

ON THE EXCELLENCE OF THE 'HILDEBRANDSLIED': A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN DYNAMICS

The Persian, Russian, Irish, and Germanic¹ versions of the action in which a 'good'² father slays a 'good' son in battle present a challenge of unique fascination to the student of heroic poetry. How comes it that these four versions are so like and yet unlike each other?

In an essay distinguished by its sobriety, accuracy, and high scholarly integrity, G. Baesecke approached the problem from a diffusionist angle, that is, he indicated affinities between certain traits in the various versions and then postulated givers and receivers, and so ended with a plausible if incomplete scheme of the movement of this plot in time and space.³

Some thirteen years later, J. de Vries came out with a different approach. Though he commended Baesecke highly for his careful handling of the material he underlined the inconclusiveness of Baesecke's results by collecting that modest scholar's own caveats — 'wahrscheinlich', 'vielleicht', 'irgendwie', 'scheint' — words not prominent in de Vries's more sanguine vocabulary.⁴ Having as it were bundled Baesecke out of the way he offered the reader his own interpretation of the *Hildebrandslied* and reconstruction of the missing end, and so went on to consider the four versions in Indo-European tongues. De Vries's conclusion had best be given in his own words, taken first from the final paragraph of the original publication, then from the end of an extension to it addressed especially to Celtic scholars:

- (a) Das Ergebnis ist also, daß der Archetypus der Hildebrandsage letzten Endes ein Mythos ist. Aber die Angst früherer Generationen vor der Mythisierung der Heldensage können wir nur insoweit teilen, als wir Mythendeutungen nach der Art der Romantiker unbedingt ablehnen. Die Religionsforschung der letzten Dezentennien hat uns aber mit großer Eindringlichkeit gelehrt, daß wir, wo wir in die letzten Tiefen des menschlichen oder völkischen Lebens durchzudringen versuchen, immer auf den Granitboden des Mythos stoßen. (pp. 272 f.)
- (b) Es ist schwer denkbar, daß das Heldenthema des Vater-Sohn-Kampfes schon in den ersten Jahrhunderten unserer Zeitrechnung aus dem Orient bis nach Irland vorgedrungen sein sollte. Wie wären die Voraussetzungen für eine so frühe Übertragung eines literarischen Motivs gegeben gewesen? Es ist viel leichter zu erklären, daß die Sagen sich aus einem gemeinsamen mythischen Urbild entwickelt haben, das dann in verschiedenartiger Abwandlung bei Persern und Deutschen, Russen und Iren erhalten geblieben ist. (p. 284)

The arguments, or rather the pronouncements, that lead to de Vries's conclusion that the four versions derive from ancient Indo-European myth are marked by gross fluctuations in their quality, fluctuations that puzzle one, until one discerns

¹ The *Hildebrandslied* is taken here to be a superficially and even ludicrously 'Saxonized' version of a (scribal) Bavarian version of an originally (oral) Langobardic lay of *circa* or *post* A.D. 650. The term 'Germanic' therefore raises fewer problems in our context than 'German'.

² In this article, 'good' and 'bad' mean no more than 'conforming averagely well' or 'obviously not conforming' to the prevailing code of a warrior class or society.

³ 'Die indogermanische Verwandtschaft des Hildebrandliedes', *Nachrichten von der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, Phil.-hist. Klasse, Fachgruppe IV, N.F. 3 (1940), 139–53.

⁴ 'Das Motiv des Vater-Sohn-Kampfes im Hildebrandslied'. Mit einer Nachschrift des Verfassers. *Zur germanisch-deutschen Heldensage*. Hrsg. K. Hauck (Bad Homburg, 1961). Reprinting *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, 34 (1953), 257 ff. and *Ogam*, 9 (1957), 122 ff.

that they proceed from a mythopœic mind using scholarly material as its medium.¹ It would be foolish — as it is impracticable — to seek to engage with de Vries's proposition if only for sheer lack of evidence. For as everybody knows, there is no Indo-European myth, extant or reconstructable, in which a good father slays a good son in battle: had there been such a myth it would have been adduced in discussion of the *Hildebrandslied* and its cognates long before 1953. On the other hand, there is naturally much 'Œdipal' matter extant in myth and story in Indo-European tongues that will endure some further shaping by myth-makers even today. No doubt, had we the texts of ancient Germanic initiation ceremonies for young men, the theme of conflict between the older and younger generations would be reflected in them; but we have no such texts and cannot make good the lack by fabulation.

As to Baesecke's scheme of diffusion, the main objection in principle that can be made to it is that it does not allow for confluences and re-confluences of different variants or the spontaneous attraction of suitable elements to the basic plot within the general range of dynamic possibilities as set out below (pp. 822 ff.), with the result that one cannot always be certain that a given trait is genetically primary or secondary.

It is not the present purpose, however, to try to bundle Baesecke and de Vries out of the way in order to bring out a third theory of origins or dissemination. It is certainly very teasing that the powerful and well-marked action in question is met with in only four heroic traditions and all of them Indo-European. It is further remarkable that there is no such rounded action in the extant heroic poetry of the Turkic and Mongol-speaking peoples.² Yet because of the lack either of evidence or of overwhelming argument as to why this is so, one must school oneself to accept the facts as they are.³

The intention here is simply to examine the dynamics of the four versions, the Persian, the Russian, the Irish, and the Germanic, on a comparative basis for their own sakes, and in addition particularly for the sake of the *Hildebrandslied*. No disturbingly new results are promised. The only hoped-for gain is greater tidiness and an enhanced appreciation of the individual features of the four versions.

A narrative in which a good father kills a good son is potentially strong stuff for any society in which the father-and-son relationship is meaningful; and the less recourse is had to accident in the telling, the more powerful the effect will be. The killing of a good son by a bad father or of a bad son by a good father is taken here to be something else in that the former case is an instance of what a very bad

¹ As specimens of de Vries's lack of respect for the texts there are the following: 'Im Hl. wird die Situation, in der die beiden Helden auftreten, dafür verantwortlich gemacht, daß der Sohn seinen Namen verschweigt' (p. 265). But Hadubrant at l. 17b has said '*ih heittu Hadubrant*'. Again: 'Im Alten Lied sagt der Vater seinen Namen' (p. 253). This he never does. For very good reasons (see p. 835, below), Hildebrand alludes to his own identity by means of a celebrated understatement. It is strange that the three editors of de Vries's article have allowed such inaccuracies to pass.

² A rumour crops up from time to time to the effect that there is a variant in one or other of the Turkic languages of Central Asia, but no text is ever produced. There is certainly no such action in the most mature extant tradition of this region, the Kirgiz of the mid-nineteenth century: and if there were such an episode among the unpublished hundreds of thousands of lines of the *Manas*-trilogy languishing in the archives at Frunze, the late Professor V. M. Zhirmunskiy could have been relied upon to bring it to the notice of the international group of comparativists of which he was so distinguished a member.

³ If one had to choose between Baesecke's and de Vries's contributions one would have to give the preference to Baesecke's for its more lasting value.

father might do, while the latter is an instance of what a very bad son might deserve.

To test the possible links in such a chain of events¹

1. A good father could kill a good son in battle only
 - (a) if there were a failure of recognition;
 - (b) if there were morally overriding considerations as understood by the society — less would make the father bad, not good;
 - (c) by accident or by a series of accidents.
2. [1(a)] How should there be a failure of recognition?
 - (a) Because, being known to each other the faces of father and son are masked [e.g. by battle-masks, helmets, mist, night, etc.]*
 - (b) Because father and son are unknown to each other and lack clues to each other's identity.
3. [2(b)] How should a father and son be unknown to each other, lacking clues to each other's identity?
 - (a) Because of a separation between the father and the (mother-and-)son, and indeed
 - (i) a 'free' separation in the sense that either the father or the mother(-with-son) voluntarily leaves home — or in a remoter contingency the father and mother leave the son to foster — before the son is of an age to recognize his father;
 - (ii) an 'unfree' separation due to a disaster, whether political (e.g. war, exile, intrigue) or natural (e.g. earthquake, inundation), whereby in both sorts of disaster . . .*
4. How in favourable circumstances could such separation [3(a), (i) and (ii)] be bridged?
 - (a) By the father and the son naming themselves, their names being known on one or both sides, i.e. by self-attestation finding mutual trust;
 - (b) through a person or persons knowing both identities — henceforth 'witness(es)';
 - (c) by means of inanimate objects held to attest identity, such as letters patent, seals, jewels, in short 'tokens' of one sort or another, with the rider that such tokens are far more liable to accident as attestors of identity than are persons . . .*
5. But how, since by definition the circumstances are tragic, could such a bridge over separation [4(a), (b), (c)] prove ineffectual?
 - (a) Self-attestation could meet with mistrust;
 - (b) witnesses could be unavailable because of absence, death, intrigue . . .*
 - (c) tokens could be lost, stolen, withheld, perverted, destroyed, misinterpreted . . .*
 - (d) at the last moment a good son could be unmasked as a bad son, thus (as noted above) going beyond the limits of the 'good-father-kills-good-son' plot.

The foregoing requires this further annotation.

1. (c) It cannot be over-emphasized that accidents must trivialize an otherwise serious action. Points at which accident could play a part were therefore indicated.
2. (a) The various physical maskings of identity listed were in fact not used in the heroic variants of this plot,² partly, no doubt, because the element of chance would have been too high to elicit interest. In isolation, that is without guilt or hybris, a battle between friends or kinsmen incognito requires to be stopped at the last moment. It is also to be noted that a widespread but far from universal custom of self-attestation between warriors, e.g. by disclosure or proclamation of names and pedigrees or by display of recognition signals (standards, blazons) can proclaim identity where the face is hidden.
3. (a) (i) A relationship in which a good father 'freely' leaves a pregnant mother with a babe suggests tolerated concubinage or 'travellers' marriages' rather than an established form of marriage. Thus unless marriage is stated to have taken place,

* means: 'accident could play a part here.'

¹ These *a priori*s are unblushingly constructed upon a great deal of hindsight.

² Such maskings of identity between friends were made much of in medieval romances, when vizored helmets were in fashion and knowledgeable heralds must have saved many lives.

- any confrontation between father and son must involve the issue of bastardy, whether explicitly or not.
3. (a) (ii) The issue of bastardy cannot apply where a husband and wife-with-child have been separated 'unfreely'.
 4. (c) Tokens played a far greater role in the attestation of identity in former times, when the bureaucratic apparatus was undeveloped or non-existent. Thus it would be wrong to regard tokens in variants of this plot as a necessarily unrealistic item of folklore. Moreover, it would seem that a father who left his partner a token of recognition for their child had little thought of ever seeing her again.

Wherever, whenever it first arose and in whatever genre, the 'original' or 'originals' of our plot must have lain within these confines; but whether any original version traced a fully or only partly consistent path through the maze of possibilities is unknowable. If it was an oral creation one would not necessarily expect a flawlessly logical unfolding but would instead be willing to be carried along by that narrative shorthand which so delighted Herder. One speculation, however, we may share with Baesecke: the presence of a recognition token in the Persian and Russian versions and of a similar jewel with nevertheless a different function in the Old Irish version,¹ strongly suggests that a dominant earlier version had a father who begat a son in a foreign land as the result of a passing attachment.

With our abstract scheme in mind, we can now assess the dynamic qualities of all four versions.

Let us begin with the version of Firdusi in the *Shahnameh*, with the warning that this test of the dynamic structure of his 'Sohrab and Rustam' will prove very damaging to his reputation, whatever the other beauties of this narrative, above all in the eyes and ears of those who read Persian.²

The poet may be allowed the initial accident which brings Rustam to Tehmineh, the future mother of his son Sohrab, namely the theft of his steed Rakhch while he slept and his tracking it into Tehmineh's city; though why this wise beast did not wake its master is not explained. Tehmineh, daughter to Rustam's royal host, comes to his bedside and offers herself to him so that she may conceive a hero. In the regular wedding with paternal consent that seems to follow instantly, scholars rightly detect courtly whitewashing of an originally free or illicit amour, making a third with those of the Russian and Old Irish versions. The legitimacy of the offspring thus assured, Rustam duly leaves a seal as token of the relationship and returns home to Zabulistan, where, for no reason that the poet gives, Rustam

¹ Conlae's thumb-ring is a calibrator of heroic physique, see pp. 828 f., below.

² It can be no accident that when Th. Nöldeke comes to speak of the finest passages in the *Shahnameh* he does not so much as mention the 'Sohrab and Rustam' episode (*Das iranische Nationalepos*, Zweite Auflage des im Grundriß der iranischen Philologie erschienenen Beitrages (Berlin-Leipzig, 1920), §51 = pp. 71 f.). Nor is it an accident that the Romantics in various European countries doted on 'Sohrab and Rustam' to the point where they virtually identified Firdusi with it. The episode was often translated and published separately (see pp. 9 ff. of the introduction to A. Bricteux's French translation, which to judge from the cool and detached tone of the introduction is scholarly as well as beautifully phrased: *Roustem et Sohrab: Épisode du livre des rois*, Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège, Fasc. LXXVI (1938)). The many MSS of the *Shahnameh* are said to differ greatly, and there is no prospect of a critical edition and translation before the end of the present era. I have therefore checked all statements based on Bricteux's unrhymed verse with J. Mohl's celebrated French prose rendering, and ambiguities further with *Firdousi Shakhname*. Izdanie podgotovili Ts. Banu, A. Lakhuti, A. A. Starikov (Moscow, 1957, etc.), II (1960), lines 14515 ff.

tells no one of his marriage, not even his brother and confidant Zevareh. Firdusi, as we shall see, is here throwing dust into his readers' eyes at very cheap cost. The son who is eventually born is named 'Sohrab'. Later 'someone' (who is evidently aware of Sohrab's and Rustam's relationship) informs Iran's deadly enemy, the Turanian Afrasyab, of Sohrab's intention to attack Iran after his swift growth to heroic stature, and Afrasyab intrigues to pit him against Rustam in the hope that the son will slay the father, an obvious requirement of which manoeuvre is that the two shall remain unknown to each other. In the sequel, Afrasyab instructs his generals Barman and Human, who accompany Sohrab to the Iranian frontier, to suppress all mention of the relationship. Sohrab and Rustam thus seem to be caught in a web of intrigue which Firdusi continues to weave with spider-like industry and a prime condition of which is that Afrasyab should know of the relationship while the Shah and his Iranians remain in ignorance of it. Rustam's and Tehmineh's wedding, however, was a public event in Turanian Semengan, which at that time was not at war with Iran, and Firdusi cannot have considered all the consequences when he decided to legitimize the union. The news of Sohrab's approach and of his first exploits on the frontier reaches Rustam, who dismisses the notion that the Turks could have bred a hero, but also rejects the idea that it could be his own son, who on his calculation would be too young to take the field. Rustam nevertheless shows his awareness that in view of the gigantic physique of his lineage, any unknown hero of comparable build must *prima facie* be a kinsman — an awareness which counts for nothing with Firdusi when he wishes Rustam *not* to recognize Sohrab. Rustam now goes disguised into Sohrab's stronghold and takes stock of him, relaxed and without his armour, on which occasion Rustam also kills Sohrab's maternal uncle Jindeh Rezm, who as a witness of the wedding in Semengan had been instructed by Tehmineh to point out Rustam to Sohrab. When the two armies lie opposite each other, Sohrab asks his patriotic Iranian captive Hejir to name the Iranian chiefs. Hejir names all the leaders save Rustam, shrewdly calculating that Sohrab might otherwise slay Rustam, and Iran consequently perish. To Sohrab's bitter disappointment Hejir prevaricates. Sohrab then sees Rustam and recognizes all the signs his mother had named: yet he does not dare to trust his eyes 'for such was the fate on his brow'. Firdusi later observes that man proposes but God disposes: fate had decreed otherwise. With threats and cajoleries Sohrab asks Hejir a second time: but Hejir fobs him off again with lies. Sohrab then attacks the Iranians with such success that the Shah commands Rustam to oppose him.

With the heroic father and the heroic son about to collide, let us survey the forces which Firdusi has set in motion in order to assure a tragic outcome:

1. For no reason given, Rustam has concealed his lawful marriage.
2. Afrasyab, informed by 'someone' of the grown young hero's warlike plans, has plotted with his generals lest Rustam's identity become known to Sohrab.
3. The witness Jindeh Rezm has been eliminated.
4. The patriotic Iranian Hejir conceals Rustam's identity from Sohrab.
5. Rustam ignores his own knowledge that *prima facie* the gigantic Sohrab must be related to him.
6. Sohrab does not dare believe his mother's signs when he sees them in Rustam.

One would have thought that after this laborious build-up Firdusi would set some store by it? Not a bit. In the space of a few lines he throws it all away and with it one of the finest dramatic plots in the world:

Sohrab: A sweet presentiment tells me 'This is Rustam'!

Rustam: No, I am not Rustam. Rustam is a great champion, I am a simple warrior.¹

Firdusi gives no human motive for this lie, only 'Fate'. In the course of a second encounter, Sohrab asks the same question, only more directly, and Rustam gives the remarkable answer: 'I am no man of feigned and deceiving words'. In the former instance, Firdusi crowns his endeavours with this high-flown comment:

O Destiny, how astonishing are thy works! . . .
 Neither sensed the voice of Nature.
 Their reason abandoning them, love did not speak.
 Every animal knows its own young,
 Whether fish in the water or wild ass in the desert . . .

O true! Some fish *do* show paternal feeling, but we may be sure that Firdusi neither had seen nor could name them. What is even more certain is that having received a respectable version of 'A good father slays a good son' from a forerunner, the much-lauded poet has transformed it into the most distinguished variant of 'A fool of a father slays a good son'. Firdusi tells us in advance that we shall be angry with Rustam and he leaves us no alternative.

The events immediately preceding the actual slaying throw further light on Firdusi's art. When he was young, Rustam's huge strength (in the cheaply hyperbolic manner of this whole region)² was an embarrassment to him, so he prayed to God to reduce it. His prayer was granted. But now that Sohrab has proved the stronger, Rustam prays to God to return his former strength. Again his prayer is answered, and in one version God even gives him greater strength than he had ever enjoyed before.³ On any reading we must assume that the Deity was determined to finish off Sohrab — for the preservation of Iran, whose unscrupulous Shah had already implored him to do so. For the sake of Firdusi's beloved Iran, God has deigned to make a fool, a liar, and a heart-broken father of his pious instrument Rustam. At some slight cost Afrasyab, and Ahriman who stands behind him, have once again been foiled.

A kind fate, such as his noble soul deserved, reigned over Matthew Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum*. First, he was unable to lay hands on J. Mohl's translation and so, second, he had to rely on Sainte-Beuve's résumé of the episode in the *Causeries du Lundi* of 11 February 1850, in which some of Firdusi's defective motivation is silently and not entirely implausibly filled in. For example, Rustam is here said to conceal his identity from pride, not wishing to let the eager youth win easy kudos. But third, most fortunate of all, Arnold also followed a résumé of the episode in Sir John Malcolm's *History of Persia* of 1815, in which Tehmineh, fearing to lose her son to Rustam, writes and tells him that she has given birth to a daughter, and, further, Rustam, following a not uncommon usage of chivalrous combat of the

¹ Rustam belies himself: barely twenty-five lines back he has, in his compassion for the young man, boasted that he has fought in many battles, covered many fields with the débris of armies, slain more than one *dív* (Bricteux; Mohl; Banu, etc.).

² The Georgian *Amiran* is no better. Exaggeration in the heroic narratives of this region lacks the charm that generally accompanies it in Ossetic (Nart), the Russian *byliny* and Old Irish.

³ Compare Bricteux, *Roustem*, line 2291: 'Ajoutant même à sa force ancienne'.

time, fights under a feigned name.¹ As a result the dynamics of Arnold's 'episode' are greatly superior to those of Firdusi, with finely contrived dramatic ironies and a superb double dramatic irony:

I am no girl, to be made pale by words.
Yet this thou hast said well, did Rustum stand
Here on this field, there were no fighting then.
(ll. 381-3)

The Russian version of our plot (*Bogatyri na zastave: boy Il'i Muromtsa s synom*) is difficult to handle since it in fact comprises about forty variants collected in the field during the last two hundred years.² Even if the rough outlines of the original lay, thought to be about fourteenth-century, could be reliably constructed, some hundreds of years would separate it from the Persian and the Old Irish versions.

According to R. Trautmann, who presumably sifted all the variants with an eye on the Persian, Irish, and Germanic versions, the bare bones of the lay were these. Il'ya stands guard on the frontier with other heroes. One morning they see a young hero riding up unconcernedly with his hawking animals. Il'ya sends one of the others to make enquiries, but he returns without having achieved anything. Il'ya then goes in person, and fighting soon begins. Il'ya falls, and the young hero sits on his chest; but Il'ya as the result of prayer or of a great effort of will reverses the situation. He then espies on the youth a token of identity which he had left with the boy's mother, claims him as his son with great affection and explains how he had met and fought with the mother — who is thus by implication a warrior-woman — until hostility gave way to love and their son (usually 'Sokol'nik' = 'falconer') was engendered. The youth takes this badly. In some variants he returns to his mother and kills her for a whore. Coming again to his father, he tries to kill him in his sleep; but the blow is held by a jewel above his father's heart. The father leaps up and dispatches his son.

If this was the bare content of the original lay, its dynamics were both simple and adequate. The father kills his son wittingly but in a sense justifiably, in self-defence, whereas from the other point of view the son intends to wipe out the deadly insult of bastardy, a motive which is underlined in some variants by the killing of the mother. Various aspects of honour provide the motive force: the honour that goes with keeping the frontier inviolate; the honour of not being put off by busybodies when one goes out hawking; but most of all the dishonour of bastardy. Thanks to the recognition-token a happy end was in sight: but the son's resentment at being found a bastard nullifies it. He was not looking for his father anyhow.

This dominance of the theme of bastardy over more positive aspects of heroic honour would appear to owe much to the peasants who inherited the tradition from the nobility. It suggests a narrowing of the heroic ethos. If we question the

¹ See Arnold's dignified rejoinders of 1854 and 1869 to the imputation by a critic that he had not acknowledged his debt to Sainte-Beuve, headnote (pp. 302 ff.) and Appendix C (p. 612) to K. Allott's excellent annotated edition of *The Poems of Matthew Arnold* (London, 1965). Since he alludes to Mohl's rendering of the *Shahnameh* only by way of Sainte-Beuve, Professor Allott reveals no awareness of how lucky Arnold was in being unable to lay hands on Mohl or indeed on any reasonably reliable translation of Firdusi, in the sense that Matthew's own creative faculty found a swifter release to work on his experience of having been 'slain' by his father Thomas, as has been wittily suggested by Trilling (Allott, p. 303).

² R. Trautmann, *Die Volksdichtung der Großrussen*, 1 (Heidelberg, 1935), *Das Heldenlied (Die Byline)*, no. 28, 'Iljas Kampf mit dem Sohn', pp. 301-8.

other versions under this head, we find that Firdusi has dodged the issue at some cost by whitewashing the love-match with instant marriage (see p. 823, above); that it is not made an issue in the Old Irish version;¹ and we shall see in the Germanic that the 'reversal' which led to the father, not the son, being the home-comer automatically excluded the issue of bastardy (see p. 836, below).

In this roughly reconstructed lay-*bylina* of Il'ya and Sokol'nik there have been some curious parallels with the other versions. Il'ya's access of new strength after prayer (in some variants only) is reminiscent of Firdusi's Rustam (see p. 825, above). Il'ya's mating abroad *with a warrior-woman* (in some *byliny* only) recalls that of Cú Chulainn (p. 828, below). The disgracing of Il'ya's companions — in Onchukov's variant Sokol'nik simply spans the great hero Dobrynya and sends him back² — recalls Conlae's tying-up the heroes of Ulster (p. 828, below). Sohrab, too, defeats Iranian heroes.³ Sokol'nik's unconcerned riding out hawking recalls Conlae's arrival off Ulster magically fowling, and also Alibrand's first appearance out hawking in the Norse prose rendering of a north German variant of the *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied*, in the *Thiðrekssaga*. A further parallel is Sokol'nik's treacherous blow at his sleeping father and Alibrand's treacherous blow under cover of a feigned surrender in the *Thiðrekssaga*.

Although it does not belong to the declared purpose of this enquiry (p. 821, above), it would be idle not to pause and gather fallen fruit.

With offshoots of Firdusi's 'Sohrab and Rustam' reported for Azerbaijan and the Caucasus⁴ it is easy to see how the Persian could have affected the Russian in the matter of the father's access of new strength through prayer (p. 827, above). The mating abroad of a paramount hero with a warrior-woman could be an essential part of an early dominant version that spread widely, since by the law of $1 + 1 = 2$ it issues in a super-hero capable of threatening ordered society; which in turn 'justifies' the father for slaying his own son; which again requires him somehow to find a special means of tipping the adverse balance in his own favour⁵ (in the Persian and some Russian variants by prayer; in the Irish with a super-weapon, together with weapon-training given by a supernatural person). The disgracing of the father's companions merely underlines the threat which the young super-hero poses to normal heroic society. Hawking by the younger hero on the other hand might well be secondary. It is expressive of his youth and it also

¹ In terms of ancient Celtic law, however, Conlae's situation in not being born of a mother within the tribe was disadvantageous (Professor Jackson's letter to me of 12 May 1972 — see p. 833, note 6).

² V. Ya. Propp, B. N. i Putilov, *Byliny v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow, 1958), 1, 209 ('Bogatyri na zastave: boy Il'i Muromtsa s synom'), reprinting Onchukov, *Pechorskie byliny*, no. 1 (taken down from Ph. E. Churkina).

³ In all three cases this is the direct reason for the father's (the paramount hero's) going into action.

⁴ Baesecke, 'Indogermanische Verwandtschaft', p. 148.

⁵ It is at this point that de Vries's orbit and mine have their nearest approach, without intersecting; compare de Vries, 'Vater-Sohn-Kampf', p. 281, 'Der Vater wiederholt sich ja in dem Sohn. Weil er selber Sproß einer übermenschlichen Verbindung ist, soll das auch mit dem Sohn so sein . . . Wird der Held in dem Kampf mit dem jugendstarken Sohn am Ende seiner Laufbahn unterliegen? . . . Oder wird der göttliche Heros bis zum Ende seines Lebens unüberwindlich bleiben? Dann wird der Kampf schrecklich sein, denn der Sohn ist ihm ebenbürtig. Durch einen letzten Aufwand der Kraft, durch eine besondere Waffe, sogar durch eine List, wird der Vater schließlich dennoch siegen . . .'. This passage, however, is preceded by the sentence 'Die Heldensage hat die Probe [i.e. Initiationsprobe] zugespitzt zu einem Kampf zwischen Vater und Sohn.' De Vries is apparently speaking of Cú Chulainn and Conlae.

emphasizes that he comes in peace — compare the famous lines in *The Battle of Maldon*:

hé lét him þa of handon léofne fléogan
hafoc wið þæs holtes, and to þære hilde stóp . . .
(He cast off his beloved hawk to fly to the wood and
strode to battle . . .)

A cowardly blow by the son as a last bid for victory when defeat is in sight would seem only to be required when the relevant society has doubts whether a father could 'justifiably' slay his son.¹

To resume. The reconstructed 'Il'ya and Sokol'nik' and some of its extant descendants, however lowly their ethos, are superior to 'Sohrab and Rustam' in the dynamic sense, in that they plausibly show in terms of human motivation how an affectionate father came to slay his son, which Firdusi fails to do.²

The Old Irish version of the 'Father-slays-son' plot is the ninth-century to tenth-century *Aided Aenfir Aífe* ('The Death of Aífe's Only One').³ In it, Cú Chulainn goes to the mainland to learn the use of arms from Scáthach. While he is there, Scáthach's sister Aífe comes to him and conceives. On leaving her, Cú Chulainn gives her a thumb-ring for their future son, with the instruction that as soon as it fits him he is to seek out his father. The boy is to let no single man deflect him from his path, he is not to name himself to any single man, nor is he to refuse single combat. With the condition of the first behest met at the age of seven he sets out. King Conchobar and his Ulstermen see him approach their shores in a little boat of bronze and watch him fowling in magical style.⁴ The King senses the boy's potential threat and sends his heroes one after the other to prevent a landing; but all are magically floored, then bound. As Cú Chulainn sets out to deal with the stranger, his wife Emer restrains him, having divined that this may be Conlae, only son of Aífe and Cú Chulainn. Even if that were the case, replies Cú Chulainn, he would have to slay him for the honour of Ulster. During the confrontation Conlae observes his father's behests. If they came in pairs, says Conlae, he would name himself, to which Cú Chulainn replies that if he will not name himself he must die. The inevitable battle ensues and culminates in a struggle in the water, in which the son twice ducks his father. But now Cú Chulainn employs a trick-weapon — the *gae bulga* — the use of which has been permitted by Scáthach to Cú Chulainn

¹ The strange mirror-effect between Sokol'nik's and Alebrand's cowardly blows at their fathers ('a woman — your mother? — taught you that blow') and Scáthach's (originally Conlae's mother's?) failure to teach Conlae the blow with which his father slew him, has been often noticed. It could be discussed without end. I refrain from adding to the discussion. See p. 832, below.

² Mr Ian Press of the Department of Russian, Queen Mary College has subjected A. Markov's dating and localization of the original *bylina* (as restated by R. Trautmann, p. 308, see p. 826, note 2) to very close scrutiny and found no reason to diverge from it: in Trautmann's words 'Die Landschaft, in der dieses Urlied gesungen wurde, kann . . . in Westrußland zu suchen sein. Denn das Wort Zastava für die Grenzwehr galt gegen Litauen hin im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert; der Name der Mutter, die im alten Liede "baba Latygorka" genannt wird, kann kaum von der altrussischen Bezeichnung für die Letgallen im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert, Latygora, getrennt werden'. I am grateful to Mr Press for his kind help with this assessment.

³ K. Meyer, *Ériu*, 1 (1904), pp. 113 ff. (Text and English translation). R. Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königssage bis zum siebzehnten Jahrhundert* (Halle, 1921), pp. 404 ff. (critical résumé). Thurneysen questions Meyer's early dating and prefers ninth-tenth century. M. Dillon, *Early Irish Literature* (Chicago, 1948), p. 16, states '9th century' without question.

⁴ According to Thurneysen, Conlae throws stones in such a way that their whirring dazes living beings: *Helden- und Königssage*, p. 404, note 4.

alone. Wounded to death, Conlae laments that Scáthach had not taught him that. Without mention of any physical token of recognition, Cú Chulainn carries Conlae to the Ulstermen with the words 'Here you have my son!' Conlae dies reconciled with them all.

The dynamics of this version are subtle and partly submerged.

Conlae is the issue of a great hero and a warrior-maiden,¹ and the presumption *a priori* is that were he to grow up he would be at least a match for his father. The mechanism that makes their collision inevitable is the *geis* that he must not yield or name himself to one man or avoid a duel. It is this which (i) leads to the confrontations with the heroes; (ii) to his father's sallying out to avenge them; (iii) to his not yielding to his father; (iv) and to his father's unswerving execution of his purpose. *For the content of Cú Chulainn's geis is also binding on himself.* Cú Chulainn, too, would never name himself to one or avoid single combat. Cú Chulainn would expect his son, when grown, to be up to his own standards. As the thumb-ring is the test of Conlae's physique, so the *geis* is the test of his heroic temper.

Neither Conlae nor Cú Chulainn can yield to one, and so one of the two must destroy the other. With heroic youth and double heroic descent on his side, Conlae would seem destined to prevail: but his imminent victory is reversed by the use of the special weapon. That the woman who favoured his father with the *gae bulga* was Conlae's aunt is just tolerable.² Another version, as if to dissociate Conlae's mother from the woman who gave Cú Chulainn the lethal advantage, makes Aífe a bellicose neighbour who leads an army against Scáthach.³ The author of a law-text knew a version in which Aífe was Scáthach's daughter (Thurneysen, p. 407). In all, there are, in the early tales, three women of war-like type in Cú Chulainn's life at this point: Scáthach, Uathach,⁴ and Aífe. One suspects reduplication of a single figure, namely of the mother of the young-hero-who-is-slain. If this were so, and if the son already at this stage of evolution were slain by his father's hand wielding a weapon furnished by his mother, the tragedy would be heightened. Again, were this so, the very starkness of the motif in an age of greater refinement could have led to toning down by the splitting of the mother-figure into a mother and a sister or daughter. There seems to be no evidence to contradict the notion that the sole function of Scáthach, Uathach, and Aífe in Old Irish heroic narrative was to provide Cú Chulainn with a son, and with a weapon and the skill to overcome him.

A short digression on Scáthach, Uathach, and Aífe will not be out of place here. These three are warrior-women.⁵ Scáthach teaches warriors to use weapons.⁶

¹ Strictly speaking, in this text Aífe is the sister of a warrior-woman, that is, she is a warrior-woman only by implication; but this is a reliable implication since in the *Tochmarc Emire* Aífe is a warrior-princess of other tribes, though here unrelated to Scáthach. Thurneysen, *Helden- und Königs-sage*, p. 391.

² Thus the *Aided Aenfir Aífe*.

³ The *Tochmarc Emire*, *Helden- und Königs-sage*, p. 391. See footnote 1, above.

⁴ Uathach is daughter to Scáthach in *Tochmarc Emire*, Thurneysen, p. 389; she sleeps with Cú Chulainn, and Scáthach gives him 'the friendship of her thigh'. In the late *Foghlaim ConCulainn* (in which the old heroes are now knights) Uathach is again daughter to Scáthach (p. 398) and she comes in the night to Cú Chulainn (p. 400).

⁵ Uathach's warrior-maiden status is only implied by her being Scáthach's sister or daughter. See previous footnote.

⁶ Prose Introduction to *Verba Scáthaige* (Thurneysen, p. 377); *Foghlaim* (p. 398); *Aided* (p. 404). In *Tochmarc*, Scáthach wages war against Aífe (p. 391).

R. Thurneysen paraphrased her name as 'die Schattige' (p. 376) and Professor Kenneth Jackson adds: 'one of the meanings of *scáth* is "spectre, phantom"' (see p. 833, note 6). Uathach, in some versions daughter to Scáthach, has a name rendered by Thurneysen as 'die Schreckliche' (p. 389), and again Professor Jackson's comment is illuminating: "'terrible" with supernatural implications'. 'Aife', I understand, has defied etymologizing by Celtic scholars: but the names of the former two in a general way fall into the same abstract sphere as the names of such Norse valkyries as *Gunnr* and *Hildr* (both = 'battle'), whose place was on the battlefield as terrible spectres of war, frightening and impeding the enemy, heartening and helping one's own side.¹

That these three owe something to battle-maidens of 'swan-battle-maiden' type² is suggested by the following.

The three live beyond an icy region and have to be reached by a taut rope or narrow bridge over a chasm, that is, by passing over a Bridge to the Otherworld.³ In *Tochmarc Emire* the icy region is identified with the Alps, much dreaded by Irish pilgrims on the way to Holy Rome.⁴ A later version interprets *Alpi* ('Alps') as *Albu* ('Albion', 'Scotland'):⁵ but in view of the general situation in the Otherworld, where a hero mates with a maiden, that is, in the sub-arctic mating-grounds of swans,⁶ and also in view of what follows here below, 'Albu' is more likely to have been the original reading than 'Alps'. Elsewhere, Scáthach has associations with Skye.⁷ Not one of the three warrior-women has wings: yet in *Tochmarc Emire* Ruad's daughter flies as a bird to Cú Chulainn in Ulster from the Hebrides, though she, on the other hand, lacks martial attributes (*Helden- und Königssage*, p. 393). A further (swan-)battle-maiden trait in Scáthach is that she has the gift of prophecy; the *Verba Scáthaige* ('The Words of Scáthach'), the earliest witness for the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* and attributed to the first half of the eighth century (*Helden- und Königssage*, pp. 376 f.), are devoted wholly to Scáthach's exercise of this gift.

Scáthach further has a trait suggesting shamanistic affinities: in return for Cú Chulainn's pleasuring her, Uathach tells him that her mother communes with the

¹ Compare J. de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, I (Berlin, 1956), §193; II (1957), §370. Discussing the more literary type of shield-maidens in an obscure passage, de Vries gallantly excuses 'the Germanic woman' from more Amazonian traits at the expense of the ancient Irish: 'Freilich, obgleich wir der germanischen Frau keineswegs Mut absprechen möchten, diese Vorstellung von auf eigener Faust kämpfenden Weibern sieht doch gar nicht germanisch aus und erinnert uns an ähnliche Züge in der irischen Überlieferung, wo sie mit der dort üblichen Wertung des Weibes durch die westische Rasse übereinstimmen.'

² I barely touched on 'swan-battle-maidens' in my article 'The swan-maiden: a folk-tale of north Eurasian origin?', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 24 (1961), 326 ff. The nearest I came to this theme, on which I hope to write soon, was on page 348, with the swan-battle-maidens of *Völundarkviða* and the sublimated apsaras of ancient India.

³ Sometimes the flight home of a swan-woman has as sequel a version of the Orpheus-story, i.e. of the man who goes to find his wife in the Otherworld. Here the rickety bridge over the chasm, or the long dive under the ice is a stock symbol for passage to the Otherworld, see Å. Hultkrantz, *The North American Orpheus Tradition* (Stockholm, 1957), passim.

⁴ Thurneysen, *Helden- und Königssage*, pp. 376, 388.

⁵ Compare Law-text, *Helden- und Königssage*, page 407, which has 'Scotland'. To a non-Celticist it looks as though the similarity between the words for 'Alp' and 'Alba' (Scotland) and the parallel 'Holy Rome' and 'Otherworld' has led to an amusing substitution of the former for the latter. Professor Jackson informs me in a letter of 12 May 1972 that 'there is a tendency in Irish story-telling to confuse the Alps and Alba ("Britain" or "Scotland")'.

⁶ Hatto, 'The swan-maiden', passim.

⁷ Professor K. Jackson (see p. 833, note 6).

gods as she lies unarmed in a *cles*-basket.¹ Similarly, she instructs her sons as she lies on her back in a yew-tree.²

One last trait strongly suggests that the Scáthach figure may originally have been a swan-battle-maiden or at least subsequently identified with one: in the *Aided Aenfir Aífe*, she is named 'Scáthach Foam-white, daughter of Loud-shriek'.³ This epithet surely makes sense only if it refers to the white Whooper Swan?

Today the main breeding grounds of the Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus cygnus*) extend eastwards from Iceland through Scandinavia to the Pacific. Of the Icelandic population about two thousand winter in Ireland, up to two thousand in Scotland and not more than five hundred in England and Wales. There is known to be a considerable interchange of Whooper Swans between Scotland and Ireland during any winter.⁴ 'The longest non-stop flights of swans are probably those undertaken by the Whooper Swans which migrate between Iceland and the British Isles.'⁵ Whooper Swans on their way to their breeding-grounds in Iceland are observable from the northern tip of the Outer Hebrides.⁶ Details of migration routes of large aquatic birds have varied within living memory and will have varied more during the millenia under the effects of climatic and other changes: but so far as the period in question is concerned (eighth to eleventh centuries A.D.) we can rest assured that the geography of the region coupled with economy of flight of the birds will have channelled migration between Iceland and Ireland up and down the western coast and islands of Scotland between the Outer Hebrides and the Mull of Kintyre — migration that will have formed a vivid part of the experience of Irish seafarers in those waters.

Any attempt to derive these (swan-)battle-maidens of Skye and the Hebrides from Norse folklore would come up against formidable chronological obstacles. The *Verba Scáthaige*, as we saw, are attributed by Thurneysen to the first half of the eighth century. They give us a prophetess; and, if the prose introduction is as old as the poem itself, they also give us a combat-instructress.⁷ On the other hand, the first Viking raid on Skye, prolonged into a raid off Dublin in the same year, is dated 795,⁸ with firm settlement by Turgeis only in about 834 (p. 276). The Norsemen of course had swan-battle-maidens to give and, if necessary, by threes; compare the three swan-battle-maidens of the *Völundarkviða* who fly from the south to make (rouse) war,⁹ and who find mates in the north.¹⁰ But any who might wish to press Norse derivation of Old Irish swan-battle-maidens would have to urge influence through peaceful trade many decades before the first Viking attack.

¹ *Foglaím ConCulainn*, Thurneysen, p. 400. In his footnote Thurneysen records his puzzlement as to what the compound '*cles*-Korb' can be. (The simplex *cles* is not problematic: it means 'trick', 'clever feat', and the old texts are full of them.) Shaman-huts and shaman-trees are widely known from Siberia as places for shamanizing.

² *Tochmarc Emire*, Thurneysen, p. 390.

³ Thurneysen gives the epithet in Old Irish as '*Uanann ingen Ardǵeme*', p. 404.

⁴ M. A. Ogilvie, 'Distribution, numbers and migration', in *The Swans*, edited by Peter Scott (London, 1972), pp. 47 f.

⁵ Ogilvie, in *The Swans*, p. 52.

⁶ Ogilvie, p. 52.

⁷ Thurneysen, pp. 376 f.

⁸ T. D. Kendrick, *A History of the Vikings* (London, 1930), pp. 275 and 303.

⁹ 1,1: *Meyar flugo sunnan . . . orlog drýgia . . .*

¹⁰ 2,1 *Ein nam þeira Egil at veria*, etc. There is late evidence that the reborn Sigrún, renamed Kára, protected her lover Helgi in battle in the shape of a swan. See E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North* (London, 1964), pp. 217 f.

The interpretation of the northerly habitat of Scáthach, Uathach, and Aife that begs fewest questions, then, is the one that regards them as former swan-battle-maidens on a northern migration route, that is, as a native Irish version of an archaic type of battle-maiden widespread in northern Eurasia.¹

A warrior woman who instructs Cú Chulainn in the use of arms seems to be established in Old Irish heroic narrative before the 'father-slays-son' plot is assimilated to Cú Chulainn. Thurneysen notes the oddity of a hero, himself destined to die young, having the role of slayer of his own son foisted on him, and is of the opinion that this could not have happened before Cú Chulainn had become the focal point of legend to such a degree that he could absorb new themes as a matter of course.²

There is substance in this argument; but there is also a further consideration. In order to overcome a super-hero even a paramount hero must have access to a source of greater strength or superior weaponry. We saw that this was provided for in 'Sohrab and Rustam' and in some possibly dependent Russian *byliny* by resort to prayer. In the *Aided* it is provided for by a weapon with its own prior history in Celtic culture (whatever that history may have been),³ a weapon bestowed by a supernatural personage together with the skill of its use. The *gae bulga* is the decisive weapon par excellence in Old Irish heroic narrative of the *Cú Chulainn* cycle; and with it Cú Chulainn defeats another hero who (as themes were doubled and redoubled) had also been a pupil of Scáthach and learned all her feats — bar the decisive feat — namely Fer Diad in the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*.⁴

The *Aided Aenfir Aife*, then, shares with Firdusi's episode (and less emphatically with the Russian *bylina*) the notion that only the paramount hero can counter the threat of the super-hero on the frontier, and only then with some sort of help from above. Were it merely a matter of some foreign giant or monster it would be the usual cold meat served up in hero-tales with local relish to suit. The fact that the external force to be overcome is incarnate in the paramount hero's son gives the plot unique depth and poignancy.

Cú Chulainn was predestined to absorb this plot in Ireland. There was no other candidate in the offing.

To return to the dynamics of the Cú Chulainn-slays-Conlae story. As narrated in the *Aided Aenfir Aife*, the plot is flawless. Even the recognition-token inferred for the 'original' version, the ring left by the father, has been assimilated to the overriding concept, since its function now is *to calibrate the son*. Having discharged its function

¹ The most striking epic swan-battle-maiden known to me is *Ai-čürök* ('White Teal') in the Kirgiz epic of *Semetey*. *Ai-čürök's* husband *Semetey*, only son of an only son, *Manas*, has been slain and her ruthless captor *Er Kıyas* is about to kill *Semetey's* and her only son at birth, when she cows him utterly with this threat: 'Do not kill my child. If you kill him, if I do not don my white swan-mask (*ak ku kehim*) and go to (my father) *Akın-kan* and take revenge, wreaking terrible vengeance, let my name "*Ai-čürök*" wither!' V. V. Radlov, *Narechiya tyurkskikh plemen zhivushchikh v Yuzhnoy Sibiri i Dzungarskoy Stepi. Obraztsy narodnoy literatury severnykh tyurkskikh plemen : karakyrgez*, Vol. v (St Petersburg, 1885), (7), *Semätai*, 1476 ff. *Ai-čürök's* gesture is that of the irate pen defending her nestlings at the nest.

² *Helden- und Königssage*, p. 463. Baesecke, 'Indogermanische Verwandtschaft', p. 149 accepts Thurneysen's argument.

³ I take my cue from the restrained treatment given to it in K. H. Jackson, *Old Irish Tradition: A Window on the Iron Age* (Cambridge, 1964), pp. 15 f. and 16, note 1.

⁴ Thurneysen, *Helden- und Königssage*, pp. 229 ff.

in Aífe's land it is rightly never mentioned again¹ and plays no part when Cú Chulainn and Conlae come face to face.² The *geis* and the Ulstermen's code of honour accomplish everything.³ *Geis* are interpreted by Celtic scholars as objectively compelling: failure to observe *geis* ends in the deaths of those concerned. Yet two facts require mention here: (i) Conlae *observes* the *geis* and finds death nonetheless; (ii) though Conlae acts throughout in accordance with the *geis*, his actions, like those of his father, can be understood entirely in terms of honour.

By his wording of the *geis* on leaving Aífe, Cú Chulainn dooms either his son or himself in advance. This would seem to be a mechanistic *reductio ad absurdum* of honour; but before we condemn it let us ask if there is a deeper meaning.

By engendering a son with a battle-maiden, Cú Chulainn risks begetting a super-hero — a super-hero who will be a threat not only to his own paramour but also possibly to heroic society in Ulster as such. And when Conlae appears on the shores of Ulster, though he is not malevolent, he justifies Conchobar's apprehensions by annihilating much of the accumulated glory of the kingdom in the space of a few minutes.⁴ Cú Chulainn's tragedy is that he had to set conditions ensuring a son as 'heroic' as himself or even more so, and that these conditions had to lead to the death of one of them. The motivation of the *Aided Aenfir Aífe* is thus vastly superior to that of the 'Sohrab and Rustam' episode in the *Shahnameh*, in that it begs no questions — all follows compellingly from the fateful love-match with a warrior-maiden, so different from Cú Chulainn's 'wooed' or 'regular' wife.⁵ Yet Cú Chulainn wove his own fate — whereas, in a poem which stands as high again above the *Aided* as the *Aided* above 'Sohrab and Rustam' for the perfection of its action, Hildebrand had no hand in his own undoing until the mounting load on his honour crushed his great resistance to an unfatherly deed.⁶

Turning to the *Hildebrandslied* we find that the poet's unfolding of the action has none of the weaknesses that have come to light in other versions. Let us follow him on his sure path through the maze of possibilities.

No sooner have we laid down our drinking-horns and fallen silent in the hall as invited by the 'empty' second half of line 1, than we are taken *in medias res*. A duel is imminent — between two kinsmen, as their alliterating names in *-brant*, with the same meaning, proclaim — indeed father and son! Within three lines the excitement of any impending duel has mounted in giant leaps to the possibility of supreme

¹ De Vries failed to perceive this, 'Vater-Sohn-Kampf', p. 264. 'Beim Abschied gibt der Vater ein Erkennungszeichen. In der Cuchulainnsage ist von einem Daumenring (*ordnasc*) die Rede; er spielt aber im weiteren Verlauf der Handlung keine Rolle (blindes Motiv).' On page 264, note 28, however, De Vries contradicts himself: 'Er [der Ring] hat hier eine andere Funktion bekommen; sobald der Ring dem Knaben passen würde, sollte er den Vater in Irland aufsuchen.' Again, page 277: 'Der Schluss der Erzählung scheint eine mißratene Kürzung zu sein. Es gibt keine Erkennungsszene, der Ring spielt gar keine Rolle.' De Vries still did not see that the ring is a calibrator.

² Baesecke, 'Indogermanische Verwandtschaft', p. 145, momentarily contradicts himself on this point, compare p. 150.

³ Baesecke, 'Indogermanische Verwandtschaft', p. 141: 'magisches Gebot' is technically correct.

⁴ Baesecke, 'Indogermanische Verwandtschaft', p. 150, was of another opinion. 'Um welche "Ehre der Ulter", von denen nicht einer gefallen ist, mußte er den eigenen Sohn erschlagen?' he asks.

⁵ In the *Tochmarc Emire*, Emer excels all other Irish maidens in beauty of person and voice, in her skill in embroidery, in shrewdness and modest ways. Except no doubt in good looks, Emer seems to be the exact opposite of the three warrior-women. See Thurneysen, p. 384.

⁶ I am grateful to Professor Kenneth Jackson of Edinburgh University for help in this section of this article, conveyed in a letter to me of 12 May 1972 to which reference has been made earlier. He is of course not responsible for any misuse to which I may have put it.

tragedy, tragedy that will be difficult to avoid if only because the encounter is staged between two armies with a high issue to settle.

The older man, Hildebrand, speaks first in accordance with a custom widespread in heroic society.¹ As is widely appreciated by scholars, the purpose of Hildebrand's opening speech is to enquire into his opponent's standing, again in accord with widely established custom.² The poet does not beg any question here, he makes no play, even negatively, with presentiments or with 'the voice of the blood'. The unforced, truthful and pragmatic answer which Hildebrand receives, however, brings him to the same point of knowledge of his situation as we listeners had been brought to by the end of the first half of line 4. It is a master-stroke on the poet's part to make Hadubrand say as though incidentally that the possible witnesses are no more; nor is this in any way forced, since thirty years have passed at a time when men did not live long. The poet then brilliantly exploits the younger man's pride in the famous father he has never seen, in order to link Hildebrand with Theoderic, so far as we can tell for the first time in Germanic legend, the fruitful consequences of which linkage I list below (p. 836). The poet now goes on to imply that Hadubrand is a legitimate son: Hildebrand had had to leave the mother as a young married woman, and moreover she had safeguarded her reputation in exactly the same way as Penelope had safeguarded hers in the absence of her warrior husband. For the 'bower' (*būr*, 20) in which the 'young wife' (*prūt*) sat was not a house, as it is usually glossed, but an inner chamber, and indeed the nuptial chamber (compare O.E. *brýðbúr* 'thalamus'; also *Beow.*, 921, the royal bedroom). *brýd* and *búr* are linked by alliteration in a passage in the metrical paraphrase of Scripture attributed to Cædmon:

On búre ahóf brýd Abrahames
hleahor . . .³

Compare *Odyssey*, xix, 594 ff.:

ἀλλ' ἦ τοι μὲν ἐγὼν ὑπερώϊον εἰσαναβᾶσα
λέξομαι εἰς εὐνὴν, ἣ μοι στονόεσσα τέτυκται,
αἰεὶ δ' ἀάκρυσ' ἐμοῖσι πεφυρμένη, ἐξ οὗ Ὀδυσσεύς
ῥχετ' ἐποψόμενος Κακοῖλιον οὐκ ὀνομαστήν.

(Penelope, little dreaming that the man she is addressing is Odysseus) 'But I indeed will go to my upper bed-chamber and lie down on my bed which has

¹ For example, the heroes of the humble Oroch of Eastern Siberia were sticklers for etiquette on the duelling-ground. In the heroic narrative of 'Stone-hero', the older man, the slayer of Stone-hero's father, begins the exchange of taunts. In the course of their exchange he invites the young hero to strike the first blow, to which Stone-hero replies that it would be a sin to strike his senior first (V. A. Avrorin i E. P. Lebedeva, *Orochskie skazki i mifi* (Novosibirsk, 1966), pp. 156 f.).

² Compare for example *Iliad*, xxi, 148 ff., where Achilles asks Asteropaeus who he is among men — 'τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν', before they close in single combat, and Asteropaeus duly gives his pedigree. Achilles has been recognized and so does not have to do the same: but when he has felled and despoiled Asteropaeus, he exults and proclaims his own descent. Tungus heroes, always gentlemen on the battlefield, enquire after their opponent's 'sounding name' (G. M. Vasilevich, *Istoricheskiy fol'klor Evenkov* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1966)), *passim*.

³ Bosworth-Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 1 (1898), p. 133b sub *búr*. This was known to K. Bohnenberger, 'Zu den Ortsnamen', *Germanica. E. Sievers zum 75 sten Geburtstag* (Halle, 1925), p. 161. But he was bent on place-names, and his interpretation passed virtually unnoticed, and, surprisingly, left no trace in E. Karg-Gasterstedt and Th. Frings, *Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, 1 (1968), p. 1519a — more's the pity, since the next opportunity lies some hundred years ahead.

become a bed of groaning to me, ceaselessly bedewed by my tears since the day Odysseus went away to see damned Ilion that should ever be nameless.'

ὑπερώϊον overlaps with θάλαμος and μέγαρον in the sense of women's quarters; and in the sequel to this passage, so helpful to the understanding of *prūt in būre*, the bard is careful to narrate that Penelope goes up into her chamber 'not alone' (601, οὐκ οἷη) but accompanied by her handmaidens.

Lastly, in the rather lengthy reply of Hadubrand, the younger man tells the warrior opposite him that Theoderic lost his father, and he concludes with 'I fancy he can no longer be alive' or 'I dare not hope that he is still alive'.

With an oath, Hildebrand denies this, but he most tactfully avoids both a direct contradiction and all suggestion of sentimentality by means of one of the pithiest understatements of all Germanic heroic poetry and he then proffers the gift of a magnificent torque. The young man is suspicious and rejects the gift with contumely, and from his point of view justifiably: he has grounds for thinking his father dead, and the Huns, those formidable horse-archers, were known to friend and foe alike as wily.¹ Hadubrand ends with the uncompromising statement, shorn of its former hesitation, that his father is dead, in a metrically more old-fashioned line than one in *Beowulf* which conveys similar information:

'tot ist Hiltibrant, Heribrantes suno!' (l. 44)
'... Denigea léodum. Déad is Æschere ...' (l. 1323)²

The first knot in the tragic involvement of the *Hildebrandslied* has been securely tied without offence to warrior custom, nature or logic.

At this point Hadubrand has rejected Hildebrand's implication of paternity with the implication that he is perjuring himself, and he has added a gratuitous insult as to Hildebrand's style of fighting. (The insult lies not in any imputation of unfairness in fighting³ but in one of meanness coupled with cowardice, just as it was not 'unfair' of Paris in the *Iliad* to loose arrows at Menelaos from cover, but merely mean and pusillanimous: a real man would have dared face the husband he had wronged, at close range with spear and sword.⁴) Our poet ties his second knot by having Hadubrand add insult to injury, leading to Hildebrand's great heroic groan, his rejection of the imputations, and his acceptance of the inevitability of battle (lines 37-44 and 49 ff.). Although the placement of lines 46-8 in the extant text is manifestly wrong,⁵ and although, as I believe, the loss of a speech or

¹ See W. Mohr, 'Geschichtserlebnis im altgermanischen Heldenliede' in *Zur germanisch-deutschen Heldensage*, hrsg. K. Hauck (Bad Homburg, 1961) [revised reprint of *Zeitschrift für Deutschwissenschaft und Unterricht* (1943), pp. 35 ff.], pp. 83 f.

² The (main) alliteration and therefore (main) emphasis on the adjective and not on the name comes nearer to our own rhetoric.

³ I must agree with my tutor, the late Frederick Norman, who observed — especially with regard to the postulated 'foul blow' by Hadubrand in the missing ending of the old *Hildebrandslied* — that there can have been no such notion as a 'foul' in the Age of Migrations (apart, perhaps, from ritual battles such as *hólmganga*, with pre-ordained rules), and that such can only have come in with the Age of Chivalry, to which the original *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied* (with death of Alebrand) belonged.

⁴ And so says Helen, *Iliad*, III, 432 f.

⁵ As many have argued. S. Beyschlag, however, is surely mistaken in thinking that lines 46-8 belong after line 57, merely because lines 56-7 and 46-8 are concerned with Hildebrand's armour. 'Hiltibrant enti Hadubrant untar heriun tuem', *Festgabe für L. L. Hammerich* (Copenhagen, 1962), pp. 14 ff. At 56-7 the reference to both suits of armour is a means of expressing the utter finality and irrevocability of the duel which Hildebrand now accepts, as a result of which (as in the Norse *hólmganga*) one combatant will live, the other die; whereas the purport of lines 46-8 is to throw doubt on Hildebrand's implied situation as an exile. These two groups of lines are incongruous as statement and counter-statement — and we must accept the fact that lines 46-8 are floating loose.

speeches is highly probable, no questions are begged by the poet so far as the dynamics of the plot are concerned. The necessity to fight and win is born within the souls of the two men, and of the two the elder is the less able to hold back at the end. The overwhelming compulsion under which Hildebrand acts is more than clear in terms of the lay itself; but it gains in definition from comparison with the Old Irish *Aided* where, as was seen, Cú Chulainn also slays his son in the name of honour. Truly, it was very dishonouring for the heroes of Ulster to be tied up one after the other by a boy, and something had to be done to set it to rights. Yet Cú Chulainn knew whom he was facing (pp. 828 ff., above) and he knew that the trap of honour in which his son was caught was of his, Cú Chulainn's, own devising, even if it were dictated by honour made absolute. That the two heroes in the Irish narrative are no more than puppets of honour places them nevertheless on a higher literary level than the puppets of a pro-Iranian deity conceived as fate: but, again, it places them on a lower level than Hildebrand and Hadubrand, who far from being puppets are human beings caught in a tragic web of circumstances interacting with their formed characters.

Indications that the story of the father who slew his son was attached to the Germanic heroic tradition at a single stroke are as strong in the *Hildebrandslied* as in the *Shahnameh* and the *Aided Aenfir Aife*. The poet of the *Hildebrandslied* was inspired when he rendered the time in which father and son never met, as the time of the father's exile; for all else follows from this equation. First, there is the reversal of the heroes' situation on the frontier, since now it is the son who stands ready to defend his native land and the father who comes from foreign parts. Second, the poet reaped the following advantages simultaneously:

1. The protagonists (whose names so far as the evidence goes were new to Theodoric's legend) were linked cyclically with Theodoric in the situation of his Return.
2. The theme of the father who slew his son was enriched by the theme of exile.
3. The son, the offspring of a regular marriage broken by an adverse political fate, was automatically legitimized. Legitimacy was of great importance in Germanic society: the father-son relationship was the central strand of the life-line of the kindred, as is shown in such expressions as *sunufatarungo* (*Hild.*, 4) and *gisunfader* (*Hel.*, 1176), in which 'father' and 'son' are fused.
4. The fact that it is the father's only lawful son who is slain deepens the tragedy.
5. Attachment of the plot to the Theodoric cycle at this juncture increases the tension, since Theodoric has returned with an army in order to fight his way back to kingship.
6. The fact that Hadubrand has always been at home makes any physical token of recognition otiose on his side. Recognition between father and son must rest securely on mental and moral, not material factors.

After these advantages a disadvantage of the new situation of the *Hildebrandslied* must be mentioned which the poet passes over in silence, as he is entitled to do if he can get away with it. How comes it that Hildebrand's son and heir has not been eliminated by Odoacer, but on the contrary figures in an apparently trusted and prominent role in his army? Various plausible answers could no doubt be found to these questions, yet the text that we have gives no hint, any more than it hints what issue has brought the two champions together or what the status of their confrontation might be. Judged by the norm, however, the unexplained survival and importance of this scion of a deadly enemy of Odoacer (line 25), comes nearest to anything that we may call a flaw in the plot of this poem. Hadubrand was available for extirpation in the *būr* (20).

What follows Hildebrand's acceptance of the inevitability of battle continues masterly. It is a wonderfully foreshortened depiction first of long-range (missile) battle, then of battle hand-to-hand. Since 'shield' is varied in this passage, and *staim bort* fits effortlessly into the epic series O.E. *gúðbord*: *wígbord*, it must be a kenning for 'shield', and so *chludun* must mean 'resounding' — resounding because the warriors have made their shields 'step together' (65 *stoptun*), that is, have stepped towards each other with shields at the ready until these clash against each other with a clang, and the warriors take each other's strain and measure. Five and a half lines (63–68a) have telescoped time to the point where a new phase of combat must ensue, since the linden shields are now useless. The next phase must be the wielding of their swords with two hands on the hilt: but this might soon give way to wrestling, as in the Persian, Russian, and Irish, with the use of knives not excluded . . . Then father and son would be face to face indeed . . .

As others have seen and said before, the *Hildebrandslied* presents not only a radical transformation of the broad plot implied by the Persian, Russian, and Irish versions, but also a highly consistent poem that unfolds with supreme inevitability. There can surely be no poem in world literature the exposition and development of which are terser and more compelling. The beauties and innovations of its style have been sensitively gathered together with new insights of his own by Professor Ingo Reifenstein.¹ The ethos according to which a father slays his son in the name of honour has all but escaped question.² Are we entitled to question it, lacking the poet's ending?³ — There may have been more to it than merely honour.

It ill beseems a scholar to set up as an examiner of poets; but in view of the mixed opinions that have been expressed in the past on the dynamics of the four versions of the 'good-father-who-slays-a-good-son-in-battle', I cannot resist the temptation to bestow *under this head alone* Gamma-minus (i.e. Delta 'with compensation') on Firdusi; Gamma-plus on the maker of 'Il'ya and Sokol'nik'; Beta-plus on the creator of 'Conlae and Cú Chulainn' and an undoubted Alpha on the poet of the *Hildebrandslied*.

Advocates of Firdusi may well point out that the very blindness or even idiocy of the fate that overwhelms Sohrab and Rustam was beautiful to eleventh-century Persians and ask what sort of scholar am I to apply twentieth-century western European standards to him and condemn him for falling short. My answer would be that were I a Persian scholar I should apply the standards relevant to Firdusi's time and place and duly glow inwardly at such profundities as the paternal feelings of fish: yet even then I would try to assess with a hard eye whether Firdusi were worth my time. But the type of investigation proposed was a comparativist approach in which, if possible, supra-national standards are applicable, those of what we are

¹ 'Zum Stil und Aufbau des Hildebrandsliedes', *Sprachkunst als Weltgestaltung. Festschrift für Herbert Seidler* (Salzburg-Munich, 1966), pp. 229 ff.

² One questioner was Professor W. Schröder: 'Jeder germanische Held mußte nicht notwendig siegen und töten.' ('Hadubrand's tragische Blindheit und der Schluß des Hildebrandsliedes', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 37 (1963), 496.)

³ The dynamics of the original *Jüngeres Hildebrandslied* with the death of Alebrand were those of its own century, the thirteenth. They therefore cannot throw any light on those of the old *Hildebrandslied* at its missing end.

accustomed to call 'world literature', a concept that was evolved not in medieval Persia but in modern western Europe and according to which, rightly or wrongly, human character, human freedom and human action are rated more highly than the workings of magic or of fate. Subjected to these tests — which in medieval Persian eyes might have seemed mere conventions — the 'Sohrab and Rustam' episode came out worst, the *Hildebrandslied* best.¹

A. T. HATTO

LONDON

¹ When this contribution was already in the hands of the Editor, I learned of W. Hoffmann's strongly argued 'Das Hildebrandslied und die indogermanischen Vater-Sohn-Kampf-Dichtungen', *Paul-Braune-Beiträge*, 92 (1970), 26 ff. Since the latter concerns itself almost exclusively with questions of genetic theory in their bearing on the *Hildebrandslied* and but little with dynamics and there is in fact scarcely any overlap with my contribution, I have decided to leave this as it stands. The only possible bone of contention which I can see is that whereas Professor Hoffmann denies that the *Hildebrandslied* is a member of the group that can legitimately be postulated for the Persian, Russian, and Old Irish pieces, I (like others before me) believe that *if* the *Hildebrandslied* had a source that was a member of that group, all of its thematic discrepancies *could* follow from the master-stroke of a great bard bedding the plot down in the Theoderic-cycle. On reflection — and much credit is due to Dr Hoffmann for making us reflect — I do not see how certainty can be arrived at either way. Fortunately it is a point of lesser importance than the aesthetic appreciation of the extant texts. Admittedly, we shall never know just how great a poet the great poet of the *Hildebrandslied* was.