

# *Vafþrúðnismál*

Second edition

Edited with an introduction and notes by

TIM WILLIAM MACHAN

Probably composed at the height of the Viking Age, *Vafþrúðnismál* recounts how one day the mysterious and powerful god Óðinn visits the hall of an ancient giant named Vafþrúðnir. There, with their heads wagered over the outcome, the two engage in a wisdom contest about how the world was created, who inhabits it, and what will come of it when the gods and giants battle one last time at the world-ending Ragnarøk. The qualities that popular imagination sees in the Vikings – bravery, courage, and cunning – are the very qualities that the two adversaries display in their deadly game. By the time the game ends, and the poem with it, the reader has witnessed a vista not only of the terror and mystery of medieval Scandinavia but of its beauty as well.



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Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Durham University

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### *Manuscripts*

A	Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, MS AM 748 I 4to
R	Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, MS GkS 2365 4to
R <sup>2</sup>	Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, MS GkS 2367 4to
T	Utrecht, University Library, MS 1374
U	Uppsala, University Library, MS DG 11
W	Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, MS AM 242 fol

### *Eddic Poems*

<i>Akv.</i>	<i>Atlaqviða in grænlensca</i>
<i>Alv.</i>	<i>Alvíssmál</i>
<i>Am.</i>	<i>Atlamál in grænlensco</i>
<i>Bdr.</i>	<i>Balds draumar</i>
<i>Fm.</i>	<i>Fáfnismál</i>
<i>Grm.</i>	<i>Grímnismál</i>
<i>Hv.</i>	<i>Hávamál</i>
<i>HHI</i>	<i>Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri</i>
<i>HHII</i>	<i>Helgaqviða Hundingsbana 2nnor</i>
<i>Hrbl.</i>	<i>Hárbarðzlióð</i>
<i>Hym.</i>	<i>Hymisqviða</i>
<i>Ls.</i>	<i>Locasenna</i>
<i>Rm.</i>	<i>Reginsmál</i>
<i>Rþ.</i>	<i>Rígsþula</i>
<i>Sd.</i>	<i>Sigrdrífomál</i>
<i>Skm.</i>	<i>For Scírnis</i>
<i>Vaf.</i>	<i>Vafþrúðnismál</i>
<i>Vkv.</i>	<i>Völundarqviða</i>
<i>Vsp.</i>	<i>Völuspá</i>
<i>Þrk.</i>	<i>Þrymsqviða</i>

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This edition, like all editions published by Durham Medieval Texts, is intended for beginning students. While it is hoped that advanced scholars will find a separate edition of *Vafþrúðnismál* useful, the presumed audience of this book is the student who is only generally acquainted with Old Norse language and literature and who is reading Eddic poetry for the first time. The Introduction, accordingly, discusses the various codicological, philological and cultural factors which determine Eddic poetry and which are requisite for any understanding of it. *Vafþrúðnismál* seems a particularly good text to serve as an introduction to the *Poetic Edda*, for its repetitions, dialogue format, and familiar legends make it more accessible than other poems.

In preparing this edition I have drawn on the help and goodwill of several people, whose contributions I am grateful to have the opportunity to recognize. I would like to thank Richard N. Ringler, with whom I first studied Old Norse language and literature, and John C. McGalliard, who encouraged my interest. John S. McKinnell has been a scrupulous editor, and this edition has benefited in many important ways from his knowledge of Eddic poetry. Richard N. Ringler and R.I. Page also read and improved earlier versions of this book. Christine Marie Machan shared her expertise on the modern Scandinavian languages and offered invaluable encouragement and support throughout this undertaking. Finally, I would like to thank the staff of Memorial Library of Marquette University, for efficiently acquiring a number of obscure but essential materials, and the Marquette University Committee on Research, for granting me a Summer Faculty Fellowship which enabled me to complete this book.

TWM

Wauwatosa, 1988

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Revising a book twenty years after it first appeared is challenging: one wants to change everything or nothing. Inevitably, I've tried to take a middle ground, updating and correcting as appropriate but leaving enough of the original to maintain the qualities that I hope made the book useful in the first place. To this end, I've revised all parts of the discussion in light of recent scholarship, edited portions in light of reviewers' comments, and worked to make the style continually accessible to beginning students, who remain this book's primary audience. While the Durham Series volumes have expanded in audience and scope, my over-riding goal has likewise remained the same – to provide an introduction to Eddic poetry, in its original language and with all its textual and interpretive complexities and uncertainties, for readers who are just beginning the study of Old Norse.

I'm grateful to Paul Bibire and Fred Unwalla for all their technical help with the volume, and to John McKinnell who first saw its merit, suggested the utility of a revised edition, and provided a wealth of valuable commentary and suggestions for this revision. Without doubt, the book is much better – not to mention simply possible – because of all their efforts.

TWM

2008