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Working Draft

"'Heiðar stjǫrnur'/ 'heiðnar stjǫrnur': The Confrontation of Paganism and Christianity in Sólarljóð"

The possibility of syncretic accommodation or of serious confrontation between paganism and Christianity would seem to presuppose a period in which active belief in both pagan and Christian religions was possible. In such an age it is clearly possible for poetry to become a religious battleground. Thus Steinunn skaldkona can taunt the shipwrecked missionary Þangbrandr in verse that Þórr had challenged Christ to a duel, but that Christ had not dared accept:

> Braut fyrir bjǫllu gæti
> --bǫnd ráku val strandar--
> mǫgfellandi mellu
> móstalls vísund allan;
> hlífðit Kristr, þá er kneyfði
> knǫrr, malfeta varra;
> lítt get ek at Guð gætti
> Gylfa hreins at einu.

[The slayer of the kinsman of the giantess (i.e. Þórr) smashed the bison of the sea-mew's perch (i.e. the ship) for the bell-keeper (priest); the gods drove the horse of the strand (i.e. the ship); Christ did not protect the stepper of the sea's shingle when the vessel was crushed; I think that God paid little enough heed to the reindeer of the sea-king (i.e., to the ship). (Turville-Petre trans., A.I.135-36, cf. Njáls s., ch. 102; Kristnisaga, ch. 9)]

In such a period the difficulty of converting a pagan form to Christian use is a testy problem. As Noreen suggested: "Skaldepoesien var så genomsyrad av hedendom, den hedniska mytologien var i så hög grad underlaget för skaldernas kenningspråk att man väl kan förstå om en nyomvänd kristen frågar sig om skaldepoesien som art överhuvudtaget låter förena sig med kristendomen" (18). The two religions confront each other in the form itself. The Christian poet could approach this problem in several ways: 1) possibly intuiting some danger, he might nevertheless seek the middle ground of accommodation, the poetic equivalent of Helgi the Lean's syncretism, a "readiness . . . to let the new faith infuse but not choke the poetic habits of the pagan world" (Edwards 35); 2) he might undertake, as several did, to salvage the skaldic form by divesting it of some of its association with paganism through eschewing the mythological kenning,

the most overtly heathen feature of the form; or 3) he might attack paganism in one of its most formidable strongholds by appropriating the form to turn it against itself, as "a way of meeting magic with a higher magic," of supplanting Óðinn with Christ (Frank 66, 108). (This device of appropriation has been used many times in many contexts: Augustine attacked the Donatists in their own popular form, the metrical psalm [Raby 20]; before he died at Bunker Hill, the American zealot Joseph Warren poured fomenting new lyrics into the old flask of an English soldier song, "The British Grenadiers," turning the song against itself as the New England turned against the Old.) In some instances it is difficult to tell which of these three approaches the poet has taken: is Eilífr Goðrúnarson's _dróttkvætt_ fragment to Christ an example of the first or the third? What is its relation to his _Þórsdrápa_? For the poet caught between the poles of Christianity and paganism, however, the struggle could be intense. It is after all in the skaldic form itself that Hallfreðr, according to tradition, wrestles to overcome his paganism:

> Ǫll hefir átt til hylli
> Óðins skipat ljóðum:
> allgilda man ek aldar
> iðju várra niðja;
> en trauðr, þvíat vel Viðris
> vald hugnaðisk skaldi,
> legg ek á frumver Friggjar
> fjón, þvíat Kristi þjónum.

[All our race has made poems in praise of Óðinn; I remember the highly valued practice of people, my ancestors; and, reluctant, I turn my hatred on the first husband of Frigg because I serve Christ, for the rule of Óðinn pleased the poet well. (Turville-Petre trans., A I 168)]

Though it is less often discussed in this context, Eddic poetry could also be the locus of tension between paganism and Christianity. Indeed, von See argues that Eddic poetry lent itself less well to Christian use than skaldic: "Vielleicht wurde die fast ausschliessliche Bindung dieser Gattung an mythische und sagenhafte Stoffe als allzu störend empfunden" (76). (It is interesting that the summer before his conversion Hjalti Skeggjason blasphemes Freyja in the Eddic meter _málaháttr_: "Vilkat goð geyja: grey þykkjumk Freyja.") _Vǫluspá_ seems to have been composed in such an age--in the last decades of the tenth century (though Kuhn now places it somewhat earlier)--, and the relationship between putative

Christian and pagan elements in the poem has remained a nagging problem of interpretation: "Both extremes, total paganism and total Christianity, and most positions in between have been looked for and found in it" (Nordal 109). Snorri, who cites it some ten times in Gylfaginning, uses it as his main source of stories of the gods. E. H. Meyer, whose study Nordal calls "a fable by a man whose learning had made him mad," gave the poem a completely Christian allegorical reading. Finnur Jónsson supposed it to have been composed with an eye to Christianity but with the aim of demonstrating the superiority of the old religion over the new. For Björn M. Ólsen the poem aimed at preparing the way for Christianity by showing that paganism "bears within itself its own death sentence" (Nordal 121). Nordal, who believed the poem to have been influenced by the Christian fear of Doomsday as the year 1000 approached, summarizes his own view as follows:

> [The poet] did not cast off his paganism. Perhaps its best parts had never been so precious to him as after this uncomprehending spiritual assault on him by the Christian missionary. But with the tolerance which was one of the things which paganism had in greater measure than Christianity (and which was one of the things that caused its fall) he took from the new message what he needed to perfect his philosophy of life. . . . Hinn ríki is neither Christ nor Óðinn, but the poet's own highest divine ideal (124, 134).

In each of these examples, identification of the specific historical context of confrontation between the two religions--of an age in which each faith had its adherents and some tried to accommodate both--has been an interpretive key to understanding the poems.

But how are we to understand works in which we find a tension between Christian and pagan elements over two hundred years after the conversion of Iceland? Contrary to the traditional view, Bjarni Einarsson suggests that Hallfreðr's Christian poems "are too good to be true," that they may not be the compositions of the tenth-century poet at all but the work of the thirteenth-century author of the saga. According to Einarsson, the author may have borrowed phrases and kenning types (e.g, harri Hliðskiálfar=Óðinn) from the twelfth-century Christian drápur and placed them in the mouth of his tenth-century hero (218-19). If this is true, does it not change the way these verses should be read?

In Sólarljóð, which is generally dated to the thirteenth century, one finds some of the same tensions that characterize Vǫluspá from the last years of the tenth. Its mixture of pagan and Christian elements has led scholars to argue both

extremes. In an unpublished commentary from the eighteenth century (AM 427 fol.), Jón Ólafsson, one of the first investigators of the poem, tends to bog down in a Christian allegorical reading of the pagan references: "Odin [v. 77] est ratio vel spiritus vivens" (fol. 78), and Jónsson disparages those who see any pagan concepts in the poem: "Det er almindeligt, at omtale digtet som stærkt blandet med hedenske forestillinger; dette er fuldkommen grundløst. . . ." (II.130). While no one would deny the poem's Christian bearings, some have rejected Christian readings of many of its images. In the view of Gelling and Ellis Davidson, for example, the Sun Hart, arguably the central Christian image of the poem, appears "rather incongruously in a Christian context": "No satisfactory explanation has been given of this figure as a Christian symbol. . . ." (172-73), and Ólsen consistently opts for a literal reading, rejecting for example any "önnur eða dipri þyðing" of the hart's horn (v. 78) than that "Rúnar voru oft ristnar á horn" (61) or the view that the sun in the seven central verses (39-45) is anything other than "blátt áfram hin náttúrulega sól" (42). Vigfusson, who dated the poem (reckoned as two) to the eleventh century, saw an immediate and balanced relationship between it and Vǫluspá next to which he printed it: "The spiritual connection between the two poets, one a heathen with glimpses of Christianity, the other a Christian with heathen remembrances, warrants us in placing their works in juxtaposition" (I.203). In all, this range of views is reminiscent of those on Vǫluspá.

One difficulty in interpreting Sólarljóð is that we cannot be confident of its historical context. As Bjarne Fidjestøl has cautioned: "I filologiske disiplinar er det likevel ei rimeleg målsetjing å nærme seg ei forståing som kunne vere aktuell i samtida, og sjølvsagt har eg streva etter det og. Men ein vanske er det at vi kjenner ikkje samtida, fordi vi ikkje veit plent kvar og når diktet var til" (8). If the poem could be dated to the late tenth or early eleventh centuries--the dates proposed by nineteenth-century scholars--one could understand the severity of its treatment of heathen tradition more readily. There would be a clear historical context for the confrontation of Christianity and paganism. But no one in this century has placed it earlier than about 1200, and several have dated it later in the thirteenth century. (Fidjestøl does not attempt to date the poem but hints that it could have been composed well after 1300 [8]). It seems likely that the poem belongs to the age of saga

composition; it is not important to my argument that it be dated more precisely than from late twelfth into the fourteenth century.

I come now to a fundamental question. Can one speak usefully at all either of syncretism or of a serious confrontation between paganism and Christianity in the late twelfth or thirteenth (or even fourteenth) centuries? I cannot answer this confidently but can only probe toward a tentative conclusion in an attempt to understand the larger questions Sólarljóð raises. One approach to an answer is through the history of the mythological kenning during the Christian period. Noreen's study shows that in the last stages of the pagan era skaldic style "är fullkomligt överlastad med mytiska namn" (2), but that under the influence of Hallfreðr and Sighvatr, the poets of the missionary kings, who had "synbarligen gjort sitt bästa för at undvika denna hedendom," there was a great simplication of style in the eleventh century. In the twelfth, there is a revival of kennings with pagan referents that corresponds to emergent antiquarian interests that lead to Snorri's Edda in the thirteenth century and continue in the fornaldarsögur of the fourteenth. For Noreen, paganism is by the twelfth century purged of its dangers; the gods of mythology now lead "ett rent litterärt liv" (28). This position has been generally accepted but needs slight revision in light of Diana Edwards' recent study of pagan references, "emptied of whatever sacral meaning they formerly possessed" (36), in the poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld (d. after 1073). None of this, however, suggests a particular twelfth- or thirteenth-century context for a strong confrontation between paganism and Christianity. Indeed when Bjarni Kolbeinsson, bishop of Orkney in the early thirteenth century, disclaims Odinic means of learning his craft--

Varkak fróðr und forsum,
fórk aldrigi at gǫldrum . . .
ǫllungis namk eigi
Yggjar feng und hanga . . .

[I did not become wise under waterfalls; I never pursued pagan charms . . .; I certainly did not take Óðinn's booty (from) under the hanging one . . . (Jómsvíkingadrápa 2, B II 1)]

--the tone is playfully revisionist, evoking a continental topos (Frank 70). Bjarni is no zealot attacking the pagan past. Óðinn poses no threat to him; he can still pour out Yggjar bjór even if no one listens (1).

Another possibility is to consider the fascination many of the sagawriters seem to have with the relationship of paganism and Christianity--as religions and ethical systems--and the frequency with which the theme of conversion figures in the Íslendingasogur. Much has been written in recent years on this subject (e.g., Lönnroth and McCreesh). Open admiration for the Noble Heathen is pervasive, and even Christian lapses into paganism are sometimes excused because of ignorance as in Fóstbræðra saga: "En þó at þá væri menn kristnir kallaðir, þá var þó í þann tíð ung kristni ok mjǫk vangǫr, svá at margir gneistar heiðninnar váru þó þá eptir ok í óvengju lagðir" (ÍF 6.125). There is clearly an interest in the pagan past and a sympathetic antiquarian attempt to recover an understanding of its beliefs, even though this effort could, as Baetke cautions, never be fully successful:

> Die Verfasser der Sagas . . . standen--200 Jahre und mehr nach der Einführung des Christentums--dem Heidentum fern und hatten nur unklare Vorstellungen von ihm. . . . Im ganzen war ihre Auffassung von [der heidnischen Religion] bestimmt durch die religiösen Ideen ihrer eigenen Zeit. Sie sahen sie gewiss nicht alle durch das Klosterfenster, aber doch durch the Brille ihrer geistlich-gelehrten Bildung. . . . Dabei konnte es nicht ausbleiben . . . dass man sich die heidnische Religion nach dem Bilde der christlichen malte (24).

It is important, though, that this antiquarian interest goes far beyond the practical need to recover myths in order to understand earlier poetry--that it concerns the systems of belief and ethical bearing themselves--but the combination of sympathy and distance does not suggest a context for serious confrontation of paganism and Christianity in the Sturlung Age. If the thirteenth-century author of Hallfreðar saga really did compose poems in which Hallfreðr struggles to give up his paganism for Christianity, his imagining of the struggle seems almost as immediate and compelling as an actual historical confrontation in the tenth century. But in general we seem to be dealing with antiquarian interest that complements the skaldic "renaissance" of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Clearly, not everyone in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries viewed the pagan past with proud antiquarian enthusiasm. As Lönnroth has suggested, there was a range of response: "A very strict Christian [imagining the pagan past] would disapprove of things which would be acceptable to a somewhat more lenient Christian, although this conflict in views may have been largely unconscious" (25). In the early twelfth century the bishop of Hólar, Jón Ǫgmundarson, had

forbidden the dedication of days of the week to the heathen gods (Týsdagr, Óðinsdagr, Þórsdagr, etc.) and banned other heathen customs (Jóns saga helga, ch. 24). In the late twelfth century, at the same time as the "pagan" renaissance, Oddr Snorrason, one of those who was looking "durch das Klosterfenster," wrote his life of Óláfr Tryggvason. His view of the gods differs from that of the antiquarians. When the king, "uvinr alls mannkyns djǫfullinn," encounters Óðinn or Þórr in Oddr's narrative, they are devils (djǫfull, fjándi) (e.g., chs. 43, 59). Oddr is not alone; the view of the pagan gods as devils pervades much of the overtly Christian literature of the age. When Snorri, arguing in Skáldskaparmál for the value of mythological stories in understanding poetic diction, cautions--

> Christians, however, must not believe in pagan gods [eigi skulu kristnir menn trúa á heiðin goð] or that these tales are true in any other way than is indicated at the beginning of this book [i.e., the euhemeristic prologue] (ch. 8, Jónsson ed. 86)

--he is clearly addressing the views of those who may have felt that study of pagan myths and imitation of pagan poetry was both dangerous and sinful, but in doing so he himself implies that it is still possible to believe in the pagan gods. We do not need to subscribe to the idea of "two cultures" in order to appreciate that for some reflective Christians paganism still may have seemed alive enough to have posed a threat. One such Christian, I believe, was the author of Sólarljóð. His imaginative powers far surpass the capacities of an Oddr Snorrason, but his view of the pagan gods and of the ethical norms of the pre-Christian period are at least as severe and certainly differ from Snorri's. It is after all possible to read Oddr's accounts of King Óláfr's encounters with the gods as entertaining folktales; no one will view the poet's representation of pagan motifs lightly.

I have suggested that the Sólarljóð's treatment of heathen tradition is severe. This has not been the usual view. The one-foot-in-each-world metaphor has dominated the criticism of the poem just as it has the pervasive view of the Sturlung Age. For Falk, the narrator ". . . hadde, som mange islændinger i Sturlungatiden, staat med et ben in kristdommen og med andet i hedendommens livsmoral" (54), and in his commentary he blends pagan and Christian details: e.g., heljar reip (v. 37) as an amalgam of norns' strand and the vincula mortis

of the Psalms (25). Bjðrn M. Ólsen, who saw the poet as composing a "kristileg Hávamál" on the model of the pagan poem he so deeply admired, writes: "Í þeim gimsteini brotna ljósöldur útlendrar og innlendrar menningar, því að skaldið stendur með annan fótinn í kenningum kirkjunnar enn hinn í Hávamálum" (73). These statements continue in the tradition of Rudolf Keyser who suggested that the poem "aabenbare ligger paa Grændsen af Hedenskabet og Christendommen" (259). Fidjestøl's view--if I have chosen a passage that does it justice--is considerably more moderate. Acknowledging the pagan references in what is a thoroughly Christian poem, he suggests that the poet/preacher may be following in the tradition of the missionary sermon (like St. Paul's on the Unknown God) in seeking a connection with pre-Christian formulations:

> Karakteristisk for metaforane i denne delen av diktet (og seinare) [i.e., the middle and last parts] er altså at dei knyter seg til førestillingar som vel kan vere kristne, men som samstundes fører tanken i retning av heidne førestillingar. Men det er viktig å merke seg at dette gjeld berre språkbruken. Sjølve moralforkynninga er reinhekla katolsk, og jamvel nett det at forkynnaren søkjer tilknyting til førkristne førestillingar, er noko som er typisk for kristen misjonsforkynning til alle tider (jfr. Lange 1958: 254)" (42-43).

Again, however, one would more readily expect such an approach in an age like the late tenth or early eleventh centuries when strong belief in both religions was current. The aim to take one's bearings from the old in order to make the new more accessible would seem to lose immediacy three hundred years after the conversion.

The possibility I would like to explore is that the poet--with thorough knowledge of especially Hávamál, Vǫluspá, and Grímnismál--appropriates the eddic mythological poem, not out of an admirer's impulse to imitate, not to create a "kristileg Hávamál," but to turn the form against itself, to displace paganism from its last formal stronghold and to consign the apparatus of the old mythology to Hell. (Cf. Hallberg's comment: "I denna dikt får den gamla trons sinnebilder vittna om djävulen" [165]). I do not argue that this is the poet's only purpose but that it may be useful to consider the relationship of Christianity to paganism in the poem as serious confrontation.

An analogy may be helpful. In the latter part of the fourth century, Prudentius appropriated the Vergilian epic and consciously turned it against itself in his Pscyhomachia. His intention is clear in the first hexameter of the poem--

Christe, graves hominum semper miserate labores

--which overturns Aeneas' prayer to Apollo just as he is about to experience the great religious insight of his career:

Phoebe, gravis Troiae semper miserate labores (VI.56).

As Macklin Smith writes: "Simply and directly, Apollo's initial place in the line has been occupied by Christ. The idol has been cast down, the true God worshipped. As Prudentius has written elsewhere, 'torquetur Apollo/ nomine percussus Christi Christi, nec fulmina Verbi/ ferre potest. . . . ['Apollo writhes when the name of Christ smites him, he cannot bear the lightnings of the Word . . .']. No other text is as good commentary on the first word of the Psychomachia" (273-74). Whereas Juvencus, Sedulius, and others bring in Vergilian passages ornandi causa for the sake of heightening or beautifying a passage--plundering the Egyptian treasures as it were--Prudentius, as Smith points out, is apt to do the opposite. He "marshalls Vergilian phrases for the ugly, the evil, the sinful" (277). Unlike Juvencus, Prudentius is always alert to the possibilities of intertextual irony; indeed the meaning often depends upon a stinging allusiveness. One of the most striking examples of this comes at the end of the work (ll. 873-87) as Wisdom, crowned on the throne of the soul, "sets in order all the government of her realm.: She holds in her hand a sceptre, "not finished with craftsman's skill but a living rod of green wood" that blooms with red roses and lilies that never wilt. This sceptre is the fulfillment of a type:

huius forma fuit sceptri gestamen Aaron
floriferum, sicco quod germina cortice trudens
explicuit tenerum spe pubescente decorem
inque novos subito tumuit virga arida fetus.

[This is the sceptre that was prefigured by the flowering rod that Aaron carried, which, pushing buds out of its dry bark, unfolded a tender grace with burgeoning hope, and the parched twig suddenly swelled into new fruits. (trans. Smith)]

The rich and vital imagery of this cento-like passage plays against King Latinus' figure of speech at the end of his oath of peace during his last moment as ruler in his native land. The sceptre he holds for the last time is altogether different:

ut sceptrum hoc (dexta sceptrum nam forte gerebat)
numquam fronde levi fundet virgulta nec umbras.

> cum semel in silvis imo de stirpe recisum
> matre caret posuitque comas et bracchia ferro;
> olim arbos, nunc artificis manus aere decoro
> inclusit patribusque dedit gestare Latinis (Aeneid XII.106-11).

[even as this sceptre (for happily is his hand he bore his sceptre) shall never burgeon with light leafage into branch or shade, now that once hewn in the forest from the nether stem, it is reft of is mother, and beneath the steel has shed its leaves and twigs; once a tree, now the craftsman's hand has cased it in seemly bronze and given it to sires of Latium to bear.]

Macklin Smith concludes his insightful study of the Psychomachia with a comment on the relationship of these two passages:

> A greater craftsman, Prudentius tells us, has nullified the King Latinus' oath and has thereby nullified the supremacy of Roman civilization conferred by Vergil through his oath. What concord has King Latinus with Christ the King? In the early Christian context, Latinus' sceptre seems all the more brazen, all the more barren, against the fruition of Aaron's rod in the hand of Sapientia (300).

The work as a whole has overturned the Roman mythos of Vergil, and the great poet of Romanitas has been outdone by being undone. I suggest that the poet of Sólarljóð is doing something of the same thing with the apparatus of the old faith. I will only sketch briefly the direction I think this takes.

Sólarljóð is, to say the least, a difficult poem; terms like "oenigmaticus," "yderst dunkle," and "baffling incoherence" abound in the criticism. Scholars have sometimes not known whether to gloss details like Njǫrðr's daughters (79) or Nið's sons (56) in bono or in malo, and the impulse to precise identification has pressed strained specificity on passages that are deliberately sketchy and ambiguous. One of the great values of Fidjestøl's astute study is that it does not propose to provide a new interpretation that clarifies all details but seeks to lay a sound foundation for interpretation by asking fundamental questions and by acknowledging that part of the poem's meaning is its very obscurity.

When one is lost in a strange landscape, a useful starting point is to orient oneself with a compass. In verses 54-56, three directions are specified:

Vestan sa ek fljúga	Sólar hjǫrt	Norðan sá ek ríða
Vánar dreka	leit ek sunnan fara	Niðja sonu

Two of these directions correspond to those in Voluspá where the "sól scein sunnan" (4; cf. 5) and "fyr norðan á Niðavǫllum" stand dark mansions, one of which, plaited with serpents' spines and dripping with venom, has doors looking

to the north ("norðr horfa dyrr")(37-38). So far the geography is consistent, and if one extends from the sun in *Vǫluspá* to Christ the Sun Hart in *Sólarljóð*, the south remains appropriate: In Eilífr's fragment, for example, Christ sits to the south, "sunnr at Urðar brunni" (B I 144). But in *Vǫluspá* nothing comes from the west; threats are from the east: "Á fellr austan um eitrdala" (36), in the east sits the old crone "Í Iárnviði/ oc fœddi þar Fenris kindir" (40), the giant Hrymr drives *austan* (50), the keel of Naglfar courses from the east (51). At the end of *Vǫluspá*, "kømr inn dimmi dreki fliúgandi . . . neðan frá *Niðafiǫllum*" (66), i.e., from the north. The poet of *Sólarljóð* holds constant the southern sun and the dark north (*Nið* 'dark of the moon') but reverses east and west. In Christian terms it is unthinkable that destruction should come from the east; the threatening *Vánar dreki* is placed in the west, the compass point associated with death through etymological relation of *occidens* and *occidere*. The pagan sybil's coordinates are evoked to be reversed.

There are other instances of reversal. As dark as the narrator's experience on the *norna stóll* is, he is there for nine *days* (51) rather than Óðinn's nine *nights* (*Háv*. 139). The nines of the pagan poems are generally replaced with sevens: Óðinn's *fimbullióð nío* (140) with the father's *sjau vinsamlig ráð* and the seven central "Sól ek sá" verses; the *nío heima* of *Vǫluspá* (2) with the *sigrheima sjau* of *Sólarljóð* (52). All of this suggests a conscious overturning of details of the pagan poems.

Consideration of contrasting representations of the damned and the saved, in verses whose images and verbal echoes ("yfir hǫfði þeim") suggest that they are related, further shows the poet's aim to overturn:

Marga menn sá ek moldar gengna þá er eigi máttu þjónustu ná *heiðnar stjornur* stóðu yfir hǫfði þeim *fáðar feiknstǫfum* (60).	vs.	Menn sá ek þá ek mark hofðu gefit at Guðs logum; *hreinar kyndlar* váru yfir hǫfði þeim brendir bjartliga. Menn sá ek þá er af miklum hug veittu fátœkum frama; lásu englar helgar bœkr ok *himna skript* yfir hǫfði þeim (69-70).

Over the heads of the just shine "hreinar kyndlar"; over those outside the sacraments of the church glow "heiðnar stjornur." Here the overturning lies in the pointed replacement of the adjective "bright" in Vǫluspá's phrase "heiðar stiǫrnur" (57) with "heathen." The phrase "fáðar feiknstǫfum" trumps a similar phrase in Grímnismál in which Baldr's radiant Breiðablik is the land in which the "fewest baleful runes" (fæsta feicnstafi) lie (12).

The image of heathen stars colored with baleful runes shining over the damned may also evoke one of the charms (ljóð) of which Óðinn boasts in the ljóðatal section of Hávamal. He claims that he has power to bring a hanging man back to life if he "colors runes" (í rúnum fác) below the tree (157). The poem denies this power over death. Throughout the poem runes seem associated with evil, heathendom, and death; they are symbols of doom: the blóðgar rúnir carved on the breasts of the envious (61) mirror the bloody runes (dreyrstǫfum) in which the sun sets at death and the gates of hell grate (39-40). It is possible that the poet intends the runes to contrast with the heavenly script (himna skript) which the angels read over the heads of the charitable. Many have noted the similarity between the father's sojourn on the norna stóll and Óðinn's hanging for nine nights on Yggdrasill to learn the mysteries of the runes. But the poet has not undertaken a Christian reworking of Óðinn's descent to grasp the magic runes. His ljóð have been replaced by those of the sun as the magic of the old religion has been overcome by a higher magic. The myth is evoked to be displaced. In the final description of the damned (67), heljar hrafnar hack the eyes (sjónir) out of the deceivers. The images of the deceiving god, the one-eyed god of ravens--known in kennings as hrafnáss, "raven tempter" (hrafnsfreistuðr) and "priest of the raven's sacrifice" (hrafnblóts goði)(see Turville-Petre 1964 57-60)--have found their proper context.

There is an obstacle to the association of runes wholly with the negative. Scholars have usually supposed that the runes in the sentence "Hér eru rúnir/ er ristit hafa/ Njar ar d tr níu" (79) are carved on the hart's horn in verse 78:

> Arfi, Faðir
> einn eik ráðit hefi
> ok þeir Sólkotlu synir
> hjartar horn,
> þat er ór haugi bar
> hinn vitri Vígdvalinn.

But this verse is framed by two stanzas that contain the only direct references to the names of pagan gods in the poem--Óðins kván in 77 and Njarðar dœtr in 79--and this frame is extended in bloody images of evil on either side (76 and 80). I would argue that the hart's horn does not bear runes carved by the daughters of Njǫrðr, but that it is interpreted by the father, and should be by us, as an image of Christ's divinity, of his overcoming of death. Paasche's reference to a passage from Alan of Lille seems wholly apt (159):

> Christ is called the hart; just as the hart arises early to break through the brush with his horns in order to rest upon the mountain top, so Christ arose from the sleep of death and ascended to heaven, breaking a path for himself through the thorn hedge with his horns: that is to say, the divinity that resides in his horns transcended his human weakness (PL 210:737).

The representation of the Sun Hart in v. 55 seems consistent with this reading; "fœtr hans/ [his humanity] stóðu foldu á / en tóku horn [his divinity] til himins." That the horns themselves, without runes, may be read this way is further suggested by Queen Ratio's figural reading of the hart's antlers in Les livres du roy Modus (I, ch. 74) as the "commandments of the law" (Thiébaux 43). (With Paasche I read Njarðar dœtr níu and their runes [79] negatively, though I do not think it necessary to link them to the deadly sins.)

It seems unlikely that this poet, who uses the apparatus of pagan religion to depict the realm of hell, who transforms "bright stars" to "heathen stars," and east to west, would allow the poem's mystery to be mediated through the agency of Njǫrðr's daughters. The father has learned a different and higher mystery--a heavenly script. It is the language of figural sign that he communicates by interpreting the hart's horn with angelic help.

Though I do not have time to develop it, I believe this pattern of evoking to displace also governs the choice of the image of the Sun Hart. In the Christian iconographic tradition, which can be more fully elaborated than Paasche and others have done, is a nexus of images whose essential elements--hart, dragon (or serpent), water, and tree--correspond to the Eicþyrnir cluster in Grímnismál. The poet evokes the pagan nexus to displace it with the Christian, to turn the Eddic mythology against itself.

The Jesuit scholar Alexander Baumgarten may not have been too far from the spirit of the poet when he used his translation of Sólarljóð in 1888 as an occasion to chasten his German contemporaries, in sermon fashion, for their antiquarian enthusiasm for Germanic mythology:

> . . . das Sonnenlied [gemahnt] unwidersprechlich an die Thatsache, dass die vorschristliche Cultur der germanischen Stämme von vielen neueren Geschichtschreibern, Mythenforschern, und Dichtern mit viel zu günstigen Farben ausgemalt und idealisirt worden ist, als hätte ihnen das Christenthum kaum mehr etwas bringen können, höchstens etwa eine kleine speculative Verfeinerung des Gottesbegriffs, als hätten diese edlen Urgermanen kaum einen Antheil an der allgemeinen Erbschuld gehabt. . . . Der Dichter des Sonnenliedes hat das Island und Norwegen seiner Zeit besser gekannt als die deutschen 'Monotheisten' die heute für Odin und Freyja schwärmen. . . . Eine wahre sittliche Bildung ist auch im Norden erst eingezogen, als der Hammer des Thor dem Kreuze der Welterlösung weichen musste und als an die Stelle der unheimlichen Zauberformeln das Bekenntnis des dreieinigen Gottes trat (442-43).

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(In the interest of space I have not given full citation of editions, only of secondary works or editions from whose commentaries I quote. The editions used are standard: Jónsson's of Snorra Edda, skaldic poetry, and Óláfs saga, Neckel-Kuhn of the eddic poems, Íslenzk fornrit of the family sagas, Guðni Jónsson's of Jóns saga, and Kahle's of Kristnisaga; for Sólarljóð Fidjestøl's revision of Falk's text seems soundest.)

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