



# THE POETIC EDDA

A Dual-Language Edition

EDWARD PETTIT



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# För Skírnis

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*För Skírnis* (*FSk.*) ‘Skírnir’s Journey’ is found in **R** (fol. 11r–12r). The initial prose and most of stt. 1 to 27—the rest having been lost—also appear in **A** (fol. 2r–v), under the title *Skírnismál* ‘The Sayings of Skírnir’. A variant version of the final stanza is quoted in *SnEGylf* (36, p. 31). Orthographical and palaeographical similarities to *Hrbl.*, the next poem in **R** (but not **A**), suggest that the two poems were originally transcribed together and separate from the rest of **R**.

The date of composition is, as usual, uncertain. *FSk.* was once held to be one of the earliest surviving Eddic poems (tenth century or earlier), but some recent commentators favour a twelfth- or thirteenth-century date. Like other poems in this collection, however, even if *FSk.* reached its present form quite late, it may include much earlier material.

*FSk.* is mainly in *ljóðaháttir*, the usual Eddic metre for dialogue-poems; the extended form, *galdralag*, also features, especially in Skírnir’s curse (e.g., 29/4–7, 30/4–7, 32). There are, in addition, several half-stanzas in *fornyrðislag* (e.g., 34/1–4, 36/1–4). The poem’s extensive use of dialogue has led to the suggestion that it is based on, or intended for, dramatic performance.

This is the only poem in **R** to focus on the group of gods known as Vanir, and on the deity Freyr in particular. His union with the giantess Gerðr is mentioned elsewhere in Norse myth, however, where it constitutes a formal bond: *Hdl.* 30 records that Freyr married Gerðr, daughter of Gymir and Aurboða. Other texts also refer to this union: *Ls.* 42 states that Freyr ‘had Gymir’s daughter bought’ with gold and thus gave away his sword, and that consequently he will not know how to fight the sons of Muspell at Ragnarok; chapter 10 of *Ynglinga saga* says that ‘[Freyr’s] wife was called Gerðr, daughter of Gymir; their son was called Fjölfnir’, progenitor of the Ynglingar dynasty.<sup>1</sup> These references suggest the former existence of other mythological material about Freyr and Gerðr.

Other than *FSk.*, the only surviving full account of the myth of Freyr and Gerðr appears in *SnEGylf* (37, pp. 30–32), but its romanticized and considerably shorter account is probably based largely on a version of *FSk.* Snorri’s prose narrative agrees in the main with that of the poem, but there are some significant differences: according to Snorri, Freyr’s love for Gerðr is a punishment for his presumption in sitting in Hliðskjálf; the giantess Skaði plays no part in events; more is made of Freyr’s desperate

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1 In addition, some scholars propose a link between small gold foils found in Sweden, which show a couple embracing, and the myth of Freyr and Gerðr.

love-sickness, in keeping with high-medieval notions of courtly love; Freyr, not his servant Skírnir, is the main figure; Gerðr accepts the proposed union at once, without gifts, violence or curses; and the story has explicit eschatological significance, because we learn that Freyr will miss his sword at Ragnarok.<sup>2</sup>

I have argued elsewhere that behind *FSk.* may lie a celestial myth about the transfer of light from sun to moon and back again, Gerðr arguably being (or having been), in my view, a lunar giantess who had acquired sunlight, which Skírnir, emissary of the sun-controlling god Freyr, seeks to reclaim for his master. This myth seems to be paralleled, albeit obscurely, in the confrontation of the eponymous hero of the Old English poem *Beowulf*, on behalf of Hroðgar, lord of the 'Friends of Ing [= (Ingvi) Freyr]' (i.e., Danes), with another hostile giantess, Grendel's mother.<sup>3</sup> But *FSk.* is also interpretable simply as a bridal-quest tale of the subjugation of a giantess to a male god's sexual desire by means of gifts, physical violence (actual or threatened), runemagic and cursing. Additionally, it shows the conflict of reason and passion in relations between gods and giants; they can, as a rule, live neither with nor without each other. On the one hand, the gods and giants are, despite their kinship, arch-enemies; on the other, they desire each other sexually. Hence, for example, Óðinn's seduction of Gunnlōð in *Háv.* and of an unnamed giantess in *Hrbl.*; Þórr's fathering of Magni on the giantess Járnsaxa in *SnESkáld*; several giants' desire for Freyja, Sif and (perhaps) Iðunn in *Vsp.*, *Brk.*, *SnEGylf* and *SnESkáld*; and the giantess Skaði's wish to marry Baldr in *SnESkáld*. Similarly, Freyr wants Gerðr, and she, despite antipathy to a suitor she believes to be her brother's slayer, would rather have him than a giant.

Although lust between gods and giantesses is evident, when it comes to more formal ties the gods generally maintain an apartheid. Exceptions include the marriage of the Njörðr to Skaði in *SnEGylf*, and her subsequent marriage to Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga*. In *FSk.* it seems that the former marriage has yet to fail, but Freyr is nonetheless aware that his desire—judging from the marriage referred to in other texts—for more than a passing liaison with Gerðr is taboo: 'of Æsir and elves, no one will wish it, that we two should be united' (*FSk.* 7). Happily, his marriage was not only allowed but proved to be a unique intergroup success in Eddic mythology.

Indeed, the story of Freyr and Gerðr, or at least the putative basis thereof, has often been interpreted as a fertility myth. More specifically, it has been thought by some to manifest the Indo-European myth of a *hieros gamos* 'sacred marriage' or a mating between Sky and Earth.<sup>4</sup> In *FSk.*, according to this interpretation, the virile sun-god Freyr—his messenger Skírnir 'Cleansing One' perhaps being a personified sunbeam—wins Gerðr '(She of the) Enclosed Place', who represents the unfertilized ground.

2 Freyr's weaponless state is possibly alluded to earlier, in *Hál.* 7.

3 See E. Pettit, 'Freyr, Skírnir and Gerðr', in *The Waning Sword: Conversion Imagery and Celestial Myth in 'Beowulf'* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2020), pp. 171–96, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0190.07>

4 Cf. *Hál.* 12.

Although this specific view differs somewhat from my reading of the poem, allusive mythic imagery can support more than one interpretation.

Despite its focus on one of the Vanir (a perspective shared in Eddic poetry only by *Hdl.*), *FSk.* also has similarities and links to its Eddic neighbours: for example, (1) the quest to giantland finds parallel in *Háv.*, *Vm.* and *Hym.*, and especially in the ironic reversal of the bridal quest in *Þrk.* and perhaps *Alv.*; also in *Fj.*, which displays strong similarities to *FSk.* in terms of theme, scene and language; (2) the theme of love, or at least lust, between gods and giants echoes that touched on in *Vsp.*, *Háv.*, *Hrbl.* and *Þrk.*, although Freyr's passivity contrasts with the active approach of the giants and Óðinn; (3) Gymir/Ægir's loss of his daughter is compounded by the loss of his prize cauldron in *Hym.*; (4) the potential confrontation with Gymir finds parallel in the hostile giants of *Háv.*, *Vm.*, *Hym.* and *Þrk.*, and foreshadows the last battles of *Vsp.*; (5) notable verbal similarities exist with *Ls.*

*FSk.* also has close affinities with bridal-quest tales that became popular in the twelfth century and with curse-literature. The bridal-quest tales contain corresponding motifs, such as the worried parents, the wooer's love from afar, the well-protected virgin, the hostility of the bride's father to the wooing, and the difficulties overcome by the wooer's helper.

## Synopsis

*Prose:* Freyr, one of the Vanir, had sat in Hliðskjálf (Óðinn's observation-seat). From there he saw a beautiful girl, for whom he suffered great sickness of heart. Freyr had a servant called Skírnir. Freyr's father, the god Njörðr, asked Skírnir to get Freyr to talk.

*Verse:* Njörðr's wife, the giantess Skaði, does the same, wondering with whom Freyr is so angry (1). Skírnir says he is likely to get a foul reply if he asks (2), but does so anyway (3).

Freyr asks why he should tell Skírnir his woes (4). Skírnir replies that they trusted each other in their youth (5). Freyr then reveals both his love for the girl he saw in the courts of the giant Gymir and his belief that none of the Æsir or elves will favour any union between them (6–7). Skírnir, having apparently decided to fetch the girl, requests Freyr's horse, so that he can pass the flames that protect her abode. He also asks for Freyr's sword, which fights giants of its own accord (8). Freyr agrees to give them to him (9). Skírnir tells the horse that it is time to set off. They gallop by night over misty mountains with the resolve either to achieve their quest or be captured by Gymir (10).

Skírnir arrives in giantland to find the hall of Gerðr—the name of the giantess whom Freyr loves—protected by dogs and a fence. He greets a herdsman who is sitting on a mound (10 pr.), and asks how he can get past Gymir's dogs to talk to the girl (11). The herdsman says he never will (12). Skírnir intimates that rather than cry, he will try anyway (13).

Upon feeling the earth shake, Gerðr asks her servant-woman what the noise is (14). She informs Gerðr that there is a man outside (15). Gerðr tells her to invite him in for some mead, even though she fears that he slew her brother (16). She asks Skírnir who he is and why he has come through the flames to her house (17). His answer is cagey (18).

Skírnir begins his attempt to win Gerðr for Freyr by offering her eleven golden apples (or, arguably, some apples to cure old age) (19), an offer she refuses (20). He then offers her the magical ring which was burnt on Baldr's pyre (21), which she also refuses (22).

He threatens to behead her with his sword, unless she acquiesces (23). But she will not be coerced; if he is looking for a fight, her father, Gymir, will oblige (25). Skírnir says he will slay Gymir with the sword (25).

Skírnir strikes (or threatens to strike) her with a 'taming wand' and begins to list the torments she will suffer unless she gives in (26): isolation from men (26); a longing for Hel and loathing of food (27); being stared at by everyone and imprisoned behind bars (28); idiocy, howling, frustration and extreme lust (29); torture by trolls and a daily crawl to the frost-giants' hall (30); having only a three-headed giant to live with (31).

Skírnir says he went to a forest and got a 'tribute(?) twig' from a sappy tree (32).

He declares that the gods are angry with her (33) and continues his curse: he bans her from men's love (34); consigns her to the giant Hrímgrímnir beneath corpse-gates, where, at the tree's roots, she will be given goats' piss to drink (35); he also carves runes of torment, but says he will remove them if she gives in (36).

At last, she grudgingly concedes (37), but Skírnir still insists on setting a date for her and Freyr to meet (38). She stipulates a grove called Barri in nine nights' time (39).

Skírnir rides home. Freyr is standing outside and immediately asks him how his mission went (39 pr., 40). Skírnir tells him the date and location of the meeting (41). Freyr exclaims that he does not think he can endure so long a wait (42).

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## För Skírnis

Freyr, sonr Njarðar, hafði setzk í Hliðskjálf, ok sá um heima alla. Hann sá í Jötunheima ok sá þar mey fagra, þá er hon gekk frá skála föður síns til skemmu. Þar af fekk hann hugsóttir miklar.

Skírnir hét skósveinn Freys. Njörðr bað hann kveðja Frey máls.

Þá mælti Skaði:

1. 'Ristu nú, Skírnir, ok gakk at beiða  
okkarn mála mög,  
ok þess at fregna: hveim inn fróði sé  
ofreiði afi!'

Skírnir kvað:

2. 'Illra orða er mér ón at ykkrum syni,  
ef ek geng at mæla við mög,  
ok þess at fregna: hveim inn fróði sé  
ofreiði afi.

3. 'Segðu þat, Freyr, fólkvaldi goða,  
ok ek vilja vita:  
hví þú einn sitr endlanga sali,  
minn dróttinn, um daga?'

Freyr kvað:

4. 'Hví um segjak þér, seggr inn ungi,  
mikinn móðtrega?  
Þvíat álfröðull lýsir um alla daga,  
ok þeygi at mínum munum.'

Skírnir kvað:

5. 'Muni þína hykka ek svá mikla vera,  
at þú mér, seggr, né segir;  
þvíat ungir saman várum í árdaga,  
vel mættim tveir trúask.'

Freyr kvað:

6. 'Í Gymis gorrðum ek sá ganga  
mér tíða mey;  
armar lýstu, en af þaðan  
allt lopt ok loqr.

7. 'Mær er mér tíðari en manni hveim  
ungum í árdaga;  
Ása ok álfa, þat vill engi maðr,  
at vit sáttném.'

## Skírnir's Journey

Freyr, son of Njörðr, had sat himself in Hliðskjálf, and he looked through all worlds.<sup>1</sup> He looked into Jötunheimar<sup>2</sup> and saw there a fair maiden as she walked from her father's hall to her bower.<sup>3</sup> From this he received great sicknesses of heart.

Freyr's servant was called Skírnir.<sup>4</sup> Njörðr asked him to get Freyr to talk.

Then Skaði said:<sup>5</sup>

1. 'Arise now, Skírnir, and go urge<sup>6</sup>  
our boy to speak,  
and ask him this: with whom the virile<sup>7</sup> youth  
is so very angry!'

Skírnir said:

2. 'Evil words I expect from your son,  
if I go to speak with the boy,  
and ask him this: with whom the virile youth  
is so very angry.

3. 'Tell me this, Freyr, folk-leader<sup>8</sup> of gods,  
which I want to know:  
why do you sit alone, my lord,  
in the long halls, for days?'

Freyr said:

4. 'Why should I tell you, young man,  
my great mind-distress?  
Because the elf-disc<sup>9</sup> shines through all days,  
and yet not to my delight.'

Skírnir said:

5. 'I don't think your desires are so great,  
man, that you can't tell me;  
for we were young together in early days,<sup>10</sup>  
we two could trust each other well.'

Freyr said:

6. 'In Gymir's courts I saw walking a girl<sup>11</sup>  
for whom I long;  
her arms gleamed, and from them  
all the sky and sea.<sup>12</sup>

7. 'The girl is lovelier to me than  
to any young man in ancient days;  
of Æsir and elves, no one will wish it,  
that we two should be united.'

8. Skírnir kvað:  
 ‘Mar gefðu mér þá, þann er mik um myrkvan beri,  
 vísan vafrloga,  
 ok þat sverð er sjálft vegisk  
 við jötna ætt.’

9. Freyr kvað:  
 ‘Mar ek þér þann gef er þik um myrkvan berr  
 vísan vafrloga,  
 ok þat sverð er sjálft mun vegask,  
 ef sá er horskr er hefir.’

10. Skírnir mælti við hestinn:  
 ‘Myrkt er úti, mál kveð ek okkr fara  
 úrig fjöll yfir,  
 þyrja þjóð yfir;  
 báðir vit komumk, eða okkr báða tekr  
 sá inn ámatki jötunn!’

Skírnir reið í Jötunheima til Gymis garða. Þar váru hundar ólmir, ok bundnir fyrir skíðgarðs hliði, þess er um sal Gerðar var. Hann reið at þar er féhirðir sat á haugi ok kvaddi hann:

11. ‘Segðu þat, hirðir, er þú á haugi sitr  
 ok varðar alla vega:  
 hvé ek at andspilli komumk ins unga mans,  
 fyr greyjum Gymis?’

12. Hirðir kvað:  
 ‘Hvart ertu feigr, eða ertu framgenginn?  
 Andspillis vanr þú skalt æ vera  
 góðrar meyjar Gymis!’

13. Skírnir kvað:  
 ‘Kostir ru betri, heldr en at klökkva sé,  
 hveim er fúss er fara;  
 einu dægri mér var aldr um skapaðr  
 ok allt líf um lagit!’

14. Gerðr kvað:  
 ‘Hvat er þat hlym hlymja er ek heyri nú til  
 ossum rönnum í?  
 Jörð bifask, en allir fyrir  
 skjálfa garðar Gymis!’

Skírnir said:

8. 'Then give me the horse, the one that can bear me through<sup>13</sup> dark,  
discerning<sup>14</sup> flicker-flame,  
and the sword which fights by itself  
against the family of giants.'

Freyr said:

9. 'I give you that horse which will bear you through dark,  
discerning, flicker-flame,  
and the sword which will fight by itself,  
if he who has it is wise.'

Skírnir said to the horse:

10. 'It's dark outside — time, I say, for us to journey  
over moist mountains,<sup>15</sup>  
to gallop over land;<sup>16</sup>  
we shall both achieve our aim, or that almighty giant<sup>17</sup>  
will take us both!'

Skírnir rode into Jötunheimar, to Gymir's courts. There were ferocious hounds, and they were bound in front of the gate in the wooden fence which was around Gerðr's hall. He rode to where a herdsman was sitting on a grave-mound and greeted him:

11. 'Tell [me] this,<sup>18</sup> herdsman, as you sit on a grave-mound  
and watch all ways:  
how can I get to talk with the young girl,  
despite Gymir's dogs?'

The herdsman said:

12. 'Are you doomed, or are you already dead?<sup>19</sup>  
You shall always be wanting to speak with  
with the good maiden of Gymir!'

Skírnir said:

13. 'There are better choices than crying  
for anyone eager to go on;  
on<sup>20</sup> one day a spar<sup>21</sup> was shaped for me<sup>22</sup>  
and all my life laid down!'

Gerðr said:

14. 'What's that din of dins which I hear now  
in our houses?  
The earth's shaking, and with it all  
Gymir's courts are quaking!'

Ambátt kvað:

15. 'Maðr er hér úti, stiginn af mars baki,  
jó lætr til jarðar taka.'

Gerðr kvað:

16. 'Inn biððu hann ganga í okkarn sal  
ok drekka inn mæra mjöð,  
þó ek hitt óumk, at hér úti sé  
minn bróðurbani.

17. 'Hvat er þat álfa né Ása sona  
né víssa Vana?  
Hví þú einn um komt eikinn fúr yfir  
ór salkynni at sjá?'

Skírnir kvað:

18. 'Emkat ek álfa, né Ása sona,  
né víssa Vana,  
þó ek einn um komk eikinn fúr yfir  
yður salkynni at sjá.

19. 'Epli ellifu hér hefi ek, algullin,  
þau mun ek þér, Gerðr, gefa,  
frið at kaupa, at þú þér Frey kveðir  
óleiðastan at lifa!'

Gerðr kvað:

20. 'Epli ellifu ek þigg aldregi  
at mannskis munum,  
né vit Freyr, meðan okkart fjör lifir,  
byggjum bæði saman!'

Skírnir kvað:

21. 'Baug ek þér þá gef, þann er brendr var  
með ungum Óðins syni;  
átta eru jafnhöfgir er af drjúpa  
ina níundu hverja nótt!'

Gerðr kvað:

22. 'Baug ek þikkak, þótt brendr sé  
með ungum Óðins syni;  
era mér gulls vant í görðum Gymis,  
at deila fé fœður!'

- A servant woman said:
15. 'A man is outside here, dismounted from horseback,  
he's letting his steed graze.'<sup>23</sup>
- Gerðr said:
16. 'Ask him to come inside our hall  
and to drink the famous mead,  
although I fear that outside here may be  
my brother's slayer.'<sup>24</sup>
17. 'Who is it of the elves, if you are not of the Æsir's sons,  
nor of the wise Vanir?  
Why have you come alone over oaken fire<sup>25</sup>  
to see our household?'
- Skírnir said:
18. 'I am not of the elves, nor of the Æsir's sons,  
nor of the wise Vanir,<sup>26</sup>  
but I have come alone over oaken fire  
to see your household.
19. 'Eleven apples I have here, all golden,<sup>27</sup>  
these will I give you, Gerðr,  
to buy your affection,<sup>28</sup> so that you may say that Freyr  
is the least loathsome one alive!'
- Gerðr said:
20. 'Eleven apples I will never take,  
for any man's wishes,  
nor, while our life endures, shall Freyr and I  
both dwell together!'<sup>29</sup>
- Skírnir said:
21. 'Then I give you a ring, the one which was burnt  
with Óðinn's young son;<sup>30</sup>  
eight are the equally heavy ones that drip from it  
every ninth night!'<sup>31</sup>
- Gerðr said:
22. 'I refuse the ring, even if it was burnt  
with Óðinn's young son;  
for me there is no want of gold in Gymir's courts,  
to share my father's wealth!'

- Skírnir kvað:
23. 'Sér þú þenna mæki, mæ, mjóvan, málfán,  
er ek hefi í hendi hér?  
Höfuð höggva ek mun þér hálsi af,  
nema þú mér sætt segir!'
- Gerðr kvað:
24. 'Ánauð þola ek vil aldregi  
at mannskis munum;  
þó ek hins get, ef it Gymir finnisk  
vígs ótrauðir, at ykkir vega tíði!'
- Skírnir kvað:
25. 'Sér þú þenna mæki, mæ, mjóvan, málfán,  
er ek hefi í hendi hér?  
Fyr þessum eggjum hnígr sá inn aldni jötunn,  
verðr þinn feigr faðir!'
26. 'Tamsvendi ek þik drep, en ek þik temja mun,  
mæ, at mínum munum;  
þar skaltu ganga er þik gumna synir  
síðan æva sé!'
27. 'Ara þúfu á skaltu ár sitja,  
horfa heimi ór, snugga Heljar til;  
matr sé þér *meirr* leiðr en manna hveim  
inn fráni ormr með firum!'
28. 'At undrsjónum þú verðir er þú út kœmr!  
Á þik Hrímnir hari, á þik hvatvetna stari;  
Víðkunnari þú verðir en vörðr með goðum!  
Gapiðu grindum frá!'
29. 'Tópi ok ópi, tjösull ok ópoli  
vaxi þér tár með trega!  
Seztu niðr, en ek mun segja þér  
sváran sú/breka  
ok tvennan trega!'
30. 'Tamar gneypta þik skulu gerstan dag  
jötna gørdum í;  
til hrímpursa hallar þú skalt hverjan dag  
kranga kosta laus,  
kranga kosta vön;  
grát at gamni skaltu í gøgn hafa  
ok leiða með tárur trega!'

Skírnir said:

23. 'Do you see this sword, girl, slender, sign-coloured,<sup>32</sup>  
which I have here in my hand?  
I shall hew the head from your neck,  
unless you pronounce a pact with me!'

Gerðr said:

24. 'I will never submit to coercion  
for any man's wishes;  
but I think this, that if you and Gymir meet,  
not slow to battle, you will both long to fight!'<sup>33</sup>

Skírnir said:

25. 'Do you see this sword, girl, slender, sign-coloured,  
which I have here in my hand?  
Before these edges that aged giant will sink,  
your father is fated to die!

26. 'With a taming wand I strike you,<sup>34</sup> and I will tame you,  
girl, to my wishes;  
you shall go where the sons of men  
will never see you again!<sup>35</sup>

27. 'On the eagle's hill you shall sit early,<sup>36</sup>  
gaze out from the world,<sup>37</sup> look longingly to Hel;  
may food be more loathsome to you than the shining snake is  
to any man among the living!

28. 'May you be a wondrous sight when you come out!  
May Hrímnir<sup>38</sup> ogle at you, may everyone stare at you!  
May you be more widely known than the watchman among the gods!<sup>39</sup>  
Gape from the gates!<sup>40</sup>

29. 'May idiocy and howling, frustration and unbearable lust  
increase your tears with grief!  
Sit down, and I shall tell you of a  
heavy tormenting desire(?)<sup>41</sup>  
and a twofold grief!

30. 'Evil creatures will oppress you all day  
in the giants' courts;  
to the frost-giants' hall you shall every day  
creep without choice,  
creep in want of choice;  
you shall have sobbing in exchange for pleasure,  
and nurse sorrows with tears!

31. 'Með þursi þríhöfðuðum þú skalt æ nara,  
eða verlaus vera;  
þitt geð grípi,  
þik morn morni;  
ver þú sem þistill, sá er var þrunginn  
í önn ofanverða!
32. 'Til holts ek gekk ok til hrás viðar,  
gambantein at geta,  
gambantein ek gat!
33. 'Reiðr er þér Óðinn, reiðr er þér Ásabragr,  
þik skal Freyr fjásk,  
in fyrinilla mæ, en þú fengit hefir  
gambanreiði goða!
34. 'Heyri jötnar, heyri hrímþursar,  
synir Suttunga, sjálfir Ásliðar,  
hvé ek fyrbýð, hvé ek fyrirbanna  
manna glaum mani,  
manna nyt mani!
35. 'Hrímgrímnir heitir þurs er þik hafa skal  
fyr nágrindr neðan;  
þar þér vílmegir á viðar rótum  
geita hland gefi!  
Æðri drykkju fá þú aldregi,  
mæ, at þínum munum,  
mæ, at mínum munum!
36. 'Þurs ríst ek þér ok þrjá stafi:  
ergi ok æði ok óþola;  
svá ek þat af ríst, sem ek þat á reist,  
ef gørask þarfar þess!'
- Gerðr kvað:*
37. 'Heill verðu nú heldr, sveinn, ok tak við hrímkálki  
fullum forns mjaðar!  
Þó hafða ek þat ætlað, at myndak aldregi  
unna Vaningja vel!'
- Skírnir kvað:*
38. 'Örindi mín vil ek öll vita,  
áðr ek ríða heim heðan,  
nær þú á þingi munt inum þroska  
nenna Njarðar syni.'

31. 'With a three-headed giant you shall always dwell,  
or [else] be manless;  
may lust seize you,  
may longing waste you;  
be like a thistle, the one which was filled to bursting<sup>42</sup>  
at the end of the harvest!
32. 'I went to a forest and to a sappy tree,  
a tribute(?) twig<sup>43</sup> to get,  
a tribute(?) twig I got!
33. 'Óðinn will be angry with you, Ásabragr<sup>44</sup> will be angry with you,  
Freyr shall loathe you,  
abominable girl, and you will have received  
the gods' tribute(?) wrath!<sup>45</sup>
34. 'Hear, giants, hear, frost-giants,  
sons of Suttungi,<sup>46</sup> you Æsir-hosts yourselves,  
how I forbid, how I ban  
happy talk with men from the girl,  
use of men<sup>47</sup> from the girl!
35. 'Hrímgrímnir<sup>48</sup> the giant is called who shall have you  
down below corpse-gates,<sup>49</sup>  
there at the tree's roots<sup>50</sup> vile boys  
will give you goats' piss!  
Better drink you will never get,  
girl, by your wishes,  
girl, by my wishes!
36. 'I carve "giant"<sup>51</sup> for you and three staves:  
"perversion" and "frenzy" and "unbearable lust",<sup>52</sup>  
I will shave it<sup>53</sup> off, just as I carved it on,  
if reasons should arise for this!<sup>54</sup>
- Gerðr said:
37. 'Hail to you rather now, lad, and accept a frost-cup<sup>55</sup>  
full of ancient mead!<sup>56</sup>  
Yet I'd thought that I would never  
love a Vaningi<sup>57</sup> well!
- Skírnir said:
38. 'My whole errand I want to know<sup>58</sup>  
before I ride home from here,  
[I want to know] when you, at a tryst, will submit to  
the mature son of Njǫrðr.'

*Gerðr kvað:*

39.                   ‘Barri heitir, er vit bæði vitum,  
                          lundr lognfara;  
                  en ept nætr nú þar mun Njarðar syni  
                          Gerðr unna gamans.’

Þá reið Skírnir heim. Freyr stóð úti ok kvaddi hann ok spurði tíðinda:

40.                   ‘Segðu mér þat, Skírnir, áðr þú verpir sǫðli af mar  
                          ok þú stígir feti framarr:  
                  hvat þú árnaðir í Jötunheima,  
                          þíns eða míns munar?’

*Skírnir kvað:*

41.                   ‘Barri heitir, er vit báðir vitum,  
                          lundr lognfara;  
                  en ept nætr nú þar mun Njarðar syni  
                          Gerðr unna gamans.’

*Freyr kvað:*

42.                   ‘Lǫng er nótt, langar ru tvær,  
                          hvé um þreyjak þrjár?  
                  Opt mér mánaðr minni þótti  
                          en sjá hálf hýnótt!’

- Gerðr said:
39.                    'It's called Barri,<sup>59</sup> which we both know,  
                          a grove of the calm-weather traveller(?);<sup>60</sup>  
                          and there, after nine nights,<sup>61</sup> Gerðr will give pleasure  
                          to Njörðr's son.'<sup>62</sup>

Then Skírnir rode home. Freyr was standing outside and greeted him and asked for news:

40.                    'Tell me this, Skírnir, before you unsaddle the horse  
                          and take one step further:  
                          what did you achieve in Jötunheimar,  
                          of your wish or mine?'

- Skírnir said:
41.                    'It's called Barri, which we both know,  
                          a grove of the calm-weather traveller(?);  
                          and there, after nine nights, Gerðr will give pleasure  
                          to Njörðr's son.'<sup>63</sup>

- Freyr said:
42.                    'Long is a night, long are two,  
                          how can I last for three?<sup>64</sup>  
                          Often a month has seemed to me shorter  
                          than this [one] half nuptial-night(?)!'<sup>65</sup>

## Textual Apparatus to *För Skírnis*

*För Skírnis*] Rubricated but faded in **R**; **A** *Skírnismál* ‘The Sayings/Lay of Skírnir’

*Freyr*] The first letter is large, half-inset and rubricated, but faded, in **R**

*hafði*] **A** *hafði æinn dag* ‘had one day’; cf. *SnEGylf* (37, p. 31) *þat var einn dag* ‘It happened one day’

Speech directions (e.g., *Skírnir kvað* ‘Skírnir said’) are abbreviated in **R** and **A**, often in the outer margins; some are wholly or partly missing in **R** where the edges of pages have been cut away. Only those wholly or largely absent from *both* texts are italicized in this edition of *FSk*. Some italicized speech directions may never have been present in either text.

1/1 *Rístu*] **A** *Ris þv*

2/2 *ón at ykkrum*] **A** *vón af yðrum*

2/5–6 *hveim ... afi*] **R** abbreviates

3] **R**’s outer margin shows the remains of a (strictly superfluous) speech direction identifying Skírnir as the speaker of this stanza

3/1 *Segðu þat*] **A** *Sæg þv mæð þat*

3/5 *endlanga*] so **A**; **R** *eNlanga*

5/2 *svá mikla*] **A** *mikla sva*

5/6 *tveir*] **A** absent

6/2 *ek sá*] **A** *sa æk*

6/5 *þaðan*] **A** *þæim* ‘them’

6/6 *lǫgr*] **A** *lægir*

7/2 *manni*] so **A**; **R** *maN*

7/3 *ungum*] so **A**; **R** *avngom*

7/6 *sátt*] **A** *samt* ‘together’

8/1–2 *þá, þann er*] **A** *þaþan*

8/2 *um myrkvan*] **A** *of myrkan*

9/2 *um myrkvan*] **A** *of myrkan*

10/4 *þyrja*] **A** *þursa* ‘of giants’

10/5 *komumk*] **A** *komvmz*

10/7 *sá inn*] **A** *hinn*

10 pr. *skíðgarðs*] **R** *skíðgarði*; **A** *skíðgarz*

11/4 *andspilli*] so **A**; **R** *anspilli*

11/5 *komumk*] **A** *komvmz*

12/4 *andspillis*] so **A**; **R** *anspillis*

- 13/2 *heldr en at*] **A** *ænn*
- 14/2 *heyri*] so **A**; **R** *hlymia heyri*
- 14/2 *nú*] **A** absent
- 14/3 *ṛṇnum*] **A** *høllum* 'halls'
- 15/3] *lætr*] **A** *lætr hann*
- 16/4 *óumk*] **A** *ovmz*
- 17] **A** has a (strictly superfluous) speech direction identifying Gerðr as the speaker of this stanza
- 17/1–2 *álfa né Ása*] **A** *asa .æ. alfa*
- 17/3 *víssa*] so **A**; **R** *visa*
- 17/4 *um*] **A** absent
- 17/5 *eikinn fúr yfir*] **A** *æik inn fyrir*
- 17/6 *ór*] **A** *var*
- 18] **A** absent
- 19] A speech direction in **A** identifies the speaker as Skírnir
- 19/3 *mun*] **A** *man*
- 19/6 *at*] **A** absent
- 20/3 *mannskis*] **A** *mannz ænkis*
- 20/4 *Freyr*] so **A**; **R** *Frey*
- 20/5 *okkart*] **A** *oKat*
- 20/6 *byggjum bæði*] **A** *byggvm bæð* 'share a bed'
- 21/6 *hverja*] **R** *hverio*
- 21/4–22/3] **A** absent
- 23/5 *ek mun*] **A** *mvn æk*
- 24/3 *mannskis*] **A** *manz ænskis*
- 24/4 *it*] **A** *þit*
- 25/1–3] Abbreviated in **R** and **A**
- 25/2] **R** omits in abbreviated passage; **A** abbreviates *m*.
- 26/6 *sé*] **A** *sía*
- 27/1–2] **A** *Ar scaltv sitia ara þvfu a*
- 27/3 *heimi ór*] so **R**, with *ór* added in the margin; **A** *ok*
- 27/5 *meirr*] so **A**; **R** absent
- 27/7 *firum*] The text of **A** ends with this word

31/3 *eða*] **R** *ep*

35/9 *at*] **R** *af*

39/4 *en*] **R** *eN* / *eN*

39/5 *Njarðar*] **R** *njarþa*

41/1–6] This stanza is heavily abbreviated in **R**

## Notes to the Translation

- 1 Hliðskjálf is Óðinn's high-seat vantage point (see the start of *Grm.*).
- 2 'Giant Homes', the land of giants. According to *SnEGylf* (37, p. 31), Freyr looked *í norðrætt* 'in a northerly direction'.
- 3 Or perhaps 'to an outhouse', *skemma* denoting some sort of small building. By contrast, *SnEGylf* (37, p. 31) refers to a *mikit hús ok fagrt* 'large and beautiful building'.
- 4 'Cleansing/Shining One'. Skírnir is known only from this poem, the corresponding account in *SnEGylf*, and Óðinn's use of him as a messenger to some dwarves or black-elves in *SnEGylf* (34, p. 28). He may be a hypostasis of Freyr.
- 5 The giantess Skaði is Njörðr's wife. Her name is perhaps related to *Scandinavia*, ON *skaði* 'harm' and OE *sceadu* 'shadow'. It is unclear whether she is Freyr's mother or stepmother here; one tradition says that Njörðr sired Freyr on an unnamed sister. Either way, it appears that her word carries more weight with Skírnir than Njörðr's. She does not feature in the version of the story told in *SnEGylf*.
- 6 The Old Norse line lacks alliteration and is therefore presumably partly corrupt.
- 7 Or 'wise'.
- 8 Or 'host/army-leader'.
- 9 A term for the sun. It could also be a proper noun for the same, as in *Vm.* 47.
- 10 I.e., ancient days.
- 11 She is later identified as *Gerðr* '(She of the) Enclosed Place', daughter of the giant Gymir and, according to *Hdl.* 30 and *SnEGylf* (37, pp. 30–31), of the giantess Aurboða. The prose at the start of *Ls.* identifies *Gymir* as a by-name of the sea-giant Ægir.
- 12 I.e., the sky and sea shone with light from her arms. Some of the wording shows through in *SnEGylf* (37, p. 31): *þá lýsti af höndum hennar bæði í lopt ok á lög* 'then light shone from her arms both in the sky and on the sea'.
- 13 Or 'over'.
- 14 Perhaps because the fire knows whom to allow across. Alternatively, the sense might be 'well-known'.
- 15 Cf. *Hm.* 11.
- 16 A's variant *þursa þjóð yfir* means 'over giants' land' (literally, 'over the people of giants').
- 17 Presumably Gymir, Gerðr's father.
- 18 Literally, 'Say it!'
- 19 A full line may well be missing from this stanza at this point.
- 20 Or 'for'.

- 21 I.e., life-span.
- 22 Cf. *Vsp.* 20.
- 23 Skírnir has apparently negotiated both the flame and the fierce dogs. If there was once a second half to this stanza, it has been lost.
- 24 Gerðr's brother is unnamed but may have been a giant slain by Freyr's sword. Cf. *Ls.* 17 in which the goddess Iðunn, possibly connected with Gerðr through her possession of the gods' youth-restoring apples (see *FSk.* 19), embraces her *bróðurbani* 'brother's slayer'. Alternatively, it has been suggested that *bróðurbani* might here mean no more than 'mortal enemy'.
- 25 I.e., a fire fuelled by oak wood, which produces a strong and lasting flame.
- 26 Unless he is lying, Skírnir is apparently neither elf nor god. His nature is uncertain, but he might be a man; cf. Þórr's human servants Þjálfi and Röskva.
- 27 The number eleven (*ellifu*) may have been chosen simply for its vocalic alliteration but it might be relevant that, according to *Hdl.* 29, eleven *Æsir* are counted after Baldr's death, an event that, judging from *FSk.* 21, predates Skírnir's journey. Emendation of *epli ellifu* 'eleven apples' to *epli ellilyfs* 'apples of old-age-healing' would identify them as the gods' youth-restoring apples, otherwise kept by the goddess Iðunn.
- 28 The sense 'peace' may also be relevant.
- 29 A's variant version means 'nor will Freyr and I share a bed together'.
- 30 Baldr.
- 31 *SnEGylf* (49, p. 47) calls the ring *Draupnir* 'Dripper'. Óðinn placed it on Baldr's pyre, and *honum fylgði síðan sú náttúra at hina níunda hverja nótt drupu af honum átta gullhringar jafnhöfgir* 'it subsequently had the property that every ninth night eight gold rings of equal weight dripped from it'; note also the similar wording in *SnESkáld* (I, 35, p. 42), and Baldr's description as *eigandi ... Draupnis* 'owner ... of Draupnir' in *SnESkáld* (I, 5, p. 17). Later, Hermóðr returned the ring to Óðinn from Hel, at Baldr's request.
- 32 Either having a damascened pattern or being marked with colourful signs or runes. Cf. *Sg.* 4.
- 33 This stanza moves from *ljóðahátt* to *fornyrðislag*.
- 34 Or perhaps 'I will strike you'.
- 35 This stanza begins Skírnir's long curse, which may continue a tradition of early Germanic maledictions and love-magic; a fourteenth-century spell inscribed in runes on a stick found in Bergen, Norway, uses some of the same threats.
- 36 Or 'on the hill of eagles'; it could also be a proper noun (cf. *Arasteinn* in *HH. I* 14, *HH. I* 13 pr.).
- 37 I.e., the world of the living.
- 38 'Rime-Covered One', a giant.
- 39 Heimdallr, who watches for the giants' arrival at Ragnarok.
- 40 Presumably the barred gates that keep Gerðr captive.
- 41 The validity and meaning of the manuscript reading *súsbreka*, here translated 'tormenting desire', are uncertain. Possibly emend to *sútbreka* 'sea of sorrow'.
- 42 I.e., bursting with seeds. Alternatively, translate 'the one that was crushed'. The meaning of the last two lines of this stanza is disputed.

- 43 Possibly the ‘taming wand’ that Skírnir mentioned in st. 26. In chapter 16 of *The Waning Sword*, I venture a solar/lunar interpretation of this obscure twig, the *gamban*- ‘tribute(?)’ (cf. OE *gambe*, *-an* ‘tribute’) arguably being originally the light owed by the moon (possibly represented by Gerðr) to the sun-controlling Freyr/Skírnir. Otherwise, perhaps understand *gambanteinn* as ‘twig worthy of tribute’ or ‘mighty twig’. Cf. *Hrbl.* 20.
- 44 ‘Æsir’s Foremost’, probably Þórr.
- 45 Here perhaps ‘wrath about the (withheld) tribute’, ‘wrath worthy of tribute’ or ‘great wrath’.
- 46 Giants. Suttungi is presumably the giant now better known as Suttungr, who once owned the mead of poetry.
- 47 I.e., sexually.
- 48 ‘Frost-Masked One’. Nothing more is known of this giant.
- 49 Or perhaps ‘Corpse-Gates’.
- 50 Probably the roots of Yggdrasill, the world-tree; cf. *Háv.* 138, *HHv.* 17.
- 51 I.e., the rune *þ*, the Old Norse name for which is *þurs* ‘giant’. The *Old Icelandic Rune-Poem* says ‘*þ* is torment of women’ and the *Norwegian Rune-Poem* that ‘*þ* causes sickness of women’—both probably refer to menstruation or labour.
- 52 Skírnir carves a runic inscription, the precise nature of which is unclear.
- 53 I.e., the inscription.
- 54 If Gerðr capitulates, Skírnir will remove the runes by scraping them off the wood on which they were carved.
- 55 Either a cup made of frosted glass or a cup covered with frost.
- 56 Gerðr’s serving of the mead-cup may amount to a formal offer of marriage.
- 57 ‘Descendent of the Vanir’. In *SnESkald* (I, 75, p. 132) *vaningi* is a poetic term for ‘(castrated) boar’, an animal sacred to Freyr, so a veiled insult is possible.
- 58 I.e., ‘I want to know that my whole errand has been achieved’.
- 59 If *Barri* derives from *barr* ‘pine needle’, it might have phallic connotations. Alternatively, derivation from *barr* ‘barley’ is a possibility. *SnEGylf* (36, p. 31) calls the place *Bar(r)ey* ‘Barley Isle(?)’, which some scholars identify as the Isle of *Barra*, formerly *Barrey*, in the Scottish Hebrides. A meadow called *Beri* ‘Barley Isle(?)’, ‘Pasture Isle(?)’ appears in an English source, the thirteenth-century *Abingdon Chronicle*, as a destination in a ritual, probably derived from pagan fertility-myth, reportedly practised by tenth-century monks of the abbey of Abingdon.
- 60 ON *lognfara*, unattested outside *FSk.*, might mean ‘(of the) calm-weather traveller’ (*logn* ‘calm weather’, ‘lack of wind’ and *-fari* ‘-farer’). It might be a term for Freyr, whose ship *Skíðblaðnir* always got a fair wind. Alternatively, perhaps translate ‘becalmed’.
- 61 Nine appears to have been something of a ‘perfect’ number in Germanic tradition. In Indo-European tradition more generally, a period of ‘nine nights’—essentially a third of a sidereal month—is often one of suffering leading to transformation or fulfillment; cf. e.g. *Háv.* 138.
- 62 The traditional period of chastity after a wedding was three days.
- 63 Skírnir quotes Gerðr’s earlier words to him.
- 64 Cf. *Gg.* 4.

- 65 Gerðr had perhaps scheduled her meeting with Freyr for nine nights after her encounter with Skírnir because she knew how long it would take those two to travel the distances involved. Possibly it would take Skírnir six nights to ride home the challenging way he had come—past flickering flame, across wet mountains and over land—which would leave Freyr three nights to reach Barri. Possibly she also appreciated that her stipulation would impose the traditional three nights of abstinence on Freyr. The ‘half nuptial-night’ that Freyr mentions would be the first of those three, it being ‘half’, which suggests incompleteness, perhaps because his wife (his ‘other half’) was elsewhere. *SnEGylf* (36, p. 31) quotes a variant of this stanza. Cf. *Þrk.* 26, 28.

