









# THE POETIC EDDA

Translated With an Introduction  
and Explanatory Notes

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## INTRODUCTION

What the Vedas are for India, and the Homeric poems for the Greeek world, that the Edda signifies for the Teutonic race: it is a repository, in poetic form, of the mythology and much of their heroic lore, bodying forth both the ethical views and the cultural life of the North during late Heathen times.

Due to their geographical position, it was the fate of the Scandinavian tribes to succumb later than their Southern and Western brethren to the revolutionary influence of the new world religion, Christianity. Before its establishment, they were able to bring to a highly characteristic fruition a civilization stimulated occasionally, during the centuries preceding, but not overborne, by impulses from the more Romanized countries of Europe. In the formative arts, little that is notable was accomplished, and still less has come down to us, owing to the prevailing use of wood for structural purposes and ornamentation; though a definite style had been evolved in wood-carving, ship-building, and bronze work. But the surging life of the Viking Age—restless, intrepid, masculine as few have been in the world's history—found magnificent expression in a literature which may take its place honorably beside other world literatures.

For the fixation of these treasures in written form we are, to be sure, indebted to Christianity: it was the missionary who brought with him the art of writing on parchment with connected letters. The Runic alphabet was unsuited for that task.

But just as in the Merovingian kingdom, in Germany, and in England, fire and sword no doubt wrought more conversions in the North, too, than peaceful, fruitful missionary activity. Little would have been heard of sagas,

and Eddic Lays, and Skaldic poetry, had it not been for the fortunate existence of the political refuge of remote Iceland.

Founded toward the end of the Heathen period (870f) by Norwegian nobles and yeomen who fled their native land when King Harold Fairhair sought to impose on them his sovereignty and levy tribute, this colony long preserved and fostered the cultural traditions which connected it with the Scandinavian soil. Indeed, for several centuries it remained an oligarchy of families intensely proud of their ancestry and jealous of their cultural heritage. Even when Christianity was finally introduced, and adopted as the state religion by legislative decision (1000 A. D.), there was no sudden break, as was more generally the case elsewhere, partly because of the absence of religious fanaticism, partly because of the isolation of the country which rendered impracticable for a long time any stricter enforcement of Church discipline in matters of faith and of living.

The art of writing which came in with the new religion was enthusiastically cultivated for the committing to parchment of the lays, the laws, the lore of the olden times, especially of the heroic and romantic past immediately preceding and following the settlement of the island.

Even though Christianity got to be firmly established, by and by, wealthy freeholders and clerics of leisure devoted themselves to accumulating and combining into 'sagas', the local traditions which had been current orally, and to collecting the lays which were still remembered—indeed, they would compose new ones in imitation of them. Gradually, huge codices thus came into being which were reckoned among the most cherished possessions of a family. Already Saxo Grammaticus (about 1200) speaks in praise of the unflinching zeal of the Icelanders in this matter.

The greatest name in this early Icelandic Renaissance (as it has been called) is that of Snorri Sturlason (1178–1241), the powerful chieftain and great scholar, to whom we owe the *Heimskringla* or 'History of the Norwegian

Kings', and the *Snorra Edda*—about which later; but he stands by no means alone. And thanks also to the fact that the language had undergone hardly a change during the Middle Ages, this antiquarian activity was continued uninterruptedly down into the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century, when it was met and reinforced by the Renaissance with its romantic interest in the Past.

In the mean time the erstwhile independent island had passed into the sovereignty of Norway and, with that country, into that of Denmark, then at the zenith of its power. In the search for the origins of Danish greatness it was soon understood that a knowledge of the earlier history of Scandinavia depended altogether on the information contained in the Icelandic manuscripts. In Saxo's preface to his *Historia Danica*, edited by the Danish humanist Christiern Pedersen in the beginning of the Sixteenth Century, it was stated in so many words that the substance of his work is based on Icelandic sources, at least for the earliest times. To make them more accessible, toward the end of the same century<sup>1</sup> the learned Norwegian, Peder Claussön, translated the *Heimskringla* which, with the kings of Norway in the foreground, tells of Scandinavian history from the earliest times down to the end of the Twelfth Century.

Since it was well known that many valuable manuscripts still existed in Iceland, collectors hastened to gather them in although the Icelandic freeholders jealously "brooded over them like the dragon on his gold," as one contemporary remarked. As extreme good fortune would have it, the Danish kings then ruling, especially Frederic III, were liberal and intelligent monarchs who did much to further literature and science. The latter king expressly enjoined his bishop in Iceland, Bryniólfr<sup>1a</sup> Sveinsson, a noted antiquarian, to collect for the Royal Library, then founded, all

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<sup>1</sup>An abridged translation had been made even earlier by the Norwegian, Mattis Störssön (ca. 1560).

<sup>1a</sup>For value of diacritic marks, pronunciation, abbreviations, etc., cf.

manuscripts he could lay hold of. As a result, this collection now houses the greatest manuscript treasures of Northern antiquity. And the foundations of other great manuscript collections, such as that of the Royal Library of Sweden and the libraries of the Universities of Copenhagen and Uppsala, were laid at about the same time.

This collecting zeal of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries may almost be called providential. It preserved from destruction the treasures which the Age of Enlightenment and Utilitarianism looked down upon as relics of barbarian antecedents best forgotten; until Romanticism again invested the dim past of Germanic antiquity with a new glamor.

It was at the height of this generous interest in the past when a learned Iclander, Arngrím Jónsson, sent the manuscript (now called *Codex Wormianus*) of the *Snorra Edda* to his Danish friend Ole Worm. Knowledge of this famous work of Snorri's had, it seemed, virtually disappeared in Iceland. Its author was at first supposed to be that father of Icelandic historiography, Sæmund Sigfússon (1056-1133), of whose learning the most exaggerated notions were then current. A closer study of sources gradually undermined this view in favor of Snorri; and his authorship became a certainty with the finding of the *Codex Upsaliensis* of the *Snorra Edda*, which is prefaced by the remark that it was compiled by Snorri.

To all intents and purposes this 'Edda' of Snorri is a 'textbook'—one of the most original and entertaining ever written. In it is set forth in dialogue form the substance and technique (as we should say) of skaldship, brought conveniently together for the benefit of those aspiring to the practice of that art. The first part, called *Gylfaginning* or 'the Duping of Gylfi', furnishes a survey of Northern mythology and cosmogony; the second, called *Skáldskaparmél* or 'the Language of Skaldship', deals with the subject of 'kennings',<sup>2</sup> whose origin is explained by

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. p. xxi.

citations from older Skaldic poems and other lore; the third, called *Háttatal* or 'the Enumeration of *hættir* (metres)', contains Snorri's encomiastic poem in 102 stanzas on King Hákon and Duke Skúli, exemplifying as many metres employed in skaldship.

Among the scholars eagerly scanning this precious find the conviction soon made itself felt that the material in it was not original with Snorri: they saw that much of the first two books was on the face of it a synopsis from older poetic sources which, in their turn, were by them ascribed to Sæmundr; hence when that lucky manuscript hunter, Bishop Bryniólfr, discovered (about 1643) the unique and priceless codex containing what we now call the 'Poetic Edda' it was but natural that he should conclude this to be the 'Edda of Sæmund' whose existence had already been inferred theoretically. And this conclusion was unhesitatingly subscribed to by all, down to modern times. The fact is though that the connection of Sæmundr with the Poetic Edda—if not purely arbitrary—has no documentary evidence whatever. Moreover, it is inherently improbable. But, since the great bulk of poems which we have come to regard as 'Eddic' is handed down precisely in this manuscript, the name of 'Edda', which properly belongs to Snorri's work, has been retained for want of another collective title.

We know with a fair degree of certainty that Snorri himself named his handbook of poetics '*Edda*'; but as to the meaning of this word we are dependent on conjecture.

Quite early, the name was taken to be identical with that of Edda, progenitress of the race of thralls, according to the 'Lay of Ríg', whose meaning is 'great-grandmother'. This was adopted by the great Jakob Grimm, one of the first to undertake a scientific edition of the collection. In the taste of Romanticism he poetically interpreted the title as the ancestral mother of mankind sitting in the circle of her children and children's children, instructing them in the lore and learning of the hoary past.—However, as it

happens, neither did Snorri in all likelihood know the 'Lay of Ríg'; nor does this fanciful interpretation agree at all with the prosy manner in which the Icelanders were accustomed to name their manuscripts, or—for that matter—with the purpose and nature of Snorri's work. It is altogether untenable.

Another explanation was propounded early in the Eighteenth Century by the Icelandic scholar, Arni Magnússon, and has been accepted by many. According to him, *Edda* means 'poetics'—a title which (from a modern point of view) would seem to be eminently fitting. Later scholars who have provided a more solid philological underpinning for this theory than Arni was able to, also point out that the simplex *óþr* which signifies 'reason, soul,' and hence, 'soulful utterance, poem', from which *Edda* may be derived, excellently agrees with the related Latin *vātes* and the Old Irish *faïth* 'seer, poet'. Nevertheless, this explanation does not quite satisfy, for the word *Edda* in the meaning 'poetics' is nowhere attested.

Simplest, and agreeing best with the matter-of-fact Icelandic style of naming their writings, is the proposal of the Icelandic-English scholar, Eiríkr Magnússon. He reminds us that *Edda* may mean 'the Book of Oddi'. This was the name of the renowned and historic parsonage in West Iceland which under that remarkable mind, Sæmundr Sigfússon, had become a center of learning whither flocked gifted youths eager for historical or clerical instruction. After his death, in 1133, the estate continued to prosper, and kept up its tradition for learning, under his two sons, and especially under his grandson, the wise and influential chieftain, Jón Loptsson. It was he who fostered and tutored the three-year-old Snorri and under whose roof he lived until his nineteenth year. What is more likely than that Oddi with its traditions and associations played a profound rôle in Snorri's entire development? To be sure, whether Snorri wrote his work there in later years, whether he gave it the title in grateful recognition of the inspira-



tion there received, or whether he wished thus to indicate an indebtedness to manuscript collections of poems owned in Oddi—these are mere surmises.

Magnússon, indeed, believed that Snorri, while in Oddi, had used a manuscript containing about all the lays comprised in the codex found by Bishop Bryniólfur, and from them made the synopses found in the *Gylfaginning*. In this he was mistaken however; for it seems well-established now that Snorri could have had before him only *Völuspá* *Vafþrúðnismál*, and *Grímnismál*.

Subsequent finds added a very few lays<sup>3</sup> of Eddic quality to those preserved in Bryniólf's codex which thus remains by all means our chief source for them. This famous manuscript, now known as *Codex Regius No. 2365* of the Royal Library of Denmark, is a small volume consisting of 45 sheets<sup>4</sup> closely covered with writing. No distinction is made between prose and poetry, except that the beginning of every lay is marked off by a large colored initial, and every stanza by a smaller one. The whole is in one firm, legible hand which paleologists agree in assigning to an Icelander of the last half of the Thirteenth Century. He must have copied it from one or more manuscripts before him, for the nature of a number of mistakes shows that he did not write from memory or from dictation. As to the date when the lays were first collected, various considerations make it probable that this occurred not earlier than the middle of the Thirteenth Century.

Next in importance comes the manuscript *Fragment 748* of the Arnamagnæan Collection of the Copenhagen University Library, dating from the beginning of the Fourteenth Century. Among other matters it contains, in a slightly different form, and in a divergent order, part of the 'Lay of Hárbarth', 'Baldr's Dreams' (for which it is the sole source), part of the 'Lay of Skírnir', the 'Lay of

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<sup>3</sup>*Bdr., Ríg., Hynd., Svip., Grot.*

<sup>4</sup>Concerning the six sheets missing cf. what is said on the *Great Lacuna*, p. 283.

Grímnir', the 'Lay of Hymir', and part of the 'Lay of Volund'. For all the differences, scholars are unanimous in holding that it derives, ultimately, from the same source as *Regius*.

The large *Manuscript Codex No. 544* of the Arnamagnæan Collection, called *Hauksbook*, from the fact that most of it was written by the Icelandic judge, Haukr Erlendsson, about the beginning of the Fourteenth Century, is important for Eddic study in that it supplies us with another redaction of the 'Prophecy of the Seeress'.

For the 'Lay of Ríg' we are entirely dependent on the *Codex Wormianus* of the *Snorra Edda* (above referred to) written in the second half of the Fourteenth Century, where it is found on the last page.

The huge *Codex No. 1005 folio* of the Royal Library, known as the *Flateyarbook* because Bryniólfr Sveinsson obtained it from a farmer on the small island of Flatey, is the source for the 'Lay of Hyndla'.

The 'Lay of Grotti' occurs only in the *Codex Regius Manuscript No. 2367* of the *Snorra Edda*, dating from the beginning of the Fourteenth Century, where the poem is cited in illustration of a kenning based on the Grotti myth.

There exist also a considerable number of *Paper Manuscripts*; but aside from the fact that some of them contain, in addition, the undoubtedly genuine 'Lay of Svipdag' they are of no importance as they all date from the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries and are essentially derived from the same source as *Regius*, if not from that collection itself. But, to be sure, they bear eloquent testimony to the continued interest of Icelanders in these poems.

The 'Eddic' lays which are found in these manuscripts, utterly diverse though they be in many respects, still have three important characteristics in common which mark them off from the great body of Skaldic poetry: their matter is the mythology, the ethical conceptions, and the heroic lore of the Ancient North; they are all composed in

a comparatively simple style, and in the simplest measures; and, like the later folksongs and ballads, they are anonymous and 'objective'. This unity in apparent diversity was no doubt felt by the unknown collector who gathered together all the lays and poetical fragments which lived in his memory or were already committed to writing.

A well thought-out plan is evident in the ordering of the whole. In the first place, the mythic and didactic lays are held apart from the heroic, and those of each group disposed in a sensible order.

The opening chord is struck by the majestic 'Prophecy of the Seeress', as the most complete bodying forth of the Old Norse conceptions of the world, its origin and its future. There follow three poems, in the main didactic, dealing chiefly with the wisdom of the supreme god, Óðin (The Lays of Hór, of Vafthrúthnir, of Grímnir); then one about the ancient fertility god, Frey (the 'Lay of Skírnir'); five in which Thór plays the predominant, or at least a prominent, part (The Lays of Hárbarth, of Hymir, of Loki, of Thrym, of Alvís).<sup>5</sup> The poems following ('Baldr's Dreams', the Lays of Ríg, of Hyndla, of Svipdag, of Grotti) are, it will be remembered, not contained in *Regius*.

The Heroic Lays are found arranged in chronological order, as far as feasible, and joined by Prose Links so as to form an interconnected cycle. The procedure is especially clear in the case of the Niflung Cycle. Not only has the Collector been at pains to join the frequently parallel lays, but he tries hard to reconcile contradictory statements. Connection with the Helgi Cycle is effected by making Helgi Hundingsbani a son of the Volsung, Sigmund. The tragic figure of Queen Guthrún then links the Niflung Cycle with the Ermanarich lays.

There has been a great deal of discussion as to the authenticity and age of the Prose of the collection, but it is clear now that (excepting the piece about 'Sinfiotli's Death'

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<sup>5</sup>Possibly by a mistake of the copyist, the 'Lay of Volund' precedes the 'Lay of Alvís'.

which no doubt is a prose rendering of a lay now lost) the Prose Links for the most part add nothing of independent value—nothing, indeed, which could not have been inferred from the poems themselves. We shall hardly err in attributing these links to the interested, but not very gifted, compiler of the collection.

The case is somewhat different, perhaps, with the narrative which binds together the fragments of the 'Lay of Helgi Hiorvarthsson' and those of the 'Second Lay of Helgi', and the Prose Links of the Sigurth Cycle from the 'Lay of Regin' to 'Brynhild's Ride to Hel'. Especially the latter group in manner notably resembles the genre of the Fornaldarsaga—prose with interspersed stanzas, a form exceedingly common in Old Norse literature and which, for aught we know, may have been the original form in this instance. Still, even here the suspicion lurks that the Prose is but the apology for stanzas, or whole lays, imperfectly remembered: there is such discrepancy between the clear and noble stanzas and the frequently muddled<sup>6</sup> and inept prose as to preclude, it would seem, the thought of their being by the same author.

Even greater diversity of opinion obtains concerning the age and home of the lays themselves. As was stated above, in sharp contradiction to Skaldic poetry, we know nothing about the author of any Eddic poem. Nay, in none but a very few, as e.g. the 'Lay of Grípir', or the 'Third Lay of Guthrún', can one discern so much as the literary individuality of the authors. In consonance with Medieval views, they were probably felt to be merely continuators, or elaborators, of a legendary tradition. Thus, to illustrate by a very clear case: A Gothic lay about the death of Hamthir and Sorli is known to have existed already in the Sixth Century. So the person who indited or, perhaps, trans-

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<sup>6</sup>As in *H.H.v.* and *Sigrdr.*—Such remarks as 'that was the belief in olden times', *H.H.II* end, and similarly in *Fáfn.* after 1; and the tenor of the Concluding Prose of *Brot*, certainly do not point to contemporaneity of composition!

lated, or possibly, added to, such a song could not well lay claim to be an 'inventor' and hence, worthy of being remembered. Skaldic art, on the other hand, may also deal with myth and legendary lore; but, note well, only to drive home a personal point, and subjectively. Hence, there the author is faithfully recorded if we owe him but a single stanza: just as was the troubadour and the minnesinger.

Thus it is that we are entirely dependent on internal evidence for the determination of the age and the origin of the Eddic poems, individually and collectively. And here, experience has taught that we must sharply differentiate between the subject matter of the poems and the form in which they have been handed down to us. Failure to do so was responsible for fantastic theories—such as the uncritical notions of the Renaissance, that they harked back to the Old Germanic songs in praise of the gods Tuisco and Manus, or else to the *barditus*, as Tacitus calls the terrifying war-songs of the ancient Teutons, and the speculations of the Age of Romanticism which claimed the Eddic poems as the earliest emanations of the Spirit of the Germanic North, if not of all German tribes, and would date them variously from the Fifth to the Eighth Century.

It was not until the latter third of the Nineteenth Century, when the necessary advances in linguistic knowledge and philological method had been made, that it was established beyond contradiction that the Eddic poems have West Norse speech forms; that is, are composed in the language that was spoken only during the Viking Age and after in Norway, Iceland, and the other Norwegian colonies in the Atlantic, and hence, in their present form, could have originated only there. In the second place, they can under no circumstance be older than about 700 A. D.—most of them are much later—because it has been shown experimentally that the introduction of Older (Runic) forms of Old Norse would largely destroy the metric structure. This date *a quo* is admirably corroborated by comparison with the language of the oldest Skaldic poems, whose age is definitely known.

Then, more general considerations make it plausible that even the oldest of the lays could hardly have originated before the Ninth Century. As to the Heroic lays, precisely those which also otherwise appear to be the oldest, breathe the enterprising, warlike spirit of the Viking Age with its stern fatalism; while the later ones as unmistakably betray the softening which one would expect from the Christian influences increasingly permeating that Age. And the Mythical lays, by and large, speak of a period when belief in the old gods was disintegrating thanks to contact with the same influences. In particular, the 'Seeress' Prophecy' reads like the troubled vision of one rooted in the ancient traditions who is sorrowfully contemplating the demoralization of his times (which we know a change of faith always entails) and who doubtfully looks to a better future.

There is also the testimony of legendary development. To touch on only one phase of the matter: we do not know when the Volsung and Nibelung legends were first carried to Norway; but sparing allusions in the oldest Skaldic verses from the early Ninth Century would point to the Seventh or Eighth Century, thus allowing several generations for the complete assimilation and characteristic Northern transformation of the material. Some lays, indeed, show traits of a legendary development which had not taken place in Germany before the Ninth Century—in other words, presuppose another, later, stratum of importation.

As a whole, the Heroic lays belong to a somewhat later period than the Mythical lays beginning, say, with the Tenth and reaching into the Eleventh or, for some, even the Twelfth Century. To sum up: though there is little unanimity among scholars as to the dating of individual lays, the composition of the corpus of Eddic poetry may safely be said to be, not the product of a single generation, or even a century, but of three or four centuries at the very least.

Intimately connected with the question of the date is that of the home, of Eddic poetry. There is fair agreement about only two poems, viz. the 'Lay of Atli', which is generally allowed to be of Greenlandish origin, and the 'Prophecy of Grípir', which no doubt was composed by an Icelander of the Twelfth Century or later who had the entire collection before him. But concerning the bulk of the lays there exists a strong diversity of opinion.

For one thing, the evidence of language is unavailing, for the Old West Norse of the Edda was spoken with scarcely a dialectal variation throughout the far-flung lands of the North Atlantic litorals and archipelagoes.—Again, all attempts to seek definite and convincing clues in climatic or topographic references, or in the fauna and flora mentioned in the poems have proved vain. Did they originate in the motherland, Norway; or in Iceland; or in the British or North Atlantic islands?

Those who claim the bulk of the Eddic poems for Norway have contended that the related Skaldic poetry, established since of old, flourished there especially throughout the Tenth Century, favored by a period of comparative calm following the organization of the realm by Harold Hair-fair; whereas Iceland, from its first settlement down to the beginning of the Eleventh Century was in a condition of constant turmoil which could not have favored the rise of a body of literature like that of the Edda. Undeniably, Norway furnishes the cultural background for the *Weltanschauung* of nearly all of the poems, both mythologic, gnostic, and heroic. In every respect their milieu is that of a cold, mountainous land by the sea. One lay, the 'Lay of Hyndla', directly refers to a Norwegian princely race; another, the 'Lay of Ríg', glorifies the institution of monarchy based on an aristocracy; both poems but poorly agreeing with Icelandic, republican, conditions.

The theory of origin in the British Islands settled by Norwegians—the Orkneys, the Hebrides, Man, and the litoral of Ireland, Scotland and Northern England, is based

on the following considerations. These regions furnish precisely the stage where the rude Vikings first came in contact with the cultural conditions of a more advanced kind already deeply infused with Roman and Christian elements. Indeed, Celtic influences are undeniable in the apparel, the architecture, the wood-carving, of Scandinavia. In literature, the type-form of the saga, possibly even Skaldic verse-art, seem to owe their inception to Irish models. A number of both mythical and heroic motifs occurring in the Edda and the sagas are demonstrably Celtic. And some Anglo-Celtic loanwords and idioms in the Edda point in the same direction.

Those who argue Icelandic origin—and they seem to the present writer to have the best of the argument—admit that Anglo-Celtic influences are evident, but insist that this can amply be accounted for by the fact that a very large proportion of Icelandic settlers had come from Norway by way of the North British Islands and littoral where they had sojourned for a shorter or longer time, frequently even wintering, and whence they had brought with them a goodly number of Celtic slaves and freedmen. Again, on their return journeys to the motherland they frequently touched at the North British, and especially Irish, trading towns, interchanging goods and ideas. As to the milieu being that of a cold, mountainous land, this holds of course also for Iceland. There, the general state of unrest attending the first times was by no means unfavorable to the intense cultivation of the Skaldic art—witness such poets as Egil Skallagrímsson, Hallfróeth Óttarsson (*vandræðaskáld*), Sighvat Thórtharson, not to mention scores of others—and hence probably neither to conditions for the inditing of Eddic lays. The first families of Iceland were notably proud of their origin from the princely races of the motherland—whence the aristocratic note of some lays—as indeed the whole people clung to their cultural traditions all the more tenaciously for being separated from it. In general, the defenders of Icelandic origin would put the



burden of proof on those who contend that the Eddic lays did not take their final shape, at least, in the land where arose, and where was perpetuated, virtually all of Old Norse literature. This does not preclude a number, particularly of gnomic, stanzas representing the stored wisdom of the race, from having originated in Norway.

One of the distinguishing features of Eddic, as against Skaldic, poetry consists in its comparative simplicity of style and diction. This is true notwithstanding the fact that we have to deal with poems composed by different poets working centuries apart, and differing in subject matter and structure. Essentially, this style is akin to that of the alliterative poetry of the other Old Germanic tribes, especially in the use of 'kennings' and the retarding epic devices of 'variation' and parenthetical exclamations. It is to the rather more extensive employment of these stylistic features that Old Norse poetry owes its peculiar physiognomy which, in Skaldic art, frequently becomes a caricature.

The figure of speech called 'kenning' is a kind of condensed metaphorical expression. It most often contains a real, or implied, comparison; or else defines a conception with reference to something else. Thus, a ship (which may be thought of as galloping over the waves) is called 'sail-steed'; a warrior, 'helm-tree' because, helm-clad, he stands proudly erect like a tree, braving the 'shower-of-arrows' (as the battle is designated for obvious reasons).—Instead of naming a person or object directly, there is a reference to somebody, or something, else. Thór, e.g. is called, simply, 'Sif's husband' or 'Hrungnir's bane', or in allusion to his typical activity, 'Breaker-of-thurs-heads'. Similarly, blood is termed 'dew-of-wounds' or 'dew-of-sorrow';<sup>7</sup> gold, 'the burthen-of-Grani' (Sigurth's steed which bears away the Niflung hoard); a prince, most often 'breaker-of-rings', 'reddener-of-swords', or similarly, with reference to the

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. Tennyson's 'drops of onset';

two qualities most highly admired in rulers—generosity and bravery.

Figures like these are common to the poetic speech of all races and all times. The important difference is that whereas elsewhere they are coined *ad hoc*, as the situation demands, and struck in the heat of poetical fervor,<sup>8</sup> in Old Germanic, and particularly Old Norse, poetry they have become stereotype; that is, entirely independent of the situation in hand, and hence are apt to appear to us far-fetched and frigid, at first, until by longer acquaintance we arrive at the deeper insight that they are part and parcel of a 'style', like the ever-recurring 'dragon motif' of Scandinavian carvings.

In Skaldic poetry the systematic and unlimited use of kennings marks that style of composition off from anything known elsewhere in world literature. Only two Eddic lays, the 'Lay of Hymir' and the 'First Lay of Helgi Hundingsbani' show a frequency of kennings approaching from afar Skaldic usage. In the 'Lay of Alvís' it is the express didactic purpose to cultivate copiousness of diction by enumerating the 'unknown names' and kennings by which common objects may be designated.

Somewhat less prominently, 'variation' or parallelism, is a stylistic device characteristic of all Old Germanic poetry—as it is, indeed, of the poetry of many nations. Only the more important features will be enumerated here, especially such as come out clearly in a somewhat faithful rendering. There is variation of words, of conceptions, of verses; and refrain.

The repetition of words, or synonymic variation, more particularly found in gnomic poetry, is on the whole not frequent in the Edda. The following stanza will furnish an example:

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<sup>8</sup>Or else, at most, used as *epitheta ornantia*; such as Homer's γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη—essentially a kenning, too.





'half-line' there are four or five syllables, very rarely three, two of which are stressed, the position of stress depending on the natural sentence accent. The rhythmical stress generally requires a long syllable, when it is conventionally represented thus: —'. However, it may also be borne by two short syllables ('resolved stress'), thus: ʊ'ʊ; for instance: a *sal'ar stéina* which may be paralleled by 'that et'ins beer'hall';<sup>14</sup> or else by one short syllable immediately following a stressed long syllable, thus: —'|ʊ', (especially in type C), e.g. *mun Bálðr kóma*.<sup>15</sup>—In the unstressed syllable, quantity is indifferent, marked thus: x.

The juxtaposition of two stresses, without intervening unstressed syllable, so offensive to the modern ear, is not only permitted but a distinctive feature, in Old Germanic poetry. It gives rise to types C and D (see below), where a strong primary, or secondary, stress may fall on important suffixal or compositional syllables, and stem syllables of the second member of compounds, e.g. *es hann váknáði, hétimbrúðu*. The following may serve as English examples: 'The sún knéw not', 'a háll stándeth', 'till trústíngly'.<sup>16</sup>

Always, two half-lines, each an independent rhythmic unit, are joined together by alliteration to form the 'lóng-line'. Alliteration, or initial rime, consists in initial consonants 'alliterating', or riming, with the same consonant (but *sk, sp st* only with themselves), and a vowel alliterating with any other vowel; but, note well, only when occurring at the beginning of stressed syllables. As the verse is addressed to hearers, not to readers, 'eye-rimes' are not permitted. Again, only syntactically stressed syllables may bear the alliteration.

In Old Norse, alliterating initial sounds are called *stafir* 'staves', the one of the second half-line, *hofuðstafr* 'main-stave', as governing the whole line. Somewhat greater

<sup>14</sup>*Vsp.* 4; 30.—In order to avoid confusion, the accents marking length in the Old Norse are omitted in the following examples.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.* 54.

<sup>16</sup>*brym.* 1, *Vsp.* 7, 5, 31; *Hym.* 4 in the order mentioned.

latitude than in Anglo-Saxon is allowed in Old Norse in the matter of this 'main-stave' falling only on the first stress of the second half-line. In the first half-line, either stress, or both—they are called *stuðlar* 'props'—may receive the alliteration.

With regard to the rhythmical structure of the half-line, certain fundamental types, five in number, seem to have been adhered to in all Old Germanic poetry—unconsciously, no doubt. These (Sievers) types<sup>17</sup> are as follows:

Type A:                    -' X | -' X  
 example: *Geýr nu Gármr mjök* (= 'Gárm bays loudly').

Type B:                    X -' | X -'  
 example: *hann sjáldan sítr* (= 'he séldom síts').

Type C:                    X -' | ú X  
 example: *mun Bálðr kóma* (= 'will Bálðr cóme then').

Type D:                    -' | -' \- X  
 example: *mégr Hlóðynjar*; cf. 'the weáther wóe-brínging'.

Type E:                    -' \- X | -'  
 example: *gínnheílug góð*; cf. 'sundered are shields',<sup>18</sup>

In other words, of the six possible mutations of four elements, but one is not admissible, viz. the one with a purely rising inflection. And this is just what we should expect in the spontaneously developed metre of a language group having strong recessive accent.

<sup>17</sup>It cannot, of course, be the purpose here to go into detail as to sub-types, etc.

<sup>18</sup>In order: *Vsp.* 50, 18, 54, 47&33, 6&37.

A stanza of eight half-lines all following one or the other of these types is said to be in *fornyrðislag* or 'Old Lore Metre'. This is the measure in which the great majority of Eddic poems are composed.<sup>19</sup>

In the closely related *málahátt* or 'Speech Metre (?)' essentially the same types occur, expanded however to structures of from five to seven syllables. The effect is one of heavy stateliness. Only one poem, the Greenlandish 'Lay of Atli', shows this measure in its purity, whereas the 'Lay of Atli' and the 'Lay of Hamthir' contain a considerable admixture of 'Old Lore' lines.

The measure called *ljóðahátt* or 'Song Metre' is a stanzaic form consisting of two symmetrical half-stanzas, each of which again is made up of the usual *fornyrðislag* long-line followed by a so-called 'full-line' without *cæsura* and, as far as can be made out, definite structure, which alliterates in itself.<sup>20</sup> The number of syllables in this full-line may vary from four to eight, and the alliteration may fall on two or three of the stressed syllables. About one-third of the corpus of Eddic poems, mostly of gnomic contents, follow this scheme.<sup>21</sup>

The 'Lay of Harbarth' follows no ascertainable scheme but seems to differ from prose only by a certain rhythm and the general use of alliteration.

In view of the utter difference from any modern scheme of versification, an adequate comprehension of the principles of Old Germanic verse technique is essential for the correct reading and understanding, nay, for entering at all into the spirit, of Old Germanic poetry. It is hoped that the reader will acquaint himself with the facts above

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<sup>19</sup>*Vsp. Hym. þrym., Bdr., Ríg., Hynd., Vol., most of H.Hv., H.H. I and II, Gríp., part of Reg. and of Fáf., Brot, Guð. I-III, Sgkv., Hel., Od., Guð. hv., Grot.*

<sup>20</sup>As to the *galdralag*, cf. p. xxiii.

<sup>21</sup>(Most of) *H Óv., Vaf., Grímn., Skírn., Lok., Alv.,* (part of) *H.Hv.,* (most of) *Reg. and of Fáf., Sigrdr., Svip.,* and parts of other lays.

set forth before attempting to recite Eddic lays—as, indeed, he should do; for they are meant for the ear, not the eye.

In doing so it should ever be kept in mind that the strongly expiratory nature of Germanic verse demands very strongly stressed, and correspondingly weak or slurred unstressed, syllables. Juxtaposed stresses must by no means be avoided. We must ever be on the alert, guided by the alliteration, to ascertain which words or syllables bear the main stress and are, hence, syntactically predominant. Thus e.g. we must be careful not to read ‘whó made Míthgarth’, but ‘who máde Míthgarth’.

The translator has endeavored to follow faithfully the rules of Eddic metrics above explained—at least in spirit. Naturally, in an analytic tongue like English many more particles, pronouns, prepositions, must be used than in the highly inflected Old Norse. A liberal use of anacrusis (*Auftakt*) cannot well be avoided to dispose of them, swelling the number of syllables countenanced by the original. This should not, however, interfere with reading half-lines of the same metre in about the same time. Thus, ‘much that is hóarded and hídden’ should not occupy more time than the following line ‘eke the hálls of Dánþ’.<sup>22</sup>

As the specialist will recognize, Gering’s text has been followed (but by no means always); because, for the purpose in hand, a constructive text is called for—one not fatuously sceptic of the results won by a century of devoted study. I can see no harm in adopting the brilliant emendations of great scholars, some of them guided by the poet’s insight in solving desperate textual problems, always providing they be shown as such.<sup>23</sup> In fact, this course must

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<sup>22</sup>*Akv.* 5.

<sup>23</sup>Interpolations are put into brackets [ . . . ], emendations etc. into parentheses ( . . . ).



be chosen to accomplish an æsthetically satisfying translation of poems which, at best, are strange and difficult for the modern reader, both as to matter and manner. Naturally, not all, or even most, changes could be so indicated. Nor is that called for in a work intended, not as a critical text, but as an interpretation for the student of literature, of folklore and folkways. Still I have thought it wise to give warning whenever the terms of the translation might give rise to misconceptions.

I hope I shall not be criticised for confining myself to the poems generally considered as comprising the Poetic Edda. I am, of course, aware of the existence of other lays fully deserving to be admitted to the corpus—indeed, it is my hope to include these in a future publication; but neither in this respect nor in the ordering of the material was it my intention to rival Genzmer-Heusler's *rifacimento*.

As to the principles which I have endeavored to follow, I may be permitted to quote from my program 'Concerning a Proposed Translation of the Edda':<sup>24</sup> “. . . while scouting any rigorously puristic ideas, I yet hold emphatically that, to give a fair equivalent, Germanic material must be drawn upon to the utmost extent, and later elements used most sparingly and only whenever indispensable or unavoidable, and even then only after anxiously considering whether consonant with the effect of the whole. The stylistic feeling of the translator must here be the court of last instance; . . . At the same time I do not mean to be squeamish and avoid a given word just because it is not found in Anglo-Saxon before the battle of Hastings, or because I have preconceived notions about the relative merit of Teutonic and French-Latin elements. Any one who has given the matter thought knows that no amount of linguistic contortions will furnish Germanic equivalents in English for such oft-recurring words as: battle, hero, glory, revenge, defeat, victory, peace, honor, and the like. Still, wherever possible, Germanic words ought to be chosen . . .

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<sup>24</sup>*Scandinavian Studies and Notes*, V 197f.

because of the tang and flavor still residing in the homelier indigenous speech material . . .

“Another difficulty: the old Germanic poetry, however scant in content, and in however narrow a circle it moves, is phenomenally rich in vocabulary, and shines with a dazzling array of synonyms for one and the same conception. Scherer has shown how this state of affairs was brought about by the very principle of alliteration, and in its turn finally gave rise to the empty verbiage and jingling of Skaldic poetry, where sense is drowned in a flood of *heiti* and *kennings*. The Edda shows almost all stages in this development short of the final consummation, from the austere art of the *Völundarkviða* to the ornate art of the *Hymiskviða*. It stands to reason that, to approach this wealth even from afar, and to avoid the overhanging danger of monotony, all the resources of the English vocabulary ought to be at one’s disposal. I have, therefore unhesitatingly had recourse, whenever necessary, to terms fairly common in English balladry; without, I hope, overloading the page with archaisms.

“The proper rendition of Old Norse proper names presents a knotty problem to the would-be translator. Shall he translate them all, to the best of his knowledge—and that is a difficult task; or some only, and if so which? Or shall he leave all untranslated—much the easiest course. Or shall he try to render only those parts of proper nouns which are of more general significance? E.g., shall he call the dwarf, *Alvís* or *Allwise*; *Thór*, *Síthgrani’s* son or *Long-beard’s* son; the seeress, *Hyndla* or *Houndling*; the localities *Gnipalund* and *Hátún*, *Cliffholt* and *Hightown*? Shall we say *Alfheim*, *Elfham*, or *Alf-home*? Are we to render *Skioldungar*, *Ylfingar* by *Shieldings* and *Wolfings*? I do not desist to say that on the translator’s tact and skill in meeting this problem—for dodge it he cannot—will depend in large measure the artistic merit of his work and its modicum of palatableness to the modern reader.” For this reason, absolute consistency in this respect was not striven for or even thought desirable.

The printing of this volume was made possible only through the generosity of the Regents of the University of Texas, on recommendation of the Publication Committees, and with the active furtherance of President Benedict. Their support is very gratefully acknowledged. To my friend, Professor William Ellery Leonard of the University of Wisconsin, I owe more than he himself may be aware of.



## THE PROPHECY OF THE SEERESS

### *Völuspǫl*

The poem referred to in the Prose Edda of Snorri as *Völuspǫl*<sup>1a</sup> significantly occupies first place in the *Codex Regius* collection of Eddic songs. It was probably felt to be the most comprehensive and representative of them all, at the same time furnishing a kind of philosophic introduction to Norse cosmogony, and embodying the outlook of thoughtful heathen of the later Viking Age. It makes a similar appeal now: notwithstanding the deplorable condition of the poem as handed down it thrills us as vision after vision of a Norse apocalypse rises before us, of the fates of gods and powers of the eld—the past and future of the world. Norse terseness, at its best here, accomplishes a triumph in condensing a world of meaning into narrowest compass. A certain stern ethical pathos in some passages is consonant to the sombre tone of the whole.

None of the Eddic poems has been a greater theme for controversy; which is not to be wondered at, seeing the condition of the text, with its vague outlines, the hopeless confusion of statement—even beyond the inevitable self-contradictions of any primitive cosmogony—the puzzling gaps, the abrupt transitions, the obscure allusions—all of which makes elaborate comments indispensable to the understanding. Indeed, there is little agreement among scholars on the fundamental points of the purpose and the structure of the poem.

Óðin, it seems, has summoned the seeress from her grave to appear before the assembled gods. To legitimate herself, she tells of first-created things, and

In the beginning how the heavens and earth

Rose out of Chaos—

how man was given the breath of life. A golden age of innocence (among the gods) ends with the coming of the Norns (the Fates) and the (ill-understood) slaying of Gullveig, a Pandora-like figure sent to the *Æsir* by the *Vanir*, an older race of gods. A war between these powers results disastrously for the *Æsir* whose battlements are laid low. In their rebuilding, broken oaths embroil the (now united?) gods with the world of giants, representative of brute force and darkness. Baldr, god of light, is slain, and evil enters into the world. Then, with strokes of tremendous dramatic power, the 'doom of the gods' is foretold, the breaking

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<sup>1a</sup>*Vala*, gen. *vǫlu*, 'seeress'; *spǫl* 'prophecy'.

loose of all the powers of destruction, and the cataclysmic end of the old world. Out of its ruins, a new world is born in which Baldr and other benign gods will establish a reign of justice and peace.

In the concluding lines, some scholars have seen an adumbration of the coming of Christ, and traces of Christianity in the poem as a whole; but at present the best scholarship would declare as an interpolation (because at variance with the prevailing spirit of the poem) the very passages on which such an inference could be based.

However, this does not preclude a general acquaintance with the fundamental concepts of Christianity such as pervaded the North in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries—times when its imagination was stimulated vigorously through the multifarious activities of the ‘Viking Age’. A study of the language and versification (*fornyrðislag*) of the poem has led to similar conclusions. For all that, much of the matter of the poem may be of considerably earlier date.

The *Völuspá* is found in the *Codex Regius* and in the *Hauksbook*. The latter version, though on the whole inferior to that of *Cod. Reg.*, has a better text sometimes. Besides, we have the paraphrase in the *Snorra Edda* which also quotes, in part or in full, nearly half of the stanzas, some in variant versions.

1. Hear me, all ye hallowed beings,  
both high and low of Heimdall’s children:<sup>1</sup>  
thou wilt, Valfather,<sup>2</sup> that I well set forth  
the foremost fates which befall the world.
  
2. I call to mind the kin of etins  
which in times long gone did give me life.  
Nine worlds I know, the nine abodes  
of the wondrous world-tree,<sup>3</sup> the welkin be-  
neath.

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<sup>1</sup>According to the Lay of Ríg, the god Heimdall (Ríg) was the progenitor of the three estates of slaves, freemen and nobles.—Heimdall ‘the Brightly Shining’ (?) is the warder of the gods. ‘Hallowed beings’ probably refers more specially to the gods.

<sup>2</sup>‘The Father of the Battle-slain’ (Óðin), who are gathered into Valholl; cf. *Grímn.* 8.

<sup>3</sup>The ash-tree Yggdrasil; see 11. 19, and *Grímn.* 25f. It is not certain to what the number nine has reference.















27. A captive lies in the kettle-grove,<sup>39</sup>  
 like to lawless Loki in shape,<sup>40</sup>  
 there sits Sigyn, full sad in mind,  
 by her fettered mate: know ye further, or  
 how?
28. There flows from the east,<sup>41</sup> through fester-  
 dales,  
 a stream hight Slíth,<sup>42</sup> filled with swords and  
 knives.
29. <sup>43</sup>Waist-deep wade there through waters swift  
 mainsworn men and murderous,  
 eke those who betrayed a trusted friend's wife;  
 there gnaws Níthhogg<sup>44</sup> naked corpses,  
 there the Wolf<sup>45</sup> rends men —wit ye more, or  
 how?
30. Stood in the north on the Nitha-fields<sup>46</sup>  
 a dwelling golden which the dwarves did own;  
 an other stood on Ókólnir,<sup>47</sup>  
 that etin's beer-hall who is Brimir hight.

<sup>39</sup>I.e. the grove about hot springs (?).

<sup>40</sup>That is, Loki 'The Ender' (?) himself.—Instead of these lines, the *Hauksbook* has the following:

With meshes mighty made the gods then  
 girding fetters out of Váli's guts.

This Váli (not to be confused with Óthin's son, 25) was a son of Loki. The gods transformed him into a wolf.

<sup>41</sup>The east is the home of the frost-giants: from the point of view of the Norwegians of the western coast who had in mind the snowy mountain wastes of the interior.

<sup>42</sup>'The Frightful'. It is 'poisonous' and 'cutting' with cold.

<sup>43</sup>This stanza is transposed from its position in the original where it follows 31.

<sup>44</sup>'The Dastardly Hewing', a dragon. Cf. the last stanza of the poem, and *Grimn.* 32, 35.

<sup>45</sup>The Fenris-wolf; cf. notes on 32.

<sup>46</sup>'The Dark Fields'. The stanza evidently is interpolated, perhaps from some other poem, because of its analogy to the following one.

<sup>47</sup>'Ever-Cold' (?).

31. A hall standeth, from the sun so far,  
 on Ná-strand's<sup>48</sup> shore: turn north<sup>49</sup> its doors;  
 drops of poison drip through the louver,  
 its walls are clad with coiling snakes.
32. In the east sat the old one,<sup>50</sup> in the Iron-  
 wood,<sup>51</sup>  
 bred there the bad brood of Fenrir;<sup>52</sup>  
 will one of these, worse than they all,  
 the sun swallow, in seeming a wolf.
33. He feeds on the flesh of fallen men,  
 with their blood sullies the seats of the gods;  
 will grow swart the sunshine<sup>53</sup> in summers  
 thereafter,  
 the weather woe-bringing: do ye wit more,  
 or how?
34. His harp striking, on hill there sat  
 gladsome Eggthér,<sup>54</sup> he who guards the ogress;  
 o'er him gaily in the gallows-tree  
 crowed the fair-red cock which is Fialar<sup>55</sup> hight.
35. Crowed o'er the gods Gullinkambi;<sup>56</sup>  
 wakes he the heroes with Herian who dwell;  
 another crows the earth beneath  
 in the halls of Hel, of hue dark red.

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<sup>48</sup>The Strand of the Dead', where Hel's hall stands.

<sup>49</sup>The direction of evil omen; cf. *Ríg.* 26.

<sup>50</sup>Probably, the giantess Angrbrotha, about whom cf. note below.

<sup>51</sup>This is the typical name for an old and monster-infested forest.

<sup>52</sup>Or Fenris-Wolf: a mythical wolf engendered by Loki with the giantess Angrbrotha 'Boder of Ill'; cf. above and *Hynd.* 42. Others of this brood are Skoll and Hati, of whom the former will swallow the sun, the latter, the moon (*Grimn.* 39), and Garm, 36.

<sup>53</sup>Blood-red sunsets, dim sunshine, and famine years presage the end of the world; cf. *Vaf.* 44.

<sup>54</sup>'Servant of the Sword', the husband of the ogress (?).

<sup>55</sup>'Multiscient'. He wakes the giants to the last combat.

<sup>56</sup>'Golden-comb'.

36. <sup>57</sup>Garm bays loudly                    before Gnipa cave,  
tears him free Fenrir                    and fares to battle.  
The fates I fathom,                    yet farther I see:  
of the mighty gods                    the engulfing doom.
37. Brothers will battle                    to bloody end,  
and sisters' sons                    their sib betray;  
woe's in the world,                    much wantonness;  
[axe-age, sword-age—                    sundered are shields—  
wind-age, wolf-age,                    ere the world crumbles;]  
will the spear of no man                    spare his brother.<sup>58</sup>
38. Mímir's sons dance;<sup>59</sup>                    the doom doth break  
when blares the gleaming                    old Giallar-horn;<sup>60</sup>  
loud blows Heimdall,                    the horn is aloft,  
in Hel's dark hall                    horror spreadeth.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>He is the *Κέρβερος* of Hel, cf. *Bdr.* 2. This portent, together with the following lines, is repeated as a refrain.

<sup>58</sup>The breaking down of all moral laws forewarns of the end of the world.—The bracketed lines elaborating this conception of an 'Iron Age' are generally thought to be interpolated. It is interesting to compare Ovid's description, *Metamorphoses* I. 141f:

*Jamque nocens ferrum, ferro nocentius aurum  
prodieret . . . non hospes ab hospite tutus,  
non socer a genero; fratrum quoque gratia rara est.  
imminet exitio vir conjugis, illa mariti . . .*

<sup>59</sup>According to Müllenhoff's thoughtful (but not generally accepted) explanation the sons of Mímir are the brooks and rivers which betray the general unrest in nature by overflowing their banks and spreading chaos.

<sup>60</sup>'The Loud Horn', in possession of Heimdall; cf. 19.

<sup>61</sup>Line 4 is put here, instead of line 3 of 39, following Much.













# THE SAYINGS OF HOR<sup>1</sup>

## *Hévamél*

This, the longest of the Eddic poems, is largely didactic in nature. Here, more abundantly than in any other monument, do we find that homely wisdom, that sternly realistic view of life, those not ignoble ethical conceptions, which find such classic illustration in the Icelandic sagas.

At least five separate portions can be made out.

The first, consisting of 79 stanzas (in *ljóðaháttr*), is a series of counsels on the more common relations of life. They stress especially the laws of hospitality, the rules of decent conduct, circumspection in one's dealing with men, moderation in eating and drinking, the vanity of mere wealth as against true merit—all in the spirit of Germanic heathendom, with with many a pearl of shrewd wisdom, of terse humor, of noble sentiment. We may single out for admiration the deeply felt stanzas on having a home of one's own, however humble (36, 37), and those magnificently asseverating the lastingness, in a world subject to the law of change, of a fair name (77,78).

The ensuing stanzas (80-90) are of irregular structure and more largely proverbial in substance. They form the transition to the so-called Ensamples of Óthin (91-110, in *ljóðaháttr*) which deal in a frankly cynical spirit with man's relation to woman; in particular, with woman's inconstancy and treachery, but also with her gullibility, as instanced by the two love adventures of Óthin, told in the first person.

Without any connection there follows the so-called 'Lay of Loddfáfnir' (111-138, for the most part in irregular *ljóðaháttr*). It contains miscellaneous counsels on love, friendship, etc., purporting to have been given to the 'thul'<sup>1a</sup> Loddfáfnir by Óthin himself. As a whole, this portion is notably inferior to the first.

A fourth part, the so-called Rune Poem, composed of somewhat incoherent stanzaic forms, deals obscurely with Runic wisdom as acquired and taught by Óthin.

Last, there are 18 magic *vísur* (stanzas) efficient to dull swords, cure disease, calm the sea etc., if used with the proper 'runes'. We

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<sup>1</sup>Óthin. Etymologically, 'the One-Eyed', but interpreted already by Snorri (*Gylfag.* chap. 2) as 'the Exalted'.

<sup>1a</sup>'Sage, bard, spokesman' (Ags. *pyle*).



5. Of his wit hath need            who widely fareth—  
    a dull wit will do at home;  
 a laughing-stock he            who lacketh words  
    among smart wits when he sits.
6. To be bright of brain            let no man boast,  
    but take good heed of his tongue:  
 the sage and silent            come seldom to grief  
    as they fare among folk in the hall.  
 [More faithful friend            findest thou never  
    than shrewd head on thy shoulders.]<sup>4</sup>
7. The wary guest            to wassail who cometh  
    listeneth that he may learn,  
 openeth his ears,            casts his eyes about:  
    thus wards him the wise man 'gainst harm.
8. Happy is he            who hath won him  
    the love and liking of all;  
 for hard it is            one's help to seek  
    from the mind of another man.<sup>5</sup>
9. Happy is he            who hath won him  
    both winning ways and wisdom;  
 for ill led is oft            who asketh help  
    from the wit and words of another.
10. Better burden            bearest thou nowise  
    than shrewd head on thy shoulders;  
 in good stead will it stand            among stranger  
    folk,  
 and shield when unsheltered thou art.
11. Better burden            bearest thou nowise  
    than shrewd head on thy shoulders;  
 but with worsen food            farest thou never  
    than an overmuch of mead.

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<sup>4</sup>Probably a later addition; cf. 10, 11.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. 9, which seems a variant.







findeth he then,            when to thing<sup>9</sup> he cometh,  
    few spokesmen to speed his cause.

26. The unwise man            weens him all-knowing,  
    since from harm he is far at home;  
 but knows not ever            what answer to make  
    when others ask him aught.

27. The unwise man            among others who cometh,  
    let him be sparing of speech;  
 for no one knoweth            that naught is in him,  
    but he open his mouth too much.

28. Clever is he            who is keen to ask,  
    and eke to answer, all men;  
 'tis hard to hide            from the hearing of men  
    what is on every one's lips.

29. Much at random            oft rambleth he  
    whose tongue doth ever tattle;  
 a talker's tongue,            unless tamed it be,  
    will often work him woe.

30. No mock make thou            of any man,  
    at a drinking bout though it be;  
 he knowing weens him            whom no one hath  
    asked,  
    and dry-shod hies him home.<sup>10</sup>

31. A wise man he            who hies him betimes  
    from the man whom he has mocked;  
 for at table who teases            can never tell  
    what foe he may have to fight.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup>The assembly.

<sup>10</sup>Literally, 'remains with his skin dry'—having escaped a shower.  
 For the meaning, cf. 26.

<sup>11</sup>I.e. what new foe, made over the cups; cf. 29, 32.

32. Many a man meaneth no ill,  
yet teases the other at table;  
strife will ever start among men  
when guest clashes with guest.
33. An early meal aye a man should get him,  
lest famished he come to the feast:  
he sits and stuffs as though starved he were,  
and naught he says to his neighbors.
34. To false friend aye a far way 'tis,  
though his roof be reared by the road;  
to stanch friend aye a straight way leadeth,  
though far he have fared from thee.
35. Get thee gone betimes; a guest should not  
stay too long in one stead;  
lief groweth loath if too long one sitteth  
on bench, though in he was bidden.
36. One's home is best though a hut it be:  
there a man is master and lord;  
though but two goats thine and a thatched  
roof,  
'tis far better than beg.
37. One's home is best though a hut it be:  
there a man is master and lord;  
his heart doth bleed who has to beg  
the meat for his every meal.
38. From his weapons away no one should ever  
stir one step on the field;  
for no one knoweth when need might have  
on a sudden a man of his sword.







59. Betimes must rise            who few reapers has,  
    and see to the work himself;  
 much will miss            in the morn who sleeps:  
    for the brisk the race is half-run.
60. What lathes and logs            will last him out,  
    a man may reckon aright,  
 and of wood to warm him            how much he may  
    want  
    for many a winter month.<sup>20</sup>
61. Well-groomed and washed            wend to the thing,  
    though thy clothes be not the best;  
 of thy shoes and breeks            be not ashamed,  
    and still less of thy steed.
62. With lowered head sweeps,            to the sea when  
    he comes,  
    the eagle o'er the ocean-stream;  
 thus eke a man            among a throng  
    who finds but few to befriend him.<sup>21</sup>
63. Both ask and answer            let every one  
    who wishes to be deemed wise;  
 let one know it,            nor none other:  
    if three know, thousands will.
64. A wise man will not            overweening be,  
    and stake too much on his strength;  
 when the mighty are met            to match their  
    thews,  
    'twill be found that first is no one.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup>One misses a stanza here telling of what man *cannot* forearm against.

<sup>21</sup>I.e. he walks about anxiously, trying to find some one he may know or seek a favor from, like the vulture peering for his prey.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. *Fáfn.* 17.

65. (Watchful and wary every one should be,  
nor put too much trust in a friend;)<sup>23</sup>  
his reckless words, rashly uttered,  
have undone oft a doughty man.
66. Too late by far to some feasts I came;  
to others, all too soon;  
the beer was drunk, or yet unbrewed:  
never hits it the hated one right.
67. Here or there would they have me in,  
if no meat at the meal I craved,  
or hanged two hams in my good friend's  
home,  
after eating one of his own.
68. A bonny fire is a blessing to man,  
and eke the sight of the sun,  
his hearty health, if he holds it well,  
and to live one's life without shame.
69. All undone is no one though dreary his fate:  
some with good sons are blessed,  
and some with kinsmen, or with coffers full,  
and some with deeds well-done.
70. Better alive (than lifeless be):<sup>24</sup>  
to the quick fall aye the cattle;  
the hearthfire burned for the happy heir,—  
out-doors a dead man lay.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup>Supplied after the *Paper Manuscripts*.

<sup>24</sup>Rask's emendation.

<sup>25</sup>The meaning is, probably: however miserable (cf. 69), life is preferable to death. Some good fortune may always befall one; but once dead and 'outdoors', no warm fire will cheer one—but only the 'laughing heir'.





77. Cattle die            and kinsmen die,  
                                 thysself eke soon wilt die;  
 but fair fame            will fade never,  
                                 I ween, for him who wins it.
78. Cattle die            and kinsmen die,  
                                 thysself eke soon wilt die;  
 but one thing, I ween,            will wither never:  
                                 the doom over each one dead.
79. The unwise man            who calleth his own  
                                 wealth or the love of a woman—  
 his overweening waxeth            but his wit never,—  
                                 he haughtily hardens his heart.

\* \* \* \*

80. <sup>29</sup>'Tis readily found            if the runes thou ask,  
                                 made by mighty gods,  
                                 known to holy hosts,  
                                 and dyed deep red by Óthin:<sup>30</sup>  
                                 that least said is soonest mended.
81. At eve praise the day,            when burned down, a  
   torch,<sup>31</sup>  
 a wife when wedded,            a weapon when tried,  
 ice when over it,            ale when 'tis drunk.
82. Fell wood in the wind,<sup>32</sup>            in fair weather row  
   out,  
 dally with girls in the dark—the day's eyes are  
   many,

---

<sup>29</sup>Arrangement of lines following Mogk.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. 143.

<sup>31</sup>Generally rendered: 'a woman when burned'; cf. *Maal og Minne* 1922, 175.

<sup>32</sup>That is, probably, in the windy seasons, winter or spring, before the sap rises.







I lured to lecherous love;  
 every taunt and gibe she tried on me,  
 and naught I had of her.

103. "Glad in his home, to his guest cheerful,  
 yet shrewd should one be;  
 wise and weighty be the word of his mouth,  
 if wise he would be thought,  
 A ninny is he who naught can say,  
 for such is the way of the witless.

104. <sup>35</sup>"The old etin I sought—now am I back;  
 in good stead stood me my speech;  
 for with many words my wish I wrought  
 in the hall of Suttungs' sons.

105. "With an auger I did eat my way,  
 through the rocks did make me room!  
 over and under were the etins'-ways;<sup>36</sup>  
 thus dared I life and limbs.

106. "Gunnloth gave me, her gold-stool upon,  
 a draught of the dear-bought mead;  
 an ill reward I her after left  
 for her friendship faithful,  
 for her heavy heart.

---

<sup>35</sup>Another, and more successful, amorous adventure of Óthin is referred to in stanzas 104–110: in his quest for the 'mead of skaldship' he discovers that the precious drink is hidden in a mountain where it is guarded by the giantess Gunnloth, the daughter of Suttung. With an auger he bores a hole and creeps through in the form of a snake. Gunnloth allows him to stay with her for three days and permits him to drink of the mead. After his escape he spews it out into vessels held ready by the gods. True skalds are allowed a drink of it; *Bragar*. chaps. 57, 58.

<sup>36</sup>Kenning for 'rocks'.

107. "Of the well-bought mead<sup>36a</sup> I made good use:  
to the wise now little is lacking;  
for Óthrocir<sup>37</sup> now up is brought,  
and won for the world of men.
108. "Unharmed again had I hardly come  
out of the etins' hall,  
if Gunnloth helped not, the good maiden,  
in whose loving arms I lay.
109. "The day after, the etins fared  
into Hór's high hall,—  
to ask after Bolverk:<sup>38</sup> whether the æsir among,  
or whether by Suttung slain.
110. "An oath on the ring did Óthin swear:<sup>39</sup>  
how put trust in his troth?  
Suttung he swindled and snatched his drink,  
and Gunnloth he beguiled."

\* \* \* \*

111. <sup>40</sup>'Tis time to chant on the sage's chair:  
at the well of Urth<sup>41</sup>  
I saw, but naught said, I saw and thought,  
listened to Hór's lore;<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>36a</sup>Following F. Jónsson's emendation.

<sup>37</sup>'Exciter of Inspiration (?)'; here, the name of the mead of skaldship, but 141 and in *Bragar*. the name of the vessel in which it was kept.

<sup>38</sup>'Evidloer', Óthin's name assumed while among the giants. This conclusion differs from the one in *Bragar*.

<sup>39</sup>Scil. that such a person was not among the gods. The oath on the ring attached to the heathen altar was a specially solemn one.

<sup>40</sup>Beginning of the 'Lay of Loddfáfnir', so called.

<sup>41</sup>There, the gods assembled for council, cf. *Vsp.* 19 and *Grímn.* 30.

<sup>42</sup>In the original, *Hélvamöl*, according to the generally accepted emendation, whence the title.

of runes I heard them            speak readily,  
    at the hall of Hór,  
    in the hall of Hór,  
    and thus I thought them say:

112. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir,<sup>43</sup>            and heed it well,  
    learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
    follow it, 'twill further thee:  
    at night rise not            but to be ready for foe,  
    or to look for a spot to relieve thee.

113. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir,            and heed it well,  
    learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
    follow it, 'twill further thee:  
    in a witch's arms            thou ought'st not sleep,  
    linking thy limbs with hers.

114. She will cast her spell            that thou car'st not  
    to go  
    to meetings where men are gathered;  
    unmindful of meat,            and mirthless, thou goest,  
    and seekest thy bed in sorrow.

115. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir,            and heed it well,  
    learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
    follow it, 'twill further thee:  
    beware lest the wedded            wife of a man  
    thou lure to love with thee.

116. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir,            and heed it well,  
    learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
    follow it, 'twill further thee:  
    on fell or firth            if to fare thee list,  
    furnish thee well with food.

---

<sup>43</sup>This is, probably, the name of the sage or singer (*þul*) who pretends to have had the following *redes* of Óthin addressed to him at a meeting of the gods.



117. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir, and heed it well,  
 learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
 follow it, 'twill further thee:  
 withhold the hardships which happen to thee  
 from the knowledge of knaves;  
 for, know thou, from knaves thou wilt never  
 have  
 reward for thy good wishes.<sup>44</sup>
118. A man I saw sorely bestead  
 through the words of a wicked woman;  
 her baleful tongue did work his bane,  
 though good and unguilty he was.
119. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir, and heed it well,  
 learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
 follow it, 'twill further thee:  
 if faithful friend thou hast found for thee,  
 then fare thou to find him full often;  
 overgrown is soon with tall grass and bush  
 the trail which is trod by no one.
120. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir, and heed it well,  
 learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
 follow it, 'twill further thee:  
 a good man seek thou to gain as thy friend,  
 and learn to make thyself loved.
121. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir, and heed it well,  
 learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
 follow it, 'twill further thee:  
 the first be not with a friend to break  
 who was faithful found to thee;  
 for sorrow eateth the soul of him  
 who may not unburthen his mind.

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<sup>44</sup>'Good wishes' are here to be understood, it seems, as kind disposition toward him one confides in.

122. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir, and heed it well,  
 learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
 follow it, 'twill further thee:  
 to bandy words with a babbling fool  
 will aye prove witless work.
123. For from evil man not ever wilt thou  
 get reward for good;  
 a good man, though, will gain for thee  
 the love and liking of many.
124. Then love is mingled when a man can say  
 to his bosom-friend all that him burdens;  
 few things are worse than fickle mind:  
 no friend he who speaks thee but fair.
125. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir, and heed it well,  
 learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
 follow it, 'twill further thee:  
 not three words shalt with a worse man  
 bandy;  
 oft the better man forbears  
 when the worse man wounds thee.<sup>45</sup>
126. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir, and heed it well,  
 learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
 follow it, 'twill further thee:  
 neither shoemaker be nor shaftmaker, either,  
 but it be for thyself:  
 let the shoe be ill-shaped or the shaft not true,  
 and they will wish thee woe.
127. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir, and heed it well,  
 learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
 follow it, 'twill further thee:

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<sup>45</sup>Scil. on slight provocation.

if wrong was done thee          let thy wrong be  
known,  
 and fall on thy foes straightway.

128. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir,          and heed it well,  
 learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
 follow it, 'twill further thee:  
 in ill deeds          not ever share,  
 but be thou glad to do good.

129. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir,          and heed it well,  
 learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
 follow it, 'twill further thee:  
 look not ever          up, when fighting,—  
 for mad with fear          men then oft grow—<sup>45a</sup>  
 lest that warlocks bewitch thee.

130. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir,          and heed it well,  
 learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
 follow it, 'twill further thee:  
 if thee list to gain          a good woman's love  
 and all the bliss there be,  
 thy troth shalt pledge,          and truly keep:  
 no one tires of the good he gets.<sup>46</sup>

131. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir,          and heed it well,  
 learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
 follow it, 'twill further thee:  
 be wary of thee,          but not wary o'er much;  
 be most wary of ale          and of other man's wife,  
 and eke, thirdly,          lest thieves outwit thee.

132. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir,          and heed it well,  
 learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,

---

<sup>45a</sup>The panic fear which (according to the *Konungs Skuggsjá* chap. 11) often seizes young and inexperienced warriors.

<sup>46</sup>I.e. she will be true to you in turn.













153. That seventh I know, if o'er sleepers' heads  
I behold a hall on fire:  
however bright the blaze I can beat it down—  
that mighty spell I can speak.<sup>71</sup>
154. That eighth I know which to all men is  
needful, and good to know:  
when hatred runs high, heroes among,  
their strife I can settle full soon.
155. That ninth I know: if need there be  
to guard a ship in a gale,  
the wind I calm, and the waves also,  
and wholly soothe the sea.<sup>72</sup>
156. That tenth I know, if night-hags sporting  
I scan aloft in the sky:  
I scare them with spells so they scatter  
abroad,  
heedless of their hides,<sup>73</sup>  
heedless of their haunts.
157. That eleventh I know:— if I am to lead  
old friends to the fray:  
under buckler I chant<sup>74</sup> that briskly they fare  
hale and whole to battle,  
and hale wend to their home:  
hale wherever they are.
158. That twelfth I know, if on tree I see  
a hanged one hoisted on high:

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<sup>71</sup>Cf. *Ríg.* 45.

<sup>72</sup>Cf. *Gróug.* 11.

<sup>73</sup>I.e. their own 'skins' or forms which they leave behind on their rides. The incantations cause the witches to forget both their original forms and their homes.

<sup>74</sup>Cf. the *barditus* mentioned by Tacitus in his *Germania* chap. 3, produced '*objectis ad os scutis.*'

thus I write            and the runes I stain<sup>75</sup>  
                                  that down he drops  
                                  and tells me his tale.<sup>76</sup>

159. That thirteenth I know            if a thane's son I shall  
                                  wet with holy water:<sup>77</sup>  
 never will he fall,            though the fray be hot,  
                                  never sink down, wounded by sword.

160. That fourteenth I know,            if to folk I shall  
                                  sing and say of the gods:  
 æsir and alfs            know I altogether—  
                                  of unlearned few have that lore.

161. That know I fifteenth            which Thióthrcerir<sup>78</sup>  
                                  sang,  
                                  the dwarf, before Delling's door:<sup>79</sup>  
 gave to æsir strength,            to alfs victory  
                                  by his song, and insight to Óthin.

162. That sixteenth I know,            if I seek me some  
                                  maid,  
                                  to work my will with her:  
 the white-armed woman's            heart I bewitch,  
                                  and toward me I turn her thoughts.

163. That seventeenth I know,            (if the slender  
                                  maid's love  
                                  I have, and hold her to me:  
 thus I sing to her)<sup>80</sup>            that she hardly will  
                                  leave me for other man's love.

<sup>75</sup>Cf. 143.

<sup>76</sup>Othin seeks the wisdom of the dead, cf. also *Bdr.* 5, *Hárb.* 43.

<sup>77</sup>In the heathen rite of baptism; cf. *Ríg.* 7, note.

<sup>78</sup>Unknown elsewhere.

<sup>79</sup>Kenning for 'dawn' (?). As to Delling, cf. *Vaf.* 25.

<sup>80</sup>Supplied by the translator.

164. In this lore wilt thou,           Loddfáfnir, be  
   in need anon and ever:  
 thy weal were it,           if this wisdom thine—  
    'tis helpful, if heeded,  
    'tis needful, if known.
165. That eighteenth I know           which to none I will  
   tell,  
   neither maid nor man's wife—  
 'tis best warded           if but one know it:  
   this speak I last of my spells—  
 but only to her           in whose arms I lie,  
   or else to my sister also.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>This is, perhaps, the same unfathomable secret Óthin whispered in Baldr's ear as he lay dead, *Vaf.* 55.

## THE LAY OF VAFTHRUTHNIR.

### *Vafþrúðnismál.*

This lay is frankly didactic in purpose, offering fragments of cosmogonic and mythological information which is brought out in the course of a *senna* or 'flyting' between the king of the gods and the wise giant Vafthrúthnir.<sup>1</sup> The narrative frame chosen is not unskillfully handled.

Óthin has heard of the wisdom of the giant and, against the wishes of his anxious spouse, fares to see him in his hall, there to match his lore against the giant's. After an initial test of the 'wisdom' of his guest who has, so far, insisted on standing on the floor, Vafthrúthnir urges him to occupy the high-seat, there to continue the wager the stake of which is the loser's head. Óthin now becomes the interrogator and finally propounds the unanswerable question. Through it, but too late, the doomed giant recognizes who is his opponent.

The measure is *ljóðaháttur*, the typical vehicle of gnomic poetry, whose regular dialogic form has, in this as in other cases, favored the preservation of the text. It is handed down completely in the *Codex Regius*, and, partly, in the *Codex Arnarnagnæanus*. Besides, some nine stanzas of it occur in Snorri's paraphrase in the *Gylfag.*, in various places. There are no clues as to place of origin. The purely heathen tone has led scholars to assign the poem to the Tenth Century; but we may well suspect it to be a later, skaldic, effort.

*Óthin said:*

1. "Give rede now, Frigg,<sup>2</sup> to fare me listeth  
to wise Vafthrúthnir.  
Much I wonder if in wisdom my like  
the all-wise etin be."

*Frigg said:*

2. "At home had I Heriafather<sup>3</sup> rather,  
in the garth of the gods;

---

<sup>1</sup>'Strong in Entangling', i.e. in questions.

<sup>2</sup>'Beloved', Óthin's wife.

<sup>3</sup>'Father of Hosts', Óthin.

there's no match in might          among thurses  
to that all-wise etin."

*Óthin said:*

3. "Far have I fared,          much afield have I been,  
and have striven in strength with gods;  
now I wish to know          how Vafthrúthnir  
lives in his high-timbered hall."

*Frigg said:*

4. "All hail to thy going!          all hail to thy coming!  
all hail to thee, hence and hither!  
May thy wit not fail thee,          Father of Men,<sup>4</sup>  
if with words ye war."

5. Went then Óthin          his wisdom to match  
with the all-wise etin:  
came to the hall          of Hym's<sup>5</sup> father.  
In went Ygg<sup>6</sup> forthwith.

*Óthin said:*

6. "Hail, Vafthrúthnir!          to thy hall I am come  
to see thee, etin, myself;  
to know me listeth          if lore thou hast,  
or art all-wise, etin."

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

7. "What wayfaring wight          such words dareth  
hurl at me in my hall?  
Alive shalt thou          never leave this hall  
if thou showest thee lesser in lore."

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<sup>4</sup>Óthin.

<sup>5</sup>Not to be confused with Hymir (of the *Hymiskviða*). Nothing is known of this son of Vafthrúthnir.

<sup>6</sup>'The Terrible One', Óthin.

*Óthin said:*

8. "Gagnráth<sup>7</sup> my name;            as guest I come  
    to thy threshold thirsty, oh thurs!  
 Needful of welcome            I wandered long;  
    now I hope thou'lt harbor me."

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

9. "Why then, Gagnráth,            greet me from floor?  
    In the hall seat thee on settle!  
 Moot then may we            who most knoweth,  
    whether guest or grizzled thul.<sup>8</sup>"

*Óthin said:*

10. "In want who comes            to a wealthy man—  
    let him say what is needful, or naught!  
 Too much babbling            is bad for him  
    to cold-hearted host who comes."

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

11. "Say then, Gagnráth,            as unseated thou wilt  
    match thy lore with mine:  
 how the horse is hight            which heavenward  
    brings  
    every day at dawn to mankind?"

*Óthin said:*

12. "He is Skinfaxi<sup>9</sup> hight            which skyward brings  
    every day at dawn to mankind;  
 of horses best he            to heroes seems,  
    his mane glisters like gold."

<sup>7</sup>'Giving Good Counsel', i.e. for victory.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. *Hǫv.*, note 1<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>9</sup>'Shiny-Mane'; the Sun-horse.

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

13. “Say then, Gagnráth, as unseated thou wilt  
 match thy lore with mine:  
 how the horse is hight which the hallowed  
 night  
 doth bring to the blessed gods?”

*Óthin said:*

14. “He is Hrímfaxi<sup>10</sup> hight which the hallowed  
 night  
 doth bring to the blessed gods.  
 As he fares, foam doth fall from his bit;  
 thence cometh the dew in the dales.”

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

15. “Say then, Gagnráth, since unseated thou wilt  
 match thy lore with mine:  
 how the flood is hight which flows between  
 the garth of the gods and the etins?”

*Óthin said:*

16. “Is hight Ifing the flood which flows between  
 the garth of the gods and the etins;  
 will it ever and ay unfrozen stay,  
 ice there is never on it.”

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

17. “Say then, Gagnráth, since unseated thou wilt  
 match thy lore with mine:  
 how the field is hight where as foes will meet  
 Surt<sup>11</sup> and the sacred gods?”

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<sup>10</sup>‘Rime-Mane’.

<sup>11</sup>The god of fire; cf. *Vsp.* 44, note.





*Vafthrúthnir said:*

23. "Mundilferi<sup>14</sup> is hight the Moon's father,  
and the Sun's also;  
they daily wander the welkin about,  
to tell the time for men."

*Óthin said:*

24. "Say thou this third, in thy thought if it  
dwells  
and thou, Vafthrúthnir, doest wot:  
whence the day springeth, in the dales which  
shines,  
and eke the night and new-moon?"

*Vawthrúthnir said:*

25. "Is one Delling<sup>15</sup> hight, he is Day's father;  
but Night was born to Nor;  
waxing and waning moon the wise gods made  
to tell the time for men."

*Óthin said:*

26. "Say thou this fourth, if thou fathom it,  
and thou, Vafthrúthnir doest wot:  
whence winter came and warm summer,  
in the beginning, for gods?"

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

27. "Is one Vindsval<sup>16</sup> hight, he is Winter's  
father,  
and Summer is Svósuth's son;

---

<sup>14</sup>According to *Gylfag.* chap. 11, he had named his daughter after the sun, and his son after the moon. In order to punish him for his presumption the gods set them to drive the wains of the sun and the moon.

<sup>15</sup>'The Shining'. According to *Gylfag.* chap. 11, a god who with *Nótt* 'Night' engendered a son, *Dagr* 'Day'.

<sup>16</sup>'Wind-Cold', a giant, as is *Vólsub* 'Hardship' (?) and *Svólsub* 'Beloved', father of Summer.

(but Vindsval was to Vósuth born:  
cold-hearted all that kin)."<sup>17</sup>

*Óthin said:*

28. "Say thou this fifth, if sage thou art  
and thou, Vafthrúthnir, doest wot:  
who the oldest etin of Ymir's kin  
was in the world's first days?"

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

29. "Ages before the earth was made,  
Bergelmir<sup>18</sup> came to be;  
Thrúthgelmir was that thurs' father,  
but Aurgelmir oldest of all."

*Óthin said:*

30. "Say thou this sixth, if sage thou art  
and thou, Vafthrúthnir doest wot:  
whence Aurgelmir and all his sib  
at the outset, wise etin?"

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

31. "Out of Élivágar<sup>19</sup> spurted venom drops,  
and waxed till there was an etin;  
'tis thence our kin came altogether;  
hence wrathful and rugged our ways."

*Óthin said:*

32. "As a seventh say, if sage thou art  
and thou, Vafthrúthnir, doest wot:  
how children gat the grim etin,  
as misshapen she-thurs none was?"

---

<sup>17</sup>Supplied with Bugge, after *Gylfag.* chap. 19.

<sup>18</sup>The meaning of these giant names is not certain.

<sup>19</sup>'Stormy Waves (?)', imagined as a 'venom'-cold river in the Far North, *Gylfag.* chap. 5.

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

33. "The ice-etin's strong arms beneath  
there grew both girl and boy;  
one with the other, the wise etin's shanks  
begat a six-headed son."

*Óthin said:*

34. "Say as an eighth, if sage thou art  
and thou, Vafthrúthnir, doest wot:  
what oldest of eld the earth above;  
for all-wise, etin, thou art."

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

35. "Ages before the earth was made,  
Bergelmir came to be;  
that first I wot that the wise etin  
lifeless was laid in the grave."<sup>20</sup>

*Óthin said:*

36. "Say as a ninth, if sage thou art  
and thou, Vafthrúthnir, doest wot:  
whence the wind cometh o'er the waves which  
blows,  
yet is never seen itself?"

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

37. "One Hræsvelg<sup>21</sup> hight sits at heaven's end,  
an etin in eagle's shape:  
from his wings is wafted the wind which  
blows  
over all who live."

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<sup>20</sup>The interpretation of this line is doubtful.

<sup>21</sup>'Corpse-Gulper'.

*Óthin said:*

“Say as the tenth,            if the sacred gods’ fate  
    thou, Vafthrúthnir, doest wot:  
 why Niorth<sup>22</sup> did come            to Nóatún,<sup>23</sup>  
    yet was not begot by gods?”

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

39. “In Vanaheim<sup>24</sup>            Vanir begat him,  
    and gave him as hostage to gods;  
 at the world’s last weird            he will wend again  
    home to the wise Vanir.”

*Óthin said:*

40. <sup>24a</sup>“Say as eleventh            where e’erliving men  
    smite each other with swords;  
 fighting they fall,            then fare from battle  
    and drain goblets together.”

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

41. “This all the einheriar<sup>25</sup>            who in Óthin’s garth  
    smite each other with swords:  
 fighting they fall,            then fare from battle  
    and drain goblets together.”

---

<sup>22</sup>The name of this Van god corresponds exactly to that of the goddess *Nerthus* ‘Terræ mater’ whose rites are described by Tacitus in the famous 40th chapter of his *Germania*. Originally doubtless a fertility god, in Old Norse mythology he rules over the wind and the sea.

<sup>23</sup>‘Ship-stead, harbor’.

<sup>24</sup>‘The Home of the Vanir’. As a return hostage, the Æsir sent Mímir, *Vsp.* 39, note.

<sup>24a</sup>The stanza is restored conjecturally.

<sup>25</sup>‘Protagonists’, the fallen warriors who are gathered by the valkyries into Óthin’s hall, Valholl (Valhalla).

*Óthin said:*

42. "Say as the twelfth            how the sacred gods' fate  
    thou, Vafthrúthnir, doest wot?  
 Of the etins' lore,            and of all godheads,  
    thou sayest but sooth,  
    thou all-wise etin!"

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

43. "Of the etins' lore,            and of all godheads,  
    sooth, and but sooth, I say,  
    for in all the worlds I wandered;  
 Nifhel<sup>26</sup> beneath            nine worlds I saw,  
    to which the dead are doomed."

*Óthin said:*

44. "Far have I fared,            much afield have I been,  
    have oft striven in strength with gods:  
 what wights will live            when that winter<sup>27</sup> is  
    over,  
    to earth-dwellers awful?"

*Vafthrúthnir. said:*

45. "Líf and Lífthrasir;<sup>28</sup>            in the leafage they  
    will hide of Hoddmímir;<sup>29</sup>  
 the morning dew            their meat will be,  
    they will rear the races of men."

---

<sup>26</sup>'Dark Hel' or Nifheim, the realm of Hel, the abode of the dead.

<sup>27</sup>The so-called *fimbulvetr* 'Chief of Winters', foretold also *Vsp.* 33, *Vsp. sk.* 15, as preceding the end of the world. It consists of three winters with no summer between.

<sup>28</sup>'Life' and 'Longing for Life' (?).

<sup>29</sup>This tree is identical with the world-tree Yggdrasil, *Vsp.* 3ff, and the 'Tree of Mímir', *Fj.* 14.

*Óthin said:*

46. "Far have I fared,            much afield have I been,  
    have oft striven in strength with gods:  
 how soars the sun            on the smooth heavens,  
    when swallowed by Fenrir's fangs?"<sup>30</sup>

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

47. "A daughter orb            was to Alfróthul<sup>31</sup> born,  
    ere that swallowed her Fenrir's fangs;  
 on her mother's path            will the maiden fare,  
    the time the fair gods fall."

*Óthin said:*

48. "Far have I fared,            much afield have I been,  
    have oft striven in strength with gods:  
 what wise maidens,            the wide sea over,  
    full many swiftly fare?"

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

49. "Three throngs of maidens<sup>32</sup>            over Mog-  
    thrasir's  
    thorp do throw themselves:  
 good hap they bring            where to homes they  
    fare,  
    though of etins' kin they are."

*Óthin said:*

50. "Far have I fared,            much afield have I been,  
    have oft striven in strength with gods:

---

<sup>30</sup>Cf. *Vsp.* 32.

<sup>31</sup>'Alf-Beam', a kenning for the sun.

<sup>32</sup>"These maidens are norns who assist at childbirth, cf. *Fáfn.* 12, 13. *Mogthrasir* 'Desirous of Sons' is a symbolic designation for mankind, 'Mogthrasir's thorp', for the world" [F. Jónsson].







## THE LAY OF GRIMNIR

### *Grímnismál.*

Like the foregoing poem, the *Grímnismál* has a didactic purpose, instruction in the mythology, the heavenly geography, and the nomenclature of the Northern Olympus. It is conveyed in Óthin's monologue, addressed first, as a reward, to young Agnar who takes pity on his plight, and finally to his erstwhile favorite Geirroeth, to whom the god gradually reveals his dread identity. The epic framework has elements in common with a fairy-story, still told in our days in northern Norway, of two brothers who sail to a monster-infested island where the one brother abandons the other to his fate in order to claim the kingdom for himself.

"The form of the narrative is very symptomatic. The reader is to gather that the old cotter has given Geirroeth the counsel to make away with his brother; from the conversation between Óthin and Frigg, that it was they who fostered the youths; again, that Frigg, in maligning Geirroeth as a miser had a double purpose—in the first place, to induce Óthin to visit the king whom by her emissary she renders hostile to the disguised god . . . in the second place, to destroy Geirroeth, since Óthin would of course not let his ill treatment go unavenged."<sup>a</sup>

The poem has suffered chiefly from accretion: its monologic form no doubt tempted copyists to interpolate stray bits of lore—sometimes of great value—which they were anxious to have preserved within its framework. For the most part, these differ in form from the otherwise regular *ljóðaháttir*.

There are no positive indications as to time of composition (Tenth Century?) or place of origin. The poem is handed down completely both in the *Codex Regius* and the *Codex Arnarnagnæanus*; and embedded in Snorri's paraphrase in the *Gylfaginning* are preserved some twenty stanzas.

King Hrauthung<sup>1</sup> had two sons, Agnar and Geirroeth.<sup>2</sup> Agnar was ten years old, Geirroeth eight. One day they were rowing in a boat with their tackle, to catch small fry, when the wind blew them out to sea. In the darkness of night they were dashed against the land. They made the

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<sup>a</sup>Detter-Heinzel II, 172.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. *Hynd.* 26.

<sup>2</sup>'Spear-peace' (?), i.e. peace gained by the spear.

shore and found a cotter. They stayed there that winter. The goodwife fostered Agnar, the goodman, Geirroeth and taught him his lore. In spring he got them a boat, and when he and his wife led them down to the shore he spoke secretly with Geirroeth. They had a fair wind and came to their father's landing-place. Geirroeth was forward in the boat. He leapt out on shore and thrust the boat back into the sea and said: "Now go where all trolls may take thee!" Agnar drifted out to sea; but Geirroeth went up to the people. He was warmly welcomed, and as his father had died he was made king and became a great leader.

One day, Óthin and Frigg were sitting in Hlithskialf<sup>3</sup> and were looking out upon all the worlds. Then said Óthin: "Canst thou see Agnar, thy fosterson, how he begets children with an ogress in a cave? But Geirroeth, my fosterson, is king in the land." Frigg answered: "He is so grudging about his food<sup>4</sup> that he lets his guests die of hunger when he thinks too many have come." Óthin said that this was a big lie, and so they laid a wager about this matter. Frigg sent her chambermaid Fulla to Geirroeth to tell him to beware lest he be bewitched by a warlock who was then come into the land. She told him that he could be told by this that no dog was so fierce as to rush at him. But it was evil slander, to say that King Geirroeth was not generous about his food. Yet he had that man taken captive whom his dogs would not set on. He was clad in a blue cloak and gave his name as Grímnir,<sup>5</sup> and said no more about himself though he was asked. The king tortured him to make him speak, by setting him between two fires; and there he sate for eight nights. Geirroeth had a son ten years old, who was named Agnar after his brother. Agnar went

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<sup>3</sup>'Hall of Gates' or 'Gate-Tower', Óthin's seat in Valholl. "When he seats himself in the high-seat he can see all the world and the doings of every man." *Gylfag.* chap. 9.

<sup>4</sup>A cardinal sin in a king, according to Old Norse conceptions.

<sup>5</sup>'The Masked One', Óthin. He is frequently pictured as concealing his countenance by a wide cowl.



6. A third hall still, all thatched with silver,  
 was built by the blessed gods:  
 in Valaskialf<sup>10</sup> hall did house himself  
 Óthin in olden days.
7. Sokkvabekk<sup>11</sup> called is the fourth, which cool  
 waters  
 ripple round about;  
 there Óthin and Sága<sup>12</sup> drink, all their days,  
 glad from golden cups.
8. Gladhome is hight the fifth where golden-  
 shimm'ring  
 Valholl<sup>13</sup> is widely spread out;  
 here Óthin chooses every day  
 many war-slain wights.<sup>14</sup>
9. Easily known to Ygg's chosen  
 are the heavenly halls:  
 the rafters, spear-shafts; the roofs, shield-  
 shingled;  
 and the benches strewn with byrnies.
10. Easily known to Ygg's chosen  
 are the heavenly halls:  
 a wolf hangeth o'er the western gate,  
 and hovers an eagle on high.<sup>15</sup>
11. Thrymheim<sup>16</sup> is hight the sixth, where Thiatsi  
 dwelled,  
 the etin of awful might;

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<sup>10</sup>Hall of Slain Warriors' (?), the first of Óthin's three halls.

<sup>11</sup>'Sunken Hall' (?). Cf. Fensalir, *Vsp.* 26.

<sup>12</sup>'Seeress', Frigg. The name is in no wise to be connected with the Norse word for 'history, story'.

<sup>13</sup>'Hall of Slain Warriors'; cf. Valaskialf, above, and, *Vaf.* 40, 41.

<sup>14</sup>I.e. the slain warriors chosen by Óthin.

<sup>15</sup>Wolf and eagle, as scavengers of the battlefield, are symbolic of Óthin's warlike activities. Their carved images adorn the gable ends of his hall.

<sup>16</sup>'Storm-Home'.

the god's bride there            her bower hath,  
Skathi, where her father before.<sup>17</sup>

12. Breithablik<sup>18</sup> the seventh;            there Baldr the  
good

hath reared him his bright abode:  
in that land it lies            where least I know  
falsehood and faithlessness.

13. Himinbiorg<sup>19</sup> the eighth;            there Heimdall,  
they say,

guards the holy hall;  
there the gods' warder            in goodly stead  
the mead drinks, glad in mind.

14. Folkvang<sup>20</sup> the ninth,            where Freya<sup>21</sup> doth say

who seats shall hold in her hall:  
half of the slain            are hers each day,  
and half are Óthin's own.

15. Glitnir<sup>22</sup> the tenth,            which on gold standeth,  
and is shingled with shining silver;

there Forseti<sup>23</sup>            unflagging sits,  
the god that stills all strife.

16. Nóatún<sup>24</sup> the eleventh,            where Niorth hath him  
reared his bright abode;

there Skathi's spouse,            the spotless god,  
holds sway in high-timbered hall.

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<sup>17</sup>She is Niorth's wife; cf. also *Hárþ.* 19, *Lok.* 50.

<sup>18</sup>'The Far-Shining'; properly the seat of Baldr, the god of innocence, justice, and light.

<sup>19</sup>'Heavenly Mountains'; concerning Heimdall, cf. *Vsp.* 1, note.

<sup>20</sup>'Field of Warriors'.

<sup>21</sup>'Mistress, Queen' (feminine of Frey), the goddess of love. She is the daughter of Niorth and the sister of Frey.

<sup>22</sup>'Shining'.

<sup>23</sup>'The Presiding One', Baldr's and Nanna's son.

<sup>24</sup>'Ship-stead'; cf. *Vaf.* 38 and above, 11.



22. Valgrind<sup>33</sup> is the gate that wards the gods,  
 holy, nigh holy doors;  
 old is that bar, 'tis barely known  
 how that latch is locked.
23. Five hundred doors and forty withal  
 I ween that in Valholl be:  
 eight hundred warriors through one door hie  
 them  
 when they fare forth to fight the Wolf.<sup>34</sup>
24. Five hundred rooms and forty withal  
 I ween that in Bilskirnir<sup>35</sup> be;  
 of all the halls which on high are reared  
 the greatest I see is my son's.
25. Heithrún, the goat on the hall that stands,  
 eateth off Lærath's<sup>36</sup> limbs;  
 the crock she fills with clearest mead,  
 will that drink not e'er be drained.
26. Eikthyrnir,<sup>37</sup> the hart on the hall that stands,  
 eateth off Lærath's limbs;  
 drops from his horns in Hvergelmir<sup>38</sup> fall,  
 thence wend all the waters their way.
27. <sup>39</sup>Síth and Víth, Sœkin and Eikin,  
 Svol and Gunnthró, Fiorm and Fimbulthul,

<sup>33</sup>'The Gate of the Battle-slain'.

<sup>34</sup>Fenrir; cf. *Lok.* 22, note.

<sup>35</sup>Of uncertain meaning. It is the hall of Thór, who is a son of Othin.

<sup>36</sup>Lærath seems to be identical with the tree Yggdrasil, which suffers still other harm, cf. 26 and 33*ff.*

<sup>37</sup>'Oak antlers' (?).

<sup>38</sup>A well at the foot of Yggdrasil.

<sup>39</sup>The following catalog of rivers is plainly interpolated. Their names refer, some to swiftness, others to coldness and depth. For Slíth, cf. *Vsp.* 36; for Leiptr, *H.H.* II, 30.

- Rín and Rinnandi,  
 Gipul and Gopul, Gomul and Geirvimul,  
 all these flow through the garth of the  
 gods;
- Thyn and Vin, Tholl and Holl,  
 Gróth and Gunnthorin.
28. Vínó is hight one, Vegsvin the other,  
 the third, Thióthnuma;  
 Nyt and Not, Nonn and Hronn,  
 Slíth and Hríth, Sylg and Ylg,  
 Víl and Vón, Vond and Strond,  
 Gioll and Leiptr, by the land of men flow,  
 but hence fall to Hel.
29. Kormt and Ormt and the Kerlaugs twain,  
 Thór wadeth through  
 every day, to the doom when he fares  
 'neath the ash Yggdrasil;  
 for the bridge of the gods<sup>40</sup> burneth alway,—  
 hot are the holy waters.
30. <sup>41</sup>Glath and Gyllir, Glær and Skeithbrimir,  
 Silfrintopp and Sinir,  
 Gísl and Falhófnir, Golltopp and Lettfeti,—  
 these steeds ride heavenly hosts  
 every day, to the doom when they fare  
 'neath the ash Yggdrasil.
31. Three roots do spread in threefold ways  
 beneath the ash Yggdrasil:  
 dwell etins 'neath one, 'neath the other, Hel,  
 'neath the third, Mithgarth's<sup>42</sup> men.

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<sup>40</sup>The rainbow bridge, Bifrost (or Bilrost), 'The Road With the Many Colors'. The passage is not clear.

<sup>41</sup>The catalog of steeds likewise is interpolated. Their names refer to speed, bright appearance, etc.

<sup>42</sup>'Middle World' or 'The Enclosure', viz. against the outer world of giants, monsters, etc.



- 31a. <sup>43</sup>(An eagle sitteth on Yggdrasil's limbs,  
 whose keen eyes widely ken;  
 'twixt his eyes a fallow falcon is perched,  
 hight Vethrfofnir, and watcheth.)
32. Ratatosk<sup>44</sup> the squirrel is hight which run-  
 neth ay  
 about the ash Yggdrasil:  
 the warning words of the watchful eagle  
 he bears to Níthhogg<sup>45</sup> beneath.
33. <sup>46</sup>Four harts also the highest shoots  
 ay do gnaw from beneath:  
 Dáin and Dvalin, Duneyr and Dyrathrór.
34. More worms do lie the world-tree beneath  
 than unwise apes may ween:  
 Góin and Móin, which are Grafvitnir's sons,  
 Grábak and Grafvolluth;  
 Ófnir and Sváfnir<sup>47</sup> ay, I fear me,  
 on that tree's twigs will batten.
35. The ash Yggdrasil doth ill abide,  
 more than to men is known:  
 the hart browsing above, its bole rotting,  
 and Níthhogg gnawing beneath.
36. <sup>48</sup>Hrist and Mist the horn shall bear me,—  
 Skeggiold and Skogul as well;

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<sup>43</sup>This stanza is lacking in the original. We are able to reconstruct it from Snorri's close paraphrase, *Gylfag.* chap. 16.—The eagle and the falcon possibly symbolize the watchfulness of the gods.

<sup>44</sup>'Rat-Tooth'.

<sup>45</sup>Cf. *Vsp.* 31. The dragon is here conceived as gnawing the roots of Yggdrasil; see 35.

<sup>46</sup>The following two stanzas are very likely interpolations.

<sup>47</sup>Several of these names have reference to the burrowing activities of worms and snakes. The last two are names of Óthin; see 54 and note.

<sup>48</sup>The names of the valkyries indicate their warlike activities, like those *Vsp.* 23.

- but Hild and Thrúth,           Hlokk and Herfiotur,  
   Goll and Geironul,  
 Randgríth and Rathgríth           and Reginleif,  
   to the einheriar ale shall bear.
37. Árvakr and Alsvith,<sup>50</sup>           they up shall draw  
   the sun's wain wearily;  
 but under their bellies           the blessed gods  
   have hidden the 'icy irons'.<sup>51</sup>
38. Svalin<sup>52</sup> is hight,           the Sun before,  
   a shield from the shining god.  
 Would smoke and smoulder           both sea and land,  
   if from him it ever should fall.
39. Him Skoll, the wolf,           in the sky doth dog  
   to the warding woods;<sup>53</sup>  
 but Hati<sup>54</sup> the other,           Hróthvitnir's son,  
   follows the fair orb <sup>54a</sup> too.
40. Of Ymir's<sup>55</sup> flesh           the earth was shaped,  
   of his blood, the briny sea,  
 of his hair, the trees,           the hills of his bones,  
   out of his skull the sky.
41. But of his lashes           the loving gods made  
   Mithgarth for sons of men;  
 shaped from his brain           were the shifting clouds  
   which in the heavens hover.

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<sup>50</sup>'Early-awake' and 'Very Swift', the sun-horses. cf. *Vaf.* 12; *Sigrdr.* 17.

<sup>51</sup>Snorri, in his *Gylfag.* chap. 11, has the following prosy explanation of these: "Under their shoulders the gods placed two bellows to cool them, and in some lays these are called 'icy irons' (?)".

<sup>52</sup>'Cooling'.

<sup>53</sup>The passage is of doubtful meaning.

<sup>54</sup>'Hate', the son of Hróthvitnir 'the Famous Wolf', i.e. Fenrir (who according to *Vaf.* 47 himself swallows the sun).

<sup>54a</sup>The Moon.

<sup>55</sup>Cf. *Vaf.* 21.

42. Will Ull<sup>57</sup> befriend him,           and all the gods,  
   who first the fire quenches;  
 for open lie           to the æsir all worlds,  
   when kettles are heaved from the hearth.<sup>58</sup>
43. In earliest times            Ivaldi's sons<sup>59</sup>  
   Skíthblathnir, the ship, did shape,  
 the best of boats,           for beaming Frey,  
   the noble son of Niorth.
44. The ash Yggdrasil           is of all trees best;  
   Skíthblathnir, the best of boats;  
 of holy gods, Óthin;           of horses, Sleipnir;<sup>60</sup>  
 of bridges, Bilrost;<sup>61</sup>           of skalds, Bragi;<sup>62</sup>  
 of hawks, Hóbrók;<sup>62a</sup>           of hounds all, Garm.<sup>63</sup>
45. Now my looks have I lifted           aloft to the gods:<sup>64</sup>  
   help will come from on high,

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<sup>57</sup>Cf. above, 8.

<sup>58</sup>The words of the second part of the stanza seem clear, but their meaning has so far resisted convincing explanation.

<sup>59</sup>According to *Gylfag.* chap. 43, they are skilful dwarves who make a present of the ship Skíthblathnir 'the Thin-planked' to Frey. "It is so large that all gods may find room in it with all their equipment". Also, it has a favorable breeze whenever its sail is raised, and can sail both on sea and over land. It may be laid together like a cloth, and be put in one's pocket.—Stanzas 43, 44 are evidently interpolated.

<sup>60</sup>'The Runner', Óthin's horse. It has eight feet. According to the story in *Gylfag.* chap. 42 it was begotten on Loki by the stallion of the giant who built the wall around Ásgarh; cf. *Vsp.* 17, note, and *Vsp. sk.* 13.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. 29, note.

<sup>62</sup>The god of poetry and eloquence. Bragr signifies 'poetry'. It is uncertain whether Bragi Boddason (Ninth Century), the first skald whose name and verses have come down to us, was the prototype of the god.

<sup>62a</sup>'High-leg'.

<sup>63</sup>Cf. *Vsp.* 36.

<sup>64</sup>The translation here offered is somewhat of a guess, no interpretation being altogether acceptable.

- from all the *æsir* which in shall come  
 on *Ægir's* benches,  
 at *Ægir's* feast.<sup>65</sup>
46. <sup>66</sup>*Grím* is my name, and *Gangleri*,<sup>67</sup>  
*Herian* and *Hialmberi*,<sup>68</sup>  
*Thekk* and *Thrithi*,<sup>69</sup> *Thuth* and *Uth*,  
*Helblindi* and *Hór*.<sup>70</sup>
47. *Sath* and *Svipal* and *Sanngetal*,<sup>71</sup>  
*Herteith*<sup>72</sup> and *Hnikar*,  
*Bileyg*, *Báleyg*,<sup>73</sup> *Bolverk*, *Fiolnir*,<sup>74</sup>  
*Grím* and *Grímnir*, *Glapsvith*, *Fiolsvith*,<sup>75</sup>
48. *Síthhott*, *Síthskegg*, *Sigfather*, *Hnikuth*,  
*Alfather*, *Valfather*, *Atríth*, *Farmatýr*:<sup>76</sup>  
 by one name was I not welcomed ever,  
 since among folk I fared.
49. *Grímnir* my name in *Geirroeth's* hall,  
 but Ialk in *Ásmund's*.

<sup>65</sup>As in the *Hymiskviða*, 1.

<sup>66</sup>The following five stanzas are obviously interpolated.

<sup>67</sup>*Grím*=*Grímnir*, cf. the *Prose* above.—*Gangleri* 'the Way-Weary' (?).

<sup>68</sup>'War-God' (?) and 'Helm-Bearer'.

<sup>69</sup>'The Welcome One' and 'the Third', i.e. with *Hór* (below) and *Iafnhór* (49). This trinity seems to betray Christian influence.

<sup>70</sup>'One-Eyed'; but, as evidenced by *Iafnhór* 'Equally High', it was at an early time confused with the homonymous word meaning 'high'.

<sup>71</sup>The Truthful', 'the Changeable', and 'Truthfinder'.

<sup>72</sup>'Glad in Battle' and '(Spear-)thruster'.

<sup>73</sup>'Fiery-Eyed'.

<sup>74</sup>'Bale-Worker' and 'Wise in Lore'.

<sup>75</sup>'The Much-Experienced'.

<sup>76</sup>In order: 'Long-Hood', 'Long-Beard', 'Victory Father', '(Spear-)thruster', 'Father of All', 'Father of the Battle-slain', 'Attacker by Horse' (?), and 'Lord of Boat-loads'. The latter epithet shows *Óthin* in his (historically earlier) rôle as god of the merchants; cf. *Mercury*—*Hermes* with whom he shares other important characteristics.





## THE LAY OF SKIRNIR

### *Skírnismál*

Hardly another poem in the Edda so appeals to the modern and, probably, to universal taste. Indeed, here we see the epic-dramatic technique of the North at its best—and the subject is a romantic love-myth that speaks to us all. The workmanship is excellent. Though entirely dialogic, the poem never leaves us in doubt of either place or drift of the action—the explanatory prose might well be dispensed with; and with surprising skill we are made to visualize the appearance, and divine the character, of the actors.

Beginning and ending with love-sick Frey, the poet delegates all the action to the god's *alter ego*, his devoted follower and friend Skírnir who with intrepidity accomplishes his mission and overcomes the resistance of the fair giant maiden by the fear of his rune magic, after both promises of gifts and threats of force have failed.

In point of the arrangement and the handling of his material the poet probably owes little to the myth. It has recently been urged with some plausibility that we have in this 'lay' actually the dramatized rites of a Frey cult celebrating the god's annual union with the fertility goddess. We can, however, just discern the consciously working author, in frequent verbal reminiscences of other Eddic lays, and in his struggle with the material to be fashioned. Most interesting in his treatment of the *ljóðaháttr* stanzas which, regular at the beginning, become swaying and incoherent, with barbarous assonances, when the terrific imprecations fill them to overflowing, but resume their regular gait toward the tranquil end.

The tradition is, on the whole, fair. Only some of the courses defy certain interpretation. The poem is found complete in *Cod. Reg.*, whereas *Cod. Arn.* breaks off after 27. Snorri's paraphrase is significantly brief: for his purposes, the lay seemed deficient in epic details.

Norway is (doubtfully) assigned as the home of the lay, on account of the mention of the thistle, which was not indigenous in Iceland. There are no definite clues as to the time of its origin (Tenth Century?).

Frey, the son of Niorth,<sup>1</sup> had seated himself one day on Hlithskialf<sup>2</sup> and looked over all the worlds. Then saw he in

---

<sup>1</sup>Cf. *Gímn.* 5, note.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. *ibid.* Introd. Prose, note.





*Skírnir said:*

5. "Thy heart's not so heavy, I hold, but thou  
mayst  
open it to another;  
for in days of yore we young were together:  
truly thou mightest trust me."

*Frey said:*

6. "From on high I beheld in the halls of Gymir<sup>6</sup>  
a maiden to my mind;  
her arms did gleam, their glamour filled  
all the sea and the air.
7. "This maiden is to me more dear  
than maiden to any man;  
but æsir and alfs all will have it  
that strangers aye we stay.
8. <sup>7</sup>("In my behalf her hand shalt ask,  
and home bring her hither,  
her father let or allow it:  
good shall thy guerdon be.")

*Skírnir said:*

9. "Thy steed then lend me to lift me o'er weird  
ring of flickering flame,  
the sword also that swings itself  
against the tribe of trolls."<sup>8</sup>

*Frey said:*

10. "My steed I lend thee to lift thee o'er weird  
ring of flickering flame,

---

<sup>6</sup>A giant.

<sup>7</sup>This stanza is not in the original; but the paraphrase of Snorri (*Gylfag.* chap. 37) shows that a stanza no doubt has dropped out here. It is supplied, following Gering.

<sup>8</sup>Frey will miss his sword in the last combat; cf. *Lok.* 42, where Loki alleges that it was given away as a bridal gift to Gerth.

the sword also            which swings itself,  
if wise he who wields it."

*Skírnir said to his steed:*

11. "Night is it now,            now we shall fare  
over moist mountains,  
to the thurses' throng;  
scatheless we both            shall scape their might,  
or else both be ta'en by the trolls."

Skírnir rode into etin-home and to Gymir's court. There were savage dogs tied to the gate of the enclosure which was about Gerth's bower. Skírnir rode to where a shepherd sate on a mound, and greeted him:

12. "Say thou, shepherd,            sitting on hill,  
who doest watch all ways:  
how win I the welcome            of the winsome maid  
through the grim hounds of Gymir?"

*The shepherd said:*

13. "Whether art thou doomed,            or dead already,  
(in the stirrup who standest) ?<sup>9</sup>  
Never shalt thou win            the welcome to have  
of the good daughter of Gymir."

*Skírnir said:*

14. "Ne'er a whit will whine,            whatso betide,  
who is eager on errand bent;  
my fate is foretold me            to the time of a day,  
laid out is all my life."

*Gerth said:*

15. <sup>9a</sup>"What outcry and uproar            within our courts  
hear I now, handmaid?"

---

<sup>9</sup>Inserted with Grundtvig.

<sup>9a</sup>We must assume that Skírnir has caused his steed to leap over the wall of flame.

The earth doth shake            and all my father  
Gymir's high halls."

*The handmaid said:*

16. "By his steed here stands            a stranger hero,  
unbridles and baits him;  
(he wishes, I ween,            welcome to have  
from the good daughter of Gymir)".<sup>10</sup>

*Gerth said:*

17. "Bid to my bower            the bold-minded come,  
to meet me and drink our mead;  
though far from us,            I fear me, is not  
my brother's banesman."<sup>11</sup>

*Gerth said:*

18. "Whether art of the alfs            or of æsir come,  
or art thou a wise van?<sup>12</sup>  
Through flickering flame            why farest alone  
to behold our halls?"

*Skírnir said:*

19. "Neither alf am I,            nor of æsir come  
nor, either, a wise van;  
through flickering flame            yet fared I alone  
to behold your halls.
20. "Apples eleven            have I all golden;  
to thee, Gerth, I shall give them,  
to hear from thy lips            thou lovest Frey,  
and deemest him dearest to thee."

<sup>10</sup>An obvious gap here is supplied, following Bugge's suggestion.

<sup>11</sup>That is, either Skírnir has slain the shepherd who was her brother; or else the allusion is to Frey's (Skírnir's) slaying of the giant Beli; cf. *Vsp.* 45.

<sup>12</sup>The different races of gods.

*Gerth said:*

21. "Thy apples eleven            not e'er shall I take  
   to do any wight's will;  
nor shall I ever                with Niorth's son Frey  
   dwell while our lives do last."

*Skírnir said:*

22. "Draupnir<sup>13</sup> the ring            thy dowry shall be,  
   which with Baldr was burned;  
eight rings as dear                will drop from it  
   every ninth night."

*Gerth said:*

23. "Draupnir the ring            I do not want,  
   though it with Baldr was burned;  
gold I lack not                in Gymir's halls,  
   to deal out daily."<sup>14</sup>

*Skírnir said:*

24. "This mottled blade,            doest, maiden, see it  
   which here in my hand I hold?  
Thy haughty head                I hew from thy neck  
   but thou yield thy love to the youth."

*Gerth said:*

25. "Nor gold nor sword            will gain it over me  
   to do any wight's will;  
if Gymir, my father,                did find thee here,  
   full soon would he slay thee."

---

<sup>13</sup>'Dripper'. This ring had been given Óthin by a dwarf (*Skáld.* chap. 35). After Baldr was burned on the pyre, he returned the ring to Óthin from Hel (*Gylfag.* chap. 49).

<sup>14</sup>Which is the wont of princes; cf. e.g. *Ríg.* 39.

*Skírnir said:*

26. "This mottled blade,           dost, maiden, see it.  
  which here I hold in my hand?  
Before its edge           the etin falls,  
  and is thy father fey.
27. "With this magic wand           bewitch thee I shall,  
  maiden, to do my will;  
where the sons of men           will see thee no more,  
  thither shalt thou!
28. "On the eagle-hill<sup>15</sup>           shalt ever sit,  
  and nod toward Nifhel;<sup>16</sup>  
thy food shalt find           far more loathsome  
  than men the slimy snake.
29. "An ugly sight           when out thou goest,  
  even Hrímnir<sup>17</sup> will stare at  
  and every hind glare at;<sup>18</sup>  
more well-known wilt be           than the watch of  
  the gods,<sup>19</sup>  
  and grin through the grate.<sup>20</sup>
30. "Shalt drivel and dote,           and drag thy fetters,  
  with salt tears shalt sorrow;  
shalt sit as I say,           with sorrow heavy,  
  and twofold torment.<sup>21</sup>
31. "Imps shall nip thee,           all the long days  
  thou art with the etins;

---

<sup>15</sup>Possibly, a kenning for 'mountain peak'.

<sup>16</sup>'Dark Hel', the abode of the dead.

<sup>17</sup>'Frost Giant' (?).

<sup>18</sup>There is rime here in the original.

<sup>19</sup>I.e. Heimdall, the warder of the gods. Cf. *Lok.* 48.

<sup>20</sup>She is to be kept a prisoner of the giants, which also the following stanzas imply.

<sup>21</sup>A very difficult stanza.



37. "Slaving slaves shall serve thee 'neath tree-  
 roots  
 with staling of stinking goats.  
 No other drink shalt ever get,  
 wench at thy will,  
 wench at my will!"

38. A 'thurs'-rune<sup>24</sup> for thee, and three more, I  
 scratch:  
 lechery, loathing, and lust;  
 off I shall scratch them, as on I did scratch  
 them,  
 if of none there be need."

*Gerth said:*

39. "Hail, rather, hero, and hold to thy lips  
 this crystal cup with mead—;  
 though hardly thought I that hence I should  
 fare,  
 a van's wife to be."

*Skirnir said:*

40. "My errand I would know altogether,  
 ere home I hie me:  
 when art minded to meet the strong one,  
 and welcome the wise son of Niorth?"

*Gerth said:*

41. "Barri is hight, as both we know,  
 for true love a trysting glade:  
 after nights nine to Niorth's son there  
 will Gerth grant her love."

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<sup>24</sup>The symbol *þ*, in Old Norse called *thurs*.—The runes (probably scratched on the limb of a tree, as in *Sigrdr.* 10) may be scraped off again, when their magic effect ceases.





## THE LAY OF HARBARTH

### *Hárbarthsljóð*

The two main divinities of the North are here made to confront each other in a *senna* (or flyting) and a *mannjafnaðr* (or matching of men against one another with respect to accomplishments and prowess): Óthin (Hárbarth), the god of the toil-abhorring, restless viking—warlike, cruel, amative, haughty; and Thór, the good-natured, mighty-thewed, and impetuous, but somewhat simple, god of the yeoman. In keeping with their characters, the exploits boasted of are, with Óthin, gallant adventures with giantesses whose spouses or fathers he overmasters by strength or cunning, and warfare for its own sake; with Thór, rather monotonously, the slaying of the giant-brood, to make the earth habitable for men.

We do not long remain in doubt where lie the sympathies of the poet: in the battle of words, from first to last, Thór loses out when his slow wits are pitted against the superior irony and smooth readiness of speech of the god of runic wisdom. Also, Thór's unquestionably useful activities are made to appear a bit prosy, and his plight after arduous combats a bit ridiculous, when compared with the more knightly pursuits and bearing of Óthin. The laughs are always on Óthin's side, especially when we consider that the meaning of a number of the insulting flings which so incense Thór completely eludes us.

For a not too squeamish taste the effect, though a little burlesque, is sprightly and entertaining—which was probably the aim of the gifted improvisor.

The lay is notable among the poems of the Edda for the absence of any recognizable verse scheme. For all we know, it was conceived in the main as we now have it: there are absolutely no reliable criteria as to omissions or interpolations.

The text is preserved completely in *Cod. Reg.*, whereas *Cod. Arn.* contains only the latter part of it, from stanza 19 to the end. It is generally assumed that the poem belongs to about the Tenth Century and was composed in Norway; mainly, because the opposition between nobility and yeomanry which is apparent in it never existed in Iceland.

Thór was on his way back from the East<sup>1</sup> and came to a

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<sup>1</sup>That is, from the giant-world, whither he goes frequently "to slay trolls", cf. 23.





*Thór said:*

11. "Why shouldst thou hide thy name but thou  
hadst good cause?"

*Hárbarth said:*

12. "Even though sought<sup>9</sup> I were: from such as thou  
I would fend my life but I were fey and  
doomed."

*Thór said:*

13. "A weary thing it were to me  
to wade through the water to thee, and so wet  
my nether parts;  
would I maul thee, knave, for thy mocking  
speech  
if I could but come over the sound."

*Hárbarth said:*

14. "Here shall I stand till thou hither comest;  
no hardier foe shalt find, now Hrungrnir<sup>10</sup> is  
dead."

*Thór said:*

15. "How Hrungrnir I fought thou hast heard  
aright,  
the stubborn etin who a stone bore as head;  
yet felled I the fiend, before me he lay.  
What didst thou meanwhile, Hárbarth?"

---

<sup>9</sup>I.e. for some misdeed; outlawed.

<sup>10</sup>A mountain giant, the largest of the tribe. He challenges Thór to single combat and is felled by the hammer; *Skáld.* chap. 17.



I cast on the cloudless sky;  
 those be the mighty marks of my great works,  
 which all men since may see.  
 What didst thou meanwhile, Hárbarth?"

*Hárbarth said:*

20. "With love-spells mighty I lured witch-  
 women,  
 and made them forsake their mates;  
 a hardy thurs Hlébarth me seemed:  
 a magic wand he gave me,  
 but I wiled him out of his wits."<sup>16</sup>

*Thór said:*

21. "Then thou gavest back ill for good."

*Hárbarth said:*

22. "One man's ill is the other man's luck;  
 in such things each for himself!  
 What didst thou meanwhile, Thór?"

*Thór said:*

23. "In Eastland was I and etins slew,  
 wanton wenches who warred on mountains:  
 much might had the etins if all did live,  
 little might had men then in Mithgarth's  
 round.  
 What didst thou meanwhile, Hárbarth?"

*Hárbarth said:*

24. In Valland<sup>17</sup> was I and waged battles,  
 egged on the athelings, nor ever made peace.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Nothing is known of the exploits referred to in this stanza.

<sup>17</sup>'Land of the Battlefields'.

<sup>18</sup>This is the prevailing conception of Óthin's activities.







*Hárbarth said:*

36. "What didst thou meanwhile, Thór?"

*Thór said:*

37. "Against berserk women<sup>22</sup> I warred on  
Hlésey;  
with wickedness they bewitched all men."

*Hárbarth said:*

38. "T'was unworthy of thee to war on women."

*Thór said:*

39. "She-wolves were they, not women, indeed;  
they shook my ship which was shored on land,  
threatened me with iron clubs, and drove off  
Thialfi.<sup>28</sup>

What didst thou meanwhile, Hárbarth?"

*Hárbarth said:*

40. "On the harrying was I which was hither  
made,  
raising the war-flag and reddening spears."

*Thór said:*

41. "To my mind thou callest that thou camest to  
war on us."

---

<sup>22</sup>A berserk (literally 'bear-skin') is a person who is supposed to be able to change himself at will into a bear; then, more generally, a fierce warrior.—The reference to their wives on the island of Hlésey (the sea-god Hlér's Island in the middle of the Kattegat) seems to point to sea goddesses (cf. 39) whose iron clubs are the breakers on the shore.

<sup>28</sup>Thór's servitor.

*Hárbarth said:*

42. "I shall make that up with a mickle ring,  
as daysmen may deem in dooming between  
us."<sup>24</sup>

*Thór said:*

43. "Whence hast thou these haughty words;  
for haughtier ones heard I never."

*Hárbarth said:*

44. "My words I have from wights so old  
who dwell in the hows-of-the-home."<sup>25</sup>

*Thór said:*

45. "A good name givest thou to the graves, in-  
deed,  
when thou callest them hows-of-the-  
home!"

*Hárbarth said:*

46. "Thus think I of such things."

*Thór said:*

47. "Thy glibness of tongue I would gag full soon,  
so soon as I wade o'er the water;  
than the wolf louder I ween thou wouldst  
howl,  
if the hammer struck thy head."

---

<sup>24</sup>"Hárbarth has done harm to Thór by disturbing the work of the farmers" (Gering). Now, Hárbarth offers a ring in composition. Just in what lies the gibe referred to in 43 is not clear at all.

<sup>25</sup>The 'home' is the world of men, the hows-of-the-home, hence, graves. Óthin gathers wisdom from the dead, cf. *Höv.* 158. The force of this remark too escapes us.

*Hárbarth said:*

48. “With Sif<sup>26</sup> some one sleeps in her bower;  
thy strength thou shouldst stake against his!”

*Thór said:*

49. “With wicked words sayst thou what worst  
would seem to me;  
but, craven knave, I know that thou liest.”

*Hárbarth said:*

50. “No lie I tell thee, full late art thou now;  
far hadst thou been had I ferried thee over.”

*Thór said:*

51. “Cowardly Hárbarth, thou hast held me here  
over-long.”

*Hárbarth said:*

52. “Never had I thought that Thór would brook  
a ferryman to flee at him.”

*Thór said:*

53. “Now give heed to my words and row hither  
thy boat;  
let mocking be and fetch Magni’s father  
over.”

*Hárbarth said:*

54. “Get thee from the firth! I shall not ferry  
thee over.”

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<sup>26</sup>Sib, kin’, Thór’s wife. Cf. *Lok.* 54.



## THE LAY OF HYMIR

### *Hymiskviða*

Were it not for the striking ballad motifs and some unforgettable scenes thoroughly representative of Northern creative imagination, the *Hymiskviða* would hardly be reckoned among the best known and best liked lays of the Edda; for on closer examination it is seen to be pieced together of at least four distinct Thór myths which the poet has not succeeded in welding into an organic whole. The main story, the fetching of the brewing kettle, is thrown into the shade by the tremendous motif of Thór's fishing for the Mithgarth's-serpent, and equalled in interest by his other feats of strength. The allusion to still another myth, the maiming of the goat, has so little to do with the lay as a whole that the stanzas dealing with it have been suspected of being an interpolation.

Again, notwithstanding the conscientious and mediating labor of scholars, there is evident a vagueness, and looseness of structure which seems inherent in the original.

For another matter, the subordinate rôle played by Týr is unworthy of the redoubtable god of war. It would seem as though he is here—ill-advisedly—substituted for crafty and resourceful Loki who so often functions as the intermediary between gods and giants.

*Fornyrðislag* is used, the typical metre for narrative lays.—In point of language the *Hymiskviða* is notable for a superabundance of kennings<sup>1a</sup> bordering on the mannerism of the skalds, which render the style turgid in places, in others, to be sure, peculiarly impressive. A number of points speak for fairly late Icelandic origin (Eleventh or Twelfth Century?), notwithstanding the naively Heathen spirit that seems to prevade the poem.

The text is handed down complete both in *Cod. Reg.* and *Cod. Arn.* It is not mentioned by name in the Snorra Edda whose excellent paraphrase is, indeed, based on other sources.

- |                                   |                             |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Much game gathered             | the gods, of yore;          |
| on wassail bent                   | the wands they shook,       |
| with blood besprent, <sup>1</sup> | for brewing kettle,         |
| and found that Ægir               | full many had. <sup>2</sup> |

---

<sup>1a</sup>Cf. General Introduction, p. xxi.

<sup>1</sup>The future was foretold from wands dipped in the blood of sacrificial animals.

<sup>2</sup>According to the reading of *Cod. Reg.* the passage may mean: "they found that Ægir had plenty of ale".—Ægir (whose name is etymologically connected with the word for 'water') is the god of the sea.

2. Sate the sea-god, smiling blandly,  
before Mistarblindi's mighty offspring.<sup>3</sup>  
With threat'ning eye Ygg's son him faced:  
"To æsir aye thou ale shalt brew."
3. Quick in quarrel he quelled the thurs—<sup>4</sup>  
he vengeance vowed on vanir<sup>5</sup> thereafter;  
bade Thór fetch him a fit caldron:  
"in which for all ale I shall brew."
4. Nor did they know, the noble gods,  
the glorious ones, where got it might be;  
till, trustingly, Týr<sup>6</sup> did give  
a helpful hint to Hlórrithi.<sup>7</sup>

*Týr said:*

5. "There lives eastward of Élivágar<sup>8</sup>  
wisest Hymir, at Heaven's end;  
a kettle there keeps my kinsman mighty,  
a rost<sup>9</sup> around is the roomy caldron."

*Thór said:*

6. "Knowest thou if we may win that boiler?"

*Týr said:*

"Ay, friend, if wily we work this deed."

---

<sup>3</sup>Following Boer's emendation, Mistarblindi is Óthin; his son, Thór. Cf. the same kenning (Ygg's son) below.

<sup>4</sup>Ægir, who is of giant kin.

<sup>5</sup>General for 'gods'.

<sup>6</sup>(Anglo-Saxon *Tiw*; cf. Latin *divus*, etc.) 'god', originally doubtless the predecessor of Óthin. In Old Norse mythology Týr is more specifically the god of war.—Stanza 8 shows that he is here conceived to be the son (by Óthin?) of Hymir's wife—some goddess, possibly, who is united with the giant against her will.

<sup>7</sup>Thór.

<sup>8</sup>I.e. in etin-home; cf. *Vaf.* 31.

<sup>9</sup>I.e. a league.

7. Then forth they fared, a full day's ride,  
 etinhome-ward, till to Egil<sup>10</sup> they came—  
 he guarded the goats with golden horns;  
 then went to the hall where Hymir dwelled.
8. His grandam<sup>10a</sup> loathly there greeted Týr:  
 swart heads she had a hundred times nine;  
 but an other dame, all dight in gold,  
 and brow-white, bore the beer to her son.

*(The fair one said:)*

9. "Sib-of-the-etins, I shall set you twain  
 'neath Hymir's kettles to hide you from him:  
 my wedded mate many a time  
 is glum with guests, grim in his mind."
10. The lubberly fiend was late in coming  
 home from hunting, heavy laden.  
 The icicles clinked as in he strode:  
 the churl had his chinbeard frozen.

*(His leman said:)*

11. "Welcome, Hymir, my well-beloved:  
 thy kinsman is come, and crossed thy thresh-  
 old,  
 him we looked for from long wayfaring.  
 With him he has Hróthr's slayer,<sup>11</sup>  
 man's well-wisher, who is Véur hight.
12. "They hide them here 'neath the hall's gable,  
 back stone-post standing, to withstand thy  
 glance."  
 The beam did burst and brake asunder,  
 straight as struck them the stare of the etin.

<sup>10</sup>A giant; cf. 39, note.

<sup>10a</sup>Týr's grandam by actual relationship; cf. 4, note. The phantas-  
 tic number of heads points to late invention.

<sup>11</sup>Kenning for Thór. Nothing is known of Hróthr. Véur 'protect-  
 or' (?).





19. To the woods wended his way the swain;  
 a black bull there bellowing stood.  
 Broke from the bull the breaker-of-thurs-  
 heads  
 the high head-castle, horny-guarded.<sup>15</sup>

*Hymir said:*

20. "Thy work meseems much worse by far,  
 steerer-of-ships, than when still thou sittest."
21. Threat'ning him, Thór bade the thurs to row,  
 the offspring-of-apes,<sup>16</sup> farther out to sea;  
 but little he listed longer to row  
 the roller-horse<sup>17</sup> for the reiner-of-goats.<sup>18</sup>
22. Up with his angle the etin drew  
 from midmost main two mighty whales;  
 but aft in the stern did Óthin's son,  
 wise Hlórrithi, hook a strong bait.
23. To the hook fastened the head of the ox  
 the Serpent's slayer<sup>18a</sup> and savior-of-men:  
 gaped on the angle the all-engirding  
 mighty monster, the Mithgarth's-worm.<sup>19</sup>
24. Doughtily drew undaunted Thór  
 on board the boat the baneful worm;  
 his hammer hit the high hair-fell<sup>20</sup>  
 of grisly Garm's greedy brother.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Kenning for 'the bull's head'.—To judge from Snorri's paraphrase, *Gylfag.* chap. 48, some lines describing their setting out are missing here.

<sup>16</sup>Late kenning for 'giant'.

<sup>17</sup>Kenning for 'ship'. Boats were drawn up on land, after use, by the help of rollers.

<sup>18</sup>Kenning for Thór, cf. 38.

<sup>18a</sup>In the last combat, cf. *Vsp.* 47, 48.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. *Grimn.* 41, *Vsp.* 42.

<sup>20</sup>Kenning for 'head'.

<sup>21</sup>Both are begot by Loki with the giantess Angrbotha, *Vsp.* 32, note.



“strike Hymir’s head!            That harder is,  
foe-to-etins,            than any cup.”

32. Then rose in wrath            the reiner-of-goats,  
on his knees standing            he strongly hurled it:  
whole stayed Hymir’s            head-piece above,  
but the shock shattered            the shining wine-  
cup.<sup>25</sup>

*Hymir said:*

33. “A treasure great            is gone from me  
since I lost from my lap            my lief goblet.”  
And quoth also:            “Nor, either, can I  
unsay the word            which unwitting I gave.<sup>26</sup>”
34. “Ye may keep the caldron            if fetch ye can  
the ale-mixer            out of our hall.”  
Twice did stout Týr            try to budge it;  
but stood without stirring,            though he strained,  
the kettle.
35. The goat’s-reiner            then grasped the rim,  
from the dais striding            down through the hall,  
heaved on his head            the heavy kettle:  
hard on his heels            the handles rang.
36. Nor long they fared            ere looked behind him  
Óthin’s offspring            on etin-home:  
beheld out of hills            with Hymir rush  
a many-headed            host of etins.
37. Standing, he lowered            the lifted caldron,  
swung murderous Miolnir            with mighty hands:

<sup>25</sup>A motif which recurs frequently in Northern lore.

<sup>26</sup>After Bugge’s emendation of this difficult passage.—We must suppose that they were promised the caldron provided they could shatter the goblet.



# THE FLYTING OF LOKI

## *Lokasenna*

It is safe to say that the Lokasenna is not, and never was, a popular lay, in any sense. It is the product of a witty and clever skald who conceived the idea of showing the solemn and glorious gods from their seamy side.<sup>a</sup> As interlocutor he uses Mephistophelian Loki who engages the various gods and goddesses in a *senna* (a flyting, or running dialogue of vituperation) of at times very spicy quality in which each and every one gets his or her share of defamation, until the disturber of the peace is finally put to flight by Thór's threat of violence. The result is a veritable *chronique scandaleuse* of the Northern Olympus.

It follows from what has been said that we need not implicitly believe that all—or any—of the 'sly god's' accusations are true or must agree with the generally accepted lore. They are, for the most part, imputations which the gods cannot, or care not to, controvert, for they are more easily made than disproved.

Technically, the poem is skilful both in composition and in the handling of the song metre. The connection between the stanzas is effected by the simple device of having one godhead defend the other, to be reviled in his turn by Loki.

The present position of the poem beside the *Hymiskviða* is in all likelihood due to the Collector, who also wrote the very inept Final Prose about the capture and punishment of Loki which in the *Snorra Edda* more properly follows Baldr's death.

For the text of the lay we are altogether dependent on the *Cod. Reg.* Very characteristically, it was not used as a source by Snorri (except for one stanza). The weight of evidence points to Norway as place of origin. It may have been composed in the latter half of the Tenth Century.

Ægir, who was also hight Gymir,<sup>1</sup> had made ale for the gods when he had gotten the kettle, as now has been told. To this feast came Óthin and his wife Frigg. But Thór was not there, because he was in the East.<sup>2</sup> His wife Sif<sup>2a</sup>

---

<sup>a</sup>It is impossible to believe that the Lokasenna was composed in any spirit of serious propaganda, or even with a faith in the gods, as some eminent scholars claim.

<sup>1</sup>Not identical with the giant who is Gerth's father, *Skírn.*, 6, and below, 41.

<sup>2</sup>This does not agree with the conclusion of *Hym.*

<sup>2a</sup>Cf. *Hárþ.* 48, note.

came, as also Bragi<sup>3</sup> and his wife, Ithun.<sup>4</sup> Týr was there; he was one-handed, for the Fenriswolf had bitten off his hand, the time he was bound.<sup>5</sup> There were also Niorth and Skathi<sup>6</sup> his wife, Frey<sup>7</sup> and Freya,<sup>8</sup> and Víthar,<sup>9</sup> the son of Óthin. Loki was there, and Frey's servitors, Byggvir and Beyla.<sup>9a</sup> Besides, there was many another áś and alf.<sup>10</sup>

Ægir had two servitors, Fimafeng and Eldir.<sup>11</sup> Shining gold served there for light, and the cups filled themselves with ale. It was a place of great peace.<sup>12</sup> Now they who were there praised greatly the servantmen of Ægir. Loki hated to hear that and slew Fimafeng. Then the gods shook their shields and raised an outcry against Loki and drove him away to the woods. Then they returned to the feast. Loki came back again and found Eldir without. Loki greeted him and said:

1. "Say thou, Eldir, nor before set thou  
one foot forward:  
what the æsir speak, at their ale sitting,  
here the hall within."

---

<sup>3</sup>Cf. *Grimn.* 44, note.

<sup>4</sup>'The Rejuvenating One', the goddess of youth.

<sup>5</sup>When the gods, after several vain attempts, had at last obtained fetters strong enough to hold Fenrir, the Wolf consented to be bound only if one of the gods would place his hand in his jaws as a pledge. Týr did so, and when the fetters proved unbreakable Fenrir bit it off. Thus *Gylfag.* chap. 34.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. *Vaf.* 38, note.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. *Grimn.* 5, note.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. *ibid.* 14, note.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. *Vsp.* 46.

<sup>9a</sup>'John Barleycorn' (?) and 'Milkmaid' (?).

<sup>10</sup>With the vanir, the races of gods of the Northern Olympus. NB. nom. sg. *ás*, nom. acc. plur. *æsir*, gen. plur. *ása*.

<sup>11</sup>'Handy' and 'Fire-Kindler'.

<sup>12</sup>I.e. a sanctuary where no deed of violence might be committed.

*Eldir said:*

2. “Of their weapons speak,           and of warlike deeds,  
   the glorious gods;  
 of the æsir and alfs            who within do sit  
   not one speaks well of thee.”

*Loki said:*

3. “In I shall, though,           into Ægir’s hall—  
   fain would I see that feast;  
 brawls and bickering            I bring the gods,  
   their mead I shall mix with evil.”

*Eldir said:*

4. “If in thou goest            into Ægir’s hall,  
   and fain wouldst see that feast:  
 if hate and mocking            thou heap’st on the gods,  
   they will throw it back on thee.”

*Loki said:*

5. “If with words we war,           we two alone,  
   then full well thou wotst,  
 Eldir, that I            will uppermost be,  
   if foul of me thou fallest.”

Then went Loki within the hall; but when they who were there saw who had come in, they all became hushed.

*Loki said:*

6. “Thirsty cometh            to these high halls  
   Lopt,<sup>13</sup> from long wayfaring,  
 to ask the æsir            if that any one  
   would pour him the mellow mead.

---

<sup>13</sup>‘Air’ (?), one of Loki’s names.

7. "Why are ye hushed,            ye haughty gods,  
    nor think me worth a word?  
 A seat on bench            at your banquet give me,  
    or else bid me hie from hence."

*Bragi said:*

8. "A seat on bench,            our banquet to share,  
    will the æsir not ever give thee;  
 for well they wot            what wights at the feast  
    it behooves them to have."

*Loki said:*

9. "Art mindful, Óthin,            how in olden days we  
    blended our blood together?<sup>13a</sup>  
 Thou saidst that not ever            thou ale wouldst drink  
    but to us both it were borne."

*Óthin said:*

10. "Arise, then, Víthar,            let the Wolf's father<sup>14</sup>  
    be benched at our banquet;  
 lest that Loki            fling lewd words at us  
    in Ægir's ale-hall."

Then arose Víthar and poured ale for Loki; but before he drank he hailed the gods:

11. "Hail to you, gods,            hail, goddesses,  
    hail to all hallowed hosts,  
 but to one god only            who with you sits,  
    Bragi, on his bench!"

---

<sup>13a</sup>We are not told elsewhere of this blood-brotherhood. For the rite, cf. *Brot.* 13, note.

<sup>14</sup>Loki, who is the father of the Fenris-wolf, cf. *Vsp.* 32.





*Loki said:*

17. "Hush thee, Ithun:            of all women  
   thou art most mad after men,  
for thy shining arms            on the shoulders lay  
   of thy brother's banesman."

*Ithun said:*

18. "I tease not Loki            with taunting words  
   in Ægir's ale-hall;  
I but soothe Bragi            with beer who is crazed,  
   lest the bold ones do battle."

*Gefion<sup>16</sup> said:*

19. "Ye æsir twain,            within this hall  
   why do ye war with words?  
for Loki knoweth            what nag he bears:  
   he loathes all living things."<sup>16a</sup>

*Loki said:*

20. "Hush thee, Gefion,            I have in mind  
   who did lure thee to lust:  
the fair-haired swain<sup>16b</sup>            sold thee the necklace,  
   ere thou threwest about him thy thighs."

*Óthin said:*

21. "Bereft of reason            and raving thou art,  
   to earn thee Gefion's grudge;  
for the world's weird she,            I ween, doth know  
   even as well as I."

---

<sup>16</sup>The Giver' (?). According to *Gylfag.* chap. 35, she is a virgin goddess who assembles in her hall all girls who die unwedded.

<sup>16a</sup>The rendering of these lines is uncertain.

<sup>16b</sup>The god Heimdall.—As to the (Brísings') necklace which, in other myths, is Freya's property, cf. *Þrym.* 12, note.

*Loki said:*

22. "Hush thee, Óthin; not ever fairly  
didst allot men luck in battle;  
oft thou gavest, as give thou shouldst not,  
mastery to worsen men."<sup>17</sup>

*Óthin said:*

23. "Granted I gave, as give I should not,  
mastery to worsen men:  
thou winters eight wast the earth beneath,  
[milking the cows as a maid,  
and there gavest birth to a brood:]<sup>18</sup>  
were these womanish ways, I ween."

*Loki said:*

24. "But thou, say they, on Sáms-isle<sup>19</sup>once  
wovest spells like a witch:  
in warlock's shape through the world didst  
fare:  
were these womanish ways, I ween."

*Frigg said:*

25. "Your doings ye should deeply hide,  
nor tell these tidings abroad;  
what in olden times ye twain have wrought,  
keep it from ken of men."

*Loki said:*

26. "Hush thee, Frigg, who art Fiorgyn's<sup>20</sup> wife:  
thou hast ever been mad after men.

---

<sup>17</sup>Óthin is frequently accused of this. Cf. *Sigrdr.* 5, *Helr.* 8. His defense is (*Eiríksmál* 7) that he needs the best heroes for the final fight with the Wolf.

<sup>18</sup>The myth alluded to is not known.

<sup>19</sup>A Danish island north of Funen.

<sup>20</sup>I.e. Óthin's. This name of the supreme deity is identical with that of Thór's mother, cf. *Vsp.* 48, *Hárþ.* 56.

Both Vili and Vé<sup>21</sup> thou, Vithrir's<sup>22</sup> spouse,  
didst fold to thy bosom both."

*Frigg said:*

27. "Forsooth, had I in Ægir's hall  
a son as Baldr so brave:  
thou 'dst not get thee gone from the gods in  
hall,  
before thou hadst fought for thy life."

*Loki said:*

28. "Be mindful, Frigg, what further I tell  
of wicked works of mine:  
my rede wrought it that rides nevermore  
hitherward Baldr to hall."<sup>23</sup>

*Freya said:*

29. "Thou art raving, Loki, to reckon up  
all the ill thou hast done:  
I ween that Frigg the fates knoweth,  
though she say it not herself."

*Loki said:*

30. "Hush thee, Freya, I full well know thee:  
neither thou art free from fault:  
all æsir and alfs within this hall  
thou hast lured to love with thee."

*Freya said:*

31. "Thy slanderous tongue, 'twill thy sorrow be,  
and still will work thee woe;

---

<sup>21</sup>'Will' and 'Holiness'; conceived as Óthin's brothers, but probably only hypostases of Óthin.

<sup>22</sup>'Lord of the Weather', Óthin.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. *Vsp.* 25 and note.

wroth are the gods and goddesses,  
thou'lt fare sadly home from hence."

*Loki said:*

32. "Hush thee, Freya, a whore thou art,  
and aye wast bent on ill;  
in thy brother's bed the blessed gods caught  
thee,  
when, Freya, thou didst fart."

*Niorth said:*

33. "Little sin me seemeth, though beside her mate  
a wedded wife have a lover:  
that the unclean ás with us should dwell,  
I wonder, who was a woman."<sup>24</sup>

*Loki said:*

34. "Hush thee, Niorth, thou hence wast sent  
as hostage for holy gods,<sup>25</sup>  
and Hymir's handmaids had thee as pot,  
and used thy mouth as midden."

*Niorth said:*

35. "My meed had I that holy gods  
as hostage sent me from hence:  
a son I gat<sup>26</sup> on whom smile all wights,  
who is highest held among gods."

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<sup>24</sup>Loki gave birth to Othin's horse Sleipnir, cf. *Grimn.* 44, note.

<sup>25</sup>We are told (*Vaf.* 39) that he was thus sent by the Vanir gods to the Æsir, but nowhere, that he was sent by them to the giant Hymir.

<sup>26</sup>Frey who, as well as his sister Freya, is begotten by Niorth with his (unnamed) sister.

*Loki said:*

36. "Have done now, Niorth, thy darling to  
praise;  
I'll no longer let it be hidden:  
with thy own sister that son didst get,—  
a wonder he is not worse."

*Týr said:*

37. "Frey is the best among blessed hosts  
here in the garth of the gods:  
aggrieves not maids nor men's wives,  
and frees all bondsmen from fetters."

*Loki said:*

38. "Hush thee, Týr, ne'er no heed givest thou  
that man meet man half-way;<sup>27</sup>  
thy sword-hand from thee was snatched, I ween,  
by Fenrir's greedy fangs."

*Týr said:*

39. "I lost my hand, Hróthvitnir<sup>28</sup> thou,  
a baleful loss to us both:  
in bondage now must bide his time  
the Wolf, till the world's doom."

*Loki said:*

40. "Hush thee, Týr, with thy housewife<sup>29</sup> I  
slept, so a son she bore;  
nor a penny didst get to pay pay thee back  
for this foul wrong, thou wretch."

<sup>27</sup>Like Óthin, the god of war is not a reconciler of men.

<sup>28</sup>'The Famous Wolf', Fenrir.

<sup>29</sup>We are nowhere told of Týr's wife.

*Frey said:*

41. "By the River<sup>29a</sup> fettered                      Fenrir will lie  
till draws nigh the doom of the gods;  
and near to him,                      but thou hush thee now,  
will be bound, thou breeder of ill."

*Loki said:*

42. "With gold thou boughtest                      Gymir's daughter,<sup>30</sup>  
and sold the thurses thy sword;  
but when Múspell's sons<sup>31</sup>                      through Myrk-  
wood<sup>32</sup> ride  
what weapon, wretch, wilt then wield?"

*Byggvir said:*

43. "If an ás I were                      like Ingunar-Frey,<sup>33</sup>  
and such blessed abode were mine,  
I should crush to marrow                      this crow of ill,  
and break his every bone."

*Loki said:*

44. "Who is that wee wight, pray,                      who wags his  
tail,  
and sniffing snoops about?  
About Frey's ears art                      ever hovering,  
or cluckst around the quern."

---

<sup>29a</sup>The river Ván, formed by the spittle from the jaws of the fettered wolf (*Gylfag.* 34).

<sup>30</sup>Gerth; cf. *Skírn.* where, to be sure, nothing is said about Frey's giving his sword to any one but his trusty servitor Skírnir, nor about Frey's winning Gerth with his gold.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. *Vsp.* 44 and note.

<sup>32</sup>'Dark Wood', typical name of a forest. In this case, the boundary against Surt's world of fire.

<sup>33</sup>Probably the same as Yngvi (-Frey), *H.H.* I, 57, *Reg.* 14.

*Byggvir said:*

45. "I am Byggvir hight, and brisk in work,  
as both æsir and einheriar<sup>34</sup> know;  
I glory now that Grímnir's sib<sup>35</sup> all  
are drinking the beer I brewed."

*Loki said:*

46. "Hush thee, Byggvir, at board thou dealest  
but ill their mead to men;  
in the straw of the floor men strove to find  
thee,  
when forth to fight they went."

*Heimdall<sup>36</sup> said:*

47. "Ale-crazed art and out of thy mind:  
why let not, Loki, be?  
O'ermuch of mead aye maketh one  
know not what twaddle he talks."

*Loki said:*

48. "Hush thee, Heimdall, to a hateful life  
wast doomed in days of yore:  
with a stiff back thou must stand always,  
and wake as the watch of the gods."<sup>36</sup>

*Skathi said:*

49. "Thou art lusty, Loki, but long thou wilt not  
a loose tail wag as thou list;  
for on a rock with thy ice-cold son's  
guts will bind thee the gods."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>The fallen warriors gathered in Valholl.

<sup>35</sup>Óthin's. Cf. *Grímn.* Intro. Prose, note.

<sup>36</sup>He keeps watch at the Giallar-bridge, against the giants.

<sup>37</sup>Cf. The Concluding Prose.



*Loki said:*

50. "If on a rock with my ice-cold son's  
guts will bind me the gods:  
know that first and foremost in the fray  
was I,  
when Thiatsi, thy father, we felled."<sup>38</sup>

*Skathi said:*

51. "If first and foremost in the fray thou wast,  
when ye felled my father Thiatsi:  
from my holy groves and hallowed shrines  
will cold counsel ever come for thee."

*Loki said:*

52. "More of love didst lisp to Laufey's son,<sup>39</sup>  
when thou bad'st me share thy bed:  
if our faults and blots to bare we are,  
this truth shall also be told."

Then came Sif forward and poured mead for Loki in a crystal cup, and said:

53. "Hail to thee, Loki! To thy lips now raise  
this beaker full of good beer,  
so that me alone among the gods  
without a blot thou letst be."

He took the goblet and drank of it (and said):

54. "That one thou wert, if thou wert indeed  
shy and didst shrink from men;  
but one I wot, whom well I know,  
made a whore of Hlórrithi's<sup>40</sup> wife  
[sly Loki, Laufey's son]."

<sup>38</sup>Cf. *Hárb.* 19, note.

<sup>39</sup>I.e. Loki, the son of the giantess Laufey.

<sup>40</sup>I.e. Thór's.

*Beyla said:*

55. "The mountains shake: fares Miolnir's  
wielder,  
Hlórrithi, hitherward;  
he will quickly quell the quarrelsome knave  
who mocks both æsir and men."

*Loki said:*

56. "Hush thee, Beyla, who art Byggvir's wife,  
and ever bent on ill;  
a worser wench never was with the gods:  
all dirty art thou, drab!"

Then came up Thór, and said:

57. "Hush thee, ill wight, or my hammer of  
might,  
Miolnir, shall shut thy mouth;  
I shall shatter thy shoulder-cliff,<sup>41</sup>—  
no longer then wilt thou live."

*Loki said:*

58. "The son of Iorth<sup>42</sup> now in hath come:  
why threaten and bluster now, Thór?  
Not so forward wilt be to fight the Wolf:  
he will swallow Sigfather<sup>43</sup> himself."

*Thór said:*

59. "Hush thee, ill wight, or my hammer of  
might,  
Miolnir, shall shut thy mouth;

---

<sup>41</sup>Kenning for 'head'.

<sup>42</sup>'Earth'; identical in meaning with *Fiorgyn*, *Vsp.* 56, *Hárþ.* 48.

<sup>43</sup>'The Father of Victory', *Óthin*.

up I'll hurl thee to etin world  
where men will see thee no more."

*Loki said:*

60. "Of thy eastern jaunts<sup>44</sup> not ever shouldst thou  
boast to any wight born:  
in a glove's thumb since, thewless, didst crouch,  
and seemed not Thór himself."<sup>45</sup>

*Thór said:*

61. "Hush thee, ill wight, or my hammer of  
might,  
Miolnir, shall shut thy mouth:  
my right hand will hew thee with Hrungrnir's  
bane,<sup>46</sup>  
and break every bone in thy body."

*Loki said:*

62. "To live I hope a long time yet,  
though with the hammer thou threaten:  
Skrymir's strings seemed stout to thee,  
nor mightest thou get at thy meat<sup>47</sup>  
[and, unharmed, thou wast hungry]."

*Thór said:*

63. "Hush thee, ill wight, or my hammer of  
might,  
Miolnir, shall shut thy mouth:

---

<sup>44</sup>Cf. *Hárþ.* Intro. Prose.

<sup>45</sup>The same unlucky adventure of Thór's is alluded to *Hárþ.* 26.

<sup>46</sup>Kenning for Thór's hammer. Cf. *Hárþ.* 15.

<sup>47</sup>On the adventure referred to, the giant Skrymir carried Thór's knapsack and secured it so stoutly that Thór was unable to unfasten the knot; *Gylfag.* chap. 45.

will Hrungnir's bane            to Hel send thee,  
even to Nágrind<sup>48</sup> beneath."

*Loki said:*

64. "To the æsir said I,            and to ása sons,  
          what my heart did whet me to say;  
for thee alone            I leave the hall,  
          for I well know thy hammer's weight.

65. "Ale mad'st thou, Ægir,            but not ever shalt  
          henceforth brew for a banquet:  
all that thou hast            this hall within  
          may flames set on fire  
          and burn on thy back!"

Thereupon Loki hid himself in the Fránangr waterfall in the shape of a salmon, and there the gods caught him. They bound him with the guts of his son Váli;<sup>49</sup> but his son Norfi became a wolf. Skathi took a venomous serpent and hung it above Loki's face so that its poison dripped on him. Loki's wife, Sigyn,<sup>49a</sup> sat by him and held a bowl under the poison, and she carried it out whenever it was full; but meanwhile the poison dripped on Loki. Then he tossed so fearfully that all the earth shook: men call this 'earth-quakes' nowadays.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup>'The Gates of the Dead', at the entrance of Hel.

<sup>49</sup>He bears the same name as the son of Óthin who avenges Baldr, *Vsp.* 25, note.

<sup>49a</sup>Cf. *Vsp.* 27 and note.

<sup>50</sup>The similarity with the story of the giant Typhœus confined under Ætna (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* V, 346) is striking.

## THE LAY OF THRYM

### *Þrymskviða*

This is the best known, and deservedly the most famous, poem in the collection; indeed, one of the few great ballads of world literature—a classic in so far as purely Northern material has here found its most adequate and most characteristic expression. One does not know what to admire most, the happy choice of subject, the marvellous characterization—effected with an admirable economy of means—the robust humor, the immense elasticity of the action.

It is a satisfaction to know that this high evaluation is not one of modern taste alone: the lay was a favorite also in the olden times, as is attested by the existence, in all lands inhabited by Scandinavians, of folk-ballads clearly based on it. The fact is therefore all the more surprising that Snorri makes no reference to it and that we are entirely dependent on the text as found in the *Cod. Reg.* which is, fortunately, in a good state of preservation.

The date of composition is most generally set quite early in the Tenth Century. Assuming this to be correct, Norwegian origin is likely.

1. Wroth was Vingthór<sup>1</sup> when awaking he  
Miolnir<sup>2</sup> missed, his mighty hammer;  
his beard gan shake, his shaggy head  
Fiorgyn's first-born,<sup>3</sup> he fumbled about him.
2. These words then first fell from his lips:  
"hear thou, Loki, what loss I have,  
which no wight knows,— neither on earth  
nor in heaven: my hammer is stolen!
3. To Freya's<sup>4</sup> bower they bent their steps;  
these words then first fell from his lips:  
"Wilt thou, Freya, thy feather-coat lend me,  
my hammer to seek, if haply I find it?"

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<sup>1</sup>'The Hurler' (?), an epithet of Thór.

<sup>2</sup>'The Crusher'. It never misses in its aim and always returns into Thór's hands.

<sup>3</sup>I.e. Thór, cf. *Hárþ.* 4, note.

<sup>4</sup>The goddess of fertility and love; cf. *Grímn.* 14. Her bower is called Folkvang, *ibid.*

*Freya said:*

4. "Though of gold it were            I gave it to thee,  
and for thy sake,            though of silver it were."  
Flew then Loki,            the feather-coat whirred,  
left behind him            the halls of the gods,  
and winged his way            to the world of etins.
5. On a mound sate Thrym,<sup>5</sup>            the thurses' lord;  
golden halters            for his hounds he twined,  
and sleeked the manes            of slender horses.<sup>6</sup>

*Thrym said:*

6. "What ails the æsir,            what ails the alfs?"  
Why art thou come            to etin home?"

*Loki said:*

"'Tis ill with the æsir,            ill with the alfs:  
doest hide Hlórrithi's<sup>8</sup>            hammer with thee?"

*Thrym said:*

7. "Hlórrithi's hammer            I hide with me  
full eight rosts<sup>9</sup> deep            the earth beneath;  
Miolnir no wight            may win from me,  
but he Freya bring            as bride to me."
8. Flew then Loki,            the feather-coat whirred,  
left behind him            the home of the etins,  
and winged his way            to the world of gods.

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<sup>5</sup>'The Noisy'.

<sup>6</sup>A Homeric situation. The action (like the fashioning of bow and arrow etc., *Ríg.* 27) is typical of the lord; also, sitting on a mound.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. *Vsp.* 40, note.

<sup>8</sup>I.e. Thór's.

<sup>9</sup>'Leagues'.

Thór met him there            in middle court.  
 These words then first        fell from his lips:

9. "What welcome word        rewards thy toil?  
 Tell while aloft            thy long<sup>10</sup> tidings:  
 sitting one oft            his errand forgets,  
 and lying, tells            lies altogether."<sup>11</sup>

*Loki said:*

10. "A welcome word        rewards my toil:  
 Thrym has thy hammer,        the thurses' lord.  
 Miolnir no wight            may win from him,  
 but he Freya bring        as bride with him."
11. To Freya's bower        they bent their steps.  
 These words then first        fell from his lips:  
 "busk thee, Freya,        in bridal linen,  
 we twain shall wend        to the world of etins."
12. Wroth grew Freya,        foamed with rage,  
 the shining halls        shook with her wrath,  
 the Brísings' necklace<sup>12</sup>        burst asunder:  
 "most mad after men        thou mayst call me,  
 if I wend with thee        to the world of etins."
13. To the thing<sup>14</sup> forthwith        fared all gods,  
 and all goddesses        gathered together.  
 Among them mooted        the mighty gods  
 how they Hlórrithi's        hammer'd win back.

<sup>10</sup>I.e., however long they be.

<sup>11</sup>The meaning of these curious lines may be that, the longer the delay, the less accurate the report: a night's 'lying' may pervert it utterly—out of regard for the host?

<sup>12</sup>The *Brísinga men* was a necklace (torque) fashioned (according to the late *Sorla þáttur*) by four dwarfs. It is no doubt identical with the precious *Brōsinga mēne* in *Beowulf* (1199).

<sup>13</sup>The assembly.

14. Whereon Heimdall, whitest of gods,—<sup>14</sup>  
 he fathomed the future as foreknowing  
 van—:<sup>15</sup>  
 “Busk we Thór then in bridal linen,  
 and buckle on him the Brísings’ necklace.
15. “Let a house-wife’s door-keys<sup>16</sup> dangle about  
 him,  
 let woman’s weeds be worn by him.  
 Let him bear on breast bridal jewels,  
 a hood on his head, as befits a bride.”
16. Then thus spake Thór, the Thunderer:  
 “a craven wretch may call me the gods  
 if I busk me in bridal linen.”
17. Then quoth Loki, Laufey’s son:<sup>17</sup>  
 “Hush thee now, Thór, and heed these words:  
 soon will the etins in Ásgarth<sup>18</sup> dwell,  
 but thou fetch home the hammer from them.”
18. Busked they Thór then in bridal linen,  
 buckled on him the Brísings’ necklace,  
 let a house-wife’s door-keys dangle about him,  
 and woman’s weeds be worn by him:  
 on his breast he bore bridal jewels,  
 a hood on his head as behooves a bride.
19. Then quoth Loki, Laufey’s son:  
 “with thee I will, to wait on thee,  
 we twain shall wend to the world of etins.”

<sup>14</sup>The One Shining Above the World’, a light divinity; cf. *Vsp.* 1, *Lok.* 48.

<sup>15</sup>We are not told elsewhere that the vanir gods were prophetic (as were some of the æsir, viz. Óthin, Frigg, Gefion).

<sup>16</sup>Cf. *Ríg.* 23.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. *Lok.* 52, note.

<sup>18</sup>The habitations of the æsir.



20. Then home the goats<sup>19</sup> to the hall were driven,  
 haltered with ropes to run with the wain:  
 the mountains brake, the earth burned in fire,  
 rode Óthin's son<sup>20</sup> to etin-world.
21. Said Thrym these words, the thurses' lord:  
 "stand up, etins, put straw on the benches:<sup>21</sup>  
 to be my bride they bring me Freya,  
 Niorth's daughter from Nóatún.<sup>22</sup>
22. "In my garth there graze golden-horned  
 kine,<sup>23</sup>  
 oxen all black, to etins a joy;  
 many rings have I, many riches have I,  
 Freya alone I lacked, methinks."
23. Soon had the sun set in that land;<sup>24</sup>  
 then ale was borne on the etins' table;  
 ate there an ox and eight salmons,  
 bolted all dainties dealt for women,  
 three measures of mead drank Miolnir's  
 wielder.
24. Said Thrym these words, the thurses' lord:  
 "where sawest thou bride bite more sharply?  
 Ne'er saw I bride bite more broadly,  
 nor more of mead a maiden drink."
25. The waiting-maid wise these words then found,  
 to the etin thus she answer made:

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<sup>19</sup>Thór's wain is drawn by he-goats.

<sup>20</sup>Thór, by the giantess Fiorgyn or Hlóthyn.

<sup>21</sup>This was done on festal occasions; cf. *Bdr.* 6.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. *Grimn.* 16.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. *H.Hv.* 4, note.

<sup>24</sup>Because of the location of the frost-giants in the far North (-east); but the line may be interpreted:

early at eve they in had come.

- “naught ate Freya for full eight nights,  
so eager was she for etin-world.”
26. He looked 'neath the veil, longed to kiss her :  
back reeled the rash one through roomy hall :  
“why are so fearful Freya's eyes?  
Methinks that fire flames in her eyes.”
27. The waiting-maid wise these words then  
found,  
to the etin thus she answer made :  
“slept not Freya for full eight nights,  
so eager was she for etin-world.”
28. In stepped the etin's starveling sister,<sup>25</sup>  
bridal gifts she dared beg from her :  
“Rings of red gold give thou to me,  
if fain wouldst have my friendship and love,  
all my friendship and fondness too.”
29. Said Thrym these words, the thurses' lord :  
“Bring the hammer the bride to bless ;<sup>26</sup>  
on the maiden's lap Miolnir lay ye,  
in Vór's<sup>27</sup> name then our wedlock hallow !”
30. Laughed Hlórrithi's heart within him,  
when his hammer beheld the hardy one ;  
Thrym he slew first, the thurses' lord,  
then crushed he all the etin's kin.
31. Struck the etin's starveling sister,—  
for shillings she got a shock of the hammer,  
a grinding blow for golden rings.  
Thus Hlóthyn's son<sup>28</sup> his hammer got him.

<sup>25</sup>The etin's sister' is, probably, a kenning for 'giantess'—some kinswoman.

<sup>26</sup>A consecration with the hammer is known also elsewhere, though not in the wedding ceremony. The hammer is a phallic symbol.

<sup>27</sup>'Oath', a goddess, seemingly a hypostasis of Frigg, goddess of marriage.

<sup>28</sup>Cf. note on 20, above.





*Thór said:*

6. "I am hight Vingthór,<sup>6</sup> I have wandered far,—  
 Síthgrani's<sup>7</sup> son I am;  
 by my leave never shalt the maiden take,  
 and have her as wedded wife."

*Alvís said:*

7. "Thy leave full soon thou wilt let me have,  
 to win her as wedded wife;  
 to marry I mean, nor to remain without,  
 the slender, snow-white maiden."

*Thór said:*

8. "The maiden's love I shall let thee have,  
 thou wise guest, as thou wishest,  
 if of every world<sup>8</sup> thou canst tell me all  
 that I list to learn."<sup>9</sup>

9. "Tell me, Alvís, for all the worlds  
 I deem that, dwarf, thou knowest:  
 how the earth is hight, before all out-spread,  
 in all the worlds so wide?"

*Alvís said:*

10. "'Tis hight 'Earth' among men, among æsir,  
 'Land';  
 call the vanir it 'Ways',

<sup>6</sup>Cf. *þrym.* 1.

<sup>7</sup>'Longbeard', i.e. Óthin.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. *Vsp.* 2, and the following note.

<sup>9</sup>Here the Paper Manuscripts insert the following stanza, generally regarded as spurious and unnecessary:

"Thou mayst ask, Vingthór, if eager thou art  
 to learn what lore I have:  
 the nine worlds over oft have I fared,  
 and mindful am I of much."





*Alvís said:*

20. "'Tis hight 'Wind' among men, but 'Wafter'  
among gods;  
call the most high it 'Whinnier',  
the etins, 'Roarer', the alfs, 'Dinfarer',  
the Hel-dwellers, 'Whistler'."

*Thór said:*

21. "Tell me, Alvís, for all the worlds  
I deem that, dwarf, thou knowest:  
how the calm is hight which quietly lies,  
in all the worlds so wide?"

*Alvís said:*

22. "'Tis hight 'Calm' among men, 'Sea-Quiet'  
among gods;  
call the vanir it 'Windlull',  
the etins, 'Sultry', the alfs, 'Day-Balm',  
the dwarfs, 'Day's Haven'."

*Thór said:*

23. "Tell me, Alvís, for all the worlds  
I deem that, dwarf, thou knowest:  
how the sea is hight which is sailed by men,  
in all the worlds so wide?"

*Alvís said:*

24. "'Tis hight 'Sea' among men, 'Wide-Sweeping'  
among gods;  
call the vanir it 'Wave',  
the etins, 'Eelhome', the alfs, 'Water',  
call the dwarfs it 'the Deep'."



*Thór said:*

25. "Tell me, Alvis, for all the worlds  
I deem that, dwarf, thou knowest:  
how the fire is hight which flames for men,  
in all the worlds so wide?"

*Alvis said:*

26. "'Tis hight 'Fire' among men, but 'Flame'  
among gods;  
call the vanir it 'Warmth',<sup>14</sup>  
the etins, 'Greedy', 'Glut-All', the dwarfs,  
the Hel-wights, 'Fast Whelmer'."

*Thór said:*

27. "Tell me, Alvis, for all the worlds  
I deem that, dwarf, thou knowest:  
how the wood is hight, in men's world that  
grows,  
in all the worlds so wide?"

*Alvis said:*

28. "'Tis hight 'Wood' among men, 'Earth's  
Mane' among gods;  
call the Hel-wights it 'Seaweed-of-Slopes',  
the etins, 'Firewood', the alfs, 'Fairbough',  
call the vanir it 'Wand'."

*Thór said:*

29. "Tell me Alvis, for all the worlds  
I deem that, dwarf, thou knowest:  
how the night is hight which to Nor<sup>15</sup> was  
born,  
in all the worlds so wide?"

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<sup>14</sup>Conjectural.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. *Vaf.* 25.

*Alvís said:*

30. "Tis hight 'Night' among men, but 'Murk'  
among gods;  
call the most mighty it 'Mask',  
the etins, 'Lightless', the alfs, 'Sleep's Ease',  
the dwarfs, 'Weaver-of-Dreams'."

*Thór said:*

31. "Tell me, Alvís, for all the worlds  
I deem that, dwarf, thou knowest:  
how the seed is hight which is sowed by men,  
in all the worlds so wide?"

*Alvís said:*

32. "Tis hight 'Barley' among men, but 'Bread-  
stuff'<sup>16</sup> among gods;  
call the vanir it 'Well-Grown',  
the etins, 'Eating', the alf-kin, 'Grain',<sup>16</sup>  
the wights of Hel, 'Waving'."

*Thór said:*

33. "Tell me Alvís, for all the worlds  
I deem that, dwarf, thou knowest:  
how the beer is hight which is brewed by  
men,  
in all the worlds so wide?"

*Alvís said:*

34. "Tis hight 'Ale' among men, among æsir,  
'Beer';  
call the vanir it 'Wassail-Brew',

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<sup>16</sup>Transposed here.

'Clear Must', the etins,            'Mead', the Hel-wights,  
the sons of Suttung,<sup>17</sup> 'Feast-Draught'."

*Thór said:*

35. "I never learned            like lore to dwell  
   in the breast of any wight born;  
with wily words            outwitted thou art:  
   above ground finds thee, dwarf, the day;  
   was the sun seen in thy hall."

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<sup>17</sup>The giants, cf. *Hólv.* 104

## BALDR'S DREAMS

### *Baldrs draumar*

This little poem purports to be a supplement to the *Völuspǫl*, elaborating the Baldr episode. As there, a seeress is summoned by Óthin from her grave at the gate of Hel, to which she returns after giving the desired prophecy.

At first sight the poem seems forceful and of one piece, but a closer examination shows that it yields no new information beyond that contained in the *Völuspǫl* and that it has grave structural defects, at least in its present form. Certain verbal similarities to the *Völuspǫl* and the *brymskviða* (where the passages involved are integral) lend color to the suspicion of several scholars that it is not an original but the work of a skilful imitator of the ancient manner—say of the Twelfth Century; whereas other students, with less probability, insist on a much earlier origin (Tenth Century).

The text which is, on the whole, in excellent condition, is preserved only in *Cod. Arn.* and was, apparently, not known to Snorri. The metre is a regular *fornyrðislag*.

1. To the thing forthwith           fared all gods,  
and all goddesses           gathered together.  
Among them mooted           the mighty æsir<sup>1</sup>  
why Baldr the Bright           had baleful dreams.<sup>2</sup>
  
2. Up rose Óthin,           oldest of gods,<sup>3</sup>  
and on Sleipnir<sup>4</sup>           the saddle laid:  
to the nether world rode,           to Nifhel<sup>5</sup> dark.  
A hound he met           which from Hel did come.<sup>6</sup>
  
3. About his breast           was he blood-besprent,  
and long did bark           at Baldr's father.

---

<sup>1</sup>The abruptness of the beginning may be due to direct loan (from *brym.* 13) of the preceding lines.

<sup>2</sup>For this myth, cf. *Vsp.* 24–26 and notes.

<sup>3</sup>Conjectural.

<sup>4</sup>The Runner', Óthin's steed. Cf. *Grímn.* 44, note.

<sup>5</sup>'Dark Hel'; cf. *Vaf.* 43.

<sup>6</sup>Viz. Garm; cf. *Vsp.* 36.

Rode Óthin on— the earth did quake—  
till the halls so high of Hel he neared.

4. Then Óthin rode to the eastern gate,  
to the haunted howe of the hoary seeress;  
there spells he chanted to charm up the dead,  
till unwilling arose the witch and spake:

5. "What man is this, to me unknown,  
who maketh me fare such fear-fraught ways?  
Was I buried in snow and beaten by rain  
and drenched with dew, dead was I long."

*Óthin said:*

6. "Vegtam<sup>7</sup> my name, I am Valtam's son;  
say of misty Hel as of Mithgarth I:  
for whom are the benches bright with arm-  
rings,  
and the dais decked with dazzling gold?"<sup>8</sup>

*The seeress said:*

7. "For Baldr the beer brewed here standeth,  
a shield<sup>9</sup> lies over the shining drink;  
in sorrow are sunk the sons of Óthin.<sup>10</sup>  
I was loath to speak, now let me cease."

*Óthin said:*

8. "Cease not, seeress! till said thou hast,  
answer the asker till all he knows:  
who will Baldr slay, the blameless god,  
and send hither the son of Óthin?"

<sup>7</sup>The Wayfarer'. Valtam, 'the Warrior'.

<sup>8</sup>The usual preparations for the advent of an honored guest.

<sup>9</sup>In the sense of a paten covering the caldron?

<sup>10</sup>I.e. the gods.

*The seeress said:*

9. "Hoth<sup>11</sup> will the hero           hitherward send,  
he will Baldr slay,           the blameless god,  
and end the life           of Óthin's son.  
I was loath to speak,           now let me cease."

*Óthin said:*

10. "Cease not, seeress,           till said thou hast,  
answer the asker           till all he knows:  
the hateful deed           who will avenge,  
and Baldr's slayer           who send to Hel?"

*The seeress said:*

11. "Rind bears Váli           in Western Halls;  
but one night old           will Váli slay him:  
neither cleanses his hands           nor combs his hair,  
till Baldr's slayer           he sends to Hel.  
I was loath to speak,           now let me cease.

*Óthin said:*

12. "Cease not, seeress,           till said thou hast:  
answer the asker           till all he knows:  
who are the girls           that greet so sore,  
and their kerchief corners           cast to the sky?"<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Cf. *Vsp.* 25ff.

<sup>12</sup>Answer: the waves. Probably, there is a pun intended, for the words of the original here translated 'kerchief corners' may also mean 'the corners of the sail'.—Similar riddles are propounded by Gest-umblindi (Óthin) in the *Hervararsaga* chap. 9. To account for the riddle being introduced here it has been suggested that the lines refer to the sail of the ship bearing dead Baldr's body (*Gylfag.* chap. 49), which dips into the sea.

*The seeress said:*

13. "Thou art not Vegtam, as I had thought,  
but rather Óthin, oldest of gods."

*Óthin said:*

"Thou art no seeress nor sage woman,  
but rather of thurses three the mother."

*The seeress said:*

14. "Homeward hie thee, happy in mind:  
no chanted spells will charm me up  
until Loki is loose from his bonds<sup>13</sup>  
and the day will come of the doom of the  
gods."

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<sup>13</sup>Cf. *Vsp.* 27 and *Lok.* Final Prose.

## THE LAY OF RIG

### *Rígsþula*

The Lay of Ríg fills exactly the last sheet of the *Codex Wormianus* of Snorri's Edda. The lost conclusion evidently stood on a following one. However, notwithstanding this fragmentary condition, it is clear that the lay was intended as a glorification of the existing (aristocratic) order in the Scandinavian homeland—not in republican Iceland—, whether in Denmark or Norway; and more specially as a vindication of the divine origin of kingship.—But this is as far as agreement among scholars goes: about few Eddic poems has there been such a diversity of opinion in almost every other respect. Thus, one famous scholar is convinced that the author had Norwegian conditions in mind, that the lay is therefore Norwegian, that it dates from the Tenth Century, that the young Kon may represent Harold Hairfair himself. Another scholar agrees that it is composed early in the Tenth Century, as the poem seems to presuppose Heathendom undisturbed, but holds that it is by some Icelandic skald celebrating the Danish royal house,<sup>1a</sup> perhaps King Gorm the Old, or Harold Bluetooth. Still another held the view that the lay had its origin on one of the Scottish islands.

Again, up to the present the lay has been universally regarded as a valuable source of information on social conditions in the earliest times; but this seems open to doubt with the growing feeling that it may be the didactic-antiquarian effort of a learned skald. At any rate, in its list of names (in free *fornyrðislag*) there is a suspicious similarity to the *nafnapulur* (rigmaroles) and the *heitatöl* of the Thirteenth Century, and to such a poem as the *Alvíssmál*; so that we may not be far wrong in assigning the lay to the Eleventh or Twelfth Century, but hardly later, as serfdom was abolished in Norway at the end of the Twelfth Century.

But whatever its authenticity, the lay does stand out as unique among Eddic poems, and will always be read with interest for its vivid and colorful, though brief, contrasted descriptions of the life of the thrall, the freeman, and the noble in ancient Scandinavia.

It is told by men in olden tales that one of the gods whose name was Heimdall, fared forth along the seashore until he

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<sup>1a</sup>See 49, notes.



came to a farm. There he called himself Ríg.<sup>1</sup> Of this the following song dealeth:

1. In old times, say they,            on earth-paths green  
there wended his way            a wise god ancient,  
rugged and mighty,—            Ríg was he hight.
2. Walked unwearied            in middle ways;<sup>2</sup>  
to a dwelling he came,            was the door let down.<sup>3</sup>  
In gan he go,            on the ground was a fire,<sup>4</sup>  
at the hearth, hoary,            sate husband and wife—  
Ái and Edda,<sup>5</sup>            in old head-gear.
3. Well knew Ríg            wisely to counsel;  
on middle seat            he sate him down,  
betwixt the twain            of the toft benched him.
4. Then took Edda            a thick loaf heavy  
of bread hard-baked            and full of bran;  
a bowl then bore            on the board Edda,  
filled with the broth            of boiled meat.
5. Well knew Ríg            wisely to counsel;  
he rose up thence,            ready for sleep;  
on middle bedstead            his berth he made,  
betwixt the twain            of the toft laid him.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In no other source does Heimdall bear this name, which is probably Celtic, meaning 'king'. The fact that in *Vsp.* 1 'all hallowed beings' (men?) are mentioned as his children, 'high and low', has led to the conjecture that the author took these lines as his 'text'.

<sup>2</sup>Generally understood as 'in the middle of the way'. It may mean, here, 'on earth'.

<sup>3</sup>Uncertain. Cf. 26, note.

<sup>4</sup>In Old Germanic times the hearth-fire was built on the ground, the smoke escaping through the louver.

<sup>5</sup>Still used in Modern Icelandic for 'grandfather' and 'grandmother'.

<sup>6</sup>In the oldest times it was not uncommon in the North, as is still the case among primitive races, for the host to offer his wife or daughter to the honored guest.



whispered and laughed and lay together  
Thrall and Thír whole days through.

12. In their hut, happy, they had a brood:  
I ween they were hight<sup>12</sup> Haygiver, Howler,  
Bastard, Sluggard, Bent-back and Paunch,  
Stumpy, Stinker, Stableman, Swarthy,  
Longshanks and Lout: they laid fences,  
put dung on fields, fattened the swine,  
herded the goats, and grubbed up peat.<sup>13</sup>
13. Their daughters were: Drudge and Daggel-  
Tail,  
Slattern, Serving-Maid, and Cinder-Wench,  
Stout-Leg, Shorty, Stumpy and Dumpy,  
Spindleshanks eke, and Sputterer:  
thence are sprung the breed of thralls.
14. At his staff Ríg strode, and straight forth  
fared;  
to a dwelling he came, were the doors let  
down.<sup>14</sup>  
In gan he go, on the ground was a fire,  
Afi and Amma<sup>15</sup> owned that house.
15. Sate husband and wife, with their work busy:  
a warp-beam he out of wood was shaping—  
his beard was brushed, and banged his hair—  
sate in kirtle tight; was a trunk on the floor.

<sup>12</sup>Some of the names in this list, as well as in those following, are doubtful. The translator has not followed the order of the original.

<sup>13</sup>In the *Orkneyinga saga* chap. 7 we are told that it was Earl Einar, the Norwegian ruler of the Orkneys in the Ninth Century, who first taught the islanders how to use peat. But the digging of peat was probably very old in the treeless portions of the North. Already Pliny (*Hist. nat.* XVI, 1) describes the method of curing it as practiced on the shores of the North Sea.

<sup>14</sup>Doubtfully, as above.

<sup>15</sup>'Grandfather' and 'Grandmother'.







34. A son bore Mother, in silk they swathed him,  
sprinkled water on him and called him Earl.  
Was his hair flaxen, and fair-hued his cheek,  
his eyes awfully like an adder's, blazed.<sup>31</sup>
35. Up grew Earl within the hall,  
gan bucklers wield and the bowstring fasten,  
gan the elmwood bend and arrows shaft;  
gan hurl the spear and speed the lance,  
gan hunt with hounds, and horses ride,  
gan swing swords eke, and swim in the sea.
36. Out of rough woodland came Ríg striding,  
came Ríg striding, and taught him runes;  
his own name gave him as heir and son,  
bade him make his own the udal lands,  
the udal lands and olden manors.
37. He dauntless rode through darkling woods,  
over frosty fells, to a far-away hall.
38. Shields he shattered and shafts he hurled,  
swung his sword and swiftly rode;  
he wakened war and warriors slew,  
with wound-red weapons he won him land.
39. He made him master of manors eighteen,  
gan share his wealth and shower it on all:  
silver and gold and slender steeds;  
squandered rings and scattered gold.
40. His heralds drove on dew-wet paths,  
and came to the hall where Hersir<sup>32</sup> dwelled;

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<sup>31</sup>Flashing eyes were regarded as a sure token of noble birth.  
Cf. Tacitus' *acies oculorum* of the Teutons.

<sup>32</sup>'Lord', chieftain of a district.





46. With Ríg the Earl<sup>37</sup> in runes he matched him,  
with wiles he warred, and outwitted him;  
thus got for him, and gained to own,  
the name of Ríg, and runes to know.
47. Rode Kon the young through copse and  
woods,  
the birds he shot with bow and arrow;  
then quoth a crow, cackling on branch:  
“why killest thou birds with bow and arrow?”
48. “Rather shouldest thou ride on horses  
— — — and slay foemen.
49. “Have Dan and Danp<sup>38</sup> a dwelling richer,  
and lands larger, than are left to thee;  
are they skilled in steering on stormy seas,  
in trying swords and slaying heroes.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Ríg the Earl, viz. his father, the son of Ríg (Heimdall). He now bestows the title of Ríg ‘king’ on Kon as his true heir.

<sup>38</sup>In all probability these are eponymous kings of Denmark. Cf. *Akv.* 5.

<sup>39</sup>The poem ends here abruptly. From the whole tenor of the poem we cannot doubt that Kon follows the advice of the bird (as does Sigurth in *Fáfn.*) and wins the lands of Dan and Danp. According to the synoptic account of the (lost) *Skioldungasaga* made by the learned Icelander Arngrim Jónsson (1597), King Ríg marries Dana, the daughter of Danpr of Danpstead; and their son Dan was the mythical king who united Denmark under one rule.

## THE LAY OF HYNDLA<sup>1a</sup>

### *Hyndluljóð.*

Owing to its sadly confused and faulty preservation (in the large manuscript codex called the Flatisland Book (*Flateyjarbók*), written in Iceland toward the end of the Fourteenth Century, this poem has given rise to the most varying interpretations. One thing is clear, viz. its didactic purpose to impart information about the genealogy of Óttar, the scion of a princely house which ruled the Norwegian shire of Horthaland (around the Hardanger Fiord) and—we assume—the forbear of a distinguished family in Iceland. The story within which this lore is framed is not made out without difficulty.

As the text is handed down to us, the following interpretation seems most plausible: the goddess Freya, riding on her boar, awakens the wise giantess Hyndla (cf. the situation in 'Baldr's Dreams' and 'Gróa's Spell') and invites her to mount her wolf to ride to Valholl with her. There, Óthin and Thór are to grant success to Freya's protégé, Óttar: he has wagered with Angantýr, another hero, and staked his all on it, as to who is of nobler descent. On the way, so Freya proposes, they are to match their genealogical lore. Notwithstanding Freya's denial the giantess knows that the boar is Óttar in disguise, and addresses to him the information desired; whereupon Freya demands, still further, that she give him to drink of the 'memory ale', so that he may keep in his mind until the third day what has been told him. This, the giantess refuses, but is compelled by the threat of encircling fire. Her curse on the drink is neutralized by Freya's blessing.

Many minor and major alterations have been proposed to render the action more plausible. Most radically, Finnur Jónsson claims that stanzas 31-34, 2 should precede 11, as furnishing the compulsion to make the giantess divulge her lore; and, indeed, this re-arrangement would eliminate a number of difficulties.

As to the genealogies of Óttar's race, three groups may be discerned—that of the kings of Horthaland, to which he belongs by immediate descent; the line of Hálfðan the Old, mythical ancestor of all the lordly races of the North; and famous legendary heroes whose kinship is claimed. To be sure, no two scholars are agreed as to what is to be regarded as genuine or interpolated in these lists.

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<sup>1a</sup>Exclusive of the Short 'Prophecy of the Seeress' which, in the original, comes between stanzas 29 and 30.

That they seemed authentic to learned Icelanders of the Thirteenth Century is attested by the fact that they are drawn on, both by Snorri, in his *Skáldskaparmǫl* (chap. 64), and in the story entitled 'How Norway was Settled' (*Hversu Noregr byggðist*).<sup>1b</sup>

To most scholars, the poem has the earmarks of rather late and learned Icelandic origin, say the Twelfth Century; but it must be acknowledged that some elements do point to a much earlier time, perhaps the end of the Tenth Century.

*Freya said:*

1. "Awake, good maiden,                    awake, my friend,  
sister Hyndla,<sup>1</sup>                    who sleepest in cave;  
'tis darkest night,<sup>2</sup>                    so now let us ride  
hence to Valholl,<sup>3</sup>                    the hallowed stead.
2. "We shall ask Óthin                    our errand to speed,  
he gives and grants                    gold to his followers:  
to Hermóth<sup>4</sup> gave he                    helm and byrnie,  
to king Sigmund,                    his keenest sword.<sup>5</sup>
3. "He gives riches to some,                    to some, victory,  
word-skill to wights,                    wisdom to others,  
sea-breeze to sailors,                    song-craft to skalds,  
gives manfulness                    to many a warrior.
4. "I shall worship Thór,                    and this ask of him  
that he shall not ever                    do ill to thee,  
though else he love not                    etin women.

<sup>1b</sup>*Flateyjarbók* I, p. 24ff.

<sup>1</sup>'Bitch'. As to Freya's wheedlingly calling her friend', cf. 6 and 31.

<sup>2</sup>The time when the beings of the nether world may be abroad.

<sup>3</sup>Hall of the Slain', Óthin's hall.

<sup>4</sup>Ags. *Heremōd*, 'He of Warlike Courage'. It is uncertain whether the god, Óthin's son, is referred to or, more probably, the famous hero who is the predecessor of Skiold, cf. 11.

<sup>5</sup>Viz. the sword Gram 'troll' which, later, becomes Sigurth's weapon.

5. "Take one of thy wolves<sup>6</sup> from his wonted  
stall,  
with my boar<sup>7</sup> let him leap on our way."

*Hyndla said:*

"Slow runs thy boar on the road to Valholl,  
nor will I weary my worthy steed.

6. "False art, Freya, to befriend<sup>8</sup> me now;  
thy eye seemeth to say to me  
thou ledest thy lover on his last journey,<sup>8</sup>  
Óttar<sup>9</sup> the Young, Innstein's<sup>10</sup> son."

*Freya said:*

7. "Dull art, Hyndla, and dreamest, ween I,  
to believe my lover on his last journey:  
my boar gleameth, golden-bristled,  
Hildisvíni,<sup>11</sup> by smiths twain shaped  
of dwarfish kin, Dáin<sup>12</sup> and Nabbi.
8. "Let us strive<sup>13</sup> as we sit astride our saddles,  
match our lore of lines of lordly races,  
of the kin of kings who came from Óthin.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>The wolf is the mount of trolls and witches; cf. *H.Hv.*, Prose introductory to IV.

<sup>7</sup>The boar is elsewhere the animal sacred to her brother Frey; cf. reference in note above. Generally, Freya's chariot has a span of cats.

<sup>8</sup>I.e. as a slain warrior to join the heroes in Óthin's (or Freya's) hall; cf. *Grimn.* 8, 14.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. *Ags. Óththere*; cf. the genealogy below.

<sup>10</sup>Known a one of 'Hálf's Warriors', who figure in the *Hálfs saga*.

<sup>11</sup>'Battle-Swine'.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. p. 388.

<sup>13</sup>Viz. with words. The passage is doubtful.

<sup>14</sup>All the royal families of the North trace their ancestry ultimately back to the gods.

9. "Wagered have they for Welsh gold,  
 Óttar the Young and Angantýr:<sup>15</sup>  
 the young hero to help I am bound,  
 lest he fail to have his father's share.
10. "He a high-altar made me of heapèd stones—  
 all glary have grown the gathered rocks<sup>16</sup>—  
 and reddened anew them with neats' fresh  
 blood;  
 for aye believed Óttar in the ásynjur.<sup>17</sup>
11. "Reckon up in order the oldest sib,  
 and call to mind the kin of men:  
 a Skioldung who, a Skilfing<sup>18</sup> who,  
 (an Othling who,)<sup>19</sup> an Ylfing who?  
 Who a land-holder, who of lordly stock,  
 Who of most worth are in the world of men?"

*Hyndla said:*

12. "Thou art, Óttar, from Innstein sprung;  
 but Innstein was born to Álf the Old,  
 and Álf to Ulf, Ulf to Sæfari;<sup>20</sup>  
 Sæfari's father was Svan the Red.

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<sup>15</sup>Ags. *Ongenþēow*.

<sup>16</sup>By the fire of repeated burnt-offerings which in the earliest times were made on rude stone altars.

<sup>17</sup>Plural of *ásynja* 'goddess'.

<sup>18</sup>Ags. *Scyldingas*, *Scylfingas*; their progenitors are Skiold and Skelfir.

<sup>19</sup>Supplied here from 16. According to *Skáld.* chap. 62 the Othlings were descended from an eponymous King Auth.—The Ylfings (Ags. *Ylfingas*), descendants of Ulf 'Wolf', are of the same race with Helgi Hundingsbani (*H.H.* I, 5).—Note that in the corresponding passage (16) the Ynglings (descendants of the god Yngvi) are mentioned instead.

<sup>20</sup>'Sea-Farer'.

13. "As mother hadst thou a high-born maiden,  
I ween she was hight Hlédís the Priestess;  
was Fróthi her father, Friaüt her mother:<sup>21</sup>  
this race was wholly ranked with the highest.
14. "Of old was Authi<sup>22</sup> among earth's greatest;  
before was Hálfðan<sup>23</sup> highest of Skioldungs;  
many wars in the world waged the bold one,  
to the welkin were wafted his works abroad.
15. "Befriended by Eymund, foremost among  
men,  
he slew Siggtrygg with the sword's edge;  
he home led Almveig,<sup>24</sup> the most high-born  
woman,—  
they issue had of eighteen sons.
16. "Thence the Skioldungs, thence the Skilfings,  
thence the Othlings, thence the Ynglings,  
the land-holders thence, the lords' stock thence  
who of most worth are in the world of men:  
thy sib all these, silly Óttar!
17. "Her<sup>25</sup> mother, hold I, was Hildigunn,  
the child of Sváva and of Sækonung;<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>All three are unknown.—Fróthi (Ags. *Fróða*) 'the Wise' bears a name common among the mythical Danish kings; cf. *Grot.*

<sup>22</sup>Accepting Jónsson's emendation for the Áli of the original. According to *Skáld.* chap. 62 Authi was a son of Hálfðan.

<sup>23</sup>Ags. *Healfdene*, 'Half-Dane'; i.e. Hálfðan the Old, a legendary king of the Danes. He is always 'the High', which may have reference to his stature.

<sup>24</sup>The *Skáld.*, *loc. cit.* indicates that she was the daughter of Eymund, King of Russia. Her sons by Hálfðan (born nine at a birth) were the mythical progenitors of the royal families of the North.

<sup>25</sup>Almveig's?

<sup>26</sup>These are unknown otherwise.—Sækonung 'Sea-King'.



- Brodd and Horvi— both I knew them—  
they house-carles were with Hrólfr the Old.<sup>32</sup>
23. “Hervarth, Hiorvarth, Hrani, Angantýr,  
Búi and Brámi, Barri and Reifnir,  
Tind and Tyrfring, and the two Haddings:<sup>33</sup>  
thy sib all these, silly Óttar!
24. “In Bolm in Eastland were born these twelve,  
the sons of Arngrím and Eyfura;  
the blare of these berserks,<sup>34</sup> their baleful  
deeds,  
like wildfire swept over sea and land:  
thy sib all these, silly Óttar!
25. “Were given to the gods the goodly men,  
king Iormunrekk’s kinsmen all—:<sup>35</sup>  
he was Sigurth’s sib— what I say heed thou—  
the folkruler’s, who Fáfnir slew.
26. “Was Svanhild’s sire the son of Volsung  
and of Hiordís, of Hrauthung’s<sup>35a</sup> kin—  
she Eylimi’s, the Othling’s,<sup>36</sup> daughter:  
thy sib all these, silly Óttar!

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<sup>32</sup>The arrangement of this and the two following stanzas is Bugge’s.—Excepting Thórir and Grím, these ‘house-carles’ (members of the king’s bodyguard) are unknown elsewhere. The company is that of King Hrólfr of the *Hrólfrs saga Gautrekssonar*.

<sup>33</sup>These twelve sons of Arngrím occur prominently in the *Hervarar saga* and in the *Orvar Odds saga*.

<sup>34</sup>Wild warriors; cf. *Hárþ.* 37.

<sup>35</sup>As he was the husband of Svanhild, Sigurth’s daughter by Guthrún, both the Volsungs and the Niflungs may be said to be his ‘kinsmen’. For the names and occurrences touched on in this and the two following stanzas, general reference is made to the entire cycle of lays dealing with the fates of the Volsungs and Giúkungs (*Gríp. to Hamð.*)—‘Given to the gods’ probably means ‘slain’.

<sup>35a</sup>A king of this name occurs in *Grímn.*, Prose Intro.

<sup>36</sup>Only here is Eylimi, Sigurth’s grandfather, called an Othling.



27. "Gunnar and Hogni were Giúki's sons,  
of the same sib was their sister Guthrún;  
but Gotthorm was not of Giúki's kin,  
though a brother to both his sons:<sup>37</sup>  
thy sib all these, silly Óttar!
28. Of Hvethna's sons Haki was best,  
but Hiorvarth was Hvethna's father.<sup>38</sup>
29. Harold War-Tooth<sup>39</sup> was to Hrcerek<sup>40</sup> born,  
the sower-of-rings: he the son was of Auth;<sup>41</sup>  
Auth the Deep-Minded was Ívar's<sup>42</sup> daughter;  
Ráthbarth was Randvér's<sup>43</sup> father:  
thy sib all these, silly Óttar!"<sup>44</sup>

*Freya said:*

30. "To my boar bring thou, that he bear all in  
mind,  
a cup<sup>45</sup> so he can keep all these words,

<sup>37</sup>In other words, he was Giúki's stepson; which is of importance in the slaying of Sigurth, cf. *Sig. sk.* 20.

<sup>38</sup>The connection of these persons with Óttar is not known.—These lines are transposed here with Bugge. Cf. *Vsp. sk.* 5, note.

<sup>39</sup>The epithet 'War-Tooth' probably signifies 'Warrior'. He is the famous, historic, king of Denmark (Tenth Century). His connection with Óttar is not explained.

<sup>40</sup>*Ags. Hrēthric*, 'Glorious Ruler'. The epithet here given him is one typical of a generous, ring-dispensing prince (cf. *H.H.* I, 18); but in this case the name is ironic: according to the ancient 'Lay of Biarki' he cast away his gold to buy off his assailant King Hrólfr kraki.

<sup>41</sup>'The Wealthy' (?). Her namesake, a famous woman colonist of Iceland, bore the same epithet.

<sup>42</sup>This famous viking plays a rôle in the *Ragnarssaga loðbrókar*.

<sup>43</sup>'Shield-Warrior'. Not identical, of course, with the son of Iormunrekk; cf. *Guð. hv.* Introductory Prose.

<sup>44</sup>After this stanza the Manuscript, without the indication of a break, inserts the Short 'Prophecy of the Seeress' which quite evidently has no connection whatever with the matter in hand.

<sup>45</sup>Containing the 'ale of memory'; cf. *Sigrdr.* Prose after 4; and below, 34.

and think of them            on the third morning,  
when the twain shall            tell of their kin."

*Hyndla said:*

31. "Wend thy way now,            I wish to sleep;  
but little good            wilt get from me,  
in the night who runnest,            thou noble friend,<sup>45a</sup>  
in her heat as Heithrún<sup>46</sup>            the he-goats among.

32. "Wert ever eager            with Óth<sup>47</sup> to lie:  
under thy apron            still others have crept,  
in the night who runnest,            thou noble friend,  
in her heat as Heithrún            the he-goats among."

*Freya said:*

33. "The evil hag            I hedge with fire:  
unscathed shalt not            escape from hence."

*Hyndla said:*

34. "A fire see I burn,            flameth the earth:  
he who loveth his life            will release him gladly:  
in the beaker I bear            the beer to Óttar,  
with venom brewed:            may it work thy bane!"

*Freya said:*

35. "Thy wicked wish            shall work no harm  
though, etin woman,            thou evil threatenest;  
for drink shall he            the goodly draught:  
may all gods then            lend Óttar help!"

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<sup>45a</sup>Ironic, with reference to Freya's speech when approaching her; cf. note 1.

<sup>46</sup>The name of the mythical she-goat mentioned in *Grímn.* 25.

<sup>47</sup>Her husband; cf. *Vsp.* 17. The meaning, possibly, is this that, notwithstanding her pretended faithfulness to him—after he had left her she sought him in many lands, *Gylfag.* chap. 34—she had accepted other lovers. A similar accusation is made by Loki; *Lok.* 30.

## THE SHORT 'SEERESS' PROPHECY'.

### *Völuspǫ en skamma.*

Though in no wise marked off in the Manuscript of the *Hyndluljóð* in which they occur, it is certain that the stanzas here printed have nothing to do with that poem. Moreover, we are in the fortunate position of having Snorri's reference to them by the above title.<sup>1a</sup>

From the evident discontinuousness of the poem it may be inferred that the original was longer but probably was not recalled in its entirety by the person who handed it down. As we now have it, the contents are largely cosmogonic, paralleling the *Völuspǫ*, of which it is no doubt an imitation, both in matter, structure, and refrain. This likelihood, coupled with certain stylistic features, and the fact that the system of twelve gods is referred to, which is late, indicate it to be the work of a learned and not untalented Icelander of the Twelfth Century who knew a number of the older Eddic poems and perhaps some which have since been lost.

1. Eleven only                    the æsir were,  
   when down did droop            in death Baldr.<sup>1</sup>  
   Then Váli revenge            did vow on him  
   who murdered his brother        in mainsworn wise.
  
2. Was Baldr's father<sup>2</sup>            Bur's eldest son,  
   — — — — —
  
3. Frey wedded Gerth,<sup>3</sup>            Gymir's daughter,  
   of etin kin,            with Aurbotha.  
   Thewful Thiatsi<sup>4</sup>            to them was in kin,  
   the skulking<sup>5</sup> etin;            was Skathi his daughter.

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<sup>1a</sup>*Gylfag.* chap. 4, before his quotation of stanza 5.

<sup>1</sup>For the story of Baldr's death and Váli's revenge, cf. *Vsp.* 24, 26 and notes.

<sup>2</sup>Óthin.—From *Gylfag.* chap. 6 we learn that the sons of Bur 'the Begotten' (cf. *Vsp.* 4) were Óthin, Vili, and Vé.—The remainder of a stanza seems to be missing.

<sup>3</sup>As told in *Skírn.*

<sup>4</sup>Concerning him and Skathi, cf. *Hárþ.* 19, note, and *Lok.* 49f.

<sup>5</sup>Conjectural.





with child he grew            from the guileful woman;<sup>16</sup>  
 thence are on earth            all ogres sprung.

15. <sup>16</sup>The stormy sea            to the stars is tossed,  
 overwhelms the land,—            the heavens give way;  
 then come great snows            and sweeping blasts;  
 then are doomed to die            the drooping gods.

16. <sup>17</sup>A god will come then,            a greater one:  
 I dare not speak            his dreaded name.  
 Farther forward            few can see now  
 than Óthin fighting            the Fenris-wolf.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Parallels to this curious myth are sparingly found in Eastern folklore.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. with this stanza *Vsp.* 49 which also gives the signs in nature foreboding, or accompanying, the doom of the gods.

<sup>17</sup>With the following lines cf. *Vsp.* 57 and note.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. *Vsp.* 45.

## THE LAY OF SVIPDAG

### *Svipdagsmél*<sup>1</sup>

The two poems here printed under a common heading are handed down only in a number of late paper manuscripts none of which is older than the second half of the Seventeenth Century. Notwithstanding many discrepancies and obscurities, necessitating numerous emendations, these are seen to go back to a common lost original.

That these poems do belong together is evident from the connection, and from the similarity in their style, language, and metre (*ljóðahátttr*). Moreover, we have the witness of a number of closely related Swedish and Danish ballads<sup>1a</sup> which treat the material as a unit. But it is difficult to decide whether both poems were originally an undivided whole, united by a stanza, or stanzas, now lost—which would account for the abrupt beginning of the *Fjolsvinnsmél* proper; or independent treatments, by the same poet, of the two phases of the myth—the fairy-story motif of Sleeping Beauty.

I. 'The Spell of Gróa' (*Gróugaldr*): Young Svipdag is given the task by an evil stepmother to win the hand of Mengloth in Giant-Land (whom, as we gather from the ballads, he has never seen, but loves nevertheless). He seeks the grave of his mother Gróa, a wise-woman, and wakes her from her death sleep to ask for the help she had promised him in his hour of need. She sings for him nine spells which are to aid him in his dangerous undertaking.

II. 'The Lay of Fiolsvith' (*Fjolsvinnsmél*): Svipdag (after overcoming all terrors of the journey, as we must assume) at last stands before a castle perched on mountain top, surrounded by a wall of flickering flames. A giant watchman, Fiolsvith, rudely bids him be gone and asks his name, which Svipdag conceals. However, the hero learns, in set question and answer, that Mengloth dwells in the castle, and that it is inaccessible save to one chosen hero—Svipdag. He reveals his true name, the gates open, and the maiden hails him as her deliverer.

These poems are peculiar in that they, to a far greater extent than any other, are a conglomerate of mythical elements and verse

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<sup>1</sup>The name of *Svipdagsmél* as a name for both poems was suggested by Bugge.

<sup>1a</sup>Grundtvig, *Danmarks Gamle Folkeviser* II, 245.

fragments loaned from a score or so of unquestionably older poems in the collection, which fact stamps them as unauthentic. And yet the poet—no doubt a scholar of the Icelandic Renaissance living, say, at the end of the Twelfth Century—has shown remarkable skill in putting these borrowed feathers together to form a well-organized and, but for the didactic portions, engaging whole which simulates the Old Norse color surprisingly well; so much so that several scholars of weight have been led to assign it to the Tenth Century. The lyrical portions, in particular Mengloth's expression of longing and exultation, are most pleasing.

### THE SPELL OF GROA.

*Svipdag*<sup>1b</sup> said:

1. "Awake, Gróa,<sup>1</sup> good woman, awake!  
At the doors of the dead<sup>2</sup> I wake thee:  
doest bear in mind how thou badest thy son  
to thy grave-hill to go?"

*Gróa* said:

2. "What aileth now my only son,  
what maketh heavy thy heart,  
that thy mother thou callest under mould who  
lieth,  
and hath left the world of the living?"

*Svipdag* said:

3. "To a cursed task called me the crafty woman<sup>3</sup>  
in her arms who folded my father:

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<sup>1b</sup>'He Whose Countenance Shines Like the Day' (?).

<sup>1</sup>From Cymric *groach* 'witch'. Like Heith, *Vsp. sk.* 5, this is the typical name of a witch or seeress.

<sup>2</sup>I.e. her grave.

<sup>3</sup>His stepmother.



where come one cannot, to come she bade me,  
fair Mengloth<sup>4</sup> to meet."

*Gróa said:*

4. "Long is the way and wearisome,  
but longer man's love doth last;  
if thou winn'st what thou wishest 'tis well for  
thee,  
but the norns' work natheless."<sup>5</sup>

*Svipdag said:*

5. "Speak thou such spells as will speed my way,  
as will shield and shelter thy son:  
full of danger, ween I, the dreaded way  
for one so young in years."

*Gróa said:*

6. "That first then heed, which most helpful I  
know,  
the which Rind spoke for Ran:<sup>6</sup>  
from thy shoulders shake what shocking  
seemeth;  
seek thou thy way thyself!
7. "This other heed thou, if ever thou  
must wearily wend thy way:

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<sup>4</sup>'Glad in Her Necklace'.

<sup>5</sup>The interpretation is not certain. The meaning seems to be that, betide what may, or whatever help I may give, you will succeed only if you are fated to succeed: which is, indeed, the gist of the fairy-story.

<sup>6</sup>In explanation of the names, Gering suggests that the Rind here referred to is Váli's mother (cf. *Bdr.* 11), and that, hence, Ran stands for Váli, the avenger of Baldr.







*Svipdag said:*

5. "To feast his eye full eager is he  
on a lovely thing who looketh:  
the gates do gleam about golden hall:  
my home would I fain have here."

*Fiolsvith said:*

6. "To whom art born, and of what blood,  
youth, from what house doest hail?"<sup>22</sup>

*Svipdag said:*

"Vindkald<sup>23</sup> my name, Várkald my father,  
Fiolkald his father was.

7. "Tell me, Fiolsvith, for I fain would know,  
answer thou as I ask:  
who holdeth sway in this seemly hall,  
so richly wrought with gold?"

*Fiolsvith said:*

8. "She is Mengloth<sup>24</sup> hight, whom her mother  
bore  
to Sváfrthorin's son:

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<sup>22</sup>Cf. *Fáfn.* 1 where, too, the hero attempts to conceal his identity. Not acknowledging himself as the chosen hero, Svipdag must inquire into the conditions—impossible of fulfilment—through which access to the castle may be gained.

<sup>23</sup>'Wind-Cold'; Várkald 'Spring-Cold'; Fiolkald 'Very Cold'. Gering suggests that, by giving these fictitious names, Svipdag wishes to make Fiolsvith believe that he, too, is of giant kin.

<sup>24</sup>*Gróug.* 3, note. The name and status of her ancestor remain unexplained.



*Svipdag said:*

13. <sup>30</sup>“Tell me, Fiolsvith, for I fain would know,  
answer thou as I ask:  
how that ash is hight which out doth spread  
its limbs over all the land?”

*Fiolsvith said:*

14. “Tis hight Mímameith,<sup>31</sup> but no man knoweth  
from what roots it doth rise;  
by what it falleth the fewest guess:  
nor fire nor iron will fell it.”<sup>32</sup>

*Svipdag said:*

15. “Tell me, Fiolsvith, for I fain would know,  
answer thou as I ask:  
of the fruit what becomes of that far-  
spreading tree,  
since nor fire nor iron will fell it?”

*Fiolsvith said:*

16. “Of its berries thou shalt bear on fire,  
for ailing women to eat:  
then out will come what within was held—  
such strength is bestowed on that tree.”<sup>33</sup>

*Svipdag said:*

17. “Tell me, Svipdag, for I fain would know,  
answer thou as I ask:

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<sup>30</sup>In the original, stanzas 13 to 18, dealing with the tree Yggdrasil (cf. *Vsp.* 11), come after 24. They are probably interpolated, having nothing to do with the subject in hand.

<sup>31</sup>‘Mímir’s Tree’. His well is under Yggdrasil, *Vsp.* 21.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. *Grímn.* 35.

<sup>33</sup>I.e. (possibly) its roasted fruit which, in some trees, has an emmenagogical effect; but the interpretation is conjectural.







*Svipdag said:*

27. "Tell me, Fiolsvith, for I fain would know,  
 answer thou as I ask:  
 will home wend him the wight who goes  
 and seeketh to win that wand?"

*Fiolsvith said:*

28. "Home will wend him the wight who goes  
 and seeks to win that wand,  
 if that he fetch which few do own,  
 to give to the goddess-of-gold."<sup>42</sup>

*Svipdag said:*

29. "Tell me, Fiolsvith, for I fain would know,  
 answer thou as I ask:  
 if any one owns ought of great worth,  
 to make fain that fallow ogress?"

*Fiolsvith said:*

30. "The shining feather then shalt thou pluck  
 which from Vithófnir's start thou must  
 steal,<sup>43</sup>  
 ere sullen Sinmara will sell to thee  
 the weapon to lay him low."

*Svipdag said:*

31. "Tell me, Fiolsvith, for I fain would know,  
 answer thou as I ask:  
 what the hall is hight which is hedged about  
 by wall of flickering flame?"

<sup>42</sup>Conjectural. If correct, it is a kenning for 'woman': Sinmara.

<sup>43</sup>The interpretation of these lines is doubtful.—The circle of impossibilities is closed: no one may enter the castle.

*Fiolsvith said:*

32. "Lýr<sup>43a</sup> is it hight, and long will it  
 hover on sword's point on high;<sup>44</sup>  
 of this shining hall from hearsay ever  
 men have learned alone."

*Svipdag said:*

33. "Tell me, Fiolsvith, for I fain would know,  
 answer thou as I ask:  
 of the gods, who made the golden floor,  
 within the hall so high?"<sup>45</sup>

*Fiolsvith said:*

34. <sup>46</sup>"Uni and fri, Iari and Bari,  
 Var and Vegdrasil,  
 Dóri and Óri, and Delling were there,  
 the time Lithskialf was locked."<sup>47</sup>

*Svipdag said:*

35. "Tell me, Fiolsvith, for I fain would know,  
 answer thou as I ask:  
 what the mountain is hight which the maiden  
 doth  
 dwell on, aloft and alone?"

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<sup>43a</sup>Following Bugge.

<sup>44</sup>In other words, it is inaccessible.

<sup>45</sup>The half-stanza is difficult. Both this and the following seven stanzas are irrelevant and, possibly, interpolated.

<sup>46</sup>Most of the following names of dwarfs remain unexplained. Several occur also in the *Vsp.* catalogue of dwarves.—The holy number nine plays a considerable rôle in both poems.

<sup>47</sup>Conjectural. If this reading is adopted the castle bears the same name as Óthin's seat in Valholl, cf. *Grimn.* Intro. Prose and note.





46. "Whence comest thou,           and what thy kin,  
  what wert hight at home?  
Thy father's name tell,           that token I have  
  thy bride that I should be."

*Svipdag said:*

47. "I am Svipdag hight,           Sólbiart<sup>51</sup> my father;  
  thence wandered I wind-cold ways;  
against Urth's<sup>52</sup> awards           winneth no man,  
  unearned the ill though it be."

*Mengloth said:*

48. "My wish have I won:           welcome be thou;  
  with kiss I clasp thee now;  
the loved one's sight           is sweet to her  
  who has lived in longing for him.
49. "Full long sat I           on Lyfiaberg,  
  bided thee day after day:  
now has happened           what I hoped for long,  
  that, hero, thou art come to my hall.
50. "Heart-sick was I,           to have thee I yearned,  
  whilst thou didst long for my love.  
Of a truth I know:           we two shall live aye  
  our life and lot together."

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<sup>51</sup>'Sun-Bright'.

<sup>52</sup>One of the norns, cf. *Vsp.* 12 and note: 'all is ordered by fate'.

## THE LAY OF GROTTI.

### *Grottasǫngr.*

We owe the preservation of this spirited poem to the interest of a copyist of Snorri's Edda. It is found only in the *Codex Regius* Manuscript and the *Trajectinus* Paper Manuscript of that work. In all probability, Snorri contented himself with the citation of the first stanza, after briefly explaining the skaldic kenning for 'gold' as 'the Flour-of-Fróthi', by a short reference to the legend.<sup>1a</sup>

It will be at once apparent that the account of the introductory Prose, while in some measure dependent on the poem, differs from it in a number of respects. Whereas in the lay the wishing-mill goes to pieces when Fróthi's good fortune ends, in harmony with the tragic conception of the theme, in the Prose the fall of Fróthi is, rather ineptly, combined with a fairy-story widely spread in the North—'how the sea grew salt'. In the other manuscripts of the Prose Edda this is localized by the statement that Mýsing's ships sank in the Pentland Firth; where, indeed, the story is still current. It is hardly open to doubt that the version of the lay is the more authentic.

The curiously mixed nature of the lay itself has given rise to many interpretations—most poetical, although not quite satisfactory, the one of Olrik who (while fully acknowledging that the poet has given his creation full human similitude in the figures of the giant maidens) conceives the song to contain an allegory of the mountain streams descending into the land of men, sweeping all before them (as 'valkyries'), but at length harnessed and reduced to servitude; until, overworked and abused, they finally rebel and overthrow the hated mill and spread general havoc.

There are frequent allusions to the quern legend in skaldic poetry, the first occurring about 950; so that we may assume the poem to have been in existence by that time, with which it also agrees as to style. There is no dependable clue as to its home. The measure is *fornyrðislag*.

Skiold<sup>1</sup> was a son of Óthin from whom the Skioldungs are sprung. He dwelled and ruled in that land which is now called Denmark, but which formerly was called Gotland.<sup>2</sup> Skiold's son was Frithleif<sup>3</sup> who ruled over the land

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<sup>1a</sup>*Skáld.* chap. 43.

<sup>1</sup>'Shield'; cf. *Hynd.* 11.

<sup>2</sup>I.e. the present Jutland and, *pars pro toto*, Denmark.

<sup>3</sup>'The Heir of Peace or of Friendship'.

after him. Frithleif's son was Fróthi.<sup>4</sup> He succeeded his father at the time when Augustus Cæsar made peace in all the world and Christ was born.<sup>5</sup> And because Fróthi was the most powerful king in all the Northern lands, peace was named after him wherever the Danish tongue<sup>6</sup> is spoken, and all people in the North call it the Peace of Fróthi. As long as it lasted, no man harmed the other, even though he met the slayer of his father or of his brother, free or bound. Then was there no thief or robber, so that a gold ring lay (untouched) three years by the high road over the Ialangr-Heath.<sup>7</sup> It happened that King Fróthi went to a feast given by King Fiolnir<sup>8</sup> in Sweden, and there he bought two bond-maids whose name was Fenia and Menia.<sup>9</sup> They were both tall and strong. At that time there were in Denmark two millstones which were so large that no man was able to turn them. And these stones had the power to grind out whatever he who turned them bade them grind. This quern was named Grotti,<sup>10</sup> and Hengikiopt<sup>11</sup> the man who had given the king this mill. Fróthi had the maids led to the mill and bade them grind him gold; and so they did, and at first ground for Fróthi gold and peace and happiness. Then he gave them rest or sleep no longer than whilst the cuckoo was silent, or a lay could be sung. It is said that then they chanted the lay<sup>12</sup> which is called the Lay of Grotti; and before it was at an end they had ground

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<sup>4</sup>'The Wise'.

<sup>5</sup>Of course, this chronology is due to a learned combination of the writer.

<sup>6</sup>I.e. the Scandinavian languages, differentiated at that time only by slight dialectal variations.

<sup>7</sup>The present Jællinge in Jutland.

<sup>8</sup>One of Óthin's names, cf. *Grímn.* 47, and possibly the god himself.

<sup>9</sup>'Water-Maiden (?)' and 'Jewel-Maiden (?)'

<sup>10</sup>'Grinder'.

<sup>11</sup>'Hang-Chaps', also a name of Óthin: in disguise, he prepares Fróthi's ruin by these gifts.

<sup>12</sup>The grinding at the (hand-)mill is everywhere accompanied by song.



this for him that on that very night came there the sea-king Mýsing<sup>13</sup> who slew Fróthi and took much booty—that was the end of the Peace of Fróthi. Mýsing took with him the mill Grotti and also Fenia and Menia, and bade them grind salt for him. At midnight they asked him whether he had not enough salt, but he bade them grind on. They ground but a little while longer before the ships went down. At that spot is now a whirlpool in the sea, where the waters rush in through the eye of the millstone. Since then is the sea salt.

1. Now are they come to the king's high hall,  
the foreknowing twain,<sup>14</sup> Fenia and Menia;  
in bondage by Fróthi, Frithleif's son,  
these sisters mighty as slaves are held.
2. To moil at the mill the maids were bid,  
to turn the grey stone as their task was set;  
to lag in their toil he would let them never,  
the song of the slaves unceasing would hear.
3. The chained ones churning ay chanted their  
song<sup>15</sup>  
“Let us right the mill and raise the mill-  
stones.”  
He gave them no rest, to grind on bade them.
4. They sang as they swung the swift-wheeling  
stones,  
till of Fróthi's thralls most fell asleep.  
Then Menia quoth, at the quern she stood:

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<sup>13</sup>‘Mouse-Grey’. Olrik explains this curious name to be that of the grey ‘sea-cattle’ of folklore: according to another tradition, Fróthi was killed by a monster arising out of the sea.

<sup>14</sup>Giants are often described as having prophetic gifts.

<sup>15</sup>The line is difficult.



- nor had mountain-maids now           to turn the mill-  
stone,  
if we had not first           found it below.<sup>20a</sup>
11. “Winters nine we grew           beneath the ground;  
under the mountains,           we mighty play-sisters  
did strive to do           great deeds of strength:  
huge boulders we budged           from their bases.
12. “The rocks we rolled           out of etins’ realm:  
the fields below           with their fall did shake;  
we hurled from the heights           the heavy quern-  
stone,  
the swift-rolling slab,           so that men might  
seize it.
13. “But since then we           to Sweden fared,  
we fore-knowing twain,           and fought among  
men;<sup>21</sup>  
byrnies we slit           and bucklers shattered,  
we won our way           through grey-coated war-  
riors.
14. “One king we overthrew,           enthroned the other.  
to Gotthorm the good           we victory granted;  
stern was the struggle           ere Knúi was struck.
15. “A full year thus           we fared among men;  
our name was known           among noble heroes.  
Sharp spears we shot           through linden shields,  
drew blood from wounds,           and brands red-  
dened.
16. “Now we are come           to the king’s high hall,  
without mercy made           to turn the mill;

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<sup>20a</sup>A difficult line.

<sup>21</sup>Scil. as valkyries.





## THE LAY OF VOLUND

### *Völundarkviða*

Stark and powerful as few others in the collection is the Lay of Volund the Smith. If, as has been said, revenge is the ecstasy of Germanic antiquity, then this lay is its glorification. It stands by itself in richness of invention, in grim compactness. Limned with a few bold strokes the characters stand before us indelibly: the tragic figure of the captive artificer, the greedy but weak king, his cruel queen, the lads with their childlike curiosity, princess Bothvild in her helpless despair.

The motif belongs essentially to Germanic hero lore; although it is difficult to deny some ancient connection with the Greek story of Daidalos, held prisoner by the evil king Minos, who fashions him and his son wings to escape; and with the limping smith of the gods, Hephaistos. Our poem gives the tradition its most authentic expression. It is antedated, however, by the Anglo-Saxon song of *'Dēor's Lament'*<sup>1</sup> and by the scene on the Franks Casket—generally referred to the Seventh Century. Later, and with many new details, is the novelistic account of the *piðreks saga*.

There can be little doubt that the poem originated in Norway. Both metre—a free *fornyrðislag*—and treatment place it among the

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<sup>1</sup>It begins as follows:

Wayland learned bitterly            banishment's way,  
earl right resolute;            ills endured;  
had for comrades            Care and Longing,  
winter-cold wanderings;            woe oft suffered  
when Nithhad forged            the fetters on him,  
bending bonds            on a better man.

That he surmounted: so this may I!

Beaduhild mourned            her brother's death,  
less sore in soul            than herself dismayed  
when her plight was plainly            placed before her,—  
birth of a bairn.            No brave resolve  
might she ever make,            what the end should be.

That she surmounted: so this may I!

Gummere, *The Oldest English Epic*, p. 186. The poem is preserved in a manuscript of the Eleventh Century, but is manifestly much older.

earliest in the Edda; that is, about the Ninth Century. And this may account also in some degree for the sad condition of the text.<sup>1a</sup> It is preserved only in the *Cod. Reg.*

There was a king in Sweden hight Níthoth.<sup>2</sup> He had two sons and a daughter whose name was Bothvild.<sup>3</sup> There lived three brothers, sons of a Finnish king. Was one hight Slagfith,<sup>4</sup> the second Egil, and the third, Volund.<sup>5</sup> They ran on snowshoes, hunting game. They came to the Wolfdales and made them a house there by a water called Wolf Lake. Early one morn they found by the shore three women who were spinning flax. By them lay their swan skins, for they were valkyries.<sup>6</sup> They were the two daughters of King Hlothvér,<sup>7</sup> Hlathguth<sup>8</sup> the Swanwhite, and Hervor the Allwise; and the third was Olrún, the daughter of King Kíar of Valland. The brothers took them home with them. Egil took Olrún to wife; Slagfith, Hlathguth; and Volund, Hervor. Thus dwelled they seven years. Then flew they away to be at battles, and came not again. Then went forth Egil on his snowshoes to search for Olrún, and Slagfith, to look for Swanwhite; but Volund stayed

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<sup>1a</sup>Only the most important emendations etc. have been referred to in the notes.

<sup>2</sup>Ags. *Nīðhād*, 'Envious Hater.'

<sup>3</sup>Ags. *Beaduhild*, 'War-Maiden'.

<sup>4</sup>'Finn-Smith'.

<sup>5</sup>O.H.G. and Ags. *Weland*. The name has not yet received a satisfactory explanation.

<sup>6</sup>The motif of the swan-skins (cf. *Helr.* 7) is but faintly stressed here. By taking them away, the brothers obtain possession of the maidens; but their departure is due, here, not to their regaining the swan-skins, as one might expect, but to the inborn longing to be valkyries again.

<sup>7</sup>Corresponding to the Frankish King, Chlodowech, as Kíar may correspond to King Kiarval (*Cearbhall*) of Valland (here meaning 'Wales').

<sup>8</sup>The names of the maidens signify, in order, 'the Necklace-Adorned Warrior-Maiden', 'the Warder of the Host', and 'the One Knowing Ale-Runes' (cf. *Sigrdr.* 7).

behind in the Wolfdales. He was the most skilful of men of whom olden tales tell. King Níthoth had him taken captive, as is told in this lay.

1. Three maidens flew through Myrkwood<sup>9</sup> from  
Southland,  
young valkyries, in wars to try them;  
they sate by the lake, their limbs to rest,  
the Southron ladies, fair linen spinning:
2. Hlathguth and Hervor, Hlothvér's daughters,  
and wise Olrún, Kíar's offspring.  
Did one of them wind her white arms  
about Egil, to her bosom held him;
3. and Hlathguth fair, the swanwing-flighted,  
(as friend to her folded Slagfith);<sup>10</sup>  
but Hervor, the third of these sisters,  
winded her arms 'round Volund's neck.
4. Thus sate the sisters seven winters,  
but on the eighth aye in yearning,  
but on the ninth they needs must part:  
longed the maidens through Myrkwood to fly,  
the young valkyries, to try them in war.
5. Came the weather-wise from the woods striding,  
(from hunting weary, Volund the smith,)<sup>11</sup>  
Slagfith and Egil, found empty the hall,  
went out and in, with their eyes seeking.
6. Fared Egil eastward, Olrún to seek,  
fared southward Slagfith, Swanwhite to find;  
but Volund alone in Wolfdales stayed—  
(bided till back his bride would come);<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup>'The Murky Forest'; typical name of a forest.

<sup>10</sup>Supplied after Grundtvig.

<sup>11</sup>After Bugge, from 11.

<sup>12</sup>After Bugge and Grundtvig.







18. "Are his eyes awful as adder's the speckled,  
 his teeth he bares, the blade as he,  
 and my daughter's dear ring he sees:  
 sever ye soon his sinews' might,  
 let him sit henceforth in Sævarstath."<sup>20</sup>

And so was done. They hamstrung him, and set him down on an isle which lay not far from land and was hight Sævarstath. There he wrought in metal and made the king all manner of costly things. No one dared to go to see him but only the king.

*Volund said:*<sup>21</sup>

19. "The sword see I at Níthoth's side  
 the which I whetted as I had the skill,  
 the which I hardened by hand, till fit.  
 Now the flashing blade from me is gone;  
 ne'er to Volund's smithy will I see it borne.  
 Now bears Bothvild my bride's armlet,  
 the gold-ring red I'll not gain ever."
20. Sate he nor slept, e'er smote with hammer;  
 wrought Volund wily works for Níthoth.<sup>21a</sup>  
 To his door drifted one day the young  
 sons of Níthoth, in Sævarstath.
21. For the keys called they to the chest when  
 they came—  
 was their ill fate sealed when in they looked.<sup>22</sup>  
 Much wondrous wealth they weened to see,  
 the younglings, of gems and of yellow gold.

<sup>20</sup>Stead by the Sea'.

<sup>21</sup>Viz. to himself.

<sup>21a</sup>Cf. the Ags. expression *Welondes geweorc* for all kinds of skilful work in metals.

<sup>22</sup>For in that moment Volund conceives his plan of revenge.



*Volund said:*

28. "Whate'er harm it has taken, I shall heal the  
ring  
that to thy father 'twill fairer seem,  
and to thy mother by much better,  
and to thyself the same as before."
29. Did wily Volund outwit her with drink,  
so that on settle asleep she fell.

*(Volund said:)*

- "Are avenged the deeds which were done to  
me,  
save one only, on the wicked queen."<sup>26</sup>
30. "Fain would I fare on my feet",<sup>27</sup> quoth  
Volund,  
"whose might from me Níthoth's men have  
taken."<sup>28</sup>
31. Laughing, aloft lifted him Volund,  
weeping, Bothvild went from the isle,  
his flight fearing, and her father's wrath.
32. Stood Níthoth's cunning queen without;  
in now went she to endmost gable;  
but on house-wall high awhile he<sup>29</sup> rested:  
"art waking, Níthoth, thou Niara-King?"<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Conjectural.

<sup>27</sup>The line is difficult.

<sup>28</sup>Here, no doubt, several lines have dropped out: "but lacking them, I must take to the wings I have fashioned me." (?)

<sup>29</sup>I.e. Volund.

<sup>30</sup>Probably the queens speech: she calls attention to Volund's presence.





## THE HELGI LAYS

A certain similarity of theme, treatment, and locality holds the three Helgi poems together. The predominant motif is that of the hero beloved of a valkyrie. They thus form a group by themselves. And although a connection with the Volsung cycle has been brought about by making the second Helgi a son of Sigmund, and thus a half-brother of Sigurth and Sinfiotli, and both Volsung and Ylfing, it is fairly certain—through the evidence of the names of persons and localities—that originally Helgi is a purely Danish hero.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this very attempt to weld the two cycles together argues a relatively late origin—say the Tenth or Eleventh Century, which is further borne out by the testimony of verse technique and language.—Except for trifling fragments, the three lays are preserved only in the *Cod Reg.*<sup>1a</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The names of Sigar and Helgi definitely belong to Danish tradition. And the localities, so far as they are not symbolical or doubtful, all cluster about the Eastern Baltic—thus, ‘Sigar’s-Field’, ‘Hringstead’ (now Sigersted and Ringsted, on the island of Zealand); ‘Hlés-Isle’ (now Læsö, in the Kattegat); ‘Hethin’s-Isle’ (now ‘Hiddense’, an island near Rügen); ‘Svarin’s Hill’ (now Schwerin); etc.

<sup>1a</sup>*H.Hv.* follows *H.H.* I in the Codex.



# THE LAY OF HELGI HIORVARTHSSON

## *Helgakviða Hjörvarþssonar*

It is obvious that this poem is not of a piece, but consists of fragments of lays joined together by the Collector whose Prose is here awkward, rambling, and absent-minded even more than is usual with him. By the relative copiousness of its Prose, the lay forms a transition stage, as it were, between the heroic lay and the legendary saga in which it often is a matter of doubt whether the interspersed stanzas and lays are meant merely to serve as an authentication of the narrative; or the narrative, to explain, or connect, these stanzas or lays.

The first two fragments are in no sense notable efforts. An almost elegiac note distinguishes the stanzas on Helgi's death (fragment IV) which, in a way remind one of Hialmar's Death Song in the *Hervarar saga*; only, there is too little imaginative energy, the main figures are too faintly outlined, to awaken our sympathy.

Internal evidence makes it rather certain that the 'flyting', or word-duel, of Atli with the giantess Hrímgærth (fragment III), which also stands out by different metre (*liðahátt*) is of a later date than the other fragments. It may be well to remind the reader—as in the case of the *Lokasenna*—that, however offensive its coarseness to the more delicate taste of a later age, the genre as a whole is not devoid of a certain interest, in showing the obverse and animal side of the Viking Age, as contrasted with the frequently stilted and stereotype idealisations of Heroic Poetry. In this particular case, a robustious, though low, humor redeems what elsewhere degenerates into a mere scolding match.

### I.

Hiorvarth<sup>2</sup> was the name of a king, and he had four wives. One was called Alfild, whose son by him was called Hethin;<sup>2a</sup> another, Særeith, whose son was Humlung; a third, Sinrióth, whose son was Hymling. King Hiorvarth had vowed to marry the handsomest woman he

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<sup>2</sup>'Protector by the Sword'.

<sup>2a</sup>Ags. *Heoðen*, most likely abbreviated from *Ulfheðin* 'Wolf-Coat, Werewolf'.

could find. Now he had heard that King Sváfnir<sup>3</sup> had a most fair daughter, hight Sigrlinn. (It had happened in this wise:) One day Atli,<sup>4</sup> the son of his earl Ithmund, was standing by a clump of trees, but a bird<sup>5</sup> sate in the branches above him which had heard how the king's men had called Hiorvarth's wives the fairest of all women. The bird twittered whilst Atli listened to what it said:

1. "Hast seen Sigrlinn, Sváfnir's daughter,  
the fairest maiden in Munarheim?<sup>6</sup>—  
handsome though be Hiorvarth's women  
in Glasir Grove, and goodly withal."

*Atli said:*

2. "Wilt to Atli, Earl Ithmund's son,  
wise bird on bough, unburthen thee?"

*The bird said:*

"I will if thou wilt worship me,  
and of Hiorvarth's chattels I may choose at  
will."

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<sup>3</sup>The king of Svávaland (below) which is to be identified, it seems, with the original home of the Suevi, now Brandenburg. Sváfnir's daughter is here called Sigrlinn, but the name is probably to be interchanged with that of Sváva.—The Prose following had to be somewhat rearranged, to make sense.

<sup>4</sup>As to his name, cf. 15, note.

<sup>5</sup>The bird is evidently the same Earl Fránmar in disguise who, later, for reasons of his own, opposes both Hiorvarth's and Hróthmar's suit. The latter invades Sváfnir's lands, when Atli surprises and slays Fránmar; Prose after 5.—Atli, by the restrictions he places on his possible demands, is intent on saving his king from the plight of Jephthah.

<sup>6</sup>'The Home of Love' (?); one of the many, probably symbolic, names occurring in the Helgi lays.—Glasir 'the Resplendent'.



and on it sate a large bird, guarding it, and was fast asleep. Atli killed the bird with his spear; but in the house he found Sigrlinn, the king's daughter, and Álof, the earl's daughter, and took them both with him. It was Earl Fránmar who had taken on the form of an eagle and had warded them from the foes by witchcraft; but Hróthmar was the name of the king who had (vainly) sought the hand of Sigrlinn and had slain the king of Svávaland and harried and burned the land. King Atli took Sigrlinn to wife, and Atli, Álof.

## II.

Hiorvarth and Sigrlinn had a son who was large of body and handsome. He spoke little, and no name would cling to him.<sup>9</sup> One time he sate on a hill and saw nine valkyries riding by. One of them was the stateliest. She said:

6. "Not soon wilt, Helgi,<sup>10</sup> hold sway over rings  
 nor, reddener-of-swords, o'er Rothulsvoll—  
 screamed the eagles early<sup>11</sup>— if aye thou say-  
 est naught;  
 though stout-hearted, hero, I ween thee!"

*Helgi said:*

7. "What gift<sup>12</sup> goes with the given name  
 which, white-armed maid, to me hast given?  
 Bethink thee well what thou wilt say:  
 I'll have none of the name, if not eke thee."

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<sup>9</sup>Possibly, because the name given him at birth did not suit the nature of the indolent (?) and tongue-tied youth.—He sits 'on a hill', here as a shepherd, being regarded as an 'ashie-pattle'.

<sup>10</sup>Ags. *Hálga*, 'the Hallowed', i.e. one dedicated to the gods.

<sup>11</sup>Eagles screaming early betoken the birth of a hero; cf. *H.H.* I, 1.

<sup>12</sup>He who bestowed a name or cognomen, whether on a child or an adult, was expected to add a gift. This custom of 'name-fastening' is frequently attested in the Northern monuments.



fared forth with Atli. They felled Hróthmar and did many a great deed.

### III.

Helgi killed the giant Hati<sup>16</sup> whom he found sitting on a mountain. Helgi and Atli had moored their ships in the Hatafirth. Atli kept the watch during the first part of the night. Hrímgërth, Hati's daughter, said:

12. "Who be the heroes            in Hatafirth?  
    Are the ships girded with shields;<sup>17</sup>  
 unflinching ye fare,            seem to fear but little:  
    make known the name of thy king!"

*Atli said:*

13. "He is Helgi hight,            and no harm whate'er  
    canst thou do the doughty leader;  
 iron-clad is            the atheling's fleet,<sup>18</sup>  
    so no witches may work us ill."

*Hrímgërth said:*

14. "What art thou hight,            thou haughty man,  
    and of what kin art come?  
 Much faith in thee            the folk-leader hath,  
    that thou dwell'st in the fair ship's fore-  
    castle."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>The Hateful'; the firth is named after him.

<sup>17</sup>The shields of the crew were hung along the bulwarks of the dragon-ships.

<sup>18</sup>Probably not to be taken literally. The iron of the shields' bosses served as protection against evil spirits.

<sup>19</sup>The *stafnbúi*, or fore-castle-man, on a man-of-war had the place of greatest responsibility and honor as leader in battle and as spokes-man; cf. *H.H.* I, 34.







*Hrímgerth said:*

24. "Awake, Helgi, and to Hrímgerth atone  
for felling Hati, her father;  
if one night she slept with the warder-of-men  
she would hold her harm made good."

*Helgi said:*

25. "Lothin<sup>25</sup> shall wed thee, hag loathly to men,  
the thurs that in Tholl-Isle<sup>26</sup> dwells,  
that wisest etin and worst of trolls:  
there is mate who is meet for thee."

*Hrímgerth said:*

26. "Wilt have her,<sup>27</sup> rather, who the haven  
scanned  
last night, with thy men, mail-clad;  
the gold-dight maiden is mightier than I;  
here stepped she from ship on to strand,  
and made fast your fleet.  
'Tis owing to her that I cannot  
slay the sea-king's men."

*Helgi said:*

27. "Hearken, Hrímgerth, if thy harm I make  
good,  
then canst thou clearly tell me:  
was it one valkyrie who warded the ships,  
or fared they all in a flock?"

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<sup>25</sup>'Hairy'.

<sup>26</sup>'Pine Island'.

<sup>27</sup>Sváva, who, unbeknown to Helgi, had guarded him against malignant powers.





in three days' time            we there shall meet.  
 I much fear me            that from it I wend not;  
 then without harm            'all may happen thus."

*Hethin said:*

34. "Thou heldest, Helgi,            Hethin worthy  
 of great gifts from thee,            thy good will to have.  
 More seeming is it            thy sword to redden,  
 than thy fell foeman            feebly forgive."<sup>33</sup>

Helgi had spoken thus because he thought himself fey, and that it was his wraith Hethin had met with when he saw the woman riding on the wolf. King Alf, the son of Hróthmar, had challenged him to do battle with him on Sigarsvoll<sup>34</sup> on the third day. There was a great battle, and Helgi fell, wounded unto death.

35. Sent then Helgi            Sigar, to fetch  
 King Eylimi's            only daughter:  
 "bid her quickly            come hitherward  
 if her lord she            alive would find.

*Sigar said:*

36. "Helgi hath me            hitherward sent  
 to say to thee,            Sváva, these words:  
 he longeth sorely            to see thee, ere  
 the bold baron's            breath have left him."

*Sváva said:*

37. "What harmed Helgi,            King Hiorvarth's son?  
 Most heavy is            my heart with sorrow:

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<sup>33</sup>The meaning probably is: "cut me off, do not weakly forgive me!"

<sup>34</sup>"The Plains of Sigar'.

if sea him swallowed,            or sword wounded,  
my wrath shall reach            the wretch full soon."

*Sigar said:*

38. "He fell this morn            at Freka Stone,<sup>34a</sup>  
under heaven who was            of all heroes best;  
'tis Alf hath won            in the weapon-play.<sup>35</sup>  
In evil hour            it all did happen."

*Helgi said:*

39. "Hail to thee, Sváva!            Sorrow thou not,  
though nevermore            we meet together;  
in the blood of my wounds            I welter here:  
all too near the steel            struck to my heart.

40. "I beg of thee,            my bride, weep not;  
but my words, Sváva,            I beseech thee, hearken:  
  
with my brother            thy bed share thou,  
let young Hethin            have thy love.

41. "A witch-woman            on wolf did ride  
in the gloaming,            wished to go with Hethin:  
full well saw she            that soon would fall  
Sigrlinn's son            on Sigarsvoll."

*Sváva said:*

42. "That vow made I            in Munarheim,  
when Helgi gave me            gold-rings many,  
that never would I,            if not in his,  
in unfamed hero's            arms lie willing."

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<sup>34a</sup>'Wolf-Stone'.

<sup>35</sup>A kenning for 'battle'.

*Hethin said:*

43. "Kiss me, Sváva:            I come not ever,  
      Rogheim to see,            nor Rothuls-fell,  
      ere avenged I have        King Hiorvarth's son,  
      under heaven who was       of all heroes best."

Of Helgi and Sváva it is said they were born again.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Viz. As Helgi the Hunding-Slayer and Sigrún; cf. the Introductory Prose of *H.H.* II.



2. At night in hall the norns did come,  
to the lord allotted his life and fate:  
to him awarded under welkin most fame,  
under heaven to be among heroes first.
3. His fate-thread<sup>3</sup> span they to o'erspread the  
world  
for Borghild's bairn in Brálund castle;  
they gathered together the golden threads,  
and in moon-hall's<sup>4</sup> middle they made them  
fast;
4. in East and West the ends did hide:  
the liege's lands lay there between;  
on the Northern side, Neri's sister<sup>5</sup>  
did hang one end to hold forever.
5. One evil only the Ylfing<sup>6</sup> threatened,  
the maiden eke who the atheling bore:<sup>7</sup>  
— — — — —  
Croaked a raven hoarsely, on high tree sit-  
ting—  
hunger gnawed him— "I know something:
6. "In his byrnie stands who was born at night,<sup>7a</sup>  
king Sigmund's son, now the sun is risen!

<sup>3</sup>The fate-thread spinning of the norns is here taken literally.

<sup>4</sup>Kenning for 'the heavens'; cf. *Alv.* 12.

<sup>5</sup>One of the norns.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. *Hynd.* 11, *H.H.* II, Intro. Prose.

<sup>7</sup>No gap is indicated in the Manuscript. Did the missing lines, or stanzas, contain the curse of one of the weird-sisters, as is the case with Ólaf, the son of Frithleif, as told by Saxo I, 27?—The impending evil certainly does not refer to the wars foretold by the raven: only by fighting can glory be won.

<sup>7a</sup>This is, probably, to be interpreted, not literally, but as meaning that on Helgi from his tenderest childhood is imposed the duty to avenge his father.



- His eyes flash fire, atheling-wise;  
 he will feast the wolves:<sup>8</sup> fain let us be!"
7. A true king he to the house-carles seemed:  
 they hoped to have good harvest years;<sup>9</sup>  
 Sigmund himself, from the sword-play coming,  
 to the lordling brought a leek most noble.<sup>10</sup>
8. Named him Helgi, and Hringstead gave him,  
 Sun Fell, Snow Fell, and Sigar's Field<sup>11</sup>—  
 Hringstead, Hótún, and Himing Meadows,  
 eke a seemly sword, to Sinfiotli's brother.<sup>12</sup>
9. Under kinsmen's care the king's son grew,  
 the high-born elm-tree,<sup>13</sup> in happiness;  
 gave and granted gold to his house-carles,  
 nor spared the hero the hoard blood-  
 spattered.<sup>13a</sup>
10. Not long the lord delayed battle,  
 when fifteen winters<sup>14</sup> the folk-warder;

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<sup>8</sup>Ravens, wolves, and eagles rejoice at the birth of a hero who will feed them on the carcasses of his slain foes—a standing conceit in Old Germanic poetry.

<sup>9</sup>It is one of the attributes of a great king to bring to his land good harvest years.—A house-carle is a member of the king's body-guard.

<sup>10</sup>As a fast-growing plant the leek seems symbolic of rapid access in royal power. Cf. the *virga* (rod) used, beside the sceptre, in the coronation of the early English kings.

<sup>11</sup>In all probability, these and other names in the poem are symbolical.

<sup>12</sup>According to the *Völsunga saga*, Sinfiotli is Sigmund's son by his own sister, Signý. Another half-brother of Helgi's is Sigurth; cf. *Sinf.*

<sup>13</sup>Kenning for 'warrior'.

<sup>13a</sup>As gained by warfare.

<sup>14</sup>According to the ancient laws in Norway a lad was of age when he had reached his fifteenth year.





*Helgi said:*

21. "In awe stand not of Ísung's slayer:<sup>24</sup>  
 (our swords shall say and settle first,  
 who Hogni's daughter's husband shall be)<sup>25</sup>  
 —will be din of fight— ere dead I lie."
22. Over land and sea the lord did send,  
 to gather together his goodly hosts:  
 rich meed pledged he of the river-hoard<sup>26</sup>  
 as reward to warriors and warriors' sons.
23. "Bid them swiftly to board their ships,  
 to set sail then to sea from Brand Isle!"  
 There he waited till thither came  
 many hundred heroes from Hethin's Isle.<sup>27</sup>
24. Straightway also from Stave Ness thither  
 rode dark warships, all decked with gold.  
 Then asked Helgi of Hiorleif<sup>28</sup> this:  
 "Hast thou mustered the mighty host"?
25. The young sea-king said to the other:  
 "'Twere lengthy to tell the long-necked ships  
 from Tronu Strand, teeming with men,  
 which in Orva Sound<sup>28a</sup> outbound hovered.
26. "Are there twelve hundred trusty warriors;  
 yet more by half in Hótún stand  
 'neath the king's banner— battle I wait me."

<sup>24</sup>I.e. Hothbrodd. We know nothing about his antagonist.

<sup>25</sup>Supplied, following Gering.

<sup>26</sup>Kenning for 'gold': the Niflung treasure, the treasure *par excellence*, was thrown into the Rhine.—To be sure, it must have been known that gold was washed out of the sands of rivers, especially the Rhine.

<sup>27</sup>Probably, the island of Hiddense, north of Rügen.

<sup>28</sup>Some follower of Helgi's.

<sup>28a</sup>'Arrow Sound'.

27. Off the awnings<sup>29</sup> the atheling drew,  
 so that awaked the warrior host,  
 his doughty men, and saw the dawn;  
 then hoisted the heroes high on mast-tree  
 the woven sails in Varins Firth.
28. Rose the din of oars, of iron clashing,  
 crashed shield 'gainst shield with shock of  
 rowing,<sup>30</sup>  
 as dashed through the waves the warrior's  
 fleet;  
 the stanch wave-steeds<sup>31</sup> stood out to sea.
29. It burst on the ears when, buffeting,  
 the long ship keels met Kolga's sister,<sup>32</sup>  
 as if surf with cliff did clash in storm.
30. Then higher Helgi bade hoist the topsails,  
 the crews shunned not the shock of billows,  
 when the dreadful daughter of Ægir  
 would overwhelm the hawser-steeds.<sup>33</sup>
31. But Sigrún on high hovering above  
 did shield them stoutly, and their ships also;  
 the king's brine-hogs<sup>33</sup> out of Rón's clutches  
 glided safely at Gnipa Grove.
32. Floated the fair-dight fleet at ease then  
 in Una Bay, at eventide;  
 sullenly saw them from Svarin's Hill<sup>34</sup>  
 the sons of Granmar, and sorrowfully.

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<sup>29</sup>At night, awnings were stretched over the (undecked) dragon-ships, for the crews to sleep under.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. *H.Hv.* 13, note.

<sup>31</sup>Kenning for 'ship'.

<sup>32</sup>One of Ægir's daughters; hence 'the wave'.

<sup>33</sup>Kenning for 'ships'.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. the modern Schwerin.

33. Asked then Gothmund, of goodly kin :  
 "Who the highborn hero, leading  
 these hosts hither to harry on us?"
34. Quoth Sinfiotli<sup>35</sup>— to the sailyard hoisted  
 the red war-shield,<sup>36</sup> with rim of gold—  
 in the stem standing to strive with words,  
 to athelings who could answer make :
35. "Tonight say thou, when the swine thou feed-  
 est,  
 and givest to hungry hounds their meat,<sup>37</sup>  
 that the Ylfing hosts from the East have  
 come,  
 girded for war, from Gnipa Grove :
36. "Here may Hothbrodd find Helgi now,  
 in the midst of his fleet, the fearless hero  
 who sated eagles oft and anon,  
 by the quern whilst thou didst kiss bond-  
 maids."

*Gothmund said:*

37. "Thou speakest rashly nor reck'st old wisdom,  
 when untruth thou of atheling tellest.
38. "Thou hast made thy meal of the meat of  
 wolves,  
 and been the bane of thy brothers twain ;

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<sup>35</sup>"The Stained (Piebald) One' (?)—perhaps referring to his illegitimate origin (cf. Ags. *Fitela*).—He is Helgi's forecastle man, like Atli, *H.Hv.* 14, note.

<sup>36</sup>A red shield indicated warlike intentions, a white one, peace.

<sup>37</sup>I.e. when made a slave?

with thy cold snout hast oft sucked men's  
wounds,  
and hateful to all hast hid in the waste."<sup>38</sup>

*Sinfjotli said:*

39. "A witch wast thou on Varin's Isle,  
didst fashion falsehoods and fawn on me,  
hag:  
to no wight wouldst thou be wed but to me,  
to no sword-wielding swain but to Sinfjotli.

40. "Thou wast, witch-hag, a valkyrie fierce  
in Allfather's hall, hateful and grim:  
all Valholl's warriors had well-nigh battled,  
wilful woman, to win thy hand.

41. "On Saga Ness full nine wolves we  
had together— I gat them all."

*Gothmund said:*

42. "The father wast not to Fenris-wolves,<sup>39</sup>  
though older thou than all of them;  
for gelded wast thou near Gnipa Grove  
by thurs maidens on Thór's Ness, before.

43. "As Siggeir's stepson<sup>40</sup> 'neath stones didst  
dwell  
in woody wastes, with the wolves howling;

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<sup>38</sup>According to the *Völsunga saga*, both Sigmund and Sinfjotli roam the woods as werewolves until they see their chance to avenge themselves on King Siggeir who had slain Sigmund's and Signý's father, Eylimi. Coming to Siggeir's hall, Sinfjotli slew the two boys whom his sister Signý had born to Siggeir and who, hence, are his half-brothers.—The imputations otherwise heaped on each other cannot be verified. As to this, cf. Loki's accusations, *Lok.*

<sup>39</sup>That is, to wolves as fierce as the wolf Fenrir; cf. *Vsp.* 32.

<sup>40</sup>Since his mother Signý was married to Siggeir.







*Hothbrodd said:*

53. "Let the reined steeds run to Regin Thing,  
Melnir and Mylnir to Murkwood dark,  
and Sporvitnir to Sparin's Heath.  
Each man bestir him, nor stay behind  
who the flame-of-wounds<sup>52</sup> can wield in battle.
54. "Bid Hogni come, and Hring's sons eke,  
Atli and Yngvi, and Alf the Hoary,  
athelings ever eager for war;  
let us warmly welcome the Volsung's sons!"
55. With swift swoop then smote together  
the flashing swords at Freka Stone:  
was aye Helgi, the Hunding's Slayer,  
foremost in fray where fought heroes;  
fierce in fighting, to fly unready,  
stout-hearted hero was Helgi ever.
56. From high heaven came helmeted maidens—  
waxed the shafts' shrilling— who shielded  
the king;  
then said Sigrún— sang the arrows—  
the ogresses'-horse ate the eagles'-food—:<sup>53</sup>
57. "Hail to thee, hero! In happiness live,  
Yngvi's scion,<sup>54</sup> hold sway over men:  
unfleeing foe felled now hast thou,  
in sword-play who slew sea-kings many.
58. "Now, folk-warder, befit thee well  
the red gold-rings and ruler's daughter;  
hale shalt, hero, hold these twain:  
Hogni's daughter and Hringstead eke,  
victory and wealth: is the war ended."

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<sup>52</sup>Kenning for 'sword'.

<sup>53</sup>That is, 'the wolf ate the slain', cf. *H.Hv.*, Prose before IV, note; but the line is doubtful.

<sup>54</sup>Yng is the mythical progenitor of the earliest Swedish kings. Here, only an honorific epithet.

## THE SECOND LAY OF HELGI THE HUNDING-SLAYER

### *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*

The same theme as in the preceding poem is here treated by another poet,<sup>1</sup> doubtless; and in a minor key, with all stress laid on the loves of Helgi and Sigrún. The result is by far more appealing to the modern taste.

It does not seem necessary to assume, with some investigators, that we have here, as in the Lay of Helgi Hiorvarthsson, a number of fragments pieced together by the collector; or a sort of gleaning of various snatches about Helgi which were not utilized in the preceding poems: with the exception of the first five stanzas,<sup>2</sup> the twenty-second, and the thirty-ninth, it is essentially one in idea—the valkyrie's absolute devotion to the hero, involving the destruction of her kin, and beyond death. If this view is correct—and a study of both style and versification serves but to confirm it—the complete lay must have been one of the glories of Heroic Song.

As it stands, there are lacunæ, awkwardly bridged by the Collector who with a maladroit hand mars the continuity by inserting a variation of the flyting between Sinfliotli and Gothmund, oddly enough after referring back to it! Besides, there are a few telling but disconnected stanzas from some poem about Helgi's youth.

Even in its present sadly mutilated condition the lay cannot fail to make the impression of simple power. Its diction is noble and restrained, the treatment worthy of the intrinsic interest. Famous throughout the North, in ancient as in modern times, is Sigrún's terrific curse over her traitor brother, and her proud praise of the splendid hero—hinting at defiant love beyond the grave. Nor has time diminished the deep appeal of the passionate lovers' meeting in the barrow—the first appearance in literature of this romantic theme of so many later ballads.<sup>3</sup>

The casual mention by the Collector that the original title of the poem was 'the Old Lay of the Volsungs' may indicate that its composition antedates that of the other two. Nevertheless it seems

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<sup>1</sup>Similarly, other favorite themes received parallel treatment by two or more poets; thus the Death of Brynhild, the Fall of the Niflungs, Guthrún's Plaint.

<sup>2</sup>Possibly, remnants of the *Káraljóð* mentioned in the final Prose.

<sup>3</sup>In England, 'Sweet William's Ghost'; see Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* II, 226.

best to retain the order of the collection; especially as the death of the lovers makes a fitting conclusion of the cycle.

## I

King Sigmund, the son of Volsung, had to wife Borghild from Brálund. They named their son Helgi, after Helgi Hiorvarthsson. He was given to Hagal<sup>4</sup> in fosterage. Hunding was hight a mighty king from whom Hundland<sup>5</sup> has its name. He was a great man of war and had many sons who were out on forays. There was hatred and feud between King Hunding and King Sigmund, and they slew one the other's kinsmen. King Sigmund and his kin were hight Volsungs<sup>6</sup> and Ylfings.

Helgi went as a spy in disguise to the hall of King Hunding. Hæming, one of the sons of King Hunding, was at home. Now when Helgi was about to leave, he met a shepherd boy and said:

1. "Say to Hæming                    that Helgi remembers  
whom in byrnie                    the heroes felled:<sup>7</sup>  
in the hall had ye                the grey heath-dweller<sup>8</sup>  
whom King Hunding                thought Hamal to be."

Hamal was the name of Hagal's son. King Hunding sent men to Hagal to seek Helgi, and Helgi could not save himself but by putting on the clothes of a bond-maid and turning the millstone. They searched but found Helgi nowhere.

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<sup>4</sup>'The Skilful'.

<sup>5</sup>Probably invented *ad hoc*. It is not the same as the Hunland over which Buthli, and after him Atli, held sway.

<sup>6</sup>Seeing that in the lays, Helgi is the kinsman of Sigmund and Sinfiotli, the Collector infers that he is a Volsung. Whether this corresponds to the oldest stratum of the legend is another matter.

<sup>7</sup>It is not certain who is meant. One of Helgi's kin?

<sup>8</sup>Kenning for 'wolf': an allusion to the name of Helgi's race, the Ylfings, i.e. 'Wolfings'.—*Hamal* 'Wether'.



was a valkyrie and rode through both air and water. She was Sváva born again. She rode to Helgi's ships and said:

6. "To the steep bank who           steereth the fleet?  
Where, ye heroes,           your homestead lies?  
For what bide ye           in Bruna Bay?  
Whither list ye now           to lay your course?"

*Helgi said:*

7. "'Tis Hamal steers           to steep bank the fleet,  
the warriors' homestead           on Hlés-Isle<sup>14</sup> lies;  
a good breeze bide we           in Bruna Bay,  
and East list we           to lay our course."

*The valkyrie said:*

8. "Where hast, hero,           hoisted war-shield,<sup>15</sup>  
or fed Gunn's fowls<sup>16</sup>           with fallen men?  
Why is thy byrnie           with blood besprent,<sup>17</sup>  
why, clad in armor,           eat ye raw meat?"

*Helgi said:*

9. "This, last of all           did the Ylfing's son  
west of the sea,           if to wit thee list,  
that bears<sup>18</sup> we bound           in Braga Grove,  
and with sword sated           the sib of eagles:  
said have I now           why my sark is red;  
and by strand why little           we steak our meat."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup>In the Kattegat, between Jutland and Sweden; cf. *Hárþ.* 37.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. *H.H.* I, 34.

<sup>16</sup>Gunn 'Battle' is a valkyrie, her fowls hence the birds of prey—eagles and ravens.

<sup>17</sup>Conjectural.

<sup>18</sup>Figuratively for 'men made captives'.

<sup>19</sup>He excuses his warriors,—they are ravenous after long privations.

*The valkyrie said:*

10. "Of the fight tell'st thou when fell in battle,  
 by Helgi's hand, Hunding the king;  
 clashed ye in combat thy kinsmen to avenge:  
 streamed the blood then o'er the brand's  
 edges."

*Helgi said:*

11. "How wist thou, woman, that we the men  
 who in combat 'clashing their kinsmen  
 avenged?  
 No lack is there of lordly kings' sons  
 in all like to our kindred."

*The valkyrie said:*

12. "Not far was I, young folk-warder,  
 when yestermorn the mighty king fell;  
 but Sigmund's son most sly I ween  
 to hint of that battle with hidden runes.<sup>20</sup>
13. "I watched thee eke on warship standing,  
 on bloody bow, breasting the waves—  
 they cool did play the keels about.  
 Now strives the hero to hide him from me,  
 but to Hogni's daughter is Helgi known."

## III

Granmar was the name of a mighty king who lived at Svarin's Hill. He had many sons. One was hight Hothbrodd, another Gothmund, and a third Starkath. At a meeting of kings, Hothbrodd plighted himself to Sigrún, the daughter of King Hogni.<sup>22</sup> But when she heard of that

<sup>20</sup>It was considered part of wisdom in a warrior to conceal his identity; cf. *Fáfn.* 1f.

<sup>22</sup>With her father's consent; cf. 17.





nine valkyries ride aloft and knew again Sigrún. Then the storm fell and they made land unharmed. The sons of Granmar were keeping watch on a mountain when the ships neared land. Gothmund leaped on his horse and rode to a hill by the harbor to find out whose fleet it was. The Volsungs were then taking in their sails. Then said Gothmund, as is written above in the Lay of Helgi:<sup>25</sup>

“Who the highborn                      hero, leading  
these hosts hither                      to harry on us?”

Sinfiotli, the son of Sigmund, made answer to him, and that also is written there.

Gothmund rode home with these tidings of war. Then gathered the sons of Granmar an army. Many kings came there, and among them Hogni, Sigrún's father, and his sons Bragi and Dag. A great battle followed, and there fell all the sons of Granmar, and all their leaders but only Dag, the son of Hogni. He was given quarter and sware oaths to the Volsungs. Sigrún went upon the battlefield and found Hothbrodd nigh unto death. She said:

18. “Wilt not Sigrún                      of the Seva Fell,  
high-born Hothbrodd,                      e'er hold in thy arms;  
have lost their lives—                      men's limbs tear now  
grey-coated wolves—                      all of Granmar's sons.”

Then found she Helgi and was most glad. He said:

19. “Not good only                      was given thee, Sigrún,  
although ill norms                      in this had share:  
fell this morning                      at Freka Stone  
Bragi and Hogni—                      my brand slew them;

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<sup>25</sup>I.e. the First Lay, 33f.



*Sinfjotli said:*

24. "Here mayst, Hothbrodd, find Helgi now  
in the midst of his fleet, the fearless hero;  
the Fiorsung's lands on the field he won him,  
all the gold eke which owned thy kin."<sup>30</sup>

*Gothmund said:*

25. "Before shall, foeman, at Freka Stone  
our slaughterous swords settle between us;  
'tis time, Hothbrodd, to take revenge,  
since by them oft overborne we were."

*Sinfjotli said:*

26. "Before shalt, Gothmund, the goat-flocks  
herd,  
in clefts of cliffs clambering about,  
and hold in thy hand a hazel-rod:  
that's better for thee than battling with  
swords."

*Helgi said:*

27. <sup>31</sup>"'Twere, Sinfjotli, more seeming by far  
to swing thy sword and sate eagles,  
than with words to wage war between you,  
though the ring-breakers' wrath is kindled.
28. "No good I wait me from Granmar's sons,  
yet befits it kings no falsehood to say;  
at Móinsheim right manfully  
their wands-of-wounds they wielded boldly."

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<sup>30</sup>The meaning of the second half of the stanza is obscure. Possibly, Sinfjotli begins to taunt him—"your lands and treasures are as good as won"?

<sup>31</sup>Identical with 47, 48 of *H.H. I.*

## VI

Helgi wedded Sigrún and had sons by her. Helgi lived not long. Dag, Hogni's son, sacrificed to Óthin that he should help him avenge his father, and Óthin loaned Dag his spear.<sup>32</sup> Dag found Helgi, his sister's husband, in a grove which is hight Fiotur Grove.<sup>32a</sup> He ran Helgi through with his spear. Helgi died, and Dag rode to the Seva Fells and told Sigrún the tidings:

29. "Loath am I, sister, of sad things to tell;  
 for unwilling was I to work thee harm:<sup>33</sup>  
 fell this morning by Fiotur Grove  
 under heaven who was of all heroes best,  
 and set his foot on sea-kings' necks."

*Sigrún said:*

30. "Shall all the oaths ever strike thee  
 which to Sigmund's son thou swarest of yore  
 by light-hued, leaping Leiptr's<sup>34</sup> water,  
 and eke by Unn's<sup>35</sup> ice-cold stone-cliff.
31. "The boat shall budge not wick beareth thee,  
 a fair wind though do fill its sails;  
 the steed shall run not thou ridest on,  
 though fain thy foeman flee thou wouldest!

<sup>32</sup>Thus also Sigmund finally succumbs to Óthin's spear, *Volsunga saga* chap. 11.

<sup>32a</sup>'Fetter Grove'. Probably identical with the one in the land of the Semnonnes mentioned by Tacitus (*Germania* chap. 39): *est et alia luco reverentia: nemo nisi vinculo ligatus ingreditur*.

<sup>33</sup>He is forced by the duty of blood-revenge.

<sup>34</sup>Leiptr is one of the rivers of the nether world, *Grimn.* 28. Hence an oath by its water corresponds to the Greeks' swearing by Styx.

<sup>35</sup>'The Wave', one of Ægir's daughters; cf. *Guð.* III, 3 and *Akv.* 32.





With spurs ye urge            to speed your horses:  
or may the heroes            wend home again?"<sup>43</sup>

*Helgi said:*

41. "No dream-sights only            thy eyes behold,  
nor world's end is't,            though us thou seest  
with spurs urging            to speed our horses;  
nor may the heroes            wend home again."

The bond-maid went home and said to Sigrún:

42. "Come out, Sigrún            of Seva Fells,  
if the folk-warder            to find thee list:  
Helgi is here,            his howe open;  
his wounds do bleed:            he begs of thee  
to stay the bloody            stream from his breast."

Sigrún went into the mound to Helgi and said:

43. "As fain am I            to find thee, Helgi,  
as Óthin's hawks,<sup>44</sup>            hungry for meat,  
when war they scent            and warm corpses,  
and dew-besprent            the daylight see.

44. "The lifeless king            to kiss I list,  
ere the bloody byrnie            thou unbucklest;  
thy hair, Helgi,            'tis hoar with frost,  
with dew-of-wounds<sup>45</sup>            all wet art thou—  
Clammy the hands            of Hogni's kinsman;<sup>46</sup>  
how shall I, hero,            find help for that?"

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<sup>43</sup>They are not allowed to return 'home' to earth, but only for a last stay.

<sup>44</sup>The ravens.

<sup>45</sup>Kenning for 'blood'.

<sup>46</sup>This is Helgi's status as his daughter's husband.

*Helgi said:*

45. "Tis Sigrún's doing, of Seva Fells,  
 that Helgi drips with the dew-of-sorrow:<sup>46</sup>  
 woman sun-bright, southern,<sup>47</sup> ere to sleep  
 thou goest,  
 thou ceaseless, sadly salt tears weepst;  
 falls each one, bloody, on the breast of the  
 king,  
 icy, festering, full of sorrow.

46. "This wondrous wine a welcome drink,  
 though life and lands be lost for aye;  
 songs of sadness shall no one sing,  
 albeit my breast doth bleed with wounds:  
 now hath my bride into barrow come,  
 the maid praised of men, to me, the dead!"

Sigrún made ready a bed in the mound. She said:

47. "A bed made I ready for both of us,  
 'tis free from care, kingly Helgi;  
 in thy arms will I, atheling, sleep,  
 as in life, lief one, I lay with thee."

*Helgi said:*

48. "No wonder, ween I, will unwonted seem,  
 sooner or later, at Seva Fells,  
 since lies with lifeless leader's body  
 in the howe, Hogni's white-armed daughter—  
 with the dead the quick, the queenly woman."

(When morning dawned, Helgi arose and said:)

49. "Along reddening roads to ride I hie me,  
 on fallow steed aery paths to fly:

<sup>47</sup>Cf. *H.H.* I, 17.





## SINFIOTLI'S DEATH<sup>1a</sup>

### *Fra dauða Sinfjötla.*

Sigmund, son of Volsung, was king over Frankland. His eldest son was hight Sinfiotli,<sup>1</sup> the second, Helgi, and the third, Hámund. Borghild, Sigmund's wife, had a brother called . . . ;<sup>2</sup> but Sinfiotli, her stepson, and . . . wooed the same woman. So Sinfiotli slew him. When he came home, Borghild bade him betake himself away; but Sigmund offered her weregild, and this she must take. At the arvel, Borghild handed ale about. She took poison, a big drinking-horn full, and handed it to Sinfiotli. But when he looked into the horn he saw that there was poison in it and said to Sigmund: "Muddied is the ale, father!" Sigmund grasped the horn and drank of it. It is told of Sigmund that he was proof against poison, so that it would not harm him within nor without. But his sons could stand poison only without, on their skin. Borghild brought Sinfiotli another horn and bade him drink of it, and all happened as before. Still a third time she handed him the horn, shaming him if he drank not. Sinfiotli spoke as before to his father. Sigmund said: "Drink boldly, my son!"<sup>3</sup> Sinfiotli drank and forthwith fell down dead. Sigmund carried him a long way in his arms until he came to a firth which was both long and narrow. There lay a small boat, and in it was a man.<sup>4</sup> He offered to ferry Sigmund

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<sup>1a</sup>This link—in very mediocre prose—was placed here by the Collector to form a transition to the Sigurth lays. It might with equal justice be entitled 'Of Sigurth's Origin'.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. *H.H.* I, 34, note.

<sup>2</sup>There is a space left here in the manuscript for the insertion of the other suitor's name, which is not known to the *Volsunga saga*, either.

<sup>3</sup>The passage also permits of the (less probable) translation: "Let it be filtered through your beard."

<sup>4</sup>The ferriman is none other than Óthin who thus himself accompanies the hero on his journey to the Realm of the Dead.

over. But when Sigmund had borne the body into the boat there was no more room in it for another. The man told Sigmund to walk around the firth; then he shoved the boat off and forthwith vanished.

King Sigmund dwelled for a long time in Denmark in Borghild's realm, after marrying her; but afterwards he fared south to Frankland to the kingdom over which he himself had sway. There he married Hiordís, the daughter of King Eylimi, and their son was Sigurth. King Sigmund fell in battle against the sons of Hunding. Then Hiordís married Hálf, the son of king Hiálprek.<sup>5</sup> The boy Sigurth grew up at his court. Both Sigmund and all his sons were far above other men in strength, in growth, in hardihood, and in all manly feats; but Sigurth<sup>6</sup> was foremost of them all, and about him men are at one in the olden tales, that he was the noblest of men and the greatest of leaders in war.

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<sup>5</sup>Of Denmark, according to the *Vǫlss*. The name corresponds to that of the West Frankish king, Chilperich.—In the *Vǫlss*, it is explained how this comes about: Alf happens to arrive on the scene of battle with his fleet, and there finds Hiordís and one of her maids by the side of the dying Sigmund. He carries them off as bond-maids, but later marries Hiordís when her true status becomes known. Her son by Sigmund, Sigurth, may thus be said to have been born in captivity; cf. *Fáfn*. 7, 8.

<sup>6</sup>'Warder of Victory'. The German form *Sigfrít* means 'Bringer of Victory'.

# THE PROPHECY OF GRÍPIR

## *Grípisspé*

'The Prophecy of Grípir' was chosen by the Collector to introduce the Sigurth poems immediately following—no doubt because it contained a sort of epitome of them all. This sufficiently evinces his lack of critical discernment; for even a slight acquaintance with the Heroic Lay teaches us that this one is of a different class: it is but a sapless versified excerpt, in the form of a gnostic dialogue, utterly lacking originality of treatment, and full of ineptitudes and contradictions, at that!<sup>1</sup> Poetically worthless, it is of interest because its author—no doubt some Icelander of the Thirteenth Century—still had before him the poems of the *Great Lacuna*.

In form, the jejune stanzas (in *fornyrðislag*) are flawless. It may be noted that the alternation between the first and the third person, as used by the speaker of himself, occurs commonly enough in Old Norse poetry, but not to the wearisome extent seen in this piece.

Grípir<sup>1a</sup> was the name of Eylimi's son, and he was the brother of Hiordís. He ruled a kingdom and was the

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<sup>1</sup>In particular, grievous confusion was wrought, in the poem (and in the account of the *Skáld.* chap. 41 based on it) as well as in some modern treatments, by the author's inability to discern that there were current two, incompatible, versions of Sigurth's relations with Brynhild and with Guthrún; or else by his trying to reconcile them in true medieval fashion:

I. According to *Fáfn.*, *Sigkv.*, *Helr.* and the *Nibelungenlied*, the hero first proceeds to Giúki's court and wins Guthrún. When there, he is prevailed upon to win Brynhild for Gunnar by riding through the wall of fire and assuming Gunnar's shape. He rouses Brynhild from her sleep, lies three nights beside her, his sword separating them, and then yields her to Gunnar.

II. In the *Völss.*, the *Nornagests þáttr* based, it seems, on poems now lost, in the *Sigrdr.*, and in the *Þiðreks saga*, Sigurth first delivers, and pledges himself to, Brynhild. He then proceeds to Giúki's court where a 'drink of forgetfulness,' given him by Grímhild, makes him oblivious of his former love, and he marries Guthrún.

Curiously enough, the *Nibelungenlied* shows traces of a similar confusion (VI, VII); and the bird prophecy in *Fáfn.* is ambiguous.

<sup>1a</sup>Both person and name are probably the invention of the poet.

wisest of men and had foreknowledge of the future. Sigurth rode alone and came to Grípir's hall. Sigurth was easily known. Outside of the hall he met a man whose name was Geitir.<sup>2</sup> Sigurth greeted him and said:

1. "This high-built castle                    what king houseth,  
known by what name                    his knights among?"

*Geitir said:*

"The gold-ring-giver                    is Grípir hight  
o'er land and lieges                    who lordeth it here."

*Sigurth said:*

2. "Is the high-born hero                    home in the land?  
Would the noble king                    hold converse with me?  
A man unknown                    hath need of it,—  
would he forthwith find                    the folkwarder.

*Geitir said:*

3. "Will the gladsome king<sup>3</sup>                    of Geitir ask  
with whom he is                    to hold converse.

*Sigurth said:*

"I am Sigurth hight,                    to Sigmund born,  
and Hiordís is                    the hero's mother."

4. Then went Geitir,                    Grípir to tell:  
"an unknown man                    without doth stand,  
of lofty mien                    this lord seemeth:  
would he, noble king,                    hold converse with  
thee."
5. Out of hall hied him                    the house-carles' lord  
to greet as guest                    the goodly warrior:

<sup>2</sup>'Goat-herd'. Cf. the situation in *Skírn.* and *Fj.*

<sup>3</sup>Standing epithet; cf. *Fáfn.* 29.

“Welcome, Sigurth,—            why no sooner here?  
Thou, Geitir, stable            Grani his steed.”<sup>4</sup>

6. The thoughtful thanes            of things many  
gan tidings tell,            true-heartedly.

*Sigurth said:*

“Make known to me,            my mother’s brother,  
what life will Sigurth            lead hereafter?”

*Grípir said:*

7. “Among sons of men,            the sun beneath,  
wilt be held of heroes            the highest born,—  
free with thy gold,            to flee unready,  
in thy words most wise,            and wondrous fair.”

*Sigurth said:*

8. “Still further, king—            far more I ask—  
say to Sigurth,            if ’tis seen by thee:  
of my fate what first            befalls me now,  
when from thy hall            I fare on the morrow?”

*Grípir said:*

9. “Wilt first, folk-warrior,            thy father avenge,  
and Eylimi eke,            for evil deed:  
the hardy sons            to Hunding born  
thou wilt lay low,            the lieges doughty.”<sup>4a</sup>

*Sigurth said:*

10. “Say clearly, king,            to thy kinsman here,  
thy sister’s child,            right cheerfully:  
seest deeds of daring            done by Sigurth,  
which soar highest            the heavens beneath?”

<sup>4</sup>See the Prose at the end of *Fáfn.*

<sup>4a</sup>Cf. *Reg.* 15-26.



with keen edge wilt                      cut her byrnie,  
slitting with sword                      which slew Fáfmir."

*Sigurth said:*

16. "The mail is slitted,                      the maiden speaketh,  
as from her sleep                      she sitteth up then.  
To thy sib Sigurth                      what saith the lady,  
which to the leader                      good luck will bring?"

*Grípir said:*

17. "Will she teach thee runes,                      doughty ruler,  
which all men are                      eager to learn,—  
teach thee to talk                      the tongues of men,  
and healing leech-craft:<sup>10</sup>                      hail to thee, king!"

*Sigurth said:*

18. "Learned is the lore                      which lords should know;  
ready am I                      to ride from thence.  
Scan yet longer                      the skein of fate:  
what will further                      fall to my lot?"

*Grípir said:*

19. "To Heimir's<sup>11</sup> halls                      wilt, hero come,  
and gladly dwell                      as guest with the king:  
at an end is now                      all my knowledge—  
ask no more of                      thy mother's brother."

*Sigurth said:*

20. "Sorrow see I                      in what thou sayest  
since, folk-warder,                      farther doest know:  
too great the grief                      Grípir weeneth,  
hence more wilt not                      to me now say."

<sup>10</sup>These Runic instructions form the main contents of the *Sigrdr.*

<sup>11</sup>Brynhild's foster-father. Her father, in Norse tradition, is Buthli; her brother, Atli. See 27, below.



*Grípir said:*

21. "In light most lieth thy life before me  
 which in youth thou, nor beyond wilt lead;  
 nor in truth can I foretell thy fate:  
 at an end is now all my knowledge."

*Sigurth said:*

22. "Is no man known beneath heaven  
 who forward sees further than thou:  
 hide not from me, unhappy though be  
 my life and lot, and luckless my end."

*Grípir said:*

23. "Learn and listen, lordly hero:  
 no fault nor flaw thy fate doth blot:  
 know that most noble thy name will be  
 the while, warrior, the world lasteth."

*Sigurth said:*

24. "Little I like it; now leave taketh  
 from thee Sigurth, though thus it be;  
 the way now show,— his weird none fleeth—  
 my mother's brother, to me if thou wilt."

*Grípir said:*

25. "To Sigurth shall I now say fully  
 since, war-worker, thou wilt it thus:—  
 thou know'st full well that naught I lie—  
 I see the day thy death will bring."

*Sigurth said:*

26. "The wise folk-warder's wrath I wish not,  
 but the good rede of Grípir, rather:



*Sigurth said:*

32. “How so, Grípir?                      Nor hide from me:  
is fickle found                      the folk-warrior’s mind?  
Will I faithlessly                      fail the maiden  
to whom my whole                      heart I had given?”

*Grípir said:*

33. “A wicked woman’s                      wiles will snare thee:  
will Queen Grímhild<sup>14</sup>                      beguile thy mind  
and offer to thee                      her own daughter,  
the lovely maiden,                      and lure thee on.”

*Sigurth said:*

34. “Then Gunnar’s kinsman                      the king<sup>15</sup> will be,  
when that as wife                      he weds Guthrún.  
Full well wedded                      then would I be,  
if the ruler<sup>15</sup> rued not                      the wrong that’s done.”

*Grípir said:*

35. “Will Grímhild beguile thee                      altogether,  
and egg thee on                      to ask Brynhild  
for Gunnar’s<sup>16</sup> wife,                      the Gothic<sup>17</sup> king’s:  
thy faith wilt thou                      forthwith plight him.”

*Sigurth said:*

36. “Ill hap draws nigh—                      I behold it well—  
foresight Sigurth,                      I fear me, lacks

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<sup>14</sup>‘Maiden in Helmet (Vizor)’. She corresponds to the *Uote* of the *Nibelungenlied*. Her daughter is Guthrún, M.H.G. *Kúdrún*, ‘Knowing War-Runes’, whose rôle is that of *Kriemhilt* in the *Nibelungenlied*.—Much of what follows is taken from the poems of the *Great Lacuna*.

<sup>15</sup>Sigurth.

<sup>16</sup>‘Leader in Battle’. Both name and person correspond to the *Gunther* of the *Nibelungenlied*.

<sup>17</sup>Here, as often, used as an honorific epithet.

if I shall ask            for other man  
her whom my whole            heart I had given."

*Grípir said:*

37. "Oaths will pledge ye            altogether,  
Gunnar and Hogni<sup>18</sup>—            thou, hero, too;  
each other's form,            when faring to her,  
takest thou and Gunnar:<sup>19</sup>            Grípir lies not."

*Sigurth said:*

38. "How may this happen            that he and I  
shift face and form            when faring to her?  
Still other falsehoods            will follow after,  
all fraught with sorrow;            but say on, Grípir!"

*Grípir said:*

39. "Wilt borrow Gunnar's            bearing and form,  
but keep thy speech            and spirit eke;  
wilt pledge the troth            of the proud-hearted  
winsome woman:            fate wills it so."

*Sigurth said:*

40. "Little I like it;            a loathly deed  
all thanes will think it,            if thus I do.  
With wiles I would not            woo for Gunnar  
as bride Brynhild,            best of maidens."

*Grípir said:*

41. "Together will both            bridals be drunk,<sup>20</sup>  
Sigurth's and Gunnar's,            in Giúki's hall.

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<sup>18</sup>The *Hagene* of the *Nibelungenlied*.

<sup>19</sup>As is told in *Brot*.

<sup>20</sup>Such is the case in the *Nibelungenlied*.







## THE LAY OF REGIN

### *Reginismál*

The present title of this collection of (two or more) fragments was suggested by Bugge, in analogy with the traditional title of the following poem.

In the introductory Prose the fateful Niflung gold is traced to its source in dim antiquity, when the gods walked the earth and became involved in guilt through Loki. In scattering stanzas we are told of its baneful influence on the kin of Hreithmar. Sigurth is introduced: through him, Regin hopes to obtain the treasure. But first, the hero feels called to avenge his fallen kinsmen on the sons of Hunding. In this portion we note the fine passage in the heroic style, describing a storm at sea.

With some good will we may consider these stanzas to hang together; but it is hardly credible that this was the original shape—the two patches of gnomic and dialogue stanzas in *ljóðaháttr* stand out too clearly from the remainder, which is cast in narrative *fornyrðislag*.

The complete text is found in *Cod. Reg.*, a number of stanzas also in the paraphrases of *Völss.* and *Nornag.* There are no clues as to where and when the lay originated; though it seems in spirit to belong to the Heathen period (before 1000).

Sigurth went to Hiálprek's stud and chose him a horse, which later bore the name of Grani.<sup>1</sup> At that time had come to Hiálprek's court Regin,<sup>1a</sup> the son of Hreithmar. He was more skilled in crafts than any other man. He was a dwarf in size, wise, cruel, and a wizard. Regin fostered up Sigurth, taught him, and loved him greatly. He told Sigurth about his own forbears and of how, once upon a time, Óthin, and Hœnir, and Loki<sup>2</sup> had come to the waterfall of Andvari. In that waterfall there were many fish. A dwarf named Andvari dwelled in it in the shape of a pike and got him food there. "Otr was the name of

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<sup>1</sup>According to *Völss.* chap 13, Óthin himself gave Sigurth the horse, which is stated to descend from the god's own steed, Sleipnir.

<sup>1a</sup>'Counsellor' (?).

<sup>2</sup>Cf. *Vsp.* 9, 10.



our brother", said Regin, "and he often came to the waterfall in the shape of an otter. He had caught a salmon and was eating him with half-closed eyes.<sup>3</sup> Then Loki threw a stone at him and killed him. The gods thought they had made a lucky catch and flayed the otter. That same evening they came to Hreithmar for nightquarters and showed him their bag. Then we bound them and laid on them as a ransom to stuff the otter-skin, and also to cover it on the outside, with red gold. Then sent they Loki to fetch the gold. He went to Rón<sup>4</sup> and borrowed her net. Then he fared to the waterfall of Andvari and cast the net for the pike, and it leapt into the net. Then said Loki:

1. "What fish is this            in the flood that swims  
   and cannot keep him from harm?  
To Hel's dark hall            art headed now,  
   but thou fetch me the fire-of-the-flood."<sup>5</sup>

*Andvari said:*

2. "I am Andvari,            Óin my father,  
   in many a flood have I fared;  
in days of yore            was I doomed by norms  
   in swirling waters to swim."

*Loki said:*

3. "Tell me, Andvari,            if on earth thou wilt,  
   dwarf, live a longer life:  
what doom            is dealt to men  
   who wound each other with words?"

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<sup>3</sup>*Völss.* chap. 14 explains that he was wont to eat his food with half-closed eyes and alone because he could not bear to see it diminish.

<sup>4</sup>The sea goddess; cf. *H.Hv.* 16.

<sup>5</sup>Kenning for 'gold'; cf. *H.H.* I, 22 note.

*Andvari said:*

4. "A heavy doom is dealt to men  
       who in Vathgelmir's<sup>6</sup> waters wade;  
 he who untruth utters and on others lies,  
       long will he linger there.

"Loki saw all the gold which Andvari owned. Now when he had given up all the gold but one ring<sup>7</sup> which he kept for himself, Loki took that from him too. The dwarf went into his cave and said:

5. "The glittering gold which Gust<sup>8</sup> did own  
 the bane will be of brothers twain,  
 and to eight athelings bring untimely death:<sup>9</sup>  
 he who holds my hoard will e'er hapless be."<sup>10</sup>

"The æsir gave Hreithmar the gold. They stuffed the otterskin with it and raised it on its feet. Then were the gods to heap the gold round about it until it was covered altogether. When that had been done, Hreithmar stepped near and saw one beard-hair of the otter, and bade them cover that too. Then Óthin took forth the ring which Andvari had owned and covered up the hair. Then said Loki:

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<sup>6</sup>A river in Hel, only mentioned here; but similar to the river in which the mainsworn and the murderers are condemned to wade, *Vsp.* 31. It has been suggested that Loki wishes by his question to induce the dwarf to tell the truth.

<sup>7</sup>According to *Skáld.* chap. 39, this ring had, like Óthin's ring Draupnir (cf. *Skírn.* 22), the power to renew itself. It is the 'Ring of the Niflungs.'

<sup>8</sup>Andvari himself, or one of the former owners of the ring.

<sup>9</sup>The two brothers are Fáfñir and Regin; the other eight athelings, possibly, Sigurth, Gotthorm, Gunnar, Hogni, Atli, and the three sons of Guthrún by Íónakr.

<sup>10</sup>The ring is to be fatal to any one possessing it, according to the prose versions.

6. "The gold thou hast gotten, but great has been  
the worth thou laidst on my life;  
'twill sorrow bring to thy son and thee,  
it will work the bane of you both."

*Hreithmar said:*

7. "Gifts thou gavest, but grudgingly,  
nor gavest with whole heart;  
but little life were left to you,  
if aware I had been of this woe."<sup>11</sup>

*Loki said:*

8. "Still worse by far— I ween to know—  
is kinsmen's hapless hate:<sup>12</sup>  
unborn the lords, I believe, as yet,  
on whose life this curse will alight."

*Hreithmar said:*

9. "My hoard of gold to hold I mean  
the while my life does last;  
not a whit dread I thy deadly threat:  
now hie you home hence!"

Fáfnir<sup>13</sup> and Regin asked Hreithmar for their share of the weregild for their brother Otr. But he would not yield it up. Then Fáfnir thrust his sword into his father Hreithmar while he slept. Hreithmar called out to his daughters:

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<sup>11</sup>The guests' life must be spared since weregild has been offered and accepted; which Hreithmar would not have done had he known of the curse attaching to the gold.

<sup>12</sup>The line is doubtful. The reference seems to be to the fateful feuds among the Giúkungs.

<sup>13</sup>He Who Surrounds With His Arms', Regin's brother.

10. <sup>14</sup>“Lynghेith and Lofnheith! Know that my  
life is ended:  
much I crave of my kin”!

*Lynghेith said:*

- “Though their father be felled      few sisters  
would  
seek their brother’s blood.”

*Hreithmar said:*

11. “Wolf-hearted woman,      if in wedlock a son  
be not born to thee,      then bear thou a daugh-  
ter;  
give the maid to a man      in thy mighty need:  
will their son then      to thy need see.”<sup>15</sup>

Then died Hreithmar; but Fáfñir took all the gold. Regin asked for his share of the inheritance after his father; but Fáfñir said no to that.<sup>16</sup> Then Regin sought counsel of his sister Lynghेith, how he should win his share. She said:

12. “Thy kinsman shalt      in kindness ask  
thy fee and a fairer mind;  
not seeming is it      with the sword thou should’st  
ask of Fáfñir thy own.”

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<sup>14</sup>The following stanzas very evidently do not fit in properly. They are, possibly with 12, fragments of another lay.

<sup>15</sup>Since the daughter refuses to avenge her father on her brother Fáfñir, this duty devolves upon her son or, if she bear a daughter, on the son born of her in wedlock. We may then, with Grundtvig, suppose that either Lynghेith, or her daughter, marries King Eylimi. Their grandson, Sigurth, who slays Fáfñir would thus be the avenger. To be sure, this connection is not authenticated by any source.

<sup>16</sup>Then, according to *Skáld.* chap. 40 (and *Völss.* chap. 14), “Fáfñir fared to the Gnita Heath and made him a lair and transformed himself into a dragon and brooded on his gold.”

All this told Regin Sigurth.

One day when he came to Regin's house, he was greatly welcomed. Regin said:

13. "Hither has come the kinsman of Sigmund,  
the keen atheling, to our hall;  
hardier he than hero tried,  
from warlike wolf I wait me strife.<sup>17</sup>
14. "Foster shall I the fearless lordling,  
now Yngvi's kinsman<sup>18</sup> has come to us;  
under high heaven among heroes first,  
his fate-thread is spun to overspread all  
lands."<sup>19</sup>

Sigurth stayed with Regin. He told Sigurth how Fáfnir lay on the Gnita Heath in the shape of a dragon and had the Helm of Terror, of which all living things are a-dread. Regin made Sigurth a sword called Gram,<sup>20</sup> which was so sharp that when he dipped it into the Rhine, and let a flock of wool float down with the stream against it, the flock was cut in two as though it had been water. With this sword did Sigurth cleave asunder Regin's anvil. Thereafter Regin egged on Sigurth to slay Fáfnir; but he said:

15. "Soon would sneer then the sons of Hunding,  
they who ended Eylimi's life,<sup>21</sup>  
if more keen the king<sup>22</sup> to crave red gold  
than blood for blood of his father's banes-  
men."

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<sup>17</sup>An Icelandic proverb; but 'warlike-wolf' (Ylfing) may also be taken as a kenning for 'hero'.

<sup>18</sup>The fabled progenitor of the royal Swedish line; but here more generally as an honorific epithet.

<sup>19</sup>For the figure, cf. *H.H.* I, 3, 4.

<sup>20</sup>'Ogre, troll'. According to *Vǫlss.* chap. 15, it was made from the fragments of Sigmund's sword which Hiordís had preserved.

<sup>21</sup>According to *Sinf.* it was his father, Sigmund, who fell in this battle.

<sup>22</sup>Sigurth.



*Hnikar said:*

20. "Signs there are many,           if men but knew,  
  which are good at the swinging of swords:  
to doughty hero           the dusky raven's  
  flight is a following fair.
21. "Another this:           when out thou goest,  
  and ready art forth to fare,  
and beholdest           good heroes twain,  
  and stout-hearted, stand on the path.
22. "The third is this:           if thereafter  
  a wolf howl in the woods;  
good hap thou'lt have           among helmet-bearers,  
  if first thou seest them fare.
23. "His foe let no one           fight withershins;<sup>26</sup>  
into setting sun           see thou never;  
for victory is theirs           whose view is best,  
of the war-workers           who in wedges array  
  them.<sup>27</sup>
24. "Then art thou fey           if thy foot stumbles,  
  when thou goest to the swinging of swords.  
Will guileful ghosts<sup>28</sup>           glower at thee—  
  would fain see thee fall.
25. "Combed and clean-washed           should the keen  
  man be,  
  and have early eaten his fill;

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<sup>26</sup>In duels, sun and wind were shifted fairly. Cf. also *Hǫv.* 129.

<sup>27</sup>The 'wedge' or phalanx was supposed to be Óthin's invention, taught by him to his favorite heroes.

<sup>28</sup>In the text, 'guileful *dísar* (female spirits) on either side of thee'.







2. "Stag<sup>2</sup> I am hight,           homeless I wandered,  
                                   I am a motherless man;  
 no father had I            as folks do else:  
                                   ever fare I unfriended."<sup>3</sup>

*Fáfnir said:*

3. "If father thou hadst not            as folks do else,  
                                   how wast thou, boy, then born?  
 (not knowing thy name,            though now I die,  
                                   I little doubt thou liest.)"<sup>4</sup>

*Sigurth said:*

4. "My forefathers            to fame are known,<sup>5</sup>  
                                   of myself I say the same:  
 Sigurth thou seest here,            was Sigmund my  
   father;  
 thou know'st now whose sword smote  
   thee."

*Fáfnir said:*

5. "Who whetted thee,            and why didst wish  
                                   to seek, Sigurth, my life?  
 Thou keen-eyed boy,            thou hadst bold father,  
                                   (such daring deed to do.)"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>In the original, 'noble animal'; but cf. *H.H.* II. 38.

<sup>3</sup>Unless we are to assume that Sigurth deliberately misrepresents, this version is at variance with his princely rearing at Híalprek's court; but indeed, according to the German story of Sigfrit (also *Þiðreks saga* chap. 168), he came to Regin's smithy as a foundling; so that there may be traces of this conception in this and the following stanzas.

<sup>4</sup>Supplied after the paraphrase in *Völss.* chap. 18.

<sup>5</sup>After Cederschiöld: in the original, 'unknown'; which does not agree with Fáfnir's knowing Sigmund (below, 5) and the circumstances of Sigurth's birth.

<sup>6</sup>The text here is corrupt, the translation of the line hence purely conjectural.

*Sigurth said:*

6. "My hands did help as my heart did whet,  
and eke my bitter brand;  
brisk will not be as bearded man  
who was afraid when fledged."

*Fáfnir said:*

7. "Forsooth, if 'mong kinsmen thou couldst  
grow up,  
thou bold in battle wouldst be;  
but unfree art, nor thy own master,  
and aye are fearful the fettered."<sup>7</sup>

*Sigurth said:*

8. "Since far I am, Fáfnir, from my father's kin  
thou scornfully scoffest at me:  
no bondsman am I, as babe though taken:  
unfettered thou feltest me now."

*Fáfnir said:*

9. "But words of hate to hear thou weenest;  
yet I tell thee this for truth:  
the glistening gold and the glow-red hoard—  
the rings thy bane will be."

*Sigurth said:*

10. <sup>7a</sup>"For wealth doth wish each wight that's  
born,  
to have till the day of death;  
sometime, forsooth, shall each son of man  
fare hence to Hel."

<sup>7</sup>On this and the following stanzas, cf. *Sinf.*, note 5.

<sup>7a</sup>This stanza, as well as several others following, seems to have belonged originally to some collection of didactic sayings like *Hǫv.*





but harder grow            the hearts of men  
if that helm they have."

*Fáfnir said:*

20. "Hear thou, Sigurth,            and heed it well:  
Ride thou home from hence!  
The glistening gold            and the glow-red hoard—  
the rings thy bane will be."<sup>17</sup>

*Sigurth said:*

21. "Warning thou'st given;            now wot that I ride  
to the gold hoarded on heath;  
but thou, Fáfnir,            shalt flounder in death  
till Hel harbor thee."

*Fáfnir said:*

22. "Regin bewrayed me,            will bewray thee too,  
will be the bane of us both;  
Fáfnir is doomed            to die full soon,  
greater thy might was than mine."

Regin had taken himself off, the while Sigurth slew Fáfnir, and showed himself again when Sigurth was wiping the blood from his sword. He said:

23. <sup>18</sup>"Hail now, Sigurth,            thou hast slain Fáfnir:  
well hast thou won the day;  
of all the men            on earth that walk  
I call thee bravest born."

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<sup>17</sup>These stanzas would seem to belong more properly after 9.

<sup>18</sup>Sigurth modestly replies to Regin's fulsome praise, but claims for himself full share of both praise and blame for slaying Fáfnir. Regin, with an eye on the hoard, admits that it would not have been done but for his egging on, but maintains that it could not have been done but for the wondrous sword he had fashioned.

*Sigurth said:*

24. "When men are met           to match their thews,  
   who knows who is bravest born?  
 Full many are brave            who brand never red-  
   dened  
 in the blood from foeman's breast."

*Regin said:*

25. "Glad art, Sigurth,            hast slain thy foe,  
   and driest now Gram on the grass;  
 my own brother                thy brand did slay,  
   yet had I a hand in his death."

*Sigurth said:*

26. "Afar thou wert            while in Fáfñir's blood  
   I reddened my slaughterous sword;  
 my strength I strained        to strive with the  
   worm,  
 whilst thou in the heather didst hide."

*Regin said:*

27. "Long had lived            in his lair on heath  
   that age-old etin,<sup>19</sup>  
 if the sword thou hadst not        which myself did  
   make,  
 the blade which bites so sore."

*Sigurth said:*

28. "Courage is better            than keenest steel,  
   when bold men bare their brands;  
 oft beheld I                    whole-hearted swain  
   with dull sword win his way.

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<sup>19</sup>Both Regin and Fáfñir are originally of giant race.

29. "The fearless aye, but the fearful nowise,  
will fare the better in fray;  
to be glad is better than of gloomy mind,  
whether fair or foul betide."<sup>20</sup>

*Sigurth said:*

30. <sup>21</sup>"Thy rede was it that ride I should  
over high mountains hither;  
Fáfnir still held his hoard and life,  
hadst thou not egged me on."

Then Regin went up to Fáfnir and cut out his heart with the sword which is hight Rithil; and then he drank the blood which flowed from the wound. He said:

31. "Sit now, Sigurth— I shall sleep the while—  
and hold Fáfnir's heart o'er the fire;  
for this morsel I mean to eat  
after gulping this gory drink."

Sigurth took Fáfnir's heart and steaked it on a spit. When he thought it was done, and the blood ran foaming out of the heart, he touched it with his finger to see whether it were fully done; but he burned himself and stuck his finger in his mouth. Now when Fáfnir's heart-blood touched his tongue, he understood the speech of birds. He overheard some titmice speaking in the bushes. One titmouse said:

32. "There sits Sigurth, all smeared with blood,  
and Fáfnir's heart he holds over the fire;  
wise would be the war-leader  
if the hated worm's bright heart he ate."

<sup>20</sup>Cf. *Hǫv.* 15.

<sup>21</sup>It has been suggested that a stanza is lacking before 30 in which Regin reiterated his charge of 25. Indeed, words to this effect are found in *Vǫlss.* chap. 18.



(*A second said:*)

33. "There lies Regin,                      and racks his brain,  
will betray the boy                      who trusts in him,—  
take him to task                      in tricky ways;  
will the base one now                      his brother avenge."

(*A third said:*)

34. "Hew off the head                      of the hoary wizard,  
let him fare to Hel from hence;  
then lord art alone                      of the lustrous gold,  
of the heapèd hoard of Fáfñir."

(*A fourth said:*)

35. "Crafty were he                      and keen of mind,  
if ear he gave                      to us sisters,—  
took heed for himself                      and the hawks glad-  
dened:<sup>22</sup>  
look out for the wolf                      when his ears ye see!"<sup>23</sup>

(*A fifth said:*)

36. "Crafty were not                      the king's offspring<sup>24</sup>—  
as ought to be                      armed men's leader—  
if he let scotfree                      escape the brother,  
when he Fáfñir first                      felled with the sword."

(*A sixth said:*)

37. "Witless were he,                      unworthy his kin,  
if he spared his fell foeman;  
Regin lies there                      who has lied to him:  
let him guard against his guile!"

<sup>22</sup>I.e. by furnishing another carcase.

<sup>23</sup>Icelandic proverb: Regin's speech has been suspicious. Cf. *Ex ungue leonem*.

<sup>24</sup>Sigurth.

(*A seventh said:*)

38. “Cut off the head of the cold etin,  
and take his red gold rings;  
of Fáfñir’s hoard then, on the heath where it  
lies,  
the only owner wilt be.”<sup>25</sup>

*Sigurth said:*

39. “’Tis not written that Regin shall wreak him  
on me,  
and ever be my bane;  
for both brothers shall by my hand  
full soon fare hence to Hel.”

Sigurth hewed off Regin’s head. Then he ate Fáfñir’s heart, and drank the blood of both Regin and Fáfñir.<sup>26</sup> Then heard Sigurth what the titmice said (further):

40. “Gather now, Sigurth, the golden rings,—  
to flinch in fear befits not a king:  
a maiden<sup>27</sup> I know, of many most fair,  
in golden weeds: a wife for thee.
41. “Green<sup>28</sup> are the paths to Giúki’s hall,  
fate doth further the fearless man;

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<sup>25</sup>Grundtvig suggested that the bird chorus has three voices only. The calmer stanzas, 32, 35, and 33, 36 (in *fornyrðislag*) he would assign to the first and second titmouse, respectively, whereas the excited advice of stanzas 34, 37, 38 (in *ljóðaháttr*) would represent the third. Bugge pointed out that the suggestion would seem to be corroborated by the wood-carving on the portals of the old Hyllestad Church, Norway, representing this scene, where only three birds are seen.

<sup>26</sup>There is a widely spread belief among many primitive peoples that the drinking of the blood, or the eating of certain vital parts, of the slain animal or foe will transfer to the slayer the powers that resided in them.

<sup>27</sup>Guthrún, the daughter of Giúki.

<sup>28</sup>I.e. ‘pleasant’.

the folk-king hath            a fair daughter:  
with the gold, Sigurth,            mayst thou gain her  
hand.

42. "A high wall standeth            on Hindar Fell,<sup>29</sup>  
all enfolded is it            by fire without;  
cunning craftsmen            this castle builded  
of the glistening            gold of rivers.
43. "A valkyrie<sup>30</sup> rests            on the rock in sleep,  
flickering fire            flames about her;  
with the sleep-thorn Ygg<sup>31</sup>            her erst did prick:  
other heroes she felled            than he had willed.<sup>32</sup>
44. "There mayst thou see            the maiden helm-  
decked  
which steered from battle            the steed Ving-  
skornir;<sup>33</sup>  
nor mayst Sigdrífa<sup>34</sup>            from sleep awaken,  
that know thou, Skioldung,<sup>35</sup>            but by norms'  
stern doom."

Sigurth followed Fáfñir's tracks till he came upon his lair, and found it open. The doors and door-posts were of iron. Of iron, too, were all posts in the house, and the whole was let into the ground. There found Sigurth a

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<sup>29</sup>'Fell of the Hind'.

<sup>30</sup>Brynhild. Cf. the situation in *Fj*.

<sup>31</sup>Óthin; cf. *Grímn*. 54.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. *Sigrdr*. 4ff and *Helr*. 8ff.

<sup>33</sup>Brynhild's steed.

<sup>34</sup>Most likely, another name for 'valkyrie' (meaning, probably, 'Giver of Victory'). It was misunderstood by the Collector as the name of a second valkyrie, a supposition which is altogether uncalled for. As to the confusion produced, cf. *Gríp*. note 1.

<sup>35</sup>'Descendant of Skiold', the mythical progenitor of the royal race of Denmark. Here used in a general sense for 'hero'; cf. *H.H.* I, 50, 58; etc.

great hoard of gold, and filled two chests with it. He took from thence the Helm of Terror, and a gold byrnie, and the sword Hrotti,<sup>36</sup> and many other things of great worth, and loaded Grani therewith; but the steed would not stir before Sigurth got on his back, too.

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<sup>36</sup>Cf. *Hrunting*, Beowulf's sword.

## THE LAY OF SIGRDRIFA

### *Sigrdrífumál*

There is no break in the *Codex Regius* between this lay and the Lay of Fáfñir which it resembles in style and manner<sup>1</sup>—short narrative portions and lyrical and didactic stanzas (in *ljóðaháttir* and irregular verse-forms), with the connecting Prose. Indeed, it has been suggested that, together with the 'Lay of Regin', these snatches were collected into an original whole dealing with Sigurth's youth.

Nevertheless, this lay cannot, any more than the others, have been conceived as a whole. The stanzas on the use of runes and on the rules of conduct, constituting the bulk of the poem, manifestly have no internal connection with the fates of Sigurth. They may have been inserted from elsewhere, the former as accompanying the ale 'mixed with magic and mighty songs'; the latter, on the hint of Sigdrífa's 'loving counsel' desired by Sigurth (23). Both portions distinctly recall the collection of the *Hǫvumál* in appeal and style.

The few remaining stanzas belong to the best in Eddic poetry, especially the fine invocation spoken by the valkyrie on awaking.—As with the two preceding lays, there is no definite clue for place of origin or date (before 1000?).

Sigurth rode over the Hindar Fell and made his way South to Frankland.<sup>1a</sup> On the fell he saw a bright light, as though a fire were burning there, and it shone to very heaven. When he drew near, he found there a wall of shields, and a banner loomed up above it. He went into this wall of shields and saw that in it slept some one in full war-weeds. Sigurth first lifted the helmet off the sleeper's head, and then he saw that it was a woman. Her coat-of-mail was tight about her as though it were grown to the flesh. With his sword Gram he slit the byrnie, from the neck down, and also both sleeves, and took it off. Then she awoke and sate up, and beheld Sigurth, and said:

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<sup>1</sup>The separate title—itself based on a misconception (cf. *Grip.*, note 1)—is found in the Paper Manuscripts and is adopted by most editors for the sake of convenience.

<sup>1a</sup>The realm of the Giúkungs, conceived to lie somewhere in Southern Germany.

1. "What bit my byrnie? How was broken my sleep?  
Who lifted from me the leaden weight?"<sup>2</sup>

*Sigurth said:*

"'Tis Sigmund's bairn— on Fáfnir's body  
ravens batten—; 'tis Sigurth's brand."

*(She said:)*

2. "Hail to thee, day! Hail, ye day's sons!  
Hail, night and daughter of night!<sup>4</sup>  
With blithe eyes look on both of us:  
send to those sitting here speed!<sup>5</sup>
3. "Hail to you, gods! Hail, goddesses!  
Hail, earth that givest to all!  
goodly spells and speech bespeak we from you,  
and healing hands, in this life."<sup>6</sup>

Sigurth sate him down and asked her name. She said her name was Sigrdrifa and that she was a valkyrie. She said that twain kings fought:

4. "(Was Hialmgunnar<sup>7</sup> hight a hoary warrior;  
had Valfather<sup>8</sup> vowed victory to him.)<sup>9</sup>  
Was the other Agnar, Autha's brother,  
to whom none ever help had given."

<sup>2</sup>Scil. of sleep imposed on her.

<sup>3</sup>The passage is doubtful.

<sup>4</sup>The 'day's sons' and the 'daughter of night' are, probably, symbolic deities of light and darkness.

<sup>5</sup>In the sense of 'victory'.—Stanzas 2–4 in the order suggested by Müllenhoff.

<sup>6</sup>See 10.

<sup>7</sup>'Helm-Gunnar'. Cf. *Helr.* 8f.

<sup>8</sup>Óthin; cf. *Vsp.* 1.

<sup>9</sup>Suggested by Bugge, instead of the Prose to the same effect.

Sigrdrífa felled Hialmgunnar in the battle, but Óthin in revenge pricked her with the sleep-thorn<sup>10</sup> and said that she should never henceforth fight in battle, but be wedded. "But I too made a vow that I should never be wedded unto a man who knew fear." (Then took she a horn full of mead and gave it to him, to bind him to her.)<sup>11</sup> She said:

5. "Long was my slumber,            asleep was I long,  
    long to the luckless is life:  
 'tis Valfather's will            that wake I could not,  
    nor rid me of runes of sleep."

Then Sigurth asked that she teach him wisdom, if so it be that she had knowledge from all the worlds. Sigrdrífa said:

6. "Ale I bring thee,            thou oak-of-battle,<sup>12</sup>  
    with strength iblent            and brightest honor;  
 'tis mixed with magic            and mighty songs,  
    with goodly spells,—            wish-speeding runes.
7. "Learn victory-runes            if thou victory wantest,  
    and have them on thy sword's hilt—  
 on thy sword's hilt some,            on thy sword's  
       guard some,  
    and call twice upon Týr.<sup>14</sup>
8. Learn ale-runes eke,            lest other man's wife  
    betray thee who trusted in her:<sup>15</sup>  
 on thy beer-horn scratch it,            and the back of  
       thy hand,  
    and the Nauth-rune<sup>16</sup> on thy nails.

<sup>10</sup>I.e. a thorn on which 'sleep-runes' are scratched, 5. Cf. the spindle in the story of *Dornröschen* (Sleeping Beauty).

<sup>11</sup>Literally, 'to strengthen his memory'; cf. *Hynd.* 46.—The passage is transferred here from the Introductory Prose.

<sup>12</sup>Kenning for 'warrior'.

<sup>14</sup>The god of war; cf. *Hym.* 4.

<sup>15</sup>As did Grímhild, see *Grip.* 31ff, and Borghild; see *Sinf.*

<sup>16</sup>*Nauth* 'need' is the name of the rune (written †) for *n*.

9. "Thy beaker bless            to banish fear,  
    and cast a leek<sup>17</sup> in thy cup:  
 (then know I that never            thou needest fear  
    that bale in thy beer there be).<sup>18</sup>
10. "Learn help-runes eke            if help thou wilt  
    a woman to bring forth her babe:<sup>19</sup>  
 on thy palms wear them            and wind them about  
    her,<sup>20</sup>  
    and ask the *dísirs*'<sup>21</sup> aid.
11. "Learn sea-runes eke            if save thou wilt  
    the sail-steeds<sup>22</sup> on the sea:  
 on the bow scratch them            and on rudder-  
    blade,<sup>23</sup>  
    and etch them with fire in the oars:  
 howe'er beetling the billows            and black the  
    deep,  
    yet comest thou safe from the sea.
12. "Limb-runes learn thou            if a leech wouldst be,  
    and wishest wounds to heal:  
 on the bark scratch them            of bole in the woods  
    whose boughs bend to the East.<sup>24</sup>
13. "Speech-runes learn thou,            to spite no one,  
    lest out of hate he harm thee:  
 these wind thou,            these weave thou,

---

<sup>17</sup>To counteract possible poison or magic.

<sup>18</sup>Supplied from the corresponding passage in *Völss*.

<sup>19</sup>A kingly accomplishment; as in later times the laying on of hands, 'the royal touch'.

<sup>20</sup>On her garments.

<sup>21</sup>The *dísir* are female guardian spirits.

<sup>22</sup>Kenning for 'ship'.

<sup>23</sup>The rudder on the dragon-ship consisted of a broad oar-blade on the right hand in the stern; whence our term 'star-board.'

<sup>24</sup>By so doing the wound is transferred to the tree: sympathetic magic.



and gather them all together  
 when men to moot are met at the thing,<sup>25</sup>  
 and all thing-men are there.

14. "Mind-runes learn thou if among men thou wilt  
 be wiser than any wight:  
 them did guess, them did grave,  
 them did hit upon Hrópt.<sup>26</sup>

15. "— — — — —  
 made of the sap which seeped in drops  
 out of Heithdraupnir's<sup>27</sup> head,  
 out of Hoddrofnir's<sup>27</sup> horn.

16. "On the brink stood he<sup>26</sup> with Brímir, the  
 sword;  
 on his head had he a helm:  
 then muttered Mímir's head  
 wisely first this word,  
 and sooth said of this:

17. "Said on the shield graven<sup>28</sup> before the shin-  
 ing god<sup>29</sup> which stands,  
 on Árvakr's<sup>30</sup> ear, and on Alsvith's<sup>30</sup> hoof,  
 on the wheel which turns 'neath (Hrungnir's  
 bane's)<sup>31</sup> wain,  
 on Sleipnir's<sup>32</sup> teeth, and on the sleigh's strap-  
 bands,<sup>33</sup>

<sup>25</sup>The popular assembly.

<sup>26</sup>Óthin.—On this and the following stanzas cf. the introduction.

<sup>27</sup>Probably, epithets of Mímir; cf. *Vsp.* 19, 38.

<sup>28</sup>Scil. runes.— The stanza hardly contains Mímir's prophetic words.

<sup>29</sup>The sun; cf. *Grímn.* 38.

<sup>30</sup>The sun-horses; see *ibid.* 37.

<sup>31</sup>Following Bugge's and Jónsson's emendation: the giant Hrungnir's slayer is Thór.

<sup>32</sup>Óthin's steed; cf. *Grímn.* 44.

<sup>33</sup>The withy bands by which the sleigh is fastened on the runners. Very likely, the sleigh mentioned *Grímn.* 49 is alluded to here.











## THE GREAT LACUNA

There is a gap of eight Manuscript pages<sup>1</sup> in *Codex Regius* after stanza 31, 1 of the 'Lay of Sigrdrífa'. Then follows all that is left of a 'Lay of Sigurth' (*Brot*). This is the so-called *Great Lacuna*. Of the poems thus lost to us, only the 'Lay of Sigrdrífa' can be pieced out from several Paper Manuscripts—of unknown source—although it too is fragmentary. For the remainder we are dependent on the paraphrase of the *Vǫlsunga saga* (chaps. 21–29) which in all likelihood renders the substance of the missing pages; but unfortunately in such a manner that it has proved impossible to arrive at any agreement among scholars as to what they contained, because the author of the saga has demonstrably rounded out his narrative with passages from the *Þiðreks saga* and paraphrases of the 'Lay of Grípir'.

However, we may be fairly sure that a major portion had as subject the winning of Brynhild for Gunnar, Sigurth's ride through the wall of flames (see stanzas **A** and **B** below), and the deception practiced on her; another, the famous quarrel between the bathing queens, when Brynhild for the first time learns of the deception (which no doubt contained some magnificent lines), the continuation of the quarrel on the next morning (see stanza **C**), and Sigurth's vain attempt to console Brynhild—also a powerful scene (see stanza **D**). Then there was, possibly, one dealing with Guthrún's anxious dreams of her winning, but soon losing, Sigurth and of her remarriage to Atli.

(Gunnar attempts vainly to ride through the wall of flames. Then Sigurth urges on his steed Grani: cf. *Vǫlss. chap. 27*).

<b>A</b>	The flickering flames	upflared to the skies,
	the earth quivered	with awful fire;
	but few <sup>1</sup> then dared	of the folkwarders
	to ride through the fire	unflinchingly.

<b>B</b>	His Grani Sigurth	with sword did urge:
	the fire was quenched	before the king,

---

<sup>1</sup>As the Manuscript consists altogether of 45 pages it is evident that about one-sixth of the whole is lost, or approximately 300 stanzas.

<sup>1</sup>I.e. no one.

the flames bated                    before the bold one,  
the byrnie glistered,                by Regin given.

(On the morrow after their quarrel Guthrún endeavors to reconcile Brynhild and to convince her that her husband Gunnar is second to no one; but Brynhild answers that it was Sigurth who slew the dragon and that this weighs heavier with her than all of Gunnar's power: *ibid.* chap. 28)

**C**    "Will not ever after                    on earth be forgotten  
how Sigurth slew                    the grim serpent;  
but thy brother                    brooked in nowise  
to ride through the fire                unflinchingly."

(Brynhild rejects all attempts on the part of Sigurth to console her: *ibid.* chap. 29).

**D**    From the talk turned him                the trusted thane,  
the son of Sigmund,                sorrowing greatly,  
at his sides so that                his sark did rive,  
of iron woven,                    on the atheling.



## FRAGMENT OF A SIGURTH LAY

### *Brot af Sigurþarkviðu*

Following the *Great Lacuna* there is, on page 33 of the *Codex Regius*, a fragment of 20 odd stanzas, constituting the conclusion—or rather, part of the conclusion—of what must have been one of the proudest lays in the Edda: very possibly the four fine stanzas cited above are taken from it. That it was probably also one of the longest, may be inferred from the fact that the other Sigurth lay, with some 70 stanzas, is called the ‘Short Lay of Sigurth’.<sup>1a</sup> The text is in a rather disordered condition.

Both poems deal with the same, central, theme of the Sigurth legend—in the main, the hero’s stay at Giúki’s court, the wooing and betrayal of Brynhild, her quarrel with Guthrún, Brynhild’s instigation of Sigurth’s death, and the queens’ lament; so that we have a parallel treatment, as in the cases of *Helgakviða* I and II and *Atlakviða* and *Atlamól*. In most of the lays following, a knowledge of the ‘story’ is assumed. The poet is interested chiefly in the emotions aroused (here, especially in Brynhild’s breast) by the tragic situation. In other words, they are dramatic lyrics with an epic frame.

The paraphrase of the *Volsunga saga* (chap. 29) seems based, partly on the ‘Short Lay of Sigurth’, partly on still other poems, now lost.—Most scholars would assign the ‘Fragmentary Lay’ to, say, the earlier part of the Eleventh Century, and therefore to Iceland.

(*Hogni said:*)

1. “What hateful harm            hath<sup>1</sup> he done thee,  
that Sigmund’s son            thou slain wouldst have?”

*Gunnar said:*

2. “To me hath Sigurth            oft sworn dear oaths,<sup>2</sup>  
hath sworn dear oaths            which all were false;

---

<sup>1a</sup>In the concluding Prose of *Guð. I.*

<sup>1</sup>*Cod. Reg.* begins again with the words equivalent to ‘done harm, that thou etc.’

<sup>2</sup>Viz. that he would not deprive Brynhild of her virginity after his ride through the wall of flames—as she alleges he had: 20.







19. "Was seen fully, when Sigurth rode  
 through flickering flame to fetch me thence,  
 how the high hero had held before  
 the oaths he sware to serve the king:
20. "His wand-of-wounds,<sup>19</sup> all wound with gold,  
 the trothful king betwixt us laid;  
 in hot fire wholly was hardened Gram,  
 its blade blazoned with bitter poison."

We are told in this lay of the death of Sigurth in such wise, as though they had slain him out of doors; but others say that they slew him while asleep in his bed.<sup>20</sup> But German men have it that he was felled in the forest; and in the Old Song of Guthrún<sup>21</sup> we are told that Sigurth was slain while on his way to the thing with the sons of Giúki; but all are at one in saying that they overcame him by treachery and killed him while lying down and unawares.

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<sup>19</sup>Kenning for 'sword'.

<sup>20</sup>In his bed: *Sig. sk.* 22; *Guð. hv.* 4; *Hamð.* 6, 7. In the forest: as instanced in the *Nibelungenlied* and the *Þiðreks saga* (whose account is based on German stories).

<sup>21</sup>I.e. *Guð.* II, 4—a misunderstanding.

# THE FIRST LAY OF GUTHRUN

## *Guðrúnarkviða I*

There are a number of indications, in sentiment, style, conception, and invention, which argue this short lay—or, rather, ‘lament’—to belong to the youngest in the collection, perhaps the Twelfth Century. It is not likely that the compiler of the *Völsunga saga* knew it.

The theme is manifestly taken from the ‘Second Lay of Guthrún’ from which, indeed, a number of expressions are loaned bodily. But this in nowise detracts from the originality and depth of its conception. Unfortunately, the artistic effect of the lay is marred, for our modern taste, by a certain lack of unity in bringing in Brynhild’s fierce love and hate. The intensity of Guthrún’s grief still lives for us in Tennyson’s poignant lyric ‘Home They Brought Her Warrior Dead’.

Guthrún sate over dead Sigurth’s body. She wept not, like other women, yet her heart was nigh bursting with sorrow. Went both men and women to speak cheer to her; but that was not easy. Men say that Guthrún had eaten of Fáfnir’s heart and hence understood the speech of birds.<sup>1</sup> This song, too,<sup>2</sup> was made of Guthrún:

1. Erst Giúki’s daughter                    unto death was nigh,  
as o’er Sigurth she sate                    sorrowfully;  
she whimpered not,                    nor her hands she wrung,  
nor wept, either,                    as do women else.
2. Went to the widow                    wise earls kindly,  
the heavy heart                    of her to ease;  
nor yet Guthrún                    her grief could weep,  
in her bosom though                    her heart would burst.
3. Sate then with her                    the wives of earls,  
with Giúki’s daughter                    gold-dight women:

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<sup>1</sup>This remark—perhaps a reminiscence of the Sigurth motif—entirely falls out of the context.

<sup>2</sup>That is, besides others that had been made of her.









- who again taught thee thy tears to shed,  
and this morn gave thee the might of speech!"
24. Then quoth Gullrond, Giúki's daughter:  
"Hush thee, Brynhild, thou hated by all:  
athelings' ill fate thou hast ever been,  
and all did call thee a curse to them—  
a sore sorrow to seven kings,<sup>10</sup>  
and hast brought woe to many a wife."
25. Then quoth Brynhild, Buthli's daughter:  
"From Atli all this evil springs,  
—to Buthli born, my brother he—  
'mongst Hunnish hosts in the hall as we  
the worm-bed's-fire<sup>11</sup> on the warrior saw.  
But woe did bring their wending thither:  
ever since see I that sight before me."<sup>12</sup>
26. Neath stone-post stood she, strained all her  
might,—  
burned in Brynhild's, Buthli's daughter's,  
her eyes a fire: she foamed with wrath<sup>13</sup>  
when the wounds she saw on Sigurth's body.

Guthrún then fared to the woods and wastes until she came to Denmark. There she stayed seven half-years with Thóra, the daughter of Hákon.<sup>14</sup> Brynhild would live no longer after Sigurth's death. She had eight of her thralls and five of her bond-maids slain. Then she slew herself with her sword, as is told in the 'Short Lay of Sigurth'.

<sup>10</sup>This accusation is probably not to be taken literally; cf. *Helr.* 2 and 4.

<sup>11</sup>I.e. Fáfnir's hoard, the gold.—The evil entered, she avers, with the ill-fated visit of Sigurth and the Burgundian kings to woo her. The treasure corrupted Atli.

<sup>12</sup>The rendition is doubtful; cf. *Sig. sk.* 36.

<sup>13</sup>Literally, 'spewed poison'.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. *Guð.* II, 14.

## THE SHORT LAY OF SIGURTH

### *Sigurþarkviða hin skamma*

The accepted title of the 'Short Lay of Sigurth'—thus it is called in the Prose of the *Codex Regius* immediately preceding—is decidedly a misnomer; for the tragedy, not of Sigurth's, but of Brynhild's, life forms its chief contents; just as the 'First Lay of Guthrún' contemplates Guthrún's sorrows. The performance of the poet is uneven. The introduction strikes one as perfunctory and grudging, as though to furnish just enough background to make Brynhild's behavior comprehensible. Even Sigurth's dying words contain no memorable lines. It is only when 'the fiendish woman's' fierce jealousy is at work, when she eggs on Gunnar with scornful threats, when she prepares to be reunited with Sigurth in death; and also when Hogni sternly repels Gunnar's treachery and refuses to hinder Brynhild from slaying herself, that the lines rise to a dark grandeur. The latter part of the lay falls off in power and contains elements which one would like to consider interpolations. Thus, the prophecy of Guthrún's fate reminds one of the style of the *Gripisspá*, besides being psychologically out of place. And unfortunately it cannot be said that the character of Brynhild has been brought humanly near to us.

For reasons, both of composition and legendary development, the poem is generally attributed to an Icelander of the latter part of the Eleventh Century. In particular, it is a later, Icelandic development to make Brynhild a sister of Atli, likewise the whole relation of Gunnar with Oddrún hinted at, especially as a motivation of the Fall of the Niflungs. The *Völsunga saga* which makes extensive use of the lay allows of fairly close control. The metre is an, at times, rather irregular *fornyrðislag*.

1. In times long gone                      came to Giúki's hall  
    Sigurth the Volsung—                      had he slain Fáfñir—;  
    in the troth was taken                      of the twain brothers:<sup>1</sup>  
    to each other                      sware oaths the kings.
2. The maid they gave him                      with much treasure,  
    Guthrún the young,                      Giúki's daughter;<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Gunnar and Hogni; cf. *Brot.* 18.

<sup>2</sup>In this version, then, Sigurth's marriage does not take place simultaneously with that of Gunnar (as in *Gríp.* 41).



8. ʾWithout went she, wishing them evil  
every evening with ice-cold heart,<sup>8</sup>  
when both they to bed did go,  
Sigurth and Guthrún, to sleep together.
9. “(Now Giúki’s daughter him gladly kisses)<sup>9</sup>  
and the Hunnish king clasps his lady:  
I have nor husband nor happiness,  
must seek my glee in grim revenge.”
10. In hate-filled breast she brooded murder:  
“Shalt, Gunnar, forego altogether  
my demesnes and me also:  
thy love I list not, liege, to have ever.
11. “Will I fare thither where before I was,  
to my near kindred, my kinsmen dear,—  
there dully dwell, and dream through life  
but thou do to death Guthrún’s darling,  
and greatest grow, Gunnar, of all.<sup>10</sup>
12. “Let the son fare eke with his father,  
nor keep too long the cub of the wolf:  
easier never is revenge  
than when slain warrior’s son still lives.”<sup>11</sup>
13. Then hung his head, heart-sick, Gunnar;  
brooding darkly he sate all day,  
nor did he know in nowise clearly  
what were for him wisest to do,  
what were for him worthiest to do,  
since to Sigurth he had sworn dear oaths,  
and loth he was to lose the Volsung.

<sup>8</sup>I follow B. M. Ólsen’s and Bugge’s interpretation.

<sup>9</sup>Supplied by Bugge.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. *Brot.* 8f.

<sup>11</sup>Of all the slain one’s kin, no one is more likely to seek revenge than his son; but the passage is doubtful. For that matter, Sigurth’s son (Sigmund) plays no rôle whatever in the legends; cf. below, 26.

14. Both this and that in thought he weighed:  
Ere now was it nowise known that ever  
from her king a queen did go.
15. "To me is Brynhild, Buthli's daughter,  
above all others, the best of women;  
and my life liefer would I lose, by far,  
than of her riches<sup>12</sup> bereft to be."
16. Summoned he Hogni to secret speech,  
to whom he could wholly trust him:  
"Wilt bewray Sigurth for the sake of gold?  
'Tis good to gain the golden rings,  
to have and to hold the hoard-of-the-Rhine,<sup>13</sup>  
and at our ease to own this wealth?"
17. To him hardy Hogni answered:  
"Twould ill beseem us, for the sake of gold  
with swords to sever oaths which we swear—  
our former oaths, the faith we plighted.
18. "On earth are not more honored kings,  
the while we four<sup>14</sup> o'er folk hold sway,  
and here the Hunnish hero<sup>15</sup> liveth,  
nor beneath heaven more highborn sib;  
if we begat us goodly sons<sup>16</sup>  
still greater grew then the Giúkung kin.
19. "Full well know I whose wiles these be:  
'tis queen Brynhild's unbridled hate."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Thus the original. A number of editors, misled by our more sentimental taste, have emended the word in question to 'love'; but cf. stanzas 10, 36, 39, 51. Gunnar's avarice is plainly shown in the next stanza.

<sup>13</sup>Sigurth's treasure was later thrown into the Rhine (*Akv.* 29); hence this—or any other treasure—is the 'hoard-of-the-Rhine'.

<sup>14</sup>Gunnar, Hogni, Sigurth, Gotthorm.

<sup>15</sup>Sigurth, cf. above, 14.

<sup>16</sup>There is here an implied criticism of Gunnar: he has never accomplished the love of Brynhild.

<sup>17</sup>No doubt several lines are missing here—in *Völss.*, chap. 30, Hogni continues: "and her counsels will bring us shame and harm."

*Gunnar said:*

20. "Egg we Gotthorm<sup>18</sup> to the evil deed,  
our younger brother, a boy as yet:  
he stood without the oaths we sware,  
our former oaths, the faith we plighted."
21. 'Twas easy to egg the o'ereager one—<sup>19</sup>  
— — — — —  
stood in Sigurth's heart the steel.
22. Arose in the hall the hero, to wreak him,  
and after the rash one in anger threw:  
cast the king's hand the keen-edged sword,  
gleaming Gram— on to Gotthorm flew it.
23. Then fell on the floor his foe, sundered:  
his head and hands did hasten on,  
the nether half into hall fell back.
24. At Sigurth's side had slept Guthrún,  
in carefree slumber, at the side of the king.

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<sup>18</sup>He is Giúki's stepson; cf. *Hynd.* 27.

<sup>19</sup>Here, too, we must assume a considerable gap in the tradition. In *Völss.* *ibid.* we read: "They call him to them and offer him gold and great power if he would do this; they took a serpent and some wolf's meat, and had it cooked, and gave it to him to eat—as the skald has it:

A worm they took,	of wolf's meat others,
and thereof gave	Gotthorm to eat,
with drink of mead	and many another
magic matter	— — — —
(ere, eager of evil,	the angry men
on high-born hero	their hands could lay)."

(The bracketed lines supplied after Bugge's suggestion from the corresponding stanza (4) in *Brot.*)—He is won over, and twice approaches the bed where lie Guthrún and Sigurth, but is frightened off both times by Sigurth's penetrating glance. Only at the third attempt does he slay the hero.





- on her couch when                    came to her ears  
the loud greeting<sup>24</sup>                    of Giúki's daughter.
31. Said then Gunnar,                    the goodly king:  
"Thou laughest not,                    vengeful lady,  
so gleefully                    as though glad thy heart:  
wherefore wholly                    hueless grow'st thou,  
fiendish woman?                    I ween thee fey.<sup>25</sup>
32. "But right were it,                    wretched woman,  
that before thy eyes                    were Atli slain,  
and with bloody wounds                    thy brother lay,  
with bloody wounds,                    for thee to bind."
- Brynhild said:*
33. "No fault find I:                    thou hast foughten well;<sup>26</sup>  
but little Atli                    thy anger fears:  
longer will he                    live than thou,  
and in might will ever                    o'ermatch thee, Gun-  
nar!
34. "Say I shall now                    what thyself knowest,  
how ye Giúkungs grew                    guilty full soon;  
my freedom had I,                    nor was fettered in aught  
on my brother's benches,                    with bounty dower-  
ered.
35. "Nor did I wish                    to be wedded ever,  
till high on horseback                    to our halls did ride,  
matchless, ye Giúkungs—                    mighty kings three:  
Would that ye never                    had wended thither!
36. "That hero's wife                    I wished to be  
who on Grani's back                    sate, rich in gold;

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<sup>24</sup>In the sense of 'weeping'.

<sup>25</sup>"According to Scotch tradition, men become violently hilarious, fey, just before a violent death." (Bugge)

<sup>26</sup>Irony?



- (Now will I slay me                      and Sigurth follow) :<sup>30</sup>  
my heavy harm then                      have I avenged."
42. Up rose Gunnar,                      Giúki's son ;  
his arms laid he                      round the lady's neck—<sup>31</sup>
43. Summoned he Hogni                      to secret speech :  
"I will have all heroes                      in the hall gather,  
both thine and mine—                      much we need them—  
how we hinder                      that to Hel she fares ;  
until in time                      we turn her from it :  
some means must we                      meanwhile find."
44. With kindly thoughts                      all came thither,  
the high-born heroes,                      her hands to stay :  
and though thrust she                      all thanes from her,  
nor would be hindered                      Hel-ward to fare.
45. To him hardy                      Hogni answered :  
"hinder her not                      Hel-ward to fare,  
whence back never                      she be born again !  
Wicked left she                      her mother's womb,  
to the world was she                      but woe to bring,  
sadness and sorrow                      to sons of men."
46. Angry turned him<sup>22</sup>                      from talk away  
when the gold-dight one                      her gifts bestowed :  
on all looked she                      which she had owned,  
eke lifeless bondmaids<sup>33</sup>                      and ladies-waiting,
47. her in gold-byrnie sheathed,                      grim in her mind,  
ere with the sword                      she slew herself ;  
back on bolster                      her body sank :  
dying bethought her                      of her dear ones.
48. "Now shall hither                      my hand-maids<sup>34</sup> come  
if gold they wish,                      and wealth, from me ;

<sup>30</sup>Supplied after Heusler's suggestion.

<sup>31</sup>No doubt there have dropped out a number of lines.

<sup>32</sup>It is not certain whether Hogni or Gunnar is meant.

<sup>33</sup>I.e. the slaves who had been slain to be burned on the funeral pile with her.

- gilded trinkets            I give to each,  
broidered bed-clothes,        bright-hued raiment.”
49. Were silent all            when said these words,  
and all together            this answer made:  
“no more shall die:        we mean to live;  
'tis unseeming honor        to us women.”
50. Thereon the lady        in linen dight,  
so young in years,        full yare did say:  
“unfain I wish none        to follow me,  
nor lose his life        who is loth to die.
51. “On your bodies’ bones        will burn, hereafter,  
far fewer rings        when forth ye come—  
nor Menia’s meal—        when we meet in Hel.<sup>35</sup>
52. “Seat thee, Gunnar;        I say to thee  
thy brow-white wife        awaiteth death;  
nor is thy ship        in shelter, either,  
even though thy bride        have breathed her last.
53. “Will Guthrún soon        forgive thee this,  
though oft the queen        at thy court, Gunnar,  
will think in sorrow        on Sigurth dead.  
Is a maid-child born—        her mother she—  
of hue whiter        than the very heavens,  
than the sun even,        Svanhild<sup>36</sup> hight.
54. “Wilt give Guthrún        to goodly hero—  
that bringeth sorrow<sup>37</sup>        to sons of men—;  
nor will she wed        whom wish she might:  
will Atli wed her        and to wife get him—  
he, born to Buthli,        my own brother.

<sup>34</sup>She offers gifts to others, possibly her free-born servants, to induce them to follow her in death.

<sup>35</sup>I.e. “when you ultimately die and join me in Hel you will have fewer ornaments burned with you; scil. than I would have given you.”—‘Menia’s meal’ is a kenning for ‘gold’, cf. *Grot.* Introd. Prose.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. *Guð. hv.*, Introd. Prose and stanza 15.

<sup>37</sup>Conjectural.

55. "Am I mindful much            how with me ye did,  
how ye bewrayed            me wretched one:  
no hap was mine            the while I lived.
56. "Thou wilt Oddrún<sup>38</sup>            then ask for wife,  
but Atli will not            thy wishes heed;  
still under linen            ye twain will lie:  
will she hold thee dear,            as I had done  
if kindlier weird            had willed it so.
57. "Will Atli then            deal ill with thee,  
in dungeon wilt            with worms be laid.
58. "Will lose his life            not long thereafter  
Atli, when all            this ill is wrought;  
for Giúki's daughter,            grim in her mind,  
with sword full soon            will slay him in bed.<sup>39</sup>
59. "For thy sister            more seeming were it  
to follow in death            her first husband,  
if good counsel            were given her,  
or heart like mine            she had in her breast.
60. "Unsparringly speak I;            yet, spite of us,  
her life she keepeth            a long time after:  
towering billows            will toss Guthrún  
beyond the sea            to Iónakr's lands.<sup>40</sup>
61. "(Will she issue have,            as heirs twain sons,  
as heirs twain sons,)"<sup>41</sup>            for Iónakr;  
o'er the sea Svanhild            will she send abroad,  
Sigurth's daughter,            to sorry fate.
62. "Will be her bale            Bikki's counsels,  
for Iormunrekk            will ill reward her.  
Slain are then            all Sigurth's kin,  
but greater still            are Guthrún's sorrows.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>'Knowing Weapon-Runes'—Brynhild's sister. For the story, cf. *Od*.

<sup>39</sup>This is told in *Dráp* and the succeeding lays.

<sup>40</sup>As is related in *Guð. hv.* and *Hamth.*

<sup>41</sup>Supplied after Bugge from *Guð hv.* 14.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. her lament, *Guð. hv.*

63. "One boon shall I                    yet beg of thee,  
 which in this life                    my last will be:  
 on meadow make thou                of many logs  
 a pyre reared,                    with room for all  
 who after Sigurth                    did seek their death.
64. "Hide it wholly                    with hangings and shields,  
 with well-dyed weeds                and Welsh thralls<sup>43</sup> many:  
 let the Hunnish hero                burn hard by me.
65. "On the Hunnish hero's            other hand let burn  
 of my bondmaids,                    bracelet-decked,  
 twain at his head,                    (twain at his feet,  
 the hero's hounds)<sup>44</sup>                and hawks eke twain;  
 then all is ordered                    evenly.
66. "Let the wand-of-wounds<sup>45</sup>        be once more laid  
 betwixt us twain                    true-hearted ones,  
 as when we both                    one bed did share,  
 though hight we were                husband and wife.
67. "On his heels fall not            the shining hall's  
 ring-handled gate,<sup>46</sup>                on hinges rolling,  
 if him follow                    my faithful thralls:  
 at our rich riding                    shall rail no man.
68. "For he is followed                by five bondmaids  
 and eight henchmen                of honest kin,  
 my playmate eke                    and all the dowry  
 the which Buthli                    to Brynhild gave.
69. "I told thee much,                yet more would say  
 but for my fate:                    my speech fails me,  
 my voice weakens,                my wounds do burn:  
 but truth I told thee—                my time is come."

---

<sup>43</sup>Many slaves were made in Celtic lands. According to Old Germanic custom not only a man's property, but also his slaves and favorite animals followed him in death: he was to maintain his standing in the world beyond.

<sup>44</sup>After the *Paper Manuscripts* and *Völss.* chap. 31.

<sup>45</sup>Kenning for 'sword'.

<sup>46</sup>Of Hel, probably.



"Twere better for thee            in thy bower to weave,  
than in Hel to hanker            after Guthrún's hus-  
band.

2. "From the land of the quick            why comest thou  
to the thurses' house,            fickle-hearted woman?  
From thy hands hast thou,            high-born lady,  
washed the blood of            warriors many."

*Brynhild said:*

3. "Upbraid me not,            thou bride of thurses,  
that in full many frays            I fought with heroes;<sup>3</sup>  
of us both, I ween,            the better am I:  
uncouth to mankind            thy kin is ever."

*The giantess said:*

4. "And thou, Brynhild,            Buthli's daughter,  
to most woe wast thou            of all women born:  
to Giúki's offspring            but ill thou broughtest,  
and low didst lay            their lordly house."<sup>4</sup>

*Brynhild said:*

5. "As the wiser one            from my wain I shall  
tell thee, witless woman,            if to wit thee list,  
how Gunnar's lies            my love did steal,  
how the false one's guile            faithless made me.
6. "In Heimir's hall            was I hight ever  
Hild<sup>5</sup> beneath Helm            by whomever knew me.

<sup>3</sup>Scil. as a valkyrie; cf. 8.

<sup>4</sup>She prophetically speaks of the fall of the Giúkungs as though it had already taken place.

<sup>5</sup>'Battle', a valkyrie; cf. *Vsp.* 23. In the paraphrase of *Skáld.* this is Brynhild-Sigrdrífa's name.—As to Heimir, cf. *Grip.* 19. In the original, this stanza follows 7. It is changed as above by practically all editors.





12. "Neath linen we twain            did lie together,  
as though born we were            brother and sister:  
in nights full eight            neither of us  
his hands did lay            in love on the other.
13. "Yet Guthrún said,            Giúki's daughter,  
that I had slept            in Sigurth's arms;  
then grew I aware,            as I would not, rather,  
how they beguiled me            Gunnâr to wed.
14. "Women and men            to the world are born,  
their lives to live            in longing and sorrow;  
our lives we no longer            shall live apart,  
Sigurth and I,—            sink now,<sup>16</sup> thurs-bride!"

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<sup>16</sup>I.e. 'Avaunt!' Cf. note on the last line of *Vsp.*

## THE FALL OF THE NIFLUNGS<sup>1</sup>

### *Dráp Niflunga*

Then Gunnar and Hogni took all the gold which Fáfñir had owned. Feud arose between the Giúkungs and Atli, for he laid Brynhild's death at their door. To atone for it, Guthrún was to be married to him, and they gave her a drink (to blot out what had gone before) ere she would be wedded to Atli. She bore Atli two sons, Erpr and Eitil; but Svanhild was the daughter she had by Sigurth. Atli bade to him as his guests Gunnar and Hogni, and sent to them his man hight Vingi or else Knéfrœth. Guthrún had knowledge of his wiles, and sent word to them by runes that they should not come, and as token she sent to Hogni the ring Andvaranaut,<sup>2</sup> and fastened within it a wolf's hair. Gunnar had asked the hand of Oddrún, Atli's sister, but Atli said nay to that. Then wedded he Glaumvor, but Hogni's wife was Kostbera. Their sons were hight Sólar, Snævar, and Giúki.<sup>3</sup> But when the Giúkungs came to Atli's court, Guthrún begged her sons to have the lives of the Giúkungs spared, but they would not.<sup>4</sup> Hogni's heart was cut out of his breast, but Gunnar was thrown into a dungeon with serpents. He struck his harp and put the worms to sleep; but one adder bored into his liver.

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<sup>1</sup>I.e. the Giúkungs, as possessors of the Niflung hoard.—This awkwardly written prose link (separated by most editors from the following poem) was no doubt meant by the Collector to form a transition to the Atli lays. It has no independent value whatever, its statements being on the face of them, derived from the following lays, especially *Am*.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. *Reg. Introd. Prose. Völss.*, chap. 28, relates that Sigurth deprived Brynhild of it in the bridal night and gave it to Guthrún.

<sup>3</sup>In *Am*. 28 the first two are mentioned as Hogni's sons.

<sup>4</sup>This statement is at variance with all other tradition. It looks as though a motive was sought to justify Guthrún's murder of her (infant!) children, *Akv.* 39, *Am.* 74.

## THE SECOND (OR OLD) LAY OF GUTHRUN

### *Guðrúnarkviða II (hin forna)*

In this lay we may recognize the prototype of the various other 'laments' of the Collection. It is unquestionably older than most—or any—of them, as is attested, not only by its title (see *Brot Concluding Prose*), but also by the fact that it contains, in organic connection, the themes from which most of the other lays are derived. Moreover, its legendary form shows an early stage of the development of the Sigurth legend—Brynhild is not mentioned at all, and Gunnar's and Hogni's jealousy of Sigurth is the cause of his death. There are, to be sure, some later elements, too.

The greater age (early Tenth Century?) may also account for the disordered and fragmentary condition of the text. A number of stanzas and the end are missing. In fact, it may fairly be questioned whether the lay as we have it is really of one piece and not, rather, patched together from an imperfect recollection of two or more lays. Certainly, there are remarkable discrepancies which it is hopeless to reconcile. Thus, the elaborate description of the drink of forgetfulness which has no recognizable effect on Guthrún's memory of Sigurth and the misdeeds of her brothers! It is just as futile to expect geographical consistency in the descriptions of Guthrún's wanderings, her journey to Atli's court etc. But making allowances for the poor transmission, there are some vigorous passages and some touching lines, especially in Guthrún's plaint over Sigurth.

The *Völsunga saga* cites a couple of stanzas in full, and paraphrases the whole rather closely. The first five stanzas are there given as a monologue, the remainder is treated as a narrative. As to the Collector's statement that the lay is Guthrún's plaint addressed to Thióthrek, it may be derived from *Guð.* III, 4. But in all likelihood the poem was conceived as a monologue.

Thióthrek<sup>1</sup> had been with Atli and had there lost most of his men.<sup>2</sup> Thióthrek and Guthrún rehearsed their sorrows to one another. She spoke to him and said:

1. "Me, fairest of maids,            my mother reared;  
    in bower, happy,            my brothers I loved,

---

<sup>1</sup>Historically, Theodoric, the King of the Ostrogoths, who reigned toward the end of the Fifth Century.

<sup>2</sup>According to the German tradition, as embodied in the *Nibelungenlied*, he loses them in battle against the Burgundians.

- till that Giúki           with gold me dowered,  
with gold me dowered           and gave me to Sigurth.
2. "Was my Sigurth           'mongst the sons of Giúki  
like the garlic grown           the grass above,  
or the high-legged hart           the hinds<sup>3</sup> among,  
or glow-red gold           amidst grey silver.
3. "Then Giúki's sons           did grudge me this—  
that my husband           was mightier than they;  
nor could they sleep           nor sit in judgment,  
before Sigurth           was slain by them.
4. "Back galloped Grani,           his gait I knew,  
but still Sigurth           himself came not;  
with sweat were wet           the saddle-horses,  
oft made to moil,           which the murderers rode.
5. "To Grani weeping           went I to speak,  
with tear-wet cheeks tried           his tale to gather.  
His head drooped Grani           to the grass adown:  
his owner knew he           on earth no longer.
6. "Long I tarried,           at a loss in my mind,  
ere after him           I asked the king.
7. "His head drooped Gunnar;           but Hogni told me  
of my lord Sigurth's           sorrowful death:  
'By the sword slain lies           he who slew Gotthorm,<sup>4</sup>  
to the ravens given,           beyond the Rhine.<sup>5</sup>
8. " 'In Southland seek thou           Sigurth's body,  
there mayst thou hear           the hoarse ravens,  
the cry of eagles,           eager for meat,  
the howls of wolves           thy husband about.'

<sup>3</sup>Conjectural. Similar figures are used *Guð.* I, 18. and *H.H.* II, 38.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. *Sig. sk.* 23.

<sup>5</sup>Literally, 'beyond the flood'.

9. "Thou art hardy, Hogni,            thus hatefully  
 Sigurth's widow            this woe to tell:  
 should ravens rive            thy ruthless heart,  
 in far-away lands            alone shouldst die.'
10. "Answered Hogni            only thuswise,  
 grim in his mind,            with gloomy words:  
 'But greater grew,            Guthrún, thy woe  
 if ravens rived            my ruthless heart.'
11. "Then turned I me            from talk away,  
 in the woods to gather            what wolves had left;  
 I whimpered not,            nor my hands did wring,  
 nor wept, either,            as women else,  
 as I sate sorrowing            over Sigurth's corse.
12. "Dark night and moonless            to me it seemed,  
 as in sorrow I sate            over Sigurth's corse.  
 (The wolves heard I            howling about me,  
 and hungry ravens,            hoarsely croaking.)<sup>6</sup>
13. "Far better meseemed            if my brothers had  
 slain their sister            after Sigurth,  
 and had burned me            like birchen wood.
14. "On the fells fared I            five days together,  
 till to Hálf's<sup>6a</sup> high-built            hall I wended.  
 I sate with Thóra            seven half-years,  
 Hákon's daughter,            in Danish lands.<sup>7</sup>
15. "In gold she broidered,            to gladden me,  
 Danish swans            and Southern halls;  
 kingly war-play            the cloths did show,  
 our handiwork,            and hero's thanes;  
 red shields of war eke,            ready henchmen,  
 helm-clad, sword-girt            Hunnish war-host;

<sup>6</sup>Supplied after Bugge's suggestion.

<sup>6a</sup>Sigurth's stepfather; cf. *Sinf.*

<sup>7</sup>In all likelihood the episode is peculiar to the author of this poem.

16. "sea-ward sailing, King Sigmund's ships,  
with golden dragons and graven stems;  
in the web we weaved the wars which fought  
Sigar and Siggeir,<sup>8</sup> south by Funen.<sup>9</sup>
17. "Then heard Grímhild,<sup>10</sup> the Gothic<sup>11</sup> queen,  
that soothed I was somewhat in mind:<sup>12</sup>  
flung down her web and fetched her sons;  
to ask gan she most eagerly,  
whether amends make they would not  
for Sigurth slain and his young son.
18. "Was Gunnar ready gold to offer,  
Hogni also, to heal my sorrows.  
Further asked she who to fare was ready,  
to hitch the horse to the wheeled chariot,  
[to sit his horse and the hawk let fly,  
to shoot from yew-bow the shafted arrow.]<sup>13</sup>
19. "In then wended, atheling-wise,  
the folk-warden's thanes;<sup>14</sup> were their frieze-  
coats red,  
their byrnies short, their helms blazoned,  
were they girt with swords and swart of hair.

---

<sup>8</sup>The names belong to the Siklings, a royal race of Denmark.

<sup>9</sup>The large Danish island.

<sup>10</sup>Guthrún's mother; cf. *Grip.* 33 and note.

<sup>11</sup>Here, merely an honorific epithet.

<sup>12</sup>After Zupitza: the text is defective, here.

<sup>13</sup>These lines clearly do not belong here. They read as though they originally belonged to *Ríg*. In the Manuscript there follow the lines:

Eke Valdar the Dane, with Iarizleif,  
Eymóth third, and Iarizkar,

which are evidently also out of their context.

<sup>14</sup>These are Atli's (Hunnish) emissaries, come to sue for Guthrún's hand: at least one stanza seems to be missing in which their journey, and Guthrún's return to the court of the Giúkungs, was described.





25. “ ‘Gold I give thee, Guthrún, to have,  
 the fair folk-lands thy father had,  
 with their hangings eke Hlothvér's<sup>19</sup> castles,  
 and all the wealth the warrior owned ;

26. “ ‘Hunnish maidens, handicraft-skilled  
 in gold to broider, to gladden thee ;  
 alone shalt wield the wealth of Buthli,  
 be with gold endowed, and given to Atli.’

*(Guthrún said:)*

27. “ ‘Nevermore I wish wedded to be,  
 nor Brynhild's brother's his bed to share ;  
 not seeming is it with the son of Buthli  
 to beget children and live in gladness.’

*(Grímhild said:)*

28. “ ‘Harbor no more hateful counsels,  
 though we have, truly, wrought wicked deeds ;  
 thy lot will be lief, as though living still  
 were Sigurth and Sigmund, if sons thou bear  
 him.’

*(Guthrún said:)*

29. “ ‘Not may I, Grímhild, in gladness live,  
 nor hold out hopes to the Hunnish king  
 since Sigurth's heart-blood the hungry wolves  
 and greedy ravens drank together’.

*(Grímhild said:)*

30. “ ‘Among heroes he is highest of kin,  
 and foremost found where foes are met.

---

<sup>19</sup>The name corresponds to the Old Frankish *Chlodovech*, German *Ludwig*. The West Franks were neighbors of the Burgundians and are here, possibly, conceived as the vassals of the Giúkungs or of Sigurth ('the warrior').

His wife shalt be till wanes thy life—  
or no husband have, save him thou takest.'

(*Guthrún said:*)

31. " 'No longer lure me, nor lend thy words  
thus eagerly to that evil kin:  
on Gunnar will he grimly wreak him,  
and the heart tear out of Hogni's breast.'

32. "Weeping, Grímhild the word did hear  
which boded ill to both her sons,  
to her offspring an awful fate:  
'Lands I give thee, and lieges eke,  
thy own forever, to ease thy heart.'

(*Guthrún said:*)

33. " 'Then choose I him the chieftains among,  
by Grímhild driven, against my will;  
though hardly can I this husband love,  
nor my brothers' slaughter save my children:

34. " '(I shall slay full soon my sons by him—  
thus grimly avenge the Giúkungs' fall;)<sup>20</sup>  
nor will I rest ere reft I have  
the lusty life of the leader-in-war.'<sup>21</sup>

35. "Their steeds forthwith bestrode the thanes;  
were the Southron women upon wains lifted.  
For seven days we drove through cold lands,  
for other seven the salt waves cleft,  
for still other seven dry steppes we rode.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Supplied after Heusler's suggestion.

<sup>21</sup>I.e. Atli. The remainder of the stanza transposed here (with Bugge) from its original position after 31.

<sup>22</sup>The stanza describes the journey of Guthrún (and the Giúkungs?) to the realm of Atli.





## THE THIRD LAY OF GUTHRÚN

### *Guðrúnarkviða III*

The legend, fairly current in Germany, of a queen who is falsely accused of adultery, and clears herself by the ordeal is here amalgamated with the Niflung story, showing Guthrún in a rôle which but ill agrees with the generally accepted turn that she slays Atli immediately after the fall of her brothers. No wonder the lay is not used in the *Völsunga saga*.

Apparently, the poem is wholly Christian and Medieval in spirit—but only apparently: the oath “upon the white and hallowed stone” and the punishment allotted Herkia point in the very opposite direction. We know that the ordeal of boiling water was introduced from Germany into Norway at the beginning of the Eleventh Century, in the reign of Ólaf the Saint; but then, in the poem it is still regarded as a new and foreign practice requiring the ministrations of a ‘Saxon’. Neither do language and versification afford a clue. However, we shall probably not err greatly in suspecting the pleasing little poem to be the work of an Icelander of, say, the late Twelfth Century who cleverly counterfeited the earlier manner.

Herkia<sup>1</sup> was the name of one of Atli’s bond-maidens. She had been his leman. She told Atli that she had seen Thióthrek and Guthrún together. This made Atli very downcast. Then said Guthrún:

1. “What is it, Atli,                   that aileth thee?  
Art sad in mind?                   Why smil’st thou never?  
'Twould seem better                   to barons in hall  
if thou spak’st to men                   and on me didst look.”

*Atli said:*

2. “I grieve, Guthrún,                   Giúki’s daughter,  
o’er what in hall                   Herkia told me:  
that thou with Thióthrek,                   Thióthmar’s<sup>2</sup> son,  
hast lain in love                   ’neath linen cover.”

---

<sup>1</sup>Historically, *Kreka*. In the *Nibelungenlied*, *Helche* is the name of Atli’s first wife.

<sup>2</sup>Historically, *Theodemer*, who actually was in Attila’s service.



9. Laughed the Hunnish king's heart in his  
breast,  
when whole he saw the hands of Guthrún.  
"Let Herkia come to the kettle now,  
she who to Guthrún this grudge did bear."
10. No sadder sight was seen ever  
than when Herkia's hands were wholly burnt.  
To stinking moor was the maid then ta'en.—<sup>8</sup>  
Thus was Guthrún all guiltless seen.

---

<sup>8</sup>This is the Old Germanic mode of capital punishment for women.

## THE PLAINT OF ODDRÚN

### *Oddrúnargrátr*

Oddrún's love for Atli, a specifically Northern development of the Niflung legend, hinted at also in the 'Short Lay of Sigurth', is here elaborated into a whole poem—perhaps the most elegiac of the whole Collection, as it is probably one of the youngest. It was not known to the compiler of the *Völsunga saga*. The very beginning as well as the whole feel of the lay attest its late origin: the many archaising turns and allusions<sup>1a</sup> occurring are due to the conscious effort of an Icelandic poet of the late Twelfth Century to imitate the earlier manner. It will be noted, in this connection, that Gunnar's and Hogni's death at Atli's hands is here motivated by the enmity aroused by Gunnar's relations with Oddrún—an unauthentic perversion of the legend. Esthetically, too, the poem is inferior. It is full of inconsistencies and irrelevancies,<sup>1b</sup> due in this instance, not to the problematic condition of the text, as in the preceding poems, but rather to the mediocrity of the poet.

Heithrek<sup>1</sup> was the name of a king, and his daughter was hight Borgný.<sup>1</sup> Vilmund<sup>1</sup> was the name of her lover. She could not give birth to her children ere that Oddrún, Atli's sister, came to her help. Oddrún<sup>2</sup> had been the leman of Gunnar, the son of Gjúki. Of these matters dealeth this lay.

1. I have heard it told                    in tales of yore  
    how that came a maid                to Mornaland;<sup>3</sup>  
    not any one could,                    the earth above,  
    lend a helping hand                to Heithrek's daughter.

---

<sup>1a</sup>As e.g. the invocation of Frigg and Freya, 8. Note on the other hand Oddrún's general (Christian) altruism.

<sup>1b</sup>As e.g. the purposeless bringing in of the fates of Sigurth and Brynhild.

<sup>1</sup>These personages seem to be the poet's own invention. Heithrek is conceived as the king of one of Atli's domains, cf. 4, 2.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. *Sig. sk.* 56 and *Dráp.*

<sup>3</sup>Unknown elsewhere.



2. Then heard Oddrún,                   Atli's sister,  
 that this maid lay                   in throes full long;  
 the bitted steed                   from stall she drew,  
 and saddle laid                   on the swart-hued horse.
3. The even earth-ways                   she eagerly rode  
 till the high-built hall                   of Heithrek she saw,  
 and swung the saddle                   from slender steed.  
 These words then first                   fell from her lips:
4. "I fain would find                   if befallen hath evil,  
 as I have heard,                   in Hunnish<sup>4</sup> lands?"

*The handmaid said:*

"Here lieth Borgný                   by labor o'ercome,  
 thy friend, Oddrún,—                   fly to her help!"

*Oddrún said:*

5. "Who did this harm                   to Heithrek's daughter,  
 and brought Borgný                   to the brink of death"?

*The handmaid said:*

- "Vilmund is hight                   a hero prōud:  
 under warm cover                   he kept the maid,<sup>5</sup>  
 [for five winters,                   so her father knew not.]"<sup>6</sup>
6. Nor more spoke they,                   the mournful ones;  
 nigh her, Oddrún                   did kneel to help:  
 stern spells she spake,                   strong spells she spake,  
 for womb-bound woman                   witchcraft mighty.<sup>7</sup>
7. Two bonny babes                   were born to the world,  
 son and daughter,                   to the slayer of Hogni;<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Cf. note 1, above.

<sup>5</sup>Euphemistically.

<sup>6</sup>Probably an interpolation.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. the spells referred to *Fáf.* 12 and *Sigrdr.* 10.

<sup>8</sup>The lay stands alone in stating Hogni to have been slain by Vilmund.



13. To high heroes in hall I was born.  
 My life I led beloved of most  
 whilst lived my father—<sup>13</sup> fair was my lot—;  
 but I fatherless drooped when five winters.
14. “These words then spake the weary king  
 when last in life his lips he oped:  
 that gifted, and garbed in golden weeds  
 I be given in Southland to Grímhild’s son.<sup>14</sup>
15. “But to Brynhild he the helmet gave:  
 she should, said he, a shield-maid be.  
 ‘No better maiden was born in the world  
 to be a queen,’ he quoth, ‘while she lives.’<sup>15</sup>
16. “In her bower Brynhild gold braids did  
 weave,  
 as lady lorded it o’er land and folk;  
 the earth quivered, and all the sky,  
 when Fáfñir’s slayer<sup>16</sup> first saw her hall.
17. “Then Sigurth’s sword did smite amain,  
 broke the stronghold which Brynhild owned;  
 nor long it lasted, but little while,<sup>17</sup>  
 till of all wiles she aware did grow.
18. “Revenge full hard vowed she therefor,  
 and took felly, as we found ourselves:  
 to farthest folklands will fly the tale  
 how at Sigurth’s side she slew herself.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>Buthli.

<sup>14</sup>Gunnar is meant.

<sup>15</sup>Buthli wishes Brynhild to become a ‘shield-maiden’, i.e. a valkyrie, rather than to marry.

<sup>16</sup>Sigurth,—who approaches her bower (here apparently conceived as a fortress) with the Giúkungs to lay siege to it. Cf. *Sig. sk.* 38 and note.

<sup>17</sup>It was not until her return as Gunnar’s wife that she became aware of the deception. Cf. *ibid.* 39.

<sup>18</sup>The theme of *Brot.* and *Sig. sk.*

19. "To Gunnar then gladly I gave my love,  
to the breaker-of-rings,<sup>19</sup> as Brynhild did not;  
to Atli they<sup>20</sup> offered untold riches  
of bright gold rings, to my brother dear.<sup>21</sup>
20. "Bade he fondly for me fifteen manors  
and Grani's burden,<sup>22</sup> if gold he wished;  
but Atli spurned to bespeak ever  
a dowry gift from Giúkung's kinsmen.
21. "Yet could we not overcome our love;  
to the goldring-giver<sup>23</sup> I gave myself.  
Then muttered among them many kinsmen,  
and spoke they had spied us together.
22. "Still Atli thought that I forsooth  
all stainless stayed, nor stooped to ill;  
yet should no one be sure of this,  
or believe another, if love's at stake.
23. "Sped Atli forth his spies full soon  
through Myrkvith's<sup>24</sup> fastness, to find me out:  
they came indeed where come they should not,  
'neath linen where we lay together.
24. "With red rings we richly tried them,  
lest they Atli told ought of our love;  
but home in haste they hied them back,

---

<sup>19</sup>Kenning for 'prince': Gunnar.

<sup>20</sup>The Giúkungs.

<sup>21</sup>As weregild for Brynhild, to appease her brother Atli.

<sup>22</sup>I.e. the Niflung treasure.

<sup>23</sup>Kenning for 'prince': Gunnar. Oddrún has evidently been staying at the court of the Giúkungs.

<sup>24</sup>'The Dark Forest', which is here supposed to separate the realm of the Burgundians from Atli's kingdom. Cf. *Akv.* 3, 5, 13.



30. "I often wonder,            woman gold-dight,  
 why alone longer            I live on earth,  
 when dead the doughty        dealer-of-rings<sup>31</sup>  
 whom more I loved            than my own self.
31. "Thou sat'st listening        as I laid before thee  
 manifold woe,            both mine and theirs;  
 thus live we all            as liketh us—<sup>32</sup>  
 sad Oddrún's plaint        is ended now."

---

<sup>31</sup>Kenning for 'prince': Gunnar.

<sup>32</sup>That is, we obey the dictates of love (as Borgný, too, had done).

## THE [GREENLANDISH] LAY OF ATLI

### *Atlakviða* [*hin grænlenzka*]

It so happens that in Old Norse poetry the grand theme of the Fall of the Niflungs is preserved only in two lays which are curiously parallel in respect of their theme and outer form; but differ decisively in conception and style. Without a doubt the shorter *Atlakviða* is both more authentic than the *Atlamǫl* and esthetically by all means superior—in fact, one of the best in the Collection.—Unfortunately its text is one of the worst preserved, presenting many problems in higher and lower criticism. There is, indeed, a strong likelihood that the lay as we now have it is composed of parts of two (or more) poems. For one thing, it is difficult to account satisfactorily for some ten indispensable and excellent scattered *fornyrðislag* stanzas which differ markedly in style from the remaining *málahátt* stanzas. Again, there are grievous lacunæ and many obscure, because corrupt, passages.

It is nevertheless evident that we are dealing here with a poet of no mean power—one, in fact, who has an uncommon epic-dramatic gift. He commands a rich and ornate diction all his own, and he accomplishes with truly epic breadth the ineluctable fate of the lordly Niflungs. The main characters are brought out with astonishingly few strokes—by deeds, not by words—; yet they are unforgettable individuals: Hogni, fearless unto death; Gunnar, gallant and constant; Guthrún, implacable, 'demonic'.

With regard to the legendary form it is noteworthy that, in both lays, Atli's avaricious longing to obtain the Niflung gold is the reason for the invitation—not Guthrún's desire for revenge (as in the *Nibelungenlied* and the other Eddic Lays). On the contrary, she is consistently solicitous about the welfare of her brothers. It is this circumstance which has suggested the thought that the Atli Lays may preserve the very oldest form of the legend, and that connection with the Sigurth motif was effected only later.

Scholars are satisfied that *Atlakviða* and *Atlamǫl* are independent treatments of the legend. Of the two, *Atlakviða* is generally considered the older (Tenth Century?): the stark Heathen tone, details of legendary form, style, its poor state of preservation, all point in that direction. With reference to the lay being called the 'Greenlandish' Lay of Atli (in the *Codex*) it seems likely that the Collector mistakenly borrowed from *Atlamǫl* whose title is rendered fairly certain, not only by the old superscription and the immediately preceding Prose, but also from internal evidence. But whether Iceland or Norway is the place of origin, that is another matter.











17. "Better were it, brother, if in byrnie clad  
and ring-covered helmet, thou rodest against  
Atli,  
and in the saddle sat'st all the sun-hot day,  
(and the ravens didst feed on reddened battle-  
field,)<sup>15</sup>
18. "and the women madest weep their war-dead  
heroes,  
and Hunnish shield-maidens to shame didst  
put,<sup>16</sup>  
but Atli himself amongst the adders didst  
throw;  
now that loathly life-end your lot will be."
19. (Then gainsaid Gunnar, the goldring-  
breaker:)<sup>17</sup>  
"Too late now, sister, to summon the Niflungs:  
'twould take long to look for our liege-men  
doughty,  
for the brave ones and bold ones from the  
banks of the Rhine."
20. <sup>18</sup>They held Gunnar fast, and in fetters laid  
him,  
the brave one from Burgundy, and bound him  
firmly.
21. Seven Hogni slew with sword sharp-cutting,  
the eighth he flung into the fire of the hearth:

---

<sup>15</sup>Supplied after Grundtvig.

<sup>16</sup>Doubtful.

<sup>17</sup>These lines are transposed here from their original position before 25, following Grundtvig.—The Niflungs rode with only few followers.

<sup>18</sup>It would seem that some stanzas are lacking here which described the battle and the slaughter of all the Burgundians except Gunnar and Hogni.



*Gunnar said:*

27. "Now behold I the heart of Hogni the fearless,  
 unlike the heart of Hialli, the thrall,  
 since little it beats on the board as it lies;  
 but even less it beat in his breast as it lay.
28. "As little, Atli, will eyes behold thee  
 as our hoard in thy hands thou wilt hold ever.<sup>24</sup>
29. "To no one but me is known where lieth  
 the hoard of the Niflungs, now Hogni lives  
 not.  
 Mistrust had I ever whilst we two did live:  
 now alone I live I no longer fear.<sup>25</sup>
30. "Let the Rhine rather the red gold hide,  
 the fast-flowing flood, evil Fáfñir's hoard;  
 let the rings rather under rolling waves shine  
 than shine on the hands of Hunnish maidens."
31. (Called then Atli, the king of the Huns:)<sup>26</sup>  
 "Let the wheel-wain fetch now fettered Gun-  
 nar."  
 To his death<sup>27</sup> then drew the doomed hoard-  
 warder,  
 the bold brand-wielder, a bit-shaking steed.<sup>28</sup>
32. Rode Atli Glaum, his goodly charger,  
 hedged round by shields and shining swords;

---

<sup>24</sup>Both lines are doubtful.

<sup>25</sup>Viz. that the secret of the treasure might be betrayed by some one.

<sup>26</sup>Supplied after Grundtvig.

<sup>27</sup>I.e. to the place of execution? *Am.* 54, Atli has Gunnar first hanged on the gallows, then cast into the snake-den.

<sup>28</sup>In the original, the last two lines follow after 33. They are transposed here, following Bugge.











## THE GREENLANDISH LAY OF ATLI

### *Atlamǫl hin grænlenzku*

In a number of ways the poem under consideration answers to the designation of the 'Greenlandish Lay of Atli' given it in the *Codex Regius*. It has proved hazardous to infer the home of an Eddic poem from the mention of certain plants or animals in it, or from supposed allusions to local conditions. Yet here, for once, we seem to have firm ground under our feet. We may be reasonably sure that Kostbera's dream of an white (Polar) bear, and its interpretation by Hogni as a fierce eastern gale, point to a far Northern home, the Greenland settlements established by Norwegians and Icelanders in the Eleventh Century. Again, the conditions as described in the lay are small, even mean. The innumerable hordes of Atli have here shrunk to thirty henchmen, and 'King' Gunnar disposes over only ten house-carles.—Still further, the general tone corresponds. The splendid heroes have become small farmers. In the course of their scolding match, Guthrún reproaches Atli for never having held his own at the thing; whereas he reminds her that their barns always were well-stocked and there had been plenty of good things etc. The boorish buffoonery with Hialli—good of its kind—takes up a disproportionate amount of space and breaks into the tragedy of the heroes' death. Over the whole there hangs a grey pall of Northern gloom which we may well believe was the mental atmosphere of those ill-fated settlements.—Even the language is provincial, commonplace, prosaic; and the invariable, painfully regular feminine ending of the half-lines suggests that the author slavishly adhered to a model which, in the hands of the *Atlakviða* poet, shows itself not unadapted to a certain stateliness. Hence, we shall not go far wrong in assigning the *Atlamǫl* to an Eleventh Century Greenlandish poet.

This again tallies well with the half-Christian, half-Heathen expressions toward the end, and also with the numerous indications that in legendary form it is decidedly younger than the *Atlakviða* which, however, was hardly known to the author.

It would serve no useful purpose to point out in detail the shortcomings of the *Atlamǫl*—its repetitiousness, its lachrymose tone, its lack of breeding, its general air of 'a sad tale done into song'—conditioned, we may surmise, by the depressing mental atmosphere in which it originated. For all that, the lay has its own peculiar place in Old Norse literature precisely in thus affording a valuable foil and contrast to the *Atlakviða*.



5. Fires they lit for them, and as friends wel-  
 comed  
 from afar who had ridden, nor of falsehood  
 bethought them;  
 the great king's gifts took they which the  
 guests awarded,  
 hung them up on the wall-posts,<sup>6</sup> nor aught  
 mistrusted.
6. Came then Kostbera,<sup>7</sup> who the queen was of  
 Hogni,  
 a woman warm-hearted, and welcomed the  
 strangers;  
 glad was eke Glaumvor, King Gunnar's house-  
 wife,  
 fulfilled what was fitting to refresh guests  
 weary.
7. They bade home to them Hogni, if with him  
 they fared, rather:<sup>8</sup>  
 nor was hidden the falsehood, if heed they had  
 given.  
 His word gave Gunnar if with him fared  
 Hogni,  
 and fain was Hogni to follow his brother.
8. Bore mead the fair maidens, of meat was  
 there plenty,  
 many full horns were handed, till his fill had  
 every one.

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. *Akv.* 1, note.

<sup>7</sup>'The Stewardess'; like Glaumvor 'the Cheerful', doubtless the poet's invention.

<sup>8</sup>The meaning seems to be: the messengers invite the *Giúkungs* to follow Hogni as their leader, so as to inspire them with confidence.











*Glaumvor said:*

24. "A stream beheld I through our hall flowing,  
the roaring river rushed 'gainst our benches,  
breaking the legs of you brothers, Gunnar:  
naught spared the waters. That forewarneth  
evil!"

*Gunnar said:*

("Acres waving ween I what water thou  
thoughtest,  
our feet oft stumble as o'er the fields we  
wander.")<sup>22</sup>

*Glaumvor said:*

25. "Methought in the darkness came dead women  
hitherward,  
clad in weeds of mourning, and wished to  
fetch thee,  
beckoned and bade thee to their benches  
forthwith:  
I fear that the goddesses have given thee  
over."<sup>23</sup>

*Gunnar said:*

26. "Too late is't to stay us: our lot is cast now.  
(I dread me hereafter that dire will our fate  
be) :<sup>24</sup>  
our fate we may flee not,<sup>25</sup> we shall fare on  
the morrow,  
though likely it seemeth that our life be a  
short one."

<sup>22</sup>Supplied following Bugge, after the paraphrase *Völss.* chap. 35.

<sup>23</sup>They seem to be the *dísar* (Cf. *Reg.* 24, note) beckoning to Hel him who is 'fey'.

<sup>24</sup>Supplied after Grundtvig's suggestion.

<sup>25</sup>The rendering is doubtful.





36. "Fare ye far from hence— 'tis fraught with  
 death to you,  
 full soon shall they slay you and swiftly burn  
 you:  
 with fair words I bade you, but falsehood  
 dwelt in them—  
 or else wait outside till up is the gallows."
37. Then Hogni spake forth, not to spare him  
 thought he,  
 nor of ought was fearful, whatever betid them:  
 "Think not of threat'ning, a thankless task  
 were it:  
 not one more word or 'twill be worse for thee  
 after."
38. They hewed down Vingi, and to Hel sent him,  
 with axes gashed him till his ghost he breathed  
 out.
39. Atli's men foregathered, and in mail-coats  
 arrayed them;  
 thus went they forward till the wall lay be-  
 tween them.<sup>32</sup>  
 Each host angrily to the other cried out:  
 "Full long had we settled to slay all of you."

(*Hogni said:*)

40. "It seems but little that settled ye had it:  
 still unready are ye, though without here lieth  
 one of your henchmen, Hel-ward sent by us."

---

<sup>32</sup>*Vols.* here has a passage in which Atli demands the Niflung treasure, which Gunnar defiantly refuses. In the *Nibelungenlied* it is Kriemhild who makes the demand at this point.











57. Scared was the scullion and scampered away  
fast,  
crept in all corners, cackling with terror;  
'twas a sore plight, quoth he, to pay for their  
warfare,  
to end his days dolefully and die from his  
swinery,  
from the fat fare which before he had eaten.
58. On Buthli's baster they brandished the knife,  
then:  
cried out the coward ere the cold edge he felt  
e'en—  
he would do it this day yet, he would dung the  
meadow,  
nor shun any drudgery, if from death they  
would spare him:  
“happy were Hialli if he had but his life left.”
59. Pleaded then Hogni— as had done the few-  
est—  
the thrall to unfetter that thence he might hie  
him:  
“for us it were easier this ill game to play  
with you;<sup>40</sup>  
why should we here wish to hear that yelp-  
ing?”
60. They laid hands on Hogni then; hard was it  
for them  
the life to lengthen of the lordly hero.<sup>41</sup>  
Laughed then Hogni,— heard it all warriors—  
steadfastly bore it, well stood he the torture.

---

<sup>40</sup>That is, to have his own heart cut out.

<sup>41</sup>I.e. they had no other choice but to obey Atli.











*Atli said:*

82. "On stake they should burn thee, but stone  
 thee beforehand:  
 then hadst earned what thou e'er hankeredst  
 after."

*Guthrún said:*

- "On the morrow early be mindful of such  
 things:  
 by a fairer death shall I fare to the other  
 light."<sup>52</sup>
83. Thus sate they together, bore a grudge to each  
 other,  
 words of hate they bandied, but happy was  
 neither.  
 Waxed Hniflung's<sup>53</sup> hatred, of high deeds be-  
 thought him,  
 set forth to Guthrún his grim hate of Atli.
84. To her mind she called then how they mur-  
 dered her brother.  
 Good hap she held it if Hogni avenged were;  
 then laid low Atli, nor lingered in doing it  
 Hniflung, Hogni's son, and high-born Guth-  
 rún.
85. Quoth the stout-hearted one, starting from  
 sleep up—  
 from the wound well knew he that it needed  
 no binding:<sup>54</sup>  
 "Say ye in sooth now: who slew King Atli?  
 Not lightly ye dealt with me: my life-blood is  
 ebbing."

<sup>52</sup>Note the Christian expression!

<sup>53</sup>He is a son of Hogni, as is told in the following stanza. His assistance seems uncalled for.

<sup>54</sup>That is, he was past help from bandaging.



*Guthrún said:*

86. <sup>55</sup>“Tis I who wrought it, that ended thy life  
and Hogni’s son eke, that to Hel thou wend-  
est.”  
now,

*Atli said:*

- “Full swiftly thou slewest me, unseemly the  
’tis ill to betray him who trusteth his friend-  
ship.  
deed, though:
87. “Unwilling went I to woo thee, Guthrún;  
wast praised in thy widowhood, and proud  
they called thee.  
Nor was it falsehood: all too well I found out.  
Thou camest home hither, a host of men  
following.
88. “A life most lordly we led, my hall within:  
dearth was there never of noble athelings;  
our barns, well-stocked were and in state  
lived we,  
had great wealth of gold-rings which we gave  
to many.
89. “A great dowry I paid thee, and adorned thee  
with jewels,  
gave thee thralls thirty, seven thrifty bond-  
maids—  
were seeming such gifts— and of silver a  
great store.
90. “Thou didst reckon it nowise, as though naught  
were all,  
but didst long for the lands aye left me by  
Buthli;

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<sup>55</sup>A line (=75, 2) is omitted here by the translator.







## GUTHRÚN'S LAMENT

### *Guðrúnarhvöt*

Not yet are ended Guthrún's sorrows. Her dearest child, Svanhild, had been fostered at King Iónakr's court, out of harm's way. Thither, Guthrún is carried by the waves, after vainly trying to end her life by drowning—a development of the legend peculiar to the North. She marries the king. Her sons by this marriage are sacrificed in an attempt to avenge Svanhild's death on King Iormunrekk—this, a theme from old Gothic legend touched on already by Jordanes (Sixth Century). Their fall leaves Guthrún utterly bereaved and unwilling to live longer.

Of the two lays dealing with this matter, the 'Lay of Hamthir' and 'Guthrún's Lament,'<sup>1</sup> the former is unquestionably the older and more original. However, here as elsewhere, the order of the *Codex* is followed; which is advantageous also by reason of its introductory Prose.

After iterating, in a somewhat modified form, the first stanzas of the older lay, the poet gives us lonely Guthrún's lament before the self-immolation which her rival, Brynhild, had suggested to her after Sigurth's death.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, one is tempted to regard the Lament as an elaboration of the hint there given. In its essence the poem is a biographic monologue (like *Guð.* I, II, *Hel. Od.*), not devoid of lyrical power.<sup>3</sup> The break between this tenderly elegiac portion and the first stanzas, whose spirit is that of the *Hamðismál*, is unmistakable. Toward the end, a reminiscence of the Sweet William motif of the 'Second Lay of Helgi' appears. These beautiful stanzas are, to be sure, by some scholars considered to have originally belonged to some other poem about Sigurth.

The measure of the lay is *fornyrðislag*. It is generally referred to the Eleventh Century, and was most likely composed in Iceland. The *Völsunga saga*, chap. 41 gives a close paraphrase of it.

When she had slain Atli, Guthrún went down to the sea to drown herself; but she could not sink. She floated across

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<sup>1</sup>The title of the original means 'The Egging on of Guthrún'. This, however, has reference only to the introductory stanzas. and not to the body of the poem which is essentially a 'Lament'.

<sup>2</sup>*Sg. kv.* 59.

<sup>3</sup>It may be remarked in passing that a *crescendo* of comparison is scarcely attempted in stanzas 17-19.

the bay to the land of King Iónakr.<sup>4</sup> He took her to wife, and their sons were Sorli, Erp, and Hamthir.<sup>5</sup> There was also fostered Svanhild, her daughter by Sigurth. Svanhild<sup>6</sup> was given in marriage to King Iormunrekk<sup>7</sup> the Mighty. Bikki was his councillor: it was he who led on Randvér, the king's son, to wish to wed her himself. This, Bikki told the king. He had Randvér hanged on the gallows and Svanhild killed under the hoofs of horses.<sup>8</sup> But when Guthrún heard of this she spake to her sons (as is told here).

- |                          |                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Wickedest words,      | most woe-bringing,  |
| out of hate-filled heart | heard I spoken      |
| when, unflinching,       | egged to slaughter  |
| Guthrún her sons         | with grim speeches. |

---

<sup>4</sup>His name is supposed to be Slavic, and his lands hence across the Baltic; or else, a corruption of *Odoacher*, the Germanic ruler of Italy during the Fifth Century.

<sup>5</sup>According to *Hamth.* 14, and the indirect evidence of the lay itself which has the dual form in Guthrún's address to her sons, Erp was Iónakr's son by another woman.—His name signifies 'the Brownish One'. The names of his half-brothers are of doubtful meaning.

<sup>6</sup>(She who fights) in Swan Garment'.

<sup>7</sup>Historically, *Hermanarich*, King of the Ostrogoths in the Fourth Century.

<sup>8</sup>According to the more detailed account of *Völss.* chap. 40, and similarly *Skáld.* chap. 42, Randvér and Bikki had been sent to Iónakr to sue for Svanhild's hand. On their return journey the king's son follows Bikki's false counsel and makes love to her. It is returned. They are subsequently betrayed by Bikki. Before mounting the gallows, Randvér plucks a hawk of all his feathers and sends him to his father. The king understands from this token that by the deed he will be shorn of honor as the bird of feathers, and orders him taken off the gallows; but too late. Whereupon, again instigated by Bikki, the king's wrath turns on Svanhild as the origin of his dishonor. "Then she was bound in the castle gate and horses were driven over her. But when she opened her eyes the horses dared not tread on her. When Bikki saw this he said that a sack should be drawn over her head, and so was done, and then she lost her life."

2. "Why sit ye still and sleep through life,  
nor loathe to speak light-hearted words,  
when Iormunrekk your young sister,  
her, Svanhild hight, had by horses trampled.<sup>9</sup>
3. "Ye are little like beloved Gunnar,  
nor like to Hogni's stout heart is yours:  
your sister's slayer would ye seek forthwith  
if bold ye were like my brothers twain."
4. Said then Hamthir, the hardy-minded:  
"not so highly thought'st thou of Hogni's deed  
when from sleep they waked Sigurth, thy  
spouse:<sup>10</sup>  
with blood was thy black and white<sup>10a</sup> bed-  
linen reddened  
from grievous gashes, in his gore as he lay.
5. "Bitterly didst thou thy brethren avenge,  
for thyself most sadly, when thy sons didst  
murder;  
with the youths<sup>11</sup> could we Iormunrekk kill,  
our sister's slayer,— of the same mind all.
6. "The helmets<sup>12</sup> bring of the Hunnish kings—  
hast whetted us to hateful strife."
7. Laughing, Guthrún to the garner wended,  
and kingly crests she from coffers chose,  
and long byrnies brought to her sons:  
the hardy heroes on horseback lept.

<sup>9</sup>The translator has omitted two lines here (= *Hamð.* 3, 3-4.)

<sup>10</sup>Cf. *Brot.* Concluding Prose, and *Sg. sk.* 24ff.

<sup>10a</sup>I.e. with black and white strips, like the sails of the ships of those times?

<sup>11</sup>Her sons by Atli, Erp and Eitil, slain by her to avenge the death of the Niflungs; cf. 11 and 12, *Akv.* 37ff, *Am.* 74ff.

<sup>12</sup>In the original, 'precious things' (= 'heirlooms'?)

(*Hamthir said:*)

8. "So will hie him home to his mother's hall  
 the god-of-spears,<sup>13</sup> in Gothland<sup>14</sup> slain,  
 that for all of us thou mayst arvel drink:  
 for Svanhild, our sister, and thy sons also."
9. Weeping, Guthrún, Giúki's daughter,  
 sate her sadly beside the hall`  
 with tear-wet cheeks, to tell her sorrow,  
 her weary tale, in many a way.
10. "Three homes knew I, three hearth-fires;  
 was I brought to the hall of husbands three;  
 matchless 'mong men was my Sigurth—  
 he whom murdered Hogni and Gunnar.
11. "More woeful wife, ween I, never lived,  
 (nor was ever wight in the world thus be-  
 wrayed);<sup>15</sup>  
 but sadder still seemed it to me  
 when the athelings to Atli gave me.
12. "The keen-eyed youths<sup>16</sup> I called to me:  
 to wreak my wrath I wrought it thus:  
 I hewed off the heads of the Hniflung heirs.
13. "To the sea I wended, weary of life,  
 the hateful norms I hoped to thwart:<sup>17</sup>  
 tossed me, nor drowned, the tow'ring billows,  
 on land me lifted, to live on doomed.

<sup>13</sup>Kenning for 'hero'. He foresees his own death.

<sup>14</sup>Iormunrekk's dominions.

<sup>15</sup>Supplied after Bugge's suggestion.

<sup>16</sup>Erp and Eitil; cf. 5.

<sup>17</sup>Viz. by cutting short the life allotted to her by them.



14. "The bed I mounted— had better fate hoped—  
 once more mated, with a mighty king.<sup>18</sup>  
 I issue bore— as heirs twain sons,  
 as heirs twain sons to the atheling.
15. "About Svanhild seated sate her bond-maids,  
 whom of all my children I cherished most:  
 of hue whiter, my halls within,  
 than bright sun-beams were Svanhild's brows.
16. "In gold I 'rayed her and goodly cloths,  
 ere that to Gothland I gave her away.
17. "The saddest this of my sorrows all,  
 when horses' feet the fair hair trod  
 on Svanhild's head, besmirched in mire.
18. "But sorest this, when my Sigurth they  
 did murder foully, fey, in my bed;  
 but bitterest this, when my brother Gunnar  
 the glittering snakes slavered over.
19. "But hardest this, when to the heart  
 of hardy Hogni King Atli hewed.  
 I call to mind many sorrows—  
 (why should I bide to bear still more?)<sup>19</sup>
20. "Bridle, Sigurth, the black-hued steed,  
 let the fleet-footed horse hitherward run:  
 here sitteth with me nor son's wife nor  
 daughter  
 to give Guthrún golden trinkets.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup>Iónakr.

<sup>19</sup>Supplied after Bugge's suggestion.

<sup>20</sup>She is utterly alone now, foreseeing the death of her last begotten sons, with neither kinsman nor kinswoman to comfort her; cf. *Hamð.* 24.

21. "To mind call thou                    what to me didst say,  
the time we, Sigurth,                    sate together :  
that from Hel, hero,                    wouldst hither wend,  
as would I to thee                    out of the world.
22. "Raise up, ye earls,                    the oaken heap,  
under heaven let it                    the highest be,  
that fire may burn                    the hate-filled breast's  
carks and cares,                    and quell all sorrows.
23. "May it lighten                    your lot, ye earls,  
and ye, noble women,                    your woe also,  
to have hearkened                    to the harrowing tale  
(of Guthrún's sorrows,                    Giúki's daughter)."<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup>Supplied after Grundtvig's suggestion.

## THE LAY OF HAMTHIR

### *Hamðismél (hin fornu)*

The 'Lay of Hamthir' enjoys the sad distinction of having been handed down in a more fragmentary condition than any other of the longer Eddic Lays. A number of stanzas are certainly missing, others clearly interpolated, and still others under suspicion. And the genuine material left has needed much surgery and sympathetic treatment to be at all intelligible. Nevertheless, enough is discernible to recognize that it brought the great Eddic cycle of Heroic songs in this Collection to a worthy, as well as logical, conclusion.

As pointed out above, several stanzas of 'Guthrún's Lament' seem to have originally belonged to the lay and are fairly considered in this connection. As a whole, they and the following stanzas breathe a sinister power equal to the best in Eddic poetry—the unwilling brothers dashing away unto their doom, snorting with rage, their mother's wild laugh yet ringing in their ears—a doom which they seal by venting their wrath on her favorite son, their half-brother Erp. And the scenes in Iormunrekk's hall, however fragmentary, are full of energy and passion.

The measure is, variously, *málahátr* and *fornyrðislag*, which in itself constitutes a sufficient reason for considering the lay as it stands a composite of two or more older, fragmentary poems. That another lay existed seems to follow from the fact that the *Volsunga saga* (chap. 42) paraphrases only the *fornyrðislag* stanzas (quoting stanza 28, 1–2), and none of the *málahátr* stanzas from which, indeed, the version of the saga differs considerably.

The origin of the lay is sought, with little conclusiveness, in Norway. Both vocabulary and style point to the Tenth Century.

1. [Sorrowful deeds                    the dayspring saw,  
unwelcome dawn,                    the alf-folk's grief;<sup>1</sup>  
thus early morn                    the ills of men  
and every sorrow                    and sadness quickens.]<sup>2</sup>
2. 'Twas not but now,                    nor newly, either,  
but ages ago,                    time out of mind,

---

<sup>1</sup>However, dawn is the grief only of the swart-alfs, the dwarfs, and of the giants whom it transforms into stone. Indeed, the sun is called the 'wheel of the alfs', *Alv.* 16.

<sup>2</sup>The whole stanza is generally regarded as spurious.

- [of all things older than any, this,]<sup>3</sup>  
 when Guthrún egged on, Giúki's daughter,  
 her young sons to avenge Svanhild the fair.
3. "A sister had ye, was she Svanhild hight;  
 her Iormunrekk in wrath had trampled  
 by white and black steeds, on high-road far-  
 ing,  
 by grey, war-hardened Gothic horses.
4. "Ye alone are left of my lordly strain;  
 but not keen are ye as those kings of yore—  
 (ye are little like beloved Gunnar  
 or Hogni, his brother, bear-hard in mind.)<sup>4</sup>
5. "On earth I am lonely like to asp in holt,<sup>5</sup>  
 amidst foes unfriended like fir stripped of  
 boughs,  
 of gladness bereft as the greenwood of leaves  
 when the waster-of-twigs<sup>6</sup> on a warm day  
 cometh."
6. Said then Hamthir, the hardy-minded:  
 "not so highly thought'st thou of Hogni's deed  
 when from sleep they waked Sigurth, thy  
 husband—  
 on thy bed wert seated,— but his slayers  
 laughed.
7. "With blood was thy black and white bed-  
 linen reddened,  
 from grievous gashes, in his gore as he lay;

---

<sup>3</sup>This absurd line must be interpolated.

<sup>4</sup>Supplied after Grundtvig's suggestion from the similar third stanza of *Guð. hv.*

<sup>5</sup>Viz. of evergreen trees. Similarly *Hǫv.* 50.

<sup>6</sup>Kenning, probably for 'fire'. Cf. *Vsp.* 44..













31. There fell Sorli,            slain at the gable,  
      at the hall's hind-wall        stooped Hamthir then.

This song is called the Old Lay of Hamthir.

## THE CATALOGUE OF DWARFS

(*Dvergatal*) *Vsp.* 9ff.

Then gathered together            the gods for counsel,  
the holy hosts,            and held converse:  
who the deep-dwelling            dwarfs was to make  
of Brimir's blood            and Bláin's bones.

Mótsognir rose,            mightiest ruler  
of the kin of dwarfs,            but Durin next;  
molded many            manlike bodies  
the dwarfs under earth,            as Durin bade them.

Nýi and Nithi,<sup>2</sup>            Northri and Suthri,  
Austri and Vestri,<sup>3</sup>            Althióf, Dvalin,  
Nár and Náin,            Níping, Dáin,  
Bífur, Bófur,            Bombur, Nóri,  
Án and Ónar,            Ái, Miothvitnir.

Vigg and Gandalf,            Vindalf, Thráin,  
Thekk and Thorin,            Thrór, Vit, and Lit,  
Nýr and Regin,            Nýráth and Ráthsvith;  
now is reckoned            the roster of dwarfs.

Fili, Kíli,            Fundin, Náli,  
Heptifili,            Hannar, Svíur,  
Frár, Hornbori,            Fræg and Lóni,  
Aurvang, Iari,            Eikinskialdi.

---

<sup>1</sup>The meaning of a number of names in this *pula* or rigmarole is uncertain, that of others, quite obvious. Most seem to refer to the nether world of death, cold, dissolution, a few to natural phenomena and to the skill for which the dwarfs were known.—It will be noted that some names are applied also to other beings—gods, giants, and men—mentioned in the Collection.

<sup>2</sup>Waxing and Waning Moon.

<sup>3</sup>North, South, etc.

The dwarfs I tell now            in Dváln's host,  
 down to Lofar,            for listening wights—  
 they who hied them            from halls of stone  
 over sedgy shores            to sandy plains.<sup>4</sup>

There was Draupnir            and Dolgthrasir,  
 Hór and Haugspori,            Hlévang, Glóin,  
 Dóri, Óri,            Duf, Andvari,  
 Skirfir, Virfir,            Skáfith, Ái,    `

Alf and Yngvi,            Eikinskialdi,  
 Fialar and Frosti,            Fith and Ginnar;  
 will ever be known,            while earth doth last,  
 the line of dwarfs            to Lofar down.

---

<sup>4</sup>Conjectural.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- Akv.* : *Atl'akvíða*  
*Am.* : *Atl'amól*  
*Alv.* : *Al'vissmól*  
*Bdr.* : *Baldrs draum'ar*  
*Bragar.* : *Brag'aræður*  
*Brot* : *(Brot) af Sig'urbarkviðu*  
*Cod. Arn.* : *Codex Arnamagnæ-anus*  
*Cod. Reg.* : *Codex Regius*  
*Dráp* : *Dráp Nífl'unga*  
*Fáfn.* : *Fáfn'ismól*  
*Fj.* : *Fíol'svinnsmól*  
*Grímn.* : *Grímn'ismól*  
*Grip.* : *Grip'isspól*  
*Grot.* : *Grott'asöngur*  
*Gróug.* : *Gró'ugaldur*  
*Guð. I, II, III* : *Guð'rúnarkviða I, II, III*  
*Guð. hv.* : *Guð'rúnarhvöt*  
*Gylfag.* : *Gylf'aginning*  
*Hamb.* : *Hamb'ismól*  
*Hárb.* : *Hár'barðsljóð*  
*Helr.* : *Hel'reið Bryn'hildar*  
*H.H. I, II* : *Helg'akviða Hund'ingsbana I, II*  
*H.Hv.* : *Helg'akviða Hjör'varðssonar*  
*Hólv.* : *Hólv'amól*  
*Hym.* : *Hym'iskviða*  
*Hynd.* : *Hyndl'uljóð*  
*Lok.* : *Lok'asenna*  
*Nornag.* : *Norn'agests þáttur*  
*Od.* : *Odd'rúnargrátr*  
*Reg.* : *Reg'insmól*  
*Ríg.* : *Rígs'þula*  
*Sigrdr.* : *Sigr'drífumól*  
*Sigkv.* : *Sig'urbarkviða hin skamma*  
*Sinf.* : *Frá dauð'a Sin'fjötla*  
*Skáld.* : *Skáld'skaparmól*  
*Skírn.* : *Skírn'ismól*  
*Þrym.* : *Þryms'kviða*  
*Vaf.* : *Vaf'brúðnismól*  
*Völ.* : *Völ'undarkviða*  
*Völss.* : *Völ'sunga saga*  
*Vsp.* : *Völ'uspól*  
*Vsp. sk.* : *Völ'uspól hin skamma*

## PRONUNCIATION

Accent is indicated (only in the Index) by an acute after the stressed syllable (e.g. Borg'hild).

Length is marked by an acute over the vowel (e.g. Sigrún).

### Vowels:

*a* as in 'artistic'.

*á* as in 'father'.

*e* as in 'men'.

*é* as in 'where', but more closed.

*i* as in 'it'.

*í* as in 'ravine'.

*o* as in 'omit'.

*ó* as in 'ore'.

*o* as in 'not' }

*ø* as in 'off' } (used only in italicized words).

*u* as in 'would'.

*ú* as in 'rule'.

*æ* as in 'there' (with open pronunciation).

*œ* as in 'slur'.

*y* as in French *une*, German *Hütte*.

*ý* as in French *sûr*, German *Tür*.

*au* as in 'house', but with the *a* broader.

*ei* as in French *paysan* (or in the 'cockney' pronunciation of long *a*, as in 'lady').

*ey* as in French *oeil*.

Note 1) that *i* before vowel (as in *ia*, *iau*, *io*, *iq*, *iu*) is always semivocalic; thus *iu* as in 'few'.

2) *ái*, *éu*, *ía*, *óa*, *ói*, *óu*, *úi* must be pronounced as entirely separate vowels.

Consonants: Their value is as in English, with the following cautions:

- 1) *g* is always pronounced as in 'go' (except *ng*, as in 'long'). It is never pronounced as in 'giant'.
- 2) *s* is always voiceless, as in 'sing'; never voiced, as in 'wise'.
- 3) in the combinations *hl*, *hn*, *hr*, *hv*, *h* is pronounced about as in 'hew'.
- 4) *þ* is voiceless *th*, as in 'throw'; *ð*, voiced *th*, as in 'father' (both used only in italicized words).

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