

# THE RYDBERG RELIGION: HOW A FORGOTTEN SWEDISH NOVELIST BECAME THE OBJECT OF A 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY CYBER-CULT

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## II. UNDERSTANDING *UNDERSÖKNINGAR I GERMANISK MYTHOLOGI*

*As anyone with any knowledge of archaeology or Nordic and Celtic folklore knows, the idea that there was ever one basic Nordic religion, or one Nordic mythology accepted and known by all of those living across the Nordic (and even Germanic) world is patently absurd.<sup>1</sup>*

*All too often there is a tendency among students of comparative mythology to equate 'Norse' with 'Germanic,' to assume that the materials contained in the Eddas, Heimskringla, Gesta Danorum, and the like, are a true reflection of common Germanic religious beliefs and practices. To make such an equation is, of course, an error; for it is abundantly clear that there were differences in religious outlook among the several branches of the Germanic-speaking peoples.<sup>2</sup>*

### A. From Linguistic Commonality to Racial Supremacy: The Nineteenth Century's "Aryan Myth"

It is a fundamental rule of interpretation that, to understand the meaning of a text, one must know why it was created.<sup>3</sup> Why would a popular writer like Viktor Rydberg, lacking a college education and

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<sup>1</sup> Terry Gunnell, *How Elvish Were the Álfar?*, in PROCEEDINGS OF THE 13TH INTERNATIONAL SAGA CONFERENCE (2006).

<sup>2</sup> C. Scott Littleton, *The "Kingship in Heaven" Theme*, in MYTH AND LAW AMONG THE INDO-EUROPEANS 83, 106 (Jan Puhvel, ed., 1970).

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Stefan Arvidsson, ARYAN IDOLS: INDO-EUROPEAN MYTHOLOGY AS IDEOLOGY AND SCIENCE 5 (Sonia Wichmann, trans., 2006).

with no training in history or mythology, set out to craft an epic mythos for an ancient race which had never been shown to exist?

Few of us today can grasp the deep emotional appeal of the racial myth of Aryan origins that gripped much of Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This myth, to which Rydberg wholeheartedly subscribed and relates in truncated form in the opening section of *Undersökningar i Germanisk Mythologi (UGM)*,<sup>4</sup> sprang from a straightforward observation by Sir William Jones, that linguistic similarities among Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit suggested that the three languages may have shared a common origin.<sup>5</sup> Jones' insight greatly stimulated the infant discipline of comparative philology, and a flourishing branch of scholarship soon devoted itself to searching for the lost ancient tongue that served as a prototype for the modern languages of Europe and India.

As this work progressed – and especially as it was filtered down to popular audiences – the idea of a single ancient proto-language became inextricably entwined with the belief that there must also have been an ancient race that carried the mother tongue from its ancient homeland (*urheimat*) westward to Europe and eastward to India.<sup>6</sup> This supposed race, along with its hypothesized native tongue, was denominated “Indo-European” or “Indo-Germanic” in the scholarship of the period.<sup>7</sup> As Romantic-nationalistic doctrines of racial superiority spread into the field of comparative linguistics,

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<sup>4</sup> See TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY at 1-21.

<sup>5</sup> See Arvidsson, *supra* note 3, at 18-19; Jim G. Shaffer and Diane A. Lichtenstein, *South Asian Archaeology and the Myth of Indo-Aryan Invasions*, in THE INDO-ARYAN CONTROVERSY: EVIDENCE AND INFERENCE IN INDIAN HISTORY 75, 75-76 (Edwin F. Bryant & Laurie L. Patton, eds., 2005); Bruce Lincoln, THEORIZING MYTH: NARRATIVE, IDEOLOGY, AND SCHOLARSHIP 87-88 (1999).

<sup>6</sup> B. B. Lal, *Aryan Invasion of India: Perpetuation of a Myth*, in THE INDO-ARYAN CONTROVERSY: EVIDENCE AND INFERENCE IN INDIAN HISTORY 50, 50 (Edwin F. Bryant & Laurie L. Patton, eds., 2005). See also, e.g., Richard Noll, THE ARYAN CHRIST: THE SECRET LIFE OF CARL JUNG 110-111 (1997) (“It was thought that by comparing and analyzing the similarities and the differences between languages that the original families of human-kind could be identified.”); J. P. Mallory, *A History of the Indo-European Problem*, 1 J. Indo-European Stud. 21, 21 (1973) (“Having reconstructed the linguistic mother of the Indo-European daughter languages, comparative philologists also thought it possible to reconstruct the culture of the Proto-Indo-European people and locate their original homeland.”).

<sup>7</sup> See Léon Poliakov, THE ARYAN MYTH: A HISTORY OF RACIST AND NATIONALIST IDEAS IN EUROPE 193 (Edmund Howard, trans., 1974).

however, many writers came to prefer the term “Aryan,” believing it reflected the unique nobility of these ancient conquerors.<sup>8</sup>

In his classic study of 19<sup>th</sup>-century European racial nationalism, Léon Poliakov identifies this confusion of language and race as central to the development of the doctrines of racial exclusivity and superiority that would ultimately play out so horrifically in the 1930s and '40s.<sup>9</sup> Yet many writers of the time seemed unable to grasp this crucial distinction. Thus, for Charles Morris, “If there was one original Aryan language, there was one original Aryan people.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Rydberg employs the terms “race” and “language” throughout *UGM* as though the two words are interchangeable.<sup>11</sup> Rydberg further positions himself ideologically by recognizing that scholars of his day employed the terms “Indo-European” or “Indo-Germanic,” but expressly rejecting these value-neutral terms in favor of the more racially charged “Aryan” to describe the celebrated tribe from whom he claimed descent.<sup>12</sup>

The myth of the tall, blond, blue-eyed, nation-founding Aryan race reflects what Mallory has called “the near-universal longing of the peoples of Europe to secure for themselves an illustrious ancestry.”<sup>13</sup> By Rydberg’s time, belief in this racial-nationalist paradigm was nearly

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<sup>8</sup> “Aryan” was derived from Sanskrit and Iranian terms meaning “noble/spiritual one.” Among 19<sup>th</sup>-century European Romantics and nationalists, the term was also favored because it was thought to be related to German *Ehre*, “honor.” See, e.g., Nicholas Goodrick-Clark, *BLACK SUN: ARYAN CULTS, ESOTERIC NAZISM AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY* 90 (2002) (“[A]s Aryans, the Germans and their ancient Indian ancestors were the people of honor, the aristocracy of the various races of mankind.”).

<sup>9</sup> See Poliakov, *supra* note 7, at 71-105.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Morris, *THE ARYAN RACE: ITS ORIGIN AND ITS ACHIEVEMENTS* 36 (1888).

<sup>11</sup> As was a hallmark of his method, Rydberg establishes his equation of language and race by means of an indirect, passing assertion: “When the question of the original home of the Aryan language *and race* was first presented, there were no conflicting opinions on the main subject.” *TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY*, at 4 (emphasis added).

<sup>12</sup> See *id.* at 3. Rydberg was explicit that he considered himself a scion of the Aryan race. See *id.* at 21.

<sup>13</sup> J. P. Mallory, *IN SEARCH OF THE INDO-EUROPEANS: LANGUAGE, ARCHAEOLOGY AND MYTH* 266 (1989).

endemic among literate Europeans.<sup>14</sup> Simultaneously, however, the development of 19<sup>th</sup>-century race theory encouraged invidious (and largely baseless) comparisons between the hypothesized “noble” Aryans, as the supposed progenitors of white European culture, and other racial stock.<sup>15</sup> In a perverse historical twist, the initial impetus of comparative philology, which built on the *commonalities* among diverse cultures, was displaced through the intermediation of race theory by “a bolder imperative of exclusionary status, identified by visible human physical differences. Aryan by complexion, versus Aryan by language, was to suggest the true ‘white man’s burden’ of nation-building within imperial rule.”<sup>16</sup>

Arthur de Gobineau’s 4-volume *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* (1853-55) first laid out the case for the superiority of the Aryan race. Gobineau deduced that the Aryans “represented the summit of civilization.”<sup>17</sup> “Civilization originated with them and declined when Aryan blood became diluted.”<sup>18</sup>

Rydberg’s contemporary, Carl Gustav Carus, had already “deduced that the four great races must be the races of dawn (yellow), day (white), sunset (red) and night (black).”<sup>19</sup> Carus took skin pigmentation to reflect the degree of each race’s “interior illumination,”<sup>20</sup> and his four-race paradigm is reflected in Rydberg’s claim that “[i]n primeval time, the yellow Mongolian, the black African, the American redskin, and the fair European had ... tented side by side.”<sup>21</sup> As has already been noted, Charles Morris, like Rydberg, fell into the elementary snare of equating families of

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<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *HITLER’S PRIESTESS: SAVITRI DEVI, THE HINDU-ARYAN MYTH, AND NEO-NAZISM* 33 (1998).

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Mallory, *supra* note 13, at 267 (“Western scholars, once they had isolated the different races of mankind, could hardly resist placing their own Caucasians at the top.”).

<sup>16</sup> Shaffer and Lichtenstein, *supra* note 5, at 94 n. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Dorothy M. Figueira, *ARYANS, JEWS, BRAHMINS: THEORIZING AUTHORITY THROUGH MYTHS OF IDENTITY* 68 (2002).

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> Poliakov, *supra* note 7, at 250.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY* at 4.

languages with distinct races.<sup>22</sup> Also like Rydberg, he viewed the Aryans as an elite subgroup of the Caucasians:

“[Only the] blonds or ‘fair whites’ were the true Aryans, the people with whom the type of language known as Aryan originated.”<sup>23</sup>

Morris forthrightly asserted the “intellectual supremacy” of the Aryans,<sup>24</sup> contrasted especially to the “childish instability” of the Negro.<sup>25</sup> The German legal scholar Rudolf von Ihering claimed to derive the entire legal system of the ancient Aryans from his study of comparative linguistics.<sup>26</sup> Von Ihering also evaluated the “national character” of the ancient Aryans, which he contrasted to that of the Semites to the detriment of the latter.<sup>27</sup> Not to be outdone, the Australian legal scholar, William Edward Hearn, advanced a detailed description of the imagined household life and legal practices of the ancient Aryans, modestly noting that he focused on this segment of humanity because “its history is more glorious, its renown is more diffused, its progress in science and in art is more advanced, its religion is more pure, its politics and its laws are more beneficent and more just, than those which prevail elsewhere upon earth.”<sup>28</sup>

For nearly a century after Jones’ identification of the Indo-European language group in 1786, attempts to “reconstruct” a proto-Indo-European culture focused on Indian texts – the *Rig Veda*, *Laws of Manu*, etc. However, by the 1870s the sources utilized for this project, especially in Germany, began to shift from philology to

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<sup>22</sup> See Morris, *supra* note 10, at 1-29.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* at 30.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at iii.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at 24.

<sup>26</sup> See Rudolf von Ihering, *THE EVOLUTION OF THE ARYAN* 27-61 (A. Drucker, trans., 1897). This is a translation of Ihering’s *VORGESCHICHTE DER INDOEUROPAER*, written no later than 1892, but not published during author’s lifetime.

<sup>27</sup> See *id.* at 226-45.

<sup>28</sup> William Edward Hearn, *THE ARYAN HOUSEHOLD, ITS STRUCTURE AND ITS DEVELOPMENT: AN INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE JURISPRUDENCE* 2 (1879). Hearn also pleaded the practical difficulty of “communication between men whose intellects are on a different level.” *Id.*

folklore. As one consequence of this change in emphasis, the hypothesized ancient Aryans “began to look less and less like Indians and Iranians, and more and more like Germans.”<sup>29</sup> This conceptual shift was accompanied by a corresponding reorientation in the supposed Aryan *urheimat*, from central Asia to Europe itself.<sup>30</sup>

Locating the homeland of the Aryans in Europe had clear ramifications for the doctrine of racial supremacy which had by then become an important force in promoting the Aryan myth. The degree of sophistication with which this consideration was disguised varied from writer to writer. Having already determined, like Rydberg, that the ancient Aryans were white, blond, and blue-eyed, Theodor Pösche bluntly concluded that their original homeland “must be sought where these characteristics are dominant.”<sup>31</sup> It was Pösche who first introduced racial anthropology into the debate, placing the *urheimat* in the region of Europe showing the highest proportion of blue-eyed blonds. This idea was adopted and elaborated by Karl Penka in his *Origines Ariacae* in 1883,<sup>32</sup> before finding its way into the first volume of Rydberg’s *UGM*.<sup>33</sup> By 1886, Penka was relying on this same reasoning to locate the *urheimat* in Scandinavia.<sup>34</sup> Morris argued more indirectly that the Aryan *urheimat* must have been in Europe on the grounds that “All Europe is named with their names, except where the geographical titles of the Basques persist.”<sup>35</sup> Not

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<sup>29</sup> Arvidsson, *supra* note 3, at 141. See also Figueira, *supra* note 17, at 67 (“[W]hen racial anthropologists applied their various sciences to the problem of origins, they found linguistic, archaeological, and anatomical reasons for situating the Aryan homeland in their own backyards, whether that be north or central Germany, Scandinavia, or the Baltic region. They also invariably claimed pure descent.”).

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., Goodrick-Clarke, *supra* note 14, at 35 (citing to the books of Karl Penka in the 1880s, urging a Scandinavian homeland).

<sup>31</sup> Arvidsson, *supra* note 3, at 142 (citing Mallory, *supra* note 6, at 30 f.). Rydberg apparently found Pösche’s reasoning convincing, arguing in *UGM* for a European homeland in part because “[t]he major part of the Aryans are in Europe.” TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY at 11.

<sup>32</sup> See Mallory, *supra* note 6, at 30-31 (citing to Theodor Pösche, DIE ARIER 12-68 (1878)).

<sup>33</sup> See TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY at 19-20.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* at 31 (citing to Karl Penka, DIE HERKUNFT DER ARIER (1886)).

<sup>35</sup> Morris, *supra* note 10, at 44. Morris made no secret of his opinions on the relative status of the Aryans vis-à-vis other races: “If we look ... over the

coincidentally, at about this same time “the Nordic race” began to be used synonymously with “Aryan” and “Indo-Germanic.”<sup>36</sup> R. G. Latham, upon whom Rydberg drew for his own presentation of the argument for a European homeland, had originally been engaged in the genetic classification of human races before taking up the study of Indo-European languages and determining that the *urheimat* was located in Europe.<sup>37</sup>

Although the Aryan myth could be (and has been) invoked to support virtually any variety of racism, its driving engine in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was anti-Semitism.<sup>38</sup> The “ancient Aryans” were first set in direct opposition to the Jews in the 1840s, in the works of the Norwegian-German linguist Christian Lassen, whose “emphasis on biology, the triumph of the strongest, the youthful and creative nature of the most recent species, and the superiority of the whites provided the basic ingredients of all subsequent thinking about the master race.”<sup>39</sup> Lassen, upon whom Rydberg relies heavily (he refers to Lassen as “the great scholar of Hindooic [*sic*] antiquities”),<sup>40</sup> was instrumental in popularizing the notion that the ancient Aryans were a tall, blond, blue-eyed race, bearing a striking physical resemblance to modern Germans and Scandinavians, possessed of a whole catalogue of virtues that he found to be entirely missing among the Jews.<sup>41</sup> “According to Lassen, the Semites [and the Aryans] make up two branches of the [white] race.” However, the Semitic race is the less gifted, and the “laurel wreath from this wrestling match” will

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whole world of the future, it is to behold the almost certain dominance of the Aryan type of mankind.” *Id.* at 318.

<sup>36</sup> Arvidsson, *supra* note 3, at 143.

<sup>37</sup> *See* Mallory, *supra* note 6, at 28.

<sup>38</sup> *See* Poliakov, *supra* note 7, at 2 (“It is well known that the division of the European population into Aryans and Semites was originally based on a confusion about the nature of men (races) and their culture (languages).”).

<sup>39</sup> Goodrick-Clarke, *supra* note 14.

<sup>40</sup> TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY at 7.

<sup>41</sup> Rydberg apparently found Lassen’s physical association of ancient Aryans and modern day Nordics to be compelling: “The Teutonic type, *which doubtless also was the Aryan in general before much spreading and consequent mixing with other races had taken place*, has, as already indicated, been described in the following manner: Tall, white skin, blue eyes, fair hair.” TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY at 18-19 (emphasis added).

therefore go to the Aryans.<sup>42</sup> Lassen found the Aryans to be “the most highly organized, the most enterprising, and the most creative among the peoples; they are also the youngest, because the earth only produced the most perfect species of plants and animals at a late date. *This relationship will ultimately reveal itself in a similar way in the political field.*”<sup>43</sup> Echoing Lassen, Rydberg unhesitatingly places his Aryans in ancient Gaul in Caesar’s time, based on the Roman’s physical description of the Germanic tribes.

The extent of Rydberg’s own anti-Semitism can be judged from his poem, *Prometheus och Ahasverus*, in which the writer contrasts the fire-giving Titan, Prometheus, with the stereotypical “wandering Jew.” As Mosse explains:

[T]he legend of the wandering Jew exemplified the curse laid upon that race by Christ himself. The figure of Ahasverus appears in legend as a Jew who sped Christ along to his crucifixion and refused him comfort or shelter. As a result, Ahasverus is doomed to a life of wandering, without a home, despised as rootless and disinherited. The wandering Jew, who can neither live nor die, also heralds terror and desolation. The medieval tale of the “wicked Jew” (as Ahasverus was often called) did not fade in the nineteenth century, but instead became symbolic of the cursed fate of the Jewish people.<sup>44</sup>

In Rydberg’s poem, Ahasverus tempts Prometheus to compromise his nobility by begging Zeus for forgiveness. “Rydberg presents Ahasverus as a cynic who has made himself subject to worldly power and who hates Jesus, the god of eternity, since the latter fights to create a better world for the oppressed.”<sup>45</sup> The imagery of the poem was well understood in the context of Aryan symbolism. As a later commentator would express it, the Aryan “is the Prometheus of

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<sup>42</sup> See Arvidsson, *supra* note 3, at 94.

<sup>43</sup> Christian Lassen, 1 INDISCHE ALTERTUMSKUNDE 513 (1847), quoted in Poliakov, *supra* note 7, at 197.

<sup>44</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Jews: Myth and Counter-Myth*, in THEORIES OF RACE AND RACISM: A READER 195, 196 (Les Back & John Solomos, eds., 2000). For further elaboration on the significance of Ahasverus as a stock figure in 19<sup>th</sup>-century racist thought, see Poliakov, *supra* note 7, at 284-87.

<sup>45</sup> See Arvidsson, *supra* note 3, at 103-104 n.11.

mankind, from whose shining brow the divine spark of genius has at all times flashed forth, always kindling anew that fire which, in the form of knowledge, illuminated the dark night.”<sup>46</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Rydberg’s “researches” pinpointed the original homeland of the European Aryans in his own backyard – i.e., in or near Sweden.<sup>47</sup> The historical advantages of such an *urheimat* were obvious to him:

“The northern position of the ancient Teutons [*forngermanernas*] necessarily had the effect that they, better than all other Aryan people, preserved their original race-type, as they were less exposed to mixing with non-Aryan elements.”<sup>48</sup>

Rydberg not only locates the European *urheimat* in part by the relative dispersal of “blondes,” “brunettes,” and “mixed” types in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe,<sup>49</sup> he relies on “craniological measurements” to determine the ancient homeland by reference to the distribution of modern-day populations possessing “Aryan skulls.”<sup>50</sup> Comparative measurements of this type, of course, would be undertaken with great energy within the lifetimes of persons then living, to determine who was entitled to “Aryan” status, and who would be sent to camps.<sup>51</sup> The data Rydberg presents, from the work of Hermann Welcker, is still celebrated on National Socialist websites today.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Adolf Hitler, *MEIN KAMPF* 243 (James Murphy, trans., 1939), quoted in Poliakov, *supra* note 7, at 2.

<sup>47</sup> *See* *TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY* at 17-18.

<sup>48</sup> *Id.* at 18.

<sup>49</sup> *See id.* at 19.

<sup>50</sup> *See id.*

<sup>51</sup> *See generally* Richard T Gray, *ABOUT FACE: GERMAN PHYSIOGNOMIC THOUGHT FROM LAVATER TO AUSCHWITZ* (2004); *see also* Richard Grunberger, *THE 12-YEAR REICH: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF NAZI GERMANY 1933-1945* 186, 288-89 (1995).

<sup>52</sup> *See, e.g.*, <http://www.overthrow.com/lsn/news.asp?articleID=8610>.

## B. Rydberg's Contribution: Imagining an Aryan Mythology

It was not Rydberg's intention in *UGM* merely to take a position on racial-nationalist ideology, as he did on nudism or folk education. Rather, he meant to make a positive contribution to the field. As long ago as Herder, an important thread of European racist thought had focused on the collective identity of a nation (or *Volk*), which supposedly found expression through commonalities of language, religion and ritual.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the very identity and continuity of a *Volk* depended on its possessing a unique mythos.<sup>54</sup> To the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romantics, this suggested an important role for mythology in advancing *völkisch* and nationalist agendas.<sup>55</sup>

In 1846, Friedrich Schlegel had famously observed that, since no common European Aryan mythology existed, “*one would have to be invented.*”<sup>56</sup> It was through their myths, said Schlegel, that “the greatest nations put their stamp upon all history.”<sup>57</sup> On this view the Aryans, if they were to be regarded as the historically and culturally dominant race of mankind, *must* be shown to have possessed a common mythology superior in scope and comprehensiveness to the fragmented, localized, and highly labile mythic traditions of specific Indo-European peoples.

There had already been efforts to “reconstruct” a proto-Aryan mythology, in emulation of the comparative philologists' reconstruction of the proto-Indo-European tongue. As Shippey notes, it was a common ambition among newly-coined 19<sup>th</sup>-century comparative philologists

to extend the new philological method to mythology:  
to take the scattered relics of Northern myth –  
primarily Scandinavian, but also German and English,  
as well as whatever could be drawn from records of

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<sup>53</sup> See Figueira, *supra* note 17, at 64-65.

<sup>54</sup> See Lincoln, *supra* note 5, at 52-54.

<sup>55</sup> See *id.* at 210.

<sup>56</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, 4 SÄMTLICHE WERKE 197 (1846), *quoted in* Figueira, *supra* note 17, at 28. Rydberg cites Schlegel as a source of his belief in the equivalence of language and race, asserting that the ancient Aryans sent out missionaries “to spread the language and religion of the mother-country among other peoples.” TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY at 5.

<sup>57</sup> Figueira, *supra* note 17, at 27.

extinct Germanic branches like the Goths or the Lombards – and work them into the connected whole which they were sure must have existed before and around the surviving fragments.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, Hearn discoursed at length on what he took to be the archaic religion of the Aryans, although he was apparently completely uninformed concerning the relevant historical sources. Instead, he had convinced himself that the essence of the original “Aryan religion was animism and ancestor-worship.”<sup>59</sup> Müller and his followers, on the other hand, invented an “ancient” solar mythology, arguing that “the appearance and disappearance of the sun and its worship as a source of life was the true basis of all mythological systems of the past, but particularly that of the Aryans . . . . Sun worship was the original natural religion of the Aryans.”<sup>60</sup>

These approaches did not resonate with Rydberg, for whom the ancient Aryans were virtually indistinguishable from the Germans and Scandinavians of his own day. Herder had urged the appropriation of the surviving Old Norse-Icelandic myths – the Eddas, the sagas, and even runic inscriptions – as raw material for an “old German” religion,<sup>61</sup> and Jacob Grimm had already employed this technique in his *Deutsche Mythologie*.<sup>62</sup> Rydberg therefore made it his project in *UGM* to weave elements of the surviving Norse myths,

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<sup>58</sup> Tom Shippey, *A Revolution Reconsidered: Mythography and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century*, in *THE SHADOW-WALKERS: JACOB GRIMM’S MYTHOLOGY OF THE MONSTROUS* 1, 12 (Tom Shippey, ed., 2005).

<sup>59</sup> See Hearn, *supra* note 28, at 15-62.

<sup>60</sup> Noll, *supra* note 6, at 111.

<sup>61</sup> Arvidsson, *supra* note 3, at 132 (emphasis added).

<sup>62</sup> See Shippey, *supra* note 58, at 11:

Grimm wanted above all to have a mythology which was specifically German, or *deutsch*. Unfortunately for him, most of the surviving sources were not German, but Scandinavian, written in Old Norse and preserved in Iceland.... Scandinavian scholars especially saw this as a ‘takeover bid.’

See also Wolfgang Emmerich, *The Mythos of Germanic Continuity*, in *THE NAZIFICATION OF AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE: FOLKLORE IN THE THIRD REICH* 34, 39 (James R. Dow & Hannjost Lixfeld, eds., 1994) (“The German *borrow*s, so to speak, his own national past, his national cultural awareness, from the Scandinavian.”) (quoting Klaus von See).

along with what he could marshal of the mythologies of other Indo-European peoples, into the fabric of a unified “proto-mythos” capable of supporting his racial-nationalistic ideology.

The details of Rydberg’s fictive epic are of little literary interest, and no scholarly value. Quite aside from the historical non-existence of his idealized “ancient Aryan race,” Rydberg’s attempt to re-imagine a 4,000-5,000-year-old mythology was critically hampered by his lack of training in either history or mythography. Neither his honorary doctorate nor his job at the high school had prepared the writer for serious scholarly work in comparative mythology. Rydberg did, however, possess one important trait not shared by Müller, Hearn, or even Anderson: his skill as a popular novelist. Moreover, like most literate Swedes of his time, Rydberg was familiar with the work of Snorri Sturluson and Saxo Grammaticus, both of whom wrote some six centuries before his own day.

Because Rydberg relies so heavily on Snorri and Saxo in tracing the outlines of his fictive epic, the casual contemporary reader may assume *UGM* constitutes an alternative version of Norse mythology. And in fact, Rydberg frequently loses his focus on “reconstructing” an *ur-mythos* for an imaginary people, and freely modifies or contradicts his primary sources on points of specifically Norse belief, seasoning his tale with frequent, albeit unsystematic, references to the *Rig Veda*, Greek and Roman mythology, and other cross-cultural sources.

For Rydberg, the tall, blond, blue-eyed “ancient Aryans” not only *looked* like 19<sup>th</sup>-century Swedes and Germans, they *thought* like them, too. Consequently, he made it part of his project in *UGM* to “correct” elements of the existing literary record that conflicted with his racial-nationalist identification. One of the most obvious examples of Rydberg’s rewriting his sources to fit his Victorian worldview is his treatment of the Eddic poem, *Hárbarðsljóð*.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to being one of the artistic gems of the Poetic Edda, *Hárbarðsljóð* opens a unique window in time, through which readers can glimpse something of the culture and tastes of the poem’s intended pre-Christian Norse audience. The thematic setting of the work is familiar from other contexts: a traveling hero needs to be conveyed across a body of water, but is refused passage by an

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<sup>63</sup> For the standard edition of the poem, see *Hárbarðsljóð*, in 1 EDDA: DIE LIEDER DES CODEX REGIUS 78-87 (Gustav Neckel & Hans Kuhn eds., 1962). For an English translation, see *Harbard’s Song*, in Caroline Larrington, trans, THE POETIC EDDA 69-77 (1996)

obstinate ferryman.<sup>64</sup> In this case the traveler is identified as the god Thor (*Þórr*), who is returning home from one of his adventures in the land of the giants. As for the boatman, Bruce Lincoln speaks for all modern scholars when he writes, “On the identity of this ferryman there can be no debate. He is undoubtedly Óðinn.”<sup>65</sup>

This identification is not difficult. Only a few leaves earlier in the *Codex Regius* manuscript, Óðinn himself gives *Hárbarð* – i.e. Grey-Beard – as one of his many names,<sup>66</sup> an identification that is confirmed in pre-Christian skaldic poetry.<sup>67</sup> In *Hárbarðsljóð*, Óðinn serves as a ferryman between two worlds, a role that is uniquely suited to his function as a psychopomp, and one that is also assigned to him

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<sup>64</sup> Both Larrington and Simek point out the resonance of the situation to the conflict between Hagen and the ferryman in the *Nibelungenlied*, 1480 ff. See Larrington, *id.*, at 69; Rudolf Simek, *DICTIONARY OF NORTHERN MYTHOLOGY* 130 (1984).

<sup>65</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *DEATH, WAR, AND SACRIFICE: STUDIES IN IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE* 64 (1991). There is no dispute whatsoever on this point among contemporary Old Norse scholars. See, e.g., Carol Clover, *Hárbarðsljóð as Generic Farce*, in *THE POETIC EDDA: ESSAYS ON OLD NORSE MYTHOLOGY* 95, 98 (2002) (“*Hárbarð* being Óðinn, Þórr’s unrecognized father”); John Lindow, *HANDBOOK OF NORSE MYTHOLOGY* 161 (2001) (the poem’s title “refers to the Odin name *Hárbarð*”); Thomas A. DuBois, *NORDIC RELIGIONS IN THE VIKING AGE* 58 (1999) (“*Hárbarðsljóð* reflects an era in which Óðinn and Þórr appear to vie directly for adherents”); Andy Orchard, *CASELL DICTIONARY OF NORSE MYTH AND LEGEND* 74 (1997) (“Odin [assumes] the disguise of a cantankerous ferryman named *Hárbarð*”); Larrington, *supra* note 63 (*Hárbarð* is “Odin, in disguise”); Marcel Bax and Tineke Padmos, “*Hárbarðsljóð*,” entry in *MEDIEVAL SCANDINAVIA: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA* 268 (1993) (“*Hárbarðsljóð* contains a ‘flyting’ (insult contest) between the gods Þórr and Óðinn, the latter disguised as the ferryman *Hárbarð*”); Beatrice La Farge and John Tucker, *GLOSSARY TO THE POETIC EDDA* (1992) (defining *Hárbarð* as “one of Odin’s names”); Patricia Terry, *POEMS OF THE ELDER EDDA* 260 (rev. ed., 1990) (“*Harbard*: Odin”); H. R. Ellis Davidson, *MYTHS AND SYMBOLS IN PAGAN EUROPE* 205 (1988) (“in *Hárbarðsljóð* [Thor] is mocked by Odin”); Simek, *supra* note 64 (*Hárbarð* is “[a] name for Odin”); Marcel Bax and Tineke Padmos, *Two Types of Verbal Dueling in Old Icelandic: The International Structure of the senna and the mannfafnaðr in Hárbarðsljóð*, 55 *Scandinavian Studies* 149, 150 (1983) (“the protagonists in *Hárbarðsljóð* [are] the gods Þórr and Óðinn, the latter (disguised) as *Hárbarð*”).

<sup>66</sup> See *Grímnismál* 49:10, in *EDDA*, *supra* note 63.

<sup>67</sup> Óðinn is referred to as *Hárbarð* in a well-known verse (cited also by Lincoln, *supra* note 65) by the 10th-century Icelandic skald Úlfr Uggason. See Finnur Jónsson, *DEN NORSK-ISLANDSKE SKJALDEDIGTING* B:130 (1908).

in the Eddic poem, *Fra dauda Sinfjötla*, as well as in *Völsunga saga*.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, Óðinn obliquely gives away his identity twice in the course of *Hárbarðsljóð* itself: first in st. 24 (suggesting that he urges princes to war and does not make peace because “Odin has the nobles who fall in battle”);<sup>69</sup> and again in st. 44-46 (stating that he acquires knowledge from the dead, a well-known Odinic attribute).

In any case, Óðinn will do no ferrying this day, for Thor immediately engages him in a ritual verbal duel, or *flyting*. Such competitions have a rich tradition in the history of many Indo-European cultures, and achieved a high degree of refinement among the pre-Christian Norse, with dozens of examples preserved in Eddic poetry and the Icelandic sagas. Two distinct types of *flyting* developed in this culture, known respectively as the *senna* (a ritualized exchange of insults) and *mannjafnaðr* (“man-matching,” or a series of boastful comparisons between two parties). A considerable body of late 20<sup>th</sup>-century scholarship investigated the structure, function and wide popularity of these verbal duels, with the result that we now have a reasonably detailed understanding of the events that transpire in *Hárbarðsljóð*.<sup>70</sup>

Bax and Padmos have shown that the poem follows a tightly-knit three-part structure: an opening *senna* segueing into a longer

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<sup>68</sup> See, e.g., Hilda Ellis Davidson, *THE LOST BELIEFS OF NORTHERN EUROPE* 77 (1993).

<sup>69</sup> *Hárbarðsljóð* (Hb.) 24:3. As Bax and Padmos point out, “stanza 24 is particularly revealing with respect to Hárbarð’s true identity; not only does he present himself as the originator of battles (traditionally the property of Óðinn, cf. stanza 40), but since a *mannjafnaðr* contains propositions referring to the speaker, he is ‘heard’ to refer to an event in his own life.” Bax and Padmos, *Two Types of Verbal Dueling*, *supra* note 65, at 173 n.41.

<sup>70</sup> See, e.g., Clover, *supra* note 65; Karen Swenson, *PERFORMING DEFINITIONS: TWO GENRES OF INSULT IN OLD NORSE LITERATURE* (1993); Marcel Bax and Tineke Padmos, “Senna – Mannjafnaðr,” entry in *MEDIEVAL SCANDINAVIA: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA* 571 (1993); Bax and Padmos, “Hárbarðsljóð,” *supra* note 65; Joaquín Martínez Pizarro, *Woman-to-Man Senna*, in *POETRY IN THE SCANDINAVIAN MIDDLE AGES* 339 (1990); H. R. Ellis Davidson, *Insults and Riddles in the Edda Poems*, in *EDDA: A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS* 25 (Robert J. Glendinning & Haraldur Bessason, eds., 1983); Bax and Padmos, *Two Types of Verbal Dueling*, *supra* note 65; Carol J. Clover, *The Germanic Context of the Unferþ Episode*, 55 *Speculum* 444 (1980); Lars Lönnroth, *The Double Scene of Arrow-Odd’s Drinking Contest*, in *MEDIEVAL NARRATIVE: A SYMPOSIUM* 94 (Hans Bekker-Nielsen, et al., eds., 1979); Joseph Harris, *The Senna: From Description to Literary Theory*, 5 *Michigan Germanic Studies* 65 (1979); Joaquín Martínez Pizarro, *Studies on the Function and Context of the Senna in Early Germanic Narrative* (Harvard Univ. diss., 1976).

*mannjafnaðr*, followed by an aftermath in which the loser withdraws from the contest.<sup>71</sup> Thor initiates the exchange of insults with his very first words, contemptuously addressing the ferryman as “*sveinn sveina*,” an epithet more appropriate for a serving boy.<sup>72</sup> This opening move, initiating a *senna* by speaking disdainfully to one’s opponent as though he/she were a child, is well attested in other sources,<sup>73</sup> and Hárbarð skillfully inverts and returns the jibe, referring to Thor as “*karl karla*.”<sup>74</sup> This is a term that would normally be applied to an aged manservant, but with an ironic twist – as Lindow points out, taken as a proper noun, *Karl* (like *Hárbarð*) is also a byname for Odin himself!<sup>75</sup> The antagonists thereafter engage in a spirited series of attacks and counterattacks in which each scores on the other. The contest is undecided after the opening *senna*, thus necessitating a shift to the *mannjafnaðr*.<sup>76</sup>

In this section of the poem Thor boasts of his combat with giants, while Óðinn responds by boasting about his amorous exploits and his stirring of warfare among men (both well-known Odinic qualities.) Thor may be the greater warrior, he implies, but it is Óðinn who initiates all battles. Óðinn’s amorous adventures are well known from other sources, and they almost always involve liaisons with giantesses. In Old Norse mythology, giants typically represent the elemental forces of nature which must be dominated, destroyed, or at least controlled, to ensure the survival of mankind. In his exchanges with Thor, Óðinn reminds his antagonist that there is more than one

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<sup>71</sup> See Bax and Padmos, *Two Types of Verbal Dueling*, *supra* note 65, at 151.

<sup>72</sup> Hb. 1. See Lindow, *supra* note 65, at 161 (“Thor insultingly calls to the ferryman”); Bax and Padmos, *Two Types of Verbal Dueling*, *supra* note 65, at 152 (“by using the word *sveinn*, Þórr degrades his potential conversational partner”).

<sup>73</sup> See Bax and Padmos, *Two Types of Verbal Dueling*, *supra* note 65, at 152, citing similar opening moves in *sennas* recorded in *Ketils saga haengs* and Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum*.

<sup>74</sup> Hb. 2:1.

<sup>75</sup> See John Lindow, MURDER AND VENGEANCE AMONG THE GODS: BALDR IN SCANDINAVIAN MYTHOLOGY 156 (1997).

<sup>76</sup> As Bax and Padmos observe, a *mannjafnaðr* was only appropriate in cases where the parties were regarded as equals. The opening *senna* of *Hárbarðsljóð* establishes that equality between Hárbarð and Thor. See Bax and Padmos, *Two Types of Verbal Dueling*, *supra* note 65, at 157.

way to deal with giants, especially female ones: Thor kills them, while Óðinn seduces them.<sup>77</sup> The three opening rounds in the *mannjafnaðr* are won by Óðinn, but Thor comes back strongly in the next two rounds. It is only when Óðinn narrowly wins the closely contested sixth round that Thor concedes the match and initiates his withdrawal.<sup>78</sup>

But Rydberg understood none of this. Handicapped by his lack of education and a personality that seemed wholly devoid of humor,<sup>79</sup> Rydberg's reading of *Hárbarðsljóð* went only deep enough for his Victorian sensibilities to be outraged that the poem seems to depict angry and mocking exchanges between a father and his son! The Swedish writer can scarcely contain himself as he rails against the poem's unacceptable family values:

*“How is it possible that one can think the person who speaks this way could be ... Odin, whose own trusted son and helper in maintaining world order is Thor!”<sup>80</sup>*

Nothing in *UGM* suggests that Rydberg grasped the nature of the *senna*, either as a historical mode of popular entertainment or as a literary motif. Indeed, he seems to have been aware of only one other example of the genre, that of the later Eddic poem, *Lokasenna*.<sup>81</sup> With his frame of reference limited to these two cases, Rydberg saw an easy resolution to his outrage: if Hárbarð exchanges insults with Thor in one poem, and Loki exchanges insults with Thor (and other

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<sup>77</sup> See Lindow, *supra* note 75, at 93 (“Odin excels at bending giantesses to his will, Thor at killing them, and indeed this contrast is one of the fundamentals of the eddic poem *Hárbarðsljóð*”); Lotte Motz, *Sister in the Cave: The Stature and Function of the Female Figures of the Eddas*, 95 ANF 168, 179 (1980) (citing Óðinn's sexual boasts in *Hárbarðsljóð* as suggesting that the god's amorous adventures “may form part of the battle of the Aesir against the female powers of the ancient order”). Cf. Orchard, *supra* note 65, at 55 (“Odin devotes practically his entire energy as a serial adulterer to the seduction of giantesses, including Gríð, Gunnlöð, Jörð, Rind, and perhaps Gerð”).

<sup>78</sup> For a detailed analysis of the nearly equal thrusting and parrying of the verbal duelers, see Bax and Padmos, *Two Types of Verbal Dueling*, *supra* note 65, at 154-65.

<sup>79</sup> See Judith Moffett, *Viktor Rydberg, 1828-1895*, in *THE NORTH! TO THE NORTH!: FIVE SWEDISH POETS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY* 77 (Judith Moffett, ed. & trans., 2001).

<sup>80</sup> 2 *UGM* at 302.

<sup>81</sup> See 2 *UGM* at 325-26.

gods) in another poem, then *Hárbarð must be Loki!*<sup>82</sup> Since Rydberg considered Loki to be “thoroughly evil”<sup>83</sup> because of an imagined resemblance to the Devil of his own religion,<sup>84</sup> this relieved the Victorian writer’s emotional dissonance without requiring him to step outside his own culture and engage *Hárbarðsljóð* on its own terms.

Rydberg’s notion of “proper” familial relationships among the gods seems wholly determined by his Victorian Romanticism and the psychological impact of his tragic childhood, rather than anything he could have gleaned from the literary sources. Although Thor is one of Óðinn’s illegitimate sons, the result of an unrecorded dalliance with the giantess Jörð, the two gods are nowhere portrayed as being particularly close.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, sources older than *Hárbarðsljóð* suggest a traditional enmity between Óðinn and Thor. In the ancient heroic legend of *Starkað*, for example, when Óðinn proclaims that *Starkað* would win the favor of chieftains, Thor responds by placing a curse on the warrior, such that all the common people would despise him. “It could be supposed that, originally, *Starkað* was a favorite of Óðinn, and was therefore the enemy of *Thór*.”<sup>86</sup> More generally, the theme of a son engaging in combat with a father he does not recognize is a familiar old Germanic motif, as in *Hildibrand’s Death Song*.<sup>87</sup> That model undoubtedly served as a thematic inspiration for *Hárbarðsljóð*, although the father-son combat in the latter poem is verbal rather than physical.

Nevertheless, having convinced himself that a father and son in Eddic times would never bandy insults, Rydberg begins casting about for any evidence that might seem to support his theory that *Hárbarð* is “really” Loki. This quickly leads him into further blunders, however, as when he seizes on the opening exchange of taunts – “sveinn sveina” and “karl karla” – as being *literal* descriptions of the

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<sup>82</sup> *See id.*

<sup>83</sup> *See 2 UGM* at 326.

<sup>84</sup> Rydberg regarded Loki as the “Norse Mephistopheles.” *2 UGM* at 326.

<sup>85</sup> In 10th-century Scandinavian society, such extramarital offspring were typically raised by their mother, and may have had little contact with their father until adulthood. *See, e.g.,* *NJAL’S SAGA*, in *3 THE COMPLETE SAGAS OF ICELANDERS* (Robert Cook, trans., 1997).

<sup>86</sup> E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *MYTH AND RELIGION OF THE NORTH: THE RELIGION OF ANCIENT SCANDINAVIA* 210-11 (1964) (emphasis added).

<sup>87</sup> *See* Lee M. Hollander, trans., *OLD NORSE POEMS* 52 (1936).

two antagonists! Completely missing both the point and the humor of the twin barbs, Rydberg solemnly concludes that the gray-bearded ferryman really *was* a “boyish boy.”<sup>88</sup> (Oddly, however, he does not reach the mirror- image conclusion, which would be required by his own logic, that Thor was in reality an aged churl.) Moreover, as Clover observes,<sup>89</sup> *Hárbarðsljóð*’s repeated challenge formula, interpreted by Rydberg as proving a correspondence with *Lokasenna*, is in fact simply a standard element of all *sennas* – as Rydberg would have known had he been familiar with *Bandamanna saga*, *Örvar-Odds saga*, or other instances of the genre.

Although Rydberg was apparently unfamiliar with the many relatively minor Icelandic sagas that exemplify the *senna* genre, he had read the highly regarded *Njals saga*, and therefore knew of the skaldic verse in which Hárbarð is identified with Óðinn. Chapter 102 of that saga tells of a message the skald Úlfr Uggason received in the form of a verse from a fellow poet, Thorvald, urging him to attack and kill the Christian missionary, Thangbrand. Úlfr is put out by what he sees as Thorvald’s attempt to use him as a cat’s paw, and he responds with a clever metaphorical verse saying, in effect, that Úlfr is too wise a fish to take such bait:

Though the dear friend  
of the drink of Odin’s hall  
orders me, I am not  
accepting the offered bait;  
I won’t fall for the fly  
from the sea-faring fellow;  
bad things are brewing –  
I’d better watch out.<sup>90</sup>

In the first half-stanza, Úlfr employs a complex kenning to refer to Thorvald: “the dear friend of the drink of Óðinn’s hall.” The drink of Óðinn’s hall is the mead of poetry, and its friend is the poet, in this case Thorvald. The point of particular interest is that, due to the strict alliterative requirements of skaldic composition, the line in which the paraphrase occurs requires a word starting with the letter “h” for Óðinn. Consequently, the kenning Úlfr actually uses for poetry is “the drink of *Hárbarð*’s hall,” thereby confirming that both he and his 10<sup>th</sup>-

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<sup>88</sup> See 2 *UGM* at 305.

<sup>89</sup> See Clover, *supra* note 65, at 99.

<sup>90</sup> *NJAL’ SAGA*, *supra* note 85, at 125.

century Icelandic audience understood that *Hárbarð* is an alternative name for Óðinn.

Faced with this clear conflict between the historical record and the requirements of his personal vision, Rydberg responded as he always did – by seeking to revise the record. In a long and tortured passage, Rydberg crafted his own revisionist “interpretation” of Úlfr’s verse, creating an awkward and ugly parody which obscures the verse’s showpiece kenning by splitting the name “Hárbarð” and assigning each half of the word to a different expression. The verse so interpreted, in addition to being stripped of any artistic merit, is quite unlike any of Úlfr’s other surviving poetry and is inconsistent with the saga’s account of the circumstances of its composition. Understandably, this idiosyncratic revisionism has never found support among scholars. Nevertheless, Rydberg closes this section of *UGM* with a blustering denunciation of any readers who are not convinced by his labors, berating them as tradition-bound fools who are unable to appreciate the author’s keen powers of reasoning or the decisiveness of his “proof.”<sup>91</sup>

With the benefit of the past five generations of scholarship, it is easy for us today to laugh at the culture-bound superficiality of Rydberg’s analysis. But in fairness, it was not unknown even for trained scholars of Rydberg’s day to share the novelist’s error of interpreting the past through the lens of their own culture. Thus, Rydberg’s argument as to the “true” identity of Hárbarð was anticipated by F. W. Bergmann – a scholar who, it should be noted, “was justly criticized for not being on a par with Eddic scholarship in his own age.”<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, Bergmann’s (and Rydberg’s) misidentification of Hárbarð was forcefully corrected shortly after the publication of *UGM* in works by Fredrik Sander, Felix Niedner, and Finnur Jónsson, and no serious scholar has fallen into this error in more than a century.<sup>93</sup>

For the purposes of this review, it is significant to note that, in his determination to preserve the sanctity of his Romantic image of 19<sup>th</sup>-century family life, Rydberg lets slip any pretense of comparative method. Had he consulted any of the major Indo-European

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<sup>91</sup> See 2 *UGM* at 326-27.

<sup>92</sup> Bjarne Fidjestøl, *THE DATING OF EDDIC POETRY* 67 (1999).

<sup>93</sup> See Clover, *supra* note 65, at 117-118 n.55; Klaus von See, *et al.*, 2 *KOMMENTAR ZU DEN LIEDERN DER EDDA* 155 (“The identity Harbard-Odin has been generally accepted since the detailed rejection of the opinions of Bergmann and Rydberg by Niedner and Finnur Jónsson”).

mythologies, Rydberg would have found ample pagan correspondences in the form of satires seeming, on the surface, to ridicule or demean the old gods for the entertainment of their followers. As Joseph Harris has observed, “a glance at Rome, Greece, India . . . shows that burlesque coexists with piety.”<sup>94</sup> Like other Indo-European people of the pre-Christian era, “Icelandic heathens knew neither blasphemy nor veneration, two faces of the devout religious coin, as Christians understand these things.”<sup>95</sup> It was only the humorless and self-important god of Victorian Christianity who would have found the *flyting* of *Hárbarðsljóð* intolerable. But that, of course, was the very source and orientation of Rydberg’s religious understanding.

As the eminent Norse scholar Ursula Dronke has observed, “The mocking dramas of the old gods – *Lokasenna*, *Hárbarðsljóð* – must have grown up among the heathen Norse people, been cultivated at the great seasonal festivals at the nobler homes, where *jarlar* and *hersir* would gather vast supplies of grain to refresh their people with ale for several weeks.”<sup>96</sup> And as the prolific ON translator Lee Hollander once said, “For a not too squeamish taste the effect [of *Hárbarðsljóð*], though a little burlesque, is sprightly and entertaining, which was probably the aim of the gifted improviser.”<sup>97</sup>

Unfortunately, Rydberg’s tastes – conditioned by his Victorian Lutheranism, his humorlessness, and his personal demons – were altogether too “squeamish” to permit him to appreciate the poem in this light. Instead, he chose to gut the work of its original meaning and artistic value, and re-conceptualize it to fit more readily into his imaginary, racial-nationalist epic of the “ancient Aryan race.”

Rydberg was passionately dedicated to both halves of what

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<sup>94</sup> Joseph Harris, *Eddic Poetry*, in OLD-NORSE-ICELANDIC LITERATURE: A CRITICAL GUIDE 68, 99 (Carol J. Clover & John Lindow, eds., 1985).

<sup>95</sup> Richard North, *Goð geyja: The Limits of Humour in Old-Norse-Icelandic Paganism*, in OLD NORSE MYTHS, LITERATURE AND SOCIETY: PROCEEDINGS OF THE 11TH INTERNATIONAL SAGA CONFERENCE 386, 388 (Geraldine Barnes & Margaret Clunies Ross, eds., 2000). For a brief comparative survey of the popularity outside Iceland of folk entertainment featuring exchanges of insults between respected and even revered figures, see Ellis Davidson, *supra* note 70, at 39-44.

<sup>96</sup> Ursula Dronke, ed., THE POETIC EDDA, VOL. II: MYTHOLOGICAL POEMS 355 (1997).

<sup>97</sup> Lee M. Hollander, trans., THE POETIC EDDA 74 (1962).

would later become known as the Nazi doctrine of “blood and soil.”<sup>98</sup> Western civilization, he believed, was entirely the product of the Aryan race, typified by the Scandinavians and Germans of his own day, who had occupied their present lands since neolithic times. Moreover, the very earth itself was holy to this noble people – in contrast to the rootless Semites, whose perpetual wandering and love of urbanity marked them as lacking the evolutionary capacity to form such an attachment.

As is reflected in Rydberg’s novels, a Christian-oriented nature mysticism was rampant in the European culture of his day, and the writer strongly identified with what Poliakov calls the “archaic longing for a great return to the beginnings, for a fusion with Mother Nature.”<sup>99</sup> Even trained scholars of Rydberg’s day projected this popular worldview back to the supposed origins of their race. With a characteristic 19<sup>th</sup>-century blend of arrogance and obtuseness, for example, Max Müller laid it down as a *scientific principle* that “there is nothing in the ancient gods of Aryan mythology that was not suggested by nature.”<sup>100</sup>

Applying this 19<sup>th</sup>-century filter to his sources, in conjunction with his deep-seated mother fixation, Rydberg became convinced that his ancient Aryans must have deified a Great Mother Earth Goddess (GMEG) as a dominant element of their pantheon. In arriving at this conclusion, Rydberg was almost certainly indebted to Johann Jacob Bachofen’s 1861 volume, *Das Mutterrecht (The Mother Right)*. Bachofen, who shared both Rydberg’s Romantic methodology (fiercely rejecting positivism and deductive reasoning as tools of research) and his mother-fixation (living with his own mother until the age of 40), argued for the prehistoric existence of a “gynecocracy,” marked by a concentration of authority in the hands of the tribal mothers and the worship of a great mother deity.<sup>101</sup> Like Bachofen,

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<sup>98</sup> Although the Nazi slogan, *blut und boden*, was not formally coined until the 1920s, it derives from the völkisch-nationalist beliefs and attitudes formed in the years leading up to Rydberg’s work. See, e.g., Mark Bassin, *Blood or Soil? The Völkisch Movement, the Nazis, and the Legacy of Geopolitik*, in *HOW GREEN WERE THE NAZIS? NATURE, ENVIRONMENT, AND NATION IN THE THIRD REICH* 204 (Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, et al., eds., 2005).

<sup>99</sup> Poliakov, *supra* note 7, at 329.

<sup>100</sup> F. Max Müller, 2 *CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SCIENCE OF MYTHOLOGY* 830 (1897).

<sup>101</sup> See J. J. Bachofen, *MYTH, RELIGION, AND MOTHER RIGHT: SELECTED WRITINGS OF J. J. BACHOFEN* 69-207 (Ralph Manheim, trans., 1967). Rydberg’s

Rydberg was not troubled by the fact that no trace of such an entity could be found in the historical record.<sup>102</sup> Instead, the Swedish writer once again applied Schlegel's advice and simply invented this supposedly crucial mythological persona as he would a character for one of his novels.<sup>103</sup>

In Norse mythology, the female personification of the earth is a distinctly minor figure: the giantess Jörð, who, as mentioned above, gave birth to Thor as the result of an extramarital liaison with Óðinn.<sup>104</sup> Jörð plays no other role in the myths, is rarely mentioned, and apparently would not even be counted as a goddess but for the fact that she was seduced by the chief god.<sup>105</sup> Like the rest of her kind, Jörð was never the object of human worship; there were no altars, *haugrs*, or cult centers named after her, as there were for all the major gods and goddesses. Indeed, Jörð seems to have played an even lesser role in Norse mythology than her counterpart, Gaia, did in

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contemporary, von Ihering, was completely convinced of the correctness of Bachofen's theory: "We stand at the present moment on the brink, as it were, of discovery respecting maternal right; on all sides evidence abounds. One of the latest discoveries in this respect is that the Teutons, before they reached the stage of paternal right, passed through a stage of maternal right, and such a period has recently been generally accepted as proved." Von Ihering, *supra* note 26, at 40.

<sup>102</sup> As the historian Stefan Arvidsson states, "[t]here were no concrete studies to show that Mother Earth was a specific ancient Indo-European goddess," albeit noting that "(t)he notion of a prehistoric and ancient belief in Mother Earth has lived on for a long time, especially among Jungians and feminists." Arvidsson, *supra* note 3, at 207 n.97 (citations deleted).

<sup>103</sup> In 1846, Schlegel, a pioneer in the study of Sanskrit and an admirer of the Vedic myths, observed significantly that, since no European Aryan mythology existed, "*one would have to be invented.*" Friedrich Schlegel, 4 SÄMTLICHE WERKE 197 (1846), *quoted in* Figueira, *supra* note 17, at 28 (emphasis added).

<sup>104</sup> *See supra*, text at notes 63-97.

<sup>105</sup> Snorri Sturluson counts Jörð among the goddesses in *Skáldskaparmál*, but probably only because she gave birth to an Ás, Thor. *See, e.g.*, Orchard, *supra* note 65, at 98. In general, marrying or giving birth to a god seems to have been the accepted path of advancement for giantesses in Norse lore. *See* Motz, *supra* note 77, at 178 (citing instances in the Eddic texts of "the making of a goddess from a giantess through marriage"). Moreover, 19th-century writers on Germanic mythology evidenced "an extraordinary interest in the marital status of the female figures of Old Norse myth, as well as the belief that their nature may be ascertained by examining their relationship with males." Joyce Tally Lionarons, *Dísir, Valkyries, Völur and Norns: The Weise Frauen of the Deutsche Mythologie*, in *THE SHADOW-WALKERS*, *supra* note 58, 271, 271-72.

the Greek myths. In Roman lore, the earth was not personified by any specific female deity, but was represented by a number of distinctly minor and shadowy figures, including Cybele and Tellus.

Disregarding this rather clear comparative data from leading Indo-European traditions, Rydberg chose instead to fixate on a second-hand account by the Roman Tacitus, who related an unidentified source's report of a Cybele-like processionary goddess who was supposedly honored by certain Germanic tribes living in the first century, C.E.<sup>106</sup> Overlooking the substantial disparities in time, place, and culture, Rydberg confidently identified this goddess (whom Tacitus referred to by Tellus's eponym, *Terra Mater*) as the Scandinavian giantess, Jörð, whom Rydberg thereupon proclaimed to be the Norse GMEG.<sup>107</sup>

As for Jörð's obvious lack of significance in the Norse myths, Rydberg had a ready answer: mistaken identity! Assuming the truth of what he needed to prove, Rydberg reasoned that (1) the GMEG *must* have been an important Aryan deity, but (2) Jörð, the personification of the earth, was not one, so therefore (3) the GMEG must have gone by another name!<sup>108</sup> Sorting through the Norse pantheon in search of suitable candidates, Rydberg quickly settled upon none other than the principal goddess, Frigg!<sup>109</sup>

Although there is not a shred of credible evidence identifying Frigg with Jörð (the two entities are expressly described as "rivals" in pre-Christian Norse poetry), conflating Óðinn's wife with his mistress resolved the "family values" issue that troubled Rydberg so greatly in his analysis of *Hárbarðsljóð*.<sup>110</sup> By the simple expedient of rewriting his sources, the Swedish novelist was able to anoint Jörð as "Odin's *real and lawful wife*, as the queen of the Asa world, and as mother of

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<sup>106</sup> See Tacitus, *GERMANIA*, chap. 40. Within a few decades Tacitus' work, itself a model of mock-historical propaganda, would somewhat ironically be appropriated by the Third Reich to advance that regime's own ideological objectives. See, e.g., Bernard Mees, *Hitler and Germanentum*, 39 *J. Contemp. Hist.* 255, 264 (2004) ("Much of the racialism of German fascism was ultimately predicated, also, on the testimony of the chief antiquarian source for Germany, the Roman historian Tacitus"); Bettina Arnold, *The Past as Propaganda*, *Archaeology* 30 (July/August 1992).

<sup>107</sup> See *TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY* at 105.

<sup>108</sup> See *id.*

<sup>109</sup> See *id.* at 104-105.

<sup>110</sup> See *supra*, text at notes 80-85.

the chief gods Thor and Balder [!]”<sup>111</sup>

Rydberg’s satisfaction with this resolution is palpable: not only had he revealed the Aryan GMEG hidden in Norse mythology, but he had caused the leading Norse deities to conform to his Victorian model of a proper nuclear family! Of course, there remained the bothersome detail of finding some kind of support for this tale in the historical record, but this was never a serious obstacle for Rydberg. No evidence was too slight, no derivation too attenuated, to propel the writer’s analysis to its predisposed conclusion. For example, Tacitus’ third-party account includes a report that the tribes who worshiped his processional goddess believed that she actively intervened in the affairs of men.<sup>112</sup> A similarly indirect Christian account of the ancient Lombards related a tale in which their chief goddess (associated with Frigg) influences her husband’s decision as to which army he should give victory in battle.<sup>113</sup> From these two disparate, unverified, and not very similar accounts, Rydberg confidently proclaims that Frigg and Tacitus’s perambulating goddess are one and the same! Which means, of course, given the author’s similarly peremptory identification of Tacitus’ goddess with Jörð, that Frigg and Jörð “*must*” be the same goddess – the GMEG!<sup>114</sup>

Continuing to pile one strained inference upon another, Rydberg goes on to discern that Tacitus’s reference to the god Tuisco’s being “born of the earth” *must* mean that he is the son of the Scandinavian giantess Jörð, and is therefore identical to Thor!<sup>115</sup> It should not be surprising that a similarly intuitive method was applied

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<sup>111</sup> TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY at 105.

<sup>112</sup> See Tacitus, *supra* note 106, quoted in TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY at 105.

<sup>113</sup> See DE ORIGINE LONGOBARDORUM, paraphrased in TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY at 67.

<sup>114</sup> See TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY at 105.

<sup>115</sup> See *id.* at 104-106. Any competent mythologist, even in Rydberg's time, would have recognized the *topos* of a primeval god issuing from the earth as common to a very wide range of mythologies, both Indo-European and other. This motif does not necessarily imply that the earth from which the god issued was itself personified as a goddess – and it would be preposterous to claim that all of these “gods born of the earth” can be reckoned the offspring of the Scandinavian giantess, Jörð! In the Egyptian pantheon, for example, the earth was personified as a male god, Geb, and that culture’s “god born of the earth,” Osiris, claimed the earth as his *father*, rather than his mother. See, e.g., George Hart, EGYPTIAN MYTHS 14 (1990).

by the 17<sup>th</sup>-century writer, Philipp Clüver, to demonstrate that “Tacitus’ Tuisto [i.e., Tuisco] . . . became the one true God who had identified himself to the Germans. His son, the Mannus of Tacitus, became Adam.”<sup>116</sup> When a superficial comparative method is utilized to snatch whatever stray snippets can be found, from any source in any Indo-European culture, to “support” a writer’s *a priori* theory, virtually any outcome is possible. It goes without saying that no serious scholars of Norse mythology took Rydberg’s account of the GMEG seriously, either in his own day or subsequently.

### C. An Ill-Starred Enterprise

Just as Rydberg lagged behind the heyday of European Romanticism, both his superficial comparative method and his fascination with the fictive Aryan race had fallen out of favor in respectable academic circles by the time *UGM* was published. Serious scholars were growing apprehensive at the direction popular culture was being driven by the Aryan myth. One after another, they began to speak out against the very confusion of language with race that forms the cornerstone of Rydberg’s “researches.”

Max Müller labeled the linkage of Indo-European language with a primal Aryan race “a downright fraud,”<sup>117</sup> adding, “it goes against all rules of logic to speak, without an expressed or implied qualification, of an Aryan race, of Aryan blood, or Aryan skulls.”<sup>118</sup> Rydberg’s English contemporary T. H. Huxley took pains to point out, “community of language is no proof of unity of race, is not even presumptive evidence of racial identity.”<sup>119</sup> And Otto Schrader added, “It is highly probable that already the first Indo-Europeans were composed of somatically heterogeneous tribes and individuals.”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Poliakov, *supra* note 7, at 91.

<sup>117</sup> Max Müller, *quoted in* Friedrich Otto Hertz, *RACE AND CIVILIZATION* 77 (A. S. Levetus & W. Entz, trans., 1928). This is a translation of Hertz’s work originally published as *MODERNE RASSENTHEORIEN* (Vienna, 1904), revised and expanded as *RASSE UND KULTUR* (Leipzig, 1915).

<sup>118</sup> Max Müller (1880), *quoted in* Shaffer and Lichtenstein, *supra* note 5, at 78.

<sup>119</sup> Thomas Henry Huxley, *The Aryan Question and Prehistoric Man*, in *MAN’S PLACE IN NATURE, AND OTHER ANTHROPOLOGICAL ESSAYS* 271, 280-81 (1896).

<sup>120</sup> Otto Schrader, *quoted in* Hertz, *supra* note 117, at 77.

Even as Rydberg wrote, Müller “returned to the problem of the Aryan homeland with a blast at the [then-] current attempts to relate linguistic and ethnological research, declaring that ‘Aryan’ was nothing more than a linguistic term, and that it was basically impossible to identify the original Aryan speakers or an original homeland.”<sup>121</sup> Contrary to Rydberg’s insistence that a homogeneous Aryan race – identifiable by complexion, hair color, and cranial index, had occupied a homeland in northern Europe since “the Aryan Stone Age,”<sup>122</sup> – the scholarly consensus had already settled on the understanding that “[t]he Aryan was initially and remained an object of pure fantasy.”<sup>123</sup>

At the same time, simplistic 19<sup>th</sup>-century comparative mythology was falling into disrepute because of its association with the very sort of ungrounded, imaginative excesses that propel *UGM*. Even Isaac Taylor, who had no qualms about inferring from comparative linguistics the existence of a race of “ancient Aryans,” right down to deducing the shape of their heads, balked at the additional leap of faith required to arrive at an “Aryan mythology”:

“Ideas may be the same, and language may be identical, but we cannot affirm that the undivided Aryans were in possession of a common mythology. It is more probable that out of the same common words, and the same thoughts, the Aryan nations, after their separation, constructed separate mythic tales, whose resemblances are apparent rather than real.”<sup>124</sup>

Indeed, Taylor devoted an entire chapter of his book, *The Origin of the Aryans*, to demonstrating the logical inadequacy of the very sort of superficial comparative-mythological similarities that are the building blocks and mortar with which Rydberg constructed *UGM*.<sup>125</sup>

The early excesses of comparative mythology reduced the

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<sup>121</sup> Mallory, *supra* note 6, at 33.

<sup>122</sup> TEUTONIC MYTHOLOGY at 21.

<sup>123</sup> Figueira, *supra* note 17, at 88.

<sup>124</sup> Isaac Taylor, THE ORIGIN OF THE ARYANS: AN ACCOUNT OF THE PREHISTORIC ETHNOLOGY AND CIVILISATION OF EUROPE 330-331 (2d ed., 1891).

<sup>125</sup> See *id.* at 299-332.

entire discipline to a “laughingstock” by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>126</sup> Even Müller’s work was mocked (one satirist purported to prove, “by Müller’s own methods, that Müller himself was a solar myth”),<sup>127</sup> prompting the aging linguist to publish a two-volume defense of his comparative method near the end of his life, although to no avail.<sup>128</sup> In particular, the quest to “reconstruct” a single epic proto-myth underlying all the various mythologies of the Indo-European peoples came to be seen as singularly misguided. It is now understood that pre-Christian Germanic religion “was never a monolithic, doctrinal affair. Most scholars recognize that at least two layers of tradition, perhaps even two different traditions, are yoked together in the extant accounts of Norse mythology.”<sup>129</sup> Not only did Rydberg’s grand proto-epic never exist, the very process of blending and melding diverse mythic traditions to force them into an ideologically-determined mold obscures what is most worth studying. As Bruce Lincoln has observed,

the attempt to reconstruct a prototypical (“Proto-Indo-European”) form from which all attested variants can ultimately be derived may actually obscure much of what is most fascinating and important in myth. For while this stance acknowledges that the contents of a given myth will vary as it is recounted by different persons over time and across space, such variation is treated as a problem – or better, as *the* problem – to be undone by scholarly research: research that takes as its task the restoration of some hypothetical “original.” Such research aims, in effect, to reverse historic processes and recapture a primordial (and ahistoric) moment of unity, harmony, and univocal perfection.

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<sup>126</sup> Shippey, *supra* note 58, at 13 n.18; *see also* Lincoln, *supra* note 65, at 231.

<sup>127</sup> *See* Arvidsson, *supra* note 3, at 130.

<sup>128</sup> *See* F. Max Müller, CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SCIENCE OF MYTHOLOGY (2 vol., 1897).

<sup>129</sup> Lionarons, *supra* note 105, at 272. *See also* John McKinnell, BOTH ONE AND MANY: ESSAYS ON CHANGE AND VARIETY IN LATE NORSE HEATHENISM 26 (1994) (it is necessary to “abandon the idea of Norse mythology as a single, unanimous system in which every detail can be explained into consistency, and which comes to us as the detailed witness of an ancient Indo-European system from thousands of years earlier”).

In its very presuppositions, such research ... is itself a species of myth and ritual, based upon a romantic “nostalgia for paradise.”<sup>130</sup>

Unfortunately, as history shows, such reservations were unknown in the popular and pseudo-scholarly circles in which Rydberg’s ideas found a reception. *UGM*’s mythic “epic” was enthusiastically embraced by the same readership that doted on Rydberg’s poems and novels, and the popular appeal of both a race of conquering Aryans and imaginative amalgams of Norse, Vedic, Greek, and Egyptian mythology continued to grow after the writer’s death. “Although there would always be linguists and anthropologists to protest, the superiority of the ancient Aryan Nordic race had entered popular political culture,”<sup>131</sup> and Rydberg’s was but one of the fictive Aryan mythologies that flourished “before being embodied in the swastika.”<sup>132</sup>

The Pan-Aryan nationalism that Rydberg sought to promote took deep root in Austria in the years following his death, and the

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<sup>130</sup> Lincoln, *supra* note 65, at 123 (citation omitted). *See also id.* at xv-xvi (discussing the many conceptual difficulties entailed in “the reconstructive endeavor which constitutes as its object of study the posited beliefs and practices of a posited people who lived in a posited time and place, speaking a posited language” – difficulties that are only intensified with the attempt to “reconstruct ‘Indo-European’ myths, rituals, or religious beliefs, as if these belonged in some sense to Proto-people”).

This criticism, of course applies equally to the scholars that influenced Rydberg, including Grimm. *See, e.g.* Shippey, *supra* note 58, at 12 (“The whole issue [of the appropriation of Scandinavian sources by German nationalists] could ... be blurred, and by Grimm was blurred, by a reaching back from the present situation ... to an earlier hypothetical unity in which (it could be assumed) mythologies, like hero-tales, were all common property, part of an original *Zusammenhang*. The further back you went with languages, as Sir William Jones had remarked, the more similar they were to each other. Surely the same must be true of mythologies?”).

<sup>131</sup> Mallory, *supra* note 13, at 269. The historical non-existence of Rydberg’s “ancient Aryans” did not hinder the growing popularity of the myth. As the English Pan-Germanist Houston Stewart Chamberlain casually observed, even if no “Aryan race” had existed in prehistory, one should exist in the future. *See* John V. Day, *INDO-EUROPEAN ORIGINS: THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL EVIDENCE* xvii (2001).

<sup>132</sup> Poliakov, *supra* note 7, at 5. Nineteenth-century nationalist ideology was already beginning to meld with elements of socialism in Rydberg’s time, and the writer’s attacks on capitalism foreshadowed political trends that would lead to the emergence of three different National Socialist parties in Sweden.

Aryan myth tightened its grip on the European psyche in part through the popularity of imaginative “proto-mythologies” like *UGM*’s. One of the most influential carriers of this torch was the turn-of-the-century Austrian mystic Guido (von) List, who called for restricting the rights of Jews in the process of establishing a Pan-Germanic order consisting of “Germans, the British, Dutch, Netherlanders, Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians.”<sup>133</sup> The racial-nationalist ideology of this movement was closely tied to romantic reinterpretations of Old Norse mythology.

List invented his own Aryan (or as he termed it, “Armanen”) *ur*-mythology, like Rydberg’s loosely based on Norse lore, but sharing Rasmus Anderson’s perspective that the old beliefs were rooted in an imperfectly realized Aryan Christianity.<sup>134</sup> Rydberg’s own version of the “ancient Aryan epic” was kept in circulation in part because of its popularity among Theosophists, followers of the esoteric philosophy and Aryan racial doctrines of the Ukrainian mystic, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.<sup>135</sup> Blavatsky, List and their followers helped promote the potent blend of nature mysticism, pseudo-mythology, and anti-Semitism that found expression in the creation of a variety of *völkisch* political journals and secret societies in the 1920s.<sup>136</sup> Organizations

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<sup>133</sup> Guido List, *ÜBERGANG VOM WUOTANSTUM ZUM CHRISTENTUM* 106 (1911), quoted in Brigitte Hamann, *HITLER’S VIENNA: A DICTATOR’S APPRENTICESHIP* 208 (Thomas Thornton, trans., 1999).

<sup>134</sup> See Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *THE OCCULT ROOTS OF NAZISM* 33-55 (1992); Mattias Gardell, *GODS OF THE BLOOD: THE PAGAN REVIVAL AND WHITE SEPARATISM* 23-25 (2003). See also *THE SECRET KING: KARL MARIA WILIGUT: HIMMLER’S LORD OF THE RUNES* 33-44 (Stephen E. Flowers, trans., Michael Moynahan, ed., 2001) (describing the influence of List and Blavatsky on Karl Maria Wiligut, a member of Himmler’s inner circle).

<sup>135</sup> Early 20th-century Theosophists apparently took *UGM* completely seriously as a source of “Aryan mythology,” even reprinting the fictional adventures of Rydberg’s character “Ivalde” and his sons in the group’s publications. See, e.g., Isabelle M. Pagan, *Aryan Mythology (With Special Reference to Its Northern Form)*, in *THEOSOPHIST MAGAZINE* (OCTOBER 1914 - DECEMBER 1914) 131, 149 (Annie Besant, ed., 2003); *The Cult of the Well in Scandinavia Mythology: Sacred Springs in Sweden*, in *THEOSOPHICAL PATH MAGAZINE: JANUARY THROUGH DECEMBER, 1929* 328 (Katherine Tingley, ed., 2003).

<sup>136</sup> See, e.g., Gardell, *supra* note 134, at 21-26. One such society, founded in 1905, even bore List’s name. See also Rolf Wilhelm Brednich, *The Weigel Symbol Archive and the Ideology of National Socialist Folklore*, in *THE NAZIFICATION OF AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE*, *supra* note 62, 97, 98 (“The Guido von List Society of Vienna ... used the *Heil* greeting and the swastika, were

such as the Germanorden, the Edda Society, and the Thule Society in Munich<sup>137</sup> were manifestations of a racial-nationalist *zeitgeist* that was

saturated with terms like “master race” and “inferior race.” In order to corroborate race theories scientifically, many “researchers” went haywire, measuring and comparing skulls and extremities, establishing alleged racial differences in the blood, in the electrical resistance, and even in the breath.<sup>138</sup>

During this period, as Arvidsson notes, “the exchange between neo-pagan groups, Wagner societies, greater German parties, and the folklorists in Vienna was intensive and mutual.<sup>139</sup> One of the splinter political parties to emerge from this foment, a working-class spin-off of the Thule Society, was to become the National Socialist German Workers (Nazi) Party.<sup>140</sup> Although his immediate source was List’s *Die Namen der Völkerstämme Germaniens (The Names of Germania’s Nations)*, the young Adolf Hitler could as easily have used *UGM* as his text for a speech the Führer-to-be delivered in Munich in 1920:

[T]hat race, which we call the Aryans, was in fact the originator of all major cultures . . . . We know that Egypt reached its high cultural level on account of Aryan immigrants, as did Persia and Greece; the immigrants were blond, blue-eyed Aryans, and we know for a fact that no cultural nation has been founded on earth except for those countries.<sup>141</sup>

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fanatically anti-Semitic, and can certainly be counted among the forerunners of National Socialism.”).

<sup>137</sup> See Goodrick-Clarke, *supra* note 134, at 123-63.

<sup>138</sup> Hamann, *supra* note 133, at 204.

<sup>139</sup> Arvidsson, *supra* note 3, at 179.

<sup>140</sup> See Goodrick-Clarke, *supra* note 134, at 7-16 (1992). See also Bernard Mees, *Völkische Altnordistik: The Politics of Nordic Studies in the German-Speaking Countries, 1926-45*, in *OLD NORSE MYTHS, LITERATURE, AND SOCIETY: PROCEEDINGS OF THE 11<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL SAGA CONFERENCE* 316, 317 (Geraldine Barnes & Margaret Clunies Ross, eds., 2000).

<sup>141</sup> Adolf Hitler, archival speech quoted in Hamann, *supra* note 133, at 211.

With the rise of the Nazis, the line between Germanic folklore and *völkisch* ideology became even more blurred than it was in Rydberg's work.<sup>142</sup> *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler dispatched archaeological expeditions to locate the Aryan *urheimat*,<sup>143</sup> while Scandinavian culture was appropriated *en masse* to support the doctrine of a common Pan-Aryan mythology that became progressively more Germanized until 1945.<sup>144</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup>-century fascination with racial distinctions reflected in Rydberg's table of "craniological measurements" evolved into a full-scale eugenics program, based on "romantic nativist and racist myths of the purebred Nordic."<sup>145</sup>

At the end of World War II, official support for the Aryan myth collapsed.<sup>146</sup> Nevertheless, the quest for exalted origins has continued to resonate with a racial-nationalist subculture down to the present day. Although it has been reduced to the status of a cult object, relegated to footnotes in tracts on 19<sup>th</sup>-century racist thought,<sup>147</sup> UGM's continuing popularity within this fringe constituency attests to what Bernard Mees has called "the intellectual consistency to be found in fascist, palingenetic thought and its search for rooted continuities and ancestral utopia."<sup>148</sup> For marginalized,

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<sup>142</sup> See, e.g., Hermann Bausinger, *Nazi Folk Ideology and Folk Research*, in *THE NAZIFICATION OF AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE*, *supra* note 62, 11-33.

<sup>143</sup> See, e.g., Christopher Hale, *HIMMLER'S CRUSADE: THE NAZI EXPEDITION TO FIND THE ORIGINS OF THE ARYAN RACE* (2003).

<sup>144</sup> See, e.g., Michael Müller-Wille, *The Political Misuse of Scandinavian Prehistory in the Years 1933-1945*, in *THE WAKING OF ANGANTYR: THE SCANDINAVIAN PAST IN EUROPEAN CULTURE* 156 (Else Roesdahl & Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, eds., 1996).

<sup>145</sup> Lori B. Andrews, Maxwell J. Mehlman and Mark A. Rothstein, *GENETICS: ETHICS, LAW AND POLICY* 56 (2002).

<sup>146</sup> See, e.g., Day, *supra* note 131, at xviii ("Inevitably, when the Allies defeated Germany in 1945 the world recoiled against the National Socialist beliefs that Nordics are the highest race and that Nordic early IE speakers had spread civilization across Eurasia."). In a little-remembered segment of the Nuremberg trials, fourteen defendants were convicted of perpetuating racial myths. See Adalbert Ruckerl, *THE INVESTIGATION OF NAZI CRIMES 1945-1978*, 79-80, 118 (1980).

<sup>147</sup> See, e.g., Reginald Horsman, *RACE AND MANIFEST DESTINY: THE ORIGINS OF AMERICAN RACIAL ANGLO-SAXONISM* 312 n.19, 313 n.26 (1981).

<sup>148</sup> Mees, *supra* note 140, at 326.

race-conscious, white readers (or more commonly, web surfers), *UGM* still fills what has been called “the need to ascribe a prehistoric pedigree to modern racial nationalism.”<sup>149</sup>

Although Rydberg’s homosexuality would have prevented *UGM* from being officially incorporated into Nazi doctrine, today his nearly forgotten contribution to racial-nationalist ideology is promoted on an array of racist and white supremacist web sites,<sup>150</sup> where *UGM* is often featured side-by-side with such works as *Mein Kampf*, Francis Parker Yockey’s fiercely anti-Semitic *Imperium*,<sup>151</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century racist hoax, *The Oera Linda Book*.<sup>152</sup> Internet discussion groups conduct the equivalent of Rydberg Bible studies, poring over *UGM* line by line as if it were a holy text.<sup>153</sup> More disturbingly, evangelical cyber-cultists dedicated to *UGM* have borrowed terrorist tactics originally employed by the Nazis, and adapted them for use in the electronic age. These troubling developments will be examined in detail in Part III of this article.

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<sup>149</sup> Goodrick-Clark, *supra* note 8, at 86.

<sup>150</sup> See, e.g., “THE ANCIENT ARYANS by Viktor Rydberg, Ph.D [sic],” at <http://www.originaldissent.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-8407.html>; <http://www.geocities.com/gambanreidi.geo/AncientAryans.htm>; “The Aryan Lands of Europe, by: Viktor Rydberg” at [http://www.libreopinion.com/members/ch1492/english/TheAryanLandsof\\_Europe.html](http://www.libreopinion.com/members/ch1492/english/TheAryanLandsof_Europe.html)

<sup>151</sup> See Gardell, *supra* note 134, at 168-170; Goodrick-Clarke, *supra* note 8, at 72-87.

<sup>152</sup> For a succinct description of this “fabrication,” see Day, *supra* note 131, at 338-39. Mees refers to the *Oera Linda Book* as “a Germanomaniacal forgery.” See Mees, *supra* note 106, at 259-60.

<sup>153</sup> See, e.g., <http://groups.google.com/group/soc.religion.asatru/topics>.

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