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THE POETIC EDDA

Hárbarðsljóð

The Lay of Harbarth

Old Norse · English – H. A. Bellows (1923)

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Thor is walking home from a journey in the East when he reaches a sound. On the far shore stands a ferryman with his boat: Hárbarðr, 'Gray-Beard' — in truth Odin himself, unrecognised by his own son. Instead of ferrying him across, he refuses passage and draws Thor into a long exchange of boasts and insults hurled over the water. Odin brags of his love-craft, his cunning and his trickery among giantesses and night-riding witches; Thor answers with his battles against the giants — Hrungrnir, Thjazi, the brides of the East. The tone is broad and comic: a flyting, a ritual duel of abuse across a strait in which neither combatant can reach the other. At the last Odin mockingly sends the thunder-god off on the long, weary road by land and wishes every evil thing upon him. The poem is loose, colloquial and full of obscure allusion. The source texts are public domain: Old Norse after the Codex Regius (ed. Guðni Jónsson) and English after Henry Adams Bellows (1923).

	Old Norse	English – H. A. Bellows (1923)
1	<i>Hverr er sá sveinn sveina, er stendr fyr sundit handan?</i>	Who is the fellow yonder, on the farther shore of the sound?
2	<i>Hverr er sá karl karla, er kallar of váginn?</i>	What kind of a peasant is yon, that calls o'er the bay?
3	<i>Fer þú mik um sundit, fæði ek þik á morgun; meis hef ek á baki, verðr-a matr in betri; át ek í hvíld, áðr ek heiman fór, síldr ok hafra; saðr em ek enn þess.</i>	Ferry me over the sound; I will feed thee therefor in the morning; A basket I have on my back, and food therein, none better; At leisure I ate, ere the house I left, Of herrings and porridge, so plenty I had.
4	<i>Árligum verkum hrósar þú, verðinum; veizt-at-tu fyrir görla, döpr eru þín heimkynni, dauð, hygg ek, at þín móðir sé.</i>	Of thy morning feats art thou proud, but the future thou knowest not wholly; Doleful thine home-coming is: thy mother, me thinks, is dead.
5	<i>Þat segir þú nú, er hverjum þykkir mest at vita, at mín móðir dauð sé.</i>	Now hast thou said what to each must seem The mightiest grief, that my mother is dead.
6	<i>Þeygi er sem þú þrjú bú góð eigir; berbeinn þú stendr ok hefr brautinga gervi, þatki, at þú hafir brækr þínar.</i>	Three good dwellings, methinks, thou hast not; Barefoot thou standest, and wearest a beggar's dress; Not even hose dost thou have.
7	<i>Stýrðu hingat eikjunni, ek mun þér stöðna kenna, - eða hverr á skipit, er þú heldr við landit?</i>	Steer thou hither the boat; the landing here shall I show thee; But whose the craft that thou keepest on the shore?

8 *Hildolfr sá heitir,
er mik halda bað,
rekr inn ráðsvinni,
er býr í Ráðseyjarsundi;
bað-at hann hlennimenn flytja
eða hrossapjófa,
góða eina
ok þá, er ek görva kunna;
segðu til nafns þíns,
ef þú vill um sundit fara!*

Hildolf is he
who bade me have it,
A hero wise;
his home is at Rathsey's sound.
He bade me no robbers to steer,
nor stealers of steeds,
But worthy men,
and those whom well do I know.
Say now thy name,
if over the sound thou wilt fare.

9 *Segja mun ek til nafns míns,
þótt ek sekr séak,
ok til alls eðlis:
Ek em Óðins sonr,
Meila bróðir,
en Magna faðir,
þrúðvaldr goða,
við þór knáttu hér dæma!
Hins vil ek nú spyrja,
hvat þú heitir.*

My name indeed shall I tell,
though in danger I am,
And all my race;
I am Othin's son,
Meili's brother,
and Magni's father,
The strong one of the gods;
with Thor now speech canst thou get.
And now would I know
what name thou hast.

10 *Hárbarðr ek heiti,
hylk um nafn sjaldan.*

Harbarth am I,
and seldom I hide my name.

11 *Hvat skaltu of nafn hylja,
nema þú sakar eigir?*

Why shouldst thou hide thy name,
if quarrel thou hast not?

12 *En þótt ek sakar eiga,
þá mun ek forða fjörvi mínu
fyr slíkum sem þú ert,
nema ek feigr sé.*

And though I had a quarrel,
from such as thou art
Yet none the less
my life would I guard,
Unless I be doomed to die.

13 *Harm ljótan
mér þykkir í því
at vaða um váginn til þín
ok væta ögur minn;
skylda ek launa
kögursveini þínum
kanginyrði,
ef ek kæmumk yfir sundit.*

Great trouble, methinks,
would it be to come to thee,
To wade the waters across,
and wet my middle;
Weakling, well shall I pay
thy mocking words,
if across the sound I come.

14 *Hér mun ek standa
ok þín heðan bíða;
fannt-a þú mann in harðara
at Hrungni dauðan.*

Here shall I stand
and await thee here;
Thou hast found since Hrungrnir died
no fiercer man.

15 *Hins viltu nú geta,
er vit Hrungnir deildum,
sá inn stórúðgi jötunn,
er ór steini var höfuðit á;
þó lét ek hann falla
ok fyrir hníga.
Hvat vanntu þá meðan, Hárbarðr?*

Fain art thou to tell
how with Hrungnir I fought,
The haughty giant,
whose head of stone was made;
And yet I felled him,
and stretched him before me.
What, Harbarth, didst thou the while?

16 *Var ek með Fjölvari
fimm vetr alla
í ey þeiri,
er Algræn heitir;
vega vér þar knáttum
ok val fella,
margs at freista,
mans at kosta.*

Five full winters
with Fjolvar was I,
And dwelt in the isle
that is Algrön called;
There could we fight,
and fell the slain,
Much could we seek,
and maids could master.

17 *Hversu snúnuðu yðr konur yðrar?*

How won ye success with your women?

18 *Sparkar áttu vér konur,
ef oss at spökum yrði;
horskar áttu vér konur,
ef oss hollar væri;
þær ór sandi
síma undu,
ok ór dali djúpum
grund of grófu;
varð ek þeim einn öllum
efri at ráðum;
hvílda ek hjá þeim systurum sjau,
ok hafða ek geð þeira allt ok gaman.
Hvat vanntu þá meðan, Þórr?*

Lively women we had,
if they wise for us were;
Wise were the women we had,
if they kind for us were;
For ropes of sand
they would seek to wind,
And the bottom to dig
from the deepest dale.
Wiser than all
in counsel I was,
And there I slept
by the sisters seven,
And joy full great
did I get from each.
What, Thor, didst thou the while?

19 *Ek drap Þjaza,
inn þrúðmóðga jötun,
upp ek varp augum
Alvalda sonar
á þann inn heiða himin;
þau eru merki mest
minna verka,
þau er allir menn síðan of séa.
Hvat vanntu þá meðan, Hárbarðr?*

Thjazi I felled,
the giant fierce,
And I hurled the eyes
of Alvaldi's son
To the heavens hot above;
Of my deeds the mightiest
marks are these,
That all men since can see.
What, Harbarth, didst thou the while?

20 *Miklar manvélar
ek hafða við myrkriður,
þá er ek vélta þær frá verum;
harðan jötun
ek hugða Hlébarð vera,
gaf hann mér gambantein,
en ek vélta hann ór viti.*

Much love-craft I wrought
with them who ride by night,
When I stole them by stealth from their husbands;
A giant hard
was Hlebarth, methinks:
His wand he gave me as gift,
And I stole his wits away.

- 21 *Illum huga
launaðir þú þá góðar gjafar.* Thou didst repay good gifts with evil mind.
- 22 *Þat hefr eik,
er af annarri skefr,
of sik er hverr í slíku.
Hvat vanntu þá meðan Þórr?* The oak must have
what it shaves from another;
In such things each for himself.
What, Thor, didst thou the while?
- 23 *Ek var austr
ok jötna barðak
brúðir bölvísar,
er til bjargs gengu;
mikil myndi ætt jötna,
ef allir lifði
vætr myndi manna
undir Miðgarði.
Hvat vanntu þá meðan, Hárbarðr?* Eastward I fared,
of the giants I felled
Their ill-working women
who went to the mountain;
And large were the giants' throng
if all were alive;
No men would there be
in Mithgarth more.
What, Harbarth, didst thou the while?
- 24 *Var ek á Vallandi
ok vígum fylgdak,
atta ek jöfrum,
en aldri sættak;
Óðinn á jarla,
þá er í val falla,
en Þórr á þrælakyn.* In Valland I was,
and wars I raised,
Princes I angered,
and peace brought never;
The noble who fall
in the fight hath Othin,
And Thor hath the race of the thralls.
- 25 *Ójafnt skipta
er þú myndir með ásum liði,
ef þú ættir vilgi mikils vald.* Unequal gifts
of men wouldst thou give to the gods,
If might too much thou shouldst have.
- 26 *Þórr á afl ærit,
en ekki hjarta;
af hræðslu ok hugbleyði
þér var í hanzka troðit,
ok þóttisk-a þú þá Þórr vera;
hvárki þú þá þorðir
fyr hræðslu þinni
hnjósa né físa,
svá at Fjalarr heyrði.* Thor has might enough,
but never a heart;
For cowardly fear
in a glove wast thou fain to crawl,
And there forgot thou wast Thor;
Afraid there thou wast,
thy fear was such,
To fart or sneeze
lest Fjalarr should hear.
- 27 *Hárbarðr inn ragi,
ek mynda þik í hel drepa,
ef ek mætta seilask um sund.* Thou womanish Harbarth,
to hell would I smite thee straight,
Could mine arm reach over the sound.
- 28 *Hvat skyldir um sund seilask,
er sakir ro alls engar?
Hvat vanntu þá, Þórr?* Wherefore reach over the sound,
since strife we have none?
What, Thor, didst thou do then?

29 *Ek var austr
ok ána varðak,
þá er mik sóttu
þeir Svárangs synir;
grjóti þeir mik börðu,
gagni urðu þeir þó lítt fegnir,
þó urðu þeir mik fyrri
friðar at biðja.
Hvat vanntu þá meðan, Hárbarðr?*

Eastward I was,
and the river I guarded well,
Where the sons of Svarang
sought me there;
Stones did they hurl;
small joy did they have of winning;
Before me there
to ask for peace did they fare.
What, Harbarth, didst thou the while?

30 *Ek var austr
ok við einhverja dæmðak,
lék ek við ína línhvítu
ok launþing háðak;
gladdak ína gullbjörtu,
gamni mæð unði.*

Eastward I was,
and spake with a certain one,
I played with the linen-white maid,
and met her by stealth;
I gladdened the gold-decked one,
and she granted me joy.

31 *Góð átt þú þér mankynni þar þá.*

Full fair was thy woman-finding.

32 *Liðs þíns
væra ek þá þurfi, Þórr,
at ek helda þeiri inni línhvítu mey.*

Thy help did I need then, Thor,
to hold the white maid fast.

33 *Ek munda þér þá þat veita,
ef ek viðr of kæmumk.*

Gladly, had I been there,
my help to thee had been given.

34 *Ek mynda þér þá trúa,
nema þú mik í tryggð véltir.*

I might have trusted thee then,
didst thou not betray thy troth.

35 *Emk-at ek sá hælbitr
sem húðskór forn á vár.*

No heel-biter am I, in truth,
like an old leather shoe in spring.

36 *Hvat vanntu þá meðan, Þórr?*

What, Thor, didst thou the while?

37 *Brúðir berserkja
barðak í Hléseyju;
þær höfðu verst unnit,
véltu þjóð alla.*

In Hlésey the brides
of the Berserkers slew I;
Most evil they were,
and all they betrayed.

38 *Klæki vanntu þá, Þórr,
er þú á konum barðir.*

Shame didst thou win,
that women thou slewest, Thor.

39 *Vargynjur þat váru,
en varla konur,
skelldu skip mitt,
er ek skorðat hafðak,
ægðu mér járn lurki
en eltu þjalfa.
Hvat vanntu meðan, Hárbarðr?*

She-wolves they were like,
and women but little;
My ship, which well
I had trimmed, did they shake;
With clubs of iron they threatened,
and Thjalfi they drove off.
What, Harbarth, didst thou the while?

- 40 *Ek vark í hernum,
er hingat gerðisk
gnæfa gunnfana,
geir at rjóða.*
- In the host I was
that hither fared,
The banners to raise,
and the spear to redden.
- 41 *Þess viltu nú geta,
er þú fórt oss óljúfan at bjóða.*
- Wilt thou now say
that hatred thou soughtest to bring us?
- 42 *Bæta skal þér þat þá
munda baugi,
sem jafnendr unnu,
þeir er okkr vilja sætta.*
- A ring for thy hand
shall make all right for thee,
As the judge decides
who sets us two at peace.
- 43 *Hvar namtu þessi
in hnæfiligu orð,
er ek heyrða aldregi
in hnæfiligri?*
- Where foundest thou
so foul and scornful a speech?
More foul a speech
I never before have heard.
- 44 *Nam ek at mönnum
þeim inum aldrænum,
er búa í heimis skógum.*
- I learned it from men,
the men so old,
Who dwell in the hills of home.
- 45 *Þó gefr þú gott nafn dysjum,
er þú kallar þær heimis skóga.*
- A name full good
to heaps of stones thou givest
When thou callest them hills of home.
- 46 *Svá dæmi ek of slíkt far.*
- Of such things speak I so.
- 47 *Orðkringi þín
mun þér illa koma,
ef ek ræð á vág at vaða;
ulfi hæra
hygg ek þik æpa munu,
ef þú hlýtr af hamri högg.*
- Ill for thee comes
thy keenness of tongue,
If the water I choose to wade;
Louder, I ween,
than a wolf thou cryest,
If a blow of my hammer thou hast.
- 48 *Sif á hó heima,
hans muntu fund vilja,
þann muntu þrek drýgja,
þat er þér skyldara.*
- Sif has a lover at home,
and him shouldst thou meet;
More fitting it were
on him to put forth thy strength.
- 49 *Mælir þú at munns ráði,
svá at mér skyldi verst þykkja,
halr inn hugblauði,
hygg ek, at þú ljúgir.*
- Thy tongue still makes thee say
what seems most ill to me,
Thou witless man! Thou liest, I ween.
- 50 *Satt hygg ek mik segja;
seinn ertu at för þinni,
langt myndir þú nú kominn, þórr,
ef þú litum færir.*
- Truth do I speak,
but slow on thy way thou art;
Far hadst thou gone
if now in the boat thou hadst fared.

- 51 *Hárbarðr inn ragi,
heldr hefr þú nú mik dvalðan.* Thou womanish Harbarth!
here hast thou held me too long.
- 52 *Ása-þórs hugða ek
aldregi mundu
glepja féhirði farar.* I thought not ever
that Asathor would be hindered
By a ferryman thus from faring.
- 53 *Ráð mun ek þér nú ráða;
ró þú hingat bátinum,
hættum hætingi,
hittu föður Magna.* One counsel I bring thee now:
row hither thy boat;
No more of scoffing;
set Magni's father across.
- 54 *Farðu firr sundi,
þér skal fars synja.* From the sound go hence;
the passage thou hast not.
- 55 *Vísa þú mér nú leiðina,
alls þú vill mik eigi um váginn ferja.* The way now show me,
since thou takest me not o'er the water.
- 56 *Lítit er at synja,
langt er at fara;
stund er til stokksins,
önnur til steinsins,
haltu svá til vinstra veggins,
unz þú hittir Verland;
þar mun Fjörgyn
hitta Þór, son sinn,
ok mun hon kenna hánum áttunga brautir
til Óðins landa.* To refuse it is little,
to fare it is long;
A while to the stock,
and a while to the stone;
Then the road to thy left,
till Verland thou reachest;
And there shall Fjorgyn
her son Thor find,
And the road of her children
she shows him to Othin's realm.
- 57 *Mun ek taka þangat í dag?* May I come so far in a day?
- 58 *Taka við víl ok erfiði,
at upprennandi sólu,
er ek get þána.* With toil and trouble perchance,
While the sun still shines, or so I think.
- 59 *Skammt mun nú mál okkat,
alls þú mér skætingu einni svarar;
launa mun ek þér farsynjun,
ef vit finnumk í sinn annat.* Short now shall be our speech,
for thou speakest in mockery only;
The passage thou gavest me not
I shall pay thee if ever we meet.
- 60 *Far þú nú,
þars þik hafi allan gramir.* Get hence where every evil thing shall have thee!

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