

HRAFNAGALDUR ÓÐINS (ODIN'S RAVEN'S SONGS)

or,

Forspjallsljóð "Prelude Poem"

Thorpe's Introduction (1866)

This very obscure poem has been regarded as a fragment only of a poem, of which the beginning and end are wanting. With regard to the beginning, the want may possibly be more apparent than real; the strophes 2-5 being in fact a sort of introduction, although they do not at first strike us as such, in consequence of the obscurity of the 1st strophe, which seems very slightly connected with the following ones, in which the gods and dwarfs are described as in council, on account of certain warnings or forebodings of their approaching downfall, or Ragnarök. Another point of difficulty is its title, there being nothing in the whole poem to connect it with Odin's ravens, except the mention of Hugr (Hugin) in the 3rd strophe. Erik Halson, a learned Icclander, after having spent or wasted ten years in an attempt to explain this poem, confessed that he understood little or nothing of it. In its mythology, too, we find parts assigned to some of the personages, of which no traces occur in either Sæmund's or Snorri's Edda; though we are hardly justified in pronouncing it, with more than one scholar of eminence, a fabrication of later times.

	Thorpe (1866)	Björnsson (2002)
1	Alfather works, ¹ The Alfar discern, ² The Vanir know, ³ The Nornir indicate, ⁴ The Ividia brings forth, ⁵ Men endure, ⁶ The Thursar await, ⁷ The Valkyruir long. ⁸	Allfather works, Elves understand, Vanir know, Norns reveal, Íviðja gives birth, Men endure, Thurses wait, Valkyries yearn.
2	The forebodings of the Æsir suspected to be evil; treacherous Vættar had the runes confounded. Urd was enjoined to guard Odhroerir, ⁹ powerfully to protect it against the increasing multitude.	The Æsir suspected an evil scheme, wights confounded the weather with magic; Urður was appointed Óðhrærir's keeper, powerful to protect it from the mightiest winter.
3	Hug ¹⁰ then goes forth, explores the heavens, the powers fear disaster from delay. 'Twas Thráin's belief that the dream ¹¹ was ominous; Dáin's thought that the dream was dark.	Hugur then disappears seeking the heavens, men's ruin is suspected, if he's delayed; Práinn's thought is an oppressive dream, Dáinn's dream was thought enigmatic.
4	Among the dwarfs virtue decays; worlds sink down to Ginnung's abyss Oft will Alswid ¹² strike them down, often the fallen again collect.	The dwarves' powers dwindle, the worlds sink down towards Ginnung's abyss; Often Alsviður fells from above, often he gathers the fallen again.
5	Stand no longer shall earth or sun. The stream of air with corruption laden shall not cease. Hidden is in Mim's limpid well men's certain knowledge. Understand ye yet, or what?	Earth and Sun cannot stand firm; malignant winds do not cease; hidden in the glorious well of Mímir lies all knowledge; know ye yet, or what?
6	In the dales dwells the prescient Dis, from Yggdrasil's ash sunk down, of alfen race, Idun by name, the youngest of Ivaldi's elder children.	Dwells in dales the curious díś, from Yggdrasill's ash descended; of elven kin, Iðunn was her name, youngest of Ívald's elder children.

7	<p>She ill brooked her descent, under the hoar tree's trunk confined. She would not happy be with Nörvi's daughter,¹³ accustomed to a pleasanter abode at home.</p>	<p>Ill she endured the fall from above, under the hoar-tree's trunk confined; dislik'd staying at Nörvi's daughter's, used to better abodes back home.</p>
8	<p>The triumphant gods saw Nanna¹⁴ sorrowing in earth's deep sanctuaries; a wolf's skin they gave her, in which herself she clad, changed her feelings, practised guile, alter'd her aspect.</p>	<p>The divinities see Nauma grieving in the wolf's home; given a wolf-skin, she clad herself therein, changed disposition, delighted in guile, shifted her shape.</p>
9	<p>Vidrir selected Bifröst's guardian, of the Giöll-sun's keeper to inquire all that she knew of every world; Bragi and Lopt should witness bear.</p>	<p>Viðrir selected Bifröst's guardian to inquire of the bearer of Gjöll's sun, whatever she knew of the world's affairs; Bragi and Loftur bore witness.</p>
10	<p>Magic songs they sung, rode on wolves the god and gods.¹⁵ At the heavenly house, Odin listened, in Hlidskiálf; let them go forth on their long way.</p>	<p>Sorcery they sang, wolves they rode, Rögnir and Reginn, against the world's house; Óðinn listens in Hliðskjálf; watched the travellers' distant journey.</p>
11	<p>The wise god asked the cupbearer of the gods' progeny and their associates, Whether of heaven, or Hel, or earth, she knew the origin, duration, or dissolution?</p>	<p>The wise one asked the server of mead, scion of gods and his road-companions, if she knew the origin, duration, and end of heaven, of hel, of the world.</p>
12	<p>She spoke not, she could no words to the anxious gods bring forth, nor a sound uttered; tears flowed from the head's orbs; with pain repressed they flow anew</p>	<p>Her mind she spoke not, nor was Gefjun able to utter a word, nor express any joy; tears trickled, from the skull's shields, the mighty one was bereft of power.</p>
13	<p>As from the east from Elivágar, the thorn is impelled by the ice-cold Thurs, wherewith Dáin all people strikes over the fair mid-earth;</p>	<p>As from the East, out of Élivágar, a thorn from the field of the rime-cold giant, with which Dáinn smites all men of glorious Midgard every night.</p>
14	<p>when every faculty is lulled, the hands sink, totters with drowsiness the bright, sword-girt As;¹⁶ drives away the current the giantess's¹⁷ blandishment of the mind's agitations of all people,¹⁸</p>	<p>Actions are numbed, the arms slump, a swoon hovers over the white god's sword; stupor dispels the wind of the giantess, the mind's workings of all mankind.</p>
15	<p>so the gods appeared Jorun to be affected, with sorrows swollen, when they no answer got; the strove the more</p>	<p>Thus the gods perceived the state of Jórunn, swollen with sorrow, when no answer came forth; they grew more persistent</p>

	the greater the repulse; still less than they had hoped did their words prevail.	as response was denied, but all their words were to no avail.
16	When then the leader of the inquiring travellers, the guardian of Herjan's loud sounding horn took the son of Nál for his companion, Grímnir's skalld ¹⁹ at the place kept watch.	Went forth the leader of the expedition, guardian of Herjan's Gjallarhorn; chose as companion the kinsman of Nál, Grímnir's poet guarded the ground.
17	Vingólf reached Vidur's ministers, both borne by Fornióts kin. They entered, and the Æsir forthwith saluted, at Ygg's convivial meeting.	Arrived at Vingólf Viðar's thains, by Forniót's sons both transported; they walk within, greet the Æsir forthwith at Yggur's merry ale-feast:
18	Hangatýr they hailed, of Æsir the most blissful; potent drink in the high seat they wished him to enjoy, and the gods to sit happy at the feast, ever with Yggiung pleasure to share.	"Hale be, Hangatýr, happiest of Æsir, may you preside over the mead at the high-seat!" "Sit, gods, in delight at the drinking-feast; may you, with Yggiungur, enjoy eternal bliss!"
19	On the benches seated, at Bölverk's bidding, the company of gods where with Sæhrímnir sated. Skögul at the tables, from Hnikar's vessel measured out the mead, in Mimir's ²⁰ horns.	Seated on benches at Bölverk's bidding the tribe of gods were with Sæhrímnir sated; Skögul, at the tables, with horns meted out Mimir's mead from Hnikar's vat.
20	Of many things inquired, when the meal was over. the high gods of Heimdall, the goddesses of Loki, - where the maid had uttered divinations or wise words? - from noon until twilight's advent.	Much was asked during the banquet of Heimdallur by the gods, of Loki by the goddesses, whether the woman had spoken prophecies or wisdom; all day they asked until twilight approached.
21	Ill they showed it had fallen out, their errand bootless, little to glory in. A lack of counsel seemed likely, how from the maiden they might an answer get.	Badly, they deemed, had gone amiss their futile errand of little glory; it would prove hard to find the ploy needed to get an answer from the woman.
22	Omi answered; all listened; "Night is the time for new counsels; till the morrow let reflect each one competent to give advice helpful to the Æsir."	Ómi answers, all listened: "Night is the time for new advice; think until morning each that is able to provide counsel for the Æsir's benefit!"
23	Ran along the ways of mother Rind, ²¹ the desired repast of Fenrisulf. ²² Went from the guild, bade the gods farewell Hropt and Frigg, as, before Hrimfaxi,	Ran along the eddies of Rindur's plains the wolf's tired food supply; the gods left the feast and saluted Hroptur and Frigg, as Hrimfaxi ascended.
24	the son of Delling urged on his horse	Delling's son urged on his horse,

	adorned with precious jewels. Over Mannheim shines the horse's mane, the steed Dvalin's deluder drew in his chariot.	well adorned with precious stones; the horse's mane glows above Man-world, the steed in his chariot drew Dvalin's playmate.
25	In the north boundary of the spacious earth, under the outmost root of the noble tree, went to their couches Gýgiar and Thursar, spectres, dwarfs, and Murk Alfs.	At Jörmungrund's northern border, under the outermost root of the noble tree, went to their couches giantesses and giants, dead men, dwarves, and dark-elves.
26	The powers rose, the Alf's illuminator northwards towards Niflheim ²³ chased the night. Up Argjöll ran Ulfrún's son, the mighty hornblower of heaven's highs.	The gods arose, Álfröðull ran, Njóla advanced north towards Niflheimur; Úlfrún's son lifted up Árgjöll, the mighty hornblower in Himinbjörg.

¹ through all nature.

² impending evil.

³ that evil is at hand.

⁴ evil.

⁵ her monstrous offspring. Synonymous with *gýgr* (plural *gýgjur*), meaning simply "giantess."

⁶ calamity.

⁷ their day of freedom.

⁸ for conflict.

⁹ [one of the vessels that contain the mead of poetry (along with Boðn and Són) or the mead itself. (cf. *Hávamál*, 107, 140; *Skáldskaparmál*, V.)]

¹⁰ Hugin, Odin's raven?

¹¹ [thought by some to mean Baldur's dream, with this poem as its prelude]

¹² [Alsviðr (Old Norse "very quick") one of the two horses which pull the sun, or Sol's chariot, across the sky each day]

¹³ [i.e. Nótt, that is, Night. In the *Prose Edda*, Nótt is listed as the daughter of Nörvi (given with variant spellings)]

¹⁴ Here Idun is apparently so called.

¹⁵ Rögnir ok regin, Odin and the powers?

¹⁶ Heimdall.

¹⁷ Night.

¹⁸ This and the preceding strophe appear to be out of their place, and have by Simrock, not without reason, been inserted after the 21st.

¹⁹ Bragi.

²⁰ Minni's horns. Minnis is probably a later gloss.

²¹ Earth.

²² All conjectures. Fenri seems confounded with Hati.

²³ That the poem lacks an end as well as a beginning appears probable from the circumstance that no further mention is made of Bragi and Idun. Simrock is inclined to think that in the *Vegtamskviða* we are to look for the ending; but this does not fill up the chasm.