the Vanir call it Wind-maker,  
giants call it Up-world,  
elves say ‘the High Roof,’  
dwarves say ‘the Drip-House.’”

Thor said:

[13] “Tell me, All-Wise—  
since I think you know  
everything about everyone, dwarf—  
what do they call the moon  
(it’s easy to see)  
in every world?”

All-Wise said:

[14] “Humans call it Moon,  
Gods say ‘Changer,’  
in Hel they call it the Turning Wheel,  
the giants call it Hurry—  
dwarves call it Shiny,  
and elves say ‘Year-counter.’”

{136} Thor said:

[15] “Tell me, All-Wise—  
since I think you know  
everything about everyone, dwarf—  
what do they call the sun  
(it’s easy to see, too)  
in every world?”

All-Wise said:

[16] “Humans call it Sun,  
Gods say ‘Southern Ball,’  
dwarves call it Dvalin’s Toy,  
giants say ‘Everglow,’  
elves call it the Beautiful Wheel;  
the Aesir say ‘All-clear.’”

Thor said:

[17] “Tell me, All-Wise—

since I think you know  
everything about everyone, dwarf—  
what do they call  
the rain-making clouds  
in every world?”

All-Wise said:

[18] “Humans say ‘Clouds,’  
but gods say ‘Hope of Rain,’  
the Vanir call them Wind-floats,  
giants Hope of Hail,  
elves say ‘Weather-Causers,’  
in Hel they call them Helmets of the Hidden.”

Thor said:

[19] “Tell me, All-Wise—  
since I think you know  
everything about everyone, dwarf—  
what do they call the wind,  
which travels so widely,  
in every world?”

{137} All-Wise said:

[20] “Humans call it Wind,  
the gods call it Blower,  
the holy say ‘Noisemaker,’  
giants call it the Screamer,  
elves say ‘Noisy Traveler,’  
in Hel they call it Stormy.”

Thor said:

[21] “Tell me, All-Wise—  
since I think you know

everything about everyone, dwarf—  
what do they call it  
when the wind stands still  
in every world?”

All-Wise said:

[22] “Humans call it Calm,  
the gods say ‘Unblowing,’  
Vanir say ‘Wind-stop,’  
giants say ‘Stop-blowing,’  
elves call it Day’s Sleep,  
but dwarves say ‘Day’s Feint.’

Thor said:

[23] “Tell me, All-Wise—  
since I think you know  
everything about everyone, dwarf—  
what do they call the sea  
that boats are rowed on  
in every world?”

All-Wise said:

[24] “Humans call it Ocean,  
gods prefer the name Sea,  
Vanir call it Restful Harbor,  
giants say ‘Eel-home,’  
elves call it Oar-place,  
the dwarves say ‘Deep, deep sea.’

{138} Thor said:

[25] “Tell me, All-Wise—  
since I think you know  
everything about everyone, dwarf—

what do they call fire,  
which burns before our eyes,  
in every world?”

All-Wise said:

[26] “Humans call it Fire,  
the Aesir call it Flame,  
Vanir call it Warmer,  
giants say ‘the Bold One,’  
dwarves call it Burner,  
‘Mover’ is its name in Hel.”

Thor said:

[27] “Tell me, All-Wise—  
since I think you know  
everything about everyone, dwarf—  
what do they call the woods  
that grow before our eyes  
in every world?”

All-Wise said:

[28] “Humans call them the Woods,  
but gods say ‘Wool of the Plains,’  
other men call them Hill-hilts,  
giants call them Firewood,  
elves say ‘Pretty Leaves,’  
the Vanir call them Wands.”

Thor said:

[29] “Tell me, All-Wise—  
since I think you know  
everything about everyone, dwarf—  
what do they call the night,

child of Norvi,  
in every world?”

{139} All-Wise said:

[30] “Humans call it Night,  
gods say ‘the Darkness,’  
the holy gods say ‘the Masked One,’  
giants call it the Un-light,  
elves say ‘Good to Sleep In,’  
dwarves say ‘Queen of Dreams.’”

Thor said:

[31] “Tell me, All-Wise—  
since I think you know  
everything about everyone, dwarf—  
what do they call seed  
that is sown in the earth  
in every world?”

All-Wise said:

[32] “Humans call it Barley,  
gods say ‘Grain,’  
Vanir call it Grower,  
giants say ‘Good Eating;’  
elves call it Things to Make Beer,  
in Hel they call it Sunken.”

Thor said:

[33] “Tell me, All-Wise—  
since I think you know  
everything about everyone, dwarf—  
what do they call the ale  
that everyone drinks

in every world?”

All-Wise said:

[34] “Humans call it Ale,  
the Aesir call it Beer,  
the Vanir call it Wine,  
giants call it Cleansing Drink,  
but in Hel they say ‘Mead’—  
the giant sons of Suttung call it Toast.

{140} Thor said:

[35] “I’ve never seen  
a single creature  
who knew so much old lore!  
But I have deceived you, All-Wise,  
with a terrible lie:  
You’re still up, and it’s dawn, dwarf—  
the sun shines in the hall!”

## **{141} *Baldrs draumar* (Balder's Dreams)**

*Baldrs draumar* (“Balder’s Dreams”) does not appear in the *Codex Regius* manuscript, but it does appear in the manuscript AM 748 I 4to alongside several poems that do occur in the *Codex Regius* (such as *Harbarthsljoth* and *Hymiskvitha*). It is also clearly linked with the Poetic Edda by its form and content. As in *Völuspá*, Odin awakens a dead witch and asks her for information—in this case, the meaning of the worrisome dreams that his son Balder is having about his own death.

## *Baldrs draumar*

- [1]     **O**NCE ALL THE GODS  
met for a conference,  
all the goddesses  
met for a conference,  
and the mighty gods  
talked about  
why Balder was having  
bad dreams.
- [2]     Odin stood up,  
that father of gods,  
and he saddled  
his horse Sleipnir.  
Then he rode  
down to Hel,  
till he saw  
the dog of Hel.
- [3]     The dog  
had a bloody chest  
and barked a long time  
as Odin passed.  
Odin rode on,  
the stones of the road rattled,  
till he came to the high  
house of Hel.
- {142} [4]     Then Odin rode  
east of the door to Hel,

and there he found  
the grave of a witch,  
and then the battle-god  
spoke a spell,  
till her corpse  
was forced to rise, and spoke:

- [5] “Who is this man,  
unknown to me,  
who has brought me back  
to loathsome life?  
I was buried in snow,  
pelted by rain,  
drowned in dew,  
I was dead a long time.”

Odin said:

- [6] “I am the Road-tamer,  
son of Corpse-tamer.  
Tell me news from Hel,  
and I’ll tell you news from above.  
Whose arrival are these benches  
draped with straw for?  
Why is the floor all  
covered in gold?”

The witch said:

- [7] “The mead is brewed  
for Balder’s arrival,  
a shield is placed over  
the fresh brew.  
All the gods

are in suspense.  
I was forced to speak,  
now I return to silence.”

{143} Odin said:

[8] “Don’t go silent, witch!  
I want to ask you more,  
till I understand everything,  
and I want to know more.  
Who will be the killer  
of my son Balder?  
Who will steal the life  
of Odin’s son?”

The witch said:

[9] “Hoth will bear  
the long spear that will kill him,  
he will be the killer  
of your son Balder,  
he will steal the life  
of Odin’s son.  
I was forced to speak,  
now I return to silence.”

Odin said:

[10] “Don’t go silent, witch!  
I want to ask you more,  
till I understand everything,  
and I want to know more.  
Who will avenge  
Hoth’s crime?  
Who will put Balder’s killer

on the funeral pyre?”

The witch said:

- [11] “In halls to the west  
Rind will give birth to your son Vali;  
he will avenge Balder  
when he is only one night old.  
He will neither comb his hair  
nor wash his hands  
till he puts Balder’s killer  
on the funeral pyre.  
I was forced to speak,  
now I return to silence.”

{144} Odin said:

- [12] “Don’t go silent, witch!  
I want to ask you more,  
till I understand everything,  
and I want to know more.  
Who are the women  
who weep in longing,  
who throw their necklaces  
up into the sky?”

The witch said:

- [13] “You are not Road-tamer,  
like I thought you were—  
no, you are Odin,  
the aged god.”

Odin said:

- [14] “You are neither a witch,  
nor a wise woman—

no, you are the mother  
of three monsters.”

The witch said:

[15] “Ride home, Odin!  
Feel triumphant, for now.  
But you will come  
for a second visit  
when Loki breaks free  
from his chains,  
and Ragnarok  
comes to end everything.”

## {145} *Rigsthula* (The Tale of Rig)

*Rigsthula* (“Rig’s List”), another mythological poem not present in the *Codex Regius*, tells of the sexual adventures of the god Heimdall (here called Rig), and how he fathered the different classes of human beings, a myth that was well-known enough to be cited in the opening lines of *Voluspa* (where humans are referred to as “all classes of men,/ you greater and lesser/ children of Heimdall”). Heimdall sleeps first between Ai and Edda, whose names mean “great-grandfather” and “great-grandmother,” respectively, and then in succession with Afi and Amma (“grandfather” and “grandmother”), and Father and Mother (the Old Norse words are virtually identical with the English: *fathir* and *mothir*). With the first couple he fathers the slaves or peasants, with the second he fathers the commoners, and with the third he fathers the nobility. The first man and woman of each class then have children of their own, many of them with obviously meaningful names, which I have rendered with an English equivalent where the meaning of the Old Norse name is clear. Finally, in the last haunting stanza of the (incomplete?) poem, the youngest child of the noble family, named King, is encouraged by a crow to wage war on his prosperous neighbors. The values that the elites of Norse society attributed to the three classes of society—low, middle, and high—are clear to be seen in this poem, one of the most sociologically transparent artifacts of its time.

## *Rigsthula*

Men say in old sagas that one of the Aesir, the god named Heimdall, went on a journey along a certain seashore, and soon he came to a farm, where he gave his name as Rig. This poem is about that story.

- [1]     **I**T IS SAID THAT  
a wise god, Rig,  
powerful and aged,  
fierce and strong,  
walked upon  
green roads.
- {146} [2]     In the middle of the road  
he came walking.  
He came to a house,  
the door was open.  
He went in,  
a fire burned on the floor,  
and a gray-haired couple  
sat before it,  
named Ai and Edda;  
they were an aged pair.
- [3]     Rig knew how to  
give them good counsel.  
He sat down  
between them,  
with the man and the woman  
on either side of him.
- [4]     Then Edda took

a swollen loaf of bread,  
heavy and thick,  
stuffed with grains,  
and she put that, and more,  
in the middle of the table.  
There was soup in a bowl,  
and boiled calf-meat  
was set on the table;  
that was the best of their delicacies.

[5] Rig rose from his seat  
and was ready for sleep;  
he knew how to  
give them good counsel.  
He lay down in bed  
between them,  
with the man and the woman  
on either side of him.

[6] He was there  
three nights in a row,  
then he went walking  
{147} in the middle of the road,  
and nine months  
soon passed.

[7] Edda had a child.  
They splashed him with water,  
wrapped him in dark clothes,  
and named him Slave.

[8] Slave grew up  
and did well for himself.

His hands had  
scabby skin,  
knobby knuckles,  
and fat fingers.  
His face was ugly,  
he had a bad back,  
and a long pair of heels on his feet.

[9]     Soon he got a chance  
to test his strength.  
He made rope,  
he made baskets,  
all day he carried  
firewood home.

[10]    Then a woman  
came wandering his way,  
with scars on her feet,  
and sunburnt arms.  
She had a hook nose,  
and her name was Slavewoman.

[11]    She sat down  
in the middle of the floor.  
And Slave sat down  
next to her.  
They spoke and they whispered,  
Slave and Slavewoman,  
they readied a bed  
after a hard day's work.

{148} [12]    They had children,  
they taught them and loved them.

I think their sons were named  
Lumpy and Barn-cleaner,  
Noisy and Horsefly,  
Sleeper, Stinker,  
Midget, Fatboy,  
Slow and Gray-hair,  
Hunchback and Dangle-leg;  
they made fences,  
they planted fields,  
they raised pigs,  
they herded goats,  
they shoveled manure.

- [13] Their daughters were  
Shorty and Fatty,  
Fat-calf  
and Beak-nose,  
Shriek and Slavegirl,  
Gossip,  
Skinny-hips,  
and Bird-legs.  
All the families of slaves  
are descended from them.

- [14] Rig went on  
upon his way.  
He came to a hall,  
the door was open.  
He went inside,  
a fire burned on the floor.  
A couple sat there,

busy with their work.

[15] The man was busy  
with wood-carving.  
His beard was trimmed,  
his hair lay in locks on his forehead,  
his shirt was tailored,  
he owned a chest of drawers.

{149} [16] His wife sat  
and spun her spinning-wheel  
with her arms,  
she was weaving.  
She had a headdress,  
she wore a blouse,  
she had a lace choker,  
and jeweled brooches.  
Afi and Amma  
were their names.

[17] Rig knew how to  
give them good counsel.  
He rose from the table,  
ready to sleep.  
He lay down in bed  
between them,  
with the man and the woman  
on either side of him.

[18] He was there  
three nights in a row,  
and nine months  
soon passed.

- [19] Amma had a child.  
They splashed him with water  
and named him Freeman.  
His mother wrapped  
her red-haired, ruddy child  
in cloth; his eyes were keen.
- [20] He grew up,  
and did well for himself.  
He tamed oxen,  
he made a plow,  
he built houses  
and he built barns,  
he made wagons  
and drove a plow.
- {150} [21] Then they brought him  
a housewife with her keys  
in goat-skin clothes,  
and married her to Freeman.  
She was named In-law,  
she wore the bridal veil.  
That couple lived together,  
they exchanged rings,  
they shared their sheets,  
and made a home.
- [22] They had children,  
they taught them and loved them.  
Their sons were Manful and Fighter,  
Brave, Swordsman, and Smith,  
Stout, Farmer,

Trimbeard,  
Rancher and Husband,  
Sharp-Beard and Manly.

[23] And they had daughters  
with these names:  
Smart, Bride, Swan,  
Lady, Dame,  
Girl, Noblewoman, Wife,  
Shy, and Vivacious.  
All the families of free farmers  
are descended from them.

[24] Rig went on  
upon his way,  
he came to a hall,  
with the door facing south  
and standing open—  
there was a ring  
for knocking on the door.

[25] He went in, and found  
the floor covered with straw.  
A husband and wife sat there  
and looked in one another's eyes.  
{151} They were named Father and Mother,  
they held one another's hands.

[26] The husband sat  
and strung his bow;  
he bent its shaft  
and made arrows for it.  
His wife inspected

the sleeves of her blouse,  
stroked the wrinkles out,  
smoothed them out.

[27] She adjusted her headdress,  
she had a jewel on her chest,  
a long dress,  
and a blue-colored blouse.  
Her face was more beautiful,  
her breast was more beautiful,  
her neck was more beautiful  
than pure snow.

[28] Rig knew how to  
give them good counsel.  
He sat down  
between them,  
with the man and the woman  
on either side of him.

[29] Then Mother brought out  
a fine white  
ornamental cloth  
and covered the table.  
She brought out  
thin-sliced bread  
made of white wheat  
and filled the table.

[30] She set out  
full plates, and treasures  
of silverware on the table,  
loaded with meat and poultry.

They drank wine  
{152} from gemstone beakers,  
they drank and talked,  
till the day turned to night.

[31] Rig knew how to  
give them good counsel.  
He rose from his seat  
and prepared the bed.  
He was there  
three nights in a row,  
then he went walking again  
in the middle of the road,  
and nine months  
soon passed.

[32] Mother had a child,  
she swaddled him in silk,  
they sprinkled water over him,  
they named him Lord.  
His hair was blonde,  
his cheeks were bright,  
his eyes were as cruel  
and clear as vipers’.

[33] They raised Lord  
there in their home;  
he learned to hold a shield,  
to string a bow,  
to bend a bow,  
to carve an arrow,  
to throw a spear,

to cast a javelin,  
to ride a horse,  
to hunt with dogs,  
to draw a sword,  
to swim competitively.

[34] Then Rig  
came walking  
to their farm,  
he taught Lord runes,  
gave him his own name,  
{153} called him his son,  
told him  
to claim lands,  
to conquer lands,  
conquer old villages.

[35] He rode then  
through the  
icy mountains of Mirkwood,  
till he came to a hall  
and shook his spear,  
shook his shield,  
set his horse to a gallop  
and drew his sword:  
he started a war,  
he reddened the fields with blood,  
he killed many men,  
he conquered lands.

[36] He became sole owner  
of eighteen estates,

he shared his wealth,  
he gave his men  
treasures upon treasures,  
and good horses.  
He gave away rings;  
he did not care to hoard them.

[37] Then messengers came  
along well-prepared roads,  
they came to the hall  
where that chieftain lived.  
They presented  
the beautiful, soft-fingered,  
wise girl,  
whose name was Eagle.

[38] They offered Lord the girl,  
took her to his home,  
married her to him,  
she wore the bridal veil.  
Then they lived together  
{154} and loved one another,  
they increased their family  
and enjoyed their days.

[39] Their oldest son was Boy  
and the next was Kid,  
then Offspring and Noble,  
Heir and Scion,  
Descendant and Successor,  
Son and Lad,  
another was Nobility,

and the youngest was named King—  
they played together,  
they learned to swim, and play chess.

[40] The sons of Lord  
grew up there,  
they broke horses,  
they made shields,  
they shot arrows,  
they made war.

[41] But young King  
learned runes,  
runes of fate  
and runes of destiny,  
he learned spells  
to save lives  
and dull blades,  
to calm storms.

[42] He learned the language of birds;  
he learned to put out fires,  
to calm sorrows and induce sleep,  
and give comfort in sorrow.  
He had the strength,  
the passion, of eight men.

[43] Rig shared runes  
with him,  
but King tricked him,  
and learned them better than he,  
{155} and then he earned  
the right to call himself

by the name of Rig,  
for his rune-lore.

[44] Young King  
rode with his arrows;  
he shot arrows,  
he killed birds.

[45] Then a crow said to him,  
a crow sitting on a high branch:  
“Why do you kill birds,  
young king?  
It would be better  
to mount up on your horse,  
and kill men.

[46] “I know two chieftains  
with rich halls, they live nearby,  
they have bigger inheritances  
than you have—  
they know how to steer ships,  
they know how to sharpen blades,  
they know how to kill men.”

## **{156} *Voluspa en skamma* (The Short Prophecy of Ragnarok)**

*Voluspa en skamma* (literally “The Short *Voluspa*”), the name given to parts of this poem quoted in the Prose Edda, is another mythological poem from outside the *Codex Regius*. It appears in its entirety in the manuscript *Flateyjarbok*, where it is identified as *Hyndluljóð* (“Song of Hyndla”). In it, the dead witch Hyndla tells the goddess Freyja and a human warrior named Ottar of Ottar’s ancestry, eventually tracing him back to the gods and telling a little about the gods and their fates. It is usually believed that the stanzas dealing with the gods (st. 30–50) were originally a separate poem (the *Voluspa en skamma* proper) and that the first twenty-nine stanzas dealing with Ottar’s ancestry were only added to it by a later editor. Whether originally a single poem or not, the poem appears to have been composed fairly late.

## *Voluspa en skamma*

Freyja said:

- [1]     **“W**AKE UP, LADY,  
wake up, friend,  
wake up, sister,  
Hyndla, you cave-dweller.  
The night is dark;  
we will ride  
to Valhalla,  
to the holy hall.
- [2]     “We’ll ask Odin  
to keep us in mind;  
he gives gold  
to those who are worthy.  
He gave Hermoth  
a helmet and armor,  
he gave Sigmund  
a sword as a gift.
- [3]     “He gives victory to some,  
money to others,  
{157} eloquence to many,  
and common sense to all.  
He gives waves to the sea,  
word-skill to poets,  
he gives many  
the happiness of love.
- [4]     “I will sacrifice

to Thor, and ask him  
to support you always  
and look on you with a smile,  
no matter how much  
he hates other giant-women.

- [5] “Now take a wolf  
out of your stable,  
let him walk  
alongside my hog.”

Hyndla said:

“I doubt the hog  
will walk the god’s road;  
I don’t want to saddle  
my swift wolf.

- [6] “You lie, Freyja,  
you want to tempt me.  
But your eyes  
tell me everything.  
Your lover,  
young Ottar,  
son of Innstein,  
follows on the road of the dead.”

Freyja said:

- [7] “You are being foolish;  
you are dreaming, Hyndla,  
if you think my lover  
follows me on the road of the dead,  
where the hog  
Gullinbusti glows,

that battle-swine  
{158} which two crafty dwarves,  
Dain and Nabbi,  
made for me.

[8] “I’ll step out of the saddle,  
we’ll sit together  
and speak together  
about great families,  
about the good men  
descended from the gods.

[9] “They have dared much,  
young Ottar  
and Angantyr,  
to take the gold of Valland.  
A young man  
needs good counsel,  
if he wants to get his  
inheritance from his kin.

[10] “Ottar made me  
a temple of stone,  
and the stones of that temple  
glisten like glass,  
reddened with fresh blood  
from sacrificed oxen—  
Ottar believed faithfully  
in the goddesses.

[11] “Now, you must  
name noble men,  
and all the best

human families:

Who are the Skjoldungs?

Who are the Skilfings?

Who are the Authlings?

Who are the Ylfings?

Who are the best prince's sons,

the best chieftain's sons,

the best of all men

in all of Midgard?"

{159} Hyndla said:

[12] "You, Ottar,  
are Innstein's son,  
and Innstein was  
the son of Alf the Old.  
Alf was Ulf's son,  
Ulf was Saefari's,  
Saefari was the son of  
Svan the Red.

[13] "Your father's mother  
was beautifully bejeweled,  
she must have been  
the priestess of Hlethi.  
Her father was Frothi,  
her mother was Friaht,  
that whole family  
was well-born.

[14] "In olden days,  
Ali was the best man,  
and before him, Halfdan

was chief of the Skjoldungs.  
Those princes  
are remembered for their killings,  
and Ali's accomplishments  
are known around the world.

- [15] "He was the in-law  
of Eymund, a great hero.  
He killed Sigtrygg  
with a cold sword-blade.  
He married Almveig,  
best of women,  
and together they raised  
eighteen sons.
- [16] "From them come the Skjoldungs,  
the Skilfings,  
the Authlings,  
the Ynglings,  
{160} the best prince's sons,  
the best chieftain's sons,  
the best of all men  
in all of Midgard.  
And this is your family,  
foolish Ottar.
- [17] "Hildigunn  
was her mother,  
the daughter of Svava  
and a Sea-King.  
And this is your family,  
foolish Ottar.

It would profit you to know it—  
do you want to know still more?

- [18] “Dag married Thora,  
mother of warriors,  
there were great men  
born in that line:  
Fratthmar and Gyrth,  
both the Frekars,  
Am, Josurmar,  
and Alf the Old.

It would profit you to know it—  
do you want to know still more?

- [19] “Ketill was their friend,  
he was heir to Klyp,  
he was the grandfather  
of your mother.  
Frothi was born  
before Kari,  
but Alf  
was born earliest.

- [20] “Then Nanna,  
who was Nokkvi’s daughter.  
Her son was the  
in-law of your father.  
These are old relatives,  
but I can speak still more.  
{161} I knew Brodd,  
and Horfi also.  
This is your family,

foolish Ottar.

[21] “Isolf and Asolf,  
sons of Almoth  
and his wife Skurhild,  
who was Skekkil’s daughter—  
you are related  
to many great men.  
This is your family,  
foolish Ottar.

[22] “Gunnar the Steadfast,  
Grim the Plow-Smith,  
Thori Iron-Shield,  
Ulf the Howler.

[23] “Bui and Brami,  
Barri and Reifnir,  
Tind and Tyrfing,  
the two Haddings,  
this is your family,  
foolish Ottar.

[24] “Ani and Omi,  
Arngrim’s sons,  
were born  
to Eyfura.  
The noise of all kinds of evil  
caused by those berserks  
went over land and sea  
like a wildfire.  
This is your family,  
foolish Ottar.

[25] “I knew both  
Brodd and Horfi,  
brave companions  
of Hrolf the Old.  
Those families are  
{162} descended from Jormunrekk,  
Sigurth’s in-law,  
and Sigurth was the prince  
who killed Fafnir.  
Listen to my story.

[26] “The prince Sigurth  
was a descendant of Volsung,  
his mother Hjordis  
was descended from Hrauthung,  
and her father Eylimi  
from the Authlings;  
this is your family,  
foolish Ottar.

[27] “Gunnar and Hogni  
were the sons of Gjuki,  
and Guthrun  
was their sister.  
Gotthorm was not  
the son of Gjuki,  
but his mother was the same  
as Gunnar’s and Hogni’s.  
This is your family,  
foolish Ottar.

[28] “Harald Wartooth

was son of  
Hrorek, the hater of riches.  
Hrorek was the son of Auth,  
and Auth the Wise  
was the daughter of Ivar.  
Rathbarth was  
the father of Randver;  
those men  
were blessed by the gods  
This is your family,  
foolish Ottar.

{163} [29] “There were eleven  
of the gods,  
after doomed  
Balder fell.  
Vali then  
craved vengeance,  
and so he killed  
the killer of his brother.  
This is your family,  
foolish Ottar.

[30] “Balder’s father  
was Odin, heir of Bur,  
and Frey married Gerth,  
who was the daughter of Gymir,  
a man of giant family,  
married to Aurbotha.  
Thjassi was  
their kinsman,

a good archer and a giant,  
and his daughter was Skathi.

[31] “I have told you much,  
and I remember still more.  
I suspect that few know all this—  
do you want to know more?

[32] “Haki was the best son  
of Hvaedna by far,  
and Hvaedna’s father  
was Hjorvarth.  
Heith and Hrossthjof  
were the giant Hrimnir’s children.

[33] “All the witches  
come from Vitholf,  
all the wizards  
come from Vilmeith,  
all the warlocks  
come from Svarthofthi,  
{164} all the giants  
come from Ymir.

[34] “I have told you much,  
and I remember still more.  
I suspect that few know all this—  
do you want to know more?

[35] “There was one born  
in ancient times,  
a very powerful son  
of the family of the gods.  
He had nine mothers,

those nine giant women  
gave birth to the noble spearman  
at the edge of the world.

[36] “I have told you much,  
and I remember still more.  
I suspect that few know all this—  
do you want to know more?

[37] “His mothers were Gjalp,  
and Greip,  
Eistla  
and Eyrgjafa,  
Ulfrun  
and Angreyja,  
Imth and Atla  
and Jarnsaxa.

[38] “The earth gave him  
strength to grow,  
as did the cold sea,  
and the blood of the boar.

[39] “I have told you much,  
and I remember still more.  
Certainly few know all this—  
do you want to know more?

{165} [40] “Loki fathered  
a wolf with Angerbotha:  
he fathered Sleipnir  
with Svathilfari.  
But there was one child  
worse than all the others

of those born to  
Byleist's brother Loki.

[41] "Loki ate a woman's heart,  
he found it  
half-burned  
on a burning linden tree.  
Loki became pregnant  
from that dead evil woman,  
and from their child  
come all the troll-women.

[42] "The storm-stirred sea  
heaves up to heaven,  
it drowns the lands  
and chokes all the air.  
Then come snow-storms  
and sharp winds,  
then the time comes near  
when the gods will fall.

[43] "One was born,  
greater than all others,  
the earth gave him  
strength to grow.  
They say that he  
was boldest of all,  
he was related  
to all the classes of men.

[44] "But another will come,  
a god even greater,  
and I dare not

speak his name.  
    Few can see further,  
    {166} beyond the day  
    when the wolf  
    will swallow Odin.”

Freyja said:

[45]     “Give a memory-drink  
          to Ottar,  
          so that three days from now  
          he can remember  
          each word  
          of what you say,  
          when he and Angantyr  
          reckon their family trees.”

Hyndla said:

[46]     “Hurry away from here,  
          I want to sleep.  
          You learned nothing from me  
          of my own free choice.  
          Leave here  
          in the night  
          like a ewe  
          with your ram.

[47]     “You ran after Odin,  
          you’re always lustful,  
          and you’ve slept  
          with many others.  
          Leave here  
          in the night

like a ewe  
with your ram.”

Freyja said:

[48] “I will strike a fire  
around you, giant-woman,  
make it so you cannot  
leave here unburned—  
so *you* can’t leave here  
in the night  
like a ewe  
with your ram.”

{167} Hyndla said:

[49] “I see a fire kindling,  
I see the earth burn.  
But most living things  
have to endure death.  
Take a beer  
to Ottar,  
a poison-mixed  
drink for ill health.”

Freyja said:

[50] “Your curse  
will do no harm,  
giant woman,  
no matter what you threaten.  
He will drink  
only good drinks.  
I ask all the gods  
to help Ottar!”

## **{168} *Grottasongr* (The Song of Grotti)**

*Grottasongr* (literally “Song of Grotti”) is the last of the poems in this collection that are not included in the *Codex Regius* manuscript. Here, we read of two giant women who were purchased as slaves by the legendary Danish king Frothi to work his magical mill named Grotti, which would grind out whatever was asked of it (this magical item is similar to the *Sampo* of Finnish legend). Initially, the giant women are told to grind out peace and wealth for Frothi, but toward the end they use it to create an army to avenge themselves on Frothi.

“Spellcaster” (who sells Frothi the slaves) and “Hangjaw” (who gives Frothi the millstone) are unusual names, but these men are no doubt Odin himself in disguise, as these are among the names of Odin that Odin himself lists in *Grimnismal*. The prose introduction is from the Prose Edda, one of the sources in which this poem is quoted.

## *Grottasongr*

Skjold was a son of Odin; the Skjoldungs are descended from him. He had his throne and ruled in lands that are now called part of Denmark, but then were called Gotland. Skjold had a son named Frithleif who ruled these lands after him. The son of Frithleif was named Frothi. He inherited the land from his father during the time when Augustus Caesar made the whole world peaceful, the time when Christ was born. And since Frothi was the most powerful of all kings in Scandinavia, the peace was credited to him wherever Norse was spoken, and Scandinavians called it the Peace of Frothi. No man did any injury to another, even if he met his father's or his brother's killer, whether free or in chains. There was no theft or robbery either, such that a gold ring was able to be left out in the open at Jalangerheith for a long time.

King Frothi went to Sweden for a visit with the king named Spellcaster, and on this visit he bought two slavewomen, named Fenja and Menja, who were both big and strong.

At this time in Denmark there was a millstone so big that no one was strong enough to grind with it. And the millstone had an unusual power, that it would produce whatever the grinder told it to produce. The millstone was named Grotti. Hangjaw was the {169} name of the man who had given the millstone to Frothi. Frothi brought his two new slavewomen to the millstone and ordered them to make gold and peace and joy with it for him. But for rest or sleep he allowed them only as much time as a cuckoo might stay silent in, or that one might be able to sing a song in.

Then it is said that Fenja and Menja sang a song called *The Song of Grotti*. And before the song was done, they had ground out an army against Frothi. And that very night, the sea-king named Mysing came and killed Frothi and took a great deal of loot. Thus ended the Peace of Frothi.

Mysing took the millstone Grotti with him on the ship, and also Fenja and Menja, and there he told them to grind out salt, and to keep grinding. They ground for only a little while before the ships sank, and now there is a whirlpool in the sea, where the sea spins around in a circle like a millstone. This is how the sea became salty.

- [1]     **N**OW THERE WERE  
two forward-seeing women,  
Fenja and Menja,

in the king's house.  
But these two women  
were taken  
as slaves  
by Frothi, Frithleif's son.

[2] The women were led  
to the millstone,  
they were told to push  
the gray millstone around.  
He promised them  
they'd have neither joy nor peace  
if he couldn't hear  
the grinding of that millstone.

[3] The two women  
sang a working song:  
"Let's put our backs in it,  
let's push the stone."  
Frothi told the girls  
to grind endlessly.

{170} [4] They sang, and they  
pushed the millstone,  
while most of the workers  
of Frothi were sleeping.  
Then Menja spoke  
as she was grinding:

[5] "We are grinding  
wealth and joy,  
and too much property,  
on this wish-stone, all for Frothi;

Frothi sits on gold  
and sleeps on down pillows,  
he wakes up when he likes,  
and we grind on.

[6] “Here no one  
hurts anyone else,  
there are no bad deeds,  
no violent deaths.  
The sword sleeps  
tranquil in its sheath,  
even if a man meets  
his brother’s killer.”

[7] The king said  
nothing to them, except:  
“Don’t sleep any longer  
than a cuckoo sleeps!  
Don’t sleep any longer  
than it takes me to sing a song!”

[8] Fenja said, “Frothi,  
you’re a wise king,  
but you were not wise  
when you bought us.  
You chose us for  
our looks and strength,  
but you asked nothing  
about our ancestry.

{171} [9] “Hrungnir was tough,  
so was his father,  
and yet Thjassi

accomplished still more.  
The mountain-giants  
Ithi and Aurnir  
are our relatives,  
we were born into their family.

[10] “Grotti, the hard millstone,  
would never have  
come out of the rock,  
never come out of the earth,  
and we giant women  
would not grind so endlessly,  
if we had known anything  
about our fate.

[11] “We grew up  
nine winters  
and played as young girls  
deep beneath the earth.  
Then we started  
to show our strength;  
we are the ones who shoved  
the stone from its place.

[12] “We rolled the stone  
up out of the ground,  
so that the whole earth  
started shaking.  
Then we threw down  
this ring of stone,  
this heavy rock,  
so humans could take it.

- [13] “Then we two  
wise giant women  
went down to Sweden  
among the armies.  
We killed berserkers,  
{172} we broke shields,  
we went straight through  
the troops in their chainmail.
- [14] “We helped one king,  
and harmed another.  
We gave help  
to Gotthorm the Good.  
We did not sit quiet  
when Knui fell.
- [15] “We played like this  
for years,  
our deeds made us famous  
as champions:  
our spears spilled  
rivers of blood,  
our swords  
were reddened in wounds.
- [16] “Now we’ve been kept  
in the house of a king,  
made slaves  
and shown no mercy.  
The dirt’s bitten our bare feet,  
we’ve frozen in the cold,  
we’ve labored at the millstone,

but all's not well with Frothi.

[17] "Now my hands will rest,  
the millstone will stop.  
I have ground all I will,  
and my work is done.  
I would have  
fallen dead  
before I ground out  
everything that Frothi wanted.

[18] "Let's grind out  
warriors' hands, hard helmets,  
bloody weapons!  
Wake up, Frothi!  
{173} Wake up now, Frothi,  
if you want to hear  
our songs  
and our old stories.

[19] "I see a fire burning  
east of the city,  
an army is awakened,  
and that will be the signal.  
An army is coming  
here in haste,  
they are setting fire  
in the king's own home.

[20] "Frothi, you will no longer  
hold the throne at Lejre,  
nor the gold rings,  
nor this royal millstone.

Put your back in it,  
sister, a little harder!  
It isn't yet warm  
with men's blood.

[21] "Oh, sister,  
you ground hard there,  
for I saw the death  
of a great many men.  
There I saw the big  
iron-fastened supports  
below the millstone break—  
let's grind still more.

[22] "Let's grind still more!  
And King Hrolf  
will avenge Halfdan  
on King Frothi.  
He will be called  
his mother's son  
and also her brother,  
we both know that."

{174} [23] The women ground more,  
they stretched their strength,  
those young women  
raged like the giants they were.  
The mill's support beam shook,  
the stone rattled,  
the hard stone halves  
of the mill came loose.

[24] Then one

of the two giant women said:

“We have ground, Frothi,

and now we’ll stop.

We have worked

this millstone long enough.”

## {175} POEMS ABOUT HEROES

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### *Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar* (The Poem of Helgi, Son of Hjorvarth)

Following the poems about the gods, the first three heroic poems in the Poetic Edda concern Helgi, a hero who is reincarnated at least twice (according to the poems themselves). In one of these poems he is the son of Hjorvarth, and in the other two the son of Sigmund. It is possible that both Helgi characters stem from one common traditional hero, and that we are dealing with different versions of the same original story that have become so divergent from one another that a later editor inserted the reincarnation of the hero to explain why he is said to be the son of two different men in different poems.

In the *Codex Regius*, the order of these three poems is different than what is given here (the order in the manuscript is *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana I*, then *Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar*, then *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana II*). However, since Helgi Hjorvarthsson is a different Helgi than Helgi Sigmundsson in the other two, I have moved *Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar* to the front in order to keep the two poems about Helgi Sigmundsson together.

*Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar* is a difficult poem: it probably consists of several fragments of poetic dialogue pieced together by a later editor, and then connected by means of explanatory prose sections between them. A short summary will be needed to help orient the reader.

The first part of the poem (including st. 1–5 and the large amount of prose surrounding them) concerns not Helgi himself but his father King Hjorvarth, and his follower Atli. Hjorvarth sends Atli to ask for the hand of Sigerlinn, daughter of King Svafnir, after a bird informs Atli that Sigerlinn is the most beautiful woman in the world. The marriage proposal is refused, which prompts {176} Hjorvarth to travel with Atli to make his case in person. However, upon reaching Svafnir's kingdom, they find that he has already been killed by his rival King Hrothmar. Hjorvarth marries Sigerlinn.

Hjorvarth and Sigerlinn have a son, and for many years they are unable to give him a name. But the boy encounters a troop of Valkyries led by Svava, who gives him the name Helgi and gives him directions to find a special sword. Helgi then leads an army to defeat King Hrothmar (who had killed King Svafnir) with the aid of Atli. Helgi and Atli also kill a giant, and there is an unusual exchange between Atli and the giant's daughter Hrimgerth; this takes up stanzas 12–23. Helgi joins the exchange of insults in stanzas 24–30, where we learn that Svava and her Valkyries have protected Helgi from having his ships destroyed by Hrimgerth. Helgi and Atli keep Hrimgerth talking till the sun rises and turns her to stone (the same trick Thor uses against the dwarf in *Alvismal*).

Helgi and Svava promise to marry one another, but Svava continues to live with her father. Later, Helgi's half-brother Hethin is away from home when he meets a troll-woman and he refuses to let her accompany him. She tells him that he will pay for this at the upcoming feast when oaths are sworn. At this feast, her promise is fulfilled when Hethin swears he will take Helgi's fiancée Svava for himself, but he regrets his oath and wanders in the wilderness.

Helgi eventually encounters Hethin, who tells him about his oath. Helgi assures him that this is for the best, since he has been challenged to a duel by King Alf (son of his old enemy King Hrothmar). Helgi expects he will die in this duel, in which case it would please him to know that

his beloved will be in the care of his brother Hethin.

Helgi is mortally wounded in the duel, and sends for Svava. Helgi begs her to marry his brother Hethin in his stead, but she says she will keep her promise to love no man but Helgi. The poem ends with Hethin swearing to Svava that he will not return home before he has avenged Helgi's death.

### Concerning Hjorvarth and Sigerlinn

A king was named Hjorvarth; he had four wives. One was named Alfild, and their son was named Hethin. The second was named Saereith, and their son was named Humlung. The third was named Sinrjoth, and their son was named Hymling.

King Hjorvarth had sworn an oath to marry the most beautiful woman he saw. He learned that King Svafnir had a daughter who was most beautiful of all, named Sigerlinn. King Hjorvarth had a man at his court named Ithmund, and Ithmund's son Atli went to ask for Sigerlinn's hand in marriage to King Hjorvarth. Atli stayed the whole winter with King Svafnir. King Svafnir had an important follower named Franmar, and he was the foster-father of Sigerlinn. Franmar had a daughter named Alof. Franmar told Atli that the girl would not be married to King Hjorvarth, and then Atli rode away.

Atli stood one day in a grove, and he heard a bird sitting in the tree branches above him; the bird had heard Atli's men say that there was no woman more beautiful than King Hjorvarth's wives. The bird called, and Atli listened to what it said.

The bird said:

- [1]     **“D**ID YOU SEE SIGERLINN,  
Svafnir's daughter,  
the most beautiful woman  
in the entire world?  
She's more beautiful  
than Hjorvarth's wives,  
though they seem beautiful enough  
to the men at Glasislund.”

Atli said:

- [2]     “Will you say more  
to Atli,  
son of Ithmund,

you wise-remembering bird?”

{178} The bird said:

“I would—if you, young man,  
would give me a sacrifice.  
I’ll choose what I want  
from the king’s household.”

Atli said:

[3] “Don’t choose Hjorvarth,  
nor his sons,  
nor the king’s  
lovely brides,  
the wives  
of King Hjorvarth.  
But we’ll make a good deal;  
that’s the way of friends.”

The bird said:

[4] “I will choose a temple,  
many altars,  
and golden-horned cows  
from the king’s household,  
if what I say brings Sigerlinn  
to sleep in his arms,  
if that woman  
marries him of her free will.”

This was before Atli’s journey to King Svafnir. When Atli came home, King Hjorvarth asked him his news, and Atli said:

[5] “We had trouble,  
the errand was not accomplished.  
We wore out our horses  
on the high mountains,

and then we had to wade  
the river Saemorn.  
And then Svafnir's  
ring-decked daughter,  
the girl we went there to get,  
was denied to us."

{179} King Hjorvarth asked them to go a second time, and he went along himself this time. And when they went up on a mountain, they saw wildfires burning in Svavaland, and they saw huge clouds of dust kicked up by horses' hooves. Then the king rode down from the mountain and spent the night by a river. Atli stood on guard, and he went over the river. There he found a house. A large bird sat on the house and kept watch, but it had fallen asleep. Atli threw a spear at the bird and killed it.

In the house, Atli found Sigerlinn, the daughter of King Svafnir, and Alof, the daughter of Jarl Franmar, and he took them away from there.

Hrothmar, another king who had courted Sigerlinn, had killed King Svafnir and then burned and robbed the country. Jarl Franmar had turned himself into an eagle, and he had been guarding the women with his magic.

King Hjorvarth married Sigerlinn, and Atli married Alof.

Hjorvarth and Sigerlinn had a big, handsome son. He was quiet, and no name suited him for long.

One day the boy sat on a mound, and he saw nine Valkyries riding, and one of them stood out from the others. She said:

[6]     "It will be a while,  
          Helgi, before you rule  
          the golden rings  
          and the lands of Rothulsvellir.  
          Even though you're always silent,  
          a young eagle will cry  
          on the battlefield after you—  
          you'll show your courage, warrior."

Helgi said:

[7]     "You named me Helgi—

what gift will you give  
to accompany my name-giving,  
you lovely woman?  
I think you know  
what everyone's names are.  
But I will not accept my name,  
unless I get you as a gift along with it."

{180} The Valkyrie said:

- [8] "I know where there lie  
forty-six  
swords  
in Sigarsholm.  
But one of those  
shield-breaking blades  
is better than the others;  
it's decked with gold.
- [9] "There's a ring in the hilt,  
and courage in its middle,  
and there's fear in its point—  
fear of the man who wields it.  
A blood-colored serpent  
decorates the blade;  
another serpent bites its tail  
on the hilt's hand-guard."

A king was named Eylimi; he had a daughter named Svava. She was a Valkyrie who rode on the waves and winds. It was she who gave Helgi his name, and who defended him in many battles afterwards.

Helgi said:

- [10] "Hjorvarth, you are not  
a wise king,

not a good leader of men,  
though you are wise enough.  
You've burned the halls  
of other kings,  
who had given you  
no provocation.

- [11] "But Hrothmar  
will come to power,  
and own the rings  
our people have owned.  
That man fears no one  
in this life; he thinks  
he'll own our inheritance  
when we're all dead."

{181} Hjorvarth said he would let Helgi have an army, if Helgi would avenge his mother's father, King Svafnir. Then Helgi found the sword Svava had told him about, and he and Atli went and killed Hrothmar and did many other great warlike deeds.

Helgi killed the giant Hati where he sat on a hill. Then Helgi and Atli anchored their ships in Hati's Fjord. Atli stood watch during the first part of the night. Then Hrimgerth, the daughter of Hati, said:

- [12] "Who are you men  
in Hati's Fjord?  
Your ships are decked  
with shields.  
You speak boldly;  
I think you fear nothing—  
tell me the name of your king."

Atli said:

- [13] "He is named Helgi,  
but you can't do any harm

to that fierce man.

There are iron ships  
in his fleet; they're too tough  
even for a giant woman."

[14] "What are you named,"  
asked Hrimgerth, "you strong man?  
What do people call you?  
Your king must trust you,  
since he lets you  
stand on the fair ship's prow."

[15] "I am named Atli,  
and I will be fierce against you;  
I have great hate of giant women.  
I've often stood  
on a ship's wet prow,  
I've often killed witch women.

{182} [16] "And what are you called,  
you corpse-hungry sorceress,  
you monster? Name your father, too.  
You ought to be lying  
nine miles below the earth,  
with a tree's roots in you."

[17] "I am named Hrimgerth,  
and my father is Hati,  
who I think is the greatest of giants.  
He had many women,  
all stolen from their homes,  
before Helgi killed him."

[18] "Witch, you've been here

by the king's ships,  
you've waited in the fjord's mouth.  
You were meaning  
to give the king's men to Ran,  
if their spears didn't kill you first."

[19] "I think you've been  
deluded by a dream, Atli:  
I see your eyelashes sunk low.  
My mother lay in wait  
for the king's ships, and I  
drowned Hlothvarth's sons in the sea.

[20] "And now you would shout, Atli,  
if you weren't a gelding—  
now I, Hrimgerth, stretch out my neck.  
You have a coward's heart,  
Atli, though I think  
you have a handsome voice."

[21] "A gelding? You'll think I'm  
a stallion if you get to try me,  
if I come ashore from my ship.  
You'll have all your bones  
broken, if I carry out my threats—  
I'll hang you by your neck, Hrimgerth."

{183} [22] "Come to land, Atli,  
if you have the courage,  
and we'll meet in Varin's bay.  
I'll straighten out  
your ribs, boy,  
if you come within my grasp."

- [23]    “I won’t leave  
till the men wake,  
and take over the watch for the king.  
I can’t be sure  
when you’ll come  
to attack our ship, you monster.”
- [24]    “Wake, Helgi!”  
said Hrimgerth. “Pay me back  
for when you killed my father—  
sleep at my side  
for one night,  
and I’ll consider the debt paid.”
- [25]    Helgi said, “Only a hairy beast  
would take you, you’re too ugly.  
But a giant, a very wise giant,  
the worst kind of lava-monster,  
lives in Tholley,  
and he’d be a good match for you.”
- [26]    Hrimgerth said, “Helgi,  
you’d rather have Svava,  
who ruled the sea last night—  
that sparkling sea  
seemed stronger than I am.  
Here the land rises from the sea  
and holds your fleet,  
and she alone  
is the reason  
I couldn’t kill your men.”
- {184} [27]    “Hear me, Hrimgerth,” said Helgi.

“If I’m going to compensate you  
for your father, tell me more:  
Was it just one lady  
who saved my ships,  
or were there more of them?”

[28] “There were twenty-seven,  
though one rode before them all,  
a beautiful lady wearing a helmet.  
Their mares were stirred up,  
dew dripped from their manes  
into the deep trenches,  
like hail upon the high trees  
when the year turns;  
I hated all this as I saw it.”

[29] “Look to the east now, Hrimgerth!  
I, Helgi, have  
kept you talking till your death.  
My fleet is saved  
on land and on sea,  
and my men are spared your terrors.”

[30] “It’s morning, Hrimgerth!  
I, Atli, have  
kept you talking till your death.  
Now you’ll become  
just a ridiculous  
standing stone in the sea.”

King Helgi was a great warrior. He came to King Eylimi and asked for the hand of his daughter Svava. Helgi and Svava swore their faithfulness to one another, and they loved each other very much. Svava stayed at home with her father, and Helgi went out on raids. Svava was still a Valkyrie, as she had

been before.

Helgi's half-brother Hethin also stayed at home with their father, King Hjorvarth, in Norway.

One time Hethin was away from home alone on a winter evening, and he met a giant woman. She was riding a wolf, and she was using snakes as reins. She offered to accompany Hethin. {185} He refused her, and she said, "You'll repay this at the feast, when you make your oaths."

That evening there was a feast, and oaths were sworn. A big boar was brought in, and men laid their hands on it and swore oaths as they drank. Hethin swore that he would take Svava, daughter of Eylimi, his brother Helgi's lover, but later he regretted this oath so much that he wandered wild roads to the south alone, and eventually he met his brother Helgi. Helgi said:

[31] "Greetings, Hethin!

What news

can you tell me

from Norway?

Young ruler,

why are you in exile?

Why have you come alone

to seek me?"

[32] "A much greater  
misfortune has befallen me:

I swore to take

your noble-born

bride, when I made

my oath at the feast."

[33] "Don't concern yourself,

Hethin; the oaths

men make while drinking

will always prove true.

A king has challenged me

to a duel, and before three nights

have passed, I must meet him  
at the appointed place.

I doubt that I  
will survive;  
and then it would be good,  
if you took Svava.”

- [34] “Are you saying, Helgi,  
that I still deserve  
your good will,  
and gifts from you?  
{186} It would be more befitting  
if you bloodied your sword  
in me, than if you gave  
your enemy peace.”

Helgi spoke as he did because he suspected he was doomed, and that the troll-woman that Hethin had seen riding the wolf was in fact Helgi’s own guardian spirit, and she had caused Hethin to speak as he had.

There was a king named Alf, son of Hrothmar, and it was he who had challenged Helgi to meet him for a duel on Sigarsvellir before three nights had passed. Then Helgi said:

- [35] “That dark  
giant woman  
rode a wolf,  
she offered to go with Hethin—  
she knew that I,  
Sigerlinn’s son,  
would be slain  
on Sigarsvellir.”

Then there was a great battle, and Helgi was mortally wounded.

- [36] Helgi sent

Sigar to ride  
to Svava,  
Eylimi's daughter—  
he said to tell her  
to make haste,  
if she wanted to see  
Helgi alive.

[37] Sigar said,  
“Helgi sent me  
to you, Svava,  
he gave me a message.  
That warrior wants  
to see you again,  
before the noble man  
falls dead of his wounds.”

[38] Svava said,  
“What has happened  
{187} to Helgi, son of Hjorvarth?  
This is a terrible sorrow for me.  
But whether he drowned in the sea,  
or was torn by a sword,  
I'll pay this back in full  
to the man who caused it.”

[39] Sigar said, “Helgi,  
the best king under the sun,  
fell this morning  
at Frekastein.  
Alf has  
total victory,

although it didn't  
have to end this way."

[40] Helgi said,  
"Welcome, Svava,  
this will be our last  
meeting in life.  
Spread a blanket  
beneath my body;  
a sword has come  
too near my heart.

[41] "I ask you,  
Svava, my bride,  
if you will heed  
my dying words—  
that you will sleep  
by Hethin,  
that you will love  
my young brother."

[42] Svava said,  
"Helgi, when you  
gave me rings,  
I said this:  
I said I would never  
willingly in my life  
{188} put my arms around  
another man, if you died."

[43] "Kiss me, Svava,"  
said Hethin.  
"I won't ever return

to Rogheim or Rothulsfjoll,  
before I've avenged  
Helgi, Hjorvarth's son.  
That man was the best  
beneath the sun."

It is said that Helgi and Svava were reincarnated.

## **{189} *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana I* (The First Poem of Helgi, Killer of Hunding)**

The Helgi of the next two poems is the son of the hero Sigmund and his wife Borghild. This, the first of these two poems, begins with Helgi's birth, which is attended by the Norns (goddess-like figures who determine fate). The Norns predict Helgi will be famous and rule a wide kingdom; a raven also predicts his success as a warrior. Helgi lives up to these expectations and kills King Hunding while he is still only fifteen years old. He refuses to compensate Hunding's sons for their father's loss, and he kills them in a subsequent battle.

After this battle, he sees Valkyries in the sky, and he desires Sigrun, their leader. She tells him, however, that she has been promised by her father Hogni to marry King Hothbrodd. She asks Helgi to fight him for her hand in marriage, which Helgi eagerly agrees to do. He sails with a great navy to do battle with Hothbrodd. Upon arriving at his kingdom, Hothbrodd's brother Guthmund interrogates them from the shore, and becomes embroiled in an exchange of insults with Helgi's half-brother Sinfjotli (this exchange comprises st. 32–44). Helgi finally stops the banter by entreating them to fight with weapons like men. Helgi and Sinfjotli win the ensuing battle, and Sigrun congratulates Helgi, telling him he has won Hothbrodd's lands as well as her hand in marriage.

## *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana I*

Here begins the poem of the Volsungs, the poem about Helgi, the killer of Hunding and Hothbrodd:

[1]     **I**T WAS IN ANCIENT DAYS  
when eagles cried,  
and holy waters fell  
from the mountains of heaven.  
Then Helgi,  
the bold man,  
was born to Borghild  
in Bralund.

{190} [2]     It was night in the house  
when the Norns came in,  
the ones who make fate  
for the noble-born.  
They said the boy  
would be a very famous king,  
he would be considered  
the best of all rulers.

[3]     They decided his fate  
with their power,  
when they broke the walls  
of Bralund.  
They had bands  
made of gold;  
they laid them down  
under the night-time sky.

- [4] They hid their ends  
in the east and west,  
to show the borders  
of the lands this king would rule.  
One of the Norns  
hid the third end  
in the north; she said  
it would hold forever.
- [5] One thing grieved  
Sigmund, Helgi's father,  
and his wife  
Borghild, Helgi's mother.  
One raven said  
to another raven,  
expecting a feast:  
"I know something:
- [6] "Sigmund's young son  
will wear armor!  
He's just a day old;  
his first day has just dawned.  
But he has sharp eyes  
{191} like a war-king;  
that boy's a friend of wolves—  
we'll be happy and well-fed!"
- [7] The boy grew up  
and was warlike at a young age;  
they said he was already  
reckoned as a man.  
King Sigmund himself

returned from battle  
to give the young prince  
a worthy sword.

[8] Sigmund named him Helgi,  
and gave him lands—  
Solfjoll, Snofjoll,  
Sigarsvellir, Hringstath,  
Hringstoth, Hatun,  
and Himinvangar—  
young Helgi  
held a ready sword.

[9] Then the young king  
began to grow up,  
a noble tree  
in the company of his kinsmen.  
He paid his men  
in gold—he was no miser  
with the loot  
from his campaigns.

[10] He did not have long  
to wait for battle.  
When the young man  
was just fifteen years old,  
he killed the brave  
King Hunding,  
who had ruled lands  
and men a long time.

{192} [11] But the sons of Hunding  
sent him a message,

they demanded compensation  
in the form of money.

They had much to avenge—  
Helgi had killed their father,  
and taken  
much wealth.

[12] Helgi paid them  
nothing of what they asked;  
he would not compensate them  
for the loss of their father.  
Instead he called for  
stormy weather,  
for a rain of gray spears  
and the wrath of Odin.

[13] Those kings  
rode to battle;  
the battle was held  
at Logafjoll.  
They broke the peace  
of King Frothi's time;  
Odin's wolves  
did not go hungry.

[14] Helgi rested  
after he killed them  
beneath Arastein—  
Alf and Eyjolf,  
Hjorvarth and Havarth,  
all the sons of Hunding.  
He destroyed the whole

family of that warrior.

[15] Then light shone  
from Logafjoll,  
and in those lights  
he saw lightning.  
He saw Valkyries  
{193} wearing helmets  
in the high heavens;  
their armor was bloody,  
and banners waved  
from their spears.

[16] Right away  
King Helgi asked  
those armed women,  
those southern Valkyries,  
if they would go home  
with the warriors  
that night.  
Battle raged all around.

[17] And Sigrun,  
daughter of Hogni,  
said to that king from her horse  
as the battle died down:  
“I think we have  
other business  
than drinking beer  
with warriors tonight.

[18] “My father  
promised me

to Hothbrodd,  
the grim son of Granmar.  
But I tell you, Helgi,  
I said to that good king  
that he seemed no better  
to me than a tomcat.

[19] “Now he will come  
for me in a few short nights,  
unless you  
invite him to battle,  
or take me by force  
from my father.”

{194} [20] Helgi said, “Do not fear  
for Helgi, enemy of Hothbrodd!  
There will be a battle  
before I fall dead.”

[21] King Helgi  
sent messages  
by air and sea  
to summon an army.  
He promised  
his men and their sons  
that there was plenty  
of gold to be won.

[22] He said, “Tell my men  
to go straight to their ships,  
be ready to sail  
out of Brandey!”  
The king waited there

till hundreds of men  
came to him  
from Hethinsey.

[23] His own ships  
left their moorings  
at the docks of  
Stafnsnes, decked with gold.  
Helgi asked  
Hjorleif then:  
“Have you taken count  
of our brave men?”

[24] Hjorleif said  
to Helgi,  
after he began to count  
the serpent-headed  
ships out of Tronueyri  
and the men on them,  
as they entered  
Orvasund:

{195} [25] “I count one-thousand,  
four hundred and forty trusty men,  
and still twice as many  
of the king’s men  
are in Hatun.  
I expect a battle.”

[26] The captain  
drew the covers back,  
woke up  
the king’s men

on board  
to see the dawning sun,  
and the kings  
hoisted up  
their sails  
in Varinsfjord.

[27] Eagles cried,  
and swords clashed,  
shield struck shield,  
Vikings rowed.  
That fleet  
of kings  
traveled swiftly  
far from land.

[28] It was like hearing  
the hills, or the ocean  
breaking apart,  
to hear the waves  
breaking against  
those long ships' keels.

[29] Helgi commanded them  
to raise the sails yet higher;  
the waves  
of the storm  
would not swallow them,  
though the shipwreck-god's  
{196} daughters might try  
to drown the ships.

[30] But bold Sigrun

protected them,  
she flew above  
their danger.  
With the strength  
of Ran in her hand,  
she saved the ships  
at Gnipalund.

[31] The fleet of  
beautiful ships  
moored in the evening  
at Unavagir,  
and then the people  
of Svarinshaug  
could count their enemies  
with worry in their thoughts.

[32] Among them,  
half-god Guthmund asked:  
“Who is the king  
who leads this army  
and directs this force  
against our land?”

[33] Sinfjotli, Helgi’s brother,  
spoke up from his ship  
with a red battle-shield  
rimmed with gold.  
He was a leader of men,  
who knew how to answer  
and exchange words  
with noble men:

[34] “Tonight, when you feed  
your pigs, when you throw  
some food in your dogs’ bowls,  
tell them this:  
{197} The Volsungs have come  
from out of the east,  
eager warriors  
from Gnipalund.

[35] “In the middle of the fleet,  
Hothbrodd will find  
Helgi, a warrior  
who is reluctant to flee.  
He is a man  
who has often fed eagles  
while you sat on millstones  
kissing slavegirls.”

[36] Guthmund said, “My lord,  
you don’t know much  
about old stories, if you  
mock noble-born men with lies.  
You have eaten  
dead men’s flesh,  
you have killed  
your own brothers,  
your cold mouth  
has often sucked wounds—  
you’ve lived, hated by everyone,  
in a stone pile.”

[37] Sinfjotli said, “You were

a witch-woman on Varinsey,  
a crafty woman,  
a teller of lies,  
you said  
you would never  
accept any man as husband—  
except me.

[38] “You liar,  
you were a Valkyrie—  
a fierce, foul female  
in Odin’s service.  
You self-righteous woman,  
{198} you wanted all the men  
in Valhalla  
to fight over you.

[39] “You and I had  
nine wolf-children  
on Sagunes;  
I was the father of them all.”

[40] Guthmund said,  
“You weren’t father  
to any wolves,  
you’re older than all of them;  
and I remember when  
some giant women  
castrated you  
at Gnipalund on Thorsnes.

[41] “You were Siggeir’s stepson,  
you slept in the straw at home,

you were used to hearing  
wolves cry in the woods outside.  
All your misfortune  
came to you  
when you cut open the chests  
of your brothers;  
you've won a famous name  
for your evil deeds."

[42] Sinfjotli said, "You were  
the mare of the stallion Grani at Bravoll,  
you wore a gold bit,  
and you were used for racing.  
I've often ridden on you  
on downhill races—  
you were a tired, skinny mare,  
a troll beneath my saddle.

[43] "No one thought you  
were any kind of man  
when you milked  
{199} the goats of Gullnir,  
or when you were  
the daughter of Imd,  
wearing a ratty dress.  
Should I say any more?"

[44] Guthmund said,  
"I would rather feed  
your carcass to the ravens  
at Frekastein  
than feed your pigs,

or throw food  
in your dogs' bowls.  
Let's exchange sword-blows."

[45] Helgi said,  
"It would be better  
for both of you, Sinfjotli,  
to fight, to feed flesh to the eagles,  
than to exchange  
these pointless words,  
even if you hate  
each other so immensely.

[46] "Granmar's sons  
seem no good to me,  
but it's appropriate  
for nobles to speak truth only.  
They showed us  
at Moinsheim  
that they have the courage  
to draw swords."

[47] Guthmund and his brothers  
rode their horses,  
named Sviputh and Sveggjuth,  
to Solheimar,  
over valleys wet with dew,  
over dark hillsides;  
the earth shook  
where the men rode.

{200} [48] They met Hothbrodd  
at his gate,

they said that Helgi  
had come to bring war.  
Hothbrodd was there  
with a helmet on his head,  
he wondered about  
the way his brother was riding.  
He asked, "Why have you come  
with this worried expression?"

[49] Guthmund said,  
"Swift ships are here,  
sailing ships with  
long oars,  
carven oars  
and many shields,  
a great army of kings,  
the valorous Volsungs.

[50] "Fifteen armies  
are coming up on land;  
eight thousand, four hundred  
are still out in Sogn.  
Blue-black ships,  
decorated with gold,  
lie at anchor at the gates  
of Gnipalund.  
That's where the biggest part  
of their armed force is.  
Now Helgi will strike  
without delay."

[51] Hothbrodd said,

“Let our saddled horses  
run to the battle;  
let Sporvitnar run to  
Sparinsheith,  
and Melnir and Mylnir  
to Mirkwood.  
Let no man  
{201} who can draw a sword  
stay behind.

[52] “We’ll invite Hogni  
and the sons of Hring,  
Atli and Yngvi,  
and Alf the Old,  
the ones who are  
eager for battle,  
we’ll show strong resistance  
to the Volsungs.”

[53] There was a storm there  
when the pale spears  
started to fly  
at Frekastein.  
Helgi,  
the killer of Hunding,  
was always at the front  
when men were fighting.  
He was always at the front,  
he never thought of fleeing—  
that warrior  
had a hard heart.

- [54] Then the Valkyries  
came down from heaven,  
they defended their princes,  
the roar of war grew greater.  
Then Sigrun, the flying  
Valkyrie, spoke  
as the wolves  
began to tear the fallen:
- [55] “Hail to you, Helgi,  
son of Volsungs—  
enjoy these victories,  
and live well  
now that you  
have killed  
{202} that unfleeing prince  
who killed another.
- [56] “Now it’s fitting for you,  
King, to take the  
golden rings, and take me  
to be your powerful wife.  
Hail to you, King,  
enjoy both  
the daughter of Hogni  
and the lands of Hringstath,  
both the victory and the lands.  
Now the battle is done.”

## **{203} *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana II* (The Second Poem of Helgi, Killer of Hunding)**

The second of the two poems about Helgi Sigmundsson tells a more complete version of his life, and this includes retelling some events from the first poem. The poem moves swiftly between scenes and can be rather confusing; a summary is called for to ground readers in the basic characters and action of the poem.

Helgi, son of King Sigmund, is fostered by King Hagal. Helgi disguises himself as Hagal's son Hamal and goes to spy on his father's enemy King Hunding. After Helgi's true identity is revealed, he flees back to Hagal. Hunding sends men, including a follower named Blind, to search for him at Hagal's, but Helgi disguises himself as a slavewoman. Blind notices that this "slavewoman" has unusually fierce eyes, to which Hagal responds that she is a captured Valkyrie. This ruse allows Helgi to escape capture.

Helgi later kills Hunding, and soon thereafter he meets the Valkyrie Sigrun. He pretends to be Hamal once again, but Sigrun recognizes him for who he really is. She tells him that she has been promised by her father Hogni to marry King Hothbrodd, and she asks Helgi to fight Hothbrodd for her hand in marriage.

Helgi sails with a great navy to do battle with Hothbrodd. Upon arriving at his kingdom, Hothbrodd's brother Guthmund interrogates them from the shore, and becomes embroiled in an exchange of insults with Helgi's half-brother Sinfjotli. Helgi finally stops the banter by urging them to fight with weapons like men. In the ensuing battle, Helgi kills Hothbrodd as well as many of Hothbrodd's allies, including his lover Sigrun's own father and her brother Bragi, though he spares her brother Dag. Helgi and Sigrun are married.

Dag, however, cannot bear to see the killer of his father and brothers alive, and he kills his brother-in-law Helgi with a spear he has borrowed from Odin. The fallen Helgi goes to Valhalla, but returns to his burial mound one night and sleeps with his wife Sigrun there. After his return to Valhalla, Sigrun continues to wait for him but he never comes back, and she dies in her sorrow.

Yet another reincarnation of Helgi is mentioned in the prose note at the end of the poem, with an allusion to a poem called the "Song of Kara." This poem is now lost.

{204} *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana II*

King Sigmund, son of Volsung, was married to Borghild from Bralund. They named their son Helgi, after Helgi Hjorvarthsson. Hagal fostered Helgi.

There was a powerful king named Hunding; Hundland is named for him. He was a great warrior, and he had many sons who went on raids. There was no peace between King Hunding and King Sigmund, and they feuded. They each killed one another's kinsmen.

King Sigmund and his kinsmen were called the Volsungs and the Ylfings. Helgi went to the court of King Hunding and spied on him in secret. Heming, the son of King Hunding, was at home. And when Helgi left, he encountered a man named Hjarthar, and Helgi said:

- [1]     **“T**<sub>ELL</sub> <sub>HEMING</sub>  
that I remember  
when the armor-clad warriors  
killed one another.  
You had a gray wolf  
within your doors,  
though King Hunding  
thought it was Hamal.”

Hamal was the name of a son of Hagal. King Hunding sent men to Hagal to search for Helgi, and Helgi could not save himself in any other way than by putting on a slavewoman's dress and grinding grain. So they searched for Helgi and did not find him. Then Blind the Crafty said:

- [2]     “Hagal has a  
sharp-eyed slavewoman!  
That's no commoner's daughter  
who's grinding the grain.  
She's splitting the stones,  
she's making the grain-basket shake.
- [3]     “Now you, crafty young prince,

must have fallen on hard times,  
when you're the one  
who has to grind the grain.  
It would befit you better  
{205} if your hand  
held a sword-hilt  
rather than a grindstone."

Hagal answered:

[4]     "It's not much danger  
if the grain-basket shakes  
when my slavegirl  
moves it.  
I saw her walking  
above the clouds,  
and she dared to fight  
like a Viking  
before Helgi  
put her in chains.  
She's a sister  
of Sigar and Hogni—  
that's why this slavegirl  
of the Ylfings has fierce eyes."

Helgi escaped and got away on a warship. He killed King Hunding, and afterwards he was called Helgi Hunding-Killer. He went with his army to Brunavagar and raided the beach there and ate raw meat.

Hogni was the name of a king. His daughter was named Sigrun. She was a Valkyrie and rode over wind and sea. She was the reincarnation of Svava. Sigrun rode up to Helgi's ships and said:

[5]     "Who commands  
these ships at this shore?

Warriors, where do you  
call home?

What do you want  
in Brunavagar?

Where have you thought  
to go afterwards?"

- [6] "I am named Hamal,"  
said Helgi, "and I  
command these ships.  
We come from Hlesey.  
What we want in Brunavagar  
{206} is a good breeze;  
we mean to sail east  
from this place."

- [7] Sigrun said, "King,  
where have you fought battles?  
Where have you set  
a table for the ravens?  
Why is your armor  
blood-soaked?  
Why are you helmeted warriors  
eating raw meat?"

- [8] Helgi said, "The latest news  
of what I, an Ylfing,  
have done west of the sea,  
if you really want to know, is this—  
I fought bear-like men  
in Bragalund,  
I fed the eagles' nestlings

with the point of my spear.

[9] “Now, lady, I’ve told  
the story of how  
I came to eat raw meat  
on my ship.”

[10] “You speak of war,”  
said Sigrun, “And I know  
it was Helgi who caused  
the fall of King Hunding.  
There was a battle then,  
you both avenged kinsmen,  
and blood ran freely  
on the sword-blades.”

[11] “How do you know,”  
said Helgi, “wise lady,  
that it was Hunding and I  
who had kinsmen to avenge?  
There are many fierce  
{207} sons of kings  
who are not unlike  
me and my kinsmen.”

[12] Sigrun said, “War-maker,  
I was not far away  
from that killing place  
yesterday morning.  
But I think you’re wise,  
Helgi, son of Sigmund,  
since you speak  
of your deeds in riddles.

[13]    “I sought you once before,  
          on your longships,  
          when you stood on  
          bloody prows  
          amid the rolling  
          cool waves.  
          Now you want  
          to conceal your name,  
          but I am Hogni’s daughter—  
          I recognize Helgi.”

Granmar was the name of a powerful king who lived at Svarinshaug. He had many sons: The first was named Hothbrodd, the second Guthmund, the third Starkath.

Hothbrodd met with other kings, and Sigrun, daughter of King Hogni, was promised to him. And when she learned this, she rode off with her Valkyries over air and sea to find Helgi. At the time, Helgi was at Logafjoll, where he had fought against the sons of Hunding. He killed Alf and Eyjolf there, as well as Hjorvarth and Havarth. He was in an extreme battle-rage and sat beneath the Eagle-Stone. There Sigrun found him, and she ran into his arms and kissed him and told him her errand, as it is told in the Ancient Poem of the Volsungs:

[14]    Sigrun sought  
          the glad king, she sought  
          the king’s hand in her own.  
          She kissed that helmeted king  
          {208} and greeted him,  
          and Helgi  
          took a liking to her.

[15]    She said  
          that she’d loved Helgi  
          with all her heart  
          before she had even seen him.

[16] “I was promised,” she said,  
“to Hothbrodd, but there is  
another king  
I would rather have.  
Warrior, I fear  
my father’s anger,  
but I have disobeyed him  
regardless.”

[17] Sigrun did not speak  
of her own love,  
but she said she wanted  
Helgi’s love.

[18] Helgi said, “Pay no mind  
to your father’s anger,  
nor to the ill will  
of your kinsmen.  
Young lady, you will  
live with me!  
Good lady, I do not fear  
your family.”

Then Helgi gathered a great navy and sailed to Frekastein, and on this journey they encountered very dangerous weather. There was continual lightning, and it even glowed on the ships. Helgi and his men saw nine Valkyries riding in the air, and they recognized Sigrun. Then the storm abated, and they came safely to land. The sons of Granmar were sitting on a certain hill when the ships sailed up to land. Guthmund leapt up on his horse and rode up to the top of a hill near the harbor. Then the Volsungs took their sails down.

{209} Guthmund, son of Granmar, said:

[19] “Who is the leader  
of this navy?

Who lowers the golden sail  
upon the prow?  
I don't think  
we can expect peace  
from this navy; I see  
a red battle-flag and Vikings."

Sinfjotli said:

[20] "I think Hothbrodd  
will recognize Helgi here,  
in the middle of the fleet—  
he hates to retreat.  
He has taken  
the ancestral lands  
of your people the Fjorsungs,  
he's stolen your inheritance."

[21] Guthmund said, "First,  
we should settle  
our differences  
at Frekastein.  
Hothbrodd! It's time  
to get vengeance.  
For a long time  
we've been losing battles."

[22] Sinfjotli said, "First,  
Guthmund, you'll need  
to watch your goats  
and climb the steep cliffs.  
Keep a wooden club  
in your hand,

you'll do better  
as a shepherd than a fighter."

[23] Helgi said, "Sinfjotli,  
it would be more honorable  
to make war,  
{210} to cheer the eagles,  
than to exchange  
pointless words,  
even if you  
hate one another.

[24] "I have no love  
for Granmar's sons,  
but it's better  
for noble men not to lie.  
We have seen  
at Moinsheimar  
that they have the courage  
to draw swords;  
these warriors  
are wise and brave."

Guthmund rode home and reported on the hostilities. Then the sons of Granmar assembled an army; many kings came to them. Hogni, the father of Sigrun, was there, along with his sons, Bragi and Dag. There was a great battle, and all the sons of Granmar fell as well as all the other chieftains, except Dag, who was granted mercy and who swore an oath to the Volsungs. Sigrun went out on the battlefield afterwards and found Hothbrodd dying. She said:

[25] "King Hothbrodd,  
I, Sigrun from Sefajoll,  
will not kneel  
to embrace you in my arms.

Your life is over,  
the wolves  
will get plenty of  
your and your brothers' flesh."

Then she found Helgi, and she was glad. Helgi said:

[26] "Wise woman,  
not everything  
has gone as you'd wish.  
The Norns have some blame.  
Bragi and Hogni  
fell today  
{211} at Frekastein,  
and I was their killer.

[27] "And I killed Starkath  
at Styrkleif  
and the sons of Hrollaug  
at Hlebjargir.  
I saw the most warlike  
of all kings  
fighting without his arms,  
and soon without his head.

[28] "Most of your family  
lies on the battlefield,  
they've become  
cold corpses.  
You could not stop  
that battle;  
you were destined  
to cause kings to clash."

Then Sigrun wept. Helgi spoke once more:

[29]     “Be comforted, Sigrun.  
          You’ve been like Hild to us;  
          and not even kings can fight fate.”  
          Sigrun said, “Let all my family  
          fall in battle, if that means  
          I can sleep in your arms.”

Helgi married Sigrun, and they had sons. Helgi was not an old man.

Dag, son of Hogni, sacrificed to Odin for vengeance for his father. Odin loaned Dag his own spear. Dag encountered Helgi, his brother-in-law, at the place called Fjoturlund. Dag ran Helgi through with the spear. Helgi fell there, and then Dag rode to the mountains and told Sigrun the news:

[30]     “Sister, I regret  
          to tell you this hard news.  
          I have been forced  
          to make my own sister weep.  
          That king who was  
          {212} the best in all the world,  
          who stood on the necks  
          of many fallen enemies,  
          fell today in battle  
          at Fjoturlund.”

[31]     Sigrun said, “All your oaths,  
          the oaths you swore  
          to Helgi,  
          the oaths you swore  
          by the sea,  
          and by the cool stone  
          of Unn,  
          will come back to bite you.

[32] “A ship will not sail  
if you are on it,  
even if it has  
the most favorable of winds.

A horse will not run  
if you are on it,  
even if it could save you  
from pursuing enemies.

[33] “No sword you draw  
will cut,  
unless it cuts  
your own head off.  
I would only  
be avenged for Helgi’s death  
if you were an outlaw  
living in the woods,  
deprived of all your property  
and all joy.  
You wouldn’t even eat—  
unless you caught your own raw meat.”

Dag said:

[34] “You are mad, sister,  
you are out of your wits,  
when you speak such curses  
{213} against your own brother.  
Odin alone  
causes all evil,  
he’s the one  
who causes war between kin.

[35] “I will offer you  
golden rings,  
I will offer you the lands of  
Vandilsve and Vigdalir.  
You and your children,  
well-dressed lady,  
will own half my home  
in compensation for your loss.”

[36] Sigrun said, “I will never  
be so happy at my home  
in the day or in the night  
that I will love life,  
unless I see that king  
and his army,  
unless I see Helgi  
riding his horse Vigblaer  
with a golden bridle—  
I would greet him gladly.

[37] “My husband Helgi  
has frightened  
all his enemies so much  
and all his kinsmen,  
that they are like  
trembling goats  
fleeing a wolf  
on a mountainside.

[38] “Helgi is as high  
above other kings  
as a noble ash tree

above a thorn,  
he is like a young stag  
coated in morning dew,  
{214} higher than  
all other beasts,  
with his horns glowing  
against the heavens.”

A burial mound was made for Helgi. And when he came to Valhalla, Odin asked him to help him rule everything. Helgi said:

[39] “Hunding, you will be  
a foot-washer  
and fire-starter,  
a dog-walker  
and a horse’s groom  
for every man in Valhalla.  
And don’t forget to feed the pigs  
before you go to sleep.”

One of Sigrun’s serving-women walked during the evening near Helgi’s burial mound, and she saw Helgi riding toward the mound with a large following of men. The serving-woman said:

[40] “Is this an illusion  
that I see before me,  
or has Ragnarok come?  
I see dead men riding,  
I see them driving  
their horses with spurs.  
Have dead kings been given leave  
to come home from Valhalla?”

[41] Helgi said, “True,  
you see us here,

driving  
our horses with spurs,  
and it is no illusion,  
nor is it Ragnarok,  
and neither do we have leave  
to come home from Valhalla.”

The serving-woman went home and said to Sigrun:

[42] “Go out from your home,  
Sigrun, if you want  
to see your  
{215} king again!  
His burial mound is open,  
Helgi has come back,  
his wounds are bleeding.  
That lord of men  
asks that you come  
and see to his injuries.”

Sigrun went inside Helgi’s burial mound and she said:

[43] “Now I am as happy  
to see you, husband,  
as Odin’s eager  
ravens are  
when they see  
fresh, warm corpses,  
or when, dew-covered,  
they greet the morning.

[44] “I want to kiss you,  
my unliving king,  
before you take your

bloody armor off.  
There's frost frozen  
in your hair, Helgi,  
there's blood all over  
your body, my king.  
Your hands are wet with  
the cold blood of Hogni's kin.  
My lord, how shall I  
heal you of these things?"

[45] Helgi said, "You alone,  
Sigrun from Sefafjoll,  
caused the sad death  
of your father Hogni.  
Gold-adorned southern woman,  
fairer than the sun,  
you wept bitter tears  
before you went to sleep;  
each tear fell bloody  
over your fierce heart,  
{216} cold, wet, bloody, burning,  
twisted with sorrow.

[46] "But I can drink  
happily of Odin's good mead  
even if I have lost  
my lands and my love.  
No one will sing  
a sorrowful song for me,  
even if I have  
wounds on my chest—

for my wife Sigrun  
is in my mound,  
the Valkyrie lies  
by me, though I am dead.”

Sigrun climbed into his bed in the mound.

[47] Sigrun said, “Helgi,  
of Ylfing kin, I offer you  
untroubled rest  
in this place.  
I want to sleep  
in your embrace,  
as I would in the arms  
of a living husband.”

[48] Helgi said, “Now  
I can foresee everything.  
You will sleep,  
lovely lady,  
daughter of Hogni,  
tonight and tomorrow morning  
in the arms of a dead man  
in his mound—  
and yet you are alive,  
noble lady.

[49] “Yet still I must  
ride the warpath,  
take my pale horse  
back to Valhalla.  
{217} I have to be  
west of Bifrost

before the rooster  
wakes the men in Odin's hall."

Helgi and his men rode their way, and Sigrun and her serving-women returned to her home. The next evening Sigrun had a serving-woman keep watch on Helgi's burial mound. And when Sigrun returned to the mound at sunset, she said:

[50] "My husband,  
the son of Sigmund,  
would have come back  
from Odin's hall, if he could.  
But I expect  
there is little chance  
of his return  
when eagles sleep in the trees,  
and all the people  
are dreaming."

[51] A serving-woman said,  
"Do not be so foolish  
that you go alone  
to his burial mound.  
All the dead  
are more powerful  
at night than they are  
during bright day."

Sigrun did not live long, because of her sorrow and indifference to life. It was generally believed in ancient times that people were reborn, though this is now called a superstition. Helgi and Sigrun are said to have been reborn. He was then called Helgi, the Sorrow of Hadding, and she was called Kara, Daughter of Halfdan, and she was a Valkyrie, as is told in the Song of Kara.

## **{218} *Fra dautha Sinfjotla* (The Death of Sinfjotli)**

The poems in the Sigurth tradition begin with a prose piece called *Fra dautha Sinfjotla*, “Concerning the Death of Sinfjotli,” who is Sigurth’s half-brother by their father Sigmund. The ferryman who takes Sinfjotli’s body away is probably Odin, who takes a great interest in the fortune of Sigurth’s family, the Volsungs (also compare Odin’s appearance as a ferryman in *Harbarthsljoth*).

## *Fra dautha Sinfjotla*

Sigmund, son of Volsung, was a king of the Franks. Sinfjotli was his oldest son, and the second was named Helgi, the third Hamund.

Borghild, Sigmund's wife, had a brother. Her stepson Sinfjotli and her brother both wooed the same woman, and because of this, Sinfjotli killed her brother. When Sinfjotli came home, Borghild told him to leave, but Sigmund offered her compensation for her brother's death, and she was forced to accept this.

At the funeral for her brother, Borghild was serving beer. She took a large horn full of poison and served it to Sinfjotli. When he looked inside the horn, he saw that there was poison in it and said to his father: "This drink is cloudy, father!" Sigmund took the horn and drank everything in it; it is said that Sigmund was so hardy that he was impervious to poison, whether by skin contact or by drinking it. But his sons were impervious only by skin, not internally.

Borghild brought another hornful to Sinfjotli and told him to drink from it, but it went exactly as before. And then she brought him the horn for a third time, and she mocked him for not wanting to drink from it. Sinfjotli spoke as he had before to his father, but Sigmund said: "Wet your mustache, son!" Sinfjotli drank and fell dead immediately.

Sigmund carried Sinfjotli's body in his arms for a long time, till he came to a long, narrow fjord, where he saw a little boat and a man standing on it, who offered to ferry Sigmund over the fjord. But when Sigmund put the body of his son on the boat, the ferry was full, and the ferryman said that Sigmund would need to walk around the fjord. Then he shoved off from shore and disappeared.

King Sigmund remained for a long time in Denmark, in Borghild's kingdom, after he was married to her. But then Sigmund {219} returned to the kingdom he had in France, and there he married Hjordis, daughter of King Eylimi, and their son was Sigurth. King Sigmund fell in a battle against Hunding's sons, and after that Hjordis remarried to Alf, son of King Hjalprek. Sigurth grew up with him while still a boy.

Sigmund and all his sons were far better than other men in strength and height, in courage, and in all achievements, but Sigurth was the greatest of all, and in the old sagas people say that he was greater than all other men, and that he was the noblest of all warrior kings.

## **{220} *Gripisspa* (Gripir's Prophecies to Sigurth)**

The first poem about Sigurth is *Gripisspa* ("Gripir's Prophecies"), in which Sigurth's future is foretold to him by his uncle Gripir. Modern readers should be warned that the medieval attitude toward "spoilers" was more accepting than that of modern audiences; much of the action of Sigurth's later life (as related in the following poems) is revealed here.

## *Gripisspa*

Gripir was the brother of Hjordis, Sigurth's mother; they were the children of Eylimi. Gripir was a wiser ruler than all others, and he could see the future. Sigurth rode to Gripir's hall alone. Sigurth was easy to recognize. He met a man named Geitir outside the hall and spoke with him. Sigurth greeted him and said:

[1]      **“W**HO IS IT WHO LIVES  
in this place?  
What name do men  
give to their king here?

Geitir said:

“Gripir is the name  
of the leader of men  
who rules this strong land  
and all its legions.”

Sigurth said:

[2]      “Is the wise king  
home right now?  
Do you think he will  
talk to me?  
I'm a stranger  
who wants to speak with him.  
I must meet  
with Gripir soon.”

{221} Geitir said:

[3]      “But the noble king  
will ask me what the name  
of this stranger is

who wants to talk to him.”

Sigurth said:

“I am called Sigurth,  
son of Sigmund,  
and Hjordis  
was my mother.”

[4] Then Geitir went  
to Gripir and said:  
“A stranger  
has come here.  
He is an impressive  
man to look at,  
and, my lord,  
he wants to talk to you.”

[5] The great king  
left his hall,  
and greeted  
his visitor well:  
“Welcome, Sigurth!  
I wish you’d come earlier.  
Geitir, take care  
of Sigurth’s horse, Grani.”

[6] There was much talking,  
there was much speaking,  
when those two wise men  
had their meeting.

Sigurth said:

“Tell me, if you know,  
my uncle,

what do you see  
of my fate?"

{222} Gripir said:

[7]     "You will become  
the most famous man  
beneath the sun,  
most honored of all kings,  
you will share your gold  
and show your courage,  
you will be a handsome man,  
and a master of words."

Sigurth said:

[8]     "Tell me more,  
I want to know,  
wise king,  
if you know it:  
What will be  
my first journey,  
after I have left  
your home here?"

Gripir said:

[9]     "Warrior, first  
you will go avenge your father  
and get compensation  
for the suffering of your kin.  
You will kill  
the hard, brave sons  
of Hunding,  
and have a victory."

Sigurth said:

[10]     “Tell me now, king.  
          I, your nephew,  
          want to hear the truth  
          when we talk together.  
          Do you see excellent deeds  
          in my future to boast about,  
          deeds that will be called the best  
          beneath the heavens?”

{223} Gripir said:

[11]     “You alone will kill  
          the shining serpent,  
          the greedy worm who lies  
          on Gnitaheth.  
          You will kill  
          both brothers,  
          Regin and Fafnir.  
          I do not lie.”

Sigurth said:

[12]     “I’ll have plenty of gold  
          if I go to battle  
          against worthy foes,  
          as you clearly foresee.  
          Let your mind wander  
          and see yet further;  
          what sort of fate  
          is waiting for me?”

Gripir said:

[13]     “You will find

Gripir's treasure,  
you will seize  
all that gold.  
You will put that gold  
on Grani's back,  
then ride to the hall  
of great King Gjuki."

Sigurth said:

[14] "I hope that you  
will say even more  
than this, my wise,  
accomplished uncle:  
When I have visited Gjuki,  
and left his home,  
what sort of fate  
will be waiting for me?"

{224} Gripir said:

[15] "A beautiful princess,  
dressed in armor,  
sleeps on a mountain  
after the death of Helgi.  
You will free  
her with your sharp blade.  
You will cut her armor  
with the sword that killed Fafnir."

Sigurth said:

[16] "I'll break her armor,  
and the girl will speak  
when she wakes

from her sleep.  
But then, what  
will this wise girl say?  
Will she say something  
useful to me?"

Gripir said:

[17] "She will teach you  
useful runes—  
everything that people  
most desire to know—  
she'll teach you to speak  
in every language,  
and how to heal the suffering—  
live well, king!"

Sigurth said:

[18] "That meeting will end,  
I'll have learned much,  
and I'll ride further  
along on my way.  
Let your mind wander  
and see yet further;  
what sort of fate  
will be waiting for me?"

{225} Gripir said:

[19] "You will come  
to Heimir's halls.  
You'll be a happy guest  
of that brave king's.  
It's all told, Sigurth,

everything I wanted to say—  
please don't ask me  
anything further."

Sigurth said:

[20] "Now your words  
cause me worry,  
for I think that you,  
wise king, see yet further:  
You know there is  
some great misfortune  
in store for me, and you  
don't want to tell it."

Gripir said:

[21] "It was easy  
to see how your life  
would be in  
your blooming youth.  
But I am not  
a real wise man  
nor much of a prophet;  
I've forgotten what I knew."

Sigurth said:

[22] "I know of no one  
in the world  
who knows better  
how to see the future:  
Don't conceal it,  
even if it's terrible to hear,  
even if I'll meet misfortune

on my life's path."

{226} Gripir said:

[23]     "Your life's path  
is not written in mockery;  
let that at least  
stand out in your memory.  
As long as humans  
live on this earth,  
the name of famous  
Sigurth will live among them."

Sigurth said:

[24]     "I think it's wrong  
for me to part from you,  
my wise uncle, in this way,  
without hearing more.  
My fate will go  
as it must, no matter what—  
but show me how it will go,  
my honored uncle, if you will."

Gripir said:

[25]     "Now Sigurth, my nephew,  
I will tell the whole truth,  
since you, young hero,  
want to force me into it.  
First, I'll say something  
which you know is no lie:  
Your final day is appointed;  
death is coming."

Sigurth said:

[26]    “I don’t want  
          to make you angry,  
          I only want  
          to get your good advice.  
          I have to know for certain  
          what awaits, even if it’s evil;  
          I want to know what fate  
          has in store for me.”

{227} Gripir said:

[27]    “There is a beautiful woman  
          who is living at Heimir’s,  
          and her name will be  
          remembered as Brynhild.  
          She is the daughter of Buthli,  
          but the brave king  
          Heimir fosters  
          that hard-hearted girl.”

Sigurth said:

[28]    “So what does it matter  
          if there is a beautiful woman  
          growing up  
          at Heimir’s place?  
          Now I need you  
          to delve deeper,  
          for I think that you  
          have foreseen all my fate.”

Gripir said:

[29]    “That beautiful woman  
          who is growing up at Heimir’s

will deprive you  
of all of your happiness.  
She will make you sleepless,  
she will make you senseless,  
you'll pay attention to nothing  
unless you're with that girl."

Sigurth said:

[30] "Tell me, Gripir,  
what can I do  
to find some medicine  
to heal this illness?  
Will this beautiful girl  
I intend to marry,  
be given to me  
in marriage?"

{228} Gripir said:

[31] "The two of you  
will swear oaths  
to one another,  
but will keep few of them.  
You will be a guest  
at Gjuki's one night,  
and then you will forget  
Brynhild, daughter of Buthli."

Sigurth said:

[32] "But Gripir, how will  
this happen to me?  
Am I made with such  
a weak mind?

Will I betray her,  
when she  
has captured  
my whole heart?"

Gripir said:

[33] "Others will trick you  
into this treachery.  
You will be trapped  
by Queen Grimhild.  
You will ask for the hand  
of her bright-haired  
daughter; she will  
fool you into it."

Sigurth said:

[34] "So then I will be  
brother-in-law of  
great Gunnar,  
married to Guthrun.  
It seems this would be  
a very good marriage,  
if I didn't suspect  
there's more bad to come."

{229} Gripir said:

[35] "Grimhild will  
terribly deceive you,  
she will ask you  
to court Brynhild  
for the bride of Gunnar,  
that king of the Goths.

And you will promise  
to go upon that journey.”

Sigurth said:

[36] “Clearly I can see  
that pain awaits me.  
And this is the worst,  
that I must court  
the famous woman  
I love most of all  
to be the fair bride  
of another man.”

Gripir said:

[37] “You will  
swear many oaths,  
you and Gunnar,  
together with Hogni.  
You and Gunnar will  
magically trade  
appearances on the journey.  
I am not lying.”

Sigurth said:

[38] “What will that gain me?  
Why will we two  
change appearances  
on this journey?  
Some other evil  
must follow  
all this other evil—  
tell me more, Gripir!”

{230} Gripir said:

[39]     “You will look like Gunnar,  
          you will act as if you were Gunnar,  
          but you’ll have your own mind  
          and your own courage;  
          you will woo Brynhild,  
          foster-daughter of Heimir,  
          for Gunnar, and nothing  
          will prevent it.”

Sigurth said:

[40]     “I think the worst part  
          is that people will call me  
          an evildoer  
          when they hear of this.  
          I do not wish  
          to woo the princess,  
          the best woman I know,  
          with trickery.”

Gripir said:

[41]     “You will sleep  
          next to the young woman,  
          but only as if  
          she had been your mother.  
          Because of this,  
          for a long time  
          people on this earth  
          will speak the famed name of Sigurth.”

Sigurth said:

[42]     “Will the famous

King Gunnar  
marry this girl,  
even after  
the wise princess  
has slept next to me  
for three nights?  
Answer me, Gripir!”

{231} Gripir said:

[43] “Two bridegrooms,  
you and Gunnar,  
will toast your weddings  
in Gjuki’s hall, on the same day.  
You’ll exchange  
appearances again  
when you come home,  
and have the same souls as before.”

Sigurth said:

[44] “Will my  
brother-in-law and I  
stay in good friendship?  
Tell me, Gripir!  
Will Gunnar  
later rejoice for  
these weddings,  
or will I?”

Gripir said:

[45] “You’ll remember your oaths,  
and you will be silent;  
you will live happily

with your wife Guthrun.  
But Brynhild will learn  
about the deception,  
and she will plot  
her revenge on you.”

Sigurth said:

[46] “And what repayment  
will Brynhild accept,  
from me and the others  
who deceived her?  
All she’ll have from me  
are the oaths I swore  
and later broke,  
and her unhappy fortune.”

{232} Gripir said:

[47] “She will  
tell Gunnar  
that you were not  
true to him.  
She will tell  
Gunnar, son of Gjuki,  
that he was wrong  
to place his trust in you.”

Sigurth said:

[48] “What is this? Gripir,  
tell me honestly,  
will her story be true?  
Is it true I’ll be faithless?  
Or will the famous woman

be telling lies  
about what she and I did?  
Tell me, Gripir!”

Gripir said:

[49] “Because of her anger,  
the girl will lie about you,  
she’ll cause you  
this heartbreak.  
Even though you  
were not the cause,  
the princess will know  
she was won through treachery.”

Sigurth said:

[50] “Will Gunnar  
be fooled by her?  
Will Gotthorm be fooled,  
and Hogni too?  
Will my brothers-in-law  
redden their swords  
in my flesh?  
Tell me, Gripir!”

{233} Gripir said:

[51] “The pain  
will go to Guthrun’s heart  
when her brothers  
kill you.  
She will never be happy,  
she will never love again;  
it will all be

Grimhild's fault.

- [52] "But Sigurth,  
leader of warriors,  
there is one comfort  
in your fate:  
A better man  
will never walk  
upon the earth  
beneath the sun than you."

Sigurth said:

- [53] "I part from you in friendship.  
My fate will be what it will.  
You have done  
what I asked you to do,  
and I think you would have  
happily told me  
I would have a better fate,  
if that had been my true destiny."

## {234} *Reginsmal* (The Tale of Regin)

*Reginsmal* (literally “Regin’s Words”) is the first of a trio of poems concerned with the adventures of the young Sigurth, together with *Fafnismal* and *Sigrdrifumal*. *Reginsmal* begins with a fairly long prose introduction, partially narrated by Regin, about the killing of Regin’s brother Otter by the Aesir, and the demands by their father Hreithmar for a large amount of gold in payment for this crime. After telling of how Fafnir, Regin’s brother, killed his father Hreithmar for this gold and became a dragon, Regin tells of how he fled to the kingdom of Hjalprek and fostered Sigurth. Sigurth tells Regin he will avenge Hreithmar, but only after he has avenged his own father and uncle on Lyngvi and the other sons of Hunding. In the last stanza of this poem, we read that Sigurth carved the “bloody eagle” (Old Norse *blothugr orn*) on Lyngvi’s back. This is a reference to a form of torture in which the victim was laid out flat in a prostrate position and his ribs removed from his back one by one. “Battle-Stirrer” is Odin in disguise.

## *Reginsmal*

Sigurth went to Hjalprek's remuda and chose a horse that later was named Grani. At this time Regin, son of Hreithmar, lived in Hjalprek's kingdom. He was more skillful with his hands than any other man, and a dwarf in height. He was wise, grim, and skilled in magic. Regin fostered and educated Sigurth, and loved him well. He told Sigurth about his parents, and about the events when Odin, Loki, and Honir had come to Andvari's Falls. This was a waterfall where an abundance of fish could be found. A dwarf named Andvari lived there for a long time, in the form of a pikefish, and fed himself there. "Otter was the name of our brother," said Regin, "and he often went to the Falls in the form of an otter. He had caught a salmon and sat on the bank where he was eating it with his eyes closed. Loki threw a stone and killed him. The Aesir felt very lucky about this, and skinned the otter and made a bag out of the skin. That same evening they came as guests to Hreithmar's house and showed him what they had caught. We captured them and threatened their lives if they did not fill that bag with gold, and cover it on the outside with gold as well. Then the Aesir sent Loki to acquire the gold. He came to Ran and borrowed her net, {235} and went back to Andvari's Falls and threw the net in front of the pikefish, and the fish jumped in. Then Loki said:

- [1]     **“W**HAT KIND OF FISH IS THIS  
          swimming in the water,  
          that doesn't know to avoid a net?  
          Your head will stay  
          on your body, if you  
          can get me some gold.”
- [2]     “I am named Andvari,  
          son of Oin,  
          I have been in many waterfalls.  
          A cruel Norn  
          shaped my fate at the beginning,  
          cursed me to live in the water.”

[3]     “Tell me this, Andvari,” said Loki,  
          “if you want go free and live  
          in the halls of men:  
          What should a man  
          get in return  
          if he lies to others?”

[4]     “They get a lot in return,  
          all those men who will wade  
          the traitors’ river at Ragnarok.  
          They will suffer for a long time  
          if they lie to others,  
          in return for their untrue words.”

Loki saw all the gold that Andvari owned. And after he had taken all of it, Andvari still had one single ring, and Loki took that from him as well. The dwarf then hid inside a stone and said:

[5]     “This gold  
          that Gust used to own,  
          will cause the death  
          of two brothers,  
          and cause grief  
          for eight kings.  
          No one will enjoy  
          my treasure.”

{236} The Aesir gave Hreithmar the gold. They filled the otter-skin with gold and set the skin on its feet, so that they could cover it with gold from the outside. And when this was done, Hreithmar reached forward and saw one whisker that was still visible, and told the Aesir to cover it. Odin took the ring Andvaranaut and covered the whisker with it.

[6]     “The gold is delivered,” said Loki.  
          “We’ve paid a huge price  
          for my head.

I do not foresee  
happiness for your son.  
This gold will be the death of you both.”

Hreithmar said:

[7] “You gave gifts,  
but you did not give willingly,  
you did not give with a whole heart.  
I would have killed you,  
both of you,  
if I had known it beforehand.”

[8] Loki said, “It seems to me  
that it will only get worse—  
men will fight over this gold.  
This gold is fated, I think,  
to cause hateful news  
for kings still unborn.”

[9] “This gold,” said Hreithmar,  
“will be mine  
as long as I live.  
I’m not afraid at all  
of your threats.  
Go home.”

Fafnir and Regin asked Hreithmar for some of the treasure, in payment for the loss of their brother Otter. He denied their requests, but Fafnir killed Hreithmar with a sword while he slept. Hreithmar called out to his daughters:

{237} [10] “Lyngheith and Lofnheith,  
I am dying! But everyone is destined  
for some torment.”

Lyngheith answered:

“Few sisters will take vengeance

against a brother,  
even for their father.”

- [11] “Have a daughter,” said Hreithmar,  
“a wolf-fierce girl,  
if you cannot have a son  
with a king.  
You’ll need to marry  
that girl to a man,  
and at last her son  
will avenge your sorrow.”

Then Hreithmar died, and Fafnir took all the gold. Regin asked for his share in the inheritance from their father, but Fafnir would give him nothing. Regin went to his sister Lyngheith and asked how he should secure his share of the inheritance. She said:

- [12] “Talk to your brother  
pleasantly about the matter,  
with a friendly attitude.  
You won’t get much  
from Fafnir if you try  
to persuade him with a sword.”

Regin told Sigurth these things. One day, when Sigurth came to Regin’s house, Regin greeted him happily. Regin said:

- [13] “Here is the son  
of Sigmund,  
a clever boy,  
he’s come to my hall.  
He has more courage  
than this old man;  
I suspect this young wolf  
has hope of good hunting.

{238} [14]    “I will raise him  
in my house,  
this noble boy,  
make a war-brave king out of him.  
He’ll grow up to be  
the greatest king beneath the sun,  
the tale of his deeds  
will be told everywhere.”

Sigurth was always with Regin, and Regin told Sigurth about how Fafnir lay on Gnitaheith in the form of a dragon. He had a helmet of terror that instilled fear in all living things.

Regin made a sword called Gram for Sigurth. This sword was so sharp that he put its blade in the river Rhine and let a tuft of wool flow downstream onto the blade, and the wool split as if it were water. With this sword, Sigurth cut Regin’s anvil in half. After this, Regin encouraged Sigurth to kill Fafnir. Sigurth said:

[15]    “The sons of Hunding,  
who killed my father and  
my father-in-law Eylimi,  
would laugh out loud  
if I seemed to care  
more for golden rings  
than for vengeance  
for my father Sigmund.”

King Hjalprek outfitted Sigurth with ships and men for his mission of avenging his father. They were caught in a bad storm and delayed at a certain headland. A man stood on the rock and said:

[16]    “Who is it there  
riding those ships  
on the high waves,  
on the roaring sea?  
Those ships are sure

sweating with the trouble;  
I doubt that they  
will stand up to the wind.”

Regin answered:

[17] “Here I am, with Sigurth,  
on these ships,  
this breeze will blow us  
{239} to our deaths.  
A high wave  
crashes on deck,  
the ships will wreck.  
Who is asking?”

[18] “They called me  
Battle-Stirrer,  
when young Volsung  
set a table for the ravens.  
You can call me  
‘Man on the Rock,’  
or ‘Burden’ or ‘Spellcaster.’  
I want a ride.”

They went to land and the man came onto the ship, and the weather immediately improved.

[19] Sigurth said, “Tell me,  
Battle-Stirrer, since you know  
the omens of gods and humans,  
what is the best  
kind of omen  
when men are about to fight?”

Battle-Stirrer said:

[20] “There are many good omens

before one goes into battle,  
if you know how to recognize them.  
A man with a faithful following  
of black-winged ravens  
will fight a winning battle.

[21] “There is a second good omen:  
If you are outside,  
out on the road,  
and you see two men  
standing in the yard,  
ready to make battle.

[22] “There is a third omen:  
If you hear a wolf howl  
{240} under the limbs of an ash,  
you and not your enemy  
will have good luck,  
if you see him first.

[23] “No one  
should leave for battle  
facing the  
setting sun.  
Bold men  
have victories  
if they can see,  
or line up in formation.

[24] “You are in grave danger  
if you stumble  
on your way to battle.  
It means that evil spirits

stand on either side of you,  
and want to see you get hurt.

- [25] “Every man should  
keep himself well-kempt and clean,  
and eat up in the morning.  
You never know  
where you’ll be in the evening,  
so it’s bad to leave home hungry.”

Sigurth had a great battle against Lyngvi, son of Hunding, and his brothers.  
Lyngvi and his three brothers were killed. After the battle Regin said:

- [26] “Now the bloody eagle  
is carved with a bitter blade  
on the back  
of the killer of Sigmund.  
No better man  
than Sigurth has ever  
soaked the earth with blood,  
and set a table for the ravens.”

Sigurth went home to Hjalprek. Then Regin encouraged Sigurth to kill  
Fafnir.

## {241} *Fafnismal* (The Tale of Fafnir)

*Fafnismal* (literally “Fafnir’s Words”) continues the trilogy of poems concerning the adventures of Sigurth as a young adult. Here, Sigurth stabs the dragon Fafnir and has a long conversation with the dying dragon, including stanzas in which Fafnir gives apparently irrelevant advice (st. 11) as well as information about the Norns and gods (st. 13, 15). Once the dragon has died, Regin encourages Sigurth to cook his heart, but Sigurth burns his finger on the meat and then places the burnt finger in his mouth, gaining the power to understand birds when he does so. With his new ability, he is warned by some wagtails (an Old World type of long-tailed bird) that Regin will betray him. Sigurth slays Regin and then listens to the birds describe the ladies he could potentially woo—including both of the women he will later court, Guthrun and Brynhild/ Sigerdrifa. The birds are called *igthur* in the Old Norse text, and my identification of them as wagtails (uniquely among Englishlanguage translators) is based on the use of a related word for wagtails in some Norwegian dialects.

## *Fafnismal*

Sigurth and Regin went up on Gnitaeith, and there they found the path that Fafnir followed when he slithered down to the water. Sigurth dug a deep pit in the path, and hid himself inside. When Fafnir slithered off his heap of gold and onto the path, he blew poison from his mouth, spraying it over Sigurth's head. And when Fafnir slithered over Sigurth's pit, Sigurth thrust his sword through the dragon up to the heart. Fafnir trembled and thrashed his head and tail. Sigurth leapt out of the pit, and the two saw one another. Fafnir said:

[1]      “**Y**OUNG MAN, YOUNG MAN!

Who is your father?

What family are you from?

Who are you who reddened

your glistening sword in Fafnir?

The sword is in my heart.”

{242} Sigurth did not reveal his name, because they believed in old times that the words of a dying man were powerful, if he cursed his enemy by name. Sigurth said:

[2]      “I am called ‘clever beast,’

and I have always been

a motherless son.

I don't have a father

like the sons of men do.

I am always alone.”

Fafnir said:

[3]      “If you had no father

like the sons of men do,

in what strange way were you born?”

Sigurth said:

[4]      “I think my family

is unknown to you,  
my identity as well.  
I am named Sigurth,  
my father was Sigmund—  
it was I who killed you with weapons.”

Fafnir said:

[5] “Who made you do it?  
Why did you let someone  
convince you to take my life?  
You fierce-eyed young man,  
I don’t doubt you had a warlike father;  
it shows clearly in your eyes.”

Sigurth said:

[6] “My courage made me do it,  
my hands assisted me,  
and my sharp sword, too.  
Not many men are brave  
in adulthood,  
if they were cowards as boys.”

{243} Fafnir said:

[7] “I know, if you had grown up  
in your own family’s embrace,  
you might have killed me for courage’s sake.  
But you are a prisoner,  
one taken in war—  
they say captives always tremble.”

Sigurth said:

[8] “Why do you mock me, Fafnir,  
for being far away

from my father's kin?  
I am no prisoner,  
though I was taken in war—  
*you* noticed that I live free.”

Fafnir said:

[9] “You think that everything  
I say to you is mockery,  
but I tell you the truth:  
my clanging gold,  
this wealth that glows like embers,  
will bring about your death.”

Sigurth said:

[10] “Every man will  
have control of his wealth  
till his fated death-day,  
but there is a time  
when each one of us  
leaves here for Hel.”

Fafnir said:

[11] “You’ll meet your death  
if you sail too close to land,  
and what a foolish death it will be.  
You’ll drown in the water,  
if you row in the wind—  
everything is dangerous for a doomed man.”

{244} Sigurth said:

[12] “Tell me, Fafnir,  
they say you are wise,  
and very knowledgeable—

who are the Norns  
who govern childbirth  
and choose who mothers what child?”

Fafnir said:

[13] “There are various  
different kinds of Norns:  
they are not all of one family.  
Some are god-born,  
some are elves,  
others come from the dwarves.”

Sigurth said:

[14] “Tell me, Fafnir,  
they say you are wise,  
and very knowledgeable—  
what is the name of the island  
where the gods and giants  
will fight their final battle?”

Fafnir said:

[15] “It is called Oskopnir;  
and there all the gods  
will wage war.  
Bifrost will break  
when they cross that bridge;  
their horses will swim it.

[16] “I wore a terror-helmet  
against all men  
so long as I sat on my treasure.  
I thought I alone  
was braver than everyone:

not many came to meet me.”

{245} Sigurth said:

[17] “That terror-helmet  
will not save anyone  
when angry men come together to fight.  
When a real battle starts,  
you’ll always find  
that there is no bravest man.”

Fafnir said:

[18] “I blew poison from my jaws  
as long as I lay  
upon my father’s great treasure.”

Sigurth said:

[19] “You brave snake,  
you blew your poison,  
and you had a bold heart.  
But men hate you,  
and their hate grows all the more  
because you have that helmet.”

Fafnir said:

[20] “I advise you, Sigurth:  
Take my advice,  
and ride home from here.  
My clanging gold,  
this ember-glowing wealth,  
will bring about your death.”

Sigurth said:

[21] “I hear your advice,  
but I will ride to the gold

where it lies on the ground—  
and you, Fafnir,  
stay here and die,  
and Hel can have you.”

{246} Fafnir said:

[22] “Regin betrayed me,  
he will betray you as well.  
He will bring death to us both.  
I think that I am nearly  
on the point of dying:  
you had the greater strength, for now.”

Regin had been away while Sigurth fought Fafnir, but he came back as Sigurth wiped the blood from his blade. Regin said:

[23] “Hail, Sigurth!  
Now you’ve won a victory  
and killed Fafnir.  
Of all men  
who live on the earth,  
I think you’re the least cowardly.”

Sigurth said:

[24] “It’s impossible to say,  
when we compare  
all sons of men,  
which one is least cowardly—  
there’s many a bold man  
who’s never bloodied a sword  
in another man’s chest.”

Regin said:

[25] “You are happy now, Sigurth,  
wiping the blood

off your sword in the grass,  
rejoice in your victory!  
But you have killed my brother,  
though I had a part in that also.”

Sigurth said:

[26] “It was your advice  
that I should ride here  
to these frosty mountains:  
the shining serpent  
would still have life, and the treasure,  
if you had not challenged my courage.”

{247} Then Regin went to Fafnir’s body and cut the heart out with his sword Rithil. Regin drank the blood from the wound. Regin said:

[27] “Sit now, Sigurth,  
roast Fafnir’s heart on the fire.  
I will be sleeping.  
I want to make  
a meal of his heart  
after that drink of dragon’s blood.”

Sigurth said:

[28] “You hid far away  
while I killed Fafnir  
with my sharp sword.  
I tested my strength  
against the dragon,  
while you crept in the bushes.”

Regin said:

[29] “You would have left  
that ancient monster  
creeping in the bushes himself,

if you did not have the sword  
that I made for you,  
that good sharp sword of yours.”

Sigurth said:

[30] “When men are in battle,  
a courageous heart  
means more than a sharp sword.  
I’ve seen a brave man  
win a victory,  
though he fought with a dull blade.

[31] “Better to be bold  
than a coward,  
when sharp swords come together.  
Better to be cheerful  
than gloomy,  
however events may turn.”

{248} Sigurth took Fafnir’s heart and roasted it on a spit. And when he thought it would be fully cooked, and the blood all boiled out of the heart, he tested whether the heart was ready to eat by touching it with his finger. His finger was burned, and he put it in his mouth. But when the blood from Fafnir’s heart touched his tongue, he could understand the language of birds. He heard some wagtails talking in the branches above him. One of the wagtails said:

[32] “There sits Sigurth,  
splattered with blood,  
cooking Fafnir’s heart  
on the open flame.  
I would say this prince  
was a wise man,  
if he were the one who ate  
the dragon’s heart.”

A second one said:

- [33] “Over there is Regin,  
conspiring against Sigurth,  
he’ll betray this boy  
who trusts him.  
In his bloody rage,  
he ponders evil—  
that wrongdoer  
will avenge his brother.”

A third wagtail said:

- [34] “He should let that crafty Regin  
go straight to Hel,  
shorter by about a head.  
Then all the gold  
would be Sigurth’s alone,  
that whole treasure of Fafnir.”

A fourth bird said:

- [35] “I would think Sigurth was wise  
if he knew how to heed  
your good advice,  
my sisters,  
{249} if he took our advice  
and set a table for the ravens.  
I always suspect a wolf  
when I see a wolf’s ears sticking up.”

A fifth said:

- [36] “He is not as wise  
as I would have thought,  
Sigurth, this lord

of many battles—  
not if he lets one brother  
live free and at ease  
when he has killed  
the other!”

A sixth said:

[37] “It would be unwise  
if he spared that enemy.  
There Regin lies,  
the brother  
who advised him on this course—  
can Sigurth not see the danger?”

A seventh said:

[38] “Let Regin be a head shorter,  
that frost-cold monster  
should be deprived of his inheritance,  
and then Sigurth would be  
the sole owner  
of the gold that was Fafnir’s.”

Sigurth said:

[39] “It would be a poor fate,  
if Regin  
caused my death.  
I think  
both brothers should go  
to Hel together today.”

{250} Sigurth cut off Regin’s head, and then he ate Fafnir’s heart and drank the blood of both Regin and Fafnir. Then Sigurth heard the wagtails saying:

[40] “Pack up  
all these treasures, Sigurth;

it would not be kingly  
to worry for long.

I know a woman  
more beautiful  
than any other—  
if you could get her.

[41] “The roads to Gjuki’s halls  
are green,  
they show the way  
for warriors.

Sigurth,  
that rich king  
has raised a daughter—  
and you could buy her.

[42] “And there’s a hall  
high on Hindarfjall,  
encircled all around  
by flame:  
wise men  
have made that wall  
from living  
ardent fire.

[43] “I know that a Valkyrie  
sleeps on that mountain,  
where fire plays  
around her.  
Odin stung her with a thorn:  
she killed a different man  
than Odin wished,

that unfaithful Valkyrie.

{251} [44]     “Sigurth, you could see  
that girl beneath her helmet,  
when you ride away  
from this battlefield.  
They say no one  
can break Sigerdrifa’s sleep,  
no one can change  
what fate has determined.”

Sigurth followed Fafnir’s tracks to his lair, and found the iron doors and gates open. All the pillars were also made of iron, and they were dug deep into the earth. Sigurth found a great quantity of gold there, and he filled two chests with it. He took the terror-helmet and a golden suit of armor, and the sword Hrotti and many other precious treasures, and he loaded them onto his horse Grani. But even with that burden, the horse would not start till Sigurth had mounted up on his back.

## **{252} *Sigrdrifumal* (The Meeting with Brynhild)**

Having been told of her by the birds at the end of *Fafnismal*, Sigurth now goes to the mountain Hindarfjall where the Valkyrie Sigrdrifa sleeps. As with many other poems concerned with the Volsungs, there is a prose introduction and occasional prose notes in the manuscript, which are translated here along with the poetic stanzas. Sigrdrifa (literally “victory-driver”) may or may not be the same person as the Valkyrie Brynhild, who appears in the later poems about Sigurth. Much of the poem consists of Sigrdrifa’s advice to Sigurth, which is reminiscent of *Havamal*, both in the tone of her general advice, and in her insistence about the power of the runes.

## *Sigrdrifumal*

Sigurth rode up on the mountain Hindarfjall, south toward Frankish lands. He saw a great light on the mountain, as though a fire burned there, and it glowed against the sky. When he came to it, he saw a fortress, and there were flags flying on top of it. Sigurth went into the fortress and saw a person sleeping there on the floor, fully armed. He took the helmet off first, and then he realized this person was a woman. Her chainmail was as tight as if it had grown to her skin. He took his sword Gram and cut the chainmail off, first cutting down the middle, and then down both sleeves. Then he took the chainmail off of her, and she woke up and saw Sigurth and said:

[1]      “**W**HAT BROKE THE CHAINMAIL?

Why am I awake?

Who has freed me

from my imprisoning armor?”

He answered:

“Sigmund’s son

is the one who cut it.

Sigurth’s sword is fresh

from feeding the ravens.”

{253} [2]      She said: “I have slept so long,

I have been asleep so long,

human sorrows last so long.

Odin cursed me

never to break the sleeping-spell

by my own power.”

Sigurth sat down and asked her name. She took a horn full of mead and offered him the ritual drink.

[3]      She said: “Hail the day!

Hail the sons of day!

Hail to night and her sister!

Look on the two of us here

with friendly eyes,

and give us victory.

[4] “Hail the gods!

Hail the goddesses!

Hail the hospitable earth!

Give the two of us

eloquent speech, and wisdom—

and healing hands, while we live.”

She was named Sigerdrifa and she was a Valkyrie. She said that two kings had fought. One was named Hjalm-Gunnar; he was old and a great warrior, and Odin had promised him victory. The other was named Agnar, brother of Hautha, who received help from no one. Sigerdrifa killed Hjalm-Gunnar in this battle. But Odin stung her with a sleep-thorn in revenge for this, and said she would never again choose victories in battle and that she would have to marry. “But I told him that I had sworn an oath to marry no man except one who knew no fear,” she said.

Sigurth asked her to teach him wisdom, if she knew news from all the realms. Sigerdrifa said:

[5] “I bring you beer,

warrior,

blended with strength

and fame.

It’s full of spells

and magic,

good enchantments

and happy words.

{254} [6] “You should carve victory-runes

if you want to have victory.

Carve some on the hilt of your sword,

carve some on the middle of the blade also,

some elsewhere on the sword,  
and name Tyr twice.

[7] “You should learn beer-runes  
if you don’t want another man’s wife  
to abuse your trust if you have a tryst.  
Carve them on the drinking-horn  
and on the back of your hand,  
and carve the rune for ‘N’ on your fingernail.

[8] “You should bless the drinking-horn;  
then watch out for trouble  
and throw garlic in the drink.  
If you do this, I know  
you’ll never drink mead  
that’s blended with a curse.

[9] “You should learn life-saving runes  
if you want to save a woman’s life  
when she is in the throes of childbirth.  
Carve them on your palm,  
and clasp them around your limbs,  
and pray to your family spirits for help.

[10] “You should make wave-runes  
if you want to save ships  
out on the wild water.  
You should carve them on the ship’s bow  
and on the steering-rudder,  
and burn them into the oars.  
Then there won’t be any steep wave,  
there won’t be any blue waves,  
that you won’t escape from safely.

[11] “You should learn limb-runes  
if you want to be a healer  
and learn how to heal wounds.  
{255} Carve them on bark,  
carve them on the needles of a pine  
that bends eastward.

[12] “You should learn speech-runes  
to prevent those who hate you  
from taking vengeance on you.  
Wind them around,  
weave them around,  
set them all around,  
at the court  
where people go  
for judgments.

[13] “You should learn mind-runes  
if you want to be wiser  
than any other man.  
Odin read them,  
Odin carved them,  
Odin thought them up,  
from the liquid  
that leaked  
from the skull of Heithdraupnir,  
from the horn of Hoddrofnir.

[14] “Odin stood on a mountain,  
Brimir’s sword in his hand  
and a helmet on his head,  
when wise Mimir’s head

spoke the first word,  
and spoke truthfully.

[15] “Runes were carved on the shield  
that stood before the shining sun,  
on the ears and hooves  
of the horses that draw the sun,  
on the wheel  
of the chariot of Thor,  
on the reins of Sleipnir,  
on the reins of his sled.

{256} [16] “They were carved on a bear’s paw  
and a poet’s tongue,  
on a wolf’s claws  
and an eagle’s beak,  
on bloody wings  
and a bridge’s beams,  
on a helper’s palm  
and a healer’s footprint.

[17] “They were carved on glass  
and gold, on treasures,  
in wine and in beer  
and a witch’s chair,  
on Odin’s spearpoint  
and a troll-woman’s breast,  
on a Norn’s fingernail  
and the beak of an owl.

[18] “All of them that were carved  
were then shaved off,  
and they were stirred into the holy mead

and sent far away.  
Some are with the Aesir,  
some are with the elves,  
some are with the Vanir,  
and mortal men have some.

[19] “The beechtree-runes  
and life-saving runes  
and all the beer-runes  
and the famous strength-runes  
will be of good use  
for everyone who knows them  
completely and correctly.  
Use them, if you know them,  
till the gods die.

[20] “Now you must choose  
from the options you are offered,  
mighty warrior.  
Choose to speak,  
{257} or choose to remain silent:  
Your fate is already decided.”

[21] Sigurth responded, “I will never flee,  
even if you know I am doomed to die.  
I was not born a coward.  
I want to have  
all of your loving advice,  
as long as I live.”

[22] Sigerdrifa said, “I advise you first,  
that you behave faultlessly  
with regard to your kin.

Don't avenge yourself on them,  
even if they give you cause—  
or your bad name will lead to your death.

[23] "I'll give you more advice:

Never swear an oath,  
unless your words are true.  
The grim rope of a hangman  
waits for the oath-breaker,  
the fate of a liar is agony.

[24] "I'll give you a third bit of advice.

You should not speak with fools  
at public events.  
An unwise man will often say  
worse things  
than he realizes.

[25] "You'll lose everything  
if you stay silent when you're mocked.

You will seem like a coward,  
or the slander will seem true.  
A reputation is dangerous,  
unless you earn yourself a good one.  
So wait for another day  
to kill a fool who mocks you,  
and then repay him for his lie.

{258} [26] "I'll give you advice a fourth time.

If an evil sorceress  
offers you lodging on your journey,  
it is better to keep going  
than to stay with her—

even if darkness sets on you outside.

- [27] “Warriors need  
prudent eyes,  
if they wish to wage battles.  
Often witches wise in magic  
will sit near a road, dulling  
men’s sword-blades—and their minds.
- [28] “I’ll give you a fifth shred of advice.  
If you see a pretty woman  
sitting on a bench,  
don’t let that woman  
into your dreams—  
don’t try to seduce a woman.
- [29] “I’ll advise you a sixth thing:  
If, in the course of drinking,  
men become drunk,  
do not fight your enemy  
while you are drunk.  
Wine steals the wits of many.
- [30] “Often a night  
of song and beer  
has caused men unhappiness;  
it’s sometimes caused their death,  
it’s sometimes gotten them cursed.  
Drunkenness has caused untold sorrows.
- [31] “I’ll give you a seventh bit of advice.  
If you dispute a case  
with courageous men,  
it is better to fight them right away

than wait for them to burn you  
inside your own home.

{259} [32] “I’ll give you advice an eighth time.

You should avoid evil,  
and stay a long way away from lying.  
Do not seduce a girl,  
nor any man’s wife—  
do not encourage women’s looseness.

[33] “I’ll give you advice a ninth time.

Respect a dead body,  
whether you find it on the ground,  
whether the death was from sickness,  
or drowning at sea,  
or men’s violence.

[34] “Clean the bodies

of the dead,  
wash their hands and head,  
and comb and dry them  
before you put them in a coffin,  
then wish them a good rest.

[35] “I’ll give you a tenth bit of advice.

You should never believe  
the oaths of your enemy’s son.  
If you have killed his brother,  
or slain his father,  
then there’s a wolf in that young man,  
even if he accepts your money.

[36] “Disputes and fights

are never forgotten,

and no one forgets sorrow.

Every man needs

his wits and his weapons

if he wants to have his way.

[37] “I’ll give you an eleventh bit of advice:

Avoid evil,

whatever path you take.

I don’t think you’ll live long,

prince of warriors—

great battles are before you.”

## **{260} *Brot af Sigurtharkvithu* (Fragment of a Poem about Sigurth)**

As its name implies, *Brot af Sigurtharkvithu* ("Fragment of a Poem about Sigurth") is incomplete, the result of many of its first pages being torn out of the manuscript. To judge from *Volsunga saga*, which was written when the lost parts of the poem were available, we are missing a story that goes something like the following: Sigurth did not marry the Valkyrie Sigerdrifa, but instead married Guthrun and pledged brotherhood with her brothers, Gunnar, Hogni, and Gotthorm (this agrees with the poem, st. 17). Afterwards he courted the Valkyrie Brynhild on behalf of his brother-in-law Gunnar (and disguised as him) and even slept in her bed, but he laid a sword between them in bed so as not to betray his brother-in-law's trust (agreeing with the poem, st. 19). Long after marrying Gunnar, Brynhild became enraged when she learned of the deception, and called for Gunnar and his brothers to kill Sigurth. The youngest brother, Gotthorm, was given a magical potion to drive him into a frenzy in order to commit the deed (suggested in the poem, st. 4). Brynhild seems to have incited Gunnar to kill Sigurth on the pretext that Sigurth would have become more prominent than Gunnar and his brothers, and threatened their possession of their own ancestral kingdom of the Goths (see the poem, st. 7–8).

Judging from the amount of narrative that is missing from the poem, from the physical size of the gap in the manuscript, and from the fact that *Sigurtharkvitha en skamma* is actually quite long in spite of its name (which translates literally as "The Short Poem of Sigurth," implying the existence of a longer one), we must infer that this fragment was part of a very long poem. The part that survives is only the very end, telling of the events just before and just after the murder of Sigurth. The killing itself is not directly told; the poem skips from the tense moments before the murder (st. 1–4), to the conversations of Guthrun with her brothers and Brynhild after the murder (st. 5–11), to the surprisingly intimate portraits of guilt-laden grief and rage felt by Gunnar and Brynhild the following night and morning (st. 12–19). At the end of the poem, a prose note acknowledges the existence of different traditions concerning the killing of Sigurth.

{261} *Brot af Sigurtharkvithu*

Hogni said:

- [1]     “... WHAT INJURY HAS SIGURTH DONE  
to you  
that you would wish to kill  
that trusty king?”
- [2]     Gunnar said, “Sigurth  
has sworn oaths to me,  
he’s sworn oaths to me,  
and all of them were lies.  
He deceived me  
when he should have kept  
all his oaths  
like an honorable man.”
- [3]     Hogni said, “It’s Brynhild  
who’s egged you on.  
She’s made you think about  
causing such cruel sorrow.  
She won’t stand for Guthrun  
to have such a man as Sigurth—  
and she grows impatient  
of life with you.”
- [4]     They cooked wolf-meat,  
they chopped up snake-meat,  
they gave wolf-meat  
to Gotthorm.  
And thus they made the

young man thirst for violence,  
made him dare to lay hands  
on the wise Sigurth.

- [5] Guthrun, Gjuki's daughter,  
stood outside,  
and seeing her brothers return,  
she asked them:

"Where is Sigurth?  
Where is my king,  
{262} who rode out  
before you, brothers?"

- [6] Only Hogni  
dared give her an answer:  
"We cut Sigurth  
apart with swords.  
Now his gray horse  
stays near the man's body."

- [7] Brynhild, Buthli's daughter,  
said this to them:  
"You brothers shall take joy  
in your weapons and lands.  
Sigurth would have taken  
it all for himself,  
if you'd allowed him to live  
even a little longer.

- [8] "It would have been unwise  
if you allowed Sigurth  
to take your father Gjuki's lands  
and rule the Goths,

when Gjuki has  
five sons,  
five princes,  
all of them fierce fighters.”

[9] Then Brynhild laughed—  
all the walls echoed—  
it was the only time she laughed  
with a whole heart:  
“You brothers will enjoy  
your lives and lands a long time,  
now that you have slain  
that bold lord of warriors.”

[10] Guthrun, daughter of Gjuki,  
said this to her:  
“You speak so many  
wretched words, Brynhild.  
{263} Woe awaits Gunnar,  
the killer of Sigurth—  
my husband’s brave heart  
will be avenged.

[11] “Sigurth was killed  
south of the Rhine;  
but a raven screamed  
in the trees up above:  
‘Attila will bloody  
his weapons in you;  
your broken oaths  
will destroy you.’”

[12] The evening wore on,

and there was much drinking.  
Everything was discussed  
that had happened that day,  
then everyone retreated to bed  
and fell asleep.

[13] Gunnar alone was awake  
longer than the others.  
His feet stirred restlessly,  
his mind stirred restlessly;  
the warrior  
was remembering  
what the birds said  
in the woods—  
what the raven had said,  
and an eagle, when they rode home.

[14] Brynhild, the Valkyrie,  
Buthli's daughter,  
woke up a little  
before the sun, and said:  
"Am I angered or soothed?  
I don't know, but I'm troubled.  
I must speak it aloud,  
or let it be."

{264} [15] Everyone was silent  
when Brynhild spoke up;  
few could understand  
her intentions  
when Brynhild wept,  
and began to speak

about the killing  
she had asked them to commit:

[16] “Gunnar, I had  
a nightmare last night:  
everyone in this hall died,  
and I slept in a cold bed.  
But you, fierce warrior,  
kept walking sadly on,  
tied up in chains,  
you entered an enemy’s camp.  
I foresee  
that all you Niflungs  
will lose your power—  
you cursed oathbreakers.

[17] “Did you forget, Gunnar,  
when you and Sigurth both  
blended your blood  
in a pledge of brotherhood?  
Now you have repaid  
all his good with your evil—  
Sigurth, who let you  
be the foremost.

[18] “I tested him  
when that bold man  
rode to woo me  
in the circle of flame—  
I remember  
how faithfully  
that noble young man

kept *his* promises.

{265} [19]    “That wealthy king  
laid a sword between us,  
a killer’s tool  
decorated with gold.  
That sword’s blade  
was hardened in flame  
and tempered  
in drops of poison.”

Concerning the Death of Sigurth: This poem tells of the death of Sigurth, and in this version it is told that he was murdered outdoors, but some people say that he was killed in his own bed. But the Germans say that they killed Sigurth out in the forest, and in *Guthrunarkvitha II* it says that Sigurth and the sons of Gjuki had ridden to a council when Sigurth was killed. But everyone agrees that Gjuki’s sons betrayed his trust, and that Sigurth was killed while unsuspecting and unarmed.

## **{266} *Guthrunarkvitha I* (The First Poem of Guthrun)**

*Guthrunarkvitha I* (“The First Poem of Guthrun”) provides a compelling picture of mourning, as Guthrun, confronted with the death of her husband Sigurth, is too shocked to weep. Many men and women attempt to comfort her by telling her of their own sorrows, but eventually she is only able to weep when she embraces her dead husband’s body.

## *Guthrunarkvitha I*

Guthrun sat by her dead husband Sigurth. She did not cry, as other women do, but she was nearly bursting with sorrow. Both men and women came to her to comfort her, but it was not easy to do. People say that Guthrun ate some of the dragon Fafnir's heart, and from doing so, she learned how to understand the language of birds. What follows is also composed about Guthrun:

- [1]     **G**UTHRUN WAS READY  
for death, long ago,  
when she sat in sorrow  
next to Sigurth's corpse.  
She did not weep,  
she did not wring her hands,  
she did not scream  
like other women do.
- [2]     Wise noblemen  
came to her.  
They tried to offer  
some comfort to her.  
But Guthrun could not  
find the comfort of weeping,  
and her chest was nearly  
bursting with sorrow.
- [3]     The wives of these nobles,  
born to high families,  
sat next to Guthrun,  
{267} decorated in gold.  
Each one of them  
told of her life's sorrows,

each one told of  
the worst she had endured.

- [4] Then Gjaflaug,  
Guthrun's aunt, spoke:  
"I live with less joy  
than anyone else on earth.  
I have endured  
the deaths of five husbands,  
two daughters,  
three sisters,  
and eight brothers,  
and only I survive."

- [5] But Guthrun could not  
find the comfort of weeping.  
She was too miserable  
over the death of her son,  
too miserable  
at the sight of her dead husband.

- [6] Then Herborg,  
queen of Hunland, spoke:  
"I have a worse pain  
to tell about.  
All seven of my sons,  
together with my husband,  
fell in battle  
south of here.

- [7] "My father and mother,  
and four of my brothers,  
they all died

in a windstorm at sea,  
the hard waves  
came over the ship's side.

{268} [8]      "I had to dress their bodies,  
I had to dig their graves,  
I had to handle  
their funerals myself.  
I endured all of this  
within less than half a year,  
and not a single person  
said a word to comfort me.

[9]      "And within six months,  
I was taken prisoner,  
made a captive,  
led into slavery.  
I was forced to dress  
and tie the shoes  
of my lord's wife  
every morning.

[10]      "She hated me  
from jealousy,  
she beat me  
savagely.  
I have never known  
a better lord,  
I have never known  
a worse lady."

[11]      But Guthrun could not  
find the comfort of weeping.

She was too miserable  
over the death of her son,  
too miserable  
at the sight of her dead husband.

[12] Gullrond, Guthrun's sister,  
said to Gjaflaug:  
"Foster-mother,  
although you're wise,  
you don't know how  
to comfort a young widow."  
{269} She advised them not  
to cover the dead man's body.

[13] She lifted the bedcloths  
from Sigurth's body  
and laid his head  
on Guthrun's knees:  
"Look at your beloved!  
Put your mouth to his,  
embrace your husband  
as you did when he lived."

[14] Guthrun cast  
a single glance on him,  
she saw her husband's hair  
dripping with blood,  
she saw the fire  
in his eyes dimmed,  
she saw her beloved's chest  
split by a sword-wound.

[15] Guthrun sank back

upon her pillow,  
her hair shaking loose,  
her cheeks turning red,  
and a long rain of tears  
fell on her knees.

[16] Then Guthrun,  
daughter of Gjuki, wept.  
She wept, the tears  
poured from her eyes,  
and the flock of geese  
which she kept outside  
screamed loudly  
in response.

[17] Then Gullrond,  
daughter of Gjuki, spoke:  
“I think the love  
between the two of you  
{270} was the greatest  
of all couples’ on the earth.  
You had no joy,  
whether at home  
or outside,  
unless he was by your side.”

[18] Guthrun said, “My Sigurth  
was, next to my brothers,  
like a garlic stalk  
towering above the grass.  
He was like a bright jewel  
set in a crown,

a precious stone  
to mark a king's forehead.

[19] "Even kings agreed  
that I, as Sigurd's wife, was better,  
higher than all the Valkyries  
who serve Odin.  
But I've become  
as little as  
a leaf in the forest,  
now that Sigurth has fallen.

[20] "I looked in the hall,  
I looked in our bed  
for my beloved,  
but it was the sons of Gjuki,  
my brothers,  
who caused my pain,  
it is they who caused  
their sister to weep so bitterly.

[21] "You, my brothers,  
you will be just as bad at ruling  
your lands as you were  
at keeping your oaths.  
And you, Gunnar,  
you'll never enjoy the treasure.  
Those rings  
{271} will be your death,  
because you swore  
false oaths to Sigurth.

[22] "There was once

so much joy in our garden,  
when my beloved Sigurth  
saddled Grani,  
and the two of you  
went to woo Brynhild,  
that wretched creature  
with her evil luck.”

[23] Then Brynhild,  
Buthli’s daughter, spoke:  
“Let me also lose  
my husband  
and my children!  
I am the one who  
made you weep,  
made you talk like this.”

[24] Then Gullrond,  
daughter of Gjuki, spoke:  
“Silence, you curse on this people!  
No more of these words.  
You have always caused  
misery for our noble family.  
Everyone wishes you  
a bad end;  
you have been the sorrow  
of seven kings,  
and the betrayer  
of all women.”

[25] Then Brynhild,  
daughter of Buthli, spoke:

“Attila, alone,  
causes all this distress,  
he is my brother,  
born to my father Buthli.

{272} [26] “It began when we two,  
brother and sister,  
looked upon Sigurth,  
loaded with Fafnir’s gold.  
I have paid  
for that vision now,  
that vision of wealth  
which thrills me still.”

[27] Brynhild,  
daughter of Buthli,  
leaned on the wall,  
she summoned her strength,  
but fire burned in her eyes  
and she snorted venomously  
when she saw the wounds  
of Sigurth.

Guthrun then departed for the forests in the wilderness, and walked all the way to Denmark, where she stayed with Thora, daughter of Hakon, for three and a half years. Brynhild did not wish to survive Sigurth, and she ordered eight of her slaves and five of her slavewomen killed. Then she stabbed herself with Sigurth’s sword, as is told in *Sigurtharkvitha en skamma*.

## {273} *Sigurtharkvitha en skamma* (A Short Poem of Sigurth)

*Sigurtharkvitha en skamma* (“A Short Poem of Sigurth”) is one of the longest poems preserved in the *Codex Regius*, and it is probably among the younger poems in the Poetic Edda. Its length is in spite of its title, which implies that the surviving *Brot af Sigurtharkvithu* must be the remains of a narrative poem that was very long. This poem gives us an abbreviated version of the tale of Sigurth’s marriage to Guthrun, of his life with her and her brothers (Gunnar, Hogni, and Gotthorm), and of Sigurth’s death at the hands of Gotthorm. In the version of the tale told in this poem, Brynhild’s motivation for wanting Sigurth dead appears to be simple jealousy, although she hints that Sigurth disguised himself as Gunnar when wooing her (st. 36), and that this must be avenged. Indeed, the largest constituent part of the poem (st. 50–70) comprises Brynhild’s regrets at not being married to Sigurth, her warnings to Gunnar and Guthrun about their own dark future, and her commandments for the lavish funeral that she orders for Sigurth and for herself.

*Sigurtharkvitha en skamma*

- [1]     **I**T WAS LONG AGO  
when Sigurth visited Gjuki—  
that young Volsung  
had killed a dragon.  
He and Gjuki's sons,  
Gunnar and Hogni,  
became blood brothers—  
those bold men swore oaths.
- [2]     They offered him a wife  
and abundant treasure.  
It was Guthrun they offered,  
their sister—  
for many days  
young Sigurth  
drank and talked  
with the sons of Gjuki.
- {274} [3]     Then they departed  
to woo Brynhild,  
and Sigurth came along  
with them on that journey;  
it was young Sigurth  
who showed them the way.  
That bride should have been his,  
but that was not his fate.
- [4]     Sigurth, that famous Hun,  
laid a naked sword,

his sharp weapon,  
between them in the bed.  
He never did  
kiss that woman,  
he never did  
hold her in his arms.  
Sigurth remembered  
she was promised to Gunnar.

[5] That lady had never  
known sorrow,  
her life had contained  
not a hint of sadness.  
That innocent girl  
suspected no wrongdoing,  
but the cruel Norns  
intended otherwise for her.

[6] She sat alone  
in the evening of that day,  
and she spoke  
openly, plainly:  
“I will have Sigurth—  
I will hold that young lord  
in my arms,  
or I will starve.

[7] “Well, so I’ve spoken,  
but now I regret those words.  
He is married to Guthrun,  
{275} I am married to Gunnar;  
the cruel Norns will make us

suffer forever.”

[8] Later, Brynhild  
would often take walks,  
lonely, sorrowing,  
over ice and snow,  
every evening,  
thinking of Guthrun  
in bed with Sigurth, thinking  
of Sigurth beneath the sheets,  
the Hunnish prince  
making love to another wife.

[9] “I am deprived  
of that man, and of all joy.  
I must seek my comfort  
in cruel thoughts.”

[10] She took her hatred  
and encouraged murder:  
“Gunnar! You will lose  
your lands, and even me,  
to Sigurth. And how could I  
ever love that man?

[11] “I will go home  
to where I dwelled before,  
I will go back to be  
among my own family,  
and go again into long sleep,  
unless you kill Sigurth  
and prove yourself better  
than all other kings.

- [12] “And let the wolf-pup  
follow the wolf to Hel!  
You shouldn’t be so foolish  
as to nourish his son.  
You won’t have to worry  
{276} so much about vengeance,  
if you kill the son  
together with the father.”
- [13] Gunnar was sad  
and downtrodden:  
he was anxious,  
he sat all day,  
he knew that he didn’t  
at all want to do  
the thing he knew  
he most *had* to do,  
the thing that would  
profit him the most.  
But he thought the death  
of Sigurth would be bad;  
he knew that Sigurth  
would be a great loss.
- [14] He thought long,  
he thought anxiously,  
he thought of the shame,  
the unprecedented shame  
that would be his—  
the shame of a man left by his wife.  
So he went for advice

to his brother Hogni,  
and brought him into his confidence—  
there was a faithful friend.

[15] Gunnar said, “I think  
Brynhild, daughter of Buthli,  
is better than all other women,  
she is the pride of all women.  
And I would rather  
lose my own life  
than lose such a treasure  
as this wife is to me.

[16] “Do you want to betray  
a man, to increase our wealth?  
{277} It would be good  
to control Sigurth’s treasure.  
If we had so much gold,  
would our lives  
not be happier,  
more leisurely?”

[17] Bold Hogni  
answered his brother:  
“What a shameful deed  
you consider!  
To break our oaths,  
our sworn oaths,  
the words we pledged,  
with violence!

[18] “I know of no happier  
people in all the world,

as long as we brothers  
and our father rule the Goths,  
and that excellent Hun,  
Sigurth, lives with us.  
Nor do I know of any  
mightier men on earth.  
Let us and him  
raise our sons together,  
let us increase  
our good families.

[19] “And yet I know  
what lies behind all this:  
the ugly jealousy  
of Brynhild!”

[20] Gunnar said, “Let us  
prepare Gotthorm,  
our young brother,  
to do the killing.  
He was too young to swear  
a pledge to Sigurth—  
{278} he has no oath to break,  
no faithful promises to keep.”

[21] Young Gotthorm  
was easily convinced.  
His sword pierced Sigurth’s  
hard, heroic heart.

[22] The dying Sigurth  
rose from his bed;  
he threw his sword

at the young man.  
His fierce iron blade,  
his good sword Gram,  
flew shining from his hand,  
and cut down Gotthorm.

[23] The boy  
was split in two:  
his head and hands  
fell one way,  
his feet and hips  
fell another.

[24] Guthrun was asleep,  
lying blithely in bed  
at Sigurth's side,  
sorrowless and safe.  
But she awoke  
to the cold death of her hopes,  
she awoke in a pool  
of her husband's blood.

[25] She wrung her hands  
in uncontrollable sorrow;  
but Sigurth rose pridefully,  
and he spoke to his wife:  
"Don't weep so sorely,  
Guthrun, dear wife!  
You're a young woman—  
and your brothers still live.

{279} [26] "Our young son,  
my heir, Sigmund,

still lives, but he cannot  
flee his enemies' hall.

And your brothers  
have cursed themselves  
with sorrow and shame  
for this treacherous act.

[27] "But your brothers  
will never have such a son  
as mine, even if they  
have seven sons apiece.  
I know exactly  
who has engineered this:  
it was for Brynhild alone  
that they brought you this misery.

[28] "She has more love for me  
than for anyone on earth,  
but I never gave Gunnar  
a reason to think I was untrue.  
I respected their marriage,  
I respected our oaths.  
Let no one ever say  
I was his wife's lover."

[29] And so Guthrun lost her joy,  
and her husband lost his life.  
She wrung her hands  
in uncontrollable sorrow,  
she screamed, and the echo  
of her scream echoed far,  
and the geese in the field

flew off shrieking.

[30] And Brynhild,  
daughter of Buthli,  
laughed one time  
with all her heart,  
when, lying in her bed,  
{280} she heard the scream  
of Guthrun, Sigurth's  
broken-hearted wife.

[31] King Gunnar  
spoke to her grimly:  
"You hateful woman,  
you aren't laughing  
so happily  
about good news.  
Why are you so pale,  
why do you look so deathly,  
you creator of cruelties?  
I think you're near death.

[32] "Will you be  
worth it, woman,  
when we fight your brother,  
Attila, before your eyes?  
You will see the wounds  
bleed red from your brother,  
you will have to tend  
to his gruesome injuries."

[33] "No one is afraid  
of you," said Brynhild.

“I think you’ve committed  
your last murder, and Attila  
won’t care for your threats.  
He will live longer  
than you, Gunnar,  
and he’ll always be stronger.

[34] “I will tell you, Gunnar,  
you yourself know this well,  
how you and your brothers  
were brought to these deeds.  
When I was young,  
without responsibility,  
and wealthy, I lived happily  
at my brother Attila’s home.

{281} [35] “I never wished  
to marry a husband,  
before you sons of Gjuki  
rode to our home.  
I saw three kings  
on horseback—  
it would have been better  
if you’d stayed at home.

[36] “I promised myself  
to the man who sat  
on Grani’s back,  
loaded with gold.  
His brave eyes  
were not like yours,  
he did not resemble you

in any way.

But still, you all  
had the look of kings.

[37] “My brother Attila  
told me in private  
that I would have no home,  
no possessions and no land,  
nothing of what  
was promised to me,  
of the inheritance given  
to me in my youth,  
unless I allowed myself  
to marry a man.

[38] “I doubted  
for a long time. I wondered  
whether I should be a warrior,  
leave corpses on the battlefield,  
whether I should wear armor  
and disobey my brother.  
I would have become  
famous all over,  
I would have killed  
and saddened many men.

{282} [39] “From then on  
our peace was destined to end.  
I coveted  
the treasures of gold,  
the precious things  
that Sigurth owned.

I did not covet  
the wealth of another man.

[40] “I loved only one man,  
and never another,  
this Valkyrie’s heart  
was faithful.

My brother Attila will  
know this is true,  
when he learns  
of my death here.

[41] “He will learn  
that his weary sister  
would not live with you, a man  
I ought not to have married.  
And then he will decide  
to avenge my sorrows.”

[42] Gunnar rose up,  
the king of the Niflungs,  
and he embraced  
his wife around her neck.  
Then, one after another,  
he and his household  
tried with all their heart  
to comfort her.

[43] But Brynhild turned away  
from anyone who came to her,  
she would not let anyone  
dissuade her from killing herself.

[44] Gunnar went to

Hogni and said:

{283} “I want everyone to go to her,  
your men and mine,  
for there is great need now.  
If my wife dies,  
more misfortune will come,  
and we will be  
at the mercy of fate.”

[45] Hogni, his bold brother,  
offered him an answer:  
“Let no one try to talk her  
out of killing herself,  
let the cursed woman  
never be reborn!  
She was the runt  
born to her mother,  
always destined  
to destroy our happiness,  
to bring sorrow  
to many men’s lives.”

[46] Unsatisfied,  
her husband Gunnar  
went to where Brynhild  
was giving away her wealth.

[47] She searched through  
all her belongings,  
she killed her maids  
and her serving-girls,  
she put a suit of armor on.

She was all in a rage,  
and finally she put Sigurth's sword  
through her own heart.

[48] She sank down  
to the pillow at her side,  
and, mortally wounded,  
she began to speak:

[49] "Come here,  
anyone who wants  
{284} to get gold or gifts  
from me.  
I'll give you all  
fine treasures,  
fine jewelry and clothes,  
fine tapestries."

[50] Everyone was silent  
when they heard her speak,  
till finally they  
gave her an answer:  
"Enough have died,  
we want to live.  
Even for serving-girls,  
life is more joy than death."

[51] But the thoughtful  
young queen spoke,  
clad in linen, and  
she made this response:  
"I do not wish  
for any of you to be killed,

to follow me for my sake,  
unwillingly.

[52] “Still, there will be  
fewer treasures,  
fewer jewels  
glowing on your bones,  
when your souls  
come to Hel with mine.

[53] “Sit down, Gunnar!  
I will tell you  
how your lovely bride  
lost her hope of life.  
The ship of your life  
is still out at sea,  
even if mine  
is coming into harbor.

{285} [54] “You and Guthrun  
will reconcile sooner  
than you expect.  
She’ll remarry, and besides  
her new husband, she’ll have  
memories of her first one.

[55] “She’ll give birth to a girl,  
Sigurth’s daughter.  
She will be brighter  
than the clear daylight sun,  
brighter than a ray of sunshine.  
Svanhild will be her name.

[56] “You’ll marry Guthrun

to a wealthy man,  
but she'll cause the deaths  
of many men.  
She will not be  
willingly married,  
but she will  
marry Attila,  
son of Buthli,  
my own brother.

[57] "I remember so much,  
I remember my misfortunes,  
how you betrayed me  
and caused my sorrow,  
how I was deprived of joy  
for the rest of my life.

[58] "Soon you will want  
to marry my sister,  
Oddrun, but Attila  
will not marry her to you.  
Still the two of you  
will meet in secret,  
and she will love you  
like I should have,  
{286} if the two of us  
had been truly fated to love.

[59] "Attila will pay you back  
with a fierce punishment,  
he'll lock you inside  
a suffocating snake-pit.

- [60]     “But not long after,  
          it will happen  
          that Attila himself  
          will lose his life,  
          his joy,  
          and the lives of his sons.  
          It will be Guthrun  
          who bloodies their bed  
          with a sharp blade,  
          with a vengeful mind.
- [61]     “It would have been better  
          for Guthrun to follow  
          her first husband Sigurth  
          and die with him.  
          But she was never  
          given good advice,  
          and she did not have  
          courage like mine.
- [62]     “I speak in pain now,  
          but I know that she  
          will not lose her life  
          for killing my brother.  
          The high waves  
          will carry her  
          to the lands  
          of King Jonaker.
- [63]     “She will have sons  
          with Jonaker,  
          and raise Svanhild there.

{287} She will marry off Svanhild,  
her daughter  
and Sigurth's.

[64] "The advice of Bikki  
will cause Guthrun grief,  
when Jormunrekk  
kills her daughter Svanhild.  
Sigurth's family  
will come to an end  
when Guthrun weeps  
for its last descendant.

[65] "I will make  
one last request,  
the last request  
of my entire life:  
Let my funeral pyre  
be high and broad,  
let there be  
sufficient room  
for everyone  
who has died with Sigurth.

[66] "Build up the pyre  
with tents and shields,  
with precious dyed cloths  
and foreign treasures.  
Let Sigurth, that Hunnish hero,  
burn alongside me.

[67] "And at Sigurth's  
other side,

burn my servants,  
adorn their bodies with jewels.  
Place two of them at his head,  
and two of his hawks,  
then the funeral  
will be arranged properly.

{288} [68] “And between him and me,  
place the precious blade  
of his sharp sword,  
just like it lay between us  
the last time  
he and I shared a bed,  
when we pledged  
to become husband and wife.

[69] “Do as I say, and  
it won’t be as if some man  
simply died at his home,  
with a single ring to his name.  
If he has such  
a following with him in Hel,  
no one will think  
that he died a poor man.

[70] “He’ll be accompanied  
by five slavegirls,  
and eight slavemen  
captured from good families,  
all the slavemen given to me  
as a young girl by my father;  
that was how

Buthli honored his daughter.

[71] “I have spoken a long time,  
and I would speak longer,  
but the sword in my side  
will not give me more time.  
My voice fails me,  
my wounds sting,  
I have spoken the truth,  
and now I must die.”

## **{289} *Helreith Brynhildar* (Brynhild's Ride to Hel)**

*Helreith Brynhildar* ("Brynhild's Ride to Hel") follows closely on the death of Brynhild in *Sigurtharkvitha en skamma*, describing Brynhild's encounters in Hel following her death on Sigurth's funeral pyre.

## *Helreith Brynhildar*

When Brynhild was dead, they built two funeral pyres. The first was for Sigurth, and it burned first. But Brynhild was placed on another pyre, and her body was on a wagon draped with expensive cloths. It is said that she came driving in this wagon along the road to Hel, and she passed through a farm where a certain giant woman lived. The giant woman said:

[1]     **“Y**OU DON’T GET TO  
ride through  
my rocky lands,  
through my pastures.  
It would be more fitting  
for you to sew a tapestry  
than to come here to visit  
another woman’s husband.

[2]     “Why are you visiting  
my home  
from the land above,  
you two-faced woman?  
You have fed  
human blood  
to the wolves,  
cursed by you.”

Brynhild said:

[3]     “Don’t scold me,  
you bride from the stones,  
even if I did once  
go on Viking raids.  
I think people would say

{290} that I'm the nobler of us two,  
if our ancestry  
were compared."

The giant woman said:

[4] "You were Brynhild,  
daughter of Buthli,  
born into the world  
for the worst luck.  
You have destroyed  
the children of Gjuki,  
changed forever  
their once-happy home."

Brynhild said:

[5] "You are unwise,  
but I am wise in my wagon.  
I will tell you in brief,  
if you want to know  
how Gjuki's sons  
made me into  
a loveless wife  
and an oathbreaker.

[6] "Everyone who knew me  
called me by the name  
'Hild in the Helmet'  
at home in Hlymdalir.  
A man was named Agnar,  
brother of Autha;  
no one would ever  
help him in any way.

- [7]     “A brave king  
ordered the feather-cloaks  
of us eight Valkyries  
to be carried beneath an oak.  
I was twelve years old,  
if you want to know,  
when I gave  
a young prince my oath.
- {291} [8]     “Then I let an old warrior,  
Hjalmgunnar  
of the Gothic lands,  
go to Hel.  
I gave victory to Agnar,  
Autha’s young brother,  
and Odin was intolerably  
angry at me for this.
- [9]     “He closed me up  
behind red and white shields,  
set them in a circle around me  
in Skatalund.  
He said only a man  
who could never  
know fear  
could break my sleep.
- [10]    “And around my  
south-facing hall,  
he kindled  
high-flaming fires;  
only one man

could ride over the flames—  
the one who brought me the gold  
that had lain beneath Fafnir.

[11] “Then that good man,  
that sharer of rings,  
came riding on Grani  
to my foster-father’s hall.  
He alone, the Viking Sigurth,  
seemed better to me  
than every other man  
at that Danish court.

[12] “The two of us  
slept together in one bed,  
not as lovers, but as if  
he were my brother—  
for eight nights  
{292} neither of us  
laid so much as a hand  
upon the other.

[13] “Guthrun, daughter  
of Gjuki, mocked me,  
she said I had slept  
in the arms of Sigurth.  
And when she said it,  
I realized the horrible truth  
of how they wooed me—  
they had tricked me.

[14] “Men and women  
will go on living

for far too many days,  
for far too little joy.  
But as for me and Sigurth,  
we will never be parted,  
never again after death!  
Now sink back down, giant.”

### **{293} *Drap Niflunga* (The Death of the Niflungs)**

*Drap Niflunga* (literally “The Killing of the Niflungs”) is not a poem but a brief prose note that summarizes the death of Gunnar and Hogni, an event that precedes the action of the next poems, and which is related in detail in the poem *Atlakvitha*.

## *Drap Niflunga*

Then Gunnar and Hogni took all the gold that had been Fafnir's. They were not at peace with Attila, because he blamed them for his sister Brynhild's death. But they made peace by giving Attila their sister Guthrun in marriage. They gave Guthrun a magical potion of forgetfulness before she consented to marry Attila. Attila's sons with Guthrun were Erp and Eitil, and Guthrun had her daughter Svanhild by Sigurth.

King Attila later invited Gunnar and Hogni to visit him, and sent his messenger named Vingi or Knefroth. Guthrun suspected Attila meant to harm her brothers, so she sent a message in runes that said they should not come, and as a sign she sent Hogni the ring Andvaranaut with a wolf's hair tied to it.

Gunnar had wooed Oddrun, Attila's sister, but Attila had not given her to him in marriage. So Gunnar had married Glaumvor, and Hogni had married Kostbera, and their sons were Solar and Snaevar and Gjuki.

When Gunnar and Hogni came to Attila, Guthrun asked her sons to beg for her brothers' lives, but they refused. Hogni's heart was cut out, and Gunnar was placed in a pit of snakes. He played a harp and lulled the snakes to sleep, but one of them bit him down to the liver.

## {294} *Atlakvitha* (The Fall of the House of Attila)

*Atlakvitha* (literally “Poem of Attila”) is probably the oldest poem in the Poetic Edda and one of the most memorable and poignant of the heroic poems. It tells of the visit of Gunnar and Hogni to Attila, of their murder by Attila, and finally of Guthrun’s vengeance on Attila when she kills her sons by him. Sigurth is never mentioned, though Gunnar and Hogni do own a great treasure, which the author of *Volsunga saga* understood as Fafnir’s. Read in isolation, the poem seems to imply that Guthrun dies as well as Attila at the end, though the following poems (as well as *Volsunga saga*) tell that she lived.

In the manuscript, *Atlakvitha* is placed after three poems with stories that take place after that of *Atlakvitha*: the poems *Guthrunarkvitha II*, *Guthrunarkvitha III*, and *Oddrunargratr*. In this translation, I have moved *Atlakvitha* before these three, to make the story more chronologically cohesive for those who wish to read the Edda from start to finish. As mentioned in the Introduction, the *Codex Regius* also includes one poem after *Atlakvitha*, called *Atlamal*, which is much longer and much later, and which tells substantially the same story but with many later additions. *Atlamal* is thus excluded from this translation because of its redundancy with *Atlakvitha*.

## *Atlakvitha*

- [1]     **A**TTILA SENT A MESSAGE TO GUNNAR,  
son of Gjuki;  
he picked Knefroth,  
a good man, to take it.  
At the end he came  
to Gunnar's hall,  
where there were warm seats  
by the fire, and good beer.
- [2]     Gjuki's sons were drinking  
when the silent Huns came in;  
the Huns and Goths  
exchanged angry glances.  
{295} But Knefroth the Hun  
sat down on a bench,  
and in a cold voice  
he said to them:
- [3]     "Attila sent me here  
on an errand;  
I have ridden here  
on a fast mare through Mirkwood.  
Attila told me to invite you,  
Gunnar and Hogni,  
to visit his own hall,  
and leave your helmets at home.
- [4]     "Attila will give you shields  
and well-crafted spears;

he will give you golden helmets  
of the Hunnish style.

You'll be given silver saddles,  
fine red cloaks,  
spearpoints, javelins,  
and fast horses.

- [5] "He will let you have the wide,  
fine valley Gnitaeith,  
and steel weapons,  
and golden ships.  
He will let you have great treasures,  
lands by the Dnieper,  
and the famous forest  
that men call Mirkwood."

- [6] Gunnar turned his head to Hogni,  
his brother, and said:  
"What do you advise,  
little brother, when we hear such?  
I don't think there's any  
gold in Gnitaeith  
that we don't have  
the equal of right here."

- {296} [7] Hogni said: "We have seven halls,  
each full of swords;  
the hilt of each sword  
is made of gold.  
I ride the best horse,  
carry the sharpest sword,  
have the best-made bow,

and wear a golden suit of armor,  
I wear a Caesar's  
bright helmet and shield—  
any one of these is better  
than everything the Huns own.

[8] “And what could Guthrun mean,  
when she sends a ring  
with a wolf's hair tied to it?  
I think she is warning us:  
A wolf's hair breaks the circle  
of this fine golden ring,  
and a wolf awaits us  
on our journey, if we take it.”

[9] It was not the advice of his brother,  
nor of his kinsmen,  
nor of his wizards,  
nor of his counselors nor his top men;  
but Gunnar alone decided,  
like a famous king should,  
and he spoke in his meadhall  
with swelling courage:

[10] “Get up, servant,  
send around the golden cups!  
Let the boys  
have a drink of mead.

[11] “A wolf, a predator  
from the forest,  
will have my  
inheritance if I die.

{297} Pale-pelted bears  
will eat our food  
and fight our dogs,  
if I don't come back."

[12] Bold fighters,  
Gunnar's warriors,  
escorted the Huns  
out of Gunnar's hall.  
Hogni's young son  
said to his father:  
"Stay well and wise,  
wherever your courage takes you!"

[13] Those brave men  
rushed across the mountains  
on swift, eager horses,  
through unmapped Mirkwood.  
Hunland trembled  
where those bold men rode;  
they drove their well-trained horses  
on the green plains.

[14] They saw the hall of Attila,  
where Huns stood guard;  
men patrolled  
outside that high hall.  
That Hunnish hall  
was full of seats for drinking,  
of iron-bound shields  
and yellow shields,  
of spearpoints and javelins,

and there sat Attila  
drinking wine;  
his best guards sat outside  
to ensure Gunnar and Hogni  
would not come in  
with flashing spears,  
meaning to start a fight.

{298} [15] Guthrun went to meet  
her brothers when they came in;  
she greeted them both,  
she was gloomy, and drank little.  
She said: “You’re unwise.  
What can you get from fighting  
the Huns, when you’re already  
so rich? Run for your life!

[16] “Brothers, it would have been  
better if you had come in armor,  
in the helmets you left at home,  
if you had sat in your saddles  
on a warm bright day,  
taken the land of Attila,  
and made corpses of these Huns—  
if you had let their Norns weep,  
and given the Valkyries  
a hard day’s work,  
had finished off Attila himself  
in a snake-pit.  
But now the snake-pit  
waits for you.”

- [17]     Gunnar said: “It’s too late now,  
             sister, to gather an army.  
             It’s a long way back  
             to our brave army,  
             over the mountains  
             and the river Rhine.”
- [18]     The Huns seized Gunnar  
             and put him in chains—  
             they’d invited him in friendship,  
             but they tied him up.
- [19]     Hogni didn’t wait;  
             he killed seven with his sword,  
             and shoved an eighth  
             into the fire.  
             {299} That is how a bold man  
             should treat his enemies—  
             the way Hogni did,  
             before he was chained like Gunnar.
- [20]     They asked King Gunnar  
             if he wanted to live,  
             if he would buy his life  
             by telling where his gold was.
- [21]     Gunnar said: “First,  
             I must see Hogni’s bloody heart  
             torn out of his living chest  
             and placed in my hand.  
             Go, take a sword or knife,  
             and cut it out of him.”
- [22]     But they cut out the heart

of Hjalli the slave,  
and put it on a platter,  
and took that to Gunnar.

[23] Gunnar, that lord of men,  
was not fooled. He said:  
“Here I have the heart  
of the coward Hjalli!  
It is nothing like  
my brave brother Hogni’s heart.  
This one trembles  
where it lies on the plate—  
and it trembled twice as much  
in the coward’s chest.”

[24] Hogni laughed  
when they cut out his heart.  
He was a killer;  
he would never weep.  
They put his heart on a plate  
and took it to Gunnar.

{300} [25] Then Gunnar,  
famous leader of spearmen, said:  
“Here I have the heart  
of my bold brother Hogni!  
It is nothing  
like the coward Hjalli’s heart.  
This one barely trembles  
where it lies on the plate—  
and it never trembled at all  
when it was in his chest.

- [26]     “Very well, Attila,  
          now your eyes shall never see  
          where I have hidden  
          the treasure of Fafnir.
- [27]     “I, the King of the Goths,  
          am the only one who knows  
          its hiding place,  
          now that bold Hogni lies dead.  
          I was always in doubt  
          while the two of us lived,  
          but now I know the secret’s safe  
          since I alone live.
- [28]     “Now no one will take  
          that treasure from its hiding place,  
          and it will lie forever  
          beneath the famous river Rhine,  
          where the cursed rings  
          will shine beneath the current  
          rather than on the hands  
          of the Huns’ children!”
- [29]     Attila said: “Put him in the wagon.  
          The prisoner can’t move from his chains.”
- [30]     King Attila,  
          Gunnar’s brother-in-law,  
          rode his horse Glaum,  
          a sword at his side.  
          {301} Noble-born Guthrun  
          spoke to him, stricken,  
          weeping in his hall:

[31] “You deserve what’s coming to you,  
Attila, for breaking  
the oaths you and Gunnar  
swore to each other long ago;  
you swore by the sun to be faithful,  
and by Odin’s hill,  
you swore by the ring of Ull,  
on the day we were wed.”

[32] Nevertheless the horse  
brought Gunnar on the wagon  
to the place prepared  
for his punishment.

[33] They placed Gunnar,  
still alive, in the snake-pit;  
many of the Huns  
were there to watch.  
But Gunnar sat in that pit,  
surrounded by vipers  
and, still feeling bold,  
he played the harp.  
He plucked the strings,  
that brave man—  
that is how to protect  
a treasure from one’s enemies.

[34] Then Attila,  
on a wild horse,  
rode back to his land  
after the murder.  
There was a great noise

of many men on horses,  
his men sang battle-songs  
as they came back home.

{302} [35] Guthrun approached Attila  
at the feast,  
with a gilded cup in hand,  
and she presented it to her husband:  
“Accept this drink, husband,  
here in your hall,  
in glad memory of your wife’s  
departed kinsmen.”

[36] Attila’s halls echoed  
as toasts were drunk;  
all the Huns  
were gathered there in his hall,  
long-bearded fighters,  
they all came in for the feast.

[37] Then lovely Guthrun was hostess,  
she brought everyone a drink,  
the hard-minded lady  
made her guests drunk;  
and then she spoke  
hateful words to Attila:

[38] “Warrior—  
you have chewed  
your own sons’  
raw, bloody hearts,  
mixed with a little honey—  
you have eaten murdered

humans as little treats,  
and sent the plate around your hall.

[39] “Our little boys,  
Erp and Eitil,  
will never again  
run up, drunk,  
and embrace your knees.  
You will never  
see them  
make a spear,  
{303} or comb a mane,  
or sit atop a war-horse.”

[40] The people in the hall  
screamed, made a frightful noise,  
their happiness turned to misery,  
and all the Huns wept.  
All of them except Guthrun,  
for she never wept,  
neither when her brothers  
died fighting like bears,  
nor when she gave death  
to the boys she’d given life.

[41] The beautiful wife of Attila  
now started giving gifts,  
she bestowed golden rings  
on Attila’s warriors.  
She went blithely on,  
distributing shining gold,  
and burdened the Huns

with more riches.

[42] Meanwhile Attila,  
the taste of his sons' flesh still fresh,  
sat, no weapon in hand—  
he'd never suspected Guthrun.  
He thought of how happy they'd been,  
back when they had been  
accustomed to embrace  
in front of everyone.

[43] Later she reddened  
their sheets with his blood,  
held a sword in her murderous hand  
and let the dogs go free.  
Then she barricaded the doors  
and set the hall on fire—  
the Huns died in the flames,  
and her brothers were avenged.

{304} [44] She gave all the Huns  
to the burning flames  
for the murder of Gunnar  
and Hogni in Mirkwood.  
The old timbers cracked and fell,  
their temples fell down,  
all the homes of the Huns burned,  
and their wives inside burned,  
all of them fell, suffocating,  
and succumbed to the hot flames.

[45] The story is now fully told,  
and no woman in armor

has avenged her brothers  
in a like manner since.  
Gorgeous Guthrun killed  
her own husband  
and her two sons,  
before she herself fell dead.

## **{305} *Guthrunarkvitha II* (The Second Poem of Guthrun)**

In *Guthrunarkvitha II* (“The Second Poem of Guthrun”), Guthrun’s husband Attila has killed her brothers Gunnar and Hogni, but she has not yet avenged them (thus contradicting the story of her immediate vengeance told in *Atlakvitha*). Guthrun speaks with a king named Thjothrek, telling him about how her brothers killed Sigurth, and about the tragedies that have befallen her since, including the murder of her brothers by Attila. The poem is fairly straightforward, but the reader should keep in mind that Guthrun is recollecting events told in previous poems, often with slight differences and extra details. For example, Guthrun recalls that her brothers killed Sigurth out of jealousy (Brynhild is not mentioned, except as Attila’s sister), and that Guthrun then wandered away from home, spending three and a half years in the company of Thora, daughter of King Hakon of Denmark, before her brothers and mother found her again and gave her a magical potion to make her forget Sigurth and his murder.

## *Guthrunarkvitha II*

King Thjothrek was with Attila and had lost nearly all his men. Thjothrek and Guthrun spoke of their sorrows to one another. This is what Guthrun told Thjothrek:

[1]     **“M**Y MOTHER GAVE ME BIRTH  
in a royal home.  
I was beautiful, a famous woman.  
I loved my brothers well,  
till my father Gjuki  
adorned me with gold,  
wrapped me in gold,  
and gave me to Sigurth.

[2]     “And my Sigurth,  
compared to my brothers,  
was like a garlic stalk  
that towers above the grass,  
or like a tall stag  
that towers over other beasts,  
{306} or like ember-hued gold  
next to tarnished silver.

[3]     “But my brothers  
hated that my husband  
was a far greater man  
than they were.  
They could not sleep,  
they could barely think,  
till they brought about

the death of Sigurth.

- [4] “I heard weapons clash.  
Grani came home,  
but Sigurth was not  
riding him.  
All the horses  
ran with sweat;  
the murderers  
rode them hard.
- [5] “I wept, and I went  
to speak with Grani,  
to ask Sigurth’s horse  
for news. Grani wept, too,  
he sank to his knees,  
his head drooped in the grass;  
the horse knew  
his lord had fallen.
- [6] “I mulled it over so long,  
I doubted it so long,  
before I asked  
Gunnar about Sigurth.
- [7] “Gunnar’s head drooped,  
and Hogni told me  
of the wounds  
that caused Sigurth’s death:  
‘Your husband, who killed  
Gotthorm, lies dead  
{307} across the river,  
left as food for the wolves.

- [8]     “‘Look for Sigurth  
on the road to the south—  
listen for  
calling ravens,  
screaming eagles,  
howling wolves,  
all enjoying a meal  
of your dead husband.’
- [9]     “‘Oh Hogni,  
why do you want to tell me,  
a grieving widow,  
such horrors?  
I hope ravens will eat  
your own heart,  
far away, across  
lands no one knows of!’
- [10]    “Then Hogni  
answered me,  
that hard-hearted man,  
he spoke with real sorrow:  
‘It will only be  
another reason for you to weep,  
sister, when the ravens  
eat my own heart.’
- [11]    “I left on my own,  
and went into the woods,  
to find what the wolves  
had left of Sigurth.  
I held back my tears—

I didn't wring my hands  
or cry out  
like other women,  
when I sat and starved  
next to my Sigurth.

{308} [12] "That night  
was hatefully dark  
when I sat alone,  
heartbroken, over Sigurth's corpse;  
I would have thought  
the wolves merciful  
if they had  
torn me apart,  
or if I had been burned  
like a pile of birch twigs.

[13] "I departed for the mountains,  
I wandered five days and nights  
till I came to the high-roofed  
hall of Half.

[14] "I stayed with Thora,  
daughter of King Hakon,  
in Denmark  
for three and a half years.  
She tried to comfort me,  
she sewed scenes of  
southern halls and  
Danish swans for me in gold.

[15] "The two of us  
sewed tapestries,

we sewed pictures  
with great skill.  
We sewed warriors fighting,  
and red shields,  
and helmets and swords,  
and proud bands of soldiers.

[16] “We sewed Sigmund’s ships  
departing from shore,  
we sewed golden helmets,  
tall ships,  
we showed in pictures  
how Sigar and Siggeir  
{309} fought in the south,  
on the island of Fyn.

[17] “Then Grimhild,  
my mother,  
queen of the Goths,  
learned what I was doing.  
She stopped her own sewing,  
she summoned her sons  
and she asked  
which of them  
would compensate me  
threefold for my son’s loss,  
who would repay me  
for my husband’s loss.

[18] “Gunnar was willing  
to offer gold  
to put the matter to rest,

and Hogni was, too.  
Then Grimhild told them  
that whoever was willing  
must saddle a horse,  
and fill a wagon,  
ride to me  
with his hawks,  
shoot arrows  
from his bow.

[19] “Valdar the Dane  
went with them, and Jarizleif,  
Eymoth was the third,  
and Jarizkar.  
Those handsome  
Langobardic kings  
came in,  
they had red cloaks,  
tailored shirts of chainmail,  
they had pointed helmets,  
they had swords at their belts,  
and their hair was chestnut.

{310} [20] “Each of them wanted  
to give me treasures,  
to give me treasures,  
and speak pleasant words;  
they wanted to know  
if I would give my brothers  
peace and forgiveness—  
but I was still suspicious.

- [21] “Then Grimhild brought me  
a drinking-horn.  
The drink was eerily cold,  
and I drank it, and forgot everything.  
That drink had been  
enchanted with the earth’s might,  
with the cold sea  
and the blood of her sons.
- [22] “There were all sorts  
of runes in that horn,  
carved there and bloodied,  
I couldn’t read them.  
There was a long sea serpent  
carved on the horn,  
there was an ear of wheat,  
there were animal guts.
- [23] “Many evil things  
were mixed into that beer,  
the blood of all beasts,  
and burned acorns,  
and eagle’s blood,  
and intestines, and  
boiled pig’s liver, all because  
she wanted to make me forget.
- [24] “And I forgot it all,  
when I drank that poison beer.  
In that hall, I forgot  
my husband’s murder.  
And three kings

- {311} came to speak to me,  
but my mother  
spoke up first, and said:
- [25] “‘Guthrun, my daughter,  
I give you gold,  
and all sorts of property,  
golden rings,  
the halls of Hlothver,  
and rich tapestries  
as inheritance  
from your father.
- [26] “‘And more:  
Handy Hunnish girls  
who’ll make golden tapestries  
to please you.  
And more: You alone will have  
the wealth of Buthli—  
you will be adorned with gold,  
and married to Attila.’
- [27] “I said, ‘I don’t want  
to marry this man,  
I don’t want Brynhild’s brother  
for my husband.  
It would not suit me  
to marry Attila,  
the son of Buthli,  
nor to bear his children.’
- [28] “Grimhild said, ‘Don’t blame  
Attila for your loss,

we were the ones  
who did you wrong.  
When you have sons  
with Attila, you'll feel  
as happy as if Sigmund  
and Sigurth both lived.'

{312} [29] "I said, 'Mother, I cannot  
find joy in life,  
I have no wish  
to marry Attila,  
since the ravens  
and the wolves  
drank the blood  
from my Sigurth's heart.'

[30] "Grimhild said, 'Attila is  
a noble-born man;  
he is the foremost of kings  
in every respect.  
You will marry him,  
and be his wife till old age—  
or you will be forever  
without a husband, if you refuse.'

[31] "I said, 'Do not  
plead the case  
of this hateful family  
to me, not so eagerly.  
Attila will cause  
Gunnar great harm;  
he will cut

the heart of Hogni out.  
And then I will not rest  
till I have taken  
the life  
of my husband.'

[32] "Grimhild wept  
when she responded,  
when she heard  
of the death of her sons,  
of the great wounds  
to her sons:

[33] "'I will give you still  
more lands and men—  
have Vinbjorg and Valbjorg,  
{313} if you will take them!  
Take them for yours forever  
and enjoy them, daughter!'

[34] "I said, 'I will take  
this king for my husband,  
since my own nearest kin  
have forced this choice on me.  
This man does not take me  
by my own free will;  
the sons of my brothers' killer  
will not be safe from me.'

[35] "Soon each of the warriors  
mounted up on horseback,  
and I, the royal bride,  
was driven away in a wagon.

We rode seven days  
through a cold land,  
and the next seven  
we sailed over the sea,  
and in the next seven days  
we walked on dry land.

[36] “Then guardsmen  
in their high tower  
drew up the gates,  
and we rode into the town.

[37] “Attila watched me closely;  
I must have seemed  
full of hate to him,  
thinking of what I had foreseen.

[38] “Attila said, ‘The Norns  
have sent me a bad dream.’  
He said that he wanted me to  
interpret his nightmare:  
‘I thought I saw you,  
Guthrun, Gjuki’s daughter,  
{314} stab me with a sword  
treacherously.’

[39] “I said, ‘When you dream  
of iron, it’s an omen of fire,  
to dream of a woman’s wrath  
is an omen of pride and conceit.  
I’ll add wood to the fire  
to chase away the evil,  
I will gently doctor you,

though I hate you.'

[40] "Attila said, 'I thought  
I saw branches burn,  
branches that I wanted  
to let grow in my garden;  
they were severed from their roots  
and reddened in blood,  
they were brought to my table,  
and offered to me for food.

[41] "I thought that some hawks  
flew from my hand,  
they flew unhappily  
to a horrible final end.  
I thought I ate their hearts,  
chewed them up with honey—  
I was sorrowful,  
I was covered in blood.

[42] "I thought that I let  
some dogs loose from my hands,  
and they both  
howled joylessly.  
I thought I saw  
their flesh die and rot,  
and I was forced  
to eat them.'

{315} [43] "I said, 'This means that  
men will sacrifice,  
cut the heads  
from some white beasts.

Those sacrificial victims  
will be kept a few nights,  
and before the dawn  
the men will eat them.'

[44] "Attila said, 'I lay in bed,  
but I could not sleep,  
my sleep was restless;  
I remember it clearly.'"

### **{316} *Guthrunarkvitha III* (The Third Poem of Guthrun)**

Like *Guthrunarkvitha II*, this poem takes place in a timeline in which Guthrun's brothers Gunnar and Hogni have been killed by her husband Attila, but she has not yet avenged them. In this short poem, she has been seen talking with Thjothrek (as she does in the preceding *Guthrunarkvitha II*), and this leads Herkja, a concubine of Attila's, to insinuate to Attila that Guthrun and Thjothrek are sleeping together (medieval Norse society placed a premium on the sexual fidelity of wives but not husbands). Guthrun is proven innocent by the ordeal of the boiling kettle. In this ordeal, a stone is placed at the bottom of a kettle that is full of boiling water and specially blessed for this purpose; the accused woman must stick her hand into the kettle and pull the stone out without any signs of injury. If her arm is burned in the kettle, she is presumed guilty.

### *Guthrunarkvitha III*

Herkja was the name of one of Attila's servingwomen; she had been his concubine. She told Attila that she had seen Guthrun and Thjothrek together, and this made Attila very unhappy. Then Guthrun said:

[1]     **“W**HAT IS BOTHERING YOU,  
Attila, son of Buthli?  
Are you sad in spirit?  
Why do you never laugh?  
It would seem better  
to your noble men,  
if you would speak with them,  
and look at me.”

[2]     Attila said, “It worries me,  
Guthrun, daughter of Gjuki,  
what Herkja said to me  
here in my hall:  
that you and Thjothrek  
slept together  
{317} under one roof,  
that you played in the sheets.”

[3]     Guthrun said, “I will swear  
oaths to you about this,  
I'll swear on that holy  
white stone,  
that Thjothrek  
and I have never  
had relations

as men and women do.

[4] “I might have embraced  
that lord of warriors,  
that fearless man,  
one time,  
but our conversation  
was about another matter,  
when the two of us  
whispered about our sorrows.

[5] “Thjothrek came here  
with thirty men,  
and he is the only one  
of those thirty now living.  
And as for me, you killed  
my brothers, and their warriors,  
you took all my family  
away from me.

[6] “Send for King Saxi  
from the south,  
he’ll know how to bless  
the kettle for the trial by ordeal.”

[7] Seven hundred men  
came to Attila’s hall  
to see the king’s wife  
pass the ordeal of the kettle.

{318} [8] Guthrun said, “Gunnar  
will not come to me,  
I cannot call on Hogni,  
I’ll never see my brothers again.

Hogni would have avenged  
this insult with his sword.

But now I must prove  
my innocence on my own.”

- [9] She thrust her beautiful hand  
to the bottom of the boiling kettle,  
and she took the gemstones  
that lay at the bottom.  
“Now look, everyone!  
I am proven innocent  
in the holiest of ways,  
and look how the kettle boils!”

- [10] Then Attila laughed  
with a whole heart  
when he saw Guthrun’s  
hands were uninjured.  
“Now Herkja  
will have to brave the ordeal,  
the one who insulted  
Guthrun’s good name!”

- [11] No one pitied  
Herkja, when they saw  
her hands burned  
in the boiling kettle.  
And they drowned her  
in a stinking swamp—  
she got that for causing  
Guthrun’s trouble.

### **{319} *Oddrunargratr* (The Weeping of Oddrun)**

This poem, which was probably composed fairly late, involves Oddrun, a sister of Brynhild and Attila who had an ill-fated love affair with Gunnar. In this poem, Oddrun assists another woman named Borgny in giving birth to twins, and then Oddrun proceeds to tell her tragic love story. The poem suggests that this affair was part of Attila's motivation in killing Gunnar, and that Borgny's otherwise unknown lover Vilmund was the killer of Hogni (st. 8).

## *Oddrunargratr*

### **Concerning Borgny and Oddrun**

A king was named Heithrek, his daughter was named Borgny, and her lover was named Vilmund. Borgny struggled to give birth till Oddrun, who was Attila's sister and Gunnar's lover, came to her. This poem is about that story.

- [1]     **I** HEARD TELL  
in old sagas  
that a woman came  
to Hunland,  
to do what no other woman  
on earth could do,  
to assist Heithrek's daughter  
in childbirth.
- [2]     Oddrun, Attila's sister,  
had learned that  
this woman had  
a hard pregnancy.  
She went out  
for her horse  
in the stable,  
set her black saddle on him.
- [3]     She rode over  
the dark swamps,  
she came to the high hall,  
{320} and there she dismounted.  
She took the saddle  
from the worn-out horse,

she walked across the hall  
to its end,  
and then she said  
this to the people there:

- [4] “What is the news?  
What is the latest  
that has happened  
in the land of the Huns?”  
A servant said: “Borgny  
is pregnant, and in pain.  
She is your friend, Oddrun,  
and needs your help.”

- [5] Oddrun said, “Who  
is the father?  
Who caused Borgny  
to have this difficulty?”

- [6] The servant said, “Vilmund  
was the name of her lover;  
he spread the warm blankets  
for the girl,  
hidden from her father  
for five winters.”

- [7] Nothing more  
was said of this.  
Oddrun sat gently  
at Borgny’s side.  
She sang loud,  
she sang powerfully,  
she sang great spells

for Borgny.

[8] A boy and a girl  
were born to Borgny;  
two healthy children  
{321} for the killer of Hogni.  
When their weakened mother  
first regained speech,  
this is what she said  
first of all:

[9] “May all the goddesses,  
Freyja and Frigg  
and all the others,  
help you, Oddrun,  
since you have saved  
me from death in childbirth.”

[10] Oddrun said,  
“I did not come here  
because I thought  
you were worth my help.  
I have sworn that I  
will always give help  
when it is needed  
to those who share  
my noble rank,  
and I honor my oath.”

[11] Then Oddrun  
sat down, and began  
to recount the troubles  
of her long, sad life:

- [12]    “I was brought up  
          in princely halls;  
          most people were happy  
          at my father Buthli’s court.  
          I enjoyed carefree  
          happiness and wealth  
          for five joyful years  
          till my father died.
- [13]    “The last thing  
          my father said  
          before he died  
          {322} was this:  
          He said they should provide  
          a dowry of gold for me,  
          send me south  
          to marry Gunnar.
- [14]    “He said a greater woman  
          would never be born,  
          unless fate had some  
          disaster in store for me.”
- [15]    Borgny said, “You are mad,  
          Oddrun, you’re out of your wits,  
          if you come to me  
          to speak these words in anger.  
          I have been like  
          a devoted cousin to you,  
          as if we were daughters  
          of two brothers.”
- [16]    Oddrun said, “I still

remember what you said  
one evening, when I served  
a drink to Gunnar.

You said no other  
unmarried woman  
would make such a mistake  
with a man, except for me.

[17] “While Brynhild  
wove in her room,  
she had power over  
men and lands.  
And there was a loud noise—  
earth and heaven shook,  
when Sigurth came  
to her tower.

[18] “He fought a battle  
with his excellent sword,  
and the tower was broken,  
{323} and Brynhild was his.  
But the peace  
did not last long  
before she learned  
of all their trickery.

[19] “She devoted herself  
to taking revenge,  
and we’ve all lived through  
enough of the results.  
The rumor of it  
has traveled the whole world,

everyone knows she went  
to Hel alongside Sigurth.

[20] “But I fell  
in love with Gunnar.  
I loved that warrior  
like Brynhild should have.  
But our father had given  
a helmet to Brynhild,  
he said long before  
that she would be a Valkyrie.

[21] “They offered  
Attila golden rings,  
he would get no small price  
if he married me to Gunnar.  
They offered him  
fifteen farms, and even a part  
of Fafnir’s treasure, if he  
would consent to the marriage.

[22] “But Attila said  
he would never accept  
money for me  
from Gunnar.  
I begged my brother  
with my head bowed low,  
but my love for Gunnar  
could not win him over.

{324} [23] “Many of my kinsmen  
spoke against me,  
they said they had witnessed

our secret meetings.  
But my brother Attila  
said I had no faults,  
he said that I  
had done no wrong.

[24] “But you should  
never deny such things  
before a witness,  
not when love is concerned.

[25] “Attila sent  
his messengers  
through Mirkwood  
to spy on me.  
And they found us  
where they never should have—  
they found me and Gunnar  
beneath the same blanket.

[26] “We offered  
precious rings  
to those men,  
begged them not to tell Attila.  
But they hurried home  
swiftly, eagerly,  
and they told Attila  
about our forbidden love.

[27] “But they hid the affair  
from Guthrun;  
she already had guessed  
the half of it.

- [28] “What a noise we heard  
when Gunnar and Hogni came!  
They rode their golden-hoofed  
horses to Attila’s hall.  
{325} The Huns cut out  
Hogni’s heart,  
and they put Gunnar  
in a pit of serpents.
- [29] “I was gone  
at the time,  
I was serving Geirmund  
his fill of drink.  
But clever Gunnar  
played a harp,  
he thought I would  
come to his aid,  
the noble-born king I loved  
thought I’d come to him.
- [30] “I was at Hlesey,  
but I heard  
him playing his harp  
with all his war-hardened courage.  
I told the serving-girls  
to get ready,  
I wanted to save the life  
of my love, King Gunnar.
- [31] “We set sail  
over the sea,  
we came to where I saw

the home of Attila.

[32] “Then a miserable  
mother of vipers  
came forth, slithering—  
I wish she would rot!  
But that snake  
bit famous Gunnar  
in the heart, before I could come—  
I could not help my lover.

[33] “I often wonder,  
Borgny, fellow woman,  
{326} how I continue  
to hold on to life,  
since I loved  
that madly daring  
prince of warriors  
like I love my own life.

[34] “Well, you sat, and  
you listened while I told you  
all the terrible troubles  
I and others have endured.  
We all live according to  
what seems right to us.”  
That is the end  
of the weeping of Oddrun.

### **{327} *Guthrunarhvot* (The Inciting of Guthrun's Sons)**

According to *Guthrunarhvot* (literally, "The Inciting by Guthrun"), Guthrun attempted to drown herself in the sea after she killed Attila. But instead of dying, she was carried by the waves to the kindgom of Jonaker. Later, when Svanhild, Guthrun's daughter by Sigurth, was promised in marriage to King Jormunrekk and then killed by him, Guthrun incited her sons by Jonaker to avenge Svanhild, and had a funeral pyre kindled for herself. As usual, the prose introduction is from the manuscript.

## *Guthrunarhvot*

Guthrun walked to the ocean after she killed Attila, and then she went out into the waves and wanted to kill herself, but she could not drown. She was brought by the waves over the fjord to the lands of King Jonaker, and he married her; their sons were Sorli, Erp, and Hamthir. Svanhild, Guthrun's daughter by Sigurth, also grew up there, and she was promised to the mighty king Jormunrekk. One of Jormunrekk's advisors was Bikki, who advised the king's son, Randver, to have his way with the bride. Bikki then told this to the king. The king had Randver hanged, and Svanhild trampled to death by horses. When Guthrun learned of this, she spoke to her sons.

[1]     **I** HEARD

the worst news,  
awful words spoken  
in heavy sorrow,  
when grim Guthrun  
incited her sons  
with bitter words  
to seek vengeance:

[2]     “Why are you sitting here,  
sleeping away your lives?  
Why are you not too sad  
to chat happily like this?  
You know that Jormunrekk  
took your sister,  
as young as she was,  
{328} and had her trampled to pieces  
by horses, some black, some white,  
some gray, some tame,  
some Gothic,

on a common road.

- [3] “You boys are not like  
my brother Gunnar,  
you are not as brave  
as Hogni was.  
The two of you  
would avenge her,  
if you had the bravery  
of my brothers,  
or the courage  
of the Hunnish kings.”

- [4] Then the brave  
Hamthir spoke:  
“You did not praise  
Hogni’s courage  
when your brothers  
woke Sigurth  
from his last sleep,  
when your blue-and-white  
striped bed sheets turned red  
in your husband’s blood.

- [5] “You achieved vengeance  
for both of your brothers  
in an awful, cruel way  
when you murdered your sons.  
Had they lived,  
I think we could all  
have avenged our sister  
on Jormunrekk.

[6]     “But bring us the armor  
of the Hunnish kings!  
You have challenged us  
to seek a battle.”

{329} [7]     Guthrun, laughing,  
gave her sons  
the treasures of kings  
which she kept in her room.  
She brought her sons  
long coats of chainmail.  
They boldly set themselves  
in their saddles.

[8]     Then the brave  
Hamthir spoke:  
“I will never again  
come back from battle  
and return to Gothic lands,  
except as a fallen corpse.  
Mother, you’ll drink  
at the funeral for us all,  
for your sons  
and Svanhild alike.”

[9]     Guthrun, daughter of  
Gjuki, went weeping,  
and sat on the road  
in sorrow.  
She counted,  
with tear-streaked cheeks,  
the many varieties

of her life's sorrows:

- [10] "I've had three homes,  
three hearths,  
three husbands  
who took me home.  
And of all of them,  
Sigurth was the best,  
the one who was killed  
by my own brothers.
- [11] "I was made to forget  
my heavy sorrows,  
but nonetheless  
{330} I was greatly offended  
when my brothers  
married me to Attila.
- [12] "I called to my bold  
young sons in secret.  
I never did any worse evil  
than when I cut off  
the heads  
of my own heirs.
- [13] "I walked to the sea,  
I hated the Norns,  
I wanted to throw off  
what they had in store for me.  
But the high waves  
lifted me, never drowning me,  
took me to a new land  
where I lived yet longer.

- [14] “So for the third time  
I shared the bridal bed  
with a king. But I liked it  
better the first time.  
I had his children,  
I gave birth to his heirs,  
boys to inherit  
after Jonaker.
- [15] “Lady-servants  
sat around Svanhild,  
and I loved her most  
of all my children.  
Svanhild seemed to me  
like a beautiful  
ray of sunlight  
come into my home.
- [16] “I gave her gold  
and precious clothes,  
before I sent her as a wife  
{331} to King Jormunrekk,  
and of all my sorrows  
the very worst is  
when I think of  
Svanhild’s fine hair  
trampled into the mud  
under horses’ hooves.
- [17] “And my bitterest memory  
is of when my brothers  
robbed Sigurth of victory,

and killed him in our bed.  
And my grimmest  
is the memory of Gunnar  
bitten to death  
by shimmering-scaled serpents,  
and my most painful  
is the memory of Hogni,  
that boldest of kings,  
with his heart cut out  
while he still lived.

[18] “I remember so much grief.  
Oh, Sigurth, mount up  
on your white horse!  
Ride to me here  
on swift-footed Grani!  
I sit here without  
a daughter or daughter-in-law  
who could comfort  
me with good gifts.

[19] “Do you remember, Sigurth,  
what we said to one another,  
sitting together, the two of us,  
on the bed we shared?  
My brave husband,  
we swore that either you  
would come back to me from Hel,  
or else I would join you there.

{332} [20] “Now, noble men,  
build a high funeral pyre

out of oak wood, stoke it  
till the flames reach the sky!  
Let fire burn  
my sob-wracked chest,  
let flame melt the sorrows  
that choke my heart.

[21] “Let any noble man  
think his bad luck is better,  
let any well-bred lady  
say her sorrows aren’t so bad,  
when they have heard  
all my misfortune told!”

### {333} *Hamthismal* (The Tale of Hamthir)

*Hamthismal* (“Words of Hamthir”) tells much the same story as *Guthrunarhvot*, with some differences of detail. Guthrun encourages Hamthir and Sorli, her sons by Jonaker, to avenge their halfsister Svanhild (her daughter by Sigurth) on Jormunrekk, a king of the Goths. The boys ride off to do the deed, accompanied by their half-brother Erp (son of Jonaker and a concubine). Hamthir and Sorli kill Erp before they reach their destination, misunderstanding his cryptic promise of help. Hamthir and Sorli fight well against the Goths, and even cut Jormunrekk’s arms and legs off, but Jormunrekk finally instructs his men to stone them to death, since he knows the sons of Guthrun are impervious to iron and steel. The two brothers regret killing Erp then, as he would have decapitated Jormunrekk (a stanza may be missing in which Erp was assigned this specific duty).

*Hamthismal*, the last poem in the *Codex Regius* and the end of the story of the Volsungs, is also one of the oldest and most difficult of the Eddic poems, so much so that its medieval copyists may have misunderstood parts of it. Some stanzas appear to be out of order, and at times it appears that the wrong speaker has been specified in the text—especially in stanzas 26–30, which the text gives to the impulsive Hamthir, but which appear to have been originally meant to be Sorli’s (and which I have translated as Sorli’s words).

## *Hamthismal*

[1] **B**URIED BENEATH THE EARTH

are horrible sorrows,  
the desperate things  
that make the elves weep.  
Early in the morning,  
everything that has caused  
someone unhappiness  
will be remembered anew.

{334} [2] It was not recently,  
it was not yesterday—  
this happened  
a long, long time ago.  
Few things were so long ago,  
that this wasn't twice as long ago,  
when Guthrun, daughter of Gjuki,  
incited her young sons  
to avenge  
her daughter Svanhild.

[3] "Your sister  
named Svanhild—  
Jormunrekk had her  
trampled by horses!  
White and black horses,  
gray horses, Gothic horses,  
horses he broke to ride  
for his errands of war.

[4] “You, my sons,  
are the last dregs  
of my noble family,  
you alone live of this line of kings.

[5] “I have become as lonely  
as an ash tree on the tundra,  
I am stripped of my family  
like a pine-tree stripped of needles,  
deprived of hopes  
like a forest that’s lost all its leaves  
when lightning strikes it  
on a hot day.”

[6] Then Hamthir spoke,  
he was a bold young man:  
“You had little good to say  
about Hogni  
when your brothers woke Sigurth  
from his last sleep—  
{335} you lay in bed  
while his killers laughed.

[7] “Then your blue and white  
striped sheets were reddened  
in the flowing blood  
of your first husband.  
Sigurth was dead,  
you stared at his corpse.  
Your joy was gone,  
and Gunnar caused it.

[8] “You had it worse

when you took vengeance  
on Attila, and killed  
your own sons, Erp and Eitil.  
There was no one who'd  
swing a battle-loving sword  
against your two little boys,  
so you had to do it yourself."

[9] Sorli spoke then,  
he was wise: "I don't want  
to exchange barbs  
with my mother,  
but the two of you  
have left something unsaid:  
Mother, what are you asking for,  
what will make you stop weeping?

[10] "You weep for your brothers  
and your dear children,  
for children you bore  
and who died in horror.  
But mother, you will weep  
for us two as well—  
we will mount up on our horses  
and die far away from here."

{336} [11] They mounted their horses,  
they were ready to fight,  
those young men  
rode over misty mountains,  
they rode Hunnish horses,  
to avenge their sister's murder.

[12] Then Erp spoke,  
one fateful time,  
he looked proud  
sitting on his horse—  
“It’s no good to show  
a coward the way to glory.”  
To Hamthir and Sorli, it seemed  
this bastard sure thought he was brave.

[13] They met on the street’s  
wide cobblestones, and asked him:  
“Little dark-haired bastard,  
how will you help us in this fight?”

[14] Their half-brother  
answered as best he could,  
he said he would help  
his brothers like a foot helps a foot.  
But they doubted him:  
“How can a foot help a foot?  
How can a hand help a hand,  
grown from the same flesh?”

[15] They drew their swords  
from their scabbards  
and with their sharp blades  
they did an evil spirit’s work.  
They reduced their numbers  
by a third, when two brothers  
let their brother  
sink dead to the earth.

{337} [16] They shook out their cloaks,

they sheathed their swords,  
and those noble, well-dressed men  
continued on their way.

[17] Their road lay ahead,  
a dangerous road.  
They found Randver  
hanging from a beam,  
on a wind-chilled gallows  
east of the city,  
and its timbers creaked  
and urged them onward.

[18] There was joyful noise  
in the beer-happy hall,  
when the two young Goths  
arrived, and no one heard them,  
till a bold, watchful man  
blew his horn.

[19] He went to tell  
Jormunrekk  
that strangers in helmets  
had been spotted:  
“Command us, lord!  
Strong men are approaching.  
It appears that woman you killed  
had powerful relatives.”

[20] Jormunrekk laughed,  
and stroked his beard—  
he stood up to fight,  
drunk on wine.

He wagged his brown beard  
over his white shield,  
and cast his golden chalice  
from his hand.

{338} [21] “I’d feel lucky,”  
Jormunrekk said,  
“to see Hamthir and Sorli  
in my hall.  
I’d tie those boys up  
with their bow-strings,  
let those grandsons of Gjuki  
choke on a noose.”

[22] Then his mother spoke,  
standing among the men,  
the soft-fingered lady  
spoke to her son:  
“I think they swore an oath  
that they cannot fulfill;  
how can those two men alone  
fight successfully against  
ten hundred Goths  
in their own high hall?”

[23] There was war in the house,  
that ale-house shook,  
men lay in pools of blood  
that poured from the Goths’ chests.

[24] Hamthir the bold  
then stood and said:  
“King Jormunrekk,

you said you'd feel lucky  
if my brother and I came  
to visit your hall.  
Now your arms are cut off,  
and your legs are cut off,  
and thrown into the fire  
before your eyes, in your own hall."

[25] Then the king  
began to roar  
in his suit of armor,  
like a bear would roar:  
"Men, throw stones at them!  
{339} Spears won't pierce them,  
blades and iron do nothing  
to Jonaker's sons!"

[26] Then Sorli turned  
to Hamthir:  
"You did poorly, brother,  
to egg this old windbag on.  
A man can still catch death  
from an enemy without limbs.

[27] "You have courage, Hamthir,  
but you have no wisdom.  
And a man lacks too much  
when he lacks wisdom.

[28] "Jormunrekk would lose his head,  
if only Erp still lived,  
our bold brother,  
the one we killed on the road.

Evil spirits encouraged us  
to kill our hero-souled brother,  
our battle-brave companion,  
and go without him in our truest need.

[29] “I didn’t think  
we had the character of wolves,  
that we would kill a brother  
like faithless wolves in a forest,  
greedy for the food  
and wealth of others.

[30] “But we fought well,  
we stand over sword-torn  
Gothic corpses and set a table for the eagles.  
We earned honor here,  
though we are fated to die today—  
a man will not live one day longer  
than the Norns have decided.”

{340} [31] And there Sorli fell  
at the threshold,  
and Hamthir fell  
in the alley.

This is called the Old Tale of Hamthir.

## {341} APPENDIX: THE COWBOY HAVAMAL

“The Cowboy *Havamal*” is a condensation of the wisdom of the first, most down-to-earth part of *Havamal* (often called the *Gestathattr*, it includes stanzas 1–79, give or take a few) into mostly five-line stanzas of a Western American English dialect. I have not endeavored to render this dialect phonetically in a thoroughly consistent way, but only to present an “eye dialect” of sorts, to suggest the dry tones of the accent behind the words.

While my other translation of *Havamal* in this volume is more complete, the tone of this one seems more authentic to me. The voice is that of my grandfather, sad with wisdom and cynical with experience, which I have always heard when reading this poem in the original.

- [1]     **U**SE YER EYES,  
          and never walk blind.  
          There ain’t no tellin’  
          where there’s someone waitin’  
          to put one over on you.
- [2]     Don’t be unkind to a wanderer.  
          You know the type: Waiting,  
          proud, outside your doorstep.  
          Give ’im a break,  
          and let ’im in.
- [3]     Let ’im get close to the fire,  
          and have a chance  
          to dry his clothes.  
          He’s been walkin’ in the mountains,  
          and that wears a man down.
- [4]     You know what he’s lookin’ for:  
          Some clothes to change into,  
          a few kind words, not too many,  
          {342} a chance to tell his story,  
          a chance to hear what you’ll say.

- [5] You ought to have  
a damn sight of learnin',  
before you step outside that door.  
It's a lot easier to stay at home,  
but no one'll listen to you if you stay there.
- [6] Now, that ain't to say  
that you ought to be showy  
about your learnin'.  
Don't say too much  
and you'll say more o' the right things.
- [7] And don't ever think  
that other folks  
have nothin' to teach you, either.  
You only stand to gain  
by keeping yer ears open, too.
- [8] People's approval ain't nothin' you need.  
Half the time it ain't true.  
Just be sure you think you're right;  
and that you're comfortable in your own skin;  
you're all you can count on.
- [9] And while you should listen  
to people's advice,  
don't just do whatever they say.  
You've got a head on your own shoulders;  
use it, boy.
- [10] That head on your shoulders  
is the best thing you'll ever have.  
And no amount o' money  
can make up for not havin' it.

Keep it in good shape.

[11] The worst way to make yourself  
into a goddamned fool  
is to drink too much.

{343} Stay out o' the liquor,  
except you know yer limits.

[12] Oh, folks'll say this and that,  
how much fun it is to drink and all.  
But the more you drink,  
the less you know,  
and that's a poor exchange.

[13] I've been drunk, I'm not sayin' otherwise.  
Let me tell you what it's like:  
It's as if a bird hovered over your head,  
drinking more of your wits  
the more you drink.

[14] Lord a'mighty, I was drunk,  
I was shamefaced drunk.  
And I didn't have myself  
near as good a time  
as if I'd gone home sober.

[15] So keep quiet,  
keep your head clear,  
and don't back off from a fight.  
You'll be happier that way—  
and you'll die soon enough.

[16] You're a goddamned fool  
if you think you'll live forever  
just because you won't fight.

Say nobody ever kills you—  
old age is no peach, either.

[17] I'll say another thing about drinkin'—

I swear I'm nearly done:

But just you think how much dumber  
a dumb man is after a few drinks:

Who ever heard more awful bullshit?

[18] Travel, see the country,

never miss a chance to get outdoors.

You'll only get smarter

{344} by knowin' more people, more places,  
more ways to be a man.

[19] Accept hospitality, but don't be a jackass.

Folk can only offer so much.

And if you want to talk,

just consider whether what you want to say  
matters to anybody else.

[20] A belly's a sure sign

that a man's not in control of himself.

Folks'll laugh if you're eatin' too much.

Yer stomach's not yer head—

you can put too much in it.

[21] You ever seen a fat cow?

I mean, they're all fat, but only to a point:

They don't eat so much they hurt themselves.

And a cow is just about the dumbest thing  
on this damn earth.

[22] Nothin' to learn from a fella

who won't but laugh at everybody else.

What he ain't learned  
would do him some good:  
He's got his own faults.

[23] You should lie down to sleep  
and not think about tomorrow;  
you'll take care of it then.  
If you worry at night, you get nothing done,  
and you're in worse shape for the day.

[24] Not everybody  
who laughs with you  
is yer friend.  
Someone who won't but laugh  
hasn't thought about much.

[25] Not everybody  
who laughs with you  
is yer friend.  
{345} It's one thing if a fella'll laugh with you,  
it's another if you can count on 'im.

[26] You're a damn fool  
if you think you can just figure out  
a way out of any problem.  
It's good to think ahead,  
but sometimes things go wrong.

[27] I wish more damn fools  
would just keep their mouths shut.  
If they did, we might not realize  
just how many goddamned fools  
there are in this old world.

[28] Ain't ever been a single person

who can keep his mouth shut  
when it comes to other people.

But try not to gossip,  
even if it makes you look smarter.

[29] You will talk yourself into trouble  
if you don't think before you speak:  
Hold that tongue, and think a little,  
or you'll find out that it's a long whip,  
and it's gonna hit you from behind.

[30] Don't make fun of someone else,  
even if he owes you money,  
and don't pester people with questions.

[31] Sarcastic people sound smart  
when they make fun of someone else.  
But making fun didn't make you smart,  
and that's time you could be putting  
into somethin' more worthwhile.

[32] A fella might be nice enough;  
there's still something  
that'll make 'im want to fight.  
Where there's more than one man,  
you'll eventually have a fight.

{346} [33] You shouldn't sit around  
and wait to eat all day.  
Go ahead and eat,  
unless you're eatin' later with a friend,  
otherwise you'll just be useless.

[34] Don't concern yerself  
with anybody

who won't repay yer friendship in kind.  
Better to walk a long way to a friend,  
than a short way to some ornery jackass.

[35] Don't overstay yer welcome.  
Folks like company, but not too much,  
and start to resent a guest 'fore long.  
So git goin' after a while,  
or you'll git on people's nerves.

[36] It dudn't matter where you live,  
long as you have a roof over you.  
Better to call some place home,  
even if it ain't much to look at,  
than to beg for ever'thing.

[37] It dudn't matter where you live,  
long as you have a place.  
Better to call a place home,  
or you'll feel worse and worse,  
as you beg for more and more.

[38] Keep yer guns close.  
I don't care what they say,  
there ain't no tellin'  
when there'll be call for 'em.  
An armed man has a shot.

[39] Don't think a generous host  
wouldn't gladly take something  
in return for yer room and board.  
Never seen a man so nice  
he wouldn't like a little in return.

{347} [40] Don't save so much money

that you don't use any of it.  
You'll die, after all,  
and it might not go to people you like.  
The world ain't aimin' to please you.

[41] Give yer friend  
a gift that'll matter to 'im:  
Weapons, clothes, you know the kind.  
This kind of giving, if he gits you back,  
will mean he'll have yer back when it counts.

[42] Be friendly  
to anybody friendly to you,  
and repay their gifts.  
Repay good with good,  
and bad with bad.

[43] Be friendly  
to anybody friendly to you;  
and to his friends, too.  
But be careful not to make friends  
with your friends' enemies.

[44] If you have a good friend,  
and really trust 'im,  
you should share yer mind with 'im,  
exchange gifts with 'im,  
visit 'im often.

[45] If you have another friend  
and don't trust him worth a spit,  
but want somethin' from 'im,  
speak kindly, but don't be surprised  
if you find yerself betrayin' that kindness.

- [46] Now this fella you don't trust:  
That's not to say you shouldn't talk to 'im,  
laugh with 'im, even—  
hell, who can you trust?  
But repay 'im just what he gives you.
- {348} [47] I was young once, I walked alone,  
and I got lost on my way.  
It wasn't alone that I found happiness,  
but in good company, good friends;  
there's no joy in loneliness.
- [48] Be friendly, be brave if you're challenged,  
and don't nurture a grudge for too long.  
That's the way to spend yer life—  
not on worrying,  
not on shirking yer responsibilities.
- [49] Once I was walkin', I saw two scarecrows,  
and that gave me the damndest funny thought:  
They were naked, so I'd give 'em clothes.  
They looked a damned sight better in 'em, too;  
a naked man just feels ashamed of himself.
- [50] Think about a pine on the edge o' town—  
once a part o' the forest, but the forest is gone,  
and now it's surrounded by pasture.  
Puts me in mind of a man no one loves—  
what's he got to live for?
- [51] You might think you have a new friend,  
but just you wait five days, that'll test 'im.  
They say that a bad friendship  
burns for only five days,

but on the sixth one it goes out.

[52] You may not have much,  
so don't give much.

But I've won friends  
with just a bowl o' soup  
and half a loaf o' bread.

[53] A small ocean  
has small beaches,  
and small brains  
have damned little to give.

But the world takes all types.

{349} [54] Don't git too goddamned smart, now,  
there's a measure for ever'thing.  
And don't think it's for nothing  
that the stupid people  
tend to be the happier ones, too.

[55] Don't git too goddamned smart, now,  
there's a measure for ever'thing.  
You'll know you're gone too far  
when you can't find a thing to smile about:  
That's what wisdom's like.

[56] Don't git too goddamned smart, now,  
there's a measure for ever'thing.  
And if you think you can learn the future,  
you're a damned fool, not a wise man.  
You'll be happier not knowing anyway.

[57] You won't learn a thing  
if you never talk to folks,  
and nobody will learn anything from you.

If you keep yer thoughts to yerself,  
you'll never turn the lead in yer head to gold.

[58] Don't sleep too late,  
that's no way to get things done.  
If you mean to do business, get goin'—  
a lazy wolf never caught a sheep,  
a sleeping man never earned a dime.

[59] Don't sleep too late,  
that's no way to get things done.  
If you're still sleepin' at sunrise,  
you're losin' the race already—  
someone's got more hours than you.

[60] You know how to measure wood  
and bark for a roof,  
and you know the way to tell the time,  
and determine the seasons.  
You know this stuff, son.

{350} [61] Don't go to see folks  
with your hair a mess and your clothes dirty.  
Put a damned shirt on, and some shoes—  
there's no shame in not having the best.  
And eat a little first, too.

[62] Consider your reputation;  
if you go to town, and know nobody,  
and nobody has a whit to say about you,  
you'll be like an eagle stretching out its beak,  
but never catching a fish.

[63] Now here's a fact I've learned:  
Tell a secret to one good friend,

and that secret might stay with him;  
but tell two people your secret,  
and everybody will know pretty soon.

[64] Don't think you're the goddamned smartest,  
or the toughest, or the best at anything,  
and don't let folks think you are, either.  
Otherwise you'll find out the hard way  
that someone is always better.

[65] Watch what you say, son—  
what you say to other people  
is often exactly what you git from 'em.

[66] There's bein' too early,  
there's bein' too late,  
and you can't always predict folks' timing.  
But try to be on time;  
that wins you more favor.

[67] People ain't always sincere  
when they say they'll give you somethin';  
you don't know it for a fact  
till it's in yer hands.  
Don't take anybody at just his word.

{351} [68] A warm home is good for you,  
the sunshine is good for you,  
and your health, too, of course,  
but don't underestimate how good it is  
to live without things to say sorry for.

[69] You can never lose ever'thing,  
even if yer health looks to give out any minute.  
You might still have yer kids, yer family,

yer money, or something else—  
or better, a job well done.

[70] Better to be alive, no matter what,  
than dead—  
only the living enjoy anything.  
I've seen a rich man's corpse;  
it wadn't different than a poor man's.

[71] Break yer leg? You can ride a horse still.  
Lost a hand? Not yer voice, too, I reckon.  
Cain't hear? Bet you can still fight.  
There ain't a damn way any shot at life  
is worse than empty death.

[72] It's good to have a son,  
or someone you can call that;  
there ain't too many men remembered  
'cept those as left family behind.

[73] If two fight again' one, two'll probably win.  
And again, son, watch yer damn tongue.  
And never trust  
that what folks keep hidden from you  
is for yer own good.

[74] The weather can change a lot in five days,  
it can change even more in a month,  
and you're a fool if you think you can predict it.  
Never trust to anything  
that's not in yer own power.

{352} [75] I've said you should listen,  
but don't listen to goddamned idiots.  
And remember: You might be poor,

someone else might be rich,  
and neither o' you has the other to blame.

[76] Cows die, friends and family die,  
you will die just the same way.  
But if you have a good reputation,  
that might survive you.

[77] Cows die, friends and family die,  
you will die just the same way.  
The only thing that won't die  
is what folks say about you  
when you're dead.

[78] I saw a rich man's sons,  
they had a good many head o' cattle.  
Now they're beggars in the street.  
Wealth's nothin' to count on;  
it'll leave you as soon as it finds you.

[79] Now, a good thing may happen  
to a pretty stupid man,  
but that dudn't make him any better.  
He'll be just as arrogant,  
and not any smarter.

(81) Don't sing the praises  
of anything that ain't over.  
Not the day's before the night,  
not the work's before its end,  
not the man's before his death.

## {353} GLOSSARY OF NAMES

This glossary is not intended to include every one of the thousands of names mentioned in the Poetic Edda, but only those that belong to characters and places that the reader might need defined in order to understand the text more fully. Names that occur in lists, such as those from the list of dwarves in *Voluspa*, the children and grandchildren of Rig/Heimdall in *Rigsthula*, and most of the verses of *Vafthruthnismal*, *Grimnismal*, *Alvissmal*, and *Voluspa en skamma*, are excluded since they have little bearing on the overall understanding of the text. Names of characters (especially human characters) who are mentioned only in passing are typically also excluded, such as the names mentioned by Sigerdrifa in her retelling of her past in *Sigrdrifumal*.

Much of the material used to provide further context in the entries below is drawn from Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda; see the English translation by Anthony Faulkes under "Further Reading" in the Introduction.

The alphabetization here is based on American rather than Scandinavian conventions, so Æ is treated as A+E, Þ is treated as TH, Ð is treated as D, Ø is treated as O, and the length of vowels is ignored.

**Aegir**, also known as *Gymir* (2); the host of the gods' feasts. He is a *giant*.

**Aesir** (plural), a family of gods including *Odin* and *Thor*.

**Afi**, father with Amma of the middle class of humans. His name literally means "grandfather."

**Agnar** (1), son of *Hrauthung*, fostered by *Frigg* and later betrayed by his brother *Geirroth*.

**Agnar** (2), son of *Geirroth*, who brings *Odin* (in the disguise of *Shadowed-Face*) a drink in *Grimnismal*, for which he is rewarded by being made king when his father dies.

**Ai**, father (by *Edda*) of the servant class of humans. His name literally means "great-grandfather" or "ancestor."

**Alf** (1), a son of *Hrothmar*, and killer of *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*.

**Alf** (2), a son of *Hunding*.

**Alf** (3), second husband of *Hjordis*, after the death of *Sigmund*.

**Alfheim**, land of the *elves*, presided over by *Frey*.

{354} **Algron**, an island mentioned by *Odin* in *Vafthruthnismal*.

**All-Wise**, a *dwarf* who wishes to marry the daughter of *Thor*.

**Alsvith**, one of the pair of horses that draw the sun across the sky.

**Amma**, mother with *Afi* of the middle class of humans. Her name literally means “grandmother.”

**Andhrimnir**, the cook in *Valhalla*.

**Andvaranaut**, a ring formerly belonging to the *dwarf* known as *Andvari*. It is cursed to cause the death of anyone who possesses it.

**Andvari**, a *dwarf* who lives in the form of a fish. *Loki* takes his ring *Andvaranaut*, which *Andvari* places a curse on.

**Angerbotha**, a *giant* woman. Mother with *Loki* of *Fenrir*, *Hel*, and the *Midgard-serpent*.

**Arvak**, one of the pair of horses that draw the sun across the sky.

**Asgard**, the home of the *Aesir* gods.

**Ask**, “ash tree,” the name of the first human man.

**Atli**, a follower of *Hjorvarth* and later of his son, *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*.

**Attila**, king of Hunland, the son of *Buthli* and brother of *Brynhild* and *Oddrun*. Second husband of *Guthrun*. In some poems (including *Guthrunarkvitha I*, *Sigurtharkvitha en skamma*, and *Oddrunargratr*), it appears that it was *Attila* who forced his sister *Brynhild* to marry.

**Aurnir**, a *giant*.

**Balder**, a son of *Odin*, accidentally slain by his blind brother *Hoth* at the instigation of *Loki* (a story related in detail in *Snorri Sturluson’s Prose Edda*, translated by Faulkes; see suggestions under “Further Reading” in the Introduction).

**Barri**, a grove where *Gerth* will meet *Frey* for their wedding.

**Battle-Stirrer**, one of the many names of *Odin* in disguise, and the name he uses in *Reginsmal*.

**Bestla**, mother of *Odin*.

**Beyla**, a servant of *Frey*, wife of *Byggvir*.

**Bifrost**, the rainbow, the bridge between *Midgard* and *Asgard*, guarded by *Heimdall*. It appears that *Asgard* is over *Midgard*, and also located somewhat

to the west.

**Bikki**, an advisor to *Jormunrekk*. He tells Jormunrekk that *Svanhild* has had an affair with *Randver*, which leads to Svanhild's death.

**Billing's daughter**, apparently a *giant* woman. *Odin* fails to seduce her, as he tells in *Havamal*.

**Blind the Crafty**, a follower of *Hunding's*.

**Bolthorn**, a *giant*, and maternal grandfather of *Odin*. In *Havamal*, *Odin* says that he learned magic from him.

**Borghild**, first wife of *Sigmund*, mother of *Helgi*. She kills *Sinfjotli*.

{355} **Borgny**, daughter of *Heithrek*, who struggles to give birth to twins and is aided by *Oddrun*.

**Bothvild**, daughter of *Nithuth*, raped by *Volund*.

**Bragi (1)**, a god of poetry. He is the husband of *Ithunn*.

**Bragi (2)**, a son of *Hogni (1)*.

**Bralund**, apparently a land associated with the *Volsungs*.

**Breithablik**, hall of *Balder*.

**Brimir**, a *giant* who owns the beer-hall *Okolnir*. In *Sigrdrifumal*, the god *Odin* is said to hold "the sword of Brimir," but this is never explained.

**Brisingamen**, necklace of *Freyja*.

**Brynhild**, a *Valkyrie*, daughter of *Buthli*, sister of *Attila*. *Sigurth* courts her in the disguise of *Gunnar*, and so she is married to *Gunnar*, but eventually she discovers the truth and causes the death of *Sigurth*. It is unclear whether she is or is not the same person as *Sigerdrifa*.

**Bur**, father of *Odin*.

**Buthli**, father of *Attila*, *Oddrun*, and *Brynhild* (the latter is very frequently referenced as "the daughter of Buthli").

**Byggvir**, a servant of *Frey*, and husband of *Beyla*.

**Dag**, a son of *Hogni (1)*.

**Dain**, a *dwarf*.

**Denmark**, roughly coterminous with the modern country, but in the medieval period it included much of what is now southern Sweden.

**Dvalin**, a *dwarf*.

**Dwarf**, a type of short humanlike creature referenced throughout the Poetic Edda. Dwarves are master craftsmen (apparently all male) who are descended from the maggots that grew in the rotting flesh of *Ymir*. In at least some stories (e.g. *Alvissmal*), they are turned to stone by sunlight. Many of them are represented as having shape-changing abilities (for instance, *Andvari* lives as a fish and *Otter* as an otter), and to have the ability to enter solid stone in order to hide themselves.

**Earth**, personified as a goddess, referenced chiefly as the mother of *Thor*.

**Edda**, mother with *Ai* of the servant class of humans. Her name literally means “great-grandmother” (whether this is the origin of the title *Edda* is unknown).

**Eggther**, a *giant*, described as a herdsman, who plays a harp at *Ragnarok*.

**Egil (1)**, a man (or *giant*?) who tends *Thor*’s goats while *Thor* and *Tyr* retrieve the cauldron in *Hymiskvitha*. Snorri Sturluson’s Prose Edda fills in details, such as that his children later become *Thor*’s slaves because one of them accidentally cripples one of the goats.

{356} **Egil (2)**, a brother of *Volund* and a famous archer.

**Einherjar**, *Odin*’s chosen, the dead warriors who inhabit *Valhalla*.

**Eitil**, son of *Guthrun* and *Attila*.

**Eldhrimnir**, the cooking cauldron in *Valhalla*.

**Eldir**, a servant of *Aegir*.

**Elf**, a supernatural creature associated with the gods, but apparently of a lower rank than the *Aesir* or *Vanir*. *Elves* are never described in terms that indicate what, if any, special appearance or characteristics they may have. They may be the same creatures as *dwarves*.

**Elivagar**, unknown location.

**Embla**, “elm tree,” the name of the first human woman.

**Erp (1)**, son of *Guthrun* and *Attila*.

**Erp (2)**, son of *Jonaker* and a concubine, according to the very early *Hamthismal* (in the later *Guthrunarhvot*, he is the son of *Jonaker* and *Guthrun*), and therefore half-brother (or brother) of *Hamthir* and *Sorli*.

**Eyjolf**, a son of *Hunding*.

**Eylimi (1)**, father of *Svava*.

**Eylimi (2)**, father of *Hjordis* (the mother of *Sigurth*) and *Gripir*.

**Fafnir**, the dragon slain by *Sigurth* in *Fafnismal*. *Fafnir* was apparently born a *dwarf*; he is the brother of *Regin* and *Otter*, and seems to become a dragon only after he kills their father *Hreithmar*.

**Father**, father (with *Mother*) of the noble class of humans.

**Fenja**, a *giant* woman, enslaved with her sister *Menja* to work on the millstone *Grotti*.

**Fenrir**, a monstrous wolf imprisoned till *Ragnarok*, and son of *Loki*. At *Ragnarok* he will kill *Odin*, but he will be killed in turn by *Vithar*.

**Fensalir**, the hall of the goddess *Frigg*.

**Fimafeng**, a servant of *Aegir*, killed by *Loki* in *Lokasenna*.

**Fimbulveter**, the terrible winter that will precede *Ragnarok*.

**Finni**, father of *Volund*; king of an unspecified kingdom.

**Fjalar (1)**, a rooster.

**Fjalar (2)**, the host of a feast mentioned in *Havamal*.

**Fjolvar**, unidentified associate of *Odin*.

**Fjorsungs**, the family that includes *Granmar* and his sons.

**Folkvang**, home of *Freyja*.

**Forseti**, a little-known god, apparently associated with justice.

**Freki**, one of *Odin*'s wolves.

**Frey**, a god of the *Vanir* family, son of *Njorth*, and brother of *Freyja*, associated with fertility and agriculture.

{357} **Freyja**, a goddess of the *Vanir* family, daughter of *Njorth*, sister of *Frey*, associated with love and fertility. May have been understood by some poets as the same goddess as *Frigg*.

**Frigg**, a goddess. The wife of *Odin*, and the mother of *Balder*. May have been understood by some poets as the same goddess as *Freyja*.

**Frithleif**, son of *Skjold*, father of *Frothi*.

**Frothi**, a king of *Denmark*. He forced *Fenja* and *Menja* to work the millstone *Grotti* for his benefit. His reign was noted for its peacefulness.

**Fulla**, servant of *Frigg*.

**Gefjun**, a goddess.

**Geirroth**, son of *Hrauthung*, who is fostered by *Odin* but later tortures him

(in the disguise of *Shadowed-Face*).

**Geirskogul**, the name of a *Valkyrie*.

**Geitir**, servant of *Gripir*.

**Geri**, one of *Odin*'s wolves.

**Gerth**, a *giant* woman courted by *Frey* through *Skirnir* in *For Skirnis*.

**Giant**, traditional English translation of Old Norse *jotunn* and related words. The term does not appear to imply a creature that is necessarily larger than the gods are, and the *giants* do not usually look different from the gods (or, indeed, humans). *Giant* women are often attractive and even marry gods (see e.g., *Gerth* and *Skathi*). However, there are also *giants* that are ugly or have unusual numbers of heads (e.g. *Tyr*'s grandmother in *Hymiskvitha*), and some are turned to stone in daylight (e.g. *Hrimgerth* in *Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar*).

**Gimle**, the home of those who survive after *Ragnarok*.

**Ginnungagap**, “yawning gap,” the nothingness that preceded creation.

**Gjallarhorn**, the horn blown by *Heimdall* to announce *Ragnarok*.

**Gjuki**, king of a people sometimes identified in the text as the *Goths*. Gjuki is the husband of *Grimhild*, and father of *Gunnar*, *Hogni*, *Guthrun*, and *Gotthorm*.

**Gladsheim**, a land in *Asgard* said to be the location of *Valhalla*.

**Glaum**, the horse of *Attila*.

**Glaumvor**, wife of *Gunnar*.

**Glitnir**, home of *Forseti*.

**Gnitaheith**, the place where the dragon *Fafnir* dwells with his treasure, until he is killed by *Sigurth*.

**Gondul**, the name of a *Valkyrie*.

**Good Advisor**, name used by *Odin* in *Vafthruthnismal*.

{358} **Goth**, a Germanic people of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Numerous human characters in the Poetic Edda are referred to as *Goths*, including sometimes people on both sides of a conflict (e.g. in *Hamthismal*).

**Gotthorm**, youngest brother of *Guthrun*, *Gunnar*, and *Hogni*. He is given a magical potion to make him act ferociously and kill *Sigurth*. He is killed by *Sigurth* in turn. Curiously, in *Voluspa en skamma*, *Gotthorm* is said to be only

a half-brother to *Gunnar* and *Hogni*, perhaps in an attempt to separate his foul deed of murdering *Sigurth* from the otherwise heroic reputation of his brothers.

**Gotthorm the Good**, unknown figure mentioned in *Grottasongr*.

**Gram**, the sword of *Sigurth*, forged by *Regin*.

**Grani**, the horse of *Sigurth*.

**Granmar**, father of *Hothbrodd*.

**Graybeard**, pseudonym assumed by *Odin* in *Harbarthsljoth*.

**Grimhild**, wife of *Gjuki* and mother of *Gunnar*, *Hogni*, *Guthrun*, and *Gotthorm*. She is a witch, and she uses magic to disguise *Sigurth* as *Gunnar* when he woos *Brynhild*, to give *Gotthorm* the blind fury he needs to kill *Sigurth*, and to make *Guthrun* forget *Sigurth* after his death (according to *Guthrunarkvitha II*).

**Gripir**, son of *Eylimi*, uncle of *Sigurth*, and brother of *Hjordis*. He has prophetic powers, which he uses to foresee *Sigurth*'s future in *Gripisspa*.

**Grotti**, a magical millstone owned by the king *Frothi*. It will grind out anything that is desired, including abstract concepts such as peace.

**Gullveig**, a vaguely described sorceress (goddess? *giant*?) who precipitates the first war.

**Gunn**, the name of a *Valkyrie*.

**Gunnar**, son of *Gjuki* and *Grimhild*, oldest brother of *Gotthorm*, *Gunnar*, and *Hogni*. He marries *Brynhild* after *Sigurth* courts her in the disguise of *Gunnar*, and when *Brynhild* later finds out about this deception, *Gunnar* is incited by *Brynhild* to kill *Sigurth*. *Gunnar* is killed in a pit full of venomous snakes by *Attila*, his sister *Guthrun*'s second husband.

**Gunnloth**, otherwise unknown *giant* woman mentioned in *Havamal*.

**Guthmund**, brother of *Hothbrodd*, insulted by *Sinfjotli*.

**Guthrun**, sister of *Gotthorm*, *Gunnar*, and *Hogni*. She marries first *Sigurth*, then *Attila*, then *Jonaker*. She avenges the deaths of her brothers on *Attila* by cooking their children and feeding them to him. Later she incites her sons *Hamthir* and *Sorli* to avenge her daughter *Svanhild* on *Jormunrekk*.

{359} **Gymir (1)**, father of *Gerth*.

**Gymir (2)**, another name for *Aegir*.

**Habrok**, a hawk.

**Hagal**, foster-father of *Helgi Sigmundsson*, who disguises himself as *Hamal* while spying on *Hunding* and again when he first meets *Sigrun* in *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana II*.

**Halfdan**, a king killed by *Frothi*.

**Hamal**, foster-brother of *Helgi Sigmundsson*.

**Hamthir**, son of *Guthrun* and *Jonaker*. Brother of *Sorli* and half-brother of *Erp* (2).

**Hamund**, a son of *Sigmund*.

**Hangjaw**, the man (*Odin* in disguise) who gives *Grotti* to *Frothi*.

**Hati** (1), a wolf that follows the sun, and will swallow it at *Ragnarok*.

**Hati** (2), a *giant*, father of *Hrimgerth*.

**Havarth**, a son of *Hunding*.

**Heimdall**, watchman of the gods, possibly a member of the *Vanir*. Under the name *Rig*, he also slept with human couples of various classes to father his “greater and lesser children” (i.e. humans of higher and lower social classes).

**Heith**, a name given to *Gullveig* in *Voluspa*. In *Voluspa en skamma* a *Heith* (possibly the same woman) is the daughter of a *giant* named *Hrimnir*.

**Heithrek**, a king, father of *Borgny*.

**Hel**, daughter of *Loki*, who appears to be half-corpse, half-living, and who rules the underworld realm, which is also called *Hel*, an abode of the dead. *Hel* is not necessarily a place of judgment for the evil dead, as in Christian tradition, but rather a repository for souls of those who have not died in battle (the latter go to *Valhalla*).

**Helgi Hjorvarthsson**, a son of *Hjorvarth*, hero of the poem *Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar*.

**Helgi Sigmundsson**, a son of *Sigmund* (1), hero of the poems *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana I* and *II*. He is named for *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*.

**Heming**, a son of *Hunding*.

**Herkja**, a concubine of *Attila*.

**Hervor**, a *Valkyrie*, wife of *Volund*.

**Hethin**, son of *Hjorvarth*, half-brother to *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*. He swears an oath to marry *Helgi*’s fiancée *Svava*, and later swears to her that he will avenge *Helgi*’s death.

**Hild**, the name of a *Valkyrie*, daughter of *Hogni* (1), who caused her father to fight her lover. *Helgi Sigmundsson* compares *Sigrun* to her in *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana II* (st. 29).

{360} **Hildolf**, mentioned by *Odin* as owner of his ferry in *Harbarthsljoth*.

**Himinbjorg**, hall of *Heimdall*.

**Hindarfjall**, a mountain where the hall of *Sigerdrifa* is located.

**Hjordis**, second wife of *Sigmund*, mother of *Sigurth*. She remarries with *Alf*.

**Hjorleif**, a captain or lieutenant under *Helgi*.

**Hjorvarth** (1), husband of *Sigerlinn* and father of *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*.

**Hjorvarth** (2), a son of *Hunding*.

**Hlathguth**, a *Valkyrie*, said to be from *Mirkwood*, married to *Slagfinn*.

**Hlebarth**, a *giant* deceived and robbed by *Odin*.

**Hlesey**, an island.

**Hlithskjalf**, the throne of *Odin*.

**Hlothver**, father of the *Valkyries* *Hlathguth* and *Hervor*.

**Hlymdalir**, apparently the ancestral home of *Brynhild*.

**Hogni** (1), father of the *Valkyrie* *Sigrun*.

**Hogni** (2), brother of *Gotthorm*, *Gunnar*, and *Guthrun*. *Hogni* is represented as the most reasonable of his brothers, and as a fantastically skilled warrior.

**Honir**, a vaguely described god who helps *Odin* and *Loth* ensoul humans and who survives *Ragnarok*.

**Hoth**, a blind son of *Odin* who accidentally kills his brother *Balder* with a mistletoe bough when he is deceived by *Loki* into throwing it (a story related in detail in *Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda*, translated by Faulkes).

**Hothbrodd**, *Helgi's* rival for the hand of *Sigrun*.

**Hrauthung**, father of *Geirroth* and *Agnar* (1).

**Hrimgerth**, a *giant* woman, daughter of *Hati*. She exchanges insults with *Atli* and *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*.

**Hrimgrimmir**, a *troll*.

**Hrothmar**, killer of King *Svafnir*. He is killed by *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*.

**Hrungnir**, a *giant* killed by *Thor*.

**Hrym**, a *giant*.

**Hun**, an Asian people of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, whose raids in Europe reached their peak in the fifth century AD and brought them into both conflicts and alliances with the Germanic *Goths*. Numerous human characters in the Poetic Edda are referred to as *Huns* (or as King of the *Huns*), especially *Attila* (who is distantly based on the historical Attila the Hun) and *Sigurth*.

{361} **Hunding**, a king who is killed by *Helgi Sigmundsson*. Some of *Hunding's* sons kill *Sigmund*, a killing that is avenged by *Sigurth*.

**Hymir**, a *giant*, father of *Tyr*. His daughters are mentioned in *Lokasenna*.

**Hyndla**, a witch.

**Idi**, a *giant*.

**Ithavoll**, a valley, apparently on *Asgard*.

**Ithunn**, one of the *Aesir*, who keeps golden apples that the gods eat to remain young. She is married to *Bragi*.

**Jalangerheith**, unknown location.

**Jonaker**, a king, third husband of *Guthrun*.

**Jormunrekk**, a king who is promised the hand of *Svanhild* in marriage. He has her trampled to death by horses when he learns that his son *Randver* has had an affair with her while transporting her to the wedding.

**Jotunheim**, “giant-home,” the realm of the *giants*. It is said to be east of *Asgard*, and *Thor* is frequently said to be “out east” or “coming back from the east,” implying he has been in Jotunheim.

**Kjar**, father of *Olrún*.

**Knefroth**, messenger of *Attila*.

**Knui**, unknown figure mentioned in *Grottasongr*.

**Kostbera**, wife of *Hogni*.

**Laufey**, mother (not father) of *Loki*.

**Loddfafnir**, an unknown character addressed during part of *Havamal*. The meaning of the name has not been deciphered.

**Loki**, a complicated trickster figure, father of *Fenrir* and *Hel* but occasionally friendly to the *Aesir*. After causing the death of *Balder* he is

imprisoned till *Ragnarok* (with venom dripping upon him from a serpent that hangs above him), when he will escape and side with the *giants*.

**Loth**, a vaguely described god who helps *Odin* and *Honir* ensoul humans.

**Magni**, a son of *Thor*. *Thor* is often identified as “the father of Magni.”

**Meili**, a brother of *Thor*, not otherwise known.

**Memory**, one of *Odin*’s ravens (Old Norse *Muninn*).

**Menja**, a *giant* woman, enslaved with her sister *Fenja* to work on the millstone *Grotti*.

**Midgard**, literally the “middle-enclosure,” the world in which humans live.

{362} **Midgard-serpent**, a gigantic dragon or snake said to dwell in the ocean surrounding the land of *Midgard*. The serpent is *Loki*’s son by *Angerbotha*, and brother to *Fenrir* and *Hel*.

**Mimir**, a famously wise *giant* who owns *Mimir*’s well. A drink from his well bestows wisdom, but *Odin* had to leave one of his eyes in the well in exchange for a drink. Later *Mimir* is beheaded, but *Odin* pickles his head and continues to consult him for his wisdom.

**Mirkwood**, anglicized name of Old Norse *Myrkvithr*, a famous forest mentioned in several poems; associated vaguely with “the south.”

**Miskorblindi**, an unknown figure, perhaps a *giant*.

**Mjollnir**, the magical hammer of *Thor*.

**Mother**, the mother, with *Father*, of the noble class of humans.

**Mysing**, a “sea-king” summoned by *Fenja* and *Menja* to kill *Frothi* when they turn the magical millstone *Grotti* to their own purposes.

**Naglfar**, “(finger)nail-vessel,” a ship made of the untrimmed nails of corpses, sailed by *Loki* and the *giants* at *Ragnarok*.

**Nari**, a son of *Loki* who is killed by the *Aesir* and whose intestines are then used to tie up *Loki*.

**Narvi**, a son of *Loki* who is turned into a wolf after *Loki* insults the gods in *Lokasenna*.

**Nithhogg**, a huge dragon that constantly chews at the roots of *Yggdrasil*. It survives *Ragnarok*.

**Nithuth**, a king in Sweden who imprisons *Volund*.

**Njari**, the kingdom of *Nithuth*, apparently a region of Sweden.

**Njorth**, a god of the *Vanir* family, father of *Freyja* and *Frey*.

**Noatun**, hall of *Njorth*, frequently mentioned in association with him.

**Norns**, the three sisters who determine the fate of gods and humans. They are *Skuld*, *Urth*, and *Verthandi*.

**Oddrun**, sister of *Attila* and *Brynhild*. She and *Gunnar* are lovers after the death of *Brynhild*, but *Attila* refuses to let his sister marry *Gunnar*. She is credited with knowing spells that ease childbirth.

**Odin**, god of poetry and war. He is often portrayed as a shrewd figure pursuing his own selfish interests, including the dispatching of human warriors so that they may serve in his army in *Valhalla*. He is very frequently seen in disguise and takes many names, such as *Good Advisor*, *Graybeard*, and *Shadowed-Face*.

**Olrun**, a *Valkyrie*, said to be from *Mirkwood* and to be a sorceress. Married to *Egil* (2).

**Oskopnir**, an island where the final battle of *Ragnarok* will be fought.

{363} **Othrerir**, the name of the horn that contains a magical mead, which imparts the ability to compose poetry upon whoever drinks it. The mead itself is also called *Othrerir*.

**Ottar**, a young nobleman who learns of his ancestry from *Hyndla* in *Voluspa en skamma*.

**Otter**, a *dwarf* (brother of *Fafnir* and *Regin*) who lives most of his life in the form of an otter. He is killed by *Loki*, which precipitates the action of the bulk of the heroic poems.

**Ragnarok**, the foretold end of the world, when most gods and humans will be wiped out.

**Ran**, goddess of shipwrecks.

**Randver**, son of *Jormunrekk*, who has an affair with *Svanhild* while transporting her to her marriage with his father.

**Regin**, a dwarven smith (brother of *Fafnir* and *Otter*) who raises *Sigurth*, forges the sword *Gram* for him, and incites *Sigurth* to kill his brother, the dragon *Fafnir*.

**Riddle-Weaver**, Old Norse *Vafthruthnir*, a *giant* who competes with *Odin* to determine who knows more mythological lore.

**Rig**, alternative name for *Heimdall*.

**Rind**, mother, with *Odin*, of *Vali*.

**Rune**, a letter of the runic alphabet that was used for writing the Old Norse language before the adoption of the Roman alphabet. (The Roman alphabet is the contemporary alphabet used to write English.) Runes were apparently regarded as bestowing special power on those who knew how to carve them, as evidenced by their mentions in *Havamal* and *Sigrdrifumal*.

**Saehrimnir**, the boar whose flesh is eaten in *Valhalla*.

**Saevarstoth**, a small island where *Volund* is imprisoned.

**Saga**, a little-known goddess(?), associated with the sea.

**Samsey**, an island.

**Saxi**, a king mentioned in *Guthrunarkvitha III*, who knows how to bless a kettle for the trial by ordeal.

**Sefafjoll**, home of *Sigrun*.

**Shadowed-Face**, the name taken by *Odin* in disguise in *Grimnismal*.

**Sif**, wife of *Thor*. She is said to have hair made of gold.

**Sigerdrifa**, a *Valkyrie* who is imprisoned by *Odin* inside a ring of fire for her refusal to obey his orders; she cannot be freed till a man who knows no fear rides through the flames. *Sigurth* frees her, and she gives him advice in *Sigrdrifumal*. It is unclear if she is the same *Valkyrie* as *Brynhild*; she is treated as the same individual in some medieval sources but not in others.

**Sigerlinn**, wife of *Hjorvarth*, mother of *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*.

{364} **Siggeir**, foster-father of *Sinfjotli*.

**Sigmund (1)**, father of *Sigurth* and *Sinfjotli*.

**Sigmund (2)**, son of *Sigurth* and *Guthrun*, and thus grandson of *Sigmund (1)*.

**Sigrun**, a *Valkyrie*, daughter of *Hogni*, and lover of *Helgi Sigmundsson*, who fights for her against *Hothbrodd*.

**Sigurth**, son of *Sigmund (1)*, the slayer of the dragon *Fafnir*. First husband of *Guthrun*. He acquires a famous hoard of treasure after killing *Fafnir*.

**Sigyn**, the wife of *Loki*, who sits beside him in his prison.

**Sindri**, probably a *dwarf*, who owns a hall made of gold.

**Sinfjotli**, son of *Sigmund (1)*, half-brother to *Sigurth* and *Helgi Sigmundsson*. According to *Volsunga saga*, he is the son of *Sigmund* and his sister *Signy*, and *Sinfjotli* killed his own half-brothers by *Signy* and her first husband, *Siggeir* (these events are alluded to in *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana I*,

st. 36 and 41).

**Skathi**, goddess of skis and snowshoes, born a *giant*, daughter of *Thjassi*, and wife of *Njorth*.

**Skirnir**, messenger of *Frey*, sent to woo the *giant* woman *Gerth* for *Frey* in *For Skirnis*.

**Skjold**, ancestor of the *Skjoldungs*.

**Skjoldungs**, a well-known dynasty of Scandinavian kings.

**Skogul**, the name of a *Valkyrie*.

**Skol**, a wolf who follows the moon, and who will swallow it at *Ragnarok*.

**Skuld (1)**, “ought,” the name of one of the *Norns*, the three sisters who determine fate.

**Skuld (2)**, the name of a *Valkyrie*.

**Slagfinn**, a brother of *Volund*.

**Sleipnir**, the eight-legged horse of *Odin*.

**Slith**, a river associated with the *giants*.

**Sokkvabekk**, an (apparently) underwater hall used by *Odin* and *Saga*.

**Sorli**, son of *Guthrun* and *Jonaker*, brother of *Hamthir*, and half-brother of *Erp* (2).

**Spellcaster**, a king of *Sweden* (*Odin* in disguise) who sells *Frothi* the slaves *Fenja* and *Menja*. *Grimnismal* gives “Spellcaster” (*Fjolnir*) as one of *Odin*’s names, and *Odin* (disguised as *Battle-Stirrer*) mentions it again as one of his names in *Reginsmal*.

**Starkath**, a son of *Granmar*.

**Surt**, a *giant* who carries a flaming sword.

**Suttung**, a *giant*.

{365} **Svafnir**, father of *Sigerlinn*; he is killed by *Hrothmar*.

**Svanhild**, daughter of *Guthrun* and *Sigurth*. She is killed by *Jormunrekk*. According to *Volsunga saga*, this is because *Randver* betrays his trust and has a tryst with her while transporting her to her marriage with *Jormunrekk*.

**Svarang**, a *giant*.

**Svava**, a *Valkyrie* who guards and eventually becomes engaged to *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*.

**Sweden**, roughly coterminous with the modern country, but much of the southern part of what is now Sweden belonged to *Denmark* till early modern times.

**Thakkrath**, a servant of *Nithuth*.

**Thjassi**, a proverbially strong *giant*, father of *Skathi*. It is said that *Thor* killed him and threw his eyes into the sky, where they became stars.

**Thjothrek**, a king who visits *Attila*. *Guthrun* tells him her tragic story in *Guthrunarkvitha II*, and in *Guthrunarkvitha III* he is falsely accused of having an affair with *Guthrun*.

**Thor**, the god of thunder and protector of humankind. He is the son of *Odin* and the *Earth*. His weapon is the hammer *Mjollnir*.

**Thought**, one of *Odin*'s ravens (Old Norse *Huginn*).

**Thruthheim**, home of *Thor*.

**Thrym**, a *giant* who steals *Mjollnir*.

**Thrymheim**, a hall of *giants*.

**Troll**, possibly the same type of creature as a *giant*, though the term *troll* seems to be always negative and associated with an ugly semi-human monster (whereas *giants* may be attractive).

**Tyr**, one of the *Aesir*. He is missing one hand, which he lost to the wolf *Fenrir* when the gods promised *Fenrir* that a magical chain would not bind him permanently. The wolf demanded that one of the gods place his hand in the wolf's mouth as a pledge that this was not done in deceit. Only *Tyr* stepped forward to offer his hand, and the wolf bit it off. The story is told more fully in the Prose Edda (see Faulkes under "Further Reading" in the Introduction).

**Ulfadalir**, valley region where *Volund* makes his home.

**Ulfjsja**, lake in *Ulfadalir*.

**Ull**, a little-known god. *Guthrun* claims that *Attila* swore an oath on *Ull*'s ring in *Atlakvitha*.

**Unn**, a daughter of *Aegir*. In *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana II*, we read that *Helgi Sigmundsson* and *Dag* swear oaths to one another on her stone.

**Urth**, one of the *Norns*, the three sisters who determine fate.

{366} **Utgartha-Loki**, a *giant* of truly immense size. In Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda it is related that *Thor* once slept in *Utgartha-Loki*'s glove, which was so gigantic that he mistook it for a house. *Thor* is often mocked for this.

**Valaskjalf**, a hall of *Odin*.

**Valhalla**, “hall of the slain,” where the *Valkyries* bring slain warriors to live with *Odin* till *Ragnarok*.

**Vali**, son of *Odin* and *Rind*, who avenges the death of *Balder* on *Hoth* while he is only one night old.

**Valkyries**, “choosers of the slain,” women who fly over battlefields and conduct the spirits of the best slain warriors to *Valhalla*. A *Valkyrie* is not a separate kind of being from humans, but appears instead to be an occupation that mortal women (such as *Sigrun*) can assume.

**Vanaheim**, a realm inhabited by the *Vanir* gods.

**Vanir** (plural), a family of gods associated with agriculture and fertility (*Frey* and his sister *Freyja*) and the sea (their father *Njorth*). *Njorth* and his children live with the *Aesir* in *Asgard*; it is implied that there are other *Vanir* as well who live in *Vanaheim*.

**Var**, goddess of wedding vows.

**Ve**, a brother of *Odin*.

**Verthandi**, “happening,” the name of one of the *Norns*, the three sisters who determine fate.

**Vilir**, a brother of *Odin*.

**Vilmund**, lover of *Borgny*, mentioned (in *Oddrunargratr* only) as the killer of *Hogni* (2).

**Vithar**, a son of *Odin* who will slay *Fenrir* at *Ragnarok* after *Fenrir* kills *Odin*.

**Volsung**, the eponymous ancestor of the *Volsungs*, father of *Sigmund*.

**Volsungs**, the family that includes *Sigurth* and *Helgi* and their father *Sigmund*. The family is named for *Sigmund*’s father, *Volsung*.

**Volund**, identified as an *elf*, a smith of great talent.

**Ydalir**, home of *Ull*.

**Yggdrasil**, the ash tree central to the nine worlds of Norse cosmology, where *Odin* hanged himself on a sort of vision-quest in which he learned the runic alphabet.

**Ylfings**, an alternative name for the *Volsungs*.

**Ymir**, the first *giant*, and the first living thing. *Odin* and his brothers made the earth from his corpse.

"The poems of the *Poetic Edda* have waited a long time for a Modern English translation that would do them justice. Here it is at last (Odin be praised!) and well worth the wait. These amazing texts from a 13th-century Icelandic manuscript are of huge historical, mythological, and literary importance, containing the lion's share of information that survives today about the gods and heroes of pre-Christian Scandinavians, their unique vision of the beginning and end of the world, etc. Jackson Crawford's modern versions of these poems are authoritative and fluent and often very gripping. With their individual headnotes and complementary general Introduction, they supply today's readers with most of what they need to know in order to understand and appreciate the beliefs, motivations, and values of the Vikings."

—Dick Ringler, Professor Emeritus of English and Scandinavian Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison

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Cover: Northern lights over lake  
Mývatn in Iceland.

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