

‘Skeggöld, skálmöld; vindöld, vergöld’ - Alexander Rud Mills and the Ásatrú faith in the New Age¹

A. Asbjørn Jøn

University of New England

The obscure yet important Australian lawyer and devotee of the Ásatrú faith, Alexander Rud Mills, played a very significant role in the twentieth century re-development of the Ásatrú faith - a religion that follows the teachings of the traditional Teutonic pantheon of gods (ie Óðinn, Týr, Þórr etc.) - in the southern-hemisphere, and perhaps even in the sparking of the modern revivalistic spiritual movement known as the ‘New Age’. In fact, Mills is even credited by many folkloric and religious scholars as being the leading force behind early to mid twentieth-century attempts ‘to revive Odinism’² in the southern-hemisphere - this claim being partially evidenced by his founding of the Odinist Society of Melbourne. Yet perhaps the most interesting feature of Mills’ work is the way in which he blended Ásatrú elements with both the worship of the Christian god and right-wing politics to create his own unique blend of ariosophy³. Local attempts towards such a ‘re-birth’ of a religion are obviously of great significance to the general study of religion in Australia, since a significant portion of the nation’s population is descended from ancestral stock that once traditionally practised the Ásatrú faith, thus making such efforts highly significant culturally. What is more, the modern practice and recognition of polytheistic religion is becoming a greater focus for western scholars of religion, as it becomes more widely recognised that, as now being constituted of so distinct individuals in a modern pluralistic society, humanity’s diversities can no longer be defined and ruled by ‘a single principle of being and by a univocal logic that will lead to Truth in the singular’⁴. Therefore modern developments in the practice of polytheistic religions such as the faith of Ásatrú must be recognised as individual responses to ‘our sense of diversity in modern culture, our sense of living in a pluralistic society’⁵. Therefore, this paper proposes to explore, inter alia, Mills’ major philosophies, and suggest some of the possible influences upon his thinking.

After a short series of lesser publications, Mills published his seemingly anti-Christian politico-religious manifesto, *The Odinist Religion Overcoming Jewish Christianity*, in 1933⁶. In this work, Mills essentially claimed that: ‘Christianity (the basis of our culture) has failed’⁷ in its effort to mould a caring and cohesive society. He felt that ‘Christianity seeks to substitute an Eastern outlook in place of our native outlook’⁸, and that, by embracing it, modern Western society has embraced a dogma and symbolism that its people can not truly understand, or be at peace with.

Mills claimed that as 'Odinism (... was) the outlook of the founders of (... the) British race'⁹, and that it is, consequently, the only outlook that can be understood by the British citizens of the modern-day British Empire. He also felt that it is only through such religious understanding human beings can achieve true inner peace. Yet, and perhaps contradictorily, Mills only saw the Ásatrú gods as a symbolic representation of the divine, and believed that each racial group could approach the essence of divinity through their own religious systems, ultimately leading to the same divine centre¹⁰.

What is more, Mills thought that 'differences of (human) race evidently exist for divine purpose or expression (... , just as) in different degree, divisions and differences (exist) in the animal and plant world (, yet that) Christianity seeks to destroy race'¹¹. This led Mills to feel that the Christian *weltanschauung* was not natural, and that it specifically attempted to break down the diversity and beauty of the natural world. Consequently, he preached that 'our own racial ideas and traditions (not those of others) are our best guide to health and national strength'¹², and that the Ásatrú faith should then be practised throughout Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand. This racist theosophical standpoint is perhaps the cause of Mills being overlooked until recently, and many of his early critical readers quickly dismissed his work as nothing but an expression of the ideology of more prominent racist theorists connected with the political rise of fascist Europe.

Notably though, Mills' notion of the Ásatrú religion as being specifically relevant to the 'British race' is flawed, as technically there is no 'British race'. Additionally, the practice of the Ásatrú religion was, it would seem, universal amongst the Teutonic peoples, yet not amongst the Celts, who, along with Teutons, form what might be loosely described as the 'British race'. Therefore such a belief obviously overlooks the traditional Celtic stock in both Great Britain, and even more in the nations settled by the British, such as Australia and New Zealand. Finally, many Australians and New Zealanders are either Kooris or Maoris, or of such stock, and therefore the collective worship of Óðinn in those states would surely not lead automatically to their spiritual enlightenment if we are to accept Mills' theories of ethnic based religion.

However, these theories, when considered in unison with the general philosophical, political and theological essence of Mills' work, do reveal much about his mind. Loosely, when combined these elements suggest that Mills' ideology most likely belongs to the tradition of antiquarian ariosophists whose influence featured strongly in nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe¹³. Perhaps the most influential of those thinkers was the Austrian, Guido von List (1848-1919). The latter was probably the first person to combine the ideology of the *völkisch* revival, with theosophy, right-wing politics and occultism. Von List quickly produced a large body of theosophical writings, and then founded the Guido von List *Gesellschaft*. Essentially, von List

was regarded by his readers and followers as a bearded old patriarch and a mystical naturalist guru whose clairvoyant gaze had lifted the glorious Aryan and Germanic past of Austria into full view from beneath the debris of foreign influences and Christian culture.¹⁴

This summary of von List's achievements seemingly matches closely the goals that Mills sought to achieve for the benefit of the 'British race', and thus highlights the loose parallel between the two men's ideologies¹⁵. The Guido von List *Gesellschaft* and like organisations continued von List's work after his death, prompting a slightly wider ariosophist movement, lead by people like Rudolf John Gorsleben and Rudolf von Sebottendorff¹⁶.

In 1925, Rudolf John Gorsleben, who was already an active member of the Thule *Gesellschaft*, established the Edda *Gesellschaft*, an organisation with similar goals to those of Mills' Odinist Society of Melbourne. The Edda *Gesellschaft* was dedicated to: the research of Germanic proto-history; the worship of the Teutonic pantheon; and the production of the journal, *Hag All All Hag*¹⁷. The under-current of the Edda *Gesellschaft*'s work, and for that matter of the Odinist Society as well, was much the same as that of the Guido von List *Gesellschaft*, primarily due to the influence that von List's ideology had asserted upon Gorsleben's thinking. However, perhaps unlike Mills, Gorsleben's work quickly came to influence the wider and more scholarly strains of critical thought, through his widely employed yet earlier written volumes on the *Edda*¹⁸, and to a lesser extent, his *Hoch-Zeit der Menschheit*. *Hoch-Zeit der Menschheit*¹⁹ still attracts comments today, perhaps most recently by Markus Wolff, who suggested that the text:

'presents an all encompassing Nordic world view, based on Gorsleben's often controversial interpretations of language, myth, and symbol, and draws together myriad correspondences that, while sometimes lacking in scientific validity, open up a startling panorama of Germanic history. His interpretations of the runes, like those of his "Ariosophist" contemporaries, remain of interest'.²⁰

Yet Mills' depiction of the Ásatrú faith is one that would seem to be heavily influenced by the dominant, Christianity-oriented Óðinic scholarship of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Perhaps the most prominent of such scholars in the nineteenth century was the Norwegian, Peter Andreas Munch. In 1840, Munch had published his highly influential *Norse Mythology: Legends of Gods and Heroes*, a text originally published as a supplement to a pre-existing Norwegian school textbook on Scandinavian history. The text was widely publicised, and quickly proceeded through a series of print runs, to become available worldwide. In this text Munch argued persuasively yet inaccurately that the Teutonic deities were late inventions, believing that Óðinn was heavily influenced by Christian mythology, and a representation of Christ²¹. Comparably, Mills believed that Óðinn is 'that of the Great One (ie God) which man can know'²². Also creating a strong parallel to Christian cosmology was Mills' interpretation of Baldr, one of Óðinn's sons, 'as the

perfect man'²³.

Such interpretations of Ásatrú cosmology also featured in the popular introductory texts of the time. Perhaps the most representative of these texts is the slightly later published *Tales of the Norse Gods and Heroes*, by Barbara Leonie Picard. Picard's work contains two parts, the first dealing with the Teutonic pantheon, and typically for its time, placing much emphasis upon Óðinn's role in the shaping of Miðgarðr.²⁴ Picard's depiction of Óðinn and his role in the shaping of Miðgarðr is in many ways one that conforms to typically Christianised *schöpfungsmythen*. Consequently, this text is an introductory source which on some levels could be seen to co-exist with both Munch's and Mills' ideologies. Picard also displays Óðinn as all-controlling and demanding, qualities that scholars such as Einar Haugen and Sven Harnesson have since attributed to the Christian mythology's Jehovah, yet which have not been associated with Óðinn outside of Munchian interpretations²⁵. Mills' like depiction of Ásatrú material also consistently refers of the existence of 'God-given destiny'²⁶, seemingly opting for a monotheistic stance, and ignoring the pluralist essence of fate in Teutonic cosmology²⁷.

The other most interesting point about Mills' portrayal of Óðinn is the emphasis that he places on the god's role as an archetypal father figure. While the role of the archetypal father is an important aspect of Óðinn's traditional persona, scholars do not usually deem it to be as dominant as Mills would seem to believe it to be. It is most likely that this is yet another manifestation of Mills' merging of Christian and Ásatrú theology, and it represents the dominance of the archetypal father role within the Christian God's persona. This position is further highlighted by the relatively obscure positions that Mills delegates to powerful Teutonic deities such as: Týr, Heimdallr, Loki, Njörðr, Ægir, Skaði, Sif, Frigg, Þórr, Freyr and Freyja.

Notably, most modern efforts towards the re-establishment of the Ásatrú religion take a more traditional approach to the faith, and make serious efforts to avoid Christian overtones²⁸. However, Mills certainly presented an interesting blend of traditional European religion and Christianity. Interpretations and movements like this, both in religious thinking and in practice are of great interest, as they allow some of the processes of religious transmutation to be documented and more fully understood, providing research material that may in the future aid the development of a deeper understanding of the transmutational processes that took place during Europe's own conversion to Christianity. Finally, if we accept that the prominent English Óðinnist, D C G Stubba, was correct when making the following summary of the early development of Great Britain's most prominent modern Ásatrú organisation, the Óðinic Rite, the efforts of Mills to reawaken the spirit of Óðinn amongst the 'British race' can not be deemed to have been completely in vain:

'The story of the Óðinic Rite thus far has been of a slow but firm growth, with some major upsets, it is true; but these too are now part of our history. Each day that passes is part of our history, of course, and awareness of this should inspire

us all to contribute something of ourselves to the continuing saga of our holy religion'.²⁹

Notes

1. 'skeggöld, skalmold, klofnir/vindöld, vargölg'. 'axe-age, sword-age/split are shields/wind-age, wolf-age'. 'Völuspá', reprinted in Paul Sach, 'Some Thoughts on Völuspá', in *Edda - A Collection of Essays*, ed. by Robert J Glendinning, and Haraldur Bessason, The University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies - vol 4. Canada: University of Manitoba Press, 1983:86-116 (st.32, p.102). This line of the prophetic Völuspá, describes the apocalyptic years of widespread war and cruelty that, according to Teutonic cosmology, would encompass the world before it would eventually be re-born into a new age of peace and harmony. The present writer wishes to thank Professor J. S. Ryan for kindly reading and commenting on an earlier version of this paper.
2. Thorsson, Edred, *Northern Magic*, Llewellyn's World Magic Series. Minnesota: Llewellyn, 1993:193. Edred Thorsson is a pseudonym for Dr Stephen E Flowers, who until 1985, when he became an instructor in humanities at Austin Community College, lectured in the departments of Germanic Languages and English at the University of Texas. Flowers has published some 15 books on European antiquities and the Ásatrú faith. On the widespread nature of this recognition cp. 'The earliest attempt to reconstruct Odinism in its modern form may be credited to the eccentric and virtually forgotten Australian A Rud Mills'. ('Asatru', in *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion*, ed by Jonathan Z Smith. London: Harper Collins, 1996:76-77 (:76)).
3. 'Ariosophy' refers to an occult wisdom of the Aryan race, and has been used to describe various Aryan-racialist-occult theories.
4. Miller, David L, *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses*. New York: Harper and Row, 1974:40.
5. Green, Deirdre, 'Towards a Reappraisal of Polytheism', *Cosmos*, 5, 1989:3-11 (:7). Green is a Lecturer in Religious Studies at St David's College in the University of Wales. She published this paper while serving as the secretary of the Traditional Cosmology Society (School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh).
6. Mills, Alexander Rud, *The Odinist Religion Overcoming Jewish Christianity*. London: A R Mills, 1933; repr. Melbourne: Ruskin Press Pty. Ltd., 1939. The overwhelmingly anti-Christian sentiment of works such as those by Mills is most likely a reflection of the extremely cruel treatment that Óðinnists suffered during the Christian imperialism of the Dark and Middle Ages according to some mediæval historians (ie see Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*', in *Heimskringla*, trans. by Lee M Hollander, published for the American-Scandinavian Foundation. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964; repr. 1995). Many cases of such treatment, that do not appear elsewhere, have recently been recorded by Shawnee State University's Professor Mark L Mirabello, in his history of the Odin Brotherhood - an organisation claiming a history of five centuries -, perhaps further strengthening such opinions amongst genuine followers of the Ásatrú faith (Mark L Mirabello, *The Odin Brotherhood*. USA: Holmes Publishing Group, 1992).
7. Mills, Alexander Rud, op. cit., p.6.

8. Mills, Alexander Rud, op. cit., p.7.

9. Mills, Alexander Rud, op. cit., p.7.

10. Mills loosely speaks of such concepts throughout his work, ie 'Odin (put briefly) is the part of the Great One (of) Whom man can be aware (of) in some degree'. op. cit., p.7.

11. Mills, Alexander Rud, op. cit., p.7.

12. Mills, Alexander Rud, op. cit., p.7. Cp. Mills' statement (p.29) that 'The Odinist (...) will not marry an alien. The Christian will. Christianity approves mongrelism, even encourages it (Vide all-are equal, Brotherhood-of-man, etc.). (...) We can populate our continent with our own racial stock. (...) Our pro-Jewish Government imports aliens to inhabit the land of our fathers and our mothers (... so that they (the Jew) can) better get (...their) money, and our British race dies out'. The racial identity of the Ásatrú faith is still asserted by most Ásatrú organisations - except perhaps in North America (ie 'It is (...) the policy of the Ring of Troth that Troth membership and activities are open to all those sincerely interested in participating, regardless of race, ethnic origin, or sexual orientation'. 'On Joining the Ring of Troth', in *Application for Membership in the Troth*. USA: The Troth, 1996), ie 'From a heathen and racist point of view, Christianity, born in Israel, should have spread to and been contained within Palestine's semitic neighbours. Protestantism is indeed the culprit of alienating further the Celto-Germanic psyche already semi-alienated by the Popes from its natural and ethnic roots' (Kad Kados, 'Pagan Racial Awareness vs. Protestantism', *Bælder*, 6, 1996:7-11 (:7)).

13. It is most likely that the pervasive influence of ariosophist thinking in Europe during this period was also at least partially responsible for the widespread use of Óðinic imagery and symbolism amongst Saturnian, occultist, and Luciferin organisations, such as the German 'Fraternitas Saturni' (Some of the lodge's documents claim 'a mystical connection between the Greco-Roman Saturnian Principle (fatum, fate) and the old Germanic high god, Wotan (...;) this (...) is seen as the All-ruling Principle of Fate'. (Stephen E Flowers, *Fire and Ice - The History, Structure, and Rituals of Germany's Most Influential Modern Magical Order: The Brotherhood of Saturn*, Llewellyn's Teutonic Magic Series. Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1994:2.). This lodge was founded in 1926 by Gregor A Gregorius, and notably, 'derives its ariosophical runic occultism (...) from' Guido von List's *Das Geheimnis der Runen* (Stephen E Flowers, op. cit., p.13. Guido von List, *The Secret of the Runes*, trans. and intro. by Stephen E Flowers. Rochester, Inner Traditions, 1988). Echoic of the ideology of Mills, the Fraternitas Saturni also possessed a set of membership restrictions that 'only (...) non-Jews (...) could be initiated and that all neophytes had to acknowledge the basic "Nordic" ideology of the lodge' (Stephen E Flowers, op. cit., p.2.).

14. Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology*, New York: New York University Press, 1992:33.

15. 'When the Odinist religion comes, a bond will bind seventy million people together, seventy million British people, who to-day, under Jesus-worship are facing shame and extinction'. Alexander Rud Mills, op. cit., p.21. Mills also suggested that the British people's culture is threatened by 'the (...) alien atavistic Jew-worshipping cult'. Alexander Rud Mills, op. cit., p.23.

16. Von Sebottendorff was a member of the anti-semitic *Germanenorden*, whose long time leader, Hermann Phol, had studied runecraft under von List; and was for some time the editor of the *Münchener Beobachter*, a newspaper that was closely connected to the NSDAP between

1920 and 1945.

17. *Hag All All Hag* was published monthly between 1929 and 1934. Early issues were published in Dinkelsbühl, and later issues in Mittenwald. It was initially edited by R. J. Gorsleben, but after a period of time its editorial role was taken over by Werner von Bülow.

18 Gorsleben, Rudolf John, *Die Edda*. (Pasing: 1922; Rudolf John Gorsleben, *Die Edda, ihre Bedeutung für Gegenwart und Zukunft*. Pasing: 1923; and Rudolf John Gorsleben, *Das Blendwerk der Götter: Gylfaginning*. Pasing: 1923.

19 Gorsleben, Rudolf John, *Hoch-Zeit der Menschheit: Das Welt-Gesetz der Drei oder Entstehen - Sein - Vergehen in Ursprache - Urschrift - Urglaube. Aus den Runen geschöpft*. Leipzig: 1930.

20. Wolff, Markus, 'The Germanic Revival: A short history', *Vor Trí*, 56, 1996:36-41 (:37).

21. Munch, Peter Andreas, *Norse Mythology: Legends of Gods and Heroes*, trans. by Sigurd Bernhard Hustvedt, revised by Magnus Olsen, published for The American-Scandinavian Foundation, Scandinavian Classics vol XXVII. London: Humphrey Milford, 1926. See the portrayal of Óðinn in: *Snorri Sturluson, Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982; repr. University College London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1988; and, *The Poetic Edda*, trans. by L. M. Hollander XE "Hollander, Lee M.", 2nd revised edn. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962; repr. 1994.

22. Mills, Alexander Rud, op. cit., p.117.

23. Mills, Alexander Rud, op. cit., p.117.

24. Picard, Barbara Leonie, 'The Beginning of All Things', in *Tales of the Norse Gods and Heroes*, illustrated by Kiddell-Monroe Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953:1-8.

25. Jehovah, 'the jealous god of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam'. (Einar Haugen, 'The Edda as Ritual: Odin and His Masks', in *Edda - A Collection of Essays:3-24 (:3)*), and; Christian mythology 'postulates a perfect all powerful (...) god (, who demands) total subservience by all created things'. (Sven Harnesson, in *Völuspá: The Prophecy of the Völva*, trans. by Jens Johansson, with notes and introduction by Sven Harnesson. Berkshire: Coxland Press, 1992:71).

26. Mills, Alexander Rud, op. cit., p.115.

27. In Teutonic cosmology fate is woven by the three goddesses known as the Norns or Wyrð Sisters (Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld).

28. The only prominent Ásatrú revivalist who does not avoid Christian overtones in this way is Ed Fitch, *The Rites of Odin*, Llewellyn's Teutonic Magic Series. Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1993.

29. Stubba, D C G, 'English Odinism in the 'Eighties', *Odinism Today*, 8, 1992:11-17 (:17). In 1980 (London) Stubba was installed by the members of the Committee for the Restoration of the Óðinic Rite as the first Director of the Óðinic Rite, for a period of nine years.