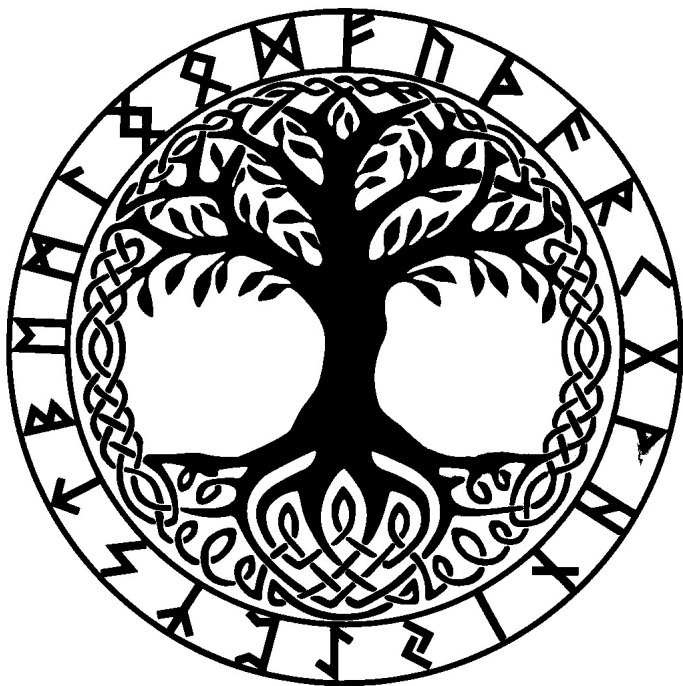






# VOLUSPÁ



*by*

*Nishil Sharma*

Submitted on 8 August 2024 for partial fulfillment of the –  
project—a graduation requirement at New Albany High  
School.

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

*I was young once,  
I travelled alone,  
I lost my way;  
I thought myself rich  
when I met another;  
man is man's joy.*

*- Hávamál 47*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## THANK YOU

I owe an astronomical debt of gratitude to the various editors, translators, commentators, and analysts of *Völuspá*. In particular, the work of the late Professor Dronke, Edward Petitt, and Professor Larrington were chiefly helpful in the normalization, translation, and interpretation of the text.

The online resources provided by Professor Jackson Crawford and the textbooks of Professors E.V. Gordon and Michael Barnes were essential in helping me learn the Old Norse language. I thank all whose work has guided my study of language.

I thank Professors Larrington and Wolf for providing immense guidance in shaping the specifics of my project. Professor Harris provided much assistance in interpretation and translation choices. Moreover, I thank him for keeping me pragmatic at all times and remembering to look at the text for what it is. Professor Russom was a great help in preventing me from getting lost in the sea of scholarly opinions and staying true to my interests. I am grateful for his active guidance of my research.

My Senior Seminar teachers—Mrs. Morlan and Mrs. Sage—ensured that I kept up with deadlines and maintained a steady rate of progress. I thank the entire New Albany High School Senior Team for their time and effort in shaping and teaching the Senior Seminar project. I have

been able to engage with a truly incredible learning experience and opportunities I never would have been exposed to without their work.

I am additionally grateful to my family and friends, who provided relentless support and were a great help in reminding me of my audience.

Finally, I thank everyone else who has influenced the course of my life and education. I am endlessly grateful.

## DISCLAIMER

It is an unfortunate truth that Old Norse literature has a history of being weaponized by prejudiced individuals with malevolent intentions. I vehemently denounce and reject association with any use of the literature to promote discrimination and prejudice on any basis—including but not limited to race, sex, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, nationality, ethnicity, economic and social status.

I am unconscious of intentional error within this work. I think it quite probable that error persists in this book despite my best efforts. I claim sole responsibility and apologize for any errors, inconsistencies, questionable assertions, missing attributions, and poor design choices present. It is my hope that they do not severely detract from my purpose: to connect others with a beautiful tradition of literature and culture.





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# PREFACE

## OLD NORSE LANGUAGE

The "Old Norse" language is often defined as the medieval-era language spoken by the North Germanic peoples residing in parts of Scandinavia and their off-shore settlements. Its usage coincides with the Christianization of Scandinavia and the Viking era.

Old Norse separated from Proto-Norse—thought to be derived from a Northern dialect of the Indo-European language Proto-Germanic—in the 8th century. As time went on, Old Norse itself split into separate dialects: Old West Norse, the predecessor to Icelandic, Norwegian, and Faroese; Old East Norse, the predecessor to Danish and Swedish; and Old Gutnish, a language without modern descendants, but closely related to the Gothic language. The final divergence into the separate Nordic languages is attested to occur around the 15th century. The language of *Völuspá* is Old West Norse, sometimes simply called 'Old Icelandic'.

Proto-Norse was written in the runic Elder Futhark, the oldest of the Germanic scripts. In the 8th century, Elder Futhark was simplified by the North Germanic people into Younger Futhark (the runes of which can be found on the front cover of this book, encircling Yggdrasil), the first script we find conventional Old Norse recorded in. The Latin alphabet was adapted for the language as well, with the addition of the letters 'Ð/ð' (eth) and 'Þ/þ' (thorn). Eth is pronounced like the 'th' in the English word 'that', while thorn is pronounced like the 'th' in 'thin'.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE POEM

*Völuspá* is a poem first recorded in the Old Norse language, composed around the year 1000 AD. The title is roughly compounded of the words *völva*, roughly 'seeress', and *spá*, meaning 'prophecy'. As the title suggests, the poem is told from the perspective of a prophetess—alternating between first and third-person—who narrates events of the world.

Though skilled as he is, the poet wrote the poem for a different audience. The poem is replete with allusions and skimps over some myths entirely, expecting his audience to have the necessary background knowledge to follow along. Thus, the narrative is at times difficult to follow. To aid the reading, an explanatory essay is provided after the translations.

The poem is preserved cohesively in two different sources. The best known is the *Poetic Edda*, a collection of Old Norse alliterative poems preserved in the 13th-century

manuscript *Codex Regius*, where it serves as the introductory poem. The second is the 14th century *Hauksbók*, which differs in structure and content from the *Codex Regius*' version significantly in some places—suggestive of an oral origin. Additionally, in his 13th century *Prose Edda*, the Icelandic lawspeaker Snorri Sturluson quotes *Völuspá* numerous times in the *Gylfaginning* section. All three sources are vital in Eddic conversation.

The term *edda* is ascribed by Snorri himself. It is uncertain where *edda* derives from, though there are several hypotheses. Interestingly, the term 'edda' appears identically in the poem *Rígsþula*, apparently meaning 'great-grandmother', potentially related to the Sanskrit *veda* meaning 'knowledge'. If this were taken to be the inspiration for the title of the anthology, in allusion to the role that elderly female family members would play in the transmission of orally derived myths such as *Völuspá*, then it would certainly be apt for the first poem of the *Poetic Edda*. This possibility is one that has sentimental value to me—resurfacing memories of my own grandmother telling me Hindu myth. Thus, I supply the reader with my personal conception of the setting:

It has been a long, dark winter in Iceland. The *völva* has gathered all the men around the roaring hearth, supplying warmth. Passing out freshly baked *brauð* and *mjólk*, the *völva* quiets everyone down to tell them stories of the world.

*N. S. July 2024*



## DEPARTURES FROM THE MANUSCRIPT

[Völuspá] Absent from R, but the title Völuspá appears repeatedly in SnEGylf

Hljóðs 1/1] The first letter is large, inset and greenish in R  
1/4 Heimdallar] R heimdalar

2/3 þá] R corrected from þau (cf. 1/8 þau)

2/6] íviðjur] R -ur abbreviation erased by a later hand, but apparently discernible under ultraviolet light

3/7 ginnunga] R corrected from griNvnga

4/6 á] R corrected from af

4/6 steina] R corrected from steini

5/4 himinjóðýr] R himin iodyr

6/1 gengu] R gen | gengo

8/5 þrjár] R III

9/1–4 gengu ... gættusk] R abbreviated g. r. a. ar.

9/6 dróttin] R drótin

10/1 var] R absent; supplied from H

12/1 ok] R corrected from oc | oc

12/4 Litr] R followed by oc vitr, with vitr deleted by under-dotting

14/6 frá Salarsteini] R corrected from Aurvanga siqt til

16/3 Frosti] R frostri

17/1 þrír] R þríar (cf. 8/5)

17/6 megandi] R megan- illegible, so supplied from H

18/2 né hqfðu] R né hqf- illegible, so supplied from H

18/3 né læti] R illegible, so supplied from H

- 18/6 gaf Hœnir] R gaf Hœn- illegible  
21/3 Gullveigu] R last letter erased by a later hand  
22/6 leikin] R leikiN  
22/8 brúðar] R corrected from þióðar 'of a people'  
23/1-4 gengu ... gættusk] R abbreviated g. r. a. a.  
25/1-4 gengu ... gættusk] R abbreviated g. r. a.  
25/5 hverr] R hverir (pl.); emended from H  
27/1] Heimdallar] R heimdalar

## NOTES ON THE TRANSLATION

1. The language of the written version of the poem is henceforth referred to as 'Old Norse'.
2. The letters 'Þ'/'þ' ('thorn') and 'Ð'/'ð' ('eth') are transliterated as 'th' and 'd' respectively in the English rendering.
3. Outside of quoted sections, my translation and commentary purvey unfamiliar and proper nouns in the Old Norse nominative form with the omission of diacritics and the above transliteration; to this, the English possessive indicator "'s" is appended where necessary.
4. The Old Norse version of the poem given here is chiefly derived from the normalization and renderings of the manuscript supplied by Edward Pettit and Professor Dronke.
5. The original poem is written in *fornyrðislag*—'ancient-story-meter'. *Fornyrðislag* consists of verses of 4-8 half lines (minus interpolations). Each half-line has two stressed syllables and two unstressed. Two or more of the stressed syllables alliterate. One of the alliterating syllables lies in the first lift of the second half-line. I do not attempt to replicate the alliterative aspect of the meter in my translations; however, I attempt to maintain the stress pattern where possible.



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*For my mother,  
educator;  
the earliest I can remember.*

# CHAPTER I

## VOLUSPÁ

- 1        Hljóðs bið ek  
          [helgar] kindir,  
          meiri ok minni,  
          mogu Heimdallar.  
Vildu at ek, Valföðr,  
          vel fyrtelja  
forn spjöll fira,  
          þau er fremst um man.
- 2        Ek man jötna,  
          ár um borna,  
þá er forðum mik  
          fœdda hqfðu;  
nú man ek heima,  
          nú íviðjur,  
mjotvið mæran,  
          fyr mold neðan.

- 1        Quiet down,  
              you blessed kindred,  
large and little,  
              all the children of Heimdallr.  
You, Father of the fallen,  
              want me to well recount  
ancient tales of the world,  
              the earliest I can remember.
- 2        I remember Jotnar,  
              born of old,  
they who once raised me  
              long ago;  
I remember nine realms,  
              nine woodly-witches,  
the exalted tree of exact measure,  
              below the ground.

- 3        Ár var alda,  
          þar er Ymir bygði;  
vara sandr né sjór  
          né svalar unnir;  
jörð fannsk æva  
          né upphiminn,  
gap var ginnunga,  
          en gras ekki.
- 4        Aðr Burs synir  
          bjóðum um ypðu,  
þeir er Miðgarð  
          mæran skópuæ  
sól skein sunnan  
          á salar steina,  
þa var grund gróin  
          gröenum lauki.

- 3        Time was young,  
              when Ymir lived;  
there was no sand  
              nor cooling waves;  
no earth,  
              nor sky,  
nor grass.  
              Only Ginnungagap.
- 4        Before the sons of Burr  
              lifted up earth,  
they who shaped  
              mighty Midgard;  
the sun shone from the south  
              on the hall's stones  
and the ground  
              flourished with green leeks.

5        Sol varp sunnan,  
          sinni Mána;  
hendi inni hœgri  
          of himinjoðyr;  
[Sól þat né vissi  
          hvar hon sali átti,  
stornur þat né vissu  
          hvar þær staði áttu,  
Máni þat né vissi  
          hvat hann megins átti.] [int. ?]

6        Þá gengu regin  
          öll á røkstóla,  
ginnheilög goð  
          ok um þat gættusk;  
nótt ok niðum  
          nofn um gáfu,  
morgin hetu  
          ok miðjan dag,  
undorn ok aptan,  
          árum at telja.



- 5        Sun, sister of Moon,  
             cast from the south  
her right hand  
             over the rim of the sky;  
Sun did not know  
             where she had halls,  
stars did not know  
             where they had stations,  
Moon did not know  
             what power he held.
- 6        Then the forces  
             took to the seats of destiny,  
sacrosanct gods  
             and on this they deliberated:  
to give name to night  
             and her kindred:  
midday  
             and afternoon,  
dawn and dusk  
             so to count the years.

- 7        Hittask Æsir  
          á Idavelli  
þeir er hǫrg ok hof  
          hátimbruðu;  
afla lögðu,  
          auð smíðuðu,  
tangir skópu  
          ok tól gørðu.
- 8        Teflðu í túni,  
          teitir váru,  
var þeim vættergis  
          vant ór gulli,  
unz þrjár kvómu  
          þursa meyjar,  
ámátkar mjök,  
          ór Jǫtunheimum.

- 7       The Æsir assembled  
          on the plains of Idavoll,  
where they built alters  
          and temples high;  
they constructed forges,  
          fashioned treasures,  
shaped tongs  
          and smithed tools.
- 8       They played checkers in the meadow,  
          and were happy,  
they knew not  
          want of gold,  
but then  
          three Jotun-maidens came,  
mighty maidens  
          from Jotunheim.

9        Þá gengu regin öll  
          á røkstóla,  
ginnheilög goð,  
          ok um þat gættusk,  
hverr skyldi dverga  
          dróttin skepja  
ór Brimis blóði  
          ok ór blám leggjum.

10       Þar var Motsognir  
          mæztr um orðinn  
dverga allra,  
          en Durinn annarr;  
þeir manlíkun  
          morg um gørðu,  
dvergar, ór jørðu,  
          sem Durinn sagði.

9       Then the forces  
          took to the seats of destiny,  
sacrosanct gods  
          and on this they deliberated:  
who should create  
          the Lord of Dwarves  
from Ymir's blood  
          and dark bones.

10       There was Mótsognir  
          the greatest  
among dwarves,  
          and Durinn second;  
they molded  
          the shapes of men,  
the dwarves, from the earth,  
          so Durinn said.

- 11        Núi ok Niði,  
             Norðri ok Suðri,  
Austri ok Vestri,  
             Alþjófr, Dvalinn,  
Bívr, Bávrr,  
             Bumburr, Nóri,  
Án ok Ánarr,  
             Ái, Mjodvitnir
- 12        Veigr ok Gandálfr,  
             Vindálfr, Þráinn,  
Þekkr ok Þorinn,  
             Þró, Vitr ok Litr,  
Nár ok Nýráðr  
             — nú hefi ek dverga —  
Reginn ok Ráðsviðr —  
             rétt um talða.

- 11        Nyi and Nidi,  
             Nordri and Sudri,  
Austri and Vestri,  
             Althjof, Dvalinn,  
Bivorr, Bavorr,  
             Bomburr, Nori,  
Án and Anarr,  
             Ai, Mjodvitnir
- 12        Veig and Gandalf,  
             Vindalf, Thrainn,  
Thekk and Thorinn,  
             Thror, Vit and Lit,  
Nar and Nyrad  
             — now I have correctly —  
Reginn and Radsvid —  
             counted the dwarves.

13        Ffli, Kfli,  
             Fundinn, Náli,  
             Hepti, Víli,  
             Hánarr, Svíurr,  
             Frár, Hornbori,  
             Frægr ok Lóni,  
             Aurvangr, Jari,  
             Eikinskjalði.

14        Mál er dverga  
             í Dvalins liði  
             ljóna kindum  
             til Lofars telja:  
             þeir er sóttu  
             frá Salarsteini  
             Aurvanga sjø  
             til Jöruvalla.



- 13      Fili, Kili,  
            Fundinn, Nali,  
Hepti, Víli,  
            Hanar, Sviur,  
Frar, Hornbori,  
            Frægr and Loni,  
Aurvangr, Jari,  
            Eikinskjaldi.
- 14      It is time to tally,  
            the dwarves in Dvalinn's troop,  
for the kindred of men  
            down to Lofar  
those who set out  
            from Hall's Stone  
the home of Aurvanga  
            at Joruvellir.

- 15        Þar var Draupnir  
             ok Dólgþrasir,  
             Hár, Haugspori,  
             Hlévangr, Glói,  
             Skirvir, Virvir,  
             Skáfiðr, Ái.
- 16        Álfr ok Yngvi,  
             Eikinskjalði,  
             Fjalarr ok Frosti,  
             Finnrr ok Ginnarr;  
             þat mun uppi,  
             meðan öld lifir,  
             langniðja tal  
             Lofars hafat.

- 15        There was Draupnir  
             and Dolgthrasir,  
Har, Haugspori,  
             Hlevangr, Gloi,  
Skirvir, Virvir,  
             Skafithr, Ai.
- 16        Alfr and Yngvi,  
             Eikinskjaldi,  
Fjalar and Frosti,  
             Finn and Ginnar;  
that will be remembered,  
             as long as the world lasts,  
the long line  
             of Lofar's forefathers.

- 17      Unz þrír kvómu  
            ór því liði,  
            ꝥflgir ok ástgir,  
            Æsir, at húsi;  
            fundu á landi,  
            lítt megandi,  
            Ask ok Emblu,  
            ørl ǥglausa.
- 18      Qnd þau né áttu,  
            óð þau né hǥfðu,  
            lá né læti  
            né litu góða;  
            ꝥnd gaf Qðinn,  
            óð gaf Høenir,  
            lá gaf Lóðurr  
            ok litu góða.

17       Until three came  
          from that company,  
strong and loving, Æsir,  
          to a house;  
they found on shore,  
          with little strength,  
Ask and Embla,  
          wanting destiny.

18       They had no breath,  
          nor spirit,  
nor blood;  
          nor good colors  
Odin gave breath  
          Hœnir gave spirit,  
Lodurr gave blood  
          and good colors.

19

Ask veit ek standa,  
 heitir Yggdrasill,  
 hár baðmr ausinn  
 hvíta auri;  
 þaðan koma döggar,  
 þærs í dala falla,  
 stendr æ yfir grœnn  
 Urðar brunni.

20

Þaðan koma meyjar,  
 margs vitandi,  
 þrjár, ór þeim sæ  
 er und þolli stendr;  
 Urð hétu eina,  
 aðra Verðandi —  
 skáru á skíði —  
 Skuld ina þriðju;  
 þær lög lögðu,  
 þær líf kuru  
 alda börnum,  
 ørlög seggja.

- 19        I know an ash tree that stands there  
             it's named Yggdrasil  
             a tall tree  
             clothed in sparkling clay.  
             From it comes dew  
             that drop in the valleys.  
             It stands green evermore  
             above Urdr's well.
- 20        From there come maidens,  
             knowing much  
             three, from the lake  
             that stands under the tree.  
             They called one Urdr  
             the second Verdandi  
             in wood they carved  
             Skuld the third.  
             They laid down laws  
             chose out lives  
             for the children of men,  
             men's destinies.

- 21      Þat man hon fólkvíg  
             fyrst í heimi,  
er Gullveigu  
             geirum studdu,  
ok í holl Hárs  
             hana brendu;  
þrysvar brendu  
             þrysvar borna,  
opt, ósjaldan,  
             þó hon enn lifir.
- 22      Heiði hana hétu,  
             hvars til húsa kom,  
völu velspá,  
             vitti hon ganda;  
seið hon kunni,  
             seið hon leikin,  
æ var hon angan  
             illrar brúðar.



21        She remembers the war of men,  
             the first in the world,  
     when they stuck Gullveig  
             with spears,  
     and burned her  
             in Har's hall;  
     three times burned her  
             three times reborn,  
     often, not seldom,  
             yet she still lives.

22        They called her Heid,  
             when she came to houses,  
     a good seeress  
             of good prophecies  
     she summoned spirits  
             who spoke to her.  
     She practiced magic,  
             practiced it possessed.  
     She was ever the delight  
             of a wicked wife.

23

Þá gengu regin ǫll  
á røkstóla,  
ginnheilög goð,  
ok um þat gættusk,  
hvárt skyldu Æsir  
afráð gjalda  
eða skyldu goðin ǫll  
gildi eiga.

24

Fleygði Óðinn  
ok í fólk um skaut —  
þat var enn fólkvíg  
fyrst í heimi;  
brotinn var borðvegr  
borgar Ása,  
knáttu Vanir vígspá  
völlu sporna.

- 23       Then the forces  
            took to the seats of destiny,  
sacrosanct gods  
            and deliberated on this:  
whether the Æsir  
            should pay great penalty,  
or all the gods  
            share offerings.
- 24       Odin let fly  
            and shot into the fray —  
it was war still,  
            the first of the world.  
The wooden door of Æsir's stronghold  
            was torn down.  
Vanir trampled the valleys  
            with spells of war.

25

Þá gengu regin öll  
á røkstóla,  
ginnheilög goð,  
ok um þat gættusk:  
hverr hefði lopt allt  
lævi blandit  
eða ætt jötuns  
Óðs mey gefna.

26

Þórr einn þar var,  
þrunginn móði,  
hann sjaldan sitr  
er hann slíkt um fregn;  
á gengusk eiðar,  
orð ok sœri,  
mál öll meginlig  
er á meðal fóru.

- 25        Then the forces  
             took to the seats of destiny,  
sacrosanct gods  
             they deliberated on this:  
who laced the air  
             with deceit  
and given Odr's girl  
             to the Jotnar?
- 26        Thor was there alone,  
             swollen with rage,  
he seldom sits idle  
             when he hears of such;  
Oaths trampled,  
             words and promises,  
all the sworn statements  
             which had passed between them.

27

Veit hon Heimdallar  
hljóð um fólgið  
undir heiðvönum  
helgum baðmi;  
á sér hon ausask  
aurgum forsi  
af veði Valföðrs.  
Vituð ér enn, eða hvat?

28

Ein sat hon úti,  
þá er inn aldni kom,  
Yggjungur Ása,  
ok í augu leit:  
“Hvers fregnið mik?  
Hví freistið mín?  
Allt veit ek, Óðinn,  
hvar þú auga falt,  
í inum mæra  
Mímis brunni;  
drekkr mjöð Mímir  
morgin hverjan  
af veði Valföðrs!”  
Vituð ér enn, eða hvat?

- 27        She knows  
             of Heimdall's hearing,  
hidden under the light-nurtured  
             hallowed tree;  
she sees a stream springing  
             with muddy fall  
from Father of the Fallen's pledge.  
             Do you still seek to know, or what?
- 28        Alone she sat in the night  
             when the old one came,  
Yggjung of the Æsir,  
             and looked into her eyes:  
"What is it you ask me?  
             Why is it you test me?  
I know it all, Odin,  
             where you hid your eye,  
in the famous spring  
             of Mimir;  
Mimir drinks mead  
             every morning  
from Father of the Fallen's pledge!"  
             Do you still seek to know, or what?

- 29        Valði henni Herfóðr  
             hringa ok men,  
fé, spjöll spaklig  
             ok spáganda;  
sá hon vítt ok um vítt  
             of veröld hverja.
- 30        Sá hon valkyrjur,  
             vítt um komnar,  
göfvar at ríða  
             til goðþjóðar;  
Skuld helt skildi,  
             en Skögul önnur,  
Gunnr, Hildr, Göndul  
             ok Geirskögul;  
nú eru talðar  
             önnur Herjans,  
göfvar at ríða  
             grund, valkyrjur.



29        Fallen-Father selected for her  
             rings and necklaces,  
             while he got wise words  
             and spirits of prophecy;  
             she saw far and wide  
             over every world.

30        She saw valkyries,  
             come from far and wide,  
             ready to ride  
             to the realm of gods.  
             Skuld held a shield,  
             and Skogul next,  
             Gunn, Hild, Gondul  
             and Geirskogul;  
             now are listed,  
             the maidens of War-Lord  
             ready to ride  
             valkyries, over the earth.

31

Ek sá Baldri,  
blóðgum tívur,  
Óðins barni,  
ørlog fólgin;  
stóð um vaxinn,  
vøllum hæri,  
mjór ok mjök fagr,  
mistilteinn.

32

Varð af þeim meiði,  
er mæ rýndisk,  
harmflaug hættlig;  
Høðr nam skjóta;  
Baldrs bróðir var  
of borinn snemma,  
sá nam Óðins sonr  
einnættir vega.

- 31        I saw for Baldr,  
             for the bloody sacrifice,  
for Odin's child,  
             fates concealed;  
There stood full-grown,  
             higher than the fields,  
slender and most fair,  
             mistletoe.
- 32        From that tree,  
             which seemed slender,  
came a dangerous harm-shaft;  
             Hodr shot.  
Baldr's brother  
             was soon born;  
that son of Odin  
             slaying when one night old.

33

Þó hann æva hendr  
né hfufuð kembði,  
áðr á bál um bar  
Baldrs andskota;  
en Frigg um grét  
í Fensqlum  
vá Valhallar.  
Vituð ér enn, eða hvat?

34

Hapt sá hon liggja  
undir Hveralundi,  
lægjarns líki  
Loka áþekkjan;  
þar sitr Sigyn,  
þeygi um sínum  
ver velglýjuð.  
Vituð ér enn, eða hvat?

33

He never washed his hands,  
or combed his hair,  
before he brought to the pyre,  
Baldr's enemy;  
but Frigg wept,  
in Fensalir,  
for the woe of  
Valhalla.  
Do you still seek to know, or what?

34

She saw a captive  
lying under Hveralund,  
in the shape of  
malevolent Loki, unmistakable;  
there sits Sigyn,  
with little  
delight  
in her man.  
Do you still seek to know, or what?

35

Á fellr austan  
um eitrdala,  
søxum ok sverðum,  
Slíðr heitir sú.

36

‘Stóð fyr norðan  
á Niðavøllum  
salr ór gulli  
Sindra ættar;  
en annarr stóð  
á Ókólni,  
bjórsalr jötuns,  
en sá Brimir heitir.

35

A river flows from the east  
through dales of cold venom  
with knives and swords:  
It's named Slidr.

36

There stood to the North  
on Nidavellir,  
a hall of gold  
of Sindri's kindred;  
yet another stood  
at Okolnir  
the beer hall of a Jotun  
named Brimir.

- 37        Sal sá hon standa  
             sólu fjarri,  
     Náströndu á,  
             norðr horfa dyrr;  
     fellu eitrdropar  
             inn um ljóra,  
     sá er undinn salr  
             orma hryggjum.
- 38        Sá hon þar vaða  
             þunga strauma  
     menn meinsvara  
             ok morðvarga,  
     ok þanns annars glepr  
             eyrarúnu;  
     þar saug Niðhoggr  
             nái framgengna,  
     sleit vargr vera.  
             Vituð ér enn, eða hvat?



- 37        She saw a hall  
             standing far from the sun  
on Naströndu,  
             Its door face north;  
drops of venom  
             fall through the roof-vent  
that hall is woven  
             with the spines of snakes.
- 38        There she saw wading  
             swift streams  
perjured people  
             and murderous wolves  
and the one who seduces  
             another's wife; there Nidhoggr  
sucked corpses of the dead  
             Do you still seek to know, or what?

- 39       Austr sat in aldna  
            í Járnviði  
ok foeddi þar  
            Fenris kindir;  
verðr af þeim ǫllum  
            einna nokkurr  
tungls tjúgari  
            í trolls hami.
- 40       Fyllisk fjǫrvi  
            feigra manna,  
rýðr ragna sjöt  
            rauðum dreyra;  
svört var ða sólskin  
            of sumur eptir,  
veðr ǫll válynd.  
            Vituð ér enn, eða hvat?

- 39        She sat in the east, the old one  
             in Jarnvidi  
             and birthed  
             broods of Fenrir;  
             from all those will come  
             a certain one  
             the snatcher of the moon  
             in troll's form.
- 40        It feeds on the life-blood  
             of doomed men,  
             paints red the home of gods  
             with crimson blood;  
             the sunshine became black  
             in the summers that follow,  
             weather all treacherous.  
             Do you still seek to know, or what?

41        Sat þar á haugi  
             ok sló hǫrpu  
             gýgjar hirðir,  
             glaðr Eggþér;  
             gól um honum  
             í gaglviði  
             fagrrauðr hani,  
             á er Fjalarr heitir.

42        Gól um Ásum  
             Gullinkambi,  
             sá vegr hǫlða  
             at Herjaføðrs;  
             en annarr gelr  
             fyr jörð neðan,  
             sótrauðr hani,  
             at solum Heljar.

41        There sat on the grave-mound  
             and struck his harp  
         the Jotun-ess's herdsman,  
             happy Eggther;  
         above him crowing,  
             in the gosling-tree  
         a gleaming red cockerel  
             named Fjalar.

42        Over the Æsir crew  
             Gullinkambi,  
         he wakens heroes  
             in War-Father's hall;  
         but another crows  
             beneath the earth,  
         a sooty-red cockrel,  
             in the halls of Hel.

- 43        Geyr [nú] Garmr mjök  
            fyr Gnipahelli,  
            festr mun slitna  
            en freki renna;  
            fjölð veit hon frœða,  
            fram sé ek lengra,  
            um ragna røk  
            rømm, sigtíva.
- 44        Brœðr munu berjask  
            ok at bönnum verða,  
            munu systrungar  
            sifjum spilla;  
            hart er í heimi,  
            hórdómr mikill;  
            skeggöld, skálmöld  
            — skildir ru klofnir —  
            vindöld, vargöld,  
            áðr veröld steypisk;  
            mun engi maðr  
            øðrum þyrma.

- 43        Now Garmr howls loudly  
             before Gnipahelli,  
the fetter will break  
             and the ravener run free;  
she knows much of old knowledge,  
             I see further ahead,  
over the destiny of gods  
             doomed fate of gods.
- 44        Brothers will break free  
             and kill one another,  
cousins will  
             break the bonds of kin;  
it is harsh in this world,  
             adultery rife;  
axe-age, sword-age  
             —shields cloven—  
wind-age, wolf-age  
             before the world collapses;  
no one will show mercy  
             on another.

- 45        Leika Míms synir,  
              en mjötuðr kyndisk  
at inu galla  
              Gjallarhorni;  
hátt blæss Heimdallr  
              — horn er á lopti —  
mælir Óðinn  
              við Míms höfuð.
- 46        Ymr it aldna tré,  
              en jötunn losnar;  
skelfr Yggdrasils  
              askr standandi.



45        Mimir's sons play  
             and destiny is kindled  
at the sound of the ringing  
             Gjallarhorn;  
Heimdallr blows loud  
             —the horn points to the sky—  
Odin talks  
             with Mimir's head.

46        The ancient tree groans  
             and the Jotun breaks free  
Yggdrasil shivers,  
             the ash, as it stands.

- 47        Geyr nú Garmr mjök  
              fyr Gnipahelli,  
              festr mun slitna  
              en freki renna;  
              fjölð veit hon frœða,  
              fram sé ek lengra,  
              um ragna rök  
              römm, sigtíva.
- 48        Hrymr ekr austan,  
              hefisk lind fyrir,  
              snýsk Jormungandr  
              í jötunmóði,  
              ormr knýr unnir,  
              en ari hlakkar,  
              slítr nái neffqlr,  
              Naglfar losnar.

- 47        Now Garm howls loudly  
             before Gnipahelli,  
the fetter will break  
             and the ravener run free;  
she knows much of old knowledge,  
             I see further ahead,  
about the destiny of gods  
             doomed fate of gods.
- 48        Hrymr drives from the east,  
             hoists his shield before him,  
Jormungandr coils  
             in giant wrath,  
the snake lashes waves,  
             and the eagle shrieks,  
pale beak tearing corpses,  
             Naglfar breaks free.

49        Kjóll ferr austan,  
             koma munu Muspells  
um lög lýðir,  
             en Loki stýrir;  
fara fífls megir  
             með freka allir,  
þeim er bróðir  
             Býleipts í fǫr.

50        Hvat er með Ásum?  
             Hvat er með álfum?  
Gnýr allr Jötunheimr,  
             Æsir ru á þingi;  
stynja dvergar  
             fyr steindurum,  
veggbergs vísir.  
             Vituð ér enn, eða hvat?

- 49       A ship fares from the east,  
          there will come Muspell's  
forces by water,  
          and Loki steers;  
the Jotnar's kindred  
          travel with the ravener,  
Byleipts brother  
          keeps company on the voyage.
- 50       What troubles the Æsir?  
          What troubles the elves?  
All Jotunheim is aroar,  
          the Æsir are in council;  
dwarves groan  
          at granite doors,  
wise ones of their confining rock.  
          Do you still seek to know, or what?

51        Surtr ferr sunnan  
             með sviga lævi,  
             skínn af sverði  
             sól valtíva;  
             grjótbjörg gnata  
             en gífr rata,  
             troða halir Helveg,en himinn klofnar.

52        Þá kœmr Hlínar  
             harmr annarr fram,  
             er Óðinn ferr  
             við úlf vega,  
             en bani Belja  
             bjartr at Surti;  
             þá mun Friggjar  
             falla Angantýr.

51        Surtr travels from the south  
             with the scathe of twigs,  
             there shines from his sword  
             the sun of slain gods;  
             stone peaks crumble  
             and witches wander,  
             warriors journey the Hel-path,  
             and the sky breaks apart.

52        Then Hlin's second sorrow  
             comes to pass,  
             when Odin goes  
             to fight with the wolf,  
             and slayer of Beli  
             bright, against Surtr;  
             then shall Frigg's  
             sweet friend fall.

53        Þá kœmr inn mikli  
             mōgr Sigfōður,  
Víðarr, vega  
             at valdýri;  
lætr hann megi Hveðrungs  
             mund um standa  
hjør til hjarta;  
             þá er hefnt fōður.

54        [Gínn lopt yfir  
             lindi jarðar,  
gapa ýgs kjaptar  
             orms í hæðum.]

Þá kœmr inn mæri  
mōgr Hlóðynjar,  
             gengr Óðins sonr  
við úlf vega;  
             drepr hann af móði  
Miðgarðs véur;  
             munu halir allir  
heimstōð ryðja;  
             gengr fet níu  
Fjörgynjar burr,  
             neppr, frá naðri  
niðs ókvíðnum



53       Then comes  
          the tall son of Sigfathir,  
Vithar, to fight  
          with the beast of slaughter;  
Into Hvethrungr's son  
          with his hand he stands the sword  
to halt in the heart;  
          then is his father avenged.

54       The earth's girdle  
          yawns across the sky  
the jaws of the ghastly serpent  
          gape in the heights.  
Then comes glorious  
          child of Hlothyn,  
Odin's son goes  
          to fight with the serpent;  
he smites in fury  
          guardian of Midgard;  
all heroes will abandon  
          the homestead of earth;  
he goes nine steps  
          Fjorgyn's child,  
exhausted  
          from the shameless serpent.

- 55        Sól tér sortna,  
             sígr fold í mar,  
             hverfa af himni  
             heiðar stjörnur;  
             geisar eimi  
             við aldnara,  
             leikr hár hiti  
             við himin sjálfan.
- 56        Geyr nú Garmr mjök  
             fyr Gnipahelli,  
             festr mun slitna  
             en freki renna;  
             fjöld þveit hon frœða,  
             fram sé ek lengra,  
             um ragna rök  
             rømm, sigtíva.

- 55       The sun turns black,  
          the earth sinks into the sea,  
the bright stars  
          fade from the sky;  
fumes rage against fire,  
          fosterer of life,  
the heat soars high  
          against the very heavens.
- 56       Now Garmr howls loudly  
          before Gnipahelli,  
the fetter will break  
          and the ravener run free;  
she knows much of old knowledge,  
          I see further ahead,  
about the destiny of gods  
          doomed fate of gods.

57       Sér hon upp koma  
              ǫðru sinni  
jörð ór ægi,  
              iðjagroena;  
falla forsar,  
              flýgr ǫrn yfir,  
sá er á fjalli  
              fiska veiðir.

58       Finnask Æsir  
              á Iðavelli  
ok um moldþinur  
              mátkan dœma,  
[ok minnaz þar  
              á megin dóma]  
ok á Fimbultýs  
              fornar rúnar.

- 57        She sees come up  
             a second time  
earth out of sea,  
             green again;  
waterfalls flow,  
             an eagle flies above,  
in the hills  
             hunting flesh.
- 58        The Æsir meet  
             on Idavollr  
and talk about the  
             mighty earth-leash  
and call to mind  
             the momentous judgements  
and Fimbultyr's  
             ancient runes.

- 59        Þar munu eptir  
             undrsamligar  
             gullnar tǫflur  
             í grasi finnask,  
             þærs í árdaga  
             áttar hofðu.
- 60        Munu ósánir  
             akrar vaxa,  
             bǫls mun alls batna;  
             Baldr mun koma;  
             búa þeir Hǫðr ok Baldr  
             Hropts sigtóptir,  
             vel, valtvívar.  
             Vituð ér enn, eða hvat?

- 59        There will be once more  
             the miraculous  
             golden checkers  
             found, in the grass,  
             those that they had owned  
             in days of old.
- 60        Without sowing  
             fields will sprout,  
             all evil will be healed;  
             Baldr will come;  
             They will make home, Hod and Baldr  
             in Hroptr's walls of victory,  
             well, gods of the fallen.  
             Do you still seek to know, or what?

- 61        Þá kná Hœnir  
             hlautvið kjósa,  
ok burir byggja  
             brœðra tveggja  
vindheim víðan.  
             Vituð ér enn, eða hvat?
- 62        Sal sér hon standa,  
             sólu fegra,  
gulli þakðan,  
             á Gimlé;  
þar skulu dyggvar  
             dróttir byggja  
ok um aldrdaga  
             yndis njóta.



- 61        Then Hœnir picks  
             the twig of augury,  
             and the sons of two brothers  
             make home  
             in the realm of wide winds.  
             Do you still seek to know, or what?
- 62        She sees a hall standing,  
             brighter than the sun,  
             thatched with gold,  
             on Gimlé;  
             there worthy  
             bands of warriors dwell  
             and all their days of life  
             enjoy delight.

63        Þar kómr inn dimmi  
             dreki fljúgandi,  
naðr fránn, neðan  
             frá Niðafjöllum;  
berr sér í fjoðrum  
             — flýgr völl yfir —  
Niðhoggr, náí.

Nú mun hon sökkvask.

64        There comes the dim  
             dragon flying,  
scintillating serpent, up  
             from Nidafjoll; he carries in his wings  
—he flies over the field—  
             Nidhoggr, corpses.

Now she will sink.

## CHAPTER 2

# SYNOPSIS AND COMMENTARY

*Völuspá*, like other sibylline works, is highly allusive and complex. The author makes quick, unexplained transitions in thought. Thus, the structure and intended meaning of the poem take much work to unearth.

The poem is generally considered to arise from three separate sources: it appears cohesively in the *Codex Regius* and *Hauksbók* and is quoted frequently in the *Gylfaginning* section of the *Prose Edda*.

### 2.1 SYNOPSIS

The poem is introduced by the prophetess calling for a hearing from all classes of men, referring to them as one

"kindred"—of one blood. They are blessed by their ubiquitous descent from the god Heimdall—the father of the three classes of men: slaves, free men, and nobles. In a society where class distinctions were heavily emphasized, this unifying address instills an air of divinity throughout the poem. She is not addressing the upper classes most prominently featured in the literature, but *all*: all the blessed children of Heimdall.

The speaker then addresses "Father of the Fallen"—referring to Odin, who presides over Valhalla: the hall where half of those killed in combat are sent to prepare to fight in Ragnarok. Thus, we are told that this occasion—the retelling of ancient tales—is in part thanks to Odin.

This convivial normalcy quickly fades away as the prophetess begins to tell of her infant memories of the Jotnar—a race of beings contrasted with the gods, sometimes erroneously called 'giants'.

She then establishes her cosmic omniscience, recalling nine realms (whether there were strictly nine realms in the Norse cosmos is contended) and *níu íviðjur*—"nine wood-witches"—who are likely the nine mothers of Heimdall and the nine roots of Yggdrasil: the sacred tree at the center of the universe. The prophetess directly mentions Yggdrasil, calling it the "exalted tree of exact measure." Nine realms, nine *íviðjur*, and the exactly measured tree of divinity: at the beginning, all is orderly and calculated. And perhaps, the poet intends to "number the days" of Yggdrasil, with

its measured fate. Her heavenly detachment is contrasted with these concrete enumerations.

We are told of the primeval father of the Jotnar, Ymir, whose corpse will later serve to fashion worldly objects. We are told that the early universe had no sand, nor waves, nor earth, nor sky, nor grass, but was simply Ginnungagap—the yawning, pregnant, primordial void.

We then proceed to the creation of the world. The sons of the first god—Burr—Odin, Vili, and Ve lift the earth from the empty void to form Midgard: the realm of men. The sun is shining—there is light—on the new stony realm flush with green leeks: the greatest of grasses.

The personified sun and moon, *Sól* and *Máni*, make an appearance. Here, we see an almost pathetic mistake: in the first half, Sun and Moon are decisive, grabbing the horizon with her dominant hand with her companion Moon in toll. Yet mere lines later, the celestial forces are bewildered and unknowing. I see good reason to consider lines 5/5-10 as a clumsy interpolation—this is otherwise unprecedented ineptitude for our most cautious and skilled poet.

The poet seems to have skimmed over the creation of the sun and moon but discusses the times of day as the children of night. Thus, a genealogical origin of the heavenly bodies is implied, as well-attested in other sources (though dismissed by Snorri).

The prophetess showcases the first hints of governmental order and authority. We have evolved from the proto-gods, *Burs synir*, the sculptors of primordial matter, to *regin á rökstola*, judicious forces presiding over the mainte-

nance of the universe. This return to committee becomes a motif, eventually leading us to the edge of Ragnarok. In *røkstolar*, *røk* can potentially imply 'authority', but also 'fate' The gods take the seats of their 'fate'—Ragnarok.

We are introduced to the *Æsir*, the family of gods. They begin to construct archetypal structures on *Iðavöllum*—Splendor-plain, a field that makes many returns. They play checkers in a lush meadow, playing for gold. All is well—there is no competition, or rivalry—until three Jotun-maidens arrive. Presumably, they play against the *Æsir*, who lost in a fit of fury.

With the loss of their birthright of easy gold, they look for another source. They create the gold-charming dwarves from the corpse of the Dark One, Ymir, and so are made of the same material as the mountains and seas.

And here we are confronted with a baffling omission. Jotnar, gods, earth, sun and moon, and dwarves have all been created—but where is the creation of man? In parallel, we are confronted with a catalog of dwarves of disproportionate length. This list is a sure interpolation, which seems to have taken a stanza about the genesis of man with it.

Instead, we are directly taken to Midgard to be introduced to the first man and woman—Ask and Embla—found as driftwood on the shore. The *Æsir* shape the wood and gift it physical life, spirit, flesh, and lastly, good color—humanity.

Apparently reminded by the introduction of Ask, the prophetess returns to the ash-tree Yggdrasil. It is no longer a

fledgling beneath the ground but towering, spilling divinity into the earth.

And here, we see a grand synthesis of multiple traditions. The myth of the creation of mankind from wood and the myth of Yggdrasil parenting mankind are brought together by their common material. From the lake under the tree come wise lake-maidens, who carve into the very material of man runes of destiny.

The poet then selects three traditions to narrate the events of Ragnarok: the divine war, the thievery of Freyja, and the death of Baldr. He moves with agility between the events and presents them with heightened allusiveness, expecting full familiarity with the myths and quickness of mind from his audience.

The first war begins with an unexpected image. Gullveig ('gold-lady') is speared and burnt three times, but reborn three times. It would seem that 'Gullveig' is a gold statue of Freyja, the most revered goddess of the *Vanir*. The *Æsir* are trying to lynch her for her treacherous witchcraft, but find that the statue is purified upon each burning, as burnt gold would be.

Freyja is again presented with a different name, here Heid. She is going door to door, bringing humans to join the *Vanir*, through the use of *seiðr*—a tradition of magic.

The *Æsir* again congregate, this time asking whether they should endure the loss of worship to the *Vanir* and share the fruits of worship.

The answer is apparently no, as Odin flings his magic spear into the battle-front. While this trick later becomes



Odin's unbeatable tactic, it is not here. The Vanir retaliate with full force, laying siege to the Æsir's wooden ramparts and reviving themselves with magic.

According to Snorri, the divine war was solved only by the union of the Æsir and Vanir. Freyja is possessed by the Æsir, who make use of her regenerative powers. Yet again, Jotnar are coming—they plan to steal Freyja—not just a witch to the gods anymore, but valuable and regenerative "Odr's girl"—away from the gods, so as to live forever.

The most assuming transition yet is made here. The poet expects the reader to be familiar with yet another story, this one a comedy told best by Snorri. In the story, a Jotun offers to build a protective wall around Asgard in three seasons to replace the ruined wooden fort and in exchange receive Freyja and the sun and moon. The gods wager an impossible bet—the wall must be completed in a single winter, with the help of no man. The Jotun asks if he would be able to acquire the assistance of his horse, to which Loki agrees. The horse is Herculean, completing the wall within a short time. The gods see the Jotun's progress, and can already see their impending doom. If the Jotnar were to have Freyja, there would not be another winter.

In the poem, the gods look around—who has brought about this most awful situation? They land upon the mischievous Loki.

Concluding the comedy, Loki turns himself into a mare, lures the powerful horse away, and has... "certain dealings" with the horse such that Loki gives birth to an eight-legged

horse "somewhat later". Certainly a staple of the Norse comedic tradition.

The story ends with Thor smashing the Jotun to pieces, but the poet summarizes all this in Thor's reaction. He is not just angry, but "swollen with rage." The "oaths" are restated multiple times—the Norse poet was trained to note and exploit the most subtle similarities—so to point to the other time oaths had betrayed the gods. As Snorri tells, Frigg exacted countless oaths such that every single object and creature, swears to not harm Baldr. The gods test Baldr's immortality by flinging weapons at him and rejoice in their success. Yet the envious Loki learns that Frigg chose one object to not fulfill the oath for thought that it is too young: mistletoe. And it is mistletoe that proves to be his downfall in the poem.

As of this point, the poet strictly employs a theme of dread. There are no more happy, game-playing gods, but councils on careful guard. The prophetess engages an intensely active voice—*Veit hon... sér hon...*—she knows and sees the anxiety of the gods, looking into the apocalypse of Ragnarok.

She knows that the uber-hearing Heimdall is watch-guard, holding his ear to the ground to listen attentively for the coming of Jotnar from beneath the roots of Yggdrasil so as to sound his nearby alarm horn.

The next half of the stanza is, unsurprisingly, elusive. It is well-attested that Odin traded an eye with Mimir, the wisest of the gods, for a drink from the well of wisdom.

This is the "Fallen of the Father's pledge," but what of the springing stream?

In *Sigrdrífumál*, the valkyrie Sigrdrífa discusses the "stream" of wisdom, materialized as "thought-runes" in Midgard. Odin "carves" and "ponders" the runes with a skull and a horn, absorbing their wisdom. While Odin rejoices in his wisdom in other sources, the prophetess is mocking his sacrifice. She challenges it, with the refrains of "Do you still seek to know, or what?"—his own wisdom failing, Odin craves the knowledge of the prophetess.

This is apparently not the first time Odin has approached the prophetess. He encroaches and looks into her eyes to begin inquiring. She will have none of it, retaliating with questions of her own. She brings up his most well-kept secret, sardonic again—Mimir has the same substance that you lost an eye to take a sip from for breakfast!

Odin bribes her with various ornaments, and she obliges. She sees valkyries, on their courses to the gods.

Rather than getting to the climax of Baldr's fate, the poet dramatizes the scene even more. With a series of descriptions—it is "full-grown," no longer the young twig Frigg saw—he delivers the blow: "mistletoe."

"Tívir." Sacrifice. As men would sacrifice in the winter for the rebirth of the year, Odin knows what he must do. Baldr will be sacrificed for the rebirth of the world after Ragnarok.

The poet's enigmatic style comes to rest here. We learn, in a pragmatic manner, that Hodr, a blind marksman, wields the mistletoe as a fierce weapon. Odin's new son,

Baldr's brother, matures in only one night and begins "slaying." He will not wash, nor comb, until he exacts his vengeance. Frigg is weeping, not simply for her son, but for all Valhalla. Baldr is only first in line for the death of gods. We are brought back from this horrific scene with another one of the prophetesses' "Do you still seek to know?..."

She sees the root of it all: Loki. Refusing to repent, he disguises himself; but she sees right through it: "malevolent Loki, unmistakable." He is captive, with only his disgusted wife Sigyn there to catch the venom dripping on his head from above him. We get another refrain, and down we go into Loki's realm of captivity.

Slidr, the venomous river, carves—"with knives and swords"—cold valleys into the plane. The golden hall of dwarves stands on a plain, while Brimir takes solace in his beer hall. On the other hand, we are told of *Náströndu*—Dead-Body shore—where soon-to-be corpses—dead sinners—swim for their lives. The serpents and wolves suck and tear into flesh.

We move yet again to a scene no less ugly. An ogress is birthing a litter of wolves, and we find out that one from the pack will attack the very sky itself, thieving the moon.

The pack sets to work, feeding on the blood of "doomed men," while the sun blackens and the weather becomes oppressive. We are met with another transitional refrain.

A moment of light. The poet draws in a seemingly cheerful scene, as a herdsman plays his harp. But, the poet is ever the illusionist. The herdsman, a Jotun himself, is sitting on a grave-mound, under a tree hung with corpses. The birds

crow, one to awaken Odin's soldiers in Valhalla, and another to awaken the honorable dead. The harpist is playing an ode to war.

A hell-hound roars, and breaks free of his chains. Ragnarok is in full swing.

Sin is rife. Humanity commits evil unto itself. While men "play" with war, Heimdall blows his horn, and Yggdrasil groans and shakes, meeting its long-ago-measured fate. Loki, in Jotun form, has broken free, his quaking footsteps shaking the tree.

The dog barks again, warning of fate.

The Jotun forces march from all directions, armed. Jormungandr, the cosmic snake who encircles the earth, abandons his station to confront his arch-enemy: Thor. Eagles feast on corpses, and the ship is driven forward yet by Loki.

While Jotun-land is roaring, the gods are, in forces of habit, in council yet again. Even dwarves face the dying light, to be turned to stone. The prophetess asks again, with a sense of building urgency, as if begging to free her from the horrors of her visions.

Surtr, the fire-Jotun, brandishes a sword burning as hot as the sun the gods created long ago. The landscape carefully crafted from Ymir's bones crumbles, displacing their witch-inhabitants. Warriors march from Hel as the very sky breaks apart.

A series of battles are presented. Odin, referenced goes to fight the wolf Fenrir and dies. But Odin is not made the center of attention here, it is Frigg and her suffering. Frigg, who lost her son mere stanzas ago, has experienced

yet another sorrow. Freyr, the divine champion, himself is slain by Surtr—*Angantýr*, 'terror of the birch tree', is a most poetic reference to fire.

Silent Vithar exacts vengeance, and slays his father's killer, sliding his sword into the heart of Fenrir.

Here, I have chosen to interpolate a stanza from *Hauksbók*, for it is one of the best-known scenes of the tradition. Whether intended by the original poet, a most epic picture is painted of the cosmic snake screaming in the sky: Thor's adversary.

He goes to fight the snake and slaughters it. He makes it nine steps before he falls dead from the venom of the snake. Midgard has lost its guardian. No man will remain.

The cosmos itself dies. The sun itself blackens, and the earth drowns in the sea. In their absence, the stars leave the darkness. What remains is aflame.

The dog howls again. We are transitioning.

A second time, the earth surfaces. A new world is born. Grass flourishes, waterfalls flow, and eagles hunt for salmon, not corpses.

The remaining Æsir return to their meeting place, remembering the past.

The golden checkers are found again, the prophetess describes in a most wholesome tone. Like the leeks of the last world, fields grow here with no sowing. Evil is healed, and Baldr and Hod rebuild upon the salvaged foundations.

Hœnir, a god of resurrection, uses divination to find the most sacred site for their gold dwelling. The salvaged war-

riors enjoy peace evermore. But what for the damned? The Christian influence is heaviest here.

They get death. The dragon soars over, retrieving the remaining corpses from the battlefield.

The prophetess sinks to the floor, ending the vision.

## 2.2 TRACING THE MYTHS OF CREATION AND DOOM

Myths of cosmogony—"world-creation"—and eschatology—"end-study" largely form the content of *Völuspá*. I aim to argue for a Proto-Indo-European basis for the poem.

### CREATION

The Indo-European myths of creation differ between cultures, but there is enough similarity to suggest an underlying Proto-Indo-European ancestor.

Indo-European creation myths are generally of two classes: one type cosmogonic, explaining the creation of the world and social classes; and the other anthropologic, explaining the diaspora and divergence of peoples.

The cosmogonic myth ubiquitously involves the dismemberment of a primeval being, whether anthropomorphic or bovine.

In *Völuspá*, the giant Ymir is dissected so that the mountains are formed from his bones, heaven from his skull, the trees from his hair, etc. This pattern is also seen in the Old Russian *Stiĥ o golubinoj knjig* where the Christian god's face yields the sun, his chest the moon, his eyes the dawn, etc. Similar is found in Celto-Germanic sources where Adam's body is derived from elements of the universe. Greco-Roman sources offer us an account of Atlas in the *Metamorphoses*, which details how his beard and



hair become forests, his bones become stone, his hands the ridges of mountains, etc. The Persian *Škend Gumānīg Wizār* describes how the physical world derives from the body of the evil demon Kunī, whose skin yields the sky, his flesh the earth, his bones the mountains, and his hair the plants. The Old Indic *Purusasūkta* from the *Rigveda* describes how Purusa, the (primeval) 'man', was divided so that his eye became the sun, his mouth the fire, his breath became the wind, his feet the earth, etc. Such evidence presents a correspondence between the anatomy of the host being and the physical world. The most frequent derivations are the following: *flesh = earth, bone = stone, hair = plants, blood = water bodies, eyes = sun, mind = moon, brain = cloud, head = heaven, breath = wind*.

The proto-creation myth also seems to involve the sacrifice of some 'Twin' by his brother 'Man'. In the Indic corpus, the figures are Yama 'twin' and Manu 'man'. Yama is seen as the sacrificial object of his 'brother', Manu, which sets creation in motion. The Iranian equivalent of Yama was Yama Xšaēta, whose divinity is dispersed to the patrons of the three social classes (and who is sliced in half by his brother). Tacitus's *Germania* records the origin of the Germans from the primeval Tuisto (from the root 'two', often taken to mean 'twin') and his son Mannus 'man' (cognate with Old Indic Manu) who generate the three social classes of the Germans. Ymir is most likely cognate with the Old Indic Yama.

This 'being-world' myth is reversible. Many sources speak of the human body as the assimilation of the ele-

ments. In the Norse tradition, we are told of the creation of man from driftwood, a common motif as seen in the Mayan *Popol Vuh*.

Heimdall's creation of the social classes bears most similarity to the Celtic sociological genesis, but the presence of the divine supernatural functioning class additionally corresponds to the Indian Brahmin and Roman flamen. White being the color associated with the divine class is also ubiquitous between the Norse, Celtic, Roman, and Indian traditions, though red is instead ascribed to the commoner rather than the warrior in the Nordic cultures, suggesting a Germanic adaptation of the proto-social-stratification.

## DESTRUCTION

In accordance with their martial nature, ancient Indo-European civilizations widely imagined the end-times as a cosmic battle between good and evil. The myths largely feature ambiguous timelines and mythical events of the past and present. The myths are generally of the following structure:

1. An inimical being lives among gods whose paternal relatives are traditionally inimical to the gods (Loki).
2. Through guile, the malevolent being assumes leadership (seemingly absent from the Norse myth).
3. During his reign, his subjects are unjustly treated while outsiders, on whose support the being relies, are favored (seemingly absent from Norse myth).

4. Building projects, especially the erection of fortifications, are carried out by the being, in which his subjects are tricked or forced to provide labor. (Loki overseeing the construction of walls around Asgard).
5. Usually as the result of a particularly heinous act, the being is exiled by his subjects (Loki conducts the murder of Baldr, is banished to *Útgarð*, becoming king).
6. The being ultimately takes refuge among his foreign relatives (Loki seeks refuge among the Jotnar). Binding of the being occurs in Norse and Iranian myth.
7. A hero appears who is the nephew or grandson of the exiled being. This relationship is often that of the Proto Indo-European *\*nept*—'daughter's son' or 'sister's son'. (Vithar, son of Odin, kills Fenrir—Loki's son).
8. A period of time passes during which both sides prepare for the final battle. This era represents the "present" in which the bearers of the religious tradition lived and worshipped. In Norse and Iranian traditions, a cataclysmic winter precedes the final battle. (Winter, monsters emerge, sun disappears, social degradation).
9. The final battle occurs on a famous field. In it, many notables among the community of gods and their adversaries slay each other in single combat. Associated

with the final battle and its aftermath is widespread death and destruction, interruption of the cosmic order, and the end of a temporal "cycle" or era. (Several figures go to battle on *Vigriðr*; the world is seared in flames, sinks below sea).

What the proto-myth may have looked like and its social significance is still unclear at best. In view of the widespread presence of epic versions of the "final battle" theme and the concurrence of an epic and mythic version in Scandinavia, it is likely that a variant epic version had evolved in the Proto-Indo-European age. How myths of creation and coming doom evolved into contemporary religion and shape societal thought continues to be studied.