Nibelungenlied Study Guide

Nibelungenlied by Anonymous

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Introduction

The *Nibelungenlied* is a German epic poem which was written sometime around 1200, probably in what is today Austria. The title means "Song of the Nibelungs." "Nibelungen" is the plural of "Nibelung," which refers to a dynasty which is conquered by the hero or protagonist of the epic, the dragon-slayer Siegfried. The word "lied" means "lay," which is a Germanic word for a song, poem, or lyric. The poem exists in more than thirty manuscripts, but three main versions represent the story as we know it. For the purposes of study, many modern editions are translated in prose rather than rhymed poetic form to be more accessible to students.

Reasons why the *Nibelungenlied* has enjoyed such a wide readership for so many centuries include: much is known about the historical context of the poem as well as about the literary sources it drew on, including mythology and legend. The story is one of heroes, romance, courtly manners, deception, and revenge. It has been enjoyed by many readers for its literary techniques and for its adventurous qualities and complex characters as well.

The *Nibelungenlied* combines elements of many different historical, legendary, and mythological tales. The legend of the Nibelungs arose from the historical destruction of the Burgundian kingdom on the Rhine River by Etzel's army of Huns (later identified in legend with the army of Attila the Hun) around the year 437. Many other characters in the *Nibelungenlied* have some historical basis as well.

Gunther was King of Burgundy, and Dietrich is thought to be based on Theodoric the Ostrogoth, who was King of Italy in 493. The events in the poem, however, were altered and combined with other legends when the story was first written down for a medieval audience around 1200.

The *Nibelungenlied* and the legends it was based on existed in oral form long before it was ever written down. A version of the *Nibelungenlied* was first translated into modern German in 1757 under the title of *Kriemhild's Revenge.* Many more versions followed, but no English translation appeared until 1814. The first complete English prose version appeared in 1848. There have been many more, in both prose and verse form.

The *Nibelungenlied,* as an epic, celebrates the achievements, adventures, and battles of several heroic figures. It also encompasses elements of the romance genre as well, and includes tales of knights, courtly behavior, and chivalry. The *Nibelungenlied* draws on history, mythology, and legend for its details. It encompasses themes such as heroism, feudalism, justice and revenge, honor, loyalty, deception, dreams, and the importance of "keeping up appearances."

The "meaning" of the *Nibelungenlied* is difficult to determine. It does not have a clearly-defined moral message for the reader. However, it raises important questions about the nature of loyalty, honor, and what constitutes tragedy. It also attracts study and commentary purely on the basis of its accomplished literary features, such as its

structure, character development, and the use of foreshadowing. The *Nibelungelied* poet combined disparate material and stories into a comprehensive whole that captures modern readers no less than audiences of eight hundred years ago.

Author Biography

The author of the *Nibelungenlied* is not known. The author is thought to have been male, possibly an Austrian from the Danube region, either a minstrel poet (a travelling poet or one associated with a court), a knight, or a clergyman associated with court life. Some critics express doubt that the author was a knight, primarily because the epic does not contain convincing or extensive details about military skill and technique, despite the numerous battle scenes. Critics believe that the "final" version of the poem was written by only one author because of its consistency in tone, language, and action. It was conventional at the time not to sign literary works. In fact, many written work that survive from the Middle Ages (the years 500 through 1500, approximately) are anonymous.

Plot Summary

Chapter 1

The *Nibelungenlied* opens with an exhortation to the reader to expect a tale of brave knights and furious battles. The main site of the action is the land of the Burgundians, which is ruled by the three brothers Gunther, Gernot, and Giselher. They have a beautiful sister, Kriemhild, and live in the city of Worms (pronounced "Voorms") on the Rhine River. Their mother is called Uote, and their deceased father was named Dancrat.

We also learn in this chapter that Kriemhild dreamed that a falcon she had raised was attacked and torn to pieces by two eagles. Her mother Uote suggests that the falcon in the dream is a noble man that Kriemhild loves who will be torn away from her. Kriemhild says that rather than risk such a loss, she will never marry. The narrator ends the chapter by warning that the dream foretells a great tragedy which will befall the Burgundians.

Chapter 2

We are introduced to another city, Xanten in the Netherlands, where the royal family of King Siegmund, his wife Sieglind, and their son Siegfried live and rule. Siegfried is described as handsome, brave, honorable, and an expert knight. Siegmund holds a lavish feast and festival honoring the knighting of his son and a host of other young warriors. The description of the festival, and of Siegmund's generous gifts of money, jewels, and clothing, is elaborate and detailed.

Chapter 3

Siegfried hears of the beauty of the Burgundian princess Kriemhild, and decides to win her hand in marriage. His father and mother are not happy to hear this at first, for Kriemhild's brothers are reputed to be fearsome warriors. Siegmund himself does not relish the possibility of war with the Burgundians if they oppose the Xanten prince's suit, but he will not be deterred.

Siegfried and his knights travel to Worms. The Burgundian knight Hagen recognizes Siegfried, and shares what he knows about the Xanten prince's reputation: Siegfried is known to have slain the two Nibelung princes ("Nibelung" here is the name of a dynasty or powerful, long-established family) and to have won their great treasure, including a magic cloak which makes the wearer invisible. Siegfried also once killed a dragon and bathed in its blood. As a result, he cannot be harmed by weapons. Therefore, says Hagen, Siegfried must be welcomed as a special guest.

Siegfried is greeted hospitably, and offers words of great flattery to Gunther and his men. However, his words contain a veiled threat: he indicates that he wishes to possess all that the Burgundians now have! Siegfried challenges Gunther to a battle, proposing that the loser give up his kingdom to the winner. Gernot and Hagen object that Siegfried has challenged Gunther without provocation. Gernot intervenes and convinces the two that little honor is to be gained from such an endeavor. A war is barely averted.

Gernot now officially welcomes Siegfried with true courtesy and offers him the full hospitality of Worms, provided he behave honorably. Siegfried does not reveal his true reason for visiting Worms until much later. Siegfried and his men are given the best accommodations, and proceed to take part in many social events, ncluding sporting contests,war games, and hunting. Siegfried outshines all the participants in each and every endeavor.

Siegfried does not see Kriemhild, who is kept in seclusion, but he cherishes his thoughts of her. He does not know that she is watching from her window as he competes against the knights of her own kingdom, and is falling in love with him. Siegfried lives with the Burgundians for a year without ever seeing her.

Chapter 4

Gunther and the Burgundians receive more surprise visitors—envoys from King Liudegast of Denmark and his brother King Liudeger of Saxony. The Burgundians are informed that the kings intended to invade Burgundy in twelve weeks. When told of the impending invasion, Siegfried pledges his aid, and Gunther accepts the offer. The envoys are informed that forces have been gathered and that the Burgundians are ready to receive the invaders.

When the envoys arrive home and tell King Liudegast that Siegfried of the Netherlands has allied with the Burgundians, he and King Liudeger summon over 40,000 troops. Meanwhile, Gunther gathers his own forces. Siegfried asks Gunther to remain behind at Worms so that he might fight the battle. The Burgundians, led by Siegfried, ride through Hesse toward Saxony, destroying enemy towns and villages along the way.

When the main forces meet in battle, Siegfried captures both King Liudegast and King Liudeger. The Burgundians also take many other Saxon prisoners, and bring the wounded back to Worms to be cared for. Most of the Danes return to Denmark, defeated. Gunther rides out to meet the returning army, and learns of the Burgundian victory. Everyone is welcomed; even the prisoners are received like honored guests. King Liudeger promises to remain with his captured troops until they are given leave to return home. Gunther dismisses the troops of warrior-vassals who had gathered to fight for Burgundy along with Siegfried, asking them to return in six weeks for a great feasts. Gunther asks Siegfried to remain in Worms, and Siegfried agrees because of his secret love for Kriemhild.

Chapter 5

The promised festivities are underway. The narrator tells us that Gunther has noticed Siegfried's secret devotion to Kriemhild, and arranged for Kriemhild and their mother Uote to join the celebration. Gunther introduces Kriemhild and Siegfried, and the narrator dwells at length on their immediate attraction to one another.

The Danes return home after asking for a pledge of peace between themselves and the Burgundians. Gunther agrees. Siegfried again plans to leave, but young Giselher asks him to remain at Worms. Again, Siegfried does so in hopes of winning Kriemhild's hand.

Chapter 6

Gunther, having heard of many beautiful maidens in other lands, decides to win one for his wife. One particular queen, Brunhild of Iceland, is very famous for her great physical strength and beauty. Her suitors are expected to engage in three tests of strength agains her in order to win her hand. Those who do not outmatch her lose their heads. Gunther is determined to win Brunhild, and Siegfried agrees to help him in his quest if in exchange he is permitted to marry Kriemhild. Gunlher agrees.

Chapter 7

The Burgundians arrive at Brunhild's kingdom. Siegfried pretends to be Gunther's vassal, or liegeman (a servant or subordinant to a noble person) and speaks on his behalf, praising his lord and explaining that they have come so that Gunther might win Brunhild as his wife. Brunhild explains the tests which he must undergo to win her: Gunther must "cast the weight" (a heavy boulder which twelve men can barely lift); perform a leap (a type of long-jump); and throw a javelin (a long spear). Gunther accepts the challenge.

As Gunther takes part in each event, Siegfried secretly helps him while wearing his magic cloak of invisibility. Together they defeat Brunhild, who grudgingly accepts Gunther as her husband and king, and joins her kingdom to his. A feast and games follow, and Siegfried leaves to visit the land of the Nibelungs, which he earlier conquered.

Chapter 8

When Siegfried arrives at the land of the Nibelungs, of whose great treasure and lands he is lord, he is challenged by the gatekeeper and a fight ensues. Siegfried wins and binds his attacker; news of the event spreads quickly. Alberich, the dwarf from whom Siegfried had taken the magic cloak, arrives and attacks Siegfried, whom he has not recognized. Siegfried wins again, and ties up Alberich. Realizing who his captor is, Alberich is relieved, and welcomes him.

When the Nibelungs arrive at Iceland, Brunhild is surprised, but welcomes them. The Burgundians prepare to return to Worms with Brunhild as queen.

Chapter 9

On their journey home, Siegfried is asked to travel ahead to tell of the good news so that all might be ready to welcome Gunther's new bride. Gifts are prepared for Brunhild, and when Gunther and his company arrive a ceremonious entourage is ready to welcome them.

Chapter 10

Kriemhild, Uote and all the king's vassals are standing by to greet those arriving, Brunhild is welcomed by Kriemhild with special attention, and the two queens at first seem destined to be friends. A wedding party is held, with games and a wonderful feast. Siegfried reminds Gunther of his oath to allow him to marry Kriemhild, and Gunther happily complies. Gunther tells Kriemhild of his wish, she gladly accepts, and the two are married at once. Brunhild is surprised that Gunther intends to let his sister marry Siegfried, since she believes what he told her in her own country: that Siegfried is only a vassal of the prince, and therefore not really an appropriate husband for a princess.

When Gunther and Brunhild retire for their wedding night, Gunther learns that Brunhild intends to remain a virgin. When he attempts to embrace her, she becomes enraged. She uses her great physical strength to tie him up and hang him from a hook on the wall, where she leaves him until morning, taking him down just before attendants enter the room the next morning, in order to spare him the embarrassment of the whole court finding out that he was overpowered by his new wife.

The next morning Gunther tells Siegfried of the humiliation he suffered. Siegfried, whose own wedding night had been quite enjoyable, offers to use his magic cloak again to help Gunther consummate his marriage, promising that he will not take advantage of the situation for his own sexual pleasure. That night, when Brunhild again resists Gunther's advances, the invisible Siegfried intervenes. He violently rights with and subdues Brunhild, holding her helpless on the bed for Gunther. Siegfried takes a girdle (a belt or any garment that encircles the waist) of silk and a golden ring from Brunhild before he returns to his own chamber, where Kriemhild waits. She is suspicious about where he has been, but he avoids her questions. He gives her the silken belt and the ring, but does not tell her where he got them. Meanwhile, Brunhild realized that with her virginity she has lost her physical strength as well, and is now no more powerful that any other woman.

This episode can be offensive to a late twentieth-century reader. However, according to the traditions of the era in which the *Nibelungenlied* was written, it was considered seriously wrong— perverse and unwomanly—of Brunhild to refuse to consummate her marriage with Gunther. As disturbing as it is to a modern sensibility, Gunther's virtual rape of his new bride was viewed as his right and as the logical next step after she

refused to submit to him. As later events show, however, the involvement of his friend Siegfried is questionable, even within the context of the times.

Chapter 11

Siegfried and Kriemhild prepare to return to the Netherlands, but not before Gunther, Giselher, and Gernot arrange to grant them the lands that are part of Kriemhild's inheritance. (Brunhild is not present at this exchange, and scholars have suggested that is perhaps because she would then have realized that Siegfried is certainly not Gunther's vassal.) They are welcomed at Siegfried's home with open arms, and King Siegmund crowns Siegfried as king on the spot. The narrator skims quickly over the next several months, telling the reader only that Siegfried and Kriemhild have a son whom they name Gunther after his uncle. In the meantime, Brunhild gives birth to a son as well, whom she and Gunther name Siegfried.

Chapter 12

Brunhild has been wondering why so much time has passed since Siegfried rendered his "lord" Gunther any tribute (money paid regularly by a vassal to a lord, usually in exchange for the use of land and military protection). She keeps her thoughts to herself, however, and asks Gunther to invite Siegfried and Kriemhild for a visit. Gunther initially objects, claiming it is too far for them to travel. Brunhild reminds Gunther of Siegfried's obligations as a royal vassal (Gunther does not contradict her) and says that she wishes to see Kriemhild again. When the invitation reaches them, Kriemhild is anxious to visit her homeland. Siegfried accepts the invitation, but brings along his father and many warriors.

Chapters 13 and 14

Siegfried and Kriemhild arrive in Burgundy. A great feast is held and war games are played. Tension develops between Brunhild and Kriemhild. Each boasts of the bravery and honor of her respective husband. Brunhild objects to Kriemhild's boast. Kriemhild does not at first understand Brunhild's objection, because she does not realize that Brunhild still believes that Siegfried is Gunther's vassal. When Brunhild explains herself, Kriemhild denies it, and states that the true nature of Siegfried and Gunther's relationship is one of equals. The argument becomes quite heated as both claim higher status than the other. When Brunhild tries to prevent Kriemhild from entering a cathedral ahead of her, saying that her own higher status means that she should enter first, Brunhild angrily tells her that she is no better than a paramour, or mistress, and that Siegfried and not her own husband was the first to be intimate with her. The narrative never indicates either that Siegfried had sexual contact with Brunhild or that either Siegfried or Gunther ever told Kriembild how Siegfried used his magic cloak to help Gunther subdue Brunhild. However she came by the knowledge, Kriemhild does produce, as proof, the golden ring that Siegfried took from Brunhild.

Brunhild demands to know the truth from Gunther. Siegfried denies having compromised Brunhild's honor and even publicly criticizes his own wife Kriemhild for saying such things. Gunther accepts Siegfried's word and is prepared to forget the matter. Hagen, however, promises Brunhild that he will punish Siegfried for her public humiliation (although nothing has been proven), and he and his knights plot Siegfried's death. Gunther tries to prevent the plot, but finally agrees to take part in Hagen's plan. The narrator concludes Chapter 14 by deploring the fact that events have started that will end in the deaths of many men because of "the wrangling of two women."

Chapter 15

Kriemhild asks Hagen to protect her husband, not knowing that it is he who has sworn to avenge his liege lady's honor by causing Siegfried's death. She also calmly admits that Siegfried beat her for publicly humiliating Brunhild. Hagen asks Kriemhild how he should protect him, that is, where Siegfried's weak spot is. She tells him that Siegfried has one tender part on his body, between his shoulder blades. As the narrator tells us, she thinks she is saving her husband's life, but in fact she is inadvertently giving Hagen the means to kills him.

Chapter 16

The knights prepare to go hunting. Kriemhild is deeply troubled, apparently because of her indiscretion to Hagen. She describes to Siegfried a dream she had the night before, in which two boars chase her husband through a field of blood-colored flowers. Siegfried promises he will return from the day's hunt. Kriemhild describes a second dream, in which two mountains fall upon and kill Siegfried. He does not take her concerns seriously.

The narrator describes the hunt in great detail (hunting is an important and noble sport in the Middle Ages). Siegfried kills many beasts in a great show of bravery and skill. Then Siegfried and a few of the company, including Hagen and Gunther, stop to rest. As Siegfried drinks from a stream, Hagen throws Siegfried's own spear at him, aiming for the cross that Kriemhild stitched onto his tunic in hopes that it would impart holy protection. The weapon passes through Siegfried's body. Still alive and maddened with rage and pain, Siegfried reaches for his weapons, but Hagen has removed them from where they lay. Able to lay hands only on his shield, he uses the last of his strength to stake one mighty blow against Hagen that shatters the shield. Siegfried collapses in a bed of flowers (reminiscent of Kriemhild's dream) and speaks, deriding Hagen and his company for their dishonor. At his words, Gunther regrets his action. The chapter closes on the image of blood-drenched flowers.

Chapter 17

The hunting party returns and, in a deed of "pride and grisly vengeance," Hagen has Siegfried's corpse placed outside Kriemhild's door so that she will find him on her way to

matins (morning church services). A servant finds the body the next morning, but cannot recognize it. Only Kriemhild sees who it is, and collapses with grief. Her grief is compounded by her guilt for having told Hagen how to "protect" Siegfried. Suspecting that Brunhild and Hagen are responsible, she swears vengeance. Word spreads of Siegfried's death, and Siegmund is especially grief-stricken. He goes immediately to Kriemhild and they both mourn. The Nibelung warriors arm themselves, and, now with Siegmund, are determined to seek out Siegfried's killer. Kriemhild convinces them all to wait until there is proof.

At the funeral, Gunther and Hagen join the mourners. Kriemhild challenges them both to approach Siegfried's body. There is a belief at this time that the wounds on the corpse of a murder victim would bleed in the presence of the killer, and this happens when Hagen approaches Siegfried's body. Gunther and Hagen both protest Hagen's innocence, but Kriemhild does not believe them.

Chapter 18

Kriemhild decides to remain at Worms with her brothers as Siegmund returns to the Netherlands. Kriemhild confers the raising of her son to his grandparents at Xanten Kriemhild, although she will remain with her own people, will not retain her position as a queen. She and Brunhild remain unreconciled.

Chapter 19

Kriemhild remains at Worms for three and a half years without ever speaking to Gunther or Hagen. She is still convinced of Hagen's guilt, primarily because she told him of Siegfried's weak spot. Hagen, meanwhile, plots to bring the treasure of the Nibelungs, now Kriemhild's, to Worms. Gunther sends his brothers to speak to her and beg her to see Gunther. She finally agrees, and once they are reconciled, she agrees to send for the treasure. Eight thousand men are sent to fetch it. Against the wishes of the kings, however, Hagen has the treasure secretly sunk in the Rhine river so that few know its whereabouts.

Chapter 20

Meanwhile, in Hungary, Helche, the wife of King Etzel of the Huns, has died, and he wishes to take another bride. He has heard of Kriemhild's beauty and sends his trusted vassal, Rudiger of Pochlarn, to win her hand on his behalf. Rudiger arrives at Worms with five hundred warriors and secures an audience with the kings. Rudiger tells Gunther the purpose of his visit and is promised an answer within three days. Gunther is willing to let Kriemhild decide whether to marry Etzel, but Hagen discourages him, fearing that Kriemhild will use Etzel's forces to exact vengeance on the Burgundians for Siegfried's death.

Kriemhild is determined not to accept Etzel's offer until Rudiger swears an oath promising to avenge any wrongs she suffers. She decides to accept Etzel's offer.

Chapter 21

Kriemhild and her company travel through Bavaria to Passau, where she encounters Bishop Pilgrim, her uncle. They pass on to Rudiger's lands where they remain for a short time. There Kriemhild meets Rudiger's wife Gotelind and her daughter. Thence they travel through Austria, and the narrator comments that in this land Christians and pagans live side by side (Etzel is a pagan). The company stays at the fortress of Traisenmauer for four days and then journeys to Etzel's court.

Chapter 22

On their way through Austria, Kriemhild sees many strange customs being followed and meets many knights and Kings of the various principalities of the land. They alt owe loyalty to King Etzel and are eager to meet their new queen. When she meets Etzel she is greeted courteously. Jousts and festivities follow. Etzel and Kriemhild, along with a great company, then ride on to Vienna where more festivities occur in honor of Knemhild's arrival. They are married in Vienna and the festivities continue for seventeen days. Kriemhild, however, continues to grieve for Siegfried. Then they leave Vienna for Hungary, where Knemhildis welcomed at the court by royal princesses, especially Herrat, the former Queen Helche's niece, who is betrothed to a lord named Dietrich.

Chapter 23

In her seventh year of marriage to Etzel, Kriemhild has a son whom she names Ortlieb. She is by now loved, respected and even feared by the Hungarian people. She still plots revenge against Hagen. One night she has a dream of walking with her brother Giselher, and the narrator implies that everyone at Giselher's court would soon know much suffering.

Kriemhild asks Etzel to invite her countrymen to visit them. He dispatches two minstrels, Swemmel and Werbel, to invite them to the summer festival. Kriemhild speaks to the envoys separately and asks them to pretend that she sorrows no longer for Siegfried, and bears no ill feeling for his loss. Thus, she wishes to see all of her brothers, and Hagen as well. The messengers do not know of Hagen's role in Siegfried's death, and so are oblivious to her alternate motives for luring Hagen to Hungary.

Chapter 24

Werbel and Swemmel stop in Pochlarn on their way to Worms and visit Rudiger and Gotelmd, who send their own greetings to the court in Worms. They are welcomed with open arms after Hagen recognizes them. They deliver the invitation and are promised

an answer within the week. Meanwhile, Gunther deliberates whether to visit Hungary. Hagen is vehemently opposed to the journey, and openly cites his own murder of Knemhild's husband as the reason that all of their lives will be in danger if they visit her. Gunther, however, assumes that Kriemhild's anger has passed. Gunther suggests to Hagen that, since he is conscience of his guilt, he should remain behind—implying that Hagen is not brave enough to face Kriemhild and her new vassals (Gunther says nothing about his own passive role in Siegfried's death). Hagen accepts the challenge and decides to go along, but insists that they go armed.

Chapter 25

As the Burgundians prepare to travel to Hungary, Uote has a dream that all the birds in Burgundy had died. She takes this to be a prophecy of doom and warns her sons not to go, but they disregard her. The Burgundians travel toward Hungary, and on the twelfth day reach the Danube River. Hagen encounters water sprites or faeries bathing in the river, and steals their clothes, returning them in exchange for their word that the trip will be undertaken in safety. However, after Hagen returns their clothes, they tell him that, in fact, great danger awaits them in Hungary, and that they are all doomed to die.

Then, Hagen fights and kills a boatman who refuses to ferry the men across the river. Once everyone has safely crossed the Danube, Hagen destroys the ferry, claiming that it is to prevent any cowards in the group from returning home.

Chapter 26

When they arrive on the other side of the river, Hagen tells the others of the prophecy he received from the faeries. He also admits to having killed the ferryman, warning that the ferryman's lord, Gelphrat will probably have heard of the death of the ferryman and seek revenge. Shortly, the Burgundians are approached by Gelphrat and his brother Else and their men. Gelphrat is slain by Dancwart and the rest of his men flee. The Burgundians continue on. They reach Rudiger's residence where they can rest.

Chapter 27

Rudiger welcomes his guests with great honor, especially Hagen, whom he had met before. His wife, Lady Gotelind, and their daughter also offer welcome. The (unnamed) daughter becomes the object of much admiration, and before the Burgundians leave, she is betrothed to Giselher. Several days later the Burgundians set out for Etzel's court, laden with gifts from Rudiger, who accompanies them on the last leg of their journey.

Chapter 28

The Burgundians arrive in Hungary and are greeted by Hildebrand and Wolfhart, two brave knights of Amelungland and vassals of Dietrich, Lord of Verona. They warn the

Burgundians that Kriemhild still mourns the death of Siegfried. Undaunted, the Burgundians ride on to the court.

Kriemhild welcomes the visitors, but does not withhold her anger from Hagen, and immediately asks where he has hidden her treasure, that of the Nibelungs to which she was entitled after Siegfried's death. Hagen claims that her brothers ordered it sunk in the Rhine River.

Chapter 29

Kriemhild weeps and is asked by Etzel's warriors why she is upset. She explains that she wants Siegfried's death avenged, and will pay dearly for it. Sixty men swear to kill Hagen, but she insists that they gather more forces and so they do. However, the knights then back away from their promise, afraid of Hagen and Volker.

Gunther and his brothers and men then enter the court of Etzel and are welcomed by the King, who is ignorant of the threat the man poses.

Chapter 30

At the end of the evening, Gunther and his men ask leave to retire, but as they leave the hall, they are surrounded by a jostling crowd. This enfuriates Volker, and tensions run high between the two groups of knights. The Burgundians are shown to a large hall where beds are set up. Hagen and Volker stand guard outside the room as the others sleep.

Chapter 31

After morning mass, festivities commence, with games and mock battles. One of these is the "bohort", a pageantry sport played on horseback with shields and lances, Rudiger, noticing the angry mood of many of Gunther's men, recommends that the bohort be canceled, but it continues anyway. Volker enters the game. When he charges, his lance kills one of the Huns (ostensibly by accident). Everyone jumps for their swords, but Etzel arrives to settle the matter. He rules that the death was an accident.

Kriemhild, meanwhile, again asks her vassals for help in avenging Siegfried. Despite being angered by the recent death, they are wary of attacking the Burgundians. So she begs lord Bloedelin to help her, but he, too, is unwilling until Kriemhild promises him much wealth and land, as well as the young woman Herrat, already promised to Dietrich as bride. Then he agrees.

Chapter 32

Bloedelin attacks the Burgundians. Entering the hall where Dancwart and his men are eating, he challenges him. Dancwart immediately cuts off Bloedelin's head and a mighty battle ensues. The Burgundians drive the Huns from the building, but only after many losses on both sides. Dancwart endeavors to fight his way out to tell his brother Hagen of the attempted massacre.

Chapter 33

Dancwart enters the hall where Hagen is dining with Etzel and Kriemhild. Dancwart calls on his brother for assistance, saying that Lord Bloedelin and his men have massacred many of the Burgundians. Between them then prevent the pursuing Huns from entering and barricade the room, then stand guard at the stairs. Then Hagen steps forth and decapitates Kriemhild and Etzel's son, Ortlieb; his head falls into Kriemhild's lap. A battle erupts, Huns against Burgundians. Kriemhild begs Dietrich to help her and Etzel escape, and he does so. Rudiger of Pochlarn is also permitted to leave with his men, for the Burgundians' fight is not with them.

Chapter 34

The Burgundians kill or seriously wound all of the Huns in the hall. They clear the hall by throwing the dead and dying alike down a flight of stairs, and many more of the wounded die because of this rough handling. Hagen and Volker address King Etzel, who is standing with a crowd outside. They taunt and insult him and his queen Kriemhild. She is incensed, and calls on her men to kill Hagen, promising great wealth in return.

Chapter 35

Iring of Denmark now calls for his weapons, determined to fulfill his queen's wishes. He engages the Burgundians in battle. Giselher strikes him down, but he is only stunned. They think him dead, however, so when he leaps to his feet it surprises them. He runs toward Hagen and manages to wound him and then retreat back to the crowd gathered outside. Kriemhild is delighted when she hears of the events. Iring is now determined to try again, and reenters the hall. Hagen is enraged and wounds Iring on the spot (with a spear shaft through his head).

Chapter 36

Kriemhild and Etzel send twenty thousand men into battle, but the Huns are again unsuccessful. Etzel is by now unwilling to let any of the Burgundians live. Things have gone too far.

Giselher addresses his sister, asking for mercy, but she refuses. Her heart is devoid of mercy. She says, however, that if they will hand over Hagen as prisoner, she will consider letting her brothers live; but Gernot and the others refuse to break faith with their friend. Kriemhild then orders the Huns to set fire to the hall. As the heatrises, those trapped inside even drink the blood of the slain to quench their thirst. They decide to enter the gathering hall of the palace and remain silent so that the Huns will think they have perished. But the Huns attack at daybreak, spurred on by loyalty for their king, and Kriemhild's promise of wealth. The narrator tells us that twelve hundred men attacked, but all were killed.

Chapter 37

Rudiger is now called upon to lend a hand to the Huns, but is reluctant since he has pledged friendship (and betrothed his daughter) to the Burgundians. He struggles with the decision to engage his new friends in battle, but is chastised by Etzel for his disloyalty on the other side. Etzel and Kriemhild are both upset by his decision not to fight. Kriemhild reminds him of his oath of allegiance to her. But he is tormented by his role in bringing the Burgundians to Etzel's court, only to see them attacked, and cannot decide what to put first — feudal obligation or a vow of friendship and kinship.

Both Kriemhild and Etzel kneel before Rudiger, who is tormented by the decision he must make. There is essentially no right choice for him. Whatever his decision, he will be betraying one of his oaths. He even offers to exile himself to avoid making the decision. But Etzel's entreaties convince him, unwillingly, to engage the Burgundians in battle.

When Giselher and the others see Rudiger and his men approach, they think help is on the way, but soon realize that their friend is here to fight them. The Burgundian kings try to dissuade him from his intention. Rudiger even gives Hagen his shield, as Hagen's was destroyed. Emotions run high, and the knights weep at the evil turn of events that pits friends against friends. They engage in battle, and Rugider and Gernot kill each other. All of Rudiger's men are slain.

Chapter 38

An emissary is sent by Dietrich of Verona to the Huns to inquire as to the state of affairs. Dietrich next sends Hildebrand, his Master-at-Arms, to the Burgundians for more information. When Volker sees Hildebrand and his knights approaching he assumes they will attack, but they are addressed by Hildebrand instead. Hildebrand asks whether it is true that they have slain Rudiger, in which case Dietrich will never be able to forgive them. Hagen confirms the report.

Hildebrand asks for Rudiger's body, but is told that they must fight for it. Hildebrand and his men engage them (contrary to Dietrich's orders). Wolfhart goads the Burgundians into battle and many of Hildebrand's men lose their lives. Hildebrand kills Volker after the latter kills Dietrich's nephew Sigestap. Hagen is devastated by Volker's death.

Dancwart is also killed by Helpfrich, a vassal of Dietrich. Wolfhart (nephew of Hildebrand) and Giselher slay each other. Finally, all of Dietrich's men are killed except Hildebrand. He and Hagen fight and Hildebrand flees from the hall, wounded. Only Hagen and Gunther are left alive.

Dietrich is angry with Hildebrand for engaging in battle with the Burgundians, since he had only been sent to talk to them. Dietrich, saddened by the confirmation of Rudiger's death, is determined to fight the Burgundians himself, but is shocked to hear that he has no warriors left. Without his men, he has no way to serve Etzel as vassal, or to protect himself.

Chapter 39

Dietrich and Hildebrand return to the hall where Hagen and Gunther wait. Dietrich offers to protect the Burgundians if they surrender themselves to him, but his offer is refused. Hagen claims that to surrender themselves would mean disgrace. Hagen insults Hildebrand for having fled the battle earlier, which provokes Dietrich. Dietrich and Hagen fight and Dietrich captures and binds Hagen, bringing him to Queen Kriemhild. Kriemhild has Hagen locked in the dungeon.

Dietrich returns to fight Gunther, whom he defeats and brings, bound, to Kriemhild. Kriemhild imprisons her brother as well, and keeps the two prisoners separate. She has Gunther killed and brings his head to Hagen. She then kills Hagen with her first husband Siegfried's sword in the presence of Etzel, Dietrich and Hildebrand. Hildebrand, however, will not allow her to go unpunished for killing such a great warrior. Despite the harm that Hagen has inflicted, Hildebrand swears to avenge his death, and kills Kriemhild. Even Etzel mourns the death of Hagen. "The King's high festival had ended in sorrow, as joy must ever turn to sorrow in the end."

Adventure 1, Kriemhild's Dream

Adventure 1, Kriemhild's Dream Summary

Just like many ancient tales, this is a story of happy feasts, woe, and daring deeds.

A fair maiden named Kriemhild lives in Burgundy,where she will cause many warriors to lose their lives. Kriemhild's three brothers—Gunther, Gernot, and Giselher—keep watch over the girl. Although the brothers are noble and mild tempered, they are fierce soldiers. The family lives in Worms near the Rhine where they maintain a glorious estate until the brothers are killed by the hate of two noble women. When their father, Dancrat dies, his children inherit the kingdom. Because of their great strength, the three princes hold loyalties from the noblest knights in the land.

One night, Kriemhild dreams that two eagles attack a falcon. Dame Uta, the girl's mother, says the falcon must represent a suitor whom God will shield so Kriemhild does not loose him. Uta's interpretation distresses Kriemhild, who swears that she will never love another in order to avoid suffering woe for a man. Uta encourages her daughter to reconsider giving love and marriage a chance, but Kriemhild maintains her position to avoid the mixture of pleasure and pain that accompanies love. However, despite her protests, Kriemhild will eventually marry a famous knight whose death causes sorrow to many others.

Adventure 1, Kriemhild's Dream Analysis

The First Adventure, or chapter, presents an abbreviated synopsis of the entire tale. From the very first line, the poet tells the reader that his story is one of happiness, sorrow, and great deeds. This sort of opening is akin to the story-telling device "Long, long ago". Beginning a tale with such an invocation is commonly found in ancient tales and fairytales. The reader learns quickly how the story will turn out. This introductory chapter introduces several important characters and Kriemhild's dream foreshadows what will happen to her. Similarly, Kriemhild's dream gives the story a sense of foreboding that makes the reader wonder who will suffer, from what will they suffer, and by whom.

Adventure 2, Siegfried

Adventure 2, Siegfried Summary

In the Netherlands, at a castle near the Rhine, lives a lofty prince who is a son of Siegmund. The boy named Siegfried is good looking, shameless, and carefree. In the halls of Burgundy, Siegfried will find both love and sorrow mixed. Siegfried's fame and honor win him the love of many noble women who wish him to be with them.

One day, Siegmund sends messengers through the land to invite those worthy of knighthood to try his hand against Siegfried. Four hundred squires attend the tournament. Numerous girls and women attempt to impress the prince with their needlework and jewelry. Following a large mass, many young warriors are dubbed "knight" with great pageantry. King Siegmund calls for the tournament to cease and the field is strewn with splintered shields.

That evening, the people enjoy a lavish feast while the king bestows lands and castles on his son., The feast lasts for seven days and then the king and queen give their guests splendid parting gifts of gold, robes, and horses. When all the attendees have departed, the Barons gather in the hall, but Siegfried does not desire to involve himself in court affairs. While his parents are alive, the prince acts only to command armies against invaders. No enemies dare to defy him and his battle prowess makes him famous.

Adventure 2, Siegfried Analysis

As in the first adventure, the second provides more introductory information. The poet takes his time to set up the plot of his story and engage the reader with his characters. The poem is a well-constructed series of events that build upon each other. Not one adventure can be removed from the story or the entire structure will crumble.

In this building block, the poet introduces another substantial character: Siegfried. A large amount of text is spent describing and praising the prince's martial abilities. Siegfried doesn't care much for the affairs of court and prefers to spend his days winning lands and treasure. As a result, the prince gains a large storehouse of gold that will later become a point of contention and sorrow for his bride. Siegfried's mighty deeds alert the reader to his importance and signal that he will only deign to take a bride of equal merit.

Adventure 3, How Siegfried Went to Worms

Adventure 3, How Siegfried Went to Worms Summary

Siegfried hears about a beautiful maiden who lives in Burgundy. Tales of Kriemhild's beauty, virtue, and virgin pride spread far and wide, drawing suitors from across the land. Despite the constant flow of suitors, the princess stands firm in her oath not to marry. Eventually though, a visitor from a distant land finally wins her favor.

When King Siegmund learns his son's intentions, he and the queen are very concerned because they know the strength of Gunther and his men. Siegfried's parents attempt to dissuade their son from his chosen course. When the prince refuses to give up on wooing the girl, Siegmund agrees to support him. Siegfried will not go to court the girl looking as if he's going into battle. Instead, he will take eleven of his closest men to travel with him. After seven days, they arrive in Worms where their shining armor and new clothes attract the attention of the townspeople. Squires run out to take the steeds and shields of the visitors, but Siegfried calls out for them to leave the horses because he does not intend to stay long.

King Gunther calls for Hagen to greet the visitors. Hagen comes to the hall and looks out a window at the strangers. Hagen says Siegfried could be the one whom he has never seen but has heard plenty about. Hagen then tells the king about Siegfried's encounter with the Nibelungers.

One day, while out riding alone, Siegfried had come upon a company of men who had just brought the Nibelung's treasure out from a cavern. Siegfried was welcomed into the group and asked by two young princes, Shilbung and Nibelung, to divide the hoard between them. Siegfried was given a sword as compensation, but when he failed to complete the task, the men became angry. When the two princes turned on Siegfried, he slew them with the sword they had presented him and continued killing until the men submitted their lands to him. After battling with Albric, the young prince's dear friend, Siegfried took control of the treasure hoard and ordered it hauled back into the cave where he appointed Albric as watchman.

Hagen concludes his report and advises the king to welcome the stranger warmly so as not to arouse his wrath. Once the guests have been settled comfortably in the hall, Gunther asks what brings Siegfried to Burgundy. The prince says that he has come to challenge the king's champions and by force win the king's lands. Gernot and Ortwine speak out against Siegfried's pompous announcement, but their words are quieted when wine is called for and Gunther offers the service of his household to the visitors. During the following days, Siegfried keeps Kriemhild foremost in his mind. However, Siegfried and Kriemhild have not yet met, even though the prince has been a guest in his castle for a full year.

Adventure 3, How Siegfried Went to Worms Analysis

The poet continues to inundate the reader with more expository information. In this adventure, the reader learns how Siegfried comes to desire Kriemhild and how his parents foster concern at the idea of their impending marriage. There seems to be a history between the Netherlanders and the Burgundians, but Siegmund does not reveal the circumstances to his son. The failure to communicate properly becomes an important theme as the tale continues to unfold. A lack of understanding leads to immense sorrow for thousands of people.

Siegfried's arrival brings more tales of his heroic deeds. Most notable is the story of how he won gold from the Nibelungers. The reader is introduced to Hagen, with the knight's actions thus far seeming innocent enough. In light of Hagen's future relationship with Siegfried, it is surprising that Gunther's trusted advisor does not become angered by the visitor's reason for seeking out Gunther's hall. Although Siegfried has come to woo Kriemhild, he goes about asking for her hand in a strange manner. Instead of ingratiating himself to his host, the young prince says he plans to win all of their lands. Siegfried appears to be a haughty young hero, too full of his past accomplishments and unfamiliar with courtly manners. However, King Gunther appears intrigued by the brash young man and takes no offense to Siegfried's proposed contest. The relationship between these two men begins for the love of a woman with a rashly issued challenge, and it will end in much the same way.

Adventure 4, How Siegfried Fought with the Saxons

Adventure 4, How Siegfried Fought with the Saxons Summary

Messengers sent by King Gunther's enemies bring him distressing news. King Ludeger of the Saxons and King Ludegast of Denmark have joined and now march towards Gunther's land. Gunther must either gather an army to face them or agree to a treaty. The king sends for Hagen and Gernot to advise his course of action. Gernot is ready and eager to fight, while Hagen cautions against rashness and suggests they tell Siegfried.

Gunther is reluctant to share the news with Siegfried, saying that this is something told only to bosom friends. Insulted by Gunther's remark, Siegfried says that if Gunther is in need of a friend then he will find none truer than Siegfried. When Gunther relents and tells Siegfried his troubles, the hero pledges to face thirty thousand of the enemies with only one thousand of Gunther's warriors. The messengers are told to inform their lords to prepare for battle, and they are sent home with bountiful gifts. Ludegast and Ludeger call for reinforcements as Siegfried gathers King Gunther's men for battle. Each side travels until they come near Saxon country where the battle shall be waged.

Siegfried appoints Dankwart as commander of the rearguard and then places Hagen in charge of the men while the hero rides out alone to scout the enemy. As he approaches the enemy encampment, Siegfried comes upon a watchman who is actually King Ludegast. Siegfried defeats Ludegast with three mortal blows to his breastplate. As the king lies dying on the grass, he gives up all claims to his lands and tells his name.

Meanwhile, thirty of Ludegast's men have come to the fray, but they arrive too late and Siegfried kills all but one of them. This one is left alive to tell the tale of Siegfried's victory. Siegfried returns to Gunther's camp with Ludegast as a captive and extols the men to ride to battle.

While the battle rages around him, Siegfried cuts a path to King Ludeger. During the fight, Ludeger recognizes the crest on Siegfried's shield and calls for his men to cease fighting. A truce is called, and Siegfried takes Ludeger and five hundred men captive. News is brought back to Gunther of the victorious events, and one messenger delivers the tale to Kriemhild in secret.

Delighted by the story of Siegfried's grand triumph, Kriemhild rewards the courier with lavish gifts of garments and gold. Gunther sees to the care of the captives before speaking with Ludegast and Ludeger. Gunther gladly sets the kings free when they assure him that they will stay in Burgundy until peace is established. The people begin to outfit themselves for a feast that will take place in six weeks time.

Adventure 4, How Siegfried Fought with the Saxons Analysis

In the previous adventure, Siegfried proved his battle prowess, but now his friendship is tested. Two foreign kings set upon King Gunther's land, and Gunther worries how best to defend himself. While at counsel with Gernot and Hagen, the latter suggests that Siegfried be told of the impending danger but it is never made clear as to why. Although Siegfried has shown the extent of his might and strength, the visitor has only been in Gunther's land for a short time. No allegiances have been sworn, no betrothals have taken place to make Siegfried Gunther's relative. The reader may glance over Hagen's first mysterious call to entrust Siegfried with important information, but more will follow, which could arouse suspicion around Hagen's motives for such gestures.

Once Gunther reveals the source of his woe to the young prince, Siegfried rises to the occasion, telling the King not to be concerned. The hero asks for the aide of twenty thousand of Gunther's knights then proceeds to capture both foreign kings. Siegfried's ability to strategize is evidenced by his mercy on the two kings. When Siegfried meets Ludegast alone at the guard post, the young warrior could easily kill the Danish king, but he wisely chooses to present the man as a captive to King Gunther. Likewise, Ludeger has only to see the crest adorning Siegfried's shield to realize that battling against the prince would be useless and that surrender will serve the Saxon king better. Siegfried agrees to take the battle on the King's behalf, but he defers punishment of the two kings to Gunther's counsel. The young hero knows how to make the best impression on the man who will allow or deny Siegfried's request to marry Kriemhild.

Adventure 5, How Siegfried First Saw Kriemhild

Adventure 5, How Siegfried First Saw Kriemhild Summary

As men flock to Gunther's land for the upcoming feast, he wonders how to best spur the men to fight their hardest in the tournament so that the most deserving man wins. Ortwine advises the king to bring out all the fair maidens because nothing inflames courage more than the sight of lovely damsels. The stunningly arrayed women are lead forth, and as Kriemhild comes nearer, Siegfried marvels that he thought he could ever win the love of such a pure and beautiful woman. Gernot then suggests to King Gunther that Kriemhild be introduced to Siegfried in order that the young prince will remain theirs forever.

The two are brought together and, as they look at one another, a bond is forged between them. The entire assembly goes to mass, and Kriemhild publicly praises the knight while Siegfried pledges to fight out of love for her.

When the feast draws to a close, Gunther offers the two captive kings great riches. In return, they ask to be allowed to travel home in peace. Siegfried counsels the king to let them go. Siegfried too desires to take his leave of Gunther's castle but Giselher convinces him to stay and enjoy all the beautiful ladies. However, the chapter ends with the foreshadowing of Siegfried's death as a result of his love for Kriemhild.

Adventure 5, How Siegfried First Saw Kriemhild Analysis

The power of beautiful women goes a long way in the lives of men. King Gunther has arranged a tournament to take place but he fears that the knights will not fight as well as they should, and the rightful warrior may not win the grand prize. The king is advised to parade the country's lovely maidens before the men in order to spur them to present their strongest arms. The ploy works and Siegfried pledges to fight not for reward but for the love of Gunther's sister. However, the love of a pretty woman can also bring great tragedy as the poet hints at the end of the adventure.

Adventure 6, How Gunther Went to Woo Brunhild

Adventure 6, How Gunther Went to Woo Brunhild Summary

Gunther learns of a queen who rules beyond the sea. Her beauty is unmatched, as is her strength, and she offers her love to any man who can beat her with a spear. Suitors must beat her in three different games or lose their heads if they fail the challenge. Gunther is convinced that he will be able to win the games and the love of Brunhild, and, if he cannot, then he does not wish to live without her. Although his men try to dissuade his course of action, Gunther's mind is made up, and the men suggest Siegfried travel with them since he alone knows of Queen Brunhild. Siegfried agrees to go on the condition that once Brunhild has been won, Gunther gives Kriemhild as Siegfried's wife.

The poet gives a summary of the events to follow, stating that the company of men succeeds in bringing Brunhild back to the Rhine. Siegfried carries with him a cloud-cloak won from the dwarf Albric, which allows the wearer to be free of wounds, move about unseen, and hold the strength of twelve men. It seems that this secret device allows Siegfried to win Brunhild, but it also results in great trouble for Gunther's men and woe for himself.

King Gunther seeks Siegfried's advice on how to proceed in their mission. The young knight tells him that only four—Siegfried, Hagen, Dankwart, and the king—will make the journey and they will be dressed in the best garments. Hagen suggests that, rather than ask Dame Uta for these garments, it would be better to seek the aide of Kriemhild and her maidens. Gunther and Siegfried go to Kriemhild's room and tell her their plan. Gunther's sister agrees to the task and calls thirty skilled maidens to begin the construction of garments the like of which has never before been seen. After seven weeks, all preparations are completed. As the men prepare to sail, Siegfried promises Kriemhild that he will ensure Gunther's safety.

After twelve days on the sea, the men arrive at a land with well-built and beautiful castles. Gunther desires to know what land it is, and Siegfried replies that this is Brunhild's land and her fortress, Isenstein. Siegfried further counsels the men to maintain that he is only a lowly servant to King Gunther. The knight says that this is for Kriemhild's sake, and the men agree as they go to meet the martial queen.

Adventure 6, How Gunther Went to Woo Brunhild Analysis

Gunther's desire to woo the warrior-queen Brunhild presents Siegfried with the opportunity to finally ask for Kriemhild's hand. Gunther is so lovesick for the dangerous woman that he would probably agree to anything Siegfried asked. Unlike the battle against Ludegast and Ludeger, Gunther does not hesitate to seek Siegfried's aide when his men counsel him to do so. In fact, Gunther defers completely to Siegfried's advice.

There is an emphasis on both finery and presenting oneself as a worthy opponent or lover flows throughout the poem. Here Siegfried wisely advises that only four men should journey to Brunhild's hall and that they should be dressed in the finest garments available. By appearing before Brunhild without a large army at his back, Gunther will appear to focus his attention on the mighty queen instead of making a show of his great strength. Likewise, by outfitting themselves in exquisite apparel, the knights show how seriously they take Brunhild's challenge. Siegfried's counsel seems to assure them success although there is still the small matter of beating the powerful queen in the contests she has devised.

Adventure 7, How Gunther Won Brunhild

Adventure 7, How Gunther Won Brunhild Summary

As the boat comes ashore, the men notice a bevy of women watching from the castle windows. Siegfried tells Gunther to pick the one he would have as wife, and is delighted when Gunther correctly identifies Brunhild among the crowd. The women continue to peek out at the men as they disembark, and Brunhild notes Siegfried's servant-like demeanor and the rich garments and weapons of the companions. When the men enter the high hall, a chamberlain asks for their weapons and Hagen bristles at the command. However, Siegfried counsels the men to observe the court's custom, and all the men turn over their arms. As they approach the queen, Brunhild asks one of her court to identify the guests. The servant replies that one appears very like Siegfried, one like a king, and the other two like fierce warriors.

Brunhild assumes that Siegfried has come to woo her and asks the young knight his purpose. Siegfried then begins to extol the greatness of King Gunther, and states that the king has come to woo her hand. Brunhild tells the men that if Gunther loses they will all lose their lives, and Hagen demands to know the nature of the games. Gunther must cast a stone past Brunhild and then leap after it and finally shoot the maid with a javelin. Brunhild suggests the men fully consider these tasks and the cost associated with them. Gunther replies that he would rather lose his head than leave without Brunhild as his wife and the princess prepares herself for the contest. The men stand in awe of her weapons that three men struggle to carry but which Brunhild has little trouble handling. Hagen declares that she must be the devil's wife.

In the meantime, Siegfried slips on his magic cloak and moves unnoticed among the crowd. The cloaked knight comes to Gunther's side and tells the king not to fear the queen's might. Siegfried holds Gunther's buckler so that when Brunhild heaves her javelin at them it goes through but does not harm them because of the cloud-cloak. Siegfried then heaves the javelin back at the maiden, butt-end first so as not to kill her. Brunhild then tosses the massive stone twelve fathoms but she bounds farther than the stone. Siegfried throws the stone even farther and quickly leaps after it, carrying the king. Brunhild storms about angrily but tells her men to bow to their new master, King Gunther.

Siegfried quickly removes the cloud-cloak and enters the hall acting as if he has not seen the entire contest. Hagen tells of Brunhild's defeat and Siegfried calls for them to return to Burgundy. However, Brunhild refuses to leave until all her kinsmen have been assembled and she can set her affairs in place. Hagen worries that they have doomed themselves by waiting for the throng to assemble. Siegfried assures them that he will protect them and leaves to gather an army of a thousand champions.

Adventure 7, How Gunther Won Brunhild Analysis

Even though Brunhild observes Siegfried's servile attitude towards Gunther, she still assumes that Siegfried is the one who has come to woo her. The queen's assumption may point to an unspoken desire to have Siegfried win her hand. When she learns that King Gunther is really the man seeking to take her as his bride, Brunhild's dislike of this match may be the reason she declares that should Gunther fail in the tasks all of the four will lose their heads. However, the warrior-queen seems a little reluctant to carry out what she has just stated since she gives the quartet time to fully consider the implications of the challenge. When Gunther assures her that he would rather perish in the attempt than not win her at all, Brunhild makes a great show of arming herself. The might and power of this woman are shown in the way men struggle to carry her weapons while she tosses them around as if they were feathers. Brunhild's treatment of her weapons suggests her feelings toward men; men are trifles to be played with and bandied about before tossing them aside.

Siegfried's aide to Gunther in winning Brunhild's hand is most unusual. This mighty warrior resorts to trickery and magic to best the mighty woman. The reader begins to wonder how many times Siegfried has used this cloud-cloak to win other honors. The use of an enchanted device to win the contest seems slightly underhanded given all Siegfried's boasts and pledges of honesty. However, the poet and King Gunther see no problems with Siegfried's deception as long as it produces the desired result.

Adventure 8, How Siegfried Came to the Nibelungers

Adventure 8, How Siegfried Came to the Nibelungers Summary

Siegfried journeys to the land of the Nibelungers and finds their stronghold barred shut and guarded by a giant. A struggle ensues and Siegfried has some difficulty subduing the watchman. The dwarf, Albric comes and begins to beat mercilessly on the champion. Siegfried binds the dwarf who demands to know the stranger's name. When Albric learns who has bested him he vows that Siegfried should rule the land. The hero agrees to leave Albric unharmed if only the dwarf will assemble a thousand Nibelungers before him.

From the three thousand that gather, Siegfried picks the best thousand and arrays them in rich garments and equipment. In the morning, the band arrives at Brunhild's fortress and Gunther tells his conquest that they are men of his left waiting for his summons. Brunhild greets the guest and, because of the large number of people crowding the castle, decides that the visitors must soon return to Burgundy. Dankwart offers to distribute the queen's wealth and she becomes concerned when she sees the large gifts made to all her guests. Hagen assures the queen that Gunther has more than enough gold to go around but Brunhild desires to take twenty chests with her so that she may still have something to distribute. She also chooses one thousand heroes, eighty-six women, and a hundred maids to travel with her. Finally, Brunhild appoints one of her kinsmen ruler in her stead until either she or Gunther sends word. At last, the large party sets sail for Gunther's land.

Adventure 8, How Siegfried Came to the Nibelungers Analysis

Siegfried has just won Brunhild as wife for Gunther, but his duty to the King is not yet over. Now the feisty woman refuses to leave her homeland until all her affairs have been set in order. Brunhild seems to be stalling while she tries to devise a plot that will free her from marrying Gunther. Siegfried hurries off to bring a thousand Nibelunger knights to Brunhild's hall, the sight of which seems to deflate the queen's resolve to further stall the inevitable. However, something important happens when Siegfried goes to the land of the Nibelungers. He finds the way barred first by a giant and then by Albric the dwarf. Albric has previously appointed protector of the Nibelungers and their gold, but now appears disgruntled at his status. It seems as if the angry dwarf takes the opportunity to fight with the lone hero in an attempt to free himself from his earlier pledge. The attempt proves futile, but this is not the last time Albric will feature in the story, nor will his loathing of Siegfried decrease over time.

Adventure 9, How Siegfried Was Sent to Worms

Adventure 9, How Siegfried Was Sent to Worms Summary

Hagen notes that no messenger has been sent on ahead to bring news of their arrival to Burgundy. He further suggests that Siegfried be sent, so the king entreats Siegfried in Kriemhild's name to inform Dame Uta of their return and to prepare a wedding feast. When the men see Siegfried coming without Gunther they fear the worse, but the young hero soon allays their fears by telling them all the news. Giselher presents Siegfried to Uta and Kriemhild so he can deliver Gunther's message in person. Upon hearing the news of Gunther's safe return, Kriemhild is so thankful that she rewards Siegfried with twenty-four golden bracelets, which he immediately gives away to her ladies-in-waiting. The feast Gunther has requested is quickly prepared and all of Worms arrays themselves in their best finery for the arrival of their king and his new bride.

Adventure 9, How Siegfried Was Sent to Worms Analysis

As Gunther and his new bride travel back to Burgundy, Hagen suggests that Siegfried be sent on ahead as messenger. This is the second time Hagen has made a strange announcement regarding Siegfried's role among the company. Here it seems very odd that Siegfried, a great warrior, would be sent in the place of a lowly messenger. However, there are two things the reader should keep in mind: only four men rode from Burgundy to Brunhild's hall, and Siegfried greatly desires to Kriemhild who eagerly awaits the return of her brother. Siegfried's role as messenger, when considered in light of these things, seems to make a little more sense, but Hagen's immediate suggestion still creates a whisper of suspicion.

Adventure 10, How Brunhild Was Received at Worms

Adventure 10, How Brunhild Was Received at Worms Summary

King Gunther makes landfall and is greeted by a grand procession of Uta and all her ladies. Kriemhild welcomes Brunhild to their land as a festive joust takes place until Hagen beseeches them to rest. As evening falls, the large party makes its way to the castle and the extravagant feast that awaits them.

Siegfried gently reminds Gunther of his oath to reward the hero with Kriemhild's hand for his part in Gunther's successful wooing of Brunhild. Kriemhild is brought to Gunther's table and asked if she will take as husband the one Gunther chooses. The maiden agrees to do her brother's bidding and is betrothed to Siegfried. However, when Brunhild sees Kriemhild sitting next to the young warrior, she becomes upset. Brunhild tells her new husband that she cannot bear to see Kriemhild given to such a lowly vassal. Gunther assures his bride that Siegfried is truly a king with lands aplenty and that he would never give his sister to anyone less.

When the couples retire to their respective chambers for the night, Siegfried spends a delightful evening with his new bride while Gunther's wedding night with Brunhild is less than pleasant. Gunther tries to seduce Brunhild, but she will have none of it until he tells her the truth about Siegfried. Instead, she takes a cord from her waist, binds her husbands' hands and feet, and hangs him from a peg on the wall where he dangles for the entire night. The following morning both couples attend Mass where they are then crowned as befits their royal stations. Gunther continues to sulk about, so Siegfried quietly inquires as to what troubles his friend. Siegfried is troubled by what he learns and vows to remedy the problem. Gunther agrees to Siegfried's offer of help as long as the warrior promises not to try to woo his wife.

That night Siegfried comes to Gunther's chamber after putting on his cloud-cloak. There he engages in a physical struggle with Brunhild in an attempt to subdue her, but she puts up a valiant fight. Finally, Siegfried throws the woman against the bed, breaking several of her bones and her resolve. Brunhild vows to be a dutiful and passionate wife and Siegfried leaves her lying on the floor. As he moves away, Siegfried quietly removes one of Brunhild's rings and takes the girdle with which she tried to bind him. The following morning Gunther is in a much-improved mood and lavishes great gifts on all his guests. After fourteen days, the knights are ready to depart and the festival ends.

Adventure 10, How Brunhild Was Received at Worms Analysis

King Gunther and his new bride arrive in Burgundy where they are greeted by a large procession of people including Kriemhild, and then trouble begins. Siegfried asks the King to remember the promise of Kriemhild's hand and the two are quickly betrothed, following Kriemhild's agreement. Kriemhild and Siegfried are happy together and Gunther is overjoyed with his new wife, but Brunhild continues to stew in the anger she first felt when Gunther won the contest. The possibility that Brunhild would have been happier to have Siegfried as her lover reasserts itself in Gunther's hall. Brunhild watches discontentedly as Kriemhild and Siegfried talk to each other during the feast. The new queen is upset because she was lead to believe that Siegfried was one of Gunther's vassals and the intermingling of social strata leaves Brunhild disgusted.

Gunther's new bride's anger carries over into the marital bed that night. When Gunther tries to seduce Brunhild, he quickly finds himself bound and hanging from a nail on the wall. Brunhild will not accept Siegfried's marriage to Kriemhild although it should be of little concern of hers. However, the warrior-queen is not quite ready to take her place as a meek and mild trophy for her husband. While Brunhild will not submit to Gunther's explanation, she does give up her resolve to Siegfried. Although it is dark and Siegfried wears his cloud-cloak, it is interesting that, for a second time, Brunhild surrenders to the Netherlandic prince. The discord between husband and wife will return to haunt Brunhild and cause even more problems for Kriemhild and Siegfried.

Adventure 11, How Siegfried Brought His Wife Home

Adventure 11, How Siegfried Brought His Wife Home Summary

Siegfried is anxious to make his departure, but Kriemhild will not go until the land has been fairly divided between her and her brothers. Although Siegfried tries to tell his wife and her brothers that he does not desire their lands, Kriemhild will not be so easily put off. Gernot tells his sister to take a thousand knights of her choosing, but when she chooses Ortwine and Hagen, a small argument arises. Hagen does not want to leave because he has always served in Gunther's lands and he feels that Gunther has no right to toss him away. Finally, Kriemhild settles on five hundred men, Hagen is not among them, and the party prepares to depart.

Tidings are sent to Siegfried's parents-Siegmund and Sieglind-of their son's imminent arrival and preparations for a celebration are initiated. Siegfried and Kriemhild are jubilantly greeted by the large crowd and carried home to a bounteous feast. King Siegmund stands before the gathering in his hall and declares Siegfried king of the Netherlanders. After ten years, Kriemhild bears an heir who they name after her brother Gunther. Around the same time, Lady Sieglind dies and Kriemhild assumes her vacant position. Although saddened by his mother's death, Siegfried is gladdened by the news that Brunhild has born a son named Siegfried. The elder Siegfried brings great fame to himself by performing glorious deeds throughout his years and nothing more is told of the infant.

Adventure 11, How Siegfried Brought His Wife Home Analysis

Brunhild and Kriemhild are more alike than probably either of them would care to admit. Kriemhild too refuses to leave with Siegfried until she settles affairs at home and receives her fair share of wealth. Hagen again becomes an issue when he refuses to travel along with Kriemhild and her new husband. It seems that Hagen would be willing to do the bidding of Gunther's sister, but instead he becomes enraged at the suggestion of leaving Burgundy. The depth of Hagen's rage seems disproportionate to the situation. Gunther has given his sister leave to choose whomever she desires, but Hagen dares to override the King. Gunther accepts Hagen's defiance and, as will happen many more times, Hagen receives no reprimand for his outlandish behavior and succeeds in getting his own way by staying in Burgundy.

Adventure 12, How Gunther Invited Siegfried to the Festival

Adventure 12, How Gunther Invited Siegfried to the Festival Summary

Brunhild sits at home, musing to herself about Siegfried's lack of homage to her husband. Likewise, Gunther's wife fumes over the honors bestowed on Kriemhild, but then, disguising her hateful intentions, beseeches her husband to invite Siegfried to visit their hall again. Therefore, Gunther calls thirty men and charges them with the task of delivering his greetings to Siegfried. After a three-week journey, the troop arrives in Siegfried's court and the sight of her countrymen gladdens Kriemhild's spirit. However, when Gunther's invitation is related, Siegfried says they cannot make the journey. The matter is dropped while the host sits to eat.

After nine days, the messengers are anxious to depart and Siegfried calls his friends to counsel. The warriors advise their leader to make the journey if he so desires, but to take a thousand armed men with them as an escort. Siegmund also pledges to accompany them and bring a hundred men of his own. The messengers return to Burgundy to relay the message in haste, and Gunther's hall springs into action to prepare for their guests' arrival.

Adventure 12, How Gunther Invited Siegfried to the Festival Analysis

Brunhild is not a woman to let past wrongs go from her mind. Gunther's queen sits in the hall and stews over Siegfried's marriage to Kriemhild and the honor Kriemhild receives from so many. Under the guise of desiring to see Siegfried and Kriemhild again, Brunhild asks Gunther to invite the couple to a feast. Gunther is still so blinded by his love for Brunhild that he cannot see the malice within her request. The reader knows immediately that no good can come of a visit by the Netherlanders royal couple.

Siegfried's immediate response when the messengers arrive-that such a journey cannot be made-will become important later in the story. The similarities between the couples continue throughout the poem and this scene will replay itself again with circumstances that are even more tragic.

Adventure 13, How They Went to the Festival

Adventure 13, How They Went to the Festival Summary

The young Gunther, Siegfried's son, is left at home because he is too young to make the fateful voyage.

King Gunther urges his wife to prepare for the guest's arrival and greet them with as much grace and pomp as they met her so many years before. Brunhild agrees, but when she does embrace Kriemhild, the onlookers think she is less tender and true. However, Gunther meets Siegfried and Siegmund with open arms and warm praise. The party wends its way toward the castle as young warriors joust with one another to delight the young maidens.

That evening the wine flows freely and the food is never ending. As Brunhild sits at the table, she eyes Kriemhild and observes the lady's lovely figure and kindly ways. Brunhild also watches Siegfried and deems him a wealthy vassal, but out of favor leaves him free of harm. The following day a tournament is staged, and the fair ladies watch from high windows as the warriors battle one another. The feasts and fun continue for eleven days until Brunhild decides to confront Kriemhild and learn why Siegfried has been lax in his duty to Gunther.

Adventure 13, How They Went to the Festival Analysis

The reader would think that when Gunther has to urge his wife to prepare for the arrival of the guests she desired to see that it might trigger the king to sense that something is amiss. However, Gunther is both so enraptured by his queen and excited by Siegfried's arrival that he pays no attention to Brunhild's sullen mood. The King's oversight will come to cost him dearly. That night at the feast, Brunhild looks on Kriemhild with contempt but leaves Siegfried free of blame because she favors him. Each encounter between Brunhild and Siegfried seems to reinforce the belief that the queen feels scorned by the man she loves.

Adventure 14, How the Two Queens Reviled One Another

Adventure 14, How the Two Queens Reviled One Another Summary

One day the two queens sit together and Kriemhild comments that Siegfried is so mighty that he should rule over Gunther's kingdoms. Brunhild states that Siegfried's only chance of ruling Gunther's land would come only if he were the last man alive. Kriemhild continues to extol the power of her husband and Brunhild answers back against Siegfried until finally she tells Kriemhild that Siegfried is nothing more than Gunther's vassal. Furthermore, Brunhild asserts that she is honored more than is Kriemhild. Upset by these comments, Siegfried's wife proposes a contest to see who the better woman is. Kriemhild states that she will enter the church before Brunhild and Siegfried will enter the courts before the Burgundian knights.

The women separate their maidens as each prepares to go before the minister. As the men stand around waiting for the arrival of the queens, they are shocked to see the women arrive separately. Brunhild speaks out against Kriemhild and Siegfried's bride replies by telling all within hearing about Brunhild's yielding to Siegfried. Brunhild cries for Kriemhild to prove her insult and Kriemhild brings forth the ring that Siegfried took off Brunhild's finger. As further evidence, Kriemhild shows the girdle that Siegfried stole the night he subdued Brunhild on Gunther's behalf.

Brunhild calls for Gunther to come and tells him what has transpired between the two women. Upon hearing the accusations flung about by Kriemhild, Gunther orders men to find Siegfried and bring him before the king. Siegfried denies the charges against him and swears an oath of innocence before a ring of Burgundian warriors. The King of the Netherlands then swears to seek out his wife and set affairs straight. However, when Hagen hears the news, he swears to Brunhild to see Siegfried repaid for this injustice.

Ortwine, Gernot, and Giselher all weigh in on the issue and speak against harming Siegfried. Hagen refuses to be silenced and pledges to either harm Siegfried or die in the attempt. Gunther is reluctant to slay the man he has pledged faith to but is finally swayed by Hagen, who proposes to stage a war wherein Siegfried shall lose his life.

Adventure 14, How the Two Queens Reviled One Another Analysis

Brunhild quickly sets about weaving her web of deceit. As the men meet each other on the jousting field, the two queens engage in a joust of their own. Kriemhild unwittingly strikes the first blow by commenting on Siegfried's powerfulness. Brunhild returns

Kriemhild's comment and the exchange escalates until Kriemhild becomes so enraged that she lets fly the truth of Siegfried's submission of Brunhild so many years before. Brunhild has pushed Kriemhild to this point, but Gunther's queen assumes no responsibility for her actions. Instead, Brunhild runs crying to her husband and demands retribution for the wrong.

The difference in personality between King Gunther and his most trusted advisor are astounding. Gunther calmly calls for Siegfried to tell the truth of the matter and trust the word of his close friend. Hagen, however, embodies the traditional Germanic warrior, eager for revenge. The king's advisor will not be silenced or pacified; instead, Hagen vows to seek vengeance on Brunhild's behalf. As in the scene where Hagen refuses to travel with Kriemhild, the knight's impudence and anger are not checked or reprimanded. The poet gives no viable reason for Gunther to allow such behavior from his trusted knight. Gunther appears to be more of a figurehead than a leader. He rarely is the first to address a wrong and he does not speak out against the injuries done to his guest. Gunther is satisfied with Siegfried's response to his query and appears to consider the matter closed. The King's lax behavior will not serve him well in future struggles and will result in the loss of many bold knights.

Adventure 15, How Siegfried Was Betrayed

Adventure 15, How Siegfried Was Betrayed Summary

Four days after their treacherous plan is hatched, thirty-two messengers ride into Gunther's stronghold with news from Ludeger, the king once captured by Siegfried that swore peace with Gunther. The messengers tell the king that Ludeger and Ludegast again march toward his land armed for battle. Gunther and many of his companions try to stop the treason, but Hagen refuses to turn away from the plan. One day, Siegfried happens upon the men whispering together and asks what is wrong. Gunther tells him about the defiance of Ludeger and Ludegast and Siegfried vows to battle the upstarts with only his warriors by his side.

As the army prepares to depart, Hagen seeks out Kriemhild who asks him to forgive her husband for any wrong she may have done Brunhild. Kriemhild states that for her insult she has received many bruises by Siegfried's hand. Hagen continues to sweetly ply Kriemhild for information. The warrior pretends to offer protection for Siegfried if he could only learn how best to protect him. Kriemhild then shares the secret of Siegfried's strength: when he was bathed by the dragon's blood, he was made immune to the blade of a sword except for a small section between his shoulders where a leaf lay. Hagen then says that if Kriemhild will mark the spot on Siegfried's garment he will be sure to watch out for the king in battle. Having thus learned how to defeat the Netherlandic hero, Hagen tells Gunther to call off the fake attack and instead arrange a hunting outing. Two messengers come to tell Siegfried that Ludeger has called off the battle and seeks only peace from Gunther. The plan is then laid for the hunting excursion that will take the hero's life.

Adventure 15, How Siegfried Was Betrayed Analysis

Following Gunther's easy dismissal of Brunhild's complaint, Hagen plots to murder Siegfried, and he gains the unwitting aide of the King. Hagen counsels Gunther to stage a war wherein Siegfried can be slain. Gunther continues to exhibit little ability to think for himself and, with little protest, accepts Hagen's advice. Gunther's power as king should be seriously questioned. He may have attained control of the kingdom by birthright but he does not appear to be the best suited for the position. It almost seems as if Gunther remains under the power of Brunhild's beauty. Hagen continues to mastermind Siegfried's death by altering the plan once he has weaseled information from Kriemhild. Hagen's brilliance is undeniable, but it is unfortunate that no one seems to recognize the control the knight wields, or to what evil intent he works.

The Burgundian rulers seem incapable of controlling their counselors, which leads to tragedy for many people. Gernot and Giselher, though, do not present a stronger front.

The two brothers know of Hagen's plan and refuse to take part, but they do not alert Siegfried of the danger, either. The reader may be tempted to feel compassion for the brothers at different times during the poem, but their inaction here should be kept in mind.

Adventure 16, How Siegfried Was Slain

Adventure 16, How Siegfried Was Slain Summary

Hagen and Gunther propose to hunt for bear, boar, and wild bull for which they'll need sharp edged javelins. Siegfried goes to say good-bye to his wife and finds Kriemhild in a sorrowful mood. His wife has been thinking on the secret she shared with Hagen, but fears to tell her husband the truth. Instead, Kriemhild says she has had a dream of treason and bids her husband to stay behind. Siegfried dismisses her concern, saying that there are no enemies among Gunther's kin, and then kisses her quickly before departing for the hunt.

The men reach their destination where Siegfried asks who will be the first to venture into the wood. Hagen proposes that the hounds be divided among the men, and each knight tries his best to prove himself the worthiest hunter. Siegfried starts off and in short measure, has slain a boar, a lion, a buffalo, an elk, four ure-oxen, and a savage shelk. The hero then turns to tracking a boar that wheels around and runs straight for Siegfried, who slays the beast with his sword. Siegfried's catch has far outmatched the other hunters as they gather for the evening meal. As they sit eating, Siegfried points out that the wine is missing, and Hagen says the fault is his. The deceitful warrior then suggests they travel farther into the mountains to a stream that will quench their thirst. Siegfried, suffering from thirst, decides to seek out the stream in hopes of wetting his parched throat.

Hagen then proposes a race between himself, Gunther, and Siegfried to see who can reach the brook first. Mindful of courtesy, Siegfried waits patiently for King Gunther to drink his fill. Ashe kneels down to drink, Hagen stabs him through the mark on his back. Siegfried attempts to chase after his murderer but is unable to catch Hagen. Siegfried then drops to the ground. With his dying breath, he upbraids his traitors. The hero beseeches that if Gunther upholds one oath, it be to care for his sister and Siegfried's wife. Siegfried's final words state that by killing him they have signed their own death warrants. Gunther and his men agree to tell the story that Siegfried was killed by robbers while hunting alone; they carry the body back to Gunther's hall on a buckler.

Adventure 16, How Siegfried Was Slain Analysis

For as much trouble women start, their dreams of misfortune should not be ignored because to disregard such premonitions usually brings disastrous consequences. Kriemhild tries to warn Siegfried of impending doom but her husband dismisses the queen's dream. Women are often the vessels of such messages in Germanic and Nordic tales. The belief seems to be that women have an unnatural connection to the supernatural world; possibly, the idea is fostered by man's inability to fully understand the workings of the feminine world. The reason women have been gifted with this ability is unclear and not usually a matter of concern in a narrative.

Hagen continues to manipulate situations to his benefit. Through all of Hagen's deceptions, he maintains an even temperament so that none will suspect his malicious intentions. The reader is constantly amazed at the depth of Hagen's character and the shallowness of his actions. A man so intelligent could have been a king, but medieval society prevents Hagen to move from his station. This constriction on his power may be the reason Hagen acts as he does. Hagen is unable to be king himself, so he attempts to control the current king who makes a perfect puppet.

Adventure 17, How Siegfried Was Bewailed and Burned

Adventure 17, How Siegfried Was Bewailed and Burned Summary

When the hunting party arrives at the stronghold, Hagen takes Siegfried's body and lays it before Kriemhild's door where she will find it in the morning. A chamberlain come to the lady's chamber is the first to discover the body. Kriemhild immediately recognizes her beloved. The queen's first thought is of the question posed by Hagen. She tells her maidens that Brunhild's counsel and Hagen's blow have rendered her husband lifeless.

King Siegmund and all Siegfried's warriors are roused by a messenger. When they come to Kriemhild's hall, they vow vengeance on the man who has laid their hero low and begin at once to seek out the murderous traitor. Kriemhild fears for the safety of her husband's men and counsels them to leave revenge for another day. A strong coffin is fashioned for the noble champion and his body is born to the church. When Gunther offers condolences to his sister, Kriemhild tells him and all his men to prove their innocence by approaching Siegfried's bier. As Hagen approaches the corpse, the wounds begin to bleed, and the traitor's deed is revealed. Gunther comes to Hagen's defense but Kriemhild refuses to believe her brother.

Siegfried's body is laid in the coffin, but before they commit him to the ground, Kriemhild announces she will watch over him for three days and nights. For the next three nights, the Nibelungers labor at keeping watch and distributing Siegfried's wealth to the poor who come to mourn him. Finally, the coffin is placed in the ground; but before the earth closes over it, Kriemhild asks to see her husband's face one more time. After kissing Siegfried's face one last time, the queen is lead away. For three more days, Siegfried's men grieve for him before their hunger pains force them back to life. Siegmund then decides to return home.

Adventure 17, How Siegfried Was Bewailed and Burned Analysis

Kriemhild's grief at the death of her husband is complete and true. Hagen insults Kriemhild and Siegfried further by carelessly dumping the hero's corpse before the Netherlandic queen's door. This irreverence for the dead will reoccur later in the poem and extend to Hagen's own men.

However, the emphasis in this adventure seems to be on Kriemhild's grief. Because the love between Siegfried and Kriemhild was pure and constant, the death of her husband

literally brings Kriemhild to her knees. Kriemhild cannot ever completely let go of her husband—a devotion both admirable and tragic.

Adventure 18, How Siegmund Returned Home

Adventure 18, How Siegmund Returned Home Summary

Siegmund approaches Kriemhild, asking her to return home with him to rule Siegfried's lands and care for their son. Kriemhild agrees, but at the insistence of her mother and other brothers-Gernot and Giselher-she changes her mind and chooses to stay in Burgundy. Siegmund makes a final plea for his daughter-in-law to return with him for the sake of her child; but Kriemhild's mind is firm and she entrusts the care of her infant son to Siegfried's men.

Siegfried's warriors vow to return to seek vengeance for their lord. The company departs without an escort from Gunther. Kriemhild remains behind, continuing her mourning each day and finding only small comfort from her brother, Giselher. Brunhild sits in haughtiness, feeling no remorse for Kriemhild's loss. However, Kriemhild will soon seek her vengeance and repay woe for woe.

Adventure 18, How Siegmund Returned Home Analysis

Kriemhild is so overwrought at Siegfried's murder that she cannot bear to leave the land stained by his blood even to return to the Netherlands and care for her infant son. Kriemhild forsakes her kingdom, her duties as queen, and her role as mother in the moment Hagen plunges the sword into Siegfried's back. Quite possibly, Kriemhild's intense grief is her way of dealing with her small role in Siegfried's murder. After all, Kriemhild is the one to tell Hagen of the hero's only weak spot. The reader should realize that Kriemhild's grief has reached unhealthy proportions and will bring no good to her or anyone near her.

Adventure 19, How the Treasure of the Nibelungers Was Brought to Worms

Adventure 19, How the Treasure of the Nibelungers Was Brought to Worms Summary

Count Eckewart waits constantly upon Kriemhild as she mourns. A house is built for her near the minster, and Siegfried's widow spends much of her time in church. Lady Uta tries to console the grieving woman but Kriemhild's grief is too deep. For three and a half years, Kriemhild sits in mourning; never once does she talk to Gunther or lay an eye on Hagen.

Hagen begins to counsel his king on how to regain Kriemhild's love. Gernot and Giselher convince their sister at least to speak with Gunther. No sooner does the lady consent than Gunther comes with all his men except for Hagen. Kriemhild pardons all the men with the exception of Hagen; then Gunther, counseled by Hagen, contrives to have the Nibelungers' treasure brought to the Rhineland. Gernot and Giselher take eight thousand warriors to retrieve the treasure from Albric's safekeeping. The dwarf laments that he has lost the first cloud-cloak and now the great hoard to Siegfried and his kin.

The treasure is so great that it takes twelve wagons three trips a day for four days to bring all from the mountain to the sea. Among the treasure is a wishing-rod that the bearer can use to control the world. Gernot and Giselher gain the treasure and with it the power to rule the country. When the treasure is brought to Kriemhild, she begins to dole it out to any foreign knight who comes to praise her virtues. Hagen becomes worried that Kriemhild's generosity will win her many knights and be a bad tiding for Gunther. Although Gunther will not lift a hand to stop his sister's largess, Hagen accepts all the blame, seizes the treasure, and throws it in the Rhine River. The location of the hoard is kept secret so that none may take from it, and Kriemhild moans her woes to Giselher who vows to avenge her.

Dankrat, Gunther's father, passes away, and Lady Uta establishes a monastery in Lorsch in his honor. There Lady Uta means to live out her days and suggests that her only daughter join her. Kriemhild will go only on the condition that Siegfried's body goes too. However, when the body is transferred, Kriemhild is detained by news that comes over the Rhine.

Adventure 19, How the Treasure of the Nibelungers Was Brought to Worms Analysis

Three years pass before Hagen begins to further implement his evil plan. Hagen begins to think about Siegfried's great storehouse of gold and treasure, and seeks to bring it

into Rhineland. Hagen manipulates Gunther into speaking with Kriemhild and convincing his sister to bring the Nibelunger's gold down from the mountain. Hagen's concern seems to be for Kriemhild's welfare, since the gold will enable the queen to care for herself and reward those who come to weep for Siegfried. However, nothing the wicked knight does is motivated by anything but his own selfish greed. Hagen's ultimate design is to take the gold for himself and prevent Kriemhild from partaking of her husband's wealth. Hagen's power continues to grow.

Adventure 20, How King Etzel Sent Into Burgundy to Propose for Kriemhild

Adventure 20, How King Etzel Sent Into Burgundy to Propose for Kriemhild Summary

King Etzel's wife dies and his men counsel him to seek Kriemhild's hand. However, Etzel worries that the Christian woman will not accept an offer of marriage from a heathen man. The warriors urge their king at least to try to woo the widow. Rudeger, who is familiar with Kriemhild's brothers, volunteers to journey to Burgundy on Etzel's behalf. As when Siegfried first journeyed to the Rhineland, Rudeger says he must travel with five hundred men properly outfitted to approach the Burgundian lady.

The king welcomes the visitors warmly and beseeches Rudeger to give news of Etzel and his wife, and tell out the message they have sent. Rudeger stands before the king and shares that Queen Helca has died, throwing King Etzel and his people into mourning. However, Etzel has heard that Siegfried is dead, leaving Kriemhild widowed, and the king wonders if Kriemhild would be disposed to accept his hand in marriage. Gunther finds the proposal agreeable, but says he must seek out the will of his sister before giving an answer. King Gunther calls his men to counsel, and all but Hagen agree that the marriage should be accepted. Hagen fears retribution from the queen if provided an army at her disposal, but Gernot and Giselher tell the traitor that he could make amends by encouraging the match.

When Gary brings the news to Kriemhild, she flatly refuses the offer, but agrees at her brothers' urging to meet with Rudeger. Rudeger does his best to change the widow's mind, but she puts him off until the next day and seeks advice from her mother and two brothers—Gernot and Giselher. Her family advises her to seek out Etzel's hand while Kriemhild continues to struggle with the idea of taking another husband. After much pleading, Rudeger finally hits upon the one thing that will sway Kriemhild's mind: the offer of revenge upon any who wrong her. Seeing her opportunity to avenge Siegfried's death, Kriemhild agrees to the match and preparations are quickly made for the return journey to Etzel's hall. Kriemhild is upset that she cannot take Siegfried's treasure with her and that it will remain in Hagen's hands, but Rudeger assures her that Etzel has more than enough wealth to go around and her sum will not be missed. The journey is begun and messengers are sent ahead to Etzel.

Adventure 20, How King Etzel Sent Into Burgundy to Propose for Kriemhild Analysis

Etzel, king of Hungary, loses his wife and desires to take a new bride. How Etzel learns of Siegfried's death is not clear, but a union between the Burgundians and the

Hungarians would profit both kings greatly. Only Hagen is on edge at the coming of Etzel's messengers. So far, Kriemhild has been unable to find anyone willing to exact revenge on Hagen for the injuries she sustained at his hand. However, Hagen knows that if Kriemhild is supplied with an army at her disposal it will not be long before the queen seeks vengeance.

Indeed, Hagen's fears prove correct when Kriemhild at first refuses to take another husband but then reconsiders when she realizes that this may be the perfect opportunity to avenge Siegfried's murder. Kriemhild shows more concern over the fact that she cannot take Siegfried's treasure with her than sorrow over leaving the body of her dead husband with whom she has spent every day for several years mourning. The intuitive reader may wonder about Kriemhild's motives and her supposedly enduring love for Siegfried. While taking revenge for the death of a loved one would be expected, the lengths that Kriemhild goes to seem extreme. Additionally, no mention is ever made again of the son she bore Siegfried or what becomes of the hero's parents. Kriemhild appears to be a very different woman from the beautiful and virginal maiden Siegfried sought to woo. The queen's demeanor has been affected by the trials in her life and she cannot see any better way of handling them than by continuing to look for vengeance.

Adventures 21 and 22, How Kriemhild Departed and How the Huns Received Kriemhild

Adventures 21 and 22, How Kriemhild Departed and How the Huns Received Kriemhild Summary

Gernot and Giselher take their leave of Kriemhild at the Danube, and the widow continues her journey, lodging that night at Pledelingen. The host takes his leave of Bishop Pilgrin and travels on to Rudeger's stronghold where his wife warmly greets the still mourning woman. Kriemhild's journey continues and at each town along the way, people flock to catch a glimpse of Etzel's new queen.

People seem to come from all corners of the globe—Greece, Russia, and Poland—to take part in Kriemhild's arrival. King Etzel rides with twenty-four princes and their armies parading before him to meet his new bride. As the two bands come together, Rudeger counsels Kriemhild on how to approach the king and what customs should be observed.

The wedding feast last for seventeen days, over the course of which Etzel bestows bountiful gifts and Kriemhild sees an array of knights the likes of which she never saw before meeting Siegfried. After fully celebrating his new bride in Vienna, King Etzel gathers his company and they journey towards his home in Hungary. When Dame Herrat, Sir Dietrich's wife, hears of Kriemhild's coming to Etzel's castle, she hurries the waiting maidens to prepare Kriemhild's welcome. The new queen is openly accepted by Etzel's people, and they find her a queen far surpassing Helca.

Adventures 21 and 22, How Kriemhild Departed and How the Huns Received Kriemhild Analysis

Kriemhild's journey and welcome into Hungary should do much to allay her fears over wedding the foreign king. At every step of her journey, the people are excited to see her, and knights from several surrounding countries come to pay homage to the new couple. The lavishness of the wedding feast produced by King Etzel speaks strongly of his desire to make his new bride feel secure in his hall. Evidence of Etzel's power can be found everywhere, and the reader may assume that the king will prove a fierce opponent in battle. This assumption will soon be tested.

Adventure 23, How Kriemhild Thought of Revenging Her Injuries

Adventure 23, How Kriemhild Thought of Revenging Her Injuries Summary

After seven years, Kriemhild produces a son as heir to Etzel's throne. She petitions her husband repeatedly until he agrees to have the child baptized and christened Ortlieb. Kriemhild continues to learn from Herrat the customs of the land, and the people of the land sing their queen's praises. After thirteen years, Kriemhild begins to think on the wrongs done her by Hagen and Gunther, and wishes for revenge.

One night, Kriemhild asks her husband for a favor, saying that she wishes to see her friends and family again. Etzel immediately calls his minstrels to him and charges them with carrying a message across the Rhine. In secret, Kriemhild speaks with the messengers and counsels them on how best to ensure the arrival of all Gunther's men. The men are then supplied with riches and garments to last their journey.

Adventure 23, How Kriemhild Thought of Revenging Her Injuries Analysis

Kriemhild seems to adjust to her new surroundings quickly and well. The queen learns the country's customs and produces an heir to the throne. However, no sorrow can lie buried forever, and after almost thirteen years, Kriemhild begins to think on Siegfried's death. In a scene very similar to one many years earlier, Kriemhild asks her husband to send messengers to Burgundy, seeking to bring her brothers for a visit. Kriemhild has been wronged, and since she does not possess the physical ability to avenge the wrong herself, she must work her evil intentions through her husband. The scorn of women will be the bane of all those who ever had the misfortune to love them.

Adventure 24, How Werbel and Swemmeline Delivered the Message

Adventure 24, How Werbel and Swemmeline Delivered the Message Summary

When the minstrels reach Rhineland, Hagen identifies them as messengers of King Etzel who were sent by Queen Kriemhild. Werbel and Swemmeline greet the king and give account of Kriemhild and Etzel, which pleases Gunther's ears. Swemmeline then relates the Queen's invitation, and Gunther replies that he will give his answer after consulting with his friends. Werbel asks leave to visit Dame Uta, and the messengers are led to the noble lady by Giselher.

In the meantime, Gunther calls his men to counsel. All but one agree that the journey should be made. However, Hagen pulls the king aside and reminds Gunther of their treason. Gernot speaks out that he will not remain at home while his sister beseeches him to visit. Giselher then taunts Hagen, saying that if the traitor is so afraid for his life then he should stay behind while the others make the journey. With the decision thus made, Gunther calls his warrior band to him, but Hagen advises the king to keep Etzel's minstrels near him for as long as possible. Hagen suggests that if Kriemhild is allowed to journey ahead, she will have ample time to plan her revenge. Gunther finally gives his answer to Werbel, and then grants the messengers permission to speak with Brunhild. Before can greet the lady, Sir Folker announces that their meeting will have to be postponed because the queen sits in ill cheer.

Werbel and Swemmeline make one last visit to Lady Uta who gives them a message for Kriemhild and lavishes them with gifts. King Gunther also offers them more treasure than the minstrels can carry, but Swemmeline says that Etzel has forbidden them to take any reward. Gunther is mildly offended by this rebuttal and presses them to take the gold. Upon their return to Etzel's castle, the minstrels seek out Kriemhild who asks for their news. The queen learns that her three brothers and Hagen will ride to Etzel's hall, as will Folker. This last bit of news unnerves Kriemhild a bit, but she is glad to hear that Hagen will attend the feast.

Adventure 24, How Werbel and Swemmeline Delivered the Message Analysis

Repetition is an important characteristic in this type of tale. In the Twelfth Adventure, Siegfried felt he could not travel to Gunther's hall. Now here, in the Twenty-Fourth Adventure, Gunther receives an invitation to Etzel's hall and feels it would be too far of a journey. Additionally, in the adventures preceding the invitation to a feast from one king to the other (Eleven and Twenty-Three), each queen makes her plea for a reunion.

Although the men take all the action and receive all the consequences, the women start the feuds and bring destruction to them all.

For the first time in the poem, Hagen appears to have a conscience. Upon hearing the news delivered by Etzel's minstrels, the knight is loath to set foot in the foreign hall. Hagen is quick to remind Gunther of the treason they exacted on Kriemhild's first husband then warns that the invitation is only a trap. In the years since Kriemhild's departure, Hagen seems to have found another willing participant in his crimes. For the first time, the reader is introduced to Sir Folker, who denies the messengers audience with Brunhild. Folker's actions result in Brunhild's absence from the party that travels to Hungary, thereby saving the life of the one who started the entire affair.

Adventure 25, How the Lords All Came Into Hungary

Adventure 25, How the Lords All Came Into Hungary Summary

As Gunther and his men prepare for the journey to Etzel's land, Dame Uta urges them to put off their visit because she dreamt that all the birds of the land died. Hagen tells Gunther to ignore such silly dreams. Rumolt also begs his king to leave off the fateful journey, but Gunther ignores the plea and instead asks that the good knight look after the women.

The traveling party sets out. After twelve days, they come to the swollen banks of the Danube. No ferryman waits at the river's edge so Hagen takes his shield and goes in search of a place to cross. As he walks along the riverside, Hagen comes upon a group of women bathing and steals their clothing. One of the women, Hadburg, demands their garments back, and tells Hagen that all who march to Hungary shall fall. The mermaids continue to inform Hagen that an inn can be found down the river where the ferryman lives and that Hagen should treat the man kindly if he wishes no trouble from the men of the land.

Hagen arrives at the place and shouts across the river at the ferryman. Hagen gives his name as another so the ferryman rows his boat to Hagen's side. A fight breaks out when the ferryman discovers Hagen's deception, and the knight cuts off the innocent man's head. Hagen then rows the boat to where Gunther's men wait and lies about the blood in the boat. The horses are made to swim across the river while Hagen ferries the men and all their equipment over. Hagen remembers how the ladies said that only the priest would survive, so he catches up the holy man and tosses him over the side. When the priest makes it safely to the bank the company just left, Hagen is assured that the mermaids' prophecy will come true. Upon safely reaching the far bank, Hagen dismantles the boat and sends the pieces down river. His strange actions alarm the gathered warriors, who ask why he would do such a thing. Hagen then tells them that none of them shall see their homeland again and he would rather see cowards drowned than return safely to the Rhineland.

Adventure 25, How the Lords All Came Into Hungary Analysis

Dreams and prophecies figure largely in this adventure. Dame Uta, Kriemhild's mother, is the first to voice a warning when she tells her sons that traveling to Etzel's land will bring great misfortune upon the Burgundian people. However, this time the female's concern is echoed by the voice of Rumolt. However, since he is no more than a cook or

steward in Gunther's hall, his request to abandon the journey is ignored as well. The opinions of women and lowly servants were not highly prized in many ancient cultures. The inclusion of Uta's dream and Rumolt's hesitancy at the trip serve only to alert the reader that something is going to go terribly wrong when Gunther's men arrive in Etzel's hall.

Interestingly though, the prophecy of the mermaids Hagen encounters at the Danube is taken to heart by the fierce knight. Quite possibly the reason for this is the mystical connection of these creatures to heathen gods which would still have been believed in strongly despite the beginnings of Christianity. The words of the mermaids drive Hagen to perform some unusual actions, much to the surprise of his countrymen. Additionally, Hagen's tossing of the priest overboard can be read as a symbolic act in which the evil-intentioned knight removes from the ship any trace of morality and right. Hagen has been wrestling with his conscience, but by trying to drown the religious man, Hagen also attempts to quiet his inner thoughts of guilt. Gunther's knight is quickly becoming consumed with his murderous actions and must find a way to clear his soul; although the measures he takes are no more along the righteous path than the slaying of Siegfried.

Adventure 26, How Dankwart Slew Gelfrat

Adventure 26, How Dankwart Slew Gelfrat Summary

Now that all the warriors are safely across the Danube, Hagen tells them the truth of the matter. He reveals both the prophecy told him by the mermaids and the reason he threw the chaplain overboard. Hagen also tells them that he did indeed slay the ferryman and now they must be wary of two men of the land: Gelfrat and Elsy. Folker then steps forward to lead the band since he has knowledge of the countryside.

News soon comes to Gelfrat of his boatman's death, and the mighty warrior gathers an army to search out the murderer. As night falls on Gunther's band, they hear the sound of horses to the side of the road. Hagen calls out for the lurkers to identify themselves. Upon learning that Gelfrat seeks the slayer of the ferryman, Hagen tells the story as it happened. A battle begins between Gelfrat, Elsy, Hagen, and Dankwart. Hagen is knocked from his horse and calls to Dankwart for aide. Quickly, Dankwart slays Gelfrat and Elsy and his comrades flee the field. Hagen and his men give chase but soon abandon their pursuit to return to Gunther's band. Dankwart urges the company to travel through the night and put off camping until daylight. The following morning the bloody weapons of Hagen and Dankwart are perceived and the story of the attack is told.

After spending a night's lodging with the Bishop in Passau, King Gunther's party travels on until they happen upon a sleeping knight. Hagen quickly takes the man's sword and asks his name. The sleeping man is Sir Eckewart who had accompanied Kriemhild from Burgundy and now waits to warn the travelers of their impending doom. Hagen brushes aside the knight's fateful decree and inquires after a place of lodging. Eckewart says he shall ride to Rudeger and beseech him on Gunther's behalf to house the large party. Rudeger is pleased to make accommodations for the men, but his wife, Gotelind, knows nothing of their coming.

Adventure 26, How Dankwart Slew Gelfrat Analysis

Although Hagen attempted to wash his conscience away in the river, it continues to gnaw at him on the other side. Gelfrat, the lord of the land, learns of the death of his ferryman and seeks to avenge the wrong. It is interesting that Gelfrat's men come upon Hagen as night falls so that their voices call out to him from the darkness. Their bodies are like the ghosts of the slain who come out of the shadows to hunt their slayer. Unfortunately, the ghosts are not strong enough to overcome Hagen and the knight remains unscathed and unremorseful.

Adventure 27, Rudeger's Hospitality

Adventure 27, Rudeger's Hospitality Summary

Rudeger hurries to tell his wife and daughter to prepare for their guests. The ladies are pleased to hear of the band's arrival and begin to array themselves in their finest garments. Rudeger then rides out to meet Gunther's company. Rudeger assures the men that he will see to the care of their equipment and replace anything that may be lost while they sojourn in his lands. When Gotelind and her daughter arrive to greet the men, Rudeger's daughter balks at kissing Hagen, but does as her father prompts. The young maiden then takes the hand of Giselher and leads him towards Rudeger's hall.

After the guests and their host have eaten their fill, the fair maidens are ushered back into the hall. Sir Folker then addresses Rudeger and pronounces that he would like very much to have Rudeger's daughter as his queen. Rudeger says that he does not know how such a thing could occur since he is but a lowly exile with no means of providing a dowry. Gernot and Hagen both voice their opinions that they would be pleased to pay homage to such a fair maiden. Rudeger accepts their words, and before long it is contrived that Giselher will take the young girl as his bride. A wedding ceremony follows and the damsel is given a dowry of castles and land from King Gunther and Gernot. In return, Rudeger pledges his eternal friendship to the brethren and a hundred horses' burden of gold and silver. Rudeger says that when the company makes their return to Burgundy they can stay with him and take the girl when they continue their journey.

On the fourth day of their stay, Gunther announces that they must depart for Etzel's hall. Fine gifts are then distributed to the guests. Gernot receives a sword, which he will soon bear in battle but will cost Rudeger his life. Gunther is given a mailcoat, which he warmly takes and wears with honor. Gotelind then tries to give Hagen a similar gift, but the knight would rather accept the buckler hanging on the wall. Rudeger's wife begins to weep, but presents him with the shield once worn by Nudung who had been slain by Wittich. Dankwart is presented with rich robes that he wears proudly. After singing a beautiful lay, Folker is given twelve bracelets by Gotelind. Rudeger then offers to escort the party to Etzel's hall and the large company departs; many of them will never return to Bechlaren.

Adventure 27, Rudeger's Hospitality Analysis

Two significant events take place in this adventure: Rudeger betroths his only child and daughter to Giselher, and great gifts are bestowed upon the guests that later are used in a spiteful battle. Folker has acquired many of Hagen's behaviors over the course of their friendship. In true Hagen fashion, Folker subtlety suggests the marriage of Rudeger's daughter to one of Gunther's brothers. While the joining of Giselher and Rudeger's daughter seems innocent enough, the fact that it is suggested not by the girl's father but by a stranger hints at an ulterior motive. By aligning King Gunther with Rudeger, Folker

has compromised Rudeger's loyalties; a situation which will later bring great distress to Rudeger's wife and daughter.

The gifts bestowed on Gunther's men are a further sign of Rudeger's pledge of friendship and a foreshadowing of coming events. Hagen turns his manipulating words on Gotelind in order to gain Nudung's shield. Gotelind is placed in a difficult position; she cannot deny the friend of her husband but she is loath to give up the prized weapon. Both Gotelind and her daughter appear to distrust Gunther's loyal advisor, but as with the premonitions of other women throughout the poem, their concern is ignored.

Adventure 28, How Kriemhild Received Hagen

Adventure 28, How Kriemhild Received Hagen Summary

Surrounded by many champions, Hildebrand, Wolfhart, and Dietrich ride out to greet the approaching visitors. When Hagen sees the men coming near, he advises his warriors to dismount and meet these glorious men on foot. Assuming Rudeger has already informed them of the truth, Dietrich approaches the men and asks if they know that Kriemhild still mourns Siegfried. Hagen states that she will mourn forever, but what cause of worry is it to them? Dietrich, Gunther, and Gernot then meet aside where Dietrich tells of Kriemhild's daily wailing for her murdered husband. Folker suggests they continue on to Etzel's court since whatever was done cannot be undone. As the retinue rides into the king's stronghold, many eyes seek out Hagen to observe his size and mien.

The knights are lodged together while the rest are spread about. Kriemhild had planned their quarters so in order to make their slaughter easier to accomplish. The Hungarian Queen greets Hagen, telling him not to look for a favorable welcome from her and desiring to know what he has brought her. Hagen wonders at her reception and says that he thought Kriemhild so wealthy that she would not require gifts. Kriemhild rejoins him by inquiring into the whereabouts of the Nibelunger's gold. Hagen says that lays sunk in the Rhine and even if he could retrieve it, he could not have carried it and his sword, shield and helmet. Kriemhild turns to the company and announces that she has been thrice wronged. The queen then demands that the warriors leave their arms at the door to which Hagen replies he will never do. Kriemhild realizes that someone has alerted the knights to her ill intentions and declares that she would like to see this person put to death. Sir Dietrich steps forth, declaring that he is the one who told Hagen of Kriemhild's plan. Kriemhild walks away angry and ashamed, glaring at all the Burgundians. As Dietrich and Hagen pledge themselves one to the other, King Etzel desires to know who stands with Dietrich. When he learns that the man is none other than Hagen who the king once fostered, Etzel is delighted to see the man again.

Adventure 28, How Kriemhild Received Hagen Analysis

If Brunhild's reception of Kriemhild and Siegfried could be considered subtlety cold, then Kriemhild's welcome to Hagen is blatantly callous. The Queen takes no cautions to conceal her hatred of the man, although Kriemhild's delight at seeing Hagen before does not appear on her countenance. The whole reason for bringing Gunther to Etzel's hall was to ensure that Hagen would be within reach of Kriemhild's knights. The Queen

attempts to show the weight of her power, but Sir Dietrich quickly cows the noble lady. Kriemhild is rendered powerless to act against one of her husband's most valued warriors and must slink away in shame. As additional frustration to Kriemhild comes the revelation that Hagen was once fostered by Etzel and, rather than seeing the Burgundian warrior as a threat, King Etzel is overjoyed to see Hagen again. Kriemhild's plans for revenge are thwarted at every turn and the queen is becoming increasingly irritated with the situation she seems unable to control.

Adventure 29, How Hagen Refused to Rise to Kriemhild

Adventure 29, How Hagen Refused to Rise to Kriemhild Summary

Hagen calls Folker to him and the pair seek out a quiet corner to talk. Kriemhild sees them from her window and begins to weep. The warriors around her desire to know the cause of her pain. The queen tells them that Hagen brings her grief, whereby they offer to seek vengeance for her sake. Sixty men gather to seek out and slay Hagen, but Kriemhild tells them that so few will not be able to overpower the champion. Four hundred warriors then assemble as Kriemhild counsels them to wait until Hagen has revealed his sins.

The queen, surrounded by the band of men, descends the stairs to meet her foe, and Folker points her out to Hagen. Folker pledges to stand beside Hagen whatever befalls them, then suggests they rise to meet the queen, as is right. Hagen refuses to rise before Kriemhild, stating that to do so would be to appear as flinching. Instead, Hagen lays across his lap the sword that once belonged to Siegfried, causing Kriemhild to pause as she beholds her deceased husband's mighty weapon. The queen approaches Hagen and inquires as to why he has ridden to Etzel's court. The traitor says that wherever his kings go so to will he. Kriemhild then asks about the wrongs Hagen has wrought on her and Hagen proceeds to deny nothing but claims Siegfried's death as his doing. Kriemhild's warriors stare about in wonder before announcing that not for all the gold Kriemhild could offer will they dare to face such a mighty knight. The cowardly band turns away, leaving Hagen and Folker unscathed. The two men hurry off in search of Gunther and his brothers.

Folker urges King Gunther to attend Etzel's court. Paired together, a thousand men walk into Etzel's hall where the Hungarian king warmly greets them. Etzel seats his guest and orders mead to be brought. The king then addresses his guests and, though he desires to know why they have never journeyed to his hall before, his joy at seeing them now surpasses his curiosity. A rich feast delights guest and countryman alike as the warriors settle into Etzel's hall.

Adventure 29, How Hagen Refused to Rise to Kriemhild Analysis

Hagen's ill treatment of Kriemhild continues even though he is a guest in her husband's hall. Gunther's knight refuses to rise before the king's sister and puts forth Siegfried's sword as an added insult to the queen. Kriemhild stands before the wicked man with four hundred armed warriors armed for battle until they hear Hagen's honest admission

that he slew Siegfried. The news should incite Etzel's knights to avenge their beloved queen, but Hagen has played his cards in just such a way as to strike further fear into the hearts of those around him. Kriemhild's moment of triumph over her foe is short-lived as the men turn and run away. At each step, Kriemhild seems to fall farther behind in her plans for revenge. It seems as if Kriemhild will never find peace for her wrongs even though the poet continues to leave clues to the coming doom of Burgundians and Hungarians alike.

Adventure 30, How the Knights Kept Watch

Adventure 30, How the Knights Kept Watch Summary

Gunther soon beseeches King Etzel to retire for the evening. As the warriors make their way from the hall, Etzel's men crowd and jostle Gunther's knights. Folker reprimands the rude behavior and Hagen states that if the Hunnish warriors desire to meet with them, then do so by daylight and leave the night to rest. The nobles retire to their well-appointed chamber while the bulk of the escort sleeps with the Huns. Giselher fears for their safety, but Hagen vows to keep watch over them. Folker boldly joins his friend in the guard of Gunther and his brothers. To lull the weary travelers to sleep, he plays on his viol.

In the middle of the night, Folker makes out the glint of a helmet and alerts Hagen to the approaching troop of Kriemhild's men. However, one of Kriemhild's warriors sees the glint of Folker's helmet and the mighty band retreats from their night mission. Angered by the fleeing band, Folker desires to go after them, but Hagen counsels against this because to do so would leave the nobles unprotected. Instead, Folker settles for shouting out to the knights, but none respond. Kriemhild is told of the thwarted plan and sets about devising a new course of action to bring death and destruction on the Burgundian knights.

Adventure 30, How the Knights Kept Watch Analysis

The tension between the Burgundians and the Hungarians becomes evident in this adventure. On their first night under King Etzel's roof, the knights from each country look upon one another with disdain as they jostle one another to exit the hall. The encounter is significant enough to warrant a guard posted before Gunther's door. The precaution seems excessive until Folker makes out the glint of helmets moving through the night. If Hagen had not taken preventative measures, Kriemhild's wrongs may have been avenged much sooner and with less bloodshed.

Adventure 31, How the Knights Went to Church

Adventure 31, How the Knights Went to Church Summary

As morning dawns, Hagen rouses the sleeping warrior band who begins to dress for morning mass. Seeing the men dressed in their finery, Hagen counsels them to put off such fancy garb and outfit themselves for battle. Hagen reminds the knights of Kriemhild's attempted treachery during the night, and suggests that they all be on guard, even at church. When King Etzel sees Gunther's men thus arrayed, he asks what could have caused them to be on guard in his household. Hagen diverts the question by explaining that their custom is to remain dressed for battle for three days when visiting a strange land in case any ill should befall them. Since Hagen has not revealed Kriemhild's thwarted plan to her husband, she refrains from saying anything in reply. Hagen and Folker stand at the church door and refuse to move aside even an inch as Kriemhild walks past. The Huns see this physical insult to their queen and, although they fear the eyes of their king, the warriors jostle Burgundian knights at the minster door.

A tournament is arranged following the mass, and Folker suggests that each country ride against the other. However, Sir Dietrich and Rudeger's men quit the tourney to avoid a bloodbath between the Hungarians and Burgundians. Men of Th'ringen and Denmark ride against Gunther's warriors and the sight of their clashing swords gives Kriemhild an idea. The queen realizes that if one person were to be harmed then the whole game would turn into a serious battle, whereby her woes could be avenged. Folker thinks that it would be wise for his men to retire for the evening, but before he can give the order, a Hunnish warrior rides onto the plain. Hagen says he will ride with Folker against the lone knight. As they ride onto the field, Folker spears the warrior through. The Huns, realizing what has happened, quickly draw their swords; but King Etzel separates the warring parties before the battle begins. The king tells his knights that Folker's slaying of the Hunnish warrior was an accident and will not be avenged.

The entire company gathers in the hall for a feast; but neither side has forgotten what just took place, and the warriors eye each other in contempt. King Etzel warns his men that if revenge is exacted on Gunther's men, the knights will pay for it with their heads. Meanwhile, Kriemhild pleads her case to Sir Hildebrand. Hildebrand will not aid her for all the gold she can offer and Dietrich tells her to leave off her vengeful thoughts. Unable to find assistance from her husband's men, the queen turns to her brother-in-law, Bloedelin. Bloedelin at first refuses her, but when Kriemhild offers him lands, castles, and the widow of Nudung, Etzel's brother agrees to avenge Kriemhild's wrongs. The queen returns to her place at the table while Bloedelin immediately calls his men to arm themselves.

King Etzel's young son, Ortlieb, is lead into the hall to stand before Hagen. Etzel then speaks to Gunther's men and tells them to look kindly on the young boy because he will be a great friend to them in times of need. Furthermore, the king beseeches Gunther to take the infant when he returns to Burgundy and raise him in honor. Kriemhild hears her husband's word but bites her lip in silence. In reply, Hagen says that he doubts the child will have the opportunity to grow into manhood. Etzel is upset by these harsh words and his men stand ready to avenge the wrong, but the king sinks silently into his seat. The poet notes that Hagen will do worse to the young prince by slaying the child before the king.

Adventure 31, How the Knights Went to Church Analysis

The climax of the story is fast approaching and the Thirty-First Adventure lays bare the sequence of events that lead to bloody battles and the deaths of thousands. Hagen is again the leader who instigates trouble among men. The knight counsels the men to put aside their finery and take up arms for the procession to church. Hagen's conscience has been pestering him since Werbel and Swemmeline brought the invitation to Etzel's feast, and it continues to incite Hagen's behavior here. Gunther's powerful advisor will not quickly forget or forgive the attempted attack of the night before. The tension between the clans continues to mount as they jostle one another at the door of the church. This is another repetition of an earlier scene when the knights struggled with each other at the door of Etzel's hall on their first night in Hungary.

A tournament would be a welcome distraction from the tension of the hall if only the knights involved were not out for blood. Sir Dietrich wisely removes his warriors from the contest in an attempt to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. However, one Hunnish knight sets off the spark that will literally bring flames to the battle between Burgundians and Hungarians by proposing to meet Hagen and Folker alone on the jousting field.

Several rash decisions are made in this adventure. The first comes from the lone Hun who foolishly steps foot on the field only to quickly lose his life. The second rash decision is made by Bloedelin, who accepts the promise of lands and a wife from Kriemhild if he will only avenge the queen on Hagen. Lastly, King Etzel bequeaths the care of his infant son to King Gunther in a gesture of friendship, but this act only leads to more death. Passions are running high among the gathered parties, but neither King Gunther nor King Etzel appears to defuse the situation as it escalates throughout dinner.

Adventure 32, How Bloedelin Was Slain

Adventure 32, How Bloedelin Was Slain Summary

Bloedelin, surrounded by a thousand knights, approaches the table where Dankwart sits. Etzel's brother does away with pleasantries and informs Dankwart that he comes to avenge Siegfried's murder. Dankwart tries to change Bloedelin's mind, but when the angry Hun refuses to budge, Dankwart quickly rises and slices off Bloedelin's head. The Hunnish warriors stare at their leader's head lying on the floor then spring upon Dankwart's men. Those who cannot find a weapon grab hold of benches, chairs, and whatever else they can find. The Hunnish warriors flee the hall with the Burgundian soldiers close behind them. Two thousand reinforcements run to Bloedelin's aide while Dankwart calls for someone to send word of his perilous situation to Hagen. Not one of the Huns dares to step foot against the mighty warrior, so they beset Dankwart with arrows until he drops his shield. The Huns then fall on Gunther's man, but even without a buckler to protect him, Dankwart defends himself valiantly. The Burgundian warrior slowly moves the fight towards the feast hall.

Adventure 32, How Bloedelin Was Slain Analysis

Bloedelin's contribution to the poem is short-lived and marginal. Overwhelmed by greed for great reward, Bloedelin agrees to aide Kriemhild, although against his better judgment. The unthinking knight strides to his enemy's table and loses his head. Bloedelin leaves the story as quickly as he entered it. The warrior's only substantial contribution to the tale is to anger Dankwart and bring an all-out battle one step closer.

Adventure 33, How the Burgundians Fought With the Huns

Adventure 33, How the Burgundians Fought With the Huns Summary

Dankwart bursts into the hall calling out that while Hagen has been sitting around, many yeomen and knights lay dead in their quarters. Hagen demands to know who has done such a thing, saying that whoever is at fault will pay dearly for it. Dankwart says that Bloedelin has wrought such grievous actions, but in the process lost his own life by Dankwart's sword. Likewise, the blood that stains Dankwart's clothes is not his but that of the many foes he has slain. Hagen says he will speak with the Hungarian troop, but first he proposes a toast with king's wine. Hagen grabs young prince Ortlieb and strikes the child so that his small head lands in Kriemhild's lap. Hagen continues the bloodbath by severing the head of the child's tutor and cutting off Werbel's hands before turning his wrath on the rest of Etzel's hall.

King Gunther and his two brothers make a feeble attempt to stop the fight before drawing their own swords and heaping Hunnish corpses around them. Dankwart guards the stair to prevent any from going up or down but quickly becomes surrounded. Folker battles his way to the knight and the two warriors battle back-to-back at the door. When Dankwart and Folker manage to bar the door shut, Hagen begins to whirl about the hall in a killing frenzy. Kriemhild cries out to Dietrich for aide, but the noble knight says he can barely defend himself. Dietrich then raises a loud cry, which draws King Gunther's attention, and the Burgundian king commands his men to hold. Gunther desires to know what wrong has befallen Dietrich, and the Hunnish man asks leave to quit the hall with all those who would follow him. In exchange, Dietrich will forever be in Gunther's service. Gunther grants permission and Dietrich leads Kriemhild, Etzel, Rudeger, and five hundred warriors from the hall. As they pass through the door, Folker slices off the head of a Hunnish knight.

Etzel wanders to his chambers, lamenting the sad events that are taking place in his hall. When those Huns that wished to leave with Sir Dietrich have gone from the hall, the battle continues until no Hungarian warriors remain alive. Only then does Sir Folker lay down his bloodstained sword.

Adventure 33, How the Burgundians Fought With the Huns Analysis

The battle becomes fully engaged in this adventure. Hagen's anger at learning the fate of his men prompts him to cut off the infant Ortlieb's head. The powerful warrior does not stop there, but continues to slay whomever crosses his path. Ortlieb's death is not

avenged and Etzel seems only mildly distraught over the death of his only heir. The child's mother, Kriemhild, makes no noise or objection to her son's death.

Dietrich's method for rescuing Kriemhild from the bloody hall is rather strange. In the middle of battle, the knight raises a loud cry that stops all the warriors in the tracks. Having gained the attention of Hagen, Dietrich asks permission to leave the hall along with anyone else who wishes to exit the battle. Few questions are asked of Dietrich as Hagen accepts his pledge of friendship in exchange for being allowed out of the hall. All those save Kriemhild and Etzel rarely figure into the following adventures. Their release from the battle seems to hold them in reserve for future events. Indeed, this may be the poet's design since there seems to be little reason for Hagen to let Kriemhild or anyone else leave the hall unscathed.

Adventure 34, How They Threw Down the Dead

Adventure 34, How They Threw Down the Dead Summary

After the battle ends, Folker and Hagen retreat to a corner where they quietly talk together. Giselher says that they should clear the hall of corpses because he is sure they will face another battle soon. The bodies of the dead are carried to the door and flung down the stairs to land in heaps. The sight of their kinsmen treated so brings a loud wail from Hungarian throats. One unfortunate man runs out to aid a warrior who still appears to live, but then is brought down by an arrow shot by Folker.

Hagen and Folker then begin to mock King Etzel's might. Hagen says that most kings lead their knights rather than run from the fray. Angered by their words, Etzel lashes on his buckler, but his men hold him back. As Hagen continues to taunt the king, Kriemhild's anger grows until she addresses the crowd of warriors before her. The queen asks who will bring her Hagen's head in exchange for heaps of gold. Folker, hearing Kriemhild's words, says that any man who does not accept the challenge should be considered a coward unworthy of Etzel's hall. Etzel's men stand around weeping with their king and only one, Iring, steps forward.

Adventure 34, How They Threw Down the Dead Analysis

The clearing of corpses from the hall shows two things: prudence and irreverence. Giselher's advice is sound because the fallen bodies underfoot will hamper mobility during future exchanges with the Huns. The more blood that covers the hall floor the slipperier the surface for Gunther's men to maintain footing on.

However, the tossing of the bodies into a heap at the bottom of the staircase is disrespectful not only to King Etzel but also to the dead. Hungarian and Burgundian bodies litter the hall so when the men toss out the corpses they devalue the lives of their own comrades as well as their foes. The act is a flagrant display of the Burgundian's lack of consideration for rules and custom. At this point, it seems clear that Gunther and his men will not play fair with King Etzel's men.

Adventure 35, How Iring Was Slain

Adventure 35, How Iring Was Slain Summary

Iring announces that he will face Hagen. Hagen says it would be better if two or three came against him together. A thousand men arm themselves to stand behind Iring. Folker sees the large host arrayed against Hagen and calls Iring a liar for saying he would fight alone. Iring kneels before his kinsmen, beseeching them to leave off accompanying him. Although the men do not think it a wise choice, they agree to let Iring face Hagen alone.

Iring charges at Hagen but is unable to defeat the powerful champion, so he turns to try his hand against Folker. Iring attempts to battle Gunther and Gernot each in turn before slaying four Burgundian men. Giselher becomes angered at the loss of his men and flies at Iring, knocking the knight from his feet. Giselher does not kill Iring, but gives him a blow that renders him unconscious. Iring awakes, leaps up from the floor, and runs for the door. On his way past Hagen, Iring delivers a mighty blow to the Burgundian knight. Hagen feels the bite of the sword and gives chase to the fleeing Hun but Iring safely reaches his kinsmen. While Kriemhild praises Iring's strike against Hagen, the Burgundian knight bellows that he has lost no strength and looks forward to laying more Huns low.

Iring calls for fresh arms to be brought so that he may battle Hagen again. When Hagen sees Iring striding towards him, the Burgundian wastes no time rushing to the fight. However, Hagen's anger is no match for the Danish man's blade; suffering from two mortal wounds, Iring struggles back to his friends. Kriemhild comes forward, crying over the wounded man, but Iring tells her not to weep for him. Iring addresses his kinsmen, telling them that they should not expect to receive gifts from the queen because any who choose to fight Hagen will not survive to collect their reward. Iring falls silent in death and his kinsmen take up arms to pursue Gunther's men. Sir Hawart and Sir Irnfried are killed by Hagen and Folker, respectively. The sight of their slain leaders angers the Danish men more and fuels their battle fury. Gernot calls for the Burgundians to fall back and allow the Huns to crowd through the hall door. A thousand and four Hunnish warriors lay dead before Gunther's men as silence descends on the hall.

Adventure 35, How Iring Was Slain Analysis

Iring's adventure is one of honor. While all the other Hungarian warriors stand about afraid to take Hagen's challenge, this lone man steps forward. The reader knows nothing about Iring. The poet does not tell if Iring is of a noble family, a relative of the king, or some other significant person. The reason he steps forward is not clear, either. Iring appears motivated by Hagen's taunts, but what makes this man unafraid of the Burgundian champion is not revealed.

When Iring's kinsmen attempt to fight alongside him, Iring pleads with them to let him maintain his honor by facing Hagen alone, as pledged. Even when Iring pretends to be dead and then runs from the battle scene, Iring's intentions seem to be pure, not cowardly. Amid more insults from Hagen, Iring calls for fresh arms and returns to the fight. Iring loses his life to Hagen but he does so with honor and secure in the knowledge that he has upheld his oaths.

Adventure 36, How the Queen Gave Orders to Burn Down the Hall

Adventure 36, How the Queen Gave Orders to Burn Down the Hall Summary

Hagen and Folker tell the others to rest themselves while they can and the two warriors keep watch at the door. Etzel and Kriemhild, mourning the loss of so many brave knights, call for more warriors to prepare themselves for battle. Twenty thousand march against the Burgundians as Dankwart, long thought dead, steps forward safe and sound. The battle rages until darkness falls and many more fine knights have perished in the fight.

Kriemhild laments the horror that lies before her; the queen wished only for vengeance upon one. Etzel and Kriemhild approach Gunther's men. Etzel addresses the company, saying that if they wish for friendship, it is too late now. The Burgundian kings plead with King Etzel, but to no avail. Finally, Gernot asks that if they are to be slain, Etzel should at least take them to the open plain. Gernot says that the men are too tired to flee, and that Etzel's amassed army will quickly overpower Gunther's men. When Kriemhild hears their request, she quickly counsels the Huns to forbid such a thing. The queen tells her men that as soon as her three brothers drew in fresh air the fight would be renewed with disastrous results for the Hungarian army. Kriemhild will allow them to save their lives if they only give up Hagen, but her brothers refuse. Etzel's queen tells her knights not to let one soul leave the hall and orders the four corners of the hall set on fire.

As flames lick about the walls, many of the warriors complain of severe thirst. Hagen advises them to drink the blood of the dead, which will revive them. One knight drinks greedily from the body of a man next to him. When the others see his improved spirits, they fall on the corpses surrounding the hall. The vaulted hall roof seems to save the Burgundian band from immediate death, but Hagen counsels the men to move back into the hall and appear as though dead. The knight reasons that if the Huns think they have all perished, they will not expect the dead to rise and fight. Spies have been watching the burning hall through the night and as day breaks over the stronghold, they report to Kriemhild that Gunther's men still live. Upset by this news, the queen encourages the Hungarian warriors to continue fighting until twelve hundred more have lost their lives trying to enter the torched hall.

Adventure 36, How the Queen Gave Orders to Burn Down the Hall Analysis

For a brief moment, Kriemhild appears to be genuinely sorry for her desire for vengeance, but the moment is fleeting. The queen views the carnage from her window

and laments that so many have had to die when she only wished for Hagen's head to brought to her. However, in almost the next breath, Kriemhild objects to the suggestion that the Burgundians be allowed to leave the hall. The queen knows full well that her brothers will only be able to mount a better attack if permitted to reach open land.

Furthermore, Kriemhild's thirst for vengeance seems to grow stronger when she orders men to light the hall on fire. The queen cares little for the welfare of her own warriors trapped inside and does not value the lives of her own brothers. Kriemhild's only thought now, as it has been for many years, is on gaining revenge for Siegfried's death. The queen is also motivated by the desire to know the location of Siegfried's treasure. In some instances, her thoughts seem to center more on the gold than on avenging her husband's murder. The reader may question Kriemhild's true motivation for wanting Hagen dead.

Adventure 37, How Margrave Rudeger Was Slain

Adventure 37, How Margrave Rudeger Was Slain Summary

Rudeger rides into the courtyard, surveying the carnage around him. He asks Sir Dietrich to help him change King Etzel's evil intent, but Dietrich tells Rudeger that the king's mind is made up and will not be swayed. A Hunnish warrior points out to Kriemhild that Rudeger has yet to strike a blow and has been missing for most of the long battle. Rudeger overhears the knight's comments and beats the man to death.

Kriemhild and Etzel chastise Rudeger for killing one of his own but not lifting a hand against the harmful strangers. Rudeger replies that the man deserved his death; but since Rudeger was the one to lead Gunther's men to Etzel's hall, he cannot raise a malicious hand to them. The king and queen fall at Rudeger's feet and implore him to aide their cause. Rudeger tells the king to take back all the possessions once given him so that the margrave can be free of any obligation to the king. Instead, Etzel tells Rudeger that if he will fight for them he will give him half the kingdom. Rudeger finally relents, but says that he knows his life will be lost before the sun sets.

Rudeger calls his warriors to arm themselves. As the company rides toward Gunther's men, Giselher sees his father-in-law and assumes it is a favorable sign. Folker says that peaceful men do not ride in full armor. Gunther and his brothers soon realize that their friend has now become a foe and that no amount of talking will change Rudeger's mind. Gernot tells Rudeger that the sword Rudeger presented him with has served him well that day and will be the same blade that ends Rudeger's life. As Rudeger rushes forward, Hagen calls for him to stop. Hagen tells Rudeger that the beautiful shield given him by Gotelind has been torn to shreds, and wonders if Rudeger would part with the one he now holds. Rudeger, indeed, gives his shield to Hagen and then Folker asks Rudeger to return the gold bracelets Gotelind gave him.

As the battle begins, Hagen and Folker uphold their promise to stay away from Rudeger. However, Gernot soon tires of Rudeger's slaying of his men and tells the champion it is time to turn and face his doom. Rudeger strikes a mortal blow through Gernot's helmet; but in his dying moments, Gernot repays the stroke. Kriemhild sits bewailing the faithlessness of Rudeger when Folker appears and tells the queen that to the very end Rudeger served her well. Folker then calls for the man's corpse to be brought and all the Hungarian band lets loose a mournful wail.

Adventure 37, How Margrave Rudeger Was Slain Analysis

Rudeger has been missing from the poem for quite sometime now. He has not figured prominently into many of the battles nor been around to lend advice. Kriemhild and Etzel seem justified in questioning the margrave's actions. Yes, Rudeger swore friendship with Gunther and his men, but shouldn't his first allegiance be to the King and Queen? Rudeger's offer of giving back all that King Etzel gave him seems childish. Etzel may have bestowed a good amount of wealth and property on the man, but that was due to an oath uttered first by Rudeger to the king.

Throughout the poem, oaths and promises of friendship have flown between men like birds through the air. Each time someone new is introduced into the plot, they make a pledge to some man or other. Many of the vows are made with evil intent behind them or as a means to an end. The situation between Rudeger and the King and Queen begs the question of which oaths should be upheld and how to determine which pledges take precedent over others. The matter is not easy to sort out; but for the modern reader, it becomes a little clearer why the 'gentleman's handshake' no longer seals a deal.

Adventure 38, How Sir Dietrich's Men Were All Slain

Adventure 38, How Sir Dietrich's Men Were All Slain Summary

Sir Dietrich hears the massive cry and thinks that the King and Queen have been slain at last. He sends Helfrich to seek out news who returns crying over what he has discovered. Helfrich relates that Rudeger has been killed by the Burgundians. Dietrich cannot believe the news and sends Hildebrand to hear from Gunther's men what has happened. However, when Hildebrand fails to put on his armor, a disagreement breaks out among the warriors. Before Dietrich can say anything, his entire fully equipped company strides off to the hall.

Folker spies the advancing troop and alerts Gunther's men to prepare themselves for battle. Hildebrand stops before Folker and asks if the news of Rudeger's death is true. Hagen says that, unfortunately, they have heard correctly. The Hungarian knights begin to lament the loss of such a true warrior. Hildebrand asks for Rudeger's body to be given over so they can give it a proper burial, but Folker tells the men that they will have to retrieve it for themselves. Incensed by Folker's taunts, Wolfhart rushes into the hall with a large band of men at his back. Hildebrand joins Wolfhart at the head of the fray; Hildebrand hacks at Hagen, while Wolfhart seeks to cut down Folker.

Hildebrand sees Folker cut down Sir Siegstab and rushes to avenge the aged warrior. The stroke Folker suffers sends splinters throughout the hall as the great minstrel crumples to the ground. Hagen sees his companion lying lifeless on the floor, and hews his way across they hall to exact revenge on Hildebrand. Helfrich slays Dankwart as Gunther and Giselher look on. Wolfhart crisscrosses the hall three times, hacking at anything in his path. Giselher calls out to Wolfhart to turn and fight, bringing about the deaths of both those valiant knights. As Hildebrand attempts to carry Wolfhart from the hall, Hagen falls on the champion, wounding him in the back. Hildebrand throws his shield over his shoulder and runs off to bring news of the battle to Dietrich.

Hildebrand finds Dietrich sitting alone and tells him that Rudeger is indeed dead by Gernot's hand. The knight also tells his lord that Gernot too is slain by Rudeger, and Hildebrand's blood flows by Hagen's hand. Dietrich chastises the warrior for not heeding the command to stay away from the battle, but when Hildebrand relates how Gunther's men refused to hand over Rudeger's body, Dietrich becomes incensed. Dietrich orders Hildebrand to have his warriors prepare themselves for a fight, only to learn that Hildebrand is the only remaining member of his company. Hildebrand also tells his lord that of the Burgundians, only Gunther and Hagen remain.

Adventure 38, How Sir Dietrich's Men Were All Slain Analysis

Dietrich, a younger warrior, is usurped by the more aged and tested knights in his band. While an argument takes place over the merits of wearing or not wearing armor while visiting the enemy on a fact-finding mission, the older warriors arm themselves and march off to battle. Their actions signify the old way of doing things. When they were young war leaders or knights engaging in their first battles, there was no time to stop and ask questions. Knights were expected to be prepared for anything that might befall them and being caught unarmed was a foolish thing to do.

However, as Dietrich comments when Hildebrand brings him news of the fray, the rash judgment of the warriors has resulted in the deaths of all save one. When Hagen sees the troop of men advancing towards him in full armor, his only safe assumption is that they, like all the rest, are coming to engage the Burgundians in battle. Although, given Hagen's treatment of almost anyone not from his homeland, the same result may have occurred had Hildebrand arrived alone and unarmed. This adventure shows the consequences of snap judgments and failure to listen to the command of a leader.

Adventure 39, How Gunther and Hagen and Kriemhild Were Slain

Adventure 39, How Gunther and Hagen and Kriemhild Were Slain Summary

Sir Dietrich gives out a loud moan of grief as he dons his mailcoat and shield. Together, Dietrich and Hildebrand stride towards the hall where only Gunther and Hagen remain, leaning against the wall. Hagen sees the approaching men and says that if Dietrich has come for a fight, he will find an equal opponent in Hagen. Dietrich overhears these words, plants his shield in the ground before the two men, and asks to know what cause they had to slay Rudeger and all Dietrich's great warriors. Hagen replies that their actions were justified because Dietrich's men advanced on them in full armor. Gunther adds that they denied removal of Rudeger's body only to scorn Etzel.

Dietrich offers friendship to Gunther if the king will only hand over Hagen as captive. Hagen refuses the offer, preferring to fight rather than end the conflict as cowards. Dietrich takes up his buckler as Hagen charges against him. Sir Dietrich delivers a long and deep gash to Hagen and the strong champion agrees to be taken captive. Wrapped tightly in a band, Hagen is lead before Queen Kriemhild who heeds Dietrich's advice and chooses to keep the murder as a captive rather than have him killed. Gunther cries out for Dietrich to meet him in battle to avenge the taking of Hagen. The two men struggle fiercely; but in the end, Dietrich marches Gunther in bonds before the Queen.

Dietrich beseeches Kriemhild to treat the captives fairly, and having received her promise, leaves the hall. The queen goes to Hagen's cell to offer him the chance at freedom if he will only tell her where Siegfried's gold is hidden. Hagen states that he took an oath that while he or any one of his men still lived, the secret of the treasure would not be revealed. Kriemhild marches to King Gunther's cell and cuts off her brother's head, which she carries back to Hagen's cell. When Hagen sees the head of his master dangling from the queen's hand, he says that now only God and he know the location of the gold, and Hagen will never reveal the answer. Kriemhild unsheathes Siegfried's sword and swipes off Hagen's head. King Etzel watches her do this and bemoans the actions of such a noble lady. Hildebrand also sees Kriemhild's actions and, although Hagen was no friend of his, the aged warrior swings his sword, ending the Queen's life. Dietrich, Etzel, and all the people of the land weep in sorrow for the terrible loss of life that happened at the King's feast.

Adventure 39, How Gunther and Hagen and Kriemhild Were Slain Analysis

Only four remain after the long series of bloody battles: Dietrich and Hildebrand on the Huns side, and Hagen and Gunther for the Burgundians. The final showdown is upon the reader, and yet it is somehow anti-climatic. The fight between Dietrich and Hagen should be just as bloody and exhausting as all the rest. However, when Hagen sustains a serious wound, he readily surrenders and allows himself to be bound. This action seems extremely out of character for Siegfried's mighty murderer. Admittedly, Hagen has been fighting wave after wave of foes for at least two days and survived a fire, but he is also the warrior who vowed to die in battle rather than be taken captive.

Gunther's capture does not come as quite the shock that Hagen's does. After all, the reader has heard little about the Burgundian king throughout most of the battles. Hagen has been the voice of the men from Rhineland, the leader carrying his men through each onslaught. Gunther fades into the background only to reappear briefly at odd moments before returning to the throng of nameless warriors.

What, in some ways, makes up Hagen's capture, is Hildebrand's slaying of Kriemhild. While the chapter heading informs the reader that she will die, the sequence of events leads the reader to believe it will be at the hands of Hagen or even her brother Gunther. However, when Hildebrand comes out of the shadows to cut the mighty Queen down, it shocks the reader. Likewise, that her husband and Dietrich stand by and allow the Queen's death is also shocking. The actions of the three men in the final moments of the poem seem to signify that Kriemhild has been greedy in her vengeance and deserves whatever punishment she gets.

Characters

Alberich

The dwarf who was the Lord Treasurer of the Nibelung dynasty. When Siegfried conquered the Nibelung brothers, he took his magic cloak of invisibility and made Alberich Lord Treasurer of the Nibelung treasure.

Aldrian

Hagen and Dancwart's father.

Amelung

This is the name of Dietrich's dynasty. It applies to his vassals as well.

Astolt

One of the lords of Melk.

Attila the Hun

See Etzel

Balmung

The name of Siegfried's sword. In heroic legends, swords were often given names. After Siegfried's death, Hagen steals Balmung. When Hagen is captured at the end of the epic, Kriemhild uses the sword to kill Hagen.

Bloedelin

Etzel's brother. Dane wart kills him in battle in Chapter 32.

Brunhild

The Queen of Iceland, a beautiful maiden of almost superhuman strength. Gunther, king of the Burgundians, travels to Iceland to win her hand in marriage. He must perform certain acts of strength and skill in order to marry the Queen. His friend Siegfried helps him perform these tasks while wearing the magic cloak of invisibility, so it appears as if

Gunther is acting alone. Siegfried also help Gunther subdue Brunhild and possess her sexually after they are married (again hidden in the magic cloak), which bring about the loss of her extraordinary strength. Brunhild is not aware of Siegfried's role until she is taunted about it by Kriemhild. The argument that follows between the two women results in Siegfried's death and in the downfall of the Burgundians.

Dancrat

Deceased father of Gunther, Giselher, and Gernot, kings of the Burgundians, and the husband of Uote.

Dancwart

Hagen's younger brother and also a vassal of the Burgundian kings. He kills Gelphrat in chapter 8 and often aids his brother. He is challenged by Bloedelin in Chapter 32, and killed. This is the beginning of the final confrontation between the Huns and the Burgundians. Dancwart is killed by Helpfrich, Dietrich's vassal, in Chapter 38.

Dietrich

Lord of the Amelung dynasty. He is engaged to Herrat and lives in exile at Etzel's court. When the Burgundians come to visit Kriemhild in Chapter 28, he tells the kings that she still mourns her dead husband Siegfried, and warns them that their visit may not be a pleasant one. He is also an old acquaintance of Hagen and greatly respected by all the Huns. He helps Kriemhild and Etzel escape when fighting breaks out between the Huns and Burgundians, and is finally responsible for the capture of Hagen and Gunther.

Eckewart

A military governor for the Burgundians. He brings Kriemhild to Hungary to marry Eztel. In Chapter 26 he is discovered on Rudiger's frontier. The narrator does not tell us how he came to be separated from Kriemhild's household. His character may have been conflated with another historical figure.

Eke

Brother of Gelpfrat and Lord of the Marches on the Bavarian bank of the Danube River. He flees Hagen's men in Chapter 26 after Dancwart kills his brother.

Etzel

King of the Huns in Hungary. Marries Kriemhild after his wife Helche dies.

Gelphrat

Military governor of Bavaria and brother of Else. Gelpfrat attacks Hagen and his men after Hagen kills his ferryman. Gelpfrat is in turn killed by Dancwart in Chapter 26.

Gerbart

One of Dietrich's vassals

Gere

A military governor and kinsman of the Burgundian kings. In Chapter 12, after the marriage of Siegfried and Kriemhild, he travels back to the Netherlands to invite them to visit the Burgundians.

Gernot

Brother of Gunther, Giselher, and Kriemhild. Second-oldest of the brothers, he is killed by Rudiger in Chapter 37.

Giselher

The youngest brother of Gunther, Gernot, and Kriemhild. He is betrothed to Rudiger's daughter in Chapter 27, but is killed by Wolfhart in Chapter 38.

Gotelind

Wife of Rudiger, military governor and Etzel's vassal. Her daughter is betrothed to Giselher.

Gunther

Eldest king of Burgundy; brother of Gernot, Giselher and Kriemhild; son of Dancrat and Uote. He wins the hand of Brunhild in marriage with the help of Siegfried. He is then complicit in the deadi of Siegfried, and dies by order of Kriemhild in Hungary. Before he dies, he and Hagen defend themselves in Etzel's hall, and are responsible for killing many Huns. Gunther's character is problematic, as many critics have considered him to be weak and ineffectual.

Gunther

Son of Siegfried and Kriemhild. He is born and grows up in the Netherlands, Siegfried's kingdom.

Hadeburg

The name of the water-faerie in the Danube river who warns Hagen that the journey to Hungary will end in disaster.

Hagen

Brother of Dancwart, eldest son of Aldrian, and chief vassal of the Burgundian kings. Also called the Lord of Troneck. He was once a hostage at Etzel's court. He is responsible for Siegfried's death and is the object of Kriemhild's revenge-plot. He discourages the Burgundian kings form travelling to Hungary upon Kriemhild's invitation, but is not heeded. Then he is warned by water-faeries that the journey will end in tragedy. Kriemhild kills him with Siegfried's sword in Hungary.

Hawart

A Danish prince who lives in exile at Etzel's court and is overlord of Iring. He is killed by Hagen in Hungary.

Helche

Etzel's first queen. She is already dead when Etzel enters the narrative.

Helmnot

One of Dietrich's vassals.

Helpfrich

One of Dietrich's vassals. He kills Dancwart, Hagen's brother, in Chapter 38.

Herrat

Niece of Helche, Etzel's first wife. She is betrothed to Dietrich. Her father is Nantwin.

Hildebrand

Vassal and Master-at-Arms of Dietrich of the Amelungs. He is also Wolfhart's uncle. He and Dietrich are the last to fight with Hagen and Gunther before the Burgundians are captured. He executes Kriemhild in the last Chapter.

Bornboge

One of Etzel's vassals.

Hunold

Lord Chamberlain of Burgundy.

Iring

Vassal of Hawart, a Danish prince living in exile at Etzel's court. Iring is killed by Hagen in Chapter 35 when he tries to fulfill Queen Kriemhild's wishes,

Irnfried

Also referred to as the Landgrave of Thuringia. He lives at Etzel's court, in exile. He is killed by Volker.

Kriemhild

Princess of Burgundy, sister of Gunther, Giselher, and Gernot, and daughter of Uote and Dancrat. She is sought in marriage by the renowned warrior Siegfried, who remains in the Burgundin court for a year in the hope of meeting her. Kriemhild and "Siegfried marry after Siegfried helps her brother Gunther to win the hand of the Icelandic queen Brunhild.

The main action of the *Nibelungenlied*—the violence between the Burgundians and Huns— is started by the bad feelings that arise when Kriemhild and Brunhild argue, first over whose husband is the greater, and then over Siegfried's role in Brunhild's marriage to Gunther. After Siegfried's death Kriemhild marries Etzel of Hungary (Attila the Hun), always planning her revenge on her brother's wife and liegemen for Siegfried's death. She has a son (Gunther) by Siegfried, and another son (Ortlieb) by Etzel.She kills Hagen with Siegfried's sword in Chapter 39 and is subsequently killed by Hildebrand.

Liudegast

King of Denmark, brother of Liudeger. He declares war on Burgundy and is captured by Siegfried.

Liudeger

King of Saxony and brother of Liudegast. He is captured with his brother while at war with the Burgundians.

Margrave

A title given to a military governor of a border province. It is roughly equivalent to a British marquess. The wife of a margrave is called a margravine.

Nantwin

Father of Herrat, who is betrothed to Dietrich. He is also a vassal of Etzel.

Nibelung

The name given to the lords of Nibelungland, Kings Schilbung and Nibelung, to whom was bequeathed the treasure of the Nibelungs by their father, King Nibelung. The term also describes the members of the dynasty of Nibelung and their followers. Later in the poem, the term is used to describe the Nibelung followers who became Siegfried's vassals when he conquered their lords. When Kriemhild went to live with Etzel, the Nibelungs did not accompany her, and so the term is sometimes used as an alternative name for the Burgundians after her departure.

Nuodung

A kinsman of Gotelind, wife of Rudiger. He does not appear in this story except by implication.

He is said to have died earlier, and his shield is given to Hagen when he visits Rudiger. Nuodung's betrothed is later promised to Bloedelin by Knemhild to lure him into battle with Hagen,

Ortlieb

Kriemhild's son by Etzel. He is around six years old when he is killed by Hagen, and plays a very minor role in the story.

Ortwin

Hagen's nephew, Lord High Stewart of Burgundy and Lord of Metz.

Bishop Pilgrim

Bishop of Passau and Uote's brother. He is the uncle of Knemhild, Gunther, Giselher, and Gernot, all of whom stop to visit on their respective ways to Hungary.

Ramung

One of Etzel's vassals and Duke of Wallachia.

Ritschart

One of Dietrich's vassals.

Rudiger

A vassal of Etzel, margrave and lord of Pochlarn and husband to Gotelind. He travels to Burgundy to ask for Kriemhild's hand in marriage on behalf of Etzel of Hungary. He betrothes his daughter to Giselher but in Chapter 37 is slain by Gernot, whom he kills at the same time. He is a heroic figure who must in the end decide whether to acknowledge his feudal oath of loyalty to Kriemhild, or his oath of friendship and kinship to the Burgundians.

Rumold

Vassal of the Burgundians and Lord of the Kitchen in Burgundy. Gunther appoints him regent to look after the kingdom when the kings leave for Hungary.

Schilbung

One of the Lords of Nibelungland, son of Nibelung (also the name of his brother). He is killed by Siegfried, who takes over his lands and treasure.

Schrutan

One of Etzel's vassals.

Siegfried

Son of Siegmund and Sieglind, and lord of the Netherlands, Norway and Nieblungland. He marries Kriemhild, princess of Burgundy, and helps King Gunther to win Queen Brunhild's hand in marriage. He is later killed by Hagen. Kriemhild's avenging of his death forms the majority of the story. The name Siegfried is also given to King Gunther's son by Queen Brunhild,

Sieglind

Queen of the Netherlands, wife of King Siegmund, and mother of Siegfried. This is also the name given to the water-faene that prophecies the fall of the Burgundians to Hagen.

Siegmund

King of the Netherlands, husband of Sieglind and father of Siegfried. He visits the Burgundian kingdom with his son and Queen Kriemhild after they are married, and then returns to the Netherlands after Siegfried is killed.

Sindold

A vassal of the Burgundians and Cup-bearer of Burgundy.

Swemmel

Etzel's minstrel. He travels to Burgundy with Werbel to invite Kriemhild's kinsmen to visit for the summer festival.

Theoderic the Great

See Dietrich

Vote

Widowed Queen of Burgundy, mother of Gunther, Giselher, Gernot and Kriemhild. She is sister to Bishop Pilgrim of Passau. She is the one who interprets Kriemhild's dream at the beginning of the story, and tries to warn her sons not to travel to Hungary after she has a dream that indicates the journey will end in tragedy.

Volker

A vassal of the Burgundians, lord of Alzei. He is Hagen's chosen comrade in arms and stands guard with Hagen to protect the Burgundian warriors at Etzel's court. He is also referred to as "The Minstrel" or "The Fiddler" for his musical ability. He is killed by Hildebrand in Chapter 38.

Waske

The name given to Iring's sword.

Werbel

Etzel's minstrel. He travels with Swemmel to Burgundy to invite Kriemhild's kinsmen to Hungary for the summer festival.

Wichart

One of Dietrich's vassals.

Wolfbrand

One of Dietrich's vassals.

Wolfliart

Nephew of Hildebrand, and Dietrich's vassal. He goads Hagen and the Burgundians into a fight in Chapter 38, wherein he and Giselher kill each other.

Wolfwin

One of Dietrich's vassals.

Themes

Chivalry

Chivalry was a code of behavior which evolved in the Middle Ages. It is associated with the tradition of mounted knights in armor, lord and ladies, feasts, jousts, and war games. In fact, "knights" arose from the development of new military techniques. The behavior of a knight both on the battlefield and in everyday life was expected to follow a certain set of rules— a moral, social and religious code of conduct. The notion of chivalry encouraged knights to foster the virtues of courage, honor, and service to their lord or kinsmen. Part of this code prescribed respectful treatment of women, who had few legal rights in the Middle Ages. For instance, in *the Nibelungenlied,* Siegfried's respectful treatment of Kriemhild and their closely-regulated courtship followed the code of chivalry. Chivalry is also associated with class, noble rank, and social standing as well as expertise on the battlefield. For instance, when the kings Liudeger and Liudegast surrender in battle, they and their men are brought back to Worms. There, they are not treated like prisoners of war, but as guests. The wounded knights receive care and medical treatment, and the others are housed and fed. This treatment adheres to the chivalric code.

Clothing and Appearances

For the characters in the *Nibelungenlied* appearances and first impressions are very important. One way this concern is manifested is through clothing and personal adornment. Clothing, in fact, sends certain messages that, within the courtly culture depicted, can be easily read. When Siegfried first decides to visit Worms to seek Kriemhild's hand in marriage, much effort is put into describing his attire and that of his companions. When they arrive at Worms in Chapter 3, the narrator tells us that they are assumed to be "either princes or princes' envoys, judging by their handsome chargers and splendid clothes." Nobility, honorable status, good breeding, and class are judged by appearance. Gift of fine clothes can also be a way to honor a guest. It is also interesting to note that as the story progresses, less time is spent discussing splendid garments, and more on fine armor and weapons, keeping with the tone of the story.

Courtly Love

Courtly love is as much a literary convention as it was a behavioral code. Courtly love represented the relationship between a suitor and his lady, and sometime, between a courtier or leigeman and the wife, sister, or daughter, of the lord whom he served. This does not mean that extramarital affairs were a part of courtly love. Such relationships were confined to the suitor's pledges of devotion and service. Sometimes such relationships between relative social equals would develop and lead to marriage. Other times, the suitor would plead for his lady's love in vain. This behavior was conventional.

The suitor always treated his lady with respect and admiration, sometimes even adoration. An examples of courtly love in the *Nibelungenlied* is Siegfried's unspoken devotion to Kriemhild and then his respectful wooing of her through Gunther over more than a year. Similarly, the vassals and knights of Etzel's army pledge themselves to avenging Kriemhild's honor because she is married to their lord.

Deception

The *Nibelungenlied* is as much a story of political and social disintegration as it is about heroes and revenge. By the end of the story, the Burgundian rulers are all dead, and many of Etzel's own vassals have been killed as well. Essentially, two kingdoms have been destroyed. The roots of this disintegration are a series of deceptions in which many characters participate. The theme of deception is problematic, since some of the instances of deception can also be seen as examples of courage, bravery, or skill. When Siegfried helps Gunther win Brunhild by taking part in the sporting events under the cover of his magic cloak, he is contributing to a marriage based on a false premise —Gunther's superior strength and skill. Then, when Siegfried subdues Brunhild after the wedding, he essentially "tames" her for Gunther. Hagen, too, is deceitful. He engages in the decepion of Siegfried's death, and Gunther himself is complicit in the deed. Many scholars justify Hagen's actions by maintaining that he acts according to his feudal obligations. His queen, Brunhild, is insulted and publicly humiliated, and it is his duty to avenge the wrongs done to her. Nevertheless, the planning that goes into Siegfried's death, including determining his "weak spot," was deceitful.

Dreams and Prophecies

Dreams and prophecies occur at various points throughout the story, and add to the constant element of foreshadowing that the narrator uses. Subsequent events of the story then represent the events of the dreams, either directly or indirectly. At the very beginning of the *Nibelungenlied,* Kriemhild has a dream which portends her marriage to Siegfried and his death. Other dreams occur at important transition points in the story. Kriemhild has two dreams before Siegfried's hunting trip that seem to foretell his death. Later, Kriemhild dreams of her brother Giselher before she invites her kinsmen to visit her in Hungary. Shortly thereafter, her mother, Uote, dreams that all the birds in Burgundy are dead, and takes it to mean that her sons should not journey to Hungary, which of course turns out to be true as they all perish there.

The *Nibelungenleid* poet uses prophecy in other ways. Hagen is warned by the Danube waterfaeries that the Burgundians' trip to Hungary will end in destruction. Such "foretellings," the type of imagery used, and the way that dreams are then represented in the subsequent actions of the story constitute an important element of the poet's use of foreshadowing.

Feudalism

The *Nibelungenlied* is set at a time when feudal obligations represented the socio-political foundation of society. Feudalism prevailed in Europe from about the ninth to the thirteenth centuries. It was an interdependant relationship of "lord" and "vassal" established through an oath of loyalty. The lords (for instance, Gunther and Etzel) owned the land in their respective kingdoms, but they allowed "vassals" to live on the land, and to engage in farming, hunting, fishing, trade, and other forms of livelihood. Vassalage does not imply mere servitude or peasantry: vassals were often of noble blood and—and is often the case with characters in the *Nibelungenlied*—included high-ranking and influential men. In exchange for military and political protection for his family and property, vassal paid tithes, or yearly sums of money, to their lord, and were pledged to military service when needed. The relationship of lord and vassal which causes much of the tragedy in the *Nibelungenlied.* In Chapter 14, Brunhild criticizes Siegfried for not performing his financial obligations as a "vassal." She had been told that Siegfried was Gunther's vassal, or "liegeman"; and so she believes that Kriemhild, being of lesser social status, should not enter the cathedral before her. Kriemhild objects, and claims that she is a "free noblewoman," that is, the wife of a lord, not a vassal. This argument instigates the events which will lead to the death of Siegfried and then of many Burgundians.

The status of women

During the Middle Ages women did not enjoy great freedom, security, or legal protection. They could not inherit land, and husbands commonly controlled household wealth. The code of chivalry encouraged the respectful treatment of a small strata of women of the upper classes and nobility, but did nothing to grant them autonomy or personal power. Even Kriemhild, the wife of a king, has difficulty persuading the vassals who owe her husband allegiance to fight for her honor. Women of the upper classes were expected to marry and bear children; their marriages were often arranged by their families for social or political purposes. Entering a convent was another of the limited choices available to women of the upper classes. The vast majority of women performed hard physical labor, either as workers or simply in running a household, for their entire lives. Most were not educated beyond practical training in weaving, spinning, and cooking; women of the nobility were taught to play musical instruments and to dance.

The Hero

Heroism in the Middle Ages was somewhat different from what we imagine it to be today. In the Middle Ages, heroism represented brave or exemplary actions, but not necessarily actions that were looked upon approvingly by the audience. A person's heroism is defined largely by how that individual comes to terms with fate. This often entails making difficult decisions. Sometimes one has no favorable alternatives from which to choose. For instance, Hagen is sometimes considered a moral villain, but must

also be recognized as a hero like Siegfried, despite the differences in their characters. A "hero" was recognized as such not by the individual himself, but by the other members of his society. Heroism is also associated with wealth and class status. Heroism in the *Nibelungenlied* encompass not only brave deeds on the battlefield, but other feats which represent strength of character, such as Siegfried's willingness to help Gunther win Brunhild's hand in marriage and his expertise in the hunting scene. Deeds such as this create an image of a character for whom status is reliant on noble characteristics such as honor, bravery, and justice. Even Kriemhild is heroic in her unwavering loyalty toward Siegfried. By the force of her will, she seeks revenge for his death, and even though the final result is death and destruction for many, she does not waver from her purpose; this is seen as essentially heroic. Rudiger, represents yet a different type of hero. He is distinguished from the others by his deeply moral character, his gentility, and his tragic inner struggle at the end, when he must decide between his feudal oath to Etzel and his vow of friendship and kinship to the Burgundians.

Hospitality and Gift-giving

The giving of gifts and the granting of hospitality to guests and friends are very important and interrelated elements in the *Nibelungenlied.* The granting of hospitality was integral to the establishment of bonds of loyalty and trust among equals. In an age in which visitors to one's kingdom might be friends or enemies intent on war, it was important to ensure that one's identity, reputation, and intent be clearly know. Thus when Siegfried first arrives at Worms, word of his exploits has preceded him; when he challenges Gunther for his kingdom to show his strength and noble heritage, there are a few tense moments before a bond of friendship is established. This friendship is based on an agreement of peace, loyalty and honor. Gunther extends hospitality to his guest to show him honor. To give gifts represents the bestowing of honor, and is also part of the bond of friendship.

Romance Genre

Romance as a literary genre treats topics which are similar to those treated in the "epic" genre. First, it must be rememberd that "romance" here is referring to a literary genre which arose in the Middle Ages, not to modern conventions of flowers and chocolates! "Romance" in the Middle Ages was perhaps equivalent to the historical romance novel today, but with complex plots, and highly developed and often "tragic" or "lovesick' characters. Romance is, in this sense, motivated by the plot development and the characters. Romance and epic both used set "conventions". Conventions were, and still are, literary devices or forms which both author and reader understand to be fitting to a certain type of literature. Thus in a "romance", the knight fighting dragons, engaged in battles or travelling on a perilous journey would be doing so not for the glory of the deed alone, but in order to win the favor of his beloved lady. Thus even Siegfried's generous offer to fight the Saxons and the Danes arises less from a desire to show Gunther his prowess in battle than to convince Gunther that he is a suitable husband for Kriemhild.

In turn, Kriemhild, hearing of Siegfried's victory, falls even deeper in love with him. This is one of the conventions of romance.

Style

Nibelungenlied as Epic

The *Nibelungenlied* draws on two important literary traditions, that of the epic, and that of the romance. As an epic, it celebrates the adventures and achievements of several noble, admirable people. It draws on history, mythology, and legend for its details, and the story is largely advanced through action. The *Nibelungenlied* also employs elements drawn from the literary romance: the quests of knights, chivalry, and complicated love relationships worked out over time. The romance genre is largely driven by plot or character, as are the romantic sections *of Ihe Nibelungenlied.* In fact, this work is often regarded as one of the first examples of a new, hybrid form of literature, encompassing elements of both epic and romance. It has also been suggested that the *Nibelungenlied* also draws on a type of story associated with the romance genre known as the "bridal-quest." This literary model encompasses several typical episodes: the report of a distant and eligible princess; a man moved to woo and win her in marriage; her initial resistance to him; commonly, a series of tasks each potential bridegroom must undertake; and finally, a triumphant bridal journey ending in a wedding. These events—which are familiar to many readers through the traditions of nineteenth-century folk and fairy tales—are played out in the relationships between both Siegfried and Knemhild and of Gunther and Brunhild.

Point of View

The *Nibelungenlied* is told from the point of view of an omniscient, or "all-knowing" narrator.

The narrator is aware of all die events as they unfold, and also those that are about to occur. To portray a unified story to the reader, the narrative unfolds with little personal commentary and employs repetitive or stock phrases: the character of Volker, for example, is often referred to as "the valiant minstrel" in order to recall both his valor and his role as a musician to the reader. Since die basic *Nibelungenlied* story was well known long before it was ever written down, the narrator trusts that the audience knows what is going to happen. This is a commonplace of medieval literature and of epic stories, which drew from existing bodies of shared cultural knowledge.

Foreshadowing

In the literary technique of foreshadowing, events that are to come later in the narrative are "foreshadowed" or hinted at in advance. Foreshadowing occurs throughout the *Nibelungenlied,* for example, through the interpretations that Uote offers of her own dream and that her daughter, the prophecy of the water faeries to Hagen, and the narrator's frequent interpolations that doom is about to befall certain characters or that terrible things will result from whatever has just happened. This type of foreshadowing

adds both structural unity and interest to the story: it ensures a steady tragic tone while it keeps the reader wondering, not exactly what will happen next, but how the inevitable tragic events will play themselves out.

Structure

The *Nibelungenlied partakes* of a twofold structure. The story is divided into two sections: the first encompassing Kriemhild's marriage to Siegfried and his subsequent death (chapters 1-19); the second covering Kriemhild's marriage to Etzel and her quest to revenge Siegfried's death (chapters 20-39). The second part builds upon and fulfills the events of the first (a type of structural foreshadowing). There is also an internal symmetry corresponding to these two parts. For instance, both parts begin with a bride-quest and a marriage, and end with death. In. keeping with the literary technique of building on and expanding on events, the first part ends with the death of a single individual, while the second part concludes with depictions of massive loss of life on botii sides of a great conflict between peoples. Gift-giving, invitations to visit, arrivals, leave-taking, and battles are represented in both parts as well. In another example of building on what has come before in the narrative, the battles depicted in part one are largely the mock fights of pageants and war games, while the fighting that concludes the epic is deadly earnest.

Historical Context

While the version *of the Nibelungenliedknown* to twentieth-century readers was written around 1200, it deals loosely with historical and legendary events which occurred or were first recounted several hundred years before. The Huns (EtzePs people in the *Nibelungenlied)* were originally a nomadic tribe from Asia. They invaded Europe around 360. They eventually settled most of their kingdom in what is now Hungary. Attila (Etzel in the *Nibelungenlied)* became king of the Huns in 433. In Latin legends he was given the nickname of "Scourge of the Gods" for his cruelty, and this is the image that has survived most widely regarding Attila. However, in the Germanic legends, he is portrayed as hospitable and fair.

The kingdom at Worms is believed to have been founded in the year 406 by the Burgundians, a Germanic people. They were conquered by the Huns under Attila in a battle in which the entire Burgundian royal family was killed. After this, what remained of the Burgundians settled in the area of France known today as Burgundy. It was after this that the names of Gunther, Giselher, and Gernot appear in their records.

The character of Dietrich of Verona is based on the historical figure of Theodoric, king of the Ostrogoths from around the year 475. As ruler of Italy from 493 he implemented legal, social, and economic reforms. He appears in the *Nibelungenlied* as Dietrich of Verona because of his historical connection to Italy.

Legends about the mythical dragon-slayer Siegfried somehow came to be associated with the tale of the overthrow of the Burgundian kingdom by the Huns. The same stories about a dragon- killing knight or warrior named Siegfried also appears in the Icelandic epic tales (called "Eddas"). These northern versions of the story differ somewhat from the Germanic versions, although they are thought to have originated from common sources. The source stories were popular throughout the regions that are now Iceland, Denmark, Norway and England.

Critical to an understanding of what motivates the characters in the *Nibelungenlied* is an understanding of the bonds of feudalism, family, and friendship. In Germanic culture of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, these issues were of compelling importance. The loyalty bond of a vassal to a lord, the bonds of blood kinship and of friendship, and the bond between husband and wife are all crucial; many conflicts in the text arise when a character is torn between conflicting demands of these varied obligations. For instance, Hagen feels honor-bound as a vassal of Brunhild's husband Gunther to defend Brunhild's honor by killing Siegfried, but since Siegfried is Kriemhild's husband and Kriemhild is Gunther's sister, he is also violating an implied bond not to hurt her. Kriemhild, in turn, betrays her husband Etzel by using him as a pawn to draw the Burgundians to their slaughter in Hungary. Rudiger is torn between his sworn loyalty to his lord, Etzel, and his bond of friendship and kinship with the Burgundians.

Such brutal behavior is rarely offset by the sometimes-explicit reminders that these events take place in a Christian culture, bound by the rules of Christian conduct.

Christianity began to spread throughout Europe in the early Middle Ages. The historical figure of Dietrich (Theodoric) was a Christian, although he belonged to an alternative, heretical sect of Christianity known as Arianism. Attila remained a pagan, but we are not certain how soon the Burgundian tribes were converted. The prevalence of Christian culture in *One Nibelungenlied was* probably the invention of the anonymous author, who was writing in the twelfth or thirteenth century, when western Europe had become almost entirely Christian. These two worlds—pagan and Christian—collide in the *Nibelungenlied* when Kriemhild, a Christian, marries Etzel, a pagan. Christian beliefs in the story are, however, given only scant treatment. There is less tension between pagan and Christian beliefs than there is within the Christian culture of the Burgundians regarding the conflicting demands of feudal obligations and self-interest.

Critical Overview

The *Nibelungenlied* was one of the most popular poems of its age, and is probably the best-known Germanic poem from the Middle Ages. Most literary analysis of the poem began after 1800, and soon Germany embraced the poem as a work of nationalism, often comparing it with Homer's *Iliad.* Essentially, commentary on the *Nibelungenlied* falls into three categories: the study of source-texts; socio-historical studies; and literary interpretations.

Much of the critical work on the *Nibelungenlied* since the eighteenth century has been done in German, but English scholarship has appeared as well. Some twentieth-century scholars have analyzed the sources of the poem, concentrating on the author's blend of historical fact, myth, and legend. Other scholars have done more literary analyses of the work, concentrating on characterization, theme and structure. According to T. M. Anderssons's A *Preface to the Nibelungenlied,* critical work in Germany on the *Nibelungenlied* from about 1902 to 1941 focused on the context of the early legends which preceded it, dealing primarily in comparisons between the known version *Nibelungenlied* and earlier versions. This critical approach is in keeping with the German to establish the *Nibelungenlied's* historical significance as a national epic.

After World War II, focus shifted to a more global European context, including historical studies on French historical works and courtly literature. This focus looked at the possible influences on the *Nibelungenlied* of works such as the *Chanson de Roland (Song of Roland)* (written aroung 1100) and other heroic tales. The historical context of medieval Germany was also explored to widen this context. Also, explorations of the "courtly" and "chivalric" elements in the work began to appear.

After about 1950, literary approaches dealing with the structure of the poem itself became popular. Such studies, according to Andersson:

assume that the structure is coherent and meaningful, thus departing from an earlier view that the poet recast an inherited story, making piecemeal modifications without strict regard for the overall plan of the poem and without necessarily imputing a consistent meaning to the whole

It is also Andersson's argument that the first half of the *Nibelungenlied* was modelled after the second part, and not vice versa.

In recent years, critical commentary has addressed qustions concerning the internal structure of the poem, its characterization, and coherence of plot. Scholarly discussions include the nature of Kriemhild's character development (from innocent bride to avenging queen), Gunther's perceived weaknesses as a king and suitor, and Hagen's guilt or innocence in the context of his role as Gunther and Brunhild's vassal.

Francis G. Gentry's article in *Monatshefte* (see Sources for Further Study) defends Hagen's actions in killing Siegfried, claiming that as Gunther's chief vassal, his "one

concern is to uphold and preserve the honor and integrity of his lord, regardless of the consequences." Not all readers would agree. Rudiger's difficult choice of whether to fight the Burgundians is also defended by Gentry, who suggests that "by entering the battle he is only doing that which is required of him under law, the defense of his lord." However, Gentry also acknowledges the difficulty of Rudiger's decision, and the impossibility of making it with a clear conscience. Rudiger ultimately chooses his feudal obligation over his moral obligation. As Rudiger says in Chapter 37 of the *Nibelungenlied,* "Whichever course I leave in order to follow the other, I shall have acted basely and infamously." Nevertheless, the choice must be made.

Gunther's character is problematic as well, and has variously been described as both strong and weak. His acquiescence to Siegfried's superior abilities in winning Brunhild is, according to most scholars, a mark against him. Lynn Thelen's article in *Monatshefte* (see Bibliography) suggests that Gunther, "is upon closer inspection revealed to be a weak and impotent ruler who must rely on the strength of others and stoop to deceit in order to preserve his realm and to realize his desires."

Scholarship on the *Nibelungenlied* has reflected the difficulties faced when trying to reconcile the various motives, intentions, and reactions of its characters, and of trying to account for the many "loose ends" left in the text. For instance, after Siegfried's death, Brunhild almost disappears from the story. KriemMld's actions after her husband's death (chosing to remain in the court that harbors her husband's killers; agreeing to marry Etzel without being sure that this will help her avenge herself on the killers), are also puzzling to many readers. Hagen's role (with respect to leadership, authority, and power) comes to supercede that of Gunther in the second part of the story. These issues have been and will probably continue to be extensively debated by critics and students studying *The Nibelungenlied.*

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

In the following essay, LeVert surveys both critical and popular reception of the German national epic and addresses questions of genre.

The *Nibelungenlied* is a work which has elicited both critical acclaim and literary frustration. W. A. Mueller in *The Nibelungenlied Today* suggests that the *Nibelungenlied* "reflected the Germanic concepts of strife, misfortune, death as fate ... which he must meet with courage and defiance to triumph over them," These issues do pervade the story, as does the characters' abilities to deal effectively with them. Many heroic deeds are performed in the name of honor. Friends even kill friends in the name of honor. But is the *Nibelungenlied* a story which celebrates honor and heroic deeds? As an epic, yes, it is. But the question deserves a more complex answer.

As an epic which encompasses strong elements of the romance genre, the *Nibelungenlied* has sometimes been accused of trying to be neither, and yet both. However, several factors must be taken into account before readers can make such a judgment. First, the elements treated in both genres are largely similar. They both deal with the adventures of knights and ladies, fierce battles, and a code of honorable conduct which pervades the lives of everyone. The difference between epic and romance is in *how* the author treats the elements at hand. It is perhaps due to a combination of these two approaches that the *Nibelungenlied* at times seems unable to decide what it wants to be, or what it wants to say. The epic genre was more concerned with the deeds of knights and noblemen, with "heroic" issues of nobility of spirit, fortitude of character, and physical displays of strength. These are all discussed in a very "grandiose" style. The deeds are performed in battle, on perilous journeys, while fighting dragons and monsters, and always with extensive commentary and long speeches by the characters or narrator himself.

In addition to the *Nibelungenlied's* merging of the literary genres of both epic and romance, the tale attempts to develop its characters into a tragic framework which complements both genres. A tragic figure is one whose misfortunes arise not out of an evil personality, and not necessarily out of a character flaw. Rather, tragedy often strikes "good" characters who make some tragic error in judgment. If this is a suitable working definition, then the reader must ask what error in judgment instigates the final tragedy of the *Nibelungenlied.*

Many scholars suggest that Kriemhild is the protagonist who sets the tragic consequences in motion. The evolution of Kriemhild's character in the *Nibelungenlied* is certainly the force which wreaks havoc at the end of the story, and indeed, throughout. Perhaps she herself is the tragic "flaw". She certainly evolves, or perhaps devolves, from innocent child-bride to avenging queen. This is an example of how epic and romance merge, and perhaps conflict. Kriemhild's motives are perhaps in keeping with an "epic" character. She does, after all, seek vengeance for a murdered husband. Nonetheless, Kriemhild's "just vengeance" is not an ideology that all the characters

agree with. Here there are inconsistencies in the literary text itself. For instance, when Siegfried's corpse begins to bleed at Hagen's approach, why do Siegfried's

Nibelungs not immediately seek the justice that Knemhild had promised earlier would be theirs? Why does not Kriemhild herself not give the order to attack? Perhaps because the story would have to stop right here and now! But perhaps it is because Kriemhild's development has just begun.

Does Kriemhild utterly lose her feminine, "romantic" image? It would seem so. Indeed, Kriemhild could perhaps be seen as a character who evolves from a "romantic" to an "epic" character. This evolution is seen throughout the *Nibelungenlied .* Even the narrator's objective tone cannot omit the constant, tragic foreshadowing which follows Kriemhild throughout the story. She never stops mourning Siegfried's death, and her grief grows into bitterness, vengeance, and a truly epic blood-lust. Charles Moorman, in his article on "The *Nibelungenlied*" suggests that Kriemhild develops "from obstinate maiden to charming bride to grief-stricken widow to revengeful devil." W. A. Mueller in *The Ntbelungenlied Today* has suggested that the author of this story subscribes to a "tragic view of life." This causes the characters to initiate their "own sorrows in spite of the potentials of greatness, happiness, and innocence." This certainly descnbes Kriemhild's results. But can she be "judged" according to modern standards for her actions? This is a question that readers must determine for themselves.

Whatever Kriemhild's persona represents, it seems clear that the event of Siegfried's death is the catalyst which spurs all further action. Thus two questions arise. First, what led to Siegfried's death in the first place? Next, what events led to the subsequent downfall of the Burgundian dynasty? With respect to the first question, the reader must ask what event "triggered" the murder. Was it Siegfried's initial decision to help Gunther win Brunhild? His pride and arrogance in taking the girdle and ring from Brunhild? Or his foolishness in giving them to Knemhild, who used them to goad Brunhild? Moreover, what role does Brunhild really play in the *Nibelungenlied* ? Is she a pawn used to further the action? The question can be raised, but perhaps not sufficiently answered. What is clear, however, is that Kriemhild's evolution in character is a unifying force in the story.

Now for the second question. What led to the downfall of the Burgundian dynasty? Before attempting to ariswer (and there is not necessarily a "correct" answer to this question either), it must be remember that, by killing Siegfried, Hagen was technically only fulfilling his feudal oath of loyalty to Brunhild. He could not have known the tragedy which would ensue. Or could he? Nevertheless, his actions instigate what amounts to an international incident. But is Hagen "responsible" in the modern sense? Moreover, what role does Etzel ultimately play in the tragedy which ensues? Is he used as a pawn as well? Let us first consider the events which followed Siegfried's death.

The events at Siegfried's funeral were enough to plant the seeds of vengeance in Kriemhild, seeds which grew into a plan of all-encompassing devastation. But several questions arise with regards to the unfolding story. First, why does Gunther himself not acknowledge the portent of Siegfried's bleeding corpse? It is perhaps because he himself was complicit in the death of Siegfried, the very man who won Brunhild for the

king. If Gunther at this point were to agree with Knemhild that Hagen was the murderer, would he not open himself to similar charges for his own involvement? Hagen himself is an enigma. He on the one hand does not at first admit the deed; nor does he deny it. In fact, he is silent on the matter. It is Gunther who speaks in Hagen's defense. But is Gunther's authority so absolute that his word goes unquestioned? It has not seemed so thus far. These are all loose ends, questions and puzzles which scholars have for centuries tried to reconcile.

Perhaps the tragic events merely provide a forum in which the author can explore the issue of heroism. W. A. Mueller in *The Nibelungenlied Today* believes that although some of the "heroes" in the story epitomize "the concept of heroic death as glory and fulfillment, the poet does not dwell upon the triumph which they voice; instead, we are reminded of the tragic aspects of their death and of the sorrow of their surviving friends and king." It is true that death and destruction are paramount in the story. Charles Moorman in his article on "The *Nibelungenlied"* believes that there are *no* heros in the *Nibelungenlied.* Moorman suggests that even though a character like Hagen may represent the ideals of chivalry, integrity and loyalty, the ideals are reduced to "barbarous cruelty." The same might be said for Knemhild, Hagen's only equal in the story. Moorman suggests that "like integrity in Kriemhild, fidelity in Hagen breeds barbarity rather than heroic valor."

Gunther himself has come under much cntical fire. Lynn Thalen has suggested that Siegfried's wooing of Kriemhild serves as a foil for Gunther's wooing of Brunhild. She suggests that by "juxtaposing Siegfried's valorous feats with Gunther's anxious inactivity, the author effects a devastating portrayal of the Burgundian king." This is indeed a scathing commentary on Gunther, but not an uncommon one. The reader might find it disturbing that the king and leader of a conquering dynasty should be portrayed as weak and ineffectual; unless, of course, the author's purpose is to highlight the deeds and personalities of Siegfried and Hagen, which he does. Thus the issue of "heroism" arises again. Lynn Thalen further criticizes Gunther for his weak nature in the scenes where he welcomes guests: "Gunther is challenged and each time he responds in awed silence, necessitating the quick wits of others to preserve his honor." These are not the actions of a hero, nor a "leader" in either the medieval nor the modern sense.

And what of Rudiger's moral struggle at the end? How does one reconcile the two conflicting worlds he has found himself between? Rudiger in many senses represents the best of both worlds. He is an exemplary feudal vassal and a loyal and trustworthy friend. These two ideals should not have to conflict, and yet they do.

So what is the reader left with? A "testament of despair" as Charles Moorman suggests? A mixed bag of history, legend, myth with only tragic threads to connect it all? What is the "message" of the *Nibelungenlige,* or does it have one? In reading a text which admits so many contradictions and critical disagreement, each reader is placed in his or her own critical position. Nonetheless, perhaps the merging of two genres, epic and romance, both raises and answers all of the above questions. It should not be necessary for the author to "choose" between writing an epic and writing a romance. Nor should it be necessary for Rudiger to "choose" between feudal bonds and

friendship. With this in mind, the reader should try to reconcile the merging of two literary ideals, romance and epic, and try to determine how and why they work together in this tragic story.

Source: Laurelle LeVert, for *Epics for Students,*.Gale Research, 1997.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Hatto offers reasoned speculations about the anonymous author of The Nibelungenlied.

Nothing is known about the poet beyond what we learn from his work. It was evidently a convention that the authors of heroic poems, which were written in a more traditional and popular style than the fashionable romances of the knights, should remain anonymous. No author of a heroic poem names himself during the earlier history of medieval German poetry. On th,e evidence of the *Nibelungenlied* alone we can only guess at the poet's status, and there is no agreed guess.

Some think that the poet may have been a mmisterialis, or 'unfree' knight bound to the service of a lord, that is a man of the same status as his great contemporaries Hartmann von Aue and Wolfram von Eschenbach. Others think of him as a menial cleric with a turn for poetry in his mother tongue. Yet others take him to be a superior sort of 'minstrel', a type of poet that whether in fact or theory, belonged to the nondescript class of wayfarers or strolling entertainers, somewhat suspect, because rootless, plebeians. Yet there are well-authenticated instances of 'minstrels' who were not only members of the households of lords lay or spiritual, but also sometimes settled owners of fiefs, well-to-do, valued men capable of discharging a variety of useful offices for their masters. These guesses virtually exhaust the possibilities, for it is unthinkable that the *Nibelungenlied* was the work of a secular lord, an ecclesiastic, a monk, a merchant, or a peasant

Despite forthright and even ill-tempered assertions that our poet must have been a knight, the evidence for this claim is weak. Interest in courtly customs, ceremonies, and dress is of course not decisive, since courtly patrons at this time will have expected it. Our poet's sensitive outlook may have matured below the salt. A man of humbler origins than a ministerialis could have had ample opportunity of conversing with his betters as Haydn and others would in a later age, had he been as gifted. But if, against probability, he was indeed a ministerialis, we may be thankful that he kept any enthusiasm he had for the new French fashions of chivalry within such reasonable bounds, since he might easily have ruined his theme. There is, however, a powerful argument, hitherto overlooked, why the poet is unlikely to have been a knight of any sort. It applies to his idea of a hunt. No nobleman who wished to be accepted as such by his fellows would have concocted so absurd a sequence of events as those narrated in Chapter 16, for no student of the hunt can take them seriously. It is quite the flimsiest affair of the chase among all the more respectable narratives of the German Middle Ages. This is at one with the remarkable fact that in an epic in which there is so much fighting there is not a single military technicality such as one finds in other heroic epics like the *Iliad* and the *Song of Roland,* or even in contemporary Arthurian narratives like *Parzival*

Perhaps the best reason for thinking of the poet as a cleric is that he could cope with over two thousand quatrains on parchment. Yet there are grounds for believing that non-clerical poets could do the same — competition was growing keen in the field of literary

entertainment. This would justify us in thinking of the poet as 'semi-clerical', if we like, that is as having enjoyed some schooling. Another reason for thinking him a cleric might be him assumed connexion with the Bishop's City of Passau, Yet the very bishop in whom many would see his chief patron, Wolfger, later Patriarch of Aquilea, generously supported lay poets, the most famous of whom was Walther von der Vogelweide. But if the poet was in fact a cleric, which of course does not necessarily mean a priest, he had a remarkable capacity for thrusting ecclesiastical considerations aside and abandoning himself to the ethos of his subject-matter, which, as we have seen, is far from Christian. We have reviewed the argument that the *Nibelungenlied* may be a sermon on the Fall of Pride, and found that if it is, it is a very unclerical sermon. The most clerical touches in the whole epic, perhaps, are two instances in which the poet praises natural at the expense of counterfeit complexions (pp. 83,206), and a passage in which he dwells, with much tolerant humour and even complacency, on the long-drawn-out greetings of the ladies (p. 83). This is all, and it amounts to very little. On the other hand, God, the Devil, Church, and the mass are mere narrative conveniences to this poet, or they are part of the normal social background. The warning in Chapter 31 should be heeded, for surely we know where we stand when a man of Hagen's stamp, having dragged a chaplain from the sacred utensils of his mobile altar and thrown him into the Danube without provocation, reminds the Burgundians to confess their sins. Nor is there a note of zeal or disapproval when he tells of Christian living cheek by jowl with pagan at Etzel's Court. If the poet was indeed a cleric he doffed his cassock and folded it neatly away before taking up his quill. He would have been the most facile cleric in medieval German literature, had he in fact been a priest. Much has been said above on his astonishing lack of candour in attributing motives for the deeds he narrates.

We are left with the least hazardous surmise, that the author of the *Nibelungenlied* was a lay poet of plebeian status who had acquired the art of letters at a school and then considerable personal culture in the household of a lord. Are there any positive arguments in favour of this conception?

There is the general argument that heroic poetry in German during this period was purveyed by the miscellaneous and not easily definable 'minstrel' class, and we shall see that what can be reconstructed of our poet's main sources was strongly marked by the 'minstrel' style, which he adopts and refines. There is in the narrative of our poem some very special pleading on behalf of superior minstrels, in part inherited and retained from a minstrel predecessor, in part our poet's contribution. King Etzel sends a leading vassal, the Margrave Rudiger, to Burgundy to sue for the hand of Kriemhild, yet to invite her royal brothers to Hungary he dispatches the minstrels Werbel and Swemmel, highly favoured men within their own class, but very small fry beside Rudiger. One might be tempted to explain this away by arguing that minstrels were the accepted go-betweens, secret agents, and tools for dirty work of their day, and that this pair were appropriately chosen to lure the Burgundians to their doom (for which, incidentally, one of them paid with his hand) (p.243). But however this may have been in the poet's source, as he tells the story they were chosen for their mission not by Kriemhild but by Etzel, and in good faith. Another explanation offered is that the Burgundians might have harboured less suspicion towards on invitation conveyed by men of so peaceful a profession. In real life they are unthinkable as royal ambassadors

for such an occasion, and it is best to ascribe them to the wistful and perhaps ironic imaginings of a poet on the fringe of high society. And here, no doubt, is the point: what gifts were lavished on Werbel and Swemmel, going and coming on their embassy!. It is both amusing and touching to see in what princely fashion these minstrels — already worth a thousand marks each from the takings at Knemhild's wedding — live for the brief space of their'royal mission. The same theme of largesse is touched on with a rather personal show of impersonality when Kriemhild rewards the messenger for his news of the Saxon war: 'Such gifts encourage one to tell such news to great ladies.' And then there is the enigmatic figure of Volker, Hagen's comrade-in-arms. We know for sure that the poet inherited Volker from his source for the second part of his poem, and there are some grounds for believing that Volker may have been of minstrel status in it. Our poet, however, presents Volker as a nobleman who brings thirty of his own vassals to the wars, and he gives him prominence in battle. Volker nevertheless retains his viol and his title of 'Fiddler' and 'Minstrel' as a sobriquet, and he plays the army to sleep. He is further distinguished by being made to sing to Lady Gotelind to his own accompaniment, earning the favour of a rich reward. Thus the poet by implication thrice advances the claims to honour of 'minstrels': in diplomacy, at court before the ladies, and on the field of battle. It is hard to imagine either a poor knight or a menial cleric doing this for his professional rivals.

The safest guess is, then, that the strange genius who wrote the *Nibelungenlied* was a semi-clerical poet by profession, technically of the order of *vagi* or wayfarers, though probably sedentary for much of his life.

Source: A T. Hatto, in an Appendix to *The Nibelungenlied,* translated by A. T. Hatto, Penguin, 1969, pp. 354-57.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Mowatt talks about both the literary merits of The Nibelungenlied *and its role as the German national epic.*

The*Nibelungenliedhas* on occasion been compared to the *Iliad.* The fact that Germans have been impelled to make, and foreigners disposed to deride, such a comparison, is revealing in itself, for it shows the veneration both works have suffered. Assessment of their literary merit has been geographically conditioned, with Homer belonging to western civilization as a whole, and the *Nibelungenlied* for the most part only to Germany. But in both cases scholars have painstakingly erected a barrier between heritage and inheritors. The occasional whiff of vanished glory that came over has been made to serve the literary and political establishment. The interesting circumstance that both works deal with events and customs that must have appeared exotic, if not bizarre, to their authors, is not emphasized. The suggestion that the virtues of our Achaean or Germanic ancestors could have been held up to bardic ridicule is discouraged. And yet they obviously are. Agamemnon, as Robert Graves points out in the introduction to his recent translation, *The Anger of Achilles* (1959), is completely out of his depth throughout most of the *Iliad.*

What poet, after all, would wish to identify himself with a bloodthirsty, conceited and obstinate king, who is not successful even by his own standards, and eventually comes to a sticky end? And the career of King Gunther in the *Nibelungenlied* is no more exemplary. Like Agamemnon, he is killed in ignominious circumstances, by a woman. Admittedly she is only his sister. But his wife shows little respect for his kingly person either: she removes him from their conjugal bed on the first night, and hangs him on a convenient nail till morning. It seems that the whole concept of royal infallibility was at least questionable in the eyes of these two poets.

The *Nibelungenlied* goes further in this direction than Homer, and the efforts of its scholarly guardians not to notice the fact have been correspondingly stronger. Unfortunately, the increase in narrative detachment seems to have involved a deterioration in traditional cliches, so that the recitals of bloody deeds and barbaric splendours are even more perfunctory in the *Nibelungenlied* than in *the Iliad.* Stripped of its irony, *thcNibelungenliedis* tedious in the extreme, and can only be taken seriously by someone in desperate need of a heroic past. The blond Germanic beast marching bravely towards his fate is not to everyone's taste. Nor, for that matter, is the hidebound medieval court, obsessed with power and protocol. As long as these two elements were kept isolated, and regarded with bovine earnestness, the *Nibelungenlied* was guaranteed a cool reception by most people, and in most ages. It was offered, and rejected, as a work extolling two self-contradictory orthodoxies, neither of which is very interesting in itself. Luckily, however, orthodoxies are seldom sacred in literature and the *Nibelungenlied* is no exception to this rule. Positions are certainly taken up in the work, but they clash, sometimes comically, sometimes tragically, and very little is left of any of them at the end. The particular pretensions chosen for undermining were historically conditioned. Instead of Trafalgar, the sanctity of the home and the royal family, for

instance, they had their heroic past, the sanctity of woman and an ideal of courtly behaviour. Instead of the hydrogen bomb, or sex, they had mythical figures like Sifrid and Brimnhilde on which to focus their hopes and fears.

Much work has been devoted to finding out something about the author, and the literary tradition in which he worked.... The yield is meagre: he was an unknown poet, probably of knightly (i.e. unexceptionable) status, writing at the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. He was probably Austrian, and may have worked for a certain Bishop of Passau. He must have known earlier versions of parts (perhaps the whole) of the material he was using, because variations on the same characters and situations are found scattered throughout Scandinavian and German literature. Any attempt to achieve greater precision on this score must be speculative. All the Scandinavian sources are later than the *Nibelungenlied,* although parts of them must be based on much earlier material.... In Germany there is the *Hildebrandslied* (written down at Fulda in the nineth century), which treats the story of Dietrich, Hildebrand and his son in archaic and highly idiosyncratic language. It is possible that the *Nibelungenlied* poet was familiar with a version of this poem, but if so he made no use of it. The Walther story referred to by Hildebrand in stanza 2344 is similarly unexploited, apart from this one mention.

The truth is there are no immediate sources; and those who need something to compare with the finished product have been reduced to reconstructing earlier versions for themselves. The process is circular, and the result unverifiable.... It seems reasonably certain that there were in existence a number of short episodic lays clustering round such figures as Sifnd, Bninnhilde, Dietrich, Hagen and Kriemhilde; and perhaps an extended narrative treating the downfall of the Burgundians. Nothing is established for these works beyond the bare probability of their existence.

The ultimate sources of the *Nibelungenlied* are much easier to discern. They are: legend (from a heroic past in the fourth to sixth centuries), chivalry (an orthodoxy from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) and myth. The wars and great migrations following the advent of the Huns in eastern Europe threw up legendary heroes like Theoderic (Dietrich) of Verona, Hildebrand, Hagen and Gundaharius (Gunther), King of the Burgundians. Some of these men actually existed, as Theodoric, who ruled over Italy from 493 to 526, and Gundaharius, whose kingdom by the Rhine was in fact destroyed by the Huns (though not under Attila) in 435. Others, like Hildebrand, are just prototypes of the Germanic fighting hero. These figures carry their legendary past with them, and their social unit is the family or tribe, As might be expected from their origins, there is often something of the landless knight or exile about them, especially when heroic exploits are involved. But the details of their dress, speech, eating and courting habits, public rituals and, in the case of Riideger at least, of their moral preoccupations, are taken from medieval courtly society. These details constitute the second, or chivalric, element. The third, or mythological, element is embodied in figures like Sifrid, Brimnhilde and Alberich the dwarf, who stand out as belonging to no society at all, as being in some way subhuman or superhuman.

So much for the ingredients. The mixture seems to have gone down well, to judge from the number of manuscripts which have survived, and it is not difficult to see why. Past

greatness, present pretensions and the possibility of rejuvenation (or destruction) from outside—this is a combination which must exercise a perpetual fascination for all self-conscious societies. It is true that an expansive community may believe for short periods that sophistication is an irreversible process; but recent history has shown how easily the most complex network of relationships can be reduced to primitive posturing, given the right circumstances. And this is exactly what happens in the *Nibelungenlied,* where a highly developed society reverts under strain.

We are shown, first of all, the court at Worms. It is presided over by the brothers Gunther, Gernot and Giselher, and actually run by Hagen. Everyone knows his place, and there are set procedures for every situation. They are, on the whole, a tedious and complacent company. Their sister Kriemhilde is outwardly an exemplary Burgundian lady, but she shows signs of being self-willed about her emotional life (stanza 17), and has an ominous future foretold for her (stanza 14).

The court at Santen is much the same. As at Worms, the homogeneity extends to the names Sigebert and Sigelinde, but their son Sifrid is even more of a misfit than Gunther's sister. Not only is his name wrong (just as Kriemhilde refuses to alliterate with her brothers), but he has a rather unorthodox past. As we later learn from Hagen, he is invulnerable, has slain a dragon and owns a magic treasure.

The court at Isenstein, by contrast, is dominated by a single remarkable woman, determined to rely on her own strength until the right man arrives. Her demands are quite simple: he must be the best (i.e. the strongest and bravest) man available. This is not perhaps so very different from the standard applied at Worms, where the king is by definition endowed with both these qualities. But the really anti-social thing about Briinnhilde is that she insists on putting royal pretensions to the test, and killing all the mighty monarchs who fail. She is a challenge to people like Gunther to justify their title. Of course Gunther himself is no fool, and would never dream of exposing himself to such a blast of reality; but the arrival of Sifrid opens up new possibilities Here, suddenly, is a man who equates kingship with conquest (stanzas 108 ff.), just like Briinnhilde, and who is eminently capable of meeting the challenge. Moreover he wants to marry Gunther's sister, and is prepared to go to any lengths to do so. Presented with this happy circumstance, it is an easy matter for the practised diplomat to manipulate Sifrid into satisfying all Briinnhilde's demands incognito, leaving all the credit, and the tangible prize, to Gunther. There is the rather intimate question of the bed, but after that has been solved and hushed up the glory of Burgundy seems assured.

The thing which destroys the foundations, if not at first the complacency of Worms, is the tension between inflated appearance and mean reality. The qualities in Sifrid and Briinnhilde that eventually uncover this tension are precisely those which the Burgundians have tried to use for their own aggrandizement. Briinnhilde is too honest and uncompromising to accept the official version of Sifrid's status, and once again she insists on putting appearances to the test. The quarrel between the two queens and the ritual murder of Sifrid are the result. Sifrid's own crime is simply to behave in character. He is quite willing to let the Burgundians use his strength, but he makes no attempt to disguise his superiority. He is quite blandly indifferent to all the jealousies, rules and

compromises which hold the society together. He is not interested in money (stanzas 558, 694-5), status (stanza 386), face-saving ceremony (stanzas 748-9) or political etiquette (stanzas 314-15). And, worst of all, he seems to have forgotten all about the sanctity of women as soon as he married Kriemhilde (stanzas 858, 894). Such innocence is in itself provocative. His one vulnerable spot is known only to Kriemhilde, and she, like a good Burgundian, betrays it to Hagen.

With Sifrid dead, and his treasure hastily dumped in the Rhine, it is left to Kriemhilde and Hagen to fight it out. In the process, the whole way of life at Burgundy is inexorably deflated and destroyed. The last magnificent tournament ends in a brutal killing; the elaborate political speeches are reduced to childish defiance; the subtly interlocking loyalties and prohibitions to blind tribal solidarity; the splendid feasting and drinking to the final macabre meal of blood, with corpses for benches. The mighty king is trussed up, and slaughtered by his sister. The crown of courtly womanhood is carved up by Dietrich's retainer.

Loyalty and good faith, made for security, are turned to destruction, so that allegiance to either side is the equivalent of a death sentence. Neutrality, on the other hand, is impossible, as even Dietrich discovers. He does, it is true, survive, but stripped of all the relationships which he and Hildebrand had built up round themselves (stanza 2319). Riideger, a much weaker and more dependent character, is pathetically caught in a dilemma of his own making. His hospitality and his readiness to oblige a lady, both excellent social qualities, have tied him equally to the Burgundians and to Kriemhilde. Obsessive generosity, designed to win lifelong friends, provides the instrument of his death. The bonds that once held society together now destroy it. At Etzel's court everyone is an exile.

Source: D. G Mowatt, in an introduction to *The Ntbelungenlied,* translated by D. G. Mowatt, Dent, 1962, pp v-x.

Critical Essay #4

fa *the following excerpt, the critics explore some possible source material for this epic. They commend the work's blending of historical fact with mythic elements, and maintain that it was probably written by a single author.*

The *Nibelungenlied,* like the *Beowulf,* is a poem embodying materials drawn from Germanic history, mythology, and legend, a story of "old, unhappy, far-off things, and battles long ago." ... It contains the story of Siegfried, dragon-slayer and winner of the treasure of the Nibelungs; his courtship of Kriemhild, sister of Gunther, King of the Burgundians, and their marriage; his winning of Brunhild, by a trick, for Gunther; the feud between Brunhild and Kriemhild; the murder of Siegfried by Gunther's vassal, Hagen; the marriage of Kriemhild to Etzel, King of the Huns, and Etzel's invitation to the Burgundians; the death of Gunther and Hagen in Etzel's hall; and finally, the death of Kriemhild.

We recognize parts of this story from our knowledge of its most recent version, that found in Wagner's operas called the *Ring of the Nibelungs.* We notice, also, that Wagner's version is in many respects quite different from that of the *Nibelungenlied.* Wagner saw the story as one in which the most important personages were Siegfried and Brunhild, and, like many Germans of his time, he thought of them as figures drawn from the Germanic pantheon: a culture-hero, almost a demigod, and a Valkyr, a battle-maiden, the chooser of the slain destined for Valhalla. In order to attain his artistic objective, he wrote two operas, *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walkiire,* which tell of the events preceding the story of Siegfried and the rival queens found in the *Nibelungenlied.* In the central opera, *Siegfried,* he tells the story of the dragon-slaying and the winning of the hoard, and includes an event scarcely glanced at in the *Nibelungenlied,* the betrothal of Siegfried and Brunhild. And in the final opera of the cycle *Die Gotterdammerung (The Twilight of the Gods),* he tells of the murder of Siegfried and the self-immolation of Brunhild on his funeral pyre, this last incident also not found in the *Nibelungenlied.*

Wagner's version, also, makes much more use of Germanic mythology than does the *Nibelungenlied.* The Middle High German poem, written in a thoroughly Christian atmosphere, could not well bring in Wotan, the principal deity of the Germanic pantheon; but Wagner's presentation of the story demanded the presence of these gods. For such materials he went to the versions of the story current in medieval Scandinavia, preserved in the Eddas, and, most completely, in the thirteenth-century Icelandic *Volsungasaga.*

The *Volsungasaga* tells a story very like that found in the *Nibelungenlied,* but it contains also other elements not found in the Germanic poem, especially the story of the birth of Siegfried (called Sigurd in the Norse), and the events which took place after the death of Gunther (Gunnar) and Hagen (Hogni). Although it was written down some two hundred years after the *Nibelungenlied,* it was not in the least influenced by that poem; rather, it is another version of the same story, drawn from the same source.

And here we must repeat what we said earlier, that the *Nibelungenlied* is a poem embodying elements drawn from Germanic mythology, legend, and history. In the *Nibelungenlied,* it is true, the mythological elements are of the slightest, if indeed, strictly speaking, they exist at all. Folklore material is there in plenty: the slaying of the dragon, for instance, and the *Tarnkappe,* the hood of invisibility, are matters met with in many fairy tales. Basically, however, the story is legend founded on history.

The historical fact underlying the legends, found widely throughout the Germanic-speaking areas, is the destruction of the Burgundian capital at Worms, in 437, by the Huns, whose king was Attila. We recognize that this must be the same name as Etzel, found in the *Nibelungenlied,* and Atli, in the *Volsungasaga.* The Burgundian princes, was we know from an early document called the "Law of the Burgundians," were named Gibica, Gundahari, and Gislahari: and these must be the same names as Gibich, father of Gunther, Gernot and Giselher, The treacherous invitation of Etzel at his wife's prompting, and his killing of Gunther and Hagen, must be a legendary reflection of the defeat of the Burgundians, for people do not celebrate their defeats in their stories; rather, they adapt history to legend in order to explain their defeats. Modern examples of this phenomenon are not lacking.

The adaptation of history to legend is the prerogative of the epic poet, who need have no concern with fact as such. Theodoric of Verona, or Dietrich von Bern, another famous German legendary and historical figure, died in 526; yet the *Nibelungenlied*-poet has him present at the death of Kriemhild, which must have been nearly a century earlier. Probably the poet was not in the least aware that he was mixing up his centuries, for he was a poet, not a historian, and, just as Wagner was to do many centuries later, he used whatever material he had as his artistic necessities demanded.

The Germanic values of the *Nibelungenlied* still prevail, beneath the courtly facade. Gunther is a medieval prince, adept in political intrigue; but it is not difficult to see in him, as in King Siegfried, the earlier "bestower-of-rings" and "shield-of-knights." This courtliness, however, owes something to the expanding influences of French models. None of the earlier Germanic stories takes any peat interest in romantic love; and love between man and woman is one of the primary forces of the *Nibelungenlied.* In this the epic is the product of its time, the late Middle Ages; for romantic love was not earlier a source of the question of loyalties.

The *Nibelungenlied-po&t* could have found easy scope for lyricism in the magical background of the poem. The ring and girdle of Brunhild, the winning of the Hoard, the awakening of Brunhild within the circle of fire—these episodes, and many more, could have carried him from his artistic purpose. Fortunately, these temptations were not victorious; perhaps, if they had prevailed, the *Nibelungenlied* would be only another interesting lay of medieval Germany. As in other poetry of epic stature, however, the mythological tradition behind the creation of the work is either told in episodic, narrative fashion, or implied. In the *Nibelungenlied,* most of this material is implied. It is very difficult to trace the mechanical techniques by which the effect is accomplished. Why does Brunhild tower over Kriemhild, in spite of their mutual ownership of the magical objects of power, and the greater number of lines which are given to Kriemhild and her

revenge? Why, without a single explicit line of proof, does Hagen tower above Gunther, worthy to be the nemesis of Siegfried and the last of the men of Nibelung to die in battle? Even without any knowledge of the Eddas or the *Volsungasaga,* any perceptive reader can feel their stature.

Keeping the mystic elements in the background, the poet of the *Nibelungenlied* saves his lyric power for more human and personal topics, as does Dante in the episode of Paolo and Francesca in the *Divine Comedy.* The German poet's description of Siegfried's first meeting with Kriemhild is scarcely to be rivaled:

Even as the full moon stands before the stars, so pure in her radiance that all clouds must run away before her, so did she stand in beauty among her ladies For Dante's Francesca, "the greatestpain of all is remembrance of past happiness in present woe"; for Knemhild, "all pleasure, no matter how sweet, must at last turn to pain." But, whether the emphasis be upon fate or upon the Christian eternity, the sweetest passages in both epics are those of human love.

Scholarly search for the author of the *Nibelungenlied* has, to date, been inconclusive. A bishop of the late tenth century—Pilgrim of Passau— had created most of the main incidents of the story, as his own version of popular legend; he is accepted as a main source for the poem. A Minnesinger known as *"Der Kurenberger"* is known to have written at least fifteen detached stanzas in the same metre. Yet, although the "folk-epic" theory of the nineteenth century has long been in disrepute, no valid scholarship has established the identity of the poet. The uniformity of style, as well as the method of incorporating myth, points to a single author. Karl Lachmann, the Germanic scholar, has found at least twenty lays of ancient origin which seem to form a part of the poem; his research, although of the "folk-epic" school, has indicated to many modern critics the probability of individual authorship; it is unlikely, they argue, that these vastly rich background sources could have been coordinated in such a manner by a "folk-author." Furthermore, his nineteen "twelfth-century additions" would appear to indicate a uniformity too great for a "folk epic" It is, in fact, unlikely that any poem of epic stature could have been other than individual in authorship. An epic cannot have "the quality of growth, rather than of authorship," although centuries of growth may lie behind it.

Some critics believe that the *Nibelungenlied* was, in its earliest form, meant to be sung rather than read. Its verse-form, a four-line strophe, instead of the couplet-form of the later romantic epics, seems to corroborate this theory. There can be little doubt that the early lays of which it is formed were sung in courtly circles. But the music of the German epic is not the music of the Minnesinger; there is now little question that it was meant to be read. There were, as we have seen, many versions of the story available, but this does not mean that it grew by itself from the songs of minstrels. The story of the fall of the Burgundian kingdom must have inspired many poets, even as the absorption of the Geats led to the creation of the semi-mythological Beowulf. But, as the *Beowulf is* now accepted as the creation of an individual, so must the *Nibelungenlied* have been a unification of many poetic tales by one author. Its simplicity and uniformity of diction, its classical richness, so well disciplined, seem ample testimony, combined with the usual linguistic and literary tests, of its single authorship. But it is very pleasant to think of the

poem as recited to the sound of harps. Its meter, with the marked caesura, the measured half-line of three feet, with the last half-line of each strophe extended to four feet, seems admirably suited to such presentation. However, the careful artistic variation of accent indicates that it was meant to be read.

Source: Arthur E. Hutson and Patricia McCoy, "Nibelungenlied," in *Epics of the Western World,* J B Lippencott Company, 1954, pp. 297-336.

Adaptations

Die Nibelungen was made into a two-part black-and-white silent movie in 1924. It was produced in Germany, and directed by Fritz Lang. It is now available on Laser Disc (Disc Format CLV) as well as on 16mm film. The two parts are "Siegfried's Death" and "Kriemhild's Revenge." The movie elaborates on the tales of Siegfried's youth, and is quite faithful to the story of the *Nibelungenlied.*

German composer Richard Wagner turned the story of the Nibelungs into the four operas *oiDer Ring des Nibelungen (The Ring of the Nibelungs).* Separately, the four operas are: *Das Rheingold*

(The Rhinegold), Die Walkure (The Valkyries), Siegfried and *Gotterdamerung (The Twilight of the Gods).* He drew from both the *Nibelungenlied* and on the Norse Eddas to compose his plots. Many versions of the operas are available on CD, video, and laser disk.

J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings,* a fantasy tale that focuses on the early accomplishments of Siegfried the dragon-slayer, is available in a 1978 animated film. It was directed by Ralph Bakshi, and produced by Republic Pictures. It is available on video.

Topics for Further Study

What type of warfare was practiced in the Middle Ages? How did it differ from the warfare practiced by the soldiers of the Roman Empire?

Explore the development of knighthood and the code of chivalry. This includes the growth of jousts and tournaments, new developments in armor, and the traditions of courtly love. Give examples of how *thsNibelungenlied* poet presents these issues.

Explore the development of feudalism as a sociopolitical structure in the Middle Ages. How is feudalism manifested in the *Nibelungenlied?.*

What personal, social, cultural, and political roles do women play in the social setting presented in the *Nibelungenlied?* Compare their roles with women's roles in the late twentieth century.

Compare and contrast the characters of Brunhild and Kriemhild. Are they more alike or different?

The narrator of the epic states explicitly several times (for example, at the close of Chapter 14), that the bloodshed in the second part of the *Nibelungenlied* is the result of pettiness on the part of the two queens. Compare and contrast the reasons for strife between the Burgundians and Huns in the *Nibelungenlied* with that between the Greeks and Trojans in the *Iliad,* between the kingdoms of Malinke and Sossa in *Sundiata,* or between any two modern nations that have gone to war. Is the cause of warfare in the *Nibelungenlied* any more or less valid than in your other example? Are some wars started for justifiable and others for unjustifiable reasons?

What are the qualities of a "hero" by twentieth-century standards? Compare this to the concept of hero in the *tins Nibelungenlied.* Then compare the "heroic" roles of Hagen and Rudiger. Are they both heroes? How do they compare to what constitutes a modern hero? Use evidence from the text.

What are the qualities and characteristics of a good leader? In view of those qualities, is Gunther a good leader? How does he compare with Etzel of Hungary? Use evidence from the text.

Compare and Contrast

Middle Ages: During the Middle Ages, laws and punishments varied from country to country, sometimes even from city to city. The type of justice and the punishments inflicted in the Middle Ages often "fit" the crime in very literal ways.

Late twentieth century: Modern legal systems eschew "eye for an eye" retributive justice. The legal systems of most nations purport to be fair and objective, with rehabilitation being a primary goal.

Middle Ages: Vengeance—revenge for a wrong done—is seen as an equitable form of justice.

Late twentieth century: Justice is commonly interpreted as punishment for the guilty and preservation of the innocent. Revenge is not supposed to be a reason for seeking justice.

Middle Ages: Kingship was hereditary. Rulers in the Middle Ages had almost unlimited power and control over their subjects.

Late twentieth century: Most monarchs are primarly figureheads who live under the same laws and enjoy the same rights as all citizens.

What Do I Read Next?

The story of *Beowulf,* written around the tenth century (though the actual poem is thought to be several hundred years older), tells the story of the heroic Beowulf, who slays monsters and dragons. It is full of brave feats and skilled swordplay on the part of its hero.

The Epic ofGilgamesh is a creation epic written in ancient Sumeria around 3000 BC. It tells the story of King Gilgamesh, who befriends the wild man Enkidu. Together they accomplish many great things, including the defeat of fearsome rampaging animals. After Enkidu's death Gilgamesh embarks alone on a journey at the end of which he discovers, and then loses, the secret of eternal life.

Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks* is a rich source of information about the history and society of the geographic region which is today France. His book provides interesting insights into the political, social, and military workings of medieval European society such as that portrayed in the *Nibelungenlied.*

J .R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is a modern fantasy tale written in 1954. Tolkien's sources for his story include the *Poetic Edda* and the legend of Siegfried the dragon-slayer. In the tale (divided into three volumes), a variation on events in the *Nibelungenlied* occurs. After Siegfried wins the Nibelung treasure, he wakes the beautiful "Sigrfrida the Valkyrie" from a magical sleep and woos her for King Gunnar (Gun-ther). Later, Gunnar and Hogni (Hagen) kill Siegfried for the Nibelung treasure.

The *Poetic Edda* is a collection of mythological and heroic stories from Iceland, recorded aroung 1270. Many of the stories draw from the same folk tales and legents as the *Nibelungenlied,* providing a Norse perspective against which to compare the Germanic point of view of the *Nibelungenlied.*

Further Study

Andersson, Theodore M. *A Preface to the Nibelungenlied.* Stanford University Press, 1987.

Andersson discusses the *Nibelungenlied* in the context of the development of epic poetry, focusing on the rise of the romance genre and the ways that the *Nibelungenlied* participates in both genres He provides extensive bibliographic entries for each of his chapters, and deals with the sources, literary context, and critical history of the *Nibelungenlied*

Boggs, Roy A. "The Popular Image of Brunhilde," in *The Roles and Images of Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance,* edited by Douglas Radcliff-Umstead. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975.

Boggs discusses the various interpretations of Brunhilde's role in the *Nibelungenlied* and in other works She is primarily seen as the "noble but betrayed queen of Iceland," but her character does appear and take other roles in some Scandinavian epics such as the *Volsunga Saga* and the *Poetic Edda*

Gentry, Francis G.. "Hagen and the Problem of Individuality in the Nibelungenlied." *Monatshefie,* Vol 68,1976, pp. 5-12 Gentry attempts to determine the attitudes of the anonymous author of the *Nibelungenlied* toward the legal and moral demands of feudalism made on characters in the work.

Hatto, A. T. Foreword to *The Nibelungenlied,* translated by A. T. Hatto, Penguin Books, 1969

Brief introduction to the work and its place in world epic literature. This useful edition also includes "An Introduction to a Second Reading," "A Note on the the Translation," and appendices consisting of essays on "The Status of the Poet," "The Manuscript Tradition, Bishop Wolfger of Passau, and the Homeland of the Last Poet," "The Date of the Poem," "The Genesis of the Poem," "The Geography of the Poem," and "A Glossary of the Characters' Names."

Haymes, Edward R *The Nibelungenlied: History and Interpretation* University of Illinois Press, 1986.

Discusses the relevance of medieval literature to a modern audience, and discusses the genesis of oral and written culture in the Middle Ages. He deals with the structural and thematic issues presented in the *Nibelungenlied.*

Haymes, Edward R andSusannT Samples. *Heroic Legends of the North- An Introduction to the Nibelung and Dietrich Cycles.* Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996

Haymes and Samples provide a comprehensive historical look at the sources from which the *Ntbelungenlied* drew. They discuss the history and development of heroic

poetry and epic, and the legends of the germanic peoples. This text also deals with the evolution of heroic legends from oral transmission to written literature

Mowatt, D. G In an introduction to "The Nibelungenlied," translated by D G. Mowatt, Dent, 1962, pp. v-x

Mowatt discusses the *Nibelungenlied's* role as a historical national epic of Germany.

Mueller, Werner A. *The Nibelungenlied Today: Its Substance, Essence, and Significance.* AMS Press Inc., 1966. Mueller discusses some of the dominant themes in the *Nibelungenlied,* such as honor, loyalty, gentility, and the role of family and social relationships and oaths.

Thelen, Lynn D "The Internal Source and Function of King Gunther's Bndal Quest." *Monatshefte,* Vol 76 (1984): pp. 143-155.

Thelen suggests that Gunther's wooing of Brunhild is problematic in the story of the *Nibelungenlied,* and provides the reader with reason to doubt Gunther's strength as a leader She suggests that the bridal games in which Siegfried takes part on Gunther's behalf serve to entertain the reader, to further characterize Gunther, and to "underscore the theme of real versus claimed power."

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Epics for Students (EfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, EfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of EfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of EfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in EfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by EfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

EfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Epics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the EfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the EfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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□Night.□ Epics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from EfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Epics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of EfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Epics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of EfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Epics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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