

There are two versions of the story of Starkadr (Starcatherus), one Latin, the other Old Icelandic. Starkadr is forced into a precarious position, caught between Odin and Thor. Here I will follow the Icelandic tale for concision, only referring to the Latin to offset some details.

In the Icelandic tale there are two Starkadrs—the hero's grandfather is of the same name. The first Starkadr is a powerful giant and is slain by Thor because the king's daughter has run away with him. In fact, Thor is upset because she prefers the giant Starkadr to himself and had consented to leaving with him. Before the giant is slain, though, the king's daughter has a child who will be the father of Starkadr.

This will lead to a future conflict, because Thor in general has always been depicted as the lone-warrior god in opposition to the race of the giants (like Zeus, sworn enemy of the titans). The second Starkadr is born with *jotunkuml*, which might best be translated as “wounds of the giant.” For our purposes we should envision Starkadr as being human while having super-human strength, and since his grandfather was a giant (with six to eight arms no less), his *jotunkuml* are like large stumps where extra limbs should be. So when the conflict begins in this story, Thor is already set against Starkadr because of the enmity he feels toward his grandfather and for the fact that he bears the mark of giants in physical prowess and deformity.

Odin, on the other hand, has always been on the side of the giants. In fact, he is descended from Ymir, the first giant. Odin and Thor are like two aspects of the war machine: Odin is the sovereign, Thor the warrior; Odin the god of the giants, Thor the god sent to keep the giants in check; Odin the god of large armies of commoners, Thor the god of errant, lone heroes. So the fact that Starkadr is a giant and by upbringing a defender of kings makes all the factors come into play here to set the hero up for his destiny.

Odin decides his fate by granting Starkadr privileges mixed with an evil demand. Odin requires that Starkadr give up his friend and king Vikar. He can get away with this because he has (in other human forms) raised Starkadr and helped train him. Before this account is settled, Odin and Thor cross words as to Starkadr's fate. Thor decrees he will have no children (to end the line of giants started by his grandfather), so Odin grants him three life spans to make up for it. Then Thor says he will commit a crime for each lifespan. Odin says he will have the best weapons and armor, but Thor says he will have no land or property. Odin gives fine furnishings, but Thor says he will never feel he has enough. Odin decrees victory in every combat, but Thor foresees that he will be gravely wounded in each battle. Odin gives him the gift of poetry and improvisation, while Thor says he will forget everything he composes. Finally, Odin says he will appeal to the well-born and the great, but Thor says he will be despised by the common folk.

The first crime to be committed is the only one that is required of him: he is to offer his friend, king Vikar, in a sacrifice to Odin. In fact, Odin makes sure to remind Starkadr that he is indebted to him for all the help. We can only imagine that Odin, being the sovereign-god, wants Vikar to join him in Valhalla in order to strengthen the number of kings that have already amassed in Odin's domain. Thus, Starkadr does what is asked of him, and hates himself for it—so do all his company men. He is forced to leave and becomes nomadic, fighting for other kings in dozens of lands. This is the first crime that starts his progress towards two other crimes, both of which are committed towards kings. The second crime is fleeing on the battlefield when the Swedish king

he is serving has been killed. The last is for murdering his king in Denmark for gold. After this he uses the money he earns to buy himself the executioner of his choice.

A few things are significant about this story (later I will connect it to the narrative of Sisupala and Krisna). For example, Starkadr's threefold life is spent serving kings. Many of the feats that are accounted in the stories tell of Starkadr acting as a regal educator, of punishing lower class men who attempt to mate with noble women, and one story even where he upbraids a dissolute king in order to revive the virtuous nature and responsibility that is befitting a sovereign. In short, he functions as an expositor of regal morals and a defender of the kingly function. His role is to protect the symbolic authority of the sovereign.

It is all the more surprising that his three crimes are directly against kings and the function of the king. Now, despite the three crimes Starkadr traveled all throughout the world performing heroic deeds and serving and aiding many different kings. So the fact that he fails these other kings is crucial. Sacrificing his friend Vikar is not directly his fault, though he feels great shame in the act. Fleeing on the battlefield is cowardice only insofar as Starkadr is a giant among men endowed with great powers and so should not easily fear for his life. Nevertheless for Starkadr, hero and general to kings, this is a degradation of the honor befitting a warrior. Finally, even though Starkadr murders a king who is a bad one, he does it for money, and so that factor overrides any sort of interpretation in which Starkadr might have removed the king in order to defend the kingly function. This is why his last crime spells his death and the loss of his power; symbolically, having forfeited all responsibility for the kingly function, he loses his gifts as a warrior.

This story will set up a further discussion about the function of the sovereign and the warrior. The *dux* (leader) and the *rex* (king) do not always correspond or oppose in simple ways. The *rex* must subordinate the *dux* or else the war machine will never become installed in the functions of the state. The function of the king has to be able to structure (and give direction to) the molar formations of the army that are composed of the selection of molecular forces under the power of the warrior. The warrior, having sworn loyalty or fealty to a king, takes on the function of binding alliances to the state. I think this discussion can especially help illuminate the difficult passages (pg. 145-166) in *Anti-Oedipus* where the despot as BwO, alliances and filiations all get conceptually networked at blinding speed. [And this may include even the seemingly insoluble question concerning how the hero effectuates an exogamous incest that marries him to the mother and the sister of the clan, thereby causing himself to be the unengendered—all filiation results from him insofar as he obtains the maternal bond, and all alliances are secured in his name via the sister that is bound to him as well.] This is the beginnings of an outline of the struggle in myth and epic to articulate a distinct representation of sovereignty and nomadic heroism that will further enlighten us on the operations of the war machine and the state's apparatus of capture.

One last glance at the abstract machine behind the gods and Starkadr's fate: the one thing about his fate that is only implicit is the fact that he will remain a warrior, faithful to the codes of kings. He is fated to commit three crimes, but there is no specification that they must be against kings. Now, we could argue that because his first crime is determined to be against a king (his friend no less) he will inevitably repeat the crimes against other kings. But we should risk more

provocative hypotheses. It's tempting to reiterate the fact that Starkadr's grandfather of the same name commits an offense against a king, and it is Thor that aids the king against the giant. So, in a strange twist of fate, Thor will undermine Starkadr's ability to fulfill his loyal function as a warrior by cursing him to betray kings. But this doesn't work either because Odin requires the first crime and determines it. I suggest that Odin and Thor here both work negatively against Starkadr's many different gifts in order to limit him, or better yet to mold him into a nobler form. Bearing the scars of a monstrous breed, he will perform the tasks of the warrior with such intensity and for so long that he comes to highlight the inevitable dangers at stake in such a position. Precluding sacrificing your king under duress, fleeing the battle—when you are left second in charge by the death of your king—and murdering your king for money must be seen as the two most despicable acts for which a warrior can be responsible. Therefore, Starkadr upholds the ideals of the kingly function, and correspondingly, he educates us on the sins of the warrior.

—Taylor Adkins

(c) Fractal Ontology, 2007