

THE WORDS  
of  
THE HILY HONK

for NARRATOR  
with PIANO

BASED ON HÁVAMÁL

and the translation of W. H. AUDEN

— DURATA: 14 MINUTES —

by  
Olav Anton Thommessen  
1991 rev 1992



THE WORDS  
OF THE HIGH ONE



Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel:  
You will fare well if you follow it,  
It will help you much if you heed it.

FOR NARRATOR with PIANO

... I saw in silence,  
saw and thought on.  
Long I listened to men

ALLEGRO MOLTO

It is time to sing  
in the seat of the wise  
Of what at Urd's well

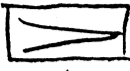
They talked of runes and of readable staves  
At Har's Hall, In Har's Hall:

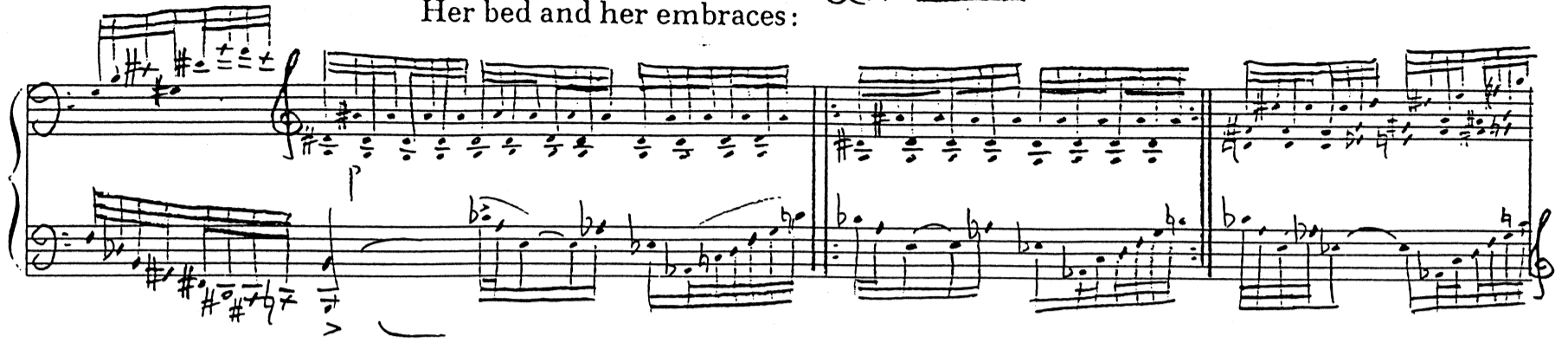
There I heard this:  
Loddfafnir,  
listen to my council

You will fare well if you follow it,  
It will help you much

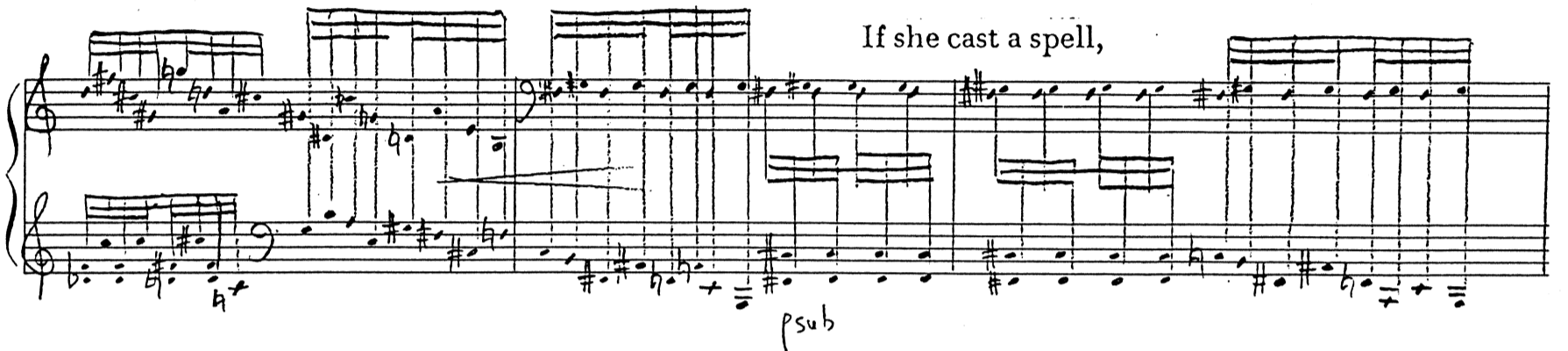
if you heed it.

Shun a woman, wise in magic,  
Her bed and her embraces:

2  
4  
2x 

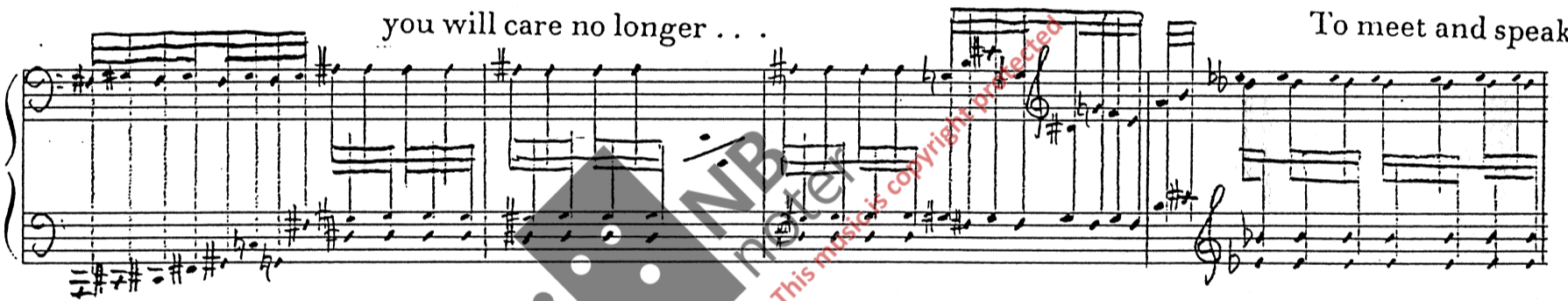


If she cast a spell,

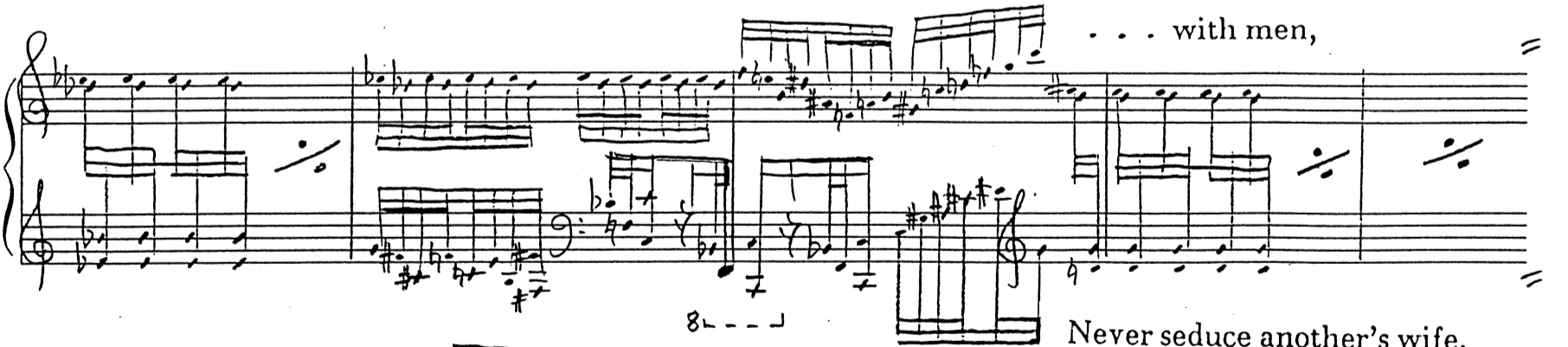


you will care no longer . . .

To meet and speak . . .



. . . with men,

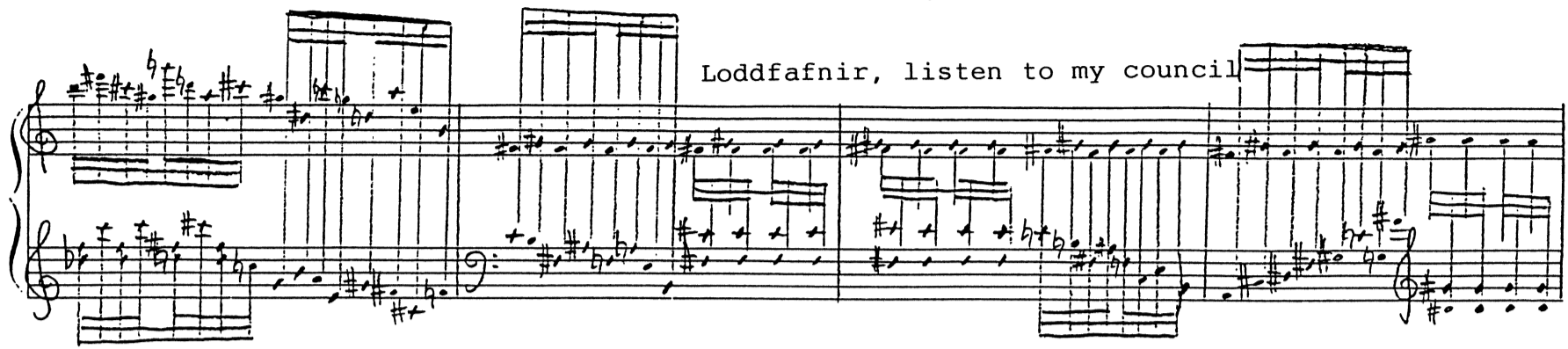


Never seduce another's wife,  
Never make her your mistress.



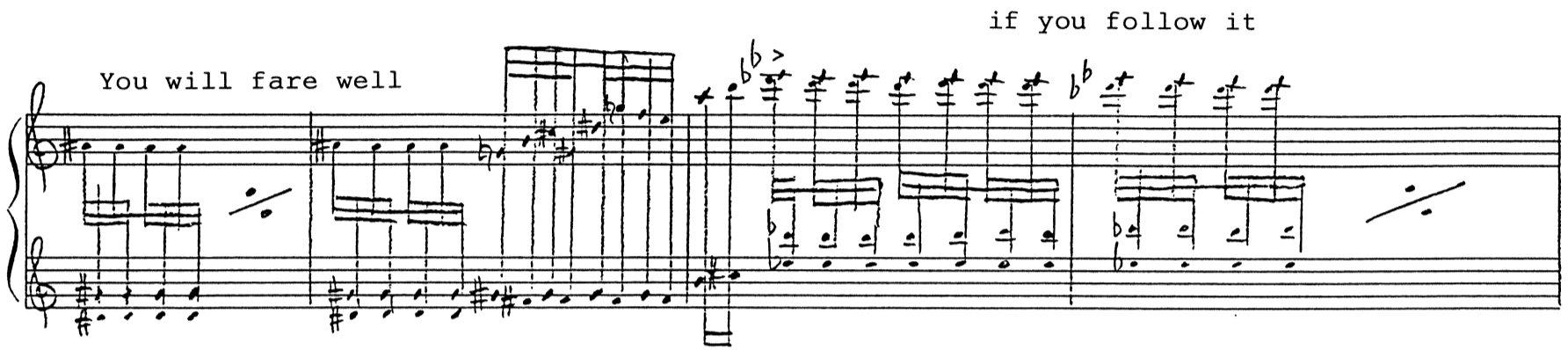


Loddfafnir, listen to my council



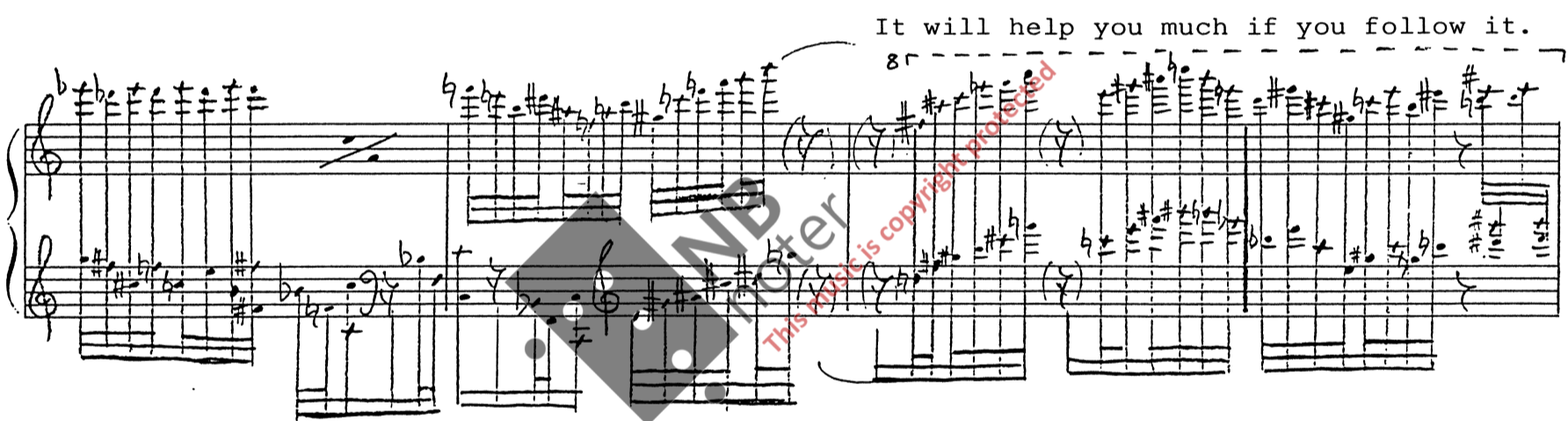
You will fare well

if you follow it

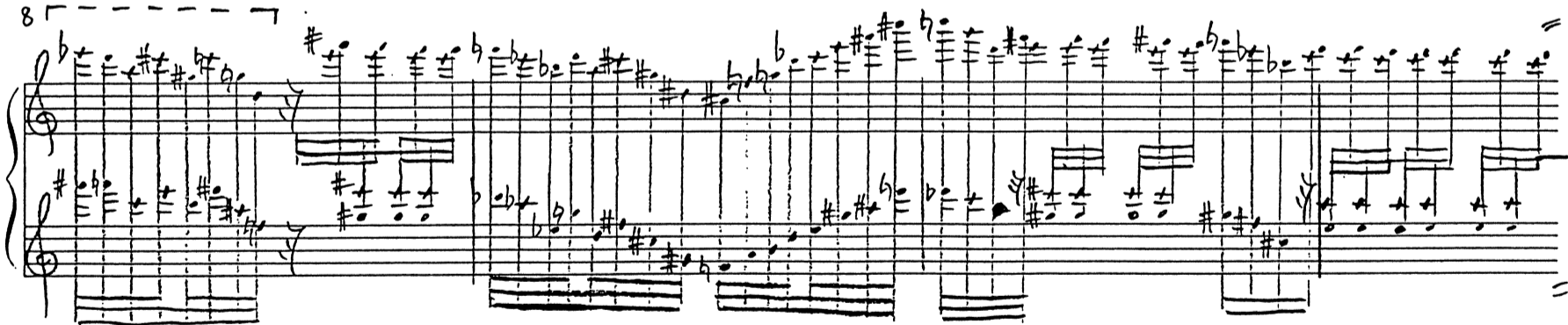


It will help you much if you follow it.

8

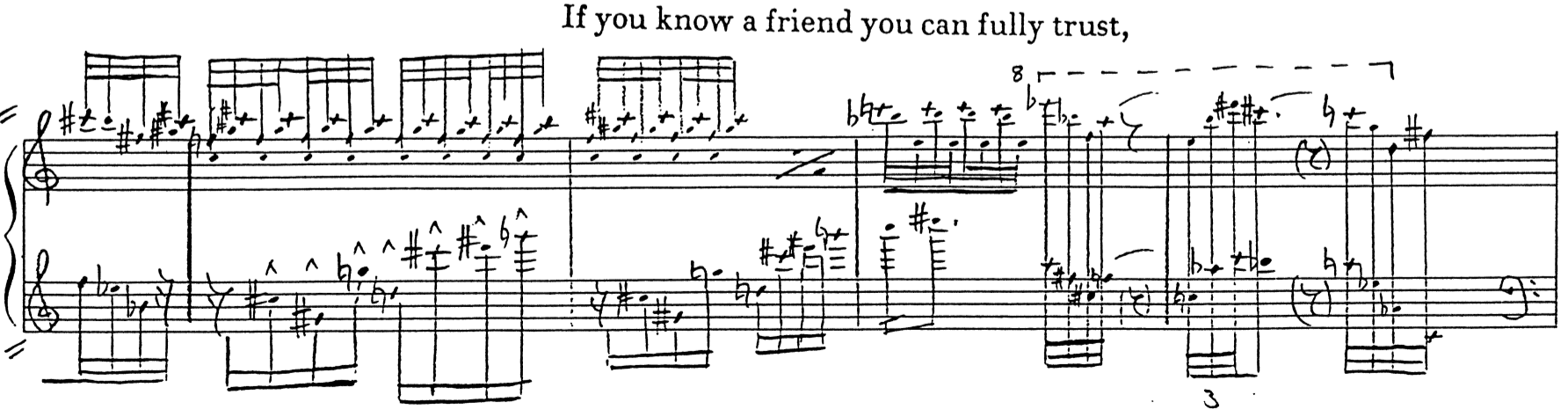


8



If you know a friend you can fully trust,

8



Grass and brambles grow quickly  
Upon the untrodden track.

Go often to his house:

Handwritten musical score for the first system, featuring piano accompaniment with treble and bass staves. It includes a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a 'secco' marking below the staff.

Affection is mutual

Handwritten musical score for the second system, continuing the piano accompaniment with treble and bass staves.

when men can open

All their heart to each other:

He whose words are always fair

Handwritten musical score for the third system, including piano accompaniment and a vocal line with lyrics. A large watermark 'NB Noter' is visible over the score.

... Is untrue and not to be trusted.

Loddfafnir, listen to my council

Handwritten musical score for the fourth system, featuring piano accompaniment with treble and bass staves.

You will fare well

if you follow it,

Handwritten musical score for the fifth system, including piano accompaniment and a vocal line with lyrics.



It will help you much if you heed it.

Handwritten musical score for piano, consisting of five systems of staves. The score includes complex piano accompaniment and a vocal line with lyrics. The lyrics are: "If aware that another is wicked,". The music features various musical notations such as notes, rests, accidentals, and dynamic markings like *p*, *pp*, *f*, and *sf*. There are also performance instructions like *l.v.* and *sub*. The score is marked with a large watermark "MP NOTES" and "This music is copyright protected".

... say so:

9  
16

Handwritten musical score for the first system, featuring piano accompaniment and vocal lines. The piano part includes chords and melodic lines in both hands. The vocal line is in the treble clef. The system is marked with a forte 'f' dynamic and includes a '16' measure marker.

Make no truce or treaty with foes.

Handwritten musical score for the second system, continuing the piano accompaniment and vocal lines. It includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings like '8'.

Never rejoice  
over that which  
is bad,

Handwritten musical score for the third system, showing piano accompaniment and vocal lines. A large watermark 'NB noter' is visible across the center. The system includes measure markers '8' and '4'.

But turn evil deeds ...      ... into those ...

Handwritten musical score for the fourth system, featuring piano accompaniment and vocal lines. It includes measure markers '8' and '16'.

... which are good.

Handwritten musical score for the fifth system, showing piano accompaniment and vocal lines. It includes measure markers '8' and '4'.



8va

Loddfafnir, listen to my council

You will fare well

8va

if you follow it.

It will help you much if you heed it.

8va

8va

Often their words are wise:

From shriveled skin, from scraggy things

That hang among the hides

Never laugh at the old when they offer counsel,

l.v.

l.v.

l.v.

8va

A Tempo

8va

And move amid the guts,

Clear words often come.

8va

A Tempo

pp

pp

l.v.

# 3X ACCEL SEMPRE

**LENTO RUBATO**  
Though he stutters like one  
forlorn

→ **A TEMPO**

**CON INTENSITA**

Loddafnir, listen to my council. You will fare well if you follow it.

**Secco**

Loddafnir, listen to my council



2  
16

8

Medicines exist against many evils:

6  
16

12  
16

Earth against drunkenness,

8

15  
16

heather against worms,

corn against sorcery,

15  
16

fire against sickness,

The moon against feuds,

8



Handwritten musical score for the first system, featuring piano accompaniment with complex rhythmic patterns and melodic lines in both staves.

Spurred rye against rupture,

Handwritten musical score for the second system, including the text "Spurred rye against rupture," and musical notation with various annotations.

Handwritten musical score for the third system, featuring piano accompaniment with complex rhythmic patterns and melodic lines in both staves.

Handwritten musical score for the fourth system, featuring piano accompaniment with complex rhythmic patterns and melodic lines in both staves.

12 15 *molto cresc.* l.v. Earth makes harmless

Handwritten musical score for the fifth system, including the text "molto cresc." and "l.v. Earth makes harmless", and musical notation with various annotations.

A TEMPO SUBITO  
the floods.

Handwritten musical score for the first system. It consists of two staves: a piano part on the left and a violin part on the right. The piano part begins with a forte dynamic marking 'f' and a tempo marking '16'. The music is highly chromatic, with many accidentals and complex rhythmic patterns. The violin part also features complex chromatic lines.

Handwritten musical score for the second system. It continues the piano and violin parts. The piano part has a dynamic marking 'f' and a tempo marking '16'. The violin part has a dynamic marking '8va' and a tempo marking 'Poco'. The music is highly chromatic and complex.

Handwritten musical score for the third system. It continues the piano and violin parts. The piano part has a dynamic marking 'f' and a tempo marking 'Poco'. The violin part has a dynamic marking '8va' and a tempo marking 'Poco'. The music is highly chromatic and complex.

Handwritten musical score for the fourth system. It continues the piano and violin parts. The piano part has a dynamic marking 'f' and a tempo marking '8va'. The violin part has a dynamic marking '8va'. The music is highly chromatic and complex.

Handwritten musical score for the fifth system. It continues the piano and violin parts. The piano part has a dynamic marking 'f' and a tempo marking '8va'. The violin part has a dynamic marking '8va'. The music is highly chromatic and complex.



Poco Ritard. Acceler.

Wounded I hung on a wind-swept gallows  
 For nine long nights,  
 Pierced by a spear, pledged to Odin,  
 Offered, myself to myself:  
 The wisest know not from whence spring  
 The roots of that ancient rood.

They gave me no bread, they gave me no mead:

I looked down; with a loud cry  
 I took up runes; from that tree I fell.

GLASS NEXT TO DAMPERS  
 PED I →

Nine lays of power I learned:

He poured me a draught of precious mead,  
 Mixed with magic Odrerir.



THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

I saw in silence, saw and thought on.

Long I listened to men

At Har's Hall,

In Har's Hall:

There I heard this.

Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel: 106

You will fare well if you follow it,

It will help you much if you heed it.

Never rise at night unless you need to spy 107

Or to ease yourself in the outhouse.

Shun a woman, wise in magic, 108

Her bed and her embraces:

If she cast a spell, you will care no longer

To meet and speak with men,

Desire no food, desire no pleasure,

In sorrow fall asleep.

Never seduce another's wife, 109

Never make her your mistress.

If you must journey to mountains and fjords, 110

Take food and fodder with you.

Never open your heart to an evil man 111

When fortune does not favor you:

From an evil man, if you make him your friend,

You will get evil for good.

I saw a warrior wounded fatally 112

By the words of an evil woman:

Her cunning tongue caused his death,

Though what she alleged was a lie.

53

IT IS TIME TO SING  
IN THE SEAT OF THE WISE  
OF WHAT AT URD'S WELL



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THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

If you know a friend you can fully trust,  
Go often to his house:  
Grass and brambles grow quickly  
Upon the untrodden track.

113

With a good man it is good to talk,  
Make him your fast friend:  
But waste no words on a witless oaf,  
Nor sit with a senseless ape.

114

Cherish those near you, never be  
The first to break with a friend:  
Care eats him who can no longer  
Open his heart to another.

115

An evil man, if you make him your friend,  
Will give you evil for good:  
A good man, if you make him your friend,  
Will praise you in every place.

116

Affection is mutual when men can open  
All their heart to each other:  
He whose words are always fair  
Is untrue and not to be trusted.

117

Bandy no speech with a bad man:  
Often the better is beaten  
In a word-fight by the worse.

118

Be not a cobbler nor a carver of shafts,  
Except it be for yourself:  
If a shoe fit ill or a shaft be crooked,  
The maker gets curses and kicks.

119

54

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

If aware that another is wicked, say so:  
Make no truce or treaty with foes.

120

Never share in the shamefully gotten,  
But allow yourself what is lawful.

121

Never lift your eyes and look up in battle,  
Lest the heroes enchant you, who can change warriors  
Suddenly into hogs.

122

With a good woman, if you wish to enjoy  
Her words and her good will,  
Pledge her fairly and be faithful to it:  
Enjoy the good you are given.

123

Be not overwary, but wary enough,  
First, of the foaming ale,  
Second, of a woman wed to another,  
Third, of the tricks of thieves.

124

Mock not the traveler met on the road,  
Nor maliciously laugh at the guest:  
Scoff not at guests nor to the gate chase them,  
But relieve the lonely and wretched.

125

The sitters in the hall seldom know  
The kin of the newcomer:  
The best man is marred by faults,  
The worst is not without worth.

126

Never laugh at the old when they offer counsel,  
Often their words are wise:  
From shriveled skin, from scraggy things  
That hang among the hides

127

55

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

And move amid the guts,  
Clear words often come

Heavy the beam above the door,  
Hang a horeshoe on it  
Against ill luck, lest it should suddenly  
Crash and crush your guests. 128

Medicines exist against many evils.  
Earth against drunkenness, heather against worms,  
Oak against costiveness, corn against sorcery,  
Spurred rye against rupture, runes against bales,  
The moon against feuds, fire against sickness,  
Earth makes harmless the floods. 129

\* \* \*

Wounded I hung on a wind-swept gallows  
For nine long nights,  
Pierced by a spear, pledged to Odin,  
Offered, myself to myself  
The wisest know not from whence spring  
The roots of that ancient rood. 130

They gave me no bread, they gave me no mead  
I looked down, with a loud cry  
I took up runes, from that tree I fell  
131

Nine lays of power I learned from the famous  
Bolthor, Bestla's father  
He poured me a draught of precious mead,  
Mixed with magic Odrerir  
132

Learned I grew then, lore wise,  
Waxed and throve well  
56  
133

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

Word from word gave words to me,  
Deed from deed gave deeds to me

Runes you will find, and readable staves,  
Very strong staves,  
Very stout staves,  
Staves that Bolthor stained,  
Made by mighty powers,  
Graven by the prophetic God  
134

For the gods by Odin, for the elves by Dain,  
By Dvalin, too, for the dwarves,  
By Asvid for the hateful giants,  
And some I carved myself  
Thund, before man was made, scratched them,  
Who rose first, fell thereafter  
135

Know how to cut them, know how to read them,  
Know how to stain them, know how to prove them,  
Know how to evoke them, know how to sacre them,  
Know how to send them, know how to send them  
136

Better not to ask than to overpledge  
As a gift that demands a gift,  
Better not to send than to slay too many  
137

The first charm I know is unknown to rulers  
Or any of human kind  
Help it is named, for help it can give  
In hours of sorrow and anguish  
138

I know a second that the sons of men  
Must learn who wish to be leeches  
57  
139



# The Elder Edda

## *A Selection*

☆

TRANSLATED FROM THE ICELANDIC BY  
PAUL B. TAYLOR AND W. H. AUDEN

INTRODUCTION BY  
PETER H. SALUS & PAUL B. TAYLOR

NOTES BY  
PETER H. SALUS

FABER AND FABER  
London

*Textual Note*

Except for 'Erik', 'Asmund' and 'Angantyr', all of the translations are based on the edition of the *Edda* as found in the *Codex Regius* of G. Neckel, as revised by Kuhn (1962). In a few places we have preferred the readings of other editions, especially that of Jón Helgason. A few lines have been taken over from the *Hauksbók* manuscript. The sources of the three non-Eddic poems are given separately.

Especially in the cases of 'Words of the High One' and 'The Song of the Sybil', we have silently rearranged some of the verses and altered, here and there, the order of the strophes — but only when it seemed to us to add to the sense of the poem.

In 'Words of the High One', for example, we have conflated some of the strophes, so that the manuscript's 165 strophes are but 157 in this version. In 'The Song of the Sybil', we have followed a suggestion of Sophus Bugge and rearranged the strophes so that our 1-4 are 22, 29, 28, 27 in the original. Further we have inserted into our strophe 33 the fragment of the manuscript's 37; transferred 41 to follow 56; added a line to 15; and omitted the manuscript's 49, 54, and 58, which are repetitions of 44. Finally, whereas in the original the Sybil speaks now in the first person, now in the third, we have made her speak in the first person throughout.

### *The Words of the High One*

- Young and alone on a long road, 1  
Once I lost my way:  
Rich I felt when I found another;  
Man rejoices in man.
- A kind word need not cost much, 2  
The price of praise can be cheap:  
With half a loaf and an empty cup  
I found myself a friend.
- Two wooden stakes stood on the plain, 3  
On them I hung my clothes:  
Draped in linen, they looked well born,  
But, naked, I was a nobody.
- Too early to many homes I came, 4  
Too late, it seemed, to some:  
The ale was finished or else unbrewed,  
The unpopular cannot please.
- Some would invite me to visit their homes, 5  
But none thought I needed a meal,  
As though I had eaten a whole joint  
Just before with a friend who had two.
- The man who stands at a strange threshold, 6  
Should be cautious before he cross it,  
Glance this way and that:  
Who knows beforehand what foes may sit  
Awaiting him in the hall?

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

Greetings to the host. The guest has arrived. 7  
 In which seat shall he sit?  
 Rash is he who at unknown doors  
 Relies on his good luck.

Fire is needed by the newcomer 8  
 Whose knees are frozen numb;  
 Meat and clean linen a man needs  
 Who has fared across the fells.

Water, too, that he may wash before eating, 9  
 Handcloths and a hearty welcome,  
 Courteous words, then courteous silence  
 That he may tell his tale.

Who travels widely needs his wits about him, 10  
 The stupid should stay at home:  
 The ignorant man is often laughed at  
 When he sits at meat with the sage.

Of his knowledge a man should never boast, 11  
 Rather be sparing of speech  
 When to his house a wiser comes:  
 Seldom do those who are silent  
 Make mistakes; mother-wit  
 Is ever a faithful friend.

A guest should be cautious when he comes to the 12  
 table,  
 And sit in wary silence,  
 His ears attentive, his eyes alert:  
 So he protects himself.

Fortunate is he who is favored in his lifetime 13  
 With praise and words of wisdom:

38

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

Evil counsel is often given  
 By those of evil heart.

Better gear than good sense 14  
 A traveler cannot carry,  
 Better than riches for a wretched man,  
 Far from his own home.

Better gear than good sense 15  
 A traveler cannot carry,  
 A more tedious burden than too much drink  
 A traveler cannot carry.

Less good than belief would have it 16  
 Is mead for the sons of men:  
 A man knows less the more he drinks,  
 Becomes a befuddled fool.

*I-forget* is the name men give the heron 17  
 Who hovers over the feast:  
 Fettered I was in his feathers that night,  
 When a guest in Gunnlod's court.

Drunk I got, dead drunk, 18  
 When Fjalar the Wise was with me:  
 Best is the banquet one looks back on after,  
 And remembers all that happened.

Silence becomes the son of a Prince, 19  
 To be silent but brave in battle:  
 It befits a man to be merry and glad  
 Until the day of his death.

The coward believes he will live forever 20  
 If he holds back in the battle,

39

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

But in old age he shall have no peace  
 Though spears have spared his limbs.

When he meets friends, the fool gapes, 21  
 Is shy and sheepish at first,  
 Then he sips his mead and immediately  
 All know what an oaf he is.

He who has seen and suffered much, 22  
 And knows the ways of the world,  
 He who has traveled, can tell what spirit  
 Governs the men he meets.

Drink your mead, but in moderation, 23  
 Talk sense or be silent:  
 No man is called discourteous who goes  
 To bed at an early hour.

A gluttonous man who guzzles away 24  
 Brings sorrow on himself:  
 At the table of the wise he is taunted often,  
 Mocked for his bloated belly.

The herd knows its homing time, 25  
 And leaves the grazing ground:  
 But the glutton never knows how much  
 His belly is able to hold.

An ill-tempered, unhappy man 26  
 Ridicules all he hears,  
 Makes fun of others, refusing always

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

A weary man when morning comes,  
 He finds all as bad as before.

The fool thinks that those who laugh 28  
 At him are all his friends,  
 Unaware when he sits with wiser men  
 How ill they speak of him.

The fool thinks that those who laugh 29  
 At him are all his friends:  
 When he comes to the Thing and calls for support,  
 Few spokesmen he finds.

The fool who fancies he is full of wisdom 30  
 While he sits by his hearth at home,  
 Quickly finds when questioned by others  
 That he knows nothing at all.

The ignorant booby had best be silent 31  
 When he moves among other men,  
 No one will know what a nitwit he is  
 Until he begins to talk;  
 No one knows less what a nitwit he is  
 Than the man who talks too much

To ask well, to answer rightly, 32  
 Are the marks of a wise man:  
 Men must speak of men's deeds,  
 What happens may not be hidden.

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

- A man among friends should not mock another: 34  
 Many believe the man  
 Who is not questioned to know much  
 And so he escapes their scorn.
- An early meal a man should take 35  
 Before he visits friends,  
 Lest, when he gets there, he go hungry,  
 Afraid to ask for food.
- The fastest friends may fall out 36  
 When they sit at the banquet board:  
 It is, and shall be, a shameful thing  
 When guest quarrels with guest.
- The wise guest has his way of dealing 37  
 With those who taunt him at table:  
 He smiles through the meal, not seeming to hear  
 The twaddle talked by his foes.
- The tactful guest will take his leave 38  
 Early, not linger long:  
 He starts to stink who outstays his welcome  
 In a hall that is not his own.
- A small hut of one's own is better, 39  
 A man is his master at home:  
 A couple of goats and a corded roof  
 Still are better than begging.
- A small hut of one's own is better, 40  
 A man is his master at home:  
 His heart bleeds in the beggar who must  
 Ask at each meal for meat.

42

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

- A wayfarer should not walk unarmed, 41  
 But have his weapons to hand:  
 He never knows when he may need a spear,  
 Or what menace meet on the road.
- No man is so generous he will jib at accepting 42  
 A gift in return for a gift,  
 No man so rich that it really gives him  
 Pain to be repaid.
- Once he has won wealth enough, 43  
 A man should not crave for more:  
 What he saves for friends, foes may take;  
 Hopes are often liars.
- With presents friends should please each other, 44  
 With a shield or a costly coat:  
 Mutual giving makes for friendship  
 So long as life goes well.
- A man should be loyal through life to friends, 45  
 To them and to friends of theirs,  
 But never shall a man make offer  
 Of friendship to their foes.
- A man should be loyal through life to friends, 46  
 And return gift for gift,  
 Laugh when they laugh, but with lies repay  
 A false foe who lies.
- If you find a friend you fully trust 47  
 And wish for his good will,  
 Exchange thoughts, exchange gifts,  
 Go often to his house.

43

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

- If you deal with another you don't trust 48  
 But wish for his good will,  
 Be fair in speech but false in thought  
 And give him lie for lie.
- Even with one you ill-trust 49  
 And doubt what he means to do,  
 False words with fair smiles  
 May get you the gift you desire.
- To a false friend the footpath winds 50  
 Though his house be on the highway:  
 To a sure friend there is a short cut,  
 Though he live a long way off.
- The generous and bold have the best lives, 51  
 Are seldom beset by cares,  
 But the base man sees bogies everywhere,  
 And the miser pines for presents.
- As the young fir that falls and rots, 52  
 Having neither needles or bark,  
 So is the fate of the friendless man:  
 Why should he live long?
- Little a sand-grain, little a dewdrop, 53  
 Little the minds of men:  
 All men are not equal in wisdom,  
 The half-wise are everywhere.
- It is best for man to be middle-wise 54

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

- It is best for man to be middle-wise, 55  
 Not over cunning and clever:  
 No man is able to know his future,  
 So let him sleep in peace.
- It is best for man to be middle-wise, 56  
 Not over cunning and clever:  
 The learned man whose lore is deep  
 Is seldom happy at heart.
- Brand kindles brand till they burn out, 57  
 Flame is quickened by flame:  
 One man from another is known by his speech,  
 The simpleton by his silence.
- Early shall he rise who has designs 58  
 On another's land or life:  
 His prey escapes the prone wolf,  
 The sleeper is seldom victorious.
- Early shall he rise who rules few servants, 59  
 And set to work at once:  
 Much is lost by the late sleeper,  
 Wealth is won by the swift.
- A man should know how many logs 60  
 And strips of bark from the birch  
 To stock in autumn, that he may have enough  
 Wood for his winter fires.
- Washed and fed, one may fare to the Thing 61  
 Though one's clothes be the worse for wear.



THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

As the eagle who comes to the ocean shore, 62  
 Sniffs and hangs her head,  
 Dumbfounded is he who finds at the Thing  
 No supporters to plead his case.

It is safe to tell a secret to one, 63  
 Risky to tell it to two,  
 To tell it to three is thoughtless folly,  
 Everyone else will know.

Often words uttered to another 64  
 Have reaped an ill harvest:  
 Two beat one, the tongue is head's bane,  
 Pockets of fur hide fists.

Moderate at council should a man be, 65  
 Not brutal and overbearing:  
 Among the bold the bully will find  
 Others as bold as he.

These things are thought the best: 66  
 Fire, the sight of the sun,  
 Good health with the gift to keep it,  
 And a life that avoids vice.

Not all sick men are utterly wretched: 67  
 Some are blessed with sons,  
 Some with friends, some with riches,  
 Some with worthy works.

The halt can manage a horse, the handless a flock, 68  
 The deaf be a doughty fighter,  
 To be blind is better than to burn on a pyre:  
 There is nothing the dead can do.

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THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

In the fool who acquires cattle and lands, 76  
 Or wins a woman's love,  
 His wisdom wanes with his waxing pride,  
 He sinks from sense to conceit.

Now is answered what you ask of the runes, 77  
 Graven by the gods,  
 Made by the Almighty,  
 Sent by the powerful sage:  
 It is best for man to remain silent.

For these things give thanks at nightfall: 78  
 The day gone, a guttered torch,  
 A sword tested, the troth of a maid,  
 Ice crossed, ale drunk.

Hew wood in wind-time, in fine weather sail, 79  
 Tell in the night-time tales to housegirls,  
 For too many eyes are open by day:  
 From a ship expect speed, from a shield cover,  
 Keeness from a sword, but a kiss from a girl.

Drink ale by the hearth, over ice glide, 80  
 Buy a stained sword, buy a starving mare  
 To fatten at home: and fatten the watchdog.

Trust not an acre early sown, 81  
 Nor praise a son too soon:  
 Weather rules the acre, wit the son,  
 Both are exposed to peril.

A snapping bow, a burning flame, 82  
 A grinning wolf, a grunting boar,  
 A raucous crow, a rootless tree,

48

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

It is always better to be alive, 69  
 The living can keep a cow:  
 Fire, I saw, warming a wealthy man,  
 With a cold corpse at his door.

A son is a blessing, though born late 70  
 To a father no longer alive:  
 Stones would seldom stand by the highway  
 If sons did not set them there.

He welcomes the night who has enough provisions: 71  
 Short are the sails of a ship,  
 Dangerous the dark in autumn,  
 The wind may veer within five days,  
 And many times in a month.

The nitwit does not know that gold 72  
 Makes apes of many men:  
 One is rich, one is poor —  
 There is no blame in that.

Cattle die, kindred die, 73  
 Every man is mortal:  
 But the good name never dies  
 Of one who has done well.

Cattle die, kindred die, 74  
 Every man is mortal:  
 But I know one thing that never dies,  
 The glory of the great dead.

Fields and flocks had Fitjung's sons, 75  
 Who now carry begging bowls:  
 Wealth may vanish in the wink of an eye,  
 Gold is the falsest of friends.

47

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

A breaking wave, a boiling kettle,  
 A flying arrow, an ebbing tide,  
 A coiled adder, the ice of a night,  
 A bride's bed-talk, a broad sword,  
 A bear's play, a Prince's children,  
 A witch's welcome, the wit of a slave,  
 A sick calf, a corpse still fresh,  
 A brother's killer encountered upon  
 The highway, a house half-burned,  
 A racing stallion who has wrenched a leg,  
 Are never safe: let no man trust them.

\* \* \*

No man should trust a maiden's words, 83  
 Nor what a woman speaks:  
 Spun on a wheel were women's hearts,  
 In their breasts was implanted caprice.

To love a woman whose ways are false 84  
 Is like sledding over slippery ice  
 With unshod horses out of control,  
 Badly-trained two-year-olds,  
 Or drifting rudderless on a rough sea,  
 Or catching a reindeer with a crippled hand  
 On a thawing hillside: think not to do it.

Naked I may speak now for I know both: 85  
 Men are treacherous too.  
 Fairest we speak when falsest we think:  
 Many a maid is deceived.

Gallantly shall he speak and gifts bring 86  
 Who wishes for woman's love:

49

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

Praise the features of the fair girl,  
Who courts well will conquer.

Never reproach another for his love: 87  
It happens often enough  
That beauty ensnares with desire the wise  
While the foolish remain unmoved.

Never reproach the plight of another, 88  
For it happens to many men:  
Strong desire may stupify heroes,  
Dull the wits of the wise.

The mind alone knows what is near the heart, 89  
Each is his own judge:  
The worst sickness for a wise man  
Is to crave what he cannot enjoy.

So I learned when I sat in the reeds, 90  
Hoping to have my desire:  
Lovely was the flesh of that fair girl,  
But nothing I hoped for happened.

I saw on a bed Billing's daughter, 91  
Sun-white, asleep:  
No greater delight I longed for then  
Than to lie in her lovely arms.

'Come, Odin, after nightfall 92  
If you wish for a meeting with me:  
All would be lost if anyone saw us  
And learned that we were lovers.'

Afire with longing, I left her then, 93  
Deceived by her soft words:

50

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

If you know a friend you can fully trust, 113  
Go often to his house:  
Grass and brambles grow quickly  
Upon the untrodden track.

With a good man it is good to talk, 114  
Make him your fast friend:  
But waste no words on a witless oaf,  
Nor sit with a senseless ape.

Cherish those near you, never be 115  
The first to break with a friend:  
Care eats him who can no longer  
Open his heart to another.

An evil man, if you make him your friend, 116  
Will give you evil for good:  
A good man, if you make him your friend,  
Will praise you in every place.

Affection is mutual when men can open 117  
All their heart to each other:  
He whose words are always fair  
Is untrue and not to be trusted.

Bandy no speech with a bad man: 118  
Often the better is beaten  
In a word-fight by the worse.

Be not a cobbler nor a carver of shafts, 119  
Except it be for yourself:  
If a shoe fit ill or a shaft be crooked,  
The maker gets curses and kicks.

54

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

I thought my wooing had won the maid,  
That I would have my way.

After nightfall I hurried back, 94  
But the warriors were all awake,  
Lights were burning, torches blazing:  
So false proved the path.

Towards daybreak back I came. 95  
The guards were sound asleep:  
I found then that the fair woman  
Had tied a bitch to her bed.

Many a girl when one gets to know her 96  
Proves to be fickle and false:  
That treacherous maiden taught me a lesson,  
The crafty woman covered me with shame,  
That was all I got from her.

\* \* \*

Let a man with his guests be glad and merry, 97  
Modest a man should be,  
But talk well if he intends to be wise  
And expects praise from men:  
*Fimbul-fambi* is the fool called,  
Unable to open his mouth.

Fruitless my errand, had I been silent 98  
When I came to Suttung's courts:  
With spirited words I spoke to my profit  
In the hall of the aged giant.

Rati had gnawed a narrow passage, 99  
Chewed a channel through stone,

51

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

If aware that another is wicked, say so: 120  
Make no truce or treaty with foes.

Never share in the shamefully gotten, 121  
But allow yourself what is lawful.

Never lift your eyes and look up in battle, 122  
Lest the heroes enchant you, who can change warriors  
Suddenly into hogs.

With a good woman, if you wish to enjoy 123  
Her words and her good will,  
Pledge her fairly and be faithful to it:  
Enjoy the good you are given.

Be not overwary, but wary enough, 124  
First, of the foaming ale,  
Second, of a woman wed to another,  
Third, of the tricks of thieves.

Mock not the traveler met on the road, 125  
Nor maliciously laugh at the guest:  
Scoff not at guests nor to the gate chase them,  
But relieve the lonely and wretched.

The sitters in the hall seldom know 126  
The kin of the newcomer:  
The best man is marred by faults,  
The worst is not without worth.

Never laugh at the old when they offer counsel, 127  
Often their words are wise:  
From shriveled skin, from scraggy things  
That hang among the hides

55

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

And move amid the guts,  
Clear words often come.

Heavy the beam above the door; 128  
Hang a horseshoe on it  
Against ill luck, lest it should suddenly  
Crash and crush your guests.

Medicines exist against many evils: 129  
Earth against drunkenness, heather against worms,  
Oak against costiveness, corn against sorcery,  
Spurred rye against rupture, runes against bales,  
The moon against feuds, fire against sickness,  
Earth makes harmless the floods.

\* \* \*

Wounded I hung on a wind-swept gallows 130  
For nine long nights,  
Pierced by a spear, pledged to Odin,  
Offered, myself to myself:  
The wisest know not from whence spring  
The roots of that ancient rood.

They gave me no bread, they gave me no mead: 131  
I looked down; with a loud cry  
I took up runes; from that tree I fell.

Nine lays of power I learned from the famous 132  
Bolthor, Bestla's father:  
He poured me a draught of precious mead,  
Mixed with magic Odrerir.

Learned I grew then, lore-wise, 133  
Waxed and throve well:

56

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

Word from word gave words to me,  
Deed from deed gave deeds to me.

Runes you will find, and readable staves, 134  
Very strong staves,  
Very stout staves,  
Staves that Bolthor stained,  
Made by mighty powers,  
Graven by the prophetic God.

For the gods by Odin, for the elves by Dain, 135  
By Dvalin, too, for the dwarves,  
By Asvid for the hateful giants,  
And some I carved myself:  
Thund, before man was made, scratched them,  
Who rose first, fell thereafter.

Know how to cut them, know how to read them, 136  
Know how to stain them, know how to prove them,  
Know how to evoke them, know how to sacre them,  
Know how to send them, know how to send them.

Better not to ask than to overpledge 137  
As a gift that demands a gift,  
Better not to send than to slay too many.

The first charm I know is unknown to rulers 138  
Or any of human kind:  
Help it is named, for help it can give  
In hours of sorrow and anguish.

I know a second that the sons of men 139  
Must learn who wish to be leeches.

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THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

A path around the roads of giants:  
I was like to lose my head. 100

Gunnlod sat me in the golden seat,  
Poured me precious mead:  
Ill-reward she had from me for that,  
For her proud and passionate heart,  
Her brooding foreboding spirit.

What I won from her I have well used: 101  
I have waxed in wisdom since  
I came back, bringing to Asgard  
Odrerir, the sacred draught.

Hardly would I have come home alive 102  
From the garth of the grim troll,  
Had Gunnlod not helped me, the good woman,  
Who wrapped her arms around me.

The following day the Frost Giants came, 103  
Walked into Har's Hall  
To ask for Har's advice:  
Had Bolverk, they asked, come back to his friends  
Or had he been slain by Suttung?

Odin, they said, swore an oath on his ring: 104  
Who from now on will trust him?  
By fraud at the feast he befuddled Suttung  
And brought grief to Gunnlod.

\* \* \*

Of what at Urd's Well 105

52

THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

I saw in silence, saw and thought on.  
Long I listened to men  
At Har's Hall,  
In Har's Hall:  
There I heard this.

Loddfafnir, listen to my counsel: 106  
You will fare well if you follow it,  
It will help you much if you heed it.

Never rise at night unless you need to spy 107  
Or to ease yourself in the outhouse.

Slun a woman, wise in magic, 108  
Her bed and her embraces:  
If she cast a spell, you will care no longer  
To meet and speak with men,  
Desire no food, desire no pleasure,  
In sorrow fall asleep.

Never seduce another's wife, 109  
Never make her your mistress.

If you must journey to mountains and fjords, 110  
Take food and fodder with you.

Never open your heart to an evil man 111  
When fortune does not favor you:  
From an evil man, if you make him your friend,  
You will get evil for good.

I saw a warrior wounded fatally 112  
By the words of an evil woman:  
Her cunning tongue caused his death,  
Though what she alleged was a lie.

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THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

- I know a third: in the thick of battle, 140  
 If my need be great enough,  
 It will blunt the edges of enemy swords,  
 Their weapons will make no wounds.
- I know a fourth: it will free me quickly 141  
 If foes should bind me fast  
 With strong chains, a chant that makes  
 Fetters spring from the feet,  
 Bonds burst from the hands.
- I know a fifth: no flying arrow, 142  
 Aimed to bring harm to men,  
 Flies too fast for my fingers to catch it  
 And hold it in mid-air.
- I know a sixth: it will save me if a man 143  
 Cut runes on a sapling's roots  
 With intent to harm; it turns the spell;  
 The hater is harmed, not me.
- I know a seventh: if I see the hall 144  
 Ablaze around my bench-mates,  
 Though hot the flames, they shall feel nothing,  
 If I choose to chant the spell.
- I know an eighth: that all are glad of, 145  
 Most useful to men:  
 If hate fester in the heart of a warrior,  
 It will soon calm and cure him.
- I know a ninth: when need I have 146  
 To shelter my ship on the flood,  
 The wind it calms, the waves it smooths  
 And puts the sea to sleep.

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THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

- I know a tenth: if troublesome ghosts 147  
 Ride the rafters aloft,  
 I can work it so they wander astray,  
 Unable to find their forms,  
 Unable to find their homes.
- I know an eleventh: when I lead to battle 148  
 Old comrades-in-arms,  
 I have only to chant it behind my shield,  
 And unwounded they go to war,  
 Unwounded they come from war,  
 Unscathed wherever they are.
- I know a twelfth: if a tree bear 149  
 A man hanged in a halter,  
 I can carve and stain strong runes  
 That will cause the corpse to speak,  
 Reply to whatever I ask.
- I know a thirteenth: if I throw a cup 150  
 Of water over a warrior,  
 He shall not fall in the fiercest battle,  
 Nor sink beneath the sword.
- I know a fourteenth, that few know: 151  
 If I tell a troop of warriors  
 About the High Ones, elves and gods,  
 I can name them one by one.
- I know a fifteenth, that first Thjodrerir 152  
 Sang before Delling's Doors,  
 Giving power to gods, prowess to elves,  
 Foresight to Hroptatyr-Odin.

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THE WORDS OF THE HIGH ONE

- I know a sixteenth: If I see a girl 153  
 With whom it would please me to play,  
 I can turn her thoughts, can touch the heart  
 Of any white-armed woman.
- I know a seventeenth: if I sing it, the young 154  
 Girl will be slow to forsake me.
- I know an eighteenth that I never tell 155  
 To maiden or wife of man,  
 A secret I hide from all  
 Except the love who lies in my arms,  
 Or else my own sister.
- To learn to sing them, Loddafnir, 156  
 Will take you a long time,  
 Though helpful they are if you understand them,  
 Useful if you use them,  
 Needful if you need them.
- The Wise One has spoken words in the Hall, 157  
 Needful for men to know,  
 Unneedful for trolls to know:  
 Hail to the Speaker, hail to the Knower,  
 Joy to him who has understood,  
 Delight to those who have listened.

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*The Lay of Grimnir*

*King Hraudung had two sons, Agnar and Geirrod. Agnar was ten winters old and Geirrod eight when they went rowing in a boat to catch little fish. But the wind drove them out to sea. During the night they were wrecked on the shore; but they found a peasant with whom they spent the winter. The housewife cared for Agnar and the bondsman cared for Geirrod, teaching him wisdom. In the spring the peasant gave him a boat, and when the couple took the boys to the shore, the peasant spoke to Geirrod in secret. They had a fair wind and came to their father's dock. Geirrod was in the front of the boat. He leapt on to the land and pushed the boat from the shore, saying 'Go now where evil may take you!' The boat drifted out to sea. Geirrod went up to the house where he was welcomed, but his father was dead. Then Geirrod was made king and became famous.*

*Odin and Frigg sat in Hlidskjálf and looked over all the worlds. Odin said, 'Do you see Agnar, your foster-child, begetting children with a giantess in a cave? But Geirrod, my foster-child, is a king ruling over his land.' Frigg said, 'He is so parsimonious that he tortures his guests if he thinks there are too many of them.' Odin replied that this was a great lie; and they wagered about the truth. Frigg sent her maid, Fulla, to Geirrod. She told the king to beware otherwise a magician who had come to the land would bewitch him, and said that he could be recognized because no dog was fierce enough to leap at him. It was a great slander that Geirrod was not hospitable; but he had his men capture the man the dogs would not attack. He wore a dark-blue cloak, called himself Grimnir, and would say no more of himself, even when questioned.*

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