

The Gold of the Gods: An Analytical Survey of the Concept of
Wealth in the Codex Regius of the Elder Edda

by

Laurence J.P. Gillespie

A thesis
presented to the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
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Winnipeg, Manitoba

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ABSTRACT

Wealth is one of the few things found in every poem of the Codex Regius. Though its treatment varies from poem to poem, it is an important element in both the mythological and heroic poems. Its overall significance in the Edda has thus far received little scholarly attention.

The main purpose of this thesis is to arrive at a definition of Eddic wealth based on the idea of that which had worth to the characters of the Codex Regius, but which was not intrinsic to them nor an abstract concept. It attempts to provide an analytical overview of the concept and function of wealth in the Elder Edda. It also examines the process of wealth transfer and Eddic attitudes toward this. In the process it assesses what wealth reveals about the Eddic poems as works of art, the society that produced them, and the editorial principles that shaped the Codex Regius.

The structure of the thesis is modelled after that of the Elder Edda, with poems being examined in order of their appearance in the Codex Regius. The thesis is divided into an introductory chapter, a main chapter, and a conclusion. Translation of some foreign language references are included at the end of the thesis.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Wealth is a powerful presence in the Elder Edda. It runs like a golden thread through the realms of gods, men, and even giants. Though its form and function may vary, wealth is one of the few universals in the Codex Regius.¹ From the first to the last of the poems there, wealth plays a role. Wealth features in the world of the gods at the highwater mark of creation, the age of innocence when "var þeim vættergis vant ór gulli" (Völospá 8). Even after the end of all existence, it will glisten in the grass of the world that is to come (Völospá 61). And in the heroic poems, wealth motivates much of the action in Atlaqviða, Reginismál and Fáfnismál. It is both a consolation and an object of caution in Hávamál. It figures in the doom of everyone from giants in Reginismál to the last heroes in Hamðismál.

Wealth's greatest value, to those who would probe the secrets of the Edda, lies in this pervasive presence. Few things or concepts can rival wealth for sheer ubiquity. And although its degree of coverage ranges from Alvíssmál's lone reference to "baugar" to Atlaqviða's ringing, multi-stanza

¹ The edition of the Codex Regius used in this thesis is that of Hans Kuhn, Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern. I Text: Ed. Gustav Neckel, rev. Hans Kuhn, Heidelberg, C. Winter, 1962.

catalogue of treasures, the cumulative impact of all the wealth-references is profound.

The wealth-references can also tell us something about the minds of the Eddic poets and the societies they came from. If nothing else, wealth shows emphatically that not all Eddic poets thought alike. To the Atlaqviða poet, for example, wealth clearly lay at the heart of the drama he was describing. For the Atlamál poet, wealth was largely irrelevant. How could they differ so? Why is the attitude toward wealth so cautionary in some places (such as parts of Hávamál) and so unabashedly materialistic elsewhere (such as other parts of Hávamál or certain heroic poems)? How can wealth bring such evil in the Sigurðr and Atli poems, yet have such associations with innocence in Völuspá? Even the framing of these questions can cast light on certain aspects of the Edda.

Wealth impinges on so many aspects of the Eddic world that a deeper understanding of its workings there will undoubtedly reveal a lot about the Edda itself. Thus far, however, wealth's potential to illuminate the Edda has been underutilized. Though material wealth has received some attention from those investigating date and provenance of the Eddic poems² few have used wealth to investigate the Edda's literary side. The most extensive effort published

² Birger Nerman The Poetic Edda in the Light of Archaeology, 1931

this century would have to be Vilhelm Grønbech's Culture of the Teutons (1909-1912) but even Grønbech did not focus specifically on the Edda. His concern was with the role of treasure in the broader context of Germanic society in the heroic age. Analysis of individual poems sometimes refer to wealth³ but again a comprehensive overview is lacking. That is what this thesis endeavours to provide.

The main purpose of this thesis is to provide an analytical overview of the concept and function of wealth in the Codex Regius poems of the Elder Edda. It attempts to arrive at an Eddic definition of wealth based on the concept "that which has value". It constructs this definition from the wealth-references in the Codex Regius itself. In the process of assessing the function of Eddic wealth, the thesis also examines the process of wealth transfer and attitudes toward this. In the course of all this it is hoped some light will be shed on the Eddic poems as works of art, the poets and society that produced them, and the editorial principles that shaped the Codex Regius. The thesis does not address questions of dating and provenance.

The original plan was to devote a separate chapter to each of the three areas: definition, function, and transfer of wealth. A follow-up chapter would tie everything together and bring the literary implications of the findings into

³ (see, for instance, Ursula Dronke's striking observations in The Poetic Edda. I: Heroic Poems, Oxford, Clarendon, 1969).

sharper relief. Once the investigation was underway, however, it became clear this course would not work. All three areas are so closely intertwined that a rigorous separation would produce a great deal of redundancy. Consequently, the decision was made to combine them.

Establishing a definition of Eddic wealth proved challenging. The first step was to collect the main concepts relating to wealth and its transfer and compare their use from poem to poem. These ranged from the concrete realities of red-gold rings, silver saddle-cloths, horses, geese and cows to more abstract notions such as property, trade, gifts, generosity, the surrender of wealth through hospitality, and the concept of women as wealth-objects.

It proved to be impossible to separate form and function in this investigation, as noted earlier. The function of wealth was closely related to its definition. Most of wealth's functions also proved to relate to its transfer. Much effort was expended on the question: How is wealth transferred in the Eddic world? The relationship between the various kinds of wealth-transfers, i.e., gifts, loans, bribes, rewards, compensation, ransom, payments for services rendered, thefts, tributes, extortion, and trade was examined. Then wealth used for these purposes was compared with wealth in more static manifestations. This necessitated a look at wealth's value independent of its transfer-function, in its representation of the honour, status, or even luck of

a family or individual, or as an object of consumption. Grønbech proved to be of particular value in this part of the investigation.

Another problem emerged in the course of the research. There proved to be less continuity in Eddic wealth concepts than anticipated. Though certain ones appeared in several poems, relatively few were found throughout the Edda. Thus, the original plan, to trace the development of certain wealth-concepts through the whole of the Edda, had to be modified. Greater attention had to be paid to the development of the wealth-concepts within individual poems, or groups of poems, or within certain sections of the Edda. When the "territories" covered by certain concepts ended at one of the major internal boundaries of the Codex Regius (such as that between goðakvæði and hetjukvæði), there was often a convenient basis for comparison. Such was the case with arfr, the idea of inheritance or heritage. It plays no part in the goðakvæði but occurs frequently in the hetjukvæði.

Eddic wealth also proved to be very diverse. This necessitated a more detailed treatment of individual poems than anticipated. As it is, great efforts have been made to attain consistency in the treatment of the poems. Since they vary so greatly in their coverage of wealth, however, this has meant very great differences in the amount of space allocated to them here. Thus there has been more reference

made to those Eddic poems traditionally associated with wealth, such as Hávamál, Atlaqviða, and Völundarqviða. The less wealth-oriented poems have not been ignored, however.

It was a constant challenge not to let the forest obscure the trees in this thesis, and vice versa. Even though poems were analyzed individually, it proved difficult to ignore developments of the same story or characters that took place elsewhere in the Edda, or even beyond. This proved particularly true of the story of the Niflung hoard aspirants from Sigurðr to Atli. In fact, Völsungasaga was ignored until quite late in the investigation, to keep its version of the story from influencing the interpretation unduly.

The advantage of treating the poems individually is exemplified by the Atli poems. On first reading they tend to gell into an amorphous narrative of torture, cannibalism, and harp-playing in a snakepit. It is only when each is examined in isolation that the absence of the hoard motif from Atlamál becomes strikingly clear. Otherwise it is easy to let their common heroics and horrors obscure this profound difference between these two poems.

Overriding themes in the realm of Eddic wealth also proved elusive. Ultimately it became clear that wealth's depiction differs greatly from one part of the Codex Regius to the other. Certain forms and functions of wealth predominant in some parts of it are absent elsewhere, as the example of arfr cited above clearly shows.

Certain wealth-related themes are found widely, though not everywhere in the Codex Regius. These include the futility of bribery, the limitations of wealth as a peace-buyer, the priority of relationships over material wealth, and the corrupting or intoxicating power of wealth. These have received considerable attention in the thesis.

The basic structure of the thesis is modelled after that of the Codex Regius. This was done for several reasons. First, it was the order that emerged most naturally in the course of the work. Since the thesis traces the development of the wealth- concept through the Codex Regius it is only natural that it cover the first poem first and the last poem last. Second, the advantages for reference purposes of such a structure are demonstrated by the various handbooks such as Gering and Sijmons, Detter/Heinzel, etc. Thus, poems are discussed in the order in which they appear in the Codex Regius. For the most part, the discussion also follows the stanza order of the poems (as presented in the Neckel/Kuhn edition).

The decision to limit the discussion to the Codex Regius poems may be somewhat more controversial. Certainly it forces the omission of at least one poem of great relevance to Old Norse concepts of wealth, Grottasongr. Ultimately, however, a full-scale foray into the Eddica minora would have enormously complicated the investigation. If one had made an exception for Grottasongr it would have been difficult to

exclude Hyndluljóð, Baldrs Draumar, and a number of other worthies. As it is, the Codex Regius provides a very convenient demarcation of responsibility. Moreover, limiting the examination in this way will also enable a sharper focus on the editorial process that produced the Codex Regius.

Orthography used in this thesis is that of Neckel/Kuhn (except when quoting references that do not use it). This should not by any means be taken as an endorsement of the principles that lie behind it. It was chosen primarily for the sake of consistency with other recent scholarly works on the Edda.

References in the text are based on the systems outlined in Turabian, the University of Manitoba Press's Icelandic Studies Series (in particular the Edda volume), and Clover and Lindow's Old Norse-Icelandic Literature A Critical Guide (Ithaca, Cornell, 1985). The latter two also functioned as convenient bibliographical aids.

The secondary literature used in this thesis is primarily drawn from English and Icelandic sources. Efforts were also made to consult the more important works in German and the Scandinavian languages available here.

Chapter II

Towards an Eddic Definition of Wealth

As noted in the introduction, this thesis examines the concept of wealth as it is presented in the Codex Regius. For that reason the order and structure of the Codex Regius is followed as closely as possible in the development of this definition. While this perhaps reads the compiler of the Codex Regius as more sophisticated than he really was, it may well reveal that there is more to the Codex Regius's structure than many realize. It is hoped that by taking such a minimalist approach, by striving to define wealth within the limits of its coverage in the Edda, anachronistic pitfalls may be avoided.

As K.J. Hughes has noted (personal conversation, April 1987):

We are dealing in the Codex Regius with a pre-monetary culture, which remotely approaches the beginnings of a monetary culture. By virtue, however, of not having reached the level of a monetary culture, the conventional categories of our monetary culture do not fit the earlier cultural experience. That is to say, while we might well deal with things in the pre-monetary culture in terms of "use-value", there is not the slightest possibility that we could meaningfully deal with it in terms of exchange value (though the occasional reference to payment for labour touches on this).

Thus, it should be noted that the use of the term "wealth" in this thesis is meant to contain the concept of "items of worth", not abstract worth, but worth for some human agent or agents in specific social settings. Moreover, in certain (though by no means all) contexts, wealth can be seen on one level as being synonymous with power.⁴

Consequently, this thesis defines wealth as that to which the characters of the Codex Regius attach worth, yet which is not intrinsic to them. This definition thus excludes personal qualities and such abstract concepts as honour or wisdom.

The Codex Regius recognizes worth in several ways. First, the very act of deliberately creating something, such as is described in Volospá, implies a recognition of its worth, for why create something unless it has worth? When something serves as an object of desire, a bone of contention, or something whose loss is lamented or whose presence is rejoiced in (or even simply appreciated) this too demonstrates worth. Worth of an object can be also demonstrated in a negative way, as when it is withheld from or denied to a foe, or extracted from him in order to inflict revenge. Even the most passive use of wealth in the Edda, Fáfnir's passive resting on it, can be interpreted in this light, for his retention of it denies it to his brother and society at

⁴ I am indebted to K.J. Hughes for considerable assistance in drafting the above paragraph.

large. The destruction of giant wealth in Hymisqviða and Prýmsgviða is another such negative demonstration of its worth. For the worth of an item is essential to its role in revenge, for destroying or withholding an item of no worth would have no meaning. The use of items as bribes is another demonstration of their worth.

The mutual recognition of worth proves to be one of the key dilemmas of the Codex Regius. For as most bribe attempts show, there is no standard exchange rate for wealth in the Edda. Time and again it will be shown that the worth a briber attaches to his bribe is not recognized by the intended recipient. An understanding of the basis of this discrepancy is essential to an understanding of Eddic wealth. Much of this thesis is devoted to analyzing this discrepancy.

2.0.1 Völuspá

The poem that stands at the head of the Codex Regius, Völuspá, is a good place to begin an investigation of wealth. It is the alpha and the omega of the Old Icelandic cosmos, beginning before its beginning, and ending beyond its end. And though its dense stanzas often defy interpretation, one assumption is safe, that they deal with things that mattered, that they cover aspects of the mythos and creation that the Völuspá poet (and quite possibly his society) felt mattered the most. Thus, any reference to wealth it makes

will have important implications for the rest of the Edda as well.

The first stanzas of Völuspá are devoid of any reference to wealth. The völva opens her oration with a demand for silence, not payment. Nor does there seem to be any wealth in the world at the beginning. Only natural phenomena are referred to at this point. Wealth is not even mentioned among that which is absent from the newly-formed world. Thus, at the beginning, at least, wealth was not important. Though there are references to gods and giants, beings closely linked to wealth elsewhere, their wealth is not mentioned here.

Wealth does not enter Völuspá and the Codex Regius until stanza 7. The context is enigmatic. It follows the ordering phase of creation, where names and positions are assigned to the heavenly bodies and the times of the day and night. It arrives just ahead of the "pursa meýjar", the first signs of evil in the new world, and immediately after the Æsir raised "hǫrg oc hof", structures of religious significance.

Hittuz æsir á fǫðavelli, þeir er hǫrg og hof
há timbroðo
afla lögðo, auð smíðoðo,
tangir scópo oc tól gorðo

What exactly is meant by auðr, the first thing to have value in the world of Völuspá? Cleasby-Vigfusson⁵ define

⁵ An Icelandic-English Dictionary, initiated by Richard

it as "riches, wealth, opulence", and note that "it is probably akin to óðal". Fritzner⁶ defines it as "overflødig Ejendom, Rigdom". De⁷Vries defines it as "besitz, reichtum" and notes its links to Old English ead "reichum, glück" and Old Saxon od "besitz". Jóhannesson⁸ concurs in the definition "reichum" while Finnur Jónsson⁹ defines it as "rigdom, guld" but defines the expression "smíða auð" as to mean here "smede genstande af guld". With regards to Völuspá specifically, scholarly opinion ranges from various kinds of treasures to the concept of wealth itself. Given the preoccupation of the previous stanzas with the establishment of primal concepts such as times of the day, the latter interpretation is more convincing.

Nordal, for his part, interprets auðr here in a more concrete way

Hér er átt við alls konar gripi úr gulli, men,
hringa, bauga, sem voru ekki einungis skrautgripir,
heldur komu í myntar stað.¹⁰

Cleasby, completed by Gudbrand Vigfusson, Oxford, Clarendon, 1874 (suppl. by Sir William Craigie 1962). p.32.

⁶ Johan Fritzner, Ordbog over Det gamle norske sprog, Kristiana, Den norske Forlagsforening, 1886, vol I, p. 94.

⁷ Jan de Vries, Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1962, p. 18.

⁸ Alexander Jóhannesson, Isländisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch, Bern, Francke Verlag, 1956, p. 7.

⁹ Finnur Jónsson, Lexicon Poeticum Antiquæ Linguae Septentrionalis Ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog oprindelig forfattet af Sveinbjörn Egilsson, 2nd ed. Copenhagen, S.L. Møller, 1931 p. 22.

¹⁰ Sigurður Nordal, Völuspá. 2nd rev. ed. (Reykjavík: Hel-

Pritchard largely concurs, but notes alternatives:

While the noun was originally interpreted to mean 'gold' Mullenhoff, DAK V (1885) 76, it may also refer to any sort of wealth.... This phrase...indicates the fashioning of jewelery and other ornaments.¹¹

However one interprets auðr here, one cannot deny it is linked very closely with a period of building and ordering for the gods. It is something created by them. Its forging is represented as a fitting occupation for them. It is linked with the idea of smithing, as the verb smíða implies, coming as it does between the building of temples and the making of tools. It brings to mind the close link between dwarvish smiths and wealth elsewhere in Old Norse tradition, and possibly even elsewhere in Völuspá, if one sees the catalogue of the dwarves as related to the creation of gold there. It is created by the Æsir acting in concert at one of their most holy places, íðavöllr.

It is hard to regard wealth as evil in itself, given the auspicious circumstances of its creation. It was part of the world before evil had even entered into that world. It was created by a common act of the gods working together at the height of their innocence.

gafell, 1952) p. 60-61.

¹¹ Elenore Cole Pritchard, "The Völuspá: A Commentary." Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1972. p. 244.

Evil comes soon thereafter, however. As early as stanza eight, Völospá takes on an ominous tone, with its introduction of the three enigmatic giant maidens and its obscure reference to the gods "var þeim vættergis vant ór gulli".

The question of greatest relevance to this investigation is to what extent does this evil relate to wealth? At first glance there does seem to be a connection. The only things that stanzas 7 and 8 have in common are references to wealth and the gods. In fact, wealth forms the strongest link between the two stanzas. There is no mention of temples or tools in the latter, but there is wealth.

What exactly is meant by this wealth reference remains very controversial, however. Some feel even the "teitir vóro" refers to wealth's influence, in this case its intoxicating power (just as some interpret the name Gullveig in the same way).¹²

Teflǫo í túni, teitir vóro,
var þeim vættergis vant ór gulli,
unz þriár qvómo þursa meyar,
ámátcar miȝ ór iȝtunheimom. (Völospá 8).

This would attach profound moral implications to the Old Norse concept of wealth very early in the Codex Regius. As it is, however, the more intense the scrutiny one gives these lines, the more obscure they become. So too with "var þeim vættergis vant ór gulli" - "there was for them no

¹² Class lectures by Haraldur Bessason, 1979-82, University of Manitoba.

lack of gold". Many commentators, from Snorri¹³ to Einar Ólafur Sveinsson,¹⁴ have seen these words as referring to a golden age. If there was one, Völuspá has little to say of it outside of stanza 8, however.

This golden age, or whatever it was that preceded the giant maidens, seems to have been fatally disrupted by their arrival, however. Some scholars, such as Sigurður Nordal, have sought an explanation in a different interpretation of "var þeim vættergis"

Þessar jötnameyjar koma með nýjar kröfur, þær vekja ágirnd með Ásum, þeim er ekki lengur vætttergis vant, af því að þeir láta sér ekki nægja það gull, sem þeir eiga. Þannig búa þursameyjarnir undir viðburði þá, sem eru næsta glapspor: víg Gullveigar.¹⁵

Elsewhere he notes:

Í hinum myrkar kafla kvæðisins um þrjár máttugar meyjar, sem komu til Ása úr Jötunheimum og seiðkonuna Gullveigu hlýtur að vera fólgin hugmynd um endalok þessa saklausa tímabils. Skaldið leitar upphafs spillingarinnar í eftirsókn auðlegðar, sem var meginþáttur í allri harmsögu Sigurðar, Niflunga, og Atla. Jötunmeyjarnar kveikja ágirndina, ganga á það lagið, að goðin eru sömu ættar og því má freista þeira.¹⁶

¹³ Snorri Sturluson, Snorra Edda Árni Björnsson, ed. Reykjavík, Íðunn, 1975, p. 28-29.

¹⁴ Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld, I. N.p. Almenna bókafélagið, 1962, p. 330.

¹⁵ Nordal Völuspá p. 63

¹⁶ Sigurður Nordal, Íslensk menning. I. Reykjavík: Mál og Menning, 1942 p. 216.

Some, such as Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, speculate they disrupted this golden age in a more direct and concrete way, "Stálu þær gulli ásanna og voru dverggar skapaðir til að bæta úr eklunni?"¹⁷

Völuspá makes no further mention of any gold-theft. Indeed, there is no sign of such a tradition anywhere else in Icelandic mythology. This absence is striking, especially given the significance such a theft would have had for the gods. Wealth does not seem to have been a bone of contention among the gods either, apart from the conflict over compensation mentioned in stanza 23. Among men it would be a different matter altogether, though.

Van Hamel, for his part, feels the whole idea to this stanza referring to a golden age

is based on the paraphrase given by Snorri. However, Snorri's interpretation finds no support from the text of the Völuspá and seems to have been influenced by such notions as he had of classical mythology. In st. 61, where the commentators would have us believe that the golden age is said to return, the only fact mentioned is the finding back of the golden pieces of the game.... Waiving the story as told in the Snorra Edda, it would never have occurred to any reader that the words var þeim vettergis vant ór gulli should contain an allusion to a golden age.¹⁸

¹⁷ Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld. N.p.: Almenna Bókafélagið, 1962. p 324-325.

¹⁸ Hamel, A.G. van, "The Game of the Gods," Arkiv för nordisk filologi 50, (1934) :219.

On the whole, this first reference to gold in the Codex Regius remains very obscure. It does, however, make an important contribution to the definition of the concept of wealth. Even if one discards, as van Hamel does, the notion of the golden age as being a classical import, this stanza does establish gold as something of value. "Var þeim vattergis vant ór gulli" definitely implies that much, for one cannot feel the lack of something unless it has worth. The giant-maidens seem to have some relationship to this gold, but whether they are the thieves, destroyers, or consumers of it, or simply the originators of the concept of avarice remains unclear. Certainly there is no shortage of avaricious giants in the Codex Regius (see for example Þrymsqviða or Hymisqviða). The skalds also referred to gold as "the giant's mouthful", another hint of their power to consume wealth. If there is in fact a mythic source or origin for greed, it probably does not lie far from jötunheimr.

Wealth does not figure in the stanzas that follow, however. One would think the catalogue of the dwarves would give ample opportunity to mention it, given the close link these creatures have with treasures elsewhere in Old Norse tradition. Though much has been speculated about the role of the dwarf-catalogue, it says nothing about wealth.

Nor is wealth among the gifts the gods bestow on men in stanza 18 of Völuspá. Instead, these are limited to immaterial mental and physical qualities. Does it say something

that the first gifts from the gods are not drawn from the material realm? In a sense the lifeless trees represent the ultimate extreme, all material and no intangible or spiritual. It is only when these things receive the non-material gifts that they become human.

By far the most discussion of wealth in Völuspá has focussed on a single name: Gullveig. For several scholars, Gullveig represents the corrupting, intoxicating power of wealth. To Nordal, for example, Gullveig is the "persónuger-vingur gullsins", the "máttur gullsins í konulíki."¹⁹

Schach seems to concur

The name Gullveig means 'the power of gold' (Sveinsson 1962, p 336) or even the 'intoxication' of gold and symbolizes the corrupting influence of wealth.²⁰

In this he follows Turville-Petre, who notes

as used in poetry, veig nearly always means "strong drink"...Gullveig's name could thus mean the 'power', the 'drink', even the 'drunkenness' of gold, and hence the madness and corruption caused by this precious metal.²¹

For his part, Einar Ólafur Sveinsson feels

¹⁹ Nordal Völuspá p 95, 96

²⁰ Paul Schach "Some Thoughts on Völuspá," Edda: A Collection of Essays. Ed. R.J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason. University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies, 4. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1983. p 95,96.

²¹ Gabriel Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North. (New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964). p. 158

Fyrsta áfall heimsins er það, þegar gullöldinni á íðavelli lauk við tilkomu þriggja þursa meýja...Gullveig hlýtur að merkja mátt gullsins og e.t.v. er lýsingin á Heiði líkingarmál: gullið geri menn óða, þetta er líkt ærslum þeim, sem fylgja seiði. Eða þekkti hann dæmi vanadýrkenda, þar sem saman fór auðsæld og seiður?²²

De Vries notes:

Der Name Gullveig...gibt noch einen weiteren Fingerzeig, denn hier muß das Gold eine Rolle gespielt haben, nicht in dem Sinne, wie Müllenhoff annahm, daß hier auf die Technik der Goldschmeidekunst hingedeutet wird, sondern vielmehr auf die verführerische Kraft, die dieses Metall auf den Geist der Menschen ausübt (auri sacra fames)²³

In his own edition of Völuspá Nordal adds:

Það kann að vera djarft að álita hana ímynd gullsins og áhrifa þess, en ef hún á að þýða eitthvað, er engin skýring eðlilegri. Og það er ekki of mikið að láta gullsóknina valda tímamótum. Öll Niflungasagan, sem bersýnilega hefur haft mikil áhrif á höfund Völuspár, eins og eðlilegt var, sýnir vald gullsins. Það er rógmálmur skatna. Ágirni var afskapleg í heiðnum sið. Það var ekki furða, þótt maður, sem skilið hafði skuggahliðar eiðrofa og skeggaldar, rekta rætur allrar spillingar til gullsóknarinnar.²⁴

As can be surmised from the above, the literature on the Gullveig question is considerable. Of all the literary aspects of wealth in the Elder Edda, this one has received the most attention by far. A convenient survey of the views on Gullveig can be found in Pritchard.²⁵ All these, however,

²² Sveinsson, Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld. p 336

²³ Jan de Vries, Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte. vol II . 3d ed. Grunndriss der germanischen Philologie, 12 (Berlin, de Gruyter, 1970) p 211-212.

²⁴ Nordal, Völuspá p 89

though intriguing, remain largely speculation. All that can be said with certainty is that there are no conflicts in Völuspá prior to Gullveig's arrival. Her entry coincides with "fólcvíg fyrst í heimi", a war among the gods, seemingly over the payment of some kind of tribute, fine, or compensation.

hvárt scyldo æsir afráð gialda
eða scyldo goðin öll gildi eiga. (Völuspá 23)

This alone has sufficed for many commentators to prove that Gullveig represents the destructive, divisive power of wealth (and most of these take the three giant maidens to have caused trouble not by stealing the gold of the gods, but by introducing them to the notion of avarice, making it possible for the gods to feel gold-greed). If this payment is indeed a kind of compensation then we have parallels with Fáfnismál and Reginismál and the terrible conflicts that develop there between kinsmen over the distribution of compensation.

Stanza 25 sees the first use of women as wealth, as something that can be given like an object. Even the gods' troubles here suggest their innocence. It may well be their inexperience with making deals, with giving and exchanging wealth, that leads them to make such a disastrous gift. They do not yet know how to bargain, they are still vulnerable to being cheated on a cosmic scale. And it falls to

²⁵ Pritchard, "The Völuspá: A Commentary." p. 111-114, 316-331.

Þórr to salvage the situation in the only way he can.

The stanzas that follow see a greater focus on the possessions of the gods than has hitherto been the case. We see possessions being used in new ways. "Heimdalar hljóð" (whether this represents his horn, his ear, or even his power of hearing) is hidden beneath the sacred tree. Is this to prevent theft or protect it, or has it in fact been stolen already? Either way, the need to hide things shows that the world has changed. It is no longer innocent.

Valföðr has put up a veð, a new type of exchange in the Eddic world. The necessity to make payments of this kind, for whatever reason, reveals yet another limitation of divine power. To whom is he making this pledge? Why? The tendency in scholarly writings on this point has been to focus more on what this veð was rather than why it was made. At least this is the case in Nordal.²⁶ The "why" is very important, however. It shows that there are other powers in the divine realm, powers that even Óðinn must deal with through gifts or pledges of wealth, not force. This need to pay is one of the first indications of the limitations of Óðinn's power. It is another use of wealth to show that the gods are not omnipotent.

²⁶ Nordal Völuspá p. 94-96

The stanza which follows, 28, suggests that this veð is an eye, possibly given to Mímir. This seems to be Óðinn's greatest treasure. Like "Heimdalar hlióð", it too is hidden. The world has become a dangerous place when the gods themselves must hide their wealth. It is clear there are other powers to be reckoned with in the universe now, ones that even the gods must pay or make pledges to.

Stanza 29 continues to describe divine surrenders of wealth. In one sense it is a culmination of the verses dealing with divine wealth transfers that began with stanza 23's argument about "afráð". Every verse since then has touched on wealth, payments, or pledging in some way. And though the nature of these payments and pledges remains obscure, if one follows Snorri a certain hierarchy may be glimpsed. The payments to the giant-smith, for example, if this is what stanzas 25-26 hint at, were the ultimate value-items: the sun, the moon, and the goddess of fertility. There follows the concealment of certain items representing or embodying the physical powers of Óðinn and Heimdall. With stanza 29, however, wealth finally takes on a more concrete, worldly manifestation, "hringa oc men". The stature of trading partner also seems to have shrunk. Although the giant smith was a mighty being, and the recipient of "veð Valfǫðrs" doubtless also of great power, the recipient of the "hringa oc men" seems in some respects a lesser being. At least Herfǫðr seems more in control of the situation, a

greater figure dispensing payment to a lesser for services rendered.

Unfortunately, textual difficulties with stanza 29 complicate the analysis of its wealth references considerably. As it is, there are readings of its third line "fe spiǫll," such as "fé", "spiǫll", and "fespiǫll", which allow for a much greater stress on wealth in this stanza than is generally recognized. Virtually all commentators reject such readings according to Nordal²⁷ "Svo má heita, að allir skýr-
endur séu sammála um að breyta fe í fekk." Some, such as Gering and Sijmons,²⁸ and Pritchard²⁹ do so primarily on metrical grounds. Nordal allows for the possibility, but seems very dubious

Féspjöll gæti þýtt: galdra til að afla fjár (sjá Yngl. s. 7. kap.) en erfitt virðist að láta þá merkingu eiga við í þessu sambandi.³⁰

Only a few stanzas earlier, however, the concepts of magic and wealth were linked dramatically in Gullveig, so it is not as incongruous as Nordal suggests to find a similar link here. Moreover, the idea of the witch receiving pay-

²⁷ Nordal Völuspá p. 96

²⁸ Hugo Gering and B. Sijmons, Die Lieder der Edda 3 vol. Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda. Erste Hälfte: Götterlieder. Nach dem Tode des Verfassers herausgegeben von B. Sijmons. Germanistische Handbibliothek, begründet von Julius Zacher, VII 3. 1. Hälfte, (Halle, Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1927).

²⁹ Pritchard, "The Völuspá: A Commentary" p. 353-354.

³⁰ Nordal Völuspá p. 96

ment for her services, which took the form of "hringa oc men" a mere line above, is quite in keeping with the idea of wealth-spells.

Stanza 29 is the first time where wealth actually serves a purpose, that is, buying the volva's services. To be sure, the text does not state this directly, it is merely implied by the reference to the gift immediately before the description of her vision.

Wealth is not a part of the volva's vision. There will be no further glimpses of gold until stanza 37's "salr ór gulli, Sindra ættar". Some, such as Finnur Jonsson, as noted by Nordal, find this stanza incongruous amongst all the descriptions of torment and retribution:

Þessa vísu telur Finnur Jónsson hafa slæðzt hingað úr öðru kvæði, og hafi einhverjum, sem kunni hana, fundizt hún eiga hér heima, af því að hún sé um sal(i) eins og næsta vísa; efni þessa kafla kvæðisins sé að lýsa kvalastöðum og ógnum, en þessi vísa bendi þvert á móti til gleðskapar (Arkiv IV, 32).³¹

It is clear that gold has passed out of the divine realm by this point. Indeed, it seems to be located in a deep, dark place from the name "Niðavellir". This is the sort of place where other Eddic gold will be found too. It is not clear whether the gold or the hall is of the line of Sindri, though. The latter interpretation seems the most likely. Nonetheless, the link between dwarves and gold implied by

³¹ Ibid., p. 108.

the positioning of the catalogue of the dwarves right after the first Völospá reference to gold (stanza 8) is reinforced here.

Sindri, as Pritchard notes (p. 394) is the dwarf who Skáldskaparmál credits with making Freyr's boar, Óðinn's ring Draupnir, and Þórr's hammer.

For those seeking early proof of a link between wealth and evil, however, stanza 39's list of crimes is disappointing. None are against wealth. No property crimes, whether theft, robbery, or vandalism are cited. One cannot but wonder if such criminals were regarded as less evil than "menn meinsvara oc morðvarga". It may well simply reflect, as Bessason has pointed out (class lectures) the bi-planar "meiri ok minni" structure of Völospá, with one level of crime (and punishment) for gods and another for men.

Wealth is also conspicuously absent from the description of the last days in stanza 45. The sins of the declining world are sexual "hórdómr mikill" and social, not material.

Stanza 42 refers to a kind of wealth thus far unknown to the gods. Eggþér is called "gýgiar hirðir", which may refer to livestock. To be sure, others have seen him as a herdsman of monsters or even other giants. The gods, for all their power, show little sign of owning herds in the Codex Regius. Only in one of the heroic poems is there a hint that they do.

Both gods and giants seem to possess, or are closely associated with, cocks. That of the Æsir seems particularly wealth-related with his name "Gullinkambi". Moreover, it is unique to Völuspá. As Pritchard (p. 419) and Detter/Heinzel³² note, it is not included in the list of rooster-names in the Snorra Edda, and he seems to be called Solgofnir in Helgakviða Hundingsbana önnor stanza 48.

Wealth is of no consequence at Ragnarok. The gods, the monsters, and the universe are destroyed, and wealth presumably along with them, though this is not explicitly stated. It is not until after all has passed away that gold gleams anew, in stanza 61:

Par muno eptir undrsamligar
gullnar tǫflur í grasi finnaz
þærs í árdaga áttar hǫfðo.

Ragnarok, indeed the whole of existence, has a golden frame. For this stanza seems to refer to the same golden game that immediately preceded the arrival of the three giant maidens, which was the beginning of the end. Its appearance after the end, after all else has been destroyed, implies a permanence to wealth that differs markedly from its depiction elsewhere in the Edda.

This has been interpreted in various ways. To Nordal (p 145) "Þetta sýnir, að friðsæla goðanna hefst aftur". Pritchard (p 483-484) stresses the wondrous, as in supernatural

³² F. Detter and R. Heinzel, Sæmundar Edda mit einen Anhang Leipzig, Verlag von George Wigand, 1903. II:59.

aspect of these toflur:

The first element of the compound, undr is most frequently used to indicate 'something strange' or 'awe-inspiring'. It can also refer to a specter or a supernatural being.... These games are 'wonderful' not only with regard to their beauty, but to their character also, for they have survived the Ragnarök to which even the world tree and the runes have succumbed.

Van Hamel goes even farther in assessing the implications this stanza has for the concept of wealth:

it is manifest that the toflur of the gods cannot be called undrsamliar simply because of their beauty. Then why does the poet use this adjective in st. 61? Evidently on account of their supernatural character. They have survived the great conflagration of Ragnarök.... The fire, in fact, is the magic through which the giants could destroy all created things. It was a magic stronger than any other, with the exception only of gold....The magic of the gold surpasses that of the fire. This is why the thrice-burned and ever-living witch is called Gullveig. As is well-known, gold was much valued among the ancient Norsemen, but not from any modern associations such as its beauty or its comparatively rare occurrence, but because of its supreme magic, immune even from fire. Paganism had its golden standard as well as modern rationalism....³³

Even if one does not go so far as van Hamel (and it should be stressed that this "supreme magic" of gold he refers to receives little corroboration elsewhere in the Edda), it is hard to deny that the creator of Völuspá seemed to regard gold as a powerful and permanent thing. It is depicted as an important part of the world to come after Ragnarok. The hall of the righteous will be "gulli þakðan" (stanza 64). This gives it very positive connotations. So

³³ Hamel, A.G. van, "The Game of the Gods", p. 224

much so, in fact, that it is difficult to reconcile this with the interpretation of Gullveig as a manifestation of gold-lust. If gold is evil, why is it adorning the halls of the righteous?

What gold does have in common with Gullveig here is indestructability. As van Hamel notes, gold survives Ragnarok just as Gullveig survives three slayings and three immolations.

Some interpretations (Müllenhoff, Pritchard) (p. 488) regard Gimlé as meaning "roof of gems and precious stones". This would stress the wealth aspect all the more, though scholars such as Nordal (p. 148) dissent from this view of Gimlé.

To render the obscure and enigmatic still more so, Völuspá concludes with the appearance of a dragon, a creature often associated with wealth in Old Icelandic tradition (see Reginismál, Fáfnismál, and Jómsvíkingasaga). In fact, in many Icelandic folktales dragons seem to grow by nesting on gold. Whether a connection is hinted at here, like much else in Völuspá remains unclear. Bessason at least feels (class lectures) that this simply describes the sibyl's return from the future to the present, a present in which dragons are still a force to be reckoned with.

2.0.2 An Overview of Wealth in Vǫlospá

With Vǫlospá, some of the first elements of an Eddic definition of wealth emerge. That which has value in Vǫlospá excepting such cosmic entities as the sun, the moon, and the deities themselves, as demonstrated by its depiction as an object of desire, possession, or reward is gold, "hringa oc men", and possibly drink "dreccr mið Mímir". There is no sign that clothes or weapons count as wealth, nor much sign that the gods valued herds, horses, or other livestock apart from cocks. Nor is there any sign of its power as a corrupting force on the human world, whatever it may do to the gods.

Vǫlospá's attitude towards wealth remains ambiguous. On the one hand, gold has positive connotations. It seems to precede the entry of evil into the world, and survives Ragnarok to adorn the halls of the righteous. This would hardly be appropriate if wealth was seen as intrinsically evil. No crimes involving wealth are numbered among the infamies mentioned in Vǫlospá nor among the signs of the collapse of the moral order.

All this argues against the interpretation of the Gullveig episode as an allusion to the corrupting power of wealth. The strongest points in its favour are when Vǫlospá seems to refer to greed for wealth, which may occur in stanza 23's discussion of who would "afrað gjalda", and stanza

25's recriminations over the loss of items of cosmic import. Both in stanza 25 and 8 there are hints that the *Æsir* are unused to dealing with wealth as a finite, limited resource (as in "var þeim vættergis vant ór gulli"). This all suggests the problems transferring wealth can bring, a theme that will recur elsewhere in the Edda. On the whole, the gods are not depicted as strivers after wealth, nor is much attention paid to their possessions. This too will set the standard for much of the Codex Regius.

2.0.3 Hávamál.

Hávamál essentially completes the introduction to the Edda begun by Völuspá. In the process, however, it brings out aspects of wealth quite different from those of Völuspá. For even though it is laid in the mouth of the highest of the gods, its preoccupation is not the sublime cosmology of Völuspá but the earthy worldliness of the Old Norse bóndi. Its treatment of wealth reflects this.

For starters, this treatment is far more extensive. Wealth, how to get and keep it, and the effects of not having it, preoccupy much of Hávamál. Hávamál also subjects the concept of the gift to intensive scrutiny (a subject that is only briefly touched on in Völuspá). It also examines the concept of hospitality. At first glance it may seem incongruous that this most materialistic of Eddic poems also devotes the most attention to the idea of freely sur-

rendering one's wealth to another through gifting and hospitality. Similarly, though attributed to a god, Hávamál is concerned more with wealth on a human scale. It deals with the wealth of men, not gods. For this reason, perhaps, the Hávamál poet seems to have been keenly aware of the concept of poverty. This is demonstrated by the frequent allusions to the plight of the traveller, who is frequently portrayed as lacking just about everything of tangible material value, in particular shelter from the elements. Often "that which has value" is defined as that which alleviates the pangs of poverty. And without a certain minimum of these things, one is particularly vulnerable, which strikes at the heart of another Hávamál ideal, independence.

Hávamál, moreover, makes a special effort to describe the things that have value. In Völospá, by contrast, this comes out only obliquely, for defining what had value was of little importance for the Völospá poet.

The central perspective, at the outset of Hávamál, is that of one who has no wealth, the lonely traveller. As if to stress his vulnerability, Hávamál opens with the warning:

Gáttir allar, áðr gangi fram,
 um scoðaz scyli,
 um scygnaz scyli
 þvíat óvíst er at vita, hvar óvinir
 sitia á fleti fyrir. (Hávamál 1).

The second stanza begins with "Gefendr heilir!", but this seems more a direct address than a hymn to the glories of

giving. Stanza 2 begins to define what has value by referring to a traveller's most basic needs. This makes for a much more concrete and practical definition of wealth than what one finds in Völuspá.

Initially, at least, Hávamál is oriented towards the simpler material pleasures: food, fire, and clothes according to stanza 3, and water and towel in stanza 4. Here wealth is something that provides comfort, not cold dragon gold.

Hávamál is swift to point out the limitations of physical comforts, however, and the threat overindulgence poses to the unwary. Stanza 10 makes clear that wealth is no substitute for wisdom:

Byrði betri berrat maðr brauto at,
 enn sé manvit mikit
 auði betra þiccir þat í ókunnum stað,
 slíct er válaðs vera.

It is significant as the first direct comparison of the value of wealth and wisdom to be found in the Edda. That wisdom is "auði betra" is one of the central themes of Hávamál.

The questions that immediately spring to mind are: How is it better? What are wisdom's advantages over wealth?

The stanzas that follow address the question obliquely. Wealth is not mentioned directly, but instead the evils and dangers of overconsumption are chronicled (stanzas 10-14, 17, 19). They are enough to fetter Óðinn himself. And overconsumption is not possible without wealth.

Overconsumption of food is taken to task next (stanzas 20-21). Men who do not know the measure of their own stomachs are depicted as worse than animals (stanza 21). Wealth in food, then, has the capacity to reduce man to the bestial level, or even below. Much trouble results in Hávamál from the overconsumption of intoxicants or food.

Hávamál wealth is very much a consumer wealth. It is found in things that are to be consumed and used, such as food, drink, clothes, and weapons. The concept of wealth without practical utility is alien to Hávamál. It makes for a sharp contrast with Völuspá.

Conversely, however, Hávamál condemns the complete absence of wealth. Without wealth, independence is impossible. This is expressed clearly in stanza 36-37:

Bú er betra, þótt lítit sé,
 halr er heima hverr
 þótt tvær geitr eigi oc taugreptan sal,
 þat er þó betra en bœnn.

Bú er betra, þótt lítit sé,
 halr er heima hverr
 blóðuct er hiarta, þeim er biðia scal
 sér í mál hvert matar.

Here wealth is valued not for itself, but for the independence it can provide. Wealth has a clearly defined function in Hávamál, and when it is used in that way, is all to the good. It is mainly when people lose sight of the proper function of wealth and misuse it that trouble starts. Wealth is to be used, not hoarded. When used in moderation it is all to the good.

With stanza 39, the main body of Hávamál's sermon on wealth begins. No one is so generous that he dislikes having his gifts repaid. The wording is adroit, so neutral it is unclear what reasons the Hávamál poet believes lie behind this. Is it that man's greed is inexhaustible, that he is never satisfied, that he can never have enough? Or is Hávamál simply telling us never to be afraid to give, never to use a benefactor's wealth as an excuse for not repaying him? Or is it simply a comment on the self-interest behind every gift, like the saying that gift always looks for gift?

Two of Hávamál's major preoccupations are the transfer and use of wealth. In both cases this reflects a view of wealth as an active, dynamic entity, not a passive, static object to be hoarded. Völospá wealth of the passive "gull-nar tǫflur" variety is not present in Hávamál.

Hávamál also goes farther than Völospá in that it attempts to draw up rules and models for the transfer of wealth. As noted earlier, wealth-transfers seem to have resulted in major conflicts in Völospá (see stanzas 23, 25, and 26). Few clues are given as to what made these transfers of wealth so volatile (though the enormity of the stakes in stanzas 25-26 must have been a factor). Hávamál tries, however, to explain the dynamics of giving and in doing so reveals a lot about the wealth-attitudes of its poet (or poets).

The first kind of wealth-transfer described in Hávamál is the most one-sided, that of hospitality to the traveller. It is not absolutely necessary that the traveller be seen as a complete stranger, outside the bonds of kinship and friendship that the host may have. Nevertheless, the frequent references to strangers in Hávamál and the repeated warnings not to mock them suggests that it may well be the case. How is it that Hávamál, then, for all its ruthless pragmatism, opens with praising a one-way surrender of wealth? For Hávamál, despite its rigorous catalogue of the needs of the guest, has little to say about his obligations towards the host. He is only advised to watch his tongue, to eat before visiting, and to avoid overstaying his welcome.

When it discusses gifting proper, however, Hávamál details the reciprocity of the obligations of giver and receiver at much greater length.

As noted earlier, Hávamál's remarks on the readiness of even the rich to receive (stanza 39) can be taken in two different ways. Indeed, given the stress Hávamál places on moderation elsewhere, this may well be a veiled criticism of those who have much, but are willing to accept more. The positive connotations of words like mildr and matgóðr really suggest the alternative, that one should not interpret generosity as making one averse to gifts. Taking it this way it becomes an apt introduction to stanzas 40-42, all of

which preach against underconsumption and its fellow travelers miserliness and stinginess. One should beware of excuses not to give, and not to repay debts.

Stanzas 40-42 are where Hávamál's doctrine of the golden mean comes into its own. Just as overconsumption was condemned in stanzas 10-14, 17, 19-21, its opposite is attacked in stanza 40. As stanzas 41 and 42 make clear, this reluctance to use wealth can mean a dangerous stinginess and fear of giving, which in turn is not so far from the greed implied by overconsumption.

Stanza 40 is the first unequivocal assertion of another view of wealth that is quite distant from Vǫlospa's:

Fiár síns, er fengit hefr,
 scylit maðr þorð þola ;
 opt sparir leiðom, þatz hefir liúfom hugat,
 mart gengr verr, enn varir.

This is a testament to the transience of wealth, that accumulating it often delivers it into the hands of other than those for whom it is intended. It is a theme that will recur time and again in Hávamál. Wealth is transient. There is no guaranteeing who will reap the benefits of one's work. One should not suffer in order to save. Wealth should be consumed in moderation, or used to cement friendship ties through giving. Wealth is worthless in itself. It is something to be used, to be spent for the liúfr.

One thinks of the Viking raids here, of all the farmers' harvests that went to stealing strangers. It is easy to view the Hávamál poet as a product of the Viking Age when one interprets his words in this way.

There is another way of reading them, however. It is possible the "leiðr" and the "liúfr" are one and the same. This verse could then be a commentary on how excessive saving (in a household situation, at least) can often alienate even the intended beneficiaries of the savings. It was a situation as familiar to Old Norse literature as it is in the present day. The classic, example, of course, is that of Hallgerðr in Njála. Her response to the husband pressing her for greater economies could easily have been inspired by Hávamál (Njálssaga, c. XI, p. 33): "Ekki fer ek at því, þóttu hafir svelt þik til fjár ok faðir þinn". She is a liúf who has become leið to her husband, in part because of his obsession with saving.

Though this interpretation of stanza 40 is not the traditionally accepted one, it is quite compatible with the Old Norse belief in the power of wealth to change people, a view expressed nowhere better than in Hávamál's "Margr verðr af aurum api" (provided one accepts the emendations necessary to produce this reading). Wealth turns people into dragons both in Eddas and in sagas. It has powerful effects both on those who receive it and on those who give or deny it to others.

Stanza 41 turns to wealth's positive influence, when wielded as a gift:

Vápnom oc váðom scolo vinir gleðiaz,
 þat er á siálfom sýnst,
 viðrgefendr oc endrgefendr erost lengst vinir,
 ef þat bíðr at verða vel.

This is reiterated in the first half of stanza 42:

Vin sínom scal maðr vinr vera
 oc gialða giðf við giðf

That wealth is not the sole basis for friendship is implied by "ef þat bíðr at verða vel." Failure to give can ruin a friendship, that much seems clear. It cannot, however, produce friendship where there is no real basis for it.

Wealth in this section is mainly a tool. And it functions through the gift.

The perception of wealth is the next subject Hávamál deals with of relevance to this investigation. What does the Hávamál poet feel makes one wealthy? What does being rich really mean? These questions are answered in stanza 47:

Ungr var ec forðom fór ec einn saman,
 þá varð ec villr vega
 auðigr þóttomz er ec annan fann,
 maðr er mannz gaman.

It is clear a very different kind of auðr is being discussed here, the richness of having friends. "Auðigr þóttumk" - 'I thought myself rich'. To the Hávamál poet, friendship is another kind of wealth. In fact, he seems to

regard it as an even higher form of wealth, because of the emphasis he places on giving gifts. Moreover, there are no injunctions to be stingy or even thrifty in Hávamál. There are no warnings to save one's wealth for a rainy day. Nor is one advised to sacrifice relationships in order to preserve or attain a higher level of material wealth. The material is always subordinated to the inter-personal in Hávamál. Wealth is for building and consolidating personal relationships. Stanza 48 reiterates this:

Mildir, fræcnir menn bazi lifa,
 sialðan súta ala;
 enn ósniallr maðr uggir hotvetna,
 sýtir æ glöggr við giðfom.

To be brave and generous is the best way to live and the happiest. Indeed, Hávamál even depicts stinginess as a kind of cowardice. The miser is afraid to give, so much so that even the receipt of gifts upsets him, because of the obligation of repayment they impose. Stinginess is "ósniallr" and cowardly.

Stanza 49 is very puzzling. On the surface, at least, it seems to offer support to stanza 48, especially when one remembers stanza 41, where clothes and weapons were used to epitomize wealth. It is possible the narrator is contrasting his own generosity with that of the hypothetical miser: I am so generous I give my clothes to wooden men, he is so stingy he cannot even give to his friends. Other commentators,

such as Briem,³⁴ have seen a far deeper mythological significance to this stanza, linking the treemen with Adam and Eve, who were ashamed of their nakedness, and Askr and Emb-la, the first men, originally in the form of trees according to Völuspá.

Elsewhere, to be sure, Óðinn is not noted for his altruism. Indeed, in the sagas and Eddas his gifts often have a decidedly nasty side, as in the whetstone Bolverkr gave to the nine thralls, or the poisoned meat he left when visiting Christian kings. And if he is the one doing the giving here, what is the point? Is it simply to demonstrate generosity for its own sake, taken to the ultimate extreme? Neither appear in keeping with Hávamál's theme of pragmatic moderation.

There are many parallels with Völuspá 7 and 17 here. A more detailed discussion of this would lead us outside the scope of our investigation, however.

Stanza 50 continues the analogy of the naked tree. Here its nudity is caused by the lack of company. The picture is more desolate than that of stanza 49 by far. Without the wealth found in friends, the tree is dying:

Hrørnar þoll sú er stendr þorpi á,
 hlýra henni þorcr né barr
 svá er maðr, sá er mangi ann,
 hvat skal hann lengi lifa?

³⁴ Ólafur Briem, Eddukvæði, Reykjavík, Skálholt, 1968. p. 104.

Bessason (class notes) has noted that stanza 50 forms an interesting contrast with stanza 49, in that in stanza 49 gifts of clothing turn wood into men, while in stanza 50 the lack of friendship (and presumably the gifts friendship represents) is killing a tree. Just as in Völuspá where the gifts of the gods turn lifeless trees into men, gifts and friendship are seen as making the difference between life and unlife, life and death.

To be sure, there are times in Hávamál where one wonders if friends are primarily valued for their gifts and hospitality, whether their ultimate justification is still the material wealth they provide. Both stanzas 50 and 52 suggest friendship has a deeper intrinsic value, however.

Stanza 52 calls for moderation in giving. Certainly this is in keeping with Hávamál's support of the moderation ideal throughout. It reminds us, however, that there is much more to the gift than its material component. It is just as important for the feelings and other intangibles that it embodies:

Mikit eitt scala manni gefa
 opt kaupir sér í litlo lof
 með hálfom hleif oc með hóllo ker
 fecc ec mér félaga.

This is not so much a warning against giving too much as it is a demonstration of what can be accomplished with small gifts.

The next section deals with a new aspect of wealth, that of obtaining it. There has been little on this subject in the Codex Regius up to now. Wealth has been something that was made by the gods, or that one has and dispenses through gifts and hospitality. With stanzas 58-59, however, the obtaining of wealth is the focus. Moreover, wealth is seen as a desirable end, a reward for waking early, comparable in value to taking the life of a foe:

Ar scal rísa, sá er annars vill
 fé eða fiqr hafa
 sialdan liggiandi úlfr lær um getr,
 né sofandi maðr sigr.

Ar scal rísa, sá er á yrkendr fá,
 oc ganga síns verca á vit
 mart um dvelr, þann er um morgin sefr,
 hálfr er auðr und hvøtom.

This is the most clearcut statement yet of wealth as a motivator of action. Wealth is obtained through competition. Getting up early gives one a crack at someone else's wealth. A very concrete, tangible incentive is offered, not some abstract appeal to heroism. It is as real as a wolf's prey.

Stanza 59 refers to a more peaceful way of obtaining wealth, that of the farmer. Here too, wealth is depicted as a worthy motivator of action: "hálfr er auðr und hvøtom." Half of wealth depends on being energetic, vigorous, and active. Just as the first wealth was made "á íðavelli", on the plains of activity, it retains its link with the energetic and the vigorous. Wealth is not for the passive. Whether in peace or war, it must be obtained through action.

Right after the reference to wealth's desirability as an end, Hávamál moves to repudiate the notion that clothes and possessions make the man:

Þvegin oc mettr ríði maðr þingi at,
 þótt hann séð væddr til vel
 scúa oc bróca scammiz engi maðr,
 né hestz in heldr, þótt hann hafit góðan.
 (stanza 61)

This is somewhat surprising, given the great stress placed on the value of clothes in stanza 49. Or perhaps the simple possession of any kind of clothing is enough, perhaps once one owns some it does not matter how good (or bad) they are. Stanza 61 is also the first reference to horses as a form of wealth. Again, Hávamál says their quality says nothing about their owner. Certainly Atli in Atlaqviða with his fine horses and terrible character would seem to bear this out. Perhaps, however, it is not appropriate to measure a Hunnish king by a code of conduct prescribed for the Old Norse bóndi. In any event, the physical comforts mentioned here echo those cited in stanzas 3 and 4, though the former reference does not suggest clothing is less important.

Stanza 61 is really Hávamál at its most egalitarian. Indeed, since clothes have come to epitomize wealth in Hávamál (see stanza. 41, 49), this statement questioning the importance of clothes really strikes at the basis for wealth as well. At this point, at least, wealth does not seem to be the be-all and end-all for the Hávamál poet.

Here as elsewhere, Hávamál views clothes as a key component of wealth. This is not the case in many Eddic poems. In Völuspá, for example, there is no mention of clothes at all. The closest it comes is the "hringa oc men" that Óðinn dispenses to the völva.

Though clothing has an important utilitarian function, in Hávamál there is a keen awareness of its role in displaying wealth. Thus clothing is a form of wealth that is most important in the company of others. Yet Hávamál stresses that its absence says nothing about the person who lacks it. Honour is independent of wealth, a theme that will be investigated more closely in relation to the Atli poems.

Wealth is not prominent in the next few stanzas. The man without backers suffers a lonely poverty in stanza 62. Stanza 65 notes how words can often cost wealth (though the sense may be simply metaphorical):

Orða þeira, er maðr qðrom segir,
 opt hann giqld um getr.

Stanza 66 reminds us of the material benefits that can come from true friendship and true hospitality. It does so obliquely, by exposing the lying stinginess of the niggardly host. For this type, the concept of hospitality does not include food and drink. It is a situation that will have many parallels elsewhere in the Edda.

It is possible to interpret stanza 66 in the light of stanza 65. That is, perhaps the niggardliness displayed to the Hávamál poet in stanza 66 is his "giöld" for not watching his tongue in stanza 65. It would be a telling illustration of an abstract word to the wise.

Whether fable or not, this stanza clearly portrays a sort of stinginess that is beneath the contempt of the Hávamál poet. The matníðingr receives rather unsympathetic treatment in the sagas as well (see Egla, Laxdæla, Njála, and Bandamannasaga, to name but a few). Óðinn's view of such characters is expressed in no uncertain terms in Grímnismál, as will be soon shown.

Even in Völuspá, where Óðinn's character is not nearly so well-delineated, there are signs he has little patience with niggling arguments over wealth. At least in stanza 24 he sets off "fólcvíg fyrst í heimi" in the immediate aftermath of a wealth dispute that was quite trivial by the cosmic scale of Völuspá up to that point.

Stanza 67 continues the theme:

Hér oc hvar myndi mér heim uf boðit,
 ef þyrptac at málungi mat,
 eða tvau lær hengi at ins tryggva vinar,
 þars ec hafða eitt etið.

The spirit of this stanza seems clear, but the significance of the "tvau lær" has puzzled many commentators. (Ger-
 ing & Sijmons even cite a possible folktale explanation, p.

109.) Does it reflect the abundance of "ins tryggva vinar" (which most commentators read as ironic), who does not share unless he has lots to spare? Or were one of those "lær" given him by the wanderer, in exchange for hospitality? Or does it, as Gering and Sijmons suggest, hint at the same sort of replenishing sorcery one finds in Draupnir and Þórr's goats? Bessason (class notes) suggests that the implication is simply that eating an entire lær would be a gluttonous abuse of a friend's hospitality.

Either way, this seems to suggest there is more to Hávamál friendship than pragmatism alone. For friendship and hospitality to be more than lip-service to social norms, a willingness to surrender wealth is essential. Greed and stinginess render friendship and hospitality meaningless. Though it does not go so far as the Christian belief that faith without works is nothing, it does stress the primacy of the personal over the material. One has to be able to surrender the material to achieve the personal. Anything else is treated very critically in Hávamál. Indeed, it frequently stresses the need to sacrifice the material to gain the personal, but never the reverse.

Stanza 69's list of consolations for ill-health includes wealth, however. This ranks it up there with sons, kinsmen, and achievement. It is clearly an end well worth striving for, to Hárr:

Erat maðr allz vesall, þótt hann sé illa heill,
 sumr er af sonom sæll,
 sumr af frændom, sumr af fé ærno,

sumr af vercom vel.

Stanza 70's treatment of wealth is enigmatic. Its second line is frequently emended to "enn sé ólifðom":

Betra er lifðom oc sællifðom,
 ey getr qvicr kú
 eld sá ec up brenna auðgom manni fyrir,
 enn úti var dauðr fyr durom.

"Sællifðom" causes many commentators difficulties. Kuhn allows for "glücklich lebend", but says "die stelle muß verderben sein" ('the passage must be corrupted')(Kuhn p. 199.). Ólafur Briem and Finnur Jónsson emend it silently in their editions.

Though tempting, the emendation is not absolutely necessary. Though "enn sé ólifðom" would strengthen the stanza's impact considerably, "sællifðom" is still plausible. The first line would then mean 'Better it is for the living and for those living in prosperity', not as powerful as the emendation, but still possible. The rest of the stanza would fit with either. The stress on "qvicr" and the contrast between the "auðgom manni" and the dead one lying outside would pass well with "enn sé ólifðom". Conversely "sællifðom" could be sustained by the "kú" and the reference to "auðgom manni."

Either way, wealth is again depicted as a reason for living in "ey getr qvicr kú". A living person always has a chance to obtain this kind of fé, supposedly. Again wealth is defined in terms of something practical, a cow.

The last half of the stanza has been interpreted in many ways. Some (such as Gering and Sijmons, I:110) view it as a contrast between rich and poor, the rich man sitting by his fire while a dead beggar lies outside. With the emendation, however, it is likely the rich man who is lying dead outside, for the stanza is then telling us that life under any circumstances is better than death, that wealth is useless to one who is dead, that one should not worry about being poor, it is still better than death. This seems the most convincing alternative.

Is there a hint of the dangers wealth can bring? Given that so much of Hávamál's imagery is derived from a Viking environment, one wonders, has the rich man been slain for his wealth? Certainly Hávamál is very conscious of this kind of wealth transfer, as stanza 58 reveals.

Stanza 71 may be a reiteration of the "ey getr qvicr kú" idea:

Haltr ríðr hrossi, hiðrð recr handarvanr
 daufr veqr oc dugir
 blindr er betri enn brendr sé
 nýtr mangi nás.

Though the emphasis here is on the abilities of the disabled, the reference to "hiðrð" may hint at that power to acquire wealth. It could just as easily imply their ability to function at the menial level of herdsmen, however.

One of Hávamál's most famous pronouncements on wealth is unfortunately marred by a major textual difficulty. The problem lies with the often-quoted "margr verðr af auðrom api", which in the text reads:

Veita hinn, er vætki veit,
 margr verðr aflöðrom api
 maðr er auðigr, annarr óauðigr,
 scylit þann vitca vár. (stanza. 75)

The emendation "af aurom" from "aflöðrom" is widely accepted, matching as it does Sólarljóð's stanza 34 "margan hefr auðr apat", and fitting in so well as it does with the rest of the stanza. Be that as it may, emendations are emendations.

However one reads the line, it is important to bear in mind that api could well be in the meaning of "monster" here, rather than 'ape'. Both foolishness and grimness figure in the stanzas that follow, with foolishness being stressed the most.

It rains on the rich as well as the poor. Wealth is no guarantee against woe. Moreover, awareness of this truth seems fundamental to knowledge. "Veita hinn, er vætki veit", 'He knows nothing, who does not know this'. One who is ignorant of wealth's destructive powers and its limitations as a source of human happiness is the ultimate fool. It is a lesson the Nibelungs could well take to heart.

Deyr fé, deyja frændr,
 deyr siálfr it sama
 enn orðztírr deyr aldregi,
 hveim er sér góðan getr. (stanza 76).

This is Hávamál's most famous statement on the impermanence of wealth. All the pillars of wealth will pass away: livestock, kinsmen, even oneself. Yet there is something that transcends all this: orðstírr.

This is as sublime as Hávamál gets. As materialistic and pragmatic as its vision usually is, there are moments, such as these, when it reveals a glimpse of something higher. It seems fé in its concrete sense of 'livestock' is meant here, rather than its more abstract sense of wealth in general. The references to fé in the stanzas immediately preceding and following (stanzas 58, 69, 77, 79) do not give any clues to its usage here.

The fé and frændr pairing forms a neat parallel with that of stanza 69. There they are consolation for the ill of health. Stanza 75's allusion to the transience of these shows that the consolation is only temporary. Orðstírr is the only thing that will survive. Is this a possible parallel with stanza 69's "vercom vel"? Stanza 77 makes it even more clear that orðstírr is the only thing that survives:

ec veit einn, at aldri deyr:
dómr um dauðan hvern.

This is a somewhat different view of wealth from that of Völuspá, where at least one form of wealth, the gullnar tǫflur survives Ragnarok (though there too orðstírr also survives). Indeed, the focus in Hávamál up to this point has been on wealth of a very transient, perishable kind. It al-

most seems as if the Hávamál poet did not know what gold was, his equivalents for wealth being so earthy, so bound to the land. There are no jewels or golden ornaments in Hávamál. Why not?

The triad fé - frændr - siálfr repeated in stanza 77 is a neat summation of the Hávamál message. The first value mentioned fé, is important, but the most external to the self. Then comes frændr, 'kinsmen', a higher value in Hávamál's scheme, and finally the self, the pinnacle of the Hávamál hierarchy. Of these three great values, fé is clearly the least important.

Stanza 78 proceeds to demonstrate how fé can die, by providing an example of the transience of wealth. Again wealth is defined in a farmer's terms:

Fullar grindr sá ec fyr Fitiungs sonom,
 nú bera þeir vánar vøl
 svá er auðr sem augabragð,
 hann er valtastr vina.

This is the most dramatic illustration of Hávamál's riches to rags theme. Some who had abundance now bear beggars' staves. Wealth is the most unstable of friends.

Hávamál does not spare the rod when it comes to chastising "false friends", so its description of wealth as "valtastr vina" is serious criticism indeed. The stanza is the culmination of Hávamál's argument that wealth is fickle and unstable. Thereafter the focus shifts to wealth's capacity to deceive and delude:

Ósnotr maðr, ef eignaz getr
 fé eða flióðs munuð,
 metnaðr hánom þróaz, enn manvit aldregi,
 fram gengr hann driúgt í dul. (stanza 78).

Wealth is as beguiling as love and can lead people to doom through their own blind arrogance. "Margr verðr af aurom api" sounds even more tempting a reading in the light of this stanza. The coupling of sexual pleasure with wealth is interesting here, but the significance, if any, is obscure. Both love and wealth serve to delude in an almost supernatural way. Again one thinks of Gullveig, with her link to wealth and to a form of magic, "seiðr" that had strong sexual overtones. She too managed to delude the Æsir, as far as can be seen from Völospá.

If anything, wealth is depicted as a obstacle on the road to wisdom in Hávamál. The same applies to love. If one interprets Völospá in this light, then the wealth the gods forged on íðavellir may have done just as much to doom them as the giant-maidens' arrival.

Though wealth has been depicted in an increasingly negative way in Hávamál, (Bessason, however (interview, December 1986) suggests this is mainly because the subject of this section is the ósnotr maðr), the next section of the poem has little to say of it. One is warned not to be fooled by appearances, which could be an oblique reference to wealth's power to deceive and disguise. Stanza 83 recommends lean steeds and dirty swords as better buys, though it does not

say why. Perhaps swords that last long enough to get dirty are not the type that will break at the first use? Stanza 84-89's list of things not to trust does not mention wealth, only individual items. These have little to do with wealth, though there are some references to livestock, horses, fields, slaves, and weapons.

Stanza 92 caps Hávamál's cynical remarks about the faithlessness of men and women to each other, by noting that fé and fair words are required to win a woman's heart (or at least to buy her from her father). Again, fé is depicted as an instrument, not an end. It is something used to obtain something better. And again, the something better is a relationship. There, as ever in Hávamál, human contact is placed on a higher level than material wealth. This time, however, this truth is illustrated with an account of Óðinn's own experience.

Ironically, however, Hávamál's only story of a woman giving a man wealth for love shows that gifts do not always win the heart of the recipient. At the divine level of gods and giants, at least, the implication is that gifting does not work for women. Or perhaps Óðinn is simply beyond buying.

The world of the giants is clearly a domain of wealth. It provides the first glimpse of gold in Hávamál:

Gunnlǫð mér um gaf gullnom stóli á
drycc ins dýra miaðar (stanza 105).

The golden chair seems part of a very different world. So different, in fact, that some feel it belongs in a different poem (see Gering and Sijmons, p. 105.). Its use here is very effective. It drives home the otherworldliness of the situation Óðinn is describing, makes it clear that it takes place in a supernatural realm.

The gold is of the passive kind epitomized by Vǫlospá's gullnar toflur. It just sits there, and is sat upon, as part of a giant's throne. It does not change hands, or build any sort of relationship. Like most giant gold in the Codex Regius, it is simply there, as part of the background.

The wealth that is used in the more traditional Hávamál way, to strengthen a friendship, is ins dýra miaðar. The mead is something that is transferred, passed from one party to another to seal a friendship. Yet it fails utterly in its purpose. Though one of the most precious gifts ever given in the Edda, it leaves no impression on the receiver's heart.

Does this episode have anything to say about wealth and gifting in general? As it is, both the Óðinsævintýri are hard to reconcile with the rest of Hávamál. Some find them out of place in Hávamál, inconsistent with the display of gnomic wisdom that comprises so much of the work. But if nothing else, Gunnlǫð's story does reiterate the limitations of wealth. All her wealth cannot buy Óðinn's love, or even

his honesty. All her giving is in vain, she only deceives herself. So gifts have one fatal weakness. If the recipient is treacherous, the gift is useless. This is an important corollary to Hávamál's sermon on gifting, all the more so since Hávamál does not address the problem of the unfaithful recipient directly.

Gunnlǫð is also the first unequivocal example of a rich giant. As Gering and Sijmons note (p. 128), others will occur in the Codex Regius.

Óðinn describes this transaction with the words "vel keyptz litar / hef ec vel notið" (Neckel-Kuhn favour the emendation "vélkeyptz"). He certainly seems proud of his ability to get something for nothing.

Twenty stanzas pass without any further mention of wealth. Loddfáfnismál has little to do with wealth. In fact, much of its advice may well be directed to the poor. Stanza 126's advice to avoid a career as a shoemaker would be quite out of place in most of the remainder of the Edda. At least one can hardly imagine Sigurðr or Atli worrying much about it.

As it is, wealth receives scant coverage in the remainder of Hávamál. Even when Loddfáfnismál concerns matters that involved wealth earlier in Hávamál, it drops any mention of wealth. For example, where stanza 92 suggests "fagrt skal mæla oc fé biðða" to win a woman's heart, stanza 130 implies fair promises are enough on their own: "fǫgru scaltu heita".

Neither Loddfáfnismál nor the rúnatal give any warnings against wealth, or any advice on how to obtain it. There is a brief warning against thieves (131) and admonitions not to be judge by appearances (134) and to take care of the poor (135). Possibly this last is for the benefit of travellers rather than the poor per se, but given that the poor would have likely travelled widely begging (if medieval Iceland is any guide), the distinction is probably of little consequence. This is the closest Hávamál comes to promoting altruism.

The stanza that immediately follows (136) is very obscure, but may hint at the prospect of retribution by denied beggars, an interpretation accepted to varying degrees by Ólafur Briem (p 125), Finnur Jónsson, B. M. Olsen, and Gering and Sijmons (see Gering and Sijmons, p. 141). If so, it would be another example of how excessive wealth-hoarding can turn men into monsters and of how greed can be destructive even to the greedy themselves.

The rúnatal says even less about wealth. Óðinn denies himself (or is denied) food and drink while hanging on the tree (139), and we are warned "ey sér til gildis giðf" (145) but that is about it. Stanza 145 does contain a warning against overgiving, but here the meaning seems to relate to magic or sacrifices of some kind. Óðinn's "fésþiðll", if he ever had any, are certainly not part of Hávamál.

2.0.4 An Overview of Hávamál wealth

Hávamál wealth differs greatly from Völospá's. Hávamál, for the most part, is set at the human level, where Völospá is concerned with the divine, the cosmic. Their treatments of wealth reflect this difference in scale.

Hávamál wealth is more prosaic. Hávamál depicts wealth in terms of things precious to the farmer: "fullar grindar", cows and horses. There is a great deal of poverty in Hávamál, reflected by the references to hunger, thirst, nakedness, begging, cold, and the agony of absolute dependence on others. In contrast, poverty is absent from the world of Völospá, while gold is nearly so in Hávamál, occurring only in a reference to the world of the giants.

Wealth is seen as a corrupting influence in Hávamál, and there are repeated warnings about this. In Völospá, however, there is only a hint of such concerns, in connection with the giant maidens and Gullveig.

Wealth is also a very transient thing in Hávamál. Awareness of this is cited as an essential component of wisdom. In contrast, Völospá wealth, at least that represented by the gullnar toflur of the gods, seems the essence of permanence and immutability, surviving as it does the destruction of the universe.

Neither poem has much to say about wealth as a source of strife, unless one interprets the Gullveig episode in Völospá in this light. For Hávamál, the more serious problem is the way wealth encourages self-delusion.

In the last third of Hávamál, wealth vanishes from the stage. None of the runes or words of wisdom spoken to Lodd-fáfnir allude to it, even when they address subjects related to wealth earlier in the poem, such as winning a woman's heart. Given the many folk traditions that link wealth and magic (one thinks of the Finnbreeks of Icelandic folk belief, but even Völospá's féspiöll could apply here.) it is a curious absence in a poem as materialistic as Hávamál.

Or is Hávamál materialistic? It is certainly far more worldly than Völospá, focussing more on cows and beggars than valkyries and gods. And most of it takes place at a very basic, worldly level, as opposed to the cosmic scale of Völospá.

Hávamál wealth is very oriented towards human interaction. Often wealth is praised not for itself, but for the influence it wields, its use in buying friends and love. It is far from the static gold of Völospá. Wealth is there to be used, according to Hávamál. And though it stresses wealth use, like everything else, should be governed by a spirit of moderation, it issues no injunctions to be thrifty or cautious with one's money, unlike many more recent com-

pendia of wisdom. On the contrary, savings for the liúfr often wind up in the leiðr's hands, according to Hávamál.

Though wealth and basic human comforts are important to the Hávamál poet, he clearly values manvit and friendship far more highly. The onus is always on trading items of material wealth for friendship, never the reverse (except possibly in the account of Óðinn's dealings with Gunnlǫð). At the opening of the rúnatal (stanza. 139) there is even an implication that self-denial has helped bring wisdom, since "Við hleifi mic sælðo né við hornigi" is followed shortly by "nam ec upp rúnar". And repeatedly in Hávamál there are graphic descriptions of the needs of the traveller and the poor stranger, and how great it is to have these fulfilled through hospitality. Vǫlospá does not have this. There is no hunger in Vǫlospá, or food. When suffering occurs in Vǫlospá, it has nothing to do with the presence or absence of wealth. As Einar Ólafur Sveinsson notes, poverty is very much "innan sjóndeildarhrings" of the Hávamál poet, something which makes it unique among the Eddic poems.³⁵

Another aspect of wealth in Hávamál is its power to change people. People are very susceptible to the influence of wealth, both good and bad. It can win one lovers and friends, but it can also delude. Those who forget the latter lack the most elementary wisdom, says Hávamál (stanza 75).

³⁵ Bertha Phillpotts also says (Edda and Saga, London, 1931 p. 126): "Of great interest are a number of maxims which seem to mirror the thoughts and lives of very poor folk".

2.0.5 Vafðrúðnismál

With Vafðrúðnismál, the focus returns to the realm of higher mythology. The central figures are deities and giants, operating at a cosmic level. Their concerns are the basic mythic truths, not material.

Nonetheless, Vafðrúðnismál does reveal some interesting things about wealth and wealth-perception in the Codex Regius. In all, it develops the wealth concept in a startling way from the base laid down in Völuspá and Hávamál.

Most significant for the concept of wealth is the frame. With Vafðrúðnismál a theme emerges that was hinted at in Hávamál and will serve as the basis for Grímnismál, that of Óðinn as the poor wanderer. In fact, poverty is the base for Óðinn's disguise when he addresses Vafðrúðnir in stanza 10:

Óauðigr maðr, er til auðigs kómr,
 mæli þarft eða þegi

One assumes that Óðinn has assumed the disguise of something he is not, thus in real life Óðinn must be wealthy. This may only seem natural for the king of the gods Allfather, but it is an assumption for which there is surprisingly little firm evidence in the Codex Regius. The Elder Edda has little to say of Óðinn's wealth.

Here as in Hávamál and Grímnismál, Óðinn seemingly puts himself at the mercy of his host's largesse. And though in

Hávamál the frame is now quite obscure, in Vafðrúðnismál it remains partly a test of hospitality as well as wisdom.

Is a link between poverty and wisdom implied in Vafðrúðnismál? Just as Óðinn denied himself "hleifr" and "horn" while on the tree in Hávamál, he tells Vafðrúðnir "nú emc af gongo kominn / þyrstr til þinna sala." Likewise in Grímnismál deprivation of physical comforts precedes an extensive display of Óðinn's wisdom. One wonders if perhaps the travel component is an essential preliminary for a wisdom contest or display, whether the rigours it inflicts help bring about the shamanistic state. Even in the sagas, Óðinn's wisdom displays most commonly follow a journey (see, for example, the riddles of Gestumblindi in Hervararsaga ok Heiðreks, or Óðinn's appearances in the Konungasögur.) (And of course there is Hávamál 18's "Sá einn veit, er víða ratar / oc hefir fiqlö um farið".)

In any event, the focus in Vafðrúðnismál is on the mythological, not the material. Vafðrúðnir's wealth is only hinted at. While Hávamál speaks of golden chairs and precious mead gracing jotun halls, nothing so concrete is mentioned in Vafðrúðnismál. It is only implied in stanza 10 and in the wish Óðinn expresses at the outset to see Vafðrúðnir's "salakynni."

As it is, however, stanza 10 makes the most sense if interpreted ironically:

Óauðigr maðr, er til auðigs kœmr,
mæli þarft eða þegi

ofrmælgí mikil hygg ec at illa geti,
 hveim er við kaldrífiðan kómr.

For while Óðinn seems to be self-deprecating ("Óðinn er með yfirdrepslítillæti.")³⁶ it could well be that the "óauðigr maðr" refers to Vafðrúðnir, not Óðinn. The implication is that Vafðrúðnir is not as rich in wisdom as he thinks he is, and that it is his "ofrmælgí mikil" that is doomed to meet an evil fate at the hands of the "kaldrífiðan" Óðinn. This would fit well with Hávamál's warnings about thinking oneself the best of all, or of being blinded by "fé eða flióðs munuð" (see also stanzas 64 and 73). Indeed in the end Vafðrúðnir admits he has been acting in a blind and reckless way: "feigom munni, mæltá ec mína forna stafi" (stanza 55). Is this fatal húbris wealth-induced? The only hint comes from stanza 10 as noted earlier.

The only other reference to wealth in Vafðrúðnismál (apart from Njörðr's temples in stanza 38) comes in stanzas 50-51. There the fate of the gods' possessions after Ragnarok is touched on:

hverir ráða æsir eignom goða,
 pá er sloðnar Surtar logi?

Here, as in Völuspá, some property survives the end of the world. Whereas in Völuspá this took the form of hlautviðr, Hropts Sigtoptir, and the gullnar toflur in the grass, in Vafðrúðnismál it is "vé goða" and "Miðllnir." Unless "Hropts

³⁶ Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld. N.p.: Almenna Bókafélagið, 1962) I: 274.

sigtoptir" can be counted among the "vé goða", the two accounts of post-apocalyptic possessions have nothing in common. Except, as noted earlier, both show that some kind of property survives the end.

In the final analysis, wealth is conspicuous by its absence from Vafðrúðnismál. The participants exchange wisdom, not wealth. Moreover, the cosmic level of knowledge they exchange seems to transgress wealth altogether.

What does Vafðrúðnismál do to develop the Eddic concept of wealth? Very little. It demonstrates that the hints of Óðinn posing as a poor wanderer in Hávamál are not without parallels elsewhere. It suggests that certain types of behaviour are expected of the poor in their dealings with the rich (stanza. 10), something Hávamál only hinted at. And whereas there are vague hints of Vafðrúðnir's failure to share wealth as a good host should (Óðinn mentions his thirst but we never hear of him being served drink, something which is mentioned in almost all the goðakvæði of the Codex Regius (not to mention Hervararsaga ok Heiðreks). The penalty for this failure of a hospitality test is shown even more dramatically in the next poem of the Codex Regius, Grímnismál.

2.0.6 Grímnismál

Grímnismál opens with treachery, a bet, and an accusation that Óðinn's protege is a matniðingr. All three of these factors relate to wealth, albeit obliquely in the case of the first two. Geirroðr usurps his brother's throne, and by implication, his wealth, though nothing is said of this directly. In fact, when the two deities compare the circumstances of their proteges, wealth is not mentioned. Instead, Agnarr's plight is expressed in terms of his domicile (a cave) and his relationship with a gýgr. And though Óðinn and Frigg "veðia um þetta mál", nothing is said of the stakes.

The last factor, however, is intrinsically bound up with wealth. Gerroðr's failure to share it will ultimately bring Óðinn's wrath down upon him.

Grímnismál graphically demonstrates the gravity of Hávamál's injunction to be hospitable. For the most part, Geirroðr fails the test of hospitality Óðinn sets for him. The seriousness of this failure is evident from the introduction. Óðinn calls Frigg's accusation of Geirroðr's stinginess "in mesta lygi" and later the narrator himself comments: "Enn þat var inn mesti hégómi, at Geirroðr væri eigi matgóðr." The charge is so serious it causes Óðinn to travel all the way to the world of men to ascertain the truth. The implication is that stinginess is a fatal quality in a king.

To be sure, analysis of this aspect of Grímnismál is complicated by the fact that it is all based on a misunderstanding (or deception), at least according to the prose introduction: "Enn þat var in mesta hégomi, at Geirroðr væri eigi matgóðr." The text of the poem itself does not allude to this. Perhaps, though, this is missing a fundamental point about the wealth-sharing that is hospitality. That is, that the identity of the guest is immaterial, that hospitality is something that must be extended to all. Certainly this finds expression countless times in the sagas, perhaps most famously in Njála or Gíslasaga, where a reluctant but generous host remarks "there should always be food for those who need it." And the ferocious revenge Egill took for mediocre hospitality in his saga also demonstrates how seriously some Norsemen took failings in this area. Perhaps Egill was following Óðinn in this as in so many other aspects.

The importance of generosity and gift-giving is expressed very early in Grímnismál. First Óðinn comments on the lack of it among Geirroðr's men:

Átta nætr sat ec milli elda hér,
svá at mér mangi mat né bauð, (stanza 2).

Then he notes the reward Agnarr will receive for his:

nema einn Agnarr er einn scal ráða,
Geirroðar sonr, Gotna landi. (stanza 2)

It all reiterates the message of Hávamál so well. Even the openings of the two poems are similar, as both deal with a visitor's need for hospitality and the importance of giving and returning gifts.

Whatever the role of Frigg's deception in this, it does not reflect well on the king to have such a stingy court. Even though the lack of hospitality may stem from the king's orders rather than the innate failings of his court, it is still a bad sign. A king should uplift his men, not egg them on to níðingsverk and deeds of unluck. This king seems a baleful influence, and does not extend good luck to his men here.

Thereafter the dispensing of mythological knowledge begins, a description of the realms of the gods. Wealth features in several of these. All Alfheimr is given to Freyr as tannfé (stanza 5). These descriptions also expand on the hints of divine wealth given in Völuspá. Gold and silver are associated with the gods more than ever before, as in stanza 6:

Bær er sá inn þriði, er blíð regin
silfri þocþo sali

In stanza 7, gold is closely associated with drinking, a motif that crops up frequently in the Edda, Gullveig being perhaps the first example:

þar þau Óðinn oc Sága drecca um all daga,
glöð, ór gullnom kerom.

Both Vafðrúðnir and Grímnismál have been described as didactic poems imparting important mythological knowledge. Yet in the latter wealth seems far more integral to the cosmic truths than in Vafðrúðnir. Why is this so? Why is wealth so

close to the gods in Grímnismál, yet so far from them in Vafðrúðnir? Why is there so much gold and silver in Grímnismál? It is almost as if measured against men, the gods seem rich, while measured against giants they do not.

What does stanza 6 tell us about wealth? Silver roofs the dwelling of a god. It is the first reference to silver in the Codex Regius. It is the material chosen by a god to roof his dwelling in ancient times:

Válasciálf heitir, er vélti sér
 áss í árdaga. (stanza 6)

Silver seems no lesser a form of wealth than gold here. Moreover, it existed "í árdaga", presumably with an origin as ancient as gold's. It has lasted all this time, a permanence that is a fair cry from the transitory wealth of Hávamál. It is also passive, being fashioned rather than motivating.

The wealth of stanza 7 has many interesting associations. Gold has links to both drink and happiness here. There is also another association of wealth with underwater realms. The deities drink from golden cups while cool waves resound above. This motif of "wealth below the waters" recurs frequently in Germanic tradition, yet its significance remains obscure. It first crops up in Völuspá, in reference to the most precious treasures of Óðinn and Heimdall. Outside the Edda it can be found in Beowulf, and in the many kennings that describe gold as the fire of the Rhine, the glow of the

oceans, the lowe of the deeps, etc. Why is wealth, particularly gold, so linked to water in the Germanic imagination? Is it due to the Nibelungs and their Rhinegold? The references in Grímnismál and Völuspá would suggest the significance of the wealth-water link lies deeper than that.

Grímnismál depicts wealth positively. Valhøll is "en gullbiarta", hardly possible if gold has any but positive connotations:

Glaðsheimr heitir inn fimti, þars en gullbiar-
ta,
Valhøll við of þrumir. (stanza 8)

Close up, however, it is clear the wealth abundant in Óðinn's "salkynni" is of a very martial kind:

scóptom er rann rept, sciöldom er salr þakiðr,
bryniom um becci strát. (stanza 9)

His home is strewn with the gear of war, but there is no mention of gold inside. Are these weapons Óðinn's wealth? Certainly their depiction as a suitable gift in Hávamál (stanza 41) and their widespread use as gifts in the sagas would suggest they were regarded as wealth, as something that had value. The gold brightness of Valhøll does not seem to illuminate its interior, however. The only adornments of Óðinn's hall mentioned in stanza 10 are corpses.

Some of the stanzas that follow are brighter and more cheerful. Wealth of the consuming type figures more prominently in the homes of other deities, such as Heimdal:

Þar vorðr goða dreccr í væro ranni,
glaðr, inn góða miðr. (stanza 13).

Heimdal is depicted as enjoying comfort. The choice of the adjective "værr" is interesting. Ólafur Briem glosses it as "viðfelldinn" (p. 152), Kuhn : "wo man weilen kann, wo es gut sein ist, behaglich" (p. 231), but Finnur Jónsson says "fredelig, rolig" (p. 627). Cleasby-Vigfússon have "peaceful, safe, snug, comfortable, tranquil" and interpret "í væru ranni" as "in the snug hall." Turville-Petre translates it as "peaceful" in his Myth and Religion of the North (p. 149, line 2).

One certainly could not apply such an adjective to Valholl, with its spears, shields, and byrnies lying around. Does this reveal anything about Heimdal? Is he, perhaps, a little too closely associated with comfort? Turville-Petre's discussion of the etymology of Heimdal in Myth and Religion of the North offers some support to this:

The most satisfying suggestion so far offered is that of J. de Vries - dallr, according to this suggestion, would derive from a root dal ...associated with Greek 'θαλαρός' (blooming) and again with Gothic dulps (feast).

Heimdal's association with the Vanir in Þrymsqviða also suggests ties with wealth, luxury, and the good life. One even wonders if Loki's obscure taunt to him in Locasenna might be a commentary on Heimdal's indolent, lay-about ways:

aurgo baki þú munt æ vera
oc vaca vorðr goða. (Locasenna 48)

Could this imply that Heimdal was always lying down on the job, like the kolbítr of tradition? How else does one get a muddy back?

This could be a reflection at the divine level of the tension that exists in many sagas and particularly in Saxo between the heroic ideal of valour in hardship and the good life of luxury and wealth consumption. Often this clash of values erupts between different generations, the older hearkening back to a heroic past and condemning the younger's obsession with idle luxury. Örvar-Odds senna, Göngu-Hrolfr's sendoff from his father in Göngu-Hrolfs saga, and Starkad's frequent attacks on his younger comrades-in-arms epitomize this tension.

Unfortunately, information about Heimdal is too scanty to permit any sweeping conclusions. All Grímnismál provides is a suggestion of an association with wealth and comfort, a suggestion that may be faintly echoed in references to Heimdal elsewhere.

Against this is the fact that most gods mentioned in Grímnismál are depicted in pleasant and often luxurious surroundings and often as drinking. Thus singling out Heimdal may be uncalled for.

Wealth is mentioned several times in the following stanzas. In stanza 15, gold and silver are combined in the same structure.

Glitnir er inn tíundi, hann er gulli studdr
oc silfri þacpr ip sama.

Little is known about the owner Forseti apart from this. Some of the wealthiest gods are also the most obscure.

Víðar, in contrast, rules a realm of grass and scrub, as stanza 17 makes clear:

Hrísi vex oc há grasi
 Víðars land, viðí.

The only wealth mentioned with him is his horse, in the next line: "enn þar mǫgr of læzc af mars baki".

Stanzas 18-19 refer to food and drink, in a manner vaguely similar to Hávamál. Here, however, the stress is on the best, the best of meat "fleska bezt" and the wine drunk by Allfather. To be sure, numerous references to it elsewhere suggest it was a beverage fit for gods. Perhaps it is simply the exoticness of wine that causes it to be associated with Óðinn here.

Whatever the case, in Grímnismál drink is just as much a form of wealth as gold or silver. It is definitely something that has value, an integral part of the lifestyle of the divine elite. It is mentioned at least eight times in Grímnismál, in stanzas 3, 7, 13, 19, 25, 26, 36, 45, 51.

Moreover, drink is the basis for the most important wealth-exchange in Grímnismál. Drink is what Óðinn lacks, suspended between the fires. It is when Agnarr provides drink, meets this need, and demonstrates his capacity to share this wealth that Grímnismál proper really begins.

Similarly, as if to prove Hávamál's warnings against the self-delusion wealth brings, it is over-consumption of precisely that form of wealth that Grímnir lacks that dooms Geirroðr. As Óðinn himself says

Qlr ertu, Geirroðr, hefr þú ofdrucit;
miclo ertu hnugginn, er þú ert míno gengi,
ollom einheriom oc Óðinns hylli. (Grímnismál
51)

Grímnismál's overall message on wealth, however, is rather complex. As is its function in the poem itself. For instance, wealth is definitely used to impress, if not intimidate the mortal to whom Óðinn's words are directed. The world of the gods is vast and mysterious, but it is also rich. Descriptions of that wealth recur time and time again, as if to stress the glory of goðheimr at the expense of mannheimr. This intimidating use of wealth will be echoed at the outset of Atlaqviða, where Knéfróðr attempts to cow and intimidate Gunnar and Hogni with his descriptions of Atli's gifts.

Whereas Geirroðr tries and fails to intimidate through the denial of wealth: the food and drink owed to the traveler, Óðinn's attempt to intimidate (based partly on his description of divine wealth) succeeds. Geirroðr is moving to put things right even as his own sword spits him.

In one sense, it is their differing uses of wealth that reveal Geirroðr's greatest crime. For Grímnismál, unlike Hávamál, has very little negative to say about wealth. Within

the realm of the gods, at least, it has only positive connotations.

None of the humans in Grímnismál have any gold or silver, however. What wealth Geirroðr has proves fatal to him. Moreover, this fatality stems in no small measure from his misuse of it, at least according to the precepts of Hávamál. The food he is accused of hoarding and the dogs he uses to guard it draw Óðinn's wrath. The fire burning in his hall, like that so closely identified with a rich man's comfort in Hávamál, is used to singe a god's beard. The drink so integral to the wealth of the gods in Grímnismál fatally befuddles Geirroðr and his failure to share is the ultimate insult to his mentor. Finally, Geirroðr's own sword turns on him, telling proof that he is truly accursed. For such a thing to happen was considered the crowning unluck (see, for example, Laxdæla's "Fótbítr" or the curse Sigrún lays on Dagr in Helgaqviða Hundingsbana ǫnnor, stanza 33). It is, however, quite appropriate here. In fact, it is the only thing to be expected. For Geirroðr, by his misuse of his wealth, has driven all the luck out of it.

For the most part, Grímnismál wealth is of the passive sort. There's scant sign of its corrupting power in the divine world, at least. On the contrary, its vast wealth is one of the things that distinguishes the realm of the gods from the realm of men. The lavish use of gold and silver as building materials there only reiterates wealth's link with

the divine. Men have neither gold nor silver in Grímnismál. Geirroðr's wealth is of the simpler kind, food and drink. What remains ambiguous about Grímnismál is whether Geirroðr was corrupted by wealth or whether it is simply a tool he misuses at a critical moment. He fails the test Óðinn sets for him, but the prose introduction blames Frigg for this. Óðinn himself blames drink (stanza 51), in which case wealth, via overconsumption, would be the cause of Geirroðr's fall. Óðinn also makes an enigmatic reference to the treachery of friends in stanza 52 "of þic véla vinir."

Since friends are an important element of wealth in Hávamál, this could be taken as another reference to wealth's power to delude. It is unclear, however, whether this refers to Geirroðr's breach of faith to Óðinn, or the bad counsel Geirroðr received that caused him to do so.

2.0.7 For Scírnis

For Scírnis is the first Eddic poem to be constructed around an attempted wealth exchange. Though wealth exchanges have figured prominently in parts of Hávamál and Grímnismál, in For Scírnis the gift, or perhaps more accurately the bribe is the foundation of the whole story.

The plot is simple. Freyr sees a giantess he desires. Through an intermediary he tries to entice her to him with bribes. These fail. The intermediary then resorts to

threats. These succeed. For Scírnis reveals a great deal about the concept of the gift. In fact, since the gifts of For Scírnis are directed to such a single-minded purpose and in anticipation of an immediate return, they are better termed bribes.

In For Scírnis, the bribe functions on several levels. It is the closest the Codex Regius comes to explaining that most tragic of Eddic wealth-transfers: the loss of Freyr's sword. Snorri seems to have regarded the loss of Frey's sword as a disaster of major proportions, and a factor in the god's death at Ragnarok (see Snorra Edda, c XXXVII, p. 56-57).

Unfortunately, this loss is only hinted at in For Scírnis. Volospá hints that this sword fell into the hands of the giants, at least if one accepts Nordal's interpretation (Nordal, p. 137-138). Yet it goes no farther than Freyr's "scósveinn" in For Scírnis.

The main action in For Scírnis is set in motion by a bribe. Freyr complains about his plight and Skírnir offers to help, if furnished with a horse and Freyr's magic sword:

Mar gefðu mér þá, þann er mic um myrkvan berr
 vísan vafrloga,
 oc þat sverð, er siálfst vegiz
 við iǫtna ætt. (stanza 8)

It is hard to assess the significance of this demand. Is it to demonstrate the enormous dangers of the journey, by an

equally enormous demand? Why cannot Freyr simply order his scósveinn on this journey? Is it again because of the great danger involved?

Or are these payments evidence of the folly of the union Freyr desired? Just as Óðinn dupes and is duped in the pursuit of love (see the Óðinsævintýri in Hávamál), Freyr allows his lust to run away with him and surrenders his most precious possessions to a servant.

It is, however, a successful bribe. In one sense, Freyr's actions are perfectly in accord with Hávamál. That is, he expends a lower form of wealth, material possessions such as a sword and horse, for a higher, that of a human relationship. It is only when this exchange is examined in a higher mythological context that one wonders if a giant bride is worth a god's weapon.

Within the confines of For Scírnis itself, however, there is little sign that the sword will pass into the hands of the giants. In fact, one is tempted to think of it as a loan, not a gift. As de Vries notes:

Wenn der Gott seinem Diener sein Schwert leihweise gibt, bedeutet das noch nicht, daß er es niemals zurückbekommen hat.³⁷

³⁷ Jan de Vries, Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte. 2 vols, 3d ed. Grundriss der germanischen Philologie, 12. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1970), II: p. 181.

The first question that confronts one relative to this wealth-transfer is whether it is a loan or a gift. Skírnir uses the verb gefa, which usually denotes a permanent transfer. Loans are also very uncommon in the Codex Regius. Other examples can be found in Prymsqviða, where the request is voiced with the verb ljá and Hymisqviða, where Þórr dispenses with the niceties of a formal request. On the face of it, it would appear that Skírnir is demanding a gift, brazen as it may sound for a shoeboy to demand a gift of a god. If so, it represents one of the few successful bribes in the Elder Edda.

The approach to the land of the giants suggests wealth of an agricultural sort. Skírnir meets dogs and a féhirðir á haugi. Barrows are a popular perch for giant herdsmen, it seems, as one such was encountered in Völuspá (stanza 42) and another will be in Prymsqviða.

With Skírnir's arrival in the giantess's hall, the second stage of bribery takes place. This fails utterly. Neither of the mythological treasures offered is of interest to Gerðr. Neither the eleven golden apples (apples of eternal life if one accepts an emendation favoured by many scholars) nor Óðinn's wealth-creating ring Draupnir win her heart. Gerðr says "era mér gullz vant" (stanza 22), which gives her something in common with the gods of the golden age in Völuspá, and is yet another affirmation of the wealth of the giants.

In fact, there is even a suggestion Freyr is overgiving, offering too much, or at least offering something inappropriate. He may well be offering something that is not even his to give, just as his fateful viewing from Hliðskiálf may reflect a usurpation of Óðinn's prerogative of the sort described in Snorri's version of this story (c. XXXVII):

svo hefndi honum það mikillæti, er hann hafði
setzt í það hið helga sæti, að hann gekk í brott
fullur af harmi.

Neither golden apples (whether of youth or not) nor Draupnir are attributed to Freyr elsewhere. Overgiving lay at the root of the Æsir's trouble with the giant smith, so obliquely hinted at in Volospá and so specifically warned against in Hávamál.

Either way, it is Gerðr who seems more honorable when refusing "at deila fé fǫður" 'to share the wealth of a father', an ambiguous reference that could apply to Óðinn's wealth (in the form of Draupnir) just as easily as her own father's. Either way, Gerðr is the first Eddic personality to emphatically refuse a gift. For Scírnir shows wealth's most spectacular failing in the Edda thus far. It cannot buy Gerðr. This is the first bribe that clearly fails in the Codex Regius.

It does not seem for want of compatibility in the concept of wealth between the two races. Though livestock tends to figure more in descriptions of giant wealth than divine

wealth, both seem to value gold, unless the implication of Gerðr's statement here is that she has no need of or interest in gold.

In any event, the bribe-failure, like most of those in the Edda, soon gives way to threats of violence. A long catalogue of threats and curses follows, but few of them relate to wealth. The threats are directed at Gerðr's own person, for the most part. The most tangible things of value threatened are the company of others, particularly men, and the enjoyment of food (stanza 27), whereas stanza 35 threatens her with the loss of drink.

Drink seems to have considerable value in For Scírnis. It frames the exchange between Gerðr and Skírnir. As usual with Eddic mead, it is qualified by the adjectives mærr and forn. It is the loss of drink that is one of Skírnir's last threats. And it is the offer of drink (stanza 37) that signals Gerðr's acquiescence to the demands, just as an offer of drink sets off the climactic chain of events in Grímnismál and is at the centre of Óðinn's adventure with Gunnlōð in Hávamál.

Wealth is thus important to For Scírnis on several levels. It seems from other sources that For Scírnis is really the story of how Freyr lost an important part of his wealth, his sword. For Scírnis through the extravagant gifts Freyr offers shows the depth of his forbidden passion. And

through her refusal of these, Gerðr demonstrates the limits of wealth as a mover of men. And though this is one of the first failed bribes in the Edda, it will not be the last.

For Scírnis develops the Eddic definition of wealth. It reiterates the wealth of both giants and gods. It brings the agrarian nature of giant wealth into sharper focus. It shows the bribe in action, how it works and how it fails.

For Scírnis has been linked by many to wealth at a more abstract level. Perhaps the most famous scholarly theories about it relate to For Scírnis's role in wealth creation as a fertility ritual.³⁸ A more recent study by Stephen A. Mitchell³⁹ interprets For Scírnis as representing a very different use of wealth, an attempt to buy peace, "frið at kaupa" through the purchase of a giant bride for a god.

Mitchell cites extensive references to the "friðkaup" in Old Icelandic literature (see p. 118-119) and notes:

It is well to remember too that the concepts of peace and prosperity have a special connection with Freyr, as Snorri points out, saying that '...á hann er gott at heita til árs ok friðar'.

³⁸ See Magnus Olsen "Fra gammel norsk myte og kultus", Maal og Minne 1 (1909) p. 17-36, and Bertha Phillpotts's The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1920).

³⁹ Stephen A. Mitchell, "For Scírnis as Mythological Model: frið at kaupa", Arkiv för nordisk filologi 98, (1983), p. 108-122.

Mitchell's main argument about For Scírnis is that it was a model for a kind of transaction widely emulated in Germanic society, the use of marriage to reconcile two opposing groups. He cites several parallels in the mythology (the numerous marriages or liasons between gods and giants) and the attempted marriage in Prymsqviða (where again a major exchange of wealth and treasure is involved in the bride-purchase).

Mitchell's study has many interesting implications for the question of wealth's role in For Scírnis. Most important of these is that using wealth to buy peace (through marriage) lies at the heart of For Scírnis. It does make a final interpretation of Skm's wealth more problematic, however. Is it to be read as a failure of wealth to achieve a friðkaup? If so, it is but the first in a long string of such failures in the Codex Regius. Both Locasenna and Hárbarðzlióð contain such failures, and there are others in the hetjukvæði. And what is to be made of violence and sorcery succeeding where wealth fails? For the objective is attained through threats, not wealth. Does this expose wealth as impotent when it comes to achieving real change?

Ursula Dronke feels that the very wealth of the Vanir may have alienated Gerðr "Perhaps she scorned their luxurious nature."⁴⁰ She cites an example from Saxo but admits "such a

⁴⁰ Ursula Dronke, "Art and Tradition in Skírnismál", English and Medieval Studies Presented to J.R.R. Tolkien on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday. Ed Norman Davis and C.L.

notion does not emerge in Skírnismál."⁴¹ Julie Randlev for her part cites wealth as point of congruence between god and giant, after wisdom:

Hvori adskiller jætterne sig fra guderne? De er næsten lige vise (Vafðrúðnismál); næsten lige rige; der er guld nok i Gymir's gård...⁴²

To Randlev, both gift-offers and threats serve as parts of a test of Gerðr's noble-mindedness, of her worthiness to marry Freyr, in fact. On all counts, Gerðr's conduct in the matter of wealth attests to her nobility. It makes for a stark contrast with Grímnismál. Geirroðr's mishandling of wealth there and his refusal to part with it to meet the sacred demands of hospitality are a fatal failure of a divine test. Gerðr, however, despite even greater justification for refusing hospitality, provides it freely. Her open-handedness, a direct precursor of her refusal to be cowed by threats, shows her worthiness of Freyr's attention. As Randlev notes:

Selv da hun tror, at Skírnir er hendes bróðurbani, følger hun gæstfrihedens love og byder ham ind for at drekka inn mæra mið...Gerðr optræder så værdigt som nogen høvdingedatter;....Men hun lader sig ikke købe med guld eller true til samtykke.⁴³

Wrenn. (London:Allen & Unwin, 1962) p. 262.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Julie Randlev, "Skírnismál", Maal og Minne 1985, Hefte 3-4, p. 146

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 147

This interpretation puts a very different light on the gift-refusal. The refusal would then demonstrate integrity, not arrogance. For by human standards, at least, Freyr is pursuing his courtship in a very irregular way, going directly to the principal with bribes, rather than via her legal guardian, her father. As Randlev notes, wealth is used to reinforce the respectability of the giants Skírnir is dealing with. They are no skin-clad brutes, but upper class figures in their own right:

Gymir hører til í Vaförúðnir's velbjærgede jätteverden. Gården er skildret som et socialt respektabelt sted, der er bevogtet af hyrde og olme hunde. Gymir karakteriseres indirekte ved sine besiddelser styrke og smukke datter; styrke og rigdom vinder altid respekt..."⁴⁴

Randlev's interpretation would help resolve the suggestion of wealth's impotence inherent in the bribe-failure. For to Randlev, the bribe-failure is in fact a success for the giantess, a demonstration of her honour. It says more about her honour than wealth's limitations. In the final analysis, For Scírnir's most important contributions to the Eddic wealth concept are in the areas of bribe and gifting. Gerðr is particularly significant as the first Eddic character to refuse a gift. As Hárbarðzlióð soon shows, however, she is not the last.

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p. 146

2.0.8 Hárbarðzlióð

In fact, Hárbarðzlióð goes For Scírnis one better. For while in Skm threats succeed where wealth fails, in Hárbarðzlióð neither works.

There is a pronounced lack of wealth in Hárbarðzlióð. Both Óðinn and Þórr seem in a very threadbare state. What little wealth there is hearkens back to the practical traveller's kind found in Hávamál, not the gold of íðavellir.

For his passage in stanza 3, Þórr proffers a basket of "sildr oc hafra", hardly a gift of kings. On the other hand, for such a small favour as he is asking, it seems recompense enough. Almost immediately, though, the ferryman begins to deride Þórr for his lack of wealth. Time and again Þórr's lack of wealth or poor clothing will serve as the basis for an insult. This is something new in the Codex Regius. For whereas Hávamál warned against this kind of mockery, Hárbarðzlióð is the first to actually inflict it. It is all the stranger that the ferryman is supposed to be Óðinn, the Hárr of Hávamál. Yet here he is inflicting exactly the kind of insult he warned against in Hávamál:

Þeygi er, sem þú þríu bú góð eigir;
berbeinn þú stendr, oc hefir brautinga gervi,
þatki, at þú hafir bræcr þínar. (stanza 6)

Þórr is alone, bereft of friends or conveyance. Indeed, the hafra in stanza 3 may even refer to his goats, which show no sign of regenerating this time. His déshabillé state

calls to mind Hávamál's "neiss er nœcqvíðr halr". Þórr wears the garb of a brautingi, a vagabond. Despite this, Þórr does not seem all that self-conscious. It is only when he is confronted with Hárbarðr's relentless stream of gibes that his self-control begins to disintegrate.

Once the initial attack on Þórr's poverty is launched, however, wealth does not enter into the boasting match until quite late, stanza 20 or after.

One aspect of wealth-exchange prominent in stanza 8 is thievery. Twice Hárbarðr speaks of thieves. Is this evidence of a more chaotic, possibly even Ragnarokesque environment? Certainly there is a palpable aura of gloom, doom, and even fear in the first stanzas of this poem.

The first possession mentioned thereafter is stanza 20's gambanteinn, a magic wand. It is the basis for a very Óðinnesque wealth exchange. Óðinn receives it as a gift from a giant and drives the giver mad. Þórr for his part is shocked at this perversion of the gift-giving tradition: "Illom huga launaðir þú góðar giafar" (stanza 21). Óðinn's reply is the essence of the "every man for himself" school of thought:

þat hefir eic, er af annarri scefr,
um sic er hverr í slíco. (stanza 22)

Wealth is of little relevance to the rest of the poem. The boasting competition revolves around sex and violence,

not property. Neither deity seems in the least bit proud of any possessions.

At the outset of the senna, there seemed a chance it would break down into a debate over the soft sensual lifestyle and the hard heroic one epitomized by Þórr. But there is little luxury in Óðinn's world. Most of his sexual adventures take place in a context of coercion, seduction, and violence rather than luxury.

There are only two wealth-related words in Hárbarðzlióð. The adjective gullbiartr (stanza 30) used for a maiden and the baugr that Harb offers to Þórr as compensation in stanza 42. Of all the Eddic rings this is perhaps the most mysterious, since it incenses Þórr for some reason obscure to us now. Vésteinn Olason (class lectures, 1984-85) postulates an oblique threat (i.e., to make a ring by closing hands around Þórr's throat, or to make a red ring by cutting it). Or possibly this type of compensation would imply an equality of social status that Þórr thinks insulting (although their exchange thus far has seen several such remarks on Hárbarðr's part without prompting strong reaction from Þórr).

In the final analysis then, Hárbarðzlióð adds very little to the concept of wealth in the Edda. It does demonstrate how little wealth had to do with Þórr and Óðinn, insofar as their boasts barely touch on it.

Hárbarðzlióð is the most spectacular failed bargain of the Edda, but wealth is only a small component of this. Indeed, Þórr's wealth is so paltry here that his failed bribe says little about wealth's limitations. That is, a refusal of Draupnir and the apples of eternal life has far different implications from a refusal of some leftover herring and oats (or herring and goats). Þórr certainly does not come across as one who knows how to wield wealth here. Why he appears in such apparent extreme poverty here remains one of Hárbarðzlióð's many mysteries.

2.0.9 Hymisgviða

The basis for Hymisgviða is far more materialistic than Hárbarðzlióð's. It is a quest for treasure. It places far more stress on wealth and comfort than Hárbarðzlióð does.

Hymisgviða begins on a note of both plenty and dearth. The gods have game and are holding a feast, but are still thirsty for ale before they eat their fill. These gods, at least, are not endowed with limitless resources. To obtain something they value, drink, they will have to act. Thus wealth, of a sort, serves as the motive force in Hymisgviða. The poem does not commence with the gods in a struggle of cosmic import. They are simply trying to get some beer for a party.

The basic storyline is thus quite simple: Þórr's quest for something valued by the gods. On the way, however, the poet uses wealth extensively. A favourite device he uses is the discomfiture of the giants through the destruction of their wealth. This is achieved through super-consumption (Þórr's enormous appetite), brute strength (the slaying of the giant's prize ox) and subterfuge (the breaking of the hrímkalkr). Lots of other things are broken in the process, from pillars and fishing line to magic goats. There are moments that are almost slapstick in their destructiveness, in fact.

Wealth destruction seems to be an important way in which the gods assert their superiority over the giants. It will occur several other times in the Codex Regius, most notably in Prymsgviða. Though the gods experience some property losses of their own (Þórr's goats are mysteriously damaged at the end of Hymisqviða and of course there is the hammer-theft that initiates Prymsgviða), they remain far ahead of the giants in that department. When the gods lose someone or something, it is a matter of high cosmic import. The loss of Þórr's hammer threatens the whole universe. The loss of Baldr brings Ragnarok. The near-loss of the sun, the moon, and Freyja threatened the basis for life on earth. The divine reaction to these losses or threatened losses is very understandable. The giants, however, go into conniption fits over the loss of a bull, a cup, a cauldron, or simply food.

It gives the gods potential to hurt them in many ways. Perhaps the gods are less vulnerable than the giants simply because they are less concerned about their material possessions.

Þórr seems more prosperous here than in Hárbarðzlióð. He is also more concerned about his possessions, delivering his goats into safe-keeping in stanza 7.

The opulence of the giant world is soon revealed, in stanza 8:

Enn önnor gecc,	algullin, fram,
brúnhvít, bera	biórveig syni.

This is the now familiar association of wealth and drinking. The giantess is all-golden and she bears a drink frequently associated with the gods at their leisure, beer. On the whole the wealth of the giants is defined in terms of tangibles: beer-kettles, beer, a hall, cattle, and cups. Þórr is able to hurt the giants by destroying this wealth, their abundance is also their weakness. It is quite in keeping with Hávamál's teachings on wealth.

Stanzas in which property is destroyed or damaged include stanza 12 (hall-pillars and a beam), 13 (kettles). 14-15 (oxen consumed), 19 (prize ox), and 31 (goblet).

Wealth is definitely a motivator of action in Hymisgviða. It is passive, with little power to corrupt. It is the basis for most of the tests that the hero Þórr must pass in

Hymisqviða to attain the object of his quest. And just as in the story of Útgarða-Loki, most of these test whether Þórr can beat the giants at their own game. Just as the giants are known as a destructive, consuming force (as the etymology of the word "iǫtunn", linked to the verb "eat" implies), Þórr must outdestroy and outconsume them. He does this on a grand scale in Hymisqviða. This is the basis of the poem's humour, the destroyers of all creation have their own property destroyed on them.

Hymisqviða, like so many other Eddic poems, focusses on the surrender of wealth through hospitality. Hymir certainly adheres more closely to the letter of the Old Norse hospitality code than Geirroðr or Vafðrúðnir. His heart does not seem to be in it, though, first with his wrathful reception of his guests, then with his ever-growing anxiety over the loss of wealth to them. And the more he tries to embarrass Þórr, the more damage Þórr does him and his wealth.

Whatever Hávamál says about gluttony, it certainly does not apply to Þórr. His prodigious consumption is depicted in only the most positive of terms in Hymisqviða.

The tests of Þórr culminate in the destruction of the indestructible, the kálcr of stanza 28 and 30. That achieved, his host can only moan:

Morg veit ec mæti	mér gengin frá,	
er ec kálki sé	ýr kníam hrundit.	(stanza
32)		

Here the giants exhibit a dependence on wealth that has no counterpart among the gods. By striking at that dependence, Þórr is able to assert his superiority and win a victory for gods and men.

2.0.10 Locasenna

Locasenna also begins amid abundance, the ale-party that results from Þórr's fetching of the kettle (at least according to the prose introduction). Gold illuminates everything, and ale flows of its own accord. The wealth seems an integral component of the griðastaðr this place is. Amid this opulence, however, the talk is of weapons (stanza 2) and "vígrisni", possibly a dark foreshadowing of Ragnarok (or possibly just a commentary on everyday doings in Valhøll). The first use of a term for wealth comes in stanza 5, where Loki threatens:

auðigr verða mun ec í andsvorom,
 ef þú mælir til mart.

Here Loki is referring to a word-hoard rather than a wealth-hoard, a wealth measured in malice, not money. It is a usage unique in the Codex Regius, but brings to mind Óðinn's claim to be an "óauðigr maðr" at the outset of Vafðrúðnismál.

Once Loki's insults begin in earnest, however, wealth figures more prominently. At first, Bragi attempts to forestall the storm of abuse with a bribe (stanza 12):

Mar oc mæki gef ec þér míns fiár,

oc bætir þér svá baugi Bragi
 síðr þú ásom ofund um gialdir,
 gremðu eigi goð at þér!

The motive for this offer seems rather complex. Perhaps Bragi is actually sorry for his actions against Loki, as Philip Anderson suggests: "Bragi then repents, realizing that he was wrong to try to turn someone away. He offers recompense to Loki for his harsh words, in the hope of avoiding another confrontation".⁴⁵ Is Bragi attempting to assert his superiority over Loki, as is appropriate for the giver of gifts in Germanic tradition? Or is Loki really the kind of god that can be bought off with "mar oc mæki" and a ring? Interestingly enough, the same bribes are offered in For Scírnis, Skírnir accepting (in fact demanding) the former, and Gerðr rejecting the latter. Gering and Sijmons note, however, (p. 282) that : "Rosse und waffen gehörten zu den beliebtesten geschenken." Anderson notes another implication, however:

Bragi is, of course, the god of poetry, and it is therefore not surprising to find that his language is characterized by phrases borrowed from heroic poetry. He offers the compensation usually paid by one warrior to another, that is, swords, horses, and rings. He threatens Loki by reminding him of his own fighting ability...⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Philip N. Anderson, "Form and Content in the Lokasenna: A Re-Evaluation." Edda, 1981, p. 218.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

It should be noted, however, that Anderson's association of these gifts as compensation between warriors has little support in the Codex Regius. In the Edda, at least, these are far more often dispensed by a superior to an underling (see the discussion of Atlaqviða in this thesis, p. 111-116). In any event, Loki roundly rejects Bragi's assertions of wealth:

Iós oc armbauga mundu æ vera
 beggja vanr, Bragi. (stanza 13)

This seems to place a pejorative on poverty and equate wealth with excellence. Perhaps this is just Loki's twisted viewpoint. Gering and Sijmons find a link between this and the assault on Bragi's martial prowess in the next line (p. 282):

Der unausgesproche gedanke der die beiden hälften der strophe verbindet, scheint zu sein: "wie solltest du zu rossen und armringen gekommen sein, da du ja stets feige den kampf gemieden hast (dir also keine beute erwerben konntest)."

Thus Loki casts aspersions on Bragi's wealth in order to imply he is incapable of gaining wealth in combat. Wealth is in fact synonymous with martial prowess here.

So much Loki does is a perversion of social norms. His very entry into the hall could be seen as a test of his hosts' noblemindedness, of their willingness to surrender wealth by sharing their feast with him. Yet those who do this simply receive the fiercest abuse from him. He turns the hospitality test of most of the previous Eddic poems on

its head. Neither bribe nor hospitality have any influence on him.

Though sexual slurs form the basis for the invective that follows, sometimes wealth is involved too. In stanza 20, Loki charge Gefion with having given herself to "sveinn inn hvíti" in exchange for a "sigli" (a jewel or trinket). Stanza 40 refers to the use of wealth as compensation for cuckolding:

qln né penning hafðir þú þess aldregi
vanréttis, vesall.

Several times Locasenna reiterates the use of wealth to buy peace, most often by compensating for wrongs done. Here Loki boasts of his ability to disrupt that process by denying to others the wealth that he owes them for his misdeeds.

He is contemptuous of wealth spent by others to buy peace or love, as expressed in his rejoinder to Bragi (stanza 13) and his criticism of Freyr's marriage arrangement in stanza 42.

Gulli keypta léztu Gymis dóttur
oc seldir þitt svá sverð
enn er Muspellz synir ríða Myrcvið yfir,
veizta þú þá, vesall, hvé þú veigr.

In Loki's version of the For Scírnis story, gold has changed hands and the sword is lost for good. Whether this represents another version of the story or simply a twisting of the facts by Loki is impossible to say. To Loki, at least, Freyr's loss of his treasure will mean his doom at

Ragnarok. And certainly his insult is meaningless if this is not in fact the case. It is reminiscent of Vígaqlúms saga, where the loss of Freyr's gifts costs his protege his luck.

Stanza 42 touches on the dependence of the gods on their treasures, and the importance of his sword to Freyr. Byggvir's rejoinder, however, places great stress on property:

Veiztu, ef ec øðli ættac sem Inguna-Freyr,
 oc svá sællicet setr,
 mergi smæra mylða ec þá meinkráco
 oc lemða alla í liðo. (stanza 43)

Byggvir seems to be saying that if he were as rich as Freyr, he would cut Loki down to size. The link between property, øðli and setr, and the power to crush Loki is not clear. Or is he simply vigorously refuting the implication that Freyr is short of wealth?

Though this stanza is obscure, subsequent passages support the modern scholarly notion that Byggvir is a personification of barley, with links to both ale (stanza 45) and food (stanza 46). And where Óðinn is charged "Þú kunnir aldregi deila víg með verom", Byggvir is charged "Þú kunnir aldregi deila með monnom mat."

Given the highly metaphorical nature of this passage, it is doubtful whether much is to be gained by assessing Byggvir's attitude towards wealth in terms of human motivations. If nothing else, though, Loki's charge reiterates

the importance of generosity, that stinginess was as grave an accusation as cowardice, if not more so.

Heimdal's warning against the dangers of overdrinking would be quite at home in Hávamál:

Pvát ofdryccia veldr alda hveim
er sína mælgí né manað. (stanza 47)

On the whole, Locasenna is a reiteration of the virtues praised in Hávamál, such as generosity and moderation in alcohol consumption. Where Hávamál criticizes failings in these areas, however, Locasenna is positively vitriolic.

Loki's rejoinder in stanza 48 is very obscure, but relates to wealth or at least the lack of it. Loki reproaches Heimdal for "ip lióta lif" he's been fated to live. To the modern reader, at least, this does not particularly discredit Heimdal. His role as warder of the gods is nothing to be ashamed of. Perhaps this reflects Loki's depravity, that he cannot comprehend duty or self-sacrifice. All he can see is the unpleasant side of the duties for Heimdal and imagines it a form of slavery.

The last attempt to bribe Loki comes in stanza 53, where Sif offers him a "hrímkalkr, fullr forns miaðar." Like all the others, it is a complete failure, drawing an even heavier volley of vituperation upon the giver.

If there is one thing that can be said of Loki, it is that throughout Locasenna he seems quite immune to the al-

lures of wealth. His evil is not of the soft, corrupt kind that can be easily bought or bribed, unless one interprets all the attempts made to bribe him as evidence that he was thought susceptible to such tactics. Neither Bragi nor Sif succeed in buying peace from him through bribes. He also seems quite critical of those who use wealth to win women, as Freyr did. In the end it is Þórr's brute force, not bribes that put an end to Locasenna. Like For Scírnis, it is a case of threats succeeding where wealth offers have failed.

2.0.11 Þrymsqviða

Þrymsqviða opens with the loss of a material possession, Þórr's hammer. It is the most wealth-oriented crisis yet seen in the Edda. Even Hymisqviða did not start from this negative premise of a loss of a treasure, it was simply a quest for luxury. The article missing here is vital, however. This is the most graphic depiction yet of the dependence of the gods upon a material item. It is also the most extensive treatment yet of the form of wealth-transfer that is theft.

The poet very quickly uses wealth to demonstrate the gravity of the situation, when Þórr seeks the loan of Freyja's fiaðrhamr. Her reply says it all:

þó mynda ec gefa þér, þótt or gulli væri,
oc þó selia, at væri ór silfri.

especially if one reads between the lines. It also helps clarify the relationship between the god of thunder and the goddess of fertility. There is no question of Freyja's sovereignty here. She controls her own possessions, completely. Even in this crisis, the sometimes uncouth god of thunder and violence has to respect that, and ask as politely as he can.

Freyja, though she may be a ruler of wealth, is certainly not ruled by it. She is willing to lend Þórr her fiaðrhamr no matter what the cost. Gold and silver seem to represent the ultimate in wealth to her, from the way she refers to them here, but she is willing to sacrifice them if necessary. Or so she says. In this she resembles all of the deities of the Codex Regius except possibly Loki. None of them is depicted as stingy.

Stanza 6 shows that, as ever, the giants are associated with wealth. Inside jotunheimr, wealth is used to set the scene for Loki's entry:

Þrymr sat á haugi, þursa dróttinn,
greyiom sínom gullbönd snøri
oc mǫrom sínom mǫn iafnaði. (stanza 6)

Both the dogs and the steeds are found in For Scírnis, the former as giant wealth, the latter divine. This barrow-sitting giant does not lack for gold either.

Even the basic situation echoes that of For Scírnis, as

Stephen Mitchell has noted,⁴⁷ an attempt by one the supernatural races of Norse mythology to buy a bride from the other with wealth. In both cases the wealth-offer fails.

Much of the rest of Prymsqviða, however, focusses on wealth's power to delude. Even Þórr's remarks to Loki about comfort in stanza 10 can be seen in this light. There Þórr complains that stories often get garbled in transmission if their bearer is sitting or lying down:

opt sitianda sǫgor um fallaz,
oc liggiandi lygi um bellir.

Comfort has a negative effect on truthfulness, it would seem.

The subsequent scheme to fool the giants is very dependent on clothing, jewelery, keys, and womanly trappings, ie "qvennváðir", "breiða steina", and "lucla."

It is in the giant realm, however, that wealth figures most prominently. Prymr revels in his wealth as his "bride" arrives:

Ganga hér at garði gullhyrnðar kýr,
øxn alsvartir iǫtni at gamni,
fiqlǫ á ec meiðma, fiqlǫ á ec menia,
einnar mér Freyio ávant þiccir. (stanza 23)

It is a wealth much like that of Hymisqviða, but with more stress on gold and jewelery as well. Prymr's wealth is defined in terms of gold, livestock, treasure, and necklac-

⁴⁷ Stephen A. Mitchell, "For Scírnis as Mythological Model..." p. 109, 120 ff.

es. Only Freyja is missing from the picture. And from the context it is clear she is just another material possession to the giant.

One question that comes up in relation to the giants' aspirations towards Freyja is how appropriate were they? That is, is there any suggestion that the giants' desire for her was wrong on the ground that it would be a misuse of Freyja? Here Prymr sees her as just another possession "iǫtni at gamni". Yet earlier in the poem she has been depicted as a character in her own right, one with the power to grant and refuse requests of all kinds, even with the security of the universe at stake. Is there not a tension between these two views of Freyja?

It is hard not to see Prymsqviða as a sermon on greed. In aspiring to Freyja, Prymr's reach has definitely exceeded his grasp. He wants something it is not right for him to have, possibly for an end it is not right to put her to. He has the "fé", now he wants the "flióðs munuð". He has so much, yet it is his failure to be satisfied that will cost him everything in the end.

Like Balthasar, Prymr exults in his wealth on the eve of his destruction. Wealth proves to be "valtastr vina" to him as it has to so many others. This sets him apart from the gods. Though there are many men in the Codex Regius who fall into the same trap, gloating over their wealth just before they die (see Hávamál, Atlaqviða, and Hamðismál

for some examples), there are no gods like this. There are no stories of them being blinded by their wealth to this extent.

And just as the power of the giants is displayed most conspicuously in terms of wealth, that is the first area in which they are humbled. Just as in Hymisqviða, it is Þórr's prodigious powers of consumption that quickly cut the giants down to size (though as Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (p 347) and Gering and Sijmons (p 322) note, Þrymsqviða is more restrained in this area than Hymisqviða):

einn át oxa, átta laxa,
krásir allar, þær er konor scyldo,
dracc Sifiar verr sáld þriú miaðar (stanza
24).

With that, the giants begin to lose control of the situation for the first time. The initiative passes to Þórr. For the next four stanzas, the giants will be reacting to his actions, not he to theirs. And the more he consumes, the flimsier the wealth of the giants appears. And the flimsier their pretensions to parity with the gods appear too. For as both Grímnismál and Hymisqviða have demonstrated, nothing destroys a host's image faster than stinginess or fear for his wealth. By this consumption, Þórr has injected fear into the giants, or at least exposed it. He shows that they are not in control, that they can be surprised too. Once they show surprise, like Glámr in Grettissaga, they lose half their power to terrify.

Þá qvað þat Þrymr, þursa dróttinn
'Hvar sátstu brúðir bíta hvassara?

sáca ec brúðir bíta breiðara,
né inn meira mið mey um drecca'. (stanza
25)

Given the stress on his wealth but a stanza previous, this casts him in a niggardly light. As it is, the giants as misers is a theme that recurs frequently in Old Norse literature. It contrasts sharply with the open-handedness of the gods on most occasions.

Very swiftly, however, Prymsqviða develops this hint of stinginess into full-blown avarice. Moreover, this coincides with the climax. The greed of the giants revealed at its most brazen is the last thing we see before Þórr destroys them:

Inn kom in arma iotna systir,
hin er brúð fiár biðia þorði:
'Láttu þér af hondom hringa rauða,
ef þú ǫðlaz vill ástir mínar,
ástir mínar, alla hylli'. (stanza 29)

Again, it is a reversal of the concept of the gift. For the giantess, as with her kinsmen, a gift does not set the seal on a friendship, it is a precondition for it. The bride must pay for the affection of her in-laws. Does this reflect giant avarice, or does it simply reflect "Freyja's" position as an outsider, from a tribe hostile to giants, one that may well owe them compensation such as "hringa rauða."

She does not get the response she expects, which adds to the humour of the situation. Prymsqviða closes with the familiar joke (a la the story of the jötunn smiðr) of Þórr giving giants hammer blows where they are expecting wealth:

Drap hann ina gldno iotna systor,
 hin er brúðfiár of beðit hafði
 hon scell um hlaut fyr scillinga,
 enn högg hamars fyr hringa fiqlø (stanza
 32).

As Gering and Sijmons note (p. 326), the humour is intensified by the fact that both scell and scillingr derive from the same root:

Beide wörter sind derselben wurzel entsprossen:
skellr ist ein 'schellender oder klatschender
 hieb'...und skillingr eine 'klingende münze', sie
 gehören zu altn. skjalla 'klingen, rasseln', ahd.
scellan usw. Das wortspiel ist ohne zweifel beab-
 sichtigt.

In the Edda, violence and death are seen as eminently appropriate rewards for grasping greed and avarice. It is a theme that will recur in many of the heroic poems as well. For it is when greed is combined with great power that the cosmic order is at its most vulnerable. The threat must be destroyed for the safety of creation, and this is Þórr's job par excellence.

Overall, Prymsqviða depicts wealth as something closely associated with the world of the giants, a world of gold, livestock, drinking feasts, and abundance. Yet for all his abundance, Prymr is not satisfied. He wants something that is not for him to own.

Prymsqviða also reveals differing attitudes between gods and goddesses as to whether women are a form of wealth. To Prymr and the gods, Freyja is a thing that can be bartered for a hammer. Freyja herself, however, rejects this view.

Þórr, as usual, reduces his giants to small men before he kills them. For all his wealth, Þrymr cannot refrain from asking pointed questions about Þórr's consumption, questions that reveal his own inadequacies as a host (though they may simply be a sign of his surprise and fear). The rich giants are not generous by the standards of Hávamál. In the end this may be one of their most unforgivable failures.

2.0.12 Völundarqviða

With Völundarqviða, the transition from goðakvæði to hetjukvæði begins. Yet despite this change of venue, from the divine to the heroic world, basic wealth-related themes remain common to them both. Both Þrymsqviða and Völundarqviða are stories of a powerful lord's greed for something that was not right for him to have. Both hinge on the return of a treasure stolen by stealth, Þórr's hammer and Völundr's ring. Both heroes must undergo humiliation before they can inflict vengeance on the thief. Both heroes are weakened by the loss of their treasure, Þórr is no match for the giants, Völundr falls asleep. Both recoveries of the stolen treasure hinge on deception. The act of marriage is the key to the recovery of both treasures. Both heroes impress their opposition with their fierce look, arousing suspicion, but not enough to spoil their plans. Both are faced with wealth-related demands from a close relative of their arch-foe. Both slay these relatives. Both poems feature

the use of a feather coat. All these links make Völundargviða a natural follow-up to Prymsgviða, reflecting as it does a divine adventure in a heroic mirror.

Though wealth, gold and treasure play a very important role in Völundargviða, the poem does not open ostentatiously. The setting is a hunter's hall in the forest. The hunters are the sons of a Finnish king, but there are no references to wealth (apart from the "dýrt lín" spun by their valkyrie wives) initially. They live the lives of simple hunters, on the fringes of the great Mirkwood, until their lovers forsake them and go south to the wars again.

It is only when Völundr is all alone, in an empty hall, that gold and treasures come into the story:

Enn einn Völundr sat í Úlfdølom,
hann sló gull rautt við gimfastan
luçþi hann alla lindbauga vel
svá beið hann sinnar lióssar
qvánar, ef hánom koma gerði (stanza 5).

Like Prymr, he handles his wealth in anticipation of his wife's arrival (see Prymsgviða stanza 6) and yet "him seo wen ge Leah". The woman he awaits with wealth betrays his trust.

The red gold seems a pale replacement for "sinnar lióssar qvánar". It is bright enough to attract the attention of King Níðuðr, however. To be sure, the poem does not say this specifically. Níðuðr hears that Völundr is alone, not that he is wealthy. His swift reaction to this news, how-

ever, implies strong motivation, and since the action that follows focusses on his robbery of Völundr (there is no sign of any revenge motive) (he does not slay or gloat over Völundr once he has him in his power), it seems likely that Völundr's wealth was common knowledge:

Þat spyrr Níðuðr Niára dróttinn
at einn Völundr sat í Úlfðolom
nóttom fóro seggir negldar vóro brynior
scildir blico þeira... (stanza 6)

Níðuðr's wealth, at least in terms of military hardware, is apparent from the last lines of this stanza. Yet it pales to insignificance before the size of Völundr's hoard:

sá þeir á bast bauga dregna,
siau hundruð allra er sá seggr átti. (stanza 7)

Völundr's wealth is defined in terms of rings, not war-gear. Is this distinction significant? Lords are often defined in terms of their mastery over rings, their ability to break and distribute them to retainers. These rings are often the measure of their power. Rings are that form of wealth most closely associated with human relationships, with the conversion of the material into the emotional, the bond between friends, between generous giver and grateful receivers. Völundr's rings and his broken relationship seem linked somehow. He awaits his wife with rings, though his precise reason for this remains obscure. Even Jón Helgason admits to uncertainty in his synopsis of the story at this point:

Nú ber svo við að Völundr tekur til hagleiks síns og fer að smíða dýrgripi úr gulli, þó að tilgang-

slaust virðist á þessum stað.⁴⁸

Why does Völundarkviða focus on Völundr's wealth here? Is it a foreshadowing of its theme of the sterility of material wealth on its own, a truth King Níðuðr will very swiftly be forced to confront himself? Or does it serve simply to echo Hávamál's

opt sparir leiðom þatz hefir liúfom hugat
mart gengr verr, enn varir. (stanza 40)

Few Eddic poems can rival Völundarkviða as a demonstration of how saving for the beloved can serve the detested instead. For swiftly this wealth will serve Völundr's foe Níðuðr, and revenge comes mainly through forcing Níðuðr's wealth to serve Völundr.

Völundr's ring hoard would rival any dragon's. Perhaps the poet uses its enormity to illustrate Völundr's grief, the intensity of his sorrow, or simply the length of time he's been waiting, time enough to fashion seven hundred rings. Or perhaps it is meant to represent both, Völundr's passion and his patience. If so, it is a use of wealth which has few Eddic parallels.

Rings are made to be given in the Germanic world. The enormous hoard, that cannot be used for such a function in a world without retainers seems somehow unnatural. Völundr's strength lies in his ring-making, not his ring-breaking. It

⁴⁸ Jón Helgason, Tvær kviður fornar: Völundarkviða og Atlakviða, (Reykjavík, Heimskringla, 1962) p. 24

is the Germanic kingship concept turned on its head.

More than any other Eddic character, Völundr is defined by his wealth. It is wealth that causes much of his troubles, and initiates the drama that comprises the heart of the poem. It is his ability to make wealth that buys him life, makes his captors dependent on him, deludes, and ultimately destroys them.

But there are hints that Völundr is dependent on his wealth too, and in a strange way. It is not a matter of softness, of a love for luxury so frequently cherished by Óðinn's men. Völundr dines on bear when he returns "af veiði", rougher fare than many a king's son is used to, perhaps. But it establishes him as a tough man, tough enough to hunt bear, at least. His wealth is hard gold, not soft luxury. It is when others try to bring this hard, wild, supernatural wealth into the world of comfort and luxury that their doom results. Yet somehow the loss of one ring seems to weaken and bewilder him, just as will befall Bøðvildr later on.

The first thing Völundr does after supper is to sit on a bearskin and count his rings. Like the dragon of Beowulf he is quick to spot the slightest discrepancy in his hoard. Yet this only seems to bewilder the "álfa lióði." His reaction to the loss is not rage, only confusion. Just as Bøðvildr will be more confused than enraged by the breaking of her

ring, so is Völundr strangely calm here. He attributes the loss to the return of his lover, even though there is no sign of her:

Sat á berfialli, bauga talði,
 álfa lióði, eins sacnaði,
 hugði hann, at hefði, Hlōðvés dóttir, alvitr
 unga, væri hon aptr komin. (stanza 10)

Is this the wishful thinking, the self-delusion of the jilted lover? Or has the loss of the ring addled his wits? Or is it another case of wealth's power to delude, is Völundr so engrossed in ring-counting that he fails to see the sword hanging over his head?

Or is Völundr in fact all that illogical? Living far off in the wilderness as he does, it is perhaps understandable why he is so surprised by Níðuðr's attack. After all, if someone had designs on his rings, why didn't they steal all of them, not just one? Völundr's behaviour may not be logical, but then again neither is Níðuðr's. Why he and his men take but one of the rings is unclear, as Jón Helgason notes:

Ósagt er látið hversvegna þeir láta sér nægja að halda þessum hring, eða ef hann er á einhvern hátt sérstakur, hvernig þeir þekkja hann frá hinum.⁴⁹

Again, it is tempting to assume the ring has special significance, though the poem only hints at this. The strangeness of the situation (and a corresponding situation near the end of the poem), plus repeated references to the ring in the poem have led some to postulate a magical signifi-

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

cance to the ring. Grimstad at least allows for the possibility,⁵⁰ as does Einar Ólafur Sveinsson:

Aðrir hugsa sér þó, að töfrar séu í hringnum: Völundr þverr megin, þegar hann missir hringsins (orðið 'viljalauss' kemur vel heim við þetta) en öðlast það, þegar hann kemst aftur yfir hann, og þar með mátt til að komast undan.⁵¹

Gering and Sijmons and Halldórsson⁵² also have some interesting comments on this point. Gottzmann is another commentator with some interesting insights into the role of the ring:

In der Vkv. hat der Ring, der leitmotivisch die gesamte Handlung durchzieht, eine vielschichtige Bedeutung. Die Ringe, die Völund für Alvit Tag für Tag schmiedet, sind an dieser Stelle des Geschehnisablaufes reine Gegenstandszeichen. Der Ring steht für die Bindung, die Völund mit Alvit eingegangen ist. Die Siebenhundert Ringe, deren Bedeutung erst im Verlauf der Handlung eindeutig geklärt wird, bringen zum Ausdruck, daß Völund der Beschützer des durch Alvit zurückgelassen Hortes ist. In dem Moment, als Völund den einen Ring an Bödvild sieht, bekommt er für ihn Indizcharakter (Handlungszeichen). Erst als er den Ring optisch vor Augen hat, weiß Völund daß Nidud ihn genommen hat. Der Ring klärt ihn über den wahren Sachverhalt auf, der durch Nidud angedeutet wurde, als er Völund nach dem Gold in den Tälern fragte. Als der Ring Bödvild entzweibricht, als die Beindung zu der Schwanenfrau endültig gebrochen ist, weil die Söhne Niduds, die den Schatz forderten, selbst zu Schätzen verarbeitet wurden, der Schatz damit tatsächlich in die Hände Niduds gelangt ist, da wird der Ring zum Drehpunkt der Rachehandlung Völunds.⁵³

⁵⁰ Kaaren Grimstad, "The Revenge of Völundr", Edda: A Collection of Essays, p. 191-192.

⁵¹ Einar Ólafur Sveinnson, Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld p. 421.

⁵² Halldór Halldórsson, "Hringtöfrar í íslenzkum orðtökum." Íslenzk tunga-Lingua Islandica, 2:7-31.

⁵³ Carola L. Gottzmann Das Alte Atlilied: Untersuchung der

Certainly when Völundr recovers it , his power increases, and it is Bǫðvildr, the previous bearer, who becomes sleepy, bewildered, and weak. The ring's role in this remains obscure, however, particularly because the Völundarqviða poet provides a rational explanation for each situation where ring-magic might have been at work. Perhaps Völundr was simply tired from the hunt. Perhaps Bǫðvildr was simply befuddled by the beer.

The nature of the ring is important because it may be one of the few magical treasures to be found in the Elder Edda. Overall magical treasures are far more common in the Snorra Edda, a curious discrepancy given Snorri's alleged distaste for fantasy, a distaste often demonstrated in his treatment of the sources of Heimskringla. It would cast some light on one aspect of wealth that is very obscure in the Edda.

That wealth motivates Níðuðr's action is soon made quite clear, when he demands:

Hvar gaztu, Völundr, vísi álfa,
vára aura í Úlfðölm? (stanza 13)

But Völundr quickly replies:

Gull var þar eigi á Grana leiðo,
fiarri hugða ec vart land fiðllom Rínar
man ec, at vér meiri mæti áttom
er vér heil hiú heima vórom. (stanza 14)

The treatment of wealth in this section has far more parallels among the hetjukvæði than among the goðakvæði. In stanza 13 Níðuðr appears to claim Völundr's wealth "vára aura" as his own, much as others do in Reginsmál and Atlaqviða. Völundr's reply, though obscure, seems to refute Níðuðr's claim on the grounds of distance. The implication seems to be that Völundr's gold originates far from the realm of Níðuðr, that Níðuðr had no claims on it, and that Völundr had possessed far more wealth at a better time.

Scholars have differed considerably in their interpretation of these lines, however. Even the ascription of "Gull var þar eigi" is disputed. Jón Helgason (p. 63-64) feels that Níðuðr probably is the one who utters it:

Í tilsvári Níðaðar felst aðdróttun að hann eigi í rauninni það gull sem Völundr hafi komizt yfir: land vort er fátækt, þar er ekki gull á leið Grana (eða með öðrum orðum: það er ekki sambærilegt við Gnitahiði þar sem Sigurður klyfjaði hest sinn gulli), og það liggur fjarri Rín (undirskilið: þess vegna hlýtur þú að hafa dregið þér gull sem ég á með réttu).... Önnur skýring er sú að tilsvár Níðaðar sé aðeins spurningin, en með orðunum Gull var þar eigi taki Völundr til máls. Níðuðr hefur sakað hann um stuld, en Völundr svarar: Land vort...er snautt að gulli, ég hef ekki getað auðgast þar, gull okkar bræðra er fengið með konum okkar...þetta virðist þó síður líklegt; orðin vort land fara betur í munni konungs: hann telur sig eiga landið.

Jón Helgason seems to resist the interpretation of Völundr as king elsewhere in the poem (stanza 11 and 14) too, thus his preference for placing "vort land" in Níðuðr's mouth. Other scholars have ascribed these words to Níðuðr

too, but this view was sharply contested by Gering and Sijmons (p. 13, vol 2):

Sicher unrichtig ist es, wenn Bugge (Forn kv. 165 b), Grundtvig, Edzardi (Germ 23, 171 ff), Detter-Heinzel u.a. die beiden zeilen noch nur rede des Níðuðr ziehen und erklären: 'in meinem reiche ist kein gold auf der heide oder in flüssen zu finden, hier habe nur ich gold, und wenn auch dir etwas besitzest, mußst du es mir entwendet haben'.

Most more recent commentators seem to have concurred with Gering and Sijmons, such as Grimstad (p. 200), however.

Like the other cruces of the Codex Regius, this one leaves us on the horns of a dilemma. Is Níðuðr alluding to a theft of his gold by Völundr? If so, there is no other evidence to support this. Or is he asserting a king's right to all treasure, all wealth? Such a claim has some parallels in early Germanic law, at least.

Perhaps Völundr's greatest crime is his independence. He represents an independent power in Níðuðr's own realm. Moreover, his wealth epitomizes that independence. He does not get his rings by lordly dispensation, but by making them himself. His wealth is enormous, but it does not represent a bond of comparable strength between him and the king, the natural ring-giver. Indeed, with his rings Völundr could clearly be a ring-giving king in his own right, which Níðuðr seems to feel threatened by.

Free agents, free of bonds to kings and families, meet with a decidedly mixed fate in Old Icelandic literature.

perhaps the closest counterpart to Völundr is Grímnir, whose wealth lies in his "manvit mikit." Both wind up prisoners of a king, and both rely on their wealth and power to escape.

Völundr's wealth, like that of Hávamál, asserts his independence. But perhaps its immoderate size, a clash with the precepts of Hávamál if ever there was one, brings Níðuðr's power against him. Perhaps one can be too independent.

The contrast between Níðuðr's and Völundr's state is even more marked if one divides the stanza as Jón Helgason does. Níðuðr's utterance: "fiarri hugða ec vart land fiðllom Rínar" would imply that gold is something almost mythological to him, the stuff of ancient legends rather than everyday reality.

Perhaps Níðuðr simply does not know much about wealth and treasure. Certainly the fascination he and his offspring have with Völundr's treasures could just as readily testify to their ignorance in this area as to Völundr's fabulous skills as a smith.

Völundr's treasures are at once among their proudest possessions. Again, this could just as easily reflect their own poverty as Völundr's brilliance. Níðuðr's sons are fascinated by the mere sight of Völundr's treasure, hardly the actions of princes jaded by opulence. And their parents accept the treasures Völundr fashions from their skulls and eyes without question, another possible hint that they knew

little of what treasure really looked like (though again it could attest to Vǫlundr's tremendous skill).

To some extent the impact of Vǫlundr's treasure is like the arrival of the three giant maidens in Vǫlospá: it deludes, arouses avarice, and marks the beginning of the end for the line of Níðuðr. Just as valkyries act as intermediaries between the divine realm and that of men (and just as Vǫlundarqviða occupies the boundary between goðakvæði and hetjukvæði in the Codex Regius, Vǫlundr seems to be a middle man in the transfer of treasure. We know nothing of the origin of his treasure, and nothing of its fate, but there is little treasure in this poem that does not come from Vǫlundr. Jón Helgason implies that the valkyries themselves might be the source of the gold (p 64) but this is not supported by other commentators.

Vǫlundr associates wealth with the better times of the past, with a "heil hiú":an intact household. This will be echoed in later heroic poems.

The purpose of this rejoinder, if any, is obscure. It sounds more like wistful reminiscings than a rebuttal to Níðuðr's claims. The implication seems to be that Vǫlundr's gold originates far from the realm of Níðuðr, and that Vǫlundr has all the gold he wants, thus no need to steal any. It avails him nothing.

The loss of this wealth effectively severs his last links with the past. Once the wealth is gone there is no further mention of Vølundr's wife. Vølundr is no longer under any delusion that she will return. He is no longer under the sentimental spell cast by his possessions. He is free to act and no longer restrained by the standards of home and hearth. He is now free to act with unrestrained ferocity.

Deprived of his treasures (particular mention is made of the gold ring and his sword), Vølundr glowers like a dragon at Bøðvildr. Níðuðr almost seems to be flaunting his stolen wealth before its former owner. It is the sort of excessive arrogance that would not be out of place in Hávamál.

Vølundr's wrath is linked to the loss of his treasures. Here, as in Prymsqviða, the status quo has been ruptured by a thief. To Vølundr, his treasures are a loss both in themselves and in the humiliation Níðuðr inflicts on him by flaunting them.

Wealth can turn men into monsters. Most often they become dragons (see Gull-Þorissaga, Beowulf, Jomsvikingasaga, and Reginismál). With Vølundr, however, it is the loss of his wealth, or the flaunting of his stolen wealth before his eyes that unleashes the dragon-grimness within him. And it is a grimness that terrifies, as the prose interlude says: "Engi maðr þorði at fara til hans nema konungr einn."

It is the ugliest display of wealth-induced malice to be seen in the Edda thus far. It will not be the last.

Völundarqviða, more than any other Eddic poem up to this point, revolves around wealth and the loss of it. And the treasures in the poem are valued for themselves, not only for what they represent. Whereas in Prymsqviða it was Þórr's ability to stave off the giants that was at stake, not just his hammer, here the wealth itself is at the centre. Níðuðr seems to claim Völundr has stolen his wealth or at least has no right to it, and justifies his raid on these grounds. Völundr claims it is his own in an equally obscure reply.

Níðuðr's subsequent flaunting of his plunder at once mocks and demonstrates that possession is nine tenths of the law. Völundr can do nothing but seethe and lament his loss. His very possessions have been turned against him, their emotional associations inflicting all the more pain. His lament for his lost wealth really says it all about his state. How carefully he praises the qualities of that which has been lost, and reiterates the link of the "baugar" to his lover:

Scínn Níðaði sverð á linda,
þat er ec hvesta sem ec hagast kunna,
oc ec herðac, sem mér høgst þótti,
sá er mér fránn mækir, æ fiarri borinn,
sécca ec þann Völundi til smiðio borinn.
Nú berr Bøðvildar brúðar minnar
- bíðca ec þess bót - bauga rauða. (stanza
18)

Even Þórr does not dwell on the qualities of his lost property to this extent, though all the universe depends on its recovery. There is a dark greed to Völundr's obsession with his treasures, comparable to that which is at work in Atlaqviða, Reginismál, and Fáfnismál. Völundr's jealous possessiveness is what makes the loss of his wealth even more painful to him.

Here, as in other Eddic poems, it is difficult to balance the love interest against the value of the "bauga rauða." Does the memory of his wife evoked by the rings torment him more than the material loss they represent? Often the loss of a wife means the loss of her property as well (in the heroic poems in particular the loss of one is frequently referred to by mentioning the loss of the other), but here the wife has left her treasure behind, and still Völundr grieves. The very mention of his wife in this stanza, "brúðar minnar", implies the memory is at least as important as the treasure.

It is ironic that much though the loss of his wealth has hurt him, it is Völundr's creation of new wealth, his forging of new treasures, that proves instrumental to his revenge. Moreover, it is the very same fascination with wealth and treasure that brought Níðuðr down on Völundr that will doom Níðuðr's offspring. Though Völundr suffers from the greed of Níðuðr's line, he makes them suffer far more for it in the end. Just as his own treasures are turned against him, he uses their own greed to ensnare the sons of Níðuðr.

Níðuðr's sons are intoxicated by treasure. Like Vǫlundr on the eve of Níðuðr's arrival, they act in a way that can only be described as feigr. That is, their behaviour is not rational, but that of someone blinded by their own impending doom. The same can be said of Bǫðvildr. It is a reiteration of the Eddic theme of wealth as a blinding and deluding force.

Is wealth seen as a solace in Vǫlundarqviða? Is it held out as a reason for living, along the line of Hávamál's "ey getr qvicr kú?" The creation of wealth occupies Vǫlundr in both his periods of grief in the poem: the aftermath of his lover's disappearance and his enslavement. But there is little sign that it comforts Níðuðr.

Of all the forms of wealth mentioned in Vǫlundarqviða, rings are the most prominent. They span most of the poem, being the focus of Vǫlundr's activity following the disappearance of his wife near the beginning of the poem, and the key to his revenge at the end. All of Níðuðr's offspring are delivered into Vǫlundr's hands by rings, the sons by the desire to see one, the daughter by the wish to repair one. And it is the losing and the regaining of the ring that seems to have a major influence on Vǫlundr's power. Indeed, with 700 rings, Vǫlundarqviða would appear to have more rings than all the other Eddic poems put together.

Völundarqviða is a particularly gruesome example of the destruction of people for the sake of wealth. It turns the message of Hávamál on its head, that material wealth should be expended for the sake of relations with people. In Völundarqviða, people themselves are expended in the physical construction of wealth. And the revenge lies in the fact that it is their relationship to the receiver of this wealth, i.e., that of sons to a father, that far exceeds their value as baubles. A relationship destroyed for the sake of wealth yields only sorrow. And just as Atli is tricked into enjoying his sons as wealth, by eating them as beer dainties, so too are Níðuðr and his wife tricked into enjoying their sons as articles of treasure.

Moreover, the forms these treasures take are a mocking echo of the insults and humiliation inflicted on Völundr. The body parts the queen placed such stress on in stanza 17 are what she and Bǫðvildr receive as treasure. She remarks on his teeth, Bǫðvildr receives the teeth of her brother. She remarks on his eyes only to receive the eyes of her sons as treasure (and it is the prying tendency of those eyes, their wish "á dýr sjá" and "baug sjá" and "að lita í" that does them in).

Bessason (personal interview, November 1986) has noted that Níðuðr's shortcomings as a host are exposed by the gift of his sons' skulls as alecups, a motif repeated in Atlamál (stanza 82).

A further hint that Níðuðr's materialism drives his children down a dangerous road comes in stanza 26, where Bǫðvildr says she dare not tell anyone of the broken ring but Vǫlundr. She is afraid of her father's wrath because she has damaged a material item, apparently.

Ultimately, however, another form of wealth, beer, plays just as much a part in Bǫðvildr's undoing as the ring. Again, one wonders if it is a form of wealth with which she was unfamiliar, since she has no resistance to it. In keeping with the rest of Vǫlundarqviða, a relatively innocuous form of wealth is used to very evil effect here.

In the end, the relative importance of wealth and kinship are put into proper perspective. When Níðuðr questions Vǫlundr for the last time, he does not ask him about gold or rings, he asks about his lost "húnom". But the reply is a description of the treasure they've been reduced to. This is the last reference to wealth in Vǫlundarqviða, apart from Níðuðr's command to his daughter: "ganga fagrvarið / við fǫður ræða."

On the whole, then, Vǫlundarqviða is a powerful sermon on the intoxicating power of wealth. All the troubles of the royal family there can be linked to their fascination with wealth, gold, and treasure. Wealth-lust and avarice make them all fey. Perhaps most telling of all, Vǫlundr's revenge is achieved not in the recovery of his wealth (only

the ring is recovered) but in killing and humiliating his foes. He does not even bother to destroy wealth, only people. This is his own statement about their relative importance.

2.0.13 Alvíssmál

Wealth is conspicuously absent from Alvíssmál. Apart from a question mentioning rings in stanza 5, "hverr hefir þú baugom borit", it does not occur. Alvíssmál's concern is the cosmic, not the material. Of all the Eddic poems, it says the least about wealth. Only in its frame situation does it resemble more wealth-oriented poems, in that its protagonist, Alvíss, is a "wealth-demander", trying to extort wealth, ie a bride, from someone who will not yield it, Þórr. And as with most Eddic wealth-demanders, he is slain by the wealth-denier.

2.0.14 Helgakviða Hundingsbana in fyrri

With Helgakviða Hundingsbana in fyrri, we move from the world of the gods to the world of heroes. As with the gods, the hero is associated with gold early on. A golden thread defines his fate.

The opening of the poem does not stress wealth unduly, however. Here as elsewhere cosmological imagery displaces earth-bound materialism. Signs both in heaven and in the

natural world attest to the birth of a hero. These have little to do with wealth. We are told he possesses weapons and armour, but no more.

With stanza 9, however, a more substantial wealth criterion is mentioned:

hann galt oc gaf gull verðungo,
sparði eigi hilmir hodd blóðrekinn.

With this, the generosity imperative comes to the fore. The hilmir had to give gold to his drótt. If the goðakvæði have taught no other lesson, that is it, that the avaricious and meat-stingy bring their own doom down upon themselves.

This may also be an oblique reference to wealth's power to intoxicate and delude, another frequent motif of the goðakvæði. Perhaps giving was stressed because thereby the lord demonstrated his independence of wealth, that he was master of the wealth that could master lesser men (or is it simply in the skald's best interest to hold up the generous lord as a model to be emulated?) By giving, the lord showed that he was not blinded by greed or materialism, that his vision was clear, unclouded by avarice. For a greedy lord might make excessive demands upon his followers, or embark on courses that would lead them all down the road to Hel. This generosity to his followers shows that his power to hold what is his is a reflection of his strength, not his avarice.

The subsequent stanzas show that wealth is closely related to conflict in the poem. Helgi's deed of daring in slaying Hunding soon has hard material consequences:

Qvøddo síðan Sigmundar bur
auðs oc hringa Hundings synir
þvíat þeir átto iofri at gialda
fiárnám mikit oc fǫður dauða. (stanza 11)

Helgi has plundered Hunding's sons and slain their father. For this they demand "auðs oc hringa" and his refusal brings war. Their demand for wealth, like virtually all demands for wealth found in the Codex Regius, is rejected out of hand:

Létað buðlungr bótir uppi,
né niðia in heldr nefgið fá. (stanza 12)

Moreover, they meet the fate of most Eddic wealth demanders, being slain by the one whose wealth they demanded (see Völundarqviða, Þrymsqviða, and Alvíssmál for but three examples). The poet has taken care to show that Helgi is by no means stingy, as stanza 9 shows, but that he holds what is his in the face of coercion. Indeed, as soon as the fighting is over, there is another reference to the hero's generosity in the kenning "baugbroti".

Hugg ec, at vér eigim aðrar sýslor,
enn með baugbrota biór at drecca.

Stanza 18 introduces another aspect of wealth with parallels in Þrymsqviða, the concept of women as barterable property. It is noteworthy that most Eddic attempts to "gifta" women do not turn out very well, especially if done against

the wishes of the woman herself. Such is the case here, where Hogni's daughter refuses to be married off to Høðbrodd. It is another aspect of the theme of failed wealth exchange that runs through the Edda.

Gold's use as an instrument of policy, something to entice levies into action, comes in stanza 21:

Sendi áro allvaldr þaðan,
of lopt oc um lög, leiðar at biðia,
iðgnógan ógnar líóma
brøgnom bióða oc burom þeira.

Wealth is clearly power, something which can produce armed forces. The Helgagviða Hundingsbana in fyrri poet, at least, was very aware of its political uses (Gering and Sijmons allow for but discount a possible interpretation of "ógnar líóma" as 'sword' rather than 'gold', (p. 83) but even this would be a form of wealth here).

Throughout the poem, Helgi is associated with wealth and gold. Apart from the references in stanza 9 and 17 above, he is said to have a gold-adorned boat (stanza 23) and even his follower Sinfiotli has a gold-rimmed shield (stanza 33). In the senna that follows, however, wealth is of little relevance. There are several insults based on social standing and the low status assigned to some, such as the feeders of goats and dogs, but that is about all.

The poem's conclusion, however, implies that wealth is as worthy a reward as a woman for the hero.

Oc þér, buðlungr samir bæði vel
rauðir baugar oc in ríkia mæð

The buðlungr has proven he is worthy of rauðir baugar and the mighty maiden. Valour has won him both gold and girl.

Wealth is closely linked to the hero in Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri. It is used to impart an aura of magnificence to him. The hero must demonstrate both his power to dispense and his power to retain it, to give it with an open hand to his followers and to keep it in the face of pressure from his foes. His ability to take it from others is also implied in stanza 11's "fiárnám mikit".

Though wealth prompts much of the conflict in Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri, there is little sign of its power to corrupt. No one seems blinded by wealth in this poem, unless it is Hunding's sons, demanding money from one who will soon destroy them. When the hero acquires and dispenses it, there is no hint of evil. Nor does wealth or greed motivate any evil actions in the poem. As it is, most wealth in this poem is used as decoration, to illuminate the splendour and magnificence of the hero, much like the natural phenomena at the outset of the poem.

2.0.15 Helgaqviða Hiorvarðzsonar

Helgaqviða Hiorvarðzsonar opens with a deal, one of the few to actually work out in the Edda. To be sure, one of the parties is a bird, who demands a stiff price for the intelligence he provides:

Hof mun ec kiósa	horga marga
gullhyrndar kýr	frá grams búi.

The bird demands a strange assortment of things. Hof and horg are generally associated with the gods (cf. Völuspá, while giants are the only owners of "gullhyrndar kýr" in the Edda (see Hymisqviða, for example). The bird also demands sacrifices, which implies that if he is not a god, he at least aspires to be one. Just as Skírnir demands wealth in exchange for his help in facilitating a courtship, so does the bird. This is one of the few types of wealth exchange that work in the Edda.

The object of the hero's affections is a wealth holder in her own right, "hringom gæddrar".(stanza 5) When she and Álof are abducted, however, there is no mention of any wealth. Atli seems quite satisfied with taking the girls alone, more material wealth does not seem to motivate him at this point.

In stanza six, however, the ruling of rings is that which defines a king: "Síð mundo, Helgi hringom ráða". This idea is repeated in stanza 11: "Enn Hróðmar scal hringom ráða".

Quite quickly, wealth becomes linked with virtue and quality. For example, gold is what characterizes the best of swords on Sigarsholm (stanza 8). Even more so than in Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri, its possession reflects the success of the hero. For wealth lies at the root of much of the conflict in Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri. And

the obtaining of wealth says far more about the fortunes of the contending parties than is the case in most other Eddic poems. Not until Fáfnismál will we hear so much about trying to "ráða" wealth.

A great deal of honour is vested in wealth in this poem. Hróðmarr's ability to rule the wealth in stanza 11 epitomizes the dishonour inflicted on the hero's family:

Enn Hróðmarr scal hringom ráða,
 þeim er áttó órir niðiar
 sá séz fylkir fæst at lífi,
 hyggz alðauðra arfi at ráða.

Wealth is no longer as fresh as it was in the goðakvæði. Whereas Völospá recounts its creation, "auð smiðuðu", and Völundargviða often depicts it hot off Völundr's forge, in Helgaqviða Hiqrvarðzsonar the wealth is old. For the first time it is depicted as arfr, something old enough to be handed down from one generation to another. It is an important development in the evolution of the wealth concept. Hróðmarr's seizure of the family wealth thus does not only threaten its present and future, but its past as well. It is an encroachment that threatens the family's reputation through its material heritage.

The "Hrímgerðarmál" is ostensibly a conflict prompted over a demand for compensation for a father's slaying (stanza 24). Again wealth has the chance to serve as a peace-buyer, even though Hrímgerðr seems to expect payment in sexual coin. It is interesting that the discussion is couched

more in terms of a man being given to a woman in payment for the wrong done her. This effectively reverses the drama of For Scírnis and Prymsgviða, not to mention the traditions of Old Norse society. Perhaps it reflects Hríngerðr's monstrous nature that she can contemplate such a reversal of the natural order in Germanic society, that she can imagine using a man as a wealth object for a woman. As it is, both sides of the senna are argued from fundamentally different premises. That is, Hríngerðr speaks in terms of Helgi giving himself to her, while Helgi replies in terms of her being possessed by an ugly giant, returning her to the traditional feminine position as something owned by a man. Of course it may well be that each is simply trying to be as insulting to the other as possible, refusing to recognize the other's power to dispose of their own person (though this is more marked in the case of Helgi than Hríngerðr).

2.0.16 Helgaqviða Hundingsbana onnor

In Helgaqviða Hundingsbana onnor wealth is also important, though it does not dominate the centre stage as in Helgaqviða Hiorvarðzsonar. There too wealth is used as decoration. As in Helgaqviða Hiorvarðzsonar, the loss of the family wealth threatens the family honour, as the taunt in stanza 20 implies:

hann hefir eðli	ættar þinnar,
arf Fiðrsunga,	und sic þrungit.

Sinfiqtli seems to be claiming that Guðmundr's family lost face by being unable to recover its wealth from Helgi. If one cannot hold onto one's property, one cannot hold onto one's honour is the gist of his argument. And though Háva-mál denies wealth is essential to manhood, Sinfiqtli's insult in stanza 22 denigrates goatherds and those of similar social station.

The most dramatic statement on the importance of wealth is made in a very negative way. In stanza 32-33, the bereaved Sigrún's curses all relate to material possessions: ship, steed, and sword. She commands them all to turn against her brother. Moreover, in stanza 33 she wishes him to be "auðs andvani", lacking in wealth. This wealthlessness is epitomized by the image of the "vargr á viðom":

Þá væri þér hefnt Helga dauða,,
 ef þú værir vargr á viðom úti
 auðs andvani oc allz gamans
 hefði eigi mat nema á hræom spryngir.

To Sigrún, at least, these are the most serious curses in her repertoire, the loss of wealth, food, and all pleasure, betrayed by one's most trusted possessions.

And while his sister curses him to be "auðs andvani", Dagr offers her wealth in compensation for her lost lover. They share a common basis in that both recognize material items as being of value, as articles of wealth. The conflict lies in that one is trying to give wealth to one who is trying to deny it to him. This makes it one of the more

unusual Eddic bribe situations, but like all the others, it is unsuccessful.

The poem ends on a sublime note. In the twilight realm where the lovers meet for the last time, wealth is of little consequence. Drink is the only material pleasure they indulge in there. There is no talk of grave goods then, only pale horses and sorrow in the gloom. A brief and dubious glimpse at Valhöll shows it at its most domestic, with the most detailed account of divine livestock to be found in the Elder Edda (stanza 39).

2.0.17 Grípisspá

With Grípisspá, the series of poems that comprise the remainder of the Codex Regius begins. Though the focus will shift as the poems progress, certain wealth concepts will run like a red thread through them all.

Grípisspá opens with a test of hospitality. The hero, Sigurðr, like something out of Hávamál, is the lonely wanderer needing hospitality. Grípir his uncle, at once passes this test with flying colours. This immediately identifies him as a good king, a better man than the many monarchs who have taken this test and failed, as in Grímnismál, Hymisqviða, and Völundarqviða. This test increases the credibility of the poem's subsequent statements on generosity.

Dú munt maðr vera mæztr und sólo
oc hæstr borinn hveriom iðfri,
giðfull af gulli enn glöggr flugar,
ítr álití oc í orðom spacr.

Grípisspá reiterates the Hávamál theme that generosity is just as important as courage to the hero. Indeed, generosity and cowardice are very neatly juxtaposed here, an effective demonstration of how incompatible they are. One must be giving of gold but stingy (ie, reluctant) of flight.

The dragon, in contrast, "gráðugr liggr á Gnitahiði" (stanza 11). The dragon is the antithesis of what a generous sovereign should be. Indeed, elsewhere dragons seem the personification of greed (see what happens to Búi in Jomsvikingasaga, the prose sections of Reginismál, and Beowulf).

Indeed in the Codex Regius there are several hints that the line between man and monster is a fine one. Moreover, greed is what makes most monsters what they are. Yet it is a quality shared by men. It is a point of contact between men and monsters. When men allow their avarice to progress beyond that point, they become monsters.

Perhaps this is why such stress is laid on generosity at the outset. For of all those who come into contact with the dragon hoard, Sigurðr will prove the most resistant to its influence. As it is, wealth figures prominently in the two stanzas that follow. It is the first thing that comes to Sigurðr's mind when he hears his slaying of Fáfnir prophesied: "Auðr mun ærinn ef ec eflic svá". It's enough to make one wonder if there is a little of the dragon in Sigurðr too.

When he asks for more information, Grípir elaborates on the wealth in store for him:

Dú munt finna	Fáfnis bæli
oc up taca	auð inn fagra,
gulli hlæða	á Grana bógo

On the whole, there is a certain ambivalence to the depiction of wealth in this poem. For the most part, it is depicted favourably, as in "auð inn fagra" (stanza 13). Both Grípir and Sigurðr see wealth as a fitting reward for slaying Fáfnir. Yet in the poem, it only serves as "Fáfnis bæli". Once Sigurðr has obtained this enormous hoard, nothing more is said of it (unless he uses it to "meyna....kaupa" in stanza 30). It is a singularly passive, inactive form of wealth. Sigurðr seems so eager to obtain it, but we never hear what he does with it. And once it is clear that Sigurðr will win the wealth, the prophecies begin to get gloomier and gloomier. For all the stress on "auð inn fagra", it is clearly unable to influence Sigurðr's fate for the better. Indeed, when Sigurðr asks: "Hvat mun at bótom brúðr sú taca, / er vélar vér vífi gerðom" Grípir does not reply. Bribes and compensation offers, as usual for the Edda, will not work, not even with the power of the Niflung hoard behind them. And like all the holders of the hoard, Sigurðr will meet a bad end. This end, and the wealth itself (and his interest in it) are what he and his monster victims have in common.

2.0.18 Reginsmál and Fáfnismál

Of all the Eddic poems, Reginsmál is the most concerned with gold. Gold is mentioned three times in the prose introduction alone. In fact, it is the only Eddic poem that can be said to revolve around greed.

As it is, wealth seems more closely associated with the other beings in this poem than it is with the Æsir. According to the prose introduction, "Þóttuz æsir miðc hepnir verið hafa" when they obtained a single otterskin. It is hard to reconcile this image of almost childish delight in the catch with the importance of Óðinn and Loki elsewhere. This all seems to date from a more primitive phase in the divine scheme of things, when the gods may very well have been innocent of wealth. This innocence contrasts sharply with the malice and avarice of the monsters in the poem.

Moreover, when ransom is demanded, the Æsir do not draw on their own resources. Indeed, there is no sign that they have any, unless one sees Hreiðmarr's demand for gold as implying the Æsir are capable of supplying such. Instead, "Þá sendo þeir Loca at afla gullzins". The dwarves are the source of all gold in this poem.

Gold's function in this poem is first and foremost as a ransom. The Æsir must use it to buy life for themselves. Loki in turn imposes the same condition on the dwarf he captures. The dwarf must buy back his own life with gold. Gold

is the currency, the buying price, of life in this poem. And though other Eddic characters try to use wealth in this way, Reginismál is the first where this is successful, where wealth is demanded and paid for a ransom.

At the conclusions of the first ransom payment, however, the gold acquires a new role supplementary to that of "life-bringer". This role has been illuminated rather well by Anne Holtsmark and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson in their articles on this poem:

Reginismál...forteller om gudene som drepte Hreiðmars sønn Otr og måtte skaffe gull til Hreiðmarr í sonnebøter; de tvang dvergen Andvari til å gi dem gullet, men dvergen lot en forbannelse følge: gullet skulle bli til bane for hver den som eide det: denne forbannelsen går som en rød tråd gjennom Sigurdsdiktningen.⁵⁴

Sagan af oturgjöldunum er ágætur inngangur að sögu Sigurðar og Gjúkunga, hverjum sem kann að hafa komið það efni í hug til skýringar á þeim hörmungaratburðum, sem á eftir fóru; eðlilegt var að gera gullið að bálvaldi, rauðum þræði í allri sögunni.⁵⁵

The master of twisting and distorting, Loki, manages to bring out the evil power of the gold with spectacular skill. He is able to make it work for good and evil simultaneously, good to ransom the Æsir, and evil to destroy the one who holds them captive.

⁵⁴ Anne Holtsmark, "Heltediktning" in Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder Copenhagen, Rosenkilder and Bagger, 1956. vol 6, p 417.

⁵⁵ Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld. p. 458

Whereas the giants in prose demand gold, red gold, quite bluntly, Loki demands "finn mér lindar loga", the "fire of the spring". It is interesting that he uses this kenning, based on the Nibelung legend, before the Nibelung legend proper even takes place. Does this refer to Loki's prophetic powers? Or does the idea of gold as the fire of the waters exist independently of the legend of the Rhinegold? Is the reference perhaps drawn from the habitat of the dwarves in the poem, who reside in an aquatic environment? Or is it simply the poet's oversight?

De Vries believes that gold is used in Reginsmál to impart a moral component to the story of Sigurðr's fate.⁵⁶ Without the gold, the fate would be impersonal, independent of Sigurðr. As it exists in the poem, however, gold makes Sigurðr bring his doom down on his own head. Sigurðr has a choice, which he makes to doom himself. Without the gold, there is no choice. Gold furnishes the poem with its heroic dilemma.

Reginsmál also seems to say something about taking, but the message is unclear. Perhaps it is moderation in taking. Perhaps it is simply the obvious, a sermon against greed. Thus far the Edda has focussed more on giving than taking. Most of the wealth-oriented villains in the Edda thus far have been inadequate givers: Geirroð, Hymir, Prymr, and

⁵⁶ Jan de Vries, Altnordische Literaturgeschichte, 2 vol. Grundriss der germanischen Philologie, 15-16. (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1941-42. Rpt 1964-67). I:147.

several anonymous Hávamál characters. Now, however, the focus is on the taking. The taking is achieved in a manner strikingly different from those used in preceding Eddic poems. Though Hárr visited, Þrymr stole, Skírnir charged for services rendered, Þórr borrowed, and Níðuðr and the Helgis robbed with force, in Reginismál the taking is done through extorting a ransom. Wealth is charged as the price for life.

Just about all the taking in Reginismál is characterized by immoderation. There is no restraint. When Loki extorts gold from Andvari, he squeezes the very last ring out of him. This seems to evoke the famous curse on the gold which ultimately destroys all who would possess it.

The first to feel the curse's bite is Hreiðmarr. Hreiðmarr is the first "exorbitant demander" of the poem, demanding a king's ransom in compensation for his son.⁵⁷ Loki delivers the gold and the curse to boot, gloating about the latter. Hreiðmarr's outrage at this disclosure is intense, but hints at some surprising attitudes:

Giafar þú gaft gaftattu ástgiafar,
 gaftattu af heilom hug
 fiqrvi yðro scyldot er firðir vera,
 ef ec vissa þat fár fyrir (stanza 7).

⁵⁷ Gering and Sijmons (p 165), to be sure, do note a number of precedents for his "skin-covering" demand in folktales and even early Germanic law.

He seems to have expected that the material gifts he demanded would be accompanied by a comparable amount of goodwill, that the gifts represented more than just a straight material payment. It is clear from the above that he is demanding compensation rather than ransom, a payment made in the desire to avoid a feud. He looked on the gift of gold as something that would end the feud initiated by the slaying of his son. He seems to have expected the Æsir to have paid it willingly in the hopes of avoiding his wrath, but "him seo wen geleaf".

For Loki, however, the gold payment is only the beginning of the feud. Although he does not express delight at the curse, as his counterpart in the prose Edda does, stanza 6 does seem to express some glee:

Gull er þér nú reitt (qvað Loki), enn þú giöld
 hefir,
 mikil míns höfuðs
 syni þínom verðra sæla scöpuð,
 þat verðr yccarr beggja bani.

If nothing else, it is a defiant attack on Hreiðmarr's pretensions. Loki clearly has no fears of a feud with Hreiðmarr, the payment in his hands functions more to correct a momentary disadvantage in position rather than to buy long term peace. This too is the essence of Loki, a great solver of problems of the moment, but a menace to the natural order over the long term.

Here, as elsewhere, there seems to be a profound difference between the giant and the divine concept of the gift. Hárbarðzlióð expresses this difference quite well in stanzas 20-22. Þórr's words there (stanza 21) are almost an echo of Hreiðmarr: "Illom huga launaðir þú þá góðar gíafar".

Grønbech in his discussion of the idea of the gift feels Loki perverts its very basis:

That the party relinquishing gives his "whole" mind means that he gives a gracious mind, not turning his evil thoughts toward the recipient and letting him carry them away with the goods. Men would have things so that nothing was "laid upon them", so that they were not inspired with a prejudice fatal to the user. When Hreidmar in his simplicity accepted payments from the gods, and then, after being promised peace was surprised by Loki's words: "The gold is taken, a rich ransom for my head, but there waits your son no luck of it; it shall be your bane and his" too late he complains "You gave gifts, but not gifts of goodwill, you gave not with a whole mind, for your life had been forfeit to me here had I guessed your crafty plan".⁵⁸

When Grønbech speaks of the "simplicity" of Hreiðmarr above, one wonders if this is another sign of an early, more innocent time, when both malice and avarice were relatively new concepts. Just as the dwarf in the Prose Edda version of this story seems to expect pity from Loki, Hreiðmarr seems to expect good will. Both are so fatally wrong it is as if they are unused to evil. Both Otur and Andvari prove very unwary and vulnerable as well, they seem part of a world where Loki's guile is a novelty.

⁵⁸ Grønbech, Culture of the Teutons, II:79.

Yet if Hreiðmarr ever had any innocence, he loses it very swiftly once he has the gold. Reginsmál makes a great deal out of his refusal to share compensation. "Hann qvað nei við", a refusal soon echoed by the son who slays him: "enn Fáfnir galt þar nei við". It is the first unequivocal murder for money to occur in the Edda.

And like all the other holders of the Niflung hoard:

Rauðo gulli (qvað Hreiðmarr) hugg ec mic ráða
muno,
svá lengi sem ec lifi. (stanza 9)

All want to "ráða" the gold, to rule it and indeed Hreiðmarr does so, while he lives. But it rules his sons as well, Fáfnir's greed for it driving him to slay Hreiðmarr. Then it will be Fáfnir's turn to talk of ruling the gold.

As Fáfnir turns into a wyrm, the focus shifts to Sigurðr, the next holder of the hoard. His first response to the lure of the hoard is more than a little contemptuous:

'Hátt muno hlæia Hundings synir,
þeir er Eylima aldrs synioðo,
ef meirr tiggia munar at sækia
hringa rauða enn hefnd fǫður.' (stanza 15)

Clearly Sigurðr views dragon-slaying as having decidedly pecuniary motives. Moreover, he views such wealth-seeking as a poor substitute for father-avenging. If Sigurðr is operating under a heroic code, it would appear his motivations differ profoundly from Reginn's. They are even at odds with those found in Grípisspá, where Sigurðr expresses no scorn

of dragon-slaying whatsoever. There, however, it is clear that the father-avenging has already been accomplished, so there is no question of misplaced priorities.

If nothing else, Sigurðr's scornful reaction here effectively distances him from his mentor Reginn. Indeed it has devastating implications for the latter, given that Reginn not only places wealth over father-avenging (see stanza 12 and the prose preceding), he is contemplating kin-slaying to obtain the hoard.

To be sure, the whole question of Sigurðr's motivation remains complex. Why did Sigurðr kill the dragon? Because it was there? To please Reginn? For the glory of it? Or is it, in the final analysis, for the wealth? Certainly the text suggests the wealth.

If so, it puts him in dubious company. Thus far, killers for wealth have not been portrayed favourably in the Edda, with the possible exception of Óðinn, and more obliquely, Helgi. In fact, Eddic sympathy has more often gone to those taking vengeance on robbers, as in the cases of Völundr and Þórr. In slaying the dragon, Sigurðr becomes linked with that whole family who would kill for wealth, Hreiðmarr, Fáfnir, and Reginn. Moreover he uses the same method to slay Reginn as Fáfnir used on Hreiðmarr, killing him in his sleep. Even his killing of Fáfnir is not a heroic attack, but a decidedly sneaky stab, as Steblin-Kamenskij has not-

ed.⁵⁹ Certainly it is hopelessly outclassed by Beowulf's valiant face-to-face confrontation with the wyrm. Is this an early sign of wealth's negative influence on Sigurðr? Surely such a great hero as Sigurðr does not need to stoop to niðingsverk to slay such a paltry coward as Reginn! Indeed, in many versions of the story the necessity to kill Sigurðr by stealth, in his sleep, reflects very badly on his murderers. Why should not the same apply here?

The death of the dragon is preceded by a discussion of gnomic wisdom and good omens, which begins in Reginismál and continues well into Fáfnismál. Wealth does not enter into this discussion. It is not even mentioned until stanza 9, and then dramatically, with three references to it in three lines:

ip gialla gull oc ip glóðrauða fé,
 þér verða þeir baugar at bana.

It is something that can be both seen and heard, the "resounding gold" and the "red-glowing wealth". It is also expressed in a very concrete form, the baugar that will be Sigurðr's bane. This ominous aspect of wealth is only heightened by the words of the dragon immediately preceding, who accuses him of seeing malice where none is present:

'Heiptyrði ein telr þú þér í hvívetna,
 enn ec þér satt eitt segic.'

⁵⁹ M.I. Steblin-Kamenskij, "Valkyries and Heroes." ANF
 97:81-93

The hoard seems to induce paranoia, or is this only a dragon's blandishments? Both Hreiðmarr and Fáfnir betray their closest kinsmen once they obtain the gold, while Sigurðr's first victim once he's gotten the gold is his erstwhile mentor Reginn. Such behaviour certainly suggests these men are "ruled by wealth". Yet the very next stanza Sigurðr seems to express confidence in the power of men to rule wealth, not the reverse:

'Fé ráða scal fyrða hverr
æ til ins eina dags,'

He may well be hinting that the dragon's lease on it has run out, given that Fáfnir has now come "til ins eina dags". To be sure, Sigurðr's words are "spakmæli", proverbial. He is very careful with the dragon, responding to its dire prophecies with a wise saying, with just a hint of heroic hubris added. The implication is that while a man lives he rules his possessions, but that death comes to all in the end.

Sigurðr in stanza 10 stands as close to Hreiðmarr as he ever will. The parallels between them are striking. Just as Hreiðmarr asserts "Rauðo gulli...hugg ec mic ráða muno" following Loki's revelation of the curse on the gold, so does Sigurðr assert his determination in the face of Fáfnir's dire warnings.

Both Hreiðmarr and Sigurðr are confident they can rule the treasure they have just won. Both are fatally mistaken.

In this Sigurðr reveals himself no better than the monster he has just slain too. It is a powerful testimony to wealth's power to delude.

The sardonic dragon-reply that follows this assertion is as brutal as it is simple. Fáfnir's warning that the un wisdom of the "api" lies in store for Sigurðr is all too reminiscent of Hávamál's conjectural "margr verðr af aurum api."

Sigurðr seems to miss the point, however, for though he proceeds to pepper the dragon with wisdom-seeking questions, he does not mention wealth. When Fáfnir refers to wealth unbidden in stanza 16, it is significant that it relates to his own delusions about his power in an earlier time:

Ægishiálm bar ec um alda sonom,
 meðan ec um meniom lág

Stanza 18 is similar:

'Eitri ec fnæsta er ec á arfi lá
 miclom míns fǫður.'

In the latter verse, Fáfnir reminisces about his father's vast hoard, yet says nothing about how he murdered his father to get it. Indeed, it is tempting to read a little irony into Sigurðr's words in stanza 8, when he states

'Því bregðr þú nú mér, Fáfnir, at til fiarri
siác
 mínom feðrmunom "

given Fáfnir's proximity to his "feðrmunir" and the way he obtained them!

In stanza 20, Fáfnir repeats the warning from stanza 9. Sigurðr dismisses this warning even more peremptorily: "ec ríða mun till þess gullz, er í lyngvi liggr" and Fáfnir dies. He no longer rules "fé oc fiqrvi", the loss of one inseparably linked to the other.

Even the subsequent argument between Sigurðr and Reginn over who killed Fáfnir touches on wealth. When Reginn credits the sword with the enterprise's success, Sigurðr argues: "Hugr er betri, enn sé hiqr's megin,". In other words, he argues for the ascendancy of the spiritual over the material. It calls to mind Freyr's words about his magic sword: "er siálftr mun vegaz, ef sá er horskr, er hefir."

Reginn, in claiming Sigurðr owes his victory to his sword, not his guts, shows how fatally bound he is to the material, like his father and brother before him. Reginn's own behaviour is ample vindication of Sigurðr's position. Reginn does not dare wield his wonder weapon against Fáfnir himself, so clearly far more than a good weapon was called for. But it is Sigurðr's inability to remain above the material desires so characteristic of Hreiðmarr and Reginn that seals his doom.

When the igðor speak of the innocent Sigurðr, they call him "spillir bauga" (stanza 32). He is one who ought to destroy rings, to break and share them with his retainers. It

is when he starts to hoard them that he begins to take on the fatal aspect of the dragon.

Another bird urges him to slay Reginn in order to take the wealth:

óllo gulli þá kná hann einn ráða,
fiqlö, því er und Fáfni lá.

The wealth is repeatedly referred to as lying under the dragon (stanza 16, 18, 21, and 34). The gold is ever something that one may "ráða".

Though the birds stress the danger Reginn will be to Sigurðr, the slayer of his brother, they return again and again to the tempting allure of the treasure. In stanza 38 the slaying of Reginn is urged so that he will forfeit the treasure, and then Sigurðr is addressed directly for the first time:

þá mundu fiár, þess er Fáfnir réð,
einvaldi vera.

This wealth is not something that can be shared. Twice the birds stress this, in stanzas 34 and 38. And all those who seize the treasure take exclusive control over it, even when this means breaking an important bond, such as that with father, son, or mentor. Perhaps that is why there is such stress on the verb "ráða" - to rule and control. For though ownership may be shared, total control, in the end, cannot. That, most of all, is what makes the gold a strife-bringer, an inciter of greed that ruptures the most sacred of ties.

Even the maiden Sigurðr is exhorted to seek once Reginn is dead, is "gulli gædda." Is this just a standard expression for a beautiful, well-born woman, or another hint of Sigurðr's gold-lust? Her father is "dýrr" (stanza 41), and she lives in a hall of gold (stanza 42). The kenning used for gold here, "ógnar liómi", like that of Loki in Reginsmál, associates gold with water, a river whose name means dread, terror.⁶⁰ The gold of this hall proves to be the gold of the other world, however, the gold of the gods.

2.0.19 Sigrðrífomál

In Sigrðrífomál, wealth is of no importance. Indeed, it is conspicuous by its absence. It is clearly of no concern to Sigrðrífa. She notes that runes can be written "á gleri oc á gulli," but provides no runes for the getting or keeping of wealth. Though the wisdom she dispenses deals with the mundane as well as the cosmic, it has nothing to do with wealth. She shows no sign of any gold-lust. Indeed, all of the valkyries seem to be above materialism.

Perhaps it is significant that Sigrðrífa in her role as a wise counsellor has so little to say about wealth. Like the valkyries of the Helgi-lays, she is an ennobler, one who elevates the hero. In her sublime world, wealth has no place (though her hall is of gold).

⁶⁰ Gering and Sijmons, II:83

This treatment of wealth helps clarify the contrast between her and Sigurðr's earlier counsellors, the iqðor and the brothers Fáfnir and Reginn. All of the latter refer to wealth several times, yet all are inciters of or perpetrators of treachery themselves. Wealth looms large in their world view, indeed Fáfnir is hard put to mention the past without referring to the kind of treasure he was lying on at the time. Many of his remarks to Sigurðr relate to his gold.

The reference to wealth in stanza 28, "sifia silfr," is very problematic and has prompted numerous emendation attempts, by Finnur Jónsson, Ólafur Briem, and Gering and Sijmons. Neckel/Kuhn, however, try to use it as it stands. Their interpretation is that "sifia silfr" "ist viell.: friedensgeld (u. meint gekaufte liebe)".⁶¹

This reading is not incompatible with what we know of the Sigurðr story from other sources. The half-verse would then translate as: "do not allow the silver of kinsmen/friends to rule your sleep, do not entice women into kissing you."

Wealth has not been referred to as silver in the Sigurðr poems thus far. It alliterates very well here, however. But what would this warning mean? Do not let silver entice you into sleeping with women? Do not become obsessed with the silver of kinsmen? Is there a reference to silver's as-

⁶¹ Neckel/Kuhn, II:183 (under "sif").

sociations with treachery here?

In stanza 30, however, wealth is lacking from Sigrdrífa's list of what can cause death, woe, and evil to men, unless fiqlǫ can be taken to mean wealth in "fiqlǫ er þat er tregir fir." In stanza 31, she calls men "auðstafir", a curious kenning. Gering and Sijmons note: "die selbe kenning nur noch in der Merl. spá."⁶²

Stanza 35 contains Sigrdrífa's most telling remark on the limitations of wealth, that the son of a slain foe should never be trusted: "þó<tt> sé hann gulli gladdr."

Gold is clearly unable to bring peace where the "sacar" are great. This is essentially what Grípir tells Sigurðr too.

To Sigrdrífa, the only material possession essential to the war-king is contained in "vitz oc vápna" (stanza 36). Neither gold nor generosity seem to matter to her. She seems beyond concerns about wealth. It is not possible to say whether this is because she's divine or female (since most Eddic women thus far have been less wealth-oriented than the men). And just as there is little wealth in this poem, there is little doom. The ominous gloom that pervaded the previous three poems is not in Sigrdrífomál. It is a curious interlude in the gathering storm.

⁶² Gering and Sijmons, p. 220.

2.0.20 Brot af Sigurðargviðo

With Brot af Sigurðargviðo, the stress on wealth resumes. Stanzas 8-10 make it clear that wealth was a major factor in the slaying of Sigurðr. Brynhildr bids the slayers:

Vel scolot nióta vápni oc landa;
 einn myndi Sigurðr ǫllo ráða,
 ef hann lengi litlo lífi heldi. (stanza 8).

She indicates that slaying Sigurðr will let them enjoy weapons and lands. For all the stress on gold, rings, and necklaces in Fáfnismál, here the emphasis is on land and weapons. Again the idea of "einn myndi...ǫllo ráða" crops up, one man ruling everything. And again the promise of material gain for slaying someone is held out. Sigurðr has become another dragon to be looted of his hoard.

He is also another monster whose power has grown to the point where it threatens everyone, like Grettir the strong. At least so Brynhildr implies. It may well be there is a subtle insult contained in these words. One has but to look to the Helgi-lays preceding to find ample evidence of the scorn attached to those who cannot hold onto their wealth. Brynhildr suggests they would be helpless to hold their own possessions against him too, hardly the most unmixed of compliments.

Brynhildr, at least, is one Eddic woman who seems to attach a great deal of importance to wealth. For this reason it is hard to view her as identical to Sigrdrífa, as Haugen

does,⁶³ since Sigdrífa barely even mentions wealth in her poem.

The incentives Brynhildr provides for killing Sigurðr are quite worldly, in fact. There is no talk of fame or reputation, the stuff of Sigurðr's sublime heroics. There is talk at the outset of Sigurðr's broken oaths, but in the end mechanical magical compulsion rather than abstract moral arguments is used to persuade the murderer.

From her words it is clear Brynhildr saw Sigurðr as an acquirer of wealth and power, that his natural tendency was to own more and more. And again there is the stress on Sigurðr's individual ownership, while his foes are supposed to enjoy lands and weapons as a collective. Even as a wealth-holder Sigurðr towers above his foes, holding individually what it takes a whole team of them to aspire to. And as noted above, there is the bitter insult implied in their alleged inability to hold their wealth against him.

Brynhildr's ultimate taunt comes in stanza 9:

Væria þat sæmt, at hann svá réði
Giúca arfi oc Gota mengi.

Again the stress is on arfr, heritage. Though a word the immortal gods had no use for, it crops up in most of the heroic poems thereafter. In both Helgaqviða Hiorvarðzsonar and Helgaqviða Hundingsbana ǫnnor, arfr is used as a goad,

⁶³ Einar Haugen, "The Edda as Ritual: Odin and His Masks." In Edda: Essays. p. 15.

áfrýjunarorð to cast in the face of revenge-reluctant kinsmen. And again the implication here is of the cowardice of the Gjúkungs, how their inability to hold their wealth threatens not only their present and future, but the past reputation of the family as well. For in taking the heritage, or threatening to, Sigurðr strikes at the very basis of the luck and honour of the clan.⁶⁴

The first reference to Sigurðr's arfr, in Reginismál stanza 12, also focusses on strife, Fáfnir's withholding of Reginn's share of the arfr. Thus far, at least, arfr has been used in a way that stresses its link with the honour, standing, and good fortune of the family. So killing Sigurðr not only removes his wealth, it breaks his hold on the family's honour. The killers' reward is expressed in stanza 10: "Lengi scoloð nióta landa oc þegna".

Sigurðr alive means unwealth for them, his death wealth. His existence is a threat to their wealth. To preserve it, they must destroy him, argues Brynhildr.

Sigurðr thus is slain for his wealth, like the dragon he slew for its wealth. Like the dragon, Sigurðr has expanded his control over wealth too far.

⁶⁴ See Grønbech's discussion of this concept in The Culture of the Teutons., II:chap 3.

2.0.21 Guðrúnarqviða in fyrsta

At first, wealth in Guðrúnarqviða in fyrsta is decoration. The women who start telling their troubles to Guðrún, the "brúðir jarla" of stanza 3, are all adorned with gold. As far as Guðrún herself is concerned, little is said of her wealth. The first reference to her possessions does not come until stanza 16, and the geese that cry when she does. Wealth also figures among the metaphors she uses for Sigurðr, who shines like a "iarnasteinn yfir ǫðlingom" (stanza 18).

Stanza 21 makes the strongest connection yet between wealth and morality in the Edda. Just as some Eddic commentators, such as Nordal,⁶⁵ have argued that the immorality of the gods leads directly to Ragnarok, so will the breaking of the Nibelung oaths ruin the realm of the brothers:⁶⁶

Svá ér um lýða landi eyðit,
 sem ér um unnoð eiða svarða
 ma<n>a þú, Gunnarr, gullz um nióta,
 þeir muno þér baugar at bana verða,
 er þú Sigurði svarðir eiða.

Gunnarr will not enjoy the gold. In fact, the rings will be his bane, as they have been for every other holder of the Nibelung hoard.

⁶⁵ Nordal, Völuspá

⁶⁶ See Ólafur Briem, Eddukvæði, p. 366, and Gering and Sijmons, II:240.

Guðrún's words here suggest a material motivation for the assault on Sigurðr too. As Gering and Sijmons note: "Aus den Worten Guðrúns soll herausgehört werden, daß der treubruch begangen wurde, um den hort Sigurðs zu erlangen."⁶⁷

And whereas in the Brot af Sigurðarqviðu Brynhildr stressed that the killers would enjoy their wealth, Guðrún stresses the opposite. Gunnarr will not enjoy the gold and rings will be his bane.

The continued stress on bane-bringing baugar in Reginismál, Fáfnismál, and now here suggests the rings have a special significance (though it may simply reflect the convenient alliteration of "baugar" and "bani"), such as that found in Völundarqviða. If so, it is a slight shift of emphasis from Reginismál, where the bane is contained in the gold, but triggered by a demand for the ring (stanzas 5, 6). In Fáfnismál, however, the idea is that "þér verða þeir baugar at bani" (stanzas 9, 20), as well as "iþ gjalla gull og ið glóðrauða fé."

In Guðrúnarqviða in fyrsta, the rings have the added significance of being the oath-rings upon which the brothers swore their oaths to Sigurðr (stanza 21).

The poem closes on a rather obscure note. Stanza 26 seems to hint that Atli was behind the slaying of Sigurðr. And there too there is a reference to gold, a kenning mean-

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, (line reference 20).

ing "fire of the wyrm's bed." It is an interesting choice of kennings, following as it does hard on the heels of Fáfnismál and immediately preceding a most dragon-like display by Brynhildr. To Glendinning, this implies that Sigurðr's wealth was a major component of his attraction to Brynhildr, a point he sees developed further in Sigurðargviða in scamma: "Here again, 'wealth' (eldr ormbeðs) is the all-important attraction of Sigurðr as a wooer."⁶⁸

Brynhildr's apparent metamorphosis into a dragon would be quite appropriate then, given the obsession with wealth she expressed in Brot af Sigurðargviðu. Certainly one need not look far for a close parallel, since Fáfnir's metamorphosis into a dragon is closely linked to the same two elements present here: the cursed hoard and the treacherous murder of a loved one. Norse tradition, moreover, contains several examples of people who turn into dragons after gaining and becoming obsessed with great wealth.

This thoroughly baroque twist, strengthen though it might the theme of corrupting wealth in these poems (and also explain Brynhildr's exit from the stage after the killing of Sigurðr), and despite the parallels with Fáfnir and Atli's mother-in-law, has not found much favour with commentators. Gering & Sijmons say (II:243): "eitre fnøste ist natürlich nur eine metaphor." Both de Vries⁶⁹ and Einar Ólafur

⁶⁸ Robert J. Glendinning "Guðrúnargviða forna: A Reconstruction and Interpretation." In Edda: Essays p. 267.

Sveinsson (p. 499) seem to feel the same way.

2.0.22 Sigurðargviða in scamma

Wealth's role as a motivating force is somewhat more complex in Sigurðargviða in scamma. From stanza 2 it seems love for Guðrún was not enough to get Sigurðr's aid in wooing Brynhildr, the Gjukungs had to sweeten the pot with some treasures: "Mey buðu hánom oc meiðma fiqlð." In other words, Sigurðr's participation in the bónorðsferð is prompted as much by treasure as love, if stanza two is to be believed. It is a little incongruous if we are to assume this Sigurðr identical with the hero of the previous few poems. After all, it is hard to imagine meiðm as much of an incentive to the holder of Fáfnir's hoard. Nonetheless it seems to do the trick.

Wealth is of little consolation to the sorrowers of this poem. Indeed, wealth does not function as a consoler in any of the poems of this cycle, nor in the Edda overall for that matter, apart from some sections of Hávamál. Brynhildr must console herself "af grimmom hug" (stanza 9) instead, which does not work so well either.

⁶⁹ Jan de Vries, Altnordische Literaturgeschichte. 2 vols. Grundriss der germanischen Philologie, 15-16. (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1941-42. Rpt. 1964-67) II:145.

Brynhildr's first threat to her husband is with the loss of land, then herself. She is clearly important for the wealth she represents. This is reiterated in stanza 15:

Ein er mér Brynhildr ǫllom betri,
um borin Buðla, hon er bragr qvenna
fyr skal ec míno fiqrvi láta,
enn þeirar meyar meiðmom týna.

This stanza has drawn the attention of a number of commentators. Gering and Sijmons, for example, have said (II:250):

die erwähnung von Brynhilds schätzen in diesem zusammenhange ist störend; auch scheint der verfasser der Völs. saga in seinem texte ein anderes wort gelesen zu haben (fyr skal ek líf láta en týna hennar ást). Dieses wort war vermutlich munuqb (vgl. Hqv 79.2). [Das überlieferte meiðmom wird trotz der Völs. s. zu behalten sein; s. die bemerkung zu Br 12.2 - Heusler...betont mit recht, daß die 'naive liebe zum golde' in Sigurðarqviða in scamma besonders stark hervortritt...]

Glendinning notes that this "is at least one indication...that a good deal of Brynhildr's attractiveness in Gunnar's eyes lay in the wealth which she represented."⁷⁰

Of course, this may be merely a circumlocution, as in English when we talk of men vying for a maiden's hand, when considerably more than a hand is actually at stake. Perhaps such is the case with Brynhildr's meiðm. But elsewhere in the poem there are hints that her wealth may well be Brynhildr's most attractive quality.

⁷⁰ Glendinning, Edda: Essays p. 264.

Stanza 16 clearly emphasizes wealth:

Villdu ocr fylki til fiár véla?
 gott er at ráða Rínar málmi
 oc unandi auði stýra
 oc sitiandi sælo nióta.

The bridge between stanzas 15 and 16 is made of gold. From his reluctance to lose Brynhildr's treasures, Gunnar passes to a desire to obtain Sigurðr's. Passive selfishness becomes active avarice. The entire Sigurðr-dilemma is assessed on the basis of wealth. There is no talk of honour as the reason for slaying Sigurðr, only fiár, auðr, sælo, and Rínar málmi. The stress on comfort and prosperity in sælo seems particularly incongruous, as Gering and Sijmons have noted (II:250): "eine überflüssige variation, die gewiß von einem interpolator herrührt."

About the first line of stanza 16, they note (II:250):

Die Übersetzung Müllenhoffs (DA. V, 377): 'willst du, daß wir den fürsten um sein gut betrügen?' ist falsch. okr ist dativ, also nicht subjekt in einem acc. c. inf., wie im Wörterb. (203.51) mit unrecht angenommen ward. Man übersetze: 'Willst du uns (d.h. Brynhildr and mir) zur liebe den fürsten verraten, damit wir dadurch in den besitz seines schatzes gelangen?' Eine 'schamlose freche aufforderung' bleibt es freilich trotzdem.

The brothers seem relatively wealthless themselves. Apart from what they offer Sigurðr in stanza 2, possibly a treasure inseparable from the woman who wore it, there are few references to wealth they possess in their own right. Moreover, they express their desire for wealth more frequently and more vividly than most other characters in these

poems, another possible hint of a wealth-dearth on their part.

The fourfold repetition of wealth-terms in stanza 16 has a powerful intensifying effect. It is the last line of this stanza, "oc sitiandi sælo nióta", that says it all about the difference between Sigurðr and Gunnarr. Sigurðr, whatever else one says about him, is not one who would leap at the change to "sitia." Hogni's reply (stanza 17) shows that he too is a hero of the active, dynamic type, decidedly not of Gunnarr's sitting inclination.

Their dialogue is really spoken in two different languages. Gunnarr speaks the language of wealth, greed, and material comfort, as revealed by his four different terms for wealth in stanza 16. Hogni speaks of honour, responsibility, power, and war. The sælli in Hogni's response seems light years removed from the sæla of Gunnar's invitation in stanza 16. It is certainly not a state that can be enjoyed "sitiandi", it is the good fortune of an invincible fighting force that Hogni refers to here.

Wealth is an acceptable end in itself to Gunnarr. Like all the owners of the "Rínar málmi", he wants not merely to own, but to ráða it. Through his eyes we catch no glimpse of the dynamic, army-buying power of wealth. Nor is there any sign of its potential to buy peace. It is simply something that enables one "sitiandi sælo nióta."

Wealth, as Glendinning has noted (p. 263-264) is an important motivating factor in both Gunnarr's marriage to Brynhildr and her murder of Sigurðr.

With Sigurðr's passing, the focus shifts to Guðrún. She is not so closely linked to wealth. In stanza 29, the poet goes Guðrúnarqviða in fyrsta one better, since not only "gæss i túni" but "kálcar í vá" join in her lamentations, inanimate objects joining the living in grief.

Brynhildr looks to her wealth of the past for a reminder of how her state has fallen:

varðcat ec til ung, né ofþrungin,
fullgædd fé á fleti bróður. (stanza 34).

Gering and Sijmons (II:259) interpret this as: "ich war nicht sehr beschränkt oder behindert, als ich, reich mit schätzen ausgestattet, im hause meines bruders (Atle) lebte."

Fé to Brynhildr connotes the freedom of her youth.

Her memory of her betrothal to Sigurðr also focusses on gold, for he "með gulli sat á Grana bógom." Both Gering and Sijmons (p. 260) and Andersson⁷¹ feel this refers to the bónorðsferð. Another possibility is that this refers to Sigurðr meeting Brynhildr as Sigrdrífa right after the slaying of Fáfnir. The importance the end of Fáfnismál attached to

⁷¹ Theodore Andersson, The Legend of Brynhild Islandica, 43. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1980). p. 32.

describing Grani as carrying both Sigurðr and the gold might be more understandable then. This interpretation also allows the stanza to remain where it is in the poem, referring to an event long before the bónorðsferð.

The ill-fated betrothal is seen to have involved considerable material coercion in stanza 36:

Oc mér Atli þat einni sagði,
at hvárki léz höfn um deila,
gull né iarðir nema ec gefaz létac,
oc engi hlut auðins fiár,
þá er mér ióðungri eigo seldi,
oc mér ióðungri aura talði.

Atli threatens to deprive Brynhildr of her patrimony unless she consents to be married off. All the things Brynhildr defines as wealth: gull, iarðir, höfn, auðins fiár, and aura are at stake. She is so attached to them she accepts marriage rather than forfeit them, the treasures she received while still a child.

Even when persuaded to take Sigurðr, she still describes her decision in terms of wealth:

léc mér meirr í mun meiðmar þiggja,
bauga rauða, burar Sigmundar,
né ec annars mannz aura vildac.

The last line is about as close as Brynhildr comes in this poem to expressing love.

Theodore Andersson sees a sophisticated financial motivation behind Atli's action:

Atli's...forcing Brynhildr to marry may be seen in the light of his pecuniary strategy. With a marriage alliance he is laying the groundwork for his

later attempt on the Burgundian gold. His ... marriage to Guðrún and invitation of the Burgundians in... Atlakviða pursue the same strategy.⁷²

Brynhildr even identifies herself with wealth, calling herself the "menscogul" -'the valkyrie of the necklace' in stanza 40. And once her identity is threatened with the approach of death, she either distributes her wealth or destroys it: "þar er mörk menja meiðmom deildi." She is the tree of necklaces who distributes her treasures. As she does so, Gunnarr's words in stanza 16 come to mind:

fyrr scal ec míno fiðrvi láta,
enn þeirar meýiar meiðmom týna.

Despite his dastardly murder of Sigurðr, he still loses both "meiðmar" and "mey", though not through divorce as he anticipated, but through the "mey" giving them away in preparation for her death.

To be sure, Brynhildr exacts a fatal return for her generosity:

Leit hon um alla eigo sína;
soltnar þýiar oc salkonor
gullbrynio smó -vara gott í hug-,
áðr sic miðlaði mækis eggjom. (stanza 47).

Just before the end she surveys her possessions. It is a very materialistic end. She gazes at her slain slaves and bondmaids, all wealth she has destroyed, as far as this world is concerned, at least. Or do they represent grave

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 35

goods, attendants for her in the afterlife? Is Brynhildr not petulantly destroying so much as putting aside for the next world? Or is she just striking out in frustration, at the only targets she can reach? Or is she simply trying to go out in a blaze of conspicuous consumption?

To those servants who have any choice in the matter, she offers even more wealth:

'Nú scolo ganga, þeir er gull vili
 oc minna því at mér þiggja
 ec gef hverri um hroðit sigli,
 bók oc blæio, biartar váðir.' (stanza 49).

Brynhildr promises gold and something less (silver?), some type of jewelery or necklace, fine cloth, and bright clothes. This is wealth to her. She seems to feel that this will suffice to entice her servants to die with her, if only so they can be burned on a pile of treasure. It is a fine example of the "niave liebe zum golde" that Heusler talks about.

But "hire seo wen ge Leah". The salkonur do not feel her gold is worth dying for. All Brynhildr's gold turns to ashes in her dying hands. She can do nothing with it. In the end, it fails her, like all her men.

One wonders if Brynhildr's "gullbrynja" is of any significance. It is a kind of armour that will not rust away, whatever its practical limitations. It calls to mind the golden helmet and "fagra brynja" Óðinn dons just before the

ride to Ragnarok (Snorra Edda LI, p 89). Is golden armour for the fey?

To Brynhildr, having wealth to be cremated with is clearly important, as her retort to those reluctant to join her on the pyre shows:

þó mun á beinom brenna yðrom
færi eyrir, þá er ér fram komið,
neit Menio góð, mín at vitia. (stanza 52)

Wealth is also "eyrir" and the goods of Menia (gold), a reference to the story told in Grottasongr.

The remaining wealth-references involve the goods Brynhildr wants burned with her on the pyre (stanzas 66, 67). They comprise tapestries, shields, cloth, and slaves. She seems to take consolation in the richness of her funeral, a point she has in common with the Atli of Atlamál: "þeygi mun vár for aumlig vera" (stanza 69).

In her last reference to wealth, Brynhildr speaks of herself as a barn, recalling when Buðli gave her his legacy:

þvíat hánom fylgia fimm ambóttir,
átta þiónar, eðlom góðir,
fóstrman mitt oc faðerni,
þat er Buðli gaf barni síno. (stanza 70).

Wealth plays quite a complex role in Sigurðarqviða in scamma. In the end, it seems quite transcendent. Brynhildr seems confident that it will follow her and Sigurðr across the barrier that separates the world of the living from that of the dead. There is little evidence that "deyr fé" here.

Even the wealth that is eminently mortal, the slaves and servants, seems to persist into the afterlife, or at least Brynhildr's conception of it.

This attitude towards wealth marks Sigurðargviða in scamma as one of the most pagan of the Eddic poems. Hávamál's stress on the impermanence of wealth seems almost Christian in contrast.

Wealth also features very prominently in the poem. There are more references to wealth in Sigurðargviða in scamma than in most other Eddic poems. It is a very diverse wealth too. Just about every form of wealth found in the Edda occurs in Sigurðargviða in scamma: slaves, fine cloth, necklaces, jewelery, hawks, weapons, clothes, goblets, tapestries, shields, and of course, gold. Meiðmar (jewels) are mentioned more often in Sigurðargviða in scamma than in all the other Eddic poems put together. Just about all that is lacking is cattle (though domestic animals are represented by the geese that trumpet in response to Guðrún's death-keen in stanza 29).

This extensive use of wealth in a hard, material form makes Sigurðargviða in scamma a very graphic, vivid poem. It is easier to visualize the objects when they are described in such detail.

Heusler's remark that the "niave liebe zum golde" stands out prominently in the poem is really quite perceptive.

Both Gunnar and Brynhildr have enormous confidence in wealth. It colours their action throughout the poem.

Is wealth really the one thing Brynhildr can count on, the one true friend in a world full of deceptive and fickle men? Does she really exit on a positive, grand, magnificent note, surrounded by things that will outlast and transcend the sorrows of her worldly existence?

There are problems with this view. How are we to take the slaves' refusal to trade an early death for fine grave goods? Is it just a demonstration of how sublime Brynhildr's vision is compared to that of a slave? Or are we to take her as deluded by gold, duped to the very gates of Hel by a misguided faith in something that does not deserve it, just as once her love for a man who didn't deserve it led her astray? Or does it in fact demonstrate that there are things far more important than wealth, such as life? That wealth is useless to buy such things?

Certainly Brynhildr's death is extravagant, lavish. She dies as she lives, with no half-measures, in a furious display and consumption of wealth and her ancestral patrimony. Though her feyness gives her a vision of the future, it sometimes looks as if her view of the present is clouded, as is often the case with the fey (see Ljósvetningasaga or Njála for examples of this).

From Hogni, however, we hear that her wealth-faith may be misplaced, in that she will never be born again (stanza 45), which presumeably would render all her deathbed preparations pointless.

It is all the more significant coming from the cool-headed Hogni, especially after he had so rudely dashed Gunnar's dreams of wealth and opulence in stanzas 16-18. Hogni notes that alive Sigurðr is worth more to them (at least in terms of a warrior's value-system) than any amount of wealth. Hogni, if nothing else, is at least the clear-seeing one in this poem, as he is in so many other poems of this cycle. His eyes are not dazzled by wealth's glamour.

If Brynhildr goes to her grave blinded by the wealth she bears then it is indeed a pathetic, almost foolish end for a brave spirit. But such would not be out of place in a poem that is such a sermon about the evil, corrupting, and deluding power of gold. Virtually everyone else involved with the hoard becomes blinded by it in some way (ie. Andvari, Hreiðmarr, Reginn, Fáfnir, Sigurðr, and the Gjúkungs).

The poem is among the most emphatic depictions of Gunnarr as wealth-crazed to be found in the Edda. Stanza 16 makes it clear that wealth serves as a major motivation in his murder of Sigurðr. Even when he does express fear of losing Brynhildr, it is his fear of losing her treasure that stands paramount (stanza 15). She seems to be just another thing

to him (though his weak attempt to stop her suicide could be cited as evidence to the contrary).

Just as Brynhildr becomes a terrible dragon at the end of Guðrúnargviða in fyrsta, so too is she terrible at the end of Sigurðargviða in scamma. And it is a terribleness linked to wealth.

2.0.23 Helreið Brynhildar

Helreið Brynhildar has little to say of wealth. The prose introduction notes the costly hangings on Brynhildr's funeral carts, and the gýgr addresses her as "vár gullz," but that is the extent of Brynhildr's wealth. The only other wealth-references focus on Sigurðr. He is called "gullmiðlandi" in stanza 11, and in stanza 10 there is a hint that gold played some role in the freeing of Brynhildr from her prison of shields and fire. Brynhildr says that Óðinn

Lét um sal minn, sunnanverðan,
hávan brenna her allz viðar
þar bað hann einn þegn yfir at ríða,
þannz mér færði gull, þatz und Fáfni lá.

Does this mean the gold was the key to Brynhildr's release, possibly a condition for lifting the spell? Or is it simply a proof of Sigurðr's prowess, that it would take a dragon-slayer to dare these flames?

The subsequent reference to "gullmiðlandi" - 'gold-distributor', could possibly refer to this, but more likely is

just a typical expression for a generous ruler, as Gering and Sijmons believe (II:285): "Der ausdrück bezieht sich nicht auf das drachengold, sondern bezeichnet der helden nur in typischer weise als einen freigebigen fürsten."

The prose excerpt Dráp Niflunga follows the Helreið Brynhildar. Its references to wealth are significant, if only for demonstrating that the compiler of the Codex Regius felt it important to tell what happened to the dragon gold: "Gunnarr oc Hogni tóco þá gullit alt, Fáfnis arf." It is also interesting that the ring Andvaranaut, of all things, is used as a warning device.

2.0.24 Guðrúnarqviða qnnor

Guðrúnarqviða qnnor opens with gold. Its beginning is reminiscent of Völuspá stanza 8, describing a time of happy innocence before the arrival of someone from the outside world linked with gold:

Mær var ec meýia, móðir mic fæddi,
 biðrt, í búri, unna ec vel bræðrom
 unz mic Giúki gulli reifði,
 gulli reifði, gaf Sigurði (stanza 1).

Her youthful happiness ends with a gift of gold. Or at least, becomes the happiness of married life. For Guðrún does not dislike gold, on the contrary, she compares her husband to its advantages over cheaper metals:

Svá var Sigurðr uf sonom Giúca,
 sem væri grænn laucr ór grasi vaxinn,
 eða hiqrtr hábeinn um hvossum dýrom,

eða gull glóðrautt af grá silfri. (stanza 2).

In connection with that passage, Gering and Sijmons remark (II:292):

Als beiwort des silbers findet sich das adj. sonst nur noch in der sprichwortlichen redensart elda grátt silfr 'feindschaft gegen einander hegen'....Die paraphrase der Völs. saga ...hat das silber durch eisen ersetzt.

Guðrún's reference to wealth here is very adroit, the way she uses silver depicts it in a treacherous, untrustworthy light, quite in keeping with the duplicity of her brothers.

Elsewhere, the term "grey silver" only occurs in the expression "elda grátt silfr", to cook, fire, heat grey silver, meaning to nurse or express hostility for someone, as Gering and Sijmons have noted above. Sigurðr's purity as that of glow-red gold contrasts with the brothers' duplicity. It makes Finnur Jónsson's emendation of "hvössom" into "hǫsom" all the more plausible, as this too would denote a treacherous greyness: that of wolves.

This connoting of treachery to silver only makes gold seem purer. Perhaps Guðrún harbours no thought of gold as a "strife-metal" when she spoke of being "gulli reifði".

Wealth as a motivation for slaying Sigurðr also seems to be lacking. The next stanza, in which Guðrún describes the brothers' envy of Sigurðr, says nothing of wealth. It seems much more a matter of jealousy over honour, rank, and prestige:

Unz mér fyrmunðo mínir bræðr,
at ec ætta ver ǫllom fremra.

In the stanzas describing her exile after Sigurðr's death (stanzas 14-16) wealth functions as a decoration, the golden embroidery she whiles away the time with (stanzas 14-15) or the golden adornment on Sigmundr's ships.

Wealth becomes more active when the Gjúkungs reenter the stage. They are quite willing to buy peace with gold:

Gerr léz Gunnarr gull at bióða,
sacar at bæta, oc iþ sama Hogni.

Like Sigurðr, however, they will soon discover that their gold is useless for this. Neither they nor anyone else in the Edda succeed in buying peace in this way, not even for the gold that ransomed the mightiest of the gods.

The long, obscure enumeration of kings, warriors, and items that follows seems to be an offer of compensation, possibly the men are vassals to the husband she is being offered. They seem to offer her much, as Guðrún says (stanza 20):

Hverr vildi mér hnossir velia,
hnossir velia oc hugat mæla,
ef þeir mætti mér margra súta
trygðir vinna, né ec trúa gerðac.

All those treasures are worthless without Guðrún's trust, which they cannot buy.

When wealth fails, magic is pressed into service, but it works no better (stanza 20, 21-23), as Glendinning has noted.⁷³ Even beer, associated with wealth consumption in some poems, is tried and fails. Clearly they lack the services of a Völundr. Then wealth is tried again, in a list of gifts that rivals "The Twelfth Day of the Christmas" (stanzas 25-26):

'Gef ec þér, Guðrún, gull at þiggja,
fiqlø allz fiár, at þinn fōður dauðan,
hringa rauða, Hlōðvés sali,
ársal allan, at iofur fallinn.

Húnscar meýiar, þær er hlaða spiqlom
oc gora gull fagrt, svá at þér gaman þicci
ein scaltu ráða auði Buðla,
gulli gōfguð oc gefin Atla.'

Glendinning notes about this section: "Since Guðrún is still clearly nourishing memories of Sigurðr....Grímhildr resorts to blatant bribery to procure her consent to the match."⁷⁴

Guðrún is offered gold three times in these two stanzas, red rings, hall hangings, Hunnish handweavers, "fiqlø allz fiár", and that "ein scaltu ráða auði Buðla."

One wonders if Guðrún does not own much of this as it is. The chance to "ráða auði" is proffered to yet another, yet Guðrún does not seem as easily hooked as her husband and brothers. And surely the significance of ruling the herit-

⁷³ Glendinning, Edda: Essays p. 270.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

age of her arch-rival Brynhildr is not lost on Guðrún. Yet she does not rise to the bait. Like Brynhildr, she cannot be bought. Indeed, wealth seems to have even less hold on her than it did on Brynhildr. The material threats that coerced Brynhildr into marriage have no effect on Guðrún at all.

Bribes alternate with threats. This contrasts with For Scírnis, where the wooer exhausts all his bribes on the reluctant woman before resorting to threats. The threat to keep Guðrún manless forever, so effective against Gerðr, only angers Guðrún. In stanza 33, consequently, Grímhildr sweetens the pot by offering lands, peoples, possibly even strongholds to her unyielding daughter. It all serves to develop the theme so popular with the poets of this cycle: the limitations of bribes. Just as Brynhildr could not be bought (at least by Sigurðr) and in turn could not buy more slaves to die with her, so too is Guðrún immune to bribes. In the end it is pure force, not bribes, that make her marry Atli.

When the bribes end, so do the references to wealth in the poem. Only Atli's brief glimpses of animals in his dreams (stanzas 41-42) return things to a more material plane.

2.0.25 Guðrúnargviða in þriðia

Wealth figures little in Guðrúnargviða in þriðia. The conflict in this poem rages over infidelity, not property. It seems to hurt Atli far more than any wealth-loss. Similarly, the accused male party, Þjóðrec, is grieving the loss not of wealth, but men, retainers, the basis for his power in exile. "Iarcnasteinar" are the only precious items found in this poem, and even then their function is quite utilitarian.

2.0.26 Oddrúnargrátr

Wealth's function in Oddrúnargrátr does not break any new ground, but parallels the applications already seen in the poems of this cycle. Its tangible manifestations are for the most part similar. Red rings, red gold, and their circumlocutions abound. The expression "fifteen farms" (stanza 21) as part of a compensation package touches on a slightly more earthy form of wealth than has hitherto been seen in these poems, though we are still a long way from Hávamál. Wealth is associated with Oddrún's memories of her youth, and again gold adorns the young bride when she is given away.

Oddrún describes Gunnarr as "bauga deilir", which causes Gering and Sijmons to note (II:334): "diese umschreibung für 'fürst' kommt sonst nicht vor, aber ähnliche kenningar sind

überaus häufig." She also calls him "hringbroti" in stanza 22. Gunnarr is not noted for his generosity elsewhere in this cycle. It may be simply convention or perhaps a lover's blindness that allows him to be termed so.

Wealth-offers and bribes also figure in Oddrúnargrátr, and as elsewhere they are refused:

Buðo þeir Atla	bauga rauða	
oc bræðr mínom	bætr ósmár	
bauð hann enn við mér	bú fimtán,	
hlífarm Grana	ef hann hafa vildi.	(stanza 21)

Enn Atli qvaz eigi vilia... (stanza 22)

Atli seems quite resistant to the allures of wealth here. Possibly it is just part of his scheme to net the big treasure, however. It may well be, though, that Atli really does feel the offence done him (Brynhildr's death) is beyond compensation.

Stanza 26 features another failed bribe:

Buðo við þegnom	bauga rauða,
at þeir eigi til	Atla segði

This time Oddrún herself is trying to buy silence from Atli's agents to cover up her affair with Gunnarr. Atli's men, however, prove just as bribe-proof as their master, even when only following orders. Though perhaps accepting bribes to keep secrets from Atli would have been more dangerous than it was worth.

In Oddrúnargrátr, as in most of the poems of this cycle, the primary function of these wealth-offers seems to be to demonstrate the depth of feeling involved. Always the desperation of the offerers is exceeded by the resentment of the aggrieved parties. Eddic wealth is made to be rejected.

In Oddrúnargrátr, at least, the Gjúkungs seem relatively rich, as evidenced by the sort of bribes they can offer. To be sure, this may well come from Sigurðr's looted hoard, as the "hlíðfarm Grana" offered in stanza 21 implies (if not merely a conventional circumlocution for gold). Gering and Sijmons believe the latter (p. 334), while Ólafur Briem allows for both possibilities (p.417).

In stanza 28, the "Giúca arfar" ride into Atli's "garðr" on golden-hoofed horses:

Hlymr var at heyra	hófgullinna,
þá er í garði riða	Giúca arfar.

Gering and Sijmons note (II:336):

Der vergoldeten hufe sind ein märchenhafter zug wie die vergoldeten rinderhorner Prymsqviða 23.1 Helgaqviða Hiorvarðzsonar 4.2... In den dänischen volkslieder 'Kvindemorderen'...hat das roß des Blaubarts goldene hufeisen.

Here too these gilded hoofs are closely linked with death, because in the next line we hear of Högni and Gunnarr's execution. It is reminiscent of Hávamál's words on wealth, how quickly it can betray one, how quickly those who possess it can die.

What does this wealth have to do with their death? Does it show their hubris, their overweening pride, binding their horses with golden Hel-shoes as they ride to the Nágrind itself?

Wealth does not feature as a major motivator in Oddrúnargrátr. In fact, in some respects it has a more romantic basis than the other poems of this cycle, given that Oddrún's love for Gunnarr was far less materialistically motivated than Brynhildr's was (if it can be called love at all). Though Gunnarr may have been generous with her, as suggested by the sorts of kennings she uses for him, there is no sign he bought her affection. On the contrary, their relationship seems to have entailed material sacrifice for both parties. And their attempt to trade wealth for secrecy in stanza 26 suggests that their love had more than a material basis, that they were willing to expend wealth to keep it going. This would revert to the Hávamál ideal of the primacy of relationships over material property, an ideal honoured more often in a negative way in these poems (as when people refuse to forget an old relationship even when offered wealth to do so).

Another obscure allusion to a woman turned serpent crops up near the end of Oddrúnargrátr, much as in Guðrúnarqviða in fyrsta. Again, it involves a female member of Atli's family, this time his mother. Again it is very difficult to account for rationally, much as Brynhildr's metamorphosis

was. Again it is very easy to dismiss as a kind of metaphor, except that one cannot explain away Fáfnir, a wereworm with a close link to the very treasure at stake here.

Is it just a haunting coincidence that the last human possessor of the Fáfnisarfr, the serpent-gold, is himself torn apart by one? Especially when the avaricious are known to turn into serpents on occasion, usually posthumously, in order to guard their gold? Seen in that light, it is hard not to read significance into the choice of the kenning "linnvengis Bil" for Borgný, "Bil of the snakeland."

Overall, wealth's role in Oddrúnargrátr is ineffectual. It is not used to effect, nor does it seem to motivate action. Its most important function is to demonstrate the irreconcilability of differences between people, to stress that some animosity gulfs are so wide they cannot even be crossed by bribe-bridges. Atli does not seem greedy for wealth here, indeed, no one does. His honour does not seem to have a pricetag.

Wealth also functions as an adornment on the horses of the Gjúkungs, as they ride to their deaths. But there is no sign that Atli wants their gold. The description of their killing is so brief there is no room for offers and refusals, of demands for gold and heroic denials. The wealth of the Niflungs is naught before the anguish of Oddrún the bereaved lover.

In a sense, one could say that wealth is conspicuous by its absence from the climax here. Though the audience surely knew the stakes being played for in the larger drama, the refusal to refer to them makes the lovers' tragedy all the more poignant, casts their dilemma in sharper relief. Just as Oddrún's failure to mention Gunnarr by name in stanza 28 "en í ormgarð annan lögðu" makes his death all the more poignant for the understatement, so too does Oddrún's refusal to mention the hoard-demands. To her, wealth is only something that could not buy reconciliation between brother and lover, or silence from mouths that knew too much.

2.0.27 Atlaqviða

Atlaqviða begins and ends on a note of opulence and wealth. Atli's messenger comes to a hall endowed with "beciom aringreypom oc at bióri svásom." Indeed, there is a focus on wealth, magnificence, and ostentatious display that really has no counterpart in the heroic poems examined thus far. Even in the more wealth-oriented poems like Reginismál and Fáfnismál, most of the wealth was dragon-gold, the cause of hate and strife and the object of a hero's aspirations, but seldom the comfortable, almost consumer wealth of Atlaqviða. Even in those heroic poems where wealth was homier, in general wealth is associated with the happy memories of the distant past.

In Atlaqviða, wealth is very much a part of the here and now. It sets the scene from the outset. It adorns and yet supports the deepening drama. And though the source of the conflict in Atlaqviða, wealth is also critical to the strength and characterization of both sides. Wealth also exerts its force on the development of the story. As Jón Helgason remarks about the principal characters of Atlaqviða: "Aflið sem knýr þá fram er fégræðgi, þrjózka, heift og hefndir."⁷⁵ Einar Ólafur Sveinsson has reservations about this, however (p. 409-410).

The opening of the poem is masterful, the wealth that adds such a "glæsibragð" to other poems only deepening the menace here. Though the hall is ornate, the beer delicious, and the wine an exotic treat, the characters enjoying this wealth are shrouded in gloom. In fact, the wealth accentuates their anxiety and fear of the Huns. Almost every line in the second stanza is either a reference to the pleasures and adornments of the hall, or a disquieting hint of trouble ahead. Wealth heightens the impact of these hints:

Drucco þar dróttmegir	-enn dyliendr þogðo-
vín í valhöllu,	<v>reiði sáz þeir Húna
kallaði þá Knéfrøðr	kaldri røðdo,
seggr inn suðræni	-sat hann á becc hám-:

Stanzas 3-7 feature a wealth-offer, a bribe-gift to all intents and purposes. It is the most detailed discussion of such to be found in the Codex Regius. It takes all of stan-

⁷⁵ Jón Helgason, Tvær kviður fornar: Völundarkviða og Atlakviða. Reykjavík, Heimskringla, 1962. p. 109.

zas 4 and 5 just to list the gifts available, and two more to rebutt it with a description of the Gjúkungs' own wealth:

Sciðldo knegoð þar velia oc scafna asca,
hiálma gullroðna oc Húna mengi,
silfrgylt sǫðulklæði, serki valrauða
dafar, darraða, drǫsla mǣlgreypa

Vǫll léz ycr oc mundo gefa víðrar Gnitaheiðar,
af geiri giallanda oc af gyltom stǫfnom,
stórar meiðmar oc staði Danpar,
hrís þat iþ mæra, er meðr Myrcvið kalla.

gull vissa ec ecci á Gnitaheiði,
þat er við ættima annat slíct.

Siau eigo við salhús, sverða full,
hverio ero þeira hiǫlt ór gulli
minn veit ec mar beztan, enn mæki hvassastan,
boga beccsæma, enn brynior ór gulli
hiálm oc sciðld hvítastan, kominn ór hǫll
Kiárs
einn er minn betri, enn sé allra Húna.

This is also one of the most detailed descriptions of wealth to be found in the Codex Regius. These are what had value in the eyes of the protagonists (and presumeably the poet) of Atlaqviða. It includes much of what Hávamál describes as wealth (though nothing of interest to the farmer, such as livestock) and more besides. Shields, spears, men (or Hunnish swords), silver-gilded saddlecloths, scarlet tunics, steeds, lands, ships, treasures, even entire forests are numbered among the gifts in store for the Gjúkungs if they visit Atli.

Yet the Gjúkungs swiftly demonstrate that this offer is paltry to ones such as they. They enumerate their own holdings of gold, horses, weapons, and war-garb. Only the of-

fers of lands and forests go unmatched. This first struggle in Atlaqviða is fought on purely materialistic terms. Indeed, it is the first direct wealth-to-wealth confrontation to be fought in the Codex Regius. It is the first and in fact the only case where the heroes preserve their prestige and standing by boasting of their wealth, where their honour rests on their possessions and their ability to outshine the other materially.

This energetic exchange of materialistic boasts is more than a little ironic when one recalls the fate in store for both sides. Neither Atli nor Gunnarr will benefit a whit from the wealth they boast of here. Indeed, the very martial aspect of many of these possessions is all the more telling, given the violent deaths they will die.

This opening achieves several things. First, it introduces the wealth-theme that will be central to the poem. Second, it establishes a balance between the protagonists. Atlaqviða is not some desperate suicide mission of striplings such as one finds in Hamðismál, but a case of mighty sovereigns in collision. The wealth-matching at the outset makes this clear.

In the realm of hospitality tests, the reception of Atlís emissary at the outset contrasts powerfully with the reception these hosts will have at Atli's hands. Even though Atli's messenger bears fear and condescension with him, he is

given the best of treatment (as stanza 2 makes clear, particularly its final words "sat hann á becc hám"). Even this rudimentary form of sharing is beyond Atli, which clearly places him in the role of the villain.

Like so many Eddic drinking scenes, this one is the prelude to the destruction of the drinkers (see Þrymsgviða, and Locasenna for other examples, though this motif can also be found to some extent in Grímnismál, Vafðrúðnismál, Hymisgviða, and Völundargviða). The opulence of the drinking scene serves to deepen the pathos of violent death. It shows that the rich too are mortal, vulnerable.

Is there a hint of delusion in all the wealth-boasting? Has their wealth made the boasters fey, blind to the terrible danger they are to each other? Certainly the behaviour of both parties here is very strange. As Dronke notes, there is : "an absurdity in the invitation: why does Atli offer wealth to the wealthiest men in the world?"⁷⁶ They all seem to have an irrational faith in the power of wealth, a faith that is completely betrayed by the end of the poem.

The only thing more absurd than the offer is its acceptance. It remains the central "Why?" of Atlaqviða. How one answers it shapes one's interpretation of the entire poem.

⁷⁶ Ursula Dronke. The Poetic Edda. I: Heroic Poems. Ed. with trans., intro., and commentary. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969) p. 13-14.

The most extensive analysis of this section to appear in recent years is that of Gottzmann.⁷⁷ Gottzmann's basic approach is to interpret these gifts in the light of the symbolism of vassalage ceremonies. Though the basic function of enticement is still part of the wealth offer in his view, the specific items offered carry connotations that have been overlooked by other commentators. As he notes (p. 32):

Wenn Atli die Giukunge nur für ihr Erscheinen auf derart kostbare Weise belohnen will, dann müssen triftigere Gründe bestehen als die eins Lockmittels.

The significance of the gifts offered in Gottzmann's view is that most all imply some sort of feudal obligation. In short, acceptance of these gifts, such as the weapons, armour, and other military trappings, will demonstrate the Gjukungs' acceptance of Atli's overlordship, defining them as his underlings, beholden to him. Gottzmann believes the same applies to the land and even to the "stórar meiðmar" offered (p. 37):

'Meidmar' im Vergleich zu andern Begriffen dieses Wortfeldes und in verschiedenen Kontexten....und unter Berücksichtigung der Etymologie...bezieht sich insbesondere auf Kostbarkeiten, die oft von einem Gefolgsherrn an seine Leute gegeben werden. Kleinode gehören zu den Mitteln, mit denen ein Herrscher Mannen belohnt. Wenn Atli hier Gunnar Hort und Kleinode zusichert, so will er ihm aus seiner Macht und unter seiner Kontrolle eben die Machtmittel zu teilen, die zur Ausübung von Herrschaft notwendig sind.

Later he goes on to state (p. 39):

⁷⁷ Carola L. Gottzmann Das Alte Atlilied: Untersuchung der Gestaltungsprinzipien seiner Handlungsstruktur, Heidelberg, Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1973. p. 30-52.

In der Zusicherung von Kleinoden kommen die Rechte und Pflichten, die ein Furst gegenüber seinen Gefolgsleuten hat, zum Ausdruck. Denn Kleinode muß ein 'Ringverteiler' als Lohn für geleistete Dienste vergeben.

Even the offer of land Atli makes has implications "denn hier beitet er etwas an, was ihn noch nicht gehört" (p. 41), since Gottzmann views Myrkviðr as a disputed border zone between the two realms. Again, it has close parallels with feudalism at an early stage, when newly-subject vassals accept their own land back from a lord to demonstrate their subservience to him (and the new order he represents). Gottzmann says as much on page 41:

Indem nämlich Atli den Wald als Gabe ausgibt, verlangt er von Gunnar, daß dieser sein eigenes Land aus der Hand Atli empfangen soll.

Gunnarr's reply, therefore, is not mere materialistic boasting, but an assertion of his sovereignty. The possessions he enumerates are all testimony to his independence, of his power to own property free of obligations. In doing so he reminds Atli that he is not dealing with a vassal, but a sovereign king (p. 46):

Der Macht, die ihm durch das Gold angeboten wird, stellt er seine eigene gegenüber. Damit hebte Gunnar hervor, daß zwei getrennte Machtgruppen bestehen, die in keiner Weise in einem untergeordneten Verhältnis zueinander stehen können, wil sie unterschiedlicher Art sind.

In Gottzmann's view, the sword plays a particularly important role in Gunnarr's assertion of wealth (p. 47):

Die Fülle an Reichtum demonstriert Gunnar jedoch zuerst durch den Besitz des Schwertes, der anges-

tamnten Waffe eines freien Fursten, um aber gleichzeitig auch seine kriegerische Stärke zum Ausdruck zu bringen.

In other words, the sword functions as a wealth item, a symbol of both independence and military power.

Gottzmann also feels that Gunnarr's wealth catalogue has a more individual focus than the more collective wealth mentioned by the Huns (p. 47):

Den Schluß der letzten Hälfte und zugleich die Abrundung der Strophe bildet wiederum das Herausstreichen des einzelnen wie auch des eigenen Besitzes, der kontrastiert wird mit dem gesamten Besitz der Hunnen.

Gottzmann even feels the reference to golden hilts in stanza 7 is significant, and notes the importance of the hilt in ceremonies of vassalage (p. 48):

Der Griff aus Gold ist der Teil des Schwertes, der es zur Prunkwaffe and zum Herrschaftszeichen macht. In ihm liegt die Kraft die vom Umfassen mit der Hand ausgeht, in ihm ist aller symbolische Gehalt des Schwertes enthalten. Wenn Gunnar nun viele dieser Griffe besitzt, dann kommt damit zum Ausdruck, daß das Zeichen seiner Macht vielfältig ist. Diese Vielfalt drückt sich in den genannten Schwertern der sieben Saalhäuser aus. Sie stellen die Konzentration seiner Macht dar, und zwar seiner erworbenen Macht. Wenn Gunnar an diesen Schwertern die Kostbarkeit der Griffe betont und die bei jedem einzelnen - da er doch als Charakteristikum seines eigenen Schwertes die Schärfe hervorhebt - , so unterscheidet er zwischen Schwert als Angriffswaffe... and dem Schwert als Zeichen übertragener Macht. Deen mit der Übergabe des Schwertes wird eine Unterwerfung in der Weise vollzogen, daß der Unterworfene das Schwert bei der Klinge faßt und dem Überwinder den Griff reicht. So ist also jeder Schwertgriff in den Saalhäusern repräsentatives Objekt der Unterwerfung eines Fürsten.

Gottzmann feels that even the reference to the bow could imply that Gunnarr considers himself the Huns' overlord, since the bow is associated with them (p. 50):

Gunnar könnte mit der Nennung des Bogens darauf verweisen, daß hunnische Scharen unter seinem Oberbefehl stehen.

and that he has no need of Hunnish retainers, viewing his own as far superior (p. 51):

Gunnar könnte auch mit den Bogen auf Atlis Angebot 'Hunnen in Menge' antworten und ihm so zu verstehen geben, daß er keiner hunnischen Knechte bedürfe, da er selbst Bogenschützen besitze, die seiner Herrscherstellung weit geziemender seien als Atlis Knechte.

Gottzmann concludes his analysis by reiterating the importance of Gjukung wealth in their response to Atli, particularly as an assertion of their independence (p. 52):

In dieser seiner Herrschertätigkeit scheint Gunnar sich in die Kontinuität eines Fürsten, vielleicht des römischen Kaisers, zu stellen, denn die Objekte, die er verleiht, stammen aus der Halle Kiárs, so daß Gunnars Vorherrschaft sich als traditionell begründet erweist. Damit stellt er dem Anspruch Atlis massiv seine eigene auf realer und traditioneller Macht beruhene Herrscherposition entgegen und betont, daß jedes einzelne Element, das seine Macht konstituiert, weit besser ist, als alle Macht der Hunnen.

There is no denying that in some respects Gottzmann's thesis is attractive. If nothing else, it is a noble attempt to confront what Dronke calls (p. 13-14) "an absurdity in the invitation" and to answer her question: "Why does Atli offer wealth to the wealthiest men in the world?" Certainly there does seem to be something more to Atli's offer

than wealth for its own sake, otherwise the Gjúkungs' subsequent actions make little sense.

Gottzmann also cites the story from *Heimskringla* of King Aðalstan's gift of a sword to King Haraldr, where the sword's acceptance is used to demonstrate the recipient's inferiority to the giver (Gottzmann, p. 49). It is a very persuasive model for Gottzmann's hypothesis. It suggests that in historical times, at least, kings were not above the sort of maneuvers Gottzmann ascribes to Atli.

Even the reaction of the Gjúkungs lends some credence to Gottzmann's thesis. If Atli's offer is in fact a veiled demand that they surrender their sovereignty, in effect an ultimatum from a superior power, then presumeably retribution for refusing is threatened. Their trip right to the seat of Atli's power could be simply a demonstration that they do not fear that power. Otherwise, there is little apparent motivation for their journey.

Even Gottzmann's thesis is still at a loss to explain what makes them go, however. He discusses a number of alternatives (p. 55-59), but none is really satisfactory. Basically, he seems to view the Gjúkungs as caught on the horns of a dilemma, between launching a preemptive strike against Atli and thereby forcing their sister against them, or surrender.

Tempting as Gottzmann's thesis is, however, it infers a great deal from the text. A dispassionate assessment of his findings depends on to what extent one accepts the link he draws between these gifts and the symbolism of vassalage ceremonies, since Atli never states in so many words that he wants the Gjúkungs' allegiance. Moreover, all the subsequent torments he puts them through are to back up his demands for the hoard, not their allegiance. Ultimately, however, one could argue that the two are linked, since the essence of vassalage is that the vassals hold property only at the sufferance of their lord, that he really owns it. And though the parallels Gottzmann draws with King Aðalstan's gift-sword are persuasive, these would be all the more convincing if parallels could be found closer to home as well, such as in the Codex Regius itself.

Since Gottzmann depicts the connotations of Atli's gift-offers to be so clearly vassalage-linked, it does not seem unreasonable to expect traces of this attitude elsewhere in the Edda. At the very least, it should be possible to show that Atli's gift-offers differ in some way from non-vassalage-oriented gifts.

To be sure, gifts or offers of weapons are uncommon in the Codex Regius. Despite Hávamál's advocacy of such (stanza 41), the only others are in For Scírnis (stanza 8,9), Locasenna (stanza 12), Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri (stanza 8), Helgaqviða Hiqrvarðzsonar (stanza 8), Helgaqviða

Hundingsbana qnnor (prose between 24 and 30), Reginsmál (prose between 14 and 15), Fáfnismál (stanza 29-30), and Guðrúnarhvot (7).

Though the Hávamál example does not have anything to do with vassalage, the other examples cited above do not refute Gottzmann. In all the cases cited, the giver of the weapon does seem to possess some kind of status advantage, if only a momentary one. Freyr is a god, Skírnir his "scósveinn". Bragi is a welcome guest, Loki a returning outcast. Helgi receives weapon and land from King Sigmundr. Reginn is Sigurðr's mentor. Óðinn loans his spear to a man. And in Helgaqviða Hiorvarðzsonar, a valkyrie dispenses a sword to a man, or at least points out where he can get it (stanza 8-9). Even in Guðrúnarhvot, Guðrún is very much the superior to her sons.

Moreover, in most of the examples cited above, an obligation of service is closely linked to the gift. Skírnir receives a sword in return for carrying out (or in order to carry out) a mission for Freyr. Sigurðr must use the sword given him to do Reginn's dirty work for him, while Dagr does Óðinn's work with the spear given him. Guðrún gives her sons armour so they can serve her revenge ends.

Only in the remaining Helgi-poems is the link between service and sword weaker. And even in Helgaqviða Hiorvarðzsonar, it can be argued that the hero does the valkyrie

service for his sword, slaying many worthies for Valhöll for her.

Thus so far as gifts of weapons go, at least, Gottzmann's hypothesis is not without basis in the Edda.

With meiðmar, the situation is more obscure. They are not linked so closely to service in the Edda. Prymr owns them in abundance (Prymsgviða stanza 23), and though this may reflect his lordship, his potential to gain followers by dispensing them, this is not unequivocally stated. It follows hard on the heels of a reference to his cattle-holdings, a form of wealth that has little or no link with vassalage in the Codex Regius. In Sigurðarqviða in scamma, the service link is stronger. Sigurðr is offered "mey...oc meiðma fiqlö" for his aid in wooing Brynhildr. And Brynhildr distributes "meiðmar" in stanza 46, presumably to followers. In stanzas 15 and 38, however, "meiðmar" seem to represent the marital relationship more than anything else:

fyrr scal ec míno fiqrvi láta,
enn þeirar meyar meiðmom týna (15) and

léc mér meirr í mun meiðmar þiggia,
bauga rauða, burar Sigmundar. (38)

In fact, all references to "meiðmar" thus far have something to do with women and marriage. Thus it is hard to see how these would automatically evoke implications of vassalage in Atlaqviða.

This is the most challenging aspect of Gottzmann's thesis. Given the fact that almost all Eddic gifts are given with some kind of return (usually speedy return) in mind, it is difficult to separate this from notions of vassalage. The kinds of gifts Atli offers usually entail some kind of service in the Edda, it is true. The same can be said about almost all other Eddic gifts, however, so it is hard to say if his selection of gifts is significant in itself.

Where the leap of faith as regards Gottzmann's thesis is required is from the point where Atli's gifts may be insulting in broad terms, to whether they specifically allude to vassalage. To accept the latter is to place considerable strain upon the text of the Codex Regius. It does, however, make the offer a far more rational one under the circumstances. Instead of an inexplicable offering of coals to Newcastle, ie wealth to the holders of the Niflung hoard, the offer becomes at once more rational, and more menacing. It changes from a wealth-deluded innanity to a threat at once coarse and subtle.

In any event, intriguing as Gottzmann's thesis is, it still fails to address the central mystery of Atlaqviða, why do the Gjúkungs go to Atli? Of the two most likely answers, sheer greed and pure heroism, the latter is by far the most popular among commentators. Certainly Dronke makes no allowance for the former, and in her study⁷⁸ she stresses the

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

challenge inherent in the sister's warning, a challenge no true hero could refuse. Her commentary rings with remarks like "Now that danger is certain, Gunnarr cannot refuse" and "The earth shakes at their impetuosity, at their will to face death."⁷⁹

Einar Ólafur Sveinsson admits uncertainty as to why they accept the invitation: "Eins og kvæðið er nú, er óljóst um hug Gunnars, þegar hann ákveður förina" and indeed allows for the question: "Eða hafa boð Atla áhrif á þá?"⁸⁰ Jón Helgason adheres strictly to a heroic interpretation of the decision.⁸¹

If one focusses on the record of the Niflung hoard up to this point, however, it must be said that few of those who possessed it demonstrated a clear-sighted view of danger. In fact, blindness in the face of danger distinguished all its owners from Hreiðmarr to Sigurðr. All of them die in a treacherous, underhanded way too. Could not Gunnarr and Högni be seen in the light of this tradition, blinded by the greedy glow of dragon gold like all its previous owners?

As it is, Gunnarr's victory, such as it is in Atlaqviða, lies in the denying of his wealth to his enemy. Again, it is possible to interpret this as the epitome of heroism or

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld p. 409.

⁸¹ Jón Helgason, Tvær kviður fornar, p. 83-85, 148.

the epitome of greed, though the former interpretation is far more attractive. Here one should bear in mind that the values of Atlaqviða are not those of Hávamál. Whereas Hávamál stresses that life is more important than wealth, in Atlaqviða Gunnarr trades his life for wealth.

The aftermath of the invitation does not rule out either interpretation, as will be indicated below.

The centrality of the wealth theme is established very early on in Atlaqviða. Wealth is the main carrot proffered to induce the brothers to visit. As Dronke notes (p. 13): "Atli wastes no words on affection or kinship - he tempts others by what tempts himself."

The brothers show that they consider wealth very important. They do not shrink from boasting extensively about their own holdings in response to Atli's invitation. There is no sign that they question the value of wealth for its own sake. On the contrary, they seem just as proud to possess it as Atli is.

Although one form of wealth-exchange: hospitality, is important for both the beginning and end of their journey, it is another form of wealth-exchange, the gift, that seems to trigger it. Guðrún's ring seems the decisive factor in sending them on their way. It remains as enigmatic as the Mona Lisa's smile. In fact, if one limits oneself to the Atlaqviða context, it is almost impossible to explain. Is

it a warning? Judging from Guðrún's subsequent behaviour in the poem and the example of Atlamál it would seem so. Could it in fact be a challenge to her brothers, defying them to come? Their response would suggest this. Moreover, rings have been very important in the poems of this cycle. Repeatedly there has been reference to rings bringing death. This was Fáfnir's warning to Sigurðr, for example. One thinks of the ring Sigurðr took from Brynhildr and gave to Guðrún in the Nibelungenlied. That would have been a powerful challenge to give to the brothers here. Or is it the last item from the hoard that remained in Guðrún's possession up to this point? That would be a very difficult gift to interpret, implying both reconciliation with her brothers (or an attempt to trick them into thinking this) or a sign that the events of the past have not been forgotten. Unfortunately, the text remains silent on this point. Its very silence does imply that something about the ring was thought common knowledge by the audience, that the audience was assumed to have known its significance.

Ultimately, as noted above, the decision to visit Atli remains a mystery. Certainly the traditional interpretation (see Dronke, Helgason) is to take Gunnarr's wealth boasting as evidence he was not fooled by Atli's transparent offer. And though he does not categorically refuse it, his own wealth-boasts certainly belittle it.

Yet there is surprise when Atli attacks them. Surely this suggests they do not go knowingly and heroically to their doom? Perhaps their decision should be seen in the light of those sagas (such as Njála, Laxdæla, and Hrafnkatla) where heroes place themselves in a foe's power so as to demonstrate his drengskapr, or lack thereof. If the foe fails the test he is revealed a complete níðingr. The tester usually dies.

The decision to leave is made with a flourish, whatever the role of wealth in it. Gold glints as Gunnarr prepares to depart in stanza 10: "...láttu á flet vaða / greppa gullscálar með gumna höndom!"

Stanza 11 suggests that wealth is on Gunnarr's mind as he prepares to leave: "Úlfr mun ráða arfi Niflunga /...ef Gunnars missir".

This is another stanza with a host of possible interpretations. Does "arfr Niflunga" refer to the treasure or the entire realm? And is Gunnarr expressing apprehension or defiance here? Is he fearing for his country if he is killed or is he making a dispassionate prediction? Or is there a hint of petulance in his claim that if he cannot rule the Niflung heritage then none but the wolf will? The cause of so much strife and treachery will revert to an animal that epitomizes both. Like Beowulf, Gunnarr seems to see his fall as the end of his kingdom as well.

The repeated "ifs" in this stanza express some uncertainty. From this it would seem Gunnarr is not certain of his fate, that he still cherishes some hope, or delusion, that Atli's invitation might be made in good faith.

It may well be that this foreshadows the victory Gunnarr will achieve - the denial of his wealth to his enemy.

The interlude between the two courts is brief. Swiftly we see that Atli's court commands its share of wealth and power (stanza 14). Atli too is drinking "vín í valhöllu," just as the Gjúkungs were in stanza 2. Their sister, however, has not partaken "bióri var hon lítt druccin" (stanza 15). She has excluded herself from the feast, an act of considerable import in Old Norse society (the "unfair drinker", one who did not drink himself drunk with the others, was often suspected of designs on them). And when she berates her brothers for coming, she does so in material terms. They have failed to bring the things they need to humble the Huns, the helmets, byrnies, and men needed to smash their power. Perhaps in this the brothers see clearer than her, for possibly the Huns were beyond the power of the Burgundians no matter how much equipment they had (though this is not clear in the poem). The brother who sought to "ráða" wealth is now "ráðinn." And he is doomed to die in a pit full of serpents, creatures closely associated with wealth.

In stanza 20, Gunnarr is asked the fateful question:

Frágo fræcnan,	ef fiqr vildi,
Gotna þjóðann,	gulli kaupa.

This is as clear as the distinction gets between wealth and happiness, between the wealth-seeker and the hero. It makes it quite clear that despite all the stress placed on wealth in Atlaqviða, the poet wants us to view Gunnarr as moved by heroic considerations, not pecuniary ones. The denial of wealth is made for grand, heroic reasons, not petty niggling ones.

It also demonstrates how essential free will was to the Old Norse concept of generosity. Despite all the stress placed on giving freely, our sources make a dramatic distinction between giving freely and yielding to extortion. This is one aspect of Atlaqviða that is quite in keeping with modern tastes as well.

The relationship of wealth to the motivation of the stanzas that immediately follow is complex and enigmatic. Stanza 26 makes it clear that Gunnarr's actions are prompted by a desire to protect the gold, or at least, to deny it to the Huns.

In making his request, however, he cannot help but detract from Hogni. He does not trust Hogni as well as he trusts himself. Yet the poet goes to great lengths to demonstrate Hogni is worthy of that trust, giving him a death even more terrible than Gunnarr's. Gunnarr's fears seem groundless from the evidence the poem contains. As Dronke notes (p. 15): "With almost fanatical jealousy he distrusts even his brother whose bravery, he knows, is boundless".

This distrust, if distrust it is, gives Hogni a spectacularly heroic exit. So spectacular, in fact, that most readers, if not disgusted by the heart-removal scene, tend to vindicate Gunnarr's choice on aesthetic grounds. It really is essential for the conclusion of the central part of the poem. Gunnarr's fallacy makes the poem all the more heroic. Perhaps that alone sufficed to justify its existence.

Within the world of the Nibelung poems, however, there is another possible explanation. All through the cycle, the gold has been working to set brother against brother, kinsman against kinsman, friend against friend. And it has been most successful in destroying trust. Those who possess it lose their ability to entrust it to anyone else. Hreiðmarr refuses to trust his sons with a share of the gold. They kill him. Fáfnir refuses to trust his brother Reginn with a share. Reginn gets Sigurðr to kill him. As soon as Sigurðr gets the gold, birds persuade him to kill Reginn. Then the Gjúkungs slay Sigurðr, in part for his gold. Atli seems to be driven by his gold-lust to kill the Gjúkungs. Throughout the cycle, the gold has worked its destructive power on the most sacred bonds known to ancient Germanic society. Would it be too much to see a case of its destructive power here as well?

The truth remains murky, if only because relations between Gunnarr and Hogni seem so good otherwise (there is no

recrimination) and Hogni, being doomed anyway, seems to relish his glorious end. And the motif of one brother working another's death to save him from a more ignominious end is known from sagas where no gold is present. But perhaps Gunnarr does show some wealth-blindness here, given the extensive precedent for it set in the other poems of this cycle. Though the expressions he uses in stanza 20 in demanding the execution of Hogni do not suggest hostility, i.e., "baldríða", "sonr þjóðans," there are ample examples from skaldic poetry of such usage about foes, so this is not conclusive.

The use of wealth provides for two very different sorts of triumphs in Atlaqviða, ensuring no chance of redundancy or dullness through repetition. Hogni dies the death of the traditional hero. His triumph lies in his heroic death, his refusal to quail in the face of doom. Though Gunnarr dies bravely too (Atlaqviða describes the lead-up to his death rather than the death itself), his real triumph lies in the wealth-denial. With that, Atli is thoroughly foiled, hoisted on the petard of his own brutality (the killing of Hogni). This triumph is all the greater when seen in the context of the cycle as a whole. Gunnarr is the only holder of the hoard who rules what will happen to it after his death. He ensures that no one else will ever enjoy it, like those who turn themselves into monsters to protect their hoards (such as Búi in Jómsvíkinga saga).

While some men seem to turn from worldly concerns at the moment of death, there is no sign of this with Gunnarr. In the two stanzas that follow the presentation of Hogni's heart, Gunnarr refers to wealth several times (stanzas 26-27):

Svá scaltu, Atli,	augom fiarri,
sem munt meniom	<mínom> verða
er und einom mér	öllum um fólgin
hódd Niflunga:	lifira nú Hogni.

Ey var mér týia,	meðan við tveir lifðom,
nú er mér engi,	er ec einn lific
Rín skal ráða	rógmálmi scatna,
sú in áskunna,	arfi Niflunga,
í veltanda vatni	lýsaz valbaugar,
heldr enn á höndom gull	scíni Húna bornom.'

Stanza 26 suggests that Atli will be as far from treasures (necklaces) as he is from eyes, whose eyes and whose necklaces remains obscure, though Kock's emendation "meniom mínom" is tempting, stressing as it would Gunnarr's hold on his treasure to the end and beyond, which is also stated in lines 5 and 6. He exults that the sole control over the treasure has passed to him, in a way not unlike that of Hreiðmarr, Fáfnir, and Reginn. The similarity is the greatest with Hreiðmarr's words in Reginsmál, stanza 9: "Rauðo gulli (qvað Hreiðmarr) hugg ec mic ráða muno, / svá lengi sem ec lifi."

Stanza 27 makes it clear that he did mistrust Hogni and it is a mistrust born of gold-lust. Gunnarr says "ec...lific" but all he talks of is the treasure. He refers to it as "rógmálmr scatna", "arfr Niflunga", "gull", and "valbaugar".

It is an interesting reversal of the traditional king's role: - in general a king is judged by how well he can give, Gunnarr's fame lies in his denial of his treasure to his foes.

He seems as fascinated by treasure as Fáfnir was and takes great consolation in denying it to the Huns. He and Fáfnir share a fascination with the shininess of gold rings. Fáfnir repeatedly calls them "ip glóðrauða fé", while Gunnarr says "lýsaz valbaugar,...á hǫndom gull scíni..."

All who have come into contact with the treasure have sought to "ráða" it, but in stanza 27 Gunnarr turns it over to the one who will possess it thereafter: "Rín scal ráða rógmalmi scatna." This seems to contradict stanza 11's "Úlfr mun ráða arfi Niflunga."

It is a strange contradiction. One assumes Gunnarr had a good idea of the fate in store for him even before he left home, and made preparations accordingly. Yet the wolf and the Rhine can hardly rule the wealth together. Perhaps the "arfr Niflunga" referred to in stanza 11 refers to the lands and realm of Gunnarr, not his gold.

In the end, the guardian of the greatest "serpent-bed" of all is put to death by snakes. One thinks of King Herod being eaten up by the worms. Yet important as generosity is elsewhere in the Edda, it is Gunnarr's ability to retain wealth, to deny it to others, that really makes him the hero

of Atlaqviða. As stanza 31 says: "svá scal gulli / fræcn hringdrifi við fira halða." As Dronke notes, the very kenning used for Gunnarr focusses on his generosity when he is practising the very opposite:

the poet makes it clear by his choice of synonyms for 'prince' - hringdrifi "scatterer of rings" that Gunnarr does not care for gold for its own sake, but he will let no one force from him what it is his right and pleasure to give away.⁸²

It should be noted, however, that Atli himself is called "sverða deilir" ('distributor of swords'), a generous epithet for one of the greediest characters in the Edda. This would seem to suggest one should not read too much into these circumlocutions for lord.

As it is, even in the killing of the Gjúkungs, wealth is expended extravagantly. A slave is slain with Hogni. It shows that the Huns can be just as extravagant as the Niflungs when it comes to destroying wealth to make a point. Indeed, many of the treasures promised Gunnarr and Hogni at the outset figure in their deaths later on, such as retainers, weapons, horses. Is there a hint of irony in this? Given Atli's general lack of subtlety in the poem it is unlikely.

The wealth of Atlaqviða is far more a horse wealth than a ship wealth. Though ships are mentioned (stanza 5), there are far more references to horses. The emissary comes rid-

⁸² Dronke, The Poetic Edda, p 15.

ing (stanza 1), he describes his ride on "mar inom mélgreyppa"(stanza 3), and then proceeds to offer some very equestrian treasures, silver-gilded saddlecloths and "drösla mélgreyppa."

Even the execution of Gunnarr is carried out in some kind of horse-drawn vehicle (stanza 28, 31). Atli also returns from the execution of Gunnarr on "ió eyrskár". Both weapons and horses resound as he returns.

Wealth is used with particular skill in stanza 34. Guðrún welcomes and serves Atli like a new arrival in Valhalla (which he is on the verge of becoming), yet in a way that uses all the comforts she offers against him. The gilded cup is filled with the ale that will fatally befuddle him. The "gnadda niflfarna", the "ölkrásir" that attest to the luxury of Atli's court are of course the ultimate tools of revenge. Atli, the consumer of wealth par excellence, is ruined by that very wealth. The woman, a wealth-object he enjoys, will slay him with the beer that befuddles him and use the beer-dainties he savours to break his heart. It is an end reminiscent of the wealth-related dooms of certain Eddic giants. Moreover, this faint echo of the Völundarqviða motif of reducing a foe's sons to wealth-objects will recur more dramatically in Atlamál.

At this point Atlaqviða comes its closest to being a sermon against wealth, or at least its misuse. Whether this

can be said about the poem as a whole remains debateable, however. Certainly none of the poem's conspicuous consumers come across very well, least of all Atli. Wealth is closely associated with all three major acts of the poem: the decision to visit Atli, the slaughter of the visitors, and the revenge taken for them.

Atli, the most wealth-oriented of the poem's characters, definitely fares the worst. Within the context of the poem it is difficult to find any motivation for his actions other than sheer greed. Moreover, he seems to feel the whole world operates this way. As Dronke notes (p. 13) "he tempts others by what tempts himself." He is the main, in fact the only real briber in Atlaqviða. And of all the Eddic bribes, his is the only one that is used to destroy a relationship rather than create one. His is virtually the only bribe to be accepted in the Edda, and with what awful consequences.

Following Atli's murder of Gunnarr and Hogni, he continues to revel in and enjoy his wealth. Moreover, unlike Gunnarr and Hogni, he allows his wealth to blind him completely, there is no sign he expects any sort of counterattack from Guðrún. Gunnarr and Hogni, on the other hand, seem moved by other forces to an extent. They are certainly proud of their wealth. But they do not seem blinded by it (though this is the heart of the thorniest interpretation problem of the poem). Or at least, not totally. They are able to see through Atli's specious offer. They suspect

something is amiss in it, and allow for the possibility of a trap, even though it has little affect on their course of action.

All the major characters of Atlaqviða manipulate wealth to some degree. With varying measures of success, they use it to advance their own ends. Of the three (Atli, Gunnarr, and Guðrún) Atli's use of wealth is the least subtle. Like a gambler he tries to use a little wealth to win a lot, but it does not work. His is the only ploy to be seen through.

Gunnarr uses wealth to advance his honour. And if he does not exactly get revenge on Atli, he at least thwarts him, greatly restricting the gains Atli's treachery achieves. His own victory is in the denial of wealth and he uses Atli's greed for that wealth to render it even more inaccessible to him.

Of them all, however, Guðrún's use of wealth is the most successful. Her most devastating weapons are luxury goods, the ale that befuddles Atli, the beer-dainties that cost him his sons. Like her brother, she uses Atli's greed against him, albeit greed for wealth-items in a different league from the Niflung hoard. Moreover, her freedom of action to achieve this comes largely because Atli regards her as a possession, something without a will of her own. She is yet another wealth-object that betrays him, just as the ale and beer-dainties do.

Atli's tendency to overlook people in place of the objects they represent is at the heart of his three major mistakes (i.e., the bribe (which the Gjúkungs see through), the killing of Högni, and his failure to perceive the danger from Guðrún).

Atlaqviða is based on the perversion of the gift. This is Atli's most heinous crime, which may be why the revenge taken is so horrendous. If Atlaqviða is a sermon, this may be why so much of it focusses on atrocity and the betrayal of sacred bonds, if only to show why such betrayals are so terrible.

The gifts very swiftly move from the real and respectable to the surreal and the bizarre. And later, even after the human drama has reached its climax, the gift-giving continues to rise to a berserk crescendo. And it is a crescendo of mindlessness, for their gifts have lost all their conventional "raison d'etre." They do nothing to cement or create a relationship, to win friends or bring peace. They do not even say anything good about the giver. They only show how monstrous gifts bereft of practical considerations or good intentions can be.

Virtually every gift and offer made in Atlaqviða is not what it seems. The hospitality offered Knéfrøðr is the last demonstration of genuine largesse to be seen in Atlaqviða. Everything else will be a perversion. Atli's initial gift

is of course a lie, a mere enticement to his court. Guðrún's gift to her brothers, the ring, is cryptic and obscure, with a hidden meaning that even defies modern scholars. If it is given in good faith out of a desire to help, it produces the opposite effect. Only the gifts the giants give to gods, as in Hávamál and Prymsqviða backfire as badly. If it is in fact a challenge, throwing a reminder of their betrayal of Sigurðr in their faces, then it is quite out of place with the giver's actions later in the poem. Either way, it has no good effects.

Even as the gifts become absurd, the duplicity magnifies. The first heart presented to Gunnarr is a fraud. When he finally receives the real thing, he refuses to make good his offer for this terrible gift (albeit an offer couched in highly ambiguous language). And as noted above, Guðrún's gifts to Atli are pure treachery, the meat not what he thinks, and the ale the ultimate in unfair drinking, a direct prelude to his murder. All the men who offer gifts in Atlaqviða either renege on them or use them to betray.

Atli is wealth-blinded in the end, as intoxicated by wealth as he is drink. It is an apt state, akin to being fey. The one who would deceive others with gifts is himself deceived with gifts. And when Guðrún proceeds "at reifa giöld rognis," the paying back analogy is eminently fitting.

Yet even then the giving continues (stanza 39):

Gulli seri in gaglbiarta,
hringom rauðom reifði hon húskarla

scop lét hon vaxa, enn scíran málm vaða,
æva flióð ekki gáði fiarghúsa.

It is at this point that action in Atlaqviða reaches its most surreal. Indeed, it becomes difficult to rationally account for the actions at this stage, so much so that it is tempting to blame the mass drunkenness of the occasion as the obscuring factor: "Atli is so drunk, and so trusting in his drunkenness, that he is easy to murder."⁸³

Even after Atli's death, the wild paroxysm of giving continues. Guðrún's very next actions are described in stanzas 41 and 42: "Hon beð broddi gaf blóð at drecca..." (stanza 41), "Eldi gaf hon þá alla, er inni vóro..." (stanza 42).

This is the ultimate perversion of the gift, outdoing even Atli's infamies. Whereas up to now things have been given to people and people (or at least their hearts) to people, Guðrún takes absurdity to its utmost by giving people to things. Atli's lifesblood is given to a bed and his retainers to a fire. It is like a human sacrifice with no gods to receive it. Atlaqviða could well be called a kind of Gjafa-Refs saga gone mad.

Even the last, wild gifts of Guðrún are enigmatic. Like the ring sent to Gunnarr, they may well be treacherous in themselves. Or do they simply reflect a wild, extravagant

⁸³ Dronke, The Poetic Edda, p. 16.

emotional state, the feyness of someone who no longer cares whether she lives or dies? Is there a malicious purpose in Guðrún's final gift-giving?

Jón Helgason feels there is. As he notes:

Guðrún fleygir gulli til hallarmanna eins og sáð sé korni, ugglauð til að leiða athygli þeirra frá þeim atburðum sem nú taka við, vígi Atla og hallarbrunum.⁸⁴

Ursula Dronke for her part finds this final giving somewhat obscure. As she notes:

Examination of stanza II suggests that the poet...might allow his appetite for sensational images...to override the logic of his story....This characteristic appears again in ...stanzas 40-2. He seems to rely upon the swiftness and vividness of the succession of incidents to turn attention...from the incredibility of the action. His two climaxes conflict: (1) the disclosure....of the murder of the children and 2) the destruction of an unsuspecting Atli and his Huns in their own hall. Drunkenness is intended to account for their behaviour, but we can hardly help asking why, if the Huns were sufficiently in command of their wits to grasp the meaning of Guðrún's words, they did not seize or kill her...and how, if Atli was not too drunk to understand her words, he could so easily forget them, surely they would shock him into soberness. If we had not been told that the Huns wept at Guðrún's words, we could have assumed that she spoke to drunken, uncomprehending ears.... Again, he does not explain why Guðrún gives away the Hunnish gold to the servants. If it is to win them to her side....it would have been more logical to do so before telling the Huns of the murder of the children, when she might have feared reprisal. It seems more likely that the wild scene of gold-giving has no narrative function related to the burning, but is the next stage in Guðrún's systematic revenge. She denudes the Huns of their gold, the symbol of their majesty, in preparation for their death. Those who know they are going to die

⁸⁴ Jón Helgason, Tvær kviður fornar, p. 102.

dispose of their wealth lavishly (cf. Si-gurðarkviða in skamma 46-9). Guðrún makes the Huns' testament for them because their burning is so imminent. That this is the meaning of her action is implied by the words skop lét hon vaxa. The giving away of the temple-hoarded gold to the servants is a parody of a common ceremony, a ritual preparation for the death of the Huns.⁸⁵

This casting-away of the temple-gold is the prelude to the annihilation of the Huns, the giving of them to the fire. It is a giving orgy as wild and destructive as any potlatch. It is even more pointless. There are no possible "future considerations" that Guðrún will get for her gifts. She does not appear to be trying to buy loyalty. Though this sort of gifting would not be incongruous in a "succession to power" situation, there is little sign that Guðrún hopes to succeed anyone.

It is also very hard to imagine, as Helgason suggests (p. 173) the gold-giving working as a distraction, given the enormity of the events that precede it. It would, however, reiterate Atlaqviða's theme of the deluding power of wealth. Just as gold blinded Atli in this poem (and possibly Gunnarr as well), it is not unfitting that it dupe his followers too. It is appropriate that one who betrayed the most sacred bonds for gold should have his men fail him because of gold. Just as Atli valued gold higher than oaths, so did his men.

⁸⁵ Dronke, The Poetic Edda, p. 28-29.

Guðrún's own attitude to wealth remains obscure throughout the grand finale. Much of her behaviour can be interpreted as expressing contempt for it. The reduction of her sons to treasure and the destruction of so much wealth at the end hint at this. Could the wolf hair around her ring be a comment on wealth's strife-bringing power? When Guðrún does gain control of the poem's wealth, she throws it away or destroys it.

Conversely, her behaviour could be seen as reflecting a profound faith in wealth. Perhaps it is precisely because she values wealth so highly that she chooses it for the vehicle of her revenge on Atli, either destroying it or wielding it against him.

Or perhaps she wishes to die in a flurry of conspicuous consumption and wealth-destruction, much as her arch-rival Brynhildr does.

Dronke for her part feels much of Guðrún's behaviour at this point reflects her tender side, a demonstration of how she can show mercy: "killing only those who condoned the murder of her brothers, loosing the dogs as if to show her scorn of the Huns, and rousing the servants who have no part in her justice"⁸⁶ and later "The loosing of the dogs and the waking of the servants are brief statements of Guðrún's mercies interwoven with her acts of murder."⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Dronke, The Poetic Edda, p. 16.

Jón Helgason seems to agree, at least about the dogs: "Guðrún man eftir því í allri ógninni að leysa hundana svo að eldurinn grandi þeim ekki."⁸⁸

Other commentators have suggested this act is prompted more by a desire to deprive the Huns of any possible grave goods (and thus possible wealth in the afterlife) and to inflict the maximum possible dishonour.⁸⁹ This seems more plausible on many counts. Indeed, as Dronke noted earlier, Guðrún denudes the Huns of their gold in order to dishonour them. Why she not intend the same by depriving them of another form of wealth, their "hvólpar oc húskarlar"? Though she does not destroy these she at least causes them to abandon their owners, and eliminates any chance they would be burned with them for the afterlife.

In the final analysis, wealth is a very important factor in Atlaqviða. And though the poem's main theme is treachery, it depends on an extensive use of wealth to bring it off. It opens with an offer of wealth through gifts, and ends with the destruction of wealth through lavish giving, fire, and sword. All major characters in Atlaqviða are linked to wealth in some way. The poet devotes great care to his description of it, probably more so than any other

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 72.

⁸⁸ Jón Helgason, Tvær kviður fornar, p. 175

⁸⁹ I am indebted to Robert J. Glendinning for this viewpoint, who in turn ascribed it to Siegfried Gutenbrunner in an interview in November, 1986.

Eddic poet. Wealth is defined in terms of horses, weapons, clothes, servants, food, beverages, saddle-cloths, and armour. Atlaqviða is a poem where the accent is on luxury. Indeed, this luxury renders the atrocities performed all the more memorable.

What statements does Atlaqviða make about wealth? This is hard to say. On the one hand, the poet's evident admiration for it is balanced by its clear role as a conflict instigator. Wealth does no one any good in Atlaqviða and harm to many. There are no poor people in Atlaqviða. Even the "húskarlar" (if one accepts Dronke's interpretation "servants") get rich in the end. The poem takes place in a lavish, ornate world of kings and courts. Atlaqviða sees the clearest striving after wealth of any Eddic poem. Wealth is linked more closely to the success of the hero (through his denial of it to his foe) than any Eddic poem outside of Fáfnismál.

Atlaqviða says nothing directly against wealth. It has none of Hávamál's out and out sermonizing on the subject. Instead, it lets the wealth-driven actions of the participants speak for themselves. That is more effective than any amount of sermonizing.

Bribes figure very prominently in Atlaqviða. As is usually the case in the Edda they are of little effect. Great stress is laid on the idea of "at ráða auð" by both Atli and

Gunnarr, continuing the traditional view of ruling wealth enshrined in the other poems of this cycle. Those who would "ráða" everything all end up "ráðinn til bana" themselves.

Wealth as an independent force for evil in its own right may or may not exist in Atlaqviða. Certainly much evil is triggered by it. The protagonists, however, are quite evil to start with, they have little innocence to lose. Corruption is not an issue in Atlaqviða, primarily because its principals have already reached such a corrupt state.

2.0.28 Atlamál

Wealth is conspicuous by its absence in Atlamál. The lavish descriptions of gifts, bribes, and courts that set the scene in Atlaqviða are reduced to:

tóco þeir fórnir, er þeim fríð sendi,
hengðo á súlo, hugðoð þat varða.

Atli does not send any gifts at all, nor does he promise any. In one stroke the wealth/greed foundation for all of Atlaqviða is struck away. Guðrún is the one who sends gifts and these are ignored, hung on a hall-pillar. It effectively sums up the Atlamál poet's attitude toward wealth.

Even in situations that cry out for lavish depictions of wealth, the poet is quite restrained. Only in stanza 8 does a little luxury emerge in "Báro miðð mærar" and the communal drinking that follows. And it is not until stanza 13 that

it is revealed the prospect of gold does entice Hogni to Atli's court: "ocr mun gramr gulli reifa glóðrauðo." This certainly does not confirm that gifts have been offered. Indeed, so stark is the contrast between the two poems on this point that Andersson asserts: "...gifts are made much of in Atlaqviða and the unfounded allusion to gifts in Atlamál inevitably looks like a reflex of this motif".⁹⁰

This reveals a number of important divergences from the Atlaqviða story. First, it is clear that Atli does not use gold to lure the brothers there, Hogni simply anticipates that it will be offered (hence the use of the auxiliary "muna"). Second, Hogni seems very susceptible to the lure of gold. He makes no counterboast of his own wealth here, indeed, he does not seem to possess any. It seems a lower budget version of Hogni is being presented here, one who is at once poor and eager for gold.

There is very little wealth in the dreams of doom either. Some dirty linen and a few domestic animals are all. No horses figure in this world. It is all sailing, rowing, and walking.

With stanza 25, however, clothing begins to take on a more prominent aspect. The dead dreamwomen "værit vart bú-nar", an expression that Dronke (p. 82) translates "they were not ill-arrayed." Gering and Sijmons (p. 375) trans-

⁹⁰ Theodore M. Andersson, "Did the Poet of Atlamál Know Atlaqviða?" in Edda A Collection of Essays p. 252.

late it as "mangelhaft (d.h. gar nicht?) bekleidet" and R.C. Boer (p. 311) as "nicht schlecht (also standesgemäss) gekleidet."

The Atlamál poet remains very restrained in his description of clothing, however. Though he admits the Gjúkung women "fóro fagrbúnar" he does not elaborate. It is hard to imagine the Atlaqviða poet passing up an opportunity like this.

Even the wealth represented by retainers is on a far smaller scale in this poem. The Gjúkungs have all of six men at their disposal, whereas Atli commands the sum total of thirty (stanzas 30, 54).

The heroes proceed toward their destination not on "marina mélgreypo," but on a boat that disintegrates beneath them. Admittedly this may result more from their own frenzied rowing than the deficiencies of their transport, but it is not clear in the text. As it is, their creaky, dilapidated "bátakostur" may be an omen of the wretched fate in store for them.

The arrival at Atli's court reveals a similar level of poverty there. The palace of Attila is reduced to "bæ...er Buðli átti." Even the Gjúkung axes seem dull, more like something out of Gerpla than the heroic age. It takes them quite a few blows to kill Vingi, at least (stanza 41). Gerling and Sijmons note (II:381) that this is the only place in the Edda where axes are wielded.

Atlamál is pervaded with an air of the paltry and the cheap. Atli's men have byrnies but these seem to be their only valuable accoutrements. The only wealthy character in Atlamál at this stage seems to be Guðrún. This is all the more striking when one recalls the scant reference to her wealth in Atlaqviða. Apart from the "fagrbúnar" women of stanza 31, no one has appeared so wealthy up to this point in Atlamál.

When Guðrún hears of her brothers' arrival, however, she becomes a wealth destroyer:

hlaðinn hálsmeniom,	hreytti hon þeim gervöl-
lom,	
sløngði svá silfri,	at í sundr hruto baugar.

This wealth-destruction is the first demonstration of the dichotomy of Guðrún, the passive wife kept in regal comfort and the active, dynamic warrior who wields a naked sword beside her brothers. By destroying or casting aside her wealth, she makes the transition from the world of comfort to the world of war. This heightens the drama of the situation. It is the one time where the Atlamál poet does not seem to be afraid to describe wealth lavishly.

It is interesting that of all the characters from Atlaqviða, Guðrún is the only one that does not diminish in Atlamál. The wealth she bears is proof of this. Whereas Gunnar, Atli, and Högni may have all degenerated into smallholders fighting over trifles, Guðrún is still very much a

regal commanding figure, adorned with necklaces and silver armrings.

In the battle that follows there is no word of wealth. It next appears in the exchange of recriminations that follows the fight. Atli and Guðrún accuse each other of stealing. Atli says she has (stanza 56): "fé opt svikinn" and has cost him kinsmen and wealth. This accusation sounds at once petty and dubious, especially as there's no sign of Guðrún's avarice in other poems, or even elsewhere in Atlamáli. Moreover, even the meaning of "fé opt svikinn" is unclear, as Gering and Sijmons note (II:387):

Worauf diese Äußerung sich bezieht, bleibt dunkel. Das fé könnte die heimanfylgja der Brynhildr sein, welche die Gjukungen (auf rat der Guðrún) nicht zurückgeliefert hätten.

Boer admits to a similar degree of uncertainty (p. 315) but Dronke does not.

The link to the Brynhildr story offers the most plausible explanation Atli's remark. The textual evidence for it, however, is nil. And if the first reference to wealth is obscure, Guðrún's reply is totally impenetrable, at least in the context of the story as we have it (stanza 57): "móður tóct mína oc myrðir til hnossa."

Atli's alleged murder of Guðrún's mother for wealth is not attested to anywhere else, though scholars have cited everything from ballads to historical sources on Attila in

their search for parallels.⁹¹

This raises the most puzzling enigma of Atlamál, the absence of the hoard motif from the central drama. For Guðrún's words certainly suggest Atli is one who would readily murder for money, yet this does not seem to be what makes him kill the Gjúkungs. Moreover, it is clear that the concept of wealth as a conflict instigator was by no means unfamiliar to the Atlamál poet. Yet the wealth motif is absent from the slaying of the brothers. Neither Gunnarr nor Högni are asked if they want to buy their lives with gold. This means Gunnarr's only possible way of spiting Atli is lost, making his death all the more pointless. To compensate, the Atlamál poet gives both brothers a more lengthy death scene, and Högni a chance to demonstrate his drengskapr by saving a slave. It still serves to diminish the stature of the Gjúkungs considerably, however, for without the denial of the secret their heroics have far less impact.

The absence of the wealth-motif here gravely weakens the rationale behind Atli's murder of the brothers too. There is not even any talk of avenging Brynhildr, try as scholars may to explain the killings on these grounds. Atli does not even say why he does it, apart from his wish that it will hurt Guðrún (stanza 58).

⁹¹ Dronke, The Poetic Edda, p. 104.

Wealth's limitations begin to emerge in stanza 70. There Atli seems to wish to compensate Guðrún for her brothers. It is a strange twist, given the stress he placed on hurting her only a few stanzas before. In Atlaqviða, by contrast, Atli makes no reference to Guðrún during the killing, nor does he express any second thoughts about the deed. The hoard-motif there would make either of these courses extremely unlikely. But here, the Atlamál Atli, having run roughshod over Guðrún in every way, and seemingly getting pleasure from this, now expects to buy back her affection. This makes him even crasser than his Atlaqviða counterpart. It also suggests a faith in the power of wealth that has few Eddic parallels.

For all the brutality that Atli has perpetrated thus far, this is the most spectacular demonstration of how insensitive and deluded he has become. His confidence in the power of wealth knows no bounds. Like all those other Eddic characters who seek to use wealth to buy peace, he fails utterly. Though textual corruptions make it unclear whether he offers "meniom" or "mani" (which Neckel/Kuhn⁹² conjecture could refer to female slaves), Atli believes that Guðrún is someone who can be bribed. But "him seo wen ge Leah."

Even though Guðrún indignantly refuses self-judgement in this case, her subsequent words show that wealth is dear to her, at least that of her childhood memories: "gæddi ocr

⁹² Neckel/Kuhn, Edda: Kurzes Worterbuch p. 70.

Grímildr gulli oc hálsmeniom." This is something else that distinguishes her from her Atlaqviða counterpart, whose views on wealth are obscure. Gold and necklaces are among her fondest memories of her youth, there is little sign of wealth moving men to do evil there. Yet we know Atli will murder Grímildr (stanza 57) for the treasures she dispenses so freely here (stanza 72).

One curious thing about Atlamál is that wealth that is imagined (stanza 13) and remembered (stanza 72) tends to be gold (if in precious metal form at all) while wealth that is present (stanza 46) or in the immediate offering (stanza 70) tends to be silver.

The next expression of wealth comes in the ale-feast. There Guðrún seems to be in control, despite the statement "Kropp var þá Guðrún." (stanza 75). The ale-feast swiftly shows that, as in Atlaqviða, sons are considered to be the greatest treasure of all. Guðrún's slaying of her children is even more horrific in Atlamál, because the death scene (like all the other death scenes in Atlamál) is more drawn out, and the children allowed to speak for themselves. The opulence of the drinking scene also provides an intensifying backdrop for the horror.

Though Dronke (p. 135) feels the poet goes too far here: "the elaboration of the grisly meal...destroys the realism that the poet of Akv achieved", it does help compensate for

the absence of wealth from the heart of the poem. In the absence of the hoard-motif, the elaborate description of the meal does establish Atli's greed. Up to this point he has made so few demands he seems quite unlike his Atlaqviða counterpart, whatever his other personal shortcomings.

The references to wealth in Atli's dying speech, however, do not support the view of him as a niggard. Again, though, one is left with the impression that he views himself through rose-coloured glasses, that his own view of his actions and motivations is more charitable than it should be. Certainly Guðrún does not hesitate to contradict him.

In stanzas 93-95 Atli enumerates the wealth they enjoyed in their life together:

alt var ítarlict um órar ferðir.

Margs var allz sómi, manna tíginna,
naut vóro ærin nutom af stórom
þar var fiqlø fiár, fengo til margir.

Mund galt ec mærrí, meiðma fiqlø þiggia,
þræla þriá tigo, þýiar siau góðar
sæmð var at slíco, silfr var þó meira.

Atli clearly felt their life together was well-supplied with material comforts. The things he defines as having value are cattle (naut), fé, meiðma fiqlø, slaves, and silver. In cattle, at least, this is a suggestion that this Atli is more agrarian than his Atlaqviða counterpart. Indeed, "naut" seldom appear in any Eddic poems outside the realm of the giants.

More significant is that stanza 95 is possibly an oblique reference to the Niflung hoard, as Glendinning has noted:

there is indeed a reference to treasure in Am. Atli himself states clearly in stanza 95 that he married Guðrún in order to gain a treasure (undoubtedly to be construed as Sigurðr's treasure)...⁹³

Some commentators have seen a textual problem in the last line of stanza 95 "silfr var þó meira." Some find comparing silver to servants akin to comparing apples and oranges. Dronke, however, disagrees, saying "it is unnecessary to suppose . . . that mention of (a smaller quantity of) gold has been lost from the stanza. The sense is 'not only numerous slaves, but abundant silver too'."⁹⁴

Atli's case is difficult to analyze, given that Guðrún believes him a liar in any event. From Atli's remarks it is clear he feels he has done his duty by Guðrún by providing her with this wealth. Her finding of this to be inadequate he finds arrogant. The idea of consumption is clearly attached to this wealth, as shown by the verb "nióta" in stanza 94.

Guðrún's great sin, according to Atli, is her rapacity, strange as this may sound coming from the greediest character in the Edda. There also seems to be an implication of a misuse of wealth here. Wealth as comfort clearly does not

⁹³ Robert J. Glendinning "Guðrúnarqviða forna. A Reconstruction and Interpretation" Edda: Essays, p. 273-274.

⁹⁴ Dronke, The Poetic Edda, p. 138

satisfy her. She demands wealth as power, in the form of the lands bequeathed to Atli by Buðli (stanza 96):

Léztu þér alt þiccia, sem ekki væri,
meðan lönd þau lágo, er mér leifði Buðli

Two different value systems are clashing here. Certainly for Atli it seems few failings can be worse than failing to appreciate wealth properly. He seems to feel he has fulfilled his part of the bargain. Indeed, it is almost as if he has bought Guðrún. He has done his share and it is her responsibility to repay him in kind.

Later this sort of tension will be echoed in the family sagas, in the freespending characters of Laxdæla's Guðrún and Njála's Hallgerðr. In both cases it will prove fatal to the marriage involved.

Here, however, the motif is superfluous. Guðrún has more than ample justification to kill Atli, the murderer of her brothers. Bringing their household finances into it just makes the wrangling all the more petty. Again, though, it reflects to Guðrún's credit that she does not descend to that level. While Atli talks of cattle, slaves, and silver and Guðrún's failure to appreciate them, Guðrún exposes the house of Atli for the rotten institution that it is.

It is clear in both Atlaqviða and Atlamál that we are supposed to regard Atli as a deluded personality. What deludes him is the only question. What makes him so blind

that he fails to see Guðrún's plans until it is too late? Is it simple drunkenness? Is he fey? Or is it wealth-blindness?

Here, the last-mentioned seems the most likely. Atli honestly seems incapable of appreciating what breach of trust and murder have done to his relationship with Guðrún. To him, it is nothing compared with her failure to appreciate his wealth. Wealth should compensate for all, by his philosophy.

Indeed, it is tempting to speculate that in both Atlamál and Atlagviða Atli may have based his security vis a vis Guðrún on his wealth. Presumably with her family gone, destroying Atli would leave her destitute. Indeed, in the prose section that follows Atlamál, there is no sign of Guðrún having any wealth or other supporters. Atli was so attached to wealth and the good life that it seems to have been inconceivable to him that someone could knowingly act in a way that would cost her this. Guðrún's revenge is an emphatic assertion that she is not a prisoner of wealth, that she is not so attached to comfort that it will thwart her revenge. Like the true hero she is prepared to cast all her material welfare aside to achieve revenge. Just as the key moment in the rejuvenation of the kolbíttr is when he forsakes the material comforts of the hearth for the hard world of the avenging hero, so too is Guðrún's demonstration that Atli's wealth has no hold on her. She is not a passive

bird in a gilded cage, but a bird of prey in her own right. The fact that such dynamism would be so unusual in a woman only increases the impact of her deeds.

It also makes for a stronger contrast with Atli. Just as his Atlaqviða counterpart assumes that the Gjúkungs will not be able to resist the offer of wealth contained in his invitation, so does the Atlamál Atli assume that Guðrún will not dare risk the loss of all wealth by striking at him or pass up his compensation offer. This shows Atli is duped in a way Guðrún is not. Here, at least, she is the clear-seeing one, and Atli the victim of delusion.

To be sure, in Atlamál this is weakened by the underdevelopment of the bribe motif at the outset of the poem. We do not hear Atli making offers so much as Högni anticipating his gifts. It is not until his offer of compensation to Guðrún, and his death-bed complaining that there are clear signs of wealth-blindness in Atli.

Is Atli stingy? The answer depends on whose testimony one trusts, Atli's or Guðrún's. Even though Guðrún says that Atli lies, however, she does not directly contradict his claims of having provided her with material comforts (stanza 97). Indeed, her answer, which follows, is reminiscent of the fable of the sword of Damocles, the message that material comforts are nothing if possessed in a climate of danger, enmity, treachery, and conflict. She concludes her

enumeration of the internecine conflicts within Atli's house with "hroldi hotvetna, þat er til hags scyldi." Yet in the following verse (stanza 98) she revels in the memory of the martial exploits she shared with her brothers. Perhaps it is the lack of trust in Atli's house, rather than danger itself, that makes its wealth so worthless to her.

The wealth she gloats about seizing in her Viking days (stanza 99) is in the form of land, adding a little credence to Atli's accusations of land-grabbing in stanza 96. But above all, Guðrún seems to have prized the power wealth gave her, if not power for its own sake. Stanza 99 is all about her overturning of the social order, repatriating outlaws, changing bonds of allegiance, and making the poor prosperous:

Konung drápom fyrstan, kurom land þaðra,
hersar oss á hǫnd gengo, hræzlo þat vissi
vágom ór scógi, þannz vildom sycnan,
settom þann sælan, er sér né áttið.

This making of the last first is not something one would expect from Guðrún, or any other Eddic character for that matter. It has very few Eddic parallels. Hárr's gift of clothing to the treemen in Hávamál (stanza 49) comes to mind here, and possibly Guðrún's saving of the dogs and house-carls in Atlaqviða, (stanza 41) provided one interprets this in a positive light. Dronke has the following explanation for it:

This idealized Viking behaviour is presumably based partly on political experience - the invaders release the enemies of the old regime - and

partly on Christian legends of the Robin Hood type
 - the poor are made rich by benevolent robbers. I
 have found no other literary parallels.⁹⁵

Certainly it is a strange reference, very difficult to explain in terms of Guðrún's character or Eddic attitudes towards the social structure in general. It does offer a struck rebuttal to Atli's materialism, however. They made the poor "sælan" while Atli felt the loss of every penny he ever gave, if his recriminations in Atlamál are any guide.

Finally, the poem closes with Atli's last request - a lavish funeral. Guðrún's apparent willingness to grant this request is taken by at least one commentator as indicative of "a final reconciliation": "Like the dying Brynhildr, Atli asks for a noble burial, and Guðrún, shedding all rancour, promises it to him."⁹⁶

It is in some ways more reminiscent of those saga women who are quite willing to give burial plots aplenty to those who died slaying their husbands, lovers, or kinsmen, such as one finds in Njála or Gíslasaga. Their cooperation does not express any sort of reconciliation. Or perhaps it is just a reiteration that Guðrún's hatred is not petty or cheap, tht she is still willing to observe the social norms by giving her husband a fancy funeral. To do otherwise would diminish her more than it would Atli. It is also as if the poet at

⁹⁵ Dronke, The Poetic Edda, p. 139

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 103.

the last moment sought something that would show that Guðrún was not a níðing, despite the níðingsverk she had perpetrated on her sons. It is another demonstration that wealth has no claim on her, that she will even dispense it on a vanquished foe, if the occasion is appropriate. Given the lack of a spectacular Götterdämmerung type finish in Atlamál, it produces a terminal flourish that would otherwise allow the poem to end on a mute note. It also links Atli to his sister Brynhildr, through their common preference for magnificent funerals.

In the final analysis, Atlamál's treatment of wealth is rather curious. On the one hand, wealth on the grand scale of the Niflung hoard is absent. Despite dealing with essentially the same legendary material as Atlaqviða, the Atlamál poet omits what is the very foundation for the conflict in Atlaqviða, the treasure. As Einar Ólafur Sveinsson notes (p. 503): "Engin sjást þess merki, að Atli dregi Gjúkasonu til fjár, og er þeim ekki boðið að leysa líf sitt með gjaldi." Moreover, as part of Atlamál's greater emphasis on the interior landscape, as opposed to the worldly setting, as Sveinsson notes (p. 505), what wealth there is in Atlamál receives far less coverage than its Atlaqviða counterpart. This is particularly true in the earlier stages of the poem, as in the proffering of the gifts to the Gjúkungs. As Einar Ólafur Sveinsson notes (p. 505):

Í Atlaqviðu eru fjórar vísur um kostgripi Atla og þeirra bræðra, sjónrænar upptalningar dýrgrípa; í Atlamálum verður úr því "okkr mun gramr gulli reifa glóðrauða", það er alt og sumt."

Yet, oddly enough, wealth is seen to be a major conflict instigator in the final stages of the poem, although it is not the Niflung hoard. Both Guðrún and Atli catalogue a host of conflicts arising from wealth.

Thus, Atlamál's omission of the hoard-motif is curious in the extreme. It is all the more striking that in stanza 95 some echo of the original hoard-motif seems to persist, yet it is absent from the central drama. Conversely, one wonders if it could have been added to the story after Atlamál's day, as opposed to being dropped from it by the Atlamál poet or his predecessor. For it is very difficult to imagine the hoard-motif being dropped from the tradition once it was in there, since it explains so many things so well.

Could Atlamál in fact be an older version of the legend, preserved on the fringes (i.e., Greenland), as is often the case with older traditions? This of course would fly in the face of one of the few scholarly consensuses about Atlamál. By virtue of its rougher setting, greater realism, and por-very, many scholars have tended to consign Atlamál to the wastes of Greenland rather than to more civilized realms closer to the centre.

One wonders if Atlamál, by virtue of its greater realism, in fact stands closer to the events it depicts than Atlaqviða. Perhaps Attila the Hun was closer to a small farmer with 30 farmhands than the scourge of Europe. But such

questions are really outside of the scope of this thesis. Except that they suggest that wealth alone does not determine the provenance of the two Atli-poems.

Atli's character does not profit from the excision of the hoard-motif. On the contrary, at least if one accepts the charges of Guðrún, he still comes across as one who kills for wealth. Moreover, his torture-slaying of the brothers seems even more vindictive in Atlamál, given that there is no secret to be wrung from them there. In fact, there seems to be no motivation for his act other than pure sadism, making it the most pointless and vicious case of this in the Edda.

Moreover, the Atlamál Atli is just as attached to wealth as his Atlaqviða counterpart, and just as blinded by it. If anything, the Atlaqviða Atli is a little more understandable, given that he is striving for the mightiest treasure-hoard ever known in the North. The Atlamál Atli's ambitions and concerns, though evil, are small-change and petty by comparison.

The Guðrún of Atlamál seems more wealth-oriented than her Atlaqviða counterpart. At least Atli's accusations bear this out. But wealth seems to mean more to Guðrún as power than comfort, hence her tastes seem to run more to land than beer-dainties. And she is not so attached to wealth that she cannot destroy it, as when girding for battle with her

brothers. She is not a slave to wealth, unlike Atli. She can and does take steps that strike at the heart of her wealth and security, i.e., her husband. That Atli cannot conceive of anyone stepping outside of this framework renders him more vulnerable than anything to Guðrún's fatal thrust.

Atlamál in the end can be interpreted as the story of a woman's willingness to sacrifice the very basis of her wealth and security to achieve revenge. Just as her brothers moved beyond the pale of their wealth and security when they visited Atli, so does Guðrún echo this when she kills him. The brothers' abandonment of wealth and security brought their deaths, Guðrún's brought revenge.

Guðrún's break with Atli really comes with stanza 46. There she breaks and casts away her jewels, presumably given her by Atli (he certainly spoke of giving her many jewels, though these are not necessarily the ones in question)(stanza 95). Just as the giving of a ring has proven the final straw on more than one occasion in Reginismál, so too is this "ungiving", this return and angry destruction of a gift. Guðrún's ties to Atli severed when she "slongði svá silfri, at í sundr hruto baugar" (stanza 46).

When she casts away her rings, Guðrún shows that she is prepared to cast away everything if need be. The deal between her and Atli has been broken. The ring-breaking is a

very powerful image here, given the role rings have played in defining agreements elsewhere in the Edda, and the associations of ring-breaking with lordly generosity.

Atli, on the other hand, is bound to wealth. He tries to cling to it even after death. He cannot understand those who would sacrifice all wealth to achieve a higher end. And when Guðrún grants him that wealth after death, it eloquently demonstrates the profound difference between their values and motivations. Moreover, when they sum up their grievances against one another, wealth is far more prominent on Atli's list than on Guðrún's.

Why wealth is so much more important at the end of Atlamál than at the beginning remains puzzling. Why is everyone there so much poorer? Does it really reflect the greater poverty of the society that produced the poem (as assumed by those who favour a Greenland origin for Atlamál), or is there another significance?

Like many other Eddic poems, Atlamál sees a bribe used in an attempt to buy peace from an injured party. As always, the offer is refused. This seems to be the sole function of Eddic bribes. And as usual, this bribe-attempt follows hard on the heels of a killing, and only seems to make things worse. It certainly makes the briber a lesser man, whatever else.

Why does Atli make this attempt to buy peace? Is he afraid of Guðrún? Does he really feel remorse for the torture-slaying of her brothers? This latter is difficult to believe given the lengths he went to achieve it, but not impossible.

More than anything, however, in the absence of the hoard-motif wealth serves to demonstrate the calumny of Atli and thereby softens the grim image Guðrún has as the slayer of her children. Even without the hoard, wealth in Atlamál puts Atli in a very unfavourable light, making him greedy and niggardly at the same time. This helps make the poem much more comprehensible. The clash between Atli and Guðrún's views on wealth helps define the conflict between them.

2.0.29 Guðrúnarhvot

Guðrúnarhvot does not revolve around wealth. The poet's treatment of it, however, reveals him to be of the Atlaqviða rather than the Atlamál school. He is clearly one who likes describing wealth and treasures in detail. His is a world of horses, not ships. And Guðrúnarhvot is linked with the dramas that precede and follow Guðrún's marriage to Atli, something lacking in Atlamál. For example, as early as stanza 4 there is a reference to her "bæcr bláhvíto", in a flashback to Sigurðr's death. Much of the latter part of the poem will focus on memories of Sigurðr as well.

Wealth displays are linked to all the major events in the poem. Guðrún's daughter isn't just trampled to death by horses, instead it is done by "íóm . . . / hvítom oc svor-
tom, . . . / grám, gangtómom Gotna hrossom." (stanza 2).

In part, this reflects the poet's tendency to go into greater detail, to lavish more attention on the description of things and settings.

The sons signal their acquiescence to their mother's "hvöt" by demanding treasure:

Berið hnossir fram Húnkonunga!
hefir þú ocr hvatta at hiörþingi.' (stanza 6)

This transfer of wealth really has no counterpart in the Edda. One thinks, perhaps, of Skírnir's demands on the eve of his journey into jötunheimr, but that is a demand for tools to do the job, a necessary prerequisite for his acceptance of the mission impossible. Here, however, the sons announce their decision to set out simultaneously with their demand for "hnossir." They are not setting a price or exacting a bribe, they seem more to be announcing "now is the time."

It seems like a rite of passage. Up to this point, Guðrún has been the guardian of the family treasure. And up to this point, the "hvöt" has frequently seemed a childish family altercation, the fanatic mother goading the lazy sons into something they'd be better off keeping out of. With

the request for weapons and the "hnossir Húnkonunga", a bridge has been crossed. With that, the boys have become men, and there is no turning back. The wealth given over to them confirms their adult status. At the very same moment as they assume the adult responsibility of revenge they gain the rights of adults to dispose of the family treasure. They go from the wards of their mother to her legal guardians.

This has no counterpart in the Edda. Only in the youthful exploits of the heroes Sigurðr and Helgi is wealth associated with a transition into manhood.

Once the treasure has been transferred, Guðrún loses all her power and indeed much of her function in the poem. Now her sons have their patrimony, and their ways part forever.

And what are these fateful treasures? The description in stanza 7, though not lengthy, is detailed. They all relate to war:

Hlæandi Guðrún	hvarf til scemmo,
kumbl konunga	ór kerom valði,
síðar brynior,	ok sonom færði

It is an ironic reversal of the "treasure distribution" motif of Helreið Brynhildar and Atlagviða. There, those about to die gave away their treasures. Here, those about to die receive them.

Such martial treasures are often the repositories of a family's luck (see for example Víga-Glúms saga). The sons may accept them in this way. One cannot help but wonder what such luck would be worth, given the terrible fates suffered by all Guðrún's husbands, brothers, and children up to this point. And indeed, in Hamðismál her sons meet a singularly unlucky end. It is hard not to think that these treasures have some hand in the disaster, just as Tyrping and various Óðinn-supplied treasures brought doom to those who bore them. Certainly this would not be at odds with the stress laid on evil treasure in the poems at the beginning of this cycle, nor the idea of such treasure bringing evil to those who inherit it. The use of the term "Hún" in "hnoossir Húnkonunga" is also fraught with associations, as Dronke notes (p. 157): "I am inclined to think that the term here derives from a more general use of 'Hun' to denote a fierce exotic race (famous for horses, swords, seamstress-es...)." .

If it does refer to their mother's previous husbands, though, as Dronke admits (p. 157): "...it is possible that Hun here refers specifically either to the family of Sigurðr . . . or to that of Atli . . ." the treasure will bring out the connotations of doom and "ǫrlög" it has had ever since being wrested from the dwarf for a god-ransom. Perhaps it helps explain the apparently magical powers of the sons during their death-ride in Hamðismál.

Once the treasures have been delivered to the sons, there is no turning back: "hlóðuz móðgir á mara bógo" (stanza 7). The sons are forgotten and the focus turns to Guðrún's troubles in the distant past.

There is little wealth in these recollections, a far cry from the golden reminiscings of Atlamál. It is not until the memories of Svanhildr begin that there is reference to wealth, this time in the form of slaves and the gold and "guðvefiar" that Guðrún adorned Svanhildr with. The gold here seems to harken back to an earlier time, when gold was not the "rógmálmr" that brought strife to so many. It is reminiscent of the golden age the Æsir enjoyed on Íðavellir, early in Völuspá.

The wealth here makes a sharp contrast with the image of Svanhildr being crushed down into the mud. Her golden adornments and fine clothes make the image of her crushed in the mud even more compelling.

Though Guðrún catalogues a lengthy chain of woes in her tregróf, material dearth is not among them. It is a contrast with Hávamál, where the agonies of poverty and destitution are frequently mentioned. The only material reflection of her woes comes in stanza 18:

sitr eigi hér	snør né dóttir,
sú er Guðrúno	gæfi hnossir.

Guðrún is alone, and that loneliness isolates her from the gifting system. Is it the gifts she really misses, or the esteem they represent? Is there any sign she is missing material wealth for its own sake? Dronke does not focus on this question (p. 157):

Guðrún looks at her deserted women's quarters, where a queen-mother would expect her daughters and daughters-in-law to visit her and bring her gifts out of affection and policy.

Jón Helgason notes there are difficulties, however:

Guðrún vîkur að einstæðingsskap sínum, að engin kona henni nákominn er viðstödd, enda á hún engar; sumum hefur þótt óviðfelldið að hún skuli vera að hugsa um gjafir þegar hér er komið.⁹⁷

Is Guðrún a materialist? The evidence of Guðrúnarhvöt does not permit a definite answer. Moreover, if one ventures outside its narrow confines, a host of contradictions emerge between her depiction there and in Atlaqviða and Atlamál. If one accepts Atli's accusations in Atlamál, then one can interpret stanza 18 as another sign of Guðrún's avarice. If one recalls Guðrún's apparent anti-materialism in Atlaqviða, however, then one will credit Guðrún with cherishing the gifts because of the relationship they represent. By lamenting her lack of gifts and gift-givers in the tregróf, Guðrún is really lamenting her social isolation, not material items. And given the dedication to her ideals of justice that lie at the heart of Guðrúnarhvöt, this seems

⁹⁷ Jón Helgason, Kviður af Gotum og Húnum: Hamðismál, Guðrúnarhvöt, Hlökkviða. (Reykjavík, Heimskringla, 1967) p. 144.

the more plausible interpretation. She readily sacrifices treasures and sons for the justice she seeks. This is not the behaviour of a materialist.

Conversely, however, one should not too readily assign Atli a monopoly on greed. For this stanza 18 is another hint that his spouse was not free of it herself.

Short though Guðrúnarhvot is, it does reveal Guðrún in a role that has some strong parallels with her counterpart in the Atli-poems. This comes across very clearly in the realm of wealth-distribution and gift-giving. In all three poems she functions as a last survivor such as founds the dragon-hoard in Beowulf, a distributor of treasure after the male head of the line is gone. In all these situations she is the skillful giver, one who gives with a purpose. That purpose, in all the poems, is linked to revenge. In all three the revenge is accomplished through a gift that destroys her sons, either directly or indirectly. In all three the gift costs her that which is most precious to her in order to encompass the destruction of that which is most hateful to her.

Guðrún, moreover, is a successful giver. Where Atli's bribes fail (and indeed he complains extensively about this in Atlamál) her gifts work. Even if they are not the motivating force in Guðrúnarhvot, they complete the process her "hvot" begins. With the acceptance of their patrimony, her

sons accept the revenge obligations that go with it (just as royal gifts in Heimskringla often entail formidable revenge obligations). At the same time, the manhood she had been questioning is affirmed. The gifts are at once compensation and proof that compensation is not necessary. Guðrún has said terrible things to her sons. Now she gives them treasure, not only in recompense, but at their request. It is her own admission that the charges are no longer true.

And by requesting the treasure, her sons demonstrate that they are prepared to do her will. By granting it to them, she recognizes them as men, for her gifts are the very basis of her heritage, not children's playthings.

One thing that Guðrún does not do is reproach her sons for enjoying wealth. This differs from many other hvöts found in the sagas, or the áfryjunarorð used to wake kolbíturs from their stupors (as in Örvar-Odds saga, for example). She criticizes her sons for indolence but not for wealth-consumption. Wealth is not linked to vice or weakness in any way in Guðrúnarhvöt.

Guðrúnarhvöt seems to close with a wish for a fine funeral. In this, Guðrún finally shares a common wish with Atli and Brynhildr. With that, the ring is closed. In death, at least, she is materialistic.

2.0.30 Hamðismál

In Hamðismál, the hvot conclusion differs in one significant way from that of Guðrúnarhvot. There is no treasure, no gifting. The sons simply acquiesce to Guðrún's demands. Moreover, though there is no gift of family treasure to mark an initiation into manhood, the sons seem more mature to begin with. Guðrún refers to them as "þióðkonunga" in stanza 4, something which has no counterpart in Guðrúnarhvot. The "bæcr...inar bláhvíto" are there, but no other sign of wealth-consumption or feasting.

In fact, wealth is of little importance in the poem until Erpr is slain. Then his brothers "smugo í guðvefi" (stanza 16) and seem to take some pains about their appearance. Both Dronke and Helgason interpret this as based on pride, on a concern about the figures they will cut:

They robe themselves flamboyantly . . . in conscious pride of birth, for they are goðbornir, divinely descended children of a great Germanic house.⁹⁸

Helgason elaborates on this point:

Bræður hafa farið yfir úrig fjöll, líklega í vosklæðum, og auk þess hafa þeir atað sig í blóði og moldu þá er þeir drápu Erp og dysjuðu. Nú tygja þeir sig sem bezt, því að ekki hlýðir að þeir komi til konungshallar eins og förumenn.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Dronke, The Poetic Edda, p. 171.

⁹⁹ Jón Helgason, Kviður af Gotum og Húnum, p. 112-113.

Events later in the poem suggest the "guðvefi" may be magically protective, certainly not an outlandish assumption about an article of clothing linked to the gods. Such a usage has no other counterpart in Old Icelandic, however.

Dronke frequently cites the poet's skilled use of contrasts to set the mood in Hamðismál (p. 171). Wealth often figures in these contrasts. For example, the sons' foes are conspicuous consumers, and revel in it: "Glaumr var í hǫllo, halir ǫlreifir" (stanza 18). The din, tumult, and cheer of this meadhall is all the louder contrasted with the grim gibbet outside in the cold. It epitomizes the deluded wealth-intoxication of the villains, much like that of the Beowulf dragon who trusted in the power of his barrow (lines 2322-2323): "beorges getruwode / wiges ond wealles; him seo wen ge Leah."

The arch-enemy, Iǫrmunreccr, is the picture of deluded, evil opulence, stroking his beard and laughing over a golden wine-goblet as the hand begins writing on the wall for him (stanza 20):

Hló þá Iǫrmunreccr,	hendi drap á kampa,
beiddiz at brǫngo,	þǫðvaðiz at víni
scóc hann scǫr iarpa,	sá á sciöld hvítan,
lét hann sér í hendi	hvarfa ker gullit.

Though the sons are not poor, more stress is laid on the wealth of their enemies. The foes' wealth is an element in their ostensible superiority, the advantage of numbers and a stronghold against a few lonely travellers from without. It

soon becomes clear that this wealth is a negative factor, however, a major element in the delusion of their foes. And just as that wealth epitomises their strength and advantage, its overthrow attests to their defeat.

With but two words in stanza 23 , "stucco ǫlscálir", the overthrow of the Goths is crystallized into an unforgettable image. Just as the vessels rattling in the pantry exemplified Guðrún's anguish at the death of Sigurðr, so do the flying alecups display the downfall of the Goths:

Styrr varð í ranni, stucco ǫlscálir,
í blóði bragnar lágo, komið ór briósti Gotna.

In their drinking the Goths are as blindly confident as any Atli, any dragon. They are just as brutally overthrown. The transition from golden goblets full of wine to blood-spattered alecups comes in the drawing of a breath. Once again wealth proves "valtastr vina."

Wealth is not a conflict-instigator, or a motivator of any kind in Hamðismál. It is a powerful literary device there, used to clarify the difference between the wilderness-cold world of the revenge-seeker and the comfortable, fatal complacency of his targets. It neither impells action nor works evil there, however.

Hubris proves fatal to the heroes of Hamðismál. It is, however, an overweening pride in themselves, in their own powers. They are not blind so much as short-sighted, a

quantum difference from the delusion of Iǫrmunreccr and his cronies, their faith in his wealth as represented by his retainers, his stronghold, his wine, and his byrnie. That is their most decisive advantage in the end.

Given the whole slant of the poem, it is hard not to feel the poet enjoyed demonstrating that wealth was "valtastr vina" here. The rich are the ones who get their come-uppance in the end in Hamðismál. The sons are not paupers, but they are not defined by their wealth. They take care to dress for the occasion of their grand entry into Iǫrmunreccr's hall. When such gross overconfidence as Iǫrmunreccr's is flaunted, it is clearly doomed to be humbled.

Wealth is not part of the final drama in Hamðismál. The environment reverts to the purely heroic, in which material possessions are unimportant. Just as the Codex Regius ends anticlimactically on this note, the culmination of the brothers "óför" through their own folly, so too does the treatment of wealth end. The Codex Regius leaves us with no definitive statement on it, apart from the gnomic wisdom of Hávamál. It is up to us to construct such as we can from the accumulated evidence of the poems.

Chapter III

CONCLUSIONS

In the end, this whole investigation of the Eddic wealth concept can be summed up as an attempt to answer two questions: What is Eddic wealth and what is its function?

The answer to the first, as noted in the introduction, is based on that which is depicted as having value in the Codex Regius. In the course of this investigation it has become clear that the Codex Regius has depicted this value in many ways.

The most direct way, that of simply stating what has value, is very uncommon in the Codex Regius. Of all the Eddic poems, Hávamál comes closest to this direct approach. It talks about what there is need of, what is good to have and to give.

Most of the wealth concept in the Codex Regius is revealed obliquely, however. Something is shown to have value through its use as a bribe or a gift, or simply as a motivator of action. Value is also revealed when something is shown to be missed, when the lack of something is felt, or when its loss or destruction is lamented or threatened. Things of value are revealed when men strive after them or

attempt to deny them to others. Even the very act of creation, such as one finds in Völuspá stanza 7's "auð smiðoðo" reveals value, for why create something unless it has value?

To be sure, there are certain things created or depicted as having value that transcend traditional notions of wealth. Some of the grander things created in Völuspá fall into this category (though the major components of the cosmos, the sun, moon, stars, and the earth itself are not so much created as organized there).

Hávamál for its part assigns value to a number of intangibles. Their role in the wealth concept is not always easy to determine. Foremost among these is wisdom. Wisdom is repeatedly cited as more useful than certain forms of material wealth, such as beer (stanza 11).

Friendship is also important. Throughout Hávamál (with the possible exception of the Gunnlǫð episode), friends have been held up as more important than material wealth. They are shown to be one of the most important "things of value". Without them, one experiences a form of poverty no amount of material wealth can ever relieve. Moreover, Hávamál is full of admonitions to obtain friends and lovers through the surrender of material wealth (i.e., gifts). It never counsels the reverse.

Wisdom is something sought or obtained by many Eddic characters. Many of the poems that follow Hávamál will hold

up wisdom as something of great value, something to be striven for. These include Vafðrúðnismál, Alvíssmál, Grímnismál, Fáfnismál and Sigrðrífomál. Indeed, Fáfnismál is a case of a hero on the brink of attaining great material wealth who directs all his efforts to obtaining wisdom. In one sense the hero Sigurðr appears to be placing wisdom before wealth there, though he scrupulously ignores the main message of the wisdom imparted, that he forego the wealth he has won.

In many cases, however, the Edda draws a clear distinction between wealth and wisdom. Hávamál is full of characters who are wise but wealth-short, or wealthy men who are not wise. Indeed, at several points Hávamál even implies a contradiction between wealth (or its overuse) and wisdom.

This sets a pattern for much of the Edda. Óðinn will frequently play the role of a very poor man when displaying his wisdom (see Grímnismál, Vafðrúðnismál). The converse, the wealthy but unwise character is also a stock figure in the Edda. See, for example, Grímnismál's Geirroðr, Þrymsqviða's Þrymr, Hymisqviða's Hymir, Völundarqviða's Níðuðr, Reginsmál's Hreiðmarr and Andvari, Atlaqviða's and Atlamál's Atli, and Hamðismál's Iqrmunreccr. From this it would appear that the Eddic poets enjoyed seeing the rich get their come-uppance, for all these rich fools meet with disaster. Far more Eddic characters are ruined by their wealth (or their striving for it) than are ruined by some

form of poverty. To be sure, possibly this simply reflects the Edda's greater preoccupation with the rich overall, it having more rich characters than poor by far.

In any event, the distinction between friends and wealth is not stressed nearly so much as that between wealth and wisdom. There are not many examples of rich characters who lack friends. Atli's and Brynhildr's isolation just before they die are perhaps the best examples. There much is made of their abundant wealth and their lack of true supporters.

Wealth's value as an end, as something to be sought, as a motivator of action, is more extensively treated in the Edda. From Völospá's "Valði henni Herfǫðr hringa ok men" (stanza 29) and Hávamál's numerous examples of people striving for or desiring wealth, the Edda proceeds to tell stories of Þórr's quest for a wealth item, a cauldron, and Þrymr's efforts to obtain what he considered a wealth item, the goddess Freyja. Völundarqviða revolves around Níðuðr's seizing of Völundr's treasure. On the heroic plane, of course, the Niflung hoard exerts a heavy influence on almost all the principals of the Sigurðr-poems. The precedents set by the mythic prequels, the murders of Hreiðmarr, Fáfnir, and Reginn for wealth will be emulated again and again by the human protagonists of the Sigurðr-poems. Sigurðr, Brynhildr, and the Gjúkungs will all refer to wealth as a motivator of action, though significantly their views are not consistent throughout the cycle. Sigurðr slays a dragon,

Brynhildr gets the Gjúkungs to slay Sigurðr, and Atli in turn kills the Gjúkungs, all out of wealth.

In the heroic sphere as well as the divine, the denial of wealth will attest powerfully to its value. The heart of the Gjúkung revenge in Atlaqviða lies in the denial of wealth to Atli. The destruction or consumption of wealth in Hymisqviða and Prymsgviða attests to its value there. And in Locasenna, Loki revels in his ability to deny wealth in the form of compensation. Thus both negatively and positively, the Codex Regius asserts the importance of wealth.

The most complex aspect of the value of wealth in the Codex Regius relates to its function as a bribe. Eddic bribes usually fail, and this sometimes suggests that the concept of wealth is ultimately subjective, that what some find of great value is of lesser worth to others. Usually where there is such a distinction between two characters' views of wealth, the one who values wealth the less, the bribe-refuser, is depicted more favourably. Such is the case with Guðrún. Notable exceptions include Locasenna's Loki and Od-drúnargrátr's Atli (and his men), where the refusal of the bribe is integral to the tragedy. Ultimately, however, Eddic bribery is most important for showing Eddic wealth is not a fixed standard, that some value it higher than others.

The search for wealth-related themes proved challenging. In the end, no one theme could be found to dominate the

Edda, though several do play a predominant role in certain sections.

There are at least nine major wealth-related themes in the Codex Regius. Five of these are referred to in some way in Hávamál, making it the most comprehensive of the Eddic poems in its approach to wealth. Those wealth-themes found elsewhere, however, are no less significant. Indeed, if Hávamál is in fact a sermon on wealth, its omission of these is sometimes surprising.

The most ubiquitous of the wealth-related themes is the test of the ability to surrender it through hospitality. In fact, most Eddic poems refer to situations where one party visits another. This is the case in Hávamál, Vafðrúðnismál, Grímnismál, For Scírnis, Hymisqviða, Locasenna, Þrymsqviða, Volundarqviða, Alvíssmál, Grípisspá, Reginismál, Sigrdrífomál, Oddrúnargrátr, Atlaqviða, Atlamál, and Hamðismál, 16 out of the 29 poems relevant to this investigation. In at least 11 of these, this visit is in fact the basis for the central drama of the poem, if not the foundation upon which it is constructed. In all but Reginismál, Sigrdrífomál, and Oddrúnargrátr, there is a definite test of hospitality, of the host's ability to share his wealth with visitors. In six poems, Vafðrúðnismál, Grímnismál, Hymisqviða, Þrymsqviða, Atlaqviða, and Atlamál, the host fails the hospitality test in some way, revealing he views wealth as more important than hospitality. Every single one of

these hosts is destroyed, which suggests there is a definite moral to these kinds of stories. In poems where the host does seem to comply with the duties of hospitality, including wealth-sharing, For Scírnis and Grípisspá are the only ones where the result is largely positive. Only in Locasenna and Gunnlaðarþáttr, however, do the hosts suffer for being hospitable, for sharing their wealth (though Atli makes claims to this effect in Atlamál too). On the whole then, it is fair to say that hospitality is a major concern of the Codex Regius.

The broader aspect of wealth-surrender through gifting is even more widespread in the Edda. Almost every Eddic poem sees a wealth-transfer of some kind (or a demand for one). Often these transfers are in the forms of gifts.

Gifts are used in a more complex way than hospitality. Though gifting is generally depicted in a positive light, there are many cases where gifts are used to harm the recipient. Such incidents are found in the Gunnlaðarþáttr of Hávamál, Völundr's gift to Níðuðr in Völundarqviða, the return Hárbarðr makes for the gambanteinn in Hárbarðzlióð, and the various gifts given in Atlaqviða and Atlamál. Loki's ransom in Reginismál can also be seen in this light. Even Þórr acts the role of a gift as the bride given to the giants in Þrymsqviða, and proves just as deadly as any of the gifts above. On some occasions gifts are associated with very unpleasant situations, even when the motive behind them may be

pure. This is the case in Guðrúnarhvot and possibly with Guðrún's gift to her brothers in Atlamál and Atlaqviða, though there the motivation is murky. Though equally ambiguous situations with regard to hospitality are found in the Codex Regius (hospitality in For Scírnis for example, seems to be sincerely extended to one with very aggressive intentions towards the hostess) one is left with a much stronger impression of the gift as a double-edged weapon.

The distinction between gift and bribe is often blurred. For the purpose of this thesis, however, bribes are defined as gifts given or offered with a definite purpose, in an attempt (usually overtly stated) to obtain something from a recipient, and whose bestowal often depends on the desired or demanded return being made. Though all gifts may have an ulterior motive over the long term (as Hávamál stanza 145's "ey sér til gildis giðf" implies), this motive is not always apparent. With bribes, however, the motive is.

The bribe is a multi-faceted thing in the Codex Regius. Though the modern reader may tend to read modern negative attitudes to the bribe into it, the situation is not so clear-cut in the Edda. Many of its heroes try to bribe. Among the more noteworthy Eddic bribers are Freyr and Skírnir (For Scírnis), Þórr (Hárbarðzlióð), Dagr (Helgaqviða Hundingsbana ǫnnor), Sigurðr, Oddrún, Gunnarr and Atli (Brot af Sigurðarqviðu, Oddrúnargrátr, Atlaqviða and Atlamál), and Bragi in Locasenna. And just as bribery is not the preserve

of the good or the evil, so it is with the bribe-refusers. Bribe-refusers in the Edda range from Gerðr (For Scírnis), Loki (Locasenna) and Óðinn (Hárbarðzlióð) to Brynhildr, Guðrún, Gunnarr, and Atli.

Despite the diversity of bribers and bribe-refusers, the dominant bribe-related theme in the Edda is the futility of bribery. This is true no matter what end the bribe is directed towards. In the first poem to feature clearcut use of the bribe, For Scírnis, bribes are used for two things. First, Freyr bribes his messenger to undertake the dangerous journey to jötunheimr. This succeeds. Then he (via Skírnir) attempts to win a bride through bribes. This fails. A bribe is offered for ferry passage in Hárbarðzlióð and for silence in Oddrúnargrátr. Both these attempts fail too.

The most common use of bribery, though, is to buy peace. This occurs in Locasenna, Helgaqviða Hundingsbana onnor, and Atlamál. Demands of bribes in exchange for peace are made in Prymsqviða, Helgaqviða Hiorvarðzsonar, Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri, and possibly elsewhere. None of these bribes for peace work, nor do the demanders of bribes for peace survive their requests by very long.

These failed bribes introduce the next major wealth-theme in the Codex Regius, the limitations of wealth, particularly as a peace buyer. The failure of bribes shows that wealth

is not omnipotent, that there are clear limits to what it can achieve, that its worth really depends on the recipient's state of mind as much as anything else. Possession of wealth is by no means synonymous with security, as is demonstrated by the cases of Völundr, Níðuðr, Atli, and Iormunreccr, among others. This tempers the praise of wealth found in such poems as Hávamál.

As it is, a list of the failures and limitations of Eddic wealth would be quite lengthy. Wealth fails to ensure happiness in Hávamál (stanza 75), it dies (stanza 76-77), and is the "valtastr vina" (stanza 78). It does nothing for Vafþrúðnir and Geirroðr. It fails to buy a bride in For Scírnis or ferry passage in Hárbarðzlióð or Loki's silence or goodwill in Locasenna. None of the three major wealth holders of the three poems that follow, Þrymr, Völundr, or Níðuðr, are made secure by their possession of it. In fact, they all suffer death, injury, or a major humiliation from the wealth they possess or aspire to.

Wealth's limitations are even more marked in the realm of the heroic poems, where it fails everyone who attempts to use it, including Dagr, Atli, Sigurðr, Brynhildr, and Óðrún.

The limitations of wealth are linked very closely to another Eddic theme, the primacy of relationships over material wealth. If there is a moral to the Edda, it is found

here. Repeatedly characters will be tested on what they value more highly, the relationship or wealth. With few exceptions those who value relationships over wealth are depicted more favourably.

The precedent for this is set as early as Hávamál. There, the stress is laid on trading wealth for friendship, never the reverse. The hospitality tests in the goðakvæði that follow reiterate this. Freyr's efforts to buy love with wealth in For Scírnis reinforces the divine sanction to this attitude towards wealth, and even Þórr is ready to sacrifice some food to win a ferryman's heart in Hárbarðzlióð.

The Edda punishes those who value wealth more than relationships. Both Hymisqviða and Þrymsqviða see the destruction of giants who valued wealth more than relationships. Locasenna provides a perverse corroboration of this theme in that Loki refuses to provide a friendly relationship in exchange for wealth, an oblique indication of the latter's inferiority.

The heroic poems are unanimous in their condemnation of those who value wealth over relationships. The gruesome revenge taken on Atli is the most spectacular demonstration of that attitude to be found there.

This is linked closely to another Eddic wealth-theme, the evil fate that meets wealth-demanders.

Most, though not all, of those who demand wealth of some kind in the Edda are depicted in a very unfavourable light. The main exceptions are the first Eddic wealth demander, Skírnir, Þórr, that strange bird in Helgaqviða Hiorvarðzsonar (stanzas 1-4), Helgi in the same poem (stanzas 6-9), and the son of Guðrún in Guðrúnarhvöt. Virtually every other Eddic wealth demander is killed or dishonoured as a direct result of his wealth demand. These include Alvíss, Þrymr, Þrymr's sister, Atli, Níðuðr and his sons, Hreiðmarr, Fáfnir, Reginn, Hundingr's sons Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri (stanza 11-13), and Hrímgæðr Helgaqviða Hiorvarðzsonar 24). Of all the Eddic wealth demands, only Þórr's in Hymisqviða can be construed as even vaguely heroic. This would suggest that wealth is irrelevant to the success of the true hero (though it does lie at the heart of the Gjúkung victory in Atlaqviða) and that the avarice implied by demanding it is in fact incompatible with heroism.

This evil fate for wealth demanders relates closely to another Eddic theme, the vulnerability of those who are overly attached to wealth. Wealth certainly has its dangers for those who become too closely attached to it. This concept is introduced in Hávamál, developed extensively in all subsequent Eddic poems dealing with giants, and runs like a red thread, as Holtsmark and Sveinsson put it, through the poems of the Sigurðr cycle. And it is the wealth-love of Níðuðr and his offspring that leave them open for Völundr's

revenge. Atli and the Huns, Iormunreccr and the Goths, Hreiðmarr and his dragon son, these are just some of those rendered vulnerable by an excessive faith in and undue attachment to wealth.

This vulnerability is linked very closely to two aspects of wealth: its power to delude and its power to corrupt. Most of those rendered vulnerable by their wealth have been deluded by it in some way. For the remainder, it is generally their excessive attachment to it that does them in.

Wealth's power to corrupt is a complex matter in the Edda. As most Eddic characters are not developed over time, it is impossible to tell whether wealth exerts a corrupting influence on them. As it is, the most wealth-driven villains of the Edda, Níðuðr, Atli, and Iormunreccr show little sign of ever having been otherwise, thus they can hardly be described as corrupted. Wealth's power to corrupt is most evident in the story of the Niflung hoard and the havoc it wreaks on Hreiðmarr's line. It is tempting to read it into the dragon's dire warnings in Fáfnismál (stanzas 9, 20) but it is not an unequivocal reference to corruption. The complicating factor is of course the fact that this hoard has had a curse placed upon it. Thus, its evil powers (such as they are) may owe more to magic than material greed. Among the gods there is little sign that wealth corrupts.

Hávamál for its part sees wealth most dangerous as a deluder. It has less to say of wealth's power to corrupt (though stanza 75 can be interpreted in this way). This is the pattern for most of the Edda.

Wealth's role as an inciter of strife varies considerably from poem to poem. Though there are hints of it as early as Völuspá 23-24, it does not figure prominently in the goðakvæði. Obtaining wealth through conflict is mentioned in Hávamál 58. It plays a role in the conflicts between gods and giants in Þrymsqviða and Hymisqviða, but not until Völundarqviða is there a conflict motivated primarily over wealth. In the heroic poems that follow, however, wealth helps incite several conflicts, such as that in Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri (stanza 11 ff), Helgaqviða Hiörvarðzsonar, Helgaqviða Hundingsbana önnor, and the battles over the Niflungaarfr in Reginismál and Fáfnismál. It is cited as a motivation for slaying Sigurðr in Brot af Sigurðarqviðu (stanza 15-16) and for the murder of the Gjúkung in Atlaqviða. Much of the quarreling in Atlamál is also over wealth. Thus, wealth figures prominently as a strife-provoker in the latter part of the Edda, though even there it is often only part of a much more complex conflict.

In the final analysis, it is much easier to catalogue the representations and functions of wealth in the Codex Regius than to assess their overall significance. Through all the diversity of these wealth depictions, however, there are

certain broad consistencies. There are no Eddic heroes who are stingy or bad hosts, but there are several villains. The Eddic poets were not in sympathy with those who valued wealth higher than friends. In short, though generosity may not have been essential to the hero, stinginess was certainly incompatible with him. The primacy of relationships over wealth is the most definite limit to its value indicated in the Codex Regius. Within that frame, there is great diversity in the value assigned to wealth.

Likewise the value of material wealth and its power to corrupt do not receive consistent treatment in the Edda.

Chapter IV

TRANSLATIONS OF REFERENCES

NOTE: For the convenience of those wishing to use this thesis, a number of references have been translated. References are listed by page number. Most of the references, except for those in German that are discussed extensively in the text as well (such as those of Gottzmann) have been provided. The reader is cautioned that it has not always been possible to preserve the original punctuation. When in doubt, the text in the original language is of course the final authority. Nor is the orthography of the translation necessarily consistent with that of the original, as here overall consistency to the scheme adopted in his thesis was stressed instead. And since lengthy scholarly analyses have been written about some points of translation passed over silently here, it should be stressed that the reader should beware. Where two alternatives seem particularly attractive, they are indicated by a "/", as in "wealth/treasures" below. Sometimes these alternatives are discussed at greater length in the main body of the thesis itself. Four Icelandic terms used extensively in this work are volva 'staff-witch, sorceress, prophetess', goðakvæði 'poems of the gods', hetjukvæði 'poems of heroes, heroic poems', and seiðr 'sorcery, sexual sorcery'. For translations from the Atli-

poems and thereafter, the reader is referred to Ursula's Dronke's The Poetic Edda, I.

4.0.31 Page One

"there was for them, not at all a lack of gold"

4.0.32 Page 12

The Æsir met on íðavellir,
They who temples and fanes,
timbered high,
laid forges
made wealth/treasures
shaped tongs and made tools.

4.0.33 Page 13

Here reference is made to all kinds of treasures made of gold, necklaces, rings, armrings, which were not only adornments/jewellery, but functioned as currency.

4.0.34 Page 15

They boardgamed in the field,
were cheerful/gleeful.
There was for them
not at all a lack of gold

until three came Thurs-maidens,
most loathsome from jötunheim.

4.0.35 Page 16

These giant maidens bring new demands. They arouse avarice among the Æsir, they are no longer lacking nothing, because they are no longer content with the gold that they have. That way the Thurs-maidens pave the way for the next misstep/disaster: Gullveig's slaying.

In the obscure section of the poem dealing with the three mighty maidens that came to the Æsir from Jötunheim and the seið-woman (sorceress) Gullveig must be an idea about the end of this innocent period. The poet seeks the origin of the corruption in the pursuit of riches, which was a main element in the whole tragedy of Sigurðr, Atli, and the Ni-flungs. The giant maidens arouse avarice, exploiting the fact that the gods are of the same family/clan and this can be tempted.

Did they steal the gold of the Æsir and were the dwarves created to repair the dearth?

4.0.36 Page 19

Gullveig is "the personification of gold, the power of gold in woman-form."

4.0.37 Page 20

The world's first disaster comes when the golden age on íðavellir ended with the arrival of the three Thurs-maidens... Gullveig has to mean the power of gold and perhaps the description of Heið is metaphorical: gold makes men mad, this is likened to the ravings/ frenzies that follow seiðr. Or was he acquainted with the example of the Vanir-worshippers, where prosperity and seiðr went hand in hand?

The name Gullveig ...gives an even broader indication that here gold must have played a role, not in the sense that Müllenhoff understood it, as a reference to the goldsmithing process...

It could be bold to look on her as the personification of gold and its influence, but if she has to mean something no explanation is more likely. And it is not too much to allow the pursuit of gold to cause a change of era. The whole story of the Niflungs, which has clearly had great influence on the author of Völuspá, as was natural, shows the power of gold. It is the "strife-metal of men". Avarice was fierce in pagan times. It was no wonder that a man who had perceived the dark side of oath-breaking and warfare, traced the roots of all corruption to the pursuit of gold.

4.0.38 Page 21

first war in the world

whether the Æsir should pay
or should all the gods share in the payment/tribute.

4.0.39 Page 23

armrings and necklaces

4.0.40 Page 24

It can be said that all commentators are in agreement in em-
ending fé into fekk.

Féspjöll could translate: magic to obtain wealth, but it
seems difficult to apply that meaning in this context.

4.0.41 Page 25

a hall of gold of the line of Sindri.

Finnur Jónsson feels this verse strayed in here from another
poem and that someone who knew it may have thought that it
belongs here, because it is about a hall as in the following
verse: the material of this section of the poem is describ-
ing places of torment and terrors, but this verse refers in-
congruously to happiness.

4.0.42 Page 26

men foresworn and murderers

4.0.43 Page 27

Thereafter will wondrous
golden gameboards in the grass be found,
those that in days of yore [the gods] had owned.

This shows that the prosperity of the gods begins again.

4.0.44 Page 32

At all entrances before proceeding,
one should look about
one should scrutinize
because it is hard to know where enemies
sit on the floor ahead.

4.0.45 Page 33

A better burden bears no man on the road
than considerable wisdom.
Better than wealth it is thought in an unfamiliar place
such is the support of the weak.

4.0.46 Page 34

A farm is better though little it be
each is a man of home.

Though one owns but two goats and a leaky-raftered hall,
that is nonetheless better than begging.

A farm is better though little it be
each is a man of home.

Bloody is the heart of the one who must beg
for food every time he eats.

4.0.47 Page 37

For the wealth that one has obtained
one should not endure privation
often one saves for the loathed what one had intended for
the beloved
much goes worse than anticipated.

4.0.48 Page 38

If you and your father have starved yourself for money,
that's your problem.

Many a man becomes from money an ape/monster.

4.0.49 Page 39

With weapons and with clothes one should gladden friends
that on oneself look good.

Gift-givers and gift-repayers are friends the longest,
if that friendship had any prospects whatsoever to start
with.

To one's friend one should a friend be,
and repay gift with gift.

Young was I long ago I went on my own
 when I wandered off the right roads
rich I thought myself when I found another,
 man is man's delight.

4.0.50 Page 40

Generous, valiant men live best,
 seldom nurture sorrow
but a cowardly man fears everything
sitting ever stingy with gifts.

4.0.51 Page 41

Withers the pine that stands in the open place
neither bark nor bough protect her
so it is with a man who loves no one.
How long shall he live?

4.0.52 Page 42

Big things exclusively one should not give
often one buys praise with little.
With half a loaf and with tilted vessel,
I got me a companion.

4.0.53 Page 43

Early must rise one who wants another's
life or wealth to have.
Seldom the lying wolf gets the loin,
nor a sleeping man success.

Early shall rise he who has cultivators few,
and go to visit one's work
much is delayed by one who sleeps in the morning.
half of wealth depends on drive.

4.0.54 Page 44

Washed and well-fed one should ride to the Thing,
even though one be not too well clothed
his shoes and breeches put no man to shame,
nor his horse though he lack a good one.

4.0.55 'Page 45

Those words that a man says to another,
 often he has to pay for them.

4.0.56 Page 46

Here and there I would be invited home,
 if I needed no food at meal-times,
or if two loins hung at the faithful friend's,
where I had eaten one.

4.0.57 Page 47

A man is not completely wretched, though he be poor of
health,
 some are rich in sons,
some in kinsmen, some in an abundance of cattle,
some in work well-done.

4.0.58 Page 48

Better it is for the living and the fortunately living,
 the living can always acquire a cow.
A fire I saw burning before a rich man,
and outside was a dead one before the door.

4.0.59 Page 49

The lame ride horses the handless drive herds,
the deaf fight and prove their prowess,
being blind is better than being burned,
a corpse is good to no one.

4.0.60 Page 50

He does not know this who nothing knows,
 many a man becomes [from money?] an ape/monster,
one man is rich another poor.
 Has that one no cause for complaint?

Cattle die kinsmen die,
 you will die yourself the same.
But reputation never dies
 for one who gets a good one.

4.0.61 Page 51

I know one thing that never dies,
the judgement about each dead one.

4.0.62 Page 52

Full-pens I saw before Fitiung's sons
now they bear beggar's staves.

So is wealth like an optical trick,
it is the most unstable of friends.

4.0.63 Page 53

An unwise man if he can get,
wealth or a woman's pleasure,
his pride grows, but never his wisdom,
onward he goes abundantly into delusion.

4.0.64 Page 54

Gunnloð gave me upon a golden chair,
a drink of the precious mead.

4.0.65 Page 56

"fair shall one speak and offer money" "fair shall you promise"

4.0.66 Page 60

"With loaf they did not refresh me nor with drinking
horn" "I took up runes"

"within the horizon"

4.0.67 Page 61

An unrich man who to a rich one comes,
should say what's worth saying or shut up.

4.0.68 Page 62

Now I have come from my travels thirsty to your hall.

An unrich man who to a rich one comes,
 should say what's worth saying or shut up,
much loquaciousness I think brings woe,
for one who comes among the coldribbed.

4.0.69 Page 63

"Óðinn possesses a superficial humility"

"with a fey mouth I uttered my ancient runes."

What Æsir rule the possessions of the gods,
 when the fires of Surtr abate.

4.0.70 Page 65

"wager about this matter"

"the greatest of lies"

"But that was the greatest slander that Geirroðr was not generous."

4.0.71 Page 66

Eight nights stayed I between fires here,
while no one offered me food.

except Agnarr alone who alone shall rule
Geirroðr's son the land of the Goths.

4.0.72 Page 67

The third farm is the one that the benevolent divini-
ties,
thatched a hall with silver.

where Óðinn and Sága drink every day
glad, out of golden vessels.

4.0.73 Page 68

Válasciálf is the name of the place that a god,
chose for himself in days of yore.

4.0.74 Page 69

Glaðsheimr is the name of the fifth, where the gold-
bright
Valhøll resounds.

with shafts the hall is raftered, with shields the hall
is thatched,
with byrnies the bench is strewn.

There the warder of the gods, drinks in a comfortable
hall,
glad the good mead.

4.0.75 Page 70

with a muddy back you will always be
and remain/wake the warder of the gods.

4.0.76 Page 71

Glitner is the tenth, it is buttressed with gold, and
thatched with silver the same.

4.0.77 Page 72

Brushwood grows and high grass, over Víðar's wide land.

"and slender says from steedback"

4.0.78 Page 73

Drunk are you, Geirroðr, you have overdrunk,
how far have you fallen from my favour,
from all the einherjar, and Óðinn's esteem.

4.0.79 Page 76

Give me the steed that across the darkness will bear me
the flickering flame that is certain to be there
and that sword that fights by itself
against the line of the giants.

4.0.80 Page 77

When the god gives his servant his sword as a loan, it does
not mean that he will never get it back.

4.0.81 Page 78

I am not short of gold.

4.0.82 Page 79

so was avenged upon him that arrogance, of his sitting in the holy seat, that he went away full of sorrow.

4.0.83 Page 83

What distinguishes the giants from the gods? They are similarly wise (Vafðruðnismál), similarly rich, there is gold enough in Gymir's garth.

Though she herself believes that Skírnir is her brother's bane, she follows the law of hospitality and invites him in to drink the noble mead...Gerðr conducts herself as respectably as any chieftain's daughter...but she does not allow herself to be bought with gold or coerced with threats to consent.

4.0.84 Page 84

Gymir belongs to Vafðrúðnir's well-endowed giant world. The Garth is conceived of as a socially respectable place, which is watched by herdsmen and mad dogs. Gýmir is characterized indirectly through his possession of a strong and beautiful daughter; strength and power/wealth always win respect.

4.0.85 Page 85

It is not as if you three good farms own,
barelegged you stand and have the garb of a tramp,
you don't even have your pants.

4.0.86 Page 86

a naked man is ashamed.

"with an evil heart you repaid good gifts"

That an oak has which it shaves off another,
for himself is each in such.

4.0.87 Page 90

And another went, all-golden, forth,
brow-white, to bear a beer-drink to a son.

4.0.88 Page 91

Many know I treasures gone from me
when I see the cup tumbled over the knee.

4.0.89 Page 92

Abundant will I become in answers
if you speak too much.

A steed and sword I will give you of my wealth,
and so Bragi will compensate you with an armring,
lest you inflict your envy on the Æsir.
Do not anger the gods at you!

4.0.90 Page 93

Horses and weapons are the most favourite of gifts.

4.0.91 Page 94

Of both steed and armrings, you will always be,
short, Bragi.

4.0.92 Page 95

neither ell nor livestock have you ever gotten,
for this injustice, wretch.

With gold you bought Gymir's daughter,
and so sold your sword,
and when the sons of Muspell,
ride over Mirkwood,
you don't know, wretch, how you will fight.

4.0.93 Page 96

Know, that if I had the property/patrimony of Inguna-Freyr,
and such a prosperous place of abode,
smaller than marrow, I would grind that malice crow,
and break every bone in his body.

"You never knew how to fairly apportion battle-killings
among men." "You never knew how to fairly apportion food
among men."

4.0.94 Page 97

Because overdrinking causes each man,
to lose control of his loquaiciousness.

"the ugly, lousy life"

a crystal goblet, full of ancient mead.

4.0.95 Page 98

indeed I would give you it even if it were made of gold,
indeed hand it over even if it were made of silver.

4.0.96 Page 99

Prymr sat on a barrow, lord of Purses,
 twisted the leashes of his hounds,
 and trimmed the manes on his steeds.

4.0.97 Page 100

often the sitter fumbles stories,
 and lying tells lies.

Golden-horned cows go about the garth here,
 all-black oxen, to the giant's delight.
 a hoard have I of jewells, a hoard have I of necklaces,
 Freyja alone, is what I find myself lacking.

4.0.98 Page 102

ate one ox eight salmon
 all the dainties for the women,
 Sif's husband drank three tuns of mead.

Then quoth Prymr lord of Purses:
 'Where did you see women bite sharper?
 I have not seen women bite broader,
 nor more mead a maiden drink.'

4.0.99 Page 103

In came the wretched giant sister
 the one that dared demand money of the bride:
 'Surrender out of hand red rings,
 if you want to obtain my love,
 my love, all benevolence and favour.

4.0.100 Page 104

He slew the ancient giant sister
 the one the bride-money had demanded,
 a slam she got instead of a shilling,
 and a hammer blow instead of a hoard of rings.

Both words are derived from the same root: skellr is a 'ringing or slamming blow' and skilligr a 'jingling coin', they derive from ON. skjalla 'ring, jingle, rattle', OHG. scellan etc. The play on words is doubtless deliberate.

4.0.101 Page 106

But alone Völundr stayed in the Wolf-dales,
 he hammered gems into red-gold,
 he closed all the armrings well,
 so he awaited his bright woman,
 if she would come to him.

4.0.102 Page 107

Níðuðr, lord of the Njars, hears,
that alone Völundr remained in the Wolf-dales,
by night went warriors nailed were byrnies,
their shields glittered...

They saw on a bast rope armrings drawn,
seven hundred of all that the man owned.

Now it happens that Völundr resorts to his craft and begins
to make treasures out of gold, though it seems pointless in
this place.

4.0.103 Page 108

often you save for the loathed what you intended for the
beloved,

much goes worse than anticipated.

4.0.104 Page 110

The lord of the elves sat on a bear pelt,
counted rings missed one
he thought that
Hlǫðver's daughter young All-wise had it,
that she had come back.

It is left unsaid on what account they limit themselves to this ring, or if it is in some way special, how they distinguish it from the others.

4.0.105 Page 111

Others postulate that there is magic in the ring: Vølundr's strength diminishes when he loses the ring (the word 'bereft of will' is quite in keeping with this) but increases when he recovers it, and therewith the power to escape.

4.0.106 Page 112

Where did you get, Vølundr, lord of elves,
our wealth in the Wolf-dales?

There was no gold on the path of Grani,
far thought I our land from the mountains of the Rhine,
I remember that we greater treasures possessed,
when we were an intact household at home.

4.0.107 Page 113

In Níðuðr's response is contained the claim that in actuality he owns the gold that Vølundr has come across: our land is poor, there is no gold on the paths of Grani (or in other words, it is not comparable with Gnítaheið where Sigurðr

loaded his horse with gold) and it lies far from the Rhine (understood: for this reason you must have gotten your hands on gold that I own by rights.... Another explanation is that Níðuðr's response is only the question, and with the words "Gull var þar eigi" Völundr begins to speak. Níðuðr has accused him of theft, but Völundr answers: Our land ... is poor in gold, I could not have gotten rich there, the gold of us brothers is obtained through our wives...this seems though less likely; the words our land would pass better in a king's mouth: he considers himself to own the land.

4.0.108 Page 114

It is certainly incorrect when Bugge, Grundtvig, Edzardi, Detter-Heinzel, etc. ascribe both lines to Níðuðr's speech and translate: 'in my realm there is no gold to be found on the heath or in the rivers, here only I have gold, and if you also possess something you must have stolen it from me.

4.0.109 Page 117

"No man dared go to him except the king alone."

4.0.110 Page 118

The sword shines on Níðuðr's belt
 the one that I sharpened as best I knew how
 and I hardened as I thought best
 that is the keen sword, that ever is borne from me
 I do not see that one borne to Vǫlundr's smithy.
 Now bears Bǫðvildr
 -I do not await compensation for this-
 the red armrings of my wife.

4.0.111 Page 122

go fair-dressed one to speak with a father.

4.0.112 Page 124

he gave gold to men
 the warlord did not spare the bloodstained treasures.

4.0.113 Page 125

Demanded later of Sigmundr's son,
 riches and rings Hunding's sons
 because they had the warlord to repay
 for a great loss of wealth and the death of a father.
 The man did not pay compensation
 nor did the sons get nose-payment either.

I think that we have other things to do,
than with the ringbreaker beer drink.

4.0.114 Page 126

The allruler sent messengers out from there
over sky and across sea to call out levies,
to offer the fire of rivers,
to men and their sons.

And you, warrior, well befit both,
red rings and the mighty maiden.

4.0.115 Page 127

A temple I would choose many fanes,
gold-horned cows from the warlord's farm.

4.0.116 Page 128

Slow you will be, Helgi rings to rule.

4.0.117 Page 129

But Hróðmarr shall rule rings,
the ones that our kinsmen owned
that king that fears the fewest things in life,
intends himself the heirless heritage to rule.

4.0.118 Page 130

He has the patrimony of your line,
the heritage of the Fjorsungs subdued under him.

4.0.119 Page 131

Then would be on you avenged Helgi's death
if you were a warg out in the woods,
devoid of wealth and all pleasure,
and had no food unless you feasted on carrion.

4.0.120 Page 132

You will be the greatest man under the sun,
and the highest-born of any prince,
giving of gold but stingy of flight,
noble of demeanour and in words well-spoken.

4.0.121 Page 133

"greedy lies on Gnitaheath"

"wealth will be abundant if I achieve such."

4.0.122 Page 134

You will find Fáfnir's lair,
and take up the beautiful wealth,
load gold on Grani's back.

buy....the maiden

What would in compensation the woman take / for the decep-
tions we did the bride?

4.0.123 Page 135

The Æsir thought themselves to have been very fortunate.
Then they sent Loki to obtain the gold.

4.0.124 Page 136

Reginismál...tells about the gods who killed Hreiðmarr's son
Otr and had to obtain gold for Hreiðmarr in compensation for
his son; they force the dwarf Andvari to give them the gold,
but the dwarf lets a curse follow: the gold shall be the
bane of whomever owns it: this curse runs like a red thread
through the Sigurðr-poems.

The story of the Otter-ransom is an excellent introduction
to the story of Sigurðr and the Gjúkungs; whoever it was
that came up with the idea of using it as an explanation for
the tragic events that followed, it was natural to make the

gold the cause of the evil, the red thread running through the entire story.

4.0.125 Page 138

Gifts you gave you gave not loving-gifts,
 you gave not with a whole heart.

Of your life you would now be bereft,
had I known of that danger in advance.

4.0.126 Page 139

Gold is to you now delivered (quoth Loki)
and you have received a great ransom for my head.
Your son is not fated for good fortune,
it will of both of you be the bane.

4.0.127 Page 140

With an evil heart you repaid good gifts then.

4.0.128 Page 141

"He said no to that" "and Fáfnir said no to that" 'The red gold' (quoth Hreiðmarr)

'I think I will rule
as long as I live.'

Loud would laugh Hunding's sons,
the ones that deprived Eylimi of life,
if it mattered more to me treasures to seek,
red armrings, than vengeance for a father.

4.0.129 Page 143

the resounding gold and the red-glowing wealth
the armrings will be your bane.

Hostile words you reckon to be in everything
but I tell you only the truth.

4.0.130 Page 144

His wealth each man shall rule
until his last day.

4.0.131 Page 145

A helm of terror I bore over the sons of men,
while I lay among necklaces.

Poison I snorted when I lay
on the vast heritage of my father.

You accuse me now, Fáfnir, that too far I be,
from my father's treasures.

4.0.132 Page 146

I will ride to the gold that lies in the heather.

wealth and life

a brave heart is better than a blade's might.

that will fight by itself, if he who has it is heart-
keen

birds

4.0.133 Page 147

destroyer of armrings

all the gold he can then rule alone,
the hoard that under Fáfnir lay.

then you will of the wealth that Fáfnir ruled,
the sole-ruler be.

4.0.134 Page 148

"on glass and on gold" "abundant is that which sorrows men"

4.0.135 Page 150

"though he be cheered/gladdened with gold"

4.0.136 Page 151

Well should you enjoy weapons and lands,
alone would Sigurðr all have ruled,
if he had held life a little longer.

4.0.137 Page 152

It would not be fitting that he so ruled,
Gjúki's heritage and a multitude of Goths.

4.0.138 Page 153

Long you should enjoy lands and warriors.

4.0.139 Page 154

"gemstone over nobles"

So for you people the land laid waste
like the oaths you swore
you will not, Gunnarr, gold enjoy,
the rings will be your bane
on which you swore oaths to Sigurðr.

4.0.140 Page 155

From Guðrún's words the implication is that the treachery is perpetrated in order to obtain Sigurðr's hoard.

the rings will be your bane

4.0.141 Page 156

spit poison is naturally only a metaphor

4.0.142 Page 157

A maiden they offered him and a multitude of treasures.

4.0.143 Page 158

Alone is Brynhildr better than all for me,

she is a paragon among women.

I would rather lose my life

than lose the treasures of that maiden.

the mention of Brynhildr's treasure in this context is troubling; moreover the composer of the Völsunga saga seems to have read another word in his text (I would rather lose my life than lose her love). This word was probably munugb (as in Háv 79.2). The transmitted meibmom must be retained despite Völs s., see the remarks to Br 12.2 - Heusler emphasizes correctly that the 'naive love of gold' is very prominent in Sg.

4.0.144 Page 159

Would you for us the warlord betray for his wealth?
 good it is to rule the metal of the Rhine,
 and contentedly control wealth,
 and sitting enjoy prosperity.

a superfluous variation that must originate from an interpolation.

Müllenhoff's translation "would you like that we betray the prince for his property" is false. okr is dative, thus not the subject in an accusative c. inf., as incorrectly supposed in the dictionary. It translates 'Would you for the love of us betray the prince, so that we can thereby obtain possession of his treasure?' A 'shamelessly brazen demand' it easily remains nonetheless.

4.0.145 Page 161

I was not too young nor oppressed
 fully-endowed with wealth on a brother's floor.

I was not very confined or impeded when I richly endowed
 with treasures dwelled in the house of my brother (Atli).

4.0.146 Page 162

And Atli said to me alone
 that neither would be allowed the distribution of possessions
 gold nor estates unless I allowed myself to be married
 and not a thing of the abundant wealth
 that was delivered into my possession as a baby,
 and the wealth accounted to me as a baby.

I was more inclined to accept treasures,
 red armrings of Sigmundr's son,
 nor did I want another man's wealth.

4.0.147 Page 163

I would rather lose my life
 than lose the treasures of that maiden.

she looked all about her possessions;
 slain bondmaids and hall-women
 slipped on a gold-byrnie - was not of good heart -
 before she aimed at herself the mækir's edges.

4.0.148 Page 164

Now should go those who want gold
 and less to accept from me.
 I will give to each jewellery
 cloth and coverlet bright clothes.

4.0.149 Page 165

though on your bones will burn
 fewer ounces when you come forth,
 no goods of Menia, to visit me.

not at all will our journey be paltry

because five bondmaids accompany it
 eight servants of good lineage,
 the servants I grew up with, and patrimony
 that which Buðli gave to his child.

4.0.150 Page 169

had about my southern hall
 a high foe of all woods burn
 there he bade one warrior to ride over it,
 the one that brought me the gold that lay under Fáfnir.

4.0.151 Page 170

The expression does not refer to the dragon gold, but rather
 merely denotes the hero in typical fashion as a free-giving
 prince.

Gunnarr and Hogni then took all the gold, the heritage of
 Fáfnir.

Noble was I among maidens, a mother raised me
 bright in a bower, I loved well my brothers

until Gjúki me adorned with gold,
adorned with gold gave to Sigurðr.

So was Sigurðr over Gjúki's sons
like a green leek grown out of the grass
or a long-legged hart among fierce beasts,
or red-glowing gold over grey silver.

4.0.152 Page 171

As an epithet for silver the adjective is found elsewhere only in the proverbial saying elda grátt silfr 'nurse grievances against one another'... The paraphrase of Vols. saga has replaced the silver with iron.

4.0.153 Page 172

until my brothers begrudged me
that I had a husband foremost of all.

Gunnarr said himself ready gold to offer
to amend the wrongs and Hogni the same.

Each wanted to choose jewels for me
jewels for me and speak sincerely
if they could give sureties
for many sorrows I did not believe it.

4.0.154 Page 173

'I will give you, Guðrún, gold to have,
 a vast mass of treasure at the death of your father,
 red rings Hloðver's hall,
 all the bed-curtains at the warlord's demise.

Hunnish maidens those who weave with
 and make fair gold so that you will find it delightful,
 alone you shall rule the wealth of Buðli,
 ennobled with gold and given to Atli.'

4.0.155 Page 175

This circumlocution for prince does not occur elsewhere, but
 similar kennings are extremely common.

4.0.156 Page 176

They offered Atli red armrings
 and my brothers compensation unsmall,
 he offered yet to me fifteen farms,
 Grani's sideload if he would accept it.

But Atli said he would not....

We offered the warriors red armrings,
 so that they would not tell Atli

4.0.157 Page 177

There was a din to hear from golden hoofs
when into the garth ride Gjúki's heirs.

The gilded hoofs are a fabulous motif like the gilded cow-horns of Þrymsqviða 23, Helgaqviða Hiǫrvarðssonar 4.2. In the Danish ballad 'The Murderer of Women' Bluebeard's horse has golden shoes.

4.0.158 Page 181

The force that drives them on is avarice, obstinacy, hatred, and vengeance.

NOTE, FOR VERSES FROM THE ATLI-POEMS AND THEREAFTER THE READER IS REFERRED TO DRONKE.

4.0.159 Page 211

Guðrún flings gold to the people of the hall as if it were grain being sown, doubtless to distract their attention from the events that follow, the slaying of Atli and the burning of the hall.

4.0.160 Page 214

In all the horror Guðrún remembers to release the dogs so that the fire does not destroy them.

4.0.161 Page 220

What this expression refers to remains obscure. The fé could be the dowry of Brynhildr which the Gjúkungs (on Guðrún's advice) had not returned.

4.0.162 Page 231

There is no sign that Atli kills the sons of Gjúki for wealth, and they are not offered a chance to ransom their lives with payment.

In Atlakviða there are four verses about the treasures of Atli and the brothers, a vivid enumeration of treasures; in Atlamál this becomes 'the warlord will give us red-glowing gold' that's all.

4.0.163 Page 241

Guðrún refers to her isolation, that no woman close to her is present, and in fact she has none, some have thought it inappropriate that she should be thinking about gifts at this point.

4.0.164 Page 244

The brothers have travelled over rain-beaten mountains, likely in rainclothes, and in addition they have likely gotten spattered with blood and dirt when they killed and threw a cairn over Erpr. Now they garb themselves in their finest, because it is not fitting that they arrive at a king's hall looking like hobos.

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