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"THEY WERE SUCH SKILLED CRAFTSMEN". HOW TO MANIPULATE A DWARF

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ABSTRACT. ***"They Were Such Skilled Craftsmen". How to Manipulate a Dwarf*****.** In Old Norse literature, dwarfs are first and foremost known as remarkable smiths and producers of weapons and other valuable, magic objects. Both gods and human protagonists need those products. However, dwarfs do not usually sell their products, neither to gods nor to humans. The closest thing to a sale contract is found in *Sǫrla þáttr eða Heðins saga ok Hǫgna*, a short narrative found in the *Flateyjarbók* manuscript. Here, Freyja intended to buy an exceptionally beautiful necklace, from the dwarfs, and offered them gold and silver in exchange for it. However, the dwarfs would only sell it to her in exchange for one night spent together and Freyja accepted the trade. But how can you make sure you get what you need from a dwarf if you do not happen to be Freyja? In this paper, I provide some case studies that seem to indicate a pattern. The most powerful gods, such as Óðinn, may issue a direct order, while less powerful beings, as Loki or Freyja, need to manipulate the dwarf into *wanting* to provide them the desired item. Human protagonists are able to manipulate dwarfs by exploiting the fact that the dwarfs reciprocate help and generosity. However, if someone attempts to treat dwarfs as servants, when, in reality, they do not have the same power over them as the mighty gods do, they risk severe retribution from the dwarf.

Keywords: *Old Norse, dwarfs, humans, gods, manipulation, reciprocity*

REZUMAT. ***„Erau meşteşugari atât de iscusiți". Cum să manipulezi un*** **dvergr.** În literatura nordică veche, *dvergar* sunt cunoscuți în primul rând ca fierari remarcabili și făuritori de arme și alte obiecte magice de valoare. Atât zeii, cât și oamenii au nevoie de aceste obiecte. Cu toate acestea, *dvergar* nu își vând de

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obicei comorile nici zeilor şi nici oamenilor. Cel mai apropiat lucru care seamănă cu un contract de vânzare se găseşte în *Sǫrla þáttr eða Heðins saga ok Hǫgna*, o scurtă povestire găsită în manuscrisul Flateyjarbók. În această povestire, Freyja intenţiona să cumpere un colier excepţional de frumos, de la *dvergar*, oferindu-le în schimbul lui aur şi argint. *Dvergar* i l-ar vinde doar dacă fiecare dintre ei ar petrece câte o noapte cu ea, lucru cu care Freyja a fost de acord. Dar cum poţi să obţii lucrurile de care ai nevoie de la un *dvergr* dacă nu eşti Freyja? În această lucrare, prezint câteva studii de caz care par să indice un şablon. Cei mai puternici zei, cum ar fi Óðinn, pot da un ordin direct, în timp ce fiinţele care nu deţin o putere la fel de mare, precum Loki sau Freyja, trebuie să-l manipuleze pe *dvergr* pentru ca acesta să dorească să le ofere produsul cerut. Alţi protagonişti din rândul oamenilor sunt capabili să-i manipuleze pe *dvergar* folosindu-se de faptul că le oferă în schimb ajutor şi generozitate. Totuşi, dacă cineva încearcă să-i trateze ca pe nişte slujitori, când ei în realitate nu au aceeaşi putere asupra lor precum zeii puternici, aceştia riscă o răzbunare de proporţii.

Cuvinte cheie: *literatura norvegiană veche, dvergar, oameni, zei, manipulare, reciprocitate*

INTRODUCTION

Dwarfs are known from various Old Norse sources, such as skaldic poetry, the *Poetic Edda*, the *Prose Edda* and saga literature, legendary sagas (*fornaldarsǫgur*) and chivalric sagas (*riddarasǫgur*) in particular. In many instances dwarfs are depicted as remarkable smiths and producers of weapons and other valuable, magic objects. Some of the most famous objects produced by dwarfs include the mead of poetry, Gleipnir (the chain with which Fenrir the Wolf was chained), Draupnir (Óðinn's magical ring), Mjǫllnir (Þórr's hammer), Gungnir (Óðinn's spear), Skíðblaðnir (Freyr's ship), Brísingamen (Freyja's necklace), and Tyrvingr and Dáinsleif (swords that are notorious for causing someone's death every time they are drawn from the sheath). John Lindow (2021) speculates that verses 8–9 of *Vǫluspá* indicate that the gods created dwarfs specifically for the purpose of producing objects that the gods themselves were not able to produce.

> Dwarfs […] produce precious objects for the gods. If the difficult lines in *Vǫluspá* st. 9 tells us that the gods created dwarfs at this point [i.e., when three *þursa meyjar* 'maidens of giants' arrived from Jǫtunheimar, UVM], it might be because their own ability to smith precious things had been compromised. (Lindow 2021, 28)

Admittedly, the relevant passage is rather obscure and hard to access:

> 8. They [i.e., the gods, UVM] played at tables in the meadow, were merry,
> there was for them no whit of a want of gold;
> until three maidens of giants came,
> immensely mighty, from Jǫtunheimar.
> 9. Then all the great powers, the most holy gods,
> went to their doom-seats and deliberated about it:
> who should devise the lord of dwarves
> from Brimir's blood and from blue limbs.
> ("The Prophecy of the Seeress" 2023, trans. Pettit, 39–41)

For the purpose of this research, I will confine myself to the dwarfs' role as producers and suppliers of such special artefacts, although this role is not the only one that dwarfs play in Old Norse sources. In some sagas they are capable healers (for example, in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* and *Gǫngu-Hrolfs saga*) or powerful helpers in combat (e.g., in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*). Furthermore, one can even raise the question of whether all dwarfs who are referred to as *dvergar* in various Old Norse sources are actually beings of the same sort, cf. Mikučionis (2020, 140–141). Researchers have expressed conflicting views on that matter. On the one hand, Kevin J. Wanner claims that dwarfs "appear in the sagas as they do in the myths, with almost no perceptible alteration in their race's essential characteristics, motivations, or powers" (Wanner 2001, 204) and describes "the uniformity which these figures exhibit across the range of Norse literary genres" as "striking" (ibid.). Paul Battles states that "the general traits of dwarfs in Norse literature remain remarkably stable from the earliest sources to the later ones. On some points […] the sources do contradict each other, but by and large they paint a consistent picture" (Battles 2005, 36). On the other hand, Werner Schäfke-Zell draws the opposite conclusion: "literary dwarves, i.e., saga dwarves, have little in common with the mythic dwarves that feature in Eddic lays and the *Prose Edda*, and do not show any resemblance to ancient Nordic dwarves" (Schäfke 2015, 366). My aim, however, is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of all aspects connected to dwarfs, but rather to discuss how various Old Norse texts describe possible ways of manipulating dwarfs into providing objects they have produced, or into producing specific quest items. My point is that dwarfs are often depicted as producers of wondrous, magic objects both in the *Prose Edda* and in saga literature, and I will focus on such episodes – without speculating about their possible relation to the original pre-Christian Old Norse religion or belief system and without attempting to reconstruct an image of an "*Ur*-dwarf" (a term I have borrowed from Ármann Jakobsson's publications). Both gods and human protagonists often need – or, at least, desire – dwarf-made products, and in some cases the protagonist's subsequent success or even survival depends

on having and using them, cf. "without the tools (treasures) that the dwarfs produced the gods would have been powerless and destitute" (Liberman 2016, 306) and "[t]he dwarf's help is decisive for the human actant's later success" (Schäfke 2012, 173). It has to be noted that the dwarfs do not usually *sell* their products. Perhaps, the explanation to this reluctance to sell is that dwarf-crafted objects *must* be hard to acquire so that the audience (the listeners and/or the readers) of the Old Norse texts is in no doubt that these items are extraordinarily valuable. If anyone with a sufficient amount of gold could buy anything they wanted from the dwarfs, their products would only be expensive – but not extraordinary (supernatural and magic) as they are.[2] Consequently, the protagonist, be it a god, another supernatural being or a human hero, needs to manipulate the dwarf(s) in one way or another to make sure they get what they need (or desire).

The dwarfs have been characterized as "subservient to [the gods]" (Liberman 2016, 314) and "indispensable servants" (Liberman 2002, 261), which implies that the gods can demand what they need (or want) from the dwarfs – and expect that the latter will obey. But the dwarfs have also been described as "reluctant donors" (e.g., Ármann Jakobsson 2005, 58; Hafstein 2003, 33; Acker 2002, 216), so the question of how they can be manipulated is to the highest degree relevant. My point of departure is the assumption that the balance of power between gods and dwarfs is different from the balance of power between, say, human beings and dwarfs. The dwarfs may, perhaps, be characterized as servants in some episodes, but definitely not in all of them. This distinction will potentially lead to differences regarding the degree of success of certain manipulation techniques, depending on *who* performs the manipulation. In his study on the motive of the 'extorted dwarf', Werner Schäfke-Zell distinguished between a) vengeful, unrewarded dwarfs, b) non-vengeful, rewarded dwarfs, and

[2] Dwarfs may, however, sell their services. For example, in *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, the giant Vaði pays the dwarfs to teach his son, Velent (Vǫlundr), the secrets of smithing:

> Vadi the giant met the dwarfs and spoke with them. He said that he had his son Velent there, and he wanted them to take him in for twelve months and teach him all kinds of smithing, and he would give them as much gold as they desired. The two dwarfs said that they would take the boy and teach him all sorts of skills, if Vadi the giant would give them a mark of gold. He agreed and put it immediately into their hands. They agreed […], and this bargain was fulfilled. (*The Saga of Thidrek of Bern* 1988, trans. Haymes, 40)

In this case, the dwarfs' services – even though they are bought and paid for with gold – are hard to get, foremost because the dwarfs are hard to find. They live in a mountain across Grønasund, where no ships are available, so that Vaði has to wade across the sound with Velent on his shoulders. Furthermore, the dwarfs won't release Velent after the period they had agreed upon. Rather, they pay back the money in order to keep Velent for additional twelve months and to teach him more – but if Vaði does not come for him on the appointed day after this extended period, they will have his head cut off (*The Saga of Thidrek of Bern* 1988, trans. Haymes, 40–41).

c) non-vengeful, unrewarded dwarfs. He thinks that the dwarf's response to the human character's actions correlates with the protagonistic or antagonistic nature of the character and with the primary or secondary role the protagonist plays (Schäfke 2012, 176). Lotte Motz defined dwarfs as beings "whose position before gods or heroes may be described by one or more of the following adjectives: helpful, deprived, insulted, vengeful" (Motz 1977, 49). I argue, by contrast, that the position of a dwarf before a powerful god is *different* to the position of a dwarf before a less powerful supernatural being or a human character. Consequently, a dwarf's reaction to the manipulation will depend on the balance of power between the manipulator and the one being manipulated (the manipulatee, i.e., in our case the dwarf). The research questions addressed in this article refer to how different characters manipulate dwarfs in Old Norse sources, how the dwarfs respond to the manipulation in the different situations, how the dwarfs' reactions are related to the balance of power between the manipulator and the manipulatee, and to what extend different manipulation techniques prove to be successful. To answer these questions, I will provide seven case studies, involving gods, a jǫtunn, and human beings. I start however with defining what I mean by manipulation.

MANIPULATION: A DEFINITION AND SOME EXAMPLES

I have chosen to look at manipulation in a semiotic perspective. Semioticians define the term *manipulation* as 'an action of humans upon other humans with the goal of having them carry out a given program' (Greimas and Courtés 1982, 184). It is worth noting that the term *manipulation* in semiotics has no pejorative connotation in and of itself (Hébert 2020, 135). For the purposes of this research, I will use the term *manipulation* discussing a manipulator's (e.g., a god's, another supernatural being's, or a human being's) actions with the goal of having a manipulatee to provide him with a product or a service. Given the research questions in this study, the manipulatee will, as a rule, be a dwarf, although, in certain episodes, two characters may attempt to manipulate each other, so that they assume the roles of the manipulator and of the manipulatee in turns or even simultaneously.

One can, thus, paraphrase *manipulation* as 'causing-to-do'. When projected upon the Greimasian semiotic square, this gives four possibilities or four kinds of manipulation: 1) causing-to-do, also labelled as "inducing" by Hébert (2020, 136) and as "intervention" by Greimas and Courtés (1982, 184), 2) causing-not-to-do (labelled, respectively, as "preventing" by Hébert and as "hindrance" by Greimas and Courtés), (3) not-causing-to-do ("non-inducing" / "non-intervention"), and (4) not-causing-not-to-do ("leaving be").

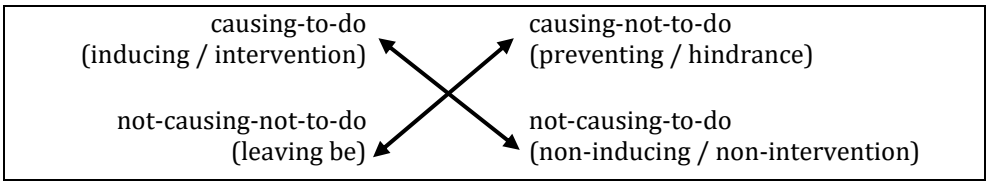

Figure 1. The four kinds of manipulation, based on Greimas and Courtés (1982, 184)

I will mainly be focusing on the first kind, causing-to-do, i.e., causing the dwarf (making the dwarf want to or have to) provide the manipulator with a certain product (e.g., a piece of jewellery, a tool, or a weapon). In some episodes it may also be relevant to look at the second kind, causing-not-to-do, e.g., making sure the dwarf does not attempt to harm the manipulator.

The manipulator seeks to change the manipulatee's wanting-to-do and/or having-to-do by proposing an object of retribution. Greimas and Courtés (1982, 184–185) suggested a distinction between a pragmatic and a cognitive side of manipulation, based on the nature of the object of retribution. On the pragmatic side, manipulation plays on temptation (proposing positive objects of retribution, e.g., promising a money reward) and/or intimidation (proposing negative objects, e.g., threatening). On the cognitive side, manipulation plays on seduction (manifesting a positive judgement of the manipulatee's modal competence by the manipulator) or provocation (manifesting a negative judgement of the same competence: "You are incapable of …"). Hébert (2020, 135) draws a distinction between positive and negative manipulation. Positive manipulation aims to produce, increase or maintain at an adequate level the manipulatee's wanting-to-do and/or having-to-do, and the purpose of positive manipulation is causing-to-do. Negative manipulation, by contrast, aims to eliminate or decrease the manipulatee's wanting-to-do and/or having-to-do, and the purpose of negative manipulation is causing-not-to-do. To illustrate the various kinds of manipulation in an actual situation, Hébert (2020, 135–136) describes two opposing armies, each commanded by a general. The generals may use positive manipulation (encouragement, the prospect of earning medals, threats, etc.) to induce their own soldiers to advance or, at least, not to retreat, and negative manipulation (threats, explosions, etc.) to induce the soldiers of the enemy not to advance or even to retreat. I would like to add to this example that a general has the authority to command his own soldiers. A general's order is in and of itself sufficient to produce a soldier's having-to-do. Another thing is that manipulation does not necessarily lead to action (Hébert 2020, 136), but the point is that a general does not need to propose any (positive or negative) retribution in order to create a soldier's having-to-do.

For our purposes, positive manipulation means that a manipulator seeks to increase a dwarf's wanting to, or having to, provide the manipulator

with a certain product. In cases the manipulator (a powerful god, such as Óðinn) has the power to command a dwarf, manipulation does not need to include any retribution. In other cases, manipulation will typically include promising a positive retribution, such as a repayment or a reward (in the pragmatic domain) or a positive judgement (praise) of the dwarf's competence (in the cognitive domain), or a negative retribution, such as threats (in the pragmatic domain) or a negative judgement of the dwarf's competence in order to provoke or challenge the dwarf (in the cognitive domain). Given our focus in this study, negative manipulation is to a lesser degree relevant, but it could turn out that it is nevertheless relevant in cases where the dwarf appears to intend to harm the manipulator, so that – in the manipulator's view – the dwarf's wanting-to-do needs to be decreased or eliminated.

We turn now to case studies, where we analyse some particular episodes, involving manipulation, with special attention being paid to the balance of power between the manipulator (gods, a jǫtunn, and human beings) and the manipulatee (the dwarfs).

SEVEN CASE STUDIES

CASE 1. GLEIPNIR, SÍF'S GOLDEN HAIR, SKÍÐBLADNIR, AND GUNGNIR

That the gods have the power to command dwarfs, seems clear from the fact that, in the early stages of world creation, Borr's sons set a dwarf under each of the four corners of the sky (which they had made out of Ymir's skull): "They also took his skull and made out of it the sky and set it up over the earth with four points, and under each corner they set a dwarf. Their names are Austri, Vestri, Nordri, Sudri" (Snorri Sturluson 1987, trans. Faulkes, 12).

In my interpretation, the gods did not need to use any advanced manipulation strategies or sophisticated schemes. They could simply command the dwarfs – not unlike generals who can command their soldiers – and, in so doing, produce the dwarfs' having-to-do. In such cases the dwarfs involved can indeed be characterized as servants to gods.

Further in the *Prose Edda*, we find two episodes where the dwarfs are told by a messenger that the gods need the dwarfs to produce a specific product for them. In the first case, Óðinn sends Skírnir to tell the dwarfs that they are required to make Gleipnir: "Then All-father sent some one called Skirnir, Freyr's messenger, down into the world of black-elves to some dwarfs and had a fetter called Gleipnir made" (ibid., 28).

In the second episode, Loki goes to the dwarfs, and, in my interpretation, Loki told them it was the gods (or, perhaps, Þórr specifically) who required that they produce not only a replacement for Síf's hair, but also two other objects for the Æsir.

> Loki Laufeyiarson had done this for love of mischief: he had cut off all Sif's hair. And when Thor found out, he caught Loki and was going to break every one of his bones until he swore that he would get black-elves to make Sif a head of hair out of gold that would grow like any other hair. After this Loki went to some dwarfs called Ivaldi's sons, and they made the head of hair and Skidbladnir and the spear belonging to Odin called Gungnir. (ibid., 96)

Admittedly, the text of the *Prose Edda* does not elaborate on what exactly Skírnir and Loki told the dwarfs. One could hypothesize that both Skírnir and Loki had to manipulate the dwarfs in one way or another to produce their wanting-to-do or having-to-do, e.g., by promising a reward, by threatening to harm the dwarfs if they do not obey, or by pointing out the negative consequences for the whole world if the gods do not receive the objects they demand. Especially the communication between Loki and the dwarfs may have been full of drama, given what we know about Loki's personality; even the above quotation mentions his "love of mischief". Also, Skírnir – Freyr's messenger – is known for his manipulation strategy in *Skírnismál* (or *Fǫr Skírnis*), where he manipulated Gerðr first by proposing positive retribution (golden apples and the magic ring Draupnir) and then negative retribution (threats) in order to make her promise to meet Freyr. However, the most straightforward assumption seems to me that, in the two episodes mentioned above, it was sufficient to tell the dwarfs that the messenger (viz., Skírnir and Loki) brings the gods' orders, which in and of itself produced the dwarfs' having-to-do. Therefore, I cannot agree with Hafstein who wrote that the dwarfs "are reluctant donors, […] and the gods generally obtain the goods [from the dwarfs, UVM] through deceit, threats, or bribery" (Hafstein 2003, 33). In cases the manipulator has the authority to command the dwarfs, a command (even when transmitted through a messenger) is sufficient – just as it was sufficient when Borr's sons set Austri, Vestri, Norðri, and Suðri under the four corners of the sky.

CASE 2. DRAUPNIR, GULLINBURSTI, AND MJǪLLNIR

When Loki acts on his own initiative, he has no power to command the dwarfs but needs to manipulate them in other ways. Right after having ensured that Ivaldi's sons produce the golden hair, Skíðblaðnir, and Gungnir on gods' orders, Loki proceeded to make other dwarfs produce some other products. To create the dwarfs' wanting-to-do he offered a wager: "Then Loki wagered his head with a dwarf called Brokk on whether his brother Eitri would succeed in making three precious things as good as these were" (Snorri Sturluson 1987, trans. Faulkes, 96). The result of this wager episode was Gullinbursti (the golden-bristled boar that was given to Freyr), Draupnir (the magical ring that

was given to Óðinn), and Mjǫllnir (the powerful hammer that became Þórr's most important weapon and main attribute), while Loki got his lips stitched together as he had lost the wager. To relate this episode to the definitions and distinctions presented above, this wager was a manipulation of the cognitive kind, playing on provocation by challenging Eitri the dwarf's modal competence. Additionally, one could speculate to what extent the prize Loki offered – his own head – was attractive to the dwarfs and whether it also might have contributed to producing the dwarfs' wanting-to-do so that the manipulation worked both in the cognitive and the pragmatic domain. When it turned out that Brokkr had actually won the wager, "Loki offered to redeem his head; the dwarf said there was no chance of that" (ibid., 97). Does it mean that Brokkr had accepted the wager because he desired the prize? Loki saved his life thanks to his quick thinking and smartness: "Then the dwarf was going to cut off Loki's head, but Loki said that the head was his but not the neck" (ibid.), and – as already has been mentioned – Brokkr eventually stitched up Loki's mouth. However, I do not think that this blood-thirsty episode shows that the original reason for the dwarf to agree to this wager could have been that he wanted to have Loki's head cut off. Admittedly, some other dwarfs – apparently, for no particular reason – killed Kvasir, caused Gillingr's drowning, and killed Gillingr's widow just because she wept too loudly when she got the news about her husband's death. Therefore, one may wonder whether the wish to kill was generally characteristic of dwarfs, including Brokkr. However, I find it more likely that Brokkr grew extremely angry with Loki in the process of producing Gullinbursti, Draupnir, and Mjǫllnir because he understood that the fly which repeatedly bit him while he was working the bellows, – and nearly caused him to lose the wager, – was no ordinary fly but Loki himself, in disguise. My conclusion is that challenging the dwarf's competence was what made the manipulation successful in this case.

CASE 3. FREYJA'S NECKLACE

The closest thing to a sale contract – besides the episode discussed in footnote 2 – is found in *Sǫrla þáttr eða Heðins saga ok Hǫgna*, a short narrative in the *Flateyjarbók* manuscript from around 1390 AD. The story starts with introducing the *Æ*sir, the people who lived in Asía and whose chief town was called Ásgarðr. Their king was Óðinn, and his concubine was Freyja, the daughter of Njǫrðr. Not far from the king's hall lived Alfrigg, Dvalinn, Berlingr and Grerr, the four smiths with extraordinary talents or powers: "There were some men in Asia, one called Alfrigg, the next Dvalin, then Berling and Grer. […] They were such skilled craftsmen they could turn their hand to anything and do well. Men such as these were called dwarves. They lived in a certain stone"

(*Sorli's Tale* 2005, trans. Tunstal). One day, when Freyja was walking past the dwarfs' stone, she saw that they were forging a golden necklace, and she liked the looks of it. The text says that the dwarfs liked the looks of Freyja as well, which is a hint about what might be efficiently used as a positive retribution in the process of manipulation.

> She asked to buy the necklace, offered gold and silver for it, and good treasures besides. They said they weren't short of money, but each would sell his share of the necklace for one thing, and they didn't want anything else, except for her to lie a night with each of them. And, whether this was gladly done on her part or otherwise, that's the deal they struck. And four nights later, when these conditions had been met, they handed over the necklace to Freyja. (ibid.)

It may seem that Freyja managed to buy a necklace from the dwarf smiths. At the same time, it is not obvious that Freyja actually was buying anything – it may equally well be argued that in reality it was the dwarfs who bought certain services from her, and that the necklace in question was the means of payment rather than the purchased product. Only when the means of payment is money is it obvious what is the object (or the service) that is being purchased, and what is the payment. But when a product (or a service) is being exchanged for another product or a service, the distinction between selling and buying is blurred out, and it may be difficult if not impossible to tell which party of the transaction is the seller, and which is the buyer.

In a modern legal system, a bilateral sale contract "arises from the exchange of mutual, reciprocal promises (the offer and the acceptance) between two persons (the offeror and the offeree)" (Sileno, Boer, and van Engers 2014, 5), i.e., the buyer and the seller. Either the seller or the buyer may be the offeror, depending on whether the whole transaction starts with the seller offering a product or a service (in exchange for a payment) or the buyer offering money or some other means of payment (in exchange for the product or service).

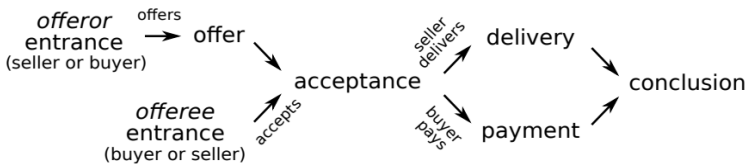

Figure 2. The sale transaction, as a bilateral contract
(quoted from Sileno, Boer, and van Engers 2014, 5)

A sale contract may be described as a special case of manipulation where the offeror is the manipulator who seeks the offeree (the manipulatee) to agree to part either with money (in exchange for a product) or with a product (in exchange for money). Both parties are often from start interested in a successful fulfilment of the contract. In the above episode, Freyja and the four dwarfs switch roles as the offeror resp. offeree. At first, Freyja is the offeror; it is she who offers silver and gold in exchange for the necklace she desires to acquire. However, her offer is not accepted, and thus there is no contract and no transaction. The reason why Freyja's offer was turned down, has hardly anything to do with the dwarfs' richness or lack of interest in gold and silver. Their own statement that they were not short of money seems to function as an excuse which came in handy in that particular situation rather than as a general rule describing what dwarfs would, or would not, accept. In a number of Old Norse sagas, such as *Nítíða saga*, *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, *Egils saga einhenda og Ásmundar berserkjabana* or *Áns saga bógsveigis*, dwarfs readily accept gold and silver (which may be given either directly to the dwarf or to the dwarf's child) – but this readiness notwithstanding, they do not exactly *sell* their products. Cf. also the episode in *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, where the dwarfs accept gold from Vaði for teaching his son Velent thereby selling their services (see footnote 2). After having denied selling the necklace to Freyja, the dwarfs take the role as offerors and offer it in exchange for something *they* want. This time the offer is accepted by the offeree (Freyja), and the contract is successfully carried out. As pointed out above, the distinction between selling and buying in this transaction is blurred out, so that the necklace may both be described as the payment for what the dwarfs bought from Freyja, and as the object that Freyja bought from the dwarfs. Thus, it does not really matter whether it was Freyja who bought the beautiful necklace from the dwarfs, or the dwarfs who bought something else from Freyja. What is germane to this study, is whether Freyja manipulated the dwarfs in this episode. In my interpretation, Freyja did not succeed in manipulating the dwarfs into selling the necklace to her (although she attempted), but rather she was herself manipulated by the dwarfs because the dwarfs willingly took the role as offerors while Freyja (the offeree) accepted their offer.

CASE 4. THE MEAD OF POETRY

Now we turn to the episode in the *Prose Edda* which already has been mentioned, namely, the story of the mead of poetry. It has been interpreted as a story of blood feud where gods, dwarfs and giants were involved (see Lindow 1994 [1995]). Given the focus of this research, the part where Suttungr the jǫtunn acquires the mead and especially whether he manipulates the dwarfs and how exactly, will be paid special attention to.

Two dwarf brothers, Fjalarr and Galarr, produced the mead by mixing honey with the blood of Kvasir, whom they had killed. As if one murder were not

enough, they invited Gillingr (a jǫtunn) and his wife to stay with them. Then they invited Gillingr to go out to sea in a boat, where Gillingr was drowned. When his wife – now a widow – learned about his death, "she was greatly distressed and wept loudly" (Snorri Sturluson 1987, trans. Faulkes, 62). The dwarfs killed her too. Now we arrive at the part where Suttungr acquires the mead.

> When Gilling's son Suttung found out about this, he went there and seized the dwarfs and took them out to sea and put them on a skerry below high-water level. They begged Suttung for quarter and offered him as atonement in compensation for his father the precious mead, and they were reconciled on these terms. Suttung took the mead home with him […]. (ibid.)

This reminds us a little bit of the episode where four dwarf smiths "sold" the necklace to Freyja – or, rather, bought a night with her, using the necklace as payment. Here the two dwarfs use the mead of poetry as payment for their own lives. The similarity lies thus in that the dwarfs in both cases use a product of theirs as payment for something. The main difference from the Freyja episode is here that Fjalarr and Galarr paid for the chance to elude the certain death by drowning, which would have been the revenge for having caused the deaths of Suttungr's parents. Another difference is that Fjalarr and Galarr could only hope – but not know with certainty – that Suttungr would find the mead valuable enough to accept it as payment. By contrast, Alfrigg, Dvalinn, Berlingr, and Grerr knew that Freyja did find the necklace of great value, as she was prepared to offer a generous payment for it. Luckily for Fjalarr and Galarr, their offer was accepted by Suttungr. Again, this episode shows that Suttungr did not manipulate the dwarfs in order to get the mead of poetry. It was not for the mead he threatened the dwarfs with killing them by drowning, but as revenge for their evil doings. Suttungr probably did not even know about the existence of the mead of poetry until he put the dwarfs on the skerry which was to disappear under water during high-water. Rather, it was the dwarfs who manipulated Suttungr and produced his wanting-to-do (willingness to let them go unharmed) – or, rather, eliminated his wanting-to-do (intention to kill them) – by proposing a positive retribution, i.e., the mead. Therefore, I argue that statements such as "[Suttungr] extracts from them the mead as compensation for his father" (Lindow 1994 [1995], 61) lack precision. My conclusion is that, although the dwarfs do not sell their products, they may use them as means of payment – or ransom – when they need something that is important to themselves.

CASE 5. TYRVINGR

We turn now to one of the most notorious dwarf-produced weapons that was ever owned by a human being (even though this particular person was Óðinn's own grandchild): king Svafrlami's sword Tyrvingr. The story of how

Svafrlami came to acquire it is told in some versions of *Saga konungs Heiðreks ins vitra* (*The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*). The reader is not only informed about Svafrlami's descent from Óðinn, but also about his father's death in a battle where the latter fought against Þjazi the giant: "Ódin […] had many sons, all great men and mighty. One of his sons was called Sigrlami […]. Sigrlami […] had a son, who was named Svafrlami. Sigrlami fell in battle, fighting against the giant Thjazi" (*The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise* 1960, trans. Tolkien, 67–68). This piece of information is important for our discussion as it gives a hint about why Svafrlami would need, or desire, a magical weapon. It was necessary to be able to avenge the death of his father, whose killer, Þjazi, was no ordinary opponent, but a supernatural being, a jǫtunn. Additionally, possessing such a weapon would undoubtedly increase its owner's chances to achieve power and glory.

We turn now back to the question of how Svafrlami got this weapon, and what sort of manipulation was involved. One day when he was out in the woods hunting, king Svafrlami encountered two dwarfs, Durinn and Dvalinn, whose exceptional skills must have been renowned – at least, in certain circles – since Svafrlami appears to have heard of them. Moreover, both Svafrlami and the audience of the saga knew that such an encounter meant an opportunity to acquire a magical, dwarf-crafted sword.

> At sunset he saw a great stone, and beside it two dwarfs. The king drew his graven sword over them, and with that sign held them outside the stone. They begged him to spare their lives, and Svafrlami asked them what their names were. One said he was called Durin, and the other, Dvalin. Svafrlami knew that these were the most skilful of all dwarfs, and he laid this charge upon them, that they should make a sword for him, the best their skill could devise […] (*The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise* 1960, trans. Tolkien, 68)

Svafrlami as well as the audience of the saga knew that dwarfs could be coerced into obeying by depriving them of the possibility to get into the stone which was their home (i.e., by offering them negative retribution). The saga text did not need to explicate this. Werner Schäfke-Zell has convincingly demonstrated that the motif of the extorted dwarf was conventionalized and well-known for the readers (and listeners) of the sagas.

> The reasons for [denying the dwarf entry to his boulder] are usually not provided by the text itself. […] [T]he motif of the extorted dwarf is already known from other texts as *literary knowledge* or by reconstructing the motif of the hero through his later clearly goal-oriented interaction with the dwarf. The motif of the extorted dwarf thus appears highly conventionalized since the narrative does not need to explicitly state the reasons for the human actant's actions. They belong to the *horizon of expectation* (*Erwartungshorizont*) of the genre of *Fornaldarsǫgur* and Late Medieval Icelandic Romances. (Schäfke 2012, 181)

Cf. also "the conventionality of the *dvergar* motifs in the sagas attests to audience familiarity with them" (Mayburd 2018, 203).

As pointed out above, one important reason for Svafrlami to coerce the dwarfs into providing him with such a magical sword may have been his intention to kill Þjazi the giant. At any rate, the saga text mentions that Svafrlami subsequently "bore it in battles and in single combats, and with it he slew the giant Thjazi" (*The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise* 1960, trans. Tolkien, 68). Whether the motif behind this intention was to avenge the death of his father, the desire to marry Þjazi's daughter (which Þjazi perhaps would not have allowed), a combination of both or something else, is unclear. In any case, Svafrlami "took Thjazi's daughter Fríd, and they had a daughter named Eyfura" (ibid.). Edward Petitt notes this episode as well, particularly pointing out that Þjazi was responsible for killing Svafrlami's father: "He used it to kill the giant Þjazi, his father's killer, before taking the giant's daughter, *Fríðr* 'Peace'" (Pettit 2020, 325). Returning to Svafrlami's encounter with the dwarfs, he decided to exploit the situation to the maximum, and demanded the sword not only to be victorious, but also luxurious and expensive.

> [I]ts hilts were to be of gold and its grip also, and they were to make its scabbard and baldrick of gold. He said that this sword must never fail and never rust, must bite into iron and stone as if into cloth, and that victory must always come to him who carried it in battles and single combats; this was the price of their lives. On the appointed day Svafrlami returned to the stone, and the dwarfs delivered over to him the sword; it was very beautiful. (ibid.)

So far, it seems that the manipulation has proven successful. Svafrlami received exactly the kind of sword he had demanded. However, it turned out soon that the dwarfs wouldn't tolerate such violent and arrogant behaviour from a human being, even if he was a king – and Óðinn's own grandson.

> But when Dvalin stood in the doors of the stone he said, 'May your sword, Svafrlami, be the death of a man every time it is drawn, and with it may three of the most hateful deeds be done; may it also bring you your death!' Then Svafrlami struck at the dwarf with the sword, and the ridges of the blade were hidden in the stone; but the dwarf leapt back into it. […] (ibid.)

And indeed, Svarflami was killed by Arngrímr the berserk who slew him using this very sword – and married his daughter Eyfura.

> [Arngrím the berserk] harried the kingdom of Svafrlami and fought with him, and they had a close fight together; Svafrlami struck off a part of Arngrím's shield, and the sword plunged into the earth. Then Arngrím swung his sword against Svafrlami's hand and struck it off; and he took

> Tyrfing himself and fought with it, and with it he slew Svafrlami. Then Arngrím took great plunder, and carried off with him Eyfura, Svafrlami's daughter; he went home to Bólm and wedded Eyfura. (ibid.)

Thus, Svafrlami's end in this version of the saga bears clear parallels to Þjazi the giant's fate. Could it be the case that Tyrvingr had the ability to choose how to act and whom to "obey"? Could the sword have been able to remember how its previous owners had used it, to learn from its own experience? In her study on Old Norse magic swords, Miriam Mayburd writes that Heiðrekr – one of those who in due course inherited Tyrvingr – "is not wielding Tyrfingr: it appears to be quite expertly wielding *him*" (Mayburd 2020, 55).

What exactly the three *níðingsverk in mestu* ('most evil/despicable deeds') mentioned in Dvalinn's curse are will depend on how one interprets the saga, which version of the saga one examines, and also on whether one takes into account other texts where Tyrvingr is mentioned, such as *Qrvar-Odds saga*. At any rate, the dwarfs' curse is highly important for the events of the story about Svafrlami and his descendants. Jackson Crawford says even that "[e]xcept for its final two, extraneous chapters, [the saga] is virtually a saga of the sword Tyrfing" (*Two Sagas of Mythical Heroes* 2021, trans. Crawford, ix).

The story of Svafrlami and his fatal attempt at manipulating the dwarfs is not the only instance in saga literature where the manipulator is punished in one way or another by the dwarf (or the dwarfs). Werner Schäfke-Zell classifies the producers of Tyrvingr as "vengeful, unrewarded dwarfs" (Schäfke 2012, 176). In addition to these two dwarfs, the category of vengeful, unrewarded dwarfs includes Andvari in *Vǫlsunga saga* and, although his vengefulness comes to expression in a different way, Alfrigg in *Þiðreks saga* (ibid., 176–177). According to Schäfke-Zell the dwarfs "only curse the protagonistic secondary characters Svafrlami in *Hervarar saga* and Loki in *Vǫlsunga saga*" – and "there are different kinds of curses" (ibid., 177). While Andvari places a curse on the treasure which Loki violently has taken from him, and while Durinn and Dvalinn curse the sword they have produced for Svafrlami, Alfrigg contents himself with declaring that Þiðrekr shall never have him under his control again: "And never shall you again get me in your power as long as I live, even if you live two men's lifetimes" (*The Saga of Thidrek of Bern* 1988, trans. Haymes, 17–18). Thus, this declaration is analysed as a special, non-lethal kind of curse – but nevertheless a curse – by Schäfke-Zell (Schäfke 2012, 176–177). Presumably, the dwarf in the longer redaction of *Mágus saga* would also have been included in the category of vengeful, unrewarded dwarfs if Schäfke-Zell had taken this redaction into account in his study, as he declares the same kind of promise to Ubbi: "nú munum vit skilja, ok lifi ek aldri svo lengi, at þú skulir fá vald á mèr (sic)" (*Bragða-Mágus saga* 1858, 81, "now we shall part, and as long as I live you will not have power over me", my translation). This would have required Schäfke-Zell to expand the

category of vengeful, unrewarded dwarfs to also include dwarfs in episodes where the manipulator is an antagonistic character. In my view, this would have made perfect sense. Why should a dwarf's reaction be determined by whether the manipulator is a protagonist or an antagonist?

My analysis of the dwarfs' response to manipulation in such cases is different to that by Schäfke-Zell in two more regards. First, I find it important that, strictly speaking, it is not Svafrlami and Loki themselves who are being cursed, but rather the *objects* that have been forcefully taken from the dwarfs (the sword Tyrvingr and Andvari's treasure, respectively) so that the curse follows the object and *all* its subsequent owners.[3] This aspect may be explained in terms of narrative structure. A cursed object which passes down from one generation to the next, suits better as the core of an exciting story than a cursed *individual* character. Second, the manipulators in all the three episodes (i.e., Svafrlami, Loki, and Þiðrekr) – four episodes when we add Ubbi in the longer redaction of *Mágus saga*, – have no legitimate power to command dwarfs in the same way as gods have but coerce the dwarfs into providing them with certain objects by force. It is this combination of the balance of power between the dwarfs and those who manipulate them on the one hand, and the brutal force used as negative retribution as manipulation strategy on the other, which results in the dwarfs responding the way they do.

CASE 6. A DWARF-MADE BOW

Another similar episode is found in the *Áns saga bogsveigis* (*Saga of An Bow-Bender*). Very much like Svafrlami, Án accidentally meets a dwarf in a forest beside a large stone, which Án realizes is the dwarf's home. Similar to what Svarflami did, Án does not let the dwarf come back inside his stone unless he produces a weapon with specific magic powers. It appears that Án knows – or, at least, assumes – that the possibility to get back into his home is vital to the dwarf. Perhaps even the dwarf's life depends on it, cf. the previous case where the dwarfs beg to spare their lives in a similar situation. Thus, Án creates the dwarf's having-to-do (i.e., his having to comply with Án's requests) by offering negative retribution in the pragmatic domain. Unlike Svarflami, however, Án gives the dwarf some silver coins as payment, – arguably, not as much for the bow and the arrows as such, but first and foremost to make sure the dwarf does not curse them.

> [Án] saw a single large stone, and a man standing next to a stream. He had heard mention of dwarves, and he'd also heard that they were more skilful than other men. [He] got between the stone and the dwarf, and cast a spell […]. He said that the dwarf would never be able to get back inside

[3] Cf. "when delivering the weapon, Dvalinn cursed it" (Pettit 2020, 325) and "[f]urious about Loki's robbery, Andvari cursed the treasure and all its owners" (Dillinger 2012, 29).

> unless he crafted a bow for him, as large and strong as he could wield, and five arrows to go with it. […] The dwarf complied with these terms, without placing any curses on the weapons. […] [Án] gave him some silver coins […]. ("The Saga of An Bow-Bender" 2012, trans. Waggoner, p. 161)

One could speculate whether this particular dwarf was not as rich as Alfrigg, Dvalinn, Berlingr, and Grerr who wouldn't sell the necklace to Freyja for money, and whether his relative poorness could have been the reason why he accepted the silver coins from Án. However, it is more likely that richness or poverty of the dwarf has nothing to do with the matter. Án did not offer any money until he had received the bow and the arrows. Thus, this episode supports the claim that dwarfs do not sell their products. The silver coins serve more as a sign that Án wants to compensate for having been rude towards the dwarf, and also to ensure that the dwarf does not curse the weapons retroactively. As Werner Schäfke-Zell notes, "[i]f the reader does not know about the potential threat of the dwarf cursing the human actant, it seems arbitrary that the human actant usually endows the dwarf with valuables such as […] silver (*Áns saga*), since the dwarf is absolutely in the power of the human actant" (Schäfke 2012, 177). It appears, thus, that the knowledge about the risk of the dwarfs placing a curse on the object they have been forcefully coerced into producing by someone who does not have legitimate power over them, was a part of the "dwarf-lore".

CASE 7. THE GRATEFUL AND INDEBTED DWARF

Finally, we briefly discuss an episode in *Þorsteins þáttr bǿjarmagns* where the human protagonist is given magical objects by a dwarf as a token of gratitude for having saved the dwarf's son. I have elsewhere analysed several sagas where human heroes manipulate dwarfs by showing generosity towards dwarf-children and by exploiting the fact that dwarfs are loving and devoted fathers, see Mikučionis (2014). Therefore, this last case-study is rather short before we turn to conclusions.

Besides a huge boulder, Þorsteinn sees a crying dwarf and asks why he is acting like a madman and screaming so loudly. The dwarf explains that an eagle – who, the dwarf says, must be a devil sent by Óðinn himself, – has caught his son and that he will die from grief if he loses him. Þorsteinn rescues the dwarf's boy by shooting the eagle. The dwarf offers a reward on his son's and his own behalf: "My son and I owe you a great debt for saving his life, and now I'd like you to choose your own reward in gold and silver" ("Thorstein Mansion-Might" 1985, trans. Pálsson & Edwards, 261). At first, Þorsteinn refuses, saying: "I'm not in the habit of taking money just for showing my talents" (ibid.). "That doesn't make my duty to repay you any the less", the dwarf responds (ibid.), and offers a wool shirt, a ring, a flint, a marble, and a steel point as a reward instead. When the dwarf explains what magical features all these objects

possess, Þorsteinn gladly accepts them. This episode shows that reciprocity and repayment are essential for dwarfs. Even when the dwarf is not being deliberately manipulated, generosity and help create the dwarf's wanting to (or even having to, – the dwarf uses expressions "my *duty*" and "my son and I *owe* you") reward the human, while ungenerous and brutal behaviour may be punished by placing a curse on the object that has been taken from the dwarf.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has shown that the dwarfs may be manipulated in more ways than one. The gods such as Óðinn have the power to command the dwarfs. Even when their command is transmitted via a messenger, the dwarfs obey. Less powerful deities, such as Freyja or Loki, may get what they want from dwarfs by offering positive retribution or by offering a wager and, thus, challenging the dwarfs' modal competence. Also, dwarfs may voluntarily offer their products as ransom, as payment for something they need or desire, or as a token of gratitude. Dwarfs won't tolerate being treated as servants by anyone else than the most powerful gods. Admittedly, this statement is only true with respect to dwarfs of the kind that has been discussed in this article – free dwarfs, famous for their capacities as smiths with magic powers. In chivalric sagas, by contrast, there are dwarfs who are servants to knights, and who are *not* associated with smith-work or craftsmanship. Dwarfs of this kind are left outside the scope of this study. If a human – even if he is a king and Óðinn's grandson – or another being, such as Loki, coerces dwarfs into producing certain objects for them or into handing over their possessions by threats and brutal force, the dwarfs may place a curse upon those objects. It appears that the dwarfs curse the *object*, – not the *individual* in question. Durinn and Dvalinn did not curse Svafrlami so that he would die, but the sword Tyrvingr so that it would bring Svafrlami his death. This explains why Grélant the dwarf did not curse Kvintalín in the *Samsons saga fagra* and why Mǫndull the dwarf did not curse Hrolfr in the *Gǫngu-Hrolfs saga*, even though in both sagas the dwarfs were threatened with physical violence and even killing. In these two cases there was no object to curse since the dwarfs were forced *to do something* rather than *to produce* or *to hand over something* to the manipulator. Alfrigg the dwarf did not exactly curse king Þiðrekr either, even though he was forced to provide him with certain objects; but he at least declared that Þiðrekr would never again have control over him. The same kind of declaration was pronounced by the dwarf in the longer redaction of *Mágus saga* regarding Ubbi, once more supporting the claim that dwarfs won't tolerate being treated as servants by anyone else than the most powerful gods.

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