

BALDR'S DRAUMAR (BALDUR'S DREAMS)
or,
VEGTAMSKVIÐA (THE WANDERER'S TALE)


Bellows' Introduction (1936)

Baldrs Draumar is found only in the *Arnarnagnaean Codex*, where it follows the *Harbarthsljóth* fragment. It is preserved in various late paper manuscripts, with the title *Vegtamskvitha* (The Lay of Vegtam), which has been used by some editors.

The poem, which contains but fourteen stanzas, has apparently been preserved in excellent condition. Its subject-matter and style link it closely with the *Voluspo*. Four of the five lines of stanza 11 appear, almost without change, in the *Voluspo*, 32-33, and the entire poem is simply an elaboration of the episode outlined in those and the preceding stanzas. It has been suggested that *Baldrs Draumar* and the *Voluspo* may have been by the same author. There is also enough similarity in style between *Baldrs Draumar* and the *Thrymskvitha* (note especially the opening stanza) to give color to Vigfusson's guess that these two poems had a common authorship. In any case, *Baldrs Draumar* presumably assumed its present form not later than the first half of the tenth century.

Whether the Volva (wise-woman) of the poem is identical with the speaker in the *Voluspo* is purely a matter for conjecture. Nothing definitely opposes such a supposition. As in the longer poem she foretells the fall of the gods, so in this case she prophesies the first incident of that fall, the death of Baldr. Here she is called up from the dead by Othin, anxious to know the meaning of Baldr's evil dreams; in the *Voluspo* it is likewise intimated that the Volva has risen from the grave.

The poem, like most of the others in the collection, is essentially dramatic rather than narrative, summarizing a story which was doubtless familiar to everyone who heard the poem recited.

Thorpe (1866)	Bellows (1936)	Auden-Taylor (1969)
<p>1. Together were the Æsir all in council, And the Asyniur all in conference, And they consulted, the mighty gods, Why Baldr had oppressive dreams.</p> <p>2. [To that god his slumber was most afflicting; His auspicious dreams seemed departed. They the Jötuns questioned, wise seers of the future, whether this might not forebode calamity?</p> <p>3. The responses said that to death destined Was Ullr's kinsman, of all the dearest: That caused grief to Frigg and Svafnir, And to the other powers - on a course they resolved:</p> <p>4. That they would send to every being, Assurance to solicit, Baldr not to harm. All species swore oaths to spare him; Frigg received all their vows and compacts.</p> <p>5. Valfather fears something defective; He thinks the Hamingiur may have departed; The Æsir he convenes, their counsel craves: At the deliberation much is devised.]</p> <p>6. Uprose Odin lord of men And on Sleipnir he the saddle laid; Rode thence down to Niflhel. A dog he met, from Hel coming.</p> <p>7. It was blood-stained on its breast, On its slaughter-craving throat, and nether jaw. It bayed and widely gaped at the sire of magic songs - long it howled.</p> <p>8. Forth rode Odin - the ground rattled - Till to Hel's lofty house he came. Then rode Ygg to the eastern gate, Where he knew there was a Vala's grave.</p> <p>9. To the prophetess, he began a magic song to chant, towards the north looked, potent runes applied, a spell pronounced, an answer demanded, until compelled she rose, and with deathlike voice she said:</p>	<p>1. ¹Once were the gods together met, And the goddesses came and council held, And the far-famed ones the truth would find, Why baleful dreams to Baldr² had come.</p>  <p>2. Then Othin rose, the enchanter old, And the saddle he laid on Sleipnir's³ back; Thence rode he down to Niflhel⁴ deep, And the hound⁵ he met that came from hell.</p> <p>3. Bloody he was on his breast before, At the father of magic⁶ he howled from afar; ⁷Forward rode Othin, the earth resounded Till the house so high of Hel⁸ he reached.</p> <p>4. Then Othin rode to the eastern door, There, he knew well, was the wise-woman's grave; Magic he spoke and mighty charms, Till spell-bound she rose, and in death she spoke:</p>	<p>1. The gods hurried to their hall of council, Gathered together, goddesses with them, All-powerful, eager to unriddle Baldr's dream that such dread portended.</p> <p>2. Up rose Odhinn, unaging magician, Harnesses Sleipnir, the eight-legged, Sped down from Asgard to Hel's Deep.</p> <p>3. The blood-dabbled hound of Hel faced him, Howling in frenzy at the father of runes. The High One halted at the eastern gate, Where loomed a tumulus, tomb of a witch. Runes he chanted, charms of power: Her spectre rose whom his spell commanded To enlighten the god with the lore of the dead.</p>

<p>Vala 10. "What man is this, to me unknown, Who has for me increased an irksome course? I have with snow been decked, by rain beaten, And with dew moistened: long have I been dead."</p>	<p>5. "What is the man, to me unknown, That has made me travel the troublous road? I was snowed on with snow, and smitten with rain, And drenched with dew; long was I dead."</p>	<p>4. Who is he that on Hel intrudes? Who calls me up, increasing my grief? Drenched by hail, driven by storm, Dew-frozen, I am dead long.</p>
<p>Vegtam 11. "Vegtam is my name, I am Valtam's son. Tell thou me of Hel: from earth I call on thee. For whom are those benches strewed o'er with rings, / Those costly couches o'erlaid with gold?"</p>	<p>[Othin spake:]⁹ 6. "Vegtam¹⁰ my name, I am Valtam's son; Speak thou of hell, for of heaven¹¹ I know: For whom are the benches¹² bright with rings, And the platforms gay bedecked with gold?"¹³</p>	<p>5. I am Struggler's Son, Strider, Way-Tamer, Your secrets I ask: all earth's I know. Why are Hel's halls hung with jewels, Her chambers rivers of red gold?</p>
<p>Vala 12. "Here stands mead, for Baldr brewed, Over the bright potion a shield is laid; But the Æsir race are in despair. By compulsion I have spoken. I will now be silent."</p>	<p>[The Wise-Woman spake:] 7. "Here for Baldr the mead is brewed, The shining drink, and a shield lies o'er it; But their hope is gone from the mighty gods.¹⁴ Unwilling I spake, and now would be still."</p>	<p>6. For Baldr our mead is brewed strong In a shining cauldron, a shield over it. Odhinn on high in heart despairs. Unwilling my words: I would no more.</p>
<p>Vegtam 13. "Be not silent, Vala! I will question thee, until I know all. I will yet know who will Baldr's slayer be, And Odin's son of life bereave."</p>	<p>[Othin spake:] 8. "Wise-woman, cease not! I seek from thee All to know that I fain would ask: Who shall the bane of Baldr become, And steal the life from Othin's son?"</p>	<p>7. Far-seeing witch, your words unriddle. More will I ask: all will I know. Who shall slay Baldr, best of the gods, Who suck the life from the son of Odhinn?</p>
<p>Vala 14. "Hödr will hither his glorious brother send, He of Baldr will the slayer be, And Odin's son of life bereave. By compulsion I have spoken; I will now be silent."</p>	<p>[The Wise-Woman spake:] 9. "Hoth¹⁵ thither bears the far-famed branch, He shall the bane of Baldr become, And steal the life from Othin's son. Unwilling I spake, and now would be still."¹⁶</p>	<p>8. Hodur the blind the branch shall throw, From his brother's body the blood to drain, Sucking the life from the son of Odhinn. Unwilling my words: I would no more.</p>
<p>Vegtam 15. "Be not silent, Vala! I will question thee, until I know all. I will yet know who on Hödr vengeance will inflict, Or Baldr's slayer raise on the pile."</p>	<p>[Othin spake:] 10. "Wise-woman, cease not! I seek from thee All to know that I fain would ask:¹⁷ Who shall vengeance win for the evil work, Or bring to the flames the slayer of Baldr?"</p>	<p>9. Far-seeing witch, your words unriddle. More will I ask: all will I know. By whose hand shall Hodur fall And Baldr's bane be burned with fire?</p>
<p>Vala 16. "Rind a son shall bear, in the western halls: He shall slay Odin's son, when one night old. He a hand will not wash, nor his head comb, Ere he to the pile has borne Baldr's adversary. By compulsion I have spoken; I will now be silent."</p>	<p>[The Wise-Woman spake:] 11. "Rind¹⁸ bears Vali in Vestrsalir,¹⁹ And one night old fights Othin's son; / His hands he shall wash not, his hair he shall comb not, Till the slayer of Baldr he brings to the flames. Unwilling I spake, and now would be still."</p>	<p>10. Rindur the blessed shall bring forth Vali. Though but a night old, he shall be the avenger, His hands he shall wash not nor his hair comb Till Baldr's bane is borne to the pyre: Unwilling my words: I would no more.</p>
<p>Vegtam 17. "Be not silent, Vala! I will question thee, until I know all. I will yet know who the maidens are, that weep at will, / And heavenward cast their neck-veils? Tell me but that: till then thou sleepest not."</p>	<p>[Othin spake:] 12. "Wise-woman, cease not! I seek from thee All to know that I fain would ask: ²⁰What maidens are they who then shall weep, And toss to the sky the yards of the sails?"²¹</p>	<p>11. Far-seeing witch, your words unriddle. More will I ask: all will I know. Who are the maidens who shall mourn then, Toss up to Asgard their trailing scarves?</p>
<p>Vala 18. "Not Vegtam art thou, as I before believed; rather art thou Odin, lord of men!"</p>	<p>[The Wise-Woman spake:] 13. "Vegtam thou art not, as erstwhile I thought; Othin thou art, the enchanter²² old." ²³</p>	<p>12. Way-Tamer you are not, nor are you Strider: You are Odhinn the wily, unaging magician. Witch you are not, nor woman either: Womb of monsters, you have mothered three.</p>
<p>Odin 19. "Thou art no Vala, nor wise woman, Rather art thou the mother of three Thursar."</p>	<p>[Othin spake:] "No wise-woman art thou, nor wisdom hast; Of giants three the mother art thou."</p>	<p>13. Go home, Odhinn: air your triumph. No guest shall again my grave visit, Till wild Loki tear loose from his bonds And the World-Wasters on the war-path come.</p>
<p>Vala 20. "Home ride thou, Odin! and exult. Thus shall never more man again visit me, Until Loki free from his bonds escapes, And Ragnarök all-destroying comes."</p>	<p>[The Wise-Woman spake:] 14. "Home ride, Othin, be ever proud; For no one of men shall seek me more Till Loki wanders loose from his bonds,²⁴ And to the last strife the destroyers come."</p>	<p>13. Go home, Odhinn: air your triumph. No guest shall again my grave visit, Till wild Loki tear loose from his bonds And the World-Wasters on the war-path come.</p>

¹ Lines 1-3 are identical with *Thrymskvitha*, 13, 1-3. After stanza 1 two old editions, and one later one, insert four stanzas from late paper manuscripts.

² Baldr: concerning this best and noblest of the gods, the son of Othin and Frigg, who comes again among the survivors after the final battle, cf. *Voluspo*, 32 and 62, and notes. He is almost never mentioned anywhere except in connection with the story of his death, though Snorri has one short passage praising his virtue and beauty.

³ Sleipnir: Othin's eight-legged horse, the son of Loki and the stallion Svathilfari; cf. *Lokasenna*, 23, and *Grimnismol*, 44, and notes.

⁴ Niflhel: the murky ("nifl") dwelling of Hel, goddess of the dead.

⁵ The hound: Garm; cf. *Voluspo*, 44.

⁶ Father of magic: Othin appears constantly as the god of magic.

⁷ The manuscript marks line 3 as the beginning of a stanza, and thus the editions vary in their grouping of the lines of this and the succeeding stanzas.

⁸ Hel: offspring of Loki and the giantess Angrbotha, as were the wolf Fenrir and Mithgarthsorm. She ruled the world of the unhappy dead, either those who had led evil lives or, according to another tradition, those who had not died in battle.

⁹ The manuscript has no superscriptions indicating the speakers.

¹⁰ Vegtam ("The Wanderer"): Othin, as usual, conceals his identity, calling himself the son of Valtam ("The Fighter"). In this instance he has unusual need to do so, for as the wise-woman belongs apparently to the race of the giants, she would be unwilling to answer a god's questions.

¹¹ Heaven: the word used includes all the upper worlds, in contrast to hell.

¹² Benches, etc.: the adornment of the benches and raised platforms, or elevated parts of the house, was a regular part of the preparation for a feast of welcome.

¹³ The text of the two last lines is somewhat uncertain.

¹⁴ Grundtvig, followed by, Edzardi, thinks a line has been lost between lines 3 and 4.

¹⁵ Concerning the blind Hoth, who, at Loki's instigation, cast the fatal mistletoe at Baldr, cf. *Voluspo*, 32-33 and notes.

¹⁶ In the manuscript the last line is abbreviated, as also in stanza 11.

¹⁷ In the manuscript lines 1-2 are abbreviated, as also in stanza 12.

¹⁸ Rind: mentioned by Snorri as one of the goddesses. Concerning her son Vali, begotten by Othin for the express purpose of avenging Baldr's death, and his slaying of Hoth the day after his birth, cf. *Voluspo*, 33-34, where the lines of this stanza appear practically verbatim.

¹⁹ Vestrsalir ("The Western Hall"): not elsewhere mentioned in the poems.

²⁰ The manuscript marks the third line as the beginning of a stanza; something may have been lost.

²¹ Lines 3-4 are thoroughly obscure. According to Bugge the maidens who are to weep for Baldr are the daughters of the sea-god Aegir, the waves, whose grief will be so tempestuous that they will toss the ships up to the very sky. "Yards of the sails" is a doubtfully accurate rendering; the two words, at any rate in later Norse nautical speech, meant respectively the "tack" and the "sheet" of the square sail.

²² Enchanter: the meaning of the original word is most uncertain.

²³ Possibly two separate stanzas.

²⁴ Concerning Loki's escape and his relation to the destruction of the gods, cf. *Voluspo*, 35 and 51, and notes. While the wise-woman probably means only that she will never speak again till the end of the world, it has been suggested, and is certainly possible, that she intends to give Loki her counsel, thus revenging herself on Othin.