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THE POETIC EDDA

Vafþrúðnismál

The Lay of Vafthruthnir

Old Norse · English – H. A. Bellows (1923)

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Not even Frigg can keep Odin at home: the All-Father is set on testing the wisest of all giants. Under the name Gagnrath he enters Vafthruthnir's hall, and the giant stakes his own head on the outcome of the contest. Question by question the whole of cosmic knowledge unfolds — how the earth was shaped from Ymir's flesh and the race of giants sprang from Aurgelmir, how the steeds Skinfaxi and Hrimfaxi draw day and night across the sky, whence the wind comes from the eagle-giant Hræsvelg, how Njorth came from Vanaheim to the gods, and what awaits the world at the end of days: Ragnarök, the survivors Lif and Lifthrasir, and the new sun. At last Odin asks the one question no one can answer but himself — what he whispered in the ear of the dead Baldr before he was lifted onto the bale-fire. By this the giant knows his guest, and knows himself doomed. The Old Norse text follows the Codex Regius (ed. Guðni Jónsson), the English rendering Henry Adams Bellows (1923); both are in the public domain.

	Old Norse	English – H. A. Bellows (1923)
1	<i>Ráð þú mér nú, Frigg, alls mik fara tíðir at vitja Vafþrúðnis; forvitni mikla kveð ek mér á fornum stöfum við þann inn alsvinna jötun.</i>	Counsel me, Frigg, for I long to fare, And Vafthruthnir fain would find; Fit wisdom old with the giant wise Myself would I seek to match.
2	<i>Heima letja ek mynda Herjaföðr í görðum goða; því at engi jötun ek hugða jafnramman sem Vafþrúðni vera.</i>	Heerfather here at home would I keep, Where the gods together dwell; Amid all the giants an equal in might To Vafthruthnir know I none.
3	<i>Fjölð ek fór, fjölð ek freistaða, fjölð ek reynda regin; hitt vil ek vita, hvé Vafþrúðnis salakynni sé.</i>	Much have I fared, much have I found, Much have I got from the gods; And fain would I know how Vafthruthnir now Lives in his lofty hall.
4	<i>Heill þú farir! heill þú aftr komir! heill þú á sinnum sér! æði þér dugi, hvars þú skalt, Aldaföðr, orðum mæla jötun.</i>	Safe mayst thou go, safe come again, And safe be the way thou wendest! Father of men, let thy mind be keen When speech with the giant thou seekest.
5	<i>Fór þá Óðinn at freista orðspeki þess ins alsvinna jötuns; at höllu hann kom, ok átti Íms faðir; inn gekk Yggr þegar.</i>	The wisdom then of the giant wise Forth did he fare to try; He found the hall of the father of Im, And in forthwith went Ygg.

- 6 *Heill þú nú, Vafþrúðnir,
nú em ek í höll kominn
á þik sjalfan sjá;
hitt vil ek fyrst vita,
ef þú fróðr sér
eða alsviðr jötunn.*
- 7 *Hvat er þat manna
er í mínum sal
verpumk orði á?
Út þú né komir
órum höllum frá,
nema þú inn snotrari sér.*
- 8 *Gagnráðr ek heiti,
nú emk af göngu kominn,
þyrstr til þinna sala;
laðar þurfi -
hef ek lengi farit -
ok þinna andfanga, jötunn.*
- 9 *Hví þú þá, Gagnráðr,
mælist af golfi fyr?
Far þú í sess í sal!
þá skal freista,
hvárr fleira viti,
gestr eða inn gamli þulr.*
- 10 *Óauðigr maðr,
er til auðigs kemr,
mæli þarft eða þegi;
ofrmælgir mikil,
hygg ek, at illa geti
hveim er við kaldrifjaðan kemr.*
- 11 *Seg þú mér, Gagnráðr,
alls þú á golfi vill
þíns of freista frama,
hvé sá hestr heitir,
er hverjan dregr
dag of dróttmögu.*
- 12 *Skinfaxi heitir,
er inn skíra dregr
dag of dróttmögu;
hesta beztr
þykkir hann með Hreiðgotum;
ey lýsir mön af mari.*
- Vafthruthnir, hail! to thy hall am I come,
For thyself I fain would see;
And first would I ask if wise thou art,
Or, giant, all wisdom hast won.
- Who is the man that speaks to me,
Here in my lofty hall?
Forth from our dwelling thou never shalt fare,
Unless wiser than I thou art.
- Gagnrath they call me, and thirsty I come
From a journey hard to thy hall;
Welcome I look for, for long have I fared,
And gentle greeting, giant.
- Why standest thou there on the floor whilst thou
speakest?
A seat shalt thou have in my hall;
Then soon shall we know whose knowledge is more,
The guest's or the sage's gray.
- If a poor man reaches the home of the rich,
Let him wisely speak or be still;
For to him who speaks with the hard of heart
Will chattering ever work ill.
- Speak forth now, Gagnrath, if there from the floor
Thou wouldst thy wisdom make known:
What name has the steed that each morn anew
The day for mankind doth draw?
- Skinfaxi is he, the steed who for men
The glittering day doth draw;
The best of horses to heroes he seems,
And brightly his mane doth burn.

13 Seg þú þat, Gagnráðr,
alls þú á golfi vill
þíns of freista frama,
hvé sá jór heitir,
er austan dregr
nótt of nýt regin.

Speak forth now, Gagnrath, if there from the floor
Thou wouldst thy wisdom make known:
What name has the steed that from East anew
Brings night for the noble gods?

14 Hrímfaxi heitir,
er hverja dregr
nótt of nýt regin;
méldropa fellir hann
morgin hvern;
þaðan kemr döggr um dala.

Hrimfaxi name they the steed that anew
Brings night for the noble gods;
Each morning foam from his bit there falls,
And thence come the dews in the dales.

15 Seg þú þat, Gagnráðr,
alls þú á golfi vill
þíns of freista frama,
hvé sú á heitir,
er deilir með jötna sonum
grund ok með goðum.

Speak forth now, Gagnrath, if there from the floor
Thou wouldst thy wisdom make known:
What name has the river that 'twixt the realms
Of the gods and the giants goes?

16 Ífing heitir á,
er deilir með jötna sonum
grund ok með goðum;
opin renna
hon skal of aldrdaga;
verðr-at íss á á.

Ifing is the river that 'twixt the realms
Of the gods and the giants goes;
For all time ever open it flows,
No ice on the river there is.

17 Seg þú þat, Gagnráðr,
alls þú á golfi vill
þíns of freista frama,
hvé sá völlr heitir,
er finnask vígi at
Surtr ok in svásu goð.

Speak forth now, Gagnrath, if there from the floor
Thou wouldst thy wisdom make known:
What name has the field where in fight shall meet
Surt and the gracious gods?

18 Vígriðr heitir völlr,
er finnask vígi at
Surtr ok in svásu goð;
hundrað rasta
hann er á hverjan veg;
sá er þeim völlr vitaðr.

Vigrith is the field where in fight shall meet
Surt and the gracious gods;
A hundred miles each way does it measure,
And so are its boundaries set.

19 Fróðr ertu nú, gestr,
far þú á bekk jötuns,
ok mælumk í sessi saman;
höfði veðja
vit skulum höllu í,
gestr, of geðspeki.

Wise art thou, guest! To my bench shalt thou go,
In our seats let us speak together;
Here in the hall our heads, O guest,
Shall we wager our wisdom upon.

20 *Seg þú þat it eina,
ef þitt æði dugir
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan jörð of kom
eða upphiminn
fyrst, inn fróði jötunn.*

First answer me well, if thy wisdom avails,
And thou knowest it, Vafthruthnir, now:
In earliest time whence came the earth,
Or the sky, thou giant sage?

21 *Ór Ymis holdi
var jörð of sköpuð,
en ór beinum björg,
himinn ór hausi
ins hrímkalda jötuns,
en ór sveita sær.*

Out of Ymir's flesh was fashioned the earth,
And the mountains were made of his bones;
The sky from the frost-cold giant's skull,
And the ocean out of his blood.

22 *Seg þú þat annat,
ef þitt æði dugir
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan máni kom,
sá er ferr menn yfir,
eða sól it sama.*

Next answer me well, if thy wisdom avails,
And thou knowest it, Vafthruthnir, now:
Whence came the moon, o'er the world of men
That fares, and the flaming sun?

23 *Mundilfari heitir,
hann er mána faðir
ok svá Sólar it sama;
himin hverfa
þau skulu hverjan dag
öldum at ártali.*

Mundilferi is he who begat the moon,
And fathered the flaming sun;
The round of heaven each day they run,
To tell the time for men.

24 *Seg þú þat it þriðja,
alls þik svinnan kveða
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan dagr of kom,
sá er ferr drótt yfir,
eða nótt með niðum.*

Third answer me well, if wise thou art called,
If thou knowest it, Vafthruthnir, now:
Whence came the day, o'er mankind that fares,
Or night with the narrowing moon?

25 *Dellingr heitir,
hann er Dags faðir,
en Nótt var Nörvi borin;
ný ok nið
skópu nýt regin
öldum at ártali.*

The father of day is Delling called,
And the night was begotten by Nor;
Full moon and old by the gods were fashioned,
To tell the time for men.

26 *Seg þú þat it fjórða,
alls þik fróðan kveða,
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan vetr of kom
eða varmt sumar
fyrst með fróð regin.*

Fourth answer me well, if wise thou art called,
If thou knowest it, Vafthruthnir, now:
Whence did winter come, or the summer warm,
First with the gracious gods?

27 *Vindsvalr heitir,
hann er Vetrar faðir,
en Svásuðr sumars.*

Vindsval he was who was winter's father,
And Svosuth summer begat;

28 *Seg þú þat it fimmta,
alls þik fróðan kveða,
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hverr ása ellztr
eða Ymis niðja
yrði í árdaga.*

Fifth answer me well, if wise thou art called,
If thou knowest it, Vafthruthnir, now:
What giant first was fashioned of old,
And the eldest of Ymir's kin?

29 *Örófi vetra
áðr væri jörð of sköpuð,
þá var Bergelmir borinn,
Þrúðgelmir
var þess faðir,
en Aurgelmir afi.*

Winters unmeasured ere earth was made
Was the birth of Bergelmir;
Thruthgelmir's son was the giant strong,
And Aurgelmir's grandson of old.

30 *Seg þú þat it sétta,
alls þik svinnan kveða,
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan Aurgelmir kom
með jötna sonum
fyrst, inn fróði jötunn.*

Sixth answer me well, if wise thou art called,
If thou knowest it, Vafthruthnir, now:
Whence did Aurgelmir come with the giants' kin,
Long since, thou giant sage?

31 *Ór Elivágum
stukku eitrdropar,
svá óx, unz varð jötunn;
þar eru órar ættir
komnar allar saman;
því er þat æ allt til atalt.*

Down from Elivagar did venom drop,
And waxed till a giant it was;
And thence arose our giants' race,
And thus so fierce are we found.

32 *Seg þú þat it sjaunda,
alls þik svinnan kveða,
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvé sá börn gat,
inn baldni jötunn,
er hann hafði-t gýgjar gaman.*

Seventh answer me well, if wise thou art called,
If thou knowest it, Vafthruthnir, now:
How begat he children, the giant grim,
Who never a giantess knew?

33 *Undir hendi vaxa
kváðu hrímpursi
mey ok mög saman;
fótr við fæti
gat ins fróða jötuns
sexhöfðaðan son.*

They say 'neath the arms of the giant of ice
Grew man-child and maid together;
And foot with foot did the wise one fashion
A son that six heads bore.

34 Seg þú þat it átta,
alls þik svinnan kveða,
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvat þú fyrst of mant
eða fremst of veizt,
þú ert alsviðr, jötunn.

Eighth answer me well, if wise thou art called,
If thou knowest it, Vafthruthnir, now:
What farthest back dost thou bear in mind?
For wide is thy wisdom, giant!

35 Örófi vetra
áðr væri jörð of sköpuð,
þá var Bergelmir borinn;
þat ek fyrst of man,
er sá inn fróði jötunn
á var lúðr of lagiðr.

Winters unmeasured ere earth was made
Was the birth of Bergelmir;
This first knew I well, when the giant wise
In a boat of old was borne.

36 Seg þú þat it níunda,
alls þik svinnan kveða,
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan vindr of kemr,
svá at ferr vág yfir;
æ menn han sjalfan of sjá.

Ninth answer me well, if wise thou art called,
If thou knowest it, Vafthruthnir, now:
Whence comes the wind that fares o'er the waves
Yet never itself is seen?

37 Hræsvelgr heitir,
er sitr á himins enda,
jötunn í arnar ham;
af hans vængjum
kvæða vind koma
alla menn yfir.

In an eagle's guise at the end of heaven
Hræsvelg sits, they say;
And from his wings does the wind come forth
To move o'er the world of men.

38 Seg þú þat it tíunda,
alls þú tíva rök
öll, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan Njörðr of kom
með ása sonum -
hofum ok hörgum
hann ræðr hundmörgum -
ok varð-at hann ásum alinn.

Tenth answer me now, if thou knowest all
The fate that is fixed for the gods:
Whence came up Njorth to the kin of the gods,--
(Rich in temples and shrines he rules,--)
Though of gods he was never begot?

39 Í Vanaheimi
skópu hann vís regin
ok seldu at gíslingu goðum,
í aldar rök
hann mun aftr koma
heim með vísum vönum.

In the home of the Wanes did the wise ones create
him,
And gave him as pledge to the gods;
At the fall of the world shall he fare once more
Home to the Wanes so wise.

40 Seg þú þat et ellifta,
hvar ýtar túnum í
höggvask hverjan dag;
val þeir kjósa
ok ríða vígi frá,
sitja meir of sáttir saman.

Eleventh answer me well, . . .
. . .
What men . . . in . . . home
Each day to fight go forth?

41 Allir einherjar
Óðins túnum í
höggvask hverjan dag,
val þeir kjósa
ok ríða vígi frá,
sitja meirr of sáttir saman.

The heroes all in Othin's hall
Each day to fight go forth;
They fell each other, and fare from the fight
All healed full soon to sit.

42 Seg þú þat it tolfða,
hví þú tíva rök
öll, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
frá jötna rúnum
ok allra goða
segir þú it sannasta,
inn alsvinni jötunn.

Twelfth answer me now how all thou knowest
Of the fate that is fixed for the gods;
Of the runes of the gods and the giants' race
The truth indeed dost thou tell,
(And wide is thy wisdom, giant!)

43 Frá jötna rúnum
ok allra goða
ek kann segja satt,
því at hvern hef ek
heim of komit;
nú kom ek heima
fyr Niflhel neðan;
hinig deyja ór helju halir.

Of the runes of the gods and the giants' race
The truth indeed can I tell,
(For to every world have I won;)
To nine worlds came I, to Niflhel beneath,
The home where dead men dwell.

44 Fjölð ek fór,
fjölð ek freistaðak,
fjölð ek of reynda regin:
Hvat lifir manna,
þá er inn mæra líðr
fimbulvetr með firum?

Much have I fared, much have I found,
Much have I got of the gods:
What shall live of mankind when at last there
comes
The mighty winter to men?

45 Líf ok Lífþrasir,
en þau leynask munu
í holti Hoddmímis;
morgindöggar
þau sér at mat hafa,
en þaðan af aldir alask.

In Hoddmimir's wood shall hide themselves
Lif and Lifthrasir then;
The morning dews for meat shall they have,
Such food shall men then find.

46 Fjölð ek fór,
fjölð ek freistaðak,
fjölð ek of reynda regin:
Hvaðan kemr sól
á inn slétta himin,
er þessa hefr fenrir farit?

Much have I fared, much have I found,
Much have I got of the gods:
Whence comes the sun to the smooth sky back,
When Fenrir has snatched it forth?

47 Eina dóttur
berr alfröðull,
áðr hana fenrir fari;
sú skal ríða,
þá er regin deyja,
móður brautir, mæ.

A daughter bright Alfröthul bears
Ere Fenrir snatches her forth;
Her mother's paths shall the maiden tread
When the gods to death have gone.

48 *Fjölð ek fór,
fjölð ek freistaðak,
fjölð ek of reynda regin:
Hverjar ro þær meyjjar,
er líða mar yfir,
fróðgeðjaðar fara?*

Much have I fared, much have I found,
Much have I got of the gods:
What maidens are they, so wise of mind,
That forth o'er the sea shall fare?

49 *Þrjár þjóðár
falla þorp yfir
meyja Mögþrasis;
hamingjur einar
þær er í heimi eru,
þó þær með jötnum alask.*

O'er Mogthrasir's hill shall the maidens pass,
And three are their throngs that come;
They all shall protect the dwellers on earth,
Though they come of the giants' kin.

50 *Fjölð ek fór,
fjölð ek freistaðak,
fjölð ek of reynda regin:
Hverir ráða æsir
eignum goða,
þá er sloknar Surta logi?*

Much have I fared, much have I found,
Much have I got of the gods:
Who then shall rule the realm of the gods,
When the fires of Surt have sunk?

51 *Víðarr ok Váli
byggja vé goða,
þá er sloknar Surta logi,
Móði ok Magni
skulu Mjöllni hafa
Vingnis at vígproti.*

In the gods' home Vithar and Vali shall dwell,
When the fires of Surt have sunk;
Mothi and Magni shall Mjollnir have
When Vingnir falls in fight.

52 *Fjölð ek fór,
fjölð ek freistaðak,
fjölð ek of reynda regin;
Hvat verðr Óðni
at aldragi,
þá er of rjúfask regin?*

Much have I fared, much have I found,
Much have I got of the gods:
What shall bring the doom of death to Othin,
When the gods to destruction go?

53 *Ulfr gleypa
mun Aldaföðr,
þess mun Víðarr vrekja;
kalda kjafta
hann klyfja mun
vitnis vígi at.*

The wolf shall fell the father of men,
And this shall Vithar avenge;
The terrible jaws shall he tear apart,
And so the wolf shall he slay.

54 *Fjölð ek fór,
fjölð ek freistaðak,
fjölð ek of reynda regin;
Hvat mælti Óðinn,
áðr á bál stigi,
sjalfr í eyra syni?*

Much have I fared, much have I found,
Much have I got from the gods:
What spake Othin himself in the ears of his son,
Ere in the bale-fire he burned?

55 *Ey manni þat veit,
hvat þú í árdaga
sagðir í eyra syni;
feigum munni
mæltu ek mína forna stafi
ok of ragnarök.
Nú ek við Óðin
deildak mína orðspeki;
þú ert æ vísastr vera.*

No man can tell what in olden time
Thou spak'st in the ears of thy son;
With fated mouth the fall of the gods
And mine olden tales have I told;
With Othin in knowledge now have I striven,
And ever the wiser thou art.

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