



THE POETIC EDDA

A Dual-Language Edition

EDWARD PETTIT



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Back cover image: The god Heimdallr blowing his horn, from a seventeenth-century Icelandic manuscript (AM 738 4to, fol. 35v)

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Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar

Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar (*HHv.*) ‘The Lay of Helgi Hjörvarðsson’ survives on fol. 22r–24r of **R**. It is a patchwork of verse fragments, stitched together with passages of prose, none too smoothly. Its hero resembles Helgi Hundingsbani, protagonist of *HH. I* and *HH. II*, who was named after him and might well be his reincarnation, despite *HHv.*’s placement after *HH. I* in **R**.

The story told in *HHv.* is not referred to elsewhere in surviving literature, but was probably influenced by medieval German bridal-quest narratives. The poem does, however, have clear affinities with *HH. I* and *HH. II*. Notably, for example, the disputation between Atli and Helgi and the giantess Hrímgærðr is an instance of a flyting, a type of verbal duel found in the other Helgi-poems and in *Hrbl.* and *Ls.* This instance attracts attention not just because of its metrical divergence from *HHv.*’s other verses—it uses *ljóðaháttir* and *galdralag*, as opposed to *fornyrðislag*—but also for its conclusion, in which the giantess is petrified by the first rays of the sun, rather as the dwarf Alviðs was overcome in *Alv.* This flyting may have been ‘conceived as a negative variation on [*FSk.*]’,¹ a poem with which it may share the underlying mythic theme of the overcoming of the moon (represented by Hrímgærðr/Gærðr) by the diurnal sun (represented by Helgi, Atli and Freyr/Skírnir).²

HHv. also merits attention for its many colourful mythological details. These include talking birds, a shape-shifted earl, mounted valkyries, a peerless sword, and a troll-woman who uses a snake-bridle to ride a wolf.

Synopsis

Prose: A preface introduces a king called Hjörvarðr, three of his four wives, and their children, only one of whom, a son called Heðinn, appears again in *HHv.*

Hjörvarðr had vowed to marry the most beautiful woman, whom, he heard, was Sigrlinn, daughter of King Sváfnir. Hjörvarðr sent his earl, Atli, to ask for her hand in

1 J. Martínez-Pizarro, ‘Woman-to-Man *Senna*’, in T. Pàroli, ed., *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (Spoleto: Presso la sede del Centro studi, 1990), pp. 339–50 at 346.

2 See also the note on the preceding killing by Helgi of the giant Hati in *HHv.* 11 pr., and the discussion in chapter 13 of E. Pettit, *The Waning Sword: Conversion Imagery and Celestial Myth in ‘Beowulf’* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0190>, which also draws parallels with *Beowulf*.

marriage on his behalf, but Fránmarr, Sigrlinn's foster-father, refused. Atli went home empty-handed.

We then learn that before Atli went to ask for Sigrlinn, he had listened and talked to a bird in a tree.

Verse: The poem begins with the bird expressing surprise that Hjørvarðr's women are deemed beautiful, and directing Atli's attention to Sigrlinn (1). Atli makes a deal with the bird: it can have what it wants from the king's court (with certain exceptions), if it will speak to him further. The bird, which is not heard of again, names its rewards, if Sigrlinn marries the king (2–4).

A brief prose passage then moves the action back to Atli's return from his mission. He reports its failure to Hjørvarðr (5).

Prose: Another prose passage records that Hjørvarðr ordered a second journey to win Sigrlinn, which he undertook along with Atli. They found Sváfnir's land in flames, but, after camping for the night, they crossed a river and came to a house. Upon it was a large bird, which was asleep. Atli shot it to death, and found Sigrlinn inside the house, along with Álǫf, Fránmarr's daughter. Atli took both women with him. The bird, we learn, was Fránmarr in the form of an eagle. He had defended the women against an army—which had presumably set the land alight—using magic.

King Hróðmarr, Sigrlinn's suitor, is then introduced. He had killed Sváfnir, and it was he who had burnt the land.

Hjørvarðr married Sigrlinn, and Atli Álǫf. Hjørvarðr and Sigrlinn had a son, who was unnamed and silent. One day, he was sitting on a burial mound when he saw valkyries riding by.

Verse: The noblest of the valkyries addresses him as 'Helgi' and urges him to speak (6). He asks what she will give him in addition to this name (7). She describes a marvellous sword (8–9).

Prose: A passage then identifies this valkyrie as Sváva, daughter of King Eylimi, and records that she protected Helgi in battles.

Verse: Next, Helgi accuses Hjørvarðr of being unwise to allow fire to burn the homes of people who had done him no harm (10). Hróðmarr, he prophesies, will rule their riches, their whole family having passed away (11).

Prose: Another prose passage records that Hjørvarðr said he would help Helgi, if he would avenge Sváfnir. Having fetched the marvellous sword, Helgi did so by killing Hróðmarr with Atli's assistance. They also killed a giant called Hati.

Verse: Hríngerðr, Hati's daughter, and Atli, who was on watch, then exchange words of introduction (12–17), before trading accusations and boasts of a sexual nature (18–23). Hríngerðr asks Helgi to sleep with her for one night in compensation for her father (24), to which Helgi replies that a shaggy giant would be more suitable for her (25). Hríngerðr responds that Helgi would rather have the maiden who protected his men from her (26). Helgi asks to hear more about this maiden, in exchange for giving Hríngerðr compensation (27), and Hríngerðr describes her and her fellow valkyries

(28). Triumphantly, Helgi tells Hríngerðr to look to the east—her conversation with him and Atli has kept her above ground until the rising of the sun, whose rays (we understand) turn her to stone (29–30).

Prose: Another prose passage describes how Helgi was betrothed to Sváva, a valkyrie (evidently the maiden whom Hríngerðr had described). Helgi went off raiding, but his brother, Heðinn, stayed at home in Norway. On Yule Eve, Heðinn encountered a troll-woman, whose company he refused. She cursed him and that evening Heðinn swore to have Sváva, Helgi's beloved. Heðinn regretted this bitterly, however, and went south along wild paths until he met his brother.

Verse: Helgi asks Heðinn why he has been driven from the land alone and come to find him (31). Heðinn explains (32), and Helgi tells him not to reproach himself as he does not expect to survive an imminent duel (33). Heðinn urges him to kill his enemies (34).

Prose: Another prose passage explains that Helgi thought his fetches had visited Heðinn when he saw the troll-woman (an event that would signal Helgi's end). It adds that Helgi's foe, Álfr, son of Hróðmarr, had prepared the duelling-ground.

Verse: Helgi declares in a single stanza that the troll-woman knew Helgi would be killed (35).

Prose: A single line records the fight and that Helgi received a mortal wound.

Verse: Helgi then sends a man called Sigarr to bring to him Sváva (36–37), who asks what has become of him (38). Sigarr relates Helgi's fall and Álfr's victory (39). Helgi then greets Sváva (40) and tells her to prepare to love Heðinn (41). She protests that she had declared she would never love another (42). Heðinn commands her to kiss him and sets out to avenge Helgi (43).

Prose: A final line records the belief that Helgi and Sváva were born again.

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Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar

Frá Hjörvarði ok Sigrlinn

Hjörvarðr hét konungr. Hann átti fjórar konur. Ein hét Álfhildr; sonr þeira hét Heðinn. Önnur hét Særeidr; þeira sonr hét Humlungr. In þriðja hét Sinrjóð; þeira sonr hét Hymlingr.

Hjörvarðr konungr hafði þess heit strengt, at eiga þá konu er hann vissi vænsta. Hann spurði at Sváfnir konungr átti dóttur allra fegrsta; sú hét Sigrlinn. Iðmundr hét jarl hans. Atli var hans sonr, er fór at biðja Sigrlinnar til handa konungi. Hann dvalðisk vetrlangt með Sváfni konungi.

Fránmarr hét þar jarl, fóstri Sigrlinnar; dóttir hans hét Álf. Jarlinn réð at meylar var synjat, ok fór Atli heim.

Atli, jarls sonr, stóð einn dag við lund nøkkorn, en fugl sat í limunum uppi yfir honum ok hafði heyrtil, at hans menn kólluðu vænstar konur þær er Hjörvarðr konungr átti. Fuglinn kvakaði, en Atli hlýddi hvat hann sagði.

Hann kvað:

1. 'Sáttu Sigrlinn, Sváfnis dóttur,
meyna fegrstu í Munarheimi?
Þó hagligar Hjörvarðs konur
gumnum þikkja at Glasislundi!'

Atli kvað:

2. 'Mundu við Atla, Iðmundar son,
fugl fróðhugaðr, fleira mæla?'

Fuglinn kvað:

'Mun ek, ef mik buðlungr blóta vildi,
ok kýs ek, þats ek vil, ór konungs garði!'

Atli kvað:

3. 'Kjósattu Hjörvarð né hans sonu,
né inar fǫgru fylkis brúðir,
eigi brúðir, þær er buðlungr á!
Kaupum vel saman! Þat er vina kynni!'

Fuglinn kvað:

4. 'Hof mun ek kjósa, hǫrga marga,
gullhyrndar kýr frá grams búi,
ef honum Sigrlinn sefr á armi
ok ónauðig jǫfri fylgir.'

Þetta var áðr Atli færi. En er hann kom heim ok konungr spurði hann tíðinda, hann kvað:

The Lay of Helgi Hjörvarðsson

About Hjörvarðr and Sigrlinn

There was a king called Hjörvarðr.¹ He had four wives. One was called Álfhildr;² their son was called Heðinn.³ The second was called Særeidr;⁴ their son was called Humlungr.⁵ The third was called Sinrjóð;⁶ their son was called Hymlingr.⁷

King Hjörvarðr had vowed this solemnly, that he would possess the woman whom he knew to be the most beautiful.⁸ He learnt that King Sváfnir⁹ had the fairest daughter of all; she was called Sigrlinn.¹⁰ His¹¹ earl was called Iðmundr.¹² Atli¹³ was his son, who went to ask for Sigrlinn on the king's behalf. He stayed the whole winter with King Sváfnir.

There was an earl there called Fránmarr,¹⁴ Sigrlinn's foster-father; his daughter was called Álof.¹⁵ The earl decided that he was to be denied the maiden, and Atli went home.

Atli, the earl's son, stood one day in a certain grove, and a bird sat in the branches up above him and it had heard that his men called the women whom King Hjörvarðr had the most beautiful. The bird chirped, and Atli listened to what it said.

It said:

1. 'Have you seen Sigrlinn, Sváfnir's daughter,
the fairest of maidens in Munarheimr?¹⁶
Yet Hjörvarðr's wives
seem suitable to men in Glasislundr!¹⁷

Atli said:

2. 'Would you speak further, wise-spirited bird
to Atli, Iðmundr's son?'

The bird said:

'I will, if Buðli's descendant¹⁸ would offer me sacrifice,
and I can choose that which I want from the king's court!'

Atli said:

3. 'Choose neither Hjörvarðr nor his sons,
nor the marshal's¹⁹ fair brides,
not the brides, those which Buðli's descendant²⁰ has!
Let's make a fine bargain together! That's the mark of friends!'

The bird said:

4. 'I'll choose temples, many outdoor sanctuaries,²¹
golden-horned cows from the king's farmstead,
if Sigrlinn sleeps in his arms
and accompanies the boar²² without compulsion.'

This was before Atli set out. And when he came back and the king asked him for tidings, he said:

5. 'We have hardship and on no account our errand;
our horses became exhausted on a mighty mountain,
then we had to wade the Sæmorn;²³
then Sváfnir's daughter, endowed with rings,
was denied us, whom we wanted to have.'

The king ordered that they should go a second time. He himself went. And when they came up onto a mountain, and they²⁴ saw in Svávaland²⁵ burning land and great 'horse-smokes',²⁶ the king rode from the mountain forward into the land and made camp for the night by a river. Atli kept watch and went over the river. He found a house. A great bird was sitting on the house and kept watch and had fallen asleep. Atli shot the bird to death with a spear, and in the house he found Sigrlinn, the king's daughter, and Álǫf, the earl's daughter, and he took them both away with him. Earl Fránmarr had changed himself into the form of an eagle and defended the women against the army with magic.²⁷

There was a king called Hróðmarr,²⁸ Sigrlinn's suitor. He slew the king of Svávaland²⁹ and had pillaged and burnt the land.

King Hjörvarðr married Sigrlinn, and Atli Álǫf. Hjörvarðr and Sigrlinn had a son mighty and handsome.³⁰ He was silent. No name stuck to him. He sat on a burial mound. He saw nine valkyries riding, and one was the noblest.³¹ She said:

6. 'You'll be late, Helgi, to rule rings,
mighty strife-apple-tree,³² or Rǫðulsvellir³³ —
an eagle screamed early³⁴ — if you always keep silent,
even if, king, you prove your hard heart!'
7. 'What will you let accompany the name "Helgi",
bright-faced bride, since you have the authority to offer?
Think well before all decisions!
I won't accept it, unless I have you!'
8. 'I know of swords lying in Sigarshólmr,³⁵
four fewer than fifty;
one of them is better than all [others],
the bale of battle-brooches(?),³⁶ and adorned with gold.
9. 'A ring is in the hilt, courage is in the middle,
terror is in the point,³⁷ for the one who gets to possess it;
along the edge lies a blood-stained snake,
and on the slaughter-cord(?)³⁸ an adder lashes its tail!'

There was a king called Eylimi. His daughter was Sváva.³⁹ She was a valkyrie and rode air and sea. She gave Helgi this name and protected him often thereafter in battles.

Helgi said:

10. 'You're not, Hjörvarðr, a king of sound counsel,
army's point-wise one,⁴⁰ even if you are famous;
you let fire consume the settlements of boars,⁴¹
but they had done no harm to you.⁴²

11. 'En Hróðmarr skal hringum ráða,
þeim er áttu órir niðjar;
sá sésk fylkir fæst at lífi,
hyggsk aldauðra arfi at ráða!'

Hjörvarðr svaraði at hann myndi fá lið Helga, ef hann vill hefna móðurföður síns. Þá sótti Helgi sverðit er Sváva vísaði honum til. Þá fór hann, ok Atli, ok feldu Hróðmar ok unnu mǫrg þrekvirki. Hann drap Hata jötun, er hann sat á bergi nökkoru. Helgi ok Atli lágu skipum í Hatafirði. Atli helt vörð inn fyrra hlut nætrinnar.

12. Hrímgæðr, Hata dóttir, kvað:
'Hverir ru hǫðar í Hatafirði?
Skjöldum er tjaldat á skipum yðrum;
frœknliga látið, fátt hygg ek yðr sjásk!
Kennið mér nafn konungs!'

- Atli kvað:
13. 'Helgi hann heitir, en þú hvergi mátt
vinna grand grami!
Járnborgir ru um ǫðlings flota —
knegut oss fálur fara!'

14. 'Hvé þik heitir', kvað Hrímgæðr, 'halr inn ámátki?
Hvé þik kalla konir?
Fylkir þér trúir, er þik í fǫgrum lætr
beits stafni búa!'

15. 'Atli ek heiti, atall skal ek þér vera —
mjök em ek gífrum gramastr!
Úrgan stafn ek hefi opt búit
ok kvalðar kveldriður!'

16. 'Hvé þú heitir, hála nágráðug?
Nefndu þinn, fála, fǫður!
Níu rǫstum er þú skyldir neðarr vera,
ok vaxi þér á baðmi barr!'

17. 'Hrímgæðr ek heiti, Hati hét minn faðir,
þann vissa ek ámátkastan jötun;
margar brúðir hann lét frá búi teknar,
unz hann Helgi hjó.'

18. 'Þú vart, hála, fyr hildings skipum
ok látt í fjarðar mynni fyrir;
ræsis rekka er þú vildir Rán gefa,
ef þér kæmit í þverst þvari!'

11. ‘And Hróðmarr shall rule rings,
 those which our kinsmen owned;
 that prince has least regard for his life,
 he intends to govern the inheritance of an entirely dead [family]!’

Hjörvarðr replied that he would get Helgi help, if he is willing to avenge his maternal grandfather.⁴³ Then Helgi fetched the sword which Sváva directed him to. Then he went, and Atli [with him], and they felled Hróðmarr and performed many mighty deeds. He slew the giant Hati,⁴⁴ when he was sitting on a certain rock. Helgi and Atli moored their ships in Hatafjörðr.⁴⁵ Atli kept watch for the first part of the night.

12. Hrímgerðr,⁴⁶ Hati’s daughter, said:⁴⁷
 ‘Who are [these] heroes in Hatafjörðr?
 Your ships are hung with shields;
 you’re acting boldly, I suspect you’re not anxious about yourselves!
 Make known to me the king’s name!’

- Atli said:
13. ‘He’s called Helgi, and you can never
 cause harm to the king!⁴⁸
 “Iron-strongholds”⁴⁹ are around the nobleman’s ships —
 troll-women cannot destroy us!’

14. ‘What are you named,’ said Hrímgerðr, ‘hugely mighty hero?
 What do men call you?
 Your marshal trusts you, when he lets you
 stand⁵⁰ in the boat’s fair stem!’

15. ‘I’m called Atli, I shall be atrocious⁵¹ to you —
 I’m much the grimmest to giantesses!
 I’ve often stood in the damp stem
 and abused⁵² evening-riders!⁵³

16. ‘What are you called, corpse-greedy witch?
 Name your father, troll-woman!
 It’s further down⁵⁴ by nine leagues you should be,
 and may fir-trees⁵⁵ grow on your trunk!’⁵⁶

17. ‘I’m called Hrímgerðr, my father was called Hati,
 whom I knew to be the most immensely mighty giant;
 he had many brides taken from their dwelling,
 until Helgi hewed him down.’

18. ‘You, witch, were in front of the warlord’s ships
 and lay in wait in the fjord’s mouth;
 you wanted to give the prince’s warriors to Rán,⁵⁷
 if a sharp point didn’t pierce your whale-flesh!’⁵⁸

19. 'Duliðr ertu nú, Atli, draums kveð ek þér vera;
síga lætr þú brýnn fyr brár;
móðir mín lá fyr mildings skipum —
ek drekþa Hlōðvarðs sonum í hafi!
20. 'Gneggja myndir þú, Atli, ef þú geldr né værir —
brettir sinn Hríngerðr hala!
Aptarla hjarta hygg ek at þitt, Atli, sé,
þótt þú hafir hreina rödd!
21. 'Hreini mun þér ek þikkja, ef þú reyna knátt
ok stíga ek á land af legi!
Öll muntu lemjask, ef mér er alhugat,
ok sveigja þinn hala, Hríngerðr!
22. 'Atli, gakk þú á land, ef afli treystisk,
ok hittumk í vík Varins!
Rifja rétti er þú munt, rekk, fá,
ef þú mér í krymmur kœmr!
23. 'Munka ek ganga, áðr gumnar vakna
ok halda of vísa vörð;
era mér ørvænt, nær óru kœmr
skass upp undir skipi.'
24. 'Vaki þú, Helgi, ok bæti við Hríngerði,
er þú lézt hoggvinn Hata!
Eina nótt kná hon hjá jöfri sofa,
þá hefir hon þolva bætr!
25. 'Loðinn heitir, er þik skal eiga — leið ertu mannkyni!
Sá býr í Þolleyju þurs,
hundvísst jötunn, hraunbúa verstr;
sá er þér makligr maðr!
26. 'Hina vildu heldr, Helgi, er réð hafnir skoða
fyrrí nótt með firum;
margullin mæ'r mér þótti afli bera;
hér sté hon land af legi
ok festi svá yðarn flota;
hon ein því veldr, er ek eigi mák
buðlungs mǫnnum bana.'
27. 'Heyrðu nú, Hríngerðr, ef ek bæti harma þér,
segðu gørr grami:
var sú ein vætr, er barg øðlings skipum,
eða fóru þær fleiri saman?'

19. ‘You’re deluded now, Atli, I say you’re dreaming;
 you’re letting your eyebrows sink over your lashes,⁵⁹
my mother lay in wait for the munificent man’s ships —
 I drowned Hlōðvarðr’s⁶⁰ sons in the sea!
20. ‘You’d neigh, Atli, if you weren’t gelded —
 Hrímgerðr’s raising her tail!⁶¹
 I think your heart’s farther back,⁶² Atli,
 even if you have the voice of a reindeer-stag!’
21. ‘I’ll seem a reindeer-stag to you, if you could try [me]
 and [if] I stepped onto land from the sea!
 You’ll be all battered, if I put all my heart into it,
 and lower your tail, Hrímgerðr!’
22. ‘Atli, come ashore, if you trust your strength,
 and let’s meet in Varinn’s bay!
 It’s a rightening⁶³ of the ribs you’ll receive, warrior,
 if you come into my clutches!’
23. ‘I won’t come until the men awake
 and keep watch for the prince;
 it would be no surprise to me should a witch
 come up beneath our ship.’
24. ‘Awake, Helgi, and pay compensation to Hrímgerðr,
 since you had Hati hacked!⁶⁴
 If for a single night she can sleep beside the boar,⁶⁵
 then she’ll have compensation for her sorrows!’
- 25.⁶⁶ ‘He’s called Loðinn,⁶⁷ [the one] who shall have
 you — you’re loathsome to mankind!
 That giant lives on Þolley,⁶⁸
 an extremely wise ogre, the worst of lava-dwellers;
 he’s an appropriate man for you!’
26. ‘You’d rather have that one, Helgi, who spied out havens
 the other night among men;
 the sea-golden⁶⁹ maiden seemed to me to have strength;
 here she stepped ashore from the sea
 and fastened⁷⁰ your fleet thus;
 she alone brings it about that I cannot
 slay the men of Buðli’s descendant.’
27. ‘Hear now, Hrímgerðr, if I compensate you for your sorrows,
 speak to the warrior⁷¹ more fully:
 was she a lone creature who protected the prince’s ships,
 or did more of them journey together?’

28. 'Prennar níundir meyja, þó reið ein fyrir,
hvít und hjálmi mær;
marir hristusk, stóð af mǫnom þeira
dogg í djúpa dali,
hagl í háva viðu;
þaðan kœmr með ǫldom ár;
allt var mér þat leitt er ek leitk!'
29. 'Austr líttu nú, Hrímgærðr, er þik lostna hefr
Helgi helstǫfum!
Á landi ok á vatni borgit er lofðungs flota
ok siklings mǫnnum it sama!'
30. 'Dagr er nú, Hrímgærðr, en þik dvalða hefir
Atli til aldraga!
Hafnar mark þykkir hlœgligt vera,
þars þú í steins líki stendr!'

Helgi konungr var allmikill hermaðr. Hann kom til Eylima konungs ok bað Svávu, dóttur hans. Þau Helgi ok Sváva veittusk várar ok unnusk furðu mikit. Sváva var heima með feðr sínum, en Helgi í hernaði. Var Sváva valkyrja enn sem fyrr. Heðinn var heima með föður sínum, Hjörvarði konungi, í Nóregi.

Heðinn fór einn saman heim ór skógi jólaaptan ok fann trollkonu. Sú reið vargi ok hafði orma at taumum, ok bauð fylgð sína Heðni. 'Nei!', sagði hann. Hon sagði: 'Þess skaltu gjalda at bragarfulli!' Um kveldit óru heitstrengingar. Var fram leiddr sonargoltr. Lögðu menn þar á hendr sínar, ok strengðu menn þá heit at bragarfulli. Heðinn strengði heit til Svávu, Eylima dóttur, unnustu Helga, bróður síns, ok iðraðisk svá mjök at hann gekk á braut villistígu suðr á lǫnd ok fann Helga, bróður sinn.

Helgi kvað:

31. 'Komðu heill, Heðinn! Hvat kantu segja
nýra spjalla ór Nóregi?
Hví er þér, stillir, stækkt ór landi
ok ert einn kominn oss at finna?'
32. 'Mik hefir myklu glæpr meiri sóttan:
ek hefi kærna ina konungbornu,
brúði þína, at bragarfulli!'
33. 'Sakask eigi þú! Sǫnn munu verða
ǫlmál, Heðinn, okkur beggja:
mér hefir stillir stefnt til eyrar,
þriggja náttu skylak þar koma;
if er mér á því, at ek aptr koma;
þá má at góðu gørask slíkt, ef skal!'

28. ‘Thrice nine maidens, yet one rode in front,
 a maiden white under helm;
the horses shook themselves, from their manes came
 dew in deep dales,
 hail in high woods;
thence comes a good harvest among men;
 all that I saw was hateful to me!’
- 29.⁷² ‘Look east now, Hrímgæðr, since Helgi
 has struck you with Hel-staves!⁷³
On land and on water the prince’s fleet is protected
 and the leader’s men likewise!’
30. ‘It’s day now, Hrímgæðr, and Atli has delayed you
 to your life’s end!
A laughable harbour’s [land]mark you’ll seem to be,
 there where you stand in the likeness of a stone!’

King Helgi was an almighty warrior. He came to King Eylimi and asked for Sváva, his daughter. Helgi and Sváva exchanged vows and loved each other very much. Sváva stayed at home with her father, but Helgi went raiding. Sváva was still a valkyrie, as before. Heðinn was at home with his father, King Hjörvarðr, in Nóregr.⁷⁴

Heðinn went home alone from a wood on Yule Eve and met a troll-woman. She rode a wolf and had snakes on the bridle, and she offered Heðinn her company. ‘No!’, he said. She said: ‘You shall pay for this at the oath-cup!’⁷⁵ During the evening they swore oaths. A sacrificial boar⁷⁶ was brought forward. Men laid their hands on it there, and men then made solemn vows at the oath-cup. Heðinn made a solemn vow to [have] Sváva, Eylimi’s daughter, beloved of Helgi, his brother, and he regretted it so much that he went away on wild paths south in the land and met Helgi, his brother.

- Helgi said:
31. ‘Welcome, Heðinn! What new tidings can you
 tell of from Nóregr?
Why, prince, have you been driven from the land
 and come alone to find us?’
32. ‘A much greater misdeed has befallen me:
 I have chosen the king-born one,
 your bride, at the oath-cup!’
33. ‘Don’t blame yourself! The ale-talk of us both
 will come true, Heðinn:
 a prince has summoned me to an island,⁷⁷
 in three nights I must come there;
 I doubt that I shall come back;
such [an outcome] may then turn out for the good, if it must be!’

34. ‘Sagðir þú, Helgi, at Heðinn væri
góðs verðr frá þér ok gjafa stórra;
þér er sœmra sverð at rjóða
en frið gefa fjándum þínum.’

Þat kvað Helgi þvíat hann grunaði um feigð sína ok þat at fylgjur hans höfðu vitjat Heðins, þá er hann sá konuna ríða varginum.

Álfr hét konungr, sonr Hróðmars, er Helga hafði völlum haslaðan á Sigarsvelli á þriggja náttu fresti.

Þá kvað Helgi:

35. ‘Reið á vargi er rekkvit var,
fljóð eitt er hann fylgju beiddi;
hon vissi þat at veginn myndi
Sigrlinnar sonr á Sigarsvöllum.’

Þar var orrosta mikil, ok fekk þar Helgi banasár.

36. Sendi Helgi Sigar at ríða
eptir Eylima eingadóttur;
biðr brálliga búna verða,
ef hon vill finna fylki kvikvan.
37. ‘Mik hefir Helgi hingat sendan,
við þik, Sváva, sjálfa at mæla;
þik kvazk hilmir hitta vilja,
áðr ítrborinn öndu týndi.’
38. ‘Hvat varð Helga, Hjörvarðs syni?
Mér er harðliga harma leitat!
Ef hann sær um lék eða sverð um beit,
þeim skal ek gumna grand um vinna!’
39. ‘Fell hér í morgun at Frekasteini,
buðlungr, sá er var baztr und sólu;
Álfr mun sigri öllum ráða,
þótt þetta sinn þorfgi væri.’
40. ‘Heil verðu, Sváva! Hug skaltu deila,
sjá mun í heimi hinztr fundr vera;
tjá buðlungi blœða undir —
mér hefir hjör komit hjarta it næsta.
41. ‘Bið ek þik, Sváva — brúðr, grátattu! —
ef þú vill mínu máli hlýða,
at þú Heðni hvílu gœrvir
ok jöfur ungan ástum leiðir.’

- 34.⁷⁸ 'You said, Helgi, that Heðinn was
worthy of good from you and great gifts;
it's more seemly for you to redden your sword
than to give peace to your opponents.'

Helgi said that because he suspected his doom and that his fetches had visited Heðinn when he saw the woman riding the wolf.⁷⁹

There was a king called Álfr, son of Hróðmarr, who, for Helgi, had marked a field with hazel poles⁸⁰ [for a duel] on Sigarsvellir⁸¹ before three nights had passed.

- Then Helgi said:
35. 'She rode on a wolf when it had grown dark,
a woman who offered him⁸² escort;
she knew that Sigrlinn's son⁸³
would be slain at Sigarsvellir.'

There was a great fight, and Helgi received a mortal wound there.

36. Helgi sent Sigarr⁸⁴ riding
after Eylimi's only daughter;⁸⁵
he bids her get ready swiftly,
if she wishes to find the marshal⁸⁶ alive.

37. 'Helgi has sent me here,
to speak with you yourself, Sváva;
the ruler said he wants to meet you,
before the nobly born one's⁸⁷ breath fails.⁸⁸

38. 'What has become of Helgi, Hjörvarðr's son?
Harshly it is that sorrows have sought me!
If sea deceived him or sword bit him,
I shall do harm to that one among men!⁸⁹

39. 'He fell here⁹⁰ this morning at Frekasteinn,⁹¹
Buðli's descendant, the man who was best under the sun;
Álfr will achieve victory over all,
although this time ought not to be.⁹²

- 40.⁹³ 'Hail, Sváva! You must share your heart,⁹⁴
this will be our last meeting in the world;
blood begins to flow under Buðli's descendant —
a sword has come very near to my heart.

41. 'I bid you, Sváva — don't weep, bride! —
if you will hear my words,
that you prepare a bed for Heðinn
and turn your love towards the young boar.⁹⁵

42. 'Mælt hafða ek þat í Munarheimi,
þá er mér Helgi hringa valði:
myndiga ek lostig at liðinn fylki
jöfur ókunnan armi verja.'
43. 'Kystu mik, Sváva! Kem ek eigi áðr
Rógheims á vit né Røðulsfjalla,
áðr ek hefnt hefik Hjörvarðs sonar,
þess er buðlungr var beztr und sólu!'

Helgi ok Sváva er sagt at væri endrborin.

42.⁹⁶ 'I had said this in Munarheimr,⁹⁷
when Helgi gave me rings:
I would not willingly, after the marshal had passed away,
put my arms around an unknown boar.'⁹⁸

43.⁹⁹ 'Kiss me, Sváva! I shall not come
to visit Rógheimr¹⁰⁰ or Røðulsfjöll,¹⁰¹
before I have avenged Hjörvarðr's son,
the descendant of Buðli who was best under the sun!'

It is said that Helgi and Sváva were born again.¹⁰²

Textual Apparatus to *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*

Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar] This title is not in **R**; it is supplied editorially

Frá Hjörvarði ok Sigrlinn] A rubricated heading, but illegible in the photograph in the facsimile volume of **R**; this reading is therefore taken from the transcription therein

Hjörvarðr] The first letter is large, inset, rubricated but faded in **R**

Atli] **R** *iarliN*

hlýddi] **R** *lyddi*

Hann kvað] **R** also has *F. kv.* (short for *Fuglinn kvað* ‘The bird said’) in the margin

2 *Atli kvað*] Abbreviated *A. kv.* in margin of **R**

2 *Fuglinn kvað*] Abbreviated *F. kv.* in margin of **R**

3 *Atli kvað*] Abbreviated *A. kv.* in margin of **R**

3/1 *Hjörvarð*] **R** *hiorvaþr*

4 *Fuglinn kvað*] Abbreviated *F. kv.* in margin of **R**

5/1 *erfiði*] **R** *erfi*

5 pr. *hafði*] **R** *hafi*

11 pr. *hann*] **R** *ho(n)* ‘she’

11 pr. *hlut*] **R** *lvt*

21/1 *Hreini*] **R** *remi*

29/5 *lofðungs*] **R** *auþlings* (the emendation provides alliteration)

33/6 *stefnt*] **R** *steyct*

36/6 *búna*] **R** *bvnir*

38/1 *Hvat varð*] **R** *Hvarþ*

41/4 *hlýða*] **R** *lyða*

42/5 *lostig*] **R** *lostic*

43/7 *var*] **R** absent

Notes to the Translation

- 1 A Norwegian king. His name means ‘Sword Guardian’.
- 2 ‘Elf Battle’.
- 3 ‘Hairy One’ or ‘Fur/Skin Jacket’.
- 4 Possibly ‘Sea Rider’.
- 5 ‘Humli’s Descendant’, Humli probably being a Hunnish king.
- 6 Perhaps ‘Cinder Red’.
- 7 Again, ‘Humli’s Descendant’.

- 8 Or 'most promising'.
- 9 Probably of Svávaland (see the *HHv.* 5 pr.), which might originally have been the home of the Suevi tribe.
- 10 'Victory Linden'.
- 11 Hjörvarðr's.
- 12 'Work/Deed Hand'.
- 13 'Terrible'.
- 14 'Sparking Famous One' or 'Shining Horse/Sea'.
- 15 A female equivalent of the male Óláfr.
- 16 'Love's Home/World' or 'Delight's World'. The word might also be interpretable as a common noun meaning 'beloved land'.
- 17 'Glásir's Grove'. *SnESkáld* (I, 34, p. 41) records that a golden-leaved tree called *Glásir* 'Gleaming One' stands before Valhöll.
- 18 Atli.
- 19 Hjörvarðr's.
- 20 Hjörvarðr.
- 21 The precise meaning of ON *hǫrgr* is uncertain.
- 22 When not denoting an actual boar, *þofurr* is, as here, a common metaphor for 'warrior' or 'prince', here Helgi.
- 23 Or *Sæmǫrn*, a river. *Sæ-* means 'Sea'; *Morn/mǫrn* is an attested term for a river.
- 24 Or 'he'.
- 25 The land of the Suevi, an early Germanic group; now Swabia.
- 26 Clouds of dust created by galloping horses.
- 27 Fránmarr was presumably the bird which Atli killed.
- 28 'Fame Glorious One' or 'Fame Horse/Sea'.
- 29 Sváfnir.
- 30 Or 'promising'.
- 31 We learn later that her name is Sváva.
- 32 I.e., warrior.
- 33 'Halo/Sun's Fields' or 'Crest's Fields'.
- 34 An auspicious sign for a warrior; cf. *HH.* I 1.
- 35 'Sigarr's Island'.
- 36 Probably shields. Alternatively, 'battle-fastenings' (i.e., armour) or 'battle-needles' (i.e., swords).
- 37 If not purely conceptual, the references to courage and terror might refer to magical inscriptions in runes or other signs.
- 38 Perhaps the hilt-binding.
- 39 'Swabian (woman)'.
- 40 An honorific for a leader skilled with the points of weapons.
- 41 Warriors, princes.

- 42 Helgi reproaches his father for not avenging the burning of Sváfnir's land by Hróðmarr.
- 43 Sváfnir.
- 44 'Hater'; cf. Hati, the sun-hunting wolf of *Grm.* 39; they are not necessarily distinct characters.
- 45 'Hati's Fjord'.
- 46 'Frost Gerðr', a giantess. Cf. Gerðr in *Fsk.*
- 47 The following flyting between Hrímgæðr and Atli is sometimes known as *Hrímgæðarmál* 'Hrímgæðr's Sayings'.
- 48 Helgi.
- 49 Presumably some form of armour-plating; perhaps shields with metal rims and bosses.
- 50 Literally 'lodge', 'inhabit'.
- 51 Atli puns on his name.
- 52 This might mean simply 'killed'.
- 53 Witches or troll-women.
- 54 I.e., underground.
- 55 Or 'a fir-tree'.
- 56 The Norse text contains a pun, as *baðmr* 'breast'—here translated 'trunk'—also means 'tree'. Cf. *Fsk.* 35.
- 57 I.e., to drown them. *Rán* 'Plunder' was the wife of the sea-giant *Ægir*.
- 58 Hrímgæðr is apparently described unflatteringly as a whale; some other Northern giantesses (such as Grendel's mother in *Beowulf*) are also identified or closely associated with whales or other monstrous sea-creatures. Alternatively, the sense might be 'if a sharp point did not entirely thwart you.'
- 59 An idiomatic description of a scowl or drowsiness, or both.
- 60 'Famous Guardian' or 'Troop Guardian'.
- 61 Hrímgæðr apparently likens herself to a mare, or another tailed animal, and reveals herself in a sexual provocation.
- 62 I.e., in your arse.
- 63 I.e., straightening and breaking.
- 64 Or simply 'since you hacked Hati'.
- 65 I.e., Helgi. In this stanza Hrímgæðr speaks of herself in the third person.
- 66 This stanza is probably spoken by Helgi.
- 67 'Shaggy'.
- 68 'Fir-Tree Island'.
- 69 Sunshine can make the sea shine like gold, and in Old Norse poetry gold is often said to reside in the sea. Emendation of *margullin* 'sea-golden' to *marggullin* 'much golden' (i.e., 'greatly adorned with gold') therefore seems unnecessary.
- 70 I.e., tethered.
- 71 Helgi refers to himself in the third person.
- 72 It is not entirely clear who is speaking here, but perhaps Atli recites this stanza and Helgi the next.

- 73 Or 'deadly staves'. The rays of the dawning sun are imagined as deadly staves that turn Hríngerðr to stone. At the same time, the 'staves' are metaphorical runic letters, the words with which Helgi has delayed the giantess until sunrise; cf. *Alv.* 35, *Hdl.* 49(?). There might also be a link between these staves and the peerless sword which Helgi took from Sigarshólmr; it bore representations of snakes, creatures traditionally likened to staffs, and, as an unmatched weapon, it was potentially solar and rune-inscribed.
- 74 Norway.
- 75 A cup which was drunk from when oaths were sworn at a feast.
- 76 An actual boar.
- 77 I.e., for a duel. Helgi's opponent is named shortly as Álfr, son of Hróðmarr, whom Helgi killed earlier.
- 78 The stanza seems to be spoken by Heðinn, who refers to himself in the third person.
- 79 A *fylgja* 'fetch' was a spirit thought to accompany someone in life (cf. *fylgja* 'to accompany'). Helgi apparently has more than one such escort, and he thinks they have abandoned him for Heðinn. Hence it would seem appropriate to Helgi that his brother should have Sváva.
- 80 Cf. chapter 52 of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*.
- 81 'Sigarr's Plains'.
- 82 Heðinn.
- 83 Helgi.
- 84 Presumably the Sigarr of the aforementioned place-names Sigarshólmr and Sigarsvellir.
- 85 Sváva.
- 86 Helgi.
- 87 Helgi.
- 88 Literally 'before the nobly born one lost breath'.
- 89 Literally, 'to that one of men'.
- 90 The pair have apparently already arrived in the vicinity of Helgi's death.
- 91 'Freki's Stone'. See *HH. I* 44.
- 92 Literally, 'is not necessary'.
- 93 Helgi speaks this stanza.
- 94 The meaning of *hug deila*, literally 'to divide heart/mood/courage', is disputed.
- 95 Heðinn.
- 96 Sváva speaks this stanza.
- 97 Or 'in my beloved homeland'.
- 98 I.e., warrior, prince.
- 99 Heðinn speaks this stanza.
- 100 'Slander/Strife Home'.
- 101 'Halo's/Sun's Fells'.
- 102 Possibly as Helgi Hundingsbani, son of Sigmundr, and Sigrún, who appear in *HH. I* and *HH. II*. See the initial prose to *HH. II*.

