

Runes Poems

This document is an attempt to interpret, translate, correct, and discuss the Old Norse and more modern Swedish rune poems. Both will be listed below, and will summarize the runes of the Younger Futhark. This document will also be largely a personal interpretation of the author, along with perspectives from other people, and by no means is an accurate, historical, or unbiased view of the rune poems.

Old Norse Rune Poem

| Rune | Old Norse | English |
|--|--|---|
| Interpretation | | |
| Fé - ƒ | “Fé vældr frænda róge; føðesk ulfr í skóge.” | “Wealth causes kinsmen to wail in slander; a wolf is raised in the forest.” |
| <p>In this poem, wealth has a negative meaning. It shows that it causes kinsmen/family to feud and fight. More accurately, it causes those without wealth to slander those who have it.</p> <p>The wolf in this poem represents greed, as it does in Old Norse culture. The wolf in kennings is also known as a devourer or destroyer. It's presence in this poem could indicate that wealth leads to consuming greed. The symbolism of the forest could refer to the “outside,” or the hidden, such as the hidden parts of the self. The idea would be that greed is hidden, and comes from within.</p> | | |
| Úr - ʀ | “Úr er af illu jarne; opt løypr hreinn á hjarne.”(1) | “Dross comes from bad iron; often the reindeer runs over hard snow.” |

This poem represents not strength or power alone, but the strength/power to overcome. It is the strength to achieve a hard goal. Dross is the impurity hammered out of iron in the forging process, which represents the struggle of achieving the final product.

Reindeer can run over hardened snow, where others like wolves and bears cannot. This represents the choice of the treacherous path, or the hard journey to achieve a good goal. In the case of the reindeer, it is not being eaten. In the case of men, it would be like quitting smoking, which is a hard path toward a fruitful goal.

Þurs - Þ

“Þurs vældr kvinna kvillu;
kátr væðr fár af illu.”

“Þurs causes a woman
anguish; merry tranquility
few of ills.”

This poem discusses friction, and what is hard in life. In the Old English poem, Þurs is Þorn. Though that is a different translation, the idea is that the thorn of the rose is the Þurs of the plant. Þurs regarding women can also relate to menstruation, or childbirth. Þurs is generally related to the Devourers, or Jotnar, which cause ills for humans and more relate to humanity. Another relation Þurs has is with curses. There are many curses related to it, such as sleep-thorn to make people sleep or a curse to break a horse’s leg. In relation to women, Skírnismál depicts curses against women using Þurs, which relates to Þurs causing pain for women.

The idea of merry tranquility having few ills relates to the hard things in life as well. Few, people have merry tranquility and have many ills instead. This could represent the hardships of life. Relating back to Úr’s poem, Þurs might be the troubles that Úr seeks to endure and overcome.

Óss - ʀ

“Óss er flæstra færða
fór; en skalpr er sværða.”

“Estuary before the
conditions of journey; but
scabbard is for swords.”

The poem for Óss represents the beginning of journeys. The Norse were expert sailors, so estuary (the mouth of a river) was the start of their journeys. Estuary is the start of the journey, and therefore before the conditions or trials of the journey.

The scabbard is like an estuary, where the sword’s journey (into things like battle) begins in the scabbard.

Reið - ʀ

“Reið kveða rossom
væsta; Reginn sló sværðet
bæzta.”

“Riding is said to be the
worst for horses; Reginn
forged the finest sword.”

Another poem based on journey, Reið’s poem speaks of the journey wearing down or being the worst for horses. This likely relates to the trials and hardships of going on a journey, which are not easy.

Forging a sword is a journey in itself, a trial to create a product. Reginn created his

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| best sword for Sigurd, who would go on to kill Reginn's brother Fafnir. | | |
| Kaun - ƿ | “Kaun er barna bǫlvan; bǫl gørver nán fǫlvan.” | “Ulcer is a bane to children; death makes a corpse pale.” |
| <p>Kaun's poem represents pain, and the avoidable. The ulcer is painful, and deadly to the child, whose death is unavoidable.</p> <p>Death itself makes corpses pale, and draws life from a body. It is part of the natural circle and cannot be prevented.</p> <p>The poem of Kaun, based on pain and unpreventable things, might remind one that sacrifice, pain, and permanent mistakes are part of life. One should not somberly mourn over these things, but should respect them as a part of life, and move on without feeling burden.</p> | | |
| Hagall - ʰ | “Hagall er kaldastr korna; Kjalarr skóp hæimenn forna.” (2) | “Hail is the coldest of grains; Kjalarr shaped the world of old.” (2) |
| <p>Hagall's poem is a dualistic poem. The first portion speaks of hail, which is shaped like little grains or corns. Hail is perhaps one of the most destructive forms of weather; where crops endure low temperature, rain, or wind, they cannot resist hail and are destroyed by it.</p> <p>The second portion speaks of creation by Kjalarr, or the Nourisher, who formed the world of old. Kjalarr is one of the names of Óðinn, and in this instance refers to Odinic Triad who shaped the universe and Miðgarðr. This creation came from destruction through the death of Ýmir, the first consciousness, being, and vibration. Through its body they formed the universe, or through destruction they had creation.</p> <p>Hagall seems to represent the cycle, destruction into creation, death into life. Hail melts and waters the world, and the death of crops fuels new life through their decay.</p> | | |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Nauðr - ʰ | “Nauðr gerer næppa koste; nøktan kælr í froste.” | “Necessity gives little choice; nude folk are chilled by frost.” |
| Nauðr's poem represents need and constraint. It is the urgency of a choice, and the | | |

constraint of necessity. Those who are cornered by necessity must decide quickly and wisely.

The second part of this poem shows an example of urgency. If one is caught out in bad weather without proper equipment, such as with little to no clothes in the face of the cold, they must act quickly to find shelter or risk freezing to death.

Íss - |

“Íss kollum brú bræiða;
blindan þarf at læiða.”

“Ice is called the broad
bridge; the blind must be
led.”

This poem represents any form of path. In summer, rivers and fjords are traveled on by boat; in winter, they turn to ice and can be traveled on by foot. Ice is dangerous though, and if one does not know where to step, they might perish.

Blindness can refer to many kinds of “unsight.” In reference to ice, many are blind and cannot see where the ice is thin and dangerous. Those who are physically blind must be aided and guided. Blindness can also be blind in forethought, such as those who do not prepare for seasonal changes. Lastly, blindness can be something like spiritual blindness, in which one needs a guide to help them see.

Ár - †

“Ár er gumna góðe;
get ek at þurr var Fróði.”

“Good year is something
that men profit from; I
guess that Fróði was
giving.”

Ár represents and literally means the good year, or good harvest. It signifies the times of plenty, where men profit from the harvest or their other endeavours.

Fróði was a Danish king who was very prosperous. In myth, he was generous with his wealth and gave so much gold away that there were no wars or theft for 30 years.

Ár’s poem represents plenty, but the example of Fróði suggests that one should be generous with their profit and shy away from greed.

Sól - †

“Sól er landa ljóme;
lúti ek helgum dóme.”

“Sol is the shining
redemption of the land; I
bow to the hallowed
judgement.”

Sól’s poem represents initiation and judgement. Sól herself is the sun, the goddess of Miðgarðr’s light. Sól’s energy can be healing, but it can also burn and destroy. If she judges the land well, she initiates the growth of crops and the prosperity of life. If she judges the land poorly, she burns, causes drought, and destroys.

One should respect such judgement, or hallowed judgement. One can’t stop it, so it is better to bow in respect rather than to cause further ills.

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Týr - ↑ | “Týr er æinendr ása; opt værðr smiðr blása.” | “Týr is a one-handed ása; often the tranquil smith blows.” |
| <p>Týr’s poem represents both Týr the god, and the outcome that takes effort. In the myths, Týr helps the Æsir bind Fenrir to keep the wolf from wreaking havoc. In order to tie the wolf up in Gleipnir, the special bindings made specifically for the beast, one of the Æsir had to put a hand in its jaws as a pledge of good faith. Týr volunteered, and when the wolf could not escape Gleipnir, it devoured Týr’s hand. This is an example of sacrifice and effort to achieve a desired outcome.</p> <p>The smith’s job is one of constant effort, where the absence of effort creates nothing good. The smith in the poem is tranquil, and peacefully accepts the effort his job requires.</p> | | |
| Bjarkan - Þ | “Bjarkan er laufgrønstr líma; Loki bar flærða tíma.” | “Birch has the greenest leaves of any plant-limb; Loki bore fortune in his deceit.” |
| <p>Bjarkan’s poem represents both feminine fertility and perennial nature. The birch tree is a good example for the nature of life, waxing and waning, enduring times of great activity and times of hibernation. In summer, the birch is green and grows, and in winter it loses and leaves and becomes dormant.</p> <p>The actions of Loki throughout the myths also wax and wane, going between success and getting away, and failure and being caught. A good example that ties Loki to the femininity of Bjarkan is the story of Ásgarðr’s Fortification. The full story won’t be summarized here, but to avoid being killed by the Æsir at the end of the story, Loki shapeshifts into a mare and deceives Svadilfari, the horse of a smith tasked with building a wall around Ásgarðr. He lures Svadilfari into the forest, causing the smith to fail his task and not receive the rewards he asked for.</p> <p>Loki thus succeeds in his deceit, and soon gives birth to Sleipnir who becomes a gift for Óðinn.(3)</p> | | |
| Maðr - ʝ | “Maðr er moldar auki; mikil er græip á hauki.” | “Men are augmented mud; great are the claws of a predator bird.” |
| <p>Maðr’s poem references humanity as a whole. In many mythologies across the world, humans are made from either clay or mud, Norse mythology being the exception where humans are made from trees. This might be a reference to our evolution, where we came from tree-dwellers (where we are made from trees), and from this Earth and its nature (where we are made from mud/clay).</p> | | |

The claws of a predator bird references two things in particular. First would be our predatory, cunning nature that led us to the top of the food chain. Second would be death, where the claws of a predator reap death, and where humans are mortal.

Løgr - ᚗ

“Løgr er, fællr ór fjalle
foss; en gull ero nosser.”

“Water falls from a
mountain as waterfall; but
gold is an ornament.”

Løgr’s poem represents water, nourishment, and flow. This can be seen in many examples. Water is a metaphor for things like Örlog (water)**(4)**, where the fate coming from the individual (the mountain) is Urðr (waterfall). Örlog flows forth to water Ýggdrásil, which is ironic since Løgr is between Maðr (men) and Ýr (yew tree, or Ýggdrásil).

Løgr also represents the primal nourisher Auðumla, along with the wells that water Ýggdrásil, and the nourishment for all of existence.

Gold is a great example for something that flows. It is a soft metal that flows easily, allowing for ease in its manipulation. Its value also flows in human society, going up and down and constantly changing. Philosophically, gold as an ornament shows that it is nothing but a shiny thing that shouldn’t control humans and make us fall for greed.

Ýr - ᚦ

“Ýr er vetrgrønstr viðá;
vænt er, er brennr, at
sviða.”

“Yew wood is
winter-greenest; it is
beautiful when consumed
by burning.”

Ýr’s poem represents Ýggdrásil and the circle of life and death. In Norse lore, Ýggdrásil is destroyed during Ragnarök, or the ending of this cycle. When the universe is reborn a new, fresh baby tree will be born in place of Ýggdrásil. In reference to winter-greenest, Yew trees are evergreen trees, and endure through the cycle of life and death, as Ýggdrásil does in the cycle of the universe.

Yew trees are also very poisonous, which therefore connects them both to life (being evergreen) and death (being poisonous). They also are beautiful when burning because Yew wood burns slowly.

1. Originally, “hreinn” was “reinn,” though the author considered this a misspelling or more modern spelling of the Old Norse word for “reindeer” and changed it.
2. Originally, Kjalarr was Kristi, or Christ. The author deemed that this was a Christian influence that didn’t quite make sense. In Christianity, God created the world, not Jesus Christ. This only works in the perspective where they are the same thing, but why choose Christ over God? Also, the poem does not refer to the world being created, but being formed, as the Odinic triad did. This makes Kjalarr perfect, as it is a name for Óðinn, and means nourisher.
3. See the story of Ásgarðr’s Fortification.

4. See the author's work on the Norse parts of the self.

Swedish Rune Poem

| Rune | Swedish | English |
|------------|--|---|
| ƿ - Fä | Fä frande ro Frid all roo i.e. Frucht Åhr | Cattle is peace among kinsmen Peace and quiet i.e. fertile year |
| ʌ - Ur | Ur Väder Värst i.e. Urwäder - urwinter | Ur worst of weather i.e. unweather - bad winter |
| ᛚ - Tors | Tors kvinna kval i.e. Swär Kvinnefödsell(1) | Thor woman's affliction i.e. difficult birth |
| ᛚ - Ös | Ös i vario å Oos-Qwaal-o-roo-osund Lufft - Oos i hwarie Wrå | Fog/smoke in every river Smoke-affliction, unhealthy air, fumes in each corner |
| ᛚ - Ridher | Ridher hästerspräng i.e. Riddare Lycka godh | Rider is horse's leap i.e. Rider/knight good fortune |
| ƿ - Kön | Kön i köte värst i.e. Kättia måste flys | Sex, worst in the flesh i.e. Recklessness must be shunned |
| ᛚ - Hagal | Hagal er i bo bäst Hagl Regn hårdast i.e. Tijdwinter godt Korn åhr | Hail is best when (you are) at home Hail is hardest rain i.e. Timely winter, good grain year |
| ᛚ - Nöd | Nöd er enda köst nordanwäder kallast i.e. dyr Tijdh | Need is the only choice North weather coldest i.e. hard times |
| - Is | Is bro bredast i.e. Isköld, Winteråhr | Ice is broadest bridge i.e. Ice cold winter year |
| ᛚ - År | År i bladhe vidast i.e. åhr öfwer alt godt | Year is richest in leaves i.e. Year makes all well |
| ᛚ - Sol | Sol i himbla högast i.e. | Sun in highest heaven i.e. |

| | Blåsår | windy year |
|----------------|--|---|
| ↑ - Tyr | Tyr i Vatöm ledast Tyri brinner bäst i.e. dyrast | Tyr (bull) is badly off in water/Tyr(bull) is meanest of spirits Resinous wood is best for burning i.e. hardest |
| ᛃ - Björk | Björkahult grönast Björkbrumar frodast i.e. bäst til Wärke | Greenest birch forest Birch branches fertile, i.e. best material for working |
| ǀ - Lagh | Lagh är landsens ära/Landzrätt Lagom boo bäst i.e. Träteår | Law is land's honor/law in the land Moderation is best in the home i.e. a year of conflict |
| ᛞ - Man | Mager Mullägor try Lius i.e. gyllen år | Man, earthen field Three lights i.e. Golden Year |
| ᛞ - Aur | Aur madur þing söker i.e. dyr Tijd | Generous man seeks the Thing (law place) i.e. hard times |
| ǀ - Aflagt | Aflagt/olagit i.e Alt godt | Year-law, (meaning unclear) i.e. Everything good |
| ᛞ - Twe | Twe sämer bäst i.e. Dubbelt gyllen år | Two agree best i.e. Double golden year |
| ϕ - Belgbunden | Belgbunden Tor i.e. Swårt odrygt år doch godt Kornår | Bellybound (inflated) Thor i.e. dark year of hardship, but good grain year. |

1. Author made slight augmentations to the poem, updating the original words into more modern Swedish.

*Author is using the version of the Swedish rune poems from the Runic Animist Calendar with slight changes. Check out the calendar itself for more information at: facebook.com/nordic.animist.calendar/

Runic Divination

Runic divination is one of many methods that are used by modern pagans in order to predict the future. The history of runic divination is unclear. Tacitus recorded that some Germanic tribes did divination, specifying that it was done by marking wooden pieces from a fruit tree. This does not mean that these tribes did divination. Historical divination in the area of runes is muddy, and therefore little known about.

With such a muddy history, this author chooses to view runic divination as a modern tradition born through the birth of neo-paganism.

The basis for divination is one's ability to interpret, or one's ability to use acumen to make connections and see possibilities. Runic divination itself is an extremely vague practice that requires a lot of experience and wisdom. There are many methods one can do to perform runic divination. The kind that is chosen is up to personal preference. Often, people carve or burn runes onto wood, bone, or stone and cast them. Some people put them on long, three/four sided sticks, some on tablets, some even on dice. It is all preference.

For simple answers, one can cast their rune lot and decide whether face up or face down is a yes or no and decide the answer based on majority. For example, one can cast three and decide based on majority. For example, majority up is yes, majority down is no. This can also be used to decide extremity, such as tossing three runes and finding a mild yes with two up, or an extreme yes with all three up. One can also pick a single rune, generally grabbing it blindly once they are randomly mixed and interpreting.

For more complex answers, one can decide the amount of runes they wish to pick, cast, and then blindly pick. For example, toss all 16 runes randomly, blindly pick three, then interpret. Another method can also be to cast all 16 runes and try to interpret the connections of each. The caster in this method attempts to see which are closer, which

are farther, which way they face or if they are downward or upward, and what each relationship means.

Through any method, one can read the name and poem for any rune to interpret. The purpose of the author's interpretations earlier in this document is not to decide a certain way that they are supposed to be interpreted. Rather, they exist to offer a base interpretation that the reader can grow from. In divination, it is better to interpret them alone to find more connections than someone else's interpretation would grant.

Runic Magic

Runic magic, like runic divination, is a vague tradition that has been reborn through neo-paganism. There are many perspectives on what runic magic is, and how it can be done. Therefore, this document will choose the perspective of the author, which is neither infallible or correct.

Most organized futharks (the name for runic alphabets) have been shown by authors like Michael P. Barnes to have been writing systems like the Latin alphabet. Many people that runes by themselves are magical, but this is likely a modern misunderstanding. It is more likely that the runes themselves are not magical, but the ability of being literate and writing to be magical.

To suggest that a rune like Fé attracts wealth just by being written is mad, like suggesting that the letter A causes apples to appear. Alone, a rune is a phonetic value, and therefore needs power that comes from the creator. Without the creator's power, it is powerless.

This power exists in Hugr, our thought and thinking mind, Önd, our divine breath, and Megin, our magical might (see the authors work on the parts of the self).

When creating a rune, either burning it, carving it, or shaping it in some manner, the work placed into the rune is given megin. This megin gives the rune ability to act on things like Urðr, or fate. Runes also need to be given life, or animation, which is given through Önd. Generally, Önd is given through Galdr. Galdr literally means a chanted spell, and uses voice and breath. One method to Galdr to a rune is to whisper its name onto the rune, breathing on it to breathe life into it. Hugr come in through shaping the intention of everything. If one intends to carve a rune to attract wealth, they think of the meaning of their rune and exert that onto the rune. For example, Fé is associated with wealth, and therefore whispering its name onto a rune will convey that intention into the rune.

Thank you for taking the time to read this document. All the information above comes from my mentor and friend, Ryan Nelson, known by many as Hrafnbjörn. Without him, I would be quite lost in the complexities of Norse history and religion.

E.T. Gunnarsson