



# The Poetic Edda

ESSAYS ON  
OLD NORSE  
MYTHOLOGY

Edited by  
PAUL ACKER AND  
CAROLYNE LARRINGTON

## The Poetic Edda

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THE POETIC EDDA

*Essays on Old Norse Mythology*

edited by Paul Acker and Carolyne  
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**The Poetic Edda**  
Essays on Old Norse Mythology

*Edited by*  
*Paul Acker andCarolynne Larrington*

First published 2002 by Routledge

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The Poetic Edda : essays on Old Norse mythology / edited by Paul Acker & Carolyne Larrington.

p. cm.

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-65385-5 (pbk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-815-31660-2 (hbk)

1. Eddas—History and criticism. 2. Old Norse poetry—History and criticism.  
3. Mythology, Norse, in literature. I. Acker, Paul. II. Larrington, Carolyne.  
PT7235.P64 2001  
839.6'1009—dc21

2001048509

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# Preface

Four of the essays in this collection, those by Carolyne Larrington, Margaret Clunies Ross, Paul Acker, and Judy Quinn, were written expressly for this volume. Two others, those by Lars Lönnroth and Svava Jakobsdóttir, were translated (from Swedish and Icelandic respectively) for inclusion in this volume. Their original places of publication and those of the other contributions are cited here; all are reprinted with permission.

Lönnroth, Lars. "Midgårds grundläggning (Völuspá 1-8)." *Den dubbla scenen: Muntlig diktning från Eddan till ABBA*. Stockholm: Prisma, 1978. 29-52; notes 401.

Svava Jakobsdóttir. "Gunnlöð og hinn dýri mjöður." *Skírnir* 162 (1988): 215-45.

Harris, Joseph. "Cursing with the Thistle: 'Skírnismál' 31, 6-8, and OE Metrical Charm 9, 16-17." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 76 (1975): 26-33.

Clover, Carol J. "Hárbarðsljóð as Generic Farce." *Scandinavian Studies* 51 (1979): 124-45.

Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben. "Thor's Fishing Expedition." *Words and Objects: Towards a Dialogue Between Archaeology and History of Religion*. The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, Oslo. Ser. B: Skrifter. 71. Ed. Gro Steinsland. Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1986. 257-78.

Anderson, Philip N. "Form and Content in the *Lokasenna*: A Re-evaluation." *Edda* (1981): 215-225. By permission of Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, Norway.

Frakes, Jerold C. "Loki's Mythological Function in the Tripartite System." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 86 (1987): 473-86.

McKinnell, John. "The Context of *Völundarkviða*." *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 23.1 (1990): 1-27.

Hill, Thomas D. "Rígsþula: Some Medieval Christian Analogues." *Speculum* 61 (1986): 79-89.

For the photograph of the Altuna Stone, Gotland (Fig. 1) and Ardre Stone VIII, Gotland (Fig. 3), we acknowledge Antikvarisk-topografiska arkivet, Stockholm, Sweden. The photograph of the Gosforth Stone, Cumbria, England (Fig. 2) was taken by T. Middlemass and is copyrighted by the Department of Archaeology, University of Durham. The photograph of the Hørdum Stone (Fig. 4) is copyrighted by the National Museum of Denmark, Danish Collections. All are reprinted with permission.

The editors would like to thank Eve Siebert, Deborah Hyland, and Laura Taylor for their help in preparing the manuscript.

# Introduction

## Edda 2000

Around the turn of the last millennium, the Anglo-Saxon monk Ælfric wrote a homily on the ‘false gods’ (*De falsis diis*) of the heathens.<sup>1</sup> In part following an earlier Latin source, Ælfric gives a Christian, euhemeristic view of the origins of Roman paganism; he treats the Roman gods as having originally been men who were then deified in error. In ancient times, Ælfric tells us, men worshiped the sun and moon as gods. Next they venerated certain evil and powerful rulers, namely Saturn, his son Jove, Mars, Mercury and Venus. To his source, Ælfric adds a few comments regarding the Danish heathens of his own time, many of whom had settled in northern England. They used the name Þór for Jove, Óðon for Mercury, and Frig for Venus; they honored Þór above all their gods and considered him to be the son of Óðon (Pope, 683-6). The pagan Romans established a day for each of these ‘gods’. Ælfric gives the Old English names for Sunday and Monday and says that the third day was named, in Latin, for Mars. The fourth was named for Mercury, the fifth for Jove, the sixth for Venus and the seventh for Saturn. He does not specify (but surely knew) that the Old English names for these days of the week, like the Danish names, commemorated Germanic heathen gods, the equivalents (in some sense) of the Roman ones: Tiw (Old Norse Týr) on Tuesday, Woden (Óðinn) on Wednesday, Thunor (Þórr) on Thursday and Frige (Frigg) on Friday.<sup>2</sup> Ælfric probably also knew that some Anglo-Saxon noblemen, including his own patrons, claimed to be descended from Woden (see Johnson, 59-62); what more he might have known about the Danish or Anglo-Saxon pagan gods is open to debate.<sup>3</sup> But Ælfric’s reticence in this matter is typical of Old English sources as a whole, which tell us precious little about

the gods venerated by the English before their conversion to Christianity beginning in the sixth century.<sup>4</sup> Information about Tīw, Woden, Thunor and Frige is hard to come by; fortunately, more can be learned about their Old Norse counterparts.

The Scandinavians were only just converting to Christianity in Ælfric's time, the Danes starting in the 960s, the Icelanders just in time for the millennium.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps because they converted so late and were comparatively remote from and resistant to ecclesiastical and royal authorities,<sup>6</sup> the Icelanders recorded more of their pagan mythological and heroic material than any other Germanic people.<sup>7</sup> Some of that material survives from before the conversion in skaldic poetry: formally complex verse, often in praise of Norwegian kings, that alluded to Norse gods in its imagery.<sup>8</sup> Snorri in his *Edda* was in fact recording mythic narratives in order to explain the earlier skaldic allusions<sup>9</sup>—luckily, for us, because it is in his *Edda* and the related *Poetic Edda* that the bulk of Old Norse myths and legends are now preserved.<sup>10</sup>

Snorri Sturluson (1178/9-1241), voted the Icelandic 'scholar of the millennium' in a recent poll,<sup>11</sup> was one of the most powerful chieftains in the last decades of the Icelandic Commonwealth, often called the Sturlung Age for the prominence of Snorri's family in that era.<sup>12</sup> Snorri's scholarly output included a number of biographical sagas about the Norwegian kings (most of them collected in *Heimskringla*) and the *Edda*, known variously as *Snorra Edda* (Snorri's *Edda*), the *Prose Edda*, or the *Younger Edda* (the latter two names to distinguish it from the *Poetic* or *Elder Edda*, discussed below). The name itself is not definitively understood. In Icelandic "Edda" can mean 'great-grandmother' (as in the poem *Rígsþula*, st. 2); or it may have been a new coinage based on Latin "edo," 'I compose', hence 'poetics' (which it came to mean in any case); or perhaps it was a playful combination of the two, as in effect the 'great-grandmother of all poetic handbooks'.<sup>13</sup> The work begins with a Christian prologue that euhemerizes the Norse gods in something of the same way Ælfric had done for the pagan Roman gods. After Noah's flood (so this account runs), people forgot the name of God, although they reasoned through their 'earthly understanding' that a being controlled the heavens. In Troy, which we (that is, Snorri and his contemporaries) now call Tyrkland (Turkey), there lived a grandson of Priam named Tror, whom we now call Þórr. He came to rule in Thrace, which we now call Þrúðheimr (Þórr's residence). He married a prophetess named Sibyl, whom we call Sif (Sif is Þórr's wife); one of their descendants was Voden, whom we call Óðinn. He set out for the Northern lands and established his sons as founders of dynasties in Denmark, Norway and Sweden; because they were from Asia they were called Æsir.

The background of this prologue in learned Latin culture with its (false) etymologies, Trojan origins and neo-Platonic explanations of heathen religion, is apparent enough.<sup>14</sup> Just as Aeneas left Troy to found Italy

(in Virgil's *Aeneid*) and Brutus to found Britain (in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*), so Þórr, via his descendant Óðinn, founded Scandinavia. Having once made this accommodation of the erroneous ideas of his non-Christian forefathers, however, Snorri then proceeds to narrate authentic Old Norse myths without further apology.<sup>15</sup> As he does so he often stops to cite stanzas from his sources, skaldic poems but also anonymous poems such as *Völuspá* and *Grímnismál*.<sup>16</sup> Most of the poems of this type from which Snorri quotes are also found in complete versions in a single manuscript written down in about 1270, the Codex Regius ('King's Book').<sup>17</sup> When this manuscript of poetry came to the attention of the Icelandic bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson in 1643, he and his contemporaries thought the author was Sæmundr Sigfússon 'the learned' (1056-1133) and that Snorri had derived his *Edda* from it; hence the collection was called *Sæmundar Edda* (see Jonas Kristjánsson, 25). That attribution of authorship no longer stands, but the poems in the manuscript are still referred to as the (*Poetic* or *Elder*) *Edda*. In addition, a few poems of the same type from other manuscripts are usually added to the canon of Eddic poetry, as defined by modern editors such as Sophus Bugge<sup>18</sup>, Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn.

The first eleven poems in the Codex Regius treat mythological themes,<sup>19</sup> and they are the focus of the present collection of essays. To them are added three mythological Eddic poems not found in the Codex Regius (*Baldrs draumar*, *Rígsþula* and *Hyndluljóð*).<sup>20</sup> Taken together, the poems convey an outline of Old Norse mythic history, from the creation of the earth, heavens, giants, gods and humans; through the war of the Æsir and Vanir (two classes of gods) and the accidental killing of Óðinn's son Baldr; and ahead to the ultimate battle against evil beings at Ragnarøk (the 'doom of the gods').<sup>21</sup> Individually the poems present mythic episodes: Óðinn consults with *völur* or sibyls (*Völuspá* and *Baldrs draumar*), then speaks several stanzas of proverbial wisdom and recounts a few of his own adventures (*Hávamál*). In *Vafþrúðnismál*, he engages in a deadly wisdom contest with a giant; in *Grímnismál* he outlines mythological geography while seated shamanlike between two fires. Freyr pines for the giantess Gerðr and sends his servant Skírnir to woo her with presents, threats and curses (*Skírnismál*). Þórr exchanges insults with a disguised Óðinn (*Hárbarðsljóð*); then goes in quest with Týr for a brewing cauldron owned by the giant Hymir, with whom he goes fishing and snags the World-Serpent (*Hymiskviða*). Loki insults all the gods in turn at a feast (*Lokasenna*), then acts as Þórr's bridesmaid to prevent a giant from marrying Freyja (*Þrymskviða*). An elf-like smith weds a swan-maiden, loses her, is imprisoned and then exacts revenge (*Völundarkviða*). Þórr questions a know-it-all dwarf to prevent him from running off with his daughter (*Alvíssmál*). Heimdallr travels among humankind and fathers the progeni-

tors of the three social classes (*Rígsþula*). Freyja consults a giant sibyl to learn the ancestors of her human protégé, Óttar (*Hyndluljóð*).

Some of these poems have prose introductions or narrative frames, but the dominant mode is monologue<sup>22</sup> and dialogue, with stanzas spoken by the gods, both Æsir (chiefly Óðinn, Þórr and Loki) and Vanir (chiefly Freyr and Freyja)<sup>23</sup>; *vǫlur* and giants (*Vafþrúðnir*, Hymir and his unnamed wife, Þrymr, Gerðr, and Hyndla); an elf (*Vǫlundr*); a dwarf (*Alviss*) and a few humans (*Skirnir*?; King *Níðuðr* and his family in *Vǫlundarkviða*).<sup>24</sup>

Most of the mythological poems of the *Edda* are represented in this volume by a single essay, except *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál* which are discussed together, as are *Vǫluspá*, *Baldur's draumar* and *Hyndluljóð* (with *Vǫluspá* also being treated first in a separate essay). We have added a second essay (by Frakes) relating to *Lokasenna* but focusing more on the figure of Loki, bringing the total appropriately enough up to thirteen.<sup>25</sup> Four of the essays (those by Larrington, Clunies Ross, Acker and Quinn) were written expressly for this volume. Two others, those by Lönnroth and Svava Jakobsdóttir were translated (from Swedish and Icelandic respectively) for this volume. The other articles are reprinted from the journals cited in the acknowledgments. Harris has added an afterword to his article, and the authors and/or editors have added some translations of foreign phrases, amplified some bibliographic citations, corrected a few misprints, and made minor revisions.

The essays reflect a range of critical and theoretical approaches. All of the essays benefit from (and, in varying degrees, contribute to) the long history of philological studies; all employ close readings, whether of episodes, poems or groups of poems. Lönnroth applies ideological criticism and reception theory to reveal the social and political messages underlying *Vǫluspá* as they might have been received by a thirteenth-century Icelandic audience. In her 1987 Icelandic novel *Gunnlaðar saga*, Svava Jakobsdóttir received *Hávamál* for a modern Scandinavian audience, interweaving a story set in contemporary Denmark with the medieval poem's episode involving *Gunnlǫð* and Óðinn. Her essay elaborates on her interpretation of that episode, employing feminist and comparative mythological approaches. Larrington's reading is ideological and anthropological. She argues that *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál* delineate the proper relationship between men and gods in the Old Norse mythic universe. Harris, as in much of his other work, emphasizes the function of genre (a Germanic tradition of cursing in *Skírnismál*) as revealed via a comparative approach with Old English literature and later folklore. Clover, too, focuses on a Germanic genre, the *senna* or flying on which she has written elsewhere and which she sees as parodied in *Hárbarðsljóð*. Meulengracht Sørensen compares Viking Age sources for the myth of Þórr's fishing for the World-Serpent—picture stones and skaldic poems—with medieval sources for the same myth in the Eddic poem *Hymiskviða* and in Snorri's *Edda*.

Philip N. Anderson's essay employs formalist, stylistic and dramatic criticism. He elucidates the interplay between speakers and stanzas, repetitions and metrical effects in *Lokasenna*. Jerold Frakes responds to the structuralist mythological approach of Georges Dumézil, who had claimed a tripartite set of functions for Norse and other Indo-European gods but had difficulty placing Loki in his schema. On the basis of *Lokasenna* and other sources, Frakes argues that Loki plays an anti-functional role. Margaret Clunies Ross's essay, like her two-volume study of Old Norse mythology, is informed by anthropology, feminism and cultural studies. She reads *Þrymskviða* against other myths concerning relations between gods and giants and in light of societal norms for gender roles in medieval Iceland. In the first part of his article on *Völundarkviða*, John McKinnell supplies lexical and metrical evidence to suggest that the poem was composed not in Iceland or Norway but in a Norse-speaking area of Yorkshire, England. Arguing in the second half of his essay that approaches to the Weland legend can rely too heavily on a constructed archetype, he employs literary historical methods to determine the *Völundarkviða* poet's particular aims in adapting the legend. Paul Acker challenges structuralist approaches to mythology, or more particularly to lore about one class of mythological beings: dwarves. Against Motz's isolation of an archetypal dwarf that would find Alviðs aberrant in the poem named for him (*Alvíssmál*), Acker suggests that mythological lore varies according to different narrative and generic demands. Throughout his scholarly career, Thomas D. Hill has explored the interaction of medieval literature and medieval Biblical commentary, whether scholarly (patristic) or more in the nature of 'popular Christian mythology'. For *Rígsþula*'s myth of the creation of three social classes, Hill finds analogues in medieval (chiefly insular) glosses on the three sons of Noah. Finally, Judy Quinn examines a sub-genre of poems involving a *völva* or prophetess in order to determine that figure's function in the overall Old Norse mythological scheme. As in her other work, this essay is informed by feminist, speech-act and oral theories, and pays particular attention to variations in the manuscript record.

Each essay is preceded by a brief introduction that summarizes the poem and gives an overview of recent criticism. The articles themselves provide detailed bibliographical references to scholarship in various languages. For the convenience of beginning students, however, we append below a general bibliography that focuses on English-language monographs.

Paul Acker

## Notes

1. Ed. John C. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, EETS o.s. 259-260 (London: Oxford University Press, 1967-8), 2:667-724; see esp. 680-87. Partial translations in Albert S. Cook and Chauncey B. Tinker, *Select Translations from Old English Prose* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), 186-191; and in David F. Johnson, "Euhemerisation versus Demonisation: The Pagan Gods and Ælfric's *De Falsis Diis*," in *Pagans and Christians: The Interplay between Christian Latin and Traditional Germanic Cultures in Early Medieval Europe*, Germania Latina 2, ed. T. Hofstra, et al. (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), 35-69. Pope (1: 147) dates *De falsis diis* between 992 and 998. Wulfstan adapted Ælfric's homily, concentrating on the portion discussed here; ed. Dorothy Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 221-24, notes 333-39. Some time around 1200, Ælfric's homily was translated into Old Icelandic; see Arnold Taylor, "*Hauksbók* and Ælfric's *De Falsis Diis*," *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 3 (1969): 101-09.
2. Johnson (55-7) points out that Byrhtferth of Ramsey in his *Enchiridion* does explicitly correlate the Roman gods and the English names for weekdays, as does a marginal commentator of Wulfstan's homily.
3. See A. L. Meaney, "Æthelweard, Ælfric, the Norse Gods and Northumbria," *Journal of Religious History* 6 (1970): 105-32.
4. For a conservative appraisal of the evidence for Anglo-Saxon paganism, focusing on the archaeological record (especially grave finds), see David Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (London: Routledge, 1992). For a more speculative approach focusing on written evidence, see Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
5. See Peter Foote, "Conversion" in Pulsiano, et al., 106-08, with bibliography. The dates given are for what Foote calls major "moments" in the conversion, when Christianity becomes officially adopted; missionary work and individual conversions will of course have begun earlier. The "moment" for conversion in Norway began ca. 995 under King Óláfr Tryggvason (who sent his emissaries to Iceland) and continued under King (later Saint) Óláfr Haraldsson (d. 1030). Sweden lagged behind; its heathen temple at Uppsala was not destroyed until the twelfth century, according to Martin (42), who also argues against there being any millennial motivations behind the Scandinavian conversion (45-8).
6. Iceland was first settled in about 870; its early history is usually divided into an age of settlement from 870 to 930, when an Alþingi or parliament was established; and a commonwealth or free state period until 1262-4, when Iceland submitted to Norwegian rule. See Jón Jóhanesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga saga*, tr. Haraldur Bessason (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1974) and Richard Tomasson, *Iceland: The First New Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).
7. The only comparable source is the *Gesta Danorum* (History of the Danes), written in Latin by Saxo Grammaticus around 1216. Relying in part on Icelandic informants, Saxo imbeds euhemerized Norse mythological material in a legendary history of the Danish kings. See Eric Christiansen, "Saxo Grammaticus" in Pulsiano, et al., 566-9, with bibliography.
8. See Roberta Frank, "Skaldic Poetry," in Clover & Lindow, 157-9; Bjarne

Fidjestøl, "Skaldic Verse," in Pulsiano *et al.*, 592-4.

9. This applies mainly to *Skáldskaparmál*, the second of the three parts of Snorri's *Edda*.

10. Other sources besides those already mentioned (none of them without accompanying problems of interpretation) include place name and other linguistic evidence (including a few runic inscriptions), classical accounts (e.g. Tacitus, regarding Germania), travel accounts (notably that of Ibn Fadlan among the Norsemen in Russia), conversion accounts (e.g. Adam of Bremen, concerning Uppsala), picture stones and other representations (see Meulengracht Sørensen in this volume), other Icelandic prose sources including the kings' sagas, family sagas and legendary sagas, and later folklore. See Turville-Petre, ch. 1; Martin, chs. 2 and 4; Davidson, chs. 1-2.

11. As reported on the website "Daily News from Iceland," Dec. 1, 1999; [www.icenews.is](http://www.icenews.is). I thank my student Eve Siebert for conveying this information.

12. We learn much about Snorri's life in the collection of contemporary accounts known as the *Sturlunga saga*, part of which was written by his nephew Sturla Þórðarson (ed. Kristján Eldjárn, *et al.* [Reykjavik: Sturlunguútgáfan, 1946]; tr. Julia McGrew and R. George Thomas [New York: Twayne, 1970-74]); see also Marlene Ciklamini, *Snorri Sturluson* (Boston: Twayne, 1978) and Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *The Age of the Sturlungs: Icelandic Civilization in the Thirteenth Century*, *Islandica* 36, tr. Jóhann S. Hannesson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1953).

13. See Anthony Faulkes, "Edda," *Gripla* 2 (1977): 32-9.

14. On this background, see Anthony Faulkes, "Pagan Sympathy: Attitudes to Heathendom in the Prologue to *Snorra Edda*," *Edda: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Robert J. Glendinning & Haraldur Bessason, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1983, 283-314; and "Descent from the gods," *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 11 (1978-9), 92-125.

15. Snorri returns briefly to his euhemeristic frame at the end of *Gylfaginning* (Faulkes *Edda* ed. 54-5; tr. 57-8) and early on in *Skáldskaparmál* (tr. 64-5). See Margaret Clunies Ross, "The Mythological Fictions of *Snorra Edda*," *Snorrastefna*, ed. Úlfar Bragason (Reykjavik: Stofnun Sigurðar Nordals, 1992), 204-16, which also comments on Snorri's narrative technique.

16. According to Faulkes (*Edda* ed. 1:xxvi), Snorri most often cites these two poems and *Vafþrúðnismál* among Eddic poems; the last he does not name but says e.g. "And here it is told by the giant Vafþrúdnir" (Faulkes, *Edda* tr. 10).

17. In 1662 Bishop Brynjólfur gave this manuscript to the king of Denmark; it was housed in the Danish Old Royal Collection (*gammel kongelige sammlung*, abbreviated GkS), under the siglum GkS 2365 4to. In 1971 the Codex Regius was returned to Iceland and it is now housed in the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, Reykjavík. For the transcription date of 1270, see Harris, 75.

18. *Norræn fornkvæði* (Christiania [Oslo]: Mallings, 1867).

19. The remaining poems treat legendary and heroic themes, especially concerning Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, the Dragonslayer (the Siegfried of Wagnerian opera). As Turville-Petre points out (11-12), some of the heroic poems include mythological matter, e.g. references to Óðinn. *Völundarkviða* is sometimes felt to belong neither with the mythological nor the heroic poems and in some editions is moved to a place after *Alvíssmál* (see Hallberg, 30; Paul Beekman Taylor, "*Völundarkviða*," in

Pulsiano *et al.*, 711-13.). Dronke includes *Völundarkviða* among the mythological poems.

20. A fourth such poem, *Grottasøngr*, found in manuscripts of *Snorra Edda*, is not included. We consider that its association with the legendary Danish king Fróði places it among the heroic poems.

21. This mythic history is imparted principally in *Völuspá*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Baldrs draumar* and *Hyndluljóð* (see Quinn's article in this volume), but is alluded to in other poems. *Grímnismál* fills in more details of mythic geography (see Larrington's article in this volume).

22. *Völuspá* is a monologue spoken by a *völva* or prophetess. *Hávamál* is spoken by Hávi, presumably Óðinn; some stanzas are addressed to one Loddfáfnir. *Grímnismál* is also spoken by Óðinn, to Agnarr and Geirrøðr, with a prose introduction setting the scene more clearly.

23. Óðinn's wife Frigg speaks a few stanzas at the beginning of *Vafþrúðnismál*; Týr speaks a few lines in *Hymiskviða*; most of the assembled gods speak stanzas in response to Loki's insults in *Lokasenna*. *Rígspula* contains no dialogue until the end, when a crow speaks to the young king, at which point the poem ends incompletely.

24. On the relation of *vǫlur* and giants, see Quinn in this volume. *Völundr* is said to be a 'prince of elves' but also 'the most skillful of men'; Dronke (262) regards him as a 'mixed being'. As Clunies Ross points out (131), *Skírnir* in st. 18 of *Skírnismál* states that he is 'neither elf nor Áss nor wise Vane'; he is Freyr's "skósveinn" or servant. A herdsman and a serving-maid also speak stanzas (12 and 15) in *Skírnismál*; servants also speak in *Lokasenna*.

25. On Loki as the thirteenth god, see Orchard, 2 (s.v. *Æsir*) and ed. Faulkes 2: 153 n. 1/9-11.

# “The Founding of Miðgarðr (*Völuspá* 1-8)”

Lars Lönnroth

Translated by Paul Acker

## *Völuspá*

*Völuspá* is the first poem in the Codex Regius; it also takes pride of place in the poetic record of Old Norse mythology, especially as a source for myths of creation and of the destruction of the world at Ragnarøk. In his *Edda*, Snorri drew extensively on the poem, quoting some thirty stanzas and paraphrasing material from sixteen others (Nordal, 1; see also Mundal). In addition to the stanzas quoted in manuscripts of Snorri and the complete version in the Codex Regius, the poem is preserved in a variant version in *Hauksbók* (AM 544 4to; see Quinn 1990). Composed mainly in the meter *fornyrðislag*, *Völuspá* is usually dated to ca. 1000 (see further below).

The poem takes the form of a monologue spoken by a *völva*, or prophetess. She addresses the father of the slain (Óðinn), who has asked her to ‘declare the ancient histories of men and gods’. She is an ancient being, perhaps even dead (she ‘sinks down’ at the end of the poem), and recalls a time when she was fostered by giants, before the earth, sea and sky were formed. These elements were established by the sons of Burr (Óðinn and his brothers, the male elders of the Æsir) and made orderly by the Æsir on their *rökstólar*, or thrones of judgment. They build temples, forge tools and live in an age of gold, cheerfully playing checkers, ‘until three giantesses came’. Next the prophetess tells of the creation of dwarves (a long list of dwarf-names intervenes) and of the first two human beings, Ask and Embla; she also mentions Yggdrasill (the World-Tree) and the well of three maidens whose names mean (roughly) Past, Present and Future; they cast lots to determine human destinies.

Sts. 21-4 tell of a war between the Æsir and the Vanir. The Æsir try to burn Gullveigr (Gold Drink), who is thrice reborn and becomes Heiðr (Heath), who teaches *seiðr*, or witchcraft, among human women (Gullveigr and Heiðr probably represent aspects of Freyja). Óðinn throws his deadly spear but his stronghold is shattered and the Vanir survive, perhaps signifying that “the unfailing killing power of Óðinn was united with the unfail-

ing regenerative power of Freyja" (Dronke ed., 44). Another crisis ensues (sts. 25-6): a giant is about to wed Freyja but Þórr kills him. (Snorri tells a more elaborate version [*Gylf.*, ch. 42]; Freyja was promised to the giant if he could rebuild Ásgarðr in what seemed an impossibly short time.) Do you want to know more, or what? The prophetess asks for the first of nine times. She alludes to Óðinn's pledging his eye for a drink of mead from Mímir's well, then tells of another crisis: Óðinn's son Baldr is killed when Høðr throws a sprig of mistletoe at him. (Again Snorri provides more details [*Gylf.*, ch. 49]: Óðinn's wife Frigg had received vows from all things, with the exception of mistletoe, not to harm Baldr. Loki then gave a piece of mistletoe to Høðr, who was blind, to throw at Baldr when the gods were amusing themselves by hurling missiles at him.)

The remainder of the poem leads up to and beyond the climactic battle at Ragnarøk (the fate or doom of the gods, st. 43). The prophetess sees the punishment of Loki and of men in the realm of the dead. Monstrous wolves are born and the sun grows dim in a rain of blood. Roosters crow to waken the warriors of Óðinn and of Hel. The monstrous dog Garmr howls outside his cave, about to break free of his chains. Brothers kill each other, siblings commit incest and the human world is full of whoredom and violence. Heimdallr blows his horn and the world-tree trembles where it stands. The giant (Loki, in his final incarnation) slips free; so do the World-Serpent and the Ship of the Dead. Surtr advances with his sword of fire, mountains collide and the heavens split. Óðinn goes to fight the wolf Fenrir, Freyr faces Surtr and both gods are killed, to Frigg's sorrow. Þórr strikes furiously at the World-Serpent, then steps back nine paces and dies. The sun grows black, the land sinks into the sea, the stars fall from the sky, and the world ends in towering flames.

But the prophetess sees even further than that. She sees the earth rise up a second time. The surviving Æsir meet again on Iðavöll (Eddying Plain?, st. 57; cf. st. 7) and find one of their golden checkers in the grass. Høðr and Baldr, slayer and slain, live again, first in the hall where Óðinn once reigned victorious, then in the new hall of Gimlé (Shelter from the Flames). Meanwhile, in the Dark Mountains, a dragon comes flying, carrying corpses in its wings.

Scholarly studies on mythology and *Völuspá* through about 1985 are annotated in Lindow; recent studies through 1983 are surveyed in Harris. Criticism of *Völuspá* in English in the twentieth century has been briefly surveyed by Quinn (1994), focusing on (for recent works) the scholarly debate on orality and the nature of manuscript texts, a subject also explored in her published conference paper (1990). Quinn mentions the comparison of *Völuspá* with Greek and Latin oracular texts made by Dronke (1992); this, as well as Dronke's earlier studies on the poem are now reprinted in Dronke (1996) and integrated into her translation and commentary on the poem (1997; see also the commentary by Schach). Martin compares and contrasts creation myths in *Völuspá*, other Eddic poems and *Snorra Edda*. Jochens (1989) explores the images of women in the poem; since they are not very positive on the whole, she thinks it unlikely that the author of *Völuspá* was

a woman, as some other scholars have suggested. Motz argues that both Gullveig and Heiðr represent the first brewing of mead.

Lönnroth (1981) provides a critical background for his chapter on *Völuspá* translated below. After the student revolutions of 1968, Scandinavian scholars became more interested in ideologically oriented criticism and reception theory, which focuses on how an audience, medieval or modern, receives a text rather than on how an author creates it. Lönnroth thus conceives of a prophetic persona delivering the poem to an Icelandic audience at the time the poem was written down (the thirteenth century), through which the dominant ideology of the powerful chieftains and their clerical allies validates itself through myth. Lönnroth was also responding to the influential interpretations of Sigurður Nordal, who had imagined an Icelandic poet wrestling with pagan and Christian influences at the dawn of the millennium, when Nordal supposed the poem to have been composed. While Lönnroth usually writes for a scholarly audience, his interpretation printed here was originally published as a chapter in a book directed at a Swedish popular audience, the subtitle of which translates as ‘oral poetry from Edda to ABBA’ (the Swedish musical group of the 1970s). It is here translated into English for the first time.

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## The Founding of Miðgarðr (*Völuspá* 1-8)

### I

*Völuspá*, or 'The Sibyl's Prophecy', is the most noteworthy and the most often discussed of the Eddic mythological poems.<sup>1</sup> It was probably composed during heathen times but no one can say precisely when, where or by whom. The text must have changed considerably during oral transmission before being written down finally in thirteenth-century Iceland in three versions that differ from each other at several points; they would all seem to be highly corrupt descendants of an original version. The Icelandic text which is given on the preceding pages, and which provides the basis for my translation, is to be seen as a reconstruction.<sup>2</sup> It may be supposed that the reconstruction gives a fairly good picture of the poem as it generally was performed on the farms of Icelandic chieftains some two hundred years after the introduction of Christianity. On the other hand, we can make only vague speculations as to what the poem was like during earlier periods.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently it is not worth speculating about the intentions of the "original" poet of 'The Sibyl's Prophecy,' although researchers have spent a great deal of time and effort on just this sort of guesswork. We must be content to try and imagine how the poem was received by its thirteenth-century Icelandic audience. This requires, however, that we know something of how Eddic poems in general were performed and how this genre of poetry developed since ancient Germanic times.<sup>4</sup>

Old Germanic poetry, of which the *Edda* is a late example, was performed to the accompaniment of a harp, probably in a sort of incantatory, half-singing delivery somewhere between recitation and actual song. At first the poetry was not divided into regular stanzas but trotted along from line to line, as for example in the Old English poem *Beowulf*, which from a technical standpoint can be regarded as a precursor of Eddic poems:

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| "Lo! We have heard    | of the Spear-Danes,                    |
| the folk-kings' glory | in days of yore,                       |
| how those noblemen    | made known their courage.              |
| Often Scyld Scefing   | from troops of foes,                   |
| from many tribes,     | took away mead-benches... <sup>5</sup> |

Several poems, including *Beowulf*, give descriptions of wandering singers and harp-players producing even streams of such verses at drinking-parties in the king's mead-hall before the assembled warriors and courtiers. Their repertory seems to have consisted of long narratives about the gods and heroes of ancient times. At the center of these tales is that same heroic/courtly locale, the mead-hall, where the performance is taking place.<sup>6</sup> The reference to 'mead-benches' in the fifth line of *Beowulf* is a

good example of the "double scene" phenomenon: the word functions within the fictive reality of the poem, but at the same time it is directed at the more obvious reality witnessed by the audience as it listens to the recitation.<sup>7</sup>

The oldest surviving poems of this kind are highly formulaic and were probably improvised during the performance itself, like the Yugoslavian heroic songs studied by Parry and Lord. The simple meter of two heavily stressed syllables per line, plus alliteration, made improvisation possible for the singer who had learned in advance a considerable number of formulas and systems. With the aid of the harp he was able to maintain the flow of words in an even and rhythmical manner, filling in the occasional pauses with music.<sup>8</sup>

In the Viking North, however, the genre underwent a radical change, which seems to have resulted primarily from a change in the rules of performance. The harp was set aside and the ancient tales began to be narrated in prose. The Old Germanic verse forms were reserved now for a few highly dramatic scenes and episodes, in which the main characters of the story express their thoughts and feelings in direct speech. As a result, the poems became to a greater extent dialogue or monologue poems, set within prose narratives of varying lengths. At about the same time the verse form developed towards greater regularity and metrical strictness: regular stanzas were introduced, the lines grew shorter, and the diction became more precise and concentrated, with considerably fewer formulas and repetitions. To improvise poems of this new kind was scarcely possible, but neither was it necessary, for the increasing concentration and brevity made it possible to learn the texts by heart. The manuscripts show clearly that the Eddic poems were written down from more or less completely *memorized* oral texts, rather like the ballads and folk songs of later times.

All of these changes were probably interrelated; they should be perceived as parts of a single development. Thus it is natural to assume that the verses became more strict in form and fixed within the oral tradition as the poetry took on a more limited function, while the prose took over the main part of the narrative. When the harp ceased to be used in performance, poetic improvisation was made difficult but at the same time it became easier for the actor to dramatically perform type-scenes of the sort one finds in the *Edda*: a troll-woman's visionary monologue, a dying hero's last words on the battlefield, a verbal duel between enemies immediately before a battle, etc. And when the poetic text became fixed, instead of improvised with each performance, there was no longer a great need for ready-made formulas.

An Icelandic tale, *Norna-Gests þáttur*,<sup>9</sup> written down about the year 1300, gives a highly romanticized but interesting picture of what it might have been like when Eddic poems were performed in medieval times. The story takes place at the Norwegian court of King Ólafr Tryggvason around

the year 1000. One day an old wanderer, Norna-Gestr ('Guest of the Norns'), comes to the court. The stranger appears to be several hundred years old; he knew the legendary heroes of ancient times and can speak of them. He also knows how to play the harp and recite poems. Shortly before Christmas, when the king's men are seated around the drinking-table, Norna-Gestr offers them entertainment. The first evening he plays his harp for a long while, and makes a bargain with his audience that the next day he will convince them he has seen a treasure more valuable than a certain gold ring which King Ólafr has recently acquired and which the entire court admires. The next day when the king himself is present, Norna-Gestr shows a piece of a golden saddle-ring which everyone must confess is superior to the king's ring. At the king's command, Norna-Gestr relates how he came by this valuable saddle-ring, which apparently was worn by Grani, the legendary horse of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani. The story develops into a short version of the saga of the Völsungs and the Rhinegold, interrupted at times by questions from the audience. For his dramatic high points Norna-Gestr employs verse instead of prose and recites Eddic poems as if spoken by the personages in the saga during certain situations: Óðinn's speech to Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, for example, delivered as the young hero is on his way to avenge his father's death; or Brynhildr's monologue, recited during her journey to the kingdom of death, and so on. These poetic speeches are highly dramatic in content and charged with emotion but they do not advance the action any further.

The performance situation described here has a good deal in common with those presented in the earlier Old English sources: a wandering harp-player entertains drinking warriors with tales about the heroes of ancient times. It is obvious that both literatures refer to the same mythical-heroic tradition of the mead-hall. One can also find parallels to Norna-Gestr as a mythic singer in several places in the earliest Old Germanic literature. In *Norna-Gests þáttur*, however, harp-playing, story-telling and poetic recitation are no longer done simultaneously but at three distinct moments during the entertainment. First the harp is played as an overture; it is followed by a prose narration. At appropriate moments in this narration poetic-dramatic monologues or dialogues are introduced, which scarcely advance the action of the story but which place the characters in dramatic relief. Throughout the entire performance, but especially during the story-telling, a dialogue occurs between the performer, Norna-Gestr, and his audience. The dramatic verse monologues to a large extent are perceived as direct speech from the saga characters to the audience: Óðinn's speech to Sigurðr Fáfnisbani deals more generally with the duties of a warrior, and Brynhildr's death monologue presents the bitterness and craving for revenge of a woman deceived. One may imagine such subjects were of special interest to the circle of drinking courtiers listening to Norna-Gestr's performance.

The setting in which the sagas and Eddic poems were usually performed during thirteenth-century Iceland was no doubt considerably less glamorous than that described in *Norna-Gests þátr*. There were no royal mead-halls, no golden treasures or centuries-old singers from the mythical past. Nevertheless it was in such a setting that the Icelandic chieftains wished to live. Many of them had served with the Norwegian court and viewed themselves as courtiers of the king. Within their limited economic resources and on farms that were small and poor by continental standards, they tried to realize the mead-hall atmosphere of wealth, heroic grandeur and fine literary entertainment.

There is extant a description of an early twelfth-century entertainment intended for the halls of Icelandic chieftains. The performance is said to have taken place in 1119 on the farm Reykjahólar, where the priest and chieftain Ingimundr Einarsson held a wedding feast for his stepdaughter and invited the notables of the district, among them the major landowner and lawman Hrólfr from Skálarnes:

There was increased merriment and joy now, good entertainment (*skemmtan*) and many sorts of amusements—dancing, wrestling, and storytelling (*sagaskemmtan*). The celebration lasted for seven whole nights, for in any summer when two *sálds* worth of corn could be brought there was an Ólaf's Guild meeting at the Þorsnes Þing, and there were many guild-brothers at the celebration . . . About such occasions, it is sometimes reported, though it is not in itself very important, who told stories and about whom stories were told. This is contained in an account which many now deny and pretend not to have known; for many reject the truth, think that what is invented is true . . . Hrólfr from Skálarnes told a saga about Hröngvið the viking and about Ólaf, the Liðsmen's King, about the barrow-robber, Þráinn the berserk, and about Hrómund Grípsson—with many strophes too. These sagas delighted King Sverri who said such lying stories were very enjoyable. Men could even trace their lineage back to Hrómund Grípsson. Hrólfr himself had put this saga together. Ingimund the priest told the Saga of Orm the Skáld of Barra, with many verses and, towards the end of the saga, many good *flokks* which Ingimund himself had composed. Furthermore, many wise men believed these sagas were true.<sup>10</sup>

The setting as well as the entertainment described here seem to be of a more robust sort than in *Norna-Gests þátr*. But it seems likely that from a technical standpoint the performance was handled in the same way and the royal mead-hall, judging by the reference to King Sverri, was the ideal setting behind the saga-telling and poetic recitation that took place at the Reykjahólar wedding feast. We may imagine that *Völuspá* was recited in a similar setting in twelfth-century Iceland. Formally we have to do with a dramatic monologue told by a fictitious personage, a poem quite like those recited by Norna-Gestr and probably also like those recited by Hrólfr from

Skálmarnes and Ingimundr the Priest. In the manuscripts the poem is not presented as an element within a prose narration, but this does not rule out the possibility that it was intended to be performed in such a context.

## II

The speaker in the text is a *völva*, a heathen troll-woman with the power to see into what ordinarily is hidden beyond death.<sup>11</sup> This sort of troll-woman appears in many of the sagas. She often comes on the scene as a mysterious stranger, quite like Norna-Gestr, and frightens the farmers with her prophecies and visions. One of the most famous descriptions of such a woman appears in *Eiríks saga rauða*:

There was a woman there in the district who was called Þorbjörg; she was a prophetess and was called 'Little Sibyl'. She had had nine sisters and they had all been prophetesses but she was the only one still living then. It was Þorbjörg's custom during the winter to attend feasts; she was invited most often by those who were curious to learn about their own destinies or what the next year would bring . . . A high-seat was prepared for her with a cushion on it that had to be stuffed with chicken feathers. When she arrived during the evening with the man who had been sent to get her, she was outfitted in this way: she wore a dark cloak fitted with straps and studded with precious stones all the way down to the hem. She wore glass beads around her neck and on her head a black lambskin hood lined with white catskin. She carried a staff with a knob on it, clad in brass and studded with stones. She wore a belt made of touchwood with a large leather pouch hanging from it, in which she kept the charms she needed for her magic . . . When she came in, everyone was obliged to greet her appropriately, and she responded according to how agreeable she found them . . . Late the following day they provided her with the things she needed to perform the witchcraft (*seiðr*). She asked them to bring her women who knew the incantations needed to perform the witchcraft, known as guardian songs; but no such women could be found. Then they asked around the farm to see if anyone might know. Then Guðríðr answered, "I am neither a prophetess nor a witch, but back in Iceland my foster-mother Halldís taught me incantations which she called guardian songs." Þorbjörg replied, "Then you are more knowledgeable than I expected." Guðríðr said, "This is the sort of knowledge and proceeding where I will not assist anyone, for I am a Christian woman." Þorbjörg said, "It might be that you would be of help to the people here, and you would then be no worse a woman." . . . The women formed a ring around Þorbjörg where she sat up on the witching platform. Then Guðríðr sang the songs so beautifully and well that no one there thought they had ever heard a more beautiful voice. The prophetess thanked her for the song. She thought many spirits had been drawn there who thought the singing was beautiful to hear; "before they had wanted to turn away from us and pay us no heed. And now many things are clear to

me which before were hidden, both from me and from others. And I can say that this famine will not last longer than the winter and conditions will improve with the spring; and the time of sickness which has lain heavy for so long will improve sooner than expected.”<sup>12</sup>

The prophetess who speaks in *Völuspá* is not described and the situation in which she gives her prophecy is never made clear, but one can fairly well imagine the scene using the description quoted above: a strangely dressed old woman sitting in a high-seat, surrounded by a listening audience for whom she describes her visions. The main difference would be the much grander perspective of *Völuspá*. The sibyl's prophecy does not concern a local famine or epidemic as in *Eiríks saga rauða* but rather the fate of the world from its creation to its final destruction or Ragnarøk. She is speaking not to some gathered farmers but to the whole of mankind.

The section of the poem which will be analyzed here represents but an eighth of the whole, and it contains many problems of interpretation which I will only briefly consider. I will be content to illustrate how the reciter of the poem in her role as sibyl constructs in the mind of the audience an image of the creation of Miðgarðr, making use of the effects of the “double scene.”

To begin with we will examine this section in relation to the poem as a whole. In its reconstructed form, *Völuspá* comprises sixty-six stanzas, the majority of which describe a separate scene that the sibyl “sees” during her prophecy. The transitions between scenes are sometimes so abrupt and unexpected as to seem, from a strictly logical point of view, quite arbitrary—which helps to explain the variations in stanza order exhibited by the manuscripts; the degree of variation was probably even greater in the oral tradition. It is clear, however, that the sibyl intends to describe a cyclical development that begins with the light and harmony of the earliest age, proceeds through a series of events towards a fragmented and inharmonious present, reaches its traumatic climax in the great global catastrophe of the future, Ragnarøk, and concludes with the creation of a new and better world, as full of light and harmony as the world described in the beginning of the poem. The central but also the most obscure section of the poem describes a gradual falling into sin, a moral degeneration for which the whole of mankind (and this includes the listening audience) is held responsible. The sibyl intends to show that this lapse into sin will doubtless lead to punishment and that the present state of the world is so corrupt that Ragnarøk is inevitable. But she gives new hope through her vision of a new world to come after Ragnarøk, where the lost happiness once created by the gods will return through those who are virtuous and pure in heart. Whether one chooses to view *Völuspá* as Christian or heathen, it exhibits to a large extent the character of a revivalist sermon. It is the ethical message rather than the historical pattern of action that connects the flow of visionary scenes.

It follows from this that one cannot expect to find in the poem any 'scientific' explanation of the world's development, nor should one expect any logical consistency or connection between the verses. Internal connections in *Völuspá* lie almost entirely on an emotional plane. From the serene *andante* of the creation myths, the listeners are swept along to the demonic *furioso* of Ragnarøk, and from there to a majestic finale where the creation theme returns in a new variation, instilling an intense sensation of catharsis and release; this occurs without enabling one, however, to give a precise account of the series of causes and effects that led up to it. The sibyl quite intentionally obscures the logical sequence to increase the effect of religious mystery.

In the first eight stanzas the logical connections are stronger than in other parts of the poem because the fundamental conditions are being presented. One may reasonably assume that this first section remained relatively unchanged from one recitation to the next. The section opens with a pair of stanzas in which the sibyl introduces herself and the situation in which she addresses the audience. Following this are six stanzas that present the creation of Miðgarðr and Ásgarðr up to the point when the powers of evil (represented by the three women from Jötunheimar) first make their entrance on the scene. Characteristic of this section are antithetically paired stanzas; the first stanza in each pair presents a scene or situation which the next stanza contrasts with a scene or situation of opposite meaning. This arrangement made the verses easier to remember for the reciter and easier to follow for the audience.

As a prerequisite to understanding the poem, the audience had to know its way around the Old Norse mythological cosmos and its cast of characters; this mythology is part of the poem's code. One was expected to know that Miðgarðr, the human world, was an island in the middle of the world-sea, created by Óðinn and his brothers (the sons of Burr). According to *Snorra Edda*, the brothers killed the giant Ymir, whose body was then used as building material. His flesh became earth, his legs mountains, his blood the sea, his hair the forest and his skull the heavens.<sup>13</sup> Beyond Miðgarðr, which represents civilization and stability, lies Útgarðr, where the giants and other evil beings reside: a world beyond the official and the known. Somewhere in the vicinity of Miðgarðr and likewise connected to the human world lies Ásgarðr, the gods' world, dominated by the Val-father Óðinn's giant mead-hall, Valhöll, the unattainable ideal model for all earthly mead-halls and places of 'entertainment' (*skemtan*).

Here in Valhöll is the official center of the mythic world. Outside is Íðavöllr, where the gods hold the parliament or *þing* in the same way as the thirteenth-century Icelanders held the Þing on þingvellir. It was here that the gods, according to *Völuspá*, played *tafl* with golden playing-pieces when the world was in its infancy. These golden pieces will be found again in the grass when the world is renewed after Ragnarøk, when most of the gods

will have fallen in battle against the giants and their evil crew. Between Miðgarðr and Ásgarðr stands the world-tree, the ash Yggdrasill, which governs human prosperity, its roots stretching out through the entire universe.

The human beings (both high and low) who inhabit Miðgarðr are descended from the god Heimdallr, who in the dawn of time sired children with three different women, who in turn became the tribal mothers for the three Old Norse social groups: nobles, farmers and slaves. The noblemen have closer contact than the others with the gods, especially with the Val-father Óðinn himself, the adviser and role model for kings. With the help of Óðinn they can prevail over their enemies and obtain information about upcoming battles, especially Ragnarøk's titanic world struggle between the forces of good and evil. One method of obtaining such information is to consult a sibyl, who has a supernatural connection with Óðinn. Another way is to offer sacrifices to the gods in the temple or at the *Þing*.

These methods of obtaining information are necessary to maintain the strength of Miðgarðr and Ásgarðr against Útgarðr's ceaseless attacks and evil stratagems. As is hinted at in the case of Guðríðr, who was reluctant to sing the guardian songs out of deference to her Christian beliefs, there were difficulties in making magical spirits and sacrifices acceptable in a society which was officially Christian. In *Völuspá* one observes this conflict most clearly in the final section, when the new world to come after Ragnarøk is ruled over by a new god mightier than any of the old Æsir; this is an obvious reference to the Christian God. By thus affirming Christ as the ultimate ruler it was possible for the thirteenth-century Icelanders to preserve the mythic universe they had inherited from their ancestors along with their oral traditions.

We now turn to the text.

### III

The sibyl begins her monologue with an invocation to the audience: 'Hear me, all you/ holy kindred.'<sup>14</sup> This is common in oral texts: "Come listen a while you gentlemen all," says the opening of a Robin Hood ballad; a modern song begins, 'Hear my song you clear evening star.' In Eddic poetry this kind of opening is rare. Usually the reciter plunges directly into the course of events: 'Enraged was Ving-Pórr when he awoke . . .' (*Þrymskviða*); 'Counsel me now, Frigg,/ for I long to go// to visit Vafþrúðnir . . .' (*Vafþrúðnismál*). In *Völuspá* the invocation imparts a sense of religious solemnity, a commanding, incantatory voice that breaks through the noise of the banquet hall. By addressing the audience—in reality perhaps a group of drunken farmers—as 'holy kindred,' she transforms them into the equals of the gods and the room into a temple for magical rites. By doing so she defines the textual code as one of religious solemnity and ritual.