

THE  
TRANSLATED  
POETIC  
BY  
EDDA  
LEE M. HOLLANDER



## THE POETIC EDDA



# **THE POETIC EDDA**

Translated with an Introduction  
and Explanatory Notes

BY

LEE M. HOLLANDER

**SECOND EDITION, REVISED**

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## **To the Memory of My Mother**



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## General Introduction

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

Due to their geographical position, it was the fate of the Scandinavian tribes to succumb later than their southern and western neighbors 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. Owing to the prevailing use of wood for structural purposes and ornamentation, little that is notable was accomplished and still less has come down to us from that period, though a definite style had been evolved in wood-carving, shipbuilding and bronze work, and admirable examples of these have indeed been unearthed. 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 national literatures.

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

But just as fire and sword wrought more conversions in the Merovingian kingdom, in Germany, and in England, than did peaceful, missionary activity so too in the North; and little would have been heard of sagas, 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 (*ca.* 870) by Norwegian nobles and yeomen who fled their native land when King Harald Fairhair sought to impose on them his sovereignty and to 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. This was 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, and the lore of olden times, especially of the heroic and romantic past immediately preceding and following the settlement of the island. Even after Christianity got to be firmly established, by and by, wealthy freeholders and clerics of leisure devoted themselves to accumulating and combining into “sagas,” the traditions of heathen times which had been current orally, and to collecting the lays about the gods and heroes which were still remembered—indeed, they would compose new ones in imitation of them. Thus, gradually came into

being huge codices which were reckoned among the most cherished possessions of Icelandic families. By about 1200 the Danish historian, Saxo Grammaticus, already speaks in praise of the unflagging zeal of the Icelanders in this matter.

The greatest name in this early Icelandic Renaissance (as it has been called) is that of Snorri Sturluson (1178-1241), the powerful chieftain and great scholar, to whom we owe the *Heimskringla*, or *The History of the Norwegian Kings*, and the *Snorra Edda*—about which more 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 centuries, when it was met and reinforced by the Nordic Renaissance with its romantic interest in the past.

In the meantime 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 the preface to Saxo's *Historia Danica*, edited by the Danish humanist Christiern Pedersen in the beginning of the sixteenth century, antiquarians found stated in so many words that to a large extent his work is based on Icelandic sources, at least for the earliest times. To make these sources more accessible, toward the end of the sixteenth century, the learned Norwegian, Peder Claussön, translated the *Heimskringla*,<sup>1</sup> 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 although the Icelandic freeholders "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 Fredric III, were liberal and intelligent monarchs who did much to further literature and science. The latter king expressly enjoined his bishop in Iceland, Brynjólfur<sup>2</sup> Sveinsson, a noted antiquarian, to gather for the Royal Library, then founded, all 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 those 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 following was to look upon as relics of barbarian antecedents best forgotten, until Romanticism again invested the dim past of Germanic antiquity with glamor.

At the height of this generous interest in the past a learned Icelandic, Arngrímur Jónsson, sent the manuscript of what is now known as *Snorra Edda* or *The Prose Edda* (now called *Codex Wormianus*), 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 fabled father of Icelandic historiography, Sæmundr 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's 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 the art. The first part, called “Gylfaginning” or “The Duping of Gylfi,” furnishes a survey of Northern mythology and cosmogony; the second, called “Skaldskaparmál” or “The Language of Skaldship,” deals with the subject of “kennings,”<sup>3</sup> whose origin is explained by quotations from skaldic poems and other lore; the third, called “Háttatal” or “The Enumeration of *höttir* (metres),” contains Snorri's encomiastic poem, in 102 stanzas, on King Hákon and Duke Skúli, exemplifying as many metres employed in skaldship and giving explanations of the technical aspects of the skaldic art.<sup>4</sup>

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 group of synopses from older poetic sources which, in their turn, investigators ascribed to Saemundr. Hence when that lucky manuscript hunter, Bishop Brynjólfur, 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 Söemundr,” 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 Saemundr with *The Poetic Edda* 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, and since we lack any other collective title, the name of *Edda*, which properly belongs to Snorri's work, has been retained for all similar works. 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, who was progenitress of the race of thralls according to “The Lay of Ríg,” and whose name means “great-grandmother.” This identification was adopted by the great Jakob Grimm who, with his brother Wilhelm, was one of the first to undertake a scientific edition of part 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, instructing them in the lore and learning of the hoary past. However, as it happens, Snorri did not, 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, Árni Magnússon, and has been accepted by many. According to him, *Edda* means “poetics”—a title which (from a modern point of view) would seem eminently fitting for Snorri's work. Later scholars, who have provided a more solid philological underpinning for this theory than Arni was able to, also point out that the

simplex *óðr*, from which *Edda* may be derived, signifies “reason,” “soul” and hence “soulful utterance,” “poem,” agrees excellently, etymologically and semantically, with the related Latin *vates* and the Old Irish *faith*, “seer,” “poet.” Nevertheless, this explanation does not quite satisfy, for the word “Edda” in the meaning “poetics” is nowhere attested before the middle of the fourteenth century.

The simplest theory, agreeing best with the matter-of-fact Icelandic style of naming their writings, is the proposal of the Icelandic-English scholar, Eirík Magnússon. He reminded us that *Edda* may mean “the Book of Oddi.” This was the name of the renowned and historic parsonage in southwest Iceland which under that remarkable mind, Sœmundr Sigfússon, had become a center of learning whither flocked gifted youths eager for historical or clerical instruction. After his death, in 1133, the estate, continuing to prosper, kept up its tradition for learning under his two sons, and especially under his grandson, the wise and powerful chieftain, Jón Loptsson. It was he who fostered and tutored the three-year-old Snorri and under whose roof the boy lived until his nineteenth year. What is more likely than that Oddi with its traditions and associations played a profound role 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 inspiration there received, or whether he wished thus to indicate an indebtedness to manuscript collections of poems owned at 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 Brynjólfur, 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 few lays<sup>5</sup> of Eddic quality to those preserved in Brynjólf’s codex, which thus remains our chief source for them. This famous manuscript, now known as *Codex Regius No. 2365* of the Royal Library of Denmark, is a small quarto volume consisting of forty-five sheets closely covered with writing.<sup>6</sup> 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 Iclander of the last half of the thirteenth century. He must have copied it from, it seems, at least two manuscripts for the nature of a number of scribal errors shows that he did not write from memory or from dictation. Paleographic evidence furthermore shows that these postulated manuscripts themselves cannot have been older than the beginning of the thirteenth century; also, that they must have been written by different scribes, for there is a distinct paleographic and orthographic boundary between “Alvíssmál,” the last of the mythological lays in *Regius*, and the heroic lays. We know nothing concerning the provenience of this priceless collection, not even where it was preserved when Bishop Brynjólfur found it. 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 to the *Regius* comes the manuscript *Fragment 748* of the Arnamagnaean 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 Grímnir,” “The Lay of Hymir,” and part of “The Lay of Volund.” For all the differences between the manuscripts, scholars are unanimous in holding that it derives, ultimately, from the same source as *Regius*. The different ordering of the two collections may be due to the various lays having been handed down on single parchment leaves, which the scribe of *Regius* arranged as he saw fit. He no doubt was the author of the connecting prose links.

The large *Manuscript Codex No. 544* of the Arnamagnæan Collection, called *Hauksbók* 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* (referred to above) 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 *Flateyjarbók* because Brynjólfur 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 exists also a considerable number of paper manuscripts of the collection; but aside from the fact that some of them contain the undoubtedly genuine “Lay of Svipdag,” not found in earlier manuscripts, they are of no importance since 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. To be sure, they bear eloquent testimony to the continued interest of Icelanders in these poems.<sup>7</sup>

The Eddic lays which are found in these manuscripts, utterly diverse though they be in many respects, still have in common three important characteristics 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 folk songs and ballads, they are anonymous and objective, never betraying the feelings or attitudes of their authors. 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 Hár, 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>8</sup> The poems following in the present translation (“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 that the several smaller cycles form one large 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 (“Guthrún’s Lament,” “The Lay of Hamthir”).

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 “Sinfjotli’s Death,” which no doubt is a prose rendering of a lay now lost) the Prose Links for the most part add nothing, or very little, of independent value—nothing, indeed, which could not have been inferred from the poems themselves.<sup>9</sup> We shall hardly err in attributing these links to the intelligent, 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 Hjorvarthsson” and those of “The Second Lay of Helgi,” and with the Prose Links of the Sigurth Cycle from “The Lay of Regin” to “Brynhild’s Ride to Hel.” Especially the latter group notably resembles in manner the genre of the *Fornaldarsaga*—prose with interspersed stanzas—a form exceedingly common in Old Norse literature and one 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 and inept prose as to preclude, it would seem, the thought of their being by the same author.<sup>10</sup>

Even greater diversity of opinion obtains concerning the age and home of the lays themselves. As was stated above, in sharp contradiction to our knowledge of skaldic poetry, we know nothing about the author of any Eddic poem.<sup>11</sup> Nay, in only a very few, such as “The Lay of Gripir,” 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 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, translated, 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 or allude to it; but—note well—skaldic poems do not narrate directly, though some do describe in detail pictorial representations of scenes from mythology or legendary history. Hence, there the author is faithfully recorded if we owe him but a single stanza; just as was the troubadour and the minnesinger, in contrast with the anonymity of the *chansons de geste* and the German folk epics.

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 some fantastic theories, such as the uncritical notions of the Renaissance, that the poems harked back to the Old Germanic songs in praise of the gods of Tuisco and Mannus, 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, that they are composed in the language that was spoken only during and after the Viking Age (*ca.* 800-1050 A.D.), in Norway, Iceland, and the other Norwegian colonies in the Atlantic, and hence, in their present shape, 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 the Old Norse language 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.

More general considerations make it plausible that even the oldest of the lays could hardly have originated before the ninth century. Of the Heroic lays precisely those which also appear in other ways 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 the later times. And the Mythical lays, by and large, bespeak a period when belief in the 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 looks doubtfully 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, however, show traits of a legendary development which had not taken place in Germany before the ninth century—in other words, they presuppose another, later, stratum of importation.

Contrary to views formerly held, we now understand that the lays about the gods are, on the whole, younger than some of the heroic lays, which in substance (except the Helgi lays) deal with persons and events, real or fictive, of the Germanic tribes from the Black Sea to the Rhine during the Age of Migrations. In general we may say that, although there is little unanimity among scholars as to the dating of individual lays, the



composition of the corpus of Eddic poetry can safely be ascribed, not to a single generation, not even to a single century, but to 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: “Atlamál,” which is generally allowed to be of Greenlandish origin, and “The Prophecy of Grípir,” which no doubt was composed by an Iclander of the twelfth century or later who had before him a collection of the lays dealing with the Sigurth legends. But a strong diversity of opinion exists concerning the place of origin of the bulk of the lays.

For one thing, no evidence can be derived from the language because the Old West Norse of the *Edda* was spoken with scarcely a dialectal variation throughout the far-flung lands of the North Atlantic littorals 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 flourished there especially throughout the tenth century, favored by a period of comparative calm following the organization of the realm by Harald Fairhair; 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, mythologic, gnostic, and heroic. In every respect their milieu is that of a cold, mountainous land by the sea. One, “The Lay of Hyndla,” may refer to a Norwegian princely race; another, “The Lay of Ríg,” glorifies the institution of monarchy based on an aristocracy; both poems but poorly agree with Icelandic, republican conditions.

The theory of origin in the British Islands settled by Norwegians—the Orkneys, the Shetland Islands, the Hebrides, the Isle of Man, and the littoral of Ireland, Scotland, and Northern England, is based on several 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 some Celtic influences are seen in the apparel, the architecture, and the wood carving of ancient Scandinavia. In literature the saga, and possibly also skaldic verse, were thought to owe their inception to Irish impulses. Also a small number of both mythical and heroic motifs occurring in the *Edda* may have congeners in the British Islands. Now, most of these claims are discounted by modern scholarship.

Those who argue Icelandic origin admit that Anglo-Celtic influences are evident, but insist that this can be amply 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 shorter or longer periods, frequently even wintering, and whence they had brought with them a goodly number of Celtic slaves and freedmen. Also, on their return journeys to the motherland they frequently touched at North British, and especially at 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, Sighvat Thórh-arson, not to mention scores of others—and hence probably was no more unfavorable 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. Indeed the whole people clung to their cultural traditions all the more tenaciously for being separated from their original homes. In general, the defenders of Icelandic origin would put the burden of proof on those who contend that the Eddic lays did not take at least their final, distinctive shape in the land where arose, and was perpetuated, virtually all of Old Norse literature. Certainly, the later poems definitely point to Iceland. On the other hand this does not preclude a number of stanzas, particularly the gnomic ones representing the stored wisdom of the race, from having originated in Norway.

Of late the Norwegian paleographer Seip has endeavored to demonstrate, on the basis of a number of Norwegianisms in *Codex Regius*, that all the Eddic lays were originally composed in Norway. Other scholars would ascribe these to a pervading influence from the motherland, since several manuscripts of unquestionable Icelandic origin also show Norwegianisms.

All this raises the question as to the ultimate source, or sources, of the matter of the Eddic poems. Were they all or partly indigenous to Scandinavia?

With regard to the mythological poems we shall probably never know, though here and there we seem to glimpse a connection with classical or oriental legends. But in all cases the matter has undergone such a sea change that we never get beyond the verdict “perhaps.”

With the Helgi poems we are on somewhat firmer ground. The Vendel Period of Scandinavian hegemony (550-800) in the north of Europe, attested by innumerable archeological finds in the western Baltic lands, may well have been accompanied by a flourishing poetic literature of which these lays (and *Bēowulf*) may be remnants.

The matter of the Niflung cycle undoubtedly is of German (Burgundian) provenience; and much has been made by German scholars of faint South and West Germanic traces in the style and language of the lays dealing with the Gjúkungs, Sigurth, and Atli. But whether these stories were transmitted to the North in poetic form or only there received their characteristic aspects, that is another question. The fact that only on Scandinavian soil did a rich literature actually arise as early as the ninth century, although its origins date even further back, would seem to speak for the latter assumption. But in the case of the retrospective and elegiac monologue poems<sup>12</sup> it has been convincingly demonstrated that they share many motifs, phrases, even vocables, with what must have been the forerunners of the Danish ballads.

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

pronounced.

The figure of speech called a “kenning” is a kind of condensed metaphorical expression. It most often contains a real, or implied, comparison, or else defines a concept with reference to something else. Thus, a ship (which may be thought of as galloping over the waves) is called a “sailsteed”; a warrior, a “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). Or instead of naming a person or object directly, there is a reference to somebody, or something, else. Thór, for example, 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>13</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 similar names, referring to the 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 poetic fervor,<sup>14</sup> in Old Germanic, and particularly Old Norse, poetry they have become stereotyped; that is, entirely independent of the situation in hand, and hence are apt, at first, to appear to us farfetched and frigid, 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 type 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 skaldic usage from afar. In “The Lay of Alvís” the express didactic purpose is to cultivate copiousness of diction by enumerating the “unknown names” (*heiti*) and kennings by which common objects may be designated.

Although somewhat less prominent, 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 translation. There is variation of words, of conceptions, of verses; and there is refrain.

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

With his friend a man      should be friends ever,  
and pay back gift for gift;  
laughter for laughter      he learn to give,  
  
and eke lesing for lies.

More frequent, and also more characteristic, is the repetition of related, or contrasting, conceptions. These are usually joined by alliteration, and occasionally by rime, so as to form together a half-line. Thus: “bark nor bast,” “he gives and grants,” “shalt drivell and dote,” “in wine and in wort,” “whet me or let me.”

Peculiar to Eddic poetry is the repetition, with or without variations, of entire half-lines. One example for many will suffice:

I issue bore      as heirs twain sons,  
as heirs twain sons      to the atheling.

With variation:

I saw but naught said,      I saw and thought.

Repetition (with variation) of a full-line occurs in the so-called *galdralag* or “magic measure” of the *ljóðaháttr* stanza:[15](#)

No other drink      shalt ever get,  
wench, at thy will,  
wench, at my will.

Refrain—for example, the “know ye further, or how” of “The Seeress’ Prophecy”—and incremental repetition—especially in the gnomic poetry[16](#)—are occasionally used with telling effect.

Only less characteristic of skaldic art than the unlimited use of kennings is the employment of parenthetical phrases—usually containing an accompanying circumstance. In *The Edda* the device occurs infrequently, and most often in “The First Lay of Helgi the Hunding-Slayer,” which also approaches skaldic art in the use of kennings; for example (Stanza 17):

But high on horseback      Hogni’s daughter—  
was the shield-din lulled—      to the lord spoke thus.

In contrast with Old West Germanic poetry, which is stichic, and quite generally uses run-on lines, Old Norse poetry is strophic, the stanzas as a rule being of four lines each. Each stanza is most commonly divided into two *vísuhelms* or “half stanzas,” by a syntactic cæsure.

This is the rule; but imperfect stanzas occur too frequently to be explained away in all cases by defective tradition. It is certainly worth pondering, however, that unexceptional regularity is found, on the one hand, in poems whose question-answer form offered a mnemotechnic help to preservation, and on the other, in those that belong to the youngest strata; whereas lays which, for a number of reasons, seem among the oldest—for example, “The Lay of Volund” and “The Lay of Hamthir”—are quite irregular in this respect. The inference seems plausible that stanzaic structure was a later and specifically Scandinavian development, the bulk of Old Norse monuments being younger, both chronologically and developmentally, than most West Germanic monuments.

Like the mass of Old Germanic poetic monuments, the Eddic lays are composed in

alliterative verse; in verse, that is, whose essential principles are stress and concomitant alliteration.

The rhythmic unit of alliterative verse is the so-called “half-line,” represented in metrics by convention as dipodic. These two feet, as will be seen, may be of very different lengths. In the normal 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 (and concomitant alliteration) generally requires a long syllable and is conventionally represented thus:  $\underline{\text{L}}$ . However, it may also be borne by two short syllables (“resolved stress”), thus:  $\underline{\text{U U}}$  “a *salar steina*,”<sup>17</sup> where *salar* constitutes two short syllables; this may be paralleled by “that etin’s beerhall,” with *etin* reckoned as two shorts); or else by one short syllable immediately following a stressed long syllable, thus:  $\underline{\text{L U}}$  (especially in type C; for example, *mun Baldr koma*, “X  $\underline{\text{L}} \mid \underline{\text{U}}$  X”) (see the discussion of rhythmic patterns below). In the unstressed syllable, quantity is indifferent, marked thus: X.

The juxtaposition of two stresses without intervening unstressed syllable, so rarely used in modern poetry, is not only permitted but is a distinctive feature in Old Germanic poetry. It gives rise to the rhythmic types C and D (see below), where a strong primary, or secondary, stress may fall on important suffixal or compositional syllables, and on stem syllables of the second member of compounds: for example, “es hann  $\underline{\text{vakna}}\text{ði}$  (C), “ $\underline{\text{hatim}}$  *bruðu*” (D). The following may serve as English examples: “The  $\underline{\text{sun}}$   $\underline{\text{knew}}$  not,” “a  $\underline{\text{hall}}$   $\underline{\text{standeth}}$ ,” “ $\underline{\text{till}}$   $\underline{\text{trustingly}}$ .”

Always, two half-lines, each an independent rhythmic unit, are joined together by alliteration to form the “long-line.” Alliteration, or initial rime, consists in an initial consonant alliterating, or riming, with the same consonant (except that *sk*, *sp*, and *st* alliterate only with themselves), and a vowel alliterating with any other vowel; but—note well—alliteration occurs only at the beginning of *stressed syllables*. Because the verse is addressed to hearers, not to readers, “eye-rimes” are not permitted. Also, alliteration may be borne only by words of syntactic importance.

In Old Norse verse, alliterating initial sounds are called *stafir*, “staves,” the one of the second half-line, *hqfuðstafir*, “main-stave,” governing the whole line. Somewhat greater latitude is allowed in Eddic poetry than in Old English poetry in the matter of the “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.

Beyond stating that alliteration is the bearing principle in their verse the ancients made no statement about how this verse is to be read. Simple observation shows that the alliteration is borne only by stressed syllables concomitant with the syntactic importance of the word, and also that the stress is borne predominantly by nominal elements—nouns, adjectives, and pronouns. As stated earlier, there is agreement among scholars that the half-line is dipodic. But there is divergence of opinion about the disposition and relative stress of the various elements of the half-line, that is, about its rhythm.

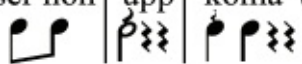
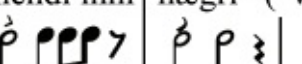
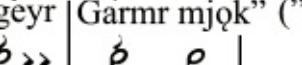
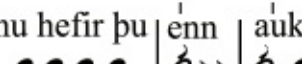
On purely empiric grounds the great German philologist and phonetician, Sievers, classified the occurring rhythmic patterns—reduced to their shortest, four-syllabic, form—as follows:



Type A:	$\frac{1}{-} \times   \frac{1}{-} \times$ example: “Geyr nu Garmr mjök” (“Garm bays loudly”)
Type B:	$\times \frac{1}{-}   \times \frac{1}{-}$ example: “hann sjaldan sitr” (“he seldom sits”)
Type C:	$\times \frac{1}{-}   \cup \times$ example: “mun Baldr koma” (“will Baldr come then”)
Type D:	$\frac{1}{-}   \times \backslash \times \times$ example: “vinr verliða” (“mens’ well-wisher”)
Type E:	$\frac{1}{-} \backslash \times   \frac{1}{-}$ example: “eisandi gekk” (“dashed through the waves”)

In other words, of the six possible permutations of four syllables, but one is not admissible, or at least occurs very rarely, 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.

Objections against Sievers’ theory were raised, chiefly by the musically trained Swiss philologist, Heusler. While by all means having regard to rhythm, he would take into account also the time element. According to him the half-line consists of two measures in four-fourth time, each of which may have from one to six syllables—the fewer the syllables, the longer each is, and the more emotionally charged<sup>18</sup> (and, probably, the higher pitched), with a pause following to fill any remaining time in the measure. And contrariwise, the more numerous the syllables, the shorter and the more weightless. Thus, using musical notation to express relative time:

“ser hon   upp   koma” (“sees she come up”)

“hendi inni   hægri” (“with the right hand”)

“geyr   Garmr mjök” (“bays Garm much”)

“nu hefir þu   enn   aukit” (“now hast thou still more increased”)


As will be understood, both theories require liberal allowance for anacrusis (upbeats). It cannot, of course, be the purpose here to go into details as to subtypes in either theory.

A stanza of eight half-lines, each an independent rhythmic unit, is said to be in *fornyrðislag*, or “Old Lore Metre.” This is the measure in which the great majority of Eddic poems are composed.

In the closely related *málahátt*, or “Speech Metre (?),” essentially the same types occur, but with the half-line expanded to from five to seven syllables (contrasted with four or five in *fornyrðislag*). 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 *ljóðaháttir* or “Song (or Magic) Metre” is a stanzaic form consisting of two symmetrical half-stanzas, each of which is made up of the usual *fornyrdislag* long-line followed by a so-called “full-line” without caesura and, as far as can be made out, without definite structure. This full-line alliterates in itself. The number of syllables may vary from four to eight, and the alliteration may fall on two or three of the stressed syllables. About one third of the Eddic poems, mostly of gnomic content, follow this scheme.

“The Lay of Hárbarth” follows no ascertainable scheme but seems to differ from prose only by possessing a certain rhythm and making general use of alliteration.

In view of the utter difference between Old Germanic verse and any modern or classic 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 set forth above before attempting to recite Eddic lays—and indeed he should recite them, for they are meant for the ear, not the eye.

In reciting the Eddic lays it should ever be kept in mind that the strongly expiratory nature of Germanic verse demands very strongly stressed syllables, and correspondingly weak or slurred unstressed syllables. Juxtaposed stresses must by no means be avoided; in fact, type C is of extremely common occurrence. 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 we must be careful to read not “who made Mithgarth,” but “who made Mithgarth.”

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, and prepositions must be used than in the highly inflected Old Norse. A liberal use of anacrusis (upbeats), to dispose of them, cannot well be avoided, and this use swells 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 hoarded and hidden” should not occupy more time than the line “save one only.”

I have followed Sophus Bugge’s text in the main, but by no means always, because, for the purpose in hand, a somewhat constructive text is called for—one not fatuously sceptical 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 the emendations be shown as such. I have considered it unavoidable to transpose stanzas and lines for the sake of intelligible connection. In fact, this course must be chosen to accomplish an aesthetically 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.<sup>19</sup>

I hope I shall not be criticized for confining myself to the body of 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;<sup>20</sup> 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>21</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 . . . 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. . . . *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 of synonymic expressions 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, *Alví* or *Allwise*; *Thór*, *Sithgrani's son* or *Longbeard's son*; the seeress, *Hyndla* or *Houndling*; the localities *Gnipalund* and *Hátun*, *Cliffholt* and *Hightown*? Shall we say *Alfheim*, *Elfham*, or *Alf-home*? Are we to render *Skjoldungar*, *Ylfingar* by *Shieldings* and *Wolfings*? I do not hesitate 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 Prophecy of the Seeress

## Völuspá1

Significantly, the poem referred to in the *Prose Edda* of Snorri as “Völuspá” 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, giving glimpses of the fates of gods and powers of the eld, glimpses of the past and the future of the world. Norse terseness, here at its best, accomplishes a triumph in condensing a world of meaning into narrowest compass. A certain stern ethical pathos in some passages is consonant with the sombre tone of the whole.

None of the Eddic poems has been a theme for greater controversy; which is not to be wondered at, considering the condition of the text, with its vague outlines, its hopeless confusion of statement (even beyond the inevitable self-contradictions of any primitive cosmogony), its puzzling gaps, its abrupt transitions, and its obscure allusions—all of which make elaborate commentary indispensable for understanding. In general, there is little agreement among scholars on even 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:

In the beginning how the heavens and earth  
Rose out of Chaos ...

She tells how man is given the breath of life, how 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 Pandoralike 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 gods (now united?) with the world of the 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 seeress foretells the downfall of the gods, heralded by general depravity, the breaking 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 they find traces of Christianity in the poem as a whole; but at present the best scholarship would declare as 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 knowledge pervaded the North in the ninth and tenth centuries—times when the imagination was stimulated vigorously through the multifarious activities of the “Viking Age.” A study of the language (the verse form is *fornyrðislag*) of the poem has led to a similar conclusion. For all that, however, much of the matter of the poem may be of considerably earlier date. Recent study has suggested that the cosmogonic part, the first twenty-seven stanzas, pieced together as it is from snatches and patches of hoary antiquity—some of extraordinary power—was added later to a compositionally younger eschatological poem.

The “Völuspá” is found in the *Codex Regius* and in the *Hauksbók*. The latter version, though on the whole inferior to that of the *Codex Regius*, sometimes has a better text. In addition, 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>2</sup>  
thou wilt, Valfather,<sup>3</sup> that I well set forth  
the fates of the world which as first I recall.
2. I call to mind the kin of etins  
which long ago did give me life.  
Nine worlds I know, the nine abodes  
of the glorious world-tree<sup>4</sup> the ground beneath.
3. In earliest times did Ymir<sup>5</sup> live:  
was nor sea nor land nor salty waves,  
neither earth was there nor upper heaven,  
but a gaping nothing, and green things nowhere.
4. Was the land then lifted aloft by Bur's sons<sup>6</sup>  
who made Mithgarth,<sup>7</sup> the matchless earth;  
shone from the south the sun on dry land,  
on the ground then grew the greensward soft.
5. From the south the sun, by the side of the moon,  
heaved his right hand over heaven's rim;<sup>8</sup>  
the sun knew not what seat he had,  
the stars knew not what stead they held,  
the moon knew not what might she had.
6. Then gathered together the gods for counsel,  
the holy hosts, and held converse;  
to night and new moon their names they gave,  
the morning named, and midday also,  
forenoon and evening, to order the year.

7. On Itha Plain<sup>9</sup> met the mighty gods;  
shrines and temples they timbered high,  
they founded forges to fashion gold,  
tongs they did shape and tools they made;

8. Played at draughts in the garth: right glad they were,  
nor aught lacked they of lustrous gold—  
till maidens three<sup>10</sup> from the thurses came,  
awful in might, from etin-home.<sup>11</sup>

... ..

17. To the coast<sup>12</sup> then came, kind and mighty,  
from the gathered gods three great Æsir;  
on the land they found, of little strength,  
Ask and Embla,<sup>13</sup> unfated yet.

18. Sense they possessed not, soul they had not,  
being nor bearing, nor blooming hue;  
soul gave Óthin,<sup>14</sup> sense gave Hœnir,<sup>15</sup>  
being, Lóthur, and blooming hue.

19. An ash I know, hight Yggdrasil,<sup>16</sup>  
the mighty tree moist with white dews;  
thence come the floods that fall adown;  
evergreen o'ertops Urth's<sup>17</sup> well this tree.

20. Thence wise maidens three betake them—  
under spreading boughs their bower stands—  
[Urth one is hight, the other, Verthandi,  
Skuld the third: they scores did cut,  
they laws did make, they lives did choose:  
for the children of men they marked their fates.

21. <sup>18</sup>I ween the first war in the world was this,  
when the gods Gullveig gashed with their spears,  
and in the hall of Hár<sup>19</sup> burned her—  
three times burned they the thrice reborn,  
ever and anon: even now she liveth.

22. Heith<sup>20</sup> she was hight where to houses she came,  
the wise seeress, and witchcraft plied—  
cast spells where she could, cast spells on the mind:  
to wicked women she was welcome ever.

23. Then gathered together the gods for counsel,

the holy hosts, and held converse:  
should the Æsir a truce with tribute buy,  
or should all gods share in the feast.[21](#)

24. His spear had Óthin sped o'er the host:[22](#)  
the first of feuds was thus fought in the world;  
was broken in battle the breastwork of Ásgarth,[23](#)  
fighting Vanir trod the field of battle.

25. Then gathered together the gods for counsel,  
the holy hosts, and held converse:  
who had filled the air with foul treason,  
and to uncouth etins Óth's wife[24](#) given.

26. Thewy Thór[25](#) then overthrew the foe—  
he seldom sits when of such he hears:  
were sworn oaths broken, and solemn vows,  
gods' plighted troth, the pledges given.

27. Where Heimdall's horn is hid, she[26](#) knows,  
under heaven-touching, holy world-tree;  
on it are shed showery falls  
from Fjolnir's pledge:[27](#) know ye further, or how?[28](#)

28. Alone she sat out[29](#) when the lord of gods,  
Óthin the old, her eye did seek:  
“What seekest to know, why summon me?  
Well know I, Ygg,[30](#) where thy eye is hidden:  
in the wondrous well of Mímir;  
each morn Mímir his mead doth drink  
out of Fjolnir's pledge: know ye further, or how?

29. Gave Ygg to her arm rings and gems  
for her seeress' sight and soothsaying:  
(the fates I fathom, yet farther I see,)[31](#)  
see far and wide the worlds about.

30. [The valkyries'[32](#) flock from afar she beholds,  
ready to ride to the realm of men:  
Skuld held her shield, Skogul likewise,  
Guth, Hild, Gondul, and Geirskogul:  
for thus are hight Herjan's[33](#) maidens,  
ready to ride o'er reddened battlefields.]

31. I saw for Baldr,[34](#) the blessed[35](#) god,  
Ygg's dearest son, what doom is hidden:

green and glossy,    there grew aloft,  
the trees among,    the mistletoe.

32. The slender-seeming    sapling became  
a fell weapon    when flung by Hoth;[36](#)  
but Baldr's brother    was born full soon:  
but one night old    slew him Óthin's son.[37](#)
33. Neither cleansed his hands    nor combed his hair  
till Baldr's slayer[38](#)    he sent to Hel;[39](#)  
but Frigg[40](#) did weep    in Fensalir  
the fateful deed:    know ye further, or how?
34. A captive lies    in the kettle-grove,[41](#)  
like to lawless    Loki in shape;[42](#)  
there sits Sigyn,    full sad in mind,  
by her fettered mate:    know ye further, or how?
35. From the east[43](#) there flows    through fester-dales,  
a stream hight Slíth,[44](#)    filled with swords and knives.
36. [45](#)Waist-deep wade there    through waters swift  
mainsworn men    and murderous,  
eke those who betrayed    a trusted friend's wife;  
there gnaws Níthhogg[46](#)    naked corpses,  
there the Wolf[47](#) rends men—    wit ye more, or how?
37. Stood in the north    on the Nitha Fields[48](#)  
a dwelling golden    which the dwarfs did own;  
another stood    on Ókólnir,[49](#)  
that etin's beer-hall,    who is Brimir hight.
38. A hall she saw,    from the sun so far,  
on Ná Strand's[50](#) shore:    turn north[51](#) its doors;  
drops of poison    drip through the louver,  
its walls are clad    with coiling snakes.
39. In the east sat the old one,[52](#)    in the Iron-Woods,[53](#)  
bred there the bad    brood of Fenrir;[54](#)  
will one of these,    worse than they all,  
the sun swallow,    in seeming a wolf.
40. He feeds on the flesh    of fallen men,  
with their blood sullies    the seats of the gods;  
will grow swart the sunshine    in summers thereafter,  
the weather, woe-bringing:[55](#)    do ye wit more, or how?



41. His harp striking, on hill[56](#) there sat  
gladsome Eggthér,[57](#) he who guards the ogress;  
o'er him gaily in the gallows tree  
crowed the fair red cock which is Fjalar[58](#) hight.
42. Crowed o'er the gods Gullinkambi;[59](#)  
wakes he the heroes who with Herjan dwell;[60](#)  
another crows the earth beneath  
in the halls of Hel, of hue dark red.
43. Garm[61](#) bays loudly before Gnipa cave,  
breaks his fetters and freely runs.  
The fates I fathom, yet farther I see:  
of the mighty gods the engulfing doom.
44. 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 the other.[62](#)
45. Mímir's sons dance;[63](#) the downfall bodes  
when blares the gleaming old Gjallarhorn;[64](#)  
loud blows Heimdall, with horn aloft;  
in Hel's dark hall horror spreadeth,  
once more Óthin with Mím's head speaketh[65](#)  
ere Surt's sib[66](#) swallows him.
46. Trembles the towering tree Yggdrasil,  
its leaves sough loudly: unleashed is the etin.
47. What ails the Æsir and what the alfs?[67](#)  
In uproar all etins— are the Æsir met  
. At the gates of their grots the wise dwarfs groan  
in their fell fastnesses: wit ye further, or how?
48. Garm bays loudly before Gnipa cave,  
breaks his fetters and freely runs.  
The fates I fathom, yet farther I see:  
of the mighty gods the engulfing doom.
49. Fares Hrym[68](#) from the east, holding his shield;  
the Mithgarth-Worm[69](#) in mighty rage  
scatters the waves; screams the eagle,[70](#)  
his nib tears the dead; Naglfar[71](#) loosens.

50. Sails a ship from the east with shades from Hel;  
o'er the ocean stream steers it Loki;  
in the wake of the Wolf rush witless hordes  
who with baleful Byleist's brother<sup>72</sup> do fare.
51. Comes Surt<sup>73</sup> from the South with the singer-of-twigs,<sup>74</sup>  
the war god's sword<sup>75</sup> like a sun doth shine;  
the tall hills totter, and trolls stagger,  
men fare to Hel, the heavens rive.
52. Another woe awaiteth Hlín,<sup>76</sup>  
when forth goes Óthin to fight the Wolf,  
and the slayer of Beli<sup>77</sup> to battle with Surt:  
then Frigg's husband will fall lifeless.
53. Strides forth Víthar,<sup>78</sup> Valfather's son,  
the fearless fighter, Fenrir to slay;  
to the heart he hews the Hvethrung's<sup>79</sup> son;  
avenged is then Víthar's father.
54. <sup>80</sup>Comes then Mjolnir's<sup>81</sup> mighty wielder;  
gapes the grisly earth-girdling Serpent  
when strides forth Thór to stay the Worm.
55. Mightily mauls Mithgarth's warder—<sup>82</sup>  
shall all wights in the world wander from home—;<sup>83</sup>  
back falls nine steps Fjorgyn's offspring—<sup>84</sup>  
nor fears for his fame— from the frightful worm.
56. 'Neath sea the land sinketh, the sun dimmeth,  
from the heavens fall the fair bright stars;  
gusheth forth steam and gutting fire,<sup>85</sup>  
to very heaven soar the hurtling flames.
57. <sup>86</sup>Garm bays loudly before Gnipa cave,  
breaks his fetters and freely runs.  
The fates I fathom, yet farther I see:  
of the mighty gods the engulfing doom.
58. I see green again with growing things  
the earth arise from out of the sea;  
fell torrents flow, overflies them the eagle,  
on hoar highlands which hunts for fish.
59. Again the Æsir on Itha Plain meet,  
and speak of the mighty Mithgarth-Worm—

again go over the great world-doom,  
and Fimbultýr's<sup>87</sup> unfathomed runes.

60. Then in the grass the golden figures,<sup>88</sup>  
the far-famed ones, will be found again,  
which they had owned in olden days.

61. On unsown acres the ears will grow,  
all ill grow better; will Baldr come then.  
Both he and Hoth will in Hropt's<sup>89</sup> hall dwell,  
the war gods' fane: do ye wit more, or how?

62. Then will Hœnir handle the blood-wands,<sup>90</sup>  
and Ygg's brothers' sons<sup>91</sup> will forever dwell  
in wide Wind-Home:<sup>92</sup> do ye wit more, or how?

63. I see a hall than the sun more fair,  
thatched with red gold, which is Gimlé<sup>93</sup> hight.  
There will the gods all guiltless throne,  
and live forever in ease and bliss.

64. Adown cometh to the doom of the world  
the great godhead<sup>94</sup> which governs all.

65. Comes the darksome dragon flying,  
Níthhogg, upward from the Nitha Fells;<sup>95</sup>  
he bears in his pinions as the plains he o'erflies,  
naked corpses: now he will sink.<sup>96</sup>



# The Sayings of Hár1

## Hávamál

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 are given such classic illustration in the Icelandic sagas.

At least five separate sections can be made out in the poem. The first, consisting of seventy-nine stanzas (in *ljóðaháttir* metre), is a series of counsels on the more common situations of life. They stress especially the laws of hospitality, the rules of decent conduct, the value of circumspection in one's dealings with men, the need for moderation in eating and drinking, the vanity of mere wealth compared with true merit—all in the spirit of Germanic heathendom, with many a pearl of shrewd wisdom, of terse humor, of noble sentiment. We may single out for admiration the deeply moving stanzas on having a home of one's own, however humble (Sts. 36–37), and those magnificently asseverating the lastingness, in a world subject to the law of change, of a fair name (Sts. 77–78).

The ensuing stanzas (80–90) are of irregular structure and more largely proverbial in substance. They form the transition to the second portion of the poem, the so-called “Ensamples of Óthin” (Sts. 91–110, in *Ijóðaháttir* metre), 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” (Sts. 111–137, for the most part in irregular *Ijóðaháttir*). It contains miscellaneous counsels, on such subjects as love and friendship, supposedly given to the “thul”<sup>2</sup> Loddfáfnir by Óthin himself. As a whole, this portion is notably inferior to the first.

A fourth part, the so-called “Rune Poem” (Sts. 138–146), composed in somewhat incoherent stanzaic forms, deals obscurely with Runic wisdom as acquired and taught by Óthin.

Last, there are 18 magic charms in *ljóðaháttir*, efficient to make dull the blades of swords, to cure disease, to calm the sea, and to perform other useful services, if used with the proper “runes.” We shall meet with similar collections in the “Sigrdrífumál” and “Grógaldur.”

Manifestly, the poem is not a homogeneous whole but a congeries of aphorisms, proverbs, magic lore, and the like, which we owe to some early collector. Attempts toward a better ordering of the material have not carried conviction. To establish the age and provenience of such a collection is, from the nature of the case, not feasible. However, Norwegian origin seems likely for the most of it. We know that at least some stanzas existed in the tenth century, for certain lines are quoted (or composed, for all we know) by the noted skald Eyvind Skaldaspillir who died toward the end of that century. The *Codex Regius*, our sole source for the collection, also gives us the title. Stanza 1 is quoted in the *Prose Edda*,<sup>3</sup> Stanza 84, Lines 4–6 in the *Fóstbræðra saga*, [Chapter 21](#).

1. Have thy eyes about thee      when thou enterest  
    be wary alway,  
    be watchful alway;  
for one never knoweth      when need will be  
    to meet hidden foe in the hall.[4](#)
2. All hail to the givers![5](#)      A guest hath come  
    say where shall he sit?  
In haste is he      to the hall who cometh,  
    to find a place by the fire.
3. The warmth seeketh      who hath wandered long  
    and is numb about his knees;  
meat and dry clothes      the man needeth  
    over the fells who hath fared.
4. A drink needeth      to full dishes who cometh,  
    a towel,[6](#) and the prayer to partake;  
good bearing eke,      to be well liked  
    and be bidden to banquet again.[7](#)
5. Of his wit hath need      who widely fareth—  
    a dull wit will do at home;  
a laughingstock 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.][8](#)
7. The wary guest      to wassail who comes  
    listens that he may learn,[9](#)  
opens 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.
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 worser food      farest thou never  
        than an overmuch of mead.
12. For good is not,      though good is it thought,  
        mead for the sons of men;  
the deeper he drinks      the dimmer grows  
        the mind of many a man.
13. The heron of heedlessness      hovers o'er the feast,[10](#)  
        and stealeth the minds of men.  
With that fowl's feathers      fettered I was  
        when I was Gunnloth's guest.[11](#)
14. Drunk I became,      dead drunk, forsooth,  
        when I was with wise Fjalar;[12](#)  
that bout is best      from which back fetches  
        each man his mind full clear.
15. Let a king's offspring      be sparing in words,  
        and bold in battle;  
glad and wholesome      the hero be  
        till comes his dying day.
16. The unwise man thinks      that he ay will live,  
        if from fighting he flees;  
but the ails and aches      of old age dog him  
        though spears have spared him.
17. The fool but gapes      when to folks he comes,  
        he mumbles and mopes;  
soon is seen,      when his swill he had,  
        what the mind of the man is like.
18. Only he is aware      who hath wandered much,  
        and far hath been afield,  
what manner of man      be he whom he meets,  
        if himself be not wanting in wit.

19. The cup spurn not,      yet be sparing withal:  
      say what is needful, or naught;  
for ill breeding      upbraids thee no man  
      if soon thou goest to sleep.
20. The greedy guest    gainsays his head  
      and eats until he is ill;  
his belly oft maketh    a butt of a man,  
      on bench 'midst the sage when he sits.
21. The herd do know      when home they shall,  
      and gang from the grass to their stalls;  
but the unwise man      will not ever learn  
      how much his maw will hold.
22. The ill-minded man    who meanly thinks,  
      fleers at both foul and fair;  
he does not know,      as know he ought,  
      that he is not free from flaws.
23. The unwise man    waketh all night,  
      thinking of this and that—  
tosses, sleepless,    and is tired at morn:  
      nor lighter for that his load.
24. The unwise man    weens that all  
      who laugh with him, like him, too;  
nor sees their scorn,    though they sneer at him,  
      on bench 'midst the sage when he sits.
25. The unwise man    weens that all  
      that laugh with him, like him, too;  
but then he finds,    when to the Thing<sup>13</sup> he comes,  
      few spokesmen to speed his cause.
26. The unwise man    weens he knows all,  
      if 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 comes,  
      let him be sparing of speech;  
for no one knows    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 everyone's lips.

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

30. No mock make thou of any man,  
though thou comest among kinsmen;  
he knowing weens him whom no one has asked,  
and dry-shod hies him home.[14](#)

31. A wise man he who hies him betimes  
from the man who likes to mock;  
for at table who teases can never tell  
what foe he might have to fight.[15](#)

32. Many a man means no ill,  
yet teases the other at table;  
strife will ever start among men  
when guest clashes with guest.

33. An early meal ay 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 ay a far way 'tis,  
though his roof be reared by the road;  
to stanch friend ay a straight way leads,  
though far he have fared from thee.

35. Get thee gone betimes; a guest should not  
stay too long in one stead;  
lief grows loath if too long one sits  
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 knows    when need might have  
on a sudden a man of his sword.

39. So freehanded never    found I a man  
but would gladly take what is given;[16](#)  
nor of his goods    so ungrudging ever,  
to forego what is given him.

40. Of his wordly goods    which he gotten hath  
let a man not stint overmuch;  
oft is lavished on foe    what for friend was saved,  
for matters go often amiss.

41. With weapons and weeds    should friends be won,  
as one can see in themselves;[17](#)  
those who give to each other    will ay be friends,  
once they meet half way.

42. With his friend a man    should be friends ever,  
and pay back gift for gift;  
laughter for laughter[18](#)    he learn to give,  
and eke lesing for lies.

43. With his friend a man    should be friends ever,  
with him and the friend of his friend;  
but foeman's friend    befriend thou never,  
(and keep thee aloof from his kin),[19](#)

44. If friend thou hast    whom faithful thou deemest,  
and wishest to win him for thee:  
ope thy heart to him    nor withhold thy gifts,  
and fare to find him often.

45. If another there be    whom ill thou trustest,  
yet would'st get from him gain:  
speak fair to him    though false thou meanest,  
and pay him lesing for lies.

46. And eke this heed:    if ill thou trust one,  
and hollow-hearted his speech:  
thou shalt laugh with him    and lure him on,

and let him have tit for tat.

47. Young was I once and went alone,  
and wandering lost my way;  
when a friend I found I felt me rich:  
man is cheered by man.

48. He who giveth gladly a goodly life leadeth,  
and seldom hath he sorrow;  
but the churlish wight is chary of all,  
and grudgingly parts with his gifts.

49. In the fields as I fared, (for fun) I hung  
my weeds on two wooden men;[20](#)  
they were reckoned folks when the rags they wore:  
naked, a man is naught.

50. The fir tree dies in the field that stands;  
shields it nor bark nor bast;  
thus eke the man who by all is shunned:  
why should he linger in life?

51. Than fire hotter for five days burneth  
love between friends that are false;  
it dieth down when dawneth the sixth,  
then all the sweetness turns sour.

52. Not great things needs give to a man:  
bringeth thanks oft a little thing;  
with half a loaf and a half-drained cup  
I won me oft worthy friend.[21](#)

53. A little lake hath but little sand;[22](#)  
but small the mind of man;  
not all men are equally wise,  
each wight wanteth somewhat.

54. Middling wise every man should be:  
beware of being too wise;  
happiest in life most likely he  
who knows not more than is needful.

55. Middling wise every man should be:  
beware of being too wise;  
for wise man's heart is happy seldom,  
if too great the wisdom he won.

56. Middling wise      every man should be:  
    beware of being too wise;  
his fate let no one    beforehand know  
    who would keep his heart from care.
57. Kindles brand from brand,      and burns till all burnt it is:  
    thus fire is kindled from fire;  
by the words of his mouth      a man is known,  
    but from his dumbness a dullard.[23](#)
58. Betimes must rise      who would take another's  
    life and win his wealth;  
lying down wolf      never got the lamb,  
    nor sleeping wight slew his foe.
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.[24](#)
61. Well-groomed and washed[25](#)      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 billowing brine;  
thus eke a man      among a throng  
    who finds but few to befriend him.[26](#)
63. Both ask and answer      let everyone  
    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 strength,  
    'twill be found that first is no one.[27](#)
65. (Watchful and wary      everyone should be,

nor put too much trust in a friend;)[28](#)  
the words by one      unwarily spoken,  
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 hapless one right.

67. Here or there      would they have me in,  
if no meat at the meal I craved,  
or hung 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 at death's door he lie:  
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):[29](#)  
to the quick fall ay the cattle;  
the hearth fire burned      for the happy heir—  
outdoors a dead man lay.[30](#)

71. May the halt ride a horse,      and the handless be herdsman,  
the deaf man may doughtily fight,  
a blind man is better      than a burned one, ay:  
of what gain is a good man dead?

72. To have a son is good,      late-got though he be,  
and born when buried his father;  
stones[31](#) see'st thou seldom      set by the roadside  
but by kith raised over kinsmen.

73. [32](#)[Two will down one;      of tongue is head's bane;  
a fist I fear      'neath every furry coat.

74. Of the night is fain      whose knapsack is full;  
close are ship's quarters.[33](#)  
Fickle are the nights in fall;  
there's both fair and foul      in five days' time—

still more so within a month.]

75. He who knoweth nothing      knoweth not, either,  
    how wealth may warp a man's wit;  
one hath wealth    when wanteth another,  
    though he bear no blame himself.

76. Cattle die      and kinsmen die,  
    thysself eke soon wilt die;  
but fair fame      will fade never,  
    I ween, for him who wins it.

77. Cattle die      and kinsmen die,  
    thysself eke soon wilt die;  
one thing, I wot,    will wither never:  
    the doom over each one dead.

78. A full-stocked farm      had some farmer's sons.[34](#)  
    Now they stoop at the beggar's staff;  
in a twinkling fleeth      trothless wealth,  
    it is the ficklest of friends.

79. The unwise man,      once he calls his own  
    wealth or the love of a woman—  
his overweening waxes      but his wit never—  
    he haughtily hardens his heart.

\* \* \* \*

80. 'Tis readily found      when the runes thou ask,  
    made by mighty gods,  
    known to holy hosts,  
    and dyed deep red by Óthin:  
that 'tis wise to waste no words.[35](#)

81. At eve praise the day,      when burned down, a torch,[36](#)  
    a wife when wedded,      a weapon when tried,  
ice when over it,      ale when 'tis drunk.

82. Fell wood in the wind,[37](#)      in fair weather row out to sea,  
    dally with girls in the dark—      the day's eyes are many—  
choose a shield for shelter,      a ship for speed,  
a sword for keenness,      a girl for kissing.

83. By the fire drink ale,      skate on the ice,  
    buy a bony steed,      a rusty blade,

feed your horse at home, and your hound in his hutch.

84. A wench's words let no wise man trust,  
nor trust the troth of a woman;  
for on whirling wheel<sup>38</sup> their hearts are shaped,  
and fickle and fitful their minds.
85. A brittle bow, a burning fire,  
a gaping wolf, a grunting sow,  
a croaking crow, a kettle boiling,  
a rising sea, a rootless tree,
86. A flying dart, a foaming billow,  
ice one night old, a coiled-up adder,  
a woman's bed-talk, a broken blade,  
the play of cubs, a king's scion,<sup>39</sup>
87. A sickly calf, a self-willed thrall,  
the smooth words of a witch, warriors fresh-slain,
88. Thy brother's banesman, though it be on the road,<sup>40</sup>  
a half-burned house, a speedy horse—  
worthless the steed if one foot he breaks—  
so trusting be no one to trust in these!<sup>41</sup>
89. Early-sown acres let none ever trust,  
nor trust his son too soon:  
undoes weather the one, un wisdom the other:  
risk not thy riches on these.
90. The false love of woman, 'tis like to one  
riding on ice with horse unroughshod—  
a brisk two-year-old, unbroken withal—  
or in raging wind drifting rudderless,  
like the lame outrunning the reindeer on bare rock.
91. Heed my words now, for I know them both:  
mainsworn are men to women;  
we speak most fair when most false our thoughts,  
for that wiles the wariest wits.
92. Fairly shall speak, nor spare his gifts,  
who will win a woman's love,  
shall praise the looks of the lovely maid:  
he who flatters will win the fair.



93. At the loves of a man to laugh is not meet  
for anyone ever;  
the wise oft fall, when fools yield not,  
to the lure of a lovely maid.
94. 'Tis not meet for men to mock at what  
befalls full many:  
a fair face oft makes fools of the wise  
by the mighty lure of love.
95. One's self only knows what is near one's heart,  
each reads but himself aright;  
no sickness seems to sound mind worse  
than to have lost all liking for life.
96. [42](#)That saw I well when I sat in the reeds,  
awaiting the maid I wooed:  
more than body and soul was the sweet maid to me.  
yet I worked not my will with her.
97. Billing's daughter on her bed I found  
sleeping, the sun-bright maid;  
a king's crown I craved not to wear,  
if she let me have her love.
98. "At eventide shalt, Óthin, come  
if thou wilt win me to wife:  
unmeet it were if more than we two  
know of this naughty thing."
99. Back I went; to win her love  
I let myself be misled;  
for I did think, enthralled by love,  
to work my will with her.
100. When next I came at nighttime, then,  
all the warriors found I awake,  
with brands high borne and burning lights:  
such the luckless end of my love tryst!
101. Near morn when I once more did come,  
the folks were sound asleep;  
but a bitch found I the fair one had  
bound fast on her bed!
102. Many a good maid, if you mark it well,

is fickle, though fair her word;  
that I quickly found when the cunning maid  
I lured to lecherous love;  
every taunt and gibe she tried on me,  
and naught I had of her.

103. [43](#) 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. 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. [44](#) With an auger I there ate my way,  
through the rocks I made me room!  
over and under were the etins' paths;[45](#)  
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 faithful friendship,  
for her heavy heart.

107. (Of the well-bought matter)[46](#) I made good use:  
to the wise now little is lacking;  
for Óthrerir[47](#) now up is brought,  
and won for the lord-of-all-wights.

108. Unharm'd 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 Hár's high hall,  
to ask after Bolverk:[48](#) whether the Æsir among,  
or whether by Suttung slain.

110. An oath on the ring did Óthin swear:[49](#)  
how put trust in his troth?

Suttung he swindled and snatched his drink,  
and Gunnloth he beguiled.

\* \* \* \*

111. [50](#)'Tis time to chant on the sage's chair:  
at the well of Urth[51](#)  
I saw but said naught, I saw and thought,  
(listened to Hár's lore);[52](#)  
Of runes I heard men speak unraveling them,  
at the hall of Hár,  
in the hall of Hár,  
and so I heard them say:
112. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir,[53](#) 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 beware of sleeping,  
linking thy limbs with hers.
114. She will cast her spell that thou carest 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.
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.[54](#)

118. A man I saw    sorely bestead  
through a wicked woman's words;  
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 oft;  
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 unburden his mind.

122. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir,    and heed it well,  
learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
follow it, 'twill further thee:  
beware thou of    bandying words  
with an unwise oaf,

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 a bosom friend what burdens him;

few things are worse than fickle mind:  
no friend he who but speaks thee 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.[55](#)

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:  
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[56](#) men then oft grow—  
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.[57](#)

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,  
follow it, 'twill further thee:  
never laugh at or mock, or make game of,  
guest or wayfaring wight.

133. Those who sit within hall oft hardly know  
of what kin be they who come;  
no man so flawless but some fault he has,  
nor so wicked to be of no worth.  
[Both foul and fair are found among men,  
blended within their breasts.}][58](#)

134. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir, and heed it well,  
learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
follow it, 'twill further thee:  
at hoary sage[59](#) sneer thou never:  
there is sense oft in old men's saws;  
oft wisdom cometh out of withered bag[60](#)  
that hangs 'mongst the hides,  
  
and dangles 'mongst the skins drying  
under roof, with the rennet.

135. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir, and heed it well,  
learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
follow it, 'twill further thee:  
beshrew not the stranger, nor show him the door,  
but rather do good to the wretched.

136. That bar must be strong which unbars the door  
to each and every one:[61](#)  
show the beggar your back lest, bearing thee grudge,  
he wish you all manner of mischief.

137. Hear thou, Loddfáfnir, and heed it well,  
learn it, 'twill lend thee strength,  
follow it, 'twill further thee:  
when ale thou drinkest invoke earth-strength;[62](#)  
[for earth is good 'gainst ale, 'gainst ague, fire,[63](#)

'gainst straining,[64](#) acorns, 'gainst witchery, steel,  
'gainst house-strife, the elder,[65](#) 'gainst hate,[66](#) the moon,  
'gainst the rabies, alum, 'gainst ill luck, runes—]  
for earth absorbs the humors all.

• • • •

138. [67](#) I wot that I hung on the wind-tossed tree  
all of nights nine,  
wounded by spear, bespoken to Óthin,  
bespoken myself to myself,  
[upon that tree of which none telleth  
from what roots it doth rise].[68](#)

139. Neither horn[69](#) they upheld nor handed me bread;  
I looked below me—  
aloud I cried—  
caught up the runes, caught them up wailing,  
thence to the ground fell again.

140. From the son of Bolthorn,[70](#) Bestla's father,  
I mastered mighty songs nine,  
and a drink I had of the dearest mead,  
got from out of Óthroerir.

141. Then began I to grow and gain in insight,  
to wax eke in wisdom:  
one verse led on to another verse,  
one poem led on to the other poem.

142. Runes wilt thou find, and rightly read,  
of wondrous weight,  
of mighty magic,  
which that dyed[71](#) the dread god,  
which that made the holy hosts,  
and were etched by Óthin,

143. Óthin<sup>72</sup> among Æsir, for alfs, Dáin,[73](#)  
Dvalin<sup>73</sup> for the dwarfs,  
Alsvith[74](#) among etins, (but for earth-born men)[75](#) wrought I some  
myself.

144. Know'st how to write,[76](#) know'st how to read,  
know'st how to stain, how to understand,  
know'st how to ask, know'st how to offer,



know'st how to supplicate,      know'st how to sacrifice?

145. 'Tis better unasked      than offered overmuch;  
for ay doth a gift look for gain;  
'tis better unasked      than offered overmuch:  
thus did Óthin write<sup>77</sup>      ere the earth began,  
when up he rose      in after time.

146. Those spells I know      which the spouses of kings<sup>78</sup>  
wot not, nor earthly wight:  
“Help” one is hight,      with which holpen thou'lt be  
in sorrow and care and sickness.

147. That other I know      which all will need  
who leeches list to be:  
(on the bark scratch them      of bole in the woods  
whose boughs bend to the east).<sup>79</sup>

148. That third I know,      if my need be great  
to fetter a foeman fell:<sup>80</sup>  
I can dull the swords      of deadly foes,  
that nor wiles nor weapons avail.<sup>81</sup>

149. That fourth I know,      if foemen have  
fettered me hand and foot:  
I chant a charm<sup>82</sup>      the chains to break,  
so the fetters will fly off my feet,  
and off my hands the halter.

150. That fifth I know,      if from foeman's hand  
I see a spear sped into throng,  
never so fast it flies      but its flight I can stay,  
once my eye lights on it.

151. That sixth I know,      if me someone wounds  
with runes on gnarled root written,<sup>83</sup>  
or rouses my wrath      by reckless speech:  
him blights shall blast, not me.

152. 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>84</sup>

153. 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.

154. 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.[85](#)

155. 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,[86](#)  
heedless of their haunts.

156. That eleventh I know,     if I am to lead  
old friends to the fray:  
under buckler I chant[87](#)     that briskly they fare  
hale and whole to battle,  
hale and whole from battle:  
hale wherever they are.

157. That twelfth I know,     if on tree I see  
a hanged one hoisted on high:  
thus I write     and the runes I stain[88](#)  
that down he drops  
and tells me his tale.[89](#)

158. That thirteenth I know     if a thane's son I shall  
wet with holy water:[90](#)  
never will he fall,     though the fray be hot,  
nor sink down, wounded by sword.

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

160. That know I fifteenth     which Thjóthrocir[91](#) sang,  
the dwarf, before Delling's door:[92](#)  
gave to Æsir strength,     to alfs victory  
by his song, and insight to Óthin.

161. 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.

162. That seventeenth I know,      (if the slender maid's love  
     I have, and hold her to me:  
thus I sing to her)[93](#)      that she hardly will  
     leave me for other man's love.

163. In this lore wilt thou,      Loddfáfnir, be  
     unversed forever and ay:  
thy weal were it,      if this wisdom thine—  
     'tis helpful, if heeded,  
     'tis needful, if known.

164. That eighteenth I know      which to none I will tell,[94](#)  
     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.

165. Now are Hár's sayings      spoken in Hár's hall,  
     of help to the sons of men,  
     of harm to the sons of etins;  
hail to whoever spoke them,      hail to whoever knows them!  
     Gain they who grasp them,  
     happy they who heed them!



# The Lay of Vafthrúthnir

## Vaffcrúðnismál

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 Vafthrúthnir and, against the wishes of his anxious spouse, fares to see him in his hall, there to match his own 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, with the loser’s head as the stake. Óthin now becomes the interrogator and finally propounds the unanswerable question. Through it, but too late, the doomed giant recognizes his opponent.

The measure is *ljóðahátt*, the typical vehicle of gnomic poetry. The regular dialogic form has, in this as in other cases, favored the preservation of the text, which is handed down complete in the *Codex Regius*, and in part in the *Hauksbók*. In addition, some nine stanzas of it occur in various connections in Snorri’s paraphrase in the “Gylfaginning.” 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, perhaps skaldic, effort.

(Óthin said:)

1. “Give rede now, Frigg,<sup>2</sup> as 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 Herjafather<sup>3</sup> rather,  
in the garth of the gods;  
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;  
to view me listeth 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>  
    when with words ye war.”

5. <sup>5</sup>[Went then Óthin     his wisdom to match  
    with the all-wise etin:  
    fared to the hall     of Im’s father.<sup>6</sup>  
    In went Ygg<sup>7</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.”

*(Óthin said:)*

8. Gagnráth<sup>8</sup> my name;     as guest I come  
    to thy threshold thirsty, oh thurs!  
    Needful of welcome     I wandered long;  
    to thy hearth hither I fared.”

*(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>9</sup>

*(Óthin said:)*

10. <sup>10</sup>“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,      since unseated thou wilt  
                 match thy lore with mine:  
how the horse is hight      on high which draws  
                 every day at dawn to mankind?”

*(Óthin said:)*

12. “He is Skínfaxi<sup>11</sup> hight      which skyward brings  
                 every day at dawn to mankind;  
of horses best he      to heroes seems,  
                 his mane glisters like gold.”

*(Vafthrúthnir said:)*

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

*(Óthin said:)*

14. “He is Hrímfaxi<sup>12</sup> hight      which the hallowed night  
                 brings 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      open remain:  
                 on it never is ice.”

*(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>13</sup> and the sacred gods?”



*(Óthin said:)*

18. “Is hight Vígríth<sup>14</sup> the field      where as foes will meet  
Surt and the sacred gods;  
a hundred leagues      in length it is;  
was that plain appointed to them.”

*(Vafthrúthnir said:)*

19. “Wise art, wayfarer!      welcome to bench!  
let us sitting on settle hold converse.  
Our heads be stakes,      my hall within,  
and wins he whose wisdom is greater.”

*(Óthin said:)*

20. “Say thou firstly,      for sage thou art  
and thou, Vafthrúthnir, dost wot:  
whence came the earth      and the heavens above,  
at the outset, etin?”

*(Vafthrúthnir said:)*

21. “Of Ymir’s<sup>15</sup> flesh      the earth was shaped,  
the barren hills of his bones;  
and of his skull      the sky was shaped,  
of his blood the briny sea.”

*(Óthin said:)*

22. “Say thou this second,      for sage thou art  
and thou, Vafthrúthnir, dost wot:  
whence the moon did come      who rides men above,  
and the sun also?”

*(Vafthrúthnir said:)*

23. “Mundilferi<sup>16</sup> is hight      the Moon’s father,  
and the Sun’s also;  
they must 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, dost wot:  
whence the day springeth,      in the dales which shines,

and eke the night and new moon?”

*(Vafthrúthnir said:)*

25. “Is one Delling<sup>17</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, dost wot:  
whence winter came     and warm summer,  
     in the beginning, for gods?”

*(Vafthrúthnir said:)*

27. “Is one Vindsval<sup>18</sup> hight,     he is Winter’s father,  
     and Summer is Svásuth’s son;  
(but Vindsval was     to Vásuth born:  
     cold-hearted all that kin).”<sup>19</sup>

*(Óthin said:)*

28. “Say thou this fifth,     if sage thou art  
     and thou, Vafthrúthnir, dost 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 came to be;  
Thrúthgelmir was     that thurs’ father,  
     but Aurgelmir<sup>20</sup> oldest of all.”

*(Óthin said:)*

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

*(Vafthrúthnir said:)*

31. “Out of Élivágar<sup>21</sup>     spurted venom drops,

and waxed till there was an etin;  
'tis thence our kin came altogether;  
hence frightful and fierce our ways."

*(Óthin said:)*

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

*(Vafthrúthnir said:)*

33. "Neath the ice-etin's arms, say they,  
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, dost 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 coffin."[22](#)

*Óthin said:*

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

*Vafthrúthnir said:*

37. "One Hræsvelg[23](#) 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."

*Óthin said:*

38. “Say as the tenth,      since the sacred gods’ fates  
                 thou, Vafthrúthnir, dost wot:  
whence came wise Njorth<sup>24</sup>      among holy gods—  
[temples and fanes      full many hath he—}<sup>25</sup>  
                 yet was not begot among gods?”

*(Vafthrúthnir said:)*

39. “In Vanaheim<sup>26</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. “Say as eleventh      where e’erliving men  
                 slay each other with swords;  
fighting they fall,      then fare from battle  
                 and drain goblets together.”

*(Vafthrúthnir said:)*

41. “All the einherjar<sup>27</sup>      in Óthin’s garth  
                 slay each other with swords:  
fighting they fall,      then fare from battle  
                 and drain goblets together.”

*(Óthin said:)*

42. “Say as the twelfth      how the sacred gods’ fates  
                 thou, Vafthrúthnir, dost wot?  
Of the etin’s 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 I have seen all the worlds ’neath the welkin.  
Niflhel<sup>28</sup> beneath      nine worlds I saw,  
                 to which the dead are doomed.”<sup>29</sup>

*(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 is over,  
to earth dwellers awful?"[30](#)

*(Vafthrúthnir said:)*

45. "Líf and Lífthrásir,[31](#)      in the leafage they  
will hide of Hoddmímír;[32](#)  
the morning dew      their meat will be,  
they will rear the races of men."

*(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 snatched by Fenrir's[33](#) fangs?"

*(Vafthrúthnir said:)*

47. "A daughter orb      was to Alfrothul[34](#) born,  
ere that snatched 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[35](#)      over Mogthrásir'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:  
of gods that were      who will wield the sway,  
when Surt's fire is slaked?"[36](#)

*(Vafthrúthnir said:)*

51. “Víthar[37](#) and Váli[38](#) will ward the gods’ fanes,  
when Surt’s fire is slaked;  
Móthi and Magni[39](#) will Mjolnir have,  
when Thór has thrown it last.”

*(Óthin said:)*

52. “Far have I fared, much afield have I been,  
have oft striven in strength with gods:  
what wight will end Alfather’s[40](#) life,  
when draws near the dreaded doom?”

*(Vafthrúthnir said:)*

53. “Will the Wolf swallow Valfather[41](#) then;  
will Víthar avenge him:  
he will sunder the savage jaws  
of fearsome Fenrir.”

*(Óthin said:)*

54. “Far have I wandered, much afield have I been,  
have oft striven in strength with gods:  
what did Óthin whisper in the ear of his son,  
ere Baldr on bale was laid?”[42](#)

*(Vafthrúthnir said:)*

55. “No dweller on earth knows what in days of yore  
thou said’st in the ear of thy son:  
with fey mouth fondly I flaunted my lore  
and spoke of the day of doom.  
With Óthin now my insight I matched:  
of all beings thou art born wisest.”





# The Lay of Grímnir

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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. And there is a striking similarity between the story of the rivalry of Óthin and his wife Frigg, as told in the Introductory Prose, and the legend about the origin of the Langobards as told in the Edict of their king, Rotharis (644 A.D.), and retold by the Langobardian monk and historian, Paulus Diaconus (ca. 800):

“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>2</sup>

The poem has suffered chiefly from accretions, which detract seriously from its æsthetic value: 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 *ljóðaháttr* stanzas.

There are no positive indications as to time of composition (tenth century?) or place of origin. Certainly the poem is archheathen. It is handed down completely both in the *Codex Regius* and the *Hauksbók*; and some twenty stanzas are embedded in Snorri’s paraphrase in the “Gylfaginning.”

King Hrauthung had two sons, Agnar and Geirroeth.<sup>3</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 shore and found a cotter. They stayed there that winter. The goodwife fostered Agnar, the goodman, Geirroeth and counseled him in shrewdness. 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 buildings. He was warmly welcomed, and as his father had died he was made king and became a famous leader.

One day, Óthin and Frigg were sitting in Hlithskjalf<sup>4</sup> and were looking out upon all the worlds. Then said Óthin: “Dost thou see Agnar, thy foster son, how he begets

children with an ogress in a cave? But Geirroeth, my foster son, is king in the land.” Frigg answered: “He is so grudging about his food<sup>5</sup> that he lets his guests die of hunger when he thinks too many have come.” Óthin said that this was a gross 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 the warlock could be recognized 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>6</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 up to Grímnir and gave him a full horn to drink from and said that the king did ill to torture one who had done no wrong. Grímnir emptied it. By that time the fire had come so near him that his cloak began to burn.

*He said:*

1. Hot art thou, blaze,      and too high, withal!  
    Get, fire, thee farther away!  
    My frieze coat is singed      though I flung it aloft,  
    flares up the fur in the flames.
2. Eight nights famished      ’twixt the fires I sate,  
    nor did anyone fetch me food,  
    but Agnar only      who after shall rule,  
    Geirroeth’s son, o’er the Goths.<sup>7</sup>
3. All hail to thee,      for happiness  
    is given thee, Agnar, by Óthin.  
    Better guerdon      shalt never get  
    for one beaker of beer.
4. The land is holy      which lies yonder,  
    near to Æsir and alfs;  
    in Thrúthheim,<sup>8</sup> there      shall Thór ay dwell,  
    till draws nigh the doom of the gods.
5. On Ydal’s<sup>9</sup> plains      Ull hath reared him  
    his hall timbered on high.  
    For Frey’s<sup>10</sup> tooth-fee      was fashioned of yore  
    Alf-Home, as gift by the gods.
6. A third hall still,      all thatched with silver,  
    was built by the blessed gods:  
    in Válskjalf<sup>11</sup> hall      did house himself

Óthin in olden days.

7. Sokkvabekk<sup>12</sup> called is the fourth,      which cool waters  
    ripple round about;  
    there Óthin and Sága<sup>13</sup>      all their days drink,  
    glad from golden cups.
8. Gladhome is hight the fifth      where golden shimm'ring  
    Valholl<sup>14</sup> is widely spread out;  
    here Óthin chooses      every day  
    weapon-slain warriors.
9. Easily known      to Ygg's chosen  
    are the heavenly halls:  
    the rafters, spearshafts;      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 Thjatsi dwelled,  
    the etin of awful might;  
    Njorth's bride there      her bower hath,  
    Skathi,<sup>17</sup> where her father before.
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. Himinbjorg<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> chooses  
    who seats shall have 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 with gold is propped,  
    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 Njorth hath him  
reared his bright abode;  
the sinless god his seat there has  
and rules in high-timbered hall.
17. Greenwoods grow, and grasses tall,  
in Víthi,<sup>25</sup> Víthar's land:  
from horseback leaps the hero, eager  
to avenge his father's fall.
18. By Andhrímnir<sup>26</sup> in Eldhrímnir<sup>27</sup>  
Sæhrímnir,<sup>28</sup> the boar, is boiled,  
the best of bacons; though 'tis barely known  
what the einherjar<sup>29</sup> eat.
19. Valfather feeds Freki and Geri<sup>30</sup>  
on the flesh of the fallen;  
but weapon-glad Óthin on wine only  
lives forever and ay.
20. The whole earth over, every day,  
hover Hugin and Munin;<sup>31</sup>  
I dread lest Hugin droop in his flight,  
yet I fear me still more for Munin.
21. Thund<sup>32</sup> roars loudly; sports Thjóthvitnir's  
fish<sup>33</sup> in the foaming flood;  
the strong stream seems too stiff to wade  
for warriors to Valholl bent.
22. Valgrind<sup>34</sup> is the gate that wards the gods,  
holy, nigh holy doors;  
old is that wicket, nor wot many  
with what bolt that gate is barred.
23. 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.
24. 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>36</sup>
25. Heithrún, the goat on the hall that stands,

eateth off Læráth's<sup>37</sup> limbs;  
the crocks she fills with clearest mead,  
will that drink not e'er be drained.

26. Eikthyrnir,<sup>38</sup> the hart on the hall that stands,  
eateth off Læráth's limbs;  
drops from his horns in Hvergelmir<sup>39</sup> fall,  
thence wend all the waters their way.

27.<sup>40</sup>[Síth and Víth, Soekin and Eikin,  
Svol and Gunnthró, Fjorm and Fimbulthul,  
Rín and Rinnandi,  
Gipul and Gopul, Gomul and Geirvimul,  
they flow by the garth of the gods;  
Thyn and Vin, Tholl and Holl,

Gráth and Gunnthorin.

28. Vína is hight one, Vegsvinn the other,  
the third, Thjóthnuma;  
Nyt and Not, Nonn and Hronn,  
Slíth and Hríth, Sylg and Ylg,  
Víl and Ván, Vond and Strond,  
Gjoll and Leiptr, flow in the land of men,  
but hence flow to Hel.]

29. Kormt and Ormt and the Kerlaugs twain,  
Thór does wade through  
every day, to doom when he fares

'neath the ash Yggdrasil;  
for the bridge of the gods<sup>41</sup> is ablaze with flames—  
hot are the holy waters.

30. <sup>42</sup>[Glath and Gyllir, Gler and Skeithbrimir,  
Silfrintopp and Sinir,  
Gísl and Falhófnir, Golltopp and Léttfeti—  
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>43</sup> men.

32. [44](#) (An eagle sitteth on Yggdrasil's limbs,  
whose keen eyes widely ken;  
'twixt his eyes a fallow falcon is perched,  
hight Vethrfofnir, and watcheth.)
33. Ratatosk[45](#) the squirrel is hight which runneth ay  
about the ash Yggdrasil:  
the warning words of the watchful eagle  
he bears to Níthhogg[46](#) beneath.
34. [47](#)[Four harts also the highest shoots[48](#)  
ay gnaw from beneath:  
Dáin and Dvalin,[49](#) Duneyr and Dýrathróf.]
35. [More worms do lie the world-tree beneath  
than unwise apes may ween:  
Góin and Móin, which are Grafvitnir's sons,  
Grábak and Grafvolluth;  
Ofnir and Sváfnir[50](#) ay, I fear me,  
on that tree's twigs will batten.]
36. The ash Yggdrasil doth ill abide,  
more than to men is known:  
the hart browsing above, its bole rotting,  
and Níthhogg gnawing beneath.
37. Hrist and Mist the horn shall bear me,  
Skeggjold and Skogul;  
but Hild and Thrúth, Hlokk and Herfjotur,  
Goll and Geironul,  
Randgrith and Ráthgríth and Reginleif,[51](#)  
to the einherjar ale shall bear.
38. Árvakr and Alsvith,[52](#) they up shall draw  
the sun's wain wearily;  
but under their bellies the blessed gods  
have hidden the "icy irons."[53](#)
39. Svalin[54](#) is hight, the Sun before,  
a shield from the shining god.  
Would smoke and smolder both sea and land,  
if from him it ever should fall.
40. Skoll the wolf, in the sky dogs him  
to the warding woods;[55](#)  
but Hati[56](#) the other, Hróthvitnir's son,

follows the fair orb too.

41. Of Ymir's [57](#) 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.
42. But of his lashes      the loving gods made  
    Mithgarth for sons of men;  
    from his brow they made      the menacing clouds  
    which in the heavens hover.
43. Will Ull [58](#) 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. [59](#)
44. [In earliest times      Ivaldi's sons [60](#)  
    Skíthblathnir, the ship, did shape,  
    the best of boats,      for beaming Frey,  
    the noble son of Njorth.]
45. [The ash Yggdrasil      is of all trees best;  
    Skíthblathnir, the best of boats;  
    of holy gods, Óthin;      of horses, Sleipnir; [61](#)  
    of bridges, Bifrost; [62](#)      of skalds, Bragi; [63](#)  
    of hawks; Hábrók; [64](#)      of hounds all, Garm.] [65](#)
46. Now my looks have I lifted      aloft to the gods: [66](#)  
    help will come from on high,  
    from all the Æsir      which in shall come  
    on Ægir's benches,  
    at Ægir's feast. [67](#)
47. Grim [68](#) is my name,      and Gangleri, [69](#)  
    Herjan [70](#) and Hjálmberi, [71](#)  
    Thekk [72](#) and Thrithi, [73](#)      Thuth and Uth,  
    Helblindi and Hár. [74](#)
48. Sath [75](#) and Svipal [76](#)      and Sanngetal, [77](#)  
    Herteit [78](#) and Hnikar, [79](#)  
    Bileyg, [80](#) Báleyg, [81](#)      Bolverk, [82](#) Fjolnir, [83](#)  
    Grím and Grímnir,      Glapsvith, Fjolsvith,
49. Síthhott, [84](#) Síthskegg, [85](#)      Sigfather, [86](#) Hnikuth, [87](#)  
    Alfather, [88](#) Valfather, [89](#)      Atríth, [90](#) Farmatýr: [91](#)



by one name was I not welcomed ever,  
since among folk I fared.

50. Grímnir my name in Geirroeth's hall,  
but Jálk in Ásmund's.[92](#)  
Was I Kjalar hight when the hand sled I drew,  
but Thrór[93](#) at Things,  
Vithur in wars,  
Óski and Ómi, Jafnhár, Biflindi,  
Gondlir[94](#) and Hárbarth[95](#) among gods.

51. Svithur and Svithrir[96](#) at Sokkmímir's was I,  
when the old etin I hid,  
and when Mithvitnir's, the mighty one's,  
son I slew alone.

52. Thou art muddled, Geirroeth! Too much thou hast drunk;  
of much art robbed since rashly thou lovest  
Óthin's and the einherjars' favor.

53. Full long I spake, but little thou mindest:  
faithless friends[97](#) betray thee:  
before me I see my foster son's sword,  
its blade all dripping with blood.

54. A death-doomed man will soon drink with Ygg:[98](#)  
not long the life left thee.  
The norns wish thee ill: now Óthin mayst see;  
come thou near if thou canst.[99](#)

55. Now Óthin's my name. Ygg was I hight,  
Thund was my name ere then;  
Vak[100](#) and Skilfing, Váfuth[101](#) and Hroptatýr,[102](#)  
Gaut[103](#) and Jálk among gods.  
Ofnir[104](#) and Svafnir,[105](#) they all have become  
one with me, I ween.

King Geirroeth was sitting with his sword on his knees half unsheathed. But when he heard that it was Óthin who had come to him, he arose and wanted to take him from between the fires. His sword slid from his hands with its hilt downward. The king stumbled and fell forward, the sword pierced him, and so he lost his life. Then Óthin vanished; but Agnar was king in that land for a long time.





# The Lay of Skírnir

## Skírnismál

Hardly any other poem in the *Edda* so appeals to 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 the poet makes us visualize the appearance and divine the character of the actors.

Beginning and ending with lovesick Frey, the poet delegates all the action to the god's alter ego, his devoted follower and friend, Skirnir, who with intrepidity accomplishes his mission, overcoming the resistance of the fair giant maiden with the threat of his rune magic, after both promises of gifts and threats of force have failed.

In the arrangement and the handling of his material the poet probably owes little to the myth. It has been urged with some plausibility that in this lay we actually have the dramatized rites of a Frey cult, celebrating the god's annual union with the fertility goddess. We can, however, 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 is his treatment of the *Ijóðaháttr* stanzas which, regular at the beginning, become swaying and incoherent, with barbarous assonances, when the terrific imprecations fill them to overflowing, but which resume their regular gait toward the tranquil end.

The tradition is, on the whole, fair. Only some of the curses defy certain interpretation. The poem is found complete in *Codex Regius*, whereas *Codex Arnarnagæanus* (*Hauksbók*) breaks off after Stanza 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, because of the mention of the thistle, a plant not indigenous to Iceland. There are no definite clues as to the time of its origin (tenth century?).

Frey,<sup>1</sup> the son of Njorth, one day had seated himself on Hlithskjalf<sup>2</sup> and looked over all the worlds. Then saw he in the world of etins a fair maiden as she went from the hall of her father to her bower. And that sight made him heavy of heart. Skírnir<sup>3</sup> was the name of Frey's servitor. Njorth bade him to make Frey speak out.

*Skathi<sup>4</sup> said:*

1. "Arise now, Skirnir, and ready make thee to summon my son, and find out this from the wise youth, whom he doth hate."

*Skirnir said:*

2. "For waspish words      I well may look,  
     if I summon thy son  
to find out this      from the wise youth,

whom he doth hate.”

*(Skirnir said:)*

3. “Wilt tell me, Frey,     foremost among gods,  
    and answer me as I ask:  
    why sittest thou lonely,     my lord, all day  
    with heavy heart in thy hall?”

*(Frey said:)*

4. “How tell thee my yearning,     oh youth, as thou wishest—  
    why heavy my heart?  
    The alfs beam<sup>5</sup> shineth     all these long days,  
    but lighter groweth not my longing.”

*(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 glamor 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 ay we stay.

- (7a). <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:)*

8. “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.”

*(Frey said:)*

9. “My steed I lend thee      to lift thee o’er weird  
    ring of flickering flame,  
the sword also      which swings itself,  
    if wise he who wields it.”[8](#)

*Skírnir said to his steed:*

10. “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 o’erborne by the etins.”

Skírnir rode into etin-home and to Gymir’s court. There were savage dogs tied to the gate of the enclosure about Gerth’s bower.

*Skírnir rode to where a shepherd sate on a mound, and greeted him:*

11. “Say thou, shepherd,      sitting on hill,  
    who dost watch all ways:  
how win I the welcome      of the winsome maid  
    through the grim hounds of Gymir?”

*(The shepherd said:)*

12. “Whether art thou doomed,      or dead already,  
    (in the stirrup who standest)?[9](#)  
Never shalt thou win      the welcome to have  
    of the good daughter of Gymir.”

*(Skírnir said:)*

13. “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,  
    allotted is all my life.”

*Gerth said:*

14. “What outcry and uproar      within our courts[10](#)  
    hear I now, handmaid?  
The earth doth shake      and all my father  
    Gymir’s high halls.”

*The handmaid said:*

15. “By his steed here stands     a stranger youth,  
              unbridles and baits him;  
(he wishes, I ween,     welcome to have  
              from the good daughter of Gymir).”[11](#)

*(Gerth said:)*

16. “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”[12](#)

17. “Whether art of the alfs     or of Æsir come,  
              or art thou a wise Van?”[13](#)  
Through furious fire     why farest alone  
              to behold our halls?”

*(Skírnir said:)*

18. “Neither alf am I,     nor of Æsir come  
              nor a wise Van;  
through furious fire     yet fared I alone  
              to behold your halls.

19. “Apples eleven”[14](#)     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.”

*(Gerth said:)*

20. “Thy apples eleven     not e’er shall I take  
              to do any wight’s will;  
nor shall I ever     with Njorth’s son Frey  
              dwell while our lives do last.”

*(Skírnir said:)*

21. “Draupnir, the ring,”[15](#)     then thy dowry shall be,  
              which with Baldr was burned;  
eight rings as dear     will drop from it  
              every ninth night.”

*(Gerth said:)*

22. “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.”[16](#)

*(Skírnir said:)*

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

*(Gerth said:)*

24. “Nor gold nor sword      will gain it over me  
any wight's will to do;  
if Gymir, my father,      did find thee here,  
fearless warrior,      ye would fight to the death.”

*(Skírnir said:)*

25. “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.

26. “With this magic wand      bewitch thee I shall,  
my will, maiden, to do;  
where the sons of men      will see thee no more,  
thither shalt thou!

27. “On the eagle-hill[17](#)      shalt ever sit,  
aloof from the world,      lolling toward Hel.  
To thee men shall be      more loathsome far[18](#)  
than to mankind the slimy snake.

28. “An ugly sight,      when out thou comest,  
even Hrímnir[19](#) will stare at      and every hind glare at,[20](#)  
more widely known      than the warder of gods,[21](#)  
and shalt gape through the gate.[22](#)

29. [23](#)“Shalt drivell and dote,      and drag through life,  
with salt tears shalt sorrow;  
shalt sit as I say,      with sadness heavy,  
feel twofold torment  
with heavy heart.

30. “Imps shall nip thee,      all the long days  
thou art with the etins;

to frost-giants' hall      shalt hobble all days,  
    cringe under curse,  
    cringe under care.  
For play shall weeping      thy pastime be:  
    live a loathly life with tears!

31. "With three-headed thurs,      thwarted, thou shalt live,  
    or else unwedded be;  
    lust shall lash thee,  
    weakness waste thee:  
be like the thistle      which is thrust under,  
    when the harvest is harbored.[24](#)

32. "To the woods I wended,      to the wet forest,  
    a magic wand me to make,  
    and a magic wand I made me.

33. "Thou hast angered Óthin,      the uppermost god;  
    Frey will frown on thee,  
thou wicked wench!      Woe betide thee,  
    thou hast the great gods' wrath.

34. "Hear ye frost-giants,[25](#)      hear ye etins,  
    ye sons of Suttung,      all ye sibs of the Æsir:  
how I forbid,      how I debar  
    men's mirth to the maid,  
    men's love to the maid.

35. "Hrímgrímnir is hight      who shall have thee, a thurs,  
    Niflhel beneath:  
there, 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!

36. "A 'thurs' rune[26](#) 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:)*

37. "Hail, rather, hero,      and hold to thy lips  
    this crystal cup with mead;  
though hardly thought I      that hence I should fare,

to be a Van's wife."

*(Skírnir said:)*

38. "My errand I would know altogether,  
ere hence I ride home.  
When art minded to meet the strong one,  
and welcome the wise son of Njorth?"

*(Gerth said:)*

39 "Barri is hight, as both we know,  
for true love a trysting glade.  
After nights nine to Njorth's son there  
will Gerth grant her love."

Then rode Skírnir home. Frey stood without and greeted him and asked what tidings he brought:

40. "Say now, Skírnir, ere thou unsaddle the steed  
and set one foot forward:  
what errand bringest thou from etin-home,  
of mark for thee or me?"

*(Skírnir said:)*

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

*(Frey said:)*

42. "Long is a night, longer are two—  
how shall I thole three?  
Shorter to me a month oft seemed,  
than part of this night of pining."[27](#)



# The Lay of Hárbarth Hárbarzljóð

The two main divinities of the North are here made to confront each other in a *senna* (or *flyting*) and a *mannjafnðr* (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 meanings of a number of the insulting flings which so incense Thór completely elude 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 improviser.

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 by which to recognize omissions or interpolations.

The text is preserved completely in *Codex Regius*, whereas *Codex Arnarnagnæanus* 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 sound. On the other shore there was the ferryman<sup>2</sup> with his boat.

*Thór called out:*

1. "Who is the fellow there      by the ferry who stands?"

*The ferryman said:*

2. "Who is the fellow there      over the firth who calls?"

*Thór said:*

3. "Ferry me over the firth!      I shall feed thee this morn:

in the basket on my back is the best of foods.  
My fill of it had I by my fireside,  
of herrings and oats,<sup>3</sup> ere from home I fared.”

*The ferryman said:*

4. “An early deed thou deem’st thy meal; but dost thou know  
that downhearted thy home folks? Dead, I ween, is thy mother.”<sup>4</sup>

*Thór said:*

5. “That sayest thou now which would seem to all  
most mournful to hear: that my mother be dead.”

*The ferryman said:*

6. “Yet methinks unlikely that three farms thou ownest<sup>5</sup>  
for barefoot thou art, and in beggar’s clothes;  
scarce whole are the breeks on thy buttocks.”

*Thór said:*

7. “Steer hither the dugout, the haven I shall show thee;  
but who owns the boat which thou hast yonder?”

*The ferryman said:*

8. “He is Hildolf<sup>6</sup> hight who bade me helmsman be,  
the dodgeful chief who dwells by Ráthsey Sound.  
He bade me haul no horse thieves or robbers,  
but goodly men only whose goings I knew.  
Now say thy name if over the sound thou wilt.”

*Thór said:*

9. “I should utter my name though outlawed I were,  
and that of all my kin: I am Óthin’s son,  
Meili’s brother, Magni’s<sup>7</sup> father,  
a god strong in thews: ’tis with Thór thou speakest.  
This now I ask, what thy name be.”

*The ferryman said:*

10. “I am Hárbarth<sup>8</sup> hight, I hide my name but seldom.”

*Thór said:*

11. “Why should’st thou hide thy name      but thou had’st good cause?”

*The ferryman said:*

12. “Even though sought<sup>91</sup> were:      from such as thee  
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;  
I would maul thee, tot,      for thy mocking speech  
if I could but cross the sound.”

*The ferryman said:*

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

*Thór said:*

15. “That Hrungnir I fought      thou hast heard aright,  
the stouthearted      who a stone bore as head;  
yet I did him to death      and he bit the dust.  
What didst thou meanwhile, Hárbarth?”

*The ferryman said:*

16. “Was I with Fjolvar      full five winters  
on that island      which is Algrœn hight  
there war we waged      and waded in blood,  
tried many deeds,      and maidens lured.”<sup>11</sup>

*Thór said:*

17. “Did you win the love of the women?”

*The ferryman said:*

18. “Merry had been the maids,      if but meek they had been;  
friendly had been the women,      if<sup>12</sup> but fond they had been:  
of sand under waves      they wound their ropes,  
out of deep dales they      dug forth the ground.<sup>13</sup>  
With wily words      I outwitted them all,  
with the sisters seven I slept,  
my will I worked with them all.  
What didst thou meanwhile, Thór?”

*Thór said:*

19. “Strong Thjatsi,[14](#) the thurs, I overthrew in battle,  
and the awful eyes of Alvaldi’s son[15](#)  
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?”

*The ferryman said:*

20. “With love spells mighty I lured witchwomen,  
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.”[16](#)

*Thór said:*

21. “Then thou gavest back ill for good.”

*The ferryman 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 slew etins,  
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?”

*The ferryman said:*

24. “In Valland[17](#) was I and waged battles,  
urged on the athelings, nor ever made peace.[18](#)  
Gets Óthin all earls slain by edge of swords,  
but Thór, the breed of thralls.”[19](#)

*Thór said:*

25. “Uneven would’st thou deal to Æsir their followers,  
if too great might were given thee.”

*The ferryman said:*

26. “Enough strength hath Thór, but a stout heart nowise:  
in fainthearted fear wast fooled in a mitten,  
nor seemed then Thór himself:  
in utter dread thou didst not dare  
to fart or sneeze, lest Fjalar heard it.”[20](#)

*Thór said:*

27. “Hárbarth, thou coward, to Hel I would send thee,  
if but over the sound I could reach.”

*The ferryman said:*

28. “Why should’st thou reach over the sound, as I slighted thee nowise?  
What didst thou meanwhile,  
Thór?”

*Thór said:*

29. “In the East was I and Ifing[21](#) guarded,  
when Svárang’s sons sought to kill me:  
huge stones they hurled, yet they strove in vain,  
they begged for peace when overborne they were.  
What didst thou, meanwhile Hárbarth?”

*The ferryman said:*

30. “In the East was I, in my arms I held  
the white-armed maiden, with wheedling words,  
gladdened the gold-dight one till she gave me her love.”

*Thór said:*

31. “Good was then the wench to thee!”

*The ferryman said:*

32. “Of thy help then had I great need, to hold fast the white-armed maiden.”

*Thór said:*

33. “I would have given it gladly, if on the ground I had been.”

*The ferryman said:*

34. “And I would trust thee, if thou didst not betray me.”

*Thór said:*

35. “No heel-biter am I,     like an old hide shoe in spring!”

*The ferryman said:*

36.        “What didst thou meanwhile, Thór?”

*Thór said:*

37. “Against berserk<sup>22</sup> women     I warred on Hlés Isle;  
with wickedness they     bewitched all men.”

*The ferryman said:*

38. “’Twas unworthy of thee     to war on women.”

*Thór said:*

39. “She-wolves were they,     not women, indeed;  
they shivered my ship     which was shored on land,  
threatened me with iron clubs,     and drove off Thjálfi<sup>23</sup>  
What didst thou meanwhile, Hárbarth?”

*The ferryman said:*

40. “On the harrying was I     which was hither made,  
to raise the war flag     and redden spears.

*Thór said:*

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

*The ferryman said:*

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

*Thór said:*

43. “Whence hast thou     these hateful words,  
for more hateful ones     heard I never.”

*The ferryman said:*

44. “My words I have     from wights so old  
who dwell in the howes-of-the-home!”<sup>25</sup>

*Thór said:*

45. "A good name givest thou to the graves, indeed,  
when thou callest them howes-of-the-home!"

*The ferryman 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 would'st howl,  
if the hammer struck thy head."

*The ferryman said:*

48. "With Sif<sup>26</sup> someone sleeps in her bower;  
thy strength thou should'st 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.

*The ferryman said:*

50. "No lie I tell thee. Full late art thou now;  
far had'st thou been had I ferried thee over."<sup>27</sup>

*Thór said:*

51. "Cowardly Hárbarth, thou hast held me here overlong."

*The ferryman 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."

*The ferryman said:*

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

*Thór said:*

55. "Then show me the way      since thou wilt not ferry me over the firth."

*The ferryman said:*

56. "Tis not long to show,      all the longer to fare:  
a while to the stock,      and a while to the stone;  
then take thy way to the left      till to Verland<sup>28</sup> thou comest.  
Will Fjorgyn there      meet Thór her son,  
and show her kinsman the road,      how he may come to Óthin."

*Thór said:*

57.      "Will I get thither today?"

*The ferryman said:*

58. "With toil and moil      thou mayst at sunrise  
get thither, since it's thawing."<sup>29</sup>

*Thór said:*

59. "Scant now be our speech,      since thou but scoffest at me;  
my might thou shalt feel      if we meet again."

*The ferryman said:*

60. "Get thee gone now      where all trolls may take thee!"





# 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 closer examination shows it 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-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 two 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 a looseness of structure which seem inherent in the original.

For another matter, the subordinate role 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.

The *fornyrðislag* stanza is used, the typical metre for narrative lays. The language of the “Hymiskviða” is notable among Eddic poems for an unusual wealth of kennings<sup>1</sup>—bordering on the usage of the skalds—which renders the style turgid in places, but in others, peculiarly impressive. A number of points speak for fairly late Icelandic origin (eleventh or twelfth century?), notwithstanding the naively heathen spirit that seems to pervade the poem.

The text is handed down complete in both *Codex Regius* and *Codex Arnarnagnæanus*. It is not mentioned by name in the *Snorra Edda*, whose excellent paraphrase seems based on other sources.

1. Much game had gathered      the gods, of yore;  
on wassail bent      the wands they shook,  
the blood they scanned<sup>2</sup>      for brewing kettle,  
and found that *Ægir*      full many had.<sup>3</sup>

2. Sate the sea god,      smiling blandly,  
*Mistarblindi*’s      mighty offspring.<sup>4</sup>  
With threat’ning eye      *Ygg*’s son<sup>5</sup> him faced:  
“To *Æsir* ever      thou ale shalt brew.”

3. Quick to quarrel      he quelled the thurs—  
he vengeance vowed      on *Vanir*<sup>6</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, true-heartedly,      Týr<sup>7</sup> did give  
a helpful hint      to Hlórrithi.<sup>8</sup>

*(Týr said:)*

5. “There lives eastward      of Élivágar<sup>9</sup>  
wisest Hymir,      at Heaven’s end;  
a kettle keeps there      my kinsman mighty,  
a rost<sup>10</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.”

7. Then forth they fared,      a full day’s ride,  
etin-homeward,      till to Egil<sup>11</sup> they came—  
to the horn-fair goats<sup>12</sup>      he gave shelter—  
then fared to the hall      where Hymir dwelled.

8. His grandam<sup>13</sup> loathly      there greeted Týr:  
Swart heads she had      a hundred times nine;  
but another 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 grudging 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 threshold,  
him we looked for      from long wayfaring.

With him he has Hróthr's foeman,  
man's well-wisher,[14](#) who is Véur hight.

12. "They hide them here 'neath the hall's gable,  
back of stone post standing, to withstand thy glance."  
The beam did burst and brake asunder,  
straight as struck them the stare of the etin.

13. And shattered rolled from their shelf eight kettles—  
but hard-hammered, one whole stayed of all.  
Then forth they came. The fell etin  
grimly eyed then his old foeman.

14. Forebodings had he to see in his hall  
who oft had smitten the sib of etins.  
Three stout steers then from their stalls were fetched:  
to broil he bade the beeves together.

15. To death were done the doomed bullocks.  
Then on the spit they speared the three.  
Ate Sif's husband,[15](#) ere to sleep he went,  
twain of the oxen all by himself.

16. A mighty mouthful Thór's meal did seem  
to hapless Hrungrnir's hoary playmate.[16](#)

*(He said:)*

"Another evening, when out we row,  
what we bag shall be our bellies' fill."

17. Ready was Thór to row out to sea,  
if the blustering thurs a bait gave him.

*(Hymir said:)*

"Turn to the herd if thou trustest thee,  
breaker-of-thurs-heads, a bait to find;

18. "I ween that there, wielder-of-Mjolnir,[17](#)  
a bait from my bull best thou fetchest."  
To the woods wended his way the swain;  
a black bull there bellowing stood.

19. Wrenched from the ox the etins' slayer  
the high head-castle,[18](#) horny-guarded.

*(Hymir said:)*

“Thy work meseems      much worse by far,  
steerer-of-ships,      than when still thou sittest.”

20. Threat'ning him, Thór bade      the thurs to row,  
offspring-of-apes,[19](#)      farther out to sea;  
but little he listed      longer to row  
the roller-horse[20](#)      for the reiner-of-goats.[21](#)

21. 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.

22. To the hook fastened      the head of the ox  
the Serpent's slayer[22](#)      and savior-of-men:  
gaped on the angle      the all-engirding  
mighty monster,      the Mithgarth-Worm.[23](#)

23. Doughtily drew      undaunted Thór  
on board the boat      the baneful worm;  
his hammer hit      the high hair-fell[24](#)  
of greedy Garm's      grisly brother.[25](#)

24. Then screeched all scars      and screamed all fiends,  
then shook and shivered      the shaggy hills.  
In the sea then sank      that serpent again.[26](#)

25. Downhearted was Hymir      as homeward they rowed;  
nor at the oar      would aught he speak,  
when back the twain brought      the boat to shore.

*(Hymir said:)*

26. “Wilt thou still win      half the work with me,  
and help to hoist      homeward the whales,  
or fetter and fasten      firmly our sea-buck?[27](#)

27. Stem and stern raised,      unstagged, Thór;  
both boat and bilge      he bore up amain,  
alone lifted      the laden sea-horse,[27](#)  
hailed the surf-hog[27](#)      to the home of the thurs  
through wild gorges,      o'er wooded ridges.

28. But still stubbornly      in strength vied  
the uncouth etin      with Óthin's son:

said a man not proved though he pulled an oar,  
if the crystal cup he could not shatter.

29. In his hand when he had it, Hlórrithi threw  
the gleaming glass through the granite walls—  
sitting, struck through the stone pillars;  
yet whole they handed to Hymir it back.

30. Till that his lovely leman did give  
a helpful hint to Hlórrithi:  
“Strike Hymir’s head! That harder is,  
the slothful etin’s, than any cup.”

31. Then rose in wrath the reiner-of-goats,  
on his knees standing he strongly hurled it:  
whole stayed Hymir’s headpiece above,  
but the shock shattered the shining winecup.[28](#)

*(Hymir said:)*

32. “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.[29](#)

33. “Ye may keep the caldron if carry ye can  
the ale-kettle out of our hall.”  
Twice did stout Týr try to budge it:  
stood without stirring, though he strained, the kettle.

34. The goats-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.

35. Nor long they fared ere looked behind him  
Óthin’s offspring toward etin-home:  
beheld out of hills with Hymir rush  
a many-headed host of etins.

36. Standing, he lowered the lifted caldron,  
swung murderous Mjólnir with mighty hands:  
the whales-of-the-waste[30](#) he whelmed altogether.

37. [31](#)Nor long they fared ere lay in the traces,  
half-dead, one of Hlórrithi’s goats.

Was the harness horse      halt on one leg:  
brought this about      baleful Loki.

38. And heard ye have—      or who of you can,  
more learned in lore,      enlighten us better?—  
what amends did make      for the maimed one the thurs,  
who begged Thór take      both his children.

39. Thus did Thór come      to the Thing of the gods,  
hauling the kettle      Hymir had owned.  
Now the Æsir shall      every winter<sup>[32](#)</sup>  
drink their ale at      Ægir's beer hall.





# The Flyting of Loki

## Lokasenna

It is safe to say that the “Lokasenna” is not, and never was, in any sense, a popular lay. 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. 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. It is a veritable Lucianesque *chronique scandaleuse* of the Northern Olympus. Indeed, there is the remote possibility that the author—through Varangian intermediaries perhaps—had an acquaintance with Lucian’s amusing *Assembly of the Gods*.<sup>1</sup>

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 that they 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 (*ljóðaháttir*). The connection between the stanzas is effected by the simple device of having one godhead defend another, 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 Concluding Prose about the capture and punishment of Loki, which in the *Snorra Edda*<sup>2</sup> more properly follows Baldr’s death.

For the text of the lay we are altogether dependent on the *Codex Regius*. However, this text was not used as a source by Snorri, though he quotes one stanza (29) in a slightly different form. The weight of evidence points to Norway as place of origin, and suggests the latter half of the tenth century as the period of composition.

Ægir, who was also hight Gymir,<sup>3</sup> had made ale for the gods when he had obtained 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>4</sup> His wife Sif<sup>5</sup> came, as also Bragi<sup>6</sup> and his wife, Ithun.<sup>7</sup> Týr was there; he was one-handed, for the Fenris-Wolf had bitten off his hand, the time he was bound.<sup>8</sup> There were also Njorth<sup>9</sup> and Skathi his wife, Frey<sup>10</sup> and Freya,<sup>11</sup> and Víthar,<sup>12</sup> the son of Óthin. Loki was there, and Frey’s servitors, Byggvir<sup>13</sup> and Beyla.<sup>14</sup> Besides, there was many another Ás and alf.

Ægir had two servitors, Fimafeng and Eldir.<sup>15</sup> Shining gold served there for light, and the cups filled themselves with ale. It was a place of great peace.<sup>16</sup> Now those 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 of, at their ale sitting,  
here the hall within.”

*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 ale I shall mix with evil.”

*Eldir said:*

4. “If in thou goest into Ægir’s hall,  
and fain would’st 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  
Loft, [17](#) from long wayfaring,  
to ask the Æsir if that anyone  
would pour him the mellow mead.

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?[18](#)  
Thou said'st that not ever      thou ale would'st drink  
                 but to us both it were borne.”

*Óthin said:*

10. “Arise, then, Víthar,      let the Wolf's father[19](#)  
                 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!”

*Bragi said:*

12. “My sword and saddle horse,      I beseech thee, Loki,  
                 take, and eke mine arm ring,  
lest to holy hosts      thy hatred thou showest:  
                 beware of the Æsir's anger!”

*Loki said:*

13. “Of steeds and rings small      store, ween I,  
                 hast, Bragi, thou to boast!  
Of all Æsir and alfs      within this hall  
                 thou art most afraid in a fray,  
                 and shyest where shields are hewed.”

*Bragi said:*

14. “If without I were—      as within I am—

Ægir's hallowed hall:  
in my hands would I have thy head full soon:  
for thy lies it would be thy lot."

*Loki said:*

15. "Thou art swift in thy seat, but slow to fight,  
Bragi, thou pride of the bench;  
come to battle, if bold thou art;  
not a whit would a stout heart stay".

*lthun said:*

16. "I beg thee, Bragi, to bear in mind  
that of Óthin's kin he is:[20](#)  
tease not Loki with taunting words  
in Ægir's ale hall."

*Loki said:*

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

*lthun 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."

*Gefjon[21](#) 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."[22](#)

*Loki said:*

20. "Hush thee, Gefjon, I have in mind  
who lured thee to lust:  
the fair-haired swain[23](#) sold thee the necklace,  
ere thou threwest about him thy thighs."

*Óthin said:*

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

*Loki said:*

22. “Hush thee, Óthin; not ever fairly  
didst allot men luck in battle;[24](#)  
oft thou gavest, as give thou should’st not,  
mastery to worser men.”

*Óthin said:*

23. “Granted I gave, as give I should not,  
mastery to worser men:  
thou winters eight wast the earth beneath,  
milking the cows as a maid,  
and there gavest birth to a brood:[25](#)  
were these womanish ways, I ween.”

*Loki said:*

24. “But thou, say they, on Sám’s Isle[26](#) 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 Fjorgyn’s [27](#) daughter:  
thou hast ever been mad after men.  
Vili and Vé[28](#) thou, Vithrir’s[29](#) 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 foregathered,

before thou had'st 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."[30](#)

*Freya said:*

29. "Thou art raving, Loki,     to reckon up  
      all the ill thou hast done:  
I ween that Frigg     the fates knoweth,[31](#)  
      though she say it not herself."

*Loki said:*

30. "Hush thee, Freya,     I full well know thee:  
      thou art not 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;  
wroth are the gods     and goddesses,  
      thou'it fare sadly home from hence."

*Loki said:*

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

*Njorth 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."[32](#)

*Loki said:*

34. "Hush thee, Njorth,     thou hence wast sent

as hostage for holy gods,[33](#)  
and Hymir's handmaids had thee as pot,  
and used thy mouth as midden."

*Njorth said:*

35. "My meed had I that hence I was sent  
as hostage for holy gods:  
a son I gat on whom smile all wights,  
who is highest held among gods."[34](#)

*Loki said:*

36. "Have done now, Njorth, 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 spouses,  
and frees all bondsmen from fetters."

*Loki said:*

38. "Hush thee Týr, ne'er no heed gavest thou  
that man meet man halfway;[35](#)  
thy sword hand from thee was snatched, I ween,  
by Fenrir's greedy fangs."

*Týr said:*

39. "I lost my hand, Hróthvitnir[36](#) thou,  
a baleful loss to us both:  
in bondage now must bide his time  
the Wolf, till the world is doomed."

*Loki said:*

40. "Hush thee, Týr, with thy housewife[37](#)I  
slept, so a son she bore;  
nor a penny didst get to pay thee back  
for this wrong, thou wretch."

*Frey said:*

41. “By the River<sup>38</sup> fettered      Fenrir will lie  
till draws night the doom of the gods;  
and nigh to him,      but thou hush thee now,  
wilt be bound, thou breeder of ill.”

*Loki said:*

42. “With gold thou boughtest      Gymir’s daughter,<sup>39</sup>  
and sold the thurs thy sword;  
but when Múspell’s sons<sup>40</sup>      through Myrkvith ride<sup>41</sup>  
what weapon, wretch, wilt then wield?”

*Byggvir said:*

43. “If an Ás I were      like Ingunar-Frey,<sup>42</sup>  
and such blessed abode were mine,  
I would crush to marrow      this crow of ill,  
and break his every bone.”

*Loki said:*

44. “Who is that wee wight, pray,      that makes water there,  
and sniffing snoops about?  
About Frey’s ears art      ever hovering,  
or cluckst around the quern.”

*Byggvir said:*

45. “I am Byggvir hight,      and brisk in work  
as both Æsir and einherjar<sup>43</sup> know;  
I glory now      that all the gods  
quaff Gymir’s<sup>44</sup> ale together.”

*Loki said:*

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

*Heimdall said:*

47. “Ale-crazed art      and out of thy mind:  
why let not, Loki, be?  
O’ermuch of mead      ay 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 alway,  
and wake as the watch of the gods.”[45](#)

*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.”[46](#)

*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 Thjatsi, thy father, we felled.”[47](#)

*Skathi said:*

51. “If first and foremost in the fray thou wast,  
when ye felled my father Thjatsi:  
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,[48](#)  
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.

*She 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 let’st 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>49</sup> wife:  
sly Loki, Laufey's son."

*Beyla said:*

55. "All mountains shake:     fares Mjolnir'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,  
Mjolnir, shall shut thy mouth;  
I shall shatter     thy shoulder-cliff<sup>50</sup>—  
no longer then wilt thou live."

*Loki said:*

58. "The son of Jorth<sup>51</sup>     now in hath come:  
why threaten and bluster, Thór?  
Not so forward wilt be     to fight the Wolf:  
he will swallow Sigfather<sup>52</sup> himself."

*Thór said:*

59. "Hush thee, ill wight,     or my hammer of might,  
Mjolnir, shall shut thy mouth;  
up I'll hurl thee     to etin-world  
where men will see thee no more."

*Loki said:*

60. "Of thy eastern jaunts<sup>53</sup>     not ever should'st thou  
boast to any wight born:  
in a mitten's thumb since,     thewless, didst crouch,  
nor seemed then Thór himself."<sup>54</sup>

*Thór said:*

61. “Hush thee, ill wight,     or my hammer of might,  
     Mjolnir, shall shut thy mouth:  
my right hand will hew thee     with Hrungnir’s bane,[55](#)  
     and break every bone in thy body.”

*Loki said:*

62. “To live I mean     a long time yet,  
     though with the hammer thou threaten:  
great Skrymir’s strings     seemed stout to thee,  
     nor mightest thou get at thy meat and,  
     unharmed, thou wast hungry.”[56](#)

*Thór said:*

63. “Hush thee, ill wight,     or my hammer of might,  
     Mjolnir, shall shut thy mouth:  
will Hrungnir’s bane     to Hel send thee,  
     even to Nágrind[57](#) beneath.”

*Loki said:*

64. “To the Æsir said I,     and to Æsir’s 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 madest 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!”[58](#)

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 Nari; but his son Narfi 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,[59](#) sate 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 writhed so fearfully that all the earth shook: men call this “earthquakes” nowadays.[60](#)



# The Lay of Thrym Þrymskviða

This is the best-known, and deservedly among the most famous of the poems in the collection; indeed, it is one of the few great ballads of world literature, a classic in which purely Northern material has 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. That the lay was a favorite also in olden times is attested by the existence, in all lands inhabited by Scandinavians, of folk ballads clearly based on it. It 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 *Codex Regius*.

There has been much discussion as to the probable date of the poem. Formerly, most scholars were inclined to set it early—the tenth century or earlier—and see in it a primitive nature myth. Modern opinion has swung to the very opposite extreme, considering it one of the latest in the collection. The reasons seem compelling: the perfect text tradition; numerous demonstrable loans from other, earlier Eddic and skaldic poems; the epic-balladic form, which points to the thirteenth century rather than to an early period; the tell-tale fact that its action is nowhere alluded to in Old Norse monuments while, on the other hand, all actors in it can be found among the dramatis personæ of other poems (as is pointed out in the footnotes). The suggestion has been made that for aught we know it may be the work of Snorri himself, the most versatile genius of Old Norse literature. He possessed the prerequisites: a great sense of humor, intimate knowledge of mythology, considerable poetic talent. It would be understandable that he did not care to quote himself in his *Prose Edda* (written ca. 1220) or adduce the story of the poem as a genuine myth.

As to the central theme of the poem, it might have been imported to Scandinavia during the crusades: there exists an Arabic tale with similarities too striking to be accidental.

1. Wroth was Vingthór<sup>1</sup> when awaking he  
Mjólnir<sup>2</sup> missed, his mighty hammer;  
his beard gan shake, his shaggy head,  
Fjorgyn'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?”

*Freya said:*

4. “Though of gold it were I gave it to thee,  
and for thy sake, though of silver it were.
5. Flew then Loki the feather coat whirled,  
left behind him the halls of the gods,  
and winged his way to the world of etins.
6. On a mound sate Thrym,[5](#) the thurses’ lord;  
golden halters for his hounds he twined,  
and sleeked the manes of slender horses.[6](#)

*Thrym said:*

7. “What ails the Æsir, what ails the alfs?[7](#)  
Why art thou come to etin-home?”

*(Loki said:)*

- “’Tis ill with the Æsir, (ill with the alfs):[8](#)  
dost hide Hlórrithi’s[9](#) hammer with thee?”

*(Thrym said:)*

8. “Hlórrithi’s hammer I hide with me  
full eight rosts[10](#) deep the ground beneath;  
Mjolnir no wight may win from me  
but he Freya bring as bride to me.”
9. Flew then Loki, the feather coat whirled,  
left behind him the home of the etins,  
and winged his way to the world of gods.  
Him Thór met there in middle court.  
These words then first fell from his lips:
10. “What welcome word rewards thy toil?  
Tell while aloft thy long tidings:[11](#)  
sitting, one oft his errand forgets,  
and lying, tells lies altogether.”[12](#)

*(Loki said:)*

11. “A welcome word rewards my toil:

Thrym has thy hammer, the thurses' lord.  
Mjolnir no wight may win from him,  
but he Freya bring as bride with him."

12. 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."

13. Wroth grew Freya, foamed with rage;  
the shining halls shook with her wrath,  
the Brísings' necklace<sup>13</sup> burst asunder:  
"Most mad after men thou mayst call me,  
if I wend with thee to the world of etins."

14. To the Thing forthwith fared all godheads,  
and all goddesses gathered together.  
Among them mooted the mighty gods  
how they Hlórrithi's hammer'd win back.

15. Whereon Heimdall,<sup>14</sup> whitest of gods—  
he fathomed the future as foreknowing Van—<sup>15</sup>  
"Busk we Thór then in bridal linen,  
and buckle on him the Brísings' necklace.

16. "Let a housewife's door keys dangle about him,<sup>16</sup>  
let woman's weeds be worn by him.  
Let him bear on his breast bridal jewels,  
a hood on his head, as behooves a bride.

17. Then thus spake Thór, the thewful god:  
"A craven wretch may call me the gods  
if I busk me in bridal linen."

18. Then quoth Loki, Laufey's offspring:<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.

19. Busked they Thór then in bridal linen,  
buckled on him the Brísing's necklace,  
let a housewives' 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.

20. Then quoth Loki, Laufey's offspring:  
"With thee I will, to wait on thee;  
we twain shall wend to the world of etins."
21. 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 with fire,  
rode Óthin's son<sup>20</sup> to etin-world.
22. Said Thrym these words, the thurses' lord:  
"Stand up, etins, put straw on benches:<sup>21</sup>  
to be my bride they bring me Freya,  
Njorth's daughter from Nóatún.<sup>22</sup>
23. "In my garth there graze golden-horned kine,  
oxen all black, for etins a joy;  
many rings have I, many riches have I,  
Freya alone I lack, methinks."
24. Soon had the sun set in that land;<sup>23</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 Mjolnir's wielder.
25. Said Thrym these words, the thurses' lord:  
"Where sawest thou bride bite more sharply?  
Never saw I bride bite more broadly,  
nor more of mead a maiden drink."
26. The waiting maid wise these words then found,  
to the etin thus she answer made:  
"Naught ate Freya for full eight nights,  
so eager was she for etin-world."
27. 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."
28. 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."
29. In stepped the etins' starveling sister,<sup>24</sup>



a bridal gift she      dared beg from her:  
“Rings of red gold      give thou to me,  
if fain would'st have      my friendship and love,  
all my friendship      and fondness too.”

30. Said Thrym these words,      the thurses' lord:  
“Bring the hammer      the bride to bless;  
on the maiden's lap      lay ye Mjolnir;[25](#)  
in Vór's[26](#) name then      our wedlock hallow!”

31. Laughed Hlórrithi's      heart within him  
when the hammer beheld      the hardy one:  
Thrym he slew first,      the thurses' lord,  
then crushed he all      the etins' kin,

32. Slew eke the old      sister of etins,  
her who had begged      for bridal gift.  
For shillings she got      a shock of the hammer,  
a grinding blow      for golden rings.

Thus Hlórrithi      his hammer got him.



# The Lay of Alvís

## Alvíssmál

Like “Vafþrúðnismál,” this poem clearly has a didactic purpose: to impart for the use of skalds, in a form easy to memorize, a synonymic vocabulary of the *heiti*<sup>1</sup> (or uncommon appellations) “in all the worlds,” of thirteen things.

The situation which serves as a framework for this versified scholastic lore is pleasingly told. Thór, on his return from the giant world, meets the dwarf Alvís, who, in the Thunderer’s absence, has induced the gods to relinquish to him Thór’s daughter<sup>2</sup> and who now precipitately hurries home with her. Thór halts him, but promises his consent to the marriage providing the dwarf can answer all his questions. With these he delays Alvís until daylight surprises the dwarf and transforms him into stone.

The unusual traits attributed to Thór—cunning and eagerness for knowledge—but ill agree with the established character of the god and render the authenticity of the story questionable: it was no doubt invented *ad hoc*. Again, the fact that the material is strung along without a purposeful order, that the appellations given the various objects are not uniformly characteristic of the beings said to use them, and that it is almost hopeless to assign consistently the six beings mentioned in each stanza to specific “worlds,” makes the poem approach in character the *heitatöl* (versified lists) of the Icelandic renaissance of learning in the early thirteenth century. For this reason, that century is given by the majority of scholars as the date of composition.

The text (in *Ijóðaháttr* stanzas) is in good condition, due no doubt, here as elsewhere, to the regular dialogic form. It is handed down only in *Codex Regius*, but Stanzas 20 and 30 are quoted in “Skáldskaparmál,” Chaps. 56 and 60.

(Alvis<sup>3</sup> said:)

1. “To put bolster on bench<sup>4</sup>    shall my bride now with me  
      make haste homeward;  
a hasty match    this to many will seem:  
      they’ll not rob me my rest at home.”

(Thór said:)

2. “What wight is this?    Why so wan about thy nose?<sup>5</sup>  
      Didst dwell with the dead last night?  
Like to thurses    methinks thou art,  
      nor born to have this bride.”

(Alvís said:)

3. “Alvís am I,    dwell the earth beneath,  
      there standeth my house under stones;  
(for the weapon’s worth)<sup>6</sup>    to Valholl I came:  
      let none his bounden faith break!”

*(Thór said:)*

4. “I shall break it;     for the bridegroom’s choosing  
     falls as father on me;  
in Valholl I was not     when was wedded to thee  
     among gods whom but I can offer.”

*(Alvís said:)*

5. “What man is this,     of the winsome maid  
     who feigns he is father?  
Thee feckless fellow     but few will know:  
     what bitch bore thee,[7](#) pray?”

*(Thór said:)*

6. “I am hight Vingthór[8](#)—     I have wandered far—  
     Síthgrani’s[9](#) 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[10](#)     thou canst tell me all  
     that I list to learn.

9. “Tell me, Alvís—     for all wights’fate  
     I deem that, dwarf, thou knowest—  
how the earth is hight,     before all outspread,  
     in all the worlds so wide?”[11](#)

*(Alvís said:)*

10. “’Tis hight ‘Earth’ among men,     among Æsir, ‘Land’;  
     call the Vanir it ‘Ways,’  
‘All-Green,’ the etins,     the alfs, ‘Burgeoning,’  
     the mighty gods, ‘Mud.’”

*(Thór said:)*

11. “Tell me, Alvís— for all wights’ fate  
I deem that, dwarf, thou knowest—  
how the heaven is hight, that to (Hronn)[12](#) was born,  
in all the worlds so wide?”

*(Alvís said:)*

12. “Tis hight ‘Heaven’ among men, ‘High-Arched’ among gods;  
call the Vanir it ‘Wind-Weaver’,  
the etins, ‘Upper World,’ the alfs, ‘Fair Roof,’  
the dwarfs, ‘Dripping Hall.’”

*(Thór said:)*

13. “Tell me, Alvís— for all wights’ fate  
I deem that, dwarf, thou knowest—  
how the moon is hight which men do see,  
in all the worlds so wide?”

*(Alvís said:)*

14. “Tis hight ‘Moon’ among men, ‘Mild Light’[13](#) among gods;  
call the wights in Hel it ‘Wheel’,  
the etins, ‘Speeder,’ the dwarfs, ‘Splendor,’  
and the alfs, ‘Teller-of-Time.’”

*(Thór said:)*

15. “Tell me, Alvís— for all wights’ fate  
I deem that, dwarf, thou knowest—  
how the sun is hight which is seen by men,  
in all the world so wide?”

*(Alvís said:)*

16. “Tis hight ‘Sun’ among men, but ‘Sunlight’ among gods;  
call the dwarfs it ‘Dvalin’s Doom,’[14](#)  
the etins, ‘Everglow,’ the alfs, ‘Fair Wheel,’  
‘All-Bright,’ the Ása-Sons.”[15](#)

*(Thór said:)*

17. “Tell me, Alvis— for all wights’ fate  
I deem that, dwarf, thou knowest—  
how the clouds are hight that carry showers,

in all the worlds so wide?"

*(Alvís said:)*

18. "They are hight 'Clouds' among men, 'Rain-Carriers' among gods;  
call the Vanir them 'Windblown,'  
the etins, 'Rain-Hope,' the alfs, 'Weather-Might,'  
the Hel-Dwellers, 'Hiding Helm.'"

*(Thór said:)*

19. "Tell me, Alvís— for all wights' fate  
I deem that, dwarf, thou knowest—  
how the wind is hight which widest fares,  
in all the worlds so wide?"

*(Alvís said:)*

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

*(Thór said:)*

21. "Tell me, Alvís— for all wights' fate  
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 'Wind-Lull,'  
the etins, 'Sultry,' the alfs, 'Day-Balm,'  
the dwarfs, 'the Day's Haven.'"

*(Thór said:)*

23. "Tell me, Alvís—for all wights' fate  
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, 'Main' among gods;

call the Vanir it 'Wave,'  
the etins, 'Eel-Home,' the alfs, 'Water';  
call the dwarfs it 'the Deep.'"

*(Thór said:)*

25. "Tell me, Alvís— for all wights' fate  
I deem that, dwarf, thou knowest—  
how the fire is hight which flames among men,  
in all the worlds so wide?"

*(Alvís said:)*

26. "'Tis hight 'Fire' among men, but 'Flame' among gods;  
call the Vanir it 'Warmth,'  
the etins, 'Greedy,' 'All-Devourer,' the dwarfs,  
the Hel-Wights, 'Fast Whelmer.'"

*(Thór said:)*

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

*(Alvís said:)*

28. "'Tis hight 'Wood' among men, 'Earth's Mane' among gods;  
call the Hel-Wights<sup>16</sup> it "Seaweed-of-Slopes,'  
the etins 'Firewood,' the alfs, 'Fair Bough,'  
call the Vanir it 'Wand.'"

*(Thór said:)*

29. "Tell me, Alvís— for all wights' fate  
I deem that, dwarf, thou knowest—  
how the night is hight which to Nor<sup>17</sup> was born,  
in all the worlds so wide?"

*(Alvís said:)*

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

*(Thór said:)*

31. “Tell me, Alvís— for all wights’ fate  
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 ‘Breadstuff’[18](#) among gods;  
call the Vanir it ‘Well-Grown,’  
the etins, ‘Eating,’ the alf-kin, ‘Grain,’  
the wights of Hel, ‘Hanging.’”[19](#)

*(Thór said:)*

33. “Tell me, Alvís— for all wights’ fate  
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,’  
‘Clear Must,’ the etins, ‘Mead,’ the Hel-Wights,  
the sons of Suttung,[20](#) ‘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;  
now the sun is seen in thy hall.”





# Baldr's Dreams

## Baldrs draumar

This little poem purports to be a supplement to the “Völuspá,” elaborating the Baldr episode. As in that poem, 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 “Völuspá” and that it has grave structural defects, at least in its present form. Certain verbal similarities to the “Völuspá,” and the “Þrymskviða” (where the passages involved are integral) lend color to the suspicion of several scholars that this is not an original but the work of a skilful imitator—perhaps in the twelfth century—of the ancient manner. Other students, with less probability, insist on a much earlier origin (tenth century).

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

1. To the Thing forthwith      fared all Æsir,  
and all goddesses      gathered together.  
Among them mooted      the mighty godheads<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 Niflhel<sup>5</sup> dark.  
A hound<sup>6</sup> he met      which from Hel did come.
3. About his breast      was he blood besprent,  
and long did bark      at Baldr's father.  
Rode Óthin on—      the earth did quake—  
till the high halls of      Hel he came nigh.
4. Then Óthin rode      to the eastern gate,  
where the hoary seeress'      howe<sup>7</sup> he knew;  
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>8</sup> my name,      I am Valtam's son;

say of misty Hel as of Mithgarth I:  
for whom are the benches with byrnies covered,<sup>9</sup>  
the dais decked eke with dazzling gold?"

*(The seeress said:)*

7. "For Baldr the beer brewed here standeth,  
a shield<sup>10</sup> lies over the shining drink;  
in sorrow are sunk the sons of Óthin.<sup>11</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?"

*(The seeress said:)*

9. "Hoth<sup>12</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<sup>13</sup> 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>14</sup>

*(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>15</sup>  
and the day will come of the doom of the gods.”



# The Lay of Ríg

## Rígsþula

“The Lay of Ríg” as preserved 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 Harald Fairhair himself. Another scholar agrees that it was composed early in the tenth century, since the poem seems to presuppose heathendom undisturbed, but holds that it is by some Icelandic skald celebrating the Danish royal house, perhaps King Gorm the Old or Harald Bluetooth.<sup>1</sup> Still another holds the view that the lay had its origin on one of the Scottish islands and it has also been urged that it mirrors Old Irish conditions. However that may be, God as the progenitor of all three estates definitely is a medieval Christian conception.

Again, until recently the lay had been universally regarded as a valuable source of information on social conditions in the earliest times; but this now 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 lists of names (like the whole lay, in free *fornyrðislag*) there is a suspicious similarity to the *nafnápulur* (rigmaroles) and the *heittatöl* 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. However, it could hardly be later, because 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 came to a farm. There he called himself Ríg. The following poem treats of this tale.

1. In old times, say they,      on earth-paths green  
    there wended his way      a wise god ancient,  
    rugged and mighty—      Ríg<sup>2</sup> was he hight.
2. Walked unwearied      (in middle ways);<sup>3</sup>  
    to a dwelling he came,      was the door bolted.  
    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 headgear.

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 calf-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.[6](#)
6. And there stayed he      three days together;[7](#)  
then walked unwearied      in middle ways.  
Moons full nine      went meanwhile by.
7. Gave Edda birth      to a boy child then,  
(in clouts she swathed)[8](#)      the swarthy-skinned one.  
Thrall they called him,      and cast on him water[9](#)  
(dark was his hair      and dull his eyes).[10](#)
8. On his hand the skin      was scraggy and wrinkled,  
(nasty his nails),[11](#)      his knuckles gnarled,  
his fingers thick,      his face ugly,  
his back hulky,      his heels were long.
9. He gan to grow      and gain in strength,[12](#)  
betimes took him      to try his might:  
to bind bast ropes,      burdens to pack,  
to bear faggots home      the whole day long.
10. Came to his cot      a crook-legged wench—  
were her soles dirty,      and sunburnt her arms,  
her nose bent downward;      her name was Thír.[13](#)
11. On middle seat      she sate her down,  
by her side did sit      the son of the house;  
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[14](#)      Hay-Giver, Howler,  
Bastard, Sluggard,      Bent-Back and Paunch,  
Stumpy, Stinker,      Stableboy, Swarthy,

Longshanks and Lout: they laid fences,  
put dung on fields, fattened the swine,  
herded the goats, and grubbed up peat.[15](#)

13. Their daughters were Drudge and Daggie-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, was the door ajar.  
In gan he go, on the ground was a fire,  
sate husband and wife there with their work busy.

15. A weaver's beam out of wood he shaped—  
his beard was brushed, and banged, his hair—  
in kirtle tight-fitting; were planks on the floor.

16. The good wife sate and swayed her distaff, braided the yarn to use for  
weaving,  
with a snood[16](#) on her head and a smock on her breast,  
on her neck, a kerchief, and clasps[17](#) on her shoulders.  
Afi and Amma owned that house.

17. Well knew Ríg wisely to counsel,  
([18](#)on middle seat he sate him down,  
betwixt the twain of the toft benched him).

18. (Then took Amma ..... ..  
..... ..  
(a full trencher on the table she put  
with boiled calf-meat, the best she had.)

19. (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.

20. And there stayed he three days together  
(then walked unwearied in middle ways).  
Moons full nine went meanwhile by.

21. Gave Amma birth to a boy child then.  
Karl[19](#) they called him, clothed him in linen;  
ruddy his hue, and rapid his eyes.



22. Then gan he grow and gain in strength,  
tamed the oxen and tempered ploughshares,  
timbered houses, and barns for the hay,  
fashioned carts, and followed the plough.
23. A bride they brought him with bunch of keys dangling,  
in goatskin kirtle, gave her to Karl.  
Snoer<sup>20</sup> was she hight and sate under veil,  
[a house they reared them and rings bestowed,]<sup>21</sup>  
their linen they spread, and the larder stocked.
24. In their homestead, happy, they had a brood,  
hight Man and Yeoman, Master, Goodman,  
Husbandman, Farmer, Franklin, Crofter,  
Bound-Beard, Steep-Beard,<sup>22</sup> Broad,<sup>23</sup> Swain, and Smith.
25. By other names were known their daughters:  
Woman, Gentlewoman, Wife, Bride, Lady,  
Haughty, Maiden, Hussif and Dame:  
thence are come the kin of carls.
26. At his staff Ríg strode steadfastly on;  
a hall he saw then, was southward<sup>24</sup> the door,  
raised on high, with a ring in the doorpost.
27. He strode in straightway, was straw on the floor.  
Sate there the good folk, gazed at each other,  
Father and Mother, with their fingers playing.<sup>25</sup>
28. On the bench he sate, a bowstring twining,  
bent the elmwood,<sup>26</sup> and arrows shafted.  
Sate the lady, looked at her arms,  
stroked the linen, straightened her sleeves.
29. Was a brooch on her breast, and a bonnet on her head,  
a long train of silk,<sup>27</sup> and sark all blue.  
Was her brow brighter, her breast lighter,  
her neck whiter,<sup>28</sup> than whitest snow!
30. Well knew Ríg wisely to counsel,  
on middle seat he sate him down,  
betwixt the twain of the toft he benched him.
31. Of bleached flax then a broidered cloth  
did Mother take, and the table covered;  
a light-baked loaf she laid on the table,

of wheaten meal,      white and thin.

32. A full trencher      on the table she put,  
silver-plated,      and set forth then  
flitches of bacon      and steaked fowl also;  
there was wine in a crock,      were the cups gold-plated;  
they drank and chatted      till the day was ended.

33. Well could Ríg      wisely counsel;  
he rose up thence,      ready for sleep;  
[29](#) (on middle bedstead      his berth he made,  
betwixt the twain      of the toft he laid him.)

34. And there stayed he      three days together;  
then walked unwearied      in middle ways.  
Full nine months      went meanwhile by.

35. 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.[30](#)

36. 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 brandish swords      and swim in the sea.

37. Out of woodlands      came Ríg walking,  
came Ríg walking,      and taught him runes;  
his own name gave him      as heir and son,  
bade him make his own      the udal lands,[31](#)  
the udal lands      and olden manors.

38. He dauntless rode      through darkling woods,  
over frosty fells,      to a faraway hall.  
Shields he shattered      and shafts he hurled,  
brandished his sword      and swiftly rode;  
he wakened war      and warriors slew,  
with wound-red weapons      he won him land.

39. He made himself master      of manors eighteen,  
gan share his wealth      and shower it on all:  
silver and gold      and slender steeds;  
squandered arm rings      and scattered gold.[32](#)

40. His heralds drove on dew-wet paths,  
and came to the hall where Hersir<sup>33</sup> dwelled;  
a daughter had he, dainty-fingered,  
fair-haired and wise, was she hight Erna.<sup>34</sup>
41. For her hand they asked, and home drove her,  
gave her to Earl, gown'd in linen;  
they lived together and loved each other,  
had many children, and lived cheerfully.
42. Boy was the oldest, Bairn the second,  
then Issue and Child, Heir, Youth, and Squire,  
Offspring and Lad—they sports did learn—  
Son and Scion—swimming and “tables”;<sup>35</sup>  
Kund one was called, was Kon<sup>36</sup> the youngest.
43. Up within hall grew Earl's children;  
spearshafts they shook, with shields they fended,  
swift steeds bestrode, and straightened arrows.
44. But Kon only could carve runes,<sup>37</sup>  
runes lasting ay, life-keeping runes;  
to bring forth babes birth runes he knew,  
to dull sword edges and to calm the sea.
45. Fowls' speech he knew, and quenched fires,  
could soothe (sorrows)<sup>38</sup> and the sick mind heal;  
in his arms the strength of eight men had.
46. In runes he rivaled Ríg the Earl;<sup>39</sup>  
with wiles he warred, outwitting him;  
thus got for himself, and gained to have,  
the name of Ríg and runic lore.
47. Rode Kon the young through copse and woods,  
birds he snared, used bow and arrow.
48. Then quoth a crow, croaking on branch:  
“Why snarest thou birds, scion of kings?  
Rather should'st thou ride swift horse,  
(brandish swords)<sup>40</sup> and slay foemen.
49. “Have Dan and Danp<sup>41</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>42</sup>

# The Lay of Hyndla<sup>1</sup>

## Hyndluljóð

Owing to its sadly confused state and faulty preservation—in the huge 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 of interpretations. One thing is clear: its didactic purpose to impart information about the genealogy of a certain Óttar. It has been suggested with some plausibility that this may have been Óttar Birtingr, a Norwegian of lowly origin who rose to a position high enough to marry King Harald Gilli's widow, and that our poem was composed to endow him with a pedigree. This Óttar was assassinated in 1146.

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 plausible, making the tangle of relationship more intelligible. The goddess Freya, riding on her boar, awakens the wise giantess Hyndla (compare with the situation in “Baldrs draumar” and “Grógaldr”) 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 that he is of nobler descent than the other. 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 the “memory ale” to drink, 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, should precede 11 to furnish the compulsion to make the giantess divulge her lore; and, indeed, this rearrangement 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 Halfdan the Old, mythical ancestor of many kings of Norway; 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 what as interpolated in these lists. 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 “Skáldskaparmál” (Chap. 64), and in the story entitled “How Norway Was Settled” (“Hversu Nóregr byggðist”).<sup>2</sup>

To most scholars, the poem has the earmarks of rather late and learned Icelandic origin, say, the end of 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>3</sup>      who sleepest in cave;

'tis darkest night,[4](#)      so now let us ride  
hence to Valholl,[5](#)      the hallowed stead.

2. "Let us ask Óthin      our errand to speed:  
he gives and grants      gold to his followers.  
To Hermóth[6](#) gave he      helm and byrnie,  
to King Sigmund,      the sword of victory.[7](#)

3. "He gives riches to some,      to some, victory,  
word skill to wights,      wisdom to others,  
breezes 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.

5. "Take one of thy wolves[8](#)      from his wonted stall,  
with my boar let him      leap on our way.

*(Hyndla said:)*

"Slow runs thy boar[9](#)      on the road to Valholl,  
nor will I weary      my worthy steed.

6. "False art, Freya,      to befriend me now;  
thine eye seemeth      to say to me  
thou ledest thy lover      on his last journey,[10](#)  
Óttar the Young,      Innstein's 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,[11](#)      by smiths twain fashioned  
of dwarfish kin,      Dáin[12](#) and Nabbi.

8. "Let us strive[13](#) as we sit      astride our saddles,  
match our lore of lines      of lordly races,  
of the kin of kings      who came from gods.[14](#)

9. "Wagered have they      for Welsh gold,  
Óttar the Young      and Angantýr:[15](#)  
the young hero      to help I am bound,  
lest he fail to get      his father's share.

10. “He a high altar made me of heaped stones—  
all glary<sup>16</sup> have grown the gathered rocks—  
and reddened anew them with neats’ fresh blood;  
for ay 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 Skjoldung who, a Skilfing<sup>18</sup> who,  
(an Othling who)<sup>19</sup> an Ylfing who?  
Who a landholder, 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.

13. “Was your father’s mother a fair-dight maiden;  
I ween she was hight Hlédís<sup>21</sup> the Priestess;  
was Fróthi her father, Fríaut her mother:  
this race was wholly ranked with the highest.

14. “Of old was Authi<sup>22</sup> among earth’s greatest;  
before lived Hálf dan,<sup>23</sup> highest of Skjoldungs;  
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,  
and home led Álmveig,<sup>24</sup> the most highborn woman—  
they issue had of eighteen sons.

16. “Thence the Skjoldungs, thence the Skilfings,  
thence the Othlings, thence the Ynglings,  
the landholders thence, the lords’ stock thence,  
who of most worth are in the world of men:  
thy sib all these, silly Óttar!

17. “Her mother,<sup>25</sup> hold I, was Hildigunn,  
the child of Sváva<sup>26</sup> and of Sækonung;  
thy sib all these, silly Óttar!  
Thou needs must know this— wilt know still more?

18. “Dag<sup>27</sup> married Thóra, mother-of-heroes;

in that kin were born the best of men:  
Frathmar and Gyrth, and the Freki brothers,  
Ám, Jofurmar, and Álf the Old;  
thou needs must know this— wilt know still more?

19. “Was Ketil<sup>28</sup> their kinsman, Klypp’s oldest son,  
your own mother’s mother-father;  
before Kári, Fróthi lived,  
and Álf the hero to Hild was born.

20. “Then was Nanna born, Nokkvi’s daughter;  
her son your father’s sister did wed;<sup>29</sup>  
of forefathers old still further I tell:  
thy sib all these, silly Óttar!

21. “Isolf and Ásolf, Olmóth’s sons these,  
and Skúrhild’s eke, Skekkil’s daughter,<sup>30</sup>  
among them are with many heroes;  
thy sib all these, silly Óttar!

22. “Gunnar Midwall, Grím the Hardy,  
Iron-Shield Thórir, Ulf the Gaping,  
Brodd and Horvir— both I knew them—  
they housecarls were with Hrólf the Old.<sup>31</sup>

23. “Hervarth, Hjorvarth, Hrani, Angantýr,<sup>32</sup>  
Búi and Brami, Barri and Reifnir,  
Tind and Tyrfing, 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. “I knew both of them, Brodd and Horvir  
both heroes were Hrólf’s followers.  
... ..  
<sup>35</sup>King Jormunrekk’s kinsmen all—:  
he was Sigurth’s sib— what I say heed thou—  
the folk-ruler’s, who Fáfnir slew.

26. “Was Svanhild’s sire the son of Volsung  
and of Hjordís, of Hrauthung’s<sup>36</sup> kin—  
she Eylimi’s, the Othling’s<sup>37</sup> daughter:



thy sib all these,      silly Óttar!

27. “Gunnar and Hogni      were Gjúki’s sons,  
of the same sib was      their sister Guthrún;  
but Guthorm was not      of Gjúki’s kin,  
though a brother      to both his sons:[38](#)  
thy sib all these,      silly Óttar!

28. “Harald Wartooth[39](#)      was to Hrœrek[40](#) born,  
the sower-of-rings:      he the son was of Auth;  
Auth[41](#) the Deep-Minded      was Ivar’s[42](#) daughter;  
Ráthbarth was      Randvér’s[43](#) father:  
were given to the gods[44](#)      these goodly men,  
thy sib all these,      silly Óttar!”[45](#)

*(Freya said:)*

29. “To my boar bring thou,      that he bear all in mind,  
a cup[46](#) so he can      keep all these words,  
and think of them      on the third morning,  
when the twain shall      tell of their kin.”

*(Hyndla said:)*

30. “Wend thy way now,      I wish to sleep;  
but little good      wilt get from me,  
in the night who runnest—      thou noble friend—[47](#)  
in her heat as Heithrún[48](#)      the he-goats among.

31. “Wert ever eager      with Óth[49](#) 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:)*

32. “The evil hag      I hedge with fire:  
unscathed shalt not      escape from hence.”

*(Hyndla said:)*

33. “A fire see I burn,      flameth the earth:  
he who loveth his life      will release himself gladly:[50](#)  
in the beaker bear thou      the beer to Óttar,  
with venom brewed:      may it work thy bane!”

*(Freya said:)*



34. “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!”



# The Short Seeress' Prophecy

## Völuspá hin skamma

Though in no wise marked off in the manuscript of “Hyndluljóð,” in which they occur (Sts. 29-44), the stanzas here translated 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.[1](#)

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 “Völuspá,” of which it is no doubt an imitation, in matter, structure, and refrain. This likelihood, coupled with certain stylistic features and the fact that the system of twelve gods (a late development) is referred to, indicates 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 had drooped    in death Baldr.  
    Then Váli revenge    did vow for him:  
    his brother's slayer    he slew forthwith.[2](#)
2. Was Baldr's father[3](#)    Bur's eldest son...
3. Frey wedded Gerth,[4](#)    who was Gymir's daughter,  
    of etin-kin,    with Aurbotha.  
    Thewful Thjatsi[5](#)    to them was kin,  
    the skulking thurs;    was Skathi his daughter.
4. I tell thee much,    yet more lore have I;  
    thou needs must know this—    wilt know still more?
5. Of Hvethna's sons    Haki was best,  
    but Hjorvarth was    Hvethna's father,  
    Heith and Hrossthjóf,    Hrímnir's kinsmen.[6](#)
6. From Vithólf[7](#) are    all witches sprung;  
    the tribe of warlocks,    from Vilmeith all;  
    the soothsayers,    from Svarthofthi;  
    and all etins    are of Ymir's kin.
7. I tell thee much,    yet more lore have I;  
    thou needs must know this—    wilt know still more?
8. In days of yore    a youth was born,  
    of sturdy strength,    of the stock of gods;

at the edge of the earth    etin maids nine  
gave birth and suck    to the brightest of gods.[8](#)

9. I tell thee much,    yet more lore have I;  
thou needs must know this—    wilt know still more?

10. Gjálp did bear him,    Greip did bear him,  
bore him Eistla    and Eyrgjafa,  
bore him Ulf rún    and Angeya,  
Imth and Atla,    and Járnsaxa.

11. He was nursed and grew    on the sap of the ground,  
on the ice-cold sea    and the sacred boar's blood.[9](#)

12. I tell thee much,    yet more lore have I;  
thou needs must know this—    wilt know still more?

13. Gat Loki the Wolf    with Angrbotha,[10](#)  
and Sleipnir he bore    to Svathilfari;[11](#)  
but of all ill wights    most awful by far  
is Býleist's brother's[12](#)    baleful offspring.

14. A half-burnt heart    which he had found—  
it was a woman's—    ate wanton Loki;  
with child he grew    from the guileful woman.[13](#)  
Thence are on earth    all ogres sprung.

15. The stormy sea    to the stars is tossed,  
overwhelms the land—    the heavens rive.  
Thence come great snows    and sweeping blasts.  
Then are doomed to die    the drooping gods.[14](#)

16. Was a mighty one born,    matchless in strength,  
he was nursed and grew    on the sap of the ground;  
most high-minded he    'mongst the hallowed gods,  
in sib with all sires[15](#)    and sons of earth.

17. [16](#) A god will come then,    an e'en greater one:  
I dare not speak    his dreaded name.  
Farther forward    few can see now  
than Óthin fighting    the Fenris-Wolf.[17](#)



# The Lay of Svipdag

## Svipdagsmál<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, all of these manuscripts 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 (*ljóðaháttir*). Moreover, we have the witness of a number of closely related Swedish and Danish ballads<sup>2</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 “Fjolsvinns-mál” 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” (“Grógaldr”): Young Svipdag is given, by an evil stepmother, the task of winning the hand of Mengloth in Giant-Land (we gather from the ballads that he has never seen Mengloth, but loves her 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 to give him in his hour of need. She chants for him nine spells which are to aid him in his dangerous undertaking.

II. “The Lay of Fjolsvith” (“Fjolsvinns-mál”): Svipdag (after overcoming all terrors of the journey, as we must assume) at last stands before a castle perched on a mountain top, surrounded by a wall of flickering flames. A giant watchman, Fjolsvith, 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 fragments borrowed from a score or so of unquestionably older poems in the collection. This 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 interminable didactic portions) engaging whole which simulates the Old Norse color surprisingly well, so well, in fact, 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 Gróa Grógaldr

*(Svipdag<sup>3</sup> said:)*

1. “Awake, Gróa,<sup>4</sup> good woman, awake!  
At the door of the dead<sup>5</sup> I wake thee:  
dost 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>6</sup>  
in her arms who folded my father:  
where come one cannot, to come she bade me,  
fair Mengloth<sup>7</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 norms work natheless.”<sup>8</sup>

*(Svipdag said:)*

5. “Speak thou such spells as will speed my way!  
Shield and shelter thy son!  
Full of danger, ween I, the dreaded journey  
for one so young in years.”

*(Gróa said:)*

6. “That first then heed, which most helpful I know,  
the which Rind spoke for Rán:<sup>9</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:  
may Urth's magic songs<sup>10</sup> on all sides guard thee,  
when with mocking words thou art met.
8. "This third heed thou: if in threat'ning waters  
thou fearest to find thy death:  
to Hel hence let fare Hronn and Uth,<sup>11</sup>  
may be dry the deeps for thee!
9. "This fourth heed thou: if foemen beset thee,  
ready to do thee to death:  
let their hearts withhold their hands from thee,  
and be made to meet thee halfway.
10. "This fifth heed thou: if fettered thou art,  
fastened hand and foot:  
a loosening spell I will speak o'er thy limbs,  
so the locks will burst off thy legs,  
the fetters from off thy feet.<sup>12</sup>
11. "This sixth heed thou: if on sea riseth  
weather more wild than men wot:  
wind and water will my witchcraft lull;  
then fearlessly fare thou forth!<sup>13</sup>
12. "This seventh heed thou: if searing frost  
beset thee on fell high faring:  
may the deadly cold not o'ercome thee ever,  
nor rob thy limbs of their litheness.
13. "This eighth heed thou, if without find thee  
a misty night on the moors,  
lest ill overtake thee, or untowardness,  
from the wraith of a Christian wretch!<sup>14</sup>
14. "This ninth heed thou: if with haughty thurs  
thou wouldest war with words:<sup>15</sup>  
wit nor words be wanting ever,  
at behest of thy heart!
15. "May thy errand no longer seem evil to thee,  
nor let thee from thy love:  
on earth-fast stone<sup>16</sup> I stood within doors,  
these spells while I spoke for thee!



16. “Of thy mother’s words     mindful thou be,  
      in thy heart let, darling, them dwell:  
luck everlasting     in life shalt have,  
      the while my words thou heedest!”

### **The Lay of Fjolsvith Fjolsvinnsmál**

1. [1](#)From far without     up he saw rise  
      the high-timbered hall of the etins[2](#)

*(Svipdag said:)*

“What foul fiend is it     in the forecourt who stands,  
about the flickering fire hovering?”[3](#)

*(Fjolsvith[4](#) said:)*

2. “What seekest thou,     for what thy search,  
      wayfarer, and what thy wish?  
On wet ways[5](#) thou     wend straight henceward:  
no hearth for the homeless here!”

*(Svipdag said:)*

3. “What foul fiend is it     in the forecourt who stands  
and welcomes not the wayfarer?”

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

“A good name, I ween,     thou never had’st,  
so hie thee home from hence!

4. “I am Fjolsvith hight,     famed for my lore,  
      but of my food am not free:[6](#)  
within this court     comest thou never:  
be off now, outlaw, away!”

*(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.”

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

6. “To whom art born,      and of what blood,  
youth, from what house dost hail?”[7](#)

*(Svipdag said:)*

“Vindkald[8](#) my name,      Várkald my father,  
Fjolkald his father was.

7. “Tell me, Fjolsvith,      for I fain would know;  
answer thou as I ask:  
who holdeth sway      in this seemly hall,  
so richly wrought with gold?”

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

8. “She is Mengloth[9](#) hight,      whom her mother bore  
to Svafrrthorin’s son:  
’tis she who holds sway      in this seemly hall,  
so richly wrought with gold.”

*(Svipdag said:)*

9. “Tell me, Fjolsvith,      for I fain would know;  
answer thou as I ask:  
how the wicket is hight      than which ’mong the gods  
none is more fraught with fear?”

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

10. “Thrymgjoll[10](#) is hight      that wicket which three  
sons of Sólblindi[11](#) made;  
with fast fetters      the wayfarer it holds  
who would heave it from its hinges.”[12](#)

*(Svipdag said:)*

11. “Tell me, Fjolsvith,      for I fain would know;  
answer thou as I ask:  
how that wall is hight      than which ’mong the gods  
none is more fraught with fear?”

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

12. “’Tis Gastropnir[13](#) hight,      which most goodly I built  
of Leirbrimir’s,[14](#) the etin’s, limbs;

'tis so stanchly built      that stand it will  
as long as men do live.”

*(Svipdag said:)*

13. [15](#) “Tell me, Fjolsvith,      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?”

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

14. “Tis hight Mimameith, [16](#)      but no man knoweth  
from what roots it doth rise;  
by what it falleth      the fewest guess:  
nor fire nor iron will fell it.” [17](#)

*(Svipdag said:)*

15. “Tell me, Fjolsvith,      for I fain would know;  
answer thou as I ask:  
of the fruit [18](#) what becomes      of that far spreading tree,  
since nor fire nor iron will fell it?”

*Fjolsvith said:*

16. “Of its berries thou      shalt bear on fire, [19](#)  
for ailing women to eat:  
then out will come      what within was held—  
such strength is bestowed on that tree.”

*(Svipdag said:)*

17. “Tell me, Fjolsvith,      for I fain would know;  
answer thou as I ask:  
how that cock is hight,      in the high tree sitting,  
which gleameth all golden?”

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

18. “He is Vithofnir hight      and watchful [20](#) standeth  
on the branches of Mimameith:  
with dreadful fear      he filleth the hearts  
of Surt [21](#) and Sinmara.”

*(Svipdag said:)*

19. “Tell me, Fjolsvith,     for I fain would know;  
      answer thou as I ask:  
how the hounds are hight     which about the hall  
      (grim and greedy prow)?”[22](#)

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

20. “Gifr is one hight,     Geri[23](#) the other,  
      if to wit thou wishest:  
strong[24](#) watchdogs they,     and watch they keep,  
      till draws nigh the doom of the gods.”

*(Svipdag said:)*

21. “Tell me, Fjolsvith,     for I fain would know;  
      answer thou as I ask:  
whether any man     within may come,  
      when the hungry hounds do sleep?”

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

22. “At the same time never     asleep they were,  
      since to their watch they were set:  
sleeps one at night,     at noontide the other,  
      so no one without may enter.”

*(Svipdag said:)*

23. “Tell me, Fjolsvith,     for I fain would know;  
      answer me as I ask:  
if morsel there be     which men might throw them,  
      and slip in the while they eat.”

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

24. “Neath Vithofnir’s limbs     lie wing-bits[25](#) twain,  
      if to wit thou wishest:  
that meat alone     may men throw them,  
      and slip in the while they eat.”

*(Svipdag said:)*

25. “Tell me, Fjolsvith,     for I fain would know;  
      answer thou as I ask:  
if weapon there be     which Vithof nir may  
      send to the halls of Hel?”[26](#)

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

26. “’Tis Lævatein<sup>27</sup> hight,      which Lopt<sup>28</sup> did forge,  
Niflhel beneath;  
in an iron kettle      keeps it Sinmara,  
there hold it hard locks nine.”

*(Svipdag said:)*

27. “Tell me, Fjolsvith,      for I fain would know;  
answer thou as I ask:  
will home wend him      the wight who goes  
and seeketh to win that wand?”

*(Fjolsvith 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 that goddess-of-gold.”<sup>29</sup>

*(Svipdag said:)*

29. “Tell me, Fjolsvith,      for I fain would know;  
answer thou as I ask:  
if anyone owns      ought of great worth,  
to make fain that fallow<sup>30</sup> ogress?”

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

30. “The shining feather      then shalt thou pluck  
which from Vithofnir’s start thou must steal,  
ere sullen Sinmara      will sell to thee  
the weapon to lay him low.”<sup>31</sup>

*(Svipdag said:)*

31. “Tell me, Fjolsvith,      for I fain would know;  
answer thou as I ask:  
what the hall is hight      which is hedged about  
by wall of flickering flame?”

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

32. “Lýr it is hight,      and long will it  
hover on sword’s point on high;<sup>32</sup>  
of this shining hall      from hearsay ever

men have learned alone.”

*(Svipdag said:)*

33. “Tell me, Fjolsvith, for I fain would know;  
answer thou as I ask:  
of the gods, who made (the golden floor),[33](#)  
within the hall so high?”

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

34. [34](#)“Uni and Iri, Ori and Bari,  
Var and Vegdrasil,  
Darri and Uri, and Delling were there,  
(the time Hlithskjalf was locked).”[35](#)

*(Svipdag said:)*

35. “Tell me, Fjolsvith, for I fain would know;  
answer thou as I ask:  
what the mountain is hight which the maiden doth  
dwell on, aloft and alone?”

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

36. “Tis Lyfja Mount[36](#) hight, and long has it been  
for the sick and the halt a help:  
for hale grows wholly, though hopeless she seems,  
the woman who wins its hight.”

*(Svipdag said:)*

37. “Tell me, Fjolsvith, for I fain would know;  
answer thou as I ask:  
what the maids are hight before Mengloth’s knees  
that sit in sisterly wise?”

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

38. “Hlíf one is hight, Hlífthrasa another,  
a third, Thjóthvara;  
eke Bjort and Bleik, Blíth and Fríth,  
Eir and Aurbotha.”[37](#)

*(Svipdag said:)*

39. “Tell me, Fjolsvith, for I fain would know;

answer thou as I ask:  
do they help award to their worshippers,  
if need of help they have?"

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

40. "(Ay they help award)<sup>38</sup> to their worshippers,  
in hallowed stead if they stand;<sup>39</sup>  
there is never a need that neareth a man,  
but they lend a helping hand."

*(Svipdag said:)*

41. "Tell me, Fjolsvith, for I fain would know;  
answer thou as I ask:  
if to any man Mengloth will grant  
in her soft arms to sleep?"

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

42. "No man liveth to whom Mengloth will grant  
in her soft arms to sleep;  
to Svipdag only the sunbright maiden  
for wedded wife was given."

*(Svipdag said:)*

43. "Let gape the gates, and give wide berth!  
Here mayst thou Svipdag see.  
Now hie thee hence, in the hall to learn  
if lief to Mengloth my love."

*(Fjolsvith said:)*

44. "Hear thou, Mengloth, a man hath come;  
go thou to greet the guest!  
The hounds bay welcome, the house hath opened:  
meseems that Svipdag it be."

*(Mengloth said:)*

45. "May greedy ravens gouge out thy eyes,  
as high on gallows thou hangest,  
if a lie it be that from long ways afar  
the hero hath come to my hall.

46. "Whence comest thou, and what thy kin,

what wert hight at home?  
Thy father's name tell, that token I have  
that I should be thy bride."

*(Svipdag said:)*

47. "I am Svipdag hight, Sólbjart<sup>40</sup> my father;  
thence wandered I wind-cold ways;  
'gainst Urth's<sup>41</sup> decree 'tis idle to strive,  
though loath be thy lot."

*(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 Lyfja Mount,  
bided thee day after day:  
now has happened what I hoped for long,  
that, hero, art come to my hall.

50. "Heartsick was I; to have thee I yearned,  
whilst thou didst long for my love.  
Of a truth I know: we two shall live  
our life and lot together."





# 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 No. 2367* of that work and in the *Trajectinus Paper Manuscript* of it. In all probability, Snorri contented himself with the quotation of the first stanza,<sup>1</sup> after briefly explaining the skaldic kenning for gold, as "Fróthi's Flour," by a short summary of the legend.<sup>2</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, harmonizing with the tragic conception of the theme, the wishing-mill goes to pieces when Fróthi's good fortune comes to an end, in the Prose the fall of Fróthi is rather ineptly combined with a fairy story widely spread in the North of "how the sea grew salt." In the other manuscripts of the *Prose Edda* this is localized by the statement that the sea king Mysing's ship 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, is the one of the great Danish scholar 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 (like "valkyries"), but at length being harnessed and reduced to servitude, until, overworked and abused, they finally rebel, overthrow the hated mill, and spread general havoc.

There are frequent allusions to the quern legend in skaldic poetry, the first occurring about 950 A.D., so that we may assume the poem to have been in existence by that time, with which it also agrees in style. There is no dependable clue as to its home. The measure is *fornyrðislag*.

Skjold<sup>3</sup> was a son of Óthin from whom the Skjoldungs are sprung. He dwelled and ruled in that land which now is called Denmark but which formerly was called Gotland.<sup>4</sup> Skjold's son was Frithleif<sup>5</sup> who ruled over the land after him. Frithleif's son was Fróthi.<sup>6</sup> He succeeded his father at the time when Augustus Cæsar made peace in all the world and Christ was born.<sup>7</sup> And because Fróthi was the most powerful king in all the Northern lands, peace was named after him wherever the Danish tongue<sup>8</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. At that time there was no thief or robber, so that a gold ring lay untouched three years by the high road over the Jalangr-Heath.<sup>9</sup> It happened that King Fróthi attended a feast given by King Fjolnir<sup>10</sup> in Sweden, and there he bought two bondmaids whose names were Fenja and Menja.<sup>11</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>12</sup> and Hengikjopt<sup>13</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 which is called “The Lay of Grotti”;[14](#) and before it was at an end they had ground this fate for him: on that very night came there the sea king, Mysing,[15](#) who slew Fróthi and took much booty—and that was the end of “The Peace of Fróthi.” Mysing took with him the mill, Grotti, and also Fenja and Menja, and bade them grind salt for him. At midnight they asked him whether he had enough salt, but he bade them grind on. They ground but a little while longer before the ship 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 the sea is salt.

1. Now then are come to the king’s high hall,  
the foreknowing twain,[16](#) Fenja and Menja;  
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;  
lag in their toil he would let them never,  
the slaves’ song he unceasing would hear.
3. The chained ones churning ay chanted their song:[17](#)  
“Let us right the mill and raise the millstones.”  
He gave them no rest, to grind on bade them.
4. They sang as they swung the swift-wheeling stone,  
till of Fróthi’s maids most fell asleep.  
Then Menja quoth, at the quern standing:
5. “Gold and good hap we grind for Fróthi,  
a hoard of wealth, on the wishing-mill;  
he shall sit on gold, he shall sleep on down,  
he shall wake to joy: well had we ground then!
6. “Here shall no one harm his neighbor,  
nor bale-thoughts brew for others’ bane,  
nor swing sharp sword to smite a blow,  
though his brother’s banesman bound he should find.”
7. This word first then fell from his lips:  
“Sleep ye shall not more than cock[18](#) in summer,  
or longer than I a lay may sing.”

*(Menja said:)*[19](#)

8. "A fool wert, Fróthi, and frenzied of mind,  
the time thou, men's friend,[20](#) us maidens didst buy;  
for strength didst choose us and sturdy looks,  
but didst not reckon of what race we sprang.
9. "Hardy was Hrungrir,[21](#) but his sire e'en more;  
more thews than they old Thjatsi[22](#) had.  
Ithi and Aurnir are of our kin:  
are we both born to brothers of etins.
10. "Scarce had Grotti come out of grey mountain,  
from out of the earth the iron-hard slab,  
nor had mountain-maids now to turn the millstone,  
if we had not first found it below.
11. "Winters nine we grew beneath the ground;  
under the mountains, we mighty playmates  
did strive to do great deeds of strength:  
boulders we budged from their bases.
12. "Rocks we rolled out of etins' realm:  
the fields below with their fall did shake;  
we hurled from the heights the heavy quernstone,  
the swift-rolling slab, so that men might seize it.
13. "But since then we to Sweden fared,  
we foreknowing twain, and fought among men;[23](#)  
(byrnies we slit)[24](#) and bucklers shattered,  
we won our way through warriors' ranks.
14. "One king we overthrew, enthroned the other.  
To good Guthorm we granted victory;  
stern was the struggle ere Knúi was struck.
15. "A full year thus we fared among men;  
our name was known among noble heroes.  
Through linden shields sharp spears we hurled,  
drew blood from wounds, and blades reddened.
16. "Now we are come to the king's high hall,  
without mercy made to turn the mill;  
mud soils our feet, frost cuts our bones;  
at the peace-quern we drudge: dreary is it here.
17. "The stone now let stand, my stint is done;  
I have ground my share, grant me a rest."

*(Fenja said:)*

“The stone must not stand,    our stint is not done,  
before to Fróthi    his fill we ground.

18. “Our hands shall hold    the hard spearshafts,  
weapons gory:    Awake, Fróthi!  
Awake, Fróthi,    if listen thou wilt  
to our olden songs,    to our ancient lore.

19. “My eye sees fire    east of the castle;  
battle cries ring out,    beacons are kindled!  
Hosts of foemen    hither will wend  
to burn down the hall    over thy head.

20. “No longer thou    Leire<sup>25</sup> shalt hold,  
have rings of red gold,    nor the mill of riches.  
Harder the handle    let us hold, sister;  
our hands are not warm yet<sup>26</sup>    with warriors’ blood.

21. “My father’s daughter<sup>27</sup>    doughtily ground,  
for the death of hosts    did she foresee;  
even now the strong booms    burst from the quern,  
the stanch iron stays—    yet more strongly grind!”

*(Menja said:)*

22. “Yet more swiftly grind:    the son of Yrsa<sup>28</sup>  
Fróthi’s blood will crave    for the bane of Halfdan—<sup>29</sup>  
he Hrólf is hight,    and is to her  
both son and brother,    as both of us know.”

23. The mighty maidens,    they ground amain,  
strained their young limbs    of giant strength;  
the shaft tree quivered,    the quern toppled over,  
the heavy slab    burst asunder.

24. Quoth the mighty maiden    of the mountain giants:  
“Ground have we, Fróthi,    now fain would cease;  
we have toiled enough    at turning the mill.”



# The Lay of Volund Völundarkviða

Stark and powerful, as are 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, who, held prisoner by the evil king Minos, fashions for himself and his son wings to escape, and with the limping smith of the gods, Hephaistos. Our poem gives the Germanic tradition its most authentic expression. It is antedated, however, by the Anglo-Saxon lay of *Dēor’s Lament*<sup>1</sup> and by the scene on the Franks Casket, generally referred to the seventh century. Far later, and with many new details, is the novelistic account of *the piðreks saga*.

The brief glimpses of nature vouchsafed us in the poem leave little doubt that the poem originated in Norway.<sup>2</sup> Both metre—a free *fornyrðislag*—and treatment place it among the earliest in *The Edda*; that is, perhaps, the ninth century. And this may account also in some degree for the sad condition of the text.<sup>3</sup> It is preserved only in the *Codex Regius*.

There was a king in Sweden hight Níthoth.<sup>4</sup> He had two sons and a daughter whose name was Bothvild.<sup>5</sup> There were three brothers, sons of a Finnish king. Was one hight Slagfith,<sup>6</sup> the second, Egil, and the third, Volund.<sup>7</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 swanskins, for they were valkyries.<sup>8</sup> They were the two daughters of King Hlothvér,<sup>9</sup> Hlathguth the Swanwhite, and Hervor the Allwise; and the third was Olrún,<sup>10</sup> 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 did not return. Then went forth Egil on his snowshoes to search for Olrún, and Slagfith, to look for Swanwhite; but Volund stayed 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.

## Of Volund and Níthoth

1. Three maidens flew through Myrkvith from Southland,  
young valkyries, in wars to try them;  
they sate by the lake, their limbs to rest,  
fair southron maids, precious flax spinning;
2. <sup>11</sup>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, enfolded Slagfith);[12](#)

... ..  
but Hervor, the third of these sisters,  
winded her arms 'round Volund's neck.

4. Thus dwelled the sisters seven winters,  
but on the eighth ay in yearning,  
but on the ninth they needs must part:  
longed the maidens through Myrkvith to fly,  
the young valkyries, in wars to try them.

5. Came the weather-wise from the woods striding,  
(from hunting weary, Volund the Smith,)[13](#)  
Slagfith and Egil, found empty the hall,  
went out and in, looking after them.

6. Fared Egil eastward, Olrún to seek,  
fared southward Slagfith, Swanwhite to find;  
but Volund alone in Wolf dales stayed—  
(bided till back his bride would come);[14](#)

7. With red gold rimmed richest jewels,  
with bast his rings then bound together;  
for the white-armed woman he waited long,  
biding if back his bride would come.

8. This heard Níthoth, the Njára King,[15](#)  
that Volund alone in Wolf dales dwelled:  
at night fared the men, were their mail coats studded,[16](#)  
their shields did shine by the moon-sickle's sheen.

9. From their horses leapt, at the hall's gable-end,  
and in they went from end to end;  
saw on bast the rings bound together,  
full seven hundred which the smith did own.  
Off they took all, put them on again;  
but one ring they away did take.[17](#)

10. Came the weather-wise from the woods striding,  
from hunting weary, Volund the Smith.  
To broil gan he a bear's meat then,  
soon flamed the fire of faggots dry,



the wood wind-dried,      on Volund's hearth.

11. On bearskins resting      the rings then told  
the alfs' folk-warder,      and one he missed:  
hoped that had it      Hlothvér's daughter,  
that the young valkyrie      had wended home.

12. Long time sate he,      till asleep he fell;  
awakened then      to woeful lot:  
on his hands had he      heavy shackles,  
were his feet fastened      by fetters strong.

*(Volund said:)*

13. "What warriors      have wound about me  
the rope of bast      and bound me thus?"

14. Then called out Níthoth,      the Njára King:  
"Where didst win, Volund,      in the Wolf dales living,  
thou lord of alfs,      our gold rings?  
That gold was not      on Grani's path,  
and far hence are      the hills of the Rhine."[18](#)

*(Volund said:)*

15. "Better treasure      I trow we had,  
in the hall when we      at home did sit."[19](#)

16. (Stood Níthoth's cunning      queen without);[20](#)  
in now went she      to endmost gable,  
on floor standing      with still voice said:[21](#)  
"There is hate in him      in the holt who dwelled."

King Níthoth gave his daughter Bothvild the gold ring which he had taken off the bast rope in Volund's hall, and he himself bore the sword which Volund had owned.

*But his queen said:*

17. "His teeth he bares,      the blade as he,  
and my daughter's      dear ring he sees:  
are his eyes awful,      like the adder's glittering.  
Sever ye soon      his sinews' might,  
let him sit henceforth      in Sævarstath."[22](#)

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 precious things. No one dared go to see him but only the king.

*(Volund said:)*

18. “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.
19. “Now bears Bothvild my bride’s armring  
the gold ring red I’ll not regain ever.”
20. Sate he nor slept, e’er smote with hammer;  
wrought Volund wondrous<sup>23</sup> works for Níthoth.  
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>24</sup>  
Much wondrous wealth they weened to see,  
the younglings, of gems and of yellow gold.

*(Volund said:)*

22. “Come again, lordlings, come alone on the morrow,  
the gleaming gold I shall give you then;  
from your nurses hide, and from household folk,  
from every wight, that ye wended to me.”<sup>25</sup>
23. Full soon one brother said to the other,  
and lad to lad: “Let us look at the rings!”
24. For the keys called they to the chest when they came—  
was their ill fate sealed when in they looked.  
He hewed off the heads of the hapless lads,  
their bodies buried ‘neath the bellows’ pit.<sup>26</sup>
25. With skill their skulls ‘neath the scalp that lay  
in silver he set<sup>27</sup> and sent them to Níthoth;  
of the bairns’ eyeballs shining beads he wrought  
and gave to the cunning queen of Níthoth.
26. But out of the twain’s teeth made Volund  
beauteous brooches which to Bothvild he sent.  
.... ..
27. Did proud Bothvild then praise the ring—<sup>28</sup>  
to Volund bore it as broken it was:

“I durst not tell this but to thee only.”

*(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 be 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:)*

30. “Are avenged the deeds which were done to me,  
save one only, (on the wicked queen).[29](#)

31. “Fain would I fare on my feet,”<sup>29</sup> quoth Volund,  
“whose might from me Níthoth’s men have taken.”[30](#)

32. Laughing, aloft lifted him Volund,  
weeping, Bothvild went from the isle,  
his flight fearing, and her father’s wrath.

33. Stood Níthoth’s cunning queen without;  
in now went she to endmost gable;  
but on house wall high awhile he[31](#) rested:  
“Art waking, Níthoth, thou Njára King?”[32](#)

*(Níthoth said:)*

34. “I am wakeful ever, nor wait me joy,  
ever since my sons’ death I slept but little:  
cold was thy counsel,[33](#) cold is my head;[34](#)  
now wish I this of Volund to ask:

35. “Make answer, Volund, thou alfs’ leader!  
What hath become of my hapless boys?”

*(Volund said:)*

36. “Ere shalt thou swear all oaths to me,  
by ship’s bulwark and shield’s border,  
by swift steed’s shoulder and sharpest sword:  
that to Volund’s wife thou work no harm,  
nor brew for my bride baleful counsel,  
though wife I have whom well ye know,

or child I have thy hall within.

37. "To the smithy wend, for Volund builded,  
there the bellows shalt all bloody find:  
I hewed off the heads of thy hapless boys,  
and their bodies buried 'neath the bellows' pit.

38. "With skill their skulls 'neath the scalp which lay  
in silver I set and sent them to thee;  
of the bairns' eyeballs shining beads I wrought  
and gave to the cunning queen of Níthoth.

39. "But out of the twain's teeth made Volund  
beauteous brooches and to Bothvild sent them;  
and now Bothvild is big with child,  
your only daughter, dear to you both."

*(Níthoth said:)*

40. "Ne'er said'st thou word which saddened me more  
nor I wished, Volund, worse to avenge:  
but so high no one, to haul thee down,  
nor so strong, belike, from below to shoot thee,  
so high since hoverest 'neath very heaven."

41. Laughing, aloft lifted him Volund,  
in sorrow Níthoth sate behind, then.

42. Then spake Níthoth, the Njára King:  
"Rise up, Thakkráth,[35](#) of my thralls thou best,  
and bid Bothvild, the brow-white maiden  
fairly dight, go with her father to speak."

43. "Is it true, Bothvild, as told I am,  
that Volund with thee was on the isle?"

*(Bothvild said:)*

44. "Tis true, Níthoth, as told thou art:  
Volund with me was on the isle  
(an hour of shame):[36](#) it should not have been.  
No strength had I to strive against him,  
naught availed it 'gainst Volund to strive."



# The Helgi Lays

A certain similarity of theme, treatment, style, 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 Sinfjotli, and both a Volsung and an Ylfing, it is fairly certain—through the evidence of the names of persons and localities—that, originally, Helgi was a purely Danish hero.<sup>[1](#)</sup> Indeed, this very attempt to weld the two cycles together argues a relatively late origin for these lays—say the eleventh century—an origin which is further borne out by the testimony of verse technique, language, and style. Except for trifling fragments, the three lays are preserved only in the *Codex Regius*.<sup>[2](#)</sup>

## The Lay of Helgi Hjorvarthsson Helgakviða Hjorvarðssonar

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 even more awkward, rambling, and absentminded than is usual with him. By the relative copiousness of its Prose, the poem forms a transition stage, as it were, between the heroic lay on the one hand and the legendary saga on the other. In the latter one may often doubt whether the interspersed stanzas and lays are meant to serve as an authentication of the narrative, or the narrative, to explain and connect these stanzas or lays.

The first two fragments are in no sense notable efforts. The almost elegiac note, which distinguishes the stanzas on Helgi's death in fragment IV, reminds one, in a way, of "Hjálmar's Death Song" in the *Hervarar saga*, but there is too little imaginative energy, and the main figures are too faintly outlined to awaken our sympathy. A late (thirteenth-century?) origin is likely for this part.

Internal evidence makes it rather certain that the "flyting," or word-duel, of Atli with the giantess Hrímgérth (Fragment III), which also stands out by the different metre (*ljóðaháttir*), is of a later date than the other fragments. It may be well to remind the reader that here, as in the "Lokasenna," 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, showing as it does the animal side of the Viking Age, as contrasted with the frequently stilted and stereotyped idealisations of Heroic Poetry. In this particular case, a robustious, though low, humor redeems what elsewhere degenerates into a mere scolding match.

### I.

Hjorvarth was the name of a king, and he had four wives. One was called Alfild, whose son by him was called Hethin; another, Særeith, whose son was Humlung; a third, Sinrjóth, whose son was Hymling. King Hjorvarth had vowed to marry the handsomest woman he could find. Now he had heard that King Sváfnir<sup>1</sup> had a most fair daughter, hight Sigrínn. (It had happened in this wise:) one day Atli,<sup>2</sup> the son of his earl Ithmund, was standing by a clump of trees, but a bird<sup>3</sup> sate in the branches above him which had heard how the king's men had called Hjorvarth's wives the fairest of all women. The bird twittered whilst Atli listened to what it said.

1. "Hast seen Sigrínn, Sváfnir's daughter,  
the fairest maiden in Munarheim—<sup>4</sup>  
handsome though be Hjorvarth's women  
in Glasir Grove, and goodly withal?"

*(Atli said:)*

2. “Wilt to Atli, Earl Ithmund’s son,  
wise bird on bough, unburden thee?”

*(The bird said:)*

“I will if thou wilt worship me,  
and of Hjorvarth’s chattels I may choose at will.”

*(Atli said:)*

3. “Choose thou nor Hjorvarth, nor Hjorvarth’s sons,  
nor the folk-warder’s fair-haired women,  
the winsome women of the war leader;<sup>5</sup>  
let us fairly deal, as friends seemeth.”

*(The bird said:)*

4. “Choose I hallowed shrines and holy places,  
golden-horned kine<sup>6</sup> from the king’s stables,  
in his arms if sleeps Sváfnir’s daughter,  
and not unwilling wends with the king.”

Atli dwelled throughout the winter with King Sváfnir.<sup>7</sup> Fránmar was King Sváfnir’s earl who had fostered up Sigrlinn. His own daughter was hight Álof. The earl counseled the king not to give Sigrlinn to King Hjorvarth; so Atli journeyed home.

*But when he came home the king asked what tiding he had and, he said:*

5. “No welcome word rewards my toil,  
our horses wearied on high mountains;  
swift Sæmorn’s flood we forded then,  
nor fetched whom we sought, Sigrlinn, for thee,  
the ring-bedight daughter of Sváfnir.”

The king bade him fare a second time, and rode along himself. And when they came over the mountain they saw in Svávaland great fires, and great clouds of dust raised by horses. Then rode the king down from the mountain into the land and halted for the night by some river. Atli stood guard and set over the river. He found a house, 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 Hjorvarth took Sigrlinn to wife, and Atli, Álof.



## II.

Hjorvarth and Sigrlinn had a son who was large of body and handsome. He spoke little, and no name would cling to him.<sup>8</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>9</sup> hold sway over rings  
nor, reddener-of-swords, o’er Rothulsvoll—  
screamed the eagles early<sup>10</sup>— if ay thou sayest naught;  
though stouthearted, hero, I ween thee!”

*(Helgi said:)*

7. “What gift goes with the given name<sup>11</sup>  
which, white-armed maid, on me hast bestowed?  
Bethink thee well what thou wilt say:  
I’ll have none of the name, if not eke thee.”

*(The valkyrie said:)*

8. “Swords know I, lie in Sigarsholm,<sup>12</sup>  
a full fifty but four, I ween;  
of the bitter brands the best is one,  
a wound-dealing wand all wound with gold.<sup>13</sup>
9. “There is Praise<sup>14</sup> in the hilt, Power in the blade,  
Awe in the edge, for whoso owns it;  
on the blade winds him a blood-hued worm,<sup>15</sup>  
but on the sword-guard a snake lies coiled.”

Eylimí was the name of a king, and his daughter was hight Sváva. She was a valkyrie and rode through the air and over the sea. It was she who had given Helgi his name, and she often afterwards shielded him in battles.

*Helgi said:*

10. “Thou takest not, Hjorvarth, wholesome counsel,  
leader-in-war— though wide thy fame—  
sacking with fire the seats of kings  
who hardly have done harm to thee;
11. “But Hróthmar lettest lavish gold rings  
which that our kin in keeping had:

but little fears he      that foemen live,  
but deems he wields      dead men's riches.

Hjorvarth answered that he would help Helgi with an army if he wished to avenge his mother's father. Then sought Helgi the sword which Sváva had told him of, and fared forth with Atli. They felled Hróthmar and did many a great deed.

### III

Helgi killed the giant Hati,[16](#) whom he found sitting on a rock cliff. Helgi and Atli had moored their ships in the Hatafirth. Atli kept the watch during the first part of the night.

*Hrímgerth, Hati's daughter, said:*

12. "Who be the heroes      in Hatafirth?  
Are the ships tented with shields;[17](#)  
unflinching ye fare,      seem to fear but little:  
make known the name of your king!"

*Atli said:*

13. "He is Helgi hight,      and no harm whate'er  
canst thou do the doughty leader;  
iron-clad[18](#) is      the atheling's fleet,  
so no witches may work us ill."

*Hrímgerth 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 forecastle."[19](#)

*(Atli said:)*

15. "Atli am I,      and awe thee [20](#) I shall,  
most hateful am I to hags;  
in the brine-washed bow      was my berth full often,  
when night riders[21](#) did I to death.

16. "Of what kin art thou,      corpse-greedy ogress?  
What father had'st thou, hag?  
Full nine leagues should'st      be beneath the earth,  
thy bosom o'ergrown with bushes."[22](#)

*(Hrímgerth said:)*

17. “Am I Hríngerth hight,     was Hati my father,  
          mightiest of all the etins;  
many’s the maid     he made off with,  
          ere Helgi sent him to Hel.”

*(Atli said:)*

18. “’Twas thou, hag, then,     who held up his ships,  
          in the firth as thou lay’st before us;  
to Rán<sup>23</sup> would’st have given     the ring-breaker’s men,  
          if his spear had not spitted thee.”

*(Hríngerth said:)*

19. “Mistaken art,     tricked by a dream,  
          now thou wrinklest thy brow in rage:  
’twas my mother     who moveless held you:  
          drowned I Hlothvarth’s sons in the sea.<sup>24</sup>

20. “Thou would’st gambol and neigh     if gelt thou were not,  
          now Hríngerth tosses her tail;  
I ween thy heart     in thy hinder part be,  
          though strong like a stallion’s thy whinny.”<sup>25</sup>

*(Atli said:)*

21. “A stallion in strength,     if I stepped on land,  
          and frisky, thou would’st find me;  
I would beat thee so,     if but I wished,  
          thou would’st lower thy tail in a twinkling.”

*(Hríngerth said:)*

22. “On land step then,     if thy strength thou trustest:  
          in Varinsfirth I’ll wait thee;  
I shall stave thy ribs,     steersman Atli,  
          if thou comest within reach of my claws.”

*(Atli said:)*

23. “I may not go     ere the men awake  
          who have watch and ward of my lord;  
small wonder were it     if, witch, of a sudden  
          thou camest up under our keel.”

*(Hríngerth said:)*

24. “Awake, Helgi,      and to Hríngerth 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>26</sup> shall wed thee,      hag loathly to men,  
        the thurs that in Tholl Isle<sup>27</sup> dwells,  
that wisest etin      and worst of trolls:  
        there is mate who is meet for thee.”

*(Hríngerth said:)*

26. “Wilt have her,<sup>28</sup> rather,      who the haven scanned  
        mail-clad, last night, with thy men!  
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, Hríngerth,      if thy harm I make good,  
        then tell me truly:  
was it one valkyrie      who warded the ships,  
        or fared they all in a flock?”

*(Hríngerth said:)*

28. “Thrice nine maidens were they,      although one led,  
        a white-armed maid 'neath helm;  
when their steeds stirred them,      astride as they sate,  
        [ran dew from their manes in deep dales,  
        fell hail into high woods;  
        thence come to men good crops:]<sup>29</sup>  
        'twas hateful for me to behold.”

*(Atli said:)*

29. “Look east<sup>30</sup> now, Hríngerth;      hath Helgi now  
        dazed thee with deadly runes:  
in the haven safe      lies the sea king's fleet,  
        and safe are his men also.”

*(Helgi said:)*

30. “Tis day now, Hríngerth, thy death it is  
that Atli hath held thee here:  
as harbor mark, mocked by sailors,  
standeth thy likeness in stone.”

## IV

King Helgi was a mighty warrior. He fared to King Eylimi and asked for the hand of his daughter. Helgi and Sváva swore oaths to each other, and their love was great. Sváva stayed at home with her father, but Helgi was in the wars; yet was Sváva a valkyrie as before. Hethin was at home with his father, King Hjorvarth, in Norway. One time Hethin was coming home alone from the forest on Yule eve. He met a troll woman riding on a wolf, with snakes as reins. She asked his leave to keep him company, but he would not. She said: “That shalt thou rue when drinking from the hallowed cup.” In the evening vows were made: the sacrificial boar was led in, men laid their hands on him and swore dear oaths as they drank from the hallowed cup.<sup>[31](#)</sup> Hethin made a vow that he would have Sváva, Eylimi’s daughter, the maiden beloved by Helgi, his brother; but he forthwith rued it so greatly that he hastened South on wild ways till he found his brother Helgi.

*Helgi said:*

31. "Hail to thee, Hethin!      What hast to tell  
of weighty news      from Norroway?  
Why hast, hero,      hastened away  
and fared alone      to find me here?"

*(Hethin said:)*

32. “A wretched wrong I wrought on thee,  
(far greater, brother, than good I can make):[32](#)  
on holy beaker in banquet hall  
thy bride I chose me, the child of kings.”

(Helgi said:)

33. “Taunt thee no more,      for true will come  
thy vow on beaker,      for both of us:  
on holm I was bidden<sup>33</sup>      by hero bold;  
in three days’ time      we there shall meet.  
I much fear me      that from it I wend not;  
then without harm      all may happen to us.”

*(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.”[34](#)

Helgi had spoken thus because he thought himself fey, and believed that it was his wraith[35](#) Hethin had met with when he saw the woman riding on the wolf. King Álf, the son of Hróthmar, had challenged him to do battle with him on ‘Sigar’s Field’ on the third day.

*Then said Helgi:*

35. “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 Sigarsvellir.”

There was a great battle, and Helgi was mortally wounded.

36. 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:)*

37. “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:)*

38. “What harmed Helgi, King Hjorvarth’s son?  
Most heavy is my heart with sorrow:  
if sea him swallowed, or sword wounded,  
my wrath shall reach the wretch full soon.”

*(Sigar said:)*

39. “He fell this morn at Freka Stone,[36](#)  
under heaven who was of all heroes best;  
’tis Álf hath won in the weapon-play.[37](#)  
In evil hour it all happened.”

*(Helgi said:)*

40. “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.

41. "I beg of thee,      my bride, weep not;  
but to my words, Sváva,      I beseech thee, hearken:  
with my brother      thy bed share thou,  
let young Hethin      have thy love."

*(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."

*(Hethin said:)*

43. "Kiss me, Sváva:      I come not ever,  
Rógheim to see,      nor Rothul-fells,  
ere avenged I have      King Hjorvarth's son,  
under heaven who was      of all heroes best."

Of Helgi and Sváva it is said they were born again.[38](#)

# The First Lay of Helgi the Hunding-Slayer

## Helgakviða Hundingsbana I

All things considered, this lay is perhaps the truest, though certainly not the finest, expression of the spirit of the “Viking Age,” when Scandinavia—*vagina gentium*—poured forth, as the last wave of the Great Age of Migration, those swarms of dragon-ships, manned with the boldest sailors and fiercest warriors of the time, which swept like angry storm clouds over the coastlands of the Western World. In no other lay is there an equal concentration of vision, to the exclusion of all else, on the warrior’s life as the only occupation worthy of men—the joyance in dangers on land and on sea of “athelings ever eager for war.” In no other lay, too, does the paucity of contents verge so nearly on monotony and thinness of invention. Barring the word-duel between Sinfjotli and Guthmund, it is all about Helgi’s warlike deeds, beginning with his birth, and leaving him at the zenith of power, with Sigrún won and the Hundings’s lands his. We hear nothing of the tragic end hinted at in Stanza 5. Characterization is totally absent and, indeed, it is not aimed at: both scenes and men are typical and representative, not individual. But within the limits of his art the poet has achieved some truly magnificent stanzas, in the Northern mood; such as the grandiose figure of the norns affixing the fate-threads of the newly born hero to the very heavens, the description of the storm at sea, and of the appearance of the valkyries in the uproar of the elements and the clash of battle.

Otherwise the poem, like “Hymiskviða,” is notable in the Collection for its unusually numerous kennings—for hero, battle, ships, and so forth—and frequent intercalated phrases, characteristics which make it approach somewhat the manner of later encomiastic skaldic poetry. And if, as has been surmised, the Helgi of this lay is meant to idealize King Magnús Ólafsson, this would furnish additional reason for placing composition of the lay in the middle of the eleventh century. Its present form may be due to later accretions.

1. 'Twas in olden times, as eagles screamed  
and holy streams flowed from the Heaven-Fells,<sup>1</sup>  
when in Brálund Borghild<sup>2</sup> bore to the world  
a hero highhearted, Helgi by name.
2. At night in hall the norns did come,  
to the lord they allotted his life and fate:  
to him awarded under welkin most fame,  
under heaven to be among heroes first.
3. His fate-thread span they<sup>3</sup> to o’erspread the world  
(for Borghild’s bairn)<sup>4</sup> in Brálund castle;  
they gathered together the golden threads,  
and in moon-hall’s<sup>5</sup> middle they made them fast.



4. In East and West the ends they hid:  
the liege's lands lay there between;  
on the Northern side, Neri's sister<sup>6</sup>  
did hang one end to hold forever.
5. One evil only the Ylfing<sup>7</sup> threatened,  
the maiden eke who the atheling bore:  
<sup>8</sup>.... ..  
Croaked a raven hoarsely, on high tree sitting—  
hunger gnawed him— "I know something:
6. "In his byrnie stands<sup>9</sup> who was born at night,  
King Sigmund's son; now the sun is risen!  
His eyes flash fire, athelingwise;  
he will feast the wolves:<sup>10</sup> fain let us be!"
7. A true king he to the housecarls seemed:  
they hoped to have good harvest years;<sup>11</sup>  
Sigmund himself, from the swordplay<sup>12</sup> coming,  
to the lordling brought a leek most noble.<sup>13</sup>
8. Named him Helgi, and Hringstead gave him,  
Sun Fell, Snow Fell, and Sigar's Field,  
Hringstead, Hátún, and Himin Meadows,<sup>14</sup>  
eke a seemly sword, to Sinfjotli's brother.<sup>15</sup>
9. Under kinsmen's care the king's son thrived,  
the highborn elm tree,<sup>16</sup> in happiness;  
gave and granted gold to his housecarls,  
nor spared the hero the hoard blood-splattered.<sup>17</sup>
10. Not long the lord delayed battle,  
when fifteen winters<sup>18</sup> the folk-warder;  
Hunding he slew, the hardy king  
who long had ruled over lands and thanes.
11. Then Hunding's sons for hoard and rings  
swiftly summoned King Sigmund's son,  
thirsted, forsooth, to repay the thane  
for their father's fall and wealth from him taken.
12. But Helgi would hear not of haggling gifts,  
nor weregild award them, though they wanted it;  
but await rather the wrath-of-Óthin,<sup>19</sup>  
and whelming-storm- of-whining-spears.<sup>19</sup>

13. Fared the sons of kings to the sword-tryst then  
which the lords had set at Loga Fells;  
was Fróthi's Peace by foemen broken,<sup>20</sup>  
ran Óthin's hounds<sup>21</sup> the island about.
14. Sate him Helgi when slain he had  
Álf and Eyolf, 'neath Eagle Rock;  
eke Hjorvarth and Hávarth, the Hunding's sons,  
had the king then killed, all the kin of the warrior.
15. A light shone then from Loga Fells;  
and out of that light lightning flashed:  
(saw the matchless hero the maidens riding)<sup>22</sup>  
high and helmeted, on Himin Meadows.  
Were their byrnies blood bespattered,  
from their spear points bright sparks flew forth.
16. At earliest dayspring, in wolf forest<sup>23</sup>  
asked Sigmund's son the Southron maidens  
if with the heroes home they would fare  
at time of night— twanged the bowstrings.
17. But, high on horseback, Hogni's daughter—<sup>24</sup>  
was the shield-din lulled—to the lord spoke thus:  
“Other deeds, I deem, we must do ere night,  
breaker-of-rings,<sup>25</sup> than drink thy beer.
18. “Hath my father my faith plighted  
to wed Granmar's<sup>26</sup> grim son Hothbrodd;  
yet have I, Helgi, of Hothbrodd said  
that the king callow like a kitten seemed.<sup>27</sup>
19. “Will he fare hither in few days' time  
(to fetch home with him Hogni's daughter),<sup>28</sup>  
but to battle on holm thou biddest him,  
or from the king carriest the maiden.”

*(Helgi said:)*

20. “In awe stand not of Isung's slayer:<sup>29</sup>  
(our swords shall say and settle first,  
who Hogni's daughter's husband shall be)<sup>30</sup>  
—will be din of fight— ere dead I lie.”
21. Over land and sea the lord did send,  
to gather together his goodly hosts:

rich meed pledged he      of the river-hoard<sup>31</sup>  
as reward to warriors      and warriors' sons.

22. "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>32</sup>

23. Straightway also<sup>33</sup>      from Stave Ness thither  
rode dark warships,      all decked with gold.  
Then asked Helgi      of Hjorleif<sup>34</sup> this:  
"Hast thou mustered      the mighty host?"

24. 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>35</sup>      outbound hovered.

25. "Are there twelve hundred      trusty warriors;  
yet more by half      in Hátún stand  
'neath the king's banner—      battle I wait me."

26. Off the awnings      the atheling drew,<sup>36</sup>  
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 Varinsfirth.<sup>37</sup>

27. Rose the din of oars,      of iron clashing,<sup>38</sup>  
crashed shield 'gainst shield      with shock of rowing,  
as dashed through the waves      the warrior's fleet;  
the stanch wave-steeds<sup>39</sup>      stood out to sea.

28. It burst on the ears      when, buffeting,  
the long ship keels      met Kolga's sister,<sup>40</sup>  
as if surf with cliff      did clash in storm.

29. 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>39</sup>

30. But Sigrún on high      hovering above  
did shield them stoutly,      and their ships also;  
the king's brine-hogs<sup>39</sup>      out of Rán's<sup>41</sup> clutches  
glided safely      at Gnipa Grove.

31. Floated the fair-dight fleet at ease then  
in Una Bay, at eventide;  
suddenly saw them from Svarins Hill  
the sons of Granmar, and sorrowfully.
32. Asked then Guthmund, of goodly kin:  
“Who the highborn hero, leading  
these hosts hither to harry on us?”
33. Said Sinfjotli—[42](#) to the sailyard hoisted  
the red warshield,[43](#) with rim of gold—  
in the stem standing to strive with words,  
to athelings who could answer make:
34. “Tonight say thou, when the swine thou feedest,  
and givest to hungry hounds their meat,[44](#)  
that the Ylfing hosts from the East have come,  
girded for war, from Gnipa Grove:
35. “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 bondmaids.
- (Guthmund said:)*
36. “Thou speakest rashly nor reck’st old tales,  
when untruth thou of atheling tellest.
37. “Thou hast made thy meal of the meat of wolves,  
and been the bane of thy brothers twain;  
with thy cold snout hast oft sucked men’s wounds,  
and hateful to all hast hid in the waste.”[45](#)
- (Sinfjotli said:)*
38. “A witch wast thou on Varins Isle,  
didst fashion falsehoods and fawn on me, hag:  
to no wight would’st thou be wed but to me,  
to no sword-wielding swain but to Sinfjotli.
39. “Thou wast, witch-hag, a valkyrie fierce  
in Alfather’s hall, hateful and grim:  
all Valholl’s warriors had well-nigh battled,  
wilful woman, to win thy hand.  
On Saga Ness full nine wolves we

had together— I gat them all.”

*(Guthmund said:)*

40. “The father wast not to Fenris-Wolves,[46](#)  
though older thou than all of them;  
for gelded wast thou near Gnipa Grove  
by thurs maidens on Thór’s Ness, before.
41. “As Siggeir’s stepson[47](#) ’neath stones didst dwell[48](#)  
in woody wastes, with the wolves howling;  
’twas ever thy share to do shameful deeds:  
thy own brother’s breast thou torest,[49](#)  
and mad’st thee known by nameless deeds.
42. “Wast Grani’s[50](#) bride on Brávoll Field,[51](#)  
for the race ready with reins all golden;  
full many a space I spurred thee on,  
slender ’neath saddle, till thou slunk’st downhill.”[52](#)

*(Sinfjotli said:)*

43. “A foul-mouthed fellow I found thee to be,  
the time thou Gollnir’s she-goats didst milk;  
another time, as Imth’s daughter,  
a tattered troll-wench.[53](#) Wilt taunt me longer?”

*(Guthmund said:)*

44. “At Freka Stone would I feed, rather,  
ravening ravens on thy riddled body,  
than give thine hungry hounds their meat,  
or the swine their swill: go snarl with the trolls!”

*Helgi said:*

45. “’Twere, Sinfjotli, more seeming far  
to wield your swords and sate eagles,  
than with words to wage war between you,  
though the ring-breakers’ wrath is kindled.
46. “No good I wait me from Granmar’s sons,  
yet befits it kings no falsehood to say;  
at Móinsheim[54](#) right manfully  
their wands-of-wounds[55](#) they wielded boldly.”
47. They spurred the steeds to speed amain,

Sviputh and Sveggjuth, to Sólheim castle—  
through dewy dales and darksome glens;  
the earth did quake where the king's sons<sup>56</sup> rode.  
At the gate met they the mighty ruler,  
said that foemen were faring hither.

48. Without stood Hothbrodd, in helmet dight—  
had cast his eyes on his kinsmen's riding:  
("Say ye, kinsmen, whom seen ye have:)<sup>57</sup>  
what rouses, Niflungs,<sup>58</sup> your wrath so sore?"

*(Guthmund said:)*

49. "Are swiftly swimming to sandy shore  
mast-stags<sup>59</sup> many with mighty sailyards,  
with shining shields and shaven oars,  
a goodly host of gladsome warriors;  
fifteen thousand set foot on land,  
but seven thousand more in Sogn are waiting.

50. "Foregathered lie before Gnipa Grove  
blue-black brine-hogs,<sup>59</sup> ablaze with gold:  
by far the most of the foes are there—  
will Helgi haste the hail-of-arrows."<sup>60</sup>

*(Hothbrodd said:)*

51. "Let the reined steeds run to Regin Thing,  
Méltnir and Mýlnir, to Myrkvith dark,  
and Sporvitnir to Sparins Heath.  
Each man bestir him, nor stay behind  
who the wand-of-wounds can wield in battle.

52. "Bid Hogni come, and Hring's sons eke,  
Atli and Yngvi, and Álf the Hoary,  
athelings ever eager for war;  
let us warmly welcome the Volsung's sons!"

53. With swift swoop then smote together  
the flashing swords at Freka Stone:  
was ay Helgi, the Hunding's Slayer,  
foremost in fray where fought heroes;  
fierce in fighting, to fly unready,  
stouthearted hero was Helgi ever.

54. 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—[61](#)

55. "Hail to thee, hero! In happiness live,  
Yngvi's[62](#) scion, hold sway over men:  
unfleeing foe felled now hast thou,  
in swordplay who slew sea kings many.

56. "Now, folk-warder, befit thee well  
the red-gold rings and the ruler's daughter;  
hale shalt, hero, hold these twain:  
Hogni's daughter and Hringstead eke,  
victory and wealth: is the war ended."

## The Second Lay of Helgi the Hunding-Slayer Helgakviða Hundingsbana II

The same theme as in the preceding poem is here treated in a minor key, and doubtless by another poet, with all stress laid on the loves of Helgi and Sigrún.<sup>1</sup> 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 Hjorvarthsson,” a number of fragments pieced together by the Collector, or a sort of gleanings 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, the twenty-third through the twenty-eighth, and the thirty-ninth, it is essentially one in idea—centering around the valkyrie’s absolute devotion to the hero, a devotion which involved the destruction of her own kin and continued 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 Sinfjotli and Guthmund, oddly enough after referring to it! There are also a few telling but disconnected stanzas from some poem about Helgi’s youth (Sts. 1-5).

Even in its present sadly mutilated condition the lay cannot fail to give 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 terrible curse upon 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 best to retain the order of the Collection; especially as the death of the lovers makes a fitting conclusion for the cycle.



# I

**ABOUT THE VOLSUNGS.** King Sigmund, the son of Volsung, had to wife Borghild from Brálund. They named their son Helgi, after Helgi Hjorvarthsson. 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 another'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. Heming, one of the sons of King Hunding, was at home.

*Now when Helgi was about to leave, he met a shepherd boy and he said:*

1. "Say to Heming      that Helgi recalleth  
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 bondmaid and turning the millstone. They searched but found Helgi nowhere.

2. <sup>9</sup> (Then Blind said thus,      ay bent on ill):  
"Bright are the eyes      of Hagal's bondmaid;  
no cotter's quean      at the quern who standeth:  
the bin breaketh,      burst the millstones.<sup>10</sup>
3. "A harsh fate hath      the hero fettered,  
since the bold one now      must barley grind;  
the hilt rather      of hero's sword,  
than the mill-handle,      that hand befitteth."

*Hagal answered and said:*

4. "Little wonder that,      though throbs the bin,  
since queenly maiden      the mill-handle turns:  
she was wont to ride      the welkin above,  
and vikingwise      wielded the sword;<sup>11</sup>
5. "Ere that Helgi her      led home as thrall,  
(and the mighty maiden      at the mill did drudge;)<sup>12</sup>  
a sister she      of Sigar and Hogni,  
hence awful the eyes      of the Ylfing maid."

Helgi escaped from there and went on a warship. He slew King Hunding and was thereafter called the Hunding-Slayer.

## II

One time he lay with his fleet in Bruna Bay and made a cattle raid on land, and his men ate the meat raw.[13](#) Hogni was the name of a king whose daughter was Sigrún. She became a valkyrie and rode through the air and over the sea. She was Sváva born again.

*She rode to Helgi's ships and said:*

6. "To the steep shore who     steereth the fleet?  
Where, ye heroes     lies your homestead?  
For what bide ye     in Bruna Bay?  
Whither list ye now     to lay your course?"

*(Helgi said:)*

7. "'Tis Hamal steers     to steep shore the fleet,  
the warriors' homestead     on Hlés Isle[14](#) 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,[15](#)  
or fed Gunn's fowls[16](#)     with fallen men?  
Why is thy byrnie     with blood besprent,  
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[17](#) 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."[18](#)

*(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 kinsman 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 kinsman 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>19</sup>.
13. “I watched thee eke      on warship standing,  
    on bloody bow,      breasting the waves—  
they coolly played      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 dwelled at Svarins Hill. He had many sons. One was hight Hothbrodd, another, Guthmund, and a third, Starkath. At a meeting of kings, Hothbrodd plighted himself to Sigrún, the daughter of King Hogni.<sup>20</sup> But when she heard of that she rode through the air and over the sea with (her) valkyries to seek Helgi. He was then at the Loga Fells and had fought against the sons of Hunding, and there he had felled Álf and Eyolf, Hjorvarth and Hervarth, and was now all wearied with battle, and was seated beneath the Eagle Rock. There Sigrún found him, and flung her arms about his neck and kissed him and told him the tidings, as is told in “The Old Lay of the Volsungs.”

14. Sought then Sigrún      the gladsome sea king,  
    and hastened Helgi’s      his hand to grasp,  
helmeted king      with kiss greeted;  
to the maiden turned then      his mind the lord.
15. <sup>21</sup>Nor hid her heart’s wish      Hogni’s daughter;  
    said that Helgi’s      love she would have,  
that dear had been,      and dwelled in her heart,  
the son of Sigmund      ere seen by her.
16. “Was I given to Hothbrodd      before gathered host,  
    but for other hero      my heart did long;  
though fear I, king,      my kinsmen’s wrath,  
for thwarted have I      the thanes’ dearest wish.”

*(Helgi said:)*

17. “Reck thou shalt not of Hogni’s wrath,  
nor of the ill will of all thy kin;  
with me shalt now, young maiden, live;  
nor dread I, dear one, thy doughty brothers.”

## IV

[22](#) Helgi drew together a great fleet and sailed to Freka Stone. At sea a fearful storm arose. Flashes of lightning shone about them and struck the ships. They saw nine valkyries ride aloft and knew again Sigrún. Then the storm fell and they made land unharmed. The sons of Granmar were seated on a cliff when the ships neared land. Guthmund leaped on his horse and rode to a hill by the harbor to find out whose fleet it was. The Volsungs were then lowering their sails.

*Then said Guthmund, as is written above in “The Lay of Helgi”:*[23](#)

“Who the highborn hero, leading  
these hosts hither to harry on us?”

Sinfjotli, the son of Sigmund, made answer to him, and that also is written there.

Guthmund 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 Fells,  
highborn 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,  
ill norms, though, in this had a share:  
fell this morning at Freka Stone  
Bragi and Hogni— my brand slew them;

20. “and at the Hlé Fells, Hrollaug’s sons,  
and at the Styr Cliffs, Starkath the king:  
of goodly warriors I grimmet ween him—  
his body battled albeit headless.”[24](#)

Then wept Sigrún.

*(Sigrún said:)*

V

*(Sinfjotli said:)*

*(Guthmund said:)*

*(Sinfjotli said:)*

26. “Rather shalt, Guthmund, 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. [28](#)“Twere, Sinfjotli, more seeming far  
to wield 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.”

## 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 lent Dag his spear.[29](#) Dag found Helgi, his sister’s husband, in a grove which is hight Fjotur Grove.[30](#) He ran Helgi through with his spear. Helgi died.

*Dag rode to the Seva Fells and told Sigrún the tidings:*

29. “Loath am I, sister, to tell sad tidings;  
for unwilling was I to work thee harm:[31](#)  
fell this morning by Fjotur Grove  
under heaven who was of all heroes best,  
and set his foot on sea kings’ necks.”

*Sigrún said:*

30. “Shall every one of the oaths strike thee  
which to Sigmund’s son thou swarest of yore  
by light-hued leaping Leiptr’s water,[32](#)  
and eke by Unn’s[33](#) ice-cold altar.
31. “The boat shall budge not which beareth thee,  
a fair wind though doth fill its sails;  
the steed shall run not thou ridest on,  
though fain thy foeman flee thou wouldest!
32. “The sword shall bite not which is bared by thee,  
but it sing o’er thyself and smite thee down,  
(nor shield shelter but be shattered quickly,)[34](#)  
(though sore needed when set upon).[35](#)
33. “Then had I vengeance for Helgi’s death,  
if a wolf thou wert in the wilderness,

wretchedly roving, and ravenous,  
and feed to bursting on foul carrion.”

*Dag said:*

34. “Bereft of reason and raving art thou,  
to wish thy brother, such baleful fate:  
of all evil is Óthin father:  
he strife did stir among stanch kinsmen.[36](#)

35. “Weregild I give thee— red-golden rings,  
Vandil’s hallowed stead, and Víg Dales also,  
half our homeland— for the harm done thee,  
Sigrún, sister, and to thy sons.”

*(Sigrún said:)*

36. “Shall I sadly sit at Seva Fells,  
nor late nor early in life be glad  
but on lord and liegemen fall light again,[37](#)  
and on Vígblær’s back he is borne hither,  
on gold-bitted steed: would I greet him fondly.

37. “Were filled with fear his foemen all,  
their kinsmen eke, cowed by Helgi,  
as from the wolf will wildly run  
fell-grazing goats aghast with dread.

38. “High among heroes did Helgi stand,  
like shapely ash tree ’mong shrubs and thorns;  
or as dew-dripping[38](#) deer doth tower  
above all other beasts of the woodlands:  
glow his horns on high to very heaven.”

A mound was thrown up over Helgi. But when he came to Valholl, Óthin let him have sway over all things together with himself.

*Helgi said:*

39. “Thou shalt, Hunding, hearth fires kindle,  
and wash the feet of every wight;  
shalt herd horses and the hounds tether,  
give the swine their swill ere to sleep thou goest.”[39](#)

## VII



One of Sigrúns bondmaids went at eventide past the barrow and beheld Helgi riding toward it with many men.

*The bondmaid said:*

40. “Is’t a dream-sight only      my eyes behold,  
or the doom of the gods—      dead men riding!  
With spurs ye urge      to speed your horses:  
or may the heroes      wend home again?”

*(Helgi said:)*

41. “No dream-sight only      thine eyes behold,  
nor world’s end is’t,      though us thou see’st  
with spurs urging      to speed our horses;  
nor may the heroes      wend home again.”[40](#)

*The bondmaid went back 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,[41](#)      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[42](#)      all wet art thou.  
Clammy the hands      of Hogni’s kinsman;[43](#)  
how shall I, hero,      find help for that?”

*(Helgi said:)*

45. “’Tis Sigrún’s doing,      of Seva Fells,  
that Helgi drips      with the dew-of-sorrow:[42](#)  
woman sun-bright, southern.[44](#)      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. “Is this wondrous wine<sup>45</sup> a welcome drink,  
though life and lands be lost for ay;  
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 would lie 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:)*<sup>46</sup>

49. “Along reddening roads to ride I hie me,  
on fallow steed aery paths to fly:  
to the west shall I of Windhelm's bridge,<sup>47</sup>  
ere Valholl's warriors wakes Salgofnir.”<sup>48</sup>

Helgi and his men rode on their way, but Sigrún and her women wended home. On the next evening, Sigrún had a maid watch by the mound.

*But when the day was at an end, Sigrún came to the mound and said:*

50. “Come had by now, if to come he wished,  
the son of Sigmund from the seat of Óthin;  
little hope that hither the hero will ride,  
now the eagles perch on ash-tree limbs,  
and all hosts hie them to the home of dreams.”<sup>49</sup>

*(The bondmaid said:)*

51. “'Twere folly, lady, to fare alone,  
thou Hogni's daughter, to dead man's howe.  
All dead men's ghosts do grow more dread

as daylight darkens      to dimness of night.”

Sigrún lived but a short while longer, for grief and sorrow. It was the belief in olden times that men were born again, but that is now called old women’s superstition. Helgi and Sigrún are said to have been born again as Helgi Haddingjaskati<sup>50</sup> and Kára, the daughter of Hálf dan, as is told in “The Lay of Kára.”<sup>51</sup> She was a valkyrie.



# Sinfjotli's Death<sup>1</sup>

## Frá dauða Sinfjötla

Sigmund, son of Volsung, was king over Frankland. His eldest son was hight Sinfjotli,<sup>2</sup> the second, Helgi, and the third Hámund. Borghild, Sigmund's wife, had a brother called . . .;<sup>3</sup> but Sinfjotli, her stepson, and . . . wooed the same woman. Therefore Sinfjotli slew him. When he returned, Borghild bade him betake himself away; but Sigmund offered weregild, and this she had to take. At the arvel, Borghild handed ale about. She took poison, a big drinking horn full, and handed it to Sinfjotli. 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 finished it off. 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 Sinfjotli 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. Sinfjotli spoke as before to his father. Sigmund said: "Let your beard filter it, my son!" Sinfjotli 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. He offered to ferry Sigmund over. But when Sigmund had borne the body into the boat there was no more room in it for another person. The man told Sigmund to walk around the firth; then he shoved the boat off and forthwith vanished.<sup>4</sup>

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 Hjordís, the daughter of King Eylimi, and their son was Sigurth. King Sigmund fell in battle against the sons of Hunding. Then Hjordís married Álf, the son of King Hjálprek.<sup>5</sup> The boy Sigurth<sup>6</sup> grew up at his court. Both Sigmund and all his sons were far above other men in strength, in stature, in hardihood, and in all manly feats; but Sigurth 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.



# The Prophecy of Grípir

## Grípisspá

“The Prophecy of Grípir” was chosen by the Collector to introduce the Sigurth poems, 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: given in the form of a gnomic dialogue, it is but a sapless versified excerpt, utterly lacking originality of treatment, and full of ineptitudes and contradictions,[1](#) at that! Poetically worthless, it is of interest because its author—no doubt some Icelfander 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. The poem is transmitted only in *Codex Regius*.

Grípir[2](#) was the name of Eylimi’s son, and he was the brother of Hjordís. He ruled a kingdom and was the 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.[3](#)

*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 highborn 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 folk-warder.”

*(Geitir said:)*

3. “Will the gladsome king[4](#)      of Geitir ask  
with whom he is      to hold converse.”

*(Sigurth said:)*

“I am Sigurth hight,      to Sigmund born,  
and Hjordís 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 housecarls' lord  
to greet as guest the goodly warrior:  
“Welcome, Sigurth— why no sooner here?  
Thou, Geitir, stable Grani, his steed.”[5](#)

6. The thoughtful thanes of things many  
gan tidings tell, trueheartedly.

*(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?”

*(Gripir said:)*

9. “Wilt first, folk-warder, thy father avenge,  
and Eylimi eke, for evil deed:  
the hardy sons to Hunding born  
thou wilt lay low, the lieges doughty.”[6](#)

*(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?”

*(Gripir said:)*

11. “Thyself wilt slay the serpent glitt’ring  
which greedy lieth on Gnita Heath;[7](#)  
to both brothers wilt bring quick death,  
to Regin and Fáfnir:[8](#) aright saith Grípir.”

*(Sigurth said:)*

12. “Great wealth I win if I work it so,  
as thou sayest certain, and slay these twain.  
Scan yet longer the skein of fate:  
what will further fall to my lot?”

*(Grípir said:)*

13. “Then Fáfnir’s lair wilt find anon,  
and have from the heath the hoarded wealth;  
wilt load the gold on Grani’s saddle:  
then ride to Gjúki[9](#) the gladsome king.”

*(Sigurth said:)*

14. “Shalt, wise folk-warder, my weird tell further  
and, sage sea king, say still onward:  
when Gjúki’s guest goes on his way,  
what will still further fall to his lot?”

*(Grípir said:)*

15. “On the fell sleepeth the folk-warder’s daughter[10](#)  
in weeds of war, since wound-dead Helgi;[11](#)  
with keen edge wilt cut her byrnie,  
slitting with sword which slew Fáfnir.”

*(Sigurth said:)*

16. “Her 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 leechcraft:[12](#) 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 [13](#) 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 dost see:  
too great the grief    Grípir weeneth,  
hence more wilt not    to me now say.”

*(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. “No man is known    beneath heaven  
who forward sees    farther 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:  
to wit I wish, though welcome nowise,  
what fate lieth before Sigurth."

*(Grípir said:)*

27. "Fosters Heimir a fair maiden  
who is Brynhild<sup>14</sup> hight, his hall within—  
Buthli's daughter, the brave folk-king's—  
of hardy mind is the maiden fair."

*(Sigurth said:)*

28. "To me what is't, a maid though be  
fostered at Heimir's, fair to behold?  
Thou shalt, Grípir, tell altogether:  
before thee lieth my fate clearly."

*(Grípir said:)*

29. "Of glee and gladness will the girl rob thee  
who is Brynhild hight, Buthli's daughter:  
no sleep thou sleepest nor seekest Thing<sup>15</sup>  
nor men's meetings, but the maid thou seest".

*(Sigurth said:)*

30. "Is aught for easement to the atheling given?  
Say thou, Grípir, if'tis seen by thee:  
will I the dear one by dowry win,  
the folk-warder's daughter, so fair to see?"

*(Grípir said:)*

31. "Oaths ye will pledge altogether,

will pledge fully, but few ye will keep:  
art with Gjúki a guest one night,  
from thy mind then falls Heimir's foster child."

*(Sigurth said:)*

32. "How so, Grípir? Nor hide from me:  
is fickle found the folk-warder'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>16</sup> beguile thy mind  
and offer to thee her own daughter,  
the lovely maiden, and lure thee on."

*(Sigurth said:)*

34. "Then Gunnar's<sup>17</sup> kinsman the king<sup>18</sup> will be,  
when that as wife he weds Guthrún.  
Full well wedded then would I be,  
if the ruler 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 wife, the Gothic<sup>19</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  
if I shall ask for another man  
her whom my whole heart I had given."

*(Grípir said:)*

37. "Oaths will pledge ye altogether,  
Gunnar and Hogni—<sup>20</sup> thou, hero, too;  
each other's form, when faring to her,  
takest thou and Gunnar:<sup>21</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 proudhearted  
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. “Wilt, Sigurth, sleep at the side three nights  
of the maiden, as though thy mother she were;[22](#)  
will hence be known thy name, great king,  
the while, warrior, the world lasteth.”

*(Sigurth said:)*

42. “Will the war-worker[23](#) win thereafter  
the good woman— this, Grípir, tell me!—  
three nights although thethane’s fair bride  
with me did sleep? A marvel were it.”

*(Grípir said:)*

43. “Together will both bridals be drunk,[24](#)  
Sigurth’s and Gunnar’s, in Gjúki’s hall.  
The sham shapes then will ye shift at home,  
though each within him his own thoughts kept.”

*(Sigurth said:)*

44. [25](#)“What hap there after will have we twain,[26](#)  
when wedded thus? I wish to know.  
Will Gunnar’s lot be good, thereafter,  
and eke my own? I ask thee, Grípir.”

*(Grípir said:)*

45. “The oaths thou’lt remember, yet utter them not,  
wilt grudge not Guthrún thy goodly body;  
but Brynhild will ween her a bride mismated:  
the woman will of the wiles avenge her.”

*(Sigurth said:)*

46. “What will I give, the grief to allay  
of the woman, since we with wiles tricked her?  
Hath the fair one from me false oaths many,  
lying pledges, but little joy.”

*(Grípir said:)*

47. “To Gunnar goes she, will grimly tell  
how that thy oaths most ill didst keep,  
when altogether Gjúki’s son had,  
the lieges’ lord, believed in thee.”[27](#)

*(Sigurth said:)*

48. “How now, Grípir, give me answer:  
did in truth I betray the king?  
Or will lie on me the highborn lady—[28](#)  
on me and herself? Say now, Grípir!”

*(Grípir said:)*

49. “In anger will deal ill with thee,  
in moody mourning, the mighty queen:  
no whit hast thou harmed the lady,  
though the king’s wife ye with wiles did trick.”

*(Sigurth said:)*

50. “Will Gunnar and Hogni, and Guthorm[29](#) eke,  
be egged thereafter against their oaths?  
Will Gjúki’s sons their swords redden  
in Sigurth’s blood? Say on, Grípir!”

*(Grípir said:)*

51. “With grim grief will be Guthrún’s heart filled,  
the time her brothers betray her foully;  
nor love ever the lady hath,  
nor gladness, thereafter:[30](#) ’tis Grímhild’s fault.”

*(Sigurth said:)*

52. [31](#)“Fare thee well, then:   over fate wins no one.  
Thou’st done my bidding   as best thou could’st;  
a fairer fate   thou fain had’st told me,  
Grípir, ungrudging,   if granted it were.”

*(Grípir said:)*

53. “May ay this ease   the atheling’s heart:  
is this lot, leader,   to thy life given:  
will no better hero   be born in the world  
’neath sun in heaven   than, Sigurth, thou!”



# The Lay of Regin

## Reginismál

The present title of this collection of fragments (two or more) was suggested by the great Norwegian scholar 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 scattered 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 might consider these stanzas to hang together, though it is hardly credible that this was the original shape of the lay—the two patches of gnomí and dialogue stanzas in *ljóðaháttir* stand out too clearly from the remainder, which is cast in narrative *fornyrðislag*.

The complete text is found in *Codex Regius*, a number of stanzas, also in the paraphrases of the *Völsunga saga* and *Nornagests þáttir*. 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 Hjálprek's<sup>1</sup> stud and chose for himself a horse, which later bore the name of Grani.<sup>2</sup> At that time had come to Hjálprek's court Regin,<sup>3</sup> the son of Hreithmar. He was more skilled in crafts than any other man. He was a dwarf in size, wise and 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<sup>4</sup> and Loki 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 food for himself there. "Otr was the name of 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 it with half-closed eyes.<sup>5</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 night quarters and showed him their bag. Then we bound them and laid on them as a ransom to stuff the otterskin, and also to cover it on the outside, with red gold. Then they sent Loki to fetch the gold. He went to Rán<sup>6</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>7</sup>



*(Andvari said:)*

2. “I am Andvari hight,    is Óin my father,  
in many a flood have I fared;  
in days of yore    was I doomed by norns  
in swirling waters to swim.”

*(Loki said:)*

3. “Tell me, Andvari,    if on earth thou wilt,  
dwarf, live a longer life:  
what is the doom    which is dealt to men  
who wound each other with words?”

*(Andvari said:)*

4. “A heavy doom    is dealt to men  
who in Vathgelmir’s<sup>8</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>9</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>10</sup> had owned  
the bane shall be    of brothers twain,  
and to eight athelings<sup>11</sup>    bring untimely death:  
he who holds my hoard    shall e’er hapless be.”

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 Othin took forth the ring which

Andvari had owned and covered up the hair.

*Loki said:*

6. “The gold thou hast gotten, but great has been  
the worth thou laid’st 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 thee,  
if aware I had been of this woe.”[12](#)

*(Loki said:)*

8. “Still worse by far— I ween to know—  
is kinsmen’s clash for the gold:[13](#)  
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[14](#) 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:*

10. “Lyngheith and Lofnheith! Know that my life is ended:  
much I crave of my kin!”

*Lyngheith answered:*

“Though their father be felled, few sisters would  
seek their brother’s blood.”

*Hreithmar said:*

11. [15](#) [“Wolf-hearted woman, if in wedlock a son  
be not born to thee, then bear thou a daughter;  
give the maid to a man in thy mighty need:  
will their son then to thy need see.”] [16](#)

Then Hreithmar died; but Fáfnir took all the gold. [17](#) Regin asked for his share of the inheritance after his father; but Fáfnir said no to that. Then Regin sought counsel of his sister Lyngheith, 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 Fáfnir thy own.”

All this told Regin Sigurth. One day when he came to Regin’s abode, he was greatly welcomed.

*Regin said:*

13. “Hither has come the kinsman of Sigmund,  
the keen atheling, to our hall;  
hardier he is than hero tried:  
from warlike wolf I wait me strife. [18](#)

14. “Foster shall I the fearless lordling,  
now Yngvi’s [19](#) kinsman has come to us;  
under high heaven among heroes first,

his fate-thread is spun to overspread all lands.”[20](#)

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 adread. Regin made Sigurth a sword called Gram,[21](#) 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 Sigurth said:*

15. “Soon would sneer then the sons of Hunding,  
they who ended Eylimí’s life,[22](#)  
if more keen the king[23](#) to crave red gold  
than blood for blood of his father’s banesmen.”

King Hjálprek gave Sigurth a fleet and men so that he might avenge his father. A great storm arose[24](#) when they were weathering a promontory.

*A man stood on the cliff and said:*

16. “What men ride there on Rasvil’s steeds[25](#)  
the weltering waves, the wild-tossing sea?  
Doth salty sweat the sea-nags[26](#) fleck,  
will the wave-horses not weather the storm.”

*Regin made answer:*

17. “On the sea-trees sit young Sigurth’s men,  
toward Hel bears us a heavy wind;  
over stem and stern the storm-waves fall,  
plunge the roller-horses: who is it asks?”

*(The man said:)*

18. “I was Hnikar hight when hawks were gladdened,  
son of Sigmund, and slain were many.  
Man of the mountain may’st now call me,  
Feng or Fjolnir:[26](#) let me fare with you!”

They sailed near to the land, and the man came on board. Then the storm abated.

*Sigurth said:*

19. “Tell me, Hnikar, for the twain thou know’st:  
what be good signs for gods and men;

what bodeh best    on battleground,  
the time that swords are swung?”

*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 outbound art,  
and ready art forth to fare,  
and beholdest    good heroes twain,  
and stouthearted, stand on the path.
22. “A third is this:    if thereafter  
a wolf howl in the woods;  
good hap thou’lt have    among helmet-bearers,  
if first thou see’st them fare.
23. “His foe let no one    fight withershins;[27](#)  
into setting sun    see thou never;  
for victory is theirs    whose view is best,  
of the war-workers    who in wedges[28](#) array them.
24. “Then art thou fey    if thy foot stumbles,  
when bound for the swinging of swords.  
Will guileful ghosts    glower at thee—[29](#)  
would fain see thee fall.

25. “Combed and clean washed    should keen man be,  
and have early eaten his fill;[30](#)  
for unsure is it    where at eve he be:  
'tis ill to forego one's gain.”

Sigurth fought a great battle with Lyngvi, the son of Hunding, and his brothers.

*After the battle Regin said:*

26. “With the bitter brand now    the bloody eagle[31](#)  
was slashed in the back    of Sigmund's banesman;  
bolder in battle    no baron ever  
dyed red the earth    and the ravens gladdened.”



# The Lay of Fáfnir

## Fáfnismál

Though set off in the original by a different—and not very appropriate—title (“Frá dauða Fáfnis,” “Of Fáfnir’s Death”), this poem is, both in matter and manner, unquestionably a continuation of the preceding lay; therefore, here too, it is a matter of dispute whether we are dealing with a number of fragments of diverse origin joined together by the Prose of the Collector, or whether the whole was planned thus. The unsuitableness of several stanzas in the dialogue between Sigurth and Fáfnir, and the unusual change from *Ijóðahátt* to *fornyrðislag* in the middle of the bird chorus certainly lend color to the former assumption.

Æsthetically considered, no one portion of the lay is satisfactory to the modern taste; yet the total impression is pleasing, thanks no doubt to the poetic glamor thrown over it by the story of young Sigurth.

The poem is found in its entirety only in the *Codex Regius*, but pieces from the gnomic portions are quoted in a number of sources, attesting its popularity. The paraphrase of it in the *Völsunga saga* is a particularly close one. Owing to the diversity of contents it is particularly difficult to assign a date.

Then fared Sigurth home to Hjálprek; but Regin egged on Sigurth to slay Fáfnir. Sigurth and Regin went up to the Gnita Heath and found there the tracks of Fáfnir where it was his wont to go for water. There Sigurth dug a great ditch and hid himself in it. Now when Fáfnir left his lair on the gold, he spewed poison, and it flowed from above on Sigurth’s head. But when Fáfnir crept over the ditch, Sigurth thrust his sword into the dragon’s heart. Fáfnir shook himself and beat (the ground) with his head and his tail. Sigurth leapt out of the ditch, and then they saw one another.

*Fáfnir said:*

1. “Thou fellow bold,     what thy father’s kin?

Youth, from what house dost hail?

With Fáfnir’s blood     thy brand is red;

in my heart standeth thy steel.”

Sigurth withheld his name; for it was the belief in olden times that the words of a doomed man had great might, if he cursed his foe by name.[1](#)

*He said:*

2. “Stag[2](#) I am hight;     homeless I wandered;



I am a motherless man;  
no father had I as folks do else:  
ever fare I unfriended.”[3](#)

*(Fáfnir said:)*

3. “If a father thou had’st not as folks do else,  
how wast thou, boy, then born?  
(Not knowing thy name, though now I die,  
I little doubt thou liest.)”[4](#)

*(Sigurth said:)*

4. “My forefathers to fame are known,[5](#)  
of myself I say the same:  
Sigurth thou see’st 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?[6](#)  
Thou keen-eyed boy, thou had’st bold father,  
(such daring deed to do.)”[7](#)

*(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. “If haply ’mong kinsmen    thou had’st grown up,  
thou bold in battle would’st be;  
but unfree art,    nor thy own master,  
and ay are fearful the fettered.”[8](#)

*(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. “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.”

*(Fáfnir said:)*

11. [9](#)“The norms’ doom    before the nesses threatens:[10](#)

a fool's fate will be thine;  
in the water will drown    in the wind who rows:  
all spells death to the doomed one.”

*(Sigurth said:)*

12. “Say now, Fáfnir,    for sage thou art,  
and much learned in lore:  
which norns<sup>11</sup> are near    when need there is  
to help mothers give birth to their babes?”

*(Fáfnir said:)*

13. “Of unlike issue    are the ilks of norns,  
nor of the same sib:  
of Æsir kin some,    of alf kin others,  
and some are Dvalin's<sup>12</sup> daughters.”

*(Sigurth said:)*

14. “Say now, Fáfnir,    for sage thou art,  
and much learned in lore:  
how that holm is hight    where the holy gods  
and Surt will meet in swordplay?”

*(Fáfnir said:)*

15. “’Tis Óskopnir<sup>13</sup> hight;    there all the gods  
will unsheath their shining swords;  
Bifrost<sup>14</sup> will break,    on that bridge when they ride;  
their steeds will swim the stream.

16. “With the Helm of Fear<sup>15</sup> I affrighted men  
while I lay on the hated hoard;  
for the might of all men a match I weened me,  
nor e’er worthy foeman found.”

*(Sigurth said:)*

17. “The Helm of Fear hideth no one,  
when bold men bare their swords;  
when many are met to match their strength,  
‘twill be found that foremost is no one.”<sup>16</sup>

*(Fáfnir said:)*

18. “I spewed venom as I sprawled on the hoard  
of my father’s gleaming gold;  
(by noon or night no one neared me,  
no weapons nor wiles I feared).”<sup>17</sup>

*(Sigurth said:)*

19. “Thou hateful worm, great hissing thou madest,  
on thy gold grimly brooding;  
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.”[18](#)

*(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 betrayed me, will betray 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. [19](#)“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.”

*(Sigurth said:)*

24. [20](#)“When men are met to match their thews,  
who knows who is bravest born?

Full many are brave    who brand never reddened  
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 Fáfnir'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,[21](#)  
if the sword thou had'st 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    wholehearted swain  
with dull sword win his way.

29. “The fearless ay, but the fearful nowise,  
will fare the better in fray;  
to be glad is better than of gloomy mind,  
whether fair or foul betide.[22](#)

30. [23](#) “Thy rede was it that ride I should  
over high mountains hither;  
Fáfnir still held his hoard and life,  
had’st 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; he burned himself and stuck his finger in his mouth. But when Fáfnir’s heartblood 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.”

*(A second said:)*

33. “There lies Regin, and racks his brain,

would betray the boy who trusts in him,  
and take him to task in tricky ways;  
would 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 Fáfnir.”

*(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 gladdened:[24](#)  
look out for the wolf when his ears ye see!”[25](#)

*(A fifth said:)*

36. “Crafty were not the king’s offspring—[26](#)  
as ought to be armed men’s leader—  
if he let scot-free escape the brother,  
when he Fáfnir first felled with the sword.”

*(A sixth said:)*

37. “Witless were then the warlike hero

if he spared his fell foeman;

Regin lies there who has lied to him:

let him guard against his guile!’

*(A seventh said:)*

38. “Cut off the head of the cold etin,

and take his red-gold rings;

of Fáfnir’s hoard then, on the heath where it lies,



the only owner wilt be.”[27](#)

*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 Fáfnir’s heart, and drank the blood of both Regin and Fáfnir.[28](#)

*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[29](#) I know, of many most fair,  
in golden weeds: a wife for thee.
41. “Green[30](#) are the paths to Gjúki’s hall—  
fate doth further the fearless man;  
that folk-king hath a fair daughter:  
with the gold, Sigurth, mayst thou gain her hand.
42. “A high hall standeth on Hindar Fell,[31](#)  
all enfolded is it by fire without;  
cunning craftsmen this castle builded  
of the glistening gold of rivers.
43. “A valkyrie[32](#) rests on the rock in sleep,  
flickering fire flames about her;  
with the sleep-thorn Ygg[33](#) her erst did prick:  
other heroes she felled than he had willed.[34](#)
44. “There mayst thou see the maiden helm-decked  
who steered from battle the steed Vingskornir;[35](#)  
nor mayst Sigrdrífa[36](#) from sleep awaken,  
that know thou, Skjoldung,[37](#) but by norns’ stern doom.”

Sigurth followed Fáfnir’s tracks till he came upon his lair, and found it open. The doors and doorposts were of iron. Of iron, too, were all posts in the house, and the whole was let into the ground. There found Sigurth a 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,[38](#) and many other things of great worth, and loaded Grani therewith; but the steed would not stir before Sigurth got on his back, too.



# The Lay of Sigrdrífa

## Sigrdrífumál

There is no break in the *Codex Regius* between this lay and “The Lay of Fáfnir,” which it resembles in style and manner<sup>1</sup>—in the short narrative portions, and in the lyric and didactic stanzas (*ljóðaháttir* and irregular verse forms) with 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 fate of Sigurth. They may have been inserted from elsewhere: the stanzas on runes to accompany the ale “mixed with magic and mighty chants”; those on conduct, the hint of Sigrdrífa’s “loving counsel” desired by Sigurth (St. 23). Both portions distinctly recall the collection of the “Hávamál” in content and style. The few remaining stanzas belong to the best in Eddic poetry, especially the fine invocation spoken by the valkyrie on awaking.

Stanzas 6-23 are quoted, with a number of variants, in the close paraphrase of the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 20.

The metre is almost wholly *ljóðaháttir*. As with the two preceding lays, there is no definite clue to place of origin or date; but the thoroughly heathen tone makes early origin (*ca.* 1000) likely.

Sigurth rode over Hindar Fell and made his way South to Frankland.<sup>2</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 above it. He entered 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:*

1. “What slit my byrnie? How was broken my sleep? Who lifted from me the leaden weight?”<sup>3</sup>

*He answered:*

“’Tis Sigmund’s bairn— on Fáfnir’s body  
ravens batten—<sup>4</sup> ’tis Sigurth’s brand.”

*(She said:)*

2. <sup>5</sup>“Hail to thee, day! Hail, ye day’s sons!

Hail, night and daughter of night!

With blithe eyes look on both of us:

send to those sitting here speed![6](#)

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.”[7](#)

Sigurth sate him down and asked her name. She said her name was Sigrdrífa and that she was a valkyrie. She said that twain kings had fought.

4. “(Was Hjalmgunnar[8](#) hight a hoary warrior;  
had Valfather[9](#) vowed victory to him.)[10](#)  
Was the other Agnar, Autha’s brother,  
to whom none ever help had given.”

Sigrdrífa felled Hjalmgunnar in the battle, but Óthin in revenge pricked her with the sleep-thorn[11](#) 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.)[12](#)

*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,[13](#)  
with strength i-blent 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.[14](#)

8. “Learn ale runes eke,    lest other man’s wife  
betray thee who trusted in her:[15](#)  
on thy beer horn scratch it,    and the back of thy hand,  
and the Nauth rune[16](#) on thy nails.

9. “Thy beaker bless    to banish fear,  
and cast a leek in thy cup:[17](#)  
then know I that never    thou needest fear  
that bale in thy beer there be.

10. “Learn help runes eke,    if help thou wilt  
a woman to bring forth her babe:[18](#)  
on thy palms wear them    and grasp her wrists,  
and ask the dísir’s aid.[19](#)

11. “Learn sea runes eke    if save thou wilt  
the sail-steeds[20](#) on the sea:  
on the bow scratch them,    and on rudder blade,[21](#)  
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 would’st be,  
and wishest wounds to heal:  
on the bark scratch them    of bole in the woods<sup>22</sup>  
whose boughs bend to the east.

13. “Speech runes learn thou,    to spite no one,<sup>23</sup>  
lest out of hate he harm thee:  
these wind thou,    these weave thou,  
and gather them all together  
when men to moot    are met at the Thing,<sup>24</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>25</sup>

15. <sup>26</sup>“... ..  
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>28</sup> with Brímir, the sword;  
on his head he had a helm:  
  
then muttered Mímir’s head  
  
wisely first this word,  
  
and sooth said of this:

17. “Said on the shield graven<sup>29</sup> before the shining god which stands,<sup>30</sup>  
on Árvakr’s<sup>31</sup> ear, and on Alsvith’s<sup>31</sup> hoof,  
on the wheel which turns ’neath (Hrungnir’s bane’s)<sup>32</sup> wain,  
on Sleipnir’s<sup>33</sup> teeth, and on the sleigh’s strap bands,<sup>34</sup>
18. “On the paw of the bear and on Bragi’s<sup>35</sup> tongue,  
on the old wolf’s claw and on the eagle’s beak,  
on the bloody wings<sup>36</sup> and on the bridge’s head,  
on the midwife’s hand and on the healing spoor,<sup>37</sup>
19. “On glass and on gold and on good luck token,<sup>38</sup>  
in wine and in wort and on wonted seat,  
on Gungnir’s<sup>39</sup> point and on Grani’s<sup>40</sup> breast,  
on the norn-nail<sup>41</sup> eke and the night owl’s beak.
20. “Off were scraped all which on were scratched,<sup>42</sup>  
  
and mixed with the holy mead,  
  
and sent about and abroad.  
  
The Æsir have them, the alfs have them,  
and some the wise Vanir have  
  
and some, mortal men.
21. “These beech runes be, and birth runes, too,  
  
and all ale runes,  
  
and mighty, magic runes:  
  
for whoe’er unspilt, and unspilt, eke,  
  
for his help will have them:  
  
gain he who grasps them,  
  
till draws near the doom of the gods!
22. <sup>43</sup>“Now shalt thou choose, since choice thou hast,



hero 'neath shining helm,

to say or naught say: with thyself rests it!

Meted out is all evil.”[44](#)

*(Sigurth said:)*

23. “Flee I shall not though fey I know me: since a babe my breast knew no fear.  
Thy loving counsel I lief would have as long as my life doth last.”[45](#)

*(Sigrdrífa said:)*

24. “This counsel I first: of kinsmen of thine

at no time fall thou foul:

curb thy revenge, though cause there be:

'twill boot thy dying day.[46](#)

25. “This other I counsel, that oath thou swear not

but thou tell the truth:

for baleful doom follows breach of truce;

ill fares the breaker of oaths.[47](#)

26. “This third I counsel, that at Thing thou never

bandy words with witless wight;

for unwise man full often says

worser words than he knows.

27. “’Tis well nowise if naught thou say’st:

a craven thou’lt be called;

[or taunted that true the charge.

Fickle is homemade fame,

but good it be gotten.][48](#)

make away with him when he waiteth him not,

and reward thus the wicked lie.[49](#)

28. “That fourth I counsel, if foul witch live

by the way thou wishest to fare:

to go on is better than be her guest,

though that the night be near.

29. “Foresight is needful to the sons of men,

where’er in the fray they fight;

oft harmful hags do haunt the way,

who dull both weapon and wit.

30. “That counsel I fifth: though fair women,

and brow-white, sit on bench:

let the silver-dight one

not steal thy sleep, nor lure thou women to love!

31. “That counsel I sixth: though swaggering speech

and unkind be made o’er the cups:[50](#)

with drunken warriors no words thou bandy,

for wine steals many a one’s wits.

32. “Quarrels and ale have of ten brought

sorrow to sons of men—

foul death to some, ill fate to others:

much woe is wrought in the world.

33. “That counsel I seventh: if for cause thou fight

against stouthearted heroes:

’tis better to battle than be burned alive

within his own house and home.[51](#)

34. “That counsel I eighth, to keep thee from evil,

nor dally with dastardly deeds;

no maiden mar thou, nor married woman

lure thou to love with thee.

35. “That counsel I ninth, that corpses thou bury,[52](#)

wheresoe’er on earth thou find them—

whether sickness slew them, or in the sea they drowned,

or whether thy fell in fight.

36. [“A bath shalt make for the dead man’s body,

and wash both his hands and head;

dry and comb him, ere in coffin laid,

and bid him sleep sweetly.][53](#)

37. “That counsel I tenth, that thou trust never

oath of an outlaw’s son;

whether art his brother’s bane, or felled his father:

a wolf oft sleeps in his son, though young,

and glad of the gold though he be.[54](#)

38. "Seldom sleepeth the sense of wrong  
nor, either, hate and heartache.

Both his wits and weapons a warrior needs  
who would fain be foremost among folk.

39. "That counsel I eleventh: to keep thee from evil,  
whence'er it may threaten thee:[55](#)  
not long the lord's life, I ween me.  
Have fateful feuds arisen."[56](#)



# The Great Lacuna

There is a gap of eight manuscript pages in *Codex Regius* after Stanza 31, line 2 of “The Lay of Sigrdrífa.” Then follows all that is left of a “Lay of Sigurth” (*Brot*). This is the so-called “Great Lacuna.”<sup>1</sup> 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 *Völsunga saga* (Chaps. 21-29) which in all likelihood renders the substance of the missing pages.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately scholars have found it impossible to arrive at any agreement about what the *Regius* pages contained, because the author of the *Völsunga 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 portion, the famous quarrel between the bathing queens, when Brynhild for the first time learns of the deception (these stanzas 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, a lay 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: the *Völsunga saga*. Chap. 27.)

A. The flickering flames    upflared to the skies,  
the earth quivered    with awful fire;  
but few<sup>3</sup> then dared    of the folk-warders  
to ride through the fire    unflinchingly.

B. His Grani Sigurth    with sword did urge:  
the fire was quenched    before the king,  
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 more heavily with her than all of Gunnar’s power: the *Völsunga saga*, 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: the *Völsunga saga*, 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 twenty-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 seventy stanzas, is called “The Short Lay of Sigurth.”<sup>1</sup> The text is in a rather disordered condition.

Both poems deal with the central theme of the Sigurth legend—in the main, the hero’s stay at Gjúki’s court, the winning and betrayal of Brynhild, her quarrel with Guthrún, Brynhild’s instigation of Sigurth’s death, and Guthrún’s lament—so that we have a parallel treatment, as in the cases of “Helgakviða” I and II and “Atlakviða,” and “Atlamál.” As 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, these lays are dramatic lyrics with an epic frame.

The paraphrase in the *Völsunga 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. [2](#)“What hateful harm    hath he done thee,  
that Sigmund’s son    thou slain would’st have?”

(Gunnar said:)

2. “To me hath Sigurth    oft sworn dear oaths,[3](#)  
hath sworn dear oaths    which all were false;  
and then betrayed me    the trusted one—  
he ought not have been—    in all these oaths.”

(Hogni said:)

3. “Envious Brynhild    to evil deed  
in hate did whet thee,    much harm to do:  
begrudges Guthrún    her goodly husband,  
and also thee,    in her arms to lie.”
4. Some a wolf did steak,    some a worm did bake,[4](#)  
of the grim beast gave they    Guthorm to eat  
ere, eager to evil,    the angry men  
on highborn hero    their hands could lay.

5. Slain was Sigurth south of the Rhine.<sup>5</sup>  
A raven on tree had wrathfully cawed:  
“Atli’s<sup>6</sup> sword blade your blood will redden,<sup>7</sup>  
your mainsworn oaths will murder you.”
6. Without<sup>8</sup> stood Guthrún, Gjúki’s daughter.  
These words then first fell from her lips:  
“Where lingers Sigurth, the leader of men,  
since all my kin are come before him?”
7. To which Hogni only did answer make:  
“With our swords we sundered Sigurth’s body;  
now stands the grey steed by stricken hero.”<sup>9</sup>
8. Then quoth Brynhild, Buthli’s daughter:  
“May ye fearless now hold folklands and arms:  
would Sigurth alone have had sway over all  
if but little longer his life he had held.
9. “Unseeming were it if sway he had  
over Gjúki’s gold and Gothic<sup>10</sup> hosts,  
and to fend him from foes five sons begat,<sup>11</sup>  
swordplay-eager young athelings.”
10. Laughed then Brynhild— her bower rang—  
one time only, out of inmost heart:  
“Long may ye live to rule lands and thanes,  
ye twain who felled the foremost hero.”
11. Then quoth Guthrún, Gjúki’s daughter:  
“With fey mouth say’st thou foul words many:  
let trolls Gunnar take who betrayed Sigurth!  
Thy thoughts bloodthirsty crave threefold revenge.”
12. Deep the men drank— the dark night came—  
many welcome words<sup>12</sup> then warmed their hearts.  
By sleep then summoned all slept in their beds,  
but Gunnar only of all did wake.
13. Much gan mutter, and move his feet,<sup>13</sup>  
gan bethink him, the thanes’ leader,  
what on greenwood tree the twain<sup>14</sup> had said,  
raven and hawk, when home they rode.
14. Awoke Brynhild, Buthli’s daughter,  
the queenly woman, ere coming of day:

“Whet me or let me,[15](#) the harm is done now,  
whether I say my sorrow or cease therewith.”

15. Were silent all when said these words  
fair-browed Brynhild, nor fathomed her speech,  
when wailing wept the woman the deeds  
which laughing she had led them to do.

*Brynhild said:*

16. “Me dreamed, Gunnar, a gruesome dream,  
that chill our chamber and cheerless my bed;  
but thou didst ride bereft of joy,  
fastened with fetters, into foemen’s throng.[16](#)
17. “Thus shall be stricken the strength of the Niflungs,[17](#)  
the mainsworn kin unmindful of oaths.
18. “Forgettest, Gunnar, altogether  
how your blood ye both did blend under sward?[18](#)  
Him now hast thou with hate requited,  
and foully felled, who foremost made thee.[19](#)
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,[20](#) all wound with gold,  
the trothful king betwixt us laid;  
in hot fire wholly was hardened Gram,  
its blade blazoned with bitter poison.”

### Of Sigurth’s Death

In this lay we are told about Sigurth’s death, and that he was slain in such wise, as though they had slain him out of doors; but others say that they slew him while asleep in his bed.[21](#) But German men have it that he was felled in the forest, and in “The Old Song of Guthrún”[22](#) we are told that Sigurth was slain while on his way to the Thing with the sons of Gjúki; but all are at one in saying that they overcame him by treachery and killed him while lying down and unawares.



# The First Lay of Guthrún

## Guðrúnarkviða I

There are a number of indications, in sentiment, style, conception, and invention, which argue this short lay—or, rather, “lament”—to belong among the youngest in the collection, perhaps from 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 borrowed bodily. But this in nowise detracts from the originality and depth of the 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.”<sup>1</sup>

Guthrún sate over dead Sigurth’s body. She wept not, like other women, yet her heart was nigh bursting with sorrow. Both men and women came to speak cheer to her; but that was not easy. It is told that Guthrún had eaten of Fáfnir’s heart and hence understood the speech of birds.<sup>2</sup> This lay, too,<sup>3</sup> was indited about Guthrún.

1. Erst Gjúki’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 Gjúki’s daughter    gold-dight women:  
their greatest griefs    they gan tell her,  
the fellest which had befallen them.

4. Then quoth Gjaflaug,<sup>4</sup>    Gjúki’s sister:  
“On earth am I    most utterly wretched:  
five highborn husbands    have I buried,  
three of my daughters    three of my sisters,  
and eight brothers;    yet on I live.”

5. Nor yet Guthrún    her grief could weep,  
so sore her sorrow    o’er Sigurth’s fall,  
so cold her heart    o’er the king’s body.

6. Then quoth Herborg,    the Hunnish queen:  
“Sadder sorrow    suffered I still:

my seven sons in the Southland all  
fell whilom in battle, my husband the eighth.

7. “Both father and mother and four brothers  
I lost in the waves, on wind-tossed ship,  
when the billows brake ‘gainst the ship’s bulwarks.
8. “Myself needs buried the bodies all,  
needs laid them out and their limbs straightened.  
This woe befell me in one half year—  
to soothe my sorrow no soul did try.
9. “As captive was I kept in bondage,  
that very half year this happened to me;  
then trimmed I the tresses,[5](#) and tied the shoes,  
for the earl’s housewife every morning.
10. “With jealous scorn she scolded me,  
urged me to work with angry stripes;  
more friendly master found I never,[6](#)  
but harsher housewife had I never.”
11. Nor yet Guthrún her grief could weep,  
so sore her sorrow o’er Sigurth’s fall,  
so cold her heart o’er the king’s body.
12. Then quoth Gullrond, Gjúki’s daughter:  
“Though old and wise, but ill know’st thou,  
foster mother, how the mourner to comfort,”  
and bade them bare the king’s body.
13. She swept the sheet from Sigurth’s corse  
and brought the bolster to the brooding one’s knees:  
“To the lief one’s lips lay thou thy mouth,  
as when didst hug when hale, the warrior!”
14. Then cast one glance Guthrún on him,  
saw the dear one’s hair all dank with blood,  
saw the folk-warder’s flashing eyes dimmed,  
and the baron’s breast breached by the sword.
15. Then sank Guthrún swooning on bolster—  
her hair loosened, her cheeks grew hot,  
a rain of tears ran to her knees.
16. Then wept Guthrún, Gjúki’s daughter,

that through her tresses<sup>7</sup> the tears did flow,  
and in the garth the geese sang out,<sup>8</sup>  
the far-famed fowl which the fair one owned.

17. Then quoth Gullrond, Gjúki's daughter:  
Knew I never beneath heaven  
greater love than was given thee:  
without nor within at ease thou wast  
but at Sigurth's side, thou sister mine!"

*(Guthrún said:)*

18. "Seemed my Sigurth 'mongst the sons of Gjúki  
like the garlic, grown the grass above,<sup>9</sup>  
like a bright stone set on band of gold,  
a gleaming jewel, the great ones among.

19. "Was I honored higher by the king's heroes  
than any one of Óthin's maidens;<sup>10</sup>  
as little am I as the leaves hanging  
on sallow twigs, now Sigurth is dead.

20. "At board I miss, and in bed also,  
my bosom's friend. 'Tis my brothers' guilt—  
'tis my brothers' guilt that this grief I bear—  
their own sister—and sore tears weep.

21. "May ye lose your land, and lieges also,  
as ill ye kept the oaths ye swear.  
No good, Gunnar, of the gold will come:  
the dragon's hoard thy death will be,  
since to Sigurth oaths thou swarest.

22. "There was greater glee in the garth, by far,  
the time my Sigurth did saddle Grani—  
the time they wended to woo Brynhild,  
that ill wight, in evil hour."

23. Then quoth Brynhild, Buthli's daughter:  
"May that hag ne'er have husband nor children  
who again taught thee thy tears to shed,  
and this morn gave thee the might of speech!"

24. Then quoth Gullrond, Gjúki's daughter:  
"Hush thee, Brynhild, who art hated by all:  
athelings' ill fate thou hast ever been,

and all did call thee a curse to them—  
a sorrow to seven kings,[11](#)  
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[12](#) on the warrior saw.  
But woe did bring their wending thither:  
ever since see I that sight before me.”

26. Neath stone post stood she, nor restrained her wrath—[13](#)  
burned in Brynhild’s, Buthli’s daughter’s,  
her eyes a fire: she foamed with rage[14](#)  
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.[15](#) Brynhild would live no longer after Sigurth’s death. She had eight of her thralls and five of her bondmaids slain. Then she slew herself with her sword, as is told in “The Short Lay of Sigurth.”



# The Short Lay of Sigurth

## Sigurþarkviða hin skamma

The generally accepted title of “The Short Lay of Sigurth”—thus it is called in the Prose immediately preceding it in the *Codex Regius*—is decidedly a misnomer; for the tragedy, not of Sigurth’s, but of Brynhild’s life forms its chief content, 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 later 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 “Grípisspá,” besides being psychologically out of place. And unfortunately it cannot be said that the character of Brynhild and her tragedy has been brought humanly near to us. Though one of the longest, this is likewise one of the weakest, poems of the Collection.

For reasons, both of composition and legendary development, our lay is generally attributed to an Iclander of the eleventh or twelfth century. In particular, it is a later, Icelandic development to make Brynhild a sister of Atli; so, also, is the whole relationship hinted at between Gunnar and Oddrún, 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 *fornyrðislag*, at times, rather irregular.

1. In times long gone      came to Gjúki’s hall  
    Sigurth the Volsung—      had he slain Fáfnir—  
    in the troth was taken      of the twain brothers:[1](#)  
    to each other      sware oaths the kings.
2. The maid they gave him      with much treasure,  
    Guthrún the young,      Gjúki’s daughter;[2](#)  
    drank together      days full many  
    Sigurth the young      and the sons of Gjúki.
3. Then wended their way      to woo Brynhild:  
    rode Sigurth with them      to seek her hall,  
    Sigmund’s young son,      the seaways knowing—[3](#)  
    for himself had won her      if fate had willed.
4. His naked sword      laid the Southron[4](#) king  
    betwixt them twain,      his trusted blade;[5](#)  
    nor did he kiss      the queenly woman,  
    the Hunnish hero,      nor held her to him,

but yielded to Gunnar the youthful maiden.

5. In all her life no ill knew she,  
and in her fate no flaw, either;  
of blemish none in her body knew she:  
yet cruel norns came between them.[6](#)
6. Without she sate at eventide;[7](#)  
gan Brynhild rashly[8](#) to raise her voice:  
“I shall hold Sigurth, the youthful hero,  
within my arms, his end though it be.
7. “In wrath spoke I: I shall rue it after—  
his wife is Guthrún, and Gunnar’s, I.  
The loathly norns our longing caused.”
8. Without went she, wishing them evil  
every evening with ice-cold heart,[9](#)  
when both they to bed did go,  
Sigurth and Guthrún, to sleep together.
9. “(Now Gjúki’s daughter him gladly kisses)[10](#)  
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.[11](#)
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.”[12](#)
13. Then hung his head, heartsick, 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,[13](#)  
and loth he was    to lose the Volsung.

14. Both this and that    in thought he weighed:  
ere now was it nowise    known that ever  
from her king    a queen did go.

*(Gunnar said:)*

15. “To me is Brynhild,    Buthli’s daughter,  
above all else,    the best of women;  
and my life liefer    would I lose, by far,  
than of her riches[14](#)    bereft to be.”

16. [15](#)Summoned he Hogni    to secret speech,  
to whom he could    wholly trust him:  
“Wilt betray Sigurth    for the sake of gold?  
’Tis good to gain    the golden rings,  
to have and to hold    the hoard-of-the-Rhine,[16](#)  
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 sware—  
our former oaths,    the faith we plighted.

18. “On earth are not    more honored kings,  
the while we four[17](#)    o’er folk hold sway  
and here the Hunnish    hero liveth,  
nor beneath heaven    more highborn sib;  
if we begat us    goodly sons,[18](#)  
still greater grew then    the Gjúkung kin.

19. “Full well know I    whose wiles these be:  
’tis Queen Brynhild’s    unbridled hate.”[19](#)

*(Gunnar said:)*

20. “Egg we Guthorm[20](#)    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’er eager one—[21](#)

... ..

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 Guthorm 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.  
To wild woe now awakened she,  
in the blood of Frey's friend<sup>22</sup> as she weltered.
25. Her hands wrung she so ruefully  
that bold Sigurth by the bed him lifted:  
“Weep not, Guthrún, nor wail so sore,  
my young bride: thy brothers live.<sup>23</sup>
26. “Too young the heir<sup>24</sup> who after me lives  
to flee afar from his father's slayers;  
they rashly wrought the reckless deed  
nightly and knavish, but newly sworn to it.
27. “Like sister's son at their side ne'er rides,  
though seven sons thou suckle hereafter;<sup>25</sup>  
full well know I whose wiles are these:  
this bale was wrought by Brynhild alone.
28. “Me she loved more than any man;  
yet Gunnar's trust betrayed I never,  
but always kept him the oaths I sware,  
lest I be called the Queen's lover.”
29. Her senses lost she— his life the king—  
her hands wrung she so ruefully  
that in the cupboard the beakers clinked  
and in the garth the geese sang out.
30. Laughed then Brynhild, Buthli's daughter,  
one time only, out of inmost heart,  
on her couch when came to her ears  
the grievous wailing of Gjúki'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.[26](#)

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;[27](#)  
but little Atli thy anger fears:  
longer will he live than thou,  
and in might will ever o’ermatch thee, Gunnar!

34. “Say I shall now what thyself knowest,  
how ye Gjúkungs grew guilty full soon;  
my freedom had I, nor was fettered in aught[28](#)  
on my brother’s benches, with bounty dowered.

35. “Nor did I wish to be wedded ever,  
till high on horseback to our halls did ride,  
matchless, ye Gjúkungs— mighty kings three.  
Would that ye never had wended thither!

36. “(That hero’s wife)[29](#) I wished to be  
who on Grani’s back sate, rich in gold;  
his eyes were ay unlike to yours,  
nor were ye like him in looks or shape,  
folk-kings though ye called yourselves.

37. “And Atli said in secret to me  
that with me he would not his wealth e’er share—  
gold nor lands— if my love I gave not,  
nor aught else of the olden treasures  
in earliest youth which up he yielded,  
and in earliest youth to own gave me.[30](#)

38. “Then did I dwell in doubt, full long,  
whether wars to wage, and wend to battle  
in byrnie bold, my brother to spite:  
had that forth gone far to many folks,  
and to many been a mournful fate.

39. “Our bond then made we    which bound us together:  
in my heart hoped I    for the Niflung hoard,  
Sigmund’s son’s his    silver and gold;  
nor wanted I    another’s<sup>31</sup> wealth.
40. “But him I loved,    nor other lord.  
A fickle heart    I had nowise;  
will Atli all this    hereafter know,  
when that he hears    how to Hel I fared.
41. “For lightheartedly    let no woman  
another’s husband    hold in her arms.<sup>32</sup>  
(Now will I slay me    and Sigurth follow):<sup>33</sup>  
my heavy harm then    have I avenged.”
42. Up rose Gunnar,    Gjúki’s son;  
his arm laid he    about the lady’s neck.<sup>34</sup>
43. With kindly thoughts    all came thither,  
the highborn heroes,    her hands to stay:  
and though thrust she    all thanes from her,  
nor would be hindered    Helward to fare.
44. 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.”
45. To him hardy    Hogni answered:  
“Hinder her not    Helward 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. Sadly he<sup>35</sup> turned    from talking with her,  
when the gold-dight one    her gifts bestowed:  
on all looked she    which she had owned,  
eke on lifeless bondmaids<sup>36</sup>    and on ladies-in-waiting.
47. In gold byrnie sheathed her,    grim in her mind,  
ere with the sword    she slew herself;  
back on bolster    her body sank:

dying bethought her      of dire counsel:

48. “Now shall hither      my handmaids come  
if gold they wish,      and wealth,[37](#) from me;  
gilded trinkets      I give to each,  
broidered bedclothes,      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 Menja’s meal—      and we meet in Hel.[38](#)

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,[39](#)  
though oft the Queen      at Atli’s court  
will think in sorrow      on Sigurth dead.

54. “Is a maid child born—      her mother she—  
of hue whiter      than the very heavens,  
than the sun even,      Svanhild[40](#) hight.

55. “Wilt give Guthrún      to goodly hero—  
that bringeth sorrow[41](#)      to sons of men—  
nor will she wed      whom wish she might:  
will Atli wed her      his wife to be—  
he, born to Buthli,      my own brother.

56. “Am I mindful much      how with me ye dealt,  
how ye did wrong      me wretched one:  
no hap was mine      the while I lived.

57. “Thou wilt Oddrún[42](#)      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.

58. “Will Atli then    deal ill with thee,  
in dungeon wilt    with worms be laid.

59. “Will lose his life,    not long thereafter,  
Atli, when all    this ill is wrought—  
lose his treasure    and the life of his sons—  
for Gjúki’s daughter,[43](#)    grim in her mind,  
with sword full soon    will slay him in bed.[44](#)

60. “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.

61. “Of what will be I speak—    yet, spite of us,  
her life she keepeth    a long time after:  
towering billows    will toss Guthrún  
beyond the sea    to Jónakr’s lands.[45](#)

62. “(Will she issue have,    as heirs twain sons,  
as heirs twain sons,)[46](#)    for Jónakr;  
o’er the sea Svanhild    will she send abroad,  
Sigurth’s daughter,    to sorry fate.

63. “Will be her bale    Bikki’s counsels,  
for Jormunrekk    will ill reward her.  
Slain are then    all Sigurth’s kin,  
but greater still    are Guthrún’s sorrows.[47](#)

64. “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.

65. “Hide it wholly    with hangings and shields,  
with well-dyed weeds    and Welsh thralls[48](#) many:  
let the Hunnish hero    burn hard by me.

66. “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)[49](#) and hawks eke twain;  
then all is ordered evenly.

67. "Let the wand-of-wounds[50](#) be once more laid  
betwixt us twain truehearted ones,  
as when we both one bed did share,  
though hight we were husband and wife.

68. "On his heels fall not the shining hall's[51](#)  
ring-handled gate, on hinges rolling,  
if him follow my faithful thralls:  
at our rich riding shall rail no man.

69. "For he is followed by five bondmaids  
and eight henchmen of honest kin,  
my playmate[52](#) eke and all the dowry  
the which Buthli to Brynhild gave.

70. "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."



# Brynhild's Ride to Hel

## Helreið Brynhildar

Though plainly the product of a later age (twelfth century?) than even the preceding poems—as is evidenced by a number of legendary traits which have no parallel elsewhere and must be of the poet's invention, and also by the minor key of a postheroic age—and though by no means among the best lays of the *Edda*, this poem accomplishes what is manifestly the aim of the preceding lays: the winning of our sympathy for Brynhild. Indeed, it may be styled a biographic justification, in an elegiac strain, against the accusations of the giantess, who represents a hostile world: there has been nothing in her life but woe. After an idyllic and harmless youth at Heimir's court she unwittingly offends Óthin by aiding a young hero she loves against an old suitor; the youth is slain (no doubt—by Óthin's spear?), and she is doomed to sleep behind the wall of flame until awakened by Sigurth. But here too she is cruelly betrayed and by a remorseless fate compelled to seek the death of the very hero she loves best. To her, it has been a world full of sorrow; but in a future and better life, Sigurth and she shall live together forever—clearly a Christian thought, foisted on an archheathen theme!<sup>1</sup>

The poem is not used in the paraphrase in the *Völsunga saga*; but is (with one slight omission) cited in full in the *Nornagests þáttur*.

After the death of Brynhild two funeral piles were made, one for Sigurth, and that one was kindled first; but on the other, Brynhild was burned, and she was laid in a wain which was lined with cloth of gold.<sup>2</sup> It is said that Brynhild rode in this wain on her way to Hel. She came to a dwelling place where lived a giantess.

(*The giantess said:*)

1. "Thy wain halt there! Thy way lies not through  
my homestead, standing on stones upraised.<sup>3</sup>  
'Twere better for thee in thy bower to weave,  
than in Hel to hanker after Guthrún's husband.
2. "Why would'st, wayward Welsh<sup>4</sup> fair woman,  
e'er drift into my lowly dwelling?  
From thy hands hast thou, highborn lady,  
washed the blood of warriors many."

(*Brynhild said:*)

3. "Upbraid me not, thou bride of thurses,  
that in many frays I fought with heroes;<sup>5</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 Gjúki’s offspring but ill thou broughtest,  
and low didst lay their lordly house.”[6](#)

*(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. “(Was I nursed and raised in noble king’s hall,  
beloved by most of lieges and thanes.)[7](#)  
But in Hlymdale court was I hight ever  
Hild[8](#) beneath Helm by whoever knew me.

7. “The fearless king[9](#) our feather coats took—[10](#)  
eight sisters we— an oak beneath.  
Was I winters twelve, if to wit thee list,  
when to Agnar I dear oaths did swear.

8. “To Hel I sent Hjalmgunnar old,[11](#)  
the Gothic[12](#) king, all gashed with wounds,  
but bestowed victory on stouthearted Agnar;  
then Óthin wreaked his wrath on me.

9. “With shields he screened me in Skatalund;[13](#)  
a ring he raised of red ones and white ones.[14](#)  
and bade my sleep be sundered by him  
who naught would fear, nor be faint of heart;

10. “Made the waster-of-wood,[15](#) as the welkin high,  
burn all about my bower to southward;  
bade him only over it ride  
who would fetch me the gold on which Fáfnir lay.

11. “The giver-of-gold[16](#) rode Grani then  
where my foster father his folk-land ruled;  
did Sigurth seem, the sea king of Danes,[17](#)  
among weapon-wielders worthiest of all.

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,     Gjúki’s daughter,  
that I had slept     in Sigurth’s arms;  
then grew I aware,     as I would not, rather,  
how they beguiled me     Gunnar to wed.
14. “Women and men     to the world are born,  
their lives to live     in longing and sorrow;  
our lives we should not     have lived apart,[18](#)  
Sigurth and I—     sink now,[19](#) thurs-bride!”



# The Fall of the Niflungs<sup>1</sup>

## Dráp Niflunga

Then Gunnar and Hogni took all the gold which Fáfnir had owned. Feud arose between the Gjúkungs 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, Erp 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 a 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<sup>3</sup> Glaumvor, but Hogni's wife was Kostbera. Their sons were hight Sólar, Snævar, and Gjúki.<sup>4</sup> But when the Gjúkungs came to Atli's court, Guthrún begged her sons to have the lives of the Gjúkungs spared,<sup>5</sup> but they would not. 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.





# The Second (or Old) Lay of Guthrún

## 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 all—of them, as is attested not only by its title (see “Brot af Sigurðarkviða,” 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. The end of the poem and a number of other stanzas are missing completely. Also, there are remarkable discrepancies which it is hopeless to attempt to reconcile: the introduction of dialogues between Guthrún and Atli on the one hand and Guthrún and Grímhild on the other, for instance, or the elaborate description of the drink of forgetfulness, which has no recognizable effect on Guthrún’s memory of Sigurth and of the misdeeds of her brothers. It is just as futile to expect geographical consistency in the descriptions of Guthrún’s wanderings and her journey to Atli’s court. In fact, it may fairly be questioned whether the lay as we have it really is of one piece and not, rather, patched together from an imperfect recollection of two or more lays. But making allowances for the poor transmission, there are some vigorous passages and some touching lines in the poem, especially in Guthrún’s plaint over Sigurth.

The *Völsunga saga* cites a couple of stanzas of the lay 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. The Collector’s statement that the lay is Guthrún’s plaint addressed to Thjóðrek may be derived from “Guðrúnarkviða” III, St. 4. But in all likelihood the poem was conceived as a monologue.

Thjóðrek<sup>1</sup> had been with Atli, and had there lost most of his men.<sup>2</sup> Thjóðrek 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,  
    till that Gjúki    with gold me dowered,  
    with gold me dowered    and gave me to Sigurth.
2. Was my Sigurth    ’mongst the sons of Gjúki  
    like the garlic grown    the grass above,  
    or the high-legged hart    the hinds among,<sup>3</sup>  
    or glow-red gold    amidst grey silver.
3. Then Gjúki’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,<sup>4</sup>  
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:  
he knew, no longer lived his master.
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 Guthorm,<sup>5</sup>  
to the ravens given, beyond the Rhine.<sup>6</sup>
8. "In Southland seek thou Sigurth's body,  
there mayst thou hear the hoarse ravens,  
the cry of eagles, eager for meat,  
the howl of wolves thy husband about."

*(Guthrún said:)*

9. "Thou art hardy, Hogni, thus hatefully  
Sigurth's widow this woe to tell:  
should ravens rive thy ruthless heart,  
in faraway lands alone should'st die."<sup>7</sup>
10. Answered Hogni only thuswise,  
grim in his mind, with gloomy words:  
"But greater grew, Guthrún, thy woe  
if ravens rived my ruthless heart."<sup>8</sup>
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.)[9](#)

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 Hálf's[10](#) high-built      hall I beheld.  
I sate with Thóra      seven half-years,  
Hákon's daughter,      in Danish lands.

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;

16. Seaward sailing,      King Sigmund's ships,  
with golden dragons      and graven stems;  
in the web we weaved      the wars which fought  
Sigar and Siggeir,[11](#)      south by Funen.[12](#)

17. Then heard Grímhild,[13](#)      the Gothic[14](#) queen,  
(that soothed I was      somewhat in mind):[15](#)  
flung down her web      and fetched her sons;  
to ask gan she      most eagerly,  
if amends to me      they meant to make  
for Sigurth slain      and his young son.[16](#)

18. Was Gunnar ready      gold to offer,  
Hogni also,      to heal my sorrows.  
Further asked she      who to fare was ready,[17](#)  
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].[18](#)

19. In then wended,      athelingwise,  
the folk-warden's thanes;[19](#)      were their frieze coats red,  
their byrnie short,      their helms blazoned,  
were they girt with swords      and swart of hair.

20. Would all choose me      their choicest gifts,  
their choicest gifts,      and speak cheer to me

that of many sorrows I might in time  
win me a truce; but I trusted them not.

21. Gave me Grímhild a goblet to drink,  
cool and bitter, my cares to forget.  
Was the mead mixed with the might of the earth,[20](#)  
with ice-cold sea, and the sacred boar's blood.
22. Runestaves full many stood on the horn  
stained and graven—I guessed them not:  
a heath-fish long of the Haddings'[21](#)  
land, an uncut ear, the inwards of beasts.
23. Were brewed in this beer many baleful things:  
all worts of the woods, wilted acorns,  
soot of the hearth, sacred entrails,  
a swine's boiled liver, my sorrow to deaden.
24. Then altogether forgot I him,  
my Sigurth, slain by sword in hall:[22](#)  
to my knees came then three kings from Hunland,[23](#)  
ere Grímhild herself did say to me:
25. "Gold I give thee, Guthrún, to have,  
the fair folk-lands thy father had,  
with their hangings eke Hlothvér's[24](#) castles,  
and all the wealth the warrior[25](#) 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 a mate to have,  
nor Brynhild's brother's his bed to share;  
not seeming is it with the son of Buthli  
to beget children and a glad life live."
- (*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 heartblood 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.  
His wife shalt be till wanes thy life—  
or husbandless live save him thou choosest.”

(*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:  
“Land I give thee, and lieges eke,  
thy own forever, to ease thy heart.  
[Wineburg, Walburg, if thou wilt have them.]”[26](#)
33. Then chose 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 Gjúkungs’ fall;)[27](#)  
nor will I rest ere reft I have  
the lusty life of the leader-in-war.[28](#)
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 our oars we plied,  
for still other seven dry steppes we rode.[29](#)
36. The castle wardens, ere we rode in  
undid the bars of the doorway’s gate,[30](#)

.... . . . . .

37. Atli waked me— but I weened to be  
grim in my mind for kinsmen murdered.

*(Atli said:)*

38. “Nightly norns me but now awakened—”  
Was I to make out his evil dream—  
“Meseemed, Guthrún, Gjúki’s daughter,  
that with stealthy steel thou didst stab me through.”[31](#)

*(Guthrún said:)*

39. “A burning bodes it, if of blades one dreams;  
if of woman’s wrath, mere wilfulness:[32](#)  
burn thee[33](#) shall I ’gainst bale and woe,  
and as leech nurse thee, though loth to me.”

*(Atli said:)*

40. “Meseemed in my garth two saplings fell,  
though greatly wished I to let them grow,  
by the roots uptorn, reddened with blood;  
which, borne to my bench, thou didst bid me eat.

41. “Meseemed from my hand two hawks did fly,  
famished for food, to the fateful house;  
their hearts, meseemed, with honey I ate  
in sorry mood— were they swol’n with blood.

42. “Meseemed from my hand two whelps I loosed;  
the young yearlings yelped bitterly:  
their flesh, meseemed, though foul become,  
I was made to eat, all unwilling.”

*(Guthrún said:)*

43. “That means that swains of slaughter speak,  
and hew off the heads of white-haired cattle:  
they are fey to fall within few nights’ time—  
before daybreak— for folks to eat.”[34](#)

*(Atli said:)*

44. “Meseemed I lay, nor to sleep listed,  
upon my bed— I will bear it in mind.”[35](#)



# 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 role 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 Herkja 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, during the reign of Ólaf the Saint; but in the poem it is still regarded as a new and foreign practice requiring the ministration of a “Saxon.” Neither language nor versification affords 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.

Herkja<sup>1</sup> was the name of one of Atli’s bondmaidens. She had been his leman. She told Atli that she had seen Thjóthrek 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, Gjúki’s daughter,  
o’er what in hall Herkja told me:  
that thou with Thjóthrek, Thjóthmar’s<sup>2</sup> son,  
hast lain in love ’neath linen cover.”

*(Guthrún said:)*

3. ‘I swear to thee all sacred oaths  
upon the white and hallowed stone:<sup>3</sup>  
that we twain never and nowise did  
what for maid and man is unmeet to do.
4. “I never kissed<sup>4</sup> the Gothic king,  
the noble warrior, one time even:  
far other were our earnest words,



when full of sorrow      we sate together.[5](#)

5. “Thanes full thirty      followed Thjóthrek hither:  
none after liveth      of all these men.  
Of my brethren didst rob me,      the byrnie-clad men,  
didst rob me of all      my next of kin.

6. [6](#)“Gone is Gunnar,      nor greet I Hogni;  
I will see no more      my sweet brethren twain;  
with his sword would Hogni      this slur avenge—  
now myself I must      of this sin clear me.

7. “Send for Saxi,[7](#)      the Southron lord,  
for he can bless      the boiling kettle.”  
In hall foregathered      seven hundred thanes  
when Atli’s queen      to the kettle went.

8. To the bottom plunged she      her bright forearm,  
and out she fetched      the flashing gems:  
“Behold, ye heroes,      upheld my honor  
by holy award,      though the water boil.”

9. Laughed the Hunnish king’s      heart in his breast,  
when whole he saw      the hands of Guthrún.  
“Let Herkja come      to the kettle now,  
she who to Guthrún      this grudge did bear.”

10. No sadder sight      was seen ever  
than when Herkja’s hands      were wholly burnt.  
To stinking moor      was the maid then ta’en.[8](#)  
Thus was Guthrún      all guiltless seen.[9](#)



# The Complaint of Oddrún

## Oddrúnargrátr

Oddrún's love for Gunnar, 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. It is also probably one of the youngest, and 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 archaizing turns and allusions<sup>1</sup> 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. Aesthetically, too, the poem is inferior. Though facile, it is full of inconsistencies and irrelevancies,<sup>2</sup> due in this instance, not only to a problematic and utterly disordered text, but also to the mediocrity of the poet.

Heithrek was the name of a king, and his daughter was hight Borgny. Vilmund<sup>3</sup> was the name of her lover. She could not give birth to her children before Oddrún, Atli's sister, came to her help.<sup>4</sup> Oddrún 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>5</sup>  
    not any one could,    the earth above,  
    lend a helping hand    to Heithrek's daughter.
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.  
    She swung the saddle    from slender steed,  
    and in she went    to endmost gable.  
    These words then first    fell from her lips:
4. "I fain would find    if befallen hath evil,  
    as I have heard,    in Hunnish lands?"<sup>6</sup>

*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 proud:  
under warm cover he kept the maid,<sup>7</sup>  
for five winters, so her father knew not.”

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>8</sup>

7. Two bonny babes were born to the world,  
son and daughter, to the slayer of Hogni;<sup>9</sup>  
then said the maid sick unto death,  
nor any word she ere that spoke:

8. “May hallowed wights bring help to thee,  
Frigg and Freya,<sup>10</sup> and favoring gods,  
as off thou warded evil from me  
(and hastened hither help to bring me).”<sup>11</sup>

*(Oddrún said:)*

9. “Not hastened I hither help to bring thee,  
as though worthy ever thou wert of it:  
an oath I swore, and ever kept,  
that the ailing all ’gainst ill I would guard.”

*(Borgný said:)*

10. <sup>12</sup>“Bereft of reason and raving art,  
since spiteful words thou speakest to me;  
yet faithfully I followed thee,  
as though born we had been to brothers twain.”

*(Oddrún said:)*

11. “I remember yet how meanly you spoke,  
when to Gunnar I gave the evening goblet,<sup>13</sup>  
saying such shame never should be known  
of any maid, but of me only.”

12. Then sate her down the sorrowful queen,<sup>14</sup>  
to tell her tales of trials great.

13. “To high heroes in hall I was born.  
My life I led beloved of most  
whilst lived my father—[15](#) 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 dowered with gold his daughter should be  
given in Southland to Grímhild’s son.[16](#)
15. “But to Brynhild he the helmet gave:  
she should, said he, a shield-maid be.[17](#)  
‘No better maiden was born in the world  
to be a queen,’ he quoth, ‘while she lives.’
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 Fáfnir’s slayer[18](#) 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,  
till of all wiles she aware did grow.[19](#)
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.[20](#)
19. “To Gunnar then gladly I gave my love,  
to the breaker-of-rings,[21](#) as Brynhild did not;  
to Atli they[22](#) offered untold riches[23](#)  
of bright gold rings, to my brother dear.
20. “Bade he fondly for me fifteen manors  
and Grani’s burden,[24](#) if gold he wished;  
but Atli spurned to bespeak ever  
a dowry gift from Gjúkung’s kinsmen.
21. “Yet could we not overcome our love;  
to the gold-ring-giver[25](#) 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>26</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 aught of our love;  
but home in haste they hied them back,  
but hidden wholly from her<sup>27</sup> kept it  
who all of it ought to have known.

25. <sup>28</sup>"The hoof beat of horses was heard full loud  
when Gjúki's sons in the garth did ride.  
Then Hogni's heart the Huns cut out,  
in dungeon laid him who was dear to me.

26. "His harp then struck the hapless king<sup>29</sup>  
(with the toes of his feet that far it rang).<sup>30</sup>  
Thought the highborn king that I quickly would  
hasten to help if I heard this song.

27. "Gone was I then to Geirmund's<sup>31</sup>  
court, the beer to brew for a banquet there;  
his harp I heard from Hlés Isle far,  
how the strings he struck, bestead full sore.

28. "I bade my handmaids to hold them ready:  
the lord's dear life I longed to ward;  
full swiftly sailed the sound over,  
till I beheld the halls of Atli.

29. "Then out did crawl Atli's mother,  
the evil wretch— may she rot foully!<sup>32</sup>  
Into Gunnar's heart she hewed her teeth  
that I might not save the matchless king.

30. "I often wonder, woman gold-dight,  
why alone longer I live on earth,  
when dead the doughty dealer-of-rings<sup>33</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—[34](#)  
sad Oddrún's plaint is ended now.”





# The Lay of Atli

## Atlakviða

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 their theme and outer form, but which differ decisively in conception and style. Without a doubt the shorter “Atlakviða” is both more authentic than the “Atlamál” and aesthetically by all means superior—in fact, this lay is one of the finest 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 scattered *fornyrðislag* stanzas, excellent and indispensable, but markedly different in their simple style from the remaining more turgid *málaháttir* 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; 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 (Kriemhild’s) desire for revenge on her brothers (as in the *Nibelungenlied* and “Brot af Sigurðarkviðu”). On the contrary, she is consistently solicitous for their safety. 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 “Atlamál” are independent treatments of the legend. Of the two, “Atlakviða” has always been considered the older: its stark heathen tone, its details of legendary form, its style, its poor state of preservation, all point in that direction. And in more recent times it has been shown that definite similarities in vocabulary, style, verse technique, and especially the liberal use of the figure of variation, uncommon otherwise in the Collection, strongly suggest the authorship of one of the court skalds of King Harald Fairhair, Thorbjorn Hornklofi, of whom we possess two fairly long poems. If this should be the case, the date of composition may be the latter part of the ninth century.

The lay is called “The Greenlandish Lay of Atli” in the *Codex*, but it would seem likely that the Collector mistakenly borrowed this name from “Atlamál,” whose title is rendered fairly certain, not only by the old superscription and the immediately preceding Prose, but also from internal evidence.

In the *Völsunga saga* (Chaps. 33-38) the compiler may be seen clinging generally to the more detailed narrative of the “Atlamál,” but supplementing it occasionally with quotation from “Atlakviða.” See also “Dráp Niflunga.”

Guthrún, Gjúki's daughter, avenged her brothers, a deed which has become widely famed. She first slew Atli's sons, then she slew Atli himself and burned his hall, and all his court in it. Of these matters this poem telleth.

1. Of yore sent Atli on errand to Gunnar  
a cunning king's man— Knéfrœth was he hight;  
to Gjúki's court came he, and to Gunnar's beer hall,  
to the benches hearth-girding,[1](#) to the beer of welcome.
2. The doughty ones[2](#) drank, their dark thoughts hiding,  
in the hall of Gunnar, fearing Hunnish wrath.  
Called out then Knéfrœth with coldhearted words—  
was he sent from Southland— as he sate on high-seat:
3. "Atli hath sent me his errand to ride,  
on charger bit-champing, through cheerless Myrkvith,[3](#)  
to bid you, Gunnar, that to his benches ye come,  
with helmets ring-dight,[4](#) to the halls of Atli.
4. "Shields may ye choose there, spearshafts of ash tree,  
eke helmets gold-burnished, sword blades full many,  
silver-gilt saddle cloths, Welsh sarks gory red,  
darts and barbed spears, and bit-champing steeds.
5. "He will give you the gold[5](#) of Gnita Heath vast,  
will give shrilling shafts and ship-prows[6](#) gilded—  
much that is hoarded and hidden, eke the halls of Danp,[7](#)  
and the mighty forest which is Myrkvith hight."
6. His head turned Gunnar, and to Hogni said:  
"What sayest thou, young hero, when of such we hear?  
Red gold I ween not on Gnita Heath hidden  
but we two do own of it even as much.
7. "Seven lofts have we, with swords filled each one,  
whose hilts are made of heavy gold;  
my steed I ween swiftest, and my sword sharpest,  
are my bows bench-seemly,[8](#) my byrnies all golden;  
and my helmet ring-dight, from the hall of Kíar,[9](#)  
to me liefer is than thy liege's hoard."

*(Hogni said:)*

8. "What, pray, meant our sister to send us a finger ring  
all wound with wolf's hair? Some warning it betokens.[10](#)  
The heath dweller's hair was hanging on it:

wolfish would be our way to the Huns.”

9. [11](#)Neither whetted nor letted the lordly kinsmen,  
nor did faithful friends further the emprise;  
quoth then Gunnar as a king befitteth,  
and a mighty warrior, in his mead hall sitting:
10. “Arise now, Fjornir![12](#) Thou shalt fill with mead,  
and hand to the heroes, the horns all golden.  
(Let us wine drink unwincing, for well may it be  
that in this world ne’ermore ye thanes sit together.)[13](#)
11. [14](#)“The Niflung gold hoard old grey-coated wolves  
may grasp greedily, once Gunnar is fallen,  
and black-skinned bears, biting with their fangs,  
to dog packs give game if Gunnar return not.”
12. The lord of the land was led out by weeping,  
faithful kinsmen from the court within.  
Said then the last-born son of Hogni:[15](#)  
“May no ill befall you wherever you may fare!”
13. Through the hills the heroes in haste did spur  
the chargers bit-champing, through cheerless Myrkvith;  
shook the Hunnish heath where they haughtily rode,  
their steeds lash-fearing on green fields did trample.
14. [16](#)Atli’s halls they beheld then, the high-builed towers;  
on the bastions above stood Buthli’s[17](#) warriors;  
was the Southrons’ hall with seats engirded,  
with long rows linked of white linden shields.
15. Within hall, Atli, (and his earls)[18](#) drank wine;  
without it, his watchmen on the walls were placed,  
to warn him if Gunnar with war shield drew nigh,  
with shrilling spearshafts and unsheathed swords.
16. Their sister first saw them as the seats they neared,  
both her dear brothers— little beer had she drunk:  
“Betrayed art, kinsman; for how could’st thou, Gunnar,  
against the Huns hold thee? From the hall flee quickly!
17. “Better were it, brother, if in byrnie clad  
and ring-covered helmet, thou had’st ridden against Atli,  
in the saddle had’st sat all the sun-hot day,  
(and the raven had’st fed on reddened battlefield,)[19](#)

18. “Had’st made the women weep    their war-dead heroes,  
and Hunnish shield-maidens    to shame had’st put,[20](#)  
but Atli himself    amongst the adders had’st thrown.  
Now that loathy life-end    your lot will be.”
19. (Then gainsaid Gunnar,    the gold-ring-breaker:)[21](#)  
“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. [22](#)They held Gunnar fast,    and in fetters laid  
Burgundy’s king,    and bound him firmly.
21. Seven Hogni slew    with sword sharp-cutting,  
the eighth he hurled    into hottest fire:[23](#)  
so shall stoutheartedthane    stem the foes’ tide,  
as ’gainst Hunnish hosts    Hogni shielded Gunnar.
22. They asked the liege    if his life he would,  
the Gothic[24](#) king,    with his gold hoard buy.
23. (Then gainsaid Gunnar,    the gold-ring-breaker:)[25](#)  
“First shall Hogni’s heart    in my hand be laid,  
from the bold one’s breast    all bloody cut,  
from the son of Gjúki,    with sword sharp-gashing.”
24. (Beguile they would    the greathearted king,  
when a gibbering thrall    they threw down and slaughtered:)[26](#)  
The heart they hewed    out of Hjalli’s[27](#) breast,  
on a board laid it,    and brought it to Gunnar.
25. Then said this Gunnar,    Gjúki’s first-born:  
“Here have I the heart    of Hjalli the thrall,  
unlike the heart    of Hogni the fearless,  
since much it beats    on the board as it lies:  
but e’en more it beat    in his breast as it lay.”
26. Then laughed Hogni,    to the heart as they cut  
the whittler-of-shields,    for whine he would never.  
(Took the hard one’s then    the Hunnish warriors),[28](#)  
on a board laid it    and brought it to Gunnar.
27. Then spoke this Gunnar,    the spear-Niflung:  
“Here have I the heart    of Hogni the fearless,  
unlike the heart    of Hjalli 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.[29](#)

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.[30](#)

30. “Let the Rhine rather the red gold hide,  
the fast-flowing flood, evil Fáfnir’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:)[31](#)  
“Let the wheel wain fetch now fettered Gunnar.”  
To his death then drew the doomed hoard-warder,[32](#)  
the bold brand-wielder, a bit-shaking steed.

32. Rode Atli Glaum, his goodly charger,  
hedged round by shields and shining swords;  
but white-armed Guthrún, sprung from gods on high,  
her tears withheld as in hall she came.[33](#)

*(Guthrún said:)*

33. “May it go with thee, Atli, as to Gunnar thou swarest[34](#)  
with holiest oaths, oft and anon,  
by the southward sun and by Sigtyr’s[35](#) cliff,  
by his steed-of-ease[36](#) and by Ull’s temple-ring.”[37](#)

34. Living they laid into loathy dungeon,  
alive with adders, the lordly Niflung:  
but Gunnar, unyielding, grim in his mind,  
with his hands did strike the harp, undaunted:[38](#)  
the strings rang out strongly. With stout heart thus  
should highborn hero hold to his own.

35. His horse Atli spurred, to his halls returning,  
the earth-stamping steed, straight from the murder.  
In the courtyard was din of capering chargers,  
eke of clash of weapons, from the woods as they came.

36. Out went then Guthrún forth to Atli the king,  
with golden goblet to greet the folk-warder:

“Thou art welcome to have in thy hall, my lord,  
most gladly Guthrún’s young game to eat.”[39](#)

37. Atli’s gold cups did clink wine-filled,  
when the Hunnish heroes in the hall foregathered;  
long-bearded henchmen benchward in strode:  
(those who in Myrkheim had murdered Gunnar).[40](#)

38. Forth bore then the beer (who had borne him sons,  
the daughter of Niflungs),[41](#) bedight with gold rings;  
grudging she brought to the Buthlung[42](#) his meat,  
and unwilling; then wildly spoke these words of hate:

39. “Now hast thou, sword-giver, of thy sons twain eaten  
the blood-dripping hearts, with honey seasoned;  
hast swallowed the flesh of slaughtered kinsmen,  
as tid-bits which to the high-seat were sent you.

40. “Wilt thou nevermore now to thy knees call the twain,  
Erp and Eitil, when ale hath cheered thee,  
nor see them sitting on settles in hall,  
gold rings dispending and spearshafts smoothing,  
mastering horses and their manes shearing.”[43](#)

41. Rose uproar on benches, men’s angry shouts,  
wept Hunnish warriors, there was wailing ’neath hangings;[44](#)  
but one wept not—Guthrún, who wept not ever  
her bearhearted brothers, nor her boys so dear,  
so young and so guileless, begot with Atli.

42. Sowed then gold snares the swan-white lady,  
and with ruddy rings enriched the housecarls;  
to fulfill their fate she flung out treasure,  
nor recked aught the woman to rob the coffer.[45](#)

43. Unwary was Atli, his wits were befuddled,  
had not with him his weapons, nor bewared of Guthrún.  
Erstwhile the athelings more ease did have,  
the time king and queen fondly clasped in hall.

44. To their bridal bed she gave blood[46](#) to drink  
with murderous hands, and the hounds she loosed;[47](#)  
into hall hurled she—the housecarls were waked—  
burning firebrands—thus her brothers avenged.

45. To the fire she gave all who within did sleep.

Flaming fell then the far-famed temples,[48](#)  
the Buthlung's beer hall; burned eke the shield-maids,  
bereft of their lives, in the roaring flames.

46. This tale is ended; nor will ever after thus  
byrnie-clad woman her brothers avenge;  
to death she did dear folk-lords three,[49](#)  
the swan-white lady, ere herself she died.

Yet more fully is spoken (of this) in "The Greenlandish Lay of Atli."





# The Greenlandish Lay of Atli

## Atlamál hin gröenlenzku

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 a 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. The remoteness would also account for the crass ignorance shown of north European geography. Again, the conditions as described in the lay are small, even mean. The innumerable hordes of Atli have here shrunk to thirty henchmen, and Gunnar disposes over only ten housecarls. Still further, the general tone corresponds. The splendid heroes have become small farmers. In the course of their undignified scolding match Guthrún reproaches Atli for never having held his own at the assembly, whereas he reminds her that their barns always were well-stocked and there had been plenty of good things. The boorish buffoonery with Hjalli—good of its kind—takes up a disproportionate amount of space and breaks into the tragedy of the heroes’ deaths.

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 ungainly 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. We shall not go far wrong in assigning the “*Atlamál*” to an eleventh- or twelfth-century poet. This again tallies well with the half-Christian, half-heathen expressions toward the end, and also with the numerous indications that its legendary form is decidedly younger than that of the “*Atlakviða*” which, in fact, was hardly known to the author.<sup>1</sup> Certain verbal and factual similarities, however, point to an acquaintance with “The Lay of *Völund*.”

It would serve no useful purpose to point out in detail the shortcomings of the “*Atlamál*”—its repetitiousness, its lachrymose tone, its lack of breeding, its general air of “a sad tale done into song.” 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 noble “*Atlakviða*.”

1. Heard have full many    how that men<sup>2</sup> had gathered  
for counsel together—    of which gain had the fewest:  
how that wiles they weaved then    of which woe came, only,  
to them and the Gjúkungs    who beguiled were by them.

2. The folk-warders’ fate grew:<sup>3</sup>    fey were the heroes.  
Unwise was Atli,    his insight failed him:

threw his strong stays down,[4](#) into straights brought himself:  
sent them word swiftly to seek him nor tarry.

3. Wise was the lady, had her wits about her,  
full well understood she what in stealth they whispered;  
a hardship she held it: would fain help give them:  
on sea went they sailing, but herself not with them.[5](#)
4. Runes had she graven; had ravelled[6](#) them Vingi—  
on their bane bent was he— ere to the brothers he gave them;  
to the firth of Lim[7](#) fared, then, afar whom Atli  
had sent to the Gjúkungs, Guthrún's stout kinsmen.
5. Fires they lit for them, and as friends welcomed  
from afar who had come there, nor of falsehood bethought them;  
the king's gifts took they gladly, which the guests brought with them,  
hung them up on the wallposts,[8](#) nor aught mistrusted.
6. Came then Kostbera,[9](#) the queen of Hogni,  
a woman warmhearted, and welcomed the strangers;  
glad was eke Glaumvor, whom Gunnar had married,  
fulfilled what was fitting to refresh guests weary.
7. They bade home to them Hogni, if with him they fared, rather:  
nor was hidden the falsehood, if heed they had given.[10](#)  
His word gave Gunnar if with him fared Hogni,  
and fain was Hogni to follow his brother.
8. Bore mead the mistresses, of meat was there plenty,  
many full horns were handed, till his fill had everyone.  
(Then up rose the sea kings and to sleep betook them,)[11](#)  
husband and wife eke, as the wise ones held seemly.
9. Clever was Kostbera, had cunning of rune signs;[12](#)  
she conned o'er the letters by the light of the fire;  
tied was her tongue, though, when she tried to read them:  
so muddled were they she could make them out nowise.
10. To bed went both then, Bera[13](#) and Hogni;  
(but little slumbered the lady highborn,)[14](#)  
nor hid she from Hogni what she had been dreaming,  
but said to the sea king so soon as she awakened:
11. "From hence would'st, Hogni, but heed thou my counsel—  
but few are rune-wise— fare thou some other time!  
The rune signs I have guessed now, graven by thy sister:

has the white-browed one     not bidden thee to her.

12. “At one thing I wonder,     nor can well make out:  
why ravelled the runes are     which were written by Guthrún;  
for so seemed to me     their secret meaning  
that your bane it would be if     Atli’s bidding ye follow:  
one rune she wanteth,     or ’tis the work of another.”[15](#)

*(Hogni said:)*

13. “Idle fears have women,     which are far from my thinking;  
bad deeds I reckon not     till back we must pay them.”[16](#)  
The good king will give us     many glow-red armrings,  
no dread had I ever,     dire things though boded.”

*(Kostbera said:)*

14. “Will be ill the ending     if ye are eager thitherward:  
a friendly welcome     awaits you not this time.  
Hear my dreams, Hogni,     hide them I will not:  
some ill will befall you,     I fear me greatly.

15. “Thy bedclothes saw I     burning in fire,  
the high flames whelming     through our hall swept roaring.”

*(Hogni said:)*

“Linens may lie here     which little thou prizest—  
they will blaze suddenly,     as my bedclothes seemed.”[17](#)

*(Kostbera said:)*

16. “A bear saw I come in here,     he broke up the planking  
and shook his paws at us,     so that shelter we sought from him;  
with his muzzle he caught many,     but our might had left us:  
there was trampling[18](#) ’neath rafters,     truly not a little.”

*(Hogni said:)*

17. “There’ll be wild weather,     with windstorms dreadful:  
the white bear thou sawest     eastern blasts betokens.

*(Kostbera said:)*

18. “An eagle beheld I     through our hall flying—  
bad tidings bodes that—     which with blood us sprinkled  
(from his gory pinions,     ere out of gable-end flying):[19](#)  
in evil seeming     like Atli looked he.”

*(Hogni said:)*

19. “Full soon we shall slaughter, and shall see much blood, then:  
often for oxen of eagles one dreameth.[20](#)  
No harm means us Atli, what’er thou dreamest.”  
Then more they said not nor their mouths again opened.

20. Awoke the well-born ones,[21](#) were their words of like things:  
aghast was Glaumvor with grievous dream-sights,  
but gainsaid her Gunnar with more goodly meaning.[22](#)

*(Glaumvor said:)*

21. “A gallows saw I threat’ning, for thee to hang on,  
and worms thee becrawling, unwounded otherwise—[23](#)  
came the doom of all godheads: what deem’st thou it meaneth?[24](#)

22. “A bloody sword saw I out of thy sark taken—  
for a husband’s hearing unhappy dreams these.  
A spear eke thought I thrust through thy middle,  
with hungry wolves howling at haft and spearhead.”

*(Gunnar said:)*

23. “Small dogs will be running with din and barking;  
oft the hounds’ baying bodes whistling of spearshafts.”

*(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 o’er the fields as we wander.”)[25](#)

*(Glaumvor said:)*

25. “Methought in the darkness came dead women hitherward,  
clad in weeds of mourning,[26](#) and wished to fetch thee,  
beckoned and bade thee to their benches forthwith:  
I fear that the goddesses[27](#) have given thee over.”

*(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):[28](#)  
our fate we may flee not,[29](#)    we shall fare on the morrow,  
though likely it seemeth    that our life be a short one.”
27. When the dawn lighted heaven    the heroes were ready  
on their way to be wending;    but with warnings some held them.  
Five, all told, fared they,    though fewer by half this  
than they had housecarls:    ’twas hot-brained and thoughtless.
28. Snævar and Sólar,[30](#)    sons they of Hogni;  
was eke one hight Orkning    who to Atli them followed,  
Kostbera’s brother—    blithe was the shield-tree.[31](#)  
Fair-Dight fared with them,    to where the firth them parted,  
the women ay warning,    but they would not heed them.
29. Spake Glaumvor these words then,    who was Gunnar’s housewife,  
to Vingi spake she    as well it seemed to her:  
“Reward ye fittingly    the feastings we gave you:  
were a foul shame your coming    if befalls them ill hap.”
30. Answered her Vingi,    nor would aught acknowledge:[32](#)  
“May the etins seize him[33](#)    in aught who betrays you,  
and the gallows his body,    who his faith breaketh.”
31. Spake Bera these words then,    blithe in her heart she:  
“May ye sail safely    and snatch victory.[34](#)  
Godspeed I wish you,    let no wight gainsay it!”
32. Hogni made answer,    his own kin loved he:  
“Be of good cheer, ladies,    whatever grief befall us;  
a kind fate bespeak many,    yet miss it oft greatly:  
the wishes that go with him    many a wight avail little.”
33. They looked at their lief ones    and lingered ere parting,  
their weirds awaited them    as their ways led asunder.
34. Amain they gan row,[35](#) then,    to rift the keel almost,  
on the oars bent them    backward wrathfully;  
the oar-thongs they sundered,    the tholes they shattered,  
their flood-horse[36](#) they fastened not[37](#)    when from it they wended.
35. Nor long it lasted—    I lag not in telling—  
ere they saw the buildings    which Buthli[38](#) had dwelt in;  
harshly the gate grated    when Gjúki’s son struck it.  
These words said then Vingi,    more wisely unspoken:

36. “Fare ye 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 aught was fearful, whatever betide 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 between them.[39](#)  
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, Helward sent by us.”

41. Hot with wrath waxed they when these words reached them,  
bestirred their fingers in stringing their bows then,  
with arrows shot sharply and behind shields hid them.

42. In came the tidings that without were struggling,  
before the hall the heroes— they heard a thrall tell it;  
dreadful was Guthrún at these dire tidings,  
the necklace-decked one: down threw she everything,  
slung down the silver, that asunder the rings[40](#) brake.

43. Out went she eftsoon, wide open the doors flung,  
nor fearful was she, to welcome her kinsmen;  
to the Gjúkungs she turned her— their last greeting was it—  
her mind she spoke truthfully, and eke more thuswise:

44. “I had sought to save you, to forsake not your homestead:  
’gainst the norms wins no one: hither nathless came ye!”  
Many sage words said she, to settle between them;  
but naught would they listen, and “no” said all of them.

45. Beheld the highborn one how they did struggle,  
then took courage unwomanish, her cloak she flung off,



a keen sword she caught up and her kinsmen defended:  
nor light were the blows which she lavished on foemen.

46. Felled Gjúki's daughter to the ground two warriors:  
Atli's brother her blade smote— they must bear him away thence—  
so fiercely fought she that his foot she sundered;  
and another struck she that he stood not up after,  
but to Hel hied him; yet her hands shook not.

47. A fight they fought there which was famed widely,  
than any deed greater which the Gjúkungs had done else.  
'Tis told that, as long as alive were the Gjúkungs,  
they made a sword fight, slit through the byrnies,  
and hewed the helmets, as their hearts bade them.

48. All morning fought they, till midday was over,  
at dusk and at dawn eke, and the day following.  
With blood flowed the battlefield ere the brush was ended:  
ere they fell, over eighteen the upper hand had then  
the two bairns of Bera,[41](#) and her brother with them.

49. Angrily eying them, Atli spake forth thus:  
"Tis an ill sight to look at, I lay it at your door:  
before, we told thirty, thanes of the doughtiest—  
but eleven live now: great loss I hold it.

50. "We were five brothers when Buthli died from us.  
In Hel dwell now half of them, two hacked by your sword lie;  
great are ye Gjúkungs— gainsay I cannot—  
and a grim wife is Guthrún, of whom good had I never.

51. "Were we happy seldom to my hands since thou camest:  
hast killed my kindred, of my coffers robbed me,  
and to Hel sent my sister:[42](#) that my heaviest sorrow."

*(Guthrún said:)*

52. "Dost hint that, Atli? And what of thy deeds?  
Thou took'st my mother and didst murder her for gold rings,  
and my keen-thoughted sister didst in cave to death starve.[43](#)  
I laugh to hear thee rehearse the wrongs done thee,  
and thank the gods that have given thee sorrow."

*(Atli said:)*

53. "Ye earls, I urge you to the utmost to heighten

the woes of this woman: fain would I behold it;  
and get ye goodly Guthrún to whimper;  
my heart it would gladden unhappy to see her.

54. “Seize ye bold Hogni and slit him with knife-edge,  
cut the hero’s heart out: hold yourselves ready;  
and stouthearted Gunnar on the gallows fasten;  
see that ye do this; to the snake den then with him!”[44](#)

*(Hogni said:)*

55. “Do thy worst and forbear not, I abide it gladly:  
thou shalt find me steadfast, I have stood much ere this.  
A whaling we gave you the while hale we Gjúkungs:  
now we are wounded and weary thy way thou mayst have.”

56. Up then spake Beiti— he was Atli’s steward:  
“Let us spare Hogni, and Hjalli slaughter,  
the foolish fellow,[45](#) he is fey for a long time;  
too long now liveth that lout, good for nothing.”

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 Hjalli if he had but his life left.

59. Pleaded then Hogni— as had done the fewest—  
the thrall to unfetter that thence he might hie him:  
’For us it were easier this ill game to play with you;[46](#)  
why should we here wish to hear that yelping?”

60. They laid hands on Hogni then; hard was it for them  
the life to lengthen of the lordly hero.[47](#)  
Laughed then Hogni— heard it all warriors—  
steadfastly bore it, well stood he the torture.

61. His harp took Gunnar,[48](#) the strings grasped with his foottwigs;[49](#)  
wept all the women, so well could he play it,  
men burst into tears eke who could best hear him;



of his wrongs he told her:[50](#) burst the rafters asunder.[51](#)

62. Then died the doughty ones: was the day still young then.  
To the last lived in them their lofty manhood.

63. Great thought him Atli: both Gjúkungs had he slain now,  
told her loss to the lady, with no little taunting:  
“Tis morning now, Guthrún; no more are thy dear ones;  
to thyself in somewhat thy sorrow thy owest.”

*(Guthrún said:)*

64. “Right merry art, Atli, of the murdered to tell me;  
but thou’lt rue thy rash deed when wrought is all of it.[52](#)  
This left they after them, and I let thee know it:  
ill hap will haunt thee the while I live, too.”

*(Atli said:)*

65. “In naught I believe this: another way see I,[53](#)  
by far more fitting— oft we fail to take such—  
with gifts and girl-slaves I shall gladden, wife, thee,  
and with snow-white silver, as yourself will have it.”

*(Guthrún said:)*

66. “Thy hope is hollow: I’ll have none of these:  
my wrath I wreaked oft for wrongs that were lesser;  
wilful they weened me, but worse I shall be now,  
yet had I forborne it if Hogni lived still.

67. “In one hall we both were brought up together,  
in the grove we grew up and gambolled playfully;  
Queen Grímhild gave us gold rings and necklaces:  
no amends canst make e’er for my murdered brothers,  
nor by aught work it that e’er I forgive thee.

68. “Woman’s lot is worsened ay by warriors’ recklessness:  
the oak’s strength is stunted when stripped are its branches,  
the tree will topple when torn are its rootlets:  
in all mayst now, Atli, thy own will follow.”[54](#)

69. The lord too lightly believed her and trusted,  
nor was hidden the falsehood if heed he had given;  
crafty was Guthrún, well could she shuffle,  
twain shields showed she him[55](#) and shammed cheerfulness.

70. Great arvel made she after her brothers,  
and after his own dead did Atli likewise.  
No more they said, then; the mead was ready,  
was the goodly gathering made with great feasting.

71. Hardhearted, hoped she to harm his kin greatly,  
most fearful vengeance she vowed on her husband:  
she lured her little ones, laid them 'gainst bedpost.  
The wild ones were frightened yet wept not nor whimpered,  
sought the arms of their mother and asked what she wanted.

*(Guthrún said:)*

72. “Ye had better not ask me: you both I shall slaughter,  
was I eager ever of old age to heal you.”

*(The boys said:)*

“To make away with us no wight can hinder thee:  
thy wrath will be sated when 'tis wrought altogether.”[56](#)

73. Unbending, she blotted out the brothers in their childhood,  
their heads she hewed off—for her 'twas unseemly.  
Where the boys were playing, asked Buthli's son then,  
his small sons twain, as he saw them nowhere.

*(Guthrún said:)*

74. [57](#)“I dare to tell now the tidings to Atli,  
will Grímhild's daughter not disguise ought of it:  
naught will it gladden thee, once thou knowest it:  
great sorrow didst summon when thou slewest my brothers.

75. “But seldom slept I ever since they have fallen.  
Grim meed I foretold thee: I mind thee now of it.  
Of that morrow spakest thou—[58](#) to mind I call it:  
'tis evening turned now and tidings I have for thee.

76. “Lost hast thou thy lief sons, which should have last betide thee:  
know that their brain-pans as beakers thou usest;  
the mead thou drinkest was mixed with their heartblood.

77. “The hearts of the striplings I steaked o'er the fire,  
calf's hearts I called them when I carried them to thee.  
Thou atest all up, nor aught of it leftest,  
didst chew greedily with thy grinders working.

78. “But to few befalls worse: their fate now knowest thou:

I brought it about, all; yet boast I not of it.”

*(Atli said:)*

79. “Cruel wast thou, Guthrún, that thou could’st do thuswise,  
to brew beer for me from the blood of my children.  
Thou’st slain those nearest thee, which thou never should’st have.  
Naught but ill from thee has befallen me ever.”

*(Guthrún said:)*

80. “In sooth, sweet were it to slay thee also;  
naught is enough for so knavish a chieftain  
for misdeeds dreadful thou hast done ere this,  
nameless, as never were known the like of.

81. “Into greater guilt hast now, and more ghastly, fallen  
than e’er was heard of: thy own arvel drankest now.”[59](#)

*(Atli said:)*

82. “On stake they should burn thee, but stone thee beforehand:  
then had’st gained what thou e’er hankered after.”

*(Guthrún said:)*

“On the morrow early be mindful of such things:  
by a fairer death shall I fare to the other light.”[60](#)

83. Thus sate they together, filled with savage rancor,  
words of hate they bandied, but happy was neither.  
Waxed Hniflung’s[61](#) hatred, of high deeds bethought him,  
set forth to Guthrún his grim hate of Atli.

84. To her mind she called then how they murdered 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 highborn Guthrún.

85. Quoth the stouthearted one, starting from sleep up—  
from the wound well knew he that it needed no binding:[62](#)  
“Say ye in sooth now: who slew King Atli?  
Not lightly ye dealt with me: my lifeblood is ebbing.”

*(Guthrún said:)*

86. “Will Grímhild’s daughter not disguise ought of it:  
’tis I who wrought it, that ended thy life now,

and Hogni's son eke, that to Hel thou wendest."

*(Atli said:)*

"Full swiftly thou slewest me, unseemly the deed, though:  
'tis ill to betray him who trusts him as his bosom-friend.[63](#)

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.  
From thy home thou cam'st hither, a host of men following.

88. "A life most lordly we led, my hall within:  
dearth was there never of noble athelings;  
well-stocked were our stables 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 bondmaids—  
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 ay left me by Buthli;  
with wiles thou didst work it, nor would'st have aught else.[64](#)  
My mother madest thou shed mournful tears oft;  
were we, wife and husband, unhappy ever after."

*(Guthrún said:)*

91. "That liest thou, Atli, though little I reckon it.  
I smiled on thee seldom: wast thou swelled up o'ermuch;[65](#)  
e'en as striplings ye struggled, was strife 'mongst you brothers,  
to Hel half of them from thy hall wended:[66](#)  
what good should have given thee, to grief it turned all.

92. "Twain brothers had I, headstrong they called us;  
we fared from our folk-lands and followed Sigurth;[67](#)  
forth strode we stanchly, steering his ship each one,  
our fates we followed, and fought our way eastward.

93. "We carved us a kingdom, its king overthrew we;  
fell at our feet then, fearful, the barons;  
him who fled his fellowmen freed we from outlawry,  
and mighty made him without means who had been.

94. "Fell then the Hunnish king,[68](#) my fate soon worsened;  
keen was my sorrow to be called widow;

but worse grief was it to me    to be given to Atli!  
A hero once had me:    ill hap to lose him!

95. “From Thing camest never—    so that we heard thereof—  
having pleaded pluckily,[69](#)    or o’erpowered thy foeman;  
gavest in at all times,    thy own never holding,  
but quietly yielded    (as a king should never).”[70](#)

*(Atli said:)*

96. “That liest thou, Guthrún;    but little it betters  
the lot of either:    our lives are blasted.  
Forget thou not, Guthrún,    nor grudge it to me,  
as honor to both of us    that out I be borne well.”

*(Guthrún said:)*

97. “A sea-steed[71](#) will I get thee,    and a stained coffin,[72](#)  
a sheet will I wax well    to shroud thy body,  
to all look that is needful,    as though we had loved each other.”

98. Lifeless sank Atli,    great loss felt his kinsmen;  
carried out the lady    all she had pledged her to.  
To the flood she fared then,    her fate to hasten;  
but her days were lengthened,    she died another time.[73](#)

99. Happy is he who    hath him begotten  
children as great as    Gjúki did foster:  
in all lands will live ay    on the lips of everyone,  
where’er men hear of it,    their hardy bearing.

# Guthrún's Lament<sup>1</sup>

## Guðrúnarhvöt

Not yet are ended Guthrún's sorrows. Her dearest child, Svanhild, her daughter by Sigurth, had been fostered at King Jónakr's court, out of harm's way. Thither Guthrún was carried by the waves, after vainly trying to end her life by drowning—a development of the legend peculiar to the North. She married the king. In this poem her sons by King Jónakr are sacrificed in an attempt to avenge Svanhild's death on King Jormunrekk—this theme from old Gothic legend had been 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,” the former is unquestionably the older and more original. However, here as elsewhere, the order of the *Codex Regius* is followed, an order which is advantageous also by reason of the 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 “Guðrúnarkviða” I, II, “Helreið Brynhildar,” and “Oddrúnargrátr”), not devoid of lyrical power and not at all an “incitation.” In fact it seems to presuppose the action of “Hamðismál.” The break between the tenderly elegiac portion and the first stanzas, whose spirit is that of the fiery “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 the bay to the land of King Jónakr.<sup>3</sup> He took her to wife, and their sons were Sorli, Erp,<sup>4</sup> and Hamthir. There was also fostered Svanhild,<sup>5</sup> her daughter by Sigurth. Svanhild was given in marriage to King Jormunrekk<sup>6</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>7</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.

2. “Why sit ye still and sleep through life,  
nor loathe to speak light-hearted words,  
when Jormunrekk your young sister,  
her, Svanhild hight, had by horses trampled.[8](#)
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,  
or if hardy you were like the Hunnish kings.”[9](#)
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:[10](#)  
with blood was thy bluish-white 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;[11](#)  
with the youths could we Jormunrekk kill—  
our sister’s slayer— of the same mind all.
6. “The helmets[12](#) bring of the Hunnish kings—  
hast whetted us to hateful strife.”
7. Laughing, Guthrún to the garner wended,  
and kingly crests she from coffer chose,  
and broad byrnies brought to her sons:  
the hardy heroes their horses mounted.
8. Then said Hamthir the high-minded:  
“So will wend hither to his mother’s hall  
the god-of-spears,[13](#) in Gothland[14](#) slain,  
that for all of us thou mayst arvel drink:  
for Svanhild, our sister, and thy sons also.”
9. Weeping, Guthrún, Gjúki’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 to me Sigurth—  
he whom murdered Hogni and Gunnar.



11. “More woeful wife,[15](#) ween I, never lived,  
(nor was ever wight in the world thus wronged);[16](#)  
but sadder still seemed it to me  
when the athelings to Atli gave me.
12. “The keen-eyed youths[17](#) 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;[18](#)  
tossed me, nor drowned, the tow’ ring billows,  
on land me lifted, to live on doomed.
14. “The bed I mounted— had better fate hoped—  
once more mated, with a mighty king.[19](#)  
I issue bore, as heirs twain sons,  
as heirs twain sons to the atheling.
15. “About Svanhild seated sate her bondmaids,  
whom of all my children I cherished most:  
of hue whiter, my halls within,  
than bright sunbeams were Svanhild’s brows.
16. “In gold I arrayed 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,[20](#) 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 hewed the king’s men.  
I called to mind many sorrows—  
(why should I bide to bear still more?)[21](#)
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.[22](#)



21. “To mind call thou      what to me didst say,  
the time we, Sigurth,      sate together:  
that from Hel, hero,      would’st 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,      Gjúki’s daughter).”[23](#)



# The Lay of Hamthir

## Hamðismál (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 other under suspicion. And the genuine material left has needed much surgery and sympathetic treatment to make it at all intelligible. Nevertheless, enough is discernible to recognize that it brought the great Eddic cycle of heroic songs to a worthy, as well as a logical, conclusion. In its original form it must have been a masterpiece of dramatic construction, with every episode furthering the action of the poem.

As it happens, “Hamðismál” is also the one poem in the Collection which unquestionably goes back to recorded history. The Gothic historian Jordanes (sixth century A.D.) in his *Getica* reports that Hermanaricus, King of the Ostrogoths, had a woman by the name of Sunilda bound to wild horses and torn to pieces because of the treachery of her husband, and that in revenge therefor her two brothers, Sarus and Ammius, fell upon him and wounded him. Legend, we may suppose, explained the king’s otherwise inexplicable, cruel deed as one done in a jealous rage; it made Sunilda his wife and invented the figure of his son Randvér, who seduced her and was hanged by the king. Connection with the Burgundian cycle of legends was effected, presumably in the North, by making Svanhild the daughter of Guthrún by Sigurth.

As pointed out above, several stanzas of “Guthrún’s Lament” seem to have originally belonged to this 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 to 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 their half brother Erp. And the scenes in Jormunrekk’s hall, however fragmentary, are full of energy and passion.

The measure is, variously, *málaháttr* 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 *Völsunga saga* (Chap. 42) paraphrases only the *fornyrðislag* stanzas (quoting St. 28, 11. 1-2), and none of the *málaháttr* 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 or earlier. The skald Bragi (early ninth century) devotes four spirited stanzas of his *Ragnarsdrápa* to the attack and slaying of Jormunrekk by Hamthir and Sorli; but it is impossible to decide which of the two poems is the earlier.

1. [Sorrowful deeds      the dayspring saw,  
    unwelcome dawn,      the alf folk’s grief;[1](#)  
    thus early morn      the ills of men  
    and every sorrow      and sadness quickens. ]

2. 'T was not but now, nor newly, either,  
but ages ago, time out of mind,  
[of all things older than any, this,][2](#)  
when Guthrún egged on, Gjúki's daughter,  
her young sons to avenge Svanhild the fair:
3. "A sister had ye, was she Svanhild hight;  
her Jormunrekk in wrath had trampled  
by white and black steeds, on highroad faring,  
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.[3](#)  
(Ye are little like beloved Gunnar  
or Hogni, his brother, bear-hard in mind.)[4](#)
5. "On earth I am lonely like to asp in holt,[5](#)  
amidst foes unfriended like fir stripped of boughs,  
of gladness bereft as the greenwood of leaves  
when the waster-of-twigs[6](#) 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 bluish-white bed linen reddened—  
by skilled hands woven—in his wounds as he lay.  
By the side of Sigurth thou sat'st when he died,  
no glee thee gladdened: thus Gunnar willed it.
8. "When thou ended Eitil's, and Erp's life too,  
thou would'st harm Atli, but didst harm more thyself;  
so ought each one work ill on his foe  
with slaughterous sword that himself he harm not."[7](#)
9. Said then Sorli with seemly wisdom:  
"Not yet wearied are ye of words, meseemeth:  
with our mother I wish not idle words to bandy;  
whate'er cravest, Guthrún, but will bring thee grief?
10. "Didst bewail thy brethren and both thy dear sons,  
thy trusted kinsmen, betrayed foully:  
shalt thou us, Guthrún, eke bewail now;  
we sit fey on our horses, and afar we shall die."[8](#)

11. [9](#)Said the highborn lady, before the heroes standing  
the slim-fingered one, to her sons speaking:  
“Are your lives at stake if ye list not to me:  
how could two men else ten hundred Goths  
strike down and fetter in their stronghold alone?”[10](#)
12. Then rashly rode they, with wrath snorting,  
(Sorli and Hamthir, the sons of Guthrún,)[11](#)  
frowardly fared over fells cloud-dripping,  
on their Hunnish horses, their harm to avenge.
13. [12](#)On the way found they their wily brother.
- (*Hamthir said:*)  
“This brownish bastard will bring us help?”
14. Answered them Erp, of another born:  
“Full quickly I come to my kinsmen’s help,  
as one hand hastens to help the other,  
(or one foot fain would its fellow help.) ”[13](#)
- (*Hamthir said:*)
15. “Scarce could one foot its fellow help,  
or one hand hasten to help the other!”
16. Said Erp these words as on they fared—  
high on horseback the hero sate—  
“I reckon not to show the road to a craven.”  
A brazen bastard they called their brother.[14](#)
17. From the sheaths they drew their sharp swords forth,  
the gleaming wound-gashers, to gladden Hel:  
the twain overthrew a third of their strength  
when they struck down to earth young Erp, their brother.[15](#)
18. Their fur cloaks they shook and fastened their swords,  
in silken sarks[16](#) then themselves arrayed.
19. Still further they fared on their fateful path,  
till their sister’s stepson[17](#) they saw on the gallows,  
the wind-cold wolf-tree,[18](#) to the west of the castle,  
by the cranes’ food[19](#) becrept— uncouth was that sight.
20. There was glee in the hall, ale-gay the throng,  
and the horses’ hoofbeats they heard not at all,  
ere a hero stouthearted his horn did blow

(the tidings to tell of the twain coming).[20](#)

21. Went then to warn the wassailing king  
of the helm-clad twain on horseback seen:  
“Be on guard now, ye Goths, wend they grimly hither,  
the mighty kinsmen of the maid ye trod down.”

22. Chuckling, Jormunrekk his chin-beard stroked,  
with wine wanton he welcomed the fray;[21](#)  
shook his dark locks, at his white shield[22](#) looked,  
in his hand upheld the horn all golden.

23. “Most happy were I if behold I might  
Hamthir and Sorli my hall within:  
bind them would I with bowstrings long,  
the good sons of Guthrún on gallows fasten.”

24. There rose outcry in hall, alecups were shattered  
.....  
in the blood they lay from the breasts of Goths.[23](#)

25. Then said Hamthir the hardy-minded:  
“Thou didst wish, Jormunrekk, that we should come;  
your feet you see into the fire hurled,  
and both your hands[24](#) into the hot flames[25](#) thrown.”

26. Then roared the king,[26](#) akin to gods,  
bold in his byrnie, as a bear would roar:  
“Cast stones, ye men, as steel will bite not,  
nor iron swords, on the sons of Jónakr.”

*(Sorli said:)*

27. “Ill didst thou, brother, to ope that bag:[27](#)  
from wordy bag oft cometh baleful speech;  
thou art hardy, Hamthir, but a hotspur ever:  
much wanteth he who witless is.”

*(Hamthir said:)*

28. “Off were his head if Erp lived still,  
our warlike brother, on the way whom we slew,  
the stouthearted hero whom hateful norms  
egged us to kill, who ought have been hallowed.[28](#)

29. “[Not should we, ween I, be of wolfish kind,

nor seek to slay one another

like the wolfs of the waste,    wild and greedy,

that howl in the hills.][29](#)

30. “Well we have fought    and felled many Goths,  
stand on athelings slain    like eagles on tree;  
glorious we die,    whether today or tomorrow:  
lives till night no man    when the norns have spoken.”

31. There fell Sorli,    slain at the gable,  
at the hall’s hindwall    stooped Hamthir then.

This song is called “The Old Lay of Hamthir.”





# The Catalogue of Dwarfs (Dvergatal)

from “Völuspá,” Stanzas 9-16

9. 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<sup>1</sup> bones.

10. Mótsognir rose, mightiest ruler  
of the kin of dwarfs, but Durin next;  
molded many manlike bodies  
the dwarfs under earth, as Durin bade them.

11. Nýi and Nithi,<sup>2</sup> Northri and Suthri,  
Austri and Vestri,<sup>3</sup> Althjóf, Dvalin,  
Nár and Náin, Níping, Dáin,  
Bifur, Bofur, Bombur, Nóri,  
Án and Onar, Ái, Mjóthvitnir.

12. Veig and Gandálf, Vindálf, Thráin,  
Thekk and Thorin, Thrór, Vit, and Lit,  
Nár and Regin, Nýráth and Ráthsvith;  
now is reckoned the roster of dwarfs.

13. Fíli, Kíli, Fundin, Náli,  
Heptifíli, Hanar, Svíur,  
Frár, Hornbori, Fræg and Lóni,  
Aurvang, Jari, Eikinskjalði.

14. The dwarfs I tell now in Dvalin'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>

15. There was Draupnir and Dólgthrasir,  
Hár and Haugspori, Hlévang, Glói,  
Skirvir, Virvir, Skafith, Ái,  
Álf and Yngvi, Eikinskjalði,

16. Fjalar and Frosti, Finn and Ginnar.  
Will ever be known, while earth doth last,  
the line of dwarfs to Lofar down.



# GUIDE TO PRONUNCIATION

Note that all names are stressed on the first syllable.

The acute serves to mark long vowels (for example: Sigrún).

## Vowels:

*a* as in “artistic”

*á* as in “father”

*e* as in “men”

*é* as in German *See*

*i* as in “it”

*í* as in “ravine”

*o* as in “omit”

*ó* as in “ore”

*o* as in “not”

*u* as in “would”

*ú* as in “rule”

*æ* as in “hair,” or French *bête*

*œ* as in “slur”

*y* as in French *une*, German *Hütte*

*ý* as in French *sûr*, German *Tür*

*au* as in “house”

*ei* as in French *paysan*

*ey* as in French *oeil*

Note: *i* before a vowel is semivocalic. Thus *Gjúki* is pronounced with the same glide vowel we have in “few.”

## Consonants:

*g* is always pronounced as in “go” (except *ng*, which is as in “long”). It is never pronounced as in “giant.”

*s* is always voiceless as in “sing,” never voiced as in “wise.”

*h* before a consonant is pronounced as in “where.”

*þ* is a voiceless *th* as in “thin”; *ð* is the corresponding voiced sound as in “father.”

# GLOSSARY

Æsir—One group of Norse gods  
ái—grandfather alf—elf  
angle—fish hook  
arvel—“inheritance ale”, funeral feast  
Ás [pl. æsir]—a god  
atheling—a noble, prince  
ay—always  
to bait—to give feed to  
bale—evil, woe, harm  
bane—death  
baneful—deadly  
banesman—slayer  
barrow—burial mound  
bast—woody fiber in plants used for binding  
belike—very likely  
berserk (er)—warrior of unnatural strength and fury  
to beshrew—to curse  
besprent—sprinkled  
bestead [adv.]—placed in peril, beset  
to betide, betid—to happen  
to boot—to remedy, to benefit  
brand—sword blade  
breeks—breeches  
to busk—to array, dress, get ready  
byrnie—coat of mail  
cark—trouble  
carl—freeman  
chthonic—relating to gods and spirits of the netherworld  
daysman—arbitrator, mediator  
dight, bedight—dressed, arrayed  
dísir—female guardian spirits  
to doom—to judge  
doughty—valiant, brave  
draughts—checkers  
edda—grandmother  
eftsoon—forthwith  
einherjar—warriors who gather in Valholl  
erst—first, former  
erstwhile—long ago  
etin—giant  
fain—glad, gladly  
fane—temple

fell [n.]—mountain  
fell [adj.]—cruel, fierce  
to fester—to rankle, suppurate  
fey—doomed to die  
to fleer—to laugh, mock, deride  
flyting [n.]—a wrangling, a scolding match  
fornyrðislag—“old lore metre,” a stanza in 8 half-lines  
fylgja—female tutelary spirit who accompanies each person  
galdralag—“magic measure”  
to gang—to go  
garth—a yard, enclosure  
gnomic—containing maxims, aphoristic  
to greet—to weep  
guerdon—reward  
hættir—metres  
hap—good luck, prosperity  
heitatal—“enumeration of synonyms”  
hight—called, named  
hind [n.]—a rustic  
hoar—white or light gray, cold  
høfuðstafr—main-stave, alliterating initial sound in the second half-line  
holt—woods, copse  
howe—hill, burial mound  
i-blent—blended  
kenning—a metaphorical expression  
leech—physician  
leman—sweetheart, mistress, spouse  
lesing—a lie or lies, falsehood  
to let—to prevent, discourage  
lief—dear, pleasing, agreeable  
liege—a vassal  
liege lord—a ruler  
to list—to desire  
ljóðaháttir—“song (or magic) metre,” stanza of two symmetrical half-stanzas each  
    made up of a *fornyrðislag* line followed by a full-line without a caesura.  
louver—opening in the roof to supply light and ventilation  
mainsworn—perjured  
málaháttir—“speech metre”  
mannjafnaðr—matching of men against one another with respect to  
    accomplishments and prowess  
mead—a drink made of fermented honey  
meed—reward  
meet—fit, proper  
mickle—large, great  
Mithgarth—the world of men

midden—dung hill, refuse heap  
to moot—to argue, debate, discuss  
must [n.]—the juice of fruit before fermentation  
nafnapulur [pl.]—rigmarole  
nathless—none the less  
Nauth (×)—the rune for “n,” standing for “need”  
ness—a promontory, a cape or headland  
norn—a fate goddess  
quean—a woman  
quern—hand mill  
to reck—to care about  
rede—advice, counsel  
rost—a league  
runes—characters used by early Germanic tribes for written communication  
sallow—a species of willow  
sark—shirt, kirtle  
scar—skerry, cliff  
senna—a quarrel, flyting  
sib—kindred, kinsmen  
stafir—staves, alliterating initial sounds  
stafnbúi—forecastleman  
stuðlar—“props,” alliterations in the half-line  
thews [pl.]—physical strength  
thewful—strong, mighty  
Thing—assembly  
to thole—to endure, suffer  
thorp—village  
thrall—slave  
thul—sage, bard  
Jmla—a rigmarole  
thurs—giant; the rune Þ  
tooth-fee—present given a child on the appearance of its first tooth  
torque—collar consisting of a twisted narrow band of precious metal  
troll—(misshapen) giant  
udal land—an allodium, freehold  
valkyries—handmaidens of Óðin who hover over the battlefield and conduct the  
    slain warriors to Valholl  
víshelming—half-stanza  
wain—wagon  
wassail—a festivity with drinking of healths  
weal—welfare, well-being  
weeds [pl.]—garments  
to ween—to expect, believe  
weird [n.]—destiny, fate  
welkin—heavens

to wend—to go  
weregild—money payment for taking a life  
to whet—to egg on, incite  
wight—a being  
to win—to labor at something  
to wit—to know (past tense wist)  
withal [adv.]—also, as well, besides  
withershins—in a direction contrary to the apparent course of the sun  
withy—willow twig used for binding  
wold—upland  
worm—dragon, serpent  
wort—a drink in the process of fermentation  
to wot—to know  
wraith—spirit, ghost  
to wreak—to avenge, take revenge  
yare—quickly, soon





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[1](#) An abridged translation of *Heimskringla* had been made even earlier by the Norwegian, Mattis Störssön (*ca.* 1560).

[2](#) For pronunciation and the value of diacritic marks see [p. 324](#).

[3](#) See [pp. xxi-xxii](#).

[4](#) For a fuller account of this see the author's *The Skalds* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1947).

[5](#) “Baldrs draumar,” “Rígpula,” “Hyndluljóð,” “Svipdagsmál,” “Grottasöngur.”



[6](#) Concerning the eight sheets missing see what is said in “The Great Lacuna.”

[7](#) For still other lays of Eddic quality see the author's *Old Norse Poems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).

[8](#) In the original, possibly by a mistake of the copyist, “The Lay of Volund” precedes “The Lay of Alvís.” In this translation it has been moved to a more logical position following “The Lay of Grotti.”

[9](#) An exception is the Prose before and after “The Lay of Grímnir.” Likewise the Prose called “The Fall of the Niflungs.”

[10](#) As in “Helgakviða Hjörvarpssonar” and “Sigrdrífumál.” Such remarks as “that was the belief in olden times,” at the end of “Helgakviða Hundingsþana” II, others in “Fáfnismál” after St. 1, and the tenor of the Concluding Prose of “Brot af Sigurþarkviðu,” certainly do not point to contemporaneity of composition!

[11](#) But see the remarks about the possible authors of “Atlakviða” and “Þrymskviða” in the introductory remarks to these lays.

[12](#) Especially “Helreið Brynhildar,” “Guðrúnarkviða” I—III, and “Oddrúnargrátr.”

[13](#) Compare Tennyson’s “drops of onset” (from “The Passing of Arthur,” 1383).

[14](#) Or else, at most, used as *epitheta ornantia*.

[15](#) See the discussion of stanzaic structure on [p. xxvi](#).

[16](#) For example, in “Vafþrúðnismál,” Sts. 11 ff. where the last lines of the question stanza become the first of the answer stanza.

[17](#) In order to avoid confusion, the accents marking length in the Old Norse are omitted in the following examples.



[18](#) Consider such a line—exceptional, to be sure—as “deyr fé,” “cattle die.”

[19](#) Interpolations are put into brackets [...], emendations into parentheses ( . . . ).

[20](#) They are printed in my book, *Old Norse Poems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).

[21](#) *Scandinavian Studies and Notes*, V (1920), 197 ff.

1 *Völva*. [gen. *völu*] “seeress”; *spá* “prophecy.”

[2](#) According to “The Lay of Ríg,” the god Heimdall (Ríg) was the progenitor of the three human estates: slaves, freemen, and nobles. Heimdall, “the One Shining above the World” (?), is the warder of the gods. “Hallowed beings” probably refers more specifically to the gods.

[3](#) Óthin as “the Father of the Battle-Slain” who are gathered into Valholl. See “Grímnismál,” St. 8.

[4](#) The ash tree, Yggdrasil; see “Grímnismál,” Sts. 25 ff. It is not clear to what “the nine abodes” refers.

[5](#) “Roarer”; the world was made of his carcass. See “Vafþrúðnismál,” St. 21, and “Grímnismál,” Sts. 41-42.

[6](#) According to Snorri’s account (“Gylfaginning,” Chap. 5) they are Óthin, Vili, and Vé”.

[7](#) “Middle World,” the earth as the abode of men. See “Grímnismál,” St. 42.

[8](#) Hoffory suggested that these lines allude to conditions in the northern high latitudes, where the summer sun, advancing from the south, at midnight wheels from west to east along the horizon before mounting again in the sky. However, what follows seems to refer, rather, to unordered chaos.

[9](#) “The Shining Plain.”

[10](#) The Norns, who introduce the note of fate. They are of etin (giant) kin. Their names are given in St. 20.

[11](#) Scholars agree that the so-called “Catalogue of Dwarfs” following here in the original is an interpolation. It is given on [pp. 322](#)-323; but in order to keep in agreement with the sequence of the original, the numbering of the stanzas is not changed.

[12](#) Accepting Gering’s emendation.

[13](#) “Ash and Vine.” One is reminded of the Greek story of Deucalion and Pyrrha.

[14](#) The supreme deity of the Teutons. [OE. *Woden*],

[15](#) His name and function have not yet been explained satisfactorily, nor has that of Lóthur. Both possibly are hypostases of Óthin.

[16](#) “Ygg’s (Óthin’s) Horse.” For the explanation of the kenning see “Hávamál,” St. 138, Note 66. This “world-tree” is the symbol of the ordered universe.

[17](#) “Fate”; by popular etymology conceived as meaning “the Past.” The names of the other two norns, or goddesses of fate, Verthandi “the Present,” and Skuld “the Future” (see next stanza), are now understood to be learned inventions of the twelfth century, on the pattern of the three *Parcæ* or *Molpai* of classical antiquity. Like them, the Norns “spin the thread of Fate.” See “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” I, St. 3.

[18](#) This difficult stanza is generally interpreted in connection with those immediately following. No satisfying explanation of the name and function of Gullveig has yet been given. She possibly represents the Vanir (as gods of commerce?) in their power to corrupt—she is a witch. The vain attempts of the Æsir to annihilate her bring about war between them and the Vanir in which the latter are victorious. Hostages are exchanged then, and the two races of gods rule the world together.

[19](#) “The One-Eyed,” Óthin.

[20](#) A name frequently borne by witches.

[21](#) That is, should both Æsir and Vanir share in the sacrificial feast offered up by men?

[22](#) A ceremonial shot by which Óðin, the god of war, dedicates the opposing host to himself. This custom is instanced also elsewhere.

[23](#) “The home of the Æsir.”

[24](#) Freya. She was not, indeed, actually handed over. Snorri, in his “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 41, relates how, after the castle wall of Ásgarð had been battered down, a giant offered to erect in one winter’s time walls proof against the attack of the giants. As price he demanded the sun and the moon and the goddess Freya. The gods accepted, stipulating that the work must be done within that time. But when it neared completion, Loki by a stratagem foiled the builder, and Thór slew him.

[25](#) “Thunder,” the god of strength, archenemy of the giants.

[26](#) That is, the seeress. Alteration between the first and the third person, used by the speaker of himself, is frequent in the *Edda*.

[27](#) “Fjolnir’s pledge” is Óðin’s one eye: “But under that root [of Yggdrasil] which faces [the world of] the frost giants there is the well of Mímir [or Mím] in which wit and wisdom are hidden; and he is hight Mímir who owns that well. He is full of knowledge because he drinks its water out of the Gjallarhorn. Thither came Óðin and asked for a draught from the well, but got it not before giving his one eye as a pledge.” (“Gylfaginning,” Chap. 14). Óðin’s eye being hidden in the well, water from it may in skaldic language be said to come from “Fjolnir’s pledge” (Fjolnir, “the Concealer,” is one of Óðin’s many names).

[28](#) This dark and challenging refrain is used with the events of the present and the future divined by the seeress.

[29](#) “Sitting out” is the technical expression for the witches’ and sorcerers’ communing with spirits, out of doors at night.

[30](#) “The Terrifier,” Óthin. He is often pictured as a one-eyed greybeard, strong, wise, crafty, and cruel.

[31](#) Supplied after the corresponding passage in St. 48.

[32](#) Literally, “Choosers of the Slain”—the shield-maidens of Óthin, who ride through the air over the battlefield, marking with their spears those who are to fall, and conducting the battle-slain to Valholl, “the Hall of the Slain,” Óthin’s abode. Another catalogue of valkyries is given in “Grímnismál.” Their names have to do with war and weapons. The stanza is no doubt a later addition.

[33](#) “Warrior,” Óthin.

[34](#) “The Glorious.” He is the son of Óthin and Frigg.

[35](#) In a proleptic sense.

[36](#) “War,” the blind god. The story is told more fully in “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 48: Baldr had had heavy dreams about his early death, so Frigg took an oath of all beings and all things not to harm him. When thus assured of Baldr’s life, the gods in sport shot and hewed at him. But Loki in malice found out that the mistletoe had not been sworn in, having been thought to be too weak. He gave a piece of it to blind Hoth as a missile, and Hoth shot Baldr dead. Loki’s punishment is told in the Final Prose of “Lokasenna.”



[37](#) Váli, engendered by Óthin with the giantess Rind, because the gods could not avenge the deed on one of their own. See “Baldr’s draumar,” St. 11.

[38](#) Hoth.

[39](#) Hel, “the Concealer,” is the goddess of the lower world where the shades of the dead dwell in cold and darkness (as in the Greek *Tάρταρο*). Hence, “to send to Hel” comes to mean merely, “to slay.”

[40](#) “The Beloved,” Óthin’s spouse, who dwells in Fensalir “the Ocean Halls.”

[41](#) That is, the grove about hot springs (?).

[42](#) That is, Loki, “the Ender,” (?) himself. Instead of these lines, the *Hauksbók* has the following:

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

This Váli (not to be confused with Óthin’s son, St. 32) was a son of Loki. The gods transformed him into a wolf.

[43](#) The east is the home of the frost giants to the Norwegians of the western coast, who had in mind the snowy mountain wastes of the interior.

[44](#) “The Frightful.” It is “poisonous” and “cutting” with cold.

[45](#) This stanza is here transposed from its position in the original, where it follows St. 38.

[46](#) “The Dastardly Striking,” a dragon. See the last stanza of the poem, and “Grímnismál,” Sts. 33 and 36. Following Snorri, the Translator has substituted here and for the preceding verb, the present for the past of the original.

[47](#) The Fenris-Wolf. See St. 39 and Note 54.

[48](#) “The Dark Fields.” The stanza probably is interpolated, perhaps from some other poem, because of its analogy to the following one.

[49](#) “Ever-Cold” (?).

[50](#) “The Strand of the Dead,” where Hel’s hall stands.

[51](#) The direction of evil omen. See “Rígsþula,” St. 26.

[52](#) Probably the giantess Angrbotha, about whom see Note 54.

[53](#) This is the typical name for an old and monster-infested forest.

[54](#) Or Fenris-Wolf, a mythical wolf engendered by Loki with the giantess Angrbotha, “Boder of III.” See above and “Völuspá hin skamma,” St. 12. Others of this brood are Garm, Skoll, and Hati. Skoll will swallow the sun, Hati, the moon, when the end of the world comes (“Grímnismál,” St. 40).

[55](#) Blood-red sunsets, dim sunshine, and famine years presage the end of the world. See “Vafþrúðnismál,” St. 44 and Note 30.

[56](#) See “Þrymskviða,” St. 6, Note 5.

[57](#) “Swordbearer.” He is glad because of the approaching downfall of the gods, announced by the crowing of the cock.

[58](#) “Multiscient.” He wakes the giants to the last combat.

[59](#) “Golden-comb.”

[60](#) See “Vafþrúðnismál,” St. 41.

[61](#) He is the *Kepþepos* of Hel. See “Baldrs draumar,” St. 2. This portent, together with the following lines, is repeated as a refrain.

[62](#) 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. 141 ff:

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, ilia mariti...

[63](#) 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.

[64](#) “The Loud Horn,” in possession of Heimdall. See St. 27.

[65](#) Line 4 is put here instead of as line 3 of 39. Following Much’s suggestion, this line, and line 4 of 47, are added from the *Hauksbók* version. According to Snorri’s “Ynglinga saga” (*Heimskringla*, Chap. 4), at the conclusion of the war between the Æsir and the Vanir, the wise Mímir (and Hœnir) had been sent by the Æsir as hostages to the Vanir who, suspecting treason, cut off Mímir’s head and returned it to Óðin. He embalmed it, and by his magic got it to speak with him and to tell him of many hidden things.

[66](#) That is, the wolf, Fenrir.

[67](#) Here, as “Light-Alfs” practically identical, it seems, with the Vanir; whereas the “Swart-Alfs” are sinister dwarfs.

[68](#) He is the leader of the giants, whose home is in the east.

[69](#) The great serpent encircling Mithgarth, the world of men, the fruit of Loki’s intercourse with the giantess Angrbotha. See Note 54. Compare with the Greek Ωκεαρός, the Hebrew Livyathan, the Accadian Tiumat. In “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 50 it is said that “now the sea rushes up on the land, because the Mithgarth-Worm wallows in giant rage.”

[70](#) In gleeful anticipation of the carnage to follow. See for example, “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” I, Sts. 1 and 6, and Note 10.

[71](#) “The Ship of the Dead” or “the Nail-Ship.” But the explanation of “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 50, that “it is made of the nails of dead men, and it is therefore reprehensible if a man die and be buried with nails uncut” seems somewhat *ad hoc*.

[72](#) That is, Loki himself (see “Völuspá hin skamma,” St. 12); followed by “witless hordes” of giants.

[73](#) “The Swart,” the ruler over Múspelheim, the world of fire, thought to be in the south. In the final battle he slays the god Frey (“Lokasenna,” St. 42).

[74](#) A kenning for “fire.”

[75](#) Here in a general sense, Surt’s.

[76](#) Óthin's wife, Frigg. Her first sorrow is Baldr's death.

[77](#) According to "Gylfaginning," Chap. 36, the giant Beli's slayer is Frey.

[78](#) "Far-Ruler" (?). See "Vafprúðnismál," St. 53, and "Grímnismál," St. 17.

[79](#) Probably, one of Loki's names.

[80](#) This stanza presents great difficulties, so that a translation is perforce conjectural.

[81](#) Thór's hammer. See "Þrymskviða," St. 1 and notes.

[82](#) Kenning for Thór, who is the protector of Mithgarth, the world of man, from all sorts of monsters.

[83](#) That is, from the world which, after Thór's death, becomes uninhabitable.

[84](#) Kenning for Thór, who is the son of Fjorgyn, "Mother Earth."

[85](#) Or, "Fire against Yggdrasil."

[86](#) Like the last thunder of a passing storm, this burden, which has resounded with

lyrical power to accompany the destruction of the old world, now heralds the creation of a new one in the future.

[87](#) “The Great God,” Óthin.

[88](#) With which they had, of yore, played at draughts (St. 8).

[89](#) One of Óthin’s names.

[90](#) That is, divine future events as the priest of the gods. See “Hymiskviða,” St. 1 and note.

[91](#) Ygg’s (Óthin’s) brothers are Vili and Vé. See “Lokasenna,” St. 26, and also Note 6, above.

[92](#) A kenning for “the Heavens.”

[93](#) “Gem-Roof” or “Fire-Shelter.” It is worthy of note that in the corresponding passage in “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 2, the abode of the blessed itself is called Gimlé, a fact which would lend strength to the former interpretation. It is difficult not to see in this stanza a reflection of the heavenly Jerusalem of the *Apocalypse*.

[94](#) The unknown (Christian?) god. This half-stanza with its Christian tinge occurs in the *Hauksbók* but not in *Codex Regius* and is therefore rejected by some editors. The paper manuscripts add the following lines:

He settles strife,      sits in judgment,  
and lays down laws      which shall last alway.

[95](#) “The Dark Fells.”

[96](#) The interpretation of this stanza has been much debated. If the reading of the main manuscripts: “now *she* will sink” be retained, with some editors, the meaning must be that the seeress is about to disappear again, having completed her prophecy. See the situation in “Baldrs draumar,” “Hyndluljóð,” and “Grógaldur.” But adopting the reading above, the evil dragon must be meant who is seen on his usual flight, carrying corpses, but who will sink out of sight in the new order of things.

[1](#) Óthin. Etymologically, “the One-Eyed,” but interpreted already by Snorri (“Gylfaginning,” Chap. 1) as “the Exalted.” See also “Grímnismál,” St. 47, Note 71.

[2](#) “Sage,” “bard,” “spokesman” [OE. *þyle*],

[3](#) “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 1.



[4](#) Disregarding this elementary caution of parlous times, the famous Einar Thambarskelfir and his son were slain (*Heimskringla*, “Harald Hardruler’s saga,” Chap. 44).

[5](#) That is, to the host. Hospitality is one of the cardinal virtues of Germanic antiquity. The *stranger*—by that same token a guest—is to be given a quick and friendly reception. The last two lines of the stanza are difficult.

[6](#) Water, for washing one’s hands, and a towel were offered before a meal.

[7](#) Conjectural.

[8](#) Probably a later addition. See Sts. 10–11.

[9](#) Conjectural, as are a number of these homely sayings which have to be interpreted *adsensum*.

[10](#) Apparently, the state of mind superinduced by the magic use of the heron's feathers. (See *Scandinavian Notes and Studies*, 1914, 259 ff). It has also been suggested that the allusion may be to the old-time scoop, usually in the shape of a long-necked bird, which floated on the butt in which the ale was served (*Arv*, 1957, 21 ff.)

[11](#) The reference seems to be to Óthin's adventure with Gunnloth, Sts. 104 ff. (in whose cave, however, he by no means loses the powers of his mind).

[12](#) Identical with Suttung (St. 103), if the above reference is correct. See also "Völuspá," St. 41 and Note 58.

[13](#) The assembly, the meeting of all the people of a district, in which all suits of law were adjudged.

[14](#) Literally, “remains with his skin dry,” having escaped a shower. For the meaning see Sts. 26–27.

[15](#) That is, what new foe, made over the cups.

[16](#) In return for his gifts.

[17](#) That is, as a result of the exchange of gifts.

[18](#) That is, the scornful laughter of enemies.

[19](#) Added by the Translator.

[20](#) Probably, wooden idols as signposts beside the road, intended to protect the wayfarer from evil powers.

[21](#) Which was Cyrus' means of gaining and retaining friends; Xenophon *Anabasis* 1, 9.

[22](#) This stanza presents great difficulties, and the translation is, therefore, tentative.

[23](#) The meaning seems to be that in the give and take of intercourse, when "one thought kindles another," it betrays stupidity to have nothing to say.



[24](#) One misses a stanza here telling of what man *cannot* forearm against.

[25](#) English lacks a word for the one in the original here, meaning “having eaten one’s fill.”

[26](#) That is, he walks about anxiously, trying to find someone he may know or seek a favor from, like the vulture peering for his prey.

[27](#) See “Fáfnismál,” St. 17.

[28](#) Supplied after the paper manuscripts.

[29](#) Rask's emendation.

[30](#) The meaning is, probably: however miserable (see St. 69), life is preferable to death. If one is alive, some good fortune may always befall one; but once dead and "outdoors," the warm fire will not cheer one, but only the "laughing heir."

[31](#) That is, memorial stones.

[32](#) The following lines, as well as the following stanza, consisting of proverbs, seem interpolated.

[33](#) That is, for sleeping comfortably ? Conjectural.

[34](#) Accepting Hj. Falk's suggestion.

[35](#) Which would undo the magic effect of consulting the runes.

[36](#) Generally rendered “a woman when burned.” See *Maal og Minne*, 1922, [p. 175](#).

[37](#) That is, probably, in the windy seasons, winter or spring, before the sap rises.

[38](#) Of the potter.

[39](#) His promises?

[40](#) That is, though you meet him on the main-travelled road, in the presence of others. Stanzas 88 and 89 are transposed, following Dietrich's proposal.

[41](#) "He's mad that trusts in the tameness of a wolf, a horse's health, a boy's love, or a whore's oath." *King Lear* III, 6, 18-19-

[42](#) There is hardly any connection to be found with the preceding stanza Sts. 96-102 recount Óthin's love escapade with Billing's daughter who is, possibly, identical with Gunnloth (St. 13).

[43](#) This stanza no doubt originally belonged to the series giving rules of conduct. It is used here to introduce another, and more successful, amorous adventure of Óthin: 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 (“Skáldskaparmál,” Chap. 1).

[44](#) Stanzas 105 and 106 are interchanged, following Sijmons.

[45](#) Kenning for “rocks.”

[46](#) Following Egilsson's emendation.

[47](#) "Exciter of Inspiration" (?); here, the name of the mead of skaldship (but in St. 140 and in "Skáldskaparmál" the name of the vessel in which it was stored). It is now in Óthin's possession.

[48](#) "Evildoer," Óthin's name, assumed while among the giants. This conclusion differs from the one in "Skáldskaparmál."

[49](#) That such a person was not among the gods; or that he acknowledged Gunnloth as his wedded wife? The oath on the ring attached to the heathen altar was a specially solemn one.

[50](#) Beginning of the so-called "Lay of Loddfáfnir."

[51](#) There the gods assembled for council. See "Völuspá," St. 19, and "Grímnismál," St. 30.

[52](#) Accepting Müllenhoff's emendation. See St. 165.



[53](#) This is probably the name of the sage or singer (*pul*) who pretends to have had the following redes of Óthin addressed to him at a meeting of the gods, beginning on a mockserious note.

[54](#) “Good wishes” are here to be understood, it seems, as kind disposition toward him one confides in.

[55](#) On slight provocation.

[56](#) The panic fear which (according to the old Norwegian *King's Mirror*, Chap. 11) often seizes young and inexperienced warriors.

[57](#) That is, she will be true to you in turn.

[58](#) Only in the paper manuscripts.

[59](#) In the original, *pul*. See Introduction, Note 2.

[60](#) The old man's wrinkled mouth is humorously compared to a bag. See "Hamðismál," St. 27, where the metaphor again suggests the rustic interior of the following lines.

[61](#) The meaning seems to be: only a strong bolt can last in the door which is unbarred to everyone. In other words, do not be too generous and hospitable. The line following is to be understood *in malem partem*.

[62](#) That is, as a remedy against any injurious effect therefrom. The bracketed lines, containing several folk-medicinal remedies, are undoubtedly a later addition. Their translation is, for the most part, conjectural. See *Maal og Minne*, 1923, [pp. 1](#) ff.

[63](#) Probably, in the form of a glowing iron.

[64](#) That is, tenesmus, relieved by the astringent decoction from acorns.

[65](#) In folklore, the elder-bush exercises a pacifying influence.

[66](#) Some ailments, such as rickets and the king's evil, were thought to be superinduced by "hate," that is, by the evil eye.

[67](#) Here begins the portion usually called “The Rune Poem.” In order to discover the runes, and through them to become possessed of secret wisdom, Óthin sacrificed himself by hanging himself on the World-Ash and wounding himself with his spear. Hence the world-tree is called Yggdrasil, that is Ygg’s (“the Terrible One’s,” Óthin’s) Horse (“the gallows”). The manner in which Óthin sacrificed himself is instanced also otherwise in Germanic heathendom. For example, according to the *Gautreks saga*, Chap. 7, the hero Starkath sacrificed King Víkar to Óthin by transfixing him with a spear and suspending him from a tree. It is difficult, however, to avoid the conclusion that the conception of the first two stanzas (see also St. 145) is ultimately derived from the crucifixion scene of the Bible, as Bugge has endeavored to prove.

[68](#) These lines seem to have gotten here from “Fjölsvinnsmál,” St. 14.

[69](#) Drinking horn.

[70](#) In “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 5, we learn that the giant Bolthorn had a daughter Bestla who, by Bur, becomes the mother of Óthin, Vili, and Vé. It has been conjectured that the wise Mímir is this giant’s son (see “Völuspá,” Sts. 27-28 and Note 27). Thus, Óthin’s wisdom is derived from three sources: from his self-sacrifice, from Mímir’s well, and from a drink out of Óthrerir (see St. 107 and note).

[71](#) That is, with blood, which is thought especially potent in magic.

[72](#) Supply “wrought runes.”

[73](#) See “The Catalogue of Dwarfs.”

[74](#) “The All-Wise.” Compare Alvís, the dwarf (“Alvísmál”).

[75](#) Conjecturally supplied by Gering.

[76](#) The runes: they were scratched into wood, stone, or bone. The translation of the following lines is mainly conjectural. They deal with the correct making and interpretation of runes, and with their proper use in sacrifice and magic. See Note 69.

[77](#) See St. 138 and Note 65.

[78](#) Who are credited with secret knowledge: for instance, Sigrdrífa, Grímhild, Guthrún.

[79](#) These are the “limb runes.” See “Sigrdrífumál,” St. 12, from which these lines are supplied by the Translator.

[80](#) That is, by magic.

[81](#) On this stanza, see “Rígspula,” St. 44.

[82](#) Consisting also of “runes.” In Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica* IV, 22, a prisoner who frees himself from his fetters is asked “*an forte litteras salutorias, de qualibus fábula ferunt, apud se haberet.*” This is also the theme of one of the “Merseburg Charms.” See “Grógald,” St. 10.

[83](#) In which manner Grettir’s death is brought about (*Grettis saga*, Chap. 81 ff.)

[84](#) See “Rígspula,” St. 45.



[85](#) Compare with “Grógaldr,” St. 11.

[86](#) That is, of 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.

[87](#) See the *barditus* mentioned by Tacitus in his *Germania*, Chap. 3, produced “*objectis ad os scutis*.”

[88](#) See St. 142 and Note 69.

[89](#) Óthin seeks the wisdom of the dead. See also “Baldrs draumar,” St. 5, and “Hárbarzljóð,” St. 44.

[90](#) In the heathen rite of baptism. See “Rígsþula,” St. 7 and note.

[91](#) Unknown elsewhere.

[92](#) Kenning for “dawn” (?). As to Delling, see “Vafþrúðnismál,” St. 25.

[93](#) Supplied by the Translator.

[94](#) This is, perhaps, the same unfathomable secret Óthin whispered in Baldr’s ear as he lay dead (“Vafþrúðnismál,” St. 54).

[1](#) “Strong in Entangling,” that is, in questions.

[2](#) “Beloved,” Óthin’s wife.

[3](#) “Father of Hosts,” Óthin.

[4](#) Óthin.

[5](#) As the only example of a narrative stanza in *ljóðaháttr*, this one looks like an (unnecessary) interpolation. The unannounced shift of scene is common to Eddic poems and the ballad.

[6](#) Nothing is known of this son of Vafthrúthnir.

[7](#) Óthin. See “Völuspá,” St. 28 and Note 30.

[8](#) “Giving Good Counsel,” that is, for victory.

[9](#) See “Hávamál,” Note 2.

[10](#) This stanza would seem to belong with the counsels on conduct in “Hávamál” rather than here.

[11](#) “Shiny-Mane,” the sun-horse.

[12](#) “Rime-Mane.”

[13](#) The god of fire. See “Völuspá,” St. 51 and Note 73.

[14](#) “Field of Battle.”

[15](#) See especially “Grímnismál,” Sts. 41-42; also “Völuspá,” St. 3 and Note 5.

[16](#) According to “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 10, 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.

[17](#) “The Shining.” According to “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 9, a god who with Nótt, “Night,” engendered a son, Dagr, “Day.”

[18](#) “Wind-Cold,” a giant, as are Vāsuth, “the Wet and Cold One,” and Svāsuth, “the Mild One.”

[19](#) Supplied with Bugge, after “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 18.

[20](#) The meanings of these giant names are not certain.

[21](#) “Stormy Rivers,” imagined as “venom-cold” rivers in the far North (“Gylfaginning,” Chap. 4).



[22](#) The interpretation of this line is doubtful.

[23](#) “Corpse-Gulper.”

[24](#) The name of this Van god corresponds exactly to that of the goddess Nerthus, “*Terra mater*,” whose rites are described by Tacitus in the famous 40th chapter of his *Germanita*. Originally doubtless a fertility god, in Norse mythology Njorth rules over the wind and the sea.

[25](#) This line is no doubt interpolated.

[26](#) “The Home of the Vanir.” As a return hostage, the Æsir sent Mimir (“*Völuspá*,” St. 45, Note 65).

[27](#) “Single Combatants” (?), the fallen warriors who are gathered by the valkyries into Óthin’s hall, Valholl (Valhalla).

[28](#) “Dark Hel” or Niflheim, the realm of Hel, the abode of the dead.

[29](#) A difficult line.

[30](#) The so-called *fimbulvetr*, “Chief of Winters,” foretold also in “Völuspá” St. 40, and “Völuspá hin skamma,” St. 14, as preceding the end of the world. It consists of three winters with no summer between.

[31](#) “Life” and “Longing for Life” (?).

[32](#) This tree is probably identical with the world-tree, Yggdrasil, (“Völuspá,” Sts. 2 and 19) and the “Tree of Mímir” (“Fjölsvinnsmál,” St. 14 and Note 15).

[33](#) See “Völuspá,” St. 39 and Note 54.

[34](#) “Alf-Beam,” a kenning for the sun.

[35](#) “These maidens are norns who assist at childbirth. See ‘Fáfnismál,’ Sts. 12 and 13. ‘Mogthrásir,’ ‘Desirous of Sons,’ is a symbolic designation for mankind, ‘Mogthrásir’s thorp,’ for the world” [F. Jónsson].

[36](#) See “Völuspá,” St. 51 ff.

[37](#) See “Völuspá,” St. 53 and Note 78.

[38](#) See “Völuspá,” St. 32, Note 37.

[39](#) “The Courageous” and “the Strong,” who both are sons of Thór and hence inherit his hammer *Mjólnir* (See “Þrymskviða,” St. 1 and Note 2). Other divinities inhabit Itha Field according to “Völuspa,” St. 61 ff.

[40](#) Óthin.

[41](#) Óthin.

[42](#) See “Hávamál,” St. 164 and Note 94.

[1](#) Some scholars, to be sure, see in the poem an Óthin monologue of great impressiveness, with no breaks in its unity—one which originally had nothing to do with the King Geirroeth motif.

[2](#) Detter and Heinzel II, 172.

[3](#) “Spear-Peace” (?), that is, peace gained by the spear.

[4](#) “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” (“Gylfaginning,” Chap. 8).

[5](#) A cardinal sin in a king, according to Old Norse conceptions.

[6](#) “The Masked One,” Óthin. He is frequently pictured as concealing his countenance by a wide cowl.

[7](#) Here, as frequently, used in a general and honorific sense for “warriors.”

[8](#) “Land of Strength.”

[9](#) “Yew Dales.” Ull, “Glorious,” is the god of archery. His weapon, the longbow, was made out of the yew. He is, possibly, a hypostasis of Óthin, or of Týr, the god of war.

[10](#) “Lord.” He is the god of fertility and prosperity. Like Njorth (see “Vafþrúðnismál,” Sts. 38-39), his father, he is said to be of Van origin. The “tooth-fee” is a gift to an infant when he cuts his first tooth.

[11](#) “Hall of Slain Warriors” (?), the first of Óthin’s three halls.

[12](#) “Sunken Hall” (?). Compare with Fensalir in “Völuspá,” St. 33.

[13](#) “Seeress,” Frigg. The name is etymologically connected, but not identical, with the Norse word for “history,” “story.”

[14](#) “Hall of Slain Warriors.” See Válskjalf, in St. 6 above, and, “Vafþrúðnismál,” Sts. 40-41.



[15](#) 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.

[16](#) "Noise-Home."

[17](#) "Scathe." She is Thjatsi's daughter and Njorth's wife. See also "Hárbarzljóð," St. 19, and "Lokasenna," St. 50.

[18](#) "The Far-Shining"; properly the seat of Baldr, the god of innocence, justice, and light.

[19](#) "Heavenly Mountains." Concerning Heimdall, see "Völuspá," St. 1, note.

[20](#) "Battlefield."

[21](#) "Mistress," "Queen" (feminine of Frey), the goddess of love. She is the daughter of Njorth and the sister of Frey.

[22](#) “Shining.”

[23](#) “The Presiding One,” son of Baldr and Nanna.

[24](#) “Shipstead,” “harbor.”

[25](#) “Wide land” (?). As to Víthar, see “Völuspá,” St. 53.

[26](#) “Sooty in the Face,” the cook of Valholl.

[27](#) “Sooty from the Fire,” the kettle.

[28](#) “Sooty Black” (?).

[29](#) See “Vafþrúðnismál,” St. 41.

[30](#) Both names signify “the Greedy One.” They are Óthin’s two wolves.

[31](#) “Thought” and “Remembrance,” Óthin’s ravens which bring him intelligence.

[32](#) “The Noisy” (?), a river probably thought to flow around Valholl.

[33](#) “The Great Wolf,” Fenrir; his “fish,” is possibly the Mithgarth Serpent. But the whole stanza presents great difficulty.

[34](#) “The Gate of the Battle-Slain.”

[35](#) Of uncertain meaning. It is the hall of Thór, who is a son of Óthin.

[36](#) Fenrir. See “Lokasenna,” Note 24, and “Völuspá,” St. 52.

[37](#) Læráth seems to be identical with the tree Yggdrasil, which suffers still other harm. See Sts. 26 and 33 ff.

[38](#) “Oak Antlers” (?).

[39](#) A well at the foot of Yggdrasil.

[40](#) The following catalog of rivers is plainly interpolated. Their names refer, some to swiftness, others to coldness and depth. For Leiptr, see “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” II, St. 30.

[41](#) Bifrost, “The Quaking Bridge” (see St. 45). The bearing of the passage is not clear.

[42](#) The catalog of steeds likewise is interpolated. Their names refer to speed, bright appearance, and similar qualities.

[43](#) “Middle World” or “The Enclosure.”

[44](#) This stanza is lacking in the original. We are able to reconstruct it from Snorri's close paraphrase ("Gylfaginning," Chap. 15). The eagle and the falcon possibly symbolize the watchfulness of the gods.

[45](#) "Rat Tusk."

[46](#) See "Völuspá," Note 46. The dragon is here conceived as gnawing the roots of Yggdrasil. See St. 36.

[47](#) The following two stanzas are very likely interpolations.

[48](#) Conjecturally.

[49](#) These are, rather, dwarf names.

[50](#) Several of these names have reference to the burrowing activities of worms and snakes. The last two are names of Óthin; see St. 55 and note.

[51](#) The names of the valkyries indicate their warlike activities, like those of “Voluspá,” St. 30.

[52](#) “Early-Awake” and “Very Swift,” the sun horses. See “Vafþrúðnismál,” St. 12, and “Sigrdrífumál,” St. 17.

[53](#) Snorri, in his “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 10, 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’” (?).

[54](#) “Cooling.”

[55](#) This passage, as well as the following, is of doubtful meaning.

[56](#) “Hater,” the son of Hróthvitnir, “the Famous Wolf,” that is, Fenrir (who according to “Vafþrúðnismál,” St. 46-47, himself swallows the sun).

[57](#) See “Vafþrúðnismál,” St. 21.

[58](#) See St. 5 and note.

[59](#) The words of the second part of the stanza seem clear, but their meaning has so far resisted convincing explanation.

[60](#) According to “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 42, they are skilful dwarfs who make a present of the ship Skíthblathnir, “the Thin-Planked,” to Frey. “It is so large that all the 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 put in one’s pocket. Stanzas 44 and 45 are evidently interpolated.

[61](#) “The Runner,” Óthin’s horse. It has eight feet. According to the story in “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 41, it was begotten on Loki by the stallion of the giant who built the wall around Ásgarth. See “Völuspá,” St. 25 and Note 24, and “Völuspá hin skamma,” St. 12.

[62](#) See St. 29, note.

[63](#) 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.

[64](#) “High-Leg.”

[65](#) See “Völuspá,” St. 43.

[66](#) The translation here offered is somewhat of a guess, no interpretation being altogether acceptable.

[67](#) As in the “Hymiskviða,” St. 1.

[68](#) Grim is short for Grimnir (see the Prose above). A number of the following names cannot be satisfactorily explained.

[69](#) “The Way-Wearied.”

[70](#) “War God” (?).

[71](#) “Helm-Bearer.”

[72](#) “The Welcome One.”

[73](#) “The Third,” (with Hár, below, and Jafnhár in St. 50). This trinity seems to betray Christian influence.

[74](#) “One-Eyed”; but, as evidenced by Jafnhár, “Equally High” (St. 50), the name was at an early time confused with the homonymous word meaning “high.”

[75](#) “The Truthful.”

[76](#) “The Changeable.”

[77](#) “Truthfinder.”

[78](#) “Glad in Battle.”

[79](#) “[Spear-] Thruster.”

[80](#) “One-Eyed.”

[81](#) “Fiery-Eyed.”

[82](#) “Bale-Worker.”

[83](#) “The Concealer.”

[84](#) “Long-Hood.”

[85](#) “Long-Beard.”

[86](#) “Victory Father.”

[87](#) “[Spear-]Thruster.”

[88](#) “Father of All.”

[89](#) “Father of the Battle-Slain.”

[90](#) “Attacker by Horse” (?).

[91](#) “Lord of Boatloads.” This epithet shows Óthin in his role (historically earlier) as god of the merchants. Compare with Mercury-Hermes with whom he shares other important characteristics.

[92](#) None of the several adventures of Óthin here alluded to are known.

[93](#) “Inciter to Strife” (?). See “Hárbarzljóð” St. 24 and Note 18.

[94](#) “Bearer of the [Magic] Wand.”

[95](#) “Graybeard.”

[96](#) Both epithets signify “the Wise.”



[97](#) Probably Frigg and her minion who, we are to understand, had made Geirrceth go counter to Óthin's instruction, given him the time he was fostered by the god, to be hospitable to guests.

[98](#) That is, in Óthin's (Ygg's) hall.

[99](#) After these words Óthin probably vanishes as, in a similar situation, he vanishes in the hall of King Heithrek, *Hervarar saga*, Chap. 9. The last stanza, which botches this excellent ending, is no doubt a later addition.

[100](#) "Wakeful."

[101](#) "Wayfarer."

[102](#) "God of Gods."

[103](#) "The God of Goths"; that is, of men (?).

[104](#) "The Entangler," that is, in questions (see the translation for Vafthrúthnir, in "Vafprúðnismál," Note 1).

[105](#) "He Who Lulls to Sleep or to Dreams."

[1](#) See “Grímnismál,” St. 5, Note 10.

[2](#) See “Grímnismál,” the Prose Introduction and Note 4.

[3](#) “The Resplendent”; possibly an epithet (or hypostasis) of Frey himself.

[4](#) Frey’s stepmother. See “Grímnismál,” St. 11.

[5](#) Kenning for “the sun.” See “Vafþrúðnismál,” St. 47.

[6](#) A giant.

[7](#) This stanza is not in the original; but the paraphrase of Snorri (“Gylfaginning,” Chap. 36) shows that a stanza do doubt has dropped out here. It is supplied, following Gering.

[8](#) Frey will miss his sword in the last combat (see “Lokasenna,” St. 42, where Loki alleges that it was given away as a bridal gift to Gerth).

[9](#) Inserted with Grundtvig.

[10](#) We must assume that Skírnir has caused his steed to leap over the wall of flame.

[11](#) An obvious gap here is supplied, following Bugge's suggestion.

[12](#) 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. See "Völuspá," St. 52 and Note 77.

[13](#) The different races of gods.

[14](#) As eleven is not one of the “holy” numbers, and as there is no apparent reason for offering just that number, it has been generally assumed that we have here a scribal error, that in the original text there stood, not *epli ellifo*, “eleven apples,” but *epli ellilyfs*, “apples of everlasting youth.” These were in the keeping of the goddess Ithun.

[15](#) “Dripper.” This ring had been given Óthin by a dwarf (“Skáldskaparmál,” Chap. 33). After Baldr was burned on the pyre, he returned the ring to Óthin from Hel (“Gylfaginning,” Chap. 48).

[16](#) Which is the wont of princes. See, for example, “Rígspula,” St. 39.

[17](#) Possibly a kenning for “mountain peak.”

[18](#) For the emendation of this line see *Scandinavian Studies*, XIX (1947), 302 ff.

[19](#) “Frost Giant” (?).

[20](#) There is rime here in the original.

[21](#) Heimdall, the warder of the gods. See “Lokasenna,” St. 48.

[22](#) She is to be kept prisoner of the giants, as the following stanzas also imply.

[23](#) A very difficult stanza.

[24](#) In explanation of these lines, M. Olsen has called attention to the Esthonian harvest custom of laying a thistle weighted with a stone into a window opening to prevent damage from malicious grain demons.

[25](#) Here the phrase stands for the giant tribe in general.



[26](#) The symbol þ, in Old Norse called “thurs.” The runes (probably scratched on the limb of a tree, as in “Sigrdrífumál,” St. 12) may be scraped off again, when their magic effect ceases.

[27](#) The last line is uncertain.

[1](#) That is, from the giant-world, whither he goes frequently “to slay trolls.” See St. 23.

[2](#) Note that here, as in “Frá dauða Sinfjötla,” Óthin appears as a ferryman (for the dead). Compare to Hermes-Mercurius.

[3](#) The homely fare of the yeoman's god.

[4](#) Thór's mother is Fjorgyn, "the Earth" (See St. 56 below and "Völuspá," St. 55), whose death would fill everyone with dismay.

[5](#) The connection is probably this: you are of too little account for the death of your mother to make such a stir.

[6](#) "Battle-Wolf"; that is, "Warrior."

[7](#) "Strength." The name and functions of Meili remain unexplained.

[8](#) “Hoar-Beard,” that is, Óthin. See “Grímnismál,” St. 50.

[9](#) That is, for some misdeed; outlawed.

[10](#) A mountain giant, the largest of the tribe. He challenges Thór to single combat and is felled by the hammer (“Skáldskaparmál,” Chap. 17).

[11](#) Nothing is known about this myth. Is it merely a hoax to satisfy Thór's curiosity? At any rate, the names Fjolvar, "The very Cautious," and Algrœn, "All-Green," that is, the Earth, seem gotten up *ad hoc*.

[12](#) Óthin is still teasing Thór with his "if's."

[13](#) These activities seem to have reference to river or sea goddesses. The ropes of sand are the ripple marks in the sand near the shore of the sea and in rivers; the mountain torrents dig deep gashes.

[14](#) According to "Skáldskaparmál," Chap. 1, all the gods slew him. See also "Lokasenna," St. 50, and "Grímnismál," St. 11.

[15](#) Thjatsi's eyes were cast up to the sky (by Óthin according to "Skáldskaparmál," Chap. 1) and transformed into stars, to appease his daughter Skathi.

[16](#) Nothing is known of the exploits referred to in this stanza.

[17](#) “Land of the Battlefields.”

[18](#) This is the prevailing conception of Óthin’s activities.

[19](#) As this assertion is not borne out elsewhere, it seems made to twit Thór.

[20](#) The reference (see also “Lokasenna,” Sts. 60, 62) is to Thór’s unlucky expedition to the giant-world, when he and his companions found shelter for the night in the mitten of the huge giant Skrymir (here called Fjalar “the Allwise”). See “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 44.

[21](#) See “Vafþrúðnismál,” St. 16. In the original, “the river.” Svárang’s sons are the giants.



[22](#) A berserk(er) is a wild warrior who fights with paroxysmal fury in his bare sark (shirt), insensitive to pain. The reference to berserk women on the island of Hlésey (the sea god Hlér's island in the middle of the Kattegat) seems to point to sea goddesses (see St. 39) whose iron clubs are the breakers on the shore.

[23](#) Thór's servitor.

[24](#) "Hárbarth has done harm to Thór by disturbing the work of the farmers" (Gering). Now Hárbarth offers a ring in atonement. Or, as has been suggested, the word for "ring" in the original may also be understood *in malam partem*, which may account for Thór's indignation in St. 43.

[25](#) The “home” is the world of men, the “howes-of-the-home,” hence “graves.” (Bugge’s emendation). Óthin gathers wisdom from the dead. See “Hávamál,” St. 157, Note 87.

[26](#) “Sib,” “kin,” Thór’s wife. See “Lokasenna,” Sts. 53-54.

[27](#) A much debated passage.

[28](#) “Land of Men,” where the earth goddess, Fjorgyn, will show him the way to Valholl. Óthin is, of couse, sending Thór on a fool’s errand.

[29](#) Which would make travelling especially arduous—if we accept Egilsson’s and Bugge’s interpretation of this difficult line.

[1](#) See the General Introduction, [p. xxiii](#).

[2](#) Wands or rods were used for divining. By casting them, and by inspecting the sacrificial blood, men foretold the future.

[3](#) But not any one big enough? A much debated passage: according to the reading of *Codex Arnemagnæanus* (as emended by Bugge), “Ægir had abundance (of the wherewithal for the brewing of ale?).”

[4](#) Ægir (?), whose name is etymologically connected with the word for “water,” is the god of the sea, and of giant kin. His role as the brewer of ale for the gods was perhaps suggested by the foam of the salt sea.

[5](#) Thór.

[6](#) Used here by the Translator for “the gods.”

[7](#) Meaning simply “god.” [OE *Tíw*; compare with L. *divus*] originally doubtless the predecessor of Óthin. In Old Norse mythology Tyr 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.

[8](#) Thór.

[9](#) That is, in etin-home. See “Vafþrûðnismál,” St. 31.

[10](#) A league.

[11](#) A giant. See St. 38.

[12](#) Which draw Thór’s wain. See “Þrymskviða,” St. 21.

[13](#) Týr’s grandam by actual relationship. See St. 4, Note 7. The phantastic number of heads points to late invention.

[14](#) Kenning for Thór. Hróthr possibly is another name for Fenris-Wolf. See “Völuspá,” Note 4.

[15](#) Thór. See “Hárbarzljóð,” St. 48.

[16](#) Hymir. See “Hárbarzljóð,” Sts. 14-15 and Note 10.

[17](#) Thór’s hammer. See “Þrymskviða,” St. 1. The epithet is inserted by the Translator.

[18](#) Kenning for “the bull’s head.” To judge from Snorri’s paraphrase (“Gylfaginning,” Chap. 47) some lines describing their setting out on the fishing expedition are missing here.

[19](#) Late kenning for “giant.”

[20](#) Kenning for “ship.” Boats were drawn up on land, after use, with the help of rollers.

[21](#) Kenning for Thór.

[22](#) In the last combat. See “Völuspá,” Sts. 54-55.

[23](#) See “Völuspá,” St. 49 and Note 69.

[24](#) Kenning for “head.”

[25](#) Both are begot by Loki with the giantess Angrbotha (see “Völuspá,” St. 39 and Note 54).

[26](#) In the version of the “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 47, this is due to Hymir’s cutting the line.



[27](#) Kenning for “ship.”

[28](#) A motif which recurs frequently in Northern lore.

[29](#) After Bugge’s emendation of this difficult passage. We must suppose that they were promised the caldron provided they could shatter the goblet.

[30](#) Kenning for “giants.”

[31](#) This and the following stanza rather irrelevantly introduce material which is otherwise found in a different connection (Thór’s journey to Utgartha-Loki). According to “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 43, Thór in company with Loki drives to the world of giants in his goat chariot. They spend the night with a “farmer,” Egil. Thór slaughters his goats, flays them, and has them boiled for supper. He invites the inmates of the house to partake, warning them, however, to throw all the bones back on the skins; but the son of Egil (on Loki’s malicious advice?) had already split one of the shank bones to get at the marrow. Next morning when Thór resuscitates the goats, one of them is lame. The frightened farmer appeases Thór’s wrath by giving him his son Thjálfí and his daughter Roskva as servitors.

[32](#) The rendering of this line is purely conjectural.

[1](#) 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 opine.

[2](#) “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 49.

[3](#) Not identical with the giant who is Gerth’s father (St. 42 below and “Skírnismál,” St. 6).

[4](#) This does not agree with the conclusion of “Hymiskviða.”

[5](#) See “Hárbarzljóð,” St. 48 and Note 26.

[6](#) See “Grímnismál,” St. 45 and Note 63.

[7](#) “The Rejuvenating One,” the goddess of youth. See “Skírnismál,” Note 14.

[8](#) 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 (“Gylfaginning,” Chap. 33. See also below, Sts. 38-39).

[9](#) See “Vafþrúðnismál,” St. 38 and Note 24.

[10](#) See “Grímnismál,” St. 5 and Note 10.

[11](#) See “Grímnismál,” St. 14 and Note 21.

[12](#) See “Völuspá,” St. 53.

[13](#) “John Barleycorn” (?).

[14](#) “Milkmaid” (?).

[15](#) “Handy” and “Fire-Kindler.”

[16](#) That is, a sanctuary where no deed of violence might be committed.

[17](#) “The Lofty” (?), one of Loki’s names.

[18](#) We are not told elsewhere of this blood-brotherhood. For the rite, see “Brot af Sigurparkviðu,” St. 18 and Note 18.

[19](#) Loki, who is the father of the Fenris-Wolf. See “Völuspá,” St. 39, and “Völuspá hin skamma,” St. 12.

[20](#) I adopt Falk's interpretation of this difficult passage.

[21](#) "The Giver" (?). According to "Gylfaginning," Chap. 34, she is a virgin goddess who assembles in her hall all girls who die unwedded.

[22](#) The rendering of these lines is uncertain.

[23](#) The god Heimdall. As to the Brisings' necklace which, in other myths, is Freya's property, see "Þrymskviða," St. 13 and Note 12.

[24](#) Óthin is frequently accused of this. His defense is (*Eirismál*, St. 7) that he needs the best heroes for the final fight with the Wolf.

[25](#) The myth alluded to is not known, but the reference is in line with other allusions to the hermaphrodite nature of Loki.

[26](#) A Danish island north of Funen.



[27](#) Thór's mother. See "Völuspá," St. 55 and "Hárbarzljóð," St. 56.

[28](#) "Will" and "Holiness"; conceived as Óthin's brothers, but probably only hypostases of Óthin.

[29](#) "Lord of the Weather" (?), Óthin.

[30](#) See "Völuspá," St. 32 and Note 36.

[31](#) That is, what will be the punishment for it.

[32](#) See St. 23 above and “Grímnismál,” Note 61.

[33](#) We are told (“Vafþrúðnismál,” St. 39) that he was thus sent by the Vanir to the Æsir, but nowhere, that he was sent by them to the giant Hymir.

[34](#) Frey who, as well as his sister Freya, is begotten by Njorth with his (unnamed) sister.

[35](#) Like Óthin, the god of war is not a reconciler of men.

[36](#) “The Famous Wolf,” Fenrir.

[37](#) We are nowhere else told of Týr’s wife.

[38](#) The river Ván, formed by the spittle from the jaws of the fettered wolf (“Gylfaginning,” Chap. 33).

[39](#) Gerth. See “Skírnismál,” where, to be sure, nothing is said about Frey’s giving his sword to anyone but his trusty servitor Skirnir, nor about his winning Gerth with his gold.

[40](#) See “Völuspá,” St. 51 and Note 73.

[41](#) “Dark Wood,” typical name of a forest. In this case, the boundary against Surt’s world of fire.

[42](#) Probably the same as Yngvi(-Frey) (“Helgakviða Hundingsbana” I, St. 55 and Note 61, and “Reginismál,” St. 14 and Note 18).

[43](#) The fallen warriors gathered in Valholl.

[44](#) Ægir. See Introductory Prose, Note 3.

[45](#) He keeps watch at the Gjallar Bridge (Bifrost), against the giants.

[46](#) See the Concluding Prose.

[47](#) See “Hárbarzljóð,” St. 19 and Note 14.

[48](#) Loki, the son of the giantess Laufey (probably a chthonic goddess).

[49](#) That is, Thór's.

[50](#) Kenning for "head."

[51](#) "Earth"; identical in meaning with Fjorgyn ("Völuspá," St. 55, and "Hárbarzljóð," St. 56).

[52](#) “The Father of Victory,” Óthin.

[53](#) See “Hárbarzljóð,” Introductory Prose.

[54](#) The same unlucky adventure of Thór’s is alluded to in “Hárbarzljóð,” St. 26.

[55](#) Kenning for Thór’s hammer. See “Hárbarzljóð,” St. 15 and Note 10.

[56](#) On the adventure referred to, the giant Skrymir carried Thór’s knapsack and secured it so stoutly that Thór was not able to undo the knot (“Gylfaginning,” Chap. 44).

[57](#) “The Gates of the Dead,” at the entrance of Hel.

[58](#) Though it is not stated, Loki's curse may be thought to have been fulfilled, leaving him the victor.

[59](#) See "Völuspá," St. 34 and Note 42.

[60](#) The similarity with the story of the giant Typhoeus confined under *Ætna*. (Ovid *Metamorphoses* V, 346) is striking.



[1](#) “Consecration-Thór.” See St. 30.

[2](#) “The Crusher” (?); or, possibly, related to Russian *molnya* “lightning.” It never misses its aim and always returns into Thór’s hands.

[3](#) Thór. See “Hárbarzljóð,” Note 4.

[4](#) The goddess of fertility and love. See “Grímnismál,” St. 14 and Note 21.

[5](#) “The Noisy.”

[6](#) A Homeric situation. The action (like the fashioning of bow and arrow—see “Rígsþula,” St. 28) is one typical of the lord; so is sitting on a mound.

[7](#) See “Völuspá,” St. 47 and Note 67.

[8](#) Supplied by all editors.

[9](#) Thórs.

[10](#) Leagues.

[11](#) That is, however long they be.

[12](#) The meaning of these curious lines may be that the longer the delay, the less accurate the report—a night's sleep may pervert it utterly—out of regard for the host? The pun exists in the original.

[13](#) The *Brísinga men* (“the Shining Necklace”) was a torque fashioned (according to the late *Sǫrlapáttir*) by four dwarfs. It is no doubt identical with the precious *Brōsinga mene* in *Bēowulf* (Line 1199).

[14](#) As to Heimdall, see “Völuspá,” St. 1 and Note 2.

[15](#) We are not told elsewhere that the Vanir gods were prophetic (as were some of the Æsir: Óðin, Frigg, Gefjon, for instance).

[16](#) See “Rígsþula,” St. 23.

[17](#) See “Lokasenna,” St. 52 and Note 48.

[18](#) The habitation of the Æsir. See “Völuspá,” St. 24 and Note 23.

[19](#) They draw Thór’s wain. See “Hymiskviða,” Note 30.

[20](#) Thór, by the giantess Fjorgyn or Hlóthyn. There is a definite resemblance between lines 3 and 4 of the original and Stanzas 15 and 16 of the poem “Haustlong” by the skald Thjóthólfór Hvini (ninth century).

[21](#) This was done on festal occasions. See “Baldrs draumar,” St. 6, and St. 1 of the (anonymous) skaldic poem *Eiríksmál*.

[22](#) See “Grímnismál,” St. 16.

[23](#) Because of the location of the frost-giants in the far North (east); but the line is susceptible of the translation:

Early at eve      they in had come.

[24](#) “The etins’ sister” is probably a kenning for “giantess.”

[25](#) A consecration with the hammer is known also elsewhere. The hammer is a phallic symbol of fertility, like the *lingam* of the Hindus.

[26](#) “Vow,” “pledge,” a goddess, probably an hypostasis of Frigg, goddess of marriage.

[1](#) According to Olrik, these words are not so much skaldic terms as noa words for tabu objects, and show similarity to expressions still used among Shetland fishermen. But the reason for putting them together remains the one indicated above.

[2](#) In payment for Mjolnir? See Note 36 below.

[3](#) “The Allwise.”

[4](#) One of the duties of the housewife, especially for a festive welcome. See “Baldrs draumar,” St. 6, and “Þrymskviða,” St. 22.

[5](#) A natural condition for a chthonic being.

[6](#) Accepting Bugge's ingenious emendation: Thór's hammer Mjólnir (as well as Óthin's spear, Gungnir) was made by the dwarfs, whose payment is opposed by Thór. But the line may also mean:

To Valholl I came      to visit Thrúthheim

(Thór's dwelling in Ásgarth. See "Grímnismál," St. 4.)

[7](#) Accepting Pipping's interpretation.

[8](#) See "Þrymskviða," St. 1.

[9](#) "Longbeard," Óthin.



[10](#) See Note 11 below and “Völuspá,” St. 2.

[11](#) 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 I have fared,  
and mindful am I of much.

[12](#) Translated according to Bugge’s daring emendation. Hronn, “billow,” is one of ÆEgir’s daughters and, hence, may stand for “the sea”: in late Classical mythology, the sea goddess, Tethys, is the mother of the sky.

[13](#) Conjectural.

[14](#) Dvalin is a dwarf. The kenning is illustrated by the fate of Alvís himself (St. 35 below) and by “Helgakviða Hjörvarþssonar,” Sts. 29-30.

[15](#) That is, the sons of the Æsir.

[16](#) Conjectural.

[17](#) See “Vafþrúðnismál,” St. 25.

[18](#) Transposed here from line 3.

[19](#) For its drooping ears.

[20](#) The giants. See “Hávamál,” St. 104.

[1](#) The abruptness of the beginning may be due to direct loan (from “Þrymskviða,” St. 14) of the first two lines. However, the manner is typical of the Scandinavian *folkeviser* (ballads) and the lines may be common property.

[2](#) For this myth, see “Völuspá,” Sts. 31-33 and Notes 36-39.

[3](#) Conjectural.

[4](#) “The Runner,” Óthin’s steed. See “Grímnismál,” St. 45 and Note 61.

[5](#) “Dark Hel.” See “Vafþrúðnismál,” St. 43 and Note 28.

[6](#) Garm. See “Völuspá,” St. 43 and Note 61.

[7](#) “Low hill or mound,” hence “grave.”

[8](#) “The Wayfarer.” Valtam, “the Warrior.”

[9](#) See “Grímnismál,” St. 9.

[10](#) In the sense of the paten covering the caldron, to protect the drink against the “evil eye”?

[11](#) That is, the gods.

[12](#) See “Völuspá,” St. 32 ff.

[13](#) Compare Krimgothic *rintsch*, “mountain.”

[14](#) 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 Gestumblindi (Óthin) in the *Hervarar saga*, 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 (“Gylfaginning,” Chap. 48) which dips into the sea.

[15](#) See “Völuspá,” St. 34 and Note 42, and “Lokasenna,” Final Prose.

[1](#) See St. 49 and Notes.

[2](#) In no other source does Heimdall bear this name, which is probably from the Celtic *rī(g)*, “king,” or else Graeco-Latin *rêx*. The fact that in “Völuspá,” St. 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.”

[3](#) That is, of Mithgarth. The line is supplied from Sts. 6 and 34. It may mean, here, “on earth.”



[4](#) In Old Germanic times the hearth fire was built on the ground, the smoke escaping through the louver.

[5](#) Words still used in Modern Icelandic for “grandfather” and “grandmother.”

[6](#) In the oldest times it was not uncommon in the North, as is still the case among primitive peoples, for the host to offer his wife or daughter to the honored guest.

[7](#) Guests generally remained three days.

[8](#) Following Gering’s suggestion.

[9](#) This is the old Germanic baptismal ceremony of “name-fastening” which had grown up, probably, independently of the Christian rite. See “Hávamál,” St. 158.

[10](#) Supplied after Sijmon’s suggestion, to correspond with the description in Sts. 21 and 35.

[11](#) Supplied after Grundtvig’s suggestion. Sallow complexion, dull eyes, and an unlovely appearance in general, are the standard characteristics of the slave in Old Norse tradition.

[12](#) The line transposed here from Stanza 8 of the original to conform to Stanza 22.

[13](#) “Drudge.”

[14](#) 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 in this, or in the following, list of names.

[15](#) 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.

[16](#) In the original, rather “hood.”

[17](#) The word *dvergar* of the original means “flat plate ornaments.”

[18](#) The portions of Sts. 17-20 within parentheses are supplied after Bugge’s very plausible suggestion, from the corresponding passages.

[19](#) “Carl,” (free) man of the common people.

[20](#) “Daughter-in-Law.” See the description of Thór as a bride in “Þrymskviða,” St. 19.

[21](#) Probably interpolated: the dealing out of rings is typical of the nobility, not the common people (see “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” I, Note 24). The exchange of rings as in the Christian marriage ceremony (which has been suggested) seems utterly foreign to the passage.

[22](#) Possibly referring to unknown fashions of wearing the beard.

[23](#) Nickname of the burly, proud farmer.

[24](#) South is the direction of good omen. The Old Icelandic door raised up-and-down, on hinges. It is raised, in the house of the noble, to indicate his hospitality. The ring served as knocker.

[25](#) Probably as an outward sign of leisure.

[26](#) The bow made of elmwood.

[27](#) The material is not indicated in the original.

[28](#) The rime is not in the original.

[29](#) Supplied from the corresponding passages.

[30](#) Flashing eyes were regarded as a sure token of noble birth. See Tacitus' *acies oculorum* of the Teutons.

[31](#) That is, the lands entailed by primogeniture.

[32](#) Lavish generosity was one of the princely virtues.

[33](#) “Lord,” chieftain of a district.

[34](#) “The Efficient” (?).

[35](#) This was a board game, a kind of chess. Compare the German (*Sckatb-*)*zabeln*. It was a royal accomplishment, like those mentioned in St. 38.

[36](#) The last two names are etymologically akin and signify “noble descendant.” In the original, *Kon(r) ungr* (Kon the Young) yields Old Norse *konungr*, “king,” by juxtaposition (and popular etymology).

[37](#) For this and the following rune magic see “Hávamál,” St. 146 ff., and “Sigdrífumál,” St. 6 ff.

[38](#) Following Sijmon’s emendation.

[39](#) That is, his father, the son of Ríg (Heimdall). He now bestows the title of Ríg, “king,” on Kon as his true heir.

[40](#) Supplied from St. 36.

[41](#) In all probability these are eponymous kings of Denmark. See “Atlakviða” St. 5.

[42](#) 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 “Fáfnismál,”) and wins the lands of Dan and Danp. According to the synoptic account of the lost *Skjöldungasaga* given by the learned Icelandic, Arngrím Jónsson (1597), King Ríg married Dana, the daughter of Danpr of Danpstead, and their son Dan was the mythical king who united Denmark under one rule.



[1](#) “The Short Prophecy of the Seeress” (“Völuspá hin skamma”) which, in the manuscript, comes between Stanzas 28 and 29 (of this translation) has been removed and appears as a separate item immediately following this lay.

[2](#) *Flateyjarbók*, Vol. I, [p. 24](#) ff.

[3](#) “Bitch.” As to Freya’s wheedlingly calling her “friend,” see Sts. 6 and 30.

[4](#) The time when the beings of the nether world may be abroad.

[5](#) “Hall of the Slain,” Óthin’s hall.

[6](#) “He of Warlike Courage” [OE. *Heremōd*]. It is uncertain whether the god of that name is referred to, or Heremōd, King of the Danes, a Skylding (*Bēowulf*, 1. 1709).

[7](#) The sword Gram, “troll,” which later becomes Sigurth’s weapon.

[8](#) The mount of trolls and witches. See “Helgakviða Hjörvarpssonar,” Prose Introduction to Fragment IV.

[9](#) The boar is elsewhere the animal sacred to her brother Frey. See the reference in Note 8 above. Generally, Freya’s chariot has a span of cats.

[10](#) That is, as a slain warrior to join the heroes in Óthin’s (or Freya’s) hall. See “Grímnismál,” Sts. 8 and 14.

[11](#) “Battle-Swine.”

[12](#) See “The Catalogue of Dwarfs,” St. 11.

[13](#) Strive with words. The passage is doubtful.

[14](#) All the royal families of the North trace their ancestry ultimately back to the gods.

[15](#) [OE. *Ongenþēow*.]

[16](#) By the fire of repeated burnt offerings which in the earliest times were made on rude stone altars.

[17](#) Plural of *ásynja*, “goddess.”

[18](#) [OE. *Scyldingas*, *Skylfingas*]. Their progenitors are Skjold and Skelfir.

[19](#) Supplied here from St. 16. According to “Skáldskaparmál,” Chap. 62, the Othlings were descended from an eponymous King Authi. The Ylfings [OE. *Ylfingas*], descendants of Ülf, “Wolf,” are of the same race with Helgi Hundingsbani (“Helgakviða Hundingsbana” I, St. 5). Note that in the corresponding passage (St. 16) the Ynglings (descendants of the god Yngvi) are mentioned instead.

[20](#) “Seafarer.”

[21](#) The names of Hlédís and Fríaut occur nowhere else. Fróthi [OE. *Frōða*], “the Wise,” bears a name common among the mythical Danish kings; See “Grottasǫngr.”

[22](#) Accepting F. Jónsson’s emendations for the Áli of the original. According to “Skáldskaparmál,” Chap. 62, Authi was a son of Hálfðan.

[23](#) “Half-Dane” [OE. *Healfdene*] Hálfðan the Old, a legendary king of the Danes. He is always “the High,” which may have reference to his stature.

[24](#) “Skáldskaparmál,” Chap. 62, 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.

[25](#) Álmveig’s?

[26](#) “The Suabian.” See “Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar,” Note 1. Saekonung, “Sea King.”

[27](#) “Day,” one of Hálfðan’s sons (“Skáldskaparmál,” Chap. 62).

[28](#) Ketil, “Helmet,” is Óttar’s great-grandfather on the spindle side, as Fróthi (St. 13) is on the spear side.

[29](#) The name of this uncle of Óttar’s is not mentioned.

[30](#) The relation of all these persons to Óttar is obscure.

[31](#) The arrangement of this and the two following stanzas is Bugge’s. Excepting for Thórir and Grím, these “housecarls” (members of the king’s bodyguard) are unknown elsewhere. The company is that of King Hrólf of the *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*.

[32](#) The original does not indicate whether this is the Angantýr with whom Óttar has made the wager or a different person.

[33](#) These twelve sons of Arngrim occur prominently in the *Hervarar saga* and in the *Orvar Odds saga*.

[34](#) “Wild warriors.” See “Hárbarzljóð,” St. 37 and Note 22.

[35](#) In the lines evidently missing here, no doubt Jormunrekk’s sons were named. Since 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 Gjúkungs (“Grípisspá” to “Hamðismál”).

[36](#) A king of this name occurs in “Grímnismál,” Prose Introduction.

[37](#) Only here is Eylimi, Sigurth’s grandfather, called an Othling.

[38](#) In other words, he was Gjúki’s stepson; which is of importance in the slaying of Sigurth. See “Sigurþarkviða hin skamma,” St. 20.

[39](#) This epithet (in the original, *Hilditǫnn*) may mean “warrior”; or perhaps the name developed by popular etymology from an original *Hildidanr*, “War Dane,” because of the similarity to Harald Bluetooth (*Blátonn*).

[40](#) [OE. *Hrēthric*, “Glorious Ruler.”] The epithet here given him is one typical of a generous, ring-dispensing prince (See “*Helgakviða Hundingsbana*” I, St. 17 and Note 24), but in this case the name is ironic: according to the ancient “Lay of Bjarki” he cast away his gold to buy off his assailant King Hrólfr Kraki.

[41](#) “The Wealthy” (?). Her namesake, a famous woman colonist of Iceland, bore the same epithet.

[42](#) This famous viking plays a role in the *Ragnars saga Iððbrókar*.

[43](#) “Shield-Warrior.” Not identical, of course, with the son of Jormunrekk. See “*Guðrúnarhvöt*,” Introductory Prose.

[44](#) “Sacrificed,” “slain.”

[45](#) 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.

[46](#) Containing the “ale of memory.” See St. 34 below and “*Sigrdrífumál*,” Prose after St. 4.

[47](#) Ironic, with reference to Freya’s speech when approaching her (see Note 3 above); but the epithet is doubtful.

[48](#) The name of the mythical she-goat mentioned in “*Grímnismál*,” St. 25.

[49](#) Her husband. See “*Völuspá*,” St. 25. The meaning, possibly, is that notwithstanding her pretended faithfulness to him—after he had left her she sought him in many lands (“*Gylfaginning*,” Chap. 34)—she had accepted other lovers. A similar accusation is made by Loki (“*Lokasenna*,” St. 30).

[50](#) To escape death. A difficult line.



[1](#) “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 4, before his quotation of Stanza 6.

[2](#) For the story of Baldr’s death and Váli’s revenge, see “Völuspá,” St. 31-33, and “Baldrs draumar,” St. 11.

[3](#) Óthin. See “Völuspá,” St. 4 and Note 6. The remainder of the stanza appears to be missing.

[4](#) See “Skírnismál.” The refrain “thy sib all these silly Óttar,” of “Hyndluljóð,” St. 16 and following, I have omitted here as quite irrelevant to the context.

[5](#) Concerning him and Skathi, see “Hárbarzljóð,” St. 19 and Notes 14 and 15, and “Lokasenna,” St. 49 ff.

[6](#) The last two are giants’ names. Heith may be identical with the witch mentioned in “Völuspa,” St. 22.

[7](#) “Forest Wolf,” probably a giant, as also Vilmeith, “Wish-Granter,” that is, “soothsayer” (?), and Svarthofthi “the Black-Headed.” As to Ymir, oldest of giants, see “Vafprúðnismál,” Sts. 21 and 28.

[8](#) Heimdall. According to “Gylfaginning,” Chap. 26, he was born of nine maidens, sisters all, as is said in a lay, unknown otherwise, which is called “Heimdall’s Spell (*Heimdallargaldr*). The maidens have been doubtfully identified with the storm waves, to which origin their name (in St. 10) seem to have reference.

[9](#) Similar lines occur in “Guðrúnarkviða” II, St. 21. The three ingredients were to ward off the evil powers from the new born.

[10](#) See “Völuspá,” St. 39 and Note 54.

[11](#) See “Grímnismál,” St. 45 and Note 61.

[12](#) That is, Loki. See “Völuspá,” St. 50. His most baleful offspring is either the Mithgarth-Serpent or the Fenris-Wolf.

[13](#) Parallels to this curious motif are found in Northern and Eastern folklore.

[14](#) With this stanza compare “Völuspá,” St. 56, which also gives the signs in nature foreboding, or accompanying, the doom of the gods.

[15](#) Accepting Boer’s emendation: Heimdall is the sire of the three estates of men. See “Völuspá,” St. 1, and Rígsþula.

[16](#) See “Völuspá,” St. 64 and Note 94.

[17](#) See “Völuspá,” St. 52.

[1](#) The name of “Svipdagsmál” as a name for both poems was suggested by Bugge.

[2](#) Grundtvig, *Danmarks Gamle Folkeviser* II, 245.

[3](#) “He Whose Countenance Shines Like the Day” (?).

[4](#) [From Cymric *groach*, “witch.”] Like Heith in “Völuspá,” St. 22 and “Völuspá en skamma,” St. 5) this is a typical name for a witch or seeress.

[5](#) That is, her grave.

[6](#) His stepmother.

[7](#) “Glad in Her Necklace.”

[8](#) 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.

[9](#) In explanation of the names, Gering suggests that the Rind here referred to is Váli's mother (See "Baldrs draumar," St. 11), and that, hence, Rán stands for Váli, the avenger of Baldr.

[10](#) Doubtful.

[11](#) Following Bugge's emendation of these names: Hronn—possibly also Uth, "Wave"—is one of the rivers flowing to Hel ("Grímnismál," St. 28).

[12](#) For this spell, see Hávamál," St. 149, and the first *Merseburg Charm*.

[13](#) The same charm occurs in "Hávamál," St. 154.

[14](#) In the original, “Christian Woman.” The line certainly points to the conception that the ghosts of Christian women are especially dangerous to a heathen hero.

[15](#) See the situation in “Vafþrúðnismál.”

[16](#) Instanced also elsewhere as a practice of sympathetic magic: the spells are as trustworthy as bedrock.

[1](#) As to the abrupt beginning, see the Introduction. I follow Bugge in the ordering of the first four helmings as well as in the attribution to the speakers.

[2](#) Possibly, a kenning for “mountain.” The entire first part of the stanza is controversial.

[3](#) The “flickering flame” surrounds Mengloth’s castle like Brynhild’s wall of fire; “Sigrdrífumál,” Introductory Prose.

[4](#) “The Very Wise,” which is also an epithet of Óthin (“Grímnismál,” St. 48).

[5](#) Over the high mountains.

[6](#) That is, not hospitable to strangers.

[7](#) See “Fáfnismál,” St. 2, 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.



[8](#) Vindkald, “Wind-Cold”; Várkald, “Spring-Cold”; Fjolkald, “Very Cold.” Gering suggests that, by giving these fictitious names, Svipdag wishes to make Fjolsvith believe that he, too, is of giant-kin.

[9](#) See “Grógaldr” St. 3, Note 7. The name and status of her kin remain unexplained.

[10](#) “The Loud-Grating.”

[11](#) “Sun-Blinded,” dwarfs whose abode is in the darkness.

[12](#) Like the gate described in “Sigurþarkviða hin skamma,” St. 68. The Old Norse door raised up. See “Rígsþula,” St. 26, Note 23.

[13](#) “Strangling the Intruder” (?).

[14](#) “Clay-Giant” (?); is it built of bricks?

[15](#) In the original, Sts. 13 to 18, dealing with the tree Yggdrasil (see “Völuspá,” St. 19), come after St. 24. They are probably interpolated, having nothing to do with the subject in hand.

[16](#) “Mímir’s Tree.” His well is under Yggdrasil (“Völuspá,” St. 28).

[17](#) See “Grímnismál,” St. 36.

[18](#) Conjectural. The word in the original is unexplained.

[19](#) Possibly its roasted fruit, which, in some trees, has an emmenagogic effect; but the interpretation is conjectural.

[20](#) The word in the original is not well understood.

[21](#) The fire giant (see “Völuspá,” St. 51). His wife (?) Sinmara is unknown elsewhere.

According to “Völuspá,” St. 41 ff, the crowing of the cocks gives warning of the approach of the destroying elements.

[22](#) This line is supplied conjecturally.

[23](#) Both names signify “Greedy.” Geri is also the name of one of Óthin’s wolves in “Grímnismál,” St. 19.

[24](#) Strangely, the manuscripts here have “eleven.”

[25](#) The exact meaning of the word in the original is not clear.

[26](#) That is, slay him.

[27](#) “Wand-of-Destruction,” a kenning for “sword.”

[28](#) Loki; see “Lokasenna,” St. 6.

[29](#) Conjectural. If correct, it is a kenning for “woman”: Sinmara.

[30](#) She is pale yellow because she dwells in a cave. See “Alvísmál,” St. 2 and Note 5.

[31](#) The interpretation of these lines is doubtful. However, the circle of impossibilities is closed: no one may enter the castle.

[32](#) Following Bugge’s interpretation. In other words it is inaccessible.

[33](#) Following Grundtvig's emendation. The half-stanza is difficult. Both this and the following seven stanzas are irrelevant and, possibly, interpolated.

[34](#) Most of the following names (of dwarfs) remain unexplained. Several occur also in "The Catalogue of Dwarfs." The holy number nine plays a considerable role in both poems.

[35](#) Conjectural. If this reading is adopted the castle bears the same name as Óthin's seat in Valholl. See "Grímnismál," Introductory Prose and Note 4.

[36](#) "Mountain of Healing."

[37](#) The nine maidens bear names appropriate to their salutiferous activities.

[38](#) A lacuna in the manuscript is supplied here following Bugge.

[39](#) To offer up sacrifice.

[40](#) “Sun-Bright.”

[41](#) One of the norms. See “Völuspá,” St. 19 and note: “all is ordered by fate.”



- [1](#) Copies of Snorri's *Edda* exist giving only the first stanza, while others give the lay in full.
- [2](#) The Prose Introduction and Conclusion (here added to the Introduction) are found in "Skáldskaparmál," Chap. 40.
- [3](#) "Shield." See "Hyndluljóð" V St. 11.
- [4](#) The present Jutland and, *pars pro toto*, Denmark.
- [5](#) "The Heir of Peace" or "of Friendship."
- [6](#) "The Wise."
- [7](#) Of course, this chronology is due to a learned combination of the writer.
- [8](#) That is, the Scandinavian languages, differentiated at that time only by slight dialectal variations.

[9](#) The present Jaellinge in Jutland.

[10](#) One of Óthin's names ("Grímnismál," St. 48), and possibly the god himself.

[11](#) "Water-Maiden" (?) and "Jewel-Maiden" (?).

[12](#) "Grinder."

[13](#) "Hang-Chaps," also a name of Óthin: in disguise, he prepares Fróthi's ruin by these gifts.

[14](#) The grinding at the hand mill is everywhere accompanied by song.

[15](#) "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.

[16](#) Giants are often described as having prophetic gifts.

[17](#) The line is difficult.

[18](#) Conjectural. Possibly also, “than the cuckoo,” which in the long summer day of the high north sings almost unintermittently.

[19](#) The assignment of the voices according to Olrik.

[20](#) A kenning for “king.”

[21](#) See “Hárbarzljóð,” St. 14.

[22](#) “Hárbarzljóð,” St. 19.

[23](#) As valkyries.

[24](#) Accepting Bugge's emendation.

[25](#) The famous royal seat of the Danish kings in prehistoric times, corresponding to the hall Heorot of *Bēowulf*. It was probably situated near the present town of Roskilde, Zealand.

[26](#) A conjectural reading.

[27](#) “That is, “I.”

[28](#) “She-Wolf.” By her father, Helgi, she has a son, the renowned hero-king Hrolf Kraki who is thus “to her both son and brother.”

[29](#) According to the *Hrólfs saga Kraka*, Fróthi murdered his brother Hálfðan in order to ascend the throne. The Translator has *ad sensum* changed the original, according to which Helgi “avenged Fróthi.”

[1](#) *Dēor's Lament* 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 Nidhād forged    the fetters on him,  
bending bonds    on a better man.

That he surmounted: so this may I !  
Beaduhild mourned    her brothers' 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 !

F. B. Gummere, *The Oldest English Epic* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), [p. 186](#). The poem is preserved in a manuscript of the eleventh century, but is manifestly much older.

[2](#) Southern (German) origin of the lay (or at least of the legend) has been claimed, but on insufficient evidence.

[3](#) Only the most important emendations have been referred to in the notes.

[4](#) "Grim Warrior" [OE. *Nidhād*'].

[5](#) "War-Maiden" [OE. *Beaduhild*].

[6](#) “Finn-Smith.”

[7](#) [OE. *Wēland*; OHG. *Walant*, *Wēlant*]. The name has not yet received a satisfactory explanation. It may be connected with Old Norse *vél*, “craft.”

[8](#) The motif of the swanskins (see “*Helreið Brynhildar*,” St. 7) is but faintly stressed here. By taking the skins away, the brothers obtain possession of the maidens; but their departure is due, here, not to their regaining the swanskins, as one might expect, but to the inborn longing to be valkyries again.

[9](#) Corresponding to the Frankish King, Chlodowech, as *Kíar* may correspond to King *Kiarval* [*Cearbhall*] of *Valland* (here meaning “Wales”); or, possibly, it may be derived from *Caesar*.

[10](#) The names of the maidens signify, in order, “the Necklace-Adorned Warrior-Maiden,” “the Warder of the Host,” and “the One Knowing Ale Runes.” See “*Sigrdrífumál*,” St. 8.

[11](#) The next two lines, in the original after St. 14, unquestionably belong here.

[12](#) Accepting Grundtvig's emendation.

[13](#) Supplied from St. 10.

[14](#) Supplied by Grundtvig.

[15](#) It is not understood what people is referred to.

[16](#) With bosses of metal.



[17](#) They take no more than one ring (which probably had magic power) in order not to arouse suspicion. Fearing the supernatural strength of Volund—he is termed a lord of the alfs (Sts. 11, 14, 35)—they mean to overcome him sleeping, and so lie in wait for him until he returns weary from the chase.

[18](#) The king implies that it was stolen from him; for the hills of the Rhine are distant where the dragon brooded over the Niflung gold (see “Reginsmál”). After slaying him, Sigurth laid the burden on his horse Grani’s back.

[19](#) That is, in his father’s hall (?).

[20](#) Supplied from St. 33. The scene is shifted, as it frequently is, without indication, here to the king's hall.

[21](#) She speaks in a low voice, not to be overheard by Volund.

[22](#) "Stead by the Sea."

[23](#) Compare the Old English expression *Wēlondeſ geweorc*, used for all skilful work in metals; but *vél* in the original may also mean "wile."

[24](#) For in that moment Volund conceives his plan of revenge.

[25](#) In the *Þiðreks saga*, Chap. 73, Volund tells the boys to return when fresh snow has fallen, and to walk backwards to the door. After their disappearance, Volund is suspected but clears himself by showing the tracks leading from his door.

[26](#) This is the scene pictured on the Franks Casket.

[27](#) As drinking vessels.

[28](#) The text is defective here.

[29](#) Conjectural.

[30](#) Here, no doubt, several lines have dropped out: “but lacking them, I must take to the wings I have fashioned me” (?).

[31](#) Volund.

[32](#) Probably the queen’s speech: she calls attention to Volund’s presence.

[33](#) In the Old Norse proverb, “woman’s counsel is cold,” that is, cruel.

[34](#) With despair?

[35](#) “He Who Gives Pleasant Counsel” [OE. and Norman *Thankrēd*, MHG. *Dancrât*].

[36](#) Conjectural.

[1](#) The names of Sigar and Helgi definitely belong to Danish tradition. And the localities, so far as they are not symbolic or doubtful, all cluster about the Western Baltic; thus “Sigar’s Field” and “Hringstead,” now Sigersted and Ringsted, are on the island of Zealand; “Hlés Isle,” now Laesö, is in the Kattegat; “Hethin’s Isle,” now Hiddense, is an island near Rügen; “Svarins Hill” is now Schwerin.

[2](#) “Helgakviða Hjörvarpssonar” follows “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” I in the *Codex*.

[1](#) The King of Svávaland (see the Prose following St. 5), 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.

[2](#) As to his name, see St. 15, Note 20.

[3](#) The bird is evidently the same Earl Fránmar in disguise who later, for reasons of his own, opposes both Hjorvarth's and Hróthmar's suits. After the latter invades Sváfnir's lands, Atli surprises and slays Fránmar. See the Prose after St. 5.



[4](#) “The Home of Love” (?); one of the many names which are probably symbolic occurring in the Helgi lays. Glasir, “the Resplendent.”

[5](#) Atli, by the restrictions he places on possible demands, is intent on saving his king from the plight of Jephthah.

[6](#) It was not unusual to gild the horns of favorite animals. See “Þrymskviða,” St. 23.

[7](#) Custom demanded that the more important the errand, the longer the guest remained before broaching the matter to his host. The refusal of the suit is typically regarded as an insult, provoking hostilities.

[8](#) 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 “ashiepattle.”

[9](#) “The Hallowed”; that is, one dedicated to the gods.

[10](#) Eagles screaming early betoken the birth of a hero. See “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” I, St. 1.

[11](#) 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.

[12](#) “Sigar’s Island.”

[13](#) The hilts of swords were often gilded or wound with gold wire. “Wand-of-wounds” is a kenning for sword.

[14](#) Accepting Grundtvig’s emendation.

[15](#) The red snake annulation probably indicates demascening. The other properties are given the sword by the appropriate magic runes engraved on it.

[16](#) “The Hateful”; the firth is named after him.

[17](#) To be on the alert the warriors sleep under their shields instead of under the awnings usually covering undecked warships at night for the crew to sleep under.

[18](#) Probably not to be taken literally: the iron-clad beak of the ships and the iron bosses of the shields were taken to be sufficient protection against evil spirits.

[19](#) The *stafnbúi*, or forecastleman, on a man-of-war had the place of greatest responsibility and honor as leader in battle and as spokesman. See “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” I, St. 33.

[20](#) In the original, there is a play on the supposed meaning of Atli’s name, “the Grim,” “the Awful.”

[21](#) That is, witches riding on sticks. See “Hávamál,” St. 155.

[22](#) Compare the curses in “Skírnismál.”

[23](#) The sea god *Ægir*’s wife. She gathers up the drowned in her net.

[24](#) Nothing further is known of them. A stanza seems missing here in which Atli likens Hríngerth to a mare, a term of particular opprobrium in the North.

[25](#) Accepting Bugge’s emendation, there would be a pun in the original here.

[26](#) “Hairy.”

[27](#) “Pine Island.”

[28](#) Sváva, who, unbeknown to Helgi, had guarded him against malignant powers.

[29](#) It would seem that these lines had crept in from some description of the valkyries, as in “Völuspá” St.30.

[30](#) At the rising sun which transforms dwarfs and trolls into stone. See “Alvíssmál,” St. 35.

[31](#) The above is a concise description of the pagan Yuletide feast, celebrated at the time of the winter solstice. This was the occasion for making vows for the coming year. The boar, symbol of fertility, is sacred to Frey. See “Hyndluljóð,” Sts. 5-7. See the same source for the wolf as the mount of witches. The troll woman proves to be Helgi’s wraith; see the Prose following St. 34.

[32](#) Supplied, following Bugge.

[33](#) The single combats were fought on *holms* (“river islands”), in plain view of the hostile armies.



[34](#) The meaning probably is, “Cut me off, do not weakly forgive me!”

[35](#) That is, Helgi’s. According to northern belief, every person was born with a *fylgja*, an accompanying tutelary spirit (here translated by “wraith”) which left him when he was “fey,” choosing another person to follow and protect.

[36](#) “Wolf Stone.”

[37](#) A kenning for “battle.”

[38](#) As Helgi the Hunding-Slayer and Sigrún. See the Introductory Prose of “*Helgakviða Hundingsbana*” II.

[1](#) The hero child is born in a tempestuous hour—eagles screaming (in anticipation of carnage) and rain pouring down from the “fells of heaven.” The names seem symbolic. See also “Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar,” St. 6 and Note 10.

[2](#) King Sigmund’s wife. See St. 6 below, and “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” II, Introductory Prose.

[3](#) The fate-thread spinning of the norns is here taken literally.

[4](#) Accepting Grundtvig’s emendation.

[5](#) Kenning for “the heavens,” similar to those given in “Alvíssmál,” St. 12.

[6](#) Evidently one of the norns.

[7](#) See “Hyndluljóð,” St. 11, and “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” II, Introductory Prose.

[8](#) 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 (Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, liber VI, 4). The impending evil certainly does not refer to the wars foretold by the raven: only by fighting can glory be won.

[9](#) 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.

[10](#) Ravens, wolves, and eagles rejoice at the birth of a hero who will feed them on the carcasses of his slain foes—a standard conceit in Old Germanic poetry.

[11](#) It is one of the attributes of a great king to bring to his land good harvest years. A housecarl is a member of the king’s bodyguard.

[12](#) A kenning for “battle.”

[13](#) As a fast-growing plant the leek seems symbolic of rapid access in royal power. Compare with the virga (“rod”) used, beside the sceptre, in the coronation of the early English kings.

[14](#) “Heaven-meadows”; some of these and other place names in the poem must be symbolic.

[15](#) According to the *Volsunga saga*, Sinfjotli is Sigmund’s son by his own sister, Signý. Another half brother of Helgi’s is Sigurth. See “Frá dauða Sinfjötla.”

[16](#) A *heiti*, or synonym, for “man,” “warrior.”

[17](#) As gained by warfare.

[18](#) According to the ancient laws of Norway a lad was of age when he had reached his fifteenth year.

[19](#) Kennings for “battle.”

[20](#) This is the standing poetic phrase for the beginning of hostilities. See “Grottasöngr,” Introductory Prose.

[21](#) The wolves, as scavengers after battle.

[22](#) Supplied after Bugge.

[23](#) Doubtful; possibly a kenning for “battle-field” (as the abode of wolves).

[24](#) Sigrún. See St. 54 below and the Prose before Part II of “Helgakviða

Hundingsbana” II.

[25](#) Kenning for “(generous) ruler,” “hero.” Before the use of coins became general in the Germanic North, the ponderous spiral armrings of gold and silver were cut or broken in pieces, which served as payment and reward.

[26](#) Concerning Granmar and his sons Hothbrodd, Guthmund, and Starkath, see “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” II, Prose after St. 13.

[27](#) The line is doubtful.

[28](#) Supplied, following Grundtvig.

[29](#) Hothbrodd. We know nothing about his antagonist.

[30](#) Supplied, following Gering.

[31](#) Kenning for “gold”: the Niflung treasure, the treasure par excellence, was thrown into the Rhine.

[32](#) Probably, the island of Hiddense, north of Rügen.

[33](#) Accepting Bugge’s emendation.

[34](#) Some follower of Helgi’s.

[35](#) “Arrow Sound.” Compare with the German *Stralsund* of the same meaning.

[36](#) See “Helgakviða Hjörvarþssonar,” Note 17.

[37](#) For this as well as Svarins Hill, see St. 31. Compare with the modern *Schwerin*.

[38](#) See “Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar,” St. 13, Note 18.

[39](#) Kennings for “ships.”

[40](#) One of *Ægir*’s daughters, hence “the wave.”

[41](#) See “Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar,” St. 18, Note 23.

[42](#) “The Stained (Piebald) One” (?), perhaps referring to his illegitimate origin

(compare with the Anglo-Saxon *Fitela*). He is Helgi’s brother and forecastleman, like Atli (“Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar,” St. 14 and Note 19).

[43](#) A red shield indicated warlike intentions, a white one, peace.



[44](#) That is, when made a slave?

[45](#) According to the *Völsunga saga*, both Sigmund and Sinfjotli roam the woods as were-wolves 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 slays the two boys whom his mother Signý has borne to Siggeir and who, hence, are his half brothers. The imputations which the two speakers otherwise heap on each other cannot be verified.

[46](#) That is, to wolves as fierce as the wolf Fenrir; see “Völuspá,” St. 39 and Note 54.

[47](#) Since his mother Signý was married to Siggeir.

[48](#) Conjectural.

[49](#) Perhaps an allusion to combat between Sigmund and Sinfjotli in their werewolf condition, when Sigmund bit Sinfjotli’s throat (*Völsunga saga*, Chap. 8).

[50](#) The name of Sigurth’s horse.

[51](#) A plain in eastern Sweden. It is the scene of the great (legendary) battle between the kings Sigurth Ring and Harald Wartooth.

[52](#) Conjectural.

[53](#) The two events referred to are unknown elsewhere.

[54](#) Possibly, the Danish island of Möen.

[55](#) Kenning for “swords.”

[56](#) Hothbrodd’s sons.

[57](#) Supplied here by the Translator.

[58](#) Here, used as honorific epithet for “warriors.”

[59](#) Kenning for “ships.”

[60](#) Kenning for “battle.”

[61](#) That is, “the wolf ate the slain.” See “Hyndluljóð,” St. 5 and Note 8, and “Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar,” Prose before Fragment IV.

[62](#) Yng is the mythical progenitor of the earliest Swedish kings. Here, only an honorific epithet.

- [1](#) Other favorite themes, such as the death of Brynhild, the fall of the Niflungs, and Guthrún's plaint, also received parallel treatment by two or more poets.
- [2](#) Possibly, remnants of the *Káruljóð*, or "Lay of Kára," mentioned in the Final Prose.
- [3](#) In England, in "Sweet William's Ghost"; see Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, II, 226; in Germany, Bürger's "Leonore."
- [4](#) "The Skilful."
- [5](#) Probably invented *ad hoc*. It is not the same as the Hunland over which Buthli, and after him Atli, held sway.

[6](#) Seeing that in the lays Helgi is the kinsman of Sigmund and Sinfjotli, the Collector infers that he is a Volsung. Whether this corresponds to the oldest stratum of the legend is another matter.

[7](#) Helgi's father (?).

[8](#) Kenning for "Wolf": an allusion to the name of Helgi's race, the Ylfings, "Wolfings." Hamal, "Wether."

[9](#) This line is supplied for the last sentence of the Prose. Blind, "the Blinding," "Deceiving One," is the typical name of an evil counsellor.

[10](#) Compare with the situation in "Grottasǫngr."

[11](#) That is, she is a valkyrie.

[12](#) Supplied after Bugge.

[13](#) This barbaric practice of the earlier vikings was condemned in later times.

[14](#) In the Kattegat, between Jutland and Sweden. See “Hárbarzljóð,” St. 37.

[15](#) See “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” I, St. 33 and Note 42.

[16](#) Gunn, “Battle,” is a valkyrie, her fowls hence the birds of prey—eagles and ravens.

[17](#) Figuratively for “men made captives.”

[18](#) He excuses his warriors—they are ravenous after long privations at sea.

[19](#) It was considered part of wisdom in a warrior to conceal his identity. Compare with “Fáfnismál,” St. 1 ff.



[20](#) With her father's consent. See St. 17.

[21](#) In the original, St. 15 follows St. 16.

[22](#) The following Prose reproduces the contents of “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” I, Sts. 22 *ff.*

[23](#) That is, “The First Lay,” St. 32.

[24](#) He is identical in name and behavior in death with the Starkath, the son of Stórverk, who figures in Saxo Grammaticus as the typical representative of the Heroic Age, and in the “Víkarsbálkr” of the *Gautreks saga*. The stanza is no doubt a later interpolation.

[25](#) The reference probably is to that famous Hild who was the cause of everlasting combat between her father, King Hogni, and her lover, Hethin, the so-called Battle of the Hjathnings (“Skáldskaparmál,” Chap. 47). However, the line is doubtful. The entire stanza is probably a later interpolation.

[26](#) A red-glowing morning sky betokens carnage, as in “The Song of the Valkyries” (“Darraðarljóð”), *Njáls saga*, Chap. 157.

[27](#) 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.”

[28](#) Identical with Sts. 45-46 of “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” I.

[29](#) Sigmund also finally succumbs to Óthin’s spear (*Völsunga saga*, Chap. 11).

[30](#) “Fetter Grove.” Probably identical with the one in the land of the Semnones mentioned by Tacitus (*Germania* Chap. 39): *est et alia luco reverentia: nemo nisi vinculo ligatus ingreditur*.

[31](#) He is forced by the duty of blood revenge.

[32](#) Leiptr is one of the rivers of the nether world (“Grímnismál,” St. 28). Hence an oath by its water corresponds to the Greeks’ swearing by Styx.

[33](#) “The Wave,” one of Ægir’s daughters. See “Guðrúnarkviða” III, St. 3, and “Atlakviða,” St. 33, for mention of the oaths such as those sworn by Dag.

[34](#) Supplied after Bugge’s and Grundtvig’s suggestion.

[35](#) Supplied by the Translator.

[36](#) See the like statement in “Hárbarzljóð,” St. 24.

[37](#) That is, unless I see him back in the light of day, alive.

[38](#) At early dawn. See “Grímnismál,” St. 26. The same simile occurs in

“Guðrúnarkviða” I, St. 18, and “Guðrúnarkviða” II, St. 2.

[39](#) As Gering observes, the sentiment here expressed is altogether unbecoming Helgi as spoken to a brave foe felled in honorable combat, since it goes straight counter to Northern conceptions of etiquette. The stanza is probably a fragment of a flyting between Sinfjotli and Hunding before battle.

[40](#) They are not allowed to return “home” to earth, but only for a last stay.

[41](#) The ravens.

[42](#) Kenning for “blood.”

[43](#) This is Helgi’s status as his daughter’s husband.

[44](#) Probably only honorific. See “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” I, St. 16.

[45](#) We must suppose that Sigrún has brought it for the bridal feast.

[46](#) Added by the Translator.

[47](#) That is, heaven's bridge, Bifrost. See "Grímnismál," St. 45.

[48](#) That is, before the cock Salgofnir wakes the einherjar to their daily combat.

"Vafþrúðnismál," St. 40.



[49](#) That is, when men court sleep?

[50](#) “Prince of the Haddingjar.”

[51](#) Now lost. It was known to the author of the *Hrómundar saga Greipssonar*.

[1](#) 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.”

[2](#) See “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” I, St. 33 and Note 41.

[3](#) There is space left here in the manuscript for the insertion of the other suitor’s name, which is not known to the *Völsunga saga*, either.

[4](#) The ferryman is none other than Óthin, who thus himself accompanies the hero on his journey to the realm of the dead.

[5](#) Of Denmark, according to the *Vǫlsunga saga*. The name corresponds to that of the West Frankish king, Chilperich. In the *Vǫlsunga saga*, it is explained how this comes about: Álf happens to arrive on the scene of battle with his fleet, and there finds Hjordís and one of her maids by the side of the dying Sigmund. He carries them off as bondmaids, but later marries Hjordís when her true status becomes known. Her son by Sigmund, Sigurth, may thus be said to have been born in captivity: see “Fáfnismál,” Sts. 7–8.

[6](#) “Warder of Victory.” The German form *Sigfrit* means “Peace by Victory.”

[1](#) In particular, grievous confusion was wrought in the poem (and in the account of “Skáldskaparmál,” Chap. 39, based on it), as well as in some modern treatments, either 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 “Fáfnismál,” “Sigurparkviða hin skamma,” and “Helreið Brynhildar” (also the *Nibelungenlied*), the hero first proceeds to Gjúki’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 *Völsunga saga*, the *Nornagests þáttur* (based, it seems, on poems now lost), “Sigrdrífumál,” and the *piðreks saga*, Sigurth first delivers and pledges himself to Brynhild. He then proceeds to Gjúki’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 (Aventiure VI, VII); and the bird prophecy in “Fáfnismál” is ambiguous.

[2](#) Both person and name are probably the invention of the poet.

[3](#) “Goat-herd.” Compare with the situation in “Skírnismál” and “Fjölsvinnsmál.”

[4](#) A standard epithet. See “Fáfnismál,” St. 29.

[5](#) See the Prose at the end of “Fáfnismál.”

[6](#) See “Reginismál,” Sts. 15–26.

[7](#) Supposed to be in Germany, by the Rhine. See “Völundarkviða,” St. 14.

[8](#) As told in “Fáfnismál.”

[9](#) The Burgundian king, Grímhild's husband, and father of Gunnar, Hogni, and Guthrún. His name corresponds to MHG. *Gibeche*, "the Generous."

[10](#) Brynhild.

[11](#) It has been suggested that this Helgi is identical with the Hjálmgunnar who is mentioned in the Prose following St. 4 of "Sigrdrífumál" and in "Helreið Brynhildar," St. 8.

[12](#) These Runic instructions form the main contents of "Sigrdrífumál."

[13](#) Brynhild's foster father. Her father, in Norse tradition, is Buthli; her brother, Atli. See St. 27 below.



[14](#) “Maiden in Byrnie.”

[15](#) The popular assembly. See “Hávamál,” St. 114.

[16](#) “Maiden in Helmet (Vizor).” She corresponds to the Uote of the *Nibelungenlied*. Her daughter is Guthrún, [MHG. *Kûdrûn*] “Knowing Battle Runes,” whose role is that of Kriemhilt in the *Nibelungenlied*. Much of what follows is taken from the poems of “The Great Lacuna.”

[17](#) “Leader in Battle.” Both name and person correspond to the Gunther of the *Nibelungenlied*.

[18](#) Sigurth.

[19](#) Here, as often, used as an honorific epithet.

[20](#) The Hagene of the *Nibelungenlied*.

[21](#) As is told in “Brot af Sigurparkviðu.”

[22](#) He laid his sword between himself and Brynhild. “Brot af Sigurparkviðu,” St. 20, and “Sigurparkviða hin skamma,” Sts. 4 and 67.

[23](#) Gunnar.

[24](#) Such is the case in the *Nibelungenlied*.

[25](#) Bugge's ordering of Stanzas 42-44 is followed.

[26](#) Gunnar and Sigurth.

[27](#) For this and the following events see “Brot af Sigurparkviðu,” “Sigurparkviða hin skamma,” and “Guðrúnarkviða” II.

[28](#) Brynhild.

[29](#) Gunnar’s stepbrother, who had not sworn Sigurth oaths. See “Brot af Sigurparkviðu,” St. 4, and “Guðrúnarkviða” II, St. 7.

[30](#) The contents of the Guthrún Lays.

[31](#) The ordering of Sts. 52 and 53 following Grundtvig.

[1](#) See “Frá dauða Sinfjötla,” Note 5.

[2](#) According to the *Völsunga Saga*, Chap. 13, Óthin himself gave Sigurth the horse, which is stated to descend from the god’s own steed, Sleipnir.

[3](#) “Counsellor” (?).

[4](#) See “Völuspá,” St. 18 and Note 15.

[5](#) The *Völsunga saga*, 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.

[6](#) The sea goddess. See “Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar,” St. 18 and Note 23.

[7](#) Kenning for “gold.” See “*Helgakviða Hundingsbana*” I, St. 21, Note 30.

[8](#) A river in Hel, mentioned only here, but similar to the river in which the mainsworn and murderers are condemned to wade (“*Völuspá*,” Sts. 35-36). It has been suggested that Loki wishes by his question to induce the dwarf to tell the truth.

[9](#) According to “*Gylfaginning*,” Chap. 46, this ring, like Óthin’s ring Draupnir (“*Skírnismál*,” St. 21), had the power to renew itself. It is the “Ring of the Niflungs.”

[10](#) Andvari himself, or one of the former owners of the ring.



[11](#) The two brothers are Fáfnir and Regin; the other eight athelings, possibly, Sigurth, Guthorm, Gunnar, Hogni, Atli, and the three sons of Guthrún by Jónakr.

[12](#) The guests' lives must be spared since weregild has been offered and accepted; Hreithmar would not have accepted it had he known of the curse attached to the gold.

[13](#) The line is doubtful. The reference seems to be to the fateful feuds among the Gjúkungs.

[14](#) "He Who Surrounds with His Arms," Regin's brother.

[15](#) The following stanza very evidently does not fit in properly. It is (possibly with stanza 12) the fragment of another lay.

[16](#) Since the daughter refuses to avenge her father on her brother, Fáfnir, this duty devolves upon her son or, if she bears a daughter, on the son born of the daughter in wedlock. We may then suppose, with Grundtvig, that either Lyngheith or her daughter marries King Eylimi. Their grandson Sigurth, who slays Fáfnir, would thus be the avenger. To be sure, this connection is not authenticated by any source.

[17](#) Then, according to “Skáldskaparmál,” Chap. 38 (and the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 14), “Fáfnir fared to the Gnita Heath and made him a lair and transformed himself into a dragon and brooded on his gold.”

[18](#) An Icelandic proverb.

[19](#) The fabled divine progenitor of the royal Swedish line; but here more generally used as an honorific epithet.

[20](#) For the figure see “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” I, Sts. 3-4.

[21](#) “Ogre,” “troll.” According to the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 15, it was made from the fragments of Sigmund’s sword, which Hjordís had preserved.

[22](#) According to “Frá dauða Sinfjötla,” it was his father, Sigmund, who fell in this battle.

[23](#) Sigurth.

[24](#) *Nornagests pátttr*, Chap. 6, tells us that this is a magical storm produced by the sons of Hunding.

[25](#) Kennings for “ship.” Rævil is the name of a sea king. As to “roller-horse,” see “Hymis-kviða,” St. 20, Note 19.

[26](#) For these names of Óthin see “Grímnismál,” St. 48. Feng signifies “Gain.”

[27](#) In duels, sun and wind were shifted fairly. See also “Hávamál,” St. 129.

[28](#) The “wedge” or phalanx was supposed to be Óthin’s invention, taught by him to his favorite heroes.

[29](#) In the text, “guileful dísir [female spirits] on either side of thee.”

[30](#) Compare with “Hávamál,” Sts. 33 and 61. The meaning of the last line presumably is that he who is untidy, or he who has to cast about for food at midday, is not likely to be fortunate in his dealings.

[31](#) In the oldest times, enemies were often sacrificed to the gods by severing their ribs from the backbone and pulling out the lungs. This was called “carving the blood-eagle.”

[1](#) Similar beliefs are held throughout the world among primitive peoples; see Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, III, 320 ff.

[2](#) In the original, “noble animal”; but see “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” II, St. 38.

[3](#) Unless we are to assume that Sigurth deliberately misrepresents, this version is at variance with his princely rearing at Hjálprek'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. See also "Helgakviða Hundingsbana" I, Note 19.

[4](#) Supplied after the paraphrase in the *Vǫlsunga saga*, Chap. 18.

[5](#) After Cederschiöld: the original, "unknown," does not agree with Fáfnir's knowing Sigmund (St. 5 below) and the circumstances of Sigurth's birth.

[6](#) The text here is corrupt, the translation of the line hence purely conjectural.

[7](#) The Translator's emendation of this corrupt line. See *Scandinavian Studies*, VII (1932), 280-287.

[8](#) On this and the following stanzas, see “Frá dauða Sinfjötla,” Note 5.

[9](#) This stanza, as well as several others following, seems to have belonged originally to some collection of didactic sayings like “Hávamál.”

[10](#) The “windy nesses” threaten the unwary sailor with destruction.

[11](#) Evidently not the fate-goddesses (“Voluspá,” Note 17) but minor divinities, the fairies of folklore. After describing these, Snorri adds (“Gylfaginning,” Chap. 14), “yet are there other norns who come to every child that is born, to shape its fate, and these are sprung from the gods; but others are of the race of alfs; and still others, of the dwarfs.” Whereupon a version of St. 13 is quoted.



[12](#) A dwarf. See “The Catalogue of Dwarfs,” St. 14.

[13](#) Probably identical with the Vígríth of “Vafþrþúðnismál,” St. 18.

[14](#) See “Grímnismál,” St. 45. The bridge breaks down under the hosts of Muspelheim, “and their horses must swim over great rivers.” (“Gylfaginning,” Chap. 12).

[15](#) See “Reginismál” Prose after St. 14.

[16](#) Compare with “Hávamál,” St. 64.

[17](#) Supplied by the Translator after the paraphrase in the *Vǫlsunga saga*, Chap. 18.

[18](#) These stanzas would seem to belong more properly after St. 9.

[19](#) In the following stanzas, 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.

[20](#) The order of Stanzas 26-31 is changed here, following Müllenhoff.

[21](#) Both Regin and Fáfnir are originally of the giant race.

[22](#) Compare with “Hávamál,” St. 15.

[23](#) It has been suggested that a stanza is lacking before St. 30 in which Regin reiterated his charge of St. 25. Indeed, words to this effect are found in the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 19.

[24](#) By furnishing another carcass.

[25](#) Icelandic proverb: Regin's speech has been suspicious. Compare with *Ex ungue leonem*.

[26](#) Sigurth.

[27](#) Grundtvig suggested that the bird chorus has three voices only. The calmer stanzas (in *fornyrðislag*) he would assign to the first and second titmice (Sts. 32 and 35 to one and Sts. 33 and 36 to the other); whereas the excited advice of stanzas 34, 37, 38 (in *ljóðahátt*) 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 the scene, where only three birds are seen.

[28](#) There is a widely spread belief among 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.

[29](#) Guthrún, the daughter of Gjúki.

[30](#) That is, “pleasant.”

[31](#) “Fell of the Hind.”

[32](#) Brynhild.

[33](#) Óthin. See “Grímnismál,” St. 54.

[34](#) See “Sigrdrífumál,” Sts. 4 ff, and “Helreið Brynhildar,” Sts. 8 ff.

[35](#) Brynhild’s steed.

[36](#) 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, see “Grípisspá,” Note 1.

[37](#) “Descendant of Skjold,” the mythical progenitor of the royal race of Denmark. Here used in a general sense for “hero.” See “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” I, Sts. 48 and 55.

[38](#) Compare with *Hrunting*, Bēowulf’s sword.

[1](#) The separate title—itself based on a misconception (see “Grípisspá,” Note 1)—is found in the paper manuscripts and is adopted by most editors for the sake of convenience.

[2](#) The realm of the Gjúkungs, conceived as lying somewhere in Southern Germany.

[3](#) Of sleep imposed on her.

[4](#) The passage is doubtful.



[5](#) The “day’s sons” and the “daughter of night” are probably symbolic deities of light and darkness. The order of the Prose and of stanzas 2-5 in the original is changed here, following Müllenhoff and Bugge, for the sake of achieving a reasonable connection.

[6](#) In the sense of “success,” “victory.”

[7](#) See St. 10.

[8](#) “Helm-Gunnar.” See “Helreið Brynhildar,” Sts. 8 ff.

[9](#) Óthin. See “Voluspá,” St. 1.

[10](#) Suggested by Bugge, instead of the Prose to the same effect.

[11](#) A thorn on which “sleep runes” are scratched (St. 5). Compare with the spindle in the story of *Dornröschen* (Sleeping Beauty).

[12](#) Literally, “to strengthen his memory.” Compare with “Hyndluljóð,” St. 29. Supplied here following *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 20.

[13](#) Kenning for “warrior.”

[14](#) The god of war (see “Hymiskviða,” St. 4 and Note 6). His name is designated by the

↑ rune.

[15](#) As did Grímhild (see “Grípisspá, St. 31 ff) and Borghild (see “*Frá dauða Sinfjötla*”).

[16](#) *Nauth*, “need,” is the name of the rune (written ×) for “n.”

[17](#) To counteract possible poison or magic.

[18](#) A kingly accomplishment, as in later times was the laying on of hands, “the royal touch.”

[19](#) The *dísir* are female guardian spirits.

[20](#) Kenning for “ship.”

- [21](#) The rudder on the dragon-ship consisted of a broad oar blade on the right hand in the stern; whence our term “starboard.”
- [22](#) When this is done, the wound is transferred to the tree: sympathetic magic.
- [23](#) By some unpropitious remark.
- [24](#) The popular assembly.
- [25](#) Óthin. On this and the following stanzas see the Translator’s Introduction to this lay.
- [26](#) The lacuna is not indicated in the original text.
- [27](#) Possibly, epithets of Mímir, see “Völuspá,” Sts. 27, 38 and Note 27.
- [28](#) Óthin.

[29](#) In runes. The stanza hardly contains Mímir's prophetic words.

[30](#) The sun. See "Grímnismál," St. 39.

[31](#) The sun-horses. See *ibid.*, St. 38.

[32](#) Following Bugge's and Jónsson's emendation: the giant Hrungnir's slayer is Thór.

[33](#) Óthin's steed. See "Grímnismál," St. 45.

[34](#) The withy bands by which the sleigh is fastened on the runners. Very likely, the sleigh mentioned in "Grímnismál," St. 50, is alluded to here.

[35](#) The god of poetry.

[36](#) See "Reginismál," St. 26, Note 30.

[37](#) Of feet running to aid ?

[38](#) That is, on amulets (consisting mostly of bracteates).

[39](#) Óthin's spear.

[40](#) Sigurth's steed.

[41](#) Perhaps the name of one of the fingernails.

[42](#) The runes were scraped from the objects on which they had been graven and then mixed with the mead—here with the mead of poetry, which was shared by Óthin with the beings mentioned.

[43](#) These words are addressed to Sigurth, urging him to decide whether he will bind her to him forever.

[44](#) That is, all is foreordained.

[45](#) Sigurth's reply: he will not flee the early death which she has, in stanzas probably lost, foretold would result from their union (See St. 39). *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 21, has kept the gist of at least two other stanzas: "Wiser woman liveth not in the world than thou art... and this swear I, that I shall wed thee, for thou art after my wish.' She answered: 'Thee would I have though I had choice among all men.' And that pledged they each other with oaths." These stanzas no doubt formed the conclusion of the original poem. Sigurth's words seem to have suggested the later addition of the remaining gnomic stanzas.

[46](#) Conjectural.

[47](#) See "Reginismál," St. 4 and Note 7.

[48](#) The bracketed lines seem a later addition.

[49](#) Accepting Gering's emendation.

[50](#) Here, the text of *Codex Regius* breaks off. The remainder of the lay is supplied after the paper manuscripts. See the discussion of "The Great Lacuna."

[51](#) Which was frequently resorted to in revenge.

[52](#) Literally, “render the last services to the dead;” which in heathen times consisted in closing the nostrils, eyes, and mouth of the departed.

[53](#) All this according to Christian custom and sentiment: the stanza is interpolated.

[54](#) He may ponder revenge even though having consented to accept “weregild” for the slain.

[55](#) Conjectural.

[56](#) A dark hint of Sigurth’s early death.

[1](#) As the manuscript consists altogether of 45 pages it is evident that about one sixth of the whole is lost, or approximately 300 stanzas. However, one must reckon on more or less extensive prose passages.

[2](#) The four stanzas given below are quoted in the *Vçlsunga saga*.

[3](#) That is, no one.



[1](#) In the Concluding Prose of “Guðrúnarkviða” I.

[2](#) *Codex Regius* begins again with the words equivalent to “done harm, that thou . . .”

[3](#) That he would not deprive Brynhild of her virginity after his ride through the wall of flames—as she alleges he did (St. 20).

[4](#) There is rime here in the original. Only after having fed Guthorm (“He Who Honors the Gods”) the flesh of serpents and wolves (to infuriate him) were they successful, with his aid, in slaying Sigurth. See “Sigurþarkviða hin skamma,” Sts. 20 and 21, and Notes 18 and 19.

[5](#) That is, in the forest, as is the case in the German versions of the legend. See the Prose at the end of the lay. The stanza is transposed here (following Grundtvig) from its original position after Stanza 10.

[6](#) The historic Attila, King of the Huns [MHG. *Etzel*]. In Eddic tradition he is the son of Buthli and brother of Brynhild, and is responsible for the deaths of Gunnar and Hogni.

[7](#) In revenge for Sigurth’s death.

[8](#) She stands outside of the hall to receive her returning kinsmen.

[9](#) See “Guðrúnarkviða” II, St. 5.

[10](#) Here used as an honorific epithet.

[11](#) According to “Sigurþarkviða hin skamma,” St. 12, Sigurth had only one son, Sigmund: Brynhild refers to the sons he might have begotten.

[12](#) Probably, the song of the minstrel, to dispel the uneasy feelings that arise in their hearts at nightfall after the deed.

[13](#) Or, following Rask, “roil his bedding.” Either would betray his agitation.

[14](#) Compare with St. 5 where, however, only a raven is mentioned.

[15](#) In the sense of “whether you incite me or hinder me.”

[16](#) Prophetic of his fate at Atli’s court. See “Atlakviða,” St. 31.

[17](#) “Sons of the Mist”; compare with Niflhel (“Vafþrúðnismál,” St. 13) [MHG. *Nibelungen*], a demonic race, the original possessors of the treasure. In the *Edda* the name is applied to the kinsmen of Gjúki.

[18](#) The ceremony of swearing foster brotherhood is here referred to. This was accomplished by standing underneath a strip of upraised sod and letting one’s blood flow on the same spot in the ground with that of the brother-to-be. The act is probably symbolic of common issue from the same womb.

[19](#) The *Völsunga saga* dwells on the increase in wealth and power of the Gjúkungs through their alliance with Sigurth.

[20](#) Kenning for “sword.” The hilt was gilded (or wound with gold wire).

[21](#) In his bed: “Sigurðarkviða hin skamma,” St. 22 ff; “Guðrúnarhvæt,” St. 4; “Hamðismál,” Sts. 6-7. In the forest: as instanced in the *Nibelungenlied* and *Þiðreks saga* (whose account is based on German stories).

[22](#) “Guðrúnarkviða” II, St. 7; a misunderstanding.

[1](#) It was suggested to him by Thorpe's translation of this lay.

[2](#) This remark—a reminiscence of the Sigurth motif—entirely falls out of the context.

[3](#) That is, besides others that had been made of her.

[4](#) Unknown elsewhere and probably the poet's own invention, like Herborg and

Gullrond.

[5](#) Freely translated.

[6](#) Which is probably the cause of the “jealous scorn.” This is the fate which befell the Irish princess Melkorka (*Laxdaela saga*, Chap. 12), and Kûdrûn, in Normandy (*Kûdrûn*, *Aventiure* 20 ff).

[7](#) The word is doubtful.

[8](#) See “Sigurþarkviða hin skamma,” St. 29.

[9](#) In some German dialects the garlic still bears the name Gruserich, “King of the Grasses.” Compare the similes in “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” II, St. 38 and “Guðrúnarkviða” II, St. 2.

[10](#) The valkyries.

[11](#) This accusation is probably not to be taken literally. Compare with “Helreið Brynhildar,” Sts. 2 and 4.



[12](#) The fire (that is, the glistening gold) of the dragon’s lair—a kenning for the treasure of the Nibelungs. The evil entered, she avers, with the ill-fated visit of Sigurth and the Burgundian kings to woo her. The treasure corrupted Atli.

[13](#) The rendition is doubtful.

[14](#) Literally, “spewed poison.”

[15](#) See “Guðrúnarkviða” II, St. 14.

[1](#) Gunnar and Hogni. See “Brot af Sigurparkviðu,” St. 18 and Note 18.

[2](#) In this version, then, Sigurth’s marriage does not take place simultaneously with that of Gunnar (as it does in “Grípisspá,” St. 43).

[3](#) Inserted by the Translator: no sea journey (like that in the *Nibelungenlied*) is indicated in the original.

[4](#) This adjective has been taken to indicate the German origin of this version of the legend. However, like “Hunnish” below, it is an honorific epithet.

[5](#) “She asked what that signified. He said it had been decreed that thus must he wed his wife or else suffer death.” (the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 27).

[6](#) Fate, not any fault of her own, is the cause for his refraining from her. He is bound by his oath to Gunnar and by his marriage with Guthrún; moreover, he has been weaned of his love for Brynhild by the magic potion. See “Grípisspá” St. 33.

[7](#) “Sitting outside” at eventide (to be by herself) suggests her sinister purpose.

[8](#) Accepting Gering’s emendation.

[9](#) I follow B. M. Olsen’s and Bugge’s interpretation.

[10](#) Supplied by Bugge.

[11](#) See “Brot af Sigurparkviðu,” Sts. 8 ff.

[12](#) 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 role whatever in the legends. See St. 26, below.

[13](#) Accepting Bugge’s emendation.

[14](#) Thus the original. A number of editors, misled by our more sentimental taste, have emended the word in question to “love”; but see Stanzas 10, 36, 39, 51. Gunnar’s avarice is plainly shown in the next stanza.

[15](#) The order of Sts. 15 and 16 is changed, following Bugge.

[16](#) Sigurth's treasure was later thrown into the Rhine in order to hide it ("Atlakviða," St. 29); hence this—or any other treasure—is the "hoard-of-the-Rhine."

[17](#) Gunnar, Hogni, Sigurth, Guthorm.

[18](#) There is here an implied criticism of Gunnar: he has never accomplished Brynhild's love.

[19](#) No doubt several lines are missing here. In the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 30, Hogni continues, "and her counsels will bring us shame and harm."

[20](#) "He Who Reveres the Gods." He is Gjúki's stepson. See "Hyndluljóð," St. 27 and Note 37.

[21](#) Here, too, we must assume a considerable gap. In the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 30 we read, “They called him to them and offered 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      Guthorm to eat,  
with drink of mead      and many other  
magic matter      . . . . .  
(ere, eager of evil,      the angry men  
on highborn hero      their hands could lay).”

(The lines in parentheses are supplied after Bugge’s suggestion from the corresponding Stanza in “Brot af Sigurðarkviðu”). 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.

[22](#) Only in a transferred sense: the god Frey is the progenitor of the royal race of Sweden, the Ynglings. See “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” I, St. 55.

[23](#) He speaks as though, at first, he knows not who are the perpetrators of the deed: on her brothers devolves the duty of revenge.

[24](#) According to the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 31, his son Sigmund was only three years old when he also was slain at Brynhild's bidding.

[25](#) That is, in a later marriage.

[26](#) "According to Scotch tradition, men became violently hilarious, 'fey,' just before a violent death." (Bugge)

[27](#) Irony?

[28](#) Conjectural.

[29](#) Supplied with all editors.

[30](#) When the Gjúkungs rode into Atli's hall she had the choice to remain a free valkyrie and wage wars but forego her dowry, or else to marry Gunnar (in Sigurth's guise) and gain both dowry and the Niflung hoard. This variant of the legend occurs only here.



[31](#) That is, Gunnar's.

[32](#) Striving to avert the catastrophe, Sigurth had offered to lie with her. This she rejected: "I will not have two kings in one hall; and rather will I die than deceive King Gunnar." (*Völsunga saga*, Chap. 29). See also "The Great Lacuna," Stanza D.

[33](#) Supplied after Heusler's suggestion.

[34](#) No doubt a number of lines have dropped out here.

[35](#) Gunnar.

[36](#) The slaves who had been slain to be burned on the funeral pile with her. She then asks, in St. 48, who might of their own free will wish to follow her in death.

[37](#) Uncertain.

[38](#) That is, “when you ultimately die and join me in Hel you will have fewer ornaments burned with you than I would have given you.” “Menja’s meal” is a kenning for “gold”; see “Grottasǫngr,” Introductory Prose.

[39](#) According to the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 31, by Queen Grímhild's magic; whereafter, against her wishes, Guthrún is married to King Atli.

[40](#) See "Guðrúnarhvöt," Introductory Prose and St. 15.

[41](#) Conjectural.

[42](#) "Knowing Weapon Runes," Brynhild's sister. For the story, see "Oddrúnargrátr."

[43](#) Guthrún.

[44](#) This is told in "Dráp Niflunga" and the succeeding lays.

[45](#) As is related in “Guðrúnarhvöt,” and “Hamðismál.”

[46](#) Supplied after Bugge from “Guðrúnarhvöt,” St. 14.

[47](#) See her lament in “Guðrúnarhvöt.”

[48](#) 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 had to maintain his standing in the world beyond. See Sts. 68 and 69.

[49](#) After the paper manuscripts and the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 31.

[50](#) Kenning for “sword.”

[51](#) Of Hel, probably. A difficult passage.

[52](#) Or “nurse.”

[1](#) But compare the tentative interpretation of St. 14.

[2](#) As will be seen, these indications differ from those given in the preceding poem. In all likelihood the prose is based on the lay following.

[3](#) Her cave: the way to Hel is conceived as lying through the habitations of the mountain giants.

[4](#) Here purely honorific.

[5](#) As a valkyrie. See St. 8.

[6](#) She speaks prophetically of the fall of the Gjúkungs as though it had already taken place.

[7](#) Inserted here by the Translator, following Neckel's suggestion, to bridge a lacuna not indicated, on the pattern of "Oddrúnargrátr," St. 13.

[8](#) "Battle," a valkyrie; see "Völuspá," St. 30. In the paraphrase of "Skáldskaparmál" this is Brynhild-Sigrdrífa's name. According to the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 27, and *Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*, Hlymdales is the seat of her foster father, Heimir, where Sigurth stays as guest and meets her and is betrothed to her. (See "Grípisspá," Sts. 19, 29, 31). In the original, St. 6 follows St. 7.

[9](#) Agnar. We may suppose the loss of a stanza here, explaining how Hild and her sisters fought in the wars as valkyries; see "Grottasöngur," Sts. 13 ff. Her oaths may refer only to the protection of Agnar in battle (in return for his releasing her?).

[10](#) Just as Volund and his brothers gain possession of the three swan-maidens ("Völundarkviða," Introductory Prose).

[11](#) For a fuller account, see “Sigrdrífumál,” Sts. 4 ff.

[12](#) Purely honorific here.

[13](#) “Grove of Heroes” (?). It corresponds to the Hindar Fell of “Sigrdrífumál.”

[14](#) Ordinarily, a white shield is a sign of peaceful intentions, a red shield, of war. Do they here symbolize the red and white flames?

[15](#) Kenning for “fire.”

[16](#) Kenning for “prince”; here, Sigurth.

[17](#) Here, an honorific epithet.



[18](#) For this interpretation, see *Scandinavian Studies* XXII (1950), 166 ff. The line is generally interpreted “we shall live our lives together.”

[19](#) That is, “Avaunt!” See Note 96 on the last line of “Völuspá.”

[1](#) That is, the Gjúkungs, as possessors of the Niflung hoard. This awkwardly written piece (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 from “Atlamál.”

[2](#) See “Reginsmál,” Prose after St. 4. The *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 28, relates that Sigurth deprived Brynhild of it on the bridal night and gave it to Guthrún.

[3](#) Gunnar.

[4](#) In “Atlamál,” St. 28, only the first two are mentioned as Hogni’s sons.

[5](#) 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 (“Atlakviða,” St. 36, and “Atlamál,” St. 73).

[1](#) Historically, Theodoric, the King of the Ostrogoths, who reigned toward the end of the fifth century. His name corresponds to the MHG. Dietrich.

[2](#) According to German tradition, as embodied in the *Nibelungenlied*, he lost them in battle against the Burgundians.

<sup>3</sup> Conjectural. Similar figures are used in “Guðrúnarkviða” I, St. 18, and “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” II, St. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Added *ad sen sum* by the Translator.

<sup>5</sup> See “Sigurparkviða hin skamma,” St. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Literally, “beyond the flood.”

[7](#) Conjectural.

[8](#) Because he is her brother.

[9](#) Supplied, following Bugge's suggestion, after *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 32.

[10](#) Sigurth's stepfather (see "Frá dauða Sinfjötla"). Thóra and Hákon probably are figures invented by the poet, since the whole episode is peculiar to this lay.

[11](#) The names belong to the Siklings, a royal race of Denmark.

[12](#) The large Danish island.

[13](#) Guthrún's mother. See "Grípisspá," St. 33 and note.

[14](#) Here merely an honorific epithet.

[15](#) Supplied after Zupitza: the text is defective here.

[16](#) See "Sigurþarkviða hin skamma," St. 12.

[17](#) To fetch Guthrún home?

[18](#) These lines clearly do not belong here. They read as though they originally belonged to "Rígsþula." In the manuscript there follow the lines:

Eke Valdar the Dane,     with Jarizleif,  
Eymóth third,     and Jarizkar,

which are evidently also out of their context.

[19](#) These are Atli's (Hunnish) emissaries, come to sue for Guthrún's hand—a plan contrived by Grímhild. At least one stanza seems to be missing in which their journey and Guthrún's return from Denmark to the court of the Gjúkungs was described.

[20](#) See “Völuspá hin skamma,” St. 10.

[21](#) The Haddings were sea kings. Thus, in the skaldic manner “the Haddings’ land” would be the sea; and “a long heath-fish of the Haddings’ land,” a kenning for an eel; but, punctuated differently, the passage would mean “a serpent and an uncut ear (of grain) of the Haddings’ land,” that is, “seaweed.”

[22](#) The line is difficult.

[23](#) Kings tributary to Atli.

[24](#) See “Völundarkviða,” Introductory Prose.

[25](#) Sigurth(?).

[26](#) This line (the poor alliteration exists in the original) is no doubt an interpolation, though already known to the author of the *Vǫlsunga saga* (Chap. 32).



[27](#) Supplied after Heusler's suggestion.

[28](#) Atli. The remainder of the stanza transposed here (with Bugge) from its original position after St. 31.

[29](#) The stanza describes the journey of Guthrún (and the Gjúkungs?) to the realm of Atli.

[30](#) Several stanzas must be missing here, dealing with her marriage and the fall of the Gjúkungs. The *Völsunga saga* affords no help.

[31](#) See "Atlakviða" and "Atlamál" for the deeds here prognosticated in Atli's dreams.

[32](#) Interpreted *ad sensum*.

[33](#) Perhaps some cauterization is meant.

[34](#) See “Atlamál,” St. 19. The rendering of the stanza is doubtful; but no doubt there is an intentional ambiguity on the part of Guthrún. In the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 33, Guthrún says, “Not good are these dreams, but they will come true; thy sons are likely to be fey.”

[35](#) As the poem breaks off here, a definite interpretation of the last line is impossible.

[1](#) Historically, Kreka. In the *Nibelungenlied*, Helche is the name of Atli's first wife.

[2](#) Historically, Theodemer, who actually was in Attila's service.

[3](#) Probably, a phallic symbol. Compare with the similar oath in "Helgakviða Hundingsbana," II, St. 30.

[4](#) According to Sijmons' emendation.

[5](#) See "Guthrúnarkviða," II, Introductory Prose.

[6](#) The sequence in the original is St. 7, St. 6.

[7](#) "The Saxon," that is, German.

[8](#) This is the Old Germanic mode of capital punishment for women.

[9](#) Translated *ad sensum*.

[1](#) For example, Oddrún's magic spells (St. 7), and the invocation of Frigg and Freya, (St. 8). Note on the other hand Oddrún's general, Christian, altruism.

[2](#) For example, the purposeless bringing in of the fates of Sigurth and Brynhild.

[3](#) These and other names occurring here are of the poet's own invention. Heithrek is conceived as the king of one of Atli's domains. See Sts. 2 and 4.

[4](#) See "Sigurparkviða hin skamma," St. 57, and "Dráp Niflunga."

[5](#) Unknown elsewhere.

[6](#) See Note 3 above. A difficult line.

[7](#) Euphemistically.

[8](#) See the spells referred to in “Fáfnismál,” St. 12, and “Sigdrífumál,” St. 10.

[9](#) The lay stands alone in stating Hogni to have been slain by Vilmund.

[10](#) The aid of Frigg (see “Völuspá,” St. 33), goddess of marital love, and wife of Óthin, was invoked at births; she was sometimes confused with Freya (See “Þrymskviða” St. 3), the goddess of love and sister of Frey.

[11](#) Added by the Translator.

[12](#) An extensive reordering of several stanzas (10-22) is required here to give a passable coherence.

[13](#) Probably to be understood as an euphemism.

[14](#) Oddrún.

[15](#) Buthli.

[16](#) Gunnar is meant.

[17](#) Buthli wishes Brynhild to become a “shield-maiden,” a valkyrie, rather than to marry.

[18](#) Sigurth, who approaches her bower (here apparently conceived as a fortress) with the Gjúkungs to lay siege to it.

[19](#) It was not until her return as Gunnar's wife that she became aware of the deception. See "Sigurparkviða hin skamma," St. 34 ff.

[20](#) The theme of "Brot af Sigurparkviðu" and "Sigurparkviða hin skamma."

[21](#) Kenning for "prince": Gunnar.

[22](#) The Gjúkungs.

[23](#) As weregild for Brynhild, to appease her brother Atli.

[24](#) The Niflung treasure. See "Grípisspá," St. 13.

[25](#) Kenning for "prince": Gunnar. Oddrún has evidently been staying at the court of the Gjúkungs.



[26](#) “The Dark Forest,” which is here supposed to separate the realm of the Burgundians from Atli’s kingdom. See “Atlakviða,” Sts. 3, 5, 13.

[27](#) That is, from Guthrún, who meanwhile has married Atli: if she had known of this situation she would have had an additional reason to warn her brothers not to come when Atli invited the Gjúkungs to his court.

[28](#) We gather that Oddrún has been called back by Atli. We must suppose that some lines or stanzas are lost here, in which was told of Atli’s deceitful invitation to the Gjúkungs and their acceptance of it. See “Atlakviða,” St. 1 ff.

[29](#) Gunnar.

[30](#) Supplied after “Atlamál,” St. 61.

[31](#) Unknown elsewhere. We are told below that his castle is on the Danish island of Hlésey.

[32](#) The poet seems to forget here that Atli's mother is her own also. This motif is not found elsewhere.

[33](#) Kenning for “prince”: Gunnar.

[34](#) That is, we obey the dictates of love (as Borgný, too, had done).

[1](#) Before the introduction, in the Middle Ages, of the hearth properly speaking, the fireplaces were on the ground, in the middle of the hall, flanked by rows of benches on the longer sides. In the North, the “highseats” were located in the middle of these, one occupied by the host, the one opposite, by the most honored guest. The benches (and walls) were hung with arms.

[2](#) The Gjúkungs.

[3](#) The “Dark Forest,” conceived here as the boundary between Gunnar’s and Atli’s dominions. See St. 5 below, and also “Oddrúnargrátr,” St. 23.

[4](#) Conjectural. Helmets of Old Germanic times were ornamented with bands of plaited rings.

[5](#) Accepting Bugge’s emendation.

[6](#) *Pars pro toto* for “ships.”

[7](#) See “Rígsþula,” St. 49.

[8](#) See Note 1 above.

[9](#) Possibly identical with the King Kíar mentioned in the Introductory Prose of “Völundarkviða.”

[10](#) See “Dráp Niflunga” and “Atlamál” for similar warnings attempted by Guthrún.

[11](#) One or more stanzas must have dropped out here in which Gunnar’s sudden change of mind was motivated.

[12](#) Gunnar’s cupbearer.

[13](#) Supplied after the corresponding passage in the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 35.

[14](#) The translation of this stanza is largely conjectural. The compiler of the *Völsunga saga* did not understand it any better! The meaning seems to be that, for aught he cares, the beasts of the wild (symbolic for enemies?) may occupy the halls should the Gjúkungs perish.

[15](#) See “Dráp Niflunga.” In “Atlamál,” St. 28, Hogni’s other two sons accompany them to Atli’s realm.

[16](#) A difficult stanza.

[17](#) Following Bugge. Buthli is Atli’s father.

[18](#) A gap in the manuscript is here supplied, following Bugge’s suggestion.

[19](#) Supplied after Grundtvig.

[20](#) Doubtful.

[21](#) These lines are transposed here from their original position before St. 25, following Grundtvig. The Niflungs rode with only a few followers.

[22](#) It would seem that some stanzas are lacking here which described the battle and the slaughter of all the Burgundians (here for Gjúkungs, Niflungs) except Gunnar and Hogni.

[23](#) The battle rages in the hall. The following lines are defective and are translated *ad sensum*.

[24](#) Only honorific here.

[25](#) Supplied as in St. 19.

[26](#) Supplied, after Grundtvig's suggestion. See "Atlamál," St. 56 ff.

[27](#) A typical thrall's name.

[28](#) The evident gap supplied after the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 37.

[29](#) Both lines are doubtful.

[30](#) That the secret of the treasure might be betrayed by someone.

[31](#) Supplied after Grundtvig.

[32](#) That is, to the place of execution? According to “Atlamál,” St. 54, Atli has Gunnar first hanged on the gallows, then cast into the snake den.

[33](#) These stanzas seem to defy proper ordering. In the original, the last two lines of St. 32 follow after St. 33. They are transposed here, following Bugge. The translation of the entire stanza is doubtful. This much seems clear: the following speech is Guthrún monologue, spoken when she descends into the hall where the fight has raged.

[34](#) As it should go with him if he violated these oaths.

[35](#) Óthin. See the similar oath in “Helgakviða Hundingsbana” II, St. 30.

[36](#) Kenning for “couch”: The bedposts were carved in the likeness of horseheads. The horse was sacred to Óthin—Following the explanation of Holtsmark in *Maal og Minne*, 1941 (XXIII), 1 ff.

[37](#) See “Grímnismál,” St. 5, Note 9.

[38](#) According to the paraphrase of the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 37, it was Guthrún who conveyed the harp to him. See also “Oddrúnargrátr,” St. 26 ff.

[39](#) She expresses herself ambiguously on purpose—she has slaughtered her “cubs.”

[40](#) Transferred here (with Grundtvig) from its original position in St. 45. Myrkheim, “the Dark Abode,” is possibly identical with the Myrkvith above.

[41](#) Supplied freely by the Translator.



[42](#) Atli, the son of Buthli.

[43](#) Occupations of the nobly born. See “Rígsþula,” Sts. 27 ff.

[44](#) Rich cloths and tapestries were hung on the walls.

[45](#) She bribes them to maintain silence and to lull their suspicions about her further designs. We may also think of a sleep potion given them.

[46](#) Atli's blood.

[47](#) They are loosed, and the housecarls awakened, so that they may not perish in the flames.

[48](#) In the sense of “treasure-houses” (?).

[49](#) Atli and his sons.

[1](#) For one thing, he says not a word about Atli's coveting the Niflung hoard (which is the propulsive force in "Atlakviða") and has thus left the central action of the poem without a motive.

[2](#) Atli's followers.

[3](#) That is, approached its fulfilment.

[4](#) That is, by bringing about the death of his kinsmen by marriage, who might otherwise have been “pillars of his might.”

[5](#) Guthrún overhears the plottings of Atli and is anxious to warn her brothers, but is not allowed to go personally with the messengers.

[6](#) In the sense of “confused.”

[7](#) An arm of the sea, the Lim Firth (North Jutland) is here supposed to separate the domains of Atli from those of the Gjúkungs.

[8](#) The gifts are of arms. See “Atlakviða,” St. 1, Note 1.

[9](#) “The Stewardess”; like Glaumvor “the Cheerful,” doubtless the poet’s invention. See also “Dráp Niflunga.”

[10](#) The meaning seems to be: the messengers invite the Gjúkungs to follow Hogni as their leader, so as to inspire them with confidence.

[11](#) Supplied after Bugge's suggestion.

[12](#) Graven on one of Atli's presents, or else on a separate runestave.

[13](#) The shorter form Bera, for Kostbera, occurs twice in the poem.

[14](#) Supplied, following Grundtvig's suggestion.

[15](#) That is, the deletion.

[16](#) That is, until or unless, they are committed.

[17](#) In the original, this is the only half-line ending on an accented syllable.

[18](#) Of those trying to escape.

[19](#) Freely supplied by the Translator.

[20](#) Compare with Atli's dream ("Guðrúnarkviða" II, St. 43).

[21](#) Gunnar and his wife Glaumvor.

[22](#) The rendering of the last line is doubtful because of an evident lacuna in the text.

[23](#) The end of Gunnar in the snake den is alluded to, but the exact meaning of the line is doubtful.

[24](#) As neither this dream nor its interpretation are mentioned in the *Völsunga saga*, we may conclude that a stanza was lacking even then.

[25](#) Supplied following Bugge, after the paraphrase in the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 34.

[26](#) Conjectural. (Neckel).

[27](#) They seem to be the *dísir*; (see “Reginismál,” St. 24, Note 28) beckoning to Hel him who is “fey.”

[28](#) Supplied after Grundtvig's suggestion.

[29](#) The rendering is doubtful.

[30](#) See "Dráp Niflunga."

[31](#) Kenning for "warrior."

[32](#) A difficult line.

[33](#) Note the ambiguity in his using the third person.

[34](#) It was customary to wish the departing ones "victory," even though no battle was anticipated.



[35](#) It was not considered beneath their dignity for the highborn to take a hand at the oars.

[36](#) Kenning for “boat.”

[37](#) The Germanic equivalent for “burning one’s bridges behind one.” They do not expect to return. Compare with the similar situation in the *Nibelungenlied* where Hagene destroys the boat on which the host has been ferried across the Danube.

[38](#) He is dead. See Sts. 50 and 90.

[39](#) The *Völsunga saga* 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.

[40](#) Of her necklace.

[41](#) See St. 28 above.

[42](#) Brynhild: possibly, a reference to Guthrún's being, indirectly, the cause of Brynhild's death.

[43](#) A trace of this deed is found in *Þiðreks saga*, Chap. 428, where we are told that Hogni's son let Atli starve to death in a cave. Her other allegations stand alone.

[44](#) Atli's hot vengefulness seems to prompt him to order two modes of death for his vanquished foe.

[45](#) Conjectural.

[46](#) That is, to have his own heart cut out.

[47](#) That is, they had no other choice but to obey Atli.

[48](#) The circumstances of Gunnar's death ("Atlakviða," Sts. 27-34) being known to his audience, the poet dispenses with their recital. Or are a number of stanzas missing?

[49](#) Kenning for "toes."

[50](#) That is, Guthrún. But compare the similar situation in "Oddrúnargrátr."

[51](#) It is not clear whether the rafters of Atli's hall are meant, hyperbolically, or the boards of the harp.

[52](#) The ambiguity is intended: all the consequences of the deed—her murder of his sons—are to be reckoned with. As it is, she hints darkly of suicide.

[53](#) To make atonement.

[54](#) The meaning apparently is: to be sure, woman always is the sufferer by men's deeds. Atli is being lulled into false security by Guthrún's seeming resignation following her outburst of vengefulness.

[55](#) That is, she played a double game: red shields indicate warlike, white shields, peaceful intentions.

[56](#) An unexpectedly philosophic reply; but the text is fairly clear.

[57](#) As elsewhere in the *Edda*, there is here an unannounced change of scene: Guthrún has left her woman's bower and gone over to the king's hall. Her speech is addressed to him.

[58](#) See St. 63 above.

[59](#) That is, by eating his own children's hearts; which necessarily draws after it his death. Hence he is darkly said by Guthrún to have drunk his own arvel.

[60](#) Note the Christian expression !

[61](#) He is a son of Hogni, as is told in the following stanza. His assistance seems uncalled for.



[62](#) That is, he was past help from bandaging.

[63](#) In the sense of “wife.”

[64](#) The rendering of the line is doubtful.

[65](#) Conjectural.

[66](#) Gering points out that the historic Attila had his brother Bleda slain to become sole ruler.

[67](#) No other source speaks of Guthrún and the Gjúkungs following Sigurth in the free viking life described in these stanzas (92-94). Also for other reasons they seem suspicious.

[68](#) Sigurth; the epithet is merely honorific.

[69](#) The rendering is doubtful.

[70](#) Supplied following Grundtvig's suggestion.

[71](#) Kenning for "ship."

[72](#) Note the mixture of Heathen and Christian rites: he is to be buried in a coffin which is to be sent out to sea in a (burning?) ship.

[73](#) See “Guðrúnarhvot,” St. 13.

[1](#) The title of the original means “Guthrún’s Incitement.” This, however, has reference only to the introductory stanzas, and not to the body of the poem, which is essentially a “lament.”

[2](#) “Sigurþarkviða hin skamma,” St. 60.

[3](#) His name is either Slavic, and his lands hence across the Baltic, or else a corruption of Odoacher, the Germanic ruler of Italy during the fifth century.

[4](#) According to “Hamðismál,” St. 14, and the indirect evidence of the lay itself, which has the dual form in Guthrún’s address to her sons, Erp was Jónakr’s son by another woman. His name signifies “the Brownish One.” The names of his half brothers are of doubtful meaning.

[5](#) “(She who fights) in Swan Garment.”

[6](#) Historically, Ermanarich, King of the Ostrogoths in the fourth century.

[7](#) According to the more detailed account of the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 40, and similarly in “Skáldskaparmál,” Chap. 39, Randvér and Bikki had been sent to Jónakr 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 is of feathers and orders his son 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 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.”

[8](#) The Translator has omitted two lines here which are identical with “Hamðismál,” St. 3, 1. 3-4.

[9](#) That is, the race of Sigurth.

[10](#) See “Brot af Sigurðarkviðu,” Concluding Prose, and “Sigurparkviða hin skamma,” Sts. 22 ff.

[11](#) Her sons by Atli, Erp and Eitil, slain by her to avenge the death of the Niflungs. See Sts. 11-12 below, “Atlakviða” Sts. 37 ff, and “Atlamál,” Sts. 74 ff.

[12](#) In the original, “precious things” (“heirlooms” ?).

[13](#) Kenning for “warrior”: he himself. He foresees his own death.

[14](#) Here, for Jormunrekk’s dominions.

[15](#) Conjectural.

[16](#) Supplied after Bugge’s suggestion.

[17](#) Erp and Eitil. See “Atlakviða,” Sts. 39 ff, and “Atlamál,” Sts. 71 ff.

[18](#) By cutting short the life allotted to her by them (conjectural).

[19](#) Jónakr.

[20](#) A crescendo of comparison is scarcely intended in Stanzas 17-19.

[21](#) Supplied after Bugge’s suggestion.

[22](#) She is utterly alone now, foreseeing the death of her last begotten sons, with neither kinsman nor kinswoman to comfort her. See “Hamðismál,” Sts. 24 ff.

[23](#) Supplied after Grundtvig’s suggestion.



[1](#) 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 “fair wheel” by the alfs (“Alvíssmál,” St. 16). The whole stanza is generally regarded as spurious.

[2](#) This absurd line must be interpolated.

[3](#) A difficult line.

[4](#) Supplied after Grundtvig's suggestion from the similar third stanza of "Guðrúnarhvöt."

[5](#) Of evergreen trees (?). Compare with "Hávamál," St. 50.

[6](#) Kenning for "fire." Compare with "Völuspá," St. 51.

[7](#) It is precisely Guthrún's tragic fate that she may not ever heed this counsel. See "Guðrúnarkviða" II, St. 10.

[8](#) Stanzas 6-8 of "Guðrúnarhvot" most likely contain material originally from "Hamðismál."

[9](#) This stanza is transposed here, following Grundtvig and Bugge, from its position in the original after St. 23. Its text is badly mutilated, and the translation hence largely conjectural.

[10](#) As they can now, in their charmed armor: the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 42, tells how Guthrún gave her sons armor impenetrable to iron, but bade them "not to damage it by stones and other large matter" as else it were their death.

[11](#) Supplied after Grundtvig's suggestion.

[12](#) The order of Sts. 13-16 is changed, following Grundtvig and Bugge.

[13](#) Supplied by Gering.

[14](#) Their half brother Erp, the “Brownish One.”

[15](#) The *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 42, continues: “Then they went on their way, and but a little while after, Hamthir slipped and put his hand out and said: ‘Erp may have said sooth—I would have fallen if my hand had not steadied me’ Soon after, Sorli stumbled, but put forth his foot and thus steadied himself. He said: ‘I would have fallen now if both my feet had not steadied me.’ Then both said that they had done ill by their brother.”

[16](#) They have arrived in the confines of Jormunrekk’s castle and now change their garments, arraying themselves in the magic (silken) armor.

[17](#) Randver: he is called thus in Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, which also tells this story. Here the original has “sister’s son,” which is quite in keeping with the Old Norse way of thinking: he is Svanhild’s stepson as the son of her husband.

[18](#) Kenning for “gallows.” “Wolf” was the designation of outlaws who had been proscribed and who were hanged wherever seized.

[19](#) Kenning for “serpent.” Doubtful.

[20](#) Supplied after Grundtvig's suggestion.

[21](#) Conjectural.

[22](#) Here, probably not the white shield of peace ("Helgakviða Hundingsbana" I, St. 33, Note 42) but a shield made of the white wood of the linden tree.

[23](#) In Stanza 4 of the skald Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa* (ninth century) Jormunrekk is described as falling prone into the ale on the floor with which is mixed his own blood.

[24](#) According to the account of "Skáldskaparmál," Chap. 39, Guthrún advised them to attack Jormunrekk at night in his bed: "was Sorli and Hamthir to hew off his hands and feet, but Erp his head." They follow her advice, but Erp is lacking at the critical moment to perform his share.

[25](#) The (ever blazing) hearth fire in the middle of the hall. See "Rígspula," St. 2, Note 4, and "Atlakviða," St. 1, Note 1. The two last lines translated after Neckel's conjectural restoration.

[26](#) In the *Völsunga saga*, Chap. 42, it is Óthin who gives the counsel to stone the brothers.

[27](#) Thy mouth (Compare with “Hávamál,” St. 134). Is a stanza lacking here in which Hamthir had taunted the king with their invulnerability to iron?

[28](#) As their half brother and thus being of their own kin, he ought to have been inviolable.

[29](#) This stanza in *Ijóðaháttr* and with adhortative content is generally supposed to be an interpolation.

[1](#) Two giants. 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.

[2](#) Waxing and Waning Moon.

[3](#) North, South, East, and West.

[4](#) Conjectural.