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Völuspá (Prophecy of the Volva, Prophecy of the Seeress) is the first and best known poem of the Poetic Edda. It tells the story of the creation of the world and its coming end related by a völvu or seeress addressing Odin. It is one of the most important primary sources for the study of Norse mythology. The poem is preserved whole in the Codex Regius and Hauksbók manuscripts while parts of it are quoted in the Prose Edda. This is Patricia Terry's English translation.

Hear my words, you holy gods,
great men and humble sons of Heimdall;
by Odin's will, I'll speak the ancient lore,
the oldest of all that I remember.

I remember giants of ages past,
those who called me one of their kin;
I know how nine roots form nine worlds
under the earth where the Ash Tree rises.

Nothing was there when time began,
neither sands nor seas nor cooling waves.
Earth was not yet, nor the high heavens,

but a gaping emptiness nowhere green.

Then Bur's sons lifted up the land
and made Midgard, men's fair dwelling;
the sun shone out of the south,
and bright grass grew from the ground of stone.

The sun climbed; the moon's companion
raised its right hand over heaven's rim.
The sun did not know where its hall would stand,
the stars did not know where they would be set,
the moon did not know what would be its might.

Then all the gods met to give judgement,
the holy gods took counsel together:
they named night and night's children,
gave names to morning and noon
afternoon and evening, ordered time by years.

until three of the Æsir assembled there,
strong and benevolent, came to the sea;
they found on the shore two feeble trees,
Ash and Embla, with no fixed fate.

These did not breathe, nor think or speak,
they had no hair, no fairness of face;
Odin gave life's breath, Hoenir gave mind,
Lodur gave hair, fairness of face.

Then the Æsir in Idavöll
built altars, temples, high timbered halls,
set up forges to fashion gold,
strong tools and well-shaped tongs.

Sitting in meadows, smiling over gameboards,
they never knew any need of gold,
but there came three maidens monstrous to look at,
giant daughters of Jotunheim.

She remembers war, the first in the world.
Countless spears were cast at Gullveig,
her body burned in Odin's hall;
three times burned, three times born,
again and again, yet even now alive.

Witch was her name in the halls that knew her,
a sorceress, casting evil spells;
she used magic to ensnare the mind
, a welcome friend to wicked women.

Then the mighty gods met to give judgement,
the mighty gods took counsel together:
should the Æsir accept great losses,
or all the gods be given what was due?

Odin's spear shot into the host --
that was the first war fought in the world.
The wall of Asgard proved too weak --
the victory was won by Vanir magic.

Then the mighty gods met to give judgement
the holy gods took counsel together:
who had filled the air with evil speech,
offered to a giant the goddess Freyja?

Thor alone struck, swollen with anger --
never idle when he heard such news;
vows were broken, promises betrayed,

the solemn treaties both sides had sworn.

There is an ash tree -- its name is Yggdrasil --
a tall tree watered from a cloudy well.

Dew falls from its boughs down into the valleys;
ever green it stands beside the Norns' spring.

Much wisdom have the three maidens
who come from the waters close to that tree;
they established laws, decided the lives
men were to lead, marked out their fates.

She knows that Heimdall's hearing is hidden
where the holy tree rises to the heavens;
she sees a rushing turbid river
pour from Odin's pledge. Seek you wisdom still?

She sat alone outside; the old one came,
anxious, from Valhalla, and looked into her eyes.
Why have you come here? What would you ask me?
I know everything -- where you left your eye,
Odin, in the water of Mimir's well.
Every morning Mimir drinks mead
from Warfather's tribute. Seek you wisdom still?

Valhalla's lord gave gold and treasure;
she looked far into the future,
spoke with wisdom of all the worlds.

She saw valkyries come from far away,
ready to ride to the lands of men;
Hild had a shield, so did Skogul,
Gunn was there, Gondul, Geirskogul.

I saw Balder stained with blood,
I saw the fate of Odin's son:
above the fields, fragile and fair,
stands the slender mistletoe.

From that same plant which seemed so frail
the fatal shaft came to Hod's hand;
and Frigg wept in Fensalir
for Valhalla's sorrow. Seek you wisdom still?

She saw in chains under the kettle-wood
someone who looked like guileful Loki;
there sits Sigyn -- she doesn't seem
happy for her husband. Seek you wisdom still?

A river bears westward through a baneful valley
spears and swords; its name is Fear.

Far from sunlight stands a hall
on the Shores of the Dead; its doors face north.
Deadly poisons drip through its roof,
snakes were woven to form its walls.

She saw men wading through heavy streams;
some were oath-breakers, others had murdered,
some had lured women to love.
There the Serpent sucks on corpses,
the Wolf rends dead men. Seek you wisdom still?

He sat on a grave-mound, striking a harp,
Eggther, glad to guard the giants' herds;
close to him, the bright red cock,
Fjalar, crowed from the gallows tree.

And in Asgard Gold-comb crowed,
the cock who wakes Odin's warriors;
another is heard beneath the earth,
a soot-red cock in the halls of Hel.

Garm is howling from the Gnipa Cave,
the rope will break, and the Wolf run free.
Great is my knowledge, I can see
the doom that awaits almighty gods.

Brothers will die, slain by their brothers,
kinsmen betray their close kin;
woe to the world then, wedded to whoredom,
battle-axe and sword rule, split shields asunder,
storm-cleft age of wolves until the world goes down,
only hatred in the hearts of men.

Mimir's sons play; now fate will summon
from its long sleep the Gjallarhorn:
Heimdall's horn clamors to heaven,
Mimir's head speaks tidings to Odin.

Lofty Yggdrasil, the Ash Tree, trembles,
ancient wood groaning, the giant goes free;
terror harrows all of Hel,
until Surt's kinsman comes to consume it.

How fare the Æsir? How do the elves fare?
Jotunheim seethes, the Æsir assemble;
at the stone doorways of deep stone dwellings
dwarfs are moaning. Seek you wisdom still?

Garm is howling from the Gnipa Cave,
the rope will break, and the Wolf run free.

Great is my knowledge, I can see
the doom that awaits almighty gods.

Westward drives the giant, Hrym, his shield high;
the world-girding Serpent rises from the water,
lashing at the waves; the bright-beaked eagle
rends corpses, screaming; Naglfar sails free.

Westward the ship sails, Loki steers;
ruin by fire flies across the sea
with Muspell's demons, monsters, and the Wolf.
Byleist's brother, Loki, leads them.

Surt moves northward, lord of the fire giants,
his sword of flame gleams like the sun;
crashing rocks drag demons to their doom,
men find the way to Hel, the sky splits open.

Gann is howling from the Gnipa Cave,
the rope will break, and the Wolf run free.
Great is my knowledge, I can see
the doom that awaits almighty gods.

A second sorrow comes to Odin's wife:
Odin goes forth to fight the Wolf;
Frey, who killed Beli, battles with Surt.
Lifeless has fallen Frigg's beloved.

Odin's son Vidar goes forth to fight the Wolf;
that carrion eater, Loki's evil son,
feels the hero's sword inside his heart --
thus is avenged the Æsir's lord.

Far-famed Thor, the son of Earth,

the son of Odin, goes forth to fight the Snake.
Midgard's defender dies triumphant,
but the human race no longer has a home:
nine steps beyond the Serpent's body,
Thor, wounded, walks in pride.

The sun turns black, the earth sinks below the sea,
no bright star now shines from the heavens;
flames leap the length of the World Tree,
fire strikes against the very sky.

She sees the earth rising again
out of the waters, green once more;
an eagle flies over rushing waterfalls,
hunting for fish from the craggy heights.

The Æsir meet in Idavöll;
they speak together about the Serpent,
consider all that came to pass,
the ancient runes offered to Odin.

Later they will find a wondrous treasure,
gold gameboards, lying in the grass
where they had left them so long before.

Barren fields will bear again,
Balder's return brings an end to sorrow.
Hod and Balder will live in Odin's hall,
home of the war-gods. Seek you wisdom still?

She sees a hall, fairer than the sun,
thatched with gold; it stands at Gimlé.
There shall deserving people dwell
to the end of time and enjoy their happiness.

There comes the dark dragon flying,
flashing upward from Nidafells;
on wide swift wings it soars above the earth,
carrying corpses. Now she will sink down.

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