

From the Mouth of Óðinn:  
A New Translation of *Hávamál*

Translation and commentary by  
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*For all the people who can't quite "join in".*

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## Introduction

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Wisdom, or perhaps *insight*, is popular right now. Be it philosophy, the science of the mind, meditation, you name it; wisdom is in. I am no different. Over a decade ago I turned to the Far East for direction and, whilst having found something to work with, I realise now that our own historical European traditions had it too; there is just nobody around to teach it these days. Insight is not from the East or the West, it's human. The more I practice, the more I see just how human *Hávamál* really is; for better or worse.

*Hávamál* reveals a collection of surprisingly developed and profound statements of human insight, moral suggestions, and universal philosophy in Old Norse, the language of the Scandinavian homelands during the Viking Age. Many of these statements may appear basic, or simple examples of common sense, but in this case, that is exactly the point: most legitimately profound insights of any time period or culture are often incredibly simple. For one to realise that life, and one's place in it, is simple, is frequently portrayed to be an incredibly arduous task. *Applying* that realisation day to day is even harder. Consequently, to make use of Musashi Miyamoto, the famous Japanese swordsman, his well-known one-liner from his 17<sup>th</sup> century *Gorin no Sho*, based on the teachings of Zen, encapsulates this struggle: "If you would follow the Way, do not follow the World".

When one considers the typically Viking Age individual, one does not project a thoughtful and talented one who has pondered life, the universe and their/everyone's place in it (in 900-1000AD) and then gone about expressing it in poetry. This does not mean that poetry was uncommon in the Viking Age. The poetical corpus of Norse poetry, in its varying styles and forms, is enormous, spans centuries, and encapsulates a highly sophisticated verse form and exhibits skilled practitioners. Yet, speaking of *Hávamál* specifically, the gravitas of the poem is not just in its apparently simple outlook. The words need chewing. Each stanza is a moment, and, like every moment, it is up to us to respond from where we are at any given time.

The poet or, as academia understands the poem today, poets, have taken the figure, voice and mythology that surrounds the Æsir Óðinn as core to the expounding and revelation of the said insights. Returning to Musashi, Óðinn, in his general role of godly renegade, could not have been a better example of "not following the World". As a deity of wisdom, war, death, poetry, magic, wealth (to name but a few), the figure of Óðinn may represent one of

the most varied mythological figures in, at least, European history. Yet before saying anything technical about *Hávamál*, I will let the poem speak for itself.

Hávamál

## I 'The Gnostic Poem'

1

*Gáttir allar,  
áðr gangi fram,  
um skoðask skyli,  
því at óvíst er at vita  
hvar óvinir  
sitju á fleti fyrir.*

Regarding each opening,  
before proceeding,  
it pays to be cautiously hesitant;  
one can't know for certain  
where possible assailants  
may be lurking in the rooms ahead.

2

*Gefendr heilir!  
Gestr er inn kominn.  
Hvar skal sitja sjá?  
Mjök er bráðr  
sá er á bröndum skal  
síns um freista frama.*

“Exalted are those who give!”  
A newcomer has arrived...  
Where shall he sit?  
In a gale of haste  
the new face rushes to the fire  
who, unknowingly, is about to tempt fate.

3

*Elds er þörf  
þeims inn er kominn  
ok á kné kalinn;  
matar ok váða  
er manni þörf  
þeim er hefir um fjall farit.*

Warmth is indispensable  
for the one who bustled in  
audibly shivering with knocking knees;  
fare and fresh clothing  
are paramount for one  
who has travelled across frigid fells.

4

*Vatns er þörf  
þeim er til verðar kømr,  
þerru ok þjóðlaðar,  
góðs um æðis,  
ef sér geta mætti,  
orðs ok endrþögu.*

Water is crucial  
for those who've materialised for dinner,  
plus a towel and honest friendly greetings;  
a good disposition,  
if one can get it,  
speech and silence in return.

5

*Vits er þörf  
þeim er víða ratar,  
dælt er heima hvat;  
at augabragði verðr  
sá er ekki kann  
ok með snotrum sitr.*

Wits are essential  
for those who travel widely,  
anything goes at home;  
in an instant you may become  
one who knows nothing  
whilst sat among the wise.

## 6

*At hyggjandi sinni  
skylit maðr hræsinn vera,  
heldr gætinn at geði;  
þá er horskr ok þögull  
kømr heimisgarða til,  
sjaldan verðr til vörum,  
því at óbrigðra vin  
fær maðr aldregi  
en manvit mikit.*

No-one should be arrogant  
about their intelligence,  
but instead watchful of mind;  
when a knowledgeable and silent person  
comes to a home,  
shame rarely befalls them  
because of that infallible companion –  
no better a friend to have –  
a great hoard of common sense.

## 7

*Inn vari gestr,  
er til verðar kømr,  
þunnu hljóði þegir,  
eyrum hlýðir,  
en augum skoðar;  
svá nýsisk fróðra hverr fyrir.*

The canny guest,  
who has come to a meal,  
keeps silent with hearing finely-tuned,  
one sees with the ears,  
and hears with the eyes;  
wise people observe what's there.

## 8

*Hinn er sæll  
er sér um getr  
lof ok líknstafi;  
ódælla er við þat  
er maðr eiga skal  
annars brjóstum í.*

A fortunate individual  
is able to get  
charitable words and praise;  
it's unpredictable at best,  
the wisdom found,  
within another's heart.

## 9

*Sá er sæll  
er sjálfr um á  
lof ok vit meðan lifir,  
því at ill ráð  
hefir maðr opt þegit  
annars brjóstum ór.*

Considering all the poor advice  
people are frequently given  
from within another's heart  
consider yourself fortunate  
if you manage  
to maintain praise and wit whilst alive.

## 10

*Byrði betri  
berrat maðr brautu at  
en sé manvit mikit;  
auði betra  
þykkir þat í ókunnum stað,*

There's no better burden  
one can bear  
than a great hoard of common sense;  
it's better than wealth –  
you'll see – in unfamiliar places,



*slíkt er válaðs vera.*

wealth is the way of the wayward.

**11**

*Byrði betri  
berrat maðr brautu at  
en sé manvit mikit;  
vegnest verra  
vegra hann velli at  
en sé ofdrykkja öls.*

There's no better burden  
that one may bear  
than a great hoard of common sense;  
there's no worse provision  
to carry into the world  
than to be overly drunk on ale.

**12**

*Era svá gott  
sem gott kveða  
öl alda sonum,  
því at færa veit  
er fleira drekkur  
síns til geðs gumi.*

It's not so great,  
that supposedly excellent provision –  
ale – for the children of generations,  
because the more one drinks  
the less one knows  
about the ways of man.

**13**

*Óminnishegri heitir  
sá er yfir öldrum þrumir,  
hann stelr geði guma;  
þess fugls fjöðrum  
ek fjötraðr vark  
í garði Gunnlaðar.*

The crane called Forgetfulness lingers  
over the carousal of ale-drinking,  
it steals people's wits;  
with this bird's feathers  
I was fettered  
in the courtyard of Gunnlöð.

**14**

*ölr ek varð  
varð ofrölví  
at ins fróða Fjalars;  
því er öldr bazt  
at aprtr of heimtítr  
hverr sitt geð gumi.*

I was drunk,  
significantly more than drunk,  
whilst at wise Fjalar's;  
that's what's best about drinking,  
that, staggering back afterwards,  
everyone gets their mind back.

**15**

*Þagalt ok hugalt  
skyli þjóðans barn  
ok vígdjarft vera;  
glaðr ok reifr  
skyli gumna hverr,  
unz sinn bíðr bana.*

Silent and mindful  
the children of kings should be,  
not to mention intrepid in action;  
everyone should be  
content and jovial  
until their time is up.

16

*Ósnjallar maðr  
hyggsk munu ey lifa,  
ef hann við víg varask,  
en elli gefr  
honum engi frið,  
þótt honum geirar gefi.*

The foolish individual  
thinks they will live forever  
if they ever evade conflict;  
but old age  
will not grant them a truce,  
even though the spears might.

17

*Kópir afglapi,  
er til kynnis kómr,  
þylsk hann um eða þrumir;  
allt er senn  
ef hann sylv um getr,  
uppi er þá geð guma.*

The inarticulate fool gapes  
when they come for a visit,  
they mutter to themselves or stay silent;  
but all at once  
if they're passed a cup,  
their mind is suddenly exposed.

18

*Sá einn veit  
er víða ratar  
ok hefir fjöld um farit,  
hverju geði  
stýrir gumna hvern  
sá er vitandi er vits.*

Only the one  
who travels widely  
and has journeyed a great deal knows  
each and every mind and heart  
that a person may have;  
thus one must have their wits in hand.

19

*Haldit maðr á keri,  
drekki þó at hófi mjöð,  
mæli þarft eða þegi;  
ókynnis þess  
vár þik engi maðr  
at þú gangir snemma at sofa.*

people shouldn't cling to their cup,  
and instead drink mead in moderation,  
speak to the point or be silent;  
there's no shame,  
no-one will speak ill of one  
for going to bed early.

20

*Gráðugr halr,  
nema geðs viti,  
etr sér aldrtrega;  
opt fær hlægis,  
er með horskum kómr,  
manni heimskum magi.*

The gluttonous one,  
unless mentally equipped,  
eats themselves into chronic unrest;  
the gannet senseless of their stomach  
is frequently the source of a chuckle,  
when dining among the wise.

## 21

*Hjarðir þat vitu  
nær þær heim skulu  
ok ganga þá af grasi;  
en ósviðr maðr  
kann ævagi  
síns um mál maga.*

Even cattle know  
when it's time to go home  
and eventually drift from the grass;  
but the brainless eater  
isn't aware  
of the strain upon their stomach.

## 22

*Vesall maðr  
ok illa skapi  
hlær at hvívetna;  
hittki hann veit,  
er hann vita þyrfti,  
at hann era vamma vanr.*

The pitiful wretch  
of poor mood and temper  
makes fun of everything else;  
yet they don't know,  
the one thing they need:  
that they are far from faultless themselves.

## 23

*Ósviðr maðr  
vakir um allr nætr  
ok hyggr at hvívetna;  
þá er móðr  
er at morgni kœmr,  
allt er víl sem var.*

The irrational among us  
lie awake through the night  
thinking of everything else;  
now they are weary  
when morning arrives,  
and everything is as bad as it was.

## 24

*Ósnotr maðr  
hyggr sér alla vera  
viðhlæjendr vini;  
hittki hann fiðr,  
þótt þeir um hann fár lesi,  
ef hann með snotrum sitr.*

The unwary  
think that all  
who laugh with them are their friends;  
yet they fail to realise  
that others speak ill over their head  
whilst sitting among the wise.

## 25

*Ósnotr maðr  
hyggr sér alla vera  
viðhlæjendr vini;  
þá þat finnr  
er at þingi kœmr  
at hann á formælendr fá.*

The oblivious  
think that all  
who laugh with them are their friends;  
then they experience,  
in arriving at the þing,  
that they have few to speak on their side.

26

Ósnotr maðr  
þykkisk allt vita,  
ef hann á sér í vá veru;  
hittki hann veit,  
hvat hann skal við kveða,  
ef hans freista firar.

The clueless  
think they know everything,  
if they take refuge at home;  
yet they have no idea  
what to provide in return  
if tested on anything else.

27

Ósnotr maðr,  
er með alder kœmr,  
þat er bazt at hann þegi;  
engi þat veit  
at hann ekki kann,  
nema hann mælti til margt;  
veita maðr,  
hinn er vætki veit,  
þótt hann mælti til margt.

If you are foolish,  
it's best to stay *stumm*  
when others arrive;  
no-one will know  
that you know nothing  
unless you speak too much...  
Yet the one who knows nothing  
is blissfully unaware  
as to *when* they have said too much.

28

Fróðr sá þykkisk  
er fregna kann  
ok segja it sama;  
eyvitu leyna  
megu ýta sönir  
því er gengr um guma.

A person seems knowledgeable  
if they're able to enquire  
and elucidate things as well;  
they can't prevent –  
no-one ever can –  
liquid knowledge from going around.

29

Ærna mælin  
sá er æva þegir  
staðlausu stafi;  
hraðmælt tunga,  
nema haldendr eigi,  
opt sér ógott um gelr.

A river of words  
sprung from one ever prattling,  
an absurd character at best;  
a babbling tongue,  
unless rapidly dammed,  
often means deep water ahead.

30

At augabragði  
skala maðr annan hafa,  
þótt til kynnis komi;  
margr þá fróðr þykkisk,  
ef hann freginn erat  
ok nái hann þurrfjallr þruma.

Derision isn't necessary –  
one should refrain,  
even though another has arrived for a visit;  
many a person often seems wise  
if they elude inquisition  
and evade the storm of activity.

31

*Fróðr þykkisk  
sá er flótta tekr  
gestr at gest hæðinn;  
veita görla  
sá er um verði glissir,  
þótt hann með grömum glami.*

It's a mark of the wise  
in making a quiet escape  
when guests start insulting each other;  
one never can tell,  
during a meal,  
if one's tongue was unsheathed among  
enemies.

32

*Gunnar margir  
erusk gagnhollir  
en at virði vrekask;  
aldar róg  
þat mun æ vera,  
órir gestr við gest.*

Many people  
are like neighbours, close and loyal,  
but still insult one another when they eat;  
insinuated indignity  
will continually increase,  
guest ever quarrelling with guest.

33

*Árliga verðar  
skyli maðr opt fá,  
nema til kynnis komi;  
sittr ok snópir,  
lætr sem sólginn sé  
ok kann fregna at fá.*

One should choose to eat  
an early meal  
even when stopping elsewhere;  
one sits and hangs around hungry,  
and makes out as if starving,  
but with mouth full has nothing to say.

34

*Afhvarf mikit  
er til ills vinar,  
þótt á brautu búí,  
en til góðs vinar  
liggja gagnvegir,  
þótt hann sé firr farinn.*

The meandering diversion is lengthy  
when travelling to the home of a foe,  
even though they live quite close...  
Yet to a good friend  
there are plentiful smooth and pleasant paths  
despite being further away.

35

*Gagna skal,  
skala gestr vera  
ey í einum stað;  
ljúfr verðr leiðr,  
ef lengi sittr  
annars fletjum á.*

One must leave  
and not remain a guest  
forever in the same home or place;  
even a loyal friend will surely be loathed  
if sat leeching too long  
on another's hospitality.

36

*Bú er betra  
þótt lítit sé,  
halr er heima hverr;  
þótt tvær geitr eigi  
ok taugreptan sal,  
þat er þó betra en bæn.*

A farm of your own is better  
no matter how small it may be,  
a hall is home to each person;  
despite owning two nannies  
and a meagre fibre-roofed hall,  
it's definitely better than begging.

37

*Bú er betra  
þótt lítit sé,  
halr er heima hverr;  
blóðugt er hjarta  
þeim er biðja skal  
sér í mál hvert matar.*

A farm of your own is better  
no matter how small it may be,  
a hall is home to each person;  
the heart breaks  
when forced to beg  
for each and every meal.

38

*Vápnunum sínum  
skala maðr velli á  
feti ganga framarr,  
því at óvist er at vita  
nær verðr á vegum úti  
geirs um þörf guma.*

Regarding the weapons  
for one outdoors  
perhaps don't step too far away;  
one can't know for certain,  
that whilst wandering the track,  
when you may have need of your spear.

39

*Fannka ek mildan mann  
eða svá matargóðan  
at eigi væri þiggja þegit,  
eða síns fjár  
svági glöggvan  
at leið sé laun ef þegi.*

I have never met a person so generous  
or so liberal with fine food  
that would not accept a gift;  
their personal wealth  
was never so great  
that they'd refuse a reward if the recipient.

40

*Fjár síns,  
er fengit hefir,  
skylit maðr þörf þola;  
opt sparir leiðum  
þats hefir ljúfum hugat;  
margt gengr verr en varir.*

With regard to the capital,  
that one has amassed,  
it's pointless to hoard or crave more;  
often such means saved for the lauded  
ends up in the hands of enemies;  
many things go worse than expected.

41

Vápnnum ok váðum  
skulu vinir gleðjask  
þat er á sjálfum sýnst;  
viðrgjefendr ok endrgjefendr  
erusk lengst vinir,  
ef þat bíðr at verða vel.

Weapons, clothes and personal effects  
should be given to gladden friends  
which is, in itself, obvious;  
those who give and those who give in return  
stay each other's longest friends  
provided that friendship is to work at all.

42

Vin sínum  
skal maðr vinr vera  
opt gjalda gjöf við gjöf;  
hlátr við hlátri  
skyli hölðar taka  
en lausung við lygi.

To a friend of theirs  
should one *be* a friend  
and restore the balance of gifts with another;  
laughter for laughter  
gains equivalent honour  
but reward duplicity with lies.

43

Vin sínum  
skal maðr vinr vera,  
þeim ok þess vin,  
en óvinar síns  
skyli engi maðr  
vinar vinr vera.

To a friend of theirs  
should one *be* a friend  
to them and to friends of theirs,  
but to *their* enemy  
no-one should advance  
the hand of friendship as well.

44

Veiztu, ef þú vin átt,  
þann er þú vel trúir,  
ok vill þú af honum got geta,  
geði skaltu við þann blanda  
ok gjöfum skipta,  
fara at finna opt.

Do you know, if you have a close friend  
whom you trust implicitly,  
and from them wish for nothing but that,  
then blend your nature with theirs  
and seal this gift with a gift  
and be sure to travel to them often.

45

Ef þú átt annan  
þanns þú illa trúir,  
vildu af honum þó got geta,  
fargt skaltu við þann mæla  
en flátt hyggja  
ok gjalda lausung við lygi.

If you have another  
whom you trust far less,  
yet would still like nothing but good,  
dispose of what's said when they speak  
but be engaged at the time  
and reward duplicity with lies.

46

*Þat er enn of þann  
er þú illa trúir  
ok þér er grunr at hans geði,  
hlæja skaltu við þeim  
ok um hug mæla;  
glík skulu gjöld gjöfum.*

Speaking again of the one  
whom you don't trust,  
and your suspicions regarding their nature,  
you should still laugh with them  
but post sentries on your mind;  
return a gift with a similar one.

47

*Ungr var ek forðum,  
fór ek einn saman,  
þá varð ek villr vega;  
auðigr þóttumsk  
er ek annan fann;  
maðr er manns gaman.*

I was young once,  
I wandered in isolation,  
then I found myself entangled, going astray;  
I thought myself prosperous  
on encountering another;  
human contact often provides alleviation.

48

*Mildir, fræknir  
menn bazt lifa,  
sjaldan sút ala;  
en ósnjallr maðr  
uggir hotvetna,  
sýtir æ glöggr við gjöfum.*

The mild mannered and resolute  
live the best lives,  
and seldom bear sorrow or grief;  
but the craven  
live in dread of everything  
and mourns deeply when given gifts.

49

*Váðir mínar  
gaf ek velli at  
tveim trémönnum;  
rekkar þat þóttusk,  
er þeir rípt höfðu,  
neiss er nøkkviðr halr.*

Of clothes that I carried  
I donated them in a field instead  
to two wooden men carved from a tree;  
they seemed upright and proud  
whilst clothed,  
but nothing whilst defenceless and naked.

50

*Hrørnar þöll,  
sú er stendr þorpi á,  
hlýrat henni börkr né barr;  
svá er maðr  
sá er manngi ann,  
hvat skal hann lengi lifa?*

A decayed and haggard fir tree  
stands alone alongside the collected crofts,  
lacking sharp needle and armoured bark;  
no different the individual  
who is loved by none;  
can he live to win wisdom with age?



51

*Eldi heitari  
brennr með illum vinum  
friður fimm daga,  
en þá slokknar  
er inn sétti kómur  
ok versnar allr vinskapr.*

A conflagration ignites  
and blazes among uncertain companions  
whilst the flare ascends and sets five times,  
but the fuel is left smouldering  
when the sixth sun is kindled  
and only ash remains of the friendship.

52

*Mikit eitt  
skala manni gefa,  
opt kaupir sér í litlu lof;  
með hálfum hleif  
ok með höllu keru  
fékk ek mér félagu.*

Only humble, seemingly immaterial things  
is one required to present,  
deep praise always fills from a spring;  
with a roughly torn loaf  
and a mutually shared flask  
I've found myself numerous friends.

53

*Lítilla sanda,  
lítilla sæva,  
lítill eru geð guma;  
því at allir men  
urðut jafnspakir,  
half er öld hvar.*

From small sands,  
from small seas,  
the minds of man are forever narrow;  
it is without doubt that all people  
are far from equally wise,  
but one half only exists with the other.

54

*Meðalsnotur  
skyli manna hvern,  
æva til snort sé;  
þeim er fyrða  
fegrst at lifa  
er vel margt vitu.*

To be moderately informed  
is a fine balance,  
to be no wiser than serves you well;  
those are the people  
who live tranquil lives,  
those who know a good many things.

55

*Meðalsnotur  
skyli manna hvern,  
æva til snort sé;  
því at snorts manns hjarta  
verður sjaldan glatt,  
ef sá er alsnotur er á.*

To be moderately informed  
is a fine balance,  
to be no wiser than serves you well;  
it is true that the reflective one's heart  
is seldom content,  
if they have understood too much.

56

*Meðalsnotr  
skyli manna hverr,  
æva til snort sé;  
ørlög sín  
viti engi fyrir,  
þeim er sorgalausastr sefi.*

To be moderately informed  
is a fine balance,  
to be no wiser than serves you well;  
the dice rolled at birth  
cannot be divined in advance,  
for those desirous of a sorrow-free mind.

57

*Brandr af brandi  
brenn unz brunninn er,  
funi kveykisk af funa;  
maðr af manni  
verðr af máli kuðr,  
en til dælskr af dul.*

Kindling kindles kindling  
and burns until wholly consumed,  
the flame ignited by a spark;  
between one person and another passes  
the opportunity to benefit from experience,  
and nonsense only grows in isolation.

58

*Ár skal rísa  
sá er annars vill  
fé eða fjör hafa;  
sjaldan liggjandi úlfr  
lær um getr  
né sofandi maðr sigr.*

Up with the larks  
for the one scheming  
to deprive another of money or life;  
the supine wolf rarely  
pulls down his prey  
and the same goes for those sleeping late.

59

*Ár skal rísa  
sá er á yrkjendr fá  
ok ganga síns verka á vit;  
margt um delvr  
þann er um morgin sefr;  
hálf er auðr und hvötum.*

The silent alarm of dawn  
wakes the one with few workers  
but sustain graft with care and attention;  
potential gain is lost  
having spent the morning asleep;  
half the assault against poverty is effort.

60

*Þurra skíða  
ok þakinna næfra,  
þess kann maðr mjöt,  
ok þess viðar  
er vinnask megi  
mál ok misseri.*

Of sturdy timber for a ski-slope roof  
and birch bark to preserve the beams,  
proper assessment and knowledge is key;  
one must also consider the wood store,  
and if it can be sustained  
for the current moon or upcoming season.

61

*Þveginn ok mettr  
ríði maðr þingi at,  
þótt hann sét væddr til vel;  
skúa ok bróka  
skammsik engi maðr  
né hests in heldr,  
þótt hann hafit góðan.*

Being washed and fed  
is essential before riding out to the *þing*,  
even if he is poorly turned out;  
scuffed shoes and patched trousers  
cannot shame you,  
nor even your horse,  
even though you ride a simple gelding.

62

*Snapir ok gnafir,  
er til sævar kømr,  
örn á aldinn mar;  
svá er maðr  
er með mörgum kømr  
ok á formælendr fá.*

Snapping and craning,  
soaring over the sea,  
an eagle-cast shadow skims ancient surf;  
no different is the one  
who when faced by the arrival of others  
finds they have few supporters.

63

*Fregna ok segja  
skal fróðra hvern,  
sá er vill heitinn horskr;  
einn vita,  
né annar skall;  
þjóð veit ef þrír ro.*

Remaining informed and inquisitive  
is the role of all knowledgeable people  
if they seek renown for vast understanding;  
one other may know,  
but knowledge must stop there;  
the whole nation knows if three do.

64

*Ríki sitt  
skyli ráðsnotra  
hvern í hófi hafa;  
þá hann þat finnr  
er með fræknum kømr  
at engi er einna hvatastr.*

One's power  
should the sagacious  
wield in careful moderation;  
for when one finds  
oneself among indomitable figures  
one sees that no one is superior to another.

65

*Orða þeira  
er maðr öðrum segir  
opt hann gjöld um getr.*

Beware of the words  
that you say about others,  
often one gets paid right back.

66

*Mikilsti snemma  
kom ek í marga staði*

I have frequently arrived  
far too early in many places

*en til síð í sumu;  
öl var drukit,  
sumt var ólagat,  
sjaldan hitter leiðr í lið.*

and to others much too late;  
the ale was drunk  
or sometimes not ready;  
some people seldom time it right.

**67**

*Hér ok hvar  
myndi mér heim of boðit,  
ef þyrftak at málungi mat,  
eða tvau lær hengi  
at ins tryggva vinar,  
þars ek hafða eitt etit.*

Here and there  
I would be invited to a home  
when I had no want nor need of food;  
that or two thighs were hung  
in the home of a trusted friend  
but I had already eaten in advance.

**68**

*Eldr er beztr  
með ýta sonum  
ok solar sýn,  
heilyndi sitt  
ef maðr hafa náir,  
án við löst at lifa.*

Fire is peerless  
among the tools of man  
in tandem with the sight of the sun;  
equally one's health  
if one can maintain it,  
avoiding chronic injury.

**69**

*Erat maðr alls vesall,  
þótt hann sé illa heill;  
sumr er af sonum sæll,  
sumr af frændum,  
sumr af fé ærnu,  
sumr af verkum vel.*

No-one is completely hopeless  
even though their mired in bad health;  
some were blessed with sons,  
some with kinsmen,  
some with plentiful goods,  
some with fine deeds.

**70**

*Betra er lifðum  
ok sé illlifðum,  
ey getr kvíkr kú;  
eld sá ek upp brenna  
auðgum manni fyrir,  
en úti var dauðr fyr durum.*

Better to survive  
than be dead,  
only the living can get the cow;  
I saw conflagration  
ruin a wealthy man,  
and thus he was dead outside of his door.

**71**

*Haltr ríðr hrossi,  
hjörð rekr handavanr,  
daufr vegr ok dugir;  
blindr er betri*

The lamed individual rides a horse,  
the handless drive flocks and herds,  
the deaf may fight and kill;  
better to be blind

*en brenndr sé;  
nýtr manngi nás.*

than to be cremated;  
a corpse has no use.

72

*Sonr er betri,  
þótt sé síð of alinn,  
eptir genginn guma;  
sjaldan bautarsteinar  
standa brautu nær,  
nema reisi níðr at nið.*

Sons are a gift,  
even if they're born late,  
after the father is dead;  
memorial stones infrequently  
cast shadows on the road,  
unless raised by one kinsman for another.

73

*Tveir ro eins herjar,  
tunga er höfuðs bani,  
er mér í heðin hvern  
handar væni.*

Two frequently conquers one,  
the tongue often murders the mind;  
I expect to find a hand  
in every coat.

74

*Nótt verðr feginn  
sá er nesti trúir,  
skammar ro skips rár,  
hverf er haustgríma;  
fjölð um viðrir  
á fimm dögum  
en meira á mánaði.*

The night is welcomed  
by those who trust their provisions,  
a ship's yard is short,  
autumn nights are capricious at best;  
copious weather  
occurs in five days  
and myriads within a month.

75

*Veita hinn  
er vætki veit;  
margr verðr af aurum api;  
maðr er auðigr,  
annarr óauðigr,  
skylit þann vítká vár.*

If one knows nothing  
the one doesn't know this:  
many are made fools for money;  
some are wealthy,  
whilst others are poor,  
there's no reproach in that.

76

*Deyr fé,  
deyja frændr,  
deyr sjálfr it sama;  
en orðstírr  
deyr aldregi  
hveim er sér góðan getr.*

Cattle die,  
kinsmen die,  
the self must also die;  
but glory  
never dies  
for those who can grasp it.

77

*Deyr fé,  
deyja frændr,  
deyr sjálfr it sama;  
ek veit einn  
at aldri deyr,  
dómr um dauðan hvern.*

Cattle die,  
kinsmen die,  
the self must also die;  
I know one thing  
that never dies,  
the reputation of the dead.

78

*Fullar grindr  
sá ek fyr Fitjungs sonum,  
nú bera þeir vánar vól;  
svá er auðr  
sem augabragð,  
hann er valtastr vina.*

I noticed that Fitjung's sons  
once had fully stocked pens,  
but now they clutch beggar's staves;  
such is wealth,  
which can be instantaneous,  
it is a precarious friend.

79

*Ósnotr maðr  
ef eignask getr  
fé eða fljóðs munuð,  
metnaðr honum þróask  
en manvit aldregi,  
fram gengr hann drjúgt í dul.*

The foolish man,  
if he manages to get  
money or a woman's love,  
develops his ego  
but never his common sense,  
and on he goes in shameless delusion.

80

*Þat er þá reynt  
er þú at rúnum spyrr  
inum reginkunnum,  
þeim er gørðu ginnregin  
ok fáði fimbulþulr;  
þá hefir hann bazt ef hann þegir.*

That is now proved  
for which you consulted the *rúnar*,  
that knowledge of divine descent;  
they were crafted by the universal powers  
and stained by the mighty-sage;  
it would be best for the sage to be silent.

81

*At kveldi skal dag leyfa,  
konu er brennd er,  
mæki er reyndr er,  
mey er gefin er,  
ís er yfir kómur,  
öl er drukkit er.*

Praise the end of the day at dusk,  
a woman when she is cremated,  
a sword when it is tested,  
a girl when she is married,  
ice when safely overcome,  
and ale when consumed.

82

*Í vindi skal við höggva,  
veðri á sjó róa,  
myrkri við man spjalla,  
mörg eru dags augu;  
á skip skal skriðar orka  
en á skjöld til hlífar,  
mæki högggs  
en mey til kossa.*

When it is windy, cut wood,  
in good weather, traverse the sea,  
and converse with a girl in darkness –  
there are too many eyes in the day;  
take a ship for speed,  
and a shield to protect yourself,  
use a sword for strong strokes,  
and a girl to kiss.

83

*Við eld skal öl drekka  
en á ísi skríða,  
magran mar kaupa  
en mæki saurgan,  
heima hest feita  
en hund á búi.*

Drink ale by the fire  
and slide on ice,  
buy a lean horse  
and a well-used sword,  
fatten your horse at home  
but the dog at someone else's.

84

*Meyjar orðum  
skyli manngi trúa  
né því er kveðr kona,  
því at á hverfanda hvéli  
váru þeim hjörtu sköpuð,  
brigð í brjóst um lagið.*

No-one should trust  
the words of a girl  
nor anything said by a woman;  
this is because their hearts were made  
on a turning wheel,  
with treachery embedded in their chests.

85

*Brestanda boga,  
brennanda loga,  
gínanda úlfi,  
galandi kráku,  
rýtanda svíni,  
rótlausum víði,  
vaxanda vági,  
vellanda katli,*

A shattered bow,  
a searing flame,  
a gaping wolf,  
a cawing crow,  
a squealing pig,  
a rootless tree,  
a rising wave,  
a boiling kettle,

86

*fljúganda fleini,  
fallandi báru,  
ísi einnættum,  
ormi hringlegnum,  
brúðar beðmálum  
eða brotnu sverði,*

an airborne shaft,  
a crashing wave,  
an icy night,  
a coiled snake,  
a bride's bed talk,  
or a broken sword,

*bjarnar leiki  
eða barni konungs,*

a bear's game,  
or a king's child,

**87**

*sjúkum kálfi,  
sjálfráða þræli,  
völu vilmæli,  
val nýfældum;*

a sick calf,  
a willful slave,  
a *völva* who speaks favourably,  
a freshly slain corpse;

**88**

*akri ársánum  
trúi engi maðr  
né til snemma syni  
– veðr ræðrakri  
en vit syni,  
hætt er þeira hvárt –*

no man should trust  
a field sowed early,  
nor give a son too much leeway  
– the weather governs  
both field and intelligence,  
so both the crop and the child are perilous –

**89**

*bróðurbana sínum,  
þótt á brautu mæti,  
húsi hálfbrunnu,  
hesti alskjótum  
– þá er jór ónýtr  
ef einn fótr brotnar –  
verðit maðr svá trygg  
at þessu trúi öllu.*

a brother's killer,  
met on the road,  
a house half razed,  
a horse too fleet for its own good  
– it is useless  
if it loses its feet –  
let no man be so trusting  
that he would trust each of these things.



## II ' The Poem of Sexual Intrigue'

90

*Svá er friðr kvenna  
þeira er flátt hyggja  
sem aki jó óbryddum  
á ísi hálum,  
teitum, tvévetrum  
ok sé tamr illa,  
eða í byr óðum  
beiti stjórnláusu,  
eða skyli haltr henda  
hrein í þáfjalli.*

Such is the love of a woman,  
those of mercurial mind;  
it's similar to driving a smooth-shod steed  
over slippery ice,  
a coltish one, barely two winters old,  
who was tamed poorly,  
or sailing in high winds  
with a rudderless boat,  
or trying to catch, whilst limping,  
a reindeer over liquid-frost slopes.

91

*Bert ek nú mæli,  
því at ek bæði veit,  
brigðr er karla hugr konum;  
þá vér fegrst mælum  
er vér flást hyggjum,  
þat tælir horska hugi.*

I now speak openly,  
because I have experience with both,  
men's minds are duplicitous toward women  
too;  
we may speak with graceful loquacity  
but our motives are fallacious,  
the wise mind can seduce and entice.

92

*Fargt skal mæla  
ok fé bjóða  
sá er vill fljóðs ást fá,  
líki leyfa  
ins ljósa mans;  
sá fær er frjár.*

One must speak gracefully  
and offer up wealth  
if one wants the love of a woman,  
praise the body  
of the bewitching young woman;  
flattery will get you everywhere.

93

*Ástar firna  
skyli engi maðr  
annan aldregi;  
opt fá á horskan  
er á heimskan né fá  
lostfagrir litir.*

No man  
should ever admonish  
another for love;  
often the wise are struck  
when the foolish are not,  
desire roused by one so fair.

94

*Eyvitar firna  
er maðr annan skal*

There is no reason  
to reproach any other

*Þess er um margan gengr guma;  
heimska ór horskum  
gørir hölða sonu  
sá inn máttki munr.*

for what is common among many men;  
even the wisest men  
are made into fools  
by that potent urge.

95

*Hugr einn þat veit  
er býr hjarta nær,  
einn er hann sér um sefa;  
øng er sótt verri  
hveim snotrum manni  
en sér øngu at una.*

Only the mind that knows  
that which lies deep in the heart,  
answers can only be found within;  
there is no worse affliction  
for any wise man  
than being unable to be content with oneself.

96

*Þat ek þá reynda  
ere ek í reyri sat  
ok vættak míns munar;  
hold ok hjarta  
var mér in horska mær,  
þeygi ek hana at heldr hefík.*

That I soon experienced,  
when sat screened by reeds,  
hoping for the object of my desire;  
I desired both the flesh and heart  
of that wise young girl,  
but I did not succeed.

97

*Billings mey  
ek fann beðjum á  
sólhvíta sofa;  
jarls ynði  
þótti mér ekki vera  
nema við þat lík at lifa.*

Billing's girl  
I found on the bed,  
radiant and asleep;  
a nobleman's delights  
meant nothing to me;  
I desired only to possess that body.

98

*Auk nær aptni  
skaltu, Óðinn, koma,  
ef þú vilt þér mæla man;  
allt eru ósköp,  
nema einir viti  
slíkan löst saman.*

“As dusk approaches  
you should return, Óðinn,  
if you wish to speak with me;  
each desire will be yours,  
unless others discover  
the shame that we share together.”

99

*Aprt ek hvarf  
ok unna þóttumsk  
vísuð vilja frá;  
hit ek hugða*

I quickly vanished,  
with thoughts of desire,  
away from assured delight;  
I was convinced

*at ek hafa mynda  
geð hennar allt ok gaman.*

that I would have  
all of her spirit and pleasure.

**100**

*Svá kom ek næst  
at in nýta var  
vígdrótt öll um vakin;  
með brennandum ljósum  
ok bornum viði,  
svá var mér vilstígr of vitaðr.*

I returned as instructed,  
night had crept in,  
but the battle-ready guards were all awake;  
with burning torches  
and bearing wood,  
I had been appointed the path of misery.

**101**

*Ok nær morgni,  
er ek var enn um kominn  
þá var saldrótt um sofin;  
grey eitt ek þá fann  
innar góðu konu  
bundit beðum á.*

But come dawn,  
I doubled-back,  
and found the hall's warriors asleep;  
I was confronted by a bitch,  
tied atop that 'good' woman's bed,  
by a length of rope.

**102**

*Mörg er góð mærl,  
ef görvu kannar,  
hugbrigð við hali;  
þá ek þat reynda  
er it ráðspaka  
teygða ek á flærðir fljóð;  
háðungar hverrar  
leitaði mér it horska man,  
ok hafða ek þess vætki vífs.*

Many a good girl,  
once you know her more intimately,  
reveals a fickle mind towards men;  
I found that out  
when I attempted to entice  
that shrewd woman into debauchery;  
every imaginable disgrace  
did that clever woman subject me to,  
and I didn't even have her.

**103**

*Heima glaðr gumi  
ok við gesti reifr,  
sviðr skal um sik vera,  
minnigr ok málugr,  
ef hann vill margfróðr vera,  
opt skal góðs geta;  
fimbulfambi heitir  
sá er fátt kann segja,  
þát er ósnotrs aðal.*

One should be glad at home  
and cheerful when in company,  
whilst discreet about himself,  
with a fine memory and articulate  
if he wants to be very wise,  
he should speak of good tidings often;  
'imbecilic' is reserved  
for those with little to say,  
simply, the nature of a fool.

**104**

*Inn aldna jötun ek sótta,  
nú em ek aþtr um kominn,  
fátt gat ek þegjandi þar;  
mörgum orðum  
mæltu ek í minn frama  
í Suttungs sölum.*

I sought an ancient giant,  
and managed to return,  
silence would have served me poorly;  
I spoke a great many words  
in my own interest  
within Suttungr's hall.

**105**

*Gunnlöð mér um gaf  
gullnum stóli á  
drykk ins dýra mjaðar;  
ill iðgjöld  
lét ek hana eptir hafa  
síns ins heila hugar,  
síns ins svára sefa.*

From upon her golden seat  
Gunnlöð gave me  
a drink of the venerable mead;  
it was but poor reward  
that I gave her in return;  
her devotion  
gained her little but anguish.

**106**

*Rata munn  
létumk rúms um fá  
ok um grjót gnaga;  
yfir ok undir  
stóðumk jötna vegir;  
svá hætta ek höfði til.*

Rata's mouth  
let me gnaw through,  
and snake through rock and stone;  
over and under  
proceeded the giant's passage;  
this is how I wagered my head.

**107**

*Vel keypts litar  
hefi ek vel notit,  
fás er fróðum vant,  
því at Óðrerir  
er nú upp kominn  
á alda vés jarðar.*

I have made fine use  
of cleverly acquired complexion,  
there is little that the wise need,  
because Óðrerir  
is now unearthed  
from an age beneath the ground.

**108**

*Ifi er mér á  
at ek væra enn kominn  
jötna görðum ór,  
ef ek Gunnlaðar né nytak,  
innar góðu konu,  
þeirar er lögðumk arm yfir.*

I am unsure  
that I would have survived  
the giant's grounds  
if I had not taken advantage of Gunnlöð,  
that fine woman,  
whom I put my arm around.

109

*Ins hindra dags  
gengu hrímþursar  
Hává ráðs at fregna  
Hává höllu í;  
at Bölverki þeir spurðu,  
ef hann væri með böndum kominn  
eða hefði honum Suttungr of sóit.*

The very next day  
the ice-giants went  
to ask the High One's advice  
in the High One's hall;  
they enquired about Bölverkr,  
and whether he was among the gods  
or if Suttungr had instead eradicated him.

110

*Baugeið Óðinn  
hygg ek at unnit hafi,  
hvat skal hans tryggðum trúa?  
Suttungr svikinn  
hann lét sumbli frá  
ok grætta Gunnlöðu.*

I was lead to understand  
that Óðinn had sworn a ring-oath,  
how could his word be trusted?  
Suttungr was left  
betrayed at the feast  
and Gunnlöð left to weep.

### III Loddfáfnismál

111

Mál er at þylja  
þular stóli á  
Urðarbrunni at;  
sá ek ok þagðak,  
sá ek ok hugðak,  
hlýdda ek á manna mál;  
of rúnar heyrða ek dæma,  
né of ráðum þögðu,  
Háva höllu at,  
Háva höllu í,  
heyrða ek segja svá:

It is time to recite  
from the sage's seat  
beside the well of Urðr;  
I saw and was silent,  
I saw and contemplated,  
I listened to people's words;  
I heard talk of the *rúnar*,  
and they were open with counsel,  
at the High One's hall,  
in the High One's hall,  
I heard it said:

112

Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
en þú ráð nemir,  
njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
nótt þú rísat,  
nema á njósn sér  
eða þú leitir þér innan út staðar.

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
that you take this advice,  
it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
and do you good if you have it:  
do not rise at night,  
unless to scout around  
or to answer the call of nature.

113

Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
en þú ráð nemir,  
njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
fjölkunnigri konu  
skal-at-tu í faðmi sofa,  
svá at hon lyki þik liðum.

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
that you take this advice,  
it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
and do you good if you have it:  
do not sleep in the embrace  
of a sorcerous woman,  
so she is able to trap your limbs.

114

Hon svá gørir  
at þú gáir eigi  
þings né þjóðans máls;  
mat þú villat  
né mannskis gaman,  
ferr þú sorgafullr at sofa.

She will make it so  
that you do not care  
about *þings* nor the ruler's affairs;  
you will have no need of food  
nor the company of anyone else,  
you will go to sleep in anguish.

**115**

Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
 en þú ráð nemir,  
 njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
 þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
 annars konu  
 teygðu þér aldregi  
 eyrarúnu at.

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
 that you take this advice,  
 it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
 and do you good if you have it:  
 never seduce  
 another's wife  
 to be your mistress.

**116**

Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
 en þú ráð nemir,  
 njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
 þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
 á fjalli eða firði,  
 ef þik fara tíðir,  
 fásktu at virði vel.

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
 that you take this advice,  
 it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
 and do you good if you have it:  
 should you travel for a while  
 on mountain or through fjord,  
 ensure enough food for the trip.

**117**

Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
 en þú ráð nemir,  
 njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
 þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
 illan mann  
 láttu aldregi  
 óhöpp at þér vita,  
 því at af illum manni  
 fær þú aldregi  
 gjöld ins góða hugar.

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
 that you take this advice,  
 it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
 and do you good if you have it:  
 never let  
 a degenerate man  
 know of any mishaps you have suffered,  
 because from such a man  
 you will never get  
 a return for your good intentions.

**118**

Ofarla bíta  
 ek sá einum hal  
 orð illrar konu;  
 fláráð tunga  
 varð honum at fjörlagi  
 ok þeygi of sanna sök.

I saw a man  
 high up, cut into bits  
 on the word of an insidious woman;  
 that deceitful tongue  
 left him to be slaughtered  
 and yet with no proof of fault or guilt.

119

*Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
en þú ráð nemir,  
njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
veiztu, ef þú vin átt,  
þanns þú vel trúir,  
far þú at finna opt,  
því at hrísi vex  
ok hávu grasi  
vegr er vætcki trøðr.*

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
that you take this advice,  
it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
and do you good if you have it:  
do you know that, if you have a close friend,  
whom you trust implicitly,  
be sure to travel to him often,  
because brushwood and high grass  
grows thick and tall  
in the place where no-one treads.

120

*Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
en þú ráð nemir,  
njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
góðan mann  
teygðu þér at gamanrúnum  
ok nem líknargaldr meðan þú lifir.*

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
that you take this advice,  
it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
and do you good if you have it:  
draw a good man  
to you you with pleasing speech  
and learn healing magic throughout your life.

121

*Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
en þú ráð nemir,  
njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
vin þínum  
ver þú aldregi  
fyrri at flaumslitum;  
sorg etr hjarta,  
ef þú segja né náir  
einhverjum allan hug.*

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
that you take this advice,  
it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
and do you good if you have it:  
with your friend  
never be the one  
to break the bond between you;  
sorrow consumes the heart  
if you do not have someone  
to share all of your thoughts with.

122

*Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
en þú ráð nemir,  
njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
orðum skipta  
þú skalt aldregi*

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
that you take this advice,  
it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
and do you good if you have it:  
you should never  
share words



við ósvinna apa,

with a foolish ape,

123

því at af illum manni  
mundu aldregi  
góðs laun um geta,  
en góðr maðr  
mun þik gørva mega  
líknfastan at lofi.

because from a degenerate man  
you will never get  
any decent reward,  
but from a good man  
you can surely receive  
charitable words and praise.

124

Sifjum er þá blandat,  
hverr er segja ræðr  
einum allan hug;  
allt er betra  
en sé brigðum at vera;  
era sá vinr öðrum  
er vilt eitt segir.

Natures are truly blended  
when you can safely voice  
all of your thoughts:  
anything is better  
than to be inconsistent;  
those who only speak in the positive  
are not true friends.

125

Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
en þú ráð nemir,  
njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
þrimr orðum senna  
skal-at-tu þér við verra mann;  
opt inn betri bilar,  
þá er inn verri vegr.

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
that you take this advice,  
it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
and do you good if you have it:  
do not waste even three words  
with a lesser man;  
often the better man gives way,  
while the lesser man fights on.

126

Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
en þú ráð nemir,  
njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
skósmiðr þú verir  
né skeptismiðr,  
nema þú sjálfum þér sér:  
skór er skapaðr illa  
eða skapt sé rangt,  
þá er þér böls beðit.

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
that you take this advice,  
it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
and do you good if you have it:  
do not make shoes  
nor arrow- or spear shafts,  
unless doing so for yourself:  
if the shoe was made poorly  
or the shaft set badly,  
then danger lies in waiting for you.

127

Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
en þú ráð nemir,  
njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
hvars þú bölv kannt  
kveð þú þér bölv at  
ok gefat þínum fjándum frið.

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
that you take this advice,  
it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
and do you good if you have it:  
where you recognise corruption,  
speak out against it  
and give this enemy no peace.

128

Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
en þú ráð nemir,  
njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
illu feginn  
ver þú aldregi,  
en lát þér at góðu getit.

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
that you take this advice,  
it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
and do you good if you have it:  
ensure never  
to be content by the harmful,  
but instead be one well spoken of.

129

Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
en þú ráð nemir,  
njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
upp líta  
skalattu í orrustu  
– gjalti glíkir  
verða gumna synir –  
síðr þitt of heilli halir.

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
that you take this advice,  
it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
and do you good if you have it:  
do not look up in battle  
– it is likely that the warriors  
will go mad with terror –  
in case you and your comrades are  
bewitched.

130

Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
en þú ráð nemir,  
njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
ef þú vilt þér góða konu  
kveðja at gamanrúnum  
ok fá fögnuð af,  
fögru skaldu heita  
ok láta fast vera;  
leiðisk manngi gótt, ef getr.

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
that you take this advice,  
it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
and do you good if you have it:  
if you want a good woman  
to call on for engaging conversation  
and someone to take pleasure from,  
make sincere promises  
and keep them strong;  
no-one tires of good once acquired.

**131**

Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
 en þú ráð nemir,  
 njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
 þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
 varan bið ek þik vera,  
 ok eigi of varan;  
 ver þú við öl varastr  
 ok við annars konu  
 ok við þat it þriðja,  
 at þjófar né leiki.

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
 that you take this advice,  
 it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
 and do you good if you have it:  
 I suggest you be cautious –  
 but not overly cautious –  
 and remain wary around ale,  
 with another's woman  
 and, thirdly,  
 ensure that thieves don't ensnare you.

**132**

Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
 en þú ráð nemir,  
 njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
 þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
 at háði né hlátri  
 hafðu aldregi  
 gest né ganganda.

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
 that you take this advice,  
 it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
 and do you good if you have it:  
 never ridicule  
 or deride  
 a guest nor a wanderer.

**133**

Opt vitu ógörla,  
 þeir er sitja inni fyrir  
 hvers þeir ro kyns er koma;  
 er-at maðr svá góðr  
 at galli né fylgi  
 né svá illr at einugi dugi.

Those already sitting inside  
 often don't know  
 whose kin may have arrived;  
 no man is so good  
 that he bears no faults  
 nor one so bad that that he can't improve.

**134**

Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
 en þú ráð nemir,  
 njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
 þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
 at hárum þul  
 hlæ þú aldregi,  
 opt er gótt þat er gamlir kveða;  
 opt ór skörpum belg  
 skilin orð koma,  
 þeim er hangir með hám

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
 that you take this advice,  
 it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
 and do you good if you have it:  
 never laugh  
 at the grey-headed sage,  
 the old provide often provide the pertinent;  
 insightful words often arise  
 from within a withered bag,  
 those which hang with the hides,

*ok skollir með skrá  
ok váfir með vílmögum.*

swing with skins,  
and dangle with the sons of misery.

135

*Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
en þú ráð nemir,  
njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
gest þú né geyja  
né á grind hrekir,  
get þú váluðum vel.*

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
that you take this advice,  
it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
and do you good if you have it:  
do not bark at guests  
nor drive them from your gate,  
be open to even the ill-natured.

136

*Ramt er þat tré  
er ríða skal  
öllum at upploki;  
baug þú gef,  
eða þat biðja mun  
þér læs hvers á liðu.*

The beam that must rise  
to let people in  
must be particularly strong;  
gift a ring,  
or a curse shall be called upon you  
and all of your limbs.

137

*Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
en þú ráð nemir,  
njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð ef þú getr:  
hvars þú öl drekkir  
kjós þú þér jarðar megin,  
því at jörð tekr við öldri  
en eldr við sóttum,  
eik við abbindi,  
ax við fjölkynngi,  
höll við hýrógi  
– heiptum skal mána kveðja –  
beiti við bitsóttum  
en við bölvu rúnar;  
fold skal við flóði taka.*

I advise you, Loddfáfnir,  
that you take this advice,  
it will certainly be useful if you learn it,  
and do you good if you have it:  
where you drink ale,  
make use of the power of the earth,  
because earth does well against drunkenness,  
use fire against sickness,  
oak against dysentery,  
an ear of corn against witchcraft,  
use the hall against internal quarrelling  
– invoke the moon in cases of feud –  
use earthworms against bites  
and against evil, *rúnar*;  
take soil to tackle a flood.

#### IV *Ljóðatal*

138

*Veit ek at ek hekk  
vindga meiði á  
nætr allar níu  
geiri undaðr  
ok gefinn Óðni,  
sjalfr sjalfum mér,  
á þeim meiði  
er manngi veit  
hvers hann af rótum renn.*

I know that I hanged  
on a windy tree  
all nine nights,  
spear wounded  
and given to Óðinn,  
myself to myself,  
on that tree  
where no man knows  
where each root runs.

139

*Við hleifi mik sældu  
né við hornigi;  
nýsta ek niðr,  
nam ek upp rúnar,  
æpandi nam,  
fell ek aptr þaðan.*

No bread was I given  
nor drink from horn;  
downwards I peered,  
I took up the *rúnar*,  
took them shouting,  
I fell from there after.

140

*Fimbulljóð níu  
nam ek af inum frægja syni  
Bölpors, Bestlu föður,  
ok ek drykk of gat  
ins dýra mjaðar  
ausinn Óðrerir.*

Nine mighty songs  
I took from the famous son  
of Bölpörn, Bestla's father,  
and I drank from an opening  
in the precious mead  
poured from Óðrerir.

141

*Þá nam ek frævask  
ok fróðr vera  
ok vaxa ok vel hafask;  
orð mér af orði  
orðs leitaði,  
verk mér af verki  
verks leitaði.*

Then I budded  
and became wise  
and grew and prospered;  
one word sought another  
word for me,  
one deed sought another  
deed for me.

142

*Rúnar munt þú finna*

You must find the runes

ok ráðna stafi,  
mjök stóra stafi,  
mjök stinna stafi,  
er fáði fimbulþulr  
ok gørðu ginnregin  
ok reist Hroptr rögnu,

and interpret the letters,  
those very powerful letters,  
those great unyielding letters,  
which the mighty sage coloured  
and the mighty powers made  
and were carved by Hroptr among the gods,

143

Óðinn með ásum,  
en fyr álfum Dáinn,  
Dvalinn dvergum fyrir,  
Ásviðr jötnum fyrir,  
ek reist sjálfr sumar.

Óðinn from among the Æsir,  
Dáinn from among the álfar,  
Dvalinn for the dvergar,  
Ásviðr for the jötnar,  
I carved some myself.

144

Veiztu hvé rísta skal?  
Veiztu hvé ráða skal?  
Veiztu hvé fá skal?  
Veiztu hvé freista skal?  
Veiztu hvé biðja skal?  
Veiztu hvé blóta skal?  
Veiztu hvé senda skal?  
Veiztu hvé sóa skal?

Do you know how to carve?  
Do you know how to interpret?  
Do you know how to colour?  
Do you know how to test?  
Do you know how to ask?  
Do you know how to sacrifice?  
Do you know how to dispatch?  
Do you know how to immolate?

145

Betra er óbeðit  
en sé ofblótit,  
ey sér til gildis gjöf;  
betra er ósent  
en sé ofsóit.  
Svá Þundr um reist  
fyr þjóða røk;  
þar hann upp um reis,  
er hann aprt of kom.

Better not to inquire  
and thus sacrifice too much,  
one gift often calls for another;  
better not to dispatch  
and to over-kill.  
Thus Þundr carved  
before the creation of people's destiny  
there where he rose,  
there where he returned.

146

Ljóð ek þau kann  
er kannat þjóðans kona  
ok mannskis mögr;  
hjálp heitir eitt,  
en þat þér hjálpa mun

I know those songs  
which another's woman doesn't  
nor anyone else's son;  
one is called 'help',  
and help you it will

við sökum ok sorgum  
ok sítum görvöllum.

against insinuations and sorrows  
and every single affliction.

147

Þat kann ek annat  
er þurfu ýta synir,  
þeir er vilja lækna lifa.

I know another  
which the son's of men need,  
for those who want to live as healers.

148

Þat kann ek þriðja,  
ef mér verður þörf mikil  
hapti við mína heiptmögu,  
eggjar ek deyfi  
minna andskota,  
bítat þeim vápn né velir.

I know a third that,  
for which my need is great  
because it fetters my enemies;  
I blunt the edges  
of my adversary,  
so their weapons and staves have no bite.

149

Þat kann ek it fjórða,  
ef mér fyrðar bera  
bönd at bóglimum,  
svá ek gel  
at ek ganga má,  
sprettr mér af fótum fjöturr  
en af höndum hapt.

I know a fourth that  
I can chant  
if individuals fix  
restraints to my limbs,  
enabling me to walk away;  
chains spring from my feet  
and bonds from my hands.

150

Þat kann ek it fimmta,  
ef ek sé af fári skotinn  
flein í folki vaða,  
flýgra hann svá stinnt  
at ek stöðvigak,  
ef ek hann sjónum of sék.

I know a fifth that,  
if I spot a maliciously cast pike  
in the thick of battle,  
it cannot fly so surely  
that I cannot stop it,  
if I catch it with my eye.

151

Þat kann ek it sétta,  
ef mik særir þegn  
á rótum rás viðar,  
ok þann hal  
er mik heipta kveðr,

I know a sixth that,  
if one seeks to wound me  
through the roots of a sappy tree,  
so that the one  
who bears me ill-will,

*þann eta mein heldr en mik.*

shall be devoured by hurt instead of me.

**152**

*Þat kann ek it sjaunda,  
ef ek sé hávan loga  
sal of sessmögum,  
brennrat svá breitt  
at ek honum bjargigak;  
þann kann ek galdr at gala.*

I know a seventh that,  
if I see great flames  
in the hall over my bench-mates,  
it cannot burn so fiercely  
that I cannot counter it;  
I know the song to chant.

**153**

*Þat kann ek it átta,  
er öllum er  
nytsamligt at nema,  
hvars hatr vex  
með hildings sonum,  
þat má ek bæta brátt.*

I know an eighth,  
that is useful  
for everyone to learn;  
if hate swells  
between the chief's sons,  
I can improve matters swiftly.

**154**

*Þat kann ek it níunda,  
ef mik nauðr um stendr  
at bjarga fari mínu á floti,  
vind ek kyrr  
vági á  
ok svæfik allan sæ.*

I know a ninth that,  
if I am in distress  
and need to secure my boat;  
I hush the wind  
upon the waves  
and lull the whole sea to sleep.

**155**

*Þat kann ek it tíunda,  
ef ek sé túnriður  
leika lopti á,  
ek svá vinnk  
at þeir villar fara  
sinna heimhama,  
sinna heimhuga.*

I know a tenth that,  
if I see a witch  
at play aloft in the air,  
I make sure  
that they remain ever astray  
from their own form,  
from their own nature.

**156**

*Þat kann ek it ellipta,  
ef ek skal til orrostu  
leiða langvini,*

I know an eleventh that,  
if I must lead  
close friends into battle;



*undir randir ek gel,  
en þeir með ríki fara  
heilir hildar til,  
heilir hildi frá,  
koma þeir heilir hvaðan.*

under shields I chant,  
and they travel with strength  
to the battle intact,  
from the battle unscathed;  
they return safely from that place.

157

*Þat kann ek it tolfþa,  
ef ek sé á tré uppi  
váfa virgílná,  
svá ek ríst  
ok í rúnum fák,  
at sá gengr gumi  
ok mælir við mik.*

I know a twelfth that,  
if I see, up in a tree,  
a swinging corpse in a noose,  
thus I cut  
and I colour the runes,  
to enable that man to walk  
and talk with me.

158

*Þat kann ek it þrettánda,  
ef ek skal þegn ungan  
verpa vatni á,  
munat hann falla,  
þótt hann í fólk komi,  
hnígra sá halr fyr hjörum.*

I know a thirteenth that,  
if I must pour water  
upon a young thane,  
he will not fall  
despite entering the field of battle;  
he will not sink before swords.

159

*Þat kann ek it fjórtánda,  
ef ek skal fyrða liði  
telja tíva fyrir,  
ása ok álfa  
ek kann allra skil;  
fár kann ósnotr svá.*

I know a fourteenth that,  
if I must recount the gods  
before mankind,  
the Æsir and the *álfar*,  
I know all the distinctions;  
few among the foolish know this.

160

*Þat kann ek it fimmtánda  
er gól Þjóðrørir  
dvergr fyr Dellings durum;  
afl gól hann ásum  
en álfum frama,  
hyggju Hroptatý.*

I know a fifteenth,  
which the *dvergr* Þjóðrørir chanted  
before Dellingr's door;  
he chanted power for the Æsir  
and distinction for the *álfar*,  
and wisdom for Hroptatýr.

## 161

*Þat kann ek it sextánda,  
ef ek vil ins svinna mans  
hafa geð allt ok gaman,  
hugi ek hverfi  
hvítarmri konu,  
ok sný ek hennar öllum sefa.*

I know a sixteenth,  
if I want a shrewd young woman  
and gain all her spirit and pleasure,  
I can sooth  
the white-armed girl,  
and deviate all of her thoughts.

## 162

*Þat kann ek it sjautjándá  
at mik mun seint firrask  
it manunga man.  
Ljóða þessa  
mun þú, Loddfáfnir,  
lengi vanr vera;  
þó sé þér góð ef þú getr,  
nýt ef þú nemr,  
þörf ef þú þiggr.*

I know a seventeenth,  
so that the prime young woman  
can hardly keep away from me.  
The songs,  
Loddfáfnir, will be out of reach  
for some time;  
but they would do you good to have them,  
useful if you learned them,  
advantageous if you got them.

## 163

*Þat kann ek it átjándá  
er ek æva kennik  
mey né manns konu  
– allt er betra  
er einn um kann,  
þat fylgir ljóða lokum –  
nema þeiri einni  
er mik armi verr  
eða mín systir sé.*

I know an eighteenth,  
which I shall never teach  
to a girl nor any man's wife  
– all the better  
when only one knows,  
that which follows at the song's end –  
except that one woman  
who is in my arms  
or perhaps my sister.

## 164

*Nú eru Háva mál kveðin  
Háva höllu í,  
allþörf ýta sonum,  
óþörf jötna sonum.  
Heill sá er kvað!  
Heill sá er kann!  
Njóti sá er nam!  
Heilir þeirs hlýddu!*

Now the High One's song is recited  
in the High One's hall,  
very useful to the sons of men,  
useless for the sons of *jötnar*.  
Hail he who recites!  
Hail he who knows!  
May he who learned benefit!  
Hail to those who heard!

## Commentary

If one were to consider the content of *Hávamál* as a whole, the poem reveals a mishmash of gnomic advice, from the basic to the profound, interspersed with mythological tales that then ends in Óðinn hanging himself to gain *rúnar* ‘secret or hidden knowledge, runes’. Furthermore, the poem as a whole appears to have been designed in order to exemplify human social wisdom, culminating in the poet, through the voice of Óðinn, recounting his own quest for knowledge. It is worthy of note that this latter section, that of Óðinn’s hanging, is one of the most cited, examined and popular pieces of Old Norse mythology and if one has a pointed interest in learning about this particular event (in perhaps extreme depth), I would suggest my 2016 PhD thesis, *The Deathly Gallows: Óðinn and the Viking Age Hanging Ritual* and its extensive bibliography, instead.

As was mentioned above, one of the most interesting factors about *Hávamál* is that this poem was placed in the mouth of this particular deity, presumably in order to solidify its rules and advice as legitimate wisdom being ‘passed down from on High’ and not simply the thoughts of some ‘insignificant’ individual who had had some good ideas. However, whether Old Norse religion had a concept of receiving social or even moral instruction from ‘on High’ remains in dispute. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that poetry, in numerous cultures across the globe, was a realm of the privileged and one in which the most complex or intense thoughts, emotions, concepts and social criticisms were expressed. As David Hinton (2008), one of the foremost translators of ancient Chinese poetry, describes, the strategy of including seemingly worthless material in this genre served two purposes: to give eminence to this apparently worthless material and to challenge the idea that some things are more worthy than others.

Of the text itself, *Hávamál* survives in its longest form only within the 13<sup>th</sup> century manuscript *Codex Regius* (GKS 2365 4to) and when speaking of the said ‘original’ composer (and consequently the time of composition) of *Hávamál*, scholars have run into numerous circular problems: it seems as if there may have been at least a few poets involved and thus numerous dates of composition. Impossible as this may seem to unravel, this very fragmentary and ambiguous nature may in fact be the primary draw of *Hávamál*: it is a puzzle of immense challenge. Returning to Hinton (2008), he states that ‘collective’ poems such as *Hávamál* have been repeatedly concluded to be some kind of literary accident (i.e. happenstance scribe placing this material together) whereas, in fact, someone or some people

purposefully went about gathering this material and then called it a poem. This act may in fact may be the core of *Hávamál* itself: its ambiguous or puzzling nature in the voice of a no-less enigmatic deity. The very creation of this poem leads us to question nearly everything about it and hence, question ourselves. Yet this disjointed nature does require a minor diversion into literary scholarship in order to explain my divisions of the translated poem below.

In 1891 Karl Müllenhoff concluded that *Hávamál* comprised of various poems that had been compiled into one. As a result of this, Müllenhoff divided the poem into six sections of his own design, based on the manuscript GKS 2365 4to:

1. sts 1-79 ‘The Gnostic Poem’
2. sts ~95-102 ‘Óðinn’s adventure with *Billings mær*’
3. sts 103-110 ‘Óðinn’s adventure with Gunnlöð’
4. sts 111-137 ‘*Loddfáfnismál*’
5. sts 138-145 ‘*Rúnatal*’
6. sts 146-163 ‘*Ljóðatal*’

Since this rough division, scholarship has largely adhered to these sections and discussed them by reference to their segmented names, but it is evident from the numbers that Müllenhoff could not account for all of the stanzas. Furthermore, some that he had classified make for a poor fit. It seems evident from the manuscript itself that the 13<sup>th</sup> century compiler(s) of our surviving version intended his audience to read the piece as one due to the lack of division in the manuscript (i.e. no spacing or larger/flourished letters to denote the beginning/end of sections and so on). With lengthy discussion of metre and comparative constructions, in 2007 John McKinnell was forced to return to the concept of three distinct sections, marked by scribal capitalisation, as had been proposed by Bjarne Fidjestøl in 1999. These sections are again of the scholar’s own design, working from the manuscript:

1. sts 1-110 ‘*Hávamál* I’
2. sts 111-137 ‘*Hávamál* II’
3. sts 138-163 ‘*Hávamál* III’

Yet the discussion does not end there. Further metrical analysis by McKinnell shows these divisions also to be unsatisfactory on the basis of ‘encyclopaedic’ or, as he names them, largely ‘unnecessary’ stanzas (i.e. those which break the metrical flow or those which, in his own opinion, contribute little to the poem and their immediate surrounds). It must be noted however that numerous scholars, including myself, do not agree with all of these conclusions. Nevertheless, McKinnell suggests that by (theoretically) removing stanzas 81-83, 85-90, 137 and 142-145, one instead sees four more coherent poems emerge:

1. sts The Gnostic Poem (roughly 1–79)
2. sts The Poem of Sexual Intrigue (84, 91–110)
3. sts *Loddfáfnismál* (111/4–8 and 11, 112–36)
4. sts *Ljóðatal* (138–141, 146–161, 162 lines 1–3, 163)

As one can see, this roughly matches Müllenhoff’s original distinctions, except that the thematically linked sections of 2-3 and 5-6 have been combined into single pieces and McKinnell has made logical attempts to explain his classifications of the unattributed/attributable and questionable stanzas.

As to the poem’s age, if it can even be regarded as a complete work, numerous scholars have presumed that the skaldic poet Eyvindr skáldaspillir quoted, or at least borrowed, some of the lines from *Hávamál* in his *Hákonarmál* (cf. *Hávamál* 21) and, therefore, suggest that *Hávamál* (or at least the latter *Ljóðatal* section) was known in Norway in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Conversely, on the whole, academic opinion points toward a 12-13<sup>th</sup> century composition in the form we have it. Nevertheless, any attempt to firmly date the entire piece has become almost superfluous due to the conclusion that *Hávamál*, again, as we have it, is a combination of multiple poems and thus contains potentially differing dates as a result of the act of compilation or individual contributions. One thing is known however. Through the efforts of Gustaf Lindblad in 1954 and his extensive palaeographical study of *Codex Regius*, *Hávamál* has been shown to have been added to the manuscript (which also contains the rest of the surviving poems used to make up modern editions of *The Poetic Edda*) somewhat later than its surrounding fellows. This in turn perhaps explains some of its oddities when compared to the surrounding mythological material.

## II On Translation

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This evaluation of the poem as an object leads to the version in your hands. The last scholarly edition and commentary of *Hávamál* was published in 1986 by David Evans and is freely available from the publishers, <http://vsnrweb-publications.org.uk>. Whilst this text rightfully remains essential reading when working with this poem and particularly Óðinnic myth, there have been, as is the nature of academia, some shifts in understanding of certain key terms since this publication. Furthermore, 2014 saw a new Old Norse edition of *The Poetic Edda* from Hið íslenska fornritafélag, the keepers and primary editors of nearly all of the surviving Icelandic manuscripts. It from this edition that I take my version of the Old Norse text, with permission kindly given from the editorial team for its reproduction here, to allow for a bilingual presentation. As for translations of *Hávamál*, there have been a great number of translations of the entire *Poetic Edda* but, in the modern sense, each has been meant as an academic reference text, a publication to maintain required output levels from academic institutions, or as an easily accessible translation for a public audience. Few have translated *The Poetic Edda* or even just *Hávamál* as an exercise purely in poetry itself. For example, one typical approach to academic translation can be found in, amongst others, one of John McKinnell's more recent publications from 2014, *Essays on Eddic Poetry*. McKinnell is one of the most prolific writers and scholars of *Hávamál* but perhaps holds an archaic view of poetic translation. For example (2014: x):

“different approaches may be appropriate for different poems...provided that three general principles are constantly borne in mind. First, any interpretation of a poem must be based on the text as we have it in the manuscripts, with as little emendation as possible, and must pay scrupulous attention to the grammar and the history of the Old Norse language. Second, it must be compatible with world view(s) that could be imagined at the supposed time of composition and should not ‘colonise’ the literature of the past by imposing fashionable but exclusively modern ideas on it...”

There are numerous difficulties with this approach. For one, the first requirement has a caveat, “with as little emendation as possible”. This informs us that such a practice is allowed and undertaken, but this is understandable: scribal errors are far from uncommon. The problem lies in the fact that these emendations can often change the whole meaning of a line or stanza and are based upon one's own education, logic, reasoning or another's

convincing academic argument. This allows for great liberty in some cases of translation and could lead to cases of, “Well, what the poet actually meant was...”.

The second requirement has two primary issues and shall be tackled in turn. Firstly, the requirement to only impose “world view(s) that could be imagined”. This lies wholly on what the individual translator or scholar imagines – or has been educated to suppose – that the people of the Viking Age thought. This alone is an enormous, whilst of course unavoidable, presumption. Whilst I agree wholeheartedly with McKinnell’s first suggestion – to stick to the issuing culture (whilst allowing for external influence) and our most current understanding of the language – some Old Norse words or terms simply do not translate into modern English (or modern languages in general). The resulting pseudo-literal rendering of the words conveys no meaning; it instead makes parts of the poem dead words on a page. That the words or terms themselves do not translate does not mean that the *sense* behind them is untranslatable. We are all human: be it in the 9<sup>th</sup> century or the 21<sup>st</sup>, and going by world literature and history, we have the same emotional range now as we did then, only different ways of expressing it. It also seems limiting to not compare the sense or meaning of the words and concepts with other cultures who were also trying to express similar ideas. This is not to say that we should use these cultures to understand Old Norse society (i.e. the primary reason that this poetry is studied in the first place), but to show that humans have been trying to express, through poetry particularly, certain things the world over. Consequently, I feel that this problem can be surmounted with minor commentary to the translated stanzas where it is advisable to explain translation choices or concepts that have no modern equivalent.

The second element, “at the supposed time of composition” is another prickle and, where *Hávamál* is concerned, has an enormous body of academic literature orbiting it. McKinnell, among many others, is largely of the opinion that *Hávamál* was composed by Christian scribes, under Continental Medieval influences, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, whilst allowing for the notion that the inspirational material was probably considerably older. Whilst I am certainly not stating that *Hávamál* survives unaltered from the Viking Age, I also don’t agree that the poem was composed 300 years after the Viking Age, taking older motifs as its starting point. Orality and oral culture is both an enormous and tricky subject, but, in the fewest words possible, when a society has no wide-spread writing system, the only way to remember things was to remember them. Furthermore, whilst academia has little room for such things, the *feeling* behind each stanza is frequently different; in both the attitudes proffered and the language used. Moreover, some stanzas are written with considerably more



skill than others. Nevertheless, the academic discussion on this topic is healthy, lengthy and ongoing, and there are numerous texts by excellent scholars that can provide more detailed information (see *Further Reading*).

Thus, in contrast to McKinnell, and more in line with another school of thought, I feel that to translate a poem, one must write a new poem and thus, I have undertaken the following approach: an attempt at a human translation of the poem. This means an avoidance of archaic grammar, terms and sentence structure and my translation is accompanied by light scholarship in the form of end-notes a) to ensure the reader is benefiting from the most modern, inter-disciplinary, research b) to explain the occasional burst of non-literal or unorthodox translation where the meaning is more conveyable than the exact words and c) to allow the poem to be read as a poem without obstructing prose or footnotes. General commentary has also been included in these notes where the poem might not make much sense on its own or where particular words have curious etymologies that might be of interest. I hope to have helped further bring *Hávamál* forth into a living poem again with words and concepts to ponder, lines to be remembered, and the humans behind them to be considered. Much like Dr. Jones (Snr.) who “just remembered his Charlemagne”, *Hávamál* creeps in now and again in my own day-to-day life.

It is also worthy of note that the Old Norse frequently speaks from the position of describing the actions of a generic male figure and uses the terms ‘he’ a great deal. Whether this was a conscious choice or not remains unknown, especially when wisdom or insight in the Old Norse world was frequently seen as something feminine. Consequently, I have made the purposeful choice to move towards a gender neutral translation, unless a man or woman is the subject of the stanza. As I suggested in the introduction, insight is human.

### III Notes to the Poem

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1

Whilst the translation presented here reflects my attempt to render the sense behind the Old Norse, I wonder if this is the voice of the poet or compiler making a subtle joke: before leaping into judgement about the advice of the poem, maybe give each part some thought.

2

Line 1 indicates that a stranger has entered the hall and is calling out to those inside. Line 3 relates to the social hierarchy that hall seating operated under: place yourself at the bottom and you will be treated accordingly. Place yourself in the middle and be prepared to defend that presumption – most likely with words or wit. Placing oneself at the top suggested extreme confidence. In this case, it seems that going straight to the fire was socially inadvisable.

3

Hospitality was considered incredibly important, even in winter when provisions may have been low or stretched already.

4

The last half of this stanza seems to relate to the possible contest insinuated above. If you are possessed of good sense or wit, you will receive words in return. If not? Silence. More positively, it may suggest that you will enter into a give-and-take relationship when holding a conversation.

5

A deep knowledge of the farm, the sea or horses is all well and good around people who do not know these things or at home where it is common knowledge. Among the travelled, or simply among new people, one needs to be able to bring more to the table. This may even apply to local dialects or customs: suddenly, despite being in your own country, you are out of your depth.

8

*Líknstafi* of line 3 is controversial. It is composed of the elements *líkn-* ‘healing, relief, mercy’ and *-stafi* ‘written words, carved runes, staff’. This produces a number of interpretations. One can either read ‘merciful words’ in a general conversational sense or ‘healing words’ in a contextually unexpected magical sense. Combined with ‘staff’ or ‘written words’, this provides two meanings for *líknstafir*: ‘merciful, healing words’ or ‘staff carved with healing words’. Healing spells do come up in the fourth and final section of

*Hávamál* when Óðinn recounts his new-found skills. However, runes, or Old Norse *rúnar*, does not just refer to ‘written, physical runes’ – it also means secret or hidden knowledge. The word *líknstafi* pops up again in a magical context where, in *Sigdrifumál* 5, Sigurðr drinks a beverage that contains *líknstafi*. At this point, one could understand ‘merciful, healing words’, since they were supposed to protect him. I chose ‘charitable words’ as a contemporary *flyting* or ‘word battle’ could get you killed if one was not eloquent enough in Old Norse society.

9

I have flipped this stanza so that the last three lines become the first. To say the very least, spoken reputation in life and one’s reputation both at and in death were of up-most importance in Old Norse society. Social disgrace, alive or dead, was not to be taken lightly. It is also interesting to note that Old Norse society considered both thoughts *and* feelings to issue from the heart, the breast, and not the head.

11

Line 5 reads *velli at* ‘on the road’, but it has been read in the sense of that road being able to take one anywhere, not just the place between locations.

13

In this stanza, it is clear that the poet is now using the voice of Óðinn. With both his travelling and wandering associations and reputation for turning up (uninvited or in disguise) at the individual halls of humans, giants and gods (*Grímnismál*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Völsunga saga*), it is not unlikely that Óðinn is supposed to be the speaker most of the time. The give-away here is the reference to Gunnlöð – she was the daughter of the giant Suttungr, who had been put in charge of guarding the Mead of Poetry (see 104-110).

14

The mention of extreme drunkenness is probably a further reference to Óðinn stealing the Mead of Poetry. Óðinn is said to have swallowed a cauldron of it down and flown home with it in his belly. Academics often consider the mention of Fjalar ‘Hider, Deceiver’ in line 3 to be a mistake by the poet or scribe as the scattered myth states that Suttungr was in possession of the Mead and that two dwarves, Fjalar and Galar, had created it in the first place. However, one wonders how Óðinn learned of the Mead in the first place since there is no poetic reference and Snorri Sturluson’s lengthier prose tale *Skáldskaparmál* doesn’t mention it either. On the surface, the second half seems like a comment on ‘at least tomorrow you’ll be able to think again’ but the language seems rather pleased with itself – after spitting out all of the Mead of Poetry when back in Ásgarðr, Óðinn had stolen liquid knowledge itself. I

wonder if this stanza references an event, or one the poet simply made up by way of explanation, placed before the theft, that has Óðinn drinking with the dwarf who made the Mead and its existence came up in drunken conversation. Now, the day after, Óðinn knows where to look. It would at least fit the warnings about drinking too much and making a fool of yourself – in this case referring to the dwarf who has given up his secret.

15

Whilst this looks like advice for the societal elite, and it probably was, this does not mean it did not also include everyone else. By acting this way, anyone could be considered the progeny of kings.

16

Again, this looks like it means one thing – fighting in war or physical combat – but if it is being spoken by Óðinn, much of his combat was dealt with in wit and words. This was also true for everyday life in Old Norse society – skill in orality was greatly prized, especially if one could mock someone without actually doing so. This apparently occurred so much, and became so sophisticated, that a law was introduced in the Icelandic law text *Grágás* to stop it happening. Either way, this is the life of a coward – a longer perhaps, but one with unrest and without honour.

17

One must keep in mind that cups would often be filled with alcohol.

18

*Gangleri*, ‘The Wanderer’ (one of approximately 200 names for Óðinn) thinks that travelling expands the mind, sharpens the senses and amplifies one’s awareness. One may also turn to the now classic line of Tolkien’s from the poem *All that is Gold does not Glitter*: “Not all those who wander are lost”. Some may suggest that, since it is supposed to be Óðinn that is speaking, he has gone out into the world to learn all he can and then use it to his best advantage. Yet, this seems too one-dimensional for perhaps the most varied mythological figure. The more I study the social and literary role of Óðinn, the more I see a development of character – one which starts entirely self-motivated and then switches to a more universal role. This concept arises again in stanza 138 onwards.

20

I have rendered the Old Norse *manni* ‘man, person’ as gannet in line 4 – utilising a gentle insult – as the tone is clearly derogatory.

22

One could turn to any world religion, moral and/or ethical system and the advice to first recognise one's own faults before pointing out those of others.

23

This suggests that we should face our problems head on, and not spend our time locked up in our heads, teasing it from every angle. We might not solve the issue, but we can *do* something.

24

Taken in tandem with the advice above to watch and hear everything you can, just because your company may be laughing, this doesn't mean that they a) think you are funny b) like you c) do not find the fact you have not noticed cruelly amusing. One must pay attention to the social cues and know the difference between being pandered to and true friendship.

25

The *þing* 'assembly, thing meeting' could host anything from a local gathering to discuss a minor matter to a full-blown regional court. Old Norse society and law functioned on having people to speak on your behalf, with character witnesses and so on. It didn't need to be many (whilst that may have helped) so yet again, be sure to know who your real friends are, even if they are few. Being unpopular, even if you were in the right, was not something to strive for.

26

Home, keeping in your corner of the world, and knowing it inside out is not knowing everything. Staying there just to look clever is not clever and takes us back a few stanzas and not knowing when you are being mocked. 'Home' here also suggests to me the idea of keeping within yourself – you may have created lots of clever answers in your mind but when the situation arises, they evaporate like mist.

28

It is hard to tell in the second half this stanza whether the poet is suggesting that a) once ignorance is out (i.e. in opposition to the first half) that it cannot be hidden any more b) once knowledge of any kind is out, it cannot be kept secret c) common knowledge cannot be hoarded or considered individual knowledge or d) all of the above.

29

To be clear, I have introduced the water metaphor for a person running away with themselves. However, the language makes it very clear that this is going on – once the endless volume of innate conversation or comments have begun and you do not notice that they should stop very quickly, you have started something that cannot stop and the only destination is trouble.

30

Firstly, just because a guest has arrived, it does not mean that they were welcome or that they were invited. Hospitality rules nevertheless dictated a welcome. In this example it is again hard to tell from the Old Norse whether it is being suggested that a) one should refrain from mocking or testing people on purpose so that they can retain the air of intelligence and avoid public scorn b) one should refrain from mocking or testing people on purpose followed by a comment on how to go about retaining the air of knowledge for yourself if *you* are not so smart c) one should have already perceived that the visitor is not all that clever but let them go about their business and store that knowledge for later or (yet again) d) all of the above. The last line of this stanza is also bit of a challenge to render into English. *Nái* is ‘avoid, keep out of’, *þurrfjallr* is made up of the elements ‘dry’ and ‘skinned’ whilst *þruma* is ‘thunder, storm’. Yet there is no concept of going outside and the storm is very much being brought inside by the poet. Consequently, the storm is the activity or challenge that the visitor faces and must make it through dry or unscathed.

32

Here the sense combines the idea that friendly mockery is all well and good but there is a time and place for it. If you are in another’s home, what goes among friends may not be appreciated or understood. Honour and reputation were of great import, even legally, and any harmless jibe out of place could potentially escalate out of hand.

33

This stanza is curiously difficult to translate as the whole meaning rests on the word *nema* ‘except, unless, save’. This reading would seem straightforward with the suggestion that one should not eat before going elsewhere to eat, in order to be able to enjoy or appreciate the hospitality shown. Yet the second half suggests that by doing so, you will make a fool of yourself, shovelling away and not answering any questions. *Nema*, in an irregular form, can also be read ‘but also’. Whilst the majority use of the term, ‘unless, except’ seems the most likely, common sense suggests otherwise when considering the second-half.

34

I’ve inserted ‘leeching’ in line 5 to first represent taking from another well beyond their initial kindness and because a colleague pointed out a spectacular Old Norse legal term, *slímuseta* ‘slime-sitting’. It refers to somebody who overstays their welcome and the law permits the host to turn them out on their ear, without penalty for assault.

36

Whilst *sal(r)* can simply be read as ‘hall’ and is most likely a way of not using *halr* twice in one stanza, *salr* has seen a great deal of academic attention. ‘Hall’ may be the most common understanding but it is also used to represent a temple or building of cultic significance, but often when compounded with other terms like a deities’ name. For general interest-sake, -*salr*, in the context of place names, is only found attached to Óðinn. These places are described as theophoric names, or those associated with a god, and are presumed to have had some form of cultic activity or reverence present.

37

Standing on your own two feet was considered an important element of Old Norse culture. In this case, it is the heart of the beggar that breaks, or literally, ‘bleeds’, for not being able to cope rather than that of an onlooker. This stanza represents rock-bottom as one did not only have to cultivate or own property to stay afloat in the world.

38

Wandering the world could be considered as a dangerous past-time. Exile was a commonly used punishment for a range of terrible crimes and thus wandering alone, perhaps far from home, may have made people suspicious. However, I wonder if this could also generally apply to ‘having one’s tools – physical or mental – at hand’ for the situation as it unfolds, thus not necessitating physical combat but strife or struggle of any kind.

39

The Old Norse is challenging here. The sense is all over the place (difficulty in reading the manuscript does not help) and it is difficult to tell what is being referenced or referred to where. The general sense is that the poet has never met a person so wealthy that a gift would be refused.

44

This stanza is very complex, but not with regards to the Old Norse. The Old Norse, in this case, is very simple and almost readable from modern English if pronounced ‘correctly’ (it is unknown exactly how Old Norse would have been pronounced so scholars fall back on modern/historical Icelandic for the most part). This simplicity may have been used in order to emphasise the importance of the concept behind the words. In this stanza the poet is suggesting that you have a friend whom you trust so implicitly that the friendship does not need to be maintained by gifts or deeds, and that they are instead trusted wholly, in a bind, to be at your side. It also suggests that there is nothing that you want from the friendship *but* the friendship – there is no ulterior motive or purposeful social/economic gain. The word *geði* in

line 4 is also troublesome to render into English as it encapsulates the concept of 'heart, mind, spirit, essence' in a single word. It is not one or another of them, it is all of them at once. A similar problem is found in Chinese and Japanese when translating the word *xin* or *shin* respectively. As for *geði*, the word appears to have fallen out of use in modern Scandinavian languages, which, to my mind, is a shame, but is probably a product of modern understandings or separation of these concepts. One could perhaps use 'soul' but this relies on a Christocentric understanding and is thus somewhat inappropriate. The act of *blanda* 'blending, mixing' in the same line also carries the connotation of fluid and therefore brings to mind the practice of blood-brothers, a practice which was alive and well in Old Norse society. Line 5 suggests that this act should be sealed with a gift, another practice common upon the receipt of, particularly, a name from one's chieftain or lord. This was perhaps something that the poet thought not to be taken lightly and was instead a deep commitment to another person. In this case, the 'blending' is going on at a physical and spiritual level and as the final line of the poem suggests, this is something significant that must be maintained.

45

This stanza is the counterpart to 44 and regards itself with advice for maintaining the status-quo. Whilst you may not trust this individual, you would like to stay on good terms, so whilst in their company listen well and engage in conversation (as to not show your disagreement or your becoming emotional) but afterwards, feel free to forget everything they said. Furthermore, as stanza 42 suggested, one is also feel free to reward their deception or lies with those of your own.

47

Lines 1 and 2 suggest that in our youth, the poet's youth, or perhaps even Óðinn's youth, that he/we wandered alone, unsure how to navigate life. In this case, the individual had wandered off the beaten track internally and had become bogged down inside. Yet upon encountering another, whether it is a specific person or just another human being, we may consider ourselves fortunate; frequently another can aid us with our difficulties, be they physical or mental, simply point us in a new/improved direction or have us instantly forget them altogether. This stanza also suggests that isolation is not a natural state for mankind and that if our world view or even our own actions cannot stand up to interaction with others, we may need to rethink them.

48

*Frækni* of line 1 generally means 'brave' but this stanza does not limit itself to those who are martial and bold, but also includes those who are calm and internally strong. The second half



really does suggest a person afraid of everything, even receiving gifts, because social etiquette incurs effort or cost.

49

Whilst simple at first glance, this stanza is, like many others, deceptively complex. On first reading it is unclear whether the traveller, poet or even Óðinn has given the two wooden men (e.g. scarecrows?) his clothes or spare clothes. Yet if they are scarecrows, being undressed and wooden would not make them very good scarecrows. Furthermore, it seems that by gaining clothes the wooden men have improved their standing from shamed men to respectable individuals. One wonders if this is just a simple piece of advice regarding a social perception of public nakedness. However, scholars have noted over the years that *trémönnum* (i.e. *trémaðr* ‘tree, wooden man’) only appears in cultic/magical contexts and may in fact represent carved trees or idols that held some sort of role in the reverence of the Norse gods, or more specifically here, Óðinn. There are numerous examples of wooden idols surrounding cultic activity and/or the Norse gods from both native and non-native sources but *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* serves as an introduction. Here, the protagonists encounter an enormous tree that had been carved in the likeness of man on an island. It speaks and tells them that it used to receive human sacrifices from worshippers (much like Óðinn) but now that they had gone, it was no longer clothed, and thus cold. Consequently, this stanza may in fact reference some element of tree/idol worship or at least a memory of it. It is also reminiscent of Óðinn (and two additional and alternating – depending on the source – divine figures) discovering the logs/trees *Askr* and *Embla* and giving them voice, spirit and clothes to make them into the first humans. As for the possible role of trees and tree worship in connection with Óðinn, the most recent analysis can be found in my 2016 PhD thesis, *The Deathly Gallows: Óðinn and the Viking Age Hanging Ritual*.

50

The usual understanding is that the fir tree has died as a result of lacking its natural protections and standing alone. Whilst a fir tree would indeed die if lacking bark or needles, unless interfered with, it would have to be dead in the first place for this to occur. Fir trees also have no issue with standing alone due to their generally hardy nature. The word *þorp* is also a problem due to range of things it has been taken to mean. Examples range from ‘mound, rocky place/outcrop, pen, field’ but there is little to no linguistic evidence for these renderings. The normal understanding in Old Norse is ‘hamlet, village, croft, small farm’ and so on and this still fits. The tree has suffered from being alone too close to human habitation and all that that entails. The lone tree metaphor rings with the blunt second-half of the stanza

and the dangers of being a lone individual with no form of, or fellows for, protection. This aligns with stanza 47 and the suggestion that isolation, and in this case perhaps near danger, is not a natural state to thrive in. As an aside, it has been suggested that there is some connection between stanzas 49 and 50 due to their placement in *Hávamál*, their content, word choice and the comparative example in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*.

52

It has been suggested that *skala* 'shall, must' of line 2 in combination with *eitt* 'only' of line 1 should best be interpreted in the sense of 'not only should a man give big gifts' on grounds of internal cohesion (i.e. of the whole poem) and 'natural reading', but I am less convinced. The first two lines, literally read, are "small [things] only should a man give" Thus far, *Hávamál* suggests that the simpler, perceptive and hospitable life is the one most likely to keep one at ease in the world and the academic suggestion that you can also give small gifts, in contrast to large/expensive ones, seems in conflict with this. Personally, it seems as if the poet and/or Óðinn is suggesting that if you always give small gifts, that is, by giving small, seemingly immaterial ones like food and drink, you are always able to give to all because the gifts are always within your means. Thus, by gifting small necessities to all, great acclaim is won for (numerous) tiny deeds.

53

This stanza is nigh untranslatable. It seems that a) the wording may be corrupt b) the grammar may be corrupt c) the first three lines are proverbial and thus only make sense with lost context or d) all of the above. Thus, a basic rendering into English and the necessary interpretation is entirely in the hands of the individual. Scholars also have no record of how sand or sea could have been used metaphorically or what connotation the words may have carried. For example, in English we may say that some person's wisdom is as deep as the sea, or as numerous as the grains of sand on a beach, but it is unknown if this can be applied to Old Norse. With the wise/unwise comparison in the second half it seems as if a comparison is being made between the sea and sand, but it may simply suggest that to have a sea/beach, you need a beach/sea and therefore, despite opposing sides designating themselves "superior", both are required for definition. Thus, men's minds are small because they think one or other thing is best where both are in fact essential and the sea/sand works in compliment without separation. I have translated *Lítilla sanda / lítilla sæva* (literally) 'of small sand, of small seas' using 'of' in the sense of 'to be from'. This is not the only way to read the Old Norse. I use it in this sense not to mean 'originating in a cut-off or remote area' but instead to highlight the variety of places that people originate from.

54

Despite line 6 seeming contradictory to the advice about not knowing too much, knowing “a good many things” is also, in our modern lives, basically inescapable in order to have a basic grasp of the current era. I sense the lesson here is the balance of knowing when enough is enough.

55

Anyone who is of the thoughtful persuasion has probably found themselves chasing a thread of knowledge deeper and deeper down the rabbit hole and become either desirous to know more or frustrated when stuck. That or they have reached a point where, having realised or observed something, they may not know what to do with the said knowledge (i.e. unable to “turn it off”) or wish that they had not realised it at all. It is interesting that one might then understand that the advice to remain moderately wise and to not see and/or understand too much suggests either that a) for those that had done so in the Viking Age, there was no widely recognised ‘next step’ mentally, philosophically or spiritually for acceptance or action having done so or b) this instead warns about the far greater challenges ahead that lie unrecognised beneath our initial ones. I feel that the latter option is more accurate.

58

This stanza is odd advice. Theft and murder (rather than manslaughter or vengeance killing) were ranked among the worst crimes that could be committed during the Viking Age. Theft was often considered *worse* than murder: in this society, there were occasionally valid reasons to kill but theft was never acceptable. In some places in Scandinavia, theft equalled hanging and this was socially, and perhaps spiritually, considered the worst possible death for an individual. One could say that at least the crimes described here were planned during the day, as Old Norse society also had rules against crimes at night or ‘secret crimes’. Yet if a crime was committed, like murder/manslaughter, and nobody was there to see that your actions were appropriate, you were supposed to publicly announce the action as soon as possible. If one did not, and people eventually found out, we come back to ‘secret crime’ and thus full circle to exile or execution. Whilst the stanza is found quoted in other medieval sources, I wonder if this stanza was a product of that later time period rather than an earlier one, due to the conflict with earlier social norms and law. That or the undertone simply suggests ‘get up early and don’t get caught’.

62

The eagle is presumably a land-based eagle that has found itself over the sea and therefore suddenly out of its depth.

63

Lines 4-6 here are interpretive. The advice is either to share your knowledge with one individual whom you trust implicitly and no other (which feels fitting with the earlier advice to have one very close person upon whom you can always rely), or it may suggest to keep all information and revelation to oneself. Either way, the last line is clear – once three people know, everyone else might as well know, if they do not already.

65

The rest of this verse is, presumably, lost.

66

Line 6 is difficult to convey from what appears to be phrasal Old Norse, but boils down to a well-recognised comment on people in general. As to the rest of the content, the person is causing their host some social/hospitality angst by turning up when there is nothing left to give or for having to be left waiting empty-handed instead.

67

There are various theories about the meaning of this stanza, but I feel that whilst the exact meaning (of line 6 in particular) is hard to pin down, the sense is less complicated than it looks. In following on from the previous stanza, the speaker continues describing situations where social rules could become a problem. In lines 1-3, the speaker mentions being invited to homes for meals, but not being hungry. This could make the rules of hospitality tricky, particularly, as it seems in relation to lines 4-6, if it is an invitation from a stranger. Lines 4-6 continue this idea where a trusted friend has invited one over to enjoy a hearty meal (at cost to himself) and again, one has already eaten.

68

The two halves of this verse do not seem to fit together very well, but one can only enjoy the former (fire, sun and the sight of it) if in possession of the latter (one's ongoing health). The comment in line 6 about living without chronic injury fits quite neatly with the world of wisdom literature on the whole; the only way to increase one's wisdom or insight is by continuing to experience (i.e. to live longer), whilst reducing the accumulation of irksome issues. This may also deepen our understanding of the first half; live long enough to see that the greatest things in life are a) already at hand and b) free and c) readily available. Regarding fire, it is probably unquestionable that the greatest physical tool in our race's toolbox is still fire and its guided use.

69

The core of this thematic section, stanzas 68-71, is simple: stay alive because there is always something to work with. I do wonder if there is a suggestion of preference in this list: sons – that is continued life – are best, kinsmen second – at least the family unit goes on – goods third – one can care for oneself/family/friends – and finally good deeds – they at least reflect well upon a life lived whilst not engendering its continuation. Conversely, this might go against the advice that there is always something to live for and that whatever you have is good enough.

70

There is a lot of speculation about how to understand this stanza. One commentator provides an undoubtedly neat academic explanation for lines 4-6, suggesting that the sense is instead that of a wealthy man who was enjoying a fire indoors whilst, unknown to him, death waited outside. Despite this suggestion, I feel that this conclusion forces too much external meaning into the poem and conflicts with lines 1-3. Line 1 suggests that survival, in whatever state, is the best result: only the living can act. This is then reinforced with an example of how people may come to *think* that their life is over: the wealthy man thinks he can only live with his accumulations and, once they are destroyed, he has nothing left to live for. The advice here is to go on as, again, only the living can do anything about it.

71

The advice about staying alive, that began in stanza 68, has gained momentum and culminates here. Many of these ailments, especially over a thousand years ago, would have greatly hampered a person, but the advice is simply to keep striving.

73

There is disagreement among commentators regarding line 1, but it only arises if one presumes that the words preserved in the manuscript are wrong or meant something else. If taken just as they are, the line reads well enough. I wonder if line 2 is speaking of the voice within, but the sense remains unclear. Lines 3-4 are bizarre, either tacked on or fragmentary, and the stanza itself is in a different poetic meter from the other 163 stanzas.

74

The idea here is that, due to the short yard of a boat, boats don't go very quickly and that by having packed enough food and water, the night need not be a tiresome experience; on or off shore. As is common with *Hávamál*, there is also a cautionary tale here. The yard on Norse boats may have been kept short due to the unpredictable nature of the weather, as described in lines 3-6, at the tail-end of the year (or in general).

76

It is interesting to note that, in both this stanza and the next, death is a given; there is no escape or salvation from it. Immortality did not need to be possessed by the living, but could instead be found in the knowledge of what one leaves behind. In previous sections these are children, kin, and so on. Here, and in 77, it is the renown of one's actions in life: once done, a deed is true forever, even if there is eventually no memory of it. Notice however, that warfare is not specified. One may also find an odd parallel of wording in the Old English poem *The Wanderer*, but it is highly unlikely that the one had any influence on the other.

77

This stanza suggests a more long-term approach to memorialisation if said reputation was to survive beyond a single generation or two. Reputation, as noted in line 6, did not need to be favourable. Some forms of capital punishment, whilst rare, in Old Norse society (like hanging) were designed to be a denigrating to a person as possible.

78

*Fitjung* of line 1 goes unreferenced elsewhere. A neat academic argument suggested it being used to reference a group of people, rather than an individual, who owned successful farms. However, it is equally possible that the name had no real significance beyond its alliteration.

80

This stanza is challenging because both the metre and the flow is obscure and the some of the terms used are rare. There is also a considerable volume of background knowledge required in order to take any depth of meaning from the lines. I have left *rúnar* in line 2 untranslated as a result of the conflict between our modern understanding of the Old Norse term and its regular usage in English. *Rúnar*, historically, encapsulated the concept of hidden or secret knowledge/speech as well as the objects or shapes which we consider runes today. *Reginkunnum* of line 3 has been translated as 'of divine descent' but, when it comes to the *rúnar*, such an understanding is not straightforward. The *rúnar* were not solely possessed by the Norse gods, as both *Hávamál* 143 and *Sigdrífumál* 18 suggest. Yet, in this case, from a human perspective, the *rúnar* were gifted from the Æsir/Óðinn. This leads to line 4 where the stanza tells that the *rúnar* were crafted by *ginnregin* 'universal powers'. This term is frequently understood or translated as the Æsir or 'gods' more generally, but *Völuspá* 6, 9, 23 and 25 sees a gathering of the *regin* to decide numerous things and does not specifically denote the Æsir. It is also clear that the *rúnar* did not originate with the Æsir; they were instead claimed for the Æsir as a result of Óðinn's own hanging in *Hávamál* 138-139, taken, by some means, from the land of the dead. *Hávamál* 142 and *Sigdrífumál* 13, amongst others, instead suggest that Óðinn interpreted the *rúnar* and then "carved/stained" them so that they

could be used in his issuing culture or society. Thus the runes (as we generally understand them today) appear to be the concept of *rúnar* given physical form. The *fimbulþulr* ‘mighty, greatest sage’ of line 5 is undoubtedly Óðinn and the same description appears in stanza 142. As for what a *fimbulþulr* did, there is little to know beyond the meaning of the Old Norse *pulr* ‘wise man, sage’ or perhaps ‘cult orator, priest, reciter, poet’. A variant of this term also arises in the Old English *pyle*. *Þulr* also pops up on a number of rune stones as some kind of title and it has been theorised that it may represent some form of official, memorial, or religious role. As for line 6 and whom should be silent, going by the rest of the poem, I have inserted ‘sage’ where the text reads ‘him’, identifying *hann*, since most of *Hávamál* suggests that one should either tell only one person what you know or no-one at all, especially, as it appears in this stanza, that the question posed has apparently been answered.

83

The initial sense of lines 5 and 6 does look like “feed the horse at home and the dog on the farm (*búi*)”, but the formulaic use of the terms implies a contrast and can be identified to mean ‘elsewhere’ by comparison with prose examples.

84

This stanza begins a recurring theme in *Hávamál*: the general distrust of women. It is possible that this stanza lends weight to the argument in favour of later additions to the poem; Norse attitudes toward women were far from modern standards but were still numerous steps ahead of the medieval church. The imagery of a turning wheel suggests something akin to a potter’s wheel and was generally understood to mean something unpredictable or unstable. It also begins a run of six stanzas, 84-89, outlining things a man should not trust.

## II ‘ The Poem of Sexual Intrigue’

90

Academic discussion goes back and forth regarding this stanza but, from the sense presented by the words, I feel the section of *Hávamál* that has been called, most recently, “The Poem of Sexual Intrigue” (see Introduction) begins here. Stanza 91 comments upon “experience with both”, in this case, human minds, and speaks of the male mind. This stanza covers someone’s feelings regarding the female aspect and thus the language seems to pair them. This stanza also begins the first of two tales regarding Óðinn’s attempts at seduction. As to this stanza, *óbryddum* of line 3 is an odd one: it describes some sort of spiked shoes for crossing ice on horseback. Lines 9-10 suggest that one should first acquire a pair of skis and some snow for catching reindeer.

93

Stanzas 93 and 94 underline an issue that runs through almost all worldly wisdom literature and groups who make the acquisition of wisdom their driving goal: the drive that can undo us all, even the wisest, is that of sexual desire. One could hypothesise that, within these two stanzas, there is an underlying reference to the mythological material surrounding Óðinn and that the poet, in the voice of Óðinn, considers these events – those prior to and including the eventual seduction of Suttungr’s daughter in order to steal the Mead of Poetry – one of the core contributions to the conflict between the Æsir and the giants.

95

This stanza is often translated pivoting on line 6. Contextually, from the stanzas around it, it could be understood as ‘having nobody to love/be loved by’, but that requires stepping away somewhat from the sense of the line itself. Furthermore, in the scope of *Hávamál* as a whole, this feels like it could then be opened up to the more general advice about gaining contentment in life. This advice also provides the basis for the moral of the story that is about to unfold – the folly of longing for that which you cannot have.

97

*Mey* ‘girl’ of line 1 could be used to represent a wife or a daughter; both are used frequently. Yet with stanzas 98 and 102, and the sense of shame, it seems more likely to be Billingr’s wife. As to who Billingr is, the name is used for both a giant and a dwarf. Both are plausible but Óðinn’s attempts to seduce giantesses is a more frequent occurrence. As to how Óðinn simply wandered inside this hall, it has been surmised that his general reputation as a master of disguise, magic or trickery had something to do with it.



98

*Mæla man* of line 3 does mean ‘to speak with’ but carries connotation of ‘flattery’ or ‘attempt at charm’ that appears in the earlier stanzas of *Hávamál*. It is also interesting that the woman uses the name ‘Óðinn’ directly – in most tales involving Óðinn, he is rarely so easy to recognise.

99

This stanza is difficult to grasp, both in sense and meaning. Line 3 has general sense of being consumed by emotion; in this case, by lust. However, this makes line 3 somewhat superfluous. *Vilja* can be understood as ‘one’s desire, pleasure’ allowing the stanza to suggest that Óðinn thought this clandestine meeting to be a certainty.

100

It is unclear what *bornum viði* ‘bearing wood’ from line 4 refers to. Many take it as a repetition of the burning torches (i.e. bearing light, burning torches), which, whilst a logical inference, makes for pointless repetition. One could try guessing: the wood describes a club, a stick, and so on, but it would be no more than a guess. It is at least clear as to why the warriors of the hall are unexpectedly awake.

101

Older translations hold that the dog lay between Óðinn and his goal, with the lady of his desire on the other side. This is not the case. In tandem with the first meeting of our characters in stanza 97, the sense of the wording suggests that this dog has been left on the bed *instead*, hence the emphasis on its female nature. The element of binding also works quite well in English, allowing for inference of the old saying, ‘enough rope to hang yourself with’. Here we have the culmination of frustration, wanting what one cannot have despite the invested personal risk or, from stanza 98, what one could have simply taken – albeit by force.

103

This stanza is a bit of a swerve away from the general theme of stanzas 90-110, but could serve as a return to the gnomic wisdom as a form of introduction to the next seduction tale.

104

So begins one of the most famous Norse mythological tales: the seduction of Gunnlöð and the theft, from Suttungr, of the Mead of Poetry. One may recall brief allusions toward it in perhaps stanza 12 and more securely in stanzas 13-14. The lengthier tale as to the creation of the Mead (and resulting conflicts) can be found in most fully in Snorri Sturluson’s prose *Skáldskaparmál* and is legitimised by a generous helping of skaldic kenning-constructions used in order to describe poetry itself. The primary examples, both here and *Skáldskaparmál*,

do differ in some significant ways and, whilst most of the tale is left out here, the reasoning seems clear enough: the poet is only using it to describe the sexual betrayal, this time, by Óðinn – perhaps the second half of ‘having experienced both’, as stanza 91 suggested.

105

Line 6 literally reads ‘for her troubled mind’. In tandem with line 5, it makes little sense: ‘for her devotion, for her troubled mind’. Thus, one is left to translate the sense of the words rather than their literal nature – for ‘her’ devotion, the reward ‘for her’ was misery. Punctuation can also prove vital in rendering where emphasis seems to fall.

106

Here we are forced to turn to *Skáldskaparmál* for context. Rata is the name of the auger or gimlet (think large corkscrew) that Óðinn used to bore a hole through the rock (of the mountain which held the Mead and Gunnlöð). Óðinn then used this path, in the form of a snake, to crawl through the protective layers. Line 6 continues the idea of a game or challenge that ‘Óðinn’ boasts about surviving in stanza 104.

107

*Vel keypts litar* of line 1 causes academic strife in a number of places but there is perhaps a simpler explanation. The word *litar* means ‘colour, hue, complexion, outward appearance’ and if one turns to the creation of mankind, as is described in *Völuspá* 18, three gods (each of whom is arguably Óðinn) gift three aspects to two inert logs: breath, mental faculties and healthy colour/bodily warmth. Thus one could suppose that this describes some form of acquired disguise, perhaps by magic, especially due to the multiple deceptions Óðinn makes use of in this tale as it is told in *Skáldskaparmál*. My translation of line 6 is somewhat controversial. Óðrerir of line 4 is at least simple – it is the name of the Mead itself (but it is often used to refer to the vessel that held the Mead as well). Line 6 is largely nonsensical due to a) the number of forms and positions that the words could take and/or occupy in the Old Norse and b) a breaking of expected metrical rules. Consequently, there have been many attempts to amend the reading of the manuscript on a presumption of errors, corruption and so on. Yet if we place ‘expected or required’ norms aside, *alda* could simply be read as ‘old, age, period of time’ and *jarðar* represents the Earth or something of (i.e. beneath or within) it. Consequently, what with Óðrerir having been contextually guarded underground and line 5 describing it as ‘come up, arisen’, this understanding does not seem so far-fetched whilst being, technically, out on a limb. Furthermore, it would not be out of the question for a poet to have broken metrical rules to allow for a good line that does not quite fit the poetic requirements.

108

It is interesting that the poet is suggesting, in Óðinn's voice, that he does not think he would have escaped without Gunnlöð's help. Also, note *ifi* of line 1; it means 'to doubt', much like we use 'iffy' today.

109

Mythologically, this stanza is bizarre. For one, the ice-giants have travelled both freely and openly, without contest, to Óðinn's (*Hávi*, i.e. the High One) hall to ask about a fellow they only know as Bölverkr. It is as if they have travelled to their local law-speaker with a domestic problem. *Skáldskaparmál* informs us that Bölverkr is the name Óðinn gives when among the giants (this time); the name means 'evil doer'. These ice-giants also don't seem to know if Bölverkr has gone into hiding or if he was killed by Suttungr, suggesting that they are not of Suttungr's 'group'.

110

Evidently these were suspicious giants as Óðinn was apparently made to swear over a metal ring (frequently appearing in Icelandic sagas in court cases) to tell the truth and, as we are aware, lies through his teeth. This would be regarded as a serious transgression, much like lying under oath today. That Gunnlöð weeps for her loss has led some to suggest that the character had genuine feelings for Óðinn. It seems more likely that she weeps for being taken advantage of sexually, the betrayal of her trust and the resulting theft. This stanza feels more like the comments of the poet rather than the giants since we hear nothing more about them. It also ends the section regarding both male and female unreliability.

### III *Loddfáfnismál*

111

There is some uncertainty as to whether or not there should be a ‘break’ at the end of line 2 or line 3. The most modern edition of *Hávamál* has it as I have presented but the other option would read fluidly, whilst deviating from the meter of the poem. The ‘well of Urðr’ in line 3 refers to the well of (the Norn) Urðr (i.e. Fate) that *Völuspá* 19 tells us lies beneath a root of the world tree, Yggdrasill. The use of ‘men’s speech’ in line 6 is curious in combination with the apparent location of this recital, as well as the inclusion of Hávi’s (i.e. Óðinn’s) hall. I have again left *rúnar* in line 7 untranslated for the reasons given in stanza 80. There is a great depth of mythological allusion being made use of here and a full explanation of each factor would result in a book of its own.

118

As has been noted in the past, many editors read *Ofarla* ‘high/er up’ in the sense of ‘sharply’ (presumably in reference to the tongue that lead to the death sentence), but this feels like a modern imposition of the English phrase “a sharp tongue”. One editor suggested physically higher up (i.e. the head). If one retains ‘higher up’ as it is and reads *bíta* ‘to bite’ in the most common way that it is used in Old Norse literature – that is the ‘biting’ of a weapon (i.e. cutting, slashing) – one instead sees a possible scene of judicial punishment for, again, using the context of a lying woman, adultery. My PhD thesis, *The Deathly Gallows: Óðinn and the Viking Age Hanging Ritual*, focused upon the use of hanging in Old Norse society and being hanged ‘high’ proved a consistent use of terminology and furthermore, adultery was one of the few crimes consistently worthy of such a punishment. It is also worthy of note that the crime of adultery was one that would rely almost wholly on the word of the woman involved, if the act was not observed by another and hence the tone of vehemence.

119

For the almost identical advice and wording, see 44.

120

It is possible that this stanza is, again, deeper than it appears. On face value, lines 5 and 6 do not seem to match very well. One could read it in the sense of being able to bring good people to you with pleasant words and either a) one should learn ways to help people throughout one’s life or b) this act of pleasant speech is the equivalent of mastering healing magic (i.e. smoothing over social unrest and so on). Yet the use of *gamanrúnum*, with the *rúnar* ‘runes, magic/secret speech’ element (see 80), in tandem with *líknargaldr*, and its -

*galdr* ‘magic, song’ element, suggests a more sorcerous or perhaps manipulative undertone. It seems possible to suggest that this ‘pleasing speech’ is in fact some kind of glamour that works like healing (i.e. soothing) magic, bringing us back into the supposed realms of Óðinn.

123

For the almost identical advice and wording in line 6, see 8.

124

For the almost identical advice and wording in line 1, see 44. Line 6 suggests that you need someone who can tell you hard truths or simply disagree and for it to be safe to do so.

126

Note that the condition of one’s shoes, and therefore one’s feet, was just as important in keeping one safe and well as the condition of one’s weapons.

127

Line 7 and ‘give this enemy no peace’ is more likely to refer to the ‘speaking out’ in line 6 (i.e. do not let them forget it or pass over it) rather than giving quarter in physical conflict. Some have suggested that this passage suggests immediate reaction to affront but that seems poor advice in comparison with the poem as a whole.

129

*Gjalti* ‘to go mad with terror’ of line 7 is in fact an Old Irish loan-word (*geilt*) into Old Norse (of which there are very few despite the lengthy periods that Scandinavians have spent in Ireland historically). The term appears only this once in poetry but a handful of times in saga prose. The most famous example from Irish literature is *Buile Shuibhne* ‘The Madness of Sweeny’, where the protagonist, Suibne Geilt, is driven insane by looking up during battle as a result of a saint’s curse. The medieval Norwegians were familiar with the tale due to its inclusion – under ‘Marvels of Ireland’ – in *Konungs Skuggsia* ‘King’s Mirror’, written c.1250. This does not mean that the tale was only known in/by the 13<sup>th</sup> century. As for being cursed in battle, scholar Neil Price, particularly in his *The Viking Way*, suggests that magical practitioners would also have been present on the battlefield, casting spells back and forth.

134

The meaning of lines 10-12 is highly speculative. Each of the verbs (*hangir*, *skollir* and *váfir*) in each of the lines means ‘to hang, dangle, swing’. This conjures the image that, like Óðinn in stanza 138, these elders (the *skörpum belg* ‘withered bag’ (i.e. ‘old person’) of line 8), or *pulr* ‘sage’ as line 5 has it, have been ‘hanged’ in order to gain wisdom. Numerous academics have suggested that Norse magical practitioners, *pulr* or even ‘shamans’ may have actually tried to emulate this mythical practice on themselves, but there is no evidence – literary or

archaeological – to support this conclusion. In 1928, Rolf Piping in his *Oden i Galgen* suggested that the things that hang here with the *pulr* are the accompanying human/animal sacrifices, for which there is significantly more evidence for. Take for example the *vílmögum* ‘the sons of misery’ of line 12: evidence suggests that criminals, particularly thieves or adulterers, may have been used as hanged sacrifices as a result of their crimes; perhaps less for the actual crime but more for the weakness of their legal position in a revenge-based society. For a significantly more detailed analysis of this practice, see my *The Deathly Gallows: Óðinn and the Viking Age Hanging Ritual*.

136

This stanza is somewhat bizarre. Having a stout beam to keep people out is in conflict with the general sense of Viking Age hospitality.

137

Much of what this stanza is alluding toward is speculative at best. As for the earth being used against drunkenness in lines 6-7, one can only wonder if the suggestion is to ingest some, invoking general folk-healing properties of the earth. The oak of line 9 is a long-standing remedy for aiding with the symptoms and effects of dysentery. The ear of corn of line 10 may seem bizarre, but there are quite a number of references to its use against the supernatural in Scandinavia. *Höll* ‘hall’ in line 11 is not a secure reading but makes general sense if one wishes to keep internal strife behind closed doors. Invoking the moon in line 12 might suggest some kind of supernatural element but with prohibitions against killing during the hours of darkness, attempting to resolve a heated feud at night seems wise. Again, *rúnar* of line 13 goes untranslated for its numerous levels of understanding.

#### IV *Ljóðatal*

138

Here begins the enormously debated account of Óðinn's self-immolation by hanging in order to gain the *rúnar*. My PhD thesis, *The Deathly Gallows: Óðinn and the Viking Age Hanging Ritual*, revolved largely around stanzas 138-141, so it is not with exaggeration to state that one could write a book, as many others have, both outlining and trying to understand the depth of Viking Age mythology, allegory, inference and social background at work here. Lines 7-9 represent the world tree Yggdrasill which, in modern understanding, is unlikely to hold its once 'safe' meaning as 'Yggr's (i.e. Óðinn's) horse' and instead, with cognates in its fellow Germanic dialects, carry a meaning of approximately 'terrifying colossus'.

139

In short, it is currently understood that Óðinn went without nutrient for the nine days of his ordeal, 'peered downwards' into the Underworld (Hel) and then 'took up the *rúnar*' prior to his return (in what could be considered an act of theft). *Niðr* of line 3 is tricky as whilst its meaning of 'down, downwards' is safe, it can also mean beneath or below (comparing the etymology of the related English 'nether'). There is also the question of word choice purely for alliterative purposes. Thus the question of "where did Óðinn look downwards or beneath?" remains a problem. 'Took them shouting' of line 5 could be understood in the sense of triumph, during an out-of-body experience, before falling, either physically from the noose or perhaps 'back' in the sense of retreating. As to why the deity would undergo this, compare *Vafþrúðismál* 43:

<i>Frá jotna rúnum</i>	Of all <i>jötnar</i>
<i>ok allra goða</i>	and gods' secrets
<i>ek kann segja satt,</i>	I can truthfully tell,
<i>þvíat hvern hefí ek heim um komit;</i>	because I have visited every world;
<i>níu kom ek heima</i>	nine worlds I have travelled through, to
<i>fyr Niflhel neðan,</i>	Niflhel below,
<i>hinig deyia ór helju halir.</i>	there the dead come from Hel's hall.

140

It is unclear as to whether these 'mighty songs' of line 1 were also acquired during this ordeal but the flow of the poem, in tandem with stanzas 146-163, suggests that these were further acquisitions enabled by having taken the *rúnar*. *Nam* of line 2 is often taken to mean 'learned' but, when considering Óðinn's usual method of acquisition where giants are

concerned, I have used the sense of theft that *nam* also carries. It is unknown who ‘the famous son of Bölþorn’ of line 3 is, but Bestla is Óðinn’s giantess mother, making this unknown male his maternal uncle (for which there is a commonly-noted special relationship between these two men in Germanic societies). Speculation suggests that Mímir (to whom Óðinn traded his eye for wisdom and whose head is in Óðinn’s possession) could fill the role but the evidence is speculative and, technically, irrelevant. I amend *Bölþor* of the manuscript to Bölþorn due the latter having distinct meaning and thematic links with the name of Óðinn’s mother (and perhaps Óðinn as well). *Ausinn* of line 6 is, in a wider literary sense, taken to mean ‘sprinkle’ and could suggest that the subject, Óðinn, was wetted with the Mead of Poetry. Yet, with contextual tales of the acquisition of the Mead stating that Óðinn was provided a drink, I have chosen to align *ausa* with *drykk* ‘drink’ and have read ‘poured’. This line is also missing a conjunction leaving the required ‘by, from, of’ ambiguous. Each would be acceptable but result in slightly different meanings. It is commonly recognised that Óðrerir represents the Mead of Poetry itself, but it is also used to represent the container thereof. Consequently, I have chosen ‘from’, which allows for either interpretation.

141

Lines 1 and 2 are far from straightforward to translate as inferred connotations are lost in translation and a singular meaning in Old Norse is almost impossible. For example, *frævask* has growth, fertility and development connotations that are difficult to render in a readable manner. Lines 4-7 are generally accepted to be understood in context of stanzas 146-163: there are eighteen runes/spells listed and initially, nine songs acquired. Consequently, ‘one found another’, and so on. This stanza closes the act of Óðinn’s hanging and perhaps leads into the beginning of a new role for the deity; less within the society or pantheon from which he originated, but a more universal one. In destroying his acquisitive self on the universal world tree and acquiring various tools as a result, the deity appears to re-appear a changed, more universal figure within the mythology bent on preventing or circumventing *ragnarök* (i.e. the end of the world, literally ‘doom of the powers, gods’) by any means.

142

In this example, whilst I have thus far left *rúnar* untranslated, it is reasonably clear that, in this case, the speaker means the carved letter forms with which we are more familiar. The *fimbulþulr* of line 5 is, again, undoubtedly Óðinn (see 80). *Hroptyr* is another by-name for Óðinn (there are approximately 200) that is widely attested to but, like almost all of Óðinn’s names, its etymology is obscure. *Odensheite* by Hjalmar Falk remains the best place to start for further information, despite its age.



143

One could simply translate *álfar*, *dvergar*, and *jötnar* as ‘elf’, ‘dwarf’ and ‘giant’ respectively but, in our modern period, these worlds have very Tolkien-orientated connotations; particularly with the names often having been borrowed from Norse literature in the first place. This stanza is also suggestive that, despite the general understanding, Óðinn was far from the only being that had acquired and interpreted the *rúnar* (see 80).

144

This stanza has also raised a great deal of discussion. For one, who is asking the questions and to whom? Generally, the lines ask if one knows how to use the *rúnar* but lines 6-8 ask repeatedly if one knows how to sacrifice/make sacrifice as *blóta*, *senda*, and *sóa* all equate to the same concept. Consequently, one is left to presume that sacrifice of some sort played some role in the understanding and/or use of the *rúnar*.

145

After 144 questioned someone’s ability to sacrifice, this stanza suggests that it is perhaps better not to ask than have to kill in sacrifice, presumably in return for the answer, as this relationship has no end. *Þundr* of line 6 is another common name for Óðinn but again, has an obscure etymology. Line 7 reads, more literally, ‘before the creation of the peoples’. *Völuspá* contains numerous acts of creation including those of both the dwarves and of humans. Fate/destiny was a required object for any living being to exist. Thus one may conclude that lines 8-9 suggest the acquisition and interpretation of the *rúnar* took place very early in Norse cosmology. One should not place too much weight on the concept of mythic time but, even in mythology, some things had to take place before others. These lines again suggest that “upon return”, the *rúnar* were given physical form for functional use.

146

*Ljóð* of line 1 is another term that is more of a concept than a word. Here it basically means ‘song, spell’ but the term encapsulates a spell, poem, song, and perhaps a chant. Consequently, simply translating ‘spell’ loses the form and delivery of this magical undertaking. The *ek* ‘I’ that appears here (and to the end) is representative of Óðinn.

147

The rest of the stanza is evidently lost.

148

*Hapts* ‘fettters’ of line 3 appears to be metaphorical as lines 4 and 5 suggest that the enemies themselves are ‘blunted’ and thus their weapons become useless in talentless hands.

151

This stanza appears to outline a defence against those carving malicious *rúnar* against you. Line 3 is a largely subjective: *rás* ‘sappy’ reads fine but many have noted that carving on soft, sap-filled wood is rather pointless. Yet if we take the root as the thing being carved upon, this line may suggest from which type of tree to take the root from, rather than taking from the sappy part itself. This is perhaps no easier but it all depends on the size of the tree/root. Furthermore, whilst all trees carry a ‘sap’ of one form or another, this stanza appears to suggest the resinous kind, commonly associated with pines and that there is some association between trees and *rúnar*.

152

*Galdr* ‘magic, song, charm, sorcery’ of line 6 is another difficult term to pin down in one word. I have favoured ‘song’ to convey the method of delivery and to be in keeping with the “nine mighty songs” from 140.

155

The *túnriða* ‘witch, ghoul’ does not simply refer to humans; it can include a host of supernatural beings. The word itself seems to mean ‘fence rider’, understood by reference to an Old Norse law where it states that witches were in the habit of straddling fences. As for *heimhama* and *heimhuga* of lines 6 and 7 respectively, these are highly debated terms. The primary manuscript has these compounds separated but, in keeping with the most recent addition, scholars generally read them as single terms. The *-huga* element of *heimhuga* provides a problem – akin to stanza 44 – in that it encapsulates the mind, spirit and essence of a being. To avoid the modern connotations of ‘soul’, I have again chosen ‘nature’. This phenomena refers to the Old Norse belief that a person could travel outside of their body and Óðinn was considered among those able to do so.

156

Despite Óðinn chanting under shields, this does not mean that he too joined the fray. Whilst it seems quite likely, Óðinn is not actually described to be in any danger here, but only his companions. It is also very uncommon in the Norse mythological corpus for Óðinn to take to the field (much like a king perhaps), despite his general perception as a war deity and the many Old Norse names reflecting his place in battle.

157

This stanza is among the integral factors for understanding the connection between the gallows, the hanged, and Óðinn. To avoid repeating the lengthy content of my PhD thesis, it is enough to say that this stanza reinforces the idea of a trade between those who perform the hanging and that which receives it. The question of that which is traded, and why, is

significant. Again, for a more in-depth analysis, see my *The Deathly Gallows: Óðinn and the Viking Age Hanging Ritual*. *Rúnar* is translated here as, again, it is clear a physical object is inferred.

158

This event looks like a baptism and it is true that the Norse literary sources have numerous examples of such a practice prior to Christian conversion. That it had already been adopted into Norse culture from their interactions with Christianity, but perhaps with different ideals, goes largely undisputed.

159

It is generally puzzled over that no spell or song is detailed here. However, it is possible that, in returning to the wider understanding of *rúnar* ‘secret, hidden speech’, this stanza entails an element of that hidden knowledge: the identities of all the supernatural beings and how to discern them. I have again retained the Old Norse *álfar* ‘elf’ to reduce Tolkien's impact on the material.

160

Here we see a possible example of co-existence between the supernatural beings of the Old Norse world only alluded towards in examples like *Völuspá* or even terms like *regin* ‘powers, gods’. *Dvergr* ‘dwarf’ and *álfar* ‘elf’ have been retained, as above. *Dellingr* of line 3 is also identified as a *dvergr*, listed as the father of the *dvergr* *Dagr*. *Hroptatýr* of line 6, akin to *Hroptr* in 142, is another common name for Óðinn, and this figure appears to have received something (unintended) wholly for himself; perhaps the ability to retain and replicate the dwarf’s performance and thus learn this fifteenth song.

162

The return of *Loddfáfnir* is somewhat out of place, particularly if we consider *Hávamál* to have been compiled thematically. If the name had appeared in stanza 163 or 164, it may have made more sense, suggesting that the poet(s) or compilers considered this fourth section to have also been delivered to *Loddfáfnir*.

163

As to what the eighteenth spell is, clearly Óðinn plans only to share it with ‘the woman in his arms’ as the figure – as far as we know – had no sister. It seems equally as likely that Óðinn’s wife *Frigg* is not inferred by the first sentiment and that the unknown ‘woman in his arms’ is the result of her having heard, and thus been beguiled by, the song. This does not mean that she will remember it.

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