

BRUNHILD IN MEDIEVAL TRADITION

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INTRODUCTION

The object of this study is to establish and explain the differences in the interpretation of Brunhild in German and Norse Nibelungen legend, i.e., in the songs of the *Older Edda*, the *Völsunga Saga*, the *Snorri Edda*, *Nibelungenlied*, *Thidreks Saga* and *Lied vom hürnen Seyfrid*. It becomes evident that in Brunhild an immortal valkyrie is mingled with a human woman.

The valkyrie Brunhild is commanded by Odin to make the hero Agnar triumphant in his battle with Hjalmgunnar. She disobeys him, and Hjalmgunnar is the victor. As punishment for her insubordination, Odin pricks her with a sleep-producing thorn, surrounds her with a *Waberlohe*, or wall of flames, and condemns her to marry the hero who shall ride through the flames and awaken her. Only a fearless hero could perform such a deed. Therefore we find in some versions Brunhild's oath to marry only a fearless hero. The only horse who will pass through the flames is Grani, and Grani will carry no other hero but Sigurd/Siegfried. The latter possesses not only Grani, but also the gold of the dragon Fafnir, a ring, and a magic cloak which can render him invisible. He disenchants the warrior-maid and plights her his troth. She prophesies his future and gives him advice which she gleans from runes. This is the story of Brunhild's and Sigurd/Siegfried's first encounter.

In one version, however, Sigurd catches his first glimpse of Brunhild as he climbs up the wall of her palace after his falcon and looks into the room where she is weaving.

With these stories is linked the tale of Sigurd/Siegfried's courting of Brunhild for Gunnar/Gunther by assuming the appearance of the latter and passing certain tests of prowess. On the wedding night he exchanges rings with Brunhild but, in most versions, remains aloof from her, as the wife of his blood-brother, Gunnar/Gunther. He subsequently marries Gudrun/Kriemhild and gives her the ring he took from Brunhild on their wedding night. Later Brunhild arouses

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Gudrun/Kriemhild's ire by claiming precedence for herself as wife of the *Waberlohe* rider: in some versions she claims the higher point in the river as they bathe; in the *Nibelungenlied* she claims first entrance into the chapel. Angered, Gudrun/Kriemhild reveals the deception to her. Brunhild avenges herself by inciting her husband to kill Sigurd/Siegfried.

Certain inconsistencies arise through the attempts to blend characteristics not belonging together, and precisely this enigmatical quality makes Brunhild an interesting subject.

I. SUPERNATURAL QUALITIES

A. Norse tradition

1. Older Edda

In the Eddic songs superhuman and human qualities appear side by side, the former resulting largely from the fusing of Brunhild with the sleeping valkyrie.

a. *Fáfnismál*

Fáfnismál (42-44) presents Brunhild as a purely supernatural being: the birds tell Sigurd of a sleeping valkyrie surrounded by fire, whom Odin has punished for insubordination. The lay makes no mention of this valkyrie's rôle in Sigurd's life.

b. *Grípisþá*

Even in this song, composed after 1200,¹ we find the sleeping valkyrie: Grípir prophesies that Sigurd will awaken the warrior-maid: she is not, however, identified with Brunhild, who appears here as a mortal woman.

c. *Sigrdrífomál*

In *Sigrdrífomál* likewise the poet fails to connect this supernatural being with Sigurd's death, to identify her, in other words, with Brunhild. Here and there the advice given Sigurd by the valkyrie he awakens might be interpreted as prophecy: i.e., that he avoid the anger of relatives (22), but in general her wisdom has so little application to his fate that it is best regarded as interpolated gnomie poetry. Heusler² considers this lay, of heathen origin, a heroic Sleeping Beauty tale. It presents essentially the same story as *Grípisþá*, ex-

¹ W. Golther, *Nordische Literaturgeschichte* (1921), p. 44.

² *Thule, Altnordische Dichtung*, vol. 1 (1920), p. 131.

cept for its addition of Brunhild's oath that she will marry only a fearless hero and her betrothal to Sigurd.

d. *Helreið Brynhildar*

Only in this 12th century³ song, among those thus far discussed, is Brunhild's rôle in Sigurd's life attributed to the valkyrie: in the other lays the disenchantment is depicted simply as an adventure of Sigurd's youth. Here we find Brunhild's self-justification after she has thrown herself upon Sigurd's funeral pyre. She explains that she once swore assistance to a young hero, who had stolen her eight sisters' swan raiment. Heusler⁴ thinks Sigurd is meant and interprets the passage as an allusion to the engagement hinted at in *Grípispá* (cf. II, A, 1, a), but we must remember that the engagement in *Grípispá* is to a mortal Brunhild, who in that lay is clearly differentiated from the disobedient valkyrie. The young hero is rather Agnar, for Brunhild's oath to him would explain her failing to vanquish him, as Odin commanded. The identification of the hero in question and Agnar is further substantiated by the application of 'ungom' to both (*Helreið* 8). Brunhild's love for Sigurd is sufficiently motivated in the disenchantment, but unless we accept the interpretation of the young hero as Agnar we find a disturbing lack of motivation for Brunhild's insubordination. In defending herself Brunhild speaks of her oath to marry only the fearless hero who can bring her Fafnir's gold. She was, in other words, predestined for, even if not engaged to, Sigurd. She describes how a hero awakened her and shared her bed for eight nights, chastely as if he were her brother. Not until Gudrun branded her as Sigurd's paramour was she aware of the deception. We must presuppose the disguise here: Sigurd, disguised as Gunnar, won Brunhild for the latter. In this lay we find no trace of jealousy or unrequited love, no trace of feeling. The deception which caused her to perjure herself was the cause of Brunhild's vengeance.

e. *Oddrúnargrátr*

This elegiac, retrospective poem, like *Helreið*, portrays Brunhild as the valkyrie.

2. *Völsunga Saga*

The Eddic poems just discussed, although not recorded until the 13th century, were for the most part composed in the 10th and 11th

³ Golther, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁴ Heusler, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

centuries. The saga we have now to consider belongs to the second half of the 13th century.⁵

Unlike *Fáfnismál*, *Grípispá* and *Sigrdrífomál*, the *Völsunga Saga* identifies the valkyrie with Brunhild. The author follows *Fáfnismál* in his description of the birds' advice to Sigurd that he visit her. The warrior-maid tells him her story, essentially the same as in the Eddic songs, and gives him counsel, much of which might be construed as prophetic, i.e., that he fear the treachery of friends and entanglement with a woman belonging to another. The betrothal of Sigurd with this valkyrie follows, and a daughter is conceived.

We then find a tale peculiar to the *Völsunga Saga*. In *Oddrúnargrátr* Brunhild's fine weaving is mentioned. That motif recurs here: Sigurd, climbing after his falcon, catches a glimpse of her embroidering pictures of his heroic deeds on her weaving. Even here some supernatural elements are retained: Brunhild has the gift of prophecy and can interpret dreams; Alsvinn admonishes Sigurd that she is a warrior-maid; just as Sigurd kisses her, she, like the wise valkyrie of the *Edda*, warns him of woman's perfidy; as he confesses his love, she reminds him that she is a valkyrie: she prophesies that she will turn the tide of battles and he will marry Gudrun. The greatest inconsistency arising from the attempted blending of a valkyrie and a human woman is apparent in this statement of Brunhild's that she cannot marry Sigurd because of her duties as warrior-maid, for marriage to the hero who awakens her is a part of the punishment imposed upon the valkyrie by Odin.

3. *The Younger Edda*

The *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson contains a collection of legends. Neckel⁶ has demonstrated that Snorri, although obviously acquainted with the Eddic songs, did not use them in the form preserved to us, for our collection was not recorded until after his death in 1241.

Snorri describes Sigurd's awakening of a valkyrie, who although called Brunhild, is not necessarily to be identified with the Brunhild who causes Sigurd's death, for this latter Brunhild is presented as quite a new character in the courtship scene, and no allusion to an earlier acquaintance between Sigurd and her is made. The *Waberlohe*, which originally was a part of the valkyrie's punishment, is

⁵ G. Neckel, *Altnordische Literatur* (1923), p. 89 ff.
Golther, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

⁶ Thule, *Altnordische Dichtung*, vol. 20 (1925), p. 4.

transferred here to the human Brunhild, who uses it to test the courage of her suitors.

B. German tradition

1. *Nibelungenlied*

The *Nibelungenlied*, the oldest extant German version, was composed ca. 1205. While the Prûnhilt of this version retains many supernatural characteristics, the influence of chivalry is also apparent. In the scenes where she appears as a supernatural figure, Prûnhilt plays the rôle of Kriemhilt's counterpart.

We are prepared for the mysterious, sinister side of Prûnhilt's nature even before she is introduced in the *Nibelungenlied*: Kriemhilt bursts into tears as the heroes depart to court Prûnhilt (372-3). Prûnhilt, like the sleeping valkyrie, awaits Sifrit and addresses him by name at once. The three tests of strength, in which Prûnhilt's suitors must surpass her, are borrowed from a *Brautwerbermärchen*, or Fairy Tale of the Courtship, and they have replaced the wall of flames. The courtly poet is endeavoring to free his Prûnhilt of such romantic elements as the *Waberlohe*, but traces of her relationship with the supernatural valkyrie are nevertheless still evident, e.g., in her effect upon the other characters: both Hagen and Gunther, when they see her weapons, cry out about her satanic powers (438, 442, 450); she displays superhuman strength in the competition with her suitors, casting a 100-pound spear and running faster than a stone travels when she throws it; she likewise defends her virginity with superhuman powers, not only against Gunther on her wedding night, but even against Sifrit after Gunther has appealed to him for assistance. After Sifrit finally overpowers her for Gunther, however, her rôle as a superhuman being is ended.

2. *Thidreks Saga*

The *Thidreks Saga* is a Low Saxon biography of Dietrich von Bern, written ca. 1250. Although in the Icelandic language, it belongs to the German tradition. The poet may have heard the *Nibelungenlied* recited, or perhaps he and the *Nibelungenlied* poet used common sources, but so much essential material appearing in the *Nibelungenlied* is lacking in the *Thidreks Saga* that we may not assume that he had at his disposal a copy of the *Nibelungenlied*.

Here Sigurd must fight his way into Brunhild's castle and tame the horse Grani. Such hindrances are not *per se* supernatural, but

they may be interpreted as remnants of the ancient *Waberlohe* carried over into everyday life. Brunhild is very friendly, although there is no mention of an engagement. On his second visit, however, she receives Sigurd coldly. Such an inconsistency is explicable only if we assume that the writer, when portraying the first meeting, had in mind Sigurd's engagement with the valkyrie. Otherwise very few of the supernatural elements are preserved in the *Thidreks Saga*. The external details of the wedding night scenes have been borrowed from the *Nibelungenlied*, but the motivation is lost. Here Brunhild has in no way been tricked into her marriage with a man she does not love, and no other reason for her reluctance on her wedding night is substituted. Siegfried's actually committing rape in this version, instead of letting Gunnar take his place as soon as he has subdued Brunhild, is a product of the vulgar taste of the unimaginative, Philistine author, who lacked the knightly training of the *Nibelungenlied* poet.

3. *Das Lied vom hürnen Seyfrid*

This song of the 16th century is based upon a combination of the fairy tales of Doughty Hans and the Bear's Son. The poet has combined the rôles of Kriemhild and Brunhild for his heroine, whom he calls Kriemhilt: where described as a princess held captive by a dragon, she is distantly related to the sleeping valkyrie; otherwise, as Seyfrid's consort and avenger, she plays Kriemhilt's part.

II. BRUNHILD AS A MORTAL WOMAN

A. *Norse tradition*

1. *Older Edda*

We must now turn our attention to the original, the mortal, Brunhild, who in so many versions of the legend has absorbed, not without inconsistencies, the story of the valkyrie.

a. *Gripispá*

Gripispá, as mentioned (cf. I, A, 1, b), makes a clear distinction between the human and the superhuman Brunhild. The real Brunhild, as she is depicted here, is in no sense supernatural, although her destiny is interwoven with magic elements. The author, like the *Nibelungenlied* poet, portrays her as a hard-hearted (*hardugðikt*) beauty (*fagrt álitom*). Sigurd, although overwhelmingly in love with her, his betrothed, nevertheless falls prey to Grimhild's treach-

ery: through a magic potion she not only awakens in him love for her daughter, Gudrun, but also causes him, disguised as Gunnar, to win Brunhild for the latter. Sensing the deception and plotting revenge, Brunhild calumniates Sigurd to her husband, Gunnar, hinting that he possessed her during his substitution for her husband. This degeneracy in Brunhild's character appears as a result of disappointed love.

b. *Brot*

Because of the gap in the *Edda* codex, we have only a fragment of the old Sigurd Lay, which was sung among the Rhine Franks as early as the 6th century. Heusler⁷ has reconstructed this song according to the prose transcription in the *Völsunga Saga*.

The poet of the fragment nowhere indulges in psychological analysis, such as we find in the later Sigurd Lay, but limits himself to the skeleton of the action. The poem, as preserved to us, begins where Gunnar informs Högni of Brunhild's accusation of Sigurd. As in *Gripispá*, the reasons for her slander are anger and scorned love. After the death of the stronger hero, Sigurd, Brunhild rejoices that his properties now belong to Gunnar. Her special stress of power may be a faint echo of the conditions of the valkyrie's marriage: only the fearless hero might become her bridegroom. Then, however, Brunhild denounces Gunnar, retracts her calumny against Sigurd and determines to share his fate: the man destined for her may not live as the husband of another, but now that he is dead, Brunhild sees in him only the hero who, through his great powers, was intrinsically related to her.

c. *Sigurdarkviða in skamma*

The younger Sigurd Lay is especially interesting in comparison with the older one. According to Golther⁸ this song belongs to the late Icelandic poems of the 11th and 12th centuries. Probing into the very depths of her soul, it brings us closer to Brunhild as a human being than any other song. Here, as in *Gripispá*, we must presuppose the recurrence of the supernatural elements in the courtship: Sigurd's abstinence on his wedding night implies his disguise as Gunnar. However, Brunhild is then motivated by quite human passions: she is described as tortured by unrequited love. Her passionate yearning for Sigurd alternates with remorse, for she is Gunnar's wife, and Sigurd belongs to another. Finally jealousy grows

⁷ Thule, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 33 ff.

⁸ Golther, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

out of brooding dissatisfaction, and a complete change of character takes place in her: hate grows out of jealousy, and out of jealousy murder. Brunhild denies her husband both her person and her property until he brings about Sigurd's death. Love and hate are equal forces in Brunhild: as soon as Sigurd dies, her hate becomes love once more. She scorns Gunnar and follows Sigurd in death desiring that she be buried next to him, separated from him only by a sword, as on their wedding night.

Brunhild's whole life is presented in this song and interpreted psychologically. The lyrical, tender lines and the self-analysis are signs of a late period. We see in *Sigurdarkviða in skamma* the metamorphosis through unrequited love of a charming, gracious maiden into a woman capable of the most extreme hatred and then into the heroine who finds unity and consolation in death.

d. *Gudrúnarkviða I*

Likewise the product of a late age is the first Gudrun Lay. This poem is not a legend, but, as Heusler⁹ expresses it, a heroic idyll, which treats the short period between Sigurd's murder and Brunhild's final scene. Here Brunhild gives vent to her hatred for the woman who was Sigurd's wife. She exults in Gudrun's grief, cursing all who attempt to console her. She describes her own overwhelming love for Sigurd, which took possession of her the first time she saw him at Atli's court and which then was replaced by the most violent aversion. Her passion can no longer be bridled. Her hatred changes suddenly into love once more. This is substantially the same interpretation which we find in *Sigurdarkviða in skamma*. The interplay of Brunhild's feelings is especially emphasized in these late songs.

2. *Völsunga Saga*

In the *Völsunga Saga* human and superhuman characteristics are inextricably mixed in Brunhild. As she weaves she seems to be a normal woman, and yet we are told soon afterwards that she has gone out to the battle field with helmet and shield. The story of her weaving is unknown in the *Edda*, but the use of the *Edda* as a source is evident in the occurrence here of the *Grípispá* story of Grimhild's ruse. The ride through the *Waberlohe* is in the *Völsunga Saga* no longer interpreted as the liberating of an enchanted maiden. That interpretation belongs to the valkyrie Brunhild. Here the ride is a

⁹ *Thule, op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 89.

means, which Brunhild selects of her own free will, to test her suitors. She has thought only Sigurd could accomplish the feat and thus win her, and when the man she takes for Gunnar rides through the flames, she is amazed. However, she may not break her oath to marry the man who has passed the test.

The nucleus of the story is the quarrel of Brunhild and Gudrun. While bathing Brunhild places herself higher in the river than Gudrun and reproaches her with being the wife of an inferior hero. Gudrun accepts the challenge and reveals the deception, which she proves with the ring taken by Sigurd from Brunhild on their wedding night. Not until the end of a second quarrel does the poet give us any hint whatsoever as to Brunhild's reasons for beginning the strife; then she asserts that she has suffered long in silence. We must remember that Brunhild has loved Sigurd (cf. I, A, 2), and she doubted Gunnar's power even during the courtship. Her slander is undoubtedly an attempt to convince herself as well as Gudrun that her own husband is the stronger. For days she broods over her wounded pride after her disillusionment, and there develops then an extreme hatred which must find expression in action. In her next dispute with Gudrun and in her challenge to Gunnar, wounded pride seems to be much stronger in Brunhild than disappointed love. Gudrun, with a premonition of the evil to befall them, urges Sigurd to visit Brunhild. This meeting is peculiar to the *Völsunga Saga*. During it Sigurd declares his love for Brunhild and his readiness to desert Gudrun for her, but she will not become guilty of any further breaking of oaths. The thought that the deception has caused her to forswear herself and withheld from her what was rightfully hers, seems to be the chief cause of her suffering here in the *Völsunga Saga*. The next scene is borrowed from *Grípispá* and *Brot*: Brunhild begrudges Sigurd to any other woman, calumniates him, incites her husband to his assassination and rejoices over Gudrun's sorrow. As in *Sigurdarkviða in skamma* she then accuses Gunnar of breaking his oath of blood-brotherhood to Sigurd and takes back her slander of Sigurd. She then offers a new version of the courtship, maintaining she promised Atli to marry the rider of the steed Grani. This assertion contradicts the earlier description of the courtship in the *Völsunga Saga*, but such inconsistencies are explicable here if we bear in mind that the *Völsunga Saga* is largely a prose adaptation of the different *Edda* lays, which themselves present no unified tradition. The rest of the Brunhild material in this saga follows the younger

Sigurd Lay : Brunhild stabs herself, after requesting that she be buried by Sigurd with the sword between them.

Unique in the *Völsunga Saga* are, to sum up, the love scene as Brunhild weaves, the daughter of Brunhild and Sigurd (cf. I, A, 2), the quarrel of the women in their bath and the meeting of Sigurd and Brunhild just before the murder.

3. *Snorri Edda*

This work presents nothing new in comparison with the *Völsunga Saga*, although it does contain elements foreign to the *Edda* songs, namely Brunhild's and Sigurd's daughter and the quarrel of Brunhild and Gudrun in the river. Although the valkyrie Sigurd awakens is called Brunhild here, she is superfluous as far as the later relationship between Brunhild and Sigurd is concerned. It is even doubtful that the author identified her with the Brunhild whom Sigurd courts. Snorri gives the bare facts of the *Völsunga Saga*, without details: the oath to marry the *Waberlohe* rider, the disguise, the chaste wedding night, the exchange of rings, the quarrel. In fact, here it would seem that Brunhild waded out to enjoy the river first because of a feeling of superiority. There is no hint that she challenges Gudrun in order to solve a mystery which is torturing her. The interpretation of the scene is left to the reader. After instigating her brothers to kill Sigurd, Brunhild stabs herself and is burned with the murdered hero. From these bare facts we are not justified in assuming jealousy or unrequited love as a motivating force. Brunhild's action can be adequately explained as resulting from wounded pride: she vows to marry only the *Waberlohe* rider; then she discovers that the true *Waberlohe* rider is not her husband; in order that she not be consciously perjurous, she and Sigurd must die.

B. *German tradition*

1. *The Nibelungenlied*

a. *Prûnhilt as courtly queen*

Human characteristics, as opposed to supernatural ones, must be considered under two headings in the *Nibelungenlied*. The mortal Prûnhilt is a two-fold being: she appears not only as an individual, but also as a typical 12th century queen. The poet of the *Nibelungenlied* undoubtedly had enjoyed an education at court, and evidences of the culture of chivalry are everywhere apparent in his epic. The spirit of the times could not fail to influence his portrayal of Prûnhilt.

The constant mention of Prûnhilt's social position, especially the designations 'princess' and 'queen,' indicates that she represented to the author, at least much of the time, the typical queen of the Hohenstaufen Period. In the very first scene where she appears, the fact that she is a 'type' is made clear, in that she is not differentiated from other beautiful maidens. Likewise at the court festival at Worms (810), she is hidden in the crowd.

Prûnhilt is beautiful. Gunther chooses her for her beauty (392); she has beautiful clothes and a beautiful palace; her beauty amazes everyone upon her arrival in Worms (593).¹⁰

Strangely enough, Prûnhilt is depicted as a courtly queen during the games (429, 434, 439), although her athletic accomplishments belong to the fairy tale heritage. Her resplendent clothes are described in broad terms, but at length.

Before Prûnhilt receives her guests, the Nibelungen, she inquires of her husband whether she should greet them (510): she wishes to act conventionally. Quite in accordance with courtly custom ('in tugentlichen zûhten') she leaves her country (526) and later greets Kriemhilt (589). At the festivities after the return from Xanten (786ff., 793) she is again the typical queen, the representative of courtly society.

b. *Prûnhilt as an active character in this epic*

Regarding Prûnhilt's earlier relationship with Sifrit the *Nibelungenlied* poet leaves us in the dark. Prûnhilt recognizes the hero at once, however, when he comes to court her for Gunnar, and praises his prowess (416). Although she apparently knows him, she nevertheless expresses no surprise when he introduces himself as Gunther's vassal.

A trace of the Norse Brunhild's love for Sigurd may be found in Prûnhilt's tears upon the announcement of Sifrit's and Kriemhilt's betrothal; however, she hides the true cause of her weeping behind class feeling, calling the marriage of her sister-in-law to a vassal a *mésalliance* (620). She seems to sense the deception and to wish reassurance regarding Sifrit's true position. When Gunther admits that Sifrit is really a mighty king, she realizes that her husband's courtship of her was not entirely fair and above-board, and she hangs

¹⁰ It is interesting to note, however, that the poet puts the praise of Prûnhilt's beauty always in the mouth of a character, rather than praise her directly, as he does his favorite, Kriemhilt.

him on a nail in their bedroom wall for three nights, until he appeals to Sifrit for assistance (635). Even after being subdued, she is still dissatisfied because her husband does not treat Sifrit as a vassal (725, 728), and she expresses jealousy of Kriemhilt (724, 730). In the *Nibelungenlied*, where the Norse story of Brunhilt's and Sigurd's first meeting is lacking, no direct reference to Prûnhilt's love for Sifrit is made, but we must read between the lines: Prûnhilt's cordial greeting to Sifrit before the courtship, her tears at his wedding, her unrest and desire to get to the bottom of the mystery, let us surmise that her feeling for him is more than mere recognition of his superiority to her husband. In order to bring the affair to a head, Prûnhilt scorns Kriemhilt to her face as the wife of a vassal, until Kriemhilt can contain herself no longer and makes use of the fatal weapon in her possession: she calls Prûnhilt Sifrit's concubine (839ff.), corroborating her words through Prûnhilt's ring and sash, which Sifrit took during the wedding night. Prûnhilt, the queen who once exhibited superhuman powers, now stands before her, helpless, despairing, weeping, as Kriemhilt steps into the chapel first, thus demonstrating her higher rank. The only retort the once proud queen, Prûnhilt, can make is that she will tell her husband (851). Hagen, when he learns the cause of her sorrow, takes matters into his own hands, and Prûnhilt's rôle is ended. Up to this quarrel between Prûnhilt and Kriemhilt the active, dramatic, woman's part has been played by Prûnhilt, and Kriemhilt has been merely a representative of social convention, a puppet in the hands of her three brothers. Now, however, she assumes the aggressive part, and Prûnhilt disappears from the stage. In the second half of the epic she is for all practical purposes non-existent.

2. *Thidreks Saga*

A marked deterioration in Brunhild takes place in the *Thidreks Saga*. In this saga Sigurd, weighing pros and cons without emotion, explains to Brunhild that he married Grimhild for practical reasons: she has a brother. He attempts to make amends by trying to bring about a good match for Brunhild. Nothing remains here of the consuming passions of the Norse tradition. The Brunhild of the *Thidreks Saga* lets the men dispose of her as they will. She agrees to marry Gunnar since she cannot have Sigurd. What a world of difference between this Brunhild and the heroine of *Sigurdarkvida in skamma*, who prefers death to life with an unworthy man!

The quarrel is revised to fit into the commonplace atmosphere of this saga. Brunhild's anger is aroused because Grimhild does not pay homage to her social position by rising when she enters the hall. This Brunhild is interested primarily in external details and public opinion. She has not the slightest suspicion of the deception, until Grimhild proves with the ring that Sigurd has violated her, and then her first reaction is concern because the evidence is presented before so many witnesses. Not a trace of the Old Germanic conception of honor is left. Brunhild is vexed, not because of her disgrace itself, but because people around her know about it, and she incites her husband to revenge not because Sigurd has defiled her, but because he has gossiped about it. After Sigurd's death she is joyful, because he has reaped his just deserts. The love for him, which tortures the Eddic Brunhild, has disappeared. The conflict of the deeply tragic heroine of the *Edda* and *Nibelungenlied* has degenerated into humdrum calculation.

SUMMARY

Taking the superhuman and the human elements in Brunhild as our point of departure we arrive at the following conclusions. The poets of *Grípispá*, *Fáfnismal* and *Sigrdrífomál* are conscious of no relationship between the sleeping valkyrie and the mortal Brunhild. The fusing of the two figures occurs in *Helreið*, *Oddrúnargrátr* and *Sigurdarkviða in skamma*. In the Song of *Hürnen Seyfrid* the valkyrie is mingled with Kriemhild. The *Younger Sigurd Lay*, the product of a later age characterized by a stronger tendency to introspection, presents a lyric description of moods quite foreign to the earlier Norse poetry: jealousy and disappointed love are the motivating forces. Both the fragment of the *Older Sigurd Lay* and *Gudrunarkviða I* present the mortal Brunhild exclusively. The *Völsunga Saga* lacks uniformity: it is a prose revision of the *Edda* lays, in each of which we find the poet's own interpretation of the material. *Snorri's Edda*, in its concise report, follows in general the *Völsunga Saga*. The *Nibelungenlied* poet does not enlighten us about Sifrit's and Prûnhilt's earlier relationship and merely hints at Prûnhilt's love. After the insult to her honor a complete change of character takes place in Prûnhilt: the woman who at the beginning gave evidence of supernatural powers, who then was tormented by jealousy and suspicion of the deception, now steps, shattered, into the background. As a mortal woman Prûnhilt in the *Nibelungenlied*

is in part the typical queen of the Hohenstaufen Period and in part an individual with a peculiar fate. This difference is less marked in the other works, for the *Nibelungenlied* alone underwent the formal constraint of chivalrous culture. In the *Thidreks Saga* little of the valkyrie myth is preserved, and the prosaic taste of the *mimi* is apparent in the divesting of Brunhild of all her heroic qualities.

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