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Heroic Legend and Onomastics:

Hálfs saga, the Hildebrandslied and the Listerby Stones

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INTRODUCTION

Several years ago, Gregory Nagy, referring to epic heroes from Greek, Indian, Hittite and other traditions, commented, “These constructs - let us call them simply ‘characters’ for the moment - are in some ways radically dissimilar from each other. Even within a single tradition like Homeric poetry, heroes like Achilles and Odysseus seem worlds apart. In other ways, however, ‘epic heroes’ are strikingly similar to each other, sharing a number of central features. The question is, how to explain these similarities?”¹ In answering this question, Nagy demonstrates how the similarity of epic heroes to each other can be accounted for by integrating three comparative methods, which he describes as (1) typological, (2) genealogical, and (3) historical. Nagy explores this idea in several specific cases (e.g., Herakles, Achilles), and underscores in his discussion the cult hero as epic hero (and the reverse), a figure whose career is marked by

¹ Nagy 2006. I take this opportunity to note that the present essay builds on and extends ideas I first outlined in Mitchell 1991a. I also want to thank the members of a recent graduate seminar at Harvard on the Germanic epic—Nicole Burgoyne, Leonard Neidorf, Seth Peabody and Frederick Reece— for their invaluable remarks on a draft of this essay.

unseasonality, extremism, and antagonism toward the god to whom he bears the closest resemblance.

One senses immediately that Nagy's observations have important implications not only for Hellenists but also for scholars engaged with other traditions. Inspired by his insights, the following comments look to extend Nagy's findings by applying his ideas and methodological innovations to a medieval northern Europe heroic complex, especially as it is articulated in the story of Hálfr Hjörleifsson, a Nordic champion known to us mainly as the eponymous hero of the legendary saga called *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* 'the saga of Hálfr and Hálfr's warriors'.²

Hálfs saga AND HÁLFR IN NORDIC TRADITIONS

Preserved in a 15th-century manuscript (with numerous later copies), this tale has deep roots in the Nordic world and intersects with a number of other legendary traditions, in each case understood as referring to the hero of the saga.³ In addition to the saga itself, his tale is mentioned in the thirteenth-century *Skáldskaparmál* of *Snorra Edda*, where the phrase *Hálfs bani* 'Hálfr's bane' is cited as a *kenning* 'metaphor' for 'fire'. This metaphor was already used in describing the death of King Dómarr in the *Ynglingatal* of Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, traditionally dated to the ninth century.⁴ Similar references to this same *Hálfr* dot the landscape of medieval Icelandic literature, often with references to his genealogy, his *berserkr* (pl. *berserkir*) status, and his warrior band: he is mentioned, for example, in *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns*, *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, and the lists of 'sea-kings' in *Snorra Edda*.⁵ He is also the king to whose court Guðrún flees in the *Poetic Edda* (*Guðrúnarqviða ǫnnor*) and in *Völsunga saga*.⁶ A recurrent theme in Old Icelandic literature portrays Hálfr and his warriors as valorized ideal heroes from, and representing, the past. Thus, *Tóka þáttur Tókasonar* explicitly juxtaposes Hálfr and his warriors

² The text cited here is the normalized edition in Guðni Jónsson 1981, II: 93-134; for the diplomatic edition, consult Seelow 1981.

³ On this saga, see especially Seelow 1981; on the genre to which it belongs, see Mitchell 1991b.

⁴ Quoted extensively in the *Ynglingasaga* of Snorri's *Heimskringla*, the dating of *Ynglingatal* has traditionally, but not without objection, been accepted as the 9th century. For the arguments in favor of this view, as well as a review of the extensive literature on the topic, see Sundqvist 2002. Cf. *Hóalfs galla* in the eleventh-century *Sexstefja* of Þjóðólfr Arórsson.

⁵ Cf. Seelow 1981, 157-66. *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns* forms part of the saga but is also known from other texts; see Mitchell 1987.

⁶ "Guðrún fór, unz hún kom til hallar Hálfs konungs..." in *Völsunga saga*, ch. 32; cf. *Guðrúnarqviða ǫnnor* 13¹⁻⁴ (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 226).

with one of Scandinavia's most renowned legendary kings and his champions, Hrólfr kraki.⁷ The Hálfr image is employed in a similar way in *Magus saga jarls*, where his size, strength and prowess are presented as legendary.⁸

Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka itself consists of a series of narratives held together in the first instance by the genealogical ties of its heroes, but certain recurrent themes— e.g., the over- and under-valuation of familial bonds, ideas of manliness and honor— also provide connective threads binding the episodes together into a single entity.⁹ In the first of these narratives, King Alrekr resolves the bickering of his two wives through a beer-brewing contest. The successful wife accomplishes this goal when Óðinn appears in disguise and she unwittingly agrees to give him, in exchange for his help, her unborn child, who will as an adult be sacrificed to Óðinn.¹⁰ A series of killings, including a 'burning-in,' follows, the conflict precipitated, as so often in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* and the other mythical-heroic sagas, by struggles over, and between, women.

The next section of the saga reports the story of Hjörleifr inn kvensami, 'the Womanizer' or 'the Amorous'. A long series of adventures, including encounters with an ogre and a merman, traces the smoldering conflict between Hjörleifr's two surviving wives, Æsa and Hildir. When Hjörleifr's home is attacked, his wives and goods are taken by the attacker back to Denmark. Hjörleifr counter-attacks and enters his enemy's house, in which everyone is asleep except his first wife, Æsa, who is to show him the way to the Danish king. Instead, she treacherously locks Hjörleifr up and he is then, at her suggestion, hung between two fires. Once the household has feasted itself into a drunken stupor, Hjörleifr's second wife, Hildir, cuts him down. Hjörleifr hangs his enemy on the same gallows on which he himself had been strung up and takes his wives back to Norway with him, where, at an assembly, it is decided that Æsa should be drowned in a swamp. This is a retribution the king declines to take, with the result that their progeny are known in Iceland as the family of the Reyknesingar.¹¹

The sons of Hjörleifr and Hildir are Hjörólfr and Hálfr. Hjörólfr, the eldest, mounts an expedition that stands as a paradigm for ill-prepared journeys: he takes all men regardless of their qualifications and they use all manner of weapons, with predictably disastrous results for Hjörólfr's prestige. Hjörólfr plays a very small role in the saga, being primarily a foil for his

⁷ "Konungr mælti: 'Muna muntu þá Hálfr konung ok rekka hans eða Hrólfr kraka ok kapp hans.'" Guðni Jónsson 1981, II:137.

⁸ Cederschiöld 1884, 28-29, 31-32

⁹ And as is often the case with the Icelandic sagas, this one frequently traces the progeny of its legendary actors to specific lineages in Iceland. On this point, see Mitchell 1991b.

¹⁰ The end of this narrative is related in *Gautreks saga*.

¹¹ Icelandic sagas, including those based on heroic materials, often write leading families (presumably patrons) into the genealogies.

brother, Hálfr, and a vehicle for explaining a ‘fools go a-journeying’ phrase in Icelandic.¹² Hálfr, determined not to make the same error, prepares his forces more carefully and the various champions who join him, after passing tests of strength and bravery, are enumerated. They become a great and renowned band of warriors and their code of heroic conduct is detailed. When King Hálfr arrives home from a voyage, he is met by his step-father, Ásmundr, who invites him to his hall, along with ‘half’ his troop. Hálfr’s counselor, Innsteinn, advises him not to accept the invitation, because he suspects treachery, but the king rejects his words of warning. Hálfr and half his men go to the hall, and are fêted with strong drink. Once they are asleep, the hall is set aflame by Ásmundr’s men. One of Hálfr’s warriors awakes, smells the smoke, comments on it and falls asleep again. A second warrior does the same, this time remarking on the heat. Finally the king awakens, rallies his men, and they break through the walls to face their attackers. A battle ensues and eventually nearly all of the men, including Hálfr, are killed.¹³ A long section on the fortunes of two of the survivors of Hálfr’s warrior band, Útsteinn (Innsteinn’s brother) and Hrókr the Black, follows.

The final section of the saga relates how Hálfr’s son, Hjørr, and his queen have two sons. Hjørr is away at the time of their birth, and the queen, finding them unattractive, exchanges them with the more comely son of a maid. When the children are older, the two brothers attack the ‘changeling’ and reclaim their positions. Their mother confesses her misdeed to the king, but he refuses to acknowledge them as his sons, and asks that they be taken away, as he has never seen such ‘dark-skinned’ children (*heliar skin*), by which name they are known thereafter. The text concludes by saying that the genealogies of the residents of Espihóll and Meðalfellsströnd in Iceland can be traced back to these two brothers.¹⁴

Even this brief review of the saga’s contents indicates that emphasis on two themes—the virtues that constitute manliness,¹⁵ and the proper, and improper, observation of familial ties—provides thematic unity to the saga, a unity strengthened by the generational linkage between the various forebears and descendants of Hálfr, who are the protagonists of the individual episodes, aspects of the saga to which we shall return.

As the synopsis indicates, by the late medieval period, the name Hálfr was phonologically indistinguishable from the adjective ‘half’ (e.g., *hálfr mánuðr* ‘half a month’, ‘a fortnight’). That

¹² “...er þat kallat siðan Hjörólfsfæri, er ófímligt er,” Guðni Jónsson 1981, II:106.

¹³ This part of the plot has had a generous legacy in the ballad traditions of the Faroe Islands and Sweden; see Mitchell 1985.

¹⁴ On the relationship of several of these episodes to Icelandic oral tradition, see Mitchell 1987.

¹⁵ Cf. *mandómr* ‘manliness’, ‘prowess’; *drengskapr* ‘mode of thinking, behavior which causes one to behave as he should’ [“Tænkemaade, Opførsel, der gjør en til et saadant Menneske, som han bør være,” Fritizner 1973, I:264], etymologically derived from ‘young male’ made into an abstract concept by the addition of the suffix (cf. *virtue*, *virtūs* ‘manliness’, ‘goodness’).

the word's synonymy was apparent to medieval saga writers and audiences is clear in the saga and played on several times, as when Hálfr fatefully accepts the invitation to the feast for himself and 'half his troop'.¹⁶ The actual Proto-Scandinavian etymon of the name Hálfr is, however, quite different and of special interest, namely, **Haþu-wulfr** 'battle-wolf' (< *haþu*- 'battle' [cf. Old Norse *hǫð*, Old English *heaðo*-] + *wulfr* 'wolf').¹⁷

This earlier dithematic name-form, **Haþuwulfr**, is documented on three famous, interrelated runestones from near Sölvesborg, Blekinge, in modern southern Sweden dating to the 6th to 7th centuries C.E.: Stentofte (DR 357 U); Istaby (DR 359 U); and Gummarp (DR 358 U).¹⁸ A further runic attestation to a later form of the name appears on a Christian runestone from Swedish Södermanland (Sö 270), **haulf** (acc.), the sole runic reference to the name Haþuwulfr not associated with the Blekinge stones.¹⁹ In fact, it would seem that, Sö 270 aside, all other known uses of the Nordic figures named Haþuwulfr, Hálfr, and so on are either connected to the Blekinge stones or refer to the legendary hero of *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*.²⁰

These runic inscriptions, the so-called Lister- and Listerby-stones, are generally dated to the seventh, possibly as early as the sixth, century, with Istaby placed to ca. 625. It reads:

¹⁶ Both the poetry and prose of the saga refer to this play on words: “Vér skulum hálfir / herjar þessa / sáttir sækja / frá sjó neðan”; “ok bauð honum til veizlu ok hálfu liði hans,” Guðni Jónsson 1981, II:109, 108.

¹⁷ *Haþuwulfr* > *Hálfr* is widely accepted (e.g., Lind 1905-31, 452-53; de Vries 1962, 204; Müller 1970, 179; Hald 1971, 33; Krause 1971, 150-51). Without objecting to this development, Janzén (1948, 76) suggests an alternative reading, but his views have generally remained unembraced. Sundqvist and Hultgård 2004, 584-85, the most recent treatment of the question, includes an extensive review of the research literature and accepts the 'battle-wolf' etymology.

¹⁸ Since the 17th century, Blekinge has been part of Sweden but was earlier part of the Danish cultural sphere. In addition to these three inscriptions, a fourth, Björketorp (DR 360 U), also forms part of the so-called Lister- and Listerby-stones; however, its inscription is not directly relevant to this discussion. Gummarp mentions only Haþuwulfr (“\$PA Haþuwulfr \$PB placed \$PC three staves \$PD fff.” Alternatively, “\$QA [In memory of] Haþuwulfr \$QB [...] placed \$QC [these] three staves \$QD fff.”). Stentofte contains both Haþuwulfr and Hariwulfr (“\$AP(To the) <niuha>dweller (and) <niuha>guests Haþuwulfr gave full year, Hariwulfr I, master of the runes(?) conceal here” [Alternatively, “\$AQ nine bucks, nine stallions, Haþuwulfr gave fruitful year, Hariwulfr I, master of the runes(?) conceal here”] \$B runes of power. \$C Incessantly (plagued by) maleficence, (doomed to) insidious death (is) he who this \$D breaks.”) The standard work on the Danish runic materials is Jacobsen and Moltke 1941-42.

¹⁹ Cf. Brate and Wessén 1924-36, 233-34. For ease of reading, following Elmevik and Peterson 1993-, I normalize the name to Haþuwulfr.

²⁰ Cf. Reichert and Nedoma 1987.

- A: 1. AfatRhAriwulafa
 2. hAþuwulafRhAeruwulafiR
- B: warAitrunARþAiAR

That is, "§A In memory of Hariwulfar. Haþuwulfar, Heruwulfar's son, §B wrote these runes."²¹ In other words, Haþuwulfar (Old Norse *Hálfr*), descended from Heruwulfar (Old Norse *Hjörólfr*), raised the monument in honor of Hariwulfar (Old Norse *Herjólfr*). Like Haþuwulfar, the other two names build on 'wolf' as their second elements: in addition to Haþuwulfar 'battle-wolf', the inscriptions show Heruwulfar 'sword-wolf' and Hariwulfar 'army-wolf'. These facts have naturally excited much curiosity, especially given that we have in these monuments the use of dithematic names built on a shared second element ('wolf'), showing familial relations, from a temporally bounded group of inscriptions, found in close proximity to each other. Importantly, the three names alliterate, the metrical requirement of all early Germanic verse.

ONOMASTIC TRADITION & PARRICIDAL HEROIC LEGENDS

What then to make of these inscriptions and the names on them? In a wide-ranging review of the inscriptions and the *comparanda*, described by the authors as the "... ritual contexts of lycanthropy and religious wolf-symbolism," Sundqvist and Hultgård (2004) make a compelling and insightful case for understanding the ritual and ideological context of these three stones and their names within a tradition of war-bands and fertility rituals, concluding that the inscriptions are "...related to ritual practices and religious ideas that refer to both initiations of young warriors and seasonal community festivals to ensure divine support and protection."²²

Expanding on these conclusions, I note that the three south Scandinavian inscriptions have a special connection by way of 'anthroponymic bundling' to a number of heroic legend complexes in the Germanic world, including *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, a fact that, although it has

²¹ Alternatively, "§AQ Haþuwulf(a)r, Heruwulfar's son, in memory of Hariwulfar §B wrote these runes," following here, and in all other runic cases, the translations in Elmevik and Peterson 1993-. The transliteration follows Jacobsen and Moltke 1941-42.

²² Sundqvist and Hultgård 2004, 597. See this essay for complete coverage of the relevant secondary literature relating to these stones.

been noted in passing on occasion in the past, has never to my knowledge been explored.²³ In addition to *Hálfs saga*, related legendary materials of onomastic interest include the Baldr story and its reflexes elsewhere in Nordic tradition (*Gesta Danorum*) and in Old English (*Beowulf*), and the Old High German (*Hildebrandslied*), as well as such cognate stories as the Old Icelandic *Ásmundar saga kappabana* and a corresponding section of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* (VII.9.12-9.16).²⁴

The underlying broken taboo shared in all these stories is parricide, the failure to respect familial ties, as when these rules are subordinated to competing cultural codes (e.g., honor). Among the various traditions, three types of incidents can be adduced: one in which the combatants transect generational boundaries (i.e., involving fathers and sons); another concerning inner-generational homicide (i.e., involving brothers and half-brothers); and a third category in which both types, cross- and inner-generational violence, are present.²⁵ Presented tabularly, the names, organized within these broad categories of parricide, appear as follows. For comparative purposes, the naming traditions witnessed on the Listerby-stones are also provided, although naturally we cannot postulate anything about the nature of the relationships beyond what the inscriptions themselves reveal.

²³ The possibility of a relationship between these runic monuments and the medieval legend complex has been noted previously by Lukman 1982, VI: 425 and Nielsen 1968, 46, although neither pursues the question further than to suggest a similarity between the names used in the two sets of monuments. Years ago, I raised the issue in the pre-prints of a conference paper (Mitchell 1991a), but to date the question has remained unaddressed.

²⁴ There are numerous other related texts, including Saxo's account of the tale in *Gesta Danorum* and the Old Norse [but Low German-derived] *Þiðreks saga*. On the Nordic traditions, see especially Ciklamini 1966. It should be noted that the resolutions of the various *Hildebrandslied* stories differ, with such later Continental traditions as those in *Þiðreks saga* and *Das jüngere Hildebrandslied* showing a non-lethal victory for the father, followed by a reconciliation between the pair. For a very complete attempt to account for the filiations among the traditions, see Gutenbrunner 1976.

²⁵ This motif, **N731.2**. *Father-son combat* (cf. **N349.2**. *Father kills his son in battle rage*) is well-documented in, e.g., Celtic, Germanic, and Persian traditions but extends well-beyond these historically related groups. The vast, comprehensive study of the father-son conflict by Potter (1902), taking the famous Persian example as its starting point, but including many other Indo-European and non-Indo-European traditions, remains a solidly useful starting point on this topic. Given the obvious Œdipal character of this narrative type and its analogues, it has naturally attracted much attention over the years from scholars with psychoanalytic perspectives as well (e.g., Róheim 1945, 68-79).

ONOMASTIC TRADITIONS, PARRICIDE & GERMANIC HEROIC LEGENDS

	?	FATHER-SON	FATHER-SON & BROTHER-BROTHER		BROTHER-BROTHER		
First element of name ²⁶	Istaby, etc.	<i>Hálfs saga</i>	<i>Hildebrandslied</i>	<i>Ásmundar saga kappabana</i>	<i>Gesta Danorum</i>	<i>Snorra Edda</i> , <i>Gesta Danorum</i> <i>etc.</i>	<i>Beowulf</i>
'army' ²⁷	Hariwulfar		Heribrant				Herebeald
'war' ²⁸	Hapuwulfar >	Hálfr	Hadubrant		Hǫðr	Høtherus	Hæðcyn
'battle' ²⁹			Hiltibrant	Hildibrandr	Hildigerus		
'sword' ³⁰	Heruwulfar >	Hjǫrólfr (Hjǫrleifr)					

There are, of course, many acts of parricide in older Germanic literature, just as there are abundant alliterating genealogies which build on such elements as *hildi-* 'battle' (e.g., the various Hildibrandr's, Hilde's and so on of such texts as *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*). It is, however, the inter-section of these two patterns in the traditions that interests us here—one a pattern of *frænd-víg* 'parricide', the other a pattern of alliterative names built on a common second element ('wolf', 'sword') with a first element related to warfare.

The most prominent, and earliest, of the first category, the father-son type, is the Old High German *Hildebrandslied*, of course, and some of the later traditions related to it.³¹ The second

²⁶ The glosses used in this column are merely convenient labels for the purposes of this chart and indicate but do not give complete expression to the full semantic ranges of each name element, some examples of which are provided below (on which, see esp. Naumann 1911 and Schramm 1957, as well as the standard dictionaries).

²⁷ *her-* cf. Old Norse *herr* 'host', 'multitude', 'army'; Old English *here* 'army', 'host', 'multitude', 'large predatory band'; Old High German *heri* 'Schar', 'Heerschar', 'Heer'.

²⁸ *hapu-* cf. Old Norse *hǫð* 'war', 'slaughter'; Old English *heaðu-* 'war', 'battle'; Old High German *hadu-* 'fight', 'battle', 'Kampf'.

²⁹ *hild-* cf. Old Norse *hildir* 'battle'; Old English *hild* 'war', 'battle'; Old High German *hiltia* 'Kampf'.

³⁰ *heru-* cf. Old Norse *hǫrr* 'sword'; Old English *heoru* 'sword'. Cf. the Old High German name Heruprecht.

type (father-son and brother-brother) is represented by the reflex of the Hildebrand story in *Ásmundar saga kappabana* and *Gesta Danorum*, where the innovation of one half-brother killing the other has been added to the tale of father killing son.³² The vitality, strength and notoriety of the legend complex is fully on display in both *Ásmundar saga kappabana* and *Gesta Danorum*, when the Hildibrand figure, who has just been mortally wounded by his half-brother, refers in passing (*only!*) in his death-song to the fact that he has killed his own son. This dramatic parricidal act plays no substantive role in the extant story but appears to have been a sufficiently integral part of the tale complex— and the expectations of the audience— that it finds a place, however fleeting, in the extant texts. The original tale is now little more than a narrative ‘survival’,³³ with the father’s reluctance to kill his son apparently transferred to Hildibrand’s attempts to avoid fighting his half-brother Ásmundr. In the third category, brothers slay brothers (e.g., *Beowulf*, *Gesta Danorum*, *Snorra edda* [also in *Völuspá*]).³⁴ Perhaps the most renowned example of this last type is the Baldr story in Norse mythology, a case famously paralleled in *Beowulf* (ll. 2432-43):

³¹ E.g., *Þiðreks saga*; *Das jüngere Hildebrandslied*. Of course, that the *Hildebrandslied* manuscript breaks off before the battle is fully engaged means that the attribution to it of the father slaying his son is conjectural. In holding this opinion, however, I note that I enjoy the company of most scholars.

³² Cf. *Gesta Danorum*, VII.9.12-9.16. It is noteworthy that both here and in *Hálfs saga*, another name pattern seems to emerge with a half-brother and step-father named Ásmundr (cp. *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*).

³³ I use this term advisedly, but in this instance it really is of the type beloved by the British Anthropological School of the 19th century.

³⁴ *Beowulf*, lines 2432-2489; *Gesta Danorum* III.3.2; *Gylfaginning* in *Snorra edda* [cf. *Völuspá* 31-32, 62; *Baldrs draumar* 8-9].

næs ic him tō life lāðra ōwihte,
 beorn in burgum, þonne his bearna hwylc,
 Herebeald ond Hæðcyn oððe Hygelāc mīn.
 Wæs þām yldestan ungedēfelice
 māges dædum morþorbed strēd,
 syððan hyne Hæðcyn of hornbogan,
 his frēawine flāne geswencte,
 miste mercelses ond his mæg ofscet,
 brōðor oðerne blōdigan gāre.
 Þæt wæs feohlēas gefeoht, fyrenum gesyngad,
 hreðre hygemēðe; sceolde hwæðre swā þēah
 æðeling unwrecen ealdres linnan.

(Klaeber 1941, 92)

In no way was I, a man of his stronghold,
 more hateful to him than his own sons,
 Herebeald, Hæthcyn, of Hygelac my lord.
 For the eldest brother a death-bed was strewn,
 undeservedly, by his kinsman's error:
 Hæthcyn shot him, his brother, his leader,
 with an arrow from his bow curved and horn-tipped
 missed his mark and struck his brother,
 one son's blood on the other's shaft.
 There was no way to pay for a death so wrong,
 blinding the heart, yet still the prince
 had lost his life, lay unavenged.

(Chickering 1977, 195)

Noteworthy of this third type is the fact that the figures whose names are based on *hǫfu-* are either killed by the father figure—as in the cases of Hadubrand and Hálfr—or perpetrate fratricide under tragic circumstances— as in the cases of Hǫðr and Hæðcyn (who kill, respectively, Baldr and Herebeald). Nor is the distribution haphazard: where the *hǫfu-* warrior is the son in a father-son relationship, he is the victim; where he is one of two brothers, he is the killer of his unwitting sibling.³⁵

SOCIAL CODES & SOCIAL REALITIES

What sorts of social realities lie behind these interlocking patterns? That is, what moral codes, underlying social fears, and cultural norms are projected by them, and what historical realities explain the naming patterns and the larger frameworks to which they belong?³⁶ Of great interest in this regard is the evidence adduced by Sundqvist and Hultgård (2004, 586) that just this sort of alliterative naming practice involving dithematic animal names, in this case, Hariulfas (cp. Hariwulfar), son of Hanhavalldus, is in evidence on a stela from Trier already in the 5th century.³⁷ This custom is reflected in many of our cultural documents, as is the

³⁵ One wonders if the negative overtones of this association might be reflected in the inventory of Old English *kent heiti* for ‘warrior’: although the other proper names under discussion constitute possible substitutions for military men (*herewulfas*, *hildewulfas*, *heorowulfas*) in Old English, there is no evidence of a corresponding **heapuwulfas*.

³⁶ I note that I do *not* by this phrase mean to resuscitate the so-called fact vs fantasy discourses sometimes conjured by such terminology.

³⁷ Of course, compound personal names, as well as simplexes, built on ‘wolf’ are attested in a wide range of Indo-European language families, including Greek, Slavic, Indic, and Germanic (e.g. Müller 1970, 4). Indeed, they may be among the most common of early Germanic names (Schramm 1957, 77-82), and are, in addition to the Old Norse

possibility of a tradition of warrior bands, groups bonded together in part through shared naming conventions. A tradition of induction- or initiation-related taking of names, perhaps corresponding to the totemic symbol of the band (e.g., ‘wolf’, ‘bear’), would certainly explain much.³⁸

The data regarding the existence of warrior bands in early northern Europe, both in the Celtic and Germanic worlds, is overwhelming, and the circumstantial evidence for a warrior cult in the Blekinge case is strong: certainly the Istaby names themselves, ‘army-wolf,’ ‘war-wolf,’ ‘sword-wolf,’ conjure up images of the *úlfheðnar* ‘wolf-clad warriors [i.e., *berserkrir* in wolf skins]’ known from Old Norse literary sources.³⁹ A parallel to the warrior band of ‘wolves’ suggested by the Blekinge inscriptions is in evidence in Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum* (Book VI.2.1-2.9), where he describes twelve ‘brothers’ (*duodecim fratrum*, Book VI.2.1) from Norway who harry and pillage Denmark from the safety of a fortress they have built for themselves on an island. His description leaves little doubt that these men constitute a warrior band of some sort: “These young men were of fierce temperament, stalwart in their early manhood, pre-eminent in physique, famous as the conquerors of giants, renowned for triumphs over defeated peoples and rich with their spoils.”⁴⁰ Significantly, the seven names Saxo cites demonstrate that the brothers are joined together by a shared animal designation, in this case, the bear, *-biorn*: Gerbiorn, Gunbiorn, Arinbiorn, Stenbiorn, Esbiorn, Thorbiorn, and Biorn. The famous inscription at Rök in Swedish Östergötland (Ög 136) from the early 800s includes what in this context is the tantalizing patrilineage, “which twenty kings sat on Sjólund for four winters, of four names, born of four brothers: five Valkis, sons of Hráðulfr, five Hreiðulfrs, sons of Rugulfr.”⁴¹ Such ‘wolf’ groupings are surely as likely to be ‘brothers’, that is, members, of theriomorphic warrior bands, as actual siblings.

forms, attested in this type, ‘army’ + ‘wolf’, is attested in Visigothic (Ariulf), Frankish (Chariulf), Bavarian (Hariulf), Alamannic (Herolf), Old Saxon (Heriulf), Burgundian (Hariulfus), Langobardic (Ariulfus), and Old English (Herewulf).

³⁸ On the question of initiations in Old Norse tradition, and of such warrior figures as Sigmundr and Sinfjötli, see Schjødt 2008, especially 271-327, and 352-55.

³⁹ The literature in this area is vast, but excellent points of departure include, e.g., J. Nagy 1985 and Weiser-Aall 1927 and Höfler 1934, especially as updated by Meier 2001. For an orientation to the *berserkr*, see Blaney 1993, and for a thorough review of the relevant archaeological data (set against the literary sources), see Price 2002. Näsström 2006 provides a wide-ranging recent review of the evidence, concluding (*pace* Klaus von See and others) that the *berserkr* is no mere literary confection but existed in reality.

⁴⁰ “Fuere autem iuuenes hi acres animis, robufti iuuenta, præstabiles habitu corporis, giganteis clari triumphis, trophæis gentium celebres, spoliis locupletes,” Friis-Jensen 2005, I:364. The translation is from Davidson 1979, 163.

⁴¹ **huariR tuaiR tikiR kunukaR satin t siulunti fiakura uintur at fiakurum nabnum burniR fiakurum bruprum ualkaR fim rapulfs| |suniR hraiþulfaR fim rukulfs suniR**, Elmevik and Peterson 1993-.

The literary image of ‘wolf warriors’ has numerous iconographic corollaries as well.⁴² Certainly the most clear-cut instance of a therianthropic presentation is that on the sixth-century helmet die from Torslunda (Öland), which shows what could only be a warrior (he bears a sword and a spear) wearing an animal skin; given the portrayal of its snout and long bushy tail, it is almost certainly a wolf’s skin (cf. Beck 1968). Likewise the so-called ‘Long Horn’ from Gallehus (ca. 400AD) depicts several figures who appear to have wolf-heads (or other animal heads) on men’s bodies bearing swords and axes. A similar animal-headed (wolf-headed?) warrior is represented on a seventh-century sword-sheath from Gutenstein. It should be noted that all of these materials, including Istaby, fall within a relatively narrow pre-Viking Age time-frame. The identification of *berserkir* with wolves (and other animals, especially bears) in Old Norse is multidimensional; in addition to the evidence adduced above, *berserkir* were said to ‘howl’ and the very word *berserkr* itself refers to ‘bear sark’ (i.e. bear-shirt, wearing a bear skin).⁴³

A further analogue to these patterns exists in the extant mythological materials as well. Importantly, it too is a reflex of these two interlocking schemes, if seen somewhat hazily, contained in the one eddic poem specifically dedicated to father-son conflict, *Hárbarðzlióð*. The poem is fundamentally a catalogue of exploits, adventures and mythological information set into the framework of Nordic traditions of ritual confrontation, verbal abuse, and manly one-upmanship (i.e., the *senna* and the *mannajafnaðr*) between Þórr and a ferryman who calls himself Hárbarðr ‘grey beard’, a known cognomen for Óðinn. It is then a verbal duel between the disguised father and his son in which the son, Þórr, is left frustrated and humiliated. It may be objected that Þórr’s paternity is frequently subordinated in the mythological materials, but it should be noted that in *Hárbarðzlióð*, when Þórr is asked for his identity, Þórr is at some pains to place himself into the context of his family pedigree, at least of the males, saying that he is the son of Óðinn, the brother of Meili, and the father of Magni: *ec em Óðins sonr,/ Meila bróðir,/ enn Magna faðir*.⁴⁴

It is worth noting too that as in, e.g., *Hildebrandslied*, we must assume that the father possesses knowledge of the father-son relationship but the son does not. When Þórr calls to the disguised Óðinn to help him across the river, Þórr asks who owns the boat. Óðinn’s response deserves scrutiny, because he says that he has gotten the boat from a hero wise-in-

⁴² This point has naturally been one of great moment within the older Germanic field, and I offer here only a few of the more salient struts that support the argument. On the theriomorphic significance of the *berserkir*, see Dumézil 1970, 139-44.

⁴³ This point has been at the center of a long controversy, but few have improved on the arguments in Noreen 1932.

⁴⁴ *Hárbarðzlióð* 9⁴⁻⁶ (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 79).

counsel (*reccr inn ráðsvinni*) named Hildólfr. Hildólfr in Old Norse literary tradition is Þórr's (half-)brother, another of Óðinn's sons, mentioned in several manuscripts of *Snorra Edda*.⁴⁵ If the name in *Hárbarðzlióð* had associations for its audience external to the poem itself, it would have conjured up the possibility of this conflict involving not only father and son, but also brother against brother.

If, as some have thought, Óðinn's naming of Hildólfr is self-referential, the tie between *Hárbarðzlióð* and other texts treating father-son conflicts, such as the *Hildebrandslied*, becomes even more striking. In either case, Óðinn's reference to Hildólfr importantly provides an example of the thus-far 'missing' Nordic member of the name paradigm, **Hildi-wulfar* 'battle-wolf'.⁴⁶ It is not the name alone that raises our expectations, naturally, but the matrix in which it is embedded: it comes in the midst of a father-son conflict in which the relationship is known to the father but of which the son is unaware.

Although Þórr's defeat in *Hárbarðzlióð* is merely symbolic and spiritual rather than literal and lethal, it nevertheless represents the dominance of the son by his more experienced father, and certainly it has overtones of the 'treacherous blow' found elsewhere in the Hildebrand tradition (e.g. *Þiðreks saga*) in Óðinn's deceptive behavior. Moreover, the reduplicated association of Hildólfr with sagacity and wise counsel, a figure who resides in 'Counsel island sound' ('*reccr inn ráðsvinni, er býr í Ráðseyiarsundi*'), and the claim by 'Hárbarðr' that *he* is the wisest in counsel (thus solidifying the connection between the characters),⁴⁷ further associates Hildólfr with his continental counterpart, Hildebrand. This famous warrior was, after all, well-known for his age, his prowess, and his cunning, a kind of Germanic Odysseus.

HEROIC PATTERNS & WARRIOR INITIATIONS

Several patterns characterize and unite these legends, and it is useful to re-examine them, following Nagy (2006), with regard to their (1) typological, (2) genealogical, and (3) historical relationships, and with respect to Nagy's observations on the careers of heroes. A strict typological comparison of our northern European heroes, of the sort described by Nagy,⁴⁸ is

⁴⁵ *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* 1848, II:473, 556, 616, including a half-line that couples him together with Þórr as Óðinn's offspring: 'Bvirr ro oðins/ balldr ok mæili/ viðarr ok næpr/ vali áli/ þórr ok hilldofr'.

⁴⁶ Cf. Petterson 2002, 95.

⁴⁷ 'Hildólfr sá heitir,/ er mic halda bað,/ reccr inn ráðsvinni,/ er býr í Ráðseyiarsundi', *Hárbarðzlióð* 8¹⁻⁴ (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 79) and 'varð ec þeim einn qllum efri at ráðom', *Hárbarðzlióð* 18⁶ (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 81).

⁴⁸ "...parallelisms between structures as structures pure and simple, without any presuppositions," Nagy 2006, 72.

very telling. A neutral review of the evidence shows the following: the literary and mythological traditions of various Germanic peoples in northern Europe held in common tales characterized by parricide and other acts of familial disloyalty (or subordination of family ties and so on); further, they display recurrent and shared anthroponymic features. Specifically, many of the names show multi-generational dithematic structures according to which the first element of the name is drawn from the common lexical inventory of Germanic military terms and compounded with a second element indicating either totemic animals or further military items (e.g., ‘wolf’, ‘sword’). To such narrative sources, we may add the historical evidence of a limited number of runic inscriptions showing the same onomastic features.

The fundamental genealogical connection (in Nagy’s terms) between these narratives derives from the fact that they violate the manifold injunctions in Germanic sententious literature concerning parricide, that is, the killing of kinsmen, specifically, filicide and fratricide.⁴⁹ Taboos against the slaying of a kinsman must surely be something of a human universal but they seem to have held a special place in Germanic thinking, as evidenced by the fact that in Norse mythology, it is Baldr’s death at the hands of his brother, Hǫðr, that marks the beginning of the apocalypse, of the gods’, and the world’s, demise. It is this crime that epitomizes the outbreak of moral decadence in the sibyl’s précis of the history of men and gods, where the world in decline is characterized by assorted social calamities—adultery, whoredom, strife, violence. But the unfathomable crime that introduces this descent into the moral abyss is that of kinsman slaying kinsman.⁵⁰ And this association of parricide with a Germanic apocalyptic worldview is by no means limited to Norse mythology, but also permeates such Christian texts as Wulfstan’s *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Cf. Old Norse *frænd-víg* ‘slaughter of a kinsman’, ‘parricide’; Old English *mægcwealm* ‘death of a father or kinsman,’ [equated with *parricidio*], *mægmorðr* ‘murder of a kinsman,’ etc.; Old High German *magslaht* ‘parricide’. With regard to the runic inscriptions, we cannot know, of course, what the situation was.

⁵⁰ “Brœðr muno beriaz/ oc at bǫnom verðaz,/ muno systrungar/ sifiom spilla,” *Vǫluspá* 45¹⁻⁴ (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 10), in Lee Hollander’s translation, “Brothers will battle / to bloody end / and sisters’ sons / their sib betray.”

⁵¹ Wulfstan begins this sermon (AD 1014) by seeing the coming end of the world (& *hit nealæcð þam ende*) and then, seemingly at every turn, identifies this eschatological view with the undervaluing of family ties. Thus, for example, he specifies as part of this moral decline the fact that kinsmen do not spare kinsmen, nor fathers sons, nor children fathers, nor brothers brothers (*Ne bearh nu foroft gesib gesibban þe ma þe fremdan, ne fæder his bearne, ne hwilum bearn his agenum fæder, ne broþor oþrum*). Throughout the sermon, he uses such depravities as attacks on kinsmen (*mægræs*) and the selling of family members into slavery to further illustrate this view. I cite the text from “The Electronic *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*” of Melissa Bernstein Ser, ed., at <http://english3.fsu.edu/~wulfstan/>, last accessed on 14 October 2011. I especially want to thank Len Neidorf for bringing this analogue to my attention.

The narratives discussed here use that association in order to cast their characters into the famous ‘double-bind’, the choice between honor and family, and force their actors into choosing which of their culture’s most fundamental precepts they will violate. This dilemma draws its strength in each of the traditions from a shared *Weltanschauung* and demands that we at least consider whether these narratives might have derived from a common source,⁵² the sort of proto-structure envisioned by de Vries (1953), who suggested that the *Hildebrandslied* is to be understood against a background of warrior cults and initiation rites displaying a filiation with Indo-European mythic archetypes. One way to understand this parricidal theme in the context of an initiation rite, naturally, is that it represents the ‘double bind’ in which the initiate finds himself, that is, bound to honor his family in one direction and bound to honor the group in the other.

Nagy’s third method, the historical, involves, as he writes, “comparisons of parallels between structures that are related to each other by way of *intercultural contact*,”⁵³ a point with much relevance to the socially, linguistically, and narratively cognate groups that comprised the Germanic world of northern Europe. One possible source of contact would, of course, be the shared background of these northern European tribes from the period when the differentiations between the various groups were not especially pronounced and the migration era had not yet begun in earnest, centuries before our earliest texts. In addition, the continued proximity, trade relations, and so on of the people who display these parallel structures over the succeeding centuries was such that ongoing episodes of sharing cultural goods was by no means outside the realm of possibility.

To take one possible example, much has been made over the years of the fact that there may be a direct connection of some sort (either codicological or stemming from shared traditions) between the Old High German *Hildebrandslied* and the Old Icelandic *Ásmundar saga kappabana* based on the fact that the two traditions both offer descriptions of Hildibrand as ‘hoary’ or ‘old’ and in each case use the etymologically ‘identical’ simplex: in the *Hildebrandslied*, Hildibrandr is called as “the older man” (*hêrôro man*) and in *Ásmundar saga*, we find the cognate phrase “the hoary [i.e., old] Hildibrand” (*inn hári Hildibrandr*). Naturally, the historical relations between and among the various West and North Germanic peoples suggest manifold opportunities for such ongoing reticulations of these story lines and their unusually named characters.

⁵² “The second method involves comparisons of parallels between structures related to each other by way of a common source. I describe this comparative method as *genealogical* because it applies to parallelisms between *cognate* structures - that is, structures that derive from a common source or proto-structure,” Nagy 2006, 72.

⁵³ Nagy 2006, 72.

Of course, with regard to the possible connections between and among these materials, there is an argument that their origins are rooted in deep history. Generations of scholars have noted the similarities between the ultimate Œdipal conflict in Germanic tradition with cognate Celtic, Russian, and Persian texts, a comparison that led, for example, to de Vries's conclusion that the pattern we see in *Hildebrandslied* and the other texts is mythic, stretching back to the world of the Indo-Europeans, a view that has been challenged over the years.⁵⁴ That conclusion, it has been argued (e.g., Hatto 1973), relies too much on the similarity of basic plot elements and plays out in too dimly lit a world to be fully proven one way or another. It is also a search for origins which, barring further evidence, is likely to remain a matter of frustrated cogitation for scholarship.⁵⁵ Yet the recent reevaluation of these materials against the naming, *Männerbunde*, and religious traditions in Greek, Celtic, Indo-Iranian and Germanic by Sundqvist and Hultgård (2004) has yielded a balanced and very interesting appraisal: on the one hand, it offers further support for some of the ideas in de Vries and elsewhere, especially the possibility of rituals and initiations forming the appropriate framework within which to understand the Listerby stones; on the other hand, it argues against other notions (e.g., a Scythian tribe known as the Saka haoma-wolves). And the shared lycanthropic rituals Sundqvist and Hultgård adduce among the various historically-connected peoples, for example, certainly re-opens for our consideration the de Vries hypothesis about the possible Indo-European background of such traditions.

An additional point raised by Nagy's discussion seems to me to have relevance in this matter as well, viz.– the relationship of the hero to the god he most resembles.⁵⁶ Although the Christianization of the West Germanic groups generally means that we have little data to work with from Old High German and Old English traditions, the considerably later conversion of Scandinavia and the deep historical interests of the medieval Icelanders provides us with rich materials from this area. And these data certainly point us in interesting directions.

The manifold connections of the *Hálfs saga* and other figures discussed here to Óðinn are suggestive, to say the least. Óðinn involves himself in the dispute between Alrekr's wives; Víkarr is promised to the god (a pledge redeemed by his mock-sacrifice in *Gautreks saga* suddenly turing real); and Hjørleifr is tortured by being suspended in a gallows in a way that

⁵⁴ “Das Ergebnis ist also, daß der Archetypus der Hildebrandsage letzten Endes ein Mythos ist,” de Vries 1953, 272. Cp. the objections in, e.g., Hatto 1973.

⁵⁵ Cf. de Vries 1953, 257, “Unter den zahlreichen Problemen, die das Fragment des Hildebrandesliedes der Forschung aufgibt, gehört die Frage nach dem Ursprung des darin auftretenden Sagenmotives zu den am meisten umstrittenen.”

⁵⁶ Specifically, he writes that the hero “is antagonistic toward the god who seems to be most like the hero,” Nagy 2006, 87.

strongly resembles aspects of Óðinn's career.⁵⁷ In addition, the Baldr-Hoðr episode is, in its Nordic context anyway, intimately connected with Óðinn and the key events in his life. And, of course, the Óðinn-Hildólfr identification in *Hárbarðzlióð* underscores the significance of the deity to the theriomorphically-derived warrior figures who populate our parricidal narratives.

And as we shall see, the Óðinn-*berserkr* connection also plays an important role, for another of Nagy's observations about heroic attributes applies here as well, and that is that heroes are often extreme, extreme in their positive behaviors when they look to achieve *kleos* 'glory', but also extreme in their negative behaviors, especially when martial fury possesses them, an identification that readily brings to mind the behavior of a *berserkr*.⁵⁸ In the later Nordic traditions, *berserkir* are generally presented as troublesome outsiders, opponents whose chief role in the story line is to provide a foil for the hero of the saga and to be heroically dispatched by him. The possibility, however, that a real and historical institution of warrior bands is reflected in these later literary traditions has generated much debate over several generations of scholarship.⁵⁹

Importantly, the *berserkir* are presented as fighters specifically connected with the figure of Óðinn. Thus, for example, *Ynglingasaga* refers to such warriors— acting mad like dogs or wolves (*váru galnir som hundar eða vargar*), biting their shields, as strong as bears or bulls (*váru sterkir sem birnir eða griðungar*), the animal imagery glaringly suggestive— as “his men” (*hans menn*), that is, Óðinn's men.⁶⁰ This association between the *berserkir* and Óðinn is deep and may have played a significant role in pre-Christian views of the afterlife.⁶¹ The fact that Óðinn's name (< **Wōþanaz*) is clearly connected with a range of meanings indicating to be 'mad', 'frantic', 'vehement' (cf. Old Norse *óðr*; Old English *wōd*; Modern German *wut*), an etymology apparently recognized in the eleventh century by Adam of Bremen when he writes “Wodan, id est furor” ('Wodan, that is Fury'), has naturally been seen as highly relevant, especially when set against

⁵⁷ Cf. Schjødt 2008, 173-224 *et passim* and Patton 2009, 220-29.

⁵⁸ “He is extreme, mostly in a positive sense, since he is ‘best’ in many categories, and ‘best of the Achaeans’ in the Homeric *Iliad*; occasionally, however, he is extreme in a negative sense, as in his moments of martial fury. In war, the warrior who is possessed by the god of war experiences this kind of fury, which is typically bestial. For example, martial fury in Greek is *lussa*, meaning ‘wolfish rage’. Comparable is the Old Norse concept *berserkr* and the Old Irish concept of *ríastrad* ‘warp spasm’ or ‘distortion,’” Nagy 2006, 88.

⁵⁹ The secondary literature on this topic is vast. For an overview, see Schjødt's careful review of the literature (2008, 22-57).

⁶⁰ Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1962, 17.

⁶¹ Cf. the view that “...having been a berserk in one's life (having been initiated into a warrior band) means that one has got a special relationship with Óðinn which again implies that one become[s] one of the *einherjar* after death,” Schjødt 2008, 353.

the idea of the *berserkir*'s battlefield fits of frenzy, the *berserksgangr*.⁶² These battle-mad moods play an important role in the parricidal materials reviewed here, as the act of filicide is sometimes carried out exactly when the father is in a *berkerskr* fury: thus, in *Ásmundar saga kappabana*, we are told by way of explanation that "... [Hildbrandr] went into a berserk rage [...] This rage was on him as he travelled his way and saw his son and immediately slew him."⁶³ It is also worth recalling that Icelandic tradition is very keen to note that Hálfr is a *berserkr*, as well as that he is always seen as part of a group of warriors, men who have had to prove their courage and strength before joining his band.

Moreover, the possibility that Óðinn had a role in the initiation of young warriors into war bands, secret societies and the like has long been bruited about. In his masterful study of initiation in the Old Norse world, Jens Peter Schjødt (2008, 454) offers a fine summary judgment on this point: "...in his relationship to the world of human beings [Óðinn] is characterised by being the one who, as *initiator*, gives certain social categories a range of numinous knowledge [...] It is, therefore, as the god of initiation that Óðinn's role in relation to his chosen heroes becomes understandable and meaningful..."

One of the most discussed instances where the later literary texts have been understood to echo such processes is the story in *Hrólfs saga kraka* of Hǫttr, the timid weakling who is transformed into a doughty warrior through the intervention of the heroic Bǫðvarr-Bjarki ['little bear of war'].⁶⁴ Part of the process (explicitly tripartite, involving separation - liminality - and reintegration) involves the dispatching of a monster and the drinking of its blood.⁶⁵ The result of these procedures is to show that Hǫttr has become a noble and valiant youth (*goðr drengr ok hraustr*).⁶⁶

To underscore this transformation, 'the new man' also gets a new name. Formerly called Hǫttr 'hood', 'cowl', a designation often used in various collocations by Óðinn as a means of hiding his identity, he is now to be called Hjalti (< *hjalt*, the boss of a sword or its guard), explicitly said to be a name taken from that of a famous sword.⁶⁷ The image of an initiate

⁶² I emphasize here the association of Óðinn with the fury of the battlefield, but it is also the case that the etymology indicates the mental excitement of poetic composition and other functions (cf. Latin *vātes*, Old Irish *fáith*); for a brief review of the theories, see Mitchell 1993. For recent detailed discussions, especially with respect to the question of warrior bands, see Kershaw 2000 and Schjødt 2008, 22-57.

⁶³ "...þá kom á hann berserksgangr [...] En í vanstilli þessu, er á honum var ok hann var á ferðina kominn, þá sá hann son sinn ok drap hann þegar," Guðni Jónsson 1981, I:404-05.

⁶⁴ This story has been much commented on by Georges Dumézil (1970, 154-58) and others, none more so than Schjødt 2008, 311-26 *et passim*, who also provides an excellent review of the secondary literature.

⁶⁵ These phases are examined in depth in Schjødt 2008, 311-26.

⁶⁶ Guðni Jónsson 1981, I:68.

⁶⁷ "...ok skal hann heita Hjalti upp frá þessu. Skaltu heita efter sverðinu Gullinhjalta," Guðni Jónsson 1981, I:69.

undergoing a trial through which he achieves an enhanced status and is provided with a new *military name* plausibly reflects past cultural behaviors among the Germanic tribes. As Sundqvist and Hultgård (2004, 597) note with regard to the naming practices on the Listerby stones, “These names might have been used as some kind of insignia received after the ceremonies, i.e. the *rite de passage*, at the time of entering or leaving an age group or warrior confraternity.”

CONCLUSION

Where does this review of the data lead us? By applying Nagy’s hero paradigm and its comparative methodology to these highly discursive materials from northern Europe—runic inscriptions, legendary and mythological texts, onomastic conventions—plausible outlines of the past begin to emerge. The relationships among the various Germanic parricidal narratives taken up here, with their particular naming traditions, paralleled in turn by historical evidence of the same onomastic practices, represent, of course, only the sober collocations of facts, pure and simple.

But they also represent hard data we should not fear to subject to informed speculation. Going then beyond the proven testimonials of our materials, I would like to suggest a way of interpreting the details and patterns, one that I readily admit is necessarily speculative, but also one that fits the facts. It overlaps in a general sense with de Vries (1953) and like Sundqvist and Hultgård (2004) locates the ideas to a specific time and place proximate to the materials and ties these patterns to known cultural phenomena.

Is it too much to imagine that, in a Durkheimian spirit, what we witness in such texts are reflections of lived lives within a tradition of military bands (whether called secret societies, *Männerbunde*, age groups, or *berserkir*) at some early point (e.g., the Roman Iron Age) and which continued as a cultural practice for long periods in Scandinavia? The particularities of the alliterating and semantically-tied onomastic patterns repeated in the various narratives, as well as the parricidal themes employed, would in turn reflect the initiation rituals or age group inductions associated with such warrior groups.

In these naming practices, it is the second element—‘wolf’, ‘bear’, and so on—that apparently signifies the institutional part of the the name, that is, the war band’s identity to the outside world, sometimes with totemic associations. The first unit of the dithematic name, on the other hand—‘army’, ‘battle’ and so on—provides the individual’s identity, perhaps even status or rank, within the group. These names would have been, as in the case of Hǫttr-Hjalti, provided for, or by, the initiate after having passed whatever tests or introductory rites the

group used, a practice broadly paralleled in many cultures, including the traditions of the Christian church (e.g., Boniface).

That the heroic narratives are centrally concerned with acts of parricide is intimately related to this process: just as the various kin-slayers in the texts must choose between codes relating to family and codes relating to personal honor, demonstrations of military prowess and so on (which may run up against, or even afoul of, family obligations), so the initiate is compelled to make choices within the hierarchy of ideals between fidelity to the war band, on the one hand, and fidelity to the family, on the other. As part of this new association, they vow to honor their obligations to the confraternity over all other calls to duty.⁶⁸ Seen in this context, the filicidal and fratricidal deaths presented in the texts reflect metaphorical, perhaps even ritually enacted, severings of the initiate's bonds to the family, and the concomitant valorization of his ties to his new 'family', the war band.

I realize that these comments push the data vary hard, of course. On the other hand, if we are not to allow some such reading of the evidence, how instead should we would explain the shared naming and behavioral patterns drawn from the traditions of the Continent, Anglo-Saxon England and the Nordic world? The war band initiation theory I have proposed here, although perhaps daring, does not violate the evidence; indeed, it appears to fit the data very well. And what alternative explanation accounts for the common naming and narrative patterns we find in the various Germanic traditions?

⁶⁸ Such a practice would also fit Stentoften's wording, one interpretation of which is that the last part of the text—"Incessantly (plagued by) maleficence, (doomed to) insidious death (is) he who this breaks"—refers not to the monument but rather to the oath associated with the ritual conjured on the inscription.

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