mentators see here, and elsewhere in the poem, a Christian meaning. These will be more inclined to accept as genuine the defective stanza which follows the present stanza 49 in one manuscript, and which Schach includes. A literal translation carries so many inevitable, but perhaps inappropriate, connections with Christian terminology that I prefer to place it here. It seems in any case hard to fit into the chronology and what seems to me the spirit of the poem, at least without the lost passages which must have accompanied it.

The mighty one comes down on the day of doom, that powerful lord who rules over all.

The final stanza has also been the subject of much conflicting interpretation, in which the dragon is seen in a variety of functions from purifying to threatening. Like Peter Hallberg and Paul Schach, I see its presence as a reminder that good cannot be disentangled from evil; to separate light from the darkness is to intensify the darkness.

31. The Gods: Æsir and Vanir

In Norse traditions the gods are of two sorts: the Æsir and Vanir. Prominent among the Æsir are Odin, Tyr, and Thor (the great champion, affiliated with thunder, whose weapon is the hammer Mjölnir); while the chief members of the Vanir are Njord and his twin children—son Frey and daughter Freya. In much of Scandinavian tradition the two sets of gods are depicted as forming an organic whole—a complete divine community—so that the gods can be collectively denoted by formulas such as “Odin, Thor, Frey.” There was a time, however, when the gods Æsir and Vanir were at war with one another—the conflict of which the stigl makes mention in the Völuspá: “I remember war, the first in the world.”

Dumézil, in the excerpt that follows, examines these words from the Völuspá and accounts of the conflict as preserved in three other medieval Germanic sources: Snorri Sturluson’s Prose Edda; the Heimskringla, Sturluson’s history of the kings of Norway; and the Gesta Danorum of Saxo Grammaticus. This war, argues Dumézil, is the Scandinavian expression of that primitive Indo-European myth of a conflict between the functions. In part 2 we encountered the Roman homologue of the Scandinavian tradition, the war that Romulus fought with the Sabines after his abduction of the Sabine daughters. Now Dumézil demonstrates, identifying idiosyncratic structural parallels, that the motif survived in Indo-European Asia as well, far beyond the boundaries of Scandinavia and the Italian peninsula.

THE GODS: ÆSIR AND VANIR

George Dumézil

Mythology frequently joins the same characters [Odin, Thor, and Frey] in a triad. Among them alone are divided the three treasures forged by the dwarfs after losing a bet with the malicious Loki: Odin gets the magic ring, Thor the hammer that is to be the instrument of his battles, and Frey the wild boar with the golden bristles. It is they, and only they, whom the Völuspá (strs. 53–56) describes as being joined in the supreme duels and deaths of the eschatological battle. More generally, it is they—and the goddess Freya, closely associated with Frey and Njord—who dominate, who indeed monopolize almost all the

From Gods of the Ancient Northmen by Georges Dumézil. Copyright the Regents of the University of California. Reprinted by permission.
mythological material. It is no less significant that the three gods who split the property of the dead—the last two under rather obscure conditions—are Odin, who consigns to himself the nobles or "half the dead" from the battlefield, Thor, to whom go the thralls (more correctly, no doubt, the nonnobles), and Freya, who according to one text takes the other half of those killed in battle and according to another text takes the dead women.4

Such is the present situation. But this union and this happy harmony, founded on a clear analysis of human wishes, have not always existed, according to the legend. In a far distant past the two divine groups lived at first separately, as neighbors; then they fought a fierce war, after which the most distinguished Vanir were associated with the Æsir, with the rest of their "people" living somewhere away from the struggle and the cares of their cult. Four strophes from that breathless poem, the Völuspá, in which the sibyl relates quite allusively the entire history of the gods; two texts of the erudite Snorri; and finally an unadroit plagiarism by his contemporary Saxo Grammaticus—these inform us of this initial crisis of the gods, which is presupposed also in several passages from other Eddic poems. These documents are not homogeneous: two present the event in mythological terms, two transpose it into historical and geographical terms. The first group includes strophes 21–24 of the Völuspá and a passage in Snorri's mythological manual written for the use of poets, the Skáldskaparmál (chap. 4); the second includes chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 of the Ynglingsaga, discussing the Ynglingar, supposed descendants of Frey, and chapter 7 of the first book of Saxo's Gesta Danorum, a fragment of the "saga of Hadingus" which fills chapters 5 through 8 of that book.

a) Völuspá 21–24. I have elsewhere made an extended analysis of this passage, which the hypercritical Eugen Mogk sought to eliminate from the dossier on the Æsir and Vanir. The order of events—described as "the first war of armies in the world"—seems somewhat confused in these rapid and discontinuous strophes, which do not narrate, but content themselves with evoking episodes already known to the listeners. There is extensive reference to a female being called Gulveig, literally, "gold-drink, gold-drunkenness," sent by the Vanir to the Æsir, who, despite metallurgical treatment, cannot rid themselves of her. A sorceress, she sows corruption, particularly among women. There is also reference (24) to a spear, apparently magic, thrown by Odin against an enemy army, which does not prevent that "broken was the wall of the stronghold of the Æsir" and that "the warlike (?) Vanir were able to trample the plains." But nothing decisive results from these contrary movements, because (23) the gods hold an assembly for peace where they discuss eventual compensation.7

b) Skáldskaparmál (chap. 5, Prose Edda) (The response of Bragi to the question "Whence comes the art called poetry?"):

The beginning of it was that the gods were at war with the people known as the Vanir and they arranged for a peace meeting between them and made a truce in this way: they both went up to a crock and spat into it. When they were going away, the gods took the truce token and would not allow it to be lost, and made of it a man. He was called Kvasir. He is so wise that nobody asks him any question he is unable to answer. He travelled far and wide over the world to teach men wisdom and came once to feast with some dwarfs, Fjalar and Galar. These called him aside for a word in private and killed him, letting his blood run into two crocks and one kettle. The kettle was called Öðrzóri, but the crocks were known as Són and Bon. They mixed his blood with honey, and it became the mead which makes whoever drinks of it a poet or a scholar. The dwarfs told the Æsir that Kvasir had choked with learning, because there was no one sufficiently well-informed to compete with him in knowledge.8

(There follows the story of the acquisition of the mead by Odin, who is to be its greatest beneficiary.)

c) Ynglingsaga (the beginning of the Heimskringla) (chaps. 1, 2, 4, 5):

1. Of the Three Continents.—The earth's round, on which mankind lives, is much indented. Great seas cut into the land from the ocean. We know that a sea goes from the Norva Sound [the Strait of Gibraltar] all the way to Jérusaláland ["Jerusalem Land," Palestine]. From this sea a long arm extends to the northeast which is called the Black Sea. It separates the three parts of the world. The part to the eastward is called Asia; but that which lies to the west of it is called by some Europe, by others Enea. North of the Black Sea lies Svithjóð the Great or the Cold. Some men consider Svithjóð the Great not less in size than Serkland the Great ["Saracen Land," North Africa], and some think it is equal in size to Blåland ["Blackman's Land," Africa]. The northern part of Svithjóð is uncultivated on account of frost and cold, just as the southern part of Blåland is a desert because of the heat of the sun. In Svithjóð there are many large provinces. There are also many tribes and many tongues. There are giants and dwarfs; there are black men and many kinds of strange tribes. Also there are animals and dragons of marvellous size. Out of the north, from the mountains which
are beyond all inhabited districts, a river runs through Svitjóð whose correct name is Tanais [the Don River]. In olden times it was called Tana Fork or Vana Fork. Its mouth is in the Black Sea. The land around the Vana Fork was then called Vana Home or the Home of the Vanir. This river divides the three continents. East of it is Asia, west of it Europe.

2. Of Ásgarð and Óthin.—The land east of the Tana Fork was called the Land or Home of the Æsir, and the capital of that country they called Ásgarð. In this capital the chieftain ruled whose name was Óthin. This was a great place for sacrifices. The rule prevailed that twelve temple priests were highest in rank. They were to have charge of sacrifices and to judge between men. They are called djar or chiefs. All the people were to serve them and show them reverence.

Óthin was a great warrior and fared widely, conquering many countries. He was so victorious that he won the upper hand in every battle; as a result, his men believed that it was granted to him to be victorious in every battle. It was his habit that, before sending his men to battle or on other errands, he would lay his hands on their heads and give them a bjønnak [benediction]. Then they believed they would succeed. It was also noted that wherever his men were sore, a man, on sea or on land, they would call on his name, and they would get help from doing. They put all their trust in him. Often he was away so long as to be gone for many years.

4. The War between the Æsir and the Vanir.—Óthin made war on the Vanir, but they resisted stoutly and defended their land; now the one, now the other was victorious, and both devastated the land of their opponents, doing each other damage. But when both wearied of that, they agreed on a peace meeting and concluded a peace, giving each other hostages. The Vanir gave their most outstanding men, Njorth the Wealthy and his son Frey; but the Æsir, in their turn, furnished one whose name was Hœmir, declaring him to be well fitted to be a chieftain. He was a large man and exceedingly handsome. Together with him the Æsir sent one called Mimir, a very wise man; and the Vanir in return sent the one who was the cleverest among them. His name was Kvasir. Now when Hœmir arrived in Vanahelm he was at once made a chieftain. Mimir advised him in all things. But when Hœmir was present at meetings or assemblies without having Mimir at his side and was asked for his opinion on a difficult matter, he would always answer in the same way, saying, "Let others decide." Then the Vanir suspected that the Æsir had defrauded them in the exchange of hostages. Then they seized Mimir and beheaded him and sent the head to the Æsir. Óthin took it and embalmed it with herbs so that it would not rot, and spoke charms over it, giving it magic power so that it would answer him and tell him many occult things.

Óthin appointed Njorth and Frey to be priests for the sacrificial offerings, and they were djar [gods] among the Æsir. Freya was the daughter of Njorth. She was the priestess at the sacrifices. It was who she first taught the Æsir magic such as was practiced among the Vanir. While Njorth lived with the Vanir he had his sister as wife, because that was the custom among them. Their children were Frey and Freya. But among the Æsir it was forbidden to marry so near a kin.

5. Gefjon Ploughs Zeeland Out of Lake Mälar.—A great mountain chain runs from the northeast to the southwest. It divides Svitjóð the Great from other realms. South of the mountains it is not far to Turkey. There Óthin had large possessions. At that time the generals of the Romans moved about far and wide, subjugating all peoples, and many chieftains fled from their possessions because of these hostilities. And because Óthin had the gift of prophecy and was skilled in magic, he knew that his offspring would inhabit the northern part of the world. Then he set his brothers Vé and Vili over Ásgarð, but he himself and all djar, and many other people, departed. First he journeyed west to Garthriki [Russia], and then south, to Saxland [northern Germany]. He had many sons. He took possession of lands far and wide in Saxland and set his sons to defend these lands. Then he journeyed north to the sea and fixed his abode on an island. That place is now called Óthinsey [Óthin's Island], on the island of Fynen.

Thereupon he sent Gefjon north over the sound to seek for land. She came to King Gyli, and he gave her a ploughland. Then she went to Giantland and there bore four sons to some giant. She transformed them into oxen and attached them to the plough and drew the land westward into the sea, opposite Óthin's Island, and that is [now] called Selund [Zeeland], and there she dwelled afterwards. Skjold, a son of Óthin married her. They lived at Hleifahr. A lake was left [where the land was taken] which is called Logrin. The bays in that lake correspond to the noses of Selund. Thus says Bragi the Old:

Gefjon, glad in mind, from Gyli
Drew the good land,
Denmark's increase, from the
Oxen so the sweat ran.
Did four beasts of burden—
With brow-moons eight in foreheads—
Walk before the wide isle
Won by her from Sweden.

But when Óthin learned that there was good land east in Gyli's kingdom he journeyed there; and Gyli came to an agreement with him, because he did not consider himself strong enough to withstand the Æsir. Óthin and Gyli vied
much with each other in magic and spells, but the Æsir always had the better of it.

Othin settled by Lake Logrin, at a place which formerly was called Sigtúnir. There he erected a large temple and made sacrifices according to the custom of the Æsir. He took possession of the land as far as he had called it Sigtúnir. He gave dwelling places to the temple priests. Nóðr dwelled at Nóðrí, Frey at Uppsalá, Þór at Hlininnbôrg, Þórir at Thríruthvarg, Baldr at Breiðablikk. To all he gave goes estates. 9

d) Saxo Grammaticus, Gesta Danorum, I, 7. 10 This brief passage is clarified by the texts of the Völuspá and of Snorri, but in itself clarifies nothing. It gathers and alters radically several features of the legend of the war and of the reconciliation of the Æsir and the Vanir, notably the gold statue (Völuspá), the beheading of Mímir (Ynglingasaga), and the murder of Kvasir (Skáldskaparmál). "Othinus" here too is a king, whose capital is "Byantium," but who willingly spends time apud Uppsalam. 11

Indo-European parallels help to explain not only the formula of the composition of the triad, but also the legend of the initial separation and war, as well as the reconciliation and fusion of the Æsir with the Vanir. To be sure, the Vedic hymns say nothing about this, oriented as they are toward eulogy and prayer: they are hardly proper for recalling the delicate episodes of divine history. The later literature, the epic, knows that the gods Indra and the Násatya, whose association is so necessary and so close, were nevertheless not always joined in one unified society. By chance an Iranian legend confirms that several essential traits of the material in this story, which probably comes from the "fifth Veda," the oral corpus of legends, were pre-Vedic, indeed Indo-Iranian. Originally the gods of the lower level, the Násatya or givers of health and prosperity, were apart from the other gods. The gods, headed by Índra (for such is the state of the divine hierarchy in the epic), whose weapon is the lightning, refused them what is the privilege and practically part of the credentials of divinity, participation in benefits of the oblations, under the pretext that they were not "proper" gods, but rather some kind of artisans or warriors who were too much mixed in with men. On the day when the Násatya raised their claims and tried to enter into divine society, a bitter conflict ensued.

We see how this entrance is substantially parallel to the initial separation of the higher Æsir—the masters of magic and lightning—and the lower Vanir—givers of richness and fecundity. In India, let us note without delay, the heterogeneity of the two groups of gods could not be explained by the contact and conflict of religions or of different peoples, as is proposed in Scandinavia for the Æsir and Vanir: Mitra-Varuna and Indra on the one hand, the Násatya on the other, grouped together at the same time and with the same hierarchical order, were brought by the Indo-Iranian conquerors to the bend in the Euphrates as well as into the Iranian plateau and the basin of the Indus in the fourteenth century B.C. But the correspondences between Snorri and the Mahábhárata do not stop there. They extend to a group of rare and complex traits which permit the comparatist to be more positive.

We recall from the Skáldskaparmál the birth and death of Kvasir; at the moment when peace is concluded between the divine adversaries, they all spit into the same vessel. Out of this "pledge of peace" the gods fashion a man named Kvasir who has extraordinary, absolutely enormous, wisdom. He travels about the world, but two dwarfs kill him, distributing his blood among three bowls, mixing honey with it and thus concocting the "meal of poetry and wisdom." Then they tell the gods that Kvasir has choked with learning, no one having been able to compete with him in knowledge.

The name Kvasir in this legend has long been interpreted: since 1864 K. Simrock, then R. Heinzell (1889), and then E. Mogk (1923) have shown that it is an onomastic personification of an intoxicating drink which recalls the kvas of the Slavs. 12 It is natural that the precious intoxication given by the meal of poetry and wisdom should have honey as an ingredient. It is equally natural that a drink fermented from squashed vegetables (Dan. kvas "crushed fruits, wort of those fruits") should be made to ferment by spittle. This technique is frequently attested; it is at least conceivable, as we are here dealing with a ceremonial or communal drink, sanctioning the agreement between two social groups, that such fermentation should be caused by the spittle of all concerned. Furthermore, on this point E. Mogk has gathered sufficient ethnographic parallels.

What is less common is that the intoxicating drink prepared with the spittle and called upon to enter as a component of the other intoxicating drink, the meal of poetry, between its two stages as a drink, should take on a completely different form, that of a man or superman, and this by the will of the gods. Furthermore, this theme is not only rare (the "King Soma," and Dionysos-Zagreus, are something else again); it is inserted in a complex and precise whole, which
must not be dislocated. It was not under just any circumstance, nor without design, that this man-drink was created. He was created at the conclusion of the war between the Æsir and Vanir, to seal the peace. Then he was put to death, and his blood, spread among the three recipients, served to make another drink, more durable in that it still inebriates Odin, poets, and visionaries.

Let us return now from Scandinavia to India, where we have left the higher gods and the Nāṣatyas in a great conflict, Indra already brandishing his thunderbolts against the latter. How does this crisis turn out? An ascetic allied with the Nāṣatyas who, as part of their usual services, have restored his youth to him, creates, through the force of his asceticism—the great weapon of Indian penitents—a gigantic man, who threatens to swallow the world, including the recalcitrant gods. This enormous monster's name is Mada “Drunkenness”: he is drunkenness personified. Even Indra gives in, peace is made, the Nāṣatyas definitely join the divine community, and no allusion will ever be made to the distinction among gods or to the initial conflict. But what to do with this character, Drunkenness, whose task is finished and who is now only dangerous? The one who created him, this time with the accord of the gods, cuts him into four pieces and his unitary essence is split up into the four things that, literally or figuratively, are indeed intoxicating: drink, women, gaming, and hunting.

Such is the story to be read in the third book of the *Mahābhārata*, sections 123–125. An Iranian legend that I called attention to in the last section of my *Naissance d’archanges* and which Professor Jean de Menasce has further scrutinized, that of the Hārūt-Mārūt, confirms the linkage of drunkenness with this affair from the beginning of Indo-Iranian mythology. The reader will not have failed to notice the analogy between the fabrications and the liquidations of Kvasir and Mada, an analogy that it is easy to delimit and define. Here is how the balance sheet was formulated in my *Loki*:

Certainly the differences between Germanic and Indic myth are striking, but so is the analogy between their fundamental situations and results. Here are the differences: among the Germanic peoples, the character “Kvas” is formed after the peace is concluded, as a symbol of that peace, and he is made according to a precise realistic technique, fermentation with spittle, whereas the character “Drunkenness” is made as a weapon, in order to force the gods into peace, and he is made mystically (we are in India), by the force of ascetism, without reference to a technique of fermentation. Then, when “Kvas” is killed and his blood divided in thirds, it is not done by the gods who made him, but by two dwarfs, whereas in India, it is his creator who at the order of the gods dismembers “Drunkenness” into four parts. Further, the dismemberment of “Kvas” is simply quantitative, into three homogeneous parts (three vessels receiving the blood, all of the same value, though one happens to be larger than the others), whereas that of “Drunkenness” is qualitative, into differentiated parts (four sorts of drunkenness). In Germanic legend, it is simply as a lying explanation that the dwarfs afterwards tell the gods of an intolerable force (of a purely intellectual kind), out of proportion with the human world, which would have led to the suffocation of “Kvas,” whereas in the Indian legend the excess of force (physical, brutal) of Drunkenness is authentically intolerable, incompatible with the life of the world, and as such leads authentically to his being disembodied. Finally the Germanic legend presents “Kvas” as a benefactor from the beginning, well disposed toward men—a sort of martyr—and his blood, properly treated, produces that most valued thing, the mead of poetry and wisdom, whereas in India “Drunkenness” is a malefactor from the beginning and his four fractions are the scourge of mankind.

All this is true, but it would only prove, if there were need of it, that India is not Iceland and that the two stories were told in civilizations that in content and form had developed in almost diametrically opposite directions. Notably their ideologies of insobriety had become just about inverse. There exists nevertheless a common pattern. It is at the moment when divine society is with difficulty but definitively joined by the adjunction of the representatives of fecundity and prosperity to those of sovereignty and force, it is at the moment when the two hostile groups make their peace, that a character is artificially created incarnating the force of intoxicating drink or of insobriety and is named after it. When this force proves to be excessive for the conditions of this world—for good or for evil—the person thus made is then killed and divided into three or four intoxicating parts that either aid or threaten man.

This pattern is original. It is not met with anywhere in the world but in these two cases. In addition, its principle is easily understood, if one pays attention to the social conditions and conceptions which must have existed among the Indo-European peoples. In particular, intoxication under various names and shapes would have been of use to all three social functions. On the one hand, it is one of the fundamental stimuli in the life of a sorcerer-priest and of a hunter-warrior in this culture, and, on the other hand, it is procured through plants that the farmer must cultivate and prepare. It is thus natural that the “birth” of intoxication and all that goes with it should be situated at that moment of mythological history when society is formed through reconciliation and the union of priests and warriors on the one hand with farmers and all the powers of fecundity and nourishment on the other. There is a profound harmony between this sociomythological event and the appearance of intoxication, and it is not superfluous to remark here that neither the poets...
of the Mahābhārata nor Snorri could still have been aware of this, which lends a strange air to their tales. For the poets of the Mahābhārata, the Nāsatya are no longer what they were at the time of the Vedic compilation, typical canonized representatives of the third function. However well Snorri in his various treatises portrays the differing characters of Odin, Thor, and Frey, he surely does not understand the reconciliation of the Æsir and Vanir as a myth concerning the origin of the harmonious collaboration of the diverse social functions.  

This correspondence is not the only one. We have also a Roman tradition that presents a new pattern for the events of the war between the Æsir and the Vanir given by the sibyl in the Völuspá, one that confirms the meaning of the entire story. In Rome, as we know, there is no more mythology, and the earliest lore is deposited in the epic of origins. Further, the "complete society" whose creation interested the very matter-of-fact Romans could only be their own. It is in fact the tradition about the birth of the city which offers the Germanist the parallel of which we speak. Rome, says the legend, was constituted by the union of two groups of men, the purely masculine companions of the demigod Romulus, maintainers of the promises of Jupiter and strong in their military valor, and the Sabines of Titus Tatius, rich farmers and, through their women, the only ones capable of giving fecundity and durability to the nascent society. But the happy union of these two complementary groups, like that of the Æsir and Vanir, was brought about at the conclusion of a difficult and long-contested war, in the course of which each adversary in turn gained the upper hand. The union was affirmed in a scene and by means that would well illustrate its "functional specialty." The Sabines, the "rich ones," nearly won by occupying the capital, but how did they occupy it? By bribing Tarpeia, a woman, with gold—or with love, according to another version. Later, in the battle of the forum, when his army fled in disorder, Romulus not only restored order, but even drove the Sabine army out of the capital back to their camp. How did he achieve this result? With his eyes and hands to the sky, he addressed himself to the sovereign Jupiter, reminding him of his promises, imploring a miraculous suspension of panic; and Jupiter granted it. It is notable that the two episodes of the war of the two divine clans in the Völuspá correspond to these two, with the same functional features. The rich and voluptuous Vanir send among the Æsir as a scourge the woman called Gullveig, "insobriety (or power) of gold," who corrupts their hearts, especially those of the women. Further, Odin throws his spear in a gesture that the sagas know well, where it regularly has the effect of throwing the enemy army into a fatal panic. In the conflict of Indra and the Nāsatya which was treated at some length above, and which does not achieve the dignity of a war of peoples, the conduct of the two parties is no less clearly significant of their functional levels. The Nāsatya have as their ally the ascetic Cauvery, whom they obtained by restoring his youth and beauty and by permitting him to keep his wife whom they had first intended to take for themselves. And it is with brandished thunderbolt that Indra responds to their audacity.

Even if all the picturesque details of Snorri's narrative have not found equal striking correspondences outside Scandinavia (I am thinking of the stories of Hœnir and the decapitation of Mimir), those just recited should suffice to establish that the war of the Æsir and the Vanir is indeed a myth that is older than the Germanic peoples, older than the dispersion of their ancestors and those of the Italic, Indo-Iranian, and other Indo-European peoples. It is a myth whose apparently strange elements still preserve, though not fully understood by its narrators, the complex elements and nuances of a "lesson" on the structure of Indo-European societies.

Notes
1. Edda Snorra Sturlusonar, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1931), p. 123 (Skaldskaparmál, chap. 42). References to Snorri's Edda (also known as The Prose Edda) are to this edition. Abbreviated: Snor Edda (Jónsson). The Prose Edda is divided into parts with separate chapter numbering: Gylfaginning, Bragið að Brot, Skaldskaparmál, Hátíðatal.
2. Edda (Kuhn [Heidelberg, Carl Winter, 1962]), pp. 12–13; Edda (Bellows [New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1923 and later]), pp. 22–23. References to individual poems of the Edda are frequent in the text and are not separately footnoted except for direct quotations.
3. Grimmrodd, skr. 14; Edda (Kuhn), p. 60; Edda (Bellows), pp. 90–91.
4. Egil saga, chap. 78.
7. Edda (Kuhn), p. 5; Edda (Bellows), pp. 10–11.
32. The Rigśpula and Indo-European Social Structure

Another of the lays of the Poetic Edda, the Rigśpula, serves as the focal point of the following essay by Dumézil. A curious aspect of early Germanic society—human society, that is, as opposed to divine society—is the disappearance (from the perspective of Indo-European inheritance) of a priestly class. Dumézil finds at least an ideological survival of human social tripartition, along primitive Indo-European lines, in the story of the god Heimdall, his journeys among humankind, and the children he engenders in those journeys, as preserved in the Rigśpula. (RDW)

THE RIGŚPULA AND INDO-EUROPEAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Georges Dumézil

Since the beginning of research into the three Indo-European functions (magic and juridical sovereignty, physical force, fecundity) and their expressions, a characteristic fact has emerged concerning the Germanic domain which doubly opposes it to the Celtic domain. The Celts, as well the Gauls as the Irish, present in their social organization a formula almost superposable on the Indo-Iranian structure (druids, flāith or warlike nobility, bó airig or breeders-farmers). But in their theology one observes a complex picture in which it is not easy to find the equivalent Vedic and pre-Vedic lists of patron gods of the same three functions ("Mitra-Varuṇa, Indra, Nāsatya"). On the contrary, the Germanic peoples profess a clear trifunctional theology (presented in Scandinavia as "Odin, Thor, Frey"), but do not divide their societies according to these three functions. Caesar, who knew the Gauls well, was struck by this difference. The Germans, he remarked, have no class comparable to that of the Druids and show little interest in ritual. As they no longer apply themselves to agriculture, only one type of man exists among them, the warrior: vita omnis in venationibus atque in studiis ret militar is consistit.

From Gods of the Ancient Northmen by Georges Dumézil. Copyright the Regents of the University of California. Reprinted by permission.

429
This statement, assuredly too simple and too radical, nevertheless brings together the essentials of Germanic originality, at least on the Continent and near the Rhine, for, as far back as one goes, Scandinavia has nourished a peasant mass, conscious of its function, under the sign of the gods Ægir and Frey. But even in the north the absence of a sacerdotal class keeps the social structure from being superposable on the Indo-Iranian or Celtic model. In looking more clearly at Rigśhula, the famous Eddic poem in which this structure is exposed, or rather formed under our eyes, I should like to show that it can nevertheless be explained on the basis of the Indo-European functional tripartition.

Traveling incognito throughout the world under the name of Rig (ON Rigr), the god Heimdall presents himself in a first house, a very poor one, in which he is met by the couple Great Grandfather and Great Grandmother. He spends three nights there in the conjugal bed and leaves after begetting a son. At his birth this son is named præll “slave (thrall).” His descendants, boys and girls, bear only pejorative names. Rig then presents himself in a second house, more wealthy, where he receives the hospitality of the couple Grandfather and Grandmother. After three nights, he again goes off, leaving Grandmother with child, a son who at his birth receives the name Karl, “freeholder.” The children fathered by Karl bear names the majority of which make allusion to peasant life and one of which, Smiðr, is even the word meaning “artisan (smith).” The names of his daughters, less characteristic, are flatteringly. Finally Rig appears in a third house, this one luxurious, where Father and Mother receive him sumptuously. Here the product of his passage receives the name Jarl, “noble (earl).” In an action contrasting with the way he treated his other children, Rig does not abandon this one, but assists in his education and adopts him as a son. To this “Rig-Jarl” only male descendants are attributed, who all have names signifying “boy, son, heir,” and who live like their father. Only the last, the young Konr, “Konr ungr,” detaches himself from the mass and becomes the first king (konungar).

This social structure has long been confirmed by juridical documents from the most diverse parts of the medieval Germanic world: adalingus, liber, servus (Angles); edhilini, frilini, lazzi; or, nobiles, ingenui, serviles (Saxons); satrapa (or nobilia), ingenuus, servus (Danish; Saxo Grammaticus). We are certainly concerned here with a tradition, almost a Germanic theory. But it must be noted right away that in the Rigśhula, præll and his descendants remain heterogeneous with the superior classes. The derisory or even defamatory names they bear are proof of it. They are not only found secluded at the bottom, but are even outside of the “good” social division, just like the śūdra of classical India in relation to the three superior varṇa; such that the following equivalence can be established, with a gap in the first term only:

- brähmaṇa
- Jarl  ksatriya
- Karl  vaisyya
- præll  śūdra

In fact, the description that the poem contains (strs. 22-23) of the life Karl leads corresponds, mutatis mutandis, to the definition of the Indian breeder-farmers, the vaisyā:

- Haun nam at vaxa  oc vel dafna;
- axnam nam at temia,  ardr at gerva,
- hūs at timbra  oc hlydor smiða,
- karta at gerva  oc keyra plóð.
- Heim sóð  hanginucle,
- geitakyrílo,  gipto Karl;
- Sner heitir sós;  settiz undir ripti;
- biuggu hión,  bauga dejlo,
- breiddo blælor  oc bú gørðo.

He began to grow, and to gain in strength, Oxen he ruled, and plows made ready, Houses he built, and barns he fashioned, Carts he made, and the plow he managed.

Home did they bring the bride for Karl, In goatskins clad, and keys the boren. Snör was her name, ‘neath the veil she sat; At home they made ready, and rings exchanged, The bed they decked, and a dwelling made.

Similarly, the occupations of Jarl—and also of Father, in whose house he is born—are those of the Indian ksatriya; it is said about the Father (str. 28):

Sat húsgumi  oc sneri streng,
álm of bendi,  ḫvar scepti.
There sat the house-lord, wound strings for the bow, Shafts he fashioned, and bows he shaped.
Then about Jarl (str. 35):

Upp óx þar jarl á fleitum;
lind nam at scelfa, leggja strengi,
álm at beygja, yrvar scepta,
fein at fleygja, froccor dyía,
hestom ríða, hundom verpa,
sverðóm bregða, sund at fremía.
To grow in the house did Jarl begin,
Shields he brandished, and bowstrings wound,
Bows he shot, and shafts he fashioned,
Arrows he loosened, and lances wielded,
Horses he rode, and hounds unleashed,
Swords he handled, and sounds he swam.

As for the first term of the Scandinavian and Indian table, consideration of the precise kind of royalty represented by “Konr ungr” reduces considerably the difference, at first glance irreducible, produced by the absence in one group and presence in another of a sacerdotal caste. “Konr ungr” in effect is and can only be defined as a magician, with the notable exclusion of the warrior traits that still characterize his father and his brothers. He owes his promotion and success solely to his magic knowledge (strs. 43–46):

Upp óx þar jarlI bornir;
heita þmöð, hitar bendo,
sceiti scófo, scelfo asca.

Ein Konr ungr kunni rínar,
ærinrúnar oc aldrúnar;
meirr kunni hann mónnom biarga,
eggjar deyfa, ægi lægia.

Klop nam fugla, kyrra elda,
seva of svefja, sorgir lægia,
..........................
afl ok elin átti manna.

Hann við Rig Jarl rínar deildi,
brøggom bætti oc betr kunni;
þa óllaðir oc þa eiga gat
Ríg at heita, rínar kunna.

Soon grew up the sons of Jarl,
Beasts they tamed, and bucklers rounded,
Shafts they fashioned, and spears they shook.

But Kon the Young learned runes to use,
Runes everlasting, the runes of life;
Soon could he well the warriors shield,
Dull the swordblade, and still the seas.

Bird-chatter learned he, flames could he lessen,
Minds could quiet, and sorrows calm;

The might and strength of twice four men.

With Rig-Jarl soon the runes he shared,
More crafty he was, and greater his wisdom;

The right he sought, and soon he won it,
Big to be called, and runes to know.

Thus the first function, magic sovereignty, if it does not have for support a whole class of men opposed to the class of warriors and to that of breeders-farmers, does at least appear, and in the expected hierarchical place. It is concentrated, however, in the person of the king, whom the function has colored even to the point where there remains in him only “the” magician par excellence. The konung is thus clearly distinguished from the Indian rajan, coming in general, like “Konr ungr,” from the warrior class, but who, pro- or juxtaposed to the class of priests, is characterized by temporal power more than by talent or knowledge, and must double, for the purpose of religious acts, with the priest par excellence who is his chaplain, the purohita.

The picture the Rigðhula gives in “Konr ungr” of royalty is in any case schematic and insufficient. If one turns to the mythology, which is doubtless closer to social reality, one sees that the god of the first function, Odin, is to be sure a king-magician similar to “Konr ungr,” but that he is also (and how could it be otherwise in the Germanic world?) a warrior god, even the great ruler of combat and fighters, the patron of the jarlar as well as of the konungar, and in the other world, of the einherjar, dead heroes skilled in combat whom the Valkyries bring to him. I have shown on several occasions how certain Scandinavian peoples or groups, while maintaining the Indo-European structure of the three functions in the triad Odin-Thor-Frey, modified the distribution of conceptual material among the three levels. This is true first for Odin, with whom the accent is
often placed on the warrior aspects at the expense of the magical aspects of his province. But this is also true for the one who strikes, the thundering and lighting Thor. He, in return, often lost his contact with the warriors, and interested society instead, and especially the peasants, with the fecund result of the atmospheric battle that he produces through rain. This confusion has either brought Thor closer to the proper, terrestrial gods of fecundity, Frey and Njord, or it has pushed these two, in turn, into the parts of their province where Thor does not compete, such as human fecundity and voluptuousness.

The following were, for example, according to Adam of Bremen, the values of the three gods associated with the temple at Uppsala: Wodan, id est furor, bella gert, says this keen observer, hominique ministrat virtutem contra inimicos; Thor praeisidet in aera, qui tonitrus et fulmina, ventos imbresque, serena et fruges gubernat; and Frigg—the god ingenti priape—has no more to himself than pacem voluptatemque. Consequently, one addresses oneself to Wodan si bellum imminet, to Thor si pestis et fames, and to Frigg si nuptiae celebrandae sunt.

Even in Norway, where the former dominion of Frey has been largely preserved, and where Thor, in the literature, has certainly remained the “one who strikes,” modern folklore and Lapp borrowings attest nevertheless to a clear and ancient evolution of this god, through the benefits of storms, toward fecundity and the service of peasants. This can easily be seen in the verses of the Hárbarðsljóð (str. 24) in which Odin haunts into Thor’s face the celebrated insult:

\[
\text{Odin has the jarlar who fall in battle,} \\
\text{And Thor has the race of the brælar.}
\]

Jan de Vries has plausibly surmised—Thor has nothing to do elsewhere with the brælar—a caricature, a parody of a more exact saying, where, corresponding to Odin, patron of jarlar, one should find Thor the patron of the karlar: is not karl the stereotyped surname that Thor bears in Lapp mythology (Hora Galleis + *Karl(ik)az)? And, in folklore from the South of Sweden, is the god not designated by a quasi-synonym of karl, go-bonden, korn, áker-bonden?

These breaks and overlappings in divine functions permit a justification of the parallel displacement which is observed in the attribution of symbolic colors that the Rǐgsþula makes to the social classes.

We know that this usage is very old, even Indo-European; it is well known among the Indo-Iranians (with whom the notion of “class, caste,” is expressed by the words, varṇa, pīṣṭha, which are connected with color). This has recently been reported among the Hittites, and has also left clear traces in Rome.13 In these various domains the colors retained were white (first function: priests, the sacred), red (second function: warriors, force), and dark blue or green (third function: breeder-farmers, fecundity). Only post-Rigvedic India, which placed a fourth class, that of the servant śūdra, below the three ārya classes, adjusted this system at the same time, attributing yellow to the vaishya and reserving for the śūdra the dark color in its extreme form, black.14 The Rǐgsþula, too, associates colors with the eponyms of the Germanic social classes.15 It presents the baby Thrall, at his birth (str. 7), as svartan, black. Then it describes the baby Karl (str. 21) as raðhan ok rjóðan, red of hair and face; and finally the baby Jarl (str. 34) is bleikr, a bright white. And apparently “Kor ungr,” for whom color is not indicated, is himself also bleikr, in his quality as the son of Jarl. We see that, if the black attributed to Thrall and his slave descendants is no more surprising than the black of the Indian śūdra, in return the white and red, attributed respectively to the noble warriors and freeholders, are lowered by one level in comparison with Indic and also with the Indo-European prototype. The table below will show how the overflowing of Odin into the warrior function and that of Thor into the function of fecundity can explain this “descent” of white and red:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indo-European State</th>
<th>Scandinavian Theology</th>
<th>Rǐgsþula</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White = Magic = Odin</td>
<td>{Magic}</td>
<td>Konr - ungr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red = Force, War = Thor</td>
<td>{War}</td>
<td>Jarl - white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue = Fecundity = Frey</td>
<td>{Atmospheric Combat, Fecund Rain, Terrrestrial Fecundity}</td>
<td>Karl - red</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In other words, the aspect of Odin (war) incorporated with Jarl and the aspect of Thor (fecund rain) incorporated with Karl caused the transfer to Jarl and Karl, respectively, of symbolic colors that, originally, were associated with aspects of Odin (magic?) and Thor (atmospheric combat) which were not incorporated in Jarl and Karl. The transfer could only have been facilitated by the fact that the magic function, being no longer assured to a class of men but only to an individual “Kor ungr,” was no longer felt to be homogeneous with the functions assured to Jarl and the jarlar, Karl and the karlar, and could, without opposing an already broken symmetry, remain outside the play of colors.17
These reflections permit the Rigsbøla to be put into the dossier of our study and afford a glimpse of the simple and coherent evolution that transformed the Indo-European prototype into an original structure among the Germanic peoples.


Notes
1. These remarks were made in a course at the Collège de France, March 1, 1958. For the text of Rigsbøla see Edda (Kuhn), pp. 28-67; Edda (Bellows), pp. 201-216.
3. Caesar, De bello gallico, VI, 21, 1; 22, 1.
4. Ibid., VI, 21, 3.
5. On the god Heimdall in his Indo-European perspective, see Dumézil, Les dieux des Indo-Européens (1952), pp. 104-105; J. de Vries has written on “Heimdall, dieu énigmatique” in Etudes germaniques 10 (1975), 257-268, and in Algemenee filologie, 24th ed. (1977), II, 219-244. Also see my article “below, chapter 8”, where one will find a justification of the use of Rig, a foreign (Irish) name for king, which does not imply, contrary to what is often said, that the poem is of Celtic inspiration. In particular, the social division presented in the Rigsbøla is certainly Germanic.
9. It has been stated above that Rig (Heimdall) taught Jarl, beside the art of war, “the runes.” But with Jarl this magic science did not prosper; it was retained as a seed that only flowered with Konr ungr.
10. This seemed so astonishing that it was supposed that the poem was broken off, and that the last strophe, lost, told of the exploits of war of “Konr ungr.” In fact, nothing supports this hypothesis.
17. There are ritual traces of the ancient system (white-beardman, red-(TypeError), black-vaisyo): Gobhi G.S., IV, 7, 7; Khâlîra G.S., IV, 2, 12.
1. Myth and Hero

The earliest Germanic literature, Old English, Old High German, Old Saxon, and Old Norse, knows a great many combats between heroes and dragons or heroic adversaries, epic conflicts which have continued to seize popular imagination from the Dark Ages right down to the 19th and 20th centuries, in the response of Richard Wagner, the still unabated vogue of the literary creations of the distinguised philologist J. R. R. Tolkien, and the immense success of the game Dungeons and Dragons. The themes of all these epic poems and tales have been repeatedly studied, catalogued, and analyzed by philologist and folklorist alike, and their similarity to the themes of Greek, Indic, and other legendary material has been noted since the 19th century. The thematic similarities may be presumed as given; our concern here is language.

A number of verbal parallels among the various Germanic dragon-slaying legends have been adduced, which prove, by the tenets of the comparative method, that they are genetically related and common inheritance. Such is the remarkable and methodologically indispensable agreement in what Meillet (1925:3) would term the critical ‘défai singulier’, the heptis-sax ‘hilted knife’, WEAPON of Giant adversary in the Grettissaga (§66) and a hapax in Old Norse, and the haft-méce ‘hilted sword’ Hunting which Unferth loaned to Beowulf (1457) and which was useless against Grendel’s mother (1523 bitanollde ‘would not bite’). The equation of the compounds is notable for two reasons. The first is that both contexts refer to the antiquity of the weapon: Beowulf 1458 des foran ealdgestræfna ‘foremost of the ancient treasures’; Grettissaga §66 metalinguistically as þæt kolluða menn þæt heptisax ‘such men called then heptisax’. The second is that Beowulf and Grettissaga come respectively at the beginning and the end of the attested Old Germanic heroic literary tradition. The two are separated by nearly 600 years (8th to 14th century), yet they are very close to each other, perhaps identical, in theme and message, i.e. in “meaning”. It is a remarkable testimony to the tenacity of the Germanic tradition.

Perhaps the clearest evidence for a common Germanic (at any rate West and North Germanic) dragon-slaying myth are the respective genealogies of the heroes Sigemund in Beowulf and Sigmundr-Sigurðr (“Siegfried”) in Old Norse:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wæls</th>
<th>Volsungr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Sister (≈ Sigmund)</td>
<td>*Sigmund (≈ Sigmundr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitela (nefa of Sig.)</td>
<td>Sin-fiotli (≈ Sigurðr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[cf. OHG PN IMHG Sigfrit (Sintar-)Fizziolo]</td>
<td>[MHG Sigfrid]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The identity of the names and their relations, the mythopoeic incest motif (probably reconstructible for Old English as well), all point unequivocally to a common Germanic mythographic background, whether the dragon-slayer is Sigemund as in Beowulf, or his son Sigurðr/Sigfrid as elsewhere. It is with this myth that we may begin.

Sigemund’s exploit is narrated as part of the victory song composed to celebrate Beowulf’s victory over Grendel (867ff.). In this victory song we have a treasure house of the metalanguage of Old Germanic poetry. ‘Mindful of lays’ (gidda gemynig) the poet ‘found another poem, truly bound [i.e. rightly alliterative]’ (word oberfand sóde gebunden). (With the neuter plural word compare Greek ένεα.) He began to ‘vary words’ (woord wrislan), as Klaeber puts it (ad 874) ‘in the customary manner of Germanic poetry’, and told of the deeds of Sigemund:

884-7

Sigemunde gesprong

aer deädæge dóm unylýtel,  
syþom wiges heard wyrmdæwælde,  
hordes hyrde.

To Sigemund came, after his death-day, no little fame,  
since the handy battler killed a serpent,  
the guardian of a treasure.

‘Great fame’ is expressed in the ancient figure of litotes, literally ‘unlittle fame’ (dóm unylýtel), like Greek κάζεως ἀρήτων and Vedic ḍkṣiti śṛdvah ‘imperishable fame’; compare also with the same semantics, Greek μέγα κάζεως and Vedic mādi śṛdvas ‘great fame’. And embedded in the phonetic figure heard... hordes hyrde we find one of the traditional Old English dragon slaying formulas: wyrmdæwælde ‘killed the worm’.

1. Compare the bibliography in Klaeber 1950. Perhaps the finest appreciation is still Tolkien 1938. For extra-Germanic comparisons cf. recently, and in some detail, Fontenrose 1980:Appendix 5.

2. Cf. Klaeber 1950:x-xviii and note to line 1457. That the Germanic names of the dragon-slaying hero in their first element (cf. Gothic sigis ‘victory’) have the same root *segilt: ‘overcome, conquer’ as the Greek name Exek (Hektor) is perhaps accidental, but still worth pointing out. The semantics of the formation of the name ‘Exek are older than those of the synchronic verb ëysa in Homeric Greek. Cf. Ved. sāhate ‘conquers, overpowers, wins over’.

3. See on these Schmit 1965:79ff.
Germanic has no cognate of ăhist, ăi, ăo, orp; the word for 'worm, serpent, dragon' is Old English wyrm, Old Norse orm, Old Saxon and Old High German wurm, Gothic waurns: Germanic *wurmiz, exactly cognate with Latin urmis, and presupposing Indo-European *urmis. The word is a rhyme formation in Indo-European to *k'rmis, probably for reasons of taboo; *k'rmis is found in Celtic, Balto-Slavic, Albanian, and Indo-Iranian. The usual meaning of *k'rmis is just 'worm' in most traditions, but in Middle Iranian it is also the word for 'dragon'; compare the Pahlavi version of the familiar Indo-European formula: kirm ösad badd 'had slain the dragon' (chap. 29). There can be no doubt that in *urmis/k'rmis we have two variants of the same alternative designation of the Indo-European mythological serpent-adversary.4

Old English here uses cwellan as the unmarked verb for 'kill', the causative of cweelan 'die': Indo-European *g'd(h,)-, Cuneiform and Hieroglyphic Luvian wal-'die', Old Irish at-baill 'dies', Greek βαλλω 'throw'. The causative formation *kwaljan, anachronistically *g'd(h,)-ije, appears to be confined to Germanic, and its use in the dragon-slaying formula is apparently an innovation confined to Old English.5 Beowulf furnishes two further instances, both precisely in that formula:

1053-5
ound bone ånne heht
golde forgylldan þone þe Grendel ðer
mæne ðcwesalde
and he ordered the compensation to be paid6
for the one whom Grendel wickedly killed,

1334 þe þu gystran niht Grendel cwéaldest
(fight) in which you killed Grendel last night.

The two well illustrate the inherited bidirectionality of the formula

KILL SERPENT.

even where the lexical expression of KILL has been renewed, from IE *g'hen- to Germanic *kwalian, Old English cwellan.

Other verbs as well are associated with the narration of dragon combat in both

4. See further below (chap. 56) on the Charm.
5. Likewise proper to Old English is the use of the verb overcome with the dragon as object. It is used twice of Grendel: Beowulf 845 niða ofergumen 'overcome by the fight', 1273 by þone feond ofcrewan 'then he (Beowulf) overcame the adversary'. Since Grendel is only the first of Beowulf's monstrous adversaries we could see in ofergumen here the continuator of IE *egh-, expressing the preliminary victory of one of the protagonists. IE *egh- shows a similar meaning; compare n. 2 above, and recall only that Hector too won a preliminary victory.
6. Compare the Greek téov, nóuv below in the same context.
by his 'chariot and weapons' (vahanayudhais), and with the arms alone, the Old Irish oath tar mo scithad γ tar mo cl(h)oidim 'over my shield and over my sword' (Fled Bricrenn §99). Völundr makes the Norse king swear

at þi kvellat kván Völundar
né brúði minni at bana verði

that you will not kill Völundr's wife, nor become the bane (= killer) of my bride.

Here kvellja and the periphrasis at bana verða (on which see below) are semantically identical; the choice of each is governed by the alliteration.

The Old English noun bona (bana), Old Norse bani 'slayer, killer', is frequent in poetic texts in both languages. In Beowulf it is applied both to heroes and to monsters; the dragon is the subject. Cf. Grendel in 1743 bona swīðe néah 'a killer is very near', 2082 bona blodigisō 'the bloody-toothed killer', and of the Worm who killed Beowulf and was killed by him, 2824 bona swyliche læg 'his killer also lay dead'.

In Old Norse the dragon is the object. It is used twice with the dragon Fafnir as object, once of the WEAPON and once of the HERO.7 Gripioppa 15:

þá munt hoggva hvossu sveröi 
brynio rista með bana Fafnís

You will have with sharp sword, cut her byrnie with Fafnir's bane (the sword Gram).

Oddrúnargrádr 17:

ígrō dúsaði ok upphimmina 
þá er bani Fafnis 
borg um þátti

Earth and Up-heaven shook
when Fafnir's bane (Sigurðr)
looked at (Brynhildr's) fortress.8

We find finally the collocation with the generic word for serpent in a kenning for the god Thor. Hymiskviða 22:

orms einbani uxa hófði

The serpent's single bane (used as bait) the head of an ox.

Here the compound ein- is there only to alliterate with orms and uxa; the underlying phrase is orms bani, which nominalizes the familiar formulaic verb phrase

KILL SERPENT.

The noun phrase 'serpent's killer' is itself here a definition of the Germanic divine HERO par excellence, the warrior god Thor himself, Nordic counterpart of Indra.

There is in fact no primary, non-derived verb in Germanic which is related to the noun of Old English bona etc.9 To express such a notion verbally by this root all the early North and West Germanic languages have recourse to a periphrasis meaning literally 'become slayer to', which semantically means just 'slay': Old English tó bonan weordan (+ dat.), Old Norse at bana vérða (+ dat.), Old High German ti bani werdan (+ dat.), Old Saxon te banon weorðan (+ dat.). This periphrastic verb phrase is regularly used of more than ordinary killings: it is semantically marked. It is found characteristically in narration of killing of or by a dragon or another monster (bidirectionality), of fratricide or other kin-slaying, of awesome exploits of the hero, or of awesome victims. The context is not indifferent. The examples from Beowulf are the following:

1330-1 Wearð him on Heorote tó handbanan
wælgræst wæfre

A wandering murderous sprite (Grendel's mother) slew him in Heorot.

Note the sentence-initial verb and the postposed, indefinite subject, who is not identified by name.

2078-9 him Grendel wearð
márum maguþegne tó miðbonan

him, the famous young retainer, Grendel slew by mouth.

The first compound members hand- and mið- are for alliteration. Beowulf taunts Unferth:

7. inn frrndi ormr 'the speckled snake' Fafnismál 19, 26, for the perseverance of this frequent Eddic formula cf. Faroese framurormur, New Norw. dial. framorman 'the snake with yellow spots'. Cf. Greek ὅφηρι ἑσυπνήσετε and chap. 39.

8. 'Earth and Up-heaven' is itself an old formula in the Old Norse tradition, indeed probably of Indo-European age. The connection is natural enough, to be sure, but compare in Hittite such colocations, all from mythological or ritual texts, as ǔ ḪURU PIM MIKUR 'in my son's hands I am the king' 'But the Storm God's son was with the Serpent; and he called up in heaven to his father . . .' (Illyankas §25); šarr 'nešši kwat lakatik 'Why does it keep looking up to heaven?' (KUB 7.41 Ro. 10-11). Both probably originally would have showed the directive case Šarr; for the locative cf. Šarr=šašn Šarr šišalel Šeškanu 'up in heaven the divine ones are shrieking' (KBO 10.24 iii 13-14). The topos of the stormy agitation of Earth and Heaven is widespread in early Indo-European literatures.

9. Old Norse does show the denominative weak verb bani (+ dat.), already once in the Poetic Edda (Hfrv 26). It is comparable to the Greek creation spéveia, which as we have seen increases dramatically in frequency in the course of the fifth century B.C.
Though you killed your brothers, and the same verb describes the primeval fratricide in

And finally Odin's question and the witch's answer in Balders Draumar 8-9:

Who will slay Baldri?
He (Baldri's blind brother Höðr) will etc.

In Old High German note only the single but telling example of the periphrasis, of tragic adversaries doomed to an ineluctable conflict. Hildebrand says of his son Hadubrand, who does not recognize his father (Hildebrandslied 54):

eddo i imo ti banin werdan
or I (shall) kill him.

The construction is finally found in Old Saxon Christian poetry as well; for examples, see the work of Rosemarie Lühr cited below.

Old Norse knows another periphrasis with the same word bani in the same meaning 'slay': ban(a)orð bera af (+ dative), literally 'bring the killer's' word from', the 'death message'. The expression is explained by Gering s.v. as derived from the legal obligation of a murderer to acknowledge himself as such.¹⁰

Compare Fáfnismál 39 at Reginn skelti mitt banorð bera 'that Reginn should slay me', Landnámabók iv. 17 (the forge-song of the smith Volundr):¹¹

Ek bar einn af ellifu
banaorð. Blístu meirs!

I killed eleven alone. Blow harder!

¹⁰ One might also however imagine a directly created metaphor, the act of killing itself being the word, the message. In RV 8.108.3 the missile of Mítra and Varuša is called their 'swift messenger' ajarð dūndr. The 'swift messenger' is formulaic in Vedic, dūndr ajarð RV 10.98.2, Ælfn ārda ajarðm 3.9.8. It is also in Greek ὑγρός ὀρός Ocl. 15.526 and especially Sappho 44.3L-P, where it is line final in the same metrical slot as that occupied by κλέος ἀγάθος in the next line. See on the latter Nagy 1974:117. Greek ὑγρός 'messengers' lacks an etymology, should we equate it with Vedic ajarða's 'swift', via the transferred epithet? A mechanical preform *a.eygro* will account for both. For examples of the transferred epithet in etymology see chap. 12.

¹¹ Cited from Gordon 1949:134. For the meter see ibid. 294. Note also the enjamment which permits a "vertical" as well as "horizontal" alliterative linkage in b-, and the "Irish" rhyme (by consonant-class) einn: meirs.
hon hefi ðrigia þiðkonunga / banorð borit

She killed three kings.

In the Prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson the description of Ragnarök, the Twilight of the Gods, presents the whole gamut of Old Norse phrases with bani in the space of a few lines: the hound Garmr will fight Tyr, or *verðr hvárr górum at bana* 'and each will kill the other', *bær berr banaord af Miðgarðsormi* 'Thor will slay the Miðgarð serpent', *Ulftrann gleypir Odin: verðr þat hans bani* 'the wolf will swallow Odin; that will be his death'. Note once again the role of Thor as formulaic dragon-slayer: *berr banaord af ormri* is equally like *orms einbani* above.

The construction 'became the bane' in Old English *to bonan weordan*, Old High German *ti banin werdan* etc. is discussed by Rosemarie Lühr 1982: 2.652-4, in her exhaustive study with rich comparative material and secondary literature. She shows that it is common West and North Germanic. Lühr rightly explains the meaning 'death, destruction, bane' found in all the medieval Germanic languages as a development of this construction, where the subject is not a person but a thing. (Compare the rich proliferation of Medieval and Early Modern English plant names like *henbane, wolfbane, cowbane, dogbane, fleabane*.)

On the other hand, Lühr's identification of this construction with certain others in Germanic misses the point. Old English and Old High German constructions like *Laws Grīð 21.2 præl weard to degene* 'slave became noble', *Tat. 15.2 steina zi brote uwerden* 'stones to become bread' are not equivalent to a finite verb, and *Ofr. III 19.25 uns zi fríimu wurti* '(that) it become of use to us' is just the equivalent of a Latin (etc.) "double dative" (*nobilis auxilio*) construction. *OHG ti banin werdan, OSax. te banon uwerdan, OEng. to bonan weordan*, ON *ata vera* are not 'fientive'; they are periphrases which mean 'to slay'. As such they are the exact semantic equivalent of the primary finite verb from the root which produced the Germanic *banan-* 'slayer, bane': a primary verb which does not exist in Germanic.

We have seen the contexts where we find the phrases *to bonan weordan* and cognates (for convenience I will use the Old English formula as a portmanteau form) or Old Norse *bera ban(a)orð*: slaying of or by a "dragon" (bidirectional!); killings of heroic dimension; fratricide. These are precisely the context for the appearance of the Indo-European formula

\[
\text{HERO SLAY (*)g'hen-)} \rightarrow \text{SERPENT/HERO}_2
\]

and we pose as equivalent Germanic

* In Germanic as well the subject HERO is frequently not overt, the more readily since he is the *bana*.
  The equivalence *g'hen-ː to bonan weordan* and *bera ban(a)orð* of must finally be recognized as not merely a typological semantic parallel, but a generic equation. For E. Seebold and others have made a convincing case for *b* as the typical reflex of Indo-European *g'h*,
  12 Citing the family of Old English *bona* as part of the evidence; we may equate *bona* exactly
  13 with Greek φόνος and Vedic *ghand-*: Indo-European *g'han-o-, o-grade of the root *g'hen-*. Indeed, it should be emphasized that the poetic equation *g'hen-ː to bonan weordan* is additional and independent evidence for the correctness of Seebold's *phonological* equation and of the sound law. It is yet another argument for the proposition that linguistics needs poetics.

Skeptics of the equation like Meid 1984:104, who prefer to regard the equation as reflecting a borrowing into Germanic from a related "Northwest block" Indo-European dialect would have to assume that the traditional phrasing of the dragon-slaying mythology of the Germanic peoples was also borrowed at the same time from this mysterious source. I doubt they would find that a congenial hypothesis.

Note finally that in the expression φόνος κενότα ( + dative) of *Od. 21.24*

\[\text{αὶ δὴ οἱ καὶ ἕσπευ φόνος καὶ μοῦρο γένος}\]

but thereafter these became his death and doom,

we can see in Greek the precise syntactic conditions for the development of the Germanic periphrastic construction 'become the bane' of Old English *to bonan weordan* (+ dative). A similar phrase is found in *Od. 11*, when the shade of Agamemnon says (444),

\[\text{όλλ' ὁι σοὶ γ', Ὅδυσσε, φόνος ἑσπεύα ἐκ γὰρ γυναικὸς}\]

and yet you, Odysseus, will never be murdered by your wife.

Lattimore's translation clearly captures the verbal force of the periphrasis. Compare also the legal formula in a fifth-century Arcadian inscription, Schwyzser 661.25-6 (Buck 16):

\[13\text{ Gmc. *bana- + n-, cf. Lühr 1982:651. Strictly the equation is with the oxytone agent noun ghand- rather than the barytone action noun φόνος. But Indo-European and Germanic could well have had both, as was conjectured by Wackernagel for Greek (φ φόνος, chap. 36).}\]
How to Kill a Dragon

el wis in to(i) terei ton totei amvudanonton/ format esta

If anyone (present) in the temple is a murderer of those who were killed at that time.

We may add Germanic to those branches of the Indo-European family which continue the ancient mythological and heroic formulas

**HERO**

SLAY (*gheh-*) SERPENT

and

**HERO_1**

SLAY (*gheh-*) **HERO_2**

The Germanic innovations are only to lose the verbal root *gheh-* and to develop, using inherited morphological, syntactic, and poetic means, a periphrasis with the agent noun derivative *ghehod-* and to utilize the inherited *gyre-, rhyme-form to *kyre-, for the serpent. The Indo-European asymmetry of the formula is well attested in Germanic, and the bidirectionality is perhaps more prominent in this family than any other due to the pessimistic Germanic view of “final things”: Beowulf slays the Worm and is slain by him; at Ragnarok Thor will slay the Midgard Worm and die of its poison.

2. Applied myth as charm

We may examine here briefly, as a sort of appendix in anticipation of part VII below (From myth to charm), an Old English dragon-slaying narrative that is incorporated into a longer metrical piece known as the Nine Herbs Charm. It is edited by Dobie 1942: 119-21, 210, from the unique manuscript Harl. 585, dated by Ker to the 10th/11th century. The relevant episode in the edited text begins with an introduction (27-30):

Dis is seo wyrtethe mergulu hadde;
Das onand seoll ofer seax hrycyg
Ondan attres opres to bote.
Das vii magan wifan nynge attun

This is the plant that is called wergulu (crabapple).

---

14. I am indebted to Daniel Donoghue for this and many of the references cited below, and am particularly indebted to Joseph Harris for corrections and suggestions, not all of which—at my peril—I followed.


16. The reference to the seal is obscure. With the metaphor in ofer seax hrycyg ‘over the sea’s ridge,’ a seal sent it over the sea’s ridge to compensate for the malice of other venom. Those nine are efficacious against nine venoms.

The narrative of the dragon myth proper (31-35) begins a new folio page (161b) and is demarcated by a cross before the first word of l. 31 and another cross at the beginning of line 36. The text then runs:

Wyrmin snican, tostal he man;
Da genam Woden viiul wuldortanas,
sloh da pa naedran, paet hie on viiul toefleh.
Pær geændade pæppel and attor,
Pæt hie naefre ne wolde on hus bugan

A worm came sneaking, it bit someone; then Woden took nine glory-twigs, he smote then the adder, so that it flew in nine (pieces). There the apple ended (it) and (its) venom, so that it never should go into house.

I translate thus in the light of common sense (the ‘apple’ as direct object is much more difficult) and the cross-linguistic commonplace of a third person object unexpressed or expressed by a zero sign. Joseph Harris (p.c.) very tentatively suggests as an Old English parallel Andreas 1221-2 haron ut brede l ond pa haran pær handa gebundun ‘they quickly carried (him) out and bound the saint’s hands’. The alliteration requirement (haran : handa) may have entailed a movement from the more expected ‘... carried the saint out and bound his hands’, leaving the pronoun as a trace. For a similar zero subject with a conjoined noun phrase compare Old Irish tét 7 a máthair ‘(he) goes and his mother’ = ‘he and his mother go’.

The text has given rise to considerable discussion and some controversy. The medical historian Charles Singer (1920: 15) recognized the notion that diseases arose from the nine fragments into which Woden smote the reptile. The healing virtues of the nine herbs mentioned in the text before and after our passage are then to be understood as directed each against a particular ‘venom’ (dittor). The arithmetic of the nine herbs is itself unclear, as noted by H. Meroney, who points out that even for an Old English botanist the (crab)apple is hardly an ‘herb’.

In my view (partly building on Meroney) at least two originally distinct metrical charms have been combined by the compiler of ms. Harl. 585 or its source: an ‘apple charm’ with the dragon-slaying narrative of Woden and a ‘nine herbs charm’. The link back compare the Old Irish phrase fairige of drun ‘over the sea’s ridge, back’ from the 7th-century poem on St. Columba discussed in chap. 9. We may have diffusion here. The same Archaic Irish poem attests the kenning nemeth mbilit ‘whales’ sanctuary’ for ‘ocean’, like Old English (Beowulf and passive) kronad, kronad ‘whale-road’.

17. As can be learned from Cockayne’s original edition.

18. Meroney 1944. I cannot follow him in his eventual equation of wergulu with lombescyre 'lamb’s cress'.
is either just the magic number nine or the apple pulp (pes apples gor), which along with ‘old soap’ (ealde sapan) provides in the prose ‘recipe’ the base into which the ground herbs are mixed. The ‘nine herbs charm’ will no longer concern us here; we are interested in the other, whose text has been given.

The name of the pagan god Woden is very rare in Old English literature; aside from genealogies Bosworth-Toller cite only this passage and one other from the Exeter Book (Krapp and Dobbie 1936:161, Maxims 1, line 132):

Woden worht e wes, wuldor alwilda, 
rum e roderas

Woden wrought idols, the Almighty (wrought) glory, 
the heavens far and wide.

That both this passage and the ‘apple charm’ should show the collocation Woden . . . wuldor ‘Woden . . . glory, fame’ is probably more than coincidence, the more so since the Old Norse cognate of the latter, Ullr, is a divine name or epithet, ‘a form of des alten idg. Hochgottes’ (de Vries, s.v.). Like Woden (IE *yet- ‘see, be cognizant of’, Latin uītēs and Old Irish féith), wuldor and Ullr, Goth. wulphas ‘sōpfo, splendor’ are derivatives of a root meaning ‘see’, IE *wely- , with close links to poetry and mantic prophetic wisdom as well, Old Irish fíll ‘learned poet’. See on these the discussion in chap. 9.

The narrative itself is ‘classical’ basic formula, with lexical renewal of the basic verb of violent action. First comes the preliminary victory of the serpent,

SERPENT (wyrm) tosslan ‘lacerate by biting’ MAN,

then the reciprocal, the hero’s smiting of the beast with a weapon:

HERO (Woden) SMITE (stéan) SERPENT (naeddr) with WEAPON (tán).

The verb is precisely Modern English slay; the Old English stéan is also used reciprocally with the snake as subject, gif naeddr stéan man ‘If a serpent bites a man’ (Cockayne 1961:2.110.14).

The weapon is a magical twig (tán). The Old Norse cognate teinn appears notably in the compound mistileteinn, English mistileTOE, the sinister twig which is the WEAPON with which blind Hörr will kill—become the bane of, at bana verða—Odin’s son Baldr (Véulsπ 31, Baldrs Drœmar 9). The word is also used for a twig cast as a lot, and we know from Tacitus, Germania 10.1, that these were cut from fruit trees (virgam frugiferæ arbore deciâm in surculus ampliânti)—and agrestia pōma ‘wild fruit’ along with fresh game and curds were alleged to be the principal diet of the ancient Germans (ibid. 23.1). Such are the overtones of Woden’s weapon against the serpent in this ancient Germanic myth narrated as part of the charm.

The brief and formulaic myth is framed, both preceded and followed, by the reference to the apple: first under the name of wergulu, mediated by the mysterious seal and his venom. What is the connection, or more simply, what is the apple doing in this charm?

The apple is an Indo-European fruit; see the discussion of Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1984:2.637-43, with attention to language, botany, ethnography, and mythology. The apple is prominent in several myths among various Indo-European peoples, such as the apple of discord, or the golden apples of the Hesperides (guardianed by a dragon), or the golden apples conferring eternal youth and immortality which belong to Idunn, wife of Bragi, the Norse god of poetry (: Vedic brähman- ‘formulation’), perhaps Iranian brazman-. For Slavic and Baltic compare the references cited by the Georgian and Russian scholars in their work.

I suggest, however, that a much simpler and humbler homeopathic image underlies the function of the apple in this Old English charm against venom (dör). Venom is conveyed by the serpent’s tooth; elementary observation teaches that it is the bite of the serpent which is toxic.

Consider then a formulaic curse in Hitite, attested from Old Hitite times down into texts of the New Kingdom and recently discussed by Soysal 1989. KBo 3.46+ Ro. 12'-13':

Gis jëti yamuwanza gaku=|$mu $ [dört]

May the apple take your (or their) teeth!

The reference is clearly to the danger of eating an unpeeled apple for one with poor teeth or ailing gums: one may leave one’s teeth in the apple.20

As such the apple is a natural homeopathic symbol of defense against the serpent’s tooth and its venom. The worms and their venom (Old English dör) are at 56. Add that diseases in the Germanic Middle Ages were themselves metaphorically known as wolf’s tooth; compare from Middle High German, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Parzifal 7591 ir truucht den eiterwolven than ‘you bear the toothmark of the pus-wolf’, with eiter the German cognate of Old English dör.21

The logic of the whole charm then becomes perfectly clear and perfectly natural. It begins with an ‘external’ narrative:

The apple is sent against venom.

Then the ‘internal’ narrative, the myth proper:

The Serpent bites Man;
Woden smashes the Serpent into nine pieces with magic twigs.

---

20. Rather than Soysal’s view that it is the sourness of the wild apple which is envisaged. Apples and corn on the cob are routinely proscribed to those with dentures.
The pieces are venoms, diseases; the venoms are (wolf's) tooth; the apple takes the

tooth. Therefore, returning to the 'external' narrative,

The apple ends (the Serpent) and the venom.

The terms apple, serpent (both adder and worm), and Woden are all Common

Indo-European as well as Common Germanic, and venom (dëtor) and magic twigs

(tānas), and the 'external' verbs send and end (rhyming!) and the 'internal' verbs bite

(sitelan) and smash (sitlēn) are all Common Germanic. The Old English charm as we

have it lexically may thus be legitimately projected back into, that is, reconstructed for,

Proto-Germanic. We are that much closer to the goal expressed by Ganikrelidze and

Ivanov 1984:2,643, that the commonality of motifs about the apple in the various

traditions may point to a 'reflection of Common Indo-European ritual and mythologi-

cal concepts'.

44

Thor's hammer

and the mace of Contract

In the preceding chapters we have studied the formulaic aspects of the narration of

the dragon-slaying myth in a variety of early Indo-European languages. It was noted that

the fullest expression of the mythological theme involved the specification of the

WEAPON, typically identified as a mace, cudgel, or war club, often a metaphor for

the thunderbolt.

Compare Thor's hammer, named Mjollnir in Old Norse (minn þrúðhamarr, Mjollnir 'my power-hammer, M.', Lokasenna passim). The Germanic word hammer

itself belongs together with cognates of variable shape meaning 'stone' (Vedic áśman-, Lithuanian akmuo, Old Church Slavonic kamy, kamene), 'anvil' (Greek ākou), and doubtless the Germanic family of heaven, German Himmel, Gothic himins, and Old Norse himin. It is conceivable that an original meaning like

'meteorite stone' lies at the back of these forms, but it seems not to have been taken

up for pre-Germanic poetic or mythographic purposes, and Thor's hammer is just that,

a massive smith's tool functioning as a weapon.

The name Mjollnir (Germanic *měld[u]njaz) on the other hand is clearly a

Northern European mythographic term, since it can be directly compared with Latvian

milna (Baltic *mēlna), the name of the chief pagan god Perkun's hammer. The two

together can then be related to the Balto-Slavic and Welsh words for 'lightning',

'thunderbolt': Old Prussian meulde, Byelorussian maladla, Church Slavonic mlčnaja,

Russian molniya, and apparently, despite its isolation in Insular Celtic, Welsh mellt

'lightning', singulative melltan 'bolt of lightning' ('with secondary t', according to

Pokorny).

Pokorny (IEW s.v.) sets up a root *měldh- for these Northern European forms,

with zero-grade *mědh-; the form is not demonstrably Common Indo-European, and

it is probably best to speak only of a Northern European *m(ë)ld-. The semantics

however are much older, for they agree with Greek and Indo-Iranian in designating the

metaphorical weapon of a warrior god or sky god, hero or giant. Northern European

Germanic Thor the thunder god or Baltic Perkūnas (Slavic Perun) with their

hammers are in this respect directly comparable to Indra with his vījra or his vādha,