

## On the Mythology of Indo-European Heroic Hair<sup>1</sup>

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In this paper I will be limiting myself, so far as the “mythology” of hair is concerned, to head-hair.<sup>2</sup> The bearded epic hero is of course possible (as in the egregious case of the Spanish knight and hero El Cid Campeador, with his flourishing and indicative *grant barba*) but to emphasize the specific *adult masculine* mark of the beard is slightly misdirective, especially when we recall that such a hero as the Irish Cú Chulainn, at the full stretch of his powers, was still called “a beardless boy;” so was his Irish contemporary, the super-warrior Conall Cernach and, in a quite different setting, the hero-prince Avtandil in the (non-Indo-European in language but heavily Persified) Georgian epic, the *Vep’xikaosani*. My main focus is on the “long-haired hero”—and beginning with the usual, in fact the predictive image, of Homer’s long-haired—*komoōntes*—Achaians.<sup>3</sup>

In fact the long hair of these Achaian warriors does *not* specifically or iconically separate them from their Trojan adversaries; the fighters of the two sides do not differ substantially in appearance, though it is at least possible that the hirsute Achaians are judged by the poet to occupy one pole in what Joel Grisward calls the “mythologie de la chevelure,” that is, of long hair as showing *Force* (Grisward, 1981: 260-261). The other pole or mark, for Grisward, is that of hair characterized by its *Beauté*; if this characteristic is assigned only

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<sup>2</sup>For the semantic intricacies encased in the Indo-European terminology for hair, see Adams, 1988: 69-93.

<sup>3</sup>Two recent studies which have been most helpful to me in the following brief analysis are Sayer, 1991, and Bartlett, 1994. Edmund Leach’s seminal essay on Magical Hair should surely also be mentioned: Leach, 1959: 147-164.

to the Trojan warriors we have an opposition that rather supports Scott Littleton's suggestion: of the presence of a reflex of a true Indo-European *guerre du fondation* in the *Iliad* (Littleton, 1970). Unfortunately the Homeric text doesn't provide any evidence for this "functional" hirsute contrast (save for one instance I will deal with later); the epic text does include, however, the episode that strongly contrasts the Achaian hero-princes to "crop-headed" Thersites, and I must return, in time, to that drama and its penumbra of possible significances.

The "long-haired" image (as specifically identifying the heroic and the warriorlike) is also repeated in the Indic *Mahābhārata*; a closer acquaintance with that huge epic than I can boast may emerge with a longer list of specific references, but as it is it seems that the heroes of the Pāṇḍava do have long hair, not least because when they adopt an "ascetic" calling, their hair must be braided, and we also have the specific instance of the super-warrior, tigerlike Arjuna's "long and plentiful" hair.<sup>4</sup> The long-haired image then may be traced down through the evidence of Tacitus and other 'anthropological' observations on the Germanic tribes, the Gothic warriors called *capillati* and various sorts of Irish evidence, to the "long-haired kings"—*reges criniti*—the Frankish *heerkonige* or war-leaders who commanded as much as they ruled,<sup>5</sup> to Saxo Grammaticus, through other medieval evidence, both historical and imaginal, that I shall cite by the way, and at least, in early Modern times, on to the long-tressed Royalist "Cavaliers" of the English Civil war: this is a long and more or less distinguished list, and clearly one with a powerful symbolic voltage carried in its entries.

1. First I must come back to the image suggested by his term *chevelure*, though I must modify Grisward in a term redone for my purposes as *chevelure chevaleuse*, long hair imitating the mane of a horse. In fact, the equine connection is already visible in the *Iliad*, but here it usually is transferred to the helmet-crests of the warriors, those high horse-hair crests that,

<sup>4</sup>Ascetic braided hair mentioned in *Mahā.*, I(7)123 (p. 271) and I(9)144 (p. 301); Arjuna's long hair is noted in 4(45)10 (p. 40). A warrior of the semi-demonic Gandharva, defeated by Arjuna, has "chapeleted" hair long enough to be grasped by his foe: I(11)158 (p. 321).

<sup>5</sup>First mentioned in Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, II.9; see Wallace-Hadrill, 1962/1982: 148ff.

in the formulaic usage, “nodded terribly” (*hippiokhaitēn deinon neuanta*: see *Il.* VI. 469-470, and note that this equine image is continued as Hector returns to the battle, as the text says, like a horse that has broken loose from its stall: lines 506-7). The human hero’s equipage only imitates the horse in this instance, but the hero may go much farther toward the bi-connection (though it is quite unsubstantiated by any etymology) of *chevelure* and *cheval*. For J.-P. Vernant, for example, a complex of images radiates outward from the monstrous figure of the Gorgon, the being so closely interwoven, in the ancient Greek sources, with the horse’s mythic origin and unearthly powers: “the terrifying effects of hair” are revealed in the hero-warrior’s imitation of both the animal and the monster, and the warrior “tossing” his hair shows this replication of a terrible, a *deinos*, flexion and display of his long *chevelure* (Vernant, 1992: 118-119). This mimetic effect may also be heightened by the warrior’s dyeing or “glazing” and reddening the hair to make it more mane-like, and Vernant suggests, citing Plutarch, that this was done by young Lacedemonian warriors—as it certainly was done, according to Diodorus Siculus, by the Celts, whose fighters bleached their hair and wore it pulled or teased back so that their hair resembled that “of satyrs and Pans” but was also much like “the manes of horses,” *khaiteis hippōn* (and we may also take note that at least some of the Celtic warrior-élite went into battle naked, like wild animals: Diodoros Siculus, V.28).

The association of the long-haired hero with the animal (the natural) realm—and beyond that to the monstrous zone or mythic mode of Gorgon or wood-spirit or daemon—is somewhat dedramatized (or denatured?) if the natural reflection or model is not animal but instead fertile, vegetal forces; this is William Sayers’ contention, at least as this image is shown in the Irish Celtic evidence, where he sees “a thoroughgoing but underlying correspondence between human hair and vegetation, especially branches and grasses” (Sayers, 1991: 187). I will return to his point in dealing, presently, with the symbolic polarized sets or valences of *nature* and *culture* as they seem to organize this long heroic hair.

2. On the level of *maturational* signs and symbols, long hair is less of a significant marker for the adult, or for the masculine gender, than is body-hair and particularly facial hair, but some complications and permutations are certainly possible in respect to this area. One complication has to do with the

question: just how young *is* our young hero? The Irish evidence tells us that to be a *gilla*, a “boy,” is a state that a true hero, like Finn mac Cumail, may occupy at one time; here we also have those who are called “bad boys,” the excluded and outlaw *díbergach*, and while the *gilla* has short hair the Irish *díberga* is seen as “tonsured” (Sayers, 1991: 161; McCone, 1986: 1-22). Presumably these youths, however they are differently evaluated in moral terms, are to be read as slightly younger than our typical hero, though it is hard to put any precise age, within the ‘adolescent’ rubric or frame, to them. I have already mentioned the beardless state of certain heroes, and what seems especially notable in such a situation is precisely the imaginal siting and the retention of the typical hero in an adolescent, that is by definition a liminoid, state: as not-child, but not-adult. Such a placement and state is demonstrated in a whole series of acts and signs, not least of these the hero’s anomalous sexual behavior, where his likely posture may be as a sexual predator (here reverting to the animal image) but he is even more commonly seen to be a sexual neutral, a celibate male. Either is possible, but we certainly do see that the *least* likely sexual mode for him, the hero, is that of the socially normal and familial role of husband and father—Achilles, we might say, almost always overcomes Hector, that doomed “guardian” as Rachel Bernaloff tersely and brilliantly describes him, “of the perishable joys” (Bernaloff, 1962: 39). The hero’s long hair, uncut, places him in a specific symbolic consonance to the figure of the virginal female, and he is himself likely to be virginal. The most striking epic instance of such a virginal heroic state can be found in the Byzantine Greek poems describing the great border-hero Digenes Akritas, who is wed to a girl called “the Korē,” the virgin, and who himself (called throughout the epic *pais*, *neos*, *neōteros*—that is, a child or youth) is almost pathologically anti-sexual (Digenes Akritas, GRO IV, 734).<sup>6</sup> A fascinating side-development spun upon the heroic sexual theme is also revealed in this Byzantine Greek epic, in that the only specific reference to long hair to be found in it refers to the hair of boy eunuchs who make up a wedding gift.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>For the hero Digenes’ only sexual adventure (with the beautiful amazon Maximo) and its result, see GRO VI, 765ff (with interpolations from the Trepizond MS: Mavrogradato, pp. 208-215).

<sup>7</sup>Digenes Akritas, GRO IV, 925: ten young boys *askeuastous kai tē komē hōraious*, “sexless and good-looking with beautiful [long] hair”; the length of the hair is

Like the female virgin the young hero remains sexually *potential*, and the symbolic heat of this particular state resonates with other effluxions of heroic heat, especially his battle-heat, his *menos* or *wut* or *furor*. Vernant properly and percipiently notes this young male warrior's significant association with the young unmarried woman and, continuing his use of an equine image, the warrior is seen as wearing or imitating the virgin's "filly-like" or bacchante hair, which is wild, tossing, disordered. But *her* virginal hair will be cut, or tamed, or covered after marriage, while the hero-youth continues to flaunt his long locks—until the end. Then we see, in Homer, the death of Euphorbos, with his "blood-drenched hair," though it is not exactly disordered, with a point made of his "tresses braided with gold and silver" (XVII.51-2) or, finally, great Hector dragged dead in the dust behind Achilles' chariot, while "on both sides the dark hair spread out" (XXII.401-2). But clearly these two examples bring up another point for our close and careful consideration: the essential difference between hair merely grown long, and long hair that is elaborately dressed—that is, hair as it makes up not a *chevelure* but a *coiffure*. I will have to elaborate on this matter, the nature/culture polarity, in due course.

3. The aspect of *class* or *status* signed in or by a particular hair-style would seem to be revealed first in our heroic sources in that well-known confrontation between the Achaian warrior-princes and the unfortunate and maltreated Thersites, the jeering loudmouth found in the *Iliad* (II.212-277). In fact Thersites may represent the *demos* or people, as some scholars have suggested, but Gregory Nagy has most persuasively argued that Thersites' crop-headed state, as well as the rest of his bedraggled and anomalous appearance and his abrasive or abusive verbal style, represents something else: he is the very faint Homeric echo of, among others, the Northern skald or "scolder," that is, an echo of the satirist or blame-poet (G. Nagy, 1979: 259-262). As such he would have some affinities with the Irish druid and with the satirist there, both being very powerful figures detached from, though they observe and often comment on, the warrior's role and Function. The 'class' component and signification of long hair also emerges in the offbeat medieval source *Meier Helmbrecht*, called by some that

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understood with its beauty. See Mavrogordato's note on the uncommon word *askeuastous* which means, literally, "lacking equipment."

rare example of a true “peasant epic” and by other scholars nothing but a satirical poem; in any case the text gives us a final episode where the *faux*-nobleman Meier is set upon by his lower-class enemies and has his long, knightly-aristocratic hair torn out, so reducing him at the end to his original, condign and degraded social position.<sup>8</sup> We know of medieval sumptuary laws that imposed or directed appropriate, status-marked hair-styling, but we can also point to other complications having more to do with the “magical” component of hair either worn long, or, conversely, cropped short. For example, OIr *mael*, variously translated as shorn, crop-headed or bald, is said by Joseph Nagy to be “primarily a sign of servility and low social status” and yet to be *mael* can also be one sign that marks the important and high-status “man of knowledge,” the druid (J. Nagy, 1985: 152). In fact the great *rígfennid* Finn mac Cumall, in one of his earlier avatars, was called Demne Mael, “Bald Demne,” before he was awarded his emblematic hero’s name of Finn, “the Bright One.” But Finn (or Demne) was not merely a warrior of the *fian* (though this warrior’s group was already sufficiently liminal in act, tone and topical placement) but had some druidic powers as well; he is one of those “twinning” warriors, like the warrior-warlock Cei of the early Welsh Arthurian *matière*, who could successfully operate in two disjunct zones or realms (Miller, 1992: 18-19).

4. So the long-haired warrior, in his I-E “functional” placement, might in one view find himself posed or poised between two short-haired Functional figures: the close-cropped druid or the tonsured priest of the First Function, and the derogated, short-haired pleb, farmer, artisan or whatever, figures encased or operating in the Third Function. But the puzzle is not yet completely laid out in all its ramifications, for interfering in our “functional” investigations into heroic hair is what might be called the problem of *style*, or the lack of it.

Again we have the opportunity to turn to the theoretical opposition, the framing concepts, of the cosmos of *nature* and or versus that of *culture*, and so to see how these concepts affect our perception of the long-haired I-E warrior-heroes. On the side of nature we have already seen the warrior imitating, in his hair-style, an animal pelt or horse’s mane—revealing the horse to be his “twin” again in his hair-style; while the Irish *fénidi*,

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<sup>8</sup>*Mare Helmbrecht*, ll. 1896-1900. See also Bartlett, 1994: 2.

according to Sayers, “must have worn their hair in distinctive fashion, to give a lupine or ursine effect” (Sayers, 1991: 161) and human hair that resembles that of a wild deer is noted in the Irish story of Finn’s son Oisín, and also is mentioned in the Welsh tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*.<sup>9</sup> Yet what we would call “wild” or disordered hair, hair worn unkempt or completely *au naturel*, might also be seen to push the hero-figure toward the exotropical Wild Man or Mad Man image; in old Ireland, once again, long and shaggy hair was not regarded as specifically heroic but might be the dark mark of the *crośán* or “entertainer,” who was an ambiguous, marginal and perhaps feared figure, and imaginally associated with the always-questionable Trickster complex.<sup>10</sup> But another Irish image has the warrior-hero boast hair that is not so much wild or disordered as simply exuberant, as Conall Cernach is described in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga, The Burning of Da Derga’s Hostel*: “his bushy tree of fair, very blond hair that is on him is the measure of a reaping basket,” while following hard on this image comes an animal simile: “it is as fleecy as a tufted ram.”<sup>11</sup> Such a literally bushy—vegetative—but also “explosive” image is repeated in the description of Cú Chulainn’s hair as given in one part of the *Táin*, while this hero’s hair has the added characteristic of being of three colors, in fact three colors with distinctly I-E Functional associations or significances: in ascending order, the hair was dark at the root, blood-red in the shaft, and golden blond at the end (*Táin*, ll. 2268ff.). This chromatic symbolization and marking anomaly aside, we can see that in both of the cases cited vegetal *and* animal images are brought into play to describe the “natural” heroic hair. We might also remember that this Irish warrior Conall, like the Byzantine hero Digenes, was described as a blond.

Before abandoning the evidence we have for “natural” hair we ought to pause briefly at Tacitus’ evidence for the German Chatti, a tribe whose young warriors, according to his *Germania*,

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<sup>9</sup>For Oisín see Sayers, 1991: 165 and fn. 19; in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, see l. 228 for the monstrously ugly Morfan son of Tegid, who “had hair on him like a stag” - *blew hyd*. See Adams, 1988: 75, 79, for his reconstructed PIE roots mixing the human and the animal images, specifically \**ker*, \**ghait* (cf. Homeric *kaite*) and \**kais*, \**keis*.

<sup>10</sup>See Harrison, 1989: 44-47, citing J. O’Donovan, 1873: 354.

<sup>11</sup>Sayers, 1991: 162, slightly varied in Sayers, 1993: 10. The text of the *TBDD* is in Knott, 1936.

wear both hair and beard uncut until their first man-killing and then can be shaven and shorn (Tacitus, c. 31).<sup>12</sup> Human “culture” here is equated with the successful slaying of a foe; “the coward and the unwarlike” remain “natural.” Tacitus does not stipulate how short the successful warrior’s hair would be cut. Vilhelm Gronbech took the evidence of the Chatti and made their hair-cutting a *devotio* to what he called “holiness;” he also, I think against the evidence, saw the practice as—necessarily for his thesis—widespread among the Germanic peoples.<sup>13</sup> In his commentary on the *Germania*, however, Rudolf Much suggests a parallel between the hair-offering made by the Chatti and the vow made by the 10th century Norse war-king Harald, who remained *húfa* or “shaggy” until he had tamed his kingdom, at which point he became *hárfagr*, “Fair-hair” (Much, 1959: 292-293).

If for schematic convenience we place the “natural” cluster of images on the left of our imaginary diagrammatic screen, we can now move to the center: to heroic hair that is *controlled*, that is, hair under control, trimmed, combed or disciplined in some fashion. It is said of the Irish *fénidi* that while they might wear their hair so as to give that animal, that “lupine or ursine,” effect, they also set aside a certain time of each day to wash this hair, as a sort of civilizing ritual (this comes from a 17th century history of the land: Keating, 1908: 329). More to the point is the evidence of Saxo Grammaticus, expressed in dour Starkathr’s diatribe aimed at the degenerate King Ingel’s careless Danish court, when the old warrior points to a young warrior who “unknots his spreading hair and allows his unbraided tresses to float” (Saxo, I, bk. VI.28). What Starkathr seems to be saying, as Saxo reports it, is that a real man, and a genuine hero, may indeed have long hair, but he keeps it disciplined into a braid or knot or both.<sup>14</sup> A fascinating side-variation on this theme is provided in Herodotus, when he describes the Spartan warriors

<sup>12</sup>“... *apud Chattos in consensus vertit, ut primum adoleverint, crinem barnamque submittere, nec nisi hoste caeso exuere*, etc; not, or rarely, he avers, a custom of any other Germanic tribe.

<sup>13</sup>Gronbech, 1931: 123-125. The *devotio* of hair connected the young male “to an inferior, masculine degree of holiness” (122).

<sup>14</sup>Though perhaps not as elaborately dressed as the Suevian tribesmen described by Tacitus (*Germania*, cap. 38) with their “knots” of hair piled high enough to make themselves “tall and terrible,” *in altitudinem quandam et terrorem adituri*... See Anderson’s notes (Anderson, 1938: 180-181 and figure 25 facing p. 180), and see immediately below.



before Thermopylae: a spy reports to the Persians, among other things, that the Spartans awaiting the barbarian attack were combing their hair; Xerxes then took the supposedly expert advice of one Demaratus, who warned him that it was the custom, *nomos*, of the Lacedemonians to “dress their hair” (*tas kephalas kosmeontai*) when about to risk their lives, so they would be especially fell-handed enemies.<sup>15</sup>

It is at this point, where the warrior “dresses” his hair for war, that we ought to consider in more detail the numerous data referent to Germanic warriors and the habit of their warchieftains—*principes*—to wear their hair made up into tall and impressive headdresses. Obviously this custom gave barbarian men who already were tall by Mediterranean standards an even more imposing height, and (as Tacitus first insisted) the custom was meant to have its effect *in terrorem*, and was no mere decoration or courtship aid (Tacitus, XXXVIII, esp. 4). Other Roman authors and observers added other details: Pliny the Younger described the soap-like stuff made *ex sebo et cinere* and used by the Germanic tribes to form and build up whorls and ‘horns’ of hair (Pliny, XXVIII.12,51); the approximate contemporary of Tacitus, Silius Italicus, described a Suebian of rank boasting three crests made of hair, *vertice surgens triplex crista iubas effundit crine* (Silius Italicus, 5, 134). And Ammianus Marcellinus gives us a portrait of a war-king of the Alamanni, Chonodomarius, already of a goodly size but also wearing his hair in a *flammeus tortulus*, that is, a “flame-colored” excrescence or what we would probably call a “roach” (Ammianus Marcellinus, XVI. 12, 24).<sup>16</sup> For that matter, it is Ammianus who tells us that the Alamanni customarily died their hair red—*comas rutiliantes ex more*—a custom worth examining again later.<sup>17</sup>

To return to the central issue: the explicit derogation, by

<sup>15</sup>Herodotos, VII.208-209. The original scout’s observation only refers to the Spartan warriors “combing” (*ktenizomenous*) their hair, not “decorating” it; was Demaratus himself decorating his story for the King of Kings, or did he actually know of some Spartan practice similar to those suggested earlier in this paper?

<sup>16</sup>J. C. Rolfe, translator of the Loeb Classical Libray edition of Ammianus, translates the phrase as “with a flame-colored plume on his helmet,” which is not accurate.

<sup>17</sup>Ammianus Marcellinus, XVI, 2, 2. I am grateful to Edgar Polomé for bringing several of the Germanic citations and the commentary thereon to my attention, via Polomé, 1989: 39-40, notes 78-80.

old Starkathr, of “uncontrolled” heroic hair leads us to our last category in the *culture/nature* sequence: to hair that has passed so far into the realm of culture that it has become a true *coiffure*, and so is perceived as too over-styled for a hero and, in this reading, can even become a mark of unheroic effeminacy or degeneracy. If we turn back to the *Iliad*'s description of the dying Euphorbos in book XVII, we will recall his elaborate “tresses braided in gold and silver.” Now, the Euphorbos of the *Iliad* is a doomed minor character who has broken into the big time: as Willcock says, “by the inherent assumptions of epic poetry, Euphorbos must die” (Willcock, 1976: 193). In daring to be the first to spear Patroklos, he has become the Iliadic equivalent to our own folkloric image of “the dirty little coward/that shot Mr. Howard/and laid Jesse James in his grave.” But Euphorbos' fancy, or fanciful, hair-dress all braided with precious metals also marks him very specifically, and perhaps supplies another small piece of evidence in favor of Littleton's suggestion concerning the remnant traces of an I-E and Interfunctional core to be found in the old Homeric epic.

The heroic coiffure that is judged to go too far toward the decorative as to become “degenerate” need not be as elaborate as this Trojan warrior's; old Starkathr was exercised at long warrior hair merely unbound, and in a quite different context another critic, indeed a clerical scourge of the effete aristocratic manners of his age, Bernard of Clairvaux, makes his opinion on the subject very clear. In his *De laude novae militiae* Bernard refers in most disparaging terms to those knights of his time who ornament themselves like women, and “nurturing a mass of hair which hides [their] sight” show themselves as figures of pride, vanity and excess.<sup>18</sup> Indeed they are nothing but a long-haired *mal-itia*, these bad knights, who cannot compare to the more admirable sort of *miles*, the tonsured soldier-monk recruited and dedicated to the sacralized service of the Temple.<sup>19</sup> The attribution of effeminacy—or, to be precise, male hair worn like a *chevelure feminine*—appears to move this mark of long, heroic hair directly into the I-E Third Function, as Grisward demonstrates in his dissection of the heroic personnel, the Seven Sons of Aymeri, who were the stars of the Old French *Cycle des Narbonnais*: the only one of Aymeri's

<sup>18</sup>*Sancti Bernardi opere*, 1960: v. III. See also the remarks of Duby, 1990: 99-100.

<sup>19</sup>St. Bernard was not alone in his criticisms: see Bartlett, 1994: 7-8.

sons to wear his hair long is red-headed Hernaut, who is the Cycle's sole "héros du troisième fonction" (Grisward, 1981: 260-263).

To introduce a final body of harder observed data, and to shift back toward the anthropological and archaeological record, it appears that the Anglo-Saxon warrior nobility, like their other North Germanic compeers, rejoiced in hair that was long, well-kempt and combed (the comb itself being a mark of nobility), but also artificially curled and frizzled, and sometimes decorated or held in place with bronze hairpins—true of men and women alike (Gramm, 1938: 13-16).<sup>20</sup> We have no surviving moral judgements made on what seems to have been a distinctly androgynous warrior-aristocratic hairstyling among this Germanic people, one paralleling what we have seen elsewhere in the heroic context.

5. The antithetical image and situation to the hero's long hair, that is, a lack of hair, has already been previewed above. Cropped or short hair may be seen as appropriate marks of either of the Functions that frame the *fonction guerrière*, and the complex variations on the OIr term *mael* have already been briefly investigated. Surely there could, in theory, be such a thing as a bald hero, but in all likelihood this bald hero would soon be seen to cross over into the Trickster complex. Indeed there are some fascinating cross-cultural exemplars to be found nearby for purposes of comparison, such as the Turkish *keloğlan* or Bald Boy, the folkloric youngest son whom I have elsewhere, and some years ago, described as occupying a symbolic familial place so far from the hypermasculinized signs of his elder brothers (who are seen as replications of the paternal force only) that he can combine masculine *and* feminine symbolic powers, and so succeed in his adventures and endeavors where others, like his older brothers, had failed (Miller, 1971: 648). This folk-character emerges in a society where head and especially facial hair are given extraordinary value as masculine gender markers. But a bald hero in the pristine I-E tradition is not going to be at all common. If we follow one of the "natural" lines, baldness must indicate a loss or diminution in the vital processes of growth: that great "tree" of hair that Conall Cernach or Cú Chulainn boasted, in this image, has lost its

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<sup>20</sup>The comb, during the medieval period and later, of course had both a decorative or cosmetic and an hygienic use, the latter as the *nizkamp* used to comb out head-lice and nits.

young virtue, and its radiate branches and leaves will spring and spread no more (Lincoln, 1991: 171; 1986: 87-98). Baldness coming with the onset of old age will not be much seen in the epic, for the good reason that the typical epic hero, following his brief “parabolic” life, should not have the time to grow old, and so should not grow bald. Even Nestor of Pylos, the prototypical *ho geros* in the *Iliad*, he who had seen two generations of princes and warriors acts their parts and pass away, is not ever pictured, so far as I know, as a *bald* old man.

To cut the warrior’s long hair, even by a more-or-less accidental blow in the heat of combat, was a deeply unmaning or dishonoring act or sign, yet this happened even to the great Cú Chulainn, and at the hand of his own young son Connla, who “cut him bald-headed... in the stroke of precision” (*Aided Oenfir Aife*, para. 10; Sayers, 1991: 175-176). Whatever the Oedipal echo of Connla’s story, Cú Chulainn still will defeat and kill this son. Gregory of Tours provides us with another anecdote along this line, writing that Clovis, king of the Franks, defeated the king of the Salians, Chararic, and then had the long hair of Chararic and of his son cut; the shamed son exclaimed that “these leaves had been cut from wood still green” and could grow again; Clovis took the threatening meaning of this vegetative image immediately, and so had the two beheaded.<sup>21</sup> Depilation can, of course, be made a non-fatal substitute for beheading, but in either case the attack is made on the hair or, more precisely, on the head that is perceived to contain a specific male vitality and a sexually potent personality or identity. In ancient India the captured warrior had his hair cut as a mark of his new servitude (and his consequent loss of any adult and male sexual identity: Chanana, 1960: 35); the crop-headed slave is a well-attested figure in any number of cultural contexts, contexts that especially seemed to fear the male slave’s darkly ambiguous sexuality (Miller, 1985: 587-605). The priest’s tonsure will of course convey, without overt derogation, the same sign of an abridged—here a voluntarily abridged—sexuality, but this mark complicates and confuses any Second Functional warrior-hero image, whatever Bernard of Clairvaux may have written.

6. Finally, there is the matter, the whole sub-mythology, of the color of heroic hair, a large subject I can only sketch here.

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<sup>21</sup>Putting, as it were, the final axe to the “tree”: *Hist. Franc.*, II.41.

Cú Chulainn in his great “distortion” may boast hair tri-colored to fit a canonical I-E trifunctional scheme (that is, when he is not described as slight, dark-haired—and melancholy—or as conventionally, heroically blond) but usually a warrior-hero shows but one hair-color, and typically, when the color is given at all, it is fair: OIr *findbuidi*, or Greek *xanthos*, like Conall Cernach, Digenes Akritas or, for that matter, Menelaus in the *Iliad*.<sup>22</sup> Given that in the accepted I-E canon of chromatism the color representing the Second Function is *red*, the color of blood, we might expect the red-haired warrior to be a dominant player, but this is not at all the case—though, as we have seen, some Germanic tribes made red-died hair a *Kriegsbrauch*, while Tacitus claimed that the German tribesmen were naturally red-headed, *rutilae comae*—if in fact this is actually red and not a “fair” or blond color (Tacitus, 4).<sup>23</sup> Achilles is still *pyrrhos*, red (or he was *pyrrha* when once disguised as a girl, in an early part of his legend) but this fiery color surely reflects his hypermachic, uncontrolled, furious warrior’s character. We may note that in the *Shāh-nāma*, where heroic hair-color is not given and, evidently, not pertinent, the hero Rostam’s demon-horse Raksh still is called “the red bay” and “the colour of fire,” while in the Indic *Mahābhārata* the god Kr̥ṣṇa is given orange hair, fiery eyes and a “reddish” beard;<sup>24</sup> living in a land and upholding a tradition touching on both the Persian and the Indic cultural areas, the pagan Armenians took their war-god Vahagn to be red-haired and red-bearded, as well.<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere, the OIr *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* there are three warriors, red-haired and armed and dressed all in red, but this trio, according to the narrative, had once “wrought evil in the *síd*”; they are warriors of the supernatural realm whose color was changed to red from the usual green of that realm, and this evidently as a punishment. Da Derga, orchestrator of that tale of fate, is red-haired, but in *his* case Sayers sees a direct

<sup>22</sup>See also Sayers, 1991: 188, and Polomé, 1989: 39-40.

<sup>23</sup>See Much, 1959: 71-72; Gramm, 1938: 16; Gramm recalls Ammianus Marcellinus as he specifically comments on the Alemanni.

<sup>24</sup>*Shāh-nāma*, VI. iv (51); *Mahā.*, 1(7)100 (p. 235).

<sup>25</sup>Vahagn was a war-god evidently related to the Avestan Verethragna, and so described in Moses Khorenatsi (1978: 123). The point of Vahagn’s red hair and beard was raised at the 1994 UCLA/I-E Conference, and my thanks are due to John A. C. Greppin for providing the exact citation from the Armenian historian. For Verethragna see Dumézil, 1963: 7.

attachment, by way of the marked “affinities with the Otherworld” of his hostel or *bruiden*, to the ancient supernatural powers of the *síd* (Sayers, 1991: 164). Red may, therefore, have rather less of a specifically F2 and warriorly significance; so, according to Grisward, *roux* was a color seen to mark a *felon* character in the medieval period—Judas Iscariot was, according to the legend, red-haired and so, at the End of Days, would be the Antichrist (Grisward, 1981: 259-260).

The last heroic chromatism to be noted here is somewhat related to the antithetical image in relation to long heroic hair, that is short or cropped hair or baldness, and this is *grey* hair. Ordinarily a sign of advancing age, grey hair like baldness would usually be perceived as unheroic, because old age is, in its plainest essence, unheroic, and so is incompatible with heroism’s ever-youthful image won by an early, violent, and consequently glorious end. We may see and remember heroic figures who live too long: Rostam, or Starkathr, or the *úlfgrátt*, that is “wolf-grey” Egil Skallagrimsson, or the Irish warrior, Finn’s son Oisín (as the latter, late in a long life, mourns his young, abundant hair as replaced by grey stubble: Sayers, 1991: 173). Where the color grey—the liminal color, not-white, not/dark—picks up an even more strongly enigmatic image is when it is itself anomalous, unnaturally appearing when a hero is in fact still young. One of the otherworldly marks set on Finn mac Cumail himself was his untimely grizzling or greying (J. Nagy, 1985: 160), and elsewhere this is a characteristic, as well, of the “unlucky” line of Grettir the Strong, in his own violent saga, he whose grandfather was called Thorgrim Greyhead and his father Asmund Grey-locks.<sup>26</sup> It is in the Norse-Icelandic North, in fact, that this color or liminoid non-color is given its most sinister charge: it is the descriptive mark of the murderous weapon crafted by sorcery in *Gísla saga súrssonar*, that is *Grásiða* or Greyflank (cap. 11); it is the color-mark of the twilight, the crepuscule—and also of the pelt of the prowling, corpse-devouring wolf. In other epic contexts it is the special color of Cú Chulainn’s uncanny chariot-horse, the Grey of Macha, who goes alive “into the mountain” after his master had died.<sup>27</sup> We might say that while white hair may bring some sort of honor,

<sup>26</sup> *Grettirs saga Asmundarsson*, cap. 13. Rostam’s father Dastān or Zāl was already white-haired as a child, a “demonic” mark that results in his occultation: *Shāh-nāma*, V (i) (35-36).

<sup>27</sup> *Aided Con Culainn*, 334, 336-337.

grey hair is, evidently, both powerful and suspect in the I-E heroic imaginal world.<sup>28</sup>

### Conclusion

The conflation of epic-imaginal and some historical and protohistorical data presented here tells us, at the very least, that the head-hair of the I-E warrior-hero can carry a considerable symbolic potency and a deep and variable set of significances. It—the importance attached to heroic hair—is not invariably seen (for some I-E epic traditions, such as the Persian and the Armenian, almost entirely ignore it)<sup>29</sup> but in the I-E epical contexts in which it figures in all its radiate possibilities, heroic hair adds its special dimensionality to our dissection, and reconstruction, of the I-E heroic Type. The long-haired image once again places this hero in a liminal, symbolic-adolescent mode, where it can be another sign of physical maturity combined with sexual immaturity (or, perhaps better, sexual potentiality)—that is, it reflects the male state of virginity. The hero also finds himself balanced between the two symbolic poles of Nature and Culture, and signs this intermediate posture by, among other acts, displays and characteristics, in the way he wears his hair. As we have seen, without adding many of the purely identificatory or decorative elements possible in “styling” the hair we still can show a rich mixture of signs or tones, in which the base tonic is long but properly kempt hair worn or displayed as a warrior-heroic marker. The color of this heroic hair *may* reflect the more direct I-E imagery, but we also find the system changed or fractured: for example, the Second Function emblematic color, red, seems to show what may be an older, an elemental and daemonic, origin mixed into or erupting through the I-E superstrate. In the end, our “mythologie de la chevelure” is not by any means completely described and fully explicated, but we can, I hope, see its outlines more clearly, even when these

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<sup>28</sup>It is worth remarking that Arawn, king of Annwfn or the Otherworld in the Welsh *mabinogi* “Pwyll pendeic Dyfed” is described as wearing grey hunting gear and rides a dappled grey horse: *Pwyll Pendeic Dyuet* in Ford, 1977: 37.

<sup>29</sup>The Armenian epic *Sassounsi David* only refers, and very briefly, to heroic facial hair, but does mention soldiers with “brown beard(s),” “White beard(s),” “red beard(s)” - a trifunctional reference? - in the epic’s Third Cycle, I “The Duel,” (253-4). In Cycle Three, II, “The Death of David” (330, 332) the eponymous hero is called “brown-bearded.”

outlines show themselves as ambiguous and shifting.

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