Theonyms, Alignment and Social Stance-Taking : From Bronze-Age Borrowings to Baby Names

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Abstract: Names of gods and other mythic agents are commonly seen as emblematic of the respective religions with which they are associated, both for researchers and for people involved in religious encounters. This paper explicates the relationship between names, images of mythic agents and people's social alignments with religious or cultural identities. These factors produce sociolinguistic perspectives on both theonym etymologies and on uses of the same names today.

The relationship between a community and a mythic agent is often polarized as aligned or opposed. As a rule of thumb, a venerated agent is aligned with the worshipping community, and that community will be opposed to that god's adversaries. This phenomenon is here approached through *mythic discourse* – i.e. the use, transmission and manipulation of mythology in society. Approaching mythic agents as existing in and through discourse acknowledges them as social constructions without independent consciousness. This makes their relationships to a society predictable according to a basic structural principle:

> A society or group will link its social position in the universe to that of its venerated gods: adversaries of the gods are thereby adversaries of the society, while adversaries of the society are either directly projected as adversaries of the gods or the gods are summoned as allies within a system of reciprocity.

The resulting alignments and oppositions are approached here in terms of social stance-taking. With particular attention to theonyms, focus is on this phenomenon in situations of religious or cultural contacts and historical change that produce alignments with, or oppositions to, gods of other groups, and/or that result in changes in social stance-taking toward inherited gods. The outcomes of these situations are then analyzable as evidence about the relations between the groups or societies involved.

The idea that positions and relations in a mythology map over those in the human world is not new. Scandinavian giants and trolls, adversaries of the old gods, became identified with the Sámi as their real-world counterparts already in the 18th century (Kuusela 2021: 474–475). Similarly, Elias Lönnrot's *Kalevala* (1835; 1849) is a reconstructive mythography in which he imagined the mythic conflicts as representing historical encounters between the Finns and their northern neighbours (Honko 1990: 560–561). That people think through such mapping is reflected in metaphorical use of terms that may reciprocally shape their semantic development (e.g. Koski 2012). During the 20th century, mythology and religion were theorized as a symbolic projection of society (e.g. Durkheim 1915 [1912]; Malinowski 1948 [1926]; Dumézil 1958). This led to more nuanced perspectives on correlations between mythology and society in meaning-making (e.g. Clunies Ross 1994–1998).

Discussions of this phenomenon often center on how the human world echoes cosmological structures and events (Frog 2022a). When mythologies are viewed as culture-bound and mutually exclusive, alignments and oppositions appear stable and tend to be taken for granted, unless current interpretations are being

challenged (e.g. Ingunn Ásdísardóttir 2018 on *jǫtnar* in Old Norse mythology). Mythic agents are then viewed through the tradition's evaluative framework. Oppositions like GOOD/EVIL or ORDER/CHAOS become a determinant on word usage, as when Modern English *angel* and *devil* are used to characterize children according to their behaviour. However, a mythology is always linked to a society or group, which both positions itself in relation to those structures and reciprocally shapes them in relation to socio-historical factors. When the relationship between mythology and society is recognized, a mythology's structures are reframed in terms of alignments and oppositions involving the living society or group.

The empirical focus here is on cultures in the Circum-Baltic region, especially Scandinavian and Finno-Karelian societies. The non-Christian religions tend to be imagined as individually opposed to Christianity as it spread. Scholars usually view what happened in these encounters in terms of historical change, continuity, syncretism and, more recently, hybridization. In contrast, non-Christian mythologies have customarily been framed as static and ideal systems, and the roles and relations of mythic agents to one another and to society are simply built into those systems. Research acknowledges contact-based influence, but such influences have predominantly been viewed in terms of 'borrowings', consistent with diffusionist approaches to folklore that were dominant across the first half of the 20th century. Conceiving non-Christian religion and mythology first and foremost in terms of linguistic-cultural heritage implicitly excluded the possibility of transcultural conversion and thus of aggressive competition between vernacular religions. The turn to mythic discourse shifts attention from stable or static structures to variation and change

The principles of social relations that map between society and mythology are here combined with a framework for mythic discourse analysis. Together, these produce a model for interpreting examples and analyzing variation that can be applied to stance-taking by individuals or to social changes as outcomes of individuals' acts. Since the 19th century, etymology has been a key tool for assessing the background of mythic agents, linking them to vernacular heritage or foreign contacts. Following the principle "that the evolution of linguistic systems occurs in systematic connection to the socio-historical situation of their speakers" (Conde-Silvestre & Hernández-Campoy 2012: 1), etymological analysis becomes a tool to reveal information about historical situations.

The approach introduced here can be applied to any vocabulary characterized by polarized alignments. Theonyms are in focus because the connection between veneration and social alignment is salient, and names can offer indications of several types of socio-historical situations. Moreover, names can be identical to common nouns, which makes them interesting because of ways that they interact with other words that seem to be less common and more difficult to demonstrate for other vocabulary. Nevertheless, as several examples below illustrate, polarized alignments and oppositions in a lexicon often exhibit remarkable durability. It should therefore be taken into account in any relevant etymology.

The framework presented here is an extension of my work on mythic discourse. I have discussed many of the examples more thoroughly elsewhere, although with different concerns. Following an overview of the theoretical and methodological approach, cases where social alignments remain the same through religious contact or change are discussed first. Such cases take a variety of forms, and the types illustrated should not be considered exhaustive. Discussion then turns to cases where alignments change. Finally, the usage of theonyms in society today is addressed in connection with heritagization, considering whether this constitutes the same or a distinct phenomenon.

Mythic Discourse Analysis and Theonyms
The turn to mythic discourse emerged independently across different disciplines especially around 1990, at a time when 'discourse' was trending as a new lens for looking at cultural phenomena (e.g. O'Leary & McFarland 1989; Rowland 1990; Urban 1991; Siikala 1992 [= 2002]; Goodman 1993). Approaches to mythic discourse remain diverse, but a crucial trajectory development has been to advance beyond treating mythology as static (often imagined as a textual universe), with which

people and societies engage. Mythology has been reframed as something that exists as and through discourse (e.g. Schjødt 2013; Bønding 2021), which tethers it to social activity, practices and situations (Frog 2015).

The methodology applied here is built on a semiotic approach to mythology as constituted of socially accessible signs mediated through language or other forms of expression (see further Frog 2015; 2019). Rather than treating mythologies as linked to particular cultures, societies or religions in isolation, mythology is approached as a *symbolic matrix* constituted of all mythic signs available in a particular milieu. Signs in the matrix operate as models for knowing that produce convictions for people in society, but they are engaged from different perspectives and with potentially competing evaluations and interpretations. The symbolic matrix offers a framework for approaching Christians' and non-Christians' acknowledgement of one another's gods and practices, although they evaluate them from competing perspectives. Mythic signs can then be circulated across different groups as knowledge about the other religion (Frog 2021a). It can also result in an assimilation of some or many of its mythic signs as 'knowledge-of' things in the world, its past or future, or as others' 'knowledge-of' that is rejected as false. Such circulation is a precondition for Christians preserving the rich bodies of information about non-Christian Scandinavian mythology, as well as for the persistence of Odin, Thor, trolls and so on in traditions recorded in the 19th and 20th centuries. Mythic discourse analysis provides an approach to these processes.

In this approach, theonyms are distinguished from the respective images that they identify. A *mythic image* is a static unit of mythology equivalent to the grammatical category of a noun. An image with a unique identity commensurate to a proper noun is described as *centralized*, while an image equivalent to a categorical identity commensurate to a common noun is described as *decentralized*. Using small capitals to represent mythic signs, the centralized image THOR is distinct from the linguistic sign *Þórr*. This image may thus be recognized in iconography, through allusion and so forth without the linguistic sign. Within this approach, images are only one formal type

of sign. Other types are not of particular concern here, but they are significant in constructing images and their associations, so two types warrant mention. A *motif* is a dynamic unit that incorporates one or more images with the equivalent of the grammatical category of a verb. A *diagrammatic schema* is a static relationship between two or more images that constitutes a distinct unit of meaning and can reciprocally impact understandings of the respective images involved.

The late 13th-century *Njáls saga* offers an illustrative example in a confrontation between a Christian missionary and a pagan woman. In their dialogue, the missionary asserts that Þórr was created and empowered by the Christian God, while the pagan woman claims that Þórr challenged Christ to a duel and Christ was too cowardly to show up (ch. 102). The Christian's assertion redefines the centralized image THOR by excluding it from the decentralized or categorical image GOD or DIVINITY. Instead, THOR is situated in a diagrammatic schema of CREATOR/CREATED relative to the Christian GOD. The woman's retort situates the centralized image CHRIST in the motif THOR CHALLENGES X TO:DUEL, where the variable slot X is conventionally completed by various specific examples of the decentralized image GIANT. The motif thus correlates the image CHRIST with agents of chaos who threaten society. (Frog 2021b: 201–203.) The example presents a specific instance of mythic discourse, or perhaps a legend type (cf. Frog 2021a; 2022b), yet the image THOR was excluded from the category GOD as a historical process. For the sake of illustration, we may also consider that, had the assertions attributed to the pagan woman become socially established, *Kristr* ['Christ'] could have become established as the name of a giant adversary of Þórr. Rather than redefining the image through its categorical identification, the theonym could simply be reassigned to a vernacular image or a new centralized image could be produced on that basis. In this case, KRISTR could have been wholly vernacularized, as an image linked to a particular adventure or adventures as people told and elaborated accounts of this or other encounters with Þórr.

The approach to mythology in terms of signs is complemented by the concept of semiotic

ideology. Perspectives on semiotic ideologies are an outgrowth of research on language ideologies – i.e. the systems of ideas, evaluations and assumptions about what languages are and how they relate to things in the world (Kroskrity 2001; Keane 2018; Gal & Irvine 2019). Put simply, language ideologies identify particular ways of speaking with social class, race and so on. Mythology is distinguished as the mythic signs constitutive of a symbolic matrix, whereas ideologies relate signs as parts of groups or systems and link these to things in the world, such as a religion or culture. Ideologies of this type can be described as *symbolic matrix ideologies* or *SMIs*. As with other semiotic ideologies, SMIs are multiple, linked to different social positions, and they may even be idiomatic to a single person. Research oriented to broad social patterns or historical cultures is normally concerned with *dominant ideologies* "that have become successfully 'naturalized' by the majority of the group" (Kroskrity 2001: 203). Especially in historical environments, the sources may also primarily represent only certain segments of society, such as the group or groups behind medieval written texts.

Individual mythic signs may index one another through their patterns of use (i.e. point to one another, be associated with one another); they may also link to things in the world, for instance as a model of lightning. When individual signs are in focus, the boundary between these and ideology can become fuzzy.[1] Nevertheless, the distinction is clear when broader systems are in focus, such as segregating certain mythic signs as belonging to one mythology as opposed to another.

Social stance-taking toward groups and systems of signs reflects an evaluative dimension of such ideologies. Medieval Christians' polarized stance-taking toward non-Christian mythology as 'pagan', with its accompanying evaluations, can be viewed as a dominant SMI for those groups. The dominant Christian SMI contrasts with that of people aligned with non-Christian Scandinavian religion, which seems to have been generally open to accepting additional gods (Schjødt 2021). It is important to acknowledge that SMIs operate in today's scholarly and popular contexts, where dominant SMIs tend to view 'Scandinavian mythology' as systematic and uniform, although the

growing trend has been to challenge such assumptions and bring diversity and variation into focus.
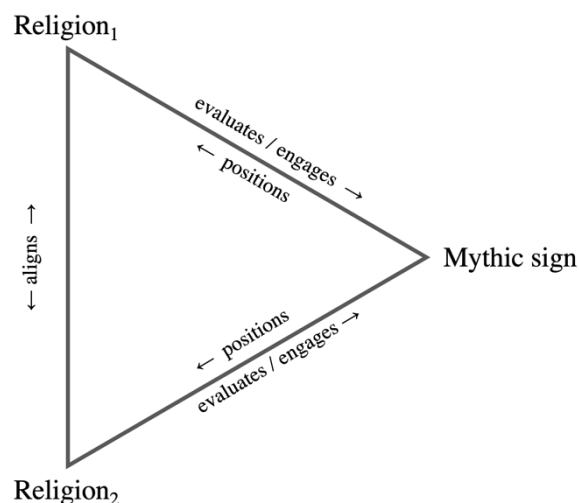

Figure 1. A stance triangle of alignment with religion relative to mythic signs (adapted from Du Bois 2007: 163, Fig. 1).

SMIs correlate religious identity with the ways that individuals or groups engage with mythic signs, interpretable as stance-taking, and as reflecting an alignment with (or against) a religious identity, as illustrated in Figure 1. Agents such as gods subject to veneration hold salient positions in such SMIs because positive alignment with a god becomes corollary with religious alignment. When social identities linked to different alignments become contrasted, conflicts or competition between them may get played out in mythic discourse. Accounts of events of cosmological scope involving emblematic agents then emerge, like that of Þórr challenging Christ to a duel, or a poem from Karelia that describes God trying to kill the demiurge Väinämöinen (*SKVR* I₁ 115). These cases reflect ideologies of exclusion in aggressive conflict, whereas others may be oriented to integration. Another singer from Karelia exchanged Väinämöinen's creation of the world from an egg for summoning God to raise the first earth (*SKVR* I₁ 54). Formally, the change to the cosmogonic epic only required the transposition of one passage for another, but it asserted Väinämöinen as reliant on, and thus subordinate to, the power of God. Such conflicts and competitions are not restricted to encounters between Christian and non-Christian religions. The mythology of Finno-Karelian kalevalaic epic and ritual incantations is structured by a contrast between the vernacular

type of ritual specialist called a *tietäjä* and that of earlier practices that this displaced, which blur into Sámi shamanism (Frog 2010: 191–196). In Old Norse mythology, Óðinn's encounters with dead seeresses called *vǫlur* may similarly play out tensions or competitions between different types ritual specialists or between the people aligned with them (Frog 2022b). When alignments are considered in relation to society, theonyms and mythology become analyzable as potential indicators of stance-taking, even if this is only seen from the perspective of a dominant SMI.

Loans with Unchanged Alignments

Where theonyms appear borrowed across languages without a change in alignment, they suggest that the theonym has spread in conjunction with an alignment of religious identity. For instance, the name repertoire of Christianity has spread across countless languages over the course of two millennia. Modern English *Jesus*, *Mary*, *Michael* and so on are outcomes of loans that reflect a perceived alignment of the respective agent with society.

Today, outside of their use as personal names for members of society, these names refer to mythic images as agents with significance and influence or impacts of cosmological proportions. Although the respective mythic images tend to be treated as internationally regular and shared, the variation in how they are conceived locally and in different parts of the world should not be underestimated. In the process of religious change, the borrowing of these theonyms is paired with the borrowing of the respective mythic images. Nevertheless, just as the theonyms are adapted to the phonology and morphology of a language, mythic signs are subject to corresponding adaptation into the local mythology and SMIs. Especially in the initial stages, assimilated images are viewed through the lens of vernacular categories and their relations, while the accompanying traditions linked to the agent could be very limited and streamlined (Bønding 2021). Where religious change is competitive, the agents of the new religion may operate as *tradition dominants*, replacing or assimilating other agents in relevant contemporary traditions (Eskeröd 1947: 79–81; Honko 1981a: 23–24; 1981b: 35–36). For example, the 10th-century Second

Merseburg Charm describes an exemplar healing event in mythic time involving Wodan and other Germanic gods, whereas Christian agents predominate in the rich post-medieval evidence of this charm type (e.g. Christiansen 1918). If we accept the charm type's Germanic background, Christian agents have replaced non-Christian gods – variations that might involve as little as transposing the respective names (cf. examples in Linderholm 1920: 427–446, #986–1034). In Finno-Karelian incantations, the Virgin Mary took over the roles and activities of otherworldly women such as *Kivutar* ['Pain-Maid'], summoned for aid in curing pains (Siikala 2002: 203). Assimilating such roles reciprocally impacted on understandings of the Christian agents in local cultures, participating in the construction of the respective mythic image. Nevertheless, the roles in the incantations remained aligned with the local society, although the images of particular agents underwent renewal in connection with religious change.

Christianity spread with a full repertoire of names, including those for agents opposed to religious or social order and many that could be more ambivalent. Stance-taking remains regular in connection with names of agents opposed to social order, yet these seem less stable at the level of mythic signs. For example, the name *Juutas* in Finnish and Karelian was linked to the Christian image JUDAS, yet the name also appears in contexts where DEVIL is expected, and it could be used as, or blurs with, a common noun. It is occasionally found for the counter-role to GOD (*Jumala*) in mythic tales (e.g. SKS KRA Kaarle Krohn 9876 [Nurmes, 1885]), as the agent of chaos from whose drool the first viper is created (e.g. *SKVR* VI$_1$ 3808), as a parallel word for vernacular terms for DEVIL in the poetry (e.g. *SKVR* I$_4$ 495) and is even sometimes used in the plural (e.g. *SKVR* I$_2$ 1105a). The name has thus shifted or extended usage to a common noun as one of a rich variety of vocabulary for DEVIL (cf. also Valk 2012: 45). In spite of the shifts in the usage of the name that identify it with other centralized and decentralized images, there is continuity in the referent's polarized opposition to the community.

Social stance-taking that structures alignment with, or opposition to, a group is not restricted to theonyms. The same may be considered for

words cognate with English *angel* or *bishop*, which also spread with Christianity. Similarly, *þur(i)saz*, "[o]ne of the Proto-Germanic words for 'giant'" (Kroonan 2013: 552), was borrowed into Middle Proto-Finnic as *tur(i)sas* already early in the Iron Age (*LägLoS* III: 322). Use is consistently for a supernatural monster. This suggests continuity as a word for a mythic agent opposed to society through roughly two millennia of cultural changes, including conversion to both eastern and western Christianity and their respective Reformations.

When a polarized alignment or opposition is found across the source and target languages of a loan, it suggests an alignment of the social positions of the speech communities involved. When the lexeme refers to a venerated agent, comparing that relationship in the source language with that in the language receiving the loan offers indications of whether the groups concerned shared or contrasted religious frameworks. Where agents are opposed to society, however, terms and mythic images may move more easily between groups: the same monster may presumably be considered equally hazardous to different religious groups.

Translations with Unchanged Alignments

In the case of Christianity, the administrative apparatus of the Church, with its organized missionary activity and progressively extending reach, worked to maintain the regularity of names, images and a dominant SMI that actively resisted identifying venerated Christian agents with the names of local gods. The exception, however, was that the Christian God was commonly designated by a common noun meaning 'god' used as a theonym. The Christian theonym was thus translated from one language into the next accompanying the assimilation of the mythic image GOD.

A similar process occurred in several languages around the Baltic Sea with the agent DEVIL and the decentralized image DEVIL. These fused with images of vernacular agents of chaos and counter-roles of the local sky god. Just as terms for, and images of, agents opposed to society seem to move more easily between groups, their images also seem to be more open to hybridization. Consequently, such images are potentially less stable and distinctive than those of venerated agents.

Slavic and Uralic cultures that underwent religious change in the spread of Orthodox Christianity exhibit a prominent position of the thunder god commensurate to that found in the Baltic Sea region. Although Christianity did not have a distinct thunder god image *per se*, St. Elijah became identified as the closest equivalent. Local forms of his name were transposed into local thunder-god traditions. Thus *Ilja* and similar names became used for a local agent with a background largely independent of Christianity.

Translation seems to be commonplace in the cross-cultural circulation of mythology. For example, traditions related to the thunder-god moved across cultures in the Baltic Sea region, yet the categorical identity THUNDER-GOD was uniquely held by a single centralized image in each local society, such as THOR, PERKŪNAS, TIERMAS or UKKO. The assimilation of a tradition involving any one of these would be 'translated', not only by exchanging the name used in one language for that of another, but also by interpreting the respective image of the god as equivalent to, and translatable through, that of the local god.

Sometime during the Iron Age, North Finnic religion assimilated a framework of North Germanic religion in a process that I have described as creolization (Frog 2019). The vernacular mythology was radically restructured as a large amount of mythology was assimilated. This included adopting the roles of gods and their relationships to practices, as well as adopting a thunder god as distinct from the inherited Finnic sky god. (See Frog 2013.) In this process, the dominant SMI clearly valorized the North Germanic models to a degree that led to fundamental changes in religion. Nevertheless, it was in parallel with a language ideology that resisted the adoption of foreign theonyms: the protagonists of mythological epic have names of Finnic origin and the assimilated thunder god became exclusively designated by vernacular terms, such as *Ukko* ['Old Man']. The resistance to borrowing theonyms appears to reflect the corresponding translation of images of North Germanic gods through Finnic counterparts with which they were identified, producing and supporting extensive hybridization. The process reflects a cross-linguistic alignment of religious identities, on which it is contingent, even if the

process transformed the assimilated framework of religion.

Processes of translation at the level of mythic signs rather than theonyms easily remain invisible. Those in the remote past require multiple points of reference to bring into focus. Whereas the creolization in North Finnic religion becomes recognizable through the collective evidence of a number of traditions, a much earlier cross-cultural change can be observed through lexical evidence in multiple languages. In both Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Uralic, the name of the central sky god is reconstructed as identical to the common noun meaning 'Sky, Weather'. As I have discussed elsewhere (2017a: 100–111; 2019: 268–269), an isogloss of these languages exhibits the loss of both this name and the corresponding common noun, coupled with a noun meaning 'god' becoming the proper name of the sky god. Evidence of this change is found in Baltic, Germanic, Mari and Mordvinic, along with loanword evidence that it occurred in an Indo-Iranian language. The correlation of multiple developments within an isogloss spanning two language families shows that 'something happened', and it suggests a conversion-like process that displaced the inherited sky gods. However, the development must have been completed in the remote past, before the present era. If this is correct, it suggests a process in which multiple linguistic-cultural groups changed their religious alignment in some sort of extended network, translating the name of the new god, 'God', into the respective local language, much as later occurred in the spread of Christianity.

Loans and Semantic Correlation

Many mythologies present theonyms that are lexically identical to common nouns for natural phenomena. The Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Uralic celestial divinities named 'Sky' are a case in point. Direct lexical identification of the image of the god SKY with the image of the phenomenon SKY can be considered rooted in a principle of the dominant SMI that I have described as *semantic correlation* (Frog 2017a). This principle is reflected in the co-variation of the theonym and corresponding noun. Thus, when the name of the sky god underwent renewal in some Uralic languages,

the noun for SKY changed to match it (Rédei 1996: 283–284; Frog 2017a: 86–100). Similarly, the Proto-Baltic and Proto-Germanic thunder gods were named with the common noun for 'thunder'. Whether Proto-Baltic *Perkūnas* ['Thunder'] or *Þunraz* ['Thunder'] in Proto-Germanic is considered the innovation, covariation of the theonym and noun reflects semantic correlation (Frog 2017a: 112–113).

Loans of words for natural phenomena are commonly considered neutral. However, where semantic correlation is part of the dominant SMI, the loan may offer perspectives on the history of the religion. When a theonym and common noun are identical, lexical change with co-variation most likely reflects a change in the theonym. Semantic correlation binds the natural phenomenon to the mythic image of the god, so a change in the name for that image produces a change in the word for the natural phenomenon. In Mari languages, for example, the displacement of 'Sky' by 'God' resulted in the latter's name also becoming a common noun meaning 'sky'. A loan only for the natural phenomenon would imply a breakdown of semantic correlation: it would produce a lexical distinction between the common noun and the theonym.

Hypothetically, a new word could be introduced as a poetic parallel term or an avoidance term for the inherited theonym (i.e. used to refer to the god/phenomenon without using the name), but this possibility would be contingent on two factors. Frist, it would require a language ideology that would make it reasonable or desirable to refer to the vernacular god with a word from another language. Second, it would require that the word was not also a theonym in the source language. Such a hypothetical scenario is possible, but not necessarily probable.

Proto-Baltic *perkūnas* ['thunder'] was borrowed into Pre-Mordvin as *perkänä* ['thunder'] (Grünthal 2012: 324–325). The word was presumably borrowed early in the Iron Age or already in the Bronze Age. However, *Perkūnas* was simultaneously the name of the Proto-Baltic thunder god. The loan must be assumed to reflect the borrowing of the theonym rather than being adopted as a common noun independent of its embeddedness in Proto-Baltic mythology. Proto-Uralic mythology

lacked a pantheon (cf. Ajkhenvald et al. 1989: 156–157); the power of thunder and lightning was presumably attributed directly to the central sky god (Frog 2013: 69–72). The loan of *perkūnas most likely reflects a borrowing of the image *PERKŪNAS, conceiving thunder not just as an empirically observed phenomenon but as a distinct agent active in the world. The loan thus implies that the pre-Mordvin speakers viewed *PERKŪNAS as having a commensurate or identical alignment with their society as to that of the respective Proto-Baltic speakers. The Erzya Mordvinic theonym *Pur'gine-paz* ['Thunder-God'] disambiguates the god from the phenomenon thunder, which suggests that the image of the god underwent some sort of fundamental renewal between the borrowing of *perkūnas/*Perkūnas* and the documented mythology.

Early in the first millennium, Proto-Sámi language spread rapidly and widely from southern inland regions of what are today Finland and Karelia. Whatever the process behind its spread, languages spoken among mobile cultures to the north and on the Kola and Scandinavian Peninsulas disappeared in language shifts. (See Aikio 2012.) Eastern Proto-Sámi *tiermēs* ['thunder'] appears to be a loan from a Palaeo-European language (Aikio 2012: 84). This word appears as the name of the central sky god in Sámi languages on and near the Kola Peninsula (Rydving 2010: 98–102). This indicates a principle of semantic correlation (at least historically) in the respective SMIs. It is therefore unlikely that the word was simply preserved from an indigenous language and later became used as a theonym. It implies that the spread of Proto-Sámi encountered one or more societies with a central god 'Thunder', whose name was retained as *Tiermēs* through a language shift. The theonym then reciprocally accounts for the retention of the common noun and implies a continuity of religion. This scenario is consistent with the paucity of Common Proto-Sámi religious vocabulary, which does not support a view of the language spreading with an associated religion (Frog 2017b).

The name of the South Sámi thunder god *Hovrengaellies* is a compound comprised of *Hovre* (not attested as an independent name or noun), from the Old Norse theonym *Þórr*, and *gaellies*, a loan related to Old Norse *karl* ['man, husband, old man']. The loan implies that the respective Sámi-speaking community imagined Þórr as in a commensurate or identical relationship to their community as to that of the speakers of Old Norse. The name has commonly been considered a borrowing of *Þórr karl* ['old man Þórr'], although *karl* is unlikely to reflect an Old Norse divine epithet.[2] Also, use in the South Sámi theonym would have to be an etymologization or translation of the Old Norse word, because *gaellies* and *Hovre* were borrowed in different periods (Frog 2017a: 120). Common Proto-Sámi *kāllēs* ['old man'] (Lehtiranta 2001: §350) was borrowed prior to syncope, when the form of Þórr's name was *Þunrar*; the reduction of *Þunrar* to *Þunrr* caused u-breaking, resulting in Þórr (Kroonan 2013: 538), from which *Hovre* derives. Finally, the theonym uses the genitive form *Hovren*. The structure of the name parallels other Sámi theonyms outside of the Kola Peninsula in which a noun for a phenomenon is combined with a noun meaning 'man', 'woman', 'old woman' or other male or female member of society. This suggests that *Hovrengaellies* was not conceived as the name Þórr with an epithet; it more likely formed as a construction meaning 'Old Man of Thunder'. Proto-Germanic *Þunraz* was both the theonym and noun for 'thunder', but, in Old Norse, Þórr was only the theonym. The disambiguation appears uniform throughout Old Norse language areas, which makes it seem unlikely to postdate syncope. In this case, the theonym was presumably borrowed, underwent semantic correlation, and then the god was disambiguated as the 'old man' of the phenomenon. Because the loan postdates syncope, it postdates the major spread of Proto-Sámi, making it unlikely to reflect some sort of language shift like that behind *Tiermēs*. It is hypothetically possible that ÞÓRR was adopted into the mythology, complementing existing roles in a pantheon or pantheon-like structure, as seems likely for Pre-Mordvin *PERKÄNÄ. However, thunder gods are prominent in the Baltic Sea region and also found across other Sámi languages. Also, if *þórr* was not a common noun for thunder, the ideology of semantic correlation was presumably linked to an inherited god, who would then have been displaced. In this case,

semantic correlation points to some process of hybridization, adapting the Old Norse god to the respective SMI.

Loans with Contrasted Alignments

In the anecdote above about Þórr challenging Christ to a duel, the image CHRIST was transposed into a traditional motif THOR CHALLENGES X TO:DUEL. This situated CHRIST in a diagrammatic schema of THOR/ADVERSARY, corelating it with images of other agents of chaos that threaten society or social order. This type of discourse can be inferred in the background when names of venerated gods are borrowed and become used to designate images opposed to, rather than aligned with, society. The result is a *contrasted alignment* that can be attributed to *contrastive stance-taking*.

In their comparative reconstruction of central features of Uralic ('Finno-Ugric') mythology, Aleksandra Ajkhenvald, Eugene Helimski and Vladimir Petrukhin observe that the counter-role of the main god often has a name borrowed from an agent "often endowed in the source mythology with positive functions" (1989: 157). These findings should be reviewed in the light of the profound advances in Uralic linguistics. If they are correct, the pattern suggests an inherited SMI that would actively engage mythic images aligned with other groups.

A classic example is the proposed etymology of Proto-Finnic *perkeleh* ['devil'] as a borrowing of the Proto-Baltic theonym **Perkūnas*. This loan was then presumably borrowed from Proto-Finnic into Pre-Sámi (Aikio 2012: 75), yielding **pērkele* ['devil']. The background of the Finnic ending **-leh* is unclear (*LägLoS* III: 52), although it has been accounted for as deriving from a diminutive form **Perkelis* (Metsämägi et al. 2012: *s.v.* 'pergel'). If the etymology is accepted, the loan would appear to belong to a Baltic substrate in Middle Proto-Finnic probably linked to the movement of Proto-Finnic speakers during the Bronze Age (Lang 2019; Kallio 2021). The loan correlates the Baltic thunder god with the counter-role of the Finnic celestial god, presumably within the inherited dualist schema of SKY-GOD/ANTITHESIS. This indicates social stance-taking toward **PERKŪNAS* as opposed to the Finnic speakers' society. The stance-

taking implies conflict or competition between the groups associated with the respective gods.

The borrowing of the Proto-Baltic theonym **Perkūnas* should not be confused with borrowing the image *PERKŪNAS. It is possible that the discourse behind the loan involved adopting and manipulating features emblematic of the Baltic god. In a 17th-century trial in Northern Norway, for example, Anders Poulsen, a speaker of North Sámi, identified a figure on his drum by the name *Ilmaris*, responsible for storm and bad weather, apparently the negative counterpart of the thunder god he called *Diermis* (< **Tiermēs*) (Willumsen 2008: 241). The name *Ilmaris* is a transparent borrowing of Finnish or Karelian *Ilmari(nen)*, a mythic smith invoked as a god of wind and weather (Harva 1946). Poulsen's use of *Ilmaris* seems to be unique, while his Christian vocabulary also seems to come from Finnish or Karelian (Krohn 1915: 13–14). Relevant here is that Poulsen seems to present Ilmaris as opposed to Diermis in a SKY-GOD/ANTITHESIS schema, but he also incorporates characteristics of the Finnic god. The discourse in the Finnic assimilation of the Proto-Baltic theonym may have similarly produced an image *PERKELEH that incorporated traits of the Proto-Baltic god. Because the evidence postdates the loan by thousands of years, the designation is simply found as a word for DEVIL, but it is necessary to consider that the borrowing of the theonym was linked to contemporary knowledge of the god.

Contrastive stance-taking was of course common in encounters between Christian and non-Christian religions. Representatives of Christianity commonly asserted that agents such as Þórr and Óðinn were opposed to (Christian) society and social order. This could involve simply using the names *Þórr* and *Óðinn* as referring to an image DEVIL. In many cases, however, Christians drew on established features or associations of the images THOR or ODIN (e.g. Kaplan 2011: ch. 6). These are preserved in a medieval corpus of specific examples. In contrast to Anders Poulsen's isolated description of Ilmaris, these examples collectively reflect a social process. Moreover, rather than a situation of religious contacts across groups speaking different languages, these are contacts between groups of competing religious alignments and identities that speak a common

language. The process is commensurate, but the theonyms are not loans.

Like loans and adaptations with unchanged alignments, contrastive stance-taking also occurs with decentralized images. In medieval Icelandic sources, the image of the *berserkr* warrior was stigmatized as a 'pagan' identity associated with supernatural power in competition with the power of Christianity. The construction of BERSERKR as opposed to society may be a product of anti-pagan discourse, since the word *berserkr* seems to have retained positive associations in contemporary Norway. (Samson 2011: 225–226; Dale 2014: 180–183, 200–202; Frog 2021b: 199–200.) The contrasted alignment between ODIN and the seeress-image VǪLVA seems to have non-Christian roots (Frog 2021b: 200). Similarly, the radical changes in the creolization of North Finnic religion, mentioned above, produced a polarized contrast between the new type of specialist and that referred to by the inherited term *noita*. *Noita* became used for dangerous, supernaturally-empowered outsiders; later, use of the word for the Christian image WITCH also impacted on the vernacular image (Frog 2013; 2022b). The Reformation produced contrastive stance-taking toward agents of pre-Reformation Christianity. In Finland, the words *munkki* ['monk'] and *nunna* ['nun'] became used as words for supernatural agents of chaos, conforming to vernacular mythic images like GIANT (cf. Jauhiainen 1998: N931). Whereas BERSERKR and NOITA evolved with continuity as images of people who were supernaturally empowered, the terms *munkki* and *nunna* were transferred more completely to images of otherworld agents, illustrating the variety of forms this process can take.

Categorical Shift and Transposition

As names and mythic signs move between groups and SMIs, they are impacted by changes, sometimes subtle, sometimes radical. Some of these result from interpretations of the foreign through the familiar. Others are produced through aggressive assertions and reinterpretations. In both cases, the assimilation of the respective image may involve only a selection of its characteristic features. Not all of these processes result in the borrowing of theonyms, as illustrated by the North Finnic creolization of North Germanic religion. Conversely, the spread of Christianity through Scandinavia entailed not only the assimilation of countless names and mythic signs associated with the new religion; the associated SMI systematically redefined images identified with vernacular names and terms.

As Christian agents were adapted into one society after another, some features were foregrounded while others were marginalized or omitted from what might be described as the Church-authorized mythology. Some shifts could be subtle or culture-specific, such as the fields of activity with which the Virgin Mary became identified in local practices in Karelia. They could also be structural, such as a lack of differentiation between CHRIST and GOD (Bønding 2021), or they could be streamlined, like the image CHRIST becoming centered on 'baby Jesus' in genres in Karelia, increasing the prominence and roles of Mary. If the new images became tradition dominants, they assimilated traditions associated with other images or they assimilated those other images directly. This process would introduce additional elements to the core characteristics of an image, which Jens Peter Schjødt (2013) describes as its *semantic center*. In some cases, a Christian name could simply re-label a vernacular image, like St. Elijah's name becoming used for local thunder gods. Even in this case, however, the image did not remain unaffected. Although the local god's semantic center could remain intact, the identification situated him within a Christian SMI's structures as subordinate to the Christian God. It also linked him directly to other agents identified by the same name in extended multicultural networks, which could make the image more open to influences and cross-cultural standardization.

Within the Church-authorized SMI, the centralized image of the Christian DEVIL and its categorical counterpart DEVIL were constructed in the polarized GOD/DEVIL schema in a fundamentally moral universe. This made DEVIL an agent of corruption, moral harm and deceit. As Christianity spread through the Circum-Baltic area, the image DEVIL assimilated vernacular counterparts with which it was identified, a process supported where the word for 'devil' was translated through vernacular vocabulary. Such vocabulary included Finnish

perkele (< **perkeleh*) and *piru* (thought to be a shortened form of *perkele*), and Lithuanian *velnias*, which historically seems to have designated a vernacular chthonic deity, although it became used for the plurality of agents of chaos that can be encountered in the human world (Gimbutas 1974; Laurinkienė 2022).

In North Finnic cultures, the Christian image GOD was assimilated by the image of the vernacular sky god, UKKO. This was an exceptional outcome of social and historical factors that are not of concern here.[3] A relevant structural factor seems to be that Finnic religion maintained a central dualist structure of a sky god and his antithesis. Rather than the creolization of North Germanic religion producing a pantheon of celestial gods, in which a thunder god was positioned alongside the sky god, the dominant SMI seems to have maintained SKY-GOD as an exclusive role that did not admit additional celestial divinities. The same principle would preclude viewing the Christian and vernacular sky gods as alternative or competing celestial gods (which would require imagining that two or more such gods could exist).

The inherited North Finnic sky god displaced by UKKO was named *Ilmari(nen)*. Ilmari had evolved from the inherited Uralic sky god called **Ilma* ['Sky, Weather']. Although ILMARI was displaced from the role SKY-GOD, he retained connections to atmospheric phenomena in function-specific ritual contexts and continued to be identified as the agent of thunder and lightning in non-ritual genres like riddles (Harva 1946; Frog 2013). The role SKY-GOD had held a central position in the culture. Displacement from that role fundamentally changed the semantic center of ILMARI, but the change could not be immediate or uniform for all the contexts in which the god was engaged or in all regions. The name *Ilmari* and corresponding image was preserved in some contexts, much as linguistic archaisms may remain normal for particular registers, such as incantations, or embedded in idioms, as in the riddles.

The assimilation of GOD by UKKO resulted in a mapping of the Christian GOD/DEVIL schema over the vernacular THUNDER-GOD/ADVERSARY schema. The image DEVIL retained its polarized opposition to Christian society. In North Finnic

mythology, however, a moral polarization was usually lacking outside of markedly Christian discourse. Aggressive hostility characterized the THUNDER-GOD/ADVERSARY schema, but its was more like cosmological pest control, without moral evaluation: devils were like rats of the universe, which the god sought to exterminate at any opportunity. The resulting GOD/DEVIL schema opposed DEVIL to human society, which was aligned with GOD. That society was characterized as Christian, which set the image DEVIL in contrast to Christianity, but without characterization as an adversary of the religion and its values.

Indo-European cultures had pantheons of gods among which multiple gods could be identified with the celestial sphere. The dominant SMI allowed the Christian God and the thunder-god to remain clearly distinct celestial agents. In Lithuanian, the THUNDER-GOD/ADVERSARY schema was or became a PERKŪNAS/VELNIAS schema alongside GOD, and the conflicts between the thunder-god and the devil were central. In Swedish traditions, however, the Christian image DEVIL remained largely distinct from images of TROLL, GIANT and other non-Christian agents of chaos that historically completed the THUNDER-GOD/ADVERSARY schema. As a consequence, the image DEVIL did not evolve in the same way as in traditions across the Baltic Sea.

Social stance-taking that involves a realignment of an agent's polarized relationship to a community often seems to involve a recategorization of the image, which redefines and reshapes it. Within a stable SMI, centralized images are regularly identified with decentralized images. This makes unique identities examples or exemplars of categorical identities. In other words, THOR, ODIN, FREYJA and FREYR were all identified with the decentralized image GOD, which characterized them, while their individual characterizations reciprocally participated in constructing the decentralized image. Christian discourse contested this categorization and reconceived THOR and so on through alternative images like DEVIL or SORCERER. The change in identification denied the validity of their veneration and characterized them as categorically (rather than only individually) opposed to society within the dominant Christian SMI. This strategy

sought to impact the mythic images' core features that are built into their patterns of use by targeting the heart of the semantic center – identity as GOD.

Among the Old Norse non-Christian gods, Odin and Thor exhibit the greatest resilience and endurance through subsequent centuries. They were marginalized from public religion and veneration, but, in Sweden, the image ODIN remained connected to sorcery, mythic knowledge and wealth (e.g. Linderholm 1920; Mitchell 2009; Barber 2019), and THOR retained connections to thunder and sorcery (e.g. Linderholm 1920; af Klintberg 2010). Whether as an expansion of his semantic center or a feature not known from early Scandinavian sources, Odin was also identified as a hunter of female forest spirits in legends (af Klintberg 2010), but he was divorced from agency of cosmological scope. Thor's connection with thunder was obscured by *Åskan* ['Thunder'] becoming the common name for the embodied agent THUNDER and otherwise by replacing the image THOR with GOD in motifs of thunder production.[4] The semantic center of ODIN and THOR had each been pared down, comparable to what happened to North Finnic ILMARI when displaced by UKKO in the restructuring of religion, reducing him from an agent of lightning and weather to a mythic smith and counter-role to the demiurge Väinämöinen (Frog 2013). In all these cases, the respective images appear to have been upheld in quite specific contexts and traditional narratives or plot types.

The features of a god's semantic center get bound up with practices and traditions that sustain the images through processes of change. As the engagements with the image become more limited, the identity's core shrinks and may seem fragmented. At the same time, individuals continued to align themselves positively with ODIN (Mitchell 2009) and the agency of thunder retained its positive associations, even when identified with THOR. The persistence of alignments with these images highlights that the Church-authorized SMI was not the only one present, even if it was dominant in the public sphere (cf. Frog 2020).

Modern Heritagization

The Enlightenment had a transformative effect on ideologies related to non-Christian religions.

It enabled mythic signs to be lifted up, brushed free of the stigma of 'paganism', and viewed as expressions of the spirit of a people. The mythic signs could then be evaluated on aesthetic rather than religious terms, which led to their conversion into cultural capital during the era of Romanticism. This was a heritagization process, whereby traditions identified with the past received value in the present and were repackaged in an idealized form.

Heritagization affected the use of theonyms and names of other mythic agents in ways directly comparable to what occurred in contexts of cultural contacts and religious change. The names are identified by people as referring to supernatural agents that align with and against another group. The images of the respective agents are most often streamlined constructs of discourse, characterized through a limited number of central features and associations.

A key difference between religious encounters and heritagization concerns the potential for supernatural agency. Historically, the existence of mythic agents has not been denied in religious encounters; instead, stances are taken toward their evaluation and definition. Thus, Christians' anti-pagan discourse acknowledged THOR, ODIN and so on as agents able to affect things in the world, but they excluded them from the category GOD and set them in a polarized opposition to society. In heritagization (revivals of vernacular religions aside), the same agents have normally been considered to lack empirical existence and thus to lack potential for supernatural agency.

Heritagization allows the names and mythic images to be lifted from connotations of belief. They retain an emblematic relation to religion, but it is a religion of the past rather than of the present, itself emblematic of the culture before Christianity and modernity. The names thus become tokens of a historical culture. They can be used to create specific connections with particular agents, but the agents are identified with the imagination of that culture rather than as social beings. Such connections are related to meaning-making, but they are used especially to create connections and alignments with the historical culture. Others who align with that culture in a similar way are invited to infer that the shared evaluation entails participation in a collective identity with shared values.

Heritagization results in using theonyms in new ways. Connotations of shared (national) values makes it unsurprising that theonyms were transferred to businesses. In many cases, such use of a name connects features of the god's semantic center to the business's aims. For example, ODIN Fund Management in Norway links their identity to Óðinn's connections to wealth. This can be viewed simply as referential play, yet Óðinn's name activates contemporary images of the god with its connotations of power, authority and supernatural agency, even for people unfamiliar with his connections to hoarded treasure and other riches. The connotations operate unconsciously as well as consciously, particularly before one has become familiar with the business's name and its work.

In one information booklet, ODIN Fund Management explicates their engagements with mythology. They make the significance and symbolism clear under the heading "A solid platform in the Nordic region" (n.d.: 7). Their logo is primitive-looking image reminiscent of Nordic petroglyphs. It is comprised of an eight-legged horse with an overlapping circle centered on its head, with "ODIN" written in a similar style. The horse is explained to be Sleipnir, whose eight legs "symbolis[e] his ability to outrun all other horses" and who "carried Odin to every corner of the world, over land, through the air and across water, on his many quests to acquire new knowledge" (n.d.: 7). More difficult to recognize without explanation is the circle, representing Óðinn's ring Draupnir, which produced eight gold rings of equal weight every nineth night – "a symbol of wealth and prosperity" (n.d.: 7). Although not in the logo, the brochure also mentions Óðinn's two ravens, Huginn and Muninn, which "flew all over the world, returning to Odin every night with information" (n.d.: 7). The ravens identify the newsletter *Hugin & Munin: Information from ODIN Fund Management*. The component of play is part of the value of using these names: it produces positive feelings for the people encountering them, even if they are merely considered 'witty'. At the same time, they attribute the business with deep roots in a collective Nordic heritage and invite people to identify the qualities of the mythic symbols with the business itself.

New uses of theonyms extends to personal names. In territories of the Swedish kingdom, the Finno-Karelian vernacular system for personal names disappeared rapidly in the medieval Christianization; a similar process, although not as comprehensive, occurred in territories of Novgorod and subsequently Russia (Ainiala et al. 2016: 159–161; see also Kepsu 2018: 32). Following the publication of the second, revised edition of Lönnrot's *Kalevala* in 1849, names began to be taken from it for use as personal names. The process was gradual, advancing to a movement toward the end of the century and reaching a watershed around the decade of Finland's independence.[5] The *Kalevala* frames its central characters as human heroes rather than gods (removing Väinämöinen from the role of demiurge), and the epic was surrounded by discussions of its possible basis in historical conflicts. In this light, 'reviving' the use of these names for people is not inherently surprising. However, they were not historically used as personal names, although exceptional people could take or receive them as epithets, apparently reflecting the individual's exceptional supernatural capacity (Frog 2020). Nevertheless, names taken from *Kalevala* gradually extended to those of supernatural agents, such as *Tapio*, the forest god: according to Finland's Digital and Population Data Services Agency (DVV), *Tapio* is now among the top ten men's names in Finland.

Choosing a theonym as a baby name may seem striking, but Lönnrot's *Kalevala* mediated that choice. The epic shifted mythological agents into a human sphere, and the challenge of the epic's language made it a work that was probably much more discussed than read. The names were easily decontextualized, while the epic was easily received as literature. In addition, the ideology of National-Romanticism promoted the use of names based in the Finnish language, which meant finding or inventing these, and baby name suggestions circulated in newspapers and on many calendars (Vilkuna 2005: 19). This promotion could leave the names completely decontextualized. Their use could draw upon the symbolic value of the associated traditional image, especially as found in Lönnrot's *Kalevala*, but the name system was progressively transformed. Just as none of the associations of Proto-Baltic

Perkūnas are retained in Finnish *perkele*, many of these names have become so commonplace that they can be given as baby names without reflection on their earlier mythic significance.

Limiting discussion to the DVV data, names from Scandinavian mythology are also found in Finland. *Kalevala* blurred the boundary between Finno-Karelian theonyms and human personal names, and there were earlier traditional uses of the theonyms for people. Scandinavian theonyms were not euhemerized in National-Romanticism, nor were they historically used alone as personal names or personal epithets: *Þórr* has been a common element in Scandinavian names since the Iron Age, but people were not named *Þórr*. The Scandinavian names are thus more saliently identified with mythology. This connection is underscored by being generally rare rather than traditional personal names. In many cases, use of the name would have required a special application for permission.

In Finno-Karelian cultures, the use of theonyms for living people is rooted in the lack of a fundamental divide between GOD and HUMAN. The word *jumala*, commonly translated 'god' today, earlier referred to a category of supernatural agency. It could thus be used for any sufficiently powerful agent, including a living ritual specialist. Non-Christian Scandinavian SMIs generally maintained a cleft between human actors and those operating on a cosmological scope, paralleled by a constraint against names being shared across that divide. Today, that usage of names is viewed from the outside, and the names refer to heritagized mythic images rather than actors in the contemporary world.

The Scandinavian theonyms used in Finland according to the DVV's database include the names of central gods Óðinn (*Odin*, *Oden*), Þórr (*Thor*, *Tor*), Freyja (*Freja*, *Freya*, *Freija*, *Freia*, *Freyja*), Freyr (*Frej*, *Frei*, *Frey*, *Freyr*, but not *Frö*), Frigg (*Frigga*), Baldr (*Balder*, *Baldur*), Heimdallr (*Heimdall*), Týr (*Tyr*), Njǫrðr (*Njord*) and Skaði (*Skadi*). Names of Óðinn's male relatives are also found. His son Víðarr's name (*Vidar*, *Vidarr*) was popular on a level with that of Þórr, Freyr and Freyja. The names of his son Váli (*Vali*) and his brother Vé (*Ve*) are less common. The name *Vili* corresponds to that of Óðinn's other

brother, Vili, but it is also considered a variant form of a Finnish name (Vilkuna 2005: 249–250). Similarly, *Nanna*, corresponds to the name of Baldr's wife Nanna, but its modern usage has several derivations, so it is not clear that examples in the database are linked to mythology. Óðinn's father's name Borr (*Bor*, *Bur*) shows up, as do names of personifications of the sun (*Sol*) and moon (*Mani*). The name of the obscure goddess Gná is found (*Gna*), although not that of Frigg's handmaid Fulla, who appears more in the mythology. The distinctiveness of these names in modern society suggests a conscious connection with non-Christian mythology, linking the child to the identity of the mythic agent.

The database presents statistics across periods of twenty years each for the 20th century, with earlier data in a single period, and data from the 21st century grouped by decade. Use of Scandinavian theonyms rises in the 1980–1999 period, continuing through the present. Beginning from this time, additional mythic names get used. Heritagized uses of these names are not constrained by principles of the agent's alignment with, or opposition to, society in the source culture. Names of agents who are ambivalent or opposed to society in the mythology are found used for people especially, although not frequently, from the 1980–1999 period onward.

Loki orchestrates the death of Óðinn's son Baldr and fights against the gods in the eschatology, so finding his name (*Loki*) is striking. However, Loki is also often viewed as a trickster-like figure, and selection of the name for a child might be based on his roles in certain stories rather than as an adversary of the gods. Similar is the appearance of the name of the cosmogonic giant murdered by Óðinn and his brothers, Ymir (*Ymir*, *Ymer*, and perhaps *Imir*, *Imer*). *Ymir* might simply be considered the name of the first being, whose body is transformed into the world. However, the personified agent of death, Hel (*Hel*) appears in 1960–1979, and the name of the eschatological wolf Fenrisúlfr, Fenrir (*Fenrir*), who swallows Óðinn, shows up in 1980–1999 and again in 2010–2019. In these cases, the rationale behind giving these names is less clear.

Names from Finno-Karelian mythology exhibit some differences. The historical

framing of Lönnrot's *Kalevala* may account for the name of Louhi (*Louhi*), the central adversary of the epic's heroes, appearing as a personal name occasionally during the period 1900–1959 (i.e. the first three periods of that century). The renewed appearance of the name in the present century may instead be connected to the rise in use of such names from Scandinavian mythology. The name of the Finno-Karelian personification of death, Tuoni (*Tuoni*), appears in the period 1920–1939. This looks anomalous in the data, but likely reflects an evaluation of the name through its connection to the mythology as heritage.

Giving people names of mythic agents opposed to society spills over from today's milieux into representations of the past. In the popular series *Vikings*, the Loki-like character Floki names his daughter *Angrboða*,[6] described as Loki's first wife. When Floki's wife objects that Angrboða was evil, Floki responds: "She was a great giantess" (season 2, episode 10, "The Lord's Prayer"). The name choice is presented as irregular, as corresponding choices might seem today. However, the show does not acknowledge and probably did not recognize that this use of the name contravenes the constraint against giving names of cosmological actors to human beings. It is a single instance of mythic discourse, which always presents the possibility of being idiosyncratic or anomalous, as might be the case with naming a child *Tuoni* in 1920–1939 or *Hel* in 1960–1979. Nevertheless, it appears consistent with a number of examples in the data above. What makes the example seem particularly modern (or, more accurately, postmodern) is that it steps outside of the polarized alignments and oppositions of SMIs that have historically structured the mythology. It equally dismisses the giantess's connection to events and other agents as well as her categorization as a destrictive agent of chaos. Floki considers Angrboða from an alternative perspective that was completely foreign and hypothetical – a perspective aligned with the monster. He selectively picks which features to bring into focus and evaluate and treats the image as having a positive emotional valence. His choice and explanation for it appear more reflective of contemporary perspectives on heritagized mythologies and engagements with them than those of the historical period.

A Perspective

Just as people align their perspectives and evaluations with characters in narration, they align with certain agents of a mythology and against others. When mythology is approached as a closed system linked to a single culture or religion, these alignments appear self-evident and stable, making them easy to take for granted. When mythology is instead approached as a symbolic matrix, constituted of all signs in a given environment, these alignments can also concern mythic agents linked to religious and cultural identities of other groups. At that point, it becomes useful to distinguish between mythic signs and the ideologies linked to social positions from which mythic signs are engaged, evaluated and manipulated. Although individual instances of discourse can be idiomatic or otherwise anomalous, SMIs position many mythic images as aligned with, or opposed to, the associated society. When mythic images or associated names are assimilated by one group from another, or when a society otherwise undergoes internal change, consistency or contrasts in these alignments or oppositions are analyzable, with the potential to reveal social dimensions behind those changes.

The examples reviewed here illustrate the wide variety of forms and diverse outcomes that these processes can have. Although heritagization may seem like an unrelated process, it also operates on the principles of one group, embedded in its own SMIs, approaching, evaluating, interpreting and manipulating mythic signs and associated names identified with another group.

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Notes

1. Mythology is here not restricted to narrative worlds and extends to ritual, omen, taboo and so on, including the potential for individuals to actualize motifs as experience. This allows for motifs of higher levels of abstraction like X VENERATES THOR and diagrammatic schemata like VENERATOR/VENERATED, which might equally be viewed as structures of an associated ideology. Rather than being problematic for the approach, such cases reflect a role of ideology

in producing more abstract mythic signs through the association of more specified signs.

2. In medieval sources, use of *karl* as an epithet is only found for living human beings. Gods do not receive terms for human domestic roles as personal epithets, nor do they receive epithets common for human beings, unless they are in disguise or are euhemerized as human sorcerers. *Þórr karl* corresponds to *Torekall* of later Scandinavian ballads, but use in the ballad more likely reflects the euhemerization of the ballad character than a historical use of the epithet for the god.

3. This assimilation may have already occurred at the end of the Viking Age, when changes in burial practices point to the arrival of Christianity before the administrative apparatus of the Church had extended to Finland (Ahola & Frog 2014: 68–69). The evidence of later North Finnic traditions shows that medieval Christianity was assimilated as complementary to, and extending, the vernacular mythology, retaining the inherited cosmological mythology, although communities consistently viewed themselves as Christian. Evidence of early Christianization thus implies that the new religion was assimilated by identifying the Christian celestial god, ambiguously named 'God', with the vernacular celestial god, ambiguously named 'Old Man'. Finland and Karelia were claimed in the expansion of the kingdoms of Sweden and Novgorod; the Christianization process was driven by religious and political authorities and administration that were linguistically and culturally other to Finnic speakers. The territories were also on the wilderness peripheries of the respective kingdoms without infrastructures for accessibility – infrastructures that were still underdeveloped or lacking in many regions in the 19th century.

4. This is evident, for example, from a review of the cards indexed under "Åska: Benämningar" ['Thudner: Names'] at the Institute of Language and Folklore, Uppsala.

5. This view is developed from the Name Service database of Finland's Digital and Population Data Services Agency alongside especially Kustaa Vilkuna's (2005) dictionary of Finnish forenames as a resource for identifying first occurrences of names.

6. Although not relevant for the current argument, Michael Males (2021: 144–155) has recently pointed out that *Angrboða* may not have been a personal name prior to the work of Snorri Sturluson; it may have been a poetic expression that was consciously reinterpreted and presented as a personal name.

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