

# Hávamál (English translation)

## Introduction

The present Hávamál version still lacks two kinds of commentaries. At first, I have not yet been able to include Mrs. Jackson's brilliant ideas relative to «definition lists». For two, although I indeed signaled Óðinn's abilities to introspection, I only begin to foresee his aptitude at handling his own unconscious. C. Jung calls this aptitude 'introversion', a behavior as risky as shooting a self-aimed arrow. Hávamál, together with other poetry and myths will provide information to our search for ancestral and contemporary mankind's unconscious, as described in the fourth section of this site: Modern and Old Norse Archetypes.

## The sections of Hávamál

My feeling is that the whole of Hávamál is one solid building (be it built by one or several poets) that links together a collection of relatively small units dealing with manifold aspects of life. This explains why I found twenty rooms available in the poem.

What I propose here is not really another translation. It is rather a commentary and a discussion of its possible meanings. This discussion is more properly an attempt at a **reconstruction** of the several meanings that this text could carry for a Heathen of the, say, tenth century. As in any other reconstruction, humility is in order here since we are simply doing our best to reconstruct as honestly as we are able to.

This approach often leads to see Hávamál under a new light the four main directions of which are as follows.

1. Many stanzas **allude to magic** and these allusions are mostly ignored by academic translators. It even happens that this bias leads to some incongruity as, for instance, in **stanza 8**.

2. Another bias, the one of **despising Heathen beliefs** leads as well to incongruities, as in **stanza 49**.

3. I have the feeling that experts tend to see Hávamál as built from ill-assorted pieces. I do here my best to show how each stanza, each line in the stanza, is perfectly in place, and all fit in the general structure of the poem's coherency. This relative **indifference the coherency** of the whole poem leads to choose meanings that fit the line but contradict the poem as a whole. A striking example is found in **stanza 84**. See also how **stanza 74** is dealt with in an offhand way because it contains a line which obviously is a maritime saying the meaning of which has been lost.

4. Totally apart from the academic approach, a political approach gave to Hávamál a bellicose and supremacist aura. This is not always totally wrong since Hávamál's options are quite harsh, very far from the compassion our society prides itself on so hypocritically. This opinion, however, forgets many stanzas filled with a **deep humanism**. See for instance **stanza 57** on the value of speech in human exchanges and, more importantly, pointing out that the arrogant self-conceited person cuts his links with humanity. See also **stanza 71** on the social value of handicapped persons and the many stanzas that commend a honest life without greed, as in **10, 68, 78** etc.

This poem has been divided in several parts by the commentators. As you see below in the list of translations put on line, I'll not use all their choices. The classical divisions are as

follows. Stanzas 1-78 are called the gnomic ones because they advise on the way of life. Stanza 79 begins what can be called Ódhinn's love complaint even though gnomic stanzas are still included. Stanza 111 starts Ódhinn's adventure with *Billings mæ*r (Billing's maid) and with *Gunnlöð*. After stanza 111, a new set of gnomic stanzas starts. They are addressed to a character named *Loddfáfnir*, this is why it is called *Loddfáfnismál*. The runic part of the poem then starts. It is divided in two: *Rúnatal* and *Ljóðatal* (Rune- and Song-talk)

You are very welcome to email me for discussing my presentation. Here is my email address, given as an anti-spam riddle. My name is Yves Kodratoff and my email name starts with the third three letters of YVEs, followed by the first three letters of KODratoff. I am on gmail international, hence my address is as YK – at – GMAIL- dot - COM.

Here, a few explanations about my motivations.

The structure I found the best to communicate the content of the poem is sevenfold as follows.

1. At first, I propose a translation which, though in plain English, tries to follow a word-for-word presentation. It tends to look like the classical academic translations, except for their care for literary worth (which is not my goal).

2. Follows a translation/explanation trying to make clear some of the ambiguities implicit in the translation.

3. We then can read the Old Norse text itself (including as few as possible versions, except when they deeply alter the meaning of the text) in front of a strictly word-for-word (often hardly understandable) translation. This part is for the readers who are interested in getting an inside view of the ON version.

4. Follows Bellows translation together with variations of several academic translators, when they significantly differ from Bellows'. Two brand new 2011 translations, both due to well acknowledged academics, have been used, namely Ursula Dronke's and Andy Orchard's. I also made use of Régis Boyer's (I'll always translate his French into English) who is particularly interesting due to the fact that, while he is an excellent specialist of Norse language and civilization, he is also a devoted Christian– for instance his PhD thesis deals with: “Religious Life in Iceland (1116-1264)” which describes the raise of Catholic faith and tries to prove that several stanzas in *Hávamál* are inspired by biblical texts. Most academics claim their indifference towards religious feelings, while they are obvious, though maybe mild ones, representatives of our Christianity-based civilization. Boyer does not hide his feelings as well as more neutral persons, and his translations - otherwise excellent for a Christian reader – helped me to spot the differences I am trying to make explicit here.

5. I then analyze the meaning of some of the words which are particularly significant for a complete understanding of the stanza. I made use, here, of Evans' glossary which provides a very good view of the academic choices for the meaning of the words, of Hugo Gering's *Glossar zu den Liedern der Edda*, together with the three basic dictionaries of the ON language, namely Cleasby-Vigfusson's Icelandic-English dictionary, de Vries' *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. and Sveinbjörn Egilsson's *Lexicon Poëticum antiquæ Linguae septentrionalis*. We find two important editions of this work, a slightly outdated one from 1860 written in Latin, and the other I did not use, dated 1931, which has been corrected by Finnur Jónsson. This last version is written in Danish.

6. Follows a discussion of the various meanings the stanza can take, depending on which of the possible word meanings we choose to use.

7. Finally, you will find a **summary** of Evans' commentaries on some of the stanzas. I'll give you only two full samples of these commentaries for stanzas 1 and 2. More details are available online as a pdf version, at

Stanzas 1-7 on relationships among guests  
Stanzas 8-9-10 on some uses of magic  
Stanzas 11-14 on drinking and good sense  
Stanzas 15-35 on wisdom.  
Stanzas 36-40 on earning material riches.  
Stanzas 41-46 on friends and friendship.  
Stanzas 47-52 on humankind.  
Stanzas 53-56 Wisdom is not happiness  
Stanzas 57-62 What are the deepest needs of a human being?  
Stanzas 63-65 "On the power of speech"  
Stanzas 66-67 "Two unsuitable relationships"  
Stanzas 68-72 "The tolerable, the good and the best"  
Introduction to stanzas 73-89

***From 73 to 110, the stanzas seem muddled when advice about love is not looked upon just as normal advice. I ordered them as follows:***

Stanzas 73-84 "Be weary, be ready: No hazard no benefit"

Stanza 85-89 "Be weary, be ready: No benefit hazards"

Stanza 90-95 "Initiation to love"

From 90 up to 110, ***Óðinn tells his love affairs with the maid of Billingr and with Gunnlöð.***

Stanza 96-102 "For Billingr's maid love"

Stanzas 103-110 "Gunnlöð's love"

Stanzas 111-137 "Loserdragon's speech"

Stanzas 138-145 "The language of the runes (Rúnatal)"

Stanzas 146-164 "Ljóðatal: The List of Songs"

Why did I start this n-th translation of Hávamál?

## **Hávamál 1-7 (High's speech 1-7)**

**"On relationships among guests"**

**\*\*\*Hávamál 1\*\*\***

**A translation as literal as possible**

The whole space behind an open door,  
before entering it,  
should be fully watched,  
should be fully pried,  
because it is uncertain to know  
where non-friends  
are already sitting in the house.

**Prose explanation** (*not necessary here*)

**ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation**

<i>Gáttir allar</i>	All door-ways
<i>áðr gangi fram</i>	before going into [this area]
<i>um skoðast skyli,</i>	all over looked about should,
<i>um skyggnast skyli,</i>	all over pried should,
<i>því at óvíst er at vita</i>	because uncertain is to know
<i>hvar óvinir</i>	where ‘non-friends’
<i>sitja á fleti fyrir.</i>	sit in the house already.

### Bellows’ translation

Within the gates | ere a man shall go,  
(Full warily let him watch,)  
Full long let him look about him;  
For little he knows | where a foe may lurk,  
And sit in the seats within.

### Dronke and Orchard 2011 translations

Here is an example of their translations. They will be further on cited when their translations are very different from Bellows’ or mine.

#### Dronke:

All doorways  
before entering  
should be spied out,  
should he scrutinized,  
for it is not known for certain  
where enemies sit in wait  
in the hall ahead.

#### Orchard:

Every gateway,  
before going ahead  
one should peer at,  
one should glimpse at;  
no one knows for sure  
what enemies are sitting  
ahead in the hall.

### Commentary about the vocabulary

*Gátta*, plural *gættir*, = for modern doors with hinges, it is the space swept by opening a door. The ancient Scandinavian doors did not work in this way. This is understood by the three systems of doors briefly described in *Rígsþula*. Ursula Dronke’s comments (volume 2, stanzas 2, 14, 26 comments) help us better imagine their functioning. To open the door of the house of future thralls, it is hand removed and put standing in a recess besides the opening. The present day ‘*gættir*’ or ‘side-niches’ have a decorative role. The door of the house of the future *carls* opens by means of a system of pulleys and rests on the lintel. In order to shut the door, it has to be pulled down (see also C. -V. comments on the past participle of *hníga*). The door of the house of the future jarls is opened and closed in the same way but carries also a ring either to block it or for a visitor to ask its opening. When the door is shut, the ring is in its side-niche.

Thus, a possible enemy can hide in the side-niche or even, in the first case, he can even hind behind the door standing in the niche.

*flet* = set of rooms and benches, this meaning extends to the whole dwelling, it does not mean a ‘hall’.

*fyrir* = ‘ahead’ and, as well, ‘already’ which makes more sense to me, here. The exact meaning of such prepositions is mostly given by its context. The same occurs in English since ‘ahead’ can express forwardness either in time or in space. This ambiguity is very

similar in ON. For instance, *vera fyrir* (= to be ahead) means in English: to foresee. When associated to the verb *spá* (to see, to foretell), *fyrir* becomes a reinforcer and *fyrir spá* may mean something like to prophesize.

The two verbs used in lines 3 and 4 are *skoða* (= to look, not 'to spy' as suggested by Dronke's inversion of lines 3 and 4 in her translation) and *skygna* (= to spy or to pry). They are both modified by the preposition *um* which suggests a complete and careful looking or prying: *um* usually means 'around, all around' but the context suggests here more than a simple 'going around' the unknown space, it should be completely explored.

The noun *vinr* ('friend') is used 25 times in the whole poem. The negative form used here: *ó-vinr*, 'non friend', 'unfriend' which cannot be translated by enemy or foe without considering the context in which it is used. In order to get a better understanding of what is exactly meant by *vinr* and *óvinr*, we shall need to reach stanza 26. We will then be able to explain why an *óvinr* is someone with whom we are not linked by a contract of assistance.

Besides obvious *úvinr*, there exist many words to designate an enemy. The choice of *óvinr* (which is kept throughout the poem) must thus be significant. Many other words could have been used: *andskoti* (or *annskoti*), *bági*, *ffándi* (you recognize here English fiend, it became the Devil in Christian vocabulary), *ffándmaðr*, *gagnmælendr*, *gagnstöðumaðr*, *heiptmögr*, *móttstöðumaðir*, *sökudólgr*.

You will find in <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/OnTheContracts.htm> a more precise explanation of what an *óvinr* might be as 'someone with whom you are not linked by a help contract'.

### **Comment on the meaning of this stanza**

This stanza can be interpreted as giving advice to show either mistrust to people who are not friends or careful respect to your '*óvinir*'.

Translating *óvinir* by foe or enemy tends to suggest mistrust. Note, however, that respecting your enemies is good way to deal efficiently with them. This translation does not suppress the possibility that Óðinn would recommend respect rather than mistrust. My view that it designates "someone whom you are not contracted to" suggests respect. The two verbs in lines 3 and 4 being modified by *um* suggest that the view, prying or spying must be thorough. To be thoroughly distrusting is akin to paranoia while being thoroughly respectful is more akin to wisdom.

This is why I tend to believe that this first stanza, instead of evoking a kind of generalized mistrust of the unknown, recommends 'thorough respect' for the unknown. Be these *óvinir* enemies or simple strangers, and even if you mistrust them, the correct behavior is to show respect to the rules of an unknown place and to do your best to recognize and acknowledge them.

Now, as soon as you are not stubbornly opposed to the existence of magic in our world, the above interpretation should suggest you what is explicitly recommended to all beginners in shamanism. Beginner or not, a shaman should always show the utmost respect to the 'beings' or 'things' he/she is going to meet in the other world – often called "non-ordinary reality." Less obvious but equally important is the advice that this world "all over looked about should, all over pried should" for the journeys to be useful, an advice seemingly very difficult to follow for the beginners.

### **A note on the many-sided meanings of the whole poem (and of s. 1)**

I hope everyone takes for granted that any poetry conveys several meanings and I do not see why Hávamál would not follow this classical pattern. I acknowledge that this first stanza does not seem to be a particularly powerful example of this last statement (see however my commentaries above) . The social and secular meaning is the most often taken for granted by the translators. This first stanza obviously describes a social behavior explaining to the reader that he/she must beware when entering an unknown place. No spiritual meaning is obviously suggested. We will find also several stanzas criticizing some personal habits: see for instance 21 says about gluttony, yet another secular interpretation. This understanding is general among modern translators who always choose to favor the most prosaic meaning and avoid as much as possible any allusion to a magic meaning, unless it becomes a totally impossible position to stand upon (for example, in stanzas 140-164 devoted to rune magic) . I will follow this trend for the stanzas that contain no hint at any other possible interpretation. Stanza 1 is a good example of the case where a secular meaning is the most obvious. Note however that a magic orientated mind can always see, in the house or the ‘hall’ where un-friends may be waiting, a world of magic in which unknown dangers are creeping around, or some knowledge is hidden, as I suggested above. It would then carry the meaning of: “Before entering the world of magic, beware of possible hidden dangers, and give it a thorough examination for hidden knowledge.” In contrast, to stanza 1, many others show some crack in their secular interpretation, either in their mundane meaning or in the coherency of the lines, and I’ll take this as a hint for a possible magical interpretation. After all, our main gods of magic are Freyja and Óðinn, and the last one is supposed to have inspired the Hávamál. Moreover, the pre-Middle-Age world is still full of Heathen magic: it is not at all surprising that our ancestors might have been able to easily catch any allusion to magic.

### *On Evans Commentaries*

[These commentaries are found in a book by David A. H. Evans, Viking Society for Northern Research, 1986. I’ll use here my scan of the printed version. I’ll not provide the commentaries to their full extent, except for s. 1 and 2. The full details are available online as a pdf version, at <http://www.vsnrweb-publications.org.uk/Text%20Series/Havamal.pdf> (I checked this link wherefrom I downloaded Evan’s work, and found a totally garbaged pdf. It is now sold by amazon. )

Most of these commentaries are highly specialized and seldom bring light on the spiritual meaning of the poem.

For example, Evans insists on the fact that Snorri Sturluson, at the beginning of the Prose Edda, cites this stanza with no reference to the poem containing it.

The meaning of lines 1-4 is quite clear but Evans gives the details of the many academic grammatical fights it led to.

My summary will skip most of these academic accuracies.]

\*\*\*[In the following, I will write in size10 bold font my own comments, as done above.]\*\*\*

### [An example of] Evans’ commentaries

1

This strophe is quoted near the beginning of Snorri’s Prose Edda, without attribution; see above, p. 2. Only the Utrecht ms has line 3; Worm’s ms lacks *at vita* in 5, and the Uppsala ms has the awkward *Skatnar allir áðr né gangim fram* as 1-2 and the pl. *fletjum* for *fleti* in 7. The text in Snorri is evidently somewhat corrupt, though *fletjum* is perfectly possible (as in st. 35) .

1-4 Although the general sense is clear, the construction is disputed. Some editors take *gáttir* as acc. object of *skoðask um* and *skyggnask um*, but this is hardly right, since these verbs are equivalent to *skoða (skyggna) um sik* and cannot have an object; they are of the same type as *sjásk um*, *líta sk um*, *leitask fyrir* etc. , see Nygaard 2, § 154. (*Skyggnask um* occurs in prose, always intransitively; cp. Fritzner 2 s. v. *skygna*. ) Others understand *gáttir* as nominative; this entails taking the infinitives as passives (with *um* as the particle) . So Finnur Jónsson. It has been denied (e. g. Olson 540, Lindquist 2, 1) that reflexive with passive sense occurs in the Poetic Edda, and indeed it is true that in Norse as a whole this usage is common only in the Latin-influenced ‘learned style’ and is otherwise largely confined to a few verbs such as *spyrjask*, *fásk*, *byggjask* (Nygaard 2, § 161) ; yet there are a few Eddaic instances which come very close to passives (*öllum muntu lemjask* Helg. Hj. 21, *á gengusk eiðar* Vsp. 26) and early scaldic stanza also supplies examples (*eyðisk land ok lád and tröddusk trögur*, both in Eyvindr’s Hákonarmál, cp. Finnur Jónsson 5, 275) . This is certainly therefore a defensible interpretation, but it is perhaps safer to take the infinitives as intransitive, with *gáttir* as acc. object of *gangi*; for this construction cp. *Þorkell ok þeir bádir förunautar gengu út skyndilega aðrar dyrr en þeir höfðu inn gengit* Hkr. ii 166 and other instances in Nygaard 2, 96.

7 *sitja fyrir* probably ‘are present’ (as in 133) rather than specifically ‘lie in ambush’ (as von Friesen) , though *sitja fyrir* can have this sense with a dative object. CPB 461 insists that *gangi fram* must mean ‘go to the door’ (from inside) , as indeed it commonly does; but this involves the impossible ‘lurk round one’s house’ for the last line, and Snorri’s use of the strophe shows that he took it to refer to entry from without.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 2\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Welcome to those who come with gifts !  
 A guest came in,  
 where will he sit down ?  
 He has to hurry  
 who is near the firebrands,  
 to put himself to test.

#### Prose explanation

*First three lines:*

We welcome our guest who are able to offer something in return. Where will they sit ?

*Last three lines:* [As we shall see in the commentaries, three explanations are equally plausible]

[*Explanation 1. 1:* Case where being near the brands is not enjoyable and the guest is directed to sit here] If they have been seated at the worse place, they must hurry to show that they do not deserve such a shame.

[*Explanation 1. 2:* Case where being near the brands is not enjoyable and the guest chooses it himself.] If they chose to been seated at the worse place, they accept a ‘low start’ but they must hurry to show that this seat does not reflect their real worth.

[*Explanation 2:* Case where being near the brands is a place of honor] They can be directed at this place or chose it themselves, in both cases, they must hurry to show that they deserve it.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

<i>Gefendr heilir!</i>	To the givers, good health!
<i>Gestr er inn kominn,</i>	A guest is in come [a guest has come in],
<i>hvar skal sitja sjá?</i>	Where will he sit 'self' ? [ <i>here, sjá = sá</i> ]
<i>Mjök er bráðr</i>	Much is hasty
<i>sá er á bröndum skal</i>	who is near the brands [near the hearth] will
<i>síns of freista frama.</i>	himself be tried 'forward' [= tried out].

### Bellows' translation

2. Hail to the giver! | A guest has come;  
Where shall the stranger sit?  
Swift shall he be who, | with swords shall try  
The proof of his might to make.

*Bellow's comment:* Probably the first and second lines had originally nothing to do with the third and fourth, the last two not referring to host or guest, but to the general danger of backing one's views with the sword.]

### Other translations of the last three lines

*Dronke:* He's full of fervour / out by the fire-stack - / a man who must vie for advancement!

*Orchard:* Very jumpy's the one who by the blaze / must make a test of his luck.

*Boyer:* Quite hurried / who near the fire / wishes to check his fame.

### Commentary about the vocabulary

**Heilir** is a greeting now used, in modern Iceland, in order to welcome someone of some importance. This might not have been the case in ancient Iceland.

**Brandr** means both 'brand, hearth' and 'sword blade'. Its dative plural is **bröndum**. Bellows' translation is therefore not absurd at all. It unfortunately slices up the stanza into two unconnected parts, as if it was of no concern to see Hávamál as a ragbag of lines. A weak connection, however, could be to spread to the last three lines the idea of fighting up. Ursula Dronke uses, perhaps a bit too hastily, the Norwegian expressions cited by Evans to translate *á bröndum* by "out by the fire-stack," which implies that the guest is not yet inside the house. This rendition destroys the coherency of the stanza in a way different from Bellows'.

**Freista**, when joined to **sín**, means both 'to check oneself' et 'to try one's courage' as translated by Boyer. This translation carries the meaning that whoever tries his fame near the fire should make haste to do it. This matches the literal understanding but puts a humdrum in Óðinn's mouth.

### Comment on the meaning of this stanza



We have to imagine what is being « nearby the brands » in a hall with a fire at its center. It has to be a deliberate choice of the guest or his host.

Evans comments show that being placed nearby the hearth is not always an asset since it does not always allude to a cozy warmth. It could even be that being placed nearby the brands is either a challenge or even a show of scorn from the host to his guest.

I will thus suggest that four different meanings can match a literal understanding: “Who comes with gifts is always welcome. He should however quickly prove that he is bright among the other guests of the house *whether* is his given *or* chooses for himself, whether the best or the worse place.” This four branched expression tells that as much welcomed a person might be, he very soon have to prove his worth.

This translation gives back to the stanza a global coherency: It suggests that a conspicuous guest will always have to prove his/her worth. Who does not wish to be tried has to stay inconspicuous.

The stanza states a fact, it expresses neither benevolence nor compassion.

### Evans' commentaries

(line) 1 is spoken by the visitor as he enters.

(line) 6 *síns um freista frama* means ‘to try one’s luck’, but lines 4-5 are difficult:

The problem, essentially, is that the context is not sufficiently precise to determine which of the many meanings of *brandr* is required. These are: (1) sword; (2) blazing log (in the pl. this is virtually ‘the fire’); (3) raised prow, ship’s beak; (4) in pl., ships’ beaks used over, or on each side of, the door of a farm ... (5) piece of (as yet unkindled) firewood. [Follows a very technical discussion strongly suggesting that this place is not really honorable. This explains why I suggest two different understandings of the stanza.] ... the stranger modestly takes up his place on the pile of firewood and waits impatiently to see what reception he will get. This is not paralleled from the ON world, but can be supported from modern Norwegian rural custom: ... If a host wishes to honour a guest especially, he will say, ‘*Nei, du skal ikkje sitja i brondo; set deg innar*’, [Do not seat near the brands, seat down in the room] ...

[Evans provides no example of a similar occurrence in the sagas, which confirms my belief that there are none. Another point to note is: Do not believe that this stanza reminisces of the burning steam-bath that two berserker are unable to stand, as told in Erbyggja Saga chapter 28.]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 3\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

There is need of a fire  
for whom came in the house  
and has frozen knees.  
Meats and clothes  
are a man’s need  
who traveled from the other side of the mountain.

#### Prose explanation (not needed)

#### ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation

*Elds er þörf  
þeims inn er kominn  
ok á kné kalinn.*

Of the fire is need  
To him who in is come  
and at knees is frozen.

*Matar ok váða  
er manni þörf,  
þeim er hefr um fjall farit.  
traveled.*

meats and clothes  
is to a man need,  
to him who is lifted beyond the mountain

### **Bellows' translation**

Fire he needs | who with frozen knees  
Has come from the cold without;  
Food and clothes | must the farer have,  
The man from the mountains come.

### **Comment on the meaning of this stanza**

In stanza 2, the traveler is “near the brands,” and this might not be as good place as we now believe. Now, stanza 3 tells us of a case where this place is needful since the traveler is half frozen after his crossing of the mountain passes. This is a compelling hospitality rule that demands to take good care of the traveler’s needs: warmth, food and clothing included.

However, this does not oppose stanza 2: *mjök er bráðr* (“much is hasty”) that he proves that he deserves such a welcome!

### **\*\*\*Hávamál 4\*\*\***

#### **A translation as literal as possible**

Of water is need  
to whom for a meal comes,  
(for) a towel and a great reception,  
(for) good manners,  
if he would meet  
the requirement  
(for) speech and silence (*or* reckoning) in return.

#### **Prose explanation**

An invited guest must be properly welcomed with “water and towel,” that is, with food and cutlery. Good manners are in order if the guest is able to ‘adjust to’ speech as well as to silence (*or* reckoning) .

#### **ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation**

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

Of water is need  
to whom for a meal comes,  
a towel and a great reception,  
good manners  
if himself (to) get meets,  
(as for) word [= speech] and again-silence (*or* again-receipt)

### **Bellows' translation**

4. Water and towels | and welcoming speech  
Should he find who comes, to the feast;  
If renown he would get, | and again be greeted,  
Wisely and well must he act.

### Other translations of the last three lines

*Dronke*: ... welcome, / good nature with it / - if he might get himself that! - / - talk and attentive silence.

*Orchard*: a kind disposition, if it's to be had, / speech and silence in return.

*Boyer*: Friendliness, / if it is available to him, / And to be silent when he speaks.

### Commentaries about the vocabulary

*Mætti* is a subjunctive form of verb *mæta* meaning 'to meet', here *ef mæta* can be rendered by 'if he would meet'. *Ser* is the dative of a reflexive pronoun. When something or someone is met, it receives the dative case. Here, *mæti* thus means that he self-meets.

*Endrþögu* is a proper genitive for *endr-þaga* = again-silence which is usually translated as 'silence in return' (as Orchard does. Dronke: "attentive silence"). The genitive of *endr-þaga* = again-receipt is translated 'retribution' by C-V, where it is given as exemplified in 'Hm 4', that is in *Hávamál*, stanza 4. This interpretation is thus far from being impossible: the canonical genitive of *endrþaga* is not so far, it is *endrþægu*.

### Commentary of the meaning

When a guest is welcomed, instead of someone distressed as in stanza 3, he/she must receive extreme attention, without any need for immediate justification. The deep comprehension of this stanza depends however on the importance given to the guest's 'return', i. e. the importance attached to the prefix *endr-* in *endrþögu*. We will note that only Orchard insists on *end-* 'in return' - while others translators overlook it. Bellows allots it to line 5 ("again be greeted"), Dronke renders it by "attentive" and Boyer forgets it.

By keeping the strength of this 'in return', the exact meaning of the stanza is modified and it better agrees with the preceding stanzas that never advise for unconditional hospitality.

We have to acknowledge that stanza 4 is the illustration of a more demanding hospitality than in the preceding stanzas. The guest is warmly accommodated and his host must address him politely, in respecting his needs for listening and silence. But, on his side, the guest owes a 'return' to his host, that is, the reciprocal words and silence that are the conditions of a harmonious dialogue. The stanza does not specify that, if this condition is not met, the accommodating behavior of the host can change brutally, but this *endr-*, otherwise useless, strongly suggests it.

### Evans' commentaries

4

3 *þjóðlaðar* 'friendly invitation'; for this sense of *þjóð-* cp. *þjóðrengr*, *þjóðmenni* etc. , *þýðr* 'kind, affectionate', Gothic *þiup*: . *τό αγαθόν*. [The Greek words mean that something or someone is 'well, good, pure' depending on the context.]

4 *góðs oeðis* most simply taken ... as ‘good disposition, friendliness’ on the part of the host ...

6 *endrpögu* - only the interpretation ‘silence in return’ makes reasonable sense; *þaga* is admittedly not otherwise recorded, but is formed regularly on *þegja* ‘be silent’ like *saga: segja*. The sense is that the guest needs conversation (*orðs*) from his host, and then silence in turn from the host while he himself speaks. [The rest of this commentary discusses and finally rejects a link with *þega*, ‘acceptance’.]

## Intermezzo

### On the vocabulary of intelligence in Hávamál

#### 1. family of *vit*

*veit* = *he is conscious etc.*

*vita* = to wit, to be conscious, to know, to see, to try, to mean.

*vita á* = to forebode.

*vit* = consciousness, intelligence, knowledge, wit, understanding It means also: ‘a place where something is put, a box’, which induces the meaning ‘a box containing breath and life’, that is the mouth and the nostrils.

*vitandi* = ‘being conscious, knowing etc’, someone who is conscious of ...

*vitand* or *vitend* = intelligence, consciousness, someone who is conscious of. . .

*viti* = a leader

*vitr* = wise

*vitka* = to bewitch.

*vitkask* = (reflexive) to come back to one’s senses

*vitki* = a ‘wise-man’, a sorcerer (may be the root of English ‘witch’)

*vitni* = a witness

*vitni-fastr* = witness-fast = what can be proved

**Note:** this poem makes no direct use of the words of the family of *vit* to speak of wisdom since words as *vitrléik*, *vitra*, *vizka*, are not met. The only occurrence of ‘wisdom’ is in stanza 6, with *hyggjandi*: wisdom, caution.

#### 2. family of *snotr*

*snotr* = wise

*snotra* = to make wise

#### 3. family of *fróðr*

*fróðastr* = wizard

*fróðligr* = clever

*fróðr* = knowing, learned,

*sögufróðr* = skilled in old lore

#### 4. family of *geð*

*geð* = mind, mood, temper

*geðillr* = ill-tempered and *geðfastr*: firm minded

#### 5. *sviðr* and *horskr*

*ósviðr* = *ósvinnr* = non-fast, non-wise

*horskr* = wise

### \*\*\*Hávamál 5\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

There is need of intelligence/spirit  
from this one who far travels;  
it is anyway sweet to be at home;  
(the wise ones) shall (mockingly) wink  
at the unlearned one  
who sits among the wise ones.

#### ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation

<i>Vits er þörf</i>	Of wit/intelligence is need
<i>þeim er víða ratar;</i>	to him who far travels;
<i>dælt er heima hvat;</i>	gentle is home howsoever; [ <i>hvat er</i> = howsoever]
<i>at augabragði verður</i>	at eye-twinkling will [people's eyes will twinkle at]
<i>sá er ekki kann</i>	who does not know, [the not knowledgeable one]
<i>ok með snotrum sitr.</i>	and with the wise sits.

#### Bellows' translation

Wits must he have | who wanders wide,  
But all is easy at home;  
At the witless man | the wise shall wink  
When among such men he sits.

*Boyer* translates *ekki kann* by “who is good to nothing” which pushes too far the meaning of ‘non knowledgeable’. *Dronke*: “who knows nothing,” *Orchard*: “who knows not a thing.”

#### Commentaries about the vocabulary

The topic of interest in this stanza is the traveler's intelligence, consciousness, spirit. This topic is at least alluded to within the whole poem. To have or not to have *vít* and to be or not to be *snotr* or *vitr* (wise) is of supreme importance within *Hávamál*. We meet just now two words, *vít* et *vitr*, used 21 times in the poem.

Substantive *vít* means ‘consciousness, sense, intelligence, knowledge, understanding’. It thus includes all aspects of intelligence. This may explain why it is so often translated by ‘wisdom’ which is actually expressed by using the adjectives *snotr* et *vitr*. In stanza 6, we shall meet the compound *mannsvit*, human understanding (good sense), which can be opposed to *bókvit*, the book-based understanding.

In the first (1 à 95) stanzas of *Hávamál*, the word *snotr* is met 17 times (and twice in stanzas 96-164). It can be as such, *snotr* = wise, or as a negative *ósnotr* = non-wise (I will always use this way of speech), or its semi negative form *méðalsnotr* = ‘middle-wise’.

## Commentary about the meaning

During a travel, we will meet wise ones and this is why a non-wise one should stay home.

In line 4, the wise ones' eyes obviously twinkle with mirth when they look at the ignorant one seated among them. Note that the third line underlines that the ignorant one could stay perfectly happy by staying home instead of confronting the wise ones. I insist on this detail because we shall see that Hávamál almost never disapprove sharply of who is non-wise. It is at most slightly despising to them. Inversely, the really critical and criticized defects are isolation and lack of communication, be them accidental (as in 47-50) or intentional, as in 5 and in 57 where it is stated that who refuses communication with other humans lacks one essential feature of humanity.

It is possible to read here an allusion to an out-of-the-body travel, what is called "shamanic journey" by modern shamanism. In this case, this stanza delivers a quite sharp teaching. During a shamanic journey, you will need in full your awareness and cleverness. Do not expect to see very kind spirits: at best you will meet their sharp wit and you will have to take into account their implicit criticism when reviewing this journey's teaching.

## **\*\*Hávamál 6\*\***

### Forewords

Here is the first stanza the content of which is disputed. The last three lines do not appear in all editions, in particular in Rask's (1818). They were introduced in Bugge's edition (1863). Besides, several versions do not give *því at* that starts these three last lines. It might well be that *því at* is an addition done in order to smoothen the transition between these lines and the six first ones.

Quite often, old manuscripts show a side commentary, called a gloss, provided by a knowledgeable copyist who explains a meaning hidden in the text. This gloss will obviously look strange to anyone who refuses to see any hidden meanings, as most 'serious' translators do. I do think that these last three lines are a gloss.

### A translation as literal as possible

Of his caution (*or* While thinking to his (mates) )  
a human should not boast,  
he/she should rather stay heedful in spirit;  
When a wise and silent person  
goes 'home-yards' (homewards) ,  
the cautious one seldom gets a penalty.

(Because) to the 'non brittle' friend,  
a human always brings  
when he/she (has) much good-sense.

### Prose explanation

[With the usual renderings of 'caution, wisdom' for *hyggjandi* and of 'to fetch' for *fá* or 'to bring' for *færa*]

No one should boast of his caution (or intelligence, or wisdom) . Better to keep an open mind when a “wise and silent” person comes visiting, since their kind usually avoids harm.

This is because a human full of good sense always brings much to a faithful friend.

for fá] [With the probable renderings of ‘while thinking’ for *hyggjandi* and of ‘to obtain’

No one should boast of his friends and allies. Better to follow the example provided by a “wise and silent” person who joins the group of friends.

This is because someone full of good sense is always able to find a faithful friend.

[We can also merge the above two understandings into one: ]

No one should boast of his caution and of his friends. You have to listen to a wise friend because he is able to avoid harm. A wise person brings much to his faithful friend but is also able to recognize his faithful friends.

### ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation

*At hyggjandi sinni  
skyli-t maðr hræsinn vera,  
heldur gætinn at geði;  
þá er horskur ok þögull  
kemr heimisgarða til,  
sjaldan verður víti vörum.*

At wisdom his/her [OR! While thinking to the mates]  
should-not a human boasting be,  
rather heedful in spirit;  
when the wise and silent  
comes ‘home-yards’ until  
seldom becomes a punishment to the cautious,

[three troublesome lines: ]  
[(því at) óbrigðra vin  
fær maðr aldregi  
en mannvit mikit.]

[(because) to a non-brittle friend  
brings a man always [OR never) ]  
when (he/she has) human-good sense much.

### Bellows’ translation

A man shall not boast | of his keenness of mind,  
But keep it close in his breast;  
To the silent and wise | does ill come seldom  
When he goes as guest to a house;  
(For a faster friend | one never finds  
Than wisdom tried and true. )

[**Bellows note:** Lines 5 and 6 appear to have been added to the stanza.]

*Dronke* and *Orchard* do not question the last three lines and translate them as meaning that a man’s best friend is his own good sense, as Bellows does.

*Dronke*: for a more unfailing friend / no man will ever acquire/ than abundant ingenuity.

*Orchard*: no man ever had a friend more faithful / than a good store of common sense.

### Commentary about the vocabulary:

**Line 1.** The noun *hyggjandi* means ‘caution, wisdom’ but it can also be a present participle of verb *hyggja*, ‘to think, believe’. The noun *sinni* means ‘fellowship’ and can be here in the dative or accusative case; but it can also be a dative of the possessive pronoun *sinn*, ‘his’. My best guess is that the first line contains a pun on the words. It suggests that a wise person does not lack friends.

**Line 5.** The word *heimisgarðr* designates the *garðr* (yard) of the *heimr* (home) . It means that a wise one comes near the house of his friend.

**Line 7.** The adjective *brigðr* is translated by ‘faithless, fickle’ by C-V. It is not found in de Vries’ etymological dictionary, which leads to think that we should be more careful of its etymology, given by the noun it stems from: *brigð*, meaning ‘right to retrieve’ (a law term) or (C-V) : ‘breaking, breach’, (de Vries) ‘modification, fickleness’. The proper sense is thus more like a capacity to breach when it is lawful than to breach with no rhyme nor reason. This is why I translate the adjective *brigðr* by ‘brittle’ which is less derogative than fickle. When we reach s. 81 you will see that the meaning ‘fickle’ becomes even a sneer at women who are supposed to be essentially fickle. This fits perfectly our social conventions of the past but it opposes all we know of the typical Norsewoman (see, for example, Anderson and Swenson’s *Cold Counsel*, 2002) .

#### **Line 7 and 8.**

Two similar verbs can do *fær* at their present third person: they are *fá* (= ‘to catch, to procure’) or *færa* (= ‘to bring’) .

If we put the Old Norse words in our ordinary English ordering, we would get: “*maðr fær óbrigðra vin*” (a human person gives\_to/gets\_from non-brittle friend) . Here the verb *fá* subject is *maðr*, a nominative Old Norse. Its indirect object complement (called a dative in Old Norse) *vin* (*vinr* = ‘friend’ is irregular and gives *vin* in the accusative and dative cases) . The form *óbrigðra* of adjective *ó-brigðr* (non brittle) is also a dative. This carries the meaning that a “human person” is in relation with a “non brittle friend.” It does not say that this “human person” has a relationship with his own good sense as suggested by the other translators. I provide all these details in order to explain that my interpretation is not as absurd as one could claim. Obviously, the way of speech of the text is ambiguous enough to also carry the classical interpretations.

### **Commentary about the meaning**

The kind of ambiguity we just noted happens quite often in skaldic poetry, though it is very hard to render it for the translators, it is thus not often known by their readers. Our translation explains the need for a commentary, as given by the last three lines: this stanza does not tell us that good sense will teach us (three last lines) that one should not boast of our good sense (first two lines) – this is redundant – but it tells us that a wise friend (last three lines) will teach us to avoid blundering (first two lines) . The double meaning of the first stanza provides two examples of a possible blunder: boasting of one’s own wisdom or of one’s social relationships.

### **Evans’ commentaries**

#### **6.**

1-2 *hræsinn at hyggjandi sinni* is commonly rendered ‘boastful of his intellect’, but the preposition *at* seems strange; one would expect *af*, which is what we find in the virtually identical lines in Hugsvinismál ... *Af hyggjandi sinni skyldit maðr hræsinn vera* ... Finnur Jónsson renders *at* ‘with regard to’ ... *hyggjandi* normally means ‘intellect, wisdom’ ... [it is also rendered by] *anima* ‘soul’. So we might translate ‘a man should not be showy in his



mind'. The weakness of this view is the poor support for such a rendering of *hyggjandi*; it is probably better to emend to *af*.

6 The usual sense of *víti* ... is 'punishment, penalty, fine'. But the sense 'harm, misfortune' seems to be present in *Reginismál* 1 (*kannat sér við víti varask*) ... Most editors, however, prefer to follow Falk 8, 231, who suggests that *víti* 'penalty' passed into denoting the offence itself ... This is certainly better evidenced than the sense 'harm' and is still alive in modern Icelandic. Thus 'the wary man seldom commits a culpable blunder'. The line is now proverbial; ...

7-9 are bracketed by many editors; their sense is inappropriate, for they do not really supply a reason for what precedes. [You noticed that I disagree with this statement.]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 7\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

The cautious guest  
who comes for a meal  
holds his breath in silence  
listens with his ears  
but sees with his eyes  
thus the learned one pries ahead.

#### Prose explanation

In short: A cautious guest comes for a meal and silently holds his breath, listens and sees with (or beyond) his eyes, thus a learned person finds and guesses.

Who is invited to a meal or a feast and is able to stay attentive to his surroundings does not try to speak too much. He listens with sharpness, keenness, and his hearing catches everything said around him. His seeing shows him what is and what will be; thus who knows sciences and magic figures out each one's hidden secrets.

#### ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation

<i>Inn vari gestr</i>	Him, cautious guest
<i>er til verðar kemr</i>	who until (=for) a meal comes
<i>þunnu hljóði þegir,</i>	in a thin breath is silent
<i>eyrum hlýðir,</i>	with ears hearkens
<i>en augum skoðar;</i>	but with eyes sees
<i>svá nýsisk fróðra hverr fyrir.</i>	thus pries the learned one ahead.

#### Bellows' translation

7. The knowing guest | who goes to the feast,  
In silent attention sits;  
With his ears he hears, | with his eyes he watches,  
Thus wary are wise men all.

*Dronke's* last three lines: "... listens with his ears, / looks with his eyes / so every wise man for himself spies ahead."

*Orchard's*: "..., but strains his ears: / all smart men find things out for themselves."

As you see, Orchard refuses to provide a translation of what seems to be trifling. Dronke and Bellows provide it and it does look trivial.

### Commentary about the vocabulary

The usual meaning of verb *skoða* is 'to see' but the associated substantive, *skoðan*, means 'a vision' as the one of seer. That may explain why the poet insists on "seeing with the eyes" in order to hint at a non-mundane meaning of *skoða*.

The verb *hlýða* means 'to listen' and it can be used with a religious meaning. For example, in a Christian context, *hlýða messu* = listen to (attend) mass.

The adverb *fyrir* means 'before, forward'. When associated to various verbs, it adds to them the meaning of forecasting. For example, *sjá fyrir* = to see forward = to foretell, prophesize. This is why I translate *nýsisk fyrir* = 'to pry ahead' by 'to figure out secrets'.

The adjective *fróðr* means 'knowing, learned' and applies to a variety of knowledge. It thus carries also the meaning of 'well informed' or 'knowing the laws of Nature and Society'. In the context of the Germanic civilization, it carries also the meaning of 'knowing the old myths and magic'. For example, in order to say that the Lapps are the greatest wizards, they are called '*fróðastir*'. In order to speak of someone knowing the sagas, it is said that he is *sögu-fróðr*.

All these words are translated by the academic translators in their secular sense. In the case of *fróðr* this convention is at least anachronous.

### Comment on the meaning of this stanza

The first line says that the guest is cautious, that is he is well aware of his surroundings. The last line says he is learned. We have to understand that he is both.

When a translation says that we have to listen with our ears and see with our eyes, this obviously sounds like trivia. We do not understand why such obvious things have so preciously been kept over the centuries. It seems to me necessary to accept that they are not so obvious. If we take the academic convention upside down, we can imagine that the scald would assume that 'everyone', in the context of Óðinn speaking, would attribute a magical meaning to his words. It was then necessary to insist on the possible secular meaning of the verbs to see and to listen. A learned person is not only a wizard (as everyone knew at this time) ; he is also a caution and clever person in everyday life.

This stanza gives us an idea of the features of a wizard, in the way used by the scald to impart his knowledge.

At first, a wizard has knowledge of magic and he is thus aware of the far and fuzzy consequences of our behavior. He is also aware of all kinds of prosaic and rational knowledge, including Science and History.

Secondly, he is silent. Obviously, as a wizard, he is able to quiet down his own thinking in order to feel the mood of his surroundings. Moreover, he can listen to and understanding ordinary speech.

He is obviously able to hear beyond the sounds around him in order to analyze the subtle interactions among these sounds. Moreover, he is able to hear all kind of ordinary noise and to understand them.

He obviously is able to see beyond the external aspect of things, but he is also able to take into account this external aspect.

He observes and probes, he pries the secret nature of each other person, but he is also able to discover everyone's small secrets.

As a conclusion, the deep meaning if this stanza is reached when we take as primary what seems unbelievable to us, and we take as a minor what looks obvious to us, that is the rational aspects of life.

### Evans' commentaries

7

3 *hljöd* is probably used here in its primary sense 'hearing' (cognate with κλῦω 'I hear') preserved in such expressions as *biðja* (or *kveðja*) *hljóds* 'to ask for a hearing', *hann kom á hljód at* ... 'he heard, learnt that. . .', *í heyranda hljóði* 'in the hearing of all'. ...

### Hávamál 8-10

#### "On some uses of magic"

#### \*\*\*Hávamál 8\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

This one is happy  
who obtains  
praise and a staff carved with healing runes;  
It is non-forbearing what  
A human person will own  
inside the breasts of another one.

#### Prose explanation

Happy and blessed is the one who obtains praise and (knowledge of) healing runes (since he is not blamed for being a wizard) ; it is 'not dealt with' (unknown and even dangerous) what a human can own in someone else's breast (= unknown is what can happen when a human tries to own something housed in the heart of someone else) .

#### ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation

<i>Hinn er sæll</i>	He [ <i>hinn</i> = 'this he-one', 'She' would be <i>hin</i> ] is happy (and 'blessed')
<i>er sér of getr</i>	who for him/her [ <i>sér</i> bears no gender] gets
<i>lof ok líknstafi;</i>	praise [ <i>and</i> allowance] and <i>líkn</i> [=healing]- <i>stafi</i> [(carved) staff, letters;
[Why so many translations do not see carved runes here? See Dronke's comments below.]	
<i>ódælla er við þat,</i>	non- forbearing is what [ <i>ó-dælla</i> = un-forbearing, and <i>ódælla við</i> = 'not dealt with' ]

*er maðr eiga skal  
annars brjóstum í.*

who human possess will [who will own]  
of the other one the breasts in [in another's breasts]

### Bellows' translation

Happy the one | who wins for himself  
Favor and praises fair;  
Less safe by far | is the wisdom found  
That is hid in another's heart.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

I checked that the first editor of the poetic Edda, Rask (1818) and Gering's critical edition (1904) read '*hinn*'. This is an exception to the generally genderless ways of speech in our poem.

*Sæll* is still today a welcoming word, it means 'happy, blessed'.

The noun *lof* evokes English 'love'. It nevertheless means both 'praise' and 'allowance'.

*Líknstafi* combines two words, it reads *líkn-stafi* where *líkn* = 'healing, relief, forgiveness'. *Stafr* has two main meanings. One is 'a staff or a board', the other is 'written letters, carved magical letters, carved runes'. Bellows translates it by 'fair' (?) Boyer by 'good repute', Evans by 'esteem', Orchard by 'warm regard' and Dronke explains it is meaningless (see below). I suppose they could not make sense of 'healing staff' without introducing some magical meaning they thought to be out of context. 'Healing staff' is obviously possible but *líkn-stafi* can also mean 'healing runes' and, in this case, *lof* must mean both allowance and praise since the wizard uses his magical knowledge for the best. He is therefore acknowledged and even praised for his use of the runes.

Adjective *dæll* means 'gentle, familiar, forbearing'. Its negation, *ó-dæll* thus means 'wicked, stranger, unforbearing'. When coupled with *við*, ('unforbearing with'), it takes the meaning of 'unknown, unpredictable'.

The verb *eiga* has also several meanings 'to own, to have, to be bound to a duty, to be entitled of'. It does not mean 'to find' as Bellows and Boyer translate it.

### Commentary

As noticed by Evans "the two halves do not fit well together," in the usual translations. This is a very typical case where ignoring the magical context of old Germanic civilization leads to absurd consequences.

A 'human of knowledge' is fortunate when he gets knowledge of the healing runes, and he will be praised for it, while the use of other kinds of magic usually attracts hate. Nevertheless, this person wields some kind of magical power, he/she is a 'witch'. The knowledge and power he/she owns over the other's heart (or soul, or spirit) is unknown and certainly unpredictable.

The usual translations do not see any message about magic in this stanza (see however Evans below).

In the first half, I feel important to keep together both meanings of *lof*, 'allowance and praise' since they complete each other. The healer is allowed to use his magic and he is even praised for it.

In the second half, they understand *eiga* as 'to possess into oneself' (hence Bellows' 'to hide'). Its actual meaning is manifold, it can be 'to possess, to have (when speaking of a

spouse or a parent, of enemies or friends) , to be bound, to own, to be entitled to, to keep, to deal with'. All these meanings imply some kind of special link, of variable intensity. I may be overstating its intensity by choosing the meaning 'to own'. In any case, the second half of this stanza says that the sorcerer has a special link with what lies in another one's breast. This strongly recalls the old witches charged on the grounds of 'possession' of their victims. The word used here to describe this kind of possession is *ódælla*. The way a sorcerer may possess another's soul is described here as both mysterious and possibly wicked.

We see that, as opposed to Evans' claim (see below) , the two halves perfectly fit together when their hints at magic are taken into account.

In his French translation, R. Boyer interprets the last three ones in a way that evokes something 'unchristian'. He says: *Plus suspect est / De tirer son inspiration / Du sein d'autrui*. (More dubious is / to draw one's insight / out of another one's breast. )

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 8

The two halves do not fit well together, for, as ... 'praise' and 'favour, warm judgments' - as *lof* and *líknstafi* are customarily rendered respectively - are precisely things which one inevitably has *annars brjóstum í*. [within one's breast] ... [the meaning of] *lof*: 'love, affection, esteem' fits better than 'praise' both here and in some other Eddaic instances (the best case is st. 52 below) ... *líknstafir* [may also be understood] as 'words (magically) calculated to win help from other persons', a sense that also fits its only other occurrence, *Sigrdr. 5: fullr er hann ljóða ok líknstafa, góðra galdra ok gamanrúna*. Other editors take *líknstafir* as = *líkn*, with *-stafir* as a mere derivative ending (so SG, comparing *bölstafir*= *böl*, *flærðarstafir* = *flærð* *Sigrdr. 30 and 32*) .

[The word giving direct access to a magical understanding is then withdrawn, it becomes "a mere derivative ending"! ] ...

### Dronke's commentary

In Dronke's 2011 translation of *Hávamál*, p. 50-51, we find a commentary of *líknstafir* that summarizes the experts' opinion. She states:

"*líknstafi* the word only in occurs in *Háv* here and in *Sigrdr 5*:

(Old Norse)	(Dronke's transl. )
<i>Biór færi ek þér,</i>	Beer I bring to you,
<i>brynþings apaldr,</i>	'Tree of Battle',
<i>magni blandinn</i>	blended with strength
<i>ok megintíri,</i>	and sovereign honour.
<i>fullr er hann ljóða</i>	It is filled with spells
<i>ok líknstafa,</i>	and salving words
<i>góðra galdra</i>	wholesome sorceries,
<i>ok gamanrúna</i>	and secrets of joy.

*Líkn* has a range of meanings from mercy to indulgence (e. g. softening of religious rules, which is strictly forbidden, see Fritzner s. v. ) . *Líknstafir* must mean general kindness, warm sympathy, healing, forgiveness, just as *líkn* does; *stafir*, originally '(potent) words', has become a poetic suffix, bringing a sense of plurality to the abstract *líkn*; cf. *böl*, *bölstafir* 'misfortune(s)', *Sigrdr 30*. In *Háv 8/3 líknstafir* is not in a magical or clerical context and presumably has a general sense of 'kindly public approval'."

This argument amounts to say: “in some non-magical contexts, the ending *stafir* takes a meaning similar to the one of ‘stuff’ and I will decide when the context is magical or not.” The bad faith associated to this definition shows up already in the above translation: “salving words” for *líknstafa* does not specially evoke magic while the context of Sigrdrífumál s. 5 is obviously magical.

### Commentary on Dronke’s argument

It is true that in Sigrdrífumál s. 30, Sigrdrífa no longer teaches runes to Sigurðr, and its context can be seen as no longer a magical one. This is however not sure at all. Let us look a bit more closely at the meaning of this stanza. Sigrdrífa warns Sigurðr against “brawls and drinking” that can cause “death to some and *bölstöfum* to some.” At least, one should say that it may bring death and bale-words, where *stafir* is translated by ‘words’. What prevents us to see here magical curses, which can be still efficient after death? The text stops then being trivial. We now understand that this kind out of control brawls can lead the people involved to be killed, and to even pronounce curses against their opponents’ children. This understanding perfectly fits Sigrdrífumál overall magical tone.

This word shows up again in s. 31, which tells that if your enemy is *hugfullr* (‘full of spirit’), then *berjask er betra / en brenna sé / inni auðstöfum* (fighting is better / than to burn oneself / at home with (or ‘by’, both possible to express the dative *stöfum*) the riches-*stafir*. The prosaic meaning of these lines is obvious: when opposed to a significant adversary, it is better to accept fighting rather than fleeing at home where this adversary will put your home to burn, you inside together with your ‘riches-stuff’, a behavior several times described in the sagas. In this understanding, *stafir* indeed is what Evans calls a “derivative ending”, that is, a ‘stuff’. I will again argue against choosing this one interpretation, without coupling it with anything magical.

1. Orchard sees *auð* as a prefix adverb that carries the meaning of ‘easily, clearly’ to the word it prefixes. He translates it by ‘other’, and he translates *stafir* par ‘men’ (I suppose that this is a modern Icelandic meaning?): his translation says that one can “be burnt at home / inside by other men.

2. Boyer translates by “... than to burn in his house / the man rich in belongings.” I thus suppose that he translates also *stafir* by ‘some man’ instead of ‘stuff’ and he recognizes in the noun for *auðr* ‘wealth’. This translation cuts the stanza in two independent parts, since the first half says that it is better to fight and the second one that a rich person is burnt. Besides the ‘stuff’ becoming a human being as in Orchard’s, all this lacks coherence and will now try to find another solution, the above prosaic one being already better.

Finding ‘the’ good translation of *auðstafir* is impossible as I will now explain. Firstly, there exist several compound words of the form *auð-* and they may use two different meanings of *auð*. Most of them use, as Orchard does, the prefix adding a meaning ‘easily, clearly’ to the word it prefixes. Several others use the meaning ‘riches’ as for example *auðmaðr* for ‘a rich man’ (*maðr* = man, human person). On the top of all that, *auðr* may mean ‘fate’ or else ‘emptiness, desert’. They do not normally give compounds but they are associated to other words, as for example the phrase *auð borð* speaks of a ship with no crew nor warriors on board. If we want to take into account the 3 possible meanings for *stafir*: rod, words or runes and the 5 ones for *auð*: easy, clear, riches, emptiness or fate, we understand why it is never possible to find one good meaning. Why not a magical one? To this purpose, I’ll keep most of my prosaic translation but, instead of seeing only prosaic riches in ‘riches-*stafir*’, I’ll see riches, material and spiritual ones. Magic will burn with you, it will

not be able to protect you against someone *hugfullr* enough. That is the hidden meaning of this stanza.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 9\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible and a comparison with s. 8

##### Hávamál 9

##### Hávamál 8

This one is happy  
who himself owns  
praise and wisdom, while he is living  
because a bad advice [or a bad way of life]  
often a human ‘raises’ to agree with  
out of the breasts of another one.

In **bold**, where they look alike, in italics where they do  
not, underlined when they oppose.

**This one is happy**  
**who obtains**  
**praise and** *a staff carved with healing runes;*  
It is **unforbearing** what  
**A human person will own**  
inside **the breasts of another one.**

#### Prose explanation

He is happy who during his life owns praise (or allowance) , (since he is)  
a wise person; what we accept from another’s heart is at best ill  
counseling, at worse a bad way of life.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

*Sá er sæll  
er sjálfr of á  
lof ok vit, meðan lifir;  
því at ill ráð  
hefr maðr oft þegit  
annars brjóstum ór.*

This one is happy  
who self owns  
praise [*and* allowance] and wisdom, while he lives  
because at ill advice [*or* ill way of life]  
begins a human often accepted  
of another out of the breasts.

#### Bellows’ translation

Happy the man | who has while he lives  
Wisdom and praise fair,  
For evil counsel | a man full oft  
Has from another’s heart. (*Orchard*: “from another man’s heart,” *Dronke*: “out of  
another’s breast.”)

#### Commentaries about the vocabulary

In stanza 8, we already said that *lof* has two main meanings: ‘praise’ et ‘authorization’. Any Old Norse speaking reader cannot miss one of these meanings and skaldic poetry shows many examples of using double meanings.

The noun *vit* means ‘conscience, knowledge, understanding’ and also, in some contexts, ‘place where something is kept, a casket’. The associated verb, *vita*, expresses all kinds of manifestation of thought, such as to be conscious, to understand, to know, to mean. When followed by *á* (*vita á*), it means to forecast, to foretell.

The noun *ráð* can be used in an abstract meaning: ‘advice, good advice, planning, foresight, agreement’, and in a concrete meaning: ‘management, state of life, marriage’. This advice may be *illr* or *illr* (ill, bad) as here, but it can be also *góðr* (good). Academic translators use the meaning ‘advice’ but, as with *lof*, all acceptations are possible, as the above prose explanation tries to suggest.

The verb *hefja* (here as *hefr*, he/she raises) means ‘to raise’. As in English, it includes a meaning such as to exalt. Thus a man ‘self-raises’ when accepting the bad advice coming from the others’ breasts. I see here an ‘inverted understatement’ where good is said for bad, that is, it means that man ‘self-degrades’ or suffers bad advice.

The verb *þiggja* (here as neuter past participle *þegit*) means ‘to accept, to obtain, to be housed’. The irregular verbal form may lead to confuse it with another verb. In s. 7, we met a form *þegir*, from verb *þegja*, meaning ‘he/she stays silent.’

### Commentaries about the meaning

The classical understanding of this stanza is that who owns by oneself satisfaction and wisdom is happy because other people can give ill advice. This is quite possible but not enough.

I feel it better to take into account stanza 8: both warn about the other people but 8 warns of their (physical) sicknesses, while 9 does of their (spiritual) weaknesses.

As you could see, I understand s. 8 as “If you are allowed to use the runes, beware of what you will find in other person’s heart when you try to help them.” Magic healing is a dangerous work and what is found inside the sick ones (i. e., their illness) can strike you if you are not careful enough. Sick people are dangerous but not bad, you are responsible for anything bad happening to you.”

We can compare this to s. 9 which sends another type of warning: “You might well be praised and have wisdom (that is non-magical virtues), but these positive features are hard to keep because others give you bad advice and this will contribute to wear away the peace of mind needed to keep praise and wisdom.”

In other words, what happens bad to a magician is his own mistake (s. 8), while a non-magician is not able to shun other people’s aggressions (s. 9) as wise and respected he might be.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 10\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

(No) better load  
a man can carry on a road (through wilderness)  
than much inborn good sense;  
better wealth  
is it believed (it = good sense) in an unknown place,



also (the same) is it for woe.

### Prose explanation

Our life can be compared to a hard walk on a difficult track. Instead of carrying useless loads, bring with you (= give the most importance to) your good sense. That is what will be the most useful in case of unexpected events. This is so for a woe-stricken one who needs more than everyone else this inborn good sense.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

<i>Byrði betri</i>	Better load
<i>berr-at maðr brautu at</i>	‘not-’ carries the human on a road [ <i>braut</i> : a road going through wilderness]
<i>en sé mannvit mikit;</i>	but would be inborn good sense much;
<i>auði betra</i>	wealth better
<i>þykkir þat í ókunnum stað;</i>	he/she thinks that in an unknown spot;
<i>slikt er válaðs vera.</i>	so who of woe be.

### Bellows’ translation

10. A better burden | may no man bear  
For wanderings wide than wisdom;  
It is better than wealth | on unknown ways,  
And in grief a refuge it gives.

### Commentary about the vocabulary

The meaning of *braut* is the one of ‘rocky track’. Mountainous tracks, especially when they run along a cliff, show many of these places where the road is replaced by large more or less flat uneven stones. During foggy weather, they are very dangerous and suddenly become an “*ókunnr staðr*”, an unknown spot.

The noun *mannvit* means ‘good sense’, it can be opposed to *bókvit*, acquired or scholarly good sense. I insist on this possibility by translating it by ‘inborn good sense’.

The noun *válað* means ‘woe’ and it clearly took over time the meaning of ‘lack of material wealth’. For instance, *ganga á válað* means ‘to go begging’. This stanza is so obviously devoted to the wealth of “inborn good sense” that I tend to reject the meaning of ‘lack of material wealth’. The ‘woe’ here alluded to is the one of being deprived of good sense. The scald does not call them stupid or non-wise, he simply points out that they show the common feature of being unable to react properly in an unknown, novel environment.

The verb ‘to be’, *vera*, can also mean a shelter. It could only be here in the nominative case and I do not see how Bellows twisted the Old Norse sentence to include his ‘refuge’.

### Comment on the meaning of this stanza

The mundane meaning of this stanza is quite clear: in order to get out of serious problems, inborn good sense is much more useful than material riches. It adds the

supplementary and not obvious comment that ‘acquired good sense’ will not be enough to save us from unexpected difficulties.

From the shamanic perspective, it is also important to notice that inborn wisdom is called a load to carry (in the stanza: *byrði berr*). This can be linked to a constant complain of Siberian shamanism that the gods are unkind to provide such a hard life to the humans. As an example, Russian anthropologist Chernetsov reports a song telling that human beings endure their life because a golden birch (Note 1). This also why I so firmly oppose to the title of Eliade’s book (“Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy”) because associating shamanism and ecstasy is very nicely ‘new age’ but it does not fit with the narratives of the Siberian shamans who describe a chaotic world and a painful initiation. The shaman and his apprentices do need each shred of their “inborn good sense” in order to properly react to their visions. Relying on our imagination or on drugs is a way to kill our inborn good sense, and great shaman Óðinn tells us here that they are misleading ways to shamanic wisdom.

(Note 1). In *Studies in Siberian Shamanism*, H. N. Michael (eds.) Univ. Toronto Press (1972). V. N. Chernetsov’s paper “Concepts of the soul among the Ob Ugrians,” pp. 3-45. The poem is given p. 27. It is said to be part of the tale of the creation of the earth where “it told how, in the back of the house of the Master of the Upper World and the Great Mother stands a gold-leaved birch.” On this birch, seven golden-winged cuckoos sit and “On the whole earth living / Men thanks to their power / To this day **endure** life.”

### Evans commentaries

#### 10-11

[Evans insists that *at* in *brautu at* means ‘along, down through’ instead of its usual ‘on, upon’. I do not understand why since good sense is as useful ‘on’ a rocky track as ‘at its end’.]

### Hávamál 11-14

#### “On drinking and good sense”

### Commentary on 10-11

*As we shall now see, s. 11-14 constitute small ‘bier theme cycle’ inside Hávamál. We cannot however forget that s. 10 and 11 are tightly linked since they share their three first lines. In this manner, the poet was able to formally link s. 10 and 11 while the theme of 10 is magic and the theme of 11 is creativity. In both of them, good sense is “the best load,” an unexpected way to compare them.*

### Introduction to 11-14

Georges Dumézil prepared a doctoral dissertation published under the title “The feast of Immortality” (1924), and never published again because he denied it later. In this work, he tried to prove that Indo-European mythologies carry a common theme: “The gods are looking for a miraculous food or drink that will provide them life eternal. They do get it after a number of episodes, each different for each Indo-European civilization.” This ‘food’ became better known under the name ‘soma’ coming from the Indian civilization. We can presume that he had good reasons to deny it and it is true that his arguments, in this particular work, are much less carefully weighted than the ones he gave in his later works.

For instance, he does not take into account Iðunn's apples when he speaks of our Germanic mythology, though they would be also an obvious candidate to being a Germanic 'soma'. I nevertheless felt that Dumézil has been able to link very nicely several myths otherwise seemingly disjoint by arguing that bier/mead is the element of the Germanic immortality feast. In my opinion and for our mythology, he missed one idea that would give much more strength to his argument: In our mythology, in order to fit into the larger myth of Ragnarök, eternal life boils down (or does it raises up?) to a combination of continuous youth and continuous creativity called 'poetical frenzy' or 'mead of poetry'. Óðinn certainly is a key stone to the Germanic attitude towards poetical frenzy and creativity. This gives some ground to the idea that these two behaviors are more central to our mythology than it is believed. We shall see that creativity is the main theme in Hávamál s. 103-110, often seen as Óðinn's disastrous love affair with Gunnlöð.

Most commentators do not see in the following stanzas, 11-14, more than mundane advice about beer drinking. Combining my analysis of Dumézil's theory together with the idea of mead of poetry, I tried to look at s. 11-14 as being a Germanic version of the Indo-European myth of life eternal. They can be understood as a way to tell to human beings that "the feast of immortality" is not for them, it is a "gods only" feast.

### **A recall on the mythical context of s. 11-14**

The myth in which Óðinn takes hold of the mead of poetry (or of the bier of creation, in view of Dumézil's work as recalled above) includes several episodes. We shall need here the one where he interacts with Gunnlöð.

Let us start when Suttungr became the owner of the bier of creation. Bier or mead is not the main point of the story. The difference between the two drinks is not so significant and, for instance, Lithuanians still prepare a bier a component of which is honey. The important fact is that this alcoholic beverage is famous for bringing the ability to produce original and creative poetry. Suttungr hides the bier in a large vat inside a mountain and his daughter, Gunnlöð, is in charge of taking care of it. By some magical means, Óðinn digs a tunnel in the mountain and is able to reach the place where the bier is hidden. Gunnlöð agrees to Óðinn's drinking some of it, provided that he makes love to her in repayment for each mouthful of bier. Óðinn complies. Note that Snorri's version does not suggest, as do s. 108 and 110, that Óðinn marries Gunnlöð. Each of his gulps is really *of-drykkja*, a super gulp, and he needs only three of them in order to drain the whole vat. He then escapes with his loot and, following 108 and 110, breaks his contract with Gunnlöð.

### **\*\*\*Hávamál 11\*\*\***

#### **A translation as literal as possible**

(Identical to 10) : (No) better load  
a man can carry on a road (through wilderness)  
than much inborn good sense;

\*\*\*

(New in 11) : Travel food worse  
He does not move on the field  
when (happens) a bier super-feast.

#### **Prose Explanation**

(Identical to 10) : Our life can be compared to a hard walk on a difficult track. Instead of carrying useless loads, bring with you (= give the most importance to) your good sense.

(New in 11) : Worse traveling-food is a lot of bier drinking (because) he (who drinks so much) does not move on his way.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

11.

<i>Byrði betri</i>	Better load
<i>berr-at maðr brautu at</i>	‘not-’ carries the human on a road
<i>en sé mannvit mikit;</i>	but would be inborn good sense much;
<i>vegnest verra</i>	way-food worse
<i>vegr-a hann velli at</i>	move-not he (who) on the field
<i>en sé ofdrykkja öls.</i>	that would be a super-draught of bier.

### Bellows’ translation

11. A better burden | may no man bear  
For wanderings wide than wisdom;  
Worse food for the journey | he brings not afield  
Than an over-drinking of ale.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The noun *völur* = a field, a terrain, gives *veldi* in the dative case, hence *at veldi* = on the field.

### Commentaries about the meaning

#### *Plain understanding.*

Good sense should prevent a traveler to carry bier with him because over-drinking prevents from moving.

#### *Mythical understanding.*

I cannot see here anything else than Óðinn an allusion to his flight before Suttungr and to the trick he had to use in order to barely save his booty. He certainly was carrying a heavy load, but he was also drunk (as described in forthcoming s. 13 and 14) and deadly frightened (cf. Snorri’s comment on the mead for clown-poets) .

#### *Spiritual understanding.*

The first three lines repeat the first three ones of 10. This seemingly useless repetition explains why the plain understanding of the whole stanza is not enough. Plain understanding almost forgets about the first three lines and understates the importance good sense in avoiding over drinking. Avoiding over drinking is obviously a safe behavior. Now, if you think that the ‘field’ upon which the traveler moves in not an ordinary way but one or both of creative thinking or magical practices, there is a real teaching in stanza 11. It says that if you do not carry enough good sense in you, your attempt at becoming a poet or wizard by drinking is bound to fail.

Nobody becomes creative, nor shaman or wizard through drug consuming. Such is *Hava-mál*, High’s word: “*vegr-a hann velli at en sé ofdrykkja öls* (he does not move on the field if he had an ‘over-drinking’ of ale) .”

### \*\*\*Hávamál 12\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

It is-not good (to speak as follows: )  
to say that (it is) good  
for the sons of ages, bier,  
because I know (that he has) less,  
who drinks more,  
of his own spirit, the man.

#### Prose Explanation

Let us put the words in the usual English ordering:

One should not say that bier is good to the sons of time (human beings) ,  
because I know that the more he drinks, the less spirit has the man.

In a more commented way:

It is not good to recommend bier drinking to anyone entwisted in the  
thread of time, because I, a divine being, know that excess drinking  
empties the spirit of the men (here, the males are pointed at) .

Speaking of humans as being the ‘children of time’ is a classical  
kenning. It emphasizes the brevity of our lives.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

12.

<i>Er-a svá gótt</i>	Is-not thus good
<i>sem gótt kveða</i>	as good to say [ <i>svá sem</i> = ‘like as’ ]
<i>öl alda sonum,</i>	bier to the sons of ages,
<i>því at færa veit</i>	because, ‘at’ less I know
<i>er fleira drekk</i>	who more drinks
<i>síns til geðs gumi</i>	of his until [ <i>here</i> = for] spirit of man.

#### Bellows’ translation

12. Less good there lies | than most believe  
In ale for mortal men;  
For the more he drinks | the less does man  
Of his mind the mastery hold.

[Bellows’ note. Some editors have combined this stanza in various ways with the last two lines of stanza 10, as in the manuscript the first two lines of the latter are abbreviated, and, if they belong there at all, are presumably identical with the first two lines of stanza 10.]

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

Lines 1 and 2 contain the term *svá sem* meaning ‘as like’.

The noun *öld*, here as a plural genitive, *alda*, means ‘an age, time cycle, (poetical) people’. As Óðinn says ‘*veit* = I know’, we understand that he insists that this stanza is coming from his own mouth, stressing the difference between gods and humans

The word *sonr* means a son, a daughter is *dóttir*.

Remember that the word *maðr* means ‘human being’. As you see, the word used in the last line is *gumi*, here as a genitive *guma*, and it is also a little ambiguous on the gender it names. I believe it tends to hint more at a male than *maðr*. For example, the compound word *hús-gumi* answers *hús-freyja* (master/mistress of a house) .

### Commentaries about the meaning

#### *Plain understanding.*

It is given in my literal translation: “It is not good to praise bier drinking for humans because I know who the more he drinks, the less the man has good sense,” summarized to “Over-drinking is bad for humans because it makes them lose their mind.”

#### *Understanding.*

Mead of poetry (i. e. , creative thinking) may be harmful for human beings.

Note that the poet says ‘I know’, a first recall of who is hidden behind the skald, namely Óðinn. Thus, this stanza says that god Óðinn refuses to say that alcohol-induced creativity is fit to humans because it destroys their inborn good-sense. Stanza 12 gives the reason (“good sense is destroyed”) of the claim in stanza 11 (“travel and creativity lead nowhere without good sense”) .

### \*\*\*Hávamál 13 \*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Oblivious heron is named  
who hangs around at drinking-parties;  
this steals (their) spirit to men;  
thus, to the fowl’s feathers  
was I ‘self-fettered’  
in Gunnlöð’s yard.

#### Prose Explanation

Oblivion-Heron hovers above drinking-parties. Who gulps down too much bier looks like a heron gobbling down fishes. This destroys your spirit and you memory.

I, Óðinn, in spite of my godly abilities, I accepted to be fettered to the fowl’s feathers when I drunk the mead of poetry in Gunnlöð’s home (and, there, I madly loved her ... [as we shall see later]) .

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

13.

<i>Óminnishegri heitir</i>	Of no memory (oblivion) heron is named
<i>sá er yfir ölðrum þrumir;</i>	who at drinking-parties hangs around;
<i>hann stelr geði guma;</i>	he (= it) steals (their) spirit to men;
<i>þess fugls fjöðrum</i>	thus (of the) fowl (to its) feathers
<i>ek fjötraðr vark</i>	I fettered ‘self-’ was
<i>í garði Gunnlaðar.</i>	in the yard of Gunnlöð.

### Bellows' translation

13. Over beer the bird | of forgetfulness broods,  
And steals the minds of men;  
With the heron's feathers | fettered I lay  
And in Gunnloth's house was held.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

*Ó-minnis-hegri* = no-of memory-heron, that is: the heron of no memory.

Here, *þjöðrum* is a dative without a preposition, it is normally rendered by adding 'at', or 'in' as in "he lives in London."

The poem's title, *Hávamál*, is strongly recalled in l. 5. Óðinn says twice that he is himself speaking by using the form *ek ...vark* = I ... I was) . This is way to remind us that all this wise advice-looking words contain more than simple wisdom.

### Commentaries about the meaning

In the following, Óðinn will speak several times of *Gunnlöð* who allowed him to drink the mead of poetry, as recalled before in s. 11. The container of this drink is called *Óðrœrir* and drinking it makes you become 'óðr': 'raving poetic'. This is now far from a drinking party, a god becomes drunk and puts on himself the fetters of madness that link him to the "feathers of the fowl."

*Plain understanding* is almost impossible. The images of a hovering Oblivion-Heron and Óðinn being fettered in the middle of a mountain are essentially un-obvious. Forgetting this 'details' can lead to nothing more than: "We can imagine that a kind of bird participates in drinking-parties in order to steal the drinkers' spirits."

*Understanding.*

In this stanza, Óðinn uncovers himself again, he says "I self-was fettered", where I try to render the reflexive form *vark*. By this way of speech, Óðinn says that he put himself the fetters on him. Another point is that he confesses his own human weakness by letting himself entangled in the feathers of Oblivion-Heron, losing both Huginn (Spirit) and Muninn (Memory or Mind-Delight (note 1) ) . He means to warn humankind: "I was myself overwhelmed by the huge draughts I had to swallow in order to steal the creativity-beverage. Remember that you are much weaker than I!"

Note also that these four stanzas do not speak of the love/sexual part of Óðinn's adventure. An allusive "*í garði Gunnlaðar*" in the last line simply hints at it.

(Note 1) There exists an absolute consensus on the meaning of Muninn, being 'Memory'. It follows from deriving the word *muninn* from verb *muna*, to remember, as de Vries does, by linking it to the two verbs past participles. This looks as a strong argument though the form of *muna* from which it could be derived, its masculine past participle, is *munað*. The same is true of *huginn* (it is derived from verb *huga* or verb *hyggja*) , since the past participle of *huga* is *hugaðr* and the one of *hyggja* is *hugat* or *hugt* and it shows also an adjective form *hugór* (as given by C-V) . It is thus not improbable that *huginn* and *muninn* would rather be derived from the corresponding substantives, *hugr* and *munr* (both are masculine words) .

The point is void for *huginn* since *hugr* mean 'mind' and *huga/hyggja* both mean 'to think'. Inversely, *muninn* is more problematic. Substantive *munr* evokes (among others!) love and pleasures

deriving from intelligence and it does not evoke memory. The verb and its associated substantive have quite different meanings. Experts thus chose to favor verb against substantive meanings.

Let us now favor substantive over verb meanings. The nouns can well be postfixed by an article (our 'the') and, in the masculine, they then read *hugrinn* and *munrinn*. We thus meet a new problem since we have now to accept an exceptional (?) 'loss' of this 'r' expressing the nominative in the name of Óðinn's ravens. Note however that all compound words of the form *hugr/munr*-adjective does lose this 'r', for instance *munligr* (delicious) or *hugblauðr* (timid) .

Anyhow, and as usual, I do not claim that translating *Muninn* by 'Memory' is wrong. I claim that an alternate understanding comes from the four main meanings of *munr*: 'mind, longing, delight, love' . Mind is already filled up by *huginn* and, for *muninn*, I would vote for a mixture of mind and delight, namely 'mind-delight' . In that case, Óðinn would fear to lose his intelligence and, overall, to lose his thinking pleasure (as explained in *Grímnismál* 20 for *Huginn* and *Muninn*) . We could then understand why he emphasizes the importance of the pleasure of thinking over 'just' thinking.

These two names are born in a purely oral civilization of knowledge transfer into which memory is indeed primary to insure a proper functioning of mind. This being acknowledged, we should also remain conscious that the sheer pleasure of feeling our minds perform (what *munr* exactly means) certainly is the strongest motivation, for everyone, to appreciate the state of being alive.

If this topic attracts you, please consult on my Academis.edu site :

[https://www.academia.edu/36079086/Huginn\\_and\\_Muninn\\_or\\_a\\_few\\_Archetypes\\_of\\_Old\\_Norse\\_Collective\\_Unconscious](https://www.academia.edu/36079086/Huginn_and_Muninn_or_a_few_Archetypes_of_Old_Norse_Collective_Unconscious)

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 13

*óminnishegri* - the heron does not appear to be connected with forgetfulness elsewhere, and the exact point of the expression is unclear. Finnur Jónsson points out that the heron's habit of standing motionless for long periods, in seeming oblivion, might account for the image, though he surely goes too far in proposing that this oblivion could have been thought to infect the beholders. Von Hofsten 25-6 asserts that what is emphasized here is not forgetfulness *per se* but rash actions under the influence of alcohol, and connects this with the way in which the heron, after waiting motionless, can suddenly strike out with his terrible 'harpoon'. But this does not sort well with the actual word *óminni* in the text. Dronke points out that the heron, in fact and in modern proverbial lore, is associated with vomiting, which (though not in herons) is often a consequence of excessive drink; but it is again some way to the *óminni* of the text. Holtsmark 1 believes the reference is to an ale-ladle in the form of a heron and renders '*yfir öldrúm þrumir*' 'floats on the surface of the ale'. *Ölör* can mean both 'ale' (as in 137 below) and 'ale-party' (which is how most editors take it here) ; in the former sense it is normally singular, but the plural occurs in a stanza of Egill (*öldrö dregg* ...) . Ladles in the form of birds (*öland*, *ölgás*, *ölhane*) are known in Norway, though no instance of a heron-ladle seems to have come to light. Elmevik has objected that a ladle would not repose silent and motionless, as implied by *þrumir*, but would be continually raised and lowered; a perhaps weightier objection is that there is no actual evidence for bird-ladles in Norway before c. 1500, though of course they might have existed earlier. If Holtsmark's suggestion is rejected, 2 should be rendered 'he who hovers over ale-feasts'. [The image of a heron is beautiful by itself and does not need so many explanations. If something mundane is needed here, we could think of the way a heron swallows a fish and a drinker takes a long gulp of beer.]

3 *guma* is probably acc. , not gen. ; for the construction cp. *stela mik eign minni* Laxdoela saga ch. 84 ...

6 Gunnlöð known in Norse legend only as the daughter of the giant Suttungr, who had acquired the sacred mead of poetry from the dwarfs Fjalarr and Galarr; Óðinn wins the mead by seducing her. The story is related in 104-110 below, and in Snorri's Prose Edda (Skáldskaparmál ch. 5-6) . Presumably this is the story referred to here and in st. 14, and *ek*



must accordingly be Óðinn; but if so it is clearly a variant version, for nothing is told elsewhere of Óðinn's being drunk nor of his visiting Fjalarr. St. 14 reads most naturally as though in this version Fjalarr, not Suttungr, was the name of Gunnlöð's giant father, and Fjalarr is indeed recorded as a giant-name (Hárbarðljóð 26, and in 'þulur', *Jötna heiti*, Jónsson's *Skjaldedigtning* t. 1- p. 659. [Nothing forces us to confuse Fjalarr and Suttungr as Evans seems to think it compulsory. It is quite possible that Óðinn has been drunk at Gunnlöð's and, in another time, drunk at Fjalarr's. The following stanza provides another possible way to understand the use of 'Fjalarr' with no need for a variant version.]

### **\*\*\*Hávamál 14 \*\***

#### **A translation as literal as possible**

Drunk I have been,  
have been totally drunk  
at learned Fjalarr's home;  
because a drinking-party is (at its) best  
when later comes up to (the drinker)  
what controls the man's spirit.

#### **Prose Explanation**

In Fjalarr the Learned's home I have been drunk, deeply drunk; (*and this happened*) because drinking is (*for the*) best when what controls the spirit of man comes back home.

#### **ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation**

14.	
Ölr ek varð,	Drunk I have been,
varð ofrölvi	have been totally drunk
at ins fróða Fjalars;	at learned Fjalarr's
því er öldr bazt,	because is a drinking-party best
at aftr um heimtír	when later comes up to
hverr sitt geð gumi.	what controls the spirit of man.

#### **Bellows' translation**

14. Drunk I was, | I was dead-drunk,  
When with Fjalar wise I was;  
'Tis the best of drinking | if back one brings  
His wisdom with him home.

#### **Commentary on the vocabulary**

Fjalarr is the name of the dwarf who owned the mead of poetry before Suttungr. Since it is recorded as a *heiti* for a giant (see reference at the end of Evans' commentaries) it can point at any giant in poetical language. This is an obvious wink of the poet to his

knowledgeable reader who cannot ignore who owned the mead of poetry before Suttungr. It is funny to use the name of the stolen one (the dwarf) in order to speak of the stealing one (the giant Suttungr). Note that Óðinn qualifies Fjalarr of being *fróðr*. This is a classical way to qualify giants, they are often ‘very clever’ or ‘well-learned’. The word *fróðr* means ‘learned’ with the suggestion of ‘very much learned’, or a wizard who is very learned at magic. The first meaning is illustrated by the way of speaking of the venerable Bede: *Bede fróði*. The second meaning is illustrated by the way of speaking the Finn wizards who are called *fróðastir*.

### Commentaries about the meaning

*Plain understanding.* Forgetting a few ‘details’ of the stanza, it may mean: “I have been drinking too much in my past. From that, I learned that the best part of drinking takes place when you come back to your senses.”

*Understanding.*

At first, Óðinn insists on the depth of his drunkenness in Gunnlöð’s yard. It is quite possible that this insistence underlines a possible role of Gunnlöð herself in it: he was drunk with both alcohol and love. Now, read again the last three lines: They do say that the best part of a drinking-party is its sobering up phase! Whoever has been drunk – not to speak of deeply drunk – knows that a severe hangover is very painful, totally contradicting this statement: The head- and stomach-ache you receive is known for being almost unbearable. Either Óðinn is making a disputable joke (“suffering is good for you”) or he is alluding to something completely different from common drinking. This is why I understand this 14th stanza as a gnomic one for poets: “When you drug yourself to get out of yourself, when you wish to share with me the madness my name carries (adjective *óðr* means frantic), the best time to become creative is this painful time when you are still drunk while your spirit comes back to you (noun *óðr* means ‘mind, wit, poetry’). This phase may last long enough to enable you to acknowledge and recognize chaos in your mind, and to take advantage of it, that is, to ride this chaos without trying to stifle it.

### Evans’ Commentaries

14

3 For Fjalarr see on 13 above.

4 *því* is correctly explained by Fritzner 2 s. v. *því* 4 as ‘*i det Tilfælde*’, that is ‘in this case’: the best sort of drinking party is one which is not excessive, one where everyone leaves still in possession of his right senses, or easily able to reclaim them. (So also Schneider 63): ‘*nur das Gelage taugt, von dem der Mann seine Sinne mit heimbringt*’. ) Many editors take *því* as ‘therefore, for this reason’ (thus ...: ‘It is ale’s best quality that everyone recovers his senses’) but this contradicts the context and gives feeble sense in itself.

5 The particle *of* is written *vf* in Codex Regius here, as also in 67 below and in Grímnismál 34; similarly for *of* preposition in Guðrúnarkviða II 2.

## Hávamál 15-35

### “On wisdom”

### \*\*\*Hávamál 15\*\*\*

### A translation as literal as possible

Quiet and mindful of other people  
should (be) a great man's child  
and battle-daring be;  
glad and happy  
will (be) each man  
until he abides by his death.

### Prose explanation

A great man's child should be thoughtful and mindful of others (he is able to listen to and understand other people) and also battle-daring. Each (other kind of) man must be glad and happy until his death.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

<i>Þagalt ok hugalt</i>	Quiet and mindful
<i>skyldi þjóðans barn</i>	should a great man's child
<i>ok vígdjarft vera;</i>	and battle-daring be;
<i>glaðr ok reifr</i>	glad and happy
<i>skyli gumna hverr,</i>	will man each
<i>unz sinn biðr bana.</i>	until he abides by death

### Bellows' translation

15. The son of a king | shall be silent and wise,  
And bold in battle as well;  
Bravely and gladly | a man shall go,  
Till the day of his death is come.

### Commentaries about the vocabulary

Adjective *hugall* means 'mindful of other people', kind, charitable and this an interesting feature for a future leader. Other experts translate it quite differently. Bellows renders it by 'wise', Orchard by 'prudent', Dronke by 'reflective', Boyer by 'thoughtful'. It seems that kindness is so much unexpected for a leader that the proper meaning has been deemed impossible.

The word *þjóðann* = 'king, great man'. 'Great leader' might then render the exact meaning of this word here.

*víg-djarft*, *víg* = battle, *djarfr* (adj. ) = bold, daring.

*glaðr* = 'glad' and also, 'shiny', for the sky or a star.

*reifr* = cheerful, as in *bjór-reifr* = wine-cheerful, and also *her-reifr* = battle-cheerful.

*hverr* is a pronoun which has two main meanings. First, it is interrogative and can be translated by 'who?' Second, it also means 'each, each one'. Each translator uses this last meaning except Bellows.

The verb *biða* means 'to abide, to undergo'.

### Commentary

This stanza does not claim that looking for happiness is absolutely opposed to leadership but that leader and follower fit into two completely disjoint destinies. Both have to be acknowledged but no one should complain of the destiny to which he has been allotted.

A social environment where all non-leaders are glad and cheerful looks like being an utopia. I suppose that Óðinn alludes here to a group of free men or warriors rather than to ordinary people.

Note also that the poem stresses again the importance of silence in social life. It seems that among the many clichés relative to the famous Viking, the one of people able to hold their tongue has been under estimated.

It is also necessary to link this stanza to s. 56. As we shall see later, it advises to be wary of an excess in the research of wisdom. Óðinn justifies the wariness by explaining that excess of wisdom can lead to the knowledge of our own örlög, and that knowledge leads to a “spirit of sadness” which opposes the present stanza. The kind of carelessness recommended by s 15 does not mean we should consider it as unimportant. This is a deeply pagan stanza which condemns asceticism, such as research for Christian holiness or the Buddhist illumination, i. e. a spirituality for which human ones attempt to leave his/her status of simple human full of “gross” bodily joys.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 16\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

A non daring person  
expects that he will live for ever  
if he avoids battle;  
but old age gives  
him no peace at all,  
even if spears leave him quiet.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

<i>Ósnjallr maðr</i>	Non-daring ( <i>or</i> not outstanding) human
<i>hyggsk munu ey lifa,</i>	thinks-self that will ever-live
<i>ef hann við víg varask;</i>	if he battle avoids
<i>en elli gefr</i>	but old age gives
<i>hánum engi frið,</i>	him no peace
<i>þótt hánum geirar gefi.</i>	though to him spears give.

#### Bellows' translation

16. The sluggard believes | he shall live forever,  
If the fight he faces not;  
But age shall not grant him | the gift of peace,  
Though spears may spare his life.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

*Ósnjallr* means ‘non daring’ and is properly translated by Dronke as ‘(who) lacks courage’. The other translators try to avoid this meaning. Bellows: ‘sluggard’, Orchard: ‘senseless’, Boyer ‘non shrewd’ (inavisé) . The contrary is *snjallr* = eloquent, excellent, valiant.

*hyggja* = to think, have a goal, imagine, *hyggjask* = ‘self hyggja’.

*víg* = the killing taking place during a fight or a battle. It can be a fight between groups or individuals.

### Comment on the meaning

Said in a terse way: Fear of death is base and is not rewarding.

The first half of stanza 16 points at a person who is ‘non daring’ and who thinks that flight is the only solution when facing battle slaughter. They flee as soon as an impending danger threatens them; they lose their wits in front of danger.

The second half underlines this view by recalling that death is an all-time impeding danger.

As everyone understands, the stanza recalls that death cannot be avoided. A less obvious meaning is that fleeing danger is useless as opposed to the universal “precautionary principle” that seems to become the supreme law dictating modern behavior.

### Evans commentaries

16

1 *ósnjallr* also occurs in 48, where it is opposed to *mildir, fræknir menn*; ‘cowardly’ seems to be what is mainly implied, though some editors render ‘foolish’ ; the positive *snjallr* can mean both ‘bold’ and ‘wise’.

4-6 mean of course that death is inescapable - even if you manage to avoid a violent death, you will die of old age in the end - and not, as preposterously suggested by Vesper 28, that the man who in his youth skulks away from battle will have an uneasy conscience in his old age. ‘This sentence had needed no commentary, had not a commentator darkened it. ’

### \*\*\*Hávamál 17\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

A simpleton gawks  
while meeting a friend  
he mumbles to himself or mopes;  
all at once  
if he gets a drink  
the spirit of the man raises to surface.

#### Prose explanation

When a simpleton or an oaf meets a friend (who speaks to him) , instead of answering properly, he mutters incomprehensible words or complains relentlessly. When he drinks a bit too much, his true (? lack of) spirit shows at once.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

17.

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

He gawks the simpleton [*or oaf*]  
who towards acquaintance comes  
he mumbles-self or mopes  
all is at once [*all at once*]  
if he a drink gets  
up is then the spirit of the man.

### **Bellows' translation**

17. The fool is agape | when he comes to the feast,  
He stammers or else is still;  
But soon if he gets | a drink is it seen  
What the mind of the man is like.

### **Commentary on the vocabulary**

*afglapi* comes from the verb *af-glapa* the meaning of which is 'noisily interrupting a law course'. Its primary meaning is 'oaf' but it can also mean 'simpleton'.

*kyn* has the same meaning as its English descendant, kin. *Til kynnis kemr* means 'to pay a friendly visit'.

Be aware that the verb 'to mumble', *þylja*, also means 'to sing' or 'to utter a magical charm'. Here, the oaf does not mumble he 'mumbles to himself', *þyljask*. This word is also used in Eriks Saga, chap. 8 when Thórhallr is calling on Þórr. As the simpleton of the present stanza, he is said to be gaping (*gapti*) and he mumbled magic words (*buldi*): the form used in this case is not a reflexive one.

The verb *þruma* means 'to mope' but it also can mean 'to sit down motionless'.

The last line is slightly ambiguous. The literal translation says that the man's spirit uncovers itself. Dronke: ("then that's the end of his intelligence") and Boyer ("off flies good sense!") have a pessimistic view of this 'disputably good' sense, as suggested by the first lines. Orchard ("the man's wits are wholly exposed.") and Bellows keep the more neutral tone of the poem.

To know "what the mind of a man is like" does not mean 'to know he is stupid or unpleasant'. For instance, a boorish person may reveal a more charming side when drunk.

### **Comment on the meaning**

This stanza states that a boorish person keeps to himself even when he meets someone of his kin. Only alcoholic beverages may open his mind.

The occurrence of two words used elsewhere to describe a wizard's attitude, even if Thórhallr is not 'self-mumbling' but simply mumbling, suggest at least that the behavior of a wizard may look very much like the one of a simpleton. If we push forward in this direction, this stanza takes an unexpected meaning. Instead of describing a stupid person, it will suggest that a wizard or a poet may look as being fools and they are often boorish. When given the 'mead of poetry' their true nature shows: they produce outstanding poetry or magic.

### **Evans commentary**

**kópa** ‘stare, gaze’, only here in ON, but found in Norwegian and in Danish and Swedish dialects, and occasionally in later Icelandic; ... testified in 1915 that it was common in this sense in Anessisla in Southern Iceland.

3. . . holds that **pylsk um** and **brumir** are contrasted: either the fool prattles endlessly or he is sullenly speechless. This is based on the sense ‘proclaim ceremonially’ for **þylja**, as e. g. in 111 below; but this verb is also well evidenced in the sense ‘mumble’ and the use of the reflexive, which is found only here and must have the force of ‘to oneself’ shows that this is the meaning in this passage...

6 **uppi er þá ged guma**. . . explains ‘the moment he gets a drink, he reveals the whole contents of his mind’, i. e. taking **uppi** as ‘displayed, visible’, and similarly many editors. But **uppi** can also mean ‘finished, exhausted’, ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 18\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

The one who is mindful and aware,  
who far away travels,  
and ‘lifts’ much for traveling,  
what state of mind  
leads such one of the men  
who is being conscious that he minds.

#### Prose explanation

One who travels far away and undertakes (‘lifts’) much in order to travel, and who travels in a state of mind of mindfulness and awareness, he only becomes conscious of the state of mind that leads him on this path. This is the state of mind of people who are conscious of being conscious.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

18.	
<i>Sá einn veit</i>	Who the one is mindful [ <i>or</i> aware, conscious]
<i>er víða ratar</i>	who far travels
<i>ok hefr fjölb of farit,</i>	and raises [ <i>or</i> : starts] much of ‘for travelling’
<i>hverju geði</i>	what state of mind
<i>stýrir gumna hvern,</i>	leads the men such that [ <i>leads such men</i> ]
<i>sá er vitandi er vits.</i>	who is ‘being mindful’ is [ <i>or</i> : he who] ‘of <i>or</i> towards mindfulness’.

#### Bellows’ translation

18. He alone is aware | who has wandered wide,  
And far abroad has fared,  
How great a mind | is guided by him  
That wealth of wisdom has.

## Various translations of the last three lines

Orchard	Dronke	Boyer
what wits every man controls:	what kind of mind	How much well-tempered
he is a man with some sense.	each man is master of.	Is anyone / Who owns
	He knows what knowing is.	knowledge and wisdom.

As you can see, each of them understands these lines in a slightly different way, and the clearer the translation, the further it is from the original text. Note also that in all translations, the first and the second half of the stanza are disconnected.

## Commentary on the vocabulary

*ratar víða* = to travel far away. To what kind of travel is Óðinn alluding? Everyone knows that the ordinary traveler – as far as he might go – carries with him the whole lot of his problems and his ignorance.

The verb *vita* is twice used in this stanza and its parent *vit* (that became our ‘wit’) once.

*Vita* means: to be conscious, to know, to be aware, to try, to behave. *Vitandi* is ‘while being conscious’ and *veit* is ‘he is conscious’.

The word *geð* means: state of mind, a mood (good or a bad) , the spirit into which something is performed.

The verb *fara* (to travel) has a supine in *farit*, a verbal form we translate as follows: the supine of ‘to do’ expresses ‘with the goal of doing, in order to be able to do’.

For *vitandi er vits*, I tried to render the exact meaning of this way of speech. In modern Icelandic *vitandi vits* means: ‘knowing what one is about’ (see Evans below) . Modern speech may have forgotten the language of the ancient gods: The Icelandic poet Sveinbjörn Beinteinnsson himself, founder of the Ásatrúarfélagið in 1972, told to a journalist “... we should speak the same beautiful language as Óðins.”

## Comment on the meaning

### *Secular meaning*

*Three first lines:*

Traveling far does not provide ‘wit’ just by itself. The travel will bring you awareness if you properly prepare it ahead of time.

*Three last lines:*

Evans’ analysis of “*er vitandi er vits*” is perfectly to the point. There is however no need to “expel the second *er*” since, by reading it as a ‘he who’ instead of a ‘he is’, it becomes a doubling such as ‘who ... who’ the poetical effect of which should not be forgotten even if it is that can be left aside in a translation.

I disagree with the commentators who see little coherency between the three first and the three last lines. From the stylistic point of view, it is made whole by the one ‘*vita*’ of the first line and the two ‘*vita*’ of the last one, together with the balance of third line ‘for traveling’ with last line ‘of mindfulness’. The logical point of view is even more convincing. This stanza looks like a syllogism since it says: Proper travel improves your mind, mind improving requests a special state of mind, *ergo*, whoever properly travels learns a special state of mind.

The problem of being conscious of one’s conscience looks so abstract that I’ll use some Computer Science facts in order to make it more concrete. Artificial Intelligence and



Robotics are repeatedly tripping over the lack of self-consciousness of computer programs. They recognize this problem as stemming from their lack of “meta-thinking.” This way of speech follows from Data Analysis that uses meta-data (i. e. data about the data) in order to help the user of a database to become conscious of the kind of knowledge which is stored into the data. As another example, it is extremely hard to program a robot in such a way that it might be able to ‘become conscious’ of its own actions, for instance that it is about to break down. Within this frame of thinking, we can express the ideas in s. 18 as: “if a person is conscious enough then, by meeting other civilizations and traditions, this person will acquire a general knowledge about the organization of a society, of the bases of a tradition, etc. that is, he/she will acquire a meta-knowledge about his own environment and about him/herself.” It is clear that the coexistence of knowledge and meta-knowledge inside the human brain looks like contradictory. The contradiction has been well exemplified by a French philosopher of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, called Alain (Émile Chartier). He would claim that introspection is absurd because “you cannot be on the balcony looking down at yourself walking in the street.” At the opposite, in this stanza, though without using these words, Óðinn suggests that being conscious of one’s conscience, i. e. something very similar to introspection, is the expected result of life experience for a thoughtful person.

We however need to add that this Computer Science way of speech provides only a static view of what is “to be conscious of one’s conscience.” For the time being, there is no way to program data bases each element of which could be ‘conscious’ of (i. e. to interact with) any other element in the base. This would demand to represent the database through a non primitive recursive function, which we can hardly achieve, to say the least.

It should be also noticed that the database formulation above given accounts only for a static look at the “conscience to be conscious.” Presently, there is no question of programming data bases each element of which could be ‘conscious’ of the existence of all the other elements of the base. This would require to represent the data base by a non primitive recursive function, which we do not know yet really how to do. Inversely, one of the human thinking feature is the ability of our ideas to interact with each other, and this interaction is able to be the source of other new ideas.

Note that Óðinn, who so often criticizes human-like stupidity, does not call stupid or non-wise people who are unable to analyze by their own thought the way they think. He rather marvels at the existence of “state of mind.”

### ***Meaning in human mental reality***

It is not so strange that the line “*sá er vitandi er vits*,” as pointed at below by Evan, caused so much confusion in the commentators’ world because it looks so apart from the ‘standard’ Hávamál lines. Quite often, the words used by Óðinn describe every day behaviors, such as for example stanzas 11-14 dedicated to alcohol consumption. On the occasion, it may evoke obviously psychological consequences of these behaviors, such as for example the memory loss caused by excess drinking. Until now, however, it never tackled the topic of human thought functioning, that we can call ‘human mental reality’. Being fascinated by our own mental functioning is clearly a bit ridiculous. Inversely, an active individual – being shown as a primary feature by Völuspá s. 17- has to take into account Óðinn’s counseling in order to understand the how and the why of his/her actions.

In this stanza, however, Óðinn insists on the importance of practicing *vitandi er vits*, i. e. to be conscious of being conscious. This could be looked upon by many as an unbearable snobbish intellectualism... which by itself shows how much the individuals of our civilization are afraid to be observed through sincere glasses. It is clear that to spend time

contemplating one's navel is a ridiculous attitude. Conversely, human activity – an essential humankind's characteristic according to Völuspá s. 17 - must include Óðinn's recommendation of to be thoughtful of the why and the how of one's actions.

The above definition of meta knowledge in a data base could straightforwardly apply to humankind by imagining than a 'small part' of our conscience is specialized in the observation of our conscience. This may be true though, but this is not at all what Óðinn suggests because he does not allude to such a partition. In order to avoid lengthy discussions on what conscience really is, for us and Óðinn, I will propose here a 'working definition' that does not claim to exhaust the topic of self-awareness, though it will be enough for us to illustrate in what to be *vitandi er vits* is already to contact the concept of infinity. We suggested above that the conscience of being conscious is obtained by a form of introspection. Now, in order to take into account the importance of action in the Old Norse thinking, let us state that it is a form of introspection which is not limited to the observation of our own mind, but which draws the conclusions of its observations as for the way of acting. All things considered, we will call 'conscience of our conscience' an introspection for action. For example, if someone always appeared antipathetic and that we become aware that he/she has many common features with a person we appreciate, it is possible that we decide to revise our opinion on him/her. This can then engage a series of actions and thoughts of which we will become conscious and who, in turn, will encourage other awakenings. This shows in a simple way how introspection for action will possibly generate an infinite number of ideas and actions. Obviously, 'infinity' here does not always entails a huge number: it means that there is no way to predict when the generative process will stop.

Since a human being cannot easily handle infinity, it is obvious that he/she will have tendency to either becoming confused, or his/her thought turn in circles. This is what explains the subjacent popular irony caused by those who acknowledge practicing introspection. On the contrary, in the present stanza, Óðinn says he admires this form of meditative mind as long as it avoids being trapped in his/her meditation and it can draw from it some useful conclusions.

We will also see that stanza 27 suggests in a negative way a similar behavior of conscience self-conscience. It concludes: "This man does not know, that he does not know anything, although he speaks much," which could be also stated as "This man is not conscious to be not conscious." This formula might look somewhat hollow but it is nothing less than a mirror of the positive statements in s. 18.

### *Spiritual meaning*

These explanations about the secular meaning of the stanza show the weakness that we do not acutely see how traveling, even very far, can bring these wonderful discoveries about oneself.

If, however, the word 'travel' takes the mystical meaning of a journey in the world of non-ordinary reality, then the link between the first and the last half of s. 18 becomes obvious. By journeying in the 'otherworld', the shaman apprentice will need to "lift much," acquire knowledge of the otherworld and by this will obviously reach an unusual "state of mind." I do not claim here that Óðinn's view of this "traveling far away" is exactly the same as what we call nowadays a 'shamanic journey'. I simply underline that the effect looked for by the modern practitioners of these techniques is very similar to what Óðinn describes in this stanza.

6 This line, which in Codex Regius reads *sá er vitandi er vits*, has caused difficulty, as is shown by the variations among translators. Since *vita* with gen. normally means 'to know, know of' (*margs vitandi* Vsp. 20, *barna veiztu þinna* Atlamál 84), Brate understood it as 'He knows what sense is'. But in Flateyrbók... we read *má hvern maðr [sjá], sá er vits er vitandi, at þessi augu hafi í einum hausi verið bæsi*, where the phrase clearly means 'anyone who has got any sense'. Cp. Fritzner... *vit* 5, where it is associated with such expressions as *varð ek svá fegin at ek þótumst varla vita vits síns* Heilag. i. 489, *þeir lágu sem daudir menn en vissu vits síns*. . . . *Vitandi vits* is still used in Icelandic, in the sense 'with one's eyes open, knowing what one is about'.

Some editors take the line as conditionally modifying *sá einn* in line 1, e. g. Heusler...: 'nur der Vielgereiste hat die Kenntnis der menschlichen Sinnesart, sofern er nämlich *vitandi er vits*'. But, as E. Noreen... remarks, this is syntactically unbelievable: if the last line is relative, it must modify the immediately preceding *gumna hvern*, and so Noreen explains that not even the travelled and experienced connoisseur of human nature can comprehend those who have not got sense. But this alternative is also unsatisfactory: the meaning proposed is most implausible and, as Sijmons... observes, after the absolute *gumna hvern* one expects no limitation. The only escape from the dilemma is to turn the line into an independent sentence by expelling the second *er* and then render 'He (i. e. the much-travelled man) is a person of sense, knows what he is talking about'...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 19\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

The drinker should not cling to the container  
though he drinks the mead with measure,  
he speaks usefully or keeps silence;  
of your lack of interaction  
no human blames you  
at your early departure.

#### Prose explanation

Óðinn provides no precision about the environment in which his advice is given. As everyone else, we can drink while eating. Drinking takes however a religious meaning in two ceremonies. During a *blót*, a purely religious ceremony, where little is ingested by the participants and much given to the gods. During a *sumbl*, which can be religious or secular, people ingest large amounts of alcoholic drinks.

The precise meaning of this stanza depends of the context in which people drink. Its general meaning is clear:

The drinker should not cling to his glass but drink at his own measure. He can also stay silent or be talkative and (if he is silent) nobody will be offended by his early leaving.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

19.

<i>Haldi-t maðr á kerí,</i>	Holds not the human ‘at’ the container
<i>drekki þó at hófi mjöð,</i>	he drinks though with measure the mead,
<i>mæli þarft eða þegi,</i>	he speaks usefully or keeps silence,
<i>ókynnis þess</i>	non-interaction of yours
<i>vár þik engi maðr</i>	he blames you non the human
<i>at þú gangir snemma at.</i>	at you go early at.

### **Bellows’ translation**

19. Shun not the mead, | but drink in measure;  
Speak to the point or be still;  
For rudeness none | shall rightly blame thee  
If soon thy bed thou seekest.

### **Commentary on the vocabulary**

The word *hóf* has two different meanings. One is ‘moderation, measure, proportion’, its contrary *óhóf* (non-*hóf*) means overindulgence. The other one means ‘banquet’. As shown by Evans’ commentaries below, you see how much the first two lines puzzled the editors. Translating *hóf* by ‘at his/her own measure’ instead of ‘with moderation’ enables to avoid all the disputes evoked by Evans. Nobody should cling to the drinking horn, and each one should drink to one’s own measure: a little sip for people sensitive to alcohol, a good gulp for most of us, a great gulp for these used to drinking.

The word *ókynni* (*ó-kynni*) is the negation of *kynni*. This last word means ‘interaction, friendly visit, friendly behavior’. Bellows translates *ókynni* by “rudeness”, Dronke by “ill-manners”, Orchard by “bad behavior.” The guest’s rudeness implied these three translations ask for some kind of forgiveness from the other guests. My ‘lack of interaction’ is more neutral and will better fit in a religious context.

### **Comment on the meaning**

In a secular environment, as in group of merry drinkers, nobody will need to cling to his glass or horn, except when he is no longer able to think clearly and not yet deadly drunk. In such a case, someone who leaves early is seriously shunned. I thus think that the secular meaning of s. 19 makes little sense.

If we turn to a religious ceremony such a *blót*, everything properly falls in place. During a *blót* where a horn goes from hand to hand, each one takes a sip and speaks to honor the god he/she addresses to and concludes by offering the horn content to the god. If a member of the ceremony feels unable to participate, i. e. unable to interact with the god(s) honored during this *blót*, it is much better that he/she leaves early and nobody will be offended by this behavior. It may also happen that someone speaks a too long time while holding the horn – he clings to the horn. This is really bad manners. We shall see when studying stanza 145: “*Betra er óbeðit en sé ofblótit*” (Better is not asked (or begged) than overdone *blót*.” In s 19, Óðinn teaches us that keeping a too long time in hand the drinking horn and speaking at length is ‘overdoing’ the *blót*.

In other words, whoever is silent, who participate out of curiosity ‘underdoes’ the *blót* and should leave. Whoever shows off excessive devotion overdoes it.

## Evans' commentaries

### 19

1-2 The sense of these lines is much disputed. Many of the earlier editors printed *haldi* and rendered 'A man may grasp the bowl, yet he should drink moderately'. But Codex Regius clearly reads *haldit* with the suffixed negative, and it is unsafe to emend, especially as *haldi* gives feeble sense to the first line. But what does *haldit* mean? *Halda á e-u* cannot mean 'abstain from sth. ', as numerous nineteenth-century editors believed. Cleasby-Vigfusson S. V. *halda* ... groups this passage with expressions like *halda á sýslu*, *halda á ferð sinni*, *halda á hinni sömu bænn*, where the verb means 'to be busy about, stick to, persist in', and renders 'to go on drinking, carousing', taking *ker* as figurative for *drykkja*... Finnur Jónsson objects that this would be a strange way to utter so simple a rule, and it is doubtful if *halda á* could have this meaning when followed by a concrete object ... Magnús Olsen 4 compares an Icelandic pre-Reformation wedding-toast which begins *Heilags anda skál skulum vér í einu af drekka, ok halda eigi lengi á* and thinks the first line means 'Don't sit for a long time with your bowl in your hand, but drain it off at a gulp'. But this leaves far too much to be read into the text. It is much more likely that the scene implied in our poem is one of *sveitardrykkja*, where the bowl goes round from man to man; the idea would then be 'Don't hold on to the bowl (drinking greedily) , but pass it on to the next man'. This seems plainly the most natural way of taking the line in itself, but does it give a clear contrast to the next line? (and contrast there must be, as *þó* shows) . Not if *at hófi* implies 'a moderate amount as opposed to a great deal', but we would get reasonable sense if we can take it as suggesting 'a moderate amount as opposed to nothing or next to nothing'. It certainly was regarded as bad conduct to drink too little; this was called *drekka sleituliga* or *við sleitur*.

3 This line is also found in Vafþr. 10.

5 *vár* is evidently from a verb *vá* 'to blame', only found here, though some insert it by emendation into st. 75...

## \*\*\*Hávamál 20\*\*\*

### A translation as literal as possible

The greedy *or* gluttonous man  
except if he would be conscious of (his) spirit  
he 'self-consumes' (because) of his difficult time (*or* his deadly sorrow) ;  
he often brings laughter  
(who with wise men comes)  
the stomach for the foolish human.

### Prose explanation

The greedy *or* gluttonous man, unless he is conscious of his spirit, consumes himself because of his difficult time. The stomach of the foolish human often brings laughter at one who joins wise persons.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

20.

*Gráðugr halr,  
nema geðs viti,  
etr sér aldrtręga;*

*oft fær hlęgis,  
er með horskum kemr  
manni heimskum magi.*

The greedy [or gluttonous] man  
except (if of his) spirits would be conscious  
he eats [metaphoric meaning: he consumes] self for (his) difficult  
time ; [also: deadly sorrow]  
often brings laughter  
who with wise men comes  
at the human (dative) foolish (dative. ) the stomach (nominative) .

### Bellows' translation

20. The greedy man, | if his mind be vague,  
Will eat till sick he is;  
The vulgar man, | when among the wise,  
To scorn by his belly (dative) is brought.

This transfer of the verb subject (nominative) , 'stomach', to a verb complement (here, dative) , 'by his belly' introduces the feeling that the 'wise ones' mock the current character because of his foolishness, while the text states that he is mocked because of his greediness.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The adjective *gráðugr* means greedy or, when associated to the belly, gluttonous. Bellows, Dronke and Orchard translate it by greedy, while Boyer chooses "goinfre" = gluttonous, pig. The use of the word nominative *magi* (stomach) as last word of the stanza shows that the scald wanted to underline this possible meaning. See the comments below for details.

The expression *geðs viti* is understood here as: *geðs* is the genitive of *geð* = 'mind, mood, spirits' and *viti* is the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of subjunctive of *vita* = 'to wit, to be conscious'. It clearly means 'to be conscious of one's mind' which echoes the *vitandi er vits* of s. 17. Again, the translators refuse to recognize an allusion to introspection or 'meta thinking' introduced in s. 17. Dronke and Boyer translate line 2 by: "unless he has good sense", Orchard by "unless he curbs his bent."

*aldrtręgi* = *aldr-tregi* = long-lasting-sorrow (→ deadly sorrow)  
*magi* = stomach, it is a technical word for a cow's maw.

### Comment on the meaning

Line 4 is ambiguous. We tend to understand that the wise ones are laughing at the foolish side of the character. Having fun at the expense of someone's lack of wit seems to me more childish than wise. It may mean also that the greedy one, when meeting wise persons, feels ridiculous, he 'laughs at himself', i. e. similarly to s. 18, he becomes conscious of his own greediness. So to say, the wise ones' mocking opens his inner eyes to his misconduct.

The words can be taken in their plain sense, and the stanza speaks of gluttonous people and their stomach is a part of their digestive tract. Alternately, the whole stanza is figurative and describes any kind of greediness, for material riches or for power. The absurdity of wise ones laughing at a physical feature, the belly, is here to point – for the *geðs vitandi* reader – at a figurative meaning.

Here is a translation where the metaphorical meanings are taken into account:

The greedy man  
who is conscious of his turn of mind  
starts hard times for himself;  
The root of greediness often brings laughter,  
when he is among wise men,  
on the foolish man.

As a short lesson of this stanza: “blind greediness ruins the soul, blind gluttony ruins the body.”

We still need to understand why being aware of one’s greediness or gluttony prevents from being ridiculous. At first, note that a *geðs vitandi* person is not foolish, thus line 6 suggests that such a person will not be scorned by the wise ones. Greediness or gluttony underline two ways of life for people who wants always more than what they get. A non-foolish person will avoid letting himself driven by these two flaws and self-derision is a good technique to control them, as said by line 2.

### Evans’ Commentaries

20

3 *aldr trega* ‘life-sorrow’ is taken ... both here and in its only other occurrence ... to mean ‘death’: the glutton eats himself to death. More probably it means ‘life-long misery’ ..., perhaps here specifically ‘grave illness’ ... compare OE *ealdor cearu*.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 21\*\*\*

This stanza insist on the gluttonry/greed theme in an almost violent way by understating that who indulges in these behaviours is less respectable than cattle.

### A translation as literal as possible

Herds know (when)  
they should be near their home  
and leave the pasture field,  
but the non-wise human  
never knows  
the speech or measure of his stomach.

### Prose explanation

Herds know when they need to leave pastureland and come back to their shed. A person slow of mind is unable to hear his stomach saying that it is full.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

21.

<i>Hjarðir þat vitu</i>	Herds that know
<i>nær þær heim skulu</i>	near their home should
<i>ok ganga þá af grasi;</i>	and go then off their pasture

<i>en ósviðr maðr</i>	but the non-wise human
<i>kann ævagi</i>	knows never
<i>síns of mál maga.</i>	of his 'of' speech/measure stomach

### Bellows' translation

21. The herds know well | when home they shall fare,  
And then from the grass they go;  
But the foolish man | his belly's measure  
Shall never know aright.

*Dronke*: size, *Orchard*: measure, for *mál*.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

In the expression *mál maga*, the word *magi* (stomach) is in the genitive case. The word *mál* we know from the title of this poem, *Háva-mál*, has many different meanings. The first is 'speech, language, tale, a suit (judicial action) , a case'. The second one is 'measure' taken spatially or temporally. The third is a drawing in the sense of an inlaid ornament on a weapon, which is out of context here. All our translators give it as a measure: "the measure of the stomach." The meaning 'speech' would tend to suggest a metaphorical understanding as in 'the speech of the stomach'.

Note in passing that *Háva-mál* means thus High's Speech or High's Measure. This last meaning is not absurd since *Hávamál* provides us with much advice on the way to assess, to measure our actions.

### Comment on the meaning

It is obvious here that the stomach's speech is not as expected as the one of our civilization: "I am empty," it is: "I am too full!"

A plain meaning is obvious: "Non wise persons are less able than animals to listen their stomach." As in s. 20, a metaphorical understanding is also possible: "Most animals are able to curb their greediness (because they can listen to their body) while non-wise humans are unable to do so (because they are deaf to the speech of their body and of their mind: they always will be greedy beyond their needs) ." This is particularly true for social greediness such as power-craving.

Stanzas 20 and 21 are slightly redundant with one large difference. In s. 20, uncontrolled greediness is said to be ridiculous. In s. 21; it is said to lower a human being level of morality under the one of a beast.

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 21

On the question of whether this strophe owes something to a Biblical or a Latin source (as argued respectively by Singer ...and Rolf Pipping ...) see p. 15 above. [*Here, see below*]

6 The *máls* of Codex Regius is defended ... by Bugge ..., but is plainly an error induced by the preceding *síns*.



## Second Intermezzo: A discussion of the supposed Christian influences on Hávamál

(Extract of pages 12-18 of Evans' introduction)

[At the end of a long argumentation, Evans concludes]... If this is accepted, the Gnostic Poem must antedate 960 (note 6) .

This attribution of the poem to pagan times has led many scholars to value it highly as giving us an unadulterated view of ancient Nordic, or Germanic, life and values; as Hans Kuhn ... (cp. e. g. Jón Helgason 1, 30 and Finnur Jónsson 3, 230 for similar sentiments) . This view of the poem as purely native and heathen has, however, been challenged sporadically, especially in recent years, by claims that some of the strophes betray Biblical or Classical influences, or can be paralleled by and therefore perhaps derive from medieval proverbs in the Continental vernaculars. **Nore Hagman**, for instance, brought together numerous supposed similarities with Ecclesiasticus as evidence that this Apocryphal text might have influenced Hávamál. But the examples adduced are fairly unimpressive, being only of a loose and general character, and are mostly not really saying the same thing at all: 'Better is the life of a poor man under a shelter of logs than sumptuous fare in another man's house' (Eccles. 29. 22) is quite different from 'a home of one's own, even a very modest one, is at any rate better than begging', which is the gist of Hávamál 36, and yet this is probably the closest of Hagman's parallels ...

(note 6) . A similar antedating is implied by the view (von See 1) that st. 17, 20 and 25 in Egill's *Sonatorrek* (c. 960) echo Hávamál 72, 22 and 15 respectively. (Von See can presumably only mean that these particular strophes antedate c. 960, since, as we saw, he does not believe that the Gnostic Poem ever existed as such. ) Magnus Olsen, *Edda og Skaldekvad IV* (Oslo 1962) 49, thought the use of *orósdír* in Egill's *Höfuðlausn* echoed Hávamál 76.

Again, **Régis Boyer** detected striking resemblances with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, all the more significant, he said, because such similarities are lacking for other books of Biblical wisdom such as Ecclesiasticus (Boyer 227) [His PhD thesis, Lille, 1972 "*Vie religieuse en Islande (1116-1264)*"]; Hagman's article is absent from his otherwise comprehensive bibliography. But here too the parallels are not at all close, as when Proverbs 27. 17 'Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend' is connected with st. 57, and sometimes they are not parallels at all, as when Proverbs 25. 21 'If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink' is associated with st. 3-4. It is true that both Proverbs and the Gnostic Poem lay stress on the connection between foolishness and loquacity; but need this be more than a coincidence? After all, the Book of Proverbs contains over eight hundred stanzas, practically all of them gnomic remarks based on observation and experience of life in a materially simple society; it would surely be startling if chance resemblances with Our Gnostic Poem did not occur here and there.

Occasional derivation from Classical writers has also been alleged. Roland Köhne noted that in the *De Amicitia* Cicero speaks of a man's 'so mingling his mind with another's as almost to make the two of them one' (note 7) and wondered if this might be the ultimate source of st. 44 with its *geði ... blanda*, and Rolf Pipping suggested that st. 21 could descend from Seneca, who in one of his letters draws a similar moralizing contrast between beasts, who know when they have eaten enough, and men, who do not, and in another letter actually uses the phrase '*stomachi sui non nosse mensuram*' in censuring gluttony (though

not, on this occasion, in contrast to the habits of the beasts) ; this answers closely to the *kann ævagi síns um mál maga* of our poem.

St. 21 had earlier been assigned to a Biblical origin by Samuel Singer, who referred to Isaiah 1. 3 and Jeremiah 8. 7, where men and beasts are compared, to the former's disadvantage, though not in any connection with over-eating. In a section on early Germanic proverbial lore in his *Sprichwörter des Mittelalters*, Singer adduces parallels, from the Scriptures and from medieval Latin and vernacular sources, to fifteen strophes, or portions of strophes, in Our Gnostic Poem and assumes a genetic connection (though in three of the fifteen instances he thinks Norse culture may be the donor rather than the recipient) (note 8) .

(note 7) . Köhne 1, 129. Cicero's remark, in *De Amicia* 81, runs ... 'quanto id magis in homine fit natura, qui et se ipse diligit et alterum anquirat, cuius animum ita cum suo misceat, ut efficiat paene unum ex duobus' .

(note 8) . Some of Singer's instances are noted in the Commentary. For a recent approach doing somewhat similar lines see Köhne 2, who adduces a number of Middle High German parallels which reflect, he maintains, influence on *Hávamál* from medieval German proverb poetry and popular wisdom.

...

[Later, Evans, speaking of s. 81, adds the following.]

The emphasis on the untrustworthiness of things has been taken by von See as a Christian theme, 'die Unsicherheit alles Irdischen' (4, 99) , thus linking *Hávamál* yet again with the learned-Biblical tradition of the Middle Ages. (13) But mutability becomes a Christian theme only when it is brought into contrast with the security and permanence of Heaven; von See has achieved this contrast by inserting the word *Irdischen*, but there is no warrant for this in the text of the poem. It is going rather far to claim that a piece of advice like 'Don't praise ale until you have drunk it' (81) implants the Christian moral of the transience and unreliability of this poor fleeting life! (This very strophe, as a matter of fact, contains a pagan allusion in what is manifestly a reference to cremation. ) As in the Gnostic Poem, the scene implied is Norwegian, or at any rate non-Icelandic: besides the cremation, note the wolf (85) , the snake, the bear and the king (86) , and the reindeer (90) .

### \*\*\*Hávamál 22\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

A person much missing  
and who badly shaped (his life)  
always laughs at something;  
he does not hit on the idea  
(he needs to know it)  
that he is not lacking of flaws.

#### Prose explanation

A person who lacks of everything and had little success in his life will laugh at everything. Though he does need to become conscious of them, he is unable to be conscious of his own flaws.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

<i>Vesall maðr</i>	The ‘deprived -of’ human
<i>ok illa skapi</i>	and badly has shaped
<i>hlær at hvívetna;</i>	laughs at ‘something-always’
<i>hittki hann veit,</i>	hits-non he knows
<i>er hann vita þyrfti</i>	is he (to) know the need
<i>at hann er-a vamma vanr.</i>	to him is-not blemish lacking.

### Bellows’ translation

22. A paltry man | and poor of mind  
 At all things ever mocks;  
 For never he knows, | what he ought to know,  
 That he is not free from faults.

### Commentaries on the vocabulary and the meaning

Note at first that the person criticized in this stanza is not non-wise or foolish as usual. He ‘in a state of lacking’ and he is unable to act properly (he ‘*illa skapi*’ = he ill shapes) .

What ‘lack-of’ is hinted at here? Since he is unable to perform what he wants to do in his life, I have the feeling that this ‘lack-of’ describes a person who always fails to achieve his goals. This is similar to the greedy one who always wants more and therefore “consumes himself in a deadly sorrow,” except that in s. 22, Óðinn seems to observe some kind of impotence. The last line suggests again that being conscious of our own state of mind is a solution to our failures.

The verb *hitta* means ‘to hit’ or ‘to bite’ as an intellectual metaphor in which you ‘hit on an idea’ and you ‘bite the bullet’.

The word *vamm* means ‘flaw’ and ‘blemish’. The last choice seems to me a better rendering of the skald’s point of view.

### Commentaries the meaning

In stanza 20 and several others, Óðinn criticizes people that lack spirit or intelligence. Here, one who ‘lacks of’ (*vesall*) lacks of everything, spirit and wealth.

This lacking person misses his goals and seems to be unconcerned by everything. This kind of unconcerned persons may be funny but their behavior may hide deep flaws.

### Evans’ Commentaries

#### 22

1 *Vesall* has been attacked on two grounds:

(1) allegedly, it fails to alliterate. This raises the question whether *v* can alliterate with a vowel; Gering thought it could, and adduced 17 examples from the Edda, as well as a few from scaldic stanza. . . The view that *v* can alliterate with a vowel was defended by ... [some]. It was attacked by. . . [others].

(2) on grounds of sense. This is a more cogent attack, for *vesall* means ‘wretched, miserable’, which does not fit. ... suggested emending to *ósnotr* (though apparently only on grounds of alliteration) ... advocated *ósviðr*, as in the preceding and following strophes, ... objecting that this failed to explain the intrusion of *vesall*, suggested the initial lines of st. 22 and 23 had been reversed; this would certainly give a more pointed meaning to 23...

2 *illa* is an adv. ; Finnur Jónsson explains the phrase as elliptical for *illa skapi farinn*, for which cp. Haraðr saga ok Hólmverja ch. 24: *mikill maðr ok sterkr ok illa skapi farinn, ójafnaðarmaðr um alla hluti...*

### \*\*\*Hávamál 23\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

A non wise human  
stays awake the whole night  
and thinks of anything;  
thus he is moody and tired  
who finds in the morning  
(that) all (his) misery is the same as it was.

#### Prose explanation

It is unwise to stay awake during the night, brooding over many ideas.  
Who does it wakes up tired and in a bad mood. His woe is just as it was.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

23.	
<i>Ósviðr maðr</i>	Non-wise human
<i>vakir um allar nætr</i>	stays awake ‘around’ the whole night
<i>ok hyggr at hvívetna;</i>	and thinks of [ <i>as in v. 22 hví-vetna</i> ] ‘something-always’ ;
<i>þá er móðr</i>	thus he is moody [ <i>or tired</i> ]
<i>er at morgni kemr,</i>	who in the morning comes
<i>allt er vil sem var.</i>	all what is (his) misery same was.

#### Bellows’ translation

23. The witless man | is awake all night,  
Thinking of many things;  
Care-worn he is | when the morning comes,  
And his woe is just as it was.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

Adjective *ó-sviðr* means non-wise. Bellows translates it by ‘witless’, Dronke by ‘unintelligent’, Boyer by ‘fool’. Orchard gives its proper meaning: ‘unwise’.

In s. 22 we already met *hvívetna* = *hví-vetna* with the meaning of ‘anything at all’.

The adjective *móðr* has a meaning similar to the one of ‘moody’.

The noun *vil* means ‘misery, disheartening’.

#### Comment on the meaning

A non-wise person is not always “unintelligent,” and I never observed that stupidity would induce insomnia, quite the contrary, by the way. Anxious insomnia is certainly not

reserved to unwise persons only. In reading this stanza, we all recognize some of our own nights and we tend to react mildly to this lack of wisdom, we tend to smile about it. In the other stanzas, however, non-wise behavior is always quite severely reckoned. This discrepancy deserves some comments.

Our civilization leads us to normalize this slightly hysterical behavior while a truly wise ancient Scandinavian knew how to control it. In the Northern Germanic civilization, we know that action and destiny are the master features of what defines a human being. Remember that *Völuspá* describes the still lifeless forms of Ask and Embla as being *lítt megandi* and *ørloglausa*, i. e. ‘little able-to-act’ and ‘destiny-less’. This means that whoever is unable to act is not yet really a human being. Since, during the night, we are supposed to take rest to be able to act the day following, the most elementary wisdom consists in resting during night without wasting our strength at being aimlessly worried.

We must also underline that the non-wise behavior is defined by “thinking of anything.” This is not analyzing problems with a cool head during the quiet of night. That kind of analysis can help us to better acting the following day, and that is wise. Óðinn does not condemn any form of nightly thinking, he only does useless worrying that leaves us exhausted the following day.

From the mundane point of view, this stanza means that the wise one is able of having good sleep, filled with dreams which bring him/her rest and good mood. This calm sleep is at the same time a goal and a challenge for all the non-wise ones we became in our civilization of non-stop unsettled individuals.

From the spiritual point of view, this stanza means that a wizard acts during the night and takes opportunity of the prevailing overall quietness and of his/her own unperturbed mood in order to carry on his work, such as healing his clients or affecting his opponents’ minds.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 24\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

A non-wise human  
believes each who is with him  
laughing to be (his) friend.  
He does not find (how) to understand  
their thought (i. e. , that) they speak badly of him  
when he sits with wise ones.

#### Prose explanation

The unwise one believes that everyone who laughs with him is his friend. He is unable to catch the idea that wise ones, when he is sitting among them, speak badly of him.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

*Ósnotr maðr  
hyggr sér alla vera  
viðhlæjendr vini.  
Hittki hann fíðr,  
þótt þeir um hann fār lesi,*

A non-wise human  
believes ‘for him/her’ all to be  
with-laughing as friend.  
He hits not [*as in 22: he is unable to understand*] he finds  
thought theirs of him badly they speak

*ef hann með snotrum sitr.*

if he with wise ones he sits.

### Bellows' translation

24. The foolish man | for friends all those  
Who laugh at him will hold;  
When among the wise | he marks it not  
Though hatred of him they speak.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

Once again, this stanza uses the word *ó-snotr* in order to speak of the 'un-wise' ones. I am careful in keeping this meaning when it is used several times in nearby stanzas. Translating *ósnotr* by a variety of similar words leads the reader to believe that several different flaws are described.

Note the opposition between an unwise one *ósnotr*, in the first line and the wise ones, *nostrum*, in the dative plural case, in the last line. Not only he is mistaken about his true friends but the wise ones despise him.

As underlined by Evans, the word *fár* is mainly used in the religious texts. Next stanza commentaries will explain meanings, and the relation between them, of *fá* and *fár*.

### Comment on the meaning

The meaning of each half stanza is obvious. They however do not seem to fit together while the couple *ósnotr/nostrum* underlines some kind of coherency. It will be really simpler for me to explain their deep coherency by using <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/OnTheContracts.htm>, on the meaning and conditions of friendship in the Indo-European civilization.

Looking a bit forward, we shall see that s. 30, 31, 32 will deal with several degrees of harshness in a joke. The general idea which is hinted at in all these stanzas is that it is easy to join a crowd of strangers and to joke with them. It is almost impossible for an unwise person to catch the threshold between good and nasty humor.

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 24

5 *fár* 'mischief, malice' ; *lesa fár um e-n* evidently means 'speak ill of someone, utter malicious slanders about someone'... *þat kann enn verða, at maðr vemk á þat, at lesa of aðra ok hafa uppi löstu manna*, and note *umlestr* 'slander', *umlassamr* 'slandrous', *umlesandi*, *umlesmaðr*, *umlestrarmaðr* 'slanderer' ; it is interesting that these words are found only in religious texts. The sentiments of this and st. 25 can be paralleled in a number of Continental proverbs (though none of them restrict their application to the unwise man) ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 25\*\*\*

### A translation as literal as possible

[As in 24] A non-wise human

believes each who is with him  
laughing to be (his) friend.  
When he finds that,  
(as) he arrives in the thing,  
few (people) as spokesmen for him

### Prose explanation

[As in 24] The unwise one believes that everyone who laughs with him are his friends.  
He becomes conscious that he has very few friends when he goes to the Thing.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

25.

*Ósnotr maðr  
hyggr sér alla vera  
viðhlæjendr vini;*

(see 24)

*þá þat finnr*

‘when’ that he finds

*er at þingi kemr,*

(when) to the thing he goes

*at hann á formælendr fáa.*

for him as spokesmen few.

### Bellows’ translation

25. The foolish man | for friends all those  
Who laugh at him will hold;  
But the truth when he comes | to the council he learns,  
That few in his favor will speak.

[Bellows’ footnote] 25. The first two lines are abbreviated in the manuscript, but are doubtless identical with the first two lines of stanza 24.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

We translate here *fáa* by ‘few’ and in a very different way in 33. We shall meet quite often a word beginning with *fá-* and its various translations may be puzzling for the reader. Here are a few explanations about these words.

In this stanza, *fáa* stands for ‘few’ but ON uses the root *fá-* in many ways.

The verb *fá* is very irregular and we meet it under several guises. It means ‘to find, to obtain’ but another form is also found, coming from the verb *fāga* and meaning ‘to paint, to draw’. For instance, *fá rúnar* means ‘to draw runes’ rather than ‘to obtain runes’, though the two meanings do not contradict each other.

Prefix *fá-\** is often used in order to add the meaning of ‘little-of-’ to a word. For instance, *fá-vitr* means ‘little wise’, i. e. , ‘unwise’.

Substantive *fár*, we met in the last stanza, s. 24, means ‘bad, badness, threat, plague’. This is a regular neuter word the declension of which does not show the form *fáa*.

Adjective *fár* means ‘few’. It is also irregular but we shall meet here only the regular cases: *fáa* for its singular masculine accusative, and later, in s. 33 its singular neuter dative *fáu*.

### Comment on the meaning

The prosaic meaning of s. 24 and 25 is quite clear: An unwise person is impressed by shallow signs of friendship with the result that the wise ones speak badly of him and they will not back him at the Thing.

I find it striking that the poem underlines twice the obvious, that is, a wise one is able to spot his true friends and the non-wise one is unable to do so. This repetition, as it is, hints at a kind of paranoid fear of treachery in the ancient Northern civilization. In order to better understand why there is nothing paranoid here, see <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/OnTheContracts.htm>. My argument relies on Dumézil's ideas on Indo-European contracts, as explained in his *Mitra-Varuna* (first published in 1940 and revised in 1948).

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 25

5 *er at þingi kómr* - most editors understand *hann* as the implied subject, but the verb may conceivably be impersonal, as in *er at morni kómr* ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 26\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

An unwise person  
thinks himself as all-knowing  
if he owns a wretched shelter.  
He does not know to hit (on the idea)  
what to say to others  
if people try him.

#### Prose explanation

A non-wise person thinks oneself to be all-knowing as soon as he owns a (any kind of) wretched shelter; he knows not (how) to understand what to say when people try him (that is: he is unable to understand what to answer to someone who is trying him).

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

26. (textual translation)

<i>Ósnotr maðr</i>	A non-wise human
<i>þykkisk allt vita,</i>	thinks himself all to know
<i>ef hann á sér í vá veru;</i>	if he to self in a wretched shelter;
<i>hittki hann veit,</i>	non-hits [as in 22 and 24 = does not understand] he knows
<i>hvat hann skal við kveða,</i>	what he shall 'with' say
<i>ef hans freista firar.</i>	If him (to) try [or to tempt] people [ <i>nom. plur. = subject of freista</i> ].

#### Bellows' translation

26. An ignorant man | thinks that all he knows,  
When he sits by himself in a corner;  
But never what answer | to make he knows,



When others with questions come.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

Evans comments clearly illustrate that *veru* (dative of *vera* = shelter) and *vá* created a large debate among scholars.

Evans says that *vera* should be also translated by ‘shelter’ in stanza 10, which I refused to do, see stanza 10 comments. Inversely, here in stanza 26, the meaning ‘they are’ is impossible. Besides, *í veru* means ‘in a shelter’, which is in perfect accordance with the context.

What about *vá*, then? As you will see Evans and other scholars managed to invent for this case the meaning: ‘nook, corner’ [that should be then a nominative (a subject) to what verb?]. Let us note that the word *vá-brestr* (m. à m. woe-accident) means an ‘unexpected strange noise’ by adding together two words hinting at a mishap. After all, the poets’ job is to show genius in handling words, no? Why then the poet could not create a new word associating ‘shelter’ and ‘woe’ in order to ‘build’ a linguistic wretched shelter? There is also a variation of *vá* as being a prefix with the same meaning as *var-*. In that case, the *vera* (shelter) is said to be a *var-vera*, which is ‘scarcely a shelter’. ‘Scarcely’ or ‘wretched’, both meanings lead to the same understanding. As a conclusion, I see no need for inventing an otherwise unknown meaning of *vá*, as Evans suggests.

### Comment on the meaning

This stanza and the next one belong to a group that stresses the idea that being together with other humans is necessary to express one’s wisdom or humaneness.

Stanza 26 underlines the non-wise one conceit as soon as he holds possession on any small thing. Stanza 17 already hinted at a ‘dense’ one who shows his true mind when a bit drunk. We shall see that 27 will clearly state that a non-wise one has better to stay silent. Finally, this tread of thought will blossom in stanza 57 where human speech is viewed as a feature primary to the definition of ‘what a human person is’.

Stanza 26 seems to purely treat of prosaic social relationship. People who cannot but utter silly words are obviously tiring and lower their social status. At least when non-friends are present, it is necessary to keep careful and avoid awkward jokes: such a lowering of your defenses is not very wise.

In this very case, I can illustrate this stanza by one of my weaknesses: I am unable to resist the urge of uttering a wretched joke, and do I pay for it! This certainly means that I am not (yet?) really a wise one, that is to say, in *Hávamál* context, I am not a powerful wizard ... which is certainly true.

### Evans’ Commentaries

#### 26

3 *vera* ‘refuge, resort’, as in 10 above. *Vá* may well be the common word ‘woe, calamity’ (as recently argued by von See...) . But Sigsk. 29 has: *at kváðu við kálkar í vá*, where ‘woe’ is clearly impossible, and from which scholars have deduced the existence of a noun of this form meaning ‘nook, corner’, either as a mere textual corruption of *vrá* (Bugge... who thinks the word may have baffled the scribe after the loss of ‘v’ before ‘r’ in West Norse) ... The rendering ‘corner’ gives better sense here than ‘woe’ and should be adopted.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 27\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

An unwise person  
who meets other ones  
has better to stay silent.  
None will know  
that he is hopeless  
unless he speaks too much.

This person does not know,  
he who knows nothing,  
though he speaks a lot.

#### Prose explanation

When he meets other people, an unwise person has better to close his mouth. Nobody will be aware of his deficiency unless he himself makes it known by his own chattering.

*Three last lines,*

*usual understanding:* Who knows nothing does not even know that he speak too much.

*another possible understanding [the one I favor]:* Even if he speaks a lot, he does not even know that he knows nothing.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

27.

*Ósnotr maðr  
er með aldir kemr,  
þat er bazt, at hann þegi;  
engi þat veit,  
at hann ekki kann,  
nema hann mæli til margt;  
veit-a maðr  
hinn er vettki veit,  
þótt hann mæli til margt.*

A non-wise human  
who with others comes  
that is best, for him to stay silent;  
none who knows  
at him non can [that he can nothing]  
except he (that he) speaks very much;  
knows-not a human  
he who nothing knows  
In spite of that he speaks very much.

#### Bellows' translation

27. A witless man, | when he meets with men,  
Had best in silence abide;  
For no one shall find | that nothing he knows,  
If his mouth is not open too much.  
(But a man knows not, | if nothing he knows,  
When his mouth has been open too much. )

[Bellows' comment 27. The last two lines were probably added as a commentary on lines 3 and 4.]

### Several translations of the last six lines

*Orchard:* no one will know that he isn't smart / unless he's talking too much; / but the man who knows nothing doesn't know / just when he's talking too much.

*Dronke:* Nobody knows / that he has no knowledge, / unless he talks too much. / A man who knows nothing / does not know / even that he is talking too much.

*Boyer:* No one will know / that he is incapable of anything / Unless he speaks too much; It is unknown / that he knows nothing / if he avoids speaking too much.

As you see, Bellows, Dronke and Orchard chose the 'usual understanding' of the last three lines. Boyer simply uses other words to repeat lines 4-6.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The verb *mæla* means 'to speak, to stipulate'. It can then hint at a somewhat emphatic speech. In the old texts, it is seldom used to designate the uttering of magical words.

### Comment on the meaning

Everyone agrees that this stanza explains that an unwise (or ignorant) person reveals him/herself by speaking too much. It adds to 26, in its second triplet, that he ignores he is unable of properly acting, and in its last triplet that he ignores he knows nothing. This looks like an apology in favor of silence. My understanding makes again use of the links between a contract, wisdom and friendship and I would rather suggest that the unwise one – who lacks friends as explained in <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/OnTheContracts.htm> – cannot freely express himself, he has better to listen to what the 'wise ones' say in order to see where and how he can join a group of *vinir* who will support him.

Boyer's version of the last three lines differs from the other versions. Boyer paraphrases lines 4-5-6 whereas English translations bring up this additional information that an ignorant person is unaware of that he/she speaks too much. This information, available in the literal translation, shows that the last three lines strongly assert that this *ignoramus* knows really nothing, not even that he does not know anything.

This leads me to the following three remarks.

Firstly, the fact that 27 contains or not three redundant lines is significant because I noticed that each time *Hávamál* seems incoherent or, as here, simply redundant, this hides a wink in direction of the magic aspects of life. We agree all on the fact that 27 seems to be rather trite and, without these last three lines, its magic aspect would be undetectable.

Secondly, if we choose to understand these last three lines as I suggest, by "Even if he speaks a lot, he does not know that he does not know anything," then the bond with introspection becomes obvious. In this case, 27 is related to 18 which declares that the magicians have a 'form of spirit' such as they are *vitandi er vits*, their spirit is conscious of itself. This comment leads to the awareness of a link with s. 18, i. e. with introspection.

Thirdly, s. 27 applies to a non-wise person. Especially in view of 18, we can suppose that it describes the 'non behavior' of a wise person. This non-wise person is unable to realize that his excessive speech is nothing but the one of a super parrot that can utter a limited number of sentences. These sentences are more or less out of tune since life brings us in an infinite variety of contexts that must be described by an infinite number of ideas. The wise one is not submitted to such a limitation and his/her sentences will always be perfectly adapted to the current context.

S. 27 describes a ‘mindless person’ and prepares us to s. 28 describing an individual “believes to be knowledgeable’ by including a new function of human’s mind, one able to generate an infinite numbers of ideas and actions.

As a side remark, all this is not “pure speculation” as specialists so often state. Instead of treating Hávamál as a set of disconnected stanzas, I use here the links between various stanzas to build up my argument.

### Evans’ Commentaries

27

*maðr* is a necessary insertion in 1. On the supposed Biblical origin of the exposure of folly by loquacity see p. 15. [Given here with stanza 21]

de Boor 373 plausibly suggests that lines 4-6 and 7-9 are interchangeable ‘tradition-variants’.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 28\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

He think himself well knowing  
who can ask questions  
and answer, or both together;  
nothing to hide  
they can, the sons of men,  
because the people gets it all.

#### Prose explanation

Whoever has got the power to both ask and answer the questions believes himself to be full of knowledge. The truth, however, is known by the people because the one who has got this power is unable to hide something to the ‘sons of men’.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

28.

<i>Fróðr sá þykkisk,</i>	Learned so self-think
<i>er fregna kann</i>	who ask questions can
<i>ok segja it sama,</i>	and speak it together ;
<i>eyvitu leynd</i>	nothing [or lack of wit] hide
<i>megu ýta synir,</i>	they can of men the sons
<i>því er gengr um guma.</i>	because that it goes among humans.

#### Bellows’ translation

28. Wise shall he seem | who well can question,  
And also answer well;  
Nought is concealed | that men may say  
Among the sons of men.

## Commentary on the vocabulary

Verb *segja* main meaning is ‘to say, declare, tell’, it never implies answering an interlocutor’s question. In the context of a dialogue, it is however often translated by ‘to answer’. Here, there is an implicit dialogue (or a monologue of the non-wise one) and a translation by to answer is possible if not necessary. Inversely, in stanza 63 we meet a case where it is absolutely necessary to preserve ‘to say’.

The word *eyvit* is here in the dative case because the hidden thing (*leyna* = to hide) , that is the complement of verb *leyna*, is seen as a dative in ON. This word indeed means ‘nothing’, but its primary meaning, *ey-vit* is ‘non-spirit’. In this stanza context, it seems to me that the primary meaning is more significant than the new one. Stanza 28 speaks of a person who believes to be *fróðr*, well-knowing, and who ignores he is actually *ey-vit*, ‘spirit-less’.

## Comment on the meaning

As shown by Evans’ commentary, some believe that the two halves of the stanza do not fit together. He also underlines the similarity between 28 and 63, both of which speak of someone who can “*fragna ok segja* (ask and say) ”. The meanings of these two stanzas really oppose each other. The three first lines of 28 are obviously ironical since the person described “believes himself” to be wise, and does *sama*, together, questions and answers. We all understand why he fails to hide his mind emptiness. The stanza is thus perfectly coherent as a whole, as opposed to Evans’ claim. Stanza 63, which is coherent in the same way, describes the opposite case: a true wise one knows how to ask (to his masters) and answer (to his pupils) and he does not call himself wise, he (“*vill heitinn horskr*”) will be called a wise one (by other people) .

I see here a way to say that people who are powerful enough to be deaf to the others (since they can do also the answers) cannot hide what they really are (witless persons) to the people.

It is funny to see Óðinn criticizing those who can impose their speeches on the people (nowadays: politicians and medias) . He says: “you believe yourselves very important while everyone is aware of your pettiness.”

## A first comment on *fregna ok segja sama* (the 2<sup>nd</sup> is in s. 63)

The two stanzas 28 and 63 use the expression *regna ok segja* which means ‘to question and say’ but the present stanza adds *sama* in 28, which leads to the understanding “to pronounce both questions and answers.” We thus will understand that the three first lines of s. 28 are ironical since who say the questions and the answers are ridiculous. Conversely, the three first lines 63 are laudatory, the subject is able to ask to someone and to express an opinion (perhaps with another one) in the form of a discussion that enriches the knowledge of both.

In these two stanzas, the last 3 lines describe the social position of the subject of each stanza. In 28, he is mocked as it should be while, in 63, he is seen as handling a significant but dangerous position.

## Evans’ Commentaries

6 *gengr um* - either ‘befalls’, as in 94, or ‘is said about’... *ganga um* 4 and *ganga* 19. Whichever view is taken, the connection between the two halves of the strophe is obscure; the ‘explanations’ of Heusler... and von See... are somewhat obscure in themselves. It may well be, as many editors have thought, that the two halves did not originally belong together, though it is certainly curious that, as von See points out, what appears to be the same combination of notions also occurs in 63 (whose two halves Heusler..., interestingly enough, sought to sever) .

### \*\*\*Hávamál 29\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

He speaks enough  
who is never silent  
with absurd written letter, *or* carved runes, *or* staffs;  
A tongue (which is) quick to speak  
(which) cannot hold back (its speech)  
often hurts itself (when) it sings (*or* shouts, *or* caws, *or* sings spells) .

#### Prose explanation

The person who speaks enough (= too much) by his absurd writings or by misplaced carved runes has chattering tongue which often harms itself when it sings (*or* shouts, *or* caws, *or* sings spells) .

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

29.	
<i>Ærna mælr,</i>	Enough he speaks
<i>sá er æva þegir,</i>	who never is silent
<i>staðlausu stafi;</i>	(‘of’) nonsense (with) staff or written letters; [runes are often written on a staff]
<i>hraðmælt tunga,</i>	quick to speak tongue,
<i>nema haldendur eigi,</i>	take holding not
<i>oft sér ógótt of gelr.</i>	Oft self no-good shouts <i>or</i> sings <i>or</i> caws <i>or</i> sings a spell.

#### Bellows’ translation

29. Often he speaks | who never is still  
With words that win no faith;  
The babbling tongue, | if a bridle it find not,  
Oft for itself sings ill.

Dronke translates the third line, *staðlausu stafi*, by “unfounded statements,” Orchard by “in nonsensical speech” and Boyer by “nonsense.” I understand it as “badly put runic spells,” which is not basically different, though it is more precise.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

The word *staðlausa* = *stað-lausa* = ‘place-without’, is generally understood as ‘absurdity’, and line 3, *staðlausu stafti*, is always understood as ‘absurd speech’.

For the noun *staft* and how it is carefully not translated in classical translations, see stanza 8. Let us recall what is needed for this stanza. It is here in its dative form, *stafti*, and it is quite polysemic: ‘staff, stake, written or carved letters (to speak of runes)’, ‘knowledge, wisdom’, ‘letters of the Latin alphabet’. As you can see, none of these meanings look very much like a ‘word’ or a ‘speech’ as it is usually rendered. The meaning ‘absurd speech’ is not impossible in everyday language but in Óðinn’s way of speech, it should be rendered by ‘absurd or misplaced runes’. As already recalled in stanza 27, Egill’s saga provides an example of such runes carved by an apprentice wizard who obtains no more than sickening the maid he is lusting after.

The verb *gala* regularly makes *gelr* in the 3rd person singular of the present indicative and means ‘to crow’ but also, metaphorically, ‘to sing a spell, to utter an incantation’ (in C-V). Lexicon Poëticum (shortened in Lex. Poet. in the following) gives more details than C-V. In addition to the many magic uses that it provides, it gives the meanings: “*canare* (to sing, to crow, to ring), *garire* (to chirp, to chatter), *ululare* (to howl as a wolf), *clangere* (to shout as a bird, to sound like a trumpet).” This review ends with de Vries who gives: “*singen* (to sing), *schreien* (to shout); *zauberformeln hersagen* (to utter formulas of witchcraft).” For the etymology of *gala*, he sends back to *gjalla* and *galdr* in its special meaning of ‘magic song’. He stresses that the proper etymological meaning of the word group associated to *gjalla* is not ‘to be noisy, to shout’, but the one of ‘religious song’ and, still further in the past of ‘light, glare’. It is thus clear that the meaning of ‘to shout, to shriek’ that I propose to add to the other meanings of *gala* is possible in spite of C-V’s presentation. In fact, I make a point of adding the meaning ‘to shriek’ because a magic incantation can be either ‘mumbled, hummed’ or ‘shouted, shrieked’ and *gala* can perfectly include these two behaviors.

In stanza 156, we shall meet an example of using *gala* where the context asks for understanding it as ‘to shriek’. In this stanza, Óðinn states “*ek gel und randir* (I ‘*gala*’ under the shields)” and the ‘chant’ in this case can hardly be uttered in another way than shrieking.

We will often meet this verb in the following and I will then recall its meaning, while referring to the present stanza for details.

### Comment on the meaning

The commentators’ preferred meaning avoids any allusion to the teaching of *galdr*. It however leads them to see here nothing but a paraphrase of 27 and other stanzas that advise silence. This rejection of a magical interpretation makes Hávamál duller since it seems to repeat several times the same slightly insignificant statement.

Coming back to the text itself, note that if the words of the three first lines are given their usual meaning, we get a meaningless statement: “Who cannot keep silent expresses himself enough by written letters.” This hints at a hidden meaning we can obtain a more spiritual meaning as follows.

The first three lines criticize who “express themselves” too often by using runes. Runes are a magical mean of expression and its use must stay restrained and thoughtful. This excludes ostentatiously dealing with them.

The last three lines clearly refer to *galdr*, a magical singing or yelling of incantations (*gala*). The ‘tongue’ that is unable to use *galdr* with parsimony in order to invoke the spirits will destroy itself. This good advice foretells of stanza 145: “*betra er ósent / en sé ofsóit*:

better if he/she does ‘send’ at all than he over uses (magic) .” Both stanzas claim that magical powers must not be overused.

### Evans’ Commentaries

29

3 *staðlausu* is generally taken as a defining gen. sg. of a noun *staðlausa* ‘baselessness, senselessness’, though the possibility that it is weak acc. pl. of an adj. *staðlauss* cannot be excluded. The noun does not occur elsewhere (though *staðleysi* is found) ; *staðlauss* is found once, rendering Latin *pavidus* ‘fearful’. *Stafi* ‘words’, cp. *sagði sunna stafi* Sigrdr. 14.

5 *haldendr* may be either nom. subject or acc. object of *eigi*.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 30\*\*\*

I believe that the various commentators of stanzas 30-31-32 somewhat confused the ideas they express. I ‘ll try now to show that these stanzas deal with quite different topics.

This kind of ‘oratory sport’ seems to have been quite casual for ten centuries around year 1000 as a banquet entertainment in the Scandinavian and Celtic worlds as illustrated by an Edda poem called Lokasenna (Loki’s Flyting). It tends to merge together poetry and insults (often of sexual content).

### A translation as literal as possible

In the twinkle of an eye  
no one shall act with another,  
even though he is visiting a friend;  
He believes himself very knowledgeable  
if nothing is asked to him  
and he is allowed to loiter, (keeping his) skin dry.

### Prose explanation

*Three third lines:*

Even when being with (backed by) a friend, or an acquaintance, or family, do not deal with another one too fast, or with too much connivance.

*Three last lines:*

Do not annoy, leave quiet and ask nothing to someone who believes himself (or knows himself for being) knowledgeable and clever.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

30.

*At augbragði  
skal-a maðr annan hafa,  
þótt til kynnis komi;  
margr þá fróðr þykkisk,  
ef hann freginn er-at  
ok nái hann þurrfjallr þrúma.*

In the twinkle of an eye  
shall-not a man toward another act,  
even though towards a known one he comes;  
much who well-knowing self-think,  
if he asked he is not  
and is allowed he dry-skin to loiter.



### Bellows' translation

30. In mockery no one | a man shall hold,  
Although he fare to the feast;  
Wise seems one oft, | if nought he is asked,  
And safely he sits dry-skinned.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

**Line 1:** *augabragð* = wink of an eye. Since it is here in the dative case, it can mean 'in/by/with' a wink. C-V states that *at augabragði* means 'to ridicule' and uses the example of this stanza, which is far from obvious. In stanza 5, the context does imply an ironical wink, while in stanza 68, fortune can leave you in the wink of an eye, and speed is implied. Irony is explicit in 31 and dispute in 32. It would be redundant to have these themes broached in 30. Another point is that it is used under the form: '*hafa at augabragði*' where *hafa at* means 'to act'. In 30, the two implicit meanings that are left are: acting rapidly, or acting in connivance. These two meanings are well-illustrated in the Saga of the Sworn Brothers (*Fóstbræðra Saga*). Chapter 11 describes how that the saga hero and Katla's daughter are attracted to each other by "*Hún hefir og nokkuð **augabragð** á honum og verður henni hann vel að skapi.*" meaning: "She would sometimes **glance** at him and he pleased her," which expresses some connivance between them. In chapter 11, the hero sees a thief going away in the 'wink of an eye', obviously expressing speed.

**Line 4:** *fróðr*. Note that stanza 30 (as will 31 and 32) no longer speaks of a *snotr* (wise) person, but of a *fróðr* (well-knowing) one. This person *þykkisk* (thinks him/herself) knowledgeable which is easier to check than being wise or not. We already met *þykkisk* in stanza 28 where the context drove us to see irony in this self-judgment. In 30. 4 and even more so in 31. 1, irony is not so obvious. Without changing the meaning of the stanza, we may understand *þykkisk* as meaning: 'he/she behaves as a knowledgeable person, be it deserved or not'.

**Line 6:** *þruma* = to mope, to loiter.

**Line 6:** 'keeping dry one's skin'. To loiter does not hint at fear, which might perhaps make you sweat, it hints at slowly moving, which actually prevents you from sweating. The last line thus alludes to someone who keeps quiet: the guest must not be bothered, he stays 'dry-skinned' as rendered by Bellows, he/she does not get involved.

### Comment on the meaning

Stanza 30 describes a scene relating two friends. One of these two characters should not show irony to the other one. They could join their strength in order to harm a third non-friend character. The second half states that this option is not a good one, they should leave him quiet. This understanding insures the coherence of the stanza, in opposition to Evans' statement that "the two halves fit poorly together."

The second half states also that when the third character is knowledgeable (who is or believes to be a wizard) it even best to avoid starting a fight with him.

### Evans' Commentaries

30

The two halves fit poorly together.

3 *þótt* is virtually 'when'.

5-6 For the co-ordination of two conditional clauses, where the first has *ef* with indicative and the second has subjunctive without *ef*, cp. *ef þú kannt með at fara, ok bregðir þú hvergi af* Njáls saga ch. 7 ... and numerous other instances in Nygaðrd...  
6 *þurrfjallr* ‘with dry skin’, i. e. in dry clothes.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 31\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

He thinks himself very knowledgeable  
who runs away  
when a guest scoffs at a guest;  
he does not quite know  
who grins during the meal  
though he chatters with monsters.

#### Prose explanation

He who believes (or knows) that he is very learned will go away when the guests scornfully make fun at each other. He who smiles a lot (he takes part in the fun among guests) does not really know (what is at stake) while he chatters with monsters.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

31.

<i>Fróðr þykkisk,</i>	Very knowledgeable he self-thinks
<i>sá er flótta tekr,</i>	the one who flight takes,
<i>gestr at gest hæðinn;</i>	the guest at guest scoffed;
<i>veit-a görla</i>	he does not know quite
<i>sá er of verði glissir,</i>	the one who at meal grins
<i>þótt hann með grömum glami.</i>	though he with monsters chatters.

#### Bellows' translation

31. Wise a guest holds it | to take to his heels,  
When mock of another he makes;  
But little he knows | who laughs at the feast,  
Though he mocks in the midst of his foes.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

**Line 2:** *flótta tekr*, literally means “flight he takes.” Evans points out, however, that people run away quite often in the sagas, and this way of speech is never used. I do not believe, as Evans claims, that “that there is a deep seated corruption in the text,” but that the scald used a very rare way of speech carrying a very peculiar meaning. We cannot know what it might have been, but we can guess it describes the peculiar way a learned person leaves a room where he feels ill at ease.

**Line 3:** *hæða* does not evoke a nice way of joking, it can even mean ‘to scoff’.

**Line 6:** *gramr*, daemon, monster; plural: *gramir* or *gröm* = demons. This word is too harsh to be used for qualifying a mere enemy: it implies someone deeply bad.

**Line 6:** *glama* = to talk idly.

### Comment on the meaning

Remember the three first lines of stanzas 24 and 25 stating that a non-wise person believes whoever smiles at him is his friend. They deal with the behavior to take by a wise one in front of a seemingly friendly person. Stanzas 31 and 32 bring up a similar topic, now relative to a group of people, all seemingly friendly among them, including the one described by the stanza who 'believes himself' being knowledgeable.

The only difficulty in this stanza is in the relation with *þykkisk*. As Evans says, if the person who *þykkisk* knowledgeable has better to leave, then *þykkisk* reduces to a simple 'he is'. I agree, and I ask the question: "Why using *þykkisk*?"

In the stanzas before, we accepted the idea that self-belief in one's wisdom carries an ironical meaning. In s. 30 we supposed that, inversely, self-belief in one's knowledge is not ridiculous, and we will transfer it to s. 31. In stanza 30 context, the reflexive form was not really ironical. The reason for it is simply that knowledge is more objective to check than wisdom (we will deal a bit later with the sorcerous type of knowledge). By the way, Óðinn will provide us with examples in which the wise one does behave as a fool in front of women. As I said in commenting s. 30, even if your knowledge is false, you still can rightly believe yourself being knowledgeable. I'll add here, that in *Hávamál* context, to be or not to be a real sorcerer is not the question. Stanzas 30 and 31 explain that, as long as you believe yourself being one, your behavior in front of other people should be the same. Who only never took the slightest sip of knowledge is unable to be aware of the danger included in staying in a place where jokes burst out, each possibly understood as an insult by a touchy guest.

In the last line, the word *gröm*, daemons, is quite exaggerated for speaking of mere human enemies, even if evil ones. It however fits perfectly the descriptions of their journeys given by Siberian shamans. An apprentice sorcerer (who *þykkisk* knowledgeable) or a really knowledgeable sorcerer are going to meet the same daemons in the Other World.

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 31

1-3 The drift of this half is not clear, and there is a metrical difficulty in 3, since (as was shown by Bugge... the first syllable of a disyllable at the end of a *ljóðaháttir* 'full line' must be short. (A long vowel followed immediately by a short vowel, as for instance in *búa*, counts as short for this purpose. ) ...

The most usual interpretation is that a guest who mocks a fellow guest is then wise to take to flight. This makes sense, but it reduces *þykkisk* in effect to *er*, it takes *fróðr* as 'prudent, sensible', which is hard to parallel, and it assumes an expression *taka flóttu* 'take to flight' that does not seem to appear elsewhere despite the frequent occurrence of the notion in the sagas ...

In view of all the difficulties, it is likely that there is a deep seated corruption in the text...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 32\*\*\*

### A translation as literal as possible

Many men  
are kind to each other  
but push each other during a meal;  
disputes among men,  
will always be  
(when/because) guest play pranks to (or madden) guest

### Prose explanation

Many people start behaving nicely with each other but will push themselves over the edge during a meal. There always will be disputes among men when a guest plays pranks to another guest.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

32.	
<i>Gunnar margir</i>	Men many
<i>erusk gagnhollir</i>	self-are kind to one
<i>en at virði vrekask;</i>	but at meal self-thrust;
<i>aldar róg</i>	of the people the strife
<i>þat mun æ vera,</i>	that will also be
<i>órir gestr við gest.</i>	he plays pranks guest with guest.

### Bellows' translation

32. Friendly of mind | are many men,  
Till feasting they mock at their friends;  
To mankind a bane | must it ever be  
When guests together strive.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

**Line 32. 3:** Due to the history of the pronunciation of the Old Norse language, the dictionaries give the meaning of verb *vreka* at the entry *reka*: = to drive, to push, to thrust, to compel.

**Line 32. 6:** *óra* does not mean 'to strive' (Bellows) or 'to brawl' (Orchard), or 'to bicker' ("*se chamailler*", Boyer) but 'to madden' (Dronke) and, following Cleasby-Vig., 'to rave, to play pranks'. Again, the proper meaning is much stronger than the one used by the translators, Dronke excepted.

**Coordination between 32. 5-6:** the coordination between line 5 and 6 is left undefined in this stanza. We can imagine it as being equivalent to a 'because' or to a 'when'.

If "line 5 because line 6," it means that "guest are always maddened by quest".

If "line 5 when line 6," it means that "when guest is maddened by guest then discord shows up."

Reading 'when' is more optimistic relative to human spirit than reading 'because'. Bellows uses an explicit 'when', Dronke and Orchard insert a ':' which hints at a 'because' and Boyer explicitly states that "guest is '*toujours*' (always) maddened by guest." This Calvinist way of looking at humanity does not fit a god such as Óðinn, nor his civilization.

### Comment on the meaning

Stanza 30-32 share a common theme: fun and pranks are a short way to bickering and fights. A learned person will be able to observe when they begin to go too far and will leave them behind. Stanza 32 makes clear that given proper circumstances, human nature starts hiding hate under pseudo-jokes that will become harsher and harsher, and end by revealing the ‘monster’ hidden into people who are looking of any occasion to start a fight.

This stanza **does not tell** us that human nature is such that people that have fun together will always end up fighting. **It does tell** us that people who want to raise fight will naturally start it by faking good mood in such a way that their aggressiveness will slowly raise up, as if their putative (possibly innocent) adversary was the one responsible of their dispute. In other words, human nature is not normally monstrous, but people with a monstrous nature hide it behind false smiles: Man is not naturally bad, bad persons are naturally hypocritical.

The three stanzas 30-32 certainly apply in the rational world. We may now remember that a “knowledgeable one” can also be a sorcerer or anyone who believes him/herself being a wizard. These stanzas apply with even more acuity to a wizard. A few bad words uttered by a drunkard should not lead to send a malediction spell. The wizard should leave before anyone goes over the edge. If he/she stays, and these bad words hide a deep hostility, he/she may be forced to make use of his/her magical powers because he/she is facing a ‘monster’.

Maria Czaplicka (in *My Siberian Year*, Mills & Boon, London, 1916) witnessed such a case and she describes the catastrophic consequences of the dispute – for everyone, her included, as I understand the full story. You can read her report at: <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/shamecurse.htm>.

### Evans’ Commentaries

32

2 *erusk* - reflexive forms of *vera* (with reciprocal sense) are very rare, but [possible, see] Cleasby-Vigfusson S. V. *vera* B IV; and a runic inscription on a comb found in Trondheim (c. 1100?) is normalized *Liut[ge]r ok Jóhan erusk vinir...*

4 *aldar róg* ‘strife of (i. e. among) men’...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 33\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Early in the morning, a meal  
should the man often take  
except (if) he goes toward an acquaintance [*or*: a kinsman];  
(otherwise) he sits and tosses around triflingly  
he behaves as if overwhelmed  
and is not able to ask many things.

#### Prose explanation

*First three lines*: a substantial breakfast is necessary in the morning, unless he is joining a friend or his kin. More generally, before

undertaking anything you must build up your strength, unless you are dealing with close friends.

*Last three lines:* if you do not take enough care, you will not have enough strength to carry out your tasks and will get nothing out of this ineffective work. If what you undertake is ‘family business’, it is better to build up your strength altogether.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

<i>Árliga verðar</i>	Early of a meal
<i>skyli maðr oft fáa,</i>	should the man often take
<i>nema til kynnis komi.</i>	except toward an acquaintance [ <i>or:</i> a kinsman] he comes
<i>Sitr ok snópir,</i>	He sits and idles dismally,
<i>lætr sem sólginn sé</i>	behaves as swallowed ‘be’ (subj. )
<i>ok kann fregna at fáu.</i>	and can ask of few things.

### Bellows’ translation

33. Oft should one make | an early meal,  
Nor fasting come to the feast;  
Else he sits and chews | as if he would choke,  
And little is able to ask.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

Adverb *árliga* means ‘yearly’ or ‘early, in the beginning’. A parent word, *árligr*, means in modern Icelandic ‘well fed’. The modern acceptance thus strongly connotes food in plenty.

This perhaps led Boyer to translate *til kynnis* by “to the banquet” instead of keeping its proper meaning of “visiting family or friends” as Dronke does. This slight mistranslation has the property to lower the meaning of this stanza to its most prosaic understanding. If its character goes to a simple banquet, it is impossible to understand his excessive behavior as described in the second half.

The verb *fá* has several meanings, already given in s. 25. I recall that it means ‘to catch, to grasp, to win’ and also its contrary, ‘to give something’, and, metaphorically, ‘to be able to do’. It can also be a contraction of the verb *fága*, it then means ‘to draw, to paint’. In this stanza, its complement is the genitive case of *verðr*, it thus means ‘to take, to earn’ as in the expression *fá konu* = to take, to earn a woman (to marry her) .

*snópir*: 3<sup>rd</sup> person indicative of *snópa* that means

- following C-V: ‘to idle about dismally’
- following de Vries: ‘*schnappen, lungern*’ (‘to snap at something *or* to snatch, to lounge around’)
- hence various translations of Bellows, Boyer, Dronke and Orchard, respectively ‘to chew’, ‘to move jaws’ or ‘to sniff round’ or ‘to stare greedily’.
- I chose ‘to toss around triflingly’.

*sólginn*: past participle of *svelgja*, to swallow. Thus *sólginn* = swallowed. To speak of someone who is ‘swallowed or choked by the environment’ we usually say he/she is crushed or overwhelmed by it.

### Comment on the meaning

We can see in the prose explanation that it is enough to widen a bit the meaning of *verður* ('meal') in order to find a perfectly simple prosaic meaning to this very disputed stanza (see Evans below) . It describes a rather clannish behavior where the clan gathers before going into action. This may seem a bit strange today. Less than 100 years ago, however, when harvest was still a communal and athletic business in France, everyone would prosaically follow this stanza advice.

In order to understand the spiritual meaning of this stanza, we must remember one well-known fact about shamanism. All shamans describe their activity as taking place in an otherworld, or in 'non-ordinary reality', where they meet powers that can be either friendly or ferocious. If your journey rides towards friendly powers, there is no need to prepare it, these otherworld friends will help you to gather power. Inversely, if you meet merciless spirits, you need a long training before going to the otherworld. Otherwise, you are bound to lose the battle. As this stanza describes so accurately (it alludes to a type of séance called *útiseti* = 'to sit outside') , you are going to be lost in the otherworld, with two results. At best, you will *setja ok snópa* (*physically* stay sitting and *spiritually* toss around triflingly) . At worse, you will feel being *sólginn* (swallowed, smothered) by the powers of the otherworld. Your journey will properly become a 'night-mare' as if a *mara* was sitting on your chest and would smother you (*mara* is the proper etymology of 'mare' in nightmare) . The word *sólginn* no longer is ambiguous in this understanding: Your feeling will be the one of being swallowed and then smothered by the powers of the otherworld.

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 33

2 *opt* probably means 'as a rule, regularly' ... Some editors have understood 1-3 to imply 'Eat early, unless you are going on a visit - in which case don't eat at all, but wait until you reach your host' ... Much the best explanation is that of M. Olsen 5, who renders 'Normally eat early, unless you are going on a visit (in which case you should eat somewhat later, so as not to arrive famished) . '

4 *snópa* is found only once elsewhere in ON, in a stanza in Gautreks saga ... In the present passage it must mean something like 'hang around hungrily, restlessly craving food'.

5 *sólginn* probably means 'famished' ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 34\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Greatly twisted way  
(has) whoever towards bad friend  
though (this bad friend his housed) near a road.  
But towards a good friend  
lays a winning way  
though he (the good friend) be longer to travel to.

#### Prose explanation

Meeting up with a bad friend goes through meandering ways even if his dwelling stands nearby an easy to ride road.

A good friend may be living further away but there are shortcuts to meet him.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

<i>Afhvarf mikit</i>	bad turn ['twisted way'] great
<i>er til ills vinar,</i>	he who until bad friend
<i>þótt á brautu búi,</i>	though on a road lives
<i>en til góðs vinar</i>	but until good friend
<i>liggja gagnvegir,</i>	lies a 'gain-way' [a beneficial way]
<i>þótt hann sé firr farinn.</i>	though he be farther traveled.

### Bellows' translation

34. Crooked and far | is the road to a foe,  
Though his house on the highway be;  
But wide and straight | is the way to a friend,  
Though far away he fares.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The word *braut* deserves some comments. It indicates a road through rocky or wooded zones. It thus may be a crooked path. The scald clearly wanted to also hint at its usefulness to avoid hardship. This stanza obviously plays with the different words to speak of a road. This friend may be a person, a book or even a religion depending on the reader's state of mind.

The past participle *farinn* makes it clear the 'he' had traveled; 'he' thus should refer to the good friend. He is presently living far away.

### Comment on the meaning

The meaning of this stanza is quite obvious: traveling towards an enemy is always complicated while traveling towards a friend always seems straightforward. In other words, as easy it may look to have companionship with a false friend, your relationship with him/her will turn out to be torturous. As difficult as it may look to find a real friend, your relationship with him/her will always feel easy.

This stanza, as opposed to 33, does not refer to the physical, nor in any special way to the mystical. It refers to the psychological and the social. It may help to understand its deep meaning by referring to s. 44, which will tell us that "you have to mingle in spirit with your friend." Even when your friend is 'traveling far' in spirit, you will easily find a path to join him. Even if your non friend is still nearby you in spirit, it will be almost impossible to meet him. This applies also to ordinary thinking: even if you share the same belief with a non-friend, you will sooner or later find a way to disagree. If you disagree with your friend at start, you will always find ways to meet an agreement or at least compromise.

### Evans' Commentaries



6 ‘Though he is gone further off’. It may be, though, that Finnur Jónsson is right to suppose that we have here an instance of *fara* transitive with acc. object: ‘to come upon, overtake, meet’ ; thus, ‘though he is (to be) met with further off’ (so also Cleasby-Vigfusson s. v. *fara* B I 2) .

### \*\*\*Hávamál 35\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

He must go away,  
the guest must not be  
always in one same place.  
The loved one will be loathed  
if he sits at length  
in the rooms of another one.

#### Prose explanation

A guest should not stay as if glued be to his chair, he has to move away.  
Even if his host loves him, a guest will achieve to be loathed if he sticks around too long.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

<i>Ganga skal,</i>	Going away he must
<i>skal-a gestr vera</i>	must-not the guest be
<i>ey í einum stað;</i>	ever in one position
<i>ljúfur verður leiðr,</i>	loved will be loathed
<i>ef lengi sitr</i>	if at length he sits
<i>annars fletjum á.</i>	of the other rooms in.

#### Bellows' translation

35. Forth shall one go, | nor stay as a guest  
In a single spot forever;  
Love becomes loathing | if long one sits  
By the hearth in another's home.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

The word *ey* is used as if it were a prefix where ‘*ey-\**’ means: ‘always-\*’. Its normal meaning when alone is ‘island’. The scald might well have wished to suggest that the guest stuck in a house is as much noticeable as an island in the middle of water.

#### Comment on the meaning

As in 34, this stanza is relative to social relationships. Even with a friend, you should not stick to him: doing it is a non-friendly behavior. It again applies to all kinds of situations, including your friends in the otherworld.

## Evans' Commentaries

35

. . . editors compare Egils saga ch. 78: *þat var engi siðr, at sitja lengr en þrjár nætr at kynni*. [Today this sentence is found in chapter 81. "it was not the custom to stay more than three nights on a visit."]

### Hávamál 36-40

"On earning material riches"

\*\*\*Hávamál 36\*\*\*

"home, sweet home"

A translation as literal as possible

The best is to own a place where to live  
even though it is small  
each man is (feels good) at home;  
although he only owns two goats  
and his dwelling is roofed by (mere) ropes,  
this is better, though, than (being compelled to) begg.

ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation

<i>Bú er betra,</i>	A house is better
<i>þótt lítit sé,</i>	although small be
<i>halr er heima hverr;</i>	man is at home each;
<i>þótt tvær geitr eigi</i>	although two goats has
<i>ok taugreftan sal,</i>	and rope-roofed hall,
<i>þat er þó betra en bæn.</i>	that is though better than a prayer.

Bellows' translation

36. Better a house, | though a hut it be,  
A man is master at home;  
A pair of goats | and a patched-up roof  
Are better far than begging.

[Bellows' footnote] 36. The manuscript has "little" in place of "a hut" in line 1, but this involves an error in the initial-rhymes, and the emendation has been generally accepted.

[Dronke and Orchard reject this emendation and keep 'little'.]

Commentaries about the vocabulary

The word *bæn* means a prayer (as meant by Christians) , and also a request, a boon. In Christian context where a prayer can become a plea for divine help, the meaning 'a prayer to God' would be acceptable. In a Germanic context where the gods are not begged for

miracles, the meaning of ‘begging’ is more likely and this is the word used by the four translators I refer to.

### Commentary about the meaning

As far as no emendation seems to be acceptable as noted by Evans, let us keep the text as it is, even though it violates the rules of scaldic poetry.

The meaning is obvious: “As humble as it might be, my home is my hall.”

These simple words do not seem to carry any magical meaning. We should however consider that most of the wizards described by Dillmann are usually very well embedded in their social environment. Similarly, Siberian shamans of both sexes, besides their spiritual role, participate in the mundane or even menial activities of their clan. This strongly suggests that magic is not a kind of work but a way of life that adds up to the everyday work that all have to perform. Viewed from this perspective, stanza 36 says that wizards should own at least their own home in order to be free to practice their art, otherwise they are no much better than ordinary beggars. I’ll jokingly put under a syllogistic form s. 36: It tells us:

“Magic practice is not a work, nothing but work deserves salary, thus a wizard who is paid for his/her magic is a beggar.”

People they help cannot show their gratefulness by giving them some kind of salary, but by freely making gifts. In our present day society, I do not think that this maxim is still relevant especially for these who practice any kind of magic healing.

### Evans’ Commentaries

#### 36

2 lacks alliteration. . . [It is probable that] the supposition that 1-2 are an old proverb incorporated in the poem without alteration, and ... suggests that *lítit* gives such perfect meaning (which is true enough) that the poet decided for once to dispense with alliteration. But lack of parallels makes this implausible. **No wholly persuasive emendation, however, has yet been advanced.** Among suggested substitutions for *lítit* are *búkot* ..., *borlítit* ..., *bjarglítit* (... found only in modern Icelandic) and *búð* ... *þót séi bragðlítit*, *Bú*, *þótt sé lítit*, *betra er*, ... *en biðja sé*, (which is rewriting rather than emending ... [Even if it violates the strict rules of Scaldic poetry, I wonder if it could not be possible that the three long vocals of line 2 replace one single alliteration.]

5 *taugreptan* (only here) evidently refers to a house whose *raptar* ‘rafters’ are of *taug*, ‘ropes’ or perhaps ‘withies’, instead of timber. For the characterization of the poorest type of household, compare *Rígsþula*, where *þræll* and *þír* tend pigs and goats (12) while the farmer Karl is depicted as breaking in oxen and erecting buildings of timber (22) .

### \*\*\*Hávamál 37\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

[The three first lines are identical to the ones of 36:

The best is to own a place where to live  
even though it is small  
each man is (feels good) at home;]  
his heart bleeds  
who has to beg

while he is in charge to feed ‘someone’ (to feed himself and some other people) .

### Prose explanation

The last line needs some explanation. “To feed someone” might well mean “to feed oneself.” This meaning is the one given by Bellows and Dronke. Orchard and Boyer give a more neutral translation “to beg for food.”

### ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation

<i>Bú er betra,</i>	A house is better
<i>þótt lítit sé,</i>	although small be
<i>halr er heima hverr;</i>	man is at home each;
<i>blóðugt er hjarta</i>	bleeding is the heart
<i>þeim er biðja skal</i>	of one who beg must
<i>sér í mál hvert matar.</i>	for self in time [‘in’ times (when) ] who(ever) he feeds.

### Bellows’ translation

37. Better a house, | though a hut it be,  
A man is master at home;  
His heart is bleeding | who needs must beg  
When food he fain would have.

[Bellows’ footnote 37]. Lines 1 and 2 are abbreviated in the manuscript, but are doubtless identical with the first two lines of stanza 36.

In Dronke, last line is “a morsel for himself every mealtime,” and “(to beg) for food at every meal.” in Orchard and Boyer.

### Commentaries about the vocabulary

In last line, the relative pronoun *hvert* is a neutral accusative which can well mean “whoever it might be.” It can point at the character that the stanza addresses, but it can as well point at any one of his kin.

### Commentary about the meaning

Stanzas 36 and 37, which begin by the same lines, are obviously a variation of the same idea. Their common point is that owning a dwelling protects from falling into begging, but s. 36 evokes the personal humiliation of the character, while s. 37 alludes to the sorrow of being unable to feed his own kin.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 38\*\*\*

“non-friend, non-sweet friend”

A translation as literal as possible

Of his weapons  
a man should not, on the field,  
go away further than a footstep;  
because he never knows for sure  
on the ways outside, how much near  
is the man's need of a spear.

### Prose explanation

One sentence is broken in three pieces in this stanza. This is perfectly usual within scaldic poetry but obscures the word for word meaning: A man should not, on the field, be further than a *feti* (from a foot) from his *vápnum* (weapons) and should stay *nær* (near) his *geirs* (of his spear) . That is: [(1<sup>st</sup> half) On the field, a man must not leave his weapons one foot away, (2<sup>nd</sup> half) because he is not sure to know how much near, on the high ways, is the man's need of a spear.]

### ON Text and its litteral pseudo English translation

38.

*Vápnum sínum  
skal-a maðr velli á  
feti ganga framar,  
því at óvíst er at vita  
nær verður á vegum úti  
geirs um þörf guma.*

(Away) from weapons his  
should-not a man the field on  
a footstep to go further,  
because 'at' non-sure [or non-wise] is to know  
near becomes on the ways outside  
of a spear about the need of the man.

### Bellows' translation

38. Away from his arms | in the open field  
A man should fare not a foot;  
For never he knows | when the need for a spear  
Shall arise on the distant road.

### Commentaries about the vocabulary

In the second line, the 'á' of 'velli á' applies to *velli* which is the dative of *völlr* = field, ground. A battlefield is a *vígvöllr*, and the still famous place of meeting called *Thingvellir* means - or meant - 'the fields of the Thing' though they are placed in a tectonic vale.

### Commentary about the meaning

It is quite clear: We live in a dangerous world.

### Evans commentaries

38

2 *velli á* probably means no more than 'out of doors' (surely not 'on the battlefield' as Holtsmark 4, 147 suggests) .

### \*\*\*Hávamál 39\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

I did not find the magnificent person  
such he feeds goodness  
(*can also mean*: such he shows off his goodness)  
that he keeps silence when receiving,  
so little generous [*or*: so little stingy]  
in the way of rewards, if he receives some.

#### Prose explanation

[Depending on the manuscript (as given by Gering, 1904) , this stanza shows different readings that prevents us from giving to it a unique meaning. The variations are given as: [OR: *variations*]. This is not the problem of an editor who chooses to read this or that as Evans seems to imply in his comments. The ‘usual’ variations in possible meanings are marked as before [*or* usual meaning variations in the dictionaries] ]

Lines 1-3. I did not find a so munificent person who feeds his goodness [*or*: *who flaunts his goodness*] and who expresses acceptance [OR: *who expresses his refusal of acceptance*, OR: *who is silent when he accepts*] when he receives a gift.

Lines 4-6. Nor he is of his wealth little generous [OR: *little stingy*] as long as he is rewarded, if it happens.

#### ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation

39.	
<i>Fannk-a ek mildan mann</i>	I have found-not I the mild [ <i>or</i> munificent] human
<i>eða svá matar góðan,</i>	or thus (he) feeds [ <i>or</i> eager to show off his] goodness
<i>at væri-t [OR: væria, væri]</i>	at would be [OR: <i>would not be</i> ] to receive [OR: <i>to accept</i> ] he
<i>þiggja þegit,</i>	is silent [he is not silent to receive = he acknowledges what he receives <i>or</i> he refuses what he receives]
<i>eða síns fear</i>	or of his wealth
<i>svági gjöflan [OR: glöggvan,</i>	not so free-giving [OR: ( <i>not so</i> ) <i>generous, open</i> ],
<i>örvan],</i>	
<i>at leið sé laun, ef þægi.</i>	at the way [he is ‘on his way to’ = going to] be (subj. )
	rewards, if he receives [ <i>or</i> accepts]

#### Bellows’ translation

40. None so free with gifts | or food have I found  
That gladly he took not a gift,  
Nor one who so widely | scattered his wealth  
That of recompense hatred he had.  
[Bellows note] 40. The key-word in line 3 is missing in the manuscript, but editors have agreed in inserting a word meaning “generous.”

[Bellows calls ‘40’ what we call here ‘39’. The first editor, Rask, hesitates and proposes after *svági: aurfan* or *örvan*. (*generous*) Bugge proposes: *gjöflan* (*free-giving*) .]

#### Commentaries about the vocabulary

Since the several existing versions more or less contradict each other, there is no way to decide with certainty what says this verse. In line 3, *væri-t* is the negation of *væri*. In line 5, *gjöflan* means generous while *glöggvan* means stingy.

The translators do not make use of the fine variations in *góðr* meaning, here in its accusative masculine form *góðan*. It obviously means ‘good, rich’ but it may also be slightly ironical. For example, *góðr matar* means “he is a good host who invites generously ». It however may also imply that the host is eager to be thought as being good (he loves to show himself in the role of a good host. )

### Commentary about the meaning

It is quite striking to see that, in spite of its various versions, the overall meaning of this stanza is clear: In one way or another, wealthy people will always be careful of their wealth.

This stanza seems to me more derogatory than laudatory. I thus tend to believe that this stanza criticizes an apparently generous man who flaunts his hospitality and his wealth. He knows when he needs to thank but he is stingy in his rewards. He is also ‘generous’ (with himself) in matters of refunding.

### Evans commentaries

39

[Some commentators] ... note similar expressions in Swedish runic epitaphs: at Hagstugan in Sodermanland ... four sons erected a stone in memory of their father *Dómara, mildan orða ok matar góðan*, and ... *mildan við sinna ok matar góðan* (spelling normalized) . Both these inscriptions are in verse.

3 Most scholars appear to take this line as conveying the idea ‘that he would not accept a gift if it were offered to him’ .... But this follows poorly on 1-2 (for it is no denigration of a man’s generosity that he is also willing to accept a gift) and, ... it is hard to see how such a meaning can be deduced from the text. 1-3 must rather mean: ‘I never met a man so generous, or so liberal with food, that *þiggja* was not *þegit*, to accept was not (reckoned as) accepted, i. e. that accepting (of hospitality from him) was not (in his eyes) a gift (and therefore demanding repayment)’ . . .

5 ... The general sense of 4-5 must be something like ‘or so generous with his money’. Most editors insert *gjöflan*, others *örvan*, though they differ as to retaining or omitting *-gi*...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 40\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Of his riches  
that he arduously builds  
a person should not suffer;  
he often spares for one disliked  
what he thought hoarding for a loved one,  
(things) fare worse that he is aware of.

## Prose explanation

*First three lines (classical understanding) :*

“Do not refrain making use of your money.”

*First three lines (personal understanding) :*

Nobody should take too much pain in gathering wealth.

*Last three lines:*

It often happens that what has been painfully spared for a beloved one falls in the hands of a disliked one. Things do not happen in the way they are expected to do.

## ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation

40.

*Féar síns*

*er fengit hefr*

*skyli-t maðr þörf þola;*

*oft sparir leiðum*

*þats hefr ljúfum hugat;*

*margt gengr verr en varir.*

Of his/her wealth

that ‘in order to fetch’ [supine form] he/she raises

should’ nt the human the need endure;

often he/she spares for the disliked one

what he/she raises for the dear one (was) thought;

much goes worse than (he/she) is aware of.

## Bellows’ translation

39. If wealth a man | has won for himself,

Let him never suffer in need;

Oft he saves for a foe | what he plans for a friend,

For much goes worse than we wish. .

[Bellows’ footnote ] 39. In the manuscript this stanza follows stanza 40. . [Bellows calls ‘39’ what we call ‘40’ ].

*Translation of the first three lines*

*Dronke:* “Of his own goods, / that he’s gained, / a man should not suffer shortage.”

*Orchard:* “The goods that a man has acquired, he ought not stint to spend;”

*Boyer:* “Of our money / And of what we have obtained, / We should not refuse to enjoy.”

## Commentaries about the vocabulary

*Féars síns* is an obvious genitive (complement of a noun) . The noun it complements only can be either *maðr* (= a human person) or *þörf* (= need, necessity) . A ‘man of his wealth’ makes little sense, while a ‘need of his wealth’ is obvious.

In line 3, *fengit* cannot be a neuter since there is no other neuter to associate to it, thus it is supine form (supine of ‘to do’ is ‘in order to do’) .

C-V gives two main meanings to the verb *þola* has: ‘to suffer, to bear, to endure’, the other one is ‘to feel at rest’. De Vries only gives ‘to suffer’.

## Commentary about the meaning

The first three lines say that “a man should not endure the need of his riches,” which can be understood as all translators do, “enjoy your wealth” or, as I understand it, “no need to



suffer for acquiring wealth.”

Instead of a somewhat coarse meaning that supports greediness (“enjoy as much as you can when it is still time to do so”), I understand this stanza in the same way as 20 and 21 that mocks greed/gluttony.

### **Evans commentaries**

#### **40**

Von See... takes the sense of 1-3 to be ‘Be generous (to others)’. But ‘one should not endure need of one’s money, which one has acquired’ would be a very tortuous, even impossible, way to express this simple notion, and it is not the case, as he avers, that 4-5 impose this interpretation. The sense is rather ‘Don’t hesitate to make use of your money; for, after all, if you do save it, it may very well end up in the hands of someone you wouldn’t have chosen’.

### **Comment on 36-40**

These last four stanzas apparently carry very little teaching of magic matters. If I dare carrying on with the idea that teaching magic pervades Hávamál, I am driven to the idea that greediness of any kind indeed is “nothing but ruin of the magician’s soul” ... though excess of destitution is a shame and a grief. As I recall in s. 36, Dillmann noted that Icelandic sorcerers are rather well-off. Moreover, none of them looks really destitute, none of them is very interested in something else than his/her knowledge of magic.

### **Hávamál 41-46** **“friend, sweet friend”**

#### **\*\*\*Hávamál 41\*\*\***

### **A translation as literal as possible**

With weapons and clothing (*or* dangers)  
friends should take delight,  
this what is the most obvious.  
These who give back in turn, and give again,  
stay friends the longest time  
if it ‘undergoes’ to become well.

### **Prose explanation**

The most visible side of shared friendship shows up in their gifts in weapons and [*classical understanding:* ] clothing [*personal understanding:* ] danger. (*That is:* friends take delight in sharing weapons and dangerous conditions) . They will stay friends that exchange many gifts, and this will last longer than for other people, if this is Óðins will.

## ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation

<i>Vápnun ok váðum</i>	(With) weapons and clothing [if <i>váð</i> ; or dangers if <i>váði</i> ]
<i>skulu vinir gleðjask;</i>	should friends self-rejoice,
<i>þat er á sjálfum sýnst;</i>	that is on one-self the most visible [obvious];
<i>viðurgefendr ok endrgefendr</i>	‘in-return-of’ -giving ones and again-giving ones
<i>erusk lengst vinir,</i>	are-self longest friends
<i>ef þat biðr at verða vel.</i>	if that abides to be well.

### Bellows' translation

41. Friends shall gladden each other | with arms and garments,  
As each for himself can see;  
Gift-givers' friendships | are longest found,  
If fair their fates may be.

[Bellows' footnote] 41. In line 3 the manuscript adds “givers again” to “gift-givers.”

### Commentaries about the vocabulary

Both words *váð* (clothing) and *váði* (danger) give *váðum* in the dative plural case.

The word *sýnn* means ‘visible, not hidden’ but Cleasby-Vigfusson introduces a meaning ‘sightly’ (= comely) specially for this line. For once, this looks to me a pure invention done to render more ‘charming’ this line, that does not deserves such an insult.

The verb *biða* means ‘to abide, to undergo’.

The way of speech for a friendly behavior ‘*viðurgefendr ok endrgefendr*’ deserves more attention than deleting *endrgefendr* as being redundant. The most characteristic feature of friendship is provided by the special way they interact together seems out of place to me. This way of speech gets its majesty from the Hávamál, not from a saying, visibly inspired by the poem. By the way, the meaning of this saying is quite clear: it speaks of these people who provide a ‘return gift’ and who, besides, are not shy at giving and giving again, instead of feeling compelled to return something equivalent to what they have received.

Evans' discussion around *viðurgefendr ok endrgefendr* seems out of place to me. This way of speech gets its majesty from the Hávamál, not from a saying, visibly inspired by the poem. By the way, the meaning of this saying is quite clear: it speaks of these people who provide a ‘return gift’ and who, besides, are not shy at giving and giving again, instead of feeling compelled to return something equivalent to what they have received.

The verb *biða* means ‘to abide, to undergo’.

### Comment on *viðurgefendr ok endrgefendr*

In stanza 18, we commented at length the expression *vitandi er vits* (here called VeV) in order to show how this way of speech opens an intellectual horizon that introduces the idea of what can be ‘handling an infinite number of objects and their relations’ in humankind's mental reality of. Let us now see how this new relation ‘*viðurgefendr ok endrgefendr*’ (VoE) will provide a new facet of this intellectual horizon.

Let us apply VoE to a simple pair of friends, friend1 and friend2. Let us suppose that, for example, friend1 does a gift (a *gefendr*) to friend2. This first gift will initialize the

manifestation of friendship between our two friends. Friend2 having received a gift must, in return (*viður*), do a gift to his friend1. The process of exchange as organized in our civilization could stop there. In Norse civilization and for friends, on the contrary, the need for redoubling gifts (*endr-gefendr*) generates an endless process since friend2 who receives a second gift will have himself to do make a second gift to friend1, and so on.

We note that *endrgefendr*, far from being redundant, is a necessary condition to build an endless friendship, an ‘eternal’ one within the limits of human duration of life). Similarly to stanzas 18 and 27, this introduces the concept of a life long friendly relation. Is this a good thing? It is not always certain, but it is a way of proving to friend2 that friendship **persists** in friend1. All things considered, each gift is a way of showing, for that which offers, that it wants to maintain the friendly relation and, for that which receives, of noting the preservation of this relation.

In our civilization where gifts are done at an appointed date and without being always offered to true friends, though the need for ‘answering a gift by a gift’ still continues, we realize that many people sell back the non desired gifts and this characterizes the common indifference between gift givers. All things considered, this obligation of *endrgefendr*, if desirable to maintain a ring of friendship, has been perverted to become a way of expressing lack of friendship by offering undesired gifts to pseudo-friends.

### Commentary about the meaning

The double meaning of *váðum* should not be ignored. In a peaceful environment, we may be expected to exchange beautiful weapons and rich clothing. In a warring context, friends are expected to share efficient weapons and common danger. Note however that the whole poem express mistrust in whoever is hooked on material riches, especially the last two stanzas. Rich clothing does not fit well ‘clothing’ as exemplified by the citation, below in Evans’, where they fit perfectly for the sycophants’ “rings of gold.”

This stanza alludes to destiny on a fatalistic way: the friends do their best so that their friendship lasts a long time but their friendship can at any moment be broken by the death of the one of them.

Evans’ commentary on the importance of a shared generosity is certainly relevant.

### Evans commentaries

#### 41

3 ‘That is most manifest on oneself or. . . on themselves’ (*sjálfum* may be sg. or pl. ). What can this mean? Richert 8-9 understood it as ‘One knows this best from one’s own experience’, and this has been widely followed ... This goes back to Sveinbjorn Egilsson’s ‘*hæc (arma vestesque) in ipsis sunt maxime conspicua*’, and is far more plausible; ... compare Haraldskvæði: *á gerðum sér þeira / ok á gullbaugum / at þeir eru í kunnleikwn við konung* “One sees from their garb and their rings of gold that they are on familiar terms with the king”. . . *Þat* refers to the whole content of 1-2: the idea is that the reciprocally exchanged gifts which they bear on their bodies give the most manifest testimony to their mutual generosity.

4-5 ... expelled *ok endrgefendr* as tautologous. . . drew attention to a Faroese proverb recorded by Svabo (1746-1824) : *Endigjeer o vingjeer eru laangstir Vinir*, which Matras renders in ‘normalised Norse form’ as *endrgerð ok vibrgerð eru lengstir vinir*. Svabo translated the proverb as ..., **officia redintegrata amicitiam diutissime conservant** [The Latin verb *redintegrare* means ‘to start again, to restore’]...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 42\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Of his friend  
a man shall be a friend  
and repay gift with gift;  
laughter with laughter  
a land owner must handle  
but falsehood with falsehood and lie.

#### Prose explanation

To friendship one should answer by friendship, and to gift by gift, and to laughter by laughter. Falsehood, however should be answered by falsehood and lie.

#### ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation

<i>Vin sínum</i>	Friend to him
<i>skal maðr vinr vera</i>	shall the human friend be
<i>ok gjalda gjöf við gjöf;</i>	and repay gift with gift;
<i>hlátr við hlátri</i>	laughter with laughter
<i>skyli höldar taka</i>	will the 'land-inheritors' take
<i>en lausung við lygi.</i>	but falsehood with falsehood and lie.

#### Bellows' translation

42. To his friend a man | a friend shall prove,  
And gifts with gifts requite;  
But men shall mocking | with mockery answer,  
And fraud with falsehood meet.

#### Commentaries about the vocabulary

The word *hlátr* means 'laughter'. It is often used with the meaning of 'not so kind laughter'.

A *höldr* is a law term. It names someone who owns his land by inheritance from his forefathers. Dronke translates it by "good men" and Orchard by "folk."

The verb *taka* obviously means 'to take'. It however connotes quickness, as in 'to seize' or 'to grasp'.

Both *lausung* and *lygi* mean falsehood. The second one may also mean 'a lie' this is why I translate it by "falsehood and lie."

#### Commentaries about the meaning

For once, the overall meaning is obvious.

Several other stanzas have been warning us about false friendship that may easily deceive a 'non wise' one. The "repaying" as in the third line is a simple way to show true friendship. It thus says: if someone you believe to be a friend is reluctant to "repay a gift," acknowledge that you have been a fool to believe him/her a friend.

The second half goes from friendship to enmity. Laughing together is a mark of good friendship and friendly competition in outwitting each other is a delight of the spirit. However, some hostility can show in laughter. Hostile or ironical laughter is repaid by trying to outwit your opponent irony. When you meet declared hostility (falsehood) , do not hesitate to overbid on your enemy.

### **\*\*\*Hávamál 43\*\*\***

#### **A translation as literal as possible**

Of his friend  
a man shall be a friend,  
to him and to his friend;  
but of his non-friend  
a person should not  
be a friend of the friend.

#### **Prose explanation**

In line 3, 'him' and 'his' refer to the friend of the 'man' in line 2. Everyone should be friend of his friends, and friendship propagates from one friend to another one.

In the second half-stanza the 'man' has a friend and a non-friend. His friend cannot be in friendly terms with his non-friend. Thus, friendship does propagate among friends, and one non-friend cannot be inserted in any friendship chain.

#### **ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation**

43.

<i>Vin sínum</i>	To friend his
<i>skal maðr vinr vera,</i>	shall a human friend be,
<i>þeim ok þess vin;</i>	to this one and of this friend.
<i>en óvinar síns</i>	but of the non-friend his
<i>skyli engi maðr</i>	should not the human
<i>vinar vinr vera.</i>	of the friend the friend be.

#### **Bellows' translation**

43. To his friend a man | a friend shall prove,  
To him and the friend of his friend;  
But never a man | shall friendship make  
With one of his foeman's friends.

## Commentary on the vocabulary

There are no real problems in understanding the words of this stanza, the problems are relative to grammar. As Bellows, we try to render a dative, as *þeim*, by translating it by 'to', while we render a genitive, as *þess* and *vinar*, by 'of'.

## Comment on the meaning

The stylistic performance of this stanza somewhat hides the simple message that friendship cannot be one-sided, it has to be a reciprocal feeling. In fact, the definition given here is a variation of the classical one for a transitive [last three lines express transitivity in a negative way] and symmetrical relation:

If  $\rightarrow$  is a symbol « is\_friend\_of », then

$(x \leftrightarrow y)$ ,

$([x \rightarrow y \text{ AND } y \rightarrow z] \text{ IMPLIES THAT } x \rightarrow z)$ .

That a *vinr* could have a mathematical definition in Hávamál is not at all trifling as it may seem. It underlines how much simply friendship is defined in the ancient Germanic world – and how much it is binding and hard to practice. As said in <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/OnTheContracts.htm>: friendship is a contract that binds you to your friend, not an emotional (and somewhat soppy) relationship as we understand it today.

Obviously, a transitive relation can structure a finished set as well as an infinite one. In the case of the friends, this relation can exist between a few friends but it is also always opened to addition of one or several friends, provided that they check the property of transitivity for all the former friends. This shows that the relation between friends, even if it can extend potentially to an infinite number of people becomes in practice increasingly difficult to respect when their number grows. Stanza 43 delivers the lesson that what we called 'infinite' in 18 and 41, depending on how the circumstance may turn out, may be a quite small number in practice. Nevertheless the idea that nobody is able to provide a fixed limit to the process is still valid.

## \*\*\*Hávamál 44\*\*\*

### A translation as literal as possible

You know that if you own a friend,  
one you fully trust  
and you will get (only) good from him,  
you must then blend him with (your) spirit,  
and exchange gifts,  
often travel to meet him.

### ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation

44.

*Veiztu, ef þú vin átt,  
þann er þú vel trúir,  
ok vilt þú af hánum gótt geta,*

You know, if you a friend own,  
this one you well trust,  
and will you from him well obtain,

*geðskaltu við þann blanda  
ok gjöfum skipta,  
fara at finna oft.*

spirit [*dative case*] shall you with him [*accusative*] blend  
and with gifts exchange,  
travel to meet often.

### **Bellows' translation**

44. If a friend thou hast | whom thou fully wilt trust,  
And good from him wouldst get,  
Thy thoughts with his mingle, | and gifts shalt thou make,  
And fare to find him oft.

### **Various translations of line 4**

*Dronke*: “you must espouse his tastes”

*Orchard*: “share thoughts with him”

*Boyer*: “you must mingle together your souls”

*Dumézil* (in *Mitra-Varuna*) “you have to mix your soul with his.”

### **Commentary on the vocabulary**

Verb *eiga* (= to have, to own) is highly irregular and gives *átt* in its indicative present singular, 2nd person.

Adjective *góðr*, neuter *gótt*, means ‘good, just’ and its neutral form tends to become a noun. It then does not evoke material goods but it keeps the adjective meaning of ‘something good’.

Noun *geð*, here in its dative singular form: *geði*, means (C-V) ‘spirit, mood’ and (de Vries) ‘knowledge, understanding, thinking’.

Verb *blanda* means ‘to blend, to mix’ as two fluids might be blended. Metaphorically: ‘to merge into each other’, in particular to speak of love making. Its past participle, *blandinn*, that is ‘blended, mixed’, points at someone of mixed opinions, such as a Christian who would also pay honor to Þórr. When someone is ‘very mixed’ (*blandinn mjök*) this becomes discriminatory.

### **Comment on the meaning**

#### *Mundane meaning.*

As you have seen above each translator gave a version of what is “spirit blending.” The two French translations, with their “soul blending,” introduce an emotional innuendo that is not found in the other three ones. Anyhow, be it emotional or rational, this spirit blending, in our civilization, would be resented as a loss of freedom, giving up one’s own personality. It would be more acceptable in a relation between two married persons, though looked up as out of the ordinary, but unbearable for two friends, especially if their friendship is sealed by a contract, as explained in <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/OnTheContracts.htm>. This does look like a contradiction, it however is necessary to insure that the contract will not be broken.

On the other hand, the other conditions for a continued good relation, that is gifts and meetings exchange, look ridiculously prosaic. I see here a literary effect intended to show that the material and the spiritual have also to be blended.

#### *Magical meaning.*

Suppose that the two friends in this stanza are two wizards. The prosaic meaning obviously applies to them, but it becomes ‘commonplace’ in this sense that such a meeting, where their souls meet, and blend, is totally commonplace – as long as they are both trusted friends! On another hand, never try to blend in such a way with someone who is not your soul mate.

In another context, when a patient receives a shamanic healing, it is even understood that the patient, who has to trust his healer, will ‘open his soul’ to his healer. On the contrary, a patient who does not trust enough his healer will never get any good of this ‘friend’ and two distrustful wizards will never merge their spirits.

We have no detail on the way *seiðr* had been practiced, I can thus nothing do more than speculating that this technique might have been used in *seiðr*, when several friends would be eager to reach a particularly difficult and important goal.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 45\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

When you have a deal with someone  
you hardly trust,  
if you nevertheless wish to get something good from him  
speak to him handsomely,  
but keep your slyness for him  
repay falsehood with lie.

#### Prose explanation

The general meaning is clear, when you have no confidence in someone with whom you are dealing, you have to use pleasing words in order to get something (good) out of this relation. Your thought, however, must be full of cunning, and you must repay falsehood with lie.

#### ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation

45.

*Ef þú átt annan,  
þanns þú illa trúir,  
vildu af hánum þó gótt geta,  
fagrt skaltu við þann mæla  
en flátt hyggja  
ok gjalda lausung við lygi*

If you (have to) deal with another  
this one you hardly trust,  
would you of him though good obtain  
beautifully shall you with him speak  
but ‘in sly way’ (shall you)  
and yield (pay, deliver) falsehood with a lie.

#### Bellows’ translation

45. If another thou hast | whom thou hardly wilt trust,  
Yet good from him wouldst get,  
Thou shalt speak him fair, | but falsely think,  
And fraud with falsehood requite.

The fifth line is translated as follows by the four translators we refer to.



*Dronke*: “(you) think false thoughts.”

*Bellows*: “but (you) falsely think.”

*Orchard*: “think him a fraud.”

*Boyer*: “hold him for a fraud.”

Orchard and Boyer translations differ from the others since, for them, this line advises to see a deceptive mind in the other one, while the text itself advises the reader to show a deceptive mind. The text is quite straightforward, in the sentence “*skaltu þann flátt hyggja*,” *skaltu* means ‘shall thou’ and the person to whom Óðinn speaks, ‘thou’ is the one who performs the action of ‘falsely thinking’.

The difference might appear tiny but it is very important to know the exact meaning given by Óðinn or the skald to *flátt hyggja*. If Óðinn acknowledges that he may sometime ‘speak falsely’ this way of speech is hardly insulting unless Óðinn is insulting himself. Inversely, if ‘the other one’ is speaking falsely, this way of speech may become very pejorative, and *flár* might then mean ‘treacherous’ or even qualify a ‘dirty cheat’. The difference becomes striking when we meet *flátt hyggja* in s. 95 as being typical of women.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

Adjective *flár*, here used as an adverb, *flátt*, is said to have the proper meaning of ‘gaping’ by C-V though it means sly (*schlau*) for de Vries and Lex. Poet. C-V seems to inverse proper and metaphorical meanings. The normal meaning of *flár* is ‘crafty’ and this raises no problem in the context of s. 45 since it cannot be an insult, except in Orchard’s and Boyer’s translations. We shall analyze in depth the etymology and possible meaning of *flár* in s. 95.

Adjective *góðr*, here neuter, *gótt*, means ‘good, honest’, and takes here the meaning of ‘who is good, fortunate’. In Old Norse there is no link, nor through etymology nor meaning with the word *goð*, god.

### Comment on the meaning

We now deal with false friends. What is strikingly constant in the attitude Óðinn recommends for both true and false friends is that we have to give back, to re-attribute, what we have been given by them. True friends receive their reward, false ones their penalty, the measure of their sincerity / falsity is the measure of the rewards / penalties.

All considered, the text says that, when facing non friends from whom we would like to get something, we have to give a shapely appearance to our way of speech, while its content can be a nest of vipers. Roughly speaking, this is a well-known feature of the political discourse.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 46\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Again for those  
you hardly trust,  
and whose mind you hold in suspicion,  
you shall laugh with them  
and speak you mind;  
repaying must replicate the gifts.

### Prose explanation

When you deal with persons you hardly trust and you believe to be insincere, then you may laugh with them. Do not be afraid to speak your mind, that is, to have sharp words with them; repaying must replicate the gifts.

### ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation

46.

*Það 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.*

Thence is yet of him

who you hardly trust,

and (at) you is suspicion at his mind

laugh shall you with them

and about mind talk;

replicate shall repaying by gifts.

### Bellows' translation

46. So is it with him | whom thou hardly wilt trust,  
And whose **mind** thou mayst not know;  
Laugh with him mayst thou, | but *speak not thy mind*,  
Like gifts to his shalt thou give.

### Three translations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> et 5<sup>th</sup> lines (*geð/hugr*)

In **bold**, the translations of *geð*, in **bold** and *italics*, the translations of *um hug mæla*.

*Orchard*: “have no faith in his **thoughts** / ... *not speak your mind*”

*Dronke*: “have doubts of his **disposition** / ... *not speak your mind*”

*Boyer*: “you have suspicion about his **mood** / ... *misrepresent your thought*”

### Commentary on the vocabulary

We have seen in s. 44 that *geð* means ‘mind, mood’ (C-V) while de Vries gives ‘knowledge, mind, understanding, thinking’. Remember also that stanza 44 says that you have to blend your *geð*, your mind, with the one of your true friends.

Noun *hugr* means ‘mind, thought’, or ‘mood, feeling’, or ‘wish, hope’.

Preposition *um* calls for the idea of including, of fully contain, not of walking around, which hints a negative form (see however Evans’ commentary) .

As you can see, the translators give for *geð*: mind, thoughts disposition, mood. They translate *um hug mæla* as a recommendation to close your thought as if *um* had a negative meaning, while the text indicates that you can fully express your thought in front of a non-friend (provided you do not expect anything ‘good’ from him) .

### Comment on the meaning

Bellows translates lines 5 and 6 by “But speak not thy mind, Like gifts to his shalt thou give.” As you see above, line 5 says exactly the opposite: Even in front of a false friend, you

can speak your mind. In line 6, the word *gjöld* does not mean a gift but a refunding. This last line says approximately the same as the last line of 45.

Stanza 44 says that you have to share your ideas with your true friends, and that you may display your thought to a false one.

Classical translations see in 46 a mere repetition of 45. Both describe the proper attitude when facing a person about whom you have doubts. Is he a friend or a non-friend? Stanza 45 advises a hypocritical attitude when you wish to obtain something 'good' from this person. stanza 46 describes the case when you have no special deal with this person and you do not know what to think of him. In this case, you need to probe his mind, that is, try to class him neatly among your friends, among your non-friends or among people you don't care about. In this case, Óðinn advises to act with ingenuity, to joke and tell one's mind. Once this work is done, you will be able to properly apply the advice of the last line, and adjust your 'refunds' to his 'gifts'.

Óðinn advises two different kinds of hypocrisy in front of someone you do not trust. If you want to obtain something from them, then be completely hypocritical. If you expect nothing from them, then speak your mind in order to accurately define your relation with them.

#### **Evans's 'commentary'**

Evans does not comment this stanza but his glossary explains wherefrom come line 5 classical translations. He provides a great many possible translations for preposition *um*, and among them the following:

« 'around' 46/5 (see **hugr**) ; » [and we find at *hugr*: ]

« *mæla um hug* 'speak around (other than, contrary to) what one thinks' 46/5. »

[As you have seen, I do find absurd to make of 46 a simple repetition of 45, and I do not find absurd to translate *um*, as it usually means, by 'all around' instead of 'to avoid by circling around'.]

## **Hávamál 47 – 52**

### **"About humankind"**

#### **\*\*\*Hávamál 47\*\*\***

#### **A translation as literal as possible**

I have been young once,  
I fared alone with myself  
thus I wandered on a bad path;  
I thought myself rich  
that I could find another one;  
a human being is a human being's pleasure.

#### **ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation**

*Ungr var ek forðum,*      Young was I once,

<i>för ek einn saman:</i>	fared I one together: [‘alone with myself’]
<i>þá varð ek villr vega;</i>	thus became I (on) a bad way;
<i>auðigr þóttumk,</i>	rich thought I myself, [I dared to think myself rich]
<i>er ek annan fann;</i>	that I another found;
<i>Maðr er manns gaman.</i>	a human being is of a human being pleasure.

### **Bellows’ translation**

47. Young was I once, | and wandered alone,  
And nought of the road I knew;  
Rich did I feel | when a comrade I found,  
For man is man’s delight.

### **Commentary on the vocabulary**

Note the curious way to express ‘to be alone with oneself’, *einn saman*, that is to say ‘one together’.

Remember that the noun *maðr* (*manns* in its genitive form) means ‘a human being’. In this stanza, translating it by ‘man’ introduces a hint of gender, which becomes here a misunderstanding.

### **Comment on the meaning**

This stanza is famous. It is significant as such, it does not need further comment.

### **Evans’ commentaries**

47

6 may well be a proverb; it also occurs in the Icelandic Runic Poem ..., though as this is of late medieval date it might have drawn the line direct from our poem.

## **\*\*\*Hávamál 48\*\*\***

### **A translation as literal as possible**

Mild and generous, tough and fearless  
people get the best of life,  
they seldom bear grief;  
a non-daring and second rate person, however,  
fears everything,  
he is given to moan, he thinks twice over his gifts.

### **ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation**

48.

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

Mild [*or* generous], tough [*or* fearless]  
men best live,  
seldom grief [mental affliction] they bear;  
but non-daring [*or* not outstanding] human  
he fears anything  
he moans ever clever [*here* = stingy] with gifts.

### Bellows' translation

48. The lives of the brave | and noble are best,  
Sorrows they seldom feed;  
But the coward fear | of all things feels,  
And not gladly the niggard gives.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The adjectives *mildr* and *frækn* have several quite different meanings. We can safely assume that the poet used them on purpose, in order to sharpen his definition of who has the best life. The soundness of their mind is also insured, as opposed to the second rate person who are fearful, whimpering and stingy.

The proper meaning of *glöggr* is 'clear-sighted' and it metaphorically extends clever, sharp (of mind) and stingy. Evan's comments thus seems to me perfect: this person is 'clear-sighted', that is s/he has a clear sight of the real cost of receiving a gift.

### Comment on the meaning

The meaning of this stanza is clear. Please, check how far goes the negation of its first half by its second half. I thus found it proper to think that "he moans ever" in line 6 opposes "men best live" in line 2. In turn, this explains why I chose, as opposed to the other translators, to render line 6 by two independent clauses: "he is given to moan" and "he thinks twice over his gifts."

This last line hints that a generous and happy person may also be somewhat '*óglöggr*', that is 'blind and unintelligent' in his way to be generous. This stanza states also clearly that Óðinn judges as positive this special type of blindness.

This stanza is also noticeable by the fact that mundane and spiritual understandings are totally merged. There are certainly some wizards who fit the description in the last three lines.

### Evans' commentaries

48

4 *ósnejallr* also occurs in 16. It is here opposed to *mildir, froeknir menn*. 'Cowardly' seems to be what is mainly implied, though some editors render 'foolish' ; the positive *snjallr* can mean both 'bold' and 'wise'.

6 is rendered by Bellows 'And not gladly the niggard gives' ... This is probably wrong; it most likely means 'the niggard is ever apprehensive about gifts' i. e. he does not want to receive them, because that obliges him to make gifts in return ... [Dronke translates it as "a niggard is always nervous of gifts," and Orchard by "and a mean man grieves at gifts," both agree with Evans.]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 49\*\*\*

### A translation as literal as possible

My clothes  
I gave somewhere

to two humans made of wood;  
they thought themselves all right  
who had (since long) their jerkin;  
a bare person is ashamed.

### Prose explanation

I met two wooden statues, images of ancient gods, that are named *trémenn*: wooden-human-beings. They were naked, without clothes and I at once gave them my own clothes. They then found back their self-respect, their pride of feeling like ‘free men’ as soon as they had my clothes on.

Not wearing clothes is shaming for a human being.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

49.

*Váðir mínar  
gaf ek velli at  
tveim trémönnum;  
rekkar þat þóttusk,  
er þeir rift [ript] höfðu;  
neiss er nökkviðr halr.*

Clothes mine  
gave I ‘on the spot’  
to two wooden-humans ;  
standing\_straight these thought-self  
who theirs jerkin had ;  
ashamed is the naked man.

### Bellows’ translation

49. My garments once | in a field I gave  
To a pair of carven poles;  
Heroes they seemed | when clothes they had,  
But the naked man is nought.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

As said by Evans we “expect here a *á*” but the scald used ‘*at*’. This means he wanted to suggest that the action took place when reaching the field, without delaying, “on the spot” as we would say.

Noun *rekkr* and adjective *rakkr* render the idea of ‘keeping straight’. They do not convey the meaning of being rigid-minded but the one of slenderness and ability of acting. The usual meaning of *rekkr* is ‘warrior, hero’ but we must realize that, in poetry, these words can be used to speak of an ordinary human.

I find it surprising that nobody glossed *nökkviðr*. I suppose that reading it as *nökk-viðr* that is, singling out the *viðr* (tree) in it, will be judged as an unfounded etymology. It is however obvious that this *viðr* is very inviting and suggests, even if it is a mere pun, the idea of a ‘naked’ tree, that is bare of his leaves.

### Dronke’s Comment on the meaning

*Dronke’s translation*

*Óðinn*

My clothes

I gave in the countryside  
to two twig-men.  
Great fellows they thought themselves  
when they had garments  
a man is mortified naked.

*Dronke's comment*

In 49 we are shown how 'liberal' Óðinn can be, and how whimsical in his liberality. 'Twig-men' - *trémenn* - were once worshipped as holy idols, possessing supernatural life (... Evans 93 ff. ), and in Christian texts were still portrayed as magically potent. To those wooden men Óðinn gives his own clothing and they lose any divinity they may have had and rejoice as they step out in their new attire. Óðinn easily disposes of an outworn creed.

The happy vanity of the fabulous *trémenn* is directly followed (50) by ...

### **Comment on the meaning**

Dronke's comment is a kind of caricature of what believers in the revealed faiths can understand in their reading of Hávamál. It rests on the following interpretation of Óðinn's behavior:

He wrapped old 'idols' in his clothing in order to flatter their vanity so that they would go away, happy as they were with the trifles he had given them. Thus, he cheaply got rid of a competition with the old religions.

1. Factual objection. If that were true, Óðinn would have largely missed his target since as late as in year 922, Ibn Fadlan noted that the Rus still worshiped such representations of the gods. Good sense tells even to us that these fragile representations were made to honor the gods still under difficult or wandering conditions, even if for a short time.

2 Religious objection. Dronke looks through her Christian glasses, which show to her how important it is to convert the Heathens. Óðinn belongs to a non-revealed religion which does not practice proselytism.

3. Objection relative to the intellectual abilities of the former gods and their believers. Dronke introduces these former gods, and their believers, as nice primitive simpletons who are supposed to disavow their gods when they get some trinkets. This is pushing a little far the civilizing arrogance, even if this happened in the history of colonization.

4. Objection relative to the text. Last line is obviously intended to explain the contents of lines 1 to 5. This explanation is neither ironic nor derogatory for these *trémenn*. It says, on the contrary, that it belongs to human nature to feel humiliated by their nakedness ... as a tree stripped of its leaves.

In understanding this stanza, you should not forget that when you meet the word 'idol' in a translation, the corresponding word in the original text is *goð*: a god (not to be confused with the adjective *góðr*: good) . These "pagan idols" were gods for our supposedly naive ancestors. My interpretation, certainly through my Heathen glasses, is that Óðinn did not appreciate to see stripped gods. If we believe Ibn Fadlan, it is even possible that he met himself among these *trémenn*. In any case, respecting the gods, who could be ancient as well as present, demands that they wear clothing, even when in their crudest representation. When the gods (the 'idols') have been clothed, they felt as being heroes (as Dronke claims) , or rather as respected humans, instead of being shown in the state of shamed

humans. This is why the last line is so essential to the understanding of Óðinn's care which could indeed look a little futile.

This stanza tells us that it is not acceptable to leave stripped a *goð*, be them in majesty in Ásgarð or in humility as posts stuck in the ground. It is obvious that the concern for supplying dresses to sculptures may appear naive to us today, and we might be tempted to compare them with scarecrows. Calling an image "a god" is certainly looked upon as a primitive feature.

I do not think it is necessary to forget our "Do not judge a book by its cover," which stresses that we should look further than veneer because so many dishonest people dissimulate reality for better misleading us. We should not however let it overwhelm the German saying "Kleider machen Leute" (clothes make people), which stresses the importance of the look, because there also exists decent people who hide their weaknesses in order to state their will to serve the community by overcoming these weaknesses.

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 49

2 *velli at*: if this means 'in a field', as most editors take it, we may cite *hrafn at meidi*... as a near enough parallel to the use of *at*, though it is true we might rather expect *á*, as in 38. M. Olsen 7, 20, comparing st. 10-11 above, argues for the sense 'passing over open country'.

3 *trémönnum* - images of men carved in wood. ... suggests these were way-marks, but there is no evidence for the existence of such in early Scandinavia. Elsewhere *trémaðr* always appears to have a cultic or magical connection: in Þorleifs þáttar jarlsskálds ... Hákon jarl constructs a *trémmaðr* into which the heart of a slaughtered man is inserted, and which then functions as a robot, and ... Óláfr Tryggvason speaks of the Freyr-idol worshipped by the *þrændir* as *eigi kvikr maðr, heldr einn trémaðr* - one of two *trémenn* whom, he explains, the Swedes had buried along with their dead king Freyr and whom they later exhumed and worshipped. In the last chapter of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* we hear how Ögmundur arrives with five ships at Sámsey, where some of his party go off into the woods and come upon *einn trémann forn*, forty ells high and covered with moss; they speculate who can have worshipped *þetta it mikla goð. Ok þá kveðr trémanðrinn*, and then follow three stanzas. (See further on strophe 50.) The Arab traveller Ibn Fadlan, describing the Rus (Swedish vikings) of the middle Volga whom he encountered in 921-2, tells how they prostrate themselves in worship before 'a long upright piece of wood that has a face like a man's. . . surrounded by little figures (idols)', praying to them for aid and sacrificing sheep and cattle to them...

5 *ript* 'cloth, clothing', only here and in a stanza by Ólafr hvítaskáld, who has *vinda ript* as a kenning for 'sail'; it also constitutes the second element of *valarípt* Sigsk. 66 and of *lérept* 'linen' (< *lín* + *ript*). A by-form *ripti* occurs a few times. The word still exists in modern Norwegian dialects, as *ryft*, *rift*, *ryfte* etc... and has cognates in OE *rift*, *rifte* 'cloak, curtain, veil'.

6 *neiss* only here in poetry, but recorded in two prose passages (see Fritzner 2 s. v. *hneiss*); in one the alliterative association with nakedness similarly occurs ...

The drift of the strophe has sometimes been thought obscure; most probably it reflects the notion 'clothes make the man; clothe a pillar and it will have the appearance of a gentleman'. Cp. the German proverb 'Kleider machen Leute [clothing make the man]' ... [All this simply underlines that the feeling of 'shame' is often associated to nudity.]



## More on the *trémenn*

I underlined Evans citation of Ragnars saga loðbrókar because it is certainly worth to have a look into it. You will find its complete translation at: <http://www.turbidwater.com/portfolio/downloads/RagnarsSaga.pdf>. [As an attempt to coax you into reading it, I'll tell you that the reason for the name Loð-brók is understood in chap. 3 of the saga. C-V says chap. 1.]

Ragnarr is a legendary king-hero-conqueror supposed to have lived around year 800 (he became suddenly worldwide famous through the tv series on 'Ragnar Lodbrok'). The translation cited above is quite thorough, I nevertheless translate below the fragment of interest here, closer to the ON version. Chapter 20 of his saga is a kind of appendix describing how some later sailors discovered a lone *trémaðr* 'who' claims 'himself' having been raised by "Loðbrók's sons." 'He' also complains having been left unattended for a very long time, unprotected because of 'his' lack of "flesh and clothing." This complaint echoes too tightly to Hávamál s. 49 to be irrelevant and favors my hypothesis of Óðinn's reverence gesture as opposed to Dronke's interpretation.

*... en aðrir menn fóru í skóg at skemmta sér, ok þar fundu þeir einn trémann fornan, ok var fertugr at hæð ok mosavaxinn, ok sá þó öll deili á honum, ok ræddu nú um með sér, hverr blótat mundi hafa þetta it mikla goð. Ok þá kveðr trémaðrinn:*

... but other men went into the woods to entertain themselves, and there they found an ancient tree-man, and it measured forty *ells*, [approximately 20 meters], in height and covered with moss, but they could still deal entirely with him, and they discussed among themselves who might have made *blót* to this great god. And then the tree-man spoke:

*"Þat var fyr löngu,  
er í leið megir  
Hæklings fóru  
hlunna-lungum  
fram um salta  
slóð birtinga,  
þá varðk þessa  
þorps ráðandi.  
Ok því settumk  
svarðmerðlingar  
suðr hjá salti,  
synir Loðbrókar;  
þá vark blótinn  
til bana mönnum  
í Sámseyju  
sunnanverðri.  
Þar báðu standa,  
meðan strönd þolir  
mann hjá þyrni  
ok mosa vaxinn;*

It was long ago  
when the offspring of the powerful  
Hœkingr (sea-king) journeyed  
On the launch-ships  
forward among the (shiny) salts  
the trail shiny,  
since then, I guard this  
land, ruling.  
And thus set me  
the black gleaming  
the south by the salt  
Loðbrók's sons;  
then was I provided with blót  
to men's death  
in Sámsey  
southern-wise.  
There they bade to stand  
while the strand endures  
the man among the thorns  
and in moss shaped;

<i>nú skýtr</i> (read <i>skýlr</i> ) <i>á mik</i>	now shelters around me
<i>skýja gráti,</i>	clouds weeping
<i>hlýr hvárki mér</i>	my cheek, neither for me
<i>hold né klæði. "</i>	flesh nor clothing.

*Ok þetta þótti mönnum undarligt ok sögðu síðan frá öðrum mönnum.*  
 And that seemed wondrous to them, and afterwards they spoke of it to other men.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 50\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

The young pine-tree withers  
 that stands in a village,  
 (her) bark nor needles shelters her;  
 such is the human being  
 who nobody supports.  
 Why/how shall he live long?

#### Prose explanation

A young pine that grows near a village (instead of being among its species in a forest) will wither, in spite of the protection it gets from its bark and its needles (that are unable to protect it from the harm due to human activities) . A supportless person is similar to this young pine tree, why and how could he survive long?

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

50.	
<i>Hrörnar þöll</i>	Withers the young pine-tree
<i>sú er stendr þorpi á,</i>	she [ <i>þöll</i> : fem. gender] who stands hamlet in [in a village]
<i>hlýr-at henni börkr né barr;</i>	shelter-not her, bark nor needles;
<i>svá er maðr,</i>	so is the man,
<i>sá er manngi ann.</i>	that no one supports.
<i>Hvat skal hann lengi lifa?</i>	How [ <i>or why</i> ] shall he long live?

#### Bellows' translation

50. On the hillside drear | the fir-tree dies,  
 All bootless its needles and bark;  
 It is like a man | whom no one loves, --  
 Why should his life be long?

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

On *þorp*. This noun always means, in Old Norse, 'hamlet, village'. Its etymology (de Vries) may provide a second possible meaning with an etymology different from the one of 'village'. This other meaning evokes the idea of multitude, crowd. This goes well together with a village, not with a "hillside drear." Here are translations of this word provided by

Bellows: “hillside drear,” Dronke: “stony ground,” Orchard: “grove,” Boyer: “place without shelter.” All these translations see this poor pine-tree withering in a wild environment, and this view, as pointed by Evans “is biologically unsatisfactory.” A human being, on the contrary, is equipped with no bark nor needles and is thus not fit to a harsh environment. Applying to a non-human being criteria valid for a human one is called anthropomorphism (= to see humans everywhere without good reason) .

On *anna*. This verb is irregular and gives *ann* in the 3<sup>rd</sup> singular person of present indicative. It never meant something like ‘to be loved’ but it means ‘to receive help or support’. But, insofar as the meaning of *þorp* is misunderstood, then the loneliness of the pine is underlined and thus there is a need to invent a meaning better expressing loneliness, such as ‘lack of love’. Dronke and Orchard, just like Bellows and Boyer, translate *anna* by ‘to love’.

On *hvat*. This word has many meanings, among which, the most probable here are ‘why?’ or ‘how?’ If, as Evans suggests, we see here a young pine shoot mistreated by too many human items, then we wonder *how* it could survive in such a degraded environment.

### Comment on the meaning

The meaning of this stanza is indeed the one everyone understands: an isolated man cannot survive without family nor friends. But the image used in the stanza is the reverse of that one seen by the translators. The ambiguity stems from the idea that the normal territory of a pine lies in vast forests of trees of the same species. The poem however, speaks about a village and thus refers to degradation caused by the village, not by hostile nature, against which it is precisely very well equipped due to its bark and needles. In other words, a young pine cannot resist the aggression of people living in a nearby village. That Óðinn might indulge in one ecological image should not be so upsetting as to lead astray all translators except Evans.

This example strikingly illustrates the eagerness with which the scholars put to the fore their own vision of the world in their translations. In this case, they even fall in the trap of anthropomorphism.

### Evans’ Commentaries

... The following meanings have been proposed for *þorp* here:

- (1) ‘Bare, rocky hillock’
- (2) ‘Ledge, shelf of rock in a hillside’
- (3) ‘Field, bare exposed area’
- (4) ...
- (5) ‘Pen, fold’

(6) ‘Habitation, farmstead, hamlet’. This has the advantage of being the usual sense of the word in ON ...

The picture of the lonely fir on mound or hillside, as evoked by all the first four explanations, appeals to modern taste, but, apart from the philological weaknesses of the first three, there is a fundamental botanical objection to this interpretation, which is that firs do not wither in such conditions; on the contrary, they thrive. Where they waste away is in the neighborhood of human habitation. So we should follow (6) : the fir stands among farm buildings, its roots nibbled by animals, its shoots and bark eaten by goats ... It is a curious fact that the passage in Ragnars saga alluded to under 49 above seems to have some relation to st. 49-50 here: both refer to a wooden man, or men, both contain the fairly unusual word *þorp* ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 51\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

In a hotter fire  
Burns with bad friends  
Peace/security/love, for five days,  
then douses, however,  
this (when) the sixth day comes  
and the friendship worsens.

#### Prose explanation

A hotter (than with good friends) fire of feeling of love/safety/peace burns five days with bad friends. It then douses when the sixth day comes and this (false) friendship disappears.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

51.

<i>Eldi heitari</i>	(In) a fire hotter
<i>brennr með illum vinum</i>	burns with bad friends
<i>friðr fimm daga,</i>	peace [ <i>and together</i> security and love] five days
<i>en þá slokknar</i>	but then douses
<i>er inn sétti kemr</i>	it in the sixth comes
<i>ok versnar allr vinskapr.</i>	and worsens all friendship.

#### Bellows' translation

51. Hotter than fire | between false friends  
Does friendship five days burn;  
When the sixth day comes | the fire cools,  
And ended is all the love.

#### Commentaries about the vocabulary

On *eldi heitari*. The translators use it as a nominative while these words are in the dative case. The poet thus decided that a preposition 'in', or 'by', or 'with' was not needed here.

On *friðr*. This word means 'peace, safety, rest' and takes the meaning of 'peace' in most of its instances, as the scald who wrote this stanza could not ignore. Its etymology, however, relies on Indo-European roots linked to 'love'. And <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/OnTheContracts.htm> explains how the Indo-European root could evolve towards its meaning in Old Norse.

On *fimm* and *sétti*. Evans does not seem convinced of the existence of a 5 days week. We cannot know if the week has been or not 5 five days long in some past civilizations, it is however obvious that a time duration of five days has been of primary importance in ancient Germanic civilizations. Evans, about the word *fimt*, sends us back to Cleasby-Vigfusson's

comments on this word. In fact, this dictionary does not say much more. It is possible that five days week and six weeks month would have existed. It is however attested that the legal summons had to be executed within five days. Hence the verb *fimta*, the literal meaning of which is ‘to five someone’ and means to summon someone.

This can help us understanding the famous and obscure Breton song, reported by la Villemarqué (*Barzaz-Breiz*, 1841) : « Here we are Duz in the night, here, here we are the Chored, ai auta (four times) , Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday until Friday. » (listen to it at: <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/DuzdelaNuitBilingue.mp3>) . These Duz and Chored are better known as Korrigans or Spirits. This song might well be remnant of a five days week. As soon as another day is added to the song, the Duz get frantic – since they are sung on a day which does not exist for them.

On *vin-skapr*. It reads as *vin-skapr* = friend-state = friendship. <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/OnTheContracts.htm> describes its evolution from the point of view of etymology. Peace, mutual confidence, friendship and love are indisputably dependent and this word indeed carries all these meanings because of its linguistic evolution as well as because its Indo-European origin.

### Comment on the meaning

The general meaning of this stanza is easy to understand: False friendship flames five days but, with the sixth one, the passion that started it all dies.

We have here two problems that are usually looked upon as details: why five days, why such an infatuated friendship?

Evans’ remark on the legal aspect of the five days duration appears perfectly relevant to me. The suspect must answer the summoning after a five days delay, and then starts the serious business in front of the court. In the same way, a friendly or love passion with no deeper roots than passion itself will not last more than five days. The lovers or friends themselves, facing the court of their own feelings, will become conscious of the shallowness of their infatuation.

Relative to passion in general, Óðinn’s remark seems to me perfectly to the point. Passion is of a transitory nature: at the best, it will take with time a more moderate course.

The esoteric meaning of this stanza seems to me the following. It warns a wizard teaching magic to apprentices. The ones who express the most extraordinary feelings, who react passionately to his/her teaching are not going to last long: they just want to be acknowledged as ‘the best pupils’. Sincerity outdoes early achievements.

### Evans’ Commentaries

#### 51

3 For *friðr* see on st. 90. The reference to *five* days (also in 74) may be connected with the frequent occurrence of this period in the Old Norwegian laws, which has led some to infer that the pre-Christian week was one of five days; cp. Cleasby-Vigfusson s. v. *fimt*.

[Evans’ commentary of stanza 90 claims that “*friðr* clearly means ‘love’ here, as also probably in *Skírnismál* 19 and possibly in 51 above. This is the original sense of the word, cp. *frjá* ‘to woo’, *friðill* ‘wooer’ and *friðla* (> frilla) ‘mistress’. These claims seem to me a bit too strong, see <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/OnTheContracts.htm> on *friðr*.]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 52\*\*\*

### A translation as literal as possible

Much to (another) one  
a human should not give,  
praise (*or* allowance) is often bought with little;  
with half a loaf  
and with a tilted vessel  
I made a fellow for me.

### Prose explanation

We should not give too much to others, we often buy praise (*or* allowance) with little, I made myself a comrade with (= by sharing) half a loaf and tilting my bottle (in his glass) .

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

52.

<i>Mikit eitt</i>	Much to (another) one
<i>skal-a manni gefa;</i>	should-not a human give;
<i>oft kaupir sér í litlu lof,</i>	oft he buys for him in little, praise [ <i>or</i> allowance]
<i>með halfum hleif</i>	with half a loaf
<i>ok með höllu kerí</i>	and with a tilted vessel
<i>fékk ek mér félaga.</i>	made I for me a fellow.

### Bellows' translation

52. No great thing needs | a man to give,  
Oft little will purchase praise;  
With half a loaf | and a half-filled cup  
A friend full fast I made.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

On *lof*, which means either praise or allowance and which is understood as ‘love’ by Evans. In stanza 8, *lof* corresponds to *líknstafi*, and Evans bases his argument on this link. Remember that I translated *líknstafi* by “rune knowledge.” This is not a feeling such as love, and it thus answers well to ‘praise’. Here, ‘love’ is even less admissible since it corresponds to *félag* which implies sharing common property, not ‘loving each other’.

On *höllu kerí*. I do not understand why the experts had so many problems with these words – see Evans discussion in its original version. Boyer gives even a footnote where he claims these words cannot be translated. We are not used to equate “tilting (or slanting) the bottle” and “serving a drink,” but this would not be totally opposed to the English language. The noise done by the liquid flowing in a glass sounds like sealing a pact between the server and the served one. This is exactly what the scald is hinting at.

On *félag*. Its proper meaning is *fé-lag* = ‘wealth-laid (in common)’ and describes a partnership, not a sentimental relationship. The Sjörup stone citation, in Evans below, shows that *félagi* evokes the member of a group of ‘comrades fighting together’.

### Comment on the meaning

Line 2 (*skal-a gefa*) sounds a bit harsh and may lead to thinking that Óðinn advises some stinginess. In this case, the stanza can be interpreted as: “Do not give too much since you can have the same result at a better price.”

On the contrary, the examples contained in the last three lines show that Óðinn is addressing here simple, badly off persons. If your wealth holds in whole bread and a full bottle, to divide them is giving half of your fortune, which is much for you. For whoever is hungry and thirsty, their value is even larger.

From the social point of view, we can rather understand that Óðinn says to us that royal gifts are made only by kings: simple people will be very happy with simple gifts, at the measure of your means. A gift made above your means rather will bother them because they will not know how to answer.

From the religious point of view, you undoubtedly already know that stanza 145 says that it is better to ask nothing to the gods than to dedicate too many *blót* to them. The rule given in stanza 52 outlines that excessive sacrifices are not a good way of attracting our gods' favor, as opposed to many other religions. The sacrifice must be well proportioned to your means. For example, when we are spreading drinks on the ground, the drink must be of the best quality you can afford for yourselves, it does not need to cost you an arm and a leg.

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 52

1-2 For *eitt* meaning ‘only’ cp. 124 below and *við vín eitt. . . lifir* Grímnismál 19 (Cleasby-Vigfusson s. v. *einn* A III β) ...

3 For the suggestion that *lof* means ‘love’ here see on st. 8 above.

[Reminder of s. 8 Evans' comment: The two halves do not fit well together, for, as Guðmundur Finnbogason 2, 105 points out, ‘praise’ and ‘favour, warm judgments’ - as *lof* and *líknstafi* are customarily rendered respectively - are precisely things which one inevitably has *annars brjóstum í*. Lindquist 2, 8ff. holds that *lof* is etymologically related to OE *lufu* etc. (but this is uncertain) and that a sense ‘love, affection, esteem’ fits better than ‘praise’ both here and in some other Eddaic instances (the best case is st. 52 below) . He takes *líknstafi* as ‘words (magically) calculated to win help from other persons’, a sense that also fits its only other occurrence, Sigrdr. 5: *fullr er hann ljóða ok líknstafa, góðra galdra ok gamanrúna*. Other editors take *líknstafi* as = *líkn*, with *-stafi* as a mere derivative ending (so SG, comparing *bölstafi*= *böl*, *flærðarstafi* = *flærð* Sigrdr. 30 and 32) .]

5 *með höllu kerí* ‘with slanting bowl’ ... [I skip a long discussion about the amount of liquid in the bowl, it looks much like hair-splitting].

6 On *félagi* as a word characteristic of the Viking Age see p. 19 above.

[p. 19, on this topic. “Instead of the *ætt*, we have the *frænd*, the friend, the comrade ‘with half a loaf and a tilted bowl I go myself a comrade, *fekk ek mér féлага*’ says st. 52, using the word which occurs repeatedly in runic memorials for a comrade in the Viking age, as for example on the Sjörup stone: ‘Saxi erected this stone in memory of Ásbjörn his comrade, *asbiurn sin filaga*, son of Tóki. He did not flee at Uppsala, but smote so long as he had a weapon’.]

### Hávamál 53-56

“Wisdom is not happiness

\*\*\*Hávamál 53\*\*\*

## Translation as literal as possible

Small beaches  
(*go with*) small seas,  
small are the minds of men.  
Because all humans  
do not become equally wise/foreseeing,  
[or: **were not equally fated to be wise/foreseeing ones**]  
humankind is a (scant?) half of one of both.

## Prose explanation

Small beaches go with of small seas (and not the large ocean) , small are the minds of men. Because all the humans do not become equally wise/foreseeing, one (scant?) half of the children of time, of humankind, is able to acquire wisdom (or becoming seer) , not the other part.

## ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

53.

*Litilla sanda* (To) small sand-banks  
*lítilla sæva* small seas  
*lítill eru geð guma.* small are the spirits of men.  
*Því at allir menn* Because 'at' all human beings  
*urðu-t jafnspakir,* did not become equally wise/second-sighted,  
*hálf er öld hvár.* half is the age [*or eternity or (poet. )* humankind] one or the other.

## Bellows' translation

53. A little sand | has a little sea,  
And small are the minds of men;  
Though all men are not | equal in wisdom,  
Yet half-wise only are all.

## Commentary on the vocabulary

On **sand**. This word means sand and also a sand-bank, a beach.

On **sær**. It does a plural genitive in **sævar** or **sæva**. It names a salted sea, never a lake.

On **urðu**. This is the plural preterit of verb *verða*, to become. The two other verbs, *eru* (3rd line) and *er* (sixth line) are in the present tense. Either we attribute this tense discordance to a poetical rule making *verða-t* impossible, or it is necessary to see here the poet's choice to recall us that some are fated to wisdom and that others are not : it implies that as of their birth, they were..." and the preterit becomes necessary.

Evans' discussion on **hálf/hvár/hvar** has a long story. For example, the first editor of poetic Edda, Rask 1818, gives **half** and **hvar** whereas Gering 1904 gives **hálf** and **hvár**, and notes that only the Regius Codex gives **hvar**. The adjective **hálf** means 'half' and but also 'a



little, scant part'. The interrogative adverb *hvar* means 'where?' but can also be indefinite and then it means 'everywhere'. The pronoun *hvárr* means 'which of the two?' or 'any of two'.

On *öld*. In poetry, *öld* indicates humankind. This way of speaking is linked to another one: "the children of time."

On *spakr*. Meaning given by de Vries: 'clever, experienced'. He links the word to the root of verb *spekja*: 'to make wise, to quiet'. This explains why C-V can provide two different meanings, one is: 'quiet, gentle' (for animals and infants), the other one is: wise, "with the notion of prophetic vision."

### Comment on the meaning

As opposed to Evans, I do not see here any "accumulation of obscurities." "To small sand-banks answer small seas" certainly alludes to the fact we are able to see in whole a sand-bank, while we can see no more than a part of a sea. Thus we have to evaluate the size of something by what we can see of it. What we can see of human beings are their (little) actions, and we thus can evaluate their (little) wisdom, even though we cannot see it directly. The first three lines express that idea. The 4th and 5th simply observe that human beings are not equal in their wisdom. The fifth one speaks of 'something' of which half of humankind is on one side, and the other half on the other side, and the context makes it obvious that this 'something' is wisdom.

But, as the fifth line underlines so aptly, some of them are able to acquire wisdom during their existence. If the chosen reading of *hálfr* is half, then the sixth line states that half humankind is "on the side" of those able to acquire wisdom through their life experiences, and that another half is "on the other side." These who are born little minded will stay so their whole life, and this is their fate, their *örlög*. All considered, this partition seems to me quite unrealistic. I suppose that the proportion meant by Óðinn is much less optimistic and I feel it more reasonable to choose the meaning 'a scant half' for *hálfr*, these who learn from life.

Wisdom or knowledge could be prosaic or spiritual, this stanza states that we are naturally ungifted and very few of us are able to become wise ones or magicians.

### Evans' Commentaries

[Here follows an unabridged version of these commentaries. I left it so because it shows how much scholars tend to err when the text does not fit their prejudices. The example of a very clear *sæva* understood as *seva* is even slightly comical.]

53

1-3 Codex Regius reads *seva*, which some early editors, and more recently Meissner, take as *sefa*, gen. pl. of *sefi* 'mind' (not otherwise found in pl. ); thus Lünig (cited in Finnur Jónsson) rendered 'small sands, small understandings' and explained 'just as grains of sand are small, even so, where the understanding is small, are the souls (*geð*) of men small'. Meissner notes that [Greek word] is rendered *grinda grindfrabjis* in Gothic, which he thinks must mean literally 'sand-minded' (OHG *grint* 'sand', ON *grandi* 'sandbank') and takes the genitives as descriptives of an understood *gumnar*: 'of small sands, of small understanding - small are the powers of understanding of many men' ('many' is not accounted for). All this is plainly unsatisfactory; especially in the neighborhood of *sanda*, we must here have the word *sæva*, gen. pl. of *sær* 'sea' or 'lake'. But the lines remain a *locus desperatus*. the principal attempts at interpretation are:

(1) The genitives are absolute and parallel: where you get small shores, there you also get small lakes, and similarly with men: where there is a man, there is a small understanding (so Finnur Jónsson). Such a use of the gen. would be unique. Wessén 4, 462 thinks the first two lines were proverbial, but admits the syntactic difficulty.

(2) The first gen. is gen. of place (Nygaard 2, §141) and the second is dependent on it (BMÓ) : thus, ‘On the little shores of little lakes men’s minds are small, i. e. provincial’ ; or both genitives are parallel gen. of place: ‘on little shores, on little lakes’ etc. (So Löffler 4. On lakes seems rather odd; Löffler explains it of fishermen who spend much of their lives on the water. ) This has been criticized as anachronistic, and Finnur Jónsson also objects that our poem is concerned with mankind in general, and not merely dwellers in remote districts.

(3) Guðmundur Finnbogason 2, 106 takes the genitives as descriptive of *geð guma*: ‘the minds of men are little, of a “small-sand”, “small-sea” variety’. This eccentric interpretation is adopted by M. Olsen 7, 31.

(4) H. Pipping 2, 13ff and 4, 182-4 interprets Codex Regius *litilla* as *lítill lá* ‘little surf’ in either or both instances. None of these possibilities gives very plausible sense; plumping finally for emending both, he renders [Danish sentence] ‘Where the ripples are weak at the shores, where the ripples are weak on the lakes, there men’s souls are small’). This is the same notion as (2) and is open to the same objections; further, it is a defect that nothing in the text corresponds to *där*. The emendation was accepted by Kock NN 2405, who however rendered slightly differently: ‘small is the plashing on the shore, small is the plashing on the lake, small are the minds of men’.

(5) Lie 215 takes *litilla* as *lítill á* in both instances, supposed to convey the notion that man is little against the background of the sands, little against the background of the waters. But this would be more than ‘moderately’ elliptical, as Lie puts it, and he fails to explain the accusatives (rather than datives) convincingly. It should be noted that *sær* in the sense ‘lake’ is evidenced only for East Norse, and is definitely absent from West Norse in literary times, cp. Flateyrbók II 550 *Mjörð er svá mikít vatn, at líkara er sjó* and II 327 *þar lá fyrir þeim vatn, er Svíar kalla sjá, er þat ósalt vatn*. But the sense ‘lake’ appears in Norwegian place-names (Frimer 2, S. V. *sjár*) and so can hardly be excluded for Hávamál.

6 is also difficult: should we read *hvar* ‘everywhere’ or *hvár* ‘each of two’ (agreeing with *öld* f. ) ? And what does *hálf* mean? Reading *hvar*, Finnur Jónsson rendered ‘Everywhere men are incomplete, imperfect’ ; he admitted that *hálf* does not occur elsewhere in ON in this sense, but asserted in 1888 (Finnur Jónsson 1, 51) that the sense was known in the modern language; this is denied by BMÓ 65, and in his separate edition of 1924 Finnur says only that Blöndal’s dictionary provides examples of modern usage which come near it; but this is not really so. The only other way of defending *hvar* is to follow e. g. Heusler 1, 112 and take *hálf* as ‘divided into two’ (ie. , by implication, the wise and the stupid) ; but there is no evidence that the word can ever bear this meaning. So it seems better to read *hvár*, as Bugge 2, 250, who explains ‘each of the two classes of men is half’ i. e. constitutes only a half, which is complemented by the other half. This is followed by BMÓ who compares *Ek man hér koma með valinkunna menn, en þú haf halfa fyr* Gulapingslög 266 (NGL I 88) , where *halfa* appears to mean ‘equally many’. Admittedly, ‘class of men’ for *öld* lacks exact parallels.

The accumulation of obscurities in this strophe makes it probable that it is corrupt in ways beyond repair.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 54\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Not over-much wise  
should be each human being,  
never (striving) towards wisdom;

To the warriors  
life is more beautiful  
(for) these (who) are very intelligent and wise.

### Prose explanation

Each human should be satisfied to be moderately wise, he should not try (strive) to become wise. Life is (however) more beautiful for those who are really very intelligent and wise.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

54.

<i>Meðalsnotr</i>	Not over-much wise
<i>skyli manna hverr;</i>	should (be) each of the human beings
<i>æva til snotr sé;</i>	never until wisdom be;
<i>þeim er fyrða</i>	to them is of the warriors
<i>fegrst at lifa</i>	happiest at live
<i>er vel margt vitu.</i>	who well much wise.

### Bellows' translation

54. A measure of wisdom | each man shall have,  
But never too much let him know;  
The fairest lives | do those men live  
Whose wisdom wide has grown.

Dronke and Orchard both translate the first line as “middling wise” and *til snotr* in line 3 by “over-wise.” In the last one, Dronke translates *vel margt* by “quite a lot of” and Orchard by “not over-much.”

### Commentary on the vocabulary

In a little unusual way, the understanding of this stanza rests on the meaning of two adverbs, *til* (line 3) and *vel* (in *vel margt*, line 6) which are sometimes rendered in contradicting ways by the translators.

On *til*. It usually means ‘towards, in the direction of’, i. e. it describes an evolutionary situation or a goal to reach. In some cases, we have no word describing such a situation and the translation may suggest that *til* refers to a stable situation. Typically, the expression ‘*vera til*’ or ‘*hafa til*’ are translated by ‘to exist’ and ‘to possess’ but they express the idea ‘to go on being’ and ‘to go on having’, which is possible and agrees better with the general use of *til*.

All traditional translators understand *til* as ‘too much’, whereas I preserve the meaning of ‘towards’ by translating it as ‘to strive, to aim at’. This choice can be criticized though *til* with the meaning of ‘too much’ is ironical, which is fine here. However, the long list of words prefixed by *til*-\* shows no case where *til* introduces some exaggeration in the meaning of the word it prefixes. My translation agrees with the one of s. 53, where I preserve the meaning of ‘have become’ for *urðu* (line 5) .

On *vel*. This adverb means ‘well, properly’ and is used as intensive particle to give emphasis to the word which it modifies. In theory, therefore, *vel margt*, means ‘well much’ with the meaning of ‘very much’. Bellows and Dronke preserve this meaning, with the result

that the first and second half of the stanza seem contradicting each other. One says that the happiest one is not too wise, the other that the very wise is the happiest. Besides, this contradicts stanzas 55 and 56.

Orchard and Boyer solve this contradiction by translating *vel* as softening *margt*, and *vel margt* becomes ‘not too much’, ‘no more than needed’. This solution is elegant but reduces the three stanzas to simple repetitions from each other (and they moreover repeat their three first lines!) whereas it is possible that Óðinn aims to underline three various kinds of wisdom.

I preserve the traditional meaning, and solve the contradictions in a different way, as explained below.

Another problem is that the last word form *vitu* may have two meanings. It can be third person plural of the present indicative of verb *vita* (to be intelligent) . But, it can also be the weak nominative plural of adjective *vittr* which means ‘wise’ more than ‘knowing’. Because of this ambiguity, I preserve the two possible meanings, ‘intelligent and wise’.

### **Comment on the meaning**

As already pointed out, a contradiction may be observed between this stanza the three first and three last lines. This contradiction disappears when *vel margt vitu* is translated by ‘not too wise’. This solution, however, erases any difference between the stanza two halves, which makes it trivial. If we follow Dronke and Bellows, the scald, with a kind of pun on *vitu*, states that the really very intelligent and wise “warriors” have a beautiful life. In this case, the ‘contradiction’ between the stanza two halves disappears if we acknowledge that Óðinn’s goal has been to introduce such an opposition. In this case, we can suppose that the fourth line begins with an implicit ‘however’. This also explains the *heiti* chosen by the scald, namely, ‘warriors’ for ‘humankind’. The part of humankind that deserves this *heiti*, that is to say the fighters struggling for a territory or a way of life, are not concerned with being “not too wise.” Their lives are better when they are able to reach deep wisdom and cleverness because they do need it to stand firm on their unusual positions, territory or intellectually-wise.

As a conclusion, let me state again that the meanings of *til* and *vel* can show opposed meanings, and classical translations are all clearly possible. The ironical meaning of *til* is even ordinary in modern Icelandic. I chose to use their usual sense in Old Norse, which pushed me toward a non-classical understanding of this stanza. This choice brings also the reward that stanzas 54-55-56 will stop repeating thrice a critique of the *alsnotr* (all-wise) ones. This critique may well fit the immediate context of stanza 54.

Nevertheless, a still better context is the one of whole *Hávamál*, where we see that Óðinn often scorns or mocks the *ó-snotr* (‘non-wise’) ones, and lauds the *snotr* ones. In this larger context, if a critique of the ‘over-wise’ ones is absolutely welcome, it has to draw precise a line between ‘well-’ and ‘over-wisdom’ Classical translations, with an either trivial or contradictory rendering of stanza 54, do not take into account out this larger context.

### **\*\*\*Hávamál 55\*\*\***

#### **A translation as literal as possible**

Not over-much wise  
should be each human being,  
never (striving) towards wisdom;

because the heart of the wise man  
becomes seldom merry  
if he is 'on' (or 'in') all-wisdom.

### Prose explanation

Each human should be satisfied to be moderately wise, he should not try (strive) to become wise. So it is because an already wise person will not keep his merry heart if his goal is reaching supreme wisdom.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

*Meðalsnotr  
skyli manna hverr;  
æva til snotr sé;  
því at snotrs manns hjarta  
verður sjaldan glatt,  
ef sá er alsnotr er á.*

Not over-much wise  
should (be) each of the human beings  
never until wisdom be  
because of the wise one (his) heart  
becomes seldom glad,  
if him is all-wise who qui 'above/in/towards'.

### Bellows' translation

55. A measure of wisdom | each man shall have,  
But never too much let him know;  
For the wise man's heart | is seldom happy,  
If wisdom too great he has won.

### Commentaries on the vocabulary

The way of speech “*er* ‘as this’ ; *er á* ‘this thing’” is a traditional way to say “it is in this way for whoever is on (= has) this thing.” The scald thus concludes his stanza on a kind of grammatical joke, letting us guess to which ‘thing’ he alludes. It seems obvious to me that ‘the thing’ is the excess of will of wisdom.

On the other hand, it would be interesting to know if the final *á* specifies a stable state or an evolution. Nothing in this last line can help us to decide which. I nevertheless tend to think that the fact of ‘having’ corresponds to a “*hafá á*” that hints more to a tendency rather than a stable state.

### Comment on the meaning

The preceding stanza said that the *vel margt vitu* have a very beautiful lives. This one says that the *alsnotr* ones, or those who seek absolute wisdom, are seldom merry. My understanding of what looks as contradicting each other is as follows. Who refuse a carefree and merry life is far from choosing unhappiness. They will be challenged by sad times because truth is often heavy to bear but will know another kind of happiness. Reexamine stanza 53 that states the smallness of humankind. In the light of 55, it says that this human smallness conditions a merry life, and that rising above the condition of an ordinary human “brings a sad mind,” as stated by next stanza.

### A translation as literal as possible

Not over-much wise  
should be each human being,  
never (striving) towards wisdom;  
his örlög (*a plural*)  
(do) not (stay) in front of a wise one  
whose mind lacks the most of sadness.

### Prose explanation

Each human should be satisfied to be moderately wise, he should not try (strive) to become wise. When his destiny (his *örlög*) is not in front of him (he is not challenged by it), the wise one's mind is the freest of sadness.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

<i>Meðalsnotr</i>	Not over-much wise
<i>skyli manna hverr;</i>	should (be) each of the human beings
<i>æva til snotr sé;</i>	never until wisdom be;
<i>örlög sín</i>	örlög his
<i>viti engi fyrir,</i>	a wise one not before
<i>þeim er sorgalausastr sefi.</i>	his is the most sadness-free mind.

### Bellows' translation

56. A measure of wisdom | each man shall have,  
But never too much let him know;  
Let no man the fate | before him see,  
For so is he freest from sorrow.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

*Örlög* is a plural word so that it evokes 'the destinies' not 'the one destiny'. Many Old Norse texts speak about or refer to *örlög*, so that we do have some knowledge of what it can have been.

A *viti* (leader) is here a leader in wisdom.

Also note that the destiny is called *örlög* or *urð* in Old Norse, not *wyrð*, an Anglo-Saxon word, that became so popular among modern pagans. The Anglo-Saxon texts do not speak of *wyrð* except when translating Latin *fatum* ([see more details HERE](#)). It follows that we do not know what the Heathen Anglo-Saxons understood by this word, besides its Latin meaning. We can only suppose that their *wyrð* was similar to our Scandinavian *örlög*.

### Comment on the meaning

The expression *örlög sín viti engi to fyrir* can take two meanings. *Engi* ('non') can apply to *viti* or to *fyrir* (in front of). The first says that 'his *örlög* (is) in front of the non-wise one', i. e. that 'the non-wise one knows his destiny'. The second meaning says that 'his

*örlög* is not in front of the wise one', that is, the wise one is unaware of his destiny. Both agree well to last line since, in both cases, the character is not sad. However, the second interpretation agrees better with the first three lines. A wise one who is unaware of his destiny is still "fairly wise." By knowing it, he becomes wiser but he has a less happy life.

Considering that *örlög* is decided or announced by the Norns, the gods themselves are partially unaware of their destiny. The wise one who goes over the limit and takes knowledge of his *örlög* leaves his human statute.

If this happens when he is still far from death, the knowledge of his destiny can only bring to him some sadness. If his death is close, his destiny is behind him, instead of being in front of him, and he becomes *feigr*. *Prideilur Rúna* comments this state: "*feigur: qvi jam fatali morti appropingvat*" (*feigur*: that whom already fatal (= natural) death approaches). The other meaning of *feigr* is 'strange, mad, fey'. All this does not describe a particularly merry person. In other words, at any age, knowing one's destiny leads to lose all illusions, ambitions and enthusiasm, everything that brings joy to life.

Present day fashion of claiming to foresee the future, especially among modern pagans who use runes to this purpose, is a kind of self-destruction. Óðinn firmly disapproves of it here because this leads to nothing but some kind of sadness that hampers the wish to be active, at least when this foreseeing is really believed to be unavoidable.

### **Comment on the meaning of stanzas 53-56**

Stanza 53 recalled us the smallness of human beings. The repetition of the first three lines at the beginning the three stanzas bring us back into s. 53 context, the one of our pettiness.

Stanza 54 presents the exception of these who properly reach extreme wisdom. They are above the level of normal human beings and are able to reconcile wisdom and happiness.

Stanza 55 says that by reaching the level of *alsnotr* (all knowing), we may put too much in searching for wisdom, and this leads us to the loss of our joy of living.

Stanza 56 deals with a significant but particular case of wisdom, the one of knowing what destiny has been allotted to us. This specific kind of knowledge embeds our mind in sadness.

Combining these four stanzas, we see that becoming an 'all wise' one or a foreseer differs from being 'properly very wise'. Wisdom, as Óðinn presents it, is a narrow pass running in between foolishness if we lack of wisdom, and a sad life if we become over wise.

### **Hávamál 57-62**

**"What are the deepest needs of a human being?"**

**\*\*\*Hávamál 57 \*\*\***

**A translation as literal as possible**

A brand from another brand  
burns, until burning out,  
flame self-kindle from flame;  
human being from human being  
becomes known when they meet in their speech  
a moody and isolated one, though, (becomes such) from his self-conceit.

## Prose explanation

### *Ordinary meaning*

A brand ignites another one until it burns out and a flame kindles another one.

A human being teaches how to speak to another human being, but self-conceit teaches nothing but loneliness and sulkiness.

### *Odinic meaning*

A fire spreads from house to house and from tree to tree until it becomes one huge flame.

Speech spreads from one human being to another until humankind crops out of this way of sharing. A self-conceited person, however, self-excludes from humankind.

## ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

<i>Brandr af brandi</i>	A brand from a brand
<i>brenn, unz brunninn er,</i>	burns, until completely burnt is,
<i>funi kveikisk af funa;</i>	flame self-kindle from flame;
<i>maðr af manni</i>	human being from human being
<i>verðr at máli kuðr</i>	becomes known towards speech
<i>en til dælskr af dul.</i>	but also a moody and isolated one from self-conceit.

## Bellows' translation

The rendering of *verðr at máli kuðr* is in italics, the one of ***dul*** is in bold italics, the one of **dælskr** is in bold.

57. A brand from a brand | is kindled and burned,  
And fire from fire begotten;  
And man by his speech | *is known to men*,  
And the **stupid** by their **stillness**.

### *Last three lines of*

*Dronke*: Man from man / gets mastery of speech, / and **too slow a wit** from seclusion.

*Orchard*: Man from man becomes skilled of speech, / but **dumb** from lack of words.

*Boyer*: Man from man / will be by speech known, / but a **fool** is known by his foolishness.

## Commentary on the vocabulary

We will need a detailed discussion of this stanza vocabulary in order to justify our interpretation.

This stanza uses four times the preposition *af* and once *at*. As usual, these prepositions can take quite a number of different meanings according to the context. It is however well-known that, very generally, *af* expresses the idea of going away from something, while *at* expresses going toward something. I thus propose to translate *af* by 'from' and *at* by 'towards' in a literal translation. In addition, I imagine that neither the skald nor Óðinn wanted to give us here a lesson of virtuosity in preposition handling but rather a lesson of morality. In particular, in lines 5 and 6, the relation between two human is the same as the



one between two flames. The flame transmits fire to another flame, and thus the human one transmits speech to another human. We cannot say, though, that a flame teaches anything to the other flame. Just like a flame becomes flame by its contact with a flame, a human beings becomes human through their contact 'toward' speech. This is why I agree completely with the meaning of *kuðr at máli* given by C-V 'speaking pals', where some teaching can take place but is not central. Bellows' and Boyer's translations, as given above, do not contradict this interpretation. On the other hand, the recent translations do not imply "recognition of man by man" but rather "teaching of man by man," which is very different. These two translators, I believe, use the meaning of 'wise' for *kuðr* (rare but possible, see Evans below) to understand that the man becomes 'wise in speech', which they express by "*mastery*" or "*skilled*."

We will see that Evans discusses the meaning of *kuðr* (that became *kunnr*). This is an adjective which generally means 'known'. This word can express a non-sentimental knowledge, but can also carry feelings, as a known criminal is 'badly known', but a friend is 'known for good'.

The adjective *dælskr* means: 'to be of the dale, moody, dull'. This evokes seclusion as Dronke puts it, but does not fit so well with stillness (Bellows), and not at all with lack of words (Orchard) or foolishness (Boyer).

The noun *dul* means 'concealment, arrogance, self-conceit' (as given by C-V, de Vries and Lexicon Poeticum). In some special cases, and in a context of insults, it may hint at a lack of wit, but the context here is not of angry words, thus it cannot take here the sense of 'stupid' as English 'dull'.

The last line thus tells us that "concealment, arrogance, self-conceit lead a person to become of the dale, moody, dull." It does not say that such a person should be especially stupid.

### **Comment on the meaning**

As Evans puts it, "The strophe plainly recommends sociability and points to the ill consequences of solitude." I do not think, however, that this expresses its basic meaning because it does not take into account the violence contained in the three first lines. They call to the mind a fire setting ablaze a village or a forest.

Thus, lines 5 and 6 do mean that human ones recognize each other by their speech (or teach speech to each other as Dronke and Orchard understand it), but they also suggest that words build our feeling to belong to humankind, setting ablaze this feeling in a gigantic communication fire. Today's web examples are too obvious to need recall.

The last line does mean that it is harmful to remain isolated, but also that self-conceit is a "capital sin," as Christians put it, which prevents some people from taking part in this kindling: they do not really belong to humanity.

This last line clearly stigmatizes who hardly deserve to be called human, but they address conceited people who are fully responsible of their loneliness, they simply need to quit their arrogance to be back again within humankind.

### **What are the real needs of a human being?**

One human essential need is belonging into humankind. An essential mistake is quitting one's own feeling of being a human. The kind of despising and arrogant pride that puts someone out of humankind is appalling.

## Evans' Commentaries

57

4-5 The strophe plainly recommends sociability and points to the ill consequences of solitude; scholars differ however in their interpretation of the second half. Most take *kuðr* (*kunnr*) as having its usual sense 'known', ... [we may also] follow Kock 2, 27 in taking *kuðr* as 'wise'. This sense is not recorded by the dictionaries for prose, but *Lexicon Poeticum* cites three instances from the Edda (not the present passage) with this meaning... [Since this adjective describes also the relationship between self-conceit and a moody person, there is little wisdom in it. From the citations in *Lexicon Poeticum*, we also get the feeling that *kunnr* became to mean 'clever' in a Christian context.]

6 *dælskr* occurs only here in verse, but (as also the noun *dælska*) a few times in prose, meaning 'foolish' ... *Dul* combines, or wavers between, the senses 'concealment, silence, reserve, proud self-conceit, folly, infatuation' ... *Af dul* denotes the *cause* of the man's becoming foolish; . .

### \*\*\*Hávamál 58 \*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

He will rise early  
he who wants to take from another one  
his wealth or his life;  
seldom a lying wolf  
gets a ham  
nor a sleeping man gets victory.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

58.

<i>Ár skal rísa</i>	Early will rise
<i>sá er annars vill</i>	he who of another will
<i>fé eða fjör hafa;</i>	wealth or 'vital parts' (life) ;
<i>sjaldan liggjandi ulfr</i>	seldom lying wolf
<i>lær of getr</i>	ham 'of' gets
<i>né sofandi maðr sigr.</i>	nor sleeping man, victory.

#### Bellows' translation

58. He must early go forth | who fain the blood  
Or the goods of another would get;  
The wolf that lies idle | shall win little meat,  
Or the sleeping man success.

#### Comment on the meaning

We have here an interestingly non politically-correct stanza that provides counseling on the good way to steal or kill an enemy. We may perhaps agree that, in spite of all the empathy and compassion that are supposed to permeate our feelings, life is still a fight and

whoever refuses to be beaten down in our society has to ‘wake up early’, never relaxing his/her awareness.

### What are the real needs of a human being?

A human essential need is finding one’s proper place within humankind.  
It is a deep mistake to refuse to fight for finding this proper place.

### Evans’ Commentaries

58

This strophe was evidently known to Saxo Grammaticus (c. 1200) , for what is manifestly a direct rendering of it is placed in the mouth of Ericus disertus in Book V of his Danish History: *Pernox enim et pervigil esse debet alienum appetens culmen. Nemo stertendo victoriam cepit, nec luporum quisquam cubando cadaver invenit.* [ in 5. 7. 3 [9] **For he who covets the pinnacle of another’s power must watch and wake all night. No man has ever won a victory by snoring, and no wolf has ever found a carcass by lying asleep.**] (See Martinez-Pizarro for the suggestion that Saxo’s account derives from a lost Eiríks þáttir málspaka; if this is correct, the strophe was no doubt quoted there) .

Heusler 1, 112 believed that 4-6 incorporated two pre-existing proverbs, the first in 4-5, the second having some such form as *sjaldan sofandi maðr sigr um getr (vegr, hlýtr)* . [seldom a sleeping man gets (or lifts, or listen to) victory] Vápnfirðinga saga ch. 17... cites *sjaldan vegr sofandi maðr sigr* as a proverb, . . . Singer 13 lists numerous other Continental instances, sometimes with different animals, as a fox and a rat.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 59 \*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

He will rise early  
he who reaches poets (or gets hold of workforce)  
and goes towards the conscience of his verse-making (his poetical works) ,.  
(he goes into) much delaying  
who sleeps the whole morning,  
under (the urge of) impulses half of fate (or wealth) (is won).

#### Prose explanation

1. Choices made by the translators quoted here:

*fá á* = to seek, *yrkjendr* = labor, *sins verka* = *sins verks* (!) = his activity, *auðr* = material wealth:

He must have an early rise the one who looks for a workforce and goes to the conscience (*here* = the knowledge) of his work. Who sleeps throughout the morning loses much time, to have impulse (= stamina) and motivations is half of wealth.

2. Personal choices, where

*fá á* = to reach, *yrkjendr* = poets, *sins verka* = his poetical work, *auðr* = productive abundance and spiritual wealth or destiny.

He must have an early rise the one who reaches the poets’ rank and who advances in the conscience of his work. Who sleeps throughout the

morning loses much time, to have motivations is half of (important poetic) works (*or* of the poet's destiny) .

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

59.

<i>Ár skal rísa</i>	Early will rise
<i>sá er á yrkjendr fáa</i>	he who towards manpower ( <i>or</i> poets) gets hold
<i>ok ganga síns verka á vit,</i>	and goes his verse-making into conscience,
<i>margt of dvelr</i>	much of delay
<i>þann er um morgun sefr,</i>	who 'all around' the morning sleeps,
<i>hálfur er auðr und hvötum.</i>	half is wealth ( <i>or</i> fate) under impulses.

### Bellows' translation

59. He must early go forth | whose workers are few,  
Himself his work to seek;  
Much remains undone | for the morning-sleeper,  
For the swift is wealth half won.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

Since stanza 6, we regularly meet the verb *fá*, which is very polysemic. In his glossary dedicated to Hávamál, Evans proposes for this verb, according to the context, the following close meanings: 'to obtain, receive, gain, take', but also a kind of opposite meanings: 'to provide, cause, influence'. Moreover, a different etymology provides also 'to draw, to paint', especially the runes. In this stanza, all the translators cited here give to *fá á* the meaning "to have few of," for example, Dronke translates the second line by "who has few workers."

On *á yrkjendr*. The verb *yrkja* means to work and to make poetry. Here, its present participle is used as noun, *yrkjendi*, thus it means a 'working' or a 'poetizing' person. The declension of these nominalized forms gives a final '-r' to their nominative and accusative plural. Lastly, the preposition *á* followed the accusative generally expresses a movement 'in the direction of'. Hence my literal translation: "towards manpower (*or* towards the poets) ." Moreover, a pun links together this expression and *síns verka* as follows.

On *síns verka*. *Síns* is a possessive adjective the declension case of which is singular masculine and neuter genitive and its plural genitive is *sinna*. It is thus somewhat strange that a copyist could confuse *síns* and *sinna*. Thus, *verka* must be a singular. The noun *verk* (= work, activity) is a strong neuter, its genitive singular makes *verks* and *verka* in the plural. The name *verki* (= poetic composition) is a weak masculine, the singular and plural genitives of which are *verka*. Consequently *síns verka* clearly means 'of his poetic composition' and does not mean 'of his job', as Evans notices without drawing any clear conclusion from it. Be it a poetic work or more concrete works (such as, say, architecture), this meaning totally opposes to a translation of *á yrkjendr fáa* by "having little manpower" as chosen by the four academics cited here. The scald thus speaks almost certainly of some kind of poetic work and certainly not of a contractor who lacks personnel as their translations suggest.

On *auðr*. The noun *auðr* has several meanings. It generally means 'material richness and abundance'. It is however quite possible that the scald wanted to evoke here the poetic richness or the abundance of a poetic work. In poetry, a rare but possible meaning of this

word is ‘fate, destiny’. Its etymology explains the existence of these two meanings. Following de Vries and Pokorny, it is related to two Indo-European words, *auð-* (luck, wealth) or *ōd* (possession, prosperity) but the root of these two words is *au-*, meaning ‘to weave’.

I agree that the meaning ‘destiny’ is ridiculous in the traditional interpretation of these lines. My interpretation, on the contrary, makes it possible to understand that Óðinn implies here that the work of a poet and his destiny are one same thing.

### Comment on the meaning

The two possible understandings above discussed lead to two different meanings of this stanza.

The traditional rendering of this stanza makes it quite dull. It is quite obvious that if you want to earn your living, it is necessary to get moving, at least a little. Good sense shows that this interpretation is however often contradicted in real life since many people are overwhelmed with work for a tiny benefit, and some others do nothing but being overwhelmed by wealth.

The understanding I propose here opposes the prejudices commonly carried by “cursed” poets. It provides a very laudatory vision of poetic work and, all things considered, it says: “No, the poet is not an idle person. On the contrary, poets have to work hard if they do not want to remain bad poets, if they want more than a destiny where they drinks the mead of poetry that Óðinn “*sendi aftr ... ok köllum vér þat skáldfífla hlut*” (sent from the behind ... and we call it the lot of fool scalds) as told by the myth of the mead of poetry.

Obviously, in an Odinic context, poetry and sorcery are intertwined. Thus, the stanza means that magic knowledge also, requires ceaseless training efforts, and major motivation brings you half of magic knowledge.

### What are the real needs of a human being?

An essential need for each human being is developing his/her knowledge: “*ganga síns verka á vit*” as the stanza puts it. Each one has his/her own way to reach poetry and spirituality. It is essential to keep this impulse instead of letting it wither out of intellectual idleness.

### Evans’ Commentaries

59

3 *síns* shows that *verka* must be gen. sg. of *verki*, which elsewhere always means ‘poem’, though *misverk*, *misverki* ‘misdeed’ exist side by side. Either we must suppose that the word here = *verki* or we must expel *síns*, which would then allow us to take *verka* as gen. pl. of *verk* (so Finnur Jónsson 1, 52; more hesitantly in his 1924 edition [of *Hávamál*]; cp. Lexicon Poeticum s. v. *verki*).

[Note that I corrected a misprint in Evans who says: “It is necessary for to us then is to suppose that the word here is *verk*, that is to say...”, which does not gives a clear sentence. My eagerness at reading *verki* has not been my motivation! ]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 60\*\*\*

### A translation as literal as possible

Of dried logs  
and of thatching birch-bark  
a human being knows the (good) measure  
and (the measure) of this wood  
such that it may last  
one or several seasons.

### Prose explanation

Each human person knows the (good) measure of dried logs and of roofing beech-bark. And (he knows also the amount) of this wood that may last one and several seasons.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

60.

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

Of dried logs  
and of thatch birch-bark for roofing  
of this knows a human-being the measure  
and of this wood (the measure)  
such that it last may  
one season and several seasons.

### Bellows' translation

60. Of seasoned shingles | and strips of bark  
For the thatch let one know his need,  
And how much of wood | he must have for a month,  
Or in half a year he will use.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The noun *mál* has four different meaning.

The first one is the best known, it covers meanings like ‘word, speech, language, spoken language, dialogue, tale, saying, sentence’. One meets many sayings in *Hávamál* which could also be call ‘High One’s Sayings’, for example.

The second meaning is takes place in a judicial context. It then means ‘judicial action, commitment to a trial, procedure, legal agreement, transaction’.

The third one is relative its temporal meanings. It then means ‘time’ as in *í mál* = in good time. It can also mean a laps of time, one season as in *sumar-mál*, summer time, i. e. approximately mid-April. This third meaning will be the one used in last line translation.

The fourth meaning is relative to images, it then means ‘drawing, inlaid ornament’.

The name *misseri* is a strong neuter which gives also *misseri* in the plural and which means ‘one season’ and, in the plural case, ‘seasons’ i. e. one year or half-year. Dronke and Orchard choose a very precise version: “three months or six months”. This precision appears to me out of context in *Hávamál* because the exact duration imports very little, which was clearly the poet’s wish to imply, by using words that do not indicate a precise duration.

### Comment on the meaning

As opposed to stanza 59, the words used here do not entail any insinuation: this stanza says that each one is able to know how much wood is necessary to the maintenance of his/her house. It does not provide counseling, it reports a fact. As compared to stanza 59, 60 states that each one finds the impulse necessary to the maintenance of his/her material needs.

If we combine the prosaic interpretation of 59 and this one, the two stanzas mean something like “(59) : a good worker is active and (60) everyone is active enough to take care of immediate material needs.” Thus 60 looks like a simple continuation of 59.

If we combine the ‘poetry’ interpretation of 59 and the obviously prosaic meaning of 60, we get an opposition between these two stanzas: “(59) a good poet needs the impulse of creation to become a real poet (and this is very hard and rare) ” while 60: “Everyone gets enough impulse for taking care of immediate material needs.” In other words: knowledge acquisition and poetic intuition are hard work, gathering enough wood is normal work, and everyone does it perfectly.

### What are the real needs of a human being?

A need essential to each human is finding a place to leave and taking care of the basic material needs. Each human being, however, is quite aware of this and knows how to deal with it.

### Evans’ Commentaries

#### 60

2 Unless we suppose the picture is one of a pile of pieces of bark waiting to be used and which, just like a wood-pile, have to be roofed against the weather, we must take *pakinna* here in an active sense (‘bark *for roofing*’) rather than in the passive sense usual in the past participle, which this word appears to be. . . .

6. . . The point of the strophe is not very clear; . . . thinks a parallel strophe has been lost, in which something one does not know the measure of would be contrasted.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 61\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Washed and well-fed  
let the man ride to the Thing  
though he is not clothed at the best;  
Of his shoes and his clothes  
the man should not be ashamed,  
nor of his horse,  
though he does not have a good one.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

61.

*Þveginn ok mettr  
ríði maðr þingi at,*

Washed and having eaten his fill  
(let him) ride the man to the Thing

<i>þótt hann sé-t væddr til vel;</i>	though he is-not clothed at the best;
<i>Skúa ok bróka</i>	To shoe and for the clothes
<i>skammisk engi maðr</i>	to be shamed not the man
<i>né hests in heldr,</i>	nor of the horse either,
<i>þátt hann hafí-t góðan.</i>	though he has-not (a) good (one) .

### **Bellows' translation**

61. Washed and fed | to the council fare,  
 But care not too much for thy clothes;  
 Let none be ashamed | of his shoes and hose,  
 Less still of the steed he rides,  
 (Though poor be the horse he has. )  
 [Bellows' note 61: The fifth line is probably a spurious addition.]

### **Comment on the meaning**

This stanza typically describes the social behavior of who goes to a significant meeting, where his/her future can be decided. The Thing was the place where free men would make decisions on the relations of power within the community. More than once, some tried to mold the decisions of the Thing by displaying their wealth. Óðinn explains here why these surface behaviors are of no import. On the contrary, personal comfort (cleanness, being well-fed and rested) is extremely significant in order to behave proudly in front of the friends and the possible enemies. The following stanza completes this description: Shame on who has no friend ready to help him.

### **What are the real needs of a human being?**

An essential need for each human is to carry out a healthy life comprising food and body hygiene. Good clothing and alert mount can be useful but their elegance is not significant.

### **\*\*\*Hávamál 62\*\*\***

#### **A translation as literal as possible**

He tries nipping and stretches his neck,  
 who comes near the sea,  
 the eagle reaching the ancient sea:  
 Such is the human being  
 who among many (persons) arrives  
 and (needs to) get spokesmen.

#### **Prose explanation**

The eagle that reaches the beaches of the “ancient see” nervously tries to grab something and stretches its neck. The isolated person who joins a crowd of strangers behaves in a similar way.



## ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

62.

<i>Snapi ok gnapi,</i>	He tries nipping and stretches the neck
<i>er til sævar kemr,</i>	he who near the sea comes
<i>örn á aldinn mar:</i>	the eagle towards the ancient sea:
<i>Svá er maðr</i>	Thus is the man
<i>er með mörgum kemr</i>	he who with many comes [he arrives among many people]
<i>ok á formælendr fáa.</i>	and (needs to) spokesmen to obtain.

### Bellows' translation

62. When the eagle comes | to the ancient sea,  
He snaps and hangs his head;  
So is a man | in the midst of a throng,  
Who few to speak for him finds.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The verb *gnapa* is classically translated by ‘to bend down the head’ because it is supposed that who *gnapi* is shamed. This is undoubtedly suggested by stanza 44 of Lokasenna where Loki insults Freyr’s servant. Evans is however right to prefer the other meaning of *gnapa*, ‘to jut out’ which suggests an action of ‘stretching the neck’, such as when seeking someone within a crowd. Moreover, even in Lokasenna 44 where this servant is compared to a puppy, Loki may mean that the servant ‘stretches his neck’ seeking the help of his master, and that is more probable than shamefully lowering the head as it seems to be classically understood. The meaning provided by de Vries is “in *between* to bend forward and to hang over.”

The verb *snapa* suffers from a similar problem. C-V translates it by ‘to snuffle like dog picking up crumbs on the floor’ and refers to Lokasenna 42 for *snapiþiss* which, in fact, is found also in Lokasenna 44, thus near *gnapa*, as it is in Hávamál 62. A snuffling dog is more usually hunting game or looking for its master than begging for crumbs. De Vries’s meaning for *snapa* is *schnappen* which means ‘to snap, to try to grab’ and that can express the nervousness of someone who is looking for helpers and does not find them.

### Comment on the meaning

I do not believe that eagles snuffle to pick up crumbs as suggested by one of the accepted meanings of *snapa*. The first three lines of 62 obviously refer to a lost myth. I find it plausible that this myth would have been about Hræsvelgr, the eagle standing at the top of Yggdrasill. Suppose that a myth describes it as leaving his position in order to come near the “ancient sea,” the one nearby which the Norns live, at the base of Yggdrasill’s trunk. It would then be expected that it stretches its neck and nervously flinches when facing the Norns. In a somewhat parallel register, I liked Mark Ludwig Stinson’s tale (no more available on the web) that describes an aging Hræsvelgr becoming blind. This at least shows that true Heathens feel they lack details on Hræsvelgr’s destiny.

Stanza 62, as 61 does, alludes to the Thing. We can easily imagine a person looking for allies in the middle of a crowd of strangers. He must be flinching a lot and stretching his neck in his hopeless search. The crowd looks to him like a strange sea, indifferent to his loneliness.

## What are the real needs of a human being?

An essential human need is having enough many friends/allies so that he will never feel ill at ease even among a crowd of ‘non friends’.

### Evans' Commentaries

62

1 *snapa* occurs only here and in Lokasenna 44 [where Loki uses this verb in order to insult a servant of Freyr]. It appears to mean something like ‘snatch, grab, snuffle for (food)’. The basic notion seems to be that of a short, quick movement (... who compares Norwegian dialect *snapp* ‘quick’) . *Gnapa* is properly ‘to project’ ... Here it describes the eagle with head stretched forwards.

3 *aldinn mar* is also in Snorri's Háttatal 67 (Skj. II 80) . The adjective normally means ‘old’... relates it here to *alda* ‘billow’ and renders ‘billowy’, comparing Norwegian dialect *alden* in this sense... [others translate it by] ‘high’, on the ground that (though this is not certain) it is cognate with Latin *altus*.

## Hávamál 63-65

### “On the power of speech”

#### \*\*\*Hávamál 63\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Ask and say,  
he shall (do it) , who (wants to become one) of the wise ones.  
Who wants to be called a wise one,  
one only (should *or* could) know,  
no other one shall (know) ,  
the (whole) people know it, if three are (aware of it) .

#### Prose explanation

Who wants to be called a wise one must be able to ask the good questions and to provide the good answers. He must not, however, be confident with a second person, because when three are aware of the same thing, then everyone is as well.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

63.

*Fregna ok segja  
skal fróðra hvern,*

Ask and say  
shall of the wise ones who,

*sá er vill heitinn horskr;* he who will be named wise,  
*einn vita* one to know  
*né annarr skal,* not another shall,  
*þjóð veit, ef þrír ro [=eru].* the people know, if three are.

### Bellows' translation

63. To question and answer | must all be ready  
Who wish to be known as wise;  
Tell one thy thoughts, | but beware of two,  
All know what is known to three.

[All provide a similar translation, except Boyer who translates the first three lines as: “He must ask and answer / To each wise one / who wants to be called wise.” Boyer thus suggests that entering the world of wisdom is a kind of scholarly examination since the ‘candidate’ has to give an answer “to each wise one.”]

### Commentary on the vocabulary

While commenting stanza 18, we already announced that verb *segja* primary meaning is ‘to say, to declare, tell’, it never implies an interlocutor who just asks a question. In the context of a dialogue, however, it can be translated by ‘to answer’. Boyer’s translation suggests that becoming wise takes place through a kind of Socrates-wise dialogue between pupil and wise one. This mimics some features of the school system, with the notable exception of PhD where the candidate must say what he/she thinks on a research topic (his/her thesis on this topic) and where jury members should not ask questions to him/her but criticize the thesis or suggest new approaches. This is why I can hardly imagine that who wishes to become an acknowledged ‘wise one’ (he/she “wants to be called wise”) could act differently than asking various questions and by exposing his/her point of view to acknowledged wise ones.

In the 2nd line, the adjective ‘wise’, *fróðra*, is a plural genitive, certainly because a preposition is implied, controlling the genitive, such as *til* for example.

The relative pronoun *hverr* is in the nominative case. I tried to render these grammatical details in my translation.

### Comment on the meaning

I suppose that everyone will interpret this stanza as advice to speak sparingly, and this is certainly a possible meaning. I do not agree completely. The first line stresses that the wise one knows how to listen and to speak. Then, follow details on what is ‘to speak’. If information must be given in confidence, then it can be shared with one person, not with two. If, this information has to be conveyed to everyone, then it has to reach at least three persons. The wise one must be able to differentiate esoteric information from the exoteric one.

Evans states the similarity between 28 and 63 that both speak about a person who can *fragna ok segja* (to ask and say) . In fact, the meanings of these two stanzas are nearly opposite. The three first lines of stanza 28 are obviously ironic since the described person “believes him/herself wise” and does *sama*, together (with him/herself), questions and answers. We fully understand why he/she fails at hiding the emptiness of his/her thought, as described in the three last lines. Stanza 28 is thus perfectly coherent as a whole, as opposed to what Evans claims. Stanza 63 describes the opposite phenomenon: A really wise person

knows how to ask and answer and singles him/herself out as being wise instead of claiming it. He/she *vill heitinn horskr* (wants to be called wise) by the other ones. Not to say that a real wise one is able control his/her speech, as stated by s. 29 and 73.

### **Second comment on *fregna ok segja (sama)***

**(Recall of 28)** The two stanzas 28 and 63 use the expression *regna ok segja* which means ‘to question and say’ but stanza 28 adds *sama*, which leads to the understanding “to pronounce both the questions and the answers.” We thus understood that the three first lines of s. 28 are ironical since who says the questions and the answers are ridiculous. Conversely, the three first lines 63 are laudatory, the subject is able to ask to someone and to express an opinion (perhaps with another one) in the form of a discussion that enriches the knowledge of both.

**(Recall ends)** .

An interesting example of this behavior is provided by *Völuspá* s. 29 that describes how the *völva*, by teaching “magic fates and the art of the prediction” to Óðinn (i. e. while answering his questions), “still and still widened her vision of this Earth” (undoubtedly by questioning him or communicating with him in some way) .

The secrecy surrounding the knowledge of who learned and taught is a mark of the importance and undoubtedly the danger of such knowledge. This strongly suggests it is about magic knowledge which can be used in a ill-considered way and especially that can be misused with catastrophic effects for the sorcerer's apprentice and his/her experimental subjects.

### ***Knowledge without ending***

The expression *regna ok segja* is illustrated in Eddic poetry by higher beings whose main motivation is an insatiable need for more knowledge, such are for example Óðinn, or the *völva* he questions in *Völuspá*. Their knowledge unceasingly increases and evolves. This increasing of knowledge performs in a way different than, but similar to introspection for action (as defined in s.18) that self-analyses and generates new forms of conscience.

Both knowledge growth and introspection for action require that the learner interacts with the physical universe and with a person. The only difference between the two and that the ‘thirst for knowledge’ is satisfied only by an exchange between two human having of different knowledge, whereas the active conscience works in introspection for the action. None of them poses a limit to their extension so that they offer an image of a possible infinity.

### **Evans' Commentaries**

**63**

[Evans cites the great specialist of skaldic poetry (together with Finnur Jónsson), Ernst Kock, who partly convinced me. He thinks that this stanza means: “do not think that sharing your thoughts with one or two persons is enough, better to share it with three and the whole world will know it.” I think that the poet states that a wise one is able to choose if he wants to share his thoughts with at most two persons or at least three.]

[Some commentators suppose that] a pre-existing proverb *þjóð veit, þat er þrír vita* [people know, what three know] lies behind the two poems here. Singer 14 quotes Continental parallels (e. g. *Quod tribus est notum, raro solet esse secretum*) [What is known by three, seldom will be secret] and suggests the proverb originated in Germany (though not actually recorded there before the fourteenth century) .]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 64\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Of his might,  
the insightful one should (be)  
one who 'owns' moderation;  
he then [thanks to this] finds,  
when he comes among the stout ones,  
that he is not the most energetic and the boldest of all.

#### Prose explanation

Who is able to provide insightful advice has to make use of his power in a moderate way. He will then find that he is not the boldest, nor the more active one among a group of bold people.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

64.

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

Of might his  
should he the insightful one  
who 'in' moderation has;  
then he that finds,  
he with stout ones he comes  
not him alone is the boldest [*and the most energetic*].

#### Bellows' translation

64. The man who is prudent | a measured use  
Of the might he has will make;  
He finds when among [*þá is not translated*] | the brave he fares  
That the boldest he may not be.

**Other translations of *þá* in line 4 and of last line:** *Orchard*: “not translated - no one outpaces every one,” *Dronke*: “then - no one is boldest of all,” *Boyer*: “then - no one is able to triumph alone.”

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

Adjective *ráðsnotr* can take different meanings depending on the way it is composed. In particular, *ráð-snotr* means ‘advice-wise’. Its ending in ‘a’ of a nominative is due to that *ráð* is a neuter. Its usually accepted meaning is ‘judicious, insightful’.

Adverb *þá* means: ‘then, at this time, accordingly’. We expect instead an adverb meaning ‘otherwise’ that would give a warning value to the first three lines, as in the sentence “if you behave badly, then you will pay for it.” Such a negative use is perfectly possible. It would, however oppose the first three lines to the three last ones. In my opinion, this *þá* means ‘thanks to this’ and shows that the last three lines are a positive issue when

following the advice given by the three first ones. Here, it does not mean ‘however’ (as we understand when its translation is skipped) .

Adjective *frækni* means ‘stout, valiant’.

Adjective *hvatr*, here as a superlative, *hvatrast*, means ‘bold, active, vigorous’.

### Comment on the meaning

The three first lines underline that the insightful one holds some power over other people. This power certainly exists through speech since he can provide wise advice to his mates. In turn, Óðinn advises the advisers to be moderate in using their power.

When caution about something is suggested, it is usual to add a warning on the dangers associated to overdoing it. This warning may exist here if we attribute an ironical sense to *þá* as in: “if you overdo it, **then** you will pay it in such way.” Irony is perfectly acceptable here since Old Norse is used to give a deprecatory meaning to laudatory words.

We obviously also may keep the normal meaning of *þá*, as I do. The last three lines of course mean that who moderately employs his power will not become a tyrant and will, in this way, avoid the inescapable uprising of the bold ones. These lines moreover mean that paying more respect to his mates, he will leave them free to provide judicious advice to him, their leader, who may have overlooked something, as much judicious as he might be.

### Evans’ Commentaries

64

4-6 cp. Fáfnismál 17: *þá þat finnr, er með fleirum kömr, at engi er einna hvatastr.*

Finnur Jónsson thinks this is a borrowing from Hávamál; more likely the two passages were variants in oral tradition. Line 6 is taken for a proverb by Heusler... and Wessén...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 65\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Watchful and careful  
shall this man,  
and scarcely to friends be in trust:  
Of his words,  
which the human being says to others,  
he often receives payment.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

65.

\*[Rask, 1918 provides:

*Gaetinnoc geyminn*

*scyli gumna hverr,*

*oc var at vina trausti: ]\**

*orða þeira,*

*er maðr öðrum segir*

*oft hann gjöld of getr.*

[Watchful and careful

shall this man,

and scarcely to friends (be in) trust]

of words his

that the human being to others says

often he payments receives.

\* These three lines miss in parchment manuscripts and are found in some paper manuscripts, as told by Bugge 1867. Note that Rask told in his introduction that he also used paper manuscripts. Bellows and Boyer carefully point it and give in a footnote a translation. I added mine between \*[ ]\*

### **Bellows' translation**

65.

...

Oft for the words | that to others one speaks  
He will get but an evil gift.

[**Bellows' note** 65. The manuscript indicates no lacuna (lines 1 and 2) . Many editors have filled out the stanza with two lines from late paper manuscripts, the passage running:

“A man must be watchful | and wary as well,  
And fearful of trusting a friend.”]

### **Commentary on the vocabulary**

The words “*var trausti*” in line 3: Prefix *var-* means ‘scarcely’, and the noun *traust* (here in the singular dative *trausti*) means ‘trust’. A translation by ‘in scarce trust’ (in order to render the dative) seems to me most probable. There is nevertheless a pun on *var*, which can obviously read ‘he was’. That gives an opposite meaning to the 3rd line: “and he was in confidence with the friends.”

### **Comment on the meaning**

This stanza insists again on the necessary care for the wording used when making a contract. I suppose that this evokes for the reader the feeling of a hyper-suspicious people. Because of the importance given to contracts in the ancient Germanic civilization, each uttered word constitutes an implied contract with no return (because “we hold word”) even when a word has been misunderstood. The concept of friends implying that there is contract between them, they can indeed be trusted, as long as we have been cautious enough about the exact meaning of the contract wording.

As a kind of side-remark, let me recall that Snorri qualifies the ‘speech runes’ as “primary.”

### **Evans' Commentaries**

65

Plainly half the strophe has been lost.

## **Hávamál 66-67**

### **“Bad guest and bad host”**

\*\*\*Hávamál 66\*\*\*

(Óðinn explains how he is a bad guest –  
see final explanation in comment of 67)

### A translation as literal as possible

Too early  
I went to some places,  
but too late to some others  
the beer had been drunk;  
(in) some others, it was not ready,  
a loathed person seldom hits the (good) membership.

### Prose explanation

Óðinn acknowledges that he arrived too early in some places and too late in others. In the latter case, all the beer was already drunk and, in the first one, it was not yet ready. His conclusion is that it ‘seldom’ (= never) happens that a loathed, hateful and unpleasant person would reach/hit/‘fall into’ (= be accepted by) a group, a member of a group or the juncture point of a group.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

66.

<i>Mikilsti snemma</i>	All too much early
<i>kom ek í marga staði</i>	went I to many places,
<i>en til síð í suma;</i>	but too late to some;
<i>öl var drukkit,</i>	the beer had been drunk
<i>sumt var ólagat,</i>	(in) some was not ready,
<i>sjaldan hittir leiðr í lið</i>	seldom hits a loathed one in a membership.

### Bellows' translation

66. Too early to many | a meeting I came,  
And some too late have I sought;  
The beer was all drunk, | or not yet brewed;  
Little the loathed man finds.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

I find the last line quite beautiful by the richness of allusions it encompasses. There is no difficulty in understanding its general meaning, but it reaches this meaning by several ways.

The verb *hitta* (here, either in the 3rd person of the present, or in a nominalized nominative form, *hittir*) means ‘to reach’, ‘to meet’, ‘to hit as in striking or as in hitting the point’, and thus, metaphorically, ‘to understand’. Here the meaning of ‘to reach’ appears most reasonable. All things considered, the English verb ‘to hit’ renders it perfectly, as long as all of its possible meanings involving brutality are removed. Lexicon Poëticum translates *hitta* by “*offendere, incidere in, invenire* (= ‘to run up against’, ‘to fall on/into’, ‘to find, to meet’) and the substantive *hittir* by “*qui invenit* (who finds, meets).” [Note that ‘to offend’ is a secondary meaning of the Latin verb *offendere*.]



Following C-V, the adjective *leiðr* means ‘hated, odious, hateful’, it is obviously used here as a noun. De Vries gives ‘*verhasst, leid*’ (hated, who brings pain) et Lex. Poet. provides two different meanings: ‘*invisus*’ (loathed) and ‘*terribilis*’ (dreadful, terrible). In view of Óðinn’s name Yggr (Dreadful), and taking into account that line 2 says “*kom ek* (came I),” this last meaning of *leiðr* should not be forgotten. Note that we already met this adjective in s. 35 where the context fitted well the meaning ‘loathed’.

As last word of the stanza, some editors have been reading *lið* (= cider; for example Mogk 1888), instead of *liðr*. I prefer this last one, as it is read, for example, by Rask 1818, Bugge 1867 (internet version), Finnur Jónsson 1932, Evans 1986. This word is ambiguous here because it can be the singular accusative either of *lið* (= group of people or a help) or of *liðr* (= an articulation, a member of the body, a member of a group). Bellows translates it by ‘little’. Dronke and Orchard make use of the positive meaning of ‘to hit’ to translate by “to hit the right spot/time”. Boyer translates it by ‘*jointure*’ (juncture) and he thus reads *liðr*, which nevertheless leads him to catch up with the general meaning of the stanza.

Thus, in one single line, we meet several ways of hitting, several kinds of loathsomeness and several locations in a group or in the human body. I find particularly beautiful that all these possible meanings harmoniously ring together by expressing all the nuances of one single idea.

### Comment on the meaning

We have here an echo of stanza 35, saying that who exaggerates the duration of his stay becomes loathed. Now, we do not understand why being never in time would trigger such hate from other people: annoyance or despising amusement is what usually brings this kind of slight misbehavior.

A guest, who always comes in too early, or too late, will be bothersome to his host because he/she does not fit the host’s behavior. Now, the last line generalizes this particular situation to the one of a person who is loathed and, being hated by the host, this person will never get a harmonious relationship with the host. In other words, loathe is not the consequence but the cause of the lack of tuning between guest and host.

Why Óðinn describes himself as being the ‘loathed one’? Since he is known for being, on occasions, a dreadful (yggr) god, there is no problem at accepting him as such, using the second meaning of *leiðr*. Now, among the various possible dreadfulness, why insisting on his lack of punctuality? I suppose that he stresses here a flaw that belongs more to human nature than to himself.

Humans are a strange stock. When they want something, they always feel that it does not happen in time. Here are two instances of this human feature. Humans tend to complain that they die too early, but the long survivors then in turn complain that they have lived too long. If we obtain material wealth too early, it will worsen our life, if we get it too late, we will no longer be able to enjoy it fully. In other words, this stanza says that, from Óðinn’s point of view, human beings are annoying hosts.

Nest stanza will insist on this human peculiarity.

### Evans’ Commentaries

66

6 Many early editors took the last word as *lið* ‘ale’ (e. g. Bugge ...) [though Rask does not], ... rather, it must be the word found in the saying *liðar verðr sá at leita, er lítit sax hefir*, which appears in *Heiðreks saga* ... (it seems best to take it as a metaphorical use of *liðr* ‘joint of the body’ and to suppose the expression arose from the need to find the joint in dismembering a carcass

Line 6 (with the final word pronounced lið, not líð) is known as proverbial in modern Iceland...

**\*\*\*Hávamál 67\*\*\***  
**(Óðinn explains how bad hosts invite him)**

**Warning: this stanza is difficult to understand and I will have to explain the meaning of several words. The traditional translations see here a story of eating hams, while I see Óðinn's requirement for offering sacrificial victims ... I do need to explain why!**

**A translation as literal as possible**

Here and there,  
my appearance is proclaimed at home,  
if I do not need meat for my not-meals,  
, two hams (or two sacrificial offerings) hung there  
(offered) by my faithful friend,  
where I had already consumed one.

**Prose explanation**

Dronke's and Orchard's modern translations say that Óðinn "was invited to the house," that he "did not need a meal," and that "two hams hung in a true friend's house, while I had already eaten one ham". They both avoid an allusion to a 'multiplication of the hams' (as suggested in Evans, below) but their translation makes sense only if Óðinn already ate a ham before going to his true friend, whose home holds two hanged hams.

The commonplace meaning of this stanza is that the guest either starves or else he is offered two hams though he already ate one.

How we obtain the mystical meaning of this stanza is not obviously understood, as we shall explain later. We can summary it as follows: Óðinn's presence might be acknowledged in some homes (he is a 'guest' there) but no sacrifice is dedicated to him, which is clearly not enough of a greeting. These people are not his true friends. Inversely, if the host is a devotee to Óðinn (he is his true friend) , this host piles up sacrifices, he offers two of them when Óðinn already accepted one (which is too much of a greeting) .

**ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation**

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  
shape mine at home to proclaim  
if need-none to not-meal-time meat  
or two upper legs had hanged  
at him the faithful friend  
there where I had one eaten.

## Bel lows' translation

67. To their homes men would bid | me hither and yon,  
If at meal-time I needed no meat,  
Or would hang two hams | in my true friend's house,  
Where only one I had eaten.

## Commentary on the vocabulary

*Heim* is an adverb meaning here 'at home'. In this sentence, it cannot be the accusative of *heimr* (= dwelling of a people, village, our world) that has a more ceremonious meaning.

Conjunction *ef* means 'if' with the usual English conditional meaning.

*Þyrftak* (= *þyrft-ak* = need-not) where *\*ak* is a negative suffix.

*Matr* means 'meat', it is normally here in the accusative but this word is irregular and can also have '*mat*' as singular dative.

*Málungi* is obviously formed from *mál* and the suffix - *gi* which brings a negative meaning to the substantive to which it is appended. One can thus translate it by not-*mál* where this name takes one of its possible meanings. It will be thus 'not-time-of-a-meal' or 'not-speech' or 'not-drawing' or 'not-measurement'. This line contains a double negation which is supposed to end up taking an assertive meaning while it does not in this very special wording.

*Mynd* means shape, with the figurative meaning of 'image'. The word is even translated into German by 'Gestalt' which took such a strong meaning in psychology. All translators render this word by 'I' but the text says clearly that it is not 'me' who is proclaimed present, but 'my shape'.

The verb *boða* does not mean 'to invite' but 'to proclaim, announce', to the point to mean 'to summon', as it is rendered by Bellows. This is more like an invocation than a physical presence and *mynd* can then mean 'manifestation'.

The conjunction *eða* can be a simple 'or' but can also express a comparison between two different things. We understand here this meaning, so that Óðinn says "either he does not need to be nourished, or..." as two alternative options.

The neuter word *lær* indicates the thigh for C-V and, by extension, ham. Lexicon Poëticum does not give exactly the same meaning for this word. It specifies: "*femur mactati animalis* (= thigh of an immolated animal)" and de Vries gives only 'thigh'. The meaning of 'ham' is thus an extrapolation allowed by C-V alone. It is no more acceptable than the extension suggested by the Lexicon: a sacrificial offering.

The verb *eta*, here in the form of a neuter past participle, *etit*, means 'to eat' in its proper and figurative meanings. For example, in stanza 121, *sorg etr hjarta* means 'worry gnaws (consumes, devours) my heart', or the expression *etandi öfund* indicates an 'all-consuming desire'. The text speaks of eating and of hanged thighs, which must have led the translators to consider that the topic was about eating ham and not about "feeding on sacrifices."

The verb *hanga* (here, its subjunctive *hengi*) means 'to hang' with the auxiliary meanings to hang a ham to smoke it and to hang a sentenced person. The first person of the preterit of *hanga* is *hékk* or *hekk*. Thus Óðinn, in order to describe his position in the stanza 138 "*ek hekk* (= I hung)," uses the same verb *hanga*. The word *hangi* indicates a body hung to the gallows and the expression "*sitja undir hanga* (to sit under a hanged one)" is used, in modern myths, to describe the position of Óðinn to acquire wisdom (You will have more explanations when we will study stanza 139). We also know that Hanga-Týr is one of

Óðinn's names and that he is known as "god of the hanged ones," this is why a sacrifice to Óðinn is often called a hanged one. Thus, the commonplace understanding: "to have eaten one ham and then being offered two" is not better confirmed than Óðinn accepting one sacrificial victim and being offered two afterwards.

### **Comment on the meaning**

This stanza has been hardly understood. For example, Boyer adds, in a footnote: "the irony here is a little obscure. Does the author want to say ... etc." Evans' comments report that some commentators saw here a magic evoking a "multiplication of hams" undoubtedly inspired by the Christian myth of the "*miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes.*"

By comparing with s. 66, an obvious meaning for 67 appears at once: S. 66 describes a bad guest whose entrance is always out of time, and 67 describes a bad host who offers too little or too much to his guest.

Understanding the religious meaning of this stanza needs calling on two godly behaviors seemingly becoming less compatible as religious extremists increase their influence. On the one hand, as so well felt by Boyer, irony is present here, and it is clearly with respect to Óðinn's sacrifices. Óðinn is supposed to be, a rarity today, an intelligent god. It comes to no surprise that an intelligent god might show some sense of humor and be ironical towards his own cult. This happens especially if he wishes to lead astray these who are not "his sincere friends" (3 first lines: he can appear even if he is offered no sacrifice) as well as those who are (3 last lines: he can be unhappy to receive too many sacrifices) . Here, the irony takes place when he himself speaks of famous "Óðinn's hanged ones" as being hanged hams. In addition, as the commentators who guessed that stanza 67 hints at magic, it describes how to acquire Óðinn's magic: to be a clever devotee to him - no need of capital letters to speak of him – he appreciates sacrifices but does not appreciate an excess of them.

Stanza 67 has a structure similar to the one 66 where he confesses appearing too early or too late to his devotees: I suppose they offered either none or too many sacrifices. In this stanza, Óðinn is clearly amused at sharpening what is said in s. 145 where he states that asking nothing is better than too much sacrificing. Stanza 67 already warns: the worse is too much sacrificing though no sacrifice at all is not admissible for a devotee.

### **A more spiritual translation of this stanza**

According to the arguments above, here is another version:

V1-2: My image (= sculptures considered as being the actual god they illustrate and called 'idols' in the Christian tradition of translations) has been proclaimed here and there in the home.

V3: Either I did not need to 'feed' on sacrifices,

V4: or two sacrificial hanged ones

V5: (offers to me) my faithful friend

V6: while I had (already) consumed one.

This can go in verses as follows.

Here and there,  
my image promises my presence.  
May be I am offered no sacrifice,  
or he offers two victims,

my faithful friend,  
while I already accepted one from him.

### Evans' Commentaries

67

3 *málungi* i. e. *málum* plus neg. particle *-gi*... For other instances with nouns cp. *hornigi* 139 and *pörfgi* Helg. Hj. 39. [this option is the one of *Lexicon Poëticum*, it however does not seem to be accepted by all experts.]

The drift of this strophe, and particularly of 4-6, is not clear. Finnur Jónsson offers no special comment, but evidently thinks that, while 1-3 describe meanness, 4-6 exemplify true generosity: a faithful friend will invite you home to consume the second of two hams of which you have already eaten the first. Others think that both halves describe meanness (this entails taking *tryggva* [faithful] as ironic) . Sijmons and Gering think the idea is that a mean man will invite you to eat his ham only if the result is the spontaneous doubling of the eaten ham by magic, so that in the end he is left with two. Wennström thinks of the same notion, though for him the doubling is not the result of magic but is a twofold compensation by the guest for what he has eaten (cp. the verb *tvígilda* [double payment] used of such compensation in the laws) . More plausibly, Bo Almqvist has ingeniously suggested to me that the idea is that the 'faithful' friend will invite one home only if a condition which is in fact impossible were to be fulfilled.

## Hávamál 68-72

“The tolerable, the good and the best”

### \*\*\*Hávamál 68\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Fire is the best  
for the sons of men  
and the sight of the sun,  
their health,  
- if the human person is able to stay near (all that) -  
living without moral nor physical flaw.

#### Prose explanation

Óðinn lists four human behaviors that characterize 'the best life'. To be near a good fire, to see the sun, to be in good health and to live without making errors, each of them as much as possible. In other words, Óðinn does not denounce who moves a little away from this perfection, he only recommends to tend towards it.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

68.

*Eldr er beztr*

Fire is the best

<i>með ýta sonum</i>	‘with’ [= for] men’s sons
<i>ok sólar sýn,</i>	and of the sun the sight,
<i>heilyndi sitt,</i>	health his/her
<i>ef maðr hafa nár,</i>	if the human one has nearby
<i>án við löst at lifa.</i>	‘without with’ (physical or moral) flaw to live.

### Bellows’ translation

68. Fire for men | is the fairest gift,  
And power to see the sun;  
Health as well, | if a man may have it,  
And a life not stained with sin.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The noun *löstr* has generally been translated by exaggerating its deprecatory character, except by Dronke. Bellows gives: ‘sin’, Boyer: ‘shame, infamy’ (“*opprobre*”), Orchard: ‘taint’, Dronke: ‘fault’. It means ‘error’, or ‘fault’, which “refers to a definite but not condemnatory, imperfection in character,” as stated by Webster’s. De Vries links it to Old High German *lahan*: ‘*tadeln*’ (to rebuke) that Pokorny derives from the Indo-European root *lok-* also meaning ‘to rebuke’. Of course, it can be transformed into ‘sin, shame etc.’ according to the context, but 68 does not express any contempt for who does not manage to avoid a *löst*, it presents it only as a lack of some kind. Thus *án við löst at lifa* can be rendered by “living without error nor rebuke.”

The structure of the last three lines is somewhat ambiguous. We cannot decide whether the 5th line applies to 4th or to the 6th line, that is to say, whether a human being “must preserve his health” or “preserve a life without error.” The translators chose the first solution and I prefer to preserve this ambiguity.

### Comment on the meaning

For people living in a cold country, loving the sun and a good fire can reveal more a desire of comfort than a religious worship of the sun.

This stanza seems to be really trite. That already happened and, until now, we found a hidden non commonplace meaning. In the case of 68, I do not believe that it has some hidden meaning. The lively aspect of this stanza lies in Óðinn’s way to tell his devotees that, by paying attention to their health, they also please him. Odinists are often described as furious people who dream of nothing but dying weapons in hands in order to join Valhöll. Óðinn states here that a life of furor is not the only way to please him.

Hávamál is a classical source of ethics to odinists, I do agree. I believe however it is necessary to avoid forgetting stanzas as 68.

### Evans’ Commentaries

68

6 ... *Löstr* is taken by most interpreters to have its common sense of ‘moral failing’ (so Bellows: ‘a life not stained with sin’) . But *löstr* can also mean ‘a physical defect’ ... and this appears to fit the context better ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 69\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

A human being is not deprived of all  
even though his health is not at its best;  
some are happy by their sons,  
some by their kinsmen,  
some by enough wealth,  
some by a well-done job.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

69.

<i>Er-at maðr alls vesall,</i>	is-not the human one of all deprived
<i>þótt hann sé illa heill;</i>	even though he would be badly hale;
<i>sumr er af sonum sæll,</i>	some are by the sons happy,
<i>sumr af frændum,</i>	some by kinsmen
<i>sumr af fé ærnu,</i>	some by wealth enough
<i>sumr af verkum vel.</i>	some by work well-done.

#### Bellows' translation

69. All wretched is no man, | though never so sick;  
Some from their sons have joy,  
Some win it from kinsmen, | and some from their wealth,  
And some from worthy works.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

The word *heill* has many meanings. When it is an adjective (as in exclamations “*kom heill!*, *far, sit* (‘travel, sit down’) *heill!*, *heill svá!* (full) ” its meanings cover the ideas of being ‘whole’, ‘without physical defect’, with a metaphorical meaning of ‘sincere’. It is used here as an adjective since it is modified by the adverb *illa*. The expression *illa heill* is translated in C-V by “in ill health.”

When it is a neutral gender noun, it can mean a prediction, auspices, or luck. When it is a feminine gender noun, it indicates someone bringing chance, or happiness. A man will call his beloved: “*heillin mín*” (my happiness and my chance) .

*Vel verkr* describes a ‘well-done work’, which does not carry the charitable meanings of ‘good work’. For example the composed word *verkafall* describes the lack to carry out one’s work, a *verkamaðr* is a worker. Bellows translates it by “worthy works,” Dronke by “greatly elated by achievements,” Orchard by “well-blessed in his works” and Boyer by “*bonnes actions*” (good deeds - which carries, in French, a strong overtone of Christian charity) . Maybe unconsciously, Boyer pushes Óðinn’s speech towards the one of a Christian priest, which I confess finding hilarious. we can nevertheless note that the translators tend to (contrary what they did to *löstr* in stanza 68) overstate the positive aspect of *verkr* which becomes a kind of feat. The expression ‘work in everyday life’ looks worthy enough, we do not need to overstate its meaning.

#### Comment on the meaning

In the preceding stanza, good health was the prerogative of an excellent life. Here, Óðinn shows how human beings may have a well-filled and happy life even if all the conditions of excellence are not met. No need to become a great person, it is however necessary to live a proper life.

### Evans' Commentaries

69

6 *verkum vel* - ... ('good deeds') and Bellows ('worthy works') are evidently giving *vel* the force of an attributive adjective, but this can scarcely be right ... equates *vel* with a predicative adjective, parallel to *sæll*, comparing *illa* in st. 22, and cp. Egils saga ch. 55 ...: *Hann var vel í vexti*. More plausibly, SG explains *vel* as standing for *vel sæll* (so also Finnur Jónsson in his edition; in ... he wavers between this and *vel* = *góðr*).

### \*\*\*Hávamál 70\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

It is better to endure life  
than not to live at all,  
[or: Better to live  
and live pleasingly. See Evan's commentary]  
the living one always catches the cow;  
I saw a fire burning  
for a rich person,  
but outside, he had died in front of his doors.

#### Prose explanation

It is better to live a painful life than not live at all. Only living persons are fast enough to catch a cow, i. e. , life is speed. While he was dead in front of his door, a good fire burned for him at his place.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

70.

<i>Betra er lifðum</i>	Better is we live
<i>en sé ólifðum,</i>	rather that we do not live,
<i>ey getr kvíkr kú;</i>	always catches a quick-living one the cow,
<i>eld sá ek upp brenna</i>	a fire saw I up flame
<i>auðgum manni fyrir,</i>	a rich human for
<i>en úti var dauðr fyr durum</i>	but out-of-doors he was dead in front of the doors.

#### Bellows' translation

70. It is better to live | than to lie a corpse,  
The live man catches the cow;  
I saw flames rise | for the rich man's pyre,  
And before his door he lay dead.



### Commentary on the vocabulary

Understanding this stanza asks for a special effort in analyzing the meanings of several of its words.

The verb *lifa* means ‘to live’, but it can also take the meaning of ‘to put up with, to endure’. This is why I understand the first line as ‘it is better to endure life than not to live’. The opposition *lifa* / *ólifa* thus stops to be commonplace.

The adjective *kvíkr* qualifies someone alive, but it connotes also speed. Read again the comment of stanza 64 to see the bond between ‘living’ and ‘quick’ in Old Norse. Thus, the ‘quick and alive’ one catches the cow. Evans says this is certainly a proverb, hence this slightly surprising way of speaking.

The preposition *fyrir* means ‘before’ normally denoting space. When it is relative to an action carried out for someone, ‘*fyrir* someone’ takes the meaning of ‘for someone’. If we use here the meaning of ‘before’ (as does Bellows, for example) that leads to the complications described by Evans. Dronke and Orchard translate it by ‘for’ and Boyer by ‘at home’. Note also that *fyrir* (5th line) and *fyr* (6th line) are simple orthographical variations of each other. They, however, do not duplicate here, since the context gives them different meanings.

The word *dauðr* is normally an adjective qualifying the state of being dead and *dauði* is the masculine noun for death. The words *var dauðr* in the last line thus clearly mean: “he had died.” The translation of *fyrir* by ‘before’ leads to a contradiction since the rich person cannot be at the same time at home in front of a fire, and a corpse in front of his doors. we note that Bellows solves this contradiction by imagining a funeral pyre, quite useless here.

### Comment on the meaning

Would the two first line really be commonplace if they simply state that alive is better than dead? In our current civilization where suicide is considered as dreadful, this assertion can be seen as a commonplace message of the revealed religions. In the Germanic civilization where suicide can be honorable and honored, this message acquires a precise meaning: an honorable suicide is not decided under a whim, the weight of our destiny must be carefully evaluated before wielding one’s own right to perform this last jump.

The third line seems to be, as suggests Evans, a ready-made phrase to express the bond between life and speed: to be active is already a great pleasure that life offers to us.

The link between the three first and the last three lines is not obvious. We already met several stanzas that insist on the lack of importance of appearances and of material wealth. If the second half of the stanza is set apart from the first, we find the same topic, that of death striking a rich person even when he/she has a comfortable house. If they are not isolated from each other, these two halves deal with two symmetrical cases. In the three first lines, the poor person is advised to endure (his hard) life and in the last three ones, the wealthy person, who does not have to endure life, but to enjoy it, is recalled that enjoying in excess is a kind of suicide because this is what hastens his/her death.

### Evans’ Commentaries

70

1 *lifðum* has an active sense, = *lifanda* ‘living’. Only found here.

2 *en sé ólifðum* is an emendation (first proposed by Rasmus Rask in 1818) for *oc sel lifðom* (i. e. *ok sællifðum*), which lacks both alliteration and sense. For the alliteration of the text as

emended, cp. *Hvötum er betra en sé óhvötum* Fánismál 31. Other suggestions are *an brendom sé(e) ... ok böllifðom ... an libnom séi ... ok sé illifðom ...* and *ok birglifðom ...* but this misses the point of the strophe, which is plainly that *any* sort of life is preferable to death.

3 may incorporate a pre-existing proverb; ... *jafnan fagnar kvíkr maðr kú*.

4-6 There are two problems here: is the fire a cremation pyre, or a fire consuming the house and property of the rich man, or the domestic fire on the hearth; and, second, is *dauðr* an adjective or a noun? ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 71\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

The lame one rides a horse  
the one-handed one leads the herd,  
the deaf one is daring (*or* useful) in combat,  
better to be blind  
rather than burned,  
a corpse is useful to nobody.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

71.

<i>Haltr riðr hrossi,</i>	The lame one rides a horse [ <i>or</i> a mare]
<i>hjörð rekr handar vanr,</i>	the flock, drives hand's 'miss-er',
<i>daufi vegr ok dugir,</i>	the deaf one does well [ <i>or</i> helps] and fights,
<i>blindr er betri</i>	blind is better
<i>en brenndr séi,</i>	than he burns,
<i>nýtr manngi nás.</i>	usable to no-man 'of' the corpse.

#### Bellows' translation

71. The lame rides a horse, | the handless is herdsman,  
The deaf in battle is bold;  
The blind man is better | than one that is burned,  
No good can come of a corpse.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

The first meaning of verb *duga* is 'to help'. It can also take the one of "to do well, to dare."

#### Comment on the meaning

This stanza states the obvious: Death makes us 'useless'. Note that it also underlines that each physical defect can be regarded as a quality for some types of work.

The first line of s. 70 expresses the same idea as the last of 71. These two stanzas must thus be understood as covering a same topic: nothing is more useless than a corpse. S. 70 opposes poor and rich persons, and 71 the lame and able-bodied ones.

- We can suppose that the first line of 71 describes a horse for something more than a prosthetic relief to a lame person. This person, forced to ride a horse to follow the other ones, becomes an excellent rider and brings to his clan an irreplaceable competence.

- This assumption is confirmed by lines 2 and 3 where the social utility of the one-handed or deaf persons is underlined. We have a famous one-handed god, Týr, whose role has been capital to the Æsir.

- No god is declared deaf, but the existence of Heimdalr, the god who hears all and does hardly more than announcing danger, highlights “the silent god,” Víðarr. His behavior is similar to that of a deaf person and he will fight so daringly to protect the Universe from Chaos.

- Our blind god is Höðr, who plays a very discrete role in Snorri’s (and a negative one since he kills Baldr) . In Saxo’s, under the name of Hotherus, his relations with Balderus (Baldr) are very complex and he plays a more positive role than Höðr.

### Evans’ Commentaries

#### 71

4-5 The reference to cremation here, as in 81 below and (according to some interpretations) in 70 above, points to a non-Icelandic origin for these lines, since there is neither literary nor archaeological evidence that cremation was ever practiced in Iceland. . . Heusler... and Wessén... take these two lines as a pre-existing proverb, which Heusler suggests was the kernel round which the rest of the strophe was constructed.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 72\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

It is the best to have a son  
even if he were born late,  
after the man left;  
it is rare that a struck stone  
draws up itself close to the stony way,  
except if the progeny raises one (for their family)

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

72.

<i>Sonr er betri,</i>	A son is better
<i>þótt sé síð of alinn</i>	though is born late,
<i>eftir genginn guma;</i>	after gone the man;
<i>sjaldan bautarsteinar</i>	seldom ‘beaten’ -stones
<i>standa brautu nær,</i>	stands the rough way near
<i>nema reisi niðr at nið.</i>	except if it raises, the progeny.

#### Bellows’ translation

72. A son is better, | though late he be born,  
And his father to death have fared;  
Memory-stones | seldom stand by the road  
Save when kinsman honors his kin.

## Commentary on the vocabulary

(To complete later by including Mrs Jackson's "definition lists")

The verb *bauta* means 'to hunt, to beat'. In some contexts, as in 'to beat with a sword', it will mean 'to kill'. For example, the Lexicon Poëticum translates *bautinn* by 'cæsus' (past participle of *cædere*, 'to slice, to cut down'). C-V comments at length on the word *bautarsteinn* and sees there a simple corruption of *brautarsteinn* ('way-stone', because these commemorative stones were aligned along the ways, as line 5 points out) obtained by loss of its first 'r'. De Vries does not accept this assumption and gives the meaning of "stone rammed (*eingerammt*) in the ground."

If you already tried to carve runes in the stone, you know what a hard work it is. The stone is stricken with the graver and hammer, which is enough to speak of a stone 'beaten' or even 'wounded'. This explains why standing stones without inscriptions cannot be *brautarsteinar*, though they can be aligned as *bautarsteinar* are.

The masculine noun *sonr* (or *sunr*, which explains its irregular declension) means a boy son.

The masculine noun *niðr*, here in its singular accusative case (*nið*), designates also a son but its meaning has been extended to the one of kindred. The accusative in *at nið* says that *at* has a temporal meaning so that *niðr at nið* means 'child after child', i. e. the kindred.

## Comment on the meaning

The three first lines keep the topic of what is good enough even if not perfect. In the first line, *sonr* gender is male while it is neuter in *niðr at nið*. This agrees with the fact that, in the last three lines, Óðinn widens his topic to the whole kindred that will honor its ancestors with runic stones.

This homage to the ancestors avoids losing the family's ancestral heritage. The rune *Othala* is easy to recognize in the Old Norse word *óðal* = (innate quality, inheritance, heritage), the Old English *ēðel* (ancestral home), the Old High German *uodil* (landed property), the Gothic *ōþal* (ancestral heritage) and *ōþli* (inherited landed property). Germanic languages thus kept living this concept. The three first lines simply allude to it, while the last three lines point out its importance for social life, as a mark of our respect for the Norns' decisions.

## Evans' Commentaries

72

4 *bautarsteinar* occurs only here in poetry, but there are several references in Kings' Sagas to the erection of *bautasteinar* (spelled thus) as memorial stones or gravestones in Norway in the heathen period ... In Ynglinga saga ch. 8 he says that Óðinn prescribed cremation as the rule in Sweden ... Some have wanted to connect the first element with the rare *bauta* 'to beat', to give the sense 'stone beaten into the earth' [Unless I am mistaken, it seems to me that my understanding of a "stone 'beaten' for engraving runes upon it" has not yet been taken into account while the context of the stanza strongly hints at this kind of meaning.] ...

The word has been revived by modern Scandinavian archaeologists to denote a stone without inscription, from prehistoric times, set up on end in the earth. Such stones, up to four or five meters in height, are common in Norway and Sweden, less so in Denmark [Does

Evans' universe of ancient standing stones goes no further than Scandinavia? I am now sure I am wrong, why does he forget them here?].

## Hávamál 73-84

**“Be weary, be ready: No hazard no benefit”**  
(73-84) , *followed by ‘no benefit hazards’* (85-92)

### \*\*\*Hávamál 73\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Two are a host for a single one,  
the tongue is the head's bane;  
for me, in each fur-coat  
(is) an expectation of the hand (= a hand in expectation) .

#### Prose explanation

Two enemies are as dangerous as a host for a man alone, this man's language, however, by itself alone, can kill his head (and many other heads) . For me, in each fur coat hides a ready hand (ready to react) .

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

73.

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

Two are hosts of a single one,  
the tongue (often) is head's death;  
is to me in fur-coat each  
of the hand readiness.

#### Bellows' translation

73. Two make a battle, | the tongue slays the head;  
In each furry coat | a fist I look for.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

In the form *‘eins herjar’*, *‘eins’* can be taken as adjective qualifying *‘herjar’* and, *herjar* being a possible singular genitive in the old texts, this results in ‘only one army’. The sense of the first line would be then “two are a host,” something similar to Bellows’ translation. We can also see in *‘herjar’* a nominative plural and, in the genitive *‘eins’*, an isolated element of these hosts. More generally, the construction called partitive genitive accounts for the presence of a sub-group within a group by putting the sub-group in the genitive case. The meaning of this line is then “two are a host for a single one.” This is the solution chosen by modern translators, and the one giving the most meaningful line. Evans proposes a third solution that uses the verb *herja*, ‘to harry, destroy’ and introduces a plural personal form *herjar*, meaning ‘the destructors’. He would thus translate *eins herjar* by a

traditional genitive: destructors of one alone. The sense of the word *herr*, ‘host, people’ is so much attested in the literature that his assumption appears not very probable.

### Comment on the meaning

The first line recalls how valuable the advantage of number is. The reverse, however, is true for a friendless person who must fight alone.

The second line seems to be completely independent of the first. Thinking of a possible link with the first line leads to noticing that the tongue is alone in the middle of the head and that, with unwise words, it can lead the head to its ruin. Speech is one of the pleasures of life, but one awkward word may waste your life, and the life of many others. This line, which looks very negative, does not say who is dead. If you speak unwisely, you do risk your head. If your enemy does, too bad for him.

A hand can be hidden in a coat to be protected from the cold and it will be ready to shake your hand in pledge of friendship, but it can also be ready to strike you.

### Evans’ Commentaries

#### 73

This stanza and 74 are widely regarded by editors as interpolated: they contain much obscurity, and interrupt the sequence of regular *ljóðaháttir* strophes (73 is in *málaháttir*, and either 7413 or 744 appears to be supererogatory) .

1 Finnur Jónsson takes *herjar* as genitive singular: ‘Two (men) are of the same host’ (but nevertheless one may inflict death on the other, as, for instance, tongue may inflict death on the head; so be watchful, even against your comrade-in-arms) . Very little of this, however, is actually in the text. ... gives the same general sense, though with unnecessary, and impossible, complications. *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* 16 inserts a neg. to read *Tveir rot eins herjar*, and renders ‘Two are never on one side’, adding the cryptic note (*Corpus Poeticum Boreale* 462) ‘somehow wrong’...

It is far better to ... take *herjar* as nominative plural ... and translate: ‘Two are the destroyers of one’, i. e. two men are superior to one man. For this sense of *herr* cp. the verb *herja*, and *herr alls víðar* as a kenning for ‘fire’ in Helreið Brynhildar 10. ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 74\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

The night will be merry  
for whom can rely on his supplies,  
(but) the yards of the ship are short;  
shifty is an autumn night  
many changes (may occur)  
during five days,  
but even more during one month.

#### Prose explanation

[These lines, literally taken, are on the verge of idiocy. To understand their meaning, they need to be interpreted. The interpretation given here is explained below.]

**Three first lines:**

The sailor, while he is doing his hard work, can comfort his exertion by thinking that, after working time, he will be able to relax, provided that he does not lack of drinks (that is, if he can “rely on his supplies”) . But, as the proverb says, “people build the yards too short” to mean that nobody deserves full confidence.

**Last three lines:**

We cannot have confidence in autumn nights because the weather quickly shifts during this time. When you are summoned at court, you have either five days, or one month to report before the court. During your travel, a ‘blast of bad weather’ can happen, that is, your case can take an unexpected turn and worsen. If you choose a convocation giving you one month to present yourself in front of justice, there are even more chances than you will have a nasty surprise when coming in front of your judges.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

74.

<i>Nótt verðr feginn</i>	Night will be joy
<i>sá er nesti trúir,</i>	to whom supply is faithful,
<i>skammar ro skips ráar;</i>	short are of the ship the yardarms;
<i>hverfer haustgríma;</i>	fickle is a Fall night;
<i>ffjöld of viðrir</i>	many the changes
<i>á fimm dögum</i>	during five days
<i>en meira á mánuði.</i>	but more in one month.

### Bellows' translation

74. He welcomes the night | whose fare is enough,  
(Short are the yards of a ship,)  
Uneasy are autumn nights;  
Full oft does the weather | change in a week,  
And more in a month's time.

[**Bellows note 73-74.** These seven lines are obviously a jumble. . . . In 74, the second line is clearly interpolated, and line 1 has little enough connection with lines 3, 4 and 5. It looks as though some compiler (or copyist) had inserted here various odds and ends for which he could find no better place.]

### Commentary on the vocabulary

On *trúir* (= he believes, he has confidence) . This is the third person of the present of verb *trúa*. Dronke is the only one to translate it as such (“never doubts”) , the other translators speak about a good amount of provisions. The use of *trúir* (he believes) hints at the possibility that the sailor is not always right to believe that the end of his working day will bring relief to him.

On *ráar*. Plural of *rá*: a yardarm, that is, the bar on upon which is fastened the square sail of some boats of the Viking type. The broader the sail, the faster and riskier is the

navigation. The Viking warships could have their yards larger than the width of the boat. By taking account of the proverb quoted by Evans, “men make short the yards of the boat,” it seems that it was not an easy thing to build a boat with large yards.

We cannot know what was exactly understood by line 3. For example, an English saying dating from the 18th century states: “the sun is above the yard,” which means that “it is time to make a pause to have some liquor.” A Breton saying is “the sun is in the shroud” (where ‘shroud’ takes its nautical meaning) as warning for rain. These two sayings, if used as if known to everyone, could be able to jumble a lot of texts. The meaning of line 3 should have been so well-known during Viking times that the poet could carelessly insert it in this stanza.

In the context of this stanza, we could read line 3 as “the yards of a ship are very seldom as long as requested from the boat manufacturer”, i. e. “nobody can be fully trusted.” This perfectly fits the two first lines meaning that the nights are pleasant when they are full of fun but nothing is for sure - even that our stores will be available.

On *hverfr*. This adjective is related to the verb *hverfa*: ‘to turn over or around’ (as the sun) and, metaphorically, ‘to disappear’. C-V dictionary gives to this word a meaning derived from *hverfa* in a pejorative way: shifty, illustrated by *hverfr hugr* = a shifty mind. Lex. Poet. goes less far in this sense by giving *variabilis* (= mobile, flexible) or *mutabilis* (variable, elusive) . De Vries does not quote this adjective, which implies that he finds it defined enough by a direct derivation from *hverfa*. As we see, dictionaries do not exactly agree on the meaning of *hverfr*. The expression *hverfr hugr*, translated in a very pejorative way by C-V, could, according to Lex. Poet. , result in ‘a mobile mind’ (slightly pejorative) , ‘a flexible mind’ (laudatory) or ‘an elusive mind’ (derogatory) . The context only may help to choose between these versions. Here, we know well that Fall climate is very variable, this is why the derogatory solution appears most probable. When we again meet this adjective applied to women in stanza 84, we will see that the translators expressed what they believe to know of women, as I express here what I know of autumnal nights (which, by the way, may be totally false under other climates than the one I lived through) .

On *fimm dögum*. We already discussed this expression (*fimm dagar* = five day) when studying stanza 51. The ‘old five days week’ was preserved in the legal uses according to which one had a week (= five days) or a month (= 30 days) to go to a legal summon. This supposed to travel under the difficult conditions of the time. Meanwhile, new charges could be raised against you, or you could be ambushed by your enemies. Instead of an allusion to a summoning time, all the translators let themselves influence by allusion to the changing weather in line 4, and this stanza seems to explain the obvious, that a good/bad weather is likely to change more during a month than in five days.

Still about *fimm dagar*, it should be remembered that the months were of 30 days, which left five ‘empty’ days each year. These five days were heavy with mystery and could thus give place to mystical travels. I am unsure whether this stanza contains an allusion to this meaning but this is not impossible. During Yule, the doors between the world of living and the dead open and this is an appropriate time to be summoned in front of the gods’ court.

### **Comment on the meaning**

The proverb of line 3, “short are the yards of the boat” indicates that this stanza refers to a person traveling and warns us against the discomforts of this journey. It moderates the



pessimism of the first two lines: we should not too much *trúa* (be confident) in our hope to have merry nights because it might be impossible to put a hand on our provisions.

In the same way, the fourth line says that the autumn is a season of abundance when we can *trúa* (be confident) in our food supply. Autumn nights, however, are not always merry, they are so shifty that it is necessary to be wary of them.

Lastly, the last three lines still refer to a travel, the one undergone to answer a legal summoning. It is advantageous to travel slowly during a month to join the place of the judgment, but it gives more time to your enemies to get at you.

### Evans' Commentaries

74

... the drift of 1-3 is obscure; ... we may compare the proverb ... in *Málsháttakvæði* 12:

*Skips láta menn skammar rár.* [Men make short ship-yards]  
*Skatna þykkir hugrinn grár.* [Men seem to have spiteful minds]  
*Tungan leikr við tanna sár.* [Tongue games at the tip of the teeth]  
*Trauðla er gengt á ís of vár.* [Hardly is the river gone from Spring ice]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 75\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

He does not know  
who nor heart nor spirit [*or nothing*] knows,  
(that) for money he will become a monkey;  
a man is wealthy,  
another 'un-wealthy',  
this last one should not be blamed for (his) his woes.

#### Prose explanation

[Three first lines. Using the traditional meaning of *vettki* = nothing]  
Who knows nothing at all the does not (even) know that being money greedy often changes people into stupid fools.

[Three first lines. Using the etymological meaning *vettki* = soulless]  
Who is not conscious of his soul (*or* who is unaware of the existence of spirits) is unable to understand that being money greedy often changes people into stupid fools, and that he will himself undergo such a change.

[last three lines]  
Some receive abundance of material wealth, others are deprived of it, and the latter should not be blamed for their misfortune.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

75.

*Veit-a hinn*

He knows-not, him

*er vettki veit,  
margr verður af aurum api;  
maðr er auðigr,  
annar óauðigr,  
skyli-t þann vítká váar.*

who no soul [*or* nothing] knows  
often he becomes for riches an ape = (a fool)  
a man is wealthy  
another not-wealthy ('unhealthy')  
one should not him blame for (his) woes.

### Bellows' translation

75. A man knows not, | if nothing he knows,  
That gold oft apes begets;  
One man is wealthy | and one is poor,  
Yet scorn for him none should know.

[Bellows' note 75. The word "gold" in line 2 is more or less conjectural, the manuscript being obscure. The reading in line 4 is also doubtful.]

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The irregular verb *vita* gives *veit* (he knows) in its third singular person of the indicative. *Veit-a* is a negative form: 'he does not know'.

On the word *vettki*: The meaning given by the dictionaries (and by all translators) is 'nothing at all'. The problem arising from this meaning is here that the second line becomes totally commonplace. As usual, my recommendation is to be wary of triteness in *Hávamál*. *Vettki* has the form *vett-ki* where the suffix *-ki* is a negation, as the one in *veit-a*. The name *vettr* or *vættr* the normal meaning of which is 'soul, spirit' and where 'spirit' has the same meaning as in *land-vættr* where the *landvættir* are the spirits of the land. As another example, *galdrá-vættr* means 'howling-spirit' and describes a witch. I suppose that the poet made here a pun on *vettki* (nothing) / *vett-ki* (no soul) .

Translating *vettr* by 'soul' or 'spirit' (of mystical nature) changes the understanding of this line. If 'soul' is chosen, it can mean that whoever does not know his soul will fall down to materiality. It is even possible to evoke Karl Jung and say that he / she who does not know his / her anima / animus (that is his / her unconscious dark side and his / her share of divinity) is always more or less neurotic and thus becomes a little insane. If 'spirit' is chosen, it can mean that whoever does not know the spirits (that is, whoever is not interested in the mystical and magical sides of our world) behaves like an animal in human shape.

we will see below that the expression '*af aurum*' raises a problem and that Evans calls it an emendation. As a matter of fact, as soon as 1818, the first editor, Erasmus Rask, reads *avþrum* = *auðrum* (dative plural of 'wealth'), and Gering (1904) provides all the manuscript versions, that is: *öþrum*, *aurum*, *afla(r?) ðrom*. The word plural *aurar* means money, *auðr* means wealth. Both lead anyhow to the same meaning of the stanza.

The sixth line raises also problem: see Evans below. *Vítka* is a verb that neither C-V nor de Vries include in their dictionaries and which seems unknown to Evans. Lex. Poet. knows it and gives to it the same meaning as *víta*: to blame (*reprehendere*) .

### Comment on the meaning

Stanzas 20 and 21 clearly blamed the greed for material wealth. Stanza 40 insisted more on uselessness of piling up wealth. Stanza 75 is now openly insulting to who accumulates wealth.

The three first lines stress that love for money fills a human person with bestiality.

It could be possible to see in the last three ones lines an evidence of compassion for the unfortunate ones who could not pile up wealth. However, if the three first lines are taken into account, the last three ones show more contempt (how a ‘monkey’ may judge a human?) for the “wealthy ones” than kindness for the “unfortunate ones.” People who become too wealthy lose their soul, they are *vettki* in the etymological interpretation which I give to this word, and their blame, or their contempt, towards those who have been less successful is nothing but ridiculous.

### Evans’ Commentaries

75

3 *af aurum* is an emendation (originated by S. Grundtvig) for the manuscript *afláðrom*, which is plainly corrupt. If *af* is the preposition, *lauðrum* (or *löðrum*) could not be right even if it made sense, since it lacks alliteration. Gould proposed *af aulðrum* (i. e. *öðrum* ‘ale bouts’), which is palaeographically plausible ... but then there would be no sense connection with 4-6. Other suggestions are *af öðrum* ...and *af auði um*...

6 is obscure. If *vár* is genitive of the noun *vá* ‘woe, misfortune’, *vítka* must be the infinitive of an otherwise unrecorded verb, apparently meaning ‘to blame’, perhaps related to *víta*, though that rather means ‘to punish’. Thus ‘One should not blame him for the misfortune’. Grundtvig emended to *vætkis vá*, with *vá* as the verb apparently seen in stanza 19. [In 19, we translated *vár* by ‘he blames’: “*vár þik engi maðr* by “he blames you no human,” i. e. , “no human blames you.”]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 76\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Cattle and richness die  
Parents die,  
in the same way, we die ourselves,  
but repute  
never dies  
that which is obtained (while having been) good and honest.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

76.

<i>Deyr fǣ,</i>	Die cattle (or wealth)
<i>deyja frændr,</i>	die the friends
<i>deyr sjalfr it sama,</i>	dies-self as well,
<i>en orðstírr</i>	but (good) fame
<i>deyr aldregi</i>	dies never
<i>hveim er sér góðan getr.</i>	this to self honest he gets.

#### Bellows’ translation

‘77’. Cattle die, | and kinsmen die,

And so one dies one's self;  
But a noble name | will never die,  
If good renown one gets.

[**Bellows comment:** In the manuscript this stanza follows 79, the order being: 77, 78, 76, 80, 79, 81.]

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The name *orðstírr* (or *orztírr*) is composed of *orðs*- (singular genitive of *orð* ('word, speech')) and metaphorically 'reputation, decision') and of *tírr* (glory, reputation). Usually, the words constructed with *orð* as a prefix majority use its plural genitive and thus have the form *orða*-.

The adjective *góðr* means 'good' with the connotation of 'just, honest' and 'gifted'. Note that *orðstírr* is a nominative which cannot be qualified by the adjective *góðan*, which is in the accusative case. The two words *góðan getr* thus mean 'he obtains the good', which justifies my slightly involved translation.

### Comment on the meaning

Stanza 76 has been quoted over and over. I translate its last line as "this to self honest he gets," indeed less understandable than the usual translations. Its aim is however broader than them. The poem does not restrict what is left of you as 'good repute' but extends it to all what has been honestly carried out. A good reputation can be acquired through dishonest ways, and this is even often the case in our society. Repute is not as much important as living a honest life.

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 76

1-2 For the occurrence of these lines in Eyvindr skáldaspillir's Hákarmál see p. 13 above [given below]. There is a close parallel in the OE elegy The Wanderer (of uncertain date), 108: *hēr bið feoh læne, hēr bið frēond læne* ('Here possessions are transitory, here friends are transitory'), where the addition of 'here' (i. e. 'in this world') conveys a Christian implication absent from Hákarmál. The use of *fé* and *frendr* as an alliterating pair doubtless goes back to early Germanic poetry; that there is any more direct connection between The Wanderer and our poem, as suggested by von See..., is highly improbable.

4-6 ... Von See... sees a Biblical echo in this strophe (Ecclesiastes 3. 19); his further suggestion... that *orðstírr* had acquired a specifically Christian connotation in Norse is far from satisfactorily borne out by its use elsewhere in stanza and is contradicted by its frequent occurrence in prose without any such connotation.

*Excerpt from Evans introduction (p. 13-14)*

<p>The view generally held by scholars has been that the Gnostic Poem is purely heathen: 'there is no trace of Christianity', in Jón Helgason's words (3). True, the only explicitly heathen allusions are those to cremation (the brief reference to Óðinn's adventure with Gunnlöð cannot be counted, since tales of the pagan gods continued to be told for centuries after the Conversion, as Snorri's Edda shows, and in any case the strophes are very likely</p>
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interpolated) . But *bautarsteinar* [cp. s. 72] also belong to the pre-Christian era, and a dating to that period is further supported by what appears to be an echo of st. 76-7 in the final strophe of Hákonarmál, an elegy on the Norwegian king, Hákon the Good, mortally wounded in battle c. 960, some forty years before the Conversion. (That it is the *final* strophe has been used to support the view that 76-7 were once, too, the final strophes of a poem. ) This strophe runs ...:

<i>Deyr fé,</i>	[Die cattle (or wealth) ]
<i>deyja frændr,</i>	[die the friends]
<i>eyðisk land ok láð;</i>	[waste-self land and meadow]
<i>síz Hákon fór</i>	[since Hákon travelled]
<i>með heiðin goð,</i>	[with the heathen gods]
<i>mörg er þjóð of þéu</i>	[many are people 'of' constrained (are treated as slaves) . þéuð is the past participle of verb þéa, a form of verb þjá]

That there is a direct connection between these lines and the Gnostic Poem is not indeed absolutely certain, since *deyr fé*, *deyja frændr* could conceivably be a traditional alliterating cliché used independently in the two poems, but since the author of Hákonarmál, Eyvindr skáldaspillir, [a 10<sup>th</sup> century poet] was notorious for plagiarism, as his nickname shows and as is plainly evidenced elsewhere in his work, the most natural view is that this is simply one of Eyvindr's borrowings (to suggest that, on the contrary, Hávamál borrowed from Eyvindr seems forced ...) . If this is accepted, the Gnostic Poem must antedate 960 (note 6) .

(note 6) . A similar antedating is implied by the view (von See 1) that st. 17, 20 and 25 in Egill's Sonatorrek (c. 960) echo Hávamál 72, 22 and 15 respectively. (Von See can presumably only mean that these particular strophes antedate c. 960, since, as we saw, he does not believe that the Gnostic Poem ever existed as such. ) Magnus Olsen, Edda og Skaldekvad IV (Oslo 1962) 49, thought the use of orðsdir in Egill's Höfuðlausn echoed Hávamál 76.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 77\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Cattle and wealth die  
 friends die,  
 in the same way, we die ourselves,  
 and I know one of them  
 who dies even less:  
 (this is) the judgment related to each dead person.

#### Prose explanation

Last three lines:

I know a thing that disappears even slower than cattle and wealth (*or, by reference to the stanza before*: even less than the reputation obtained by being good and honest) . And this is the judgment that your close relations carried on you.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

77.

<i>Deyr fé,</i>	Die cattle ( <i>or</i> wealth)
<i>deyja frændr,</i>	die the friends
<i>deyr sjalfr it sama,</i>	dies-self as well,
<i>ek veit einn</i>	and I know one
<i>at aldrei deyr:</i>	even more never dies:
<i>dómr um dauðan hvern.</i>	judgment on dead each.

### Bellows' translation

'78'. Cattle die, | and kinsmen die,  
And so one dies one's self;  
One thing now | that never dies,  
The fame of a dead man's deeds.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The three dictionaries which I use agree give to *dómr* the meaning 'court, judicial decision'. Here, it can only mean 'judicial decision', one favorable to the judged person or one that sentences him. In 77, the poet used the word *orðstírr*, reputation, and the last three lines made it clear that it must a 'good repute'. Nothing like that here, and Evans' argument, based on statistics of this word use, is not convincing since it is obvious that there are many more laudatory (and even toady ones) poems than disparaging ones. Moreover, if 76 and 77 say the same thing, why both would have been preciousely preserved?

### Comment on the meaning

We recognized, at the beginning of 77, the three first lines of 76 that are thus identically translated here.

Stanza 76 says to us that the people who carried out an honest and good life will not be forgotten by their descendants. Stanza 77 specifies that the descendants will not forget the judgment that they carried on the behavior of their forefathers. There many enough parents who leave behind them an awful remembrance that we understand why 77 has to moderate 76 on its aspect "we must honor our ancestors." It recalls that their dreadful deeds, if any, will not be forgotten. People having such an ancestry usually dislike speaking about it, but they do not think less about it\*. This stanza states something obvious to each who had such a forerunner... it is however not politically correct to recall it, as Óðinn does here.

\*[A section of psychotherapy, called psychogenealogy, is devoted to this problem. It studies the various mistreatments the patient endured from his/her ancestors. This is a way to detect hidden causes of their present day mental diseases. Would Óðinn be judged too primitive to be able to underline this fact, as he does in 77, at least as I understand it?]

### Evans' Commentaries

77.

6 *dómr*: literally ‘judgment’ (whether favourable or unfavourable) ; but, whereas the Norsemen commonly observed that a man’s fair fame would be remembered for ever, they very rarely stated that disgrace would never be forgotten ... So, in the context, *dómr* is in practice restricted to ‘renown’ [The note above opposes this opinion. Evans is nevertheless aware that abusive ancestors may exist], just as ... quoted in the note on 76, *orð*, though in itself neutral, refers in the context only to fair fame. The substance of 76 and 77 is therefore identical. It is unnecessary to go further ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 78\*\*\*

An enclosure (well) filled,  
I saw for the children of Fitjung,  
(and) now he carries “sticks of hope”;  
thus it is richness,  
like a wink,  
it is more staggering of the friends.

#### Prose explanation

I could see that the children of a rich person (Fitjung) had an enclosure filled with livestock. Nowadays, they can rely on nothing more than a beggar’s stick. Wealth (can disappear) as quickly as a wink, it is the least stable (the most roaming and staggering) friend. A faithful friend is linked to you by a contract of mutual help. You cannot get any contract with your wealth.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

78.

<i>Fullar grindr</i>	Full enclosures
<i>sá ek fyr Fitjungs sonum,</i>	saw I for Fitjung’s sons,
<i>nú bera þeir vonar völ;</i>	now carry they of hope stick [a hope stick = a beggar stick]
<i>svá er auðr</i>	so is richness
<i>sem augabragð,</i>	same as the twinkling of an eye
<i>hann er valtastr vina.</i>	‘he’ ( <i>auðr</i> ) is most reeling of the friends.

#### Bellows’ translation

‘76’. Among Fitjung’s sons | saw I well-stocked folds, -  
Now bear they the beggar’s staff;  
Wealth is as swift | as a winking eye,  
Of friends the falsest it is.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

*Grind* means ‘gate’ or ‘pen’.

*Fitjungr* has been thought to come from the word *fita* (grease) and it would then mean ‘the fat, obese’. Lex. Poet. translates *fitjungs synir* by ‘sons of rich person’. As we see below, Evans convincingly criticizes this choice. He concludes that the name is made up and quite possibly harmless.

*Vonr* or *vánr* means ‘hope’, thus *vonar völ* = ‘stick of hope’, understood as ‘stick of a beggar’.

*Auðr*, when feminine, means ‘fate’ and when masculine ‘wealth’. Here, in lines 6, it is recalled by anaphora *hann*, ‘he’, and it clearly means here ‘wealth’. Remember that in stanza 9 this problem had no solution. In 9, *auðr* is used as prefix and it is impossible to know its gender.

The adjective *valtr*, here in its superlative form, means ‘wandering, staggering’.

### Comment on the meaning

To be rich is an obvious advantage, but wealth will never be our ‘friend’, especially in the meaning given to this word in <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/OnTheContracts.htm>.

We already met and commented many stanzas that speak in a scorning way of the material wealth or which present another type of wealth than a spiritual one. Refer to 8, 10, 18, 20, 39, 40, 41, 52, 59, 79.

### Evans’ Commentaries

78

2 Most editors have seen *Fitjungr* (who occurs nowhere else) as a symbolic name for a prosperous man. Lexicon Poeticum, following some of the earlier scholars, took it as ‘Fatty’, as though connected with *feitr*. [Lex. Poët connects it with *fita*, a weak feminine word the declension of which contains no form as ‘*fitj-*’] But the presence of ‘j’ rules this out. In his 1924 edition Finnur Jónsson proposed instead a connection with *fit* (gen. *fitjar*) ‘the web or skin of an animal’s foot’ and rendered the name (with a query) as ‘he who owns many cloven-footed beasts’...

Nevertheless, it was ... Olsen rejected in its favour his own earlier and far more attractive proposal... to deduce the name from the homonym *fit* ‘water-meadow’. This word, as *Fit*, or plural *Fitjar*, occurs in West Norse as a farm-name, mostly of fairly humble farms; great farms were higher up, not down in the water-meadows. But there is one big exception, *Fitjar* on the island of Stórð in Hörðaland, stróbu owned by Haraldr haorfagri. Olsen suggests that the Fitjungar were the once rich owners of this great farm, reduced to beggary when Haraldr seized it (he further suggests that the Icelandic settler Öundur breiðskeggr, grandson of Úlfr fitjumskeggi, was of this family and that this is why he emigrated).

It is very possible, however, that the name has no special significance. ... takes *Fitjungr* as a pure fiction created to alliterate with *fullar*. Support for this approach can be found in the similarly arbitrary use of fictional names...

3 *vánarvöl* ‘a beggar’s staff’ (literally ‘a staff of hope’) also occurs in Norwegian laws ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 79\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible



A non-wise person  
if he happens to acquire  
wealth or the pleasure of a woman  
(his) pride (over-) waxes  
but never does (his) good sense:  
he plentifully proceeds in (his self-) conceit.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

79.	
<i>Ósnotr maðr,</i>	Non-wise human
<i>ef eignask getr</i>	if self acquire happens
<i>fé eða fljóðs munuð,</i>	wealth or woman's pleasure
<i>metnaðr hánum þróask,</i>	pride his waxes
<i>en mannvit aldregi:</i>	but (his) good sense never:
<i>fram gengr hann drjúgt í dul.</i>	forwards goes he strongly in conceit.

### Bellows' translation

80. An unwise man, | if a maiden's love  
Or wealth he chances to win,  
His pride will wax, but his wisdom never,  
Straight forward he fares in conceit.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The feminine word *munuð* does not mean 'love' in general, but describes the physical pleasures associated to it, and its translation by 'love' is nothing but prudishness (or, at best, academic primness) . De Vries translates it by *lust* (pleasure) and Poet. Lex. by *voluptas* (pleasure) . It can be here in the nominative case, the accusative or the dative but certainly not in the genitive.

The neutral word *fljóð* means 'woman' in poetry, and can be here only in the genitive.

The only possible translation of *fljóðs munuð* is thus 'a woman's pleasure' which carries a double meaning by leaving unsaid who receives the pleasure. To be precise, it may also mean what a man 'wins' in providing his wife with her share of pleasure. All translators adopt the male point of view that "he wins a woman's love."

The word *dul* means 'concealment, self-conceit, pride'.

### Comment on the meaning

(Recall of 57) : Refer to stanza 57 where Óðinn points to those who, in his opinion, do not really belong to humanity. These despicable persons do not belong to a 'race' as racists often believe, but to the genre of the *dul* ones, that is, who shows self-conceit and arrogance. Note that this position recommends a humanistic ethics very far from the brutal deviations which we still know. In particular, Óðinn implicitly says also that the insane and the disabled fully belong to humanity (obviously, except when they are *dul*) . In s. 71, he even explicitly refers to the usefulness of some disabled persons.

We have another overtone of *dul* here: this stanza says clearly that the *dul* one is a 'non-wise' one who, as soon as he achieves some success, will believe that 'he got it' and wallows in stupid self-satisfaction instead of working at preserving what he acquired. We

can also understand the implied statement that a wise person is able to preserve these invaluable goods of obtaining “a woman’s pleasure.”

### \*\*\*Hávamál 80\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

It is thus, when it has been tried  
(and) he follows the track (which leads) to the runes,  
these which, to the children of the gods,  
the supreme divinities made for them  
and that painted the huge-wise-storyteller,  
he has then better to be quiet.

Note: the way of speech “to make something to children for them” is obviously redundant but it accounts well of the Old Norse text.

#### Prose explanation

As a matter of fact, who tries to follow the track leading to the runes, that the supreme divinities made, and that the immense-wise-storyteller painted for the gods’ children, then it is better for him to stay quiet.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

80.

*Þat er þá reynt,  
er þú að rúnum spyrr  
inum reginkunnum,  
þeim er gerðu ginnregin  
ok fáði fimbulpulr;  
þá hefir hann bzt, ef hann þegir.*

That is when tried,  
that you towards the runes you track  
these ones to the gods’ sons,  
to them that made the supreme-gods  
and painted (or drawn) huge-wise-storyteller  
then has he the best, if he be silent.

#### Bellows’ translation

79. Certain is that | which is sought from runes,  
That the gods so great have made,  
And the Master-Poet painted;

....

of the race of gods:

Silence is safest and best.

[Bellow’s 79. This stanza is certainly in bad shape, and probably out of place here. Its reference to runes as magic signs suggests that it properly belongs in some list of charms like the *Ljóthatal* (stanzas 147-165). The stanza-form is so irregular as to show either that something has been lost or that there have been interpolations. The manuscript indicates no lacuna; Gering fills out the assumed gap as follows:

“Certain is that which is sought from runes,  
The runes--,” etc.]

[Evans, Dronke and Orchard do not point at any missing part here. The only difference between Evans’ edition and the ON version provided above takes place in line 4. He gives *gerðu* instead of *gerðu*.]

## Commentary on the vocabulary

*Reyna* means ‘to try, to examine’. Its reflexive form, *reynask* means ‘to prove’. That changes the meaning of the beginning of the stanza: it ‘proves’ nothing, but somebody ‘seeks the track of the runes’. This same verb is used in stanza 81 and everyone gives to it its usual meaning, ‘to try’.

The basic meanings of the preposition *at* (= *að*) followed by a dative, like here, are

1. to indicate a movement in direction of the limits of an object,
2. to be close to an object,
3. to indicate an interval of time, which can be very short, and metaphorically: a process of assimilation (possibly destructive) .

The verb *spyrja*, ‘to trace steps, to track’, makes *spyr* in the present indicative and thus *spyrir* mean ‘you tracks’ or ‘he tracks’.

Adjective *kunnum* is the plural dative of *kunnr* which usually means ‘known’ and takes in poetry meaning of ‘son of’ or ‘of the same family’.

The pronoun *þeim* can have two meanings, either it is the dative of ‘they’ (masculine and feminine) and it thus means ‘to them’. It can also be the singular dative of ‘this’ (masculine only) and then mean ‘to this’.

## Comment on the meaning

The commentators (Evans is among them, but I jumped over this part of his comments) raise many questions about the three following personal pronouns: in line 2: *þú* (you) , line 4: *þeim* (to him) and line 6: *hann* (he) . They hesitate on the point of knowing whom this stanza addresses. For the ‘you’ and the ‘he’, I do not see a real problem: Óðinn addresses at first a particular rune student (you) and later any rune student (‘he’) , ‘you’ included. This sounds odd in English (this is why I used only ‘he’ in my translation) but it is usual in skaldic poetry. The ‘to them’ is a bit more difficult to understand. It suggests that the *Ginnregin* made the runes for several different races. This understanding agrees with other poems speaking of runes for the Elves, for example. In turn, this suggests that when Óðinn spread runic knowledge to our world, he did not, as Prometheus did, oppose the *Ginnregin*. Our Scandinavian supreme-gods do not seem to fear the propagation of knowledge, and stanza 80 alludes to this fact.

We can also ask why silence is recommended to the rune student by line 6. Doesn’t that contradict the authorization to transmit knowledge? No, because there are other ways that the verbal one to transmit knowledge. In my own work on the runes, I do not try more than restoring knowledge that has been choked by the huge hubbub which nowadays goes with the use of the runes. I never say how to use them, which is looked upon as being too limited, but you now know the reason of my moderation.

Lastly, in a less direct way, this stanza informs us about the creators of the runes. Let us ‘foresee’ what the last three lines of 142 say of the runes:

*er fáði fimbulpulr*                      that (has) painted, drawn Fimbulthulr [Powerful Wise or  
rather Immense-wise-storyteller]  
*ok gerðu ginnregin*                      and (has) made, manufactured, ‘made active’  
Ginnregin [Supreme holy Power or supreme-divinities. *Ginnregin* is in the  
singular in Old Norse but denotes a group of people.]

*ok reist hrofrir rögn.* and (has) carved Hroptr (Óðinn “who discloses hidden truths”) of the gods.

we see that the two first lines above are practically identical (in Old Norse) to lines 4 and 5 of 80. The difference is in last the line of 142 that speaks about Óðinn, for whom Hroptr is classical name, and they say that he carved them. Then, either we claim that Fimbulthulr and Ginnregin are again twice Óðinn, or he did not create the runes himself. The collective aspect of Ginnregin does not plead in favor of the assumption ‘Óðinn everywhere’, and he is not either a storyteller. It is thus very unlikely that these two names would be Óðinn’s. That agrees perfectly with the *æpandi nam* (howling I (them) took) of stanza 139, which describes Óðinn collecting the runes and not creating them.

As a last comment, this stanza integrates without problem to the set of stanzas 73-84. It is certainly not a detached fragment as Evans and the majority of the commentators believe. The present stanzas provide counseling and it is quite natural that Óðinn would also advise us about the use of the runes. His advice is the following here: Clearly, rune studies are an enthralling topic deserving the effort of “tracking toward them.” But they are also a dangerous pursuit because they bring you in front divinities who are “*fimbulpulr ok ginnregin*” and, you take the risk of burning your fingers, be thus “quiet in your research.” They are large risks to be taken, but with an immense benefit.

### Evans’ Commentaries

80

This obscure and metrically very irregular strophe, with no apparent connection with its context, seems like a detached fragment of the mystical poetry about runes such as we find below in 142-45; note particularly the resemblance between 4-5 and 142/5-6. [As soon as magic is involved, the commentators are lost. The context of 73-84 is the one of weariness and acting careful. This stanza contains good advice for leading an honorable life when practicing runic magic. This stanza is thus perfectly in place here, and what will need to be said again will be in s. 142-145.] The reference of the initial *þat* is unclear; as the strophe stands, it can only point forward to the last line, which Mullenhoff ... understood as conveying the ‘very modest truth’ that silence is best; ‘mit komisch ironischem pathos’ the poet presents this lesson in the ‘concluding strophe’ of the Gnostic Poem as the fruit of inquiry into the runes, which had been made by the gods and coloured by the *fimbulpulr*, the Great Sage (doubtless Óðinn himself) [Who is *komischer* in his statement, Mullendorf or Óðinn could be a matter of discussion. Moreover, as explained above, I disagree with the identification of *fimbulpulr* and Óðinn]. This entails identifying *þú* and *hann*. Von See ... avoids this awkwardness by taking *hann* as the *fimbulpulr*: when his listeners inquire into the runes, Óðinn does best by denying them this knowledge and remaining silent. This, says von See, makes a fitting conclusion to the ‘first section’ of Hávamál, with its emphasis on caution and silence. Somewhat more plausibly, Heusler... took the last line as enjoining holy silence during the ritual of runic enquiry; this too necessitates identifying *þú* and *hann* [and I agree with Heusler here, though with less ‘pathos’].

3 *reginkunnum*: ‘of divine descent’ (not ‘world-known’, as Cl- Vig) ; only here in literature, but clearly a traditional epithet of runes, cp. *runo fahi raginakudo* on the seventh-century Noleby-Fyrunga stone and *rúnaR þaR ræginkundu* on the ninth-century Sparlösa stone, both in Västergötland ...

### Note on 81-84

After the flight of magic lyricism in stanza 80, the three following stanzas reconsider less serious topics connected to everyday life. They are a kind of pause preparing us to the severe warnings delivered by stanzas 85-90.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 81\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

In the evening will the day be praised,  
a woman, who is burnt,  
a sword, which is tried,  
a maid, who is engaged,  
ice, upon which walking is possible,  
bier, which is drunk.

#### Prose explanation

Do not laud your day before the evening, and do not praise a woman before she is burned, do not praise a sword that is not tested, do not praise a girl before she is engaged, do not praise ice before it is walked upon, beer until it is drunk.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

<i>At kveldi skal dag leyfa,</i>	In the evening will the day be praised, [Latin: <i>vespere laudari debet amoena dies</i> ]
<i>konu, er brennd er,</i>	a woman, who burnt is,
<i>mæki, er reyndr er,</i>	a sword, which tried is,
<i>mey, er gefin er,</i>	a maid, who is given,
<i>ís, er yfir kemr,</i>	ice, which upon he walks,
<i>öl, er drukkit er.</i>	bier, that drunk is.

#### Bellows' translation

81. Give praise to the day at evening, | to a woman on her pyre,  
To a weapon which is tried, | to a maid at wed lock,  
To ice when it is crossed, | to ale that is drunk.

[Bellows' comment 81. With this stanza, the verse-form abruptly changes to Malahattr as indicated in the translation. What has happened seems to have been something like this. Stanza 80 introduces the idea of man's love for woman. Consequently some reciter or compiler (or possibly even a copyist) took occasion to insert at this point certain stanzas concerning the ways of women. Thus stanza 80 would account for the introduction of stanzas 81 and 82, which, in turn, apparently drew stanza 83 in with them. Stanza 84 suggests the fickleness of women, and is immediately followed--again with a change of verse-form--by a list of things equally untrustworthy (stanzas 85-90). Then, after a few more stanzas on love in the regular measure of the *Hovamol* (stanza 91-9s), is introduced, by way of illustration, Othin's story of his [fp. 46] adventure with Billing's daughter (stanzas 96-102). Some such process of growth, whatever its specific stages may have been, must be assumed to account for the curious chaos of the whole passage from stanza 81 to stanza 102.]

[Except the "curious chaos," and "some reciter or compiler," Bellows understanding of the structure of these stanzas seems quite logical.]

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

*Reyna* means ‘to test, to examine’, as we saw in the preceding stanza.

On *gefa*, to give, past participle *gefinn*. A maid who is engaged is said, in Old Norse, to be ‘given’.

### Comment on the meaning

As we have already seen, the experts have put a lot of attention in finding all kinds of possible influences on *Hávamál*. In this very case, the Latin influence is undisputable (see below my comment to Evans’) . Evans citing a 12th c. influence falls into the trap of detecting Middle Ages ones while a much more ancient one is obvious, namely Latin: “*vespere laudari debet amoena dies.*” This proves to me that, considering the huge effort done for finding Middle Age (‘thus’ Christian) influence on *Hávamál*, considering the general failure of this approach, it is now safe to claim that *Hávamál* is a genuine image of the pre Christian Northern world. Inversely, as long as the skalds were no mere ignoramus, it is obvious that they must have received some kind of Latin and Greek influence. This verse, among others, shows how they have been adapted to a Northern way of life.

The point of a “burnt woman” deserves some comments.

At first, note that all experts carefully underline the obvious, that the poem has thus not been composed in Iceland. Why do they forget to add that it proves also that the poem cannot be composed say, after the 10<sup>th</sup> century, again rejecting any Middle Age influence?

A deeper question comes from that we know about important men being burned, possibly with their female slaves. Does the poem allude to these slaves? This is contradicted by the use of the word *kona* which points at a mature woman or a wife (a wife in the Northern civilization, not in a Latin influenced one!) , hence to a free and responsible woman. The only possible conclusion is that our poem speaks of an important woman since her corpse is treated in the same way as important men’s corpses. Any important person, be him/her male or female, is always a person we should praise covertly. In everyday life, *Hávamál* recommends to each man to be careful in praising too loudly his *húsfreyja*, his house-goddess, unless she may be spoiled, as any other chief is by an excess of praise.

In fact, the biggest problem lies in the last line. The difference between a burned woman and a beer drunkard is too large for us: it points at a significant difference between our way of life and the Old Norse’s. At first, notice that checking the day, a maid, a sword or the ice may be impolite, it is not morally reprehensible for us. On the other hand, to test beer appears slightly commonplace (it should at least be a great vintage!) . I see two possible causes explaining why beer was so important in the Norse civilization. One is that beer consumption can be a sacred action, as during a *sumbl*, a form of religious ceremony during which considerable quantities of alcohol could be consumed. This assumption is to some extent confirmed by Evans’ irony on who want to see here an allusion to “the Christian moral of the transience and unreliability of this poor fleeting life.” In our present day ethics, spirituality is impossible to a boisterous half-drunk person. Understanding *Hávamál* makes it necessary to replace us inside ethics where the beer was an “a drink immortality,” such as the Indian *soma*, and not a way of self-dazing.

### Evans’ Commentaries

See p. 23 above [See below] for suggestions that the *málaháttir* strophes [this is one of the skaldic poetical forms] beginning here might have some connection with the MHG poetic form known as the ‘Priamel’, and that the suspicion of women which they sporadically express may derive less from Nordic antiquity than from the Christian Middle Ages.

1 For the sentiment cp. Möttuls saga... *at kveldi er dagr lofandi* and the twelfth-century Ysengrimus...: *vespere laudari debet amoena dies*. Singer..., who cites numerous Continental parallels, thinks the notion is of German origin, borrowed by the Norsemen at an early date.

[The Latin sentence: *vespere laudari debet amoena dies* means “In the evening must be judged a pleasant day.” This traditional Latin way of speech had a frequent later use, and Ysengrimus is nothing but one example of it. You can find it translated in several metaphorical ways, such as: “Out of beautiful grapes, often comes poor wine.” or “Beautiful maiden make old mothers.” or “Morning laugh means evening tears.”

### Evans’ introduction p. 23

Before leaving the Gnostic Poem, a few words should be said about the eighteen or so strophes that precede the tale of *Óðinn and Billings mæx*, which begins, properly speaking, at 96. Whether any of these strophes are to be regarded as part of the Gnostic Poem is, as already remarked, obscure; the theme of sexual love, which is fairly prominent in them, has not previously been touched on in the poem, and there is something to be said for the opinion that their view of woman as faithless and deceitful (note especially st. 84) is alien to the pagan Nordic tradition and reflects the misogynist attitudes of medieval Christianity; this would suggest that they are of later origin than the Gnostic Poem. The strophes in *málaháttir* (81-3, 85-7, 89-90), with their lists of things to do and things to beware of, are reminiscent of the medieval German genre known as the *Priamel* and have for this reason sometimes been regarded as of foreign inspiration. The German *Priamel* itself, however, appears to belong to the very end of the Middle Ages, so it can hardly be the direct source of the form in Norse, and so elementary a poetic mode as a list could arise spontaneously in many different cultures. The emphasis on the untrustworthiness of things has been taken by von See as a Christian theme, ‘die Unsicherheit alles Irdischen’ (4, 99) [the uncertainty of anything earthly], thus linking Hávamál yet again with the learned-Biblical tradition of the Middle Ages. (13) But mutability becomes a Christian theme only when it is brought into contrast with the security and permanence of Heaven; von See has achieved this contrast by inserting the word *Irdischen* [earthly], but there is no warrant for this in the text of the poem. It is going rather far to claim that a piece of advice like ‘Don’t praise ale until you have drunk it’ (81) implants *the Christian moral of the transience and unreliability of this poor fleeting life!* [my emphasis] (This very strophe, as a matter of fact, contains a pagan allusion in what is manifestly a reference to cremation.) As in the Gnostic Poem, the scene implied is Norwegian, or at any rate non-Icelandic: besides the cremation, note the wolf (85), the snake, the bear and the king (86), and the reindeer (90).

13 This view consorts uneasily with von See’s belief (I, 28-9) that 89/7-8 influenced Egill’s *Sonatorrek* (so also, independently, Einar Ol. Sveinsson 2, 299 note 2). If this is right, these lines must be older than c. 960.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 82\*\*\*

A translation as literal as possible

He must strike [to cut] a tree in the wind,  
 row at sea [for fishing] by windy weather,  
 speak [to flirt] in the darkness with a maidservant,  
 many are the eyes of the day;  
 with a boat, he must work on (its) gliding  
 but with a shield, (its) protection,  
 with a sword, (its) blow  
 but with a girl, (her) kisses.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

<i>Í vindi skal við höggva,</i>	In the wind shall (we) a tree strike
<i>veðri á sjó róa,</i>	by wind at sea row
<i>myrkri við man spjalla,</i>	in darkness with the maid speak,
<i>mörg eru dags augu;</i>	many are during the day eyes;
<i>á skip skal skriðar orka,</i>	on a ship shall gliding work, [shall we work at gliding]
<i>en á skjöld til hlífar,</i>	but on a shield protection,
<i>mæki höggs,</i>	on a sword, a strike
<i>en mey til kossa.</i>	but on a maiden, kisses.

### Bellows' translation

82. When the gale blows hew wood, | in fair winds seek the water;  
 Sport with maidens at dusk, | for day's eyes are many;  
 From the ship seek swiftness, | from the shield protection,  
 Cuts from the sword, | from the maiden kisses.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

*Vindr* means 'wind, air' as when we feel the wind on our skin. Bellows' translation, gale, is an error. Moreover, cutting down a tree during a storm is sheer suicide. Inversely, a moderate and constant wind enable the lumberjack to start cutting the tree side opposed to the wind, and safely finish his job on the other side, helped by the wind.

*Veðri* means 'weather, wind'.

The way of speech in line 4: "many are the eyes of the day" answers English "Fields have eyes, and woods have ears."

*Man* (a neutral word) is an old word initially for a war prisoner; it then took the meaning of 'bondman or bondwoman', i. e. someone who lost his/her freedom. A bondwoman is subjected to the goodwill of her master, where from the derived meaning of 'lover, mistress' and finally of 'love'. The *man-rúnar* are the runes of love, once again with a strong sexual connotation. This word is often confused with *maðr* (a human person) which has old forms in *mannr* and which makes *mann* in the accusative. Boyer's translation of line 3, where *man* is rendered by 'virgin', can be attributed to his sense of humor. Dronke uses the word 'girl' Orchard 'friend', this last one being also a little unexpected.

*Skriðr* indicates a gliding motion. It makes *skriðar* in the singular genitive. The verb *orka* means 'to be able of' but, when its complement is with the genitive (as it is the case here), it means 'to be the cause of'.

The sixth line, by analogy with me fifth, is understood as: (*á*) *mæki (til) höggs*, where the prepositions are left unsaid.



## Comment on the meaning

We meet here what seems to be small acts of everyday life, the magic significance of which is not obvious.

In order to attenuate this feeling, let us notice that the first three lines use the verbs ‘to strike, to row, to speak’ that describe a precise action. On the other hand, the last four lines are controlled by the verb ‘to work’, which describes a general behavior. Óðinn could have said that a maiden deserves deep feelings, a sword strikes and a shield protects. The work to do relates to significant components of life: life at sea, weapons and love. I suppose that the *mær* (maiden) is ‘worked upon’ for other reasons than sexual ones, especially as to become a partner, perhaps even the one about which s. 163 speaks: this one who “protects you with her arm” and who the magician entrusts the eighteenth rune song. On the other hand, a *man* (a girl) requests discretion and glibness but no “work” to be seduced.

This thinking leads us to examine more carefully the differences between lines 1-4, which tell how to behave in unimportant facts of life, and 5-8, which tell the behavior for important ones.

The second line speaks of rowing a boat (to go to fishing), that is a rather prosaic task whereas the fifth line speaks of the way a ship glides, a significant problem for long course navigation or in the event of a combat. By taking of account the preceding remarks, this implies that Óðinn’s lesson is as follows: “Use your arms and a favorable wind to row, but use also your magic when your ship gliding is at stake.”

The first line speaks of cutting down a tree with an axe, while lines 6-7 speak of weapons deciding of life or death. This implies that Óðinn’s lesson is then: “Use your arms and a favorable wind to cut a tree, but use also your magic when fighting your enemies.”

Coming back to lines 2-3 and 8, their comparison leads us to the following Óðinn’s lesson: “Use your fluency and darkness to allure the maidservant, but use also your magic (“your kisses”) when the deal is finding a life-long love.”

### Evans’ Commentaries

#### 82

1 *í vindi* - so that one can anticipate on which side the tree will fall? (so Finnur Jónsson) . Hannaas 236 ingeniously suggests that the line is intended to contrast with what follows: when it is stormy, stay ashore, and then felling trees (or chopping up wood?) is suitable work.

2 ... For the sense ‘good weather’ cp. *vesið með oss unz verði / veðr; nú brim fyr Jaðri* in a stanza of Þjóðólfr hvinverski. . .

4 This sounds like a proverb; so Heusler ... compares *mörg eru konungs eyru* recorded several times...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 83\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

He must drink beer near fire,  
but slip on the ice,  
(he must) buy a lean stallion,  
but a soiled sword,

fatten a horse at home,  
but (feed) a dog out of the house.

### Prose explanation

He must offer to himself the pleasure of a good beer in the heat near a fire, but slip on the ice in the cold. He must buy a fit and trim 'greaseless' stallion, but acquire a sword greasy with the blood that stains it after having killed someone. One must feed his horse at home, but let the dog has to eat outside, nearby home.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

83.

<i>Við eld skal öl drekka,</i>	By a fire must-we bier drink,
<i>en á ísi skríða,</i>	but on ice glide,
<i>magran mar kaupa,</i>	lean steed buy,
<i>en mæki saurgan,</i>	but sword dirty,
<i>heima hest feita,</i>	at home horse fatten,
<i>en hund á búi.</i>	but a dog out of the dwelling.

### Bellows' translation

83. By the fire drink ale, | over ice go on skates;  
Buy a steed that is lean, | and a sword when tarnished,  
The horse at home fatten, | the hound in thy dwelling.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

*Merr* is a mare, *marr* is a stallion (in poetry) .

The adjective *magr* means thin. Lex. Poet. translates it by '*macer*, *macilentus*' both meaning 'slim' and possibly holding the other meaning of 'scanty'.

A *mækir* is a kind of sword, here qualified by the last participle of the verb *saurga*, to soil ('to dirty badly') .

In the expression *á búi*, the word *búi*, household, is in the dative. The adverb *á*, followed by a dative, positions an object on the surface of another, or right apart from one another. Here *á* does not translate by 'on' as usually but by 'out of'. Do not confuse with the word *búi* (neighborhood) that would make *búa* in the dative and the accusative.

Dronke excepted, the translators tend to render the sequence of aphorisms in a single continuous file because they translate the word *en* (= but) by 'and'. This is perfectly possible, but seems to be an error here. These aphorisms go per pair, the second half of which is opposed in some way to the first, a way to spice up the stanza.

We will drink beer at ease in the warmth, but uncomfortably slip on the ice while Bellows and Dronke speak of skating, a pleasurable activity.

We will buy a slim stallion without fat on his body, but we will buy a soiled sword, meaning it has been covered with sticky blood, thus able to kill.

We will respectfully feed a horse with the best food, whereas a dog can manage its own food.

## Comment on the meaning

It is still possible, as for 82, to see in this sequence of aphorisms a description in the normal way to live when the poem was made up, i. e. an interesting testimony of the life of the time. The message relating to the magic of life is skillfully dissimulated.

We note at once that Bellows, Boyer and Orchard translate the sequence of aphorisms as if they were in line one after the other. This is why they translate the word *en* (= but) by 'and', or do not translate it at all (Orchard), which is often possible, but does not properly render the text. Dronke translates two of the three by *but*, and she jumps over one.

To my understanding, these lines go per pair, the second half of which is opposed in a certain way to the first, which gives spice and meaning to the stanza.

Thus, we comfortably drink beer in the warmth, but we slip on ice either by falling down, or by slipping at high speed on ice-shoes.

Thus, we buy a slim horse that is not burdened with fat, but we must buy a sword which has been soiled (as 81 already stated) and that is 'burdened' with blood and knows what is to bring death.

Thus, we keep and fatten at home a horse, because its strength can be anytime useful, whereas a dog is left alone outside, in order to correctly fulfill its role of home guardian.

The aphorism furthest from our present thinking is the one about purchasing a bloody sword. We consider, nowadays, that these sharp objects are without proper life. Many texts witness, for instance the healing of Kalevala's hero, Väinämöinen, that the cure of a serious wound is conditioned by the knowledge of "the origin of iron." This shows that the weapon was regarded as endowed with its own life and its proper functioning needed its 'consent'. Boyer's understanding of "a rusted sword" is interesting and convincing. It however destroys any magic in this line.

This stanza thus gives us, in a different style but as the preceding one, a lesson which is the following here: "Drink your beer, buy a slim horse, and keep it at home without using your magic, you will however need magic to easily glide on ice, to acquire a killer sword and to handle your dog in such a way that it makes the difference between enemies and friendly guests."

## Evans' Commentaries

### 83

[Evans gives examples of sentences where *á búi* cannot mean 'on the dwelling' but points at an outside position. He concludes that *á búi* means "in another person's home".]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 84\*\*\*

(Does Hávamál say that women are frivolous?)

### A translation as literal as possible

In the words of a girl  
no man should have confidence  
nor in what an (adult) woman says;  
because on a revolving wheel  
their hearts have been shaped,  
contention-breach (*or flexibility, or change or inconstancy*) is lying in their chest.

### Prose explanation

A man should not have confidence in the words of a woman, whether she is a young girl or a person of some importance. This is true because their hearts were created on a revolving wheel and (thus) rupture (*or* flexibility, *or* change *or* inconstancy) is lying in their chest.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

Old Norse	Litteral translation
<i>Meyjar orðum</i>	Of a maid the words
<i>skyli manngi trúa</i>	should no man have confidence
<i>né því, er kveðr kona,</i>	nor what, is to say [ <i>or</i> sing, recite] a woman [ <i>or</i> wife],
<i>því at á hverfanda hvéli</i>	because on a turning wheel
<i>váru þeim hjörðu sköpuð,</i>	were to them hearts shaped [ <i>or</i> created]
<i>brigð í brjósti lagiað.</i>	breach in the (their) breast is lying.

### Bellows' translation

84. A man shall trust not | the oath of a maid,  
Nor the word a woman speaks;  
For their hearts on a whirling | wheel were fashioned,  
And fickle their breasts were formed.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

Line 3: *kveðr*. The verb *kveða* carries no hint at magic. It can also mean 'to recite a poem'. In the sagas, when a character X wishes to recite a poem, the saga says "X kvað ... (X declaims ...)." ."

Line 4. We already met the adjective *hverfr* in the stanza 74 where it could take several meanings. We have here the verb *hverfa*, in the participle present, which has the meaning 'to turn, to turn around'.

**Line 5. Comment on *sköpuð*.** This word seems without problem because its grammar is clear: it is the past participle of the verb *skapa*, to shape/to create. All translators use this meaning and say that "the women's heart is shaped on a revolving wheel." Associated to this verb is the word *skap*, state of mind or mood. Being associated the verb *skapa* its plural, *sköp*, tends to take the meaning of the 'shapings' that are worked upon us, i. e. our fate (more details at <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/OrlogSkopEngl.pdf>). In poetic Edda, we meet some ten occurrences of the word *sköp* and all of them relate without ambiguity to the fates. Moreover, there are 5 occurrences of *sköpuð*. One of them, (Reginismál s. 5) describes a curse sent by Loki on a person whose '*sköpuð*' will be unhappy and the meaning of 'fates' is obvious. In the four other instances the meaning of 'shaped' is as possible as the one of 'fated'. In the present stanza, the meaning of 'fated' is not absolutely obvious, except that who else than fate could shape women's heart of on a revolving wheel, in the context of using the word *sköpuð*?

This is why I do not understand these lines as kind of jest *à la* Offenbach. Óðinn states the women's fates (*sköp*) . He intended to imply that women are really *brigð* (see below) because they are fated to. If this word means 'fickle' as everyone seems to believe, then for one Óðinn says a stupid thing, and for two and more convincingly, the illustrations of such women provided in the following stanzas do not fit at all this feature. Billings mæð is incredibly crafty and cutting since she joins insult to rapture (see s. 96-102) . Gunnlöð is not at all frivolous nor cutting, she is broken by Óðinn, showing her weakness. These are two examples which occur in worlds where the women are not respected, they have the choice between being cutting ('breaking') or being broken, which explains their *sköp*.

Line 6, on *brigð*. It should be obvious that the reading of *Hávamál* is not for male persons only, and that interpretations insulting to women must be carefully weighted.

According to C-V, the adjective *brigðr* means 'unfaithful, fickle' but the noun *brigð*, is here the subject of verb *leggja* (with preterit *lagði*) . It does not mean inconstancy but it is a legal term which indicates "a right to claim something which belongs to you." It can also take the meaning of 'a break, a cut'. It needs to be associated to another word to clearly take the meaning of 'fickleness'. For example, *vináttu-brigð* = friendship-breach = inconstancy, or *hvar-brigð* = always-breach = inconstancy. De Vries gives to it the meanings of 'veränderung' (change, modification) , 'wankelmut' (fickleness) and 'lösungrecht' (right of cancellation?). Lex. Poet. gives: *varius / mobilis / inconstans* (varied, variegated / mobile, flexible / inconstant, inconsistent) . In conclusion, the word *brigð* does not have the sole meaning of 'fickleness' (Bellows: fickle; Dronke and Orchard: fickleness; Boyer: 'inconstance') but also 'breaching, flexibility, change'.

We will meet again this word in stanza 124 in the plural dative, *brigðum*. In 124 context that praised sincerity among friends, lack of sincerity is the context and *brigð* translates by fickleness with the connotation of fickleness in friendship, i. e. as in *vináttu-brigð* (= friendship-breach) . We will meet it also in 91, it will then be an adjective, qualifying men's behavior with women.

Stanza 84 context is not as clear. It is well understood that Óðinn wishes to criticize the fair sex, but the nature of this critique is not obvious. We will now see why 'fickleness' fits in the stanza's context but does not fit at all the one of the following stanzas and that "breach" or "change" returns a better meaning of *brigð* in this stanza.

### Comment on the meaning

- On the first three lines

They clearly state that men cannot count on the word of a woman, whatever her age. It should be noted that this does not indicate a 'word given', an oath, or a contract. This relates to a 'usual wording'.

- On the three last lines

Evans says that modern Icelanders use *á hverfanda hveli* to speak of an object or a person in an unstable state but it does not guarantee that it has been the case before Christianization. Grettir's saga (he quotes) indeed describes a very unstable situation. It can however refer to Grettir's destiny, meaning the wheel of fortune, i. e. his destiny, made him live the restless life of an everlasting runaway. As stated by Evans, this meaning is suggested by a quotation from *Flateyrbók* speaking of the "fortune's turning wheel."

Evans quotes also chapter 21 of the Saga of the sworn Brothers (*Fóstbræðra saga*) in which a slave notices that his mistress becomes less tender and spends far too much time in the men's building: "A small poem came back to his mind, one speaking of the prostitutes (*lausungarkonur*). " This 'small poem' is exactly the same as the three lines we are discussing. The slave thus thinks that these lines describe a prostitute. When he meets his mistress, he says his discontent and the only answer he gets is "*Hún svarar honum sem henni var í skapi til* (She retorted exactly to him what she thought). " This text shows well that a jealous and uncouth man will interpret these three lines as speaking of female (sexual) inconstancy while the lady's reaction suggests nothing more than she already broke with this man.

It does not seem to me reasonable to imagine such a crude Óðinn, although this choice is implicit in a unanimous translators' opinion as we have seen. I think that Óðinn wants to stress here that women change their opinion and won't budge from it, they are 'breachy' in their relations with men.

In order to get things straight, let us use some crude ways of speech. Crude men, when they are angry at their female companions, often call them names, such as 'whore'. We found an Old Norse example of this behavior in the Saga of the Sworn Brothers. I think that the reproach Óðinn means here is not an insult, even a polite one as 'fickle', it would at worst be more like 'unreliable' or as I invented it, 'breachy'. A feminist in charge will at once recall us that men also are 'unreliable' and, by the way she would be faithful to Óðinn's word since, in s. 91, he will recall that "*brigðr er karla hugr konum*, (*brigðr* are men the heart with the women – where *brigðr* is an adjective). " As a consequence, if man-women equality is not respected, the balance is in favor of women since *Hávamál* says that women are 'sharp' with men, while men are 'fickle' with women. Why then to insist so much on the difference between 'fickle' and 'breaching'? Fickle carries the connotation of being capricious, unstable as the typical 19<sup>th</sup> century Hoffenbach's woman. This does not fit a responsible Scandinavian *kona*.

In my (male) view, the main problem here is not the one of female dignity, it is more the one of *Hávamál* coherence. In the reduced context of stanza 84, much insistence is given to a context of instability, by connecting a woman's heart with a 'revolving wheel'. In the context of this stanza, a very pejorative meaning is possible. In stanzas 96-110, however, Óðinn will give us two examples of those women who are so much *brigðr*. The one of Billings mær describes a crafty woman one who tricked him by promising him her own body and offering the one of her bitch. Billings mær cannot be called 'fickle'. Calling her 'unreliable' would be slightly unjust because forgetting that she defended herself against Óðinn's insistence, as we shall see while studying s. 98 and 102. The second example is that of Gunnlöð, a woman who accepted him, saved his life and who he dumped for unsaid reasons. In view of stanzas 104-108, we understand that Gunnlöð is "an excellent woman" (s. 108) with whom Óðinn has been the fickle party, and he obviously feels ashamed of his behavior. In stanza 110, the poet comments on Óðinn's attitude in such a severe way that we can wonder if this stanza is not Óðinn's confession of shame or regret. In the broader context of the stanzas following 84, between a crafty Billings mær and an excellent Gunnlöð, describing women as 'fickle' amounts to call incoherent the skalds who wrote *Hávamál*. I refuse to scorn them in this way. Conversely, who scorns them without problem will naturally adopt the translation, in 84, of *brigðr* by 'fickle'.

Why placing this stanza as a conclusion of the section "**No advantages without dangers**"? Here again, the following stanzas will say to us how much invaluable benefits a

man gets from a woman. The overly pejorative tone of 84 can be explained by the need to stress that this benefit is not without its dangers.

As a last remark, we should remember that a very typical Germanic tradition lies in the fact that a human status has been simultaneously provided to Ask and Embla, as described by Völuspá. Hávamál does not negate it, it says, joining 84 and 91, that both their hearts were shaped on the same whirling wheel.

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 84

4 á hverfanda hvéli 'on a turning wheel'; very possibly the reference is to a potter's wheel... However, in Alvíssmál 14 *hverfanda hvél* is given as a name for the moon, and CPB 483 suggests that this is the sense here too ('women's hearts are shift as phases of the moon'), a notion recently revived by Kristján Albertsson. But this seems less probable, especially in view of the occurrence of the expression elsewhere, e. g. Grettis saga ch. 42: *En til Grettis kann ek ekki at leggja, því at mér pykkir á mjök hverfanda hjóli (v. 1. hvéli) um hans hagi*. [This means "I have nothing to propose about Grettir, for all his doings seem to be at the mercy of the turning wheel."] The phrase *á hverfanda hvéli* is common in modern Icelandic, to denote something unstable and fickle; Halldór Halldórsson 7-12 thinks it derives from a fusion of the expression in our poem with the medieval notion of the wheel of fortune. This fusion appears already in Flateyjarbók I 93: *er með öngu móti treystanda á hennar* (fortune's) *hverfanda hvél*.

4-6 (omitting *því at*) are cited in Fóstbrœðra saga ch. 21; see p. 2 above [Here, see below]. The mss of the saga show a few verbal discrepancies: Flateyjarbók has *eru* for *váru*, ... reads 5 as *er þeim hjarta skapat*, both add *ok* before *brigð*, and Hauksbók omits *um*.

In this strophe, as in 81 above and 90 below, we meet the concept of the fickle, deceptive woman so much exemplified in medieval Continental proverb lore, ... derives the sentiments from medieval clerical misogyny).

### Relevant part of p. 2 in Evan's introduction

Further, the second half of st. 84 is cited in Fóstbræðra saga ch. 21 (IF VI 225) where it is said of a thrall in Greenland who suspects his mistress of infidelity *kom honum þá í hug kviðlingr sá, er kveðinn hafði verið um lausungarkonur* and then the lines follow. This part of Fóstbræðra saga is extant in two mss from the fourteenth century and in later copies of what is thought to have been another fourteenth-century ms. It is worth noting that neither the Prose Edda nor Fóstbræðra saga attributes these quotations to a poem called Hávamál, which is indeed not named in any Old Norse document apart from Codex Regius itself. Lastly, it should be mentioned that chapters 6 and 7 of Ynglinga saga (in Snorri's Heimskringla) contain manifest echoes of st. 148 and some of the following strophes, showing that Snorri must have known this part (at least) of the poem; and in one place Snorri's wording is helpful in establishing the correct text (see the Commentary).

Below: Fate, Pompei version



Thanks to:

[http://www.convivialiteenflandre.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=259:2e-citation-latine-2009-cr-vincihals&catid=38:citation-et-uvre-dart](http://www.convivialiteenflandre.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=259:2e-citation-latine-2009-cr-vincihals&catid=38:citation-et-uvre-dart)

This image shows a picture of Fate. A structure seems to rest on the attributes of poverty (right), of royalty (left) and (center) a skull – death –, a butterfly – a dead one's soul - and a wheel, perhaps the one of fortune.

## Hávamál 85-89

### “Be weary, be ready: No benefit hazards”

The first three of these five stanzas are in the shape of lists, a spoken poetic metre, naming various dangers to be avoided. They give advice for a systematic mistrust of a large number of people and phenomena. Stanzas 85-89 relate to society as a whole, except the topic of loved women ... they will be the topic of 90-95.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 85\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

[Do not give your whole trust]

To a bursting bow,  
to a burning flame,  
to a gaping wolf,  
to a croaking crow,  
to a squealing boar,  
to a rootless tree,  
to a growing billow,  
to a boiling kettle, ...



## Prose explanation

[Do not give your whole trust to: ] a bow that can break, a flame so hot that it burns you, a wolf with a gaping mouth, a crow that croaks (*or sings or* shouts a magic formula) , a boar that squeals, a tree without roots, a billow that grows, a kettle the water of which boils...

## ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

85.

<i>Brestanda boga,</i>	To a bursting bow,
<i>brennanda loga,</i>	to a burning flame,
<i>gínanda ulfi,</i>	to a gaping wolf,
<i>galandi kráku,</i>	to a crowing [ <i>or singing/shouting magic</i> ] crow
<i>rýtanda svíni,</i>	to a squealing swine,
<i>rótlausum viði,</i>	to a rootless tree,
<i>vaxanda vági,</i>	to a growing wave,
<i>vellanda katli,</i>	to a boiling kettle,

## Bellows' translation

85. In a breaking bow | or a burning flame,  
A ravening wolf | or a croaking raven,  
In a grunting boar, | a tree with roots broken,  
In billowy seas | or a bubbling kettle,

## Commentary on the vocabulary

- *galandi* (verb *gala*) : to croak, to sing, to shout (see the comments in s. 29) . It may mean 'to utter magic words'. This last meaning can seem eccentric here though being wary of a crow is eccentric as well. It can happen in two contexts. Firstly, as a hint to a battlefield where crows and ravens eat the corpses. In this case, these birds can be seen as a bad omen. Secondly, as being kin to Óðinn's ravens, trying to watch over you, and it always wise to be a little wary of Óðinn. In this second case, they no longer are 'plain crows' because they are associated to Óðinn's magic, and their croaking may be magical.

- *vaxanda*, (verb *vaxa*) : to grow, *vági vaxanda* gives 'growing billow or sea'.

- *vellanda katli*. It is remarkable that the Icelandic runic poem related to rune Laukaz, named Lögr (water, lake, river) in Old Norse, says "*lögr er vellanda vatn ok viðr ketill...*" (lögr is **boiling** water and a large **kettle**...) " so that *vellanda ketill* is still a definition of the rune Lögr of which Óðinn says here that it should not be entirely trusted.

## Comment on the meaning

We have just seen that lines 4 and 8 can refer to actions that are very far from these words commonplace meaning, as confirmed by Evans below.

A gaping wolf obviously evokes Fenrir and we are quite certain that Týr has been wary of it.

The plain meaning of the words: "rootless tree" does not suggest any reason why we should or should not trust such an object. Again, we can either accept that Hávamál reports absurd information or suppose it refers to something which has been lost. At least, we know that a 'rootless' tree, actually one of which we don't wherefrom its roots come, is

Yggdrasill, the world-tree. Why Óðinn would claim it to be unreliable in some way, we do not know.

The nature of the myth associated with rune Lögr may be also guessed by referring to another line of a runic poem: “(lögr) *er, er fællr ór fjalle* (lögr is what falls from cliffs)”, i. e. a waterfall. In addition to the danger of natural cascades, we know that Loki killed Ótr, who was in a cascade in the form of an otter. Many adventures followed this calamitous episode. Loki should have been warier of this waterfall.

I'd be very happy if someone teaches me what myths or sayings could be associated to a bursting bow, a burning flame, a squealing boar and a growing wave.

### Evans' Commentaries

85

4 *galandi kráku* - for the belief that crows possessed the gift of prophetic utterance see the story of Óláfr kyrri and the crow in *Morkinskinna* (Finnur Jónsson – 1932) p. 293-5.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 86\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

[Do not give your whole trust]  
to a flying arrow,  
a breaking billow,  
to one night (old) ice,  
to a coiled snake,  
to the bride's bed talk,  
or to a broken sword,  
to having fun of (with) a bear,  
or to a king's baby,

#### Prose explanation

[do not trust entirely all this: ] an arrow that flies, a wave that breaks, ice formed the night before, a coiled snake, a bride's pillow speech, a broken sword, the bear with which you have fun, or the child of a king...

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

86.

*fljúganda fleini,  
fallandi báru,  
ísi einnættum,  
ormi hringlegnum,  
brúðar beðmálum  
eða brotnu sverði,  
bjarnar leiki  
eða barni konungs.*

To a flying shaft,  
to a falling wave,  
to ice one night old,  
to a serpent coiled up,  
to a bride's bed talk,  
or to a broken sword,  
to a bear's sport  
or to the baby of a king,

#### Bellows' translation

86. In a flying arrow | or falling waters,  
In ice new formed | or the serpent's folds,  
In a bride's bed-speech | or a broken sword,  
In the sport of bears | or in sons of kings,

### Commentary on the vocabulary

In the preceding stanza, *vágr* indicates the sea as well as a wave. Here, *báru* is a wave and *fallandi báru* indicates a falling wave. It can also designate the foam which is formed on the wave when it runs in shallow waters. In both case, the ship is put in danger.

The word *ormr*, which takes in other Germanic languages the meaning of worm (e. g. , German: *Wurm*) most often has the meaning of 'serpent' or 'dragon' in Old Norse. A coiled snake seems to be in peace but it can slacken off as a spring if it feels danger.

The word *brotna* does not mean 'cracked' as one could have guessed but plainly 'broken'. A broken sword will not unexpectedly betray you as could do a sword with a hidden flaw, such as a tiny crack.

### Comment on the meaning

The two couples connected by an 'or' in lines 6-7 and 8-9 may seem surprising since they create a bond between a bride and a sword, and between a bear and a baby.

The bride's words may be sincere, she does not try to mislead her husband, but to rely on them is a mistake. In the same way, to rely on a broken sword, although you are aware of its flaw, is an error.

A king's baby is like a playing bear, it looks harmless but the least change in his mood can take your life.

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 86

2 *fallandi báru* 'a falling billow', perhaps (as Hannaas 237 suggests) with specific reference to a billow breaking on an underwater reef (which is why it is so dangerous) , cp. the use of *fall* to denote such reefs, or water breaking on them (Fritzner ..., and still in modern Norwegian dialect) .

### \*\*\*Hávamál 87\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

[Do not give your whole trust]  
to a sick calf,  
to a free-minded slave,  
to the soft words of a völv (a witch or soothsayer)  
to a corpse lately fallen.  
[to a serene sky,  
to a laughing lord (undoubtedly with hypocrisy) ,  
to a barking dog,  
and to a sad whore.]

## ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

87.

<i>sjúkum kalfi,</i>	to a sick calf
<i>sjalfráða þræli,</i>	to a free-minded thrall
<i>völu vilmæli,</i>	to the völva's sweet-words
<i>val nýfelldum,</i>	to a corpse new-fallen.
<i>(In Rask, Möbius, not in Bugge nor Finnur Jónsson)</i>	
<i>[heiðrikum himni</i>	[to a shiny heaven
<i>hlæjanda herra,</i>	to a laughing ( <i>somewhat hypocritical</i> ) lord,
<i>hunda gelti</i>	to a hound that barks,
<i>ok harmi skækju]</i>	and to a sorrowing harlot.]

### Bellows' translation

87. In a calf that is sick | or a stubborn thrall,  
A flattering witch | or a foe new slain.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

*sjalfráð* = *sjalf-ráði* = self advisor = having his free will.

*vilmæli* = *vil-mæli* = good\_will-tone = friendly word.

*gelti* (verb *gelta*) : to shout for human, to bark for a dog. Compare with s 85 croaking crow (verb *gala*) and squealing boar.

### Comment on the meaning

A sick calf can seem very ordinary as compared to the three characters that follow, a slave, a völva and a corpse. In a civilization of stockbreeders, to preserve a sick animal is always a serious error. One never should hope that it will heal: it will even probably contaminate the remainder of the herd. We must also notice that stanza 88 will say that a son should not be too early trusted. It is thus not impossible that this calf is both a 'young animal of the herd' and a 'young child of the kin'. This pushes up its importance and brings this 'calf' at the same level than the three other characters evoked in the four first lines. From that, follows the digression below.

Why should we have no confidence in the "words softly spoken" by a völva? Our civilization sees a charlatan in each foreseer and it will immediately understand that "the völva tells us lies." During pagan times the *völur*, the soothsayers, were either much respected or much feared, they thus had a significant power and could be heard without raising their voice. This line thus says: "Do not pay attention to the völva's tone, rather listen the meaning of her words. She can tell with the mildest voice a dreadful future."

"Do not trust a lately fallen corpse" is an elementary caution because a last burst of life of this 'corpse' may take your life.

Lastly, you will notice that the last four ones lines that are rejected by the scholars seem to call upon less significant topics than the rest of stanzas 84-89. Their interest primarily holds in that they underline the depth of the other lines. For example, I did not comment on the second line about free-willed slaves. This is not because it is unimportant

but because, on the contrary, it would involve endless digressions on slavery, the existence of rebellious slaves etc.

### **A digression on therapeutic harassment on premature babies**

Mentioning a calf, a young animal, evokes also the Germanic ‘barbaric’ habit to expose misshapen children, i. e. to let them die in the land. The problem of deciding where true cruelty lies is far from being so trivial. Still little time ago, I would not have hesitated one minute to condemn the Germanic habit to expose misshapen children. It happens that a friend of mine is a nurse specialized in the treatment of the premature babies. I had always admired her role of baby savior, associated to her extreme sensitivity in the others’ misfortunes. A little time ago, she said to have given up this work, precisely because of her sensitivity, to pass into the general ‘sick children’ section. When I asked her why, she answered that she could no longer stand any more to work in order to “create handicapped children.”

Then, where is cruelty? Is it exposing misshapen new born ones or doctors medically harassing children who will be never find their place in our society? I do not have any idea of the ideal solution, and I do not even know if there is one. It is quite possible that an approach not based on compassion for the child and his parents, but on an absolute respect of the rights of the parents and the child would help doing less many errors.

Hávamál advises us to little believe in compassion and to give more importance to respect.

### **\*\*\*Hávamál 88\*\*\***

#### **A translation as literal as possible**

In a field (*or* crop) [too] early sown  
no human has confidence  
nor too early [to have confidence] in his son,  
- the weather speaks for the harvest  
but intelligence for the son;  
both these two are carrying danger.

#### **Prose explanation**

Nobody trusts a field too early sown, nor too early trusts his son. Good or bad weather says us what the harvest will be and (our and his) intelligence says us what will be the son. These two carry danger.

#### **ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation**

88.

*akri ársánum*  
*trúi engi maðr*  
*né til snemma syni,*  
*- veðr ræðr akri*  
*en vit syni;*  
*hætt er þeira hvárt.*

To a field (*or* crop) early-sown  
gives confidence no human,  
nor too early to (one's) son,  
- weather speaks (for) the crop  
but wit (for) the son ;  
danger is them both.

### Bellows' translation

89. [Bellows orders 'our 88' as 89.]

Hope not too surely | for early harvest,  
Nor trust too soon in thy son;  
The field needs good weather, | the son needs wisdom,  
And oft is either denied.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The verb *ársá* = *ár-sá* where *ár* is an adverb meaning 'early'. Its last participle is *ársáinn* = early sown. Bellows' translation, "early harvest," uses the name *ár* meaning 'year, abundance'.

The adverb *snemma* also means 'early'.

The verb *ræða* means nothing but 'to speak' as Dronke and Orchard, while Bellow reads 'to need' and Boyer 'to control'. It is followed here by datives (*akri* and *syni*) what can be translated 'to speak for someone' and this evokes 'to uncover'.

### Comment on the meaning

This stanza seems very clear. We nevertheless should wonder what is dangerous. Is it the harvest and the son or is it the weather and the intelligence? Avoiding *ræða* normal meaning, as Bellows and Boyer do, removes this interesting ambiguity which is found in Dronke and Orchard.

To my understanding, Óðinn gives us two concrete examples here, harvest and son, and obviously warns to us against excessive confidence in them. He warns especially against what exposes their true value, weather and intelligence. We should not blindly believe in weather to be favorable to harvests, nor in the intelligence of others people before being in position of observing them.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 89\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

His brother's killer,  
even if he is met very far,  
a half burned house,  
a too hasty horse -  
the stallion is no longer fit  
if it has a broken leg -  
it does not happen that a human is so unconcerned  
that he trusts all this.

### Prose explanation

We meet no one so unconcerned by everything (= so concerned by nothing) that he gives his trust to

- the one who killed his brother, even when meeting him in a foreign country where the vendetta cannot go on,
- a half burned house in which enemies can still be alive,
- a too nervous horse which is likely to break its leg.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

89.

<i>Bróðurbana sínum,</i>	brother-killer his own,
<i>þótt á brautu mæti,</i>	even if far away met,
<i>húsi hálfbrunnu,</i>	house half-burned
<i>hesti alskjótum,</i>	horse all-hasty
<i>- þá er jór ónýtr,</i>	-when is the stallion non-fit
<i>ef einn fótr brotnar -,</i>	if a foot (is) broken -,
<i>verði-t maðr svá trygg</i>	becomes-not the human so faithful (or unconcerned) ,
<i>at þessu trúi öllu.</i>	to these give faith for everything.

### Bellows' translation

88. In a brother's slayer, | if thou meet him abroad,  
 In a half-burned house, | in a horse full swift--  
 One leg is hurt | and the horse is useless--  
 None had ever such faith | as to trust in them all.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

We already met the adjective *tryggr* in 67 with the meaning of 'faithful'. It can also have the meaning of 'uncaring' which agrees better to the context of this line. Note that Evans suggests the meaning of 'trusting'.

The expression *at öllu þessu* uses the neuter singular dative form to indicate 'that what', not 'these who', we can trust. This is why there is no problem in understanding that the last the line is implicit at the beginning of stanzas 85-87.

### Comment on the meaning

The meaning of this stanza is very clear, except perhaps the allusion to a half-burned house. During a battle, when the enemies would take refuge in a house, it was usual to burn this house in order to chase them out of it. The residents of a half burned house are, similarly to a "corpse recently killed," are likely to have a last burst of energy which can be deadly for you.

Bellows and Boyer do not read the singular dative and translate *at öllu þessu* by "in them all," "in everyone". This suggests a crowd of individuals in which one should not have confidence, instead of suggesting that all of them can be partly trusted, provided being careful. Their interpretation makes shallower this stanza.

### Evans' Commentaries

89

7 *tryggr* in the sense 'trusting, confident' is very rarely evidenced in ON, but also occurs in Sonatorrek 22 (Skj. í 37) and in the compounds *auðtryggr* and *tortryggr*; also in

modern Icelandic in the phrase *vera tryggur um sig* ‘believe oneself secure’. It is the normal sense of modern Norwegian and Swedish *trygg*, Danish *tryg*.

## Hávamál 90-95

### “Initiation to love”

#### \*\*\*Hávamál 90\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Who obtains love and peace of the women,  
whose thought is crafty,  
(is) just like one who rides a steed without ice-spikes,  
on the slipping ice,  
very merry, two winters old,  
and badly tamed,  
or (he is like who steers) in a furious wind  
a rudderless ship,  
or (he is like) a cripple who must catch  
a reindeer in the mountain when the snow melts.

#### Prose explanation

The achievement of who obtains peace and love with women, so crafty is their thought, can be compared to three acrobatic behaviors:

- the one of riding a steed without ice-spikes on slipping ice, and this steed is merry and full of life, two years old and badly tamed,
- or the one of sailing without a rudder in a furious wind,
- or the one of a cripple trying to catch a reindeer in the mountain at thawing-time.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

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 stjórnlauðu,  
eða skyli haltr henda  
hreini í þáffalli.*

So who love (or peace) of women,  
of them is craftily mind,  
same as he drives a stallion non-pinned  
on gliding ice,  
cheerful, two winters (old) ,  
and be tame badly,  
or in wind frantic  
a ship rudderless,  
or should the lame catch  
the reindeer in the thaw-mountain.

#### Bellows' translation

90. The love of women | fickle of will



Is like starting o'er ice | with a steed unshod,  
A two-year-old restive | and little tamed,  
Or steering a rudderless | ship in a storm,  
Or, lame, hunting reindeer | on slippery rocks.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

*friðr* means, in general, 'peace' (as in the well-known phrase "*till árs ok friðar*" meaning "to prosperity and peace"). I partly follow Evans who sees here the meaning of 'love' that better fits the context. The Indo-European origins of *friðr* and its etymological connections with 'love' are explained in <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/OnTheContracts.htm>. The meaning 'peace' should not, however, be rejected. The comparison with a "young untamed horse" calls to mind the fact that there is a long story of keeping peace with women by oppressing them. In this state, they never behave as a "young merry horse." It is compulsory to choose between oppression and love.

*flátt* (neuter of *flár*) = crafty, astute, perfidious. Cleasby-Vigfusson, for once, proposes a fanciful etymology to this word. We actually ignore its exact etymology and we thus cannot do better than compare it with the equivalent words in other Germanic languages. Old English gives us *flāh*: 'misleading, enemy'; Old High German, *flēhan*: 'to beg, flatter'; Gothic, *ga-blaihan-blaihan*: 'to comfort'. We see that the general meaning of the proto-Germanic word (i. e. the unknown word which gave rise to all these words) has to turn around the idea to obtain something by appealing to feelings. In Old Norse, the meaning of 'astute with a bit of perfidy' thus appears quite probable, and this is the meaning suggested by the dictionaries. This amounts to stating that women are shrewd and dangerous to handle. This is far from the translators' insults such as Bellows: "fickle of will," Dronke: "those who think in lies," Orchard: "(women) whose heart is false," Boyer: "(woman) whose heart is haunted by falseness." The examples which follow, and which compare the woman with a young merry horse, a ship and a reindeer, illustrate the difficulty of having them love you peacefully. They do not describe any "inconstancy," or "falseness of heart" or "lies."

*hyggja* (noun fem. ) = thought, spirit, opinion. *hyggja* (verb) = to think, mean, believe.

*óbryddum* = *ó-bryddum* = (to be) without- crampoons. Lex. Poet. defines the adjective *bryddr* by what qualifies *a stimulus minutus* (a small spike). Evans says that archaeology attests the existence of ice-spikes to shoe the horses having to move on ice.

The meaning given to *teitr* by the dictionaries is that of 'glad, cheerful'. When this adjective is applied to a horse, C-V translates it by 'wild' and Lex Poet. gives (*teitr* for a horse) : *lasciviens* (burning). Bellows translates it by 'restive', Dronke by 'lively', Orchard by 'frolicsome' and Boyer by 'wild'. I prefer to keep 'merry, cheerful' since a merry person always tends to be a little agitated.

*beiti* = pasture = ship in poetry. A 'rudderless pasture' would be hard to imagine.

### Comment on the meaning

This stanza assesses woman in a way far from being as pejorative as everyone seem to believe. The word *flár* is indeed often pejorative, but Óðinn provides three examples that do not project at all a pejorative image. Neither the young merry horse, neither the insane ship,

nor the fleeing reindeer are particularly perfidious, though they are difficult to control. My understanding of Óðinn's message is that women are out of control, and that can be understood in two ways. The negative way is to conclude that they are unstable and shift, the positive way is to deduce that none should try to control them. This last understanding constitutes indeed the first love lesson that each man should receive.

The image of the young horse full with life, *lasciviens* (burning) as translated by Lex. Poet. , entails an obvious connotation of 'lasciviousness'. Óðinn's description expresses his appreciation but it also says that this young horse is badly equipped (it has no ice-spikes) . The image of the ship lost in a storm reinforces the feeling that a woman is badly equipped and explains why she is out of control. Conversely, the image of a reindeer describes a reindeer (i. e. , the woman) well equipped to run in melting snow and a wobbly man, i. e. a handicapped person. This last image prevents us to think that a woman is always 'lacking'. This stanza finally underlines that, in a couple, peace and love are extremely difficult to reach. A man will seek controlling a woman and she spends her time fleeing this control. All this is not very optimistic, but it is not either specially misogynist.

Remember that already in stanza 74, commenting on *hverf* applied to Fall, we underlined how much our personal experience of of Fall weather would influence our understanding of *hverf*. Here again, the same tendency shows up. The translators translated *flár* in accordance with their personal opinions on women, forgetting that s. 90 context is not at all derogatory. To be completely honest, I simply have just shown you that my personal opinion (that is: a woman is 'generally' intelligent and hard to handle) is not incompatible with Óðinn's words in this stanza. Anyhow, a honest misogynist cannot go beyond the most pejorative meaning of the word *flár* the one of "astutely perfidious" which, at least, is not the crude insult that that has been so often put in Óðinn's mouth.

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 90

1 *friðr* clearly means 'love' here, as also probably in Skírnismál 19 and possibly in 51 above. This is the original sense of the word, cp. *frjá* 'to woo', *friðill* 'wooer' and *friðla* (> frilla) 'mistress'. [Recall: see <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/OnTheContracts.htm>.]

3 *óbryddum* - ice-spikes for horses are mentioned only here, but are evidenced from archaeology (e. g. in the Gokstað ship burial from the late ninth century) ...

9-10 The scene is plainly Norwegian, not Icelandic. *þáffjall* only here, but well known as *tå(e) fjell* in modern Norwegian dialect. The point of the lines is that reindeer can be caught only on skis, which cannot be used in a thaw. [Some of you may have never tasted what is cross-country skiing in such a snow. 'Spring' snows sticks to the skis in such an amount that moving becomes exhausting even for a perfectly fit person.]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 91\*\*\*

Here is at last the stanza in which Óðinn restores balance between 'female bad faith' and male inconstancy. We will note two things. Firstly, he uses the exact same words in both cases, but they are two grammatical different forms of this same word, which do not bear the same meaning. Secondly, translators seem reluctant to speak about 'wise women': they speak of "the wise ones" as if the context did not point at women being wise. Here again, do not confuse the translators' misogyny with the one they drive you to see in Óðinn!

### A translation as literal as possible

My naked thought, I speak now  
because I know both,  
the heart of the man is unfaithful to women;  
when we utter our finest words,  
our thinking is the craftiest:  
thus you seduce the wise (women) 's heart.

### Prose explanation

Now, I give you my naked thought because I know them both, men and women, and male heart is quite as inconstant towards women as women's one is sharp with respect to men. It is when we (men) pronounce our finest words than our thought the craftiest: you (my male brother) allure the heart of women of wisdom in this way.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

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.*

Naked I now speak,  
because I both know,  
unfaithful is male's soul towards women;  
when we the fairest speak  
is that we the most craftily think:  
that you entice of the wise (women) the soul.

### Bellows' translation

91. Clear now will I speak, | for I know them both,  
Men false to women are found;  
When fairest we speak, | then falsest we think,  
Against wisdom we work with deceit.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

Remember 84 last line:

**brigð** í brjósti of lagið. Breach [or contention] in [their] the chest is lying.

And the second line of 90.

*þeira er flátt hyggja*, theirs is astutely thinking,

I boldfaced the two words used to describe the sharpness and cunning of women's hearts. They now will be almost identically used to describe men's behavior.

On *karl* (and *maðr*) : *karla-maðr* = male-human, *kvenna-maðr* = female-human. When both at the same time are spoken of, *maðr* is not repeated: to explicitly speak of men and women, one says *karlmaðr eða konna*.

*horska* is the genitive of *horskr* which is the same for the three genders. It is an adjective qualifying 'a wise person', which we in general call 'a wise one'. Even though Bellows' and Boyer's translations completely dissociate the last and the first lines, they thus cannot be called 'mistaken' from a strict grammatical point of view. Bellows speaks of

wisdom in general, and Boyer of ‘the wise ones’ (“les sages”) as if this line applied to both genders. Dronke speaks of a “delicate mind” and Orchard of a “sensible soul,” which, either, does not clearly designate a woman. I do not see in what way (apart from avoiding alluding to the medical wise women), qualifying a woman as being wise looks so awkward. Moreover, in stanza 161 Óðinn himself describes Billings mæR as being *horskr* (wise) and in s. 161 he speaks of obtaining pleasure *ins svinnar mans* (“from the ‘svinnr’ young woman,” where *svinnr* means also ‘wise’) . This is translated as “a girl of good sense” by Dronke and as “a wise girl” by Orchard.

At any rate, this last line is clearly a conclusion of the lines before and these lines clearly speak of how men mislead women, not how they mislead ‘wise ones’.

It is also significant that Óðinn would speak about ‘women who are wise’, that is, who hold knowledge and wisdom. They should better resist seduction, while, on the contrary, they are the most sensitive “to very fine words.” Nevertheless, Óðinn claims again male/female symmetry in respect to this weakness since stanza 93 opposes a *horskan* (a wise one – then a clear masculine accusative) , who is able to appreciate a woman’s beauty to the point to lose his wits, and a *heimskan* (heavy minded male) who is unable of it.

### Comment on the meaning

We already saw in 84 that it was not necessary to insist too much on the exact meaning of the words *brigð* and *flúr*, as long as 91 restores the balance between women and men. In 84, we also saw that the real question hidden behind this problem is the one of Hávamál’s global coherence. Here as well, the problem of equality between men and women hides another significant question, the one of knowing if Óðinn really states that all human ones are always inconstant and misleading. We can easily see that using the words “inconstant and misleading” is an attempt at describing humankind as guilty of some unsaid mistake. We are still submitted to multiple attempts at making us feel guilty. For instance, you are guilty if you do not give money for the healthcare of handicapped children, a smoker is guilty of endangering the health of other people etc. This is how the proper words for ‘sharp’ and ‘astute’ may become something meaning ‘unfaithful’ and ‘fickle of will’. Within a society pushing us into guilt, these translations are indeed the good ones! On the contrary, a Heathen Óðinn does not try to make us feel guilty but he tries to honestly describe us, men or women, with our pluses and minuses.

As side remark, let me add that, now that balance between the sexes is restored, men will perhaps better understand why women are so much annoyed by these pejorative ways of describing them.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 92\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

It must speak gracefully  
and offer richness (*or* the rune *fé*)  
if he wants to seize a girl’s love,  
to allow (her) to (her) body,  
the one of the shiny desired girl:  
thus obtains who loves.

#### Prose explanation

Who wants to grasp the love of a woman must tell her fine words and be generous of his goods [or: to offer her a carved rune *fé*], he must also authorize his brilliant mistress to her (to have a) body (to allow her to enjoy her body) [or: he must praise the body of the shiny mistress]: thus who loves will obtain (the woman that he wishes) .

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

92.

<i>Fagurt skal mæla</i>	Beautifully shall (he) speak
<i>ok fé bjóða</i>	and wealth offer (or rune fé to proclaim)
<i>sá er vill fljóðs ást fá,</i>	if he will the woman's love fetch
<i>líki leyfa</i>	to the body allow (or praise)
<i>ins ljósa mans:</i>	she of the lights desired-maid:
<i>Sá fær er fríar.</i>	thus fetches who woos (or loves)

### Bellows' translation

92. Soft words shall he speak | and wealth shall he offer  
 Who longs for a maiden's love,  
 And the beauty praise | of the maiden bright;  
 He wins whose wooing is best.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

- *líki leyfa*: *líki* is the singular dative of *lík*, the body. All translators translate *leyfa* by 'to prais' although this meaning of *leyfa* is normally followed by an accusative. Considering the context, one is led to translate by praising, but the dative must make us think of another meaning. It is necessary "to allow to the (her) body," i. e. 'to authorize the body' of the courted woman.

- *mans*: genitive of *man* (a neuter word) . I already explained in stanza 82 that *man* is woman-liege, a kind of slave. The word took the meaning of 'sexually loved woman' and sexual love. The *manrunar* are always called "runes of love" where the sexual component of 'love' is quite heavy.

- *bjóða* means 'to offer'. To offer a rune *fé*, means to engrave it and symbolically offer it to beloved one, as a token a sensual wealth more than one of material richness. To offer material wealth does not only mean to offer money, which suggests prostitution rather than love.

- *fé*: initially means 'cattle' and then 'wealth'. As expected, all the translators understand it as being relative to material wealth. The rune *fé* (*fehu* into Old Germanic) is also the rune of the wealth. The second line of the Icelandic rune poem calls it "fire of the sea" to refer to gold, and also in some versions, *fyrða gaman*, that is "warriors' delight," which can be another reference to gold. Its third line calls it *grafseiðs gata*, usually translated either by "fish-box" or "path of the serpent." In a Latin comment found in *Prideilur Rúna*, this line is commentated as "the way of the delicious viper" (*deliciae viperæ via*) . Put together, all these various comments clearly point towards wealth associated to women's sexual tract.

### Comment on the meaning

It often happens that the skalds who wrote the Edda poems, or the scribes who copied them, did not follow the same exact grammar as most other writers. Thus, giving precedence to the context to grammar and translating *leyfa* by ‘to praise’, cannot be called an error. The strict application of grammar, however, does not lead to such nonsense that we feel necessary to push it aside. The translators’ prudishness obviously prevents them from seeing in the expression ‘allowing the body’ the meaning of “your mistress should be allowed to take her own sexual pleasure.” In any case, ‘to praise the body’ and ‘to give pleasure to the body’ seem to me obviously complementary. This belongs as well to the corpus that constitutes the primary love lessons that each man should receive.

I prefer the interpretation of *fé* by ‘rune fé’, though some will call it fanciful, rather than by ‘wealth’. The meaning ‘wealth’ implies a kind of stinginess on behalf of the desired woman while the meaning ‘rune *fé*’ stresses another kind of greed. Here again, the one does not prevent the other ... and this depends on each person’s peculiarities. Still, I easier imagine Óðinn providing wise advice for properly behaving with horny females than with rapacious ones.

### Evans’ Commentaries

92

6 The verb *fría* [to love] or *frjá* [to pet] (= Gothic *frijōn* rendering *ἀγαπᾶν* [= love] and *φιλεῖν* [= friendship]) is obsolescent in ON [these verbs are defective. We have here an example of a normal use of them]; it is found, apart from the present passage, twice in the Edda (Sigsk. 8 and Lokasenna 19, both somewhat obscure and once in *málsháttakvæði* 5...; it does not occur in prose. Sturtevant 4 argues that in Norse its sense appears to have developed from ‘love’ to ‘woo, caress, fondle’.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 93\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Blaming for love,  
no human should  
ever someone else;  
often, they do catch the wise one,  
and do not the heavy-minded one,  
these whose beauty strikes like the colors of dawn.

#### Prose explanation

No human should never blame another for the love he shows for someone.  
Often, strikingly beautiful women who look like the colors of dawn are able to catch a wise one’s feelings whereas they do not arouse the heavy-minded one.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

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

For love, to blame  
should no human person  
another one never;  
often they catch a sage one,  
(these women) who a heavy-minded one do not catch,  
strike(ingly) -beautiful complexions (or colors of the day-break) .

### **Bellows' translation**

93. Fault for loving | let no man find  
Ever with any other;  
Oft the wise are fettered, | where fools go free,  
By beauty that breeds desire.

### **Commentary on the vocabulary**

The last line is difficult to translate because it uses few words to render the poetry of a complex idea, which we express by ‘stunningly beautiful’, to describe a shapely person. *Lostfagrir* and *litir* are two words in the nominative plural that describe these who are able “to catch a wise one and to leave indifferent a heavy-minded one.”

- *lostfagrir* is made of *lostr* (a blow - as the one stricken by a fist blow) and *fagr* (beautiful) . This word thus expresses what English would call “stunningly beautiful” or “a striking beauty.”

- *litir* has several meanings; on the one hand, those of color, face, aspect and, on the other hand, the one of ‘light of the dawn’.

Grammar does not tell us if such a beautiful person is male or female, but the context strongly hints at female beauty.

### **Comment on the meaning**

I cannot prevent being a bit amused to see Óðinn so well ‘setting up the field’ for the confession done in stanza 96. He fell insanely in love for a desirable woman who ridiculed him, and he presently says to us that nobody should blame him for it.

In a deeper way, is it really ‘wise’ to remain insensitive when love calls us? Are not the happiest moments of our life, these mad moments when love dazzles us and reveals to us (or makes us believe into) the incredible beauty of the loved one? Who never knew that feeling can cast the first stone but, sincerely, I feel sorrier for the stone thrower than I do for Óðinn!

### **\*\*\*Hávamál 94\*\*\***

#### **A translation as literal as possible**

Blame for nothing  
another, the human should (‘not’) ,  
from what goes among many men;  
the wise ones as oafs  
it transforms sons of man,

it, the powerful need (to like) .

### Prose explanation

A human one should blame in nothing (should not blame) another person for a very common behavior among men, the powerful need (to love) , acts on sons of man to transform the wise ones into morons.

### Text and its pseudo English literal translation

94.

*Eyvitar firna  
er maðr annan skal,  
þess er um margan gengr guma;  
heimska ór horskum  
gerir hölða sonu  
sá inn máttki munr.*

In nothing blame  
he, a human one, another-one should,  
of it is among it goes many men  
oafs out of wise ones  
it builds from men's sons  
that powerful need (or love) .

### Bellows' translation

94. Fault with another | let no man find  
For what touches many a man;  
Wise men oft | into witless fools  
Are made by mighty love.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

- *gerir heimska ór horskum* exactly means: 'it builds morons out of wise ones'.
- *munr* is a word which has many meanings. In this stanza, it is connected to the Middle Ages German *minne* (love) , as in the *Minnesang* of this time. But it means also 'will, need, desire, delight'.
- *heimskr* means 'who remains at home', which takes the meaning of an oaf, a moron. As in s. 93, I prefer a more precise translation: 'heavy-minded one'.

### Comment on the meaning

We could have believed, according to 93, that the wise one is able to remain wise even when he under the spell of irrepressible love. No, he unfortunately becomes a moron from it. In fact, I'd speak of myself in exactly the same words ("what a fool have I been!") . Yet, I do not begrudge one minute of the time I spent in this state of relative blindness. Might it then be that Óðinn does not really regret it?

### Evans' Commentaries

94

1 *Eyvitar* is gen. sg. of the same word as appears in the dative in 28. [this dative case is *eyvitu*. In this stanza, it is in the genitive case since Old Norse says, *firna* (to blame) someone (accusative) of something (genitive in place the 'expected' dative) ]

2 *er* appears superfluous; similar examples (all at the opening of the second half of a *ljóðáttir* 'long line') are in *Alvíssmál* 7: *sáttir þínar er ek vill snemma hafa*, and in *Grímnismál* 50,



Hárb. 25, Helg. Hj. 16 and 22, and Fjölsvinnsmál 50. No very satisfactory explanation has been adduced; ....

### \*\*\*Hávamál 95\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Thought alone knows what  
is close to the village of the heart,  
**he** is **alone** to **himself** in (the quietness of?) his soul;  
nothing (so much like) a disease  
for each wise one  
as being in self-agreement about nothing.

#### Prose explanation

Human thought only can know what dwells close to its heart; thought only can know the state of calm (or of disorder!) lying in its heart; To be in agreement with nothing in oneself is what looks like the best as a disease, for the wise one.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

95.

<i>Hugr einn þat veit</i>	Mind (intelligence) one (alone) what knows [knows what]
<i>er býr hjarta nær,</i>	is the village of the heart near,
<i>einn er hann sér um sefa;</i>	one-alone is <b>it</b> (or <b>he</b> ) to it/him-self among the ‘quietness-of its/his-mind’;
<i>öng er sótt verri</i>	nothing that sickness might-be
<i>hveim snotrum manni</i>	for-all sage human-ones
<i>en sér engu að una.</i>	but in one-self with-nothing at feeling-good.

#### Bellows’ translation

95. The head alone knows | what dwells near the heart,  
A man knows his mind alone;  
No sickness is worse | to one who is wise  
Than to lack the longed-for joy.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

The pronoun *hann* means ‘he’ or ‘him’ in the masculine nominative and accusative. Evans supposes that it is impossible that this ‘he’ (in bold letters in the word for word translation) refers to *hugr* which is however a masculine. He concludes from it that the wise one (male) is alone in his heart. Most translators think as Evans does, except Orchard who translates line 3 by “alone it (mind) sees into the soul.” I prefer this choice that preserves the ambiguity relating to the gender of the wise one because it does not appear at all impossible to me that the thought, the intelligence (*hugr*) can analyze the state of mind, the heart of the

wise one. This behavior is not impossible and is nothing but introspection. Following this understanding the third line is rendered by “**it is alone to itself** in (the calms of?) its soul.”

The verb *sefa* means ‘to calm down’. The noun *sefi* (here in the dative case, *sefa*) is translated by ‘spirit, soul’ in the dictionaries. In this case, the context suggests a meditating attitude. This is why I think it appears judicious to avoid forgetting what the verb *sefa* means and to understand a second meaning of *um sefa* as ‘in his/its heart quietness’. Boyer is the only one to render *sefi* by ‘love’, which Evans describes as “non-founded.” Bellows gives ‘mind’; Dronke, ‘feeling’; Orchard, ‘soul’.

- *una* = to dwell, to feel good in (*una lifi* = to be well in life = to be pleased with one’s life) .

- *verri* = 3rd person of past subjunctive tense of verb being.

- *öng* (line 4) = *engi* (line 6) = ‘nothing’. It does *engu* in the dative.

### Comment on the meaning

From a translation point of view, the last line is a problem. Does it speak of “the longed-for joy” (Bellows) , “happiness for himself” (Dronke) , of something “that makes one content” (Orchard) or of “self-fulfillment” (Boyer) ?

Boyer’s curtly egocentric translation is completely out of the love context of the stanzas before 95. English translators do refer as well to some kind of pleasure but they are moving away from the literal meaning. All these translations suggest that this stanza does not deal with love for another person.

The literal meaning: “to have no happiness for one self in anything,” that is: “to feel in complete disagreement with oneself,” can be interpreted curtly as Boyer does it, but it can be also interpreted as a description of the ‘love disorders’ described in the preceding stanzas. Stanzas 90-92 show how much stability in love is difficult to reach. Stanza 93 shows that a wise one is particularly predisposed to fall into the traps of passionate love. Stanza 94 explicitly states that love passion turns the wisest into idiots. Thus, 95 is the logical conclusion of stanzas 90-94, it says: “A wise one is able to analyze his feelings, he is conscious of the contradictions imposed on him by the passion of love, which it is a kind of spiritual disease for him.”

In this last love lesson, Óðinn explains why love is the most delicious and the most painful/dangerous feeling that a wise person might undergo.

### Evans’ Commentaries

#### 95

3 *hann* [this ‘he’ has been put in bold in the pseudo-translation] must refer to the man who owns the *hugr*; it cannot be the *hugr* itself, for then it is impossible to give sense to *sefa*. Suggestions that *sefi* could mean either ‘beloved person’ ...or ‘breast’ ... lack any foundation. So render ‘He is alone with his thoughts’; *sér* is dative of the reflexive pronoun (not a verb ...).

6 *una sér* is normally used absolutely ‘to be content’; its combination with a dative object is however also found [twice in the sagas]. . .

### Hávamál 96-102

#### “For Billings maid’s love”

### \*\*\*Hávamál 96\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

I experienced all this  
when I was sitting in the reeds (or among the stones)  
hoping for my love;  
flesh and heart  
was for me the wise maid;  
although I did not get her,

#### Prose explanation

I experienced all what (is said in the preceding stanzas) while I sat in a wild place, stone heaps or reed tufts, while waiting to meet my love. This wise maid was for me flesh and heart. I was however unable to win her, on the contrary she succeeded in fooling me.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

96.

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

Thiat I then experienced  
when I in the reed (or the stones) sat  
hoping for love mine;  
flesh and heart  
was for me the wise maid;  
although not I her but I have.

#### Bellows' translation

96. This found I myself, | when I sat in the reeds,  
And long my love awaited;  
As my life the maiden | wise I loved,  
Yet her I never had.

[Bellows' note 96. Here begins the passage (stanzas 96-102) illustrating the falseness of woman by the story of Othin's unsuccessful love affair with Billing's daughter. Of this person we know nothing beyond what is here told, but the story needs little comment.] [My comments below show that 'falseness' is totally inappropriate and that the story does deserve comment.]

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

The expression *í reyri* means in or among the *reyrr*, and the word *reyrr* most often means 'reed', and seldom 'cairn, heap of stones'. All the translators see Óðinn among reeds, which supposes he is in a boat or swimming or lying in the mud. The boat would be most probable but it does not appear very typical of Óðinn. On the other hand, this regular traveler could stop at a mountain pass, for example, and sit down among the rocks. There exists still nowadays in Iceland seldom used roads where each traveler builds a small a cairn near a remarkable spot.

Verb *vætta* (or *vætna*) means ‘to hope for, to wait for’. The form *vættak*, used here, is a contraction of *vætta ek* (I wait) . By assimilation with the preterit of *sat* in the second line, *reynda* and *vætta* are read as being in past tense.

Noun *munr*, according to C-V, can mean ‘mind, delight, love’ or ‘the turn of balance’. Both give *munar* in the genitive: the text does not give grammatical means to separate the two meanings.

Verb *hafa* means ‘to have, to obtain’ and *hefik* means ‘I obtain’.

### Comment on the meaning

‘What’ in the first line refers to the few stanzas before. They describe the difficulty of love relations. They already have shown how much important is women’s beauty to Óðinn and he also acknowledged being able to make a fool of himself when in passionate love. Many legends report of a god having love affairs with a woman, for instance in the Greek myths, and we are used to see him taking advantage of his godly powers to reach his goal, i. e. , most often, having sex with a woman. Here, we see a god, anxious as a young man waiting for his first date, and who acknowledges his passion. Nordal’s interpretation, given below in Evans’ comment illustrates bias of someone trained in Greek culture. The proper meaning of *munr* being ‘mind’, we can even propose an interpretation reverse to Nordal’s: the one that Óðinn was waiting for the soul of his beloved instead of a primary ‘satisfaction of his desire’. Since Óðinn says that she was “flesh and heart” for him, the true understanding must be that he was waiting for her soul and her body.

### Evans’ Commentaries

#### 96

The story told in 96-102 is not otherwise known; Billings occurs twice elsewhere as the name of a dwarf. The *ek* of the story is shown by 90 to be Óðinn ...

Most editors interpret 96 as describing a tryst at which the girl has failed to turn up. This entails taking *munr* as ‘beloved person’, for which cp. *munr Foglhildar* as a kenning for Jörmunrekkr in Ragnarsdrápa 6 ...and possibly at *muni grata* Baldrs Draumar 12 ... Nordal, however, suggests that the waiting in the reeds comes *after* the events described in 97-8, and takes *munr* as ‘satisfaction of my desire’.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 97\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Billings maid  
I found on (her) beds  
sleeping, shiny as the sun;  
a jarl’s delight and luck  
no other thought in me  
except to live near this body.

#### Prose explanation

I found Billings’ maid, lying on her bed where she was sleeping, shiny as the sun. I had no thought of a jarl’s (a kind of Scandinavian nobleman) delight and luck or cosiness, except living beside such a body.

## ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

97.

<i>Billings mey</i>	Billings maid
<i>ek fann beðjum á</i>	I found beds on
<i>sólhvíta sofa;</i>	sun-white sleep;
<i>jarls ynði</i>	a jarl's delight ( <i>and</i> luck <i>or</i> cosiness)
<i>þótti mér ekki vera</i>	thoughts mine not be
<i>nema við þat lík at lifa.</i>	except near this body 'at' live.

### Bellows' translation

97. Billing's daughter | I found on her bed,  
In slumber bright as the sun;  
Empty appeared | an earl's estate  
Without that form so fair.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

- *mær* means 'a girl, a maid' and does *mey* in the accusative, as here. When her sexual attraction is emphasized, she becomes ON '*man*'. In the next stanza, Billings *mær* will speak of herself as being a *man*. (see also stanzas 82 and 92)

- *ynði* is a neutral noun meaning 'chance, delight, coziness'. Among its possible grammatical cases, the plural accusative seems most probable.

- *líki* means body, as already seen in stanza 92. It can also take the meaning of 'shape; form' as Bellows translates it. Here, it is in the accusative i. e. , the preposition *við* takes the meaning of 'beside, associated to'.

### Comment on the meaning

Óðinn catch unawares the sleeping beauty, falls in love for her and, in the last three lines, claims that his passion is more significant than a lavish life.

### Evans' Commentaries

97

1 Since the story is unknown elsewhere, it is not possible to say whether 'daughter' or 'wife' of Billingr is meant, for both senses of *mær* are well attested (LP) . But the use of *löstr* [= **flaw, misbehaviour**] 98 and *flærðir* [*flærð* = **falsehood, deceit**] 102 makes the latter somewhat more likely. [In the context of this stanza, it seems even more probable that this *mær* is simply Billingr's mistress. She speaks of herself as a *man*, and if one gives to *löstr* the weak meaning of 'misbehavior' (instead of sin or vice - as if these Christian concepts could apply) , all these words apply to a mistress who does not want yet another 'master' in her life.]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 98\*\*\*

### A translation as literal as possible

“Also near the evening  
you shall, Óðinn, come  
if you will request a mistress for you;  
all (we both) are fateless (dead)  
except if (us) alone are aware  
of our misbehavior.”

### Prose explanation

Wait for the evening, Óðinn, to come and find me back, and ask me to grant my favors to you. This is not immediately possible because we are not alone. If we are not the only ones to know of our misbehavior, our fate would stop here.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

98.

<i>“Auk nær aftni</i>	“Also near the evening
<i>skaltu, Óðinn, koma,</i>	you shall, Óðinn, come
<i>ef þú vilt þér mæla man;</i>	if you will for-you request the girl
<i>allt eru ósköp</i>	all are without-fates (i.e. dead )
<i>nema einir viti</i>	except if alone become conscious
<i>slikan löst saman.”</i>	of such a misbehavior together.”

### Bellows' translation

98. “Othin, again | at evening come,  
If a woman thou wouldst win;  
Evil it were | if others than we  
Should know of such a sin.”

### Commentary on the vocabulary

*aptni = aftni* = dative of *aptan* = evening.

The verb *mæla* means ‘to speak, to stipulate, to request’. Here, the context drives us to a meaning like ‘to gain with words, to successfully require’, but I’ll argue in favor of ‘to require, to claim’: Óðinn’s real purpose is not for ‘gaining the beautiful one with soft words’ because Billings mær straightforwardly invites him to join her during the night, he will have no more to do than claiming what she is offering.

The neutral name *man* takes many meanings, as explained in stanzas 82 and 92. It means a liege man/woman, a mistress.

The neutral word *skap* makes *sköp* in the plural. In the singular, it means ‘form’, ‘state, condition’. In the plural, it takes the meaning of “what was formatted” and becomes ‘fate, fortune’. It is prefixed here by the negation ‘ó’ and we can understand it means ‘not-destiny, not-fortune’ or ‘death’.

The adverb *nema* means ‘except, save’.

*löstr* = ‘flaw, misbehavior, vice’. Here, in the singular accusative case: *löst*.

### Comment on the meaning

Billingsr's mæR calls herself a *man*, i. e. , she fakes being as eager as Óðinn for having sex together. She speaks of her behavior as a 'flaw' or, at least as 'misbehavior'. I suppose that her aim is to definitively convince Óðinn to leave her quiet for the moment by promising to give him more pleasure next night. Her trick will fully succeed. We should ask why she thinks it necessary to resort to such a trick. I do not see another reason than Óðinn has been so insistent that she fears to be raped if she tersely refuses. We will see in 102 that Óðinn seems to have, afterwards, well understood that his haste pushed Billingsr's mæR to mislead him in such a way. This is shown by the expression "*ef görva kannar*" and the new translation we give for it in s. 102.

She is certainly a crafty one. 'Cheater' is even a little strong as long as she is trying to keep her freedom of having no unwanted sex. She is certainly nor 'unfaithful' nor 'fickle'. This still substantiates again our interpretation for *brigð* ('cutting, sharp' rather than 'fickle') as we saw in stanza 84.

### Evans' Commentaries

98

3 *mæla man* - apparently 'to win a woman through speech' ... but exact parallels are lacking.

5 *einir viti* - we would expect *ein vitim*; Finnur Jónsson emends accordingly. [I translated *einir viti* by "alone become conscious" and Jónsson's proposal amounts to translate by "us alone would become conscious."]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 99\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Back I turned  
and I believed myself in love  
from the knowledge of (her) good-will;  
I was really thinking of that  
that I should have  
all her mind and her pleasure.

#### Prose explanation

I went away from her and I thought that I was going to love her since she had shown her goodwill (her agreement) . Thinking of all that I believed I was going to get from her all her spirit and her pleasure (*or* her love) .

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

99.

*Aftir (=aptr) ek hvarf  
ok unna þóttumk  
vísun vilja frá;  
hitt ek hugða  
at ek hafa mynda*

Back I turned  
and to love I believed myself  
knowledge of good-will from  
(strongly of) that I thought  
that I have should

*geð hennar allt ok gaman.*

mind hers all and pleasure.

### Bellows' translation

99. Away I hastened, | hoping for joy,  
And careless of counsel wise;  
Well I believed | that soon I should win  
Measureless joy with the maid.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The verb *unna* means 'to grant, to love'.

The verb *þykkja* means 'to seem, to be taken for'. It does *þóttum* at first plural person preterit and thus means 'we seemed'. The reflexive form *þóttumk* means 'I thought myself' as we already saw in stanza 47 (*auðigr þóttumk* = I thought myself rich) .

### Comment on the meaning

My translation of the second line is very similar to Bellows': Óðinn confesses his lack of wisdom when he left believing in his success with the maid. Orchard strongly interprets, but keeps the idea that Óðinn realizes that he lost something: "I turned back ... from some delight." Inversely, Dronke and Boyer understand that Óðinn is satisfied with himself. Dronke: "beyond known bliss" and Boyer: "(I turned back) ... with my hard craving."

### Evans' Commentaries

99

3 *visum vilja frá* - generally taken closely with the preceding line to mean 'out of my senses' ('I was distraught with love' ...) ; Commentary 119 Finnur Jónsson says *vili* here is more or less *forstand* ('understanding, reason') . No parallel, however, can be adduced. Kock 2, 279-80 plausibly proposes that *vili* means 'what one desires, joy' (cp. Sigsk. 9) ; thus, 'I turned back. . . from certain delight'. Finnur Jónsson's objection that this would require *af* instead of *frá* is baseless, but it is true that line 2 seems a little feeble when left thus isolated. [As you could read, I understand that Óðinn says that he got "the knowledge of (her) good-will."]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 100\*\*\*

### A translation as literal as possible

Thus I came near  
when it was in the night;  
all kind of soldiers were awake  
(carrying) burning lights  
and they carried wood,  
I understood thus my path of misery.



### Prose explanation

I then came near Billings's home, but in the night, his warriors watched over in the light of the flames, carrying "wood," i. e. , torches or lances or barricades. I then understood onto which path of misery I moved.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

100.

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

Thus came I near  
while in the night was  
battle-folk all 'of' awake,  
with burning lights  
and carried wood,  
thus was to \_me misery\_path 'of' been \_conscious.

### Bellows' translation

100. So came I next | when night it was,  
The warriors all were awake;  
With burning lights | and waving brands  
I learned my luckless way.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The only ambiguity in the vocabulary is here that of *bornum viði*. The name *viðr* means 'tree, wood' and does *viði* in the singular dative. The verb *bera* means 'to carry'. It does *borinn* in the personal last participle and *bornum* in the dative, as it is here. This "wood carried" might be a torch, a spear, an arrow or, still, if it has been carried to the site, the stakes of a barricade.

### Comment on the meaning

Thus the house in which Óðinn believed to have a lovers' date with Billings mæ is well watched over and he cannot join his beautiful maid. But he nevertheless keeps hope and he will, next morning, become aware of how insulting is the fun played on him.

### Evans' Commentaries

100

5 *bornum viði* - it is unclear what this is. Some take it to refer to the same thing as *brennandum ljósum*, i. e. torches ... Olsen ... accepts this, ... however, (he) takes *bornum* to mean '(previously) carried in (and now lying ready for use) '...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 101\*\*\*

### A translation as literal as possible

Also near the morning,  
that I was again to come  
when the house-folk was in sleep;  
I found there a lone greyhound  
at the good woman's place  
bound on the beds.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

101.

*Auk nær morgni,  
er ek var enn of kominn,  
þá var saldrótt sofin;  
grey eitt ek þá fann  
innar góðu konu  
bundit beðjum á.*

Also near morning,  
that I was still 'of' come  
when was house-folk in sleep;  
a lone greyhound I there found  
at the good woman's  
bound on the beds.

### Bellows' translation

101. At morning then, | when once more I came,  
And all were sleeping still,  
A dog found | in the fair one's place,  
Bound there upon her bed.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The name *grey* is neutral and means 'greyhound'. This is in agreement with the neutral form of the last participle of *binda* (to attach) , *bundit*. It may mean a dog or a bitch.

### Comment on the meaning

We can suppose that this greyhound is a bitch and Evans' comment explains why.

It is thus true that Billings mær deliberately sought to humiliate Óðinn. We, as spectators, we may think that he well deserved it, and that he should have applied the advice he gives in stanza 90: we should not attempt controlling a woman by whom we want to be loved... *a fortiori*, avoiding to force her. The wise one becomes a fool and is not able to make use of his own wisdom, as far as he had been carried by his passion. This exactly what stanza 94 tells us.

It seems that the commentators have been reluctant to accept that Óðinn may confess his weakness towards women, and calls himself a fool. It is also true that the gods we know of are not often intelligent to the point to self-criticize. How possibly could such a primitive god as Óðinn be able to behave like any sensible and clever person?

### Evans' Commentaries

101

5 *góðu* is of course ironic, as probably in the similar phrases in 102 and 108 and perhaps in 130 ;. . [Evans is certainly right to speak of irony, though irony towards whom? This irony can be addressed to her, who acted 'bad', or to himself because he has been naive enough to believe that she would be 'good' for him. In the following stanza, we will see that the irony is not as primitive as

Evans seems to suppose. In 108, it is obvious that Gunnlöð has actually been 'good' to him. In 130, the woman who will love Loddafnir in secrecy is certainly not a good Christian woman... but she is not Christian either.]

6 *beðjum á*: not 'tied to her bed' ... just as in 97, this expression means on, or in, the bed ... The implication of these lines is no doubt that Óðinn is being offensively invited to sate his lust, not on the girl whom he expected to find awaiting him, but on the bitch who has replaced her.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 102\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

More than one good maid,  
if he clearly looks for her  
(is) spirit-breaching (*or* feeling-breaching) with the man;  
thus I that experienced,  
when good suggestions,  
I attributed to the deceitful woman;  
of her shame (*or* her scorn)  
this wise girl made mine,  
and naught had I of this woman.

#### Prose explanation

For the man who approaches her and too clearly lets show his desires, more than one good girl will not have any tender feeling. I experienced that when I believed that the misleading woman gave me a good advice when she proposed me to join her at night. I shamed her with my proposals and the wise girl made mine her shame. I did not have anything of her.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

102.

*Mörg er góð mæð,  
ef góðva kannar,  
hugbrigð við hali.  
Þá ek þat reynda,  
er it ráðspaka  
teygða ek á flærðir fljóð; '   
háðungar hveðrar  
leitaði mér it horska man,  
ok hafða ek þess vettki vífs.*

More than one good maid,  
if clearly he looks for,  
spirit-breaching (*or* feeling-breaching) with man;  
thus I that experienced,  
when good-advice  
drew' I on the deceitful woman;  
of her shame (*or* her scorn)  
looked for mine this wise girl,  
and had I of her naught woman.

#### Bellows' translation

102. Many fair maids, | if a man but tries them,  
False to a lover are found;  
That did I learn | when I longed to gain

With wiles the maiden wise;  
Foul scorn was my meed | from the crafty maid,  
And nought from the woman I won.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The verb *kanna* means ‘to seek, to explore’. Lex. Poet. gives ‘*lustrare*’ undoubtedly in the meaning of ‘to turn around’ (and not the one of ‘to purify’ as in a lustration) .

The name *hugbrigð* is normally translated by ‘fickleness’, but its primary meaning is ‘to breach’ and *hug-brigð* = spirit- breaching or feeling- breaching.

*flærðr* = falseness, fraud

### Comment on the meaning

Óðinn is ironical when he describes a Billings mæR as ‘good’ (line 1) and ‘wise’ (line 8) . This type of irony however recalls W C Fields’s one when he utters his famous aphorism: “Any man who hates dogs and babies can’t be all bad.” He, obviously, did not love too much children nor dogs. Similarly, Óðinn’s irony, in appearance relative to Billings mæR, is also addressed to him, and nevertheless implies that this woman is indeed good and wise though I did not appreciate her worth.

Even though he has been nastily tricked by her, Óðinn does not spit insults at Billings mæR. He obviously learns his lesson and warns us: all women are not willing to offer themselves when undesired persuasion is applied to them. It becomes even worse when you offend them by wanting to force them. As Billings mæR who has been able to get rid of her shame by throwing it, instead of her body, in Óðinn’s arms, their crafty spirit will find something to drown you in your own ridicule.

### Evans’ Commentaries

#### 102

6 *flærdir* means ‘treachery, deceit’, which, as Nordal observes, fits best if we suppose Billingsr was the woman’s *husband* ... [At the end of s. 97, I explain why I believe the *mæR* was Billingsr’s mistress.]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 103-110 \*\*\*

#### “Gunnlöð’s love”

### \*\*\*Hávamál 103 \*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

A man glad at home  
and with a cheerful guest,  
shall be wise ‘around’ victory,

remindful and talkative,  
if he will be well-knowing.  
Often he shall speak well;  
he is called huge-simpleton  
he who little can speak,  
this one is non-wise by his nature.

### Prose explanation

A host can be completely happy at his place and merry with his guests, he must however remain wise and not believe that he always will win. He must speak and remember what is said to him if he wants to learn something from and on his guests. It is said that who is not able to carry on a dialogue is a huge simpleton because this exposes his lack of wisdom.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

103.

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

At home glad a man  
and with a guest cheerful,  
wise shall around victory be  
remindful and talkative,  
if he will well-knowing be.  
Often he shall good speak;  
huge-simpleton he is called  
he who little can speak,  
this one non-wise by his nature.

### Bellows' translation

103. Though glad at home, | and merry with guests,  
A man shall be wary and wise;  
The sage and shrewd, | wide wisdom seeking,  
Must see that his speech be fair;

[Bellows note 103. "With this stanza the subject changes abruptly, and apparently the virtues of fair speech, mentioned in the last three lines, account for the introduction, from what source cannot be known, of the story of Othin and the mead of song (stanzas 104-110) .]

[It is quite true that the topic shifts abruptly: we go from Billings's maid shrewdness to Gunlöd's betrayal. It seems that Óðinn won with beautiful words the trust of the two guardians of the mead of poetry: Gunlöd and her father Suttungr. This justifies the place of s. 103 at the beginning of this account.]

### Commentary on the vocabulary

- *sviðr* or *svinnr* = wise.
- *sig* or *sigr* = victory. In *um sig*, *sig* cannot be anything else than *sigr* accusative form. Line 4 does speak of 'victory'.
- *geta* means to get when followed by an accusative case. When its complement is a genitive, it then means 'to guess, to speak of'.
- Adjective *fár* does *fátt* in the neutral. It means 'little' or even 'not at all'.

## Comment on the meaning

The first half of the stanza underlines the need for an harmonious communication with others in order to get informed about what they know and think.

The second half underlines that who cannot share his words with other humans stays ignorant and he misses the fundamental means to acquire wisdom. Remember stanza 57, saying “*maðr... verðr at máli kuðr.*” I translated it by “a human being becomes known (or wise) when they meet in their speech.” In the context of stanza 57, the translation of *kuðr* by ‘known’ had been the most probable. In stanza 103, Óðinn says that who is deprived of speech is by nature a ‘non-wise one’, that is, he joins shared speech to wisdom. It follows that, in the context of whole *Hávamál*, both meanings of *kuðr* are possible. When the topic is about relations between human beings, then ‘known’ and ‘wise’ share many features. That does not mean that all true human beings are wise, they need to get in contact with one another to reach wisdom. In other words, contact among humans is necessary to wisdom, it is not sufficient. In this way, 57 and 103 together refine Óðinn’s thought.

## Evans’ Commentaries

### 103

7 *fimbulkambi*: ‘great idiot’. *Fimbul-* (only in Eddaic poetry and Snorri’s Edda...) is prefixed to nouns as an intensifier ...

## \*\*\*Hávamál 104 \*\*\*

### A translation as literal as possible

He the ancient giant I looked for,  
now I came back:  
I got little being silent there;  
with many words  
worded I in my fame  
in Suttungr’s halls.

### Prose explanation

I took the huge risk to go to an ancient giant’s home, a giant full of power, and I succeeded to escape thanks to my speech. I had much to say to Suttungr in order to succeed obtaining his daughter’s hand, that has been my way to the mead of poetry.

## ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

### 104.

*Inn aldna jötun ek sótta,  
nú em ek aftr of kominn:  
fátt gat ek þegjandi þar;  
mörgum orðum  
mæltá ek í minn frama  
í Suttungs sölum.*

He the ancient giant I looked for,  
now am I back ‘of’ come:  
little got I being silent there;  
with many words  
worded I in my fame  
in Suttungr’s halls.

### Bellows' translation

104. I found the old giant, | now back have I fared,  
Small gain from silence I got;  
Full many a word, | my will to get,  
I spoke in Suttung's hall.

[Bellow's note 104. "The giant *Suttung* ("the old giant") possessed the magic mead, a draught of which conferred the gift of poetry. Othin, desiring to obtain it, changed himself into a snake, bored his way through a mountain into Suttung's home, made love to the giant's daughter, Gunnloth, and by her connivance drank up all the mead. Then he flew away in the form of an eagle, leaving Gunnloth to her fate. While with Suttung he assumed the name of Bolverk ("the Evil-Doer") "]

[*böl-verk* = *bale-work*, *böl-verkr* = *bale-pain*. See Faulke's translation of Snorri's Edda for more details.]

### Commentary on the vocabulary

Verb *sækja* = 'to seek, to attack, to pursue'. It does *sóttu* in the preterit first person.  
Word *frami* means 'furtherance, fame'.

### Comment on the meaning

The first three lines illustrate the thought of stanzas 57 and 103. "He the ancient giant I looked for" implies that Óðinn confronted danger to go in the residence of a giant while "now I came back" implies that Óðinn obtained a kind of victory by escaping the danger he exposed himself to. Remember the word *sigr*, victory, has been a bit difficult to understand in stanza 103, here is this word is explained. Finally, "I got little being silent there" states that thanks to his speech he could reach Suttungr and Gunnlöð, and could use his wisdom to get out of this trap.

The last three lines repeat the three first in a clearer form, and they specify that Óðinn used his speech "for his fame," and certainly to leave Suttungr's lair alive, carrying with him (actually, 'inside him') the mead of poetry.

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 104

For the story of Óðinn's theft of the mead of poetry from the giant Suttungr by seducing the giant's daughter Gunnlöð, see Snorri's Prose Edda (Skáldskaparmál ch. 5-6) [It starts at reference [56-7] of Faulkes' translation of Snorri's Edda.] and cp. st. 13-14 above. Richert ... suggests that 104-10 imply a version where Óðinn arrives in Suttungr's halls as a seemingly respectable wooer and goes through a marriage ceremony with Gunnlöð...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 105 \*\*\*

### A translation as literal as possible

Gunnlöð gave me  
on a golden stool  
a draught of the precious bier;  
a bad reward

I let her have after,  
for her hale mind,  
for her the grave mind.

### Prose explanation

Gunnlöð gave me a mouthful of this precious mead. She did this gift in accepting me in her generous heart (the “golden stool”) . I badly rewarded her for her generosity. [The myth described by Snorri Sturluson states that she accepted to give a gulp of mead for each love night he would give her. They somehow agreed on three nights. On the morning after these three nights, he was allowed to get these three gulps of mead.] This has been a quite reasonable exchange and her ‘grave’ mind did not enable her to guess that I could swallow a full container at each gulp.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

105.

<i>Gunnlöð mér of gaf</i>	Gunnlöð to me gave
<i>gullnum stóli á</i>	a golden stool on
<i>drykk ins dýra mjaðar;</i>	a draught of the precious bier;
<i>ill iðgjöld</i>	bad reward
<i>lét ek hana eftir hafa</i>	let I to her after have
<i>síns ins heila hugar,</i>	of her the hale mind,
<i>síns ins svára sefa.</i>	of her the grave/heavy mind

### Bellows' translation

106. Gunnloth gave | on a golden stool  
A drink of the marvelous mead;  
A harsh reward | did I let her have  
For her heroic heart,  
And her spirit troubled sore.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

*hugr* means ‘spirit, thought, heart, wish’.

*sefi* means ‘spirit, heart, affection, feeling’.

*svárr* means ‘heavy’. In English, a “heavy spirit” indicates a kind of distress. It could mean here as well, ‘serious’. Both meanings are possible, while ‘heavy’ implies that line 6 and line 7 do not refer to the same moment in time. See also Evans’ comments.

### Comment on the meaning

The explanation in prose gives the meaning of this stanza. It should be noticed that Óðinn, even if *svárr* is used ironically, speaks of Gunnlöð with an obvious respect, at least in the first four lines. We know by Snorri that she asked for three nights of love to Bölverk-Óðinn. After these three nights, he got permission to swallow three gulps of the mead of poetry, thus emptying the three barrels containing it. She would obviously not have been misled so heavily if she had accepted to let him drink a gulp each morning. It seems obvious



to me that Óðinn had to use fine words to convince her of such an odd bargain by which she lost any control of the situation after having been satisfied. This is explained at s. 109.

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 105

**7 síns ins svára sefa** 'her troubled mind'. **Svárr** (only found in poetry) seems to mean primarily 'heavy' (cp. German *schwer*) and evidently implies 'melancholy' here, as in Skírnismál 29. It is true that with this sense the line is strictly illogical, for which reason Finnur Jónsson expelled it; others avoid the illogicality by such renderings as 'her steadfast love' ... or 'her strong affection' ... but it is doubtful whether the words can bear this meaning. [The lack of logics introduced by "Gunlöð's heavy soul" is true only if we suppose that two adjacent lines obligatory refer to the same period of time. That line 7 and 8 do not refer to the same time makes easier to understand the stanza.]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 106 \*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Rati's mouth  
let me fetch room  
and the stone gnawed,  
over and under  
I stood (in) the giant's ways,  
thus I risked (my) head till.

#### Prose explanation

It should be known that, during the summer before the episode with Suttungr, Óðinn had rented himself as a farmhand to Suttungr's brother, under the name of Bölverk. The contract stipulated that, if the work were well done, this brother would ask Suttungr to give a mouthful of mead of poetry to Óðinn. But when Suttungr was asked, he obstinately refused. Óðinn then borrowed from the brother (obviously a giant knowing magic) a magic drill named Rati whose "mouth nibbled the stone" and Óðinn, being transformed in snake, has been able to slip inside Suttungr's residence.

The drill Rati, as would have done a mouth, dug the stone and made me a place so that I could infiltrate the corridors of the giant's residence. I went inside in this residence in which I was exposed to a great danger.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

106.

<i>Rata munn</i>	Rati's mouth
<i>létumk rúms of fá</i>	let me room fetch
<i>ok um grjót gnaga,</i>	and the stone gnawed,
<i>yfir ok undir</i>	over and under
<i>stóðumk jötna vegir,</i>	stood I giant's ways,
<i>svá hættu ek höfði til.</i>	thus risked I head till.

#### Bellows' translation

105. The mouth of Rati | made room for my passage,  
And space in the stone he gnawed;  
Above and below | the giants' paths lay,  
So rashly I risked my head.

(Bellows' note 105) . *Rati* ("the Traveller") : the gimlet with which Othin bored through the mountain to reach Suttung's home.] [*rati* = traveler or 'wandering soul, ghost' ]

### Commentary on the vocabulary

*höfuð* (neuter) dat. *höfði* = head.

### Comment on the meaning

This stanza explains how Óðinn could penetrate without being noticed in Suttungr's residence. The detail of what he does immediately after is not known. Two assumptions seem possible. Either Óðinn, again in human form, enters immediately the room where Gunnlöð was in charge of keeping watch on the mead, and he directly negotiates with her. He will mislead her with fine words and false oaths. Or he meets Suttungr and Gunnlöð. Since Óðinn insists on the danger he was running, it is quite possible that Suttungr submitted him to a kind of questioning. From Scandinavian mythology, we know that the behavior of the giants towards the gods was violently aggressive. Óðinn thus needs to hide to Suttungr that he is one of the *Æsir*. In that case, it is possible that he had to swear on his ring that he was not one of the *Æsir*. This oath could not be sincere and this explains, according to Bellows (as in stanza 108) , the reproach of perjury made to Óðinn in stanza 110. It is even possible that this episode could contain another perjury. We do not understand why, god or not, Suttungr would trust this stranger who forced his entrance. On another hand, it is completely possible that Óðinn explained his presence by a beautiful history of desperate love for Gunnlöð and that he thus convinced Suttungr to spare his life provided he marries his daughter. It would then have also made an oath on the ring with Gunnlöð. This second interpretation is not less probable than another one, it however has the advantage of providing a good understanding of the last lines of 110, as we shall see.

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 106

1 *Rata munn* - Snorri relates that Óðinn won access to Suttungr's dwelling by turning himself into a snake and using the gimlet Rati to bore a passage through the rock.

2 *létumk* is explained by SG and LP 362 as = *lét mér*. But it could well be *létum* with *-k* (from *ek*) suffixed. For such forms of the first person sg. see on 108 and 112.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 107 \*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

The well bargained 'sunset color'  
I enjoyed well  
the wise ones lack of little,

because Óðrerir  
now came up  
towards the people of sacred earth.

### Prose explanation

I benefitted well from the woman, beautiful like the rising of the day with whom I bargained. Now, little misses to Óðinn's favoured wise ones by because they can have, through me, access to the magic drink (that brings poetic fury only to those who are already wise ones) . I did lift Óðrerir up to the inhabitants (the gods) of Miðgarðr (the sacred earth) .

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

107.

<i>Vel keypts litar</i>	Well of the 'bargained with' 'sunset color'
<i>hefi ek vel notit,</i>	had I well enjoyed
<i>fás er fróðum vant,</i>	few is to the wise ones lacking,
<i>því at Óðrerir</i>	because 'that' Óðrerir
<i>er nú upp kominn</i>	is now up come
<i>á alda vés jarðar.</i>	towards the ages (or the people) of sacred earth.

### Bellows' translation

107. The well-earned beauty | well I enjoyed,  
Little the wise man lacks;  
So Othrerir now | has up been brought  
To the midst of the men of earth.

[Bellows note 107. *Othrerir*: here the name of the magic mead itself, whereas in stanza 141 it is the name of the vessel containing it. Othin had no intention of bestowing any of the precious mead upon men, but as he was flying over the earth, hotly pursued by Suttung, he spilled some of it out of his mouth, and in this way mankind also won the gift of poetry. **[This prudish interpretation of the myth of the mead of poetry lasted until recently. In fact, Snorri's text specifies that a very small amount of mead was left "by the behind" and this is called the drink of the buffoons. Moreover, it is also known that Óðinn gives a mouthful of the 'good' mead to true poets, as opposed to what Bellows seems to suggest.]**

### Commentary on the vocabulary

- *litr* = color, color of the dawn. It has been used in stanza 93, in the nominative plural case, to indicate the beauty of a woman. Here, this word is a singular genitive since Óðinn well benefitted from this woman. The genitive form is expected as a complement of *notit*.

- *keypts*. *Kaup* = to buy, to make a deal or a bargain. It does *keypts* in the last participle genitive (masc. or neuter) .

- *njóta* = to profit, draw benefit. It does *notit* as a last participle and its complement is in the genitive case.

The adjective *fár* means 'little of' with an associated meaning of 'not at all'.

The word *alda* can be the genitive plural of *öld* = 'the times, the people'.

The Codex Regius gives *jarðar* which is the genitive singular of *jörð*, the earth. The editors, mainly for reasons of strict application of poetry rules, prefer to read *jaðar* = accusative *jaðarr* = 'the edge'. As shown by Evans, this emendation causes a string of other problems in order to respect grammar. Since there is not satisfactory emendation, I prefer to

suppose that this deviation from poetic rules has been a poetic whim rather than a mistake, and to keep *jarðar*.

### Comment on the meaning

In this stanza Óðinn explicitly declares that he misled Gunnlöð in “taking good advantage on her.” Their sexual intercourse will become explicit in stanza 108.

It is interesting to note that only ‘wise ones’ have access to poetic fury. More generally, these lines suggest a capital difference between fury and anger. Anger is accompanied by a blindness which is opposite to wisdom. On the contrary, fury sharpens our senses and our intellect, it does not contradict wisdom in anything, or even favors it.

### Evans’ Commentaries

**107** [ I give these comments *in extenso*. Those relative to lines 1 and 6 display the experts’ ingeniousness when they propose to modify the text. In particular, lines 6 comment shows how a reasonable assumption on a poetic form can lead so far amiss that it eventually looks undecipherable.]

1 *litar* has not been satisfactorily explained. As it stands, it must be gen. sg. of *litr* ‘colour, hue, complexion, outward appearance’. ... think the reference is to Óðinn’s transformation into a snake, but whether *litr* can be stretched to mean ‘bodily shape’ is doubtful; Finnur Jónsson denies it. (This also causes difficulty with *keypts*, for the change can hardly be called a *kaup*; BMÖ speculates that *kaupa* could mean the same as *skipta* ‘exchange, win in exchange’. ) ... takes *litar* as ‘a poetic circumlocution for Gunnlöð’ and connects *keypts* with expressions like *kaupa sér konu*, *brúðkaup* (for he thinks a wedding took place) ; he renders *litar* as *skönheten* ‘the beauty’, but this too lacks parallels. Bugge 2, 251 interprets as *hlitar*, which he takes with the second *vel* (the phrase *hlitar vel* ‘tolerably well’ occurs in prose) ; he then has to interpret *velkeypts* as gen. sg. n. used substantively: ‘the well-purchased’ (i. e. the mead) . This is clearly impossible. Others suppose *litar* somehow conceals a word referring to the mead: some early editors read *líðar* (but the genitive of *líð* ‘ale’ is in fact *líðs*) , and Konrtib Gislason (in Njásla II 406) , followed by Finnur Jónsson, emends to *hlutar* ‘share, winning’. CPB 22, reading *vél-keyptz litar*, renders ‘the fraud-bought mead’, without explaining the last word. In all probability the line is corrupt beyond redemption.

[I acknowledge I do not fully understand why the experts discussed so much to include a metaphor already met and treated without problem in 93.]

4 Óðrerir is, in Snorri’s account, one of the three vessels in which the sacred mead is stored by Suttungr, and this is evidently also the sense it has in 140 below. Here it would seem rather to denote the mead itself; probably this was the original sense of the word, and its application to the vessel containing it is secondary, for it appears to be compounded from *óðr* ‘soul; poetry’ and *\*hrærir*, agent noun from *hræra* ‘to stir up’... Finnur Jónsson prefers to connect the second element with the root seen in *rísa*, but the sense would be the same: thus, ‘stirrer-up of the soul (or, of poetry) ’.

6 The reading of Codex Regius *á alda vés jarðar* must be corrupt, for an acc. is required after *á*, and a *ljóðahátt* ‘full line’ may not end in a trochaic disyllable (see on 31 above) [the first syllable of a disyllable at the end of a *ljóðahátt* ‘full line’ must be short – and Evans provides a lot of discussions about this law given by Bugge]. Editors usually emend to *jaðar* ‘rim’. But what is ‘the rim of the sacred place of men’ ? Bugge 1, 56 equates it to *Miðgarðr* without explanation (though in Snorri’s account it is in fact Ásgarðr to which Óðinn brings

the mead) and similarly CPB 22 and 466: ‘the skirts of the city of men’, i. e. the edge of the inhabited world. Another interpretation takes *alda vé* as Valhöll either by postulating that in Óðinn’s mouth ‘men’ could allude to his warrior hosts ... or by taking *alda* as from an adjective \**aldr* ‘ancient’ otherwise evidenced only in compounds like *aldjötunn* ...; the *jaðarr* of Valhöll is then either the fence around it (Neckel) or the land surrounding it (i. e. Ásgarðr). Finnur Jónsson takes *jaðarr* in its secondary sense ‘protector, prince’ and reads *á alda vé jaðars* ‘to the sacred place of the lord of men (i. e. Óðinn)’, that is, ‘to Ásgarðr’; this would however really require the word order *á vé alda jaðars* (so SG). As the variety of interpretations suggests, the line is intractable; Bugge’s solution is as plausible as any, but no real decision is possible.

[Evans provides the chain of discussions that caused this Bugge invented ‘law’. As you see, the complications that follow are prevented if we naively keep, as I do *jarðar*.].

### \*\*\*Hávamál 108 \*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

I am in doubt  
that I would come back  
from the deeds of the giants  
if I did not take pleasure with Gunnlöð,  
(or if I did not make use of Gunnlöð,)  
the good woman,  
on whom I put the arm.

#### Prose explanation

I utterly doubt to have been able to escape the destroying actions of the giants without the love (*or* help) from Gunnlöð. This good woman, on whom I put my arm.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

108.

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

Doubt is to me on  
that I would yet come (back)  
of the giants the deeds  
if I of Gunnlöð non I took pleasure (*or* non I used) ,  
the good woman,  
whom I put the arm on.

#### Bellows’ translation

108. Hardly, methinks, | would I home have come,  
And left the giants’ land,  
Had not Gunnloth helped me, | the maiden good,  
Whose arms about me had been.

[Bellows’ note 108. “The frost-giants, Suttung’s kinsmen, appear not to have suspected Othin of being identical with Bolverk, possibly because the oath referred to in stanza 110 to was an oath made by Othin to Suttung that there was no such person as Bolverk among the gods. The giants, of course, fail to get

from Othin the information they seek concerning Bolverk, but Othin is keenly conscious of having violated the most sacred of oaths, that sworn on his ring.”] [This note anticipates on s. 109 and 110 and we will come back to it then. It is however interesting to notice that most commentators [me included] believe that the oath is relative to Óðinn and Gunnlöð’s marriage. Bellows introduces here an interesting interpretation.]

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The verb *njóta* gives *nyta* in the first person of the subjunctive present and *nytak* = *nyta-ek*. It means ‘to take pleasure, to receive a benefit’.

- *görð* describes the action of building or doing, hence a ‘deed’.

### Comment on the meaning

We see that, as I stated in the comments of stanza 84, Óðinn is grateful and respectful towards Gunnlöð. When he qualifies her in 107 with *svárr*, whatever the exact meaning of this word, this confirms that Gunnlöð cannot illustrate an inconstant and carefree woman.

Whatever the meaning chosen for *njóta* in lines 4, line 6 explicitly confirms the sexual intercourse of Gunnlöð and Óðinn.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 109 \*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

During the day after  
the frost-coated-giants went  
to ask of High’s doings  
into High’s hall.  
They inquired of Bölverk,  
if he had come back with the gods  
and/or (if) Suttungr would have slaughtered him.

#### Prose explanation

The day following the official marriage, the frost-coated-giants went in High’s (Óðinn) hall, i. e. the bridal room, to enquire of Bölverk (who they may still believe to be different from Óðinn) . When they noticed that he disappeared, they asked whether Bölverk went back to the Æsir or if Suttungr had sacrificed-killed him.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

109.

*Ins hindra dags  
gengu hrímþursar  
Háva ráðs at fregna  
Háva höllu í.  
At Bölverki þeir spurðu,  
ef hann væri með böndum kominn  
eða hefði hán um Suttungr of sóit.*

In after a day  
went the frost-coated-giants  
of High doing for ask  
of High the hall into.  
At Bölverk to them inquired,  
if he would be with the gods come  
and/or would have of him Suttungr slaughtered.

### **Bellows' translation**

109. The day that followed, | the frost-giants came,  
Some word of Hor to win,  
(And into the hall of Hor;)  
Of Bolverk they asked, | were he back midst the gods,  
Or had Suttung slain him there?

### **Commentary on the vocabulary**

The verb *spyrja* gives *spurðu* in the third plural person of preterit = they 'sought, asked, got information, enquired of'.

More details on *sóit* in the vocabulary of s. 144.

### **Comment on the meaning**

This stanza full understanding holds in the interpretation given to *hindra dags* as you guessed in reading the prose explanation above.

I will need to provide at first a few details about a marriage ceremony, which are gathered from hints in the Eddas and the sagas. Some of these details are significant for understanding this stanza.

***Intermezzo:*** A few words about the marriage ceremony of in pagan times

When celebrating an official marriage, the traditions tells us that bride underwent a rather complex rite of passage before the marriage itself.

Two days before of the marriage, she is taken in hand by women whose role is to officialize the loss of her single person statute. In particular, her clothing was to be different and, at least in the Middle Ages, we know that an ornament called a crown (*kransen*), specific to a single woman, was removed from her hair.

The day before marriage, she is busy going to the bath-house, what is now called a sauna, and the day is filled in discussions with her bath partners. On the marriage day, she is 'dressed', may be not in special clothes, but at least her hair has to fall freely on her shoulders this very day: once married she cannot let her hair fall so. Carrying a special and gaudy marriage crown is attested with the Middle Ages but is not certain in the times known as Vikings.

Marriage day is primarily a gigantic feast. In the evening, the engaged are put at the bed in the presence of six witnesses in charge of testifying the engaged one's identity and, undoubtedly, also that the marriage had been actually consummated.

This tells us that the forementioned 'consummation' cannot happen before three days during which bride and groom are fully occupied and they are either in different locations or in the middle of a crowd.

Finally, the new husband had to offer a 'morning gift' (*morgingjöf*) to his young wife in the morning of this busy night.

If an official marriage, all the events above are necessary. Otherwise, people were said to be 'married' when they slept together and had a steady common life.

We meet an allusive testimony of these premarital days in the Eddic poem called *For Skírnis* (Skírnir's journey) where Skírnir is in charge of asking giantess Geirðr to become Freyr's wife. After some arguments, she finally agrees and Freyr learns how that he will be able to marry the lady who dazzled him with her shiny arms. The marriage will be carried according to the ancient rules and this enables us to understand Freyr's complaint in the last stanza of the poem, which otherwise looks pointless.

<i>Lang er nott,</i>	Long is one night,
<i>langar 'ro tver,</i>	longer are two,
<i>hve vm þreiyac þriár?</i>	how I shall wait during three?
<i>opt mer manapr</i>	Often, for me, one month
<i>minni þotti,</i>	(is) less thought
<i>enn sia half hynótt.</i>	than such a wedding half-time.

### *Intermezzo ends*

Snorri says that Óðinn spent three nights with Gunnlöð and that, then, he drank the three mouthfuls. Thus, Snorri strongly suggests a nonformal marriage.

Conversely, the text of *Hávamál* very clearly suggests an official ceremony, which contradicts Snorri's interpretation. It follows also that, in the fourth line, Óðinn hall is nothing but the bridal room where they do not find Óðinn but a tearful Gunnlöð. Speaking of the bridal room as "Óðinn hall" may look a little awkward. It is however unthinkable that a delegation of giants might go to Ásgarðr: one only giant in Ásgarðr is already exceptional and suicidal. In this case, we can expect that the giants do not know yet that Bölverk is the same person as Óðinn.

Thus, *hindra dags* indicates the day after the wedding though it does not appear elsewhere in the literature, as Evans states it.

Everything goes by threes in this story: three nights, three love-makings, three gulps. This should carry some meaning. Besides, we have to understand why Gunnlöð accepts to give these gulps to Óðinn.

Now, if we think of the 'morning gift' given by the husband to his new wife, we can imagine that Óðinn has been able to convince Gunnlöð to play it 'the other way round'. Does not he claim in s. 104 that "with many words" he "worded" his fame? This talking might have been applied to Gunnlöð as well as to her father. In the case of an official marriage we know that love-making did not happen before the third night and this suggests that Gunnlöð has been satisfied three times. Óðinn then nicely convinced her to grant him, for each 'satisfaction', one gulp of mead while she was still in a state of confused delight. As you see, the whole love story takes its form if we imagine such a tender wedding night occurring between them. It also explains why Gunnlöð felt so much cheated when he left her.

### **Evans' Commentaries**

#### **109**

1 *Ins hindra dags* 'the next day'; only here in literature, but found as *hindardags* in Norwegian laws...), and also in Swedish laws, where *hindradagher* regularly has the sense 'day after a wedding'. Richert... holds that this is the sense in the present passage too.



3-5 ... From Snorri's account we learn that Bölverkr is the name under which Óðinn disguised himself while in quest of the mead. But Snorri has nothing corresponding to the substance of this strophe, and it is unclear whether line 3 means 'to ask Hávi for advice' or 'to enquire about Hávi's situation'. Are we meant to understand that the frost-giants do not realise that Hávi and Bölverkr are identical? [And the bridal room named here an 'Óðinn's hall'?]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 110 \*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Oath on the ring Óðinn  
think I, had granted;  
what shall we believe of his sincerities?  
Suttungr betrayed  
he left after (leaving) the sumbel  
and sorrow to Gunnlöð.

#### Prose explanation

I ['I' is either the skald or Óðinn] think that Óðinn had made oath on the ring [the poem does not give the content of the oath]. How can he still be believed sincere? After the *sumbl* (see the vocabulary below), he did not leave anything to Suttungr but deceit, and to Gunnlöð nothing but distress and her tears.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

110.

*Baugeið Óðinn  
hygg ek, at unnið hafi;  
hvat skal hans tryggðum trúa  
Suttung svikinn  
hann lét sumbli frá  
ok grætta Gunnlöðu.*

Oath on the ring Óðinn  
think I, he granted had;  
what shall of him sincerities believe?  
Suttungr the (this) betrayed  
he left *sumbl* from  
and sorrow to Gunnlöð.

#### Bellows' translation

110. On his ring swore Othin | the oath, methinks;  
Who now his troth shall trust?  
Suttung's betrayal | he sought with drink,  
And Gunnloth to grief he left.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

- *hvat* is the nominative of the neuter 'interrogative who/which': it means 'to whom?' and 'to what?'

- *tryggð* means 'good faith, trustiness' and thus *tryggðum* means 'in good faith, in trustiness'.

A *sumbl* is a festival, often including serious drinking. It can go from a simple drinking bout to a festive religious ceremony. In this context, we can also call *sumbl* the fact that Óðinn drank in three mouthfuls the three barrels of mead, a particularly severe drinking bout (see also s. 11 and 13) . Obviously, modern experts consider that it is the *sumbl* which followed the supposed official marriage of Óðinn and Gunnlöð.



*Gunnlöð's sorrow*

Drawing by Ernst Hansen 1941 – Thanks to W. Reeves and his <http://germanicmythology.com/works/>

### Comment on the meaning

This stanza is a comment of Gunnlöð's story, as if written by an external observer who sternly criticizes Óðinn. In fact, stanzas 96-110 describe two stories in which Óðinn is discredited. He is ridiculed by Billingr's daughter and he acknowledges himself that he misled Gunnlöð. In Snorri's report, we realize that his fraud consists in passing a contract with her, but a misleading one in the exact meaning of the word 'gulp', which is a true mouthful for Gunnlöð, and an enormous, divine, mouthful for him. The contract is respected to the letter, but there is fraud on the intent. We realize that Óðinn is conscious of having been dishonest. The author of comment 110 does nothing but hammering home Óðinn's culpability.

As a first problem we have to understand why the poem so directly informs us of this shame. We explain in <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/OnTheContracts.htm> Dumézil's conclusions relating to the choice of Týr as someone able to convince Fenrir that the Æsir were not going to use the magic to bind 'him'. That Týr did not kept his word explained why Týr had lost his function as a 'Germanic Varuna', the one of the law warrant god, in charge of controlling a proper application the laws. As another god of the royal function, Óðinn was thus very appropriate to succeed Týr. Óðinn's account contained in stanzas 103-110, tells us that he broke his oath with Gunnlöð and this disqualifies him, as it has been for Týr, to carry the role of divine judge in charge of controlling a proper use of the laws. Breaking his oath is thus not a small anecdotic shame (as it is usually interpreted) but a significant episode. It has been placed here so that Óðinn's devotees could understand the evolution of their god in their mythology. We then understand why this function could slip to other gods' hands as reported in the above reference.

The second problem is to understand why Óðinn accepts performing such a self-criticism. He is obviously ashamed by these two stories, then why telling them?

In order to understand the grotesque side of these stanzas, we have to reconsider Hávamál in its entirety, by taking the point of view of its grotesque aspects and supposing that it is unthinkable that Óðinn might be unwittingly grotesque, especially for a Heathen who worships him as a god!

From this point of view, Hávamál is divided into three parts.

*First part.*

Stanzas 1-102, often called ‘gnomic’ ones, where Óðinn is lavish of good everyday life advice. We noticed that I often oppose this shortsighted interpretation, which is unaware of the magic aspect of life.

Stanzas 90-95, that I called “Initiation to love,” starts a change of tone. For example, 90 directly steps into humor by describing the features of a man who succeeds in building a durable love relation with a woman.

*Second part.*

Stanzas 90-95 announce the second part of Hávamál (from this grotesque point of view), i. e. stanzas 96-137 where Óðinn tells of his love misfortunes and provides a series of seemingly ridiculous advice to a buffoon named Loddfáfnir (this name is explained in 111). This part culminates at its center, with stanzas 110, 111 et 112. We just saw 110 where Óðinn is said to have broken his word. A (seemingly) pompous stanza 111 follows immediately. It calls to mystical exaltation under the guidance of a wise *thulr* (a storyteller). We cannot decide if this *thulr* is Óðinn or Loddfáfnir. Stanza 111 ends by stating that we will be now initiated to the major rune mysteries. Follows 112 where what drops from the mouth of the wise *thulr* is this solemn sentence: “Do not leave during the night outside, except if you *leitir út staðar* ‘you seek of a place outside’ whose meaning is, as the dictionaries say in their prude Latin: ‘*cacare*’. The grotesque aspect of this sentence did not escape anyone and it shocked many. This kind behavior might have given to some the wish to tell Óðinn: “Will you please stop clowning! I will suggest to listen to Óðinn when he is clowning rather than becoming irritated. This clowning here only for preventing the too rigid minds to understand the magic of the runes such as Óðinn wishes to teach it.

*Third part.*

Stanzas 138-165 teach explicit runic knowledge. We cannot understand them without comparing them to stanzas 1-137 nor without having fun with the serious buffooneries of the great god Óðinn. He hides under grotesque the rules on how using the runes.

We now will begin the reading of this second part. I will however give you no more than some tracks to help you to decipher the Word of Hár: Believe what you want!

## Evans’ Commentaries

### 110

**Baugeið** - not referred to in Snorri’s account. The swearing of oaths on rings is spoken of quite frequently in ON sources: Landnámabók... states that a ring was to lie on the altar of every ‘chief temple’, to be worn by the *goði* at assemblies where he presided; every man who had legal duties to discharge at the assembly *skyldi ádr eið vinna at þeim baugi*, and cp. similar allusions in Eyrbyggja saga ch. 4 and Viga-Glums saga ch. 25. . . Atlakviða 30 speaks of oaths sworn *at hringi Ullar* and the Anglo- Saxon Chronicle s. a. 876 describes how the Danish host in England swore oaths to King Alfred on *þæim halgan beage*. ...[ (... “on the sacred ring”) It looks here as if they became sworn to King Alfred. They actually swore to “speedily leave his kingdom,” they were not “sworn to him.”]

## Hávamál 111-137

### “Loserdragon’s speech”

#### Evans’ general introduction (p. 26) to these stanzas

[We will note that the interpretation given here to stanza 110 is, ‘as expected’, adverse to the comments of the experts.]

As with the Gnostic Poem, scholars disagree whether *Loddfáfnismál* as intended from the beginning as Óðinn's utterance. The first person pronoun appears twice, in 118 and 131, but in neither case does the speaker appear to possess Odinic characteristics, and the poem's advice is in general of a mundane, even petty, kind (particular offence has been taken at the notion that the last line of 112 could proceed from the lips of a deity; Müllenhoff even thought a touch of burlesque was intended here). The question is complicated by the problem of how 111 is to be understood. As the text stands in Codex Regius, this strophe introduces *Loddfáfnismál*, but its grand mystical tone, in contrast to the not very elevated contents of the poem that follows, makes it doubtful that it was originally composed for this purpose. A further objection has been seen in the reference in line 7 to runes, which are not in fact dealt with in *Loddfáfnismál* (apart from a very cursory allusion in 137). The strophe would in fact be more appropriately placed among the miscellaneous fragments of *Rúnatal*; it is also conceivable that it was at one time intended to introduce *Ljóðatal*. Even if we accept it as the opening strophe of *Loddfáfnismál*, its implications are far from clear. Who is the *ek* who saw and was silent in the hall of *Hávi*, pondering and listening to counsels and talk of runes? Certainly a god, says Finnur Jónsson 3, 237, for only a god would have been admitted to such exalted surroundings, and so most naturally Óðinn, and it is Óðinn (Finnur continues) who utters *Loddfáfnismál* in the disguise of an aged *pulr*, giving an exaggerated portrait of himself in 134. This may be so; but in the hall of *Hávi* it would seem reasonable that *Hávi*, i. e. Óðinn, would be the speaker rather than that he would be the listening *ek*. Müllenhoff believed that 111-137 were the utterance not of *Hávi* but of the *pulr* *Loddfáfnir* recounting what he claims has previously been addressed to him in *Hávi*'s hall (Müllenhoff emended *manna mál* in 111/6 to *Hávamál* - but that leaves *þögðu* with no apparent pl. subject), and that 164 was the original conclusion of this poem; in that strophe he expelled *Háva* before *höllu í* and took the hall to be the one in which the *pulr* gave his performance; *heill sá er kvað* is his praise of *Hávi* and *heill sá er kann* his praise of himself. This is ingenious, but obviously very speculative, and is still vulnerable to the charge that the advice, taken as a whole, is too trifling for its grandiose frame. The most plausible conclusion is that what we have here originated, like the Gnostic Poem, as an independent set of impersonal didactic strophes of six *ljóðaháttir* lines each; at some date it was adapted to the *Loddfáfnir* formula and thereby somewhat disrupted; and it was then (like the Gnostic Poem) incorporated in the ‘Words of *Hávi*’, only at that stage acquiring a connection with Óðinn.

[This breath-taking inquiry goes on in stanza 111 which seems to me very clear as for who is the ‘I’ and Óðinn's role in these. Understanding, however requests to behave as Óðinn, *hlýdda á manna mál*: to listen to the word of men.]

#### On the meaning of the name *Loddfáfnir*

“Loserdragon”

All experts state that the meaning of the name Loddfáfnir is unknown. I certainly will not do so much better as for giving you an exact name, because the meanings of the two words composing this name, *lodd-fáfnir*, are really fuzzy. It seems however possible to me to get a general idea on the meaning of this name: is it praising or insulting for whom carries it? The knowledge I am using here is the one of his current use, as illustrated by the dictionaries (see below) . I would be slightly *lodd* (here ‘childish loser’) myself to attempt opposing Antony Lieberman’s proposal to *lodd* etymology. In the paper cited in (Note 1) , he strongly suggests that this etymology is rooted in the meaning ‘child’. I willingly confess that ‘loser’ is perhaps a bit overstated, and that something like ‘baby-dragon’ might be more to the point. The general tone of stanza 112-137 evokes something more discriminatory than childish, hence my final choice for ‘loser’. Besides, ‘young loser dragon’ is too long.

(  
Why translating *fáfnir* by ‘dragon’? The name Fáfnir is well-known. It appears within the mythical cycle of Sigurðr. We will find all the details in Faulkes’ translation of Snorra Edda. Here are the facts related to Fáfnir. He is one of three sons of a very knowledgeable giant. The first son is accidentally killed by Loki who makes up for his guilt by paying a tribute, i. e. a treasure made up of a magic ring and a great quantity of gold. The two others sons, Reginn and Fáfnir require of their father their share of the treasure and he refuses. They plot then against him and Reginn takes care of the murder of his father. The sharing of the inheritance turns out sour because each of two sons wants the treasure for him alone. Fáfnir owns a magical weapon known as an *Ægishjálmr* (‘Dread-helmet’) . Reginn loses this battle and Fáfnir flees and carries away the treasure. To protect it, he takes refuge in a cave, transforms himself into a dragon, and starts a life of treasure sentry.

We saw throughout the gnomic stanzas how much Óðinn despises material richness and he will thus scorn a father killer who ends up sprawling on his gold. In order to account for Óðinn’s contempt, I chose to translate the word *fáfnir* by a scorning qualifier prefixing ‘dragon’.

Why translating *lodd* by ‘loser’ in spite of its etymological meaning? The word *lodd* is associated to two Old Norse words, *lodda* and *loddari*. I give you below all what is known of these two words, according to the four dictionaries’ that I use here. We see that de Vries and Lexicon Poëticon do not supply anything particularly pejorative for the meaning of *lodd*. On the other hand, C-V points out a strong pejorative connotation. The meaning ‘woman’ of *lodd* designates, according to him, a prostitute and the meaning ‘entertainer’ of *loddari* designates a vagrant. This is why I chose to translate *lodd* by ‘loser’.

This name thus looks like the way American Indians call someone they want to ridicule. That this insult is repeated throughout stanzas 112-137 (and lastly in 163) will help us better understand the really wretched aspect of some Loddfáfnismál stanzas in their commonplace understanding.

(Note 1) Antony Lieberman, *Ten Scandinavian and North English Etymologies*, in *alvíssmál* 6, ISBN 978-3-86135-606-6 ISBN 978-3-86135-606-6. Available at <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~alvismal/7etym.pdf>

### Meanings of *lodda* and *loddari*

De Vries.

*lodda*: ‘*frau, fluss*’ (woman, river) . He adds the following meanings of *lodda* in other Germanic languages. Modern Icelandic: ‘*schmeichelname für adler*’ (cherishing term for an eagle) ; Modern Norwegian: ‘*kleines weib, groberhalbstrumpf*’, (small woman, coarse knee sock) ; modern Swedish dialect: *ludda*: ‘*nachlässiges weib*’ (negligent woman) .

*loddari*: ‘musician, travelling acrobat’.

Lex. Poet.

*lodda*: ‘*amnis*’ (river) , ‘*femina*’ (woman, female animal) ;*lögðis lodda* ‘the flood of the swords, blood’.

*loddari*: not mentioned.

C-V

*lodda*: a prostitute (?) , an insulting word.

*loddari*: a buffoon, a vagrant, an insulting word.

Hans Kuhn

These words are missing in his *Wörterbuch* because they do not appear in poetic Edda elsewhere than in the name of Loddfáfnir.

**\*\*\*Hávamál 111\*\*\***

**Explanation**

*Óðinn kvað*:

It is high time that I chant  
from the seat of Urðr’s source,  
kept by the wise poet and storyteller.  
Therefrom I watched,  
I saw and I kept quiet,  
I fell silent and I thought,  
I understood and I lent an ear,  
I heard the word of humankind.  
Thousand words on the runes I heard,  
they had many pieces of advice.  
From High’s hall, inside High’s hall  
this is what I heard mankind state:

**ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation**

111.

<i>Mál er at þylja</i>	It is high time to chant incantations
<i>þular stóli á</i>	from the storyteller seat on
<i>Urðarbrunni at,</i>	Urðr’s well at,
<i>sá ek ok þagðak,</i>	saw I and I kept quiet,
<i>sá ek ok hugðak,</i>	saw I and I thought,
<i>hlýdda ek á manna mál;</i>	I hearkened to of the humans the speech;
<i>of rúnar heyrða ek dæma,</i>	of the runes heard I reckon,
<i>né of ráðum þögðu</i>	non of advice they kept silent
<i>Háva höllu at,</i>	at the High one’s hall,
<i>Háva höllu í,</i>	in the High one’s hall
<i>heyrða ek segja svá:</i>	heard I speak thus:

**Bellows’ translation**

111. It is time to chant | from the chanter’s stool;  
By the wells of Urth I was,  
I saw and was silent, | I saw and thought,

And heard the speech of Hor.  
(Of runes heard I words, | nor were counsels wanting,  
At the hall of Hor,  
In the hall of Hor;  
Such was the speech I heard. )

### Comments on the vocabulary

I remind you that, as explained in stanzas 21 and 60, the neutral word *mál* has multiple meanings.

It means a ‘decorative drawing’ and, besides, ‘measure of distance, size’, and also ‘time measure, time, the time of the meal, the seasons of the year’. Lastly, its third principal meaning is ‘a word, the faculty of speech, an exchange of words, a tale, an account, a saying, a grammatical sentence’. This last meaning expanded to the legal language to give ‘a procedure, a legal case, a transaction’.

The verb *þylja* means ‘to say, to sing’ or ‘to mutter magic words’. In the context of this stanza the last meaning appears more probable to me.

The verb *hlýdda* or *hlýða* means ‘to listen to’ and also in a figurative way, ‘to correctly achieve’ and in the negative forms ‘to refuse to listen, refuse to act in an improper way’.

The verb *dæma* means ‘to pass sentence, judge, speak, to deem’ . C-V insists on the way of speech *dæma ok drekka* (to have a drink while chattering) which is the most commonplace the meaning ‘to chat’ of *dæma*. Lex. Poet. gives also this meaning, but it probably is not its etymological meaning since de Vries gives ‘to judge, to adjust’.

The verb *þegja*, being quiet, to keep silent, does *þögðu* (they kept silent) in the plural third person of the preterit and, in line 4, *þagða* is the first person of the singular (I kept silent) .

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

You can see that my translation considerably differs from Bellows’, which dates a little. In fact, except for some variations, my version and those of Dronke and Orchard are identical. It is, on the other hand, a point of comprehension where it differs completely from that of the modern academics. It seems to me that it is now allowed that the ‘ek’ lines 4-7 is not Óðinn but a mysterious storyteller (the *pulr* evoked in lines 2) about which we know nothing and who will disappear in the following as mysteriously as it appeared. It seems to me that, the only evoked character being Óðinn, he is the one who comes to listen to humans’ words about the runes. It seems to me that it is indeed single that the first gesture of a god come to teach us the runes (or anything else) is to listen to us instead of thundering his eternal top-down truths . That evokes more modern pedagogy of listening to the pupils than the usual behavior of transcendent gods, as we know them. I suppose that This has been possible looked upon as improbable by modern experts who preferred to invent a non divine character who listened to human opinion on the runes.

From his hall, he listens to what people have to say about the runes. And the 25 following stanzas indeed bring back what people say. The poetic skill of Óðinn consists in using ambiguous words which give a possible prosaic meaning (though sometimes rather involved – and once senseless) to the stanza. It even happens that his sentences are naturally ambiguous (like 119: your friends should be called on, be they magicians or not) can be read in a commonplace understanding as well as in spiritual one. Thus, the mysterious *pulr* who so much fascinates the commentators is quite simply Óðinn disguised into a human

being (as he is used to do) who utters earthy words behind which is hidden their divine meaning.

### Evans' Commentaries

111

On this obscure and much-debated strophe see p. 26 above [here also, this page is given above] and Hollander 2, 282-7.

2 *pulr* seems to mean something like 'sage' or perhaps 'seer'. The word recurs in 134, where Loddfáfnir is exhorted not to laugh at a 'hoary pulr', since the old often speak wisely, and in 80 and 142 the runes are said to have been coloured by fimbulpulr, the mighty pulr (presumably Óðinn); the association with age also appears in the other two occurrences in the Edda: *inn Hára pul*, referring to Reginn, in Fáfnismál 34 and *inn gamli pulr*, used of Vafþrúðnir, in Vafþr. 9. In other poems the word is applied once to the legendary hero Starkaðr, once to the 'wizard poet' Þorleifr jarlsskáld, and once by the poet Rögnvaldr kali to himself; it does not occur in prose, but an early ninth-century Danish runic inscription from Snoldelev commemorates one Gunnvaldr, son of Hróaldr, pulr at Salhaugar (now Sallev), as though this were a recognized public office. The OE cognate *þyle* is used to gloss orator and also, it seems, scurra and histrio..., and *þelcræft* (evidently for \*þylcræft) glosses rethoric, and in Beowulf Unferth, a courtier of the Danish king Hrothgar, at whose feet he sits, is called Hroþgāres þyle. The Norse verb *þylja*, which is doubtless derived from the noun, sometimes appears to mean 'chant, proclaim', as in the present passage, and sometimes 'mumble to oneself' (especially of the mumbling of spells, hidden wisdom etc.). cp. st. 17 above: there is also a noun *pula* 'poetic catalogue, rigmarole'. There has been much speculation as to the original function of the *pulr*: most probably he was some kind of publicly acknowledged wise man, repository of ancient lore and credited with prophetic insight. But since the concept was evidently essentially prehistoric and already obsolescent at the time of our oldest records, certainty is impossible...

3 *Urðar brunni at* - editors differ as to whether this should be taken with what precedes or with what follows. But since the strophe as a whole is involved in so much obscurity it seems risky to break the regular pattern of *Ljóðaháttir* by placing a stop after the first 'long line' (i. e. at the end of line 2); the only parallel would be 69, but there a break occurs at the end of line 3 as well. The *Urðar brunnr* is stated in *Völuspá* 19 to lie beneath the evergreen ash *Yggdrasill*, and Snorri says in the Prose Edda (*Gylfaginning* ch. 15) *that þrjú röt asksins stendr á himni, ok undir þeirri röt er brunnr sá, er mjök er heilagr, er heitir Urðarbrunnr. Þar eigu guðin dómstað sinn*. In a fragment of a Christian poem the tenth century skáld Eilífr Guðrúnarson speaks of Christ as having his station *sunnr at Urðar brunni* (Skj. í 144), evidently a Christian appropriation of the concept of the Well of Fate as the seat of wisdom.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 112\*\*\*

#### Translation as literal as possible

I advise you, Loserdragon  
and if you catch my advice,  
you will benefit of it, if you catch it,  
do you good, if you catch it:  
at night, do not get up  
unless if you seek news  
and that, inside you, you look for a place outside.



### Explanation in prose

*What a human being who is unaware of the runes will understand.*

Loserdragon, here is advice for you, if you catch it, it will be good for you if you understand it, you will be better if you understand it.

Do not rise at night  
except if urgent news await you outside  
or that you look for the way towards the toilets.

*What the apprentices in runic wisdom should understand.*

Apprentice magician, here is advice for you: Try to understand it if you can, if you are able to understand them it will do you good because it will protect you from your early failures; if you are able to understand it will also protect you from other people. If you fail to understand it, go back to your earthy career.

Do not rise at night  
except if you must collect new information  
then go outside of your body by *úti seta* ('outside sitting').

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

112.

<i>Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,</i>	I advise you, Loserdragon
<i>en þú ráð nemir, -</i>	but (if) you the advice catch
<i>njóta mundu ef þú nemr,</i>	benefit will you if you catch,
<i>þér munu góð ef þú getr -:</i>	to you will good if you catch:
<i>nótt þú ris-at</i>	at night get-not up
<i>nema á njósn séir</i>	except to news you see
<i>eða þú leitir þér innan út staðar.</i>	or that search for you from within outside a place.

### Bellows' translation

112. I rede thee, Loddfafnir! | and hear thou my rede, ---  
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,  
Great thy gain if thou learnest:  
Rise not at night, | save if news thou seekest,  
Or fain to the outhouse wouldst fare.

### Comments on the vocabulary

The verb *nema* means 'to take' and specially 'to take by force'. It is thus better rendered by 'to catch, bereave, reach'. It carries also the intellectual aspects of acquisition: 'to feel, understand, learn'.

We already met the verb *njóta* in stanza 107 where Óðinn claims he well *njótit* of his dear "color of the dawn." It means 'to use, take pleasure of, benefit from'.

The verb *sjá*, 'to see, to spot' does *sé* in the subjunctive present and the second person of the singular is *séir* 'would you see'.

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

This stanza illustrates the huge difference which can take place between the usual understanding and the spiritual one.

Note that the prosaic meaning is stated in a rather awkward way. In “you seek in you (*or* within) a place outside” the “in you” can be only understood as the recommendation to go to seek your excrements inside yourself, which is exaggeratedly redundant, if not ridiculous. Conversely, if the topic is going out in order to find inside you the information you are seeking (as states the line before the last) by the practice of *úti seta*, the last line is then very clear.

In this stanza, Óðinn is what would qualify as ‘gross’. He says to his readers (or rather, I believe, listeners) : “If you want to hear shit, just go on being gross yourself. Otherwise, if you understand that I am speaking of your soul, you deserve to be welcomed to rune magic.”

### Evans’ Commentaries

112

1 *Ráðumk* ‘I advise’ ; not a reflexive form (for ‘advise’ is always *ráða*, not *ráðask*) but a first person sg. in *-um* with *-k* from *ek* suffixed; cp. on *létumk* 106 and *lögðumk* 108, and note *hétomk* beside *ek hét* ‘I was called’ in *Grimnismál* 46-54; *heita* is never reflexive in this sense... *Loddfáfnir* is not mentioned outside *Hávamál*, and the etymology of the name is mysterious. The first element has often been connected with *loddari* ‘trickster’, but this word occurs only in latish texts and is probably a loan from West Germanic (cp. OE *loddere*, MLG *Lodder*, German *Lotter*) , in which case it would hardly be found in *Hávamál*. . .

### \*\*\*Hávamál 113\*\*\*

	Explanation	
Commonplace understanding		Understanding the magic
With a female magician excelling in her art,  you shall not sleep enfolded in her arms:  she could then lock your limbs.		With an unknown magician, (carrying the same power as you do,) you can have sex but do not let you sleep unfolded in her arms, in spite of the pleasure she provides, since you will then be unable to protect yourself against her.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

113.

*Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,*

*en þú ráð nemir; -*

*njóta mundu ef þú nemr;*

*þér munu góð ef þú getr -:* [same four lines, indicated by [...] in the following]

*ffölkunnigri konu* with a full-knowing woman

*skal-at-tu í faðmi sofa,* shall-not-you ‘locked in a hug’ sleep,

*svá at hon lyki þik liðum.* so she blocks you at the joints.

### Bellows’ translation

113. I rede thee, Loddafafnir! | and hear thou my rede, --  
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,  
Great thy gain if thou learnest:  
Beware of sleep | on a witch's bosom,  
Nor let her limbs ensnare thee.

### Comments on the vocabulary

The masculine noun *liðr* means 'joint, limb, member (including *membrum virile*)' in poetry.

The verb *lykja* (to block) gives *lykði* in the third person (singular and plural) of the present subjunctive: 'it would block you', spelled here *lyki*.

The masculine name *faðmr* means 'a measurement, the arms' and the verb *faðma*, here with the subjunctive present, means 'to embrace, seize in one's arms'.

The noun *liðr*, joint, here in the dative plural *liðum* can be translated by 'at the (your) joints', as I do, or 'with the (her) joints', as most translators do. A good witch does not need physical strength in her joints in order to be able to block someone, hence my choice.

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

It seems to me that the use has been to call a "bad woman" a witch, in the pejorative meaning of the word. A female magician, with a rather laudatory meaning, could be called "a good woman" and in a neutral way, without referring her good or evil powers, "a very educated woman."

We could believe that 'to sleep in a hug' is a way of saying 'to make love', but the word is to be understood in its proper meaning: If you sleep in the posture of deep love, you then open your whole heart to the magician who can turn you into her slave. In the prosaic version, "to block the joints" takes of course the meaning 'to make impotent', an archetypal sorcery that left many memories in men's fears.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 114\*\*\*

#### Explanation

(By thus enfolding you in her arms)  
Thus, she changes you  
so that you no longer take into account  
neither word of Thing nor that of the prince,  
of food you will not want any more  
nor to take pleasure with another human person,  
you travel towards a sad sleep.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

114.

*Hon svá gerir*

*at þú gáir eigi*

*þings né þjóðans máls;*

She thus builds/prepares (you)

at you care not

of the Thing nor the prince's speech.

<i>mat þú vill-at</i>	meat/food you will-not
<i>né mannskis gaman,</i>	nor of a human being's pleasure,
<i>ferr þú sorgafullr að sofa.</i>	she 'ferries over the other side' you sorry-full at sleep.

### Bel lows' translation

114. Such is her might | that thou hast no mind  
 For the council or meeting of men;  
 Meat thou hatest, | joy thou hast not,  
 And sadly to slumber thou farest.

### Comments on the vocabulary

*Mannskis* is the genitive of *mann-gi* (*maðr* followed negative suffix *gi*) , it means 'nobody'.

The verbs *fara* and *ferja* give both *ferr* to the second and the third person of the singular. *Fara* means 'to go, travel' and *ferja* means 'to carry, move' with the possible meaning 'to carry over a river'. In this stanza, the grammatically correct translation of *ferr þú* is obviously 'you go, you travel'. However, the meanings 'you are carried over' and 'you carry over' where the '*ferr*' would be that of *ferja* are not so far from each other.

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

The prosaic translation contains a spiritual meaning without needing a special translation. Obviously, the female magician is described as insulating her 'victim' (or her 'chosen'?) from the external world, a behavior allotted to undines and fairies in the tales.

This stanza directly follows 113 and explains better the consequences of allowing a witch to "block your joints." This expression means, in fact, to lose any kind of freedom. The last line describes in a striking way what happens to whom lets himself bind in such a way. Prosaic interpretation implies that bewitched one becomes completely stunned. The magic interpretation supposes that we accept a kind of deviation of strict grammar to understand "you are transported." The bewitched one is carried "on the other side," being carried away in the opposite direction of the classical tale characters who flee a wizard: As soon as they pass over a river or a lake, the magic capacity of the wizard disappears. Conversely our bewitched one finds himself without defense when he is on the "other side." Some versions of the Arthurian legend report that Merlin would have let himself, of his own will, bewitched by Viviane. This type of myth is relative to the contents of 113 and 114, the general meaning of wick is to warn men against the bodily and magic charms of these so beautiful and attractive witches.

## \*\*\*Hávamál 115\*\*\*

### Explanation

Another man's woman  
 You will never attract to you  
 as an 'ear-friend'  
 (to provide her with what you want her husband to know about you, and  
 to receive from her what you want to know of her husband. )

## ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

115.

*Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,            [...]*  
*en þú ráð nemir, -*  
*njóta mundu ef þú nemr,*  
*þér munu góð ef þú getr -:*  
*annars konu                                Another one's wife*  
*teygðu þér aldregi                        attracts you to you never*  
*eyrarúnu at.                                 ear-secret at.*

### Bellows' translation

115.     [...]

Seek never to win | the wife of another,  
Or long for her secret love.

### Comments on the vocabulary

On *eyrarúnu*. The word désigant a rune, *rún*, is a 'strong' feminine word, i. e. it does its dative in *rún*. The word *rúna*, female friend, does its dative in *rúnu*. It is thus necessary to read *eyrarúnu* as the dative of *eyra-rúna*: where *eyra* = ear and where *rúna* = 'female friend knowing your secrets, confidante'. Note that the masculine equivalent of *rúna* is *rúni* = 'friend, conseller'. In these words, the meaning of *rún* seems to be more the one of 'secret' than 'magic sign'.

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

Traditional translations do use the meaning of 'someone receiving your confidence' 'ear-friend' but do not take into account that the friends entrust also their secrets to you, which I added in the magic interpretation. Moreover, 115 obviously echoes to stanza 146, in which Óðinn speaks of the eighteenth chant of a rune song that he entrusts to one woman only, his "sister," and not to "another's woman."

Well also note that the traditional translations suppose that the man will sexually seduce his 'friend-ear'. Nothing in the stanza hints at something more than complete confidence between him and his ear-friend. The often antagonistic context of the sexual relationships would rather let suppose that 115 is relative to a platonic connection. The sexual meaning of the expression 'pillow-talk' seems absent here.

## \*\*\*Hávamál 116\*\*\*

### Common place understanding

On cliff or near the fjord  
if you often travel to these places  
take good care of your **meal**.

### Understanding the magic

On cliff or near the fjord  
if you often travel to these places  
take good care of your **value**.  
(in order to resist the forces of chaos, for  
example, the giants) .

### Explanation

On cliff or near the fjord  
if you often travel to these places  
take good care of your value (or of your meal) .  
(in order to be able resisting the forces of chaos, for example, the giants) .

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

116.

*Ráðumk þér, Loddfäfnir,            [...]  
en þú ráð nemir, -  
njóta mundu ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð ef þú getr -:  
áffalli eða firði,  
ef þik fara tíðir,  
fásktu at virði vel.*

On fells or fjord  
if you travel frequently/skilled to/eager  
fetch/draw towards meal/value well.

### Bellows' translation

116.     [...]

If o 'er mountains or gulfs | thou fain wouldst go,  
Look well to thy food for the way.

### Comments on the vocabulary

The masculine noun *virðr* or *verðr* means 'meal'. It does *virði* in the dative.

The adjective *verðr* means 'having worth'. Lex. Poet. and de Vries give also to neutral name *virði* the meaning of 'worth'. (Lex. Pöet. : *pretium rei* = value of a thing) .

The verb *fá* means either 'to catch' or 'to draw'. In particular, *fá rúnar* means 'to draw the runes'. It is followed here the reflexive - *sk* and the personal pronoun in the second person to give *fá-sk-tu*.

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

Superficially, the only difference between the two translations proposed above lies in the reading of *virði* as being the dative of *virðr* (meal) in the one and the dative *virði* (worth) in the other. I am quite sure that this ambiguity is voluntary on Óðinn's behalf: food is necessary to preserve our strength, which holds our value up when we travel on difficult paths.

This being said, the magic interpretation of this stanza is actually very different from the prosaic one. The "journeys by cliffs or fjords" point at very difficult "shamanic journeys" that only of few wizards (or shamans) are able to carry out. They are extremely demanding, their success is far from certain. In order to increase their chances of success, Óðinn advises here the wizard to carefully prepare his journey by carrying with him all the spiritual 'meals' which might be needed.

The more than trite meaning of the common understanding thus disappears in the magic understanding.

\*\*\*Hávamál 117\*\*\*

## Explanation

### Commonplace understanding

To a bad person,  
never let  
to know your bad luck.  
Because a bad human  
you will never collect  
any reward for your good spirit.

### Understanding the magic

To another wizard  
never let  
to know your weaknesses.  
Because a wizard  
never returns  
compassion for confession

## ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

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.*

the wicked person  
let never  
ill-luck 'at you' know  
to whom (goes) towards a bad person.  
fetch(es) /carve(s) you (he) never  
reward of the good spirit.

## Bellows' translation

117. [...]

An evil man | thou must not let  
Bring aught of ill to thee;  
For an evil man | will never make  
Reward for a worthy thought.

## Comments on the vocabulary

As said in s. 116, the verb *fá* means 'to fetch, to draw' and *fær* means both 'he/she fetches or draws' and 'you fetch or draw'.

## Comments on the meaning of the stanza

The prosaic translation that I give is largely the same as the one given by other translators. We cannot fail to notice its plain obviousness and naivety. In the magic version, the "bad man" becomes a wizard and the stanza gives us a significant feature of a wizard: He/She has nothing to do with compassion. Magic in general, and in particular the runic one, does not take into account our feelings and follows very stern rules of practice. The last two lines, besides their obvious meaning, also tell that you will never carve runes just for rewarding a 'good spirit'. I tried to render this second meaning by using an impersonal way of speech.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 118\*\*\*

#### Explanation

**Note:** In between brackets: [*or: bold font ...*] gives the magic interpretation of the commonplace one, above in italics.

I saw, quite quickly,  
the perfidious word of a witch  
bite a man;  
*words of bad advice*  
[*or: words of magic ...*]  
brought him death  
though that which one showed it  
*has not been proven, i. e. , thus slander can kill.*  
([*or: thus a witch does not take care of judicial evidence before launching her/his curse.*])

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

118.

<i>Ofarla bíta</i>	After some time, to bite
<i>ek sá einum hal</i>	I saw a man
<i>orð illrar konu;</i>	word of a bad woman;
<i>fláráð tunga</i>	ill-advice tongue
<i>varð hán um at fjörlagi</i>	was for him 'at' death
<i>ok þeygi of sanna sök.</i>	and though non 'of' to prove the charge.

#### Bellows' translation

118. I saw a man | who was wounded sore  
By an evil woman's word;  
A lying tongue | his death-blow launched,  
And no word of truth there was.

#### Comments on the vocabulary

- *fláráð* = *flár-ráð*. The meaning of *flár* lies between 'lithe' and perfidious,( see 45, 90, 91) . The one of *ráð* is 'advice, foreseeing, wise advice, agreement, house-hold affairs, state of life, marriage'. Here, the worst of the meanings of *flár*, perfidious, appear to me justified by the context. Remember that I opposed this meaning in other stanzas, on the same grounds. on the contrary preceding instances, used in another context. Dronke and Orchard translate it by 'lie-telling' and 'insidious'.

- *fjörlagi* = *fjör-lag* where *fjör* is 'life, living body' and *lag* (*in poetry*) is a stab = death.

The verb *sanna* means 'to prove, state' with a strong meaning since it can take the meaning of 'to sentence' and its reflexive form, *sannask* ('to prove oneself') has the meaning 'to admit, to confess'.

#### Comments on the meaning of the stanza



By translating lines 3-4-5 by “the word of a bad woman can give death”, the idea of slander is immediately induced, which is obviously a possible meaning. In the same magic context, I do not think that a “really bad woman (= good witch)” would go down to calumny, her power being greater than that. For her, a well tied up curse will kill the man without problem or questions about its social justification. Here again, magic is presented without kindness, under its real aspect.

This being said, we should not forget that magic is also based on ordinary reality and that a gossipmonger curse will be considerably more difficult to properly tailor. In this case, the curse becomes a kind of trial by ordeal: if it is effective, then the culpability is proven, if not, then the witch dies. In other words, the culpability is not always proven in the legal meaning, certainly, but the witch must be deeply convinced of the accuracy of the charges carried against the person she/he curses, build up her/his curse according to these charges ... and to take her/his risks.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 119\*\*\*

#### Explanation

You know, if you have a friend  
who you really hold in your confidence,  
you will often travel to meet him/her;  
because bushes grow  
and tall grasses  
on the way which is seldom trod.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

<i>Ráðumk þér, Loddfäfnir,</i>	[...]
<i>en þú ráð nemir, -</i>	
<i>njóta mundu ef þú nemr,</i>	
<i>þér munu góð, ef þú getr -:</i>	
<i>veistu, ef þú vinn átt</i>	Know-you, if you a friend have
<i>þann er þú vel trúir,</i>	who him you well trust,
<i>far þú at finna oft,</i>	travel you ‘at’ find often,
<i>því at hrísi vex</i>	because ‘at’ shrub grows
<i>ok hávu grasi</i>	and high grass
<i>vegr, er vættki treðr.</i>	the way, which seldom he treads.

#### Bellows’ translation

119. [...]  
If a friend thou hast | whom thou fully wilt trust,  
Then fare to find him oft;  
For brambles grow | and waving grass  
On the rarely trodden road.

#### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

This stanza treats relations between friends who can or not be of this world. In the case of human friends, the meaning of the stanza is obvious. In the case of the magic friends, the meaning is less obvious because the ‘journey’ to find them is done with our souls. Each wizard, each shaman carries inside some ‘friends’ that he has better to avoid not to forsake, otherwise they will disappear. I point out also to you line 7 of stanza 44 that recommends to travel often go to find his/her friends, and I send you back to the magic meaning of 44.

Óðinn’s insistence to advise something obvious may seem ridiculous to some. On my part, how much time did I meet beginners who are filled with wonder by the meeting that they had with some ‘spirits’ and, later, speak with contempt of this experience?

### Evans’ Commentaries

119.

5-6 occur also in st. 44, and 8-9 also (virtually) in Grímnismál 17.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 120\*\*\*

#### Explanation

Commonplace understanding	Understanding the magic
A good person you will attract it with you by pleasant words and learn the charms from benevolence, as long as you live	A good person you will attract to you by pleasure runes and use galdr/rune magic to gain his/her benevolence, as long as that is left to you (until your death) .

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

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.*

a good human being

draw-you to you ‘at’ the pleasure-runes

and catch a healing galdr, while you live.

#### Bellows’ translation

120. ...

A good man find | to hold in friendship,

And give heed to his healing charms.

#### Comments on the vocabulary

The word *líkn* has the meanings of ‘cure, comfort, grace, benevolence’. A *líknargaldr* thus will be always understood as a cure or benevolence charm. In the context of 120, it is however clear that there is nothing to cure. Inversely, there is much to gain to obtain the good graces, the benevolence of a good person, as Jónsson suggests. In his interpretation, note that he coldly removes the word ‘*galdr*’, which is indeed useless if magic is treated as *thema non grata*.

The verb *lífa* means ‘vivre’ but also ‘to remain, to stay’.

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

In stanza 161, Óðinn says that he can obtain, by the effect of his 16th magic incantation “*geð allt ok gaman* (all the mind and pleasure)” of his “wise and knowledgeable beloved” who must thus certainly be a “good person.” However, here, the topic is about attracting a human person, not specifically a woman. Stanza 47, which states “*maðr er manns gaman* (the human person is the pleasure of a human person),” is even more relevant than 161. The pleasure in 120 is not always sexual, the pleasure of exchanging words with a friend, for example, is more certainly evoked here. It is not enough to allure, it is still necessary to please, the additional use of benevolence *galdr* may be to this purpose.

Finally, these three small lines stress the particular importance that Óðinn grants to human relations especially among magicians: they must put their magic to the service of the “soul sharing” evoked in stanza 44.

### Evans’ Commentaries

120

7 *líknargaldr* healing charms’ (only here) . What precisely is referred to is unclear; SG explain as ‘the art of making yourself loved’ (cp. on 123) . Finnur Jónsson suggests the compound means in effect no more than *líkn* ‘benevolence’, but *-galdr* does not appear elsewhere as an empty suffix.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 121\*\*\*

#### English translation as literal as possible

Of your friend  
would be you never  
too much early (carried) the neglect;  
sadness eats you the heart,  
if what you say does not reach  
someone’s whole soul.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

121.

*Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
en þú ráð nemir, -  
njóta mundu, ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð, ef þú getr -:  
vin þínum  
ver þú aldregi*

[...]

of a friend yours  
be you never

<i>fyrri at flaumslitum;</i>	sooner at forsaking;
<i>sorg etr hjarta,</i>	sadness eats the heart,
<i>ef þú segja né náir</i>	if (what) you say non reaches
<i>einhverjum allan hug.</i>	of someone the whole soul.

### Bellows' translation

121. [...]  
 Be never the first | to break with thy friend  
 The bond that holds you both;  
 Care eats the heart | if thou canst not speak  
 To another all thy thought.

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

The second part of this stanza extends 119 and 120. It strongly evokes stanza 44 that evokes a soul fusion between friends.

“Sadness eats up your heart when no one hears your words with his/her whole soul” seems to me an excellent rule of life, though difficult to apply.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 122\*\*\*

### Explanation

Words never should be exchanged,  
 (in which you open your soul to another person)  
 with an unwise and hardly human person. [continuation in 123 ]

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

122.  
*Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,*            [...]  
*en þú ráð nemir, -*  
*njóta mundu, ef þú nemr,*  
*þér munu góð, ef þú getr -:*  
*orðum skipta*            words to share  
*þú skalt aldregi*        you must (share) never  
*við ósvinna apa.*        with a non-wise ape.

### Bellows' translation

122        [...]  
 Exchange of words | with a witless ape  
 Thou must not ever make.

### Comments on the vocabulary

The word *api* means monkey. C-V says that it is seldom used to speak of the animal but provides several instances where this word also applies to a giant. Giants are

representatives of chaos and some are described as intelligent or of educated. This testifies of the double nature of chaos: it is simultaneously nonsense and creativity generating.

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

Here again, 123 seems to express an extreme banality. On the other hand, if we replace it in its runic context, Óðinn provides an important advice: Some runes represent the chaotic aspects of our lives, and they must be carefully used, because “we should never use the magic of the ape-like side (stupid or inhuman) of the runes of chaos. Use their creative side.”

### \*\*\*Hávamál 123\*\*\*

#### Commonplace understanding

Since from bad persons,  
nobody ever could obtain his/her attention  
to some reward for the good (done to this bad person) ;  
but a good person  
pays attention to being able of  
cure and benevolence for your praise and what you enabled him/her to  
do.

#### Magic understanding

When you deal with a bad witch  
do your deal without adding any amount of friendship  
in the contract you sign together.  
Inversely, if this witch is favorable to friendship,  
then he/she will be will be responsive to your proposal and your praises  
and he/she will not dither looking after you with benevolence  
instead of remaining uninterested in your fate, apart from your contract.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

123.

<i>Því at af illum manni</i>	Because bad persons
<i>mundu aldregi</i>	they never gave attention
<i>góðs laun of geta,</i>	from goodness rewards obtain,
<i>en góðr maðr</i>	but a good person
<i>mun þik gerva mega</i>	gives care to you quite be able to
<i>líknfastan at lofi.</i>	fast-healing/-benevolence at praise/allowance.

#### Bellows' translation

123. For never thou mayst | from an evil man  
A good requital get;  
But a good man oft | the greatest love  
Through words of praise will win thee.

### Comments on the vocabulary

The verb *muna* is met here in line 2 (*mundu*, 3rd person plural, preterite) and in line 6 (*mun*, imperative, 1st or 3rd person of the singular, present) . It means ‘to pay attention, remember’ (including gratitude and aggressiveness) .

The adverb *görva* (here in the form *gerva*) means ‘clearly, completely’.

The verb *mega* means ‘to be able, to benefit from’

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

Once again, the prosaic understanding of this stanza is of an extremely trivial while its magic understanding is quite significant. It is extremely important to get confidence and friendship from the magician who takes care of you.

In everyday life, think of the difference between a doctor who really tries understanding you and another one, as competent as he could be, who treats you as a simple disease case. If you have been treated in a hospital, you know that this difference can even become what splits up cure from relapse.

### Evans’ Commentaries

123

6 *líknfastan at lofi* is somewhat unclear. *Líknfastr*, which is found only here, is generally explained by editors as ‘assured of favour’, i. e. popular, beloved, though, ‘popularity’ seems a curiously extended sense for *líkn*, which normally means ‘solace, comfort, mercy’. But cp. st. above, where *lof* and *líkn* are also conjoined. There seems in fact no acceptable alternative to understanding the line as ‘assured of favour in respect of praise’, i. e. ‘generally liked and praised’.

[The magic understanding of this stanza grows out of these complexities]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 124\*\*\*

#### Explanation

**Note:** In between brackets: [*or: bold font ...*] gives the magic interpretation of the commonplace one, above in italics.

*In order to merge according to affinity*

*each one must open*

*with only one all his/her spirit;*

[*or: ... a true blending is performed only once during your life, with only one person.*]

*always choose another solution than breaking.*

*He is not really a friend,*

*who always says the same thing to his/her friend.*

[*or: who does not progress at the same speed as his/her friend.*]

[this line is classically understood as saying:

“who hides the truth to his/her friend.”]

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

124.

*Sifjum er þá blandat,  
hver er segja ræðr  
einum allan hug;  
allt er betra  
en sé brígðum at vera;  
er-a sá vinr öðrum, er vilt eitt segir.*

By affinities is then for blending  
these who say advises  
to one all spirit;  
all is better  
than self fickle be;  
is-not this one friend to the other, who will no  
more than one thing he says.

### **Bellows' translation**

124. Mingled is love | when a man can speak  
To another all his thought;  
Nought is so bad | as false to be,  
No friend speaks only fair.

### **Other translations of last line**

Dronke: "only tells facts that please."  
Orchard: "only says the one thing."  
Boyer: "always supports."

### **Comments on the vocabulary**

The prefix *ein* - expresses a form of unicity ('one and only one') but the word used here, *einn*, can have the two meanings of 'one among others' and of 'one and only one'. The reader remains free to understand what he/she wishes. In the magic version, I made the choice of the unicity meaning because the tradition hardly describes 'clubs of conjurers' and even the simple current magicians are extremely jealous of their knowledge. In a humorous way, you will notice that even druids of the 'Astérix' series only meets to compete, not to share their knowledge (a rotten argument, I know, but I couldn't resist!) . The same remark more obviously applies to *eitt* in the last line.

The form *blandat* is the supine of verb *blanda*, 'to mix, blend'. As in Latin, the supine translates by "for + infinitive."

The feminine word *sif* designates, in the singular case, the goddess Sif, Þórr's wife. In the plural, it means 'affinity, marriage'.

### **Comments on the meaning of the stanza**

When we think of material, intellectual or morals affinities, which can remain fixed during years, the last line is more or less in contradiction with the ones before: To say the truth it is often, in everyday life, to offend and yet, if **all** is better (*allt er betra*) then lying by love or friendship should be better as than telling a truth that your friend is not yet ready to receive.

Think also of the unbearable boredom generated by a soul-blending relationship in which both partners would constantly think the same thing together.

This inexpressible magic, even for a brilliant writer as Montaigne\*, of a "because it was him, because it was me" is found here in the form of "not always saying the same thing"

that Orchard and the original text provide to us. The two friends evolve together, each one pushing the other to change, and they understand and appreciate their mutual evolution.

It is my pleasure to meet such a magic interpretation, well-known in traditional literature and which, however, is not less magic.

\* Montaigne, a French philosopher of the 16<sup>th</sup> c. , could not find a more precise explanation to his famous friendship with La Boétie.

### Evans' Commentaries

124

1 *Sifjum* 'kinship', here, uniquely, in a metaphorical sense.

5 *brigðum* is dative sg. m. of the adj. *brigðr* 'false, deceitful'. The dative is usually explained (Finnur Jónsson, SG) as due to attraction to an understood *manni*. Kock's proposals to emend ... are uncalled for, since the construction occurs elsewhere: *gott er vammalausum vera* Solarljöð 30, *illt er veillyndum at vera* Hugsvinnsímál 127...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 125\*\*\*

#### Commonplace understanding

To barter three (angry) words  
with a bad person, you must not.

Often the best one fails,  
Whereas the bad one fights and strikes.

#### Understanding magic

You must not, against an evil wizard,  
hold a fight of magic words,  
even if it reduces to three runes.  
Often the best magician fails,  
while the evil one fights and strikes.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

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*  
*oft inn betri bilar,*  
*þá er inn verri vegr.*

Three words to share  
will-not-you to you with a worse person  
oft him the best fails,  
while the bad one fights/strikes.

#### Bellows' translation

125.        [...]

With a worse man speak not | three words in dispute,  
Ill fares the better oft  
When the worse man wields a sword.

#### Comments on the vocabulary

The adjective *þrír*, three, does *þrimr* in the dative singular.



The verb *vega* has two different etymologies. The first one has the meanings of ‘to move, spin, weigh’. The second one is ‘to fight, smite, slaughter’.

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

In everyday life, bartering three words, even if angry ones, does not carry out very far, except with an exceptionally violent person. Among wizards, these words contain curses. It is not at all obvious that a wizard used to curse would be more dangerous than a wizard used to cure, perhaps the opposite. Actually, the patients, especially those in their final phase, wildly attack their healers who have to protect themselves - otherwise they die quickly.

Óðinn’s recommendation means here: “Opposing fierce challengers is a useless loss of power.”

### Evans’ Commentaries

125

6 *þér* is dative of comparison with *verra*. The word order is awkward: Bugge and Jón Helgason emend *þér við* to *við þér*.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 126\*\*\*

#### Explanation

#### Commonplace understanding

Would not be a shoe craftsman  
nor a shaft craftsman,  
unless you do them for yourself,  
  
if a shoe is ill-shaped  
or a shaft is bent  
then misfortune will be called on you.

#### Understanding magic

Do not wield your art to move things  
nor to stop an action (*or*: send a curse, as in s. 145) ,  
except when you deal with your own destiny,  
  
if things do not move anymore  
or if the action (*or* sending) turns badly,  
then hatred will fall down upon you.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

126.

<i>Ráðumk þér, Loddáfñir,</i>	[...]
<i>en þú ráð nemir, -</i>	
<i>njóta mundu, ef þú nemr,</i>	
<i>þér munu góð, ef þú getr -:</i>	
<i>skósmiðr þú verir</i>	shoe-maker (that) you be
<i>né skeftismiðr,</i>	nor shaft-maker,
<i>nema þú sjálfum þér séir,</i>	except if you self at them see,
<i>skór er skapaðr illa</i>	a shoe is shaped badly
<i>eða skaft sé rangt,</i>	or a shaft twisted
<i>þá er þér böls beðit.</i>	then is for you bale asked.

### Bellows’ translation

126. [...]

A shoemaker be, | or a maker of shafts,  
For only thy single self;  
If the shoe is ill made, | or the shaft prove false,  
Then evil of thee men think.

### Comments on the vocabulary

The words *skepti* (= *skefti*) and *skapt* mean the shaft of arrow.

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

The commonplace interpretation gives two precise examples of the social activity and the social penalty punishment associated their failure to fulfill their role. It is clear that we could say the same for any kind of trade. The fury which falls down today on the medical doctors, while they have been protected until now by their high specialization, gives us a current example of it. All this is however absurd: What the craft of a craftsman is good to if it should work for him/herself only?

The two examples given in this stanza are very significant if they are understood as metaphors. The metaphor associated with the shoes is probably associated to the situation which in the wizard is supposed to solve a problem, and the one associated to the arrows is the one of a process the wizard is supposed to stop or to send a curse. Thus, Óðinn's advice is understood as: "Do not intrude in the destiny of other people, by blocking the course of their destiny, and let them solve their own problems by themselves." Note that the wizards of the curse spend their time intruding in the destiny of the other people whereas the wizards of the cure only try to help a destiny to find back its normal course. Besides, a wizard of the curse is frantic with the need of using his/her power, whereas the wizard of the cure tries to help his/her patients to stopping their self-damage. Thus, Óðinn's advice can also be understood as: "Don't be so eager for power, and never use it without weighing its dangers."

### Evans' Commentaries

126

5-6 For *né* negating the preceding as well as the succeeding element cp. *við hleifi*. . . *né við hornigi* in 139 below.

8-9 For the variation from indicative to subjunctive in two co-ordinated conditional clauses cp. 30 above. The present instance differs, however, in that *ef* does not appear. For similar omission of *ef* in conditional sentences in the indicative cp. *gestr em ek Gjúka* Grípisspá 14 ... The usage is particularly common in the laws.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 127\*\*\*

#### Explanation

When you come across wickedness  
[or an evil wizard]  
denounce his/her evil  
and never leave in peace these enemies.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

127.

<i>Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,</i>	[...]	
<i>en þú ráð nemir, -</i>		
<i>njóta mundu, ef þú nemr,</i>		
<i>þér munu góð, ef þú getr -:</i>		
<i>hvars þú böll kannt,</i>		of what you for bad know,
<i>kveð þú þér bölví at</i>		say you it for bad
<i>ok gef-at þínum fjándum frið.</i>		and give-not to foes peace.

### Bellows' translation

127. [...]  
 If evil thou knowest, | as evil proclaim it,  
 And make no friendship with foes.

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

Strong people only can afford to uncover the scandals taking place in their social environment. In the context of Hávamál, rune knowledgeable wizards seem to be in first line to fulfill this role.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 128\*\*\*

#### Explanation

Never delights in evil  
 But let it go  
 with the pleasure of doing good.  
 [ And the magic meaning adds simply:  
 ... as 'good' wizard ]

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

128.		
<i>Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,</i>	[...]	
<i>en þú ráð nemir, -</i>		
<i>njóta mundu, ef þú nemr,</i>		
<i>þér munu góð, ef þú getr -:</i>		
<i>illu feginn</i>		of the bad, rejoiced
<i>ver þú aldregi,</i>		be you never,
<i>en lát þér at góðu getit.</i>		but let you at the good take pleasure.

### Bellows' translation

128 [...]  
 In evil never | joy shalt thou know,  
 But glad the good shall make thee.

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

Here again a stanza in which the concept of ‘good and’ is ‘evil’ is used, and we do not know exactly what that means. In our current social environment, we have a quite precise idea of what is good and the evil. However, all stanzas 1 - 95 advise us on the good and the evil as Óðinn conceives them and stanzas 96 - 110 describe the disasters associated with an improper behavior with women. The present translation, done by carefully avoiding to introduce modern or Christian concepts in it, enables you to build yourselves your idea on what was kind of ethics have been recommended by Óðinn. I give my own understanding of this morality (together with my knowledge of the runes) in my text on runic ethics at <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/RunicEthics.htm>.

We will note that I insist there much on the fact the concept of ‘good and evil’, as we currently understand it, is not significant in runic ethics. This is equivalent to stating that the words *illr* and *góðr* are primarily untranslatable. The fact that they are still used in modern Icelandic obviously does not mean that they have been used with the same meaning in Heathen times.

### Evans' Commentaries

128

7 For *geta* with dative ‘to be pleased with, to rejoice in’ cp. Grettis saga ch. 64: *eigi læt ek mér at einu getit*. This idiom is now obsolete in Icelandic, and was evidently not understood by the copyists of some of the late paper mss, who substituted *þín* for *þér* (giving, of course, a different meaning) .

### \*\*\*Hávamál 129\*\*\*

#### Commonplace understanding

You will not look upwards  
during the battle,  
- similar to frightened pigs  
are the sons of man -  
unless some others chant magic around you.

#### Understanding magic

You will not make magic invocations  
during the battle,  
- your magic would be useless on people  
frightened as domestic animals -  
unless you run up against other magicians  
chanting magic around you.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

129.

*Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,  
en þú ráð nemir, -  
njóta mundu, ef þú nemr,  
þér munu góð, ef þú getr -:  
upp líta  
skal-at-tu í orrustu,  
- gjalti glikir  
verða gumna synir -  
siðr þitt um heilli halir.*

[...]

up to look  
will-not-you in the battle,  
- to pigs alike  
are men's sons -  
except you (accusative) around they would bewitch the men  
(except if the men would bewitch around you)

### Bellows' translation

129. [...]

Look not up | when the battle is on, --

(Like madmen the sons | of men become, --)

Lest men bewitch thy wits.

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

Why should we avoid looking up during a battle, except to avoid looking at the enemies? This is why I prefer to think that Óðinn means here this complementary meaning: "Look straight at your enemies."

In the magic version, the bond between the lines in the center of the stanza and the others is carried out by the teaching of Óðinn that people in a state of panic are no more sensitive to an influence, including a magic one. The last line says that if, inversely, other magicians are among the enemy ranks, then only magic will be able to save the friendly army. In this way, the whole stanza is coherent if we accept that, at war, magic must be used only in a defensive way. This thus appears to me to be the hidden lesson of this stanza.

That such practices existed appears undeniable. Jordanes, in his work "Origin and actions of Goths," dating from the 6th century, speaks of warlike witches, called *Allrunnæ* who, in his opinion, were expelled of the Goths armies around year 400. This is still attested at the end of the 15th century in the work of the inquisitors Kramer and James, *Malleus maleficarum*, which contains virulent advice to eliminate the use of the magic in battles. Óðinn, on his side, advises against the offensive use of these practices.

### Evans' Commentaries

129

7 *gjalti* (dative) is a loanword from early Irish *geilt* (now *gealt*) 'one who goes mad from terror; a panic-stricken fugitive from battle ... This is the earliest occurrence in Norse of this word, and its only appearance in poetry; ...

9 *pik* - the ms *pitt* is kept by many editors, to mean something like 'you and yours'; the nearest parallel is *sitt bjó sannvinr rétta. . . til betra* in a thirteenth-century stanza of Amundi Árnason ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 130\*\*\*

#### Commonplace understanding

If you want to find a good woman

you want to share something with her,  
and if you want to find joy in that,  
fair promises must you do  
and to hold them firmly.

Each one likes to receive a good thing, if he  
can obtain it.

#### Understanding magic

If you want to attract a witch who is not a  
"bad woman" (pejorative acception of a witch)  
you must call to pleasure runes.

And if you want to find joy in that,  
fair promises must you do  
and especially to hold them firmly  
(never break the contract implied by your  
promises) .

Even a witch who reads in your play will be  
grateful and will reward you. (cp. 123)

## ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

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 skaltu heita*

*ok láta fast vera;*

*leiðisk manngi gótt, ef getr.*

if you will for you a good woman

call on pleasure runes

and get joy of it,

beautifully shall-you promise

and let firm be;

loathes nobody the good, if gets it.

### Bellows' translation

130. [...]

If thou fain wouldst win | a woman's love,

And gladness get from her,

Fair be thy promise | and well fulfilled;

None loathes what good he gets.

### Comments on the vocabulary

The verb *kveðja* means 'to call on, request'.

The word *gamanrúnum* is the dative plural of *gamanrún* = *gaman-rún* = pleasure-rune.

Bellows translate it by 'win the love', Boyer by 'happy talks', Dronke by 'give her love in secret' and Orchard by 'talk in intimacy'.

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

Stanza 120 recommends already the use of the *gamanrúnum* for seduction but, as we have seen, without specifying that the topic was seducing a woman. The topic, here, is thus the one of building a relationship. Stanza 130 specifies that, in this case, the contract signed between the partners must give a plentiful share to the good woman and that we should not reassess the advantages that have been granted to her. The seemingly minor last line, is here to recall stanzas 84, 90 and 92 where Óðinn describes how much it is difficult to durably link with a woman and stanza 91 where Óðinn notices that men do not often respect the terms of the contract which they took with a woman, even when their aim has been to build a stable relation with her.

The magic interpretation does not differ from the commonplace one, except by the fact that a 'good' witch is even more delicate to handle than an ordinary woman and, implicitly, than we should not try to bind with a 'bad' one.

### Evans' Commentaries

130

The last line may have been a pre-existing proverb: it has a very general sense and is not closely attached in meaning to what goes before.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 131\*\*\*

#### Explanation

Commonplace understanding	Understanding magic
Please see a warning here and not exaggerated prudence; Be extremely careful with your beer consumption, and with the woman of another  and moreover, thirdly, do not let thieves deceive you.	Please see a warning here and not exaggerated prudence; Never indulge in overdriking the sacred beer, nor in your relationship with a married witch, (whether she is 'good' or 'bad') , and moreover, (when meeting new persons) , be wary of all those who try to grab your power.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

131. <i>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 ofvaran; ver þú við öð varastr ok við annars konu ok við þat it þriðja at þjófar né leiki.</i>	[...]  Warning bet I to you be and not overwearyness; be you with bier the weariest and with another's wife and with that thirdly of thieves not they would fool.
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#### Bellows' translation

131. [...] (Beware most with ale or another's wife,  
And third beware | lest a thief outwit thee. )

#### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

The extreme dullness (including a repetition of 115) of the commonplace version speaks by itself. The magic version warns the wizard against three dangers which he/she should not exaggerately fear.

It is quite possible to consume beer in excess in order to induce a trance, this should not, however, become a customary trend.

To practise adultery is not a deep mistake but it is necessary to be careful in the choice of the partners.

Lastly, a wizard is surrounded by other wizards or by greedy persons, all covetous of his powers they would gladly acquire.

The wizard should not be obsessed by these problem and build exaggeratedly powerful spiritual defenses. This is because he should not be cut from social relationships, especially a healer wizard who must ‘open his soul’ to his patients in order to access the causes of their poor health.

### Evans’ Commentaries

131

6 *eigi ofvaran*: ‘not too cautious’, because then, Finnur Jónsson explains, you may be led into cowardice ....

### \*\*\*Hávamál 132\*\*\*

#### Explanation

Jeering nor laugh  
never you will practise  
at your guest nor a walker.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

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.*

‘at’ scoffing nor laughter  
should have-you never  
a guest nor a walker.

#### Bellows’ translation

132.        [...]

Scorn or mocking | ne ‘er shalt thou make  
Of a guest or a journey-goer.

#### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

It is very dangerous to make fun and laugh at our guests and, especially, at an unknown passer-by.

A guest knows you and he/she will be able to get revenge. You do not know their exact power, and never forget that this unknown person may be me, Óðinn.

### Evans’ Commentaries

132

7 *gangandi* ‘tramp’. The alliterating phrase occurs elsewhere: *ala gest ok ganganda með góðan hug til guðs þakka* in an old Norwegian homily ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 133\*\*\*



## Explanation

Often, they do not understand well,  
these who already sat in the home,  
(how) to recognize who is a soul-mate;  
no human is so good  
that it is not led by some flaw,  
nor so bad, that he/she brings no help at all.

## ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

<i>Oft vitu ógörla</i>	often they know non-clearly
<i>þeir er sitja inni fyrir</i>	these who sit inside in front
<i>hvers þeir ro (=eru) kyns, er koma;</i>	who to them are of their kin, who come;
<i>er-at maðr svá góðr</i>	is-not a human one so good
<i>at galli né fylgi,</i>	that a flaw not he follows,
<i>né svá illr, at einugi dugi.</i>	nor so bad, that at nothing he would help.

## Bellows' translation

133. Oft scarcely he knows | who sits in the house  
What kind is the man who comes;  
None so good is found | that faults he has not,  
Nor so wicked that nought he is worth.

## Comments on the vocabulary

The neutral name *kyn* does *kyns* in the singular genitive and has two very different meanings. The most probable here is 'family'. The expression "being of the same family" can have a 'genetic' meaning but I believe that the meaning to be understood here is the metaphorical one, i. e. : to sit among soul-mates. The other meaning is 'wonder' (possibly a worrying one) which is used for example to make up word *kynjamenn* which indicate all the wonderful beings, the fairies, elves etc.

The adjective, substantivized here, *einugi* are the dative of *engi* (= one-not) , 'nothing'.

## Comments on the meaning of the stanza

Once again, the extreme banality of this stanza leads the reader to wonder what information Óðinn wanted to put in it.

It does not seem reasonably possible to choose the meaning 'wonder' for *kyn* but, to keep this meaning as 'background music' for a proper understanding of this stanza.

Now, here is a group of people already settled in the home and they do not know well if the newcomers are of the family. This remark either is ironic, or touches to dumbness since, as everyone knows, the principal concern of a group already in place is to judge the nature of the newcomers. Moreover, the last three lines not only do not shine by their originality but moreover they seem disconnected from the three first.

The solution with these dilemmas are in the choice of the meaning 'soul-mates' rather than simply 'family'. None is able to recognize his/her soul-mate at first sight and even less the one of other people. In it lies a kind of magic which I already evoked by studying 124 in an allusion to Montaigne and La Béotie's famous friendship. This kind of relation is

established without knowing too precisely why. This is why “these who are already in the home,” i. e. the former friends, are not able to spot in a newcomer if he/she will become a soul-mate.

The second half of the stanza explains why, in any case, to accept a soul-mate, as beautiful his/her soul might be, it is necessary to show generosity, i. e. to seek in the others what is better than you own self. All things considered, this second half says that each one contains parts of the best and parts of the worse and it implicitly advises you to recognize your own worse and the other’s best in order to build a faithful relation.

The magic of life is so strong in this stanza that it is enough for me to recall that the relations between friend magicians follow the same paths as for everyone’s.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 134\*\*\*

#### Commonplace understanding

Never make fun of the hair (white or gone)  
of the wise storyteller,  
often what says the old man is good;  
often a clear word comes from a dry and  
wrinkled skin,  
from the one whose skin hangs  
and who withdraws among the parchments  
and who dangles with the children of misery  
(hanged ones?) .

#### Understanding magic

Never make fun of the hair (white or gone)  
of the wise storyteller,  
often what the Old man (Óðinn) says is  
good;  
often the right magic word comes from a dry  
and wrinkled skin,  
from the one whose skin hangs  
and who withdraws among the books  
[or who hangs with the moon (?) ]  
and who dangles beside hanged ones (who  
bring knowledge to him) .

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

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,*  
*oft er gótt þat er gamlir kveða;*  
*oft ór skörpum belg*  
*skilin orð koma*  
*þeim er hangir með hám*  
*ok skollir með skrá*  
*ok váfir með vílmögum.*

at the hair, the wise storyteller  
lough you never,  
often is good what the old one says;  
often out of a shrivelled skin  
a clear word comes  
to whom hangs ‘with’ the skin  
and keeps aside with scrolls  
and dangles with harshness-children.

#### Bellows’ translation

134.        [...]

Scorn not ever | the gray-haired singer,  
Oft do the old speak good;  
(Oft from shrivelled skin | come skillful counsels,

Though it hang with the hides,  
And flap with the pelts,  
And is blown with the bellies. )

### Comments on the vocabulary

*hamr*: de Vries ‘*hülle, gestalt*’ (cover, shape) , C-V ‘skin of a bird, shape, metaphorically: personality’ would do *ham* in the singular accusative. We see in Evans’ comment that the experts agreed to see there the single occurrence in Old Norse of the plural dative of *há*, skin, and the modern editors read *hám*. Note however that Rask, since 1818, gives *hám* as they do.

The feminine noun *skrá* means ‘manuscript, document’, it does *skrá* in the plural dative. The masculine noun *skrámr* is said by Vries and Lex. Poet. to mean the name of giant and a way to speak of the moon. It does also *skrá* in the singular accusative.

The verb *skolla* means ‘to hang, dangle’ just like *hanga*. However, it has also a figurative meaning ‘to keep away, roam’, and this avoid a repetition of meanings. The other translators give, for this verb, Bellows: ‘flap’, Boyer: ‘dangle’, Dronke: ‘vacillate’, Orchard: ‘dangle’.

The preposition *með* can mean ‘with’ when it is followed either by the accusative or the dative.

The word *vílmögr* (here a plural dative) is read as *víl-mögr* and means ‘destitution-children’.

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

We note that this stanza, as we will see it again in the following one, can imply here that Óðinn recommends a form of respect towards the weak ones, here stale old men.

In the ancient Germanic world, magic always plays a significant role even for those living a normal life. In Loddfáfnismál, Óðinn begins his teaching of rune magic and he describes the behavior requested from those for whom magic is the most significant thing in the world, those who undertake studying the runes. Old magicians only, who survived all the silly things that a too sure of himself young magician can do, can teach the wisdom necessary to the use of magic. Thus, the topic here is not about respecting the weakness of the old men but of honoring them as Masters in their art.

Remember that Óðinn states in stanza 157: “*ef ek sé á tré uppi váfa ná... mælir við mik* (if I see in the top of a tree oscillate a **corpse**... it speaks with me).” It is thus clear that the “children of misery” are hanged ones near whom Óðinn the magician comes to seek knowledge. We come back to this topic in 157.

### Evans’ Commentaries

134

8 For *skarpr* in the sense ‘shrunk, withered’ cp. its application to *fiskr, skreid, skinnsrakkr*, and note the related *skorpa* ‘to be shrivelled’, *skorpin*, ‘shrivelled’. For *belgr* meaning ‘person’ (or possibly ‘mouth’ as e. g. SG take it) cp. Hamðismál 26: *opt ór þeim belg böll ráð kom*, and note the proverb in Gull-Þóris saga ch. 18 ... *hafa skal góð ráð. þó at ór refs belg komi*.

10-12 *þeim er* evidently refers back to *belg*, but the meaning of these last three lines is very obscure. The last word in 10 is surely *hám*, dative pl. of *há* ‘skin’ (not found elsewhere in ON, but known in modern Icelandic) rather than dative sg. of *hamr* (as some nineteenth

century editors thought) , which means ‘(temporarily adopted) shape, form’. The final word in the strophe appears to be *vílmögum*, dative pl. of *vílmögr* ‘wretch’ (literally ‘son of misery’) which is listed among names for cowards and wretches in Snorra Edda ... and also occurs twice elsewhere in poetry. Finnur Jónsson thinks the lines describe the ‘withered bag’ (i. e. the old man) wandering around among other old men, depicted as ‘skins’ (*hám* and *skrám*) and ‘wretches’. But the three verbs all mean ‘dangle, swing to and fro’ and cannot give the required sense. Since the three verbs are all more or less synonymous, and *hám* and *skrám* are also near-synonyms, some editors have naturally tried to make *vílmögum* too synonymous with the other substantives ... achieved this by emending *hám* to *hámum*, dative pl. of a supposed \**hám* ‘wretch’ (cp. Swedish dialect *hám* ‘wretch, clown’) and by taking *skrám* to be from a supposed ‘*skrái*’ cognate with Swedish dialect *skrde* ‘miserable fellow’ ... suggests the *pulr* is a magician hanging up in a tree, like a shaman or like Óðinn in 138, to acquire mystical knowledge: the ‘skins’ are the bodies of sacrificed men and animals. (This is compatible with either interpretation of the last word. ) This is the only interpretation which makes sense, but it is undeniably highly speculative. [Here as so often, Evans is giving an honest advice but he has ‘got to’ show suspicion towards any meaning implying some kind of Heathen mysticism. In fact, many accepted interpretations are not less ‘speculative’ than mine. They however belong to our present definition of good sense.]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 135\*\*\*

#### Explanation

##### Surface understanding

Your guests, you should not scorn them (‘bark’)  
nor upset them when opening your gate to them,  
you will receive well the poor wretches.

##### Hidden understanding

(Each one of your guests can know a form of magic) ,  
do not underestimate the magic knowledge of your guests  
thus you will not upset them when opening your gate to them,  
these who are stripped of material wealth, they are often rich in spirituality.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

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.*

[...]

guest you non bark (scoff)  
not at the gate he offends  
get you the wretched ones well.

#### Bellows’ translation

135. [...]

Curse not thy guest, | nor show him thy gate,  
Deal well with a man in want.

### Comment on the vocabulary

Verb *geta*, to get, takes the meaning of ‘to welcome’ when its complement is in the dative, as here.

### Comments on the meaning

We may feel that the hidden understanding is hardly different from the surface one. The only difference between the two is in the intention of the host. In the surface understanding, the reader believes that Óðinn recommends a kind of Christian compassion with respect to each one including the ‘wretched one’. This is obviously ridiculous in Óðinn’s mouth. In the hidden understanding, Óðinn recommends to be wary relative to visitors, since each one of them may possess some magic.

The context is here the same as in 132-134: the host is a student in magic and the guest (or ‘the other one’) might be powerful wizard.

The advice he gives is clear: “The fact that you are known for being a rune student or expert will draw to you unusual characters. Be always wary of your visitors. Respect them.”

### \*\*\*Hávamál 136\*\*\*

#### Explanation

##### Commonplace understanding

The beam is powerful,  
which is necessary to move,  
to open the bolt to each one.

Offer (him) a ring  
or what plague this spirit it will request for  
you at the joints?

##### Understanding magic

You need a great power  
so that you can without danger  
raise the beam which closes your door to  
each one.

(Only a great wizard is able to lower his/her  
defenses in front of anyone)

You must have some valuable thing to offer,  
if not, he/she will be able to block your  
magic  
(in order to steal it from you) .

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

136.

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

Mighty is the beam  
which swing shall  
to all unlock.  
Ring you give,  
or what (will) beg the spirit  
for you of bale which (of which bale) at the joints.

### Bellows' translation

136. Strong is the beam | that raised must be  
To give an entrance to all;  
Give it a ring, | or grim will be  
The wish it would work on thee.

### Comments on the vocabulary

- *biðja*, for C-V, means only 'beseech' or 'to request (from the Christian God)'. Lex. Poet. gives '*petere* (to try reaching, obtain), *rogare* (to question, request)'. It is followed by the genitive for the requested thing and by the dative for the person who receives or gives it. Here, therefore the requested thing is *læs hvers* (plague, curse).

The neutral word *læ* made *læs* in the singular genitive. It means 'fraud, trick, skill, plague, curse'. Only the meaning 'skill' is not entirely pejorative, but it is understood that this skill is a crafty one.

### Comments on the meaning of the stanza

In their commonplace understanding, 132 and 135 seems to recommend the greatest hospitality and 136, somewhat on the contrary says to be wary of open doors hospitality. My comments of 132 and 135 insist on the fact that, if hospitality is necessary, its cause is mistrust or fear of the evil that the unknown passer-by can do to you, blind hospitality is excluded. Under these conditions, 136 explains why blind hospitality is dangerous. Only a very skilled magician can allow himself to accommodate anyone with no harm. If not, a normal person must retain the good graces of his/her visitors and if he/she really fears them, it is better that he/her makes them gifts which will bind them to him/her and will prevent them to use their magic against him/her.

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 136

1 *tré* can surely only refer to the beam (*loka, slagbrandr*) raised to admit a guest: you need a stout beam on a door ... which is going to let in everybody. This sounds like advice against over-generosity, but there is no denying that this causes difficulty in that it contradicts both the general note of Norse etiquette and the immediate surroundings of 1-3; for 4-6 cannot satisfactorily be interpreted to mean anything other than 'Give a ring', i. e. a gift (to anyone who comes). [Obviously, giving a ring to anyone who comes would quickly exhaust your ring stock. You do that for the wizards who seldom visit you.]

But attempts to find alternative interpretations are uniformly unconvincing ...

5 *þat* is hardly 'the failure to give' ...; more probably it means 'people, visitors', cp. *rekkar þat þóttusk* 49.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 137\*\*\*

#### Explanation

#### Commonplace understanding

#### Understanding magic

Wherever you drink beer,  
(especially if it is brewed with bearded  
darnel, i. e. poisoned by ergot)

choose the help of earth power

because the earth absorbs drunkenness,

but fire absorbs physical and psychological  
diseases

oak absorbs strong colic  
ear-corn absorbs the (noxious) effect of  
magic,  
elder tree absorbs family strife,  
- deadly fights have to call on moon  
(heavenly bodies?) power -  
alum absorbs the bites that do not cure,

runes absorb curse,  
field absorbs the flood (of blood?) .

Wherever you drink beer,  
(in order to ingest the magic drink that  
brings knowledge)

choose the help of earth power

because earth grounding absorbs your  
intoxication,  
but fire absorbs the diseases of the soul,

oak absorbs excess in the forecasting need

ear-corn absorbs the (noxious) effect of  
magic,  
elder tree absorbs the loss of contact, in a  
household, with earth power,  
- deadly fights have to call on heavenly  
bodies' power -

use of maggots absorbs the bites that do not  
cure,  
runes absorb curse,  
countryside grass decoctions stop a flood of  
blood.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

137.

*Ráðumk þér, Loddfáfnir,        [...]*  
*en þú ráð nemir; -*  
*njóta mundu, ef þú nemr;*  
*þér munu góð, ef þú getr -:*  
*hvars þú öl drekkir;*  
*kjós þér jarðar megin,*  
*því at jörð tekr við öldrí,*

*en eldr við sóttum,*  
*eik við abbindi,*  
*ax við fjölkynngi,*  
*höll við hýrógi,*  
*- heiftum skal mána kveðja, -*  
*beiti við bitsóttum,*  
*en við bölví rúnar,*  
*fold skal við flóði taka.*

Wherever (you) are, you beer drink  
choose for you earth's power  
since towards earth (takes with) (receives/ absorbs)  
heavy drinking.  
but fire with (=absorbs) sicknesses  
the oak with (absorbs) *tenesmus* (severe diarrhea) ,  
the ear of wheat 'with' much-knowledge (magic) ,  
the elder 'with' household strife,  
- deadly fights will call upon the moon -  
alum 'with' bite-sicknesses  
but 'with' a curse, the runes,  
the grass-field shall with the flood take.

### Bellows' translation

137.        [...]

When ale thou drinkest) | seek might of earth,

(For earth cures drink, | and fire cures ills,  
 The oak cures tightness, | the ear cures magic,  
 Rye cures rupture, | the moon cures rage,  
 Grass cures the scab, | and runes the sword-cut;)  
 The field absorbs the flood.

### Comments on the vocabulary

The verb *kjósa* means ‘to choose, to elect’. The reflexive form *kjósask at* means ‘to draw lots’. This shows that the kind of choice associated to *kjósa* is not always commonplace. De Vries adds to these meanings: “to wish, display, bewitch (*zaubern*) the proper meaning of the last word being ‘to choose an object for magic’ (*einen Gegenstand zur zauberei wählen*).”

The verb *taka* means ‘to take’ in all the meanings of the word. *Taka í jörð* means ‘to graze’ for animal. But *taka við* takes the meaning ‘to reserve, accept’ (C-V *taka*, IV, - *taka með*).

C-V translates *abbindi* by *tenesmus*, and a Latin dictionary saves us by translating it: “tenesmus, painful need to go to the toilet.” De Vries gives ‘*stuhzwang, dysenterie*’ and Lex. Poët. ‘*tenesmos*’. The current medical use of the word ‘tenesmus’ is a little more complex than a simple diarrhea and is near Dronke’s translation. Between the opposite translations of Orchard, Waggoner<sup>1</sup> and Boyer, ‘constipation’ and the one de Vries, we meet here, for one of the two translations, an unexpected and funny scatological misinterpretation. Dronke (“cures bowels”) and Bellows (“tightness”) astutely avoid this dilemma.

Its etymological meaning is given by Lex. Poët. : ‘*af-bindi*’, which brings up two interesting meanings. The prefix *af-* is generally used as a intensifier of the word that follows it. The verb *benda* can mean ‘to give a sign’ and, metaphorically, ‘to forecast’. Another type of meaning is the one of ‘to bend’ and, metaphorically, ‘to give, give up’. The word *abbindi*, can then mean ‘excess of capacity to forecast’ or ‘excess of giving up’, the last one provides a poetical rendering of diarrhea while the first one bring us back in the realm of magic.

The noun *ax* is systematically translated by English-speaking translators ‘ear of corn’ (see images obtained by seeking ear of corn on Google) : corn ear. This word meant the more general ‘ear of wheat’ before the appearance of corn. De Vries: ‘*ähre*’ (ear) , Lex. Poët. : ‘*spica*’ (thorn, ear) . In *Hávamál*, it is obviously a wheat ear.

The noun *höll* means ‘hall’ but we do not understand what a hall might have to do, magically or not, with marital strife. Lex. Poët. , in the same way, gives “*domus, ædes, tectum, aula* (house, temple, roof, court) .” On another hand, de Vries adds the second meaning of ‘*holunder*’ (elder tree) , the meaning used by Orchard ‘elder’.

The word *hýrógi* is translated by C-V as “bearded rye (?)”, de Vries “*feinschaft zwischen hausgenossen* (strife among people living together) ,” Lex. Poët. (*hýróg*) by “*dissidia famuliti*” (divisions of the servants) with the etymology *hjú róg*, where *hjú* = ‘household, servants, husband and wife’ and *róg* = strife.

The noun *máni*, the moon, is of the male gender in Old Norse, as in modern German. Note that the use of *heiti* in poetry is so common that we can read it as “the moon, the sun and all other celestial bodies.”

The word *beit* means ‘field’ but de Vries announces, for *beiti*, ‘*grasgang, köder*’ (field covered with grass, vergé fabric) . He adds the older meaning of ‘alum’, with the possibility of meaning ‘*regenwurm*’ (rainworm = earthworm) . It is advised here to alleviate serious

<sup>1</sup> In *Norse magical and Herbal Healing*, Troth publications, 2011, p. xxix.



bites, see below Evans' long discussion. I kept 'alum' as, a commonplace meaning because the earthworm is not used against infected wounds while alum has been often used in the past. However, the use of maggots, in the ancient medicine of hard-to-heal wounds, perdures until our days. This is not an assumption to be eliminated. It sounds more magic than alum, I kept it as a magic practice.

### **Digression on the elder tree**

It is not unreasonable to wonder what the elder tree can have to do with domestic strife. It is however possible to connect the elder tree to Lithuanian divinities called *kaukai* (one *kaukas*). They are chthonian entities that live in the roots of the elder tree, especially when it grows in group, in the forest. They show up through very inconspicuous signs but if a housewife can read these signs, she will be able to sign a contract with them, by fashioning them a dress (*kaukai* are naked before binding themselves to a home) and regularly providing food. In exchange, the *kaukai* bring something that Greimas does not translate, the *skalsa*. According to his further explanations, we understand that the *skalsa* is a benefit to the whole household. From the material point of view, they do not bring wealth, they however multiply existing wealth. When the *kaukas* "brings a bit of grass, this amounts to a whole cart-load." But this is not the most significant. "Just like the earth, untiring and inexhaustible, out of which he has emerged, the *kaukas* is the manifestation of the constancy of earth's dynamic force."

We see that the *kaukas* is almost explicitly a representative of the chthonian forces, which we address during the apprentices' shamanic journeys. He lives in the roots of the elder tree and sends very discreet signs to these he allows trying to tame him. I jumped over many details relative to the contract between a *kaukas* and a housewife, but they are excessively detailed and the least failure in the contract brings disaster on the household. It is then rejected by the *jarðar megin*, the power of the earth. By this, I connect line 6 and line 11 of s. 137.

As for the bond with the family quarrels, let us notice at first that neither the spelling nor the meaning of *hýrógi* is absolutely sure. A slight variation of meaning in direction of "bad feeling in the household" rather than "strife" makes obvious the *kaukas*' role. Conversely, if we hold to "strife", it is not at all impossible that the Lithuanian myth of the *kaukai* might have slightly changed when crossing the Baltic, a passageway more than a barrier between Lithuania and Scandinavia.

**Reference.** The ideas and the quotations of this paragraph are drawn from: Algirdas J. Greimas, *Of Gods and Men, Studies in Lithuanian mythology*, Indiana Univ. Press, 1992, Chap. 1: *Kaukai*.

### **Comments on the meaning of the stanza**

These lines contain a series of treatment against various diseases. Their commonplace translation obviously will refer to physical diseases (it may also happen that it is meaningless) whereas the magic translation will refer to the various evils that can strike the apprentice in runic magic. For more explanations on the commonplace meaning of these lines, and sometimes for references on their magic use, see below Evans' comments associated with each line of the stanza.

#### **Line 5-7**

*Commonplace meaning:* “Wherever you drink beer, especially if it is brewed with bearded darnel, i. e. poisoned by ergot,” choose the assistance of earth power because earth absorbs poisons (or even: the vomits) .”

The least danger of drinking beer brewed with barley polluted by darnel is to behave as a drunkard. How could this ‘earth power’ cure ergot poisoning is unknown to us. Ingesting clay in order to absorb the poisons is still a well-known ‘old woman’ medication in vegetarian circles. See also the comments of Evans.

*Magic meaning:* “Wherever you drink beer, in order to ingest the magic drink that brings knowledge, select the assistance of earth power because earth absorbs your intoxication.”

To drink great quantities of alcohol is already enough of a poison to require remedy. The magician composing a galdr may choose the ‘drinking way’ and has to, simultaneously, ingest a quite large amount of beer to excite his creativity and to remain cogent enough to compose a coherent galdr. We cannot know exactly what *megín* (power) of earth was this *jarðar*, but I do not believe that it was a potion. It is rather a state of mind, acquired by the assiduous practice of the “out of the body journey” such as Óðinn could practice it when he used his ravens to receive remote information.

### Line 8

*Commonplace meaning:* “but fire absorbs physical and psychological diseases.”

Fire and the hearth, without referring to any magic action, quite simply by their heat, protect you from a number of diseases.

*Magic meaning:* “but fire absorbs the diseases of the soul”

I believe that we find here a kind of opposition between the use of earth power and the one of fire. Earth power is to be used against human aggressive intentions. The one of fire is used against the dangers of Nature. Again, I must reckon that the stanza does not provide anything detailed on the use of these two powers, but this line say that the chthonic forces protect from human ill will and that the force of flames protect from the natural dangers. The objection that ‘fire’ does not protect from accidental fires should take into account the use of backfires, in which flames are opposed to flames i. e. , fire eats up itself.

### Line 9

*Commonplace meaning:* “oak absorbs strong colic.”

See below the references of Evans for the use of the bark of oak against colic.

*Magic meaning:* “oak absorbs excess in the forecasting need.”

The commonplace use does not prevent another use intended for the beginner magicians. It often happens, at least in societies that still acknowledge magic, that oracular trance takes an extremely violent turn, dangerous for the health of the young magician. It is possible that a tea of bark of oak can calms down these crises. I believe that it acts, more generally, as a magic associated trees. Georges Charachidzé provides us with many examples of such apparent ‘madness crises’ taking hold of otherwise healthy spirited persons. His book describes the Georgian *kadag* attested until the middle of the 20th century.

**See:** George Charachidzé, *The religious system of pagan Georgia - structural Analysis of a civilization*, Maspéro, 1968 (in French) .

### Line 10

*Commonplace and magic meaning:* “ear-corn absorbs the (noxious) effect of magic”

As in the other cases, the magic understanding calls upon the magic of ear-corn, i. e. its aspects related to the richness of earth and abundance. For example, rune Jeran can be closely associated to ear-corn.

### **Line 11**

*Commonplace meaning:* “elder tree absorbs family strife.”

Obviously, we do not see how the elder tree can play this role, except in his magical role.

*Magic meaning:* “elder tree absorbs the loss of contact with earth power in a household.”

This translation is inspired by the existence of the Lithuanian *kaukai* which I described above. A household where abundance reigns has less many topics of quarrel than where famine rules, hence the commonplace meaning.

### **Line 12**

*Commonplace and magic meaning:* “deadly fights have to call on moon (heavenly bodies?) power.”

Here is still an indication, unfortunately quite vague, about a kind of magic to be used in fights where warriors’ life (commonplace understanding) and the magicians’ (magic understanding) are at stake. In this case, we have to use the power of the celestial bodies.

Note that a link between elder tree and moon is not obvious, while the opposition of ‘family fights / earth’ and ‘deadly fights / celestial body’ is obvious and links lines 11 and 12.

### **Line 13**

*Commonplace meaning:* “alum absorbs the bites that do not cure.”

See Evans below for the use of alum in medicine of the wounds. I remember a time when men hand shaved with a large razor and treated their cuts with alum. Currently, alum is still used as ‘deodorant’ because it stops sweating.

*Magic meaning:* “use of maggots absorbs the bites that do not cure.”

This use (by using carefully disinfected maggots) seems to come back in fashion because of its extraordinary effectiveness and in spite of its repulsive aspect. It is an extremely old medication that the Germanic wizards probably knew. It is not really irrational, and I classify this treatment within magic because it seems magic that maggots, considered as dirtiness incarnated, could operate cures in desperate cases. The ‘almost true’ magic must have been the magician’s ability in collecting clean maggots.

### **Line 14**

*Commonplace and magic meaning:* “runes absorb curse.”

In this case, the commonplace meaning is incomprehensible.

### **Line 15**

*Commonplace meaning:* “field absorbs the flood (blood?) .”

*Magic meaning:* “countryside herbs decoctions stop the flood of blood”

The two meanings are very close and their difference relates to the one in line 13. The art of the magician was especially due to his/her ability to collect good herbs and to join the effect of good herbs to incantations, perhaps more useful than it is today believed.

## **Evans’ Commentaries**

5 *öl* - probably the reference is not to mere excess in drinking, but to ale poisoned by bearded darnel, *lolium temulentum*, ON *skjaðak* [Recent studies show that darnel is not toxic when not infected by the ergot fungus (*Claviceps purpurea*) . This infection being very frequent, darnel has been looked upon as a vicious herb ... certainly quite often used by sorcerers.] ...

6 *jarðar megin* is also referred to, as one of the ingredients in Grímhildr's drugged potion, ... Codex Regius there actually has *Urðar magni* [dative] but this is doubtless corrupt for *jarðar magni*, [This emendation relates to Guðrúnarkviða in forna. It is accepted by the experts and the modern versions do not give *urðar magni*. I do not see why a magic related to the power of destiny would not have been possible.] which appears in the paraphrase of the lines in Völsunga saga ... and, as *jarðar megin*, in what seems to be a borrowing from that poem in Hyndluljóð 38 and 43. There may well be a specific connection with the so-called *terra sigillata*, cakes of earth rich in iron oxide, stamped with the image of Diana or Christ, exported from Lemnos and recommended (e. g. by Pliny and Galen) as a remedy against poison. This is referred to in the Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany ... Finnur Jónsson queries whether *terra sigillata* was known in the North so early, and thinks the picture is one of over-indulgence in alcohol and consequent vomiting on the earth.

8 *eldr* - Cederschiöld suggests this refers to need-fire [a fire obtained by rubbing a rope on a piece of wood. It has been used in Scotland in order to cure sick sheep.], carried from farm to farm in times of pestilence, a practice widespread in early modern times in Scandinavia, Germany and Gaelic Scotland... thinks the reference is more comprehensive and includes an allusion to the use of glowing iron for cauterization, cleaning of dirty wounds etc. but, as Finnur Jónsson points out, *eldr* can scarcely mean 'glowing iron' [This objection is really shallow: a glowing iron is obviously a kind of fire. The word *eldr* is here to evoke all kind of heat, not to designate one particular kind of fire. In particular, it can be an allusion to warm water springs the warmth of which do heal, even if *eldr* does not mean specifically 'hot spring'.], and also to fumigation for expelling evil spirits; ...

9 *abbindi* occurs elsewhere in ON only in the late fourteenth century ... *Tak oxa gall ok rið um endaparms rauf, þá mun batna við abbindi*. However, ... The word doubtless denotes tenesmus, and is probably borrowed from OE *gebind* in the sense *tenacitas ventris*, *tentigo* which it bears in the Leiden Glossary. This is a symptom of dysentery, against which oak bark and bast are a well-known traditional remedy.

10 *ax* 'ear of corn'. Cederschiöld thought this was senseless and proposed to read *öx* 'axe', with a reference to the custom (known in later Scandinavian folk-tradition) of setting an axe above the door as a protection against sorcery. But this is unnecessary, and also rash in view of the mention of *ax óskorit* as a constituent of Grímhildr's potion in Guðrúnarkviða II 22... shows that there is much evidence from later times in Scandinavia (and elsewhere) of the use of ears of corn to ward off trolls, magic etc. ; he cites ... a custom from Bodin, in north Norway, of affixing eight ears of corn, arranged in a cross, on the door of the cowshed at Christmas-time... ears of corn were also used as supposed remedies for sties, toothache, and other afflictions often believed to emanate from wizards and trolls.

11 *höll við hýrógi* is not satisfactorily explained. The last word, if not corrupt, can only mean 'household strife'. It cannot be said that 'hall' gives any reasonable sense here, though it is taken thus by Sveinbjorn Egilsson, Finnur Jónsson and others ('Dispute between members of the household does not come outside the house, is short-lived') . The ms has *havll*, which could equally well be read as *hauill* 'hernia', but this gives no sense either. The sign *av* can also be read as *ø*; we might suppose then that we have here a word \**høll* (or, better, \**høllr* m. ) 'elder-tree', cognate with Swedish and Norwegian *hyll*, Danish *hyld* (all originally masculine) . This tree is not native to Iceland, and no name for it is certainly known in ON (either or both of the tree-names *hallarr* and *yllir*, ... may possibly be connected, ... the latter means 'elder' in modern Icelandic) . The elder has played a prominent part in folk medicine since classical antiquity; but how is it a remedy for domestic

strife? ... suggests the idea is that this is the 'household tree', residence of domestic spirits who ward off strife and sickness from the home ...

12 *heiptum* - for this word in a rather similar connection cp. Sigdr. 12: *málrúnar skaltu kunna, ef þú vilt at manngi þér heiptum gjaldi harm*. ... thinks the 'hatreds' referred to are the workings of the evil eye, against which moon-shaped amulets were employed in classical antiquity. The moon in fact plays a very small part in Germanic pagan religion...

13 *beiti* is otherwise recorded in ON, once as a *heiti* for 'ship' (plainly irrelevant here) and also as a rare by-form of *beit* 'pasturage'. ... But this scarcely makes sense, and the strophe appears to be concerned with the diseases of men, not of animals. Other suggestions are:

(a) 'beet'; Latin *beta* was borrowed into West Germanic languages at an early date ... proposed that it had also been borrowed into ON and appeared here. Pliny mentions beet as a remedy for snakebite. But its use is unknown in Nordic folk medicine, and the plant itself does not seem to have reached the North until a far later date.

(b) 'alum'; Cederschiöld referred to Germanic verbs meaning 'to tan, to apply chemical liquid in tanning or dyeing', as Swedish *beta*, German *beizen*, Norwegian dialect *beita* etc., the basic sense being 'cause (the acids) to bite'... since alum was commonly used for this purpose in the Middle Ages and has also been employed since antiquity as a remedy for, among other things, wounds...

(c) 'bait' or, more precisely, 'earth-worm'...; elsewhere in ON 'bait' is *beita* f., but *beite* is known as a masculine noun in Norwegian, and in southern Norwegian dialect means 'earth-worm' rather than bait in general. The worm has been employed since ancient times as a remedy for wounds of various sorts and rashes (Pliny XXX 106, 115). The Old English Leechdoms ... recommend worms for dog-bites .... This interpretation of *beiti* is clearly the most plausible.

14 *við bölví rúnar* - for the therapeutic use of runes cp. the references to *bjargrúnar*, *brimrúnar* and *limrúnar* in Sigdr. 9-11...

15 ... takes this line as a proverb.

## Hávamál 138-145

### "The language of runes (Rúnatal) "

#### \*\*\*Hávamál 138\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

I know that I hung  
on the wind gnarled tree (Yggdrasill)  
nine whole nights,  
wounded by a spear  
and given to Óðinn,  
I to me,  
on this tree  
of which nobody knows  
from which roots it rises.

## Explanation of the last lines

The last line must be read as: “From the roots of some (unknown) entity, it stands up.” Instead of “it stands up,” we could also use the metaphor “it flows, it runs upwards.” The usual reading (except Dronke) is “on which roots it grows.” This could be a possible commonplace understanding of this line but it does not respect the more mysterious wording used in the text. This wording raises another question relating to Yggdrasill’s mystic role: the lore speaks of Yggdrasill’s roots and we well know that the roots of our ordinary trees are resting in and on the ground. Upon what are Yggdrasill’s roots resting? Nobody knows the answer.

This helps understanding the form *hvers* (genitive of ‘what?’, that I put in bold in the Old Norse version) . Modern experts qualify it as “not very clear” (see Evans below) and they vainly tried to emend it.

## ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

138.

<i>Veit ek, at ek hekk</i>	Know I, that I hung
<i>vindgameiði á</i>	windy-pole-tree on
<i>nætr allar níu,</i>	nights all nine,
<i>geiri undaðr</i>	by a spear wounded
<i>ok gefinn Óðni,</i>	and given to Óðinn,
<i>sjalfur sjalfum mér,</i>	self to self mine,
<i>á þeim meiði.</i>	on it pole-tree.
<i>er manngi veit</i>	which nobody knows
<b><i>hvers</i></b> <i>af rótum renn.</i>	of which from roots it grows.

## Bellows’ translation

*(Bellows’ 139. He introduced here as ‘his’ 138, ‘our’ 165. From now on his numbering = ours + 1. For instance, in the note below ‘stanza 139 is ‘our’ 138, but his s. 104 is still our 104. )*

I ween that I hung | on the windy tree,  
Hung there for nights full nine;  
With the spear I was wounded, | and offered I was  
To Othin, myself to myself,  
On the tree that none | may ever know  
What root beneath it runs.

[Bellows’ note 139: With this stanza begins the most confusing part of the *Hovamol*: the group of eight stanzas leading up to the Ljóthatal, or list of charms. Certain paper manuscripts have before this stanza a title: “Othin’s Tale of the Runes.” Apparently stanzas 139, 140 and 142 are fragments of an account of how Othin obtained the runes; 141 is erroneously inserted from some version of the magic mead story (cf. stanzas 104-110) ; and stanzas 143, 144, 145, and 146 are from miscellaneous sources, all, however, dealing with the general subject of runes ...] **[The understanding of these stanzas, as given by Evans in his introduction, though it stays purely academic, does not show the same systematic scorn for our poem. See s. 139 introduction, below, which provides a part of this introduction.]**

## Special commentary on verb *gefa*

I obviously deal here with *gefa* in the context of 138, but these comments we will also be useful in stanza 157 relative to Óðinn’s relations with the hanged ones.

The verb *gefa* does its past participle in *gefinn*, it means ‘to give, allow, pay, allot’. It is however important to better analyze its meaning in view of understanding what mean Óðinn when he states that he has been “given to himself.”

The expression *gefa saman* (‘to give together’) describes a betrothal, that is, a kind of ‘self giving’ to someone else. The idea of a sacrifice is totally absent here, except in an over pessimistic view of marital life.

To be exhausted is *uppgefinn* and to give up is expressed by *gefa upp*.

To be a devoted or excessively pious person on a spiritual path is expressed by *gefinn*.

A fertile ground is said to be ‘given to grass’: *fat-gefinn*.

A socially inferior person is known as ‘given below’, *undir-gefinn*.

Something or someone who is not given is said to be ‘non-given’, *úgefinn*. For instance, a free, unmarried woman is known as ‘non-given’, *úgefinn*. This negation is quite noticeable since people who understand *gefinn* as ‘sacrificed’ would never imagine that a free woman can be called ‘non sacrificed’ especially in the case of Scandinavian civilization or, perhaps, excessive feminism.

As you see the uses of *gefa* and *gefinn* do not include the concept of sacrifice. We cannot say that Óðinn is ‘sacrificed to himself’: he has been **offered** to himself.

### Commentary on the vocabulary, except *gefa*

The verb *vita*, *veit* in its first person singular indicative present, means ‘to be conscious, to learn, to know, to see’. The compound ‘*vita á*’ (to see on) means ‘to forebode’.

The verb *hanga*, *hék* (here spelled *hekk*) in its preterit first person singular, means ‘to hang, to be hanged’. The meaning ‘I have been killed’ is thus perfectly possible here, though it is certainly understood in a mystical sense.

The noun *vindgameiði* = *vindga-meði* = *vindugr-meðr* = *windy-pole*. C-V insists that “the word (*meðr*) can never be used of a living tree.” For once, de Vries does not seem so reliable here since he refers to Alt Hoch Deutsch *meit*, meaning, he says, ‘*baum*’ while the AHD dictionaries give to *meit* the same meaning as Old Norse *meiða*, ‘to hack, to cut’, never ‘*baum*’. Finally, Lex. Poet. gives also ‘*arbor* (tree)’ often used for speaking of Yggdrasill, which we hope to be still a living tree.

All this hints at a primitive meaning of *meðr* being more related to the hacking of the tree than to a living tree, as C-V notices. It may also well be that this ‘windy-pole’ refers more to a wind- gnarled tree than to a simple pole. Moreover, Yggdrasill is not a tree living in this world and he is described as being ‘hacked at’ by several animals. The better translation for *vindgameiðr* seems to me to be: “wind-gnarled Yggdrasill.”

The word *undaðr* has the regular form of the past participle of a verb *unda* given only by Vries ‘*verwunden* (to wound)’ while C-V and Lex. poet. gives only *undaðr* ‘wounded’. I thus suppose that the verb *unda* is not used as Old Norse apart from its past participle. Note that Óðinn says that he “is wounded,” and not “struck, stabbed, gashed.” These last meanings suggest a specific actor to execute the wounding while “wounded” is more centered on the state of the wounded one.

The pronoun *hvers* is the masculine or neutral genitive interrogative pronoun ‘who, what?’, it thus means here ‘whose?’ or ‘of what?’.

The expression *af rótum* combines the preposition *af* and the noun *rót*, here in the dative plural, *rótum*. *Af* is always followed by a dative and generally indicates a movement from the outside of the thing in the dative case. The English translations easily return it by “*from roots*” except Bellows who translates *af* by “*beneath*.”

The verb *renna* means ‘to run, to rise (for a thing and a plant), to run (for a river)’.

## Digression on Yggdrasil

At first, note that the name of the world tree is written neither *Yggdrasil* (with a ‘long y’) nor *Yggdrasil* (with only one ‘l’) in Old Norse. I thus give you here a not very current but exact spelling.

It is composed of *ygg* and *drasil*. The word *drasil* (or *drösull*) means ‘horse’ in poetry. The word *ygg* is not present in C-V who provides only *ygr* (fierce), hence a possible spelling with a *Y*, but it contradicts the experts’ opinion. Lex. Poet. and de Vries give three meanings for this word. As an adjective, it means ‘*terribilis*, vel potius *suspectus*, *malefidus* (terrible, or even suspect, rather unreliable)’. As a substantive, it means Óðinn, and properly ‘*ygr* (fierce)’ and also ‘*metuandus*, *terribilis* (the frightening one, the terrible one)’ and in de Vries: ‘*furcht*, (fear, terror)’.

No myth describes Yggdrasil’s creation. Some suppose that it existed for ever, which contradicts too much our cosmogony to be acceptable. I thus have ‘invented’ a version of the creation of Yggdrasil which is not pure imagination. It is based on the names, Burr (or Borr) and Bestla, of the couple of the gods of the second generation, therefore the parents of Óðinn, Vili and Vé. Except their kin, this couple of primitive gods disappeared almost completely from our mythology.

### Meaning of the words ‘burr’, ‘borr’ and ‘börr’

In C-V, de Vries and Lex. Poet. the word *burr* means ‘son’. In C-V and de Vries, the word *borr* means ‘digger’ and C-V says that it is less correct form of *börr*. Lex. Poet. gives two meanings to *borr*: ‘*ligni genus* (kind of tree)’ and ‘*filius* (son)’, and notes it as identical to *burr*.

Lastly, C-V and de Vries give to the word *börr* the meaning ‘a kind of tree, a son’. Lex. Poet. gives also to *börr* the meaning of ‘*ligni genus*’ but not the meaning of ‘son’: Börr is presented only as Óðinn’s father, this name is the same as Burr or Borr.

We thus see that the words *burr*, *borr* and *börr* intermingle their meanings and the ones of ‘son’ and ‘kind of tree’. That the first god, Buri (or Búri) has as a son named indifferently Son or Tree already drives us to conceive a possible the bond between this son-tree and Yggdrasil.

### Meaning of the word ‘bestla’

The three dictionaries give no more than describing Bestla as Óðinn’s mother and Bölthorn’s daughter (as we will see it when studying 145). De Vries gives the etymology of her name as being disputable but, in addition, he places it in the list of the words connected to *bast*. This last word can mean a bond, as in modern German, and also the internal layer of the bark of the lime in which the sap moves up.

Thus, without obtaining an undeniable proof, we can find very strong bonds between Burr, Bestla and the tree. This is why I suggest reinventing a myth, which would have been lost, and according to which the father and the mother of our gods would transform themselves into a cosmic tree, our Yggdrasil.

## Comment on the meaning

It seems to me important to understand that this stanza describes four ‘heroes’.

### The ‘main heroes’

The two main ones are Óðinn and Yggdrasil and the two secondary ones are the spear and the runes. Óðinn’s wording: *sjalfur sjalfum mér* impressed everyone and above all



Christians who recognized a similarity with the fate of their Christ, with the difference that theirs sacrificed himself for them, at least so they believe, while ours sacrificed himself for himself, at least so we believe. Notice also that the stanza contains nine lines, five devoted to Óðinn and four to Yggdrasill,

Óðinn has not been hung to any ordinary post-tree, but to one grounded on an unfathomable mystery (a *hvert*, a ‘what?’ as he says) whose collaboration was necessary for him to grasp the runes and their meaning.

Óðinn became the god of hanged ones and we naturally tend to represent him as hung in Yggdrasill in the same way. He could be hung by the neck or the feet, and both forms of ordeal have some historical existence. Here, I would tend to rather see a form of the Siberian habit to let the corpses rot on an open air platform, before burying their skeleton \*. This gives weight to Oleus Magnus’ remarks\*\*, whose testimony going back to 1555 is often summarily rejected by the scholars.

“... in order that their kings and princes should become gods or be raised up among the deities, many nations burned their dead bodies with fire or suspended them with solemn rites in the forests and groves by a golden neck-chain...”

“... the man whom chance had presented for immolation was plunged alive into a spring of water ... if he quickly breathed his last (sic) , the priests proclaimed that the votive offering had been auspicious, soon carried him off from there into a nearby grove and hung him up, asserting that he had been transported in the assembly of the gods”

Some person’s flesh rotting in open air has been thus known for being the ‘royal’ way towards divinity.

All considered, three assumptions on what exactly is ‘to be hanged’ are equally probable. One is the fact of being hanged (by the neck) , the second, if the subject is hung by the feet, it amounts to an inversion of normality \*\*\* and the third is related to the fact that their flesh rots in the open air on the gallows. Because of the way Siberian people deals with its dead ones, I prefer the third assumption and my vision of Óðinn ‘hanged on Yggdrasill’ is the one of a body tied to the tree lying **upon** its limbs, and left rotting in the open air (note the ‘**on**’ (*á meiddi*) that, in spite of the present English use of ‘to hang on’, may point at a body hanged **in** the tree or **to** the tree, or even **lying upon** it).

[A note on ‘hanged on’. The English language uses the expression “to hang on the gallows” in order to point at a body hanging ‘at’ the gallows. This suggests that the same occurred in Old Norse, which seriously hampers my argument. Now, let us not etymologize from a modern to an ancient language! It is quite probable that this way of speech is inherited from the Old Norse language and could thus can have found its source in the sacrificial way of describing as ‘hanged on’ bodies ‘tied to’ or ‘hooked in’ a tree.]

Note also that, in the majority of civilizations, the hung ones are left to rot on the spot, “as a warning,” says the rational explanation. Anyhow, the fact of letting rot the corpse in the open air was still in use, even when hanging became a chastisement.

We must now await new information given by stanza 158 to be able to start again this discussion. It is however clear for me that the present stanza suggests the possibility that Óðinn was not hung by the neck but rather hooked, fastened or settled in some way in Yggdrasill’s limbs.

\* For more details, consult archaeological work carried out on the Siberian tombs. See for instance, in French, Éric Crubézy and Anatoly Alexeev, *Chamane*, Errance 2007. Note that the maid-shaman who

provided the title of their book is an exception; she had been mummified and preserved by the cold in the permafrost.

\*\* I use Foote's excellent edition: P. G Foote, *Oleus Magnus*, Hakluyt Society, 1996-1998. The sentences quoted here are in book 3, chapters 1 and 7.

\*\*\* See Jere Fleck, "Óðinn 'Self-Sacrifice - A New Interpretation: I: The Ritual Inversion.'" in *Scandinavian Studies*, 1971, vol. 43, N 2, pp. 119-42.

The second 'hero', is a 'windy' *meiðr* (a post, a beam) twice named in this stanza. This cannot be due to a poetic technique intended to respect alliterations and the stanza is thus built around this word. This hints at two ideas. One is the vision of these trees growing in the mountain or the seashore that are twisted by the wind. They offer a view evoking suffering, but they actually thrive in this harsh environment. The other is the one of a beautiful cut tree, the trunk of which has been used to make a mast or a beam. Yggdrasill carries the image of all, with this difference which it has not been 'cut' but put in place as being the axis of the universe by colossal forces which exceed our imagination.

We do not know upon which others 'roots' its roots are based. The modern language uses words that explain very little but what they mean can be measured thanks to Newton's mathematical discoveries, and we call them 'gravitation forces'. They also abundantly feed the mania of astrophysicists in need of advertisement. It is however outstanding that our mythology is aware of the need for an unimaginable force, which defines what is up and down for mankind. We will see here that the Germanic civilization was, just like many other primitive civilizations, one based on the worship of several natural forces, among which the tree. Besides, the eight runes of the second family give us a kind of list of the paramount forces that is summarized by Hail and Sun (Hagala and Sowelo) , Need and Wild Animals (Naudiz and Algiz) , Ice and Storm (Isaz and Pertho) , Buddings and Tree (Jeran and Ihwaz) .

#### *The 'secondary heroes': spear and runes*

We are unable, at present, to guess which hand held the spear nor in what way Óðinn's wound has been enacted. It is also possible to believe that he wounded himself, so that "blood could run" thus offering a kind of spiritual food to the tree, him to whom (cp. 139) no food nor drink is offered. This spear is a symbol of his warlike abilities and it is plausible that he would choose it to cause his wound, an attitude shared by thousands of mystics in search of illumination, including many Heathens and Christians, all agreeing on this topic. You will find in s. 157 commentaries a detailed note explaining why being wounded by a spear is important to make the difference between 'offered' instead of 'sacrificed' to Óðinn. It explains the importance that Óðinn would have been self wounded by a spear.

Following further the idea that the "blood ran," it did 'ran downwards' to the mystical substance equivalent, in the otherworld, to our ordinary ground. The following stanza will say that Óðinn "looked downwards" in order to "take-understand- learn the runes upwards." We do catch the idea of a move in the opposite direction to that of the running blood. Óðinn stands in a middle position, neither chthonian nor really heavenly. He is able to collect the runes on the ground under him, where his blood met the ground and he goes down (the 'going down' is more relevant than any details explaining how this move was carried out) to collect the runes, which are thus indeed of a chthonian nature: they get out of the ground to be offered to Óðinn, as a result and reward for his suffering and the gift of his blood.

#### **Evans' Commentaries**

138.

2 *vindga* - an adj. *vindugr* (evidently ‘wind-blown’ here) is otherwise known only in modern Icelandic, but there is nothing suspect about it; the elaborate objections of ...are over-nice.

7-9 bear a strong resemblance to Fjölsvinnsmál 20: *Mímameiðr hann heitir / en þat manngi veit / af hverjum rótum renn*; some scholars ... hold that they are borrowed thence. *Hvers* should perhaps be emended to *hverjum*, for as it stands it is obscure; Finnur Jónsson thinks *trés* [of the tree] is to be understood [i. e. *hvers* stands for *trés*] (which would be, as he says, ‘completely illogical’), ... understands *kyns* [of the wonder or of the kindred].

### \*\*\*Hávamál 139\*\*\*

#### Evans’s introduction to 139-141

“Why did Óðinn hang fasting on the tree in this way? The reasons are supplied in 139-141. These strophes evidently describe his acquisition of occult wisdom through self-imposed ascetic disciplines: rapt into an ecstatic trance, he wins insight into the hidden depths of nature and attains mastery of runes and poetry. The underlying notion is that self-imposed privations and torments will, if continued long enough, induce an exalted visionary state in which the seer transcends the mundane limits of time and space and is granted a revelation of the hidden secrets of the universe... It is probable that such mortifications were thought to bring the seer to the critical border between life and death, or perhaps to take him, by means of his own symbolic death, right into the world of the dead. This was where occult wisdom was to be acquired: in *Vafþrúðnismál* 43 the giant Vafþrúðnir explains that he learnt all the fates of the gods, the secrets of the giants and of all the gods, in his journeyings through the ‘nine worlds’ of the underworld inhabited by the dead and, as we have already noticed, Óðinn is stated to have been able to arouse the hanged and converse with them, doubtless to learn their secrets; some lines by the poet Bjarni Kolbeinsson seem to imply a legend that Óðinn acquired the art of poetry in this way: *öllungis namk eigi Yggjar feng und hanga*: I did not learn the art of poetry beneath a hanged man’ (implying that somebody else (Óðinn?) [or anyone else] did), *Jómvíkinga drápa* 2 (Skjaldedigtning B. II p. 1).”

[The literal translation of this line is: *quite learned-I not* (I did not learn at all) *Yggr*’s (Óðins) *prey* (mead of poetry) *underneath* (followed by acc. when denoting motion, this means ‘by going under’) *hanging-corpses* (acc. plur. ). This line unambiguously states that the art of poetry might be learned under the hanged corpses. This line reveals some secret behaviour among Óðinn’s disciples, not of Óðinn himself, as suggested by Evans. Note also that Barni was a bishop and he would certainly negate his involvement in such hateful Heathen practices!]

#### A translation as literal as possible

With a loaf to comfort me  
nor with a drinking-horn,  
I peered down,  
I took up the runes,  
shrieking I took them,  
I thereafter fell again.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

139.

*Við hleifi mik sældu*

With a loaf to me comfort

<i>né við hornigi,</i>	nor with drinking-horn,
<i>nýsta ek niðr,</i>	peered I down,
<i>nam ek upp rúnar,</i>	took I up the runes,
<i>æpandi nam,</i>	shrieking I took,
<i>fell ek aftr þaðan.</i>	fell I again from there/after.

### Bellows' translation

None made me happy | with loaf or horn,  
 And there below I looked;  
 I took up the runes, | shrieking I took them,  
 And forthwith back I fell.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The verb *nema* means ‘to catch, take, learn’. Its meaning is similar to ‘to catch’ in English: “I caught the runes” i. e. “I caught them and learned (understood) them.” The expression *nema upp* is used to describe the movement from the bottom to the top done when we collect something from the ground.

The verb *æpa* means ‘to shout, to howl’. It is given in the form *æpa* by de Vries, with the same meaning. The form *æpandi* is the one of a present participle which can qualify ‘ek’ i. e. a nominative singular. One of the serious supporters (Fleck, cited above) of Óðinn hanging by the feet supposes an emendation to *æpanda* so that it could qualify the runes, *rúnar*, (*rún* holds the feminine gender, their proposal would be significant if it had the masculine gender) which is the plural feminine accusative here. Since the regular declension of the plural feminine accusative of *æpandi* is still *æpandi*, this emendation just confuses the issue. Indeed, *æpandi* could qualify (shrieking) runes from a purely grammatical point of view.

The adverb *aptr* or *aftr* means ‘again, behind’.

The adverb *þaðan* means ‘from there, from now on’.

### Comment on the meaning

This stanza provides some new detail on how Óðinn acquired runic knowledge. After nine days fast, his initiation-torment finally ended. He then looked downwards and collected the runes by heaving them to him, ‘upwards’. This description cannot agree with the prosaic description of a person hung by the neck and it is therefore used by those who support that he was hung by the feet.

As told earlier, it is not necessary to modify the text for reading that the runes have been the shrieking hero, an interpretation that pushes to its extreme the parallel between the runes and the mandrake root, that are ‘well-known’ for growing under hanged ones and that are supposed to howl when they are torn off. That the runes might be ‘shrieking’ is not confirmed elsewhere in our mythology, while Óðinn is presented several times as an intense speaker as some of his names show, for example, Göllni and Göllungr (the howler) or Thundr (the thundering). This is why it seems much less probable to me that runes might be howling than Óðinn does ... of pain, triumph, relief, he had no lack of causes for shouting.

### Evans' Commentaries

If this strophe is taken to be in *ljóðaháttur*, the last line lacks alliteration, and ... emended *patan* ... to *ofan*. But the strophe is in fact clearly in *fornyrðislag* ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 140\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Nine powerful songs  
I caught coming from the famous son  
of Bölþorn (Bad-thorn) , Bestla's father,  
and I obtained a full mouthful of the precious hydromel  
versed-sprinkled from Spirit-stirrer.

#### Prose explanation

*Prosaic point of view.*

Bölþorn's famous son offered me nine powerful songs. He was the father of Bestla, my mother and I could drink a mouthful of the invaluable hydromel poured from Óðrœrir [that made of me a gifted poet].

[Remember that in the 'Digression on Yggdrasill', s. 138, I explained the meaning of the names of Burr and Bestla and their link with Yggdrasill.]

*Mystical meaning.*

For better explaining the use of the runes, I must now tell you some details of my birth.

I was born from Bestla, whose father was a giant called Badthorn who owned a very powerful and aggressive magic. According to the antique tradition, I was sprinkled of liquid soon after my birth and my family named me Óðinn, the furious one. In my case, the liquid with which I was sprinkled was the one contained in the vase Spirit-stirrer and my intelligence woke up.

My maternal uncle took care of me and gave me, as a birth gift, nine songs that belong to giants' magic and that enable me to combine the runes to exploit their magic.

You will see soon that I present to you, 18 magic songs that complete the 9 ones that the famous brother of my mother offered to me.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

140.

*Fimbulljóð níu  
nam ek af inum frægja syni  
Bölþorns, Bestlu föður,  
ok ek drykk of gat  
ins dýra mjaðar,  
ausin Óðreri.*

Mighty 'songs nine  
grasped I 'after' him-the famous son  
of Balethorn, Bestla's father;  
and I a draught got  
of him-the precious mead,  
sprinkled (or poured out) from Óðrœrir.

#### Bellows' translation

Nine mighty songs | I got from the son  
Of Bolthorn, Bestla's father;  
And a drink I got | of the goodly mead  
Poured out from Othrörir.

[Bellows' note 141. This stanza, interrupting as it does the account of Othin's winning the runes, appears to be an interpolation. The meaning of the stanza is most obscure.] **[Obscure and untimely, Belows is quite right to judge this strophe in this way, at least in its common sense version, the only one he accepts to notice.]**

### Commentary on the vocabulary

*Bölþorn* means *Bölþorn* = Bad-thorn.

The verb *ausa*, here *ausinn* in the past participle, means 'to sprinkle'. This verb can be used to indicate prosaic actions, like 'to cover (dust)', but it has also a ceremonial tinge. The children were "sprinkled with water" then named by their parents in pagan times. It was a family-only ceremony. We do not know any further detail about it, but it probably was the ceremony by which the child was accepted in the family, and became exposed to the duties and rights of free person. In Roman antiquity, the ceremony of purification by water was done on adults by a magistrate, and was called a lustration. In the Christian culture, that looks much like baptism, it is thus necessary to distinguish this 'Germanic Heathen sprinkling' from Roman lustration and of Christian baptism. This why I propose you to simply call it a *sprinkling* since the sagas say: "the child was sprinkled with water."

The vessel containing the hydromel of poetry is called Óðrœrir (here spelled Óðrerir). It does Óðroeri in the accusative and the dative, here undoubtedly a dative. This name is made of *óðr-hrœrir* = 'intelligence-stirrer'. [Recall that *óðr* as a substantive means 'intelligence, spirit'. As an adjective, it means 'furious' – in our context, 'furious' and 'clever do not oppose as it does now, because we took the habit to confuse anger and furor.].

### Comment on the meaning

This stanza seems, as noticed the experts, is a little out of context. In my "prose explanation," you could see that I explain this shift by a kind of side-remark on Óðinn feeling the need of bringing some details on the circumstances of his sprinkling at birth. This assumption supposes that Óðrœrir existed before Óðinn's birth, i. e. there has been a primitive Óðrœrir or, in order to reconcile all versions of our mythology, that Auðumla's milk is called here Óðrœrir because its magic properties.

Óðinn's uncle was in charge of his education and gave him 'knowledge', i. e. magic. This confirms the well-known importance of mothers' brothers in ancient Germanic civilization. These nine songs originate from giants' knowledge, often qualified as "very knowledgeable" in the Eddas. We will see in stanza 143 that the giant who brought the knowledge of the runes to his people is named Ásviðr (one of the Æsir's Tree) what obviously refers to Yggdrasill, and which thus seems a good candidate to name Óðinn's uncle.

Stanza 143 is also often said to be disconnected from the others stanzas, which we just shown being false, in our '*Mystical meaning*' above. This shows us that the major coherence of Rúnatal is observable only through a magical understanding of the poem.

Again in my 'Prose explanation', I consider this stanza as an announcement of the eighteen songs that Óðinn will deliver in the last stanzas of the poem: it brings coherence between Rúnatal and Ljóðatal.

## Evans' Commentaries

140

3 *Bestla* was Óðinn's mother. ... Her father's name is given as *Bölþorn* (sic) in Snorri's Prose Edda. Who his son (i. e. Óðinn's uncle) was is not recorded.

6 *ausinn Óðrerir* is difficult. *Ausa* commonly means 'sprinkle', with the dative of that which is sprinkled (e. g. *ausa barn vatni*) [to sprinkle the baby (acc. ) with water (dat. )] [... and its masculine nominative and accusative declension is *ausinn*, all other declension cases are different.]. We might therefore take *ausinn* here as nominative to agree with *ek*, and *Óðrerir* as referring to the mead itself (as apparently in 107) . ...[we] are then obliged to explain *ausinn* as 'moistened (internally) '. This seems implausible, but the only alternative is to take *ausinn* as accusative modifying *drykk*, giving the sense 'ladled from (the vessel) *Óðrerir*' (so Finnur Jónsson) . Such an ablative construction with *ausa* cannot be paralleled. [... maybe not paralleled, though making perfect sense. My own reaction has been to see here an impersonal construction ... as English "I have been sprinkled by using Óðrerir," by keeping together both *ausinn* meanings: sprinkled and poured.]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 141\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

I then became fertile  
and was full of knowledge  
and grew and well throve,  
a word, out of my speech,  
looked for another word,  
a deed, out of my deeds,  
looked for another deed.

#### Prose explanation

It should be understood that "each of my words/deeds looked into my words/deeds for helping my words/deeds." This sought is better understood in its negative version: "None of my words/deeds blocked my word/deed by other words/deeds, on the contrary they helped each other."

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

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 became I fertile  
and full of knowledge was  
and grew and well throve,  
a word out of my word  
a word looked for help  
a deed out of my deed  
a deed looked for help.

### Bellows' translation

Then began I to thrive, | and wisdom to get,  
I grew and well I was;  
Each word led me on | to another word,  
Each deed to another deed.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The verb *frjóva*, here in the form *fræva*, means 'to bloom' and its reflexive form means 'to be fertile'.

The regular preterit form of *leita* is *leitaði*: 'he sought'. It is followed by a genitive thus *orð leitaði orðs*, means 'a word sought a word'. Metaphorically, its meaning is 'to seek help'.

### Comment on the meaning

The most prosaic way to interpret these two lines is to understand the obvious, i. e. that words and the actions used in the past decide of words and actions to come. But it is nevertheless necessary to take into account two more facts. Firstly, Óðinn declares in the first lines of 141 that he acquired this capacity on words and actions while becoming creative. Secondly, the word *orð* (word) tardily only took its grammatical meaning. This word has been used a long time as an opinion expressed by a short sentence as the English Word of Wisdom. We can thus understand how Óðinn became able to invent new ways of describing and to act on his surroundings starting from previous knowledge.

This is a form of 'active conscience' where the words themselves act on other words to create a new 'conscience' starting from these new words. Of course, the 'thirst for knowledge' of of s. 63 is also an important factor.

This stanza is a direct continuation of 140 since it explains how Óðinn, as a baby, grew after having received his sprinkling and his uncle's birth gift.

Thus, stanza 141 explains how Óðinn obtained a harmonious destiny, according to which his spirit is fertile and his life is prosperous. The 'recipe' is given by the four last lines: if your deeds and words intermingle in a harmonious evolution, without ever being hampering each other, you then deserve a harmonious destiny, as the one described in the three first lines. The way in which these two capacities operate and are laid out determines the chaotic destinies - known as unhappy - and the harmonious ones - known as happy.

This stanza also put under a new light stanzas 17 and 18 of *Völuspá* which show a seldom discussed mystery.

In *Völuspá* 17, when the gods find Ask and Embla, and before they give them life, these two are described as being *litt megandi* and *ørlöglausa*.

The verb *mega* (here with the participle present, means 'to have strength to do' (C-V), 'vermögen (to be able to make)' (de Vries) and 'posse (to be able of)' (Lex. Poet.). Its present participle, *megandi* took current meaning of 'powerful, strong' but as you see it in the meanings given by the dictionaries, it would be returned better, in the old texts, by 'having capacity of acting'. The adverb *litt* means 'little' with a rather pejorative nuance of 'unable of'. We will thus translate *litt megandi* by 'unable to act'.

The word *ørlag* means (de Vries) 'closure, end' and its plural, *ørlög*, take the meaning of 'destiny, death, combat'. Lex. Poet. provides only the meaning 'fata (destinies)'. To be



*ørlöglaus* thus means primarily to be without destiny [The Norns, and specially the one called *Urðr*, is are in charge of the *ørlög* of the world. Her name, in the Anglo-Saxon world, was used, and still is again, to speak of *ørlög*. Anglo-Saxon *wyrd* is called *urðr* in Old Norse.] When the gods bring life and humanity to Ask and Embla, as described in stanza 18, none of their gifts explicitly comprises neither *megin* nor *ørlög*. They give them *önd*, *óðr* and *lá*: breath, intelligence and sea (= blood in poetry) . Breath is associated to speech and intelligence, and blood to activity. It follows that humankind holds the tools necessary to build itself a way of acting and speaking, hence a destiny, in agreement with the way in which Óðinn builds his destiny in stanza 141.

## Understanding *sjalfr sjalfum mér Óðinn's* wisdom

In order to better understand what is Óðinn's wisdom, we cannot not make do with a stanza alone, we need to consider several stanzas together. All these stanzas show the common feature of being somewhat obscure for a modern reader.

I give below the part of the stanza strong point in Norse and in English. It might be judicious to read in parallel the comments in <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/IntroNewHavamalEng.htm> .

Óðinn's wisdom is exposed through the use of four recommendations given in various Hávamál stanzas. I called them:

**Rules of active thinking,  
Unwise thinking,  
Rules of contractual friendship (and Óðinn is  
humankind's 'contractual friend')  
Rule of active faith**

### Rules of active thinking

Stanza 18. *sá er vitandi er vits* (who is being conscious of [or towards] mindfulness) . Note: 'towards' takes into account an implicit '*til*' governing '*vits*' genitive. This describes an individual who has a solid experience of life.

It hints at introspection during which an individual explores his/her own conscience.

Stanza 63. *Fregna ok segja [ sá er vill heitinn horsk ]* (to question and tell [who wants to be called wise]) .

He/she is aware of his/her knowledge he/she knows (and will say it to other people) and of the one he/she ignores (and ask about it to other people) .

Stanza 141. *orð (verk) mér af orði (verki) orðs (verks) leitaði* (a word (action) , out of my word (and action) sought a word (and action) ) .

He/she can listen to and understand his/her words and actions. His/her understanding leads him/her to seek and find new words and actions.

### Unwise thinking

Stanza 27. *veit-a maðr hinn er vettki veit* (This person does not know that he/she knows nothing) .

A kind of opposite to s. 18 statement: he/she has been unable to use his/her conscience to grasp that he/she knows nothing.

Stanza 28. *er fregna kann ok segja it sama* (who can together question and say) .

A kind of opposite to s. 63 statement. In 28, it carries a lot of irony since who does together questions and the answers but no one believes his/her words and he/she is not conscious of it.

### Rules of contractual friendship

Note: the concept of purely sentimental friendship does not exist in Hávamál: Two ‘friends’ are also linked by a contract, they friends and allies. This is why I will call them ‘contractual friends’ abbreviated in c-friend when it becomes too heavy.

Stanza 43. *Vin sínum skal maðr vinr vera, þeim ok þess vin; ... en óvinar síns engi vinar vinr vera.* (Of his/her c-friend will be a human c-friend be, and of his/her c-friend... but of his non-c-friend, he/she should not be the c-friend of a c-friend.)

This regulates in a quasi mathematical way what is c-friendship: the c-friend of my c-friend must also be my c-friend. The c-friend of my c-friend, though, cannot be my enemy (otherwise c-friendship collapses) . This is called in mathematics a transitivity relationship.

Stanza 41. *viðurgjafendr ok endrgjafendr* (giving back and giving again) .

This rule defining a lasting c-friendship. He/she gives in return of a gift and does not hesitate to give several times to his/her c-friends.

And Óðinn is humankind’s ‘contractual friend’: Stanza 111. *sá ek ok þagðak, sá ek ok hugðak, hlýdda ek á manna mál* (I saw and I was quiet, I saw and I thought, I listened to human speech) .

This stanza is linked to 63. According to my interpretation (opposed to the academics’ one) Óðinn listens to humankind. He is wise thus he knows when he must speak. He also knows how to ask by silently listening. And, as supervisor, here comes stanza 138: “*gefinn Óðni, sjalfr sjalfum mér*” (given [offered] to Óðinn, me to myself)

### Rule of active faith

We recognize here a formulation *à la* ‘*vitandi er vits*’ where the central individual is the object of his/her own attention and actions. What this twisted formula may mean? In the context of a Christocentric civilization, we will immediately recognize the Christian mystics who offered themselves to Christ and, why not, an “obvious Christian influence.” But the Viking and pre-Viking civilization lives with an ancestors’ religion the base of which is an euhemerization, i.e. in which the gods are particularly famous ancestors. ‘My’ gods are kinds of grand... grand grand parents as my own grand parents have been for me. Why should I be offered to them? In addition, and even for those who remain Christocentric, the rules suggested by Óðinn in the stanzas quoted above are more of the nature of a friendly advice than of an imposed obligation. This is why, even then should understand that stanza 138 provides a paramount rule to ‘catch’ the runes, and catching the runes is the first step in direction of the Old Norse faith. They tell us: “My far away grand... grand son or daughter, in order to catch the runes you need enough faith in yourself to become able to offer you to yourself. If you do not see at once what that means, you will have to devote your understanding to it, and never forget that you need c-friends to hold on during your search.”

This faith is active because “to be offered to oneself” is an action which can be carried out over years and which uses the rules of active conscience defined in s. 18. It differs from a more passive faith that has been revealed by a kind of miracle and not obtained by an obstinate work.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 142\*\*\*

#### Prose explanation

[The translation below, into which I introduced the various possible meanings of each polysemous word, requests a comment, but no particular explanation.]

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

142.

*Rúnar munt þú finna  
ok ráðna staði,  
mjök stóra staði,  
mjök stinna staði,  
er fáði fimbulpulr  
ok gerðu ginnregin  
ok reist Hroptr rögn.*

Runes will you meet/discover/perceive  
and the meaningful ‘carved runes’,  
very powerful/ruthless ‘carved runes’,  
very strong/stiff ‘carved runes’,  
that painted/got the wise high-storyteller  
that made/set up the higher creative-powers  
and that scratched/hacked the Hroptr of powers/gods.  
[*Hroptr* = ‘messenger of unsaid truth’, a name classically used for Óðinn.]

#### Bellows’ translation

Runes shalt thou find, | and fateful signs,  
That the king of singers colored,  
And the mighty gods have made;  
Full strong the signs, | full mighty the signs  
That the ruler of gods doth write.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

The verb *ráða* means ‘to advise, consult, determine, rule, explain, punish’. Its past participle, *ráðinn*, usually takes the meaning of ‘determined, resolved’ and does its plural masculine accusative in *ráðna*.

The word *stafr* has already been met and explained in stanzas 8, 29 and 52 where the translators display boundless ingenuity to avoid translating it by referring to magic. Here, magic is too much indisputable to be hidden to the readers, even by translating *stafr* by ‘sign, table, symbol, stick’. I thus translate it by ‘runes carved on a stick’ with the short form ‘carved runes’.

The verb *fá* gives *fáði* in its third singular person of the preterit. As usual, multiple meanings are allotted to it, see the comments on the vocabulary of stanzas 6, 25, 33, 59, 116, 117. Here, its two main meanings: ‘to paint’ and ‘to obtain’ are completely compatible. See also Evans’ comments below.

The verb *göra* does *gerðu* in its third plural person of the preterit. It means ‘to make’, ‘to prepare’, ‘to make ready’.

The verb *rísta* does *reist* in its preterit third singular person. It means ‘to cut, slash, carve’.

The two plural words ‘*regin*’ and ‘*rögn*’ are very close, both mean ‘the gods’ in a Christian context. The experts notice that they do not have identical meanings, at least in the nominative and the accusative, since they are absolutely identical in the genitive and the

dative. In *‘regin’*, their creative aspect and even the one of ‘good advice’ are more important than in *‘rögn’*, who better fit with ‘the gods’ without any particular feature attached.

A *fimbulpulr* (= *fimbul-pulr*) is a ‘immense wise storyteller’. We already met the radical *fimbul*, in stanza 103, where it was used pejoratively in *fimbul-fambi* ‘immense simpleton’. We also met the word *pulr* in the expression “the seat of the *pulr*” in 111, from which ‘the word of Wretched Dragon’ (Loddfáfnismál) is chanted.

Note that Óðinn’s name *Hropt*, or beginning by *Hropt-* as in 160, is very often translated by ‘shouter’ (as in C. V. ) or ‘king’ (as Bellows) but experts tend to say that its meaning is unknown. The verb nearest to which it may connect is *hrópa* which means ‘to slander, to shout’. If we preserve these two meanings together, we find something as ‘who shouts hidden truths’ or ‘herald of the concealed truths’. This is the meaning I kept.

### Comment on the meaning

This stanza requires three types of explanations: 1. A commentary of some nontraditional qualifiers of the runes, 2. Which features characterize the runes since their creation? 3. An analysis of the role of the three rune creators.

#### 1. How to qualify the runes.

First of all, the second line says that the runes are *ráðna*, i. e. ‘interpreted, understood’ what is no more the case nowadays. This implies that the properties of the runes in the following lines and stanzas relate to correctly interpreted and understood runes. When we note the mass of the works where a version of the meaning of each rune is stated (and not discussed, explained... interpreted) , we see that this first Óðinn’s remark, though implicit, is hardly respected.

The third line says that they are *stóra*, an adjective which carries the meaning of power associated to some ruthlessness. It never should be forgotten that the runes quickly become ruthless. They do not yield to the criteria of compassion and ‘pure’ love that our civilization romanticizes.

The fourth line says they are *stinna* i. e. strong and rigid. The notions of power and strength of the runes crossed the centuries as archetypes while the brutal and stiff runes were slowly forgotten. The last ones were revived by the Nazis who forgot their adaptability and possible softness. It should be forgotten, no more than their brutality and stiffness. By their ‘stiffness’, I understand that Óðinn says that they have a clear meaning and that we should not try to ‘twist’ it to our whims. Our understanding must yield and adapt in front of the stiff strength carried by the runes.

#### 2. On the creation of the runes

The runes were painted/got, made/set up and scratched/hacked.

- the last couple of qualifiers is easy to understand. The “Hropt of the powers” etches them on wood and needs more strength to put them on metal or stone.

- the couple made/set up clearly states that they were designed/shaped by the *ginnregin* i. e. ‘the supreme powers’. These supreme powers might be Nature, as seen by dedicated atheists, or their God for the fundamentalists, or the big-bang, for the mystics of astrophysics. In all cases, the majesty of the design of the runes remains practically the same. As the place where the roots of Yggdrasill take their support (stanza 138) , the runes belong to the unfathomable mechanisms of the creation of the universe and we cannot say much of their origin... can any shaman visit their birthplace? I doubt it.

- Lastly, how this “wise storyteller” could paint/get them? We have to paint them, color the runes, possibly with the red of our blood, with the aim to ‘activate’ them, as we would say now. We thus ‘get’ living runes that are ready to be used.

### 3. *On the creators of the runes*

First of all, the commentators tend to see the same character hidden behind these three names, i. e. Óðinn. This means that Óðinn, who is already overloaded with nicknames describing his many functions, should also carry being a *fimbulþulr* and the *ginnregin* (a plural noun). As for the *ginnregin*, anyway, this is opposed to our mythology that describes Óðinn like born after the formation of the universe, as he says himself in stanza 140. It thus appears much more reasonable to me to acknowledge that the creators of the runes are three different divine entities.

- the *fimbulþulr*, that is the immense-wise storyteller, is the one who perpetuates the traditions, who transmits knowledge. He collected the knowledge of how activating the runes, and he seems to have received it at the origin of the runes.

- the *ginnregin* must be the forces that built the runes. They conceived the structure of Futhark, that is the fact that the 24 runes are structured into three *ættir* (families) and provided in a given ordering. The *ginnregin* look like the architects who conceived the structure of the ‘house’ they built.

- *Hroptr of the powers* seems to be indeed Óðinn owing to the fact that the name Hroptr is often allotted to him. However ... as a power reigning over the *rögn*? Moreover why Óðinn would need to collect the runes at the Yggdrasill’s foot if he were one of their three creators? Óðinn is called Hroptatýr, which qualifies it well as an Æsir’s leader but not as one of ‘the powers’. Once again, as in the case of the final destiny of Burr and Bestla, without inventing a romantic story, I must call upon the concept of a “lost myth” in order to understand how Óðinn can be called a ‘herald of the unsaid truths’ according to the translation I propose for Hroptr (or, rather Hróptr). We know practically nothing of the Óðinn who left Frigg and whose place has been temporarily taken, at Frigg’s side, by Vili and Vé. Óðinn’s character, such as we know it by later texts, suggests an intelligent god who does not sputter his words. His blood brother, Loki [**again, an unknown myth: the one in which took place the ceremony which hallowed their fraternity**] plays exactly the same role of a hidden truth discloser (not the one of crier). This role, now degraded in the one of the *ragna* (king’s) fool, might have been played by Óðinn with dignity. I thus feel it quite possible that the conjunction of Loki’s crafty and fragile intelligence and Óðinn’s sincere and powerful one might have led them to tell to the gods unpleasant truths. As an example, think of them explain to the other gods the Norns’ power as a limit to their freedom. Here is the scheme of a possible explanation the meaning I give to this ‘slanderer’ (a meaning carried by the verb *hrópa*) who dares to put the gods in front of their weaknesses.

As a conclusion, we can as notice that the above three characters cannot integrate Dumézil’s trilogy of the sovereign gods. That drives us to think that the present trilogy corresponds to beliefs older than the Indo-European civilization. The runes could well have not reached their status of written signs before, say, the second century, while they convey a much older knowledge.

### Evans’ Commentaries

142

5-6 are almost identical with 80 / 4-5.

*fáði* ‘coloured’. References to ‘colouring’ runes also occur in 144 and 157, and this same verb appears in a number of Scandinavian runic inscriptions from the early period, e. g. the Einang stone (Norway, c. 400) has [ek Go]dagastiR runo faihido ‘I, Godagast, coloured the runes’, the Rök stone (Sweden, c. 800) has **uarin faþi**, and similarly **auaiR faþi** on two early ninth-century inscriptions from Denmark. (But in some of the inscriptions the context suggests that *fá* may already have come to be used sometimes merely to mean ‘came’ or ‘cut’, as in later Icelandic. . . ) Guðrúnarkviða II 22 speaks of *hvers kyns stafir* (evidently runes) as *ristnir ok roðnir* ‘carved and reddened’, and one of the stones at Överselö (Sweden) states *Hér skal standa steinar þessir, rúnum roðnir, reisti Guðlaug* (spelling normalised). The verb *steina* ‘to paint’ is also found in runic inscriptions in the same connection, e. g. from Gerstaberger (Sweden) : *Ásbjörn risti ok Úlfr steindi*. Traces of colour still survive on some Swedish stones ...

*fimbulþulr* ‘the mighty sage’. Only here and in 80 above. Doubtless a name for Óðinn, ... [see my argument against this ‘lack of doubt’]

*ginnregin* ‘mighty gods’, a compound found several times elsewhere. The element *ginn-* seems to have intensive force: it occurs also in the expression *ginnheilög goð* in Lokasenna II and Vsp. 6 etc. , and is probably to be identified with the first element in the early seventh-century runic Danish **ginoronoR**, **ginArúnaR** on the Stentoften and Björketorp stones respectively; ...

**7 Hroptr** (or *Hróptr*?) is widely evidenced as a name for Óðinn. The etymology is obscure and disputed, nor is the problem made any simpler by the occurrence of *Hroptatýr* (as in 160) as another Óðinn-name. Its governing of the gen. *rögn* has sometimes been thought to present a puzzle, which some editors have sought to resolve by printing *hroptr* as a common noun (though the meaning of such a noun is purely speculative). Most probably the phrase simply means ‘Hroptr among the gods’ ... [which shows, however, the one deficiency to have no particular meaning.]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 143\*\*\*

#### Prose explanation

Each of the five following persons carved the runes within and with their people:

1. Óðinn with the Æsir
2. Dáinn with the elves
3. Dvalinn with the dwarves
4. Ásviðr with the giants
5. I, the poet or Óðinn, who is teaching mankind.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

143.

<i>Óðinn með ásum,</i>	Óðinn (the furious one) (together) with the Æsir,
<i>en fyr alfum Dáinn,</i>	and for the elves, Dáinn (impotent, entranced)
<i>Dvalinn ok dvergum fyrir,</i>	Dvalinn (Dillydally) and the dwarves for
<i>Ásviðr jötnum fyrir,</i>	Ásviðr (Ástree – the tree of one of the Æsir) the giants for
<i>ek reist sjalfr sumar.</i>	I carved myself some.

#### Bellows' translation

Othin for the gods, | Dain for the elves,  
And Dvalin for the dwarfs,  
Alsvith for giants | and all mankind,  
And some myself I wrote.

### Comment on the meaning

We remember that the adjective *óðr* means ‘furious’ and that the substantive *óðr* means ‘intelligence’. In our civilization, we tend to confuse ‘furious’ and ‘angry’. The feelings are certainly similar but anger blinds you while fury enlightens you; for example it will help you to see a truth that someone tries to hide. Poetry and runes are practiced with creative fury, if not they remain style exercises. We can thus carve the runes in an inspired fury, a mystical fury, and even a desperate fury. We then involve our body, our heart and our spirit into the task to be achieved. The other uses of the runes, the games inspired by the runes are at best ineffective.

The word *dáinn* means either ‘impotent’ or ‘filled with wonder, ecstatic’. By giving this name to the first elf carver of runes, Óðinn shows that he somewhat despises elf magic. For a god of action as Óðinn, an impotent person (we speak here only of the incapacity to act) is a lower being since he/she is *litt megandi* as explained in the comment of stanza 141. The added meaning of being ecstatic as well shows that Óðinn little respect for ecstatic people because they are unable to act, and they vaticinate without taking their problems in hand.

The word *dvalinn* means who waddles, who is unable to decide when to act. Dwarf magic does not interest Óðinn much more than the one of the elves.

As opposed to this contempt, the name of the giant magician is more intriguing. The word *ásviðr* (*ás-viðr* which is read *áss-viðr*) means “one of the Æsir-tree.” Óðinn thus exposes his respect for giants’ magic, which carries no surprise, as stanza 140 taught us. This stanza, even in its most prosaic and rational version possible, explicitly states that Óðinn inherited nine magic songs coming from his maternal uncle. If we recall stanza 138, we understand that this *ásviðr* strongly evokes Yggdrasill which is “the tree of the gods Æsir,” to which Óðinn has been hung. Moreover, as an initiator of giants’ runic magic, *Ásviðr* name qualifies to be his uncle’s one.

In an even more significant way, it shows that runic magic is related to a worship of the tree of world, something left implicit in 138.

### Evans’ Commentaries

#### 143.

2-3 *Dáinn* and *Dvalinn* are mentioned together in Grímnismál 33 (and thence in Snorri’s Prose Edda) as two of the four harts who nibble the twigs of Yggdrasill. Dvalinn is widely recorded as a dwarf-name (e. g. Vsp. 11) ; *Dáinn* also occurs a number of times as the name of a dwarf (e. g. Hyndluljóð 7) and once, in a *pula*, as a name for a fox, but nowhere as an elf-name.

4 *Ásviðr* is not recorded elsewhere.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 144\*\*\*

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

144.

<i>Veistu hvé rísta skal?</i>	Do you know how to carve and hack?
<i>Veistu hvé ráða skal?</i>	Do you know how to advise, contrive, rule and punish?
<i>Veistu hvé fáa skal?</i>	Do you know how to fetch, win and paint?
<i>Veistu hvé freista skal?</i>	Do you know how to try, tempt and test?
<i>Veistu hvé biðja skal?</i>	Do you know how to ask, try to get (and even) beg?
<i>Veistu hvé blóta skal?</i>	Do you know how to sacrifice to the gods?
<i>Veistu hvé senda skal?</i>	Do you know how to dispatch (and even) kill?
<i>Veistu hvé sóa skal?</i>	Do you know how to use (possibly) up to wiping out and slaughter?

### Bellows' translation

Knowest how one shall write, | knowest how one shall rede?  
Knowest how one shall tint, | knowest how one makes trial?  
Knowest how one shall ask, | knowest how one shall offer?  
Knowest how one shall send, | knowest how one shall sacrifice?

### Commentary on the vocabulary

Some of the verbs are known to us, I recall their meaning:

*rísta* means 'to gash, chop, scrape, skin, carve'.

*ráða* means 'to advise, decide, contrive, rule, explain, punish'.

*fáa* means 'to fetch, win, endure, give' and 'to draw, paint'.

*freista* means 'to try, tempt'.

*biðja* means 'to beg'. Lex. Poet. gives '*petere* (to seek, reach, obtain), *rogare* (to question)'. The meaning 'to pray God' certainly does not date from Heathen time.

*blóta* means 'to sacrifice, and also, more seldom in academic translations: to honor the gods'.

*senda* means 'to send, dedicate, and according to de Vries, also to kill (in poetry)'. A ghost called by a wizard and sent against an enemy is called a *sending* (a sending).

*sóa* means, for C-V the same as *blóta* to sacrifice, but Lex. Poet. gives to it two different meanings: 1. *serere* (to intertwine) 2. *consumere* (to spend, exhaust), *interficere* (to wipe out). If this is relative to a sacrifice, then *sóa* is much harsher than *blóta*. In stanza 109, I used the meaning 'to destroy' to translate *sóit* (preterit of *sóa*).

### Comment on the meaning

Here still a stanza where the choice of the meaning to be given to the verbs employed by Óðinn is capital. Some of these verbs refer to a magic known as "black" of an incredible ferocity and the translators obviously do not feel at ease with this fierce and politically incorrect aspect of Óðinn's knowledge. We will see that, in stanza 145, Óðinn strongly moderates this 'politically incorrect' not by 'correction', obviously, but by knowledge of the laws of the magic - that he partially reveals to us.

### Evans' Commentaries

144.

2-3 *rísta* 'cut', *ráða* 'interpret' and *fá* 'colour' clearly have 'runes' as the object to be understood, and possibly *freista* 'make trial of' does too.



7 The force of *senda* is unclear. ... suggests it might mean 'to sacrifice', on the basis of Beowulf 599-600, which states that the monster Grendel *lust wigeð, swefeð ond sendeþ* 'executes his pleasure, slays and "sends," where *sendeþ* must mean something like 'kills'....

### \*\*\*Hávamál 145\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Better to avoid asking  
than 'over-sacrificing' to the gods,  
always (might) the gift for you to be at the proper value,  
Better to avoid dispatching  
than over use (magic).  
Thus Þundr (Óðinn) carved] future destiny of the people  
there he rose up (after catching the runes)  
him who came back  
[from hanging in Yggdrasill].

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

145.

<i>Betra er óbeðit</i>	Better he does not ask for
<i>en sé ofblótit,</i>	than over-sacrifice to the gods,
<i>ey sér til gildis gjöf;</i>	ever (might) you be (or to you) to the proper value the gift
<i>betra er ósent</i>	Better he does not dispatch (and even kill)
<i>en sé ofsóit.</i>	than 'over-use' (possibly up to 'wiping out')
<i>Svá Þundr ofreist</i>	Thus Þundr (Óðinn) carved
<i>fyr þjóða rök,</i>	[fyr rök = rök ahead] future destiny of the people
<i>þar hann upp of reis,</i>	there he up rose
<i>er hann aftr of kom.</i>	who him again came.

#### Bellows' translation

Better no prayer | than too big an offering,  
By thy getting measure thy gift;  
Better is none | than too big a sacrifice,  
.....  
So Thund of old wrote | ere man's race began,  
Where he rose on high | when home he came.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

The two verbs *beiða* and *biðja* do *beðit* in the third person of the indicative present. *Beiða* means also 'to beg' but with the meaning 'to request' or even 'to hunt'.

**Recall:** the verb *biðja* is used in the 5th line of 144.

The verbs *blóta*, *senda*, *sóa* were already met in 144.

**Recall:** The verb *blóta* is used in the 6th line of 144, it means 'to sacrifice, and also, more rarely: to honor the gods'.

The first and the second line of 145 thus refer to, or quote, the 5th and 6th lines of 144.

**Recall:** The verb *senda* is used with the 7th line of 144 and 4th of 145. The verb *sóa* is used in the 8th line of 144 and the 5th of 145.

The first and the second line of 145 thus refer to, or quote, those of the 5th and 6th lines of 144. The 4th and the 5th line of 144 use the same verbs as the 7th and 8th of 144. All things considered, stanza 145 supplements the second half of 144.

The name *Pundr* is presented as perhaps meaning “The Thundering one” by C-V, but the other dictionaries present it as a name of Óðinn without clear significance.

### Comment on the meaning

This stanza announces to us very clearly that *biðja* and *senda* are magic activities that must be very seldom or even never practiced, and *blóta* and *sóa* should never be too much applied.

It is not really necessary to ask (*biðja*) something to magic and to the gods, nor to dispatch (*senda*) spells or curses, those of the kind by which you do not really try to dispatch (possibly *ad patres*) a person. A comparison with their Christians equivalent will help to understand the meaning of these two verbs: see how much the Christians are keen to ask (it is often the base of a ‘prayer’ to their God) and have horror to dispatch (this ‘black’ magic). In other words, Óðinn says both supplications and curses are possible but not primarily important, without including here any particular ethical judgment.

It is dangerous to overdo sacrifices made to the gods (*blóta*) and ‘wiping out’ (*sóa*) magic. There again, no ethical judgment but a similar opposition to Christian habits, though we need to replace the idea of sacrifice by the one of an offering, more Christian than the brutish pagan sacrifice. Óðinn says that we should not exaggerate the practice of sacrifices (or offerings) while the Christians are fond of offerings to their God. Óðinn says that one should not exaggerate the practice of magic murdering on enemies, while Christians loathe the idea of magic murder. We also see that these lines enable us to specify the meaning given here to the verbs *senda* and *sóa*. The first means probably ‘to send a spell’ without any specific will to kill, while the second certainly means ‘to wipe out an adversary by killing him/her’.

### Explanations relative to the meaning of the last three lines

In the 7th line, *fyr þjóða rök*, the word *rök* is with the accusative and we cannot know if its nominative is *rök* or *rökr*. In this case, the context pushes us to choose the meaning ‘origin’ for *rök*, though *rökr* (twilight) would not much change the meaning of the line, if understood as daybreak. The adverb *fyrir* (here in the form *fyr*) followed by the accusative means ‘in front of, before’ including a move; taken temporally, it means ‘before’ (this is the choice made by the traditional translators) and, metaphorically, it can also mean ‘for, for the benefit of’. The three meanings are completely possible. I chose a metaphorical space meaning ‘before’ understood here as ‘confronted to’. The runes existed well ‘before’ humankind but it seems more interesting to me to conceive them as carved as an answer to the existence of humankind.

This explains the comment of this line: [confronted to the birth of humanity]

In the 8th line, *þar hann upp of reis*, the compound *upp rísa* ‘to rise up’ took the meaning of ‘to resurrect’. ‘To return to ordinary life’ means something else than ‘to return to life’ in a shamanic context. The shamanic meaning is much closer to our ‘to return to a normal (non shamanic) life’ than ‘to carry out an incredible miracle’.

This explains the comment of this line: [*or, in a Christian context: he resurrected*]

The 9th line, *er hann aftr of kom*, expresses the fact that Óðinn returns to his normal life at the end of his ordeal when he “falls down” on Yggdrasill’s base after collecting the runes.

This explains the comment of this line: [*or, he then came back from Yggdrasill’s roots*]

Once again, if we do not take into account the interactions between various stanzas in Hávamál, here between 145, 144 and 139, the meaning of the poem considerably reduces.

### Evans’ Commentaries

#### 145

3 is evidently proverbial. cp. *sér æ gjöf til gjalda* Gísla saga ch. 15 ... *sér gjöf til gjalda* Viktors saga ok Blávus ... 20.

6 *Þundr* is a common name for Óðinn.

7 *fyr þjóða rök* seems to mean ‘before the creation of peoples’, though *aldar rök* Vafþ 39 certainly means ‘the end of mankind, doomsday’. *Rök* covers a wide semantic field, from ‘basis, reason, origin’ to ‘course of events, history’ and thence to ‘destiny, final doom’.

8-9 The reference of these lines is obscure; possibly they relate to the events described in 139. [*As you may have noticed, this reference is obvious to me.*]

### Hávamál 146-164

#### Ljóðatal

#### “A List of Songs”

The word *tal* means either a language or a list. I thought that the appropriate meaning was ‘language’ for *Rúnatal*, while it should read ‘list’ for *Ljóðatal*.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 146\*\*\*

#### Prose explanation

I know the songs that a prince’s wife (*i. e.* even a knowledgeable woman) does not know nor any man’s son (*nor* (obviously) any human being) .  
The first is called Help and it will help you against charges and worries, and also against any kind of sorrows.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

146.

<i>Ljóð ek þau kann</i>	Songs I them know
<i>er kann-at þjóðans kona</i>	that knows-not prince’s wife
<i>ok mannskis mögr.</i>	and man-no’s son.
<i>Hjálp heitir eitt,</i>	Help is named the one (of the songs) ,
<i>en þat þér hjálpa mun</i>	but (and) this one to you help will

*við sökum ok sorgum*  
*ok sítum görvöllum.*

against charges/persecutions and worries/griefs  
and sorrows 'quite-all'.

### Bellows' translation

147. The songs I know | that king's wives know not,  
Nor men that are sons of men;  
The first is called help, | and help it can bring thee  
In sorrow and pain and sickness.

[Bellows understands *sít* as 'sickness', one of its possible meanings. Dronke is the only one to keep its ambiguous meaning by translating it by 'affliction'.]

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The expression "*ek þau kann*" means "I know them". The name *ljóð* is neuter and the dative and the neuter accusative of third person plural of the personal pronoun is *þau*. This says explicitly that *ljóð* is here a plural: songs, poems.

In line 4, *eitt* is in the neuter singular accusative and thus indicates 'one (song)'. Instead of saying 'the first', the poet says 'the one'. In the following stanza, he will use *annarr*, the second.

We already met *mannskis* in stanza 114, it is the genitive of *mann-gi* (*maðr* followed negative suffix *gi*), it means 'nobody'.

The feminine word *hjalp* means 'saving, help, healing'

The feminine word *sök* means 'charge, persecution'.

The feminine word *sorg* means 'worry, sorrow'.

The feminine word *sít* means 'affliction'.

### Comment on the meaning

For a good understanding of the importance of this first song, it is necessary to imagine the huge amount of people who request protection. This need is underlined by the increasing importance of 'zero risk' in our modern society. For example, the doctors continuously but vainly recall that a zero medical risk is impossible, *vox populi*, though, calls for it again and again. In the opaque world, which is discreetly named "popular beliefs" and which covers all the not so small (at least by its income) world of magic and superstition practitioners, the demand for protection amulets and talismans stands quite well. If you cannot believe it, just go on Internet and look there to see the number of sites that propose you to buy products, stones and crystals, runes and ogams, filters and magic spells that are supposed to bring magic protection.

Some forms of magic, as the one of stanza 154, which quiets down strong winds at sea, are no longer regarded as useful, but everything referring to protection and health (and undoubtedly together with the 'aggressive protection' kind, but in a more hidden way), the belief in magic remains very alive as soon as serious life difficulties are in sight - though it is publically hidden under a good layer of shame. . . Moreover, the number of rationalists who 'convert back' to their childhood religion before dying shows that, in front of the ultimate difficulty of life, many are these who tip over in the very irrationality they rejected during the rest of their life.

We should notice that Óðinn does not speak of runes but of some kind of *ljóð* (songs). In stanza 151, he even says that, wielding magic is done by *gala*, that is, emitting bird-like

sounds, howling as a wolf, singing, human like howling a *galdr* (magic incantation) . This is, definitely different from a *ljóð*, that is poems or songs in the usual meaning of the word in the title *Ljóða-tal*. This is why I think no single rune is a ‘protection’. Some runes, in some contexts, are more prone to be used in a protection *galdr*. Thinking in terms of a ‘protection rune’ leads many persons to manufacture or to buy carved runes they use as an amulet, i. e. , a defensive object protecting against certain harmful influences by a capacity that it naturally holds. Inversely, each *galdr* given by Óðinn in these stanzas is what would now be called a talisman, i. e. a magic object which more or less has the same role than an amulet, but that is in contact with ‘universal or cosmic forces’ that the wizards are supposed to be able to handle, and that protect the talisman owner.

A *galdr* holding runes is at heart connected to the forces expressed by the runes: divine, cosmic, natural, social or simply the primary strengths of each individual. How to compose this *galdr* is another business and you noticed that Óðinn does not give us any detail on the way to proceed. He however tells throughout *Hávamál* many details of the life to lead in order to become able to compose a *galdr*.

A last information contained in this stanza is implicitly contained in its lines 2 and 3. Why starting, in line 2, to tell than no prince’s wife knows these songs and add in line 3 that no man either knows them? Rather than seeing here Óðinn boasting, I believe he means that if someone could know these 18 songs, then a prince’s wife would. The poem *Sigrdrífa’s Word*, *Sigrdrífumál*, illustrates the fact that she has been a rune expert. Remember that, once she had been awakened by Sigurðr, the first thing he asks her is to teach him her rune knowledge: “*Hann segir ok biðr hana kenna sér speki* (He [Sigurðr] speaks and he begs from her [Sigrdrífa] to know her wisdom)”. The Germanic hero *par excellence* begs wisdom from a ‘prince’s wife’ and this wisdom is contained in sets of *rúnar* (runes) of various powers. She also joins several runes in *góðra galdra* (valuable incantations) , just as Óðinn does in stanza 151. The implicit information given here by Óðinn is: “do not scorn a prince’s wife’s knowledge.”

### Evans’ Commentaries

#### 146.

S. 146-63 are generally referred to as the *Ljóðatal* (Catalogue of Spells) , a name first given by Müllenhoff; there is no indication in Codex Regius that the scribe regarded them as a separate section. Snorri plainly knew these verses, for portions of *Ynglinga saga* ch. 6-7 (in *Heimskringla*) are manifestly based on them; he understood the *ek* of the verses as Óðinn, unquestionably rightly.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 147\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Of these songs I know a second one (for)  
the sons of men who wish (it) (*even*: who need it)  
these who will as a healer live.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

#### 147.

<i>Þat kann ek annat</i>	(of) These (songs) know I second
<i>er þurfu ýta synir,</i>	who wish/need launch sons
	or [the mariners sons who wish]
	or [the sons (of men) who wish to launch (themselves) ]
<i>þeir er vilja lækna lifa.</i>	these who will physicians live.

### Bellows' translation

148. A second I know, | that men shall need  
Who leechcraft long to use;

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The masculine noun *sonr* does *synir* in the nominative plural.

The verb *ýta* means ‘to launch’. I suppose that it is by assimilation with these who ‘launch their ship’ that it took the meaning of the plural word *ýtar*, sailors. The expression *ýta synir* thus indicates ‘sons of sailors’, which includes a hint at someone adventurous. Here, *synir* is in the nominative plural and nothing prevents it from being the subject of the verb *ýta* taken in its proper meaning. These variations do not change the global meaning of the line. We will find in the last stanza, 164, the same expression (*ýta sonum*) to indicate sons of man but where the plural dative of *sonum* makes it impossible to associate *sonr* to verb *ýta*.

*Lækna* is nominative plural *læknir*, a doctor. The plural genitive would be *lækna*. The verb *lifa* means ‘to be left, to live’.

### Comment on the meaning

This stanza suggests that to become a medical doctor and especially “to live as a doctor” is a kind of calling similar to that of a sailor. The possible meaning of the verb *þurfa*: ‘to need’ emphasizes the possibility of an adventurous choice. It is certain that the ancient doctors to whom Óðinn refers here were also magicians. Combining magic and the social responsibility of a doctor is certainly slightly adventurous.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 148\*\*\*

### A translation as literal as possible

Of these, I know a third:  
if I become much in need  
of a handcuff for my enemies,  
I blunt the edges (of the weapons)  
of my enemies  
their weapons nor their staffs bite anymore.

### Prose explanation

The notion of ‘non-biting’ staff is explained below.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

148.

<i>Það kann ek þriðja:</i>	(of) Them, I know a third:
<i>ef mér verður þörf mikil</i>	if I become (in) need much
<i>hafts við mína heiftmögu,</i>	of handcuffs for my enemies (acc. case)
<i>eggjar ek deyfi</i>	the (cutting) edges I blunt
<i>minna andskota,</i>	of my enemies (gen. case)
<i>bíta-t þeim vápn né velir.</i>	bite-not their weapons nor their staffs.

### Bellows' translation

149. A third I know, | if great is my need  
Of fetters to hold my foe;  
Blunt do I make | mine enemy's blade,  
Nor bites his sword or staff.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The feminine word *vél* or *væl* means 'device, artifice, trick' and does *vælar* or *vélar* in the nominative plural. Using this meaning requires to emend *velir* to *vélar*. Many translators (Boyer, for example) did so, following Bugge as Evans says. Bellows, Dronke and Orchard do not follow this false track and translate it by 'staff, bludgeon, bat'.

The masculine word *völur* does *velir* in the nominative plural and it means 'rounded stick', without edge. The expert discussion reported by Evans (I skipped it) rests on the fact that blunting an 'absence of edge' makes little sense, and it has nothing to do with a warlike use. Inversely, the use of *völur* here is quite plausible if we take into account the link between magic and the staffs (*stafi*) upon which runes are carved. Remember that stanza 129 advises against starting to use the magic in battle. Such a magic wand is thus looked upon as a weapon. Stanza 148 tells us that Óðinn was able to blunt his enemies' physical weapons as well as the magic ones.

### Comment on the meaning

Evans does not comment on this stanza strange structure (except to say that *hapt* is "apparently here metaphorical" nor on the saga very documented stories of swords blunted by magic.

Metaphorical or not, the stanza two halves look disconnected, since the first one speaks of chaining the enemies and the second of removing the killing edge of their weapons. This discrepancy may be deleted as does Evans, by using the verb 'to shackle' with its meaning of 'to constrain'. It is also possible to use the meaning 'to fasten tightly' because blunting the enemies' weapons enables to make them captive (thus without the need to kill them) and to be able to constrain them afterwards.

As for the possibility of magic blunting the swords, this is reported in many sagas as a fact. The trolls and some berserks in particular are known to have a natural magic (trolls) or magic formulas (berserks) enabling them to blunt their enemies' swords.

### Evans' Commentaries

148.

3 *hapt* 'fetter', apparently here metaphorical.

6 *velir* is pl. of *völur* ‘stick, club’ ...[Follows a very technical discussion on the exact meaning of *velir*.]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 149\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Of these I know this fourth:  
if some warriors carry to me (make me bear)  
fetters on the arms,  
I then crow/sing/shout,  
in order to go destroy (these fetters) ,  
the fetters bounce off my feet,  
and the handcuff off my hands.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

149.

*Þat kann ek it fjórða:  
ef mér fyrðar bera  
bönd að boglimum,  
svá ek gel,  
at ek ganga má,  
sprettr mér af fótum fjötrr,  
en af höndum haft.*

(of) These know I this fourth:  
if to-me warriors carry  
fetters at the arms,  
then I crow/sing/shout,  
so that I go destroy (the fetters) ,  
spring from me off feet the fetters,  
but (and) off hands the handcuff.

#### Bellows' translation

150. A fourth I know, | if men shall fasten  
Bonds on my bended legs;  
So great is the charm | that forth I may go,  
The fetters spring from my feet,  
Broken the bonds from my hands.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

Bellows's translation of *boglimum* sees here the plural dative of *bog-lim*. This compound word would result from *bogi* and *lim*. Several compound words with *bogi* have the form *bog -*, for example *bog-maðr* for an archer. The word *lim* means foliage or the branches of a tree and, by extension, the human members. Bellows 'leg' is completely justified in this sense. Good sense pushes me to think that the arms are twisted when they are bound and 'folded up' behind the back. Modern translators tend to modify this word by seeing acute accents on the vowels: They read *bóg-límr* (= shoulder-member) , the arm, and I followed them there. It makes no difference in the understanding of the third line.

The verb *gala*, to crow (I crow = *gel*) , means also 'to sing, incantate'. (See the comment on *gala*, s. 29) .

#### Comment on the meaning



Here, no one suggests that the shackles are a metaphor because this stanza is easy to understand within our present day culture. The galdr used here by Óðinn seems to have been well-known among Scandinavian wizards since the witch Gróa promises her son to protect him by the following galdr.

Grógaldur's stanza 10:

<i>Þann gel ek þér inn fimta,</i>	This fifth one I crow/sing/shout for you
<i>ef þér fjöturr verður</i>	if at you an iron chain was
<i>borinn at boglimum:</i>	carried to the twisted members:
<i>leysigaldur læt ek</i>	a galdr of 'loosening' (of release) I do
<i>þér fyrir legg of kveðinn,</i>	in front of you I lay by my said/sung
<i>ok stökkr þá láss af limum,</i>	and jumps this latch off your members
<i>in af fótum fjöturr.</i>	but (and) off your feet the iron chain.

We notice the similarity between Óðinn's song and Gróa's fifth galdr. We may conclude that, as Evans claims the last is "a strophe fairly plainly derivative from the present passage." I prefer to see here the sign of a traditional knowledge among Scandinavian wizards. That also shows why Ljóðatal should be called Galdratal.

### Evans' Commentaries

149

3 **bóglimum** - many editors read **boglimum**, with the first element meaning 'curved' or 'flexible'. But elsewhere in ON this notion is conveyed by *bjúg-*, as in **bjúglimir** in Tindr Hallkelsson..., and compounds in **bog-** are related to **bogi** 'bow'. It appears from 4-7 that the word implies 'arms and legs'; **bógr** means 'shoulder', but the OHG cognate **buog** could mean 'hip' as well, and BMO suggests that the Norse word too originally possessed this double sense. The word also occurs in Grógaldur 10, a strophe fairly plainly derivative from the present passage.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 150\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Of these I know this fifth:  
 if I see [a shaft] shot by villainy [*or* 'for no good (reason)'],  
 a shaft rush towards the folk,  
 it [the shaft] is not tossed so rigidly  
 that I could not stop it,  
 if I see it with my eyes.

#### ON Text and its literal pseudo English translation

150.

<i>Þat kann ek it fimmta:</i>	Of these know I this fifth:
<i>ef ek sé af fári skotinn</i>	if I see (subjunctive form) , in villainy [ <i>or</i> for little], shot
<i>flein í folki vaða,</i>	a shaft in the folk to rush,
<i>fýgr-a hann svá stinnt</i>	it (the shaft) tossed-not so rigidly
<i>at ek stöðvig-a-k,</i>	that I stop-I-not-I,
<i>ef ek hann sjónum of sék.</i>	if I it (the shaft) by my sight I see.

### Bellows' translation

151. A fifth I know, | if I see from afar  
An arrow fly 'gainst the folk;  
It flies not so swift | that I stop it not,  
If ever my eyes behold it.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The expression *af fâri* obviously disturbs the translators since each one gives a different translation C-V: 'in rage', Bellows: 'from afar', Boyer: 'in villainy', Dronke: 'fatally', Orchard does not translate it. The noun *fâr* means 'evil, mischief' and the adjective *fâr* 'a little'.

The verb *skjóta*, 'to shoot with a weapon' does *skotinn* in its past participle.

The verb *stöðva* means 'to stop, to alleviate'. The form used here, *stöðvig-a-k*, is a negative form of the present indicative (or subjunctive). All things considered, Óðinn thrice says here 'I' in a line: *at ek stöðv-ig-a-k* = that I stop-I-not-I = that I do not stop.

The verb *sjá*, to see, does *sé* in the first person of the indicative present and thus *ek sé* = I see = *sék* = see I.

The verb *ffúka*, (here spelled *ffúga*), 'to be directed towards something', does *fy'kr* in the third person of the indicative present: the arrow is 'directed towards'.

### Comment on the meaning

This stanza describes an application of eye-magic. Many ancient texts describe the importance of a glance in sorcery. The Celtic tales, for example, describe the power of Balor's eye that kills, the Edda the one of giant visited by Týr and Þórr in Hymiskviða: "*sundr stökk sula / fyr sjón jötuns* (asunder leaped a pillar / before the sight of the giant)." It is also often evoked in Grimm's tales. Other Edda poems quote the 'piercing' eye of people who know the runes and who are thus wizards. The sagas insist on this capacity and three of them even specify that this eye power is most effective when the sorcerer/ress takes a position which we would today consider ridiculous or obscene (as described bellow). This is perhaps why there is so little documentation about this supreme visual sorcery. In fact, it is attested in three sagas and *Landnamabók* (colonization book). As an illustration, here these three examples.

In Gold-Thorir's saga, ch. 17, the witch Kerling leads an attack and blunts the weapons of her enemies by "walking around behind the house with her clothes pulled up and her head bent down, looking backwards through her legs at the clouds." She is stopped by some people who spot her, put her back standing straight and, at once, "weapons began to bite" again.

In Vatnsdæla saga, ch. 26, the witch Ljót tries to protect her son in such a way: "She had pulled her clothes over her head and was walking backwards, with her head thrust between her legs. The look in her eyes was hideous – the way she could dart them like a troll." The people she attacked ask her what she intended to do and she answers: "she had intended to turn around the whole landscape and all of you would have run wild and be driven crazy with fear out among the wild animals, and that is how things would have turned out if you had not spotted me before I saw you." This episode is described as well in the *Landnamabók* (book of settlements) where Ljót declares she wanted that "*snúask jörðin*: the earth reverses itself," making use of the reflexive form of the verb *snúa*. Thus, she had failed her sorcery and after these words, she dies "in her rage and sorcery."

Another saga shows that this attitude is not for female witches only, or even that it can be used in an admissible social context.

Kormak's saga, ch. 10 describes the setting of a ritual dueling called *hólmganga* as follows. "The dueling laws (called *hólmgöngulög* in the ON version) had it that the cloak [upon which the combat had to take place] was to be five ells square, with loops at the corner, and pegs had to be put there of the kind that had a head at one end. They were called 'tarses' (pl. *tjösnu*, sing. *tjasna*) , and he who made the preparations, was to approach the tarses in such a way that he could see the sky between his legs while grasping his ear lobes with the invocation (*formáli*. C-V says that its usual meaning is 'preamble, condition') that has been since used again in the sacrifice (*blót*) known as the tarse-sacrifice (*tjösnuþlót*) .” Since he had to recite a 'formula' and a *blót* was associated to it, this ceremony is of a clear religious (hence, magical) character. That he had to take the attitude of the witches trying to 'reverse' the earth shows that the ground upon which the *hólmganga* had to take place was seen as outside the normal space.

### Evans' Commentaries

150

2 *af fari* 'with hostile intent, maliciously'. (Bellows' 'from afar' is a strange error. )

3 *fólki* in the dative seems to require the sense 'battle' rather than 'people' ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 151\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Of these I know this sixth:  
if a freeman wounds me  
with the roots of a sappy tree,  
then this man  
who sends me (put on me) a curse of hate,  
he is eaten by an ulcer, not me.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

151.

*Þat kann ek it séttá:  
ef mik særir þegn  
á vrótum hrás viðar,  
ok þann hal  
er mik heifta kveðr,  
þann eta mein heldr en mik.*

Of these know I this sixth:  
if me wounds a freeman  
on (with) the roots of a sappy tree,  
and this man  
who to me hate/curse sends  
this one an ulcer eats (him) however but me.

#### Bellows' translation

152. A sixth I know, | if harm one seeks  
With a sapling's roots to send me;  
The hero himself | who wreaks his hate  
Shall taste the ill ere I.

## Commentary on the vocabulary

The verb *særa* has two very different meanings. One is ‘to wound’, the other ‘to conjure’. All the examples given by C-V of this last meaning relate to Christendom.

The feminine word *rót* indicates the root of a tree and has an ancient form *vrót* (see Evans’s comments) .

The feminine word *heipt* (or *heift*) (already seen in s. 137 see also the notes relative to line 12) ‘blodd feud, hatred, fury’ and according to C-V ‘imprecation, curse’. A curse certainly is what stanza 145 finds better “not to send.”

Adverb *heldr* and conjunction *en* both mean ‘but’, *heldr* however marks an opposition stronger than *en*, often rendered by ‘and’, according to the context

### *Translating þann eta mein*

The verb *eta* means ‘to eat, to devour’. The feminine noun *eta* means ‘to eat’ or ‘cancer’. The noun form can be here only in the nominative singular.

The neuter noun *mein* means ‘hurt, harm’ and does also *mein* in the singular accusative. The verb *meina* means ‘to harm’ (in another context, it means ‘to mean’) .

The majority of the translators understand *þann eta mein* as follows: *þann* (= this one, accusative) *eta* (verb) *mein* (noun) by ‘to eat the harm’. Dronke alone reads *eta* (noun) *mein* (verb) and thus translates “the ulcers eat.” The three unavoidable accusatives *þann hal... þann* speak in favor of Dronke’s translation though it seems less easy to understand than the traditional one.

## Comment on the meaning

Evans report below the expert discussion about: are the roots on which the runes must be carved should be either full of sap (*hrás*) or strong (*rams*) ? We see that the heart of the problem is that *hrás* does not bring the awaited alliteration in line 3. I nevertheless preserved it because an Eddic poem, Skirnir’s Travel (*För Skirnis* ou *Skírnismál*) [Note 1] uses exactly the same expression. stanza 32 of this poem reads:

<i>Til holtz ec gecc</i>	To the thicket I went
<i>oc til hrás viðar,</i>	and towards a <b>full-of-sap tree</b> ,
<i>gambantein at geta,</i>	a precious-rod to seek
<i>gambantein ec gat.</i>	a precious-rod I found.

Skirnir is charged to obtain the assent of the Gerðr giantess to become Freyr’s wife and this one has just rejected with irony or mistook all the offers of Skirnir who solves the dilemma by using an ultimate magic: he will carve runes on a *gambanteinn* he chose in the forest a (*gamban* - *teinn* = precious-rod, not a ‘magic wand’ as is its usual meaning, but a ‘rod carrying magic’). The repetition of the last two lines underlines the care which he put in choosing the good tree. The choice of Skirnir is done in a magic and ceremonial environment.

The enemy who attacks Óðinn is thus undoubtedly a powerful wizard who carefully prepared his blow. Under these conditions, he had thought of the possibility of ‘returns’, as modern sorcerers say, i. e. he built in advance of his defenses. Óðinn thus declares that, even in this difficult case, he and his followers will always be able to return the hostile magic that will destroy in return who may have wanted to harm them.

[Note 1] You will find a more detailed comment of *Skírnismál* in stanza 161.

## Evans’ Commentaries

151 This strophe appears to refer to the carving of malignant runes on a piece of wood, as in the story in Grettis saga ch. 79, where an old woman carves such runes on a *rótartré* ...

3 Codex Regius *rás* is problematic. Speimismál 32 (which also has to do with magic) speaks of *hrás viðar* (gen. ) ‘sappy wood’, and this phrase is also found occasionally in prose. But if we read *hrás* there is no alliteration ... [as a side argument, Evans states: ] As *rót* is usually held by etymologists to descend from a prehistoric *vrót* ... [going back to the heart of the topic, he adds: ] observing that a sappy piece of wood is hardly suitable for carving ... The safest emendation, and a very small one, is to read *rás* as *rams* ‘strong’ ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 152\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Of these I know this seventh:  
if I see high to burn in flames  
the hall around my bench-mates  
it does not burn so wide,  
that I do not save them;  
I know the galdr to crow/sing/shout for this.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

152.

*Þat kann ek it sjaunda:  
ef ek sé hávan loga  
sal um sessmögum,  
brennr-at svá breitt,  
at ek hánum bjargig-a-k;  
þann kann ek galdr at gala.*

Of these know I this seventh:  
if I see high to burn in flames  
the hall around my bench-mates  
it burns-not so wide,  
that I them save-I-not-I;  
this-one know I the galdr to crow/sing/shout.

#### Bellows' translation

153. A seventh I know, | if I see in flames  
The hall o 'er my comrades' heads;  
It burns not so wide | that I will not quench it,  
I know that song to sing.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

The masculine noun *mögr* means ‘young person, man, companion’.

Classically, the masculine words in ‘r’ as *galdr* lose the final ‘r’ in the accusative case. We can thus be surprised that I translate *kann ek galdr* by “I know the galdr”: this treats *galdr* as a direct object of ‘know’, i. e. the accusative. But *galdr* made *galdrs* in the genitive and thus its ‘r’ belongs to the root of the word and this is why it is preserved at the accusative, as it is here.

We already often commented on the verb *gala* (See the comment on *gala*, s. 29) .

## Comment on the meaning

Everywhere in the world, shamans had to show their control of heat (fire or cold) in order to validate their capacities. Here are some examples. Shamans of the Siberian peoples, while in trance, hold burning coals in their hands, sometimes swallow them. Some are able to seize white-hot iron bars without burning themselves. I do not know if all this is true, but it is attested by many witnesses and some ethnologists who studied Siberian shamanism. Conversely, or perhaps in parallel, Manchus cut out nine holes in the ice and ask the candidates shamans to remain in each one of these holes, in succession. Inuit initiation consists of staying five days in icy water. Apart from the shamanic context, the tests to which certain apprentice yogis are subjected are similar.

We also find a striking example (Reported by Lewis Spence, *The History and origins of Druidism*, Newcastle Publishing, 1947) of this resistance to fire in the history of St Patrick, Ireland evangelist. According to the legend, St Patrick fights against the magic of local druids and a battle of magic follows. The head of the Irish druids and St Benign, one of St Patrick's companions, are then both locked up in a small house which is put on fire. Obviously in this context, St Benign goes out of there without a burn and the chief druid is reduced to ashes. We can see in this story a Christian version of stanza 152, where St Patrick plays the role of Óðinn by protecting his companion in a hall in flames.

Many commentators qualify the assertions contained in these 18 songs of Óðinn of boasts. Far from it, you see that it amounts to describing magic such as it has been practiced in the North at the beginning of the vulgar era.

## Evans' Commentaries

### 152

2 This line alliterates only if *sé* is taken as the alliterating word; most editors have been properly reluctant to believe that the verb could take precedence in this way (especially as *sé* does not alliterate in 150, 155 or 157) , ...

[This remark shows that commentators claim themselves able to rewrite a poem by following the rules that Snorri\* (in *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal*) and themselves (in particular Bugge) enacted. In general, I'd call 'bad poet' one who follows too strictly the rules ... what exactly are the commentators who refuse to accept and start at once emending.]

\* Note. Refer to de Judy Quinn's paper, « Eddu list: The emergence of Skaldic pedagogy in Medieval Iceland » downloadable at

<http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~alvismal/4list.pdf>

In particular, she explains that Snorri himself acknowledges that the ancient poets did not always follow all his rules.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 153\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Of these I know this eighth,  
that is among all is  
(most) useful to understand:  
where hate grows  
among the war-leader's sons,  
that I am able to fix up at once.

## ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

153.

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

Of these know I this eighth,  
that among all is  
usefully/productively/amusingly to understand/learn:  
where-is hate grows  
with (among) the war-leader's sons  
that may I fix up suddenly.

### Bellows' translation

154. An eighth I know, | that is to all  
Of greatest good to learn;  
When hatred grows | among heroes' sons,  
I soon can set it right.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The verb *bæta* means to improve, repair and it is also used if the person is sentenced "to pay weregild" for a crime. In this meaning, Óðinn "pays the price of blood" drawn because of disputes that decrease the fighting capacity of the army. The warlike head is in charge to keep order within his troops and he sacrifices something of himself to restore order.

### Comment on the meaning

Here is an example of a magic which may look less incredible to the rationalists. This magic requires so much psychological knowledge and of acquaintance with the complex relationships among the various clans that 'pure' magic seems here almost second rate.

This illustrates how much 'magic power' is indeed knowledge, however not as simple as we usually understand the word knowledge. 'Magic knowledge' request also a large ability to reach certain states of mind where intelligence and sensitivity combine to enable a correct and quasi instantaneous analysis of all the factors controlling an unforeseen situation. For example, in our current civilization, this is illustrated by the so-called cunning way in which foreseers and wizards are said to take advantage of each bit of information provided by their customers. This behavior tends to be looked upon as cheating, whereas Óðinn claims in this stanza that this ability is indeed 'magic'.

## \*\*\*Hávamál 154\*\*\*

### A translation as literal as possible

Of these I know this ninth:  
if I am caught by the need  
to save my ship at sea,  
I quiet down the wind  
on the wave  
and I put the whole sea to sleep.

## ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

154.

<i>Þat kann ek it níunda:</i>	Of these know I this ninth:
<i>ef mik nauðr um stendr</i>	if mine need around stands
<i>at bjarga fari mínu á floti,</i>	to save travel ( <i>here: ship</i> ) mine afloat,
<i>vind ek kyrri</i>	the wind I quiet down
<i>vági á</i>	on the wave
<i>ok svæfik allan sæ.</i>	and put-to-sleep-I the whole sea.

### Bellows' translation

155. A ninth I know, | if need there comes  
To shelter my ship on the flood;  
The wind I calm | upon the waves,  
And the sea I put to sleep.

### Comment on the meaning

As in stanza 149, Grógaldur describes a witch Gróa's ability, similar to Óðinn's.

Grógaldur 11

<i>Þann gel ek þér inn sétta,</i>	This one I crow/sing/shout for you in seventh,
<i>ef þú á sjó kemr</i>	if you arrive in the sea
<i>meira enn viti:</i>	the most (dangerous) that men know:
<i>logn ok lögr</i>	(that) quietness and water
<i>gangi þér í lúðr saman</i>	become to you a flour-bin together
<i>ok ljái þér æ friðrjúgrar farar.</i>	and lend you a sea of peace-full travels.

The primitive meaning of the word *lúðr* is the one of a hollow object, a container. The image of the calm sea called a "flour container" seems to originate from a lost myth (cp. C-V, meaning 2 of *lúðr*). As much as in 149 the common use of the words *boglimum* and *af fótum fjötur* drives to think that Grógaldur and Hávamál are derivative of each other, this does not apply now, and the two stanzas at hand show widely different wordings. Expressions only contained in Grógaldur: *will meira enn menn viti*, *logn ok lögr saman* and the striking image of the word *lúðr* (quietness and sea become as indistinguishable as two specks of flour) makes it possible to think that the two charms have been composed independently. This being said, the same conclusion than for 149 applies: this type of charm seems to be part of a common pool of sorcery knowledge.

## \*\*\*Hávamál 155\*\*\*

### A translation as literal as possible

Of these I know this tenth:  
if I see hedge she-riders  
playing in the air,  
I thus work  
so that they astray travel



from their home-shape,  
from their home-spirit.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

155.

<i>Þat kann ek it tíunda:</i>	Of these know I this tenth:
<i>ef ek sé túnriður</i>	if I see hedge-she-riders/ghosts
<i>leika lofti á,</i>	performing (playing tricks) in the air,
<i>ek svá vinnk</i>	I thus work
<i>at þær villar fara</i>	'at' them astray travel
<i>sinna heimhama,</i>	their home-skin/shape,
<i>sinna heimhuga.</i>	their home-mind/thought/mood/wish/spirit.

### Bellows' translation

156. A tenth I know, | what time I see  
House-riders flying on high;  
So can I work | that wildly they go,  
Showing their true shapes,  
Hence to their own homes.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The neuter noun *tún* means 'edge' and the feminine noun *riða* is generally seen as a derivative of verb *riða*, 'to ride' or 'to sway'. The first meaning is the one usually chosen and *riða* is translated by 'she-rider'. The second meaning of *riða* is also possible here: a 'she-swinger' would then be an imprecise female form, similar to a strand of fog, which does not seem stable when it crosses a solid obstacle. The word *túnriða* indicates also a ghost which contains the idea of 'imprecise forms'. The corresponding masculine is *riði* which would do *riðar* in the plural.

Line 5 refers to them by *þær*, they, nominative or plural feminine dative of the personal pronoun in the third person. There is no doubt that Óðinn refers here to female wizards.

In the last line, the noun *hamr* means 'skin, shape' including the case in which where wizards are often described as being able to change their shape. The word *hugr* has many meanings as we know (see s. 46), 'spirit' seems here the best choice. Thus, in spite of the Evans' final remark below, *heimhamr* and *heimhugr* cannot indicate something else than the home-shape/spirit. This way of speech may look ambiguous since it can be understood as a spirit resident at home, but the context says that the witch's proper shape/spirit had been attacked by Óðinn.

### Comment on the meaning

The magic at play here is not so easily understood as the one of the stanzas before. The above discussion will help us to imagine what happens to the witches. The magic of the "hedge she-riders" is carried out by "leaving their bodies temporarily", as recalled by Evans below. While leaving their bodies, they are exposed to the possibility of not finding their bodies back. In our present civilization where this kind of out-of-the-body state is primarily carried out by imagining it, this risk is almost zero except for psychotic persons. In

opposition, in ancient civilizations, this seems to have been happening when the witches' mission would fail. The two versions of the saga of Peace Thief (Friðþjófr) describe such a situation. First of all, the witches are called *hamhleypunni* = *hamr-hleypunni* and *hleypunni* is the past participle of the verb *hleypa* (to leap, rush, throw). They thus are "shape-throwers," which implies that they might be unable to find back this shape. In addition, the risks at stake are described in four phases in the saga.

First phase: "They worked their *seiðr* and climbed on a platform while carrying out *galdrar* and sorceries."

Second phase. They are located by Peace Thief who states: "I see two women on the back of the whales, and they must have caused this unfriendly storm with the worst of their *seiðr* and *galdrar*. Now we will check what is stronger, my *Hamingja* (protective spirit associated to a family) or their troll shapes."

Third phase, Peace Thief rushes to them and breaks their back: "He immediately struck one of the shape-throwers with a stick, and Elliði's (his boat) keel struck the back of the other one and both (were) back-broken."

Fourth phase: Consequence for the witches. "While they were with their *seiðr*, they fell from the *seiðr* platform, and both (were) back-broken"

The witches are here 'whale-riders' their form is projected on the back of whales they seem to control. Peace Thief's *Hamingja* seems stronger than the magic of the witches, and they pay it with their life.

Peace Thief is simple human and he must risk his life to overcome the witches whereas Óðinn can carry out the same operation by his magic.

This legend very well explains the slightly odd expressions used by Óðinn, *heim-hamr/hugr*: the witches projected their shapes and these will not be able to find back intact the shapes remained in their "home-shapes." That the witches have two kinds of shapes, the home one and the 'thrown' one, may explain why some readers get confused.

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 155

This much-discussed strophe ...

2 *túnriða* only occurs here in ON, but the cognate *zunriten* occurs once in MHG in a list of demonic beings against whom protection is sought ... The Norse word clearly refers to the same class of creature as *kveldriða*, *myrkriða*, *trollriða* 'witch, trollwoman'. Most likely, however, *tún-* means 'fence' here, as in German *Zaun* and modern Swedish dialect *tun*, and alludes to the proclivity of witches to sit astride fences, as mentioned in the Older Västergötland Law

This strophe clearly refers to the well-evidenced Norse belief that a person's soul (*hugr*) could in certain circumstances depart temporarily from his body and range abroad by itself ... sometimes taking on a new physical shape (*hamr*), while the owner's body lay in a trance. (See for example Ynglinga saga ch. 7, where Óðinn is said to possess this gift

However, this use of *heimr* with the gen. to denote 'where something truly belongs' is unparalleled and suspect ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 156\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Of these I know this eleventh:

if I shall to the battle  
lead old friends,  
under the shield I crow/sing/shout,  
and they move with power  
safe to the battle field,  
safe from the battle field,  
they come back safe anyway.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

156.

*Þat kann ek it ellifta:  
ef ek skal til orrustu  
leiða langvini,  
und randir ek gel,  
en þeir með ríki fara  
heilir hildar til,  
heilir hildi frá,  
koma þeir heilir hvaðan.*

Of these know I this eleventh:  
if I shall to the battle  
lead old friends,  
under the shield I crow/sing/shout,  
and they with power travel  
safe battle to,  
safe battle from,  
come them safe anyway.

### Bellows' translation

An eleventh I know, | if needs I must lead  
To the fight my long-loved friends;  
I sing in the shields, | and in strength they go  
Whole to the field of fight,  
Whole from the field of fight,  
And whole they come thence home.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The preposition *und*, now *undir*, means 'below'. It is followed by a dative when it does not express a movement, as it is the case here.

The feminine word *rönd* does *randir* in the plural dative. It means 'edge, rim' and took the meaning of 'shield' in poetry. In this stanza, the dative *randir* indicates that the shield is put in position and is motionless while Óðinn *gelr* inside.

### Comment on the meaning

Even if the expression *und randir ek gel* describes an action difficult to imagine, it is certainly "under the shield" that the magic of protection is sent by the warrior. He thus must raise his shield and howl within his *galdr* to send it (remember *senda* in stanzas 144 and 145) forward the enemy. Evans' comment, below, recalls that the berserks bite the edge of their shield while howling. This is possible, but I rather imagine them howling very close to the edge of their shield ('in' their shield) so as to send a curse that goes over the shield center, in direction of their enemies. Their gaping mouth could be seen as biting their shield.

Another point to clarify is the fact that this stanza tends to be understood as a song of victory since coming back healthy and safe from the battle, implies that it has been a victory. The choice of a kenning is, however, never innocent. Here the kenning for 'warrior' is *langvinr* (friend of long) . Thus, Óðinn protects only a small part of the army, not large

enough to gain the victory. Moreover, the insistence of the last three lines to specify that they are always unhurt, leads me to think that Óðinn implies as they are unhurt in victory as well as in defeat (when they come back home) .

The galdr of 156 is certainly an extremely powerful charm of protection, which helps to win the battle, but does not warrant it. Moreover, Óðinn's "old friends" certainly do not behave as "frightened pig" in the way of the soldiers in s. 129. I insist on this point to support my comment of stanza 129, where I claim that Óðinn recommends to avoid using magic in the battle except if the enemy already did. Stanza 129 deals with victory magic instead of a protection one as in 156, here [which may indeed seem a slightly hypocritical to a crafty spirit].

### Evans' Commentaries

156

4 This line has often been compared to Tacitus' description (Germania, ch. 3) of the *barritus*, the concerted 'battle-roar' with which Germanic warriors inflamed their own courage and terrified the enemy as they drew up for the contest. According to Tacitus, they placed their shields to their mouths to impart a fuller and deeper note ... The word *randóp* ( 'shield-cry') may occur in a stanza of Þórðr Kolbeinsson ... but the text is ... Berserks are commonly described in the sagas as howling and biting the edges of their shields ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 157\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Of these know I this twelfth:  
if I see up on a tree  
swing a necklace-corpse  
thus I carve  
and catch in the runes  
in such a way that the man goes (to me)  
and speaks with me.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

157.

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

Of these know I this twelfth:  
if I see on a tree up  
swing/shudder a halter/necklace-corpse  
thus I carve  
and in the runes (I) paint/catch  
towards this (in order to that) goes the man  
and he speaks with me.

#### Bellows' translation

A twelfth I know, | if high on a tree  
I see a hanged man swing;  
So do I write | and color the runes

That forth he fares,  
And to me talks.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The word *tré*, tree, remain unchanged in the singular dative and accusative, which leaves ambiguous the meaning of *á*. Followed by a dative, it means ‘on, above’, followed an accusative, it means ‘towards’. The context is without ambiguity, and the man about which Óðinn speaks certainly hangs on a tree.

The verb *váfa* means ‘to vibrate, to oscillate’. It should be noted that the associated feminine noun, *váfa*, means ‘spectrum, phantom’.

The word *virgillnár*, here in the accusative or the dative, means *virgill-nár*, halter/necklace-corpse. In stanza 134, Óðinn says that the ‘old one’ whose skin *hangir* (hangs) , keeps away among the books he also “*váfir* (dangles) with the children of misery.” stanza 157 helps understanding te last three lines of 134.

Let us recall (see S. 25 and 59) that the verb *fá* has many meanings. It means ‘to catch, seize, win’ but also the reverse: ‘to give something’ and it means also metaphorically ‘to be able to carry out something’. In addition, it can be a contraction of the verb *fága* and then mean ‘to trace, to paint’.

### Comment on the meaning

In the ‘**Comment on the meaning**’ of stanza 138, we saw that I suggest the possibility that Óðinn was not hung by his neck but rather ‘tied to’ or ‘hooked in’ Yggdrasill’s branches. We have just noted that the ‘halter-corpse’ (*virgill-nár*) with which the present stanza deals can be nothing but a hanged one, in the usual meaning of the word. This explains why a majority of commentators holds for obvious that Óðinn was hung by the neck in Yggdrasill. Another indication that Óðinn’s sacrifices were hung by the neck is found in chapter 7 of Gautrekr’s saga. This chapter is famous because it contains the episode of the ‘dispute’ between Óðinn and Starkaðr which ends by the sacrifice to Óðinn of king Víkarr, executed by the hero Starkaðr. King Víkarr, whose sacrifice is required by Óðinn, accepts that the ceremony is carried out on him because he is convinced it will be a fake. The text of the saga says that, when Víkarr was ready, “... *lagði Starkaðr virgulinn um háls honum*... [w. for w. : put-in-place Starkaðr the halter around the neck his (the one of the king, without ambiguity in this context) ].” We recognize the word *virgill* contained in the 3rd line, here in its other traditional form, *virgull*. All this confirms that the sacrifices to Óðinn are hung by the neck. Remember also the fact that, in stanza 138, Óðinn says of himself: “*gefinn Óðni, sjalfur sjalfum mér* (given to Óðinn, me to myself) .” This way of speech is usually understood that he was sacrificed to himself and thus, like all Óðinn’s sacrifices, hung by the neck. The comments on the vocabulary in stanza 138 showed us that the ‘gift’ of self such as it is expressed by the past participle of *gefa*, *gefinn*, may seem linked to the idea of sacrifice, though in a shallow way. See the note below **on the sacrifices and the sacrificed ones**, which shows that the positions of the god Óðinn (offered to himself) in Yggdrasill and the one of someone hung on the gallows (sacrificed to Óðinn) cannot be closely compared.

Another interesting discussion is that of the exact meaning of the expression *í rúnum fák* in the fifth line. The commentators tend to see there a relationship with *ok fáði fimbulpúl* in stanza 80. These same persons support the idea that this Powerful Storyteller, Fimbulpúl, is no other than Óðinn, while I tried to show, in commenting 80, how much this assumption is improbable. The verb *fá* (to catch) in the preterit gives *fékk* from which

follows that *fáði* in stanza 80 cannot mean ‘he caught’ and it means ‘he painted’. Basing their reasoning on the debatable confusion of Fimbulpúl with Óðinn, they conclude that *fák* in 157 is obviously ‘I paint’. This is grammatically possible, but semantically very hazardous, if the two characters are not really one. Moreover, “to paint in the runes” which have been just carved is possible but odd since painting “in the runes” supposes very deep marks to be painted. It is also a very prosaic description of the magic action. Conversely, “I caught in the runes” alludes, in a metaphorical way, to the power that fills them. The wizard catches what is contained in the runes that he has just carved. In this interpretation, this stanza teaches the runes carvers: Catch the seeds of power resting in the shapes you scratched and magnify them in your galdr!

At any rate, this stanza obviously describes a kind of victory over death.

First of all, this hanged one has been killed by an unspecified worldly power and to bring him/her back from the kingdom of the dead ones is a prickle stung in this power. Grímnismál describes a case where Óðinn revenges from such a mundane power: He stands the torture of an unjust king until he terrifies the king who, in his panic, falls upon his own sword. Similarly, Gautrek’s saga describes a king who wants to use his worldly power to avoid being sacrificed to Óðinn. What happens is that Starkaðr, inspired and helped by Óðinn, convinces the king that the ceremony will be simple show, the king agrees to lend himself to this show, and he dies hung and stabbed by a spear, as a ‘lot’ of (sacrificed to) Óðinn, though he is also ‘sacrificed to’ Óðinn by Starkaðr. We see that Óðinn is not particularly friendly to the powerful ones of this world, especially those who do not stand their rank, as opposed to all these God chosen and blessed kings we know of.

In addition, Óðinn is known to be a necromancy wizard, which precisely consists in forcing the dead ones to speech, without really bringing them back to life. This stanza does not speak to bring back to life the hanged ones, but of being able to question them to share their knowledge.

That the hanged one speaks to Óðinn (if one interprets in this way the verb *mæla*, in last line of this poem) does not seem to be the main lesson he gives. Óðinn himself has been ‘hanged’ and he even there acquired rune knowledge. The poem underlines, in a much more striking way, that this humble hung person reaches a measure similar to Óðinn’s. This is a case where we understand that speaking together is also measuring each other. This is why I prefer not to forget the double meaning of *mæla* in last the line of this stanza.

### *Note on sacrifices and the sacrificed ones*

It is interesting to check more in detail that someone sacrificed (hanged) to Óðinn is not ‘given’ to Óðinn but simply ‘sacrificed’ to him. This is all the more significant since Christian culture precisely transformed the horrible pagan sacrifice into a soft offering to its God, which could have included a semantic slip of some words. Let us see how ‘sacrifices’, and then ‘offerings’, are spoken of.

#### **1. Sacrifices**

The word the most used in Old Norse to speak about sacrifices is *blót*. The associated verb *blóta*, however can sometimes indicate the precise act of sacrifice instead of the ceremony, and can be specifically carried out on the victim. Except for this possible exception, the word *blót* seems to be exclusively used to speak about the sacrificial ceremony, never about the sacrificial victim.

The word *són* means ‘sacrifice’ as witnessed by the two compound words *sónar-dreyri* (the blood of the sacrifice and not ‘sonar-dreyri’ - the blood of the son!) and *sónar-göltr*

(the sacrifice of wild boar) . The first denotes the sacrifice blood sprinkled on the ceremony premises and its members, and which was used to make omens. The second denotes the sacrificed of a wild boar for the festival of Yule. He seems to have never been used to mean a Christian offering.

The word *tafn* means sacrifice as in the expression *Gauts tafn* (sacrifice to the Goth – i. e. , Óðinn) . It takes also the meaning of ‘corpse’ and it does not seem used to mean a Christian offering.

The verb *sæfa*, ‘to kill, to slaughter’, was used to speak about sacrificed animals and a *sæfing* denotes such an animal sacrifice. Again, no Christian uses, to the best of my knowledge.

In parallel, the words *hlaut* (blood) and *hlutr* (lot drawn by fate) denote also of the sacrificed one. For example, in Gautrekr’s saga quoted above, king Vikarr is not said to be *gefinn* to Óðinn, he is said to be Óðinn’s ‘lot’ (*hlutr*) because he had been chosen by drawing lots to be sacrificed to Óðinn.

It is finally noticeable that Christendom seems to have carefully avoided using Heathen words to indicate its own offerings.

## 2. Offerings

The only word of which we could suppose that it underwent a semantic slip is *förn* (do not confuse with *forn* that means ‘old’) . It means ‘offering’ but could be used for ‘sacrifice’ in the made up word *slátrförn*, a ‘flesh-sacrifice/offering’, but this seems that it would then be a sacrifice of the Jewish religion and not a Heathen sacrifice.

Finally, there is indeed a way of speech saying that a person is offered to Óðinn. This does not concern a public religious sacrifice but is either a warlike practice which is the most terrible of ‘Heathen offerings’, or a funeral practice where a dying one wounds himself (or is sometimes helped to it) by a spear, as to offer him to Óðinn.

The warlike practice is the *blóð-örn* (blood-eagle) where the winner offers his still alive enemy to Óðinn by cutting out his ribs, pulling his lungs out, and spreading them out as two bloody wings (seen as the ones of an eagle) . For example, Orkneys saga, says of a winner that “*gaf hann Óðni tils sigrs sér* (he - the winner - - gave him -the defeated one - to Óðinn for his - the winner’s - victory) .”

The funeral practice is the one of *marka sik geiroddi* (to mark oneself with the point of a spear) . One finds an example where the ‘dying one’ does not wound himself in the very chapter 7 of Gautrekr’s we already cited. Starkaðr, after having struck king Vikarr with a rod (that will soon change into a spear by Óðinn’s magic) says: “*nú gef ek þik Óðni* (now I offer you to Óðinn) .” This saga shows some ambiguity because king Vikarr will be hung and simultaneously stabbed by a spear. Starkaðr, however, utters these words immediately after having struck Vikarr with the rod that will become a spear. In the exact same way, in stanza 138, which we read without paying much attention to the order of the lines: “*geiri undaðr / ok gefinn Óðni* (by a spear wounded / and offered to Óðinn) ,” the offering to Óðinn is placed immediately after the wound with a spear.

Combining that to the rite *marka geiroddi* of the warriors who mark themselves to be offered to Óðinn, we understand that that offering oneself to Óðinn is done by spear stabbing and not by a hanging.

All these arguments show that the position of Óðinn’s sacrifices is not the same as the one of the people sacrificed to him and the present stanza does not prove at all that Óðinn was hung by the neck.

### A translation as literal as possible

Of these I know this thirteenth:  
if I shall (on) a young free-man  
throw water (on) ,  
he should not fall,  
though he comes among people:  
this man does not sink in front of the swords.

### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

158.

*Þat kann ek it þrettánda:  
ef ek skal þegn ungan  
verpa vatni á,  
mun-at hann falla,  
þótt hann í folk komi:  
hnígr-a sá halr fyr hjörum.*

Of these know I this thirteenth:  
if I shall a free man young  
throw water on,  
must-not he fall,  
though he among people he comes:  
he sinks-not this man before the swords.

### Bellows' translation

A thirteenth I know, | if a thane full young  
With water I sprinkle well;  
He shall not fall, | though he fares mid the host,  
Nor sink beneath the swords.

I know the thirteenth: if on a young thane  
I shall sprinkle water,  
he will not fall  
though he fights in a battle- that stalwart does not sink before swords.

158. I know a thirteenth, if it falls to me,  
to sprinkle a young boy with water,  
he will never fall when he walks to war, that warrior will never sink under  
swords.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

The verb *skulu*, ‘shall’ as it does in English may become a simple auxiliary, or take a meaning stronger than ‘must’, depending on the context. Conversely, the verb *munu*, also ‘will, shall’ is mostly used as an auxiliary expressing the future. It is here in the negative form, *munu-at*, which expresses that the young man who is sprinkled “will not fall”.

The verb *verpa* means to throw (something, in the dative) . Here *vatni* is the dative case of the neuter word *vatn*, water.

The verb *ausa*, of which Evans announces that it is more generally employed than *verpa*, is a topic of discussion among the specialists. C-V gives the meanings ‘to sprinkle, to



kick (for a horse) , to pump (for water in a boat) '. De Vries gives only 'to draw' (from any container) and Lex. Poet. gives the two meanings: 'to draw, to sprinkle'.

The verb *skíra* means 'to clean, purify' and in an ecclesiastical context, 'to baptize'.

### Comment on the meaning

We will see in the comment of Evans below that the operation of *verpa vatni á* is comparable to (or even reduced to) a baptism by some specialists. It is striking in the sagas that when a child is 'sprinkled with water' the thing is stated very briefly. All we know is that the ceremony consists in sprinkling and allotting a name to the baby. The Scandinavian ceremony of sprinkling was strictly private and thus did not call upon the authority of a Heathen priest. Óðinn's presence in such a ceremony, even under his usual disguise of an old vagrant, is thus quite improbable.

Christian influence lays here more in the lack of details relating to this significant operation than in the evocation of a Christian baptism. It would then be named with contempt insofar as neither *vapna* nor *ausa* mean to purify. Moreover, we do not understand how this 'baptized one' either stays pagan, or even more incredibly, converts to Christianity later during his life.

If we choose to understand *ungr* as denoting a baby, then the charm endowed to the baby by Óðinn is supposed to stay active during his whole life. This recalls the legends of the fairies who allot good or bad features to the babies, as in the tale of Sleeping Beauty. Such 'life-long charms' seem to be not very credible in the context of the ancient Scandinavian culture where a magic being, as is the Hamingja, watches the 'charmed one' all his life long. In the present instance, while advancing in age, the charmed one will eventually reach a state in which he will be unable to take care of himself, thus the charm should stop acting.

It is thus possible that the adjective *ungr*, here in the masculine accusative, *ungan*, does not designate a baby, but a young man who would in this way become an Óðinn protected being at specific times. This would also explain why Óðinn does not *ausa*, the verb used for sprinkling babies, but he will rather *verpa* a young warrior, a unique instance for using this verb, as said by Evans.

Be them selected with at birth or later, the existence of two types of bands of particularly frightening warriors dedicated to Óðinn, *berserkir* and *úlfrédnar* (wolf-coats) confirms the belief in a protective charm for some selected warriors.

### Evans' Commentaries

158

The pagan Norsemen are depicted as 'baptizing' new-born infants in a good many passages in the sagas, e. g. Egils saga ch. 31, Laxdoela saga ch. 25 ... and further references in Cleasby-Vigfusson ... *ausa (vatni)* , which is the regular expression (not elsewhere with *verpa* as here) ..., noting the absence of satisfactory evidence for this practice in Germanic heathendom outside Scandinavia, attributed the custom to Christian influence, a view that has been widely followed; cp. however de Vries *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin 1956-7) §137. Walter Baetke ... suggests that the pagan Norsemen did not in historical fact practise baptism and that these passages are misrepresentations by christianizing saga-writers; this obliges him to suppose, implausibly, that the present strophe is 'a late addition'. [See, s. 140, my comments on "Germanic sprinkling" being different from Roman lustration and Christian baptism.]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 159\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Of these I know this fourteenth:  
if I should (in front of) the warrior people / tell of the gods,  
[or if I should (for) the warrior people / speak to the gods,]  
of the æsir or the elves  
I can for everything (of them) ;  
none (of it) can do a non-wise one.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

159.

*Þat kann ek it fjögurtánda:* Of these know I this fourteenth:  
*ef ek skal fyrða liði* if I should of the warriors to the people [to the people of warriors]  
*telja tíva fyrir,* speak of the gods in front of,  
*ása ok alfa* æsir and elves  
*ek kann allra skil;* I can in all part (them) ;  
*fár kann ósnotr svá.* few (or none) can a non-wise one thus.

#### Bellows' translation

160. A fourteenth I know, | if fain I would name  
To men the mighty gods;  
All know I well | of the gods and elves,  
Few be the fools know this.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

The neuter word *lið* denotes the people, the army. It does *liði* in the singular dative. The masculine word *tívi* (a god) is generally used in the plural, *tívar*. It does *tíva* in the plural accusative and genitive (and other cases as well) . The preposition *fyrir*, in front of, controls the dative when it does not describe a movement and the accusative when it describes one. One of the meanings of *fyrir* when it controls the accusative is 'to be in position to cross the way of someone'.

Thus, Evans' assertion that "*fyrir* governs *liði*" is dependent on the context and, on the contrary, lines 2 and 3 simultaneously express that Óðinn can 'be in front of the people' or 'cross the way of the gods'.

The verb *telja* means 'to say, to tell' and also 'to count'.

In line 6, the verb *kunna*, 'to know, understand, be able of' is irregular and does *kann* in the present first person.

The adjective *allr*, 'all', is used as an adverb when it is in the genitive, in both cases: singular, *alls* or *allz*, and plural, *allra*.

#### Comment on the meaning

The ambiguity related to the two possible meanings of *fyrir*, depending whether it controls the accusative or the dative, suggest the image of an Óðinn being used as intermediary between humanity (the people of the warriors can be a kenning for 'humanity')

and the gods. In this stanza, Óðinn takes the position of a kind of a supreme goði, connecting humans and gods.

A goði and war leader, even if a simple human, is in charge to speak of the gods to his followers as described in this stanza. In the particular case of Óðinn, it can even take them along with him to Valhöll.

A wizard, in the irreligious view that we have today, has little to do with his gods, as Evans points out. Inversely, in our religious context all the charms evoked in these stanzas are connected to the divinities and the choice of the divinity who goes along a charm is significant. Knowing the gods is thus necessary and to avoid the confusion of the Æsir with the Elves. As Óðinn says, a “stupid person” is unaware of that and allows himself to use magic apart from his religion. Óðinn throws this insult in the face of the immense majority of human beings ... though this is nothing but commenting stanza 159.

### Evans' Commentaries

#### 159

Unlike the other strophes, this does not appear to refer to knowledge of a spell.

3 *fyrir* governs *lidi*.

6 *ósnotr* elsewhere in the poem alliterates on the vowel, but there is a number of instances in the Edda where the negative prefix *ó-* is ignored in the alliteration ...

### \*\*\*Hávamál 160\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Of these I know this fifteenth:  
that Þjóðrerir crowed/sung/shouted  
in front of Dellinger's doors:  
strength he crowed/sung/shouted for the Æsir, but renown (*or*  
conspicuousness) for the Elves,  
thought for Hroptatýr.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

160.

*Þat kann ek it fimmtánda  
er gól Þjóðrerir  
dvergr fyr Dellings durum:  
afl gól hann ásum,  
en alfum frama,  
hyggju Hroftatý.*

Of these know I this fifteenth:  
that crowed/sung/shouted Þjóðrerir  
the dwarf before Dellinger's doors:  
(physical) strength he crowed/sung/shouted for the æsir  
but for the elves renown (conspicuousness) ,  
thought to Hroptatýr.

#### Bellows' translation

A fifteenth I know, | that before the doors  
Of Delling sang Thjothrörir the dwarf;  
Might he sang for the gods, | and glory for elves,  
And wisdom for Hroptatyr wise.

## Commentary on the vocabulary

The meaning of the name *Þjóðrerir* is still under discussion. If we think its form is similar to *óðrerir* (*óð-rerir*) and that this last means ‘that which brings *óðr*’ (intelligence), it can then take two meanings. It may mean “the one of who brings the *þjóð* (people),” or think of intensive use of the prefix *þjóð* - or still think of *þjóðann*, the king. The last two choices lead us to a meaning around the idea of ‘the one who brings power’, which agrees with the galdr sung by *Þjóðrerir*.

The neuter or feminine word *dyrr*, ‘a door’ can sometimes do the datives *dura* and *durum*.

The name *Dellingr*, known as the father of *Dagr* (Day), is given by Vries as etymologically linked to the root *dall\** (as in the name of the god *Heimdallr*) which means ‘shining’. This meaning also agrees with its role of Day’s father.

The masculine word *frami* does *frama* in the accusative and means ‘renown, fame’.

The feminine noun *hyggja* (*hyggju* in the accusative) means ‘thought, opinion’.

We already saw in stanza 142 that *Hroptatýr* is a traditional name of Óðinn, and we discussed the meaning of this name. Note that Orchard calls him Tumult-god, i. e., he understands *hroptr* as ‘tumult’. In a similar, but more precise way, I interpreted it as ‘herald of the unsaid truths’, and the name of the Týr god placed in postfix position, introduces here the concept of supreme god. *Hroptatýr* may mean something like “supreme god, herald of the unsaid truths”.

## Comment on the meaning

When commenting stanza 159, I described Óðinn as a “supreme goði” who exceeds by far all anything a human person can dream. We will see that as soon as 161, he will become again excessively human-like. In the present stanza, he reaches a summit which appears inaccessible since he ‘climbs higher’ than in 159: here, instead of being a ‘simple’ intermediate between the gods and humanity, he knows the galdr which makes it possible to decide features of two divine races and *Hroptatýr*’s, the supreme herald of the unsaid truths.

And thus, there is a galdr able to grant outstanding capacities to the race of Æsir, that of the Elves and to a supreme god, *Hroptatýr*.

A “supreme herald of the unsaid truths” cannot allow himself the least trace of intellectual weakness, this is why, if this is really a name allotted to Óðinn by the Scandinavian religions, we can say that Óðinn is a god of ‘supreme intelligence’, one which we cannot even really imagine. Let us note that he is not ‘omnipotent’, he is only ‘omni-intelligent’ ... what clearly differentiates him from God of the revealed religions.

This galdr allots ‘strength’ to the Æsir. In Scandinavian mythology, three gods are distinguished as being characteristic of the Æsir. Óðinn is called: “most important of the Æsir” [refer to Ólafsson and Worm’s *Specimen Lexici Runici* p. 9 (1650) : “*Odinum asarum principem significat*” and Snorri: “*Óðinn er æðstr ásanna*”]. Freyr is called “most famous of the Æsir” [ref. Snorri: “*ágætasti af ásum*”]. Þórr is called: “strongest of the Æsir” [ ref. Snorri, and Ólafsson and Worm: “*Thorum asarum imperatorem fortissimum significant*”]. The allusion made to strength in this stanza thus refers undoubtedly to Þórr, but also to the “second strongest of the Æsir” [ref. : Snorri]: Víðarr. The reference to fame certainly alludes to Freyr, king of the Elves.

As in 142, we meet here a trilogy of gods which is certainly younger than the one of 142. This new trilogy is now quite compatible with Dumézil’s. Óðinn, Þórr et Freyr are the representatives of functions 1, 2 et 3 in Dumézil’s ordering. We have to be aware, however, that the first function is not ‘kingly’ (as in Dumézil) but ‘principal’, the second function is

not specially ‘warlike’ but ‘strong’ (Dumézil says “strong and especially warlike”) , and the third function is not devoted to ‘voluptuousness and wealth’ but to ‘fame’.

In stanza 143, I had noted that Óðinn seemed to express some contempt towards the magic of the Elves. Stanza 160 goes in the same direction in allotting to them a surface quality as ‘fame’. Freyr being referred to as ‘king of Elves’ and that he is known as the most famous of the Æsir, all this agrees with what Óðinn says of the Elves. This contempt for Freyr gives the feeling that the war between the Æsir and the Vanir had very deep roots in the personal ethics of the Scandinavian gods.

### Evans’ Commentaries

160

1 Apart from the problematic 152, this is the only strophe in Ljóðatal where the numeral does not alliterate. Some editors therefore suspect corruption ...

2 *Þjóðreyrir* is not mentioned elsewhere.

3 Dellingr appears in lists of dwarf-names in a Þula (Skj. i. 672) and in Fjolsvinnsmál 34, and is said in Vafþr. 25 to be the father of Day (Dagr) . The phrase *fyr Dellings durum* occurs in a formula which opens four of the riddles of Gestumblindi (in Heiðreks saga) . The name has been thought to mean ‘bright one’, cp. early Irish *dellrad* ‘sheen, brilliance’.

[Honestly, de Vries’ etymology is more convincing than a similar Irish word.]

6 Hroptatýr is well evidenced as a name for Óðinn, cp. Hropr 142.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 161\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Of these I know this sixteenth:  
if I will of the wise girl  
[a non-married woman, full of knowledge and wisdom]  
have her whole spirit and pleasure,  
I turn around the thought  
of the white-armed woman  
and I change her whole mood.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

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.*

Of these know I this sixteenth:  
if I will of the wise girl  
have spirit whole and pleasure,  
(her) thought I turn around  
to the white-armed woman  
and change I of her whole mood.

#### Bellows’ translation

162. A sixteenth I know, | if I seek delight

To win from a maiden wise;  
The mind I turn | of the white-armed maid,  
And thus change all her thoughts.

### Commentary on the vocabulary

We already met several times the adjective *svinnr* (or *sviðr*) in stanzas 21, 23, 91, 103. It means ‘quick, wise’ where wise has no connotation of being modest or reserved but the one being knowledgeable. The neuter noun *man* has been already explained in stanza 82 and again quickly in stanzas 92 and 98. Thus, a *svinna man* is here what we would call an ‘educated and full of wisdom single person’.

In the fifth line, Óðinn speaks of a *kona*, i. e. a woman. This word can take the meaning of ‘wife’.

We already met *geð* and *hugr* together in stanza 46 where we translated *geð* by ‘spirit’ and *hugr* by ‘thought’ as we can do here.

The verb *hverfa* means ‘to turn’ and its subject is what ‘turns’. In this meaning, it should do *hyrfi* in the first person subjunctive preterit (‘that I would turn’). The form *hverfi* used here indicates that it is a causal form of *herfa*: ‘to make turn’. In the subjunctive preterit, it thus seems to adopt a regular form *hverfi* (‘that I would make turn’).

The verb *snúa*, ‘to turn, change’, does *sný* in the first person of the present. Its complement of object is in the dative, as here *öllum sefa*.

We already met the masculine noun *sefi* in stanzas 53 and 95 where we translated it by ‘spirit’ with the connotation of ‘quietness of spirit’ given by the meaning of the verb *sefa*: to alleviate. “To change and turn the quietness of spirit” evokes what is also said as “to make the head spin.”

### Comment on the meaning

This song and the two following ones relate to male/female relationships, obviously presented from a male point of view. The three songs are love-inducing\* songs, adapted to three kinds of women. I make a point of underlining immediately that the majority of the commentators frown in front of such a profusion of advice relating to seduction. In a civilization where woman is systematically belittled, such a safety measure is of course useless and felt as ridiculous. In the ancient Scandinavian civilization, the respect for women so often shows through that is not so surprising that Óðinn adapts his behavior to the fact that a normal woman changes during her life and that new needs must be answered by new means of seduction. I am not certain that such a respect is really commonplace in our present civilization.

\* *Note on ‘love-inducing’*. The verb ‘to seduce’ implies the idea of “tempting someone into an evil or improper behavior” (see Webster for instance). I would gladly accept to change its meaning into “tempting someone into an unexpected enriching behavior,” but I am not in position to change the meaning of words. I’ll rather use the made up verb ‘to love-induce’ to express the idea that the seducer is also seduced, the seduction is asked for by the seduced one, and it takes place for the best of both partners. It might be that this enchanted state of being does not last forever. In general, a failed seduction is very strongly reproved and punished by our society that includes thus artificially, by its own authority, the evil part of seduction. The first meaning of the Latin original word *seducere* is ‘to pull apart’, which might be equally for the best or for the worse. It took later the meaning of ‘to corrupt’, which became primary in English. Concerning the ancient Scandinavian civilization, these last three stanzas hint at a completely different point of view, perhaps even dating from the hypothetical times of the Vanir.

In stanza 161, the person to be love-induced is an erudite young woman who becomes a riper woman in line five. We can here claim that the poet chose these words by simple compliance with the alliteration poetic rules. But we may also believe that Óðinn, by changing his way of naming the woman to be love-induced, takes into account this woman's ripening. We can consider that this *svinna man* is a valuable bride who marries and becomes then a ripe woman, who will become even more learnt than the girl she has been.

Knowledge is always associated to magic capacities, which leads me to think that this young woman is a young witch, a still inexperienced one. When she will become a woman, she will then reach her full power. To love-induce such a woman is undoubtedly not very easy. Doing so with a *galdr* was undoubtedly more of a demonstration of power than some love cooing. This recalls the way, described in *Skirnismál*, by which Skirnir love-induces Gerðr for Freyr. At first, Gerðr rejects contemptuously Freyr's offers, which leads Skirnir to show off his magic capacities by threatening to carve three runes for her. At once, Gerðr gives up her arrogance and, somewhat reluctantly, "agrees to marry a Vane."

I feel unable to better explain the relation between Freyr and Gerðr than Carolyne Larrington did in her 'feminist' analysis of *Skirnismál*: "What does a Woman Want? Mær und munr in *Skirnismál*" available at <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~alvismal/1maer.pdf>. I thus send you back to this subtle and enthralling analysis in order to better understand why Óðinn opposed so much to Freyr's request. We know that Freyr lost his sword in the bargain but, more importantly, he raped Gerðr in a way. Stanza 101 lesson is clear: the rapist (a potential one in Óðinn's case) does not deserve anything better but to suit himself with the partner he deserves, a bitch. The lesson of stanza 161 is that 'love-inducing' a full of wisdom maid, i. e. educated and intelligent, is a work that needs your whole magic abilities and which one will be completed only with the advice of 163, after having avoided (or played with) successes only worthy of a "Wretched Dragon," as described by s. 162.

I have been deeply impressed by this splendid poem and I produced two different versions of it as 'tales'. One mostly follows Larrington's version in the paper above cited, though presenting a stronger Gerðr, it is available at <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/SkirnisforTale.htm>. The other one takes a view opposed to the classical one by postulating that Gerðr is largely Freyr's accomplice by playing a charade on the Giants and Skirnir in order to avoid Gerðr dishonoring at marrying her brother's killer. It is to be found at : <http://www.nordic-life.org/nmh/weddingFreyrGerdr.htm>.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 162\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Of these I know this seventeenth:  
she cannot strongly shun me  
she, the youthful girl.  
These songs  
you will, Wretched Dragon,  
for long be missing (them) ;  
though they would be for you good, if you (ever) get (them) ,  
useful if you catch (them) ,  
if you accept (their) need.

## ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

162.

*Þat kann ek it sjautjándi  
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 þiggir.*

Of these know I this seventeenth:  
me she will weakly shun  
she the youthful girl.  
Songs these  
will-you, Wretched Dragon,  
at length missing be;  
though they would be for you good, if you get (them) ,  
useful if you catch (them) ,  
need if you accept (it) .

## Bellows' translation

163. A seventeenth I know, | so that seldom shall go  
A maiden young from me;

.....  
.....

164. Long these songs | thou shalt, Loddfáfnir,  
Seek in vain to sing;  
Yet good it were | if thou mightest get them,  
Well, if thou wouldst them learn,  
Help, if thou hadst them.

## Commentary on the vocabulary

In the last three ones line, *góðr* and *nýtr* are adjectives ('good' and 'useful') and whereas *þörf* is a substantive ('necessity'). This feminine word can be in the accusative to be here in complement of object of *þiggja*, as Bellows and Orchard do. They all, however, stick to the meaning 'to get' of *þiggja*.

## Comment on the meaning

We recognize a last appearance of Loddfáfnismál's leitmotiv at the end of the present stanza. Instead of being surprised by it, as Evans does below, let us try to know why Óðinn had to put this seventeenth song in Loddfáfnir's hands.

We could note that Loddfáfnismál is sometimes ironic or even straightforwardly outrageous (s. 112 in particular) in the advice it gives. The "youthful girl" whose main concern is discovering her female hormones is not a very enriching success, nor a difficult one, she may become knowledgeable and wise later ... All things considered, to love-induce such a girl perfectly fits the level of Wretched Dragon's magic. Óðinn assigns to him this type of inglorious reciprocal seducing.

## Evans' Commentaries

162

3 The adjective *manungr* occurs only here; it appears to mean 'maiden-young', i. e. in the prime of maidenhood ...



5 The sudden reappearance of Loddfáfnir here is strange, and it may well be that 4-9 properly belong to Loddfáfnismál.

### \*\*\*Hávamál 163\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Of these I know this eighteenth:  
this one, I never teach  
to a maiden nor to a man's wife,  
- all is better  
that I alone fully know (it) ;  
this closes the content of my songs,  
except to the only one  
who protects me with her arm  
and who is also my sister.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

163.

*Þat kann ek it átjándi,  
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.*

Of these know I this eighteenth:  
this one I never teach-I  
to maiden nor to a man's woman,  
- all is better  
that I alone fully know;  
this closes the content of my songs,  
except to the one alone  
who protects me with her arm  
and who is also my sister.  
(or "or who is my sister") .

#### Bellows' translation

An eighteenth I know, | that ne 'er will I tell  
To maiden or wife of man, --  
The best is what none | but one's self doth know,  
So comes the end of the songs, --  
Save only to her | in whose arms I lie,  
Or who else my sister is.

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

The adverb *æva* (or *æfa*) is a form of *æ-gi* = always-not.

The verb *kenna*, used in line 2, means 'to know, entrust, teach'.

The verb *kunna*, 'to know' does *kann* in the first and the third person of the singular of the indicative present. We often translated "*kann ek*" by 'I know' but, in line 5, the person who *kann*, first or third person, is completely ambiguous.

The masculine word *armr*, the arm, here *armi*, can be only a singular dative. The translations which use ‘the arms’ (which would be *armum*) do not take into account this fact. Dronke only renders it by a singular, as I do.

The verb *verja* has two distinct meanings and perhaps resulting from distinct etymologies. One is ‘to defend, protect’, the other is ‘to clothe, surround’. Both do *verr* in the third person of the indicative present (he/she protects or surrounds). To surround by only one arm is physical feat, this is why I chose the meaning ‘to protect’: This woman “protects me with her arm” instead of “coddling me in her arms.”

### Comment on the meaning

Several commentators seem puzzled by line 6 announcing that Óðinn stops here teaching, while he goes on. Line 7 explains why: he stops “except for ...”

In principle, the woman to whom Óðinn refers is indeed his wife Frigg, as Evans recalls. It is also possible that Óðinn never used this *galdr*. He however stresses its importance, by putting it forward in this way.

The lesson of the stanza is double sided. Óðinn advises his pupils that they may choose between two attitudes. Either they feel deeply happy when alone, and they then have to hide a part of their knowledge to their partners, even if they love them tenderly. Or some part of their heart is lacking if they do not meet their ‘sister’, i. e. their soul mate, who may be or not their biological sister, biology being irrelevant here. In this case, they must be extremely careful in sharing their knowledge because, as stanza 114 points out, a witch who is not their soul mate is going to reduce them to slavery.

The meaning of the verb *verja* is very significant here. If we choose ‘to surround’ the woman in question is introduced as a lover and the stanza would mean, somewhat absurdly, that the magician can reveal his secret knowledge to the first woman who will take him in her arms. If we choose, as I did, ‘to protect’, it is understood that such a woman protects her partner, which is much more common than what many people believe it, and applies to sorcerers as well as to any man. This ‘protecting arm’ reminds of the Germanic habits of the she-shield carrier who fought alongside her partner, he striking the enemy with his sword, her protecting him with her shield, indeed “with her arm.”

### Evans’ Commentaries

163

7-8 i. e. Óðinn’s wife Frigg.

9 Óðinn in fact had no sister [or he had several one soul mates, a god may show non human features.]

The notion that Óðinn has a great secret which he will communicate to none (save his wife) has often reminded readers of the unanswerable riddle posed by the disguised Óðinn in *Vafþr. 54* and in *Heiðreks saga* ... ‘What did Óðinn say in Baldr’s ear before he mounted the pyre?’; the query exposes the questioner’s identity, since only Óðinn knows the answer.

[I did not comment this hypothesis since it seems very stretchy to me. Thinking of stanza 114 is much more important. Besides, *Vafþrúðnismál* describes Óðinn in a dangerous position in his deadly fight with *Vafþrúðnir* who had been till then able to answer all questions: if he is unable to prove that *Vafþrúðnir* lacks some knowledge, he will have to accept to be put to death. He then asks a devious question in a tricky way to save his skin. The content of the knowledge is not relevant. Inversely, the context here is the one of a relationship with a woman he loves, and the point is to hide or not a knowledge by which he might become her slave. The content of this knowledge is much more important than its secrecy.]

### \*\*\*Hávamál 164\*\*\*

#### A translation as literal as possible

Now High's speech are  
sung in High's hall,  
all-needed by the sons of men,  
not-needed by the giants' sons.  
Hail him, who said,  
hail him, who knows,  
who learned something he will value,  
hail, all who listened.

#### ON Text and its pseudo English literal translation

<i>Nú eru Háva mál</i>	Now are High's speech
<i>kveðin Háva höllu í,</i>	sung High's hall in,
<i>allþörf ýta sonum,</i>	all-needed by the sailors' (men) sons,
<i>óþörf jötna sonum.</i>	not-needed by the giants' sons.
<i>Heill sá, er kvað,</i>	Hail him, who said,
<i>heill sá, er kann,</i>	hail him, who knows,
<i>njóti sá, er nam,</i>	let them appreciate, who took/learned,
<i>heilir, þeir hlýddu.</i>	hail, all who listened.

#### Bellows' translation

165 (our 138)  
Now are Hor's words | spoken in the hall,  
Kind for the kindred of men,  
Cursed for the kindred of giants:  
Hail to the speaker, | and to him who learns!  
Profit be his who has them!  
Hail to them who hearken!

#### Commentary on the vocabulary

The verb 'to be'. *vera* does *eru*, 'they are', in the plural third person of the present. The word *mál* is thus implicitly a plural although its grammatical form is the one of a singular.

The verb *kveða* does *kveðin* in the feminine past participle. In my translation, I intentionally render *mál* by 'speech' to keep the idea of a plural thing. In fact, this word, means 'word', 'measure' or 'drawing' and is a neuter. One can also think that this word is made of a song, *ljóð*, this one is also a neuter.

The verb *njóta* means 'to use, appreciate, profit'. Its subjunctive (a form suggested by Evans) would be *nyti*, and its imperative would be *njót*. There would thus meet here an imperative form of the subjunctive... why not? The English expression "let him appreciate!" is similar.

We see that this last stanza contains some grammatical 'errors', a grammar obviously acquired by using less sacred texts.

### Comment on the meaning

This last stanza looks like an echo of stanza 111.

The incantation announced in 111 “is sung in High’s hall” and 164 announces that it was indeed “sung in High’s hall” (second line of 164) .

In 111, Óðinn says that he observes what the human ones say of the runes “*hlýdda ek á manna mál* (I listened to the words of the human ones) ”. In 164, he says that they “are all-needed to the sons of man” and even reserved to humankind insofar as they are useless to the Giants... and undoubtedly also to any non-human ones.

All this strongly suggests that Óðinn’s proper rune teaching is contained in stanzas 111-164. For this reason I interpreted *Loddfáfnismál* stanzas as a real rune teaching, while it is usually considered as secondary or even ridiculous by the commentators, including some who consider themselves as Óðinn’s disciples. In fact, 164 is a kind of solemn conclusion affirming that the promise, solemn as well, contained in 111 is indeed held.

In this last stanza, Óðinn greets all the ‘*loddfáfnar*’ who made the effort to leave their mediocrity by learning, catching, valuing the knowledge that he has taught them in the 163 preceding stanzas. ‘Learning’ does not mean only ‘to listen and to remember’, it is necessary also ‘to feel them in your body’ and ‘to incorporate in your mind’, to make them ‘a part of your soul’. It is moreover necessary to show creativity enough to build the *galdrar* he spoke of so often and the magic evoked throughout his High’s speech. The 163 preceding stanzas are there to lead us in the (re-) creation of this magic and these *galdrar*.

Stanzas 1-90 provide advice on everyday life and are called ‘gnomic’ by the experts. They subdivide in fifteen groups as follows:

### Evans’ Commentaries

[None]