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**Kriemhild: Demon - hero - woman**

Wideburg, Laura Bethany Ann, Ph.D.

University of Washington, 1993

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Kriemhild

Demon – Hero – Woman

by

Laura Bethany Ann Wideburg

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

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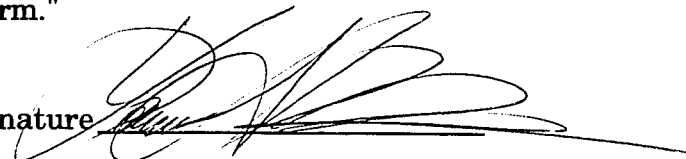
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## Doctoral Dissertation

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Abstract

Kriemhild  
Demon–Hero–Woman

by Laura Bethany Ann Wideburg

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Kriemhild, the main character of the *Nibelungenlied*, provides an interesting transformation from a young girl afraid of a potentially tragic marriage into a mature woman commanding an army in her pursuit of revenge. The reconciliation of these two images of Kriemhild has been the focus of scholarly attention. Scholars such as Gottfried Weber and Winder McConnell have seen this development as Kriemhild's descent into the demonic, while others, such as Werner Schröder, have seen Kriemhild acting solely out of love for her murdered husband. The two views of Kriemhild fall into the traditional classification of women into "saint" (the loving Kriemhild) or "sinner" (the evil Kriemhild). This dissertation attempts to find a human Kriemhild between these two extremes.

Twelfth-century beliefs about the role and responsibilities of noble women form the basis for an in-depth discussion of Kriemhild's actions. Kriemhild's relationship to her mother Uote, her brothers Gunther, Giselher and to a lesser extent Gernot, as well as her husband Siegfried are examined through the late twelfth-century society's expectations of noble women in a time of rising population and economic decline. Kriemhild's behavior becomes more understandable when these pressures are taken into account.

Finally, Kriemhild's revenge is considered in the context of heroic women in other works common to the time. The question of female heroism is examined in depth, showing that Kriemhild is as much a heroic figure as her male counterparts.

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## Introduction

A great struggle for power, influence and love unfolds in the forceful epic poem *Nibelungenlied*. At the center of this private all-consuming war stands the enigmatic figure of a twelfth-century courtly maiden, Kriemhild. As the first character to appear in the work and the last to die, she is the central character. Her importance is reflected in the title, given to a later manuscript, D, *Das Buoch Chriemhilden*<sup>1</sup>. The central place of Kriemhild is one of the most novel aspects of the work, according to Marianne Wahl-Armstrong: "Schon dies, daß hier eine Frau zur Mittelpunktsgestalt eines heroischen Epos gemacht wurde, ist bemerkenswert und verweist auf eine das Ereignishafte transzendierende Tendenz des Nibelungenepikers."<sup>2</sup>

What kind of woman is this, who first obeys and acquiesces to society's expectations, but then overturns that same society by commanding an army? The figure of Kriemhild is more complex than she first appears, and her actions, her revenge, and the meaning of her death have been the source of controversy.

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<sup>1</sup> "Das Nibelungenlied ist zwar nicht nur sondern auch die Tragödie Kriemhilds. Das hat vielleicht schon der Schreiber der Prunn-Münchener Handschrift D, 14. Jahrhunderts, erkannt, als er die Dichtung mit der Überschrift versah: *Daz ist das Buoch Chriemhilden*, und die Ambraser Handschrift d, 16. Jahrhunderts, ist ihm darin gefolgt: *Ditz Puech heysset Chrimhilt*."

Werner Schröder, *Nibelungenliedstudien* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1968) 48.

<sup>2</sup> Marianne Wahl-Armstrong, *Rolle und Charakter: Studien zur Menschen-darstellung im Nibelungenlied* Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik Nr. 221 (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1979) 14.

The fact that Kriemhild is a woman causes at least one scholar to debate whether one should consider her to be the main character at all. Edward R. Haymes warns the modern reader against Kriemhild's primacy: "The critics who would make her [Kriemhild] the central figure in a tragedy have fallen victim to the woman who lured Siegfried to Worms in the first place. The poet of our version of the epic was able to work the two Kriemhilds into a compelling figure, but his success has ended up distracting us from the centrality of the two heroes [Hagen and Siegfried]."<sup>3</sup> Yet without the figure of Kriemhild as the center of action, the story lacks focus. Hagen and Siegfried are defined in large part through their relationship to Kriemhild, as enemy or as lover. Siegfried dies before the second half of the work begins, ruling him out as a central figure for the second half of the work, while Kriemhild becomes more self-determined in her efforts to bring about the end of her hated enemy.

Scholarly opinion on the interpretation of Kriemhild's character divides into two main camps. The first, and largest, body of opinion interprets Kriemhild as a representative of the evil woman, who, driven by bloodlust, becomes a demon. "Also wächst Kriemhild mit zunehmender Dämonie keineswegs an heldischer Selbstaufgabe. Sie bleibt – als ärgste verwandelte – *riterfrouwe*, ... sie ist groß lediglich in der dämonischen Perversion heldischer Haltung, in der Unbedingtheit und

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<sup>3</sup> Edward R. Haymes, *The Nibelungenlied: History and Interpretation* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986) 85.

Hinopferungsfähigkeit des Rachedurstes.”<sup>4</sup> Edward R. Haymes believes that Kriemhild is indeed a monster in disguise: “The ‘valandinne’ [she-devil] epithet is thus seen as more than a mere insult. It is ‘objectively’ descriptive of the thing Kriemhild has become, forced there partly by the role she is playing against the hero Hagen.”<sup>5</sup> Winder McConnell states: “[Kriemhild’s] is not the death of a human being, but rather the slaying of a monster.”<sup>6</sup> Kriemhild’s failings can be summarized as not behaving as a woman should.

A. T. Hatto, the *Nibelungenlied* translator, comments on Kriemhild’s slaying of Hagen: “Women must not take up the sword to slay. Their womanhood should prevent them.”<sup>7</sup> Kriemhild is encroaching on one of the most important bastions of male power, the power to kill. This same power in the hands of men creates heroes.

Both A. T. Hatto and Philip A. Anderson regard her failure as lack of ability to be a traditional woman. Hatto picks up on Kriemhild’s “failure as a mother,”<sup>8</sup> while Philip N. Anderson sees Kriemhild as a total failure in all female roles: “She has failed as a wife, as courtly mistress, as sister.”<sup>9</sup> Some

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<sup>4</sup> Gottfried Weber, *Das Nibelungenlied: Problem und Idee* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1968) 16.

<sup>5</sup> Haymes, p. 84.

<sup>6</sup> Winder McConnell, *The Nibelungenlied* Twayne’s World Author Series 712 (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1984) 24.

<sup>7</sup> *The Nibelungenlied*, trans. with afterword A. T. Hatto (Harmondsworth, Middelsex: Penguin Books, 1965) 319.

<sup>8</sup> *The Nibelungenlied*, p. 315.

<sup>9</sup> Philip N. Anderson, “Kriemhild’s Quest” *Euphorion* 1985 79 (1): 10.

critics assert that she is rather stupid. D. G. Mowatt and Hugh Sacker call her "...the small mind that started it all,"<sup>10</sup> and "repressed," and they want to interpret her later fury as "the characteristic break-down of a persona based on too savagely inhibited desires."<sup>11</sup>

The second, minority opinion, considers Kriemhild a woman whose revenge is exacted exclusively for love of her husband, avenging his wrongful murder at Hagen's hand. Werner Schröder is probably the strongest advocate of Kriemhild as the lover of Siegfried, with her revenge as the ultimate expression of thwarted love: "Die Geschichte Kriemhilds und Sivrits ist vom Nibelungenlied-Dichter mit allen Attributen einer Erfüllten Liebe ausgestattet worden. Das kann kein Zufall sein, es liefert die helle Folie zu Kriemhilds dunklem Leid, das die Handlung des zweiten Teils bewegt."<sup>12</sup> Love is a very acceptable motivation for feminine action, but Schröder ignores some of the complications of the Kriemhild-Siegfried love story. Kriemhild and Siegfried may love each other, but Siegfried humiliates her in public and beats her in private, making Kriemhild's revelation of his weak spot to Hagen highly ambiguous. As yet, no critic has discussed a connection between Siegfried's beating and Kriemhild's subsequent betrayal. The two incidents are related, as I will argue in my fourth chapter.

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<sup>10</sup> D. G. Mowatt and Hugh Sacker, *The Nibelungenlied: An Interpretative Commentary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967) 40.

<sup>11</sup> Mowatt and Sacker, p. 58-59.

<sup>12</sup> Werner Schröder, *Nibelungenlied-Studien* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1968) 70.

Kriemhild has also been seen as the positive embodiment of the ability to reveal her true feelings, a trait often attributed to the female half of the human population. Marianne Wahl-Armstrong shows Kriemhild as a woman of strong passions: "Ihr Erröten ... ist zwar gewiß auch ein Motiv des frühen Minnesangs, ... im Kontext des Nibelungenliedes jedoch dient es der Kennzeichnung der starken Emotionalität Kriemhilds und damit der vorgehenden Motivierung des ungeheuerlichen Werdegangs dieses 'vil edel magedin' zur bedingungslos Liebenden, unsagbar Leidenden und unerbittlich Rächenden."<sup>13</sup> Kriemhild is therefore all "real-woman"; her passions, for better or worse, rule her actions.

The two opinions reflect a familiar dichotomy. The woman is either a "saint," placed on the pedestal for men to revere or a "sinner," worthy only of contempt. The loving Kriemhild reflects the sainted woman, while the demonic Kriemhild is the sinner. This bipolarization reflects a basic way of viewing women from the early medieval period to the present day. The woman is good girl or bad girl, Mary or Eve, Madonna or Whore, an idealized representation of an extreme instead of a human being.<sup>14</sup> R. Howard Bloch sees in these two extreme contrasts a way that misogynistic

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<sup>13</sup> Wahl-Armstrong, pp. 47-48.

<sup>14</sup> This concept and the resulting consequences have been discussed in a number of works.

Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality and the Catholic Church* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1990).

Carol Tavris, *The Mismeasure of Woman: Why Women are not the Better Sex, the Inferior Sex or the Opposite Sex* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books) 1983.

thought denies women a role in history: "...the effect of a [misogynistic] speech act ... is to make of woman an essence, which, as essence, is eliminated from the world stage. ...Its purpose – to remove individual women from the realm of events – depends on the transformation of woman into a general category, which, internally at least, appears never to change."<sup>15</sup>

R. Howard Bloch understands the origins of the Western concept of the completely good or completely evil Woman to lie in the early Christian ideas of asceticism: "...we find in the writings of the early church fathers: (1) a feminization of the flesh, that is, the association, according to the metaphor of mind and body, of man with *mens* or *ratio* and of woman with the corporeal; (2) the estheticization of femininity, that is, the association of woman with the cosmetic, the supervenient, or the decorative ...; and (3) the theologizing of esthetics, or the condemnation in ontological terms not only of the realm of simulation or representations ... but of almost anything pleasurable attached to material embodiment."<sup>16</sup>

This dichotomy separating men and women, which identifies men with thought and rational action and women with emotion and irrationality, has been applied to interpreting Kriemhild. The view of Kriemhild as an understandable woman of her time is lost.

Who is Kriemhild and what does her character represent? A. T. Hatto sees her character as a left-over from an earlier time: "A woman whose will

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<sup>15</sup> R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 5.

<sup>16</sup> Bloch, p. 9.

was as strong as a man's risked being branded as a monster. Such women were far less rare in the heroic Age of Migrations, when warriors had need of them. But men of the high Middle Ages found them either comic or objectionable."<sup>17</sup>

There may be another side to this story, since women were also readers of books and patrons of the arts in twelfth-century Germany. The character of Kriemhild may have appealed to them on terms other than that of a monster.

Herbert Grundmann discusses the importance of women as readers and as owners of books:

Daß innerhalb des Laienstandes nur die Frau als Leserin gilt und Bücher als Frauensache, das hat sogar im alten deutschen Recht seinen Niederschlag gefunden. Im Sachsenspiegel – und ähnlich davon abgeleitet, dann auch im Deutschen- und Schwabenspiegel – werden unter den Gegenständen der 'Gerade', die einer ausschließlich weiblichen Erbfolge vorbehalten bleiben und niemals an einen männlichen Erben fallen sollen, neben weiblichem Schmuck und weiblicher Kleidung, Toilettegegenständen und allerhand Hausrat, der nur von Frauen gebraucht oder doch von ihnen vorwiegend verwendet und betreut wird (einschließlich des Kleinviehs), auch Bücher genannt, Psalter nämlich und alle Bücher, die zu Gottes Dienste gehören; 'die die Frauen zu lesen pflegen', hat ein Bearbeiter des Sachsenspiegels hinzugefügt, gewiß nicht einschränkend, sondern diese erbrechtliche Bestimmung erklärend und begründend: die Bücher werden von Frauen gelesen, sollen also von ihnen auch geerbt werden.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *The Nibelungenlied*, p. 320.

<sup>18</sup> Herbert Grundmann, "Die Frauen und die Literatur im Mittelalter: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Entstehung des Schrifttums in der Volkssprache" *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 1936 (26): 133-34.

Women, giving their books to their daughters as part of the latter's inheritance<sup>19</sup>, influenced the choice of literature that they wanted to read. Grundmann mentions that Heinrich von Veldeke wrote his Servatius legend for Agnes von Looz and his Eneas for Margarete von Cleve.<sup>20</sup> Women also wrote books, both in the vernacular, as did Frau Ava,<sup>21</sup> and in Latin, as did Hildegard von Bingen.<sup>22</sup> Women therefore participated in their literary culture, a culture that included the *Nibelungenlied*. One scholar has suggested that the author of the *Nibelungenlied* was a woman.<sup>23</sup>

The *Nibelungenlied* was a popular work with over 35 manuscripts and fragments preserved to the present day. All but one of these manuscripts contain the *Klage*, a poem mourning the deaths in Hunland,

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<sup>19</sup> Susan Groag Bell notes that inheritance from mothers was the most important way for daughters to acquire books, yet daughters also requested and inherited favorite books from their fathers and male relatives as well.

Susan Groag Bell, "Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture" in *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages* eds. Judith M. Bennett, Elisabeth A. Clark, Jean F. O'Barr, B. Anne Vilen, and Sarah Westphal-Wihl (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) 141.

<sup>20</sup> Grundmann, p.147.

<sup>21</sup> Frau Ava, *Die Dichtung der Frau Ava* ed. Friedrich Maurer Altdeutsche Textbibliothek Nr. 66 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1966).

<sup>22</sup> Peter Dronke writes: "In the Middle Ages only Avicenna is comparable: cosmology, ethics, medicine and mystical poetry were among the fields conquered by the eleventh-century Persian master and the twelfth-century 'Rhenish sybil'."

Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (203) to Marguerite Porete (1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 144.

<sup>23</sup> Lösel-Wieland-Engelmann, Berta, "Verdanken wir das Nibelungenlied einer Niedernburger Nonne?" *Monatshefte* LXXII (1980).

immediately following the end of the epic.<sup>24</sup> In comparison the *Kudrun*, Hartmann's *Erec* and *Moriz von Craûn* have been preserved in only one manuscript.<sup>25</sup> Much scholarly attention has been paid to the development of the *Nibelungenlied* from its roots in quasi-historical events of the fourth century to the extant twelfth-century versions. During the course of transmission, the figure of Kriemhild has undergone a shift towards a positive interpretation. This transformation can also be seen within various manuscripts of the *Nibelungenlied*. Manuscript B, from which Bartsch/deBoor's standardized edition has been formed, has a more ambiguous picture of Kriemhild than Manuscript C. Theodore M. Andersson comments on this development: "A historical perspective on Kriemhild suggests not that the B and C poets had substantially different views of her character but that there was a consistent and linear unburdening of her, undertaken by the B poet and then pursued logically by the C poet."<sup>26</sup> Hugo Bekker argues for the superiority of the B version: "...the editor responsible for the C\* version, while stylistically superior and more factual than his predecessor, had little eye for the subtle technique employed by the author of the B\* text – and even less eye for the subtle

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<sup>24</sup> Werner Hoffmann, *Das Nibelungenlied* 5th ed. Sammlung Metzger Nr. 7 (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlerschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1982) 68.

<sup>25</sup> *Kudrun* 5th ed. ed. Karl Stackmann (Wiesbaden: F. A. Brockhaus, 1980) lxxxviii.

<sup>26</sup> Theodore M. Andersson, *A Preface to the Nibelungenlied* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987) 166.

implications involved.”<sup>27</sup> Edward R. Haymes notes: “Working in the opposite direction [from the thirteenth-century author of *Rosengarten zu Worms*, who saw Kriemhild as a monster] were the courtly revisers ... who attempted to make Kriemhild less of a villain and Hagen more of one. ... The strophe [where Kriemhild is blamed for bringing her son into the hall] has been eliminated entirely.”<sup>28</sup> The development of Kriemhild into an innocent in Manuscript C continues in the *Klage*. The *Klage* poet assures the reader that Kriemhild's place after death is in heaven.<sup>29</sup> This tendency to absolve Kriemhild and to take her part may speak to an identification with her situation by the courtly women reading the work.

Kriemhild's concerns about her position in her society speak to the women who were faced with similar, if less drastic, choices. The economic expansion of the tenth and eleventh centuries had ended, and a period of contraction, combined with population pressures, was making itself felt. Women, who had earlier enjoyed some measure of economic independence, were losing their position through changes in dowry and inheritance patterns, which consolidated wealth in the hands of the oldest son. The position of women and family in twelfth-century society has been the focus of a scholarly boom during the last quarter century. Georges Duby,<sup>30</sup> David

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<sup>27</sup> Hugo Bekker, *The Nibelungenlied: A Literary Analysis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971) 4.

<sup>28</sup> Haymes, pp. 84-85.

<sup>29</sup> *Der Nibelunge Noth und die Klage* ed. Karl Lachmann 6th edition (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1960) 314.

<sup>30</sup> Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France* trans. Barbara Bray (New York, Pantheon Books, 1983).

Herlihy,<sup>31</sup> Shulamith Shahar,<sup>32</sup> Margaret Wade Labarge<sup>33</sup> and James Brundage<sup>34</sup> among others have contributed to a renewed focus on this long-neglected aspect of medieval social life. With a deepened socio-historical understanding of the place of women in their milieu, aspects of Kriemhild's place in the *Nibelungenlied* can be more fully understood. For instance, the emphasis which the *Nibelungenlied* places on women's wealth and its power becomes clear. The redistribution of female property was taking place at the same time that the extant *Nibelungenlied* was composed. This economic shift provides a significant backdrop against which the struggle over the *hort*, the treasure of the Nibelungs, is fought.

Some *Nibelungenlied* scholars have begun to read the work from a socio-historical perspective, as opposed to reconstructing an Ur-*Nibelungenlied* from the various works in both German and Old Norse traditions. The first to do so was Nelly Dürrenmatt,<sup>35</sup> followed by Gottfried Weber and Karl-Heinz Ihlenburg.<sup>36</sup> This current study falls under that

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<sup>31</sup> David Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1985).

<sup>32</sup> Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* trans. Chaya Galai (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>33</sup> Margaret Wade Labarge, *A Small Sound of the Trumpet: Women in Medieval Life* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1986).

<sup>34</sup> James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>35</sup> Nelly Dürrenmatt, *Das Nibelungenlied im Kreis der höfischen Dichtung* (Bern: Verlag Herbert Lang & Cie 1945).

<sup>36</sup> Karl-Heinz Ihlenburg, *Das Nibelungenlied: Problem und Gehalt* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1969).

branch of *Nibelungenlied* scholarship which prefers to consider the piece as an integrated whole which reflects its twelfth-century perspective.

Unlike these scholars, however, I do not want to ignore the Old Norse material as having no relevance. The Old Norse versions place the action in a pagan setting and provide an interesting contrast to the nominally Christianized *Nibelungenlied*. They provide radically different pictures of Kriemhild. These contrasts highlight the aspects of Kriemhild which were most important to the twelfth-century German audience, for they show where changes and adaptations of the figure have taken place. The works that I refer to most, the *Völsungasaga*, the *Elder Edda* and the *Piðreks saga*, differ also between themselves. The former two present a heroic woman who fulfills her society's demands for familial revenge, while the latter portrays an evil, devilish woman. Considering these differing versions of Kriemhild will highlight the discussion of the demonic versus the heroic aspects of Kriemhild's characterization.

Since this study focuses on Kriemhild, the other characters in the work are viewed from the standpoint of their relationship to her. I begin my study by considering the ideal woman and the expectations that surround her. I consider the pressures and responsibilities that Kriemhild faces regarding her relationships to the members of her family during the course of her lifetime. I hope to sidestep the stereotypes that have made Kriemhild a monster and find the woman who attempted to hold her own place at court even as this position was undermined by those who should have helped her preserve it.

Without the Kriemhild character there is no struggle and no story. Yet the place of Kriemhild in the poem has been obscured through the centuries, much as the place of women in Western society has been kept at the edges of historical analysis. This study will brush the dust from the mirror of history in order to find a more understandable, human Kriemhild.

## Chapter One

### The Ideal Woman

Kriemhild is a woman.

This primary identity places her in a system of expectations about women. The *Nibelungenlied* through its portrayal of Kriemhild and the other women in the text defines the requirements expected of women. Kriemhild, in the beginning of the work, is shown as the culmination of all that is desirable in a woman.

Beauty is the primary characteristic of the ideal woman. Kriemhild is introduced as the first character of the *Nibelungenlied* with beauty as her identifying characteristic:

Ez wuohs in Búrgónden	ein vil édel magedîn
daz in allen landen	niht schœners mohte sîn,
Kriemhilt geheizen:	si wart ein scœne wîp.
dar umbe muosen degene	vil verlîesén den lîp.
	(Strophe 2)

In the land of the Burgundians there grew up a maiden of high lineage, so fair that none in any land could be fairer. Her name was Kriemhild. She came to be a beautiful woman, causing many knights to lose their lives. (Hatto, p. 17).

Kriemhild's beauty appears as such an important quality that it is brought into the work even before her name. Her beauty surrounds her identity as an individual, both preceding and following her introduction. As Karl Heinz Ihlenburg states: "Mit wenigen Strichen zeichnet der Dichter ein Bild eines jungen Mädchens, wie es dem Ideal der höfischen Dichtung entspricht und sowohl in der Lyrik als auch in der Epik ... auch dort wird wie im

Nibelungenlied die höfische Frau weniger in ihrer konkreten Anschaulichkeit beschrieben als mehr in einer abstrakten Idealität gepriesen ... so stellt der Dichter hier Kriemhild als die Verkörperung der Schönheit schlechthin dar.”<sup>1</sup>

But her beauty is also a danger to the men around her, as many knights are to lose their lives because of her. This introductory stanza gives Kriemhild's beauty mythological proportions, connecting her representation to that of other beautiful women over whom men have fought wars.

Robin Lakoff and Raquel Scherr have discussed the various mythologies of beauty, including the idea of dangerous beauty:

Too often, a beauty's allure drives men to their doom: Pandora, the Sirens, Delilah and Eve, along with Helen, are examples. The woman herself may not necessarily be a conscious conspirator (like Delilah), but may only be a dupe of her beauty, as was Helen. But because beauty is so powerful, and arouses in its observer that most peremptory and inexplicable of impulses, sexual desire, it evokes fear. Because great personal beauty comes close to what Burke called the 'sublime' – phenomena that seem transcendent, not arising by human intervention, and thus creating awe and even dread – and because we cannot understand it, much less the effect it has on us, we may fear it. Thus, we perceive beauty as dangerous, and, as pleurably titillating as it may be, we are forewarned to be on guard against its effects – the myths are to that end.<sup>2</sup>

The introduction of Kriemhild's beauty falls under the pattern discussed by Lakoff and Scherr. The audience of the *Nibelungenlied* is warned at the start

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Heinz Ihlenburg, *Das Nibelungenlied: Problem und Gehalt* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1969) 76.

<sup>2</sup> Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr, *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: Boston, 1984) 31.

of the work that Kriemhild's beauty is dangerous, life-threatening, and therefore powerful.

In the second introductory stanza, the motif of Kriemhild's beauty is repeated and expanded:

Der minneclîchen meide                 triuten wol gezam.  
ir muoten küene recken, niemen was ir gram.  
âne mâzen schœne                 sô was ir edel lîp.  
der juncvrouwen tugende                 zierten ándériu wîp.  
(Strophe 3)

This charming girl was as if made for love's caresses: she was desired by brave fighting men and none was her enemy, for her noble person was beyond all measure lovely. Such graces did the young lady possess that she was the adornment of her sex.  
(Hatto, p. 17)

Her beauty is described in this stanza in physical terms, although specific characteristics are not mentioned. Nelly Dürrenmatt notes: "Einzelheiten erwähnt der Nibelungenlied Dichter nur ganz selten. Nur von den weißen Händen und Armen ist häufig die Rede ... wo sonst von der Schönheit Kriemhilds die Rede ist – und dies ist häufig der Fall –, wird sie einfach 'scœne', 'unmâzen scœne', die Schönste genannt."<sup>3</sup> In addition to the white hands and arms, only Kriemhild's bloneness is specifically mentioned in the work. Kriemhild is "die schöne 'frouwe' als Idee".<sup>4</sup> Kriemhild is desirable because she is the incarnation of the woman beautiful beyond measure. Kriemhild's *unmâzen scœne* predicts an unusual course of events for this character.

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<sup>3</sup> Nelly Dürrenmatt, *Das Nibelungenlied im Kreis der höfischen Dichtung* (Bern: Verlag Herbert Lang & Cie, 1945) 183.

<sup>4</sup> Dürrenmatt, 181.

Her beauty is so much her defining characteristic throughout the work that even at the end she remains beautiful. As she prepares to confront Hagen, she is described as “*der schænen Kriemhilden lîp*” (Strophe 1762) “beautiful Kriemhild” (my translation; Hatto just translates as “Kriemhild”<sup>5</sup>). The audience is reminded of Kriemhild's beauty before the last fateful battle, a few days before Kriemhild loses her life.

In spite of the emphasis that the *Nibelungenlied* lays upon Kriemhild's beauty, this major characteristic has drawn very little scholarly attention. Winder McConnell summarizes her appearance as “the epitome of the courtly ideal of womanhood ... which makes her the honor of her sex.”<sup>6</sup> The meaning of this ideal of womanhood is not discussed. D. G. Mowatt and Hugh Sacker call her “the model of orthodox attractiveness”<sup>7</sup> without elaborating on what orthodox attractiveness might be and the implications for the character of Kriemhild. Friedrich Panzer notes that it is the “Ruf ihrer Schönheit”<sup>8</sup> which sets the events in motion. Indeed, without her beauty, Kriemhild would not be as attractive as a potential spouse, and Siegfried would not set out to win her.

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<sup>5</sup> *Das Nibelungenlied* trans. with afterword A. T. Hatto (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1969) 219.

<sup>6</sup> Winder McConnell, *The Nibelungenlied* Twayne's World Author Series 712 (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1984) 11.

<sup>7</sup> D. G. Mowatt and Hugh Sacker, *The Nibelungenlied: An Interpretive Commentary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967) 41.

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Panzer, *Das Nibelungenlied: Entstehung und Gestalt* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1955) 266.

Since Kriemhild's beauty is given so much emphasis in the *Nibelungenlied*, it is necessary to consider the importance that female beauty held in twelfth-century life and literature. Female beauty was considered a necessary attribute in a woman who was to be married, and therefore it carried an economic importance in attracting a worthwhile suitor. Kriemhild's beauty is no exception.

Werner Schröder, for instance, mentions Kriemhild's beauty in the context of Siegfried's arrival as a suitor: "Daß ihn angesichts ihrer Schönheit, als er sie *erste gesach*, minnesängerische Verzagtheit anwandelt ...."<sup>9</sup> Siegfried has heard of Kriemhild's beauty, which inspires him to ride to Worms in order to win her for himself,<sup>10</sup> and it is definitely her beauty which is the most important aspect of her potential as a wife:

er hôte sagen mære,	wie ein scœniu meit
wære in Búrgónden,	ze wunsche wolgetân,
	(Strophe 44)

But one day he heard a report that there was a maiden living in Burgundy who was of perfect beauty...  
(Hatto, p. 23).

Not only is Kriemhild's first husband egged on by the rumor of her physical charms, but her second husband Etzel is convinced to take Kriemhild as his wife after hearing of her good looks:

Dô sprach aber Etzel:	"vriunt, du solt mir sagen,
ob si in mînem lande	krône solde tragen.

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<sup>9</sup> Werner Schröder, *Nibelungenliedstudien* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1968) 71.

<sup>10</sup> Other aspects of this marriage besides physical beauty are discussed in Chapter Four.

und ist ir lîp sô schœene, als mir ist geseit,  
den mînen besten vriunden sold' ez nimmer werden leit."

"Sie gelîchet sich wól mit schœene der lieben vrouwen  
mîn

Helchen der vil rîchen. jane kónde niht gesîn  
in dirre werlde schœener deheines küniges wîp.  
den si lobt ze vriunde, der mac wol trœsten sînen lîp."

(Strophes 1149-50).

"Tell me, my friend, whether she is fit to wear a crown in my country," continued Etzel, "For if she is as beautiful as they tell me, my privy councillors shall never regret it."

"For looks she can well bear comparison with the Queen, my lady Helche. No royal consort anywhere could possibly be more lovely. The man she swore to love would find all the solace he could wish for." (Hatto, pp. 150-51).

Kriemhild's beauty enables her to win the best possible men as husbands, much as male strength and wealth convince her of the worthiness of the prospective suitors.

In this respect, Kriemhild's beauty is used in a similar manner as Isolde's in Gottfried's *Tristan*, who is recommended to King Mark as a suitable bride primarily on the basis of her beauty, although her virtues are also important:

"herre," sprach er "uns dunket guot:  
diu schœene Isot von Irlant,  
als al den landen ist bekannt,  
diu uns und in gelegen sind,  
diu ist ein maget unde ein kind,  
an die wiplichiu sælekeit  
alle die sælde hat geleit  
die si dar gelegen kunde,  
als ir ze maneger stunde  
von ir selbe habet vernomen,  
diust sælic unde vollekomen

an lebene unde an libe.”  
(Lines 8462-8473).<sup>11</sup>

“Sire,” he said, “this is our considered opinion. As it is well known to our neighbors and those of the Irish, fair Isolde of Ireland is a maiden on whom the spirit of womanly perfection has showered all possible blessings, as indeed you have often heard concerning her that she is fortune's darling and perfect in life and limb.”<sup>12</sup>

The knight Iwein in Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein* falls in love with Laudine on the basis of her beauty:

und nâch der bâre gienc ein wîp  
daz er nie wîbes lîp  
also schœnen gesach.  
(Lines 1307-9).

And following the bier there walked a woman  
Of greater beauty than  
he'd ever seen in a woman before.<sup>13</sup>

Her other qualities serve to reinforce the impression that her beauty first gave, and the marriage is celebrated shortly thereafter.

Joachim Bumke discusses the pressures inherent in marrying off a daughter in twelfth-century noble society: “Nur wenn die Familie von sehr hohem Rang war, machte die Verheiratung der Töchter keine Schwierigkeiten, weil es für viele von Vorteil war, eine Verwandtschaft mit einer solchen Familie zu begründen. ...Häufig wurden die Töchter mit

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<sup>11</sup> Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan und Isold* ed. Friedrich Ranke 15th ed. (Weidmann, 1978) 106. Further citations will be given with line numbers in the text.

<sup>12</sup> Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan and Isolde* tr. A. T. Hatto, ed. Francis G. Gentry, foreword C. Stephen Jaeger (New York: Continuum, 1988) 112. Further citations will be given with page numbers in the text.

<sup>13</sup> Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein* Garland Library of Medieval Literature Series A Vol. 19 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984) 57.

Männern verheiratet, die ihrem adligen Rang nach eine Stufe tiefer standen.”<sup>14</sup> Beauty is one factor that could sway the prospective husband towards a particular woman. Bumke relates the story of the twelfth-century Herzog Magnus, who, when courting one woman, carried off another, due to the latter's beauty.<sup>15</sup> Bumke further concludes that the values looked for in a prospective mate were different based on sex: “In dem anonymen Ehevertrag *Sacramentum coniugii non ab homine*, ebenfalls aus der Mitte des 12. Jahrhunderts, wurden außer den üblichen Heiratsmotiven besondere Gründe für die Wahl des Ehemanns und der Ehefrau angeführt. ‘Bei der Wahl des Ehemanns werden vier Punkte berücksichtigt: seine Tugendhaftigkeit, seine Abstammung, seine Schönheit und Klugheit. Bei der Wahl der Ehefrau spielen vier Sachen eine Rolle, die den Mann bewegen: ihre Schönheit, ihre Abstammung, ihr Reichtum und ihr guter Lebenswandel.’”<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note that although beauty is important in the choice of a partner of either sex, beauty is listed first as the most important asset a woman has in attracting a mate.

In Hartmann von Aue's *Der arme Heinrich*, beauty is a necessary attribute in the unnamed heroine, the young girl. Although she herself is concerned with her spiritual salvation, and her love for Heinrich motivates her actions, it is her physical beauty which moves Heinrich's heart and saves her life:

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<sup>14</sup> Joakim Bumke, *Höfische Kultur: Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986) 535.

<sup>15</sup> Bumke, p. 537.

<sup>16</sup> Bumke, p. 543.

Nû er sî alsô schoene sach  
 wider sich selben er dô sprach:  
 “dû hâst ein tumben gedanc,...  
 ich enwil des Kindes tût niht sehen.”

(Lines 1241-43 and 1256).<sup>17</sup>

When he saw her so beautiful, he berated himself, “You had a foolish belief...I do not wish to see the child's death.” (my translation).

The beauty of the female child is what moves Heinrich to pity and to charity. The end result for the child herself is a good marriage to a man who is socially her superior, and one which leads to “*ein langes und glückliches Leben*” (Line 1541) as well as eternal life in the hereafter. Beauty is an important instrument to bring about this happy-ever-after end to the story, and can be seen as an instrument of God's salvation.

Beauty is an ideal which plays an important role in the culture of *minne*, where the young knight is moved to improve his life in order to win the heart of the beautiful and supposedly morally superior lady of his heart. In this respect, female beauty is used not for the benefit of the woman herself, but for the benefit of the man who gazes upon her, and for those who know how to use this ideal for their own purposes.

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<sup>17</sup> Hartmann von Aue, *Der arme Heinrich* ed. Hermann Henne (Fischer Tachenbuch Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1987) 68.

Both Joan Ferrante<sup>18</sup> and Marina Werner<sup>19</sup> have discussed the use of the female form in allegory for the moral improvement of men. Ferrante sees both the positive and negative aspects of male desire first in theological terms:

Woman, as the most obvious object of male concupiscence, is made to represent lust and is thus held responsible for it; the object of temptation becomes the cause. And because heresy, like woman, attracts with superficial beauty, woman is also identified with heresy – indeed the love of woman can itself be a form of idolatry. Yet, in the Song of Songs, the groom's love for his bride represents the love of God for his church; their union stands for the union of God and man. In this case, the woman represents the part of man that will be saved.<sup>20</sup>

Ferrante observes this dichotomy in the secular literature as well. The courtly poet is concerned with the effect of love on the male lover:

Love can provide a man with a new and nobler identity and inspire him to great deeds in the service of others, or it can cause madness that cuts him from the world and drives him into exile and death. The acknowledgment of love brings with it a series of conflicts for the lover, not only the moral conflicts we have seen in allegory, between good and evil forces, but also those of clashing moods and aspirations which he must learn to bring into balance.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Joan M. Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975).

<sup>19</sup> Marina Werner's work concentrates on Classical allegories from antiquity to the modern age, such as Sophia, Pandora, Athena, and other mythological figures.

Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of Female Form* (Atheneum: New York, 1985).

<sup>20</sup> Ferrante, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Ferrante, p. 65.

The lady to whom the courtly poet proffers his love is more than a specific individual woman, but a personification of the concept of love:

He [the poet] selects the lady he loves or, to put it another way, he incarnates Love in a lady. Then he forms an image of her in his mind, attributes the qualities he values to that image, and worships or berates it, depending on his mood. The romance lady appears to be a separate being, but ... she is a mirror image of the lover, or a figure he has somehow fashioned to his desires.<sup>22</sup>

The ideal woman, therefore, represents to man the best and the worst that he has in himself, and is loved and hated according to what the man feels about his own nature and desire.

Although Ferrante is basing her ideas on French courtly poetry, we can see a similar phenomenon in German poetry. Heinrich von Morungen, for instance, praises his lady on the one hand as the ideal: “... *si ist aller wibe ein krône*”<sup>23</sup> (“she is the crown of all women”, my translation) and on the other hand as a darker, more threatening figure: “*vil süeziu senftiu toeterinne*” (“sweet, soft murderess”, my translation).<sup>24</sup>

This idea of the beautiful woman as the personification of the concept of love is seen in the figure of Isolde in Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan und Isold*. Isolde represents the aspect of female beauty as an asset to the court and as an observed exemplification of the ideal of feminine perfection. Young

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<sup>22</sup> Ferrante, p. 66.

<sup>23</sup> *Des Minnesangs Frühling* eds. Hugo Moser and Helmut Tervooren, 37th edition (Stuttgart: S. Herzel Verlag, 1982) 236.

<sup>24</sup> *Des Minnesangs Frühling*, p. 282.

Isolde's education results in her beauty being admired at the court. All her other talents and attributes lend strength to the total effect of her beauty:

so was der tougenliche sanc  
 ir wunderlichiu schœne,  
 diu mit ir muotgedœene  
 verholne unde tougen  
 durch diu venster der ougen  
 in vil manic edele herze sleich  
 und daz zouber dar in streich  
 daz die gedanke zehant  
 vienc unde vahende bant  
 mit sene und mit seneder not.  
 Sus hæte sich diu schœne Isot  
 von Tristandes lere  
 gebezzeret sere.  
 (Lines 8122-34).

But her secret song was her wondrous beauty that stole with its rapturous music hidden and unseen through the windows of the eyes into many noble hearts and smoothed on the magic which took thoughts prisoner suddenly, and taking them, fettered them with desire!

Thus, under Tristan's instruction, lovely Isolde had much improved herself. (p. 108).

This passage reveals the major contradiction in Western thought about female beauty. Her beauty is her glory, which allows men to look at and admire her splendor. In looking at this beauty, however, the men are at risk to lose possession of themselves and find themselves in the position of a prisoner to their desires. Nancy Zak discusses Isolde's beauty in great detail.<sup>25</sup> Although Isolde's beauty is often identified with gold and light,

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<sup>25</sup> Nancy Zak, *The Portrayal of the Heroine in Chrétien de Troyes's 'Erec et Enide', Gottfried von Straßburg's 'Tristan', and 'Flamenca'* Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik Nr. 347. (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1983) The discussion of Isolde's beauty is found on pages 69 through 88.

positive, if not divine attributes, her beauty has a more somber aspect. It is “identified with death.”<sup>26</sup> Zak observes: “In ways both direct and indirect, the heroine’s unique attractiveness sets key events in motion.”<sup>27</sup> Isolde’s beauty thus becomes something above and beyond the individual woman Isolde. Instead of being an individual woman, she is part of the divine order, reflecting the glory of the natural world.

When she enters the court in a procession with her mother and the other ladies, she is compared to the sun:

sus kam diu küniginne Isot,  
 daz vroliche morgenrot,  
 und vuorte ir sunnen an ir hant,  
 daz wunder von Irlant,  
 die liechten maget Isote.  
 (Lines 10885-899).

And so Queen Isolde, the glad Dawn, came leading by the hand  
 her Son, the wonder of Ireland, the resplendant maiden Isolde.  
 (p. 144).

Yet Gottfried counterweighs this magnificent image with the more ambiguous image of the falcon:

als si diu Minne dræte  
 ir selber zeinem vederspil,  
 dem wunsche zeinem endezil,  
 da vür er niemer komen kan. ...  
 gevedere schachblicke  
 die vlugen da snedicke  
 schachende dar unde dan:  
 ich wæne, Isot vil manegen man  
 sin selbes da beroubete.  
 (Lines 10896-899; 10957-961).

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<sup>26</sup> Zak, p. 86.

<sup>27</sup> Zak, p.87.

...Love had formed her to be her own falcon, the fulfillment of every wish beyond which there is nothing. ...  
 Rapacious feathered glances flew thick as falling snow, ranging from side to side in search of prey. I know that Isolde robbed many a man of his very self! (pp. 144-45).

The natural world in all its splendor is still a dangerous superhuman force, placing the men who view its female embodiment at risk for their self-identity. By being placed in the supernatural realm, high on a pedestal above the men who stand below and admire her, the woman is a glorified goddess. Yet her supernatural beauty is also threatening, not only of the heavens but also of the underworld, the realm of loss and death.

The *Nibelungenlied* has a similar scene describing Kriemhild's entrance at court, where she is admired by all:

Nu gie diu minneclîche, alsô der morgenrôt  
 tuot ûz den trüeben wolken. dâ sciet von maneger nôt,  
 der si dâ truog in herzen und lange het getân.  
 er sach die minneclîchen nu vil hêrlîchen stân.

Jâ lûhte ir von ir wæte vil manec edel stein.  
 ir rôsenrôtiu varwe vil minneclîchen scein.  
 ob iemen wünschen solde, der kunde niht gejeihen,  
 daz er ze dirre werlde het iht scœners gesehen.

Sam der liechte mâne vor den sternen stât,  
 des scîn sô lûterlîche ab den wolken gât,  
 dem stuont si nu gelîche vor maneger frouwen guot.  
 des wart dâ wol gehœhet den zieren hêldén der muot.

(Strophes 281-83).

But now lovely Kriemhild emerged like the dawn from the dark clouds, freeing from much distress him who secretly cherished her and indeed had long done so. He saw the adorable maiden there in all her splendor – gems past counting gleamed from her robe, while her rosy cheeks glowed bewitchingly; so that even if a man were to have his heart's desire he could not claim to have seen anything fairer. Kriemhild outshone many good ladies as

the moon from the stars when its light shines from the clear sky, and those gallant warriors' hearts rose within them as they gazed on her. (Hatto, p. 48).

Kriemhild's beauty is also of the heavens, and moves the hearts of men to admiration and desire. The power of Kriemhild's beauty to move the hearts and minds of the courtiers at Worms places her above them where she can shine in her splendor.

Her magnificent beauty had already been mentioned in the second strophe as dangerous, and Winder McConnell, as Nancy Zak had done with Isolde, draws a similar analogy between beauty and death: "The fascination with Kriemhild is rooted, from the beginning, in the two poles, beauty and death."<sup>28</sup> Kriemhild becomes "a death figure, a personality whose outer radiance and beauty are overshadowed by her link to the Otherworld and the calamities to follow."<sup>29</sup>

Whatever its positive features, beauty had an awesome destructive power which was feared by medieval thinkers, theological and secular alike. A woman's beauty is a lure and a temptation to those around her, leading them into sin and thence to death. The twelfth-century *Ancrene Riwe*, which was a handbook for nuns, stressed the woman's responsibility to keep herself covered so that men would not be tempted: "These are very terrible words for the woman who shows herself to men's sight. ...The pit is her fair face, and her white neck, and her light eye, and her hand if she holds it out before his

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<sup>28</sup> Winder McConnell, "Kriemhild and Gerlind: Some Observations on the *vâlandinne*-Concept in the *Nibelungenlied* and *Kudrun*" in *The Dark Figure in Medieval German and Germanic Literature* eds. Edward R. Haymes and Stephanie Cain Van D'Elden (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1986) 45.

<sup>29</sup> McConnell, p. 46.

eyes; and further her speech is a pit, if it is not controlled, and all other things whatsoever that belong to her, through which sinful love may be aroused.”<sup>30</sup>

Medieval theologians based their beliefs of the threat of female beauty on Biblical tradition and on the received wisdom of the Church Fathers and the Greek philosophers. One can turn to John Chrysostom, writing in the fourth century, for a statement on the death-inducing threat of female beauty: “...consider what is stored up inside those beautiful eyes and that straight nose, and the mouth and the cheeks, you will affirm the well-shaped body to be nothing else than a white sepulchre; the parts within are full of so much uncleanness”.<sup>31</sup> Marbod of Rennes lists the Biblical and Classical women who, through their beauty, brought about the downfall of men:

Who led astray David the holy and who led wise Solomon astray with sweet charm so that one turned adulterer and the other committed sacrilege – who but seductive woman? I pass over many women catalogued on the sacred page: the horrifying Jezebel, Athalia who dared to commit heinous sin, and more whom it is unnecessary to enumerate. I mention only in passing many who are traditionally spoken of in the works of poets and historians: Eriphyle, Clytemnestra, Belides, Procne, and that harlot bred by Leda who was fought over in the ten-year war of nations, and others too whose stories the tragic poets often rehearse for the people.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* ed. Alcuin Blamiers, (Claredon Press: Oxford, 1992) 96.

<sup>31</sup> Bullough, Vern L., Shelton, Brenda and Slavin, Sarah, *The Subordinated Sex : A History of Attitudes towards Women* Revised Edition (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988) 97.

<sup>32</sup> *Woman Defamed and Women Defended*, p. 101. Original in *PL* 171, 1698D-1699A.

The problem with this concept of destructive beauty is that the woman has little real control over a beauty that is hers by birth. A woman cannot affect the final result of her beauty on others. The idea that a woman's beauty is powerful, dangerous and threatening towards men places the responsibility for that power in the woman's lap, although that power is largely delusory. Lakoff and Scherr comment: "women are praised for beauty, and blamed for beauty – that is, given responsibility for it although they do not have control over it. They are expected to act so as to reap the rewards of their beauty, and are envied and censured for that. Yet we do not seem to realize that women do not have power through beauty: *beauty* has power."<sup>33</sup> Beauty's power lies in its singularity, according to Lakoff and Scherr: "it is not possible ... for everyone to be equally beautiful: one woman's beauty diminishes that of the next, subtracts from the latter's resources. To be beautiful is not in itself sufficient: one must be more beautiful than anyone else in range, or one's beauty is non-existent."<sup>34</sup> The concept that a woman's beauty must be superior to all others is common in literature, and even appears in the Biblical story of Esther, who is a participant in the perhaps oldest beauty pageant:

And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young maidens ... and let the maiden which pleases the king be queen instead of Vasti.  
 And he brought up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter... and she was fair and beautiful...  
 And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all of them that looked

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<sup>33</sup> Lakoff and Scherr, pp. 278-79.

<sup>34</sup> Lakoff and Scherr, p. 279.

upon her.

And the King loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vasti.

(Esther 2: 3, 4, 7, 15, 17, KJV).

Although Esther has other qualities, it is her beauty first and foremost which wins her favor and esteem. She displaces all the other women in the competition, and seals the fate of the former queen, Vasti, “who was fair to look upon” (Esther 1: 11, KJV). Esther’s beauty was used by God for the purposes of good, for in her position as queen, she was able to prevent a massacre of her people.

The *Nibelungenlied* narrator follows in this tradition. The superiority of the heroine's beauty is explicitly made manifest.

The confrontation between Kriemhild and Brünhild is expressed in terms of their relative physical merits. The narrator compares the worth of the two women's appearance as if they were in competition for the rank of the most beautiful woman. In the first comparison, Brünhild has arrived at Worms and is the object of much admiration. The court, both its men and its women, is judging Brünhild's entire person through her appearance. The author takes a stand by pronouncing Kriemhild the more beautiful of the two:

dô sprâchen dâ die wîsen, die hetenz baz gesehen,  
man möhte Kriemhilden            wól vor Prünhîlden jehen.  
(Strophe 593)

...but those who looked more discerningly declared Kriemhild to have the advantage. (Hatto, p. 83).

The discerning (superior) gaze determines that Kriemhild's beauty is the more worthy of the two. Brünhild and Kriemhild cannot stand in equality as far as their physical appearance goes — one woman must be chosen as the more beautiful. This follows Lakoff and Scherr's argument that a woman is ranked in her beauty compared to other women and that the more beautiful is the superior.

Brünhild is aware that she is scrutinized in comparison to Kriemhild and in a later strophe we can sense her jealousy, as well as her insecurity:

under wîlen blicken	man Prünhilde sach
án vroun Kríemhilde,	diu schoene was genuoc.
ir varwe gegen dem golde	den glanz vil hêrlîchen
	truoc.
	(Strophe 799)

Now and again Brunhild darted a glance at lady Kriemhild who looked so very lovely, the radiance of her fair face vying magnificently with its setting of gold. (Hatto, p. 108).

In this passage, Brünhild is the one who is secretly looking at Kriemhild while Kriemhild does not glance at Brünhild. Hugo Bekker, on the other hand, sees this passage as reflecting the *superiority* of Brünhild: "Brunhild has frequently shown herself more of a 'man' than any of them. It is this quality that presents her as a person rather than as a woman, eye-catching less for her femininity than for her courage and ability in games."<sup>35</sup> Brünhild is "queen before she is woman. Perhaps we are to consider hers a beauty with a gloss of regality subduing the pure femininity that is Kriemhild's."<sup>36</sup> This

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<sup>35</sup> Hugo Bekker, *The Nibelungenlied: A Literary Analysis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971) 72.

<sup>36</sup> Bekker, p. 73.

argument is nothing if not convoluted. Kriemhild is supposed to be less beautiful because she is more beautiful and therefore more feminine. Bekker is using Kriemhild's beauty to her disadvantage, playing on the stereotype that a woman is less of a person than a man. Her beauty reinforces her femininity, and hence her lower position.

Brünhild in fact asks directly about Kriemhild's beauty when the messenger returns from Xanten, revealing her concern about her rival's physical appearance:

nu sagt mir, kumet uns Kriemhilt?	hât noch ir schœner lîp
behalten iht der zûhte	der si wol kunde pflegen?

(Strophe 771)

Tell me, is Kriemhild coming? ... Does she retain the elegant style that used to be all her own? (Hatto, p. 105).

Brünhild's question, with its emphasis on Kriemhild's *zûhte* and her *schœner lîp*, reveals her jealousy of Kriemhild's physical beauty and related attributes. This is a major factor in the rivalry between the queens over their social status. Brünhild has brought up the beauty element long before the two queens clash over other matters.

Not only is Kriemhild shown as more lovely than Brünhild, she is also in competition with the sainted departed Helche, Etzel's former wife. Kriemhild is considered by Etzel's court to be the more beautiful of Etzel's two wives:

Uf ruhte si ir gebende:	ir varwe wol getân
diu lûht' ir ûz dem golde. dâ was vil manic man,	
die jâhen, daz vrou Helche	niht schœner kunde sîn.

(Strophe 1351)

...she pushed back her wimple and revealed her lovely face all radiant amid the gold of her hair, so that many a man declared that Queen Helche had not been lovelier. (Hatto, p. 172).

Of all the women in the *Nibelungenlied*, therefore, our author assures us that Queen Kriemhild is the most beautiful of all. Her extreme beauty ranks her at the top of the hierarchy. She has the power that her beauty gives her, the danger that her beauty represents, and she is admired by all the men who see her.

It is a very short step from the pedestal to the pit of hell. R. Howard Bloch discusses in great detail the relationship between the ideal woman and her supposed counterpart, the evil and dangerous woman threatening men:

... the simultaneous condemnation and idealization of woman and of love are not contrasting manifestations of the same phenomenon, opposite sides of the same coin. They are not opposites at all. Rather, antifeminism and courtliness stand in dialectal rapport which ... assumes a logical necessity according to which woman is placed in the overdetermined and polarized position of being neither one nor the other but both at once, and thus trapped in an ideological entanglement whose ultimate effect is her abstraction from history.<sup>37</sup>

The supposed contrast between the beautiful maiden of the first strophe and the Kriemhild who wields the sword in revenge at the end of the work is a reflection of this conception of femininity as both better and worse, at one and the same time, than masculinity. Putting Kriemhild on the pedestal as the most beautiful woman does not deny the inevitable "fall" from that ideal

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<sup>37</sup> R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 164.

into its opposite, but rather includes it as part of the system of the dangerous beauty of women.

Kriemhild's beauty has been displayed throughout the work in relation to its reception by those around her, both the men who love her, husbands and courtiers alike, and Brünhild, the woman jealous of Kriemhild's superior beauty.

Kriemhild's beauty has an effect on one other person, Kriemhild herself. In the first *âventiure*, Kriemhild comments on her own beauty. In this instance, her beauty is a part of her, separate from the pedestal of ideal beauty, in the context of her life and of her future. The next chapter will bring Kriemhild's beauty away from the pedestal and into the life of a woman seen from within, a reflection of the lives of the twelfth century noblewomen who were listening to and reading this work.

## Chapter Two

### Among Women

“*sus scœn’ ich wil belîben / unz an mînen tôt*” (Strophe 15) “I mean to keep my beauty till I die...” (Hatto, p. 18).

Kriemhild's comment about her own beauty comes in the first *âventiure*, while she is in conversation with her mother. This conversation centers around the role of the noble woman in her society, with marriage as the proper station for a young woman to attain. Kriemhild's assertion about her beauty must be understood in the context of the societal role that she is expected to fulfill.

This dialogue occurs in the first scene in the work where the action moves from introduction to event. It is unique in that this first scene is a conversation between mother and daughter.

Mother and daughter scenes occur in medieval German literature, but they are rare. For instance, there is the strong bond between the mother Queen Isolde and her daughter Isolde in Gottfried's *Tristan*. The mother-daughter bond is also apparent in the memorable discussion about *minne* between Lavinia and her mother in Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneasroman*. In spite of this discussion, Lavinia's mother turns into a witch-like hag bent on destroying her daughter's happiness.

The Old Norse versions of the *Nibelungenlied* story, the *Völsungasaga* and the *Eddas*, both Snorri's *Edda* and the *Elder Edda*, portray Gudrun's mother Grimhild as a witch-like figure, working against the best interests of

the daughter through her potions and her greed. Although she is eager to make a suitable match for her daughter as well as her son, her match-making leads to disaster. Her potions temporarily displace real affection, but cannot eradicate it. Her insistence that Gudrun marry Atli against her will locks her into a loveless marriage. Gudrun enters into matrimony just to fulfill her perceived duty to her family. Only between Gudrun and her daughter Svanhild is any affection shown.

Unlike these works, the *Nibelungenlied* does not portray older women as evil, but describes not only Queen Uote, but also Queen Sieglinde and Queen Helche in a favorable light. Evil intent is far from their minds, and their actions usually work for the betterment of the society in which they live, usually through their largess.<sup>1</sup>

Queen Uote acts in the role that society expects her to take. In spite of the love and protection that Uote shows to Kriemhild, the mother never looks beyond the expectations that courtly society placed on noble women. Uote never questions these demands, and is confident that her daughter will also learn to accept her place in the courtly world.

The relationship between Kriemhild and Uote is particularly strong. Although Uote has three sons, she has only one daughter, and the relationship between the two, the only females in the Burgundian household until the coming of Brünhild, is never completely severed.

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<sup>1</sup> This discussion will be taken up further in Chapter Three.

The mother-daughter relationship is one that has been ignored in scholarship (Adrienne Rich calls it “the great unwritten story”<sup>2</sup>) or underanalyzed in literary works. Marianne Hirsch points out that “the story of mother and daughter has indeed been written, although it is not often found on the surface but in the submerged depths of literary texts.”<sup>3</sup> The relationship between Kriemhild and Uote has not been thoroughly examined for the light it brings to bear on Kriemhild's development as a woman in the context of her society. Although this scene between Kriemhild and Uote appears “above the surface” in this text, the intent of the conversation and its significance have been undervalued.

The key for unlocking the meaning of the work surfaces in the context of the mother-daughter relationship between Kriemhild and Uote. In the conversation between the two that opens the work, the stage is set for the entire epic. Here Kriemhild proclaims the line that is used at the end to sum up the meaning of the story: “*wie liebé mit leide / ze jungest lónen kan*” (Strophe 17) “in the end love is rewarded by sorrow” (my translation). This particular conversation and the relationship between mother and daughter in which it takes place is worth a closer examination.

Kriemhild has come to her mother after having had a troubling dream about a falcon that she has raised being ripped apart by two eagles. In the *Nibelungenlied*, predictive dreams are dreamt four times, three times by

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<sup>2</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution. Tenth Anniversary Edition* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1986) 225.

<sup>3</sup> Marianne Hirsch, “Mothers and Daughters” in *Ties that Bind: Essays on Mothering and Patriarchy*. eds. Jean F. O'Barr, Deborah Pope and Mary Wyer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 181.

Kriemhild and once by Uote, a link between mother and daughter in the realm of the supernatural. Jerold C. Frakes sees Kriemhild's first dream, the dream of the falcon, as a reflection of Kriemhild's societal position: "Her initial act in the narrative is not set in time or place, but solely in the context of her social standing; in fact it seems that it is only in this context that Kriemhild can dream, act, exist."<sup>4</sup>

Uote's interpretation of the dream is just as significant as the dream itself. Uote becomes a force for the conventional standards of her society (as Frakes says, "the queen and bastion of courtly behavior at Worms"<sup>5</sup>), and she reinforces the limited scope of what a woman can expect from life. Uote's interpretation shows clearly the path to which Kriemhild should adhere as a grown woman, that is, to accept her husband and her role as a married woman.

Ida H. Washington and Carol E. Washington Tobol note that Kriemhild follows her mother's footsteps as far as she is able: "Daughters seeking personal power evidently have ancient roots in Kriemhild and Clytemnestra, who both tried the passive resistance patterns of their mothers in a restrictive environment. Neither, however, could find her own final answer in these models... ." <sup>6</sup> The path that Uote sets out for Kriemhild will

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<sup>4</sup> Jerold C. Frakes, "Kriemhild's Three Dreams: A Structural Interpretation" *ZDA* 1984 113(3) : 178.

<sup>5</sup> Frakes, p. 186.

<sup>6</sup> Ida H. Washington and Carol E. Washington Tobol, "Kriemhild and Clytemnestra – Sisters in Crime or Independent Women?" in *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*. eds. Cathy N. Davidson and E. M. Broner (New York: Frederick and Ungar Publishing Co., 1980) 20.

be the latter's undoing. Part of the tragedy of the *Nibelungenlied* lies in the limited range of action available to the protagonist. Kriemhild must marry if she is to remain a member of courtly society, for there is no room for a woman who is not attached to a man. To remain free of marriage, a woman must leave the court and either enter into the religious life or exist at the fringes of society in the company of heretics and outcasts. The protection of the court means acquiescence to the rules of the court. One of these rules is that a beautiful girl must be married to the man of her family's choosing.

The relationship between Kriemhild and Uote is intimate and trusting: Kriemhild does not withhold the content of her dream nor does Uote refrain from commenting on the more disturbing aspects of its interpretation. It is one of the few conversations in the work which is free from guile, malice or hidden aspirations and yet the conversation does not reveal a way to escape the determining power of Kriemhild's dream. Uote, in spite of the dream's dark overtones, can only see one way of happiness for her daughter, and that is the route of marriage. The daughter must follow the mother in her role as wife and mother first, queen only in name. Uote, in spite of her ability to decipher dreams, has no real influence in the court in which she resides. She has no power to change the shape of her daughter's future.

When Kriemhild goes to her mother after having experienced the troubling dream, she is undergoing the change from a child into a young woman. She is not yet of marriageable age, but her dream is an indication that thoughts of the future have entered her mind. The scene occurs two or three years before Kriemhild's marriage to Siegfried, so she must be that much younger than a woman of marriageable age. When we consider the age

of marriage in the twelfth century among the nobility, we can estimate an age between seven and twelve for the scene at hand. Shulamith Shahar posits three stages of childhood in medieval society. The first stage ends at age seven, which at the same time ends childhood innocence and forces the segregation of the sexes: "...children up to the age of 7 generally enjoyed freedom. ...Throughout society, boys and girls were not separated up to the age of 7, even in the prosperous urban households and the castles of the nobility."<sup>7</sup> Edward Shorter mentions the earlier physical development of girls in the twelfth century, compared to following centuries: "A long period of scarcity settled over the Western society at the end of the Middle Ages, apparently affecting women by increasing the average age at which puberty began. ...In Classical Greece and Rome, and during the Middle Ages, women seemed to have started menstruating at about thirteen or fourteen."<sup>8</sup>

The age at menarch influenced the age at marriage. David Herlihy discusses a few noble marriages involving young brides in Germany: "Noble girls were usually young at first marriage. In the noble family of Wittelsbach, from 1300 to 1520, four brides were between 12 and 13 years; eight about fourteen; and two about 15."<sup>9</sup> Shulamith Shahar also discusses this young age: "Girls were sometimes married off before the age of 12 – the minimum

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<sup>7</sup> Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* trans. Chaya Galai (London: Routledge, 1992) 101-102.

<sup>8</sup> Shorter concludes that it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that the onset of menarch approached that experienced by women in the twelfth century. Edward Shorter, *A History of Women's Bodies* (New York: Basic Books, 1982) 18-19.

<sup>9</sup>David Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) 106.

age of matrimony according to canon law. ...Legally speaking, the marriage of a girl under twelve was considered to be a betrothal, and could be annulled if she so wished upon reaching this age. ...However, girls were often pressured into consenting.”<sup>10</sup> Joachim Bumke discusses the case of Elisabeth of Hungary: “König Andreas II. von Ungarn († 1235) verlobte im Jahr 1208 seine Tochter Elisabeth, die gerade ein Jahr alt war, mit dem ältesten Sohn des Landgrafen Hermann I. von Thüringen. Mit vier Jahren kam sie an den Thüringer Hof, mit vierzehn feierte sie Hochzeit mit Ludwig IV. († 1227).”<sup>11</sup>

This young age for marriage, although the accepted norm at the time, was not without trauma for the young girls involved. Shulamith Shahar states: “The daughters of nobility were usually given in marriage before reaching the majority at which they were entitled by law to enjoy independence in civil matters (independence of which wedlock deprived them). There was unquestionably a discrepancy between their emotional development and the social custom which burdened them with matrimony at a tender age.”<sup>12</sup> The popularity of female saints who fled their parents’ demands of marriage may be a reflection of this anxiety. David Herlihy mentions a German female saint who fled marriage: “In the Rhineland, St. Christina of Stommeln, a village near Cologne (d. 1312), allegedly fled from

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<sup>10</sup> Shahar, p. 223-24.

<sup>11</sup> Bumke, p. 539.

<sup>12</sup> Shahar, p. 224.

her family home when her parents tried to force a husband upon her; she was then age 12.”<sup>13</sup>

The life of St. Christina of Markyate (1096-1160) reflects the problems a young woman in a noble family faces when her parents pressure her into a marriage that she does not want. Christina is forced into a betrothal through trickery:

When the young man acted on the bishop's advice, the bishop backed his promise with such malicious persistence that he did not stop until, against Christina's will, he had gained the parents' consent for her to be betrothed to Burthred. When this was accomplished, the prelate, glorying in his conquest, went off to Durham, leaving the maiden sad at heart in her parents' home.<sup>14</sup>

Christina's family attempt various methods to persuade Christina to change her mind. They beat her and deprive her of church attendance. When all else fails, they allow her husband into her room in order to take her by force. This seemingly vicious attitude by the family was not unusual. Bernd Thum reports: “Wie noch heute in Randzonen des südlichen Europa wurden Frauen gelegentlich auch durch Vergewaltigung in eine ungewollte Ehe gezwungen. Wenn es sich dabei um Töchter angesehener Familien handelte, war dies ein Mittel, sich gesellschaftliche oder materielle Vorteile zu schaffen.”<sup>15</sup> In Christina's case, she escapes her betrothed's attempted rapes three times

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<sup>13</sup> Herlihy, p. 106.

<sup>14</sup> *The Life of Christina of Markyate* ed. and trans. by C. H. Talbot (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959) 45.

<sup>15</sup> Bernd Thum, *Aufbruch und Verweigerung: Literatur und Geschichte am Oberrhein im Hohen Mittelalter: Aspekte eines geschichtlichen Kulturraumes* (Waldkirch i. Br.: Waldkirchlicher Verlagsgesellschaft, 1980) 294.

through divine intervention. At one point she hides from her husband by hanging from a nail on the wall behind a curtain.

Her father takes her to the prior Fredebert, pleading:

“I know, my fathers, and I admit to my daughter, that I and her mother have forced her against her will into this marriage and that against her better judgment, she has received this sacrament. Yet no matter how she was led into it, if she resists our authority and rejects it, we shall be the laughing-stock of our neighbors, a mockery and a derision to those who are round about. Wherefore, I beseech you, plead with her to have pity on us: let her marry in the Lord and take away our reproach. Why must she depart from tradition? Why should she bring this dishonor on her father? Her life of poverty will bring the whole of the nobility into disrepute.”<sup>16</sup>

Christina's refusal to marry is seen not just as disobedience, but an affront to the social order. The family cannot bend her to their will, resulting in a loss of face not only for themselves, but for the entire noble caste. Christina's assertion of her individual will in the matter of her future is a threat to the continuation of the noble way of life.

In order to achieve her goal of preserving her virginity and dedicating her life to God, Christina plans a dramatic escape:

And seizing hold of one of them [the horses], she paused, covered with embarrassment. Why delay, fugitive? Why do you respect your feminine sex? Put on manly courage and mount the horse like a man. At this, she put aside her fears and, jumping on the horse as if she were a youth and setting spurs to his flanks, she said to the servant: “Follow me at a distance: for I fear that if you ride with me and we are caught, they will kill you.” It was about nine in the morning; and about three in the

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<sup>16</sup> *Life of Christina*, p. 59.

afternoon they reached Flamstead, having covered over thirty miles in that time.<sup>17</sup>

Christina, after years in hiding from her family, eventually finds a new life in her own hermitage, advising others through her holy wisdom. C. H. Talbot speculates that the St. Albans psalter now at Hildesheim was in her use. "...the calender has been altered by introducing a number of entries which reflect an interest in female saints. These saints are Juliana, Milburga, Faith, Etheldrith, Frideswide, Hilda and Felicity. If we examine the lives of these saints we discover that at least four of them have something in common with Christina, in that they rejected their suitors and fled from the joys of marriage to devote themselves to a religious life."<sup>18</sup>

Stories of female saints who resisted their adversaries through their courage and strength of mind were popular both in the works of Hrothswita of Gandersheim<sup>19</sup> in the tenth century to Christine de Pisan in the fourteenth<sup>20</sup>, showing the attraction of the theme to women of the medieval period. Both of these writers wrote primarily for the edification of noble women, whether in the nunnery in the case of Hrothswita or in the court as in the case of Christine. Bernd Thum sees in these centuries of the High Middle Ages "die erste Frauenemanzipation der europäischen Geschichte."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Life of Christina*, p.93.

<sup>18</sup> *Life of Christina*, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> Hrothswita of Gandersheim, *Hrotsvithae Opera* ed. Paulus de Winterfeld Monumenta Germaniae Historica Nr. 34 (Munich: 1978).

<sup>20</sup> Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the City of Ladies* trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982).

<sup>21</sup> Thum, p. 291.

One of the signs of this emancipation was the flight from marriage into lives of religious contemplation, both in and alongside the Church: "Auch verheiratete Frauen ließen ihre Männer im Stich und schlossen sich der Laienbewegung an. ...Die Grenzen zum Sektierer- und Ketzertum waren undeutlich."<sup>22</sup> One of the most interesting aspects of this female escape from social roles was the development of the Beguines, religious women who rejected both secular marriage and the restrictions of the cloistered life. Carol Neel writes: "As beguines, these medieval women were independent of male authority in marriage and in the church to a degree otherwise unknown in their culture."<sup>23</sup>

Anxiety in the face of marriage exists in the realm of German twelfth-century courtly literature as well, even if the heroine accepts marriage in the end as her proper station. The young girl in *Der arme Heinrich* is 8 or 12 depending on the manuscript (deBoor/Henne, the editors of the standard edition, choose eight as more likely) at her entrance into the story. The young girl, most likely under the influence of stories of female saints, prefers to become a saint in heaven rather than live the regular life of a woman in marriage. In order to achieve her goal of sainthood, she is willing to face death on behalf of another. She is to be sacrificed to achieve health for the noble knight Heinrich, the same man who will become her husband at the

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<sup>22</sup> Thum, p. 294.

<sup>23</sup> Carol Neel, "The Origins of the Beguines" in *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages* eds. Judith M. Bennett, Elisabeth A. Clark, Jean F. O'Barr, B. Anne Vilen, and Sarah Westphal-Wihl (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1989) 243-44.

end of the work. When her desired martyr's death is thwarted, she bursts out in rage and despair:

Dô diu maget rehte ersach  
 daz ir ze sterbenne niht geschah,  
 dâ was ir muot beswæret mite.  
 si brach ir zuht unde ir site.  
 si hete leidens genuoc:  
 ze den brüsten sî sich sluoc...  
 “wê mir vil armen unde owê!  
 wie sol ez mir nû ergân?  
 muoz ich alsus verlorn hân  
 die rîchen himelkrône?...”  
 (Lines 1281-84b; 1290-93).<sup>24</sup>

When the maiden understood that her death was not going to take place, her mind was greatly disturbed. She broke with her upbringing and her decorous ways. Her suffering was great: she beat her breast...“Oh, what misery is mine! What will happen to me now? Must I lose the crown of heaven in such a manner?” (my translation).

The little girl, unnamed throughout the story, cannot even imagine a life beyond her girlhood and believes that life in heaven would be much preferable to life as a woman. She considers herself already dead: “*nu bin ich alrêst tôt*” (Line 1296). The death that she is undergoing is the death of her maidenly innocence, and the loss of her range of independent action. She must adapt to life as a wife, and the loss of selfhood when her identity is subsumed in the person of her husband. When she marries Heinrich, the story is over. The audience never learns how the little girl adjusts to life as a married woman.

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<sup>24</sup>Hartmann von Aue, *Der arme Heinrich* ed. Helmut de Boor. re-ed. and expanded. Hermann Henne (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987) 70.

Kriemhild's dream, as well as her reaction, shows a similar fear of the future, especially as the future involves married life:

In disen hôhen êren tróumte Kriemhîldè,  
 wie si züge einen valken starc, scœn' und wîldè,  
 den ir zwêne arn erkrummen. daz si daz muoste sehen,  
 ir enkûnde in dirre werlde leider nîmmér gescehen.

Den troum si dô sagete ir muoter Uotèn.  
 sine kúndes niht besceiden baz der gúotèn:  
 "der valke, den du ziuhest, daz ist ein edel man.  
 in welle got behüeten, du muost in sciere vlôren hân."

"Waz saget ir mir von manne, vil liebiu muoter min?  
 âne recken mînne sô wil ich immer sîn.  
 sus scœn' ich wil belîben unz an mînen tôt,  
 daz ich von mannes minne sol gewinnen nimmer nôt."  
 (Strophes 13-15.)

Living in such magnificence, Kriemhild dreams she reared a falcon, strong, handsome and wild, but that two eagles rent it while she perforce looked on, the most grievous thing that could befall her. She took her dream to her mother Uote, who could give the good maiden no better reading than this: "The falcon you are rearing is a noble man who, unless God preserve him, will soon be taken from you."

"Why do you talk to me of a man, dear mother? I intend to stay free of a warrior's love all my life. I mean to keep my beauty till I die, and never be made wretched by the love of any man."  
 (Hatto, p. 18).

The dream is more than just a dream. Marianne Wahl Armstrong states: "Er konfrontiert das 'vil edel magedîn' zum ersten Mal mit dem Ernst und der Härte der Wirklichkeit...Bislang hatte sie solche Überlegungen und Ängste nicht erkannt."<sup>25</sup> The little girl wants reassurance from her mother, and Uote, through interpreting Kriemhild's dream, is attempting to comfort

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<sup>25</sup> Wahl Armstrong, p. 251.

her and to calm her fears about growing up. She interprets the falcon as a future husband, whom Kriemhild will be destined to lose. The falcon is a conventional symbol for the knight in courtly love poetry, and Uote's interpretation of the falcon as a knight follows the standard pattern. Kriemhild, instead of being comforted, bursts out with a denial of the dream's portent.

Kriemhild attacks the idea of love, of marriage and the subsequent loss of her independent selfhood within that scheme. Philip N. Anderson believes that the dream characterizes Kriemhild's "failure" to "submit to the social structure of the court".<sup>26</sup> Anderson continues: "She cannot continue to be so attractive without attracting love. She has already sown the seeds to her own self-destruction in her paradoxical approach to court life."<sup>27</sup> Kriemhild's beauty is her undoing, since beauty is what will attract husbands. But Kriemhild's words here stress the beauty that she already is, and she sees that beauty in opposition to marriage and a husband.

Hugo Bekker believes that it is only the idea of love as madness, in the classical Greek sense that Kriemhild rejects, while praising the ideal of married love which Uote represents: "This love, though assailed at times, is never really endangered – and it is never dangerous. It provides a protective shield for the faithful wife."<sup>28</sup> Yet it is not adulterous madness-inducing love,

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<sup>26</sup> Philip N. Anderson, "Kriemhild's Quest" *Euphorion* 79 (1985): 7.

<sup>27</sup> Anderson, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Bekker, p. 63.

symbolized for Bekker in the figure of Dido, that Kriemhild fears, but the conventional one which Uote predicts for her.

Kriemhild considers the ideal of married love a great misery, *nôt*, and one which she would prefer to reject. She wants to *remain the way she is, beautiful, until her death*. (Hatto's translation insists on seeing Kriemhild's beauty solely as a possession, while the language of the Middle High German, with the use of *sîn* and *beliben*, stresses Kriemhild's beauty as an aspect of her self, her identity as a person.) Kriemhild's identification of remaining as she is with her own death follows the theme which Hartmann set forth for his little girl, a deep longing to escape the lot of womanhood by leaping straight from girlhood into death. The girl Kriemhild cannot understand the middle stage of womanhood, but would prolong her childhood for her entire life if she could.

The psychologist Emily Hancock describes the psychological conflict facing the pre-pubescent girl succinctly: "While the boy's pubertal changes portend an increased ability to dominate, the girl's imply, recurrently, the mandate to nurture and the need for restraint. His experience of adolescence is one of extreme power, hers is one of increased risk."<sup>29</sup> Kriemhild is at the point where she articulates the inner conflict of the child at the verge of becoming a woman. Kriemhild's desire is to remain a beautiful innocent, a reflection of the medieval belief in the superiority of virginal women to that of women who lose their virginity while becoming part of adult society.

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<sup>29</sup>Emily Hancock, *The Girl Within* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1989) 20.

Gottfried Weber interprets Kriemhild's reaction to the interpretation of her dream in the following manner: "Kriemhilt, die Unangerührte, will keine Minne – um letzter Selbstbewahrung willen."<sup>30</sup> According to Weber, Kriemhild: "fürchtet sich nicht etwa vor der Liebe; was sie aber geradezu existenzgefährdend fürchtet, ist die Zerstörtheit aus geraubter Liebe ...Denn dies und nichts Geringeres besagt es, wenn sie *sus scæn' – âne recken minne* (15, 2-3) bis an ihr Ende bleiben möchte – nämlich seelenschön und bewahrt vor dem Untergang aus dem Liebessein ...'*schæne*': das Gegenteil von seelisch häßlich, also ungetroffen von den Entfesselungen des Dämonischen."<sup>31</sup> Weber places Kriemhild's beauty in the realm of the ideal abstract, from where she can only fall into the demonic. Although Weber sees the loss of the love as the provocation for the fall from grace, it is clear that Kriemhild wants to avoid marriage and the love of a man, and sees that love as a threat to her beauty.

Since Kriemhild's conventional beauty in the text never disappears, as has been discussed in Chapter One, that aspect of her beauty which she wants to keep might well be her virginity.

R. Howard Bloch discusses the problem of the attraction of the courtly virginal maiden for the courtly man: "to love, one must love perfection, or a virgin; to love a virgin is to love an abstraction; in loving an abstraction, one loves by definition that which is by definition unembodied; and finally, by

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<sup>30</sup> Gottfried Weber, *Das Nibelungenlied: Problem und Idee* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1963) 5.

<sup>31</sup> Weber, p. 6.

giving expression to the love object, one destroys it."<sup>32</sup> Kriemhild recognizes that to lose her virginity is to lose that strong aspect of herself which has placed her on a spiritual pedestal. To lose it is to fall into the realm of lesser women, the women whose lives are determined by their relationships to the husbands whom they marry.

Uote responds to Kriemhild's determination by stating her belief about the truth behind married life:

“Nu versprich ez niht ze sêre”, sprach aber ir muoter dô.  
 “soltu immer herzenliche zer werlde werden vrô,  
 daz gesciht von mannes minne. du wirst ein scoene wîp,  
 ob dir noch got gefüeget eins rehte guoten riters lîp.”  
 (Strophe 16).

“Do not forswear it too firmly,” rejoined her mother. “If you are ever to know heartfelt happiness it can only come from a man's love. If God should assign to you a truly worthy knight you will grow to be a beautiful woman.” (Hatto, p. 18)

Uote is here insisting that a woman's happiness comes solely through the love of a man. Not only that, a girl becomes a beautiful *woman* only insofar as she is married. The beauty that Kriemhild desires to keep for herself was that of a girl, a beauty that will transform itself into another kind of beauty when she marries.

This transformation from beautiful virginal child to beautiful married woman shows why Kriemhild's determination to hold onto her beauty disappears as the work progresses. The girl must become a woman with the passage of time. It is inevitable.

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<sup>32</sup> R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 153.

James A. Schulz stresses the importance of marriage as the defining act of adulthood for girls: "The noble culture of the Middle High German literary world is one in which there are very clear rites of passage: marriage or sexual relations for girls; knighting or less often, inheritance for boys. At marriage a female changes from *maget*, maiden, to *wîp*, which means wife, woman in general, and a woman who has had sexual relations: to get married is to become a woman."<sup>33</sup> Shulamith Shahar states: "Whereas the transition from the first to the second stage of childhood among girls who remained at home was less sharp than among boys, the transition from the second stage to the third was extremely abrupt. For most girls, *adolescencia* meant marriage, with all this implied."<sup>34</sup> The transition from child to woman takes place on the wedding night. Kriemhild's own marriage makes this change of status perfectly obvious. At her marriage to Siegfried, she is still "*daz minneclîche kind*" (Strophe 616), but the next evening, after her sexual initiation, she is "*în schœnes wîp*" (Strophe 661).

This prepubescent anxiety over marriage and the resultant womanhood is not limited to Kriemhild, but is also reflected in miniature later in the work. Gunther, Hagen and the brothers are on the way to Hungary, where they will meet their doom, and stop in Bechelâren, by Rüdiger's fiefdom. There they meet Rüdiger's beautiful daughter, and the resulting engagement proceeds swiftly. The daughter is first "*bî den kinden*" (Strophe 1672). Both deBoor and Hatto are uncomfortable with this

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<sup>33</sup> James A. Schulz. "Medieval Adolescence: The Claims of History and the Silence of German Narrative" in *Speculum* 66 (1991): 534.

<sup>34</sup> Shahar, p. 224.

terminology. De Boor footnotes *bî den kinden* as “bei den jungen Mädchen” without embellishment<sup>35</sup>, and Hatto evades the age of the girl by translating the passage as “with the young ladies.” That Rüdiger’s daughter is young enough to be a child seems difficult for them to accept, but the text does indeed place the daughter with the children. From what we have seen earlier, that is not unusual, but rather completely normal in the context of the early age of female marriage in the nobility, with the concurrent ending of the girl’s childhood on her wedding night.

The men decide that a marriage between the girl and Giselher would be a good idea in order to bind the two families together. It is only after the men have made their decision that the young girl is called over to their place. When asked whether she would like to marry Giselher, the young girl does not answer:

Dô man begunde vrâgen	die minneclîchen meit,
ob si den recken wolde,	ein teil was ez ir leit,
und dâhte doch ze nemene	den wætlîchen man.
si schamte sich der vrâge,	sô manic maget hât getân.
	(Strophe 1684)

When they asked the lovely girl whether she would have the warrior, she was somewhat adverse, though she meant to take the handsome fellow! – Like many another young woman she found the question embarrassing. (Hatto, p.209)

The young girl’s feeling in the matter of marriage is divided, a reflection of the ambivalence the idea of marriage caused her. The thought of marriage is both painful, alluring and embarrassing, an emotional mixture which the narrator assures us is common to many young maidens. The young girl’s

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<sup>35</sup> *Das Nibelungenlied*, p. 265.

reaction is therefore to be understood as normal, an ordinary reaction to a marriage betrothal. The conflicting emotions prevent her from speaking.

Rüdiger must intervene:

Ir riet ir vater Ruedigêr,	daz si spræche jâ
unt daz si in gerne næme.	vil schiere dô was dâ
mit sînen wîzen handen,	der si umbeslôz,
Gîselher der edele,	swie lützel si sîn doch genôz.
	(Strophe 1685).

Her father Rüdiger urged her to say 'yes' and to accept him willingly – and at once noble Giselher was there to take her with his white hands and kiss her – small joy she was to have of him. (Hatto, p. 209).

It is clear that the marriage is arranged for reasons other than love between the partners and that the girl must agree to it or shame her father in front of the whole court. The girl's consent is not quoted, but only implied by Giselher's subsequent attentions. Her sole action regarding her own future is agreement to a decision which has been made for her by her father. None of the men debating her future think twice about the possibility that the girl would refuse the marriage offer. The girl's refusal would have meant public humiliation of her family, much as Christina of Markyate humiliated her family by refusing to marry the man that they had chosen for her. Rüdiger and Gotelind's daughter, nameless like the young girl in *Der arme Heinrich*, is a normal courtly girl, who does not reject the necessity of wedlock when her family decides that it is time to see her suitably married.

Kriemhild is not as acquiescent to this limited scope of female action. Unlike Rüdiger's daughter, she does not quietly assent to the future that is laid out for her. When Uote presents the fairy tale of the prince who will,

with his love, transform her into a woman, she repeats emphatically her desire to avoid the lot of married women:

“Die rede lât belîben”, sprach si. “frouwe mîn.  
 ez ist an manegen wîben vil dicke worden scîn,  
 wie líebé mit leide ze jungest lônén kan.  
 ich soll si mîden beide sone kán mir nimmer missegân.”  
 (Strophe 17).

“Let us speak of other things, my lady. There are many examples of women who paid for happiness with sorrow in the end. I shall avoid both, and so I shall come to no harm.”  
 (Hatto, p. 18).

It is noteworthy that in the first rejoinder, Kriemhild refers to her mother as her “*liebiu muoter*”, where Uote’s speech has been a personal interpretation of Kriemhild’s dream. In this speech, however, she is reacting to Uote’s insistence on society’s rules by referring to her as “*frouwe mîn*,” indicating by this response that she is responding to her mother as a representative of society itself. Kriemhild’s “*liebe mit leide*” has the resonance of a proverb, and by avoiding the first she hopes to avoid the second. Unlike Rüdiger’s daughter, Kriemhild resents society’s norms when it comes to her future. Unlike Christina of Markyate, she does not attempt to flee the eventual restriction of marriage through devoting herself to a religious life, which is never an option in the *Nibelungenlied*, but remains at court until the day that Siegfried rides to her door. Kriemhild cannot envision a life other than that of the court, and must therefore learn to live with the inevitability of marriage, which her mother has shown to her.

Her anxiety over becoming a woman is larger than any implied future happiness as a married, and sexual, woman. She then suppresses these worrisome thoughts and returns to herself as a child at play:



that she is to marry. The fact that she sees the love potion as necessary reveals the concern that love is not usually found in an arranged marriage. Its potency in arousing love between two people who might not otherwise ever love each other would make life easier for the young woman who must submit to society's expectations.

Lavinia's mother in Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneasroman* is also concerned about her daughter's marriage possibilities. Unlike Uote and Queen Isolde, she is not concerned with her daughter's future happiness, but rather hopes to cement a political alliance. She is hoping that her daughter would turn her heart to Turnus, a knight who should make an appropriate match politically, since he is allied with Lavinia's father.

The Queen instructs her daughter in *minne*, showing that a girl can learn to love a man to whom she is to be wed, in order to convince the girl that she should turn her heart to Turnus:

“ob dû sâlliche  
unde wole welles tûn,  
tohter sô minne Turnûm.”  
“wâ mite sal ich in minnen?”  
“mit dem herzen und mit den sinnen.”  
“sal ich im mîn herze geben?”  
“jâ dû.” “wie soldich danne geleben?”  
“dune salt ez im sô geben niht.”  
“waz ob ez niemer geschiht?”  
“und waz, tohter, ob ez tût?”  
“frowe, wie mohte ich mînen mût  
an einen man gekêren?”  
“diu minne sal dichz lêren.”  
(Lines 261, 14-26).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Heinrich von Veldeke, *Eneasroman* Nach dem Text von Ludwig Ettmüller ed. Dieter Kartoschoke (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986).

“If you want to do well and be happy, daughter, love Turnus.”  
 “How might I love him?” “With your heart and your thoughts.”  
 “Shall I give him my heart?” “Yes.” “How might I live then?”  
 “You won’t give it to him in that way.” “But what if it never  
 happens?” “Well, daughter, what if it does?” “My lady, how can I  
 turn my mind to a man?” “Minne will teach you.” (my  
 translation).

Nelly Dürrenmatt compares Lavinia's mother to Uote: “Uote lehrt ihre Tochter schlicht und herzlich...Lavinias Mutter dagegen führt eine komplizierte Gefühlsanalyse durch, zergliedert kasuistisch-allegorisierend die Minne, ergründet und untersucht sie beinahe wissenschaftlich, zeigt, daß sie im Zergliedern eines Begriffes wohl geschult ist. Uote besitzt gemessen an Lavinias Mutter wenig von der Kunst höfischer Konversation.”<sup>37</sup>

In spite of her high education and nobility, Lavinia's mother changes from concerned parent to witch when Lavinia falls in love with Eneas. She attempts to thwart the marriage in any way possible. In this manner she is similar to Christina of Markyate's parents, who are more concerned with proper marriage than the good of the child. Lavinia's mother can never forgive her daughter for going against her wishes, curses her daughter and her husband, and finally dies a bitter death:

mit grôzen rouwen si lach  
 ich ne weiz wie manegen tach,  
 unz ir der tôt inz herze quam,  
 der ir den lîb unsanfte nam.  
 (Lines 344, 1-4).

With great regret she lay, I don't know for how many days, until death came into her heart and viciously took her life. (my translation).

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<sup>37</sup> Nelly Dürrenmatt, *Das Nibelungenlied im Kreis der höfischen Dichtung* (Bern: Verlag Herbert Lang & Cie., 1945) 185-86.

The mother's concern transforms itself into a bitter hatred for the child who has chosen to flaunt her wishes. Her hatred consumes her, so that she dies from the seething emotions that control her. Her death frees the daughter and allows her to prosper in the kingdom of her father with the husband of her choice.

Grimhild, the mother of Gudrun in the *Völsungasaga*, also acts with the political interests of the family having higher precedence than that of its individual members. Grimhild is introduced to the audience in negative terms: "*Grimhilldr var grimhugud kona*"<sup>38</sup> "Grimhild was a grim-minded woman."<sup>39</sup> When Sigurd rides into Gjuki's hall, Grimhild realizes the advantages that such a match could have:

Þat finnr Grimhilldr, hve mikit Sigurdr ann Brynhildi, ok hve oppt hann getr hennar. Hugsar fyrir ser, at þat veri meire gipta, at hann stadfestizt þar ok ette dottur Giuka konugs, ok sa, at einge matte vid hann iafnazt, sa ok, hvert traust at honum var, ok havdi ofr fiar, miklu meira, enn menn visse demi til.<sup>40</sup>

Grimhild perceived how much Sigurd loved Brynhild and how often he mentioned her. She thought it would be more fortunate if he settled there and married the daughter of King Gjuki. She saw that no one could equal Sigurd and realized the importance of his support. Besides, he had exceptional wealth, far exceeding what men had known before.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Völsungasaga ok Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*, ed. Magnus Olson SUGNL 36 (Copenhagen: S. L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1906-08) 61.

<sup>39</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon-Slayer* intro. and trans. Jesse L. Byock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 76.

<sup>40</sup> *Völsungasaga*, p. 64.

<sup>41</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs*, p. 78.

Grimhild does not ask her daughter whether or not she would be interested in marrying Sigurd, nor has Gudrun expressed any interest in the possibility. Grimhild has assessed Sigurd's worth as a man, with his strength and wealth as possessions which she would like to see kept at her family's hall. The only way to keep Sigurd and his wealth would be marrying him into the family. Since Sigurd's heart is set on Brynhild, a fact which Grimhild notices but does not take into account as a portent of future trouble, Grimhild prepares a potion of forgetfulness, which turns Sigurd's mind from his true beloved.

Next Grimhild does not go to Gudrun and ask her if she would marry Sigurd, but instead approaches her husband with the suggestion of offering Gudrun to Sigurd against standard convention:

Ok eitt sinn geck Grimhilldr fyrir Giuka konung ok lagde hendr um hals honom ok melkti: "Her er nu kominn enn meste kappe, er finnast man i verolldu. Vere at honum mikit traust. Gipt honum dottur þina med miklu fe ok sliku riki, sem han vill, ok meti hann her ynde nema." Konungr svarar: "Fatitt er þat, at bioda fram dettr sinar, enn meire vegr er at bioda honum, enn adrir bide."<sup>42</sup>

And one time Grimhild went to King Gjuki, put her arms around his neck, and said: "The most valiant hero that can be found in the world has come here. There would be much support in him. Give him your daughter in marriage along with many riches and such power as he wants, and he might be able to find pleasure here." The king replied: "It is a rare thing to offer one's daughter, but there is more honor in offering her to him than in having others propose marriage."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Völsungasaga*, p. 65.

<sup>43</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs*, p. 79.

Grimhild appeals to the advantage of having support of such a man as Sigurd for the sake of the kingdom, not for the sake of Gudrun's happiness. When Gjuki eventually offers Gudrun to Sigurd in marriage, her opinion on the matter is not asked, nor is it required.

After Gudrun and Sigurd are wed, Grimhild hints to Gunnar that he should take Brynhild as a bride, a suggestion to which Gunnar agrees. It is noteworthy that Grimhild is the initiator of both Gudrun and Gunnar's marriages, and that she does not take into consideration the allegiance that Sigurd already owes Brynhild. Her potions aid Gutthorm in killing Sigurd once the truth comes out.

Later in the work, Grimhild again initiates a marriage. She brings a potion to Gudrun, to help her forget her sorrow upon the death of Sigurd, and then she requests that her daughter marry Atli, who, like Sigurd, is known for his wealth:

Þa melli Grimhilldr, er hun fann Gudrunu: "Vel verde þer ,  
dottir. Ek gef þer gull ok allzkonar grippe at þiggia eptir þinn  
fedr, dyrliga hringa ok arsal hynskra meyia, þeirra er  
kurteisastar eru, þa er þer betr þinn madr. S þann skal þig  
gipta Atla konungi innum rika. Þa muntu rada hans aude. Ok  
lat eigi frendr þina fyrir sakir eins mannz ok gior helldr, sem  
ver bidium."<sup>44</sup>

When she met Gudrun, Grimhild said: "Good fortune to you, daughter. I give you gold and all kinds of treasure from your father's legacy, precious rings and bed hangings of the most gracious Hunnish maids. Thus will you be compensated for your husband. Then you will be given in marriage to King Atli the Powerful. You will rule over his wealth. But do not abandon

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<sup>44</sup> *Völsungasaga*, p. 88.

your kinsmen for the sake of one man; instead, you must do as we ask."<sup>45</sup>

. Again, Grimhild is acting for the sake of the kin and not for the sake of Gudrun, who does not want to remarry. Grimhild insists that Gudrun marry in spite of Gudrun's revelation of the harm that will do the family and in the end the marriage comes about:

Hennar ord stoduz sva mikit, at þetta vard fram at ganga.  
Gudrun mellti: "Þetta mun verda fram at ganga, ok þo at minum uvilia, ok mun þat lit til yndiz, helldr til harma."<sup>46</sup>

Grimhild's words carried such weight that this had to come about. Gudrun said: "This must happen then, although it be against my will. And it will lead to little joy. Rather, it will bring grief."<sup>47</sup>

Grimhild uses her influence over her daughter so that her daughter enters into a loveless marriage that she knows will end in a disaster. Grimhild, although warned of the disaster, insists on a marriage that she believes will add status and riches to her family. The daughter is a pawn in a larger family dynamic. Although Gudrun's wishes in this matter are clear, the mother refuses to take them into account, and the dutiful daughter celebrates her wedding day.

Unlike these stories, where the mother figure uses her will against her daughter's will with varying degrees of success, the relationship between Uote and Kriemhild is not severed, neither with Kriemhild's marriage nor

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<sup>45</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs*, p. 95.

<sup>46</sup> *Völsungasaga*, p. 89.

<sup>47</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs*, p. 95.

later after the death of Siegfried. The tie that binds them together fades into the background but is never totally lost.

Yet Kriemhild has internalized the role in life which Uote set forth before her. She marries, she moves to her husband's country, she takes up the role that is required of her. She bears a son (Strophe 715) and takes over Sieglinde's position upon the latter's much-mourned death (Strophe 717). In all of ten years as a married woman in her husband's country, she is not described as an actor in these events, nor does she speak about their effects on her personality. Like the young girl in *Hartmann*, her married life is played out behind the scenes of the story's action.

Finally the messenger comes to bring the invitation to the festival at her brother's court. Kriemhild literally springs back into life: "*si spranc von einem bette, / dar an si rúowénde lac*" (Strophe 740) "the Queen at once rose to her feet from the couch where she was resting" (Hatto, p. 102).

Among the beloved names from home, the messenger includes Uote as one who is eager to see her:

"iuwer muoter Uote	diu hât iuch gemant,
Gêrnôt unt Gîselher,	ir sult in niht versagen.
daz ir in sît sô verre,	daz hoer' ich tãgelîche klagen."
	(Strophe 752).

"Your mother Uote, and Gernot and Giselher, have bidden me urge you not to refuse them ... I have heard them lamenting daily that you live so far away." (Hatto, p. 103).

The messenger adds emphasis to the relationship between Kriemhild and Uote – Uote's position as her mother is more important than Gernot's and Giselher's positions as her brothers. Uote is one of the inviters and the messenger stresses that fact. The connection between mother and daughter



seen as a duty or obligation by Giselher, is stronger than the love for her son. Of course, the plot calls for her to remain at Worms, as A. T. Hatto points out: "If Kriemhild stays in Worms with her son, Hagen will surely destroy him. If she goes to the Netherlands to rear him she will walk out of the picture."<sup>48</sup>

It might be worth considering whether Kriemhild's apparent lack of concern for her two sons is a remnant of the child-murderer which is seen in the Old Norse versions of the story.

The Old Norse Gudrun of the *Elder Edda* murders her sons by Atli, in order to take revenge for her brothers. She not only kills them, but serves them to Atli as dinner. Her revenge is completed once she murders Atli himself.

Atli's sons are not the only children for whom she shows little love. She also sends her sons by a later marriage on a revenge mission from which they most likely will not return. The revenge mission is instigated after King Jormunrek has killed her only daughter Svanhild, who also is her only child by Sigurd. Gudrun has a closer tie to her now dead daughter than she does to the sons who are still living. In her lament in the *Elder Edda*, *Guðrúnarhvot*, Gudrun expresses her love for her daughter:

"Enn um Svanhildi	sáto þyiar,
er ec minna barna	bazt fullhugðac;
svá var Svanhildr	í sál mínom,
sem væri sœmleitr	sólar geisli." <sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> A. T. Hatto, "Medieval German" in *Traditions of Heroic and Epic Poetry* ed. A. T. Hatto (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 1980) 173-74.

<sup>49</sup> *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst Verwandten Denkmälern* ed. Gustav Neckel, 5th edition ed. Hans Kuhn (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1983) 266.

“Bondwomen sat                      around Swanhild  
of all my children                    the one I most cherished,  
my daughter Swanhild                shining in my hall,  
as lovely to see                        as a ray of sunlight.”<sup>50</sup>

Her love for her daughter is compelling in its heartfelt simplicity. The loss of the daughter adds a dimension of tragedy to a life filled with grief and pain.

In the *Nibelungenlied*, Kriemhild has no daughters. The mother-daughter bond of love which ties her closely to Uote cannot be extended to another generation. It is noteworthy that the daughter by Sigurd in the Eddic versions is replaced by a son in the *Nibelungenlied*. Kriemhild never laments the loss of a child as Gudrun does, for her sons belong more with their fathers than to her. It is Etzel, not Kriemhild, who boasts of the worth of his son before the assembled court. Kriemhild is blamed for bringing the son into the assembly in the first place, exposing him to Hagen's wrath for political reasons of revenge. Would she have so easily sacrificed a daughter?

There is one other scene between Kriemhild and Uote before the end of the *Nibelungenlied*. Once more marriage is the subject of the conversation. The marriage offer from Etzel has arrived, and, again, as in the first chapter of the *Nibelungenlied*, Kriemhild does not wish to re-enter the state of matrimony. Unlike the first episode, here Kriemhild is no longer a young, inexperienced girl, but a mature woman, a widow. Her mother is not the only person urging her to re-marry, as her brothers have already decided that she should accept the proposal (Hagen being the only dissenter) and Giselher becomes the brother who brings this desire to Kriemhild.

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<sup>50</sup>*Poems of the Vikings: The Elder Edda* trans. Patricia Terry (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merril Educational Publishing, 1969) 235.

After hearing Rüdiger's message, Kriemhild consults with her mother and Giselher. Giselher reminds her of Etzel's power, but Kriemhild rejects his power as the basis for remarriage.

Kriemhild is no longer the confident young maiden secure in her beauty and filled with confidence. Her reasons for not remarrying are very different:

Si sprach: "mîn lieber bruoder, zwiu rætestu mir daz?  
 klagen unde weinen mir immer zæme baz.  
 wie sold' ich vor recken dâ ze hove gân?  
 wart mîn lîb ie schoene, des bin ich âné getân."  
 (Strophe 1245).

"Why do you ask me to do this, dear brother?" she asked. "For me, weeping and wailing will always be more seemly. How could I appear at court under the eyes of the warriors? – If I ever had any beauty I have lost it quite." (Hatto, p. 160).

This Kriemhild has condemned herself to grieving isolation, an isolation which is reinforced by her belief that she, in her grief, has been deprived of her beauty, and is therefore no longer worthy to be seen at court. At this juncture, Kriemhild does not want to reenter society as a wife, but prefers to be in a situation for which society has no room, neither a religious recluse nor a married woman, not under the control of any male authority.

Then Uote speaks, appealing to a conventional idea of marriage as a cure for female unhappiness:

Dô sprach diu vrouwe Uote ir lieben tochter zuo:  
 "swaz dîne bruoder râten, liebez kint, daz tuo.  
 volge dînen friunden, sô mag dir wol geschehen.  
 ich hân dich sô lange mit grôzem jâmér gesehen."  
 (Strophe 1246).

"Dear child," said Uote to her beloved daughter, "do as your brothers counsel you. Take your kinsmen's advice, then things

will turn out well for you. I have seen you grieving and lamenting for such a long time now." (Hatto, p. 160.)

Although Kriemhild has changed dramatically from the first conversation on marriage to this last one, Uote's opinion has not changed in the least. She still regards the basic idea of marriage in accordance with familial wishes the foundation for a happy future. She wants Kriemhild to accept her brothers' plans for her future, and this time Kriemhild does not openly disagree with her mother's statements.

She considers briefly the shame of marrying a heathen, but this does not inform her decision to marry one way or another; it is a societal "should" which she dismisses after only cursory rumination. It is only in a conversation with Rüdiger that she changes her mind about remarriage. Rüdiger has reminded her that her beauty can only be used for a limited time, and she should therefore grasp her opportunity while she can:

dô sprach der marcgrâve: "daz wære missetân.  
zuiu wolder ir verderben      einen alsô schœnen lîp?  
ir muget noch mit êren      werden guotes mannes wîp."  
(Strophe 1254).

"That would be very wrong – why let such beauty fade? You can still – and with great honour – be wife to a good husband."  
(Hatto, p. 161).

This appeal to Kriemhild's vanity has no effect. It is only when Rüdiger promises loyalty that Kriemhild at last consents to marry Etzel.

In leave-taking, Uote's sorrow is shown by her weeping:

dâ wart vil michel weinen      von vrîundén getân.  
Uote diu vil rîche      unde manic schœne meit,  
die zeigeten, daz in wære      nâch vroun Kriemhilde leit.  
(Strophe 1285).

This occasioned much weeping between friends. – Noble Uote and her many comely maidens showed by their demeanour that they would miss the lady Kriemhild. (Hatto, p. 164).

The sorrow felt by Uote when she sees her daughter leave to marry lies in the knowledge that the two never expect to see each other again, as that was the expected outcome of such a distant alliance.

Uote, despite her queenship, has no real power to use on her daughter's behalf. She can only advise, but she cannot influence the outcome of events that befall Kriemhild. She hopes that Kriemhild's life will follow her own, in that marriage should bring her happiness. When this fails, Uote cannot think of another solution besides remarriage. Kriemhild's own position against marriage cannot change Uote's belief in the power of that institution.

Kriemhild herself cannot challenge her mother's insistence on the importance of marriage. She follows the role that her mother has presented her, in spite of her own desires to the contrary, as there are no other options open to her. She is a royal woman who will be given away in marriage, and she accepts that fate in the end after her first childhood protests.

The bond between the two lasts throughout the work. The women are in their places as society requires, but they are free to show each other concern and care. The future is bleak, but the tie is not severed. Uote's helplessness in the face of her daughter's fate is matched equally by her love.

## Chapter Three

### Kings and Queens

The most dramatic shift in loyalty in the *Nibelungenlied* is Kriemhild's turn from love to hatred of her royal brothers, Gunther, Gernot and Giselher. Kriemhild's relationship to her brothers at first is affectionate and loyal, as she obediently follows the wishes of her brother the king, but as the epic progresses, Kriemhild allows her brothers, even the brother whom she loves best, to be destroyed in the conflagration at the end of the story.

Kriemhild's betrayal of her brothers is seen as the heart of the story according to Saxo Grammaticus, one of the earliest writers to mention the theme: "Therefore, sedulously rehearsing the well-known perfidy of Grimhild against her brothers in the words of a very polished lay, he attempted to inspire in him a comparable fear through the example of this notorious deceit."<sup>1</sup> The *Þiðreks saga* provides a story similar to Saxo's account, in that Grimhild's betrayal of her brothers is grimmer than any other version of this material. On the other hand, Old Norse works such as the *Eddas* and the *Völsungasaga* eliminate the idea of fraternal betrayal and instead place Gudrun on the side of her brothers, loyally providing them with a warning

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore M. Andersson, *A Preface to the Nibelungenlied* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987) 254.

and with her assistance, effecting her final revenge on her husband Atli for their sake.<sup>2</sup>

The *Nibelungenlied* presents a Kriemhild between these extremes of gruesome betrayal and family loyalty. Kriemhild's attitude towards her brothers shifts in a meaningful context. With the introduction of the conflict over the Nibelungen treasure, the *hort*, the theme becomes familial betrayal, for the stealing of the treasure is the last act in a series of smaller injustices that her brothers had already perpetrated. The struggle over the treasure is not just a fight for wealth, but a symbol of the lack of loyalty which at the beginning of the work marked the relationship between Kriemhild and her brothers.

Gunther, the oldest brother, is king and guardian over Kriemhild at various points in the development of the work. As king, he is expected to act justly and preserve the law for the benefit of his subjects. In return, his subjects are to obey his commands freely and remain loyal to his person. Edward Peters comments on the idea of the good king versus the useless king: "Royal expressions of piety took the form of concern for the law and for justice, and from this concern came the ecclesiastical emphasis upon the royal protection of those who were not strong enough to enforce their own claims for justice: widows, clerics, orphans, and paupers. The king who fulfilled these duties was *misericors, clemens, mitis*."<sup>3</sup> Peters contrasts this

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<sup>2</sup> This heroic aspect of the Gudrun figure will be discussed in Chapter Five at length.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Peters, *The Shadow King: Rex Inutilis in Medieval Law and Literature 751-1327* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970) 94.

with the useless king: "The *rex inutilis*, like the useless prelate or the negligent Christian man, is one who has failed to create for himself a moral personality, who has retained his individual human weakness instead of acquiring abstract moral traits external to himself."<sup>4</sup> Gunther's characterization shows him to be more of a *rex inutilis*, who never overcomes his insecurity and weakness. This fatal flaw leads to the destruction of the royal house as inevitably as Kriemhild's desire for revenge, which arises through Gunther's ineptitude.

Karl Heinz Ihlenburg sees the weaknesses of both Gunther and Etzel as a key element in the tragedy: "In beiden Königen ... erweist sich also das höfisch-humane Wollen gegenüber den Kräften der feudalen Wirklichkeit als nicht stark genug, als zu schwach, um dem Frieden eine dauerhafte Geltung verschaffen zu können."<sup>5</sup> Ihlenburg sees in the *Nibelungenlied* a reflection of the criticism made against German kings of the period: "Die Situation der Entstehungszeit des Nibelungenliedes war durch die Existenz eines schwachen Königtums und eines mächtigen Hochadels gekennzeichnet. Diese geschichtliche Gegebenheit stand im Widerspruch zur geschichtlichen Notwendigkeit: Das Königtum, das im Hinblick auf die Entwicklung der deutschen Nation das Progressive gegenüber den Sonderinteressen des hohen Lehnsadels darstellte, mußte auch über die Macht verfügen, sich die Partikulargewalten unterzuordnen, deren Eigenbestrebung das Historisch-

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<sup>4</sup> Peters, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> Ihlenburg, p.146.

Rückschrittliche waren.”<sup>6</sup> Gunther himself relies heavily on Hagen, who serves him as a relative, a subject and an advisor. Hagen has his own political agenda, which he puts into place through playing on Gunther's weaknesses. Gunther, who chooses to follow Hagen's advice even when it goes against his ethical principles and when it harms Kriemhild, who is also a family member, brings upon himself, his brothers and his men a death which could have been avoided through just, righteous leadership.

The royal family should be bound together with feelings of affection and blood ties which should inspire *triuwe*. Francis G. Gentry explains the importance of *triuwe*: “Since the feudal system was based on that of kinship and proposed to meet the same needs, it is not surprising to find that *triuwe* is also a fundamental concept within the kinship system. In the *Nibelungenlied* this is illustrated primarily between Kriemhild and Gunther or Hagen before Sivrit's murder. After Sivrit's death, Giselher, Gernot and Uote are the ones mentioned most frequently in this connection.”<sup>7</sup> The collapse of family obligations towards Kriemhild forces her out of the courtly society at Worms both through the murder of her husband and through the theft of the treasure, her only remaining independent means of wealth. Without the treasure, Kriemhild remarries against her initial desires, turning her against her family for good.

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<sup>6</sup> Ihlenburg, 147.

<sup>7</sup> Francis G. Gentry, *Triuwe and Vriunt in the Nibelungenlied* (Amsterdam: Rodopi N. V., 1975) 23.

At the beginning of the work, relations between the family members are good. Kriemhild's attitude towards her brothers is a respect based on her family tie to them and to their kingship.

Kriemhild's love for her brother Gunther is shown most clearly during the scene where Gunther is preparing to win Brünhild for a bride. Nelly Dürrenmatt speaks about the importance of this love in the development of Kriemhild's character: "Die Liebe zu Gunther wirkt als ein Vorklang zur mächtigen Liebe zu Siegfried."<sup>8</sup> But the love that Kriemhild has for Gunther is also important in contrast to her later feelings. She loves Gunther for his own sake, while at the same time she is aware of his faults.

The scene begins with Gunther's desire to win Brünhild as a wife. Although Siegfried at first warns him against it, Gunther is not easily dissuaded. Noting that a new set of clothes will be important in order to display their worthiness at Brünhild's court, Gunther at first wants to go to his mother in order to have clothes prepared for the journey:

Dô sprach der degen guoter:	“sô wil ich selbe gân
zuo mîner lieben muoter,	ob ich erbitten kan,
daz uns ir scœnen meide	helfen præiven kleit,
diu wir tragen mit êren	für die hêrlîchen meit.”
	(Strophe 345).

“Then I shall go to my dear mother,” answered the good knight, “and see if I could obtain leave for those pretty girls of hers to help us to get ready such clothes as we can wear with distinction when we appear before the noble Brunhild.” (Hatto, p. 55).

Here Gunther is recognizing the importance of female wealth in his own ambitions, and is eager to turn to his mother for material assistance. Uote is

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<sup>8</sup> Dürrenmatt, p. 187.

known for her generosity, which is a quality revealed in all the queens of her generation. The royal women of the earlier generation, Uote, Sieglinde and Helche, all possess independent wealth which they use to strengthen and further their own and their family interests. The ideal of female generosity is shown as a positive sign of a functioning society. Before Gunther makes his suggestion to acquire aid from his mother, Uote has already displayed her generosity in the fifth *âventiure*.

After the successful war with the Saxons, the victors and the conquered gather together in Worms. Queen Uote's hospitality welcomes both conquerors and conquered alike. She is rich in liberality:

Uote diu vil rîche	diu mære hôrte sagen
von den stolzen recken,	die dâ solden komen.
dô wart ûz der valde	vil rîcher kléidér genomen.

Durch ir kinde liebe	hiez si bereiten kleit,
dâ mite wart gezieret	manec fróuwe und manec meit
und vil der jungen recken	ûz Búrgónden lant.
ouch hiez si vil den vremden	prüeven hêrlích gewant.
	(Strophes 263-264).

When queenly Uote heard of the proud knights who had been invited, she had some magnificent fabrics taken from the chest and clothes got ready for love of her dear children; and with these many ladies, maidens and young warriors of Burgundy were adorned; but she had many fine robes made up for the strangers, too. (Hatto, p. 45)

Uote's generosity is magnanimous, extending even to former enemies. Uote acts *durch ir kinde liebe*, for the love of her children. The court is supposed to think kindly of her offspring due to her showering of her largess. Her generosity is a force which creates amity between enemies and brings harmony to the court.

Uote's liberality is a trait which she shares with Queen Sieglinde, the mother of Siegfried. Queen Sieglinde, giving away presents at her son's knighting ceremony, dispenses valuable red gold:

Siglint diu rîche	nâch alten siten pflac
durch ir sunes liebe	teilen rôtez golt.
(Strophe 40)	

...in honor of her son, Sieglind dispensed gifts of red gold, in accordance with ancient custom. (Hatto, p. 22).

Sieglinde acts to insure her son a place in his future kingdom through the practice of generosity *nâch alten siten*. The passage reveals a queen who is secure in her possessions and free to dispense them as she would. The phrase *nâch alten siten* points to the fact that this ideal was already in effect long before Sieglinde's day, but also alludes to the possibility that the practice was no longer followed at the time the poet committed the work to parchment. Sieglinde's generosity is positive and for the benefit of someone other than herself, her son and the future king.

Messengers benefit from the generosity of queens. When a messenger comes with the news that Siegfried and Kriemhild are about to enter Xanten, Sieglinde shows her joy through generosity:

Dô gap diu vrouwe Sigelint	vîl manigen samît rôet,
sîlber unt gólt daz swære,	daz was ir botenbrôt.
(Strophe 705)	

...Queen Sieglind gave the messenger many lengths of red samite, silver and heavy gold, so pleased she was to hear it [the news]. (Hatto, p. 97).

Red gold is again the gift of choice from this powerful woman. Although both Sigmund and Siglinde hear the news of Siegfried's return, it is the queen and not the king who rewards the messenger handsomely.

When Gunther suggests going to Uote for aid in preparing for the journey to Brünhild's country, Hagen counters his suggestion with the idea of seeking Kriemhild's help instead:

Dô sprach von Tronege Hagene	mit hêrlîchen siten:
“waz welt ir iuwer muoter	sôlher dienste biten?
lât iuwer swester hœren,	wes ir habet muot:
sô wirdet iu ir dienst	zuo dirre hovereise guot.”
	(Strophe 346).

“Why do you ask your mother for such services?” asked Hagen of Troneck in his lordly way. “Tell your sister what you have in mind – her help will turn out well for you on this visit to Brunhild's court.” (Hatto, p. 55).

Gunther acts on Hagen's suggestion, and the wooers appear before Kriemhild and request her help. Kriemhild does not hesitate, but readily agrees to assist her brother:

Dô sprach diu juncfrouwe:	“vil lieber bruoder mîn,
swaz der mînen helfe	dar an kan gesîn,
des bring' ich iuch wol innen,	daz ich iu bin bereit.
versagt iu ander iemen,	daz wære Kriemhilde leit.
Ir sult mich, riter edele,	niht sórgénde biten,
ir sult mir gebieten	mit hêrlîchen siten.
swaz iu von mir gevalle,	des bin ich iu bereit,
und tuon es willeclîche,” sprach diu wûnneclîche meit.	
	(Strophes 355-356).

“I shall leave you in no doubt, dear brother, that I am ready to do anything within my power for you,” answered the young maiden, “and I should be very sorry if any other were to deny you. You must not ask so timidly, but command me as my lord,

since I am at your service for whatever you care to ask of me. I shall do it gladly," the charming girl concluded. (Hatto, p. 56).

Kriemhild's readiness to supply her brother with the clothes he needs for his journey shows her affection as well as her loyalty. She reminds her brother that he does not need to ask her for her aid, but that he, as king, should command the help that he requires. D. G. Mowatt and Hugh Sacker interpret her willingness to aid her brother in a negative light: "Kriemhilde's insistence (unparalleled in the poem) on her submissiveness may be correlated with her self-imposed isolation ...one might want to call her repressed ... she asks to be ordered about."<sup>9</sup> I do not see this scene as a representation of an inhibited Kriemhild, but rather a scene which clarifies the relationship between Kriemhild and her brother as society would have it. Kriemhild's brother is king, and deserves the respect due to a king. With her speech, Kriemhild accepts her role in society as a subject of her king and brother, to whom she owes subservience. She reassures him that her wealth will be shared with him willingly, which demonstrates that she gives him the clothes out of love and not solely because he demands it of her. This scene reenforces Kriemhild's loyalty, a loyalty that will be ill-rewarded by her brother.

In this matter, Kriemhild is following the ideal of queenly generosity. She fulfills her brother's request by producing goods of great value. The value of the clothes is increased since Kriemhild herself took part in their creation and did not leave the sewing of the clothes to her handmaidens:

Die árâbîschen sîden, wîz alsô der snê  
unt von Zázamanc der guoten, grûen' alsam der klê,

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<sup>9</sup> Mowatt and Sacker, pp. 58-59.

dar in si leiten steine;      daz wurden guotiu kleit.  
 selbe sneit si Kriemhilt,    diu vil hêrlîchen meit.  
 (Strophe 362)

They threaded precious stones into snow-white silk from Arabia or into silk from Zazamanc as green as clover, making fine robes, while Kriemhild cut the cloth herself. (Hatto, p. 56).

The wealth of the cloth used defines not only the social position of the royal family, but also Kriemhild's desire to outfit her brothers with the best.

Kriemhild has not stinted on the materials. The resulting clothes reflect visibly the affection that she holds for her brother Gunther and the knights that will accompany him:

Von Márroch ûz dem lande      und ouch von Lybîân  
 die aller besten sîden,      die ie mêr gewan  
 deheines küniges künne,      der heten si genuoc.  
 wol lie daz scînen Kriemhilt,    daz si in holden willen truoc.  
 (Strophe 364).

The ladies were supplied with the best Moroccan and Libyan silk that a royal family had ever acquired, and Kriemhild let it be seen clearly that these knights enjoyed her favour. (Hatto, p. 57).

*“daz si in holden willen truoc”* shows that Kriemhild herself holds the knights high in her esteem. Kriemhild is actively displaying her affection through the wealth of the garments that she has provided.

Kriemhild's concern does not stop with the provision of clothes for the journey, but she also dispenses advice which reflects her doubts about the wooing of Brünhild as a bride for her brother:

Si sprach:“vil lieber bruoder,      ir möhtet noch bestân  
 unt wurbet ander frouwen      (daz hiez' ich wol getân),  
 dâ ir sô sêre enwâge      stüende niht der lîp.  
 ir mugt hie nâher vinden      ein alsô hôchgeborene wîp.”  
 (Strophe 372).

“Dearest brother,” Kriemhild said, “if you would stay here, where your life would not be in so much danger, and woo other ladies, I should say it were well done. You can find her equal nearer home.” (Hatto, p. 57).

Kriemhild, concerned for her brother's safety, unintentionally reveals Gunther's weakness. Kriemhild knows that, left to his own devices, her brother cannot truly claim Brünhild for himself.

Kriemhild is well-informed of Brünhild's prowess and turns to Siegfried to insure protection for her brother:

Si sprach: “herre Sîvrit, lât iu bevolhen sîn  
 ûf triuwe und ûf genâde den lieben bruoder mîn,  
 daz im iht gewerre in Prünhilde lant.”  
 daz lobte der vil küene in froun Kriemhilde hant.  
 (Strophe 374).

“Lord Siegfried,” said Kriemhild, “let me commend my brother to your loyal protection so that no harm befalls him in Brunhild's land.”  
 The dauntless man gave Lady Kriemhild his hand and swore it.  
 (Hatto, p. 58).

Although Kriemhild recognizes that Gunther on his own would be no match for the strong and powerful Brünhild, she knows that Gunther will win the bride that he desires with Siegfried's help.

In Islant, the men deceive Brünhild into believing that Gunther is the stronger man, although the truth of the matter is that Siegfried is the better and stronger of the two. Gunther is given a sham façade fit for the king that he is in name only, but the real power lies in his loyal companion.

Once Brünhild has been won, she must make her preparations for departure to her husband's new country. Her departure, found at the end of the eighth *âventiure*, is a perverse twist to the ideal of feminine generosity.

Brünhild wants to reward her loyal subjects before she departs her fatherland forever:

Dô sprach diu küniginne: "ich wold' im wesen holt,  
 der geteilen kunde           mîn silber unt mîn golt  
 mîn unt des küniges gesten,   des ich sô vil hân."  
 (Strophe 513).

"I should be obliged to anyone who could dole out my treasure of both silver and gold among my guests and the King's," said the Queen. (Hatto, p.73).

Dancwart, Hagen's brother, volunteers to help her, and she entrusts him with her property, which he dispenses all too liberally:

Wol bî hundert pfunden           gap er âne zal.  
 genuoge in rîcher wæte           giengen vor dem sal,  
 die nie dâ vor getruogen       sô hêrlîchiu kleit.  
 daz gevriesch diu küneginne:   ez was ir wærlîche leit.  
 (Strophe 516).

Over and over again he bestowed a hundred pounds or more at a time; and many who had never worn such fine clothes in their lives walked past that hall arrayed in splendid robes. But when the Queen came to hear of it, believe me, she was piqued. (Hatto, p. 74).

Losing so much wealth at once is a shock to Brünhild. "*Ez was ir wærlîche leit*" ("it caused her real suffering", my trans; Hatto's use of 'piqued' seems to diminish the extent of her feelings) shows that the loss of her wealth was no small matter. She feels keenly the severe loss of her paternally inherited wealth. Since she feels that she has been wronged in this matter, Brünhild addresses Gunther, the king and her husband-to-be. Gunther is obliged to be her protector, since she is now under his authority:

Dô sprach diu vrouwe hêre:       "her künic, ich hetes rât,  
 daz iuwer kamerære           mir wil der mînen wât  
 lâzen niht belîben;           er swendet gar mîn golt.

der iz noch understüende,            dem wold ich immer wesen holt.

Er gît sô rîche gâbe,            jâ wænet des der degen,  
 ich habe gesant nâch tôde:        ich wils noch lenger pflegen.  
 ouch trûwe iz wol verswenden,    daz mir mîn vater lie."  
 (Strophes 517-18).

"My lord King," said that proud lady, "I could do without your treasurer's generosity, since he intends not to leave me a stitch and is frittering away all my gold. I should be eternally obliged to any who would put a stop to it. This knight is lavishing such gifts that he must fancy I am thinking of dying! But I mean to keep my money and trust *myself* to squander my inheritance."  
 (Hatto, p. 74, italics his).

Brünhild claims the use of her own money, which is hers by inheritance, and which she intends to keep under her control. Brünhild sees the loss of so much of her property as the equivalent of a distribution of property common at funerals. Wealth may be given in abundance while a person is alive to demonstrate their generous disposition, but losing all the wealth shows that for the Burgundians, Brünhild as an individual is as good as dead. Her property is distributed as if she will no longer have the use of it as a living person.

In spite of the fact that Brünhild has made her claim directly to her overlord and husband, Gunther does not answer her claim himself. Instead, Hagen speaks in the name of the king:

Dô sprach von Tronege Hagene: "vrouwe, iu sî geseit,  
 ez hât der künec von Rîne            gólt únde kleit  
 alsô vil ze gebene,            daz wir des haben rât,  
 daz wir von hinnen fûeren        iht der Prünhilde wât."  
 (Strophe 519).

"My lady," said Hagen of Troneck, "let me tell you that the King of the Rhenish lands has so much gold and so many clothes to

bestow that there is no need for us to take any clothes of yours away with us." (Hatto, p. 74).

Hagen stresses that Gunther has property of his own and that there is no need for her to bring hers. Because Gunther's wealth is so extensive, Brünhild's wealth is no longer necessary. Underneath these words lies the idea that Brünhild's wealth in her own hands is a threat that must be defused. Without her wealth, Brünhild has little power in her own name.

Brünhild knows that she cannot dispense Gunther's wealth as freely as her own. She realizes that to enter Gunther's land with no property will bring her shame and loss of status, and she wants to act as a queen should, that is, be able to bestow gifts on her new subjects. The ability to be generous is a necessary component of her reputation as queen. She therefore insists on retaining some of her own property:

"Nein, durch mîne liebe,"	sprach diu künegîn.
"lâzet mich erfüllen	zweinzec leitschrîn
von golde unt von sîden,	daz geben sol mîn hant,
sô wir komen übere	in daz Guntheres lant."
	(Strophe 520).

"I disagree," replied the Queen. "Do me the pleasure of letting me fill twenty trunks with silk and gold, so that I may give it away myself when we have crossed over to Gunther's land." (Hatto, p. 74).

Brünhild is not demanding new rights, but insisting on the right that she already has, with money and cloth from her own stores. She is, in fact, asking to be allowed to perform her duties with *less* than is hers by right. She has lost most of her property through Dancwart's freehandedness, and she cannot recover what has already been given away. At least she will have a

remnant of her wealth in order to hold her head high in her new country, but she will not have enough wealth to form a power base of her own.

Brünhild was used to ruling her own country. The narrative voice gives one last glimpse of Brünhild as ruler, before she departs for her new country as a wife to a king: "*In tugentlîchen züchten si râmte ir eigen lant*" (Strophe 526) "Brunhild decorously left the land that was hers by right" (Hatto, p. 75). Although her new husband and his men have lessened her honor by taking her treasure, she holds her head as high as she can, giving the impression of a regal woman in control of her emotions. With little of her treasure left in her own hands, she leaves with less power than she had as queen in her country, subservient to her husband, who now has authority over her.

The men of Worms took Brünhild's treasure in order to make sure that her power in the new country would be limited. Gunther cannot be usurped by the woman who is entering his country, especially since, as his wife, she is under his authority.

After the dual wedding between Siegfried and Kriemhild, Gunther and Brünhild has taken place, another leave-taking scene is shown. This time, it is Kriemhild who will be leaving Worms for Siegfried's country, and like Brünhild, she wants to take her inheritance into her new country. Although Kriemhild and Siegfried were married under happier circumstances than Gunther and Brünhild, matters of wealth are as important in this marriage as they were when Gunther prepared to bring Brünhild to Worms.

As Kriemhild and Siegfried are preparing to depart for Xanten, Kriemhild decides that it is time to claim her paternal inheritance:

Si sprach zuo z'ir manne: "wenne sul wir varn?  
 daz ich sô harte gâhe, daz hiez' ich wol bewarn.  
 mir suln ê mîne brüeder teilen mit diu lant."  
 leit was ez Sîfride, do erz an Kriemhilt ervant.  
 (Strophe 691).

"When shall we leave?" she asked her husband. "I do not wish to hurry overmuch, because my brothers must first share our lands with me." This intention was unwelcome news to Siegfried. (Hatto, p. 95).

Here Kriemhild only wants what is hers by inheritance. Mowatt and Sacker criticize this: "... she shows a rather childish insistence on getting her fair share out of her brothers ... and an irresponsibility about the unity of Burgundy which foreshadows her later destructiveness."<sup>10</sup> Kriemhild is not demanding anything out of the ordinary, nor is she irresponsible. This property is her own possession, her paternal wealth which comes to her through her family. Kriemhild is aware that she is entitled to lands in her own name, and she wants to be sure that she receives what is her due.

Siegfried is distressed that Kriemhild wants to take her own wealth with her. His distress is not made clear, but it can be assumed that he does not want Kriemhild to bring a large amount of wealth into the marriage. Hugo Bekker recognizes this possibility: "The poet does not say why [Siegfried is annoyed], but there are several indications in the *Nibelungenlied* that marriage is a doubtful venture for a woman, and that she may do well to take with her what worldly goods she can. Siegfried's annoyance at seeing Kriemhild insist on her rights may very well stem from

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<sup>10</sup> Mowatt and Sacker, pp. 72-73.

his apprehension that she might be less tractable than a wife without independent means."<sup>11</sup>

When the matter is put before the royal brothers, it is the youngest brother Giselher who most freely acknowledges Kriemhild's right to inheritance. Giselher in the progress of the work will be the brother who will take Kriemhild's part as much as he is able, and this first sign of loyalty from him predicts his later role as her protector.

Giselher delineates exactly what Kriemhild is entitled to, although he refers to her property as Siegfried's possession, due to Siegfried's status as her overlord:

“Wir suln ouch mit iu teilen,” sprach Gîselher daz kint,  
 “lânt únde bürge, die unser eigen sint.  
 unt swaz der wîten rîche ist uns untertân,  
 der sult ir teil vil guoten mit samt Kriemhilde hân.”  
 (Strophe 693).

“Furthermore,” added the youthful Giselher, “we mean to share with you the lands and castles that are our sovereign possession, and, jointly with Kriemhild, you shall have your due part of the spacious realms that are subject to us.” (Hatto, p. 95).

At this point Siegfried speaks up in order to deny Kriemhild the division of property to which she is entitled, insisting that he is able to provide for her himself:

“got lâz' iu iuwer erbe immer sælic sîn  
 unt ouch die liute darinne. ja getúot diu liebe wine mîn  
 Des teiles wol ze râte, den ir ir woldet geben.  
 dâ si sol tragen krône, unt sol ich daz geleben  
 si muoz werden rîcher danne iemen lebender sî.

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<sup>11</sup> Bekker, p. 64.





wir suln in langer dienen,           den wir alher gevolget hân."  
(Strophes 698-99).

"Everybody knows that it is not in Gunther's power to give us to anyone!" he cried. "Let others of your retainers go with you, for the custom of those of Troneck is well known to you. We are bound to abide at court beside the Kings and shall continue to serve those whom we have followed hitherto!" (Hatto, p. 96).

Hagen is appealing to custom, of which both Kriemhild and Gunther should be aware. Typically, he speaks up where Gunther is silent. Gunther should have spoken up at this point to guarantee Hagen's place at court, but he does not. Hagen must defend his own interests himself. Winder McConnell sees the request for Hagen as "more than a simple faux pas. By defying a basic and long-standing tradition among the Burgundians, she has evinced a degree of alienation from her family and the court at Worms... ." <sup>12</sup> Asking for Hagen nevertheless was not Kriemhild's first choice in the settlement of her inheritance rights, but a second-best attempt to rescue some of her due. McConnell comments on the rejection she faced when requesting her part of her father's estate: "... the queen is soundly rebuffed, first by her husband and then by Hagen. To one as self-conscious of her position as Kriemhild, this cannot help but sting, and it is only the first in a series of instances in which she is forced to comply with the decisions of the men around her, suffering, on later occasions, even greater affronts to her honor and pride." <sup>13</sup>

In the end, Kriemhild rides off with "*zwo und drîzig meide unt fünf hundert man*" (Strophe 700) much less than she should have received at the

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<sup>12</sup> McConnell, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> McConnell, p. 12.

outset and less than Gêrnôt had recognized as a good compromise for the lack of land offered her. There is no explanation as to why the number of knights was halved.

Although Gunther was mentioned as being present at these negotiations, he does not take part in them. His silence is puzzling. Siegfried's refusal to take the lands which were Kriemhild's birthright seems to have fitted his purpose, for he does not counter this refusal by protesting that his wealth was sufficient to endow his sister with her goods. Gunther does not uphold the rights that his sister has to inheritance for he benefits from her loss. Keeping her material wealth nevertheless proves that he is not as wealthy a king as Siegfried, for he admits through his refusal to recognize Kriemhild's rights to her lands that he needs them himself. He is therefore not as wealthy as Siegfried, who could afford to give up those lands in an act of generosity. Siegfried bestows the lands back on the brothers in a manner which emphasizes his strength and wealth in his own country.

Nevertheless Siegfried, as well as Gunther, benefits by having Kriemhild's potential influence at his court lessened through her lack of property. Kriemhild brings in little wealth to her new country. Like Brünhild, who enters Worms with just enough wealth to have her image intact, Kriemhild enters Xanten with just enough of her inheritance to save face. She does not have enough wealth to affect the balance of power in her new country.

This loss of female wealth depicted in the *Nibelungenlied* was not entirely fictional, but rather reflects a concern of the time.

At the beginning of the High Middle Ages, women were a vital component in the economic development of Europe. David Herlihy recognizes their importance: "The wife characteristically supervised the household's 'inner economy' ... however the precise range of the woman's inner economy was flexible, expanding or contracting in relation to whether the man had assumed other functions which might keep him from home for lengthy periods.." <sup>14</sup> The role of the noble woman centered on moveable goods: "According to [Hincmar of Rheims' tract] *De Ordine [Palatii]*, the royal treasurer, the *camerarius*, is directly under the queen. Moreover, the queen is responsible for giving the knights their yearly gifts, the equivalent of their salaries." <sup>15</sup> Herlihy notes a change in the course of time between the Carolingian period and the end of the High Middle Ages: "...German lands show a considerable proportion of women as contiguous owners in the eighth century ... the percentages fall off in the twelfth century." <sup>16</sup> Society was under pressure from general population growth. Robert S. Gottfried indentifies the reasons behind this growth: "...a number of agricultural and technological innovations in the tenth and eleventh centuries produced a food surplus. ..Europe's disease pool had reached an equilibrium ... the High Middle Ages was remarkably disease-free. The result was an increase in

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<sup>14</sup> David Herlihy, "Land, Family, and Women in Continental Europe, 701-1200" in *Women in Medieval Society* ed. Susan Mosher Stuard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976) 24.

<sup>15</sup> Herlihy, p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> Herlihy, p. 27.

population from about 25 Million in 950 to about 75 Million in 1250.”<sup>17</sup> The end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth century saw the end of this economic expansion as a result of population pressure, which resulted in squeezing out the women from their traditional access to wealth.

One of the reasons that the question of property would focus on women may be that women were now living longer lives. David Herlihy believes that women's increased longevity contributed to their economic diminishment.<sup>18</sup> Bernd Thum notes that available men were on the decrease: “Das Leben der Frauen war in der Stauferzeit dadurch belastet, daß aufgrund kriegerischer Unternehmungen wie der Kreuzzüge und der italienischen Feldzüge der Kaiser, aber auch vieler kleinerer Fehden, ein Frauenüberschuß dadurch entstanden war. Dieser verschlimmerte sich noch, als sich allmählich im Klerus der Zölibat durchsetzte.”<sup>19</sup>

Toward the end of the twelfth century, economic conditions were worsening. One means of economic consolidation entailed the limiting or eliminating of the wealth of the female members of the family. The tradition of the *dos* (or *Morgengabe*), or gift to the bride from the groom was gradually being replaced by the dowry, or gift of the father to the bride. At the same time the father would cut the married daughter from the inheritance to which she previously had been entitled. David Herlihy states: “One tactic

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<sup>17</sup> Robert S. Gottfried, *The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe* (New York: The Free Press, Macmillan, 1983) 16-17.

<sup>18</sup> See David Herlihy, “Life Expectancies for Women in Medieval Society” in *The Role of Women in the Middle Ages* ed. Rosemarie Thee Morewedge (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975).

<sup>19</sup> Thum, p. 294.

they followed was to exclude some offspring – typically daughters and younger sons – from a full share of the inheritance. Daughters (all or some) received from their fathers or brothers the dowries they now needed for marriage, but, barring unusual circumstances, neither they nor their offspring could advance any further claim on the patrimony. Daughters were pushed to the margins of agnatic lineage, and their offspring passed entirely out of the *generatio* of their maternal ancestors.”<sup>20</sup> With the lack of their inheritance, the noble women were at a disadvantage in managing their wealth. George Duby comments on this economic shift: “the authority of the husband ... increased. He managed not only the part of his own family heritage that he had settled on his wife [the *Morgengabe*], but also the property that might have come to her from her family. It was all at his disposal. Admittedly he needed her consent, but it was he who spoke and acted.”<sup>21</sup> Questions of inheritance and ownership of wealth were concerns that would appeal to the audience responding to the *Nibelungenlied*, since economic change was bringing about strains on the traditional ways families had settled property on their daughters.

In the *Nibelungenlied*, the paternal inheritance has been taken from both Brünhild and Kriemhild, in order to prevent the women from exercising more power than their respective husbands wish. When Kriemhild's husband is murdered by Hagen with her brother Gunther's

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<sup>20</sup> David Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) 87-88.

<sup>21</sup> Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France* Tr. Barbara Bay (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983) 102.

consent, the role of the treasure and inheritance from the husband comes into play.

Kriemhild has decided to stay with her paternal family after the death of Siegfried. As discussed in Chapter Two, one of the major reasons she has decided to stay is the love she feels for her mother. Another reason is the proclamation of loyalty which Giselher makes. Giselher is the brother to whom Kriemhild is closest. When Kriemhild and Uote are awaiting news of Gunther's expedition to Iceland, it is Giselher who goes to them with the news of Siegfried's arrival and advises them to receive him, even though Gernot is also at court (Strophes 543-549). Giselher is the one who recognized Kriemhild's rights to her parental inheritance.

The murder of Siegfried is the most significant betrayal by the brothers. Hagen's suggestion to murder Siegfried plays on Gunther's feelings of weakness and insecurity. Marianne Wahl Armstrong states: "Wohl spricht er dagegen, aber nicht stark genug, um den Beschluß zu verhindern."<sup>22</sup> His protestations are half-hearted, for he himself may be threatened by Siegfried's competence.

The legal components of the murder of Siegfried have repercussions on the figure of the king and the court at Worms. Ursula R. Mahlendorf and Frank J. Tobin discuss the ramifications: "Since the punishment for murder was proscription or death, Gunther, by failure to call together a court puts himself outside the law. He is not ... merely a weak and unwilling accessory but by law a criminal and a murderer. No one need serve him. In fact, his

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<sup>22</sup> Wahl Armstrong, p. 134.

nobles could depose him.”<sup>23</sup> Gunther's authority as king goes only as far as his actions warrant loyalty. Kriemhild no longer owes fealty to a king who has betrayed her through criminal actions.

During the scene where Giselher and Uote urge Kriemhild to remain in Burgundy, Giselher promises Kriemhild that he will replace Siegfried in watching out for her welfare, in effect becoming her legal guardian. Giselher promises:

“du solt bî dînem bruoder        Gîselhere sîn.  
jâ wil ich dich ergetzen    dînes mannes tât.”  
(Strophe 1080).

“You must stay with me, your brother Giselher, who will console you for the loss of your husband.” (Hatto, p. 141).

Kriemhild is persuaded to stay, but significantly she promises this not to Gunther, the king, nor Gernot, nor Uote, but only to Giselher: “*Si lobte Gîselheren, si wolde dâ bestân*” (Strophe 1083) “And so she promised Giselher to stay” (Hatto, p. 142). Giselher therefore must live up to his side of the bargain, watching out for Kriemhild's interests if the need arises, since she has placed her trust in him.

Hagen has had designs on the Nibelungen treasure while Siegfried was still alive (strophe 774) but must wait until Siegfried's death before he can put his thoughts into action. He goes to Gunther and suggests that he

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<sup>23</sup> Mahlendorf and Tobin base their understanding of Gunther's actions on the *Sachsenspiegel*, specifically this line “Swelk richtere ungerichte nicht (ne) richtet, de is selven gerichtes schuldich, dat over jenen scolde gan. Neman n'is ok plichtig des richteres ding to sukene noch rechtes em to plegene, de wile he selve rechtes weigert hevet.” (II, 13, 8).

Ursula R. Mahlendorf and Frank J. Tobin, “Legality and Formality in the *Nibelungenlied*” *Monatshefte* LXVI 3 Fall 1974: 233.

make his peace with Kriemhild, so that she will have her *morgengabe* brought to her:

Dô sprach der helt von Tronege: "möht ir daz tragen an,  
da ir iuwer swester           ze vriunde möhtet hân.  
sô kœme ze disen landen daz Nibelunges golt.  
des möht ir vil gewinnen,           würd' uns diu küneginne holt."  
(Strophe 1107).

"If you could succeed in winning your sister's friendship," said Hagen, the warrior of Troneck, "we could bring the Nibelung's treasure here to Burgundy. If only the queen were well disposed towards us you could possess yourself of much of it." (Hatto, p. 145).

Gunther agrees to make peace in order to bring the treasure into his country. Gottfried Weber sees Gunther's motivations as twofold: "Mit der Schwester möchte er versöhnen: Aber er kann den Blick doch gleichzeitig nicht ganz von ihrem Reichtum lassen."<sup>24</sup> He does not intend to benefit his sister, but hopes that the treasure will somehow come into his own hands, as Hagen has suggested.

Gunther uses Giselher and Gernot to convince Kriemhild to allow him to make peace with her. It does not appear that Gernot and Giselher are aware that Gunther and Hagen have decided to make peace only in order to rob Kriemhild of her inheritance. Although Gernot argues persuasively, Kriemhild does not give in to his entreaties. Only Giselher's plea moves her to receive Gunther and make the peace: "*do begônde vlêhen Gîselher, der vil wætliche man. / 'Ich wil den künic grüezen', dô si im des verjach*" (Strophes 1112-3) "Then handsome Giselher begged and entreated her. And as soon as

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<sup>24</sup> Weber, p 71.

she had given the promise 'I will receive the king',..." (Hatto, p. 146.) Note that Hatto leaves out the pronoun *im*, which in the Middle High German reinforces the fact that Kriemhild made the promise to Giselher alone. Her act of receiving Gunther is a show of affection for her brother Giselher. She receives the king as a favor to the brother whom she loves. She is loyal to the request her brother has made, not refusing out of hard-heartedness or maliciousness, but will forgive Gunther the wrong that he has done solely out of her feelings of love and loyalty. This love and loyalty will be betrayed yet again.

After Gunther and Kriemhild have become reconciled, Kriemhild trusts Giselher and Gernot to bring her treasure back from the Rhine, which they do (Strophes 1117-18). At this point, they show that they are loyal to her interests and recognize her rights to the treasure, unaware that their elder brother has already agreed with Hagen that the treasure should eventually fall to him.<sup>25</sup>

Once Kriemhild had her *dos*, her marriage dowry from Siegfried, brought to Worms, she immediately put it to good use, generously giving it away in order to win men over to her side and her cause. She is using her treasure in the traditional manner for women, as the narrator recognizes and for which he gives her credit:

Dô sie den hort nu hête    dô brâhtes' in daz lant  
vil unkunder recken.    jâ gab der vrouwen hant,  
daz man sô grôzer milte    mêre nie gesach.

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<sup>25</sup> Interestingly enough, the treasure in the *Piðriks saga* ends up in Hagen's family, given to a son whom he has engendered on his deathbed.

*Piðreks saga af Bern.* ed. Henrik Bertelsen. SUGNL 34 Copenhagen: S. L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1905-11. Vol II.

si pflac vil guoter tugende,      des man der küneginne jach.

Den armen unt den rîchen      begonde si nu geben,  
 daz dâ reite Hagene,      ob si solde leben  
 noch deheine wîle,      daz si sô manigen man  
 in ir dienst gewunne,      daz ez in leide müez' ergân.  
 (Strophes 1127-28).

Now that Kriemhild had possession of the hoard she lured many foreign warriors to Burgundy, and indeed her fair hand lavished gifts with such bounty that the like has never been seen. Many were the fine qualities she showed, for which she received due credit. Kriemhild was showering such largess on rich and poor alike, that Hagen declared that were she to live for any time she would recruit so many men that matters would go ill with the Burgundians. (Hatto, p. 147-48. Hatto's translation of *brâhtes* 'brought' as 'lured' places an ulterior motive on Kriemhild's action that the Middle High German does not imply.)

Hagen uses this fact in order to prompt the kingly brothers to go along with the theft of the treasure. Here Hagen's rhetoric reveals his fears. First, we see his unconscious (or conscious) wish for Kriemhild's death, as he would no longer have to fear for his own life, a fact that is understood but not expressed directly. This is one of the crucial scenes in the *Nibelungenlied* which illuminates the relation of generous and hence powerful women with the men who want the money and the power for themselves. Gunther replies that he has no right to take his sister's property from her:

Dô sprach der künec Gunther: "ir ist lîp und guot.  
 zwiu sol ich daz wenden, swaz si dâ mit getuot?  
 ja erwarp ich daz vil kûme,      daz si mir wart sô holt.  
 nu enruochen, war si teile      ir silber und ir golt."

Hagen sprach ze dem künige: "ez solde ein frumer man  
 deheinem einem wîbe      niht des hordes lân.  
 si bringet ez mit gâbe      noch unz ûf den tac,  
 dâ'z vil wol geriuwen      die kûenen Bûrgónden mac."  
 (Strophes 1127-1130)

“She is the mistress of her person and property,” replied King Gunther. “Why should I prevent her from doing whatever she likes with them? It was only with great difficulty that I succeeded in bringing her round to me. Let us not bother our heads as to where she bestows her treasure.”

“No man who is firm in his purpose should leave the treasure to a woman,” said Hagen. “By means of her gifts she will bring things to the point where the brave sons of Burgondy will bitterly regret it.” (Hatto, p. 148).

Hagen challenges the right given to Kriemhild by law while attacking Gunther's masculinity. Hagen's basic premise is that women (not Kriemhild specifically but any woman) would not be able to hold on to their property by strength alone. Therefore, a man who is a real man would take the property without thinking twice about it. He wants Gunther to break the law which Gunther is to uphold in his position as king. Gunther must therefore choose between his duty as king or his manliness as defined by Hagen. He opts for manliness.

When Kriemhild realizes that her treasure is under threat, she goes to her brothers the kings and pleads with them to act in protecting her rights. The brothers profess loyalty, but when it comes to action, they stand beside Gunther and Hagen and against Kriemhild. Gernot is the one who proposes that it be sunk in the Rhine, and Kriemhild's direct, heartfelt plea to Giselher to save her treasure is turned away, in spite of Giselher's previous oaths to be her protector:

si gie vil klegelîche            für ir bruoder Gîselhere stân.

Si sprach: “vil lieber bruoder,    du solt gedenken mîn.  
beidiu lîbes unde guotes    soltu mîn voget sîn.”  
dô sprach er zuo der vrouwen:    “daz sol sîn getân,  
als wir nu komen widere; wir haben rîtéennes wân.”

(Strophes 1134-35).

But Kriemhild went to her brother Giselher and stood most piteously before him.

"Dearest brother, remember me," she said. "You ought to be my protector with regard to both person and property."

"It shall be done when we return," he told the lady. "We have a journey to make." (Hatto, p. 148).

Giselher rides away in solidarity with his brothers, leaving Hagen to carry out Gernot's plan to sink the treasure. When Gernot and Giselher hear of Hagen's treachery, they are angry, but their anger appears hypocritical. Giselher goes so far as to declare his intention to kill Hagen, if it weren't for the obvious fact that they were kin: "*wær' er niht mîn mâc, ez gienge im an den lîp*" (Strophe 1133) "If he were not my kinsman, it would cost him his life" (Hatto, p. 148). This is pure boasting, for in spite of their protests, both Gernot and Giselher allow Hagen to go unpunished. With the theft of the treasure, Kriemhild is left solely dependent on her brothers. As Werner Schröder writes: "Der offenkundige Rechtsbruch macht die Witwe Sivrits, wenn nicht arm, so doch abhängig vom Wohlwollen der Brüder, und er nimmt ihr mit der Verfügung über den unerschöpflichen Schatz das letzte wirkungsvolle Machtmittel und vorerst einzig taugliche Instrument der Rache. Er beeinträchtigt ihre *êre*, ihr königliches Ansehen, das nicht zuletzt auf ihrer immer noch unverächtlichen Machtstellung beruhte."<sup>26</sup>

Giselher is of two minds on the theft of Kriemhild's treasure. Although he has taken no action to prevent the theft of his sister's treasure, even when she begged him to fulfill his duty as a guardian, he still feels affection for

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<sup>26</sup> Schröder, pp. 85-86.

her: “*gerne wær’ ir Giselher / aller triuwen bereit*” (Strophe 1138) “Giselher would have especially liked to give proof of his affection” (Hatto, p. 149). His opportunity to give that proof has come and gone, leaving the bitter aftertaste of betrayal and unfulfilled fraternal duty to his sister and ward. His earlier vows to protect Kriemhild are proven to be worthless.

Giselher sees Etzel's proposal as an opportunity for Kriemhild. It is no surprise that he will urge Kriemhild to marry Etzel and leave the country, as he cannot truly stand as her guardian when her older brothers are working against her interests. When Kriemhild is packing to go to Etzel's court, another treasure-stealing episode occurs. Whether this is confusion on the part of the Nibelungenlied author(s), or whether the author attempted to reinforce the magnitude of Hagen's theft through its repetition, the end result is that Kriemhild leaves the country with very little of her spousal inheritance. Rüdiger makes light of this theft, appealing to the wealth of the husband who will now take care of her, much as in the earlier episodes between Hagen and Brunhild and Siegfried and Kriemhild's brothers:

“Rîchiu küniginne,            zwiu klaget ir daz golt?  
iu ist der künic Etzel        sô græzlîchen holt,  
geséhent iuch sîniu ougen,    er gît iu alsô vil,  
daz irz verswendet nimmer,    des ich iu, vrouwe, sweren wil.”

Dô sprach diu küneginne        “vil edel Ruedigêr,  
ez gewan küniges tohter    nie rîchéite mêr,  
danne der mich Hagene        âne hat getân.”  
(Strophes 1275-76).

“Why do you lament your gold, mighty Queen?” he asked. “King Etzel loves you so well that as soon as he sets eyes on you I swear he will give you more than you could ever squander away, my lady.”

“Noble Rüdiger,” answered the Queen, “no daughter of a king

ever had such wealth as Hagen has taken from me.” (Hatto, p. 164).

Kriemhild insists on the value of her own wealth for her own sake. Her wealth was hers, and no compensation from Etzel will make up for that loss. In spite of her desire to keep her own money, Rüdiger protests that she should bring none of her own wealth with her. Kriemhild and her ladies ignore that advice and take with them what they have left. It seems that Kriemhild has had enough of men making decisions about her wealth for her.

When Kriemhild takes leave of her brothers, Giselher makes one last promise to be loyal to Kriemhild:

Gîselher der snelle	sprach zer swester sîn:
“swenne daz du, vrouwe,	bedurfen wellest mîn,
ob dir iht gewerre	daz tuo du mir bekant,
sô rîte ich dir ze dienste	in daz Etzelen lant.”
	(Strophe 1292).

“If you should ever need me, madam, or suffer any annoyance, inform me of it, and I shall ride to your aid in Etzel's land,” brave Giselher promised his sister.

When Kriemhild is on her way to Etzel's court, the motif of queenly generosity reappears. Queen Helche, well-loved by her people, is held up as an example. Ruth H. Firestone believes that Helche can be seen as “a model of good behavior, occasionally but revealingly contrasted to Kriemhild.”<sup>27</sup> In a conversation with Kriemhild, her uncle, the Bishop of Pöchlarn, in a friendly manner urges her to take up where her predecessor left off:

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<sup>27</sup> Ruth H. Firestone, “Queen Helche the Good: Model for Noblewomen” in *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages* ed. Albrecht Classen. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik Nr. 528 (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1991) 117.

daz si sich wol gehabete, wie vast' er ir daz riet,  
 und daz si ir êre koufte, als Helche het getân.  
 (Strophe 1330)

... urging her to be of good cheer and to acquire honor through  
 liberality as Helche had done before her. (Hatto, p. 170).

Generosity is the sign by which the people will realize her good qualities and  
 win the love and affection of her new people. On her way to Etzel's country,  
 Kriemhild already demonstrates her generosity to Rüdiger's family,  
 cementing their relationship through liberal gifts:

Vil minneclîchen dienst      Ruedegêr in bôt.  
 dô gab diu küneginne      zwelf ármbóuge rôr.  
 der Gotelinde tohter      und alsô gut gewant,  
 daz si niht bezzers brâhte      in daz Etzélen lant.

Swie ir genomen wære      der Nibelunge golt,  
 álle díe si gesâhen,      die machte si ir holt  
 noch mit dem kleinem guote,      daz si dá mohte hân.  
 des wirtes ingesinde      dem wart grôziu gâbé getân.  
 (Strophe 1322).

Rüdiger looked after them most amiably. The Queen gave  
 Gotelind's daughter twelve bracelets of red gold and the finest  
 cloth that she had brought with her to Etzel's country. And  
 although she had been deprived of her Nibelung treasure, she  
 even now won the goodwill of all she met, thanks to the slender  
 means that remained to her: her host's retainers were rewarded  
 with great munificence. (Hatto, p. 169).

Kriemhild does not skimp with her remaining wealth, but uses her wealth in  
 order to solidify her own reputation as well as to retain goodwill for Rüdiger  
 among his subjects. It is significant that Kriemhild bestows a great gift on  
 the daughter of Gotelinde, who cannot return the favor directly. Her  
 generosity wins the admiration of the young girl, who would like to go learn  
 from Kriemhild at her court. Gotelinde's daughter gives a long speech with



concerned) and never did she fail to see a dozen kings in attendance. (Hatto, p. 177).

Kriemhild is famous for her generosity and her skill in politics. She is an able queen who has solidified support at court to the point where she can maneuver for her own benefit, a skill that is rare indeed by the narrator's own admission, where he points out that women rarely are able to hold their own in conniving courtly society. Kriemhild now is able to act without interference, but her mind turns back to her home country. She has not lost the bitterness she experienced through her own family's myriad betrayals. Her thoughts coalesce in the form of a dream, where her mixed feelings of love and hatred for her family members are revealed. It is not until this dream occurs that she decides to move into action against her family:

Si gedâht' ouch maniger êren von Nibelunge lant,  
 der si dâ was gewaltic, unt die ir Hagenen hant  
 mit Sifrides tôde hete gar benomen,  
 ob im daz noch immer von ir ze leide möhte komen.

“Daz geschæhe, ob ich in möhte bringen in daz lant.”  
 ir troumte, daz ir gienge vil dicke an der hant  
 Gîselher ir bruoder; si kuste'n z'aller stunt  
 vil oft in senftem slâfe: sît wart in arbeiten kunt.  
 (Strophes 1392-93).

She brooded on the many wrongs that had been done to her at home and all the honours that had been hers in Nibelungenland, but of which Hagen had stripped her by murdering Siegfried, and she wondered whether she could ever make him rue it. “If I could get him to this country it could be done,” she mused. Then she dreamt that she was walking with her brother Giselher, hand in hand, repeatedly, and that she kissed him time and time again as she lay gently sleeping. (As things turned out, they were all to know much suffering.) (Hatto, p. 177).

It could be that when she is thinking of her brothers' arrival in Hunland, and thinks especially loving thoughts of Giselher, that she expects that Giselher will be on her side no matter what was at stake. Here again a deep love, that of Kriemhild for Giselher, is equated with suffering to come. What kind of a love is this? Kriemhild's three previous dreams all had to do with the coming death of Siegfried, her husband. This dream, barely alluded to, touches her brother, who has earlier offered himself as her husband's substitute after the latter's death. Her love here is without restraint, as the phrase *z'aller stunt vil ofte* makes clear. As much as her waking self wants Hagen in Hunland due to her hatred, her sleeping self wants Giselher due to her love. Yet this Giselher whom she loves has also taken a passive part in the theft of her treasure and is one of the causes of her sorrow. In spite of the fact that she will now set in motion the plan which will result in his death, Kriemhild still loves Giselher.

This enigmatic love for Giselher is reflected in the *Piðreks saga* as well, where Kriemhild's relationship to Giselher is doomed to bitter betrayal. In both *Piðreks saga* and the *Nibelungenlied*, the final confrontation is made more horrific through the mixed loves and loyalties of these two royal siblings. Kriemhild does not hold Giselher accountable for the theft of her treasure nor the murder of her husband, but due to the choice Giselher must make between Kriemhild and Gunther, his life is also lost.

When her brothers arrive in Hunland, Kriemhild pointedly kisses Giselher to the exclusion of her other brothers: "si kuste Gîselheren / und nam in bî der hant." (Strophe 1737). "Giselher alone did she kiss, after which she took him by the hand." (Hatto, p. 216). Her actions reflect her dream in

the signs of affection that she shows. Yet her love towards Giselher is a clear sign of her enmity towards the rest of her kin by blood, and the event that precipitates the hostilities insofar as Hagen recognizes the gesture's real meaning and mentally prepares for battle. This is the last sign of any affection between Kriemhild and her blood relatives.

In the *Þiðreks saga* as well, Grimhild kisses Giselher to show her affection towards him, expecting him to be on her side in the coming confrontation:

Nu gengr Grimhilldr at sinum vnga bræðr Gislher oc kyssir hann oc sitr ihia hanum oc milli oc Gunnars konungs oc nv grœtr hun sarlega. oc nu spyr Gislher huat grœtr þu fru.<sup>28</sup>

Now Grimhild goes up to her young brother Gislher and kisses him and sits down between him and King Gunnar, and now she weeps sorrowfully. And now Gislher asks: "Why do you weep, lady?"<sup>29</sup>

When the battle is joined, Giselher is given the opportunity to depart and live, which he rejects in order to preserve his masculine honor:

þa mellte Gislher. ei mœli ek því þetta at ei þore ek at ueria mik. þat veit min systir Grimhilldr. ath þa er drepin uar Sigurðr sveinn. þa uar ek .v. vetra gamall. oc la ek i reckio minnar moðor með henni. oc saklaus em ek þess vigs. enn ecki hirði ek at liva ein epter mina bræðr.<sup>30</sup>

Then Gislher spoke: "I do not say this because I do not dare defend myself. My sister Grimhild knows that when Young Sigurd was killed, I was five years old and lay in my mother's

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<sup>28</sup> *Þiðreks saga*. p. 299.

<sup>29</sup> Andersson, p. 196.

<sup>30</sup> *Þiðreks saga*. p. 323.

bed with her and I am innocent of this killing. But I do not care to survive my brothers alone.”<sup>31</sup>

After the battle has ended, and the victors are walking across the hall, Grimhild is inspired to a last bit of horrific revenge against the brother whom she loved the best, which triggers her execution:

Oc nu gengr Grimhilldr oc tecr einn mikinn brand þar er husid hafði brunnit. oc gengr at gernoþ sinum broðor. oc stingr brandenum loganda imunn honom. oc vill vita huart hann er dauðr. eða liuande. En gernoþ er at visu dauðr. oc nu gengr hon at giselher oc stingr elldibrandenum imunn hanum. hann var eigi aðr dauðr. oc af þessu dœyr giselher. Nu ser þiðrekr konungar af bern huat grimhilldr gerer. oc mellti til attila konungs. Se hversu diovollin Grimhilldr þin kona kuellr brœdra sina goða drengi.<sup>32</sup>

And now Grimhild goes and takes a great firebrand where the house had burnt and goes to her brother Gernoþ and sticks the flaming brand in his mouth and wants to know whether he is dead or alive. But Gernoþ is most certainly dead, and now she goes to Gislher and sticks the firebrand in his mouth. He was not dead before, but Gislher dies from this. Now King Thidrek of Verona sees what Grimhild is doing, and he spoke to King Attila: “Look how the devil Grimhild, your wife, torments her brothers, who are worthy men...”<sup>33</sup>

In the *Þiðreks saga*, Grimhild's action is a retaliation for her family's betrayal in which all family members who chose to side against her must die. In the *Nibelungenlied* as well, the tragedy could have been less bloody and less severe if her brothers had taken her part instead of remaining loyal to Hagen at all costs. Gottfried Weber comments on the stubborn loyalty of the

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<sup>31</sup> Andersson, p. 206.

<sup>32</sup> *Þiðreks saga*, p. 325.

<sup>33</sup> Andersson, p. 207.

brothers to Hagen: “Gêrnôt, Gîselher und Dancwart (auch Gunther) bewahren einem Hagen die Treue bis in den Tod ... indes: das Ethos dieser Treue wiederum ist untermischt mit lebenslanger unheilvoller, schließlich allgemeiner Hörigkeit gegenüber dem dämoniegeladenen Recken, der um jeden Preis die Rolle des Ersten spielen will und seine Könige vollends eigenmächtig, wenn auch wider Willen, ins Verderben stürzt.”<sup>34</sup>

The last conflict begins when Kriemhild demands her treasure from Hagen, insisting on the fact that it is her possession and has been wrongfully withheld from her:

“Nu sult ir mich der mære        mære wissen lân:  
 hort der Nibelunge,        war habt ir den getân?  
 der war doch mîn eigen    daz ist iu wol bekant.  
 der soldet ir mir fûeren    in daz Eτζélen lant.”  
 (Strophe 1741).

“Tell me further: what have you done with the treasure of the Nibelungs? – It was mine, as you well know. *That* is what you should bring me here to Etzel's country.” (Hatto, p. 216).

Hagen, on the other hand, is proud to see Kriemhild's demand for her treasure go unfulfilled. His stubborn refusal to return Kriemhild her rightful property unleashes the revenge. Franz H. Bäuml criticizes Kriemhild's demanding of the treasure: “...Kriemhild – in demanding the source of Siegfried's power, his treasure, – explicitly wants to BE Siegfried.” Bäuml's criticism rests on the assumption that women should not demand power, especially in the form of material wealth, which rightly should belong to a man. This assertion is not supported in the text. Kriemhild does not want to be Siegfried, but rather she wants the treasure because it belongs to her.

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<sup>34</sup> Weber, p. 155.

Other critics see Kriemhild's demand for the treasure as a way for her to reclaim Siegfried himself in a symbolic manner. Werner Schröder sees the demand for the treasure as a problem which the *Nibelungenlied* poet should have avoided altogether: "In unserm Nibelungenlied erscheint sie [die Hortforderungsszene] als Fremdkörper, der sich der geradlinigen Durchführung des neuen Themas, der Rache Kriemhilds für Sivrits Ermordung, recht störend in den Weg stellt..."<sup>35</sup> The troublesome scene implies that Kriemhild wants the treasure, which a woman should not desire. Following the logic that Kriemhild acts for the sake of Siegfried alone, Hugo Bekker writes: "the hoard is for Kriemhild a piece of Siegfried, IS Siegfried."<sup>36</sup> Still, Kriemhild herself is not asking for her husband back, nor even for compensation for his death. Kriemhild is making a demand on her own behalf for her own wealth which has been stolen from her. She will be avenging not only the wrongful murder of her husband, but also the unprovoked theft of her property.

In finding men to carry out her revenge on Hagen for her, Kriemhild's generosity takes on a new and bitter meaning. Using the wealth at her disposal, she enlists the help of knights through promises of rewards. Her generosity, directed to her own need for Hagen's death, brings death on those who would take her gold. The brave Irinc, dying from wounds which Hagen inflicted on him, warns the other knights of Etzel's court away from Kriemhild's gold and the obligations her gifts entail:

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<sup>35</sup> Schröder, p. 93.

<sup>36</sup> Bekker, p. 68.

“die gâbe sol enpfâhen iuwer dehéines hant  
 von der küneginne, ir liehtez golt vil rôt.  
 unde bestêt ir Hagenen, ir müezet kîesén den tât.”  
 (Strophe 2068)

“None of you must accept the Queen's gifts of bright red gold,  
 since if you fight against Hagen, you must die.” (Hatto, p. 256).

Many men refuse to listen to Irinc's advice. Kriemhild is eager to dispense all her wealth for the sake of revenge, and pours out her gold by the shieldfull:

si hiez golt daz rôte dar mit schilden tragen.  
 si gab ez, swer sîn ruochte und ez wolde enpfân.  
 jane wârt nie grœzer solden mêr ûf vîendé getân.  
 (Strophe 2130).

...for Kriemhild had the red gold carried out shieldwise and she gave it to any that wanted it or cared to accept it: never was there such a hiring of men against one's enemies! (Hatto, p. 263).

Kriemhild's generosity fails to win her the results that she wants, and Hagen is not killed by the men who go out to fight against him. The battle is fierce and bloody.

At one point in the hostilities, Kriemhild's brothers ask her for her mercy, based on their kinship ties to her. Kriemhild promises them their lives if they would only give Hagen over to her. Her revenge is only focused on Hagen, and she would let her brothers live if they would hand Hagen over to her revenge:

“Welt ir mir Hagenen einen ze gîsél geben,  
 sone wîl ich niht versprechen, ich welle iuch lâzen leben,  
 wande ir sît mîne bruoder unde éiner muoter kint:  
 sô rêd ich ez nâch der suone mit disen helden, die hie sint.”  
 (Strophe 2104).

“Yet if you will give me Hagen alone as my prisoner I will not deny that I may let you live – for are you not brothers, and sons

of the same mother? – and I will discuss the matter of a settlement with these warriors here.” (Hatto, p. 260).

Kriemhild recognizes that she has obligations to her family, which she is ready to fulfill if her brothers will give her enemy over into her hands. She is willing to be merciful to them in spite of their lack of loyalty in the past by virtue of their relationship through their mother, and not, significantly, through their father. For her mother's sake, she is willing to speak in their behalf. But her brothers are not willing to accept her mercy on her terms, since they owe allegiance to a masculine form of honor, which binds them in death with Hagen.

Gernot speaks first, denying her request, and then Giselher defends his loyalty:

“swer gerne mit uns vehte,      wir sîn et aber hie,  
wande ich deheinen mînen friunt      an *den* triuwen nie  
verlie.”  
(Strophe 2106).

“if anyone wishes to fight with us, here we are, at his disposal! I have never broken faith with a friend.” (Hatto, pp. 260-61).

Giselher proclaims his loyalty to his friends, of which Hagen is the primary benefactor, but his loyalty is not as intact as he would believe.

He has broken faith, not with his warrior friends, but with Kriemhild. He has promised her his aid, which he has never given. He has promised to watch out for her interests, but allows her treasure to be stolen without interference. His concept of loyalty extends only to the men within his family.

It is ironic that the brothers, in requesting their lives from Kriemhild, ask her mercy for the sake of family ties, ties which they have ignored

numerous times when it suited their politics and desires. In spite of her natural love for her brothers, especially Giselher, their lack of loyalty to her position, her desires and her potential threat after they have mistreated her, force her to turn against them and leave them to the deaths that they have chosen, by taking Hagen's part before they take hers. They have numerous times followed Hagen's advice when it was evilly turned against Kriemhild, and it should come as no surprise when their lack of loyalty is responded to in kind. Kriemhild pays them back in kind for their deceit.

The *Nibelungenlied* gives many examples of men gaining their power and influence at the expense of the women who are under their protection. A woman's treasure is there for the taking, which results in keeping her power and influence at a minimum. The men, who pride themselves on their loyalty to each other, see nothing amiss when they betray their female kin. This is a reflection of the loss of power and wealth that women in the twelfth century experienced first-hand. The historian H. G. Koeningsberger believes that the *Nibelungenlied* is a warning: “[the *Nibelungenlied*] was... an implied criticism of its [society's] treatment of women; for both the murder of Siegfried and his wife Kriemhild's dreadful revenge on her brothers, were the direct result of the appalling way that she, as a woman, had been treated, a type of treatment which corresponded all too well to the experience of many women at the time.”<sup>37</sup> The rage that Kriemhild and Brünhild express through the loss of their respective treasures may reveal the hidden anger that

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<sup>37</sup> H. G. Koeningsberger, *Medieval Europe 400-1500* (Harlow, Essex: Longman Group Ltd., 1987) 273.

women listening to or reading this story kept to themselves after suffering similar humiliations.

Kriemhild and Brünhild, with their treasures stolen, must hold their heads high in society on the basis of their status and good name alone. Their status cannot be raised through their own attributes, but rests on the status of their husbands, the husbands who boasted of their wealth as compensatory for the loss of the treasure the women used to own in their own names. This status proves to be as illusory as status based on wealth, as the next chapter will show.

## Chapter Four

### The Failure of Marriage

The marriage between Kriemhild and Siegfried has been understood as a relationship based on *minne*. Kriemhild begins her married life as the loving maiden who gladly enters into wedlock with the man that she loves, in spite of her initial hesitation. In spite of the affection that Kriemhild and Siegfried feel for each other, especially in their courtship, the institution of marriage places Kriemhild in a position from whence she is not free to defend her position in society. Siegfried himself is more interested in defending the status quo of a woman's place in society than in defending the wife to whom he should show loyalty and protection. Much as Kriemhild's brothers favor themselves above her in matters of property and inheritance, Siegfried favors himself and his king in matters of status and propriety. The marriage ties which should bind Kriemhild and Siegfried in mutual benefit fail before the overt necessity of subordinating women to the authority of their husbands for the sake of social stability. This social stability built upon such a foundation is destined to crumble.

During the twelfth century, marriage in the nobility was undergoing a shift from a political marriage between family units to one where consent of the partners, especially of the woman, was more important.<sup>1</sup> With the

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<sup>1</sup>The increased influence of church canon law over the marriage lives of the nobility has been discussed by Georges Duby, James A. Brundage, and Christopher Brooke. Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France* tr. Barbara Bray (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

concept of consent, the idea of love between the spouses gained ground. According to James A. Brundage, "...the decretists saw marriage as a personal relationship between husband and wife, a relationship bonded by the marital affection that was essential to the marital union."<sup>2</sup> In fact, the marital bed was the one exception to the rule of female subordination to the male: "The sex life of the married couple was, or ought to be, an island of comparative privacy where equal rights prevailed, within a larger society where women's rights were severely curtailed."<sup>3</sup> This equality was only on the sexual level, as the wife was expected to be subject to her husband in the social realm.<sup>4</sup>

As the church intensified its hold on marriage, Brundage supposes, the laity responded by elevating the concept of love, both within and without marriage: "It is probably no accident that the ideal of romantic love was born in the same generations that gradually accepted the rigid rules of marriage advocated by Church reformers. ... The poetic typology of romance took shape

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James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) See especially Chapters Four through Six.

Christopher Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Brundage, p. 274.

<sup>3</sup> Brundage, p. 225. Brundage is discussing Gratian's *Decretum*. The theology of a wife's equality in the marriage bed is based on Pauline doctrine. Paul wrote: "Let the husband render unto his wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife." (I Corinthians 7: 3-4, KJV).

<sup>4</sup> Brundage (p. 255) quotes Gratian: "Nulla est mulieris potestas, sed in omnibus uiri dominio subsit." "The woman has no power...but in everything is subject to her husband." This is also based on Pauline ideas: "Likewise ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands;..." (I Peter 3:1, KJV) and "Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as is fit in the Lord." (Colossians 4:18, KJV).

in opposition to, and as an escape from, a bleak marriage ideology that canonists and theologians championed.”<sup>5</sup> Denis de Rougement sees the rise of *minne* as the influence of Catharist heresy spreading in Provence via the troubadours and brought to the center of literary production through the patronage of Eleanor of Aquitaine.<sup>6</sup> De Rougement believes that this idea is antithetical to Christianity because of its emphasis on the feminine: “Courtly love came into existence in the twelfth century during a complete revolution of the western *psyche*. It sprang up out of the same movement which forced upwards into the half light of our human consciousness, and into lyrical expression of the human spirit, the Feminine Principle of *Shakti*, the worship of Woman, of the Mother, and of the Virgin.”<sup>7</sup> The end result of this romantic love is death, for it is not a life-giving love in the Christian *agape* tradition, but rather is selfish in its root: “They love one another, but each loves the other *from the standpoint of the self and not from the other’s standpoint.*” (De Rougement’s italics).<sup>8</sup> Therefore, according to de Rougement’s argument, *minne*, focused on the self through the other, can only have a tragic outcome. “Drawn to a death remote from the life that has been spurring them [Tristan and Isolde] on, the lovers are doomed to become the voluptuous prey of conflicting forces that will cast both in the same headlong swoon.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Brundage, p. 184.

<sup>6</sup> Denis de Rougement, *Love in the Western World* tr. Montgomery Belgion (New York: Schocken Books, 1983) 123.

<sup>7</sup> de Rougement, p. 122.

<sup>8</sup> de Rougement, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> de Rougement, p. 53.

Gottfried Weber posits that the *Nibelungenlied* poet uses the concept of *minne* in order to subvert it, to show its dark shadow: “Minne ist höchster positiver Ausdruck des neuen Zeitalters der Gothik. Man erkennt schon hier: Was dieser Dichter geschaut hat, ist eben die Gegenseite: in unzerstörbarem Minnebewahren heillos zerstörte Liebeswirklichkeit – daraus unzerstörbaren Haß, ins Grenzlose vermehrten Vergeltungswahn – inneren Untergang des liebenden Weibes aus geraubter Liebesmöglichkeit.”<sup>10</sup> Werner Schröder also believes that the marriage between Kriemhild and Siegfried is the basis for the entire work: “Die Geschichte Kriemhilds und Sivrits ist vom Nibelungenlied-Dichter mit allen Attributen einer erfüllten Liebe ausgestattet worden. Das kann kein Zufall sein, es liefert die helle Folie zu Kriemhilds dunklem Leid, das die Handlung des zweiten Teiles bewegt.”<sup>11</sup> Philip N. Anderson takes a darker view of the love between Kriemhild and Siegfried: “For Kriemhild also fails as a wife, a role usually seen by critics as her strongest side.”<sup>12</sup> Her failure? “Unlike the traditional wife, she does not support Siegfried with sacrifice, but destroys him with her pride.”<sup>13</sup>

Clearly, a closer look at this marriage is in order.

When Siegfried first mentions his intention to win Kriemhild for his bride, he is basing his choice not on the individual woman but on the reputation of Kriemhild's great beauty:

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<sup>10</sup> Weber, *Das Nibelungenlied*, 21.

<sup>11</sup> Schröder, “Die Tragödie Kriemhilds”, 70.

<sup>12</sup> Philip N. Anderson, “Kriemhild's Quest”, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Philip N. Anderson, p. 9.

Im rieten sîne mâge      und genúoge sîne man,  
 sît er ûf stæte minne      tragen wolde wân,  
 daz er dan eine wurbe      diu im möhte zemen.  
 dô sprach der küene Sîvrit:      “sô wil ich Kriemhilde nemen,

Die scœnen juncfrouwen von Búrgónden lant  
 durch ir unmâzen scœne. daz ist mir wol bekannt:  
 nie keiser wart sô rîche, der wolde haben wîp,  
 im zæme wol ze minnen der rîchen küneginne lîp.”  
 (Strophes 48-49).

Seeing that he aspired to a constant love, his kinsmen and many of his vassals counselled him to woo a lady of suitable standing. “I shall take Kriemhild the fair maiden of Burgondy,” he answered boldly, “on account of her very great beauty, since even if the mightiest of emperors wished to marry, I know he would not demean himself in loving the noble princess.” (Hatto, p.23).

Siegfried has come of the age to marry. His marriage is considered not just the matter of an individual choosing a mate, but a political matter in which his relatives and retainers have a stake. Siegfried declares that Kriemhild, due to her beauty and beauty alone, will be the most suitable for his spouse. It is significant that Siegfried mentions prestige and rank along with his love for the beautiful girl. Kriemhild is an ornament that even the most powerful of emperors would not be ashamed of possessing.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Siegfried's desire to augment his power through a profitable marriage alliance to a woman who has expressed a desire never to marry is reminiscent of the bridal quest theme in Western literature, including the *Nibelungenlied*. Marianne Kalinke writes: “Marriage to a maiden king [a translation of the Icelandic *meykongr*] is by its very nature if not always a means of upward mobility for the suitor, then in any case an opportunity to augment his wealth and power.” (p. 83). The winning of Brünhild fits this pattern most closely. (see pp. 36-37). In so far as Siegfried wants to gain power, prestige and wealth through his marriage to Kriemhild, a parallel comparison can be drawn. The major deviation from this pattern is that Kriemhild does not rule in her own right, nor will she inherit a kingdom.

Marianne Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland* *Islandica* XLVI (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990) 83.

Siegfried's parents Sigmund and Siglinde are not happy with Siegfried's intentions, but rather are struck with foreboding. In his attempts to reassure his parents, Siegfried reassures them of his love for Kriemhild:

“ân' edeler frouwen minne      wold ich immer sîn  
ich enwûrbe, dar mîn herze      vil grôze liebe hât.”  
(Strophe 52).

“rather than not woo where my heart finds great delight, I would quite forgo the love of noble ladies.” (Hatto, p. 24).

Siegfried shows that his love for Kriemhild is a matter of his own will, and that he has no intention to change his mind. His declaration of love includes a bit of parental defiance. Marianne Wahl Armstrong sees this relation to *minne* as a sign of the “Verhöfischung Siegfrieds” in the *Nibelungenlied*, compared to the Dragon-Slayer found in Old Norse versions: “Nicht ein heroisches Abenteuer, sondern die Macht des Minneeros bestimmt sein Schicksal.”<sup>15</sup> Still, the mention of *minne* comes secondary to that of power.

Now that Siegfried has mentioned love, his parents, although still reluctant, begin to realize that Siegfried will not be dissuaded. Still, Sigmund warns Siegfried of the dangers ahead, namely Kriemhild's family, but most of all Hagen:

“Ob ez ánder niemen wære      wan Hagene der degen,  
der kan mit übermüete      der höhverte pflegen,  
daz ich des sêre fürhte,      ez mûg' uns werden leit,

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The *Þiðreks saga*, on the other hand, declares that Sigurd will receive half of Gunnar's kingdom: “*oc taca með henni halfi riki Gunnars konungs.*” This is a considerable bit of wealth, indeed!

*Þiðreks saga af Bern*, ed. Henrik Bertelsen, SUGNL 34 (Copenhagen: S.L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1905-11) 2: 37.

<sup>15</sup> Wahl Armstrong, p. 194.

ob wir werben wellen      die vil hêrlîchen meit."  
 (Strophe 54).

"Were there no other than Hagen, he has such haughty ways that I fear we might regret it if we asked for the Princess's hand." (Hatto, 24.)

This strong foreshadowing of Siegfried's death by Hagen's hand also echoes Kriemhild's fear of marriage in the first *âventiure*, which she expresses in a proverbial manner: "*wie liebe mit leide / zu jungest lônem kan*" (Strophe 17). "how love is in the end rewarded with sorrow" (my translation). Unlike Kriemhild, who fears for what the future may bring and who would prefer to avoid thinking of the sorrows to come, Siegfried trusts in himself and in his physical strength, ignoring his father's sage advice:

"Waz mag uns daz gewerren?" sprach dô Sîvrit.  
 "swaz ich friwentlîche      niht ab in erbit,  
 daz mag sus erwerben      mit ellen dâ mîn hant.  
 ich trouwe an in ertwingen      beide lûte únde lant."  
 (Strophe 55).

"How should that trouble us?" asked Siegfried. "Whatever I fail to get from them by friendly requests, I shall take by my own valor. I fancy I shall wrest their lands and peoples from them." (Hatto, p. 24.)

Again Siegfried's rhetoric returns to that of force and power. There is no mention of his love for Kriemhild the maiden, but a declaration to win whatever he wants by the strength of his own hand. He sees Kriemhild as one of the possessions that he wants to acquire. The language of *minne*, in this *âventiure* at least, is far from Siegfried's mind. He is focusing on his own strength and power and is confident that his strength alone will enable him to gain the lands of his neighbor, as well as its riches, which includes the people on it. As Gottfried Weber writes: "Solch stoltzes Eigenbewußtsein und

Überlegenheitsgefühl kann gar nichts anderes als zumindest höchst zwiespältige Empfindungen und Gegenbewegungen bei denen hervorrufen, mit denen er in Berührung tritt.”<sup>16</sup> His *superbia*, his fatal flaw, is already clearly displayed.

Sigmund is disturbed by this turn of phrase, and states a truism which Siegfried would be wise to reflect upon, a piece of wisdom which would prevent tragedy if Siegfried had taken it to heart:

“mit gewalte nieman erwerben mag die maget,”  
 sô sprach der künec Sigmunt, “daz ist mir wol gesaget.”  
 (Strophe 57).

“I have been told on good authority that none will ever win the girl by force.” (Hatto, p. 24).

Sigmund is giving Siegfried the chance to reflect on the possibility that force is not always the best option in obtaining a suitable bride. Siegfried's reliance on his force alone will bring him to his death, a future that Sigmund already sees as a possibility. Siegfried does not listen to his parents' warnings, and confidently strikes out for Worms in order to capture the woman whom he desires.

When Siegfried arrives in Worms, he reveals the desire in his heart clearly. “Even this early in the epic it is clear that Kriemhilde is by no means the only attraction for Siegfried at Worms. ...Equally important is the prospect of a good fight.”<sup>17</sup> When asked why he came, he replies in fighting words:

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<sup>16</sup> Weber, p. 22-23.

<sup>17</sup> Mowatt, and Sacker, p. 44.

“ich wil an iu ertwingen, swaz ir muget hân:  
 lânt únde bürge, daz sol mir werden undertân.”  
 (Strophe 110).

“I will wrest from you by force all that you possess! Your lands  
 and your castles shall be subject to me!” (Hatto, p. 29).

Threats are exchanged on both sides, but finally Siegfried does think of Kriemhild, which calms his hostility: “*dô gedâhte ouch Sîvrit / an die hêrlîchen meit*” (Strophe 123) “..while Siegfried, too, was mollified by thoughts of lovely Kriemhild” (Hatto, p. 30). The thought of a woman is enough to tame the hostile attitude, but the real intentions towards the Burgundians have been revealed to the Burgundians themselves.

Now that Siegfried has appeared in Worms, Kriemhild has the chance to see him, and her love is awakened. Nelly Dürrenmatt believes that the medieval idea of women in love differed from that of men in love: “Die Liebeskraft ... ist stärker und soll stärker sein als die Liebe des Mannes; dies zeigt sich nicht nur darin, daß die Liebe in ihnen früher erwacht und die Neigung des Mannes schürt, sondern auch darin, daß das Ethos der Hingabe bei ihnen größer ist. Die Hingabe ... ist nicht zeitlich begrenzt, sondern ewig. Die Liebe wird zur höchsten Form gesteigert: zur ‘triuwe’.”<sup>18</sup> For Dürrenmatt, Kriemhild's character is determined by love: “... Kriemhilds Entwicklung ist ein immer gesteigertes Wachstum der Liebe.”<sup>19</sup> Like Lavinia in Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneas*, Kriemhild passively observes Siegfried from her window perch, as she is not allowed to see him face-to-face. While Siegfried wants the beautiful Kriemhild for the status that she represents, Kriemhild is falling in

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<sup>18</sup> Dürrenmatt, p. 184.

<sup>19</sup> Dürrenmatt, p. 185.

love with an image of manly strength on the field. Siegfried is also represented as a man with whom women easily fall in love:

sô stuont sô minneclîche	daz Siglinde kint,
daz in durch herzen liebe	trûte manec frouwe sint.
	(Strophe 135).

Siegling's son made such a handsome figure that many fell deeply in love with him. (Hatto, p. 32).

In other words, Siegfried has a great deal of erotic appeal, and Kriemhild, in spite of her fear of marriage and men, is drawn to him as well.

The *âventiure* closes with the picture of Siegfried pining for Kriemhild and Kriemhild pining for Siegfried. And yet, as Siegfried himself acknowledges, the two are total strangers to each other: "*diu ist mir noch vil vremde*" (Strophe 136). "she...remains an utter stranger to me." (Hatto, p.32). Both are in love with an image of the other, which has nothing to do with the real person underneath the façade. The *Nibelungen* poet reminds the audience that this state of affairs leads to tragedy, and the theme of *liebe unde leide* is reiterated:

daz er die minneclîchen	die zîte niene gesach,
dâ von im sît vil liebe	und ouch vil léidé gescach.
	(Strophe 138).

...without ever seeing the lovely maiden who was to bring him much joy and much sorrow, too. (Hatto, p. 32).

Siegfried must now win Kriemhild, and is given two tasks: to fight the Saxons and to help Gunther win Brünhild as a wife. As Marianne Wahl Armstrong puts it: "Er muß einsehen, daß das Glück der Minne nicht mit Gewalt zu erringen ist, daß es erdient und als Geschenk der Huld empfangen

werden muß."<sup>20</sup> Still, Siegfried's service for the sake of *minne* ignores one vital aspect: "Aber Siegfried bleibt Siegfried ... Denn das Faktum seiner Überlegenheit ist nicht zu übersehen."<sup>21</sup>

After Siegfried has successfully fought in the war against the Saxons, the Burgundians believe that Siegfried is a suitable husband for Kriemhild, since he has proved his fighting prowess. Their motives in this matter have nothing to do with whether or not Kriemhild loves Siegfried, but are political. In giving Kriemhild to Siegfried, they will obtain him as an ally as well as a relative. Gernôt explicitly states that Kriemhild should be allowed to meet Siegfried in order to hold Siegfried in their camp:

"...diu sol in grüezen pflegen,  
dâ mit wir haben gewonnen      den vil zierlichen degen."  
(Strophe 289).

"...let her now bid Siegfried welcome. With this we shall attach the splendid warrior to ourselves." (Hatto, p. 48).

Once the family approves of the match, Kriemhild is allowed to greet Siegfried, and even to kiss him (Strophe 297) and to hold his hand (Strophe 295). Hugo Bekker comments on the courtly aspects of the love between Kriemhild and Siegfried: "The instances in which courtliness in the Siegfried-Kriemhild relationship become manifest are but minor compared to those in which non-courtly aspects reveal themselves. ...the poet deliberately *mutes* his presentation of Siegfried as a courtly lover, and of Kriemhild as a

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<sup>20</sup> Wahl Armstrong, p. 203.

<sup>21</sup> Wahl Armstrong, p. 204.

lady of courtly love.”<sup>22</sup> In Bekker's view, the political is never lost in matters of love: “After his initial plan to acquire Kriemhild by force has evaporated, Siegfried behaves towards Kriemhild's brothers like any suitor whose position and that of the desired lady command a practical – in this case, a political – approach.”<sup>23</sup>

While in Iceland, winning Brünhild for Gunther in order to win Kriemhild for himself, Siegfried reveals another side of himself. In spite of his ideals of love, he professes definite ideas of a woman's place in relation to a man. His views show the other side of *minne*, the attitudes towards women that a man can hold once the woman is off the pedestal.

Siegfried rejoices in Brünhild's defeat, brought about through Siegfried's deceit, in spite of the knowledge that his own strength was no match for Brünhild's innate power. Even though he knows that Brünhild was brought low through his deceit and magic devices, Siegfried does not hesitate to rub salt into her wounds:

“Sô wol mich dirre mære,” sprach Sîfrit der degen,  
 “daz iuwer hôhverte ist alsô hie gelegen,  
 daz iemen lebet, der iuwer meister müge sîn.”  
 (Strophe 474).

“I am delighted to hear that your pride has been lowered in this way,” said brave Siegfried, “and that there is someone alive who can master you.” (Hatto, p. 68).

Siegfried is still speaking the language of power and mastery. He knows that it is he himself who has brought Brünhild low, and his gloating is a form of

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<sup>22</sup> Bekker, p.109-110.

<sup>23</sup> Bekker, p. 108.

boasting with himself as the master. He rejoices in the proud being brought low, and yet is blind to his own pride, which is an ever present danger to himself. He also reveals that although a man may love a woman, the woman's place is still under the mastery of men.

The wedding is arranged in a traditional manner. As Hugo Bekker comments: "When arrangements are made, it does not seem to occur to anyone, least of all Siegfried, that Kriemhild's will could be a relevant factor. ... we are in a world where women are mute objects of gifts and barter, in the eyes not only of brothers, but also of lovers."<sup>24</sup> Kriemhild must give her consent, a nod to the church's new insistence that the woman also must agree to the match.

Once Kriemhild and Siegfried are married, they retire to enjoy their wedding night. The act of love is described by the *Nibelungen* poet as combat which men are bound to win:

Die herren kômen beide,	dâ si solden ligen
do gedâht' ir ietslîcher	mit minnen an gesigen
den minneclîchen vrouwen;	daz semphtet' in den muot.
Sîfrides kûrzewîle	diu wart vil grœzlîche guot.

Dô der herre Sîfrit	bî Kriemhilde lac,
unt er sô minneclîche	der juncvrouwen pflag
mit sînen edelen minnen,	si wart im sô sîn lîp.
er næme für si eine	niht tûsent ándériu wîp.
	(Strophes 628-29).

And now those two great lords had come to where they would lie, and each thought how he would wrest love's victory from his handsome wife, and was comforted in his heart. Lord Siegfried's pastime was to his vast contentment, for as he lay with the young lady and inured her so tenderly to his noble

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<sup>24</sup> Bekker, p. 108.

loves, she became as dear to him as life, and he would not exchange her for a thousand others. (Hatto, p. 87).

The metaphor of combat emphasizes the end result of male superiority and female submission, but does not exclude love. Siegfried's lovemaking is *minneclîche*. The night is described from Siegfried's point of view. *Sifrides kurzewîle*, Siegfried's pleasure, is emphasized, and the audience is told explicitly that he is pleased with his wife. The audience is not given Kriemhild's opinion of his abilities. We are left to infer that Kriemhild may be pleased by Siegfried's attentions, but that her reaction is not seen as significant.

Siegfried finds that Kriemhild became "*im sô sîn lîp*." She becomes to him as his own body, which refers not only to her value to him, but also echoes the Biblical verse in Genesis: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (Genesis 2:24, KJV). The phrase implies that Siegfried and Kriemhild are man and wife; Kriemhild's body and Siegfried's body are one.

In spite of this unity, Siegfried will not spend the entire second wedding night in their nuptial bedroom. When Gunther describes his inability to subdue Brünhild in the marital bed, Siegfried's pride returns to the forefront. He is irritated by Brünhild's pride and wants to put her in her place:

"Owê" dâht' der recke,	"sol ich nu mînen lîp
von einer magt verliesen,	sô mugen elliu wîp
her nâch immer mêre	tragen gelpfen muot
gegen ir manne,	diu ez sus nîmmér getuot."
	(Strophe 673).

“Alas,” thought the hero, “if I now lose my life to a girl, the whole sex will grow uppish with their husbands for ever after, though they would otherwise never behave so.” (Hatto, p. 92).

Here Siegfried not only is expressing his fear of possible death, but also his even stronger fear of women not obeying their husbands and masters. He is fighting not just Brünhild, but all women who would dare to assert their own will against their men. He wants to preserve the status quo whereby women are subservient to their husbands, in spite of the fact that Brünhild is the stronger than Gunther. Siegfried sees Brünhild's superiority as a threat to the entire system of marriage, whereby husbands dominate the persons of their wives, for women will look to Brünhild's example as an inspiration to expressing their own will contrary to their mates, and this rebellion would be a permanent state from which men could not reassert their position.

If this is his general idea of how a wife should behave subject to her husband, we can assume that he also expects this obedience from Kriemhild, in her role as his wife. If *she* decides to “*tragen gelpfen muot*”, he is bound to react in a similar manner. He will not allow any woman, especially any wife, to stand against her husband.

Brünhild's self-assertion incites Siegfried's anger – “*zürnen er began*” (Strophe 674) – and he redoubles his efforts to subdue Brünhild by force. He has not taken to heart the wisdom of his father that women are not won through violence.

Kriemhild's views of Siegfried as her husband are indicated in a more discreet manner. The first time she sees him, she is attracted to him, but she cannot act upon her desires. Kriemhild is the dutiful daughter and does not give Siegfried any encouragement prior to the family's endorsement. Even

when her guardians are not present, she refrains from expressing her own desires directly, as when Siegfried appears with the message that Gunther and Brünhild are on their way to Worms: “*getorste si in küssen, / diu vrouwe tæte daz*” (Strophe 562) “Had she dared kiss him, the lady would have done so” (Hatto, p. 79). Yet it is not left open to doubt that Kriemhild is in love with Siegfried, for “*dô mêrte sich ir varwe / die si vor lîebé gewan*” (Strophe 561) “Then her color increased, which she acquired through love” (my translation). Kriemhild loves Siegfried as an attractive man, much as he loves her as a beautiful woman.

Yet on the second night of their marriage, Siegfried literally disappears in front of her eyes in order to help Gunther subdue Brünhild:

Sîvrit der herre	vil minneclîchen saz
bî sînem schœnen wîbe	mit vreuden âne haz.
si trûte sîne hende	mit ir vil wîzen hant,
unz er ir vor den ougen	sine wesse wénné verswant.

Dô si mit im spilte	unt si sîn niht mêr ensach,
zuo sînem gesinde	diu kûneginne sprach:
“mich hât des michel wunder,	war der kûnic sî bekommen.
wer hât die sînen hende	ûz den mînen genomen?”
	(Strophes 661-62).

Lord Siegfried sat beside his lovely wife with great affection and delight while her lovely white hands fondled his – when he vanished suddenly before her very eyes! Toying with him thus and then no longer seeing him, the queen said to her attendants: “I am amazed! Where can the king have gone? Who took his hands out of mine?” (Hatto, p. 91).

For the first time in the *Nibelungenlied*, a woman is showing desire towards her husband on her own initiative. She shows her love through caressing and playing with him (both verbs *trûte* and *spilte* are in the singular). Instead of responding to her affection, he decides to disappear.

When Siegfried returns with the ring and the girdle that he had taken from Brünhild that night, what was his explanation? The *Nibelungenlied* is silent on the exact content of Siegfried's conversation with his wife, but Kriemhild is led to believe, either through Siegfried's boasts or through the evidence of his gift of ring and girdle, that Siegfried has had sexual relations with Brünhild.<sup>25</sup> In any event, Siegfried was hardly tactful in giving Kriemhild the trophies symbolizing Brünhild's sexual conquest. Mowatt and Sacker comment on Siegfried's action: "Once he is married, however, Siegfried shows the same casual disregard for her personality and needs that he shows for those of all others – a characteristic largely responsible for his death – and gives her tokens of his manly exploits without apparently bothering to explain much about them or to think what she might use them for."<sup>26</sup> Whether he boasted of his sexual prowess or not, Kriemhild is left with the ambiguous impression that her husband spent one of his honeymoon nights in the bed of another woman.

After the wedding, Kriemhild speaks up on her own behalf in order to assert her rights to her inheritance. When Siegfried boldly rejects her property in order to keep his own pride, she is thwarted in her desire to have economic self-sufficiency. Kriemhild will bring no material goods into the marriage that can threaten her husband's position as master of the house. Kriemhild is reminded of her powerlessness as a wife, and that she is

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<sup>25</sup> In the *Þiðreks saga*, Sigurd explicitly takes Brynhild's virginity as well as her ring: "oc þa tecr hann til brynildar. oc faer skiott hennar moeydom. oc er mornar þa tecr hann af hennar hendi i. fingr gull oc laetr þa annat istaðen." *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, Vol 2, p. 42.

<sup>26</sup> Mowatt and Sacker, p. 15.

married to a man who places his own will first without any consideration of his wife's feelings in the matter.

In the Netherlands, once the two of them are settled into Siegfried's home, the marriage goes as it should. Kriemhild bears a son, and succeeds Siglinde in influence and power once Siglinde dies. There are no intimate scenes between Siegfried and Kriemhild on Siegfried's home territory. *Minne* considerations are absent. Hugo Bekker comments on the lack of loving scenes after the marriage has taken place: "...after he is married, Siegfried no longer displays towards Kriemhild any reverence that could claim to be of courtly orientation... 'reality' prevails."<sup>27</sup> The poet presents the audience with a picture of a righteous king and a beautiful queen, but there is no comment on the affections of the two together during that time.

Kriemhild is resting in a bed when the messenger comes from Burgundy: "*si spranc von einem bette, / daran si rúowénde lag*" (Strophe 740) "the Queen arose at once from the couch where she was resting" (Hatto, p. 102). As soon as the extraordinary invitation comes, Kriemhild is literally leaping back into action and into the story. Kriemhild's pleasure at the invitation betrays her eagerness to return home. "*gegen ir herzeleide / wie liebiu mære si bevant!*" (Strophe 741) "what glad news it was for Kriemhild's homesick heart!" (Hatto, p. 102). For whatever reasons, Kriemhild is not happy in Xanten, which may explain her reluctance to return there later on.

The confrontation between Kriemhild and Brünhild reveals Siegfried's importance for Kriemhild. It is vital for Kriemhild herself to be married to

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<sup>27</sup> Bekker, p. 64.

the greatest man in the realm, just as it is important for Brünhild for the same reasons. Both women have been robbed of their own economic power. Without a self-reliant means of security, their standing in their society rests on the status of their husbands. Brünhild, in fact, has her doubts about Gunther and her position as his wife, which was why the invitation was extended in the first place. Neither Kriemhild nor Brünhild can have a sense of self-worth and importance apart from their positions as wives. The status of the husband is their own status.

Kriemhild's comments on her husband's prowess provide Brünhild with the opening she has been waiting for, a glimpse of the truth that she has been hoping to discover.<sup>28</sup> Kriemhild is well aware of Siegfried's superiority:

“...ich hân einen man,  
daz elliu disiu rîche      ze sînen handen solden stân.”  
(Strophe 815).

“I have a husband of such merit that he might rule over all the kingdoms of this region..” (Hatto, p.111).

Brünhild feels rightly threatened by Kriemhild's assertion, for her position as queen is dependent upon her husband's ability to keep the realm for himself, that is, to be a better man than Siegfried. She is insecure in her belief that Gunther truly is the man he has made himself out to be, and that is not without cause. She therefore asserts strongly that Gunther is the better man: “*die wîle lebt Gunther, / sô kundez nîmmér ergân*” (Strophe 816) “...as long as Gunther lives it could never come about” (Hatto, p. 111).

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<sup>28</sup> Interestingly enough, in *Þiðreks saga*, it is Brynhild who initiates the confrontation and not Kriemhild. *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, Vol. 1, p. 259.



Kriemhild is speaking the truth in the matter, a truth which Brünhild is not eager to hear.

Brünhild claims on the authority of the words of Siegfried and Gunther themselves that Siegfried is of lower status than Gunther:

“dô jach des selbe Sîfrit, er wære 'sküneges man.  
des hân ich in für eigen, sît ichs in hôrte jehen.”  
(Strophe 821).

“...– and Siegfried himself said so – that he was Gunther's vassal, and so I consider him my liegeman, having heard him say so.” (Hatto, p. 112).

Brünhild now asserts either of two things: that Siegfried is truly Gunther's subordinate or that Siegfried and Gunther are both liars. Brünhild insists on her position, based on the word of the two men, whose status the argument appears to be about. But Kriemhild sees this as an attack on her own position and cuts through the veil surrounding the argument, going right for the heart of the matter:

“Wie heten sô geworben die edelen bruoder mîn,  
daz ich eigen mannes wine solde sîn?”  
(Strophe 822).

“How could my noble brothers have had a hand in my marrying a liegeman?” (Hatto, p. 112).

Kriemhild has voiced her concern for what is at stake: her position at court and her reputation. Brünhild has as much at stake as she does, and therefore the argument escalates until Kriemhild “*vil sêre zürnén began*” (Strophe 823) “...Kriemhild lost her temper” (Hatto, p. 112). Brünhild has pushed her to her limit, and she retorts with the assertion that Siegfried is not Gunther's equal, but his superior, and therefore implies that she is not Brünhild's

inferior but her superior: “*er ist tiwerr danne sî / Gunther mîn bruoder*” (Strophe 824). “He ranks above my noble brother Gunther.” (Hatto, p. 112). Kriemhild also appeals to the evidence that Siegfried is above paying *zins*, or the dues that a liegeman owes to his overlord. She accuses Brünhild of letting her pride rule her, an accusation that Brünhild is quick to throw back in Kriemhild's face. In fact, the pride of both women is compensatory for the weaknesses that they had hoped to conceal.

Finally Kriemhild throws down the gauntlet and challenges Brünhild to a contest to determine once and for all who is the better queen. At stake is Kriemhild's position as a freeborn noble woman and her husband's status as the man most fit to rule:

“Du muost daz hiute schouwen, daz ich bin adelvrî,  
unt daz mîn man ist tiwerr, danne der dîne sî.”  
(Strophe 828).

“You must see visible proof this day that I am a free noblewoman, and that my husband is a better man than yours.” (Hatto, p. 112).

Kriemhild and Brünhild now hate each other with a hatred that cannot be erased, for one of the women must be right and the other must be wrong about her status as a queen of rank. One of the two will fall in status, and that fall will be dramatically public.

Kriemhild uses all her weapons, that is, her clothes and her beauty, in order to humiliate her enemy. She and her retinue come to the cathedral steps in all their finery, and, as usual in the matter of beauty in the *Nibelungenlied*, Kriemhild is deemed the more elegant of the two women. Her beauty in itself is an assertion of her superiority, a beauty which is

accented by the abundant wealth which she is now displaying. Brünhild had rightfully feared Kriemhild's beauty earlier in the epic as a threat to her own position. Kriemhild's magnificence is a visible declaration of her freeborn status:

Swaz kleider ie getruogen	edeler ritter kint,
wider ir gesinde	daz was gar ein wint.
si was sô rîch des guotes,	daz drîzec künige wîp
ez möhten niht erziugen,	daz tete Kriemhilde lîp.
	(Strophe 836).

However fine the clothes ever worn by daughters of any noble knights, they were as nothing beside those of her suite: Kriemhild was so rich in possessions that thirty queens could not have found the wherewithal to do as she had done. (Hatto, p. 113).

Through her bearing and beauty and possessions, Kriemhild has already won the contest, just as putting Siegfried and Gunther side-by-side allows anyone to see who is the better man.

Still Brünhild must carry the fight to its bitter conclusion by publicly forbidding Kriemhild to enter the cathedral, which would lower Kriemhild's status in front of the crowd: "*jâ sol vor küniges wîbe / nimmer eigen diu gegân*" (Strophe 838) "A liegewoman may not enter before a queen!" (Hatto, p. 113). Brünhild has clearly gone too far, and Kriemhild hurls the insult which will bring about the ruin of Brünhild's reputation for good:

"kúndestu nóch geswîgen,	daz wæré dir guot.
du hâst geschendet selbe	den dînen schœnen lîp:
wie möchte mannes kebse	werden immer küniges wîp?"
	(Strophe 839).

"It would have been better for you if you could have held your tongue ... for you have brought dishonour on your own pretty

head. How could a vassel's paramour ever wed a King?" (Hatto, p. 114).

Calling Brünhild a whore in public is an act which Kriemhild would not undertake without evidence. Kriemhild believes that she has the certain knowledge of the true state of the matter:

“daz tuon ich dich,” sprach Kriemhilt. “den dînen schœnen lîp  
den minnet' êrste Sîfrit, der mîn vil lieber man.  
janê wás ez niht mîn bruoder, der dir den magetuom  
an gewan.

War kômen dîne sinne? ez was ein arger list.  
zuiu lieze du in minnen, sît er dîn eigen ist?  
....

...dîn übermuot dich hât betrogen.”  
(Strophes 840-42).

“I call you one,” answered Kriemhild. “My dear husband Siegfried was the first to enjoy your lovely body, since it was not my brother who took your maidenhead. Where were your poor wits? – It was a vile trick. – Seeing that he is your vassel, why did you let him love you? ... Your arrogance has gotten the better of you.” (Hatto, p. 114).

This accusation is destructive, calling into question the lineage of Brünhild's children and her main purpose as queen. As Margaret Wade Labarge states: “the queen's primary role was to ensure the passage of royal blood to a male heir whose existence was considered essential for the peaceful transmission of power from one generation to the next.”<sup>29</sup> Calling Brünhild a whore also implies the possibility of illegitimate children resulting from such whoredom. (Hagen follows this rationale in arguing for the murder of Siegfried in

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<sup>29</sup> Margaret Wade Labarge, *A Small Sound of the Trumpet: Women in Medieval Life*. (Boston: Bacon Press, 1986) 44.

Strophe 876: “*Suln wir gouche ziehen?*” “Are we to raise cuckoos?” (Hatto, p. 117, cuckoos meaning here bastards).

Kriemhild has won the first round of this war of words, and sweeps into the cathedral first, while Brünhild cries in frustration. Her triumph is public. Nelly Dürrenmatt comments on the importance of this public demonstration: “Dieses Wichtignehmen der Oeffentlichkeit ist durchaus höfisch, denn im Leben des höfischen Menschen spielt die Oeffentlichkeit diese entscheidende Bedeutung. ...innerlich bleibt die Ehre Brünhilds unangetastet... Aeufferlich aber ist ihre Ehre befleckt, denn die Kränkung vor dem versammelten Hof läßt sich nicht aus der Welt schaffen.”<sup>30</sup>

Once the service is over, Brünhild demands further proof, and Kriemhild produces the ring: “*daz brâhte mir mîn vriedel / als er êrste bî iu lac*” (Strophe 847) “...which my sweetheart brought me when he first slept with you” (Hatto, p. 114). Brünhild through insinuation accuses her of theft and then the girdle, a more intimate piece of apparel, is produced. Brünhild cries again, a sure sign of defeat, and the men are called in to adjudicate.

Siegfried now has a choice: he can tell the truth or he can lie. He chooses to blame Kriemhild for revealing the secret instead of admitting the ruse that he and Gunther used to force Brünhild into her subservient role as Gunther's wife, both in Iceland and in Gunther's bed. For all his talk of love and how precious Kriemhild is to him, when put to the test, he chooses himself, and, in addition, threatens Kriemhild with a beating:

Dô sprach aber Sîfrit:	“geniuzet es mîn wîp,
daz si hât betrüebet	den Prünhilde lîp,

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<sup>30</sup> Dürrenmatt, 227.

daz ist mir sicherlîchen âne mâze leit."  
 dô sâhen zuo z'ein ander die guoten rîttér gemeit.

"Man sol sô vrouwen ziehen", sprach Sifrit der degen,  
 "daz si üppeclîche sprûche lâzen under wegen.  
 verbiut ez dînem wîbe, der mînen tuon ich sam.  
 ir grôzen ungefüege ich mich wærlîche scham."  
 (Strophes 861-862).

"If my wife were to go unpunished for having distressed Brünhild I should be extremely sorry, I assure you," rejoined Siegfried, at which the good knights exchanged meaningful glances. "Women should be trained to avoid irresponsible chatter," continued Siegfried. "Forbid your wife to indulge in it, and I shall do the same with mine. I am truly ashamed of her unruly behaviour." (Hatto, p. 116).

Siegfried does three things in one speech: he lowers Kriemhild's status significantly by humiliating her in public, he chooses Brünhild over Kriemhild in the war between the two women, and he threatens to punish Kriemhild for speaking about that which he had hoped to hide. Instead of attacking Kriemhild's claim directly as untruthful, he cloaks his guilt in a speech designed to demonstrate the worthlessness of all speech by women, insisting on keeping women in their place as inferiors to men. The talk of women he denounces as *üppiclîche*, or prideful, but Siegfried shows contempt for whatever truth is hidden in that speech. Kriemhild's *grôzen ungefüege* is bringing the sham behind Gunther and Brünhild's marriage to light, bringing out that which was hidden, that which Brünhild herself desired to know. Kriemhild speaks up where Gunther and Siegfried would have preferred her to keep silent, in order to keep their deceits and failings in the dark. For Siegfried, Kriemhild's pride easily can be sacrificed to keep his own place in court society secure.





with the husband either repenting of his actions or being punished in return. Siegfried's death may also be understood in the light of the unrepentant husband, who, through pride, inflicts an unjust punishment on the woman who is totally dependent on him for her welfare.

In Hartmann von Aue's *Erec* and Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, the husband's right to punish his spouse is shown, but it is also limited by society's opinion of proper behavior in courtly men.

Hartmann's *Erec*, based on Chrétien de Troyes' poem, is the story of a marriage that grows to harmony and equilibrium, but this harmony is hard-won. Enite, newly married, finds that the court is criticizing her arrival there since Erec spends all his time in bed with her:

si sprâchen alle: "wê der stunt  
daz uns mîn vrouwe je wart kunt!  
des verdirbet unser herre."(Lines 2996-98).<sup>33</sup>

[They all said]: "Woe be to the hour when we set eyes upon my lady the queen! It is for this that our lord is going to ruin."<sup>34</sup>

Enite finds a way to broach the subject to Erec, but in his wrath at being criticized, Erec forbids her to speak and forces her to precede him on a journey. His punishment is not through physical beating, but through humiliation and degradation. During the journey, Enite sees a danger and decides to speak out in order to save Erec's life, which provokes Erec's anger:

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<sup>33</sup> Hartmann von Aue, *Erec* ed. Albert Leitzmann, Re-ed Ludwig Wolff, 6th edition eds. Christoph Cormeau and Kurt Gärtner, (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1985) 89.

<sup>34</sup> Hartmann von Aue, *Erec* tr. and intro. Michael Resner, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987) 94.

In spite of the fact that her warning saves his life, he threatens her with death and increases her punishment, justifying his actions through his belief in the inferiority of women:

“wie nû, ir wunderlîchez wîp?  
 jâ verbôt ich iu an den lîp  
 daz ir niht soldet sprechen:  
 wer hiez iuch daz brechen?  
 daz ich von wîben hân vernomen,  
 daz ist wâr, des bin ich komen  
 vol an ein ende hie:  
 swaz man in unz her noch ie  
 alsô tiure verbôt,  
 dar nâch wart in alsô nôt  
 daz sis muosten bekorn.”  
 (Lines 3238-48).

“What have you to say for yourself, strange woman? Indeed, I have forbidden you, at the risk of your life, to utter a single word. Who bade you break that oath? Everything that I have heard tell about women I have, in truth, seen fully confirmed here: to this day they have been attracted to precisely that thing which is emphatically forbidden to them, that they could not help but try it.” (p.97).

Erec's speech is grounded in the belief in the perverseness of female speech, a speech which reflects the perverseness of womankind in general, symbolized by their desire to disobey. Although the person who gives the orders is not specified, one can assume that Erec is referring to men in their God-given right of authority over women. If Enite will not obey his order to keep silent, she deserves to die.

In spite of Erec's threats, Enite warns him again, although she fears his punishment:

si gedâchte: “warne ich mînen man,  
 sô briche ich aber sîn gebot.  
 er enlâtz durch êre noch durch got

er enneme mir den lîp. ...”  
 vil drâte si hin umbe sach,  
 ze Erecken si mit vorhten sprach:...  
 (Lines 3353-56 and 3378-79).

“If I warn my husband,” she thought, “then I shall be breaking his commandment anew. Neither his sense of honor nor God Himself will deter him from killing me...”  
 Enite looked back at once and called to Erec with trepidation...(pp. 98-99).

Each time she warns him, Erec's wrath and the severity of his punishment increases. Erec refuses to recognize the necessity of Enite's warnings to preserve both of their lives.

Finally, Erec has been wounded and finally collapses in a faint resembling death. Enite is trapped at the court of Count Oringles. The Count wants to force Enite to marry him, and in order to ensure her submission, he beats her:

sîn zorn in verleite  
 ze grôzer tôrheite  
 [und ûf grôzen ungevuoc,]  
 daz er si mit der hand sluoc  
 alsô daz diu guote  
 harte sêre bluote.  
 (Lines 6517-23).

His anger led him onto the path of great foolishness and great impropriety, such that he struck Enite with his hand so brutally that the good lady bled quite profusely. (p. 138).

The court criticizes the Count, some even to his face, in spite of the danger of incurring his displeasure:

ouch wizzenz im genuoge  
 under sîniu ougen:  
 die andern redtenz tougen  
 ez wære tôerlîch getân

und er möchtez gerne lâzen hân.  
(Lines 6529-33).

Moreover a good many reproached him to his very face for what he had done, while others spoke secretly of it, saying it was a foolish deed, and one which he easily could have forgone.  
(p. 138).

The Count is surprised that his court dares to challenge his action, while claiming that he has the right to do as he pleases with his own wife:

“ir herren, ir sît wunderlich  
daz ir dar umbe strâfet mich  
swaz ich mînem wîbe tuo  
dâ bestât doch nieman zuo  
ze redenne übel noch guot,  
swaz ein man sînem wîbe tuot.  
si ist mîn und bin ich ir:  
wie welt ir daz erwern mir,  
ich entuo ir swaz mir gevalle?”  
dâ mite gesweicte er si alle.  
(Lines 6540-6549).

“Your behaviour is extraordinary, you lords, for denouncing me for what I do to my wife. It is indeed no one's privilege to speak ill or well of what a man does to his wife. She is mine and I am hers. How is it that you would prevent me from doing with her as I please?” With that he silenced them all. (p. 138).

The Count's legal right to beat his wife as he pleases cannot be questioned by the court, although the courtiers may disagree with his methods in private.

Enite keeps provoking the count, in order to bring about her own death.

Hartmann's narrator comments on this as abnormal behavior:

wâ si die vreude möchte nemen?  
daz muget ir gerne vernemen,  
wan slege tuont selten iemen vrô. (Lines 6554-56).

Whence did she manage to cull this joy? This you may well wish to know, for seldom does a beating make anyone happy. (p. 138).

In spite of the blow which she has already received, Enite continues to cry out, provoking the Count to hit her again. Significantly, this blow is aimed at her mouth, in order to silence her:

der rede treip si sô vil  
 unz er si anderstunt  
 sêre sluoc an den munt.  
 (Lines 6577-79).

At such length did she rant on that he finally struck her again brutally on the mouth. (p. 138).

Enite's loud cries eventually wake her husband as if from the dead. Wendy Sterba shows how Enite through this epic is learning to use her voice, and hence her power: "Having realized that she can expedite her own death by inciting an angry Oringles to kill her, she cries out her feelings and it is this personal outpouring ultimately that will wake Erec and lead to Enite's salvation."<sup>35</sup> The Count is repaid for his behavior by being killed at once, one of the few characters to whom Erec does not extend mercy. His beating of Enite had set in motion the chain reaction that led to his death.

According to Sterba, Erec must now learn the error of his ways, namely to control his temper and to participate in society. Erec stops punishing Enite, not because she has learned to obey him without question, but because he has learned that her speech is valuable to him. In fact, after he rescues her from the Count, she saves his life one more time by speaking out at the proper moment before the epic ends.

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<sup>35</sup> Wendy Sterba, "The Question of Enite's Transgression: Female Voice and Male Gaze as Determining Factors in Hartmann's Erec," in *Women as Protagonists and Poets in the German Middle Ages: An Anthology of Feminist Approaches to Middle High German Literature* ed. Albrecht Classen, Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik Nr. 528 (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1991) 63.

Hartmann's *Erec* interweaves the legal right of wife-beating with a vision of a married relationship which has no need for such measures. The husbands who use punishment in order to force their wives into submission are in turn visited with punishment. The members of the court comment on the brutality of wife-beating in moral terms. Clearly, wife-beating brought some measure of disapprobation, in spite of the legal right for its existence.<sup>36</sup>

In Wolfram's *Parzival*, another instance of wifely punishment is demonstrated. The beautiful Jeschute is humiliated by her husband for a transgression which she in fact did not commit. Parzival has come and stolen a ring, a brooch and two kisses from her, in spite of her protests and self-defense. When her husband Orilus returns, he believes her guilty and punishes her by denying her clothes and other necessities of life. Like *Erec*, he does not physically beat his wife, but lowers her station in the eyes of all.

When Parzival meets them later in the course of his journeys, Jeschute's clothes have turned to rags, she is sunburned and in want. The narrator explains the situation as a matter of male pride and dominance:

Ich wil iu sagen des einen zorn.  
daz sîn wîp wol geborn

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<sup>36</sup> Wife-beating is not seen as grounds for separation or divorce until the middle of the thirteenth century. Brundage considers the question under the term *saevitia*: "Another basis for separation...was cruelty (*saevitia*), which justified separation when the spouse's cruelty had become unbearable. This cause for separation was created by practice, not legislation" (p. 455). Shulamith Shahar summarizes the use of physical correction by the husband: "Häufig jedoch begnügten sich Gesetzgeber und Kommentatoren nicht damit, die Gehorsamspflicht einer Ehefrau generell festzustellen, sondern legten im einzelnen dar, welche legitimen Mittel dem Mann zu Verfügung stünden, um seine Frau zur Gefolgschaft zu zwingen, oder ihre moralische Besserung herbeizuführen. Beaumanoir gestand einem Mann jede Methode zu, die er zur Erziehung seines Weibs für geeignet hielt. Er dürfte sie nach Gutdünken bestrafen, allerdings nicht verwunden oder töten."

Shulamith Shahar, *Die Frau im Mittelalter* tr. Ruth Achlama, (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1988) 97.

dâ vor was genôtzot:  
 er was iedoch ir rehter vogt,  
 sô daz si schermes wart an in.  
 er wânde, ir wîplîcher sin  
 wær gein im verkêret,  
 unt daz si gunêret  
 het ir kiusche unde ir prîs  
 mit einem andern âmîs.  
 des lasters nam er pflîhte.  
 ouch ergienc sîn gerihte  
 über si, daz grœzer nôt  
 wîp nie gedolte âne tôt,  
 unde ân alle ir schulde.  
 er möht ir sîne hulde  
 versagen, swenner wolde:  
 nieman daz wenden solde,  
 ob [der] man des wîbes hât gewalt.  
 (Lines 264, 1-19).<sup>37</sup>

I will tell you why one of them was angry. It was because his well-born spouse had suffered violence some time past. After all, he was her legal guardian, so that she looked to him for protection. He imagined that her wifely feelings for him had undergone a change and that she had brought dishonour on her chaste living and her good name by taking another lover. And he made this scandal his concern. Indeed, he passed such dire judgment on her that no woman ever endured harsher treatment, short of death, and this without fault on her part. He could withhold his favor from her at any time he pleased, no one will prevent that, with wives being under their husbands' jurisdiction.<sup>38</sup>

Wolfram's narrator comments directly on the position of the wife as under the power (*gewalt*) of the husband, and acknowledges that the power of the husband over the wife is beyond the control of society. No one is able to

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<sup>37</sup> Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* Studienausgabe nach dem Text von Karl Lachmann, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1965) 118.

<sup>38</sup> Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* tr. A. T. Hatto, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980) 139.

criticize the husband, as he is allowed to do as he pleases with his wife. The word *gewalt* also implies a physical superiority and the possibility of physical violence. The narrator cannot go so far as to condemn Orilus of bad behavior, as that would question the husband's authority, but throws the final judgment into God's hands:

mich dunket si hân bêde reht.  
 der beidiu krump unde sleht  
 geschouf, künner scheiden,  
 sô wender daz an beiden,  
 diez âne sterben dâ ergê.  
 (Strophe 264, 25-29).

As I see it, both were right. May He that created the crooked  
 and the straight avert a fatal outcome if He can resolve it.  
 (p.139).

The narrator thus calls in God to adjudicate the joust between Parzival and Orilus. Parzival fights Orilus and once Orilus is defeated, Parzival insists that Orilus accept his wife back. But not until Parzival admits his error publicly and swears to Jeschute's innocence does Orilus admit his guilt in punishing Jeschute too severely: "*ich hân unfuoge an ir getân*" (Strophe 271,7) "I have treated her in a scandalous manner" (my translation).

In both *Erec* and *Parzival*, the husbands' legal right to punish the wife is not called into question, not even by the wives so punished, who accept their lot until their husbands change their minds. When Enite is being forced to accept another husband, Count Oringles, her only way to free herself from the false husband was to keep screaming in the hope that he might beat her to death, hardly an attractive option. Still, the moral question is much more murky, as the husbands are shown acting out of anger and out of their need to control their wives' behavior. The Count, whose punishing beating is the

most direct and bloody, is killed. His death is a severe judgment on his cruelty. The true husband, Erec, learns to stop punishing his wife by the end of the story. Orilus in *Parzival* not only ceases punishing his wife, but also admits to wrong-doing.

In these works, the husband who punishes his wife, especially if he is punishing her unjustly, will suffer punishment in retribution. Kriemhild's mentioning of a beating may serve as an instance whereby Siegfried's death is hastened by his own behavior and not just by the malice intended by his enemies.

The *Nibelungenlied* mention of a beating is unique to that version of the material. In the Icelandic versions, there is no instance of Sigurd beating Gudrun for any reason. Even the *Piðreks saga*, the Norse version most similar to the German one, shows no scene where Grimhild demonstrates her bruises to Hagen or to anyone else.

One major work of Old Icelandic literature, *Brennu-Njals saga*, incorporates the theme of wife abuse along with its larger tale of the breaking of bonds of loyalty leading to revenge. When a husband abuses the wife, the family steps in to avenge the perceived wrong against the family honor. This occurs in spite of the affection which might otherwise exist between the couple.

The beautiful and proud Hallgerd in *Brennu-Njals saga* is given away in marriage against her will. Jenny Jochens surmises that such marriages against the will of the wife are didactic in nature. Contemporary twelfth-century Christian ideas urge the woman's consent. "This didactic quality is further underscored when we perceive that in the family sagas all the five

marriages contracted against the will of the women ended in disaster.”<sup>39</sup> In *Njals saga*, this marriage ends in the death of the husband through a revenge killing. When her husband slaps her, her foster father Thjostolf kills him, freeing her up for another marriage.

Her second marriage to a man named Glum is for love. Her guardians have explicitly requested her consent, which she freely gives. Her family, however, warns her new husband not to take in Hallgerd's foster father Thjostolf, a warning which later goes unheeded.

When Thjostolf is living with the couple, he and Glum get into an argument. Glum takes the argument to Hallgerd:

Glúmr gekk at henni ok mælti: “Illt hofum vit Þjóstólfr nú saman átt, ok munu vit skamma stund saman búa,” – ok sagði allt þat, er þeir hofðu við átzk. Hallgerðr mælti þá eptir Þjóstólfi, ok varð þeim þá mjok at orðum. Glúmr drap till hennar hendi sinni ok mælti: “Ekki deili ek við þik lengr,” – ok gekk á braut. Hon unni honum mikit ok mátti eigi stilla sik ok grét hástofum. Þjóstólfr gekk at henni ok mælti: “Sárt ert þú leikin, ok skyldi eigi svá opt.” “Ekki skalt þú þessa hefna,” segir hon, “ok engan hlut í eiga, hversu sem með okkr ferr.” Hann gekk í braut ok glotti við.”<sup>40</sup>

Glum went up to her and said, “Thjostolf and I have just had a quarrel. We are not sharing the same roof much longer.”

He told her everything that had happened between them.

Hallgerd started to defend Thjostolf, and a quarrel flared up.

Glum slapped her and walked away saying, “I am not going to argue with you any more.”

She loved Glum so deeply that she could not restrain her tears and wept bitterly. Then Thjostolf came up to her and said, “You

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<sup>39</sup> Jenny Jochens, “The Medieval Icelandic Heroine: Fact or Fiction?” *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 17 (1986): 48.

<sup>40</sup> *Brennu-Njals saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, (Reykavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1954) 48.

have been harshly treated, but it won't happen very often again."

"This I forbid you to avenge," she cried. "You are not to take a hand in our affairs, however they may go."

Thjostolf walked away with a grin on his face.<sup>41</sup>

Glum's slap is the provocation that Thjostolf has been waiting for. Hallgerd's affection for her husband is not enough to save his life. In spite of her definite declaration not to avenge the slap, her foster father kills Glum shortly thereafter. Hallgerd takes her revenge on Thjostolf, having him killed by a relative. Thjostolf has been the proper avenger with regard to the first husband, but not with regard to Glum. The slaps brought dishonor to the woman, but she was the one who decided if they needed to be avenged. When Thjostolf used the slap to take revenge for his own purposes, Hallgerd initiates revenge for her husband in turn.

Hallgerd's relationship to her third and last husband, Gunnar, also is marred by a slap. In this instance, Hallgerd takes vengeance herself. When Gunnar is attacked by his enemies, he holds out as long as he can until his bowstring breaks:

Hann mælti til Hallgerðar: "Fá mér leppa tvá ór hári þínu, ok snúið þit móðir mín saman til bogastrengs mér." "Liggr þér nokkut við?" segir hon. "Líf mitt liggr við," segir hann, "því at þeir munu mik aldri fá sóttan, meðan ek kem boganum við." "Þá skal ek nu," segir hon, "muna þér kinnhestinn, ok hirði ek aldri, hvárt þú verr þik lengr eða skemr." "Hefir hverr til síns ágætis nokkut," segir Gunnar, ...<sup>42</sup>

He said to Hallgerd, "Let me have two locks of your hair, and help my mother plait them into a bow-string for me."

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<sup>41</sup>*Njal's Saga*, tr. with intr. Magnus Magnusson, and Herman Pálsson, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1960) 69-70.

<sup>42</sup> *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 189.

“Does anything depend on it?” asked Hallgerd.

“My life depends on it,” replied Gunnar, “for they will never overcome me as long as I have my bow.”

“In that case,” said Hallgerd, “I shall now remind you of the slap you gave me. I do not care in the least whether you hold out a long time or not.”

“To each his own way of earning fame,” said Gunnar.<sup>43</sup>

Hallgerd cannot avenge her humiliation directly, so she waits for a moment when Gunnar's life is in mortal danger. He loses his life for lack of aid on Hallgerd's part, but the fatal blows come from men.

Hallgerd has been seen as a literary descendant of the revenge-driven women in the *Nibelungenlied* and the *Eddas*.<sup>44</sup> It is noteworthy that the deaths of all three of Hallgerd's husbands come about through the blow that they give their wife. By considering that Kriemhild's revelation of the beating and of the weak spot occur at the same time, the two events connect to give Hagen all he needs in order to take the life of his enemy. Kriemhild, too, may have an injury that needed to be avenged, in spite of her protestations to guard her husband with care.

The critical response to Kriemhild's beating at Siegfried's hands has been muted. The critics who mention it at all point to it as evidence of Kriemhild's lack of character strength. Hugo Bekker puts it this way: “... we surmise that she tells Hagen with a certain amount of smugness about the beating that Siegfried has given her.”<sup>45</sup> Joachim Bumke's interpretation is similar: “Nicht ohne Stolz erzählte Kriemhild davon, wie Siegfried das

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<sup>43</sup> *Njal's Saga*, p. 171.

<sup>44</sup> Jochens, p. 50.

<sup>45</sup> Bekker, p. 66.

Hausrecht über sie ausgeübt hat..."<sup>46</sup> Mowatt and Sacker put the blame squarely on Kriemhild: "She next incites her husband to beat her and brags about it afterwards."<sup>47</sup> In fact, the beating may not have been enough! "Both [Brünhild and Kriemhild], after all, in their different ways, are asking to be beaten, and both are only partly satisfied in the event."<sup>48</sup> Here Mowatt and Sacker seem to imply that being beaten is a part of female sexuality, hence Kriemhild's alleged pride at her beating. Perhaps one should reconsider Hartmann's words: "*slege tuont selten iemen vrô.*" Another reason must lie behind her mentioning the beating.

Bert Nagel at least does not see the wife-beating as an extension of Kriemhild's pride: "Zwar wirft die strenge Hauszucht ... einen Schatten auf die so ideal gezeichnete Siegfried-Kriemhild-Minne und durchbricht auf desillusionierende krasse Weise ... die höfisch-ritterliche Romantik des Frauendienstes. Aber seltsamerweise wird das Glück der beiden nicht ernsthaft getrübt."<sup>49</sup> The beating does not fit with idealized *minne*, but with practical relations between the sexes, where the husband has authority over the wife's body.

The problem of this scene becomes more complex with Kriemhild's next speech to Hagen. She reveals that she is very much aware of Siegfried's strength and his tragic flaw:

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<sup>46</sup> Bumke, p. 466.

<sup>47</sup> Mowatt and Sacker, p. 59.

<sup>48</sup> Mowatt and Sacker, p. 63.

<sup>49</sup> Bert Nagel, *Das Nibelungenlied: Stoff – Form – Ethos* (Frankfurt am Main: Hirschgraben-Verlag, 1965) 200.

“Ich wære ân' alle sorge,” sprach daz edel wîp,  
 “daz im iemen næme in sturme sînen lîp,  
 ob er niht wolde volgen sîner übermuot;  
 sô wære immer sicher der degen küene unde guot.”  
 (Strophe 896).

“I should not be afraid of anyone killing him in battle,” replied the noble lady, “if only he would not let his rashness get the better of him. Apart from that, the good warrior would never come to harm.” (Hatto, p. 121).

*Übermuot* means not rashness, as Hatto would have it, but pride.

Siegfried is the match of any man in battle, relying on his great physical strength, but his pride will be his undoing in the end, a fact of which Kriemhild is fully aware. Kriemhild received her beating in payment for Siegfried's pride, as it was his pride which prompted his removal of Brünhild's ring and girdle in the first place.

From this position, after discussing all of Siegfried's faults in veiled terms, Kriemhild proceeds to narrate precisely how Siegfried can be killed, calling on Hagen's loyalty as her kinsman “*dú bist mîn mâc, / sô bin ich der dîn*” (Strophe 898) “You and I are of one blood, dear Hagen...” (Hatto, p. 121). The *Nibelungen* poet insists that Kriemhild is hoping that she will save her husband by her actions: “*dô wând' ouch des diu vrouwe, / ez sold im vrume sîn:*” (Strophe 905) “And she fondly imagined that it was for Siegfried's good...” (Hatto, p. 122). The poet's narrator in this unusual scene is both implicating Kriemhild in Siegfried's murder and absolving her from all guilt. The narrator also gives Kriemhild a reason for wishing Siegfried's death, the humiliating beating, but at the same time backs away from this possibility by insisting on Kriemhild's innocent motivation for revealing the weak spot.

Mowatt and Sacker believe that Kriemhild and Hagen are two of a kind when it comes to Siegfried: "Hagen is obsessed with the *idea* of Sifrid. The only other person so obsessed is Kriemhilde. Since they find the man a bit uncomfortable, all they can do is join forces to kill him, and then fight each other to the death over the (useless) remains."<sup>50</sup> Kriemhild may not be as blatant as Mowatt and Sacker believe, but there is an ambiguity in this conversation. Hagen, her *mâc*, is supposed to defend her interests and take revenge for wrongs done. Siegfried may have wronged Kriemhild through beating her unjustly, but Kriemhild is hoping that Hagen will not take revenge on Siegfried for whatever wrongs he has done to the women at Worms. Like Hallgerd's pleas to Glum, her request for mercy falls on deaf ears. The avenger will reassert the familial honor.

This confusion of feelings and desires appears during the last conversation held between Kriemhild and Siegfried. Kriemhild is aware of what she has done and the danger that Siegfried is in:

Dô gedâhtes' an diu mære	(sine tórst' ir niht gesagen),
diu si dá Hagenen sagete:	dô begonde klagen
diu edel küniginne,	daz si íe gewan den lîp.
dô weinte âne mâze	des herren Sîfrides wîp.
	(Strophe 920).

Kriemhild thought of what she had told Hagen, but she dared not mention it and began to lament that she had ever been born. (Hatto, p.124). Then lord Siegfried's wife wept uncontrollably. (my translation. Hatto for some reason did not translate this line).

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<sup>50</sup> Mowatt and Sacker, p. 94.

Kriemhild, aware that Siegfried's life is threatened, is afraid to tell Siegfried of the danger that he is in. Unlike Enite in Hartmann von Aue's *Erec*, Kriemhild is not going to risk Siegfried's anger and the resultant beatings by speaking of something that he would not want to hear. If Siegfried had not kept her in line by force, she would not be afraid to tell him directly of the peril he is in.

Instead of directly revealing the threat to Siegfried's life, and her part in revealing his weak spot to Hagen, Kriemhild hints at the peril through the use of dreams. Kriemhild explains that she has had two dreams portending his death, but he pays little attention to her concerns, trusting in his own abilities. Perhaps he sees Kriemhild's warnings as the women's talk to which no attention should be paid. Unlike Erec, who always acts on Enite's warnings even while forbidding her to speak, Siegfried does not act on the warning he has received. He dies trusting in the men who have decided to kill him for their own political purposes.

Kriemhild suffers extreme grief upon Siegfried's death. She screams, cries, and faints, and acts in a manner that gives one concern for her sanity.

But in the midst of her grief, Kriemhild vows revenge:

“... wird' ich des bewîset,	der mir in hât benomen, ich sol im schâdelîche komen.” (Strophe 1033).
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“I shall always be ready to avenge my husband with you and if I ever obtain proof who took him from me I shall have the life out of him.” (Hatto, p. 136).

She finds proof of Hagen's complicity, when Siegfried's corpse bleeds as Hagen walks by, and from that moment on, Hagen's death by Kriemhild's hand is assured. The avenger will himself feel the sting of revenge.

The *Nibelungenlied* narrator is careful to assure the reader that Kriemhild was not intentionally guilty in Siegfried's death:

Und wære sîn tûsent stunde    noch also vil gewesen,  
und solt' der herre Sîfrit    gesunder sîn gewesen,  
bî im wære Kriemhilt    hendebîlôz bestân.  
getriuwer wîbes künne    ein helt nie mêt gewan.  
(Strophe 1126).

And yet, had there been a thousand times as much [treasure], Kriemhild would have gone empty-handed in order to be with lord Siegfried, could he have but lived, for no hero ever had a wife so loyal. (Hatto, p. 147).

Francis G. Gentry notices that the *Nibelungenlied* author does not use the word *triuwe* while Siegfried is alive: "Sivrit is Kriemhild's *vrunt*, but is called this only after he has died, which is also the case with the use of *triuwe* to describe their marriage."<sup>51</sup>

The *Klage* picks up on the idea of Kriemhild as the *getriuwe* wife, using this ideal to proclaim her innocence in spite of the bloodshed that she has unleashed for the sake of that *triuwe*:

Als vroun Krîmhilt geschah,    der von schulden nie sprach  
misselîche dehein man.    swer daz mære merken kan,  
der sagt unschuldic gar ir lîp,    wan daz daz vil edel wîp  
tæte nâch ir triuwe    ir râche in grôzer riuwe.  
(Lines 76-79).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Gentry, p.65.

<sup>52</sup> *Der Nibelunge Noth und die Klage*, ed. Karl Lachmann, 6th edition (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1960) 307.

...as happened to lady Kriemhild, to whom no guilt was ever attributed by any man. Whoever can understand this tale declares her innocent, because the very noble woman took revenge for the sake of loyalty in all regret." (my translation).

The *Klage* narrator goes so far as to assure the audience that Kriemhild has found her reward in heaven:

Sît si in triwe tât gelac, an gotes hulden manegen tac  
 sol si ze himel noch geleben. got hât uns allen daz gegeben,  
 swes lîp mit triwen ende nimt, daz der dem himelrîche gezimt.  
 (Lines 286-288).

Since she lay dead in her loyalty, she should be living in heaven for many days through the grace of God. God has given this to us all, that whoever ends his days in loyalty will acquire the kingdom of Heaven. (my translation).

This medieval view of Kriemhild considers her wifely *triuwe* her saving grace. Her acts of revenge, bloody as they may be, are forgiven because of her great loyalty to her husband's memory, in spite of the fact that the great love in life was tragically flawed.

The ideal of *triuwe* gives Kriemhild the possibility to maneuver and to act politically for the sake of revenge. She is not easily condemned for acting on behalf of her deceased husband, but she is the person who will determine her actions. Her freedom of action in amassing an army of her own is what prompts Hagen to steal her treasure, which eventually forces her into another marriage. Her new marriage is devoid of *minne*, but she remains free to act within her new marriage in a way that she could not while married to Siegfried:

Nu het si wol erkunnen, daz ir nieman widerstuont,  
 alsô noch fürsten wîbe küneges recken tuont,  
 unt daz si alle zîte zwelf künige vor ir sach.

sie gedâcht ouch maniger leide, der ir dâ héimé geschah.  
(Strophe 1391).

By this time she had ascertained that there was none who dared cross her will (as courtiers are still apt to do where a princely consort is concerned) and never did she fail to see a dozen kings in attendance. She brooded on the many wrongs that had been done to her at home... (Hatto, p. 177).

Kriemhild's path is clear, as her court is behind her. She is no longer the shy maiden obeying her brothers and her husband, but a full-grown woman in command of a great retinue. She is powerful, and she is uncontrollable. Her independence comes from the knowledge that she can no longer be restrained from doing what her heart desires.

The institution of marriage which was to unite Siegfried and Kriemhild forever to the mutual benefit of both parties has failed to fulfill its function. Both parties, who should have been protecting the other, have not succeeded. Siegfried had failed to acknowledge his wife's lawful rights and insisted on viewing the woman as a dangerous entity that had to be kept subservient to her husband. His public humiliation and beating of his wife demonstrate aptly the loss of *minne* once the courtship has been concluded. Kriemhild, in revealing both the beating and the weak spot, provide the opening Hagen needs to instigate the first revenge killing in the work. This revenge killing sparks Kriemhild's determination to take revenge herself, leading to the cataclysmic orgy of death in Hunland.

## Chapter Five

### The Death of Kriemhild

The death of Kriemhild dramatically ends the *Nibelungenlied*. The entire epic has been building tension which culminates in the moment when Kriemhild swings the sword which decapitates Hagen. Her sudden, violent action instantly brings about her own gruesome demise through Hildebrand's avenging sword. Why must Kriemhild die? If she only lived for revenge, then Friedrich Panzer's words state the necessity of her death: "Sie mochte sterben; ihre Aufgabe war erfüllt."<sup>1</sup> If Kriemhild's killing of Hagen is seen as murder of a brave knight, then Panzer's description of Hildebrand – "Hildebrand, der lebenslang für höfische Ordnung sorgte"<sup>2</sup> – states the case for a just executioner, implying that with Kriemhild's death, order had been returned to society. The disorder, or demonic element, which Kriemhild personifies, has been destroyed: "ze stücken was gehouwen / dô daz edele wip" (Strophe 2376) "The noble lady was hewn in pieces" (Hatto, p. 291). The many blows which completely destroy Kriemhild's body show the hostility which female power engendered in the male characters and the extent to which these characters must go to rid themselves of its disturbing force. Kriemhild's death is more than a literary device to rid the scene of a now-

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Panzer, *Das Nibelungenlied: Entstehung und Gestalt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1955) 235.

<sup>2</sup> Panzer, p. 235.

superfluous character, more than a cursory return to order, but a strong indictment of the uncontrollable woman.

Kriemhild's death stands as a warning to women to remain under the proper control of men or face a gruesome end. A. T. Hatto posits: "Women must not take up the sword to slay. Their womanhood should prevent them."<sup>3</sup> In breaking with her "womanhood," Kriemhild deserves to die a death seen as a just judgment, with Hildebrant's sword the correct instrument of retribution. As Hugo Kuhn states: "Es war keine Rache, sondern ein Strafgericht, und dies nicht im Auftrag des Königs, ... aber dennoch mit seiner Duldung. Es geschah im Dienste eines höheren Rechtes oder vielleicht Gottes."<sup>4</sup> Let us take a closer look at this assumption. Hildebrant, the executioner, has a reason for anger towards Kriemhild which is rooted in previous events. In fact, Hildebrant can be seen as a defender of a certain idea of masculine heroism, which Kriemhild's sword-wielding calls into question.

Philip N. Anderson sees the problem of Kriemhild's death as the result of her unique status in medieval German literature:

In comparison to the women in the works of Hartmann, Gottfried, Wolfram, and the poems of the minnesingers, where women are generally portrayed as passively waiting for things to happen to them, Kriemhild constantly acts upon her own initiative, regardless of the cost. Her independence is not merely the desire to be free of the influence of men, nor is it mere power brokering. What fascinates and horrifies the poet simultaneously is her obstinate will to defy society and take

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<sup>3</sup> *The Nibelungenlied*, p. 319.

<sup>4</sup> Hugo Kuhn, "Brünhilds und Kriemhilds Tod" in *Kleine Schriften Vol. II* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co. 1971) 86.

charge of her own life...Such defiance must bring a counter attack from society, and indeed, at every step of the way she finds herself challenged by Hagen, until what began as a quest for independence sinks into an obsession for Hagen's destruction.<sup>5</sup>

Philip Anderson rightly perceives Kriemhild's appeal in her defiance.

Perhaps the medieval audience, especially the female half of that audience, found Kriemhild's will to act a refreshing change from the usual damsel in distress. It is also possible that Kriemhild's activity is not as unique as it first appears.

During the last battle at Etzelburg, the *Nibelungenlied* characters act in a manner that reflects the idea of what is appropriate for men and women in extreme circumstances. The approach of death and the destruction of society is the backdrop for action which can be considered heroic, but the heroism of the *Nibelungenlied* is gender specific. Gottfried Weber sees this heroism only as a masculine possibility: "Was aus alledem wird – insgesamt aus dem Ethos des Rittertums mit den zeitgegenwärtigen Zentren *manheit* und *minne*, aus den sittlichen Kräften des ritterlichen Menschen überhaupt, wie ritterliche Art dem Ansturm des Untergründig-Dämonischen zu begegnen sucht und wie sie ihm erliegt, das alles sollte dargestellt werden. Dies eben ist die 'Idee' des Nibelungendichters... ." <sup>6</sup> According to Weber then, the *Nibelungenlied* concerns itself only with the heroism of men.

Heroism is cast in a masculine mold. The arena for determining a man's heroic caliber is the field of battle, from which women should be

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<sup>5</sup> Philip N. Anderson, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Weber, p.196.

excluded. The twelfth century nevertheless saw women participating in battle, including the famous example of Eleanor of Aquitaine on the Second Crusade in 1146.<sup>7</sup> Margaret Wade Labarge describes the noble women who defended their territories in peace and war, including the twelfth-century noblewomen Adela of Blois and Ermengarde of Narbonne.<sup>8</sup> The presence of women on the battlefield was rare and threatening. Antonia Fraser sees the Warrior Queen giving a specific reaction of horror in the listener hearing about her deeds: “Part of this *frisson* – of fear and admiration – is undoubtedly due to the fact that woman as a whole has been seen as a pacifying influence throughout history, this pacifying role being perceived as hers by nature and hers by duty.”<sup>9</sup> Kriemhild, in leading her army, in goading her men to battle, and in using the sword herself, is placed in the horrific sphere of the Warrior Queen, one who takes upon herself a role assigned to the opposite gender.

Hagen is the embodiment of that ideal of masculine heroism, as even Etzel, the king whose kingdom was destroyed by Hagen is forced to admit, calling him “der aller beste degen” (Strophe 2374) “the best knight” (Hatto, p. 290). Philip N. Anderson sees Hagen as the personification of the social order: “Hagen then stands for the often callous social structure which demands obedience and which punishes the individual who insists on

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<sup>7</sup> Antonia Fraser, *The Warrior Queens* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988) 23-24.

<sup>8</sup> Labarge, p. 77-79.

<sup>9</sup> Fraser, p. 7.

standing outside of it.”<sup>10</sup> Hagen also “represents the vested interests which will block her [Kriemhild] at every step.”<sup>11</sup> If society is represented by Hagen, then Hagen's use of violence, including murder, is socially sanctioned masculine privilege. If the use of the sword is a masculine act, and Kriemhild is punished by death for using male means to her goal, it is worthwhile to contemplate this construct of gender.

The language of fighting is laced with implications of gender. The men fear a condemnation of themselves on the battlefield as *less* than men. Their enemies in the field taunt them as being *unmanly*, *cowardly*, or at worst *women*, and the men, through bravery on the battlefield, which usually implies killing the taunter, prove their masculinity to all observers. The messenger reporting the Saxon battle called this: “*si strîten nâch êren*” (Strophe 228). The goal of the fighting man was to acquire honor, which proved his male prowess. The loser lost honor; if he lived, his masculinity had been called into question, and he was subordinate to the man who had defeated him. In this way, the loser acquired a feminine position of submissiveness *vis-à-vis* his victor.

During the battle between the Burgundians and the Huns, many examples of such taunting occur. Volker, for instance, accuses the Huns of being women, implying their cowardice: “*die Hiunen die sint bæse, / si klagent sam diu wîp.*” (Strophe 2015). “The Huns are cowards and they weep

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<sup>10</sup> P. N. Anderson, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> P. N. Anderson, p. 9.

like women..." (Hatto, p. 249). Volker identifies weeping as a female characteristic, but he weeps himself when his comrades are killed.<sup>12</sup>

Other attributes of the male work in the same manner. How men dress also reveals their relative masculine or feminine traits. One man in the work is criticized solely on the basis of apparel which confounds the sensibilities of Hagen and Volker. The first Hun killed by the Burgundians bends the gender line through his dress to the point that the *Nibelungenlied* author compares him to a woman: "*er fuor sô wol gekleidet / sam eines edeln ritters brût*" (Strophe 1885) "he was decked out in his finery like a young wife of the nobility" (Hatto, p. 234). Volker decides that the Hun's demeanor deserves death:

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<sup>12</sup> In fact, it appears that all the male heroes are capable of tears and weeping. When Rüdiger and Gernot kill each other during the course of the battle, their deaths are cause of great grief, even in men who, like Volker, had previously scorned tears:

Gunther unde Giselher	und ouch Hagene,
Dancwart unde Volkêr,	die guoten degene,
die giengen, dâ sie funden	ligen die zwene man.
dô wart dâ von den helden	mit jâmer wéinén getân.

(Strophe 2225)

The good warriors Gunther and Giselher, Hagen, Dancwart and Volker went to where the two men lay and they began to shed tears of grief. (Hatto, p. 274).

Dietrich also laments Rüdiger:

Triuwen unde leides	mant' in dô sîn tôt.
er begônde starke weinen	des gie dem helde nôt:

(Strophe 2315).

Rüdiger's death woke thoughts of affection and grief in him, and the hero began to weep passionately, as indeed he had good cause (Hatto, p. 284).

Although weeping and mourning are identified as feminine behavior, not even the most heroic of heroes is exempt from grief and tears. Volker's initial comment on his enemies "weeping like women" intends to make their human expression of grief into weakness, a weakness identified with femaleness, which in turn is not the attribute of a fighting man, a warrior. Yet this identification is a false analogy, as the men who despised tears shed them in copious abundance. The behavior still exists in men, whether or not the men allow themselves to recognize it.

“jener trût der vrouwen muoz ein gepiuze hân.  
ez kûnde niemen gescheiden; ez gât im an den lîp.”  
(Strophe 1886).

“This lady’s pet must take a hard knock! No one shall deter me  
but it shall cost him his life.” (Hatto, p. 234).

King Gunther, however, disapproves of killing the Hun as an act which  
would not be prudent:

“Nein durch mîne liebe,” sprach der kûnec sân.  
“ez wîzent uns die liute, und ob wir si bestân.”

“No, for my sake don’t,” interposed King Gunther. “If we attack  
them first, we shall earn the blame.” (Hatto, p. 234).

Yet Volker does not give the knight an opportunity to defend himself, and  
kills him without direct provocation. He acts in distinct opposition to the  
stated wishes of his king, to whom he is expected to show obedience. His  
anger at a man who does not live up to his ideas of manly dress may have  
been prompted by a fear that this man was blurring the lines between male  
and female, and by a need to preserve the social order with respect to male  
and female behavior in order to protect his own position as a man within that  
order. Volker, Hagen’s friend and side-kick, reflects the stand which Hagen  
represents in the larger context of *Nibelungenlied* action.<sup>13</sup>

Bravery in battle, more than any other form of behavior, defines the  
masculine hero. The man must continually prove that he is not a coward by  
acting in a fearless manner. The accusation of cowardice by another man

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<sup>13</sup>C. S. Jaeger interprets this as part of a larger context of the *Nibelungenlied* author  
rejecting courtly ways of manner and dress through the judgment that Volker has rendered:  
“Here it is the man’s foppishness and nothing else that outrages Volker and spells his doom.  
He is guilty in Volker’s eyes of betraying the warrior code.”

C. S. Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of  
Courtly Ideals 939-1210* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985) p. 191.

propels the men to actions that they would not otherwise have taken. Hagen, for instance, does not wish to attend the ceremony at the Hunnish court, but is chided into acting against his better judgment by an accusation of cowardice. Hagen must defend his masculinity through proving his bravery, even if he knows that he will lose his life.

Dô sprach der fürste Gîselher zuo dem degene:  
 “sît ir iuch schuldec wizzet, frîunt Hâgene,  
 sô sult ir hie belîben unt iuch wol bewarn,  
 und lâzet, die getürren, zuo mîner swester mit uns varn.”

Dô begonde zürnen von Tronege der degen:  
 “ine wil, daz ir iemen fûeret ûf den wegen,  
 der getürre rîten mit iu ze hove baz.  
 sît ir niht welt erwinden, ich sol iu wol erzeigen daz.”  
 (Strophes 1463-4).

“Since you are so conscious of your guilt, Uncle Hagen,” said King Giselher to that warrior, “you stay here and let *those who dare* [Hatto's italics] come with us to see my sister.”

“I would not want you to take anyone on your journey who dared to ride to court with greater courage,” retorted Hagen angrily, “and since you are set on going I shall prove it!” (Hatto, p. 185).

The implication that Hagen is a coward inspires Hagen to anger, which raises his fighting spirit.

During the last battle scene, Hagen and Hildebrant provoke each other with implications of cowardice. Hagen reminds Hildebrant that he has just run from battle covering his behind with his shield. Hildebrant reminds Hagen of an earlier battle where Hagen had lost his mettle and run away. The accusations of cowardice heighten the tension between the two knights, whose fighting spirit is raised with each attack. The veiled threat to the

other's masculinity are brought into the open when Dietrich puts both of them to shame, attacking their masculinity directly:

“....daz enzímt niht helde lîp,  
 daz si suln schelten        sam diu alten wîp.”  
 (Strophe 2345).

“It ill becomes warriors to bandy insults like old women.” (Hatto, p. 288).

Dietrich asserts his own superiority and masculinity through rebuking the two. His words end the verbal jousting, increase the knights' desire to compete in battle, and move the combatants into the realm of action. Dietrich is the first of the four men to spring into battle, showing by action his mettle as a man.

The verbal jostling for position is reflected on the battlefield. The man who defeats another man is clearly the superior. The Huns, for instance, are all eager to see Hagen for themselves, viewing his killing of Siegfried as a matter of fame:

dô wunderte dô zen Hiunen        vil manegen küenen man  
 umbe Hagen von Tronege,        wie der wæré getán.

Durch daz man sagete mære        (des was im genuoc),  
 daz er von Niderlande        Sifrîden sluoc,  
 sterkest aller recken,        den Kriemhilde man.  
 (Strophes 1732-33).

...many a brave man among the Huns was most curious to know what Hagen of Troneck looked like. Because of all the many tales told about his slaying of Kriemhild's husband Siegfried of the Netherlands, the strongest of all warriors... (Hatto, p. 216).

Although the killing of a warrior adds to a man's reputation, even the warrior who is defeated can be deemed courageous posthumously through

the status of the man who killed him. In this way, a ranking order is created in which all men, both living and dead, have their place. If a man must die, the rank of his killer can redound to his own honor. Wolfhart, for instance, felt he was dying an honorable death because he had been killed by a king:

“daz si nâch mir niht weinen;      daz ist âne nôt.  
vor eines küniges handen      lige ích hie hêrlîchen tôt.”  
(Strophe 2302).

“Tell those who are nearest and dearest not to weep for me, there is no need. I die a magnificent death, slain by a king's hand.” (Hatto, p. 283).

Wolfhart has gained status as he has been killed by a man with the highest social rank, a king. The aura of a king therefore also touches him, as he has been brave enough to face a king in battle.

Whereas death by the hand of a king may be magnificent, death by the hand of a woman is a source of shame. A woman is not included in the hierarchical ranking of men in battle, and to die by the hand of a woman calls into question the masculinity of the man so killed. The shame involved in such a death is made clear in the *Nibelungenlied*.

At the court of Brünhild, Dancwart warns against the dishonorable implications that death brought about by a woman has for the male honor:

“nu hiezen wir ie recken:      wie verlîeze wir den lîp,  
suln uns in disen landen      nu verdêrbén diu wîp.”  
(Strophe 443).

“We have always borne the name of heroes, but what a shameful way of dying if we are to perish at the hands of a woman!” (Hatto, p. 65).

This belief is not unique to the *Nibelungenlied*. For instance, this idea was held in Ancient Israel and is found in the Bible, and so was part of the

heritage of the Middle Ages. In the Old Testament Book of Judges, where a warrior who has been fatally wounded by a woman echoes similar sentiments:

And a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull. Then he called hastily to a young man his armor-bearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died. (Judges 9:53-54, KJV).

Shame is the end result of death at a woman's hand, and reflects the lack of worthiness of the man so slain. The author of Judges attributes Abimelech's death to his evil deeds: "Thus God rendered of Abimelech..." (Judges 9:55, KJV). His death, in spite of his last-minute plea, is a dishonorable one. The book of Judges contains another judgment on the humiliation of a man receiving his death-wound through a woman. Deborah, one of the few recognized female prophetesses of Israel, predicts this shameful fate for an enemy which will at the same time humiliate a cowardly leader:

And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go. And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honor; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. (Judges 5:8-9, KJV).

The enemy is killed in the tent of a woman:

Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died. (Judges 5:21, KJV).

Mieke Bal recognizes the importance of gender in the death of Sisera: "Such a category [of feminine gender] is possible only in terms of a preoccupation

exclusive to the masculine gender in societies where the division of labor reserves the military domain for men. For what is at stake here is *the honor-shame opposition, linked to that between the sexes*. [Bal's italics].<sup>14</sup> Like the world of the Old Testament, the culture of the *Nibelungenlied* reflects a separation of gender-based military roles which is vital to the preservation of male honor. Death in battle is necessarily bound together with status hierarchy, where the hero is at the top and the woman, if a woman appears in a battle scene, is at the bottom. As long as the combatants are heroes, honor can be kept. In the *Nibelungenlied*, this belief is put into Hagen's mouth:

“Das ist ein schade kleine,” sprach aber Hagene,  
 “dâ man saget mære von einem degene,  
 ob er von recken henden verliuset sînen lîp.”  
 (Strophe 1954).

“It is but a minor misfortune when it is related by a warrior that his life was taken by a hero.” (Hatto, p. 242).

Here, through the character of Hagen, a death in battle, especially the hand of a hero, a *man* who has proved himself through battle, is not shameful. As Wolfhart has shown, death attained in battle is still a glorious death for a man, while his reputation can be enhanced by the status of the man who killed him.

Hagen does not die in battle, nor does he die by a hero's hand. His death is brought about by a woman. When Kriemhild wields the sword, the

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<sup>14</sup> Mieke Bal, *Murder and Difference: Gender, Genre and Scholarship on Sisera's Death* tr. Matthew Gumpert (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) 116.

observers of her action react in horror. Even Etzel is shaken by the incongruity of the hero of Troneck dying by a female's hand.

“.....wie ist nu tôt gelegen  
von eines wîbes handen der aller beste degen.”  
(Strophe 2374).

“...that the best knight who ever bore a shield to battle should now lie slain by a woman!” (Hatto, p. 291).

Through the long battle, a hierarchy of honor has been won. Hagen and Gunther have defeated all comers except Dietrich. Hagen has defeated Hildebrand during one skirmish, so that Hildebrand has had the shame of fleeing a battle. Of the men left alive at the moment that Kriemhild picks up the sword, Dietrich ranks as the most valiant, Hagen next and Hildebrand following Hagen. Etzel has not won himself any honor in the battle, having kept to the sidelines. When Kriemhild wields the sword, she inserts herself into the male martial arena.

Hildebrand's reaction is swift:

“swie er mich selben bræchte in angestlîche nôt,  
idoch sô wil ich rechen des küenen Tronegæres tôt.”  
(Strophe 2375).

“Although he put me in deadly peril, I shall avenge the death of the brave lord of Troneck!” (Hatto, p. 291).

Hildebrand's reaction to Kriemhild's deed is anger: “*Hildebrant mit zorne / zuo Kriemhilde spranc...*” (Strophe 2376) “He leapt at Kriemhild in fury...” (Hatto, p. 291). Anger as the motivating force behind Hildebrand's killing of Kriemhild is modified in the earliest interpretation of the *Nibelungenlied*, the *Klage*, where the poet considers Hildebrand's *zorn* as *herzegrîm*, grim-hearted. “*dô der alte Hildebrant / durch sînen herzegrîmmen zorn / sluoc die*

*vrowen wol geborn*" (Lines 260-61).<sup>15</sup> "Then old Hildebrant on account of his grim-hearted wrath, slew the high-born lady" (my translation). Hildebrant is not acting in a rational manner, but is venting his own anger at Kriemhild for bringing about Hagen's loss of honor. This wrath is a response to the male honor which has been threatened and must be defended. Hildebrant, in defending Hagen's honor, is also defending his own. After all, Hagen has defeated him in battle, putting him to shame. His shame becomes all the worse when Hagen's honor is lessened by Kriemhild's act of revenge.

It is worthwhile to look at the concept of honor regarding female characters in other literatures and see whether there may be a concept of honor that can be applied to Kriemhild.

In Heinrich von Veldeke's version of the *Aeneid*, Queen Dido is very much concerned with her status and her honor. When Eneas leaves her, she perceives his betrayal as a loss of honor for her. Dido prefaces her suicide through a long lamentation on her lost honor, which can only be redeemed through her death:

"...ich mûz dorchstechen  
 daz herze, daz mich verriet.  
 war umbe ensterbete mich niet  
 do ich zem êrsten quelen began....  
 het ich mich ê selbe erslagen,  
 sone dorfte ich mich niht klagen  
 noch mîner frunde dehein,  
 sô wâre geteilet enzwei  
 mîn schade und mîn schande.  
 nû is after lande  
 mîn laster vile mâre

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<sup>15</sup> *Der Nibelunge Noth und die Klage* ed. Karl Lachmann 6th ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1960) 313.

und mûz ouch offenbâre  
 mîn schande vile grôz wesen  
 wand ich ne wil niht genesen." (77, 20-23; 27-36).<sup>16</sup>

"I must pierce the heart that betrayed me. Why did I not die when I for the first time began to suffer... if I had killed myself earlier, then neither I nor my friends would need to mourn me. My pain and my shame would be cut in two. Now my shame is public throughout the land, and my complete disgrace must also become known; for this reason I no longer want to live." (my translation).

Through violent means, the use of the sword, Dido can purge herself of the dishonor that Eneas has brought to her, and in this manner regain some measure of self-respect.

The use of suicide to regain lost honor is also found in Old Norse material. In the works sharing the same legendary background as the *Nibelungenlied*, the *Elder Edda* and the *Völsungasaga*, the same pattern appears. Suicide is seen as a measure whereby a woman can regain the honor that has otherwise eluded her. Brynhild in the poem *Sigurðarquiða in scamma* commits suicide to prove her honor, which is bound together with her love of Sigurd. Like Dido, she chooses the sword as the instrument of her death. Brynhild also condemns Gudrun for not committing suicide once Sigurd has been murdered. Brynhild portrays suicide in positive terms as the most suitable way to demonstrate love and preserve honor:

"Sœmri væri Guðrún,	syster occur,
frumver sínom	fylgia dauðom

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<sup>16</sup> Heinrich von Veldeke, *Eneasroman* Nach dem Text von Ludwig Etmüller. ed. Dieter Kartschoke (Stuttgart: Philip Reklam, 1986) 138-140.

ef henni gæfi eða ætti hon hug	góðra ráð, oss um lícan.” <sup>17</sup>
“Gudrun, your sister, followed in death had she been given or if she had	would have sooner her first husband, good counsel a heart like mine.” <sup>18</sup>

Brynhild's words are uttered after she has stabbed herself with a sword and thus have the validity of prophecy since they are spoken during the act of dying.

The death of such a strong-willed woman is not necessarily mourned. Högni, the Old Norse Hagen figure, comments on Brynhild's death as beneficial for men:

Eino því Högni “Letia maðr hána þars hon aptrborin Hon krong of komz hon æ borin morgum manni	andsvor veitti: langrar gongo, aldri verði! fyr kné moður, óvilja til, at móðtrega.” <sup>19</sup>
He didn't have to wait “Let no one lead her May her ride to Hel Monstrous she came born to be ever and bring misfortune	for Hogni's words: from the long road; have no returning! from her mother's womb, bound to evil to many men.” <sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst Verwandten Denkmälern* ed. Hans Kuhn 5th ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1983) 217.

<sup>18</sup> *Poems of the Vikings: The Elder Edda* tr. Patricia Terry (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1969) 190.

<sup>19</sup> *Edda: Lieder*, p. 214.

<sup>20</sup> *Poems of the Vikings*, p. 188.

The suicide of a proud and strong-willed woman is seen by Högni as a benefit to the world of men. In death she can no longer disrupt the male order.

The Old Norse Signy of the *Völsungasaga*, after completing a hideous revenge, also opts for an honorable suicide. The origin of her misfortunes lies in the marriage she is forced into accepting by her father, although she knows that nothing good will come from it:

“Eigi villda ek a brott fara med Siggeiri, ok eigi giorir hugr minn hlegia vid honum, ok veit ek af framvisi minne ok af kynfylgiu varri, at af þessu rade stendr oss mikill ufagnadr, ef eigi er skiott brugdit þessum radahág.”<sup>21</sup>

“I do not wish to go away with Siggeir, nor do my thoughts laugh with him. I know through my foresight and that special ability which is found in our family that if the marriage contract is not quickly dissolved, this union will bring us much misery.”<sup>22</sup>

She has been married against her will by her father, and her husband has brought her nothing but grief. Yet in her final hour, at the moment her revenge has succeeded, she reminds the audience present at the burning of her house, as well as the audience of listeners, that she is nevertheless bound to the husband whom she loathes. The only honorable course for her is to let herself be burned at her husband's side:

“...Hefi ek þar til unnit alla luti, at Siggeirr konungr skyldi bana fá. Hefi ek ok sva mikit til unnit, at fram kemizt hefndinn, at mer er med aungum kosti lift. Skal ek nu deygia med Siggeiri konungi lostig, er ek atta hann naudig.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Völsunga saga ok Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*. ed. Magnus Olsen *SUGNL* 36 (Copenhagen: S. L. Møller, 1906-08) 8.

<sup>22</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer* Tr. Jesse L. Byock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 39.

<sup>23</sup> *Völsunga saga*, p. 19.

“...In everything I have worked toward the killing of King Siggeir. I have worked so hard to bring about vengeance that I am by no means fit to live. Willingly I shall now die with King Siggeir, although I married him reluctantly.”<sup>24</sup>

Signy foreshadows Gudrun in the *Völsungasaga*, and her self-condemnation as a woman unfit to live perhaps is a commentary on the revenge-driven woman. Such a woman can redeem herself only through death.

The Old Norse Gudrun also attempts suicide, but her attempt is unsuccessful. Instead Gudrun's energies for the most part are turned outward towards exacting revenge. She, like her *Nibelungenlied* counterpart, uses the sword in defense of honor. Unlike her German sister, she uses the sword to take revenge on her husband's family and in defense of her brothers Gunnar and Högni:

Nu serr hun, at sarth er leiket vid breðr hennar, hyggr nu a hardrede, for i bryniu ok tok ser sverd ok bardizt med bredrum sinum ok geck sva fram sen hinn hraustazti karlmadr, ok þat saugpu allir a ein veg, at varla sei meire vornn en þar.<sup>25</sup>

Gudrun, seeing that the game was going against her brothers, set a bold course. She put on a mail coat, took up a sword, and fought beside her brothers like the most valiant of men. Everybody agreed that a stronger defense could hardly have been seen.<sup>26</sup>

Her strength and prowess as a woman warrior are praised through gendered terms. She becomes an honorary man on the battlefield, as she proves herself

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<sup>24</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs*, p. 47.

<sup>25</sup> *Völsunga saga*, p. 97.

<sup>26</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs*, p. 101.

to be as good as a man in use of arms. Her right to use the sword is not questioned.

In the Eddic poem *Atlamál in grœnlezco*, the moment when Gudrun picks up the sword is an occasion for the poet to break into praise:

Annan réð hon hoggva, svá at sá upp reisat,  
í helio hon þann hafði; þeygi henni hendr sculfo.

þiorco þar gorðo, þeiri var við brugðit;  
þat brá um alt annat, er unno born Giúca;...<sup>27</sup>

When she struck another he didn't stand again;  
to Hel she sent him, and her hands did not tremble.

Their valiant fighting made them famous  
outdid all the other deeds of the Gjukungs;...<sup>28</sup>

Unlike the *Volsunga saga* poet, the Eddic poet praises Gudrun's swordship as her own courage: "*þeygi henni hendr sculfo*" "her hands did not tremble". Her actions render her worthy of praise and of fame.

Once her brothers are killed, she fulfills her familial obligations to seek revenge through murdering her sons and then killing her husband. Even in revenge, she is merciful in honoring her husband's last request for a proper funeral, and is again accorded praise from the Eddic poet:

Nár varð þá Atli, niðiom stríð æxti,  
efndi ítrborin alt þaz réð heita;  
fróð vildi Guðrún fara sér at spilla  
urðo dvol dœgra dó hon í sin annað.

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<sup>27</sup> *Edda: Die Lieder*, p. 254.

<sup>28</sup> *The Poetic Edda*, p. 223.

Sæll er hverr síðan,      er slíct getr fœða  
 ióð at afreki,              sems ól Giúki;...<sup>29</sup>

Dead then was Atli;      his kinsmen despaired.  
 Gudrun performed      all that she had promised;  
 the wise lady wanted      to end her life  
 but her days were lengthened; she died much later.

He will rejoice              who raises such children  
 as Gudrun and her brothers,      the brave sons of Gjuki.<sup>30</sup>

After this carnage, she does not feel worthy to live, and, like Signy, is bent on suicide:

Gudrun villde nu eigi lifva eptir þesse verk...  
 Gudrun geck eitt sinn til sevar ok tok griot i fanng ser ok geck a  
 seinn ut ok villde tapa ser.<sup>31</sup>

“Once Gudrun went out to sea, picked up stones in her arms,  
 and walked into the water, meaning to kill herself.”<sup>32</sup>

Gudrun is a woman who turns her anger outwards, not towards herself, and she lives to incite her next brood of sons to a last act of revenge.

Suicide was a more acceptable redemption for female honor than turning the anger felt after a betrayal towards the person or society that had brought about the loss of honor. The woman who kills herself redeems only her personal honor, but does not threaten the status quo or the world of men who insist on upholding that status quo. Male heroes do not commit suicide. It is a form of defiance that damages only the woman herself, and frees men

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<sup>29</sup> *Edda: Die Lieder*, pp. 262-263.

<sup>30</sup> *The Poetic Edda*, p. 232.

<sup>31</sup> *Völsunga saga*, pp. 104-5.

<sup>32</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs*, p. 106.

from any responsibility towards that particular woman. A woman who turns her anger away from herself and towards the perpetrators of her loss of honor acts more in keeping with the male ideals of courage and self-respect. She is much more threatening to the status quo of male society and the lives of the men who had wronged her.

Kriemhild is that kind of unusual woman. She does not turn her anger on herself, but lashes out at those most responsible for her loss of honor. In this way, she behaves not like the traditional heroic woman who kills herself, but like the men in the *Nibelungenlied*, who do not have any constraints when redeeming their honor through killing the person who has caused them to lose face. Kriemhild is close to unique in that she is one of very few literary women who raise the sword against men.

The fighting woman also appears in literature in a positive light, where the woman is acting in order to save herself or her people. The Biblical story of Judith and Holofernes, which also ends in a beheading of a man, and the story of Gyburc, who defends her husband's lands in armor like a man, are non-Amazonian, i.e., non-warrior women who raise their swords in defensive action.

The Judith figure was popular in the Middle Ages, as shown by the Old English Judith poem, dated to the tenth century.<sup>33</sup> The story appears in the Apocryphal Old Testament Book of Judith, which had been translated into Latin by Jerome and was considered part of the canonical Bible during

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<sup>33</sup> *Judith* ed. B. J. Timmer. Revised edition (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1978) 6-8.

the entire Middle Ages.<sup>34</sup> Judith can be seen as the first literary female figure to take up the sword in defense, in this case the defense of the state of Israel, which Judith considers first and foremost as the defense of the women of Israel:

“Lord God of my father Symeon, in whose hand you put a sword to take vengeance on the aliens who had loosened a maiden's headdress to defile her and stripped her thigh to shame her, and profaned her womb to disgrace her; for you said, ‘It must not be done,’ yet they did it.” (Judith 9:2).<sup>35</sup>

Through defending Israel, Judith is therefore defending the women of her country, who need to be saved from the shame of potential rape by the victorious enemy army. Judith attacks the enemy through her sexuality, which is that aspect of herself and her compatriots which is most in need of defense. Judith, who has been a widow for years, puts off her mourning dress and clothes herself in her finery, and enters the enemy's camp, pretending to predict a loss for the army of Israel. Holofernes, aroused by her beauty, persuades Judith to stay in the camp. She serves him drink, and when he collapses in a drunken stupor, she has her chance:

And she went up to the rail of the bed, which was at Holofernes' head, and took down from it his scimitar, and she went close to the bed and grasped the hair of his head, and said ‘Give me strength, Lord, God of Israel, today!’ And she struck him on the neck twice, with all her might, and severed the head from his body. (Judith 13: 6-8).

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<sup>34</sup> *The Apocrypha*. trans. Edgar J. Goodspeed. intro. Moses Hadas (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) v.

<sup>35</sup> *The Apocrypha*. p. 149.

Judith, like Kriemhild, has brought about her enemy's defeat through decapitation by use of the sword. She brings the head back to her city and proclaims:

For the Lord has struck him down by a woman's hand.  
(Judith 13: 15).

This echoes the earlier Book of Judges with Jael's victory over Sisera. The judgment over the man's sin, in both attacking Israel, and then in desiring a woman who is not his wife, is a shameful death at the hands of a woman. The woman is seen as bringing about a punishment from God, in that the man is not killed in battle, as would be proper for the leader of a great army, but is instead killed while in a prone position by the hand of the weakest of his enemies, a female. It is to be expected that this Biblical and Apocryphal judgment was known by the author of *Nibelungenlied*, who uses very similar wording on the fate of a man who is killed by a woman's hand.

Judith, like Deborah in the Book of Judges, then proceeds to take the role of a military commander, much as Kriemhild is seen directing the field of battle from behind the scenes. She proceeds to give the men strategic military advice, which the men follow. Her advice is wise, and brings about victory. Once the battle is won, Judith celebrates first of all with the women of Israel, on whose behalf she had risked her life:

And all the women of Israel came to see her, and they blessed her and made a dance in her honor, and she took branches in her hands and gave them to the women that were with her, and they crowned themselves with olive, she and the women with her, and she went before all the people in the dance, leading all the women, and all the men of Israel in their armor, with garlands and songs on their lips. (Judith 15: 12-13).

Judith is a woman who is lionized as a heroine for the ages, as a victorious military leader whose name will never be forgotten. She has fought not just for her country, but primarily for the women of her country. Still, the interpretation of the meaning of the Judith figure is problematic precisely because she is acting in such a male manner. Marina Werner discusses the threat that the figure of Judith inspired in men. She argues that Jerome placed her actions in a male context in order to deflect the fear that men would have of such a strong figure: "Judith is extolled here, 'since you behaved like a man...'; this verse, turning on the equation of manliness-chastity-virtue axiomatic in so much early Christian asceticism, matches Jerome's expressed opinion elsewhere, and might as well represent an attempt to allay the fears Judith's method inspired."<sup>36</sup> Judith's actions, in order to be interpreted as positive, must also be interpreted as male.

Another medieval heroine who used the sword is Gyburc, the converted wife of Willehalm. Wolfram von Eschenbach, basing his work on the anonymous Old French *La Bataille d'Aliscans*, certainly was aware of Kriemhild, as he had already mentioned the *Nibelungenlied* in his earlier work *Parzival* (Lines 420, 22-30; 421, 1-12). Gyburc is a steadfast heroine, who does not shy away from the martial arts in defense of her adopted country. Like Judith, Gyburc also fearlessly confronts her aggressors. Here, as in the *Nibelungenlied*, the war is between two families, and the woman is related to both of the families. Her father is making war against her husband because he has stolen her away from her heathen husband and her faith.

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<sup>36</sup> Marina Werner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (New York: Atheneum, 1985) 163-4.

Marion E. Gibbs sees Gyburc as a woman “torn between two loyalties.”<sup>37</sup> She “is bound by blood and loyalty to the heathens and this she cannot forget, in spite of the new bond of love which binds her to Willehalm and so to the Christian God and the whole of Christendom.”<sup>38</sup> Gyburc, like Judith, relies on her faith, but also on her own strength and guile. While her husband Willehalm is away, she defends the castle and the country against the intruders, and she must do so with men's weapons, wearing armor. Her own intelligence and military strategy saves the castle of Orange from falling into the enemy's hands, and when Willehalm returns with reinforcements, she is standing ready to defend her husband's property against all comers:

Nu stuont vrou Gyburc ze wer  
mit uf geworfeme swerte  
als ob si strites gerte,  
unt bi ir Steven, ir kapelan,  
unt ihr juncvrouwen so getan  
daz si waren harnaschvar.(Lines 227, 12-17).<sup>39</sup>

Now Lady Gyburc stood with upraised sword ready to defend herself, as if she were looking for combat, and with her stood Stephen, her chaplain, and her maidens attired in armor.<sup>40</sup>

Gyburc is not only dressed for battle, she has participated in it:

Gyburc streit doch ze orse niht:  
ditze mære ir anders ellen giht,

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<sup>37</sup> Marion E. Gibbs, *Wiplichez Wibes Reht: A Study of the Women Characters in the Works of Wolfram von Eschenbach* Duquesne Studies Philological Series 15 (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1972) 63.

<sup>38</sup> Gibbs, p. 62.

<sup>39</sup> Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Willehalm* ed. Werner Schröder (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978) 290.

<sup>40</sup> Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Willehalm* Gibbs and Johnson, p. 119.

daz si mit armbrusten schoz  
 und si grozer wüfze niht verdroz  
 unt ir wer mit liste erscheinde. (Lines 230, 1-5).

But Giburc had not fought on horseback. This tale attributes other brave deeds to her, saying that she shot the crossbow, hurled huge stones, and that her defense was marked by clever tactics. (p. 120).

Yet brave though she is, the sight of her in armor is enough to inspire fear. Her appearance in armor affects the male hearer of the story as a potential threat, which should not be underestimated. Wolfram himself comments on the ambiguous image of a woman in armor and acknowledges his own insecurities regarding such a woman:

“mir wære ein zagheit geschehen  
 ob ich ein wip het ersehen  
 so kuenlich gestanden.” (Lines 243, 23-25).

“I would have become faint-hearted if I had spied a woman standing there so boldly. ...” (p. 126).

Yet now that the men have returned to take up the duties, the necessity of a woman in armor is no longer valid. Gyburc no longer needs to protect herself and her husband's country, and the Gyburg returns to the social role required of women with the honor due to a man. “*Gyburc moht ir wapenroc / nu mit eren von ir legen*” (Lines 246, 24-25) “Now Gyburc could lay aside her surcoat in honor...” (p. 127). Gyburc has the honor that usually accrues to men. Now that the need for defense is over, Gyburc urges the women to put on women's clothes and return to their female role: “*leget iuwer besten kleider an: / ir sult iuch feitieren, / vel und har so zieren / daz ir minneclich sit getan*” (Lines 247, 2-5) “...put on your best clothes. You should deck yourselves out, do your face and hair so that you look lovely...” (p. 128).

Although the battle will continue to be fought, Gyburc no longer participates in it, and will dress accordingly. According to Gibbs, Gyburc has proved herself through her *triuwe*: "her *triuwe* is tested to the full in the defense of Orange. As well as fighting on behalf of her husband, she is defending the cause of both of them, and this is possible only because she has faith in it, because she has faith in God: her *triuwe* is directed both towards Willehalm and towards God."<sup>41</sup> Gyburc is a positive representation of the woman with a sword, who, through love, defends her country and through it herself.

Kriemhild, on the other hand, does not take up the sword to defend her country, but her own understanding of justice. She has been wronged both through the murder of her husband, and through the theft of her treasure. Her enemy Hagen was personally responsible for both wrongs, and the final confrontation must be understood with Hagen's guilt as part of the equation of the complete scene.

Kriemhild has attempted to bring Hagen to justice through all means possible, and her desperation increases in intensity with each foiled attempt. Yet her desperation is balanced by Hagen, who also sacrifices king and country in order to preserve his ideal of masculine heroism. Hagen's brand of heroism has been greeted sympathetically by the critical literature, while Kriemhild's revenge based on real wrongs done to her has been seen as a breach of the social order and inspired by the Devil, so that Kriemhild ranks as a demonic monster.

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<sup>41</sup> Gibbs, p. 65.

In order to understand the basis by which Kriemhild has been deemed a monster, it is necessary to examine the role that *ordo*, or social order, played in cementing the relationships between hierarchies, including that of men and women. By picking up a sword, Kriemhild breaks out of that social order.

The concepts of *ordo* and *inordinatio* in the *Nibelungenlied* have been used to place Kriemhild out of the *ordo* of medieval society, and through her *inordinatio*, according to Bernard Willson, she enters into the demonic realm. Willson sees the entire *Nibelungenlied* as a struggle between *ordo* and *inordinatio*. "The *Nibelungenlied* abounds with evidence to prove that the poet was not only familiar with the *ordo*-concept and all that it implied, but that he used it as the basic structural principle governing the orderly disposition of his poem, its *fuoge*. The two poles of the *ordo-inordinatio* opposition, whether they be conceived as *mâze-unmâze*, *fuoge-unfuoge*, *zuht-unzuht*, or any other similar combination reflecting the antithesis between courtly conduct and its negation, such as *triuwe-untriuwe*, form the axis of the poem."<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, *ordo* is divine: "the courtly *ordo* participates in the universal *ordo* of creation."<sup>43</sup> One definitive way to recognize *ordo* is through adherence to the strict roles which separate men from women. Willson sees this idea perfectly expressed in both Walter von der Vogelweide and Thomasin von Zerklære: "Here the incongruous combinations manly woman, womanly man, clerical knight and knightly cleric are for Walter indicative of

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<sup>42</sup> Bernard Willson, "Ordo and Inordinatio in the Nibelungenlied." *PBB* (Tübingen) 1963: 88.

<sup>43</sup> Willson, p. 85.

*unmâze, inordinatio*. Two opposites stand together in a relationship of disparity."<sup>44</sup> Clearly in this scheme of things, Kriemhild picking up the sword for her own ends indicates unwomanliness, and hence *inordinatio*. What is then *ordo*, or womanliness in this world-view?

Franz Bäuml compares the *ordo* represented in Brünhild to the *inordinatio* of Kriemhild." [Brünhild] is Woman seeking to dominate. With her defeat, however, and her subordination to her supposed vanquisher, Gunther, her role becomes constructive. It is now she – Brunhild – who, in the famous quarrel between the two women, defends the *ordo* against the challenge of the *inordinatio* of Kriemhild."<sup>45</sup> But once Kriemhild is put into place through the murder of her husband, what happens to Brünhild? She retreats into silence, and no longer has a place in the cataclysmic events. She appears only once more, in order to provide her husband with her sexual services, without saying a word:

den künec bat nóch belîben      sîn vil schoene wîp;  
si trûte noch des nahtes    den sînen wætlichen lîp.  
(Strophe 1515).

This done, the King asked his lovely queen to linger there, and when night came, she solaced his handsome person with amorous caresses. (Hatto, p. 191).

Even Uote is allowed a final scene with her son before he departs for Hunland, but Brünhild silently does her spousal duty. In other words, *ordo* for the female implies silence and obedience to the male who is over her.

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<sup>44</sup> Willson, p. 85.

<sup>45</sup> Bäuml, p. 36.

Bäuml posits that *ordo* is represented more perfectly in the figure of Kudrun in the *Kudrun* epic. She, even more than Brünhild, is the perfect figure of femininity. Brünhild accepts her feminine role after a struggle, but Kudrun is the personification of long-suffering feminine humility. "She [Kudrun] is not in this context an example of steadfastness in adversity, but is rather representative of the concept of *patientia*, the submission proper to the symbolic Woman in any well-ordered hierarchy."<sup>46</sup> Kudrun never threatens the *status quo*. Winder McConnell sees Kudrun's behavior as "heroic,"<sup>47</sup> but how is her heroism revealed? She suffers, prays, and waits. In no way does she actively participate in her rescue, and after her humiliation she is rewarded with the happy-end marriage to the prince who rescues her. She submits to her victimization and waits for God to act on her behalf. Is this an ideal for feminine heroism? Compared to Judith or Gyburc, she is pathetically weak. This may explain the *Kudrun* epic's lack of popularity in comparison with the *Nibelungenlied*.<sup>48</sup>

Philip N. Anderson sees the problem in Kriemhild's desire to be independent: "Her independence is not merely a desire to be free of the influence of men, nor is it mere power brokering. What fascinates and

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<sup>46</sup> Bäuml, p. 37.

<sup>47</sup> Winder McConnell, "The Passing of the Old Heros: The *Nibelungenlied*, *Kudrun*, and the Epic Spirit" in *Genres in Medieval German Literature* eds. Hubert Heinen and Ingeborg Henderson (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1986) 109.

<sup>48</sup> "Die 'Kudrun' dagegen, selbst ein ungewöhnlich eindrucksvolles Zeugnis für die prägende Kraft des Nibelungenliedes, ist fast unbeachtet geblieben. Nie hat sich eine zweite Handschrift gefunden, kaum ein mittelalterlicher Autor verrät seine Bekanntschaft mit dem Gedicht."

*Kudrun*, ed. Karl Bartsch. Fifth edition ed. Karl Stackmann (Wiesbaden: F. A. Brockhaus, 1980) xiii.

horrifies the poet simultaneously is her obstinate will to defy society and take charge of her own life.”<sup>49</sup> Kriemhild's search for justice is a “perversion”<sup>50</sup> which leads to her complete collapse as a human being: “In her struggle to punish Hagen she is forced into an ever intensifying rejection of her roles as mother, mistress, wife, kinswoman, queen. No wonder the poet sees her career in terms of the demonic.”<sup>51</sup>

Both Kriemhild and Hagen have been seen as demonic figures, but Hagen has been given the status of hero while Kriemhild has been seen as not even human. Winder McConnell glorifies Hagen's last stand: “who can doubt the greater inner comportment demonstrated by the hero of Troneck in his final, defiant stand before the *vâlandinne*, Kriemhild?”<sup>52</sup> Gottfried Weber gives Hagen the upper hand; he has “heroische Größe im Dämonischen,”<sup>53</sup> while Kriemhild “wächst mit zunehmender Dämonie keineswegs an heldischer Selbstaufgabe.”<sup>54</sup> As Weber writes: “Dieser unbedingte und schließlich hemmungslose Wille zur Rache wandelt sie zur Dämonin.”<sup>55</sup> Not only does she become a demon, but she loses all sense of human identity: “sie

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<sup>49</sup> P. N. Anderson, p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> P. N. Anderson, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> P. N. Anderson, p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> McConnell, p. 107.

<sup>53</sup> Weber, p. 56.

<sup>54</sup> Weber, p. 16.

<sup>55</sup> Weber, p. 12.

hat kein Selbst mehr.”<sup>56</sup> Her death is therefore completely justified: “Endlich vollzieht Hildebrant die entscheidende Vergeltungstat an der Urheberin allen Unheils.”<sup>57</sup> Hagen, on the other hand, is “der innere Sieger über Kriemhilt.”<sup>58</sup> Ihlenberg sees Hagen's defiance of Kriemhild as his heroism: “In grausiger Konsequenz geht er dem Tode entgegen. Er hat seiner Gegnerin nicht im geringsten nachgegeben.”<sup>59</sup> The thrust of these arguments is that Kriemhild's defiance and perseverance are negative, due to her female sex, while the same traits in Hagen, make him a great hero, in spite of his demonic elements.

Edward R. Haymes takes these arguments one step further, seeing a problem in the role of a woman as enemy: “...our image of medieval narrative causes us to resist the notion of a woman as the chief adversary of a hero.”<sup>60</sup> Haymes places Kriemhild outside of womanhood and into the realm of the supernatural, in order for Hagen to have a more worthy enemy: “The adversary is often superhuman or non-human in nature and medieval narrative was always very ready to associate such adversaries with the devil. The ‘valandinne’ epithet is thus seen as more than a mere insult.”<sup>61</sup> Kriemhild is therefore the rightful enemy of Hagen, as she is a supernatural

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<sup>56</sup> Weber, p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> Weber, p. 108.

<sup>58</sup> Weber, p. 20.

<sup>59</sup> Ihlenberg, p. 114.

<sup>60</sup> Edward R. Haymes, *The Nibelungenlied: History and Interpretation* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986) 78.

<sup>61</sup> Haymes, p. 84.

demon bent on his destruction. This epithet is the proof of Kriemhild's demonicity, for not only her enemy Hagen, but also Dietrich uses it against her. As Karl Heinz Ihlenburg states, Dietrich's words are to be weighed more carefully than Hagen's: "Daß es nicht ihr Todfeind Hagen ist, der sie als Teufelin bezeichnet, sondern Dietrich von Bern, der ...den ethischen Standpunkt des Dichters verkörpert, wiegt um so schwerer."<sup>62</sup>

This labeling of Kriemhild as demonic serves two purposes: first, it disallows any claims that Kriemhild may have in the justice of her cause and second, it justifies any action that Hagen has taken, allowing him to be seen as heroic in the face of a superhuman evil enemy. Therefore it is necessary to weigh carefully the accusation of demonic in the context of the *Nibelungenlied*, as well as the demonization of women in general, which began to flower as an idea in the twelfth century.

Kriemhild is tied to the demonic in three places: when she is considering whether or not to invite her brothers to Hunland in order to take revenge on Hagen, by Dietrich when he is warning Hagen, and by Hagen himself, as he stands before Kriemhild during the last, climactic scene. In the first instance, the author takes an authorial standpoint in order to explain Kriemhild's action. The other two instances are direct quotes attributed to specific characters in the work, and must be considered in the context of the utterance. Kriemhild is not the only character to be described by satanic epithets, for both Siegfried and Brünhild are commented upon by other characters as demonic in the context of enmity and battle.

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<sup>62</sup> Ihlenburg, p. 87.

The first mention of the demonic in regard to Kriemhild brings purposeful ambiguity to the understanding of her character. The narrator says: “*Ich wæne der übel vâlant / Kriemhilde daz geriet*” (Strophe 1394) “If you ask me, it was the foul fiend who prompted Kriemhild” (Hatto, p. 177). The narrator creates the possibility that Kriemhild's actions were inspired by the devil, but also adds the subjunctive *ich wæne*, which implies uncertainty on the speaker's part to this conclusion. Through this suggestion that the idea for the revenge plot came from the devil, the poet shifts some of the blame to the Evil One, for he does not call Kriemhild a *vâlandinne* here. In fact the author never calls her by that name when using the voice of outside narrator. Every use of the word *vâlandinne* is contained within a statement by one of the characters in the work.

Kriemhild is not the only character who is condemned with a devilish word. The evocation of the Evil One conveys a fear of a real threat to the lives and security of men.

The first instance of such condemnation in the work occurs when the men of Worms, with Siegfried leading the battle, have defeated the Saxon king Liudeger. Liudeger sums up his defeat at the hands of Siegfried as the work of the devil:

“Sîvrîden den starken	hân ich hie bekant.
in hât der übele tiuvel	her zen Sâhsén gesant.”
	(Strophe 216).

“I have just recognized mighty Siegfried, son of Siegmund. The Devil accurst has sent him here to Saxony!” (Hatto, p. 40).

Liudeger sees Siegfried as a demonic enemy, in other words, an enemy who is a real risk to their lives. He is placing the blame for his unlucky fate at the feet of the Devil.

The next instance of devilish condemnation appears when the men of Worms are in mythical Iceland wooing Brünhild. In this position they are in real fear for their lives, as Brünhild has threatened to kill all men who fail to meet her challenge. Hagen, when faced by this strong woman, is angry at the threat to their lives that she represents:

“wâ nû, künic Gunther? der ir dâ gert ze minnen	wie vliesen wir den lîp! diu ist des tîuvéles wîp.” (Strophe 438).
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“What now, King Gunther?” stalwart Hagen of Troneck asked fiercely...“we are done for – the woman whose love you desire is a rib of the Devil himself!” (Hatto, p. 65).

Here Hagen puts the threat that Brünhild represents into the realm of the demonic in order to emphasize the seriousness of her strength and its real risk for the men. As D. G. Mowatt and Hugh Sacker put it: “For them [Gunther and Hagen], apparently, hell is peopled with women they do not understand or cannot manage.”<sup>63</sup> In this world view, the uncontrollable woman belongs to hell, working for the destruction of men.

Brünhild is again called a devil woman by Gunther after the disastrous first wedding night. He has been put to shame through Brünhild's anger and her superior strength, which he attributes to the demonic.

“...ich hân láster unde schaden,  
want ich hân den übeln tiuvel heim ze hûse geladen.”  
(Strophe 649).

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<sup>63</sup> Mowatt and Sacker, p. 109-110.

“I was utterly humiliated, for I have brought the foul fiend home with me!” (Hatto, p. 89).

Again Brünhild, as a woman who is superior in strength to the man, poses a real threat to the man's honor and his life. In Gunther's eyes, the life of such a woman is not valuable, for he tells Siegfried that if he manages to kill Brünhild while subduing her, that would be all the same to him:

“sô tuo ir, swaz du wellest	unt næmest ir den lîp,
daz sold ich wol verkiesen;	si ist ein vreislichez wîp.”
	(Strophe 655).

“Do anything else you like – even though you killed her, I should find it in my heart to pardon you – for she is a dreadful woman!” (Hatto, p. 90).

The woman who is stronger than the man is labeled demonic, which would justify her death in the eyes of men. Brünhild subdued no longer poses a threat to the lives or honor of men, and she passes into the *ordo* which Bäuml and Willson posit as the rightful place for medieval womankind.

Kriemhild, on the other hand, never possessed superhuman, Amazonian strength, as Brünhild had before her humiliation. She was raised in the *ordo* of courtly society. She has been gradually forced out of courtly society and into *inordinatio* when she does not allow herself to be humiliated and kept in her place. Her demonization comes about only at the point where she becomes a real threat to the lives of the men of Worms.

The point where Hagen had been praised, his stubborn refusal to give in to Kriemhild, is the point where Kriemhild has been damned. He grows in heroic stature through his defiance, even though his defiance is just as destructive to society as Kriemhild's revenge. Hagen does not meekly submit to death, nor does he turn from a course that will lead to destruction, in order

to avert the disaster which will come upon his king and his people, even when he has been explicitly warned. At the point where the Burgundians have the last opportunity to turn away, they are faced by Dietrich, who tells them of Kriemhild's true intentions towards them.

When Kriemhild is angry that her plot has been revealed and threatens to kill the person who deceived her intentions, Dietrich calls her a *vâlandinne*, the first time the epithet is used against her<sup>64</sup>:

“ich binz, der hât gewarnet,      die edeln kûnege rîch...  
nu zúo, vâlandinne,      du solt mîchs niht geniezen lân.”  
(Strophe 1748).

“It was I that warned the illustrious kings...Now come on, you she-devil, you must not let me go unpunished!” (Hatto, p. 217).

Kriemhild has directly threatened his life and he reacts by associating her with the devil. The use of *vâlandinne* includes the life-threatening aspect of enmity, but here it is out of place. Instead of being a real threat to Dietrich, as Brünhild was to Hagen and Gunther, Kriemhild is unable to carry out her threat. She flees subdued, because, weaponless and without the backing of men, she is not a true threat to Dietrich, and in fact fears him: “...*si vorhte bitterlîchen / den Dietrîches lîp*” (Strophe 1749) “...she went in bitter fear of Dietrich” (Hatto, p. 217). Both Kriemhild's powerlessness and dependence in a man's world is reinforced in this exchange, but it also intensifies her desire to defeat Hagen, albeit in a covert manner. It is ironic that this Dietrich who has put her in her place is the only knight who can bring Hagen to Kriemhild as a prisoner. Kriemhild has used Dietrich's strength for the undoing of her

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<sup>64</sup> Bartsch believes that this use of *vâlandinne* is a “Stilfehler des jüngsten Dichters”. *Das Nibelungenlied*, p. 276.

enemy. Kriemhild herself laments the necessity for acting through the strength of men and wishes that she were able to act on her own: “*ob ich ein ritter wære, / ich kœm in êtwénne bi*” (Strophe 1416) “...were I a knight I should come among them sometime or another” (Hatto, p. 182)<sup>65</sup> Kriemhild's course of action is largely determined by her sex. She would be acting in a more knightly, that is, heroic manner if she were able to do so. One could also surmise that the actions of a knight in such a circumstance would be seen as a positive, admirable act. Kriemhild would rather act directly, but is forced to maneuver through deceit and indirect action for most of the second half of the *Nibelungenlied*.

The last instance of *vâlandinne* is, of course, Hagen's insult to Kriemhild right before she kills him. His defiance is a recognition of Kriemhild's real threat to his life and honor, and a provocation to action, much as men goad each other through insults before a battle. When Kriemhild takes the sword from Hagen's belt, she reacquires the power that she has lost, and after a moment's reflection on the losses that she has suffered, she lifts the sword in the cathartic act that ends the work. In this moment, she directly accomplishes her bitter goal of taking her enemy's life. Her threat is carried out at last.

The *Nibelungenlied* presents us with an idea of masculine heroism in Hagen, the knight admired even by his enemies. In creating a strong woman willing and eager to use the sword in order to avenge her wrongs herself, the

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<sup>65</sup> Hatto sees this passage as a *double entendre*: “(i) if Kriemhild could travel freely like a man she would visit her relations; (ii) if she were an armed man she would 'get at' Hagen and Gunther.” p. 180.

poet brings about the death of this hero. Kriemhild's strength undermines the concept of heroic male and submissive female, the order which the *Nibelungenlied* author appears initially to support. Kriemhild at the end of the epic is uncontrollable by any male figure, and this independence is what gives her the ability to kill the embodiment of masculine power in the person of Hagen. Her uncontrollability is what makes her dangerous, drives Hildebrand to killing her, and is the foundation of her appeal as a fictional heroine.

## Conclusion

The *Nibelungenlied* is first and foremost the story of a woman's fate. Therefore, in order to illuminate that part of the story which has been ignored up to now, I have taken care to study the position of women through historical as well as literary sources. These sources illuminate many of the unresolved problems when considering complicated motivations or ambiguous scenes. The power of a woman, denied and submerged, cannot be kept bound forever.

Kriemhild's relationship to her mother is of great importance in the work. Very few medieval German works contain a picture of a mother-daughter relationship which is as positive as that between Kriemhild and Uote. Unfortunately, Uote cannot see beyond the normal course of life expected of women in order to prevent the tragic destiny which she herself has predicted. I have explored the relationship between mother and daughter in depth, for previous scholars have shown little interest in the subject. The bond between mother and daughter shows a continuity that is not destroyed during the course of events. Uote and Kriemhild are free to show their love for each other in spite of the catastrophic events which rend the rest of the family to pieces. This relationship is the only one in the *Nibelungenlied* which is not marred by lack of trust. The emphasis on this connection in the epic shows the centrality of a woman's world, and adds to the view that Kriemhild's destiny is of primary importance.

As a young woman, Kriemhild accepts the role that is expected of her. She does not protest her condition, but lives as a full-fledged member of the

court at Worms. Her love for her brothers is clearly defined. She obeys Gunther in all things, providing him with provisions that he requires. She does not enter into her romantic relationship with Siegfried without the prior approval of her brother, who is also her guardian. She lives up to her end of the social contract, but this loyalty goes unrewarded. This initial loyalty shows that her later revenge does not spring from a perverse mind. Rather her actions are taken as a direct response to the injustice that she has received from the hands of her brothers. They have betrayed the trust that she has placed in them.

With her marriage, her role as her husband's subordinate is demonstrated through Siegfried's refusal of her inheritance against her explicit wishes. She is not attempting to claim anything that is not hers, but rather her legal due. Even her brothers agree that her claim is justified. Some critics have seen her insistence for her inheritance as simple greed, but Kriemhild is not attempting to grasp beyond what is hers. In fact, taken with the parallel scene where Brünhild also loses her paternal inheritance, the *Nibelungenlied* shows a consistent pattern of depriving women of their wealth as a method of social control.

Although she has submitted to the requirements of her society to marry, she finds that these conventions leave her unprotected from harm. Her husband is free to act against her best interests for his own reasons. She is not allowed to keep any property of her own which might detract from her husband's power and authority.

Siegfried, in spite of his love for her, is eager to make sure that she keeps in her place. When Kriemhild reveals his secret regarding Brünhild's

marriage, Siegfried punishes her through public humiliation and through physical violence. The institution of marriage places Kriemhild in a role where she is the first to pay for Siegfried's deception, although she is not responsible for it. The random tyranny which allows a husband the latitude to punish has been criticized in other twelfth-century works, wherein the husband learns the error of his ways or is otherwise punished. I believe that there is a correlation between Siegfried's beating of Kriemhild and her revelation of his weak spot, although Kriemhild is attempting to protect Siegfried. Siegfried has overstepped his boundaries through his pride. His beating of his wife is one manifestation of his attempt to assert himself at the expense of others, his pride which makes Hagen his enemy and leads to his death.

Kriemhild therefore cannot protect herself within her marriage. Without its security, however, she is even more at risk. Once Hagen murders her husband and steals her treasure with the approval of her relatives, Kriemhild is forced from the court at Worms and into another foreign court. Here she begins to put her plans for revenge into effect. Instead of giving in to her loss of status, husband and treasure, she begins to fight back to regain her lost honor. She acts directly to destroy her enemy Hagen, and picks up the sword in the same tradition as Judith and the Gudrun of the Eddas. Her action is a heroic necessity to rectify the wrongs that have been inflicted on her.

Her drive toward revenge makes her a threat to the lives of men, and therefore she is placed into the role of a demon by her enemies. This demonization makes her into a monster instead of a human being. Critics of

the epic have accepted this characterization by her enemies unequivocally, although this interpretation has not been applied to Siegfried or Brünhild, when they were labelled demonic. This belittles the significance of Kriemhild's losses.

Kriemhild's loss of her rights, status and reputation mirror a similar development in twelfth-century society. The gradual removal of inheritance rights for noble women and the concurrent loss of status and influence were justified by placing women outside of the public sphere. The human dilemma of conflicting loyalties in which Kriemhild found herself may have allowed noble women to identify with her fate. Since political marriage was a reality, many a woman must have found herself caught between two hostile factions.

Separating women from their rightful place in society created not just a "demonic" Kriemhild in literature, but had repercussions in the real world. From the twelfth-century onwards many women on the edge of society were given the demonic label.<sup>1</sup> The consequences for women of the split between the ideal of the saintly woman and the sinful she-devil included the fiery deaths of many in the horrific witch trials which began to plague Europe with increasing severity from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. The witch trials demonstrate a long-standing fear of women in Western thought. Society sanctions placing women outside of society's protection, where they can easily be destroyed.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters place the emergence of official dogmatic belief in witches at 1100. The Inquisition was given the right to persecute witches in a Papal Bull by Pope Alexander IV in 1258.

Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe 1100-1700: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972) 10-11.

Kriemhild's demonization is a response to her power to destroy. The society which has forced her out on her own through its acceptance of the murder of her husband and the theft of her treasure is in turn destroyed by her.

Kriemhild dies in her last act of revenge, cutting down her husband's murderer with her husband's sword. Her actions terrify the men around her, who, horrified that a woman could exact such revenge, cut her down. Kriemhild's power, when it cannot be used to build up and protect her society, becomes negative. Forced out of the society that contained her, she is forced to destroy it completely.

Kriemhild's destiny reveals the precarious position of women in their society. They, too, were constrained by the changes in their society that left them in a weaker position, with less property and position and no way to recover the status that their mothers had enjoyed. Her revenge is the cathartic event which expresses the rage of women who may have found themselves in similar situations where they could not act on their own behalf. The popularity of the *Nibelungenlied* shows, at least in part, that its main character appealed to the people of its time. The conflicting threads of love and loyalty which bound Kriemhild to her destiny have not lost their resonance, and I hope that this study leads to a renewed appreciation in our own time for her fate.

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## Vita

Laura Bethany Ann Wideburg was born on January 14th, 1961 in Waukegan, Illinois. After graduating from Jack Benny Junior High School, she attended Waukegan West High School. During her junior year, she spent a summer in Vrigstad, Sweden, as a Youth for Understanding exchange student. She graduated in 1979.

She attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She spent the 1982-83 academic year at the University of Stockholm as an independent student. Under the direction of Professor Rochelle Wright, she wrote an honors thesis entitled *The Death of the Soul* on the plays of Hjalmar Bergman. She graduated with distinction from the University of Illinois in 1984.

In 1986 she moved to Seattle. She received the Master of Arts degree in Scandinavian Languages and Literature from the University of Washington in 1988. She then decided to continue her studies towards the PhD in the Department of Germanics.

She is married to Asmus Freytag, and lives with her husband and two cats, Per and Fröken, in Seattle, Washington.