

Harbardsljod and Lokasenna

by Mark Puryear

The purpose of this essay is to clearly define the relationship between the two Eddaic poems Harbardsljod and Lokasenna, while at the same time attempting to clear up some misconceptions surrounding them. It shall be demonstrated that, for the most part, the reason they have been misinterpreted for so long is due to the false identification of Odin to Harbard in Harbardsljod. Once the evidence is shown that leads to the conclusion that Harbard is Loki in disguise and using one of Odin's names it shall be easier for people to see the link between the two lays. As we notice the points where they meet Harbard's identity should become apparent, and may even lead some to wonder why Odin was ever placed in the position of a hateful, spiteful mocker of the gods and goddesses.

It has been surmised that Harbardsljod was developed from or inspired by Lokasenna, given their probable dates of origin and the similarities of their contents. It may even be possible that the poems were composed by the same person or by two individuals within the same skaldic circle. We know that both poems were composed in Norway in the 10th century; i.e. during the final years of heathendom in that region. Once we examine closely the episodes that these two poems present we can see that it is very likely that they both describe the same mythic event.

To begin investigating their content we must first eliminate the greatest obstacle between the two poems, that which led to their separation and misinterpretation: the true identity of Harbard. That this poem, Harbardsljod, represents some sort of vulgar domestic dispute between father and son, a "symbolic" conflict between the noble and peasant classes is spurious. Even Bellows argues against the authenticity of this (The Poetic Edda: The Mythological Poems, pgs. 121-2). The only evidence to support this idea is Grimnismal 49 where Harbard is listed as one of Odin's names and Harbardsljod 24, which states, in third person no doubt: "Odin has all the jarls that in conflict fall, but Thor the race of thralls." Nowhere else is such a claim made, that Thor and Odin split the einherjar between them by class, nor does this imply any sort of conflict between the two.

It is true that Harbard is one of Odin's names, but there is no reason why we could not assume that Loki once used this name as well. In fact, the very first strophe of Harbardsljod lets us see that Harbard's designation is in itself a falsehood. The name is a kenning for an old man, yet Thor sees him as a "knave of knaves", a "youth of youths" (sveinn sveina) and later calls him a "tot", a "trifling boy" (kǫgursveinn, str. 14, see UGM II pt. 2 pg. 111). So it is definite that the name Harbard "Hoar-Beard", though perfectly describing Odin, here falsely represents the person who claims it.

It is without a doubt that Odin's association with Harbard in Harbardsljod had its

foundation in Christian scholarship. It is easy for the Christian writer, who thinks of Odin as a demon without morals or familial devotion, to see the Asagard spewing the venomous bile at Thor that we see in the poem and then have his own son, likewise a demon in their eyes, return hateful remarks back at him. Rydberg notes in UGM II part 2 pg. 129 □□in a number of Icelandic tales, their Christian authors have given Odin the character he was thought to have as a demonic being.□ Modern scholars often see Odin here as the cunning trickster and Thor as the stupid oaf, which also betrays their Christian bias. With all of this in mind, these authors have no problem seeing Odin as the one who turned princes against each other □But never reconciled them□ (Harbardsljod 24). One must never confuse a god of war with a demon of discord and strife.

None of the incidences mentioned in Harbardsljod can in any way be linked to any known adventure of Odin□s. However, Rydberg has proven that all of them either relate Loki□s adventures as known in other sources or allude to his nature. Since my goal here is to demonstrate the connection between Harbardsljod and Lokasenna, and Rydberg has already done an excellent job of interpreting the former in UGM II part 2 pgs. 103-130, I will only briefly outline the proofs that Loki is in fact Harbard of Harbardsljod:

-Strophe 8 is a sexual metaphor. Hildof (Maid-wolf) designates the phallus while Radsey sound) the sound of □rad□, a sexual union) is a euphemism for a vagina. Thus Harbard is saying that his penis (Hildolf), whose □home□ is a vagina (Radsey sound) told him to make the boat (an obvious jest). This may have some connection to Thor□s journey to Geirrod where giantesses, urinating in the river Vimur (the Elivagar) caused it to swell. Rydberg states that □one event refers to the other□, i.e. that the body of water that obstructs Thor□s path in Harbardsljod is the same as that which caused him trouble before (UGM II part 2. Pg. 111). Loki□s position to make such a vulgar statement, that of the representative of unbridled lust, is well attested to.

-Strophe 16, Fj□lvar is one of the frost-giants who led the attack on Midgard during the first Fimbulwinter (see The Prose Edda, Tr□llkonur Nafnapular and UGM II part 2 pgs. 111-112). This shows that Harbard is an ally of the powers of frost and an enemy of the gods. □All-green□ is an epithet of Midgard. When Loki-Harbard then claims, in str. 18, to have had sex with seven sisters who □seek to wind ropes of sand□ during this war this refers to Hymir□s daughters, mentioned in Lokasenna str. 34, who, just as Gjalp, Greip, Stikla and Rusila are □personifications of the wild, overflowing rivers that surge through dales, digging riverbeds in their depths and leaving long, continuous sandbanks, □ropes of sand□, along their paths to the sea□ (UGM II part 2 pg. 112). These maidens represent the dangers of overflowing rivers and flash floods.

-In strophe 20 Harbard is the lover of myrd-riders, the Teutonic equivalent of evil witches akin to Gullveig-Heid in most cases. However, the rest of the strophe

leads us to hypothesize that there may be something more to these myrk-riders. In UGM I no. 116 Rydberg identifies Hlebard with Thjazi-Völund (Thjazi and Völund's identity is proven in no. 115) and states that the "stealing of his wits" refers to the event when "Thjazi, who, seeing his beloved (Idun) carried away by Loki and his plan about to be frustrated (this would be his revenge against the gods in the form of the first Fimbulwinter, see below), recklessly rushed into his certain ruin." The "wand" he gave to Loki was the mistletoe, the arrow made of mistletoe that Loki gave to Hödr to shoot at Balder, which caused the latter's death.

William Reaves has postulated that these myrk-riders may be identical to the swan-maids of Volundarkvida. Rydberg shows that Hervor is identical to Idun, Olrun is identical to Sif, and Hladgun is the same as Auda. These three maidens are the lovers of the Ivaldi sons Völund, Egil and Slagfinn. Hrafnagaldur Óðins 8 states that Idun "changed disposition, delighted in guile, shifted her shape." Thus these women, who have left the divine clans to be with their scorned lovers in the Myrkwood (Völundarkvida 4), may both literally and figuratively be called myrk-riders. If we then compare their longing to leave the Myrkwood with other instances in the lore where such longing occurs and witchcraft, Seidr, is suspected (such as against Frey in Skirnismál) then it may be possible that Loki had something to do with their longing, which led to their leaving their "husbands", the Ivaldi sons. This may also relate to Loki's words in Harbarðsljóð 48 and Lokasenna 54 about his relations with Sif.

Strophe 24 refers to Loki as Lokerus, Sifka-Bekki and Blind Bölvise in Saxo's *Historia Danica* and Beowulf. Here he has turned Gudhorm and Hadding against one another, a conflict which leads to many deaths, and never brought about reconciliation. This is the same disposition that Loki held when he was amongst the gods.

Strophes 30-32 refer to Loki's exploits with Idun, when he was sent off to find her. It was then that he held the linen-white maid after turning her into a nut and flying off in falcon form. He needs Thor's help because Thjazi-Völund was chasing him in eagle-guise towards Asgard. This help Thor gladly gave for the security of Idun and the Asa-citadel.

Strophes 40-42 refer to Loki's part in Thor's campaign against Geirrod where he had led Thor astray with his lies, telling him that "green paths lead towards Geirrod's home" (Thorsdrapa 1). Thor's statement about Harbard offering the war party "hard terms" refers to this.

Now that proofs of Harbard's true identity have been given we shall examine the actual relationship between Harbarðsljóð and Lokasenna. To begin with, let's look at what Rydberg has to say about this:

In plan and construction, (Harbarðsljóð) closely resembles Lokasenna. The main figure in both is Loki. Lokasenna places him in the midst of a gathering of gods and goddesses and thus he gets the opportunities to give his desire for abuse a multi-faceted workout. But the multitude of figures there prevents a more thorough characterization of them. The whole legacy of objectionable incidents, which the ethically perfected mythology inherited from a time when the gods were more forces of nature than personalities, is exposed, made worse, garnished with lies by an enemy of the gods and cast in their face. Harbarðsljóð with just its two figures has an incomparably better opportunity to characterize them and

do so in a lively manner. UGM II part 2, pg. 129.

In investigating the connection between these two poems it is important to consider their placement within the Teutonic epic as proven by Rydberg. Such placement is not difficult when we look at passages that describe events that have already taken place. For instance, we know that the episode described in Lokasenna would be placed towards the end, because Loki describes so many things that have already happened, such as the slaying of Balder (str. 28), the slaying of Thjazi-Völund (str. 50-51), Thor's adventures at Fjalar's (str. 60) and his battle against Hrúgnir (str. 61). Furthermore, as we learn from the concluding prose, this is the last time Loki interacts with the gods and goddesses before they capture him and bind him until Ragnarok (see UGM II part 2 pg. 208 #146 & FG pg. 136-7). Upon close inspection of Harbardsljod we also find that this episode would have to have taken place near the end of the epic. If Rydberg is correct in assuming that strophe 24 of Harbardsljod refers to Loki's role as Sifka and Blind among the Teutons, when he turned Gudhorm-Jörmunrek and Hadding-Thjodrek against one another "but never reconciled them", then it is from this that we get our key to Harbardsljod's placement. This episode is one of the last known the "r alda, the age of mythological events, but takes place right before the events described in Lokasenna (see UGM II part 2 pg. 204-205 #s 130 & 132; and FG pages 123-129). Thus, if Loki is describing this event in Harbardsljod, then his meeting with Thor on the Radsey Sound must have taken place after Sifka-Blind-Loki's treachery against Halfdan's sons, Gudhorm and Hadding. Consequently, this would place Harbardsljod in exactly the same time frame as Lokasenna.

From this we can conclude that Harbardsljod and Lokasenna are two parts of the same mythic event. By connecting the two it is easy to see how they can fit together. Rydberg has noticed that "Hardbard's task, as the song expressly points out, is to delay the world-protecting god on his way home" However, it is not his journey home that Loki inhibits, it is his journey to Aegir's annual mead feast, an event special enough to have such a poem (or two poems) written about it. Thus, in Harbardsljod Loki is purposefully delaying Thor, while in Lokasenna Thor is late for the gathering. With this delay Loki has enough time to abuse the gods and goddesses and even to kill one of Aegir's servants before Thor arrives. The Asagot has had to find his way across the sound to the meadhall. It is possible that Thor expected to find a ferryman on the sound, perhaps one of Aegir's servants, and that Loki presumably killed the servant to take his boat when Thor shows up.

It is also probable that Loki remains there for the purpose of deterring Thor from going to the feast at all. He originally tries to dismay the Asagot by telling him that his mother is dead (Harbardsljod 4), which, we can surmise, was meant to make Thor change his course and head straight for Asgard. It is well known that Thor is an excellent wader whose size increases with the depths of the waters (Thorsdrapa, Skaldskaparmal) so Loki could not have initially believed that he would keep the Asagot from crossing the sound, simply by refusing to ferry him. Then he discovers that Thor needs the boat to get him across, that he cannot wade due to the augur (eyes, which he makes into stars? Str. 13) he carries, so refusing to ferry him then becomes sufficient to hinder him. This would

explain why he later tells Thor that his mother is alive (str. 56).

If augurs really are "eyes", as William Reaves suggests (cp. ON *augua*), then we might consider them to be evidence of Thor's mighty deeds, to be presented to the gods at the mead feast. Such a presentation was sacred to the Teutons as they passed around the Bargarhorn while boasting of their adventures. This would really be the only reason why he would be holding them, since we see in *Skaldskaparmál* and *Harbardsljód* 19 that these are to be thrown into the sky to make stars.

Besides the placement of the two episodes within the epic, we should also consider the location they take place in. Rydberg states (in UGM I no. 93) that "Aegir's Hall is far out in the depths of the sea. The Ocean known by the Teutons was the North Sea. The author (of *Lokasenna*) has manifestly conceived Aegir's hall as situated in the same direction from Asgard as Vanaheim, and not far from the native home of the Vanir". From this standpoint we should compare the opening prose of both *Harbardsljód* and *Lokasenna*, *Harbardsljód* states that, "Thor, journeying from the east, came to a strait or sound", while *Lokasenna* informs us that "Thor was not there (at Aegir's feast), because he was in the east.

It should be noted that Aegir's home was thought to have been located on the island of Hlesey or Laesí (Skaldskaparmál), which is situated in the Kattegat strait between Jutland, Denmark and Southwestern Sweden. So we can see that in both poems Thor is returning from a journey "in the east", i.e. Jotunheim, and that his path brings him to a strait or a sound.

On pg. 111 of UGM II part 2 Rydberg states that the body of water that restricts Thor's path in *Harbardsljód* is the same as that which stopped him before on his way to Geirrod's. Thus, the Ríðseyjarsund of *Harbardsljód* 8 is identical to Vimur of *Skaldskaparmál*, where giantesses urinate to make the torrents swell. Elsewhere it is known that Vimur is one of the names of the Elivagar (FG pg. 204), which is caused to rise when "Gjalp, Geirrod's daughter stood astride the river (Skaldskaparmál). Note that Elivagar, though often called a river, is actually a sea or ocean so its connection to a strait or sound would not be contradictory. It is very likely that Aegir's home, Hlísey or Hles Isle, was also originally thought to be located on the Elivagarm the Underworld sea that actually is situated near Vanaheim (see above and UGM I no. 93). The later placement of his home on Laesí probably came from the euhemerist movement, where ancient gods became ancient kings and mythic realms became actual geographic locations. That Aegir's hall is probably located in the western domains of or near Vanaheim comes from *Lokasenna* 34 where Loki states that Njord was "sent eastward from here, as a hostage to the gods.

Considering all that has been stated here, we should now take a step-by-step look at the strophes that correspond to one another in each of these poems:

In *Thorsdrapa* Thor is called "Odin's grief-thief", i.e. his joy (str. 15, *Odins alfi sodnum*). This stands in stark contrast with strophes in *Harbardsljód*, where "Harbard" (Loki) lies to him (str. 4), insults his manner of dress (str. 6), implies that he is a horse-thief (str. 8), and calls

him a coward (str. 26). The entire concept and tone of these strophes mimics exactly the abuses of Lokasenna from Loki to the gods and goddesses, further contradicting Odin's association with Harbard of Harbardsljod.

To this we should compare Thor's words to Harbard, where he calls him a weakling (str. 13), womanly (strophes 27 and 51), a liar and a fool (str. 49). He also threatens to kill him! (Strophes 27 and 47). Such a threat, given Thor's past encounters, should not be taken lightly. That scholars would consider the benevolent protector of Midgard to be capable of parricide (and strophes 31-35 show us that Thor does know who Harbard is, see below) further demonstrates the Christian influence on their investigations into the ancient Teutonic lore, since from the Christian perspective both Odin and Thor would be seen as demons. Again, in Lokasenna Thor calls Loki "womanish" or "unmanly" in a refrain (strophes 57, 59, 61 and 63), while in the same refrain he threatens to take his life with Mjollnir.

Both poems depict Loki as the representative of unbridled lust, where he boasts of his sexual exploits with Hymir's daughters (Harbardsljod 16 and 18, cp. Lokasenna 34), the myrk-riders (Harb. 20), Idun (Harb. 30, see above, and Loka. 17), Tyr's wife (Loka. 40), Skadi (Loka. 51-52) and Sif (Harb. 48 and Loka. 54).

Harbardsljod 14 and 15 and Lokasenna 61 refer to Thor's battle with Hruginir. In Lokasenna Thor may be reminding Loki of his words spoken on the sound in Harbardsljod.

Strophe 26 of Harbardsljod describes the exact same event with the same insult Loki uses against Thor in Lokasenna 60. In fact, the line "ok ok ok orr vera" ("and hardly thought you were Thor") is repeated in both strophes.

These associating strophes would allow Thor to confirm the fact that it was Loki on the sound before, disguised and using the name Harbard, when he confronts him in Aegir's hall. Whether this was considered by the author or authors of Harbardsljod first or Lokasenna first we cannot know. This would simply be a confirmation made by the author(s) of the poems, since it is already made clear in strophes 31-35 of Harbardsljod that Thor knows exactly who Harbard was, when they reminisce over the event that led to the death of Volund-Thjazi.

Thjazi's death is referred to in both poems, when Loki brags about his sexual relations with Idun.

We have already determined that strophe 30 of Harbardsljod describes Loki's returning of Idun to Asgard (compare str. 31 "Full fair was thy woman finding" with what is said in Skaldskaparmal - "saekja etir Idunni i Jotunheima", "seek after Idun in Jotunheim"). Hrafnagaldur 19 tells us that Thjazi is a son of Alvaldi. Ivaldi and Alvaldi are identical (see UGM I no. 123). Thus Thjazi-Volund is a brother of Idun. So when Loki claims, in Lokasenna 17, that Idun laid her arms "about thy brother's slayer" this refers to the same mythic event where Harbard claims to have "held" (in this case literally, though Loki uses it in a sexual context) the linen-white maid. This mythic event is, of course, Loki's self-serving adventure into Thrymheim to bring Idun back to her rightful place among the gods and goddesses.

Harbardsljod 42 can be interpreted in the following manner: Loki means to recompense his offense to Thor with arrows, or with an attack (UGM II, part 2 pg. 117-119). Rydberg here relates the "hands-ring" which arbitrators (jafnendr) give as the horn-bow, which forms a circular shape when drawn. The statement is a reference to Njord-Fridlevus' attempt to marry Skadi and propitiate the offended Volund for the competition between his artwork and that of Sindri, which he lost (see Saxo book 6 and FG pg. 57-60). Njord's messengers were killed and later he and his arbitrator (jafnendr or ljona) Hdr-Bjorno were attacked by the Ivaldi sons. This competition between the artists left the Ivaldi sons to turn against the gods

and seek refuge in the Myrkwood (Wolfdales).

In both Harbardsljod 42 and Lokasenna 12 the phrase Baeta baugi "pay a fine with rings" occurs. In Lokasenna it is Bragi claiming that he will "Baeta baugi" for any offense he has brought against Loki, and that he will give him a horse and a sword if he will curb his vile tongue. His "horse" is the set of stones Loki will lay upon until Ragnarök, bound by the entrails of one of his own sons, with a sword sticking in his back (UGM I no. 78 and FG pg. 137). Here the phrase refers to the same mythic idea as Harbardsljod 42, that Bragi will recompense Loki's actions with violence.

Both poems end with a curse. In Harbardsljod 58 and 60 Loki-Harbard predicts that the sun shall vanish, which we should compare to Völuspá 57, and states that Thor should go where all the powers of evil will have him. In Lokasenna (str. 65) he predicts that Aegir's home shall burn to the ground, which may be another reference to Völuspá 57. These proofs demonstrate that without doubt, there is a clear connection between Lokasenna and Harbardsljod. This connection has simply been overshadowed by the misconceptions surrounding the identity of Harbard in Harbardsljod. Once this misunderstanding is eliminated the relationship between these two poems becomes so apparent that it can lead one to wonder how such a relationship has gone unnoticed for so long.