

[http://web.me.com/cameliaelias/Interests/Tarot/Entries/2011/12/14\\_RENEWED\\_\(M\)ANTICS.html](http://web.me.com/cameliaelias/Interests/Tarot/Entries/2011/12/14_RENEWED_(M)ANTICS.html)



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Runic stones in Scandinavia are very well documented. However, there's often very little information offered by historians in addition to what the stones themselves tell. This is perhaps better than we might expect. The fact that all these stones have an enunciative and performative function, which enables us to get the message, renders any additional discourse on the context of the enunciation redundant. To give an example, one of my favorite inscriptions comes from a baptismal font and says: "Arinbjørn made me. Vidkunnr, the priest wrote me. And here I shall stand for a while." That's right, the passerby always agrees, and one hardly thinks that one needs to know more.

Lately I have developed a habit in connection with short stays at the Isaberg mountain resort near the town of Hestra in Sweden. I go to visit a 1011 years old Runic tombstone. The stone is big and beautiful. It is in the middle of a silent forest and planted in the ground in such a way that the light falls on it very mysteriously. I am always enveloped by this mystery every time I find myself going with my fingers over its inscription. The Runic letters can be very beautiful. These are quite angular in their shape, individual in their stroke, and expansive in their zig-zags. What they communicate is a simple descriptive message: "Ófeigr placed this stone in memory of Udde, his son, a very good valiant man (who) died on a journey."



## WRITTEN IN STONE

It's been a few years now since I started wondering what happened to Udde. Every time I find myself by his side, I invent new stories about his demise. In a way, one could say that the now very old grave goes through a process of renewal every time new elements are added to the story of how it was created. The story comes full circle by way of contradiction. For, there are always two narrative strands that emerge against the background of what is clearly enunciated. There's the account on the stone done by a

surviving soul, and then there's the dead man's life that one can try to gauge through the inscription. According to the Swedish records, Ófeigr was Udde's father. In putting up the stone he was complying with the custom at the time of honoring the one who perished on a journey or in a battle. Usually such dead men are praised for their goodness, voraciousness for food and life, or courage. Very few would count as evil wrongdoers, fools, possessive men, or unfortunate lovers gone insane. So we know of Udde what his father lets us know about him. But what of Udde's own story?

For some bizarre reason, and although I always carry a pack of cards with me, it had never occurred to me until my last visit – in October – to ask the cards about Udde's fate. Armed with the sunlight gloriously making diamond sparkles on the stone, I took out my Noblet, assumed a reverentially straight position facing the stone, and asked: "Udde, what happened to you? What say you?" Three cards fell on the stone: La Maison Dieu (The Tower), La Roue de Fortune (The Wheel of Fortune), and La Mort (Death). Although the Tarot de Marseille is not nearly as old as my stone, it communicates in straight messages every time.



“So, Udde,” I said out aloud, “your house came down, you hit the road, and you died on it.” “You got it,” Udde replied from beyond the grave. While packing the cards, and thinking, ‘how sad’, I noticed the bottom card. Lemperatrise (The Empress) and I couldn’t help speculating: was it her fault? The fall?



I came back to the cabin where I was staying and kept musing. I found it odd that the cards insisted on enforcing the father’s statement. But what about Udde’s house? What made it come down? I shuffled the full deck and I was ready to follow Udde on his journey. This became an epic, as I ended up using all the cards in the now cut deck, 27 of them. They made quite a story. I began with 3 cards and then I continued with rows of threes until the last card. Very neat symmetry, I thought, and quite episodic. So this is Udde’s story, as told by the nomadic Tarot tombstone.

#### UDDE’S WALKABOUT

Udde was a very good young man who went East in search of love and money. He found both, and settled down with his own little kingdom. (5 cups, 2 coins, King of coins). One day a bidding came from home. His father and his mother said: “return to our bosom. Great love awaits you.” (The Emperor, The Empress, 10 cups). But this was a problem for Udde. He already thought he had a great love. Now, how could he follow his father’s bidding? This drove him mad, and paralyzed his will. (9 cups, the Fool, The Hanged Man). Udde’s wife in the foreign land saw things differently. She sent her emissary out to announce that if Udde were to leave, the swords would come out, so he had better think twice. (8 swords, Knight of Swords, Queen of Coins). But Udde was duty bound to follow his father’s calling and



return to his own people. On his way he found shelter with a strong woman, a queen of the woods, who offered him to stay with her and prosper fully (6 cups, Queen of Wands, 10 coins). This greatly displeased her powerful neighbor who had had his eyes on her for a while. In spite of his nature, he turned into a vengeful jealous lover (King of Cups, 7 swords, The Devil). Udde was forced to flee again, going North to the mountains. There he found an intriguing woman who was the guardian of that domain, and he decided to seduce her. She was not too displeased to hear about her two rivals to the south fighting over affairs of the heart. So she took him in. (Queen of Swords, Le Bateleur, 4 swords). But life with the queen of No Nonsense was not easy. The many swords of Udde's past threatened to catch up with him. Messages from the south of Udde's betrayal were taken very seriously at the court. Udde was given a choice: to duel and win or argue for his case. (The Page of Swords, 3 swords, Justice). He chose the latter. Love and money had always stood Udde in good stead. But now Udde was not so convinced that he could buy the Queen of Swords with the little love he had left. So he resorted to the not inconsiderable sum that he had managed to steal from the previous lady. He won a reprieve from Justice who has never minded tilting the scale for a few coins. But the verdict was still clear. Udde was cast out and he had to fend for himself penniless, loveless, alone, but alive (2 cups, 8 coins, The Hermit).

## THE GIFT OF DEATH

The point of this exercise is to show that any act of reenacting past events through a process of renewal relies on the idea that there can be no primacy of meaning (new or old) over image. What people die from, and why, and who gets to tell the story about it and why is not more important than the way in which death affects us on a level beyond words. In Tarot we speak of death as a singular event that brings renewal with it.

The Death card is not in the middle of the Major Arcana for nothing. In the middle of our lives we experience death all the time. Systems of belief die, relationships die, love dies, hope dies, truth dies, a man dies. Everything can die. As much as we would like it, it is rather pointless to call death by any other name. In some versions of the Tarot de Marseille, beginning with Jean Dodal in around 1701, Death is left nameless. And the French still refer to this card as the L'Arcane Sans Nom. In terms of reading practice, most readers have a problem with passing on the message that death is in the picture. Here, I often advise that if one must go softly about it, then it is better to serve the whole catalogue of deaths to a client, and let him or her make the pick among the names of what to call it. People come to a Tarot reader also to hear about the anger and the rage that a confrontation with death might entail, rather than merely to hear that renewal is on the way. While there is something unsubstitutable about the singularity of death – it happens only once – it is still subject to contextualization.

This notion has been explored successfully by Italo Calvino, particularly in his work, *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* (1969), in which Tarot readings are taken to a higher ground. My own story about Udde here follows his method. What this higher ground suggests is the idea that between word and image, or meaning and message, a lot can happen. The experience of Tarot is all about what we make of transition. It is also for this reason that reading with a Marseille deck, or a deck that doesn't do picture cards on the number cards, is more dynamic. We think of transitions, and the fact that what happens between 2 and 3 is not the same as what happens between 8 and 9. And yet there's a sense of things being repeated and which we experience as either going from contraction to expansion or from expansion to contraction. This is a lesson that some of the best tarologists around, such as [Colette Silvestre](#) and [Enrique Enriquez](#), teach.

Moreover, the reason why reading with Tarot de Marseille is more exciting than reading with a Waite-Smith variant is because we get a better sense of the interplay between what is major and what is minor. For instance, people tend to assign much more significance to what they 'think' they feel when they see the 5 of cups in the Rider-Waite-Smith pack than when they see the 5 in the Marseille deck. The 5 of cups in Tarot de Marseille is about an emotional situation that involves this scale: more than 4 and less than 6. We learn our lessons by degree, which means that it is pointless to sit with a subject who constantly goes through 'intense' feeling even when the situation does not call for such an experience.

That we should be allowed to distinguish between what's essential and what's not essential is something that Calvino insisted on in his lessons about experiencing the immediacy of a message in a literal, rather than symbolic form. We should not respond in the same way when we see the smashed cups and the cloaked figure in mourning in Pamela Coleman Smith's 5 of cups as we do when we see the smashed Tower. While the events evoked in such cards may be similar, they are not congruent.

The other significant thing that we might like to consider when reading with a full historical deck is that transitions always leave a trace. In this sense, whatever we may make of renewal becomes an act of 'bringing together', of agreement. The old stuff cannot be gotten rid of, only reworked, or reincorporated. Consequently, as any transition carries with it contamination, a spilling over, a

remainder, or residue, it creates a supplement that is bound to haunt all exits. It is also for this reason that all number cards in a historical deck emphasize tensions – great tensions or not so great.

In any great storytelling – which Tarot is a tool for – we can think of what the philosopher and a follower of Calvino, Jacques Derrida, said in his book *The Gift of Death* (1995): “Everyone must assume his own death, that is to say the one thing in the world that no one else can either give or take: therein resides freedom and responsibility [...] Even if one gives me death to the extent that it means killing me, that death will still have been mine and as long as it is irreducibly mine I will not have received it from anyone else. Thus dying can never be taken, borrowed, transferred, delivered, promised, or transmitted. And just as it can't be given to me, so it can't be taken away from me” (44).

### UDDE'S DOPPELGÄNGER

Back to Udde's death. My first three-card reading at the stone illustrates exactly Derrida's point. Udde's father's wish to give his son a death when he failed to come home is impossible. The fact that the Tarot answered my question, “what happened to Udde?” with the Death card in the final position, while I myself was standing by his grave, and thus already in possession of at least this very fact, that Udde died, opens up for the suspicion that there may be more to the story. As the Death card is redundant in the face of factual knowledge, it is thus only fair to speculate that perhaps Udde didn't die immediately, nor perhaps did he die as a “good young man,” but rather disappeared into the unknown, fallen pray to the wheel of destiny and change, as suggested by the progression of the 27 cards in my second reading.

Thus there is always more than one story in what is otherwise directly communicated. And we only attain a sense of closure when we engage in reading several contradictory elements at once. Beside facts, the elements that go into a story are also the ones that we can invent ourselves, or the ones that we can see emerging as a pattern out of visual material. All stories thus carry the ingredients of renewal with them. Tarot itself serves as an example. Any time a reshuffling occurs, renewal is on its way. We can therefore, not only intone once more, but also consecrate the words of British novelist D.H. Lawrence: “never trust the teller, trust the tale.”



## RENEWED MANTICS - REDUX

One could argue that the test of the validity of any good story lies in imagining how one could revive what has just been written. As all Tarot readers are good storytellers, it can always prove a good exercise to check what one can come up with against the words of another. For instance, as soon as I finished with my claims about the efficiency of reading with the Marseille deck, and its advantage over other decks, I became curious to know what would happen if the same cards were used to tell a story from the Waite-Smith perspective. I've asked a Tarologist friend, proficient in reading with both decks, the Marseille and the Waite-Smith, to do me the favor of reading the same cards but using the Rider pack. Paul Nagy has graciously agreed to do it, leaving from the exact same premise as I did, the writing on the stone, followed by the same question: what happened to Udde?

What made me come up with the idea of comparing two stories told with the two different decks was the fact that when I myself used the Rider cards, I could see that my reading with them could still prove consistent with what I had seen in the Marseille images. However, as this, now third, reading was contaminated by ideas formulated in the previous one, the final test of the efficiency of reading with either one decks was to see what would emerge from someone who was not told 'my' story of Udde's story. Here's then what we got, courtesy of Paul Nagy, of [Tarot Hermeneutics](#). (Special thanks to him for contributing his thoughts here.)



## PAUL'S STORY OF UDDE'S STORY

“Udde has a talent for tragedy and comedy. A likeable fellow, perhaps he is a little too much into his cups. His talent is making practical decisions with limited resources. Perhaps because of a failed love interest his father believes he may best expand his talents if he goes to serve the family’s lord. (Row 1) Udde’s spirits are restored and he is received well at court. (Row 2) The reality of his situation however expanded his hopeful spirits too much and his initial good impression causes his prospects to be



seriously turned around. (Row 3) Depression and a lack of self confidence cause him to become agitated and wanting to flee. However his practical side makes him settle down to work as a way toward calm. (Top Middle Row 4) This help improves his prospects with women and his work and talent reaches toward perfection. He is attracted to powerful women. (Row 5) His affair becomes a source of uncontrolled attachment and anger and his emotions or sense of rivalry makes him agitated and a coward. (Row 6) Another powerful woman helps put him straight (rebound relationship?) but for him this gives him the means to better know himself and not allow his mind and heart bounce him around as much. (The entire row of cards shows someone who may be bipolar.) (Row7) Uddi falls in love with a less powerful woman for the first time, and it is painful for both of them. Public opinion and the families intervene. (Row 8) Uddi marries and settles down for a productive stable life. Uddi dies while on a pilgrimage of thanksgiving. (Row 9)”

## RECONTEXTUALIZATIONS

When comparing these two stories, it is interesting to observe how not only agency – who is who, and who is doing what to whom – but also plot changes with the changing of decks. While we may find overlapping events and close associations, the second story gets ‘derailed’ already in the second row of cards. As Paul pointed out, his reading with the RWS version creates quite a family resemblance. There is a shift in relations, especially the Emperor/Empress pair, with the Emperor turned now into the Lord of Udde’s father. In addition, whereas I saw the Page of Swords as a messenger from the past, Paul gave a secondary reading of the Page of Swords as a younger woman with stress romance. Paul here has emphasized that he usually reads the Queens as older women, or more established than Udde. The final card also shifts significance, with Paul turning the Hermit into an event of a Pilgrimage, whereas I saw the card as embodying Udde as an old man.

The final point in comparing Tarot stories across history and divination practices can be made apart from insisting on who holds monopoly on the best signification process. For it is indeed quite pointless to claim superiority for any one deck. If I find the Marseille cards more efficient than the others, it is simply because I have a preference for them, and because I happened to learn a few reading ‘tricks’ from a few Marseille masters. The same can apply to others. What we must emphasize is the idea that cards, regardless of their origin, work best when seen in conjunction. It is never a good idea to think of the

individual cards as having inherent meaning in themselves. They only mean something in context, and as relating to the other cards. So, depending on what else you've got on the table, the Death card can go from being a very good thing, opening up a space for a wound to close, to being a sign of anger, separation, or resistance. At the level of a card's action or non-action, we can see its enunciation – Death is here – as a form of open(ed) conclusion. The rest is silence.

#### NOTE ON THE TEXT:

A shorter version of this text was published in [Tarosophist International](#), Nr 13, December 1, 2011. This text here adds the contribution from tarologist and owner of [Tarot Hermeneutics](#), Paul Nagy, which enhances the discussion about comparing readings with 2 different decks.

#### NOTE ON THE DECKS USED:

Jean Noblet's Tarot de Marseille (1650) as restored by Jean-Claude Flornoy, and the Waite-Smith Tarot (1909).

#### SOME RESPONSES TO THIS POST



#### [ENRIQUE ENRIQUEZ](#)

Hey Camelia,

I enjoyed your text very much, as I tend to believe that any text set on gray letters over a darker gray background is automatically true. I also agree with your initial diagnosis:

LA MAISON DIEV + LA ROVE DE FORTVNE + LA MORTE = somebody dying because of a fall. This is, of course, as long as we are talking about the imaginary death of an imaginary person named Udde. (A person that would be as imaginary as any person whose fate we try to see in the cards, either dead or alive, and also, as imaginary as ourselves). "Udde falls" anagrams into "dude falls" or "a dude fell(s)", and also "full(s) dead". Now, these extra (s) may be an invitation to erase the letters S from LA MAISON DIEV. MAISON - S = MAION. See? MAION is, without a doubt, the name of the person (or celestial being) who pushed poor Udde down.

Mystery ( )olved\*.

1. \*"solved" - s = "olved", which anagrams into "loved". Perhaps Udde felt from his own hearth.

1. \*I forgot to mention that a full(s) dead is, of course, a Fool's death.



[CAMELIA ELIAS](#)

Exquisite. Then, I was right, about her, the haunting empress, press(ing) me to guess that she pushed Udde into acting foolishly, mutating at the command of she, the Angel of Self-Discipline, MAION herself. Oh, how sublime this string is. More real than we can ever imagine. -