

Irish Perspectives on Heimdallr

In a succinct but thorough entry “Heimdall(l)” in *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid*, Folke Ström (1961) made a non-controversial observation, but one with important methodological consequences for students of Nordic mythology: Heimdallr was not, to the best of our knowledge, the object of a cult, but belongs to the world of myth.¹ In another capsule judgment, Jan de Vries (1962) headed a nonetheless rather long entry for Heimdallr in *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* with the summary statement: the etymology is opaque (“undurchsichtig”). But if we heed Polomé’s call (1989, 55–58) to break our fixation on etymology (like an atavistic belief that knowledge of the name gives power over the bearer) and investigate the entire file of a given divinity—“myths, rites, cults, toponymic and anthroponymic data . . . symbols, consecrated animals and so forth”—we are then held to a quite limited body of evidence in the instant case. Limited, but still tantalizing. Heimdallr has generated a considerable quantity of ink, as much a consequence of the scholarly problems we have set ourselves as of agreement with Ellis Davidson (1969, 105–7) that Heimdallr is the most impressive after the great gods and Loki.² He has been variously interpreted as the god of the heavens, of light, the father of the gods, an emanation of an older god, an equivalent of Varuna, Mithra and Janus, an embodiment of the world tree Yggdrasil, most recently the god of fire (Schröder 1967).³

Our almost exclusively literary evidence can be assigned to some externally determined, rather than inherent, categories. Most numerous, we have the references in the *Edda* and other works of Snorri Sturluson. In a strictly narrative

1. A more recent overview in Polomé 1987; more strictly etymological concerns are treated in exemplary fashion and with exemplary purpose in Polomé 1990, 452–53.

2. Fuller treatment in Davidson 1964, 172–76.

3. Schröder returns to the earlier suggested parallel with Indian Agni, on the very slim evidence of the frequent Indian description of Agni as “descendant of waters,” and a Norse *heiti*, “sævar niðr,” that is not conclusively shown to be a reference to Heimdall; see *infra* for a review of Heimdallr’s supposed wave-mothers, and of Snorri’s and the skalds’ view of the elements as siblings, which further lightens the weight of Schröder’s argument.

work, such as *Gylfaginning*, we have come to recognize a degree of subjectivity in Snorri's accounts, whether we go on to identify this as the result of error, rationalization, or attempted synthesis. An arguably more objective body of data is the list of names, descriptors, and circumlocutions for Heimdallr that are cited in *Skáldskaparmál*; it may be thought to have been both less open to authorial manipulation and well known to his public, especially his fellow poets. The other primary source for Heimdallr is the Poetic Edda, and its evidence can be judged to complement Snorri's—at least nothing in these two main sources is directly contradictory. A third category of references to Heimdallr would be allusions in the poems of other skalds, although here, too, we are in the main limited to the citations and paraphrases in Snorri, particularly of Úlfr Uggason's tenth-century *Húsdrápa*, which, as a poetic tour de force purportedly describing carved wall panels in Óláfr Høskuldsson's new house, portrays select scenes rather than full stories.

The larger constraint on further scrutiny of the Heimdallr file is one common to most of our early Norse mythological testimony. Theonyms, even when successfully interpreted, may neither reveal the original conception of the divine figures nor describe adequately their subsequent early medieval functions/spheres of influence, e.g., *Týr* < *Tīwar* < IE **dyeus* 'luminous diurnal sky'. Further, many functional domains seem to have been the field of action of more than a single god, and a degree of overlapping between some scholars' conception of Heimdallr and Freyr is a case in point. Our perspective here is perhaps determined, to a degree unconsciously, by a desire to impose more order—an *interpretatio graeca* or *romana*—than the evidence will bear. Some of this functional duplication may have resulted from the Æsir/Vanir fusion, if we see a nuclear historicity here and accept the continuing influence of an Old European mythology, in a northern guise, after the proto-Germanic penetration of Scandinavia. Another trend that we might presume, if not adequately prove, is that gods who became the focus of cultic observance would, over time, gain functional strength at the expense of those that did not. Here, other factors could also come into play, such as geographical preferences, e.g., very roughly, Freyr associated with fertility in the East, Þórr in the West, or even vocational affiliations, e.g., poets under Óðinn's aegis, controlling the poetic medium, in part determining the textual record, and celebrating their patron in language as frequently disguised as he.

If, then, Heimdallr's file, in terms of categories if not actual volume, is a rather spare one, if etymological leads end in an impasse, and more general limitations attend our search for a suitable method of more accurately mapping Heimdallr in his several contours, where is one to turn? The comparative method, with its seductive selectivity, has been available since its assumption into mythology from philology, and not unsurprisingly Heimdallr has been matched up with legendary figures from other cultural communities heirs to the Indo-European patrimony. What *is* surprising is how often the scholarly gaze has turned toward

the Celtic lands. While Heimdallr's attributes and "biography" will be more fully catalogued below, one can here cite Dumézil's efforts to make Heimdallr's nine mothers the waves of the sea, and him, thus, the grandson of Ægir, ruler of the sea. This conclusion was rather shakily buttressed by late and suspect Welsh testimony that the ninth wave was called "the ram," the animal most surely associated with the Norse god. Since the Rígr of *Rígsþula*, who fathers the three estates of men, is identified as Heimdallr in the preface to the poem, and since *Rígr* can be plausibly derived from OIr. *rí* (gen. *ríg*), Chadwick could cite the Irish god of the sea, Manannán mac Lir, as a prototype or parallel, calling him, too, a visitor to people's homes for the purpose of begetting children. Young found other Irish accounts of undersea conception. Again on a point of detail, Turville-Petre focused on Heimdallr's purported death by means of another's head, to then call attention to the Irish epic hero Conall Cernach, who had mixed an opponent's brains with lime to create a souvenir, but then lost his trophy to another who used it as a missile that, embedded in the head of King Conchobar, would eventually cause his death. On another occasion, notes Turville-Petre, Conall, a late arrival in the hall, would throw a severed head across a banquet table to gash the lips of its owner's brother and thus secure the champion's portion.⁴

The comparative method will also be exploited in this article and the chief evidence will be from legendary Ireland, but the methodological objective is to locate and isolate a data set that is both more comprehensive than the above atomistic detail, and internally consistent in Irish tradition — a dense Irish file if you will — with a view to presenting one or more multifaceted figures for comparison with Heimdallr. More specifically, attention will be turned to two apparently discrete, but not unrelated, personages in legendary Irish history, the first a step down from Heimdallr in the hierarchy of beings and literary mode of deployment, the other a step up to a still powerful, although somewhat coarsened, major divinity in lightly euhemerized form. As general familiarity with Heimdallr, for all his mystery, may be expected of this article's readers, his textual file will be rather summarily reviewed, permitting fuller consideration of the Irish evidence.

Drawing on the communal store of knowledge, which does not preclude poetic invention at some stage of its development, Snorri lists the following ways to refer to Heimdallr:

Svá, at kalla hann son níu mœðra eða vörð guða, svá sem fyrr er ritað, eða Hvíta ás, Loka dólgr, mensæki Freyju. Heimdalar hofuð heitir sverð; svá er sagt, at hann var lostinn manns hofði í gognum. Um hann er kveðit í Heimdalgaldri, ok er síðan kallat hofuð mjötuðr Heimdalar; sverð heitir manns mjötuðr. Heimdalar er eigandi Gulltopps; hann er ok tilsækir Vágaskers ok Singasteins; þá deildi hann við Loka um Brísingamen;

4. The extensive earlier scholarship on Heimdallr, of which the studies this century by Chadwick, Cour, Dumézil, von Friesen, Holthausen, Jessen, Much, Pering, Ohlmarks, Pipping, Rosén, de Vries, and Young serve more as way-markers than definitive statements, is handily characterized in Lindow 1988. Turville-Petre 1964 stays close to the textual evidence and is a useful antidote to much earlier speculation. Briefer recent comment on Heimdallr in Boyer 1983, 125; Schach 1983, 98–99.

hann heitir ok Vindhlér. Úlfr Uggason kvað í Húsdrápu langa stund eptir þeiri frásögu, ok er þess þar getið, er þeir vǫru í sela líkjum, ok sonr Óðins. (*Skáldskaparmál* chap. 16, Jónsson 1931, 98–99, orthography normalized)

[By calling him son of nine mothers, guardian of the gods, as was written above, or the white As, Loki's enemy, recoverer of Freyia's necklace. A sword is called Heimdall's head; it is said he was struck through with a man's head. He is the subject of the poem *Heimdallargaldr*, and ever since the head has been called Heimdall's doom: man's doom is an expression for sword. Heimdall is the owner of Gulltopp. He is also the visitor to Vagasker and Singastein; on that occasion he contended with Loki for the Brisingamen. He is also known as Vindhler. Ulf Uggason composed a long passage in *Húsdrápa* based on this story, and it is mentioned there that they were in the form of seals. Also son of Odin.] (Faulkes 1987, 75–76)

On the basis of other evidence we are probably justified in seeing a slip on Snorri's part in the equation of man's doom = sword. As he makes clear elsewhere: "Heimdallr's head" is a kenning for sword, "Heimdallr's sword" a kenning for head (*Háttatal* 7, Faulkes 1991, 7; *Skáldskaparmál* chap. 87, Jónsson 1931, 190). Much of this information is corroborated in *Gylfaginning* or complemented in *Völuspá*, e.g., Heimdallr as the warder of the gods, residing in Himinbjörg, near the rainbow bridge Bifröst, ready to blow his far-sounding horn, Gjallarhorn. At Ragnarök, Heimdallr will sound his horn, but will fall with Loki, earlier opponents meeting a last, mutually fatal time. The warder of the gods is described by Snorri as needing less sleep than a bird, capable of seeing a hundred leagues by day or night. He continues: "Hann heyrir ok þat er gras vex á iqrðu eða ull á sauðum ok allt þat er hæra lætr" [He can also hear grass growing on the earth and wool on sheep and everything that sounds louder than that] (*Gylfaginning* chap. 27; Lorenz 1984, 360; Faulkes 1987, 25). Reference to the god who hears everything louder than silence and has a horn heard in all worlds creates a kind of functional bracketing effect on a cosmic scale, from minimum to maximum. The analogy "grass is to earth as wool is to sheep" is a common one, and has Norse antecedents in the primal giant Ymir's hair at the origin of trees and their foliage.⁵ As Snorri remarks, hair may be called "forest" or by the name of any tree (*Skáldskaparmál* chap. 87, Jónsson 1931, 191). Yet another kind of metonym is illustrated in the Heimdallr corpus, when we read (*Völuspá* 27) that Heimdallr left in pawn at the foot of Yggdrasil his *hljóð*, 'hearing' but also 'ear'. Snorri interpreted the situation more rationally, saying that it was Heimdallr's horn that was left, used to drink from Mímir's well (*Gylfaginning* chap. 8; further comment on this substitution, *infra*). But even this rationalization illustrates metonymical thinking in the substitution of an instrument for a faculty, what was sounded and heard for what heard the sounds. On the analogy of Óðinn's pledge of an eye for knowledge of runes (and, one might add, perhaps a portion of his manhood for knowledge

5. *Gylfaginning* chap. 8 (Lorenz 1984, 158–59), citing *Grímnismál* 40 (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 65). The vegetation : earth ↔ wool : sheep equation forms the basis of the Irish king Cormac's well-known judgment and finds its way into Norse prince literature (Sayers 1985).

of Freyja's magic, *seiðr*), Turville-Petre convincingly claims that Heimdallr's clair-audience is the faculty obtained in this exchange (1964, 149). Just how willingly the substitution was undertaken is a question that remains to be addressed. Dumézil has called such surrenders "mutilations qualifiantes" and, more recently, Picard, in a discussion of lower body and sexual impairment, has neatly summarized: "the specific power or function of a given mythological character is confirmed or stressed by the loss of the organ which is normally the instrument of this function" (1989, 369).

As all the gods are implicated in Ragnarøk, it is Heimdallr's pairing with Loki that may be significant. This combat was foreshadowed on one occasion in the sea-battle with Loki as seals. In the poem, Úlfr refers to Freyja's dwarf-made necklace (girdle in the minds of some) as *hafnýra*, which seems a *heiti* for "amber" (source, colour, shape; some anagrammatic play on Icel. *raf?*), and a suggestion of a Scandinavian, i.e., Baltic, origin for the episode.⁶ As eared seals (Otariidae) are not found in North Atlantic waters, the two divine combatants must have taken the form of earless seals (Phocidae), and Heimdallr's fundamental disfiguration, ear loss, would not have occurred then. There is yet another confrontation between Heimdallr and Loki, where Loki comes off the winner, and this is in the eddic poem *Locasenna*.⁷ In this review of his fellow gods' indiscretions and foibles, significantly undertaken when they are out of Ásgarðr and guests in Ægir's hall, Loki accuses the goddess Gefjon of having exchanged her sexual favours for a necklace from "sveinn inn hvíti" (st. 20, Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 100). As Freyja is also called *Gefn* 'gift', Gefjon might be seen as Freyja *in potentia*. Although admittedly a speculative exercise, one could expand on what Klingenberg (1983, 144) has called the "mythic abbreviations" of *Locasenna* (*Aufreihlied* might be another generic descriptor) by suggesting that Heimdallr, if it is he who is meant, has bartered or promised a portion or all of the love goddess Freyja's necklace, recovered from the sea (the natural element to which amber returns?), for sexual access to the tutelary divinity of women who died virgins. This betrayal of trust has been punished, in a homological inversion, by making him the warder of the gods, now on guard for the security and integrity of all.

At a later point in the poem, Loki jibes at Heimdallr:

Pegi þú, Heimdallr! þér var í árdaga
 iþ lióta líf um lagit;
 aurgo baki þú munt æ vera
 oc vaca vorðr goða.

(*Locasenna* 48, Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 106)

6. This identification of *hafnýra* is supported by the related reference *hafgall* 'sea gall', i.e., 'amber' (Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, "Addenda," s.v. "hafgall").

7. Typologically, Þórr's arrival in Ægir's hall can be compared to Conall Cernach's in the Irish *Scéla mucce Meic Dathó* (Thurneysen 1935); for another comparison concerning flyting, see Sayers 1991. On flyting in general, see now Parks 1990 and Swenson 1991.

[Hush thee, Heimdall, to a hateful life
wast doomed in days of yore:
with a stiff back thou must stand alway
and wake as the watch of the gods.]

(Hollander 1962, 100)

Hollander's "stiff back" [aurgo baki] has been rendered by others as "wet, clammy" (Klingenberg 1983, 144; Polomé 1987, 251). The term, in fact, meant "clayey, muddy" and is otherwise used of Hœnir, who is called *aurkonungr*.⁸ Is this due to the sentinel's proximity to the rainbow bridge Bifröst? Rather more tentatively, I note an allusion in *Skírnismál* 28 that suggests Heimdallr may have had some kind of highly visible facial disfigurement, since he is cited as a reference point in a context of ugliness. Could this have resulted from the fight with Loki or the loss of the ear?⁹

As Hœnir seems to counterpoint Loki in other episodes, e.g., helping to establish accord between the Æsir and Vanir (*Gylfaginning* chap. 11, Jónsson 1931, 30), the story of Hreiðmarr and his otter son (*Skáldskaparmál* chap. 47, Jónsson 1931, 126–28), one may question whether there is not some interference between Heimdallr and Hœnir in our extant records.¹⁰ In a larger context, one may suggest that Loki seeks to undermine Ásgarðr both from within and with outside aid. Hœnir seeks to neutralize his schemes internally, while Heimdallr guards against external enemies. In the final conflict, traitor and sentinel cancel each other out, while the arbitrator Hœnir survives to prophesy the new fortunes of gods and men in Gimlé. It is also Heimdallr, the discerning sentinel, who suggests the expedient of Þórr disguising himself as a bride with Freyja's necklace (parodic sacrifice of virility in order to exercise it more forcefully), as a means to recover his hammer (*Þrymsqviða* 15). Despite the attention that scholars have called to the god's Van affinities, we should not lose sight of the clear (although commonplace) ascription of paternity to Óðinn.¹¹

8. Professor Hermann Pálsson points out that the "stiff back" interpretation is based on an identification of the adjective as *órðigr*. He goes on to speculate on possible word play: "on the one hand *órðgu* (< *órðigr* 'straight, rigid', the central consonant in the cluster *órðgu* would naturally disappear) and *órgu* (< *argr* 'depraved, perverse'), suggesting a homosexual propensity" (personal communication). This would accord well with other countercharges against Loki in *Locasenna*. See, too, the discussion of *Rígr*, infra.

9. In *Vǫlospá in scamma* 7 (= *Hyndlolióð* 35, Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 294), the positive picture of Heimdallr includes the epithet *naðgofgan mann*, with variants *náð-*, *nadd-*, *-bofgann*. As the first element alliterates, one hesitates with radical textual emendation. 'Nail-resplendent' (*naddr*) could refer to rivets holding a metallic lip and other trim on a horn; in *Grógaldr* the term is used of a giant, father of a woman called *Menglǫð* 'Necklace Glad'. Still, more general personal qualities seem meant in this context. Less likely is *náðr* 'adder, snake', despite the serpents at the foot of Yggdrasil where Heimdallr left his horn.

10. Possible Celtic parallels to Hœnir are pursued in Sayers 1992b.

11. Confusing the issue is the tag in *Þrymsqviða* 15 concerning Heimdallr's prophetic ability: "vissi hann vel fram, sem vanir aðrir" (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 113). But does this necessarily mean that he was of the Vanir, or simply that he shared the talent with the others, the Vanir?

Aside from remarks about his height and sacrality (*heilagr*), the other principal attributes of Heimdallr that have not thus far been detailed include his affinities with the ram (cf. hearing wool grow, *supra*) and his role as Rígr in *Rígsþula* (cf. the phrase *megir Heimdalar* ‘sons of Heimdallr’, *Vǫlospá* 1; *sif sifiaðan*, *Hyndlolióð* 43 = *Vǫlospá in scamma* 15; Hollander 1962, 139: “in sib with all sires”), where some have seen the coalescence of two traditions. At one point (*Gylfaginning* chap. 15) Snorri says that he is called *Hallinskíði*, *Gullintanni*, and goes on to gloss the latter term by saying that he had yellow teeth. That Snorri and others may have been unsure about the first term is evidenced not only by the absence of a paraphrase but also by other manuscript readings or references which give *hallinskíði*, *hjálmuskíði*. The preferred interpretation is an allusion to the rearward curving horns of the ram, although Turville-Petre visualizes an attribute “of leaning stick(s)” (1964, 151; see further *infra*).

A last body of evidence concerning Heimdallr is more indirect in nature, and is the list of *heiti* found in *Skáldskaparmál*:

Hrútr, ofrhyrningr,
hornumskváli,
gumarr, hornglóinn.
ok gjaldhróinn,
hveðurr, hallinskíði,
berr, hornhróinn
ok heimdali,
bekri, miðjungur,
blær, mǫrðr ok veðr.

(Jónsson 1931, 210)¹²

Faulkes translates manfully:

[A] ram [is called]: mighty-horn, horn-squealer, *gumar*, glowing-horn and shining-horn, teg, Hallinskidi, berry, wretched-horn and Heimdali, tup, middler, bleater, Mord and wether. (Faulkes 1987, 164)

We may then conclude with Turville-Petre that “it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Heimdall . . . was associated with the ram” (1964, 151). Thus, the horns which the ram uses in combat recall the horn that head-struck Heimdallr will sound as the call to the final combat, or, pawned or surrendered for clair-audience, could be used to drink from the well of wisdom.

The above review has illustrated that there are breaks in the narrative evidence for the Heimdallr story, most apparent in the possibly related episodes with Freyja’s necklace, Loki, and Gefjon. Another major loss is the poem *Heimdalar-galdr*, an incantatory poem to judge by the title, of which a single, relatively

12. Orthography normalized. The list illustrates how poets could draw on dialect and specialized vocabularies, as well as myth: *vǫþurr* and *gumarr* are thought to be Swedish terms, the latter the more recent. *Mǫrðr* would mean “marten” to a Norwegian and probably to an Icelander, even though the animal was not native. If we accept de Vries’ proposed root, IE *mer-* ‘glimmering, glittering’, it may have been a euphemistic term highlighting the animal’s coat; applied to the ram, it could refer to the coat or horns (cf. *hornglóinn* and the discussion, *infra*).

uninformative strophe is preserved in *Skáldskaparmál* chap. 16. Leaving the question of the etymology of the name *Heimdallr* and other epithets for a later discussion, we may now turn to Irish evidence for several of the motifs and functional areas that are prominent in the Heimdallr file.

In my judgment, Turville-Petre spotted an important clue in his reference to the Irish epic hero, Conall Cernach, but the centre of gravity for this figure does not lie in the two head-related incidents (brain-ball and thrown head) which he cites. Conall Cernach displays a formal evolutionary similarity to Heimdallr in that he may be thought to have suffered a degree of functional attrition, or at a minimum, diminution in narrative importance, as Cú Chulainn assumed paramount status in the Ulster cycle of texts as the champion and defender of the province. Cú Chulainn, Conall Cernach, and Lóegaire Búadach are the three most eminent heroes, but the latter two often serve only as foils to enhance the former's status, when they come off second best in a variety of heroic trials. Conall figures as a principal character in a limited number of texts; nonetheless, a consistent, albeit complex, picture emerges of this epic hero.

In a sequence of descriptive vignettes which make up the report of a scout to a band of raiders in the tale *Togail bruidne Da Derga* [The destruction of Da Derga's hostel], Conall is described as follows:

At-chonnarc fer n-and i n-imdae cumdachdae as caíme di laechaib Hérenn. Brat cas corca immi. Gilithir snechta indala grúadh dó, breicdeirgithir sían a ngrúad n-aile. Is glaisidir buga indala súil dó, duibithir druimne duíl in tsúil aile. Méit clíab búana a ndosbili find forórda fil fair. Benaíd braine a dá imdae. Is caisithir reithi copad. Cía dofortae míach do chnoib dergfuiscib for a mullach ní foíchred cnoí díb for lár. Claideb órduirn ina láim. Scíath cróderg ro brecaid do semandaib findruine iter eclanda oir. Sleg fota thredruimneach, reimithir cuing n-imechtair a crand fil indti. Samailte 7 rl. (Knott 1936, 29)

[I saw a man there in an ornamented dining compartment, who was the fairest of the warriors of Ireland. A fleecy crimson cloak about him. As white as the snow one of the cheeks on him, as freckled-red as the foxglove the other cheek. One of his two eyes is as blue as a hyacinth, as black as a beetle's back the other eye. The measure of a reaping basket his bushy tree (of) fair, very blond (hair) that is on him. It strikes the edge of his two hips. It is as fleecy as a tufted ram. Though a sack of bountiful (?) red nuts were poured out over the top of his head, not a nut of them would fall to the ground. A gold-hilted sword in his hand. A blood-red shield, dotted with rivets of white metal (tin-copper alloy) between plates of gold. A long, three-ridged spear, as thick as an outer yoke (of a miller's team?) the shaft that is on it. He is like etc.]¹³

13. See below for other descriptions of Conall. *Copad* here seems derived from *copp* 'tuft'; see Stokes' rendering in Knott's glossary, s.v. "rethe," for a contrary view. Rams' horns were sought after by comb-makers, another reinforcing tie between hair and wool(-bearers) (*The Triads of Ireland*, Meyer 1906b, no. 117). This reading of the second component of *dergfuisc* is very tentative; the *f*- may be a hyper-corrected form of a supposedly lenited *f*- in a base word *aisc* meaning 'generosity, gift'. As well as meaning 'red', *derg* was a variant spelling for *derc* 'hole, eye', by extensive 'berry, nut'. *Findruine*, a frequent material in the descriptions of arms and other military gear, has generally been rendered 'white gold'. On the basis of the relative value of the objects made of it and the degree of hardness required by their use, Scott makes a convincing case for an alloy of tin and copper (1981).

The formulaic description breaks off in conscious mid-phrase in the manuscript, and is followed by an identification by one of the raiders that this is Conall Cernach, and a description of the havoc he will wreak—his spear will give drinks of poison, etc.—when battle is joined.

The portrait, flamboyant in a rather different way than the Norse *heiti* or kennings, is typical of this Irish descriptive sub-genre in its organization, high chromatic contrast, attention to head and hair, reliance on the equative adjective for similes, etc., but offers an interesting nexus of motifs. There is the explicit comparison of the warrior to a ram (*reithe* a poetic, elevated or otherwise charged term for the more common *molt*); the implicit equivalence ram's wool : tree's foliage : man's blond hair; more indirect allusion in the earlier use of *cas* 'fleecy' for his cloak; and, in general, reference to healthy, even luxuriant, organic growth and human material prosperity: rich fleeces, summer flowers, reaping and milling, ripened nuts. We should also note the contrast between his two cheeks, the one whiter than his fair hair, and between his two eyes.

To a degree, the marginalization of Conall that was referred to above may have been part of the original conception of this hero. He is consistently cast in the role of a sentinel, sharp-eared observer, or resolver/regrouper/rescuer/avenger, arriving relatively late in a tale from the border or shore.¹⁴ In the "Macgnímtratha" [Boyhood deeds] of Cú Chulainn, recounted by Fergus mac Róich in *Táin bó Cúailnge* [The cattleraid of Cooley], Conall is on sentinel duty on the Ulster frontier when the youthful Cú Chulainn makes his first precocious foray as an armed warrior. Conall is there to repel and warn of enemies, and to receive and escort poets. With a typical ruse, Cú Chulainn slings a stone to break the swingle-tree of Conall's chariot (the yoke, causing a dislocated shoulder, for which see *infra*, in another recension). This obliges him to return to the fortress and allows the young hero to leave the territory (O'Rahilly 1976, lines 671–90). At a later point in *Togail bruidne Da Derga*, the fated king Conaire hears a noise outside the banquet hall, but it is Conall who identifies raiders (Knott 1936, line 1400). In another tale, *Táin bó Froích* [The cattleraid of Fróech], Fróech meets Conall while on his way to the Alps (perhaps earlier Alba, 'Scotland') to recover stolen cattle, his wife and children. On their arrival in enemy territory, they are warned of a serpent that guards the city, but when they approach, the serpent surprisingly jumps inoffensively into Conall's girdle (Meid 1970, lines 303–51). Anne Ross (1967, 150–54) has linked this episode, and Conall's epithet, *Cernach*, generally 'victorious' but also 'angled, cornered; plate-bearing' (see *infra*), to the antlered Gaulish deity Cernunnos, represented in rock carvings and on the Gundestrup

14. A composite biography for Conall can be assembled from the summaries of Ulster cycle tales in Thurneysen 1921. He is sent as a scout with Bricriu in *Compert Con Culainn* (Hamel 1933). He collects tribute beyond the borders of Ulster, raises a navy, and regroups fleeing forces in *Cath Ruis na Ríg* (Hogan 1892). Conall takes vengeance for Cú Chulainn (*Aided Con Culainn*, Hamel 1933). In *Togail bruidne Da Derga*, the hall is said to have seven entrances and the raiders fear that Conall will meet them at each one (par. 98). Other tales where Conall figures are cited below.

cauldron, who holds there a ram-headed serpent, interpreted as a dual sign of death and fertility/wealth. In one of the tales cited by Turville-Petre, *Scéla mucce Meic Dathó* [The tale of Mac Dathó's pig] (Thurneysen 1935), Conall resolves the contention in the banquet hall over the *curadmír*, champion's portion, when as a latecomer to a feast he verbally bests and faces down the Connacht warrior, Cet mac Mágach, who plays an important role in Conall's birth-tale, just as Conall is the chief agent in Cet's death-tale, two stories to which we shall return below.

The lists of epic tales that qualified Irish poets were expected to know included a *Compert Chonaill Cernaig* [The conception of Conall Cernach], but the story has not been preserved in full form. Summaries, representing variant versions, do exist in other narrative matter, such as the tract *Cóir anmann* [The appropriateness of names], which explains both the name *Conall* (fancifully) and the epithet *cernach* (Stokes 1897, no. 251). Although Conall's mother, Findchoem, is on occasion called Conchobar's sister and daughter of the druid Cathbad, and his father was the Ulster poet Ameirgin, his mother must have had Connacht affiliations, since it is prophesied that he will wreak destruction on his mother's kin (cf. Heimdallr, son of Óðinn, born of giantesses). This prompts the Connacht warrior Cet mac Mágach to trample on the infant, leaving him with a wry neck. Conall then bears the epithet *cláen* 'crooked, slanted',¹⁵ which complements one of the meanings of *cernach*, as referring to the angle of the head and neck. Each of the three pre-eminent Ulster heroes had a head-related defect, Cú Chulainn a squint (or supernumerary pupils), Lóegaire a stammer, Conall a wry neck, that, in my judgment, were meant to identify them as true heroes, carrying a light disfiguration to the head that, in ideal terms, would have disqualified them from the Irish kingship, which called for physical as well as moral integrity, the two combining to find expression in just judgments, successful warfare, and a bountiful kingdom.¹⁶ It is repeatedly stated that Conall slept each night with the freshly taken head of a Connachtman under his knee; "fo glún" [under the knee] was an expression of subservience, e.g., in the tiered seating arrangements in the king's banquet hall. Thus, we have a repeat of the head and angled joint combination.¹⁷ This is not Conall's only impairment, since he was also attacked by a worm while in his mother's womb and is born with a pierced hand, which, according to the paradigm that is now familiar, may account for his subsequent mastery over the

15. The importance of partiality, bias, crookedness in Irish concepts of the kingship is explored in Sayers 1992a.

16. The Irish tag for the three "beauty marks" is "cluíne 7 minde 7 guille" [crookedness, stammering, blindness of one eye], whose formal mnemonic features we might try to duplicate by rearranging the sequence as "squint, stoop, and stammer." In the context of contention over the champion's portion, Cú Chulainn mocks Conall for the heavy and awkward passage of his war-chariot, perhaps an alloform of a gait affected by the cortical misalignment (*Fled Bricrend*, Best and Bergin 1929, lines 8490–94).

17. Conall's grisly daily tribute is singled out as a characterizing feature in the brief text *Scéla Chonchobuir* [Tidings of Conchobar], a kind of epitome or compendium of Ulster cycle figures and motifs (Best and O'Brien 1956, lines 12522–31).

chthonic serpent. In the brain-ball story which recounts the death of Mes-Gegra, Conall's dying opponent says to take his head on his own head, add his glory to his own glory. The public knows this to be a ruse, since we are told that blood dripping from the head earlier burned through a stone. Here again, Conall proves resistant; instead of the prior injury being compounded, the wry neck is corrected, just as the serpent was vanquished.¹⁸

In the Conall corpus, variant is piled on variant, without altering the underlying significance. To complement the conception of the skewed head, we find references not only to misalignment but also to a “bumb, knob” or “depression” (*cern*) on his head the size of a shield boss, the result of a blow received while contending over a woman in Alba (*Cóir anmann*, Stokes 1897, no. 251). Perhaps the two-toned complexion and eyes are to be referred to these events, either as consequences, or as allomorphs of the sound and scarred halves of Conall's head.

This strand of characterization is elsewhere represented in the traditional matter associated with Conall, if, in the following, we have correctly teased apart a rather tangled skein. In another of the vignettes from Da Derga's hostel, the six dispensers (*dáilemain*), responsible for pouring and taking round the ale, are portrayed. After the usual description of hair style, cloaks, jewellery, it is stated: “It é lethgabra amail Conall Cernach” [They were *lethgabra* like Conall Cernach] (Knott 1936, line 1150). The text then goes on to say that each could put his cloak around the other as quickly as a water-driven mill wheel. As there is a hint of humour in the names and descriptions of the functionaries in the hall, e.g., the meat-servers whose hair stands upright from their many trips to the fire (par. 127), this physical dexterity may be related to their swift turning from drinker to drinker. But what of *lethgabra*? OIr. knew two terms: *gabor* ‘goat’ (cf. ON *hafr*) and *gabor* ‘white, brilliant’. A poetic term for a white horse, *gabor*, seems to have borrowed from both concepts. *Leth* ‘side’ was employed in compounds with the meaning “half-” or “one of two” followed by a nominal or adjectival concept. We have seen that as well as one black and one blue eye, Conall had one white and one red-freckled cheek, which in *Fled Bricrend* is rendered as “drech lethderg lethgabur laiss” [a face half-red, half-white with him (= he had)] (Best and Bergin 1929, lines 8636–37). Thus, “half-white” is one possible interpretation of the dispensers' appearance, although not one immediately perceived as relevant. Another tradition, which runs counter to full descriptions of Conall and his war-cart drawn by a team of two horses, is that Conall rode on horseback, and we find one gloss of *lethgabra* as *lethech* or “half (the pair of) horse(s).”¹⁹ But this could scarcely be the case in the banquet hall. We must then entertain the possibility that *lethgabra*

18. *Cath Étair*, summarized in Thurneysen 1921, 510. After being severed, Mes-Gegra's head turns alternately red and white in emotional distress at the thought of his wife's capture by the Ulstermen. Here, the motif of Conall's two cheeks has become disassociated from the hero but is still part of the story complex. The episode, noted by Turville-Petre, of Mes-Gegra's brain-ball used by Cet as a missile against Conchobar is given in *Aided Chonchobuir* (Meyer 1906a).

19. Discussion in Knott 1936, 91, note to line 1150.

meant “half (like a) goat.”²⁰ Pending the later discussion below, I suggest that the reference is to the horn-like excrescence on one side of Conall’s head. In this case, the bearers of drinking horns are appropriately marked, in physique or apparel, by the sign of their function. In Conall’s case, the arc of the goat’s horn is then yet another reflex of the misaligned head or the circumference of its circular, boss-shaped swelling.

Conall lives on past his warrior’s prime, a kind of survival to the last day. In a curious twist, he judges that only his former enemies Medb and Ailill of Connacht can show him the honor he deserves, and by turning to them he creates and exploits an obligation of hospitality (*Goire Conaill Chernaig i Crúachain ocus aided Ailella ocus Conaill Chernaig*, Meyer 1897). He eats the food they provide while recounting stories of Connacht warriors he has killed. Queen Medb displays many of the promiscuous traits of Freyja—there was always another man standing in the shadow of her lover—but is to be identified as a reflex of the goddess of territorial sovereignty, her sole concern that the land have a fit consort to rule. Her husband, Ailill, is then a *mari complaisant* free of jealousy in the texts, but this tolerance is not mutual. Medb enlists Conall to cast a spear at Ailill when he is consorting with a woman in the bushes. Conall is happy to do so to avenge the Ulster hero Fergus mac Róich, who had been killed in a near-similar incident by a spear thrown by a blind poet at Ailill’s instigation when Fergus was swimming with Medb hanging from his breast. Disregarding the Baldr parallel, Conall’s relationship with Medb has interesting points of contact with that of Heimdallr and Freyja.

There is little unique in Conall’s eventual death in combat. But after his death, his huge skull is used by the Ulstermen from which to drink milk; this cures them of the *ces noinden*, an affliction from a curse that leaves them as weak as women in labor in their time of greatest military need. Thus, the head, one function exchanged for another, can be both a weapon (cf. Heimdallr), and life-restoring or life-enhancing (Mímir).

In partial summary, we have a complex, which includes both plot-related elements and motifs, of ram (and goat?), fair hair, white skin, injury to the side of the head or neck, head-related drinking vessel, and associations with sexuality, security, and prosperity, with which to return, below, to the Heimdallr file and such unresolved matters as the epithet *hallinskiði*.

Points on which comparison is not immediately available also deserve note. There is no exclusive interaction with Bricriu, the Irish equivalent of Loki, who

20. Another tag in *Togail bruidne Da Derga* refers to a war-party as “leth ruith 7 leth gabra” (Knott 1936, line 460). “Half [over the] wheel, half [over the] horse,” i.e., a reference to ostentatious paramilitary feats, seems stretching the phrase; “half-red [reading *-ruada*], half-white” is possible but unlikely. I prefer to see, in this context of the description of equipment, helmets marked with both horns and wheel (*roth*) like those of Gaulish warriors portrayed on the arch at Orange, France (Ross 1967, 159, fig. 109). A warrior with a horned helmet holds half a wheel up to a god on one panel of the Gundestrup cauldron.

promotes dissension, prodding the Ulstermen into fighting among themselves over the champion's portion, although Bricriu does recognize Conall's territorial function when he says flatteringly that Conall was always three days and nights ahead of the troop on a sortie and protected their rear on the retreat (*Fled Bricrend*, Best and Bergin 1929, lines 8136–38). Making allowances for the relative status of the Norse god and Irish hero, we do not find any ascription of hierarchical, multiple parenthood to Conall, despite the mention of a number of sons. He has two horses, Dergdrutach 'Dewy red' and Conchenn 'Hound-head', but no Gulltoppr. No sentinel's horn is named, and acute hearing is underplayed. A more fanciful tale, like the Welsh *Culhwch and Olwen*, does have among Arthur's retainers Clust, who "though he were buried seven fathoms in the earth could hear an ant fifty miles away stirring in its hill in the morning," and Drem, who could "see from Celliweg in Cornwall to the top of Blathaon in Britain when the gnat would thrive in the morning sun" (Bromwich and Evans 1988, lines 347–48, 261–62; translation Ford 1977, 131, 128), but the hyperbolic description of such human faculties is the common story goods of many oral cultures.²¹ In similar fashion, multiple maternity and paternity are not foreign to medieval Celtic narrative. A hero like Cú Chulainn may be born three times, to divine + divine parents, divine + human, and human + human, with fosterage a form of parenthood in the last case. In Welsh tradition, the poet Taliesin in one of his transformational poems, intended to display the poet's knowledge of all history and all the natural world, says that he was born of nine elements, including the water of the ninth wave (*The Book of Taliesin*, Evans 1910, 23–27; translation Ford 1977, 184–87). Taliesin's Irish counterpart is the "original" poet Ameirgin, namesake of Conall's father, who was one of the Milesian (= Gaelic) invaders. In a poem similar to the Welsh verses, he says: "Am gáeth i m-muir / am tond trethan / am fuaim mara" [I am wind on the sea, I am an ocean wave, I am the roar of the sea] (*Lebor gabála Érenn*, Macalister 1938–56, 5:110, lines 2673–75; cf. Heimdallr as Vindhlér).

Many of the attributes and incidents in the Heimdallr dossier that went unmatched in the investigation of Conall are elsewhere represented in legendary Irish history and the transformed myths that we judge it still to carry, whatever our difficulties in satisfactory reconstitution.²² This comes as little surprise, especially in the sphere of etiological myth, since such accounts articulate and answer a nucleus of essential and existential human questions, e.g., the origin of humankind, that are common to most cultures. As well, a god-to-god comparison is bound to disclose more affinities than one god-to-hero, given that the supernatural powers and liberties associated with the godhead are generally beyond the

21. The raiders in *Togail bruidne Da Derga* also look for one in their party with special gifts: "búaid clúaise 7 búaid rodairc 7 búaid n-airdmesa" [the gifts of hearing and sight and judgment] (Knott 1936, lines 439–40).

22. For supernatural beings contending in a variety of animal forms, see the two swineherds in *De chophur in dá muccida* (Roider 1979); in the sea, they fight as whales.

human grasp. Coincidence in such cases must be striking and thorough, before we lend any credence to notions of genetic interrelationship, either in common origins, or from unilateral or bilateral influence at a later evolutionary stage.

Cath Maige Tuired [The (second) battle of Mag Tuired] (Gray 1982) encompasses much mythological matter concerning the Tuatha dé Dannan “the People of the Goddess (D)Anu,” one of the series of invading races. They would defeat the Fomoiri but in turn be subjected by the Milesians and relegated to the Otherworld of undersea and underearth, over centuries to be scaled down in power and stature to the little people of present-day Ireland. A commanding figure in this tale is the Dagda or “Good God” (although memories of an earlier interpretation, “Fire God,” persisted in the learned class; *Cóir anmann*, Stokes 1897, no. 150). In the former interpretation, this is clearly a secondary epithet, explained through narrativization as a name bestowed on this son of Elatha after his promise singly to wield all the powers of the enemy host in the forthcoming battle. But in a ribald sexual encounter with a young woman, she too of supernatural power, this rather coarse fertility figure recounts a litany of some twenty of his names, most of which display the idiosyncratic phonological-morphological features that often distinguish theonyms. Among those, in this text and elsewhere, that can be most readily identified are *Ollathair* ‘Great-Father’ (cf. Óðinn as *Alfaðir*, *Gylfaginning* chap. 9), *Rúad-Rofhesach* ‘Red-Great-Knowing’, *Riog*, plausibly associated with *rí*, gen. sg. *ríg* ‘king’, and *Athgen mBethai* ‘Regeneration of the World’. The Dagda is not credited in any extant story with engendering a socially stratified society, although he did father three daughters, all named Bríg (apparently a fire divinity before transformation into the Christian saint Brigit), who were, respectively, a leech, a poet, and a smith, all vocations that enjoyed high status in the royal banquet hall. The Dagda also had a son, Óengus or Mac ind Óg “The Young Son” (cf. Norse Konr ungr in *Rígsþula*), who, in another tale and in yet another example of functional displacement, would trick his father out of his residence at Bruig na Bóinne, Newgrange, the megalithic earthworks on the Boyne. Such displacement is apparent in *Cath Maige Tuired* as well, although it may be judged more plot-related. Under the unjust rule of the half-Fomoirie king, Bres, the Dagda, once a king in his own right, is relegated to building ramparts, before Lug assumes a rejuvenated kingship. But building ramparts is not the same as sentinel duty, and the Dagda does not carry a horn but rather an iron staff, blows from one end dealing out men’s death, blows from the other restoring life.

We must recognize that there is no narrative interplay between Conall Cernach and the Dagda, since the latter makes only the occasional “guest appearance” in the epic tales of the Ulster cycle, e.g., seen in the distance plying his staff in *Mesca Ulad* [The intoxication of the Ulstermen] as the Ulster forces advance into the visual range of a watchman (Watson 1941, lines 623–40), much as the god Lug visits his son Cú Chulainn in an interpolation in the *Táin* in order to cast a healing sleep over the wounded hero. However, on the level of

onomastics, which we are advised to treat cautiously for sweeping explanatory purposes, there is a tie, albeit tenuously through a third party, between the wry-necked warrior and the staff-wielding divinity. Among the epithets of the Dagda is *Cerrce*, which, I believe, can be traced to the percussive Indo-European root **per-g-*, *per-k-* ‘strike’ via the evolved forms **perk^w-* > **k^werk^we-* (Sayers 1988). This facet of the Dagda and his iron staff then link him, onomastically and/or functionally, to such weather-workers and thunder-makers as Indra, Zeus, Þórr, Perkúnas, and Perun. Narrative evidence can also be assembled to present the Dagda as both Striker and Stricken (*Cath Maige Tuired*: immobility from over-eating, partial interment, temporary impotence, and symbolic castration). In light of the Buddha position of the figure on the Gundestrup cauldron and the inward turned feet of the horned figures of the rock carvings, one may speculate whether *Cernunnos*, with the tie of *cern-* to cranial excrescence, e.g., horns, bumps, was not preceded by a **Cercunnos* drawing on the stem **perk^w-*, in a development, antecedent to that of the Dagda, from Striker to Stricken. In the other temporal direction, lower body impairment to ruler figures leads to *le roi méhaigné* of Arthurian tradition (Picard 1989). But, on balance, the Dagda, whatever his similarities to Heimdallr as progenitor, exhibits too few “close fits” with the Norse god to make this line of inquiry of more than general comparative interest.

Ellis Davidson’s nod in the direction of Manannán mac Lir, the Irish god of the sea (who had a predecessor, Tethra, like Ægir also a common noun for “sea,” as well as a Welsh counterpart, Manawydan fab Llŷr) also deserves consideration, but it will be recalled that from the perspective of Heimdallr, this is of greatest interest if (1) we accept that Heimdallr’s role as father of the three estates is a near-original one and not the result of some substitution, and (2) we are attracted to the identification of Heimdallr’s nine mothers with nine waves personified as daughters of the ruler of the sea. Without reviewing Dumézil’s case in detail, some immediate observations can and must be made concerning this latter equation. Despite Heimdallr’s wet or muddy back, there is no marine dimension to his file, save in the fight as seals, which, one must recall, is imperfectly known to us. His mothers’ names, as listed in the twelfth-century *Vǫlospá in scamma* 8–11 (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 294) with its conscious, informed approach to traditional matter, belong to the lexicon of giant names, and at least three are listed among the troll-wives in *Skáldskaparmál* (Jónsson 1931, 195, st. 423). While Ellis Davidson (1969, 107) would allow of giant doings in marine environments, some of the names are those earlier met in terrestrial undertakings, e.g., Gjálp and Greip who figure in Þórr’s visit to Geirrøðr, their father. As Turville-Petre observes (1964, 152), the wave-daughters of the sea king have quite different names, e.g., *Bylgja*, *Hrǫnn*, *Uðr*. What we may have here is an example of mythic propagation, the central idea of the giant Ægir ruling the sea sending out shoots, prompting one poet looking for a kenning to create the conceit of daughters, another to supply the semantically and phonologically appropriate names. Further, when Ægir is

invited to Ásgarðr (*Skáldskaparmál* chap. 1) there is no recognition of a grandson, and it is Bragi who is the visitor's table companion.²³ The concept of sets of waves, with special features associated with the last in the set, whether seventh or ninth, was certainly a widespread one in early Europe, but is not convincingly at home with Heimdallr.²⁴

Manannán, whose euhemerization brought an association with the Isle of Man and overseas trade (cf. Ægir, also known as Hlér, and Danish Læsø 'Hlér's island'), does figure in one story of spousal substitution, of which there are many in early Celtic tradition, including the conception of Arthur. But a more central characterization is Manannán as a master of enchantment and illusion. The son whom he fathers is named Mongán, from *mong* 'mane, head of hair' but also 'sea foam' + the diminutive suffix; as **Mon-gan* it might also be thought to pun on the name *Morgan* 'Sea-Engendered' (which figures elsewhere in Celtic tradition), with *mon* 'ruse, guile' here the initial element.²⁵ Although the events leading to and accompanying the conception of Mongán (while the husband Fiachna is battling in Scotland; Lochlann 'Scandinavia' in a later recension) have little that recalls *Rígsþula*, the portraits of Mongán und Konr ungr do exhibit interesting similarities, many of which, one must admit, could be put down to idealized conceptions of the young aristocrat who gets some taste of divine mysteries.

23. If we entertain, for the moment, the fiction that the male gods are listed according to a general conception of rank and that this ranking is reflected in the seating arrangement, a distribution that would put the guest, Ægir, next to Bragi and opposite the host, Óðinn, might look like this (numbers represent sequence after the naming of Óðinn):

Æðribekkr High bench North side	9. Ullr	3. Freyr	1. Þórr	Host Óðinn	2. Njörðr	4. Týr	10. Hœnir
Úæðribekkr Less high bench South side	11. Forseti	7. Víðarr	5. Heimdallr	Guest Ægir	6. Bragi	8. Váli	12. Loki

24. An Irish text referred to in the study of Young (1933) undeniably catalogues many of the motifs of concern here, e.g., undersea conception, multiple motherhood, but the adventure of Irishmen travelling to Scandinavia is so surely a sign of late medieval romance, when the viking raids were only a memory, that intercultural influence, if at work in the tale, is more likely from Norse to Celtic. In the *Lebor gábala Érenn* [Book of the takings of Ireland], the Milesians' initial landing is thwarted and they must retreat beyond the ninth wave to regroup and make a fresh and ultimately successful invasion (Macalister 1938–56, 5:114, line 2707).

25. The story of the conception of Mongán is found in *Imram Brain* [The voyage of Bran] (Meyer 1895, Hamel 1941); the description of Mongán is found in stanza 52 of the verses. In another account, Manannán spirits away the wife and children of King Cormac and causes him to lose his way in the mist, then confront a couple cooking at a magic cauldron in the forest. Three truths must be told before the food will cook properly (cf. the redeployment of this motif as gruel cooking then cooling while two heroes and a hag recount their life stories in the Icelandic romance *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* (Jónsson 1954, 334–53). From the encounter Cormac takes away insignia that assist him in ruling justly, e.g., a cup that breaks in the presence of lies (Stokes 1891, 183–229). See, too, Dubuisson 1973. The degree of caution that should be adopted toward the Norse conception of the waves as Ægir's daughters is reinforced by the Manannán corpus where waves are called both his steeds and his wife's tresses.

Konr ungr, it will be recalled, is the youngest son in the numerous family of Jarl, last of the three estates to be engendered by Rígr. He grows up with knowledge of runes and their power, and the language of birds; he blunts swords, presides over calm seas, extinguishes fires, assists in the birth of babies, soothes sorrows and sick minds (*Rígsþula* 44–49). Much of this is reminiscent of the faculties and activities of the Divine Twins, the *dioscurii* of Greek tradition and their many European and Indic reflexes (Ward 1968).²⁶ But Konr ungr is also a warrior, and is encouraged at the end of the incomplete poem to undertake a military expedition to the lands of apparently Danish rulers. The crow that urges him to such activity is reminiscent of the Irish war goddess, the Morrigan, who often appears in the same guise. Mongán, too, will make known secrets (“adfií rúna”), will engage in shape-shifting on both land and sea (including stag and seal form), will be a successful warrior and ruler, but will eventually be killed by a slung “dragon stone” taken from the sea.

As in the case of the Dagda, this degree of coincidence is not sufficient to convince that there is a genetic or causal link between Manannán and Heimdallr, or that our knowledge of Heimdallr has been enhanced. But this rather circuitous Celtic route, past Conall and Bricriu, the Dagda and Óengus, Taliesin and Aneirin, Manannán and Mongán, will permit us to turn again northward to unresolved questions of names, epithets and etymologies from a fresh quarter, with a fairly thick “working file” in our Irish baggage. To extend the circumambulatory metaphor to the area of circumlocutions, Snorri provides a theoretical orientation and instructs on how to read the poetic roadsigns. On the subject of semantically polyvalent words and homonyms, he states:

Læti er tvennt: læti heitir rødd, læti heitir æði, ok æði er ok ólund. Reiði er ok tvikennt: reiði heitir þat er maðr er i illum hug, reiði heitir ok fargervi skips eða hross. Far er ok tvikennt: fár er reiði, far er skip. Þvílík orðtøk hafa menn mjök til þess at yrkja fólgit, ok er þat kallat mjök ofljóst. Lið kalla menn þat á manni, er leggir mætas, lið heitir skip, lið heitir mannfólk; lið er ok þat kallat, er maðr veitir qðrum liðsinni; líð heitir ql. Hlið heitir á garði, ok hlið kalla menn oxa, en hlið er brekka. Þessar greinir má setja svá i skáldskap, at gera ofljóst, at vant er at skilja, ef aðra skal hafa greinina, en áðr þycki til horfa en fyrri vísu orð. Slíkt sama eru ok qnnar mōrg nafn þau, er saman eigu heitit margir hlutir. (*Skáldskaparmál* chap. 88, Jónsson 1931, 193, orthography normalized)²⁷

[*Læti* means two things. Noise is called *læti*, disposition (*ædi*) is called *læti*, and *ædi* also means fury. *Reiði* also has two meanings. It is called *reidi* (wrath) when a man is

26. The typical distinction between the twins is that of (pacific) stockman and (bellicose) warrior; do Hœnir and Heimdallr, the spokesman and listener, peacemaker and combatant with Loki, meet the general criteria for such twins?

27. One may speculate that *líð* ‘ale’ has some tie to OIr. *linn*, *lind* ‘drink’, preferentially ‘ale’. *Hlið* is given here as a term for “ox”; later it will figure among words for “hart” (Jónsson 1931, 211, st. 511). The reference may be to the “gap” between the horns or to their slant angle. More relevant to present purposes is the fact that certain features selected for characterization could be attributed to more than one animal.

in a bad temper, the gear (*fargervi*) of a ship or horse is called *reidi*. *Far* also has two meanings. *Far* is anger, *far* is a ship. People frequently use such vocabulary so as to compose with concealed meaning, and this is usually called word-play (*ofliost* [obvious]). People call it *lid* (joint) on a person where the bones meet, *lid* (fleet) is a word for ships, *lid* (troop) is a word for people. It is also called *lid* (help) when someone gives another assistance (*lidsinni*). *Lid* is a word for ale. There is what is called a *hlid* (gateway) in an enclosure, and *hlid* is what people call an ox, and *hlid* is a slope. These distinctions can be made use of in poetry so as to create word-play which is difficult to understand, if it is a different distinction of meaning that has to be taken than the previous line seemed before to indicate. Similarly there are also many other such words where the same term applies to several things.] (Faulkes 1987, 155)

Snorri's interpretation that Heimdallr left his "horn" not his "hearing" at the foot of Yggdrasil may owe something to such thought patterns and compositional practices, and to a mental juxtaposition of *lúðr* and *hljóð*. But if Snorri were no longer fully familiar with the mythological episode of the surrendered ear, one could conceive of him interpreting *hljóð* as "silence." If Heimdallr traded on his silence, his deposit by Yggdrasil could have been that which broke silence, the horn.

Earlier, as synonyms for *eyru* 'ears', Snorri had mentioned "hlustir ok heyrn" and went on to say: "Þau skal svá kenna, at kalla land eða jarðar heitum nǫkkurum, eða munn eða rás eða sjón eða augu heyrnarinnar, ef nýgervingar eru" [They shall be referred to by calling them land or by any of the terms for earth or mouth or channel or sight or eyes of the hearing, if allegory is being used] (*Skáldskaparmál* chap. 87, Jónsson 1931, 190, orthography normalized; trans. Faulkes 1987, 153).

If we imagine polysemy and homonymy as a communally sanctioned, essentially paradigmatic axis structuring a selection of the medieval Icelandic poetic lexicon, say, terms related to the faculty of hearing, we can see *heiti* and *kennningar* based in myth, or analogies and allomorphs generated by homological association, as an intersecting, subjective (or poets' collective) syntagmatic axis. Over time, some newly minted turns of phrase from the latter category win a lasting place in the former. It is on such a grid that we must plot the components of Heimdallr's lexical file.

For example, imagine that we say *hljóð* and intend "hearing," while both we and our public know that it also "means" the conditions under which hearing is propitious, i.e., "silence." If we (imaginary medieval Icelanders) are particularly attuned to phonological proximity, we might also hear an echo of *Hlóðyn* 'Earth' (Þórr's mother; cf. Snorri on *lið*, *liðr*, *líð*, *hlið*, *hlíð*). In another turn, we could go on to speak of hearing as "Heimdallr's pawn" or the "sight of the ear," or, to name the organ instead of the faculty, call the ears the "eyes of hearing." What Snorri does not give us license to do, whatever the temptation, is to assume that *Hlóðyn* 'earth' was "close enough" to *hljóð* 'hearing, silence' that *heimr* would suggest it when coupled with Ir. *dall* 'blind' (cf. Kormákr's mother, Dalla) to give a compound *Heimdallr* that, like Ir. *clúasdall* 'ear-blind', would mean "the deaf one,"

that is, him in total silence.²⁸ Let us abandon this pastiche of nineteenth-century scholarship and proceed more cautiously, from the apparent periphery, with the epithet/alternate name *Vindhlér* and variants.

Hlér is given at the beginning of *Skáldskaparmál* as another name for Ægir, and both are given by Snorri as common nouns meaning “sea” (Jónsson 1931, chap. 77). Faulkes sees “roarer” (1987, 139; cf. *gjálfr* ‘roar of the sea’), while de Vries calls the etymology disputed, but favours a meaning associated with “splashing” or “flushing,” against the alternative “softener” (ON *hlé* ‘shelter’). OIr. *Lir* and MWe. *Llŷr* in all likelihood share a common origin; a further derivative is Shakespeare’s *Lear* (with a new set of daughter names). None of the above explanations combines with “wind” in such a way as to illuminate what we know of Heimdallr. There was, however, a near-homonym: *hlør/hler* ‘listening’. On the basis of the complementary conventions of regarding the natural elements as siblings (wind, sea, fire, etc., *Skáldskaparmál* chap. 37), and of substituting another god’s name plus a functional epithet for a given theonym, e.g., “hanged Týr” = Óðinn, we could see a conflation of “*Hlér* [ruler] of the wind” and “wind-listener” to characterize the sharp-eared sentinel to whom air and wind brought the sounds of the world.

Turning to terms for sheep and in particular the ram, one might suggest that in similar fashion *veðr* ‘wether’ (originally ‘yearling’, one year’s growth perhaps the time of gelding) could be made to play on *veðr* ‘weather’, although no example is available in the Heimdallr references, aside from his clayey back and station at Bifröst. Nicknames find interesting use in idiom, e.g., “brjóta bekrann” [break one’s neck] from *bekri* ‘ram’, supra). *Hrútr* seems to have rapidly supplanted *veðr* as base term (Bernström 1960a), and derives relatively straightforwardly from IE **kerəs-*, **kerei-* ‘horn’ (Pokorny 1959–69, 1:575–76), with related forms designating horned animals and the horns themselves (ON *horn*, OIr. *cern*, *cernach*), even the neck (Lat. *cervix*). More fundamental, perhaps, is the root **ker-*, **kerə-*, **krē-* ‘grow, make grow, nourish’. The use of *Hrútr* as a personal name, and the generic term for ‘sheep’ *sauðr*, like Goth. *sauþs* ‘sacrifice’ related to ON *sjóða* ‘to cook, boil’, have suggested to some a Heimdallr cult, but we have no authority to claim that pigs were sacrificed exclusively to Freyr and, thus, sheep to Heimdallr.²⁹

In his note on wordplay, for which an expression such as *hliðmæltr* ‘said in oblique speech’ may have prompted the choice of examples, Snorri listed meanings for *hlið* and *hlið*. *Hlið* in the sense of “flank, side” derives from the same root as Ir. *leth* ‘side’, which was seen in the description of Conall Cernach and was also used in interesting compounds to indicate the loss of half of body parts or organs

28. *Clúasdall* is cited from Pokorny (1959–69, 1:266), but regrettably is not found with a textual reference in *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (Marstrander et al. 1913–76).

29. Turville-Petre calls attention to the sacrifice of a ram in *Ljósvetninga saga* (Sigfússon 1940, chap. 4), but recent commentators find no parallel for the incident (Andersson and Miller 1989, 134n29).

that come in pairs, thus, *lethsúil* ‘one-eyed’. Heimdallr’s status in Irish would then have been *lethchlúas* ‘one-eared’. *Hlið* is relevant to our present concerns in that, via **k̂lei-*, it derives from the same Indo-European root **k̂el-* ‘incline’ as *hallr*, found in Heimdallr’s variously contoured epithet *hallinskíði*, *hallinskídi*. The adjective *hallr* meant “inclined, sloped,” whether we see this as a natural or imposed condition; note the idioms “bera hallt hǫfuðit” [to carry the head on one side], “verðr hallt á einum” [one is worsted]. But similar to the Norse conception that hearing (*hljóð*) is best exercised in silence (*hljóð*), in order to listen closely one should incline the head, whence Lat. *aus-culto*, Ir. *ro-clúinethar* ‘hears, listens to’, *clúas* ‘hearing’ and ‘ear’, ON *hlust* ‘ear’. These terms share the same Indo-European root as do *hallr* and Conall Cernach’s epithet *cláen* ‘wry, slanted’, used of his misaligned head. In the larger context of the Celtic evidence adduced in this article, this lexical field, wide in terms of both semantics and geography, is potentially very significant for our present concerns. Although doubtless pure coincidence, we then have Snorri’s three meanings for *hlíð/hlið*, slope, gate, and ox, neatly matched by a tripartite application of *hallr* to slope, sentinel, and ram.

Before turning to possible origins of the elements compounding with *hallr* in Heimdallr’s epithet, we should recall (1) its variant versions, (2) Snorri’s failure to gloss, (3) its association with a head-related feature, *gullintanni*, and, in general, (4) these two terms’ apparent “self-containedness” and formal linguistic symmetry. *Skíð* meant “a billet of firewood” and by extension “split length of wood, ski”; the variant *-skíði* may be derived from a dative singular form (cf. *skíða* ‘billet’). What we have here, I propose, is a complex of meanings that originate in the butting of contesting rams, with the possibility of injury that could result in a crooked head (admittedly less likely in the natural world than that of myth and metaphor), yet, ironically, or with the compensatory inversion of myth, a head inclined for attentive listening. In *hallinskíði* I see not a characterization of the rearward curling horns of the ram, much less Turville-Petre’s leaning stick(s), but a metaphorical expression for the head that one might bring into dictionary English as “slant-split billet,” or slang as “skewed block.” The god Heimdallr’s loss or trade of *one ear* for compensatory sharp hearing is homologically projected in the allomorph of the ram’s head (attentively) tilted to *one side*.

This said, we can clearly not close the Heimdallr file, whatever gains in comprehensiveness of view may have been afforded by the Irish parallels. It may then not be inappropriate to complement this openness by questioning the depth of one of the panels of our triptych of warder, ally of Freyja, and ram. Sheep were not among the first animals to be domesticated by man, and the early Icelandic archaeological record shows that on typical farms their numbers were appreciably inferior to those of cattle and other stock. The goat, on the other hand, has a much longer history of domestication and occupies a proportional position in the folklore of many Near Eastern and European traditions. As Bernström acutely observed (1960b), the goat has a prominent place in the Poetic Edda, e.g., Heiðrún

and Þórr's draught animals, ranking second only to the horse in frequency of mention. The sheep is not mentioned. In relative terms, bucks are more given to butting than rams and their horns are more voluminous. According to one source, early Scandinavian goats were predominantly white. Animal behavior also led the goat to be more directly associated with sexuality than the sheep (cf. Loki and the nanny goat in the episode of Skaði's laughter). This may have earned it the status of scapegoat in the Old Testament and more surely shaped, along with concepts of the satyr, the Christian conception of the cloven-hoofed devil. Admittedly, the image of the goat in the list of synonyms appended to *Skáldskaparmál* is not markedly negative; it is somewhat more aggressive than that of the sheep, since teeth are singled out in the names for Þórr's team which are included.³⁰ The terminology of domestic animals in early Scandinavia was both extensive and quite dynamic, with groupings of stock along lines of age, productivity (young, milk, hides, etc.), and economic worth as well as categories within a single species. From the perspective that the male goat or buck (*hafr*) would embody many of the attributes of Heimdallr with rather higher relief than the sheep or ram (*hrútr*), it then appears legitimate to question whether Heimdallr's first animal associations may not have been with the former (cf. "lethgabra amail Conall Cernach," supra, p. 13). It would be hazardous to suggest any Christian influence in a transfer of the positively conceived identity of Heimdallr from buck to ram in the period to which we owe skaldic or eddic verse. It would be even less justified to date such a shift in Iceland to a period when overgrazing of brushwood had reduced primary food supplies for goats, and a greater emphasis on sheep had led to an export surplus of wool and hides. Still, while the lexical associations are quite full (e.g., *heimdali* figuring among sheep names), the absence of the sheep from the mythological corpus is striking. It is also worth noting that sheep were generally grazed at a greater distance than goats from the farmstead (Heimdallr as border sentinel).

To turn to the other attested animal form of the god, medieval seal hunters who advanced over the ice floes believed that seals had sharp hearing and could understand human speech, as a consequence of the excellent acoustic conductivity of the water below the ice on which they walked. The countermeasure was to use the equivalent of a tabu-prompted vocational language where circumlocutions were found for the animal and for the hunting gear. This meant that the names of various domestic animals were combined with *sæ-* to refer to seals, and no special association of sheep and seals is recorded. In the Baltic and perhaps northern Norway, this disguised language took the form of Norse lexical borrowings from Finno-Ugric, which the seals were thought unable to understand. Finnish, Estonian, and Saami hunters practised the same technique, borrowing from

30. For the he-goat, *Skáldskaparmál* chap. 89 gives: "Hafr heitir grímnir / ok geirþlnir / Tanngnjóstr, kjappi / ok Tanngrisnir, / skimuðr ok brúsi, / bokkr, grímr taliðr" (Jónsson 1931, 211, st. 508, orthography normalized).

Germanic (Vilkuna 1972). Thus, even Heimdallr's seal-shape has a tie to acute hearing (note the name *Vindhlér* given in the middle of Snorri's brief retelling of the seal fight) and overtones of metaphorical and metonymical language.³¹

We cannot deny the textual evidence that *Rígsþula* identifies Rígr as Heimdallr, and the earlier cited opening stanza from *Vǫlospá* and similar encoded references in kennings are additional proof of an association that predates our written records. The most generally accepted explanation of the *-dall* element of the god's name, like the *-dǫll* of *Mardǫll*, a name of Freyja, associated with organic growth (see *infra*), complements this equation, but is circumstantial evidence at best, since not fully confirmed in its own right. The derivation of *Rígr* from an inflected Celtic nominal form (suggesting an oral transfer) is entirely plausible and, indeed, the portrait of the future ruler, Konr ungr, exhibits a degree of polyfunctionality in its attention to privileged knowledge, military leadership, and the somatic dimension of life that is more reminiscent of Irish conceptions of the kingship than Nordic. Nonetheless, one can at least suggest for the arch-progenitor *Rígr*—always within Snorri's referential framework of wordplay—some overtones from the complex of words, marked by metathesis, dealing with hypertrophic or otherwise socially inadmissible sexual activity: *regi* 'lechery' and *ergi*, conditioned by the polarized conception of the sexes, hence "unmanly activity" in the spheres of sexuality and magic (*seiðr*).³² The interaction between Heimdallr and Freyja, as symbolized by her necklace or represented by Gefjon, is compatible with such a perspective. But, as is proven by so many mythological traditions, mortal societal norms are little respected in myth.

It is at least consistent that the figure who fathers the three very different estates of men is himself the product of a multiple conception. If we break our fixation with the nine wave maidens and recall Taliesin, born of nine different telluric elements, we could envisage the gestation of a divine figure, incorporating the element *heimr* in his name, by nine elemental beings (giantesses), representative of different aspects of terrestrial and perhaps marine matter and power. The infant Heimdallr's first nourishment, while suggestive of human charms, also supports this idea: sap of the earth, ice-cold sea, boar's blood (*Vǫlospá in scamma* 11 = *Hyndlolióð* 38, Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 294).

31. In an example of *dróttkvætt* in stanza 7 of *Háttatal*, Snorri has the verse: "Híalms fylli spekr hilmir / hvatr Vindlís skatna" (Faulkes 1991, 7). Faulkes explicates: "The bold king quietens men with Vindhler's helmet-filler [Heimdall's head, i.e., a sword]" (1987, 171). This further association of Vindhler and Heimdallr's head as sword suggests that the latter image is drawn from the seal fight with Loki.

32. A sacrifice of goats is promised to Þórr in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* (Jónsson 1954, 349), and goat-skins are elsewhere associated with magical practices. It might have been expected that the bear would be associated with the god of war, but it appears to have been Óðinn's and the berserks' animal (cf. the epithet *ifjungr* 'hooded one', *Skáldskaparmál* chap. 89, st. 511). One could speculate that the prominence of the bear cult among the Finno-Ugric peoples, known for their magic, might have assisted in shifting the bear towards Óðinn's sphere. See the references in Lindow 1988, to whose index entries under "Bear" should be added nos. 2170 and 2683. In general, one may note in Snorri's series of animal descriptors a fall toward derogatory terminology toward the end of each list.

Nine mothers is not necessarily the same as nine lives, as some would infer in an effort to accommodate the fact of a Heimdallr struck through with a man's head yet still on guard to sound the horn at Ragnarøk and fall in combat with Loki. Mythic chronology and sequential, linear narrative are not always well reconciled, and many episodes seem to exist in their own time, a variant of Eliade's *in illo tempore*, unaffected by events we might judge to have preceded them. The reference does, however, match up well with the notion of butting rams or bucks, wherever it is to be located in Heimdallr's biography. While on the question of what we can and cannot conclude from the available evidence, there seems no good reason to associate Heimdallr preferentially with the world tree, Yggdrasil, as do Ellis Davidson (1969, 105) and others, simply on the basis of the deposit there of his hearing. The tree is not a guardian of cosmic order, as Heimdallr is a guardian of Ásgarðr; it *is* cosmic order, always dynamic, in a concrete manifestation.

Two general statements will precede our concluding probe of the name *Heimdallr*, inescapably driven by the hope that etymology will prove the key to original identity, if not precipitate a synthesis of all the narrative elements in the Heimdallr file. Turville-Petre (1964, 148): "it is evident that Heimdall filled a certain place in the Norse hierarchy in earlier times, although the memory of him was somewhat faded by the time the extant sources were composed." This judgment, however flat in the present context, may well stand, although one could argue that the "certain place" need have been no more prominent, in absolute terms, than that occupied later by Heimdallr in the two Eddas. Only the attribution of engendering the three estates or the race of man lifts Heimdallr beyond the ranks where one might expect to find the warder figure.

Secondly, the comparative study of the evidence drawn from the legendary biography of the Irish epic hero Conall Cernach and from other Celtic sources has proved a useful heuristic tool in readdressing Heimdallr problematics. It should be recognized, however, that theriomorphic features are not restricted to these two figures in the Irish and Norse traditions. Once the basic equation, god or man = ram, is made, the natural world readily supplies the realistic detail to fill out the picture. Thus, Heimdallr as ram could as well be "modelled" on Óðinn as snake or eagle, or Loki as horse, as on largely untraceable Celtic antecedents of Conall Cernach. On balance, the ovine affinities of Conall are scant—physical description, mastery over the (ram-headed?) serpent—unless we choose unequivocally to bring the wry neck, cranial excrescence, and other head motifs into this sphere of reference. Similar cautions must be heeded concerning the sentinel function. Noteworthy as well is the absence in the Conall file, as we have it, of any mythic causality, e.g., crime and typologically appropriate punishment (Heimdallr's possible relegation to sentinel status as a result of betrayal of trust) or accrued cognitive power in compensation for the loss of some bodily faculty (clairaudience for ear).

But Conall Cernach is a figure of legendary history, not of myth. If, after this voicing of methodological scruples, we still find compelling the relatively full correspondence between Heimdallr and Conall, we are doubtless better advised to locate such coincidence within the temporal framework of Celto-Germanic interaction, rather than the appreciably later Hiberno-Norse relations to which we owe such stray Irish lexical items as Snorri's *tarb* 'bull'.

Will this browsing in Irish and Norse semantic fields assist in explaining what our extant evidence compels us to recognize as the single, central name of this Norse divinity? The etymological options that have enjoyed the greatest acceptance are to view *heim-* as 'world' or 'shining' (conceivably a late addition to a root name), *-dall* as deriving from Gmc **dal-þu-* 'blooming, flourishing', related to Gk *thállō*. Judged less likely are associations with OE *deall* 'brilliant, bright; proud', or Icel. *dalla* 'totter, wobble'. The Late Icelandic term *dallur*, glossed as *arbor prolifera*, has fuelled speculation on associations with the world tree, largely unsupported in the narrative evidence; the notion of prolific growth is not, however, incompatible with the **dal-þu-* derivation. Not previously considered, to the best of my knowledge, is the Norse cognate of Ir. *dall* 'blind', i.e., *dœlskr* 'foolish' (cf. Goth. *dwals* 'foolish', Eng. *dull*, Germ. *toll*). But impairment to the cognitive faculty of a divine being is less likely to generate a name (however suggestive we might find "World-Bedazzled") than is the accrued power won through such loss or injury. Reinterpreting the first element of the name and viewing the second as an agent noun, one could imagine "Bright Dazzler," which would account for the ascription of whiteness and brilliance to Heimdallr, but finds no support elsewhere.

It will be recognized that the contents of the Irish file are not of equal potential relevance in attempting a more informed choice among the various semantic configurations the above options would give the compound Norse name. If so general a conception as "world growth" or "flourishing world" is the central one, the Dagda's epithet, *Athgen mBethai* 'Regeneration of the World', must be judged no more relevant than is one of his other names, "Great-Father," in its coincidence with an epithet of Óðinn. More importantly, a derivation from **dal-þu-* would imply that the Heimdallr of the extant texts had suffered considerable functional attrition.

The continuing impasse and the Conall Cernach component of the Irish file do, however, prompt consideration of one more option. Norse *dalr* 'valley' had a metaphorical extension as 'bow', and we also find both *dalr* and *dalarr* in the poetic lexicon as terms for the stag, where the metonymical name calls into prominence its curved antlers. A parallel development is seen in ON *bukkr*, *bokkr*, Mir. *bocc* 'buck, he-goat', both deriving from IE **b^hugno-*, as de Vries states: 'gebogen, das Tier mit den gekrümmten Hörnern' (cf. *hlið*, both 'ox' and 'hart'). While I would not wish to claim that *heim-* in a compound theonym *Heimdallr* (the orthography varies between *-l-* and *-ll-*) is intended to indicate a

domesticated animal—“shining” seems more likely (cf. *hornglóinn*)—derivation from *dalr* would accord extremely well with an epithet such as *hallinskiði*. Together, they align male ovine or caprine appearance and behavior with the “biography” and “mutilation qualifiante” (wry neck or single ear) of the attentive watchman.

In the poetic record and Snorri’s prose, the accounts of Heimdallr have three foci: duties as warder of the gods, association with Freyja and her sphere, and appearance, especially affinities with the ram. The opposition to Loki, although it takes the form of physical combat on two occasions, is from our limited perspective no more specific than that between Þórr and Loki. Under the operative assumption that *Heimdallr* represents an original theonym, I propose the following development. As many earlier commentators have suggested, Heimdallr’s original status was more fundamental in early north Germanic cosmology and had its centre of gravity in the functional area of fertility. As a consequence of a historical resolution between two sets of divinities represented in our texts as the Æsir and Vanir and/or of functional shifts in the various roles of Óðinn, Týr, Þórr, and Freyr, the god Heimdallr was marginalized. Perhaps this diminution of role as fertility figure was accompanied by a shift from caprine to ovine insignia, facilitated by some common descriptive reference points, e.g., horns, teeth. This freed up the goat for what must be recognized as a rather bizarre attribution to a god of war, a redefined Þórr whose area of influence was extended to aggressive virile sexuality, and human and animal fertility.³³ The change of economic perspective that would eventually accord enhanced importance to sheep may have saved Heimdallr from even greater eclipse. Heimdallr’s original procreative function was retained in the *Rígsþula* story and poetic tags, but otherwise muted. Elsewhere in myth these developments were narrativized in the assignment of divine sentinel duties on the boundary of Ásgarðr, perhaps motivated by the ascription of some misdemeanor (Gefjon) or disfigurement (battle with Loki, ear loss), sharp- but single-eared Heimdallr now standing watch in all weather with his attentively cocked head and curving horn under the arch of the rainbow bridge.³⁴



33. Edgar C. Polomé rejects such an association as incompatible with the evident heterosexuality of Heimdallr (personal communication), while Hermann Pálsson speculates that the name may be related to the common noun *rigur* ‘strife, hostility’: “Each of the social classes inherited from their common ancestor a sense of antipathy toward the other two” (personal communication). I should like to record my thanks to Professors Pálsson and Polomé for much helpful comment on an earlier draft of this article.

34. In suggesting an origin of the name *Heimdallr* in *dalr*, I return to a small part of the thesis of Pipping (1926, 120–30), but rather than the grandiose “arch of the heavens” I see only the curving horn of a vital domestic animal. But even under such modest cover most of the evidence in the Heimdallr file can be accommodated.

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Illustration auf Seite 27: Heimdallr-Motiv auf dem Steinkreuz von Gosforth, Cumbria. Nach einer Zeichnung von W.G. Collingwood. Mit freundlicher Erlaubnis des Verlages Faber & Faber entnommen aus: W.G. Collingwood, *Northumbrian Crosses in the Pre-Norman Age* (London 1927), 156.