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THE POETIC EDDA

Skírnismál

The Lay of Skírnir

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

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Skírnismál – För Skírnis tells one of the tenderest and yet most disquieting love stories of the Poetic Edda. The Wane-god Freyr one day sits down on Hliðskjálf, Odin's high seat, and looks out over all the worlds. In Jötunheim he beholds the giantess Gerðr, whose gleaming arms light up sea and sky – and at once he is seized by a consuming love-sickness. Njörðr and Skaði send Freyr's servant Skírnir to learn the cause of his grief. Freyr lends him his horse that bears its rider through the flickering flame and his self-fighting sword. Skírnir rides to Gymir's dwelling in Jötunheim. In vain he offers Gerðr eleven golden apples and the ring Draupnir; only when he threatens her with a fearsome curse of runes and a taming wand – loneliness, madness and joyless longing without end – does she consent to meet Freyr nine nights hence in the grove Barri. The verses are all dialogue, the action carried by short prose links. Old Norse text after the Codex Regius (ed. Guðni Jónsson), English rendering by Henry Adams Bellows (1923) – both public domain.

	Old Norse	English – H. A. Bellows (1923)
1	<i>Rístu nú, Skírnir, ok gakk at beiða okkarn mála mög ok þess at fregna, hveim enn fróði sé ofreiði afi.</i>	Go now, Skirnir! and seek to gain Speech from my son; And answer to win, for whom the wise one Is mightily moved.
2	<i>Illra orða er mér ón at ykrom syni, ef ek geng at mæla við mög ok þess at fregna, hveim enn fróði sé ofreiði afi.</i>	Ill words do I now await from thy son, If I seek to get speech with him, And answer to win, for whom the wise one Is mightily moved.
3	<i>Segðu þat, Freyr, fólkvaldi goða, ok ek vilia víta, hví þú einn sitr ennlanga salí, minn dróttinn, um daga.</i>	Speak prithee, Freyr, foremost of the gods, For now I fain would know; Why sittest thou here in the wide halls, Days long, my prince, alone?
4	<i>Hví um segiak þér, seggr enn ungi, mikinn móðtrega? þvíat álfröðull lýsir um alla daga ok þeygi at mínom munom.</i>	How shall I tell thee, thou hero young, Of all my grief so great? Though every day the elfbeam dawns, It lights my longing never.
5	<i>Muni þína hykka ek svá mikla vera at þú mér, seggr, ne segir, þvíat ungir saman várom í árdaga; vel mættim tveir trúask.</i>	Thy longings, methinks, are not so large That thou mayst not tell them to me; Since in days of yore we were young together, We two might each other trust.

- 6 *Í Gymis görðom
ek sá ganga
mér tíða mey;
armar lýsto
en af þaðan
alt lopt ok lögr.*
- 7 *Mær er mér tíðari
en manni hveim
ungom í árdaga;
ása ok álfa
þat vill engi maðr
at vit samt sém.*
- 8 *Mar gefðu mér þá,
þann er mik um myrkvan beri
vísan vafrloga,
ok þat sverð
er síálft vegiz
við iötna ætt.*
- 9 *Mar ek þér þann gef
er þik um myrkvan berr
vísan vafrloga,
ok þat sverð
er síálft mun vegaz,
ef sá er horskr er hefír.*
- 10 *Myrkt er úti,
mál kveð ek okr fara
úrig fiöll yfir,
þyria þjóð yfir;
báðir vit komumk,
eða okr báða tekr
sá inn ámatki iötunn.*
- 11 *Segðu þat, hirðir,
er þú á haugi sítr
ok varðar alla vega,
hvé ek at anspilli
komumk ens unga mans
fyr greyiom Gymis.*
- 12 *Hvárt ertu feigr
eða ertu framgenginn?
...
anspillis vanr
þú skalt æ vera
góðrar meyar Gymis.*
- From Gymir's house I beheld go forth
A maiden dear to me;
Her arms glittered, and from their gleam
Shone all the sea and sky.
- To me more dear than in days of old
Was ever maiden to man;
But no one of gods or elves will grant
That we both together should be.
- Then give me the horse that goes through the dark
And magic flickering flames;
And the sword as well that fights of itself
Against the giants grim.
- The horse will I give thee that goes through the dark
And magic flickering flames,
And the sword as well that will fight of itself
If a worthy hero wields it.
- Dark is it without, and I deem it time
To fare through the wild fells,
(To fare through the giants' fastness;)
We shall both come back, or us both together
The terrible giant will take.
- Tell me, herdsman, sitting on the hill,
And watching all the ways,
How may I win a word with the maid
Past the hounds of Gymir here?
- Art thou doomed to die or already dead,
Thou horseman that ridest hither?
Barred from speech shalt thou ever be
With Gymir's daughter good.

13 *Kostir ro betri
heldr en at klökkva sé,
hveim er fúss er fara;
eino dægri
mér var aldr um skapaðr
ok alt líf um lagit.*

Boldness is better than complaints can be
For him whose feet must fare;
To a destined day has mine age been doomed,
And my life's span thereto laid.

14 *Hvat er þat hlym hlymia
er ek heyri nú til
ossom rönnom í?
iörð bifaz,
en allir fyrir
skiálfa garðar Gymis.*

What noise is that which now so loud
I hear within our house?
The ground shakes, and the home of Gymir
Around me trembles too.

15 *Maðr er hér úti
stiginn af mars baki,
ió lætr til iarðar taka.*

One stands without who has leapt from his steed,
And lets his horse loose to graze;

16 *Inn bið þú hann ganga
í okkarn sal
ok drekka inn mæra miöd;
þó ek hitt óumk
at hér úti sé
minn bróðurbani.*

Bid the man come in, and drink good mead
Here within our hall;
Though this I fear, that there without
My brother's slayer stands.

17 *Hvat er þat álfa
né ása sona
né víssa vana?
hví þú einn um komt
eikinn fúr yfir
ór salkynni at síá?*

Art thou of the elves or the offspring of gods,
Or of the wise Wanes?
How camst thou alone through the leaping flame
Thus to behold our home?

18 *Emkat ek álfa
né ása sona
né víssa vana;
þó ek einn um komk
eikinn fúr yfir
yðor salkynni at síá.*

I am not of the elves, nor the offspring of gods,
Nor of the wise Wanes;
Though I came alone through the leaping flame
Thus to behold thy home.

19 *Epli ellifo
hér hefi ek algullin,
þau mun ek þér, Gerðr, gefa,
frið at kaupa,
at þú þér Frey kveðir
óleiðastan lífa.*

Eleven apples, all of gold,
Here will I give thee, Gerth,
To buy thy troth that Freyr shall be
Deemed to be dearest to you.

- 20 *Epli ellifo
ek þigg aldregi
at mannzkis munom,
né vit freyr
meðan okkart fiör lifir,
byggjom bæði saman.*
- I will not take at any man's wish
These eleven apples ever;
Nor shall Freyr and I one dwelling find
So long as we two live.
- 21 *Baug ek þér þá gef,
þann er brendr var
með ungom Óðins syni;
átta ero iafnhöfgir,
er af driúpa
ena níundo hveria nótt.*
- Then do I bring thee the ring that was burned
Of old with Othin's son;
From it do eight of like weight fall
On every ninth night.
- 22 *Baug ek þikkak,
þótt brendr sé
með ungom Óðins syni;
era mér gullz vant
í görðom Gymis,
at deila fé föður.*
- The ring I wish not, though burned it was
Of old with Othin's son;
In Gymir's home is no lack of gold
In the wealth my father wields.
- 23 *Sér þú þenna mæki, mæ,
mióvan, málfán,
er ek hefí í hendi hér?
höfuð höggva
ek mun þér hálsi af,
nema þú mér sætt segir.*
- Seest thou, maiden, this keen, bright sword
That I hold here in my hand?
Thy head from thy neck shall I straightway hew,
If thou wilt not do my will.
- 24 *Ánauð þola
ek vil aldregi
at mannzkis munom;
þó ek hins get
ef it Gymir finnis,
vígs ótrauðir,
at ykr vega tíði.*
- For no man's sake will I ever suffer
To be thus moved by might;
But gladly, methinks, will Gymir seek
To fight if he finds thee here.
- 25 *Sér þú þenna mæki, mæ,
mióvan, málfán,
er ek hefí í hendi hér?
fyr þessom eggjom
hnígr sá inn aldni iötunn,
verðr þinn feigr faðir.*
- Seest thou, maiden, this keen, bright sword
That I hold here in my hand?
Before its blade the old giant bends,--
Thy father is doomed to die.
- 26 *Tamsvendi ek þik drep,
en ek þik temia mun,
mæ, at mínom munom;
þar skaltu ganga
er þik gumna synir
síðan æva sé.*
- I strike thee, maid, with my magic staff,
To tame thee to work my will;
There shalt thou go where never again
The sons of men shall see thee.

- 27 *Ara þúfo á
skaltu ár sitia,
horfa heimi ór,
snugga heliar til;
matr sé þér meirr leiðr
en manna hveim
enn fráni orm með firom.*
- 28 *At undrsíónom þú verðir,
er þú út kömr;
á þik Hrímnir hari,
á þik hotvetna stari;
víðkunnari þú verðir
en vörðr með goðom,
gapi þú grindom frá.*
- 29 *Tópi ok ópi,
tiösull ok ópoli,
vaxi þér tár með trega!
Seztu niðr,
en ek mun segja þér
sváran súsbreka
ok tvennan trega:*
- 30 *Tramar gneypa
þik skolo gerstan dag
iöttna görðom í;
til hrímpursa hallar
þú skalt hverian dag
kranga kosta laus,
kranga kosta vön;
grát at gamni
skaltu í gögn hafa
ok leiða með tárom trega.*
- 31 *Með þursi þríhöfðuðom
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 holtz ek gekk
ok til hrás viðar,
gambantein at geta;
gambantein ek gat.*
- On the eagle's hill shalt thou ever sit,
And gaze on the gates of Hel;
More loathsome to thee than the light-hued snake
To men, shall thy meat become.
- Fearful to see, if thou comest forth,
Hrimnir will stand and stare,
(Men will marvel at thee;)
More famed shalt thou grow than the watchman of
the gods!
Peer forth, then, from thy prison.
- Rage and longing, fetters and wrath,
Tears and torment are thine;
Where thou sittest down my doom is on thee
Of heavy heart
And double dole.
- In the giants' home shall vile things harm thee
Each day with evil deeds;
Grief shalt thou get instead of gladness,
And sorrow to suffer with tears.
- With three-headed giants thou shalt dwell ever,
Or never know a husband;
(Let longing grip thee, let wasting waste thee,--)
Be like to the thistle that in the loft
Was cast and there was crushed.
- I go to the wood, and to the wet forest,
To win a magic wand;
...
I won a magic wand.

- 33 *Reiðr er þér Óðinn,
reiðr er þér Ásabragr,
þik skal Freyr fiásk,
en fyrinilla mær,
en þú fengit hefir
gambanreiði goða.*
- Othin grows angry, angered is the best of the gods,
Freyr shall be thy foe,
Most evil maid, who the magic wrath
Of gods hast got for thyself.
- 34 *Heyri iötnar,
heyri hrímpursar,
synir Suttunga,
siálfir áslíðar,
hvé ek fyrirbýð,
hvé ek fyrirbanna
manna glaum maní,
manna nyt maní!*
- Give heed, frost-rulers, hear it, giants.
Sons of Suttung,
And gods, ye too,
How I forbid and how I ban
The meeting of men with the maid,
(The joy of men with the maid.)
- 35 *Hrímgrímnir heitir þurs,
er þik hafa skal
fyr nágrindr neðan;
þar þér vílmegir
á viðar rótom
geita hland gefi;
æðri drykkio
fá þú aldregi,
mær, at þínom munom,
mær, at mínom munom!*
- Hrimgrímnir is he, the giant who shall have thee
In the depth by the doors of Hel;
To the frost-giants' halls each day shalt thou fare,
Crawling and craving in vain,
(Crawling and having no hope.)
Base wretches there by the root of the tree
Will hold for thee horns of filth;
A fairer drink shalt thou never find,
Maid, to meet thy wish,
(Maid, to meet my wish.)
- 36 *Þurs ríst ek þér
ok þriá stafi,
ergi ok æði
ok óþola;
svá ek þat af ríst
sem ek þat á reist,
ef góraz þarfar þess.*
- I write thee a charm and three runes therewith,
Longing and madness and lust;
But what I have writ I may yet unwrite
If I find a need therefor.
- 37 *Heill ver þú nú heldr, sveinn,
ok tak við hrímkálki,
fullom forns miaðar;
þó hafða ek þat ætlat,
at myndak aldregi
unna vaningia vel.*
- Find welcome rather, and with it take
The frost-cup filled with mead;
Though I did not believe that I should so love
Ever one of the Waners.
- 38 *Örindi mín
vill ek öll vita,
áðr ek ríða heim heðan,
nær þú á þingi
munt enom þroska
nenna Niarðar syni.*
- My tidings all must I truly learn
Ere homeward hence I ride:
How soon thou wilt with the mighty son
Of Njorth a meeting make.

39 *Barri heitir,
er vit bæði vitom,
lundr lognfara;
en ept nætr nío
þar mun Niarðar syni
Gerðr unna gamans.*

Barri there is, which we both know well,
A forest fair and still;
And nine nights hence to the son of Njorth
Will Gerth there grant delight.

40 *Segðu mér þat, Skírnir,
áðr þú verpir söðli af mar
ok þú stigir feti framarr,
hvat þú árnaðir
í iötunheima
þíns eða míns munar.*

Tell me, Skirnir, ere thou take off the saddle,
Or farest forward a step:
What hast thou done in the giants' dwelling
To make glad thee or me?

41 *Barri heitir,
er vit báðir vitom,
lundr lognfara;
en ept nætr nío
þar mun Niarðar syni
gerðr unna gamans.*

Barri there is, which we both know well,
A forest fair and still;
And nine nights hence to the son of Njorth
Will Gerth there grant delight.

42 *Löng er nótt,
langar ro tvær,
hvé um þreyiak þriár?
opt mér mánaðr minni þótti
en síá hálf hýnott.*

Long is one night, longer are two;
How then shall I bear three?
Often to me has a month seemed less
Than now half a night of desire.

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