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ARIZONA CENTER FOR
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FROM *HÁVAMÁL* TO RACIAL HYGIENE: GUIDO LIST'S *DAS GEHEIMNIS DER RUNEN*, “THE SECRET OF THE RUNES” (1908)¹

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1. Introduction

The Austrian occultist Guido List (1848–1919) was a prominent figure in the *völkisch* movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,² whose influence on subsequent generations was far-reaching: much of the nationalist and racist mythography and esotericism of the twenties and thirties, as well as the iconography and cult practice of the SS, is rooted in List's writings; and he is the ultimate source of the National Socialists' *Sieg Heil!* greeting.³

List's chief contribution to the *völkisch* occult movement was his fantastical “reconstruction” of a secret history in which the German people represented the pinnacle of human evolution, and in which a hidden élite were the keepers of ancient wisdom encoded in the runes. His esoteric interpretation of the runes

¹ All English translations of German texts in this paper are mine, except where indicated otherwise.

² On the *völkisch* movement in general, see Uwe Puschner, *Die Völkische Bewegung im wilhelminischen Kaiserreich* (Darmstadt, 2001); *Handbuch zur Völkischen Bewegung 1871–1918*, ed. idem et al. (Munich, 1996); Stefanie von Schnurbein, *Religion als Kulturkritik* (Heidelberg, 1992); *Völkische Religion und Krisen der Moderne*, ed. eadem and Justus H. Ulbricht (Würzburg, 2001). For more substantial information on List's life and ideas, see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (London, 1992); Ulrich Hunger, *Die Runenkunde im Dritten Reich* (Frankfurt a.M., 1984), 315–30; Inge Kunz, “Herrenmenschentum, Neugermanen und Okkultismus: Eine soziologische Bearbeitung der Schriften von Guido List” (Dr. Phil. thesis, University of Vienna, 1961).

³ Hunger, *Runenkunde*, 100; Guido List, *Das Geheimnis der Runen* (Leipzig and Vienna, 1912), 14; idem, *The Secret of the Runes*, trans. S. E. Flowers (Rochester, 1988), 118.

remains the basis of most, if not all, neo-pagan runic practice. Aside from those modern neo-pagan authors like Stephen Flowers (a.k.a. Edred Thorsson), who consciously disseminate his ideas within the occult/neo-pagan subculture,⁴ even the more popular works on rune-divination have at their heart the Listian conception of runes as hieroglyphs which encode profound mystical ideas in their names and forms.

This paper focusses on just one aspect of List's runic fantasy: his appropriation of part of the medieval Icelandic poem *Hávamál* ("Sayings of the High One") in the service of his fictitious version of Germany's past—a fiction which expresses his mystical conception of race as well as a deep-seated misogyny justified by appeal to the secret knowledge of the ancients.

It would be a mistake to infer from List's fondness for Germanic antiquity and for Eddic poetry in particular that he was in any sense a scholar of Old Norse, or indeed a scholar of any kind. He would be better characterised as an enthusiastic autodidact, whose engagement with the primary materials was through German translations; his selection and manipulation of his source material in furthering his own beliefs will become apparent in the following analysis.

List's pseudo-history is built on a Germanocentric extension of the racist mythology constructed by Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891), the founder of the Theosophical Society. In common with the Theosophists and with his close friend Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels (1874–1954), List believed that contemporary humanity was engaged in an apocalyptic struggle between the superior Aryans and the degenerate offspring of earlier, less evolved, races of humanity.⁵ Although List was not a member of the Theosophical Society himself, several members of his inner circle were, including Lanz and Johannes Balzli, author of List's biography. Among those who joined the Guido von List⁶ Society (founded in 1908) were the leading German Theosophist Franz Hartmann (1838–1912) and the entire membership of the Vienna Theosophical Society.⁷

⁴ Flowers/Thorsson's sympathy for List's ideas is apparent in his translation of the latter's works (List, *Secret*), and in his own writings: e.g., Edred Thorsson, *Rune Might* (St. Paul, 1990).

⁵ In Blavatsky's fantastical anthropogony, humanity is supposed to be in a process of evolution through seven "root-races," from which various sub-races diverge. Modern Europeans are identified as the descendants of the fifth, "Aryan," root-race and the current high point of human development. See Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* (Wheaton, 1888), 2:227–315; Kunz, "Herrenmenschentum," 113; Guido List, *Die Ursprache der Ario-Germanen und ihre Mysteriensprache* (Leipzig and Vienna, 1914), 24–25. On Lanz, see Goodrick-Clarke, *Roots*, 90–122.

⁶ List adopted the *von* particle in 1903, in recognition of his (almost certainly spurious) claim to aristocratic ancestry: Johannes Balzli, *Guido v. List* (Leipzig, 1917), 5; Goodrick-Clarke, *Roots*, 41–42.

⁷ Goodrick-Clarke, *Roots*, 44.

In a series of publications under the rubric of “research findings” (*Forschungsergebnisse*), List “reconstructed” the high culture and hidden wisdom of the Aryo-Germans, carried and preserved by their priestly rulers, the *Armanen*.⁸ The first and most influential of these works was *Das Geheimnis der Runen*, “The Secret of the Runes” (1908),⁹ in which List outlined the supposed connection between *Hávamál* and the runes.

2. *Hávamál*, the Eddas and the Influence of Karl Simrock (1802–1876)

Hávamál is recorded in the Poetic Edda, a collection of mythological and heroic Icelandic poetry preserved in the late thirteenth-century *Codex Regius*. The roughly contemporary Prose Edda, traditionally attributed to Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241), attempts to explain the rich mythological allusions in Eddic and skaldic poetry. To many nineteenth-century scholars, the Eddas represented an authentic record of Nordic heathen belief and revealed elements of a pan-Germanic culture and literature with origins stretching back into antiquity and even into prehistory.¹⁰

Hávamál is itself probably a composite of several poems belonging to an existing oral tradition; some of these poems are thought to have been composed in the heathen period, perhaps in the tenth century.¹¹ *Hávamál* consists for the most part of ethical instruction given by the god Óðinn (German *Wuotan/Wotan*) to a young man named Loddfáfnir. The final portion, the part which captured List’s imagination, is known in contemporary editions as *rúnatal s þáttur Óðins*, “Óðinn’s rune-song.”¹²

⁸ The name “Armanen” is based on *Herminones/Irminones*, one of the three divisions of the Germani described by Tacitus (*Germania*, 2). List reinterpreted Tacitus’ regional groupings (*Ingaevones*, *Istaevones*, *Irminones*) as the three estates of Aryo-German society: respectively, the farmers, warriors, and priests/rulers (List, *Geheimnis*, 30).

⁹ All references in this paper are to the second edition (1912); see n. 3 above.

¹⁰ Compare, for example, Jacob Grimm, *Geschichte der deutschen Sprache*, 4th ed. (Leipzig, 1880), 760–62; Karl Simrock, *Die Edda die ältere und jüngere nebst den mythischen Erzählung der Skalda* (Stuttgart, 1851), 333–36. See also C. Lee’s contribution in this volume.

¹¹ David A.H. Evans, *Hávamál* (London, 1986), 7–8, 34–35.

¹² Simrock, *Edda*; Hans von Wolzogen, *Die Edda* (Leipzig, n.d. [1876]); Adolf Holtzmann, *Ältere Edda* (Leipzig, 1875); Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, 4th ed. (Heidelberg, 1962); Friedrich Wilhelm Bergmann, *Des Hebrén Sprüche (Háva mál) und altnordische Sprüche, Priameln und Rünenlehren* (Strassburg, 1877). I have used the modern editions of Evans and Neckel for the Norse text. The German translations to which I have referred are those which were available at the time of writing and which predate the publication of *Das Geheimnis der Runen*.

In this section of the poem, Óðinn describes how he sacrificed himself on a tree (taken to be the “world-ash” Yggdrasill) to gain knowledge of the runes. There follow eighteen stanzas in which he describes various charms or spells which he knows. In modern editions (such as those of Evans and Neckel: see nn. 11–12), these are treated as a separate section subtitled *ljóðatal*, “spell-song”; but this division was introduced by Karl Müllenhoff in his encyclopaedic survey of materials pertaining to Germanic antiquity.¹³ In earlier editions of the Norse text (e.g., the editions of Bergmann and Holtzmann; see n. 12), it is part of the *rúnatal*; and in the German translation used by List (see below), *Hávamál* is broken up into four poems, presented as entirely separate texts.

In the introduction to his English translation of *Das Geheimnis der Runen*, Flowers implies that List’s source text is Karl Simrock’s translation of the Eddas.¹⁴ Although List was familiar with Simrock’s work, the text used is in fact the translation by Hans von Wolzogen (1848–1938), a follower of Wagner and author of numerous commentaries on his works.¹⁵ Where List quotes *Hávamál*, he uses Wolzogen’s text (without acknowledging his source), aside from several emendations which appear to be List’s own; one of these is discussed below.

This is not to say that Simrock did not exert a powerful influence on List and his contemporaries: following the realisation early in the nineteenth century that Scandinavian, German, English, and Gothic languages shared a common origin which could be reconstructed, few scholars hesitated in applying the same principle to mythology and culture. Since nationalists regarded shared language as a marker of common identity and history, it followed that peoples with related languages (Germans, Scandinavians, Goths) must have had, in addition to a common proto-Germanic language (*Ursprache*), a common *ur*-culture and *ur*-religion. It followed that the Norse myths in their “original” forms belonged to Germans as much as (and in List’s worldview, perhaps more than) to Scandinavians. Simrock followed the practice of the Brothers Grimm in using *deutsch* rather than *germanisch* to refer to Germanic antiquities—so, for example, his translation of *Beowulf* is subtitled *Das älteste deutsche Epos*, “the oldest German epic.”¹⁶

It is Simrock’s patriotism and his enthusiasm for his subject matter, rather than his academic rigour, which distinguish him as a scholar. His translations of medieval texts tend to favour aesthetic qualities over linguistic accuracy.¹⁷ What endeared him to List and his followers, however, was Simrock’s desire to

Stanzas are left unnumbered, as numbering varies between editions and has no bearing on the present discussion.

¹³ Karl Müllenhoff, *Deutsche Altertumskunde* (Berlin, 1870–1891), 5:251, 270–79.

¹⁴ List, *Secret*, 27.

¹⁵ Hildegard Châtelier, “Hans Paul Freiherr von Wolzogen,” in *Handbuch*, ed. Puschner et al., 933–34.

¹⁶ Hugo Moser, *Karl Simrock* (Berlin, 1976), 283–84.

¹⁷ Moser, *Simrock*, 284–91.

reawaken the spirit of the German *Volk* by making available to them the literature of their forebears, “die versunkenen Schätze unserer Vorzeit,” “the sunken treasure of our prehistory.”¹⁸

In his handling of the Eddas, Simrock goes beyond simply laying claim to them as common Germanic (and therefore essentially German) cultural property; he elevates them to the status of heathen holy scripture. Simrock was the first German translator to put together the Poetic and Prose Eddas in a single volume, and his introduction makes explicit his view that they comprised a singular Edda, a “Nordic Bible.”¹⁹ Echoing Simrock’s phrase in an article written towards the end of his life, List refers to the prophecies contained in “unserer ariogermanischen Edda, der uraltheiligen ‘Armanenbibel,’” “our Aryo-Germanic Edda, the ancient holy ‘Armanic Bible.’”²⁰

The crucial feature of List’s revelation — that the “spell-song” is an esoteric rune-poem — likewise stems from an idea of Simrock’s. In his commentary on *Hávamál*, Simrock describes the three extant medieval rune-poems (the Anglo-Saxon, Norwegian, and Icelandic), each verse of which describes the object which corresponds to the rune’s name.²¹ He goes on to suggest that through his self-sacrifice Óðinn discovered not only the runic symbols but the verses that went along with them (i.e., the “original” rune-poem).²²

3. The “Futharkh”: List’s Runic Alphabet

The core of List’s seminal work is the esoteric interpretation of the eighteen charms as a rune-poem, with each verse corresponding to a particular rune and containing the key to understanding its secret meanings. There is, however, no eighteen-letter runic alphabet. The sixteen-letter alphabets used in the Viking Age developed from the twenty-four-letter version known nowadays as the Older Fupark; but in the nineteenth century they were widely believed to be older, apparently on the assumption that the fupark began in its simplest form and was later elaborated.²³ In order to match the eighteen charms of the *ljóðatal* to eighteen runes, therefore, List needed to expand the fupark.

Before discussing his solution to this problem, it is worth remarking on List’s name for the runic alphabet. The name *fupark* comes from the values of the first six runes. List asserts that the alphabet should properly be named after the first *seven*

¹⁸ Simrock, *Edda*, 318; quoted approvingly by Balzli, *List*, 43.

¹⁹ Simrock, *Edda*, 319.

²⁰ Guido List, “Wer ist der Starke von Oben?,” in Balzli, *List*, 125.

²¹ For more detail, see R. I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes* (Woodbridge, 1999), 60–79.

²² Simrock, *Edda*, 383.

²³ Grimm, *Geschichte*, 110–11.

runes, i.e., *Futharkh*.²⁴ List's interest in numerology is one reason for this alteration—the number seven is not given prominence in *Das Geheimnis der Runen*, although List refers the reader to the forthcoming *Die Ursprache der Ario-Germanen*, “The Proto-language of the Aryo-Germans” (which does not in fact offer any further explanation).²⁵ This number is, however, prominent in Cabbala, Christian eschatology, and occult philosophy: the seven planets in astrology correspond to the seven metals of alchemy and are governed by seven angels, and so on. Clearly List intended to link the runes to this occult symbolism, and at various points in his writings he alludes to a forthcoming work, *Armanismus und Kabbala* (which was never published, and the manuscript of which was lost), claiming that Cabbalistic techniques are not Jewish, but are part of the Armanic legacy.²⁶

The name Futharkh does not, though, originate with List; he appears to have taken it from Friedrich Fischbach (1839–1908), a *völkisch* writer who translated selections from the Poetic Edda in order to promote them to a popular audience.²⁷ Like List, Fischbach believed that the runes were Aryan holy signs brought to the Mediterranean by the Phoenicians as the basis of the other Middle Eastern and European alphabets.²⁸ List went further and claimed that, just as the Aryan *Ursprache* was the original language, the Aryan writing system was the forerunner of *all* other writing systems, including Egyptian hieroglyphics (the ancient Egyptian civilisation being, like all others, founded by Aryans).

Fischbach identifies the first seven runes (*f u þ a r k h*) as the holiest of the Aryan symbols which were adapted for writing, giving an original Futharkh of seven letters later expanded to fourteen (not sixteen).²⁹ List, on the other hand, takes as his starting point the sixteen-letter *fuparks* and adds two more runes in order to expand the inventory to eighteen. The first of the additional runes is † *e*,³⁰ while the other is the secret holy Aryan symbol of the swastika or *Fyrfos* “four-foot,” much beloved by the Theosophists and other occultists of the period.

²⁴ List, *Geheimnis*, 1.

²⁵ List, *Ursprache*, 104.

²⁶ E.g., List, *Geheimnis*, 35; *Ursprache*, 15 *et passim*. On the delay in publication, see Balzli, *List*, 65–67. The disappearance of the ms. is mentioned in an article by one of List's followers: A. Wolf-Wolfsberg, “Guido v. List, der Skalde, Seher und Forscher,” *Zeitschrift für Menschenkenntnis und Schicksalsforschung* 2 (1927): 93–96.

²⁷ Friedrich Fischbach, *Die schönsten Lieder der Edda* (Cologne, 1903). For biographical information, see Georg Fischbach, “Gedenk-Blatt an Friedrich Fischbach” (Wiesbaden, 1908). Fischbach was (presumably briefly) a member of the Guido-von-List Gesellschaft (Puschner, *Völkische Bewegung*, 141).

²⁸ Friedrich Fischbach, *Ursprung der Buchstaben Gutenbergs* (Mainz, 1900), 5.

²⁹ Fischbach, *Ursprung*, 5.

³⁰ The form † is normally a form of *a* in Viking Age inscriptions, although in late modifications of the *fupark* it was given the value *æ* and sometimes *e* (Page, *English Runes*, 202–3).

It is hardly surprising that List wanted to include the swastika in his scheme, even though it is not normally considered to be a letter. The appearance of swastika-like symbols in many different places and cultures constituted for List, as it did for the Theosophists, evidence that all human societies, religions, and languages had a common origin. The presence of the sign in Europe, Asia, the Americas, and the Pacific was taken as proof of the existence of a high Aryan civilisation which had once dominated the whole globe.³¹ To List, as to Fischbach (who did not regard the swastika as a rune in itself but as a derivative of the *f*-rune), it represented the life-generating element of fire.³² We find similar ideas in the work of the Theosophist Maximilian Ferdinand Sebaldt von Werth, who influenced List's thinking on sexuality and sexual morality (see below). In Sebaldt's "reconstruction" of Aryan prehistory, the swastika represents a fire-drill (*Feuerquirle*): the production of fire is fundamental to Indo-European mythology, and fire-generation with the drill is associated mythologically and symbolically with the sexual act (the spark being created by friction between a shaft of hard wood and a notched board of softer wood).³³

List does not assign any phonetic value to the swastika. Instead he says that the skalds (whom he portrays as medieval successors of the Armanen) protected the mystery of the *Fyrfos* by partially replacing it with another rune, *gibor* (a variant of the *g*-rune χ). The *gibor*-rune is in effect the exoteric version of the eighteenth rune, and the *Fyrfos* the esoteric.³⁴

List's eighteen-letter Futharkh, then, looks like this:³⁵

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
ƒ	ᵛ	þ	ʀ	ʁ	ʀ	*	†	l	l	h	↑	β	↑	Υ	↓	†	卐 χ
f	u	th	o, a	r	k	h	n	i	a	s	t	b	l	m	y	e	(g)

Runes 1–16 follow the order of the Viking-Age fuparks (except that *l* and *m* are transposed from their usual order, for reasons which will be explained later), while the additional runes have been placed at the end, rather than integrated into the sequence at an earlier point.

³¹ Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, 1:98–101; List, *Ursprache*, 33; Maximilian Ferdinand Sebaldt, *D.I.S.: Die Arische Sexualreligion als Volks-Veredelung in Zeugen, Leben und Sterben* (Graz, 2008 [1897]), 57–58.

³² Fischbach, *Ursprung*, 9; Kunz, "Herrenmenschentum," 96.

³³ Sebaldt, *Sexualreligion*, 27–32.

³⁴ List, *Geheimnis*, 21–23.

³⁵ Compare List, *Geheimnis*, frontispiece.

4. *Hávamál* and the Futharkh in *Das Geheimnis der Runen*

In *Das Geheimnis der Runen*, List maps each of the eighteen runes onto a verse of *Hávamál* and reveals its esoteric meaning. The entries for each rune follow a pattern: List first presents the rune-form and a series of names and glosses. These include the names attested in the medieval rune-poems and one or more Aryan *ur-* and “seed”-words from which they are supposedly derived (such as *fā* for the first rune), as well as additional names probably taken from Fischbach, and other alliterating words which List has added himself. The name-list is followed by the *Hávamál* verse taken (without attribution) from Wolzogen, and List’s explanation of the rune’s esoteric meaning(s). Each entry closes with an aphorism.

As was mentioned earlier, List’s use of the *Hávamál* text is inconsistent (perhaps unsurprisingly for an avowed irrationalist, who believed firmly in the primacy of intuitive insight over reason in the search for knowledge and truth).³⁶ For seven of the eighteen runes (*f u r h n a m*), he bases his exegesis entirely (or almost entirely) on the rune-names. For the remaining eleven, he pays at least some attention to the verses of the *ljóðatal*, even if it is just a matter of picking up on a single word or concept in the text and using it to make a quite general point.

Where List does make use of the text, he does so primarily in the service of one of his major themes: the interplay of sexuality, moral character (individual and collective), and racial hygiene. This broad theme is central to the commentaries on seven of the eleven runes where the *Hávamál* verse is used (*p o k i y e* and the swastika), as well as three of the runes where it is not (*r h m*).³⁷

At the heart of List’s philosophy is a belief that the individual can overcome external obstacles through a strong will and through self-knowledge. To List, individual spiritual power is intrinsically bound up with the *moralische Kraft*, “moral force” of the *Volk*: the spiritual life of the race is the macrocosmic reflection of that of the individual.³⁸ This philosophy can be seen in his commentaries on the *o* and *i* runes:³⁹

³⁶ Balzli, *List*, 51, 67.

³⁷ The remaining runes (*f u n a*, which List explains without reference to the corresponding *Hávamál* verse; and *s t b l*, where he makes some use of the verse, but his exegesis does not relate to the theme of sexuality and race) are not discussed further in this paper.

³⁸ List, *Geheimnis*, 10.

³⁹ List, *Geheimnis*, 9, 13.

ǫ (o, a): os, as, ask, ast = Ase, Mund; Entstehung, Esche, Asche:⁴⁰

“os, as, ask, ast [branch] = Ase, mouth; arising, ash-tree, ash”

<i>Ein Viertes noch weiß ich, wenn man mir wirft</i>	A fourth I also know, if someone throws
<i>Arme und Beine in Bande;</i>	My arms and legs in bonds;
<i>Als bald ich es singe, als bald kann ich fort,</i>	As soon as I sing it, I can go forth,
<i>Vom Fuße fällt mir die Fessel,</i>	From my foot falls the fetter,
<i>Der Haft von den Händen herab.</i>	The shackle from my hands.

ǐ (i): i (ich), is, Eis, Eisen:

“i (I), is, ice, iron”

<i>Ein Neuntes versteh ich, wenn Not mir entsteht</i>	A ninth I understand, when the need arises
[sic],	for me,
<i>Mein Schiff auf dem Meere zu schützen:</i>	To protect my ship on the sea:
<i>Da still ich den Sturm auf der steigenden See</i>	Then I still the storm on the rising sea
<i>Und beschwichtige den Schwall der Wogen.</i>	And pacify the swell of the waves.

Having identified the *i*-rune as the *Ich*-rune, it is not surprising that List seeks an interpretation which emphasises the power of the ego, the individual will. He builds on the theme presented in the *Hávamál* verse by reinterpreting the charm for calming the waves as a charm for *freezing* the waves (here drawing his inspiration from the rune-name “ice”). Furthermore, the waves (*Wellen*) esoterically signify the will (*Wille*), which can be “frozen” (that is, controlled) by a sufficiently powerful ego. Confidence in one’s own spiritual power enables the individual to impose his will on others and cause both physical and spiritual paralysis. List allows himself to deviate from the content of the verse and bring in an eclectic array of imagery from classical mythology and folklore, including Athene’s shield (on which is mounted Medusa’s head) and the supposed ability of hunters to freeze their prey, as well as the modern art of hypnotism.

As we might expect, List strays freely from the text into more general and esoteric discussion, though he takes his lead from the *Hávamál* text and attempts to integrate the meaning of the verse with that of the rune-name. His conception of the power of the will calls to mind the Nietzschean *Wille zur Macht* or Schopenhauer’s *Wille zum Leben*. Although List borrows certain ideas (such as the

⁴⁰ In the examples below, the list of rune-names with their alleged meanings, and the German versions of the stanzas, are quoted from List. The verses are in turn taken from Wolzogen; where List deviates from Wolzogen’s text, this is noted in the following discussion. The English translations are mine.

belief that humanity is divided into masters and servants) and terminology from Nietzsche, he does not directly refer to or quote him in any of his own writings, save for a single derogatory mention.⁴¹ Similarly, Schopenhauer's influence might be present in List's use of the metaphor of history as the "court of the world" (*die Welt selbst ist das Weltgericht*, "the world itself is the world-court"),⁴² but we have no evidence that he was directly or intimately familiar with Schopenhauer's work; the metaphor is conventional and properly originates with Hegel.⁴³ Schopenhauer and Nietzsche both conceive of the will in terms of amoral striving,⁴⁴ a conception which List does not accept (see below). The Nietzschean *Übermensch* may be, as Tanner puts it, a being who "manifests [the *Wille zur Macht*] in its purest, most impressive way: as self-overcoming,"⁴⁵ but Nietzsche's attention seems to be firmly on the individual will's attainment of greatness (whatever that is). While List's account of the individual will has echoes of Nietzsche, to List the will is fundamentally bound up in the mystical connection among individual, racial, and divine consciousness.

In the verse which List connects with *o*, Óðinn describes his ability to loosen bonds through his magic. In List's esoteric interpretation, we see again the belief that magical effects can be achieved through the exertion of personal power. The fetters in the verse represent the bonds of the temporal world, which can be overcome by the power of the voice as the expression of the will. This spiritual power (*geistige Macht*) overcomes those who attempt to control people by purely physical means.

List develops the theme further in a footnote, explaining that in the struggle for survival, it is the *Volk* which retains its *moralische Kraft*—rather than the one which excels in purely intellectual development—which will triumph; conversely, if the *Volk* loses its moral power, it also loses its intellectual standing.⁴⁶ This is a departure from the foregoing commentary and, if we focus exclusively on the *Hávamál* verse, the footnote seems like something of a non sequitur. It does, however, serve List's claim that spiritual power trumps physical might and

⁴¹ Kunz, "Herrenmenschentum," 207.

⁴² Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (Stuttgart, 1987 [1859]), 1:495.

⁴³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 3rd ed. (Berlin, 1854), §340.

⁴⁴ Christopher Janaway, "Schopenhauer," in *German Philosophers: Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche*, ed. Roger Scruton et al. (Oxford, 2001), 215–337, at 226–27, 249–58; Jörg Salaquarda, "Nietzsche and the Judaeo-Christian Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins (Cambridge, 1996), 90–118, at 105–6.

⁴⁵ Michael Tanner, "Nietzsche," in *German Philosophers*, ed. Scruton et al., 339–435, at 398.

⁴⁶ List, *Geheimnis*, 10.

intellectual sophistication (that is, worldly power). More importantly, though, it advances his theses that this spiritual power is essentially moral in nature (unlike the Schopenhauerian or Nietzschean will); and that the individual will and the vital force of the *Volk* are reflections of one another. The coupling of macrocosm and microcosm is a central idea in the mysticism of *Das Geheimnis der Runen*—a principle to which List refers frequently using the term *zwiespältig-zweieinige* (or *beideinig-zwiespältige*) *Zweiheit*.⁴⁷ This rather opaque term refers to the resolution of duality, the paradoxical union of opposites—not only the opposites of macrocosm and microcosm, but also those of male and female.

These themes are also addressed in the commentaries on the *r*- and *h*-runes, where List makes no use of the *Hávamál* verses.⁴⁸ In the latter case, List plays on the name *bagal* “hail” to derive the phrase *das All hegen*, “to cherish/foster the All,” and again tells the reader that the knowledge of one’s own inner godlike nature gives one the confidence and power to perform wonders like Christ or Wuotan.⁴⁹ In the *r* commentary, he claims that the ancient Aryans had this kind of awareness and that when a *Volk* collectively retains this sense of *Gottinnerlichkeit*, “divine inwardness,” it has no need for the outer trappings of organised religion.⁵⁰ Here again, the belief in the divine essence of the individual (a familiar element of Western mysticism with its roots in Gnosticism) is linked to the collective soul of the *Volk*.⁵¹

In the commentary on the *k*-rune, List develops this notion of a mystical union of individual and *Volk* into a clearer and more overt expression of his racial ideology:

Ʒ (*k*): ka, kaun, kan, kuna, kien, kiel, kon, kühn, kein
(nichts) usw.:

“*ka, kaun, kan, kuna, torch, keel, kon, bold, no (nothing) etc.*”

<i>Ein sechstes ist mein, wenn ein Mann mich seht</i>	A sixth is mine, when a man harms me
<i>Mit fremden Baumes Wurzel;</i>	With the root of a foreign tree;
<i>Nicht mich versehrt, den Mann verzehrt</i>	The destruction with which he threatened me
<i>Das Verderben, mit dem er mir drohte.</i>	Does not hurt me, but consumes that man.

⁴⁷ Flowers translates this (rather unhelpfully) as “bifidic-biune (or biune-bifidic) dyad” (List, *Secret*, 19–20 *et passim*).

⁴⁸ See Simrock, *Edda*, 56–57; Wolzogen, *Edda*, 182.

⁴⁹ List, *Geheimnis*, 12.

⁵⁰ List, *Geheimnis*, 10.

⁵¹ For further comparisons with Gnosticism, see Kunz, “Herrenmenschentum,” 208–21.

In this case List's exegesis makes more extensive use of the *Hávamál* text than those we have examined so far. Before we turn to the verse itself, the rune-names merit some comment: List states the attested names of *k* and their meanings from the medieval rune-poems (OE *cen* "torch"; ON *kaun* "sore, ulcer"), but does not make further use of them. Instead, he cites the names *kaun*, *kunna* as meaning "maiden" (this seems to be simply an error on his part—the appropriate Old Norse word is *kona* "woman"). The addition of *kiel* "keel" to the list is probably attributable to Fischbach, who focusses on the name "torch," as this could readily link the rune to his Aryan sun- and fire-cult. Fischbach explains that any wood with protruding branches is known as *Kielholz*, and implies that *kien* and *kiel* were equivalent, both being connected with fire.⁵² List knew Fischbach's work, but he has not simply imitated it here: it is sexual imagery which attracts List's attention.

The "maiden" signifies "das weibliche Prinzip im All, im rein sexuellen Verstande," "the feminine principle in the All, in the purely sexual sense."⁵³ List explains to his readers that in the Aryan-German religious worldview, women were regarded as goddesses and the procreative act as a holy action, in stark contrast to the centuries-long mistreatment of women by the Catholic Church. The restoration of the old Aryan "sexual morality" (*Sexualmoral*) is necessary for the healing and salvation of the *Volk*, a process which, List tells his readers, is being pioneered by a handful of independent thinkers (possibly an allusion to Sebaldt).⁵⁴

The connection between the feminine principle and the *Hávamál* verse relies on the reference to the "root of a foreign tree" in the second line—an especially significant point, since this phrase (*fremden Baumes Wurzel*) has been inserted by List. The word *fremd* is not found in Wolzogen, nor in any other German translation, and is not represented in the Norse text. The relevant line in the Norse text has multiple possible readings: Neckel gives the text as *á rótom rás viðar*;⁵⁵ while Evans has *á rótom rams viðar*.⁵⁶ *Rams* "strong, sharp, bitter" appears to have been favoured in the translations of Holtzmann ("mit den Wurzeln eines rauhen Baumes," "with the roots of a rough tree")⁵⁷ and Simrock ("Mit harter Wurzel des Holzes," "with the hard root of the wood").⁵⁸ If *rás* is the proper reading, it could be the genitive singular masculine form of *rár* "bent, crooked";⁵⁹ but

⁵² Fischbach, *Ursprung*, 15.

⁵³ List, *Geheimnis*, 11.

⁵⁴ List, *Geheimnis*, 55.

⁵⁵ Neckel, *Edda*, 1:41; likewise D.E. Martin Clarke, ed., *The Hávamál, with Selections From Other Poems of the Edda* (Cambridge, 1923), 82.

⁵⁶ Evans, *Hávamál*, 71.

⁵⁷ Holtzmann, *Edda*, 86.

⁵⁸ Simrock, *Edda*, 57.

⁵⁹ Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Leiden, 1961), s.v. *rár*.

Neckel identifies it with *brár* “raw, fresh,”⁶⁰ as does Bergmann (“zu den Wurzeln des Saftbaums,” “to the roots of the sappy tree”).⁶¹ Clarke translates *rás víðar* as “of a sapling,” evidently on the same understanding.⁶² Wolzogen has *mit wilden Baumes Wurzel* “with the root of a wild tree,”⁶³ which is curious in itself;⁶⁴ but *fremd* is an interpolation of List’s, and one which is clearly ideologically motivated. Both *rams* and *rás* are words with a range of possible senses and interpretations, but neither of them can reasonably be translated as “foreign.”⁶⁵

Precisely what purpose the introduction of the “root of a foreign tree” serves is made plain in List’s explanatory remarks. The tree in question is the “world-tree” Yggdrasill, symbolising the Aryan race, while the intrusive foreign root is the phallus belonging to men of other races. This verse, as altered by List, reflects the *völkisch* preoccupation with racial degeneration through interbreeding between Aryan women and men of lesser races.⁶⁶

The idealisation of the female and the fear of the sexually intrusive foreign male are probably partly influenced by Sebaldt’s writings on the “sexual religion” of the ancient Aryans. He places a strong emphasis on the sexes as mirrors of the natural law of polarity, and on the importance of marriage as an Aryan institution as well as the basis of racial health.⁶⁷ The point to be stressed at present is that List’s interference with the *Hávamál* text is driven by the concept of sexuality as a mystical union of male and female, important to him because proper, “pure” sexuality was the basis of Aryan racial purity. The *k*-rune warns Aryo-Germans to keep the foreign phallus away from the Aryan female and so to protect their racial stock. The aphorism for *k* encapsulates this idea: “Dein Blut, dein höchstes Gut!” (“Your blood, your greatest possession!”).⁶⁸

The themes of sexuality and racial hygiene are picked up in the exegeses of several other runes. The importance of the phallus as the symbol of masculine vitality stands out in the commentary on the *þ*-rune:

⁶⁰ Neckel, *Edda*, 2:136.

⁶¹ Bergmann, *Sprüche*, 118.

⁶² Clarke, *Hávamál*, 83.

⁶³ Wolzogen, *Edda*, 182.

⁶⁴ It is likely that Wolzogen deviates from the source text in order to preserve the alliterative metre, a common concern for translators. Simrock’s choice of *Holz* rather than *Baum* is similarly motivated.

⁶⁵ Flowers translates *fremd* here as “strange” (List, *Secret*, 53), perhaps to downplay the racist tone of List’s version. Given what follows, it is beyond doubt that List means “foreign” in a strictly racial sense.

⁶⁶ Kunz, “Herrenmenschentum,” 117. Compare Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, 2:286–88, 680–89.

⁶⁷ Sebaldt, *Sexualreligion*, 24–32, 248–68; see also Goodrick-Clarke, *Roots*, 51–52.

⁶⁸ List, *Geheimnis*, 11.

Þ (*th*): thorr, thurs, thorn = Thorr (Donar, Donnerkeil, Blitz), Dorn:

“*thorr, thurs, thorn* = Thorr (Donar, thunderstone, lightning), thorn”

<i>Ein Drittes kenn' ich, das kommt mir zu gut</i>	A third I know, which comes in useful to me
<i>Als Fessel für meine Feinde;</i>	As a fetter for my enemies;
<i>Dem Widerstreiter verstumpf ich das Schwert,</i>	I blunt the sword of my opponent,
<i>Ihm hilft weder Waffe noch Wehr.</i>	Neither weapon nor defence helps him.

List picks up on the notion of blunting an enemy's weapons, again in a metaphorical sense; but he otherwise ignores the verse (not making use, for example, of the metaphor of fetters as he does in the following verse—see the discussion of *o*, above). The focus of List's attention is the rune-name *thorn*, which is given two esoteric meanings: firstly, it is the *Todesdorn* “death-thorn” with which Óðinn punishes Brynhild's disobedience by putting her into a magical sleep in another Eddic poem (*Fáfnismál* 43).⁶⁹ Here, List may again be taking inspiration from Fischbach, who believed the thorn to be a symbol of the thunderbolt: “Der oft nur betäubende Blitz ist der Schlafdorn, aber er bringt auch den ewigen Schlaf. Daher folgern wir auch, dass diese Rune den Tod bedeutet” (“The lightning, which often simply stuns, is the sleep-thorn, but it also brings eternal sleep. Therefore we also conclude that this rune signifies death.”)⁷⁰

The other aspect of the rune's dual nature is as “der ‘Lebensdorn’ (Phallus), mit welchem der Tod durch die ‘Wiedergeburt’ besiegt wird” (“the ‘life-thorn’ (phallus), with which death is conquered through ‘rebirth’”).⁷¹ List relates the “life-thorn” to the text of *Hávamál* by identifying it as that which dulls the weapons of death through the promise of rebirth and the eternity of the ego. The section on the þ-rune closes with the aphorism “Wahre dein ‘Ich!’” (“Protect your ‘I!’”)⁷²—the individual ego or soul being guaranteed survival through the protective strength of the phallus. Fischbach makes no such claims, but he does identify the hawthorn as a symbol of reawakening;⁷³ and both authors claim a connection between the story of Brynhild and that of Sleeping Beauty (*Dornröschen*), an association which originates with Grimm.⁷⁴

List's interest in macrocosmic masculine and feminine principles is partly motivated by a desire to portray conservative sexual mores as the expression of natural law. The phallus is granted the power to give and take away life, while

⁶⁹ Neckel, *Edda*, 176–84.

⁷⁰ Fischbach, *Ursprung*, 12.

⁷¹ List, *Geheimnis*, 9.

⁷² List, *Geheimnis*, 9.

⁷³ Fischbach, *Ursprung*, 12.

⁷⁴ Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, 4th ed. (Wiesbaden, 2007 [1875–1878]), 331.

the role—perhaps it would be better to say function—of women is to reproduce, and to do so through marriage to racially suitable (i.e., Aryan) males. He develops this theme further through the final four runes of the Futharkh.

Ÿ (*m*): man, mon, Mann, Mond (*ma* = muttern,
mehren, leer oder tod):

“*man, mon, man, moon* (*ma* = to mother, to multiply, empty or dead)”

<i>Ein Fünfzehntes zähl ich, was Volkraſt der Zwerg</i>	A fifteenth I count, which Folk-rest the dwarf
<i>Sang vor den Toren des Tags</i>	Sang before the doors of the day
<i>Den Aſen zur Stärkung, den Alben zur Kraft,</i>	For the Æsir for strength, for the elves for power,
<i>Mir ſelber die Sinne zu klären.</i>	For myſelf to clear my mind.

The name of the dwarf in the first line warrants some comment. In the Norse text, it is *Þjóðrörir* / *Þjóðreyrir*.⁷⁵ The first element is *þjóð* “people, nation,” but the etymology of the second is not certain. De Vries, citing Müllenhoff, suggests a connection with an unattested verb **rjósa* “to sound”; Müllenhoff, however, stresses that this etymology is speculative. The element may alternatively be *hrærir* “mover,” to *hræra* “to move, stir.”⁷⁶ In the German translations of Holtzmann and Müllenhoff the name is retained (respectively as *Þjóðreyrir*, *Þjóðreyrir*).⁷⁷ Bergmann reads ON *Fiaðr-eyrir*, which he renders into German as *Goldfed’rig* “gold-feathered.”⁷⁸ It is Simrock who promotes the calque of *Þjóð* as *Volk*; but he leaves the second element untranslated, giving *Volkörir*.⁷⁹ In his commentary on the poem, Simrock draws a comparison with *Oðhrörir* (*Óðrærir*), the mead of poetry. The second element of this compound is normally taken to be *hrærir* “mover, arouser” (see de Vries’ remarks, above), and Simrock accordingly glosses *Volkörir* as “der die Völker aufregt, als etwa ein früher Morgentraum,” “[the one] who excites/arouses the peoples, rather like an early morning dream.”⁸⁰ Wolzogen’s interpretation is similar, though his translation of *-rörir/-reyrir* as *-rast* “rest” is

⁷⁵ Several variants are attested: see Clarke, *Hávamál*, 84; Evans, *Hávamál*, 73; Neckel, *Edda*, 1:43.

⁷⁶ de Vries, *Altnordisches Wörterbuch*, s.v. *Þjóðrærir*; Karl Müllenhoff, “Die alte Dichtung von den Nibelungen,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 23 (1897): 113–73, at 157–58.

⁷⁷ Holtzmann, *Edda*, 87; Müllenhoff, *Deutsche Altertumskunde*, 273.

⁷⁸ Bergmann, *Sprüche*, 37, 119.

⁷⁹ Simrock, *Edda*, 58.

⁸⁰ Simrock, *Edda*, 384.

peculiar, and he does not explain how he arrived at it. In a footnote he identifies *Volkrast* as a sleep-spirit, but he offers no further explanation.⁸¹

List shows little interest in the *Hávamál* verse, instead connecting the rune with the Man in the Moon as a symbol of the propagation of mankind. It is possible that he has taken inspiration from Wolzogen's identification of the dwarf as a character who empowers sleepers. List's main focus of interest, though, is the rune-names: in the rune-poems the name of the *m*-rune is "man, person" (OE *mann*, ON *maðr*), to which list adds the names "moon" and "mother." He links the various names together by "reconstructing" an Aryan *ur*-word *ma*, meaning "female generation," with *fa* being the masculine *ur*-word and the name for the *f*-rune (an idea which List does not mention in regard to the *f*-rune and the associated section of *Hávamál*). The rune is in this way linked to the feminine principle through the image of woman as mother, as perpetuator of the race. The idealisation of women that we have seen so far takes on a darker aspect in the following section.

𐌿 (y): yr, eur, Iris, Bogen, Regenbogen,
Eibenholtzbogen, Irren, Zorn usw.:

"yr, eur, iris, arc, rainbow, yew-wood bow, to err, fury etc."

<i>Ein Sechzehntes sprech ich bei spröder Maid</i>	A sixteenth I speak to a demure maid
<i>Mir Gunst und Glück zu erlangen;</i>	To get myself favour and happiness;
<i>Das wandelt und wendet mir Wunsch und Sinn</i>	It changes and turns to me the desire and the mind
<i>Der schwanenarmigen Schönen.</i>	Of the swan-armed beauty.

Several German translators seem to have felt the need to alter the sense of the first line. In the Norse text, the adjective used to describe the maiden is *svinnr* "shrewd, clever, wise." Holtzmann translates it straightforwardly as *klug* "clever";⁸² but Bergmann uses *keusch* "chaste"⁸³ and Simrock *schön* "fair, beautiful."⁸⁴ Given that the topic of the verse appears to be Óðinn's ability to seduce young women with his magic, it is possible that translators wished to depict those women as virtuous and innocent. Wolzogen's use of *spröd(e)* would be consistent with this motive.

On the other hand, Flowers' translation of *spröd(e)* as "coy"⁸⁵ is perfectly legitimate and seems to imply an element of coquetry which might be more appropriate to List's intentions, if not to Wolzogen's. In this part of his exegesis,

⁸¹ Wolzogen, *Edda*, 183.

⁸² Holtzmann, *Edda*, 88.

⁸³ Bergmann, *Sprüche*, 120.

⁸⁴ Simrock, *Edda*, 58.

⁸⁵ List, *Secret*, 62.

List portrays women as fickle and devious, citing an earlier verse of *Hávamál* in which the narrator warns his audience not to trust women:

The words of a girl no-one should trust,
 nor what a woman says;
 for on a whirling wheel their hearts were made,
 deceit lodged in their breasts.⁸⁶

List begins his commentary by observing that the γ -rune is an inverted m -rune, from which he infers that their meanings are inverse. Though he does not say so explicitly, it is for this reason that he moved m from the fourteenth position to the fifteenth in the Futharkh, placing Υ and λ together. Where the m -rune represented the full moon and the cardinal female role of motherhood, γ is its opposite. Playing on the name γr “yew, bow,” List tells us that the γr -rune is also the *Irr*-rune, the rune of error and confusion. Although confusion, sophistry, and deception can be used to overcome obstacles, they yield only false victories. In this sense, says List, the γ -rune is the opposite of the o -rune which represents the overcoming of obstacles through inner spiritual power.⁸⁷

Here List’s moralising has taken a decidedly misogynous turn: women are deceitful and dangerous when allowed to stray from their “natural” roles of marriage and motherhood. This portrayal is wholly in keeping with the conservative mores of List’s time, but what is significant is that List embeds the idea deeply into his occult system. The commentary on γ is one of the few places in *Das Geheimnis der Runen* where List makes reference to any other part of *Hávamál*, and one of the few places where he explicitly links the meaning of one rune to those of others. Although Flowers/Thorsson does not share List’s view of women (nor indeed his racist beliefs), he does follow List’s mystical conception of masculine and feminine principles in his own writings, identifying the γr -rune explicitly as the death-rune⁸⁸ and as “the negative feminine principle in the cosmos.”⁸⁹ He also uses it to mark an individual’s date of death.⁹⁰ This “negative feminine principle” is in List’s view antithetical not only to proper female behaviour (which is vital to racial purity and racial survival), but also to the spiritual endeavour discussed earlier: that the individual should cultivate awareness of the spiritual connection between microcosm and macrocosm. To be successful and develop a strong will, one should direct one’s attention to a sense of inner divinity; this rune warns against the dangers of sensuality and transient pleasures.

⁸⁶ Carolyne Larrington, ed. and trans., *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford, 1996), 25.

⁸⁷ List, *Geheimnis*, 19–20.

⁸⁸ List, *Secret*, 120 (Flowers’ note).

⁸⁹ Thorsson, *Rune Might*, 47.

⁹⁰ Thorsson, *Rune Might*, 9 *et passim*.

The seventeenth rune provides a solution to the perils associated with the sixteenth, and it should come as no surprise to the modern reader that this solution is marriage and obedience to the law:

† (*e*): eh (é), Ehe, Gesetz, Pferd, Gericht usw.:

“*eh* (*é*), marriage, law, horse, law-court etc.”

<i>Ein Siebzehntes hilft mir bei holder Maid,</i>	A seventeenth helps me with a fair maid,
<i>Daß nimmer sie leicht mich verlasse.</i>	So that she will never easily leave me.

The description of the charm constitutes only part of the *Hávamál* verse. In the remainder (which does not concern us at present) Óðinn commends his teaching to Loddfáfnir before mentioning the eighteenth and final charm, which he keeps secret (see below).

While the sixteenth charm turns a maiden’s mind to thoughts of the charmer, the seventeenth binds her so that she will never want to leave him. As far as List is concerned, it represents the counterpoint to the *y*-rune: where *y* is concerned with transitory love, *e* signifies lasting love through marriage. Stressing again the importance of marriage and breeding which we saw in his treatment of the *k*-rune (see above), List states emphatically that marriage is the foundation of the *Volk*. He also makes reference to the “later” form of the *e*-rune, Ɔ (actually the *e*-rune in the Older Futhork) by interpreting it as a double *l*-rune († + reversed †)—*l* having the meaning “law” in his earlier exegesis⁹¹—which he interprets as “zwei durch das Lebens-Urgesetz verbunden!” (“two bound together by the *ur*-law of life!”).⁹² The marital bond, then, acts as an appropriate restraint on the wayward hearts of women, placing them in their proper role as wives and mothers—that is, as the vessels of reproduction to ensure the continuation and success of the Aryan race.

The importance of marriage, sexual morality, and racial purity culminates in List’s treatment of the final rune, the swastika.

⁹¹ List, *Geheimnis*, 17–18.

⁹² List, *Geheimnis*, 20.


 or  or : Fyrfos, Hakenkreuz

“*fyrfos*, hook-cross”

*Das Achtzehnte werd' ich ewig nie
Einem Weib oder Mädchen melden;
Das bildet der Lieder besten Beschluß—
Was Einer von Allen nur weiß
Außer der Frau, die mich ehelich umfängt,
Oder auch Schwester mir ist.*

The eighteenth I will never, ever
Tell to a woman or a girl;
That makes the best ending to the songs—
Which only One of All knows
Except the woman who embraces me in
marriage,
Or who is also my sister.

In accordance with occult convention, List states that this symbol expresses the highest mystery of the eternal cycle of creation, life, death, and rebirth. This mystery, he tells us, is known only to the matrimonially bound deities who embody the *beideinig-zwiespältige Zweiheit*.⁹³ This focus on cosmic sexual principles accords with Blavatsky's identification of the swastika as “the symbol of the male and the female principles in Nature, of the positive and negative.”⁹⁴

Here again, marital sexual union is made the key to the mystery of the runes, in an interpretation licensed by a peculiarity of Wolzogen's translation. The last two lines of the Norse text read *nema þeiri einni, er mik armi verr / eða mín systir sé*,⁹⁵ which Simrock translates: “Als allein vor ihr, die mich umarmt / oder sei es, meine Schwester” (“But [I sing the charm] only before her who embraces me / or as it may be, my sister”)⁹⁶ Holtzmann's rendering is very similar: “als sie allein, die mich in Arme einschließt, / oder die meine Schwester sei,”⁹⁷ while Bergmann has “ausser allein ihr, die mich im arm umfasst, / oder meine schwester wohl ist.”⁹⁸

Wolzogen's *auch*, repeated by List, is explicitly motivated by the belief that the verse refers to a lover who is *also* the narrator's (i.e., Óðinn's) sister. List explains that “Wuotans Gattin ‘Frigga’ ist gleichzeitig seine Schwester, ein Beweis dafür, daß in Altertum Geschwisterehen allgemein waren” (“Wuotan's wife ‘Frigga’ is at the same time his sister, proof that in ancient times marriages between siblings were common”).⁹⁹ Wolzogen also asserts in a footnote to this verse that Frigg is Óðinn's sister: “Nur Wodan und Frigg, die ehelich verbundenen Gottheiten des Himmels und der Erde, kennen die letzte Rune: das Geheimniß der

⁹³ List, *Geheimnis*, 21.

⁹⁴ Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, 2:29.

⁹⁵ Clarke, *Hávamál*, 86; Evans, *Hávamál*, 73; Neckel, *Edda*, 1:43.

⁹⁶ Simrock, *Edda*, 58.

⁹⁷ Holtzmann, *Edda*, 88.

⁹⁸ Bergmann, *Sprüche*, 120.

⁹⁹ List, *Geheimnis*, 21.

Zeugung stäts neuen Lebens, der Wiederkehr” (“Only Wodan and Frigg, the matrimonially bound deities of the sky and the earth, know the final rune: the secret of perpetual generation of new life, of returning”)¹⁰⁰ — a comment which List closely echoes.

This is rather a curious notion: incestuous unions are common enough in mythology (and appear to have been the norm among the Vanir prior to their pact with the Æsir in Norse mythology as portrayed by Snorri);¹⁰¹ but the union between Óðinn and Frigg is not among them. It is possible that List had in mind the goddess Jörð (Earth), who according to the Prose Edda is both the wife and the daughter of Óðinn (*Gylfaginning* 9);¹⁰² although in the following chapter Snorri identifies her as the daughter of Annar and Nótt (Night). Frigg’s father is named Fjörgynn (*Gylfaginning* 9; *Lokasenna* 26).¹⁰³ It is possible that the solution to the problem lies in the fact that the feminine form of this name, Fjörgyn, is also a by-name for Jörð.¹⁰⁴ Even if we suppose — as do some modern commentators — that the two are identical and that Fjörgyn/Jörð is Frigg’s mother, rather than her father,¹⁰⁵ this could make Frigg Óðinn’s daughter (and also his grand-daughter); but she cannot be his sister.

The late nineteenth-century fondness for comparative mythology might be responsible for the confusion: Bergmann, commenting on this verse of *Hávamál*, claims that Frigg is originally (in Indo-European myth as he reconstructs it) the wife and sister of Parddjanias, a storm-god who has been transformed in Norse mythology into Fjörgynn and has become her father. When Óðinn supplanted Fjörgynn as the storm-god, Frigg became his sister-wife instead of Fjörgynn’s. While incestuous marriages were (according to Bergmann) common among the “Proto-Slavs,” they were considered immoral by the Germani, and so the sibling relationship is concealed and obscured.¹⁰⁶

As well as deriving his interpretation from the supposed “proto-myths” of the Indo-Europeans, Bergmann is making a claim for the propriety of the Germanic tribes in their rejection of incestuous unions, unlike such morally degenerate peoples as the Slavs. List picks up a similar interpretation of the *Hávamál* text and uses it to make the opposite claim about the Aryo-Germans. It is also possible that List was thinking of the marriage between the chief Egyptian god Osiris and his sister Isis: in his account of the Aryo-Germans as originators

¹⁰⁰ Wolzogen, *Edda*, 184.

¹⁰¹ Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes* (Odense, 1994), 58, 97.

¹⁰² Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (London, 1988), 13.

¹⁰³ Neckel, *Edda*, 1:98; Sturluson, *Edda*, ed. Faulkes, 13.

¹⁰⁴ The etymology of the name is not clear; see entry in de Vries, *Altnordisches Wörterbuch*.

¹⁰⁵ Kevin Crossley-Holland, *The Norse Myths* (Harmondsworth, 1983), xxxi.

¹⁰⁶ Bergmann, *Sprüche*, 184.

of all human civilisations, List identifies Osiris as an Aryan, and specifically a Saxon.¹⁰⁷ Whatever the reason, List's insistence that such unions were not merely permissible but normal in Aryo-German antiquity is motivated by the importance of preserving bloodlines. If one's family is of the purest blood, inbreeding is the most obvious way to maintain that purity.

5. Conclusions

List's interpretation of the *ljóðatal*, and his connection of the charms with runes, are built on a foundation of belief that was common currency in the *fin de siècle* occultist community. The mysticism of *Das Geheimnis der Runen* espouses a *völkisch* worldview strongly influenced by Theosophy, by Fischbach's depiction of runes as the holy signs of the Aryan fire-cult, and by Sebaldt's *völkisch* sexology. It also finds sympathetic opinions in the romantic nationalism of scholars such as Simrock, who promoted the view that modern Germans were heirs to a great ancient cultural and mythological tradition.

The race-mysticism and the (to modern eyes) striking misogyny expressed in List's work are hardly surprising against this background. His interest in sexuality does not reflect a concern with eroticism or an interest in the practice of sex magic, which preoccupied contemporary groups such as the *Ordo Templi Orientis* (of which his associate Franz Hartmann was also a member).¹⁰⁸ Notwithstanding the characterisation of the sex act as a mystical union of opposites in the *beideinig-zwiespältige Zweiheit*, List's chief interest in sexuality is as a marital union for the purposes of reproduction and preserving racial stock.

What is original in List's work—and what marks out his lasting impact on the *völkisch* occultism of subsequent generations—is that he embeds his sexual mores and the imperative to protect the Aryan female from predatory, racially foreign males into his interpretation of the runes as holy symbols. The runes are sacred hieroglyphs which encode the mystery of the union between the macrocosmic masculine and feminine, as well as the racially pure male and female. Simrock's elevation of the Eddas to the status of Scripture might be seen in retrospect as an invitation to the *völkisch* neo-pagans of List's generation to adopt it as the basis of their religious and spiritual belief systems. The *ljóðatal* becomes, in List's hands, the holy text which reveals the greatest mystery of the ancients; and that mystery is the cosmic unity of the individual will with the racial spirit.

¹⁰⁷ List, *Ursprache*, 33.

¹⁰⁸ Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood* (Durham and London, 2003), 142–43; Goodrick-Clarke, *Roots*, 61.

