

THE RYDBERG RELIGION: HOW A FORGOTTEN SWEDISH NOVELIST BECAME THE OBJECT OF A 21st CENTURY CYBER-CULT

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INTRODUCTION

Cults and new fringe religions have been a topic of concern in the United States for the past 30 years.¹ Although many relatively mainstream cults have long exploited the communicative power of the Internet, little systematic attention has been devoted to the phenomenon of “cyber-cults” – loosely-knit fringe groups that, for all practical purposes, exist *only* on the Internet. For reasons that will be examined later in this paper, such cults are prone to be more extreme than their “real-world” counterparts, blurring the distinction between fantasy and reality in ways that can pose real dangers to the cultists themselves, as well as to those perceived as critical of their beliefs.

This paper will undertake the first serious examination of one such cyber-cult, that has coalesced around the 19th-century Swedish writer, Viktor Rydberg, and his racial-nationalist fantasy, *Undersökningar i germanisk mytologi (UGM)*. Part One of the paper will provide a brief historical overview of Rydberg’s life and career, while Part Two will locate *UGM* in the historical context of “Germanic” racial-nationalist ideology that reached its mature form less than 45 years later, in the Third Reich. The remainder of the paper will recount the development of the modern cyber-cult based on Rydberg and his work, and consider the legal landscape constraining the activities of such groups.

I. THE HISTORICAL RYDBERG

It would be hard to imagine a writer less likely to register on the fleeting attention span of Internet e-lists and chat rooms than Abraham Viktor Rydberg (1828-1895). Although his imaginative fiction and poetry enjoyed wide popularity in his home country during

¹ See generally, e.g., CULTS AND NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS: A READER (Lorne L. Dawson, ed., 2003). THE CULTIC MILIEU: OPPOSITIONAL SUBCULTURES IN AN AGE OF GLOBALIZATION (Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööv, eds., 2002); Jeffrey Kaplan, RADICAL RELIGION IN AMERICA (1997).

his lifetime, over the past century Rydberg has fallen into almost total obscurity outside Sweden. He does not receive so much as a footnote, for example, in the massive, 324-volume *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. If Rydberg is mentioned in Anglo-American scholarship today, it is usually in conjunction with a gay studies curriculum. According to the *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*, Rydberg, together with his long-time friend Pontus Wikner, played an important part in the emergence of an underground gay culture in Victorian Sweden under the repressive anti-sodomy legislation of 1864.² As noted in *GLBTQ: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Culture*, despite the legal ban on such activities, Rydberg and Wikner were counted “[a]mong the important Swedish cultural figures of the period who engaged in same-sex sexual relationships,”³ and the thinly veiled homoerotic themes in Rydberg’s writing “were brought to a newly formed mass audience of bourgeois readers (who mostly preferred not to understand his homoerotic hints).”⁴

The “controlling passion of Rydberg’s life” has been described as *gosse-svärmeri* – boy-craziness.⁵ The Scandinavian gay studies journal, *Lambda Nordica*, has published an examination of Rydberg’s erotic fixation on the aesthetic ideal of the “Snow White Youth,”⁶ and the writer’s fascination with the youthful male physique is strongly conveyed in many of his works, including his 1859 novel, *The Last Athenian* and his essay on Antinous, the young lover of the Emperor

² See “Sweden,” entry in *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HOMOSEXUALITY* 1270 (Wayne R. Dynes, et al., eds., 1990).

³ “Sweden,” entry in *GLBTQ: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, AND QUEER CULTURE*: <http://www.glbtq.com/social-sciences/sweden.html> (last viewed August 31, 2006).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Judith Moffett, *Viktor Rydberg, 1828-1895*, in *THE NORTH! TO THE NORTH!: FIVE SWEDISH POETS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY* 77, 82 (Judith Moffett, ed. & trans., 2001) quoting Sven Stolpe, *DIKT OCH SAMHÄLLE: RYDBERG, SNOILSKY, 80-TALET* (1978). That Rydberg’s erotic fixation was more than just a matter of esthetics is confirmed by his well-publicized liaison – prior to the passage of the anti-sodomy act -- with the young Rudolf Ström. See Svante Nordin, “Viktor Rydberg,” entry in *151 SVENSKT BIOGRAFISKT LEXIKON*, 45, 47 (2000).

⁶ See Hans-Henrik Brummer, “Among the Shining Antique Marbles”: *Viktor Rydberg’s Essay on Antinous*, in *DOCTO PEREGRINO: ROMAN STUDIES IN HONOUR OF TORGIL MAGNUSON* 51-77 (Thomas Hall, et al. eds., 1992).

Hadrian.⁷ In the latter work, written as Rydberg emerged from a serious depression, the author “exhibits a deep sympathy for same-sex relations,” notwithstanding the Swedish legislation banning such conduct.⁸ This refusal to conceal his aesthetic focus in the face of possible prosecution was one of the most compelling qualities of Rydberg’s life. It is therefore both sad and ironic that his modern-day devotees know so little of the man and his work that Rydberg’s name is now sometimes invoked in support of homophobic polemics warning against the supposed evils of the gay lifestyle.⁹

There was nothing in Rydberg’s early life to suggest that anything but an anonymous, working-class existence awaited him. He was the son of an alcoholic prison guard who was unable to support his family after Rydberg’s mother died in the cholera epidemic of 1834. Young Abraham was shunted through a succession of foster homes until he dropped out of school after his first year at Lund University and found employment with the *Göteborgs handels och sjöfartsstidning* (*Gothenburg Mercantile & Shipping Gazette*) as a newspaper writer, the career he was to pursue for most of his life.¹⁰ Finally able to pay his bills from his employment as a journalist, Rydberg filled his spare time writing popular fiction, which he was allowed to serialize for publication in the pages of his employer’s newspaper.

His tragic childhood left an indelible mark on Rydberg, who suffered from symptoms of “severe mental illness” as an adult.¹¹ Rydberg’s later work often expressed the writer’s deep emotional longing to be reunited with the mother he had lost,¹² and the “mother-

⁷ According to Moffett, “The enormous excitement and sensuality with which he describes the beauty of young Greek men [in *The Last Athenian*] leaves no doubt about the sort of love-object Rydberg would have pursued, given circumstances that would have permitted the feelings to be recognized and the pursuit undertaken.” Moffett, *supra* note 5, at 83.

⁸ “Swedish Literature,” entry in GLBTQ: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, AND QUEER CULTURE: http://www.glbtq.com/literature/swedish_lit.html. (Last viewed August 4, 2006.)

⁹ See, e.g., http://www.geocities.com/gambanreidi.geo/View_of_Pleasures.html (last viewed August 31, 2006).

¹⁰ See Nordin, *supra* note 5.

¹¹ Moffett, *supra* note 5, at 79.

¹² See Lars Lönnroth, *Vårdträdet och Höstsejd: om olika sätt att använda Völvans spådom*, in SKALDEMJÖDET I BERGET: ESSAYER OM FORNISLÄNSK

obsession so evident in his work has a bearing on the homosexuality covertly expressed in his many poems about naked children and adolescents.”¹³ At the same time, much of Rydberg’s most creative writing would also display a yearning for the normality of a traditional family life – something that had been snatched away from the writer as a child, and was denied to him as an adult by the country’s legal climate. His friend Wikner made a passionate appeal for the legalization of same-sex marriage in his book, *Psykologiska självkännelser* (*Psychological Confessions*), but such reforms would not be considered until nearly a century after his and Rydberg’s lifetimes.

Rydberg published his first serialized novel in 1857, the ripping adventure tale *Fribytaren på Östersjön* (*Freebooter on the Baltic*). The following year brought the serialization in a literary calendar of the moody and darkly erotic *Singoalla*, the work that established Rydberg as a popular favorite with Swedish readers. *Singoalla* highlighted what would become some of the author’s characteristic themes: nature mysticism, Christian humanism, and a highly charged homoerotic undercurrent. In his introduction to a 1983 edition of the book, Sven Delblanc noted that the novel “reflected homosexual desires and impulses in Rydberg himself,” and that the protagonist’s slaying of young Sorgborn is a “masked representation of homosexual intercourse.”¹⁴ Stig Bäckman has countered that other interpretations of the story are possible,¹⁵ and Birthe Sjöberg suggests that Rydberg’s use of erotic themes in *Singoalla* represented an escape from reality and the loss of an innocent childhood to which the author longed to return.¹⁶

Rydberg’s style deliberately harkened back to the Romantic era, with the result that much of his work seems cloying and overly sentimental to modern readers. Even in his native land, Rydberg’s

SKALDEKONST OCH DESS ÅTERANVÄNDNING I NUTIDEN 169, 207 (1996) (Rydberg’s poem, *Vårträdet*, is literarily redeemed by its expression of the mythical dream of returning to the mother’s bosom).

¹³ Moffett, *supra* note 5, at 79.

¹⁴ Stig Bäckman, *Viktor Rydberg som Erland Månesköld. Om Sven Delblancs läsning av Singoalla*, 125 *Samlaren* 78-91 (2004).

¹⁵ *See id.*

¹⁶ *See* Birthe Sjöberg, *Erotik som verklighetsflykt i Viktor Rydbergs Singoalla*, in *LITTERATUR OCH KJÖNN I NORDEN* 140-147 (Helga Kress, ed., 1996).

prose is now perceived as “old-fashioned, wordy, sentimental and even toothless.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, the tension between Rydberg’s thinly disguised homoeroticism and his sentimental paeans to the simple joys of childhood and family life struck an emotive chord with Swedish readers of the Victorian era, and his fiction enjoyed great popularity.

The growth of Rydberg’s celebrity as a writer, combined with his position at the newspaper, gave him a platform which he used to promote his views on the issues of the day. His unsuccessful stint as a university student led him to become an advocate of “folk” education, first promoted by the Danish theologian N. F. S. Grundtvig, in which rigorous, formal academic study and research would be replaced by practical training directed to the common man.¹⁸ Enamored with what he knew of Hellenic culture, Rydberg advocated public nudity and group exercise, which he believed had been practiced in ancient Greece.¹⁹ In an essay entitled, “On Nudity and Ways of Dressing,” Rydberg “suggested that a society civilized to the point of wearing clothing was weak; it could be strengthened if its citizens adopted the primitive habit of nudity.”²⁰ Most importantly, Rydberg harshly criticized what he saw as modernist trends in Swedish writing, and the authors who employed such methods. Thus, despite his personal interest in liberalizing Sweden’s strict code of public morality, Rydberg refused to support August Strindberg when the modernist writer was tried for blasphemy.²¹

In 1877, Uppsala University celebrated its 400th anniversary with a year-long jubilee. As part of the festivities, honorary doctorates were bestowed upon a variety of Swedish celebrities at public ceremonies and – perhaps due in part to the influence of Wikner, who was then a professor at Uppsala – Rydberg was among

¹⁷ Lönnroth, *supra* note 12, at 207.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Lars Lönnroth, *The Academy of Odin: Grundtvig’s Political Instrumentalization of Old Norse Mythology*, in *IDEE/GESTALT/GESCHICHTE: FESTSCHRIFT KLAUS VON SEE* 339 (Gerd Wolfgang Weber, ed., 1988).

¹⁹ See Michele Facos, *NATIONALISM AND THE NORDIC IMAGINATION* 85-86 (1998).

²⁰ *Id.* at 86.

²¹ See “Viktor Rydberg,” entry in Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viktor_Rydberg. For his part, Strindberg considered Rydberg to be a mediocre talent whose novel, *The Last Athenian*, was “quite unbearable.” When Rydberg was at the height of his popularity, Strindberg described his countryman as “the illustrious progenitor of all that’s vapid.” August Strindberg, *2 STRINDBERG’S LETTERS* 468 (Michael Robinson, ed. & trans., 1992).

those who received this recognition.²² Honorary degrees, of course, are entirely a reflection of the recipient's notoriety, and are unrelated to scholarly accomplishment or capability.²³ Nevertheless, and despite his public denunciations of traditional institutions of higher learning, Rydberg seemed inordinately pleased with this distinction, and thereafter began designating himself "Viktor Rydberg, Ph.D.," as if his honorary doctorate were actually an earned degree.

That same year, three deaths occurred among the eighteen members of the Swedish Academy, the non-academic body established by King Gustav III to award prizes and take other measures to promote Swedish literature. The Academy had been in the forefront of the opposition to modernism that had caused Sweden's literature to lag far behind the rest of Scandinavia in breaking with the Romanticism of prior generations.²⁴ Rydberg's anachronistic style and biting criticism of Strindberg and other modernists made him an obvious candidate to fill one of the vacancies, and he was accordingly elected to Seat 16 on the Academy, replacing the poet C. V. A. Strandberg. In that capacity, Rydberg's continuing hostility helped ensure that Strindberg – by most measures a greater literary talent than himself – would never be elected to the Academy. Characteristically, Rydberg used the occasion of his inaugural address to denounce Lund University, where he had dropped out 30 years before, as being overly bureaucratic and stifling its students' creativity.²⁵

The same year Rydberg took his seat on the Academy, the newly-organized Stockholm *högskola* (high school) began hosting public lectures on scientific themes.²⁶ The school had already encountered more than a decade of delays in opening, and the first

²² Rydberg composed and read the poem, *Cantata*, on the occasion of being presented with his honorary degree. See Moffett, *supra* note 5, at 84.

²³ See, e.g., "Honorary Degree," entry in Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honorary_doctorate (such degrees are awarded "as a decoration").

²⁴ See Sven H. Rossel, *A HISTORY OF SCANDINAVIAN LITERATURE, 1870-1980* 44 (1982).

²⁵ See Nils Runeby, *Vagabonds, Specialists or the Voice of the People: Scandinavian Students and the Rise of the Modern Research University in the 19th Century*, in *UNIVERSITY AND SOCIETY: ESSAYS ON THE SOCIAL ROLE OF RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION* 19, 30-31 (Martin Trow & Thorsten Nybom, eds., 1991).

²⁶ See Stockholm University web site: <http://www.su.se/english>. See also Sven Tunberg, *STOCKHOLMS HÖGSKOLAS HISTORIA FÖRE 1950* 25-38 (1957).

two instructors, hired in 1881, lectured and administered examinations out of their homes.²⁷ A private institution that neither conducted research nor granted degrees, the *högskola* was intended to focus on instruction in the natural sciences.²⁸ But by 1884 the school's need for public recognition had become so pressing that its administrators determined to add Rydberg to its staff of two despite his lack of a university diploma, assigning him to teach cultural history.²⁹

It was while employed at the *högskola* that Rydberg embarked upon the strangest episode of his eclectic career.

During Rydberg's lifetime, Swedish Romanticism developed a strain of "ardent nationalism," derived in part from the influence of the German Romantics.³⁰ As will be reviewed more fully in the next section, 19th century European nationalism was not necessarily related to promoting what we now think of as nation-states. Rather, the concept of *nation* was an organic one, less concerned with flags and borders than with commonalities of language, culture, and ultimately race.³¹ The Romantic nationalism that was gaining influence in the region consequently tended to be Pan-Scandinavian in nature, or Pan-Germanic, or even – and this was the variety that commanded Rydberg's allegiance – Pan-Aryan.

Rydberg's post at the *högskola* left him enough free time to undertake a massive work, by which he hoped to harness the

²⁷ See Aant Elzinga, *Universities, Research, and the Transformation of the State in Sweden*, in *THE EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN UNIVERSITY SINCE 1800: HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL ESSAYS* 191, 192, 206 (Sheldon Rothblatt & Björn Wittrock, eds., 1993).

²⁸ See *id.* at 205.

²⁹ Lars Emil Scott, "Abraham Viktor Rydberg," entry in *DICTIONARY OF SCANDINAVIAN LITERATURE* 499 (Virpi Zuck, ed.-in-chief, 1990).

³⁰ "Scandinavian Literature," entry in *ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA*, 15th ed., vol. 27, p.15.

³¹ See, e.g., Bruce Waller, *Relations between States and Nations*, in *THEMES IN MODERN EUROPEAN HISTORY 1830-90* 252, 252 (Bruce Waller, ed., 1999) ("A nation is a group of people with similar characteristics and aspirations. It is not the same thing as a state, and every Celt will tell us that."). Indeed, the word *nationalism* "derives from the Latin *natio*, implying a common racial descent." Carl Savich, *The Development of Modern European Nationalism: Social Darwinism and Scientific Racism*, <http://www.serbianna.com/columns/savich/073.shtml> (quoting Carlton Hayes, *NATIONALISM: A RELIGION* (1960)). See also Barbara Miller Lane, *NATIONAL ROMANTICISM AND MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN GERMANY AND THE SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES* 10 (2000) (nineteenth century Scandinavian nationalism "began as a cultural movement").

popularity of the old Scandinavian myths to drive his Romantic nationalist ideology. The result of this labor was the ponderous, two-volume *Undersökningar i germanisk mytologi* (*Researches in Germanic Mythology*)—rather pretentiously titled, given that Rydberg was, notwithstanding his one year of college, essentially an autodidact, a “largely self educated journalist”³² whose formal academic training could best be characterized as “spotty.”³³

UGM opens with an earnest yet fanciful account of the supposed origin and spread of the “ancient Aryans”³⁴ – a race that could, Rydberg believed, be identified by its body type: “light hair, blue eyes, light complexion, and tallness of stature.”³⁵ Rydberg viewed these “Aryans” as an elite sub-group of the white race, which included Semites and other lesser stock.³⁶

Rydberg’s understanding of the emergence of racial distinctions in the course of human evolution was less than complete, resulting in such statements as, “In primeval time, the yellow Mongolian, the black African, the American redskin, and the fair European had there tented [in central Asia] side by side.”³⁷ In this halcyon age, Rydberg claimed, all Aryans shared a common mythology which became splintered and fragmented with the diaspora of their race across the globe. For the remainder of the book Rydberg ostensibly “recreates” this original epic mythos, employing a naïve comparative method of the sort that became popular with later *völkisch* writers,³⁸ selectively citing to snippets of myth and folklore

³² Elias Bredsdorff, et al., AN INTRODUCTION TO SCANDINAVIAN LITERATURE 127 (1951).

³³ Scott, *supra* note 29, at 498.

³⁴ See Viktor Rydberg, 1 UNDERSÖKNINGAR I GERMANISK MYTHOLOGI 1-23 (1886).

³⁵ Viktor Rydberg and Rasmus B. Anderson, TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY 1 (1891). All English quotations from *UGM* are taken from Anderson’s edition, which remains the only professional translation of Rydberg’s work into English.

³⁶ For example, he asserts, “It is a known fact that southern portions of Europe, such as the Greek and Italian peninsulas, were inhabited by white people before they were conquered by Aryans.” *Id.* at 5.

³⁷ *Id.* at 4.

³⁸ See, e.g., Bernard Mees, *Völkische Altnordistik: The Politics of Nordic Studies in the German-Speaking Countries, 1926-45*, in OLD NORSE MYTHS, LITERATURE AND SOCIETY 316, 325-26 (Geraldine Barnes & Margaret Clunies Ross, eds., 2000); THE NAZIFICATION OF AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE: FOLKLORE

from across a vast temporal-cultural domain to fill in the details of his “epic,” while ignoring the incomparably greater body of inconsistent or contrary evidence. In this, Rydberg was only adhering to the standard of earlier Romantic nationalists in striving to create a “Germanic” mythology not as it was, or had ever been, but as it was imagined to be.

If *UGM* is mentioned at all in modern scholarship, it is typically dismissed as “imaginative,”³⁹ a “pseudo-scholarly private mythology,”⁴⁰ or simply wrong-headed and outdated.⁴¹ The work fared little better at the time of its publication. Although the Swedish popular press embraced *UGM* with the same enthusiasm normally accorded to Rydberg’s novels, the scholarly community generally greeted its publication with silence. Even scholars like A. C. Bang and Sophus Bugge, who had been drawn into popular disputes with Rydberg in the past, preferred to ignore his venture into ethno-mythography. The Stockholm *högskola* made no public comment on the episode, but quietly stripped Rydberg of his position in cultural history and transferred him to a newly-created post as lecturer in the history of fine arts.⁴²

UGM drew inevitable comparisons to Olof Rudbeck’s hyper-nationalistic fantasy, *Atlantica*, an imaginative rewriting of world history in which Sweden played a disproportionately dominant role.⁴³ In terms that closely foreshadow Rydberg’s method, scholars have noted that Rudbeck “changes numerous historical events, persons and

IN THE THIRD REICH (James R. Dow and Hannjost Lixfeld. Eds., 1994).

³⁹ “Rydberg, (Abraham) Viktor,” entry in *ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA*, (14th ed.), at 842.

⁴⁰ Hans-Peter Naumann, *Viktor Rydbergs “Undersökningar i germanisk mytologi,”* in *STUDIEN ZUR DÄNISCHEN UND SCHWEDISCHEN LITERATUR DES 19. JAHRHUNDERTS*, 185, 191 (4 Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie, 1976).

⁴¹ See, e.g., 2 *KOMMENTAR ZU DEN LIEDERN DER EDDA* (Klaus von See, et al., eds., 1997) (dismissing Rydberg’s assertion that Hárbarð is really Loki with the observation that this misinterpretation was corrected nearly a century ago); Paul C. Bauschatz, *THE WELL AND THE TREE: WORLD AND TIME IN EARLY GERMANIC CULTURE* 122, 217 (1982) (noting that Rydberg’s speculations concerning the roots of the World Tree reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of his sources).

⁴² See, e.g., Brummer, *supra* note 6.

⁴³ For references to contemporary comparisons of *UMG* to *Atlantica*, see sources cited in Naumann, *supra* note 40, at 199; Frauke Hillebrecht, *SKANDINAVIEN – DIE HEIMAT DER GOTEN?* (1997), text at nn.19-20.

place names in favor of his thesis or invents freely.”⁴⁴ He “used the well known myths and symbols of other peoples, in order to write a chronicle for his own nation.”⁴⁵

Although it was a far more massive undertaking, *UGM* also echoed the work of the “Gothic Federation” of the early 1800s, whose literary-artistic magazine *Idunna* advanced Romantic nationalism via appeals to Old Norse myths.⁴⁶ The closest model for Rydberg’s work, however, both temporally and thematically, was Grundtvig’s creative reimagining of Norse mythology as nationalist ideology. The 1832 edition of Grundtvig’s *Nordens mytologi*⁴⁷ re-wrote the old myths to promote Danish patriotic spirit and nationalist identification with basically Christian ideals, disguised under a thin veneer of historical paganism. As the Old Norse scholar Lars Lönnroth has pointed out, Grundtvig’s use of his Icelandic sources was “extremely arbitrary and unreliable”; he “eliminates such Eddic myths as do not fit into his scheme of things (he maintains them to be ‘late,’ ‘corrupt,’ etc.) and fabricates new myths on the strength of vague allusions in the sources.”⁴⁸

The same words could be used to describe Rydberg’s method in *UGM*. As has previously been mentioned, Rydberg was already a follower of Grundtvig in his rejection of rationalism and classical scholarship in favor of Romanticism, nationalism, and “folk” schooling. With *UGM*, Rydberg simply moved Grundtvig’s project one step further along by fashioning a largely fictional mythos designed to promote “Aryan” racial nationalism, as opposed to Grundtvig’s comparatively paltry concern with Danish patriotism.

Thinking that *UGM*’s cool reception might be due to its being written in Swedish, Rydberg sought diligently to have the book translated into German, French, or English, but could find no scholar

⁴⁴ Hillebrecht, *id.*, text at nn.24-25.

⁴⁵ *Id.*, text at nn. 26-27.

⁴⁶ *See id.*

⁴⁷ The full title of Grundtvig’s 1832 text was NORDENS MYTHOLOGI ELLER SINDBILLED-SPROG, HISTORISK-POETISK UDVIKLET OG OPLYST (“The Mythology or Symbolic Language of the North, an Historical and Poetic Exposition and Explanation”). This was a substantially revised and reoriented version of his 1808 work, NORDENS MYTOLOGI ELLER UDSIGT OVER EDDALÆREN FOR DANNEDE MÆND DER EI SELV ERE MYTOLOGER. *See* Lönnroth, *supra* note 18, at 339-40.

⁴⁸ Lönnroth, *id.*, at 340, 342.

in Europe willing to undertake the task. Finally, this quest led to far-off Wisconsin, where the idiosyncratic Norwegian-American Rasmus Anderson expressed an interest in privately publishing an English translation of *UGM*. As it turned out, however, Anderson had little interest in Rydberg's fictive mythology; indeed, he had previously published his own revisionist interpretation of the Norse myths, which he regarded as merely a primitive version of Christianity.⁴⁹ But Anderson was perhaps an even more ardent Scandinavian nationalist than Rydberg, and he was attracted to the Swede's account of the "ancient Aryans'" rise to world dominance. Consequently, Anderson wound up translating only the first half of Rydberg's book – the part containing the "Aryan" pseudo-history – in his self-published *Norraena* series.

Anderson and Rydberg jointly dedicated the translated volume to Oscar II, then king of both Sweden and Norway, as the "Ruler of the Aryan People of the Scandinavian Peninsula."⁵⁰ The monarch's reaction to this "honor" is not recorded. Presumably he considered himself the ruler of *all* the citizens of his realm, Aryans and non-Aryans alike. (Indeed, since Jews had been granted full civil rights in Sweden only two decades earlier, *UGM*'s dedication would have carried an unmistakable implication by exclusion.) Moreover, Oscar II's support of the works of Strindberg and other modernists suggests he would not have been enthusiastic about his new title.⁵¹

In any case, Anderson's partial translation marked both the beginning and end of any real scholarly interest in *UGM*. By the end of the 1880s, to the relief of his friends and supporters, Rydberg put aside his public fascination with crafting a racial-nationalistic mythos and returned to the creative outlets that had won him recognition in the first place. In particular, the poetry that he wrote in the years before his death in 1895 met with critical as well as popular acclaim, and it is these works, few though they may be, that have proven to have the most lasting literary value of any of Rydberg's extensive

⁴⁹ See Rasmus B Anderson, *NORSE MYTHOLOGY: OR, THE RELIGION OF OUR FOREFATHERS, CONTAINING ALL THE MYTHS OF THE EDDAS / SYSTEMATIZED AND INTERPRETED* (3rd ed. 1879). See also Rasmus B. Anderson, *The Religion of the Ancient Scandinavians*, in *NON-BIBLICAL SYSTEMS OF RELIGION: A SYMPOSIUM* (Fredk.Hastings & A. F. Muir, eds., 1888) 153, 177 (The old Scandinavian religion of the Eddas "has many 'broken lights' of Christianity in it").

⁵⁰ See *TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY*, unnumbered dedication page.

⁵¹ See Lane, *supra* note 31, at 11-12.

output.⁵²

Rydberg's historical significance is as "a representative of the moribund romantic idealism" that stood opposed to the wave of Scandinavian modernism ushered in by Strindberg, Ibsen, and those who followed.⁵³ He has been described as Sweden's "last Romantic, the last idealist, the last major Swedish poet to believe literally in the power of Christianity to work in the personal life."⁵⁴ His work, with its pervasive blend of homoeroticism and Christian-Platonic idealism, marked the last gasp of the Romantic era that passed with him.⁵⁵ Despite achieving literary prominence for a time, Rydberg "influenced the next generation of writers hardly at all."⁵⁶

UGM fell into near-total obscurity after its author's death. Nevertheless, minor though its impact may have been in its time, the work was unmistakably both a part and a product of the *völkisch* Zeitgeist that rolled from Herder to Hitler, ultimately sweeping away much of European civilization in its wake. But like Tolkien's ring, *UGM* did not perish in the 20th century's holocaust of racial nationalism, but lay quietly in the darkness waiting to be rediscovered.

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⁵² See, e.g., Scott, *supra* note 29, at 499; Frederick Winkel Horn, HISTORY OF THE LITERATURE OF THE SCANDINAVIAN NORTH 399 (Rasmus B. Anderson, trans., 1895).

⁵³ Giovanni Bach, et al., THE HISTORY OF THE SCANDINAVIAN LITERATURES 119 (1938).

⁵⁴ Moffett, *supra* note 5, at 83.

⁵⁵ Rossel, *supra* note 24, at 45.

⁵⁶ Moffett, *supra* note 5, at 85.