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Norse Mythology

Svipdagsmál — The Ballad of Svipdag

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Anonymous (Eddic poetry)

Translation by Henry Adams Bellows (1923)

Credits

Author	Anonymous (Eddic poetry)
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About:

Two poems preserved only in seventeenth-century manuscripts, which editors join into one story. In Grógaldr young Svipdag, bound by his stepmother to win the mysterious Mengloth, wakes his mother Groa in her grave, and she sings him nine charms of protection.

In Fjölsvinnsmál he reaches the castle ringed with flames, faces the questions of the warder Fjolsvith and, on speaking his own name, is welcomed by Mengloth, who had been waiting for him.

The two poems are not in the medieval manuscripts of the Edda and were first joined as one continuous story in the nineteenth century by the Norwegian philologist Sophus Bugge.

The same plot — a youth who wakes his dead mother for protection and wins a distant bride — appears in the Scandinavian ballad of young Sveidal.

The tone is that of a fairy tale, with spells, a castle ringed by fire and guardian hounds.

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GRÓGALDR

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1 Svipdag spake:

"Wake thee, Groa! wake, mother good!
At the doors of the dead I call thee;
Thy son, bethink thee, thou badst to seek
Thy help at the hill of death."

2 Groa spake:

"What evil vexes mine only son,
What baleful fate hast thou found,
That thou callest thy mother, who lies in the mould,
And the world of the living has left?"

3 Svipdag spake:

"The woman false whom my father embraced
Has brought me a baleful game;
For she bade me go forth where none may fare,
And Mengloth the maid to seek."

4 Groa spake:

"Long is the way, long must thou wander,

But long is love as well;
Thou mayst find, perchance, what thou fain wouldst have,
If the fates their favor will give.”

5 Svipdag spake:

“Charms full good then chant to me, mother,
And seek thy son to guard;
For death do I fear on the way I shall fare,
And in years am I young, methinks.”

6 Groa spake:

“Then first I will chant thee the charm oft-tried,
That Rani taught to Rind;
From the shoulder whate’er mislikes thee shake,
For helper thyself shalt thou have.

7 “Then next I will chant thee, if needs thou must travel,
And wander a purposeless way:
The bolts of Urth shall on every side
Be thy guards on the road thou goest.

8 “Then third I will chant thee, if threatening streams
The danger of death shall bring:
Yet to Hel shall turn both Horn and Ruth,
And before thee the waters shall fail.

9 “Then fourth I will chant thee, if come thy foes
On the gallows-way against thee:
Into thine hands shall their hearts be given,
And peace shall the warriors wish.

10 “Then fifth I will chant thee, if fetters perchance
Shall bind thy bending limbs:
O’er thy thighs do I chant a loosening-charm,
And the lock is burst from the limbs,
And the fetters fall from the feet.

11 “Then sixth I will chant thee, if storms on the sea
Have might unknown to man:
Yet never shall wind or wave do harm,
And calm is the course of thy boat.

12 “Then seventh I chant thee, if frost shall seek
To kill thee on lofty crags:
The fatal cold shall not grip thy flesh,
And whole thy body shall be.

13 “Then eighth will I chant thee, if ever by night
Thou shalt wander on murky ways:
Yet never the curse of a Christian woman
From the dead shall do thee harm.

14 “Then ninth will I chant thee, if needs thou must strive
With a warlike giant in words:
Thy heart good store of wit shall have,
And thy mouth of words full wise.

15 “Now fare on the way where danger waits,
Let evils not lessen thy love!
I have stood at the door of the earth-fixed stones,
The while I chanted thee charms.

16 “Bear hence, my son, what thy mother hath said,
And let it live in thy breast;
Thine ever shall be the best of fortune,
So long as my words shall last.”

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FJÖLSVINNSMÁL

✦

17 Before the house he beheld one coming
To the home of the giants high.

Svipdag spake:

"What giant is here, in front of the house,
And around him fires are flaming?"

18 Fjolsvith spake:

"What seekest thou here? for what is thy search?
What, friendless one, fain wouldst thou know?
By the ways so wet must thou wander hence,
For, weakling, no home hast thou here."

19 Svipdag spake:

"What giant is here, in front of the house,
To the wayfarer welcome denying?"

Fjolsvith spake:

"Greeting full fair thou never shalt find,
So hence shalt thou get thee home.

20 “Fjolsvith am I, and wise am I found,
But miserly am I with meat;
Thou never shalt enter within the house,—
Go forth like a wolf on thy way!”

21 Svipdag spake:

“Few from the joy of their eyes will go forth,
When the sight of their loves they seek;
Full bright are the gates of the golden hall,
And a home shall I here enjoy.”

22 Fjolsvith spake:

“Tell me now, fellow, what father thou hast,
And the kindred of whom thou camst.”

Svipdag spake:

“Vindkald am I, and Varkald’s son,
And Fjolkald his father was.

23 “Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
Who is it that holds and has for his own
The rule of the hall so rich?”

24 Fjolsvith spake:

"Mengloth is she, her mother bore her
To the son of Svafrthorin;
She is it that holds and has for her own
The rule of the hall so rich."

25 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What call they the gate? for among the gods
Ne'er saw man so grim a sight."

26 Fjolsvith spake:

"Thrymgjol they call it; 'twas made by the three,
The sons of Solblindi;
And fast as a fetter the farer it holds,
Whoever shall lift the latch."

27 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What call they the house? for no man beheld
'Mongst the gods so grim a sight."

28 Fjolsvith spake:

"Gastropnir is it, of old I made it
From the limbs of Leirbrimir;
I braced it so strongly that fast it shall stand
So long as the world shall last."

29 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What call they the tree that casts abroad
Its limbs o'er every land?"

30 Fjolsvith spake:

"Mimameith its name, and no man knows
What root beneath it runs;
And few can guess what shall fell the tree,
For fire nor iron shall fell it."

31 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What grows from the seed of the tree so great,
That fire nor iron shall fell?"

32 Fjolsvith spake:

"Women, sick with child, shall seek
Its fruit to the flames to bear;
Then out shall come what within was hid,
And so is it mighty with men."

33 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What cock is he on the highest bough,
That glitters all with gold?"

34 Fjolsvith spake:

"Vithofnir his name, and now he shines
Like lightning on Mimameith's limbs;
And great is the trouble with which he grieves
Both Surt and Sinmora."

35 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What call they the hounds, that before the house
So fierce and angry are?"

36 Fjolsvith spake:

"Gif call they one, and Geri the other,
If now the truth thou wouldst know;
Great they are, and their might will grow,
Till the gods to death are doomed."

37 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
May no man hope the house to enter,
While the hungry hounds are sleeping?"

38 Fjolsvith spake:

"Together they sleep not, for so was it fixed
When the guard to them was given;
One sleeps by night, the next by day,
So no man may enter ever."

39 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
Is there no meat that men may give them,
And leap within while they eat?"

40 Fjolsvith spake:

"Two wing-joints there be in Vithofnir's body,
If now the truth thou wouldst know;
That alone is the meat that men may give them,
And leap within while they eat."

41 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What weapon can send Vithofnir to seek
The house of Hel below?"

42 Fjolsvith spake:

"Lævatein is there, that Lopt with runes
Once made by the doors of death;
In Lægjarn's chest by Sinmora lies it,
And nine locks fasten it firm."

43 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
May a man come thence who thither goes,
And tries the sword to take?"

44 Fjolsvith spake:

"Thence may he come who thither goes,
And tries the sword to take,
If with him he carries what few can win,
To give to the goddess of gold."

45 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What treasure is there that men may take
To rejoice the giantess pale?"

46 Fjolsvith spake:

"The sickle bright in thy wallet bear,
Mid Vithofnir's feathers found;
To Sinmora give it, and then shall she grant
That the weapon by thee be won."

47 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What call they the hall, encompassed here
With flickering magic flames?"

48 Fjolsvith spake:

"Lyr is it called, and long it shall
On the tip of a spear-point tremble;
Of the noble house mankind has heard,
But more has it never known."

49 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What one of the gods has made so great
The hall I behold within?"

50 Fjolsvith spake:

"Uni and Iri, Bari and Jari,
Var and Vegdrasil,
Dori and Ori, Delling, and there
Was Loki, the fear of the folk."

51 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What call they the mountain on which the maid
Is lying so lovely to see?"

52 Fjolsvith spake:

"Lyfjaberg is it, and long shall it be
A joy to the sick and the sore;
For well shall grow each woman who climbs it,
Though sick full long she has lain."

53 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What maidens are they that at Mengloth's knees
Are sitting so gladly together?"

54 Fjolsvith spake:

"Hlif is one named, Hlifthrasa another,
Thjothvara call they the third;
Bjort and Bleik, Blith and Frith,
Eir and Aurbotha."

55 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
Aid bring they to all who offerings give,
If need be found therefor?"

56 Fjolsvith spake:

"Soon aid they all who offerings give
On the holy altars high;
And if danger they see for the sons of men,
Then each from ill do they guard."

57 Svipdag spake:

"Now answer me, Fjolsvith, the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
Lives there the man who in Mengloth's arms
So fair may seek to sleep?"

58 Fjolsvith spake:

"No man there is who in Mengloth's arms
So fair may seek to sleep,
Save Svipdag alone, for the sun-bright maid
Is destined his bride to be."

59 Svipdag spake:

"Fling back the gates! make the gateway wide!
Here mayst thou Svipdag see!
Hence get thee to find if gladness soon
Mengloth to me will give."

60 Fjolsvith spake:

"Hearken, Mengloth, a man is come;
Go thou the guest to see!
The hounds are fawning, the house bursts open,—
Svipdag, methinks, is there."

61 Mengloth spake:

"On the gallows high shall hungry ravens
Soon thine eyes pluck out,
If thou liest in saying that here at last
The hero is come to my hall.

62 "Whence camest thou hither? how camest thou here?
What name do thy kinsmen call thee?
Thy race and thy name as a sign must I know,
That thy bride I am destined to be."

63 Svipdag spake:

"Svipdag am I, and Solbjart's son;
Thence came I by wind-cold ways;
With the words of Urth shall no man war,
Though unearned her gifts be given."

64 Mengloth spake:

"Welcome thou art, for long have I waited;

The welcoming kiss shalt thou win!
For two who love is the longed-for meeting
The greatest gladness of all.

65 "Long have I sat on Lyfjaberg here,
Awaiting thee day by day;
And now I have what I ever hoped,
For here thou art come to my hall.

66 "Alike we yearned; I longed for thee,
And thou for my love hast longed;
But now henceforth together we know
Our lives to the end we shall live."

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