

Hrafnagaldur Odins
Odin's Ravens' Song.

Translation, introduction, and notes by Benjamin Thorpe

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

1. Alfather works, [1]
the Alfar discern, [2]
the Vanir know, [3]
the Nornir indicate, [4]
the Ividia brings forth, [5]
men endure, [6]
the Thursar await, [7]
The Valkyruir long. [8]
2. The forebodings of the Æsir
suspected to be evil;
treacherous Vættar had
the runes confounded.
Urd was enjoined
to guard Odhroerir,
powerfully to protect it
against the increasing multitude.
3. Hug [9] then goes forth,
explores the heavens,
the powers fear
disaster from delay.
'Twas Thráin's belief
that the dream was ominous;
Dáin's thought that
the dream was dark.
4. Among the dwarfs
virtue decays;
worlds sink down
to Ginnung's abyss
Oft will Alswid
strike them down,
often the fallen
again collect.
5. Stand no longer shall
earth or sun.
The stream of air
with corruption laden
shall not cease.
Hidden is in Mim's
limpid well
men's certain knowledge.
Understand ye yet, or what?
6. In the dales dwells

the prescient Dis,
from Yggdrasil's
ash sunk down,
of alfen race,
Idun by name,
the youngest of Ivaldi's
elder children.

7. She ill brooked
her descent,
under the hoar tree's
trunk confined.
She would not happy be
with Nörvi's daughter,
accustomed to a pleasanter
abode at home.
8. The triumphant gods saw
Nanna [10] sorrowing
in earth's deep sanctuaries;
a wolf's skin they gave her,
in which herself she clad,
changed her feelings,
practised guile,
alter'd her aspect.
9. Vidrir selected
Bifröst's guardian,
of the Giöll-sun's
keeper to inquire
all that she knew
of every world;
Bragi and Lopt
should witness bear.
10. Magic songs they sung,
rode on wolves
the god [11] and gods. [12]
At the heavenly house,
Odin listened,
in Hlidskiálf;
let them go forth
on their long way.
11. The wise god asked
the cupbearer
of the gods' progeny
and their associates,
Whether of heaven, or Hel,
or earth, she knew
the origin, duration,
or dissolution?
12. She spoke not,
she could no words
to the anxious gods
bring forth,
nor a sound uttered;
tears flowed from the head's orbs;
with pain repressed
they flow anew
13. As from the east
from Elivágar,
the thorn is impelled by
the ice-cold Thurs,
wherewith Dáin
all people strikes
over the fair mid-earth;
14. when every faculty is lulled,
the hands sink,

totters with drowsiness
the bright, sword-girt As; [13]
drives away the current
the giantess's [14] blandishment
of the mind's agitations
of all people, [15]

15. so the gods appeared
Jorun to be affected,
with sorrows swollen,
when they no answer got;
the strove the more
the greater the repulse;
still less than they had hoped
did their words prevail.
16. When then the leader
of the inquiring travellers,
the guardian of Herian's
loud sounding horn
took the son of Nál
for his companion,
Grimnir's skalld [16]
at the place kept watch.
17. Vingólf reached
Vidur's ministers,
both borne
by Fornióts kin.
They entered,
and the Æsir
forthwith saluted,
at Ygg's convivial meeting.
18. Hangatýr they hailed,
of Æsir the most blissfull;
potent drink in the high seat
they wished him to enjoy,
and the gods to sit
happy at the feast,
ever with Yggiung
pleasure to share.
19. On the benches seated,
at Bölverk's bidding,
the company of gods
where with Sæhrímnir sated.
Skögul at the tables,
from Hnikar's vessel
measured out the mead,
in Mimir's [17] horns.
20. Of many things inquired,
when the meal was over.
the high gods of Heimdall,
the goddesses of Loki, -
where the maid had uttered
divinations or wise words? -
from noon
until twilight's advent.
21. Ill they showed
it had fallen out,
their errand bootless,
little to glory in.
A lack of counsel
seemed likely,
how from the maiden they
might an answer get.
22. Omi answered;
all listened;

"Night is the time
for new counsels;
till the morrow let reflect
each one competent
to give advice
helpful to the Æsir."

23. Ran along the ways
of mother Rind, [18]
the desired repast
of Fenrisulf. [19]
Went from the guild,
bade the gods farewell
Hropt and Frigg,
as, before Hrimfaxi,
24. the son of Delling
urged on his horse
adorned with precious jewels.
Over Mannheim shines
the horse's mane,
the steed Dvalin's deluder
drew in his chariot.
25. In the north boundary
of the spacious earth,
under the outmost root
of the noble tree,
went to their couches
Gýgiar and Thursar,
spectres, dwarfs,
and Murk Alfs.
26. The powers rose,
the Alf's illuminator
northwards towards Niflheim [20]
chased the night.
Up Argiöll ran
Ulfrún's son,
the mighty hornblower
of heaven's hights.

Notes:

1. through all nature
2. impending evil.
3. that evil is at hand.
4. evil.
5. her monstrous offspring. See Index.
6. calamity.
7. their day of freedom.
8. for conflict.
9. Hugin, Odin's raven?
10. Here Idun is apparently so called.
11. Odin.
12. Rögnir ok regin, Odin and the powers?
13. Heimdall.
14. Night.
15. This and the preceding strophe appear to be out of their place,
and have by Simrock, not without reason, been inserted after the 21st.
16. Bragi.
17. Minni's horns, Stockh. edit. See Grimm, D.M. p.52, 53. Petersen,
N.M. p.179. Minnis is probably a later gloss.
18. earth
19. All conjectures. Fenri seems confounded with Hati. See N.M. I. p.5-7
20. That the poem lacks an end as well as a beginning appears
probable from the circumstance that no further mention is made of
Bragi and Idun. Simrock is inclined to think that in the Vegtamskviða
we are to look for the ending; but this does not fill up the chasm.