

A Comparison of Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and
William Morris's *Sigurd the Volsung*

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I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given
where reference has been made to the work of others.

ABSTRACT

The thesis compares the text of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* with the epic poem *Sigurd the Volsung* by William Morris .

Chapter I begins with an outline of the question under discussion, namely, whether *Sigurd the Volsung* could have been written as an anti-*Ring* . The rest of the thesis discusses various questions of interpretation which may help towards an answer to this question. Chapter II is devoted to a discussion of the sources in mediæval literature of the *Ring* and *Sigurd the Volsung* , while Chapters III and IV discuss the poetic diction and imagery used by Wagner and Morris in their poems, examining the differences and similarities between the poetic devices used; special attention is paid to the use of metaphor. Chapters V to IX examine in closer detail the presentation of the chief characters in the *Ring* and *Sigurd* , while Chapter X , the final chapter, sums up what has been presented in the previous chapters and concludes that there is considerable evidence in favour of the hypothesis that *Sigurd* was written as an anti-*Ring* .

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This research develops from the hypothesis that William Morris may have been inspired to write *Sigurd the Volsung* by his knowledge of the existence of Wagner's *Ring*, and that he may have intended it to be read as a response to the *Ring*, perhaps as an anti-*Ring*. Although he originally said that he was not interested in reading Alfred Forman's translation of *Die Walküre*,¹ there is a certain amount of internal evidence which indicates that by the time he came to write *Sigurd* Morris may have had some familiarity with Wagner's text in Forman's translation.

I begin this chapter with an outline of the development of interest in mediæval Norse studies in England² during the nineteenth century, and of the development of Morris's own interest in the subject, which culminated in the epic poem *Sigurd the Volsung*. Contemporary critical response to *Sigurd the Volsung* is then discussed and this is followed by discussion of the development of interest in Germanic/Teutonic material in Germany during the same period, which preceded and influenced Wagner's own interest, and the history of the development of the *Ring* text is outlined. The chapter concludes with discussion of the proposition that Morris may have written *Sigurd* as an anti-*Ring*, in order to rescue the corpus of legends from what he regarded as Wagner's misinterpretation. I also wish to suggest that the present-day reader's perception of mediæval literature is irrevocably influenced by a knowledge of Wagner's works, however vague that knowledge is; much criticism of medieval literature is, whether consciously or not, affected by the reader's knowledge of Wagner.

¹ The correspondence with Henry Buxton Forman, who sent Morris a copy of his brother's translation, is mentioned below.

² England rather than Britain because, apart from Sir Walter Scott's version of the *Eyrbyggja Saga*, there is little evidence of interest in Norse studies in Scotland, Wales and Ireland until the closing years of the nineteenth century.

1.1 Morris's interest in Norse literature: Norse studies in England prior to Morris.

Interest in Scandinavian studies had existed, if not flourished, in England since the end of the eighteenth century. Bishop Percy's translation of Mallet's *Northern Antiquities* (1770)³ in which Norse poetry is discussed, was the first scholarly work of Scandinavian studies to appear in Britain. Percy also translated some of the poems of the *Poetic Edda*,⁴ but his translations were based on Latin paraphrases by Scandinavian scholars such as Ole Worm,⁵ rather than on the original Old Norse. Norse poetry was also translated by Amos Cottle (1768-1800), whose verse translations, or paraphrases, of the *Poetic Edda* were published in 1797. The collection *Select Icelandic Poetry* by William Herbert (1778-1847) appeared between 1804-1806. The work of George Webb Dasent (1816-1896) was also of importance; his translation of Rask's *Grammar of Icelandic* appeared in 1843,⁶ and was followed by his translations of *Njáls Saga* (1861) and *Gisla Saga* (1866), which Morris read.⁷ In 1851 Benjamin Thorpe's *Northern Mythology* was published;

³ First published as *Introduction à l'histoire de Dannemarc* (1755) and *Monuments de la mythologie et de la poésie des celtes et particulièrement des anciens scandinaves* (1756)

⁴ A collection of Old Norse poems on mythological and heroic subjects, which formed one of the major sources of Wagner's *Ring* and Morris's *Sigurd the Volsung*

⁵ A seventeenth-century Danish antiquarian, whose study of Runes - *Runir seu danica litteratura antiquissima, vulgo gothico dicta* - was published in 1636.

⁶ Dasent explains in the Foreword his reasons for undertaking the translation of Rask's *Grammar*, and his belief in the importance of Old Norse studies for an understanding of the history of the English language; In good truth it seems hopeless to expect that Englishmen should ever get to understand their native tongue till they are taught it, and by teaching I mean, till they study its structure and literature, just as they study the structure and literature of any other language of which they are wholly ignorant. Hitherto on the contrary it seems to have been assumed as granted that we take in our mother's tongue along with their milk; our instruction in English rarely reaches beyond the nursery, in my opinion a man who could teach English with comfort to himself and profit to his hearers ... should have a thorough knowledge of Anglo-Saxon, and Anglo-Norman, of Old, Middle and New English, besides a considerable proficiency in the Old Norse, and early German tongues.

(Dasent, George Webb; *Intro. to Rask's Grammar of Icelandic*)

Thorpe (1782-1870) was a scholar of Anglo-Saxon who had studied with Rask in Copenhagen. Thorpe was evidently familiar with the *Nibelungenlied*,⁸ since he introduces the Nibelung cycle as follows :

"In consequence of its immediate connection with the Mythology of the Æsir,⁹ it has been deemed desirable to relate the origin of the celebrated Nibelungen Hoard or Treasure, the calamities caused by which form the subject of so many compositions, both Scandinavian and German.

(Benjamin Thorpe, *Northern Mythology* , p.91)

This would seem to indicate that Thorpe could assume that his readers would know, without further explanation, who the Aesir were, and what the Nibelungen hoard was , in other words, that the elements of Norse mythology were familiar to scholars, if not to the general reader.

William Morris's interest in Scandinavian studies had begun as early as 1852, when Burne-Jones introduced him to Thorpe's *Northern Mythology*,¹⁰ but appears to have lain dormant for a decade, emerging again in the late 1860s . It was in 1868 that he began to study Icelandic with Eiríkr Magnússon¹¹ ; the first book they read together was *Eyrbyggja Saga* , and they had already begun to publish their translations of the sagas by 1869.¹² It is not clear how well, if at all, Morris knew the Norse poems of Thomas Gray¹³ or the *Balder Dead* of Matthew Arnold,¹⁴ but evidently he was

⁷ Dasent's translations of the Icelandic Sagas were widely read during the nineteenth century , and greatly appreciated by Morris .

⁸ The Middle High German version of the Sigurd/Siegfried corpus of legends ; less important than the Norse versions to both Wagner and Morris.

⁹ The Gods and Goddesses of the Norse pantheon .

¹⁰ See J.N. Swannell ,*William Morris as an interpreter of Old Norse* ,Saga-Book of the Viking Society, Vol. xv, 1957-61, pp.365-382)

¹¹ Eiríkr Magnússon (1833-1913) was an Icelander who came to England in 1862 on behalf of the Icelandic Bible Society. He stayed in England , taught Morris Icelandic and collaborated with him on the Saga-Library, their six volumes of saga translations.

¹² See J.W. Mackail , *The Life of William Morris* , pp. 200-201

¹³ *The Fatal Sisters* and *The Descent of Odin* (1761)

¹⁴ Arnold's "Norse" poem, *Balder Dead* , owes as much to Classical literature as to Norse mythology. Arnold's opinions on the difference between Teutonic and Norse literature are worth noting ;

well-versed in Old Norse material long before he was made aware of the existence of Wagner's *Ring*. In her biography of her father, May Morris explains what attracted Morris to Scandinavian Studies :

"here in the age of the Sagas we can see what it was in the actual putting-together of the legends that the poet and craftsman so keenly appreciated . In spite of all the wealth of epithets in the Irish annals, in spite of the beauty of the Celtic handling, the terse Norse phrase, bare of poetic decoration, is more effective for purposes of dramatic story-telling.¹⁵ In the plain abrupt dialogue we feel all the subtlety of the word withheld ; the dramatic action is put before us almost by suggestion while emotions have to be divined from the curtest mention."

(*William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, p.447)

In the Preface to the translation of *Völsunga Saga*, which he produced in collaboration with Eirkr Magnússon, and which was first published in 1870, Morris makes an eloquent plea for Norse literature to be recognised as being of equal value with Classical literature :

".... we must say how strange it seems to us, that the Volsung Tale, which is in fact an unversified poem, should never before have been translated into English. For this is the Great Story of the North, which should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks - to all our race first, and afterwards, when the change of the world has made our race

Style, then, the Germans are singularly without, and it is strange that the power of style should show itself so strongly as it does in the Icelandic poetry, if the Scandinavians are such genuine Teutons as is commonly supposed ... there is a fire, a sense of style, in Icelandic poetry, which German poetry has not. Icelandic poetry, too, shows a powerful and developed technic; and I wish to throw out, for examination by those who are competent to sift the matter, the suggestion that this power of style and development of technic in the Norse poetry seems to point towards an early Celtic influence or intermixture ... I had been hearing the *Nibelungen* read and commented on in German schools ... and it struck me how the fatal humdrum and want of style of the Germans had marred their way of telling this magnificent tradition of the *Nibelungen*, and taken half its grandeur and power out of it; while in the Icelandic poems which deal with this tradition, its grandeur and power are much more fully visible, and everywhere in the poetry of the Edda there is a force of style and a distinction as unlike as possible to the want of both in the German *Nibelungen*.

(Arnold: *Lectures and essays in Criticism*, Vol.III , pp.364-365)

¹⁵ Not that Morris goes in for "terse ... phrase[s], bare of poetic decoration", even in his translations, let alone in *Sigurd the Volsung*.

nothing more than a name of what has been - a story too - then should it be to those that come after us no less than the Tale of Troy has been to us."

(*Völsunga Saga*, Preface, p. xiv, 1888 edition)

There is no evidence as to whether Morris was, or was not, familiar with *The Literature and Romance of Northern Europe* by William and Mary Howitt, which appeared in 1852, but its existence is an indication of the growing interest in this field of study during the nineteenth century, and the authors appear to have had the same motivation as Morris had for their interest in Norse studies, namely, a desire to elevate the stature of Northern studies to that enjoyed by the literature of Classical antiquity. To this end, discussion of the Nibelungen material is explicitly compared with the themes of Greek tragedy.¹⁶

Morris appears originally to have decided against writing an epic poem based on the "Sigurd" story. This decision was expressed in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton, dated 21st. December, 1869:

"I am not getting on well with my work, for in fact I believe the Volsunga has rather swallowed me up for some time past. I mean thinking about it, for it hasn't taken me long to do - I had it in my head to write an epic of it, but though I still hanker after it, I see clearly it would be foolish, for no verse could render the best parts of it, and it would only be a flatter and tamer version of a thing already existing."

(William Morris; *Collected Letters*, ed. Norman Kelvin, Letter 95, p.98)

It was not until 1873, when Henry Buxton Forman sent Morris a copy of his brother's translation of the libretto of *Die Walküre*,¹⁷ that Morris seems to have changed his

¹⁶ "There are great and overwhelming tragedies [in these poems], to which those of Greece only present any parallels. The awful fatalities of the Atridæ family, the madness of Orestes, the terrible story of Medea, and sorrows of Iphigenie or Antigone, may equal, but cannot surpass the dread events and rending grief of the "Nibelungen" story, as presented in its original Northern state."

(William and Mary Howitt; *Literature and Romance of the North*, p.94)

¹⁷ Alfred William Forman (1840-1925) was the elder brother of Henry Buxton Forman. His translation of the *Ring* was privately printed between 1873-1875, and was published in 1877, to coincide with Wagner's visit to London; it met with Wagner's approval. Forman also translated *Tristan und Isolde* (1891), *Parsifal* (1899) and *Tannhäuser* (1919) though *Tannhäuser* was unpublished at Forman's death.

mind about writing a "Sigurd" epic .His letter in reply to Forman expressed a very negative opinion of Wagner, and of opera:

"I look upon it as nothing short of desecration to bring such a tremendous and world-wide subject under the gas-lights of an opera; the most degraded and rococo of all forms of art - the idea of a sandy-haired German tenor tweedledeeing over the unspeakable woes of Sigurd, which even the simplest words are not typical enough to express!"

(William Morris, *Collected Letters* , ed. Norman Kelvin; Letter 216, p.205)

Morris was evidently unaware of Wagner's own opinions as to the degeneration of opera as an art form, and was in any case not interested in music;¹⁸ he was not, therefore, interested in Wagner's reforms and innovations in the field of music-drama.

On 12 September 1894 , Morris wrote in similar vein to Professor Franklin Peterson, of Edinburgh:

"If I may venture to express an opinion thereon, I should say that such a subject is impossible for the stage, even when helped by the music of a great master. But here I must stop, or I may get to talking about or defending my own work - which would be an offence. "

Here we have Morris's customary reluctance to discuss his own work in any detail - and an indication that his opinion of Wagner had not changed radically since 1876, when *Sigurd the Volsung* was published. The letter also indicates the contrast between Morris's attitude to his art - that he thinks it speaks for itself ¹⁹ - and that of Wagner, whose explanations of his ideas fill several volumes.. In her biography of her father, *William Morris : Artist. Writer. Socialist* , May Morris refers again to this letter , in which Morris goes on to explain that he remains close to the sources in his poem.

¹⁸ Although he may have said this for effect - exaggeration to make a point. Morris was not interested in opera, or in any of the performing arts, but he was very interested in what we would now call Early Music - particularly Renaissance music.

¹⁹ Morris was perfectly prepared to explain his methods in the visual and decorative arts , but reluctant to do so in the case of his literary works.

In her introduction to *Sigurd the Volsung* ²⁰, May Morris admits to having gone through a period of enthusiasm for Wagner, which she hints was not entirely to her father's liking:

"One morning at breakfast I was giving an account of my first hearing of *Siegfried*. Thereupon Father began to explain how he felt about Wagner and his interpreters and the German operatic stage generally. The explanation did not last very long, but it was much to the point, and a joyful, invigorating introduction to the day."

(May Morris; *Introduction*, Collected Works Vol.XII, p.viii)

Morris began writing *Sigurd* on October 15th, 1875, according to the notebooks in which the draft of the poem was written.²¹ It was published in November 1876 - the first editions bear the imprint 1877. Critical reaction was not as favourable as Morris had hoped; he regarded it as his greatest literary achievement, and was disappointed at the lukewarm response it received.

²⁰ William Morris, Collected Works Vol. XII, ed. May Morris

²¹ see May Morris, *William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist*, Vol 1, p.468

1.2. Contemporary critical reaction to *Sigurd the Volsung*

The poem was praised highly by such critics as Francis Hueffer²² and George Bernard Shaw; indeed, Shaw considered it to be "the greatest epic since Homer".²³ It is not clear, however, whether Shaw's opinion of *Sigurd* had any influence on his interpretation of the *Ring* in *The Perfect Wagnerite*, which first appeared in 1898. But the general response was muted - polite approval rather than enthusiasm. A review from the *Literary World* for February 1877 concludes by suggesting that "Whatever its immediate reception may be, William Morris's *Sigurd* is certain eventually to take its place among the few great epics of the English tongue." Sadly, this has not been the fate of the poem. Although the immediate critical reception was not unfavourable, *Sigurd the Volsung* has been almost forgotten since Morris's death, no doubt because Morris's achievement has been overshadowed by Wagner's greater work: but a close examination of the poem reveals that it has been unjustly neglected.

Some contemporary critics did discuss and compare the two works as though they were of equal cultural value, and nearly all reviews of the period mention Wagner's *Ring* at some point in their discussion, for instance the following lines from an unsigned article in the *Saturday Review* for 20th January 1877:

²² Francis Hueffer (1845-1899) was a music critic of German origin, who came to England in 1869 and became a British citizen in 1882. He was a colleague and associate of the Pre-Raphaelites, and married Ford Madox Brown's youngest daughter, Catherine. He may be said to have had a foot in both camps, as he was a fervent admirer of both Wagner and Schopenhauer, and was instrumental in promoting the Wagnerian cause in England. His book *Richard Wagner and the music of the future* appeared in 1874. The article *The Story of Sigurd and its sources*, which appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for 1877, is discussed below.

²³ "Iceland and the Sagas helped by changing the facile troubadour of love and beauty into the minstrel of strife and guile, of battle, murder and death. Incidentally he achieved the summit of his professional destiny by writing the greatest epic since Homer, *Sigurd the Volsung*. He was quite aware of the greatness of this work, and used to recite passages from it, marking its swing by rocking from one foot to another like an elephant. After one of these recitations he sat down beside me. I said "This is the stuff for me; there is nothing like it." Whereupon he presented me with the copy he had read from."

(G.B. Shaw, *William Morris as I knew him*; Intro. to Vol. II of *May Morris*; *William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist*, p.xxxvii)

" At last, and in the same year, 'music and sweet poetry agree' to recall Sigurd or Siegfried, Chriemhild or Gudrun, from their sleep of ages: in Bayreuth and London Wagner and Morris make simultaneous celebration. Perhaps this is no more than a coincidence; and no doubt with the German the dominant motive was one that is absent from the English poet - that is to say, a national motive."

(in : William Morris, the Critical Heritage , ed. Peter Faulkner, p.237)

The most favourable and most detailed contemporary review is Francis Hueffer's The Story of Sigurd and its Sources (in The Gentleman's Magazine , 1877, part II). In his article on Sigurd , he notes

It is, indeed, not many months ago since the attention of the cultivated classes in this country and in Germany was directed towards the story of Sigurd by two important events - the performance of Wagner's tetralogy, "The Ring of the Nibelung" at Bayreuth last August , and the appearance of Mr. Morris's "Sigurd the Volsung".

(The Story of Sigurd and its sources ; The Gentleman's Magazine, 1877, pt. 2, p.46)

Hueffer took the view that Wagner's Ring and Morris's Sigurd were of equal importance. He discusses the mediæval sources on which Morris and Wagner drew, and his emphasis throughout is on Morris's interpretation. He is not in favour of Morris's decision to conclude his poem with Gudrun's Revenge rather than with the deaths of Brunhild and Sigurd²⁴, and he takes issue with Morris for including the story of Sigmund, Sigurd's father. The same criticism is voiced by Mackail in his biography of Morris, in which he gives it as his opinion that the

24."..as soon as her beloved foe is killed the old passion, never quenched, rises up again in Brynhild's breast. To be united with her lover in death, she pierces her breast with a sword, and one pyre consumes both.

With the climax Wagner very properly concludes his drama. But the epic poet loves to follow the course of events to their ultimate consequences, and Mr. Morris, in accordance with the Volsunga Saga , proceed to relate how, after many years of mournful widowhood, Gudrun is married to Atli, a mighty king, the brother of Brynhild. [*in Morris's poem, Atli is not in fact Brynhild's brother*]It is characteristic of the Icelandic epic that...Gudrun lives for a number of years, and is yet again married to a third husband. But to this length even Mr. Morris refuses to accompany the tale."

(Ibid . p52) (emphasis added)

Sigmund/Signy/Sinfjolti ²⁵ episode does not belong with the Sigurd story, and continues:

With what skill Morris effects the transition, with what genius he drives the story through into its destined channel, is hardly to the purpose; the fact remains that what he tried to do was wrong, and that no skill can set it wholly right.

(J.W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, p.331)

Sigurd continued to receive critical acclaim, if not precisely enthusiasm, during its author's lifetime. Typical of the "damning with faint praise" attitude towards the poem was the review by Henry Hewlett in Fraser's Magazine for July, 1877. Hewlett praises Morris for having chosen to base his poem on the *Völsunga Saga* rather than the *Nibelungenlied*, ²⁶ both of which he summarises for the reader before discussing Morris's poem itself, with which he is evidently not impressed; one comment in particular reveals a lack of sensitivity to Morris's poetic diction:

The diction, however appropriate, is almost pedantically close in imitation to its model, the identical similes and metaphors employed by the Sagaman being often reproduced with some rhetorical amplification. Passages of novel and pictorial description are frequent, but the prevailing tenor of the narrative seldom rises above mediocrity.

(Hewlett, p.110)

I quote Hewlett's review because it is typical of the "could do better" attitude of many of Morris's contemporaries, who evidently did not share Shaw's view that *Sigurd* was "the greatest epic since Homer". After Morris's death, however, many of the obituaries singled the poem out for special praise. The obituary by Henry Buxton Forman in the *Illustrated London News* of 10 October 1896, is perhaps of special

²⁵ The incestuous relationship between Signy and Sigmund, the last two remaining Volsungs; Sinfjolti is their son, engendered for the specific purpose of avenging his family. The various strands of the different plots are discussed at length in Chapter II.

²⁶ Hewlett finds Sigurd a more sympathetic character than the Siegfried of the *Nibelungenlied*:

As an heroic personage, Siegfried will bear no comparison with Sigurd, his character being flawed by that propensity to bully and swagger still too common among his North German countrymen.

(*Mr. Morris's 'Sigurd' and the 'Nibelungenlied'*, p.109)

This is an opinion shared by the present writer, and by the late R.G. Finch.

interest , since it was Forman who introduced Morris to Wagner's *Ring* . The critical comments on Morris's poetic technique are especially worth noting :

Love is enough (1873) , a dramatic and lyric morality, derives the more marked features of its poetic method from the Icelandic. The period is that in which Morris shows a prevailing feeling of Northern hardness, has abandoned the three Chaucerian stock metres, and developed a metric system with anapæstic movement surpassing in every vital particular all that has been done in anapæstic measures since Tennyson showed the way in Maud. In the much higher qualities, which derive from knowledge of life, feeling for national myth, epic action and tragic intensity combined, The Story of Sigurd the Volsung (1877) the epic in anapæstic couplets which rounds this period, stands among the foremost poems not only of this century, but of our literature .

1.3. Nibelungen studies in Germany prior to Wagner . The development and chronology of the *Ring* text.

A cursory examination of the development of Nibelungen studies prior to Wagner is necessary to provide us with a context within which to view Wagner's poetic and musical achievement , as the *Ring* did not appear from nowhere in the mid-nineteenth century . Wagner and Morris were not the pioneers of interest in Norse and Germanic studies, but the culmination, and the *Ring* and *Sigurd* move the Nibelungen and Volsung material from the realm of scholarship to that of the creative arts.

Interest in the Nibelungen material in Germany developed contemporaneously with the interest in Scandinavian Studies in England, although knowledge of the legend may never completely have died out ; Hans Sachs had written a seven-act tragedy , *Hürnen Seufrid* , and a chapbook ²⁷ known as the *Volksbuch vom gehörnten Sigfrid* appeared in 1726.²⁸ A manuscript of *Das Nibelungenlied* was discovered in 1755. Part of the poem was published in 1757 ,with the title *Chriemhilden Rache und die Klage; Zwey Heldengedichte Aus dem Schwäbischen Zeitpuncte, samt Fragmenten aus dem Gedichte von den Nibelungen und Aus dem Josaphat* .²⁹ The whole poem was first published in 1782 , edited by C.H. Myller as *Der Nibelungen Liet, ein Rittergedicht aus dem XIII oder XIV Jahrhundert* . Critical reception was not immediately favourable, as this was still, in Germany as in England, the period of intense admiration of the literature of Classical Antiquity, but over the next three or four decades, interest in German and Scandinavian material grew steadily. A modern German version of *Das Lied vom Hürnen Seyfried* appeared in 1811; 1812 saw the publication of a translation by C.H. Rüh of the *Prose Edda* by Snorri Sturluson, a thirteenth-century Icelander, and a translation of the same work by

²⁷ During the 18th and early 19th centuries, *chapbooks* were collections of popular literature sold by itinerant ballad sellers and pedlars , also known as chapmen.

²⁸ See ; Elizabeth Magee, *Richard Wagner and the Nibelungs* , p2, passim

²⁹ See: Mary Thorp , *The Study of the Nibelungenlied* . (Oxford, 1940)

Friedrich Majer followed in 1818. *Thidreks Saga*³⁰ and *Vølsunga Saga* were translated by Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen in 1814-15. The first complete translation of the *Poetic Edda* was that by Simrock, which did not appear until 1851, but translations of some of the poems had appeared in F.D. Gräter's *Nordische Blumen* in 1798, and Ludwig Ettmüller's translations of the heroic poems, on which Wagner drew, were published in Zürich in 1837. Von der Hagen's first critical edition of the *Nibelungenlied* in the Middle High German original appeared in 1810, and Lachmann's *Über die Ursprüngliche Gestalt des Gedichtes von der Nibelungen Noth* was published in 1816.

Wagner provides some information about what material was available to him in a letter he wrote in 1856 to Franz Müller, who was thinking of writing a book about the sources of the *Ring* text. Wagner said that at that stage he was not sure whether he would ever finish his Nibelungen drama, but offered Müller the following list of his sources:

1. *Der Nibelunge Not und Klage*, hrsg. von Lachmann.³¹
2. *Zu den Nibelungen, etc.* von Lachmann.
3. Grimms *Mythologie*
4. *Edda*³²
5. *Vølsunga-Saga* (übersetzt von Hagen; Breslau)
6. *Wilkina- und Niflunga-Saga*³³ (ebenso)
7. *Das deutsche Heldenbuch* -alte Ausgabe, auch erneut von Hagen

³⁰ A late medieval compilation of Norse and Germanic versions of the material.

³¹ Karl Lachmann's edition of *Das Nibelungenlied - Der Nibelunge Not mit der Klage* - was published in 1826, and the second edition appeared in 1841.

³² Wagner doesn't make it clear whether he means the *Prose Edda*, the *Poetic Edda*, or both or a combination of extracts from each. His command of Old Norse was not great, and he read the *Poetic Edda* in Ludwig Ettmüller's translations (Zürich, 1837), so this may be what he means.

³³ Contains a translation of *Thidreks Saga*.

- bearbeitet in 6 Bänden von Simrock

8. *Die deutsche Heldensage* von Wilhm. Grimm
9. *Untersuchungen zur deutschen Heldensage* von Mone (sehr wichtig)
10. *Heimskringla* - übersetzt von Mohnicke (glaub' ich!)
(nicht von Wächter - schlecht) ³⁴

Tannhäuser and *Lohengrin*, which preceded the *Ring*, were based on mediæval romance rather than Germanic epic, while for the opera which is now considered to be the first of the Wagner canon ³⁵ - *Der fliegende Holländer* - Wagner drew his immediate inspiration from a comic tale by Heinrich Heine, and the plot also contains elements of the myth of the Wandering Jew and of the *Odyssey*. After *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, Wagner turned his attention to Germanic heroic epic, in particular the *Nibelungenlied*. His first essay in the direction of getting to grips with Germanic heroic legend was *Die Wibelungen*, in which he equates the struggle for the hoard with the struggle of the Guelfs and Ghibellines, ³⁶ but this probably has no direct bearing on the development of the *Ring* text, which went through various changes, omissions and additions before it became the *Ring* as we know it today.

Wagner's first Prose Sketch for what eventually became the *Ring* - *Der Nibelungen-Mythos als Entwurf zu einem Drama* (1848) - differs in many respects from the completed work as we have it - in particular, the conclusion is optimistic, in that the gods are not destroyed, but redeemed - or perhaps it would be

³⁴ See Elizabeth Magee, *Richard Wagner and the Nibelungs*, (Oxford, 1990) for further discussion of the contemporary sources of the *Ring*, i.e. the research and scholarship of Lachmann, F.H. von der Hagen, F. J. Mone, and the Grimm brothers.

³⁵ *Die Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot* and *Rienzi* were excluded by Wagner from his list of mature works, and are never performed at Bayreuth; *Rienzi* is sometimes performed elsewhere, but performances of *Die Feen* and *Das Liebesverbot* are very rare.

³⁶ This idea did not originate with Wagner, but with K.W. Göttling, whose *Nibelungen und Ghibelliner* was published in 1816. (See Mary Thorp, op.cit., p.21 & passim)

more accurate to say that their redemption consists not in annihilation, but survival. The date of 1848 is of course highly significant. Wagner was involved in the revolutionary uprisings that swept Europe, and his original conception of the work is deeply influenced by contemporary concepts of Socialism.³⁷ In this Prose Draft, it is Siegfried who is the hero and the focus of interest, not Wotan. In *Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde*, Wagner discusses his concept of the nature of revolution, before going on to discuss his original plans for what became the *Ring*; his revolutionary ideas were at this stage intimately involved with his plans for the Nibelungen drama. He states that he realised that a true revolution could not come from above, organised by intellectuals, but only from below, from purely human needs (*aus dem Drange*

³⁷ It is suggested by Manfred Kreckel in *Richard Wagner und die französischen Frühsozialisten* (Peter Lang, 1986): "In [Wagners] Schriften, vor allem in *Oper und Drama*, im *Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, in *Die Kunst und die Revolution*, in der Prosafassung des Nibelungenmythos und nicht zuletzt in den Frauengestalten seiner Opern tauchen immer wieder Erinnerungen oder Assoziationen an saint-simonistischen Ideengut auf."

Wagner himself recognised how his ideas changed after 1848, as is evident from his famous letter to August Röckel in 1856:

I shaped it [the poem of the Ring] at a time when I had built up in my conceptual thought a hellenistic-optimistic world, the realization of which I held to be entirely possible, if only men wanted it - though I rather ingenuously pushed away the problem why they actually did not want it. I remember that I worked out the personality of my Siegfried in this premeditated way, with the desire to represent an existence free from pain; and I thought to express myself even more clearly in the presentation of the complete Nibelung myth, by showing the original injustice from which a whole world of injustice arose and therefore fell to ruins, so as to ... teach us a lesson how to recognise injustice, tear it out by the roots, and establish a just world in its place. But I hardly noticed that, in carrying out my plan - indeed, even in laying it down - I was unconsciously following a quite different, much deeper intuition, and instead of conceiving a phase in the development of the world, I had conceived the essence of the world itself and recognised its nothingness; from which it naturally followed that, since I had to be faithful to my intuition and not to my conceptual ideas, something different came to light from what I actually thought.

(Translation from Patrick McCreless, *Wagner's Siegfried*)

des rein menschlichen Bedürfnisses).³⁸ It was in this spirit that he originally conceived of his Siegfried figure, which underwent such radical alterations in the course of composition. The Prose Sketch makes no mention of the Renunciation of Love - the condition under which, in *Das Rheingold*, Alberich is able to obtain the gold, and which is a central concept in the *Ring*; in the Prose Sketch, the emphasis is on Alberich's theft (or at least acquisition) of the gold and the fact that he enslaves the Nibelungs:

Des klaren edlen Rheingoldes bemächtigte sich Alberich, entführte es den Tiefen der Wässer und schmiedete daraus mit großer, listiger Kunst einen Ring, der ihm die oberste Gewalt über sein ganzes Geschlecht, die Nibelungen, verschaffte; so wurde er ihr Herr, zwang sie, für ihn fortan zu arbeiten, und sammelte den unermesslichen Nibelungenhort, dessen wichtiges Kleinod der Tarnhelm, durch den jede Gestalt angenommen werden konnte, und den zu schmieden Alberich, seinen eigenen Bruder, Reigin (Mime-Eugel) gezwungen hatte. So ausgerüstet strebt Alberich nach der Herrschaft über die Welt und alles in ihr Enthaltene.

(*Der Nibelungen-Mythos ; Gesammelte Schriften* , Bd. II, p. 156)

The Prose Sketch remains in many ways closer to the original sources than does the completed *Ring*. The opening paragraph is an example of how close Wagner at that stage remained to his sources - and how well he knew them.

Dem Schooße der Nacht und des Todes entkeimte ein Geschlecht, welches in Nibelheim (Nebelheim), d.i. in unterirdischen düsteren Klüften und Höhlen wohnt; sie heißen Nibelungen; in unsteter, rastloser Regsamkeit durchwühlen sie (gleich Würmen im toten Körper) die Eingeweide der Erde; sie glühen, läutern und schmieden die harten Metalle.

(*Der Nibelungen-Mythos ; Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. II, p.156)

³⁸ "selbst öffentlich gegen die bloß politisch formelle Auffassung der Revolution, und für die Nothwendigkeit, daß der rein menschliche Kern derselben deutlich in das Auge gefaßt werde, mich auszusprechen. An dem Erfolge dieses Schrittes gewährte ich nun erst ersichtlich, wie es bei unseren Politikern um die Erkenntnis des Geistes der Revolution stand, und daß eine wirkliche Revolution nie von Oben, von Standpunkt der erlernten Intelligenz, sondern nur von Unten, aus dem Drange des rein menschlichen Bedürfnisses, zu Stande kommen kann."

(*Mitteilung* , *Gesammelte Schriften* , Bd. IV , p. 310)

In Richard Wagner's Music Dramas, Carl Dahlhaus suggests that this "unsavoury simile"

(*gleich Würmen im toten Körper*)³⁹ betrays Wagner's "fundamental disgust" for the industrial proletariat, although he expressed sympathy with their sufferings. This may be true, although it is doubtful whether Wagner really knew much about the industrial proletariat, but Dahlhaus is evidently not aware that Wagner based this paragraph on the following passage from the Prose Edda.

Next the gods sat in their high seats to give judgement, and discussed where the dwarves had been generated in the earth, like maggots in the flesh. The dwarves had first appeared in Ymir's flesh, and then they were maggots, but by decree of the gods, they were brought to life and given a human shape, and now they live in the earth or in stones. (emphasis added)

The similarity is too striking to be a coincidence; Wagner must have based his simile with maggots on the text of the Prose Edda.

The broken contract with the giants, so vital in Das Rheingold, is not important in the Prose Draft - but Wotan's dilemma does not basically change between the Prose Draft and the completed work. In Der Nibelungen-Mythos, Wagner states that Wotan cannot expiate this guilt without committing another wrong; it can only be atoned by someone who is independent of the gods, who look to humanity as their eventual redeemer.⁴⁰ The texts pass through several stages, from portraying Siegfried as the redeemer (Der Nibelungen-Mythos) to Siegfried and Brünnhilde as joint redeemers (Siegfrieds Tod) to the completed Ring, in which it is Brünnhilde who is the Redeemer, and Wotan who is redeemed - by annihilation, whereas in Der Nibelungen-Mythos and in Siegfrieds Tod, redemption meant that the gods

³⁹ It was also adopted into the language of anti-semitism during the Nazi period.

⁴⁰ Wotan selbst kann aber das Unrecht nicht tilgen, ohne ein neues Unrecht zu begehen; nur ein von den Göttern unabhängiger, freier Wille, der alle Schuld auf sich selbst zu laden und zu büßen im Stande ist, kann den Zauber lösen, und in den Menschen ersehen die Götter die Fähigkeit zu solchem freien Willen.

(Der Nibelungen-Mythos; Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. II, p.158)

survived , and that the Nibelungs - including Alberich himself - were freed from the domination of gold . ⁴¹

Wagner's original plan for one drama - *Siegfrieds Tod* - gradually developed into three dramas with a prelude (*Vorspiel*) , *Das Rheingold* , as he realised that *Siegfrieds Tod* was insufficient as a drama in itself ; it was suggested by Edward Devrient (1801-1877) , whom Wagner knew in Dresden , that the text consisted of too much exposition and that the events preceding Siegfried's death should not merely be narrated, but enacted. Wagner decided to preface *Siegfrieds Tod* , of which the first version was completed in November 1848, to be followed by a revision in early 1849, with a drama about Siegfried's youth - *Der junge Siegfried* - which began to take shape in 1851 , and was completed in June of that year. ⁴² In the same year , Wagner began preliminary sketches for *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* , which were completed in the following year. The entire *Ring* text was first printed privately in 1853 , but the titles *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* for the third and fourth parts of the tetralogy did not appear until 1856 . When the *Ring* text was published in 1863, variants from the privately printed edition of 1853 were included.

⁴¹ In *Siegfrieds Tod* , Brünnhilde also addresses the Nibelungs in her final scene:

Ihr Nibelungen, *vernehmt* mein Wort!
 Eure Knechtschaft künd' ich auf;
 der den Ring geschmiedet, euch Rührige band, -
 nicht soll er ihn wieder empfang'n -
 doch frei sei er, wie ihr!
 (*Siegfrieds Tod* ; Gesammelte Schriften , Bd. II)

⁴² See Strobel, Otto ,*Skizzen und Entwürfe zur Ring - Dichtung* (Munich , 1930).

1.4. Is "Sigurd the Volsung" an anti-Ring?

I now turn to discussion of whether *Sigurd* could have been conceived by Morris as an anti-*Ring*. The evidence from Morris's correspondence was discussed above, and I intend now to examine the evidence from the poem. I also discuss the possibility that Morris may have been unconsciously indebted to Wagner for some of the ideas in his poem, in spite of the negative opinions he expressed of the composer. Morris had no interest in Wagner's music, as he informed Henry Buxton Forman in his letter of 12th. November 1873:

Many thanks for your letter and the translation of Wagner: I have not had time to read it yet, nor to say the truth am I much interested in anything Wagner does, as his theories on musical matters seem to me as an artist and non-musical man perfectly abominable^[sic]

(Collected Letters, ed. Norman Kelvin, letter 216, p.205)

and he would in any case not have had the opportunity to hear any of the *Ring* music at the time of writing *Sigurd*.

In Richard Wagner and the English Anne Dzamba Sessa suggests that "Morris was acquainted with Wagner's works through Hueffer and Swinburne"; there is no direct evidence that Morris and Swinburne helped each other to become acquainted with Wagner's works, but Wagner's influence on Swinburne's *Tristram of Lyonesse* is immense. As we have seen, Francis Hueffer's contribution to critical studies of both Morris and Wagner is undisputed.

It is possible that one reason Morris decided to write *Sigurd* is precisely that he thought it was an unsuitable subject for music, and wanted to show Wagner how to do it "properly". It is instructive, in this context, to note how even that arch-Wagnerian Ernest Newman acknowledged the superiority of Morris as a poet, and praised his technique.⁴³

⁴³...and who, in spite of all the splendor of the music of the *Ring*, does not feel that the actual spectacle of gods and heroes that has been put before our eyes on the stage cannot compare in true sublimity with the picture given us in the great opening lines of Morris's *Sigurd the Volsung*;

There was a dwelling of kings ere the world was waxen old,
Dukes were the doorwards there, and the roofs were thatched with gold;

One major difference between *Sigurd* and the *Ring* is the emphasis on Sigurd's happy childhood in the former, together with the explicitly Biblical references to Sigurd's wisdom and to his role as the redeemer. His wisdom is not emphasised in *Völsunga Saga*, where the emphasis is on his strength and courage; ⁴⁴ this is Morris's innovation, just as Siegfried's foolishness is Wagner's; that is, Wagner identified Siegfried with the boy who is too stupid to experience fear. This may indicate that Morris was familiar enough with Wagner's *Siegfried* to wish to portray his Sigurd as a very different character from Wagner's loutish hero. ⁴⁵ The narrator's insistence on Sigurd's happy childhood runs contrary to many hero legends, in which the mysterious birth is a significant factor, and also of course contradicts Wagner's depiction of Siegfried as a *Naturmensch* who is never integrated into society. Morris's narrative also emphasises Brynhild's human origin and her love of humanity. ⁴⁶ Evidently Wagner's idea of the hero (and of the heroine) is different from

Earls were the wrights that wrought it, and silver nailed its doors;
 Earls' wives were the weaving-women, queens' daughters strewed its floors,
 And the masters of its song-craft were the mightiest men that cast
 The sails of the storm of battle adown the bickering blast.
 There dwelt men merry-hearted, and in hope exceeding great
 Met the good days and the evil as they went the ways of fate;
 There the gods were unforgotten, yea whiles they walked with men,
 Though e'en in that world's beginning rose a murmur now and then
 Of the midward time and the fading and the last of the latter days,
 And the entering in of the terror, and the death of the People's Praise.

How the imagination fills out the ample spaces here left to it to play among - how great and godlike and noble and beautiful a world of men and women it is that the poet evokes for us!

(Ernest Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist*, p.343)

⁴⁴ he ...had to name Sigurd, of whom all men speak with one speech and say that none was ever his like for growth and goodliness. He was brought up in the house of King Hjalprek in great love and honour; and so it is, that whenso all the noblest men and greatest kings are named in the olden tales, Sigurd is ever put before them all, for might and prowess, for high mind and stout heart, wherewith he was far more abundantly gifted than any man of the northern parts of the wide world.

(*Völsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, p.125)

⁴⁵ See Chapter VI

⁴⁶ This may be a tenuous link with the character Ellen in *News from Nowhere*, who expresses her love for the earth:

"Oh me! Oh me! How I love the earth, and the seasons, and weather, and all things that deal with it, and all that grows out of it."

(*News from Nowhere* p.391; in *Three Works by William Morris*, ed. A.L. Morton: Lawrence and Wishart 1962).

Morris's idea , and hero in folklore and hero in drama don't necessarily mean the same thing anyway. The main difference between the *Ring* and *Sigurd* is that the *Ring* is a drama of redemption - the world is redeemed by a woman's self-sacrificing love . The narrator in *Sigurd* characterises Sigurd as *The Redeemer* , with explicit Biblical references , but the characters in the poem do not think in terms of redemption.

Although I intend to develop the proposition that *Sigurd* may be intended as an anti-*Ring* , we will see in Chapter II that the conclusions of the two works are not very different . In both the *Ring* and *Sigurd* , a woman avenges her husband by fire , although it is not the same woman. Morris may have been aware of the conclusion of *Götterdämmerung* , i.e. that the world is consumed by fire; in the sources (*Atlakviða* , *Atlamál* ⁴⁷ and *Völsunga Saga* ,) Gudrun sets fire to Atli's hall, but she *doesn't succeed in drowning herself* (as she is presumed to do at the end of Morris's poem) ; she is rescued and embarks upon a third marriage - not until all her children are dead does she die herself.

The form of poetic narrative Morris chose may in itself be an indication that *Sigurd* is intended as an anti-*Ring* . Wagner adapts the *Stabreim* of Ludwig Ettmüller's translations of the *Poetic Edda*, but his alliteration is freer than Ettmüller's. One reason for this was undoubtedly to fit the words and the music together, but on some occasions when the alliteration is very emphatic the scoring is rather sparse , in order to foreground the narrative. Morris had seen Forman's translation (of *Die Walküre* at any rate) before he embarked upon *Sigurd* , so he had some idea of what Wagner was trying to do with language , but Morris's verse is leisurely and expansive, whereas Wagner's is terse and compact . ⁴⁸ In his translations of the *Poetic Edda* , Morris does reproduce the alliteration and sparse poetic style of the original, so it is possible that he could have written *Sigurd* in a style similar to that of

⁴⁷ The final poems of the *Poetic Edda* , which deal with Gudrun's Revenge and the death of Atli, her second husband.

⁴⁸ Discussed in Chapter III .

his translations had he wished; his choice of metre and alliterative style may have been a deliberate decision to make his text as unlike Wagner's as possible.

The fact that the narrative concentrates on the fate of the human beings involved, rather than the gods, may be another indication that *Sigurd* should be interpreted as an anti-*Ring*; the gods are, for the most part, remote from human concerns. Although Odin is involved with the lives of the Volsungs, and the poem ends with a reference to *The Sorrow of Odin the Goth*, Odin is in no sense the hero of the poem, as Wotan is the hero/central character of the *Ring*; Morris is more interested in depicting the fates of the Volsungs and the Niblungs. In *Sigurd*, as I have already suggested, the emphasis in the presentation of Brynhild is on her love of humanity and her love of the earth; Morris had seen the text of *Die Walküre* in Forman's translation, and was therefore aware that Wagner had made her into a goddess, and interpreted the loss of her divinity as a moral gain; he may therefore have decided to stress Brynhild's human origins as a deliberate counter to Wagner's idea.

These are some indications that *Sigurd* should perhaps be read as an anti-*Ring*; but there are also ideas that may link the texts, and may suggest that in some respects Morris was more indebted to Wagner than he realised. One of the connecting threads that runs through *Sigurd* is the idea of *wrong amended by wrong*; in the last lines of the poem, Gudrun welcome death as a final release from the *wrong amended by wrong* that has characterised her life and the experiences of all those associated with her. "Wrong amended by wrong" is a concept that figures very prominently in Greek tragedy, especially the *Oresteia* of Æschylus - a work by which Wagner was profoundly influenced - and this concept is certainly present in the *Ring* at a sub-textual level; this is an instance, therefore, in which *Sigurd* resembles the *Ring* rather than differing from it.

A second "leitmotif" of the poem is the idea that the gods created the human race, especially the Volsungs, for the mutual benefit of gods and men. Perhaps there

is not quite enough internal evidence to justify the view ⁴⁹ that the idea of the gods' need of the human race to help them at *ragnarøk* is central to Morris's poem ; it is certainly not absent, but it does occupy a rather subordinate position - whereas in the *Ring* , the need for a free hero who can do what Wotan is powerless to do is central to the work .

It is possible that *Sigurd* would have been very different - indeed, may not even have been written at all - had it not been for Wagner's *Ring* .

⁴⁹ As expressed by John Hollow in *The After-Summer Seed ; re-considerations of William Morris's "Sigurd the Volsung "* , (NY/London ; The William Morris Society , 1978) (a collection of essays edited by John Hollow.)

CHAPTER II

SOURCES IN MEDIÆVAL LITERATURE OF WAGNER'S DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN AND MORRIS'S SIGURD THE VOLSUNG

The sources common to Morris and Wagner are :

The *Poetic Edda* (PE) (Old Norse)

The *Prose Edda* by Snorri Sturluson (Old Norse)

Vølsunga Saga (VS) (Old Norse)

Das Nibelungenlied (NL) (Middle High German)

Another source for Wagner was the Old Norse *Thidreks Saga* (TS) ; there is no indication that Morris was familiar with this. In the following pages, I discuss in detail how Morris and Wagner use the sources, what is retained, what is discarded or re-interpreted, how the two nineteenth century interpretations differ from each other and from the sources, and what similarities, if any, can be discerned. Morris at all times remains closer to the sources than does Wagner. ¹

¹ In a letter to the Edinburgh-based Professor Franklin Peterson, dated 12. Sept, 1894, Morris mentions his procedure of remaining close to the sources:

(1st. para omitted)

2nd. I stick very closely to the *Volsunga* in my poem of Sigurd; it is in fact the same story, modern amplification and sentiment excepted. I have invented nothing except detail. The songs from the Romantic part of the *Edda* included in our translation I have also drawn upon.

But, 3rdly, I suppose that the *Volsunga* and even these Eddaic lays are later than the original tale, that in fact it is told over and over again in them, the *Volsunga* being a comparatively late redaction of the fragments; the vellum belonging to the early fourteenth century. The terrible incestuously begotten Sinfjolti is, I think, the original Sigurd (so to say), the Dragon-Slayer and the releaser of Sigrdrifa the second, and the ally of the Nibelungs and husband of Gudrun the third. The Andvaranautr and Regin belong duly, I think, to the second one. The Gods therein are characterised a good deal like the Gods in the *Gylfa-gynning* of the *Prose Edda*. I should mention that Sigmund and Sinfjolti are mentioned in the *Beowulf*.

(Quoted in : May Morris , *William Morris . Artist . Writer . Socialist*)

2.1. Sigmund, Singy, Siggeir / Siegmund, Sieglinde, Hunding.
The sword in the tree.
Sinfjolti ; the vengeance of the Volsungs.

Book One of *Sigurd the Volsung*, subtitled *Sigmund*, introduces the family of Sigurd. A brief outline of the story may be in order here.

Volsung has ten sons and a daughter, Signy. Signy, somewhat against her will, yet accepting the decrees of the Norns, marries King Siggeir. On their wedding day, an old man (Odin in disguise) enters the hall and plunges a sword into the tree around which Volsung's hall is built, saying that it belongs to the man who can draw it from the tree. Only Volsung's son Sigmund (Signy's twin, according to Wagner) is able to do this. Siggeir offers to buy the sword from him; his offer is scornfully rejected. He returns home with Signy, plotting vengeance. He invites Volsung and his sons to visit him; Volsung accepts, although he suspects that Siggeir meditates treachery. Volsung is killed by Siggeir's men; his sons are captured, and killed one by one, until only Sigmund is left. Signy helps her one remaining brother to escape, and he lives as an outlaw in the forest for some time. Signy sends him her sons by Siggeir, for him to test their courage, to see if they are able to help the Volsungs to their revenge; Sigmund asks the boys to bake bread for the evening meal, but they are both frightened by the viper concealed in the meal-sack. At Signy's behest, Sigmund kills them both.

Signy now changes shapes with a witch, and in this guise she shares her brother's bed. Their son, Sinfjolti, helps them to their revenge. Sigmund doesn't know the identity of Sinfjolti's mother until they have set fire to Siggeir's hall; then Signy tells Sigmund that Sinfjolti is the son of an incestuous union between them. She chooses to die beside her husband; her vengeance is now complete, and she has nothing left to live for.

(Sigmund now marries Borghild; she quarrels with Sinfjolti and poisons him.)

After Sinfjolti's death, Sigmund marries Hjordis. He has to fight against King Lyngvi, who had also wanted to marry her. He is killed in the battle, when Odin

intervenes and causes Sigmund's sword to shatter against his spear. Hjordis joins Sigmund on the battlefield and is able to speak to him before he dies ; he tells her that the child she is expecting is a boy, and that she is to keep the pieces of the sword for him. When Hjordis's child is born, he is given the name Sigurd. Great things are prophesied for him.

Morris retells this tale in considerable detail in Book One of *Sigurd*. In Wagner's *Ring* , most of this material appears - in a somewhat mutated form - in the first act of *Die Walküre*. The principal differences are these;

(a) The names of the incestuous pair are Siegmund and Sieglinde. (Coincidentally, these are the names of Siegfried's parents in NL, though there it is nowhere suggested that he is the child of an incestuous union ; the poet probably gave them these names for reasons of euphony.)

(b) The union of the twins appears to be spontaneous and unplanned, though we learn in Act II that Wotan had planned it for reasons of his own.

(In VS, Signy plans the incestuous union in order that she and her family shall be revenged on Siggeir. Her brother is unaware of her identity until much later.)

(c) In VS, PE and NL, Siegfried/Sigurd is not the child of the incestuous union of twins, nor is he an orphan. In TS, his mother - Sisibe - dies in giving birth to him, but in VS and PE he is the child of Sigmund's second marriage, and in NL he is the heir to a royal house.

The principal source for this episode is VS; we can now examine in greater detail how Morris and Wagner adapt this source.

The Saga introduces Volsung, his sons and daughter, and relates the events at Signy's wedding to Siggeir. (Not Hunding , who plays a somewhat subsidiary role in VS, and is not married to Signy.)²

² There was a king called Siggeir, who ruled over Gothland, a mighty king and of many folk; he went to meet Volsung , the king, and prayed him for Signy his daughter to wife; and the king took his talk well, and his sons withal, but she was loth thereto, yet she bade her father rule in this as in

Morris's version of this episode is as follows :

...
 And when men tell of Volsung, they call that war-duke's tree,
 That crownéd stem, the Branstock; and so it was told unto me.

.....lo on an eve of May
 Comes a man from Siggeir; the King with a word for his mouth to say;
 "All hail to thee, King Volsung; from the King of the Goths I come;

...
 But if thou wouldst grant his asking, and make his heart full fain,
 Thou shalt give him a matter, saith he, without a price,
 -.Signy; the fairer than fair, Signy the wiser than wise."

Such words in the hall of the Volsungs spake the Earl of Siggeir the Goth;
 Bearing the gifts and the gold, the ring, and the tokens of troth,

.....
 But nought said the snow-white Signy as she sat with folded hands

all other things that concerned her; so the king took such rede that he gave her to him, and she was betrothed to King Siggeir; and for the fulfilling of the feast and the wedding, was King Siggeir to come to the house of King Volsung. The king got ready the feast according to his best might, and when all things were ready, came the king's guests and King Siggeir withal at the day appointed, and many a man of great account had Siggeir with him.

The tale tells that great fires were made endlong the hall, and the great tree aforesaid stood midmost thereof; withal folk say that, whenas men sat by the fires in the evening, a certain man came into the hall unknown of aspect to all men; and suchlike array he had, that over him was a spotted cloak, and he was bare-foot, and had linen-breeches tight even unto the bone and he had a sword in his hand as he went up to the Branstock, and a slouched hat upon his head; huge he was, and seeming-ancient, and one-eyed. So he drew his sword and smote it into the tree-trunk so that it sank in up to the hilts; and all held back from greeting the man. Then he took up the word, and said -

"Whoso draweth this sword from this stock, shall have the same as a gift from me, and shall find in good sooth that never bare he better sword in hand than is this ."

Therewith out went the old man from the hall, and none knew who he was or wither he went.

Now men stand up, and none would fain be the last to lay hand to the sword, for they deemed that he would have the best of it who might first touch it; so the noblest went thereto first, and then the others, one after other; but none who came thereto might avail to pull it out, for in nowise would it come away howsoever they tugged at it; but now up comes Sigmund, King Volsung's son, and sets hand to the sword, and pulls it from the stock, even as if it lay loose before him; so good that weapon seemed to all, that none thought he had seen such a sword before, and Siggeir would fain buy it of him at thrice its weight of gold, but Sigmund said -

"Thou mightest have taken the sword no less than I from there wheras it stood, if it been thy lot to bear it; but now, since it has first of all fallen into my hand, never shalt thou have it, thou thou biddest therefor all the gold that thou hast."

(*Volsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, pp.93-94)

And gazed at the Goth-king's Earl till his heart grew heavy and cold,
As one that half-remembers a tale that the elders have told,

A story of weird and of woe; then spake King Volsung and said:
"A great King woos thee, daughter; wilt thou lie in a great king's bed,
And bear earth's kings on thy bosom, that our name may never die?"

A fire lit up her face, and her voice was e'en as a cry:

"I will sleep in a great king's bed, I will bear the lords of the earth,
And the wrack and the grief of my youth-days shall be held for nothing
worth.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, pp.3-4)

...
Then into the Volsung dwelling a mighty man there strode,
One-eyed and seeming ancient, yet bright his visage glowed:
Cloud-blue was the hood upon him, and his kirtle gleaming-grey
As the latter morning sundog when the storm is on the way;
A bill he bore on his shoulder, whose mighty ashen beam
Burnt bright with the flame of the sea and the blended silver's gleam.

...
So strode he to the Branstock nor greeted any lord,
But forth from his cloudy raiment he drew a gleaming sword,
And smote it deep in the tree-bole, and the wild hawks overhead
Laughed 'neath the naked heaven as at last he spake and said;
"Earls of the Goths, and Volsungs, abiders on the earth,
Lo there amid the Branstock a blade of plenteous worth!
The folk of the war-wands forgers wrought never better steel
Since first the burg of heaven uprose for man-folk's weal.
Now let the man among you whose heart and hand may shift
To pluck it from the oakwood e'en take it for my gift...

Upstood the Earls of Siggeir, and each man drew anigh
And deemed his time was coming for a glorious gain and high;
But for all their mighty shaping and their deeds in the battle-wood,
No looser in the Branstock that gift of Odin stood...

...
At last by the hand of the Branstock Sigmund the Volsung stood,
And with right hand wise in battle the precious sword-hilt caught,
Yet in a careless fashion, as he deemed it all for nought;
When lo, from floor to rafter went up a shattering shout,
For aloft in the hand of Sigmund the naked blade shone out
As high o'er his head he shook it; for the sword had come away
From the grip of the heart of the Branstock, as though all loose it lay.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, pp.6-8)

We see here that Morris keeps close to the outline of the episode in VS.

In Wagner, the central events are similar, but they serve a different purpose in the development of the story. Sieglinde is married against her will to Hunding - the wedding-feast takes place in his home, not hers:

Der Männer Sippe saß hier im Saal

Von Hunding zur Hochzeit geladen.
 Er freite ein Weib das, ungefragt,
 Schächer ihm schenkten zur Frau.
 (*Die Walküre*, Act I ll.2199-2204)

The arrival of the old man (Wotan) with the sword is fairly close to VS:

Ein Fremder trat da herein,
 Ein Greis in grauem Gewand;
 Tief hing ihm der Hut,
 der deckt' ihm der Augen eines....

 Auf mich blickt' er, und blitzte auf jene,
 Als ein Schwert in Händen er schwang;
 Das stieß er nun in der Esche Stamm,
 bis zum Heft haftet' es drin.
 Dem sollte der Stahl geziemen,
 der aus dem Stamm es zög.
 (*Die Walküre*, Act I ll 2207-2210 , 2219-2226)

No-one can remove the sword, since it is destined for Siegmund. Wotan has destined the sword for him in the mistaken belief that Siegmund will be the free hero the gods need. As Wotan explains to Fricka in Act II:

Not tut ein Held der, ledig göttlichen
 Schutzes,
 sich löse vom Göttergesetz.
 Und so nur taugt er zu wirken die Tat
 die, wie Not sie den Göttern,
 dem Gott doch zu wirken verwehrt.
 (*Die Walküre*, Act II ll 2621-2627)

None of this has any relevance to *Sigurd the Volsung* , but it is highly significant in the *Ring*.

Book I of *Sigurd* then continues to relate the events of VS, up to the birth of Sigurd. Most of this does not figure in the *Ring* , but a brief outline can be given:

Signy goes away with Siggeir, who invites Volsung and his sons to visit him in his home in three months' time. When they arrive, in acceptance of the invitation, Signy warns them that it is a trap, and that Siggeir intends their death. The Volsungs refuse to flee, and as a result they are all captured - Siggeir wants to have them killed at once, and the only reprieve Signy is able to win for them is that they should be placed in the stocks, and not killed immediately. Then they are all killed one by one by a she-wolf

who comes out of the forest to devour them.³ When only Sigmund is left, he manages to kill the she-wolf, and escapes into the forest. Signy sends one of her sons to Sigmund, in order for Sigmund to test his bravery. Sigmund asks him to bake some bread, but the boy is afraid of the poisonous snake concealed in the meal-sack - Signy then decides that as the boy is obviously a coward, Sigmund might as well kill him. (In VS, there are two children, in *Sigurd* only one.)

It is at this point that Signy decides that the only way she will be able to rear a Volsung who will avenge her family is to commit incest with her brother. The differences between this version and the *Ring* are immediately obvious - the brother and sister are not twins, nor do they meet after years of estrangement and fall in love before becoming aware of each others' identity. Signy plans the incest in order to conceive a Volsung child, and she changes shapes with a sorceress, so that Sigmund is unaware of who she is.⁴

³ Possibly Siggeir's mother, who has changed her shape by sorcery.

⁴ So on a tide it befell as Signy sat in her bower, that there came to her a witch-wife exceeding cunning, and Signy talked with her in such wise, "Fain am I," says she, "that we should change semblances together."

She says, "Even as thou wilt then."

And so by her wiles she brought it about that they changed semblances, and now the witch-wife sits in Signy's place according to her rede, and goes to bed by the king that night, and he knows not that he has other than Signy beside him.

But the tale tells of Signy, that she fared to the earth-house of her brother, and prayed him give her harbouring for the night; "For I have gone astray abroad in the woods, and know not whither I am going."

So he said she might abide, and that he would not refuse harbour to one lone woman, deeming that she would scarce pay back his good cheer by tale-bearing; so she came into the house, and they sat down to meat, and his eyes were often on her, and a goodly and fair woman she seemed to him; but when they are full, then he says to her, that he is right fain that they should have but one bed that night; she nowise turned away therefrom, and so for three nights he laid her in bed by him.

Thereafter she fared home, and found the witch-wife, and bade her change semblances again, and she did so.

Now as time wears, Signy brings forth a man-child, who was named Sinfjolti, and when he grew up he was both big and strong, and fair of face, and much like unto the kin of the Volsungs, and he was hardly yet ten winters old when she sent him to Sigmund's earth-house; but this trial she had made of her other sons or ever she had sent them to Sigmund, that she had sewed gloves on to their hands through flesh and skin, and they had borne it ill and cried out thereat; and this she now did to Sinfjolti, and he changed countenance in nowise thereat. Then she flayed off the kirtle so

In Morris's treatment of this episode, it is clear that the decision to enter upon an incestuous relationship is Signy's alone, and that she does it for one purpose - revenge. She realises that incest is a crime, but decides that it is worth it if she can conceive a Volsung child:

"...What is it my heart hath feared?
And how shall it be with Earth's people if the kin of the Volsungs die,
And King Volsung unavenged in his mound by the sea-strand lie?"

...

Fierce then in the heart of Signy a sudden flame 'gan burn,
.....
And she thought; "Alone I will bear it: alone I will take the crime;
On me alone be the shaming, and the cry of the coming time.
Yea, and he for the life is fated and the help of many a folk,
And I for the death and the rest, and deliverance from the yoke."
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, pp.30-31)

She changes shapes with a sorceress, and goes to the forest to seduce Sigmund.

So Sigmund looked on her face and saw that she was fair;

.....

So he took the hand of the woman and straightway led her in
Where days ago the Dwarf-kind would their deeds of smithying win:
And he kindled the half-slaked embers, and gave her of his cheer
Amid the gold and the silver, and the fight-won raiment dear;
And soft was her voice, and she sung him sweet tales of yore ago,
Till all his heart was softened; and the man was all alone,
And in many wise she wooed him; so they parted not that night,
Nor slept till the morrow morning, when the woods were waxen bright;
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 33)

that the skin came off with the sleeves, and said that this would be torment enough for him; but he said;

"Full little would Volsung have felt such a smart as this."

So the lad came to Sigmund, and Sigmund bade him knead their meal up, while he goes to fetch firing; so he gave him the meal-sack, and then went after the wood, and by then he came back had Sinfjolti made an end of his baking. Then asked Sigmund if he had found nothing in the meal.

"I misdoubted me that there was something quick in the meal when I first fell to kneading of it, but I have kneaded it all up together, both the meal and that which was therein, whatsoever it was."

Then Sigmund laughed out, he said -

"Naught wilt thou eat of this bread tonight, for the most deadly of worms hast thou kneaded up therewith."

Now Sigmund was so mighty a man that he might eat venom and have no hurt therefrom; but Sinfjolti might abide whatso venom came on the outside of him, but might neither eat nor drink thereof.

(*Volsunga Saga* : Morris's translation , pp.103-104)

The child of this incestuous relationship is Sinfjolti. He and Sigmund are finally able to kill Siggeir and avenge Volsung - Sigmund does not know until the end that Sinfjolti is his own son; Signy tells him, before she dies. Sigmund and Sinfjolti set fire to Siggeir's hall, and Signy refuses the opportunity they offer her to leave with them, choosing instead to die with her husband, now that her vengeance has been accomplished.⁵

In *Sigurd*, Signy makes it clear before she dies that she planned to conceive Sinfjolti for one reason only:

For hear thou: that Sinfjolti, who hath wrought out our desire,
 Who hath compassed about King Siggeir with this sea of a deadly fire,
 Who brake thy grave asunder - my child and thine he is,
 Begot in that house of the Dwarf-kind for no other end than this;
 The son of Volsung's daughter, the son of Volsung's son.
 Look, look! might another helper this deed with thee have done?
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.46)

None of this figures in Wagner's *Ring*; the remaining parts of Book I of *Sigurd* have been briefly summarised. Some of the events - e.g. the death of Sigmund - are reflected in the *Ring*, but their function in the development of the action is different. Sigmund is killed in his last battle by Odin, but the context is very different from the parallel episode in the *Ring*. By the time of the last battle, Sigmund is an old man; he is fighting against King Lyngvi, son of King Hunding, who had also wished to marry Hjordis; she had chosen Sigmund in preference to Lyngvi. Odin intervenes

⁵ But she answered, "Take heed now, and consider, if I have kept King Siggeir in memory, and his slaying of Volsung the king! I let slay both my children, whom I deemed worthless for the revenging of our father; and I went into the wood to thee in a witch-wife's shape; and now behold, Sinfjolti is the son of thee and me both! and therefore has he this so great hardihood and fierceness, in that he is the son both of Volsung's son and Volsung's daughter; and for this, and for naught else, have I so wrought, that Siggeir might get his bane at last; and all these things have I done that vengeance may fall on him, and that I too might not live long; and merrily now will I die with King Siggeir, though I was naught merry to wed him."

Therewith she kissed Sigmund her brother, and Sinfjolti, and went back again into the fire, and there she died with King Siggeir and all his good men.

(*Vølsunga Saga*; Morris's translation, pp.108-109)

when the fighting has been going on for some time.⁶ There are other instances in Norse literature of Odin withdrawing his favour from his former favourites at crucial moments; this may be capriciousness, but there are some indications that he is offering them an honourable death in battle rather than the decrepitude of old age.

Morris's treatment of this episode is as follows :

But lo, through the hedge of the war-shafts a mighty man there came,
 One-eyed and seeming ancient, but his visage shone like flame:
 Gleaming-grey was his kirtle, and his hood was cloudy blue;
 And he bore a mighty twi-bill, as he waded the fight-sheaves through,
 And stood face to face with Sigmund, and upheaved the bill to smite.
 Once more round the head of the Volsung; fierce glittered the Branstock's
 light,

The sword that came from Odin; and Sigmund's cry once more
 Rang out to the very heavens above the din of war.

Then clashed the meeting edges with Sigmund's latest stroke,
 And in shivering shards fell earthward that fear of worldly folk.
 But changed were the eyes of Sigmund, and the war-wrath left his face;
 For that grey-clad mighty helper was gone, and in his place
 Drave on the broken spear-wood 'gainst the Volsung's empty hands:
 And there they smote down Sigmund, the wonder of all lands,
 On the foemen, on the death-heap his deed had piled that day.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.60)

It is worth noting that, for Morris, Odin always carries an axe - twi-bill - rather than a spear. It would appear that Morris is not particularly interested in the significance of Odin's spear. In Wagner, of course, Wotan's spear is highly significant.

As usual, Wagner has taken the outward form of the events of heroic legend and invested them with an entirely new meaning. Siegmund is Wotan's son by a relationship with a mortal woman. Wotan has indeed destined the sword for Siegmund,

⁶ But now whenas the battle had dured a while, there came a man into the fight clad in a blue cloak, and with a slouched hat on his head, one-eyed he was, and bare a bill in his hand; and he came against Sigmund the King, and have his bill up against him, and as Sigmund smote fiercely with the sword it fell upon the bill and burst asunder in the midst; thenceforth the slaughter and dismay turned to his side, for the good-hap of King Sigmund had departed from him, and his men fell fast about him; naught did the king spare himself, but he rather cheered on his men; but even as the saw says, *No might 'gainst many*, so was it now proven; and in this fight fell Sigmund the King, and King Eylimi, his father-in-law, in the fore-front of their battle, and therewith the more part-of their folk.

(*Volsunga Saga* : Morris's translation , pp.118-119)

but it is precisely this that proves his undoing. Neither of them is a free agent, although Wotan has tried to convince himself that they both are.

In VS and in *Sigurd*, Sigmund's sword is broken, but he is able to speak to his wife before he dies, and asks her to keep the broken pieces for their son, who is destined to be a great hero. After the birth of Sigurd, Hjordis remarries, and Sigurd grows up happily in the home of his step-father.⁷

⁷ The tale tells that Hjordis brought forth a man-child, who was straightly borne before King Hjalprek, and then was the king glad thereof, when he saw the keen eyes in the head of him, and he said that few men would be equal to him or like unto him in any wise. So he was sprinkled with water, and had to name Sigurd, of whom all men speak with one speech and say that none was ever his like for growth and goodliness. He was brought up in the house of King Hjalprek in great love and honour; and so it is, that whenso all the noblest men and greatest kings are named in the olden tales, Sigurd is ever put before them all, for might and prowess, for high mind and stout heart, wherewith he was far more abundantly gifted than any man of the northern parts of the wide world.

So Sigurd waxed in King Hjalprek's house, and there was no child but loved him.

(*Volsunga Saga*; Morris's translation, p.125)

2.2. The childhood and youth of Sigurd.

His upbringing by Regin the Smith, who tells him of Andvari's Gold.

The equivalents in Wagner.

Book II of *Sigurd* deals with the childhood and youth of Sigurd. It remains close in outline to VS, and is subtitled *Regin*. This is the name of Sigurd's foster-father in all the Norse literature, except TS, in which he is called Mimir/Mime - this is the source from which Wagner adapted much of his Siegfried figure.⁸ TS is the only source in which Sigurd is an orphan, and is bought up by the smith, Mime. Sigurd's parents in this saga are Sigmund and Sisibe. His mother is falsely accused of adultery by Sigmund's evil counsellors, Hartwin and Hermann - Sigmund tells them to take her into the forest, cut out her tongue and leave her there. While the men are disagreeing about what to do with her, Sisibe gives birth to a baby boy, whom she places for safety in a glass casket. The men fight, and during the fight the glass casket with the child inside is kicked into the river, and Sisibe dies. The child is found and suckled by a deer.

It may be of interest here to quote verbatim from TS,⁹ which is Wagner's major source for Act I of *Siegfried*. Wagner took from TS the foster-father Mime,

⁸ For the possible identification of Mime with Mimir we may consult *Heimskringla*, Vol. 1, Ch.4., in Morris's translation

With him sent the As-folk a man hight Mimir, the wisest of men, but the Vanir in return him of the best wits in their company, Quasir by name ... the Vanir misdoubted them the the As-folk had beguiled them in the exchanging of men, and they took Mimir and cut his throat, and sent the head to the As-host ; then Odin took the head, and smeared it with such worts [herbs] that it might not rot, and sang words of *willardry* thereover, and gave it such might that it spake to him and told him many hidden matters.

There is also the Well of Mimir, from which Odin obtains wisdom - does Wagner confuse the dwarf Regin with Mimir - or is it deliberate irony on Wagner's part ?

⁹ 163. There was a smith called Mimir, unequalled in fame and skill. He had many apprentices in his service. He was married, but in nine years of marriage he and his wife had had no children, and he was greatly distressed by this.

He had a brother called Reginn: he was very strong, and an evil man. The evil was repaid, because he dabbled so much in sorcery and magic that he turned into a dragon. He was the greatest and most wicked of all dragons, and hoped to kill everyone except his brother. Only Mimir knew where his lair was.

264. One day, Mimir decided to go to the forest to burn charcoal. ... He built a big fire ... and ... a beautiful boy came running towards him. Mimir asked the boy who he was, but the child couldn't speak. But Mimir took the child and set him on his knee and dressed him, because he was naked. Then a deer came running out of the forest to stand by Mimir's knees, and she licked the child's face and head. Mimir concluded from this that the deer must have raised the child, so he decided not to kill it. He took the child ... home to be brought up as his son; he called him Sigurd. The boy grew up there until he was twelve years old. By then he was so tall and strong that there was no-one to equal him. He was very difficult to get on with, and would torment the apprentices and beat them, so that hardly anyone could bear to stay with him.

[Mime decides that it's time Sigurd learns something useful.]

165. Then Mime --- led him to the smithy. He sat down in front of the hearth, took an iron bar and placed it in front of the fire. He gave Sigurd the heaviest hammer. When the iron was hot, Mime took it out of the fire and placed it on the anvil, and told Sigurd to hammer it - Sigurd's first blow was so strong that it split the base of the anvil in half; the anvil sank some way through the floor, the pieces of iron flew aside, and the tools were broken.

Mime cried, "Never before have I seen anyone strike so heavily and so incompetently! Whatever else becomes of you, you're obviously not cut out to be a craftsman!"

Then Sigurd ran back to the house, sat down next to his foster-mother and told no-one whether he was happy or miserable.

[Mime decides to get rid of Sigurd, as he is so troublesome.]

166 ... So Mime went to the dragon in the forest, and told him that he was going to bring him a boy whom he could kill.

[Mime sends Sigurd into the forest to burn charcoal. He gives him enough food and wine for nine days.]

... he ate all the food and wine which Mime had intended to last for nine days. Then he said to himself, "I can hardly imagine anyone with whom I wouldn't like to fight right now, if he crossed my path! I don't imagine it would be beyond my ability to kill someone!"

As soon as he'd said this, a big dragon came towards him, and he said, "Perhaps I will be able to put it to the test at once, just as I wished." He ran to the fire, grabbed the biggest of the branches and ran towards the dragon; he hit it over the head so that it was unable to spew out poison, and its head sank to the ground. He kept hitting it until it was dead.

He then... cut off the dragon's head ... he didn't know what he should do about food, and he thought the best thing to do would be to cook the dragon's flesh for his evening meal. So he took his kettle, filled it with water and hung it over the fire. Then he took his axe and hacked great chunks off the dragon, until his kettle was full. When he thought the meat should be ready, he put his hand into the kettle; the water was boiling. He

who is a skilled smith; the fact that Siegfried is an orphan, whose mother died giving birth to him; Siegfried's unwillingness (or inability) to apply himself to the smith's craft, plus the fact that he breaks the anvil. In no other source is Siegfried/Sigurd an orphan, and in none is his foster-father called Mime - he is always Regin. (That is, in the Norse literature ; in NL he doesn't have a foster-father, and his parents are living - Sigmund, in fact, survives him.)

Curiously enough, in TS it is the dragon who is called Regin, and he is the brother of Mime; it would appear that their relationship is one of fraternal affection!

In Wagner , Mime is the brother of Alberich, and not of the dragon, Fafner.¹⁰

burnt his finger, and put it into his mouth to cool it. As the broth ran over his tongue and into his throat, he heard two birds sitting on a branch and talking, and he understood what one of them was saying; "It would be better for this man, if he knew what we know. Then he'd go home and kill Mime his foster-father, who was plotting his death, if things had gone according to plan. That dragon was Mime's brother, and if Sigurd doesn't kill Mime, then Mime will avenge his brother and kill Sigurd." Then Sigurd took the dragon's blood and rubbed it on his skin and on his hands, and everywhere it touched became like horn. Then he undressed and rubbed the blood everywhere he could reach - but he couldn't reach between the shoulders. Then he got dressed again and set off for home carrying the dragon's head in his hands.

[The apprentices warn Mime that Sigurd is coming home.]

167. Mime went on his own to greet Sigurd, and bade him welcome. Sigurd replied,

"Neither of us is welcome to the other, and you'll gnaw at this head like a dog."

Mime replied, "You won't do what you've just said, and I'll make amends for having angered you. I'll give you a helmet and shield and breastplate - weapons that I made for Hartnid of Holmgard. They're the best of all weapons. And I'll give you a steed called Grani, from Brynhild's stud, and a sword called Gram, the best of all swords."

Sigurd said, "I'll agree to this if you keep your promise.

Then they went home together.

Mime took some iron armour and gave it to Sigurd. He put on the armour; then Mime gave him the helmet, which he put on his head. Then he gave him the shield. These weapons were so good that their equal could not be found. Then Mime gave Sigurd a sword. He took it, and as he swung it it seemed to him a very good weapon. Then he swung the sword as hard as he could and dealt Mime his death-blow. (my translation)

¹⁰ It is probably from TS that Wagner obtained the name of Fasolt; as far as I know, it is not recorded anywhere else. However, in TS, he isn't the

In VS and PE (*Reginmál*), Sigurd's foster-father, Regin is the brother of Fafnir, who has turned himself into a dragon in order to guard the gold that has been obtained from the gods (Odin, Loki and Hoenir) in payment for a ransom for the third brother, Otter . In VS and in Morris's poem (which, as usual, closely follows VS), this episode occurs in the chapter dealing with Sigurd's childhood, in the form of a flashback: Regin tells Sigurd about his own background, as a preamble to egging Sigurd on to kill the dragon.

We shall discover that, in *Das Rheingold*, Wagner has conflated two legends; the theft of the gold and the building of Valhalla (involving a deceitful bargain with a giant) were originally unconnected.

In VS, Regin tells Sigurd that there is great wealth to be obtained by killing the giant Fafnir, who guards his hoard on Gnitahaid. Regin had two brothers, Otr and Fafnir. Their father was Hreidmar. Otr could change his shape into that of an otter, and would go fishing in this shape. He used to fish near a waterfall, under which lived a dwarf called Andvari. One day the gods Odin, Loki and Hoenir passed by Andvari's falls, where Otr was fishing. Loki killed the otter by throwing a stone. In the evening they arrived at Hreidmar's house, showed him the otter-skin , and Hreidmar identified the dead beast as his own son. As compensation he demanded that the gods fill the otter-skin with gold, and cover it with gold. Loki then captured Andvari, who was swimming in the waterfall, and demanded all the gold that the dwarf possessed. Andvari tried to keep back one ring, but Loki took that as well, whereupon the dwarf said that the ring would mean the death of anyone who possessed it. The gods paid the compensation for Otr with this gold - Hreidmar made them give up the ring to cover a whisker. They seemed, if anything, glad to get rid of it. The ring which Andvari is made to surrender is obviously the basis for Alberich's Ring, but it doesn't have the same significance.

brother of Fafnir, but of Ecke, whom Thidrek has defeated in battle and killed. Nor is he a giant.

Later, Fafnir killed Hreidmar, to get his hands on the treasure - he became a fearsome dragon (VS doesn't explain how), and Regin got none of it. And - after this rather lengthy preamble - he wants Sigurd to kill Fafnir so that he can have the treasure - to which, it may be argued, he has some right (i.e. part of his inheritance/ransom for his brother). He hasn't brought up Sigurd for altruistic reasons, but for his own ends, and he plans to get rid of the boy once Fafnir has been killed - so in this instance Wagner has remained fairly close to his source material.

Morris, as usual, remains close to the source in this episode. Sigurd is brought up as a cherished son in the house of his mother Hjordis and her second husband. Morris, unlike Wagner, makes Sigurd into an intelligent child :

Now hath the child grown greater, and is keen and eager of wit
And full of understanding, and oft hath he joy to sit
And talk of weighty matters, when the wise men meet for speech.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 76)

One can hardly imagine Wagner's Siegfried participating in intelligent debate! ¹¹

Regin offers to foster the boy - his offer is accepted, but he is warned:

But think how bright is this youngling, and thy guile from him withhold;
For this craft of thine hath shown me that thy heart is grim and cold,
Though three men's lives thrice over thy wisdom might not learn ...
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.76)

Regin is aware that he is fated to die by Sigurd's sword -

But again he laughed and answered:"One day it shall come to pass,
That a beardless youth shall slay me: I know the fateful doom;
But nought may I withstand it, as it heaves up dim through the gloom.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.76)

This is not suggested in either VS or PE.

In *Siegfried* it is the Wanderer who prophesies that Mime will forfeit his life to someone who doesn't know the meaning of fear:

¹¹ See Chapter VI for further discussion of Siegfried's intelligence

'Nur wer das Fürchten nie erfuhr,
 schmiedet Nothung neu.'
 Dein weises Haupt wahre von heut';
 verfallen lass' ich es dem,
 der das Fürchten nicht gelernt!
 (*Siegfried*, Act I ll 4852-4858)

Wagner equated his Siegfried with the folk-tale (Märchen) motif of the youth who was too stupid to learn what fear is - in the sources, and in Morris's poem, it is not necessary for Sigurd to learn the meaning of fear.

Morris follows the episode in VS in which Sigurd obtains his horse - called **Grani** in VS, **Greyfell** in *Sigurd*. Regin encourages Sigurd to ask his family to give him a horse - he tries to convince Sigurd that he is not being well-treated, and that his father's wealth is being withheld. Sigurd is helped by Odin to obtain the horse.¹² This is not the only time that Odin steps in to help Sigurd - later he helps him to counteract Regin's treacherous advice about digging a pit to catch Fafnir's blood. Regin has told him to dig only one pit, in the hope that he will drown in the blood, but Odin appears and tells him to dig several, so that he is able to evade the flow of blood.

In the *Ring*, Wotan is not able to intervene to help Siegfried - the point is that Siegfried has to act alone.¹³

In *Sigurd*, Morris places more emphasis on Regin's attempts to make Sigurd believe that his family are treacherous; Sigurd obtains the horse with Odin's help, as in

¹² So the next day went Sigurd to the wood, and met on the way an old man, long-bearded, that he knew not, who asked him wither away.

Sigurd said, "I am minded to choose me a horse; come thou, and counsel me thereon."

"Well then," said he, "go we and drive them to the river which is called Busil-tarn."

They did so, and drave the horses down into the deeps of the river, and all swam back to land but one horse; and that horse chose Sigurd for himself; grey he was of hue, and young of years, great of growth, and fair to look on, nor had any man yet crossed his back.

Then spake the grey-beard, "From Sleipnir's kin is this horse come, and he must be nourished heedfully, for it will be the best of all horses;" and therewith he vanished away.

So Sigurd called the horse Grani, the best of all the horses of the world; nor was the man he met other than Odin himself.

(*Volsunga Saga*; Morris's translation, p.126)

¹³ I believe that Siegfried's independence and freedom are illusory; this is discussed more fully in Chapter VI.

VS. In Wagner, he obtains the horse from Brünnhilde - it is the horse that she rode as a Valkyrie.

Für den Ring nimm nun auch mein Roß!
 Ging sein Lauf mit mir
 Einst kühn durch die Lüfte,
 Mit mir verlor es die mächt'ge Art.
 Über Wolken hin, auf blitzenden Wettern
 Nicht mehr schwingt es sich mutig des
 Wegs.

(*Götterdämmerung*, Act.1, ll. 7109-7120)

In TS, he also obtains the horse from Brunhild - it is his first contact with her. She appears to run some kind of stud-farm, and he visits her for the specific purpose of obtaining the horse Grani -Mime has briefly mentioned this to him in the previous chapter.

I have already summarised the "flashback" in VS, in which Regin tells Sigurd about his own background and about Fafnir's treasure. We can now examine Morris's version of this in greater detail. This section of Morris's poem is subtitled *Regin telleth Sigurd of his kindred, and of the Gold that was accursed from ancient days* .

Regin starts by taunting Sigurd with cowardice :

Then answered Regin the guileful;`" The deed is ready to hand,
 Yet holding my peace is the best, for well thou lovest the land;
 And thou lovest thy life moreover, and the peace of thy youthful days,
 And why should the full-fed feaster his hand to the rye-bread raise?
 Yet they say that Sigmund begat thee and he looked to fashion a man.
 Fear nought; he lieth quiet in his mound by the sea-waves wan.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.83)

In *Siegfried* , Mime cannot taunt Siegfried with cowardice, and when he tries to inspire him with fear, he doesn't succeed in that. As Siegfried comments:

Das Fürchten zu lernen
 will er mich führen;
 ein Ferner soll es mich lehren:
 was am besten er kann,
 mir bringt er's nicht bei;
 als Stümper besteht er in allem!
 (*Siegfried* , Act. 1, ll. 5165-5170)

2.3. Regin tells Sigurd of the Treasure and forges a sword for him.
Siegfried and Mime ; Siegfried forges his own sword.

Regin tells Sigurd of the treasure,(including the Helm of Aweing, which doesn't precisely correspond to the Tarnhelm. In NL, Siegfried has a Tarnkappe, a cloak of invisibility). Regin explains that he is of the dwarf-kindred. (It isn't explicitly stated in VS that he is a dwarf, but this is mentioned in the prose introduction to *Reginismál*). He implies that the Dwarves were at odds with the Gods from the beginning:

So as we dwelt came tidings that the Gods amongst us were,
 And the people came from Asgard: then rose up hope and fear,
 And strange shapes of things went flitting between the night and the eve,
 And our sons waxed wild and wrathful, and our daughters learned to grieve
 Then we fell to the working of metal, and the deeps of the earth would
 know,
 And we dealt with venom and leechcraft, and we fashioned spear and bow,
 And we set the ribs to the oak-keel, and looked on the landless sea;
 And the world began to be such-like as the Gods would have it to be.
 In the womb of the woeful earth they quickened the grief and the gold.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.84)

This last line quoted above is especially important, implying as it does that the Gods by their very existence created the possibility of greed for gold.

Regin became an expert smith, but his soul was forever unsatisfied.¹⁴ He relates how Loki killed Otter - implying that Loki did it out of spite, which is not explicitly stated in VS, but this was perhaps unnecessary, as Loki was in any case familiar as a spirit of trickery and ill-will :

...
 Then passed by Odin and Hoenir, nor cumbered their souls with doubt;
 But Loki lingered a little, and guile in his heart arose,
 And he saw through the shape of the Otter, and beheld a chief of his foes,
 A king of the free and the careless: so he called up his baleful might,
 And gathered his god-head together, and tore a shard outright
 From the rock-wall of the river, and across its green wells cast;
 And roaring over the waters that bolt of evil passed,
 And smote my brother Otter that his heart's life fled away,

¹⁴ This aspect of the characterisation of Regin is discussed at greater length in Chapter IV.

And bore his man's shape with it, and beast-like there he lay,
 Stark dead on the sun-lit blossoms; but the Evil God rejoiced,
 And because of the sound of his singing the wild grew many-voiced.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, pp.86-87)

There is perhaps some resemblance between what Reidmar says to the gods about the ransom in this episode, about keeping bargains, and what Fasolt says to Wotan in *Das*

Rheingold :

1)

It was better in times past over, when we prayed for naught at all,
 When no love taught us beseeching, and we had no troth to recall.
 Ye have changed the world, and it bindeth with the right and the wrong ye
 have made,

Nor may ye be gods henceforward save the rightful ransom be paid.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.90)

2)

Lichtsohn du, leicht gefügter,
 hör' und hüte dich: Verträgen halte
 Treu'!

Was du bist, bist du nur durch Verträge:
 Bedingungen ist, wohl bedacht deine Macht.
 Bist weiser du, als witzig wir sind,
 Bandest uns Freie zum Freiden du:
 All deinem Wissen fluch' ich,
 fliehe weit deinem Frieden,
 weißt du nicht offen, ehrlich und frei,
 Verträgen zu wahren die Treu'!

(*Das Rheingold* II. 480-508)

We may also see a parallel between the threats uttered by Reidmar and his sons, and the threats Alberich makes to Wotan and Loge when they visit Nibelheim :

"O hearken, Gods of the Goths! ye shall die, and we shall be Gods,
 And rule your men beloved with bitter-heavy rods,
 And make them beasts beneath us, save today ye do our will,
 And pay us the ransom of blood, and our hearts with the gold fulfil."

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.90)

Alberich

.... mit goldener Faust
 euch Göttliche fang' ich mir alle!
 Wie ich der Liebe abgesagt,
 alles, was lebt, soll ihr entsagen!
 Mit Golde gekirrt,
 nach Gold nur sollt ihr noch gieren ...
 Habt acht! Habt acht!

Denn dient ihr Männer erst meiner Macht,
 eure schmucken Frau'n, die mein Freien verschmäh'n,
 sie zwingt zur Lust such der Zwerg,
 lacht Liebe ihm nicht.
 (*Das Rheingold* ll.1190-1209)

The resemblance between these passages is actually just a vague similarity of language, the context is different.

Reidmar demands Andvari's gold as a ransom. It is implied that this gold is already cursed, by its very nature, or by the nature of Andvari:

Then Odin spake; "It is well: the Curse shall seek for the curse;
 And the Greedy shall cherish the evil - and the seed of the great they
 shall nurse.

...

And that force is the force of Andvari, and an Elf of the Dark is he.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.91)

This could be compared with the references to Alberich as Schwarz-Alberich, i.e. the Wanderer's reference in *Siegfried*:

In der Erde Tiefe tagen die Nibelungen.
 Nibelheim ist ihr Land;
 Schwarz-Alben sind sie;
 Schwarz-Alberich hütet' als Herrscher sie einst.
 (*Siegfried*, Act. 1 ll.4655-4660)

Later, the Wanderer will call himself Licht-Alberich, thereby admitting his affinity with Alberich. ¹⁵

Loki demands the Ring:

So there in the dim grey desert before the .God of Guile,;
 Great heaps of the hid-world's treasure the weary Elf must pile,
 And Loki looked on laughing; but, when it was all done,
 And the Elf was hurrying homeward, his finger gleamed in the sun:
 Then Loki cried, "Thou art guileful; thou hast not learned the tale
 Of the wisdom that Gods hath gotten and their might of all avail.
 Hither to me! that I learn thee of a many things to come:
 Or despite of all wilt thou journey to the dead man's deedless home.
 Come hither again to thy master, and give the ring to me;
 For meseems it is Loki's portion, and the Bale of men shall it be."
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.93)

¹⁵ Elf of the Dark and Schwarz-Alben are translations of the Old Norse *svart-alfar*

Andvari curses the Ring - but the implication is that the gold is in some way already cursed:

.....There farest thou Loki, and might I load thee worse,
 Than with what thine ill heart beareth, then shouldst thou bear my curse;
 But for men a curse thou bearest; entangled in my gold,
 Amid my woe abideth another woe untold.
 Two brethren and a father, eight kings my grief shall slay;
 And the hearts of queens shall be broken, and their eyes shall loathe the
 day.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.93)

As in VS, the gods seem quite relieved to be rid of the gold:

Then Loki drew off the gold ring and cast it down on the heap,
 And forth as the gold met gold did the light of its glory leap;
 But he spake; "It rejoiceth my heart that no whit of all shall ye lack,
 Lest the curse of the Elf-king cleave not, and ye 'scape the utter wrack!" 16

16 Compare the parallel episode in *Reginismál* :

Loki sá allt gull, þat er Andvari átti. Enn er hann hafði fram réitt gullit, þá hafði hann eptir einn hring, oc tók Loki þann af hánom, Dvergrinn gekk í í steininn ok maelti;

þat scal gull,	er Gustr átti,
bræðrom tveim	at bana verða,
ok þálingom	átta at rogi,
mun míns fiáŕ	mangi nióta.

Aesir reiddo Hreiðmari féi þ ok tráðo upp otrbelginn oc reisto á foetr. þá scyldo aesimir hlaða upp gullino oc hylia. Enn er þat var gort, gekk Hreiðmarr fram oc sá eitt granahár, oc bað hylia. þá dró Odinn fram hringinn Andvaranaut oc hillði hárit.

Gull er þér ne réitt (qvað Loki), oc þú gjöld hefir
 mikil míns höfuðs;
 syni þínom verðra seala scöpuð :
 þat verðr yccarr beggja bani.

Loki saw all the gold that Andvari had. When he had given up all the gold, he had a ring left, and Loki took that too. The dwarf went into the rock and said;

The gold that Gustr possessed
 Shall be the death of two brothers,
 and cause the destruction of princes,
 if I am to be deprived of my wealth.

The gods gave Hreiðmarr the gold and brought up the otter-skin and set it on its feet. They had to fill it with gold and cover it. When this was done, Hreiðmarr noticed a whisker, and told them to cover that. Then Odin took off the ring Andvaranaut and covered the whisker.

Regin has now made it clear what his purpose was in becoming Sigurd's foster-father; he didn't rear him for altruistic reasons, but in order to have someone who would obtain Fafnir's treasure for him.

The flashback has actually taken the reader rather a long way from Sigurd's childhood and upbringing - we shall return now to discussion of this, before turning to comparison of the episode of the theft of the gold with the parallel episode in Das Rheingold.

In VS, Sigurd asks Regin to make a sword for him; Regin makes two swords, both of which Sigurd breaks. He then asks his mother for the pieces of his father's sword; these are reforged by Regin, and with this sword Sigurd breaks the anvil. 17

You now have the gold, said Loki,
and you have received a large ransom for my head;
your sons will fight you for it,
and it will mean your death.

Morris doesn't mention using the ring to cover the whisker; as we shall see, Wagner uses this motif in a different form, for a different purpose.

17 So Regin makes a sword, and gives it into Sigurd's hands. He took the sword, and said -

"Behold thy smithying, Regin!" and therewith smote it into the anvil, and the sword brake; so he cast down the brand, and bade him forge a better.

Then Regin forged another sword, and brought it to Sigurd, who looked thereon.

Then said Regin, "Belike thou art well content therewith, hard master though thou be in smithying."

So Sigurd proved the sword, and brake it even as the first; then he said to Regin-

"Ah, art thou, mayhappen, a traitor and a liar like to those former kin of thine?"

Therewith he went to his mother, and she welcomed him in seemly wise, and they talked and drank together.

Then spake Sigurd, "Have I heard aright, that King Sigmund gave thee the good sword Gram in two pieces?"

"True enough", she said.

So Sigurd said, "Deliver them into my hands, for I would have them."

She said he looked like to win great fame, and gave him the sword. Therewith went Sigurd to Regin, and bade him mkae a good sword thereof as he best might; Regin grew wroth thereat, but went into the smithy with the pieces of the sword, thinking well meanwhile that Sigurd pushed his head far enow into the matter of smithying. So he made a sword, and as he bore it forth from the forge, it seemed to the smiths as though fire burned

Here we have the kernel of the forging-scene in Wagner's *Siegfried*, with the vital difference that, in Wagner, Siegfried makes the sword himself. We find here the failed attempts by the smith to make swords for Sigurd, and the fact that eventually the only sword which is suitable is his father's sword, which was broken in his last battle, and has been kept by his mother - who is still living, and gives Sigurd the pieces of the sword herself. The scene of the breaking of the anvil occurs in VS and *Reginsmal*, and also in *Thidreks Saga*, where, however, it demonstrates Sigurd's clumsiness and incompetence, not the excellence of the sword. The sword is called Gram - in the *Ring* it is called Nothung, in NL Balmung. In *Sigurd*, Regin urges Sigurd to kill Fafnir:

wilt thou help a man that is old,
 To avenge him for his father? Wilt thou win the treasure of Gold
 And be more than the Kings of the earth? Wilt thou rid the earth of a
 wrong
 And heal the woe and the sorrow my heart hath endured o'erlong?
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.100)

He appeals, in other words, to Sigurd's goodwill, and offers to make him a sword to enable him to accomplish the deed. Regin, like Wagner's Mime, plans to get the treasure and achieve power with it; but his plans for world domination seem more generous and less limited in scope than those of Mime:

And some day I shall have it all, his gold and his craft and his heart
 And the gathered and garnered wisdom he guards in the mountains
 apart
 And then when my hand is upon it, my hand shall be as the spring
 To thaw his winter away and the fruitful tide to bring.
 It shall grow, it shall grow into summer, and I shall be he that
 wrought,
 And my deeds shall be remembered, and my name that once was
 nought:

along the edges thereof. Now he bade Sigurd take the sword, and said he knew not how to make a sword if this one failed. Then Sigurd smote it into the anvil, and cleft it down to the stock thereof, and neither burst the sword nor brake it. Then he praised the sword much, and thereafter went to the river with a lock of wool, and threw it up against the stream, and it fell asunder when it met the sword. Then was Sigurd glad, and went home.

(*Volsunga Saga* ; Morris's translation, pp. 133-134)

Yea, I shall be Frey, and Thor, and Freyja, and Bragi in one;
 Yea, the God of all that is - and no deed in the wide world done,
 But the deed that my heart would fashion; and the songs of the freed
 from the yoke

Shall bear to my house in the heavens the love and the longing of
 folk.

And there shall be no more dying, and the sea shall be as the land,
 And the world for ever and ever shall be young beneath my hand.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, pp.99-100)

It seems here that Regin desires, not merely to get his hands on the treasure, but to accomplish worthwhile things with it. Compare this with Mime, who is motivated merely by greed and a desire to make others work for him, instead of working himself - at the end of Act I of *Siegfried* he fantasises about what he will do when he has the Ring:

Alberich selbst, der einst mich band,
 zur Zwergenfrone zwing' ich ihn nun;
 als Niblungenfürst fahr' ich danieder;
 gehorchen soll mir alles Heer!
 Der verachtete Zwerg, wie wird er geehrt!
 Zu dem Horte hin drängt sich Gott und Held:
 Vor meinem Nicken neigt sich die Welt,
 vor meinem Zorne zittert sie hin!
 Dann wahrlich müht sich Mime nicht mehr:
 ihm schaffen andre den ewigen Schatz.
 Mime, der kühne, Mime ist König,
 Fürst der Alben, Walter des Alls! ¹⁸
 (*Siegfried*, Act I, II 5223-5265)

In *Sigurd*, as in VS, Sigurd breaks both the swords that Regin makes for him.. Sigurd obtains the pieces of his father's sword from his mother. According to Morris, Regin made this sword himself - this is not in VS or PE, but in TS Mime does give Sigurd a sword - it isn't explicitly stated that he made the sword, but he has made other weapons and armour that he gives to Sigurd:

No words on his lips were gathered the Volsung child to greet,
 Till he took the sword from Sigurd and the shards of the days of old;
 Then he spake: "Will nothing serve thee save this blue steel and cold,

¹⁸ Musically, this scene is constructed in such a way that Mime's plots and fantasising are conveyed as a vague twittering in the background, while Siegfried forges his sword; the effect is that Mime's plans seem irrelevant, as indeed they turn out to be.

The bane of thy father's father, the fate of all his kin,
 The baleful bane I fashioned, the Wrath that the Gods would win?"
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.104)

Regin repeats his presentiment that he is doomed to die at Sigurd's hands - not that he says it in so many words, but the implication of his repeated references to his appointed doom is clear:

.....Think thou how strange it is
 That the sword in the hand of a stripling shall one day end all this!

Great waxed the gloom of Regin, and he said: "Thou sayest sooth,
 For none may turn him backward: the sword of a very youth
 Shall one day end my cunning, as the Gods my joyance slew,
 When nought thereof they were dreaming, and another thing would
 do.

But this sword shall slay the serpent; and do another deed,
 And many a one thereafter, till it fail thee in thy need.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.105)

Regin refashions the sword, and Sigurd splits the anvil with it :

White leapt the blade o'er his head, and he stood in the ring of fire
 As hither and thither it played, till it fell on the anvil's strength,
 And he cried aloud in his glory, and held out the sword full length,
 As one who would show it the world; for the edges were dulled no whit,
 And the anvil was cleft to the pavement with the dreadful dint of it.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.107)

Wagner's *Siegfried* follows the outline of these events, but with a shift in emphasis. We have observed that Wagner makes his Siegfried an orphan. He introduces him in a fit of what we may choose to interpret as youthful high spirits, or as an attempt to terrorise the harmless old dwarf who has brought him up - namely, by bringing a bear into the cave, which, not unnaturally, frightens Mime. There is a tendency in some Wagner criticism to make excuses for Mime, but this is not justified by the way he is portrayed by Wagner, or by the character of Regin in the Norse literature, who has plotted all along to use Sigurd to kill Fafnir, and then to kill Sigurd. It is true, though, that Wagner's Siegfried is not a particularly sympathetic character, although he is by no means as dislikeable as the Siegfried of NL. The episode of the bear is probably based on an incident in NL, which occurs shortly before Siegfried is

killed.¹⁹ Such an episode is probably nothing out of the ordinary in a society which regarded bear-baiting and cock-fighting as enjoyable ways of passing an afternoon; but one wonders whether Wagner the animal-lover really expected his audience to warm to a character who erupts onto the stage bringing a live bear with him.

Before Siegfried's entry, Mime has been alone, brooding upon the fact that he lacks the ability to forge the sword Nothung, with which Siegfried can be prevailed upon to kill Fafner, so that Mime can gain the hoard for himself:

Könnst' ich's dem Kühnen schmieden,
meiner Schmach erlangt' ich da Lohn!
Fafner, der wilde Wurm,
Lagert im finstren Wald;
Mit des furchtbaren Leibes Wucht
der Nibelungen Hort hütet er dort.
Siegfrieds kindischer Kraft
erläge wohl Fafners Leib;
(*Siegfried*, Act. 1 ll 4160-4168)

So Mime's problem is that he knows that only Nothung can be used to kill Fafner, but he is unable to forge the sword himself. The solution is pointed out to him by the Wanderer: *Nur wer das Fürchten nie erfuhr / schmiedet Nothung neu!* Mime now has to work out a way of getting Siegfried to reforge the sword and kill Fafner -

19

Do reit der ritter edele
in sâ hen zuo in komende
si liefen im engegene
dô fuorte er bi dem satele

vil weidenliche dan
die Guntheres man.
und empfiengen im daz marc.
einen bern grôz unde starc.

Als er gestuont von rosse,
von fuoze und ouch von munde.
vil grôze das gehûnde
daz tier ze walde wolde;

dô lôste er im diu bant
dô erlûte dâ zehant
swaz des den bern sach.
die liute heten ungemach.

Der ber von dem schalle
hei waz er kuchenknehte
vil kezzel wart gerüeret,
hei waz man guoter spise

durch die kûchen geriet.
von dem fiuwer schiet!
zerfüeret manec brant.
in der aschen ligen vant!

Dô sprungen von dem sedele
der ber begunde zürnen:
allez daz gehûnde,

die herren und ir man.
der kûnec hiez dâ lâ n
daz an den seilen lac.

(NL, 16. Aventure; *Wie Sîfrit erslagen wart.*)

and then getting Siegfried out of the way, before he can use the sword to kill Mime himself, as the Wanderer has warned him will happen:

Dein weises Haupt wahre von heut';
Verfallen lass' ich es dem
der das Fürchten nie gelernt!
(*Siegfried*, Act 1, ll. 4855-4858)

While Siegfried is forging the sword - he alone can do this - Mime decides to brew a poisonous draught, which he can make Siegfried drink after Fafner has been killed - that way, he can get rid of Siegfried and get the Hoard for himself. Mime then, like Regin in the Norse literature, has brought Siegfried up for his own purpose, not for altruistic reasons. The only source in which the boy's foster-father starts by adopting him for altruistic reasons is TS - he finds the orphan in the forest, and decides to adopt him because he and his wife are childless. Sigurd, however, is a great disappointment to him, and he decides to have him killed.

Siegfried finally forces Mime to tell him what he knows about his parents - that his mother died giving birth to him, and left the pieces of his father's sword for the boy. As Mime puts it, that's not much of a reward for looking after you from infancy.

Das gab mir deine Mutter:
für Mühe, Kost und Pflege
ließ sie's als schwachen Lohn.
Sieh hier, ein zerbrochnes Schwert.
Dein Vater, sagte sie, führt' es,
als im letzten Kampf er erlag.
(*Siegfried*, Act 1 ll. 4518-4522)

In VS and in Morris's poem, Sigmund is able to speak to his wife - Sigurd's mother - before he dies, and to entrust the broken pieces of sword to her, to keep for their son. In the *Ring*, it is Brünnhilde who rescues Sieglinde, and saves the pieces of the sword - it is also Brünnhilde who foretells that Sieglinde's son will be a great hero:

Denn eines wiss'
und wahr' es immer:
den hehrsten Helden der Welt
hegst du, o Weib,
im schirmenden Schoß!
Verwahr' ihm die starken
Schwertesstücken;

seines Vaters Walstatt
 entführt' ich sie glücklich:
 (*Die Walküre*, Act III ll. 3644-3652)

In the Norse literature, Brynhild has nothing to do with Sigmund's last battle, though his sword is shattered by Odin's spear.

In NL, Siegfried obtains his sword and the treasure in an entirely different manner. The episode is quoted here for purposes of comparison; the information is supplied by Hagen to the Burgundian court. ²⁰ This passage also introduces the

20

- | | |
|--|--|
| 87. Er bringet niuwemaere
die küenen Nibelunge
Schilbunc und Nibelungen,
er frumte starkiu wunder | her in ditze lant
sluoc des heldes hant,
die rîchen künenges kint,
mit sîner grôzen krefte sît. |
| 88. Dô der helt al eine
er vant vor einem berge,
bî Nibelunges horde
die waren im ê vremde, | â ne alle helfe reit,
daz ist mir wol geseit,
vil manegen küenen man;
unz er ir künde d â gewan. |
| 89. Hort der Nibelungen
ûz einem holen berge.
wie in wolden teilen
daz sach der degen Sîvrit; | der was gar getragen
nu hoeret wunder sagen,
der Nibelunge man.
der helt es wundern began. |
| 90. Er kom zuo zin sô nahen
und ouch in die degene.
"hie kumt der starke Sîvrit,
vil selteniu maere | daz er die helde sach
ir einer drunder sprach;
der helt von Niderlant!
er an den Nibelungen vant. |
| 91. Den recken wol empfiengen
mit gemeinem râ te
den schaz in bâ ten teilen,
und gerten des mit vlize. | Schilbunc und Nibelunc
die edelen fürsten junc
den wætlîchen man,
der herre loben inz began |
| 92. Er sach sô vil gesteines
hundert kanzwægene
noch mê des rôten goldes
daz solde in allez teilen | (sô wir hœren sagen)
ez môhten niht getragen:
von Nibelunge lant.
des küenen Sîvrides hant. |
| 93. Dô gaben si im ze miete
si wâ ren mit dem dienste
den in da leisten solde
ern kundez niht verenden; | daz Nibelunges swert.
vil übele gewert,
Sîvrit der helt guot.
si wâ ren zornec gemuot. |
| 94. Si heten dâ ir friunde
daz starke risen waren. | zwelf küene man,
was kundez si vervân? |

motif of Siegfried's invulnerability - found also in TS, and used by Wagner - though in the *Ring* it is Brünnhilde who makes him invulnerable, he doesn't bathe in dragon's blood. This motif is not present in the Norse literature. The treasure in NL is not connected with a ransom or a curse, nor has it been fraudulently obtained by the gods, who do not figure in NL.

-
- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>die sluoc sit mit zorne
und recken siben hundert</p> | <p>diu Sîvrides hant,
twanc er von Nibelunge lant.</p> |
| <p>95. Mit dem guoten swerte,
durch die starken vorhte
die si zem swerte heten
daz lant zuo den bûrgen</p> | <p>daz hiez Balmunc
vil manec recke junc,
und an den kûenen man,
si im tæ ten undertan.</p> |
| <p>96. Dar zuo die richen kûenege
er kom von Albriche
der wande sine herren
unz er die grôzen sterke</p> | <p>die slouc er beide tôt,
sît in grôze nôt.
rechen dâ zehant,
sît an Sivride vant.</p> |
| <p>97. Done kunde im niht gestriten
alsam sie lewen wilde
da er die tarnkappen
dô was des hordes herre</p> | <p>daz starke getwerc.
si liefen an den berc,
sît Alberich an gewan,
Sîvrit der vreisliche man.</p> |
| <p>98. Die da torsten vehten,
den schaz den hiez er balde
da in dâ vor dâ n âmen
Alberich der vil starke</p> | <p>die lâ gen alle erslagen.
fûeren unde tragen
die Nibelunges man.
dâ die kameren gewan.</p> |
| <p>99. Er muose im sweren eide,
aller hande dinge
sô sprach von Tronege Hagene.
alsô grôzer krefte</p> | <p>er diente im sâ sîn kneht.
was er im gereht."
"daz hâ t er getâ n.
nie mêr recke gewan.</p> |
| <p>100. Noch weiz ich an im mêre
einen lintrachen
er badete sich im dem bloute;
des snîdet in kein w âfen.</p> | <p>daz mir ist bekant:
den sluoc des heldes hant.
sin hût wart hûmin.
daz ist dicke worden schîn.</p> |

(NL, 3. *Aventiure; Wie Sifrit ze Wormes kam.*)

2.4. The theft of the gold in *Sigurd* ; the parallel episode in *Das Rheingold*

This seems to be a suitable juncture at which to discuss in greater detail the nature of the treasure and Siegfried's connection with it. The episode of the theft of the gold in *Sigurd* shows some parallels with *Das Rheingold* :

- i) The gods obtain the gold from a dwarf, not precisely fraudulently, but certainly by force and without any right to it.
- ii) They have to hand it over to a third party in order to pay a ransom.
- iii) Fafnir kills his father (not his brother) to obtain the gold, and becomes a dragon in order to guard it.
- iv) Part of the treasure is a ring, which the dwarf curses.

But: the dwarf is not a Nibelung (Niflung). He is called Andvari, not Alberich. He does not appear to have stolen the gold, but to possess it legitimately.

The building of Valhalla and the offer of Freia as payment are taken from two different legends.²¹ In the *Prose Edda*, the theft of the gold and the curse on the ring have nothing to do with the building of a fortress for the gods; it was Wagner's

²¹ The gods contract with a giant that he will build Asgard for them - in Norse mythology, Asgard is the home of the gods and Valhall the destination of those slain in battle. This is found in *Snorra Edda*, not in VS, and is used by Snorri to explain how Odin obtained his horse Sleipnir - but much of it is relevant to *Das Rheingold*.

A smith - later identified as a mountain-giant - offers to build the gods a fortress - he asks as a reward Freia, the sun and the moon. Loki maliciously advises the gods to agree to this. They stipulate that he is to do the work alone, but agree that he may use his horse to carry materials. The gods have no intention of fulfilling their side of the bargain - when it becomes apparent that the work is going to be completed within the allotted time, they compel Loki to find a way of preventing the giant from completing the work. Loki turns himself into a mare, and distracts the giant's horse; Odin's horse, Sleipnir, is the product of this union. The giant is thus prevented from completing the work and is killed by Thor.

The goddess who possesses the golden apples of youth is not Freia but Idun. She is the wife of Bragi, said to be the wisest of the gods. She is abducted by a giant, as a ransom demand. This is found in *Skáldskaparmál*, part of the *Prose Edda*. Loki is captured by the giant Thiazi, who says he will only release him on condition that he brings Idun and her apples to him. Loki persuades Idun to go out into the forest to look at some apples which she will think are of great value, and to bring her casket of apples with her. She is then recaptured by Thiazi - the gods begin to grow old and grey, and make Loki go and recapture her.

innovation to connect these two legends, for his own dramatic purpose. In Snorri's version, the giant is tricked into not fulfilling his contract, and is immediately killed by Thor; it seems that his purpose was in any case a hostile one. In *Das Rheingold*, the initial problem arises because the giants have fulfilled their part of the bargain, and Wotan has no intention of keeping his. Fasolt is concerned with the honourable keeping of bargains, but Fafner reminds him that there is also considerable advantage to the giants - and disadvantage to the gods - in getting Freia away from them, not for herself, but for the golden apples :

Goldne Äpfel wachsen in ihrem Garten;
 sie allein weiß die Äpfel zu pflegen!
 Der Frucht Genuß frommt ihren Sippen
 zu ewig nie alternder Jugend;
 siech und bleich doch sinkt ihre Blüte,
 alt und schwach schwinden sie hin,
 müssen Freia sie missen.
 Ihrer Mitte d'rum sei sie entführt!
 (*Das Rheingold*, ll.534-547)

Wotan's offer to barter away Freia - even though he intends to cheat the giants - symbolises his readiness at this stage to throw away love for the sake of gaining power. But he is still too lacking in self-awareness to admit this to himself, unlike his rival, Alberich. (It will be recalled that, in *Siegfried*, the Wanderer refers to himself as Licht-Alberich.) Alberich is perfectly prepared to forswear love to obtain the gold.

The condition under which the gold can be obtained - the forswearing of love - is entirely original to Wagner. It is also original to Wagner that the gold comes from the Rhine in the first place. In NL it ends up there - Hagen has it sunk in the Rhine so that Kriemhild cannot use it to gain adherents to her cause - but it is not suggested that the gold originally came from the Rhine. In PE, Sigurd is killed in a location vaguely connected with the Rhine, and there is a reference in *Atlakviða* to the gold in the

Rhine - but only in Wagner does the gold originally come from the Rhine.²² Andvari's gold does come from a river, but the river isn't identified. In the Norse literature, and

²² Recent research by Stewart Spencer and Elizabeth Magee has demonstrated that the connection between Siegfried's death and the Fall of the Gods, which had previously been thought to have originated with Wagner, had in fact been made by Lachmann and Etmüller.

In *Richard Wagner und sein Mittelalter*, Stewart Spencer has drawn attention to Lachmann's *Kritik der Sage von den Nibelungen*, which contains "a summary so strikingly similar in outline to the scenario of the *Ring* that it is inconceivable that Wagner was not familiar with it, either in Lachmann's original or Etmüller's transcription."

Lachmann's summary is as follows:

Sigufrið, Sigmundes Sohn, ein Wälsung mit leuchtenden Augen und von unglaublicher Kraft, wird erzogen von einem weisen und kunstreichen Alb, der Regin, d.i. Rathgeber, heißt, und zwar Menschengestalt, aber die eines Zwerges hat. Er verschafft ihm ein Roß und schmiedet ihm ein Schwert, mit dem Sigufrið einen eisernen Amboß spalten kann; so reizt er ihn der Nibelungo Hort und unermeßliches Geld zu erwerben. Zuerst hatten drei Götter das Gold geraubt und aus der Tiefe des Wassers heraufgeführt. Auch ihnen hätte gewiß seine geheimnisvolle verderbliche Kraft den Tod gebracht, wenn sie es nicht als Wer-geld für den erschlagenen Otter gegeben hätten; nicht nur das Gold, womit der Otterbalg ausgefüllt wird, sondern auch den Ring, welchen sie anfangs behalten wollten. So waren die Götter dem Verderben entgangen; aber das Mittelgeschlecht zwischen Göttern und Menschen, das nun im Besitze des verderblichen Schatzes war, rieb sich untereinander auf. Ottares Brüder töteten den Vater; Regin ward von dem Anderen verdrängt, der in Gestalt eines Wurmes sein Gold bewachtete. Um es ihm zu entreißen, hat Regino den jungen Sigufrið aufgereizt, den Wurm zu tödten. Sigufrið aber erschlägt beide. Durch das Drachenblut, wovon er trinkt, wird noch seine Kraft gemehrt und sein Leib geschützt von Wunden. Durch das Gold und zumal durch den Ring ist er unermeßlich reich. Die Tarnchappa giebt ihm die Fähigkeit, seine Gestalt in die eines Anderen zu verwandeln. Denn bei all dieser Herrlichkeit ist er durch den Besitz des Goldes in die Knechtschaft der Nibelungo gekommen und dem Verderben geweiht. Umsonst verlobt er sich mit der kriegerischen Königstochter Brunhild; sein Herr, Gundahari, der Nibelungo König, will sie selbst haben. In der Tarnchappa unter Gundahari's Gestalt reitet Sigufrið durch die Flamme, die um ihre Wohnung lodert; er giebt ihr den Ring aus dem Schatze und bringt sie dadurch in die Gewalt Gundaharis; sie erkennt Sigufriðen nicht; er selbst bekommt ein anderes Weib, Grimhild (Gudrun), die Schwester Gundahares. Brunhild rühmt sich des tapfersten und würdigsten Gemahls, dem Sigufrið weichen müsse; da entdeckt ihr Grimhild gereizt den Betrug; den [sic] Ring, den sie am Finger trage, sei aus dem Nibelungenhort; der sie genommen, sei Sigufrið und nicht Gundahari. Brunhild, die sich nun selbst erinnert, daß sie an dem vermeinten Gundahari die leuchtenden Wälsungenaugen erkannt habe, wüthig auf alle, läßt Sigufrið, der für offenen Angriff unbesiegbar ist, meuchlerisch ermordern (Hagano scheint des Mörders rechter name zu sein) und tödtet sich selbst.

in Morris's poem, the gold that Sigurd gains is the gold that once belonged to the dwarf Andvari. But only in Wagner do the gods obtain it from the dwarf (Alberich), in order to hand it over to the giants, with whom they have made a fraudulent bargain.

In NL the gold has no connection with the gods. The episode in which Siegfried wins the gold has been quoted. It is indeed guarded by a dwarf called Alberich, who becomes Siegfried's vassal after Siegfried has killed the original owners of the hoard; Alberich thereafter guards the hoard for Siegfried. This episode explains an otherwise puzzling remark by Hagen in *Götterdämmerung*; when he tells Gunther and Gutrune about Siegfried and the Nibelungen hoard, he says *Knecht' sind die Nibelungen ihm*. In fact the Nibelungs in the *Ring* do not become Siegfried's vassals when he obtains the treasure - this is something left over from *Siegfrieds Tod*.

Der Schatz, nachdem Alle, die an ihm Theil hatten, vernichtet sind, fällt an seine ursprünglichen Herren zurück, und sie versenken ihn in den Rhein.

(Richard Wagner und sein Mittelalter)

In *Richard Wagner and the Nibelungs*, Elizabeth Magee observes that

"Mone in his Einleitung derives Siegfried's sun-god role from his Odin ancestry This is a rather strained interpretation, which uses NL as its source. The sun festival which finds mention in NL is that of midsummer. Just before Siegfried is killed, he and his queen are invited to a feast. The feast is at midsummer; therefore, Mone concludes, midsummer is the ancient festival of Siegfried's death. For the three remaining sun festivals which NL failed to mention Mone has an answer too; just as Christianity has taken the original midsummer Siegfried festival and renamed it after John the Baptist, so too do other events in the Christian calendar mark Siegfried festivals. Behind the figure of the Archangel Michael at Michaelmas, the reborn son at Christmas and the festival of the dragon-slayer St. George in April lurks the old nature sun-god."

(p.143)

She goes on to say that

"The real connection between Siegfried's death and the twilight of the gods is not logical but poetic, and had already been established by the Romantic scholars." (p.193)

In Mone's *Untersuchungen zur deutschen Heldensage*, Sigurd is equated with a sun-god who fights with the winter-dragon and releases the imprisoned Easter;

Sigfrit (oder wer er sonst war) kämpft mit dem Winter-Drachen um die 6 Monate lang eingesperrte Oster, der Winter wird besiegt, und Sigfrit vermählt sich mit der Oster.

2.5 The Ring in the different redactions.

We now turn to the question of the Ring itself in all these legends. In Wagner, the Ring which Wotan takes from Alberich, and which Alberich curses, eventually becomes the ring which enables Brünnhilde to recognise Siegfried, and realise how she has been tricked into marrying Gunther - in fact, it is this ring which leads to Siegfried's death.

VS does not at first make it clear that it is this ring that Sigurd gives to Brynhild; it merely says that he gave her "a gold ring". Only when he woos her in the guise of Gunnar does the Saga make it clear which ring it is :

Then he took from her the ring Andvaranaut which he had given her, and gave her another ring from Fafnir's inheritance. ²³

It only becomes entirely clear to her in the quarrel with Gudrun what has happened. Sigurd has obviously given the ring to Gudrun at some point, just as Siegfried gives Brunhild's ring to Kriemhild in NL:

and little it beseems thee of all folk to mock him who was thy first beloved; and Fafnir he slew, yea, and he rode thy flaming fire, whereas thou didst deem that it was Gunnar the King, and by thy side he lay, and took from thy hand the ring Andvari's loom - here mayst thou well behold it!

(Völsunga Saga, Morris's translation, p.177) ²⁴

In NL, the ring which Sigurd takes from Brunhild and gives to Kriemhild is her own, not one that he had previously given her, as the poet of NL does not make use of the prior betrothal motif of Siegfried and Brunhild. ²⁵

²³ Han tók þa af henni hringinn Andvaranaut er hann gaf henni, en fekk henni nú annan hring af Fáfnis arfi.

²⁴ok eigi samir þér vel at lasta hann, því at hann er þinn frumverr, ok drap hann Eafni ok reið vaflogann, er þu hugðir Gunnar konung, ok hann lá hjá þér ok tók af hendi þér hringinn Andvaranaut, ok máttu nú hann kenna.

25

679. Sifrit der stuont dannen
sam er von im ziehen

legen lie er die meit,
wolde sîniu kleit.

Perhaps we have got slightly ahead of ourselves here; we need to discuss the origins of this ring, and how Siegfried came to possess it.

In *Das Rheingold*, the idea that the gold can be obtained and made into a ring by one who forswears love is Wagner's own, and it did not figure in the early drafts. The idea of the Rhinemaidens is probably taken from an episode in NL, though of course Wagner would also have been familiar with the figure of the Lorelei. In NL, it is Hagen who encounters merewîp - mermaids - and asks them whether anyone will come home safely from their journey to Etzel's court. ²⁶

er zôch ir ab der hende
daz si des nie wart innen,

ein guldîn vingerlîn,
diu edele künegin.

680. Dar zuo nam er ir gürtel,
ine weiz ob er daz tæte
er gap ez sînem wîbe;

daz was ein porte guot.
durch sînen hôhen muot.
daz wart im sider leit.

(NL, Aventure 10)

26

1533. Dô suochte er nâ ch den vergen
er hœrte wazzer giezen
in einem schönen brunnen.
die wolden sich dâ küelen

wider under dan.
(losen er began)
daz tæ ten wisiu wîp.
unde badeten ir lip.

1534. Hagene wart ir innen;
dô si daz versunnen,
daz si im entrunnen,
er nam in ir gewæte;

er sleich in ougen n âch.
dô wart in dannen gâ ch.
des wâ ren si vil hêr.
der helt enchadete in niht
m êr.

1535. Dô sprach daz eine merwîp,
"edel ritter Hagene,
swenne ir uns, degen küene,
wie iu zuo den Hiunen

Hadeburc was si genant;
wir tuon iu hie bekant,
gebet wider unser wâ t,
disiu hovereise ergâ t."

1536. Si swebten sam die vogle
des dühten in ir sinne
swaz si im sagen wolden,
des er dô hin ze in gerte,

vor im üf der fluot.
starc unde guot.
er geloubte ez deste baz.
wol beschieden si im daz.

1537. Si sprach; "ir muget wol rîten
des setze ich iu ze bürgen
daz helde nie gefuoren
n âch alsô grôzen eren.

in Etzelen lant.
mine triuwe hie zehant.
in deheiniu riche baz
nu geloubet wærlichen daz."

1538. Der rede was dô Hagene
dâ gap er in ir kleider
dâ si dâ an geleiten
dô sagten si im rehte

in sînem herzen hêr.
und sûmte sich niht mêr.
ir wunderlich gewant,
die reise in Etzelen lant.

In a similar incident in TS, Hogni encounters the mermaids at the confluence of the Rhine and the Danube; they tell him that he and all his companions will cross the river unharmed, but none of them will return. He then kills the two women. There are no similar incidents in the Norse literature. In both NL and TS, Hagen encounters two women, not three.

Though Wagner may have derived the idea of the Rhinemaidens from NL, ²⁷ his conception of their role is entirely original. It is only in *Das Rheingold* that there is gold in the river, which has the power to bestow infinite wealth on its possessor - if he is prepared to renounce love. The idea that it is the ring which conveys power is central to the *Ring*, but it is not so important in *Sigurd*; the ring Andvarnaut is the ring that Sigurd gives Brynhild, and later takes from her, but it doesn't have the vital connection with the gods, and the forswearing of love, that Alberich's ring has.

In *Das Rheingold*, as soon as Wotan hears about Alberich's ring, he decides that he must have it for himself - he, like Alberich, is greedy for power, and he is relieved to hear that he can obtain it by stealing the gold - he doesn't need to forswear

1539. Dô sprach daz ander merwip,
"ich wil dich wamen, Hagene,
durch der wæte liebe
kumestu hin zen Hiunen,

diu hiez Sigelint:
daz Aldri nes kint.
h ât min muome dir gelogen.
sô bistu sere betrogen.

1540. Jâ soltu kêren widere!
wan ir helde küene
daz ir sterben müezet
swelche dar gerîtent,

daz ist an der zit,
alsô geladet sît,
in Etzelen lant.
die habent den tât an der
hant."

1541 Dô sprach aber Hagene,
wie môhtez sich gefügen
solden dâ belieben
si begunden im diu mære

"ir trieget âne nôt.
daz wir alle tât
durch iemannes haz?"
sagen kuntlicher baz.

1542. Dô sprach aber diu eine;
daz iuwer deheiner
niwan des küneges kappelan,
der kumet gesunder widere

"ez muoz alsô wesen,
kan sô niht genesen,
daz ist uns wol bekant.
in daz Guntheres lant.

(NL, Aventure 25.)

²⁷ Another possible source is the Oceanides (daughters of Oceanus) in the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus: see Wolfgang Schadewaldt, *Wagner und die Griechen*

love to get it. Fasolt and Fafner also lust after the gold, especially the Ring, when Loge tells of its power. Fafner tells Fasolt that it would be just as good as having Freia:

Glaub' mir, mehr als Freia
 frommt das gleißende Gold;
 auch ew'ge Jugend erjagt,
 wer durch Goldes Zauber sie zwingt.
 (*Das Rheingold*, ll.792-795)

As we have seen, the idea that this is the ring which will confer on its possessor incredible power is absent from the Norse literature and from *Sigurd* - and the ring that Siegfried takes from Brunhild in NL is her own.

Alberich curses the ring when Wotan wrests it from him. To some extent his curse is a parallel to Andvari's curse in *Reginsmál*, but it is much more wide-ranging in scope:

Wie durch Fluch er mir geriet,
 verflucht sei dieser Ring!
 Gab sein Gold mir Macht ohne Maß,
 nun zeug' sein Zauber Tod dem, der ihn trägt!
 Kein Froher soll seiner sich freu'n;
 keinem Glücklichen lache sein lichter Glanz!
 Wer ihn besitzt, den sehre die Sorge,
 und wer ihn nicht hat, den nage die Neid!
 Jeder giere nach seinem Gut,
 doch keiner genieße mit Nutzen sein!
 Ohne Wucher hüt' ihn sein Herr,
 doch den Würger zieh' er ihm zu!
 Dem Tode verfallen, sterb' er lechzend dahin,
 des Ringes Herr als des Ringes Knecht -
 bis in meiner Hand den geraubten wieder ich halte!
 So segnet in höchster Not
 der Nibelung seinen Ring!
 Behalt' ihn nun, hüte ihn wohl -
 meinem Fluch fliehst du nicht!
 (*Das Rheingold*, ll. 1482-1519)

In *Reginsmál*, Andvari merely warns that his ring will be the downfall of its immediate possessors - which indeed it is. Alberich's curse is aimed at Wotan, but is also intended to fall upon anyone, other than himself, who gains the Ring. In *Sigurd*, Morris indicates in several passages that the gods, especially Loki, act through greed, whereas in the *Ring*, Loge is the only one who is not affected by greed- he just

cynically comments upon the greed of the others.²⁸ We have noted before that all the gold seems to be cursed and to be destined to bring about grief, before Andvari specifically curses the Ring:

Then the Elf drew off the gold ring and stood with empty hand
E'en where the flood fell over 'twixt the water and the land,
And he gazed on the great Guile-master, and huge and grim he grew,
And his anguish swelled within him, and the word of the Norns he
 knew,
How that gold was the seed of gold to the wise and the shapers of
 things,
The hoarders of hidden treasure, and the unseen glory of rings;
But the seed of woe to the world and the foolish wasters of men,
And grief to the generations that die and spring again.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung* , p.94)

We have observed that, in *Sigurd*, the gods seem almost glad to get rid of the ring, although they had held on to it when they gave the rest of the gold to Reidmar. This is not, of course, the case in *Das Rheingold*. The demand of the giants that the gold be piled up so as to hide Freia is taken from the demand by Reidmar that the otter's skin be filled with gold, and covered with gold on the outside; but in *Das Rheingold*, the effect is one of deep humiliation for Freia. Fasolt is reluctant to let her go, and says he will not give her up while he can still see her lovely eyes:

Freia, die schöne, schau' ich nicht mehr;
so ist sie gelöst? Muß ich sie lassen?
Weh! Noch blitzt ihr Blick zu mir her;
des Auges Stern strahlt mich noch an;
durch eine Spalte muß ich's erspähn!
Seh' ich dies wonnige Auge,
von dem Weibe lass' ich nich ab.
(*Das Rheingold*, II.1620-1627)

We needn't interpret this as a manoeuvre to get the Ring, as it is Fafner who demands it, and later, when the brothers quarrel over the hoard, Fafner points out that Fasolt was more interested in Freia than in the gold:

Mehr an der Maid als am Gold
lag dir verliebtem Geck;

²⁸ This may be another indication that *Sigurd* should be read as an anti-*Ring*.

mit Müh' zum Tausch vermocht ich dich Toren.
 Ohne zu teilen,
 hättest du Freia gefreit:
 (*Das Rheingold* , ll.1720-1725)

In *Sigurd* , Morris makes no use of the demand to cover the otter's skin with gold, and also stuff it with gold - in *Reginsmál* , the gods are made to surrender the ring to cover a whisker. In Morris's poem, the gold is placed before Reidmar ; he examines it, then sees the Ring on Loki's finger:

And lo from Loki's right hand came the flash of the fruitful ring.
 And at last spake Reidmar scowling:" Ye wait for my yea-saying
 That your feet may go free on the earth, and the fear of my toils may
 be done;
 That then ye may say in your laughter; the fools of the time agone!
 The purblind eyes of the dwarf-kind! they have gotten the garnered
 staf
 And have let their Masters depart with the Seed of Gold and of Grief:
 O Loki, friend of Allfather, cast down Andvari's ring,
 Or the world shall yet turn backward and the high heavens lack a
 king.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung* , p.94)

Loki surrenders the ring without argument . Not so Wotan! He is even prepared to go as far as letting the giants take Freia ~~af~~terall - perhaps therefore he assumes that it will give the gods eternal youth just as well as her apples, as Fafner previously said - and he is only persuaded to surrender it by the intervention of Erda.

2.6. The fight with the dragon : acquisition of the hoard .

**Siegfried / Sigurd learns to understand the language of the birds,
Siegfried kills Mime : Sigurd kills Regin.**

We now return to Siegfried's acquisition of the treasure. We have already observed that in NL he acquires it in an entirely different manner from the other sources, and this version of events is used neither by Morris nor by Wagner. What Wagner did take from NL is the name of the dwarf Alberich, and the fact that he is the guardian of the treasure belonging to the Nibelungs.²⁹ The treasure, known as Fafner's hoard, or the Nibelung's hoard, is now guarded by Fafner, who has turned himself into a dragon and lies in front of his cave - deep in the forest, according to Wagner; on Gnitaheid (Glittering Heath) according to Morris (Taken from VS). In Wagner, Fafner kills Fasolt to obtain all the gold, including the Tarnhelm and the Ring, then he turns himself into a dragon with the aid of the Tarnhelm.

Mime had made the Tarnhelm for Alberich, and it had the power of enabling its wearer to change shape and become invisible, and also to cover great distances instantaneously, as we discover in *Götterdämmerung* . In NL, Siegfried has a *Tarnkappe* - cloak of invisibility, which he has won from Alberich as part of the Nibelungs' hoard. It enables him to help Gunther to defeat Brunhild, as he can make himself invisible. In VS, Regin tells Sigurd that Fafnir has turned himself into a dragon, but doesn't explain how - in *Reginismál* , Fafnir has a Helm of Terror, which enables him to frighten every living creature.³⁰

In *Sigurd* , Regin accompanies Sigurd when he sets out to slay the serpent - as Mime accompanies Siegfried. Mime continues to attempt to inspire Siegfried with a sense of fear, and continues to be unsuccessful - as Siegfried sends him away, Mime utters the heartfelt wish that Siegfried and Fafner should kill each other.

²⁹ The whole topic of precisely who the Nibelungs are is rather a vexed question, which is discussed in greater detail below.

³⁰ *Hann átti ægishiálm, er þll qviqvindi hrædduz við* . (He had a helm of aweing, that frightened all living things)

Act II of *Siegfried* opens with Wotan and Alberich encountering each other outside Fafner's cave. Wotan promises that he's only come to watch ³¹, and warns Alberich to be on his guard against Mime. Alberich threatens that, once he regains the Ring, he will use its power, unlike the giant, who was too stupid to know what to do with it. Alberich has thus by no means given up his plan for world-domination - unlike Wotan, who is now prepared to yield to Siegfried and Brünnhilde.

This colloquy between the two arch-rivals is unique to Wagner - there is nothing resembling it in any of the sources, or in Morris's poem. In VS and PE, Andvari fades out of the story as soon as his gold has been obtained. Although he curses it, he makes no attempt to recover it, and nor do the gods show any further interest in it. VS, in fact, shows very little further interest in the gods, except that Odin intervenes one last time to help Sigurd - that is, he counteracts Regin's treacherous advice about the best way to kill the dragon. Wotan is, of course, unable to intervene to help Siegfried.

Morris's Sigurd has little interest in obtaining the gold for himself - he repeatedly assures Regin that he will be able to do what he likes with it. The following passage is particularly illustrative of Sigurd's attitude:

The deed shall be done tomorrow; thou shalt have that measureless
 And devour the garnered wisdom that ^{gold,} blessed thy realm of old,
 That hath lain unspent and begrudged in the very heart of hate;
 With the blood and the might of thy brother thine hunger shalt thou
 And this deed shall be mine and thine; but ^{safe,} take heed for what
 followeth then!
 Let each do after his kind! I shall do the deeds of men;
 I shall harvest the fields of their sowing, in the bed of their strewing
 shall sleep;
 To them shall I give my life-days, to the Gods my glory to keep.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.119)

The attitude of Wagner's Siegfried is rather similar; he only takes the Tarnhelm and the Ring because the Woodbird tells him to, and shows no particular interest in the hoard.

³¹ Zu schauen kam ich, nicht zu schaffen.

In VS, Sigurd asks Regin what is the best way of dealing with Fafnir - he really shows considerable foresight when he asks, what if he should get in the way of the dragon's blood, but Regin taunts him once more with cowardice. Odin then appears, and advises Sigurd to dig several pits so that he won't be in danger of being drowned by the flow of blood.³² In Morris's poem, Sigurd encounters Odin, who, as in VS, gives him advice about killing the dragon. This meeting is in complete contrast to Siegfried's only face-to-face encounter with Wotan, in which Siegfried manifests hostility from the beginning. In *Sigurd*, the young hero treats the old man with respect.

In *Siegfried*, before Fafner emerges from his cave, Siegfried has a long reflective passage - who were his parents, what did they look like? He tries unsuccessfully to imitate the birdsong he hears on a makeshift pipe, then decides to blow his horn instead - and this entices Fafnir out of his cave. It doesn't take long for Siegfried to deal Fafner the death-blow. Before he dies, Fafner is able to ask Siegfried who he is - Siegfried replies that he doesn't know - and to warn him against Mime:

Blicke nun hell, blühender Knabe;
der dich Blinden reizte zur Tat,
berät jetzt des Blühenden Tod!

³² Then Sigurd spake;

"How sayedst thou, Regin, that this drake was no greater than other
lingworms; methinks the track of him is marvellous great?"

Then said Regin; "Make thee a hole, and sit down therein, and
whenas the worm comes to the water, smite him into the heart, and so do
him to death, and win for thee great fame thereby."

But Sigurd said, "What will betide me if I be before the blood of the
worm?"

Says Regin, "Of what avail to counsel thee if thou art still afeard of
everything? Little art thou like thy kin in stoutness of heart."

Then Sigurd rides right over the heath; but Regin gets him gone,
sore afeard.

But Sigurd fell to digging him a pit, and whiles he was at that work,
there came to him an old man with a long beard, and asked him what he
wrought there, and he told him.

Then answered the old man and said, "Thou doest after sorry counsel;
rather dig thee many pits, and let the blood run therein; but sit thee down
in one thereof, and so thrust the worm's heart through."

And therewithal he vanished away; but Sigurd made the pits even as
it was shown to him.

(*Völsunga Saga* ; Morris's translation, pp.141-142)

Merk, wie's endet! Acht' auf mich!
(*Siegfried*, Act II ll.5731-5734)

Siegfried then asks Fafner, who seems to have gained wisdom in death, to tell him more, ³³ but as Fafner repeats the name Siegfried he dies. This bears some resemblance to the episode in *Eafnismál* - Sigurd first conceals his name, because of an ancient belief that revealing one's name to an enemy could give the enemy power, but later he tells Fafnir who he is. Fafnir warns him that the gold will eventually lead to his death; after an exchange of gnomic verses, Fafnir warns Sigurd to beware of Regin. This dialogue is reproduced in prose in VS, including the gnomic utterances, which Wagner omits.³⁴

In *Sigurd*, Fafnir's appearance is not described, except that he has a human face - instead, the narrator conveys the atmosphere of gloom and dread that emanates from his presence: ³⁵

33

Woher ich stamme, rate mir noch;
weise ja scheinst du, Wilder, im Sterben;
rat' es nach meinem Namen -
Siegfried bin ich genannt!
(*Siegfried*, Act II ll. 5737-5741)

³⁴ So whenas Fafnir had his death-wound, he asked "Who art thou? and who is thy father? and what thy kin, that thou wert so hardy as to bear weapons against me?"

Sigurd answered, "Unknown to men is my kin. I am called a noble beast; neither father have I nor mother, and all alone have I fared hither."

Said Fafnir, "Whenas thou hast neither father nor mother, of what wonder wert thou born then? But now, though thou tellest me not thy name on this my death-day, yet thou knowest verily that thou liest unto me."

He answered, "Sigurd am I called, and my father was Sigmund."

Says Fafnir, "Who egged thee on to this deed, and why wouldst thou be driven to it? Hadst thou never heard how that all folk were adrad of me, and of the awe of my countenance? But an eager father thou hadst, O bright-eyed swain!"

Sigurd answered, "A hardy heart urged me on hereto; and a strong hand and this sharp sword, which well thou knowest now, stood me in stead of the doing of the deed...."

..... Fafnir answered; "In angry wise dost thou take my speech; but hearken, for that same gold which I have owned shall be thy bane too."

Quoth Sigurd, "Fain would we keep all our wealth till that day of days; yet shall each man die once for all."

(*Vølsunga Saga*; Morris's translation, pp.142-143)

³⁵ According to C.W. Herford, in his lecture *Norse Mythology in English Poetry* (Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, Vol. 5, 1918-20, pp.75-101),

But now, how the rattling waxeth till he may not heed nor hark!
And the day and the heavens are hidden, and o'er Sigurd rolls the
dark,

As the flood of a pitchy river, and heavy-thick is the air
With the venom of hate long-hoarded, and lies once fashioned fair;
Then a wan face comes from the darkness, and is wrought in man-like
wise,

And the lips are writhed with laughter and bleared are the blinded
eyes,

And it wandereth hither and thither, and searcheth through the
grave

And departeth, leaving nothing, save the dark, rolled wave on wave
O'er the golden head of Sigurd and the edges of the sword,
And the world weighs heavy on Sigurd, and the weary curse of the
Heart

Him-seemed the grave grew straiter, and his hope of life grew chill,
And his heart by the Worm was enfolded, and the bonds of the Ancient
Ill.

(Sigurd the Volsung, pp.124-125)

By using the medium of poetry rather than the stage, Morris had a distinct advantage over Wagner for this episode - putting a believable Fafner on stage has been an insuperable difficulty ever since the Ring was first produced.³⁶

As in Eafnismál and VS, Fafnir warns Sigurd that the gold will eventually mean his death; he does not, however, warn him about Regin. In the Ring, Fafner warns Siegfried about Mime, but not about the curse on the Ring. (One wonders why

Rosetti angrily derided Fafnir's transformation into a dragon as "silly", provoking a drastic response from "Topsy". [Morris's nickname among his friends and family] Even in Wagner the dragon has tried the patience of the unselect.

Rosetti's opinion may well have been a minority verdict ; I have indicated that Morris's poetic description of Fafnir is more effective than Wagner's attempt to stage the fight with the dragon ; and see also the next footnote.³⁶ In her Introduction to Sigurd the Volsung (Vol. XII of Morris's Collected Works), May Morris informs us of her father's opinion of the first attempts to stage the Ring ; he had not been to Bayreuth himself, but was told about it by his friend Aglaia Coronio;

When Mrs. Coronio ... came back... from Bayreuth, she and Father used to have long discussions, in which of course neither convinced the other, nor stirred one iota from the ground taken. The Wagner menagerie came in from special criticism. Mrs. Coronio spoke with admiration of the dragon constructed under the Master's own eye; Father scoffed at the notion that Fafnir, the man-beast of the savage legend, should be represented by modern stage ingenuity ... such mechanical realism seemed to him childish and futile .

(May Morris : Introduction, Collected Works , Vol.XII, p.ix)

Wagner omitted this - after all, Fafner knows about the curse, since he was there when Alberich pronounced it, and he killed his brother in order to obtain the Ring.)

Now Siegfried learns to understand the speech of birds. Some of the dragon's blood spills onto his finger, and when he puts his finger into his mouth to cool it, he understands what the Woodbird is saying to him. It first advises him to take the Ring and the Tarnhelm from the hoard:

Hei! Siegfried gehört nun der Niblungen Hort!
 Oh, fänd' in der Höhle den Hort er jetzt!
 Wollt' er den Tarnhelm gewinnen,
 der taugt' ihm zu wonniger Tat;
 doch wollt' er den Ring sich erraten,
 der macht' ihm zum Walther der Welt!
 (*Siegfried*, Act. II ll.5757-5761)

While Siegfried goes into the cave to find the Ring and the Tarnhelm, there follows a scene of rather less than fraternal affection between Alberich and Mime. Each is determined to obtain the Ring and Tarnhelm for himself, and not to share anything with the other. Much to their chagrin, Siegfried has obtained both items for himself, because the Woodbird told him to, not because he knows what use they are:

Was ihr mit nützt, weiß ich nicht;
 doch nahm ich euch
 aus des Horts gehäuften Gold,
 weil guter Rat mir es riet.
 So taug' eure Zier als des Tages Zeuge,
 es mahne der Tand,
 daß ich kämpfend Fafner erlegt,
 doch das Fürchten noch nicht gelernt.
 (*Siegfried*, Act II, ll.5859-5867)

Perhaps there is some dramatic irony in the Woodbird's advice - *Wollt' er den Tarnhelm gewinnen, der taugt' ihm zu wonniger Tat* - because when he does use it, it is actually to accomplish a deed of treachery and betrayal. Similarly in NL he uses his Tarnkappe (cloak of invisibility) twice to deceive Brunhild. So this device is actually only used by Siegfried to deceive. And one does wonder whether it could ever be used for a worthy purpose, considering who made it and why.

The Woodbird's next piece of advice is to warn Siegfried about Mime:

Hei, Siegfried gehört nun
 der Helm und der Ring!
 O, traute er Mime, dem treulosen nicht!
 Hörte Siegfried nun scharf
 auf des Schelmen Heuchelgered'
 Wie sein Herz es meint,
 kann er Mime versteh'n;
 so nütz' ihm des Blutes Genuß.
 (*Siegfried*, Act. II ll.5869-5877)

There now follows the scene in which Mime cannot help revealing his plans to kill Siegfried and take the Ring for himself. In this scene, Wagner adopts the dramatic device of having Mime tell Siegfried outright that he wants to kill him, and furthermore that he has always hated him and his family and has just been waiting for this opportunity to get him out of the way.

According to Ernest Newman, in Vol. II of his *Life of Richard Wagner*, this scene is based on a farce called *Dr. Fausts Hauskäppchen*:

About this time (1874), a certain Dr. Ernest Koch ... published a study of the sources of the Ring - *Richard Wagners Bühnenfestspiel "Der Ring des Nibelungen" in seinem Verhältnis zur alten Sage wie zur modernen Nibelungendichtung betrachtet*. Towards the end of the book Koch threw out ... a suggestion with regard to the scene in which ... Mime declares his intention of murdering (Siegfried) ... This scene ... 'has no basis in the mythology, but in the well-known farce *Dr. Fausts Hauskäppchen*, by Fr. Hopp, there is a merry character who, by putting on his head a magic cap that ostensibly belonged to Dr. Faust, can compel people to answer his questions fully and truthfully." No doubt, Koch continued, it was the memory, perhaps unconscious, of this device that prompted Wagner to handle the scene of the tasting of the dragon's blood as he has done.

...This suggestion ...came from Wagner himself! Koch, for the purpose of his book, had evidently asked him for information regarding the powers attributed to the dragon's blood. In his reply of 10th. August 1874, Wagner said it was necessary for him to expand the effect of the "dragon's blood magic", which in the Edda extends only to an understanding of the speech of birds, to an understanding by Siegfried of Mime's treachery. He was able to achieve this, he says, in the particular way he did, by reason of the fact that Mime sings - the cajoling melody expresses his desire to dupe the boy, while he has no control over his words, which consequently lay bare his true intentions, "all of which is highly comic in its effects." "I cannot remember," he

continues,"a direct source for this; but no doubt Dr. Faust's magic skull-cap unconsciously contributed to it." 37

37 It would appear that Peter Wapnewski, in Richard Wagner: die Szene und ihr Meister , is unaware of this source, and his interpretation of this scene - *Siegfried und sein Waldvöglein* - is thus rendered unnecessarily complicated. See for instance p. 81;

Nun ... kommt Mime. Und läuft mit seinem lästerlich provozierenden Reden geradewegs in das Schwert des anderen. Das vernunftwidrige Verhalten dieses Listenreichen scheint schlechthin absurd; auch erfahrenen Kenner des Wagnerschen Werkes haben hier Schwierigkeiten des Verstehens. Ist es germanische Sehnsucht zum Tode, so wurde gefragt, die Mime dazu reizt, sich durch selbstmörderische Reden dem Jungen ans Messer zu liefern? ...

Ist Mime von allen gut-bösen Geistern verlassen?

Wagner hat hier einen hochsubtilen Mechanismus ingeniös angelegt...Ein junger Held, der durch die Warnung der Vogelstimmen bewogen wird, zum Schwert zu greifen und zu töten ; das war zu wenig, und war zu viel....Siegfried sollte aus sich heraus erwachsen, sollte autonom sein. Die Tötung des Drachens darf nicht verstanden werden als kolossales Bubenstück eines, der seine Unfähigkeit, sich zu fürchten, erhärten will. Sondern: Sie ist die Schritt in die Welt.

...nicht die Vogelstimme, sondern die Stimme in der eignen Brust hat Siegfried gewarnt.Er ist wissend, ist denkend geworden, so weiß er nun auch, Mimes Wissen, Mimes Denken zu deuten ...

Gemäß seiner auf Siegfrieds Persönlichkeitsentfaltung gerichteten Konzeption hat Wagner die eddischen Verse nicht nur materiell reduziert sondern sachlich relativiert. So wurden aus den sieben Warnstrophen der Meisen (zu je vier Versen) die lediglich vier Verse des Waldvogels(ein Verhältnis von eins zu sieben)

O! traute er Mime
dem treulosen nicht!
Hörte Siegfried nur scharf
auf des Schelmen Heuchlergered'!

Und jetzt folgen die des Verständnis der Szene ganz aufschlüsselnden - und allein Wagner gehörenden! - Worte;

Wie sein Herz es meint,
kann er Mime verstehn;
so nützt ihm des Bluts Genuß.

Die eddischen Meisen sind Partner ihres Helden. Der Waldvogel hingegen ist Projektion des Helden Ich.

Although Wapnewski does back this up with an analysis of the music of this episode, his analysis is still based on a false premise, i.e. ignorance of the source. In this case, how valid is his musical analysis?

Wagner had to adopt this dramatic device in order to make the scene intelligible to an audience in the theatre, and it is probably more reasonable to seek an explanation in the history of theatre than in psychological analysis.

In VS and *Fafnismál*, Regin instructs Sigurd to roast the dragon's heart. When Sigurd touches the heart to see if it is cooked, he burns his finger; when he puts his finger to his mouth, he can understand what the birds are saying to him. They first of all warn him to beware of Regin, who is plotting revenge for the death of Fafnir. 38

38

Fafnismál

32. Þar sitr Sigurðr,
Fáfnis hiarta
spacr þøtti mér
ef hann fiørsega
- There sits Sigurd,
And Fafnir's heart
Wise were the breaker
To eat the life-muscles
- sveita stokkinn,
við funa steikir;
spillir bauga,
frá þann acti."
- sprinkled with blood,
by the fire he cooks;
of rings, I ween,
all so bright.
33. Þar liggr Reginn,
vill tacla mæg,
berr af reiði
vill bølva smiðr
- There Regin lies,
The youth to betray
Lying words
Till his brother the maker
- ráðr um við sic,
þann er trúir hanom;
røng orð saman,
bróður hefna.
- and plans he lays
who trusts him well;
with wiles will he speak
of mischief avenges.
34. "Høfði scemra
øllo gulli
í fiøld,
- Less by a head
Then all of the wealth
The gold that Fafnir guarded.
- lái hann inn hōra þul
fara til heliar heðan!
þá kōa hann einn ráða,
ví er und Fáfni lá."
- let the chatterer hoary
Go from here to hell;
he alone can wield,
35. "Horscr þætti mér,
á strað mikit
hygði hann um sic
þar er mér úlfs vín,
- Wise would he seem
The counsel good
Thought he would give
There is ever a wolf
- ef hafa kunni
yðvar systra;
oc Hugin gleddi:
er ec eyro síc."
- if so he would heed
we sisters give;
and the ravens gladden,
where his ears I spy.
36. "Erat svá horscr
sem ec hers iaðar
ef hann bróður lætr
- hildimeidr,
hyggia myndac,
á brot komaz,

Sigurd makes short work of Regin, once he has discovered that Regin is plotting treachery. In VS, he then eats some of the dragon's heart - in *Reginismál*, it seems that he eats the entire heart, and drinks the blood of both Fafnir and Regin.

Examination of the dragon-killing episode in TS reveals that the saga summarises all the versions of the episode. After he has killed the dragon - which he does by beating it to death, not by stabbing it - Sigurd is hungry, having eaten all the food that Mime provided, which was supposed to last for nine days. There is no mention at this stage of any treasure, but it is mentioned in passing much later, by Grimhild, the saga's equivalent of Gudrun/Kriemhild, when she is married to Attila;

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>enn hann æðrom hefr
Less wise must be
Than to me would seem
If forth he lets
When he of the other</p> | <p>aldrs of syniat."
that tree of battle,
the leader of men,
one brother fare,
the slayer is.</p> |
| <p>37. "Miðc er úsviðr,
fiánda inn fólcscá,
þar er Reginn liggr,
kannat hann við slíco at síá!</p> | |
| <p>Most foolish he seems
There Regin lies,
Yet falsehood knows he not.</p> | <p>if he shall spare
His foe, the bane of the folk;
who hath wronged him so,
er hann ráðinn hefr;</p> |
| <p>38. "Höfði scemra
þá mundu fíar,
læti hann þann inn hrimkalda
iötun
oc af baugim búa;
þess er Fafnir ráð,
einvaldi vera."</p> | |
| <p>Let the head from the frost-cold
And let him of rings be robbed;
Then all the wealth
Shall belong to thee alone.</p> | <p>giant be hewed,
which Fafnir's was</p> |
| <p>39. "Verðr svá róc scöpp,
mitt banorð bera;
þvíat þeir báðir bræðr
fara til Heljar heðan.</p> | |
| <p>Not so rich a fate
As the tale of my death to tell;
For soon the brothers
And hence to hell shall go.</p> | <p>at Reginn scyldi
scolo brúlliga</p> |

Sigurd r hió höfuð af Regin, oc þá á t hann Fáfnis hiarta oc dracc blóð þeira beggia, Regins oc Fáfnis. Sigurd hewed off Regin's head, and then he ate Fafnir's heart, and drank the blood of both Regin and Fafnir. (Translation by Henry Adams Bellows, Princeton University Press, 1936)

she talks of Sigurd's wealth, which her brothers are withholding from her, and says that this wealth includes the gold he took from the dragon that he killed. TS also introduces the theme of Siegfried's invulnerability, which does not occur in the Norse sources. In NL the dragon-slaying is first mentioned by Hagen, who does not appear to know of the vulnerable spot; this secret is only revealed to him later by Kriemhild - something which, the poet says, she would have done better to conceal.³⁹ Wagner also uses the motif of Siegfried's invulnerability - in *Götterdämmerung*, it is Brünnhilde who has made him invulnerable, but, as she knows that he would never flee or turn his back on an enemy, he is not invulnerable there.

In VS, Regin reminds Sigurd that, although Sigurd actually killed Fafnir, it was at Regin's instigation; in fact it is clearer in VS than in *Reginismál* or *Fafnismál* that Regin actually encourages Sigurd to kill Fafnir for him, so that he can obtain what he considers to be his inheritance.⁴⁰ But by the time the birds warn Sigurd about Regin, he is actually plotting revenge for his brother, although he originally wanted him killed.

Regin never really implied that Sigurd should have the gold for himself - this is clearer in Morris's poem than in the sources, as Regin repeats his demands in such a way as to make it clear that Sigurd is expected to turn the gold over to him. This Sigurd

39 901 Ich melde ez ûf genade,
daz du dîne triuwe
dâ man dô mac verhouwen
daz I âze ich dich hœren;

vil lieber friunt, dir
behaltest ane mir.
den mînen lieben man,
deist ûf genade getan.

902. Dô von des trachen wunden
und sich dar inne badete
dô viel im zwischen die herte
dô mac man in versnîden;

vlôz daz heize bluot
der küene recke guot,
ein linden blat vil breit.
des ist mir sorgen vil bereit.

⁴⁰ "Thereafter," says Regin, "Fafnir slew his father and murdered him, nor got I aught of the treasure, and so evil he grew, that he fell to lying abroad, and begrudged any share in the wealth to any kman, and so became the worst of all worms, and ever now lies brooding upon that treasure; but for me, I went to the king and became his master-smith; and this is the tale of how I lost the heritage of my father, and the weregild for my brother."

(*Völsunga Saga* ; Morris's translation, p.131)

is quite happy to do; he is prepared to kill Fafnir for love of adventure - this is implied in the lines:

...but the deed will I surely do,
For today the dream of my childhood hath bloomed in my heart anew;
And I long to look on the world and the glory of the earth
And to deal in the dealings of men, and garner the harvest of worth.

As in VS, Regin in *Sigurd* accuses Sigurd of killing his brother. Sigurd's response is that Regin can now have the gold, and they have come to a parting of the ways:

But Regin darkened before him, and exceeding grim was he grown,
And he spake, "Thou hast slain my brother, and wherewith wilt thou
atone?"

"Stand up, O Master," said .Sigurd, "O Singer of ancient days,
And take the wealth I have won thee, ere we wend on the sundering
ways
I have toiled and thou hast desired, and the Treasure is surely anear,
And thou hast wisdom to find it, and I have slain thy fear."

But Regin crouched and darkened; "Thou hast slain my brother," he
said,
"Take thou the gold," quoth Sigurd, "for the ransom of my head!"
(*Sigurd the Volsung* , p .128)

Then Regin demands that Sigurd roast the dragon's heart for him. The poem conveys the atmosphere of desolation that reigns on the Glittering Heath:

But Sigurd took the Heart, and wood on the waste he found,
The wood that grew and died, as it crept on the niggard ground,
And grew and died again, and lay like whitened bones -
(*Sigurd the Volsung* , p.128)

Morris makes the birds into seven eagles; in his translation of VS, he calls them woodpeckers. The word in Old Norse is *igdur* - variously translated as *tits* or *nuthatches*. In fact, it probably doesn't matter all that much what type of birds they were, and Wagner was thinking along the right dramatic lines when he reduced the number of birds to one, and called it just a Woodbird. But it is a neat illustration of Morris's attention to detail that in his poem he makes the birds into eagles; since he has already conveyed that the Glittering Heath is a place of desolation, where wood is very

sparse, he couldn't then make the birds into woodpeckers, and eagles fit very well into the desolate atmosphere -*And the ernes cried over his head*The eagles warn Sigurd, somewhat cryptically, that Regin is plotting his death, and Sigurd understands what is going on in Regin's mind:*But lo, how the eyes of Sigurd the heart of the guileful behold ...*When he realises what Regin has been plotting, he strikes him dead. There is now no reason why Sigurd should not gain the treasure for himself, although that wasn't his original intention. The sequence of events is the reverse of that in Wagner's *Siegfried*. There, the Woodbird's first instruction to Siegfried is to obtain the Ring and the Tarnhelm - because he knows nothing about the hoard, Mime having deliberately kept him in ignorance. In *Sigurd*, the first necessity is to warn Sigurd about Regin, since he already knows about the treasure.

2.7. Brynhild

VS summarises the advice of the birds into one passage, including the advice that, if Sigurd kills Regin, he can have the treasure for himself.⁴¹ This advice is also contained in one of the verses in *Eáfnismál*, already quoted, but omitted by Morris, who is more concerned with the warning against Regin's treachery. What is more interesting is that he also omits any direct reference to Sigurd's next adventure, namely the meeting with Brynhild. In VS, the instructions from the birds are perfectly clear - they tell him to take all of Fafnir's gold, and then ride to Hindarfjall, where he will find Brynhild lying asleep.⁴²

⁴¹ Høggvi hann þá hofuð af honum, ok má hann ráð a gullinu því inn miklu cinn. Let him smite the head from off him then, and be only lord of all that gold. (*Völsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, p.146)

⁴² mælti in fjórða, ' væri hann vitrari ef hann hefði at sem þær hofðu ráðit honum, ok ríði síðan til bóls Fafnis ok tæki at it mikla gull er þar er, ok ríði síðan upp Hindarfjall þar sem Brynhildr sefr, ok mun hann nema þar mikla speki.' And once more the fourth spake and said, "Ah, the wiser were he if he followed after that good counsel, and rode thereafter to Fafnir's lair, and took to him that mighty treasure that lieth there, and then rode over Hindfell, whereas sleeps Brynhild; for there would he get great wisdom." (*Völsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, p.146)

In *Fáfnismál*, the instructions are not quite so direct - first the birds tell him about Gudrun, then they backtrack and tell him about the Valkyrie sleeping on Hindarfjall, and it is by no means certain that the Valkyrie is the same woman as Brynhild. Or rather, in PE she is not necessarily the same woman. By the time VS was compiled, Sigdrifa the Valkyrie is identical with Brynhild. It is possible that Sigdrifa is not a woman's name, but an epithet meaning "giver of victory". The way *Fáfnismál* tells the story implies that Sigurd is going to Giuki's hall, where he will meet the woman he will marry, but that on the way he will meet the sleeping Valkyrie - who may or may not be Brynhild. ⁴³ The poem quite clearly states that Sigurd is going to marry

43 40. Bitt þú, Sigurðr,
— era konunglic
mey veit ec eina,
gulli gædda,

Bind thou, Sigurd,
Not meet it is
A fair may know I
Girt about with gold,

bauga rauða,
qviða mörgo;
myclo fegrsta,
ef þú geta mættir.

the bright red rings!
many things to fear.
fair of all the fairest,
good for thy getting.

41. Liggja til Giúca
— fram vísa scop
þar hefir dyrr konungr
þá mundu, Sigurðr,

Green go the ways
That the fates show forth
There the rich king
Thou shalt deal, Sigurd,

grænar brautir,
fólclíðondom; —
dóttur alna,
mundi kaupa.

toward the hall of Guiki
to those who fare thither;
reareth a daughter;
with gold for thy sweetling.

42. Salr er é h já
allr er hann utan
þ ann hafa horscir
or óðöccom

A high hall is there
Without all about it
Wise men wrought
With the unhidden gleam

Hindarfjalli,
eldi sveipinn;
halir um gorvan
ógnar líoma.

reared upon Hindfell,
sweeps the red flame aloft.
that wonder of halls
of the glory of gold.

43. Veit ec ófialli
oc leicr yfir
Yggr stacc þomi:
hørgefn, hali,

Soft on the fell
The lime-trees' red plague
The sleep-thorn set Odin
For her choosing in war

fólcvittr sofa,
lindar véði;
aðra feldi
enn hafa vildi.

a shield-may sleepeth,
playing about her;
into that maiden
the one he willed not.

44. Knáttu, mögr, siá
þa er sóa végi
matt.. Sigdrifa

mey und hiólmi,
Vingscomi reið;
svefni bregða,

Giuki's daughter, but that on the way to the hall he will meet this Valkyrie - the poem need not necessarily be taken to imply that he is going to have a broken romance with her, or rather, it doesn't imply that she is the woman with whom the broken romance occurs.

Close examination of *Sigrdrifumál* reveals that at no time does she say that she is Brynhild, or that she is Sigurd's destined bride. She does say that she has sworn never to marry anyone who knew what fear was.⁴⁴ Later redactions have identified this woman with Brynhild, and Sigurd with the fearless man she has sworn to marry. But if we just had *Sigrdrifumál* as it stands, we would not necessarily be justified in assuming that Sigrdrifa and Brynhild are one and the same woman. *Eafnismál* definitely indicates that Guiki's daughter is the woman that Sigurd is going to marry, and the Valkyrie is just someone he meets on the way. In *Sigrdrifumál*, there is no exchange of vows between the pair; she gives Sigurd some advice in gnomic verses, and then he goes on his way. In VS, where the Valkyrie is identified with Brynhild, the couple do exchange vows.⁴⁵

In *Sigurd*, the eagles hardly refer to Brynhild at all; the only reference is this rather obscure prophecy:

Sciöldunga niðr,	fyr scopom Norna.
Go, son, behold	that may under helm
Whom from battle	Vinskornir bore,
From her may not turn	the torment of sleep,
Dear offspring of kings	in the dread Norns' despite.
(<i>Eafnismál</i> ; Morris's translation)	

44 Enn ec sagðac honum, at ec strengðac heit þar í mot at giptaz øngom eim manni, er hræðaz kynni. "But there-against I vowed a vow, that never would I wed one who knew the name of fear." (*Vølsunga Saga*; Morris's translation, p.151))

45 Sigurðr mælti, "Engi finnsk þér vitrari maðr, ok þesss svér ek at þik skal ek eiga, ok þú ert við mit æði."

Hon svarar, " þik vil ek helzt eiga, þótt ek kjósa um alla menn." Ok þetta bundu þau eiðum með sér."

Sigurd spake, "None among the sons of men can be found wiser than thou; and thereby swear I, that thee will I have as my own, for near to my heart thou liest."

She answers, "Thee would I faintest choose, though I had all men's sons to choose from." (*Vølsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, p.156)

Bind the red rings, O Sigurd! and gladden all thy heart!
 For the world shall make thee merry ere thou and she depart.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.133)

One episode that may throw some light on this is *Of Gripir's foretelling*. It is based on *Gripispá* in PE, which may have been composed as a way of drawing all the strands of the various legends together. According to PE, Gripir is Sigurd's uncle, whom Sigurd visits to ask him to foretell the future. At first Gripir prophesies a wonderful future for Sigurd - he says that he will kill both Fafnir and Regin, and win the hoard for himself. He also prophesies that Sigurd will meet the Valkyrie, still unnamed at this juncture.

15. "A lovely king's daughter sleeps on the mountainside; you will cut her armour with the bright sword, Fafnir's bane."
16. "I pierce the armour, the girl wakes from her sleep. What will the maiden say to Sigurd?"
17. "She will teach you powerful runes, all you need to conduct your life, and also runes of healing ."

Gripir says that Sigurd will arrive at Heimir's court, not saying at this stage who Heimir is - and then he claims that he can't foretell anything else. Sigurd insists, then Gripir warns him that he will wish to marry Brynhild and will betray her.⁴⁶ He also foretells that the whole thing will end in Sigurd's death .

46 27. Flióð er at Heimis,
 - hana Brynhildi
 dóttur Buðla,
 harðugðict man,
 A maid in Heimir's
 Brynhild her name
 Daughter of Buthli,
 And Heimir fosters

fargt álitom
 bragnar nefna -
 en dýrr konungr,
 Heimir, fœðir.
 home there dwells,
 to men is known,
 the doughty king,
 the fearless maid.

28. "Hvat er mic at því,
 fœgr álitu,
 þat scaltu, Gripir,
 þvíat þú þúll um sér
 What is it to me,
 So fair, and of Heimir
 Gripir, truth
 For all of fate

ótt mæð sé,
 fœdd at Heimis?
 gœrva segir,
 ørløð fyrir.
 though the maiden be
 the fosterling is?
 to me shalt tell,
 before me thou seest.

29. "Hon firrir þic

flestro gamni,

In *Sigurd*, Gripir's prophecies are somewhat more cryptic. The reader understands that he is referring to Fafnir, when he says:

There the child in the noon-tide smitheth; the young king rendeth apart,
The old guile by the guile encompassed, the heart made wise by the heart.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.111)

(i.e. eating the dragon's heart will help Sigurd to gain wisdom.)

Gripir also foretells Gudrun:

How green are the garths of King-folk, how fair is the lily and rose
In the house of the Cloudy People, 'neath the towers of kings and foes!
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.111)

And he foretells, again rather cryptically, that Sigurd will be killed by his brother-in-law:

Dawn now; but the house is silent, and dark is the purple blood
On the breast of the Queen fair-fashioned; and it riseth up as a flood
Round the posts of the door beloved; and a deed there lieth therein,
The last of the deeds of Sigurd; the worst of the Cloudy Kin -
The slayer slain by the slain within the door and without.
O dawn as the eve of the birth-day! O dark world cumbered with
doubt!
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.112)

<p>føgr á liti svefn þú né sefr, gáaðu manna, Of many a joy Fair to see, Sleep thou shalt find not, Nor seek out men,</p>	<p>fostra Heimis; né um sacar dæmir, nema þú mey sér." the maiden robs thee, whom Heimir fosters; feuds thou shalt end not, if the maid thou seest not.</p>
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<p>30. "Hvat mun til lícna seg u, Grípir, þat, mun ec meyna þá ina sögra What may be had Say now, Gripir, May I buy the maid The daughter fair</p>	<p>lagt Sigurði? ef þú síá þicciz: mundi kaupa, fylkis dóttur?" for Sigurth's healing? if see thou canst; with the marriage price, of the chieftain famed?</p>
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<p>31. "It munðalla fullfastliga verið hefir þú Giuca mantattu horsca Ye twain shall all That bind full fast; One night when Gjuki's Will Heimir's fosterling</p>	<p>ei ðá vinna, fá munð halda; gestr eina nótt, Heimis fostrá." the oaths then swear few shall ye keep; guest thou hast been, fade from thy mind."</p>
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(Translation by Henry Adams Bellows)

This tells Sigurd nothing about Brynhild. The only passage that might be foretelling her existence is this:

Cry out, o waste before him! O rocks of the wilderness, cry!
 For tomorn shalt thou see the glory, and the man not made to die!
 Cry out, O upper heavens! O clouds beneath the lift!
 For the golden King shall be riding high-headed midst the drift;
 The mountain waits and the fire; there waiteth the heart of the wise
 Till the earthly toil is accomplished, and again shall the fire arise ...
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.113)

But, as Gripir has just referred to the return of Baldur after the destruction of the gods, he may not be referring to Brynhild's mountain and the fire surrounding it, but to the impending destruction of the world.

We may therefore arrive at the provisional conclusion that Morris structured his poem in such a way as to convey the idea that Sigurd meets Brynhild more or less by chance; the few references that might refer to her are too cryptic for us to assume that she is definitely intended. In *Sigurd*, there is no prophecy that he is intended to meet her, or that they are destined to marry - the eagles foretell that Sigurd will meet Gudrun, though she is not named at this stage. Brynhild has specified that she will not marry a coward, but it does not appear in VS that she has specified that the man who will breach her barrier of flame and awaken her is to be Sigurd; that identification seems to come at a later stage of the development of the legend, as does the identification of Brynhild with the sleeping Valkyrie.

Morris follows the Norse sources - VS and *Helreið Brynhildar* from PE - in making Brynhild a mortal woman whom Odin had chosen to be a Valkyrie. In VS, Sigurd tells Brynhild that he has heard she is the daughter of a powerful king, and she tells him how she came to be asleep on the mountain; she asks him if he is Sigurd son of Sigmund, to which he replies in the affirmative. She goes on to explain how she gave the preference in battle to one whom Odin had marked out for death, and Odin in revenge cast her into the enchanted sleep from which Sigurd woke her. In VS, she doesn't give a reason why she defied Odin's order; in *Sigrdrifumál* she implies that

it may have been out of a feeling of sympathy with King Agnarr, because Odin did not look upon him with favour. 47

Other poems in PE refer to Brynhild's past as a warrior maiden; the most explicit of these is *Helreið Brynhildar*. 48 The reference to a warrior past in *Sigur ædarkviða*

47 Hon nefndiz Sigrdrifa oc var valkyria. Hon sagð i, at tveir konungar börðuz; hét annarr Hjalms-Gunnarr, hann var þá gamall oc inn mesti hermaðr, oc hafð i Oðinn hánom sigri heiti; enn

annar hét Agnarr,
er vætr engi

Auðo bróðir,
vildi þiggia.

Sigrdrífa feldi Hjalms-Gunnar í orrostinni.

She said that her name was Sigrdrifa, and that she had been a valkyrie. She said that two kings had been fighting, one was called Helm-Gunnar, and old man and a mighty chieftain, to who Odin had promised the victory; and "the other was Agnarr, Audi's brother, and there was no-one to help him." Sigrdrifa killed Helm-Gunnar in the battle.

48 þá kvað Brynhildr

3. Bregðu eigi mér, brúðr, ór steni,
þótt ec værac í víkingo!
ec mun occar æri þiccia,
hvars menn þó li occart kunno.

Brynhild

Nay, blame me naught, bride of the rock-hall,
Though I roved a warring in the days that were;
The higher of us twain shall I ever be holden
When of our kind men make account.

Gygr kvað;

4. Þú vart, Brynhildr, Buðla dóttir,
heilli versto í heim borin;
þú hefir Giúca um glatat þomom
oc búð eira brugðit góðo.

The Giant-woman.

Thou, O Brynhild, Budli's daughter,
Wert the worst ever born into the world;
For Giuki's children death hast thou gotten,
And turned to destruction their goodly dwelling.

Brynhildr kva ;

5. Ec mun segja þér, svinn, ór reiðo,
vitlausí miðc, ef þák vita lystir,
hvé góðo mic Giúca arfar
Æstalausá oc eiðrofa.

Brynhild

I shall tell thee true tale from my chariot,
O thou who naught wottest, if thou listest to wot;
How for me they have gotten, those heirs of Giuki,
A loveless life, a life of lies.

in skamma refers to her considering whether it is worthwhile resisting the pressure exerted by her brother, Atli, who has threatened to withhold her inheritance if she does not marry:

37. þá var ær hvorfon hugr minn um þat,
 hvart ec scylda vega eða val fella,
 bóll, í brynio, um bróður søc.
 þat myndi þæ þiðkunt vera,
 mǫrgom manni at munar stríði.
 Wavered the mind within me then,
 If to fight I should fall and to the felling of folk,
 Bold in byrny because of my brother;
 A deed of fame had that been to all folk,
 But to many a man sorrow of mind.
 (*Sigur arkvi a in skamma*, Morris's translation)

In other words, this poem doesn't imply that she was once a Valkyrie who defied Odin by granting victory to the wrong warrior.

In *Sigurd* there is only the vaguest of hints that Brynhild might be Sigurd's destined bride, and it seems that when he sees the fire-wreathed mountain, he is first inspired to climb it by the love of adventure already mentioned:

Long Sigurd rideth the waste, when, lo, on a morning of day,
 From out of the tangled crag-walls, amidst the cloud-land grey
 Comes up a mighty mountain, and it is as though there burns
 A torch amidst of its cloud-wreath; so thither Sigurd turns,
 For he deems indeed from its topmost to look on the best of the earth;
 And Greyfell neigheth beneath him, and his heart is full of mirth.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.135)

Sigurd doesn't know what - or whom - he can expect to find once he has penetrated through the flame. In the event, he finds what he takes to be a man asleep behind a protective ring of shields. It is customary to laugh at the scene in Wagner's *Siegfried*

6. Lét hami vœra hugfullr konungr,
 átta systra, undir eic borit;
 var ec vetra tólf, ef þic vita lystir,
 er ec ungom grami ei þa seldac.

The changeful shapes of us eight sisters,
 The wise king bade under oak-tree to bear;
 Of twelve winters was I, if thou listest to wot,
 When I sware to the young lord oaths of love.
 (*Helreið Brynhildar*, Morris's translation)

in which Siegfried discovers that Brünnhilde is a woman after all, but, taken in context, his reaction is not so surprising. True, he was expecting to find a woman, but (a) he has never seen a woman before, and we will recall that he spent some time speculating about what a human woman - his mother - would have looked like; (b) women are not usually found in full armour. ⁴⁹ It is true that Sigurd does know what women look like - his mother, after all, played a significant part in his upbringing - but point (b) still applies. In *Siegrðarkvæða la stamma*, he doesn't realise that the person in armour is a woman until he removes the helmet. ⁵⁰ This is in spite of the fact that he is expecting to meet a woman. Perhaps, then, we should not be too severe upon Wagner's Siegfried.

We have seen that Brynhild has been cast into an enchanted sleep by Odin for defying him, and giving the victory to a warrior whom Odin did not favour, and that this warrior is not Sigmund, Sigurd's father, with whom she has nothing to do. In VS, she knows that it must be Sigurd who has awakened her - this is not the case in *Sigrdrifumál*, where she has to ask him who he is.⁵¹

⁴⁹ It seems that this was a part of the *Ring* about which Morris was very dismissive, according to May Morris in her introduction to the Collected Works edition of *Siegrð*: "But he raged most at the representation of the great scene of the Awakening on the Mountain, where the most enthusiastic of his musical friends could not hide the inadequacy of that difficult moment when the tenor, laying his hand on the breast of the stalwart Brünhilde [*sic - it is spelt like this*] - reclining decently composed in her unimaginative 'princess-robe' of gold mail, warbles, with all the surprise he can manage to force into his voice,

'Das ist kein Mann!'

(May Morris : *Introduction*, *Collected Works*, Vol. XII, ix)

⁵⁰ This also applies to VS:

En er hann kom at, stóð þar fyrir honum skjaldborg ok upp ór merki. Sigurðr gekk í skjaldborginn ok sá at þar svaf maðr ok lá með öllum hervapnum. Hann tók fyrst hjálminn af höfði ok sá at þat var kona. and when he came thereto, lo, a shield-hung castle before him, and a banner on the topmost thereof; into the castle went Sigurd, and saw one lying there asleep, and all-armed. Therewith he takes the helm from off the head of him, and sees that it is no man, but a woman. (*Völsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, p.149)

⁵¹ Þá tók hann brynio af henni; enn hon vacnaði, oc settiz hon up oc sá Sigurd oc mælti:

1. "Hvat beit brynio, hví brá ec svesni?
hvert feldi af mér sölvar nauðir?"

Thou hast cast up the curse against me; it shall fall aback on thine
head;

Go back to the sons of repentance, with the children of sorrow wed!
For the Gods are great unholpen, and their grief is seldom seen,
And the wrong that they will and must be is soon as it hath not been."
(*Sieged the Volsung*, p.141)

Here, the ex-Valkyrie implies that she came into conflict with Odin more than once before he wearied of her defiance - she doesn't refer to a specific battle, but speaks instead of being at variance with Odin in more general terms, and perhaps implies that she is distressed at the indifference of the gods to the fates of men; this is what her vow to wed the *fearless heart* seems to indicate.

The Brünnhilde of Wagner's *Ring* is obviously based on this woman,⁵² but there are some important differences. In the Norse literature, she is a mortal woman (unless we accept the identification of Brynhild with Sigrdrifa, and there is in fact no indication that Sigrdrifa is not a mortal woman), whereas Wagner makes his Brünnhilde Wotan's *daughter* by Erda. (This in fact also makes her into Siegfried's aunt, but perhaps we had better not let that concern us too deeply.)

Wotan had originally ordered Brünnhilde to protect Siegmund in the battle with Hunding, but was later forced to rescind his order after the intervention of Fricka, who forced him to acknowledge that Siegmund was not the free hero he had been seeking. She reminds him, with devastating accuracy, that he created the circumstances in which Siegmund suffered unhappiness, and that it was Wotan who placed the sword in the tree for Siegmund to find.⁵³ Wotan has in fact painted himself into a corner, as Fricka remorselessly makes clear, and he is left with no option but to rescind his order to Brünnhilde, and instruct her to protect Hunding instead. The reason behind all this is

⁵² i.e. The ex-Valkyrie of *Sigrdrifumál*.

⁵³ Fricka. So schütz' auch heut' ihn nicht!
Nimm ihm das Schwert, das du ihm geschenkt!

Wotan. Das Schwert?

Fricka Ja, das Schwert,
das zauberstark zuckende Schwert,
das du Gott dem Sohne gabst!
(*Die Walküre*, Act II, II. 2655-2662)

that the gods needs a free hero to do that which he is forbidden to do - i.e. obtain the Ring.⁵⁴ Wotan has been forced to realise that Siegmund isn't this hero, and commands Brünnhilde to fight for Hunding instead. Brünnhilde defies him, because she sees Siegmund and Sieglinde together and is moved with pity for their plight, and by Siegmund's love for Sieglinde. She chooses, in fact, to ally herself with humanity in defiance of the cold, loveless world of the gods. Wotan deprives her of her godhead and casts her into an enchanted sleep - he sees this as a punishment, but Wagner sees it as a moral gain. (Though her moral character deteriorates in *Götterdämmerung*).

Wagner has given the Wotan-Siegmund-Brünnhilde relationship a motivation it lacked in the Norse literature. Once the gods have handed over Andvari's gold (including the Ring, which he curses) as ransom for the death of Otter, they have no further interest in it - indeed, as we have seen, they seem almost glad to get rid of it. Siegmund has no connection with it - and, although Odin does take a close personal interest in the fate of the Volsungs, it is not because he needs them to retrieve the gold and the ring. Nor is Brynhild Odin's daughter, but a mortal woman who has spent some time as a Valkyrie. It is Brünnhilde who plans that the man who wakes her shall be Siegfried and no other - indeed, it is she who has given the unborn child his name, and given his mother the pieces of Siegmund's sword for her son, who, Brünnhilde predicts, will be the greatest of heroes.

⁵⁴ Der Riesen einer, denen ich einst
mit verfluchtem Gold den Fleiß vergalt:
Fafner hütet den Hort,
um den er den Bruder gefällt.
Ihm müßt' ich selbst den Reif entringen,
den selbst als Zoll ich ihm zahlte.
Doch mit dem ich vertrag,
ihn darf ich nicht treffen;
machtlos vor ihm erläge mein Mut:
das sind die Bände, die mich binden;
der durch Verträge ich Herr,
den Verträgen bin ich nun Knecht.
Nur einer könnte, was ich nicht darf:
ein Held, dem helfend nie ich mich neigte ...
(*Die Walküre*, Act II . II.2872-2890)

The scene of Brünnhilde's awakening is one in which Wagner remains close to his sources, even adapting the vocabulary of some stanzas of *Sigrdrifumál*. In both versions, she first greets the sun, the gods and the earth, and rejoices in her return to life. ⁵⁵ In *Sigurd*, the awakening of the Valkyrie takes place as the sun rises - the reader is reminded how the sun shone again on the Glittering Heath after Sigurd had killed Fafnir. Brynhild then greets the world, in terms similar to Sigrdrifa and to Wagner's Brünnhilde:

"All hail, O Day and thy Sons, and thy kin of the coloured things!
Hail following Night, and the daughter that leadeth thy wavering
wings!
Look down with unangry eyes on us today alive.

55 *Sigrdrifumál*.

3. Heill dagr, heilir dags synir,
heil nótt oc nipt!
óreiðom augom liuð ocr þinig,
oc gefit sitiondom sigr!

Hail to the day come back!
Hail, sons of the daylight!
Hail to thee, dark night, and thy daughter!
Look with kind eyes a-down,
On us sitting here lonely,
And give us the gain that we long for.

4. Heilir æsir, heilar ásynior,
heil si á in siðlayta fold!
mál ok manvit gefit ocr mærom tveim
oc lærnishendr, með an lifom.

Hail to the Æsir,
And the sweet Ásynior!
Hail to the fair earth fulfilled of plenty!
Fair words, wise hearts,
Would we win from you,
And healing hands while life we hold. (Morris's translation)

Heil dir, Sonne! Heil dir, Licht!
Heil dir, leuchtender Tag!
Lang war mein Schlaf:
ich bin erwacht,
wer ist der Held, der mich erweckt?

.....

Heil euch, Götter! Heil dir, Welt!
Heil dir, prangende Erde!
Zu End' ist nun mein Schlaf:
erwacht, seh' ich -
Siegfried ist es, der mich erweckt!
(*Siegfried*, Act III . II 6552-6570)

And give us thy hearts victorious, and the gain for which we strive!
 All hail, ye Lords of God-home, and ye Queens of the House of Gold!
 Hail, thou dear Earth that bearest, and thou wealth of field and fold!
 Give us, your noble children, the glory of wisdom and speech,
 And the hearts and the hands of healing, and the mouths and hands
 that teach."

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.140) 56

There is a significant difference between Morris's Brynhild and Wagner's Brünnhilde - the former shows no reluctance whatsoever to accept Sigurd's embraces, whereas for Brünnhilde it takes rather a long time for her to realise precisely what being a mortal woman entails. But then she shows no hesitation, and claims, in fact, to be the more passionate of the two. Brünnhilde promises to teach Siegfried wisdom - Wagner

⁵⁶ It is curious that contemporary critics of *Sigurd* did not always realise that these lines were a reasonably faithful paraphrase of the corresponding scene in *Sigrdrifumál*, as is shown by the following observations from an unsigned review in the *North American Review* for March 1877:

"To reproduce the antique, not as the ancients felt it, but as we feel it - to transfuse it with modern thought and emotion- this is the method that is now "in the air" as the French say, among Mr. Morris's fellow-artists, and it is the main source of interest which Mr. Morris has given to his own work, as well as the source of its weakness.

Now we need hardly remark that this method is essentially falsifying, nor shall we have to seek far in the present poem for illustrative instances. Take, for instance, this passage in the second book, an apostrophe put into Brynhild's mouth:

All hail, ye Lords of God-home, and ye Queens of the house of Gold!
 Hail, thou dear earth that bearest, and thou wealth of field and
 fold!
 Give us, your noble children, the glory of wisdom and speech,
 And the hearts and the hands of healing, and the mouths and the
 hands that teach.

This represents no possible sentiment of the mediaeval North."

The anonymous reviewer is evidently not familiar with Morris's sources.

doesn't reproduce the gnomic verses of *Sigrdrifumál*, but from what is said in *Götterdämmerung*, we may conclude that this teaching has taken place - although Siegfried, being Siegfried, has promptly forgotten it all. She tells him that she is only wise for his sake:

Was du nicht weißt,
Weiß ich für dich;
doch wissend bin ich
nur, weil ich dich liebe.
(*Siegfried*, Act III ll.6602-6604)

Later, she is afraid that her wisdom may vanish, but Siegfried reminds her that she previously said that her wisdom was a product of her love:

Brünnhilde. Mir schwirren die Sinne;
mein wissen schweigt;
soll mir die Weisheit schwinden?

Siegfried. Sangst du mir nicht,
dein Wissen sei
das Leuchten der Liebe zu mir?
(*Siegfried*, Act III ll.6707-6712)

In *Sigurd*, Brynhild expresses a similar idea:

I have spoken the words, beloved, to thy matchless glory and worth,
But thy heart to my heart hath been speaking, though my tongue hath
set it forth;
For I am she that loveth, and I know what thou wouldst teach
From the heart of thine unlearned wisdom, and I needs must speak thy
speech.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.143)

She then tells him of her antecedents and her family home, and invites him to visit her there; this is the first time she actually tells him what her name is:

Yet I bid thee look on the land 'twixt the wood and the silver sea
To the bight of the swirling river, and the house that cherished me!
There dwelleth my earthly sister and the king that she hath wed;
There morn by morn aforetime I woke on the golden bed;
There eve by eve I tarried mid the speech and the lays of kings,
There noon by noon I wandered and plucked the blossoming things;
The little land of Lymdale by the swirling river's side,
Where Brynhild once was I called in the days ere my father died;
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, pp.145-146)

2.8. Brynhild's family and background

Brynhild acquires a family in the course of the development of the legend (in the Norse source). In NL, she appears to have kinsmen - she leaves her country to her uncle when she leaves to marry Gunther. Only in Wagner is she Wotan's daughter; this isn't in any of the sources, but it is consistent with Wagner's dramatic purpose. It also makes the conflict between her and Wotan that much more poignant, as she is the person who is closest to him and means most to him. Also, as she says, it is the fact that she is so close to him that enables her to defy him. ⁵⁷

In VS, Sigurd goes to visit Brynhild's relatives. ⁵⁸ This chapter introduces Heimir as Brynhild's brother-in-law, but the next chapter has him as her foster-father; in fact the two roles are not necessarily incompatible in Norse society. It transpires that Brynhild is the daughter of Budli.

In Chapter 25 the Giukings are introduced, and then more is said about Brynhild's family, including the fact that Atli is her brother:

Now Budli was the name of a king mightier than Giuki, mighty though they both were; and Atli was the brother of Brynhild; Atli was a fierce man and a grim, great and black to look on, yet noble of mien withal, and the greatest of warriors.

(*Völsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, p.165)

The compiler of VS may have overlooked this when he has Brynhild foretell their future to Gudrun, although one would have thought that such a family relationship would be very important.

Brynhild answers; "I will arede thy dream, even as things shall come to pass hereafter; for Sigurd shall come to thee, even he whom I have chosen

⁵⁷ In *Sigurd*, Morris perhaps implies that there is a certain amount of hostility between Brynhild and Odin, or at any rate that she defied him several times before he finally cast her into her enchanted sleep.

⁵⁸ Forth Sigurd rides till he comes to a great and goodly dwelling, the lord whereof was a mighty chief called Heimir; he had to wife a sister of Brynhild, who was hight Bekkhild, because she had bidden at home, and learned handicraft, whereas Brynhild fared with helm and byrny unto the wars, wherefore was she called Brynhild.

(*Völsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, p.159)

for my well-beloved; and Grimhild shall give him mead mingled with hurtful things, which shall cast us all into mighty strife. Him shalt thou have, and him shalt thou quickly miss; and Atli the king shalt thou wed; and thy brethren shalt thou lose, and slay Atli withal in the end."
(Volsunga Saga, Morris's translation, pp.167-168)

For his marriage to Brynhild, Gunnar obtains the consent both of her father, Budli, and her foster-father, Heimir, though they both say that the final decision rests with Brynhild alone. Her father and brother are present at her wedding to Gunnar. After the quarrel with Gudrun, Brynhild tells Gunnar that her father, Budli, pressurised her into marriage.

Yea, at that time he led me apart, and asked me which I had chosen of those who were come; but I prayed him that I might be able to ward the land and be chief over the third part of his men; then were there two choices for me to deal betwixt, either that I should be wedded to him who he would, or lose all my weal and friendship at his hands; and he said withal that his friendship would be better to me than his wrath.
(Volsunga Saga, Morris's translation, p.181)

In *Sigurdarkviða in skamma*, however, as we noted above, it is Brynhild's brother, Atli, who pressurises her into marriage. In *Sigurd*, Brynhild's father, Budli, is already dead, but in VS he is still alive, to give his consent to his daughter's marriage to Gunnar. But he seems to fade out of the story after this.

In VS, it transpires that Sigurd and Brynhild have a daughter, Aslaug, who is fostered by Heimir. The story of Aslaug forms an appendix to VS; she later marries Ragnar Loðbrók. We don't hear anything more about her after Brynhild's marriage to Gunnar, however, and she is not mentioned in *Sigurd*.⁵⁹ After the murder of Sigurd, we are reminded again that Atli is Brynhild's brother, and before Brynhild dies she foretells the future to Gunnar; that Gudrun will reluctantly marry Atli, and also that Gunnar will wish to marry Oddrun, another sister whom Atli has acquired at a late stage in the development of the legend. This episode is not used by Morris, who adapts the second half of NL for the conclusion of *Sigurd*.

⁵⁹ One of the poems in Morris's *The Earthly Paradise* is *The Fostering of Aslaug*.

All branches of the legend establish Brynhild as a mortal woman; in VS she is chosen by Odin to be a Valkyrie, but defies him and is sent back by him to the world of mortals. In NL there is no connection with the gods - Brunhild is an amazon, her background is rather mysterious, and there are some indications that the poet may have known of the prior betrothal motif and decided not to use it. For instance, in the episode in which Siegfried and Gunther arrive on the wooing expedition, Brunhild assumes that Siegfried is the wooer, not Gunther, but Brunhild and Siegfried appear to dislike each other from the start. This may indicate that there is a background of a prior betrothal, giving Brunhild reason to dislike Siegfried for having betrayed her, or it may indicate that they just dislike each other.

VS gives Brynhild a family background. It is not clear whether this was an integral part of the work from the beginning, or whether it was tacked on as the legend developed. Kinship is in any case vital in VS - more important than marriage, it will transpire in the second half of the work. In NL, the situation is reversed - the tie of marriage turns out to be more important than that of kinship. It is probable that both Morris and Wagner decided to adapt NL rather than VS because they lived in a society which regarded the tie of marriage as more important than that of kinship - the avenging of a husband's death as more important than vengeance for a brother.

2.9. Identification of the Niblungs

Book III of *Sigurd - Brynhild* - is subtitled *In this book is told of the deeds of Sigurd, and of his sojourn with the Niblungs, and in the end of how he died.*

This does, of course, raise the question of identifying precisely who the Niblungs are, and this is by no means straightforward. For Morris, it is not too much of a problem, as he identifies them throughout with the Giukings (Wagner's Gibichungs more or less) - Gunnar, Hogni, Gudrun, the younger brother Gutthorm, their scheming mother Grimhild and their father Giuki:

And now of the Niblung people the tale beginneth to tell,
 How they deal with the wind and the weather, in the cloudy drift they
 dwell...

Now the king of this folk is Giuki , and he sits in the Niblung hall
 When the song of men goes roofward and the shields shine out from the
 wall;

And his queen in the high-seat sitteth, the woman overwise,
 Grimhild the kin of the god-folk, the wife of the glittering eyes;
 And his sons on each hand are sitting; there is Gunnar the great and fair,
 With the lovely face of a king 'twixt the night of his wavy hair;
 And there is the wise-heart Hogni; and his lips are close and thin,
 And grey and awful his eyen, and a many sights they win:
 And there is Guttorm; the youngest, of the fierce and wandering glance,
 And the heart that never resteth till the swords in the war-wind dance:
 And there is Gudrun his daughter, and light she stands by the board,
 And fair are her arms in the hall as the beaker's flood is poured;
 She comes, and the earls keep silence; she smiles, and men rejoice;
 She speaks, and the harps unsmitten thrill faint to her queenly voice.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung* , pp.148-149)

Here, the Giukings are the same as the Niblungs, and identification is constant throughout. In VS, however, the family are introduced without any mention of Niblungs:

There was a king hight Giuki, who ruled a realm south of the Rhine; three sons he had, thus named; Gunnar, Hogni, and Guttorm, and Gudrun was the name of his daughter, the fairest of maidens; and all these children were far before all other king's children in all prowess, and in goodliness and growth withal; ever were his sons at the wars and wrought many a deed of fame. But Giuki had wedded Grimhild the Wise-Wife.

Now Budli was the name of a king mightier than Giuki, mighty though they both were; and Atli was the brother of Brynhild; Atli was a fierce man and a grim, great and black to look on, yet noble of mien withal, and the greatest of warriors. Grimhild was a fierce-hearted woman.

Now the days of the Giukings bloomed fair, and chiefly because of those children, so far before the sons of men.

(*Volsunga Saga* , Morris's translation , p.165)

They are nowhere referred to as Niblungs or Niflungs - but Hogni does have a son called Niflung, who is instrumental in helping Gudrun to her revenge against Atli.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Now Hogni had a son left alive, hight Niblung, and great wrath of heart he bare against King Atli; and he did Gudrun to wit that he would avenge his father. And she took his words well, and they fell to counsel together thereover, and she said it would be great good hap if it might be brought about.

In *Brot af Sigur ar kvíða*, Brynhild at one point calls the Giukings "Niflung Kin".⁶¹ There are further references in *Atlakviða* and *Atlamáll* to the Niflungs, and to the Niflungs' treasure in *Atlakviða* - the identification of the Niflungs with the Giukings being constant throughout.⁶²

So on a night, when the king had drunken, she gat him to bed, and when he was laid asleep, thither to him came Gudrun and the son of Hogni. Gudrun took a sword and thrust it through the ^{breast} of King Atli, and they both of them set their hands to the deeds, both she and the son of Hogni.

Then Atli the king awoke with the wound, and cried out, "No need of binding or salving here! - who art thou who hast done the deed?"

Gudrun says, "Somewhat have I, Gudrun, wrought therein, and somewhat withal the son of Hogni."

(*Völsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, pp.222=223)

61 16. Hugða ek mér, Gunnar, svalt allt á sal, en þú, gramr, ráðir, fiðri fatlaðr	grimt í svefni, ætak sæing kalda, glaums adnvani, í fiónda lið ;
In dreams, O Gunnar, Dead-cold the hall was, And thou, lord, wert riding Laden with fetters,	grim things fell on me, and my bed was a-cold; reft of all bliss, 'mid the host of thy foemen.

svá mun þoll yðr afli gengin -	ætt Niflunga erod eiðrofa!
(So now all ye, Shall be brought to naught,	O House of the Niblungs, O ye oath-breakers!)
(Morris's translation.)	

62 <i>Atlakviða</i> Er und einom mér hodd Niflunga: Ey var mér tyia, nú er mér engi, Beholden in my heart That hoard of the Niblungs, Doubt threw me two ways But all that is gone,	øll um fòlgin lifira nú Hogni! með an vit tveir lif ðom, er ek einn lifik! is hidden for ever now Hogni is dead. while the twain of us lived, now I live on alone.
--	---

Rín skal ráða á svinn, áskunna —Éveltanda vatni heldr en høndom gull The great Rhine shall rule That gold of the Niblungs, In the weltering water Or it shine on the hands	rógmálmí skatna, arfi Niflunga lýsaz valbaugar! - skíni Húna bõrnóm! o'er the hate-raising treasure, the seed of the gods; shall that wealth lie a-gleaming, of the children of Huns!
(Morris's translation)	

In the *Prose Edda*, Snorri mentions that Niflungs is another name for the children of Giuki. The *Prose Edda* also refers to Niflheim - world of mist - and at some stage in the development of the different redactions of the legend, the Niflungs and/or Giukings became identified with the inhabitants of this shadowy realm - or vice versa. (Morris calls the Niblungs/Giukings the Cloudy People.)

In NL, Gunther, his brothers and Hagen (a vassal, not a brother) do not actually become the Nibelungs until Siegfried is dead. In the first part of the poem, the Nibelungs are Siegfried's followers, and not dwarves. Alberich is a dwarf, but he appears to be a vassal of the Nibelungs, rather than a relative, and transfers his allegiance to Siegfried in any case. Hagen gives the information, when Siegfried first arrives in Worms. ⁶³ Usually Siegfried is referred to as *der held ûz Nederlant*, but after his death, reference is made to *sine recken von Nibelunge lant*. It seems to become *Nibelunge lant* after Siegfried's death, and his followers are *die küenen Nibelungen*. Then, in Aventure 25, the Burgundians are referred to as Nibelungs - the Aventure is subtitled *Wie die Nibelunge zen Hiunen fuoren*. ⁶⁴ After this, in

Atlamá l.

Ut gekk hon sí ðan, - fóra fælt eygi - hvarf til Niflunga:	yp þ it lítt hur ðom ok fagnað c komnom, sá var hinzt kveðia
Then out did she go, All fearless she went To the Niflungs she went -	she flung open the doors, and the guests did she welcome; her last greeting it was -
þiørko þar gørðo, þat brú um allt annat svá kóðo Niflunga, skapa só 'n sverðom, hó gáru svá hl álma,	þeiri var við brugð it; er unno börn Giúka: með an sálfir lifð o, slitaz af brynior, sem þeim hugr dygði.
Full wide was the fame 'Twas the greatest of deeds Men say that the Niflungs, With their swords fought mightily, And helms did they hew,	of the battle they fought, of the sons of Giuki; while themselves were living, mail-coats they sundered, as their hearts were fearless.

(Translation by Henry Adams Bellows).

⁶³Aventure 3, Strophes 86-100.

64	1522.	Die snellen Burgonden dô wart in dem lande beidenthalp der berge swie dort ir volc getæte,	sich uz hüoben. ein michel uoben. weinde wîp und man. si fuoren vræliche dan.
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the second half of the poem, it is Gunther, his brothers, Hagen and all their followers who become the Nibelungs.⁶⁵

The historical background is not strictly relevant to our purposes, but it is interesting to look at it briefly. The main historical sources are examined by Ursula Dronke in her introduction to *Atlakvi a*, from which the following passages are of most immediate interest:

Gundaharius... ruled the Burgundians west of the Rhine for at least twenty-five years... the contemporary historian Olympiodorus mentions 'Guntiaros' as leader of the Burgundians who... supported the Gualish usurper Jovinus as emperor in 411. After the defeat (of Jovinus) the Burgundians were accorded by the Romans the right to settle in Gaul, on the Rhine. It was probably at this time that Gundaharius established the kingdom of Worms attributed to him in heroic legend. After the slaughter of Gundaharius and great numbers of his people by the Huns in 437, the remnant of the Burgundians west of the Rhine were given Savoy to settle in by the Romans... The memory of Gundaharius was kept alive by the Burgundians in their new place of settlement. In the Lex Burgundionum of Gundobad (c. 480-516) Gibicha, Gundomaris, Gislaharius and Gundaharius are cited as the ancestral kings of the Burgundians...

1523. Die Nibelunges helde
in tûsent halspergen.
vil manege schœne frouwen,
die Sîfrides wunden

kômen mit in dan
ze hûs si heten lâ n
die si gesahen nimmer mê
tâ ten Kriemhilde wê.

⁶⁵ In his introduction to his translation of NL (Penguin Classics, 1965), A.T. Hatto makes the following observations about the poet's use of the name; "Of all the names in the *Nibelungenlied*, the plural "Nibelungs" is used in two senses. Up to the end of Chapter 18, when Siegfried's father returns home after burying him, it is applied either to members of King Nibelung's dynasty or (more frequently) to the latter's vassals and men, whereas from Chapter 25 onwards until the end it is applied to the Burgundian warriors, except in the phrase 'the land of the Nibelungs'. Here it might seem possible to argue that the Burgundians have taken the name together with the Nibelung treasure; but this will not do, since there is no intimate symbolic link between the Burgundians and the treasure, either in the form of a curse or in any other way than by tenacious possession. (The acquisition of the Nibelung treasure was in no wise a turning-point in the lives of the Burgundians, even though Kriemhild, in our author's ambiguous fashion, seems to make it a matter of Hagen's life and death at the end.) Moreover there are still Nibelungs in Nibelungenland who are the deadly enemies of the Burgundians, the murderers of their lord Siegfried. It is therefore not surprising that the poet succeeded in confusing himself in his use of the name of 'Nibelung' on more than one occasion."

(A.T. Hatto, *Das Nibelungenlied*, Introduction to a second reading, pp.301-302)

Niblung appears to have been a personal or family name among the Burgundians... In the eighth and ninth centuries Nibelunc is recorded as a personal name in Frankish families.

(Ursula Dronke ; *The Poetic Edda*, Vol.1, pp.31-32)

The historical background is not of central relevance, certainly not to Morris, who was not particularly interested in the historical reality out of which the legend grew. It is of some relevance to Wagner, however, who had his own idiosyncratic interpretation of the historical reality, as we shall shortly discover.

The foregoing has established that, in all the Norse literature, the Niblungs or Niflungs are identified with the Giukings, and not with a race of dwarves who fraudulently obtain a treasure - this is unique to Wagner, who has interpreted his sources in a different way. In his essay *Die Wibelungen*, Wagner uses a somewhat forced folk-etymology to identify the Nibelungs with the Ghibellines (descendants of Charlemagne). This idea was not entirely original to Wagner, but had already been mooted in 1816 by K.W. Götting in his *Nibelungen und Gibellinen* (1816):

Ihm [dem Verfasser] sind die Nibelungen nicht ein besonderes Geschlecht, sondern die Könige, welche ein Streben beseelt, das nämlich für den weltlichen Hort. ⁶⁶

I quote here some examples of Wagner's train of thought:

... Unbestritten ist die Sage von den Nibelungen das Erbeigenthum des fränkischen Stammes. Dem Forscher ist erwiesen, daß der Urgrund auch dieser Sage religiös-mythischer Natur ist; ihre tiefste Bedeutung des Mythos, in welcher wir Siegfried als Licht- oder Sonnengott zu erkennen haben, wollen wir für jetzt absehen; zur vorläufigen Hindeutung auf seinen Zusammenhang mit der Geschichte, gedenken wir der Sage hier erst von da an, wo sie das menschlichere Gewand des Urheldenthumes umwirft. Hier erkennen wir Siegfried, wie er den Hort der Nibelungen und durch ihn unermessliche Macht gewinnt. Dieser Hort, und die in ihm liegende Macht, bleibt der Kern, zu dem sich alle weitere Gestaltung der Sage wie zu ihrem unverrückbaren Mittelpunkte verhält; alles Streben und alles Ringen geht nach diesem Horte der Nibelungen, als dem Inbegriff aller irdischen Macht, und wer ihn besitzt, wer durch ihm gebietet, ist oder wird Nibelung.
(*Die Wibelungen* ; *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. III, p.119)

...Von den deutschen Völkern von jeher für jenes wunderbare... fränkische Königsgeschlecht ein Name bekannt war, den wir endlich in italienischer

⁶⁶ See Mary Thorp , *The Study of the Nibelungenlied* (Oxford , 1940)

Entstellung als Ghibelini wiederfinden. Daß dieser Name nicht nur die Hohenstaufen in Italien, sondern in Deutschland schon deren Vorgänger, die fränkischen Kaiser bezeichnete, ist durch Otto von Freisingen historisch bezeugt ; die zu seiner Zeit in Oberdeutschland geläufige Form dieses Namens war Wibelungen oder Wibelingen. Diese Benennung trafe nun vollständig mit dem Namen der Haupthelden der urfränkischen Stammsage, sowie mit dem bei den Franken nachweislich häufigen Familiennamen, Nibelung, überein, wenn die Veränderung des Anfangbuchstabens N in W erklärt würde. Die linguistische Schwierigkeit dieser Erklärung löst sich mit Leichtigkeit, sobald wir eben den Ursprung jener Buchstabenverwechslung richtig erwägen; dieser lag im Volksmunde, welcher sich die Namen der beiden streitenden Parteien der Welfen und Nibelungen nach der, der deutschen Sprache inwohnenden Neigung zum Stabreime geläufig machte...

(*ibid.*)

... Im religiösen Mythos der Skandinavien ist uns die Benennung; Nifelheim, d.i. Nibel-Nebelheim, zur Bezeichnung des (unterirdischen) Aufenthaltes der Nachgeister, "Schwarzalben", im Gegensatz zu dem himmlischen Wohnorte der "Asen" und "Lichtalben", aufbewahrt worden. Diese Schwarzalben, "Niflungar", Kinder der Nacht und des Todes, durchwühlen die Erde, finden ihre inneren Schätze, schmelzen und schmieden die Erze; goldener Schmuck und scharfe Waffen sind ihr Werk. Den Namen der "Nibelungen", ihre Schätze, Waffen und Kleinode, finden wir nun in der fränkischen Stammsage wieder, und zwar mit dem Vorzuge, daß die, ursprünglich allen deutschen Stämmen gemeinschaftliche Vorstellung davon, in ihr zu sittliche Bedeutung geschichtlich sich ausgebildet hat.

(*ibid.*)

In Der Nibelungen-Mythos als Entwurf zu einem Drama, the identification of the Nibelungs with the Ghibellines is not sustained - they resemble much more closely the dwarves of Norse legend, although it is not explicitly stated that they are dwarves.⁶⁷ The first paragraph of Der Nibelungen-Mythos introduces the Nibelungs thus:

Dem Schooße der Nacht und des Todes entkeimte ein Geschlecht, welches in Nibelheim (Nebelheim), d.i. in unterirdischen düsteren Klüften und Höhlen wohnt; sie heißen Nibelungen; in unsteter, rastloser Regsamkeit durchwühlen sie (gleich Würmen im toten Körper) die Eingeweide der Erde; sie glühen, läutern und schmieden die harten Metalle.

⁶⁷Incidentally, dwarf doesn't always, or even necessarily, mean a person small of stature - it nearly always implies someone skilled in metalwork, and in Norse legend this seems in fact to be the primary meaning.

From the foregoing, therefore, it would seem that we can conclude that Wagner's decision to identify the Niblungs with the dwarves who once owned (or fraudulently obtained) a treasure is his own original concept. It is based on a somewhat strained etymology, but this need not detain us, as the etymology suited his dramatic purpose.

To establish the family relationships of the Gibichungs and the Nibelungs in *Götterdämmerung*, Wagner drew on both NL and the Norse sources, including *Thidreks Saga*. Hagen is the half-brother of Gunther and Gutrune, his father being Alberich, who bought the favours of Grimhild. Grimhild never appears in the *Ring*, but references to her establish her as a formidable character, while in VS and PE she has some claim to be considered the villain of the piece. It is she who drugs Sigurd into forgetting Brynhild, and she who forces the reluctant Gudrun into a second marriage with Atli. In *Götterdämmerung* we can assume that Grimhild is dead, by the time we are introduced to Gunther, Gutrune and Hagen - but in *Sigurd* she is very much alive. ⁶⁸

Each source tells a somewhat different story about who is related to whom, and what part they play in the tragedy. Morris, as usual, remains close to VS/PE, whereas Wagner amalgamates the various sources to provide the dramatic scenario he needs. Some information about Wagner's Gibichungs comes from TS, e.g. Hagen's (Hogni's) parentage. ⁶⁹

⁶⁸ See Chapter VIII

⁶⁹ There was a king called Aldrian, who ruled over Niflungaland ... One day it happened, when the king was absent from home, that [the queen] fell asleep in the garden. A man came and lay with her. As she awoke, she thought it was King Aldrian, but before she could be sure, the man vanished.

After a while, the queen realised that she was pregnant. Before the birth, when she was once more on her own, it happened that the same man appeared and told her what had happened at their first meeting. The child she was expecting was his, and he was an elf.

"If the child grows to manhood, tell him who his father is, but conceal my identity from everybody else. I foretell that it will be a boy. Whenever he's in such straits that he can't save himself, let him call on his father. He will be there if he's needed."

Then the elf vanished like a shadow. And after a while the queen gave birth to a baby boy, whom she named Hogni, and he was considered to be the son of King Aldrian.

In NL, Hagen is not a brother, but a kinsman and a vassal. He is continually hostile to Siegfried, and this is something that Wagner takes over into *Götterdämmerung* - with, however, a shift of emphasis. In *Götterdämmerung*, he plans from the outset to separate Siegfried and Brünnhilde, and marry them off respectively to Guttrune and Gunther, in order to get hold of the Ring. This is not Hagen's plan in NL - he becomes interested in Siegfried's treasure after the quarrel between the queens, and more particularly after Siegfried's death, but this is principally to stop Kriemhild from using it, as he has it sunk in the Rhine. In NL and TS, Hagen is to a large extent motivated by a sense of loyalty to Brunhild, as the wife of his feudal overlord; we need not interpret this as insincere, although it is true that he uses the quarrel as an excuse to get rid of Siegfried, and that he had shown some hostility to Brunhild on the wooing expedition, as had his brother Dankwart, saying that her pride should be humbled.⁷⁰ Siegfried expresses himself in a similar vein about Brunhild's pride, but the hostility between Siegfried and Brunhild persists throughout the first half of the poem, and is the main cause of Siegfried's death.

In *Götterdämmerung*, Hagen claims to be acting on Brünnhilde's behalf, but he has an ulterior motive; nevertheless, some of the attitudes he strikes are borrowed from NL. He reminds the vassals of their duty to avenge Brünnhilde if she suffers any affront:

...King Aldrian had three sons and one daughter. The eldest son was Gunnar, the second Gernoz and the third Giselher; he was still a child when these events took place. Their sister was called Grimhild.

After King Aldrian's death, his son Gunnar took over the kingdom.

70 445. Daz wizzet sicherlîchen, si soldenz wol bewarn.
 und het ich tûsent eide ze einem vride geswarn,
 ê daz ich sterben sâhe den lieben herren mîn,
 jâ müese den lip verliesen daz vil schœne magedin.

446. "Wir solden ungevungen wol rumen diz lant",
 sprach dâ sin bruoder Hagene, "unt heten wir daz gewant
 daz wir ze nôt bedurfen und ouch diu swert vil guot,
 sô wurde wol gesenftet der frouwn übermuot."

Hold seid der Herrin,
 helfet ihr treu;
 traf sie ein Leid,
 rasch seid zur Rache!
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act II 11.7991-7994)

During the quarrel in Act 2, Hagen is quick to turn the situation to his advantage, by encouraging Brünnhilde's anger, and again reminding the vassals of their duty to her:

Jetzt merket klug
 was die Frau euch klagt!
 Brünnhild', kühne Frau,
 kennst du genau den Ring?
 Ist er's, den du Gunthern gabst,
 so ist er sein,
 und Siegfried gewann ihn durch Trug,
 den der Treulose büßen sollt'!
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act II, 11.8065-8070)

It is not true Brünnhilde "gave" Gunther the Ring, since Siegfried, in the guise of Gunther, tore it from her finger, but this is the situation as Hagen desires the bystanders to see it.

In NL, it is Hagen rather than Gunther who takes Brunhild's part, as Gunther is unable to do this with any degree of sincerity. It is Hagen who promises to avenge her shame.⁷¹ He uses the argument about gaining wealth and power by Siegfried's death to convince Gunther, but the way the poet narrates the story may imply that this is a secondary consideration, used more because Gunther is likely to be convinced by such an argument than because Hagen himself has any particular interest in Siegfried's wealth. This is not to say, however, that Hagen is not hostile to Siegfried in NL; on the contrary, the indications are that they always disliked each other. But then, Siegfried went out of his way to antagonise people when he first arrived in Worms, by issuing a

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864 Er vragete waz ir wære weinende er si vant.
 dô sagte si im diu mære. er lobte ir sâ zehant
 daz ez erarnen müese der Kriemhilde man,
 oder er wolde nimmer dar umbe vrælich gestân.

completely unmotivated challenge to Gunther. Wagner softens this approach by having Siegfried offer Gunther the choice:

Dich hört' ich rühmen
 weit am Rhein -
 nun ficht mit mir,
 oder sei mein Freund!
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act I, ll.7277-7280)

Just why Gunther should be expected to fight in the first place is not clear. It is possible that the contemporary audience of NL regarded Siegfried's behaviour as acceptable, but the text seems to indicate that in fact Siegfried's irruption into the ordered society of Worms is not acceptable, and Hagen and his nephew Ortwin von Metz are more offended by it than Gunther and his brothers.⁷² In NL, therefore, there is hostility between Hagen and Siegfried from the beginning. In *Götterdämmerung* Hagen is hostile to Siegfried, but for a reason which has nothing to do with codes of correct behaviour in feudal society.

In the Norse literature, which Morris followed, the situation is different. Hogni is a full brother, and he is more hostile to Brynhild than to Sigurd - he advises against the murder of Sigurd, though he doesn't actually try to prevent it; whereas in NL and TS, which Wagner followed, Hagen is the perpetrator.

⁷² See Chapter IX for further discussion of Hagen's role in NL

2.10 Gudrun's dream

Now, having devoted considerable space to identifying the Niblungs (or failing to identify them), we can return to Book III of *Sigurd*. Not all of this finds exact, or even tenuous parallels in the *Ring*, but of course the central episode - the deception of Brynhild - will need to be examined in considerable detail.

The Gudrun of the Norse literature and of Morris's poem is a far more positive, forceful character than Wagner's Guttrune, who seems scarcely to exist as a person in her own right. We will recall that Wagner discarded the episode of the quarrel between the women (although he uses it in *Lohengrin*), and at least one reason may have been that his Guttrune is far too ineffectual to quarrel with anyone. At the end of *Götterdämmerung*, she simply collapses.

In *Sigurd*, Gudrun is introduced when she tells the dreams she had the previous night. In VS, Gudrun first relates only the positive aspects of her dreams, and they are interpreted favourably - but she is worried, and decides to ask Brynhild to interpret them. She dreams that she had a beautiful hawk that she prized above all else; her companion interprets this as meaning that she will soon win a husband whom she will love very much, but Gudrun decides she needs further information, which she can get from Brynhild. She tells Brynhild another dream, in greater detail, including its unfavourable outcome.

“This I dreamed,” said Gudrun, “that we went, a many of us in company, from the bower, and we saw an exceeding great hart, that far excelled all other deer ever seen, and the hair of him was golden; and this deer we were all fain to take, but I alone got him; and he seemed to me better than all things else; but sithence thou, Brynhild, didst shoot and slay my deer even at my very knees, and such grief was that to me that scarce might I bear it; and then afterwards thou gavest me a wolf-cub, which besprinkled me with the blood of my brethren,

(*Völsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, p.167)

Brynhild interprets the dream by prophesying exactly what will happen later between herself, Sigurd and Gudrun, and what Gudrun's future will be. There is a corresponding episode in NL, in which Kriemhild's mother Uote interprets her daughter's dream as a prophecy that the man she will fall in love with and marry is

destined to come to an untimely end. Kriemhild at this stage doesn't want to know about love and marriage.

This is all omitted by Wagner, but Morris elaborates upon it in considerable detail. In both VS and NL, Gudrun dreams of a falcon.⁷³ As in VS, Morris's Gudrun only tells the unhappy outcome of her dream to Brynhild, while to her old nurse she only tells the good part and the old woman, not unnaturally, interprets the dream favourably:

Meseems I sat by the door of the hall of the Niblungs' bliss,
And from out of the north came a falcon, and a marvellous bird it was;
For his feathers were all of gold, and his eyes as the sunlit glass,
And hither and thither he flew about the kingdoms of Kings,
And the fear of men went with him, and the war-blast under his
 wings
But I feared him never a deal, nay, hope came into my heart
And meseemed in his war-bold ways I also had a part;
And my eyes still followed his wings as hither and thither he swept
O'er the doors and the dwellings of King-folk; till the heart within me
 leapt,
For over the hall of the Niblungs he hung a little space,
Then stooped to my very knees, and cried out kind in my face:
And fain and full was my heart, and I took him to my breast.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.150)

Unlike Kriemhild in NL, who tells her mother the whole dream, including its unhappy outcome, Grimhild is reluctant to tell the dream to her mother, for this reason:

Wise too is my mother Grimhild, but I fear her guileful mood,
Lest she love me overmuch, and fashion all dreams to ill.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.151)

Grimhild has already been introduced as *the woman otherwise, Grimhild the kin of the god-folk, the wife of the glittering eyes*. Morris develops the theme of Grimhild as ambitious and scheming - she intends the best for her family, but, as we shall see, she brings about their downfall. Significantly, at this early stage in the proceedings, Gudrun is unwilling to discuss her dreams with Grimhild, Lest she love me overmuch - i.e. lest her ambition for her family should overreach itself - which it does, later in the poem. Gudrun decides to visit Brynhild, who will interpret

⁷³ A fairly common symbol in mediæval literature.

her dream correctly. Although the language of *Sigurd* is much more elaborate than VS, Brynhild is actually somewhat evasive about her interpretation of Gudrun's dream in the poem, whereas in VS she is blunt and to the point. Gudrun first of all relates her falcon dream, and Brynhild interprets it favourably, until Gudrun adds :

..... "Not yet hast thou hearkened all;
 For meseemed my breast was reddened, as oft by the purple and pall,
 But my heart was heavy within it, and I laid my hand thereon,
 And the purple of blood enwrapped me, and the falcon I loved was gone.
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.155)

Although it is not possible to interpret this part of the dream favourably, Brynhild nevertheless exhorts Gudrun to be happy, because there are worse fates which could have been hers. Gudrun then goes on to relate her second dream - this time of a hart from the forest, with whom she found peace for a while, until

Then darkened all the heavens and dreary grew the tide,
 And medreamed that a queen I knew not was sitting by my side,
 And from out of the din and the darkness, a hand and an arm there
 came,
 And a golden sleeve was upon it, and red rings of the Queen-folk's
 fame,
 And the hand was the hand of a woman; and there came a sword and a
 thrust,
 And the blood of the lovely wood-deer went wide about the dust.
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.156)

Brynhild interprets the dream cryptically; it appears that she knows that the woman in Gudrun's dream is herself, but she is not going to tell Gudrun that:

Thy dream is all aareded; I may tell thee nothing more.....

For the rest, thou mayst not be lonely in thy welfare or thy woe,
 But hearts with thine heart shall be tangled; but the queen and the hand
 thou shalt know
 When we twain are wise together....
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.157)

Even a reader unfamiliar with the legend could probably deduce that Brynhild herself is the queen of Gudrun's second dream, but this information is not available to Gudrun.

2.11. Sigurd and Brynhild in Lymdale

In the next section - *How the folk of Lymdale met Sigurd the Volsung in the woodland*- Sigurd goes to spend some time with Brynhild and her family. Morris makes this into a time of idyllic peace and rest for Sigurd and Brynhild. There are indications of Morris's vision of an ideal society - from the days before he became a Socialist. ⁷⁴

And all these lived in joyance through the good days and the ill,
Nor would shun the war's awaking; but now that the war was still,
They looked to the wethers' fleeces and what the ewes would yield,
And led their bulls from the straw-stall, and drave their kine afield.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.158)

When their land is at peace, the people of Lymdale go hunting. Morris appears to have based his description of hunting on scenes in the medieval romance rather than the medieval epic, and just possibly on depictions in medieval or Renaissance textile art rather than in literature. The episode also contains elements of pastoral:

Till at last in the noon they tarry in a daisied wood-lawn green,
And good and gay is their raiment, and their spears are sharp and
shcen,
And they crown themselves with the oak-leaves, and sit, both most and
least,
And there on the forest vension and the ancient wine they feast;
There they wattle the twigs of the thicket to bear their spoil away,

⁷⁴ Linda Anne Julian, in *William Morris : the Icelandic influence on his writing* (Ph.D. Boston, 1989) suggests that "Sigurd... was first and foremost a symbolic and socialist statement and secondly, though importantly, a story. " (p.117) However, although within the poem Sigurd is known as a fighter for freedom and justice, Morris's explicitly socialist writings all date from the period after Sigurd; the concepts of social relations and ideal societies expressed in Sigurd are more in line with Victorian philanthropy than with socialist ideas. The concluding observation in Jürgen Kühnel's *Zu William Morris' Epos "The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs."* in *Mittelalter-Rezeption II ,Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 358*, is closer to the mark: "Hierin so etwas wie die Formulierung einer Kapitalismuskritik sehen zu wollen, wäre sicher eine Überinterpretation. Die 'l'art pour l'art' - Welt des Morris'chen Epos in ihrer Geschlossenheit erlaubt es nicht, direkte Bezüge zur außerliterarischen Wirklichkeit herzustellen. "(p.468)

And the toughness of the beech-boughs with the woodbine overlay;
 With the voice of their merry labour the hall of the oakwood rings,
 For fair they are and joyous as the first God-fashioned Kings.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.159)

This idyllic episode has no direct parallel in Wagner, and in comparison with Morris's version, the chapters in VS on which it is based seem somewhat perfunctory. The episode is a time of peace and tranquillity for Sigurd and Brynhild before they are again caught up in the web of Fate - and the web of destruction which Grimhild weaves for them. The reunion of Sigurd and Brynhild is an occasion of peace and happiness for them both; they have no foreboding of doom, and do not feel that they are destined to part, whereas in VS, Brynhild actually foretells that Sigurd will marry Gudrun.⁷⁵

Brynhild and Sigurd swear oaths of loyalty to each other, and the Saga says that Sigurd gave Brynhild a gold ring. It is not specified at this stage what ring he gave her; it is only later, when he returns disguised as Gunnar, that it transpires that it was the ring he had taken from Fafnir's hoard. We have already devoted some space to discussing the identity of the Ring - it should be added here that Morris's Sigurd had already given Brynhild Andvari's ring at their first meeting, on Hindfell:

From his hand then draweth Sigurd Andvari's ancient Gold;
 There is nought but the sky above them as the ring together they
 hold,
 The shapen ancient token, that hath no change nor end,
 No change, and no beginning, no flaw for God to mend.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.146)

The ring in this context seems not to be cursed, or not any more, but is a symbol of eternity, continuity and love. Sigurd does know of the curse, since Regin has told him of it, but he treats it as irrelevant, and it is possible that it lost its power when Sigurd gained possession of the treasure. But in Wagner's *Ring* the curse turns out to have lost none of its power when Siegfried obtains the Ring, although Wotan hopes for this. When Siegfried gives it to Brünnhilde, he intends it as a wedding ring, but when he

⁷⁵ Brynhildr svarar; "Ek mun kanna lið hermanna, en þú munt eiga Guðrunu Giukadottur. Brynhild answers; I shall gaze on the hosts of the war-kings, but thou shalt wed Gudrun, the daughter of Giuki. (*Vølsunga Saga* , Morris's translation, p.163)

later seizes it from her, it precipitates his downfall; the curse cannot be undone merely by good intentions.

For our purposes, it is important to note that Morris is somewhat clearer about the identity of Brynhild's ring than is his source. VS merely states that Sigurd gave Brynhild a ring, and only later specifies which ring it was. It is, of course, vital for the development of the plot that a ring should have been taken, in order for it to be flaunted later during the quarrel between the women.

2.12. Sigurd visits the Niblungs

Grimhild's potion

The parallel episode in *Götterdämmerung*

After the pastoral interlude, Sigurd takes his leave of the people of Lymdale and rides to the land of the Niblungs. It is not clear - either in VS or Morris - whether this is purpose or chance, but we should note that it has been foretold by Gripir. (It should also be borne in mind that *Gripispá* is probably a late addition to PE.)

The contrast between Lymdale and the home of the Niblungs is apparent in the way Sigurd is welcomed, first by Heimir (Brynhild's foster-father), then by Giuki. Both offer hospitality, saying that they hope Sigurd comes in peace rather than with hostile intent. They stress that they don't fear him if his intent is hostile, but Heimir lays more emphasis on the peaceful nature of his land and his people, and his own preference for peace now that he is old:

...Now soon shall the deeds befall,
And tonight shalt thou ride to Lymdale and tonight shalt thou bide in my
hall;
For I am the ancient Heimir, and my cunning is of the harp,
Though erst have I dealt in the sword play while the edge of war was sharp.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 161)

Giuki's offer of hospitality, on the other hand, stresses the war-like nature of his people:

.... For unto the Niblungs' home
And the heart of a war-fain people from the weary road are ye come;
And I am Giuki the King; so now if thou nam'st thee a God
Look not to see me tremble; for I know of such that have trod

Unfeared in the Burg of the Niblungs...
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.174)

The narrator indicates that Sigurd fights to right wrongs and punish injustice:

The song of the fair-speech-masters goes up in the Niblung hall,
And they sing of the golden Sigurd and the face without a foe,
And the lowly man exalted and the mighty brought alow;
And they say, when the sun of summer shall come aback to the land,
It shall shine on the fields of the tiller that fears no heavy hand,
Then the sheaf shall be for the plougher, and the loaf for him that
 sowed,
Through every furrowed acre where the son of Sigmund rode.

In *Sigurd*, Gudrun falls in love with Sigurd long before Grimhild's intervention. This is perhaps more psychologically convincing than the corresponding episode in VS, and it is certainly more in accord with nineteenth-century views on love and marriage. (Though it is as well to recall that, in NL, Siegfried falls in love with Kriemhild before he has even seen her - he falls in love with her reputation.) Sigurd treats Gudrun with courtesy, but his thoughts are all of Brynhild; indeed, when he first arrives at the home of the Niblungs, he is reminded of her:

And he looked to the cloudy hall-roof, and anigh seemed Odin the Goth,
And the Valkyrs holding the garland, and the crown of love and of troth;
And his soul swells up exalted, and he deems that high above,
 In the glorious house of the heavens, are the outstretched hands of his
 love;
And she stoops to the cloudy feast-hall, and the wavering wind is her voice,
And her odorous breath floats round him, as she bids her king rejoice.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.175)

Sigurd sees this time with the Niblungs as an interlude of action and adventure before he returns to Brynhild in Lymdale:

 ... and he thinks the time is long
Till the dawning of love's summer from the cloudy days of wrong.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.181)

Gudrun realises that her love for Sigurd is hopeless - the narrator's expression of grief for her perhaps also foreshadows the grief that will follow when Sigurd is tricked into marrying her:

Woe worth the while for her sorrow, and her hope of life forlorn!
 Woe worth the while for her loving, and the day that she was born!
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.184) ⁷⁶

Grimhild decides to detach Sigurd from Brynhild and marry him to her daughter as a way of gaining glory for her family. In the episode of VS on which this is based, Grimhild notices how Sigurd loves Brynhild, though no-one else seems to. Her action does not stem from malice, but to some extent even from goodwill, or at least a desire to gain advantage for her family. ⁷⁷ One problem with this occurs at the end of the chapter, namely, that there seems to be no reason why Grimhild should suggest that Gunnar marry Brynhild; she could suggest any woman, it doesn't necessarily have to be Brynhild. The reader is left with the impression that the compiler of VS knew that this was the next stage of the plot, and therefore had to put it in somewhere, but its motivation is lacking.

The whole episode is made by Morris into a traumatic crisis in Sigurd's life, and the poem concentrates on the change in Sigurd's personality. In *Götterdämmerung*, Siegfried does not undergo a personality change to anything like the same extent, because it is rather the point that he remains the same brash youth that he always was, never experiencing any noticeable inner development. In *Sigurd*, after drinking Grimhild's potion, Sigurd rides blindly to "the burg of Brynhild". It is not

⁷⁶Just possibly a reminiscence of Kriemhild in NL, of whom it is said *dar umbe muosen degene vil verliesen den lîp*. The lines do not just refer to Gudrun's own sorrow, but the sorrow which she will cause.

⁷⁷ But Grimhild finds how heartily Sigurd loved Brynhild, and how oft he talks of her; and she falls to thinking how well it were, if he might abide there and wed the daughter of King Giuki, for she saw that none might come anigh to his goodliness, and what faith and goodhelp there was in him, and how that he had more wealth withal than folk might tell of any man; and the king did to him even as unto his own sons, and they for their parts held him of more worth than themselves.

(*Volsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, p.170)

clear from the context whether this is Lymdale or Hindfell, but it turns out later, when Sigurd woos Brynhild on behalf of Gunnar, that it is Lymdale significantly, it is now the Waste of Lymdale, where previously Lymdale was an idyllic pastoral landscape; the same evil that blighted Sigurd's life also blighted Brynhild's, and even blighted the countryside in which she lived:

Men say that a little after the evil of that night
All waste is the burg of Brynhild, and there springeth a marvellous
light

On the desert hard by Lymdale, and few men know for why;
But there are, who say that a wildfire thence roareth up to the sky
Round a glorious golden dwelling, wherein there sitteth a Queen
In remembrance of the wakening, and the slumber that hath been;
Wherein a Maid there sitteth, who knows not hope nor rest
For remembrance of the Mighty, and the Best come forth from the
Best

(Sigurd the Volsung, p.189)

Sigurd realises that something is wrong, and that the happiness and security he once experienced has somehow been blighted:

But he looked to the right and the left, and he knew there was ruin and
lack,
And the death of yestereven, and the days that should never come back;
And he strove, but nought he remembered of the matters that he would,
Save that great was the flood of sorrow that had drowned his days of good.
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.193)

Morris relates the seasons of the year to what happens in peoples' minds, or to their actions - Sigurd drinks the potion and marries Gudrun in the autumn:

Now therein, mid the yellowing leafage, and the golden blossoms spent,
Alone and lovely and eager the white-armed Gudrun went.
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.196)

Gudrun shows the same lack of confidence in herself as Wagner's Guttrune:

And now in the morn she trembleth; for her love is blent with fear;
And wonder is all around her, for she deemed till yestereve,
When she saw the earls astonied, and the golden Sigurd; grieve,
That on some most mighty woman his joyful love was set.,
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.196)

This resembles Gutrune's expression of self-deprecation in *Götterdämmerung*:

Du Spötter, böser Hagen!
 Wie sollt' ich Siegfried binden?
 Ist er der herrlichste Held der Welt,
 der Erde holdesten Frauen
 friedeten längst ihn schon.
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act I, ll.7228-7233)

Morris's poem emphasises the fact that Sigurd never smiles again after partaking of Grimhild's potion:

Yet no smile there came to Sigurd, and his lips no laughter had;
 But he seemed a king o'er mighty, who hath won the earthly crown,
 In whose hand the world is lying, who no more heedeth renown.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.193)

In the parallel episode in *Götterdämmerung*, there is less emphasis on the psychological effect on Siegfried - and the motivation, of course, is different, as it is all part of Hagen's plan to obtain the Ring. Hagen starts by awakening Gunther's interest in Brünnhilde, considerately reminding him at the same time that he will not be able to brave the flames; this is only for Siegfried :

<u>Gunther.</u>	Vermag das mein Mut zu besteh'n?
<u>Hagen.</u>	Einem stärk'ren noch ist's nur bestimmt!
<u>Gunther</u>	Wer ist der streitlichste Mann?
<u>Hagen</u>	Siegfried, der Wälsungen Sproß, der ist's, der stärkste Held! Ein Zwillingsspaar, von Liebe bezwungen, Siegmund und Sieglinde, zeugten den echten Sohn. Der im Walde mächtig erwuchs - den wünsch' ich Gutrun' zum Mann. (<i>Götterdämmerung</i> , Act I, ll.7189-7199)

Gutrune is even more self-deprecating than Gunther, which makes it all the easier for Hagen to involve them both in the deception of Siegfried and Brünnhilde. They are rather helpless, weak characters - how far this excuses their perfect readiness to enter upon a scheme of deception and betrayal must remain open to question. They are ready to fall in with Hagen's plans for them, rather than trusting to their own merits, which

they in any case haven't got; at least, though, neither of them is deceived about this - Gunther about the extent of his courage, nor Gutrune about the extent of her charms.

Siegfried is a guileless innocent (having, of course, forgotten all the wisdom that Brünnhilde taught him), and so is easily caught in the web of deception woven by Hagen - and by Gunther and Gutrune, who are by no means innocent, though undoubtedly weak-willed. Everything in this scene occurs with the utmost brevity and despatch, in spite of Wagner's reputation for being long-winded. There is a fairly empty exchange of courtesies between Siegfried and Gunther, while Gutrune disappears to prepare the potion, and Hagen tells Siegfried what the Tarnhelm is for (he can use it to deceive people). Siegfried also guilelessly lets slip the information that he took a Ring from Fafner's hoard, which is held by a noble woman - whom Hagen immediately, and correctly, guesses to be Brünnhilde. Hagen works cleverly on Gutrune's emotions, so that she fancies herself in love with Siegfried before even seeing him. He says to her:

Gedenk' des Trankes im Schrein -
 vertraue mir, der ihn gewann!
 Den Helden, dess' du verlangst,
 bindet er liebend an dich!
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act I; ll.7234-7236)

There hasn't been any suggestion, up to this point, that Gutrune longs for Siegfried, just that Hagen wants her to long for him, which she obligingly does.

Siegfried doesn't suspect anything wrong - why should he? - when he accepts the drinking horn from Gutrune. It is an unbearably poignant moment when he first addresses the absent Brünnhilde:

Vergäß' ich alles, was du mir gabst,
 von einer Lehre lass' ich doch nie -
 den ersten Trunk zu treuer Minne
 Brünnhilde, bring' ich Dir!
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act I ; ll.7356-7360)

Then the twist in the music demonstrates what is happening in Siegfried's mind. But it isn't as traumatic for Wagner's Siegfried as it is for Morris's Sigurd - it is really rather

a simple case of "off with the old, on with the new". Although when Gunther describes Brünnhilde's fire-girt rock Siegfried does have some vague feeling that he ought to remember *something*, even this vague memory soon fades, and he is planning the details of the deception with Gunther, with whom he swears blood-brotherhood. The potion, of course, has obliterated the memory of the oaths of loyalty he swore to Brünnhilde, which are now superseded in his mind by the oath of blood-brotherhood he has just sworn to Gunther.

So off they go on their treacherous wooing expedition. In fact, they are just pawns in Hagen's schemes, as he makes clear:

Gibichs Sohne wehet der Wind,
auf Werben fährt er dahin.
Ihm führt das Steuer ein starker Held,
Gefahr ihm will er bestehn.
Die eig'ne Braut ihm bringt er zum Rhein;
mir aber bringt er den Ring!
Ihr freien Söhne, frohe Gesellen,
segelt nur lustig dahin!
Dünkt er euch niedrig, ihr dient ihm doch,
des Niblungen Sohn.
(Götterdämmerung, Act I ; ll.7437-7446)

2.13. Siegfried/Sigurd woos Brünnhilde/Brynhild for Gunther/Gunnar

Wagner's chief source for this episode is NL, at least to the extent that he found in NL the idea that it is necessary *at the outset* to deceive Brünnhilde. Gunther's first question to Siegfried is *Wie willst du sie täuschen?* As Siegfried is now, thanks to Hagen, acquainted with the properties of the Tarnhelm, he is able to reply that he will use it to carry out the deception that they all agree to be necessary. Wagner follows NL in making Gunther's wooing of Brünnhilde from the start a matter of treachery and betrayal, though the motivation, of course, is different - no-one is acting independently, of his own volition, both Gunther and Siegfried are acting in accordance with Hagen's plans for them. Wagner also draws from NL the idea that Gunther is not capable of subduing Brünnhilde himself (and their attitude is indeed that it is necessary to subdue her; as we shall see, the wooing is strikingly lacking in the most elementary forms of courtesy.) But at least in NL Gunther has the merit of deciding himself to gain Brunhild's hand - Siegfried at first counsels against it, and Hagen then suggests, with a certain air of sarcasm, that Siegfried should help Gunther. Siegfried agrees, on condition that he be rewarded by being allowed to marry Kriemhild. ⁷⁸

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| 329. Dô sprach der vogt von Rîne;
hin ze Prünhilde,
ich wil durch ir minne
den wil ich verliesen, | "ich wil nider an den sê,
swie ez mir ergê.
wâ gen minen lîp;
sine werde min wîp." |
| 330. "Daz wil ich widerrâ ten"
"Ja hât diu küneginne
swer umbe ir minne wirbet,
des muget ir der reise | sprach dô Sîvrit.
sô vreisliche sit,
daz ez im hôhe stât.
haben wærlîchen râ t." |
| 331. "Sô wil ich iu daz raten,"
"ir bittet Sîvrîde
die vil starken swære;
sît im daz ist sô kündec | sprach dô Hagene,
mit iu ze tragene
daz ist nu min râ t,
wie ez um Prünhilde stât." |
| 332. Er sprach:"wil du mir helfen,
werben die minneclichen?
und wirt mir ze eime trûte
ich wil durch dînen willen | edel Sîvrit,
tuostu des ich dich bit,
daz minnecliche wîp,
wagen êre unde lîp." |

This is the most unpleasant episode in the first half of the poem - Brunhild is wantonly deceived, and the deception practised on her is going to have drastic repercussions later.

Wagner obviously drew the idea of an actual struggle to defeat Brünnhilde from NL - it is not present in the Norse literature - but in NL, Brunhild sets the conditions for the combat herself, and her defeat is not so crushing a humiliation as it is in *Götterdämmerung*. She also abides by the conditions she sets - except to the extent that she is reluctant to permit Gunther to consummate the marriage, as she still has doubts about him. (The reader/audience knows, of course, that these doubts are entirely justified.)

In *Götterdämmerung*, before Siegfried's return disguised as Gunther, Brünnhilde is visited by her sister Waltraute; an episode unique to Wagner. We learn from this that Brünnhilde is no longer able to identify in any way with the world of Valhalla, which has rejected her - or which she has rejected:

Der Götter heiligen Himmelsnebel
bin ich Törin enttaucht -
nicht fass' ich, was ich erfahre.
(*Götterdämmerung*, Act I ll.7602-7604)

The appeal to discard the Ring falls on deaf ears, not surprisingly, since neither woman is capable of understanding the other now. Waltraute is so sure that she only needs to remind Brünnhilde of the past, and she will understand and discard the Ring. But to Brünnhilde, it is her wedding ring, and she naturally thinks Waltraute is mad to make such a demand - she is no longer interested in the wider implications of the existence of the Ring -

Brünnhilde Den Rheintöchtern - ich- den Ring?
Siegfrieds Liebespfand?
Bist du von Sinnen?

Waltraute. Hör' mich, hör' meine Angst!
Der Welt Unheil
haftet sicher an ihm.
Werf' ihn von dir,
fort in die Welle!

Walhalls Elend zu enden,
den Verfluchten wirf in die Flut!
(*Götterdämmerung*, Act I ll.7619-7628)

Brünnhilde is unable to understand this appeal; after all, she sacrificed Valhalla for the sake of human love, and she is not about to let them destroy it for her now:

Geh' hin zu der Götter
heiligem Rat
Von meinem Ringe
raune ihnen zu;
die Liebe ließe ich nie,
nie nähmen mir sie die Liebe,
stürzt' auch in Trümmern
Walhalls strahlende Pracht!
(*Götterdämmerung*, Act I, ll.7645-7652)

In fact what we discover about Brünnhilde here is that her conception of love has narrowed - she now equates it with marriage, more specifically with marital fidelity, and is going to exact a terrible revenge for its betrayal - whereas in *Die Walküre*, the basis of her conflict with Wotan was that she saw love as compassion and love for humanity in general - something that Wotan was incapable of comprehending. Brünnhilde's refusal to surrender the Ring, however, is going to mean that everything it symbolises for her - love and loyalty - is shortly going to be destroyed, and she is going to avenge herself by instigating the murder of Siegfried.

The scene between Siegfried (in disguise) and Brünnhilde which now follows is exceptionally brutal, and not paralleled by anything in the sources, except to some extent NL - certainly in VS Sigurd and Brynhild are rather distantly polite to one another. The closest parallel to the scene in *Götterdämmerung* is the episode in NL in which Siegfried subdues Brunhild to the extent of weakening her so that Gunther is able to consummate the marriage. In TS, it is stated quite frankly that Sigurd rapes Brynhild - in NL, Gunther makes the point that he would prefer Siegfried not to go quite that far - kill her if you like, he says, but don't rape her.⁷⁹ In the ensuing

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655. "Ane daz du ihr triutest,"
die mine lieben frouwen,
sô tuo ir swaz du wellest,
daz solde ich wol verkiesen;

sprach der künec dô,
anders bin ich es vrô.
unt næmest ir den lîp.
si ist ein vreislichez wip."

struggle, Brunhild nearly manages to defeat Siegfried - and for him, it seems to have become a matter, not merely of enabling Gunther to consummate his marriage, but of reinforcing the principle of male supremacy in society - if he lets Brunhild defeat him, then it might occur to other women to defy their husbands.⁸⁰ This illustration of sexual politics in medieval society was not something which Wagner was concerned to pursue, his interest is in the individual relationship between Siegfried and Brünnhilde, which Siegfried is in the process of destroying.

Some Wagner criticism tries to excuse Siegfried's excessive brutality in this scene by claiming that he has not only taken on Gunther's appearance but also his personality. I wonder if this is really necessary?⁸¹ The problem of Siegfried's brutality

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673.	"Owe", gedahte der recke, von einer magt verliesen, her nâ ch immer mêre gegen ir manne,	"sol ich nu mînen lîp, sô mugen elliu wîp tragen gelpfen muot diu ez sus nimmer getuot."
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81 See Robert Donington's comments:

[Brünnhilde] resists her attacker, but not before he has revealed an unnecessary brutality which is not really in the character of Siegfried but of Gunther; a far from brave man, he is not afraid of any woman.

The unconscious fantasy which the magic potion initiated and Tarnhelm confirmed has got the mastery of Siegfried just when he thinks he is using it so cleverly. It is not merely his shape that he has identified with Gunther but his personality.
(Wagner's "Ring" and its symbols. p.227)

See also an article by Warren Darcy, *Redeemed from Rebirth - the evolving meaning of Wagner's "Ring"* (in Wagner in Retrospect, 1983), in which we read the following;

...donning the Tarnhelm [Siegfried] does not simply take on the outer form of a Gibichung; inwardly, he has actually become one. His terrifying re-appearance on the mountain peak is rendered doubly so by his marked cruelty, an aspect of the scene which bothered Cosima. There is no need for him to treat Brünnhilde so harshly, and we suspect that Gunther himself would not have done so, but Hunding would have, and so would Hagen.
(p.55)

Darcy goes on to quote an entry from Cosima's diary for June 4th, 1870;
"The best thing about him is the silly boy," says R. "The adult man is horrible."

(It should be noted that Cosima's grammar is a bit perfunctory here, the entry in fact makes it appear that Wagner is referring to a house-guest at

is not going to be solved by making excuses for Siegfried and claiming that he was under the influence of Hagen's potion at the time. He was, but in fact he was not noted for the gentleness of his personality before this, witness his dealings with Mime ⁸². We must just acknowledge that there is an element of brutality in Siegfried's nature,

Wahnfried. One must deduce from the context that he was referring to Siegfried.)

⁸² Elizabeth Magee suggests that Wagner may have found in Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's *Sigurd der Held des Nordens* (1810) the inspiration for Siegfried's aggressive attitude towards Mime;

To Fouqué must go the credit for having devised a dimension of verbal aggression to match the physical aggression of the sources. (Simrock was not far behind). As Wolfgang Golther notes, the influence of these two writers on the language and dialogue patterns of the first act of *Siegfried* is quite transparent. Golther quotes a passage from the sword-testing in Fouqué's *Sigurd* ;

Sigurd (*Er haut gegen den Eckstein. Die Klinge zerspringt.*)
Sieh den vermaledeiten Binsenstock!

Reigen
Das? Binsenstock?

Sigurd
Ja, hält's denn besser vor?
Seht mir den Prahler, seht den trägen Werkmann!
Willst du nicht tüchtig schmieden?
So thu' ichs, und zwar auf deinen Kopf am Amboss statt,
dazu noch ist des Schwertes Trümmer gut.

Note also Simrock:

"Das ist nun dein Geschmeide," sprach da Siegfried,
"Mime, greiser Prahlhans, du unnützer Schmied,
Kannst du nichts Bessres wirken, als solch ein gläsern Ding,
So bist du zum Erschlagen, zum Hängen selbst zu gering.

"Ich hätte Lust und würde dir ins Gesicht das Heft."
"Dir schmieden", sprach da Mime, "das ist ein übles Geschäft."

(Elizabeth Magee ; *Richard Wagner and the Nibelungs* , p.115)

The possible influence of Fouqué's *Der Held des Nordens* on Wagner was noted as early as 1907 by Friedrich Panzer in his article *Richard Wagner and Fouqué* (Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochstifts , 1907) , which is devoted to a close comparison of the text of the *Ring* with parallel episodes in Fouqué's trilogy. Elizabeth Magee does not refer to this article.

which emerges at its worst in this scene. And it would be as well to recall that the source is probably the episode in NL quoted above.

During the struggle, Siegfried tears the Ring from Brünnhilde's finger. It will not occur to him to pass it on to Gunther, so as to make the deception complete, and Brünnhilde will then discover that she has been deceived and betrayed. What is highly significant here ⁸³ is that Brünnhilde half-recognises Siegfried. The stage directions at this point are as follows:

Er faßt sie bei der Hand und entzieht ihrem Finger den Ring. Sie schreit heftig auf. Als sie wie zerbrochen in seinen Armen niedersinkt, streift ihr Blick bewußtlos die Augen Siegfrieds.

Later, Brünnhilde will remember this, when she says to Hagen:

Ein einz'ger Blick
seines blitzenden Auges,
das selbst durch die Lügengestalt
leuchtend strahlte zu mir,
deinen besten Mut
machte er bangen.
(*Götterdämmerung*, Act II, ll.8232-8237)

From the Norse literature Wagner takes the fact that Siegfried lays his sword between them - this motif does not occur in NL or TS, because there is no need for it. The quarrel will arise from the fact that (a) Siegfried takes the Ring and (b) Brünnhilde will deny that he placed his sword between them. In *Götterdämmerung*, Siegfried retains the Ring himself, and Brünnhilde recognises it - in the sources, Sigurd passes it on to his wife, who flaunts in in the course of the quarrel between the women. (The quarrel is more about rank than sexual jealousy, especially in NL.)

⁸³ Wagner may here have followed a hint given in VS; when Sigurd and Brynhild meet for the last time, Brynhild says that she felt that she recognised him when he came disguised as Gunnar.

"Ah, nay," she said, "never did Gunnar ride through the fire to me, nor did he give me to dower the host of the slain: I wondered at the man who came into my hall; for I deemed indeed that I knew thine eyes; but I might not see clearly, or divide the good from the evil, because of the veil that lay heavy on my fortune."

(*Volsunga Saga*, Morris's translation , p.184)

We have noted elsewhere that the Ring Siegfried takes from Brunhild in NL is her own, not one which he had previously given her - the poet comments upon Siegfried's foolishness in handing over Brunhild's ring and girdle to Kriemhild.⁸⁴

In the Norse literature, and in *Sigurd*, they don't decide at the outset to deceive Brynhild - Gunnar is perfectly prepared to attempt to brave the flames himself, and the deception is only decided upon when he is unable to do this - not through lack of courage, but because neither his own horse nor Sigurd's will carry him. (One might think that this would tell them something, but it transpires that Grimhild has foreseen just such an eventuality.) The parallel episode in Morris's poem is not as brutally humiliating for Brynhild; indeed, the motivation of the characters involved is different. The impetus for Gunnar's wooing of Brynhild comes from Grimhild, and everything she does is part of a plan to increase the renown of her family. In fact, she brings about their destruction through her overweening pride, but she imagines that it is for her to defy the decrees of fate:

For she thought; I will heal the smitten, I will raise up the smitten and
slain,
And take heed where the Gods were heedless, and build on where they
began,
And frame hope for the unborn children and the coming days of man.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.188)

Attempts to defy the decrees of Fate - and unawareness of impending doom - increase the sense of foreboding for the reader. Note how it is emphasised that Sigurd and Gudrun are oblivious of the disaster that is in store for them:

Then dight is the fateful bride-bed, and the Norns will hinder nought
That the feet of the Niblung maiden to the chamber of Kings be
brought
And the troth is plight and wedded, and the Norns cast nought before
The feet of Sigurd the Volsung and the bridal chamber-door.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.202)

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680. Dar zuo nam er ir gürtel, daz was ein porte guot.
ine weiz ob er daz tæte durch sinen hôhen muot.
er gap ez sinem wîbe; daz wart im sider leit.

After the wedding, Sigurd, Gunnar and Hogni swear oaths of blood-brotherhood. The procedure is based on actual practice in Old Norse society, so it may be of interest to quote it here:

And they cut a strip of the greensward on the meadow's daisied floor,
 And loosen it clean in the midst, while its ends on the earth abide;
 Then they heave its midmost aloft, and set on either side
 And ancient spear of battle writ round with words of worth;
 And there are the posts of the door, whose threshold is of the earth,
 And the skin of the earth is its lintel; but with war-glaives gleaming bare
 The Niblung Kings and Sigurd beneath the earth-yoke fare;
 Then each an arm-vein openeth, and their blended blood falls down
 On Earth the fruitful mother where they rent her turfy gown;
 And them, when the blood of the Volsungs hath run with the Niblung
 blood
 They kneel with their hands upon it and swear the brotherhood;
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, pp.204-205)

In VS, not much is made of the oath of blood-brotherhood; it is mentioned in passing, as it were.⁸⁵ It is also not mentioned that the younger brother, Guttorm, does not participate in the oath - this only becomes important later, when Sigurd's murder is decided upon, and Gunnar says that Guttorm can be persuaded to kill him, as he has not sworn any oath. In *Sigurd*, oaths are also sworn at the wedding-feast of Sigurd and Gudrun, and there the point is specifically made that Guttorm is not present, and his non-participation in the oath will be remembered when the time comes to plot the murder of Sigurd.

Grimhild imagines that her plan for Gunnar to marry Brynhild will see the culmination of her striving for the advancement of her family, and she convinces Gunnar that he must be the man destined for Brynhild:

But for this cause sitteth she thus in the ring of the Wavering Flame
 That no son of the Kings will she wed save the mightiest master of
 fame,
 And the man who knoweth not fear, and the man foredoomed of fate
 To ride through her Wavering Fire to the door of her golden gate...
 ...
 Speak thou, O mighty Gunnar! - nay rather, Sigurd my son,

85 þeir sverjask nú þá bræðralag, sem þeir sambornir bræðr. Therewith they swore brotherhood together, and to be even as if they were children of one father and one mother. *Völsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, p.171)

Say who but the lord of the Niblungs should wed with this mighty
one?

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.207)

Grimhild doesn't act out of malice - rather the reverse, in fact, from her point of view - but the vocabulary associated with her and her deeds is invariably negative. She is most frequently referred to as *guileful*, *overwise*, and the potion of forgetfulness that she mixes for Sigurd, while possibly devoid of evil intent, is in itself evil, and we have already seen that its effect is to bring about what Grimhild wants, but at the price of the diminution of Sigurd's glory. Similarly, her plan for Gunnar to win Brynhild - *A deed all lands shall tell of, and the hope of the Niblungs' bliss* - can only be accomplished by means of *sore guile*.

Sigurd, Gunnar and Hogni don't set off on their wooing expedition with any intention of deceiving Brynhild; Gunnar does not lack the courage to attempt to win Brynhild for himself, neither he nor Hogni are aware that any deception is necessary, and Sigurd has forgotten. Grimhild, of course, knows that there will be a need for deception, and consequently she initiates Sigurd and Gunnar into the mysteries of shape-changing. The episode makes interesting use of the various meanings of the word *craft*, and of *spinning*, both as a handicraft and as a metaphor for plotting; this is discussed in detail in Chapter VIII.

The brutality that is so distressing in the scene between Brünnhilde and the disguised Siegfried in *Götterdämmerung* is absent here. Brynhild is distressed, but she accepts Gunnar with very little hesitation - not enthusiastically, but more or less willingly. She does indeed express bitter regret when she first speaks to the man she believes to be Gunnar:

Yea, verily, I am Brynhild; what other is like unto me?
O men of the earth, behold me! hast thou seen, O labouring Earth,
Such sorrow as my sorrow, or such evil as my birth?

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.215)

Morris omits from his poem Brynhild's objection in VS:

"O Gunnar," she says, speak not to me of such things, unless thou be the first and best of all men; for then shalt thou slay those my wooers, if thou hast heart thereto; I have been in battles with the King of the Greeks, and our weapons were stained with red blood, and for such things still I yearn."
(Volsunga Saga, Morris's trans.)

In the poem, Sigurd is aware of Brynhild's hesitation, although not the reason for it, and reminds her that she is too noble a person not to keep her word -

...thou art none of the women that swear and forswear and rejoice
 Forgetting the sorrow of kings and the Gods and the labouring earth.
 Thou shalt wed with Gunnar the Niblung and increase his worth with
 thy worth.
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.216)

Brynhild makes a rather less than enthusiastic promise to marry Gunnar; Sigurd promises on behalf of Gunnar to love her, but she can only promise in return to be true to him:

But over his knees and the mail-rings the high King laid his sword,
 And looked in the face of Brynhild and swore King Gunnar's word;
 He swore on the hand of Brynhild to be true to his wedded wife,
 And before all things to love her till all folk should praise her life.
 Unmoved did Brynhild hearken, and in steady voice she swore
 To be true to Gunnar the Niblung while her life-days should endure.
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.216)

In the wedding-bed, Sigurd places his sword between them. In VS, Brynhild asks why he does this, ⁸⁶ but in Morris's poem she says nothing, about this or about anything else; her attitude seems to be one of weary indifference. The images associated with her now are of pallor and death, e.g.

Then they went in one bed together; but the foster-brother laid
 'Twixt him and the body of Brynhild his bright-blue battle-blade,
 And she looked and heeded it nothing; but e'en as the dead folk lie,
 With folded hands she lay there, and let the night go by.
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.217)

Now occurs the crucial point at which they exchange rings. VS puts it as follows:

⁸⁶ ..and he abode there three nights, and they lay in one bed together; but he took the sword Gram and laid it betwixt them; then she asked him why he laid it there; and he answered, that in that wise must he needs wed his wife or else get his bane.
(Volsunga Saga, Morris's translation, p.175)

Hann tók þá af henni hringinn Andvaranaut er hann gaf henni, en fekk henni nú annan hring af Fáfnis arfi.

Morris's translation reads;

Then she took from off her the ring Andvari's-loom, which he had given her foretime, and gave it to him, but he gave her another ring out of Fafnir's hoard.

This may be a small point, but in Old Norse *Hann tók þá af henni* does mean *he took from her* not *she gave him*. It is not, however, intended to imply that Sigurd took the ring from Brynhild against her will - but expressing the transaction as "she gave him" rather than "he took from her" denotes a certain shift in emphasis.

In *Sigurd*, Brynhild does voluntarily give Andvari's Ring to Sigurd (i.e. to the man she thinks is Gunnar), stressing that it is the most precious gift she has to give;

Lo here, my gift of the morning! 'twas my dearest treasure of all;
But thou art become its master, and for thee was it fore-ordained,
Since thou art the man of mine oath and the best that the earth hath
gained

(Sigurd the Volsung, p.218)

The Ring does not serve to jog Sigurd's memory, although he contemplates it for a long time. When he leaves to rejoin Gunnar and Hogni, Sigurd does not feel that he has achieved something wonderful, instead he feels wretched and defeated:

So forth from the hall goes the Wooer, and slow and slow he goes,
As a conquered king from his city goes forth to meet his foes.
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.219)

This is in contrast to the brash, self-confident Siegfried of *Götterdämmerung* who is quite happy to boast to Hagen and Gutrune about how he subdued Brünnhilde, and is not in the least ashamed of himself - self-doubt is not a characteristic one associates with Siegfried. There is always sadness associated with Sigurd now.

Sigurd gives Gudrun Andvari's Ring, thereby laying the foundations for his own destruction:

Nor his life nor his death he heeded, but told her last night's tale;
Yea he drew forth the sword for his slaying, and whetted the edges of
bale;

For he took that Gold of Andvari, that Curse of the uttermost land,
 And he spake as a king that loveth, and set it on her hand;
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.221)

The poem implies that Sigurd actually told Gudrun the truth about his proxy wooing of Brynhild, and that she distorts the truth later during the quarrel.

Comparison of this scene with the parallel scene in *Götterdämmerung* reveals a sharp contrast. The first thing that strikes us is the strained courtesy with which Sigurd and Brynhild speak to each other, in contrast to the brutal scene in *Götterdämmerung*. And Brynhild voluntarily offers him the Ring, because it is her most treasured possession, and she wants to give it to the man she has promised to marry, and whom she is going to make a determined effort to love - or, if not to love, at least to regard as the man destined for her - *For thou art the man of mine oath and the best that the earth hath gained.*

This motif of Brynhild's determination to see Gunnar as the man destined for her persists in the next section of the poem, *How Brynhild was wedded to Gunnar the Niblung*. She seems determined to make the best of a bad situation; she barely mentions love to Gunnar, but refers instead to her promise to marry him and to be faithful to him, and repeats her resolve to think highly of him;

And she said, "I behold thee, Gunnar, the King of War that rode
 Through the waves of the Flickering Fire to the door of mine abode,
 To lie by my side in the even, and waken in the morn;
 And for this I needs must deem thee the best of all men born,
 The highest-hearted, the greatest, the staunchest of thy love;
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.223)

Like Sigurd after he has drunk Grimhild's potion, Brynhild never smiles again - she does not smile at her wedding-feast, and later Gunnar notices and is troubled by *The fair face never smiling and the eyes that know no change.*

Grimhild, of course, is not far away, and again her presence casts a shadow of foreboding:

but e'en as the rainless cloud
 Ere the first of the tempest ariseth the latter sun doth shroud,
 And men look round and shudder, so Grimhild came between
 The silent golden Sigurd and the eyes of the mighty Queen.
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.225)

The imagery of clouds and impending storms (simile for impending disaster) is reminiscent of the imagery used to describe the effect on Sigurd of Grimhild's potion:

Why are the long leaves drooping, and the fair wind hushed o'erhead?
 -
 Look out from the sunless boughs to the yellow-mirky east,
 How the clouds are woven together o'er that afternoon of feast;
 There are heavier clouds above them, and the sun is a hidden wonder,
 It rains in the nether heaven, and the world is afraid with the
 thunder -
 E'en so in the hall of the Niblungs, and the holy joyous place,
 Sat the earls on the marvel gazing, and the sorrow of Sigurd's face.
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.189)

Sigurd now recognises Brynhild, but gives no sign of his anguish - he is of course able to understand the bitterness beneath her seemingly courteous greeting:

If aught thy soul shall desire while yet thou livest on earth,
 I pray that thou mayst win it nor forget its might and worth.
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.227)

To anyone not acquainted with the true situation, this would sound as though Brynhild wishes Sigurd well, but Sigurd understands (and so, presumably, does Grimhild) that Brynhild is referring to herself - it is her might and worth that he has forgotten. Brynhild makes a point of not greeting Gudrun, who is immediately filled with foreboding. We see again in this section of the poem the discrepancy between the courteous exterior and the seething emotions underneath. Brynhild appears to wish everybody well - but she never smiles, and of course a jarring note is struck by the fact that she pointedly ignores Gudrun.

The wedding-feast takes place in May - the spring was formerly a time of hope and happiness,⁸⁷ but now the rejoicing is hollow. Sigurd also is unhappy, but does not openly show his grief;

⁸⁷ See Chapter IV

And forth to the freshness of May went the joyance of the feast;
 And Sigurd sat with the Niblungs, and gave ear to most and to least,
 And showed no sign to the people of the grief that on him lay;
 Nor seemeth he worsere to any than he was on the yesterday.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.228)

2.14. The quarrel between the women

In all the sources - and to some extent in Morris's poem - the quarrel is basically a quarrel about rank between the women, although Morris does introduce the motif of sexual jealousy. Only in Wagner is it a quarrel between Brünnhilde and Siegfried about the betrayal of marriage vows. And only in Wagner does the quarrel take place actually at the wedding; he follows NL in making it a double wedding. In NL, Brunhild cries at the wedding, but explains her tears by saying that she does not like to see Kriemhild marry beneath her station - we recall that Siegfried had insisted that he was Gunther's vassal. ⁸⁸ In his introduction to his translation of VS, R.G. Finch argues that this explanation is valid in medieval society;

Brunhilt's tears at the wedding banquet (st. 618) have been ascribed to her disappointment at not marrying Sîvrit. Even if this is so, her feeling for Sîvrit need not antedate Gunther's expedition. Brunhilt's own words (st. 820) imply that she had seen neither Gunther nor Sîvrit previously, and

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The relevant passage in NL is str. 618-620;

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>618. Der küene was gesezen
 dô sach si Kriemhilde
 bi Sîfride sitzen;
 ir vielen heize trähene</p> | <p>unt Pr^ûhilt diu meit.
 (dô wart ir nie sô leit)
 weinen si began.
 über lichtiu wange dan.</p> |
| <p>619. Dô sprach der wirt des landes
 daz ir sô lâ zet truoben
 ir muget iuch freun balde;
 mîn lant und mîne bürge</p> | <p>"waz ist iu, frouwe mîn,
 liechter ougen schîn?
 ir ist undert ân
 und manec wætlîcher man."</p> |
| <p>620. "Ich mac wol balde weinen",
 "umb dine swester
 die sihe ich sitzen n âhen
 daz muoz ich immer weinen,</p> | <p>sprach diu schœne meit.
 ist mir von herzen leit.
 dem eigenholden dîn.
 sol si alsô verderbet sîn."</p> |

her explanation (st. 620), viz. that she is grieved because Kriemhilt, now her sister-in-law, in marrying Sîvrit is marrying below her station (in Iceland Sîvrit had pretended that Gunther was his lord) is entirely reasonable in a mediæval context.

(*Völsunga saga*, Introduction, p.xxii)

When the quarrel later erupts, it is about rank. Brunhild is concerned about the discrepancy between the vassal status that Siegfried had claimed was his, and the fact that, once married to Kriemhild, he does not actually behave as vassals were expected to behave in feudal society; she complains to Gunther that he doesn't pay any homage or render any services.⁸⁹

There is no indication that sexual jealousy is involved in the quarrel. Kriemhild doesn't seem to mind that Siegfried allegedly slept with Brunhild; on the contrary, she is rather proud of him for having done so, as it raises him in her esteem and humiliates Brunhild. Kriemhild is able to insult Brunhild in public by calling her a vassal's concubine. The basis of the quarrel is not rivalry over sexual partners - this plays a very secondary role; what is important is the fact that Siegfried has specifically told Brunhild that he is a vassal, and she is angry that he has failed to render the services expected of a vassal. It should further be borne in mind that marrying beneath one's station in feudal society was not merely a social gaffe - it could actually involve loss of rights and even legal penalties. It is instructive in this context to refer to Hartmann von Aue's *Der arme Heinrich*, and to critical discussion of the legal status of the marriage; Heinrich has to insist that the girl may not be a noblewoman, but at least she is of free birth. It is significant that he feels it necessary to discuss the matter with his council and the nobility; he does not feel that he can just marry the girl without the approval of those closest to him.

Discussion of the nature of marriage in feudal society may appear to be a digression, as neither Morris nor Wagner were at all interested, but the fact that they

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724. Nu gedahte ouch alle zîte
 "wie treit et alsô hôhe
 nu ist doch unser eigen
 er hat uns nu vil lange

das Guntheres wîp;
 frou Kriemhilt den lîp?
 Sîfrit ir man;
 lützel dienste getan."

were not interested is in itself significant, as the way they treat this episode represents a shift of consciousness - the nineteenth century had a different view of marriage from that current in feudal society. It would not have been possible for Wagner to make the quarrel into a dispute about rank between Brünnhilde and Gutrune, for many reasons, not least because his Gutrune is a weak, ineffectual character, whose one contribution to the quarrel is a request that Siegfried testify to his innocence: *Treulos, Siegfried, sannest du Trug? / Bezeuge, daß jene falsch dich zeiht!* In nineteenth century society, marriage was a matter for the two individuals concerned, and the way Wagner and Morris treat the quarrel reflects this shift in attitude. In *Götterdämmerung*, the quarrel has become a personal matter between Brünnhilde and Siegfried; in *Sigurd*, although the question of rank is not entirely absent - since Morris remains as close to his source as possible - the personal jealousy between the women is considerably more important than the question of precedence. In NL, it is precedence that is of overriding importance - the question of who has the right to enter the church first.⁹⁰ Brunhild plays into Kriemhild's hands by claiming the higher rank, as it enables Kriemhild to humiliate her by accusing her of having been Siegfried's concubine.⁹¹ To substantiate her allegation, Kriemhild produces Brunhild's ring and girdle.⁹²

⁹⁰ Wagner uses this scene in *Lohengrin*, not in the *Ring*.

91

839. Dô sprach diu schœne Kriemhilt "kundestu noch geswîgen, du h âst geschendet selbe wie môhte mannes kebse	(zornec was ir muot); daz wære dir guot, dînen schœnen lîp; immer werden kûneges wîp?"
--	--

840. "Wen hastu verkebset?" "daz tuon ich dich," sprach Kriemhilt, den minnete erste Sîfrit, jane was ez niht mîn bruoder,	sprach dô des kûneges wîp. "den dînen schœnen lîp der mîn vil lieber man. der dir den megetuom an gwan."
---	--

92

847. Dô sprach diu frouwe Kriemhilt: Ich erziugez mit dem golde, daz brahte mir mîn vriedel	"ir môhtet mich lazen gan. daz ich an der hende hân; dô er erste bî iu lac."
---	--

848. Si sprach; "Diz golt vil edele	daz wart mir verstoln
-------------------------------------	-----------------------

The result of the quarrel is that Siegfried is asked to swear - not that he didn't do it, but that he didn't boast about it.⁹³ But when Siegfried raises his hand to swear the oath, Gunther hurriedly says that there is no need for it, as he is fully convinced of Siegfried's innocence. In fact he is glossing over the situation, as he and Siegfried share a guilty secret - and it is Hagen who takes the responsibility of avenging Brunhild's humiliation.

A brief glance at TS reveals a similar situation; in this version, too, the emphasis is on rank, and on public humiliation. Brynhild is angered that Grimhild (Sigurd's wife in this version) has the arrogance to remain seated in her presence, as she claims the higher rank; Grimhild reacts by flaunting Brynhild's ring, which Siegfried had given her after he had raped Brunhild. The worst thing for Brynhild is the public humiliation.⁹⁴ As in NL, it is not so much that it happened that Brynhild minds; it is that Sigurd has not only raped her, he has gossiped about it with his wife, who has made the matter public - indeed regards it as a matter of pride. When she complains to Gunnar, that is part of the complaint.⁹⁵ In NL and TS, then, the main

und ist mich harte lange

vil übele vor verholn.

.....

849. Dô sprach aber Kriemhilt;
du môhtes wol gedaget hân,
ich erziugez mit dem gûrtel,
daz ich niht enliuge;

"ine wils niht wesen diep.
und wære dir êre liep.
den ich hie umbe hân,
jâ wart min Sîfrit dîn man."

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855. Dô sprach der kûnec Gunther:
und hat er sichs gerüemet,

"er sol her fur gân!
daz sol er hœren lâ n.>

.....

857. Dô sprach der kûnec Gunther;
mir hat min frouwe Prûnhilt
du habes dich des gerüemet,
allererst habes geminnet;

"dô ist mir harte leit.
ein mære hie geseit,
daz du ir schœnen lip
daz sagt frou Kriemhilt dîn
wip."

⁹⁴ She regretted bitterly that they should have discussed this matter in the hearing of so many, and that the affair should have become common knowledge.

⁹⁵ "Sigurd has broken the oath of loyalty between you, and has told his wife Grimhild everything - how you trusted him, when you couldn't subdue me yourself, and let Sigurd take my virginity. Grimhild taunted me with this today in front of everyone. "

focus of the quarrel is the question of rank, allied to public discussion of a humiliating secret.

Wagner adapts some of this in *Götterdämmerung*, but the question of rank and precedence is entirely absent. No-one flaunts the Ring; Brünnhilde recognises it on Siegfried's hand. She recognises him, and the audience supposes that he recognises her, but his memories of their time as lovers is not restored. In this, Wagner differs from Morris. In *Sigurd*, Sigurd did not recognise Brynhild when she gave him the ring, but his memories are restored at her wedding to Gunnar;

For the will of the Norns is accomplished, and outworn is Grimhild's
 spell,
 And nought now shall blind or help him, and the tale shall be to tell;
 He hath seen the face of Brynhild, and he knows why she has come,
 And that his is the hand that hath drawn her to the Cloudy Peoples'
 home;
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.226)

But in *Götterdämmerung*, nothing prompts any memories in Siegfried, and it is as he supports Brünnhilde as she recovers from her near-collapse that she notices the Ring - on his finger and not on Gunther's. Hagen is quick to observe her bewilderment, and draws the attention of the vassals to it: *Jetzt merket klug was die Frau euch klagt!* This situation is precisely what Hagen had planned. It is Hagen who offers to avenge Brünnhilde, just as in NL, but here he has manipulated the situation in order to bring about Siegfried's death.

The quarrel is about treachery and the betrayal of marriage vows; Siegfried denies that he has betrayed anybody, and it seems as though he has forgotten the details of what happened when he went back to Brünnhilde disguised as Gunther, as he claims that he did not receive the Ring from any woman:

Von keinem Weib
 kam mir der Reif,
 noch war's ein Weib,
 dem ich ihn abgewann;
 genau erkenn' ich
 des Kampfes Lohn,
 den vor Neidhöhl' einst ich bestand,

als den starken Wurm ich erschlug.
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act II, ll.8057-8064)

It is of course true that he obtained the Ring from Fafner's hoard in the first place, but are we to assume that he has now forgotten what happened with Brünnhilde the previous night? He seems to remember perfectly well that he placed his sword between them, although Brünnhilde denies that he did so. On the other hand, he could hardly admit to having seized the Ring from Brünnhilde and forgetting to hand it over to Gunther, without revealing the whole deception.⁹⁶ His only recourse, in fact, is to appear not to take the matter all that seriously; he regrets that the deception was not entirely successful, but "she'll get over it":

Glaub', mehr zürnt es mich als dich,
 da' schlecht ich sie getäuscht;
 der Tarnhelm, dünkt mich fast,
 hat halb mich nur gehehlt.
 Doch Frauengroll
 friedet sich bald;
 daß ich dir es gewann,
 dankt dir gewiss noch das Weib.
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act II, ll.8185-8192)

It is Gunther's embarrassed silence that leads Brünnhilde to suspect the truth - although this is in fact a situation of half-truths, lies and evasions.

Brünnhilde claims that she and Siegfried have been lovers, which is true, but her claim that they were lovers on the previous evening is untrue - Siegfried did place his sword between them, and accuses her of besmirching her own honour for no good reason:

Achtest du so
 der eignen Ehre?
 Die Zunge, die sie lästert,
 muß ich der Lüge sie zeihen?
 Hört, ob ich Treue brach!
 Blutbrüderschaft
 hab' ich Gunther geschworen;
 Nothung, das werthe Schwert,
 wahrte der Treue Eid;
 mich trennte seine Schärfe

⁹⁶ Wagner takes from VS the motif of Sigurd having placed his sword between himself and Brynhild.

von diesem traur'gen Weib.
(*Götterdämmerung*, Act II, ll.8104-8114)

This is true, and what Brünnhilde says in refutation is not true; they have been lovers, but they were not lovers that night. So the oath that Siegfried swears is not perjury, as Brünnhilde claims, because what he swears is that he didn't break the oath of blood-brotherhood to Gunther. Hagen is now able to manipulate Brünnhilde and Gunther into plotting Siegfried's death.

Wagner has considerably shifted the emphasis here, as he has entirely dispensed with the episode of Kriemhild's revenge - not that one could imagine Wagner's Guttrune surviving in order to take revenge, but the emphasis is in any case on Brünnhilde. In VS she commits suicide because she does not wish to outlive Siegfried, whereas in *Götterdämmerung* her suicide is intended as a world-redeeming act of self-sacrifice. Wagner takes what he needs from both the Norse and the German sources. A quarrel about rank between the women would have been foreign to his dramatic purposes, and also foreign to nineteenth-century concepts of marriage - so the quarrel becomes instead a dispute between Brünnhilde and Siegfried about whether they have, or have not, been lovers.

As in NL, the quarrel in VS starts off by being about rank - the women are bathing in the river, and Brynhild wades further out. Gudrun asks why; Brynhild claims the higher rank, and Gudrun then reveals the whole deception, flourishing Andvari's Ring to prove her point. The saga doesn't explain how Gudrun obtained the ring, so we must just assume that Sigurd gave it to her at some point.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Brynhild said: "Yea, and why then should I be equal to thee in this matter more than in others? I am minded to think that my father is mightier than thine, and my true-love hath wrought many wondrous works of fame, and hath ridden the flaming fire withal, whilethy husband was but the thrall of King Hjalprek." Gudrun answered full of wrath, "Thou wouldst be wise if thou shouldst hold thy peace rather than revile my husband; lo now, the talk of all men it is, that none has ever abode in the world like unto him in all matters soever; and little it beseems thee of all folk to mock him who was thy first beloved; and Fafnir he slew, yea, and he rode thy flaming fire, whereas thou didst deem that he was Gunnar the King, and by thy side he lay, and took from thine hand the ring Andvari's loom; here mayst thou well behold it!"

(*Volsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, p.177)

The situation differs from NL to the extent that there was a prior betrothal between Brynhild and Sigurd, so Sigurd was in fact Brynhild's first lover - but not at the time Gudrun claims. This is more nearly parallel to the situation in *Götterdämmerung*; Brünnhilde is lying when she says that Siegfried was her lover when he wooed her on Gunther's behalf, but her more general point - that she and Siegfried have been lovers - is true. Siegfried is not intentionally lying when he denies Brünnhilde's claims.

Sexual jealousy is present during the quarrel in VS, whereas it was absent from NL - since there was no prior betrothal in NL there was no need for this motif. In VS, although the quarrel starts off by being about rank, it soon turns out that Brynhild is jealous of Gudrun, as Sigurd observes in the course of discussion with Gudrun.⁹⁸ Later, when the quarrel is resumed between them, Brynhild admits her jealousy.⁹⁹

There seems to be some confusion in VS as to which ring is being quarrelled about. Gudrun flaunts Andvari's ring - this is the ring that Sigurd had obtained from Fafnir's hoard and had given to Brynhild - which she had then given him, thinking him to be Gunnar - and it is now in Gudrun's possession. But surely it is a different ring Brynhild asks Gunnar about? Her words are

What didst thou with that ring that I gave thee, even the one which King Budli gave me at our last parting, when thou and King Giuki came to him and threatened fire and sword, unless ye had me to wife?
(*Volsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, p.181)

This is most likely a mistake on the part of the compiler, which is then forgotten about - the ring isn't mentioned again in the Saga.

⁹⁸ Gudrun said, "Why may she not love her life, having wealth and bliss, and the praise of all men, and the man withal that she would have?"
"Ah, yea!" said Sigurd, "and where in all the world was she then, when she said that she deemed she had the noblest of all men, and the man withal that she would have?"

(*Volsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, p.178)

⁹⁹ Brynhild answers; "For this shalt thou pay, in that thou hast got Sigurd to thee - nowise can I see thee living in the bliss thereof, whereas thou hast him, and the wealth and the might of him."

(*Volsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, p.178)

Brynhild demands Sigurd's death, implying, though not stating openly, that Sigurd was her lover when he visited her disguised as Gunnar - a lie, as he placed his sword between them.¹⁰⁰ As in NL and TS, Brynhild resents the fact that Sigurd has not only been her lover, but has gossiped about it with his wife - at least, this is how she interprets the situation. There is no need for Gudrun (or Kriemhild) to be jealous of Brynhild, because in deserting Brynhild for her, Sigurd has shown that he considers Gudrun to be the better woman. The jealousy is on Brynhild's side.¹⁰¹ Brynhild demands revenge for the shameful way in which she has been tricked into marrying the less worthy man.

In *Sigurd*, Brynhild at first hides her sorrow, and tries hard to be a friend to Gudrun:

Close now is her converse with Gudrun, and sore therein she strives,
Lest the barren stark contention should mingle in their lives.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.229)

But Gudrun knows the truth - it was not Gunnar who braved Brynhild's fire, but Sigurd disguised as Gunnar.

It is indicated that Hogni is learning some of Grimhild's wisdom. It was already suggested that of all her children he is the closest to her, and understands more of her deep-seated plans than the others; for instance, in the episode of the wooing of Brynhild, he seems to be the only one who realises why Grimhild taught them the art of

¹⁰⁰ "I will not live", says Brynhild, "for Sigurd has bewrayed me, yea, and thee no less, whereas thou didst suffer him to come into my bed; lo thou, two men in one dwelling I will not have; and this shall be Sigurd's death, or thy death, or my death; - for now has he told Gudrun all, and she is mocking me even now!"

(*Volsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, p.186)

¹⁰¹ A glance at Hebbel's *Die Nibelungen* may be instructive here. When Brunhild realises how she has been deceived, she bursts out in rage and grief;

.....Ich ward nicht bloß verschmäht,
Ich ward verschenkt, ich ward wohl gar verhandelt!

.....

.....Ihm selbst zum Weib zu schlecht,
War ich der Pfennig, der ihm eins verschaffte!

(SIEGFRIEDS TOD, Act III, sc. xi, ll. 1772-1776)

shape-changing. But perhaps he is even wiser than Grimhild, in that he does not believe it is possible to defy the decrees of the Norns:

He knows of the craft of Grimhild, and how she looketh to sway
The very council of God-home and the Norns' unchanging mind;
And he saith that well-learned is his mother, but that e'en her feet are
blind
Down the path that she cannot escape from; nay, oft is she nothing,
he saith
Save a path for the foredoomed staying ¹⁰², and a sword for the
ordered death;
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.229)

Hogni will not attempt to defy the decrees of Fate, or bend them to his will, as Grimhild does; he decides that, whatever the decrees of Fate are, he will meet them unflinching.

Before the quarrel breaks out, Grimhild drops hints to Gunnar about Sigurd's wealth and power, and sows the seeds of suspicion in Gunnar's mind by causing him to wonder whether Sigurd did in fact become Brynhild's lover. Morris here introduces another motive for the eventual murder of Sigurd - envy of his wealth. In VS, this motive is not introduced before the quarrel, but it gradually assumes importance, and it is one of the arguments that Gunnar uses to persuade Hogni to agree to the murder.¹⁰³ In *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*, (The Short Lay of Sigurd) the greed motif is even more explicit - Brynhild threatens to leave Gunnar, who doesn't want to lose her *or her wealth*, and also sees an opportunity to seize Sigurd's wealth. ¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² *sic* ; not a typing error for *slaying* !

¹⁰³ Gunnar grew sick at heart thereat, and might nowise see what fearful thing lay behind it all; he was bound to Sigurd by oath, and this way and that swung the heart within him; but at the last he bethought him of the measureless shame if his wife went from him, and he said within himself, "Brynhild is better to me than all things else, and the fairest of all women, and I will lay down my life rather than lose the love of her." And herewith he called to him his brother and spake;

"Trouble is heavy on me", and he tells him that he must needs slay Sigurd, for that he has failed him wherein he trusted him, "so let us be lords of the gold and the realm withal."

(Volsunga Saga , Morris's translation , p.187)

¹⁰⁴ Adrad was Gunnar,
Heavy-hearted was he,

The greed motif is also introduced in NL and in *Götterdämmerung*. In *Götterdämmerung*, Hagen promises Gunther that he will gain wealth and power by Siegfried's death:

And in doubtful mood
Day-long he sat.
For naught he wotted,
Nor might see clearly
What was the seemliest
Of deeds to set hand to;

What of all deeds
Was best to be done:
For he minded the vows
Sworn to the Volsung,
And the sore wrong
To be wrought against Sigurd.

Wavered his mind
A weary while,
No wont it was
Of those days worn by,
That queens should flee
From the realms of their kings.

"Brynhild to me
Is better than all,
The child of Budli
Is the best of women.
Yea, and my life
Will I lay down,
Ere I am twinned
From that woman's treasure."

He bade call Hogni
To the place where he bided;
With all the trust that might be,
Trowed he in him.

"Wilt thou bewray Sigurd
For his wealth's sake?
Good it is to rule
O'er the Rhine's metal;
And well content
Great wealth to wield
Biding in peace
And blissful days."

(*Sigur ðarkviða in skamma*, Morris's trans.)

Er falle - dir zum Heil!
 Ungeheure Macht wird dir,
 gewinnst von ihm du den Ring,
 den der Tod ihm wohl nur entreißt.
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act II, ll.8314-8317)

This is not true, but it is an argument which serves to convince Gunther. In NL, Hagen advances a similar argument, and it appears to be this, as much as the insult to Brunhild, that persuades Gunther to agree to the murder; ¹⁰⁵ but in fact the greed motive is secondary. The primary motivation does seem to be the insult to Brunhild, although Hagen has always been antagonistic to Siegfried, and it is possible that he is using the insult to Brunhild as a pretext, and might have found another reason for getting rid of him, had the quarrel not occurred. ¹⁰⁶

In *Sigurd* the greed motif is introduced before the quarrel, whereas in all the sources it is not introduced until after the quarrel, and is of secondary importance. The reader is not surprised to note that it is Grimhild who introduces the idea of envy of Sigurd's wealth. As in VS, the quarrel erupts when the women are bathing together in the river. Brynhild wades further out, and this is an explicit declaration of war;

And her laugh went down the waters, as the war-horn on the wind,
 When the kings of war are seeking, and their foes are fain to find.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.233)

Brynhild's claim that her husband is "the best of the earth" is a continuation of her determination to think well of Gunnar, but in her insistence upon Gunnar's worth she seems to be protesting too much - she has never shaken off her doubts about him.

105

870. Sîn gevolgete niemen,
 riet in allen zîten
 ob Sîvrît niht enlebte
 vil der kûnege lande.

niwan daz Hagene
 Gunther dem degene
 sô wurde im undert ân
 der helt des truren began.

106

867. "Suln wir gouche ziehen?"
 "des habent lützel êre
 daz er sich hât gerüemet
 dar umbe wil ich sterben,

sprach aber Hagene:
 sô guote degene.
 der lieben frouwen mîn,
 ez enge im an daz leben sîn."

Gunther (in großer Verwirrung)
Den Ring? Ich gab ihm keinen;
Doch - kennst du ihn auch gut?:

Brünnhilde Wo bärgest du den Ring,
den du von mir erbeutet?

(Gunther schweigt in höchster Betroffenheit)

Brünnhilde *(wütend auffahrend)*
Ha! - Dieser war es, der mir den Ring entriß;
Siegfried, der trugvolle Dieb!
(Götterdämmerung, Act II, ll.8046-8056)

Brünnhilde's rage and grief will lead her to make the false claim that Siegfried has been her lover on the occasion when he laid his sword between them. In *Sigurd*, she does not claim this, although she does in VS, but Gunnar thinks that this is what she means, when she begs him to say that he gave the Ring to Gudrun:

O swear it, King of the Niblungs, lest thine honour die of the dearth!
O swear it, lord I have wedded, lest mine honour come to naught,
And I be but a wretch and a bondmaid for a year's embracing bought!

Till his heart hath heard her meaning at the golden bed he stares,
And the last of the words he speaketh flit empty past his ears;
For he knows that the tale of the night-tide hath been told and
understood,

And now of her shame is he deeming e'en worse than Brynhild would.
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.244)

All versions culminate in Brynhild's demand for Sigurd's death to avenge her shame.

2.15. Siegfried's death

It is Brünnhilde who demands Siegfried's death, to atone for the deception practised upon her -she sees it it is the only fitting vengeance. In *Götterdämmerung* Hagen manipulates the situation so that Brünnhilde will demand Siegfried's death; he also discovers the secret of Siegfried's invulnerability and that he can only kill him by stabbing him in the back. It is Brünnhilde who has made him invulnerable, as she laments;

Brünnhilde O Undank, schändlichster Lohn!
Nicht eine Kunst
war mir bekannt,
die zum Heil nicht half seinem Leib!
Unwissend zähmt' ihn
mein Zauberspiel,
das ihn vor Wunden nun bewahrt.

Hagen So kann keine Wehr ihm schaden?

Brünnhilde. Im Kampfe nicht; -doch-
träfst du im Rücken ihn....
Niemals, das wußt' ich,
wich er dem Feind,
nie reicht' er fliehend ihm den Rücken;
an ihm drum spart' ich den Segen.
(*Götterdämmerung*, Act. II, ll.8251-8264)

This is adapted from NL, in which Siegfried became invulnerable through bathing in the dragon's blood, except for a spot between the shoulder-blades, where a leaf fell unnoticed. Hagen knows about the invulnerability at the beginning of the poem; he learns about the one invulnerable spot from Kriemhild, who foolishly volunteers the information in the mistaken belief that Hagen will thus be enabled to protect Siegfried in battle. As the poet says, it would have been better for her to have kept quiet about this; *si sagte im kundiū mære, diū bezzet wæren verlân*. Hagen persuades her to sew a small cross on Siegfried's garment, to indicate the exact location of his vulnerable spot.

Wagner also adapts from NL Hagen's suggestion that they go hunting, and that Siegfried can be killed in the course of the hunt - pretending that he was killed by a wild boar - in order, he says to Gunther, to spare Gutrune's feelings, although in the event,

he shows very little regard for her feelings, and nor does Gunther, once he and Hagen start fighting over the Ring. (Although Gunther does at one point refer to it as *Gutrunes Erbe*).

The scene with the Rhinemaidens at the beginning of Act III of *Götterdämmerung* has no parallel in any of the sources, except for Kriemhild's dreams of foreboding in NL; Siegfried is unaffected by her warning. The scene precipitates the crisis, and also demonstrates Siegfried's blindness. We may ask at this point - just what does the Ring mean to Siegfried? Obviously he still doesn't remember that he seized it from Brünnhilde, since he says to the Rhinemaidens:

Einen Riesenwurm
erschlug ich um den Reif;
für eines schlechten Bären Tatzen
böt' ich ihn nun zum Tausch?
(*Götterdämmerung*, Act III, ll.8438-8441)

Another reason he gives for refusing to surrender the Ring is more puzzling:

Verzehrt' ich an euch mein Gut,
des zürnte mir wohl mein Weib.
(*Götterdämmerung*, Act III, ll.8446-8447)

meaning Gutrune; but, as he didn't get the Ring from Gutrune, why should she care what he does with it?

What is psychologically and dramatically convincing, however, is that Siegfried refuses to listen to the warnings of the Rhinemaidens; he is, and remains, a brash youth. At one point he is prepared to surrender the Ring, but not when the Rhinemaidens warn him that he will die if he keeps it. Obviously, none of the source material allows for Siegfried to survive, and Wagner was not rewriting the source material in order to give it a happy ending.¹⁰⁷ The point for Wagner, though, is that Siegfried is incapable of understanding the significance of the Ring - he never attains maturity. He just sees the whole incident as not letting himself be intimidated by a trio

¹⁰⁷ But see the final scene of *Siegfrieds Tod* .

of silly girls; he actually says that he doesn't value his life that much - certainly not enough to yield to threats:

Doch bedroht ihr mir Leben und Leib;
 faßte er nicht
 eines Fingers Wert,
 den Reif entringt ihr mir nicht!
 Denn Leben und Leib,
 seht: - so
 werf' ich sie weit von mir!
*Er hebt eine Erdscholle vom Boden auf, hält sie über seinem
 Haupte und wirft sie mit den letzten Worten hinter sich.*
 (Götterdämmerung, Act III, ll. 8520-8525)

Both Brünnhilde and Siegfried refuse to surrender the Ring when they have the opportunity to do so - and it was to be anticipated that they would refuse, given the circumstances under which they are asked to surrender it. But by her refusal, Brünnhilde precipitates catastrophe for herself; and by his refusal, Siegfried seals his fate. Siegfried never really understands his own significance in the scheme of things; Brünnhilde only understands after Siegfried's death. It is Brünnhilde who precipitates the final catastrophe, although Wagner does not in fact interpret it as a catastrophe, but sees Brünnhilde's suicide as a world-redeeming act, and furthermore as the culmination of the drama; there is no room in Wagner's dramatic conception for a wife who survives to avenge Siegfried. Wagner takes from his sources Brünnhilde's pivotal role in bringing about Siegfried's death, and expands it into something that affects the fate of the whole world, not just that of her former lover. ¹⁰⁸

In Götterdämmerung, it is Brünnhilde who demands Siegfried's death; in NL, she doesn't specifically demand his death, but Hagen promises to avenge her. ¹⁰⁹

In TS also, it is Brynhild who demands Sigurd's death; it is also Brynhild who

¹⁰⁸ Or husband ; it is difficult to know exactly how to describe the relationship between Siegfried and Brünnhilde. No wedding ceremony has taken place, but they have plighted their troth, and Brünnhilde refers to herself as Siegfried's *Gattin* , while he refers to her as *heilige Braut*

864. Er vragete waz ir wære,
 dô sagte si im diu mære.
 daz ez eramen müese
 oder er wolde nimmer

weinende er si vant.
 er lobte ir sâ zehant
 der Kriemhilde man,
 dar umbe vrœlich gestân.

introduces envy of Sigurd's wealth as another motive for the murder. She demands that Gunnar - or anybody - avenge the shame that Sigurd has caused them, and adds:

"Sigurd came here like a beggar. Now he's so proud and so powerful that it won't be long before you all serve him. And when he first came to me, he didn't know who his father and mother were, or any of his kin."

King Gunnar said, "Lady, don't cry! Sigurd won't be our master for very long, and my sister Grimhild won't be your queen."

The murder of Siegfried is treated differently in VS and PE, and in Morris's poem. He is killed at home in bed, and the younger brother, Gutthorm, is prevailed upon to commit the murder, as he took no part in the oaths of blood-brotherhood that the others swore to Sigurd. Hogni in this redaction is the one who is against the murder; in VS he tries in vain to dissuade Gunnar, saying that no good will come of giving in to Brynhild's demands; it is Gunnar who insists, and eggs Gutthorm on to do the deed.¹¹⁰ In VS, there is no indication that Hogni actively participates in, or indeed condones, the murder of Sigurd. But in *Brot af Sigurd arkviða* (Fragment of a Lay of Sigurd) we find indications of familiarity with the German version - a suggestion that Sigurd was killed away from home, and that Hogni actively participated.¹¹¹

Guttorm is prevailed upon to commit the murder. Grimhild is called upon again to prepare her drugs in order to put him into a suitable frame of mind. Except in *Brot*

¹¹⁰ Hogni answers, "Ill it behoves us to break our oaths with wrack and wrong, and withal great aid we have in him; no kings shall be as great as we, if so be the King of the Hun-folk may live; another such brother-in-law never may we get again; bethink thee how good it is to have such a brother-in-law, and such sons to our sister! But well I see how things stand, for this has Brynhild stirred thee up to, and surely shall her counsel drag us into huge shame and scathe."

Gunnar says, "Yet shall it be brought about; and, lo, a rede thereto; - let us egg on our brother Guttorm to the deed; he is young, and of little knowledge, and is clean out of all the oaths moreover." (*Vølsunga Saga*, Morris's translation, pp.187-188)

¹¹¹

One word Hogni
Had for an answer;
"Our swords have smiten
Sigurd asunder,
And the grey horse hangs drooping
O'er his lord lying dead."
(Morris's trans.)

af Sigur arkyi a, where Gudrun's fears are aroused when her brothers come home without Sigurd, Sigurd is killed in bed with Gudrun; she wakes drenched in his blood, and he has time for some comforting words for her before his death.

In VS, Sigurd has no foreboding of disaster:

But of these evil wiles naught at all knew Sigurd, for he might not deal with his shapen fate, nor the measure of his life-days; neither deemed he that he was worthy of such things at their hands.

(*Volsunga Saga*, Morris's trans., pp.188-189)

The idea of not being able to fight against fate is one that is central to Morris's poem. He expands the above sentence from the saga to indicate that both Sigurd and Gudrun are aware that treachery is afoot, but that in the final analysis nothing can be done but to meet one's fate as bravely as possible. In the Saga, before Sigurd dies he recalls that this was foretold:

Lo, now that, is come to pass which was foretold me long ago, but from mine eyes has it been hidden, for none may fight against his fate and prevail.

(*Volsunga Saga*, Morris's trans., p.189)

Morris introduces into his poem an episode that has only vague precedents in his sources; the section subtitled *Of the exceeding great grief and mourning of Brynhild* devotes equal weight to Gudrun's forebodings, and narrates from her point of view her feelings when she finds her brothers (that is, Gunnar and Hogni; Guttorm is still absent) and Sigurd clad in full armour, waiting. The effect of Brynhild's silence and grief is that Gudrun is filled with foreboding; in fact everyone realises that something dreadful is going to happen because of Brynhild. No-one is prepared to face her; Gudrun begs Gunnar to confront her, but he feels unable to do so. Hogni is also reluctant to see Brynhild, and he reiterates the idea he has previously expressed, that it is wiser not to attempt to fight the decrees of fate. He is wiser than Grimhild in this:

Bide thou and behold things fated! Hast thou learned how men may teach
The stars in their ordered courses, or lead the Norns with speech?

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.247)

When Gudrun finds Sigurd clad in armour, her fear grows, and Sigurd hints that this will probably end in death:

"So oft, O wife," said Sigurd, "is a war-king clad the best
When the peril quickens before him, and on either side is doubt;

.....

Now is Brynhild sore encompassed by a tide of measureless woe,
And amidst and anear, as I see it, she seeth the death-star grow."

(Sigurd the Volsung, p.248)

The narrator has already hinted in the course of the quarrel that death will be the outcome of all this - not necessarily Sigurd's death, perhaps Brynhild's own death. But we may also recall that Grimhild has been dropping hints to Gunnar to make him envious of Sigurd's wealth.

In VS, Gudrun asks both Gunnar and Hogni to try to console Brynhild, but she refuses to speak to either of them. Finally, Sigurd goes to see her, and they have their last confrontation. It is evident that there is no possibility of reconciliation between Sigurd and Brynhild; there never has been, from the time he betrayed her, however unwittingly. He even offers to divorce Gudrun and marry Brynhild - but it is too late for that, all she wants is death - his and hers.¹¹² In Morris's poem, as in VS, Brynhild demands that Gunnar kill Sigurd, or have him killed. Hogni does not, as in the saga, advise against the murder, rather he seems to accept it with weary resignation.

"I am none of the Norns," says Hogni, "nor the heart of Odin the Goth,
To avenge the foster-brethren, or broken love and troth;
Thy will is the story fated, nor shall I look on the deed
With uncursed hands unreddened, and edges dulled at need."

(Sigurd the Volsung, p.255)

¹¹² "This is the sorest sorrow to me", she said, "that the bitter sword is not reddened in thy blood."

"Have no fear thereof!" says he, "no long while to wait or the bitter sword stand deep in my heart; and no worse needest thou to pray for thyself, for thou wilt not live when I am dead; the days of our two lives shall be few enough from henceforth."

(Volsunga Saga, Morris's trans., p.184)

Guttorm is then persuaded to commit the murder, and Sigurd is able to kill Guttorm before he dies himself, so he has at least the satisfaction of revenge. ¹¹³ In Morris's poem, there is a poignant moment when Gudrun and Sigurd are peacefully asleep in bed, unaware of the disaster that is about to strike:

Slow, all alone goeth Guttorm to Sigurd's chamber door,
 And all is open before him, and the white moon lies on the floor
 And the bed where Sigurd lieth with Gudrun on his brest,
 And light comes her breath from her bosom in the joy of infinite

rest

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.257)

¹¹³ So Guttorm went in to Sigurd the next morning as he lay upon his bed, yet durst he not do aught against him, but shrank back out again; yea, and even so he fared a second time, for so bright and eager were the eyes of Sigurd that few durst look upon him. But the third time he went in, and there lay Sigurd asleep; then Guttorm drew his sword and thrust Sigurd through in such wise that the sword point smote into the bed beneath him; then Sigurd awoke with that wound, and Guttorm gat him unto the door; but therewith Sigurd caught up the sword Gram, and cast it after him, so that the feet of him fell one way, and the head and hands back into the chamber.

(*Volsunga Saga*, Morris's trans. ,p.189)

2.16. Brynhild's death

After the death of Sigurd, the immediate focus is on the response of the women; Gudrun's grief and Brynhild's laughter, which is the laughter of hysteria.¹¹⁴ Gudrun's grief is at first expressed in silence and inability to weep, until she is made to look again on Sigurd's body, and then her tears break out. This is omitted from VS, which goes straight from the death of Sigurd to Brynhild's suicide. *Guðrunarkviða in fyrsta* (The First Lay of Gudrun) is the source for this episode. Gudrun flees from her family after Sigurd's death, but she will survive, reluctantly remarry, and take vengeance.

In *Götterdämmerung*, Guttrune's grief is seen as irrelevant; but then, poor Guttrune has been rather irrelevant all along. The focus is on Brünnhilde and her response to Siegfried's death. She has demanded his death as a personal vendetta, but once he is dead, it becomes more than that, and her suicide achieves cosmic significance. Obviously one of her reasons for committing suicide is to be united with Siegfried in death, but it goes further than that; we are meant to think that by her sacrifice she has redeemed the world. I have my doubts about this, but at any rate the funeral pyre which burns her and Siegfried also destroys Valhalla, and the corrupt world-order which Valhalla represents, so it is at least a partial redemption. In the all-embracing wisdom she has now attained, Brünnhilde realises that only returning the Ring to the Rhine can lift the curse:

Das Feuer, das mich verbrennt,
rein'ge vom Fluche den Ring!
Ihr in der Flut,
löset ihn auf,
und lauter bewahrt
das lichte Gold,
das euch zum Unheil geraubt!
(*Götterdämmerung*, Act III, ll.8913-8919)

In NL, she appears to survive, as far as we can tell, but she might as well be dead for all the interest the poet takes in her. After Siegfried's death, Hagen states that he is

¹¹⁴ Discussed further in Chapter V

pleased that Brunhild has been avenged; ¹¹⁵ Kriemhild knows immediately that the dead man is Siegfried, whom Hagen has killed for Brunhild's sake; ¹¹⁶ and the final reference to her in the first half of the poem states that she does not care how much Kriemhild grieves, and that one day Kriemhild will cause her grief in her turn.¹¹⁷ In the second half of the poem, there are two mentions of Brunhild. When Werbel and Swemmel come with Kriemhild's invitation, they ask to be allowed to see Brunhild, but are denied access to her. ¹¹⁸ The last mention of "Gunther's lovely wife", whom we assume to be Brunhild, occurs before he and the others set off for Hungary; we are told that she shared his bed for the last time. ¹¹⁹ To the poet of NL, Brunhild has no further significance after the death of Siegfried.

115

1001. Dô sprach von Tronege Hagene; "ich bringe in in daz lant.
 mir ist vil unmære und wirt ez ir bekant,
 diu sô hât betrüebet den Prunhilden muot.
 ez ahtet mich vil ringe swaz si weinens getuot."

116

1010 Dô sprach daz gesinde; "waz ob ez ist ein gast?"
 daz bluot ir ûz dem munde von herzen jâ mer brast.
 dô sprach si; >ez ist Sîfrit, der mîn vil lieber man;
 ez hât geraten Prûnhilt, daz ez hat Hagene getan."

117

1100. Prûnhilt diu schœne mit übermuote saz.
 swaz geweinte Kriemhilt, unmære waz ir daz,
 sine wart ir guoter triuwe nimmer mê bereit
 sit getet ouch ir frou Kriemhilt diu vil herzenlîchen leit.

118

1485. Der kûnec in erlaubte (das was noch niht geschehen)
 ob si wolden gerne froun Prûnhilde sehen,
 daz si für si solden mit sînem willen gân.
 daz understuont dô Volker; daz was ir liebe getân.

1486. "Jane ist min frouwe Prûnhilt nu niht so wol gemuot,
 daz ir sî müget schouwen" sprach der ritter guot.
 "bîtet unz morgen", sô lât mans iuch sehen."
 dô si sie wanden schouwen, done kunde ez niht geschehen.

119

1515 Gezelt unde hütten spien man an daz gras
 anderthalp des Rines. dô daz geschehen was,
 der kûnec bat noch beliben sîn vil schœne wîp.
 si truhte noch des nahtes dem sînen wætlichen lîp.

In TS, it transpires that she survives until the end - it is probably to be assumed that she is now the ruler of Niflungaland, since all the Niflungs are dead. She is visited by Hogni's son, Aldrian, whom she congratulates on avenging his father, by contriving the death of Attila; she helps him to win a kingdom for himself. Her survival at the end of TS comes as something of a surprise, and in fact the author/compiler reveals a hitherto unsuspected propensity for tying up loose ends.

In the Norse redactions, and in Morris's poem, Brynhild's suicide is dramatically and psychologically inevitable, but is not intended as a world-redeeming act by her, and is not perceived as such by the narrator. Suicide is the only possible solution for her, as her life has become unbearable. Gunnar attempts to persuade her to remain alive, but she ignores him; and Hogni's attitude to her is in any case one of hostility. ¹²⁰ He is consistently hostile to Brynhild in VS and PE; he and Gudrun express similar sentiments about her, namely that she has brought nothing but grief to the family who made her welcome. In *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*, he expresses his reluctance to prevent her suicide, saying that she was born to cause grief. ¹²¹

¹²⁰ Then Gunnar called to Hogni, and prayed him for counsel, and bade him go to her, and see if he might perchance soften her dreadful heart, saying withal, that they now had need enough on their hands in the slaking of her grief, till time might get over.

But Hogni answered, "Nay, let no man hinder her from dying; for no gain will she be to us, nor has she been gainsome since she came hither!"

(*Volsunga Saga*, Morris's trans.)

¹²¹ One answer Hogni
Had for all;
"Nay, let hard need
Have rule thereover,
And no man let her
Of her long journey!
Never born again
May she come back thence!

Luckless she came
To the lap of her mother,
Born into the world
For utter woe,
For heart-whole mourning.
(Morris's trans.)

In *Guðrunarkviða in fyrsta*, Brynhild is cursed by Gullrond, a character who doesn't appear elsewhere. She is referred to as "Giuki's daughter", but there is no other reference to the Guikings having a sister other than Gudrun, and her function appears to be (a) to encourage Gudrun to weep for Sigurd, (b) to curse Brynhild. To the accusation that she has brought grief to the Giukings - which is true enough - Brynhild responds that they also caused her grief by tricking her into marrying Gunnar.

In VS, Hogni sees Brynhild as a force for evil, as he does in *Sigurd*; asked by Gunnar to dissuade her from suicide, he refuses, saying:

"It is nought, thy word," said Hogni, "wilt thou bring dead men aback,
Or the souls of kings departed midst the battle and their wrack?
Yet this shall be easier to thee than the turning Brynhild's heart;
She came to dwell among us, but in us she had no part;
Let her go her ways from the Niblungs with her hand in Sigurd's
hand

Will the grass grow up henceforward where her feet have trodden
the land?

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.270)

The concluding lines of this section of the poem perhaps indicate that the deaths of Sigurd and Brynhild were not entirely pointless:

They are gone - the lovely, the mighty, the hope of the ancient Earth;
It shall labour and bear the burden as before the day of their birth;
It shall groan in its blind abiding for the day that Sigurd hath sped,
And the hour that Brynhild hath hastened, and the dawn that waketh
the dead:

It shall yearn, and be oft-times holpen, and forget their deeds no
more,

Till the new sun beams on Baldur, and the happy sealess shore.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.275)

This last line is a reference to *ragnarøk* - not quite the same thing as *Götterdämmerung*, though the two concepts are often equated, but *ragnarøk* means *fate of the gods* rather than *twilight of the gods*. The poem implies that Sigurd and Brynhild will never be forgotten while this world endures. *Till the new sun beams on Baldur* is a reference to the last stanzas of *Völuspá*, which relate how, after *ragnarøk*, a new and better world will arise, and Baldur will return.

2.17. Gudrun's revenge

The *Ring* ends with the death of Brünnhilde, which may or may not have redeemed the world. But, in all the sources, this is not the end, as Sigurd's wife survives. (To avenge him, in NL - to avenge the death of her brothers at the hands of her second husband in VS and PE.) The fourth book of Morris's poem, *Gudrun*, is based on NL rather than on the Norse literature, which deals with a different branch of the legend; Gudrun survives and, at Grimhild's insistence, marries Atli (Brynhild's brother; though in the earlier stages of the development of the legend this may not have been the case.) In VS and PE, Atli is envious of the wealth of the Niflungs, and sends a messenger to invite them to a feast. He is plotting treachery, however; Gudrun tries to warn her brothers by sending a wolf's hair knotted to a gold ring, but they disregard her warnings, and also disregard the warning dreams of their wives. When they arrive at Atli's hall, they are attacked by his men; Gudrun takes up the sword to fight by the side of her brothers. Gunnar and Hogni are defeated and killed, without revealing the whereabouts of Sigurd's treasure. In revenge, Gudrun kills her sons by Atli, and serves up their flesh to him at a feast. Then she and Hogni's son kill Atli and set fire to the hall. Gudrun attempts to drown herself, but is washed ashore in the land of King Jonakr, whom she marries. She and Jonakr have three sons, Hamdir, Sorli and Erp. She also has a daughter, Swanhild, whose father was Sigurd. Swanhild is maligned by an enemy and killed. Gudrun sends her sons to avenge their half-sister, but the two eldest kill the youngest brother, thinking he is of no use to them; in fact this means that it is easy for their enemies to kill them.

For the concluding book of *Sigurd*, Morris turns to NL, in which Kriemhild marries Etzel. The figure of Etzel/Atli is based on the historical Attila the Hun, but, in NL, Etzel is a kindly old man who means well by his brothers-in-law, and does his best to avert the catastrophe when Kriemhild sends a treacherous invitation, which they accept. Kriemhild is intent on vengeance for Siegfried, which she achieves with such cruelty that she is perceived as a she-devil (*vâlandinne*) by the few survivors, and is killed by Hildebrand, one of the followers of Dietrich of Bern.

In the final book of *Sigurd*, Morris has followed Wagner's procedure of taking what he needs from all the available sources and creating a new version of the legend. *Gudrun* relies more heavily on the second half of NL than on VS; Gudrun does not take up the sword on behalf of her brothers, she does not intervene in the fighting at all, but watches it all impassively. Morris omits the episode of Gudrun's grisly vengeance (killing her sons and making Atli eat their flesh), but she kills Atli and sets fire to the hall. The poem ends with her suicide.

The opening sections of *Gudrun*, though, are based on VS. We are reminded again that Grimhild is a central figure in Morris's conception. She is still firm in her belief that she can defy the gods. In Morris's poem, Atli is not Brynhild's brother. (And of course, in NL Etzel is no relation to Brunhild.) Brynhild has not, as in VS and PE, prophesied that Gudrun will marry Atli, but she has foretold that Gunnar will be betrayed and killed, though not in detail, as she does in VS.

The motif of Atli's greed predominates throughout; this is also taken from the Norse literature, it is not present in NL. Grimhild's cunning and guile are mentioned again; she alone knows where Gudrun is, and her cunning will be necessary to find Gudrun, and to persuade her to agree to the marriage with Atli.

The poem here introduces Hogni's objection to the marriage; this is not found in VS or PE, but in NL Hagen objects, as he realises that Kriemhild will be able to harm them if she marries Etzel ¹²²:

"O wise-heart Hogni," said Grimhild, "wilt thou strive with the hand of fate,
And thrust back the hand of Odin that the Niblung glory will crown?
Wert thou born in a cot-carle's chamber, or the bed of a King's renown?"

"I know not, I know not," said Hogni, "but an unsure bridge is the sea,

122

1210. "Daz ich dô wol bekenne,
sol si nemen Etzel
si getuot uns noch vil leide,
ja wirt ir dienende

daz tuon ich iu kunt.
gelebt si an die stuont,
swie siz getraget an.
vil manec wætliche man."

1212. Dô sprach aber Hagene;
und sol diu edele Kriemhilt
si getuot uns leide,
ir sult ez lan belîben:

"mir mac niemen widersagen:
Helchen krone tragen,
swie si gefüege daz.
daz zimt iu michel baz."

And such would I oft were builded betwixt my foeman and me.
 I know a sorrow that sleepeth, and a wakened grief I know,
 And the torment of the mighty is a strong a fearful foe."
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.281)

This is ironic; it is of course Grimhild who tempts fate, Hogni is wiser than his mother in this. But Hogni is aware of Gudrun's grief, if the others are not. Her first reaction when they find her shows that she is hardly prepared for reconciliation:

"What! bear ye tidings of Sigurd? is he new come back from the dead?
 O then will I hasten to greet him, and cherish my love and my lord,
 Though the murderous sons of Giuki have borne the tale abroad."
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.283)

Grimhild drugs her into accepting the inevitability of marriage to Atli. Again, there is negative vocabulary - *cunning, guile* - associated with Grimhild. Nothing good can ultimately come of what she does, no matter how magnificent it seems at the time. Grimhild's potion blots out many of Gudrun's memories, but she doesn't forget Sigurd. This is not the case in VS, where it is stated that she forgot all her wrongs.

In *Gudrunarkviða II.*, Gudrun's reluctance to marry Atli stems from two causes; she thinks it inappropriate that she should marry Brynhild's brother, of all people, and she foretells that Atli will cause the deaths of Gunnar and Hogni, and that she will kill Atli. Nevertheless, she is forced into the marriage.

In *Sigurd*, her specific objections are not mentioned; she marries Atli sunk in weary indifference, showing neither joy nor sorrow at the prospect. Possibly she accepts the marriage as a way of achieving vengeance, as does Kriemhild in NL; Kriemhild agrees to marry Etzel when Rüdiger promises her that he will be the first to defend her and avenge her wrongs.¹²³ Gudrun plays on Atli's greed; she never forgets Sigurd, and she, like Kriemhild, is using her second marriage to help her to her

123

1259 Dô gedahte diu getriuwe;
 alsô vil gewonnen,
 diu liuhte swaz sie wellen
 waz ob noch wirt errochen

"sît ich friunde hân
 sô sol ich reden lâ n
 ich jamerhadtez wîp.
 des mînen lieben mannes lîp?

vengeance. It is easy to arouse his desire for the wealth of the Niblungs, part of which is the treasure that once belonged to Sigurd:

Cold then is her voice in the high-seat, and she hears not what it saith;
 But Atli heedeth and hearkeneth, for she tells of the Glittering Heath,
 And the Load of the Mighty Greyfell, and the Ransom of Odin the Goth;
 Cold yet is her voice as she telleth of murder and breaking of troth,
 Of the stubborn hearts of the Niblungs, and their hands that never yield,
 Of their craving that nought fulfilleth, of their hosts arrayed for the field.
 ...

How oft shall I tell thee, Atli, of the wise Andvari's Gold,
 Ther Treasure Regin craved for, the uncounted ruddy rings?
 Full surely he that holds it shall rule all earthly kings;
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.288)

When the messenger arrives in Gunnar's hall with the treacherous invitation, there is no warning from Gudrun, since she is the instigator. The messenger, Knefrud, describes how Gudrun waits eagerly to see her brothers arriving, but in such a way as to imply that she expects them to come armed; Hogni immediately understands what is meant, but Gunnar chooses not to. But when he decides to accept the invitation, he knows perfectly well that neither he nor Hogni will ever come back. Knefrud realises this, and knows that telling the truth about Gudrun will make no difference now:

Then the liar laughed out and answered; "Ye shall go tomorrow morn,
 The man to turn back Gunnar shall never now be born:
 Each day-spring the white Gudrun on Sigurd's glory cries,
 All eve she wails on Sigurd when the fair sun sinks and dies!"
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.296)

Hogni sinks Sigurd's treasure in the river; this is based on the episode in NL in which Hagen sinks Siegfried's treasure in the Rhine to prevent Kriemhild from obtaining it, but the motivation here is different. Morris has developed this from what Gunnar says to Atli before Atli has him killed; that he would rather the Rhine should have the gold. This needn't necessarily mean that it has literally been thrown in the Rhine, merely that Gunnar feels that it would be a better place for it, and that, now that Hogni is dead, he is the only one who knows the whereabouts of the gold, which he will not reveal. In NL, Hagen sinks the gold in the Rhine long before Kriemhild's marriage to Etzel, in order to undercut her power, whereas in *Sigurd*, Hogni throws it

away before he and Gunnar go to visit Atli and Gudrun, on what they know will be their last journey. There is perhaps a suggestion that they are glad to get rid of it, as the gods were glad to get rid of it so long ago; after all, it has brought them nothing but trouble, it is the *Seed of murder and broil*.

The *allwise Grimhild* is waiting to greet her sons and speed them on their way; but this time she is not spinning, she never spins again. Her pride is greater than ever:

But exceeding proud sits Grimhild, and so wondrous is her state
That men deem they have never seen her so glorious and so great.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.305)

She tells her sons that the future is going to see the culmination of the Niblungs' glory and pride, but she knows this isn't true, and once Gunnar and Hogni have gone, she curses the gods and dies. What happens is in a sense the culmination of what she has striven for, but in the sense that it is *the waste her labour won*; all her striving has been to achieve glory for her family, but all she has in fact achieved has been their destruction. There are more references to her cunning and guile; all the vocabulary associated with Grimhild is negative. Her heart, for instance, is *the forge of sorrow*.

When the Niblungs arrive in Atli's country, they abandon their ships:

There none hath tethered the dragons, or inboard handled the oars,
And the tide of the sea cometh creeping along the stranger shores,
Till those golden dragons are floated, and their unmanned oars awash
In the sandy waves of the shallows, from stern to tiller clash;
Then setteth a wind from the shore, and the night is waxen a-cold,
And seaward drift the long-ships with their raiment and vessels of gold,
And their Gods with mastery carven; and who knoweth the story to tell,
If their wrack came ever to shoreward in some place where fishers dwell,
Or sank in midmost ocean, and lay on the sea-floor wan
Where the pale sea-goddess singeth o'er the bane of many a man?
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.309)

They abandon the ships because they know that they will never return; there is no comparable episode in the Norse sources, but in NL Hagen smashes the one boat, because he knows that none of them will ever need it again; the water-nymphs have

warned him that only the chaplain will return safely, and his unsuccessful attempt to drown the chaplain proves the accuracy of their prophecy. 124

In VS, when the brothers arrive in Atli's hall, Gudrun goes out to greet them, and takes up the sword to defend them. 125 This is the point at which Morris breaks with the Norse tradition, in which Gudrun fights in defence of her brothers, but he doesn't follow NL to the extent of having her initiate the fighting, as Kriemhild does; instead, she watches silently and impassively. She only speaks once, and that is to say; *Ye shall die today, O brethren, at the hands of a King forsworn.*

When only Gunnar and Hogni survive after the fighting, Atli has them put in chains. Both refuse to divulge the whereabouts of the treasure; Gunnar demands to see

124

1580	Dô stuont der arme priester dâ bî sach wol Hagene daz im für mære sageten er dahte; 'dise degene	unde schutte sîne wâ t. daz sîn niht wære râ t, diu wilden merewîp. müezen verliesen den lîp."
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1581	Dô si daz schif entluoden swaz dar ûfe hêten Hagene ez sluoc ze stucken des hete michel wunder	und gar getruogen dan, der drier künege man, und warf ez an die fluot. die recken küene unde guot.
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1582	"Zwiu tuot ir daz, bruoder?" "wie suln wir komen übere, riten von den Hiunen sit dô sagete im Hagene	sô sprach Dancwart; sô wir die widervart ze lande an den Rîn?" daz des kunde niht gesîn.
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1583.	Dô sprach der helt von Tronege; ob wir an dirre reise der uns entrinnen welle der muoz an disem wâ ge	"ich tuon ez ûf der w ân, deheinen zagen hâ n, durch zâgelîche nôt, doch liden schmælichen tôt
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125 But therewithal came the tiding to Gudrun, and when she heard thereof, she grew exceeding wroth, and cast her mantle from her, and ran out and greeted those newcomers, and kissed her brethren, and showed them all love - and the last of all greetings was that betwixt them.

Then said she, "I thought I had set forth counsels whereby ye should not come hither, but none may deal with his shapen fate." And withal she said, "Will it aught avail to seek for peace?"

But stoutly and grimly they said nay thereto. So she sees that the game goeth sorely against her brothers, and she gathers to her great stoutness of heart, and does on a mail-coat and takes to her a sword, and fights by her brethren, and goes as far forward as the bravest of manfolk; and all spoke in one wise that they never saw any fairer defence than in her.

(Volsunga Saga, Morris's trans.)

Hogni's heart cut from his body before he will tell Atli anything. Once Hogni is dead, he reveals that it is where no-one will ever be able to use it again:

.. for I, only I am left
 To tell of the ransom of Odin, and the wealth from the toiler reft.
 Lo, once it lay in the water, hid, deep adown it lay,
 Till the Gods were grieved and lacking, and men saw it and the day;
 Let it lie in the water once more, let the Gods be rich and at peace!
 But I at least in the world from the words and the babble shall cease.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.332)

This is by way of being a summary of the fate of the Gold and what it has symbolised for everyone involved, including the gods; i.e. it has occasioned misery and destruction, and not much else. So the conclusion of *Sigurd* is not so very different from the conclusion of the *Ring*; the gold, which was robbed from the waters and occasioned nothing but grief, is returned to its source, and its last owners (Gunnar and Hogni in this case) want nothing more than the peace and oblivion of death. Atli has Gunnar cast into a snake-pit, in which he reveals a hitherto unsuspected talent as a musician, playing his harp to quieten the snakes. The episode is developed by Morris to include the subject of Gunnar's song; he sings of the Creation according to Norse legend. (This may be based on *Völuspá*.) Gunnar knows he is going to die, and sums up his life; he has attempted to live by the principles most of the characters in the poem profess to admire.

The poem terminates with Gudrun's suicide. After the death of her brothers, she pretends to be reconciled with Atli for long enough to give him a feast at which, for a short while, he can revel in the illusion of now being the most powerful king on earth, since the Niblungs are dead; but she has only waited for this to be able to destroy Atli as well. The life she had with Atli was miserable, and now she wants to punish his greed. She doesn't even promise him a decent burial, as she does in VS. Everything is destroyed now, and Gudrun has no further desire to live; she throws herself into the sea, and her wish for death is granted.

CHAPTER III

IMAGERY AND VERSIFICATION IN THE RING

3.1. Wagner's poetic theories: the suitability of *Stabreim*

In *Oper und Drama* Wagner explains his poetic and literary theories at some length, in particular his decision to use alliterative verse (*Stabreim*); he discusses what he considers to be the nature of *Stabreim*, (or unsuitability of end-rhyme) and its particular relevance to, and importance for, for his dramatic purposes; specifically, for the purpose of dramatising material from Germanic myth ¹:

Der Rhythmus des modernen Verses ist ein nur gebildeter, und am deutlichsten mußte dieß der Tonsetzer empfinden, der eben nur aus diesem Verse den Stoff zur Bildung der Melodie nehmen wollte...

(Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde, Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. IV, p.326)

Als ich den Siegfried entwarf, fühlte ich, mit vorläufigem gänzlichen Absehen von der musikalischen Ausführungsform, die Unmöglichkeit, oder mindestens die vollständige Ungeeignetheit davon, diese Deutung im modernen Verse auszuführen.

(ibid. p.327)

In speaking of "the utter impossibility of producing the poem with modern verse techniques", Wagner refers specifically to the Germanic material (at this stage still the one poem, *Siegfrieds Tod*.) He also discusses the question of what would be the most suitable poetic form in which to depict Siegfried, as he conceived of him:

der männlich verkörperte Geist der ewig und einzig zeugenden Unwillkür, des Wirkers wirklicher Thaten, des

¹ This is noted and elaborated upon by Leif Ludwig Albersten, in *Plädoyer für die metrische Formung von Richard Wagners "Ring"*, in Orbis Litterarum, 41/1986, where the point is made "daß Wagners alliterierende Praxis selber ein experimentelles Intermezzo blieb, ausprobiert nur als eine Art Pastiche und am altgermanischem Stoff. Vorher und nacher hat der Verseschreiber Wagner anderer Formen der Metrik gewählt." (p.295)

Menschen in der Fülle höchster¹⁶², unmittelbarster Kraft und zweifellosester Liebenswürdigkeit. (ibid, p.328)

Wagner states that he found modern verse-forms, especially end-rhyme, unsuitable because he feels that his Siegfried-figure would not have used such artificial means of expression:

So, wie dieser Mensch sich bewegte, mußte aber notwendig sein redender Ausdruck sein; hier reichte der nur gedachte moderne Vers mit seiner verschwebenden, körperlosen Gestalt nicht mehr aus.....

(ibid. pp.328-329)

an dem urymythischen Quelle, wo ich den jugendlich schönen Siegfried'menschen fand, traf ich auch ganz von selbst auf den sinnlich vollendeten Sprachausdruck, in dem einzig dieser Mensch sich kundgeben konnte. Es was dies der, nach dem wirklichen Sprachaccente zur natürlichsten und lebendigsten Rhythmik sich fügende, zur unendlich mannigfaltigsten Kundgebung jeder Zeit leicht sich befähigende, stabgereimte Vers, in welchem einst das Volk selbst dichtete, als es eben noch Dichter und Mythenschöpfer war.

(ibid., p. 239)

Because Wagner thinks that *Stabreim* is somehow a more "natural" or "primitive" form of poetic composition than end-rhyme, he finds it an eminently suitable vehicle for conveying the character and personality of the jugendlich schöner Siegfriedmensch. In Wagner's opinion, *Stabreim* is

die urälteste Eigenschaft aller dichterischen Sprache.... Im Stabreime werden die verwandten Sprachwurzeln in der Weise zueinander gefügt, daß sie, wie sie sich dem sinnlichen Gehöre als ähnlich lautend darstellen, auch ähnliche Gegenstände zu einem Gesamtbilde von ihnen verbinden, in welchem das Gefühl sich zu einem Abschlusse über sie äußern will.

Stabreim does not actually reflect or reproduce the nature of ordinary speech ; it is just as highly stylised as end-rhyming verse in iambic pentameters. Wagner is, however, making a valid point in saying:

Wie einfach ist die Erklärung und das Verständnis aller Metrik, wenn wir uns die vernünftige Mühe geben, auf die natürlichen Bedingungen alles menschlichen Kunstvermögens zurückzugehen, aus denen wir auch einzig wieder nur zur wirklichen Kunstproduktion gelangen können!

Wagner seems to share with Wordsworth a dislike of what the latter called the "gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers" and also to believe that poetry consists in "fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men" (*Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, 1805*).

For the *Ring*, Wagner invents his own version of *Stabreim*, based on Ludwig Ettmüller's translations of the *Poetic Edda*,² but in a form which allows him much more flexibility. Wagner reproduces hardly any of the vocabulary that he found in Ettmüller's translations, and also disregards the strophic nature of the *Poetic Edda*. Very occasionally, a character in the *Ring* will have a four-line strophe, but this is the exception rather than the rule. Ettmüller explains in his introduction how *Stabreim* works:

In den zusammengehörenden Zeilen müssen drei Wörter vorkommen, die mit denselben Buchstaben anfangen. Von diesen drei Wörtern finden zwei in der ersten, das dritte jedoch in der zweiten Zeile ihre Stelle.

(Ettmüller, *Introduction*)³

Ettmüller also attempts to convey something of the nature of Old Norse poetic idioms (kennings):⁴

So versteht sich denn auch von selbst, daß alle die kühnen bildlichen Ausdrücke, an denen die altnordischen Dichtungen so reich sind, in der Uebersetzung wiedergegeben werden mußten und nicht mit den durch sie ersetzten natürlichen Ausdrücken vertauscht werden durften. (ibid.)

The following passage probably had the greatest influence on Wagner:

[ich] habe keine neuen Wörter gemacht...wohl aber habe ich zuweilen...gutem alten Golde, dessen Gepräge, wenn auch nicht den Schriftstellern, doch dem Volke noch gar wohl bekannt ist,

² Published in Zürich in 1837. Wagner met Ettmüller - known to his friends and colleagues as "Eddamüller" - during his period of exile in Switzerland.

³ Wagner does not strictly observe this rule, and nor does Morris in his poem. Morris's alliterative verse is more flexible than the Old Norse versification and he uses end-rhyme which, as we observed, Wagner considered unnecessary.

⁴ See Chapter IV and Appendices for definition of *kenning*.

auch in der Schriftwelt aufs neue Geltung zu verschaffen gesucht. (ibid.)

In claiming *Stabreim* as a more suitable vehicle for his drama than end-rhyming iambic pentameters, Wagner notes that verse and metre are made up of *Hebung und Senkung, Ausdehnung und Kürzungen, Steigerung und Abnahme der tönenden Laute*. It is not always explicit in *Oper und Drama*, but he is actually making the point specifically about his own experimentation with various verse-forms, although in some passages he generalises far too much about the suitability of one or other particular verse-form: he appears to have a particular antipathy to iambic pentameter, which at one point he dismisses as unsuitable for drama altogether.⁵ At times he seems not to be entirely clear whether the unsuitability refers to drama as a whole, or just to opera, and he cannot be entirely absolved from the charge of inconsistency, but on one point he seems quite definite:

Die Darstellung der Verwundtschaft, der zu Tönen gewordenen Vokallaute an unser Gefühl kann daher nicht mehr der Wortdichter bewerkstelligen, sondern der Tondichter.

(*Oper und Drama*, iii ; Gesammelte Schriften, Bd.IV, p.138)

It is the flexibility of *Stabreim* which attracts Wagner, and he claims that it is much more easily adaptable to musical rhythm than more conventional metre. What he says about stress pattern does not apply to conventional, "authentic" *Stabreim*, but it does apply to his version of it:

Der rein musikalische Takt bietet dem Dichter Möglichkeiten für den Sprachausdruck dar, denen er für den nur gesprochenen Wortvers von vornherein entsagen mußte. Im nur gesprochenen Wortvers mußte der Dichter sich darauf beschränken, die Zahl der Sylben in der Senkung nicht über zwei auszudehnen, weil bei drei Sylben der Dichter es nicht hätte vermeiden können, daß eine dieser Sylben bereits als

⁵ There is a case for saying that Milton uses iambic pentameter far more effectively than Shakespeare, as he is not limited by the necessity to make what he says effective on the stage; but Wagner's argument seems to be about the nature of iambic pentameter, rather than the competence of the poet or dramatist. This may not be the best example to have used, in view of the fact that Wagner's command of English was not great, and he would not have read Milton; but it is probably the example that springs most readily to mind.

Hebung zu betonen gewesen wäre, was seinen Vers natürlich sogleich über den Haufen geworfen hätte. ⁶ (ibid.)

Hardly any of Wagner's contemporaries or successors followed him in his claim for the superiority of alliterative verse over iambic pentameter, and the poets who did follow him most enthusiastically - the French Symbolists - were not dramatists, but lyric poets. ⁷

⁶ Stanley R. Hauer, in *Wagner and the Völuspá (Nineteenth Century Music, Summer 1991, Vol. XV, No. 1)*, observes: "Most notable is Wagner's ignorance of the primacy of the *höfu stafr*, the head-stave which determines the alliteration of the entire long line. [The head stave is] the third stressed syllable in a full metrical line;

skeggjöld, scálmöld, scildir ro klofnir. "

(*Wagner and the Völuspá*, p.54)

It is true that Wagner's alliterative verse rarely, if ever, follows this pattern. He did know Ettmüller's translations, but it is possible that he didn't quite understand the nature of *Stabreim* or the nature of Old Norse versification, and for his dramatic purpose it was perhaps not entirely necessary that he should.

⁷ In *Das Theater Richard Wagners*, Dieter Borchmeyer suggests that Wagner was attracted to *Stabreim* because "Stabreim und Leitmotif offenbaren die geheimen "Sympathien" der Dinge, von denen die deutschen Romantiker, die "Correspondances", von denen die Symbolisten gesprochen haben." (p.144)

It is noteworthy, though, that Wagner does use end-rhyme in *Tristan und Isolde*, which probably had more direct influence on the Symbolists than the *Ring*.

It is suggested by Emeric Fiser, in his doctoral thesis *La théorie du symbole littéraire et Marcel Proust*, that "Pour retrouver les traces du symbole dans l'œuvre de Wagner, nous n'avons pas à nous adresser à son œuvre musicale et poétique ... ce qui enchantait le plus les symbolistes, les pages où ils ont trouvé le plus enseignement pour compléter leurs théories, c'était les œuvres théoriques de Wagner...Le principal collaborateur de la Revue Wagnérienne était Theodor de Wyzewa, c'est lui qui a transformé l'esthétique de Wagner à prédominance musicale, en une esthétique littéraire plus conforme aux idées poétiques des symbolistes."

(*La théorie du symbole littéraire*, Paris 1941)

3.2. Wagner's use and adaptation of alliterative verse technique

It may be helpful to illustrate Wagner's procedure by quoting a few of Ettmüller's translations, to illustrate just how flexible Wagner's verse is in comparison. Ettmüller retains as far as possible the pattern of alliteration found in the *Poetic Edda*; note for instance the following lines from *Gripispá*:

wird der Reiche mir
Rede bieten?
froh des Rathes
der Fremdling wäre;
flugs gern fände
des Fürsten ich.

Was fügt sich förderst
zur Freude mir,
hub ich aus deinen
Hallen mich?

Since Wagner allows himself so much more flexibility in the pattern of alliteration, his constructions are rarely as clumsy as

wie läuft des Lebens
Lauf mir ferner?

although in the original Old Norse, this is not a particularly clumsy stanza.

Ettmüller uses some archaisms that Wagner doesn't use, for instance *schaff mir Stromes Strahlglut* - translation of a kenning.⁸ Those that Wagner does use, or invent, are not directly taken from Ettmüller's translations, but are words or expressions which he considered fitted best into the context of his poem. Wagner rarely uses a periphrastic expression such as *schaff mir Stromes Strahlglut*, but the Rhinegold is once referred to as *der Wassertiefe wonniger Stern*. Occasionally Wagner adapts an expression found in Ettmüller's translation, but always expands upon it and amplifies it; a similar procedure to that which Morris adopts, in fact. For example, Andvari's curse

⁸ Morris translates a similar expression - *finn mér lindar loga!* - as "fetch me fire of the flood", a periphrasis for "gold from the river", i.e. the Rhine. "Fire of the flood" is a fairly common kenning for gold - the kennings are listed in *Skaldskaparmál*, which was of interest to Morris, if not to Wagner.

is rendered by Etmüller as *Niemand des Goldes / genießen soll!* which is adapted and expanded by Wagner into the line *Doch keiner genieße mit Nutzen sein!*

Perhaps most useful for our purposes would be a comparison of the various versions of the Woodbird episode; in PE and in Morris's poem, Sigurd is warned by eagles of Regin's treacherous intent, told about the bride who awaits him on the fire-girt rock (Sigrdrifa/Brynhild), and advised to take the treasure. Wagner alters the vocabulary and the structure of this episode;⁹ the birds are reduced in number to one Woodbird, whose advice to Siegfried is delivered in three stanzas, not consecutive but arising from the dramatic situation. I quote first of all Etmüller's translation, then Morris's translation for purposes of comparison.

Als aber Fafnirs Herzblut ihm auf die Zunge kam, verstund er die Vogelsprache. Er hörte, daß Adlerinnen von den Aesten riefen;

28.

Da sitzt Sigurd
besudelt vom Blute,
Fafnirs Herz
er am Feuer bratet;
der Kampfwarspalter 10
klug mich däuchte,
äßt er die leuchtende
Lebensfaser.

30. Hauptes kürzer laß' er
den haarigen Schwätzer
fahren hin zur Hel:
ihm dann eigen
wird alles Gold,
der Hort, den Fafnir hegte.

38. Ein Hof steht hoch
auf Hendarfiäll,
fest umfängt ihn
Feuer von außen;
den haben hehre

29.

Da liegt Regin
sinnt Rath bei sich;
will trügen, der ihm
traute, den Mann;
aus Neid er denkt,
auf nichtige Händel;
der Falschhart will
Fafnirn rächen.

36. Die roten Ringe
reihe dir an;
Furcht zu fühlen
nicht Fürsten ziemt;
Eine Maid ich weiß,
die minniglichste,
hell in Golde,
wenn du sie haben
könntest.

39. Auf dem Steine schläft
die Streitweise,
und ringsum lecket
der Linde Feind;
Yggur stach den Dorn

⁹ Perhaps there may be some resemblance to the Wotan-Mime colloquy in Act I of *Siegfried*; information of which the audience is already in possession has to be conveyed to Siegfried.

¹⁰ *sic.* This is evidently a kenning, or an attempt at translating a kenning, but it is not clear what it means.

Helden erbauet
aus fern strahlender
Stromesgluth.¹¹

einst in's Gewand
der Maid, die Männer
morden wollte.

Morris's translation

Bind thou, Sigurd,
the bright red rings!
Not meet it is
Many things to fear.

A fair may know I
Fair of all the fairest
Girt about with gold,
Good for thy getting.

Soft on the fell
A shield-may sleepeth,
The lime-trees' red plague¹²
Playing about her;
the sleep-thorn set Odin
Into that maiden
for her choosing in war
the one he willed not.

A high hall is there
Reared upon Hindfell,
Without all about it
Sweeps the red flame
aloft.
Wise men wrought
That wonder of halls
With the unhidden gleam
Of the glory of gold.

Go, son, behold
That may under helm
who from battle
Vinskornir bore;
From her may not turn
the torment of sleep,
dear offspring of kings
in the dread Norns' despite.

Wagner's Woodbird has three stanzas in which it conveys the necessary information to Siegfried, plus a three line flourish in which it explains the nature of its song.¹³

¹¹ kenning for *gold*

¹² Word-for-word translation of the kenning for *fire* ; Morris rarely uses this type of kenning in his poem.

¹³

Hei! Siegfried gehört nun der Niblungen Hort!
O, fänd' in der Höhle den Hort er jetzt!
Wollt' er den Tarnhelm gewinnen,
der taugt' ihm zu wonniger Tat;
doch wollt' er den Ring sich erraten,
der macht' ihm zum Walter der Welt!

Hei! Siegfried gehört nun
der Helm und der Ring!
O, traute er Mime,
dem Treulosen nicht!
Hörte Siegfried nur scharf
auf des Schelmen Heuchelgered'!
Wie sein Herz es meint,
kann er Mime verstehn;
so nützt ihm des Blutes Genuß.

Almost any section one cares to isolate, however short, will serve to illustrate the flexibility of Wagner's alliterative verse. Hunding's lines

die so leidig los dir beschied
 nicht liebte dich die Norn ;
 froh nicht grüßt dich der Mann
 dem fremd als Gast du nahst.
 (*Die Walküre*, Act I)

follow the pattern of Eddic verse and Ettmüller's translations. Thus in *die so leidig Los dir beschied Inicht liebte dich die Norn, liebte* could be said to function as the *höfu staf*r, and to determine the alliterative pattern of the line. The next lines provide an example of double alliteration, without a head-stave; *froh nicht grüßt dich der Mann, dem fremd als Gast du nahst*. Strictly speaking, *grüßt* doesn't quite alliterate with *Gast*, but this is a typical example of the flexibility and freedom that Wagner allowed himself.

The use of alliteration often produces very striking onomatopæic effects, as in the epithet *schäbiger Schust*. The alliteration is not always obtrusive or obvious, although this criticism has frequently been made; in the the following lines, for instance

Vor Klugheit bläht sich
 zum Platzen der Blöde!
 Nun plage dich Neid!
 Bestimm', in welcher Gestalt
 soll ich jach vor dir steh'n?
 (*Das Rheingold*, sc. iii)

Hei, Siegfried erschlug nun den schlimmen Zwerg!
 Jetzt wüßt' ich ihm noch das herrlichste Weib!
 Auf hohem Felsen sie schläuft,
 Feuer umbrennt ihren Saal;
 durchschritt er die Brunst,
 weckt' er die Braut,
 Brünnhilde wäre dann sein!

Lustig im Lied sing' ich von Liebe;
 wonnig aus Weh web' ich mein Lied:
 nur Sehnde kennen den Sinn!
 (*Siegfried*, Act II)

the alliteration is hardly noticeable, it forms part of the *symphonisches Gewebe*, as Wagner intended.¹⁴ And on occasion, basically factual information or lines of dialogue are as economical as possible, hardly bothering with alliteration at all:

Halt ihn fest, bis ich ihn band.
Nun schnell hinauf; dort ist er unser.
(*Das Rheingold*, sc. iii)

This would suggest that when Wagner gave Alberich such obtrusively alliterative lines as *garstig glatter glitschriger Glimmer* or when Wellgunde expresses her negative opinion of Alberich's appearance;

Pfui, du haariger,
höckriger Geck!
Schwarzes, schwieliges
Schwefelgezwerg!
(*Das Rheingold*, ll.103-106)

very obtrusive alliteration is deliberately used for comic effect, in order to make a point about Alberich, and that in his use of language Wagner was at least as competent a craftsman as Morris. Much of the alliteration used by and about Alberich in the first scene of *Das Rheingold* conveys his unprepossessing nature and appearance; apart from the above lines, we have Wellgunde's comment *Prustend naht meines Freiers Pracht!* in which the alliteration enables Wagner to use *Pracht* ironically, to alliterate with *prustend*, so that Alberich is subject to ridicule for his efforts.

The same overloading of alliteration is used by Siegfried to express his revulsion at Mime's appearance:

seh' ich dich stehen, gangeln und geh'n,
knicken und nicken, mit den Augen zwicken...
(*Siegfried*, Act 1)

¹⁴ Discussed in his theoretical writings, particularly *Oper und Drama*.

This couplet is also one of the rare examples in the *Ring* of the use of internal rhyme, combined with alliteration. Siegfried returns to the subject of Mime's unprepossessing appearance in Act II:

Grade so garstig,
griesig und grau,
klein und krumm,
höckrig und hinkend....
(*Siegfried*, Act II ll.5598-5601)

Do Siegfried's insults about Mime's appearance parallel the Rheinmaidens' insults about Alberich's appearance? These examples support the contention that Wagner deliberately chose obtrusive alliteration, with spitting consonants, to characterise the Nibelung brothers. This is carried over into the quarrel between Alberich and Mime in Act II of *Siegfried* :

Für des Knaben Zucht
will der knickrige
schäbige Knecht
keck und kühn
wohl gar König sein?
(*Siegfried*, Act II, ll.5806-5811)

Wagner gives himself constant opportunities to use cross-alliteration and double-alliteration effectively, as in the following example:

Wut und Minne,
wild und mächtig,
wühlt mir den Mut auf!
(*Das Rheingold* ll.190-192.)

The alliteration here allows the use of antithesis. *Wut* and *Minne* are linked in Alberich's mind because of the situation in which he finds himself, but there is no natural link between the two states of mind. *Wut* is linked with *wild* and *Minne* with *mächtig*. This is the first link between *Minne* and *Macht* (and its derivative, *mächtig*), and we shall become aware that the main argument of the *Ring* is the incompatibility between power and love. There will be further close verbal links between *Minne* und *Macht*, most noticeably the condition under which the *Rheingold* can be obtained:

Nur wer der Minne
Macht entsagt,
 Nur wer der Liebe
 Lust verjagt,
 (Das Rheingold, II.269-272)

and at the beginning of Wotan's narration in Die Walküre, in which he tells Brünnhilde

Von der Liebe doch
 mocht' ich nicht lassen;
 in der Macht verlangt' ich nach Minne.
 (Die Walküre, Act II, II.2778-2780)

The link is also found at the very end of Götterdämmerung, as Brünnhilde expresses her intention to join Siegfried on his funeral pyre: *in mächtigster Minne vermählt ihm zu sein!* Of course it may be a coincidence, and *mächtig(st)e Minne* is a fairly obvious epithet for any poet who has decided to use alliteration, but this functions as a demonstration of the different contexts in which the concept can be used, and I like the way Wagner introduces it first in an ironic context.

Further effective and striking examples of double alliteration are found, for instance:

sollte die grimmige Wal
 nicht schrecken ein gramvolles Weib?
 (Die Walküre, Act II)

which also includes another archaism - *Wal* - which Wagner has to use in order for it to alliterate with *Weib*; as so often, the archaic vocabulary is effective in its context, the alliteration providing a balance of sounds that is satisfying to the ear.

Another example worth noting is Sieglinde's Grauen und Schauder ob gräßlichster Schande where the double alliteration emphasises the related concepts. What is the *gräßlichste Schande* that Sieglinde feels? There is perhaps a deliberate ambiguity here. In the eyes of the world (i.e. of Fricka, who may be seen to represent respectable opinion), what Sieglinde and Siegmund have done is a shameful disgrace;

but during the *estasy* of their love-duet it was her marriage that she felt as a shameful disgrace:

was je ich gelitten
 in grimmigem Leid,
 was je mich geschmerzt
 in Schande und Schmach,
 süßeste Rache
 sühnte dann alles!
 (*Die Walküre*, Act I ll. 2244-2249)

A splendid example of double alliteration followed by cross-alliteration occurs in

Freieste Liebe furchtbares Leid
traurigsten Mutes mächtigster Trotz!
 (*Die Walküre*, Act III)

Or again, Wotan's despair at the situation in which he finds himself during Act II of *Die Walküre* is given expression and emphasis by the skilful use of cross-alliteration: *O heilige Schmach! O schmähhlicher Harm!*

The principle of using double and/or cross-alliteration for emphasis is found again and again in Wagner's text ; in *Götterdämmerung*, it occurs on one occasion in conjunction with vowel alliteration, which Wagner only uses sparingly. Siegfried here accuses Brünnhilde of having scant regard for her own honour:

Achtest du so
 der eig'nen Ehre?
 Die Zunge, die sie lästert,
 muß ich der Lüge sie zeihen?
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act II, ll.8104-8107)

The Blood-brotherhood duet in *Götterdämmerung* supplies further examples of cross-alliteration and double alliteration, for instance; *Blühenden Lebens labendes Blut*. Throughout the duet, the balance of meaning is paralleled by the balance of sounds, e.g. *Was in Tropfen heut' hold wir tranken*, (cross-alliteration), or *In Strahlen ström' es dahin*.

Wotan's first words in *Das Rheingold* bear a closer resemblance to the form of Old Norse verse, or at least to Etmüller's translations, than anything that has preceded them:

Der Wonne seligen Saal
bewachen mir Tür und Tor;
Mannes Ehre, ewige Macht
ragen zu endlosem Ruhm!
(*Das Rheingold*, II.324-327)

This still lacks the exactness of alliteration of Etmüller's translations, but it is a four-line strophe, unlike anything in the first scene, and we should note that cross-alliteration is used - *Mannes Ehre, ewige Macht*. We shall discover that Wotan's vocabulary, at least in *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, is that of aggressive masculinity, consisting largely of references to power - *Macht und Herrschaft* - with love coming a poor second.

Note should also be taken of the concluding four-line strophe of *Das Rheingold*:

Traulich und treu
ist's nur in der Tiefe;
falsch und feig ist,
was dort oben sich freut!
(*Das Rheingold*, II.1857-1860)

Here the balance of the alliteration allows a balanced antithesis of ideas, even though, for the sake of the alliteration, there cannot be an exact antithesis, which the nature of the ideas would seem to demand. There is the antithesis of *traulich und treu* against *falsch und feig*, although this is not an exact antithesis: *treu* is the opposite of *falsch*, but *traulich* is not the exact opposite of *feig*; in the context of the alliterative verse, however, it works effectively.

Wotan also gets a somewhat cryptic four-line stanza after Fricka asks him to explain the name Walhall:

Was, mächtig der Furcht
mein Mut mir erfand,
wenn siegend es lebt,
leg' es den Sinn dir dar!
(*Das Rheingold*, II.1814-1817)

The occasional cryptic nature of some of Wotan's utterances is due to the compactness of Wagner's poetic language, and is deliberate - possibly as deliberate as the cryptic nature of Gnipir's prophecies in *Sigurd the Volsung*. He speaks equally cryptically to Siegfried about the absence of his eye;

Mit dem Auge,
 das als eines mir fehlt,
 erblickst du selber das Auge
 das mir zum Sehen verblieb! 15
 (*Siegfried*, Act III ll.6385-6388)

The fact that Wagner has a free alliterative pattern allows him the use of cross-alliteration, as in *Mannes Ehre, ewige Macht*, which provides a satisfying balance of vowel and consonant alliteration. Similar use of cross-alliteration is found elsewhere, such as Fricka's *Dich freut die Burg, mir hängt es um Freia* or *herrliche Wohnung, wonniger Hausrat*, in which the alliteration is not obvious, still less obtrusive, but flows naturally.

Cross-alliteration is used by Loge to give weight to his sarcastic comments as the gods fade into old age: *Trügt mich ein Nebel? Neckt mich ein Traum?* *Necken* wouldn't have been the most obvious verb to choose in relation to *Traum*, so it was evidently chosen for the sake of the alliteration, and it is a very effective way of conveying Loge's mocking attitude. And here, as often when specific verbal effects are to be conveyed, the scoring is quite sparse.

There appears to be no consistent reason for the use of cross-alliteration; that is, is it not always used in ironic contexts or for emphasis, but just where it seems to flow most naturally and be most effective, as in Wotan's interpretation of the relationship between himself and Alberich; *mit neidischem Grimm grollt mir der Niblung* (*Die Walküre*, Act II). Alberich is characterised by his envious anger, in general terms as a

15 Perhaps we are (or Siegfried is) meant to deduce from this that Wotan's eye is (an allegory of) the sun.

personality and specifically in his struggle with Wotan. But there are many instances where cross-alliteration does seem to be used where emphasis is required, as in Wotan's *als mir göttlicher Not nagende Galle gemischt* or *wütender Sehnsucht sengender Wunsch* (*Die Walküre*, Act III) where a fairly complex construction is compacted into a few words, which cross-alliterate for greater emphasis.

3.3. Poetic and stylistic devices used in the Ring

One of the most striking qualities of Wagner's poetic language is its compactness; a good example occurs in Siegfried's final words at the end of Act I of Götterdämmerung :

Nun, Nothung, zeuge du,
daß ich in Züchten warb;
die Treue während dem Bruder,
trenne mich von seiner Braut!
(Götterdämmerung, Act I, ll.7727-7730)

Wagner here expertly manipulates alliterative patterns to emphasise the ideas that his character is expressing. ¹⁶ This compactness is a quality that Wagner shares with Gerard Manley Hopkins, and it is a quality which Morris did not always value. Wagner claims (as did Wordsworth and Hopkins) that his poetry is closer to "the natural rhythms of speech" - this is not in fact the case, either for Wagner or for Hopkins, whatever may have been the intention. ¹⁷ Wagner's reputation for prolixity and long-windedness is actually not justified; he very rarely digresses from the main theme of the plot, as Morris does, especially in The Earthly Paradise and Jason, which contain many descriptive passages, especially of landscape, which are the poetic equivalent to Pre-Raphaelite painting in their close attention to detail, but do not advance the narrative at all. ¹⁸

¹⁶ Space doesn't permit us to elaborate upon this at great length, but it is interesting that the consonant cluster *tr* can be used to express opposing ideas, whereas the cluster *br* seems to be used for kinship words . ie.

Treue/trennen ; Bruder/Braut.

¹⁷ Hopkins , referring to this metrical pattern of his verse (rather than the vocabulary) , says that he developed sprung rhythm (his own terminology) because it is "the nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is the native and natural rhythm of speech, the least forced, the most rhetorical and emphatic of all possible rhythms, combining, as it seems to me, opposite and, one would have thought, incompatible excellences, markedness of rhythm - that is rhythm's self - and naturalness of expression."

Much of the above could be applied to Wagner's verse, with the necessary modifications. His verse can perhaps best be described as a sort of rhythmic prose, or indeed as *vers libre* - Wagner was, after all, one of the major influences on the French Symbolists.

¹⁸ The resemblance of Morris's poetry - especially The Defence of Guenevere - to Pre-Raphaelite painting earned the adverse criticism of his

Apart from the main poetic device of alliteration, Wagner uses various literary and stylistic devices. He is actually quite sparing in his use of imagery and metaphor, which I discuss below, but there are examples of antithesis, paradox, repetition, personification, anaphora and the less common devices of hyperbaton ¹⁹ and polyptoton ²⁰ throughout the text. Most interesting is Wagner's frequent use of the balanced antithesis of vocabulary to create an antithesis of ideas; the alliteration is manipulated to create this effect, as in the following striking example from *Götterdämmerung*, in which Brünnhilde laments Siegfried's betrayal of her:

In seiner Macht
hält er die Maid,
in seinen Banden
faßt er die Beute,
die, jammernd ob ihrer Schmach,
jauchzend der Reiche verschenkt!
(*Götterdämmerung*, Act II, ll. 8216-8224)

Here, double alliteration (*jammernd / Schmach - jauchzend / verschenkt*) is used for emphasis, and the alliterative force of *jammernd / jauchzend* serves to highlight the contrast between Brünnhilde's feelings and those of Siegfried.

Skilful and effective use is made of anaphora, for instance in Siegmund's response to Brünnhilde's *Todesverkündigung* :

contemporaries, as this unsigned article from *The Saturday Review* for Nov. 20, 1858 demonstrates:

But when painters think it is their duty to work through a microscope, and to try to paint every stain on every leaf, as well as every leaf on every tree, they not only forget what art is, but are ignorant of what artistic imitation is. This extravagance is, we think, what Mr. Morris delights in. He works in the patient spirit of the illuminators, but then he is grotesque as well as minute and patient. All his thoughts and figures are represented on a solid plane; he has no notion of distance or aerial perspective, or gradation of tints; or rather, of malice prepense, he neglects these things. He has abundance of vivid, positive colour, sharp outline, and great richness of word diaper, with a certain stiff, antique, cumbrous embroidery of diction; but it is all cold, artificial and angular.

¹⁹ Words in an unfamiliar order.

²⁰ Defined by G.N. Leech, in *A Linguistic Analysis of English Poetry*, as 'the repetition of a word with varying grammatical inflections'.

So grüße mir Walhall,
grüße mir Wotan,

grüße mir Wotan und alle Helden;
grüß' auch die holden Wunschesmädchen -
 zu ihnen folg' ich dir nicht!
 (*Die Walküre*, Act II ll. 3207-3214) (emphasis added)

A shorter example of anaphora occurs in Siegmund's couplet in Act I:

Mißwende folgt mir, wohin ich fliehe;
 Mißwende naht mir, wo ich mich neige

Another example occurs at the end of *Siegfried*:

Brünnhilde lachend muß ich dich lieben,
 lachend will ich erblinden,
 lachend lass' uns verderben,
 lachend zugrunde gehn!
 (*Siegfried*, Act III ll.6851-6854) (emphasis added)

An extended example of anaphora occurs at the beginning of the Brünnhilde-Siegfried duet in Act I of *Götterdämmerung*:

Brünnhilde Willst du mir Minne schenken,
 gedenke deiner nur;
 gedenke deiner Taten,
 gedenk' des wilden Feuers,
 das furchtlos du durchschrittst,
 da den Fels es rings umbrann!

Siegfried Brünnhilde zu gewinnen!

Brünnhilde Gedenk' der beschildeten Frau
 die in tiefem Schlaf du fandest,
 der den festen Helm du erbrachst -

Siegfried Brünnhilde zu gewinnen!

Brünnhilde Gedenk' der Eide, die uns einen;
 gedenk' der Treue, die wir tragen;
 gedenk' der Liebe, der wir leben;
 Brünnhilde brennt dann ewig,
 heilig, dir in der Brust.

(*Götterdämmerung*, Act I, ll.7079-7097) (emphasis added)

The following lines from *Die Walküre* may serve as an example of hyperbaton. Hunding says to Siegmund:

Die so leidig Los dir beschied,
 nicht liebte dich die Norn;
 froh nicht grüßt dich der Mann,
 dem fremd als Gast du nahst.
 (*Die Walküre, Act I* ll.2061-2064)

It would be tempting to conclude that Wagner employed this rather strange syntax in order to fit in with the exigencies of the music, but in fact the scoring is rather thin at this point. In long narrative passages such as Wotan's crucial narration to Brünnhilde in Act II of *Die Walküre* the scoring is sparse in order to foreground the narrative, but this is only a four-line remark, made in order to draw the attention of the audience to Hunding's instinctive antipathy to Siegmund. The syntax is twisted to fit the alliteration.

Another, less complex example of hyperbaton evidently exists for the sake of the alliteration:

fröhlich nicht
 hängt Freia
 den Rauhen über dem Rücken.
 (*Das Rheingold, ll.841-843*)

Wotan's reproach to Brünnhilde is an example of *polyptoton*:

Durch meinen Willen
 warst du allein;
 gegen mich doch hast du gewollt ;
 meine Befehle nur
 führtest du aus;
 gegen mich doch hast du befohlen ;
Wunsch-Maid
 warst du mir,
 gegen mich doch hast du gewünscht;
Schildmaid
 warst du mir,
 gegen mich doch hobst du dein Schild;
Loskieserin
 warst du mir,
 gegen mich doch kienstest du Lose;
Heldenreizerin
 warst du mir,
 gegen mich doch reiztest du Helden.
 (*Die Walküre, Act III* ll. 3758-3765. emphasis added)

It is one of the few examples in the *Ring* of this stylistic device ; the same root is used in varying grammatical forms, first as a noun, then as a verb deriving from, or related to, the noun. An example of similar usage occurs in

War es so schmählich,
 was ich verbrach,
 daß mein Verbrechen so schmählich du bestrafst?
 War es so niedrig,
 was ich dir tat,
 daß du so tief mir Erneidrigung schaffst?
 War es so ehrlos,
 was ich beging,
 daß mein Vergeh'n nun die Ehre mir raubt?
 (*Die Walküre*, Act III ll.3840-3848)

where *schmählich* is repeated verbatim, but otherwise a word first found in one form is used in a different grammatical form in the next line.

Floßhilde's deceptive praise of Alberich, and his response:

Mir zagt, zuckt
 und zehrt sich das Herz,
 lacht mir so zierliches Lob.
 (*Das Rheingold*, ll.142-144)

works out as a sort of antithesis. *zagen*, *zucken*, *zehren*, all relate to the same basic idea of his heart being affected, trembling for joy, and in this context perhaps *zierliches Lob* is somewhat inappropriate; *zierlich* obviously exists for the sake of the alliteration, since it is not what Floßhilde says that is *zierlich*, but she herself, her appearance; the "praise" of Alberich is not *zierlich* at all, but hyperbolic and ironic, as she proceeds to demonstrate:

Deinen stechenden Blick,
 deinen struppigen Bart,
 o säh' ich ihn, faßt ich ihn stets!
 Deines stachlichen Haares
 strammes Gelock,
 umflöß es Floßhilde ewig!
 Deine Krötengestalt,
 deiner Stimme Gekrächz,
 o dürft ich, staunend und stumm,
 sie nur hören und sehen!
 (*Das Rheingold*, ll. 153-162)

This could almost be a parody of a conventional love-lyric, ²¹ in which the man lists the qualities and beauties of his beloved and expresses the desire to spend his life in contemplation thereof; the lines seem to be a double parody, in which *she* lists *his negative* attributes, and expresses the desire to spend her life in contemplation of his ugliness. She even explicitly concludes by saying that her *song* comes to an end (*Wie billig an Ende vom Lied!*)

The laughter of the Rhinemaidens is double-edged, to say the least. It is the laughter of primal innocence, but also the laughter of cruel mockery at Alberich's defects, then laughter of pure happiness when the sun lights up the gold.

Further examples of antithesis in *Das Rheingold* include the following, which occurs after Wotan has violently wrested the Ring from Alberich:

Alberich Ha! Zertrümmert! Zerknickt!
 Der Traurigsten traurigster Knecht!

Wotan Nun halt' ich, was mich erhebt,
 der Mächtigen mächtigsten Herrn!
 (*Das Rheingold*, ll.1473-1476)

The antithesis of situation is illustrated by the antithesis of language, and there is further emphasis on Wotan's obsession with *Macht* and *Herrschaft*. This idea of antithesis/opposition - but also a link between Wotan and Alberich - is illustrated by what they both say about Siegfried; they use almost identical vocabulary, as they realise that the curse cannot affect Siegfried, but of course they interpret this fact differently. Wotan expresses his willingness for Siegfried to inherit the world, whereas Alberich tells Hagen that they must now devote their efforts to the destruction of Siegfried:

Wotan
 dem herrlichen Wälsung
 weis' ich mein Erbe nun an.

.....
 Liebesfroh,
 ledig des Neides,
erlahmt an dem Edlen
Alberichs Fluch;

²¹ The Siegfried/Brünnhilde love-duet at the beginning of *Götterdämmerung* may contain traces of the *aubade* ; not a parody in this instance.

denn fremd bleibt ihm die Furcht.

(*Siegfried*, Act III ll.6261-6262, 6268-6272 emphasis added)

Alberich

An dem furchtlosen Helden

erlahmt selbst mein Fluch:

denn nicht kennt

er des Ringes Wert,

zu nichts nützt er

die neidlichste Macht.

Lachend in liebender Brunst,

brennt er lebend dahin.

Ihn zu verderben

taugt uns nun einzig.

(*Götterdämmerung*, Act II ll. 7783-7792 emphasis added)

In Alberich's curse, effective use is made of such figures of speech as oxymoron and paradox, for instance in Alberich's designation of *Des Ringes Herr als des Ringes Knecht!*. The curse is built up on use of repetition and antithesis, repetition to emphasise Alberich's point ; he doesn't repeat words verbatim, instead, ideas and concepts are recapitulated and expanded.²² The curse elaborates upon ideas only hinted at in the source, and there is an attempt at a balanced antithesis of ideas expressed in pairs of opposites. For instance, in *Jeder giere nach seinem Gut, / doch keiner genieße mit Nutzen sein*, the antithesis of *jeder / keiner* is echoed in the antithesis of *giere/genieße*, emphasising the impossibility of any pleasure to be had from ownership of the Ring.

Wie durch Fluch er mir geriet,
 verflucht sei dieser Ring!
 Gab sein Gold mir Macht ohne Maas,
 nun zeug' sein Zauber Tod dem, der ihn trägt!
 Kein Froher soll seiner sich freu'n,
 keinem Glücklichen lache sein lichter Glanz!
 Wer ihn besitzt, den sehre die Sorge,
 und wer ihn nicht hat, den nage der Neid!
 Jeder giere nach seinem Gut,
 doch keiner genieße mit Nutzen sein!
 Ohne Wucher halt' ihn sein Herr,
 doch den Würger zieh' er ihm zu!
 Dem Tode verfallen, fessle den Feigen die Furcht;
 so lang er lebt, sterb' er lechzend dahin,
 des Ringes Herr als des Ringes Knecht,
 bis in meiner Hand den geraubten wieder ich halte.
 (*Das Rheingold*)

Wotan's realisation of the paradoxical situation in which he finds himself - *der durch Verträge Ich Herr, Iden Verträgen bin Ich nun Knecht!* - is perhaps deliberately intended to recall the central threat of Alberich's curse: *des Ringes Herr als des Ringes Knecht!* especially since much of Wotan's dispute with Fricka has been about the *Herr/Knecht* antithesis and the nature of freedom. These are ideas which are interpreted rather simplistically by Fricka, but which Wotan is now developing.²³ In fact he now understands the situation perfectly well, but he does not yet know what to do about it; does not realise, in fact, that there is nothing left for *him* to do, he will only begin to realise this after losing Brünnhilde, and will not come to acceptance of his impotence until his spear is shattered by Siegfried's reforged sword.

Weibes Wert, Welbes Wonne is used as antithesis to demonstrate Wotan's distorted values, as in Fasolt's words:

Die ihr durch Schönheit herrscht,
schimmernd hehres Geschlecht -
wie löricht strebt ihr
nach Türmen von Stein,
setzt um Burg und Saal
Weibes Wonne zum Pfand!
(Das Rheingold, II.516-521)

Running through the disagreement between Wotan and the giants in Das Rheingold is the idea of the antithesis *Liebe/Liebe vs. Macht*, and there is also a hint that the antithesis is related to the idea of male/female polarity which Wagner discusses so elaborately in Oper und Drama; not quite as crude and unsubtle as *Weib/Liebe* opposed to *Mann/Macht*, but the idea is there, especially in Fricka's reproach to Wotan: *Was ist euch Harten heilig und Wert Igiert ihr Männer nach Macht?* When Wotan asks her whether she too was not lusting after power, her reply is that she

²³ See Chapter VII for extended discussion of the disputes between Wotan and Fricka.

was hoping for a lovely home where she and her husband could be at peace, but he will not accept this.²⁴ This antithesis of Macht and Liebe is spelt out again by Fricka;

Um der Macht und Herrschaft
müßigen Tand
verspielst du in lästerndem Spott
Liebe und Weibes Wert?
(Das Rheingold, II.402-405)

Brünnhilde's announcement to Sieglinde ; *Den hehrsten Helden der Welt / hegst du, O Weib, in schirmenden Schoß!* functions as an antithesis to the dramatic irony of Wotan's *des Hasses Frucht hegt eine Frau / des Neides Kraft kreißt ihr im Schoß!* It is almost the same vocabulary; Sieglinde bears the fruit of love in her womb, Grimhild²⁵ bears the fruit of hate in her womb.

The conspirators in Act II of Götterdämmerung - Brünnhilde, Gunther and Hagen - utter the sort of sentiments that conspirators might be expected to utter,²⁶ but the last five lines contain a balanced antithesis of ideas, the finer nuances of which may sometimes be missed in performance:

Gunther /Brünnhilde

Allrauner, rächender Gott!

Schwurwissender Eideshort!

Wotan! Wende dich her!

Weise die schrecklichheilige
Schar

hierher zu horchen der

Hagen

Alberich, gefallener
Fürst!

Nachthüter!

Niblungenherr!
Alberich! Achte auf
mich!

Weise von neuem der

Niblungenschar
dir zu gehorchen,

²⁴ Possibly this dispute between Wotan and Fricka, and even more their fatal disagreement in Act II of *Die Walküre* contains an echo of Goethe's *Nach Freiheit strebt der Mann, das Weib nach Sitte* (Torquato Tasso, Act II, sc. i)

²⁵ Although we don't actually know her name until Götterdämmerung.

²⁶ Shaw was one of the first to point out that Götterdämmerung is more conventionally 'operatic' than the works which precede it. He condemned it on this account, but scenes such as the Conspirators' Trio which concludes Act II are dramatically effective; and surely a Conspirators' Trio is supposed to be 'conventionally operatic' for maximum dramatic effect?

Rache Schwur!

des Ringes Herrn!

Wotan is called upon by his daughter ²⁷, Alberich by his son, in very similar terms; the parallels between Alberich and Wotan are again emphasised, and Alberich's association with night / darkness is recalled (*Nachthüter! Niblungenherr!*) Perhaps there is a distant affinity with Milton's Satan? (*gefallener Fürst!*)

Wagner occasionally uses internal rhyme, but only one example of end-rhyme, or rather assonance, can be found in the text of the *Ring*, in the passage in Act II of *Götterdämmerung* in which Brünnhilde accuses Siegfried of lying:

Du listiger Held,
 sich' wie du löst!
 Wie auf dein Schwert
 du schlecht dich berufst!
 Wohl kenn' ich seine Schärfe,
 doch kenn' auch die Scheide,
 darin so wonnig
 ruht an der Wand
 Nothung, der treue Freund,
 als die Traute sein Herr sich gewann!
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act II, II. 8115-8124)

There are also expressions (e.g. *Dach und Fach*) in which internal rhyme is substituted for alliteration; these are not very frequent, but other examples include *mit Fleiß und Schweiß ist es gefügt*. A particularly interesting example of internal rhyme is *Leben und Weben*, used by Loge to indicate the extent of his researches to discover if there is any living creature that can live without love. It is introduced for the sake of the internal rhyme, and the onomatopœia; and Weben could perhaps be related to Wagner's idea of the *symphonisches Gewebe* that he wanted his music to be. ²⁸

²⁷ And by the husband who has been forced upon her, who really has no independent voice in this conspiracy.

²⁸ Wagner is not, of course, using a full-fledged textile metaphor, as Morris does in *Sleurd*, but it is interesting that he refers to a "web of symphonic sound".

3.4 Vocabulary and characterisation

The technique of associating particular vocabulary, as well as specific leitmotifs, with a character, is followed in the case of Loge, whose vocabulary and music reflect his nature as a flickering flame. In the lines

zur leckenden Lohe
mich wieder zu wandeln
spür' ich lockende Lust
(Das Rheingold II.1822-1824)

the audience picks up a very strong sense of fire flickering - the alliteration contributes enormously to this effect, of course. Wotan's summoning of Loge at the end of *Die Walküre* ²⁹ reinforces this idea. Loge's vocabulary differs from that of the other gods just as his music does, though perhaps this is not quite so immediately noticeable; that is, Wagner does employ verbal leitmotifs to some extent, though of course they are not as important to him as musical leitmotifs. The main verbal leitmotif seems to be the imagery of light vs. dark, and fire imagery is also used. ³⁰ Loge's nature as the embodiment of flame perhaps also exemplifies his nature as the embodiment of trickery - his music and his vocabulary express his evasiveness and tricksiness, and the dangerous nature of uncontrolled fire. There is no need for specific fire imagery in *Das Rheingold*, because Loge is present on stage as an embodiment of the spirit of flame. Loge reminds Alberich that all the gold of Nibelheim would be no use without his help :

Kennst du mich gut,
kindischer Alb?
Nun sag', wer bin ich,
daß du so bellst?
Im kalten Loch,
da kauern du lagst.

29

Loge, hör'! Lausche hieher!
Wie zuerst ich dich fand, als feurige Glut,
wie dann einst du mir schwandest, als schweifende Lohe,
wie ich dich band, bann' ich dich heut!
Herauf, wabernde Lohe!
umlodre mir feurig den Fels!

³⁰ Discussed in greater detail below

wer gab dir Licht
 und wärmende Lohe,
 wenn Loge dir nicht gelacht?
 Was hülft dir dein Schmieden,
 heizt' ich die Schmiede dir nicht?
 (*Das Rheingold*, II.1138-1148)

Loge's vocabulary conveys subtlety, sinuousness, suppleness, whereas Wotan's language is that of aggressive masculinity. Wotan begins as articulate, but his progress towards self-knowledge is a progress from articulacy to silence; he has run out of evasions, and in silence he can no longer make treaties which he intends to break. This is emphasised in Waltraute's Narration to Brünnhilde in *Götterdämmerung*. (There is nothing comparable to this scene either in the sources or in Morris's poem.) Here we have Waltraute's interpretation of Wotan's silence, and Brünnhilde's inability to comprehend or interpret Waltraute's narrative, which has a dual purpose; both Brünnhilde and the audience have to be informed of the latest developments in Valhalla. We already know something of the World Ash Tree from the Norns in the Prologue:

Zweite Norn
 Da hieß Wotan
 Walhalls Helden
 der Weltesche
 welches Geäst
 mit dem Stamm in Stücke zu fällen.

Dritte Norn
 Es ragt die Burg,
 von Riesen gebaut;
 mit der Götter und Helden
 heiliger Sippe
 sitzt dort Wotan im Saal.
 Gehau'ner Scheite
 hohe Schicht
 ragt zu Hauf
 rings um die Halle;
 die Weltesche war dies einst.
 Brennt das Holz
 heilig brünstig und hell
 sengt die Glut
 schrend den glänzenden Saal -
 der sel'gen Götter Ende
 dämmert ewig da auf.
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act I, II. 6951-6955, 6963-6978)

Since Waltraute is narrating the same events, her vocabulary is similar to that of the Norns, but her narration focuses more on Wotan's silence ³¹, which the Norns don't mention, as it is not important to them:

Mit stummen Wink
Walhalls Edle
wies er zum Forst,
die Weltesche zu fällen.

.....

Der Götter Rat ließ er berufen;

.....

ihm zur Seite
hieß er die Bangen sich setzen,
in Ring und Reih'
die Hall' erfüllen die Helden.

So sitzt er,

sagt kein Wort,

auf hehrem Sitze

stumm und ernst;

(Götterdämmerung, Act 1, ll. 7537-7556 emphasis added)

Wotan's aggressive masculinity has brought him to silence and impotence. Perhaps he now remembers what Fricka said to him in *Das Rheingold*:

Wotan, Gemahl,
unsel'ger Mann!
Sieh', wie dein Leichtsinn
lachend uns allen
Schimpf und Schmach erschuf!
(Das Rheingold, ll.898-902)

Fricka did rather emphasise Wotan's frivolity, and the fact that his heedlessness brought shame on the gods, and would finally bring about their destruction - and she was right.

Wotan's praise of Walhall - *prächtig prahlt der prangende Bau!* - proves on close examination to have a curious sub-text. Obviously something has to alliterate with *prächtig*, and *prangend* is fine - but what about *prahlt*? This - meaning *to boast* - is usually only found in negative contexts, and also usually conveys the idea of empty

³¹ Except for her allusion to his dream-like utterance;

Des tiefen Rheines Töchtern
gäbe den Ring sie wieder zurück,
von des Fluches Last
erlöst wär' Gott und Welt.

boasting. The vocabulary is thus as important as the music for revealing the hollowness of Wotan's triumph, and the shaky moral foundations on which Walhall is built. The frequent references to Walhall's *Pracht* usually have an ironic sub-text, implying that this magnificence is hollow, as for instance Brünnhilde's dismissal of Walhall in her love-ecstasy at the end of *Siegfried*:

Fahr' hin, Walhalls
leuchtende Welt!
Zerfall' in Staub
deine stolze Burg!
Leb' wohl, prangende
Götterpracht!
End' in Wonne, du ewig Geschlecht!
(*Siegfried*, Act III)

This is echoed in her refusal to surrender the Ring at Waltraute's request:

Die Liebe ließe ich nie,
nie nähmen mir sie die Liebe,
stürzt auch in Trümmern
Walhalls strahlende Pracht!
(*Götterdämmerung*, Act I. ll.7649-7652)

In his Narration in Act II of *Die Walküre*, Wotan expresses despair in his outburst:

Fahre denn hin,
herrische Pracht,
göttlichen Prunkes
prahlende Schmach!
(*Die Walküre*, Act II ll.2949-2952)

As I have suggested, in performance some of the more subtle nuances of the text may be overlooked. Here, for instance, there is surely a link with, and a reminder of, Wotan's praise of Walhall, with its rather suspect sub-text; *prahlen* is now used in a more realistic context, an open admission that the boasting of Walhall and the gods is not only hollow but shameful. ³²

³² Many of the references to Valhalla's *Pracht* or *Glanz* have an ironic subtext or are found in ironic contexts, implying that its magnificence is a sham.

In discussion of Wagner's vocabulary in the *Ring*, the use of *Tand* is significant - it is used as a metaphor by Fricka to illustrate the worthlessness of power, but is also used (by Loge) to refer to the Rhinegold itself, in its pure state:

Ein Tand ist's,
in der Wasser Tiefe,
lachenden Kindern zur Lust.
(Das Rheingold, ll.723-725)

In performance, the audience may not be completely aware of the context(s) in which the word *Tand* is used, but the implication is always that the gold is innocent or neutral in itself, although it can be put to evil uses ³³. *Tand* - trinket, toy - always has overtones of frivolity or triviality, but possibly also harmlessness, so that, when the Rhinemaidens lament:

Rheingold! Rheingold!
Reines Gold!
O leuchtete noch
in der Tiefe dein lautrere Tand!
(Das Rheingold, ll.1853-1856)

they are wishing that the gold could be restored to its original condition of harmlessness, and also perhaps that the life of harmless frivolity that they previously enjoyed could be restored to them. The term *Tand* is also used by Alberich, in response to Wotan's demand for the Ring:

zu fürstlichem Tand
soll sie fröhlich dir taugen,
zur Freude dir frommen mein Fluch?
(Das Rheingold, ll.1459-1641)

Alberich perhaps has not at this stage fully grasped that Wotan desires *maßlose Macht* as well; he has previously reproached the gods for their frivolity; his argument is that what he has gained at a terrible cost should not be taken from him and put to frivolous use. He never had any idea of the gold just being a toy - his first question is, what *use* is it.

³³The same is true of Andvari's gold in Morris's poem.

Until the gold is stolen and put to use, emphasis is laid on its glittering triviality, especially by Loge:

Um den gleißenden Tand,
der Tiefe entwandt,
erklang mir der Töchter Klage.

Ein Tand ist's, in des Wassers Tiefe,
lachenden Kindern zur Lust;
doch ward es zum runden Reife geschmiedet,
hilft es zur höchsten Macht,
gewinnt dem Manne die Welt.³⁴
(*Das Rheingold*, ll.696-698, 723-729)

Loge appears not to be corrupted by the desire for this glittering trinket, but it is as if he has introduced an Apple of Discord among the gods and the giants, and then watches with cynical amusement their subsequent actions, which are motivated by greed. He more than once reminds Wotan that the gold is supposed to be returned to the Rhinemaidens, and it is again implied that in its rightful place it is a toy for them to play with:

Klug und fein
mußt du verfahren,
ziehst den Räuber du zu Recht,
um des Rheines Töchtern
den roten Tand,
das Gold, wiederzugeben...
(*Das Rheingold*, ll.778-784)

Loge emphasises the trivial, trinket-like nature of the gold; it is not something which interests him, though he can watch the gods with cynical amusement and later refuse to follow them into Valhalla.

³⁴ In Morris's poem, the nature of the gold is also mentioned, and there is perhaps the suggestion that it could be put to positive use;
How that gold was the seed of gold to the wise and the shapers of things,
The hoarders of hidden treasure, and the unseen glory of rings;
But the seed of woe to the world and the foolish wasters of men.

Alberich's curse makes it impossible that the gold can ever again be treated as a toy. In *Das Rheingold* the gold is referred to as a toy, because once the Ring is forged out of it, it loses its glittering triviality, and when it is referred to as a toy in *Siegfried* it is with ironic intent. The Wanderer advises Alberich to wake Fafner, saying

Dort liegt der Wurm.
 Warnst du ihn vor den Tod,
 willig wohl ließ er den Tand.
 Ich selber weck' ihn dir auf.
 (*Siegfried*, Act I, ll.5415-5418 emphasis added)

Fricka, too, is interested in the gold; she wants to know what use it is to women. She picks up Loge's terminology and also refers to the gold as a glittering trinket:

Taugte wohl
 des goldnen Tandes
 gleißend Geschmeid
 auch Frauen zu schönem Schmuck?
 (*Das Rheingold*, ll.736-739)

Loge tells Fricka what she most wants to hear, namely that wearing the Ring will enable her to enforce her husband's fidelity.

Some of the ideas suggested by the vocabulary of *Das Rheingold* are developed and perhaps re-interpreted in *Die Walküre*. We noted the incongruity of *prahlen* in Wotan's praise of his fortress, indicating that on some unconscious level he may well have been aware of the hollowness of his power, and in *Die Walküre* he seems to have come to conscious awareness of it. And when he refers to *der Gottheit nichtigen Glanz* it may be a link back to *Das Rheingold*, in which Loge referred ironically to *der Götter neuem Glanze*, indicating that their "glitter" was false and trivial. ³⁵

³⁵ An interesting link to Morris's poem, in which *glitter* is always used in a negative context, whether with reference to Grimhild's *glittering eyes*, or to the *Glittering Heath* on which Fafnir guards his hoard.

In the *Todesverkündigung* scene of *Die Walküre*, Siegmund calls Brünnhilde *fühllose Maid* - a reproach which the Brünnhilde of *Götterdämmerung* makes to Waltraute. In the latter case, it isn't quite justified, since Waltraute evidently has some feelings, but the point Siegmund is making is the same point that Brünnhilde makes to Waltraute - that the gods are incapable of feeling human emotions of love and loyalty, the only genuine emotion they feel is concern for their grip on power ; although Freia has stayed with them, in a way they have lost her, have lost the ability to love.

We shall discover that Brünnhilde uses fire and light imagery in her funeral oration; *wie Sonne lauter strahlt mir sein Licht* must surely be a deliberate reference to the sun imagery she used in *Siegfried*. And her reference to the ravens perhaps indicates that she has taken in some of what Waltraute said to her:

Auch deine Raben hör' ich Rauschen;
mit bang ersehnter Botschaft
send' ich die beiden nun heim;
ruhe, ruhe, du Gott.
(*Götterdämmerung*, Act III) 36

Of course this last line is the crux of the matter; it is all about Wotan, still. Brünnhilde addresses her last words to him, in love and pity; and so briefly, everything is summed up in this one exhortation - *rest now, you god*.

36 Waltraute had told her ;
Seine Raben beide sandt' er auf Reisen;
kehrten die einst mit guter Kunde zurück,
dann, noch einmal, zum letzten Male,
lächelte ewig der Gott..

3.5 Fire, light and sun imagery in the *Ring*

Imagery of fire/light/sun is the imagery most consistently used in the *Ring*.³⁷ It is not always used with the elaborate metaphorical meanings discussed below; at times there appears to be a somewhat crude antithesis along the lines of dark=night=Nibelungs=bad, whereas light/sun=everyone else=good.³⁸ Fire imagery is not always linked with the imagery of light/dark contrast; in Brünnhilde's Immolation scene, the idea of fire as redemptive and cleansing is introduced³⁹, but fire does not always have these positive connotations.

The idea of the antithesis of light/dark is introduced early, when Alberich says to the Rhinemaidens that he comes from *Nibelheims Nacht* and there is perhaps the suggestion that the night (darkness) which is his habitual environment is contrasted with the intermittent brightness of the Rhine, which is illumined when the sun shines on the gold; light and sun here emphasise the innocence and beauty of the gold in its natural state. There are relatively few uses of light/dark contrast imagery in *Das Rheingold*; there are more in *Die Walküre*, while the use of this imagery is found throughout *Siegfried* and is also frequent in *Götterdämmerung*, which culminates in the literal

³⁷ This has been noted by Elizabeth Magee, who observes in *Richard Wagner and the Nibelungs*: "It is probably better to see in Wagner's 'Licht-Alberich' not a precise statement on the identity of gods and light-elves but rather a more general wish to use the light-versus-dark contrast to symbolise the major opposing power forces in his drama, along the lines suggested by Jacob Grimm; (p.137)

Man findet in dem gegensatz der lichten und schwarzen elbe den dualismus, der auch in anderen mythologien zwischen guten und bösen, freudlichen und feindlichen, himmlischen und höllischen geistern, zwischen engeln des lichts und der finsternis aufgestellt wird.

³⁸ Wagner is not really as lacking in subtlety as this, but there may be a danger of reducing the many-layered hermeneutic possibilities to a crude schema of Knowledge+ Malevolence vs. Wisdom+Love.

³⁹

Das Feuer, das mich verbrennt,
rein'ge vom Fluche den Ring!
Ihr in der Flut, löset ihn auf,
und lauter bewahrt das lichte Gold,
das euch zum Unheil geraubt!
(*Götterdämmerung*, Act III)

fire which consumes Siegfried, Brünnhilde and Valhalla and the metaphorical fire of love which consumes Brünnhilde's heart as the flames consume her body:

Im Feuer leuchtend,
 liegt dort dein Herr,
 Siegfried, mein seliger Held.
 Dem Freunde zu folgen,
 wieherst du freudig?
 Lockt dich zu ihm
 die lachende Lohe ?
 Fühl' meine Brust auch,
 wie sie entbrennt ;
helles Feuer
 das Herz mir erfaßt....
 (Götterdämmerung, Act III, ll.8935-8945 emphasis added)

Alberich's threat to Wotan and Loge in Das Rheingold also emphasises the night and darkness of his natural element, in (implied) contrast to their brightness:

Die in linder Lüfte Weh'n
 da oben ihr lebt,
 lacht und liebt;
 mit goldener Faust
 euch Göttliche fang' ich mir alle!
 ...
 Auf wonnigen Höh'n
 in seligem Weben
 wiegt ihr euch;
 den Schwarz-Alben
 verachtet ihr ewigen Schwelger!
 ...
 Habt Acht vor dem nächtlichen Heer,
 entsteigt des Nibelungen Hort
 aus stummer Tiefe zu Tag.
 (Das Rheingold ll. 1187-1191, 1197-1201, 1213-1215).

It is implied that the fortress of Valhalla may provide protection against the night from which Alberich emerged, or that when Wotan says *Es naht die Nacht; / vor ihrem Neid biete sie Bergung nun* he is hinting specifically at Alberich's envy.

There is a suggestion that the light of the gold, which reflectd the light of the sun, is contrasted with the false and hollow glitter of the gods, when Loge sarcastically exhorts the Rhinemaidens:

glänzt nicht mehr
 euch Mädchen das Gold,
 in der Götter neuem Glanze
 sonnt euch selig fortan!
 (Das Rheingold, ll.1849-1852)

This complex of ideas is taken up again at the opening of Act III of Götterdämmerung with the Rhinemaidens lamenting that it is night now in the depths since the Rheingold was stolen:

Nacht liegt in der Tiefe;
 einst war sie hell,
 da heil und hehr
 des Vaters Gold noch in ihr glänzte.
 (Götterdämmerung, Act III, ll.8393-8396)

The alliterating words *hell*, *heil* and *hehr* also involve similar or related meanings, so that brightness is associated semantically with wholeness. Later, they go on to say, not only *wie hell du einstens strahltest*, but *wie froh du einstens strahltest*, reinforcing the linkage between brightness and joy, which are so often associated in Wagner's text, if only by Loge's irony, the point of which is that both Loge and the girls are aware of the hollowness and worthlessness of the gods' new grandeur. Wotan himself begins to realise this in Die Walküre, and is fully convinced of it by the end of the Ring.

The main focus of light/dark imagery centres round Siegfried, as it does in Morris's poem. Wagner, like Morris, uses imagery connected with the contrast between light and dark..⁴⁰ There is a link between the light/dark contrast imagery and the

⁴⁰ In Wagner's case, for obvious historical reasons, this vocabulary may be regarded as having anti-Semitic overtones; in fact, though, this imagery is not all that different from the imagery used by Morris - it is therefore at least possible that the language is not in itself racist, but that the racist connotations have been grafted on. It is suggested by Adorno that Mime is to be perceived as a "Jewish stereotype" - this is also indicated in Patrice Chéreau's production. The character is in fact based on the figure of Regin as he is portrayed in the mediæval literature - Morris's Regin is also portrayed negatively. A more likely explanation is that the figure of Mime/Regin is a *literary and/or mythological stereotype*, not a racial stereotype. As we noted in Chapter II, a possible source for Siegfried's bad relationship with his stepfather was Fouqué's *Sigurd der Held des Nordens*,

imagery of fire and flame used by Wagner. Mime's fear (fearful nature) is expressed in onomatopœic images of fire and flame. This is another example of the perfect marriage of words and music, especially

was flackert und lackert, (internal rhyme)
 was flimmert und schwirrt,
 was schwebt und webt (Internal rhyme)
 und wabert umher?

In fact, it is worth looking at the whole passage:

Verfluchtes Licht!
 Was flammt dort die Luft?
 Was flackert und lackert,
 was flimmert und schwirrt,
 was schwebt dort und webt
 und wabert umher?
 Dort glimmert und glitzt
 in der Sonne Glut!
 Was säuselt und summt
 und saust nun gar?
 Es brummt und braust
 und prasselt hierher!
 (*Siegfried*, Act 1, ll.4859-4870)

The onomatopœia, alliteration and internal rhyme all combine to produce the effect of fear; it has the same aura of flickering sinuousness as Loge's music, but it is here intensified to illustrate Mime's cowardice.⁴¹ If we look now at Mime's attempt to inspire Siegfried with fear, we will see that it is very similar in vocabulary and style to the passage quoted above, in which he expressed his fear (culminating in the fantasy that Fafner was about to devour him) in images of hateful light and flickering flame. I have quoted Forman's translation in parallel text, as it may help us to decide whether Morris could have been influenced by any of this vocabulary, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Fühltest du nie
 im finstren Wald

Hast thou not felt
 in furthest wood

and it has never been suggested that this has an anti-semitic sub-text. Wagner here uses the topos of the lame craftsman, which is found in Homer (the figure of Hephaestus) and the topos of the uncaring step-parent.

⁴¹ Actually, Mime as a blacksmith should know all about fire, so this is obviously fear of something intangible, his cowardly nature, rather than fear of something actual and concrete.

bei Dämmerchein
am dunklen Ort,
wenn fern es säuselt,
summt und saust
wildes Brummen

näher braust -
wirres Flacken
um dich flimmert,
schwellend Schwirren
zu Leib dir schwebt -

fühltest du dann nicht

grieselnd Grauen die Glieder
dir fahen?

Glühender Schauder
schüttelt die Glieder

in der Brust, bebend und bang,

berstet hammernd das Herz ?-

(*Siegfried*, Act I ll.4942-4959)

at gloomy spots
as twilight spreads,
when far it hisses,
hums and howls,
now with cries

and crashes nears,
fiercely flares
at thee, and flickers,
storms and swells,
and sweeps and
strikes.-

hast thou not felt
the hand
of horror along thy
limbs?

shuddering fire
shake thee to shivers,
wildly swim and
wander thy senses,

in thy breast,
hunted and hurt,
burst thy hammering
heart?

Comparing the two passages, we note

a) was säuselt und summt
und saust nun gar ?

b) wenn fern es säuselt
summt und saust _

a) es brummt und braust

b) wildes Brummen
näher braust

a) was flackert und lackert
was flimmert und schwebt

b) wirres Flackern
um dich flimmert,
schwellend schwirren
zu Leib dir schwebt?

(emphasis added)

This relies very much upon onomatopœia ; *schwellend Schwirren/zu Leib dir schwebt* almost comes into the category of nonsense rhyme. Mime retains the vocabulary of his own fear, and only slightly elaborates upon it in attempting to convey its nature to Siegfried. The attempt fails, but the music alerts the audience to the fact that Siegfried will only learn fear when he encounters the sleeping Brünnhilde. We are being

told here that Mime fears everything, Siegfried only fears the unknown - and only until it ceases to be the unknown. Wotan also attempts to inspire Siegfried with fear of the flames, in the following extract (again with Forman's translation in parallel text):

Wanderer
Ein Feuermeer
umflutet die Frau,
glühende Lohe
umleckt den Fels,
wer die Braut begehrt

dem brennt entgegen die Brunst!

Blick' nach der Höh'!
Erlugst du das Licht?

Es wächst der Schein,
es schwillt die Glut,
sengende Wolken,
wabernde Lohe,
wälzen sich brennend

ein Lichtmeer
umleuchtet dein Haupt;
bald frißt und zehrt dich
zündendes Feuer !

(Forman's translation)

With floods of fire
the woman is fenced,
redly it rushes
and licks the rock;
he who finds the
bride
must face the heat of
her blaze!
Heighten thy look!
Beholds't thou the
light?
How flies the flame!
How fares the flood!
Withering blasts
and wavering beacons
of their coming,
below!
The full heat
will hiss in thy face;
the sucking fire
will sear thee to
cinders ;-

Siegfried
Ha! Wonnige Glut!
Leuchtender Glanz!
Strahlend nun offen
steht mir die Straße!
Im Feuer mich baden!
Im Feuer zu finden die Braut!

Ha, gladdening glow!
Lightening look!
Ways of fire
widen before me.
In flame to be floated!
In blazes to fall on the
bride!

(*Siegfried* , Act III ll.6431-6448, 6470-6475)

Wagner is demonstrating the contrast between the negative way that Wotan wants Siegfried to perceive the fire, and the joyful manner in which he in fact welcomes it. Mime had previously used fire imagery to illustrate the fear which Siegfried is incapable of feeling ; and Brünnhilde's demand for the fire to protect her expresses the desire that the fire should be a thing of horror to all but one man:

Auf dein Gebot
entbrenne ein Feuer -
den Felsen umglühe

lodernde Glut!
 Es leck' ihre Zung',
 es fresse ihr Zahn,
 den Zagen, der frech sich wagte
 dem freislichen Felsen zu nah'n!
 (*Die Walküre*, Act III ll. 4071-4078)

In the final scene of *Götterdämmerung*, fire has connotations of redemption and cleansing, but Brünnhilde's first image of fire is, not unnaturally, a negative image, and throughout the *Ring* there is a conflict between positive and negative images of fire.

When Siegfried finally does learn fear, he expresses his feelings in vocabulary not dissimilar to that which Mime has been using ; perhaps this is the only language in which to express fear ? Or at any rate, the only language available to Siegfried.

Brennender Zauber
 zückt mir ins Herz ;
 feurige Angst
 faßt meine Augen;
 mir schwankt und schwindelt der Sinn.
 ...
 Mir schwebt und schwankt
 und schwirrt es umher!
 Sehrendes Sehnen
 zehrt meine Sinne;
 am zagenden Herzen
 zittert die Hand!
 Wie ist mir Feigem?
 Ist dies das Fürchten?
 (*Siegfried*, Act III ll. 6509-6513, 6524- 6531)

It is noteworthy that Siegfried's fear is expressed in these terms (*brennender Zauber, feurige Angst*); evidently Wagner had a preference for fire imagery. Siegfried's *mir schwebt und schwankt/und schwirrt es umher* recalls Mime's *schwellend Schwirren zu Leib dir schwebt*; the same alliteration is used, but the nonsense rhymes have developed into a description of feelings. These images can be contrasted with the fire/light imagery used by Siegmund, which convey a more positive idea of fire. Siegfried takes Mime's negative images and begins the process of turning them into something more positive. Siegfried's fear is evidently fear of the unknown, and is also connected with longing, ultimately with love - *Sehrendes Sehnen zehrt*

meine Sinne - this is something Mime wasn't capable of experiencing. There is a sense of irony in Siegfried's outcry:

O Mutter! Mutter!
 Dein mutiges Kind!
 Im Schlafe liegt eine Frau -
 die hat ihn das Fürchten gelehrt!
 (*Siegfried*, Act III , ll.6532-6535)

Siegfried himself may not fully understand the irony, but the attentive audience will.

By Act III of *Siegfried*, which parallels Act II in its structure in the progression from night to dawn to full daylight, there is more emphasis on light and sun imagery. It begins with a stage direction indicating a stormy night.⁴² Dawn occurs as Sigurd penetrates the flames to find Brünnhilde,⁴³ after which the stage directions specify full daylight.⁴⁴ The sun shines for the first time as Siegfried arrives on the plateau where Brünnhilde sleeps. When Brünnhilde wakes, she greets the day and the sun, but not the night and the darkness, as in *Sigrdrifumál*, on which these lines are based. *Heil dir, Sonne! Heil dir, Licht! / Heil dir, leuchtender Tag!* The greeting to the sun implies a greeting to Siegfried himself, recalling that the sun is called the Waker⁴⁵, and Siegfried is also the Waker. Brünnhilde greets him as *Du Wecker des Lebens, siegendes Licht!*

⁴² *Wilde Gegend am Fuße eines Felsenberges, welcher links nach hinten steil aufsteigt. Nacht. Sturm und Wetter [sic ; perhaps Gewitter intended?] Blitz und heftiger Donner, welcher letztere dann schweigt, während Blitze noch längere Zeit die Wolken durchkreuzen.*

⁴³ *Sc. III: Das immer zarter gewordene Gewölk hat sich in einen feinen Nebelschlier von rosiger Färbung aufgelöst und zerteilt sich nun in der Weise, daß der Duft sich gänzlich nach oben verzieht und endlich nur noch den heitren, blauen Tageshimmel erblicken läßt, während am Saume der nun sichtbar werdenden Felsenhöhe --- ein morgenrötlicher Nebelschleier heften bleibt ...*

⁴⁴ *Endlich beginnt die Gluth zu erbleichen; sie löst sich wie in einen feinen, durchsichtigen Schleier auf, der nun ganz sich auch klärt und den heitersten, blauen Himmeläther, im hellsten Tagesscheine, hervortreten läßt.*

⁴⁵ *Lugt, Schwestern!
 Die Weckerin lacht in den Grund!*

Brünnhilde's temporary fear of sexuality is expressed in images of darkness:

Trauriges Dunkel
trübt meinen Blick.
Mein Auge dämmert,
das Licht verlischt.
Nacht wird's um mich;
aus Nebel und Grau'n
windet sich wütend
ein Angstgewirr;
Schrecken schreitet
und bäumt sich empor.
(*Siegfried*, Act III ll.6713-7622)

Siegfried tries to reassure her by reminding her of the sunlight and the day, which she greeted so enthusiastically on waking:

Nacht umbangt
gebund'ne Augen;
mit den Fesseln schwindet
das finstre Grau'n.
Tauch' aus dem Dunkel und sieh' -
sonnenhell leuchtet der Tag!
(*Siegfried*, Act III ll.6723-6728)

In their final duet, Siegfried enthusiastically welcomes the sun and the day, but Brünnhilde's lines contain dramatic irony, though in performance the audience may not be fully aware of this:

<u>Siegfried</u>	Heil dem Tage, der uns umleuchtet! Heil der Sonne, die uns bescheint! Heil dem Licht, das der Nacht enttaucht!
<u>Brünnhilde</u>	Götterdämm' rung, dunkle herauf! Nacht der Vernichtung, neble herein! Mir Strahlt zur Stunde Siegfrieds Stern! (<i>Siegfried</i> , Act III)

Brünnhilde is not echoing Siegfried's sentiments, but expressing negative sentiments of her own; the irony resides in the fact that she doesn't perceive these utterances as negative, it is rather that she no longer cares what happens to Valhalla and the gods, now that she has found human love. She will be instrumental in bringing about the

destruction that she now hails so enthusiastically, and Siegfried will be included in that destruction - something which at this stage she cannot possibly foresee.

Siegfried and Brünnhilde, as representatives of the new order, emerge at daybreak onto the sunlit plateau at the beginning of *Götterdämmerung*. The Norns who, like Wotan and Erda, are representatives of the old order, spin and weave at night, and it is made clear that they can only function at night ; *Die Nacht weicht; nichts mehr gewahr' ich*, says the first Norn as day breaks.

During the scene with Waltraute in *Götterdämmerung*, Brünnhilde refers again ⁴⁶ to the light and laughter that Siegfried's love has brought her: *In seiner Liebe leucht' und lach' ich heut auf! Leuchten* is perhaps rather unexpected, another nuance that might be missed in performance, but the alert listener/audience may be reminded of the light/sun imagery associated with Siegfried, which Brünnhilde feels that she now reflects. Similarly, her line *an meiner Wonne willst du dich weiden* is almost metaphoric; obviously Wagner needed to find something that alliterated with *Wonne* and there may be a link with Siegfried's metaphoric response to her in their love-duet at the end of *Siegfried*: *auf wonnigen Munde weidet mein Auge*.

⁴⁶ i.e. as in *Siegfried* :

*Lachend muß ich dich lieben,
lachend will ich erblinden,
lachend lass' uns verderben,
lachend zugrunde gehen!*

3.6 The illustration of the metaphor *Die Musik ist ein Weib* in *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried*.

In *Oper und Drama* Wagner uses male/female polarity as a metaphor for the relationship between words and music, and the nature of the what he calls the *poetic intent* (*die dichterische Absicht*). His discussion of the nature of music involves discussion of the nature of Woman; the language of the discourse is both literal and metaphorical, in that *Die Musik ist ein Weib* involves using what Wagner considers to be the actual, *literal* nature of Woman as a *metaphor* for the nature of music, and the following can be interpreted both literally and metaphorically:

aller musikalische Organismus ist seiner Natur nach... ein weiblicher, er ist ein nur gebärender, nicht aber zeugender; die zeugende Kraft liegt außer ihm, und ohne Befruchtung von dieser Kraft vermag sie eben nicht zu gebären.
(*Oper und Drama iii : Die Oper und das Wesen der Musik, G.S> Bd. III, p.314*)

Die Natur des Weibes ist die Liebe; aber diese Liebe ist die empfangende und in der Empfängnis rückhaltlos sich hingebende.

(*ibid, p.316*)

...

Das Weib erhält volle Individualität erst im Momente der Hingebung. Es ist das Wellenmädchen, das seelenlos durch die Wogen seines Elementes dahinrauscht, bis es durch die Liebe eines Mannes erst die Seele empfängt.....

(*ibid., p.316*)

Das wahre Weib liebt unbedingt, weil es lieben muß. Es hat keine Wahl, außer da, wo es nicht liebt. Wo es aber lieben muß, da empfindet es einen ungeheuren Zwang, der zum ersten Mal auch seinen Willen entwickelt.

(*ibid., p.317*)

All these passages can be read both literally, as Wagner's analysis of the relationship between the sexes, and metaphorically, as his analysis of the relationship between words and music - which, when united, enable music to give birth to drama. And it could perhaps be seen as a foreshadowing of what happens to Brünnhilde in the *Ring*,

when Love (compassion, as she experiences it in *Die Walküre*) enables her to act as an individual.

Wagner now turns to discussion of the poetic intent (*die dichterische Absicht*).

Der nothwendige Drang des dichtenden Verstandes in diesem Dichten ist... die Liebe... die tiefe Sehnsucht in der mitempfundenen Wonne des liebenden Weibes sich aus seinem Egoismus erlöst zu wissen; und diese Sehnsucht ist das dichtende Moment des Verstandes... dieser zeugende Samen ist die dichterische Absicht, die dem herrlich liebenden Weibe Musik den Stoff zur Gebärung zuführt.

(*ibid.* p.320)

This seems to suggest that true poetry and drama, as Wagner conceives of them, cannot exist without music, but music (i.e. the feminine principle) is only activated by the poetic intent. He also introduces one of his key ideas, that of *Erlösung*. The poet is redeemed, and his Poetic Intent, is liberated by Woman (literally) and by music (metaphorically). In a later section of *Oper und Drama*, Wagner returns to discussion of this relationship:

Diese Melodie war der Liebesgruß des Weibes an den Mann... nur als höchstes Leibesverlangen ist das Weibliche zu fassen, offenbare es sich nun im Manne oder im Weibe... Erst der Dichter, dessen Absicht wir uns hier darstellen, fühlt sich zur herzinnigsten Vermählung mit dem "ewig weiblichen" der Tonkunst so unwiderstehlich stark gedrängt, daß er in dieser Vermählung zugleich seine Erlösung feiert.

(*Oper und Drama ; G.S> Bd. IV, p.416*)

...durch den erlösenden Liebeskuß jener Melodie wird der Dichter nun in die tiefen, unendlichen Geheimnisse der weiblichen Natur eingeweiht; er sieht mit anderen Augen und fühlt mit anderen Sinnen.

(*ibid.*, p.146)

This use of metaphor is applied in the text of the *Ring*. Wagner actually makes very sparing use of metaphor; his characters only use it to any significant degree when they are inspired by Love; Love liberates and redeems the poetic intent of Siegmund, and then of his son. Occasional metaphoric or metonymic expressions are found elsewhere in the text - for instance, Wellgunde says of Alberich *Ein Schwefelbrand in der*

Wogen Schwall; Ivor Zorn der Liebe zischt er laut! but for the most part the language of the characters in the *Ring* is not metaphorical.

In the first Act of *Die Walküre*, most of Siegmund's language is metaphorical, and I suggest that he is inspired to these heights of poetic invention by his love for Sieglinde. We begin by discussing his image:

Sank auf die Lider mir Nacht,
die Sonne lacht mir nun neu.
(*Die Walküre*, ll.1910-1911)

This image only operates on a metaphorical level; in Sieglinde's presence, Siegmund is able to feel that the sun is shining again, or that he is revived - literally, with the drink she has given him, and metaphorically by her life-giving presence. He returns to this image in his first lyric effusion:

Nächtiges Dunkel
deckte mein Aug',
ihres Blickes Strahl
striefte mich da;
Wärme gewann ich und Tag.
(*Die Walküre*, Act 1, ll.2165-2169)

Sieglinde's exit from the room is compared to or equated with the sunset, and also relates to the role of the sun and light through the *Ring*. He was invigorated by her presence (the sun shone on him again); when she left the room, it was as if the sun had set, but the fire burns (the sun glows) in his heart. The darkness of the physical environment is banished; but, more importantly, Siegmund's inner world is illuminated, so that he gains understanding of his feelings.

His narrations are factual, but when he is alone he has a lyrical reflective passage in which the narrative is to be understood on a metaphorical level:

Was gleißt dort hell
im Glimmerschein?
Welch ein Strahl bricht
aus der Esche Stamm?
Des Blinden Auge
leuchtet ein Blitz;

lustig lacht da der Blick.
 Wie der Schein so hehr
 das Herz mir sengt!
 Ist es der Blick
 der blühenden Frau
 den dort haftend
 sie hinter sich leiß,
 als aus dem Saal sie schied?
 Nächtiges Dunkel
 deckte mein Aug';
 ihres Blickes Strahl
 streifte mich da;
 Wärme gewann ich und Tag.
 Selig schien mir
 der Sonne Licht,
 den Scheitel umglaß mir
 ihr wonniger Glanz,
 bis hinter Bergen sie sank.
 Noch einmal, da sie schied,
 traf mich abends ihr Schein,
 selbst der alten Esche Stamm
 erglänzte in goldener Glut;
 da bleicht die Blüte,
 das Licht verlischt;
 nächtiges Dunkel
 deckt mir das Auge;
 tief in des Busens Berge
 glimmt nur noch lichtlose Glut.
 (*Die Walküre*, Act I ll.2151-2184)

I have quoted this at length because it differs in many ways from the long narrative passages in which Siegmund told the story of his childhood. The dramatic function of Siegmund's narrative passages is to convey information to Sieglinde and Hunding, and to the audience; all of whom will pick up a slightly different sub-text. The audience needs to know that Siegmund is the illegitimate son of Wotan (known as Wälse to his children), and is also the twin brother of Sieglinde. Sieglinde feels an instinctive sympathy with the stranger, and Hunding, for that very reason, feels an instinctive antipathy. He notices the resemblance between his wife and the stranger; *Wie gleicht er dem Weibe!! Der gleißende Wurm Iglänzt auch ihm aus dem Auge!* It is perhaps not surprising that the nearest Hunding comes to skilful manipulation of language or use of imagery (metonymy) is this comment.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Alberich's threat *Mit gold'ner Faust leuch Göttliche fang' ich mir alle!* is another rare example of the use of metonymy in the *Ring*:

Da bleicht die Blüte, das Licht verlischt . How does this image of the blossom fading fit in to the overall pattern of the lyric? It is an attractive image, and a metaphor within a metaphor - is it possible to call it a double metaphor? Because up till this point there has not been any reference to blossom, but to sun and light. Sieglinde's exit is equated with sunset, light fading, the blossom fading. Siegmund uses a considerable amount of fire and light imagery in this passage - reference to fire and light, especially the light of the sun ⁴⁸, are often found in the text of the *Ring*, as we have already discussed, but rarely so closely fused as they are here, with several layers of meaning. *Blindness* also is used with several layers of meaning in this passage. There is a literal level at which Siegmund can't see that the firelight is showing him his way of escape, namely the sword in the tree, so at this level it could certainly be concluded that Siegmund is unobservant. In fact, though, what we are being told is not that Siegmund fails to observe outward reality, the physical details of his environment, but that he has the poet's grasp of the nature of inner reality, and that he is able to express it in metaphor.

For greater dramatic effect Wagner has altered from the sources the context in which the sword is found; Siegmund doesn't notice the sword until he is told about it by Sieglinde. She is given a narrative passage (*Der Männer Sippe*) to balance the narrative passages given to Siegmund in the first scene.

The alliteration in Siegmund's lyric passage *Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond* ⁴⁹ is very skilfully woven together ; Wagner does actually use *weben*

⁴⁸Bearing in mind Wagner's knowledge of contemporary scholarship, and the tendency to identify Siegfried as a sun-god. Elizabeth Magee notes that "The sun-god in Wagner's cosmos is not Wotan, though [he is] lord of the light-elves and harbinger of the dawn, but Siegfried, that other Baldur, Wotan's heir." (Elizabeth Magee ; *Richard Wagner and the Nibelungs*) The idea of Sigurd as sun-god is something of which William Morris was also aware, and of which there are traces in his poem.

⁴⁹

Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond,
in mildem Lichte leuchtet der Lenz;
auf linden Lüften, leicht und lieblich,
wunderwebend er sich wiegt;
durch Wald und Auen weht sein Atem,

as a metaphor here, referring to the "wonders woven by the Spring", but it is not a metaphor he uses as often as Morris. The compactness of expression is again most striking, as is the use of oxymoron, in *mit zarter Waffen Zier* - Spring conquers the world with "gentle weapons", not by force - and paradox, in which the burgeoning of Spring is equated with *tapfern Streichen*. The metaphors that Siegmund uses in this lyric effusion are caught up and interpreted literally by Sieglinde; she is the inspirer and the interpreter of his poetic intent. At the literal level, Siegmund does not actually "know" that Sieglinde is his sister, any more than he "sees" that the sword is in the tree; but possibly the metaphors he chooses (of Spring and Love as brother and sister) indicate a deeper level at which he does have an instinctive knowledge. The language also has the dramatic function of conveying the information to the audience; Siegmund's earlier lyric passage has a similar dual function. The audience has to be alerted to the fact that Wälse's sword has been placed in the tree, ready for Siegmund to find it, and Siegmund has the chance to expatiate upon his love for Sieglinde, and develop the metaphors of fire and light in which he expresses his love.

Sieglinde recognises Siegmund, although she does not actually spell it out in literal terms until the very end of the Act. She recognises him as the Spring for which she has longed, just as he recognises her, not as his actual sister, but as the embodiment of the

weit geöffnet lacht sein Aug':
 aus sel'gen Vöglein Sange süß ertönt,
 holde Düfte haucht er aus;
 seinem warmen Blut entblühen wonnige Blumen;
 keim und Sproß entsprießt seiner Kraft.
 Mit zarter Waffen Zier bezwingt er die Welt;
 Winter und Sturm wichen den starken Wehr;
 wohl mußte den tapfern Streichen
 die strengen Türe auch weichen
 die, trotzig uns starr uns trennte von ihm!
 Zu seiner Schwester schwang er sich her -
 die Liebe lockte den Lenz!
 In unsrem Busen barg sie sich tief-
 nun lacht sie selig dem Licht!
 Die bräutliche Schwester befreite der Bruder,
 zertrümmert liegt, was je sie getrennt;
 jauchzend grüßt sich das junge Paar -
 vereint sind Liebe und Lenz!
 (*Die Walküre*, Act.1)

love for which he has longed. Her recognition of him involves the interpretation of his metaphorical language, and he caps her interpretations with another metaphor: *Du bist das Bild das ich in mir barg!* Is the fact that she names him also part of inspiring his poetic intent? To name someone is to give them an identity; in this case, Sieglinde restores Siegmund's identity to him by giving him his correct name again.

One of the differences between the portrayal of Siegmund and that of his son is that Siegmund narrates the experiences of his childhood and youth, everything that led up to his stumbling into Hunding's hut, whereas Siegfried's youthful experiences occur before us on the stage; all that the audience actually sees of Siegmund's experiences is the last days of his adult life. We know that Siegfried's Poetic Intent is liberated by love, because we know that he was inarticulate before and is subsequently inarticulate,⁵⁰ but we never actually find out how Siegmund becomes articulate, because he is presented from the outset as possessed of the ability to manipulate language skilfully. Siegmund and Sieglinde are, it seems to me, the most articulate characters in the *Ring*. (The idea of Wotan's progress from articulacy to silence is discussed elsewhere).

Brünnhilde's progress towards self-knowledge and wisdom enables her to gain in articulacy; her introductory *ho-jo-to-ho* has some of the same innocence, meaninglessness and exuberance of the nonsense rhymes of the Rhinemaidens, and she gradually gains in eloquence throughout the *Ring*, until, at the end of *Götterdämmerung*, she alone of the women gains the ability to use metaphor.

At the beginning of *Götterdämmerung*, it will become apparent that Brünnhilde has tried to pass her wisdom on to Siegfried, but that he is not capable of profiting from it; in *Siegfried*, however, it appears that, temporarily at least, love has inspired his Poetic Intent, and that indeed *er sieht mit anderen Augen und fühlt*

⁵⁰ He claims that he would hardly have learnt to talk at all if he had not forced it out of Mime;

Kaum das Reden hätt' ich erraten,
entwandt' ich's mit Gewalt nicht dem Schuft!

(*Siegfried*, Act I)

mit *anderen Sinnen*. Brünnhilde states - as a literal statement of fact - that she sees her horse grazing. Siegfried turns *weiden* into an elaborate metaphor involving feasting his eyes on her beauty:

Brünnhilde

Dort seh' ich Grane,
mein selig Roß;
wie weidet er munter,
der mit mir schlief;
mit mir hat ihn Siegfried erweckt!

Siegfried

Auf wonnigem Munde
weidet mein Auge;
in brünstigem Durst
doch brennen die Lippen,
daß der Augen Weide sich labe!
(*Siegfried*, Act III ll.6648-6657)

She sees her helmet and shield, which protect her no longer. Siegfried replies - using more conventional imagery this time - that he came without any protection for his heart:

Siegfried

Eine selige Maid
versehrte mein Herz;
Wunden dem Haupte
schlug mir ein Weib;
ich kam ohne Schild und Helm.
(*Siegfried*, Act III ll. 6663-6667)

Siegfried then proceeds to elaborate upon the imagery of fire. The literal fire that encircled Brünnhilde's rock now burns in his breast:

Siegfried

Durch brennendes Feuer
fuhr ich zu dir!
Nicht Brünne noch Panzer
barg meinen Leib;
nun brach die Lohe
mir in die Brust,
Es braust mein Blut
in blühender Brunst;
ein zehrendes Feuer
ist mir entzündet;
die Glut, die Brünnhilds
Felsen umbrann,
die brennt mir nun in der Brust!
O Weib, jetzt lösche den Brand!
Schweige die schäumende Glut!
(*Siegfried*, Act III ll. 6676-6690)

That his final image should be *schäumende Glut* is perhaps somewhat startling; one supposes that it has been used for the sake of the alliteration.⁵¹

In a later section of the dialogue, Siegfried picks up her imagery of the clear stream, and uses it as a metaphor for his sexuality, hoping to elicit a response from her:

Brünnhilde

Sahst du dein Bild
im klaren Bach?
Hat es dich frohen erfreut?
Rührtest zur Woge
das Wasser du auf,
zerflöbe die klare
Fläche des Bachs;
dein Bild sähst du nicht mehr,
nur der Wellen schwankend Gewog.

.....

Siegfried.

Ein herrlich Gewässer
wogt vor mir;
mit allen Sinnen
seh' ich nur sie,
die wonnig wogende Welle;
brach sie mein Bild,
so brenn' ich nun selbst
sengende Glut
in der Flut zu kühlen -
ich selbst, wie ich bin,
spring' in den Bach!
O, daß seine Wogen
mich selig verschlängen!
Mein Sehnen schwänd in der Flut!
(Siegfried Act III ll.6749-6757, 6773-6786)

Only at the very end of Götterdämmerung does Brünnhilde acquire the ability to manipulate language by using metaphor and imagery - like the male characters, she

⁵¹ In Götterdämmerung , Siegfried uses fire metaphors to express his sudden, drug-induced passion for Guttrune ;

Ha, schönstes Weib!
Schließe den Blick!
Das Herz in der Brust
brennt mir sein Strahl;
zu feurigen Strömen fühl' ich
ihn zehren zünden mein Blut!

(Götterdämmerung , Act 1 , ll. 7344-7352)

uses the metaphor of fire, the literal flames of Siegfried's funeral pyre become the flame of love in her heart, as we have already observed, and the cycle closes with further fire and light metaphors from Brünnhilde.

In *Wagner androgyne*, Jean-Jacques Nattiez says that Wagner sees Siegfried as a poet, according to the metaphoric terms that he used in *Oper und Drama*.⁵² My own view that Siegmund is more truly a poet, because Siegfried only demonstrates poetic ability (the ability to manipulate language and use metaphor) in Act III of *Siegfried* ; in *Götterdämmerung*, he has lost it.

⁵² *L'oiseau de la forêt* .. [est] la première incarnation de l'union poésie-musique pour Siegfried, il joue les intermédiaires et lui explique où trouver Brünnhilde. ... Mais en même temps qu'il l'introduit à Brünnhilde, l'oiseau ... révèle à Siegfried qu'il a la possibilité de comprendre la pensée perfide de Mime ; l'artiste 'moderne' voudrait tuer l'artiste de l'avenir.

...C'est ... sa propre image, première étape de la fusion, que Siegfried reconnaît à travers les cheveux de Brünnhilde. ...C'est à cette union du masculin et du féminin que nous assistons après l'éveil de Brünnhilde. Elle a conscience d'être la part féminine de Siegfried ... et elle reconnaît en lui sa part masculine ... La scène se termine sur la célébration de l'union parfaite rendue possible par la complémentarité sexuelle des deux partenaires ... Or, Brünnhilde incarne bien la musique...Siegfried, le soleil, le poète ... Brünnhilde incarne la position précaire de la musique face au poète.

(Jean Jaques Nattiez ; *Wagner androgyne* , pp.98 ff.)

3.7 Siegfried as inarticulate *Naturmensch*; his relationship with Mime: Mime's use of language

The relationship between Siegfried and Mime is, among other things, a question of language, of the manipulation of language and of Siegfried's inarticulacy. Siegfried, like the Rhinemaidens and the young Brünnhilde, is introduced with nonsense syllables and laughter. He is a *Naturmensch* - inarticulate, to the extent that he doesn't reflect or think. He shows instinctive antipathy to Mime, and demands to know who his parents are.

Mime's opening monologue in *Siegfried* is intended partly as exposition, to keep the audience abreast of events ; but the narrative doesn't only narrate events, it explains the perspective of the narrator. Mime provides the information that the audience needs, namely that he has not brought Siegfried for altruistic reasons, but for his own ends. What he wants out of the relationship is that Siegfried shall kill Fafner and obtain the Ring for Mime - *Siegfrieds kindischer Kraft / erläge wohl Fafners Leib; des Nibelungen Ring erränge er mir*

There is a narrative thread that links links four operas, so that what is said at one point deliberately recalls something the speaker said at an earlier point in the drama. For instance, when Mime says to Siegfried; *dir schmiedet' ich Tand und ein tönend Horn* , this may be intended to recall:

Sorglose Schmiede
schufen wir sonst wohl
Schmuck unsren Weibern,
wonnig Geschmeid,
neidlichen Niblungentand.
(*Das Rheingold* II. 1019-1023)

If so, we may note the use of *Tand* again, in a somewhat different context from that in which it was used in *Das Rheingold*.. We observed that the Rheingold is no longer a plaything after the Ring has been forged from it, but the word is used to refer to toys, playthings and trivia. Siegfried refers to the swords Mime makes as *müssiger Tand*. Perhaps there may be some kind of link with the pride in his craftsmanship that Regin shows in Morris's poem. Obviously craftsmanship is far more important to Morris than

to Wagner, and in Chapters IV and VIII I shall draw attention to the way in which Morris's experience as a craftsman influences the vocabulary and technique of his poetry. Wagner is not concerned with questions of craftsmanship in the *Ring*⁵³, but in his theoretical writings, especially *Die Kunst und die Revolution*, he does make some pertinent comments about the perceived difference between art and craft, which may be said to anticipate Ruskin and Morris.

Mime thinks that if he could get hold of the Ring, he would be avenged for his shame - *meiner Schmach erlangt' ich da Lohn!* Why his shame? His envy and resentment, yes, projected onto Siegfried, although he is really envious and resentful of Alberich. Mime, like his brother, has an envious and resentful nature. We noted in *Das Rheingold* that obtrusive alliteration with spitting consonants is frequently used to characterise the Nibelung brothers. A similar pattern may be discerned in *Siegfried*, in lines such as *nur Nothung nützt meinen Neid*; Mime not only shares his brother's nature, he shares his vocabulary.

References to, and discussion of, the nature of wisdom - perhaps the difference between mere knowledge and wisdom - occur throughout the *Ring*. Brünnhilde only gains true wisdom through suffering, for instance. It is significant that Siegfried refuses to learn wisdom from Mime; he feels that any quality that Mime possesses can't be worth possessing. Later, of course, it will transpire that he is incapable of learning wisdom from anyone. In the Norse literature, Mime (Sigurd's foster-father) is considered to be "wise",⁵⁴ but the Wanderer's *Heil dir, weiser Schmied* is ironic. Mime reminds Siegfried that *mit klugem Rate riet ich dir klug, / mit lichtem Wissen lehrt' ich dich Witz*. Siegfried responds that, rather than learn wisdom from Mime, he'll remain stupid; *Willst du mich weisen, witzig zu sein / gern bleib ich taub und dumm*, and furthermore, if Mime is really wise, he will tell Siegfried something useful - who his parents were. He may reject Mime's false

⁵³ It is of greater interest in *Die Meistersinger*, of course. It is perhaps surprising that Morris was not more interested in *Die Meistersinger*.

⁵⁴ See Chapter VII for further discussion of this point.

cunning, but he also rejects Brünnhilde's true wisdom. Mime is really cunning, crafty, in the perjorative sense.⁵⁵

The alliteration in *Siegfried* is freer than in *Das Rheingold*, and *Die Walküre* and there is less emphasis on *Gleichung* a satisfying balance of form and content. The texts of *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* first saw the light of day as *Der junge Siegfried* and *Siegfrieds Tod*; Wagner was less proficient in the manipulation of Stabreim at this early stage in the development of the text.

Siegfried's Forging Song is the first (but not quite the only) strophic song in the *Ring*; the Woodbird's Song is also a strophic song, in which the first verse tells Siegfried what to take from the Hoard, the second warns him to beware of Mime, the third tells him about Brünnhilde. Although the Woodbird stresses the lyric nature of its song (*lustig im Leid/sing' ich vom Lieben!*), its poem is narrative as well; it gives Siegfried information in the form of a lyric. Siegfried's Forging Song is perhaps rather like a folk-song, with its refrain and its nonsense rhymes. The rather one-dimensional nature of the song expresses Siegfried's nature, and also the nature of his occupation - one supposes that forging a sword requires a fair amount of concentration, and something fairly simple would be sung in order to keep the rhythm going. Wagner doesn't use end-rhyme even for this strophic song; the alliteration is freer than in the preceding operas, for the reasons outlined above. There are a few examples of cross-alliteration and double alliteration, for instance:

Des Baumes Kohle wie brennt sie kühn;

Schmiede, mein Hammer, ein hartes Schwert;

es ziert den Kühnen des Zornes Kraft.

Schlage den Falschen, fälle den Schelm!

⁵⁵ Morris occasionally uses cunning in its rare, archaic sense of skilful, as in *'twas a country of cunning craftsmen*. It is not meant perjoratively in this context.

but these are rarely used for to the same purpose as in *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, where alliteration is often combined with compactness of expression, to give a sense of directness and emphasis. Wagner was still learning his craft at this stage, but the simple vocabulary is admirably suited to the simple sentiments that are being expressed. Perhaps Siegfried's language, like Wotan's earlier, is the language of aggressive masculinity. There may be some suggestion of a metaphor of sexual control in these lines, for instance:

Nun hat die Glut
dich rot geglüht;
deine weiche Härte
dem Hammer weicht;
zornig sprühst du mir Funken,
daß ich dich Spröden gezähmt!
...

Durch Glut und Hammer
glückt' es mir;
mit starken Schlägen
streckt' ich dich;
nun schwinde die rote Scham,
werde kalt und hart, wie du kannst!
(*Siegfried*, Act I ll. 5184-5189, 5214-5219)

Without labouring the point, one might suggest that terms such as *Scham*, *Spröde*, *zähmen*⁵⁶ belong in the vocabulary of sexual conquest. In any case, it would hardly be surprising if Siegfried were aggressively masculine, since he has no experience of women.

When Siegfried expresses his pleasure in the sparks that emerge from the forge, the vocabulary anticipates his pleasure in Brünnhilde's fire:

⁵⁶ For instance, when Siegfried returns to Brünnhilde disguised as Gunther, he threatens her by saying that he is *Ein Helde, der dich zähmt / bezwingt Gewalt dich nur*. After encountering the Rhinemaidens, he reflects

Trüg ich nicht Gutrun' Treu,
der zieren Frauen eine
hätt' ich mir frisch gezähmt!

This is not the sort of language that would ever be used by Morris's Sigurd.

Der frohen Funken
 wie freu' ich mich;
 es ziert den Kühnen
 des Zornes Kraft;
 lustig lachst du mich an,
 stellst du auch grimm dich und gram!
 (*Siegfried, Act I* ll.5206-5211)

There is a certain amount of contrast between Siegfried's vocabulary and that of Mime ; they sing at the same time, though it is not a duet in the normal sense in which that term is understood, as they are not responding to each other, instead what we have is the antithesis of Mime's deviousness and Siegfried's innocence and straightforwardness, and the contrast between Siegfried's joy in his task and Mime's grudging incompetence. Mime's language is more elaborate than Siegfried's ; this applies generally, as well as specifically to the contrast between the hearty simplicity of Siegfried's forging song and Mime's elaborate plot against Siegfried's life.

3.8 Wagner's use of archaisms

Some of the archaisms used by Wagner are listed in an Appendix. The question of archaism, the use (and the invention) of archaic or pseudo-archaic forms is discussed at length by Oswald Panagl in "*Vermählen wollte der Magen Sippe dem Mann ohne Minne die Maid*" - *archaisches und archaisierendes in der Sprache von Wagners Ring* (in *Richard Wagner und sein Mittelalter* ed. Ursula und Ulrich Müller, 1989). Although Panagl does not actually discuss this particular sentence, with its alliterating M and the archaic vocabulary, this is evidently as good an example as any to highlight the idiosyncracies of Wagner's poetic style. *Der Magen Sippe* is actually something of a tautology, since both *Magen* and *Sippe* belong to the group of words that can be translated as kin or kinfolk, or perhaps kinsmen⁵⁷, and

⁵⁷ All of these terms are slightly outmoded in English - in everyday colloquial speech, we would probably say *family*, but *kin* or *kinship* has

Sippe is a word that will recur several times during Siegmund's narration, in the course of which Hunding realises that Siegmund is the enemy whom he has been pursuing; *Sühne zu nehmen für Sippenblut*, for instance. *Magen* may well have been used for the sake of the alliteration, and *Sippe* for emphasis. As so often with Wagner, one is struck by the compactness and conciseness with which the necessary information is conveyed, Siegmund goes to the aid of a girl whose kinsmen were trying to force her into a loveless marriage, to help her wider den Zwang - against coercion. We are alerted to the sub-text, that Siegmund is one who will defend the weak,⁵⁸ and also to the fact that Sieglinde's marriage to Hunding was brought about by coercion.

Panagl also discusses some other archaisms used by Wagner, such as *Harst*, which he suggests is *ein altertümlicher Ausdruck für Kampfgruppe, der auf die Wurzel von Heer (heri) zurückgeht*. *Harst* is found in alliterating pairs such as *vom Hetzen und Harst einst kehrten wir heim* (*Die Walküre*, Act I) and also in *bis Speer und Schild im Harst mir zerhau'n*. (*Die Walküre*, Act I) and in *Wer hieß dich, Maid, dem Harst mich entführen?* (*Die Walküre*, Act III) This quotation from *Die Walküre* also includes one of Wagner's favourite archaisms, *Maid*. Morris aroused the ire of some of his contemporaries for his persistent use of *may*⁵⁹ to mean maiden or girl - one reviewer reminded Morris that *maiden* would be just as archaic, and "of his *mays* we are heartily tired."⁶⁰ Wagner would have found the epithet *minnige Maid* in Etmüller's translation of *Gripispá*⁶¹, and also in Simrock's translation of *Das Nibelungenlied*.

perhaps deeper resonances than we are aware of, to do with tribe, nation, or maybe just "extended family"

⁵⁸ In Morris's poem, this is a characteristic of Sigurd rather than his father.

⁵⁹ Evidently a word he found very attractive, since his daughter was given the name May.

⁶⁰ The Spectator, XLIII, Aug. 13, 1870

⁶¹ ef ek skal mærrar
meyiar bi ðia
ø ðrom til handa,
þeirar ek unna vel.

Panagl discusses the developments in the usage of *Minne*, which in Wagner's texts is almost always synonymous with *Liebe*:

Das Substantiv Minne gehört zu einer Wortwurzel der Bedeutung "(ge)denken", die auch das Verbum mahnen einschließt, Im MHD zunächst das gängige Wort für Liebe in all ihren Schattierungen, galt es über eine betont sinnlich-geschlechtliche Lesart ab dem 15ten Jahrhundert als obszön und wurde zunehmend vermieden, d.h. von *Liebe* verdrängt. Die Wiederbesinnung auf das Wort gab ihm seine unverfängliche Bedeutung wieder (vgl. Minnesänger), ja ist Minne wieder in seine alten Rechte eingetreten und steht in einem nicht leicht definierbaren Konkurrenzverhältnis zu Liebe, das sich bald als Synonyme darstellt, dann aber doch bezeichnende Unterschiede erkennen läßt. In der ersten Szene des Rheingold stehen Liebesgier und "seiner Minne Brunst" nebeneinander und variieren offenbar denselben Gehalt. Und auch die berühmte Bedingung für des Schmieden des Rheingoldes ("nur wer der Minne Macht entsagt, nur wer der Liebe Lust verjagt") in derselben Szene scheint im Wortwahl eher den Gesetzen des Stabreimes als faßbaren Bedeutungsunterschieden zu verdanken.

The above analysis is undoubtedly correct in its conclusion that *Liebe* and *Minne* are more or less synonymous, and I think considerably more accurate than the view that *Minne* should be equated with the OHG *minni*, remembrance. Even Elizabeth Magee, admirably sensible in most respects, has fallen prey to this in her comments on Siegfried's address to the absent Brünnhilde as he accepts the drinking horn from Guttrune; ⁶² "Wagner's use of the word *Minne* has evidently caused some confusion, for it appears in various English editions translated as love. What Wagner had in mind, however, was very likely the ceremony of Minnetrinken as described by Jacob Grimm in the *Mythologie* :

Einem abwesenden oder verstorbenen pflegte man zu ehren indem man seiner bei versammlung und mahlzeit erwähnte, und auf sein andenken einen becher leerte, dieser trunk wurde altn. erfi dryckja, und wiederum minni genannt.

Ettmüller's translation

*soll die minnige
Maid ich werben,
Andrem zu Handen,
die ich so liebte!*

⁶² Den ersten Trunk zu treuer Minne / Brünnhilde, bring ich dir!

Minnetrinken is thus a drink in memory of absent friends and Minne in this context is used in its archaic sense of remembrance, not love. The irony Wagner intended in these lines is therefore not that Siegfried ceases to love Brünnhilde but that in drinking to her memory he should forget her. " (Elizabeth Magee; Wagner and the Nibelungs p.94)

This interpretation of Siegfried's address to the absent Brünnhilde is possible, perhaps even allowable, and is given weight by the fact that Ettmüller provides a footnote in his translation of Sigrdrifumál to the effect that, in this context, *Minnetrank* means *drink of remembrance*. I consider it highly unlikely, though, that Wagner intended *Minne* to mean *remembrance* only on this one occasion, since everywhere else in the Ring *Minne* and *Liebe* are more or less synonymous; it is more reasonable to draw the conclusion that Panagl has drawn, namely that Wagner uses *Minne* and *Liebe* interchangeably, depending upon the exigencies of the alliteration and the rhythm, although admittedly in the instance quoted above, there seems to be no reason why *Minne* should have been chosen in preference to *Liebe*; it may be that *Minne* is more "poetic", "elevated" if one will, less colloquial than *Liebe*. In most cases, one is preferred over the other in Wagner's texts for the sake of the alliteration, as in Wotan's expression of grief over Siegmund: *Was ich minne Imuß ich mordern* (Die Walküre, Act II) or in Sieglinde's *da ganz sie minnte den Mann / der ganz ihre Minne erweckt* (Die Walküre, Act II).

IMAGERY AND VERSIFICATION IN "SIGURD THE VOLSUNG"4.1. Morris as a translator

Although this chapter centres on discussion of Morris's imagery and versification in *Sigurd the Volsung*, it is prefaced with a few introductory remarks about his work as a translator of Old Norse, as it is from this that his interest in writing an original epic developed. His procedure as a translator was explained by his collaborator, Eiríkr Magnússon, as May Morris quotes in *William Morris; Artist, Writer, Socialist*:¹ "Morris's saga style... is not 'pseudo Middle English', as thoughtless critics have claimed. It is his own; and is the result of an endeavour by a scholar and a man of genius to bring about such harmony between the spirit of the Teutonic element in English and the spirit of the Icelandic Saga as the not very abundant means at his command would allow. The soundness of this principle is surely not in dispute, only the application of it." Magnússon also mentions Morris's creation of archaic-sounding expressions, which are actually philologically correct; by-men (Byjarmenn) -- town's-folk, shoe-swain (skósvein) = page.

I would actually not acquit Morris entirely of the charge of writing "pseudo-Middle English". He seems to be attempting to make his translations read like Malory, but one supposes that Malory did not sound "old-fashioned" to a fifteenth-century audience, and the Icelandic Family Sagas, with which Morris was chiefly concerned,

¹ Magnússon was the Icelander with whom Morris studied Icelandic, and with whom he collaborated on his translations of Icelandic sagas, as we observed in Chapter I. Magnússon apparently formed a very favourable opinion of Morris's abilities in this field, according to May Morris;

Magnússon tells us that he was taken aback by the intuition with which Morris got at the sense of the story of Gunnlaug in the very first lesson, eager to see it all with as little delay as possible. He says, 'From the very first day I began work with William Morris on Icelandic literature, the thing that struck me most was this, that he entered into the spirit of it not with the pre-occupied mind of a foreigner, but with the intuition of an uncommonly wide-awake native.'

(May Morris; *William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist*, Vol. 1, p.469)

don't in themselves resemble Arthurian Romance ². The style that Morris adopts for his translations makes the narrative style of the Sagas appear florid, whereas in fact saga-style tends towards the laconic, except in scaldic poetry, which Morris translated very competently, although he apparently found it extremely difficult.³ Part of the problem for a reader of Morris's saga translations is that one has to have some familiarity with Old Norse in order to understand his translations. ⁴ To illustrate this point, I have listed in an Appendix some examples from Morris's translation of *Grettis Saga*, which bristles with archaic, 'poetic' vocabulary, such as *withal* instead of *as well*, *abode* instead of *lived*, *enow* instead of *enough*, *drave* instead of *drove*. A construction such as *Thorarin defended him* instead of *defended himself* is one to which Morris seems particularly attracted, as he uses it in his Prose Romances as well as in his translations. *Chapmen* is always used as a synonym for *merchants*. *Karle* is used as a synonym for *old man*; this is a dialect form, used by other writers apart from Morris.⁵ But perhaps Morris's translations of

² Morris doesn't appear to have been at all interested in the sagas of Arthurian Romance - a late group known as *riddararsögur* - which is curious given his interest in Arthurian Romance in English and French.

³ May Morris tells us that

[Morris] used to tell us of the roundabout metaphors in the verse he was dealing with. One would think that the saga-poets gave trouble out of sheer impishness with their strange synonyms, so far-fetched and crabbed as they were.

(May Morris ; *William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist* , Vol. 1, p.460)

⁴ By the twentieth century, even the most fervent admirers of Morris's pioneering work in translating Icelandic sagas were admitting that they were not at ease with his use of archaisms. Margaret Schlauch produced a new translation of the *Völsunga Saga* in 1930, and explained in her introduction the reasons for doing this;

In the first place, Morris's version is no longer as accessible as such an important text surely deserves to be; and in the second, the excessively archaic language he chose to employ, out of very respect for his original, is unfortunately all but incomprehensible in places, especially to a reader who does not know Old English [sic]

Perhaps Old Norse may have been meant, or perhaps she means that a reader who knows Old English may generally be assumed to have some knowledge of, or at least interest in, Old Norse.

⁵ When used in English, *karle* nearly always has the implication *old man*, sometimes even *surly old peasant* - but the Old Norse word *karl* just means *man*. The word *maðr* can be translated as *man* or *person*, so that there exist the compounds *karlmaðr* (man) and *kvænmaðr* (woman).

For Wagner, the idea of using archaisms was to locate the action in a timeless antiquity, whereas for Morris it was to locate it in the fourteenth or fifteenth century (in *A Dream of John Ball*, for instance) or in a dream-world very much resembling his idea of this period.⁸ There is a tradition of "archaism" in English verse which seems to be absent from German verse. It is suggested in the *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms* that this "fashion" [sic] was introduced by Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* because of his admiration for Chaucer - an admiration which Morris of course shared. Some of Morris's archaisms - for instance a half-line such as *ere the world was waxen old* - belong to the common stock of Victorian poetic vocabulary, and would not be out of place in the poems of Tennyson or Rossetti. There are also instances which recall the rhythms of Eddic verse, such as *witless thou waxest*, which also preserves the alliteration. He constantly uses *wot* for *know* (e.g. "I shall do thee to wot"), *belike* for *perhaps*, and so on, both in the poem and in his translation of VS. Some of the archaisms used, such as *glaiue* for *sword*, *byrny* for *breastplate* (or *armour*), were probably only ever literary and poetic, and were never used in everyday speech.

Morris experimented with a variety of verse techniques - *terza rima* in *The Defence of Guenevere*,⁹ alliterative verse in *Sigurd*.¹⁰ There is a strong tradition

⁸I am thinking of the Prose Romances, but this would also apply to *News from Nowhere*, to some extent. Morris does not use archaising language for this Utopian novel, but he envisages people wearing clothes similar to those worn in the mediæval period, and reviving mediæval craft techniques.

⁹It is curious to note that many contemporary critics did not actually recognize the *terza rima* form. It is not common in English - it is always possible that it was brought to Morris's attention by Rossetti, whose father was a Dante scholar.

¹⁰Morris uses alliterative verse for *Sigurd* in a deliberate attempt to convey something of the original, although his alliteration, like Wagner's, is in fact somewhat more flexible than the original. Attempts by other poets to convey "Northernness" rely much less heavily on alliteration: Gray's *The Fatal Sisters* (based on *Darraðaljǫð* in *Njals Saga*) and *Vegtam's Kivitha* use end-rhyme, and alliterate only when the context seems to require it, as in the following stanza from *The Fatal Sisters*:

*Shafts for shuttles, dipt in gore,
Shoot the tembling cords along.
Sword, that once a monarch bore,
Keep the tissue close and strong.*

of alliterative verse in England; this appears not to have been the case in German poetry, where alliterative verse had more or less died out, to be revived by Wagner for a specific purpose, and not really followed up, either by Wagner's contemporaries or by twentieth century poets. In England, on the other hand, the use of alliterative verse continued throughout the mediæval period (the *Gawain*-poet being a case in point). Both Morris and Swinburne (in *Hymn to Proserpine*) are able to produce a successful combination of alliterative verse and end-rhyme, and the poetic vocabulary of Gerard Manley Hopkins is clotted with alliteration.

Morris's translations preserve the alliteration of the *Poetic Edda*, but he does not attempt to reproduce exactly the syllable count. I quote here a stanza from *Sigur arki a in skamma*, in the original, in Morris's version and in Ettmüller's version, for the purposes of comparison:

Ar var, þats Sigur
sótti Giúka,

Vølsungr ungi,
er vegit hafði

tók við tryggð om
tveggja bræðra,
seldo eiða,

eliunfræknir.

Sigurd of yore
Sought the dwelling of
Giuki
As he fared, the
young Volsung
After fight won;
Troth he took
From the two brethren;
Oaths swore they betwixt
them,
Those bold ones of deed.

Einst war's, daß Sigurd
suchte Giuki'n;
vom Wahlfelde kam
Volsungs Enkel.
Beider Brüder
Bündnis ward ihm;
Eide schwuren
die Ellenkühnen.

4.2. The metre and alliterative technique of *Sigurd the Volsung*

Morris does not attempt to reproduce the rhythm or metre of Eddic verse in his poem, no doubt considering that he had done all that was necessary in that direction in his translations. The metre used in *Sigurd the Volsung* is based on the metre of *Das Nibelungenlied*; this was noted, with varying degrees of approval, by Morris's colleagues and contemporaries. It is condemned as "monotonous" by Gustav Gruener in *The Nibelungenlied and Sage in Modern Poetry*.¹¹ It is discussed with greater interest and enthusiasm by Francis Hueffer in *The Story of Sigurd and its*

Sources: 12

This metre has been a sore puzzle to the critics of "Sigurd". It has been described as "anapæstic", "dactylic", "English ballad metre", and what not.... Mr Morris's lines undoubtedly are [English hexameters] in a certain sense - in so far, namely, as they contain six high-toned or accentuated syllables. But a couplet like this, chosen at random -

*The shapen ancient token that hath no change nor end,
No change and no beginning, no flaw nor God to mend -*

distinctly shows that the fundamental scheme of the metre in "Sigurd" is neither dactylic nor anapæstic, but iambic; and a comparison of the same couplet with the very first verse of the "Nibelungenlied" -

Uns ist in alten maeren-wunder vil geseit -

further proves that both metres are identical, or, in other words, that Mr. Morris has adopted the "Langzeile", the long line of the old Germanic poem, with such modifications as the genius of the language or his individual bias seemed to require.

(Hueffer, *The Story of Sigurd*, p.49)

Morris's metre is also discussed in the review in the *Athenaeum* for December 9, 1876, probably the longest and most comprehensive contemporary review:

The verse is exceedingly musical. With regard, however, to the selection of the metre, we cannot think it a happy one for a poem of such length. Rask has pointed out the hexametrical nature of Icelandic verse, but English hexameters are essentially lyrical, and therefore are unfit for the heavy business of dramatic narrative. That law of accentuated verse, the effect of which is that, when the pause falls after the third

¹¹ Publications of the Modern Language Association of America , 1896; pp.220-257)

¹² In *The Gentleman's Magazine* , 1877, pt. 2 , pp.46-57

foot (as in hexameter), it is double the length of the pause falling after any earlier or later foot, becomes intensified when the line is either dactylic or anapæstic. The result of this is, that in English hexameters the back of every line is broken exactly in the middle, and produces an unpleasant monotony, unless the writer, every now and then, quite alters the character of the line, - as Mr. Tennyson does in "Maud", and as Mr. Swinburne does in "Hesperia."

(*Athenæum*, Dec. 9, 1876, p.755)

In *Sigurd* Morris uses a flexible alliteration, just as Wagner does in the text of the *Ring*. This was noted in a review of the first Bayreuth festival in the *Athenæum*, July 29, 1876; the reviewer explicitly compares Wagner's alliterative verse with that of Morris's translations ¹³, but in fact Morris's alliteration is even freer than that used by Wagner. Perhaps one might go so far as to say that Morris uses alliteration in a more subtle way than does Wagner; his alliteration is rarely, if ever, "obtrusive", although we noted in Chapter III that it is more than probable that Wagner uses obtrusive alliteration where necessary for comic effect, e.g. to characterise the Nibelung brothers.

The metre Morris uses in *Sigurd the Volsung* is that of *anapæstic hexameters*. I quote here some examples of his alliteration, taken at random from the poem. The alliterative pattern is shown by emphasis in bold characters.

There is a desert of dread ^a in the uttermost part of the world

Where over a wall of mountains is a mighty water hurled, ^b

13

" One important variation in his librettos must be noticed at once - he has abandoned modern verse. Herr Wagner had adapted for his metrical basis the alliterative principle. Herr Franz Hueffer, in his volume on "Music of the Future", states that Herr Wagner has treated the old metre much in the same manner as Messrs. E. Magnusson and W. Morris in their story of the Volsungs and the Niblungs, translated from the Icelandic. Mr. Dannreuther, in his essay on Richard Wagner, regards the rhythmical speech used in the "Nibelungen" as calculated to render more adapted to the condensed form emotional intensity and enabling the musician to give precise expression to the melody. "(emphasis added) (Athenæum, 1876)

^a d and dr alliterate for Morris ; this would not have been the case in Old Norse alliterative verse.

^b The alliterating w crosses over two lines in this instance.

Whose hidden head none knoweth, nor where it meeteth the sea;
 And that force is the Force of Andvari, and an Elf ^c of the Dark is
 he.

In the cloud and the desert he dwelleth amid that land alone;
 And his work is the storing of treasure within his house of
 stone.^d

Time was when he knew of wisdom, and had many a tale to tell ^e
 Of the days before the Dwarf-age, and of what in that world
 befell; ^f

And he knew of the stars and the sun, ^g and the worlds that
 come and go

On the nether rim of heaven, and whence the wind doth blow,
 And how the sea hangs balanced betwixt the curving lands,

And how all drew together for the first Gods' fashioning hands.

But now is all gone from him, save the craft of gathering gold, ^h

And he heedeth nought of the summer, nor knoweth the winter
 cold,

Nor looks to the sun nor the snowfall, nor ever dreams of the sea,

^c Vowel alliteration ; not very common.

^d Double alliteration ; w/st -w/st

^e Different consonant before and after the cæsure ; w/wh/w; t/t/

^f A similar pattern to that used in the previous line ; d/dw ; wh/w . Again , d can alliterate with d + consonant

^g s can alliterate with s+ consonant

^h The g alliteration crosses the cæsure .

Nor hath heard of the making of men-folk, nor of where the high
Gods be ⁱ

But ever he gripeth and gathereth, and he toileth hour by hour,

Nor knoweth the noon from the midnight as he looks on his stony
bower,

And saith; "It is short, it is narrow for all I shall gather and get;

For the world is but newly fashioned, and long shall its years be
yet."

(Sigurd the Volsung, p.91)

"It is well with my house", said Gudrun, "and my brethrens' days
are fair

And my mother's morns are joyous, and her eves have done with
care;

And my father's heart is happy, and the Niblung glory grows,

And the land in peace is lying 'neath the lily and the rose. ^j

But love and the mirth of summer have moved my heart to come

To look on thy measureless beauty, and seek thy glory home. ¹⁴

ⁱ In this line, the m/m alliteration is framed by h/h/h/ alliteration.

^j The l alliteration crosses the cæsure.

¹⁴ We may compare this with some lines from Swinburne's *Hymn to Proserpine*, to examine how a similar pattern of alliteration was used by a contemporary and colleague of Morris;

Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from
thy breath;

We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on the fullness of death.

Laurel is green for a season, and love is sweet for a day;

But love grows bitter with treason, and laurel outlives not May.

We see here that Morris uses a very expansive, "leisurely" metre, and that the alliterative pattern is not as intricately woven together as is Wagner's; he rarely uses cross-alliteration or double alliteration to convey emphasis, as Wagner does. Wagner's alliterative verse, as we discussed in the previous chapter, is often onomatopœic, and its most striking feature is its terse compactness, the use of a few words to convey a complex set of ideas. The more expansive metre and freer alliteration of *Sigurd the Volsung* is more suited to the style of narrative epic than the terse compactness of *Stabreim*.

Sleep, shall we sleep after all? for the world is not sweet in the
end;

For the old faiths loosen and fall, the new years ruin and rend.
Fate is a sea without shore, and the soul is a rock that abides;
But her ears are vexed with the roar and her face with the foam of
the tides.

O lips that the love blood faints in, the leavings of racks and
rods!

O ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted Gods!

Swinburne uses internal rhyme as well as end-rhyme in this poem.

4.3. Verse forms used by Morris: epic simile, anaphora, parallelism

There are several examples of the use of epic simile, a classical allusion which Morris would have expected his readers to recognise. One occurs as Sigurd's mother watches him leave:

as some for-travailed one
Comes o'er the dark fell-ridges on the birth-tide of the sun,
And his gathering sleep falls from him mid the glory and the blaze;
And he sees the world grow merry and looks on the lightened ways,
While the ruddy streaks are melting in the day-flood broad and white;
Then the morn-dusk he forgetteth, and the moon-lit waste of night,
And the hall whence he departed with its yellow candles' flare;
So stood the Isle-king's daughter in that treasure chamber fair.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.104)

Note also the occasional use of classical epithets - white-armed Gudrun, white-hand Signy - and the use of stichomythia, when Sigurd's birth is announced,¹⁵ and between Sigurd and Odin and Sigurd and Fafnir on the Glittering Heath.

Also noteworthy is Morris's use of anaphora, especially in the passage - most probably a reference to the *Nunc Dimittis* - in which the unnamed "man most ancient" greets the birth of Sigurd:

But there rose up a man most ancient, and he cried, "Hail Dawn of the Day!
How many things shalt thou quicken, how many shalt thou slay!
How many things shalt thou waken, how many lull to sleep!
How many things shalt thou scatter, how many gather and keep!
O me, how thy love shall cherish, how thy hate shall wither and burn!
How the hope shall be sped from thy right hand, nor the fear to thy left
return!
O thy deeds that men shall sing of! O thy deeds that the Gods shall see!
O SIGURD, Son of the Volsungs, O Victory yet to be !"
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.74)

15

Said King Elf ;"Great words of women! or great hath our dwelling become."
Said the women; Words shall be greater, when all folk shall praise our
home."
"What then hath betid," said King Elf, "do the high Gods stand in our gate?"
"Nay," said they, "else were we slient, and they should be telling of fate."
"Is the bidding come," said the Helepr, "that we wend the Gods to see?"
"Many summers and winter," they said, "ye shall live on the earth, it may
be."
(*Sigurd the Volsung* , p.72)

In this passage, effective use is also made of the balanced antithesis of ideas, before and after the cæsure. ¹⁶

Sigurd may be considered an interweaving of narrative and other verse forms, especially pastoral in the Lyndale episode. *Interweaving* is especially appropriate in Morris's case, since his technique of writing poetry is evidently paralleled by his technique of designing textiles. In all of his long narrative poems, Morris's work as a craftsman and designer influenced the vocabulary and style of his poetry, but this influence is especially prominent in *Sigurd*, which is constructed like a tapestry, that is, the layers of metaphor and imagery constitute a narrative technique that resembles the repeated patterning of Morris's textile designs. Morris's frequent use of the technique of paralleling a description in the first part of the poem with a similar but not identical passage in the second part is one way in which the construction of his poem resembles the repeated patterning of a tapestry. ¹⁷ One of the most striking examples of

¹⁶ This passage comes in for some adverse criticism by Iselin Maria Gabrieli (In *William Morris e l'antichità nordica*, Istituto Lombardo, Rend. Lett. 107, 1973.) but I believe Morris's use of anaphora and other forms of repetition is usually very effective, as he is quite sparing in his use. Gabrieli takes Morris to task for what is considered to be the "mechanical" nature of the repetitions;

Malgrado gli accenti ritmici che qui cadono per lo più sulle sillabe essenziali d'identico timbro, le parole anziché intensificare la suggestione delle immagini, restano grigie e incolore nella loro dilatata indeterminatezza. L'uso stesso delle antitesi che dovrebbe creare un ritmo drammatico, resta qui puramente meccanico, inerte.

I cannot agree with Gabrieli's analysis; I find that Morris uses repetition and antithesis very effectively, to present a structural balance; there is a balance of vocabulary and ideas.

¹⁷ This has been noted by Stephen Sossaman in *William Morris's Sigurd the Volsung and the Pre-Raphaelite Visual Aesthetic* (Pre-Raphaelite Review, Vol. 1, pt.2, 1978), an article largely devoted to discussion of Morris's colour symbolism, but which also draws attention to the parallels between Morris's technique of designing tapestry or wallpaper with repeating patterns and the similar technique of constructing an epic;

The most important stylistic devices employed are strict attention to detail and minutiae, the use of color and light to create mass as well as to serve symbolic functions, the concomitant creation of a heightened surface pattern, and the sequential presentation of fully developed tableaux which sacrifice the sense of movement in favor of a tapestry-like sequence of set pieces....It is not surprising that the poet of Sigurd would be

this technique is the contrast between the description of Brynhild when Sigurd first meets her in Lymdale, and when he comes back disguised as Gunnar. The parallels are striking, even more striking because the details of the description are almost the same, but the effect is markedly different:

But a woman sits on the high-seat with gold about her head,
 And ruddy rings on her arms, and the grace of her girdle-stead;
 And sun-lit is her rippled linen, and the green leaves lie at her feet,
 And e'en as a swan on the billow where the firth and the out-sea meet,
 On the dark-blue cloths she sitteth, so fair and softly made
 Are her limbs by the linen hidden, and so white is she arrayed.
 But a web of gold is before her

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.164)

And lo, on the height of the dais is upreared a graven throne
 And thereon a woman sitting in the golden place alone;
 Her face is fair and awful, and a gold crown girdeth her head;
 And a sword of the kings she beareth, and her sun-bright hair is shed
 O'er the laps of the snow-white linen that ripples adown to her feet;
 As a swan on the billow unbroken ere the firth and the ocean meet,
 On the dark-blue cloths she sitteth, in the height of the golden place,
 Nor breaketh the hush of the hall, though her eyes be set on his face.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 214)

The first passage contains imagery that develops and reinforces the association of Brynhild with summer and fruitfulness, especially the *green leaves* that lie at her feet; this imagery is no longer valid in the context of the second passage. In the first passage there is a sense of movement, liveliness; the second passage conveys instead a sense of stasis and rigidity. The location is the same, she is wearing the same rippled white linen, but whereas in the first passage she moves gracefully in the sunlight before her loom, a living woman, in the second passage she seems almost to have become a statue, and she has exchanged her *web of gold* for a *sword of the kings*.¹⁸ The

interested in the repetitious and stylized pattern of floral wallpaper design....Surface pattern in poetry may be established when the form supersedes the content or narrative interest of a work by strong metrical construction [or] by exaggerated use of rhyme, alliteration or other sound devices.

(*"Sigurd" and the Pre-Raphaelite Visual Aesthetic*, pp.81, 85)

¹⁸ The description of Brynhild is paralleled by the appearance of Gudrun in Atli's hall; she too has been transformed into a silent statue.

No king and no earl-folk's children do the bidden guests behold
 Till they look aloft to the high-seat, and lo, a woman alone,

passages quoted demonstrated the difference between images of potential fecundity and images of sterility; Morris frequently has recourse to this contrast, indicating with the imagery he chooses the potential for growth and achievement that is never quite achieved - or only achieved on a temporary basis, during the pastoral idyll in Lyndale.

Linked to this is the contrast between Brynhild's invitation to Sigurd to sit in her father's seat, and the repetition of the invitation to the man she believes to be Gunnar. Brynhild and Sigurd meet and embrace, and Brynhild invites Sigurd to sit in her father's high seat: ¹⁹

Then forth she stepped from the high-seat, and forth from the
threshold he came,
Till both their bodies mingling seemed one glory and the same,
And far o'er all fulfilment did the souls within them long,
And at breast and lips of the faithful the earthly love strained strong;
And fresh from the deeps of summer the breeze across them blew,
But nought of the earth's desire, or the lapse of time they knew.

.....

And she leadeth him through the chamber, and sitteth down in her
seat;
And him she setteth beside her, and she saith; "It is right and meet
That thou sit in the throne of my fathers, since thy gift today I have;
Thou hast given it altogether, nor aught from me wouldst save;
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.166)

When Brynhild invites "Gunnar", i.e. Sigurd in disguise, to sit in the high-seat, there are ironic parallels between this meeting and their previous meeting:

A white queen crowned, and silent as the ancient shapen stone
That men find in the dale deserted, as beneath the moon they wend

....
So Hogni seeth Gudrun, and the face he used to know,
Unspeakable, unchanging, with white unknitted brow,
With half-closed lips untrembling, with deedless hands and cold
Laid still on knees that stir not, and the linen's moveless fold.

....
The white and silent woman above the slaughter set.

¹⁹ Compare VS ;

Alswid answered, "None has ever yet been known whom she would let sit beside her, or to whom she would give drink; for ever will she hold to warfare and to the winning of all kinds of fame."

Sigurd said; "We know not for sure whether she will give us answer or not, or grant us a seat beside her."

So the next day after, Sigurd went to the bower ...

He sat him down by her, and there came in four damsels with great golden beakers, and the best of wine therein; and these stood before the twain.

Then said Brynhild, "This seat is for few, but and if ny father come."
He answered, "Yet it is granted to one that likes me well."

(*Volsunga Saga* , Morris's translation , p.162)

"For thee, for the King, have I waited, and the waiting now is done;
I shall bear Earth's kings on my bosom and nourish the Niblung's son.

...
Come, Gunnar, Lord of the Niblungs, and sit in my fathers' seat!
For for thee alone it was shapen, and the deed is due and meet."

Up she rose exceeding glorious, and it was as when in May
The blossomed hawthorn stirreth with the dawning-wind of day;
But the Wooer moved to meet her, and amid the golden place
They met, and their garments mingled and face was close to face;
And they turned again to the high-seat, and their very right hands
met,
And King Gunnar's bodily semblance beside her Brynhild set.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.216)

This almost, but not quite, resembles the embrace at their previous meeting, and this is the point, this is where the irony resides. The pastoral idyll of Lymdale occurs in the summer, and there is an ironic reference to spring /May in the later episode, as though this were still a time of hope for Brynhild. We will note that, in the first passage *both their bodies mingling seemed one glory and the same*, whereas in the second passage the reference is *their garments mingled and face was close to face*, implying that the embrace is not an embrace of soul to soul, but an empty act of courtesy. The poem tells us *-And no speech there was betwixt them that their hearts might understand*. There is a poignant contrast between what they say to each other, and what they feel. They confront each other in silence for a while, and the silence is full of anguish and the presage of death. Sigurd's wooing speech on behalf of Gunnar contains positive images, in contrast to the apathetic sadness both are feeling - he exhorts her to "awaken unto life":

Now therefore awaken to life! for this eve have I ridden thy Fire
When but few of the kings would outface it, to fulfil thy heart's desire.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.215)

The reader is conscious of irony here - if Sigurd had come in his own semblance, this would indeed have fulfilled Brynhild's heart's desire. There are repeated references to the fact that they don't know what to say to each other. When they do speak, it is with strained politeness, a mask hiding the aching emptiness. This can be contrasted with the previous time they spent together - then they sat together and talked, now they sit together in embarrassed silence.

...and they two are all alone,
 And they sat awhile in the high-seat when the wedding-troth was done
 But no while looked each on the other, and hand fell down from hand,
 And no speech there was betwixt them that their hearts might understand.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.217)

We may also compare the oaths of love sworn between Sigurd and Brynhild, and then those between Sigurd and Gudrun. At their first meeting on Hindfell, Sigurd gives Brynhild Andvari's ring, and promises to visit her in Lymdale:

Then Sigurd cries; "O Brynhild, now hearken while I swear
That the sun shall die in the heavens and the day no more be fair,
 If I seek not love in Lymdale and the house that fostered thee,
 And the land where thou awakedst 'twixt the woodland and the sea!"

And she cried, "O Sigurd, Sigurd, now hearken while I swear
That the day shall die forever and the sun to blackness wear,
 Ere I forget thee, Sigurd, as I lie 'twixt wood and sea
 In the little land of Lymdale and the house that fostered me!"
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.146) (emphasis added)

During the pastoral interlude in Lymdale, these vows are renewed:

Said Brynhild; "I bid thee remember the word that I have sworn,
How the sun shall turn to blackness, and the last day be outworn,
 Ere I forget thee, Sigurd, and the kindness of thy face."

And they kissed and the day grew later and noon failed the golden
 place.

But Sigurd said; "O Brynhild, remember how I swore
That the sun should die in the heavens and day come back no more
 Ere I forget thy wisdom and thine heart of inmost love."
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, pp.166-167) (emphasis added)

Sigurd's vow of love to Gudrun is couched in not dissimilar terms:

And Sigurd's eyes grow awful as he stretcheth forth his hand,
 And his clear voice saith; "O Gudrun, now hearken while I swear
That the sun shall die for ever and the day no more be fair,
 Ere I forget thy pity and thine inmost heart of love."
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, pp.196-197) (emphasis added)

He praises Brynhild's *wisdom* and thanks Gudrun for her *pity*, but apart from that the oaths are substantially the same; he is saying that what he values in both women is their capacity for love.

Book I, dealing with the vengeance of the Volsungs and the death of Siggeir, is paralleled in many ways by Book IV of the poem, which deals with Gudrun's

revenge and the death of Atli - the characters of Atli and Siggeir are parallel. Although there are many parallels between Books I and IV of *Sigurd* - for instance Siggeir evidently foreshadows Atli²⁰ and his treachery evidently foreshadows Atli's treachery - the differences are as interesting, if not more so, than the parallels. Volsung seems genuinely to be unaware of Siggeir's evil nature, and even when Signy warns him that Siggeir is plotting treachery, he only half heeds her warning:

Now wise is Signy my daughter and knoweth nought but sooth;

 Nor for her word of Siggeir will I trow it overmuch,
 Nor altogether doubt it, since the woman is wrought so wise;
 Nor might my heart love Siggeir for all his kingly guise.
 Yet shall a king hear murder when a king's mouth blessing saith?
 So maybe he is bidding me honour, and maybe he is bidding me death;
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 14)

This is in contrast to the bravado shown by Gunnar and Hogni when they accept the treacherous invitation from Atli and Gudrun; they know that they will never return, but will not admit it:

At last spake Gunnar the Niblung as his hand on the cup he laid;
 "A great king craveth our coming, and no more shall he be gainsayed;
 We will go to look on Atli, though the Gods and the Goths forbid;
 Nought worse than the death meseemeth on the Niblungs' path is hid,
 And this shall the high Gods see to, but I to the Niblungs' name,
 And the day of deeds to accomplish, and the gathering-in of fame."

Up he stood with the bowl in his right-hand, and mighty and great he
 was,
 And he cried; "Now let the beakers adown the benches pass;
 Let us drink dear draughts and glorious, though the last farewell it be,
 And this draught that I drink have sundered my father's house and
 me."
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.295)

The poem frequently emphasises the parallels between Siggeir in Book I and Atli in Book IV. Consider for instance the description of their appearance; Siggeir is compared unfavourably with Volsung's sons, while Atli is described as small and insignificant:

²⁰ Discussed by Mark Cuming in *The Structure of Sigurd the Volsung*.

Therewith downlighted Siggeir as the lord of a mighty folk,
 Yet showed he by King Volsung as the bramble by the oak,
 Nor reached his helm to the shoulder of the least of Volsung's sons.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.4)

And the Niblungs looked for the coming of King Atli in his pride;
 But one man entered only, and he thin and old and spare,
 A swordless man and a little - yet was King Atli there.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.313)

Siggeir does not participate in the battle with Volsung and his sons. Given this, and the parallels already noted between Atli and Siggeir, the reader is not surprised to discover that Atli doesn't participate in the battle with the Niblungs. There is a longer description of Atli in his triumph than there is of Siggeir in his, and there is perhaps some irony which is lacking from the narration of the aftermath of Volsung's defeat. Atli's glory and pride are false, and Gunnar and Hogni are nobler and more magnificent than he is, even after he appears to have defeated them. There is emphasis on Atli's gold adornment, the fact that he wears the external trappings of power, but is quite insignificant in himself:

And folk heard the gold gear tinkle and the rings of the Eastland
 crown;
 Folk looked on his rich adornment, on King Atli's pride they gazed,
 And the bright beams wearied their eye, by the glory they were
 dazed;

...
 But King Atli looketh before him, and is grown too great to rejoice,
 And he speaks, and the world is troubled, though thin and scant be his
 voice;
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 324)

This is compared with Hogni;

And the might of his body hath failed him, and yet so great was he
 That the East-folk cowered before him and the might of his majesty.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 324)

Just as the Volsungs are still more glorious than Siggeir, though he has defeated them, so the Niblungs are still greater than Atli, and it is Hogni's personal majesty from which Atli's followers shrink; unlike Atli, he has no need of gold to make himself

appear worthy.²¹ Yet another example of Morris's careful attention to detail may be seen in the half-line *by the glory they were dazed*, quoted above; the reader has probably unconsciously been expecting to read *by his glory they were dazed*; by using the definite article instead, it is made clear that it is not Atli's personality and presence that impresses the onlookers, but only the gold he wears.

A further striking example of the use of parallelism occurs in the contrasts between the two occasions on which Sigurd braves Brynhild's fire; that is, when he wakens her on Hindfell, and when he woos her for Gunnar in Lymdale. (When he visits her in the pastoral setting of Lymdale, there is no fire, as there is no need for one.) The first time Sigurd braves the flames, he does it for love of adventure, not knowing who, or what, he would find there. His horse then is eager to carry him through the flames, and Sigurd revels in the experience. We may compare this with the hint Wagner gives of Siegfried's enjoyment of his adventure (see previous chapter):

Now Sigurd turns in his saddle, and the hilt of the Wrath he shifts,
 And draws a girth the tighter; then the gathered reins he lifts,
 And crieth aloud to Greyfell, and rides at the wildfire's heart;
 But the white wall wavers before him and the flame-flood rusheth
 apart,
 And high o'er his head it riseth, and wide and wild is its roar
 As it beareth the mighty tidings to the very heavenly floor;
 But he rideth through its roaring as the warrior rides the rye,
 When it bows with the wind of the summer and the hid spears draw
 anigh.
 The white flame licks his raiment and sweeps through Greyfell's
 mane,
 And bathes both hands of Sigurd and the hilts of Fafnir's bane,
 And winds about his war-helm and mingles with his hair,
 But nought his raiment dusketh or dims his glittering gear;
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.136)

The wooing expedition with Gunnar shows parallels with this, as well as some stark contrasts - the refusal of the horse to carry Gunnar, for instance. The narrator stresses that the animal has no more fear now than it has when it carried Sigurd, but it senses that something is wrong.²² Gunnar doesn't lack courage, but Hogni is the only one

²¹ We will no doubt recall at this juncture than Hogni has in any case thrown the gold away.

²²

There sits the eager Gunnar, and his heart desires the deed,
 And of naught he recketh and thinketh, but a flame-stirred warrior's need;

who realises what is going on, having inherited more of Grimhild's wisdom than his brother. The passage in which Sigurd, disguised as Gunnar, penetrates the flames, shows some parallels with the earlier passage:

But Sigurd leapeth on Greyfell, and the sword in his hand is bare,
 And the gold spurs flame on his heels, and the fire-blast lifteth his hair;
 Forth Greyfell bounds rejoicing, and they see the grey wax red,
 As unheard the war-gear clasheth, and the flames meet over his head, Yet a
 while they see him riding, as through the rye men ride,
 When the word goes forth in the summer of the kings by the ocean-side;
 But the fires were slaked before him and the wild-fire burned no more
 Than the ford of the summer waters when the rainy time was o'er.

(Sigurd the Volsung, p.213)

The fire gives way before Sigurd, just as it did in the earlier passage. The narrator uses the same simile, of a man or warrior "riding through the rye". The difference here is that when Sigurd penetrates the flames disguised as Gunnar, there is no reference to his pleasure in the experience, as there was the first time.

But Greyfell trembleth nothing and nought of the flame doth reck,
 Then the spurs in his flank are smitten, and the reins lie loose on his
 neck,
 And the sharp cry springeth from Gunnar - no handbreadth stirreth the
 beast.

(Sigurd the Volsung, p.210)

finds her and wakens her. Here the imagery is reminiscent of Loge's fire imagery in *Das Rheingold*; the alliteration is onomatopœic, conveying the sinuousness of flickering flame:

For lo, the side of Hindfell enwrapped by the fervent blaze,
And nought 'twixt earth and heaven save a world of flickering flame,
And a hurrying shifting tangle, where the dark rents went and came.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.133)

Morris's verbal imagery is as effective as Wagner's music in conveying the nature of the fire.

Brynhild goes home to Lymdale after Sigurd has woken her, and the fire appears to guard her home there after Sigurd has drunk Grimhild's potion.

Men say that a little after the evil of that night
All waste is the burg of Brynhild, and there springeth a marvellous
light
On the desert hard by Lymdale; and few men know for why;
But there are, who say that a wildfire thence roareth up to the sky
Round a glorious golden dwelling, wherein there sitteth a Queen
In remembrance of the wakening, and the slumber that hath been,
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 189)

This implies that Brynhild summons up the fire herself, that it has nothing to do with Odin, but with her powers, or perhaps with the powers of Nature, with which she is evidently closely allied.²⁴

Sigmund's sword is twice referred to as the *War-flame*, but it is more commonly known as the *Wrath*, after Regin has reforged it for Sigurd. Andvari's Gold is sometimes called *The Flame of the Waters*; this is derived from an Old Norse kenning. When Sigurd is born, the narrator tells of his mother's happiness:

But Hiordis looked on the Volsung, on her grief and her fond desire,
And the hope of her heart was quickened, and her joy was a living fire.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.71) (emphasis added)

Love sometimes occurs in the context of a fire/flame metaphor, which, as in the case of Gudrun's love for Sigurd, implies a flame that consumes, rather than a light that illumines - in other words, a negative image of love:

²⁴ In the unpublished draft of the poem, Brynhild has two lines in which she specifically states that she summoned up the fire herself;
So I dight my house in the desert and I dreamed of the earlier day
And I set the red bane of the oakwood about my dwelling to play.

He longs, and she sees his longing, and her heart grows cold as a sword,
And her heart is the ravening fire...
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.184) (emphasis added)

It is implied that Gudrun is consumed by this fire of love, which is akin to the fire which will one day consume Atli's hall when she gets her revenge. We have already noted the parallels between Siggeir and Atli, but the narrator goes into much greater detail when describing the fire which destroys Atli's hall:

(Siggeir)

Then they ²⁵ drew their swords and watched it till the flames began to win
 Hard on to the mid-hall's rafters, and those feasters of the folk,
 As the fire-flakes fell among them, to the last of their days awoke.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.44)

(Atli)

She spake; ²⁶ and the sun clomb over the Eastland mountains rim
 And shone through the door of Atli and the smoky hall and dim,
 But the fire roared up against him, and the smoke-cloud rolled aloof,
 And back and down from the timbers, and the carven work of the roof,
 Then the ancient trees were crackling as the red flames shot aloft
 From the heart of the gathering smoke-cloud; then the far-fetched
 hangings soft,
 The gold and the sea-born purple, shrank up in a moment of space,
 And the walls of Atli trembled, and the ancient golden place.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.343)

It does not seem to be implied that the fire that Gudrun ignites is in any way purifying, as Brünnhilde's fire at the end of *Götterdämmerung* is, and we may conclude that fire imagery forms only a minor component of the pattern of imagery in *Sigurd the Volsung*. The imagery of Nature is far more important, ²⁷ as is the use of the various meanings of craft as metaphor and image.

²⁵ Sigmund and Sinfjolti

²⁶ Gudrun

²⁷ Morris's use of nature metaphors, especially the use of the tree metaphor for the Volsungs, was noted by J.W. Blench in *William Morris's "Sigurd the Volsung"; a re-appraisal* (Durham University Journal, Dec. 1968). Blench also notes the fact that Sigurd is frequently likened to or equated with the sun, a feature that I discuss at length in Chapter VI.

4.5. Craft imagery in *Sigurd the Volsung*

The repeated occurrence of the various meanings of *craft* is one of the major connecting threads running through the poem - one could almost say *leitmotif*, although Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites never used this term²⁸. In discussion of the role of Grimhild,²⁹ we find that there is a cluster of references to craft - meaning *witchcraft* and *spinning*, which has a metaphorical link with witchcraft. *Sigurd* is the poem in which Morris makes the most extensive use of the vocabulary of craft, not only textile craft,³⁰ but the craft of the mason, and of the smith. The word is also used in its meaning of *cunning, guile, deception*, as when it is said of Sigurd that *he feared no craft of the Dwarf-kind*, and it usually has this dual meaning when applied to Grimhild. But when at the beginning of Book II we are told of Sigurd's home:

'Twas a country of cunning craftsmen, and many a thing they wrought
That the lands of storm desired, and the homes of warfare sought
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.69)

cunning is being used in the rare (and probably already archaic) sense of *skilled*. The point is also being made that this is a land of peace and plenty, in contrast to the *lands of storm* and the *homes of warfare*.

²⁸ Nor was it used by Wagner, but was coined by Hans von Wolzogen.

²⁹ My article *The Role of Grimhild in "Sigurd the Volsung"*, (Journal of the William Morris Society, Autumn 1989)

³⁰ Other examples are found, in *The Earthly Paradise* and in *Jason*. Most important is the fact that Morris knows what the technical process of weaving, spinning and embroidering involves, so that he uses the vocabulary of textile craft in a literal context, and also as a metaphor for women's work. I quote here a stanza from *Pygmalion and the Image*, one of the *Earthly Paradise* poems.

Yet note, that though, when looking on the sun,
The craftsman o'er his work some morn of spring
May chide his useless labour never done,
For all his murmurs, with no other thing
He soothes his heart, and dull's thought's poisonous sting,
And thus in thought despite the world goes on;
And so it was with this Pygmalion.

It is perhaps surprising that Morris isn't more interested in the fate of Pygmalion as a craftsman - that he doesn't develop the theme the way he does with Regin, because on the face of it one would have expected Pygmalion to be a more promising theme.

It is also sometimes used as a metaphor, for instance to describe the road to the Glittering Heath which is a natural phenomenon, but is described as though it had been fashioned by giant craftsmen:

...and that highway's fashioner
 Forsooth was a fearful craftsman, and his hands the waters were,
 And the heaped-up ice was his mattock, and the fire-blast was his man.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.116)

There is an ironic reference to the *craft of the masons* when Sigmund and Sinfjolti cut their way free from Siggeir's prison. The term is also used ironically with reference to the wolves who devour Volsung's sons; Siggeir sends his henchmen to *behold those craftsmen's carving*.

The episode in which Signy changes shape with the witch-wife perhaps foreshadows Grimhild to some extent, that is, some of the same vocabulary is used. The ability to change shape is a *craft* in which Grimhild is skilled, but in this context *craft* doesn't just mean *skill*, it also means *sorcery/witchcraft*. *Craft* is occasionally used to mean knowledge or wisdom, but then the implication is that the wisdom is misapplied; Brynhild is wise, but never uses *craft*, Grimhild is a wise-wife, and does. Thus, Andvari once had wisdom, but in his greed for gold lost everything save *the craft of gathering gold*.³¹ The metaphors of textile craft are mainly connected with Grimhild's spinning, but there is also a reference to Loki, *who weaveth the unseen meshes and the snare of strong deceit* to trap Andvari; literally it refers to the net in which Andvari is trapped, but there is also the implication of weaving as a metaphor for deception.

The gods are also sometimes referred to as craftsmen, shapers, or framers - Makers or Creators is the implication.³²

³¹ In which surely he resembles Alberich ; Alberich amasses the gold, but enslaves others to make things with it. He doesn't actually *make* things himself , once he has made the Ring, he just gloats over his possessions.

³² There is a reference to the *craft of creation*, while Sigmund and Sinfjolti are in their werewolf guise;

...and a dim thought wearied his head
 And his tangled wolfish wit, that might never understnad;
 As though some God in his dreaming had wasted the work of his hand,
 And forgotten his craft of creation ...
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.37) (emphasis added)

And they fain would look on the earth, and their latest handiwork,
 And turn the fine gold over, lest a flaw therein should lurk.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.86)

Reidmar mocks the gods for their aspirations as craftsmen.³³ This perhaps echoes or develops Regin's complaints about the gods, uttered earlier in this narrative flashback. Regin may be hinting that the basis of the conflict between the dwarves and the gods - the envy that he feels - is based on their differing creative capacities; the gods can create human beings, the dwarves can't. The narrator in *Sigurd the Volsung* does not perceive Regin entirely negatively - and since Regin becomes his own narrator, the reader is also enabled to perceive him more sympathetically than is possible in the case of Wagner's Mime. Morris of course emphasises Regin's achievements as a craftsman; much of his narration to Sigurd is concerned with pride in his craftsmanship.³⁴ Regin in Morris's poem has a long narrative flashback, in which Sigurd and the reader are informed, not only of the basic facts, i.e. how the gold came to be on the Glittering Heath, but also of the background, the strained relationship between the gods and the dwarves, the nature of the gods and their relationship with human beings, but seen from Regin's viewpoint.³⁵ There are repeated references to Regin's pride in his

when they are released from their wolfskins, Sinfjolti acknowledges that he had a *craft to learn*.

33

...Come, Hoenir, fashion now
 My heart for love and for hope, that the fear in my body may grow,
 That I may grieve and be sorry, that the ruth may arise in me,
 As thou dealtst with the first of men-folk, when a master-smith thou
 wouldst be.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.92)

(emphasis added)

³⁴ This is noted by Linda Anne Julian in *William Morris ; the Icelandic Influence on his writing* (Ph.D., Boston, 1989);

It is almost inconceivable that Morris would not have been drawn into writing *Sigurd* at least partly by the possibilities for symbolism that Regin embodies, especially if Morris had already made, by 1876, the connection that he finally made between politics and art. To Morris the socialist, Regin would have represented the ineffectual artist, handicapped and doomed by his own personal greed and self-interest.

Although I do not agree with Julian that Morris had already become a socialist when he wrote *Sigurd*, she is certainly correct in her view that Morris was fascinated by the figure of Regin the craftsman.

craftsmanship, which perhaps renders him less unsympathetic than Wagner's Mime, although Mime too recalls a time when he and the Niblungs took pride in their craftsmanship.³⁶ A major difference between Regin and Mime is that Regin is eloquent; *So sweet was his tongue-speech fashioned, that men trowed his every word* (p.70)

Regin expresses pride in his craftsmanship, but also discontent:

And to me, the least and the youngest, what gift for the slaying of
ease?
Save the grief that remembers the past, and the fear that the future
sees;
And the hammer and fashioning-iron, and the living coal of fire;
And the craft that createth a semblance, and fails of the heart's desire;
And the toil that each dawning quickens and the task that is never
done;
And the heart that longeth ever, nor will look to the deed that is won.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.85)

Possibly here Morris is making a point about the nature of artistic creation, suggesting that what Regin makes never quite lives up to the ideal, and that this is often the fate of the artist. Wagner's Siegfried once calls Mime an "artist" - ironically.³⁷ Regin's craft is used with the dual meaning of *skilled workmanship* and *guile*, especially when he offers to foster Sigurd:

For thou art the Master of Masters, and hast learned me all my skill;
But think how bright is this youngling, and thy guile from him
withhold,
For this craft of thine hath shown me that thy heart is grim and cold
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.76)
emphasis added

³⁵ Wagner altered both the content and the form of this episode. In the *Ring*, the crucial events are enacted on the stage - some are then narrated, by different characters from different perspectives .

³⁶

Sorglose Schmiede schufen wir sonst wohl
Schmuck uns'ren Weibern, wonnig Geschmeid,
niedlichen Niblungentand -
wir lachten lustig der Müh' .
(*Das Rheingold*)

³⁷ *Mime, der Künstler, lernt jetzt kochen! /Das Schmieden schmeckt ihm nicht mehr.*

where *craft* could mean both skill and guile. Similarly, in *Lo, here is a sword I have wrought thee with many a spell and charm / And all the craft of the Dwarf-kind;* (p.101) *craft* refers to Regin's technical skill in metalwork and his skill in sorcery, so that he shapes the sword with spells as well as with his smithying-hammer. Skill in metalwork is a characteristic of the Dwarves in any case, and there are frequent references to *Dwarf-wrought treasures*.

Perhaps connected with the idea of the master-craftsman, and the sinister personality of Regin, are these rather puzzling lines at the end of Brynhild's interpretation of Gudrun's dream;

Thou shalt know of the wild-wolves' howling and thy right-hand red with
blood,

When the day of the smith is ended, and the stithy's ³⁸ fire dies out,
And the work of the master of masters through the feast-hall goes about.

(Sigurd the Volsung, p.157)

What could be the meaning of *the work of the master of masters*? The most plausible explanation is that it a a kenning for battle - swords, made by master-craftsmen, will be wielded in the feast hall.

³⁸ *sic* . Morris always uses *stithy* for smithy/forge, because of its Old Norse derivation.

4.6. The metaphor of the carved or painted image

Regin, like Sigmund earlier³⁹, becomes an image - evidently another leitmotif, which may even link with the imagery of craftsmanship which runs through the poem, as the reader may wonder who carved or painted these images. Regin and Sigmund are seen as, or become, carved or painted images; Sigmund says of himself in old age, I am nought but a picture of battle. Morris the craftsman is here, as so often, influencing the choice of vocabulary of Morris the poet. We are told of Regin:

...and his brow was sad and wise;
And the greed died out of his visage and he stood like an image of old.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 106)

He does not become an image of gold, as Sigmund does, since this would not be in keeping with the portrayal of Regin. The idea is repeated and developed when Sigurd comes to fetch his sword (which, incidentally, only now gets a name - Wrath):

And amidst the fire-hall's pavement the King of the Dwarf-Kind stood
Like an image of deeds departed and days that once were good;
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 106)

When Regin told Sigurd his story, he emphasised how unimaginably old, by human reckoning, he was, and how much he had experienced, and maybe Sigurd is seeing the vision of all this in Regin's image.

Later in the poem first Brynhild, and then Gudrun, are portrayed as silent images of stone, as we discussed above. In a couplet describing Gudrun during the time of her happiness, the narrator tells us that

All doubt in love is swallowed, and lovelier now is she
Than a picture deftly painted by the craftsmen oversea.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.197)

Gudrun is perhaps never seen or portrayed by the narrator quite as a living woman, as Brynhild is; the emphasis is on her pictorial, even decorative qualities.

³⁹ Discussed in Chapter VI

During the proxy wooing of Brynhild for Gunnar, Brynhild and Sigurd are described as lying like carved images with the sword between them :

...but e'en as the dead folk lie,
With folded hands she lay there, and let the night go by;
And as still lay that Image of Gunnar as the dead of life forlorn,
And hand on hand he folded as he waited for the morn.
So oft in the moonlit minster your fathers may ye see
By the side of the ancient mothers await the day to be.
(Sigurd the Volsung, p. 217)

After Brynhild has demanded Sigurd's death to avenge her shame, Gudrun's (and the reader's) sense of foreboding is intensified by the way her brothers and her husband appear like stone images in the Niblungs' hall:

So she came on her brother Gunnar, as he sat apart and alone,
Arrayed in the Niblung war-gear, nor moved he more than the stone
In the jaws of the barren valley and the man-deserted dale;
On his knees was the breadth of the sunshine, and thereon lay the
edges pale,
The war-flame of the Niblungs, the sword that his right hand knew:
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.246)

And there sitteth Sigurd the Volsung in the gold and the harness of
war
That was won from the heart-wise Fafnir and the guarded Treasure of
yore,
But pale is the Helm of Aweing, and wan are the ruddy rings:
So whiles in a city forsaken ye see the shapes of kings,
And the lips that the carvers wrought, while their words were
remembered and known,
And the brows men trembled to look on in the long-enduring stone,
And their hands once unforgotten, and their breasts, the walls of war;
But now are they hidden marvels to the wise and the master of lore,
And he nameth them not, nor knoweth, and their fear is faded away.
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.249)

Sigurd is again briefly transformed into a carved image just before Guttorm kills him; he lies *as the carven dead that die not*. There may be a link here with the fact that it is just before his death that Sigurd's father is seen as an image, and also with the passage quoted above, in which Sigurd and Brynhild lie like the dead - suggesting, that is, that Sigmund and Sigurd become transformed into stone or painted images at the point of their deaths, whereas Gudrun and Brynhild are petrified into stone while they are still alive. Gudrun first becomes a stone image after Sigurd's death, when her family come to persuade her to marry Atli:

Still she stood as a carven image, as a stone of ancient days
When the sun is bright about it and the wind sweeps low o'er the ways.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.283)

This idea of Gudrun as a petrified image is especially striking when used in Book IV; we have already discussed this in relation to the comparison of Gudrun and Brynhild.

Hogni too becomes an image at the point of death :

.....nor dreadful is he now,
For the mock from his mouth hath faded, and the threat hath failed
from his brow,
And his face is as great and Godlike as his fathers of old days,
As fair as an image fashioned in remembrance of their praise;
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.331)

4.7. Imagery of nature: the seasons, harvest, tree metaphors

Morris is careful to differentiate between the landscape of the different locations, especially the elements of pastoral in Lymdale. Volsung's home is also a pleasant environment, a bit like the English countryside, or vaguely generalised "countryside".⁴⁰ Morris's descriptive passages, first about Lymdale, then about the land of the Niblungs, show a vivid contrast between the two places. ⁴¹ Lymdale is idyllic and pastoral - the Niblungs' home is an almost inaccessible castle placed atop a mountain, and this involves a third contrast, this time with Brynhild's Hindfell; where that was ringed with flame, this is ringed with snow, and cold:

And the grey in the awful cloud-land, where the red rents came and went

⁴⁰ This is perhaps a Victorian development of the tradition of pastoral poetry in English, and could be a link with the Romantics. In other words, Morris's poem is firmly in the tradition of English poetry, although it owes its subject matter to Old Norse poetry.

⁴¹ This contrast was noted by Jürgen Kühnel in *Zu William Morris' Epos "The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs."* in *Mittelalter-Rezeption II* (Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 358) Die Hallen Heimirs und Brynhilds sind von 'blossomed trees', 'flowery swords' ... umgeben ...die Halle Gjuki's erhebt sich in einem öden FelsengebirgeDas Reich Heimirs ist ein Reich der Bauern und Viehzüchter ... das Reich der Nibelungen ist ein Reich der Krieger, eine Welt der Speere und Schwerter.

Round the snows no summers minish and the far-off sunset flame:

For as waves on the iron river of the days whereof nothing is told
 Stand up the many towers, so stark and sharp and cold;

The flame here is the shining gold roof:

And dusk its gold roof glitters when the rain-clouds over it swarm,
 And bright in the first of the morning its flame doth it uplift,
 When the light clouds rend before it and along its furrows drift.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.171)

We are presented here with a fairly sharp contrast, in which the landscape is an expression of the nature of its inhabitants. Lymdale is a peaceful land, in which people are free to go about their business in a pleasant rural landscape, but can be warlike if necessary. The Niblungs live in an almost inaccessible castle in an inhospitable mountain landscape, and they take greater pleasure in warfare than in tilling the land.

There is contrast also between the seasons - after a spring and summer of idyllic peace with Brynhild and her family in Lymdale, Sigurd spends the winter in riding to war with the Niblungs.

Morris sometimes uses very conventional terminology such as *on an even of May*, and within the poem he develops the conventional associations of May / Spring / Hope / blossoming, so evidently he is very much aware of the poetic tradition in which this imagery is used. In contexts in which he decides not to develop the conventional imagery, awareness of the tradition gives a hint of irony. Siggeir woos Signy *on an even of May*, but their marriage is not going to involve any blossoming or fulfilment of hope. In the Siggeir episode the theme of landscape is not developed, but it is hinted at:

And amidst of the garden blossoms, on the grassy, fruit-grown land,
 Was Volsung King of the Wood-world with his sons on either hand
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 4)

The point is that the land is fruitful, and acts as a metaphor for the Volsungs; in the fruitful land the family blossoms, and they are the finest fruits of the land. The fruitful land is also linked with the metaphor of the Branstock. Literally, the Branstock is the tree that forms the support and centre-piece of Volsung's hall. Morris makes more of

the metaphorical possibilities of the Branstock than Wagner does in *Die Walküre*; the tree is in Hunding's house, and it is an essential stage property as Siegmund has to find the sword in it, but Wagner does not find it necessary to develop the theme further.⁴² For Morris, however, the tree is not only a literal tree, it is a metaphor for the house of the Volsungs, and Volsung's sons are the branches of the Branstock.⁴³

So therein withal was a marvel and a glorious thing to see,
 For amidst of its midmost hall-floor sprang up a mighty tree,
 That reared its blessings roofward, and wreathed the roof-tree dear
 With the glory of the summer and the garland of the year.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 2)

When Siegmund has drawn Odin's sword from the Branstock, the narrator uses an elaborate tree simile to describe him:

A little while he stood there mid the glory of the hall,
 Like the best of the trees of the garden, when the April sunbeams fall
 On its blossomed boughs in the morning, and tell of the days to be;
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.9)

Siegmund's own feelings are somewhat more sombre, as he senses what the fate of the Volsungs will be:

For this was the thought within him; Belike the day shall come
 When I shall bide here lonely amid the Volsung home,
 Its glory and sole avenger, its after-summer seed.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.9)

In these lines, the fulfilment of Summer is bypassed, and Spring gives way to Autumn. Later in the poem, the metaphor of Siegmund as a blossoming, sturdy tree will give way to the metaphor of him as an image; that is, he will no longer be perceived as living and growing, but as static and frozen in stone or gold. (This also occurs with the portrayal of Brynhild and of Gudrun; they are introduced as living women, and gradually become petrified into stone images, as we have discussed.) But in Book I of the poem, Volsung's sons, especially Siegmund, are, metaphorically, the fruit of Volsung's tree,

⁴² Indeed, since the tree is located in Hunding's house, it would be impossible for it to function as a metaphor for the Volsungs.

⁴³ It is not clear whether Volsung's daughter is included in this; she seems neither to be included nor specifically excluded.

and Sigmund himself is a sturdy tree. When Volsung dies, the narrator laments; *Woe's me for the boughs of the Branstock and the hawks that cried on the fight!* (p.18) Here, both the tree itself is lamented, and the poem goes on to lament Volsung's empty hall, and Volsung's sons, all of whom, except Sigmund, are soon going to die. Many years later, Sigmund dies in battle.⁴⁴ The narrator laments again... *the blossomed boughs of the Branstock, and the house where he was born* (p.65) and elaborates upon the tree metaphor in an extended (epic) simile which describes how a tree that is cut down can be made into a ship (*golden dragon*), and that this will bring it *a fame that groweth not old*.

The house of the Volsungs seems to experience its greatest desolation when *Sigmund* dies; the lamenting at *Sigurd's* death is for the house of the Niblungs, not for the house of the Volsungs.

So rent is the joy of the Niblungs; and their simple days and fain
From that ancient house are departed, and who shall buy them again?
For he, the redeemer, the helper, the crown of all their worth,
They looked upon him and wondered, they loved, and they thrust him
forth.⁴⁵

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.262)

Evidently, Sigurd has completely identified his interests with those of the House of the Niblungs, although he is the greatest of the Volsungs. The tree metaphor is used much more with reference to Volsung and his sons; it is only occasionally found with reference to Sigurd, although when it is used, it implies that he is the fairest branch of the tree. For instance, after he has killed Fafnir we are told:

And the Branstock bloometh to heaven from the ancient wondrous root;
The summer hath shone on its blossoms, and Sigurd's Wrath is the fruit.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.131)

Seed, blossoming and harvest imagery is used by Brynhild when she foresees Sigurd's future in general terms and she also uses a tree metaphor; although she

⁴⁴ Odin withdraws his favour, either through capriciousness, or because he is offering Sigmund an honourable death instead of the decrepitude of old age.

⁴⁵ And of course this is also Biblical .

presumably is not referring specifically to the Branstock, the link is present in the reader's mind:

But the day when the fair earth blossoms, and the sun is bright above,
Of the daring deeds it is fashioned and the eager hearts of love.

Be wise, and cherish thine hope in the freshness of the days,
And scatter its seed from thine hand in the field of the people's praise;
Then fair it shall fall in the furrow, and some the earth shall speed,
And the suns of men shall marvel at the blossom of the deed;
But some the earth shall speed not; nay rather, the wind of the heaven
Shall waft it away from thy longing - and a gift to the gods hast thou given,
And a tree for the roof and the wall in the house of the hope that shall be
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.142) emphasis added

The poem refers to *the blossomed garth of rhyme*. Is this metaphor original to Morris, or does it have a history? Poetry as the flowering of song, perhaps.

Throughout the poem, as we have had numerous occasions to observe, the seasons of the year are closely linked to the states of mind and/or actions of the protagonists. Sigmund marries Hjordis in the Spring, a time of hope for him and for her, although by now he is an old man.⁴⁶ We find that the tree metaphor is now linked with the image/picture metaphor:

And he said; "The tree was stalwart, but its boughs are old and worn.
Where now are the children departed, that amidst my life were born;
I know not the men about me, and they know not of my ways;
I am nought but a picture of battle, and a song for the people to praise.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.55)

The image of growth and blossoming, which has been implicit, and sometimes explicit, in the uses of the tree metaphor, is here linked to the prophecy, uttered by Hjordis, that Sigmund's son will be the greatest of heroes.⁴⁷ There are two points to

⁴⁶ We sometimes tend to forget, I think, that only in Wagner does Siegmund die young; in VS and in Morris's poem he dies in battle, at the end of a long life; in NL, he survives Siegfried and returns home after the death of his son, presumably to rule the kingdom again.

... and indeed full well I know
That fair from the loins of Sigmund shall such a stem outgrow
That all folk of the earth shall be praising the womb where once he lay
And the paps that his lips have cherished, and shall bless my happy day.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.57)

(Discussed below in a different context)

be made in connection with this. Firstly, the language may be Biblical, or an unconscious echo of Biblical language (a reference to the Tree of Jesse). Secondly, the reader may also be reminded of the sentiments uttered by Siegfried and Brünnhilde; - *O heil der Mutter, die mich/dich gebar!* There are occasions on which the vocabulary of Morris's poem resembles that of the *Ring*, and this is one of them. Similarly, Morris's emphasis on Spring as the season of hope is perhaps a link with *Die Walküre*; he does not emphasise the Spring in his poem as forcefully as Wagner does in *Die Walküre*, as the sub-text of his plot is more concerned with the *recurrence* of the seasons, and none of his characters get quite such an elaborate lyric passage as *Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond*; but in Morris's poem we are certainly aware of the metaphorical as well as the literal significance of the seasons of the year.

Images of harvest and fruitfulness are used on occasion with reference to Sigurd and Brynhild; the reader is aware of the ironic sub-text, since their happiness is not destined to last, and there will be no fruit or harvest, in other words, no fulfilment:

"...sit in this throne of my fathers, since thy gift today I have;
Thou hast given it altogether, nor aught from me wouldst save;"

.....

He said: "I have cast it away as the tiller casteth the seed,
That the summer may better the spring-tide, and autumn winter's
need;

For what were the fruit of our lives if apart they needs must pass,
And men shall say hereafter; Woe worth the hope that was!"

She said: "That day shall dawn the best of all earthly days

When we sit, we twain, in the high-seat in the hall of the people's
praise;

Or else, what fruit of our life-days, what fruit of our death shall be?
What fruit, save men's remembrance of the grief of me and thee?"

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.166)

Autumn is not always seen as a "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness"; as we observed in Chapter II, the wedding of Sigurd and Gudrun takes place in the autumn, and it is seen merely as the forerunner of winter.

The imagery associated with the Niblungs is more warlike, as befits their warlike nature, but they also get some imagery connected with Spring and blossoming, although it is not sustained, as it is in the case of the Volsungs. We are told of the time *when the days of the Niblungs blossomed and their hope was springing*

green. (p.158) The spring and growth imagery belongs much more properly to the Volsungs and to Lymdale, and some harvest and fruitfulness imagery is associated with Brynhild (to be blasted into sterility after Grimhild's potion). The Niblungs are able to link enjoyment of spring with their enjoyment of war:

And with war-helms done with blossoms round the Niblung hall they sing
 In the windless cloudless even and the ending of the spring.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.181)

Even Grimhild uses the metaphor of blossoming, but here there is an ironic sub-text, as this passage occurs after she has given Sigurd the potion:

The waste shall bloom as a garden in the Niblung glory and trust,
 And the wrack of the Niblung people shall burn the world to dust.
 Our peace shall still the world, our joy shall replenish the earth;
 And of thee it cometh, O Sigurd, the gold and the garland of worth.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.188)

It is characteristic of Grimhild that she immediately follows up her image of the world "bloom[ing] as a garden" with an image of destruction, and that all her hopes centre in her ambition for her family.

4.8. Foreshadowing and prophetic ability

Morris uses the technique of foreshadowing in his poem, and this may be related to the ability of some of the characters to foretell the future. Volsung's hall, with its hawks in the boughs of the Branstock, foreshadows the Niblungs' hall.

So there was the throne of Volsung beneath its blossoming bower,
 But high o'er the roof-crest red it rose 'twixt tower and tower,
 And therein were the wild hawks dwelling, abiding the dole of their lord;
 And they wailed high over the wine, and laughed to the waking sword.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.2)

And great shouts of salutation to the cloudy roof were cast;
 And they rang from the glassy pillars, and the Gods on the hangings
 stirred,
 And afar the clustering eagles on the golden-roof-ridge heard,
 And cried out on the Sword of the Branstock as they cried in the other days
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 175)

There are hawks in Volsung's hall, eagles in Giuki's hall, but both halls are resting-places for birds of prey, and the eagles recognise and welcome Sigurd.

The casting of Sigmund and Sinfjolti into a pit in Book I to some extent foreshadows the casting of Gunnar into a pit in Book IV, although the theme is developed at much greater length in the case of Gunnar;⁴⁸ and Signy could be said to foreshadow Brynhild in that she never smiles or laughs after her wedding to Siggeir; similarly, Brynhild never smiles or laughs again after her wedding to Gunnar.

There is one rather curious instance of foreshadowing; Sigmund in his days as an outlaw seems to foreshadow Regin - this does seem odd, since dwarves lack the heroic qualities possessed by the Volsungs, but Morris is far too conscientious a craftsman to have done this inadvertently. It is said of Sigmund: *Alone in the woods he abided, and a master of masters was he //In the craft of the smithying folk....(p.27)* which is exactly what we are told about Regin: *The Master of the Masters in the smithying craft was he (p.70)*. There are further references in Book I to the fact that Sigmund inhabits a dwarf-built home, and that he has taken on at least one of the characteristics of the dwarves, namely their skill as smiths. It is also hinted that Sigmund may have taken on other characteristics, such as the hoarding of gold, although it is not specifically stated that he was greedy for gold, just that he hoarded it, and made himself a helm of gold and a golden sword - which could be the characteristics of the outlaw, as well as of the Dwarves.

Many of the characters in Morris's poem have the ability to prophesy; for some, this is intensified at the hour of their deaths. Signy especially is endowed with this ability, and Sigmund shares it to some extent, as we are informed at the very beginning - it is Signy's ability to foretell the future that makes her reluctant to marry Siggeir:

Yet a boding heart bare Sigmund amid his singing and laughter,
And somewhat Signy wotted of the deeds that were coming after;
For the wisest of women she was, and many a thing she knew;
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.11)

⁴⁸ This question is discussed by Mark Cuming in *The Structure of Sigurd the Volsung*, (Victorian Poetry, 1983), in which it is pointed out , for instance, that Siggeir in Book I foreshadows Atli in Book IV, as we discussed above.

Signy tries to warn Volsung against Siggeir, but she, like most of the other characters in the poem except Grimhild, realises that no-one can defy the decrees of the Norns.⁴⁹

Then answered Signy, weeping; "I shall see thee yet again
When the battle thou arrayest on the Goth-folk's strand in vain;
Heavy and hard are the Norns; but each man his burden bears;
And who am I to fashion the fate of the coming years?

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.13)

Signy is able to prophesy Sigmund's coming victory over Siggeir, and his long and successful life. She does not foretell the birth of Sigurd, but evidently the plan to conceive a Volsung hero is already germinating in her mind:

But I wot that the King of the Goth-folk for his deeds shall surely pay,
And that I shall live to see it; but thy wrath shall pass away,
And long shalt thou live on the earth an exceeding glorious king,
And thy words shall be told in the market, and all men of thy deeds shall
sing;

...

... Nor yet shalt thou be alone
For ever-more in thy waiting; for belike a fearful friend
The long days for thee may fashion, to help thee ere the end.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, pp.25-26)

Sigmund has some dim awareness that a son yet to be born to him (not Sinfjolti) will be the fulfilment of the Volsung line. The first hint of this is given when he has returned home with Sinfjolti after achieving their vengeance.

Then for many a day sits Sigmund 'neath the boughs of the Branstock
green,

With his earls and lords about him as the Volsung wont hath been.

And oft he thinketh on Signy and oft he nameth her name,
And tells how she spent her joyance and her lifedays and her fame

That the Volsung kin might blossom and bear the fruit of worth

For the hope of unborn people and the harvest of the earth.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.47)

The Branstock is still blossoming, and is as vital a symbol of the strength of the Volsungs as it has even been. It will transpire that *the fruit of worth* for whom Signy sacrificed her good name and finally her life was not Sinfjolti, but the son yet to

⁴⁹ Which is another way in which the poem differs from Wagner. In the *Ring*, it is specifically stated that the Norns only predict the future, they don't determine it;

Im Zwange der Welt weben die Nornen,
sie können nichts wenden noch ändern!

(*Siegfried*, Act III)

be born; this is the beginning of Sigmund's awareness of this. It is an awareness that Hjordis shares, and the reason why she chooses to marry Sigmund:

... and indeed full well I know
 That fair from the loins of Sigmund shall such a stem outgrow
 That all folk of the earth shall be praising the womb where once he lay
 And the paps that his lips have cherished, and shall bless my happy day.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.57)

Sigmund's prophetic ability is increased just before he dies, and he knows that his son is to be the greatest of heroes: ⁵⁰

I have wrought for the Volsungs truly, and yet have I known full well
 That a better one than I am shall bear the tale to tell;
 And for him shall these shards be smithied; and he shall be my son
 To remember what I have forgotten and to do what I left undone.
 Under thy girdle he lieth, and how shall I say unto thee,
 Unto thee, the wise of women, to cherish him heedfully.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.62)

Regin foretells that he will be killed by Sigurd, but he is unable to evade his destiny, and offers to foster the child:

One day it shall come to pass,
 That a beardless youth shall slay me; I know the fateful doom;
 But nought may I withstand it, as it heaves up dim through the gloom.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.76)

Brynhild's wisdom is linked to her gift of prophecy; this is developed from her characterisation in *Volsunga saga*, in which Sigurd asks her to teach him wisdom and foretell the future for him. ⁵¹ She is also able to predict what will happen between her and Gunnar, Gudrun and Sigurd; in VS she spells this out to Gudrun, but in Morris's poem her prophecy is not as explicit. (This is discussed at greater length in Chapter II.)

⁵⁰ In the *Ring*, this prophecy is made by Brünnhilde

⁵¹ Sigurd spake now, "Sure no wiser woman than thou art one may be found in the wide world; yea, yea, teach me more yet of thy wisdom!"

She answers, "Seemly it is that I do according to thy will, and show thee forth more redes of great avail, for thy prayer's sake and thy wisdom;" (*Volsunga Saga*, Morris trans., p.155)

4.9. The narrator in *Sigurd the Volsung*

One of the major differences between epic and drama is the presence of the narrator in the epic, and the absence of the narrator in much drama - not all, since the Messenger in Greek tragedy could be considered to be the narrator, and possibly in Wagner's operas the orchestra is the narrator. Some of the characters become narrators as well as protagonists; that is, they interpret their actions or they interpret the events, to each other and/or to the audience. There are several layers of narrative in Morris's *Sigurd*. There is first the persona of the narrator, then, as in the *Ring*, some of the characters - Regin, for instance, and Brynhild - become their own narrators, although Brynhild's role as narrator and interpreter of her experience is clearer in the draft than in the final version.⁵² In *Sigurd*, the reader is always conscious of the presence of the narrator this is a technique Morris has adapted from the Family Sagas, in which a chapter or section often begins with "and now the story tells", or a similar expression. Morris adapts it in lines such as the following:

And when men tell of Volsung, they call that war-duke's tree,
That crownèd stem, the Branstock; and so was it told unto me.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 2) emphasis added

and

Now there was a king of the Islands, whom the tale doth Eylimi call,
And saith he was wise and valiant, though his kingdom were but small;
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.55) emphasis added

A further example of the "intrusive narrator" occurs as Signy says goodbye to her father. Here, the narrator is not omniscient

And sure she whispered him somewhat ere she passed toward the deck,
Though nought I know to tell it;

⁵² In the draft of *Sigurd*, Brynhild has a much lengthier narration than in the published version, in which she explains to Sigurd the reasons for her conflict with Odin; as with the *Ring* so in Morris's poem, narration is also an act of interpretation, it is rarely, if ever, 'purely' factual. This narration is supplied in an Appendix

The use of this narrative technique has the effect of distancing the text from the reader, of creating a lack of immediacy and setting the tale within a frame. The reader is continually being reminded that this is an ancient tale, handed down from generation to generation, as when we are reminded that Sigmund is impervious to poison:

For here, the tale of the elders doth men a marvel to wit,
That such was the shaping of Sigmund among all earthly kings,
That unhurt he handled adders and other deadly things -
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.35) (emphasis added)

The narrator is present again, and addresses the reader directly, when Sigmund drinks the poison intended for Sinfjolti :

“Well looked it is,” said Sigmund, “give thou the cup to me;
And he drained it dry to the bottom; for ye mind how it was writ,
That this king might drink of venom, and have no hurt of it
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.52) emphasis added

The omniscient narrator is aware of the impending birth of Sigurd, and of what his fate will be, and conveys this knowledge to the reader;

Though e'en in that world's beginning rose a murmur now and then
Of the midward time and the fading and the last of the latter days,
And the entering in of the terror, and the death of the People's Praise.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, pp.1-2)

This is an adaptation of medieval narrative technique; the narrator is in collusion with the readers/audience, who know the outcome of the story, but want to know how it will be told. Morris adapts the saga-technique of starting a section with *and now the tale tells* . this technique is also used by the poet of the *Nibelungenlied*, in which the reader is informed in the first *Aventiure* that many heroes will die because of Kriemhild. 53

4.10. The male characters as musicians

Many of the male protagonists have the ability to express themselves in song. This may be intended to balance the ability of the women to weave and embroider and, in the case of Grimhild, to cast spells.⁵⁴ At the very end of the poem, Gunnar temporarily acquires the ability to enchant (cast spells on) the snakes with his harp-playing. The poem here depicts an image of heroic society, and one of the influences is probably *Beowulf*, in which the scop (harpist/performer) sings the song of creation.⁵⁵

The poem opens with a description of Volsung's hall, an image of society in the heroic age, in which everyone is the best and most noble in his or her calling:

And the masters of its song-craft were the mightiest men that cast
The sails of the storm of battle adown the bickering blast.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.1)

That is, the poets and musicians of Volsung's hall are also mighty warriors.⁵⁶

At the wedding feast of Siggeir and Signy, an anonymous Viking narrates the story of the Creation; music, singing and harping are nearly always associated with feasting in hall, although this is not inevitable.

Wherefore uprose a sea-king, and his hands that loved the oar

⁵⁴ Of the women, only Signy ever sings; this is when she changes shapes with the witch-wife in order to seduce Sigmund.

⁵⁵ Morris's own translation of *Beowulf* was not published until the end of his life, although he was almost certainly familiar with the poem by the time he wrote *Sigurd*. The translation was not very well received by the critics. As with his saga translations, the problem is that it is too literal, and rather presupposes an knowledge of Anglo-Saxon on the part of the reader. This is what he makes of the Song of Creation;

Then the ghost heavy-strong bore with it hardly
E'en for a while of time, bider in darkness,
That there on each day of days heard he the mirth-tale
Loud in the hall-house. There was the harp's voice,
And clear song of shaper. Said he who could it
To tell the first fashion of men from aforetime,
Quoth how the Almighty One made the earth's fashion,
The fair field and bright midst the bow of the Waters,
And with Victory beglory'd set Sun and Moon,
Bright beams to enighten the biders on land,
And how he adorned all parts of the earth
With limbs and with leaves, and life withal shaped

For the kindred of each thing that quick on earth wendeth .

⁵⁶ This is evidently a literary device to set the scene for Morris's vision of society in the Heroic Age; but it is possible that he had in mind *Egils Saga*, which narrates the story of Egil Skallagrimsson, a skald renowned for his warlike prowess as much as for his poetic gifts.

Now dealt with the rippling harp-gold, and he sang of the shaping of
 earth,
 And how the stars were lighted, and where the winds had birth,
 And the gleam of the first of the summers on the yet untrodden grass.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.5)

This Creation song may be indebted to *Völuspá* and/or *Beowulf*.

We may also note that Siggeir never shows any musical ability, and nor does Atli, this ability seems to be reserved for the heroes - and for Regin, who is hardly a hero, but for whom the narrator evidently feels some sympathy. Of Regin we are told;

So sweet was his tongue-speech fashioned, that men trowed his every
 word;
 His hand with the harp-strings blended was the mingler of delight
 With the latter days of sorrow; all tales told he aright;
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.70)

When the new-born Sigurd is presented in the hall;

But there sat the Helper of Men with King Elf and his Earls in the hall,
 And they spake of the deeds that had been, and told of the times to befall,
 And they hearkened and heard sweet voices and the sound of harps draw
 nigh,
 Till their hearts were exceeding merry and they knew not whether or why.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.72)

I would not exclude the possibility that here "the sound of harps" may be a metaphor (e.g. for heavenly music, angelic song) rather than literal harps; there are several layers of meaning and metaphor in this poem.

Regin teaches Sigurd

The tongues of many countries, and soft speech for mens' delight;
 The dealing with the harp-strings, and the winding ways of song.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.77)

Regin's eloquence is part of his craftsmanship. When he forges Sigurd's sword, he *crie[s] to the harp strings* how he forged the sword *before the days of men*.

Harps are played in the Niblung hall too, but their music is the music of war, even in peace-time. In Lymdale, the music is often that of the hunting-horn rather than that of the harp, perhaps to emphasise the pastoral, idyllic nature of the setting; but Heimir,

Brynhild's foster-father, is introduced as *chief / Of all who have handled the harp...*(p.160). Just before he drinks Grimhild's potion, Sigurd gives a sort of command performance on the harp; this is the moment of his greatest glory, because after this he never sings or smiles again, and his glory is somehow diminished:

Then they brought the harp to Sigurd, and he looked on the ancient man
 As his hand sank into the strings, and a ripple over then ran,
 And he looked forth kind o'er the people, and all men on his glory gazed,
 And hearkened, hushed and happy, as the King his voice upraised;
 Then he sang of the works of Odin, and the halls of the heavenly coast,
 And the sons of God uprising, and the Wolflings' gathering host;
 And he told of the birth of Rerir, and of Volsung yet unborn,
 And the deeds of his father's father, and his battles overworn;
 Then he told of Signy and Sigmund, and the changing of their lives;
 Tales of great kings' departing, and their kindred and their wives.

....

But the wonder of the people, and their love of Sigurd grew,
 And green grew the tree of the Volsungs, as the Branstock blossomed anew.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.186)

The last line quoted above reintroduces the tree metaphor which was employed with reference to Volsung and his sons. The Branstock which sustained their home has not literally reblossomed, but Sigurd represents the Branstock, and this is the moment of his greatest flourishing.⁵⁷

After Sigurd drinks the potion, someone else - unnamed - plays and sings at Grimhild's behest. The contrast is striking:

But the hushed Kings sat in the feast-hall, till Grimhild cried on the harp,
 And the minstrels' fingers hastened, and the sound rang clear and sharp
 Beneath the cloudy roof-tree, but no joyance with it went,
And no voice but the eagles' crying with the stringèd song was blent;
And as it began, it ended, and no soul had been moved by its voice
To lament o'er the days passed over, or in coming days to rejoice.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.189) emphasis added

The song of the unnamed minstrel emphasises sadness, in contrast to Sigurd's joyous recital before the potion.

⁵⁷ This has been commented upon by Linda Anne Julian, from whose thesis we have already had occasion to quote;

The Volsung line descends from splendor to grief and dies, resurrected only in the tale of their deeds. Sigurd himself causes the regeneration of the Branstock with his own art as singer....

(*William Morris: the Icelandic Influence on his writing.*)

It will turn out that Gunnar is the most gifted musician of them all. In the source (VS) this is only revealed at the end, when Gunnar plays his harp to charm the snakes in the snake-pit into which Atli has cast him. In *Sigurd*, his ability as a musician is hinted at long before this:

But Gunnar is King of the people, and the chief of the Niblung land;
A man beloved for his mercy, and his might and its open hand;
A glorious king in the battle, a hearkener at the doom;
A singer to sing the sun up from the heart of the midnight gloom.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.206) (emphasis added)

Gunnar possesses all the conventional attributes of the Kings of medieval literature; generous, wise and merciful in judgement, skilled in battle; to be a gifted musician was considered desirable but optional. The compiler of VS introduces the idea of Gunnar as a harpist when the plot requires it; as so often in this poem, Morris has improved on his source by attention to detail, and he provides the poem with an internal consistency which VS lacks.

When urged by Grimhild to woo Brynhild, Gunnar replies; *May a king of the people fear? / May a king of the harp and the hall-glee hold such a maid but dear?* (p.207); but there is considerably less mention of music, poetry, singing and laughter after the weddings, and especially after the quarrel between the women.

During the battle in Atli's hall, the *Niblungs' song* is mentioned more than once, evidently as a metaphor for their skill in swordplay.⁵⁸ Then in the thick of the battle Gunnar takes his harp and sings to encourage his comrades:

Then doth Giuki's first-born a deed most fair to be told,
For his fair harp Gunnar taketh, and the warp of silver and gold;
With the hand of a cunning harper he dealeth with the strings,
And his voice in their midst goeth upwards as of ancient days he sings,
Of the days before the Niblungs, and the days that shall be yet,
Till the hour of toil and smiting the warrior hearts forget.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.319)

He sings of the Creation and of human life:

⁵⁸ There may possibly be an oblique reference to Volker the Minstrel in NL.

Therein was Gunnar the mighty; on the shields of men he sat,
 And the sons of his people hearkened, for his hand through the harp-
 strings ran.
 And he sang in the hall of his foeman of the Gods and the making of men,
 And how season was sundered from season in the days of the fashioning,
 And became the Summer and Autumn, and became the Winter and Spring;
 He sang of mens' hunger and labour, and their love and their breeding of
 broil,
 And the hope that is fostered of famine, and their rest that is fashioned of
 toil;
 Fame then and the sword he sang of, and the hour of the hardy and wise.
 When the last of the living shall perish, and the first of the dead shall
 arise,
 And the torch shall be lit in the daylight, and God unto man shall pray,
 And the heart shall cry out for the hand in the fight of the uttermost
 day.⁵⁹
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.321)

The imminence of death inspires Gunnar to prophecy, as happened to Sigmund and to Brynhild at the approach of their deaths. Morris was evidently very taken with the idea of Gunnar as Orpheus; this is the role he takes on in the snake-pit, when all the snakes save one are struck into immobility by his harping.

But he heeded them not nor beheld them, and his hands in the harp-
 strings ran,
 As he sat him down in the mid-most on a sun-scorched rock and wan;
 And he sighed as one who resteth on a flowery bank by the way
 When the wind is in the blossoms at the even-tide of day;
 But his harp was murmuring low, and he mused; Am I come to the death,
 And I, who was Gunnar the Niblung? nay, nay, how I draw my breath,
 And love my life as the living! and so shall I ever do,
 Though wrack be loosed in the heavens and the world be fashioned anew.
 ...
 Then he rose at once to his feet, and smote the harp with his hand,
 And it rang as if with a cry in the dream of a lonely land;
 Then he fondled its wail as it faded, and orderly over the strings
 Went the marvellous sound of its sweetness, like the march of Odin's kings
 New-risen for play in the morning when o'er meadows of God-home they
 wend,
 And hero playeth with hero, that their hands may be deft in the end.
 But the crests of the worms were uplifted, though coil on coil was stayed,
 And they moved but as dark-green rushes by the summer river swayed.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.334)

Gunnar's final song is a Song of Creation, showing some parallels with the Song of Creation that Sigurd had once sung in the Niblungs' Hall.⁶⁰ At the sound of Gunnar's

⁵⁹ Yet another reference to *ragnarøk*, the Twilight or Fate of the gods.

⁶⁰ In the draft of the poem, Gunnar also sings about his own childhood. It is perhaps regrettable that Morris felt obliged to omit this from the published

song, the serpents seem even to lose their horrible appearance, and seem like *dark-green rushes* - a benign image. The snakes charmed by Gunnar are all named by the narrator - all except one have ceased to be a threat;

And the crests of the worms have fallen, and their flickering tongues are
still,
The Roller and the Coiler, and Greyback, lord of ill,
Grave-groper and Death-swaddler, the Slumberer of the Heath,
Gold-wallower, ⁶¹ Venom-smiter, lie still, forgetting death,
And loose are coils of Long-back; yea, all as soft are laid
As the kine in mid-most summer about the elmy glade;
- All save the Grey and Ancient, that holds his crest aloft,
Light-wavering as the flame-tongue when the evening wind is soft;
For he comes of the kin of the Serpent once wrought all wrong to nurse,

version, as in no other redaction are we vouchsafed a glimpse of what the childhood and youth of the Giukings/Gibichungs/Niblungs may have been like.

I quote here the relevant passage from Morris's draft:

What hope had the Gods of heaven when the first of the Niblung they sent
To the land without a city and the world without a name
What hope as the years passed over with the gathering in of fame
When the desert laughed with plenty and the wasteland bloomed as a rose
What hope as the ancient fathers [pierced through the wall of foes
/burnt up the hidden woes

And sang of the pleasant lealand by the Niblung river rent
And he sang of the hall of his fathers and the mighty burg of war
v.28

And he sang of the earls and greybeards once gathered round the door
And of Giuki the King amidst them black bearded fierce and young
And he sang of the harps of aforetime how adown the hall they rang
As they bare the [baby?] outward and the lealands heard the shout
And saw the sun entangled mid as the white swords leaped about
For this was the hope of Gunnar (sic) and the king that was to be
But again he sang of the lealand and the woods and the dark-blue sea
And the Niblung child among them mid the shields of bearded men
bearded warriors' shields

Then he sang of the meeting sword-blades and the iron bearing fields
And the N. hope in the tangle and their child in the front thereof
And the glorious eve of battle round the banners of their love
Then he sang of the outland and the cities of the world
And the hope of the Cloudy people against their ramparts hurled
And their child the first in the turmoil and the beater down of pride
Then he spake of the mound of Giuki on the misty mountain side
v.29

And the last of the ancient fathers laid therein proud and fain
To behold the sons of Niblung draw upward from the plain
With the crowned child fair and merry o'er the spoilers and the spoil
laughed(?)

Then sang the song triumphant as he sang sore strife and toil
The struggle and prevailing through the hatred (?) and the wrong

61 The reader will perhaps recall that this epithet was also applied to Fafnir.

The bond of earthly evil, the Midworld's ancient curse.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.336)

So charmed are all the serpents but one by Gunnar's harping that they acquire a pastoral aspect; they resemble reeds by the river, cows in the meadow. Gunnar is finally killed by the one serpent he has not been able to charm. The references are to the Midgard Serpent of Norse mythology, but I suggest that it is not too far-fetched to detect a distant kinship with the serpent of *Paradise Lost*.⁶²

62

.....where soonest he might find
 The serpent; him fast sleeping soon he found
 In labyrinth of many a round self rolled,
 His head the midst, well stored with subtle wiles;

...
 So spake the enemy of mankind, enclosed
 In serpent, inmate bad, and toward Eve
 Addressed his way, not with indented wave,
 Prone on the ground, as since, but on his rear,
 Circular base of rising folds, that towered
 Fold above fold a surging maze, his head
 Crested aloft, and carbuncle his eyes;
 With burnished neck of verdant gold, erect
 Among his circling spires, that on the grass
 Floated redundant ...
 (Book IX, ll. 181-184, 494-503)

CHAPTER VBRYNHILD5.1. The character of Brynhild in mediæval literature

I start this chapter by suggesting that the Brynhild of mediaeval literature and legend may have been perceived negatively, as a disruptive character, perhaps even a force for evil, and that it may have been Wagner's innovation to present her as a force for good. I don't, obviously, want to go so far as to postulate a "lost poem", merely to draw attention to some of the textual evidence, especially in PE, which seems to indicate that Brynhild is seen by the characters in the poems, and by the narrator, as a negative, not a positive, character. This then raises the question of why Wagner decided to innovate by portraying her positively - and may also suggest, as I indicated in the Introduction, that the reader's perception of mediæval literature is inevitably coloured by Wagner, however unfamiliar that reader may be with Wagner's interpretation - we approach NL and the Norse literature expecting Brynhild to be the heroine. The evidence, especially in PE, that she is not the heroine - *Gudrun* is the heroine, Brynhild a the intruder who destroys her happiness, as in, for instance, the following stanzas from *Brot af Sigurðarkviða* (Fragment of a Sigurd Lay):

Hogni said:

What hath wrought Sigurd of any wrong-doing,
That the life of the famed one thou art fain of taking?

Gunnar said:

To me has Sigurd sworn many oaths,
Sworn many oaths and sworn them lying,
And he bewrayed me when it behoved him
Of all folk to his troth to be the most trusty.

Hogni said :

Thee hath Brynhild unto all bale
And all hate whetted, and a work of sorrow;
For she grudges to Gudrun all goodly life
And to thee the bliss of her very body.

(Morris's translation)¹

In *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* (Short Lay of Sigurd) it is suggested that Brynhild wasn't an evil person in herself, but that Fate was against her. However, the poem also states that she plotted evil against Sigurd and Gudrun:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1. Sigurd of yore
As he fared, the young Volsung,
Troth then he took
Oaths swore they betwixt them,</p> | <p>sought the dwelling of Giuki,
after fight won;
from the two brethren,
those bold ones of deed.</p> |
| <p>2. A may they gave to him
Gudrun the young,
They drank and gave doom
Sigurd the young</p> | <p>and wealth manifold,
Giuki's daughter;
many days together,
and the sons of Giuki.</p> |
| <p>3. Until they wended
Sigurd a-riding
The wise young Volsung
Ah! he had wed her,</p> | <p>for Brynhild's wooing,
amidst their rout,
who knew of all ways -
had fate so willed it.</p> |
| <p>4. Southlander Sigurd
Bright, well grinded,
No kiss he won
Nor in arms of his
Since he gat the young maid</p> | <p>a naked sword,
laid betwixt them;
from the fair woman,
did the Hun King hold her,
for the son of Giuki.</p> |
| <p>5. No lack in her life
and at her death-day
For a shame indeed
But about and betwixt</p> | <p>she wotted of now,
no dreadful thing
or a shame in seeming;
went baleful fate.</p> |
| <p>6. Alone, abroad,
Of full many things
"O for my Sigurd !
Or my fair, my lovely,</p> | <p>she sat of an evening,
she fell a-talking;
I shall have death,
laid in my arms.</p> |

1

<p>...hvat hefir Sigurðr er þú frocknan vill</p>	<p><u>Hogni</u></p>	<p>til saka unnit , fi þrvi naema?</p>
<p>'Mir hefir Sigurðr eiða selda, þá velti hann mik, allra eiða</p>	<p><u>Gunnar</u></p>	<p>selda eiða, alla logna: er hann vera skyldi einn fulltrúi.'</p>
<p>'Hk hefir Brynhildr heiptar hvattan, fyrman hon Guðruno en siðan þér</p>	<p><u>Hogni</u></p>	<p>bøl at gørva, harm at vinna; goðra reða, sin at nióta.</p>

7. For the word once spoken I sorrow sorely -
His queen is Gudrun, I am wed to Gunnar;
The dread Norns wrought for us a long while of woe."

8. Oft with heart deep in dreadful thoughts,
O'er ice-fields and ice-hills she fared a-night-time,
When he and Gudrun were gone to their bed,
And Sigurd wrapped the bed-gear round her.

(Morris's translation) ²

2

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Ar var, þats Sigur r
Vølsungr ungi,
tók við trygg om
selðoz ei ða, | sótti Giúka,
er vegit hafði;
tveggja broðra,
eliunfroeknir. |
| 2. Mey buðo há nom,
Guðruno ungo,
drukkok doemðo
Sigurðr ungi | ok meidma fiöld,
Giúka dóttur;
doegr mart saman,
ok synir Giúka. |
| 3. Unz þeir Brynhildar
svá at þeim Sigurðr
Vølsungr ungi,
Hann um aetti, | biðia fóro,
reið í sinni,
ok vega kunni.
ef hann Gíga knaetti! |
| 4. Seggr inn suðroeni
maeki málfán,
né hann kono
né, húnskr konungr,
mey frumunga | lagði sverð nökkvit,
á meðal þeira,
kyssa görð i,
hefia sér at armi:
fal hann megi Giúka. |
| 5. Hon sér at lifi
ok at aldragi
vamm þat er vaeri
gengo þess á milli | löst ne vissi
ekki grand,
eð a vera hygð i -
grimmir urðir! |
| 6. Ein sat hon úti
nam hon sva bert
'Hafa skal ek Sigurðr,
mög frumungan, | aptan dags,
um at maelaz;
- e ða þó svelt! -
mér at armi! |
| 7. Orð maeltak nú -
kván er hans Guðrún,
liótar nomir | iðromk eptir þess:
en ek Gunnars -
skópo oss langa þrá! |
| 8. Opt gengr hon innan,
Íssa ok iölka,
er þau Guðrun
ok hana Sigurðr
konungr inn húnski, | illz um fyld,
aptan hvern,
ganga á beð
sveipr í ripti,
kvan frá sína. |

This poem implies that *Gudrun* is seen as Sigurd's promised bride, and that Brynhild appears later, to disrupt their relationship - stanza 8 gives an indication of a peaceful domestic life led by Sigurd and Gudrun, before it was disrupted by Brynhild.

Helreið Brynhildar goes so far as to suggest that Brynhild was the most evil woman ever born - but she is given a chance to defend herself :

The Giant-Woman

4. Thou, O Brynhild,	Budli's daughter,
Wert the worst ever born	into the world;
For Giuki's children	death hast thou gotten,
And turned to destruction	their goodly dwelling.

Brynhild

5. I shall tell thee	true tale from my chariot,
O thou who nought wottest,	if thou listest to wot;
How for me they have gotten,	those heirs of Giuki,
A loveless life,	a life of lies.

(Morris's translation) 3

In all the Eddic poems, and in VS, it is Brynhild who is the instigator of Sigurd's murder - Hogni is against it, Gunnar only agrees to it when Brynhild threatens to leave him - and it is the younger brother, Gutthorm, who is persuaded to carry out the murder, as he is not bound by oaths of blood-brotherhood to Sigurd. These Eddic poems suggest that there was a stage in the development of the legend at which Brynhild was perceived negatively - that it is only at a later stage that she comes to be seen as Sigurd's destined bride, and Gudrun as the interloper. Certainly this is the case

3

4. ' þú vart, Brynhildr,
heilli versto
þú hefir Giúka
ok búir eira

Buð la dóttir,
í heim borin:
um glatat bómom
brugðit góð.

5. Ek mun segja þér,
vitlaussi miök,
hvé gørðo mik
á stalause

svinn, ór reiðo,
ef þúkvita lystir
Giúka arfar
ok eið rofa!

in VS, as Grimhild gives Sigurd a drug in order to make him forget Brynhild, but in the Eddic poems it is actually Gudrun who is the destined bride. Should we perhaps conclude that Brynhild is a later addition to the cycle, and that she was not originally connected with the Sigurd/Gudrun relationship? Any conclusion must be tentative.

5.2. Wagner's characterisation of Brünnhilde: influence of Sophocles' *Antigone* and Goethe's *Iphigenie auf Tauris*

Given the above (i.e. the presumption that the Brynhild of mediæval literature may not have been perceived as the "heroine"), the literary and dramatic ancestresses of Wagner's Brünnhilde should perhaps be sought outside the immediate mediæval sources. Wagner himself never tires of indicating the extent of the influence of Greek drama on his own drama, and a precedent for Brünnhilde is to be found in Sophocles' *Antigone*, as Wagner interpreted her (in *Oper und Drama*). The interpretation of *Antigone* quoted here, especially the final clause, could also serve as the interpretation of the character of Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre*.

Antigone verstand nichts von der Politik - sie liebte. Suchte sie den Polyneikes zu vertheidigen? Forschte sie nach Rücksichten, Beziehungen, Rechtstandpunkten, die seine Handlungsweise erklären, entschuldigen oder rechtfertigen konnten? - Nein, sie liebte ihn.

...Was nun war diese Liebe, die nicht Geschlechtsliebe, nicht Eltern- und Kindesliebe, nicht Geschwisterliebe, welche die Gesellschaft verläugnet und der Staat verneint hatte, wuchs, von den unvertilgbaren Keimen aller jener Liebe genährt, die reichste Blume reiner Menschenliebe hervor.

...Antigones Liebe war eine vollbewußte. Sie wußte, was sie that - sie wußte aber auch, daß sie es thun mußte, daß sie keine Wahl hatte und nach der Nothwendigkeit der Liebe handeln mußte; sie wußte, daß sie dieser unbewußten zwingenden Nothwendigkeit der Selbstvernichtung aus Sympathie zu gehorchen hatte; und in diesem Bewußtsein war sie der vollendete Mensch, die Liebe in ihrer höchsten Fülle und Allmacht.(emphasis added)⁴ (*Oper und Drama. ii* ; Gesammelte Schriften IV, pp.62-63)

⁴ In another section of *Oper und Drama* . Wagner interprets the figure of *Antigone* as representing the conflict between the individual and the State;

Antigone... trotzte mit vollem Bewußtsein dem Gebote... Hier sehen wir den Staat, der unmerklich aus der Gesellschaft hervorgewachsen war, aus der Gewohnheit ihrer Anschauung sich genährt hatte und zum Vertreter dieser Gewohnheit insofern wurde, daß er eben nur sie, die abstrakte Gewohnheit, deren Kern die

In a footnote to *Oper und Drama*, Wagner refers to Antigone as *die Erlöserin*. His idea of redemption in *Der Fliegende Holländer* and *Tannhäuser* was that an individual man was to be redeemed by the self-sacrificing love of a woman; ⁵ the audience is not asked to believe that her sacrifice has redeemed the world. His concept changed to the extent that in the *Ring* we are asked to believe exactly that. In his Prose Drafts and in *Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde*, Wagner had seen Siegfried as "the perfect human being", and as at least the potential Redeemer; in the completed *Ring*, however, it is Brünnhilde who is the Redeemer. ⁶

Furcht und der Widerwille vor dem Ungewohnten ist, vertrat. (ibid., p.58)

Space does not permit detailed discussion of Hegel on Wagner's thought, but it should be borne in mind. It is suggested by Simon Goodhill, in the programme notes to the Covent Garden Ring performances, October 1991:

Antigone was a central text for Hegel, as Hegel was for the early and most directly revolutionary Wagner. Wagner's reading, however, is quite different from Hegel's influential portrayal of the play as an unresolved dialectical clash of the rights of the state and those of the individual. For Wagner, Antigone offers a glorious vindication of genuine Human Nature, by which he means the 'all-puissant beauty' of Antigone's 'pure human love'. His glorification of Antigone as the perfect embodiment of love, however, also arises from the fact that she 'had to listen to the unconscious, strenuous necessity of self-annihilation in the cause of sympathy'.

⁵ In *Richard Wagner und das Mittelalter*, Volker Mertens reminds the reader: "Für Wagner ist die Erlösung des Mannes durch die liebende Frau ein durchgängiges Thema in seinem Werk, vorgebildet in Fausts Errettung im zweiten Teil des Goetheschen Dramas durch die Fürbitte Gretchens."

⁶ Wagner's concept of Woman as Redeemer, and his idea of woman's place, may be expressed in a very different form, but in content it does differ radically from the pronouncements of many Victorian writers, especially Ruskin; it is an idea that is also found in some of the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, especially *A Drama of Exile*, which can be read as an answer to *Paradise Lost*. The idea of Woman as Redeemer is linked to the extended metaphor of male/female polarity for the relationship between poetry and music - *Die Musik ist ein Weib* - that we discussed in Chapter III. Metaphors of sexuality and of male-female polarity are used in discussion of the nature of music; vocabulary such as *Befruchtung*, *Zeugung*, *Zeugungsfähigkeit*, *Zeugungsorgane* predominates, but we noted then that there is also a literal level at which Wagner is discussing the relationship between the sexes:

Das Weib ist dem Manne... das ewig klar und erkenntliche Maaß der natürlichen Untrüglichkeit, denn es ist das Vollkommenste, wenn es nie aus dem Kreise der schönsten Unwillkürlichkeit heraustritt, in den es durch Das, was sein Wesen einzig zu beseligen vermag, durch die Nothwendigkeit der Liebe gebannt ist.

(*Oper und Drama*"; Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. IV)

Donald H. Crosby, in *Freedom through Disobedience; Die Jungfrau von Orleans, Heinrich von Kleist und Richard Wagner*⁷ gives some helpful pointers towards the interpretation of the role of Brünnhilde in Wagner's drama, concentrating on her role in *Die Walküre*, rather than discussing how she changes in *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*. One of the questions asked is - why do Schiller, Kleist and Wagner choose a woman as the peg on which to hang their ideas about freedom? I would like to make some attempt to answer this question, although it may turn out to be unanswerable. Crosby observes that

In the scene in which Johanna spares Lionel, for example, Schiller takes pains to present Johanna's compassion not as an act of wilful disobedience, or as a conscious surrender to temptation, but rather as an unreflected act, a spontaneous welling up of *Gefühl*.

The disobedience of each virgin warrior (Johanna and Penthesilea) which in each case sparks her metamorphosis from a blind instrument of a higher power into a sentient woman, is followed by a similar pattern of punishment and atonement.

Brünnhilde's disobedience sprang from the exercise of a free will - by stripping Brünnhilde of her divinity, Wotan emancipates her from the morass of guilt, crime and retribution into which Valhalla is slowly sinking... Brünnhilde's punishment is thus her fulfilment; like Johanna and Penthesilaea, by yielding to the stirrings of *Menschlichkeit* she has advanced to *Mensch-Sein*.

Brünnhilde becomes an autonomous subject, something Siegfried never quite achieves. I am a bit dubious, however, about the way the above is phrased. "Wotan emancipates her"... surely the point is that she emancipates herself? It would not be genuine freedom if she were granted it by Wotan, rather than achieving it herself by defying

.. Durch den erlösenden Liebeskuß jener Melodie wird der Dichter nun in die tiefen, unendlichen Geheimnisse der weiblichen Nature eingeweiht; er sieht mit anderen Augen und fühlt mit anderen Sinnen.
(ibid.)

⁷In; Ugrinsky, Alexej, ed. *Friedrich von Schiller and the drama of human existence*. (Greenwood Press, 1988)

Wotan . In Wagner's view, ⁸ true freedom can only be achieved by the individual, it cannot be granted by any higher authority and retain the name of freedom. This is, after all, at the heart of Wotan's dilemma:

Wie schüf' ich den Anderen,
der nicht mehr ich? ⁹

Selbst muß der Freie sich schaffen -
Knechte erknet' ich mir nur!
(Die Walküre, Act II ll. 2910-2911, 2922-2923)

I suggest that another literary precursor or progenitrix of Wagner's Brünnhilde may be Goethe's Iphigenie, especially in view of Iphigenie's elevation of feeling above understanding (*Ich untersuche nicht, ich fühle nur.*) Wagner's critical writings also discuss the relationship between *Gefühl* and *Verstand*, developing his belief that the poet appeals in the first instance to *Gefühl*, not to *Verstand*. Brünnhilde in her actions - that is, her decision to defy Wotan and protect Siegmund, the first independent decision she has ever made - also exemplifies this principle, as she explains to Siegfried:

Denn mir allein
erdünkte Wotans Gedanke.

...
Für den ich büßte,
Strafe mich band,
weil ich nicht ihn dachte
und nur empfand!

...

Denn der Gedanke -
dürftest du's lösen! -
war nur Liebe zu dir!
(Siegfried, Act III ll. 6609-6610, 6619-6622, 6623-6625)

It is Brünnhilde's closeness to Wotan that enables her to defy him - she tries to make this clear to him, to convey that she understood what he really wanted. Her

⁸ Very much influenced by Schiller, I think.

⁹ I suppose it wouldn't occur to him to ask, *wie schüf' ich die Andere, die nicht mehr ich !*

defiance in the Norse literature, and in Morris's poem, has nothing to do with the Volsungs, or with Siegmund's last battle; it is only Wagner who makes this connection, and I suggest that it was this innovation - to make her into Wotan's daughter - which was Wagner's greatest stroke of genius. The indication in *Sigrdrífumál* that Brynhild acted out of some kind of sympathy with the underdog cannot have been the only precedent for Wagner's creation of the character of Brünnhilde.

Wagner himself makes clear that Greek drama is at least as important a source of his works as Norse literature. Wagner's interest in Greek tragedy, and its influence on his own drama, is discussed by Wolfgang Schadewaldt, in *Wagner und Die Griechen* (in *Richard Wagner und das neue Bayreuth*, ed. Wieland Wagner, 1962). Schadewaldt suggests, among other things, that the scene in which Brünnhilde tells Sieglinde that she is to bear *den hehrsten Helden der Welt* can be traced back to *Prometheus Bound*.

...die Szene erweist sich mit der unmittelbarsten Gewißheit des Augenscheins als eine Spiegelung der ebenfalls zentralen Szene in dem uns erhaltenen "Gefesselten Prometheus"; Prometheus der von der Hera verfolgten Io den Weg über die Erde weisend und ihr ansagend, daß sie in Ägypten den Epaphos gebären werde. Io wird über den Epaphos die Stamm-Mutter des Befreiers des Prometheus, Herakles, werden, so wie Sieglinde die Mutter des Befreiers Brünnhilde, Siegfried. (*Wagner und die Griechen*, p.170)¹⁰

¹⁰ This has also been noted by Hugh Lloyd Jones in *Wagner and the Greeks*, in *The Wagner Compendium*:

"The use Wagner has made of Prometheus in creating the figure of Brünnhilde is of prime importance, for it is through Brünnhilde, together with the innovation of making Wotan propagate the Volsungs in order that the Ring may be recovered, that the fate of Siegfried is linked with that of Wotan. In the *Volsunga Saga* the gods who correspond to Wotan and Loge are taken prisoner by enemies, one of whose brothers the Loge figure has killed. To pay their ransom they need gold, which they steal from the figure that corresponds to Alberich. In Wagner, the gold is needed to pay for the building of Valhalla.

That last change is vital, for it enables Wagner to make out of the Nordic myth a story of crime and punishment, like that of *The Oresteia*. In the latter work, too, the curse of Thyestes on the House of Atreus, and in the Theban the curse of Pelops on the house of Laios, play an important part; so in the *Ring* does the curse of Alberich." (p.160)

The question remains; does Brünnhilde ever become fully emancipated from Wotan? Her argument in their final confrontation in Act III of *Die Walküre* is that she did fulfil his command, and bring about his deepest desire. Certainly at this stage she does not perceive herself as fully independent of him, and reminds him that she had previously not been at all independent: *Daß sonst sie ganz dir gehörte , du Gott, vergiß das nicht!* She narrates how she saw Siegmund and Sieglinde, and that this enabled her to understand for the first time what humanity and human love could be. She reminds Wotan that it was he who taught her to love the Volsungs:

Der diese Liebe
 mir ins Herz gehaucht,
 dem Willen, der
 dem Wälsung mich gesellt -
 ihm innig vertraut,
 trotz' ich deinem Gebot.
 (*Die Walküre*, Act III ll.3925-3929)

And then:

Wohl taugte dir nicht
 die t'ör'ge Maid,

I quote the English translation of *Prometheus Bound* here; there is a resemblance, but the main difference is that Prometheus knows, and is explicit about, the fact that Zeus will be stripped of power; possibly Brünnhilde intuits that this will be Wotan's fate, but she is not explicit about it to Sieglinde;

IO. By whom shall Zeus be stripped of power?

PROMETHEUS. By his own foolish purposes.

IO. How will it happen? Tell me, if it does no harm.

PROMETHEUS. He plans a union that will turn to his undoing.

IO. With mortal or immortal? Tell me, if you may.

PROMETHEUS. As to with whom, that is a thing I may not tell.

IO. Then it is she who will unseat him from his throne?

PROMETHEUS. She is to bear a son more powerful than his father.

IO. Is there no way by which Zeus can escape this fate?

PROMETHEUS. None, but with my help. I could save him, once set free.

IO. But if Zeus be unwilling, who can set you free?

PROMETHEUS. A child of yours is named as my deliverer

IO. What do you say? My child shall free you from these chains?

PROMETHEUS. Yes, in the thirteenth generation after you.

(Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*. Trans. by Philip Vellacott)

die, staunend im Rate,
 nicht dich verstand,
 wo mein eig'ner Rat
 nur das eine mir riet -
 zu lieben, was du geliebt.
 (*Die Walküre*, Act III ll.3970-3976)

It could be argued that Brünnhilde's conception of love has narrowed by the time we encounter her in *Götterdämmerung*, in which she equates love with marital fidelity and exacts a terrible revenge for its betrayal - a view not noticeably different from that of Fricka.¹¹

In the confrontation with Waltraute, who is acting for Wotan, Brünnhilde still doesn't fully understand what is at stake, as she admits:

Der Götter heiligen
 Himmelsnebel
 bin ich Törin enttaucht;
 nicht fass' ich, was ich erfahre.
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act I, ll.7602-7605)

She refuses to give up the Ring, as she considers it to be Siegfried's pledge of love and her wedding-ring. She does not yet realise that she is supposed to redeem the world, or that Wotan had hoped that she and Siegfried, united, would redeem the world. It was an idea of which she was perhaps intuitively aware when she planned that Siegfried should be the one to awaken her, and that Wotan spells out in his last confrontation with Erda:

Die du mir gebarst,
 Brünnhild',
 weckt sich hold der Held;
 wachend wirkt
 dein wissendes Kind
 erlösende Weltentat!
 (*Siegfried*, Act III ll. 6273-6278, 6282-6284)

¹¹In fact, though, Wagner had written what became *Götterdämmerung* before writing *Die Walküre*, and certainly before coming within the orbit of Schopenhauer, whose idea of compassion was so influential. He had in fact completed the text of the *Ring* before reading Schopenhauer, but explained in his correspondence that the reason he found himself so drawn to the philosopher was that he had instinctively been groping towards ideas that Schopenhauer had expressed, and the idea of compassion had found its way into the character of Brünnhilde; though, as we have seen, he based her to a large extent on Sophocles' Antigone.

It has been suggested by Lutz Eberhard Seelig, in *Brünnhildes christlich erlösender Liebestod* (Österreichische Musikzeitschrift, 1985, Bd. XL/6) that Brünnhilde is really acting for Wotan, but that she only understands this clearly herself in her funeral oration for Siegfried.¹²

The point is evidently that Brünnhilde must learn wisdom through suffering; Wagner no doubt intends to convey that she has grasped the difference between knowledge and understanding. At the end of *Siegfried* she expressed the fear that becoming mortal and experiencing human, sexual love might deprive her of her wisdom, but Wagner means for it to lead to something more profound. She tries to pass her wisdom on to Siegfried, but he is not capable of understanding it, as he admits:

Mehr gabst du, Wunderfrau,
als ich zu wahren weiß!
Nicht zürne, wenn dein Lehren
mich unbelehret ließ!
(*Götterdämmerung*, Act I. II.7071-7078)

Seelig also suggests that Brünnhilde and Siegfried are "Marionetten in [Wotans] Hand, um sein schließliches Ende zu erreichen." (p.298) I would agree in the case of Siegfried - he is first of all manipulated by Wotan and Brünnhilde, and then manipulated by Hagen into betraying Brünnhilde, so that Hagen can then manipulate *her* into conspiring to cause Siegfried's death. But is Brünnhilde as much of a puppet as Siegfried? This cannot have been Wagner's intention, and certainly the point of the conflict between her and Wotan is that she has ceased to be his puppet, and must henceforth take the consequences of having acted independently:

nun sei fortan,

¹² Seelig argues further that redemption would not have occurred if Brünnhilde had yielded to Waltraute's request to return the Ring to the Rhine : "Brünnhilde handelt, genau betrachtet, sogar in Wotans Sinne, wenn sie den Ring noch nicht hergibt, denn sie kann ihn noch nicht wissend geben, die Welterlösung noch nicht bewirken; Siegfried muß sie erst verraten, und sie muß erst durch dieses Leid wissend werden."

(*Brünnhildes christlich erlösender Liebestod*, p.298)

was so du noch bist!
 (*Die Walküre*, Act III ll.3772-3773)

von mir sagtest du dich los.
 Dich muß ich meiden,
 gemeinsam mit dir
 nicht darf ich Rat mehr raunen;
 getrennt, nicht dürfen
 traut wir mehr schaffen;
 so weit Leben und Luft,
 darf der Gott dir nicht mehr begegnen!
 (*Die Walküre*, Act III ll.3962-3969)

Is Brünnhilde then unconsciously concerned to redeem Wotan? How concerned is she to redeem the world? When she demands Siegfried's death, she is concerned to avenge her dishonour, there are no thoughts of redemption at this stage. She plots Siegfried's death with Hagen, then says to Gunther:

Dich verriet er,
 und mich verrietet ihr alle!
 Wär' ich gerecht,
 alles Blut der Welt
 büßte mir nicht eure Schuld!
 Doch des einen Tod
 taugt mir für alle;
 Siegfried falle -
 zur Sühne für sich und euch!
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act II ll. 8305-8313)

Here, then, she is closest to the Brynhild of the mediæval sources, and of Morris's poem.

I raised the question of whether Brünnhilde is (whether consciously or not) concerned with the redemption of Wotan. She has emancipated herself from her father¹³ - this is involved also with the question raised earlier, why is the figure of a woman chosen by dramatists in order to illustrate their ideas about freedom? This

¹³ This seems to be a fairly constant topos - let us for convenience call it the King Lear topos - and could perhaps be examined in greater detail, except that there is the danger of introducing extra-literary criteria, and even amateur psychology. The question to be examined would be something like - why is it the daughter who has to liberate herself from the father, not the son? And how far does she ever become truly emancipated? Brünnhilde's suicide is as much for the sake of Wotan as for the sake of redeeming the world - just as Cordelia forgives and tries to save the father who has rejected her.

usually has very little to do with the actual position of women in society, but in Wagner's case does have a lot to do with his view of the nature of Woman.

Brünnhilde attains a measure of self-awareness and autonomy, but there is always the doubt as to how autonomous she is. Isn't she in some ways always the embodiment of Wotan's will,¹⁴ even after she has parted from him? Wotan shouts at her in anger, *Wer bist du, / als meines Willens / blind wählende Kür?* The rhetorical question is shortly going to get an answer that Wotan doesn't like. Earlier, Wotan has tried to escape from his dilemma by saying to Fricka *Die Walküre walte frei*, but Fricka sees through this. The point is, of course, that once Brünnhilde does choose freely, she is no longer the instrument of Wotan's will.

In the *Ring*, Brünnhilde gains wisdom through suffering. As she says in her funeral oration, *Mich mußte der Reinste verraten, / daß wissend würde ein Weib!* The wisdom which Brünnhilde is said to possess as a Valkyrie, and which she tries unsuccessfully to pass on to Siegfried, (though we are never told what constitutes her wisdom) she presumably inherited from her mother Erda. Erda reminds Wotan:

Ein Wunschmädchen
gebar ich Wotan;
der Helden Wal
heiß für sich er sie küren.
Kühn ist sie
und weise auch;
(*Siegfried*, Act III, ll.6177-6185)

14

Zu Wotan Willen sprichst du,
sagst du mir, was du willst.
Wer bin ich,
wär' ich dein Wille nicht?
(*Die Walküre*, Act II ll.2757-2760)

Erda's wisdom has become impotent, and so has Wotan's will. He hopes that Brünnhilde and Siegfried, united, will be able to take over. On awakening, Brünnhilde fears that her wisdom may vanish - in fact it will be transmuted into a deeper understanding. She feels that she has lost it when Siegfried betrays her, not realising that both he and she are being manipulated by Hagen. she laments that Siegfried was unable to appreciate her wisdom, and threw it away when he discarded her:

Wo ist nun mein Wissen
 gegen dies Wirrsal?
 Wo sind mein Runen
 gegen dies Rätsel?
 Ach Jammer! Jammer!
 Weh, ach Wehe!
 All mein Wissen
 wies ich ihm zu!
 In seiner Macht
 hält er die Maid;
 In seinen Banden
 faßt er die Beute,
 die, jammernd ob ihrer Schmach,
 jauchzend, der Reiche verschenkt!
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act II, ll. 8211-8222)

5.3. Morris's characterisation of Brynhild

The link between Morris's Brynhild and Wagner's Brünnhilde is the question of their wisdom. Brynhild is sometimes called the *all-wise Brynhild*, and her wisdom is sharply differentiated from that of Grimhild; Brynhild would never be called a *wise-wife*, with its perjorative overtones of witchcraft.

After her marriage to Gunnar, she never smiles again, and clothes herself in the dignity of a Queen. She says to him before the wedding ceremony:

And for thee I deem I was fashioned, and for thee the oath I swore
 In the days of my glory and wisdom, ere the days of my youth were
 o'er.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.224)

She feels that now her days of glory and wisdom are over, although this is not how she is perceived by the other characters in the poem, who consider her to be glorious and wise.

The first mention of Brynhild in *Sigurd the Volsung* occurs in a cryptic reference in *Of Gripir's Foretelling* :

But the Day and the Day shall loosen, and the Day shall awake and
arise,
And the Day shall awake with the dawning, and the wise heart learn
of the wise.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.111)

The reader would need to have already read the poem, or be familiar with *Gripispá* in the *Poetic Edda* in order to understand this reference. Was Morris assuming this knowledge on the part of the reader, or are the lines deliberately cryptic? ¹⁵ The reader

¹⁵ I cite here for the purposes of comparison the relevant passage of *Gripispá*, which indicates that Sigurd will kill Fafnir, then meet with the Giukings, the awaken the sleeping Valkyrie. At this point it is not suggested that there will be a broken betrothal, only that he will wake her and she will teach him wisdom.

16. (Sigurd)

Brotin er byrnja,	brúðr mæla tær,
er vacnað i	vif ór svefni;
hvát mun snót at heldr	við Sigurð mæla,
bat er at farnað i	fylka verð i?
(The mail-coat is broken,	the maiden speaks,
The woman who	from sleep has wakened;
What says the maid	to Sigurd then
That happy fate	to the hero brings?)

17 (Gripir)

Hon mun ríkum þær	rúnar kenna,
allar, þær er aldir	eignæ vildo,
oc á mannz tunga	mæla kveria,
lif með læcning;	lif u heill, konungr.
(Runes to the warrior	will she tell,
All that men	may ever seek,
And teach thee to speak	in all men's tongues,
And life with health ;	thou'rt happy, king!)
(Translation by Henry Adams Bellows , 1936)	

Gripir then foretells that Sigurd will go to Heimir's hall - "and that is all I know." Sigurd persuades Gripir to elaborate upon his prophecy; he foretells that Sigurd will meet Brynhild, Budli's daughter, in Heimir's hall, but desert her for Gudrun at Grimhild's instigation.

31 (Gripir)

It munóð alla	ei ð a vinna,
fullfastliga ;	fá munóð halda;
verið hefir þú Giúca	gestr eina nótt,
mantattu horsca	Heimis föstro.

can at least assume that Sigurd understands what is said. Both he and she are referred to as *Day*; in other words she, as the Day, will "awake and arise", and she will teach

-
- (Ye twain shall all the oaths then swear
That bind full fast; few shall ye keep;
One night when Gjuki's guest thou hast been,
Will Heimir's fosterling fade from thy mind.)
- 32 (Sigurd)
Hvart er þá, Gripir? get þú þess fyr mér?
sér þú geð leysi í grams scapi?
er ec scal við meyjá málom slita,
er ec allz hugar unna þóttomc?
(What sayst thou, Gripir? give me the truth,
Does fickleness hide in the hero's heart?
Can it be that troth I break with the maid,
With her I believed I loved so dear?)
- 33 (Gripir)
þú verð r, siclingr, fyr svicum annars,
mundo Grimhildar gialda ráð a;
mun bióð a þér biarthaddat man,
dóttur sina, dregr hon vé! at gram.
(Tricked by another, prince, thou art,
And the price of Grimhild's wiles thou must pay;
Fain of thee for the fair-haired maid,
Her daughter, she is, and she drags thee down.)
- 34 (Sigurd)
Mun ec við þá Gunnar gorva hleyti,
oc Guðruno ganga at eiga?
fullqvæni þá fylkir væri,
ef meintregar mæ r angrarð it.
(Might I with Gunnar kinship make,
And Guthrun win to be my wife,
Well the hero wedded would be,
If my treacherous deed would trouble me not.)
- 35 (Gripir)
þic mun Grimhildar gørva véla,
mun hon Brynhildar biðja fysa,
Gunnari til handa, Gotna drotni;
heitr þú fliótliga fór fylkis móð ur.
(Wholly Grimhild thy heart deceives,
She will bid thee go and Brynhild woo
For Gunnar's wife, the lord of the Goths:
And the prince's mother thy promise shall win.)
(Translation by Bellows)

him wisdom - *the wise heart learn of the wise*. (We will recall that Sigurd has already distinguished himself by his wisdom.)

When Gripir foretells Sigurd's funeral, he perhaps intimates that Brynhild will lie by his side:

And none shall be nigh in the ending and none by his heart shall be
laid
Save the world that he cherished and quickened, and the Day that he
wakened and made.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.113)

It is perfectly possible to interpret this literally, as meaning "Brynhild will lie beside you on the funeral pyre", if it is recalled that she has already been referred to as the day, although this epithet is more commonly bestowed upon Sigurd. But - *the world that he cherished and quickened* ? There are various ways of interpreting this, since it is as ambiguous as the rest of Gripir's prophecies. I would take it to imply that the deaths of Sigurd and Brynhild will extinguish the glory of the world that they intended to make but failed to, because their endeavours were thwarted.

There is also a possible prophecy by the eagles on the Glittering Heath ;

Bind the red rings, O Sigurd! and gladden all thine heart!
For the world shall make thee merry ere thou and she depart!
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.111)

Is "she" Brynhild or the world? Or is this deliberately ambiguous? It is not necessarily implied in the poem that Sigurd and Brynhild are destined for each other; Sigurd seems to climb Hindfell through love of adventure, not knowing what, or whom, he is going to encounter on the mountain-top. It will transpire, after Sigurd has woken her, that she has sworn only to wed "the fearless heart". Brynhild in Morris's poem is not in a position to say "I will only marry Sigurd" - since her defiance of Odin has nothing to do with Sigurd's last battle, the reader has to assume that she does not in fact know of Sigurd's existence. In the draft version, though, it is possible that Odin is able to foretell that the unnamed and unspecified "fearless heart" will be Sigurd, although she is not. His response to Brynhild's vow only to wed the "fearless heart" is:

....The doom abideth, the doom of me and thee;

Now go thou, sleep and slumber, for long the time shall be
Ere the world cry out for its glory and the best for the best shall be
born.

Fare forth and forget and be weary 'neath the sting of the Sleepful
 Thorn.

(emphasis added)

In the published version, this is altered to:

Then somewhat smiled Allfather, and he spake: 'So let it be!
 The doom thereof abideth; the doom of me and thee;
 Yet long shall the time pass over ere thy waking-day be born;
 Fare forth and forget and be weary 'neath the Sting of the Sleepful
 Thorn.

(Sigurd the Volsung, p. 141)

In the draft, Odin would appear to be foretelling the birth of Sigurd in his prophecy that *the best for the best shall be born*; the published version is far less explicit.

There are some correspondences/similarities in the language used by both poets to depict Brynhild's awakening. Morris describes her sweet breath as resembling *summer wind from a garden under the sun*. Siegfried's comment on Brünnhilde's beauty and the sweetness of her breath is an elaborate version of this metaphor:

Süß erbebt mir
 ihr blühender Mund;
 wie mild erzitternd
 mich Zagen er reizt!
 Ach, dieses Athems
 wonnig warmes Gedüft!
 (Siegfried, Act III ll.6540-6545)

Morris may have seen Forman's translation of the above passage, which reads:

Sweetly mocks me
 her blossoming mouth;
 it moves for my kiss
 to be made in its midst!
 Ah! to be smothered
 in warmth of its wildering smell!

A rather bizarre translation, if I may say so! Morris knew of Forman's translation of *Die Walküre*. as he corresponded with Forman's brother about it, ¹⁶ but it is not clear whether he knew Forman's entire *Ring* translation. In any case there is no need to postulate influence or direct borrowing, as the metaphor of woman's sweet breath is a fairly common poetic device. Both Wagner and Morris use the image of women's hair resembling a river:

....a river of sun-bright hair
Flows free o'er bosom and shoulder and floods the desert bare.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.139)

In *Siegfried*, the stage directions are also important:

Vorsichting löst er den Helm und hebt ihm der Schlafenden vom Haupte ab; langes, lockiges Haar bricht hervor. - Siegfried erschrickt.

Schimmernde Wolken
säumen in Wellen
den hellen Himmelssee;
leuchtender Sonne
lachendes Bild
strahlt durch das Wogengewölke!
(*Siegfried*, Act III ll.6497-6502)

Here the parallel is almost word for word. The metaphor (river and sun for Brynhild's hair) is very striking. The shining sun refers to him, not her, but here it is actually literal, as well as a symbol. The sun shines through her hair, her hair is as bright as the sun, the golden hair is the sun that lights his life, and so on.

Forman's translation is not actually a lot of use:

Billows of cloud
that brimmingly border
a lake of hazeless heaven!
Laughter a face
of fathomless sun
sends through the mustering mist. (alliteration emphasised)

¹⁶ See Chapter 1.1.

He has preserved the alliteration, but to the detriment of much of the sense. *Mustering mist* doesn't mean very much, however well it preserves the alliteration.¹⁷

Brynhild's defiance of Odin does not occupy the same key position in the development of Morris's poem as the comparable episode in *Die Walküre*. All we are told in VS is that Brynhild defied Odin. *Sigrdrifumál* gives a little more information:

She said that her name was Sigrdrifa, and that she was a Valkyrie. She said that two kings had been fighting ; one was called Helm-Gunnar, and old man and a great warrior. and Odin had promised him the victory ; 'and the other was Agnarr, Audi's brother, and there was none to help him.'¹⁸

Brynhild is not Odin's daughter¹⁹, so the conflict does not have the same poignancy; and Morris's poem is not about her in the same way as *Die Walküre* is about her and her conflict with Wotan; the narrative perspective of the poem nearly always focusses upon Sigurd. Nevertheless, there are certain points of resemblance between Morris's Brynhild and Wagner's Brünnhilde, and it may be that both characters exemplify narrative functions or dramatic ideas that are not present, or are only hinted at, in the mediæval literature. *Sigrdrifumál* does suggest that Brynhild (or the Valkyrie Sigrdrifa who, as we discussed in Chapter II, need not necessarily be the same woman as Brynhild) defies Odin by giving the victory to Agnarr. Morris has elaborated upon this hint ; his Brynhild is a mortal woman whom Odin has made into a Valkyrie. When she defies him, it is for the love of humanity - which, as she is a mortal woman herself, she already feels, she doesn't have to learn it, as Wagner's Brünnhilde does.

¹⁷ The question at issue is the use of archaising language; how legitimate is it, and how well is it done by both poets?

¹⁸ Hon nefndi z Sigrdrifa oc var valkyria. Hon sag ð i, at tveir konungar
borduz, hét annarr Hiálm-Gunnar, hann var þ á gamall ok in mesti hermað r,
oc hafð i Oð inn hanom sigri heiti ; enn
annarr hét Agnarr, Auð o broð ir,
er vætr engi vildi þiggia

¹⁹ Although there is a metaphorical sense in which she may be considered to be Odin's daughter, as Sigurd may be considered to be Odin's son. There is a line in Morris's draft in which Brynhild refers to herself and Sigurd as the son and daughter of Odin.

Brünnhilde learns love, compassion, through meeting Siegmund and seeing for herself what human love means. Brynhild in Morris's poem acts against the gods, for the sake of humanity, because she comes of human stock in the first place:

And I scorned the earth-folk's Framer and the Lord of the world I must
teach;
For the death-doomed I caught from the sword, and the fated life I slew,
And I deemed that my deeds were goodly, and that long I should do and
undo.

But Allfather came against me, and the God in his wrath arose,
And he cried, "Thou hast thought in thy folly that the Gods have friends
and foes,

That they wake, and the world wends onwards, that they sleep, and the
world slips back,
That they laugh, and the world's weal waxeth, that they frown and fashion
the wrack;

Thou hast cast up the curse against me; it shall fall aback on thy head.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 141)

In the draft, Brynhild narrates her story at somewhat greater length. She acts against Odin, not because she is inspired by sudden compassion for one individual, but because, as a mortal woman, she naturally has more concern for, and interest in, humanity than in the gods. It is perhaps regrettable that Morris decided to omit the following passages from the final version:

I saw the brave man vanquished and the trusty heart but vain,
Yea, I saw the earth's best helpers how they oft would fare afield
With the sword-edge dulled by Odin and his wrath on helm and shield,
Yea, I wrought his will in sorrow and his host of battle grew.
(*An early version*)

And I reached my hand for that garland for the Kings of the Goth-
folk meet

And the men were arrayed for battle and the ordered field was set
And at home and abroad I saw them and the worthiest man afield
With his edges dulled by Odin and his wrath on helm and shield.

But I wrought my will rejoicing and the friend of Odin fell
And the Goths were glad of the tidings and the Earth folk deemed it
well.

(*Second draft version of the same idea.*)

The published version provides a summary of Brynhild's experience. Morris originally gave her a much longer narration, which does not appear in the published

glorious death, perhaps having saved the world, or at least not having lived in vain. Morris's Brynhild, it would seem, is possessed by the desire to help the world in a practical, day-to-day sense, rather than to save it or redeem it; that is, the specifically religious and Biblical references in Morris's poem all refer to Sigurd, and Brynhild doesn't conceive of redemption in any transcendental or religious sense. Her suicide, in the end, is not redemptive, as Brünnhilde's immolation is presumed to be. The narrator suggests that the *lives* of Sigurd and Brynhild, had they been allowed to live in peace, might have been in some way redemptive. This would certainly seem to be Brynhild's intention, as she swears to wed only the fearless heart:

Then the fearless heart shall I wed, and bring the best to birth,
And fashion such tales for the telling, that Earth shall be holpen at
least.

If the Gods think scorn of its fairness, as they sit at the changeless
feast.

(Sigurd the Volsung, p. 141) emphasis added

At this stage, comparing Morris's Brynhild with Wagner's Brünnhilde, Brynhild seems to the reader to be the more generous of the two, to the extent that she is already aware of her mission to save the world, whereas this is something that Brünnhilde has to learn. something she cannot be aware of until she becomes a mortal woman and is purified and made wise by suffering.

There is no *leitmotif* consistently associated with Brynhild, as there is with Sigurd - the repeated references to gold, sun, light, brightness and so on. ²⁰ The nearest the poem comes to a *leitmotif* in the case of Brynhild is in the images of gardens, summer and fruitfulness, or at least potential fruitfulness. ²¹ Odin snatched Brynhild

²⁰ See Chapter VI

²¹ In Regin's very Victorian, very *Pre-Raphaelite* image of the Valkyrs, they seem to bring fruitfulness to the earth; this obviously links with the images of fruitfulness and blossoming associated with the young Brynhild. It is an attractive image and one not entirely commensurate with the way Valkyries are depicted in much Norse literature, i. e. as bloodthirsty and violent. (For instance, in *Darra ð aljǫð* in *Njáls Saga*).

Their time of content is over. Brynhild does not know what has happened to Sigurd, but it appears that Nature knows, perhaps because Grimhild's potion has ripped the fabric of nature apart.

Men say that a little after the evil of that night

All waste is the burg of Brynhild, and there springeth a marvellous
light

On the desert hard by Lyndale, and few men know for why,

But there are, who say that a wildfire thence roareth up to the sky

Round a glorious golden dwelling wherein there sitteth a Queen

In remembrance of the wakening, and the slumber that hath been;

Wherein a Maid there sitteth, who knows not hope nor rest

For remembrance of the mighty, and the Best come forth from the
Best.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.189)

When Sigurd woos her for Gunnar, they lie on the bed with his sword between them; she doesn't ask why, she agrees to everything with weary indifference; her pallor is compared to the pallor of the moon, and she lies on the bed *silent as an image of the dead*.

We have observed that Morris is very careful to link the seasons and the rhythms of nature with the moods and actions of the characters in his poem; thus, the love of Sigurd and Brynhild is associated with summer, but his wedding to Gudrun takes place in the autumn.

Morris chose to have the narrator set the quarrel between the women in the summer, which the reader may perhaps not have expected. It may be intended to recall the earlier association of Brynhild with summer and fruitfulness, and to indicate that this is now distorted:

Now it happed on a summer-season mid the blossom of the year,
When the clouds were high and little, and the sun exceeding clear,

That Queen Brynhild arose in the morning, and longed for the
eddying pool,

And the water of the Niblungs, her summer sleep to cool;

...

there the wives of the Niblungs oft

Would play in the wide-spread water when the summer days were
soft;

...
and there is Gudrun, the white-armed Niblung child
All bare for the sunny river and the water undefiled.

...
...but Brynhild's face grew white,
Though soft she spake and queenly; "Hail, sister of my lord!
Thou art fair in the summer morning 'twixt the river and the sward!"
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.232)

There is also the possibility that Morris intended this peaceful summer setting to contrast with the forbidding exterior of the Niblungs' home; the reader will recall that they live in a remote, forbidding castle, built on a snow-capped mountain, but within the castle they have gardens, and pools for the women to bathe in.

Brynhild's laughter is an open declaration of war:

And her laugh went down the waters, as the war-horns on the wind,
When the kings of war are seeking, and their foes are fain to find.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.233)

The question of Brynhild's laughter deserves further discussion. In *Sigurd* the point is made that, after Sigurd drinks Grimhild's potion, neither he nor Brynhild ever laugh, or even smile, again, although during their brief pastoral idyll in Lyndale they laughed, and even the gods laughed to see their happiness, as when Sigurd first sees Brynhild's tower:

So Sigurd stayed to behold it, for the heart within him laughed
Then the gods laughed out in the heavens to see the Volsungs' seed
And his heart went forth to meet her, yet nought he moved for a
while,
Until the God-kin's laughter brake blooming from a smile.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.165)

This may be compared with the final scene of *Siegfried*, where there is a similar emphasis on laughter and love, but with an ambiguous finale (*lachender Tod*):

Siegfried Erwache, Brünnhilde! Wache, du Maid!
Lache und lebe, süßeste Lust!

Sei mein! Sei mein! Sei mein!

Brünnhilde

...
 Ö kindischer Held! O herrlicher Knabe!
 Du hehrster Taten töriger Hort!
 Lachend muß ich dich lieben,
 lachend will ich erblinden,
 lachend lass' uns verderben,
 lachend zu Grunde geh'n!

...
 Leuchtende Liebe, lachender Tod!

Siegfried

Lachend erwachst du, Wonnige, mir!
 Brünnhilde lebt, Brünnhilde lacht!

...
 Heil der Welt, der Brünnhilde lebt!
 Sie wacht, sie lebt, sie lacht mir entgegen!
 Prangend strahlt mir Brünnhildes Stern!
 Sie ist mir ewig, ist mir immer,
 Erb' und eigen, ein und all!
 Leuchtende Liebe, lachender Tod!
 (Siegfried, Act III)

This is the only time either of them think of laughter in terms of abandoning themselves to joy and gladness. Brünnhilde's laughter in *Götterdämmerung* ²³ is more likely to be the laughter of hysteria. ²⁴ I suggest that what Wagner wished to convey in the concluding bars of *Siegfried* is that learning to be human entails not only learning to love, but learning to laugh.

We have observed that Sigurd and Brynhild never smile again after Grimhild's potion. There is no reason why they should, as they no longer have anything to be happy about, and they have left their youth behind.²⁵ We are told that Gunnar finds no

²³ Gutrune Lachen Brünnhildes weckte mich auf

²⁴ This is discussed by Carolyn Abbate in *Unsung Voices* (the chapter is entitled *Brynhild walks by night*). Her discussion makes some valid points, for instance the idea that the young Brünnhilde's *hojotoho* exclamation depicts her as "embodied laughter", and the fact that Brynhild's laughter after Sigurd's death, found in the Norse literature, is the laughter of hysteria. She does, however, overlook the frequent references to laughter in the final scene of *Siegfried* quoted above.

²⁵

But the smile is departed from him, and the laugh of Sigurd the young,

And of few words now is he waxen, and his songs are seldom sung.
 Howbeit of all the sad-faced was Sigurd loved the best;

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.205)

happiness with Brynhild, as he observes *The fair face never smiling, and the eyes that know no change*. Brynhild's laughter after Sigurd's death is set against, and provoked by, Gudrun's grief.²⁶ It is clear enough to Gunnar that her laughter is the laughter of hysteria:

"Woe's me, thou wonder of women! Thou art glad for no man's sake.
Nay, not for thine own meseemeth, for thou bidest here as the dead,
As the pale ones stricken deedless, whose tale of life is sped."²⁷

26

Long Gudrun hung o'er the Volsung and waited the coming word;
Then she stretched out her hand to Sigurd and touched her love and her
lord,

And the broad day fell on his visage, and she knew she was there alone,
And her heart was wrung with anguish and she uttered a weary moan;
Then Brynhild laughed in the hall, and the first of men's voices was that
Since when on yester-even the kings in the high-seat had sat.

²⁷ And even therewithal life left the king; but Gudrun moaned and
drew a weary breath, and Brynhild heard it, and laughed when they heard
her moaning.

Then said Gunnar; Thou laughest not because thy heart-roots are
gladdened, or else why doth thy visage wax so wan? Sure an evil creature
thou art; most like thou art nigh to thy death.!

(*Völsunga Saga*, Morris's trans. pp.189-190)

Wearily sighed Gudrun,
As the king gat ending,
And so sore her hands
She smote together,
That the cups arow
Rang out therewith.
And the geese cried on high
That were in the homefield.

Then laughed Brynhild,
Budli's daughter,
Once, once only,
From out her heart;
When to her bed
Was born the sound
Of the sore greeting
Of Giuki's daughter.

Then quoth Gunnar,
The king, the hawk-bearer,
"Whereas thou laughest,
O hateful woman,
Glad on thy bed,
No good it betokeneth;
Why lackest thou else
Thy lovely hue;
Feeder of foul deeds,

Brynhild asks to be placed on the funeral pyre by Sigurd's side, so that she may join him in Valhalla:

The bale for the dead is builded, it is wrought full wide on the plain,
It is raised for Earth's best Helper, and thereon is room for twain;
Ye have hung the shields about it, and the Southland hangings
spread,
There lay me adown by Sigurd and my head beside his head;

...
How then when the flames flare upward may I be left behind?
How then may the road he wendeth be hard for my feet to find?
How then in the gates of Valhall may the door of the gleaming ring
Clash to on the heel of Sigurd, as I follow on my king?
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.273)

These lines are based on the following stanza of *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*:

Never then, belike, shall clash behind him
Valhall's bright door with rings bedight ;
And if my fellowship followeth after
In no wretched wise then shall we wend.
(Morris's translation) 28

In *Götterdämmerung*, there is no question of Brünnhilde joining Siegfried in Valhalla; redemption means oblivion, for her and for Wotan. The final scene in *Siegfrieds Tod*, however, is more closely related to this source, with the chorus expressing the idea that Siegfried's wife follows him, so that the gate of Valhall will not close on his heels:

Die Frauen: Wer folgt ihm nach, daß nicht auf die Ferse
Walhalls Thüre ihm fällt?

Die Mannen: Ihm folgt sein Weib in den Weihebrand,
ihm folgt sein rüstiges Roß.

Hrynia hánom þá	á hæl þeygi
hlunnblic hallar	hringi litcuð ;
ef hánom fylgir	ferð mín heð an;
—þeygi mun vár for	aumlig vera!

The final stage directions are also of interest in this context:

Plötzlich leuchtet aus der Gluth ein blendend heller Glanz auf; auf düst'rem Wolkensaume [gleichsam dem Dampfe des erstickten Holzfeuers] erhebt sich der Glanz, in welchem man Brünnhilde erblickt, wie sie, behelmt und in strahlendem Waffenschmucke, auf leuchtendem Rosse, als Walküre, Siegfried an der Hand durch die Lüfte geleitet.

In her funeral oration in *Siegfrieds Tod*, Brünnhilde addresses Wotan as follows; *Nur Einer herrsche; Allvater, herrlicher Du!* It is a long way from this to *Ruhe, ruhe, du Gott!* her valedictory words to Wotan in *Götterdämmerung*.

There is no dramatic or narrative necessity for Morris's poem to end with Brynhild's death, as her suicide is in no sense seen as a world-redeeming act, but perhaps we are being told that Brynhild and Sigurd may not have lived entirely in vain, at least that they will never be forgotten:

They are gone, the lovely, the mighty, the hope of the ancient Earth;
It shall labour and bear the burden as before that day of their birth;
It shall groan in its blind abiding for the day that Sigurd hath sped.
And the hour that Brynhild hath hastened, and the dawn that waketh
the dead;

It shall yearn, and be oft-times holpen, and forget their deeds no
more

Till the new sun beams on Balder, and the happy sealess shore.

(Sigurd the Volsung. p.273)

For Wagner, it would have been dramatically inappropriate for the *Ring* to continue with Siegfried's wife surviving to avenge him, especially since he has made Brünnhilde into the legitimate wife, Gutrune into the mistress. ²⁹

²⁹ Brünnhilde does begin her funeral oration with a reference to avenging Siegfried; *Schweigt eures Jammers jauchzenden Schwall! / Das ihr alle verrietet, zur Rache schreitet sein Weib!*, but she certainly doesn't take revenge in the sense of Kriemhild's Revenge.

CHAPTER VI

SIGURD / SIEGFRIED6.1. Contrast imagery in *Sigurd the Volsung*

In Morris's *Sigurd*, the imagery most consistently associated with the hero is the opposition between light and dark.¹ Sigurd is associated with light and sun, and the epithet that occurs most frequently with reference to the hero is *the golden Sigurd*.

In Book One, *Sigmund*, there is less light/dark contrast imagery than in Books II and III, as this imagery is almost exclusively associated with Sigurd himself, but there are constant references to the changing and contrasting seasons of the year, and indications that the darkness of winter precedes the brightness of spring and summer. The house of the Volsungs, which is also a metaphor for the Volsungs themselves, is presented as *a rose in the winter season, a candle in the dark*, i.e. as a positive contrast to their immediate environment.

When Sigurd is named, the old man welcomes his birth by saying *Hail, Dawn of the Day*. Thus the poem contains not only the imagery of opposition between light and dark, but also contrast between dawn and dusk, and emphasis on the seasons again, all combined in these lines:

But men feast in the merry noontide; and glad is the April green
That a Volsung looks on the sunlight and the night and the darkness
have been.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.75)

Sigurd's birth presages new hope and happiness for his mother, their kin² and for the dwellers in their adopted country. From the moment of his birth, he is

¹ Wagner, like Morris, uses imagery connected with the contrast between light and dark. As we discussed in Chapter III, there are obvious historical reasons for suspecting Wagner's vocabulary of having an anti-Semitic sub-text, but in fact his vocabulary is not all that different from that used by Morris.

² That is their new kin, after his mother's marriage - the Volsungs, except for Sigurd, are all dead by now.

associated with the spring, with light and the sun, with the overcoming of darkness, winter and night.

It was assumed by early nineteenth century scholarship, especially by the German scholarship to which Wagner had access and which influenced him, that the story of Sigurd and Brynhild should be seen as a sun or nature myth, symbolising the sun conquering the forces of darkness. Morris nowhere specifically states that he is aware of, or interested in, this interpretation, but there are references within the poem to Sigurd's association with the sun.³ When Sigurd asks for a horse, and his enthusiasm for adventure is likened to the sun and the dawn:

Forsooth no more may we hold thee than the hazel copse may hold
 The sun of the early dawning that turneth it all into gold.
 (Sigurd the Volsung, p.79)

³ Some contemporary criticism was certainly aware of it, as is shown, for instance, by the following letter in *The Spectator* (1877.)

"I have read with great interest your review of Mr. Morris's poem "Sigurd the Volsung", and it seems to me that much of what might, at first sight, seem obscure in the poem may be explained if it is borne in mind that the story of Sigurd is a sun-myth. Mr. Morris has been careful to keep this in view throughout the poem, and the lines quoted by your reviewer as "fine, though unintelligible", become clear, if the reader realises that Sigurd is the new-risen sun, who "shall smite when the day-dawn glimmers thro' the folds of God-home's foe", i.e. the darkness; who "binds the red rings" - rays of light - to "cast them abroad" and rejoice the earth with the "water's hoard", the golden glory on the sea at sunrise. With this clue the whole passage, as well as many others in the poem, become less obscure and more interesting. Thus Brynhild represents the Dawn, the Niblungs the evening clouds among which the sun finally sets."

This is a somewhat strained interpretation, although it is an interpretation that would have been familiar to Wagner, who knew the writings of early nineteenth century German scholars such as Franz Joseph Mone, who was an enthusiastic exponent of the sun or nature myth interpretation. But the "solar myth" interpretation of Sigurd the Volsung was dismissed as irrelevant by contemporary reviewers such as Francis Hueffer and Henry Hewlett. Though the text does allow, indeed encourage, the reader to interpret the figure of Sigurd as to some extent a representative of the Sun and of light, "red rings" as "rays of light" just will not do. The rings are Fafnir's hoard, and the "water's hoard" is also a reference to the treasure, which Andvari, who had his lair behind a waterfall, once held.

and there are further references to dawn and day when Sigurd obtains the broken pieces of his father's sword from his mother:

These shards...
They have shone in the dusk and the night-tide, they shall shine in
the dawn and the day,
They have gathered the storm together, they shall chase the clouds
away.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.104)

Regin says to Sigurd; *Yet whiles I dream I have wrought thee, a beam of the morning light, / A fatherless motherless stripling, to work out my desire.*⁴ During the ride to the Glittering Heath with Regin, there is continual emphasis on the contrast between light/dark, dawn/dusk, positive/negative, Sigurd/Regin. The Glittering Heath is a dreary place, associated with dark, dusk and moonlight - all negatives. Sigurd's brightness is contrasted with Regin's darkness:

And the sun rose up at their backs and the grey world changed to
red,
And away to the west went Sigurd by the glory wreathed about,
But little and black was Regin as a fire that dieth out.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.117)

Later Sigurd tells Regin of his desire for everything to be illuminated, in spite of the fact that Regin fears him:

Yea me, who would utterly light the face of all good and ill,
If not with the fruitful beams that the summer shall fulfil
Then at least with the world a-blazing, and the glare of the grinded
sword.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.118)

The world must be illuminated, nothing must be hidden; Sigurd is not disposed to secrecy, for light is also associated with openness and honesty. When Sigurd

⁴ There is a link with the Mime of Wagner's *Siegfried*, and perhaps also with *Thidreks Saga*, which is the only one of the sources in which Siegfried is an orphan. There is no indication that Morris was familiar with *Thidreks Saga*, so it is interesting that he should use this motif here; the reader is reminded of Mime's attempts to convince Siegfried that he has no father or mother, that Mime is his sole parent.

mounts to ride in search of Fafnir, it as if dawn is brought by him, or by his positive qualities; he is a metaphor for sunrise, illuminating even this dreary place:

And he sprang aloft to the saddle as he spake the latest word,
And the Wrath sang loud in the sheath as it ne'er had sung before,
And the cloudy flecks were scattered like flames on the heavens'
 floor,
And all was kindled at once, and that trench of the mountains grey
Was filled with the living light as the low sun lit the way.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.119)

The presence of Fafnir inhibits the sunrise, so the only light (= sunrise) emanates from Sigurd. Odin comes to help him again - unlike Wotan, who is unable to intervene, but can only watch. During this encounter, Sigurd treats Odin with respect and courtesy, and defers to his wisdom, since he guesses at his identity, but there is a hint that Sigurd's brightness may, at least temporarily, outshine that of the gods.

..... but dim did his the bright shape grow
As a man from the litten doorway fades into the dusk of night;
And the sun in the high-noon shone, and the world was exceeding
 bright.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.81)

After Sigurd has killed Fafnir, the sun shines again, the world seems to be reborn, and perhaps Sigurd himself has gone through some kind of initiation into manhood:

And he laughed at the heavens above him for he saw the sun arise,
And Sigurd gleamed on the desert, and shone in the new-born light,
And the wind in his raiment wavered, and all the world was bright.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.124)

The narrator emphasises the brightness of the day, and repeats the contrast between Sigurd's brightness and the dark gloom of Regin's presence.

Sigurd wakes Brynhild at dawn:

And yet kneels Sigurd moveless her wakening speech to heed,
While soft the waves of the daylight o'er the starless heavens speed,
And the gleaming rays of the Shield-burg yet bright and brighter
 grow,
And the thin moon hangeth her horns dead-white in the golden
 glow.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.139)

And the lowly man exalted and the mighty brought alow,
 And they say, when the sun of summer shall come aback to the
 land,
 It shall shine on the fields of the tiller that fears no heavy hand;
 Then the sheaf shall be for the plougher, and the loaf for him that
 sowed,
 Through every furrowed acre where the Son of Sigmund rode.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.178)

It is after Grimhild's potion that Sigurd becomes associated with *dark* for the first time; darkness is able to conquer him, instead of being conquered by his brightness; *In the deedless dark he rideth*. As we have noted before, his marriage to Gudrun takes place in the autumn - the whole relationship is associated with autumn and decline. At the wedding, there is the first mention of him as being *fair as a star*, where perhaps the reader has learned to expect a reference to the sun. He is still called *the golden Sigurd*,

But the smile is departed from him, and the laugh of Sigurd the
 young,
 And of few words now is he waxen, and his songs are seldom sung.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.205)

The wooing of Brynhild for Gunnar takes place at night, a fitting time for a deed of darkness and betrayal, yet the imagery associated with Brynhild is still that of light and brightness:

And thereon a woman sitting in the golden place alone;
 Her face is fair and awful, and a gold crown girdeth her head,
 And a sword of the kings she beareth, and her sun bright hair is
 shed
 O'er the laps of the snow-white linen that ripples adown to her
 feet.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.214)

But now it becomes apparent that brightness need not be entirely positive, it can imply sadness and the cold brightness of the moon:

He rose and looked upon her; as the moon at her utmost height,
 So pale was the visage of Brynhild, and her eyes as cold and bright;
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.217)

During the last interview between Sigurd and Brynhild, in the midst of Sigurd's grief his imagery still associates him with sun, light, brightness:

A pillar of light all golden he stood on the sunlit floor;
 And his eyes were the eyes of Odin, and his face was the hope of
 the world,
 And his voice was the thunder of even when the bolt o'er the
 mountains is hurled;
 The fairest of all things fashioned he stood 'twixt life and death....
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.251)

6.2. Imagery of gold in *Sigurd the Volsung* and Morris's shorter poems

How significant is the use of colour imagery ? In the case of Sigurd, highly significant. Sigurd is not only associated with day, light, and brightness; there is also a cluster of images which refer to him as "gold", "golden". The midwives wrap Sigurd in gold cloth as soon as he is born:

Then lo, in the hall white raiment, as thither the damsels came,
 And amid the hands of the foremost was the woven gold aflame.
 Then she with the golden burden to the kingly high-seat stepped.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.73)

These lines from *Of Gripir's foretelling* should also be noted in this context:

 ...the walls are clear and bright,
 For they cast back to each other the golden Sigurd's light;
 Through the echoing ways of the house bright-eyed he wendeth
 along.

 ...
 As the earliest sun's uprising o'er the sea-plain draws a path
 Whereby men sail to the Eastwood and the dawn of another day,
 So the image of King Sigurd on the gleaming pavement lay.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.109)

Gripir is also introduced in association with gold - his gown was of mountain-gold. This may refer to the gold that is dug from the mountains rather than obtained

from the river, and which therefore may not have the evil connotations of Andvari's gold.⁵

As applied to Sigurd, *gold* has only positive connotations; it refers to the colour of his hair and his armour, and is also a metaphor for his innate goodness and heroic stature. In other contexts in the poem, there is a literal level at which gold is a precious metal after which the evil people lust,⁶ and the word *gold* has several layers of metaphorical meanings. Sigurd himself does not lust after the gold - specifically, he is not greedy for Fafnir's hoard, and neither does he lust after wealth in more general terms. This is also true of Wagner's Siegfried, who takes the Ring and the Tarnhelm from the hoard because the Woodbird tells him to, not because he appreciates their value. The evil characters lust after gold, or use the gold they already possess to try to obtain more, or to obtain other sources of wealth and power. Siggeir brings gold to woo Signy, and after the wedding-feast (interrupted by Odin), they all go to *gold-hung beds*. Siggeir tries to buy Odin's sword from Sigmund with gold and other precious metals; Signy on Siggeir's ship is called *a grief in the heart of the gold*.

When Signy tells Sigmund *As a picture all of gold thy life-days shalt thou see*, gold is seen as a framing device, a material for art and craft. (The metaphor of the carved or painted image was discussed in Chapter IV). Sigmund himself is not called *golden*, this epithet is reserved for Sigurd - perhaps because Sigurd is the greater hero? But there is a reference to Sigmund as an *image all of*

⁵ I am aware of the danger of finding a metaphor where none is intended; Morris may have used *mountain-gold* merely for the sake of the rhythm, although *river-gold* would have the same rhythmic effect. But it is perhaps worth noting that he did not choose a descriptive epithet such as *shining gold*, which would also have fitted the rhythm.

⁶ Stephen Sossaman, in *William Morris's "Sigurd the Volsung" and the Pre-Raphaelite Visual Aesthetic* (Pre-Raphaelite Review, 1/2. 1978, pp.81-90) draws attention to another aspect of the constant association of Sigurd with gold and brightness:

All heroes are presented in an aspect of gold ... most of the evil characters lust after gold, so that the color becomes the identifying mark of the good and the objective of the evil people." (Sossaman, p.89)

gold just before his last battle - and, on the rare occasions in the poem when Sigmund is associated with gold, it is in the context of the distancing framing device. During his time as an exile, he gains a reputation as *a lover of gold and of goods* - the sort of reputation outlaws always get, of course - and he makes himself *a golden sword*.⁷

The Gold - i.e. Andvari's Gold/Fafnir's Hoard bears a curse; it is, however, possible that gold in itself is neutral, and its value for good or evil depends upon the uses to which it is put.⁸ In this case, it is not without parallel to Wagner's Rhinegold, which is innocent or neutral unless the condition of obtaining it is fulfilled, and the condition is held to be impossible:

Alberich Eurem Taucherspiele
nur taugte das Gold?
Mir gält' es dann wenig!
(Das Rheingold ll. 247-249)

Loge Ein Tand ist's,
in des Wassers Tiefe,
lachenden Kindern zu Lust.
(Das Rheingold ll. 723-725)

Sigurd makes it clear to Regin that he will kill Fafnir and win the gold for him, but for love of adventure, not hope of gain:

And I long to look on the world and the glory of the earth,
And to deal in the dealings of men, and garner the harvest of
 worth.
(Sigurd the Volsung, p.108)

⁷ Which one must suppose to be a metaphor, or perhaps adopted solely for the sake of the rhyme or the metre, as a golden sword would not be much use - Odin's sword, which Sigmund actually uses in battle, is of course made of steel.

⁸ At one point, Andvari's gold is referred to by the narrator as *The thrice-cursed burden of greed and the grain from the needy won*. One wonders if this may be an oblique reference to capitalist modes of production. Although Morris was not yet an active Socialist, this could be an indication of the development of his Socialist ideas.

This again perhaps suggests that gold (precious metal) can be neutral in itself. The perception in Morris's poem of the gold as harbouring the potential for evil may be similar to the perception of the gold in Wagner's 1848 Prose Draft, *Der Nibelungen-Mythos als Entwurf zu einem Drama*.¹⁰ Regin laments that the gods have created, or at least made possible, the evil potential of gold (perhaps not specifically Andvari's gold, but gold in general):

And the world began to be such-like as the gods would have it to be,
In the womb of the woeful earth had they quickened the grief and the
gold.¹¹
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.84)

The gods in Morris's poem seem to bear a guilt similar to that borne by the gods in Wagner's Prose Sketch, although they do not further compound their guilt by trying to retain the gold; rather, they seem glad to get rid of it.

Interestingly, there is a scaldic kenning for *gold* which refers to it as *kafsunna* (sun of the deep), and even one in which it is called *Rfnar sol* (Sun of the Rhine). Morris was skilled as a translator of scaldic poetry, and it is inconceivable that he was not aware of these kennings, though Wagner probably did not know them, as his command of Old Norse was not great; he knew the *Poetic Edda* from Ludwig Ettmüller's translation.

In Morris's poem, Andvari's gold is hidden behind a waterfall near *a desert of dread in the uttermost part of the world*; gold in a negative environment. Andvari's greed for gold has caused him to lose everything, even the wisdom he once had:

¹⁰ Des klaren, edlen Rheingoldes bemächtigte sich Alberich

¹¹ The following lines are also of importance, as they are the most explicit reference to the potential of the gold either for good or evil;
How that gold was the seed of gold to the wise and the shapers of things,

*The hoarders of hidden treasure, and the unseen glory of rings;
But the seed of woe to the world and the foolish wasters of men,
And grief to the generations that die and spring again.*

And the bleak sun lighteth the wave-vault, and tells of the
 fruitless plain,
 And the showers that nourish nothing, and the summer come in
 vain.

(Sigurd the Volsung, p.91)

The description of Andvari's hoard

And the twain went into the rock-house and on fine gold they trod,
 And the walls shone bright, and brighter than the sun of the
 upper air.

How great was that treasure of treasures; and the Helm of Dread was
 there.

The world but in dreams had seen it; and there was the hauberk of
 gold;

None other is in the heavens, nor has earth of its fellow told.

(Sigurd the Volsung, p.93)

is repeated verbatim in the description of Fafnir's hoard.

Most of the women, starting with Hjordis, embroider with silk and gold.

Brynhild weaves:

But a web of gold is before her, and therein by her shuttle wrought

The early days of the Volsungs...

And the golden babe uplifted to the eyes of duke and thrall...

Then Sigurd stood and marvelled, for he saw his deeds that had
 been,

And the deeds of the days that should be, fair wrought in the golden
 sheen;

(Sigurd the Volsung, p.164)

She uses golden thread to depict the golden hero.

The Biblical reference is perhaps the crux of the matter:

And he laughs to scorn the treasure where thieves break through
and steal,

And the moth and the rust are corrupting;...¹²

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 181)

Sigurd doesn't need or covet Andvari's gold, but its existence is a lure to others.

On the expedition to woo Brynhild for Gunnar, the following ominous reference occurs; *Blood-red is the Helm of Aweing on the golden Sigurd's head*. Why would Sigurd need to wear the Helm of Aweing on what is supposed to be a peaceful journey? The imagery of the *blood-red Helm* is in striking contrast to *the golden Sigurd*. When Sigurd changes shapes with Gunnar he sees "himself" - and he sees *an image of gold* - exactly as Sigmund was depicted just before his last battle.

Another reminder of the negative associations of the gold occurs when Sigurd gives Andvari's Ring to Gudrun:

Yea, therefrom, from the seed of Andvari, the spark of the water
wan,

Sprang a flame of bitter trouble, and the death of many a man,
And the quenching of the kindreds, and the blood of the broken
troth

And the grievous need of the Niblungs and the Sorrow of Odin the
Goth.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.221)

Gold is also used by Morris in some of his shorter poems, for instance *Rapunzel*, although in *Sigurd* it has deeper resonances. *Rapunzel* uses the rather commonplace poetic device of *golden hair* to stand for the qualities of virtue that emanate from the heroine, who metamorphosises into *Golden*

¹² Matthew 6, 19-21

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal;

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust do corrupt, and where thieves break not through and steal;

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Guendolen when she leaves the witches' tower; the 'goldenness' emanates from her, because

Gold or gems she did not wear,
But her yellow rippled hair,
Like a veil, hid *Guendolen*.

'Twixt the sunlight and the shade
My rough hands so strangely made
Folded Golden *Guendolen*.

In the last section of the poem, *Guendolen*'s golden hair gives her power, which she can transfer to King *Sebald*:

KING SEBALD

I took my armour off,
Put on king's robes of gold;
Over her kirtle green
The gold fell fold on fold.

We rode through the town,
A gold crown on my head,
Through all the gold-hung streets.
"Praise God!" the people said.

Of the shorter poems, *The Eye of Crecy* is most concerned with gold in its literal and metaphorical meanings; we are introduced to a woman dressed in gold, and to the knight who admires her but is prevented by poverty from approaching her; he hopes that the outcome of the forthcoming battle may change this:

Gold on her head, and gold on her feet,
And gold where the hems of her kirtle meet,
And a golden girdle round my sweet-
Ah, qu'elle est belle, la Marguerite!

6.3. Sigurd's death and its aftermath

When Sigurd is born there is much emphasis on his piercing eyes, ¹³ and the reader remembers this when Gutthorm is prevailed upon to murder him. He hesitates to strike the fatal blow when he sees Sigurd eyes gleaming, and can only venture upon the deed when the hero's eyes are closed:

...but lo, how Sigurd lies,
As the carven dead that die not, with fair wide-open eyes,
And their glory gleameth on Guttorm, and the hate in his heart is
chilled.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.257)

Before he dies, Sigurd is able to sum up what he has made of his life:

I have done many deeds in my life-days, and all these, and my love, they
lie
In the hollow hand of Odin till the days of the world go by.
I have done and I may not undo, I have given and take not again,
Art thou other than I, Allfather, wilt thou gather my glory in vain?
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.259)

We are reminded here of the way Sigmund sums up his life:

13

In the bed there lieth a man-child, and his eyes look straight on the
sun,

...

Men say of the serving-women, when they cried on the joy of the
morn,

.....

Yet they shrank in their rejoicing before the eyes of the child,
So bright and dreadful were they; yea, though the spring morn
smiled,

...

Yet the hour seemed awful to them, and the hearts within them

burned

As though of fateful matters their souls were newly learned.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.71)

....I have lived no empty days,
 The Norms were my nursing mothers; I have won the people's praise.
 When the Gods for one deed asked me I ever gave them twain;
 Spendthrift of glory I was, and great was my life-days' gain;
 Now these shards have been my fellow in the work the gods would have,
 But today hath Odin taken the gift that once he gave.
 (Sigurd the Volsung, p.62)

Gunnar also sums up his life with his song in the snake pit. As we saw in Chapter IV, he takes on the role of Orpheus when he charms the deadly snakes with his music, and it is Gunnar who, long after Sigurd's death, and just before his own, pronounces the last epitaph for Sigurd. He is aware of his own guilt - complicity in the murder of Sigurd - but pays tribute to Sigurd's glory (this passage occurs before his song in the snake-pit; it is his response to Atli's demands for the gold);

With a dreadful voice cried Gunnar;" O fool, hast thou heard it told
 Who won the treasure aforetime and the ruddy rings of the Gold?
 It was Sigurd, child of the Volsungs, the best sprung forth from the
 best:

He rode from the North and the mountains and became my
 summer-guest,
 My friend and my brother sworn; he rode the Wavering Fire
 And won me the Queen of Glory and accomplished my desire;
 The praise of the world he was, the hope of the bidders in wrong,
 The help of the lowly people, the hammer of the strong;
 Ah, oft in the world henceforward shall the tale be told of the deed,
 And I, e'en I, will tell it in the day of the Niblungs' Need:
 For I sat night-long in my armour, and when light was wide o'er
 the land
 I slaughtered Sigurd my brother, and looked on the work of mine
 hand.

(Sigurd the Volsung, p.328)

How do people speak of Sigurd after his death? At first it seems hardly to matter,
 as the Niblungs have attained fame and glory:

But no tidings of Sigurd and Brynhild, and whoso remembers their
 days
 Turns back to the toil or the laughter from his words of lamenting
 or praise.
 Turns back to the glorious Gunnar, casts hope on the Niblung
 name,
 Doth deeds from the morn to the even and beareth no burden of
 shame.

(Sigurd the Volsung, p.277)

But Gudrun still remembers him. She is still called *the wife of the golden Sigurd*, not his widow. Gunnar and Hogni, before they die, remember Sigurd and praise him. They don't exactly express regret for what they have done, as this would not fit in with their ethos. Hogni's attitude is that if he wasn't prepared to prevent Sigurd's murder, then he is hardly going to pay much attention to Atli's threats.¹⁴ Gunnar's acknowledgement of Sigurd's worth has already been discussed. Gudrun's last words - that she was Sigurd's wife - are reminiscent of Brünnhilde's last words in *Götterdämmerung*: *Siegfried! Siegfried! sieh - selig grüßt dich dein Weib!*

14Thee shall I heed, or the longing of thy pride?
 I who heeded Sigurd nothing, who thrust mine oath aside,
 When the years were young and goodly and the summer bore
 increase.

Shall I crave my life of the greedy and pray for days of peace?
 I, who whetted the sword for Sigurd, and bared the blade in the morn,
 And smote ere the sun's uprising, and left my sister forlorn?
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.325)

6.4 Biblical references in *Sigurd the Volsung*

Especially interesting is Morris's use of Biblical imagery, and the Christ-like tendencies in the figure of Sigurd.

For he, the redeemer, the helper, the crown of all their worth,
They looked upon him and wondered, they loved, and they thrust
him forth.

The speech of the old man praising the birth of Sigurd (beginning *Hail, Dawn of the Day*) is a reference to the *Nunc Dimittis*. Sigurd as a child is noted for his intelligence. This recalls the *puer senex* topos of mediæval literature, and also the Biblical story of Christ in the temple among the doctors:

Now hath the child grown greater, and is keen and eager of wit
And full of understanding, and oft hath he joy to sit
And talk of weighty matters where the wise men meet for speech
And joyous he is moreover and blithe and kind with each.¹⁵
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.76)

The following passage, referring to the dead Sigurd, is also worthy of note, as it suggests a *Pietà*:¹⁶

All heed gave the maids and the warriors, and hushed was the spear-
thronged place,
As she stretched out her hand to Sigurd, and swept the linen away
From the lips that had holpen the people, and the eyes that had
gladdened the day;
She set her hand unto Sigurd, and turned the face of the dead
To the moveless knees of Gudrun.....
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.264)

¹⁵ Luke 2; 46-47 (Authorised Version)

And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions.

And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding.

¹⁶ Not necessarily an explicitly Biblical reference, but implying familiarity with Crucifixion iconography. Some of the references in the poem indicate Morris's familiarity with mediæval art, as J.M.S. Tompkins suggests in *William Morris: a guide to the poetry*: "the maidens that carry the new-born child to King Elf and his father, the Helper, recall the midwives in medieval art." (p.252)

6.5. Wagner's characterisation and presentation of Siegfried

We turn now to discussion of Wagner's Siegfried. My purpose here is to demonstrate that Wagner's Siegfried has some traits in common with Morris's Sigurd, but Siegfried remains a brash youth, who never attains maturity, although it may be that Wagner originally intended the audience to think that he does. In *Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde*, Wagner discusses his concept of the nature of revolution, before going on to discuss his original plans for what became the *Ring*, his revolutionary ideas being at this stage intimately involved with his plans for the Nibelungen drama. He states that he realised that a true revolution could not come from above, organised by intellectuals, but only from below, from purely human needs (*aus dem Drange des rein menschlichen Bedürfnisses*).¹⁷ It was in this spirit that he originally conceived of his Siegfried figure, which underwent such radical alterations in the course of composition. In discussing his studies of Germanic antiquity,¹⁸ Wagner explains how his interest in the Siegfried figure

¹⁷ "selbst öffentlich gegen die bloß politisch formelle Auffassung der Revolution, und für die Nothwendigkeit, daß der rein menschliche Kern derselben deutlich in das Auge gefaßt werde, mich auszusprechen. An dem Erfolge dieses Schrittes gewährte ich nun erst ersichtlich, wie es bei unseren Politikern um die Erkenntnis des Geistes der Revolution stand, und daß eine wirkliche Revolution nie von Oben, von Standpunkt der erlernten Intelligenz, sondern nur von Unten, aus dem Drange des rein menschlichen Bedürfnisses, zu Stande kommen kann."

(*Mitteilung*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. IV, p. 310)

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...gelangte ich Schritt für Schritt in das tiefere Altherthum hinein, wo ich denn endlich zu meinem Entzücken, und zwar eben dort im höchsten Altherthume, den jugendlich schönen Menschen in der üppigsten Frische seiner Kraft antreffen sollte. Meine Studien trugen mich so durch die Dichtungen des Mittelalters hindurch bis auf den grund des alten urdeutschen Mythos; ein Gewand nach dem anderen, das ihm die spätere Dichtung entstellend umgeworfen hatte, vermochte ich von ihm abzulösen, um ihn so endlich in seiner keuschesten Schönheit zu erblicken. Was ich hier ersah, war nicht mehr die historisch konventionelle Figur, an der uns das Gewand mehr als die wirkliche Gestalt interessieren muß; sondern der wirkliche, nackte Mensch, an dem ich jede Wallung des Blutes, jedes Zucken der kraftigen Muskeln, in

developed; he considered that the representation of Siegfried in the *Nibelungenlied* had acquired far too many literary overtones, and that he was only able to conceive of him as the hero of a drama once he had penetrated to what he considered to be the original myth. Wagner next informs the reader of his gradual realisation that *Siegfrieds Tod* was insufficient alone, and of his decision to precede it with *Der junge Siegfried*. He concludes *Ich beabsichtigte meinen Mythos in drei vollständigen Dramen vorzuführen, denen ein großes Vorspiel vorauszugehen hat.*

It is curious to note that Morris has been criticised for providing the story of Sigurd with both a "prologue" and an "epilogue", as readers considered the story of Sigurd to be complete in itself (although this is not in fact the case),¹⁹ whereas Wagner came to realise during work on *Siegfrieds Tod* that this story is not complete in itself, and that it was not sufficient for the events leading up to the death to be narrated, they had to be shown on the stage.

uneingeengter, freier Bewegung erkennen durfte, der wahre Mensch überhaupt.

(*Mitteilung*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. IV, pp.311-312)

...Hatte mich nun schon längst die herrliche Gestalt des Siegfried angezogen, so entzückte sie mich doch vollends erst, als es mir gelungen war, sie, von aller späteren Umkleidung befreit, in ihrer reinsten menschlichen Erscheinung vor mir zu sehen. Erst jetzt auch erkannte ich die Möglichkeit, ihn zum Helden eines Dramas zu machen, was mir nie eingefallen war, so lange ich ihn nur aus dem mittelalterlichen Nibelungenliede kannte.

(*ibid*, p.312)

...Ich war mit der Konzeption des "Siegfried" bis dahin vorgedrungen, wo ich den Menschen in der natürlichsten, heitersten Fülle seiner sinnlich belebten Kundgebung vor mir sah.

(*ibid.* p.328)

(Siegfried) war mir der männlich verkörperte Geist der ewig und einzig zeugenden Unwillkür, des wirkers wirklicher Thaten, des Menschen in der Fülle höchster, unmittelbarer Kraft und zweifellosester Lebenswürdigkeit.

(*ibid.*, p.328)

¹⁹ The views of Francis Hueffer and J.W. Mackail were quoted in Chapter I.

In the *Prose Sketch* of 1848, Siegfried is still seen as the central figure²⁰ but during the process of composition, Wagner's interest shifted to the characters of Wotan and Brünnhilde. For our purposes it is necessary to trace how Wagner's perception of the nature of the hero changes from the optimism of 1848, where Siegfried is the hero of the *Prose Sketch*, to the completed work, in which (a) Wotan is the hero/central character (b) Brünnhilde is the Redeemer. Did Wagner conceive of Siegfried as a type of Christ? Not, I think, in the completed *Ring*, but possibly in some of the earlier drafts. In the completed *Ring* it is Brünnhilde who is the Redeemer; if, that is, we are to conclude that the world is redeemed at the end of *Götterdämmerung*. Brünnhilde demands Siegfried's death to atone for his treachery and her shame. When she demands his death (Act II of *Götterdämmerung*), she is presumably not thinking of world-redemption, but of revenge. The question arises, would she be able to redeem the world without Siegfried's death? What role, exactly, does Siegfried's death play in the redemption of the world? In early versions of the text, Siegfried is the Redeemer - Christ-like in that he atones for a guilt he has not himself committed, as Wagner outlined in *Der Nibelungen-Mythos*:

...Wotan selbst kann aber das Unrecht nicht tilgen, ohne ein neues Unrecht zu begehen; nur ein, von den Göttern selbst unabhängiger, freier Wille, der alle Schuld auf sich selbst zu laden und zu büßen im Stande ist, kann den Zauber lösen, und in dem Menschen ersehen die Götter die Fähigkeit zu solchem freien Willen.²¹

(*Der Nibelungen-Mythos, Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. I, p.158*)

²⁰ We may note the following remark from Carolyn Abbate's *Unsung Voices*; "Anderssen (in *The Legend of Brynhild*) asks, why has Siegfried ever been seen as the "hero" of ancient legends that so obviously center on Brynhild? One might echo his plaint by asking why Wagner, having written a tetralogy whose central figure is Brünnhilde, continued to pen Hegelian rhapsodies to his pallid world-historical hero, Siegfried." (p.211)

²¹ In Wagner's early drafts, there was more emphasis on the guilt of the gods towards the Nibelungs, and on freeing the latter from their servitude, as Elizabeth Magee points out; "In the *Mythos* the plight of the Nibelungs is the chief item in the gods' guilt, for they had it in their power to restore freedom to the dwarfs but they chose not to do so ... in Wagner's original

The gods look for their hero in the human race, but

Immer ist aber der rechte Held noch nicht geboren, in dem die selbstständige Kraft zum vollen Bewußtsein gelangen soll, so daß er fähig sei, aus freiem Willen, die Todesbüßung vor den Augen, seine kühnste That sein eigen zu nennen.

(ibid., p.158)

In the final scene of *Siegfrieds Tod* Siegfried's role as Redeemer is emphasised.

This is not the case in the completed *Ring*.

Schlußszene, *Siegfrieds Tod*.

Brünnhilde Hab' Dank nun, Hagen!
 Wie ich dich hieß,
 wo ich dich wies,
 hast du für Wotan ihn gezeichnet -
 zu dem ich nun mit ihm ziehe.

...Nur einer herrsche,
 Allvater! Herrlicher Du!
 Freue dich des freiesten Helden!
 Siegfried führ' ich dir zu;
 biet' ihm minnlichen Gruß,
 dem Bürger ewiger Macht!

Hagen wendet sich rasch und wirft, bereit, sich in die Lohe zu stürzen, Speer und Schild von sich. Plötzlich leuchtet aus der Gluth ein blendend heller Glanz auf; auf düstrem Wolkensaume [gleichsam dem Dampf des erstickten Holzfeuers] erhebt sich der Glanz, in welchem man Brünnhild erblickt, wie sie, behelmt und in strahlendem Waffenschmucke, auf leuchtendem Rosse, als Walküre, Siegfried an der Hand durch die Lüfte geleitet.

In *Siegfrieds Tod* the ending is unequivocally triumphant, although even at this stage the emphasis is more on Brünnhilde than on Siegfried. Is there ever a stage at which he alone is perceived as the redeemer? Perhaps this is implied in *Der Nibelungen-Mythos*, in which Brünnhilde's funeral oration for Siegfried suggests that she sees Siegfried as the Redeemer and herself as his successor:

Nibelungen concept the fate of the oppressed dwarves was a major concern." (Richard Wagner and the Nibelungs, p.73)

Du übermuthiger Held, wie hieltest du mich gebannt! All mein Wissen verrieth ich dir, dem Sterblichen, und mußte so meiner Weisheit verlustig sein; du nutztest es nicht, auf dich allein nur verließest du dich; nun du es frei geben mußt durch den Tod kommt mir mein Wissen wieder, und dieses Ringes Runen erkenne ich. Der Urgestzes Runen kenn' ich nun auch, der Nornen alten Spruch! Hört denn, ihr herrlichen Götter, euer Unrecht ist getilgt; dankt ihm, dem Helden, der eure Schuld auf sich nahm. Er gab es nun in meine Hand, das Werk zu vollenden; gelöset sei der Nibelungen Knechtschaft, der Ring soll sie nicht mehr binden. Nicht soll ihn Alberich empfangen; der soll nicht mehr euch knechten; dafür sei er aber selbst auch frei wie ihr. Denn diesen Ring stelle ich euch zu, weise Schwestern der Wassertiefe; die Gluth, die mich verbrennt, soll das böse Kleinod reinigen; ihr löset ihn auf und bewahret es harmlos, das Rheingold, das euch geraubt, um Knechtschaft und Unheil daraus zu schmieden. Nur einer herrsche, Allvater, herrlicher, du! Daß ewig deine Macht sei, führ' ich dir diesen zu; empfangen ihn wohl, er ist dess' werth! (emphasis added)

As Wagner's conception of the *Ring* developed, however, there came a shift in emphasis, so that the focus of attention is on Wotan and Brünnhilde, not on Siegfried - in a way, he ceases to be relevant to her development as a person.²² In her rage and grief in *Götterdämmerung*, Brünnhilde demands Siegfried's death as atonement for the guilt of all who betrayed her, and it is not here suggested that Siegfried's death will atone for the guilt of the gods, that his death will be redemptive in a Christian sense, just that he should atone for *his own* guilt and for that of the Gibichungs:

Wär' ich gerecht,
 alles Blut der Welt
 büßte mir nicht eure Schuld!
 Doch des einen Tod taugt mir für alle -
 Siegfried falle,
 zur Sühne für sich und euch!
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act II, ll.8307-8313)

²² It would perhaps be interesting to investigate this further - just how different is Siegfried from the tenors in so many nineteenth century Italian operas? So many of Verdi's operas are not "about" the tenor at all, they are about the heroine and her father - the tenor exists so that the heroine and her father can fulfil their destinies. I have mentioned the King Lear topos earlier; many, if not most, of Verdi's operas deal with this theme, and one may come to the conclusion that Siegfried's role does not differ in essentials from that of any *bel canto* tenor; it is the *soprano* (and sometimes the baritone as well) who is the focus of interest; dramatically and musically, the tenor is a foil to her, rather than existing in his own right .

Brünnhilde's funeral oration takes up the theme of Siegfried's treachery. Although she now understands that he betrayed her unwittingly, still the emphasis is on the suffering she had to undergo, through Siegfried's betrayal, in order to gain wisdom - *Mich mußte der Reinste verraten, ldaß wissend würde ein Weib!* She does not say, as she did in earlier drafts, that the guilt of the gods is wiped out by Siegfried taking the burden of their guilt upon himself; she says instead that Siegfried has fallen victim to the same curse to which the gods were subject:

Durch seine tapferste Tat,
 dir so tauglich erwünscht,
 weihtest du den,
 der sie gewirkt,
 dem Fluche, dem du verfielst.
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act III, ll.8882-8886)

and that it is for her now, by her suicide, to lift the curse.

Siegfried never really attain the status of an autonomous subject. He lets himself be manipulated into doing what all the other characters expect from him, and is not, in the final analysis, any more free than Siegmund.²³ Wotan states his dilemma clearly to Fricka - the gods need a free hero to do the deed which Wotan cannot do. He elaborates upon this to Brünnhilde; he needs a free agent who will do of his own free will that which Wotan so desperately needs him to do.²⁴ What in

²³ It is suggested by Lutz Eberhard Seelig in *Brünnhildes christlich erlösender Liebestod*, that "Siegfried unterwirft sich zunächst nicht den Gesetzen und ist in diesem Sinne der von Wotan gewollte freie Mensch. Mit beginn der Götterdämmerung, genau genommen mit der Erweckung Brünnhildes, ist es vorbei mit Siegfrieds Freiheit." (pp.296-297) I would go further, and say that Siegfried is never really free.

²⁴ Nur einer dürfte, was ich nicht darf;
 ein Held, dem helfend nie ich mich neigte,
 der fremd dem Gotte, frei seiner Gunst,
 unbewußt, ohne Geheiß,
 aus eig'ner Not,
 mit der eig'nen Wehr,
 schüfe die Tat, die ich scheuen muß,

fact happens, of course, is that Brünnhilde turns out to be the free agent who in the end performs the deed that Wotan needs so desperately to be done; Wotan is unable to recognise this, and punishes her defiance when he should reward it; although if he rewards it, she would presumably cease to be a free agent anyway.

A.T. Winterbourne's article *Wagner's 'Ring' and the Nature of Freedom; some Kantian Speculations* (British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol. 28, No. 4, Autumn 1988) offers some helpful pointers in the discussion of the problematical nature of Siegfried's 'freedom'. He suggests that

"the characters [in the Ring] seem... to be unquestionably part of a world which could be described independently of the stage action, and are hence characters in an 'open' drama. "(p.342)

It is argued that

"The moral dilemmas set out in the Ring belong to the mainstream of philosophical thinking in the nineteenth century, with its roots in Kant, and cannot be fully grasped without it...According to Kant, freedom is the property that causality has of being effective independently of determination by alien causes... Siegfried's freedom, we might suppose, is noumenal and real, in the full Kantian sense, whereas Brünnhilde's is illusory. She is really not much more than an agent for Wotan, at least in her original incarnation.

Now, if Siegfried's freedom is real, then his choices are real too. But since an essential element of rationality is missing ²⁵... we cannot say that Siegfried is rational man in action. Not knowing one important human emotion, Siegfried lacks one crucial Kantian component; he does not choose what to do by balancing duty against inclination. He

wünscht sie auch einzig mein Wunsch.
 Der entgegen dem Gott für mich föchte,
 den freundlichen Feind, wie fänd ich ihn?
 Wie schüf' ich den Freien,
 den nie ich schirmte,
 der in eig'nem Trotze der traueste mir?
 (*Die Walküre*, Act II)

²⁵ i.e. fear; he hasn't conquered fear, he is just unaware of it, so he is not acting bravely, just intuitively. This brings us to Siegfried's need to learn what fear is. The *Märchen - Von einem, der auszog, um das Fürchten zu lernen* - is humorous, in the sense of slapstick farce, and this is to some extent reflected in *Siegfried*. The boy in the *Märchen* learns fear through something trivial, a trick that his wife plays on him. Robert Donington, in *Wagner's 'Ring' and its symbols*, argues convincingly that learning fear is a necessary part of becoming an integrated personality, of coming to terms with one's shadow.

acts as he does because he is driven by inclinations which he is not rational enough to control."

(*ibid.*, pp.347-348)

I dispute Winterbourne's claim that Brünnhilde's freedom is illusory - surely it is only Brünnhilde who attains to a state of moral awareness that enables her to make free choices. Brünnhilde prophesies that Siegfried will be *der hehrste Held der Welt* and she plans - before he is even born - that she will be his wife. She is perhaps not entirely clear that together they will redeem the world, or at least be given the chance to do so; at the end of *Die Walküre* she is not thinking that far ahead, is not fully aware that her union with Siegfried is to have cosmic significance; only after Siegfried's death does she fully understand. Brünnhilde and Wotan agree that Siegfried shall be the one to awaken her. She puts it in terms of being saved from humiliation, when she begs that only a free, fearless hero shall awaken her; she does not need to name Siegfried, as the Siegfried motif is played by the orchestra. What Brünnhilde and Wotan plan for Siegfried surely negates any idea that he could possibly be a free agent; in my view, Siegfried's freedom is completely illusory. He seems to attain neither freedom nor maturity, though this may have been Wagner's original intention.

The confrontation with Wotan is a test for Siegfried - is he prepared to stand up to Wotan and assert his independence? Of course he is; he has no respect for the wisdom of age, being full of the arrogance of youth:

Wotan. Geduld, du Knabe!
Dünk' ich dich alt,
so sollst du mir Achtung bieten!

Siegfried Das wär nicht übel!
So lang ich lebe
stand mir ein Alter stets im Wege;
den hab' ich nun fortgefegt!
Stemmst du dort länger dich steif mir entgegen,
sieh dich vor, mein' ich,
daß du nicht wie Mime fährst!
(*Siegfried*, Act III ll.6356-6367)

Wagner did find a precedent for this scene in VS, in which Odin intervenes to help Siegfried choose a horse, and advises him on the best way to kill the dragon. For Wagner, the emphasis in the scene is very much on Wotan - his last appearance on the stage, his last attempt *zu hemmen ein rollendes Rad*. The meetings between Sigurd and Odin in Morris's poem were discussed elsewhere. The contrast is striking, especially the contrast between the respect Sigurd shows for Odin (probably suspecting his identity) and the lack of courtesy Siegfried shows to Wotan, and the almost casual way in which he shatters the god's spear before going on his way.

How does Wagner intend the audience to perceive Siegfried? The stage directions introduce him as follows:

Siegfried, in wilder Waldkleidung, mit einem silbernen Horn an einer Kette, kommt mit jähem Ungestüm aus dem Walde herein; er hat einen großen Bären mit einem Bastseile gezäumt, und treibt diesen mit lustigem Ungestüme gegen Mime an.

The combination of *lustig* and *Übermuth* is unusual. *Übermuth* and *Ungestüm* are not, surely, positive qualities. In *Das Nibelungenlied* there are several references to Sîvrit's *ubermuot* - this is definitely not a positive quality for the mediæval poet - any mediæval poet - as it translates *superbia*, a deadly sin. Perhaps we could tentatively suggest that Siegfried's *Übermuth* and *Ungestüm* are to be somehow "tamed" by Brünnhilde.²⁶

One of the main differences between Wagner's Siegfried and Morris's Sigurd is that the latter is integrated into society, while Siegfried never is. In *Sigurd*, Brynhild is the one who is never fully integrated: Hogni says of her *She came to dwell among us, but in us she had no part*.

It is possible that Wagner may have intended his Siegfried to be someone who has *potential* good qualities loyalty, for instance - which never quite get the chance to develop. This is certainly how Brünnhilde sums him up in her funeral oration.

²⁶ One may compare Kriemhild's falcon dream in NL, in which Siegfried's wildness is to be tamed by her love.

CHAPTER VIIODIN/WOTAN7.1. Introductory remarks

One of the main differences between the *Ring* and *Sigurd* is the way the gods are depicted and perceived, although both Morris and Wagner borrow at least some of the characteristics of the Odin of Norse mythology, as in the following extract from *Snorra Edda*:

Odin is highest and most ancient of the Aesir. He rules all things, and mighty though the other gods are, yet they all submit to him like children to their father....Odin is called *All-Father*, for he is the father of all gods. He is also called *Val-father* (Father of the Slain), since all those who fall in battle are his adopted sons. He assigns them places in Valhall and Vingolf, and then they are known as *Einheriar*. He is also called *Hanga-god* (God of the hanged), *Hapta-god* (god of prisoners) and *Farma-god* (God of cargoes).¹

Not all the characteristics of Odin, as listed by Snorri, are adapted into the *Ring* and *Sigurd*, but Morris sometimes assumes on the part of the reader a basic knowledge of Old Norse mythology, in which Odin is known as the god of poetry.² This aspect of his nature does not appear to have been of interest to either Wagner or Morris, but it may not be entirely absent from Wagner's sub-text. I have suggested that Wotan's psychic development is a development from articulacy to silence, because in silence he cannot deceive either himself or others with (false) eloquence. Waltraute's narration to Brünnhilde in *Götterdämmerung* emphasises Wotan's silence:

Mit stummem Wink
Walhalls Edle

¹ Odin has many names ; the following are listed in the *Prose Edda*.

Allfather
Herran/Herian (Lord of Hosts)
Nikarr/Hnikarr (Spear-Lord)
Nikuz/Hnikuðr (Striker)
Fiðlnir (Knower of many things)
Oske (Fulfiller of wishes)
Omi (Far-speaking one)
Biflindi (The Shaker or He that Putteth the Armies to Flight)
Sviðarr (Burner)
Sviðrir (Destroyer)
Viðrir (Protector)
Iálg/Iálkr (Gelding)

² See Appendices

wies er zum Forst,
die Weltesche zu fällen.

....

Der Götter Rat
ließ er berufen;
den Hochsitz nahm
heilig er ein;

.....

So sitzt er,
sagt kein Wort,
auf hehrem Sitze
stumm und ernst;

(Götterdämmerung, Act I, ll.7537-7540, 7545-7556)
(emphasis added)

By this stage, the World Ash-Tree has become a ragender Hauf ; previously (in *Das Rheingold*) Walhall was die ragende Burg, but now the wood for kindling surrounds Walhall, and Wotan has accepted the inevitability of annihilation.

7.2. Odin and the gods in *Sigurd the Volsung*

In *Sigurd*, the gods are presumed to act for the good of humanity - specifically, Odin is presumed to act for the good of the Volsungs, and he has not led them into conditions of suffering so that they can solve his problems for him, as has Wotan. Wotan is the central character of the *Ring* although this was not Wagner's original intention. Morris does not deviate from his intention of having Sigurd as the hero of his poem.

In *Sigurd*, the idea is that gods and men will stand together at the last battle. This idea is not entirely absent from the *Ring*, but the focus is different. Wotan has not created the human race out of benevolence, and this does seem to be at least partly the case in *Sigurd*.

On his first appearance in *Sigurd*, Odin is carrying an axe, but this axe has none of the many-layered significance of Wotan's spear.

Then into the Volsung dwelling a mighty man there strode,
One-eyed and seeming ancient, yet bright his visage glowed;
Cloud-blue was the hood upon him, and his kirtle gleaming-grey
As the latter morning sundog when the storm is on the way;
A bill ³ he bore on his shoulder, whose mighty ashen beam
Burnt bright with the flame of the sea ⁴ and the blended silver's gleam.

³ axe

⁴ kenning for *gold*

And such was the guise of his raiment as the Volsung elders had told
Was borne by their fathers' fathers, and the first that warred in the wold.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.5)

warred in the wold is perhaps somewhat Wagnerian (or influenced by Forman's translation of Wagner?) e.g. *wold* for the rhyme and the alliteration.

On Odin's subsequent appearances, the above description is repeated more or less verbatim, so that it functions as a verbal leitmotif, especially his appearance as *one-eyed and seeming ancient*.⁵ The axe is mentioned again, but it seems to have less importance than his lack of an eye, and his grey cloak and blue hood.

He appears twice to Sigurd, first when he helps the boy choose a horse,⁶ and for the second and last time when he gives Sigurd advice about how to kill the Serpent. Sigurd's response here is radically different from Siegfried's response to Wotan in the *Ring*,⁷ which takes place after Siegfried has killed the dragon. The difference may lend weight to my contention that *Sigurd* was conceived as an anti-*Ring*.

Sigurd is not focussed on Odin, but on men and women, some of whom admittedly are descended from him or were involved with him in some way. The meeting with Sigurd mentioned above is the last time that he appears in person in

⁵ Sinfjolti's death:

But therein was a man most mighty, grey-clad like the mountain cloud,
One-eyed and seeming ancient

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.54)

Sigmund's death:

But lo, through the hedge of the war-shafts a mighty man there came,
One-eyed and seeming ancient, but his visage shone like flame;
Gleaming-grey was his kirtle, and his hood was cloudy blue;
And he bore a mighty twi-bill, as he waded the fight-sheaves through.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.60)

6 .

...but lo, a grey-clad man,
One-eyed and seeming ancient, there met him by the way;

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.80)

7

Then content in Sigurd groweth because of his majesty -

.....
Said the child, "I shall do thy bidding, and for thee shall I strike the stroke;
For I love thee, friend of my fathers, Wise Heart of the holy folk."

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.122)

Sigurd, but he does not withdraw because he has been defeated, as Wotan does - *Zieh' hin! Ich kann dich nicht halten*. There is a marked difference between the courtesy with which Sigurd speaks to Odin and Sigurd's rudeness to Wotan - Wotan is perhaps not deserving of respect in any case, and it is precisely in these meetings with the young hero that the difference between Morris's Odin and Wagner's Wotan is most apparent. Siegfried knows no reason why he should treat the old man with respect; Sigurd, on the other hand, knows no reason why he should not, especially as he guesses at his identity:

Wouldst thou have red gold for thy tidings? Art thou Gripir's horse-herd
then?

Nay sure, for thy visage is shining like the battle-eager men
My master Regin tells of; and I love thy cloud-grey gown,
And thy visage gleams above it like a thing my dreams have known.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.80) ⁸

It is also hinted, as we saw in Chapter VI, that Sigurd's brightness might eclipse that of the gods, if only temporarily - but it is not suggested that the brightness of the gods is false and deceitful, as it is in *Das Rheingold*.

In Morris's poem, when Odin places the sword in the tree, he states that

The folk of the war-wand's forgers ⁹ wrought never better steel
Since first the burg of heaven uprose for man-folk's weal.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.6)

It is not explicitly stated in the Norse mythology that the *burg of heaven* (Asgard or Valhall) was created for the good of humanity, but in Morris's poem *Volsung* and the others seem to be aware of the idea that gods and men are fated to stand together at *Ragnarøk*;

...Yea, this ¹⁰ shall I have in my hand
When mid the host of Odin in the Day of Doom I stand.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p. 8)

⁸ Morris hardly ever uses pararhyme as in the pair *gown/known* - it might sound rather clumsy if read aloud.

⁹dwarves

¹⁰sword

Sigmund reveals that he too is aware of the special relationship between Odin and the Volsungs, when he narrates to Signy how he escaped from Siggeir's captivity and killed the she-wolf sent to destroy him. ¹¹ These lines indicate Sigmund's awareness of what is to happen at Ragnarøk:

But now was I wroth with the Gods, that had made the Volsungs for naught
And I said; in the Day of their Doom a man's help shall they miss;

...
...my teeth took hold the first
and amid her ¹² mighty writhings the bonds that bound me burst,
As with Fenrir's Wolf it shall be; ¹³
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.24)

Sigurd also knows that the Volsungs are destined to help the gods in their last battle:

And for e'en such work was I fashioned, lest the songcraft come to nought,
When the harps of God-home tinkle, and the gods are at stretch to hearken;
Lest the hosts of the gods be scanty when their day hath begun to darken.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.82)

The Volsungs - Volsung and Sigmund especially - are aware that they are highly valued by Odin. They are descended from him, but this is not foregrounded in the poem, whereas of course in the *Ring* it is absolutely vital. Volsung and Sigmund identify their interests with those of Odin. ¹⁴ Volsung, for instance, says of himself:

Yea, I am the hired of Odin, his workday will to speed.
And the harvest-tide shall be heavy. What then, were it come and past
And I laid by the last of the sheaves with my wages earned at the last?
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.9)

The idea that Odin owes them something - or the metaphor of earning their due (wage) from Odin - is expressed several times, both by Volsung and by Sigmund. ¹⁵

¹¹ In some sources, Siggeir's mother in disguise . Morris's poem doesn't hint at this.

¹² The she-wolf

¹³ The Fenris Wolf is an enemy of the gods; he is bound in unbreakable fetters. During the course of binding him, he struggled so fiercely that he bit off the hand of the god Tyr. His bonds will be loosed on the day of the Doom of the Gods.

¹⁴ I noted in Chapter VI that Sigurd identifies his interests with those of the Niblungs, rather than with those of Odin, or even those of the Volsungs.
¹⁵

Then he [Volsung] cried; "Lo now, Allfather, is not the swathe well-shorn?
Wouldst thou have me toil forever, nor win the wages due?"

There is no suggestion that Odin intervenes in Sigmund's life to the extent of arranging his marriage to Hjordis, but the sub-text indicates that Sigurd's birth has been fated, fore-ordained, either by the gods or by the Norns, and Sigmund is certainly aware of this. At no time, however, is the suggestion made in *Sigurd the Volsung* that the gods created the Volsungs in order to redeem them or expiate their guilt. Sigurd is indeed stated to be the Redeemer, in explicitly Christian and Biblical terms, but he is the redeemer of humanity, not of the gods. However, the fact that Morris concludes the poem with a reference to *The Sorrow of Odin the Goth* may indicate that he was more influenced by Wagner than he realised or was prepared to admit; the idea may bear some resemblance to *Götternot!! Der Traurigste bin ich von allen!* The story of Sigurd is "framed", as it were, by *The Sorrow of Odin the Goth*. This is one of the many framing devices used by Morris to distance the reader from the narrative, so that it becomes a story within a story seen within a frame, and there are also references within the poem to framing devices.¹⁶ But there are few references in the actual poem, as the narrative unfolds, to Odin's sorrow; it is not a central concern of the poem, whereas Wotan's sorrow, dilemma and rage are the central concern of the *Ring*. Morris's poem is much more focussed on his human protagonists - they may be god-born, or god-descended, but it is their fate as human beings that interested the poet. But surely the gods of Morris's poem do bear some guilt, in their relationship

¹⁶ Another framing device is the story of Sigmund, Sigurd's father. The use of framing devices and patterning is as characteristic of Morris's narrative art as it is of his work in the visual arts, as is suggested by Norman Kelvin in his article *Patterns in time; the decorative and the narrative in the works of William Morris* (C.U.P. 1989). He only mentions *Sigurd* in passing, but what he has to say about *The Earthly Paradise* has some relevance to all Morris's narrative art, especially the longer poems. He argues that the framing device "creates a story within a story, a narrative within a narrative ... there are actually two frames to *The Earthly Paradise*; a series of monthly lyrics, and the frame figures of Greeks and Norsemen". (p.148) Framing devices are not used in the earlier poems, and are perhaps not suitable for shorter poems in any case; *The Defence of Guenevere*, for instance, begins very abruptly, without any attempt to "set the scene" or place the narrative in any kind of frame; *But knowing now that they would have her speak*"

with the dwarves, in the fact that they created the (potential for) greed. ¹⁷ In Regin's long narrative to Sigurd in Book II of the poem, he implies that it was the gods who, if they did not deliberately create evil and greed, certainly unleashed the potential:

Then we fell to the working of metal, and the deeps of the earth would
know,

.....

And the world began to be such-like as the gods would have it to be;
In the womb of the woeful earth had they quickened the grief and the gold.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.84) (emphasis added)

The above extract is very interesting; to begin with, it is convenient for Morris that *womb* and *woeful* alliterate, as the alliteration enables the point to be emphasised.¹⁸ These lines function as a contrast to *Das Rheingold*, which starts with Alberich stealing the gold - although we later learn that it was Wotan who committed the *Ur-Frevel* by cutting the branch from the World-Ash-Tree. Alberich is the one who brings greed into the world, but evidently the gods are not immune from this; quite the contrary, in fact. Wagner's gods don't *quicken the grief and the gold*, as Morris's gods do; that is, Regin's narrative - this is being narrated from Regin's point of view - implies that it is the gods who are responsible for awakening greed for gold. He also makes the point that the gold comes from the earth, not from the river; can we perhaps assume that he is making a general point about greed for gold here, and only later refers specifically to Andvari's gold? And as far as anyone knows, Andvari possesses the gold legitimately, none of the sources suggest that he may have obtained it fraudulently - the gods obtain it fraudulently from him.

¹⁷ In *William Morris : a guide to the poetry* , J.M.S. Tompkins suggests that ;
Into this pre-moral world [of the dwarves] come the Gods,
teaching good and evil and imposing toil and sorrow. In
this they represent the developing human intellect. They
make oaths and are bound by them, and they have a purpose
for life on earth and the men they have made. Under this
pressure the amorality of the dwarves becomes barren and
destructive. (p.270)

¹⁸ This is not the only time within the poem that the earth is associated with the idea of the womb, of giving birth, but usually she gives birth to something other than grief, especially in the cluster of images of fruitfulness and achievement associated with the birth of Sigurd.

Regin's narrative is a textual crux, explaining his attitude and the role of the gods. The gods made the world according to their specifications, which made the dwarves envious, as it reduced their power. ¹⁹ But - Reidmar (father of Regin, Fafnir and Otter) is covetous, and it is not suggested that this is influenced by the gods in any way, rather that he is covetous by nature. Regin also seems to be implying that the dwarves learned all their craft skill as a result of the gods' intervention - *Then we fell to the working of metal.*

Brynhild's opinion of Odin is not very favourable, though this is clearer in the draft than in the published version. In a passage not included in the published version of the poem, but quoted by May Morris in her biography of her father (*William Morris ; Artist, Writer, Socialist*), Brynhild has a lengthy narration in which she informs Sigurd (or ; in which, through her, the narrator informs the audience) about her conflict with Odin; this is not dissimilar to Brünnhilde's conflict with Wotan. In the published version of the poem, her conflict with Odin is conveyed much more concisely, not to say elliptically, as we noted in Chapter 5. She criticises the indifference of the gods; this perhaps contradicts the idea that the gods care about the continued welfare of their creation, but serves to reinforce the idea of Odin's capriciousness:

And he cried; 'Thou hast thought in thy folly that the Gods have friends and
foes,
That they wake, and the world wends onward, that they sleep, and the world
slips back;
That they laugh, and the world's weal waxeth, that they frown and fashion
the wrack;
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.141)

Odin here reproaches Brynhild with imagining that the gods are subject to human feelings and emotions. Her criticism of them - akin to that of Wagner's Brünnhilde - is precisely that they are not. Her idea of how men should behave towards the gods is no

19

For belike no fixèd semblance we had in the days of old,
Till the gods were waxen busy, and all things their form must take
That knew of good and evil, and longed to gather and make.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.84)

doubt based on personal experience of Odin - and it expresses the ethos which most of the characters in *Sigurd* profess to believe in.

Love thou the gods - and withstand them, lest thy fame should fail in the
 end,
 And thou be but their thrall and their bondsman, who wert born for their
 very friend;
 For few things from the gods are hidden, and the hearts of men they know,
 And how that none rejoiceth to quail and crouch alow.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.143)

7.3 Wotan in the *Ring* ; sources in Classical and Norse literature

There is of course considerably more to say about Wagner's Wotan than about the Odin of Morris's poem, as Wagner made the god into the central character of his tetralogy. I start with a suggestion made by Volker Mertens in the *Wagner Handbuch*:

Der Streit zwischen Wotan und Fricka dürfte auf eine Bemerkung Grimms zurückgehen, daß Frigg einen von Odin Begünstigten in Nachteil gebracht habe.
 (*Richard Wagner und das Mittelalter*, p.38)

This is possible, but it is more likely that the precedent is the scene in the *Iliad* in which Zeus and Hera dispute over the fate of Sarpedon. This is suggested by Simon Goodhill in the Covent Garden *Ring* programme, Oct 1991; I give his reasoning in full because it reminds us again of the relative significance of the literary sources of the *Ring*. Wagner's debt to Greek Tragedy cannot be over-emphasized, and it is apparent that his Wotan has some of the characteristics of Zeus, as Goodhill's argument demonstrates.

in *Die Walküre*, the extended discussion by Wotan and Fricka as to whether Wotan can protect his child is clearly intended to recall one of the most famous and pathos-filled scenes of the *Iliad*. There Zeus, king of the gods, observes the plight of his beloved son Sarpedon, progressing to a fatal encounter with the Greek forces at Troy, and announces to the gods his wish to save him from his doom.²⁰ Hera,

²⁰The Son of Cronos of the Crooked Ways saw what was happening and was distressed. He sighed, and said to Here, his Sister and his Wife; 'Fate is unkind to me - Sarpedon, whom I dearly love, is destined to be killed by Patroclus, son of Menoetius. I wonder now - I am in two minds. Shall I

Zeus's wife and queen, instantly upbraids her husband for even contemplating an overturning of the fates and man's necessary mortality. And so immortal Zeus, sorrowing but without intervention, watches from Olympus the death of the mortal hero, his warrior son.

When Wagner has Wotan - forced by Fricka's arguments on the sanctity of the laws of marriage - not merely allow the death of Siegmund but also actively engage in the destruction of the hero, both the force of Wotan's predicament and the nature of Fricka's contentions find their significance in contrast with the different pathos of the Homeric scene. By recalling the Greek model, Wagner emphasises Wotan's active role in the violent history of power (as opposed to Zeus' sorrowing distance from Man) and stresses Fricka's reliance on the restrictive force of the social laws of marriage over and against natural love (as opposed to Hera's appeal to the necessary mortality of humans.) In this scene, then, the Ring's essential thematic contrasts between love (Liebe) and law (Gesetz), and between love and power, are crucially developed through the rewriting of the Greek epic scene.

Wotan's dialogues with Mime and Erda in *Siegfried* are drawn from Old Norse poetry; his Riddle Contest with Mime in Act I is based on *Vafthrudnismál*, one of the poems of the *Poetic Edda*. The idea of the Riddle Contest is often found in Old Norse literature; the contest is usually between a giant or dwarf famed for his wisdom, and an old man who at the end of the contest reveals himself to be Odin by asking a question that the opponent cannot answer; the opponent then forfeits his head. For the Wanderer/Mime scene in *Siegfried*, Wagner has used this form but invested it with a new significance. The purpose is not to convey information about the world and its natural phenomena, but to illustrate the inner landscape of Wotan's mind; and

snatch him up and set him down alive in the rich land of Lycia, far from the war and all its tears? Or shall I let him fall to the son of Menæceus this very day?

"Dread Son of Cronos, you amaze me!" replied the ox-eyed Queen of heaven. "Are you proposing to reprieve a mortal man, whose doom has long been settled, from the pains of death? Do as you please; but do not expect the rest of the immortals to applaud. There is this point too that you should bear in mind. If you send Sarpedon home alive, what is to prevent some other god from trying to rescue his own son from the fight? A number of the combatants at Troy are sons of gods, who would resent your action bitterly. No; if you love and pity Sarpedon, let him fall in mortal combat with Patroclus, and when the breath has left his lips send Death and the sweet god of Sleep to take him up and bring him to the broad realm of Lycia, where his kinsmen and retainers will give him burial, with the barrow and monument that are a dead man's rights."

The father of men and gods made no demur. But he did send down a shower of bloody raindrops to the earth, as a tribute to his beloved son, whom Patroclus was about to kill in the deep-soiled land of Troy, far from his own country.

perhaps a subsidiary purpose is to demonstrate that Mime is only a paler copy of his brother - he has all his malice, but reduces it to pettiness, lacking the tragic grandeur that makes Alberich into a distant cousin of Milton's Satan. The audience knows the answers to Mime's questions, but we need to know that Wotan has progressed far enough towards self-knowledge to recognise Alberich as his *alter ego*, his shadow:

Schwarz-Alben sind sie ;
Schwarz-Alberich
hütet' als Herrscher sie einst.

.....
Licht-Alben sind sie ;
Licht-Alberich,
Wotan, waltet der Schar.
(*Siegfried*, Act I, ll. 4658-4660, 4699-4701)

Wotan's greeting to Mime - *Heil dir, weiser Schmied* - is ironic, although in the Old Norse Riddle Contest it would not have been. Implicit in much of the sub-text of the *Ring* is the difference between wisdom and knowledge, as we discussed in Chapter V in relation to Brünnhilde. Wotan gains in wisdom, until he realises that, for him, true wisdom means accepting the inevitability of his extinction. Mime, it becomes apparent, possesses neither knowledge nor wisdom, and his response is that of the Philistine.²¹ It is not the response that would have come from Regin in Morris's poem, who does possess wisdom, though of a rather sinister kind.²²

Wotan narrates to Mime how he obtained his spear - later, in the Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, it will be narrated by the Norns from a different perspective. Wotan manages to frighten Mime by his extravagant claims of the power that is wielded by the owner of the spear:

Den Haft der Welt
hält in der Hand,
wer den Speer führt,

21 Müß'ges Wissen wahren manche;
ich weiß mir g'rade genug;
mir genügt mein Witz,
ich will nichts mehr -
dir Weisem weis' ich den Weg.

22 He and other craftsmen are sometimes called *cunning* ; Morris is using the word in its rare, archaic meaning of *skilled*, though as applied to Regin it also has the usual meaning of *sly, devious*.

den Wotans Faust umspannt.
 Ihm neigte sich
 der Niblungen Heer;
 der Riesen Gezücht
 zähmte sein Rat;
 ewig gehorchen sie alle
 des Speeres starken Herrn!
 (*Siegfried*, Act 1, ll.4712-4721)

This is enough to frighten Mime, who is not noted for his courage, but it is a last-ditch attempt by Wotan to convince himself that his power is still intact, and that "everybody eternally obeys him"; this isn't the case, of course, as the person who meant most to him defied him.

It would appear that Wotan drank from the well at the foot of the World Ash Tree in order to obtain power, not wisdom, although the first Norn defines it as a source of wisdom:

Im kühlen Schatten
 rauscht' ein Quell,
 Weisheit raunend
 rann sein Gewell;
 da sang ich heil'gen Sinn.
 Ein kühner Gott
 trat zum Trunk an den Quell;
 Seiner Augen eines zahlt' er
 als ewigen Zoll.
 Von der Weltesche
 brach da Wotan einen Ast;
 eines Speeres Schaft
 entschnitt der Starke dem Stamm.
 (*Götterdämmerung*, Act I ll. 6914-6926)

It is put somewhat differently in *Snorra Edda*, in which it is narrated that Odin drank from Mimir's well in order to obtain wisdom:

Yggdrasil, the World Ash-Tree.

... under the root that reaches towards the frost-giants, there is where Mimir's well is, which has wisdom and intelligence contained in it, and the master of the well is called Mimir. He is full of learning because he drinks of the well from the horn Gjallahorn. All-Father went there and asked for a single drink from the well, but he did not get one until he placed his eye as a pledge.²³ Thus it says in *Völuspá* ;

²³ Wagner used this in *Götterdämmerung* ; the first Norn narrates that
*Ein kühner Gott trat zum Trunk an den Quell;
 seiner Augen eines zahlt' er als ewigen Zoll.*

But he also used other versions of the explanation for Wotan's one-eyed state, which are not entirely consistent. In *Das Rheingold* , he says to Fricka;

I know it all, Odin, where you deposited your eye, in that renowned Well of Mimir. Mimir drinks mead every morning from Val-father's pledge. Know you yet, or what? ²⁴

(The Prose Edda. Trans. by Anthony Faulkes)

Here, as often in the *Ring*, Wagner has conflated - or confused? - two legends from the source. One of the kennings for Odin is indeed *Mimir's friend*. Wagner seems to equate the brother of Alberich with the guardian of the well of wisdom. In all the sources except *Thidreks Saga*, however, Sigurd's foster-father is called *Regin*.

In the *Ring*, Wotan's spear is the outward and visible symbol of his power ; that it was made from a branch of the World Ash Tree is probably Wagner's invention, and the spear itself does not appear to be as significant in the Norse literature as it is in the *Ring*. ²⁵ There is a reference to Odin *throwing his spear* over a host of battle, which means that he has doomed them to die. The spear, as the symbol and repository of Wotan's power, contains all the treaties that he has made engraved on it, as Fasolt reminds him. ²⁶

*Um dich zum Weib zu gewinnen,
mein eines Auge setzt' ich werbend daran.*

And in *Siegfried* he says to Siegfried;

*Mit dem Auge, das als and'res mir fehlt,
erblickst du selber das eine,
das mir zum Sehen verblieb.*

- ²⁴ allt veit ek, Oðinn, hvor þú auga falt;
í inom mæra Mímis brúnni;
Drekkr mið Mímir morgin hverian
af veðí Valføðrs - vitoð ér enn, eða hva?

- ²⁵ In *Richard Wagner and the Nibelungs*, Elizabeth Magee suggests that

The emblem of Wotan's political and judicial authority is his spear ... The mythologies of Wagner's day were familiar with the spear as an adjunct of Wotan's wargod role. Mostly their material was based on the *Heimskringla* and other sagas. Casting a spear opens hostilities; a spear-wound marks heroes for Wotan. As symbol of Wotan's civil authority, however, the spear did not arouse the same attention. Only mentioned by Müller: immutable treaties engraved in potent runes on Wotan's spear give the god power and dominion over the rest of the world's citizens. The spear is more than just an emblem of Wotan's authority; his power is vested in it. (p.177)

*Was du bist, bist du nur durch Verträge,
bedungen ist, wohl bedacht deine Macht.*

The influence of *Vegtamskviða* is apparent in the Wotan/Erda scene in Act III of *Siegfried*, as one may note on comparison of the following extracts: ²⁷

(Prophetess)

What call unknown, what charms presume
To break the quiet of the tomb?
Who thus afflicts my troubled sprite,
And drags me from the realms of night? 28

Erda

*Stark ruft das Lied
Kräftig reizt der Zauber;
Ich bin erwacht
Aus wissendem Schlaf;
Wer scheucht den Schlummer mir?
(Siegfried, Act III, ll.6132-6136)*

(Prophetess)

Unwilling I my lips unclose,
Leave me, leave me to repose

(*Erda*)

*Lass' mich wieder hinab;
Schlaf verschließe mein Wissen!
(Siegfried, Act III, ll.6222-6223)*

(Odin)

Once again, my call obey,
Prophetess, arise and say....

Wotan

*Dich Mutter lass' ich nicht zieh'n,
da des Zaubers mächtig ich
bin.-
(Siegfried, Act III, ll.6224-6225)*

(Prophetess)

Ha! No traveller art thou,
King of men, I know thee now;
Mightiest of a mighty line.....

(*Odin*)

*No boding maid of skill divine
Art thou, nor prophetess of good;
But mother of the giant brood!*

(*Erda*)

²⁷ The English version used for comparison is Thomas Gray's poem *The Descent of Odin* (1761). Gray's poem, with its monotonous tetrametric rhythm, is not one of his more inspired efforts, but it does quite faithfully reproduce at least some of the sentiments that are expressed in *Vegtamskviða*. Gray's version has some folk-song or ballad resonances:

*Uprose the king of men with speed
And saddled straight his coal-black steed.*

Wagner would have been familiar with the poem in Simrock's translation.

²⁸ Hvát er manna þat, mér ókunnra,
er mér hefir aukit erfit sinni?
var ec snívin snióvi ok slegin regni
oc drifin dögva, dauð var ec lengi.

*Du bist nicht,
was du dich nennst!
Was kamst du, störrischer Wilder,
zu stören der Wala Schlaf?*

*(Wotan)
Du bist nicht,
was du dich wähnst!
Urmütterweisheit
geht zu Ende.
Dein Wissen vergeht
vor meinem Willen!
(Siegfried, Act III, ll.6238-6247)*

The Vala says she will not wake again *Till Lok has burst his tenfold chain* i.e. till the end of the world. ²⁹

Structurally, this scene at the beginning of the act is paralleled by the scene of Brünnhilde's awakening at the end; but we should also be aware of the contrasts. Wotan does not wake Erda with a kiss, as Siegfried wakens Brünnhilde; but he does wake her from sleep, to demand that she help him with her wisdom yet again. Brünnhilde, once awakened, offers her wisdom to Siegfried, but we discover in *Götterdämmerung* that he is unable to profit from it. Erda's wisdom appears to have disintegrated; a sure sign that the gods and their world-order are about to come to an end. Erda does not realise care; Wotan welcomes the end of the gods, and realises that Erda's wisdom can no longer help him: *Urmütter-Weisheit geht zu Ende; / dein Wissen vergeht vor meinem Willen*. And what Wotan wills - what he wishes - has changed since he parted from Brünnhilde; evidently her defiance has changed the world irrevocably, since Erda's wisdom is no longer of any avail. ³⁰

Um der Götter Ende
grämt mich die Angst nicht,
seit mein Wunsch es will!
Was in des Zwiespalts wildem Schmerze
verzweifelnd einst ich beschloß,

²⁹ As a punishment for his crimes against the Gods, Loki is chained to a rock when a serpent suspended above his head drops venom on him . (The resemblance to Prometheus was not lost on Wagner .) His wife Sigyn collects the venom in a bowl, but whenever she goes to empty the bowl , Loki's struggles cause an earthquake . He will not be released until *ragnarøk* .

³⁰ This idea is reinforced and presented visually to the audience in *Götterdämmerung* , when the Norns' rope breaks , to which their response is *Zu End' ewiges Wissen! / Der Welt melden Weise nichts mehr* .

froh und freudig
führe frei ich nun aus. 31
Weiht' ich in wütendem Ekel
des Niblungen Neid schon die Welt,
dem herrlichsten Wälsung
weis' ich mein Erbe nun an.
(*Siegfried*, Act III, ll.6252-6262)

So he has evidently come a long way since *Das Rheingold*, when what he willed was to gain power and retain it .

³¹ Note the emphatic alliteration, which serves to reinforce the idea being expressed.

7.4. Wotan and Fricka

In *Das Rheingold*, as we noted in Chapter III, Wotan uses the language of aggressive masculinity, which may be contrasted with Fricka's femininity.

Mannes Ehre,
ewige Macht,
ragen zu endlosem Ruhm!
(*Das Rheingold*, ll. 326-328)

Here, as so often, Wagner uses cross-alliteration for emphasis.(m / e + e / m). And there is the emphasis on *Mannes Ehre*, perhaps as a contrast to *Weibes Wonne und Wert*.

Wotan is still dreaming when we first see him, and Fricka has to recall him to reality - *Auf, aus der Träume wonnigem Trug! / Erwache, Mann, und erwäge*. He is somewhat reluctant to face reality, and she has to insist. The idea of Wotan's dreaming is recalled in Waltraute's Narration in *Götterdämmerung* ; *Tief seufzt' er auf, schloß das Auge, / und wie im Traume raunt' er das Wort....* (emphasis added). And could the reference to closing his eye be related to what we already know of Wotan's sacrifice of one eye, does this enable him to "see" more clearly with his inner eye ?

Macht, Ruhm, Herrschaft ; this is what interests Wotan,as Fricka scornfully sums up:*Was ist euch Harten heilig und wert, / giert ihr Männer nach Macht ?* and a few lines further on she gives her criticism a new emphasis:

Liebeloser,
leidigster Mann!
Um der Macht und Herrschaft
müßigen Tand
verspielst du in lästerndem Spott
Liebe und Weibes Wert.
(*Das Rheingold*, ll. 400-405)

Evidently Fricka has a firmer grasp on reality than Wotan. She knows that his dream of man's honour and eternal power is based on a deception and that no good can come of it. In *Das Rheingold*, she is perhaps the voice of reason. She often reproaches Wotan for frivolity and heedlessness, and this criticism of his attitude and actions is also made

by Alberich, who complains that he does not see why the gods should obtain, with no effort, that which he obtained at such a cost, and use it for their frivolous pleasures.

In *Die Walküre*, Fricka may represent the voice of Wotan's conscience.³² He realises, after their confrontation, that he has not really deceived himself or her:

So leicht ja entfrug mir
Fricka den Trug!
Zu tiefster Scham
durchschaute sie mich -
ihrem Willen muß ich gewähren.
(*Die Walküre*, Act II, ll. 2935-2939)

The relationship between Wotan and Fricka is from the outset one of gender polarity in the negative sense; some critics³³ refer to her dismissively as "a nagging wife", as though this were all there is to say about Fricka's role in the *Ring*. She is portrayed more sympathetically than Wotan in *Das Rheingold*, until she becomes corrupted with the greed for the gold. On one level Fricka and the other gods, perhaps even including Wotan, are perfectly well aware of the superiority of love over power, otherwise Fricka would have no need to refer to *der Macht und Herrschaft müßigen Tand*. There is no need to doubt her sincerity at this point when she calls power worthless in comparison with love, but, in the closing scene of *Das Rheingold*, it would seem that Fricka's attitudes have changed, once she has been relieved of her anxiety for Freia:

Wo weilst du, Wotan?
Winkt dir nicht hold
die hehre Burg,
die des Gebieters
gastlich bergend nun harrt?
(*Das Rheingold*, ll. 1762-1766)

She never called it *die hehre Burg* before; *die ragende Burg* was the nearest she got to praising its qualities, and this was when she was criticising Wotan for turning it

³² Another way of expressing this is suggested by William E. Macdonald, in his article *What does Wotan know?* (Nineteenth-century music, Vol. xiv,1, 1991), where it is proposed that "The whole [Wotan-Fricka] scene can be viewed as a psychomachia ." (p.41)

³³e.g. Robert Donington, in *Wagner's "Ring" and its symbols*

into a fortress instead of a home. Evidently the corrupting influence of Wotan's greed has spread to all the gods except Loge.

During the Wotan-Fricka confrontation in Act II of *Die Walküre*, it becomes clear that she has just as high a regard for power as he does; and the question arises, would she ever have been prepared to sacrifice power for the sake of love? The point of the *Ring* is that only Brünnhilde is prepared to do this. Until Fricka is corrupted by greed she is perhaps to be seen as, at least potentially, an embodiment of love similar to Freia - who is, after all, her sister. It is she who refers most often to *Liebe*, and she reproaches Wotan with being loveless and frivolous; *O lachend, frevelnder Leichtsin!* *!Liebelosester Frohmut!* I suggest that we should not perceive her entirely negatively, even in Act II of *Die Walküre*, in which she is ultimately correct, even though she may express herself in an unappealing manner. Someone, after all, has to tell Wotan that he is wrong, and it has already been suggested that she may be the voice of his conscience. But in their final confrontation, Fricka no longer speaks of *Liebe* - she speaks of *Ehe und Eid*, of upholding her rights and the rights of the gods and about the necessity for them to maintain their power:

Deiner ew'gen Gattin
 heilige Ehre
 beschirme heut' ihr Schild!
 Von Menschen verlacht,
 verlustig der Macht,
 gingen wir Götter zugrund,
 würde heut' nicht,
 hehr und herrlich,
 mein Recht gerächt
 von der mutigen Maid!
 Der Wälsung fällt meiner Ehre!
 (*Die Walküre*, Act II ll. 2714-2724)

She has here completely assimilated Wotan's attitudes, especially his greed for power. One of the features of their disagreement concerns Fricka's opinion that human beings are "the lower orders", who should be kept in their place. Wotan elaborates upon this to Brünnhilde:

Wotan Daß stark zum Streit
 uns fände der Feind,
 hieß ich euch Helden mir schaffen;
 die herrisch wir sonst

in Gesetzen hielten,
die Männer, denen
den Mut wir gewehrt,
 die durch trüber Verträge
trügende Bande
zu blindem Gehorsam
wir uns gebunden,
 die solltet zu Sturm
 und Streit ihr nun stacheln,
 ihre Kraft reizen
 zu rauhem Krieg,
 daß kühner Kämpfer Scharen
 ich sammle in Walhalls Saal!
 (*Die Walküre*, Act. II ll. 2824-2840) (emphasis added)

We may contrast this with the few references in *Sigurd* to the relationship between gods and men, which were quoted above. Wotan is here far from realising that he and his world-order will ultimately be *superseded* by the human beings whom he has created.

Fricka does not accept Wotan's reasoning about the need for a free hero; she brushes it aside - *mit tiefem Sinne willst du mich täuschen!* - as another of Wotan's specious excuses for his philandering. What is very significant (and seems not previously to have been discussed in any detail) is Fricka's notion of what *Freiheit* means. For her, it is the logical conclusion of the idea of keeping the lower orders in their place, it has no philosophical dimensions, it is merely the distinction between free - the ruler - and unfree - the subject; and it is for the ruler to punish the rebellious subject:

Mit Unfreien
 streitet kein Edler;
 den Frevler straft nur der Freie.
 Wider deine Kraft
 führt' ich wohl Krieg,
 doch Siegmund verfiel mir als Knecht!
 der dir als Herren
 hörig und eigen,
 gehorchen soll ihm
 dein ewig Gemahl?
 (*Die Walküre*, Act II ll. 2677-2686)

Surely Wotan shares this attitude when he punishes Brünnhilde for her rebellion? Both Wotan and Fricka express the attitudes of the autocrat - and not of benevolent despotism, either. Fricka is contemptuous of human beings, indeed this is one of her

major complaints about Wotan's philandering, that he has actually sunk to the depths of begetting a pair of ordinary mortals.³⁴ This confirms that Wotan did not create the human race out of goodwill, but because of his own needs.³⁵ The following extract from Wagner's *Der Nibelungen-Mythos als Entwurf zu einem Drama* throws further light on the subject:

In hoher Thätigkeit ordneten... die Götter die Welt... und widmeten sich der Pflege des Menschengeschlechtes. Doch der Friede, durch den sie zur Herrschaft gelangten, gründet sich nicht auf Versöhnung; er ist durch Gewalt und List vollbracht. Die Absicht ihrer höheren Weltordnung ist sittliches Bewußtsein; das Unrecht, das sie verfolgen, haftet aber an ihnen selber. Aus den Tiefen Nibelheims grollt ihnen das Bewußtsein ihrer Schuld entgegen. (emphasis added)

Wagner goes to to explain that the only hope for the gods to achieve redemption is for a redeemer to arise from the human race.³⁶

Wotan regards Brünnhilde as his creation, and is horrified when she shows signs of becoming an autonomous subject:

Da mit dir ich tagte,
sank ich so tief,
daß zum Schimpf der eig'nen
Geschöpf' ich ward?
(*Die Walküre*, Act II ll. 3020-3023)

34 Doch jetzt , da dir neue Namen gefielen,
als Wälse wölfisch im Walde du schweiftest,
jetzt , da zu neidrigster Schmach du dich neigtest,
gemeinen Menschen ein Paar zu erzeugen....
(*Die Walküre*, Act II)

35 Wotan asks Fricka whether she has no regard for human courage . Her response is that this, like all their characteristics, is something Wotan has given them:

Wer hauchte Menschen ihn ein?
Wer hellte den Blöden den Blick?
In deinem Schutz scheinen sie stark,
durch deinen Stachel streben sie auf ;
du reizest sie einzig,
die so mir Ew'gen du rühmst!
(*Die Walküre* , Act II)

36 I have already suggested that this is one of the main differences between the *Ring* and *Sigurd* ; in the latter , the gods are not in need of a redeemer , Sigurd is the Redeemer of humanity.

Wotan develops further in his Narration the idea with which he vainly tried to inspire Fricka; the need for a free hero. When he first states the problem to Fricka, it doesn't sound too complicated. It is the necessity for the hero to be free of the god's protection and therefore free of the god's laws upon which Wotan elaborates;

Nur einer könnte,
 was ich nicht darf;
 ein Held, dem helfend
 nie ich mich neigte;
 der fremd dem Gotte,
 frei seiner Gunst,
 unbewußt,
 ohne Geheiß,
 aus eig'ner Not,
 mit der eig'nen Wehr,
 schüfe die Tat,
 die ich scheuen muß,
 (*Die Walküre*, Act II ll. 2888-2901)

After her confrontation with Wotan in Act II of *Die Walküre*, Fricka does not appear again in the *Ring* - Brünnhilde makes a reference to her in her debate with Wotan:

Als Fricka den eignen Sinn
 dir entfremdet;
 da ihrem Sinn du dich fügtest,
 warst du selber dir Feind.
 (*Die Walküre*, Act III, ll. 3867-3870)

Fricka's motif is also heard in Act III of *Siegfried*. When this motif was first heard, Fricka sang to it
 Herrliche Wohnung,
 wonnige Hausrat,
 sollten dich binden
 zu säumender Rast.
 (*Das Rheingold*, ll. 381-384)

Siegfried, then, is also being offered a peaceful home - which, like Brünnhilde's love and wisdom, he is not able to appreciate. Just like his grandfather, he rejects the peace and contentment of home for the sake of adventure.

In *Götterdämmerung*, Hagen tells the vassals - *Schafe aber schlachtet für Fricka, / daß gute Ehe sie gebe!* Since Hagen knows that this is not going to

be a good marriage, he is presumably being ironic, but this serves to recall to the minds of the audience Fricka's (self-appointed?) role as the guardian of marriage vows.

Robert Donington's Jungian analysis would have it that Fricka and Brünnhilde are both projections of Wotan's *anima*; this idea could be developed to imply that Wotan absorbs Fricka as he discards Brünnhilde, as Brünnhilde ceases to be a projection of Wotan's *anima* or agent of his will and becomes a person in her own right. The *Ring* is outwardly the story of Wotan's collapse and defeat, but perhaps his eventual annihilation, or at any rate his willing acceptance of the end, means moral regeneration.

7.5 Wotan and Alberich

Wotan and Alberich are to be seen as each other's alter ego; Wotan of course acknowledges this when he names himself *Licht-Alberich*.³⁷ The main difference between them is that Wotan does change, and Alberich does not. Wotan announces to Erda that he is prepared to renounce power, and welcome the end of the gods; *Um der Götter Ende grämt mich die Angst nicht, seit mein Wunsch es will!* He has already announced his intention to Alberich, but Alberich does not believe him; he has, after all, no cause to trust Wotan. Wotan is more dishonest than Alberich, and what Alberich says to him in *Das Rheingold* is actually the crux of the matter:

Wirfst du Schächer
die Schuld mir vor,
die du so wonnig erwünscht?
Wie gern raubtest du selbst
dem Rheine das Gold,
war nur so leicht die Kunst,
es zu schmieden, erlangt:
...

Hüte dich,
herrischer Gott!
Frevelte ich,
so frevelt' ich frei an mir;
doch an allem was war,
ist und wird
frevelst, Ewiger, du,
entreibst du frech mir den Ring! 38
(*Das Rheingold*, ll. 1441 - 1447, 1462-1469)

³⁷ In Jungian terms, acc. to Robert Donington, Alberich is Wotan's *shadow* .

³⁸ Hanslick, in his criticism of the *Ring* , makes the mistake that some less perceptive audiences and critics have subsequently made - though presumably not for very long - in assuming that Wagner intended the audience to perceive Wotan and the other gods as somehow "noble" or even virtuous. This mistake was even made by Andrew Porter, who proposed , in the *New Yorker* of 13. June 1983 , the founding of a 'Society for the Defense of Wagner's Wotan'. One may suspect Porter of irony , but it seems he was angered by Nicolas Lehnhoff's interpretation of the *Ring* . Lehnhoff takes the view that

Wotan's power politics have brought chaos to the world ...
You see the gods, especially Wotan, as helpless, arrogant,
vain, entangled by guilt ... What you as a director have to
show is this arrogant swimming-pool society, these gods
sitting around the pool, saying that they can live for
ever.

(Quoted in *What does Wotan know ?* by William E . Macdonald , 19th.
Century Music, 1991)

The audience may agree with Alberich at this point. His crime is actually not as serious as the crime Wotan is contemplating, since he was prepared to pay the going rate for the Rheingold - he did forswear love to get it, so he met the required condition - his obtaining of it can hardly be called a theft at all. In the course of their confrontation in Act II of *Siegfried*, it will become apparent that only Wotan has changed and developed; he is now prepared to renounce all claims to the Ring, whereas Alberich is devoting all his energies to regaining it, and he now has the added incentive of revenge:

Denn fass' ich ihn wieder
 einst in der Faust,
 anders als dumme Riesen
 üb' ich des Ringes Kraft;
 dann zittre der Helden
 heiliger Hüter!
 Walhalls Höhen
 stürm' ich mit Hellas Heer -
 der Welt walte dann ich!
 (*Siegfried*, Act II, ll. 5363-5371)

Alberich sees to the heart of Wotan's weakness, his dilemma:

Nicht du darfst,
 was als Zoll du gezahlt,
 den Riesen wieder entreißen;
 du selbst zerspelltest
 deines Speeres Schaft;
 in deiner Hand der herrische Stab,
 der starke, zerstiebe wie Spreu.
 (*Siegfried*, Act II, ll. 5340- 5348)

This turns out to be something of a prophecy, for Wotan's spear is broken, although not in the way Alberich predicts.

Wotan wakes Fafner, to demonstrate to Alberich his sincerity, but his warning is ignored. Alberich reproaches the gods with frivolity:

Doch lacht nur zu,
 ihr leichtsinniges,
 lustgieriges
 Göttergelichter!
 Euch seh' ich
 noch alle vergehn!
 (*Siegfried*, Act II, ll. 5460-5465)

Is this not reminiscent of similar passages in *Das Rheingold* ? Alberich's mockery is of course an ineffective cover for his envy, especially in these lines:

Die in linder Lüfte Wehn
 da oben ihr lebt,
 lacht und liebt;
 mit goldener Faust ³⁹
 euch Göttliche fang' ich mir alle!
 Wie ich der Liebe abgesagt,
 alles, was lebt,
 soll ihr entsagen!
 (*Das Rheingold*, ll. 1187-1194)

We have already noted that Alberich's reproach to Wotan - that he would have been glad to have stolen the Rhinegold himself, but wasn't prepared to pay the price - is at least partly justified.

³⁹ One of Wagner's rare examples of metonymy ; discussed in Chapter III

7.6. Wotan and Siegfried

Why is the confrontation between Siegfried and Wotan necessary - and for whom is it necessary? For Wotan, in order for him to learn that he has to mean what he says about renouncing his power. When his spear is shattered by Siegfried's reforged sword, this is but the outward symbol of the decay that set in long before, when he committed the *Urfrevel*. He has told Erda that he is no longer troubled by the thought of the end of the gods, since he now desires it (*seit mein Wunsch es will*), and that he is happy to leave the world to Siegfried (*Dem herrlichen Wälsung / weis' ich mein Erbe nun an*). So why does Wotan actually need to confront Siegfried - why not just withdraw and leave the field? I suggest that there are two reasons, one psychological, one dramatic. Wotan is not quite prepared actively to will the inevitable; he knows that once Brünnhilde is awakened this betokens the end of his power;

Fürchte des Felsens Hüter!
 Verschlossen hält meine Macht
 die schlafende Maid;
 wer sie erweckte, wer sie gewänne,
 machtlos macht' er mich ewig!
 ...
 Fürchtest das Feuer du nicht,
 so sperre mein Speer dir den Weg!
 Noch hält meine Hand
 der Herrschaft Haft;
 das Schwert, das du schwingst,
 zerschlug noch dieser Schaft;
 noch einmal denn
 zerspring' es am ewigen Speer!
 (*Siegfried*, Act III ll. 6425-6430, 6453-6460)

Dramatically, it is necessary that the audience should see Wotan forced to abandon the power to which he clings, in spite of what he says to Erda about his willingness to relinquish it.

CHAPTER VIIIGRIMHILDThe role of Grimhild in *Sigurd the Volsung*

This chapter examines in some detail the role of Grimhild in *Sigurd the Volsung*. The way Morris treats this character, and the vocabulary he uses, gives rise to some reflections on his use of the vocabulary of craft and textiles, which seems not to have been noticed before. It is not entirely fortuitous that Grimhild is the only woman in *Sigurd* who spins - the others weave and embroider, but they don't spin. This would probably not be significant in another poet of the period, but in Morris it is highly significant, as he was also a skilled craftsman who wove tapestries and designed embroideries, some of which he executed himself, but most of which were executed by his wife, Jane, and his daughter, May. May also did some of her own designing. Curiously enough, the firm of Morris & Co. never did any spinning - though if it had it would doubtless have been Jane or May who did it, spinning being quintessentially womens' work. We need not discuss in this context why this should be the case - weaving (and in the Middle Ages embroidery) has been at times a craft practised by both sexes, but never spinning. There seem to be deep-rooted associations of spinning with witchcraft, and it is in witchcraft that Grimhild excels. This can probably be traced back to the Fates in Greek mythology, who spin the thread that controls peoples' lives.

Interestingly enough, although here we have no occasion to refer to Wagner except peripherally, he assumes that the Norns spin, but this is not the case in the *Prose Edda*. Wagner's Norns are in fact more closely related to the Greek Fates than to the Norns of Norse mythology. ¹ The *Prose Edda* says that the Norns *skapamønnum alldr* that is they "shape the fate of men", but it does not actually specify how they shape it. Wagner's Norns only have the power to foretell fate, they can't alter the decisions. In *Siegfried*, Erda, their mother, says about them:

¹We are reminded yet again of the far-reaching influence of Greek tragedy on Wagner's drama.

Doch wenn ich schlafe,
 Wachen Nornen -
 Sie weben das Seil,
 Und spinnen fromm, was ich weiß....
 (*Siegfried* , Act III , ll.6162-6165)

To which the Wanderer replies -

Im Zwange der Welt
 weben die Nornen:
 Sie können nichts wenden noch wandeln.
 (*Siegfried*, Act. III ll. 6167-6179)

In the prelude to *Götterdämmerung* the Norns weave and spin - Wagner isn't clear about the distinction, but it was unnecessary that he should be. Nor is it strictly necessary for Morris, but, as a craftsman, he was aware of the difference, and this is apparent in his poetry. The extent to which this awareness influenced the vocabulary of *Sigurd the Volsung* has not previously been recognised.

There is a difference between the way in which Morris uses the vocabulary of craft and textiles in his poetry, and the way some of his contemporaries use it. Many male writers of the period include references to textile craft - usually embroidery , but sometimes weaving, and occasionally spinning - because of a conviction that "this is what women do ", whereas Morris obviously knows what the technical process of producing textiles entails. This passage from *The Life and Death of Jason* may serve as an illustration of Morris's familiarity with the techniques of textile art, which he carried over into his poetry.

Therewith she brought her to a chamber where
 Abode the royal maidens slim and fair,
 All doing well-remembered works; of whom
 White-armed Alcestis sat before the loom,
 Casting the shuttle swift from hand to hand.
 The while Eradne's part it was to stand
 Amongst the maids who carded out the wool
 And filled the gleaming ivory shuttles full.
 Amphinome, meanwhile, her golden head
 Bent o'er the spinners of the milk-white thread,
 And by the growing web still set aside
 The many-coloured bundles newly dyed,
 Blood-red, and heavenly blue and grassy green,
 Yea, and more colours than man yet has seen

In flowery meadows midmost of the may .

And from the same poem, Medea's treacherous wedding gift for Glauce :

Soothly she spoke, because the web was fair
And thin, and delicate beyond compare,
And had been woven on no common loom,
For she herself within her fair-hung room
Had set the warp and watched the fine web glide
Up from the roller, while from side to side,
Scarce seen, the shuttle flew from fingers thin
Of a dark Indian maid ... ²

The comparison which springs most readily to mind is Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalot*. Tennyson evidently had only the dimmest idea of what actually happens when a woman weaves a tapestry, and Holman Hunt, in his painting illustrating the poem, obviously had no idea at all. This was not the point, however, because she was not doing anything as banal as actually weaving clothes for people to wear (although her mediæval counterpart would have been). Firstly, she is weaving a decorative

² The argument may also be supported by some extracts from *The Earthly Paradise* , for instance the following from *Bellerophon at Argos* :

Withal the wool-comb's sound within the fleece
began and grew, and slowly did decrease,
And then began as still it gat new food;
And by the loom an ancient woman stood
And grumbled o'er the web ; and on the floor
The spindles twisted ever; from the store
Raised on high pillars at the gable end,
Adown a steep stair did a maiden wend,
Who in the wide folds of her gathered gown
Fresh yarn bright-dyed unto the loom bore down.

The following passage from *The Ring given to Venus* is also worthy of note:

The purple lay beneath the sea,
The madder waved in the light wind,
The woad-stalks did the peasant bind
That were to better his worn hood;
And ever, amid all things good,
Least of all things this lucky land
Lacked from the craftsman's cunning hand.

This extract demonstrates that Morris evidently knew what materials were needed for dyeing , and that he expected his readers to know. It also indicated that he expected his readers to have had a classical education , otherwise they would probably not understand what is meant by *The purple lay beneath the sea*.

tapestry, illustrating events she sees in the mirror; secondly, the weaving probably symbolises her isolation and the fact that she is cut off from the outside world.³

Returning now to our main topic - the characterisation of Grimhild, and the association of spinning with witchcraft - we shall have occasion to observe that, though the Norns in Morris's poem never spin, Grimhild does, and her spinning is what makes her witchcraft effective; there are references to her belief that she can defy the decrees of the Norns, or of Fate. She is given by Morris a role of vital importance which is hinted at in the source - *Völsunga Saga* - but which is only developed to its full potential in Morris's poem. It is Grimhild who has some claim to be considered the villain of the piece - she drugs Sigurd into forgetting Brynhild, and she forces the reluctant Gudrun into a second marriage with Atli.

Grimhild is characterised in negative terms in *Völsunga Saga* from the first mention of her, where she is referred to as *fjølkuunnga*, which Morris translates as "wise-wife", R.G. Finch as "sorceress". In his translation, Morris renders the sentence

³ Some of the points made by Andrew Belsey and Catherine Belsey in their article on Christina Rossetti (in *TEXTUAL PRACTICE*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1988) are relevant here. The article is not only about Christina Rossetti, but about Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite views of women. It is observed that :

The Pre-Raphaelites had a special place for women. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting of 1849-50, *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, gives some indication of what it was. Huddled on her bed, the handmaid of the Lord shrinks visibly from the explicit masculinity and mastery of *the Angel*."

The first stanza of Christina Rossetti's poem *Repining* (1847) is quoted:

She sat alway through the long day
Spinning the weary thread away,
And ever said in an undertone,
"Come, that I be no more alone."

Here, spinning is used in a negative context, as a metaphor for the pointlessness and hopelessness of woman's existence.

The authors also discuss illustrations of *The Lady of Shalott*; and a drawing by Lizzie Siddal, strikingly different from Holman Hunt's painting, is reproduced. The authors observe;

"For an instant the Lady is in command of her craft and of the objects of her gaze before the consequences of her transgression take full effect. Siddal's Lady of Shalott is an artist and a subject."

They might also have added - she seems to be weaving a real tapestry.

Gjiúki átti Grimhildi ina fjølkunngu as *But Giuki had married Grimhild the Wise-wife*. The sentence in the original does not begin with *but* - by inserting this, Morris is able to indicate to the reader that everything is going well for Giuki's family, except for the fact that he has married Grimhild. The contemporary audience of *Vølsunga Saga* would have realised that the fact that Giuki was married to a *fjølkunnga* was in any case likely to lead to no good. *Wise-wife* is more or less obsolete now, and was fairly archaic even when Morris used it - certainly it no longer has any negative connotations, but it in fact implies, not merely a woman who possesses wisdom, but a woman skilled in witchcraft. As we noted in Chapter V, Brynhild would never be referred to as a *wise-wife*.

Witchcraft/sorcery was a very real force for evil in the world of the family sagas, and the same attitude is apparent in *Vølsunga Saga*. Grimhild is referred to as *grimmhugu kona*, which Morris translates as "fierce-hearted woman", Finch as "of an evil disposition." Finch's translation is perhaps clearer, as "fierce-hearted" can under certain circumstances have positive as well as negative connotations - that is, it could just mean "brave" or "fearless". It would perhaps have been better to translate it as "evil-hearted".

Based on the hints given in *Vølsunga Saga*, Morris creates a woman of formidable power and ambition who plays a central role in Books III and IV of his poem. Her chief characteristic is her ambition for her family; everything she does is undertaken with the aim of gaining greater glory for her children, but what she does in fact achieve is their destruction - her belief that she can defy the decrees of Fate is shown to be false.

The vocabulary associated with Grimhild in Morris's poem is invariably negative. She is introduced as: *The woman overwise, Grimhild the kin of the God-folk, the wife of the glittering eyes.* (p.149) References to Grimhild's glittering eyes occur quite frequently - it is a negative rather than a positive epithet. One of the most interesting aspects of Morris's poem is the way in which the personality of

Grimhild is gradually and subtly built up, from the first reference to her as *overwise* . Her life is a constant striving after achievement, but in the end she loses everything.

Gudrun doesn't trust her mother, knowing her to be over-ambitious, and she is reluctant to ask Grimhild to interpret her dreams, not because Grimhild will interpret the dreams unfavourably, but because she will go too far in interpreting them favourably, probably looking for material advantage rather than love in Gudrun's marriage. In this situation, Brynhild's wisdom is more highly prized than Grimhild's.

It is indicated that Grimhild thinks of Sigurd as a possible husband for Gudrun as soon as she sees him:

So Grimhild greeted the guest, and she deemed him fair and sweet,
And she deemed him mighty of men, and a king for the queen-folk meet.
(*Sigurd the Volsung* , p.176)

When Grimhild gives Sigurd the potion to make him fall in love with Gudrun, this is described in entirely negative terms:

He laughed and took the cup: But therein with the blood of the earth
Earth's hidden might was mingled, and deeds of the cold sea's birth,
And things that the high Gods turn from, and a tangle of strange love,
Deep guile, and strong compelling, that whoso drank thereof
Should remember not his longing, should cast his love away.
(*Sigurd the Volsung* , p.187)

After Sigurd has drunk the potion, there occurs the first mention of Grimhild's belief in her ability to defy the decrees of Fate:

But Grimhild looked and was merry; and she deemed her life was great,
And her hand a wonder of wonders to withstand the deeds of Fate;
For she saw by the face of Sigurd and the token of his eyes,
That her will had abased the valiant, and filled the faithful with lies.
(*Sigurd the Volsung* , p.187)

It is clear enough, therefore, that Grimhild is proud of her achievement in somehow diminishing Sigurd - she has won him as a husband for her daughter, but he is less of a radiant hero than he was before he drank her potion. She has subdued Sigurd, and feels this to be a sign that she can subdue Fate: *But all this was a token unto her, and*

nature. Among the definitions of *craft* given in the O.E.D., the following are the most relevant to our purposes:

1. Strength, power, might, force. (Obsolete).

II. Intellectual power, skill, art.

2. Skill, skilfulness, art, ability in planning or performing, ingenuity in constructing, dexterity.

Occult art, magic. (obsolete)

3(b). A magical device, a spell or enchantment.

4. In a bad sense, skill or art applied to deceive or overreach; deceit, guile, fraud, cunning.

IV. A branch of skilled work.

b. An art, trade or profession requiring special skill and knowledge; esp. a manual art, a handicraft.

Morris uses the term *craft* in his poem both in the sense of *handicraft* and in the sense of *occult art, magic*. And Grimhild practises both the craft of magic and the craft of spinning. I have already drawn attention to the fact that Grimhild is the only woman in *Sigurd* who spins, and I suggest that, given Morris's own work as a professional craftsman, this can hardly be fortuitous. It is also significant that the cluster of references to Grimhild's spinning occur at the point at which she is preparing a spell to enable Gunnar and Sigurd to deceive Brynhild; the reader is reminded of the age-old association of spinning and witchcraft. It will be useful to turn here again to the O.E.D., in which the following definitions of spinning are the most relevant to our purposes:

I. To draw and twist the fibres of some suitable material, such as wool or flax, so as to form a continuous thread; to be engaged in or to follow this occupation.

2. (b) In figurative contexts.

To spin a yarn (To tell a story)

4. (fig.) a Of the Fates or other powers. To devise or appoint (One's destiny or fortune.)

The O.E.D. also contains the following definition of *weave*;

1b. In figurative contexts; In many languages, the equivalent vb. is used in metaphorical expressions relating to the contriving of plots or deception.

In other words, Morris is here employing the idea of spinning and weaving as metaphors for deception. I have already quoted the first reference to Grimhild's spinning, which occurs at the point when she finds it necessary to teach Gunnar and Sigurd the craft of shape-changing. A second reference occurs as Gunnar is unable to cross Brynhild's fire, even though he is riding Sigurd's horse; he exclaims:

Who mocketh the King of the Niblungs in the desert land forlorn?
Is it thou, O Sigurd the Stranger? Is it thou, o younger-born?
Dost thou laugh in the hall, O Mother? dost thou spin, and laugh at the tale
That has drawn thy son and thine eldest to the sword and the blaze of the
bale?

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.211)

Sigurd replies:

... Nay, strengthen thine hand for the work, for the gift that thy manhood
awaits,

For I give thee a gift, O Niblung, that shall overload the Fates;
And how may a King sustain it? but forbear with the dark to strive;
For thy mother spinneth and worketh, and her craft is awake and alive.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.211)

The poem continues ...

Then Hogni spake from the saddle;"The time, and the time is come
To gather the might of our mother, and of her that spinneth at home.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.211)

Hogni then advises Sigurd and Gunnar to change shapes, as Grimhild has taught them, and the narrator informs us:*But the craft of the kings of aforetime on those kings of the battle lay.*

A final reference to Grimhild's spinning occurs as the men return from the wooing expedition:

O'er heath and holt they hie them, o'er hill and dale they ride,
Till they come to the Burg of the Niblungs and the war-gate of their pride;
And there is Grimhild the Wise-wife, and she sits and spins in the hall.
"Rejoice, O mother," saith Gunnar, "for thy guest hath holpen all
And this eve shall thy sons be merry ..."
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.220)

There is perhaps a literal level at which Grimhild can be seen as fulfilling her domestic duty by spinning wool to make clothes for her family - which would in mediaeval society in fact have been one of her chief duties, a fact of which Morris was well aware - but the metaphor of spinning as a means of deception is here far more important.

Grimhild does no more spinning once she has achieved her aim - of winning Brynhild as a wife for her son - but her ambition for her family is by no means sated. She drives them on to what she sees as greater honours, greater achievements, but in fact brings about the destruction of the Niblung race. She plays a negative role at the wedding of Gunnar and Brynhild by stepping between Sigurd and Brynhild, and the simile is striking:

... but e'en as the rainless cloud
Ere the first of the tempest ariseth the latter sun doth shroud,
And men look round and shudder, so Grimhild came between
The silent golden Sigurd and the eyes of the mighty Queen.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.225)

This is not the first time that Grimhild has been associated with storm and tempest, with blotting out the sun. In the above case, she extinguishes the light from Brynhild's life, as she had previously done to Sigurd, when she gave him the cup of evil drink. The elaborate epic simile Morris employs at this point indicates not only that Sigurd's life is blighted, but also that his sorrow somehow communicates itself to all the others present:

As folk of the summer feasters, who have fallen to feast in the morn,
And have wreathed their brows with roses ere the first of the clouds was
born;
Beneath the boughs were they sitting, and the long leaves twinkled about,

And the wind with their laughter was mingled, nor held aback from their
 shout,
 Amidst of their harp it lingered, from the mouth of their horn went up,
 Round the reek of their roast was it breathing, o'er the flickering face of
 their cup -

- Lo now, why sit they so heavy, and why is their joy-speech dead,
 Why are the long leaves drooping, and the fair wind hushed overhead?
 Look out from the sunless boughs to the yellow-mirky east,
 How the clouds are woven together o'er that afternoon of feast;
 There are heavier clouds above them, and the sun is a hidden wonder,
 It rains in the nether heaven, and the world is afraid with the thunder;
 E'en so in the hall of the Niblungs, and the holy joyous place,
 Sat the earls on the marvel gazing, and the sorrow of Sigurd's face.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.188)

Grimhild, then, is not only seen as overwise and skilled in witchcraft and deception, but is also associated with clouding the brightness of the sun - which seems to be a metaphor for blighting peoples' lives.

Brynhild, in her greeting to Grimhild, seems to be perfectly well aware that she has been brought to the Niblungs' hall as a result of the older woman's ambition:

O mother of the Niblungs, such hap be on thy head,
 As thy love for me, the stranger, was past the pain of words!
 Mayst thou see thy son's sons glorious in the meeting of the swords!
 Mayst thou sleep and doubt thee nothing of the fortunes of thy race!
 Mayst thou hear folk call yon high-seat the earth's most happy place!

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.225)

Could one be correct in assuming that that next line *-Then the Wise-wife hushed before her, and a little fell aside* implies that even Grimhild is somewhat abashed before Brynhild? That she can't think of anything to say in response to Brynhild's greeting, which is, on the surface, courteous, but indicates suspicion of Grimhild's motives? The reader is reminded again that Grimhild is a wise-wife, i.e. a witch, and this negative attribute is emphasised here in order to draw attention to the contrast with Brynhild.

It is interesting - perhaps curious - to note than, when Sigurd and Brynhild finally come face to face and he recognises her, the poem tell us that

The will of the Norns is accomplished, and, lo, they wend on their ways,
 And leave the mighty Sigurd to deal with the latter days -

The reader had been led to suppose that it was the will of *Grimhild* that had been accomplished, and that she thought that she could defy the will of the Norns. Perhaps, then, this should be interpreted as implying that ultimately Grimhild will not succeed in defying the will of the Norns.

Grimhild now turns her attention to inspiring Gunnar with envy of Sigurd's wealth :

He hearkens to Grimhild, moreover, and he deems she is driving him on,
 He knoweth not whither nor wherefore; but she tells of the measureless
 gold,
 And the flame of the uttermost Waters, and the Hoard of the Kings of old;
 And she tells of kings' supplanters, and the leaders of the war,
 Who take the crown of song-craft, and the tale when all is o'er.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.230)

It is not suggested in VS that Grimhild is the one who inspires Gunnar with envy of Sigurd's wealth - this is in any case a secondary motive in the Saga. In the Saga, it is Brynhild who is the chief instigator and Gunnar who insists on the murder being carried out. Grimhild plays a very minor role:

Gunnar...was bound to Sigurd by oath, and this way and that swung the heart within him; but at the last he bethought him of the measureless shame if his wife went from him, and he said within himself, "Brynhild is better to me than all things else, and the fairest woman of all women, and I will lay down my life rather than lose the love of her." And herewith he called to him his brother and spake, -

"Trouble is heavy on me," and he tells him that he must needs slay Sigurd, for that he has failed him where in he trusted him; "so let us be lords of the gold and the realm withal."

Hogni answers, "Ill it behoves us to break our oaths with wrack and wrong, and withal great aid we have in him; ...such another brother-in-law never may we get again ... But well I see how things stand, for this has Brynhild stirred thee up to, and surely shall her counsel drag us into huge shame and scathe."

Gunnar says, "yet shall it be brought about ... let us egg our brother Guttorm to the deed; he is young, and of little knowledge, and is clean out of all the oaths moreover."

So the brothers fall to talk, and Gunnar says that it is a deed well worthy of death, that taking of Brynhild's maidenhead;

"So come now, let us prick on Guttorm to do the deed."

Therewith they call him to them ... and they took a certain worm and somewhat of wolf's flesh and let scethe them

together, and gave him to eat of the same, even as the singer sings -

Fish of the wild-wood,
Worm smooth crawling,
'With wolf-meat mingled,
They minced for Guttorm;
Then in the beaker,
In the wine his mouth knew,
They set it, still doing
More deeds of wizards.

Wherefore with the eating of this meat he grew so wild and eager, and with all things about him, and with the heavy words of Grimhild, that he gave his word to do the deed; and mighty honour they promised him in reward thereof.

(Volsunga Saga, Morris's translation.)

In Morris's poem, Grimhild sees Sigurd merely as a means to an end, i.e. to the aggrandisement of her family - this is not really the case in *Volsunga Saga*, in which she decides to obtain Sigurd as a husband for Gudrun, but there the marriage is an end in itself, as far as she is concerned; it is not then necessary to get rid of Sigurd in order to obtain his wealth. This motive is first suggested by Gunnar, but his main motive is that he is driven to plan the murder of Sigurd by Brynhild - Hogni speaks against the plan, and Grimhild is not concerned in it.

The poem does not precisely suggest, when Grimhild first sees Sigurd, that she sees him as a means to an end - I have already drawn attention to the fact that Grimhild deemed *him mighty of men, and a king for the queen-folk meet*, in other words, that she saw him as a suitable husband for her daughter. But we have also noted that she was pleased that the effect of her potion was to diminish Sigurd in some way, to make him less of a radiant hero than he was before :

But Grimhild looked and was merry: and she deemed her life was great,
And her hand a wonder of wonders to withstand the deeds of Fate;
For she saw by the face of Sigurd and the token of his eyes
That her will had abased the valiant, and filled the faithful with lies...
(Sigurd the Volsung , p.187)

So perhaps this does indicate that Grimhild merely sees Sigurd as a means to an end, the end being the aggrandisement of her family. If this is so, the poem has an internal consistency that *Volsunga Saga* lacks . It would be possible to interpret Book IV of

Sigurd as the tragedy of Grimhild, as it in this final book of the poem that she sees all her ambitions destroyed. We should, then, take careful note of the fact that it is Grimhild who first sows the seeds of suspicion and envy in Gunnar's mind, and inspires him with "measureless pride".

During the quarrel with Gudrun, Brynhild curses Grimhild, and reveals that she knows (and presumably has always suspected) that Grimhild drugged Sigurd into forgetting her - and foretells that she will one day drug Gudrun in the same way.

"O Niblung child," said Brynhild, "what bitterer curse may be
Than the curse of Grimhild thy mother, and the womb that carried
thee?"

"Ah, fool!" said the wife of Sigurd, "wilt thou curse thy very friend?
But the bitter love bewrays thee, and thy pride that naught shall end."

"Do I curse the accursed?" said Brynhild, "but yet the day shall come,
When thy word shall scarce be better on the threshold of thine home;
When thine heart shall be dulled and chilly with e'en such a mingling
of might,

As in Sigurd's cup she mingled, and thou shalt not remember aright."
(*Sigurd the Volsung* p.237)

This reminds us that Brynhild has the gift of prophecy - she is not a wise-wife like Grimhild, but a woman gifted with wisdom.

It is Grimhild's suggestion that Guttorm, the youngest brother, should carry out the planned murder of Sigurd:⁴

Again spake Grimhild the wise-wife; "Where then is Guttorm the
brave?
For he blent not his blood with the Volsung's, nor his oath to Sigurd
gave,
Nor called on Earth to witness, nor went beneath the yoke;
And now is he Sigurd's foeman; and who may curse his stroke?"
(*Sigurd the Volsung* . p.255)

And Grimhild, in order to inspire Guttorm to the deed, brews an even nastier drink than the one she gave to Sigurd:

Then uprose Grimhild the wise-wife, and took the cup again;
Night-long had she brewed that witch-drink and laboured not in vain.

⁴ In VS, by contrast, it is Gunnar's idea that Guttorm should be the murderer.

For therein was the creeping venom, and hearts of things that prey
On the hidden lives of ocean, and never look on day;

And the heart of the ravening wood-wolf and the hunger-blinded
beast

And the spent slaked heart of the wild-fire the guileful cup increased;
But huge words of ancient evil about its rim were scored,

The curse and the eyeless craving of the first that fashioned sword.

(*Sigurd the Volsung* , p.256)

Morris did not base this on *Volsunga Saga* , but on his own view of Grimhild as a central figure in the plot.

Book IV of *Sigurd the Volsung* , although entitled *Gudrun* , might with almost equal justification be entitled *Grimhild* . As I indicated above, the final book of the poem is in many ways her tragedy; she believes that she is going to see the culmination of all her hopes, but instead she experiences their extinction.

And the years have made her glorious, and the days have swollen her
pride;

She looketh down on the people, from on high she looketh down,

And her days have become a wonder, and her redes are wisdom's crown,

She saith; Where then are the Gods? what things have they shapen and
made

More of might than the days I have shapen? of whom shall our hearts be
afraid?

(*Sigurd the Volsung* , p.277)

Although this passage seems to indicate that Grimhild despises the Gods, she is more circumspect in a later conversation with Gunnar. She is here telling him how she will persuade - or force, if persuasion will not serve - Gudrun to accept Atli's wooing:

But now is the day of our deeds, and no longer durst I refrain,

Lest I put the Gods' hands from me, and make their gifts but vain.

Yea, the woman is of the Niblungs, and often I knew her of old,

How her heart would burn within her when the tale of their glory was told.

With wisdom and craft shall I work, with the gifts that Odin hath given

Wherewith my fathers of old, and the ancient mothers have striven.

(*Sigurd the Volsung* , p.280)

"Ancient mothers" may be a reference to the Norns - or to a concept closer to the Fates of Greek mythology.⁵ Grimhild claims here not to be defying the Gods; she is

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The following information, from *The Greek Myths*, by Robert Graves, may be of some relevance ;

making the best of their gifts, or perhaps improving on what they have given. She has previously indicated that she is motivated by a desire to defy the indifference of the Gods - as was Brynhild. (See above). It is now Grimhild who reproaches Hogni with attempting to fight against Fate:

"O wise-heart Hogni", said Grimhild, "wilt thou strive with the hand of Fate,
And thrust back the hand of Odin that the Niblung glory will crown?"
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.281)

It will transpire, however, that Grimhild has misinterpreted the omens, or that she has interpreted them according to her own desires, still thinking that she is in control of Fate, or that she is manipulating the Gods, rather than being subject to their decrees like anyone else.

Perhaps this will become a bit clearer if we jump ahead to Grimhild's last utterance; she knows that her sons have gone on their last journey, and they know it too, although no-one is prepared to admit it, and when they have left, she curse the gods and dies:

"O ye - whom then shall I cry on, ye that hunt my sons unto death,
And overthrow our glory, and bring our labour to nought -
Ye Gods, ye had fashioned the greatest, and to make them greater I
wrought,
And to strengthen your hands for the battle, and uplift your hearts for the
end;
But ye, ye have fashioned confusion, and the great with the little ye blend,

"There are three conjoined Fates, robed in white, whom Erebus begot on Night: by name Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos. Of these Atropos is the smallest in stature, but the most terrible.

b. Zeus, who weighs the lives of men and informs the Fates of his decisions can, it is said, change his mind and intervene to save whom he pleases, when the thread of life, spun on Clotho's spindle, and measured by the rod of Lachesis, is about to be snipped by Atropos's shears. Indeed, men claim that they themselves can, to some degree, control their own fates by avoiding unnecessary dangers. The younger gods, therefore, laugh at the Fates, and some say that Apollo once mischevously made them drunk in order to save his friend Admetus from death.

c. Others hold, on the contrary, that Zeus himself is subject to the Fates, as the Pythian priestess once confessed in an oracle; because they are not his children, but parthenogenous daughters of the Great Goddess Necessity, against whom not even the gods contend, and who is called 'The Strong Fate'."

Till no more on the earth shall be living the mighty that mock at your
 death,
 Till like the leaves men tremble, like the dry leaves quake at breath.
 I have wrought for your lives and your glory, and for this have I
 strengthened my guile,
 That the earth your hands uplifted might endure, nor pass in a while
 Like the clouds of latter morning that melt in the first of the night."

She rose up great and dreadful, and stood on the floor upright,
 And cast up her hands to the roof-tree, and cried aloud and said;

"Woe to you that have made me for nothing! for the house of the Niblungs
 is dead,
 Empty and dead as the desert, where the sun is idle and vain,
 And no hope hath the dew to cherish, and no deed abideth the rain."
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.207)

Before concluding, let us return to Grimhild's potions. She now gives Gudrun
 a potion to make her agree to marry Atli, and it is specifically stated that Gudrun does
 not forget Sigurd:

Nought changed the eyes of Gudrun, but she reached her hand to the cup
 And drank before her kindred, and the blood from her heart went up,
 And was blent with the guile of the serpent, and many a thing she forgat,
 But never the day of her sorrow, and of how o'er Sigurd she sat.
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.285)

This differs from *Volsunga Saga*, in which ...

They were fain to choose good gifts for their sister, and
 spake softly to her, but in none of them would she trow.
 Then Gunnar brought unto her a drink mingled with
 hurtful things, and this she must needs drink, and with
 the drinking thereof she had no more memory of their
 guilt against her.
 (*Volsunga Saga*, Morris's translation.)

But, in the Saga as in the poem, it is to Grimhild's persuasion and guile that Gudrun
 finally yields.

After this, Grimhild plays no further part in the Saga, whereas in Morris's
 poem she does not fade out of the story, but continues to occupy a central role until, as
 we have already observed, she curses the gods and dies, after her sons have gone on
 what they know, and she knows, to be their last journey.

To sum up - Morris was evidently fascinated by the figure of Grimhild, and advanced her to a role of centrality, based on the hints given in *Volsunga Saga*. In doing so, he has in fact given Books III and IV of the poem an internal consistency which is lacking in the Saga. I have suggested that, in Morris's poem, the downfall of the Niblungs could be interpreted as the tragedy of Grimhild, as all her scheming for the sake of her family leads to their destruction, not to the greater glory she desired for them.

CHAPTER IXHAGENHagen in the Nibelungenlied : Hogni in Morris's poem

In Chapter V I suggested that Brynhild might have been perceived negatively in the mediaeval sources. I would now like to suggest that Hagen/Hogni might not have been perceived as the villain, and that this too might have been an innovation of Wagner's.¹ This again raises the question of how much our interpretation of mediæval literature is influenced by Wagner, as I think we tend to approach texts such as NL expecting Hagen to be the villain and Siegfried to be the hero. In fact, as I hope to demonstrate, matters are by no means so simple.

To begin with an examination of NL - Wagner assumed that the kernel of the work is the relationship between Siegfried and Brunhild, and that it is in fact a debased myth. This interpretation is, however, very much open to question; Wagner either did not realise, or deliberately chose to ignore, the fact that much of NL deals with the question of rights and duties in feudal society. In this context, both Siegfried and Brunhild are outsiders. Siegfried's irruption into the ordered society of Worms is disruptive, and only Hagen and his nephew Ortwin have the courage to oppose him; it is Hagen's duty towards Gunther, his feudal overlord, to oppose Siegfried, and it could be argued that he would be failing in his duty if he did not oppose him, and that Siegfried's arrogance suffers a check through Hagen's intervention. The poet specifically states that Gunther was angered that Hagen kept silence for so long:

119. N âch swerten rief dô sêre	von Metzen Ortwin.
er mohte Ha genen swester sun	von Tronege vil wol sîn.
daz der sô lange dagete,	daz was dem kûnege leit.
	<i>(Das Nibelungenlied, 3. Aventure)</i>

Siegfried replies rudely to Gunther's courteous greeting;

¹ Though in this instance he may have drawn on *Thidreks Saga* for the characterisation of Hagen.

106. "Mich wundert dirre maere ", sprach der künec zehant,
 " von wâ nnen ir, êdel Sîvrit, sît komen in ditze lant.
 oder wâ z ir wellet werben ze Wormez an den Rîn."
 dâ sprach der gast ze dem küneger: daz sol iuch unverdaget sin.'
109. Ich bin ouch ein recke und solde krône tragen.
 ich wil daz gerne fegen daz si von mir sagen
 daz ich habe von rehte liute unde lant.
 dar umbe sol mîn êre und ouch min houbet wesen pfant.
- 110 . Nu ir sît sô küene, als mir ist geseit,
 sone rûoche ich, ist daz iemen lîep oder leit:
 ich wil an iu ertwingen swaz ir muget hân;
 lâ nt unde burge daz sol mir werden undertâ n.'
111. Den künec hete wunder unde sîne man alsam
 umbe disiu mære diu er hie vernam,
 daz er des hete willen, er næme im sîniu lant.
 daz hœrten sîne degene; dô wart in zürnen bekant.
112. "Wie het ich daz verdienet," sprach Gunther der degen,
 "des mîn vater lange mit êren hâ t gepflegen,
 daz wir daz sôlden verliesen von fem nnes kraft?
 wir liezen übele schînen daz wir ouch pflegen ritterschaft."
 (*Das Nibelungenlied, 3. Aventiure*)

Siegfried issues a completely unmotivated challenge, as Gunther's reply makes clear - he has no need to fight Siegfried for lands which he has inherited. Even though Siegfried offers his own kingdom, and his own life, if Gunther wins, still the challenge is unjustified. It would have perhaps been appropriate if Siegfried had issued a challenge to a tournament -but he is the guest, the visitor, and his behaviour is arrogant and aggressive.

The next stage is that Gernot, the second brother, also tells Siegfried that they have no need to fight for their lands, to which they have every right, and which they in any case already possess; and Ortwin von Metz points out to Gunther and the others that Siegfried had no right to issue such a challenge.² Siegfried replies to Ortwin by

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115. "Wir hân des niht gedingen," sprach dô Gernôt,
 "daz wir iht lande ertwingen, daz iemen darümbe têt
 gelige vor heldes handen. wir haben richiu lant;
 diu dient uns von rehte, ze niemen sind si baz bewant."
116. Mit grimmigem muote dô stuonden friunde sin.
 dô was ouch dar under von Metzen Ortwin.
 der sprach; "disiu suone ist mir harte leit.

reminding him of their respective ranks. Gernot again acts as peacemaker, and Hagen expresses the opinion of all the vassals when he says:

121. Dô sprach der starke Hagene: "uns mac wol wesen leit,
 allen dînen degenen, daz er ie gereit
 durch striten her ze Rine. er soltez haben lâ n.
 im heten mîne herren solher leide niht getâ n."
 (*Das Nibelungenlied*, 3. Aventiure)

The situation is finally resolved peacefully, and Siegfried is made welcome; but from the start, there is hostility between him and Hagen, since Hagen regards him as an intruder and an upstart, who has disrupted their society.

This is not by any means to say that Hagen is seen entirely positively by the NL poet, at least not in the first half of the poem, but he is not the dark, brooding figure of evil that we find in Wagner. He is not really - or at least not primarily - concerned to gain Siegfried's treasure, but to undercut Siegfried's influence. When the treasure is brought to the Rhine after Siegfried's death, Hagen has it sunk in the river in order to prevent Kriemhild from using it. He does not plot Siegfried's death from the beginning of the poem, but he does promise Brunhild to kill him, or at least to avenge her shame:

- 863 Mit rede was geschieden manec schoene wip.
 dô trûrete alsô sêre der Prûnhilde lip,
 daz ez erbarmen muose die Guntheres man.
 dô kom von Tronege Hagene zuo sîner frôuwen gegân.
- 864 Er vâr gete was ir wære, weinende er si vant.
 dâ sagte si im diu mære. er lobte ir sa zehant
 daz ez eramen müese der Kriemhilde man.
 oder er wolde nimmer dar umbe vrœlîch gestâ n.

Hagen may have been waiting for this as an excuse to get rid of Siegfried, but it could also be argued that his desire to avenge Brunhild's tears is perfectly genuine, since it fits it with his conception of his duties in feudal society and his feeling that Siegfried is an outsider and an intruder. It is Hagen (assisted to some extent by Ortwin von Metz) who keeps insisting that they would all benefit from Siegfried's death:

iu hât der starke Sîvrit

unverdient widerseit."
 (*Das Nibelungenlied*, 3. Aventiure)

870 Sîn gevolgete niemen,
riet in allen zîten
ob Sîfrit niht enlebte,
vil der kûnege lande.

niwan daz Hagene
Gunther dem degene
sô wurde im undertân
der helt des truren began.

It is not clear how true this is; Siegfried's son would be the one to inherit, but perhaps Hagen means that, during his minority, Gunther would act as regent, although there is also the possibility that the regency would devolve upon Kriemhild. It is, in any case, enough to work upon Gunther.

In NL, as in the Norse literature, it is Brunhild who is the instigator of the murder. Hagen carries it out, but, in the Norse literature, his counterpart Hogni speaks against it. It is to this version that we now turn. In Chapter V, I indicated that Hogni speaks in defence of Sigurd when Brynhild urges his murder. In VS, Hogni attempts to persuade Gunnar to abandon his plan to have Sigurd killed, but Gunnar insists, and suggests that the younger brother, Gutthorm, be chosen as the murderer, since he is not bound by oaths of blood-brotherhood to Sigurd. After the event, Hogni warns the others that they have done an evil deed.³ Hogni's opposition to Sigurd's murder is also clearly expressed in PE, for instance in *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*:

One thing alone Hogni	had for an answer;
"Such doing for us	are naught seemly to do;
To rend with sword	oaths once sworn,
Oaths once sworn	and troth once plighted.

"Nor know we on mould	men of happier days,
The while we four	rule over the folk;
While the bold in battle,	the Hun King, bides living.

"And no nobler kin	shall be known afield,
If our five sons	we long may foster;
Yea, a goodly stem	shall surely wax.
- But I see clearly	in what wise it standeth,

³ Høgni mælti; 'Nú er fram komit þat er Brynhildr spúrð i, ok þetta it illa verk er vér frám aldri bót.'

Brynhild's sore urging o'ermuch on thee beareth.
(Morris's translation) 4

In the same poem, Hogni expresses further negative opinions of Brynhild, and refuses to prevent her suicide:

Then called he Hogni	to have talk with him;
Let all folk go	forth into the hall,
Thine with mine -	-O need sore and mighty! -
To wot if we yet	my wife's parting may stay.
Till the time's wearing	some hindrance wax."

One answer Hogni	had for all;
"Nay, let hard need	have rule thereover,
And no man let her	of her long journey!
Never born again,	may she come back thence! " 5
(Morris's translation)	

Somewhat confusingly, there is one stanza in *Brot af Sigurd arkviða* in which Hogni tells Gudrun that he did participate in the murder :

One word Hogni	had for an answer;
"Our swords have smitten	Sigurd asunder,

4	17. Eino því Hogni	annsvør veitti:
	"Samir eigi okkr	slíkt at vinna,
	sverði rofna	svarna ei ða,
	ei ða svarna	unnar trygg ðar!

18. Vitoma vit á moldo	menn in sælli,
meðan fiórir vér	fólki ráðom
ok sá inn húnski	herbaldr lifir.
ná in mætri	mægð í moldo
ef vér fimm sono	fæddim lengi,
á ttom góða	Oxla knættim!

19. Ek veit gørla	hvaðan vegir standa;
ero Brynhildar	brek ofmikil!"

5	44 Nam hann sér Høgna	heita at rénom:
	"Seggi vil ek alla	í sal ganga,
	þúna með mínom	- nu er þér mikil! -,
	vita, ef meini	moðfar kono,
	unz af mæli	enn mein komi:
	þá kútom því	þarfar ráa!"

Eino því Hogni	andsvor veitti:
Letia máðr hána	langrar göngo,
þars hon aptrborin	aldri verð i!
Hon krøng of komz	fyr kné móður,
hon borin	óvilja til,
mørgom manni	at móð trega!"

And the grey horse hangs drooping o'er his lord lying dead. ⁶

Apart from this one reference - which may be influenced by the German tradition - there is no indication in the Norse literature that Hogni is in any way regarded as the "villain"; it is Grimhild who is perceived negatively, and perhaps also Brynhild, as I indicated in Chapter V.

In Morris's poem, following the sources in Norse literature, Hogni is portrayed positively, or at least not as negatively as Wagner's Hagen. There are, however, some indications that he has acquired more of his mother's wisdom and cunning than the others. The first mention of Hogni refers to his wisdom: *Lo, here is Hogni that holdeth the wisdom tried in the fire.* It is perhaps significant that Hogni has forebodings about the future which the others don't seem to share;

But Gunnar the bright in battle deems him ⁷ his earthly friend,
 And Hogni is fain of his fellow, howso the day's work end,
 And Guttorm the young is joyous of the help and gifts he hath.
 (emphasis added)

In the episode in which Sigurd woos Brynhild for Gunnar, Hogni is the only one who suspects that all of Grimhild's craft and cunning will be needed, and he is the one who understands why Grimhild taught Gunnar and Sigurd the craft of shape-changing. When Sigurd offers Gunnar his own horse, since Gunnar's will not brave the flames, Hogni realises, or suspects, that this will not be enough:

Then Hogni laughed in his heart, and he said: "This changing were well
 If so might the deed be accomplished; but perchance there is more to tell;
 Thou shalt take the war-steed, Gunnar, and enough or naught it shall be;
 But the coal-blue gear of the Niblungs the golden hall shall see."
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.210)

Hogni has been careful not to say, "You shall see Brunhild's golden hall", but has hinted that someone in Gunnar's guise will. He has also hinted that he doesn't think

6

Eino því Hogni
 "Sundr hǫfom Sigur
 gnápir gráðr íór

andsvør veitti:
 svefðinn hoggvin.
 yfir gram dauðom!"

⁷Sigurd

that it will help for Gunnar to borrow Sigurd's horse. There is one reference in this episode to Dark Hogni - *Dark Hogni sat on his war-steed, and stared out into the night* - which one is tempted to interpret as implying that Hogni is in some way a sinister figure - but Morris may not have intended this, as all the Niblungs are dark-haired, and it may be a neutral reference to Hogni's colouring.

In Morris's poem, Hogni does not try to prevent the murder of Sigurd, instead he accepts the inevitable with weary resignation:

Then spake Hogni and answered; "All lands beneath the sun
 Shall know and hearken and wonder that such a deed must be done".
 "Speak, brother of Kings", said Gunnar, "dost thou know deeds better or
 worse
 That shall wash us clean from shaming and redeem our lives from the
 curse?"

"I am none of the Norns," said Hogni, "nor the heart of Odin the Goth
 To avenge the foster-brethren, or broken love and troth;
 Thy will is the story fated, nor shall I look on the deed
 With uncursed hands unreddened, and edges dulled at need."
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.255)

As in VS and PE, Hogni refuses to dissuade Brynhild from committing suicide, and expresses a negative opinion of her:

"It is naught, thy word," said Hogni, "wilt thou bring dead men aback
 Or the souls of Kings departed midst the battle and the wrack?
 Yet this shall be easier to thee than the turning Brynhild's heart:
 She came to dwell among us, but in us she had no part;
 Let her go her ways from the Niblungs with her hand in Sigurd's
 hand
 Will the grass grow up henceforward where her feet have trodden the
 land?"
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.270)

The second half of NL and VS are not used by Wagner, but these texts are relevant to Morris's poem. In NL, Siegfried's treasure is brought to the Rhine for Kriemhild - it is her inheritance, to which she is entitled. Hagen sinks the gold in the Rhine to prevent her from using it to gain adherents to her cause. This in fact takes place at Gernot's suggestion, and the brothers are - or pretend to be - angry with Hagen

for what he has done, although in fact he has done it for their benefit and, as it will later transpire, at their command . 8

In Morris's poem, Hogni throws the gold away, but it is for a different reason; he does it before he and Gunnar go to Atli's court, which they know will be their last

8

1128. Den armen unt den richen
daz dô reite Hagene,
noch deheine wile,
in ir dienst gewunne
- begunde si nu geben
ob si solde leben
daz si sô manegen man
daz ez in leide müese ergâ n.
1129. Dô sprach der künec Gunther;
zuiu sol ich daz wenden,
ja erwarp ich daz vil kûme,
nu enruochen war si teile
- "ir ist lîp und guot.
swaz si dâ mit getuot?
daz si mir wart sô holt.
ir silber und ir golt."
1130. Hagene sprach ze dem kûnege;
deheinem einem wîbe
si bringet ez mit gâ be
d âz vil wol geriuwen
- "ez solde ein frumer man
niht des hordes lâ n.
noch unz ûf den tac
die kûenen Burgonden mac."
1131. Dô sprach der kûnec Gunther;
daz ich ir getâte
und wil es fürbaz heten;
dô sprach aber Hagene;
- "ich swuor ir einen eit
nimmer mêre leit
si ist diu swester mîn."
"I ât mich den schuldegen sin."
1132. Ir sumelîcher eide
dô nâ men si der witwen
Hagene sich der slûzzel
daz zumde ir bruoder Gêrnôt,
- wâ ren umbehuot.
daz kreftege guot.
aller underwant.
do er daz rehte bevant.
1133. Dô sprach der herre Giselher:
vil leides miner swester;
wære er niht min mâ c,
iteniuwez weinen
- "Hagene hâ t getâ n
ich solde ez underst ân.
ez gieng im an den lip."
tet dô Sifrides wîp.
1134. Dô sprach der herre Gêrnôt;
gemüet mit dem golde
allez heizen senken,
si gie vil klegelîche
- "ê daz wir immer sin
wir soldenz in den Rin
daz ez nimmer wurde man."
für ir bruoder Giselheren stâ n.
1135. Si sprach: "vil lieber bruoder,
beidiu libes unde guotes
dô sprach er zuo der frouwen:
als wir nu komen widere;
- du solt gedenken min.
soltu mîn voget sîn."
"daz sol sîn getan,
wir haben ritennes wâ n."
1136. Der kûnec und sîne mâ ge
die aller besten darunder
niwan Hagene aleine,
den er trouc Kriemhilde,
- rûmten dâ daz lant,
die man inder vant,
der beleip dâ durch haz,
und tet vil willeclîche daz.
1137. E daz der kûnec rîche
die wîle hete Hagene
er sancte in dâ ze Lûche
er wande er solde in niezen:
- wider wære komen,
den schaz vil gar genomen.
allen in den Rîn.
des enkunde niht gesîn.

journey.⁹ Morris adapted the scene from NL, and there is perhaps some suggestion that Hogni throws the gold away in order to prevent Gudrun and Atli from obtaining it. It should be recalled that, in VS and PE, Gudrun fights against Atli, on the side of her brothers, and that Atli has issued a treacherous invitation in order to obtain the wealth of the Niblungs. In the last book of *Sigurd*, Morris has conflated his sources in a way rather similar to Wagner, taking what he needed from NL and the Norse literature. Morris's Gudrun is based on the Kriemhild of the second half of NL, rather than on the

9

Now when the house was silent, and all men in slumber lay,
 And yet two hours were lacking of the dawning-tide of day,
 The sons of his foster-mother doth the heart-wise Hogni find;
 In the dead night, speaking softly, he showeth them his mind,
 And they wake and hearken and heed him, and arise from the bolster blue,
 Nor aught do their stout hearts falter at the deed he bids them do.
 So he and they go softly while all men slumber and sleep
 And they enter the treasure-houses, and come to their midmost heap;
 But so rich in the night it glimmers that the brethren hold their breath,
 While Hogni laugheth upon it: long it lay on the Glittering Heath,
 Long it lay in the house of Reidmar, long it lay 'neath the waters wan;
 But no long while hath it tarried in the houses and dwellings of men.

Nor long these linger before it; they set their hands to the toil,
 And uplift the bed of the Serpent, the Seed of murder and broil;

.....

No great way down from the burg-gate, anigh to the hallowed field,
 There lieth a lake in the river as round as Odin' s shield,
 A black pool huge and awful: ten long-ships of the most
 Therein might wager battle, and the sunken should be lost
 Beyond all hope of diver

There now the Niblung War-king and the foster-brethren twain
 Lead up their golden harvest and stay it wain by wain
 Till they hang o'er the rim scarce balanced

Down then and whirling outward the ruddy Gold fell forth,
 As a flame in the dim grey morning, flashed out a kingdom's worth,
 Then the waters roared above it, the wan water and the foam
 Flew up o'er the face of the rock-wall as the tinkling Gold fell home,
 Unheard, unseen for ever, a wonder and a tale,
 Till the last of earthly singers from the sons of men shall fail:

But his face was proud and glorious as he strode the war-gate through,
 And went up to his kingly chamber, and the golden bed he knew,
 And lay down and slept by his help-mate as a play-spent child might sleep
 In some franklin's wealthy homestead, in the room the nurses keep.

(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.297)

Gudrun in the Norse literature, but Atli is still the treacherous Atli of the Norse sources, whereas Etzel in NL is a much nobler character. Gudrun works on Atli's greed in order to persuade him to issue his treacherous invitation:

Cold then is her voice in the high-seat, and she hears not what it
saith;
But Atli heedeth and hearkeneth, for she tells of the Glittering Heath,
And the Load of the mighty Greyfell, and the Ransom of Odin the Goth:
Cold yet is her voice as she telleth of murder and breaking of troth,
Of the stubborn hearts of the Niblungs, and their hands that never
yield,
Of their craving that nought fulfilleth, of their hosts arrayed for the
field.

...

Thus she stirred up the lust of Atli, she, unmoved as a mighty queen,
While the fire that burned within her by no child of man was seen.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.289)

In VS and PE, Gudrun tries to warn her brothers that Atli's invitation is treacherous, but they either ignore or deliberately misinterpret the warning. In NL, she sends messages that are deliberately misleading, although Hagen sees clearly enough what she means.¹⁰ In Morris's poem, both Gunnar and Hogni know that, if they accept

-
- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>10 1418. Sô sagt ouch Gîselhêre
daz ich von sînen schulden
des sâhen in vil gerne
ich hete in hie vil gerne</p> | <p>daz er wol gedenke dar an,
nie leides niht gewan.
hie diu ougen min.
durch die grôzen triuwe sîn.</p> |
| <p>1419. Sagt ouch mîner muoter
und ob von Tronege Hagene
wer si danne solde
dem sint die wege von kinde</p> | <p>die êre die ich hân.
welle dort best ân,
wîsen durch diu lant?
her zen Hiunen wol bekant."</p> |
| | |
| <p>1457. Zen herbergen fuoren
dô het der kûnec rîche
Gunther der edele
wie in diu rede geveile.</p> | <p>die von Hiunen lant.
n âch friunden sîn gesandt.
vr âgte sîne man
vil maneger sprechen dâ began,</p> |
| <p>1458. Daz er wol mächte rîten
daz rieten im die besten,
ne Hagene eine.
er sprach zem kûnege tougen;</p> | <p>in Etzelen lant.
die er dar under vant,
dem was ez grimme leit.
"ir habt iu selben widerseit.</p> |
| <p>1459. Nu ist iu doch gewizzen
wir mugen immer sorge
wande ich sluoc ze tôde
wie getorste wir geriten</p> | <p>waz wir haben getan.
zuo Kriemhilde hân,
ir man mir mîner hant.
in daz Etzelen lant?"</p> |

the invitation, they are doomed, but they accept it anyway, with a certain bravado. This is perhaps sufficient to demonstrate that in no part of Morris's poem is Hogni portrayed negatively, since, until Book IV of the poem, Morris follows only the Norse sources.

Wagner's source for his characterisation of Hagen is probably *Thidreks Saga* rather than NL. He certainly gets Hagen's unprepossessing appearance from TS:

When he was four years old, he went to play with some other boys. He was stubborn and strong and difficult to get on with; people said as a reproach that he looked like a troll and not like a man, and his appearance was indicative of his character. He was very angry at this; he ran to a pool and looked at his reflection. There he saw that his face was as white as bast and as wan as ashes, and it was large, frightening and grim. He ran to his mother and asked her why he looked like that. She told him who his real father was.

According to the Saga, Hogni's father is not King Aldrian, his mother's husband, but an unnamed elf or dwarf; in Wagner, of course, his father is Alberich, who paid Grimhild to sleep with him. In this version, it is Hogni, at Brunhild's urging, who is responsible for killing Sigurd.

In his characterisation of Hagen Wagner has, as usual, re-interpreted his sources to serve the purposes of his drama. I am not necessarily suggesting that Hagen is perceived entirely positively in the German sources - it is in the German versions that he murders Sigurd - merely that he is not just "the villain", with no redeeming features.

1460. Dô sprach der künec rîche;
mit kuse minneclîche
daz wir ir ie getæ ten,
ez ensi et, Hagene, danne

"min swester lie den zorn.
si h ât ûf uns verkorn
dâ si von hinnen reit:
iu einem widerseit."

(*Das Nibelungenlied*, Aventiuren 23/24)

CHAPTER X
CONCLUSION

We have now discussed and compared Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and Morris's *Sigurd the Volsung*, examining the mediæval literature on which the works are based, the poetic techniques used by Morris and Wagner, and the way in which the chief characters are presented and perceived in the two works.

There are naturally some similarities and resemblances, since *Sigurd* and the *Ring* are based on the same mediæval sources (except for *Thidreks Saga*, with which only Wagner was familiar). We noted in Chapters I and II that in some respects the conclusions of *Sigurd* and the *Ring* are not very different. That is, although Morris's poem does not conclude with the deaths of Sigurd and Brynhild, but continues with the story of Gudrun's Revenge,¹ in both versions the accursed gold is returned to its origin in the water, and the hope is expressed that it will no longer be a source of misery. Gunnar refuses to tell Atli where the gold is;

...for I, I only am left
To tell of the ransom of Odin, and the wealth from the toiler reft.
Lo, once it lay in the water, hid, deep adown it lay,
Till the Gods were grieved and lacking, and men saw it and the day;
Let it lie in the water once more, let the gods be rich and in peace.
(*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.332) (emphasis added)

There may be some kind of tenuous link between this and Brünnhilde's exhortation to the Rhinemaidens in her final scene:

Ihr in der Flut,
löset ihn auf,
und lauter bewahrt
das lichte Gold,
das euch zum Unheil geraubt.
(*Götterdämmerung*, Act III, ll.8915-8919)

¹ An aspect of Morris's poem to which Francis Hueffer objected, as we saw in Chapter I ; but since Morris had not followed Wagner in making Brynhild's suicide a world-redeeming act of self-sacrifice - had not, in fact, conceived of Brynhild as the Redeemer - there was no reason why he should not conclude his poem with Gudrun's Revenge, which he evidently thought of as a more fitting and satisfying conclusion than Brynhild's suicide.

But Gunnar's last words do not precisely convey the idea that the gold can be purified by being returned to the water; it has already been returned to the water, when Hogni threw it away, and there is no sense of redemption, certainly not the idea suggested by Wagner that redemption is to be achieved through annihilation, except that for Gunnar death is a welcome release: *But I at least in the world from the words and the babble shall cease.* (p.332) This echoes Wagner's ideas in the *Ring* about language, articulacy and silence, which were discussed more fully in the preceding chapters. In Chapter VII, I suggested that Wotan's experience is a progression from articulacy to silence; perhaps Gunnar may be saying something similar.

After Signy's death, Sigmund reflects that

...she spent her joyance and her life-days and her fame
That the Volsung kin might blossom and bear the fruit of worth.
(*Sigurd the Volsung* , p.47)

The line *That the Volsung kin might blossom and bear the fruit of worth* again raises the question that is never very far away ; how aware was Morris of Wagner's text? It appears to be a fairly close parallel to Siegmund's closing lines in Act I of *Die Walküre* - *Braut und Schwester bist du dem Bruder; so blühe denn Wälsungenblut!* Of course this may just be a coincidence , just a chance resemblance of language (The Volung kin might blossom / *So blühe denn Wälsungenblut!*) but Morris may have been aware that Wagner's version emphasised the fact that the greatest hero was to come from the incestuous union of the twins.

The overall conclusion, however, must be that, once the reader / audience has penetrated beneath the superficial resemblances, the differences between the two works are greater than the similarities ; great enough, perhaps, to confirm the hypothesis that Sigurd was written in deliberate opposition to Wagner's *Ring*.

The *Ring* is a drama of redemption, but none of the characters in *Sigurd the Volsung* thinks in terms of world-redemption; certainly not Brynhild, when she commits suicide. For the episode of Brynhild's suicide, Morris as usual retains and adapts the language of the source: (which Wagner discarded, though he used it in *Siegfrieds Tod*).

How then when the flames flare upward may I be left behind?
 How then may the road he wendeth be hard for my feet to find?
 How then in the gates of Valhall may the door of the gleaming ring
 Clash to on the heels of Sigurd, as I follow on my king?
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.273)

Of course, in *Götterdämmerung*, Siegfried and Brünnhilde aren't going to Valhalla; Valhalla is going to be consumed in the flames of their funeral pyre, this is the whole point. But in *Sigurd*, we are specifically told that

There is peace on the bale of Sigurd, and the Gods look down from on high
 (*Sigurd the Volsung*, p.274) (Emphasis added)

The world is not redeemed, because that wasn't Brynhild's intention, she dies because she feels unable to live without Sigurd. Perhaps there is some hint that eventually the world will be redeemed, indirectly through the *lives* of Sigurd and Brynhild, though not through their deaths; as we discussed in Chapter VI, Sigurd is referred to as the Redeemer in explicitly Biblical and Christian terms. There is no indication that the gods may need redemption, or that they will be consumed by Brynhild's fire; they are watching, probably with god-like indifference, although later the narrator tells us of *The Sorrow of Odin the Goth*.²

One of the major differences between the *Ring* and *Sigurd* is in the delineation and presentation of the characters of Sigurd and Brynhild; this was discussed in Chapters V and VI, and can be briefly summarised here. It is Morris's characterisation of Sigurd as a type of Christ and as a *puer senex* that has led me to suggest that *Sigurd the Volsung* may be intended as an anti-*Ring*. As I suggested in Chapter 1.4., this is one of the features of *Sigurd* which differs most from the

² Internal evidence obliges us to disagree with the observation made by Hartley S. Spatt in his article *Morrissaga - "Sigurd the Volsung"* (in *The After-Summer Seed*, ed. John Hollow); the idea seems to be more applicable to Wagner than to Morris;

"The crime for which the gods must pay at the ragnarök - the breaking of their word to the giant who built Asgard by withholding their payment and subjugating his people, runs exactly parallel to that which Regin seeks to avenge."

This certainly doesn't apply to *Sigurd the Volsung*, in which the breaking of the gods' word to the giants does not figure; and the Norse mythology doesn't specifically indicate that *ragnarök* occurs as a direct result of this fraudulent transaction. In Wagner's *Ring*, though, the Twilight of the Gods does occur as the ultimate consequence of the fraudulent dealings entered into by Wotan in *Das Rheingold*.

Ring, and it may indicate that Morris wished to make his hero as different as possible from Wagner's Siegfried. Sigurd's happy childhood in the heart of a loving family in a peaceful country contrasts with the gloomy upbringing Wagner's Siegfried undergoes at the hands of the surly dwarf, and Morris may have deliberately stressed this in order to differentiate Sigurd as much as possible.

I have suggested that the explicitly Biblical references to Sigurd's role as the Redeemer are Morris's innovation, as are the references to his wisdom; this may indicate that Morris was aware that Wagner equated his Siegfried with the youth who was too stupid to feel fear, and replied with an innovation of his own that is directly contrary to Wagner's conception of Siegfried. There are no explicit references in any of the sources to Sigurd's wisdom, although there are plenty to his strength and courage; Wagner has imported the idea of the stupid youth who did not know the meaning of fear from the *Märchen*, while Morris has imported the idea of Sigurd's wisdom from Biblical references to the wisdom of the Christ-child.

Morris's Brynhild, too, is conceived very differently from Wagner's Brünnhilde, as we have seen. Morris's poem is not lacking in classical allusions - use of epic simile and stichomythia, for instance - but the actual structure and characterisation is not as indebted to Greek tragedy as the *Ring*, especially in the character of Brünnhilde, who derives from Wagner's interpretation of the figure of the heroine in Sophocles' *Antigone*, whom Wagner explicitly calls *die Erlöserin*.³ The affinity of Morris's Brynhild to the figure in the sources is more immediately recognisable than that of Wagner's Brünnhilde, especially the fact that she is a mortal woman whose defiance of Odin is based on love of humanity. This in one way links her with Wagner's Brünnhilde, who defies Wotan because she is inspired by a sudden

³ It is possible that Wagner may not have been entirely sure who was redeemed by Antigone's action - presumably not Creon, although he relents when it is too late. He may mean that, because Antigone's action is performed in obedience to natural law and the law of kinship and family piety, although in defiance of Creon's decree (unnatural law) it is redemptive in intention, and that we are therefore to conclude that society - the society in which she lives - is redeemed. A similar vagueness attends Brünnhilde's redemptive act.

APPENDIX I

Extracts from the first draft of *Sigurd the Volsung*: the last meeting of Sigurd and Brynhild . (Bm. Add. MS. 37,498)

v.1.

And thee they arrayed against me and thy will that none may wrest
And thy deeds and the light of battle and the heart in thy Godlike breast
my hope

Yea thee and my eyes were blinded / so was dead at the root
As I went from my desert dwelling the fear was under my foot
And the spech of Queens was my kindness / and my life was the longing
for death

Yet thy life was all about me and thy name was on every breath
And thy deeds that I might not share in I beheld and I might not die
O sorrow sorrow and sorrow that the world lives after the lie
He said for a little it liveth and the season of spring is fair
Loved (?) summer and heavy and the restful winter bare
it all

But the Gods' love wasteth and Balder's strong desire
And we too shall remember the world and the last of the
quickenning fire

He looked in her eyes as he spake it and so glorious was he grown
That he wrapped her soul from all things till the world was Sigurd alone
And the heart arose in Brynhild and her voice was the song of the swan
In the dale of the lovely mountains o'er the shipless waters come.
I rode in the wrack aforetime and I choose out Odin's host
And I dealt the crown and the garland and no whit of the world was lost

v.2

Many deeds have I rewarded, and long was I bidden to wend
Through the fears and the hopes made nothing to reward thy deeds in the
end

He said, many deeds have I fashioned and now behold my reward
In the hollow hand of Odin till the day of the [deletion - illegible]
I have given and take not again

And all deeds in today are swallowed and this the deed for us [?]
She said it was life that we thought of and we fashioned, our love
for the life

And still we beheld it before us through the gates of the smithy of
strife

But indeed for the death were we fashioned we meet for the
death alone

We the son and the daughter of Odin and the seed from his
longing grown.

He said yea the measureless life near by afore it lay
And the death was a hap unthought of mid the glory of the war
Great was it but not the greatest for the mighty and the strong
The son and the daughter of Odin and the seed from his longing sprung
The end of my life days she cried & the end of my desire

That the body of Sigurd shall perish and the flesh that rode the fire.
O great is the deed said the Volsung and for this cause hither I came
To uplift thine heart O Brynhild for the furthering of our fame

sword & the
For to the *helm and* the golden guard of my breast

I shall smite when they fall upon me and shall strive gainst the uttermost

est

v.3.

my

For e'en so was body fashioned from the ancient Volsung seed
But with thee I strive not Brynhild or the sorrow of thy deed
rode in wrack and I

She cried I chose the *war host* Allfather's host
And nought I did to repent and no whit of the world was lost
But what name shall name the sorrow when I rend the world atwain.
Great tidings, said the Volsung, when they tell of Sigurd slain.
But hearken now, O Brynhild with what name shall men name this
That I depart from before thee and kiss thee with no kiss
Because of the love that I fell from & the kiss that I brought to nought.
O Sigurd she said O mighty O fair in spech and thought
As thou wert in the days past over / may the high Gods hid [*sic*] it yet
day

The *thought* and the deed of thy slaying lest I falter and forget
And we twain grow vile together / this too on me hast thou laid
O why was the life of Brynhild by thy loving hand betrayed
He said in the days hereafter this also shalt thou know

fairer

And thine abundant wisdom the *greater* for it grow
But now I durst not tell it for of thee and me is the word
And the dreadful Norms and their dooming and Allfather's whetted sword
v.4

for the

Unmeet it is the while hour e'er the end of hope and strife
To name the names that avail not and the bitterness of life
She spake O farewell Sigurd for the time grows short indeed
And who knows how the world cries on thee and sickeneth of thy need.
He said, Farewell O Brynhild / what deed what deed shall grow
For the whetting of the warflame the time is long enow
Now so may tomorrow brighten that I never more
Woe worth thy sorrow Brynhild and thy fair hope cast away.
She cried, I lay upon Hindfell ere the doom of the Gods was fulfilled
And the great grew up and perished and lives were given and spilled
And I knew it not nor remembered and the world went speeding on
And many a grief for Godhome and many a joy was won
Then there came the gleam and the splendour and the hope and the love
there came
And I knew of the deeds that should be and remembered the ancient fame
And this was the wakening of life that all shall desire and praise
It is fair if thou tellest it over and countest the hours and the days
O where are the days and the hours and the deeds they brought to the birth.

v.5

Are they dead are they dreams forgotten are they [*solely?*] dreams of the
earth
Are they stones in the walls of the heavens are they corner stones of the
shrines

Where many a deed earth failed of in heaven's fulfilment shines
Yet weary am I of the waking for gone is the splendour of day
And Sigurd is departed, and when shall the [*dawning?*] grow grey
When gone is the gloaming and darkness and the empty world of night
And the Gods once more are arisen and the glad world longeth for light.

Yet Sigurd gazed for a season on the woman well-beloved

And no speech his lips might fashion though with wordless sound they
moved

Then he turned in the flood of sunlight and he heard the sounds of
{illegible}

And the voice of the sons of the Niblungs and the day beginning again
And slowly he went from the chamber and the walls without he lit
With the gloom of the gold of Fafnir and they rang with the sound of it
But the mail of the eyebright Sigurd that no sword hand rent
On his breast was bursten asunder as amidst the house he went
And the morn and the noon departed [then bitter] evermore
And sealed were the lips of Sigurd and he spake to men no more.

(the above is omitted from the printed version)

Another version of the last interview between Brynhild and Sigurd

r.10 (deleted)

Then forth he went through the house with unfaltering feet he went
To the chamber of Queen Brynhild and the fell entanglement.
And he found the door wide open as the last had left it there
Who swift from the place had departed at her measureless woe aghast
But he loitered not nor lingered but into the chamber passed
And there [?] lay Brynhild nor moved on her broidered bed
And he looked in her eyes beloved and faltered not but said
Awake, arise O Brynhild for the sun shines through the house
And the hour of the deeds is begun; cast off thy grief and thy woe
And array thyself in gladness, that the deeds of the mighty may [grow?].
{She spake at once when she heard him
{He heard her voice as she lay and fearful words she spake
But sweet were they in his sorrow for the ancient kindness' sake
Hast thou come then to behold me, the earliest and the worst
Of the pitiless betrayers / the mightiest and the worst.

r.11

He said I have come O Brynhild e'en I that have loved thee well
speakest thou not to thy friends
Why now art thou hushed [as the folk that lie in hell?] ¹
Then she raised herself in the bed and she looked in Sigurd'es eyes
And forth from her heart and her lips did a dreadful sound arise
She said unto thee unto thee will I tell of my anger and shame
Upheaved the bosom of Sigurd and a sob in his throat there came
But he spake O Brynhild Brynhild spellbound must I call thee and blind
If aught hard in my heart thou seest or a cruel thought mayst find
Arise unto deeds O Brynhild for men say to the ends of the Earth
That thou chocest a man for thy mate whom thou [?] the master of worth
O would I had stayed thee, she said, ere thy lips should say the thing
O me me how I remember the coming of the king
When he stood dark-clad on my hall-floor yet meseemed I knew thine eyes
betwixt

But the Norns were there to hinder and a veil across them [lies?]
That I saw but in dreams unhappy nor might part the good from the ill
Though there I beheld them together - thus the Gods shall have their will
He said, mightst thou live and be mighty, for great men the Niblungs are

¹ Conjectural reading; not very legible

Where the reins of their bridles are loosened their steeds will carry them far

O Sigurd she said, I beheld thee, I remember how ye rode
 Ye twain to the Heath of the Glitter from the peaceful king's abode
 And the death of the Worm I remember / O might I forget and be dead
 How thou rodest the flaming fire on the topmost Hindfell's head
 O yet were I dead should I hearken of the deeds thou broughtest to pass
 O sorrow sorrow & sorrow for the deeds thou broughtest to pass
 He said I am not thy husband and I am not thy wife [sic] ²
 Yet the best of the Kings of the Goth-folk is thine and loveth thy life.
 She cried O fool O fool didst thou deem when thou gav'st me away
 I should smile on him in the night-tide whom I loathed in the open day?
 He said O Brynhild thy wisdom where then are thy fair words gone
 Wilt thou curse the best of the King-folk & the battle-glorious one
 Wilt thou curse thy friend and thy lover what then is the deed he doth

r.12

What then is the bitterest trouble and the worst that maketh thee loath
 Twice over she said thou givst me and twice hast thou cast me aside
 This, this is the bitterest anger and the worst that I must abide
 Yea this, that the sword of Gunnar lies not in thy loveless heart
 She set her hand to her bosom and rent the raiment apart
 And low on the bed she grovelled but he drew anigh and said
 Fear not O love O Brynhild no long tarrying shall there be
 Ere the bitter sword edge sunder the life from the death of me
 The days of us twain together shall be few indeed to tell
 She raised her head and answered, death, death I hear in thy word
 shall I heed

But *what is* the sundering of life or the edges of the sword
 Since the day when thou bewrayd'st me & sundered me and bliss
 Yet sweet for the young and the glorious said he the day-tide is
 O live, and love King Gunnar O beloved love me still
 And with all the world's abundance thy bosom will I fill
 But she said thou knowesdt me [not] nor the heart I bear in my breast
 For I know thee Sigurd the Volsung for the noblest and the best
 And I am the harlot of Gunnar, *and the harlot of the*
 shall we sit together now

but

When I grew *most* loathsome ere the time of the perished vow.
 Nay this is truer to tell said Sigurd hearken then & hear
 For more than myself I loved thee till my foot was fast in the snare
 That was spread for the lives of us twain and from [?] shall never be free
 But at last when the spell was perished and the sight came back unto me
 And the net was around and about us that my hands unwitting had wove
 What tongue may tell the sorrow that I had for thy wedded love
 But I dwelt in the dwelling of kings so I thrust my trouble apart
 Yea despite of the shame & the anguish 'twas a solace to my heart
 That we dwelt in a fashion together though a stranger's house it was
 It is over. Well, it may happen that all shall come to pass
 Which the seers have seen from aforetime and the love shall drag me down

r.13

Fear not for I fear it nothing and long have I wrought for the crown.
 O long she looked upon him and the hate from her eyes was gone
 And the scorn and the bitter anger, and grief was there alone.
 But wild hope arose in Sigurd and his arms around her he spread
 And glittering bright were his eyes as he cried aloud and said

² Probably meant to write thou art not my wife

She moaned it is overlate it is overlate to be told
 And the last of the solace is dead and the world is waxen acold
 If wrapped in the arms of each other for a little while we lay
 Twixt the dusk of the [winter?] tide and the dawn of the summer day
 Then well were we wedded mescemeth ere the time should come to die.

(Two lines deleted, illegible)

The next section is another draft of the same passage.

He wondered at its glory and the freshness pierced to his heart
 Yet not for a moment he lingered but set his foot to depart
 Through the echoing hall and the cloisters to the chamber of Brynhild he
 went
 And his face was as clear as the heavens and his brow was clear with intent
 Then he came to the chamber of Brynhild was opened wide
 As the last of the women had left it when her voice in the silence had died.
 But clear rang the golden harness as into the chamber he passed
 And the Helm of Awe sun-smitten bright beams from its glory cast.
 Thus he came to the chamber of Brynhild and she gazed from the golden
 bed
 And her eyes beheld him coming and he faltered nothing but said
 Awake arise O Brynhild for the sun shines over all
 And its beams flood bower and chamber & the floor of the N. hall
 And the hour of deeds is begun and the hour to cast off woe
 And put on the latter gladness that the tale of the world may grow.
 She said thou art come O Sigurd and I looked that this should be
 O short is the time mescemeth for the speech 'twixt me and thee
 My body he said hath bewrayed thee and my speech that folk have heard
 When amidst the gathered people the hearts of men were stirred.

 Nor thee nor another of manfolk O Sigurd will I have
 There is no man in the world that Brynhild's soul shall save.

r.14

And my hand that broke the battle and rent the death-wall down
 And my hope of the fair time coming and my memory of things
 known

All these all these have bewrayed thee but now their time is past
 And the day of their deeds is accomplished and what is there left at the last
 Save the heart thou hast cherished on Hindfell and the soul of the Volsungs
 bom

That hath dwelt with the Cloudy People & with many a grief been worn.
 As a bird in the snare of the fowler when through the net she sees
 The nest on the high hills builded and the fair wind-shaken trees
 She said, e'en yet I behold thee I remember of thy road
 To the height of the Glittering Heath from the peaceful king's abode
 And the End of the Worm I remember - O might I forget and be dead
(next few lines similar to previous draft)

She said e'en yet I behold thee: I remember the Lymdale land
 I remember the waiting and labour & the joyous toil of my hand
 As I bode thy certain coming and the fruitful day of thy fame
 O might I be dead and forget the day that Sigurd came
 - O yet, were I dead should I hearken to the lovely Sigurd's voice
 O sorrow sorrow and sorrow that I woke and lived to rejoice

He said we stood in Lymdale and the hope was arrived at home
 And we saw all joy accomplished & the fame of deeds to come
 And nought we feared repentance as heart beat close to heart
 We rejoiced & the joy hath bewrayed us and repentance rends us apart
 She said, e'en yet I behold thee, I remember the rumour and word
 How thou rodest forth with the Niblungs and the Kings of hosts were
 stirred

And thy banner was as the sun, as the lightning was thy blade
 And thy cry was the death of the war-kings and the folk that are never
 afraid

I remember and yet I live for the fool of the Norns I was
 How the dream of the Niblung maiden & the wedding came to pass
 And I strove to behold the ending but dim and veiled were my eyes
 And a fool I hoped for the morrow & I feared the deeds to arise
 So I dight my house in the desert and I dreamed of the earlier day
 And I set the red bane of the oakwood about my dwelling to play
 O might I be dead and forget it the night when the fire sank down
 And betwixt the noon and the morning I lay with the King of Renown
 With the dwarf-wrought sword between us and its edges thin
 All blue with the blast of the fire and the venom worked within
 O Sigurd

Brynhild & Sigurd. 3

And the hour of deeds is begun and the hour to cast off woe
 And put on the latter gladness, that the tale of the world may grow.

She said, "Thou art come, O Sigurd, and I looked that this hour should be;
 O short is the time mescemeth for the speech 'twixt me & thee.
 They have bidden me speak and I spake not, for I knew that the time would
 come
 Where they should live to be merry in the garth of the ancient home;
 But to thee will I tell of thy trouble, and to thee will I tell of my wrong;
 For thou art the King and the stranger, nor here art thou sojourning long."

He said, "Thou sayest it, Brynhild; I have wrought for my day's wage here,
 But I come from another country, and thither again would I fare."

Long while they gazed on each other and no word goeth between
 But things past the telling of man-folk the eyes of each had seen.
 Thrice then with the speech strove Brynhild and thrice to the bed she bent
 And hid her eyes from the Volsung and moaned o'er her intent
 And Sigurd looked upon her and the wild words rent his heart
 As he strove with the speech and the silence and thrust the curses apart.
 And at last the words were fashioned, and his voice was sweet and clear
 That the bitter memories rent her as she rose in the bed to hear;

"My body:, he said, "hath bewrayed thee, and my speech that folk have
 heard

When amidst of the gathered people the hearts of men were stirred.
 And my hand that hath broken the battle and rent the death-wall down
 And my hope of the fair days coming, and my memory of things known

All these, all these have bewrayed thee but now their time is past
 And the day of their deeds is accomplished; and what is there left at the last
 Save the heart thou hast cherished on Hindfell, and the soul of the
 Volsungs born

That hath dwelt with the cloudy people, and with many a grief hath been
 worn,

As a bird in the snare of the fowler, when athwart the net she sees
 The nest on the high boughs builded, and the free wind-shaken trees."

He said, "For a little it liveth, and the season of Spring is fair,
 Loved Summer, and laden autumn, and the restful winter bare.
 But the Gods' love wasteth it all, and Baldur's strong desire,
 And we too shall remember the world mid the last of the quickening fire."
 He looked in her eyes as he spake it, and so glorious was he grown
 That her soul in his soul was quickened, and the world was Sigurd alone.
 And her heart arose and was mighty, and her voice was the song of the
 swan,
 Mid the cliffs of the lonely mountains, on the shipless waters wan;
 I rode in the wrack etc.

She cried, "I lay upon Hindfell, ere the doom of the wrong was fulfilled,
 And great things arose and perished, and lives were given and spilled,
 But I knew it not nor remembered, while the speedy world slept on,
 And many a gift for God-home, & many a grief was won,
 Till they came to the gleam and the splendour, the hope and the love there
 came
 And I knew of the things there should be, and remembered the ancient
 fame
 And this was the wakening of life, and the gift that all shall praise.
 O gift of the Golden Sigurd! - let me count the hours and the days
 While yet in the world I tarry, lest the Gods again grow wrath
 And they tell me to sleep in the desert remote from Sigurd's path
 Far off from his eyes that brighten, and his hand that praiseth and stayeth
 And his heart the increaser of love, & his burning Wrath that slayeth
 -O where are the days and the hours, and the deeds he hath brought to the
 birth?
 Are they dead? Are they dreams forgotten? are they solacing dreams of the
 Earth?

He said, "For a little it liveth, and the season of Spring is fair,
 Loved summer, and laden autumn, and the restful winter bare.
 But the Gods' love wasteth it all, and Baldur's strong desire,
 And we too shall remember the world mid the last of the quickening fire."
 He looked in her eyes as he spake it, and so glorious was he grown
 That her soul in his soul was quickened, and the world was Sigurd alone.
 And her heart arose and was mighty, and her voice was the song of the
 swan;
 Mid the cliffs of the lonely mountains, on the shipless waters wan.
 I rode in the wrack.....etc.

She cried, "I lay upon Hindfell, ere the doom of the wrong was fulfilled,
 And great things arose and perished, and lives were given and spilled,

And I knew it not nor remembered, while the speedy world slept on,
 And many a gift for God-home, & many a grief was won
 Till they came to the gleam and the splendour, the hope and the love there
 came

And I knew of the things there should be, and remembered the ancient
 fame

And this was the wakening of life, and the gift that all shall praise.

O gift of the Golden Sigurd! - let me count the hours and the days

While yet in the world I tarry, lest the Gods again grow wroth

And they tell me to sleep in the desert remote from Sigurd's path

Far off from his eyes that brighten and his hand that praiseth and stayeth

And his heart the increaser of love, & his burning wrath that slayeth.

- O where are the days and the hours, and the deeds he hath brought to the
 birth?

Are they dead? Are they dreams forgotten? are they solacing dreams of the
 Earth?

flood bower and chamber & the floor of the N. hall

And the hour of deeds is begun and the hour to cast off woe

And put on the latter gladness that the tale of the world may grow.

She said thou art come O Sigurd and I looked that this should be

O short is the time meseemeth for the speech 'twixt me and thee

My body he said hath bewrayed thee and my

APPENDIX II (a)

Here are listed some examples from Morris's translation of *Grettis Saga*. Sometimes the problem with Morris's translations is that they are too literal and can only be understood by someone with a working knowledge of Old Norse, which defeats the object of the exercise. Rich of chattels (*au igr at fé*) will probably pass muster, especially as it refers to a man who is wealthy as far as possessions, especially livestock, are concerned, but doesn't own a lot of land. The legal terminology especially really requires a glossary and footnotes in order to be understood.

the case was settled by umpiredom.
siðan váru málin lögð í gørð

he was ware of (he knew about)
hann var varr við

nor had the gift been voided.
ok hefir þat ekki ript orðit

Thorfin was unatoned, and boot was given to Thorgeir
Þorfinnr var ógildir, Þorgeiri var bætt fyrir fjórráð

I shall give boot for the man as the doom goes, but the
outlawry I may not settle.
þat ek mun bæta slíku, sem dæmt verður, en sekð um má ek eigi ráð

Hjarandi said he would not bring his brother to purse.
Hjarandi kvazk eigi mundu bera bróður sinn í sjóði¹

men so brave that they would none bear the other to purse.

but it is strangely done to speak scorn of sackless men.²

¹ Hjarandi said he was not going to weight his brother's death against money

² In Morris's translation of *Volsunga Saga*, Regin's words to Sigurd after the death of Fafnir are translated as *Thou hast slain my brother, and scarce shall I be sackless of the deed* - i.e. I can hardly avoid taking some of the responsibility.

he was very froward ³ in his childhood
hann var mjök ódæll í uppvexti sinum

and now it misliked them of their lot as much again as before⁴
en líkaði þeim nú verr en áðr

Now God were in garth if our lot might better ⁵
Nú væri guð í garði, ef nokkut mætti um bœtask varn

Morris followed the same procedure in his translations of *Völsunga Sága* and the *Poetic Edda*. It is possible that these works lend themselves more readily to Morris's archaizing style than do the Family Sagas, being much closer in spirit to mediæval romance. I quote here some examples of Morris's style in his translation of VS:

he was hight Sigi

and naught more I wot of him.

Skadi misdoubted this tale of Sigi, and deemed that this was a guile of his.

Yea, even the brothers of his wife. (Biblical)

gat Rerir to himself.

long they abode together with good hap.

took such rede that ... (= decided to ; tók ra a at...)

in good sooth

nor is it said that they letted him therein (i.e. they made no attempt to stop him)

my rede it is that we flee nowither

something quick (something alive)

withal he must needs think him in no wise a kinsome man.

whenas the battle had dured a while.

the dew-shoe of that said sword. (sheath ; over-literal translation)

³ This is Biblical - Authorised Version - rather than fifteenth century.

⁴ A less literal, and more comprehensible translation, would be something like *and now they were even more miserable than before*.

⁵ I must admit that I do not understand what this means; I think it is meant to be an expression of hope or encouragement.

Scaldic poetry.

Hugstóran bið ek heyra foldar vör þá fyrða
 (Heyr, jarl, Kvasis dreyra) fjor leggjar brim dreggjar.

[Land's magnanimous guardian I bid hear - hear, earl, Kvasir's blood (poetry) fiord-bone's (stone's) men's (dwarfs') yeast-surf (mead)]

stone-men's yeast -surf = dwarfs' mead = poetry.

From a verse by Orm Steinthorsson;

At væri borit bjórs (rekkar nemi) dauð s drykk
 bríkar ok mitt leik Dvalins) í einn sal.

[that the beer-plank's (woman's) body and mine to one room be brought when dead;
 let men receive Dvalin's drink (the mead of poetry)]

Origins of the craft of poetry.⁶

ok enn mælti Aegir; Hvað an af hefir hafizk sú i þrótt, er þér kalli skáldskap?

Bragi replied; The origin of it was that the gods had a dispute with the people called Vanir, and they appointed a peace-conference and made a truce by this procedure, that both sides went up to a vat and spat their spittle into it. But when they dispersed, the gods kept this symbol of truce and decided not to let it be wasted, and out of it they made a man. His name was Kvasir and he was so wise that no-one could ask him any questions to which he did not know the answer. He travelled widely through the world teaching people knowledge, and when he arrived as a guest to some dwarfs, Fialar and Galar, they called him to a private discussion with them and killed him. They ~~paired~~ his blood into two vats and a pot, and the latter was called Odrerir but the vats were called Son and Bodn. They mixed honey into the blood and it turned into mead; whoever drinks from it becomes a poet or scholar. The dwarves told the Æsir that Kvasir had suffocated in intelligence because there was no-one there educated enough to be able to ask him questions.

The dwarves manage to kill a giant and his wife; their son, Suttung, maroons them on a skerry, they offer him the precious mead as compensation: This is why poetry is called Kvasir's blood or dwarves' drink or Suttung's mead.

Odin then gets his hands on Sutting's mead in his usual rather devious fashion. He

⁶ From the *Prose Edda*; English translation by Antony Faulkes

calls himself Bolverk ⁷. He incites the slaves of Baugi, Suttung's brother, to kill each other; he says he will do the work of 9 men in return for a drink of Suttung's mead. Suttung refuses this when Baugi asks him for it; Bolverk produces an auger and asks Baugi to drill through the mountain where Suttung lives - Baugi tries to cheat him, but Bolverk turns himself into a snake and crawls through the auger-hole. He sleeps with Gunnlod, Suttung's daughter, who is guarding the mead - she lets him drink 3 draughts, which means he gets the lot. He flies back to Asgard in the form of an eagle, Suttung pursues him but he escapes, and spits the mead into the containers which the gods have got ready.

APPENDIX II (b)

Kenning is defined by Snorri Sturluson in *Skaldskaparmál* as follows;

if we name Odin or Thor or Tyr, or one or another of the gods or elves, and to each one that I mention, I add the name of a property of another god, or allude to some of his deeds, then the latter becomes the owner of the name, and not the former, whose name was given. Just as when we say Victory-Tyr, or Hanged-Mens' Tyr, or Cargoes' Tyr, these are names for Odin;

(English trans. by Gabriel Turville-Petre)

Kennings and periphrastic expressions used by Morris in "Sigurd"

Fair in the house of my fathers the benches are bestrown .

i.e. I am awaited in Valhalla (I am not afraid to die)

wolf of the holy places ; outlaw

spae-wights; (prophets?)

Ran; the Sea-Goddess ⁸

Aegir's Acre ; the sea

the field of the fishes ; the sea

swan-bath ; the sea (used in Old Norse and Old English)

The People's Praise; Sigurd (One of several epithets used to designate Sigurd)

flood of murder ; the army of Siggeir

wood of battle : this would usually mean spear, or warrior , but in the context in which Morris is using it, he seems to intend it to mean forest where the battle is

⁷ Worker of evil

⁸Probably most readers would need footnotes and a glossary, although it is just possible to deduce it from the context.

fought. This is not quite how kennings are used in scaldic poetry.

Water's Hoard ; Andvari's Gold.

Dusk of the Gods ; (Morris does use this expression once)

the fair-stained sea-beast's tooth ; ivory stained with red (sometimes used to describe a woman's complexion when she blushes, although Morris does also use the more conventional metaphor of lily and rose.)

flame of the sea; gold

flame of the Glittering Heath ; gold (this is also a prolepsis, as it is used before any mention is made of the Glittering Heath.)

blossomed garth of rhyme ; a metaphor rather than a kenning.

folk of the war-wand's forgers ; makers of weapons = dwarves.

golden dragons ; ships ⁹

grey wolf's gleanings ; mortal remains / bodies

bickering blood-reeds' tangle ; swords' tangle, battle

sister of the moon ; the sun ¹⁰

wasters of the sea-plain ; sailors, Vikings

serpent of the Branstock ; Sigurd's sword. (i.e. Nothung in Wagner).

saw of battle ; sword

my crown of the sea-flood's fire ; crown of gold.

Sometimes king is used as a metaphor, to refer to the regal looks and bearing of Sigmund and Sinfjolti.

Old Norse kennings for gold are most relevant to our purposes ; most of these are not used, either by Morris or Wagner, but Morris was certainly aware of them .

Gold is known as ;

Ægir's fire ; Glasir's foliage ; Sif's hair; Fulla's snood; Freyja's weeping; mouthcount & voice & words of giants; dripping from Draupnir; rain or shower from Draupnir; rain or shower from Freyja's eyes; seed of Fyri plains; Holgi's mound roof; fire of all kinds of water and of the arm; stones and rocks or gleam of the arm.

otter payment

Æsirs' forced payment

These two are the most important for our purposes ; the background to the kenning,

⁹ Morris obviously has in mind Viking ships with dragon prows.

¹⁰ Probably taken from *Völuspá* .

explained by Snorri, is the killing of Otter by Loki (accompanied by Odin and Hœnir), and the payment of Andvari's gold as a ransom.

The following kennings for gold are also relevant to Morris's poem and to the *Ring*; lair or abode of Fafnir ¹¹; metal of Gnita - heath ¹²; burden of Grani ¹³; Niflungs' treasure or inheritance ¹⁴.

Note also the following lines;

Gunnar and Hogni hid the gold, Fafnir's legacy, in the Rhine, and that gold has never been found. ¹⁵

Appendix II (c) Some of the archaisms used by Wagner

Friedel (sweetheart)

Found in Middle High German - Kriemhild refers to Siegfried as her *vrîdel* - but probably already archaic when Wagner used it.

fröhnen

an archaic term, meaning service or serfdom. Wagner uses it in the context of the Nibelungs being forced into servitude to Alberich. When Loge says to Mime von ihrer Not / befrei'n wir der Niblungen Volk he doesn't mean this particularly sincerely, but freeing the Nibelungs from tyranny was a central concern of the 1848 Prose Sketch, and of Brünnhilde's closing address in *Siegfrieds Tod*.

siech (ill)

the usual word would be krank

another archaic word - used only by Wagner in the 19th. century, as far as I can discover. Found in contexts such as schwanden die Sinne ihm? /wäre er siech? (*Die Walküre*, Act I) Wagner usually uses siech when krank would be the word in everyday speech, and follows this practice in *Tristan und Isolde* and

¹¹ *ból eða byg Fáfnis*

¹² *málmr Gnitaheiðar*

¹³ *byr þr Grana*. In the Norse literature, Sigurd loads the gold on the back of Grani, his horse.

¹⁴ *Niflunga skaltr eða arfr*.

¹⁵ *Gunnar & Hogni fálu (þeir) gullit Fáfnisarfi í Rin, of hefir þat gull aldri stöðun fundiz*.

Parsifal, as well as in the *Ring*. I have chosen this one example, but others will no doubt spring to mind; it is a practice that Morris also follows, substituting an archaic or pseudo-archaic word for the word common in everyday usage, and it is a practice in which both poets are reasonably consistent ; that is , they rarely, if ever, use colloquial speech, and the practice of using archaisms whenever it is considered necessary is consistent with the aim of conveying an atmosphere of timeless antiquity (Wagner) or an imagined mediæval period (Morris).

Schächergewerb

Surely a neologism, or neo-archaism, invented by Wagner for the purpose of the alliteration and the rhythm.¹⁶ Schächer is often used by Wagner to mean wrongdoers, criminals ; it is not a word in common usage.

In *Götterdämmerung*, Alberich exhorts Hagen;

*Hagen, mein Sohn! Hasse die Frohen!
Mich Lustfreien, Leidbelasteten
liebst du so, wie du sollst!*

Here Lustfreien is evidently a nonce-word, coined as an antithesis to Frohen , and to alliterate with Leidbelasteten ; not even Alberich would normally describe himself as *free* of joy, surely.

Wunschgeschlecht; (used in *Siegfried*)

also surely a nonce-word or neologism coined by Wagner to alliterate with Wälsungen and to imply that the Volsungs are the race that the gods needed / desired / created.

mein holdes Geschwister is how Fricka refers to Freia, which must be for the sake of the alliteration, and possibly the rhythm, although die liebliche Schwester might have fitted the alliteration and the rhythm just as well. So ohne Scham verschenktet ihr Frechen / Freia, mein holdes Geschwisterfroh des Schächergewerbs! The expression may be a play on words, alerting the audience to

¹⁶ In Andrew Porter's translation of the *Ring*, *froh des Schächergewerbs* is translated *as well content with your deal* ; the point is that the formal, archaic or pseudo-archaic German of Wagner's text translates very well into a more colloquial style of English - this was not attempted by contemporary translators, especially not by Alfred Forman, with whose translation Morris had some acquaintance, though it is difficult, if not impossible, to judge how well he knew it.

the fact that Freia is also known as Holda, so that the emphasis should be on holdes, rather than Geschwister ; there are other instances of puns and word-play in the *Ring*, one of them occurring in Fasolt's reminder to Wotan;

*Bedungen ist, was tauglich uns dünkt;
gemahnt es dich so matt?
Freia, die Holde, Holda, die Freie,
vertragen ist's, sie tragen wir heim!*

See also Loge heißt du, doch nenn' ich dich Lüge! and Verfluchte Lohe, dich löscht' ich aus!

freien

was probably already archaic in the nineteenth century; the word allows Wagner the opportunity for word-play and puns, one of which we have already noted, the play of words on Freia's name. It always means to woo - to release would be befreien - but the words are obviously cognate, and in Denn einer nur freie die Braut -/ der Freier als ich, der Gott. (*Die Walküre*, Act III)

Freier has the meaning - wooer, and "freer than I." A line such as die bräutliche Schwester befreie der Bruder combines both meanings.

APPENDIX III

Passage omitted from the completed (published) version of *Sigurd the Volsung* ; reproduced in May Morris's biography of her father.

And my story thou shalt hearken; ere my long sleep was begun
I was called the Victory-Wafer; and many a deed I won.
And I chose out folk for Odin, and the will of his heart I knew
When the Kings of hosts were gathered the doomful deeds to do.
Hither and thither I rode, and the night in my path would pale,
As the cloudy mane of my war-steed dripped dew in the deepsome dale.
And the tree-boughs opened to meet it, and glory grew on the grass,
And the earth was fruitful of men, and the dear deeds come to pass.

Now the kings of the people met and the sword on the warshield rung,
And there was the old Helmgunnar, and his foe was Agnar the young;
And I knew the doom of Odin was dark on the young man's face,
And that well on Valhall's benches that day was dight his place ;
That the elder's promised gift was to live and live on the earth
Till he knew not the wail of sorrow from the cries of men in mirth.

So I stood and looked on at the battle when the war-flames met on the heath
And bright was the valiant Agnar, as he faced the fateful death;
But dim and grey was Helmgunnar; then wrath sprang up in my heart,
And i said; All wise is Odin, but he sitteth far apart
From the folk of the earth he has fashioned; and I, from the earth I came;
And I deal with the carls of the Goth-folk, and I know of their glory and
shame
And I know of their joy and their sorrow, and their inmost heart's desire.

Lo, here the elder of days, who has waded blood and fire,
And won all the deeds of his life;
let him wend the uttermost way;
But the young shall abide for a while and fulfil the hope of his day.
So is Earth with a helper bettered, and the Host of Odin's war
Hath gained a Captain of men well-learned in the battles' lore.
And if Odin shall yet repent it, and change the good for the worse,
Then not me but mighty Odin shall the sons of the Goth-folk curse.

So I spake and my heart was uplifted and better than God I seemed;
But they joined in the fight on the heath, and mens' eyes in the spear-wall
gleamed,
When lo, through the cloudy drift, do men my face behold,
And hope goes home to their hearts and fear the bitter-cold;
But I fashioned the glory for Agnar, and the life of the days to be,
Till the fire was softer to stop and the wind was duller than he.
Then I turned on Helmgunnar the old, and he grew weary of life,
And his shield grew heavy and frail, and his sword grew dull in the strife,
And the waves of the fight swept o'er him, and the cry of victory rose,
And a while and a little while, and none were alive but his foes.
Then I watched them lading the mounds with the sheaves of the fruitful
fields
And he went to his fathers' hall to spend the life I gave.
And I deemed that my deed was goodly and that great was I to save.

Then I turned to the mountain dwelling, and trod the earth with my feat
 And the earth-born wind of the even was fresh in my face and sweet,
 And the flowers were fair in the summer, and the gold sky overhead
 Seemed a half-roof meet for the earth; and I thought great scorn of the
 dead.

I said; My will have I done, I have helped the earth at its need
 And now if the gods mislike it, they are strong to do the deed,
 And wise to endure the cursing - but I, full well have I done
 Though death be born with my glory and I lose the world I have won.
 But lo, as I went in my pride, and my love of the earthly home,
 To a glimmering bight of the mountains in the dusk of the day was I come
 And forth from the night of the crag-walls a cloud-grey man there strode
 With a countenance of terror, and withstood my onward road.
 And he cried ; "O fair are thy feet, O maiden of the shield;
 But wither away this even so late from the shaft-strewn field?"

The hillroots shook at his word, and nodded the mountain-wall,
 And frail and feeble I felt and my body soft and small ;¹
 And I deemed that the thunder laughed and that Thor in his wain went by
 And the glittering night grew strange and I knew not earth from sky,
 Or the Æsir stooped from heaven on the ill-matched play to look.
 But the heart grew great in my breast, though my body quivered and
 shook,

And I said; 'I walk on the earth and I love it passing well.'
 But he spake; 'What tidings tellst thou of Agnar ere he fell?'
 I said; 'There shall be great tidings; for he passed from the field of the slain
 Aloft on the shields of the Goths, and his story beginneth again;
 I took his life from Odin and gave it to the day;
 Now let the gods see to it, and take the gift away!'
 He spake; 'And how of Helmgunnar, as he sat aloft on the gold,
 And doomed of good and evil as the sons of the Goths from of old?'

I said; 'In the mound he sitteth with the gold on either hand,
 And the carles shall judge each other, for his land is a kingless land.
 I took his life from Odin and cast it to the night.
 Let the high gods counsel o'er it how they the wrong shall right.'

Then greater and greater he waxed and the cloudy head I knew
 And Allfather's face of sorrow; and faint and feeble I grew,
 And the heavens opened aloft, and the Gods stooped behold;
 And the heart swelled up in my bosom though my limbs were waxen cold.
 And he said, 'For the earth thou hast failed me, for the blind desires of folk;
 Thou shalt cleave to the earth henceforward, and bear the earthly yoke;
 Thou shalt bring forth men in sorrow; thou shalt cumber thy goodly breast
 With the mouth that may not name thee; thou shalt long and know no rest
 For the heart that hath failed thy heart, and the hand that forgetteth thine
 hand;
 Thou shalt sit by the murderer's hearth, and live in the foeman's land.'

Then the heart swelled up within me; with the fleshly bonds I strove,

1 Comp. Wagner , Die Walküre

*Ach, Schwestern , helft!
 Mir schwankt das Herz!
 Sein Zorn zerschellt mich,
 wenn euer Schutz ihn nicht zähmt!*

And I cried, 'Thou hast doomed me, O Goth-god! but I doom myself to love
 And to bear earth's kings on my bosom, and to long and know no rest
 For the heart that feareth nothing, and the soul that craves the best,
 And to change my life in glory, and come to thee again
 When the world is waxen lovelier for my unforgotten pain!'

Glad grew Allfather's visage and his smile was kind and fair
 And Thor laughed out in heaven and the high Gods witness bare
 As he said; 'The doom abideth, the doom of me and thee;
 Now go thou, sleep and slumber, for long the time shall be
 Ere the world cry out for its glory and the best for the best be born.
 Fare forth and forget and be weary 'neath the sting of the Sleepful Thorn.'

Then darkened the earth and the heavens and my feet were caught away
 I knew not how or wither and I waded the cloudland grey
 Till lo the Head of Hindfell and the ruddy shields and white
 And the wall of the wildfire waving around the isle of night,
 And there was I stayed in the midmost, and my feet to the earth were fast,
 And a wave of grief and terror across my pride there passed,
 And a flood of woeful longing deep o'er my anger swept,
 And the heart grew soft within me, and for hope and pity I wept
 And stretched out hands of beseeching for the coming of the day;
 For the earth seemed sweet and plenteous though 'neath the night it lay,
 And I feared the dark's abiding and the dreams to lead me back
 Through the tumult and the tangle and the days of restless wrack,
 No more a queen as aforetime to wield the Gods' award
 But a drift on the wind of the will of the wrath and the eyeless sword;
 Then all thought wavered and fainted, for I felt the sleepthorn's sting
 And I bowed my head and sickened with the doom's encompassing
 And my breath came short and failed me with the first of the weary woe
 And the fallow bonds' constraining, and I fell on the earth alow;
 Then the tears sank back to my heart; there the moan in my heart was
 stayed,
 There my hands lay weak together; there foot to foot was layed;
 Ah, there was the night and the slumber, while Odin sat above
 And the kings took counsel of battle, and the maidens counselled of love;
 And the world on its ways was wending, while the dark dreams drew me
 aback
 To the tangle I might not deal with, and the unhelped masterless wrack;
 Yet day from ill day I knew for as sore as the bonds constrained
 And the murmur of many tidings about me waxed and waned
 While I craved and naught came to me; but hopeless was my sleep,
 And wordless my beseeching from out of the deedless deep.
 Till lo, without a warning I wakened unto rest
 And love my body cherished, and kindness fired my breast,
 And the night had never been, and naught was the bondage grey,
 And there was the light and the love, and there were the eyes of the day.

AN EARLIER DRAFT OF BRYNHILD'S NARRATION + BETROTHAL TO
SIGURD

Add. Ms. 45,314.

And he called me the Victory-Wafer and gave me the whetted sword
 And the heart for the slain hosts' choosing and the hand to wield his award
 And I wrought his will rejoicing and his hosts of battle grew
 And I looked on the [?] Kings faces and the doom of men I knew.
 But the days and the deeds passed over and oft and o'er again
 I saw the brave man vanquished & the trusty heart but vain
 Yea, I saw the earth's best helpers how they oft would fare afield
 With the sword edge dulled by Odin and his wrath on helm and shield
 Yet I wrought his will in sorrow and his host of battle grew
 For the

But the and oft the doom went home
 But I saw the glory springing from the brave man overcome
 And I stored up my hope and my anger till I turned at last and said
 They fall and faint [and] fear not and all men bless them dead
 Yet fall they facing Odin instead of mortal foes
 Their crowns should excel all others

L.3

And I reached my hand for that garland for the Kings of the Goth- folk meet
 And the men were arrayed for battle and the ordered field was set
 And at home and abroad I saw them and the worthiest man afield
 With his edges dulled by Odin and his wrath on helm and shield
 But I wrought my will rejoicing and the friend of Odin fell
 And the Goths were glad of the tidings & the Earth folk deemed it well

L.4

So there I stood in the midmost and my feet were fast to the earth
 And a wave of grief and terror across my pride there passed
 And a flood of woeful longing o'er all my anger swept
 And the heart was softened within me and for hope and pity I wept
 And I stretched out hand beseeching for the coming of the day
 For the earth seemed sweet and plenteous though 'neath the night it lay.
 abiding

And I feared the nights and the dreams to lead me back
 But my breath came short and failed with the sleep thorn's bitter woe
 And the fallow bonds' constraining & I sank on the earth alow
 And the tears sank back to my heart and the moan in my mouth was stayed
 And my hands lay weak together and foot by foot was laid
 And lo the night and the slumber While Odin sat above
 And the kings took counsel of battle and the maidens counselled of love

L.5

And the world on its ways was wending while the dark dreams drew me
 aback

To the tangle I might not deal with and the unhelped masterless wrack
 Yet strait as the bonds constrained me still day from day I knew
 And I craved and naught came to me for hopeless was my sleep
 And wordless my beseeching from out of the deedless sleep
 When lo the hope awakened & I knew that the night was done
 And my longing ere the slumber & my wakening longing were one
 And the night had never been and nought was the bondage grey
 For here was the light and the love and the eyes of the golden day
 O love if I asked thy name it was not that I knew not well
 How the best for the best had ben fashioned & all thou hadst to tell

But I longed for the river of speech to flood mine heart with love
 And I would that the pain of longing thine eyes with hope should move
r.6.

O fair and young is thy cheek O sweet and fair are thine hands
 And thine arms the fair and mighty the gatherers of the lands
 Then spake the son of Sigurd; How sweet is thy mouth that speaks
 fair

O *love* thine eyes beholding and the blossom of thy cheek
 How gainful is thy loving and the gift of thine earthly days
in their hearts

Then the speech died out was weary but oft and o'er again
 They craved and kissed rejoicing & their hearts were full and fain

Then spake the Son of Sigmund, O best O most of worth
 O wisest Victory-Wafer where dwellest thou on Earth

For meseems the Kings are calling and there are deeds to do
 In this morning of my life-days when the sword is wrought anew
 And the earth is fresh and abundant and thou lov'st it e'en as I
 And[?] in the days *that shall be* exceeding close and nigh
 Our hands should work together and that oft our eyes should meet

r.7.

And the same road down to the darkness wind on for both our feet
 For indeed I know full surely that when both our lives shall change

Our eyes in the long day wakening shall look on nothing strange
 She said I have hoped as thou hast and this word was in my heart

That we twain on the earth abiding might scarcely dwell apart

For indeed when I awaken and death our life shall change

Thine eyes shall they see and long for & look on nothing strange

But come thou bane of the serpent for now hath the high noonday come

And the sun hangs high o'er Hindfell and looks on the earthfolks' home

And thy soul is so great within thee and so glorious are thine eyes

And me so love constraineth and my heart from old time wise
 mens' house

That we twain may see *the* dwellings and the *place* where we shall dwell

And fair words a little longer to each may each one tell

So they go they twain together and hand in hand they fare

r.8

To the very head of Hindfell and they [?] from the wilderness bare

Till all about and above them is nought but the sunlit air

(Next 4 lines identical with published version, p.145)

And the rich and plenteous acres by many a forest's hem

And the silver seas and the mountains & all that holdeth all

(Next 3 lines identical with p.v)

Long long they looked rejoicing as side to side they clove
 was in

And no look their longing and no speech their love

And each from the thoughts of the other made dreams of deeds to praise

r.9.

And sweet were the days of their telling and they so strong in their joy

Wreathed round with the glory and fame

And so locked in the love and the life and where was the God to destroy

At last spoke the Victory-Wafer, O King of the Earthly Age

gaze

Canst thou look enough on the treasure & the joy of our heritage
And the world thine heart hath fashioned since thou trodst the wavering
fire

And the home we twain shall {?} ² with the well-fulfilled desire.
But look at the little land 'twixt the wood and the silver sea

(Next 3 lines identical with p.v., p. 145)

There eve by eve I loitered to hear the songs of kings

(Last 2 lines on this page identical with p.v. p. 146)

r.10

(Ist 3 lines identical with p.v.)

And for joy the speech dies in them but oft and o'er again
they craved and kissed rejoicing and their hearts were full and fain.
Then spake Sigurd & said hark Grani neighs for his lord
And the bed of the worm is gleaming and I hear the fateful sword
And thou knowest thou wise of women that one day the dark shall come
And the life shall be lulled for a season ere Baldur wendeth home

wend

So go we and sow we the seed that one day in his garden shall spring
When they tell of the King of the World & they tell of the wife of the King
O mighty of men said Brynhild, go forth with my heart in thine hand
Go forth with the girded sword and the gold of the uttermost land
Go forth on the cloudy warsteed go forth with the gleaming eyes
Till the tide of toil is over & the woe of the weary dies

r.11

But forget not the land of Lymdale and the bed wherein I woke.

Then Sigurd drew from his hand *the Andvari's ring of old* fashioned gold
And they twain stand there on the mountain and the ring together they
hold

And Sigurd cries Beloved now hearken how I swear
That the sun shall fail in the heavens & the day no more be fair
When I think no more of Lymdale and the land that fostered thee
once

And the bed where thou awakedst 'twixt the woodland and the sea
And she cried O king beloved now hearken while I swear

(next 3 lines identical with p.v. ,p 146)

Then he set the ring on her finger & oft and o'er again
They kissed each other sweetly & their hearts were full and fain
So died the afternoon in the joy of their desire

(last line identical with last line, p. 146)

² May be dwell in ; not very legible

r.12

(Ist 2 lines identical with last line, p. 146)

And sure if a man had been born mid the hush of that starry night
 And heard no tale of the sunrise he had never longed for the light
 But in longing amidst its slumber the Earth beneath (?) lay
 And fresh and all abundant it waited for the day.

Failure of Brynhild's awakening and alterations.

r.20

And no wayfarer's door and no window that hands of the builders have
 wrought

The Volsung smileth to see it as its breath uplifts his hair
 And his eyes are bright before it and his war-coat white and fair
 And his war-helm pictures the heaven & the waning stars behind
 To the right nor the left he swerveth nor seeketh a door to find
 But he crieth aloud on Greyfell and rides at the wild fire's heart
 And the wide wall wavers before him and the flame (?) falleth apart
 Then high o'er his head it riseth and wide and wild is its roar
 As it beareth the mighty tidings to the very heaven's floor.
 Then all sinks down behind him & lo the dawn-dusk grey
 And the young horned moon a-paling & the stars grown faint with day
 Before him gazeth Sigurd and a shield-burg there he saw
 The tiles of [Odin's?] hall-roof with their fateful histories

r.21

Set close & fair together the war-kings battle-wall
 With an ensign of great glory set high above them all.
 That tinkleth now a little with the earliest wind of morn
 And now in the bright Wrath's scabbard an answering song is born
 As glad of heart goes Sigurd into the war-garth's gate
 There stand none of the earl-folk to hinder or debate
 And all is open before him & the door post doth he pass
 And lo a garden of kings & a space of flowery grass.
 And e'en in the grass-growth's midmost lies one with helmed head
 And (?) & glorious moreover asleep or dreaming or dead.
 Or maybe a God that dreams of God-home's golden floor
 Then the Volsung sprang from Greyfell nor drew his glaive of war

stooped

But fared light-foot to the sleeper, and he *knelt*
 And knew that the breath of life doth yet in the body abide.
 And again a god he deems it so fair is the fashion thereof
 And he deems that heaven is good and a place of marvellous love
 And needs must he set his hand to the helm that hideth the face.
 And so he draweth it off and lo how fair is the place
 That hath born such an earthly wonder yet if naught of the Gods it be
 He must call it a very woman and full fain thereof is he
 And still she lieth and sleepeth though close he kneels thereby
 And the (?) tide of heaven is drawn so close anigh
 And he looketh and seeth her clad in a hauberk e'en as straight
 As though to her flesh it were grown then he bared the blade of Fate
 And white in the dawning it gleamed but not to grieve or to slay
 For he set the blue-white edge to the glittering mail of grey

And the Wrath bit fast on the steel-coat and sheared the smith's work
through

L.22

As though the loom had wrought it of some much-laboured fleece
Then the eyes of the woman quivered + they opened in all peace
And gazed o'er the golden dawning too glad to change or smile
But little moved her body, nor spake she for a while
And Sigurd knelt beside her and nought he seemed to need
And soft did the lovely daylight or *[sic]* the starless heaven speed
Then he knew the lips that they moved and he heard the speech-tide flow
And her eyes were set on his eyes and he looked on her face as he heard
How she spoke unto nothing but him and his heart drank in her word.
O what is

(identical with pp. 139/140, until....)

Then the woman turned to Sigurd and oft and o'er again
They kissed each other sweetly and their hearts were full and fain.

L.23

And the wide world lay beneath them and their days that yet should be
But each on the other gazing was the sweetest sight to see
Then spake the fair-armed woman Thy name e'en now hast thou told
And I knew thee the fateful helper and the love that was doomed from of
d

And the fateful death it may be least I should die but sleep
Time was that I knew of all men but my slumber hath been deep
And belike the Norns have been busy snce Odin laid me here
Midst empty dreams of nothing and the tangled night and drear
So speak for thy speech is wise and no Queen shall thy story shame
And the gathered Kings might hearken when thou tellest dreams of fame
He said, wouldst thou speak rather that I might hearken thereto
And be glad as when in my youth-days the song-speech first I knew
And I heard the songs of my fathers & the Wolfings' gathering host
She said, thou shalt gladden my heart and tell both the least and the most
For deep indeed was my slumber and I lay as the dead men lie
Who forgot the hope in their lifedays and let the deeds slip by

Wolfings

So he told of the tale of the *Volsungs* and how the *Volsungs* were born
And the deeds of his father's father and his battles over worn.
And he told of Signy and Sigmund and the changing of their lives
And of great kings departing and their kindred and their wives
Till she deemed that the day was as sweet as the night had been evil and
lmg

And he told of the Kings of the Dwarf-kind and the guileful masters of
wrog

And they looked at the twice-wrought Wrath and he set it in its sheath
And they looked on the serpent's bed, the gold of the Glittering Heath
And her face was as wise as his words and hope was alive and awake
And he told of the fall of Fafnir & her heart was glad for his sake
And he told how Regin died and how to the gold he came
And how he rode the desert with his craving heart of fame
Till the head of Hindfell lifted that torch in the morning of day
That gateless wall of the fire that round her slumber lay.
And he spake Have I ridden for nought? thou art fairest of all the earth
Thou art wise of the wisest women & great deeds shall be brought to birth
If my heart with thine heart shall mingle/did not the Gods forbear

Of helping or of hindrance ³ when Regin drew me here
 And abode behind on the highway; Nought else save Sigmund's son
 Might have ridden the wavering fire or the fallow bonds undone
 So i wot that the Norms are abiding till we together plight
 The troth of our lips and our hands & our hearts that know aright
 Speak, sister and kin of the Gods for thy tale shall shame no king
 And the kin of the Queen shall be hushed when thy mouth shall [?sing]
 Then spake the wise-eyed woman - before my sleep was begun

(The next section is similar to the passage that May Morris quotes
 in *Artist, Writer, Socialist*)

some alterations.

1) And there was Helmgunnar the old, and Agni was his foe
 And I knew that Odin's heart was fain of the young man's face
 To the golden halls of Godhome & would have him in his place
 And was fain that the elder should live a little while on Earth
 Scarce knowing the wail of sorrow from the cries of men in mirth
 So I stood and looked on the battle when the war-flames met on the heath
 And bright was the valiant Agni as he went to his fateful death

I waxed all

But grey and dim was Helmgunnar and wroth of heart I grew
 And I said, all wiseetc.

r.27. Another version of Brynhild's awakening

And the Wrath yet lay in the sheath, for he deemed he should deal with a
 God

And nought but the wind he heard & the clank of his golden mail
 And the following hoofs of Greyfell as they went by the shield-burg pale
 But lo he is come to the gate and the doors are open wide
 And no spear in the way he seeth and no warders stand beside

(then identical with p. 137)

And a level garth within it and no work of man thereon
 But the very head of Hindfell a rugged rock well-worn
 And a path that leadeth upward from the eastward-lying side
 Then he standeth awhile and wondereth what sights his eyes abide
 Till he has climbed his topmost on the other world to gaze
 And his soul goes forth before him amidst the peoples' praise
 But beneath those cliffs desired he sees an earth-shaped mound
 Raised up to the height of the shield-wall above the level ground.
 And upreared on the earth-mound's topmost to the wilderness forlorn
 A pale-grey thing is gleaming in the gathering light of morn.
 Lo the floor of that world-great tower in the battlements of God
 Lightfoot and utter fearless the son of the Volsungs trod
 And he setteth his face to the earth and the moveless thing & wan
 Grows clear to his eyes and clearer and lo the shape of a man
 Set forth to the eyeless desert on the tower-top of the world
 High over the cloudy castle whence the bolts of the wind are hurled
 So he climbs the mound high-hearted to see if the man be dead

³ This is a line that seems to be influenced by Wagner; Wotan is of course unable to help Siegfried. In the printed version of Morris's poem (and in VS), Odin does in fact help Sigurd, by advising him how to kill Fafnir without risk to himself.

L.32

I said thy will have I done ⁴ /I have helped the earth at its need
 And now if the Gods mislike it there [sic] are strong to do the deed
 And wise to endue the cursing - but I, full well have I done
 Though death be born with my glory & I lose the world I have won

additions.L.34

And he deemed it living indeed, though it stirred at his coming no whit
 For as sweet as the summer wind from a garden under the sun
 Came forth on topmost Hindfell the breath of that sleeping one
 And a God he surely deems it, for too fair is the fashion thereof
 For a son of the earthly king-folk or a child of womens' love.
 But now he setteth his hand to the helm that hideth the face
 And gently draweth it off, and lo how fair is the place
 And the head of highest Hindfell and the coming of the day
 And why was he born so late, and yet [? moved] on the way
 For no God it is but a woman and nought in his heart there is
 But the love that shall never die and the new full-waxen bliss
 But still she lieth and sleepeth though so close he kneels thereby
 Though the waking tide of heaven is drawn exceeding nigh.

v.39

And down sank I in the midmost and the thought in my heart was stayed
 And the helpless fear fell on me as I felt the sleep-thorn's sting
 And in the waste of slumber and the measureless void I lay
 Nor dreamed I nor remembered as day crept after day
 And the world meseemed had perished in the tangle of its wrong
 Yea such was the sleep-thorn's slumber though it lasted long and long
 As a man that awakens in dread in the dullest fevertide
 And he seeketh the door and the window and the mate that lay by his side
 And all is waste and empty and there is nought to do
 And a great God silent above him and no more shall aught be new
 But the watchers hasten unto him and they bring him light and speech
 And he knoweth the kindred faces + the speaking each to each
 And the measureless dark dies out and his [slumber comes again]
 So came no voice to my slumber no hand to my weary pain
 Till lo in an instant of time the torment left my breast
 And the fallow bonds' constraining and wakened me unto rest.
 And there were the eyes of a man and the hands of Sigurd the King
 And the white blade bare in the dawn & the day's awakening
 Yea there was the bondage rent and the golden days above
 And the cherishing hands of a King and the eyes of the living love
 Lo I am she that loveth and I bid thee tell it forth
 Of thy lifedays and thy fathers & thy many deeds of worth.

4 Comp. Wagner;

Brünnhilde: Deinen Befehl führte ich aus.

Wotan: Befahl ich dir, für den Wälsung zu fechten?

Brünnhilde: So hiessest du mich, als Herrscher der Wal.

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