

URSULA DRONKE

SIX NOTES ON THE INTERPRETATION OF HYMISKVIÐA

1. *Hymiskviða* 10/1*

THE TWO GOOD friends, Týr and Þórr, are intent on getting from the giant Hymir a vast cauldron for the brewing of the Æsir's ale. They have just arrived at the giant's home at Heaven's End. The giant — who is in this poem the father of Týr — has not yet returned from his hunting and fishing expedition. Týr's lovely mother — imperturbable and angelic — delightedly greets her visitors and swiftly puts them into a safe place at the gable end of the hall under the cauldrons that hang there. She explains that her dear consort can be a little disagreeable to visitors:

‘Er mín frí
morgo sinni
gløggr við gesti,
gørr illz hugar’.

‘My beloved
is many a time
miserly with guests,
prone to bear malice.’ (9/5–8)

And indeed he arrives in a stubborn temper, delayed by storm and covered in ice:

En vá[s]skapaðr
varð síðbúinn
harðráðr Hymir
heim af veiðom.
Gekk inn í sal
— glumðo iðklar —
var karls, er kom,
kinnskógr frørrinn!

But, in his element in the tempest,
he was tardy to finish
— inflexible Hymir —
and get home from hunting.
He entered the hall
— icicles jangled —
the old churl's cheek-forest
was frozen by the time he came! (10/1–8)

* The numbering of stanzas after stanza 10 follows that of *SG*.

Both manuscripts read *váskapaðr* here, a word not found elsewhere in Old Icelandic. It is variously translated ‘wretchedly formed, created, destined, for woe, for disaster’. The context, however, does not call for such a generalized insult to the giant.¹ If, instead of *vá-* (‘woe’, ‘disaster’) we read *vás-* (‘harsh weather’ ‘exposure to violent wind, rain and snow’), we have a word — *vásskapaðr*² — that relates directly to Hymir’s late arrival home and to his frozen beard. Hymir is *vásskapaðr* (1) ‘created for harsh weather’, designed by his gigantic physique and will-power — *harðráðr Hymir* — to defy icy and tempestuous conditions³, and (2) ‘created out of harsh weather’, just as his ancestor, the first giant, Ymir, — was created out of the venom-cold spume — the *eitrdropar* — of the snow-storm waves — *Élivágar* — in the primordial ocean, as is said in *Vafþrúðnismál* (31). All giants are *hrímbursar* in origin (*SnE* 12/21–22), and the grandfather of *Vetr* — ‘Winter’ itself — was *Vásaðr*, ‘Foul Weather’; and all of that family were cruel and coldhearted — *grimmir ok svalbrjóstaðir* (*SnE* 27/8) — much akin to the giants. Hymir’s home is oriented to the place of his origins — *fyr austan Élivága* (5/1–2): the poet knows the old traditions.

2. *Hymiskviða* 25/1

From the giant Hymir’s boat, Þórr strikes the World Serpent with his hammer and thunders are heard, at his hammer-blow —

Heingálkni hlumðo, [MSS. Hrein]
en hólkn þuto.
Fór in forna

Hone-wreckers rumbled,
and stony wastes howled.
The ancient earth

¹ Epithets applied to Hymir in the poem are remarkably specific: *hundvíss*, *móðugr*, *harðráðr*, *forn*, *hárr*, *ballr* (sycophantic use by Þórr), *óteitr*, *þrágirni vanr*, *kostmóðr*. There is no moral generalisation directed against him (if we discount the rudeness of the kenning, *átrunnr apa*, ‘shrub of the ape family’, 21/3).

² *Vásskapaðr* is also a hapax legomenon; I suggest, a deliberate creation of the poet’s.

³ So, Hallfreðr Óttarsson, disguised as a decrepit old man, declares himself *hrumr af vási ok nú mest af kulðum*, *er ek hefi rekizt úti á skógum í allan vetr*, ‘weak from harsh weather and now mainly from the cold, since I have been wandering out in the open in the forests the whole winter’ (*Flateyjarbók* I 330, *ÍF* VIII 164). According to Snorri’s story (*SnE* 61), Hymir scorns Þórr’s offer to accompany him on his fishing expedition, because he is small and callow (Þórr is disguised as a *sveinn*), and ‘will feel cold, if I sit as long and as far out as I usually do’. Hymir himself is designed for this.

fold ǫll saman.
Søkðiz síðan
sá fiskr í mar.

all collapsed.
The fish then sank
itself into the sea.

Hreingálm, ‘monstrous destroyers of reindeer’, the reading of the two MSS.⁴, makes no contextual sense, but emendation to *Heingálm* does, because the *hein* ‘whetstone, or hone’, is the weapon of the giant Hrungrnir; and when he fought Þórr, he flung his whetstone at Þórr and it split against Þórr’s hammer. This story is told with vivid complexity in *Haustlǫng*⁵ and the poet of *Hymiskviða* is deliberately referring to it, as one of Þórr’s early successes. Now *Hymiskviða* tells of Þórr’s final and total success, destruction of all the giants with his thunder-hammer (37). But on his way to that final success, Þórr turns aside, as it were, to dispose of the World Serpent, ‘the one the gods abhor — the encircler — from below — of every land’ (23). As he accomplishes this little task, the echoing thunders of his hammer-blow on the serpent’s skull evoke the crash of the whetstone in the old, stone-age battle.

The poet calls the giant Hymir ‘Hrungrnir’s close friend’ (16) with a certain irony, for the two giants meet the same fate under Þórr’s hammer.

While the meaning of *heingálm* in its context is clear, only a general sense, of ‘antagonist’ or ‘destroyer’, can be given to *gálm*, as no etymology has been determined. In skaldic verse, the three instances of *gálm* are in the plural, as in *heingálm*, and their action is to destroy their opponents’ defence, in two cases specifically their shield:

⁴ In MS. R a faint mark beneath *r* in *Hreingálm* might possibly be the remains of a negating dot. Six letters in the line beneath *reingá* have been roughly erased, perhaps to the detriment of the dot.

⁵ *Skjaldedigtning* B I 18, vv. 13–20; most recently edited, with commentary and translation, by R. North, *The Haustlǫng of Þjóðólfr of Hvinir*, Hisarlik Press, 1997, 10–11. The lines relevant to *Heingálm* read:

Ok harðbrotin herju
heimþingaðar Vingnis
hvein i hjarna mœni
hein at Grundar sveini.

And the whetstone — not easily broken — of that one [i.e. Hrungrnir] who had a meeting at the home of the warrior-girl [i.e. Þrúðr, powerful daughter] of Vingnir [i.e. Þórr] — whined its way into the roof-top of the brain of Earth’s lad [i.e. Þórr]. (My translation). As Hrungrnir is called ‘the thief of Þrúðr’ in Bragi Boddason’s *Ragnarsdrápa*, *Skjaldedigtning* B I, 1, v. 1, his visit to Þrúðr’s home was, no doubt, to abduct her, as the giant Þjazi abducted Íðunn in *Haustlǫng* v. 2.

Upp soggðo lög ... hlífa — gnóg til gumna feigðar — gálkn ‘Destroyers of defences declared their laws — sufficient for the death of men’. (Hallfreðr Óttarsson).⁶

... *gindo Þriðja hauðrs á þjóðir þunn gálkn járnmunnum* ‘there gaped the fine-edged destroyers of the shield — Óðinn’s earth — with iron mouths at the hosts of men’. (Halldórr ókristni).⁷

... *váro reynd í røndom randgálkn* ‘destroyers of shields were well-tried against shields’. (dream-verse, *Gunnlaugs saga*).⁸

Hallfreðr is composing an elegy for his king and friend, Óláfr Tryggvason, in which the hostile *gálkn* have the voice of fate and its judgements. Halldórr, composing a *flokkur* in honour of the — still living — Jarl Eiríkr, Óláfr’s enemy, deliberately echoes some of Hallfreðr’s phrases, but makes his *gálkn* physically solid with razor-jaws of iron — clearly, not just spirits — and uses a kenning for ‘shield’ that has no associations of defence. In the dream-verse in *Gunnlaugs saga* there are no unearthly overtones, only the weary word-play of the dead man’s ghost. The idiom has worn out.

Hallfreðr’s father, Óttarr, was born in Hálogaland, a close neighbour of the Lapps, and perhaps a descendant of the family of Ohthere, the explorer, who told the Anglo-Saxon King Alfred (c. 896) of his visits to the homes of Lappish hunters and fishermen on White Sea coasts, where he listened to their stories⁹. A hundred years later, Hallfreðr Óttarsson, in his *Óláfsdrápa*, uses for the first recorded time, the word *gálkn*, which, two hundred years later, reappears as a specifically Lappish phenomenon, in the composite *finngálkn*.

The *finngálkn* is an imagined monster: it comes from the adventurous entertainment world of the *finnför*, the caravans of traders and tourists who for centuries had sought out the Lapps for the fame of their shamanism, as well as their furs.¹⁰ The *finngálkn* is, it would seem, a garbled version of the ancient

⁶ *Óláfsdrápa*, c. 1001, v. 8, *Skjaldedigtning* B I 152.

⁷ Eiríksflokkur, c. 1003, v. 7, *Skjaldedigtning* B I 194; cf. *ÍF* XXVI 367 note.

⁸ *Skjaldedigtning* B I 398; *ÍF* III 104; c. 1270–80.

⁹ See A. S. C. Ross, *The Terfinnas and Beormas of Ohthere*, reprinted, with an Additional Note by the author, and an Afterword by Michael Chesnutt. Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London. 1981.

¹⁰ For references see Vigfússon s.v. *Finnar*; Fritzner s.v. *finnafé*, *-vara*, *finnferð*, *-för*, *-kaup*, *-skref*. On the deep influence of Lappish shamanism on the Norse imagination see the recent

gálkn, but it may help us to discover the old word's meaning. There are obvious differences between the usages of the two words: *gálkn* is, in all four instances, plural; *finngálkn* is always singular, but characteristically multi-form, a freakish blend of e.g. man, beast and dragon.¹¹ *Gálkn* is plural, no doubt because it relates not to single combats, but to a plurality of 'destroyers' (as to a plurality of defences, cf. *hlífar*). This reflects the nature of corporeal human battle, but, if it were in a shamanic context, *gálkn* could relate to the spirit battles of shamanic clans, as these are recorded of the Evenks of central Siberia:¹² a clan's shamans, wishing to attack a hostile shaman clan, would call up their 'clan shamanistic spirit-helpers' and send them to the other clan, 'to bring to its people disease and death. The spirits sent by the shaman penetrated into the territory of a given clan and began to eat the souls of the

articles of Clive Tolley, 'The Shamanic séance in the *Historia Norvegiae. Shaman*'. Vol. 2. No. 2, 1994; 'Vörðr and Gandr: Helping Spirits in Norse Magic', *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* Vol. 110, 1995; 'Sources for *Snorri's* depiction of *Óðinn* in *Ynglinga saga*: Lappish shamanism and the *Historia Norvegiae*', *Maal og Minne* 1996, 67–79, and the further references they include. On the dating of the *Historia Norvegiae* see G. Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature*, Oxford, 1953, 174 f.

¹¹ There is no evidence, I believe, that multi-form monsters, such as the *finngálkn*, played any part in Lappish tradition, though tales of the shaman's spirit adventures in divers animal forms might have contributed to that popular Norse image. The *finngálkn* now on record belong to the Norse literary and learned world, far removed from the living shamanic.

¹² See 'The Shamanic séance', cited in note 10 above, 142–143. Dr. Tolley has kindly sent me the following note to explain some of the problems that are involved in an attempt to use Lappish material for the elucidation of Norse texts:

Lappish shamanism is not very well recorded, as it died out before the nineteenth-century ethnographers could describe it. As far as I know, it cannot unequivocally be demonstrated that the Lapps had clan areas defended by specific shamans and their spirit-helpers, but such a concept is fairly common in Siberian shamanism; the Evenks perhaps had the most developed form of this, which is well recorded. The *Historia Norvegiae* (HN) demonstrates, upon close examination, that the Lapps had a more detailed and developed form of shamanism in the twelfth century than is recorded in the eighteenth-century accounts, as I have shown in my article on it in 1994, and many of these features can only be understood by reference to other shamanisms such as the Evenks'. The HN account is shamanism as seen through a Norseman's eyes, and he would not have been aware of many important features. Among these would certainly have been the social structure within which shamans worked: it is more than likely that the individualist shamans of the HN account were actually representatives of their clans, as is typical of shamanism elsewhere, and that the contest represented clan or at least partisan rivalry undertaken in the spirit realm. The conversion of a shaman into sharp stakes (HN) is particularly reminiscent of the *marylya* fence of the Evenks, acting as a prohibitive boundary. The *gálkn* could be the protective spirit of the clan or his spirit-helpers, perceived perhaps in transformed shapes, to suit their purposes. (C.T.)

people.’ So, to avoid surprise attack by such spirits, ‘each clan shaman fenced in the clan lands with a special mythical fence (*marylya*) consisting of the shaman’s spirit-watchmen’, and the hostile spirits had to get through the fence of spirit-watchmen by force or subterfuge, just as the *gálkn* would try to smash through the defences — *hlífar* — of King Óláfr’s men. The Norsemen had — it would seem — created their own Norse name for the shaman’s spirit-helper, *gandr*; might they have also created their own Norse name for the shaman’s host of spirit-attackers — the *gálkn*?

In *Hymiskviða* if *heingálkn* may be interpreted as ‘destroyers of the whetstone’, and as the whetstone — Hrungnir’s defence — was destroyed by Þórr’s hammer, then the *gálkn* must be the hammer, metaphorically. The huge physical dimension of Þórr’s act in killing the world serpent —

Hamri kníði
háfiáll skarar
ofliótt ofan
úlfs hnitbróður

With his hammer he crushed
the most hideous high hill
of the hair-parting
of the wolf’s welded brother
from above (24/5–8)

— changes to a visionary dimension, like an old transformation scene — heralded by the rumbling of the *gálkn*, echoes of Þórr’s thunder-hammer — in which the heathen earth shrinks into nothing and the evil serpent submerges in the sea. The *heingálkn* identify with Þórr’s determination, like spirit-helpers. Is the introduction of the *heingálkn* at this moment a reminder, perhaps, that the killing of Leviathan is not a physical, but a spiritual task? The poet is a good theologian (cf. 23).

3. *Hymiskviða* 26/5

After the cataclysm Hymir and Þórr row home. The giant is glum; he is, no doubt, thunderstruck, and given matter for thought. Not commenting in any way on Þórr’s amazing performance in killing the World Serpent, he turns to domestic matters: how shall they divide the work between them, ‘Will you take the whales or the boat?’ (27)

Óteitr [var] iqtunn,
er þeir aprt rero,

The giant was not in revelling mood
when they rowed back

| | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| svá at ár Hymir | so that at first Hymir |
| ekki mælti. | said nothing. |
| Veifði hann ræðo [MSS. ræði] | He diverted the talk |
| veðrs annars til. | to a different tack. (26/1–6) |

In the MS. text there is a puzzling conflict between 1. 2 and 11. 5–6: ‘when they rowed back’ [i.e. ‘home’] — as indeed they did, for Þórr *bar til bæiar* the giant’s great fish 28/7 — Hymir then ‘switched the rudder in another direction’ *veifði ræði* i.e. *not* ‘back home’. A small emendation of *ræði* to *ræðo* makes the giant simply ‘change the subject’, deliberately refuse to mention the events he had just witnessed, and start on a new topic.

DH 241 note the incongruity of the MS. text and suggest that *veifði ræði* should be understood metaphorically: ‘he turned the rudder — i.e. the control of the conversation — in another direction’, and, in the following stanza, Hymir does propose a comparative test of strength with Þórr. Bray 121 follows DH: ‘then anew he turned the tiller of thought’. SG dismiss this metaphorical interpretation as a bizarre notion — *ein wunderlicher einfall*. Emendation of *ræði* to *ræðo* may make a more acceptable metaphor.

Von See 331 would read 26/5–6 as reference to an action that has implicitly taken place in 26/2 — *er þeir aptr rero*. Hymir must have ‘switched his rudder to another direction’ before they could row back. Such redundancy of statement is foreign to this poet’s narrative style. The parallel of hysteron proteron claimed to be in 28/7–10 is not, I think, valid, since 11. 9–10 are not likely to be original to this version of *Hymiskviða* (see 4. below).

4. *Hymiskviða* 28/9–10

Þórr responds to the giant’s question with panache — taking both tasks upon himself:

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| Gekk Hlóriði, | Hlóriði stepped out, |
| greip á stafni, | seized hold of the prow, |
| vatt með austri | swung the sea-stead up ashore |
| upp lögfáki. | with its unbaled brine. |
| Einn með árom | On his own, with the oars |
| ok með austskoto, | and the baling bucket, |

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| bar hann til bæjar | he carried to the homestead |
| brimsvín iǫtuns. | the giant's surf-hogs. |

Then, it would seem, an interpolator has added two lines to enhance Þórr's prowess:

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| ok holtrifa ¹³ [<i>read</i> -rifo] | and through every one |
| hver [<i>read</i> hveria] í gegnom. | of the uphill chines. |

There are good reasons to attribute 28/9–10 to an interpolator and not to the poet. He is a very good poet indeed, with a dynamic speed in burlesque. So, now, when he has shown in eight tight-packed lines a flashing image of Þórr grasping the boat, tossing it ashore, loading on himself the oars, the bucket and the two whales, then striding home to Hymir's farm, the poet is not going to ruin his effect by adding an inept pragmatic touch about the terrain. We do not need it, and there is no other stanza in the poem longer than eight lines.

Nevertheless it is interesting to note that stanza 29 opens with *Ok* :

| | |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| Ok enn iǫtunn | And still the giant |
| um afrendi | on the subject of strength |
| þrágirnir vanr | with habitual obstinacy |
| við Þór senti | bickered with Þórr |

¹³ MS. R reads 'holtriba', i.e. *holtrifa* (see Facsimile 28, line 12, Anmærkninger 124). This reading is not noted by editors, or by Lindblad 217 f., as a second instance of intervocalic b for f, as in *Hárbarðsljóð* 'oluban' (for *óliufan* [*kost*], MS. A 'oliufan'). *Holtrifa* is hapax legomenon, but the two elements, *holt*, 'stony, scrub-covered high ground' and *rifa*, 'cleft, gully', are common words. Parallel compound formations are *berggrifa* and *bjarggrifa* (cf. *Egils saga* 171: '„Hér set ek upp niðstong ...“. Síðan skýtr hann stonginni niðr í bjarggrifu ok lét þar standa' ('„Here I set up a stake of contempt ...“. Then he thrusts the stake down in a cleft in the rock and left it standing there')). MS. A reads *holtriða*, also hapax legomenon. *Rið* signifies 'gallery' 'staircase', 'path along a field's edge'; *loptrið*, 'stairway to an upper room'; cf. Fritzner s.v. *rið* 2, 4. The MS. A reading does not make the lines, 28/9–10, more acceptable as part of the stanza.

To make sense of 28/9–10, one could read *holtrifo hveria*. It seems improbable that *hverr*, 'cauldron', which occurs nine times in the poem, would be casually used once in a topographical sense, 'cauldron-shaped hollow', as some editors suggest, supposing the lines to be original to the poem (*DH* 236, *SG* 269, von See 334).

— as if the giant can hardly wait to tackle Þórr again on the problem that obsesses him. Initial *Ok* here is a clever link and time-saver between stanzas 28 and 29 — no need to waste words on the home-coming and hearty eating. Do the lines 28/9–10 derive from an old version of *Hymiskviða*, from which the poet picked his abrupt opening *Ok* in 29/1? Though it was not uncommon in skaldic verse to begin a stanza with *Ok*, it was rare in Eddic,

That the story of Hymir and Þórr was told and retold long before the extant *Hymiskviða* was composed, is illustrated by the sixteen *vísur* by five early skalds c. 850 to 1000, describing incidents in the story (and now preserved helter-skelter in *Skáldskaparmál*). *Gylfaginning* MSS. also have variants that differ from parallel episodes in *Hymiskviða*, while in *Hymiskviða* itself there are loose ends of narrative threads that belong traditionally to other versions from which the poet now wishes to diverge: so, the goats in stanza 7 must be forgotten in stanza 35, because Þórr must walk away with the cauldron on his head. Perhaps the best illustration of the confusion of versions underlying the extant text of *Hymiskviða* is the copying of two stanzas, which are not part of *Hymiskviða*, immediately before the final stanza of the poem. These two intrusive stanzas relate to the beginning of the story of Þórr's visit to Útgarda-Loki (*SnE* 49) which in *SnE* precedes the story of Hymir. The confusion between the two stories may have been stimulated by the fact that three stanzas about Þórr's journeying begin with a similar line, *Fóro driúgom* (7), *Fóro[t] lengi* (35), *Fórot lengi* (intrusive stanza), and that stanza 7 and the intrusive stanza are both concerned with Þórr's travelling goats. The poetic habit of repetition, the overlap of oral and written recollections, as well as the confusion of written pieces, waiting to be sorted on the scribe's table (such as the *Hauksbók* text of *Völuspá*) will have contributed to slips — and perhaps to occasional felicities, as in 29/1 — in the recording of such ancient texts. But today, when such slips are obvious, the incongruities they bring into the work could perhaps be taken out of it and relegated to notes.

5. *Hymiskviða* 31/5–8

Having failed to discover any weakness in Þórr, but — on the contrary — having provoked an outrageous display of Þórr's physical strength, that the giant had not expected, Hymir confronts Þórr with another test, which seems suspiciously simple. They have just dined, and the wine glasses are still on the table before them, and the giant picks up his argument —

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| kvaðat mann ramman, | declared no man strong |
| þótt róa kynni | — however strapping he might be |
| kröpturligan, | as an oarsman — |
| nema kálk bryti. | if unable to break a goblet. (29/5–8) |

So Þórr nonchalantly, as he sits at the table, throws the giant's glass goblet at the stone pillars around the giant's hall, crashing through them, but never breaking the glass,

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Unz þat in fríða | Until the lovely |
| frilla kendi | lady-friend imparted, |
| ástráð mikit | out of affection, momentous advice |
| — eitt er vissi: | — a fact she knew: |
| ‘Drep við haus Hymis, | ‘Strike at the skull of Hymir, |
| hann er harðari, | the supper-weary giant — |
| kostmóðs iqtuns, | it's of greater hardness |
| kálki hverio[m]!’ | than any goblet!’ 31/1–8) |

Þórr rises from the table and takes a thrower's stance and breathes in divine strength —

| | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Harðr reis á kné | He rose on braced knees, |
| hafra dróttinn, | resolute lord of he-goats, |
| færðiz allra | took on himself entirely |
| í ásmegin. | the strength of a god. |
| Heill var karli | Unharméd was the old churl's |
| hiálmstofn ofan, | helmet-prop on top, |
| en vínferill | but the wine's round |
| valr rifnaði. | roadway split apart. (32/1–8) |

But how can a giant's skull be harder than a glass goblet which shatters stone pillars without being hurt? The answer to the riddle is easy: because heaven was created from a giant's skull, as Vafþrúðnir said¹⁴, and nothing can be harder, more indestructible, than heaven —

| | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| Ór Ymis holdi | From Ymir's flesh |
| var iqrð um sköpuð, | earth was fashioned, |

¹⁴ *Vafþrúðnismál* 21/4–5; cf. *Grímnismál* 40/6 (the version cited by Snorri, *SnE* 16).

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| en ór beinom biörg, | and mountains made from his bones, |
| himinn ór hausi | heaven from the skull |
| ins hrímkalda iǫtuns, | of the frost-cold giant, |
| en ór sveita siór. | and out of his blood the sea. |

This is the *ástráð* that the lovely lady-friend knew. It was known also to scribes of the *Snorra Edda*: two MSS., in the prose version of the story of Þórr and Hymir, replace, consistently, Hymir's name with 'Ymir' (MS. W), or 'eymir' (MS. U; MS. T has 'Ymir' fitfully).¹⁵ The giant's name, Hymir, may indeed have been chosen by the poet to stir an echo of the primordial Ymir and his 'ancient skull' for the purposes of his own story.¹⁶

In the great tangle of folktales with which — as von Sydow has shown¹⁷ — *Hymiskviða* has affinities, one motif stands out: the casting of an object — an egg, or a cup — at a giant's head. The egg or the cup holds in it the giant's life, and only the giant's skull is hard enough to break it. Traditionally this means that the giant dies: he has broken his own life. Hymir does not die, but a shadow comes over him, a mourning for his ritual toasting cup, for an old era ending, a pride and a pleasure gone —

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 'knákat ek segia | 'I am not to announce |
| aptr ævagi: | ever again |
| þú ert, ǫlðr, of heitt!' | "Ale! You are brewed!" (33/6–8) |

And then he remembers his cauldron, and his optimism returns.

¹⁵ *SnE* 61–62, textual notes.

¹⁶ The image of the heavens as a giant's skull is not confined, to ancient Eddic verse; it is used, with elegaic power by Arnórr jarlaskáld (born c. 1012) in his *drápa* for Magnús, son of St Óláfr Haraldsson: 'No young prince as generous as he will ever sail ship beneath Ymir's old skull — *und gömlum Ymis hausi*' (cf. *Magnússdrápa* 19).

More than two centuries later, the writer of ch. 86 of *Egils saga* tells of an attempt to break a gigantic human skull, which was thought to be Egill's, and was found beneath an old, disused, altar. The priest, a sardonic wit, Skapti Þórarinnsson, was curious to test its hardness, and, struck it with an axe; a white mark appeared on the skull, but no dint, no crack. Þórr's testing of Hymir's infrangible skull must have been in the mind of the author of this anecdote in *Egils Saga*, no doubt Snorri himself.

¹⁷ C.W. v. Sydow, Jätten Hymes Bägare, 113–150, *Danske Studier* 1915. The narrative parallels from folktale are illuminating and indispensable for understanding the genesis of *Hymiskviða*. Von Sydow does not see why the poet diverges from the traditional folktale theme at certain points, however, e.g. 142–143, and this necessarily hampers his argument. He takes no account of the basic Christian theme that takes precedence in the poem over any folktale roots.

6. *Hymiskviða* 35/3–4

Hymir makes his last challenge: ‘Can you two get the cauldron out of here?’

‘Þat er til kostar
ef koma mættið
út ór óro
ǫlkiól hofi.’
Týr leitaði
tysvar hræra;
stóð at hváro
hverr kyrr fyrir.

‘It is yet to be tested
if you could take
the ale-ship
out of our hall.’
Týr tried
twice to move it:
each time the cauldron kept
still despite that. (34/1–8)

Faðir Móða
fekk á þremi
ok í gegnom steig
gólf niðr í sal.
Hóf sér á hofuð upp
hver Sifjar verr,
en á hælom
hringar skullo.

Móði’s sire
seized it by the rim
and kicked it all the way down
across the floor in the hall.
He heaved the cauldron up
— husband of Sif — on to his head,
and against his heels
the chain-hoops clanked. (35/1–8)

Þórr deftly rolls it out of the hall and bears it away on his head.

The precise nature of his action in 35/3–4 is, however, much debated (cf. von See, 345–7). I suggest that, instead of interpreting *steig* as intransitive, we may find the rarer transitive use more fitting. Two instances of *stíga*, ‘to perform an action with the foot, e.g. kick, trample’, with an accusative object, are noted by Vigfússon and by Fritzner s.v.: *stíga* 2:

(1) In *Knýtlinga saga* 269: A wealthy farmer from Plógssýsla in Jutland named Plógr, avenges his father, who was unjustly killed by the Danish king. When this king is at a Jutland assembly, Plógr walks up to him, saying he wishes to speak to him; he carries a tall spear, its point encased in a cylindrical piece of wood; he keeps the point turned down:

Ok er hann nálgaðisk þangat, steig hann keflit af spjótsoddinum. Síðan lagði hann spjótinu í gegnum konunginn ok veitti honum banasár.

‘When he came close to the place, with his foot he pushed the wood casing off the spear. Then he aimed the spear at the king and gave him his death-wound.’

(2) In *Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar* in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in *Flateyjarbók* I 522: ‘Stórolfr, fifth son of the *landnámsmaðr* Hængr Ketilsson, has a lazy and obstinate little son, Ormr. As there is a shortage of farm hands, Stórolfr asks Ormr to mow the meadows. Stórolfr gives him a costly scythe and new blade. Ormr despises these and ruins them:

Ormr vatt ljáinn í sundr milli handa sér, en steig í sundr orfit, ok kvað sér hvárki skyldu.

‘Ormr twisted the scythe-blade in two with his hands and kicked the scythe-handle to pieces and said neither was of any use to him.’

In both cited examples (1) and (2) *steig* has an accusative object. In *Hymiskviða* 35 the poet uses an acrobatic syntax to express Þórr’s rapid and startling actions; the verbs in both lines 35/2,3 — *fekk á þremi / ok í gegnom steig* ... have as their object *hverr*, ‘cauldron’, in the last line of the preceding stanza.

The phrase *í gegnom ... gólf niðr í sal* has an idiomatic parallel in *Egils saga* 213: Arinbjörn gave Egill as a *jólagjöf* a splendid, flowing silk coat, richly embroidered with gold thread, *slæður ... settar fyrir allt gullknoppum í gegnum niðr*, ‘a robe ... ornamented in front all the way down with studs of gold’ (cf. Fritzner s.v. *gegnum* 2). In *Hymiskviða*, Þórr is going right across the floor *niðr*, down from the raised dais (cf. *upp á pallana*), to the exit, where the ‘nether’ seating, *neðra borð*, in the hall would be (cf. *Privatboligen* 198). The poet’s pleasure in eccentric word-order can be seen in other stanzas also (e.g. 13/5–8, 22/1–4, 24/5–8). There is no need suppose that Þórr’s feet went *through* the hall floor, as some suggest; von See 346.

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EFNISÁGRIP

Í þessari grein er tilraun gerð til að skýra sex torræða staði í Hymiskviðu. Um er að ræða orðið *váskapaðr* í 10. erindi, *hreingáln* í 25. erindi og *ræði* í 26. erindi. Gert er ráð fyrir að 9. og 10. vísuorð í 28. erindi sé innskot, en 5.–8. vísuorð í 31. erindi eru skýrð með skírskotun til sköpunarsögu Vafþrúðnismála og Snorra Eddu. Loks er vikið að 3.–4. vísuorðum í 35. erindi kviðunnar.

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