

OCCIDENTAL REGIONALISM IN THE *NIBELUNGENLIED*:  
MEDIEVAL PARADIGMS OF FOREIGNNESS

BY

SHAWN ROBIN BOYD

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in German  
in the Graduate College of the  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Professor C. Stephen Jaeger, Chair  
Professor Marianne Kalinke  
Associate Professor Frederick Schwink  
Associate Professor Laurie Johnson  
Associate Professor Carol Symes

**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation explores the issue of foreignness in the *Nibelungenlied*, raising questions about the nature, and crossing, of intra-Christian borders within the text that separate customs, practices, and worldviews. It analyzes cultural alterity and its attendant outcomes in the first half of the *Nibelungenlied* using concepts from anthropology and cultural and sociological theory. The dissertation argues that multiple levels of foreignness, as defined by the philosopher Bernd Waldenfels, separate characters in the *Nibelungenlied*. Despite their varying origins, these instances of alienation all have a common result: a lack of a complete picture of the world for individual characters and the prevention of close human connections that would allow intentions and motivations to be divined. Characters' imperfect understandings of their surroundings are fostered by their foreignness and drive many of the conflicts in the text, including Siegfried's verbal clash with the Burgundians when he first arrives in Worms, Brünhild's entanglement with Gunther and Siegfried, and the argument between Kriemhild and Brünhild. In addition, this dissertation argues that the constant interaction with the foreign undergone by the court at Worms leads to a change in its culture away from one which sees appearance and reality as one and the same to one that takes advantage of the power granted by a newfound ability to separate *Sein* from *Schein*.

*To Amanda*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation could not have been completed without the patient guidance of my advisor C. Stephen Jaeger, whose enthusiastic support of the project was invaluable during its development. Thanks also go to the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for providing a home where I could study and write about medieval German literature. I would also like to thank my parents, whose love and support have been unflagging, no matter what paths I have found myself on in life. Finally, my love and thanks to my wonderful wife Amanda, who had to endure the many ups and downs of this project. Without her at my side, this dissertation would have never come to fruition.

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## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores the issue of foreignness in the *Nibelungenlied*. The study raises questions about the nature, and crossing, of intra-Christian borders<sup>1</sup> within the text that are drawn by customs, practices, and worldviews – in other words, culture. The performance or reading of the text during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries may have had the power to extend the limits of the imaginable for those who came in contact with it, engaging its audience in considering how cultural difference did, or could, affect life in their own world.<sup>2</sup> This dissertation analyzes cultural alterity<sup>3</sup> and its attendant outcomes in the first half of the *Nibelungenlied* using concepts from anthropology and cultural and sociological theory.

The issue of difference in the western half of the *Nibelungenlied* world becomes a central topic very early in the text. It is introduced by Siegfried's challenge to the Burgundians in the third Aventure, which describes a conflict informed by the behavior, and expectations thereof, fostered by cultural difference. The kingdom of Burgonden, the culture of which is depicted as peaceful and inward-focused, is shocked by the appearance of the obstreperous Siegfried on its doorstep. Siegfried's home of Xanten, although courtly like Worms, welcomes individuals from

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<sup>1</sup> According to Robert Bartlett, "Latin Christendom consisted of those churches worshipping in Latin and according to a rite approved by the papacy, usually the Roman rite. One of the striking features of the western Church, is, in fact, its insistence on the dominance of one liturgical language and one cultic form. There are a few dubious or borderline cases, where special circumstances allowed other languages or rites within the Roman obedience, but these were few in number and diminished over time," *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950-1350* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993), 18.

<sup>2</sup> For literature's ability to have an impact in the real world of the Middle Ages see C. Stephen Jaeger, "Book-Burning at Don Quixote's: Thoughts on the Educating Force of Courtly Romance," Keith Busby and Christopher Kleinhenz, eds. *Courtly Arts and the Art of Courtliness: Selected Papers from the Eleventh Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006): 5-28.

<sup>3</sup> "Alterity" has a specific meaning in the philosophical vocabulary of "otherness," as will be discussed below. However, in the phrase "cultural alterity" it simply serves as a synonym for "difference."

the world beyond its borders. The knight himself has traveled in foreign lands and picked up elements of those cultures with which he comes into contact. Thus the learned behavioral idioms of Siegfried and the Burgundians differ greatly, nearly leading to violence until Gernot can assuage the rage of Siegfried by appealing to the courtly side of his background that until then had been overshadowed by a proclivity for engaging foreigners with force.

### **Difference, the Other, and the Foreign**

When speaking about “difference” in this context, one encounters definitional issues that must be negotiated first. Application of the word “difference” to the concept of culture<sup>4</sup> raises more questions than it answers due to its all-encompassing nature. Foremost among those questions is to what degree does the form of a cultural practice, custom, or tradition need to diverge from analogous elements in that same culture before it brings forth a wholly other culture? In other words, does variability within one culture actually signal the presence of multiple cultures, or at least subcultures? And on the other side of the coin, how closely must cultures resemble each other before they are considered to be a single entity? One word that on its surface leaves no room for cultural commonalities is “foreign,” which in its cultural, as well as national, connotation emphasizes apartness and which often enters discussions of cultural difference. An American is by definition a foreigner when traveling in Asia, because it is not his or her *place*. But as with “different,” the colloquial notion of “foreign” is problematic for our purpose of discussing difference in the cultural realm. It does not take into account the complexity of culture, including the ability to become “foreign” within one’s own culture and place, or the mutability of culture, its capacity to turn foreign. So while the *Nibelungenlied*

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<sup>4</sup> A definition of “culture” as used in this definition follows below.

clearly deals with those acting away from their homes, those who have not been influenced and infused with the history, customs, and culture of what takes place and has taken place within that circumscribed and specific space, the colloquial meaning of “foreign” or “the foreign” is neither precise nor robust enough when examining the text for traces of conceptions of cultural difference. This study will be using a specific philosophical description of the concept to assist in that end. But before that can be formulated, it is important to first examine the interconnected terms of otherness (as the core of “difference”) and foreign, as they are often the basis of literary studies but without elaboration do not afford the appropriate precision to serve as useful interpretive tools.

Otherness is a concept closely tied to difference insofar as it is the result of separating oneself from other individuals, declaring one’s own independence and natural, formal, and qualitative difference from other human beings. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel began the line of thought on the other that informs the philosophical discourse to this day. For Hegel the “other” was the antithesis to the self and its self-consciousness. The interaction of self-consciousnesses determines the limits of a particular self-consciousness, while at the same time defining it: “self-consciousness lives outside of itself in another self-consciousness, in which it at once loses and also finds itself.”<sup>5</sup> In Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, a struggle ensues between two self-consciousnesses, which leads to the destruction and end of their intertwinement, clearly demarcating the space between both and leading to a subordination of one self-consciousness to

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<sup>5</sup> Georg Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 111. Jacques Lacan also sees identity, or self-consciousness, as emerging from a relationship with and differentiation from another self-consciousness. But Lacan also locates the “Other” in the “non-reflexive, unconscious” portion of one’s own identity, Andre Gingrich, “Conceptualising Identities: Anthropological Alternatives to Essentialising Difference and Moralizing about Othering,” *Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach*, eds. Gerd Baumann and Andre Gingrich (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004): 3-17, here 11.



another: “The demotion of another self-consciousness so that it does not really compete with my self-consciousness, now takes the new form of making it thing-like and dependent, the self-consciousness of a bondsman as opposed to that of a lord.”<sup>6</sup> Thus one self-consciousness takes a superior position to the other, supporting its own primacy and emphasizing its own wholeness and importance. This recalls Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism as a process of separating the East from Western culture and the West taking a stance of superiority by “making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it.”<sup>7</sup> Inherent in Hegel’s conception of the competition between the self and other is the concept of domination and division that imbues the other with dangerous qualities, because it wishes to employ the self as its own measure of definition and comparison.

The phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, conceived of the self as having primary importance in relationship to the other and standing under less influence of the other. In opposition to Hegel the self and other have less interaction. Husserl felt that the individual had a “sphere of ownness” or a “primordial sphere,” a notion that excluded “everything other, all other consciousness.” The self, or the “I,” is marked by primordially and “the other, understood as alien consciousness and as the content of this consciousness, is not given in such originality.”<sup>8</sup> But it is not as if the other does not occupy the world of the self, because the sphere which surrounds the individual is “by no means a solipsistic sphere, for it also embraces the ego’s immanent experiences of the other. What is excluded alone is the intentional correlates (nomata) of these immanent experiences.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, the ego experiences the other’s place and

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Rudolf Bernet, Iso Kern, and Eduard Marbach, *An Introduction to Husserlian Phenomenology* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern UP, 1993) 156.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 157.

actions in the world, but what it does not grasp are the reasons, the origins and intentions, of those behaviors. Thus the interior of the other remains hidden and irretrievable: “Were that which is essential to the other’s own self accessible in a direct manner, then it would merely be a moment of my own essence, and, finally, he and I would be one and the same.”<sup>10</sup> The intimate entanglement between the self and the other Hegel discusses is dissolved by Husserl, who argues that such a bond could never exist, let alone be broken by the ascendancy of the self’s consciousness.

The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, on the other hand, understands the concept of the other as an individual disrupting the world of the ego. This disruption caused by another self forever alters the ego, rendering that self an “other”: “The other’s face (i.e., any other’s facing me) or the other’s speech (i.e., any other’s speaking to me) interrupts and disturbs the order of my ego’s world; it makes a hole in it by disarranging my arrangements without ever permitting me to restore the previous order. For even if I kill the other or chase the other away to be safe from intrusion, nothing will ever be the same as before.”<sup>11</sup> David Zahavi explains that Levinas’s thought about the other rests upon the notion of alterity, that everything in the world is different but becomes familiar via interaction: “The world I am living in is a world filled with objects which all differ from me, and which are therefore all characterized by a certain alterity. I encounter and handle these objects with different attitudes, practical as well as theoretical. But when I study them or consume them or utilize them in work, I am constantly transforming the foreign and differentness into the familiar and same, and thereby making them lose their

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<sup>10</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1960), 139.

<sup>11</sup> Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue UP, 1993), 19-20.

strangeness.”<sup>12</sup> In the process of familiarizing oneself with the other, however, the self is irrevocably changed, a notion that has an echo in the *Nibelungenlied*’s depiction of the change Siegfried brings to Burgonden by his mere presence.

For Martin Heidegger, the other is of no consequence in establishing one’s own identity; the contrary is true with the thought of Levinas. However, difference is of utmost importance: “For Heidegger, ‘identity’ is primarily a subject-centered concept, which is partly informed by existential solitude. Difference, by contrast, is something completely external to ‘identity’ [...]: it is, first and foremost, a fundamental condition of universal and particular being. To condensate his point even more, identity is primarily (though not exclusively) a subject-centered concept, whereas difference is an ontological category.”<sup>13</sup> Gingrich argues that Heidegger’s thought “tends to essentialise difference” and criticizes the philosopher for a line of thought that assigns “priority to differences between cultures.”<sup>14</sup>

Based on this brief examination of philosophical concepts of the other, it is clear that the concept has been highly variable in its interpretation, but the first three of these notions of the other can be of use when discussing the *Nibelungenlied*. Hegel’s conception of struggle captures the conflict among characters of the work seeking to dominate the other, defining their own power against that of those who are made submissive and weak. On the other hand, Husserl’s notion that one cannot truly grasp the essence, the intentions, of the other finds expression in the subterfuges and deception that run throughout the work. Levinas’ notion of the massive

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<sup>12</sup> Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern UP, 1999), 195.

<sup>13</sup> Andre Gingrich, “Conceptualising Identities: Anthropological Alternatives to Essentialising Difference and Moralizing about Othering” *Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach*, eds. Gerd Baumann and Andre Gingrich (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004): 3-17, here 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

consequences a collision with the other can cause an individual also resonates throughout the *Nibelungenlied*, a work in which every confrontation with another can bring about significant change. But except for the possibility of extending Heidegger's philosophy into the realm of cultural analysis and politics that concerns Gingrich, these ideas do not touch on the more specific notion of "culture" and how cultures differentiate themselves.

Philosophers and other scholars who have worked on the definition of "foreignness" have been careful to define the notions of "difference," "the other," and the "foreign" in recognition of the fact that these terms are often confused or used interchangeably. According to Susan Handelman, "Otherness, or alterity, has become a fashionable term in recent literary theory. The most problematic question, however, is defining just what and who is the 'other.'"<sup>15</sup> The philosophy of the "other" outlined by Hegel and later thinkers deals with the demarcation of the self from another being or object, it concerns the idea of the limits of the individual and his or her wholeness vis-à-vis all that surrounds the self or the ego. But the fact that something is "other" does not automatically suggest that it is "foreign" (in the cultural sense, not in terms of one's origin) at the same time. The expressions, in other words, are not mutually inclusive: "Das Fremde and das Fremdverstehen [kann] zureichend kaum nach dem Modell von ego und alter ego, also unter Zugrundelegung nur einer Systemreferenz, erklärt werden."<sup>16</sup> The issue of

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<sup>15</sup> Susan Handelman, "Facing the Other: Levinas, Perelman, Rosenzweig," *Divine Aporia: Postmodern Conversations about the Other*, ed. John C. Hawley (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2000): 263-285, here 263.

<sup>16</sup> Alois Wierlacher, "Ausgangslage, Leitbegriffe und Problemfelder," *Kulturthema Fremdheit. Leitbegriffe und Problemfelder kulturwissenschaftlicher Fremdheitsforschung*, ed. Alois Wierlacher (Munich: Iudicium Verlag, 1993), 66. Wierlacher also writes, "Das Fremde ist nicht einfach die Antithese des Eigenen, sondern ist ein Attribut eines an sich komplexen Systems, das aufgrund des einen oder anderen Merkmals als fremd markiert wird," *ibid.* A phenomenologist in the tradition of Husserl, Bernd Waldenfels has emphasized the separateness of the domestic/foreign and self/other dichotomies: "Fremdes ist nicht einfach ein Anderes das [...]"

difference brought up by “Fremdheit”<sup>17</sup> adds an additional aspect of separation between the self and other, or ego and alter ego, in terms of qualitative difference, but one which is not necessarily predicated upon the division of the self from other beings or things. To take an example from the philosopher Bernd Waldenfels, who has written extensively on this problem, a bed and a table can be compared to each other and are able to be differentiated (“unterscheidbar”) “im Medium des Allgemeinen,” while two tables can be distinguished based on their unlike qualities: “Eines ist in diesen Fällen von anderem verschieden, weil es von ihm *unterschieden wird* aufgrund einer ‘spezifischen Differenz’, nicht aber weil es *sich selbst* von einem anderem *unterscheidet*.”<sup>18</sup>

### **The Complexity of the “Foreign”**

In his study of the conception and definition of “Fremdheit,” Florian Kragl summarizes, “die Komplexität von der Verschiedenheit und vor allem von der gegenseitigen Überschneidung der Fremdheitsaspekte” means that “nur für bestimmte, abegrenzte Bereiche einzelne Teilaspekte hervorgehoben werden können.”<sup>19</sup> *Fremdheit* is a concept that means many things for many different fields. “Das Fremde” has been used to label “das normative und das kognitiv Fremde, die intra- und interkulturelle Fremde, die ethnische Andersheit, die Außenseiter und Ausgegrenzten, das Unbekannte als das Bedrohliche oder exotisch Reizvolle und intellektuell

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durch *Abgrenzung* vom Selben entsteht,” *Topographie des Fremden* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1997), 20-21.

<sup>17</sup> See Florian Kragl, *Die Weisheit des Fremden. Studien zur mittelalterlichen Alexandertradition* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005). Kragl’s examination of historical and modern dictionary definitions of “fremd” shows three main denotations: from another land or people, belonging to another, and strange, unusual, or unfamiliar, 50. These meanings overlap with those of the term “foreign,” which in this dissertation will be used as the English equivalent of “fremd.”

<sup>18</sup> Waldenfels, *Topographie*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Kragl, 60-61.

Attraktive, das Ausländische oder Nichtzugehörige, das zeitlich oder räumlich Entfernte, das Verdrängte, Rätselhafte und Unheimliche oder die Unbegreiflichkeit Gottes etc.”<sup>20</sup> While on the one hand the foreign has received various shadings in meaning and been used for numerous purposes, complicating its use, on the other hand it does not stand as a monolithic concept that should be dialectically applied to specific cultures, as Said has shown was done by Westerners to Eastern cultures, a process that revealed much about Western culture but little about the East.<sup>21</sup>

Waldenfels warns against considering “das Fremde” as a rigid concept that is universal or a known quantity. He reminds us that every human interaction carries with it the possibility of encountering the foreign: “Es gibt [...] nicht ‘das Fremde’, es gibt vielmehr verschiedene Fremdheitsstile. Fremdheit bestimmt sich, wie Husserl sagen würde, okkasionell, bezogen auf das jeweilige Hier und Jetzt, von dem aus jemand spricht, handelt und denkt. Ein standortloses ‘Fremdes überhaupt’ gliche einem ‘Links überhaupt’ – ein monströser Gedanke, der Ortsangaben mit begrifflichen Bestimmungen vermengt.”<sup>22</sup> Kragl concurs with Waldenfels, as he sees that there is no such thing as an “objektiv Fremdes.” He understands “Fremdheit” as “eine Beziehung, die ein Subjekt irgendeinem Objekt gegenüber empfindet; erst sekundär kann diese Fremdheitsqualität vom Subjekt auf das Objekt übertragen und dieses mit dem fixen Attribut fremd versehen werden. Die Relation wird dadurch eingerastet, bleibt aber wesentlich subjektiv bestimmt.”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, one cannot say that the *Nibelungenlied* is a work that turns on the

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<sup>20</sup> Wierlacher, 39.

<sup>21</sup> Said writes, “The Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe,” 63.

<sup>22</sup> Waldenfels, *Topographie*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Kragl, 61.

opposition between the foreign and the familiar without investigating the various guises the foreign takes therein.

As a result, a truly informed examination of the foreign must attempt to examine what makes individuals foreign to each other when we look for its presence in our own world and in the world of the Middle Ages. In order to do so, I will employ philosophical concepts of foreignness that will inform an anthropological approach to the *Nibelungenlied*. For Alois Wierlacher, “Fremdheit” can have two loci with respect to culture: “Fremdheitserfahrungen [können] nicht nur im interkulturellen, sondern auch im intrakulturellen Referenzrahmen gemacht wurden.”<sup>24</sup> This formulation deals with the false dichotomy of an individual or group whose counterpart can only be a foreign group with which one has no affinity. He suggests that the foreign can occur within a group, that it must not exist in dialectical relationship with all others that are not part of that group, especially since there are numerous subcultural sources of foreignness, including hierarchical and age differences.<sup>25</sup> Waldenfels has identified three grades of foreignness that correspond roughly to Wierlacher’s division of foreignness into cultural and subcultural components.

The first level of foreignness outlined by Waldenfels is one which individuals encounter at every turn of their lives: “Fremdheit kann [...] auftreten als *alltägliche* und *normale* Fremdheit, die innerhalb der jeweiligen Ordnung verbleibt, so etwa die Fremdheit von Nachbarn oder Straßenpassantinnen, mit denen wir uns auf alltägliche Weise verständigen können.”<sup>26</sup> This describes those who live within one’s own culture or society but who are strangers to oneself. In another study, Waldenfels terms this “social” foreignness: “Das sozial Fremde wird als

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<sup>24</sup> Wierlacher, 66.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Waldenfels, *Topographie*, 35.

Nichtzugehörigkeit bestimmt. Fremdheit bezeichnet in diesem Falle Distanz zu einer sozialen Einheit oder einer Gruppe bzw. zu einem Angehörigen dieser Gruppe. Sie kommt zustande durch eine besondere Art der Grenzziehung, nämlich die *Exklusion*, den Ausschluß oder die Ausgrenzung.”<sup>27</sup> This corresponds to Otfried Schäffter’s interpretation of one aspect of foreign being “das Fremde als das noch Unbekannte,” which contains in it the chance to get to know and become familiar with things that are “prinzipiell erreichbar,” recalling Levinas’s thoughts on the possibility of familiarizing oneself with the other.<sup>28</sup>

The second level of foreignness in Waldenfels’ system is aligned with more familiar notions of the foreign, in particular those of a cultural nature: “Die Fremdheit steigert sich mit dem Auftreten einer *strukturellen* Fremdheit, die all das betrifft, was außerhalb einer bestimmten Ordnung anzutreffen ist, so etwa der fremde Festkalender, die fremde Sprache, die wir nicht verstehen, das fremde Ritual oder selbst nur der Ausdruck eines Lächelns, dessen Sinn und Funktion uns verschlossen bleibt, oder ein vergangener Zeitgeist, der uns nichts mehr sagt.”<sup>29</sup> In another publication Waldenfels has termed “Fremdheit” at this level “cultural foreignness,” which indicates a lack of knowledge needed to properly deal with situations: “Fremdheit besagt nunmehr die Unvertrautheit oder Unverständlichkeit von Wahrnehmungsgestalten und Handlungssituationen, denen unser ‘Wissensvorrat’ nicht gewachsen ist. Im Falle einer strukturellen oder kulturellen Fremdheit sehen wir uns mit einer anderen Wirklichkeitsordnung

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<sup>27</sup> *Vielstimmigkeit der Rede* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1999), 90.

<sup>28</sup> “Modi des Fremderlebens. Deutungsmuster im Umgang mit Fremdheit,” *Das Fremde. Erfahrungsmöglichkeiten zwischen Faszination und Bedrohung*, ed. Otfried Schäffter (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1991): 11-42, here 14.

<sup>29</sup> Waldenfels, *Topographie*, 36.



konfrontiert.”<sup>30</sup> These two levels of foreignness play a significant role in the *Nibelungenlied* and lie at the heart of the interpretation of the work offered in this dissertation.

Waldenfels’ highest level of foreignness, which he calls “radikale Fremdheit,” might apply to the meta-issue of how we interpret the *Nibelungenlied*. Scholarship on the text has not come to a unified *communis opinio* and is consumed by arguments over major aspects of its nature, such as whether its seeming inconsistencies can be interpreted or whether the text is shaped according to an overarching authorial conception.<sup>31</sup> According to Waldenfels, foreignness finds its “höchste Steigerung in einer *radikalen* Form. Diese betrifft all das, was außerhalb jeder Ordnung bleibt und uns mit Ereignissen konfrontiert, die nicht nur eine bestimmte Interpretation, sondern die bloße ‘Interpretationsmöglichkeit’ in Frage stellen.”<sup>32</sup> The last category of Waldenfels appears more suited to modernity and its reliance upon empiricism and scientific explanations of phenomena, according to which events evading explication are rendered suspect as to their validity or true existence. For the medieval world, in which all types of phenomena could be ascribed to the workings of God, such an existence outside of that theological framework (“Ordnung”) would appear impossible.<sup>33</sup> The monstrous races which were thought to live on the edges of the known world, for example, can be interpreted via

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<sup>30</sup> Waldenfels, Bernd Waldenfels, *Vielstimmigkeit der Rede*, Studien zur Phänomenologie des Fremden 4 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999), here 90. Schäffter closely relates this notion to spatial separation: “Es geht [...] um die locale Erreichbarkeit von bislang Abgetrenntem. Diese Perspektive enthält gleichzeitig eine starke Betonung des ‘Inneren’ als Heimat oder Einheitssphäre,” 14. But Waldenfels’ idea more adequately covers the consequences of such separation: the failure to possess that knowledge necessary to grasp the different “Ordnung” [culture] of the foreigner.

<sup>31</sup> See Walter Haug, “Hat das Nibelungenlied eine Konzeption?” *Das Nibelungenlied. Actas do Simpósio Internacional 27 de Outubro de 2000*, ed. John Greenfield (Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 2001): 27–49 and Jan-Dirk Müller, *Spielregeln für den Untergang* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Waldenfels, *Topographie*, 35-36

<sup>33</sup> See Kragl, 100.

Christian thought: “The higher purpose of the bizarre peoples of the earth was not to demonstrate a benign universality but, rather, to provide a grim lesson in the consequences of sin and defiance of God visited upon succeeding generations.”<sup>34</sup> The *Nibelungenlied* relates to this category of “Fremdheit” in its resistance to being placed within a “known” order that would facilitate interpretation, such as the courtly romance or the historical epic and in the gaps of our knowledge about its preliminary stages, which, if illuminated, might give us more direction in determining if it fits into the order of a narrative shaped by an author or a narrative “assembled” by an individual or individuals.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Middle Ages as the Foreign**

In view of Waldenfels’ definition of structural foreignness, modern individuals cannot help but acknowledge the difference of “Ordnungen” between the Middle Ages and our world today. A major rift separates that which orders our world and theirs. From technological advances, to changes in religion and political structures, we see a structurally foreign world when we look at the world of the medieval individual. Recognizing this fact adds a further dimension of foreignness to the task of looking for the contemporary (medieval) foreign in the *Nibelungenlied*. Despite the cultural gulf separating now from then, medieval historiography has “tended to present the medieval explicable in modern terms – demystifying its romantic, ‘Gothic’ reputation in favor of those aspects that could be considered progressive or rational.” But Paul

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<sup>34</sup> Paul Freedman, “The Medieval Other: The Middle Ages as Other,” *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations*, eds. Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications Western Michigan University, 2002) 1-24, here 2-3.

<sup>35</sup> See Christoph Fasbender’s discussion of the notions of “Schalten” and “Verwalten” in “Einleitung,” *Nibelungenlied und Nibelungenklage. Neue Wege der Forschung*, ed. Christoph Fasbender (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005): 7-12.

Freedman and Gabrielle Spiegel note that more recent trends in medieval studies, under the influence of postmodernism and the linguistic turn, have betrayed an increasing focus on medieval civilization “as the [modern] West’s quintessential ‘other,’ in which the salient traits of the Middle Ages derive from its marginal and unsettling character.”<sup>36</sup> Kathleen Biddick has described medieval studies as divided into two main camps, which practice what she calls “pastism” and “presentism.” Under the guise of pastism, medievalists regard “the past and the present as bounded temporal objects that cannot come into contact for fear of scholarly contamination. Pastism produces historical difference as moral difference between a medieval exemplarity and an impoverished present.”<sup>37</sup> Presentism, in contrast, “looks into the mirror of the Middle Ages and asks it to reflect histories of modernist or postmodernist identities. Absorbed by these reflections, presentism forgets to examine the privileging of such identities or to question institutional and personal investments in understanding the past as a mirror, however near or distant.”<sup>38</sup> Central to both ideas is the question of whether a border should or should not be drawn between the medieval world and the contemporary one in which the scholar is situated. But what remains undeniable is the fact that with modernity’s severance of human beings from a close relationship to the means of production of sustenance and a shift to effortless travel and instant communication to the secularization of Western society, the various structures that enveloped a peasant living in twelfth-century France or a nobleman in fourteenth-century England might almost seem unrecognizable, or foreign, to the modern observer, despite some

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<sup>36</sup> Paul Freedman and Gabrielle Spiegel, “Medievalisms Old and New: the Rediscovery of Alterity in North American Medieval Studies” *The American Historical Review* 130 (1998): 677-704, here 67.

<sup>37</sup> Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998), 83.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-84.

continuation of everyday issues like the connection between work and survival, and the care of parents for their children, among others.

This dissertation leans in the direction of presentism insofar as it looks at the issue of cultural difference in a medieval Latin Christendom setting with the knowledge that such difference now exists. I argue that, at least as far as the world of the *Nibelungenlied* is concerned, within a context of Latin Christendom cultural difference existed to some degree, no matter however slight, and played a role in the interactions of individuals from divergent cultural spheres. But at the same time, the dissertation examines the work from a pastist stance since it is an attempt to read the *Nibelungenlied* in its own cultural context, in other words to understand how it may have impacted its thirteenth-century audiences and altered, played on, or spoken to their own conceptions of the possibility and consequences of cultural differences in their part of the European continent. But of course, to place this exploration under the rubric of “cultural difference” is admittedly anachronistic and presentist, as “not until the twentieth century does ‘culture’ become part, a decisive and almost inescapable part, of our world. With regard to the strange and alien Other, difference is now, for the first time, *seen as cultural difference, as cultural diversity*.”<sup>39</sup> However, despite the fact that medieval individuals did not speak in the parlance of cultural anthropology, alterity was perceived and commented upon, albeit in a manner far removed from modern paradigms.

In addition to the chronological foreignness of the Middle Ages for us, the foreign was naturally an issue during the Middle Ages themselves. It took the form of foreign religious practices (the Waldensian and other religious heterodoxies), invasions from the world outside (the Vikings in England and Muslims in Spain, for example), and in the clash between foreign

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<sup>39</sup> Bernard McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989), 113.

dynasties, principalities, and kingdoms (the Hundred Years War, the Norman invasion of England), or even the interaction with those from distant lands (as at the universities in Bologna and Paris, the trade fairs in places like Champagne, and the increased interfaith communication arising from the “opening of Europe to the outside world as a result of the Crusades and the rise of commerce and trade”<sup>40</sup>). The examples cited above of course come from a broad swath of medieval history, but this is exactly where the *Nibelungenlied* can add to our understanding of a specific time and place: that period right around the turn from the twelfth to the thirteenth century and a fairly specific geographic location, German-speaking territory in what is now modern-day central Europe. This dissertation asks whether and how a text from this specific time and place depicted cultural alterity, and what did it tell its audience about variations in customs, practices and outlooks amongst different groups? One thing that this project cannot tell us is whether or not the recipients of the text perceived cultural difference prior to their contact with the *Nibelungenlied*. However, one may reasonably deduce that if such a cultural artifact may signal an awareness thereof, then other elements of the society not engaged in its production may have as well.

### **East versus West in Medieval Thought**

As for medievalist discussions of the foreign during the period, one of the more recent extensive explorations of the subject has been undertaken by Florian Kragl in connection with a study of medieval literary works, primarily from the tradition of Alexander the Great. Kragl’s discussion of the foreign in the Middle Ages divides the medieval world into two parts, a western and an eastern “Ökumene:” “Nach beiden Richtungen hin konnte im Mittelalter Fremdes

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<sup>40</sup> Ed. Michael Goodich, *Other Middle Ages: Witnesses at the Margins of Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1998), 190.

imaginiert werden, wobei der Osten zweifellos die Heimat der meisten fremden Elemente mittelalterlicher Vorstellungswelten war.”<sup>41</sup> As far as the eastern half of the medieval world is concerned, Kragl points out that in medieval thought this was the origin and location of the greatest amount of foreign (often quite exotic) peoples, animals, objects, etc., and has correspondingly received a great deal of attention from scholars: “Der Fülle mittelalterlicher Berichte von östlichen Wundern entspricht die Fülle an Sekundärliteratur.”<sup>42</sup> As for foreignness located in the West, Kragl notes, “Weit seltener als der Osten wurde von mittelalterlichen Autoren der Westen als Ort der Fremde beschrieben.”<sup>43</sup> Of great significance for the goal of this dissertation is Kragl’s decision to focus on Ireland as an example of foreignness in the Western portion of the medieval world. Ireland is “am äußersten Rand der Ökumene auf mittelalterlichen Weltkarten und auch hinsichtlich der realen Geographie einigermaßen weit abseits gelegen,” which limited real contact with the island by medieval poets, Kragl maintains. It is true that during the course of the Middle Ages Latin Christendom was ever expanding and thus coming in contact with previously unassimilated peoples like the Celts and the Slavs, unquestionably leading to intercultural confrontations.<sup>44</sup> But Kragl’s choice of Ireland as a prime illustration of the foreign in the western world privileges foreignness as that which lies on the periphery of Europe.

Kragl prefaces his division of the foreign with the admission that such a broad topic allows the inclusion of only exemplary illustrations of these divisions, but his emphasis on Ireland (no other part of the western world is mentioned), which he considers a bastion of

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<sup>41</sup> Kragl, 107.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 108. Kragl focuses on works like the *Straßburger Alexander*, *Herzog Ernst*, *Mandeville’s Travels*, and the *Nibelungenlied* as exemplars of the literary preoccupation with the contact to the foreignness of the East.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 120.

<sup>44</sup> See Bartlett for a discussion of this process.

foreignness, implies that far fewer issues of foreignness existed in the heart of Latin Christendom. While this may not have been the message Kragl intended, this lacuna fits within larger discourses about the unity of the center of Latin Christendom. Within the context of the *Nibelungenlied*, which illuminates a world similarly divided into a western and an eastern half, the latter of which has received a great deal of scholarly attention as a foreign counterpart to the first half of the work, his concentration on physical distance as a marker of, and preserver of, foreignness may find expression in the far-flung lands of the Schilbung and Nibelung and Brünhild. Yet the “Fremdheit” schema of Waldenfels would appear much more applicable because it does not rely on geographical distance, but rather distance in terms of culture and experience, which in themselves reflect physical and mental distance, and the *Nibelungenlied*, as will be demonstrated, presents both levels of foreignness, one marked by physical and the other by mental distance.

### **Regionalism and Universalism in Latin Christendom**

Kragl’s depiction of the Western world’s outer boundaries as dominated by strange cultures where the centralizing powers of the Church were conceived as tenuous and not as cultivated by the stamp of Latin as elsewhere<sup>45</sup> points out a larger issue in Medieval Studies, the question as to whether the central Middle Ages were marked by a gravitation toward universalizing cultural currents (the papacy, Latin, courtliness/chivalry), characterized by regional particularity, or culturally located in the gray area between these two poles. The tension between accounts of the period that focus on its cultural centralization versus its regionalism is

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<sup>45</sup> Kragl, citing the scholarship of Timothy R. Jackson, states that the image of Ireland was dominated by two strands, one which stressed a possession of unimaginable riches and the other which looked with uncertainty at the particularity of Irish Christianity or suspected the Irish of being heathens, in addition to its “barbarische[] Sprache,” 120-121.

an important point of departure for this study. It is undisputed that after the fall of the Roman Empire, what is modern-day Europe was thrown into a period of extreme regionalism as the contacts across vast distances that had been established by the Romans crumbled and disappeared: “However much the successor states managed to imitate Roman political and economic patterns, which they did in very varying degrees, they did not match that scale. Anything in their local infrastructure that depended on a wider geographical framework [...] could not survive political localization.”<sup>46</sup> The lack of centralized authority and economy allowed regional variation to bloom: “What happened when the empire broke up into its various pieces was that each piece took the surviving elements of Roman social, economic, and political structures and developed them in its own way.”<sup>47</sup> Interaction between regions lessened significantly, giving rise to regional particularity due to a lack of interregional contact: “Certain regions began to decline while others were still, or once again, climbing to new heights of population and the production of wealth. This very disjuncture worked negative consequences on the interaction of different regions of the Roman empire.”<sup>48</sup> Based on the views of Wickham and McCormick, whose recent scholarship has added greatly to our understanding of the post-Roman world and early Middle Ages, this period in European history was exemplified by extreme localism.

However, as the power of the Church began to grow, long-distance trade resumed, and communication in Latin linked greater and greater distances, it is understandable to argue that Latin Christendom became much more culturally unified. But how far had this development

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<sup>46</sup> Christopher Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400-800* (Oxford: Oxford UP), 10.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, A.D. 300-900* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP), 115.



progressed by the time the *Nibelungenlied* in its earliest extant versions was entertaining, and influencing, audiences? According to Bartlett, “From around 1050 Rome [...] created a new institutional and cultural uniformity in the western Church. Alongside the development of this machinery of authority and communication, however, one sees the strengthening of something less easily defined or dated, namely an identity.”<sup>49</sup> And the movement towards cultural universalism was complete by 1300, when “Europe existed as an identifiable cultural entity.”<sup>50</sup> Jan Ziolkowski concurs that Latin Christendom was culturally unified, and his explanation for that is multivalent but particularly reliant on the prominence of Latin: “The cultural unity of western Europe resulted from many forms of commonality, not only of religion but also of Latin language and literature: a phrase such as *omnis latinitas* conveyed more precisely the shared culture than the geographical designation *Europa*. Latin was the means that enabled people from Latin Christendom to transcend the localism of myriad dialects and to converse across frontiers.”<sup>51</sup> One characteristic that often distinguishes arguments for a universal medieval culture from those of the primacy of regionalism is the complete discounting of the significance of local culture, a negation of any likelihood that cultural regionalism enjoyed an existence of any import. R. W. Southern for examples, describes the “obliteration of the local” in favor of internationalism.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Bartlett, 250.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>51</sup> Jan Ziolkowski, “Latin and Vernacular Literature,” *The New Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. IV Part 1*, eds. David Luscombe and Jonathan Riley-Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995): 658-731, here 659. In the introduction to the same volume, however, David Luscombe and Jonathan Riley-Smith note that local dialects were becoming more prominent, especially in the area of literature, a trend towards regional differentiation as opposed to cultural centralization. David Luscombe and Jonathan Riley-Smith, “Introduction” *The New Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. IV Part 1*, eds. David Luscombe and Jonathan Riley-Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995): 1-10, here 10.

<sup>52</sup> R.W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1953), 221.

For those who see a persistent localism in the central Middle Ages, it is often in opposition to a universalism they claim owes its existence more to medieval rhetoric or modern scholarship than to reality. For example, according to Joseph Strayer, “By 1300 it was evident that the dominant political form in Western Europe was going to be the sovereign state [...] the universal Church had to admit that defense of the individual state took precedence over the liberties of the Church or the claims of the Christian commonwealth. Loyalty to the state was stronger than any other loyalty.”<sup>53</sup> According to Kathy Lavezzo, “The vision of a uniform Christendom under the leadership of a single Church barely concealed the heterogeneity of the peoples it embraced or the diversity of beliefs they held.”<sup>54</sup> However, proponents of such a view of medieval culture are often more cautious than their counterparts in making sweeping statements about the components of medieval culture, instead choosing to single out aspects that can serve as examples of intact localism. Much of the work being done on the subject of regionalism in Latin Christendom is by scholars of medieval England like Lavezzo. In her book *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000-1534*, she offers geographical representations of England as an attempt to create a sense of “otherness” that has at its heart nationalist sympathies.<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere she has called the notion of religious universalism a “myth” spread by scholars like Benedict Anderson that would have short-circuited any local or regional sympathies and identities.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Joseph Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), 57.

<sup>54</sup> Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl, “Introduction,” *Christendom and its Discontents*, eds. Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996): 1-18, here 1.

<sup>55</sup> Kathy Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000-1534* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2006), 13-14.

<sup>56</sup> Kathy Lavezzo, “Introduction,” *Imagining a Medieval English Nation*, ed. Kathy Lavezzo (Minneapolis, U of Minnesota P, 2004), viii.

And finally, another group of scholars observe in the Middle Ages a mixture of local and supralocal tendencies and trends. For example, William Chester Jordan claims that “in the High Middle Ages there was a strong and creative tension between cosmopolitan values and local concerns, universalism and parochialism.”<sup>57</sup> An interesting formulation of this view is found in Susan Reynold’s study of medieval kingdoms and communities. She argues that medieval institutions had a flexibility that allowed the local to flourish and that the commonality of this flexibility throughout Europe was in itself a characteristic of universalism.<sup>58</sup> Marc Bloch argues that local cultures have their origins in the late Roman empire and the Germanic culture of the period, which created “pronounced [...] differences,” and at the same time there existed “the predominant quality of a common civilization – that of the West.”<sup>59</sup>

In view of the above examples, it would appear that we are faced with two problems regarding the issue of medieval localism versus universalism. First, scholarly opinion diverges quite remarkably on this question, leaving it unanswered and open to debate. Second, the very nature of these statements is complicated by the fact that many of these general studies focus on a large period of time. For example, Bartlett sees the move towards a European identity occurring somewhere in the time span between 1050 and 1300. Reynold’s study encompasses the period from 900 to 1300, while Lavezzo’s examines more than five hundred years of evidence.

Thus the actual cultural context of the *Nibelungenlied* is difficult to pin down given our lack of a clear picture of the relationship between regionalism and universalism at the time the

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<sup>57</sup> William Chester Jordan, “‘Europe’ in the Middle Ages,” *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 72-90, here 89.

<sup>58</sup> Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 9.

<sup>59</sup> Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society, Vol. 1: The Growth of Ties of Dependence*, trans. L. A. Manyon (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961), xix.

text reached the form we possess today. But in a very modest way, this dissertation contributes to this discussion insofar as it explores how one piece of literature conceived of foreignness in the literary analogue to Latin Christendom. While a study of the foreign in the *Nibelungenlied* cannot tell us what the actual cultural currents were for the author and the work's audience an anthropological approach might tell us how inhabitants of that real world interpreted, or at least imagined, how individuals from different cultural backgrounds might interact with each other in a geographical context reminiscent of Latin Christendom.

### **The Concept of “Culture”**

In this study of the *Nibelungenlied*, I draw on sociological theory to explore the concept of culture and its impact on characters' motivations, actions, and intentions. It is necessary to understand what is meant by culture, since it is individuals moving from one culture to another that generates the Waldenfels' notion of structural foreignness that informs the *Nibelungenlied* in part. This conception draws together sociological theories to develop a tool for interpreting at least in part why characters behave as they do in the work. Not only is the examination of a medieval text an anthropological endeavor insofar as one deals with a time that differs greatly from one's contemporary culture, but in the case of the *Nibelungenlied*, as will be shown, differences stemming from culture can be said to be a central driving force of the tensions and problems of the text.

Bernard McGrane has noted that the concept of culture has in modern times grown in importance as other explanations and categorizations of difference have lost favor: “Not until the twentieth century does ‘culture’ become part, a decisive and almost inescapable part, of our world. With regard to the strange and alien Other, difference is now, for the first time, *seen as*

*cultural difference, as cultural diversity. Culture accounts for difference, rather than ‘evolution,’ ‘progress,’ evolutionary development through fixed stages of progressive civilization, as in the nineteenth century; rather than the various possible modalities of ‘ignorance’ and ‘superstition’ as with the Enlightenment; and rather than the demonical and infernal as with the Renaissance.”*<sup>60</sup>

But how do we define culture? “The definition of culture has a contested history. Not only do cultures change over time, influenced by economic and political forces, climactic and geographic changes, and the importance of ideas, but [so too does] the very notion of culture itself.”<sup>61</sup> A central event in the definition of the term was the collection of definitions of “culture” carried out by the anthropologists A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn. In their 1952 book, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, they collected more than 150 definitions of the term “culture,” a prime example of the popularity of the concept noted by McGrane. Kroeber and Kluckhohn added one more definition to the mix, a synthesis of many of the definitions they had collected. According to this description, “Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action,

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<sup>60</sup> Bernard McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989), 113.

<sup>61</sup> John R. Baldwin, Sandra L. Faulkner, and Michael L. Hecht, “A Moving Target: The Illusive Definition of Culture.” *Redefining Culture: Perspectives Across the Disciplines*, eds. John. R. Baldwin, Sandra L. Faulkner, Michael L. Hecht, and Sheryl L. Lindsley (London: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006), 23.

on the other as conditioning elements of further action.”<sup>62</sup> As will be discussed below, Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and recent work on cognitive theories of culture maintain the notion of culture as both conditioning human behavior and being shaped by humans themselves, ideas contained in the Kroeber and Kluckhohn formulation, yet with far more precision and sophistication.

A more recent attempt to collect and categorize definitions of the term is the collective study *Redefining Culture: Perspectives Across the Disciplines*, which includes more than 300 definitions, most of them since 1952. The voluminous collection of terms in *Redefining Culture*, published in 2006, indicates that there has been little letup in efforts to encapsulate the concept of culture in a short definition. Baldwin, Faulkner, and Hecht have identified no fewer than seven separate themes that inform definitions of culture.<sup>63</sup> So the question arises: what should one do when working with the concept of culture – is it even something that has any explanatory worth, or is it simply a worn-out expression that can applied to a multitude of unrelated conditions?

The anthropologist Adam Kuper has argued that the notion of culture has been applied to such a broad range of concepts and issues that it no longer retains any explanatory value. He warns that the term should be avoided because those issues around which culture often swirls, like “knowledge, or belief, or art, or technology,” are all areas that “cannot be solved by tiptoeing around the notion of culture, or by refining definitions.” Kuper, it would appear, argues that the complexity of those things sought to be examined under the light of a cultural definition overwhelm simplistic definitions. But Kuper’s second attack on attempts to define

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<sup>62</sup> A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York: Random House, 1952) 181.

<sup>63</sup> These are structural/pattern, functional, process, product/artifactual, refinement/moral progress, power/ideology, and group membership definitions of culture. “A Moving Target,” 62-63.

culture emerges from the viewpoint that culture has enormous explanatory power when it comes to human behavior, that culture is the thing in which all human action is couched, and that culture is appealed to as “a source of explanation in itself” as opposed to something that can “be described, interpreted, or even perhaps explained.” The reason for this is that “culture can offer only a partial explanation of why people think and behave as they do, and of what causes them to alter their ways. Political and economic forces, social institutions, and biological processes cannot be wished away, or assimilated to systems of knowledge and belief.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, there are aspects of human life that stand outside of culture. Kuper’s assertion that biology is one of these would appear to be unassailable. However, political, economic, and social currents in culture may be seen as outside, independent of culture, or dependent upon it. The question appears to be whether culture is all-encompassing, impinging on all aspects of life, affecting all aspects of life or not. The theories of culture that will inform this study and will be discussed below propose that, in fact, culture, in the form of the extrapersonal world fashioned by human beings, does affect all aspects of social life, albeit in a fluid and complex manner that is not a one-way street of influences.

Kuper questions the whole enterprise of talking about culture, but his doubts about the power of culture to explain the world are well-founded and articulate the question of the relationship between the individual and the larger world – in other words, how much autonomy does the individual enjoy, and how much is the individual influenced by extrapersonal factors. And this is a question that is especially pertinent for the Middle Ages, as it has an analogue in the larger discussion of regionalism versus universalism – as in the question whether local concerns trumped wider currents like the Church and structures of political control. But this question has

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<sup>64</sup> Adam Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologists' Account* (New Haven: Harvard UP, 2000), x-xi.

at its heart the assumption that influences beyond the human can steer the behavior of individuals. However, as researchers of marginalized groups in the medieval period like Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie<sup>65</sup> and Michael Goodich<sup>66</sup> have shown, these extrapersonal influences are not all-powerful structures that rob the individual of autonomy and funnel behavior in a single direction with no recourse to alternative life-paths and choices. In historical research on the Middle Ages the preponderance of Church documents in the extant sources of the period have favored interpretations of the period that assign the church a significant influence on the everyday lives of people. More recent studies like those noted above have nevertheless argued against the tyranny of universalism. But at the same time they shed light on shared subcultures operating outside of the bounds of mainstream culture that inform individuals and their behaviors, in other words culture on a small, local scale. Nevertheless, historical accounts of extrapersonal influences emanating either from more distant or more local centers represent in themselves a tacit acceptance of the fact that culture has power over people – something that even Kruper acknowledges. Thus, the question is, how does individual autonomy yield to the pressures of the surrounding culture and customs, which have the tendency to channel behavior into certain outcomes?

## **Two Theories of Culture: Geertz and Poststructuralism**

It is not a new trend for literary scholars to turn to the theoretical insights of anthropologists, and several strands of anthropological thought have received great attention

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<sup>65</sup> See his *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: G. Braziller, 1978).

<sup>66</sup> Goodich has written several books about marginal groups that were not integrated into more prevalent religious, social, and cultural orders, including *Other Middle Ages: Marginal Groups in the Medieval Period* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1998) and *Minorities, Heretics and Life on the Margins in the Middle Ages* (New York: Praeger, 2007).



from those interested in investigating literature from a social sciences perspective. One anthropologist who has enjoyed particular popularity amongst literary scholars is Clifford Geertz, whose view of culture does not explore the interaction of the intrapersonal and extrapersonal. Geertz reads culture as a text and interprets it just as the literary historian interprets a text, meaning that literary texts are just one part of a larger web of meaning that is culture. For Geertz, the production of cultural meaning is a public process: “Geertz’s anthropological theory of culture enables an expanded view of the text without positing a separate ‘background or context. The text is its culture and does not have to be subsequently related to a background or context by a critic or anthropologist. Culture is already likened to a text; for the understanding of a way of life is seen as a certain capacity of story-telling.”<sup>67</sup>

A drawback of Geertz’s theory is that it does not address the mind of the individual, only interpreting the behavior of the individual against a background of cultural texts, signs, and codes and thereby removes any question of intentionality. Regularities of behavior, according to Geertz’s writings “should not be explained by positing the mental intentions of the agent who acts. Rules and instructions are public; they are continually reproduced in processes of interaction and exchange. In keeping with Geertz’s rejection of mind (or some mental site where rules are internalized), the medium for cultural exchange is the symbol.”<sup>68</sup> In contrast, the authors of the theory of cognitive culture that will be discussed below argue that meanings must go back to the actors – that people cannot be cut out from the process of determining meaning in a public setting: meanings that are created are “the actors’ meanings: They are the actors’

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<sup>67</sup> Claire Colebrook, *New Literary Histories: Theory After Poststructuralism* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997), 73-74.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 70-71.

thoughts, feelings, and motivations, including out of-awareness psychological states. As others have insisted before us, meanings can only be evoked in a person.”<sup>69</sup>

Critics of Geertz have argued that the individual is pushed too far into the background in the generation of meaning for his views to offer a satisfactory account of the relationship between human beings and the thing we call culture. Geertz has also been critiqued from a historical perspective, again because he appears to allow little space for individual behavior. His theories become “enmeshed in a seeming contradiction because the thick description [he calls] for does not give us access to an individual but only to the culture in which he or she is bound up.”<sup>70</sup> Because Geertz insists that ethnologists and historians do not have direct access to experience of others, “he has to continue to decipher these experiences indirectly through symbolic and ritualistic acts that, proceeding beneath the immediacy of individual intentions and actions, form a text that makes access to another culture possible.”<sup>71</sup>

But even within the bounds of the current study, it becomes clear that individuals have been assigned intention and motivation. As will be discussed later, the *Nibelungenlied* itself contradicts this lack of intentionality. For example, Siegfried intends to travel to Worms, against the better intentions of his parents, who wish to protect him from harm. Even in the portrayal of this familial disagreement, it emerges that choices lie before individuals, although they may be constituted by cultural expectations. Even though Siegfried believes he must prove himself outside of the gates of Xanten, his will is not fully overridden by customary concerns, as he chooses to take on the ride to Worms. He acknowledges and accepts customary practices, but his

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<sup>69</sup> Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn, *A Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 20.

<sup>70</sup> George G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan UP, 1997), 104.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

parents' warnings signal the existence of an opposite choice of action. Siegfried's march to Worms is both symbolic in a Geertzian sense – it can be interpreted as an aspect of the symbolic world of Xanten – in addition to its being a self-considered and self-driven act.

And this opens up further concerns about the validity of Geertz's theories in the larger realm of literature – the process of composing a text, an undeniably individualized endeavor of the fictional characters. Are we to just ignore the primacy of the author and see meaning not arising from his intentions but from the external culture of which the text itself is a part? What about the intentions of the author(s)? While literary historians may argue about the actual intentions that lie behind the production of the work, some kind of discernible motivation lies behind its composition (illustrating the rise of courtliness, critique of modern behavior, adulation of past heroism, the desire to tell a good story, etc.). Although the retrieval of those specific intentions may be barred to us today, this does not mean that they did not exist. It would appear illogical to imagine that some plan did not enter the mind of those who composed, copied and disseminated the text. At the very least, those involved with the text undertook the effort to work on and with a text, which suggests they possessed some kind of intent with respect to it. Even a work such as the *Nibelungenlied*, for which the question of authorship is vigorously debated, yields some sense of authorial motivation, even in its seemingly authorless nature: “[man kann] den Verzicht auf volle Autorschaft als bewußte Selbstbeschränkung verstehen; sie entspringt dann dem Willen, sich – anders als die Romanautoren – dem vorgegebenen Text, den Texten (im weitesten Sinne) zu überlassen. Das aber setzt einen Autor voraus, der sich selbst außer Kraft setzt.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Haug, “Konzeption,” 36.

According to what the anthropologists Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn call Foucauldian postmodern and post-structural thought, represented in their assessment by Judith Butler, a person is not seen “as something separate that is acted upon by social discourses but rather as a creation, construct, or ‘effect’ of social discourses. In their terms society is not the context within which people develop. There is no real boundary between people (and their inner workings) and the social world outside them; any attempt to draw such a boundary itself serves as a means of trying to create normalized, disciplined selves.”<sup>73</sup> This decentering of the individual calls into question a unified self that can act out its own will and intentions: “If we appear to be stable, that stability is mere appearance. In reality we are inherently unstable, and like language itself, without a centre. Since there is no centre, there is no structure: we are made up of conflicting fragments.”<sup>74</sup> Post-structuralist approaches have found particular favor in feminist interpretations of literature, as well as in questions of gender identity.

Post-structuralist theories of culture voice “the ways that subjectivities and agency are constructed by arbitrary but powerful cultural and historical forces. Here attention is given to the ways that individuals are constrained rather than free [. . .] Desires, motivations, and concepts of the human subject are shown to arise from particular discourses rather than free will and rational thought. Moreover, aspects of the self are considered to be often contradictory, fragmentary, or incomplete. Such an understanding again attacks the idea of a unitary, sovereign actor.”<sup>75</sup> This anthropological theory focuses on the power of discourse and the power of culture to act on and define people. This is reminiscent of Said’s work on the power of Orientalism to

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<sup>73</sup> Strauss and Quinn, 28.

<sup>74</sup> Johannes Willem Bertens and Hans Bertens, *Literary Theory: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 136-137.

<sup>75</sup> Philip Daniel Smith *Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 119.

define non-Europeans, a definition that emanates from without and influences relationships between East and West in a way not intended by those being defined: “In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on [...] flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand.”<sup>76</sup>

Both of these theories of culture move the focus away from the individual to the culture generated by individuals that can be read by the anthropologist, or the overwhelming impact that culture itself (in the forms of discourse, power, etc.) has on the individual. But common sense informs us that people still do make decisions for themselves, although always with respect to a range of behaviors condoned or proscribed by cultural influences (whether to become a banker or a pilot, whether to follow the law or not). Bankers and pilots fit well within cultural expectations of employment paths, while the willfully unemployed eschew accepted forms of behavior, and yet are still defined by their relationship to cultural expectations. But while the person who avoids employment is defined by the surrounding expectations of a particular culture, that does not mean that it was not his own free will and intention to seek a state of unemployment. And of course it should be remembered that judgments about one’s employment path evolved from individual opinions - people feel that becoming a pilot brings financial gain, respect for the skills one must possess to do the job, and the responsibility one carries for others’ lives. But this is not a perception of pilot-hood that emerged from thin air, but rather was an accumulation of positive opinions that individuals held that became part of wider perceptions of the profession. In other words, while someone’s path in life can be influenced by culture, the individual himself or herself can likewise affect and contribute to that culture.

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<sup>76</sup> Said, 7.

## Pierre Bourdieu and Habitus

Pierre Bourdieu attempts to resolve the dialectical relationship of the individual to culture by positing their codependence. The question he seeks to answer is: “How can one take into account both the observed regularities of social action, which most frequently are visible only to the social scientist who takes the time and effort to calculate them, and the experiential reality of free, purposeful, reasoning human actors who carry out their everyday actions practically, without full awareness of or conscious reflection on structures?”<sup>77</sup> Bourdieu “draws on the basic insight of the classical sociological tradition that maintains that social reality exists both inside and outside of individuals, both in our minds and in things.”<sup>78</sup> Bourdieu’s theory is underpinned by the notion that “objective structures” impact individual actors while at the same time those object structures themselves are the result of individual actions and behaviors.<sup>79</sup>

Habitus is the term that defines the subject’s interaction with the objective world in the thought of Bourdieu. Habitus is learned at an early age by children who internalize the external world, a process of socialization. The result of this socialization is the establishment of “what is possible or unlikely for a particular group in a stratified social world.” If we take the example from the modern world from above, the habitus creates boundaries for individual action, like the expectation that a healthy individual should seek employment upon reaching adulthood. At the same time, the dispositions established by the habitus generate “perceptions, aspirations, and practices that correspond to the structuring properties of earlier socialization.”<sup>80</sup> To take our example again, the child who has been raised in a situation in which the virtues and advantages

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<sup>77</sup> David Swartz, *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997), 95.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 103.

of becoming a professional such as a pilot would be imprinted by that experience and possibly seek out those advantages by pursuing a career which it has learned can provide them.

For Bourdieu behavior is “strategic rather than rule or norm conforming, for, as the label suggests, actors in their everyday practices attempt to move through a maze of constraints and opportunities that they grasp imperfectly through past experience and over time.”<sup>81</sup> Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus features flexibility of response to the external world because of the general nature of the dispositions that make up one’s habitus: “Our internalized (in his words, ‘incorporated’ or ‘embodied’) knowledge is less specific than rules because it is learned through everyday practice. Everyday practice is somewhat variable from one day to the next but still tends to remain within the boundaries of what is culturally acceptable. The knowledge acquired from practices of this sort is thus not highly precise, but rather consists of more general categorical relations that can be realized in different ways, depending on the context. This form of internalization enables people to react flexibly to new contexts instead of enacting the same practices over and over again.”<sup>82</sup> There is one area that does not allow much flexibility in terms of reacting to external stimuli and situations, those situations that are closely regulated and codified: “Highly ritualized situations reduce (but do not eliminate) opportunities for strategy and innovation by habitus, whereas less ritualized ones enhance strategic opportunities.”<sup>83</sup>

In situations that are not closely regulated or highly codified, the general dispositions of habitus allow great flexibility of response to everyday situations. The responses to real world situations, conditioned by the dispositions present in the habitus, in turn have an impact on the external world, that thing that itself impacts the habitus, “creating new (or recreating old) objects

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>82</sup> Strauss and Quinn, 44.

<sup>83</sup> Swartz, 113.

and practices. In Bourdieu's theory, the tendency is towards social reproduction. However, the overall tendency toward reproduction is accomplished through individual actions that are never exactly the same from one context to the next because they are enactments of dispositions themselves acquired from varying practices.”<sup>84</sup>

### **Cognitive Theory of Culture: Strauss and Quinn**

Strauss and Quinn, who have expanded on Bourdieu's theories on the basis of recent \ research on cognition, state that while his theory is a step in the right direction, it is not detailed enough to provide proper analytical strength. In addition to other concerns, they find two main shortcomings in his theory that apply to this study. First, they believe that he ignores motivation and emotion as forces of cultural change or reproduction because the knowledge in the habitus is not conscious and therefore not discussable: “Learning by modeling, which may occur largely out of awareness, is not forever after barred from awareness. While it is true and significant that such knowledge tends to remain backgrounded in consciousness, it is entirely possible to foreground it and describe it.”<sup>85</sup> Second, they believe that Bourdieu draws too close a connection between the intrapersonal and extrapersonal worlds. Strauss and Quinn note that the same cognitive forces they identify as the sources of cultural reproduction, i.e., the habitus of Bourdieu, “also allow us to account for centrifugal effects that he largely ignored in his overemphasis on the unchanging mutual reflection of mental structures and extrapersonal structures.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Strauss and Quinn, 44.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 46.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 47.



Strauss and Quinn offer a complete criticism of the Geertzian concept of culture. In their formulation, culture is “not some free-floating abstract entity; rather, it consists of regular occurrences in the humanly created world, in the schemas people share as a result of these, and in the interactions between these schemas and this world. When we speak of culture, then, we do so only to summarize such regularities.”<sup>87</sup> What something means to someone “depends exactly on what they are experiencing at the moment and the interpretive framework they bring to the moment as a result of their past experiences. A *cultural meaning* is the typical (frequently recurring and widely shared aspects of the) interpretation of some type of object or event evoked in a people as a result of their similar life experiences.”<sup>88</sup> In the medieval period, the pervasiveness of the church and the importance of faith in many aspects of society would have fostered similar life experiences in regions throughout Latin Christendom. By extension, the Mass would have had a cultural meaning across the continent. In the area of literature, this idea of cultural meaning recalls Hans Robert Jauss’ idea of the “Erwartungshorizont,” in which readers bring to texts their own backgrounds of experience that shape their expectations of the text of which they are partaking.<sup>89</sup>

According to Strauss’ and Quinn’s cognitive theory of culture, meaning is momentary, dependent on a number of factors: “This definition makes meanings momentary states, as some current theorists would argue. Unlike these theorists, however, we also stress that these momentary states are produced through the interaction of two sorts of relatively stable structures: *intrapersonal*, mental structures (which we will also call ‘schemas’ or ‘understandings’ or ‘assumptions’) and *extrapersonal*, world structures. The relative stability of the world and our

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>89</sup> Hans-Robert Jauss, “Literary History As A Challenge to Literary Theory,” *Toward an Aesthetics of Reception*, trans. T. Bahti, (Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1982): 3-45.

schemas has the effect that both in a given person and in a group of people who share a way of life, more or less the same meanings arise over and over. Our definition also makes meanings psychological (they are cognitive-emotional responses), but highlights the fact that meanings are the product of current events in the public world interacting with mental structures, which are in turn the product of previous such interactions with the public world.”<sup>90</sup>

The central point of their theory is the concept of schemas, which they describe as neural networks that process information holistically. In the first stage of a schema’s functioning, “An event activates all the units that respond to the features of that event; these units, in turn, then activate all the others to which they are strongly linked by associations learned from past experience, exciting some units and inhibiting others. This process continues until the network reaches a response that satisfies as many of the constraints as possible in the situation.”<sup>91</sup> The output of these neural networks are “improvisational” because they are immediate reactions to an external stimulus, “but regulated because they are guided by previously learned patterns of associations; they are not improvised out of thin air.”<sup>92</sup> “Cultural meanings” of external events and objects occur when the schemas of people elicit similar reactions to those events and objects.<sup>93</sup> Money, for example, has bound up in it numerous meanings for people familiar with its use, expectations, and benefits that cannot be gleaned from its physical format. The schemas of people who use money have had those expectations about its use and purpose imprinted at an early age. As the anthropologists put it: “There is no meaning for that thing, no essential meaning floating in the ether somewhere.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Strauss and Quinn, 6.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

As Strauss and Quinn put it, schemas provide humans with the background knowledge of the world necessary to properly function in the world, especially in interaction with other individuals. “Schemas sometimes reconstruct our memories of past events, determine the meanings we impart to ongoing experience, and give us expectations for the future. Schemas also fill in missing or ambiguous information: just think of everything that can be left unsaid in any conversation because speakers assume their interlocutors share their schemas. Without these learned expectations regarding the way things usually go, it would be impossible to get anything done, plan for the future, or even interpret what is happening; and without schemas that are at least partly shared, social interaction would be impossible as well.”<sup>95</sup>

Schemas have two tendencies, one a centripetal and the other a centrifugal. The first tendency maintains the current state of the schema, while the latter allows schemas to change and develop. The centrifugal aspect of schemas allows older schemas to be partially retained despite new experiences in the world that differ from an earlier “distinctive pattern of experiences and corresponding neural changes. [...] Change in the world can lead to new patterns of strong neural connections, but it does not completely destroy earlier learning.”<sup>96</sup> The stability of schemas is also guaranteed by the fact that they never correspond fully to real-world situations, i.e. every new experience in the world normally only corresponds to one degree or another to the experiences that are foundational to a schema: “Once a network of strongly interconnected units has been created, it fills in ambiguous and missing information by activating all the units in an interconnected network, even those not directly stimulated by current experience. Subjectively,

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 90.

we may experience all the feature of the typical event when only some of its features are present, reinforcing our original expectations.”<sup>97</sup>

The centripetal force that challenges this durability and ultimately leads to changes in the schemas is the fact that schemas do not filter perception or block out incongruent information. If such a thing were the case, then adults would not be able to learn new things and change behavior, “because their well-learned schemas would prevent them from becoming aware of anything that contradicted these understandings.” This is not to say that adults do not possess prejudices or well-worn ways of doing things, however “there is no evidence that schemas, including cultural schemas, act as gatekeepers that bar perception of unexpected events.”<sup>98</sup>

But Strauss and Quinn are careful to avoid universalizing culture, as they do not wish to support the notion that cultural meanings overwhelmingly tend to reproduce themselves, a point of difference from Bourdieu: “An implication of our view is that cultures are not bounded and separable. You share some experiences with people who listen to the same music or watch the same television shows you do, other experiences with people who do the same work you do, and still others with people who have had formal schooling like yours, even if you live on opposite sides of the world. This makes each person a junction point for an infinite number of partially overlapping cultures.”<sup>99</sup>

The advantage of the cognitive model proposed by Strauss and Quinn is that it accounts for social variation even within small social groups: “To the extent that different subcultural groups have different typical experiences, their cognitive networks will develop differently, and the interpretations evoked in them by a given object or event will diverge. There are also likely

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 7.

to be subcultural differences – some large, some subtle aspects of the context – in the objects and events being interpreted. To put it in terms of the model: There are likely to be subcultural differences, indeed, differences within any group, no matter how small, both in connection weights developed over time and input features at any one point in time.”<sup>100</sup> This recalls Waldenfels’ concept of “normal” or “everyday” foreigners, those with whom one partially differs in terms of schemas, but not enough to block all understanding and possibility of interaction.<sup>101</sup>

### **Geoffrey Samuel and the MMF**

The anthropologist Geoffrey Samuel, in his study *Mind, Body and Culture: Anthropology and the Biological Interface*, works with a similar concept to that of Quinn and Strauss with respect to the individual’s interaction with the world being a fluid give and take between external and internal stimuli. The context in which this interaction takes place is called the multimodal framework, or MMF. It is within this framework that individuals, guided by what he terms modal states, interact with the social manifold, or the extrapersonal realm. Through space and time flow what he calls modal “currents” at both the individual and societal levels: “These are the momentary or continuing ‘states’ of the minds and bodies of human beings that make up society,” of which there will be numerous currents active at any location in the social system, by which he means not just place but categories like age, social status, profession, gender, and so

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>101</sup> Waldenfels, *Topographie*, 35.

forth. According to Samuel, “‘Culture’ can be seen as constituted by the ebb and flow of these currents.”<sup>102</sup>

The point of interaction between these modal currents and the individual are “individual modal states,” which are “structures of conceptualization, feeling and intentionality within each of us acts and chooses and behaves.”<sup>103</sup> By virtue of the actions and behaviors, which are given context by modal states, the modal current can be affected by the individual: “What replaces a particular current depends on the individual creativity through which new states are constructed. This creativity works on the basis of the states (currents) already active at that point, but through it the currents themselves are affected, in a small or large way.”<sup>104</sup> The individual modal state has several features. Most importantly, “It splits up or interprets the individual’s stream of experience in characteristic ways” and “is associated with a set of images or symbols, in part shared by individuals within a given cultural context.” Additionally, these states correspond to decision structures: “Within it the individual will respond in certain ways to certain events, will subjectively find certain goals attractive and others unattractive.” Furthermore, these states correspond to intentions, emotions, and feelings.<sup>105</sup>

However, the actual dynamics of this process go unexplained by Samuel, who defines his ideas theoretically and eschews any claim to “positivistic assumptions.” His purpose in publishing the study is to offer a theoretical framework that should be treated like a theory in the natural sciences, “as a basis for developing and testing hypotheses, with the aim of improving the

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<sup>102</sup> Geoffrey Samuel, *Mind, Body and Culture: Anthropology and the Biological Interface* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1990), 68.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 15.

framework.”<sup>106</sup> Because of the theoretical status of his ideas, he acknowledges that it cannot explain how far a “particular modal state dictate[s] a specific response in a particular situation” or how “the creation of new modal states take place,” among other questions.<sup>107</sup>

Both the theories of Samuel and Quinn/Strauss can be viewed in a complementary light. Quinn and Strauss provide insight into how the mind is impacted by external events, the schema in their terms, the modal state in Samuel’s, the dynamics of which he does not elaborate. On the other hand, Samuel illustrates how real-time interactions take place between individuals and the modal currents that are parts of the larger cultural flow, allowing one to analyze the process of a single interaction between an individual and the extrapersonal realm. Furthermore, Samuel, with the idea that an individual has a choice among different modal states to determine behavior, addresses more directly the choices of behavior that lie before a person than the idea of centripetal forces in the form of new experiences as advocated by Quinn and Strauss.

### **The *Nibelungenlied* and Theories of Culture**

The advantage of Samuel’s work and the cognitive theory of Strauss and Quinn is that they question the common insistence on a dialectical relationship of culture and the individual. By avoiding a simple binary relationship between the subject and object, they offer models that attempt to capture the complexity of the real world. Based on these two theories, the concept of culture that informs this study is one that both informs individuals and is informed by those same individuals, changes based upon the behavior of individuals, and has the ability to channel, but not block, their own motivations and intentions. It is my contention that the individuals in the *Nibelungenlied* act out the influence of their own cultures, but at the same time influence them.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 69.

In addition, the characters process the flow of the modal current, choosing among modal states to decide how best to deal with new experiences and challenges.

### **An Anthropological Approach to the *Nibelungenlied***

The intention of this study is to query the text for what it reveals anthropologically about the viewpoints of medieval people about the nature of foreignness and the opportunities and difficulties that both cultural and social foreignness can afford. Not only does the dissertation explore the mechanics of foreignness in the text, but by revealing the complex issues of foreignness present therein it is hoped that it can shed some light on how individuals may have thought about issues like regionalism versus universalism, how the influence of cultural background on individuals was conceived, the importance of knowledge and information in a world where foreigners pose a dangerous threat, and the societal impact of situations created by the interaction of foreigners, particularly deception and the manipulation of reality. Anthropology in this instance is to serve as a tool of interpretation, a way to approach the text and see what it tells us about itself and those who produced and consumed it, and the world in which they lived.

The medievalist Aaron Gurevich has extensively discussed the application of anthropological thought and methods to medieval texts and history. He defines the essence of historical anthropology as consisting of “revealing the human content of history in all the manifestations of man as a social being and, above all, in achieving a qualitatively new historical



synthesis” and “this approach, naturally, highlights the subjective, psychological side of the historical process.”<sup>108</sup>

Interestingly, Gurevich is a proponent of the idea of universalist culture, which he identifies by the concept of *mentalité*, “which implies the presence of a common and specific intellectual equipment, a psychological framework shared by people of a given society united by a single culture enabling them to perceive and become aware of their natural and social environment and themselves. A chaotic and heterogeneous stream of perceptions and impressions is converted by consciousness into a more or less ordered picture of the world which sets its seal on all human behavior. The subjective side of the historical process, the manner of thinking and feeling particular to a people of a given social and cultural community, thus becomes part of the objective process of history.”<sup>109</sup> Gurevich’s notion of common intellectual equipment and psychological frameworks gives voice to a universalist view of medieval culture, subsuming individual experience into a larger cultural framework that unifies individual experiences. Gurevich’s pursuit of the individual side of the historical process, while laudable, would seem irreconcilable with the totalizing power which he attributes to a common culture.

It is exactly this dialectical relationship, often unresolved in the historical literature, that this study seeks to subvert. With the assistance of cognitive cultural theory and Samuel’s multimodal framework, this study will interpret the *Nibelungenlied* from the aspects of supraindividual culture and the impact of the individual on that culture. In the process of this interpretation, it is hoped that the extratextual cultural assumptions and worldviews of those involved in the production of the text and its consumption might come to light.

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<sup>108</sup> Aaron Gurevich, *Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages*, trans. Jana Howlett. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992), 4.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER ONE: SIEGFRIED, XANTEN, AND THE QUESTION OF FOREIGNNESS IN THE *NIBELUNGENLIED*

### Introduction

This chapter lays the groundwork for retrieving concepts of the “foreign” and “culture” from the *Nibelungenlied* and discusses the interpretive approaches necessary for doing so. Using the example of Siegfried and his home of Xanten, it argues that characters raised and living in the same spaces are shown in the text to share common cultural understandings. The work reveals that the cultural practices of Xanten, while not dealt with extensively, are marked by openness to the world, which, along with the exploits of Siegfried in foreign lands, contributes to the kingdom’s widespread fame. Thus, early in the text, the *Nibelungenlied* exhibits a propensity for extensively addressing issues of culture and interaction with the foreign, be it either in a Waldenfelsian “everyday” or “structural” form.

In addition, the chapter explores the connection between the character and his or her culture and explains how culture cannot be understood as the sole motivator of the work’s characters, but nevertheless does influence behavior to a large degree. In view of this fact, an extended examination of Siegfried’s character shows that he can only be understood based on all aspects of his life, including the culture in which he was raised, as well as his experiences outside of it. This chapter argues that in the *Nibelungenlied*, the past of a character is fundamental for understanding motivations and actions.

Besides examining the culture of Xanten and its role in informing Siegfried’s character, this chapter discusses how the *Nibelungenlied* can be interpreted via syntagmatic analysis and close readings of grammar and syntax despite its perceived narrative discontinuity. It also addresses the issue of evidence about characters from the levels of exteriority (words, actions,

experiences) and interiority (thoughts, dreams, beliefs), and how this empowers recipients to receive a greater understanding of events in the text than is afforded to the characters themselves.

### **The Importance of Geography**

Although it is a work filled with memorable characters and their actions, the *Nibelungenlied* revolves as well around specific geographic spaces. There are numerous distinct geographical entities of various natures, but two are of central importance to the text as a whole – Worms and Etzel’s land. It is in these two locales that the most significant scenes of the work take place. In Worms two foreigners, Brünhild and Siegfried, are introduced to the world of the Burgundians, the repeated betrayal of Brünhild occurs, and so does the argument between the two queens which eventually leads to Siegfried’s murder in the Burgundian countryside. In the land of Etzel, the clash between a Western court and an Eastern one, orchestrated by Siegfried’s vengeful wife, heralds the bloody collapse of the world imagined in the text. But as I will argue, the peripheral locales in the Western expanse of the text (Niederland, Isenstein, and land of the Nibelungen)<sup>1</sup> play critical roles in imbuing it with a discourse of difference that is of equal gravity to the complications themselves generated by the regional particularities of the kingdoms of Gunther and Etzel. The cultures linked to these places are evocative of Latin Christendom,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Western” here delineates those realms described in the first half of the work as opposed to the Eastern kingdom of Etzel, where the autochthonous characters are *heiden*. Thus, this is a semi-geographical division that also has a religious component. Furthermore, the long journey necessary to travel from Worms to the kingdom of Etzel reflects a division of space not found in the first half of the text, even though the land of the Nibelungen and Isenstein, on the basis of their cultural characteristics and fantastic elements, would seem to occupy a much more fringe position than the Christian kingdoms based in Xanten and Worms.

<sup>2</sup> “Western Europe” is a modern concept inappropriate for a medieval context. As Gerard Delanty has noted, “Europe is a protean idea and not something self-evident. It is erroneous to regard Europe as merely a region for the simple reason that it means different things to different people in different contexts,” *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (New York: St. Martin’s

albeit described in an often fleeting and brief manner, and in contrast with that of the central locus of Worms. In the text, culture is linked to place in a way that recalls modern anthropological accounts of culture,<sup>3</sup> while at the same time it is equally dependent on actors who simultaneously constitute and reveal a culture not only in its autochthonous location but even carry that culture beyond its originary boundaries. When individuals of one customary background enter another realm of culture, the difference between that prevailing in the world of the inhabitants and that imported by the stranger is shown in relief. To use the terms of Waldenfels, this results in structural foreignness, as the character of a different culture brings with him or her a “bestimmt[e] Ordnung” that differs from the “Ordnung” in the place being entered.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, in order to understand the foreign in the text, one must first understand the pertinent domestic culture entered into by the foreigner as well as the one he or she has left, and how they shape characters involved in cross-cultural interaction. In the *Nibelungenlied*, difference of culture is not merely an interesting source of information about medieval notions of culture and identity, but also the engine that drives critical junctures of the narrative.

Unlike the more nebulous world geography often found in Arthurian romances, a distinct geography instrumental to the text is envisioned in the *Nibelungenlied*. The first two *Aventiuren* contain descriptions of the Western centers of *Nibelungenlied* geography, the Burgundian court in Worms and Xanten, the capital of Siegmund’s kingdom of *Niederland*. Although there are similarities between the two courts, as in the fact that they possess governance structures based

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Press, 1995), 3. *Christianitas* is the most common term used in the Middle Ages to encompass the geographic space now considered Western Europe, thereby intertwining sacral and terrestrial concepts. Latin Christendom encompasses the part of the world under the authority of the pope, thus including areas from Scandinavia to England and Italy, Jordan, 75.

<sup>3</sup> In classic anthropological accounts like Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *Tristes Tropiques*, Pierre Bourdieu’s work with on the Kabyle people of Algeria, Bronislaw Malinowski’s studies of Melanesia, and Clifford Geertz’s Bali research, place is closely connected to specific cultures.

<sup>4</sup> Waldenfels, *Topographie*, 36.

on the idea of male kingship and are influenced by kinship bonds and hierarchical relationships to various degrees, their past and present as established in the narrative evoke quite different perspectives on the *vremde*, that which is not situated within the confines of their day-to-day activities. It will become clear that the court in Xanten exhibits a tendency to welcome contacts with the outside world, while the Burgundians maintain a domestic, insular focus prior to the advent of Siegfried, which influences its active engagement with non-Burgundian elements in the world of the text. Whereas the Xantener facilitate lively contact with the outside world, the Burgundians have a reactionary approach to the foreign that forces them to scramble to respond to incursions of the *vremde* when presented to them.

### **The Syntagmatic *Nibelungenlied*: Xanten's Fame**

A larger question that will be addressed is how protagonists in the work connected with these geographical centers embody the larger cultural structures from which they issue, and how the environmental influences in which they find themselves can shed light on their actions and motivations. My argument is that there is a general motivational coherence within the text, but one which requires efforts on the part of recipients to accurately recall previously presented information so that they may properly contextualize their current place in the narrative. Put simply, the recipients usually have had presented to them the origins of behaviors they encounter as the text unfolds, and these are often of a cultural nature. While it can in no way be argued that the *Nibelungenlied* yields a systematic, clinical account of every action's motivations, this study will show that information provided early in the text would have allowed a medieval audience to reasonably infer motivation. To put it a different way, while some actions may appear to be contradictory and blindly motivated in the *Nibelungenlied*, prior-established facts may have

allowed recipients to bridge textual gaps and provide an understanding of the text and its characters that precludes its assessment as a riotous mélange of unmotivated actions that degenerate into chaos and the downfall of the world it describes.

Some scholars have vehemently attacked any idea that the work reveals clear motivation and narrative continuity. Joachim Heinzle feels that the text is deficient to such a degree that the recipient *must* interpret gaps in the motivational structure of the work in order for it to make any sense.<sup>5</sup> But because moderns lack the historical and cultural context, scholars only stand in a long line of interpreters of the work. Thus, a “correct” reading of the text, in terms of how the audience understood it, remains elusive to modern-day scholars.<sup>6</sup> However, as will be discussed below, the “Leerstellen” of the text that Heinzle feels complicate coherence are fairly narrow and can be bridged through close readings and the application of some inference. Although the full intentions of the *Nibelungenlied* poet may remain in the dark to us, the audience had sufficient information to draw its own conclusions about why the characters of the text act in the manner portrayed. Patterns, or as Jan-Dirk Müller has termed them, *Spielregeln*, present in the text allow recipients to make judgments based on the application of such models to seemingly ambiguous junctures in the text: “‘Spielregeln’ meinen kein für alle Male festgelegtes Inventar, sondern einen Rahmen der Ermöglichung, der Bestimmtes zuläßt und Bestimmtes ausschließt, eben Regeln für ein Geschehen, das ein weites, gleichwohl begrenztes Repertoire von Optionen

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<sup>5</sup> Heinzle is a major critic of the notion that the *Nibelungenlied* is a coherent whole: he argues that Kriemhild’s demand of the treasure at the end of the work is a “Defekt,” the result of the impossibility of melding the various sources of the text into a smooth narrative where character motivation is clear and obvious. This defect is found throughout the work, he argues, to the extent “daß die epische Struktur des Nibelungenliedes insgesamt in nicht geringem Maße defizient ist.” “Gnade für Hagen? Die epische Struktur des *Nibelungenliedes* und das Dilemma der Interpreteten,” *Nibelungenlied und Klage. Sage und Geschichte, Struktur und Gattung. Passauer Nibelungengespräche 1985*, ed. Fritz Peter Knapp (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987): 257-276, here 267.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

offenläßt.”<sup>7</sup> The following is a brief illustration of how the text establishes a *Spielregel* that can assist in its understanding.

Read in terms of the foreign and the native, the first strophe of the second Aventure is a crucial example of the demands the *Nibelungenlied* places upon its recipients. It also establishes the work’s first peripheral setting with respect to the more central Worms but nevertheless of great weight. This stanza locates the residence of Siegmund in a very specific place, Xanten “nidene bî dem Rîne” (20,4), and includes an important attribute of the court’s castle: it was “wîten wol bekant” (20,3).<sup>8</sup> This kind of statement is typical for the *Nibelungenlied*, as it is not immediately grounded in justificatory detail and description. In other words, the text provides a general statement about the court’s widespread fame, but makes no direct statements about the source of that reputation or its actual nature. A gap in meaning ensues that can only be closed through the syntagmatic<sup>9</sup> progression of the narrative. By virtue of excluding certain interpretive options and offering others that are plausible, the text often steers recipients to the basis of a stated fact as in this instance.

The text which immediately follows stanza 20 avoids revealing a clear-cut reason for the wider awareness of the castle. For instance, the reputation of the castle does not rest on its architecture or location, as neither possibility is mentioned by the narrator. Instead, the text

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<sup>7</sup> Jan-Dirk Müller, *Spielregeln*, 48.

<sup>8</sup> Citations from ms. A of the *Nibelungenlied* are from Helmut de Boor, ed. *Das Nibelungenlied*. Fifteenth ed. (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1959).

<sup>9</sup> The terms “syntagmatic” and “paradigmatic” in this study refer to semiology theory, with syntagmatic narrative meaning the line-by-line unfurling of the text, with each verse linked to those that precede and follow it. The paradigmatic interpretation of the text refers to the analysis of themes, ideas, characters, and actions not explicitly joined in the text through syntagmatic relationships but that can be placed side by side by virtue of their overall commonalities and despite any syntagmatic differences therein. For more on these terms, see Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977).

indirectly suggests that its fame has been established by those who occupy and constitute the court at Xanten. For example, as will be discussed below, the following strophes outline characteristics and behaviors of young Siegfried that could have the effect of spreading knowledge about him. This fame stands as an analogue to that of his father's court, where he plays a central role, leaving the recipient to determine whether a direct relationship exists between these two circumstances. The author here and in many other instances establishes a fact and only reveals the details behind it through a thickening description. As often happens in the text, it is not stated that "A is valid because of B." Instead, the audience must establish the links between this general statement and that which follows – in other words it is asked to use a *syntagmatic* approach to the narrative for the purpose of its clarification. The initial lack of explanation of Xanten's fame illustrates how gaps in the text are filled with the assistance of the recipients' own hermeneutic powers. But this example does not constitute an unbridgeable breach in the text into which narrative unity disappears. Instead, the gap itself is narrowed by the narrator who provides details that hypothetically *could* be linked to a general statement, but which are not. This interaction of narrative "hints" and audience participation is a model of interpretation valid in many instances for the rest of the work, perhaps most notably in the interactions of foreigners, *vremden*. The "hints" in this example constitute an interpretational *Spielregel* of the text, a method of overcoming textual blank spaces, as well as a "rule" that establishes the possibilities for the spread of fame within the world of the work.

### **The Sources of Xanten's Fame and Its Contacts with the Foreign**

Two possible sources for the reputation of Xanten emerge in the text: the exploits of the young Siegfried and his parents' involvement with those living outside the confines of



Niederland. In stanzas 21 and 22, it is revealed that not only did people express amazement at the honors grew in him (“waz êren an im wüehse”) and the beauty of his body, but that he also has traveled outside of his homeland before his arrival in Worms. While it is unclear if the fascination for the young man spread beyond the boundaries of his land, either by word of mouth or his travels, the text definitively states that he “versuochte vil der rîche durch ellenthaften muot” (21,2). The extensiveness of young Siegfried’s aggressive campaigns in other lands is reinforced through chiasma in the following line, which replaces “vil der rîche” with “menegiu lant.” Quite clearly these were not pleasure jaunts to the immediate neighbors of his father’s kingdom, but rather extensive military pursuits in lands not beholden to Xanten. The scribe of manuscript C even replaces “menegiu” with “fremediu,” testimony to the idea that in the manuscript tradition Siegfried was seen as a warrior who engaged with lands to which he was not culturally bound.<sup>10</sup> His travels provide a plausible explanation for the knowledge of Niederland outside of its borders, with him as its representative. In addition, the utilization of the model of knowledge distribution via word of mouth established in the description of the renown of Kriemhild’s beauty (45) may be implied to be at work here, given the close proximity between the mention of Xanten’s reputation and Siegfried’s physical and constitutional distinctiveness. The supplementary strophe 21 of ms. C offers one further argument for linking the fame of Xanten to the exploits of Siegmund’s son: before he became a man, it states, “dô het er solhiu wunder mit sîner hant getân” that one can sing and speak thereof (2). It has been argued that this insertion is an attempt to make space in Siegfried’s biography for Hagen’s later account of his

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<sup>10</sup> This study will focus primarily on ms. B of the text. References will be made to the other two major manuscript traditions, A and C, when their divergences from B affect the readings at hand. Citations from manuscript B come from the edition of Helmut de Boor, those from manuscript A from Michael Batts’ synoptic edition, and those from manuscript C from Ursula Hennig’s edition.

youth,<sup>11</sup> but it also serves to expand the description of Siegfried's youthful exertions in general, and more specifically his time abroad. He traveled to foreign lands to engage in some form of strife, and, according to ms. C, the results may have brought him additional attention because of the "wunder" he was able to single-handedly achieve. Here his remarkableness issues from his actions, as it does from the properties of his own being. Thus the addition in ms. C provides a broad picture of the ability of Siegfried to attract attention to himself and by extension (although this remains unstated), to the place of his origin through the unusualness of his deeds and his own self.

Upon Siegfried's qualification for knighthood, his father announces to his men that he wishes to organize a celebration with his vassals ("mit lieben vriwenden" 27,2). The celebration is not to remain an internal occasion, however. Word is sent out to the lands of other kings; and those who are known to the kingdom, as well as strangers, are welcomed and provided with horses and clothing, a demonstration of Siegmund's openness to outsiders and the graciousness of his *milte*. Whereas Siegfried used foreign countries as opportunities to pursue his own martial ends, his father treats those unknown to him as the equals of his own associates. No matter their origins, those who were prepared to be knighted along with his son are invited by Siegmund to the celebration. Four hundred accept the invitation to be knighted in Xanten, and other foreigners are attracted by the generosity of the king and queen. The pair's *milte* acts as a magnet, bequeathing Xanten with a cosmopolitan character that is open to all who wish to gain from the kingdom's openness and munificence: "des sach man vil der vremen zuo z'in rîten in daz lant" (29,4).

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<sup>11</sup> See Siegfried Grosse, ed. *Das Nibelungenlied. Mittelhochdeutsch/Neuhochdeutsch* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1999) 737 and Friedrich Panzer, *Das Nibelungenlied. Entstehung und Gestalt* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1955) 92.

The number of candidates for knighthood is significant for the fact that nowhere else does the text mention any other young men who might be ready to assume the sword – the portion of the *Nibelungenlied* world onto which the author shines his narrative lantern is not exactly bristling with such people. The men of the Burgundian court in Worms, for instance, have already proceeded beyond this stage on their paths to the upper echelons of their society, and Etzel's land hosts a collective of exiles of proven knightly skill. Naturally, had any of the Burgundians been prepared to enter knighthood at the same time as Siegfried and accepted the invitation to Xanten, the narrative would have taken a completely different turn and the confrontation in Worms between Siegfried and the Burgundians would have never arisen. This lack of candidates for knighthood mentioned by name in the text might lead one to imagine that a large number of other unspecified lands were involved in sending their sons to Xanten. Of course the very high number of candidates may qualify as hyperbole typical of the *Nibelungenlied* and heroic epic in general, but it still suggests a lively exchange between Xanten and kingdoms beyond its boundaries. Not only that, but for the castle to have the capacity and the king and queen the desire to host so many strangers with ease speaks to what a recipient might assume to be a particular feature of life at the court, its enjoyment of mingling with the foreign and the unknown. Furthermore, the envoys of Siegmund reflect the insouciance with which the Xantener approach the *vremde*. The four hundred candidates are rounded up “swâ man vant deheinen, der riter solde sîn / von art der sînen mât” (28,1-2). This method of selecting participants for the ceremony appears almost nonchalant, insofar as it is implied that Siegmund's men assume that if a young man is ready for knighthood, he should be welcomed to Xanten, irregardless of his own cultural origins, political alliances, personal history, and so forth. The only criterion for attendance is that the young man's lineage qualifies him for the trans-

regional status of *riter*. This embrace of foreigners is placed in greater relief by the fear Siegmund and Sieglinde express concerning the dangers of contact with Gunther and Hagen, about whom they have specific knowledge. That which is *vremd* does in itself not pose a threat until it proves itself to be one.

The knighting ceremony, the only in the work, is conducted “nâch ritterlîcher ê,” or according to chivalric law (33,3). This is a trans-regional concept on the basis of its common usage in the text, ranging from its references to individual Burgundians and those associated with the court of Etzel. The text does not describe the process of becoming a knight for these others, but it can be inferred from 33,3 that there is a single protocol for this. Nevertheless, the lack of attention to this subject elsewhere in the text leaves open the possibility that the term may have a different connotation based upon the culture concerned, that it is a general category being fit to specific instances. Indeed, much of the description of Xanten in *Aventiure 2* appears similar to aspects of life described in Worms and Etzelburg. For example, attendance at Mass (33,1) is commonplace in the work. Most notably it serves as the backdrop for the conflict between Brünhild and Kriemhild. In addition, the tournament (34), feast (37), and practice of gift giving (40,2-3) are standard features of festivities in the *Nibelungenlied*. Nevertheless, the narrator does carve out a unique space for Xanten, most especially via the willingness of its leaders to incorporate elements of the foreign into its most meaningful occasions.

### **Understanding the Culture of Xanten and the Vocabulary of Custom**

Although the text does not describe the culture of Xanten in detail, subtle indications about its nature can be detected, despite the doubts of Peter Göhler, who ascribes to the character of Siegfried “ein[en] gewisse[n] märchenhafte[n] Zug” because “sein Reich [Xanten] bleibt [. . .]

in einer gewissen Unbestimmtheit märchenhafter Ferne,” in spite of the description of his noble background in the second Aventiure.<sup>12</sup> Two of these details are linguistic features that are also markers of culture in Aventiure 2. These highlight the unusual nature of the festivities at Xanten with regard to the foreign and set it apart from the other festivals which take place in the work, thus creating a sense of Xanten’s cultural niche. The first example can be found in the usage of the weak verb *lieben*, uncommon in the *Nibelungenlied*, which conveys the delight which Siegfried’s fellow candidates for knighthood experience while at the ceremony: “dô liebt’ in diu reise, daz si kômen in daz lant” (39,4).<sup>13</sup> These newly-minted knights relished the journey that led them to this particular land, and one can assume also the accompanying benefits: the goods bequeathed to them, the opportunity to participate in a tournament, and their elevation to the knighthood. Despite the fact that many aspects of the festival in Xanten can be found in the other descriptions of celebratory situations in the work, the verb that expresses their reaction separates it from the responses to other festivities and stresses how these non-Xanteners embrace their hosts.

A similar scene provides a paradigmatic basis for understanding how this celebration stands out in the text. While the narrator states that guests were never treated better during the reception of Brünhild in Worms after the successful wooing trip to Isenstein, the representation of the festival becomes ambivalent when it is noted that those who wish to leave the land wanted to do so even before the gift giving concluded the fourteen-day festival: “die wider ze lande wolden, die dûhte des ze lanc” (689,2). Those who have traveled from outside Worms, in other words those “who wanted to go back where they came from,” wish no further delays to their

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Göhler, *Das Nibelungenlied. Erzählweise, Figuren, Weltanschauung, literaturgeschichtliches Umfeld* (E. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989), 80.

<sup>13</sup> The verb appears again just once, in stanza 591, where it is used to describe how the knights present at the arrival of Brünhild in Worms are happy to see her standing next to Kriemhild.

home journeys, a negative reflection on some aspect of the festival. A parallel negative use of this term – to express racial superiority – occurs during Gahmuret's stay in Zazamanc in *Parzival*: “liute vinster sô diu naht / wâren alle die von Zazamanc. / bî den dûhte in diu wîle lanc” (17,24-26). Is the festival successful but just too long, or not good enough to warrant its length? The text provides no answer, but this urgency to leave sets the festivities at Worms apart from the unequivocal acclaim for the celebrations in Xanten. When contrasted to the impatience of those who wished to leave Worms for home, Siegfried's knighting ceremony was gladly shared to its full extent by the outsiders who benefited from the generosity and hospitality of the Xanteners.

Throughout the work, when the narrative turns to the customs of a particular place or culture, the author uses the substantive *lant* to situate the practice in a particular geographical location.<sup>14</sup> Occasionally, a religious connection with the term will also appear, but only in the second half of the work.<sup>15</sup> However, when Sieglinde offers red gold to Siegfried's companions during the knighting ceremony, this is done “nâch alten siten” (40,2). The text is ambiguous as to what is “ancient” about the practice. Its antiquity may be based on the actual process of providing red gold to newly-minted knights by the mother of the host proves to be ancient in terms of originating prior to other behavioral schemes present in the narrative and is not tied to the locale in its present usage, or it may be a reference to an old tradition that has been maintained in Xanten through the ages. The narrator goes on to say that the queen knew well how to endear others to her son, presumably by means of this custom (40,4). This passage is interesting for two reasons. First, nowhere else in the text is *alt* used to modify the term for

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<sup>14</sup> For example, “Dâ wart von guoten helden vil kleider ab geriten / von den hôchgemuoten nâch des landes siten” (602,1-2).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. 1353,4 (“daz tâten kristen helde und ouch die heiden nâch ir siten”) and 1850,4 (“nâch siten kristenlîchen man vil liuten began”)

practice or custom, *site*. This modifier lends her action a sense of timelessness, a conservatism that is grounded in binding strangers to one's family and realm. Sieglinde is well aware of how to employ such older practices, keeping them alive in Xanten, a fact stated for no other cultural milieu in the text. Rather than act according to the dictates of her own whim, she is acting with respect to older customs, which may or may not be more universal than "landes siten." In fact, the phrase recalls the opening stanza in mss. A and C, in which the narrator frames the work within the oral tradition of "alten mæren." This openness to ancient tradition, whether marked by autochthonous or universal custom, is comparable to the openness of the kingdom to foreigners. Although the maintenance of tradition in the kingdom links past and present, the practice of custom in the form of the knighting ceremony at the same time holds the potential of introducing outside influences into the land.<sup>16</sup> The further significance of this phrase is that it sets Siegfried and her land apart from those who act in accordance with "landes siten" – in itself, this phrase is an indicator of the geographic anchor of a practice. Xanten is set even further beyond Worms and Isenstein in that it follows an older stratum of custom that may at one time have been more universal in its appropriation and utilization by other cultural centers. Instead of the connection to customs leading back to antiquity evident in the offering of red gold, Gunther's enunciation of his kingdom's historical reach goes back only as far as his father's honorable leadership of Burgonden (112). As for the particular practices of Isenstein (Brünhild's competition, the ban on weapons in the castle), they have no stated source in the past. In the Xanten of the text's presence, the success of this maintenance of older forms of social interaction is evident in the use of the verb *lieben*, a very positive assessment of the "traditional" culture in place at the court in Xanten on the part of the *vremden* who attended Siegfried's knighting

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<sup>16</sup> Siegfried, as will be discussed below, exemplifies his homeland's integration of traditional modes of behavior with new approaches to the world.

festivities. But although there is a streak of traditionalism running through the Xantener's culture, it is balanced with persistent openness to the foreign, and consequently, the possibility of contact with the novel and unaccustomed.

The festival for Siegfried is just a snapshot in time, set before his travels to Worms and confrontation with the Burgundian kings. Because foreigners are invited once to Xanten and Sieglinde offers gifts in the ancient manner, were recipients of the text to assume that this conduct represents a peculiarity vis-à-vis the Xantener's interaction with the world imagined in the *Nibelungenlied*? In fact, the text provides hints about the regularity with which such contacts with the outside world may have taken place. Upon determining that Siegfried is ready to be knighted in stanza 26, the preparations for the invitation of a large number of foreigners are carried out in strophe 27. In the first two verses, Siegmund's men are told that he wants a celebration with his "vriwenden." This announcement is then interpreted by other unnamed actors as a request to spread the word in the lands of other kings. And then in what appears to be a curious foreshadowing of the later full depiction of the festival, Siegmund provides both those he knows and strangers who have traveled to Xanten with the appropriate host gifts. This seemingly instantaneous enactment of the king's desire suggests that such preparations have a routine character, making the impression that such forays into the foreign world were normal for the men of Siegmund. In contrast to the long, somewhat confused preparations for the welcoming party in Worms for the reception of Brünhild to be discussed below, the effortlessness with which the desires of Siegmund are carried out allows a recipient to conclude that such interaction with the outside world was part and parcel of life in Xanten. And this early impression of the permanence of Xanten's embrace of *vremden* is supported by the reception of Siegfried, his new wife Kriemhild, and her retinue in Aventiure 11: "ist iemen baz enpfangen,



daz ist mir unbekant, / danne die helde mære in Sigemundes lant” (707,1-2). Just as the *milte* of Siegmund and Sieglinde is magnificent at the beginning of the work, at this later point in the narrative this practice remains intact, setting this locale apart from the court of the the Burgundians: “swie grôz ir hôhzît bî Rîne was bekant, / noch gap man hie den helden vil bezzer gewant, / danne si ie getrüegen noch bî allen ir tagen” (711,1-3). As will be discussed later, the timelessness of Xanten’s cultural practices is critical for understanding its present, as represented by the character of Siegfried. On the other hand, the description of Worms in *Aventiure 1* and during the confrontation with Siegfried remains fixed in the present but offers insight into its immediate past and the history of its own unique culture. Both possess strong cultural traditions that influence the worldviews of their representatives and in turn are reinforced by them.

### **The Structural Constituents of Foreignness in the *Nibelungenlied***

*Aventiure 2* deals nominally “von Sîfride,” but the details about his life inform the audience just as much about the world from which he ventures to challenge the Burgundians. The themes include the idea of preparing the next generation to continue the governance of a kingdom, the necessity of education and training for young men to carry out such a task, and the basic components for a successful medieval celebration. At the same time, the foreign is a key element in this second *Aventiure*. The celebration of Siegfried’s knighthood receives greater significance through the large influx of fellow candidates from outside of Xanten, who partake in the excellence of their hosts’ preparations, word of which spreads likely beyond the borders of *Niederland*: “von der hôhgezîte man mohte wunder sagen” (29,1). Xanten’s interactions with the foreign dominate the second *Aventiure*, and this early concentration on the subject hints at the importance of the interrelationship of *kunden* and *vremden* for the text as a whole.

But what constitutes the foreign in this work, and what role does this concept play in the *Nibelungenlied*? One aspect of being a *vremder* centers on possessing a different cultural background from those with whom one interacts for the first time or of whom one has not received any mediated knowledge. An early example of such a meeting of complete strangers takes place during Siegfried's interaction with the denizens of the land of the Nibelungen. Siegfried, from his own perspective, is a complete stranger because insofar as the text reveals, he knows nothing about the culture of the Nibelungen, neither through a shared background nor through information he has received. On the other hand, the Nibelungen know that Siegfried is "stark," and all that description entails. It is only through his direct experiences with them that Siegfried gains *künde* of Nibelung, Schilbung, and their men, although they remain *vremden* to him, since their cultures differ markedly. Such occurrences are a common expression of *vremde* in the text, the fully unknown meeting the partially known.<sup>17</sup> But even mediated or direct experience of foreigners, which may grant *künde*, fails to erase the essential cultural differences between those originating in separate locales and customary backgrounds. The prime example of this situation is Siegfried's trip to Worms. The information provided by his parents prepares him for the confrontation with the Burgundians, but of course this does not lead to an equivalence of their cultures. On the other hand, those with whom one has a shared background, as in growing up and living in the same environment, can be foreigners in an "everyday" or "social" sense (to use Waldenfels's description of the first, and most common, level of the "foreign), when intervening circumstances generate non-mutual experience.<sup>18</sup> One example of "everyday" *vremden* can be found in the relationship between Siegfried and his parents, as will be discussed

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<sup>17</sup> The meetings of those with different levels of cultural knowledge generate many of the central conflicts in the text, as will be discussed below.

<sup>18</sup> Waldenfels, *Topographie*, 35 and *Vielstimmigkeit*, 90.

below. Because Siegfried's experiences beyond Xanten alter his world view from that of his home court, his perception, expectations, and behavior no longer overlap with those of his parents, causing them concern. Kriemhild, who has been transformed by the grief over her husband's murder, constitutes another example of the metaphorical, or social, foreigner in the text. As for literal, or structural, foreigners, they may be twice removed from their counterparts – they may not know of the other and certainly do not share the background that would make a successful approach to that person more likely by allowing them to avoid the friction inherent in meetings between those of different worldviews and experiences.

When characters in the *Nibelungenlied* know each other, both in terms of having an awareness of their existence and sharing a similar background (this can be considered possessing *künde* of another individual), a set of shared cultural expectations generates anticipations of what others will do, although the possibility of interference arising from “everyday” foreignness always exists. For example, when Siegmund and Sieglinde tell their son about the dangers that face him in Burgonden, they do so because they believe him to be serious about his intentions to win the hand of Kriemhild. What triggers this concern? They know a young knight in their culture will wish to seek out a woman, and he does gather the necessary advice for this; they also know that he will wish to marry within his social level, as his relatives and subordinates tell him to do. These are desires reinforced by his own milieu, and Siegmund and Sieglinde proceed with an understanding of the power of this cultural background to act on a young man like Siegfried, as the elaboration of his plans matches the expectations of his cultural and social background.<sup>19</sup> Their advice to give up his hopes of marrying Kriemhild due to the “hōhvarte” he can expect

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<sup>19</sup> One might also add the power of language to telegraph future actions and relay inner plans to the components of Xantener culture. His wish for marriage corresponds to cultural norms, while the expression of his plans is understood to fully correspond with his intentions.

upon arrival is also likely given under the assumption that he will obediently follow the precepts of his parents, especially in view of his mother's distress (60,2).

Nevertheless, the best efforts of his parents cannot weaken his enthusiasm for the undertaking, one which is reinforced by his own cultural background but at the same time clashes with the authority of his own parents, themselves powerful representatives and retainers of the culture in Xanten. What might be the source of this break, the impetus that emboldens him to turn his back on the pattern of life he has known since childhood, one in which his development has been closely guided?<sup>20</sup> The answer to this dilemma facing the work's recipients may be found in the first description of Siegfried's deeds: "er versuochte vil der rîche durch ellenthaften muot" (21,2). He has ridden into the wider world before, and obviously carried himself well in those situations – at least no negative repercussions are noted. Siegfried's engagement in lands beyond Xanten causes a rift between his own experiences and those of his parents. His development occurs partly outside of their own cultural sphere, and the possibility of his divergence from their own culture is opened up. As will be discussed later, this preview of Siegfried's adventures provides the kernel to what will be a detail-laden exposition of these adventures by Hagen.

As sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu<sup>21</sup> and Anthony Giddens<sup>22</sup> have shown, individuals act not only according to the structures that frame their world, but also according to their own experience and the specific situations in which they find themselves. Furthermore, their desires, hopes, and intentions are shaped by cultural structures but may be modified by experiences that

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. stanzas 23 and 25.

<sup>21</sup> See his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977).

<sup>22</sup> See his *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California P, 1984).

do not fit therein. As Quinn and Strauss point out, there are centrifugal forces which maintain and reinforce the cognitive schemas that, when they overlap amongst multiple individuals lead to a commonality of culture, while centripetal forces, such as contact with the foreign, can alter an individual's mental structures. A similar circumstance can be detected in the *Nibelungenlied*.

Neither in the real world nor in the world of this text does culture predetermine every action. If it did, for example, the Burgundians likely would have never traveled to Etzelburg at the behest of Kriemhild because they might have guessed she would seek revenge, an emerging aspect of Burgundian culture evident in the murder of Siegfried and which, it has been argued, is first evinced in Hagen's ruining of the *leit* inflicted upon his lords by the impetuous Xantener.<sup>23</sup> This topic is the subject of one of the major disagreements in *Nibelungenlied* scholarship, the degree to which personal autonomy governs the twists and turns of the plot. For instance, according to Walter Haug, the initial actions of the characters manifest "etwas Unwägbares, Unkalkulierbares, das unmerklich das Verhängnis heraufbeschwört. Das Überschüssig-Sinnlose, das Unkontrolliert-Zufällige ist es, das als Hebel der Katastrophe fungiert, denn der Zufall ist letztlich der Handlanger des Todes, da am Ende der negative Zufall immer den positiven

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<sup>23</sup>Ingeborg Cavalié is a proponent of this interpretation: "Hagen wertet den Vorfall als schier unerträgliches *leit* [. . .] für den Troneger ist Sîfrits Kriegserklärung nicht wieder gut zu machen [. . .] Er [the author/compiler] kennzeichnet Hagen als den Kontrahenten und Feind des Helden und unterlegt seinem Tun und Streben eine wohlbegründete Motivation. Beim ersten Zusammentreffen mit Sîfrit wird Hagens Standpunkt klargestellt; sein Hass auf den Helden und sein Verlangen nach Vergeltung haben in dieser Szene ihren Anfang [. . .] Die großepische Anlage des Werkes ist gesichert: Der Vorfall am Burgundenhof ist strukturierender Baustein und kann als solcher nicht aus dem Epos herausgelöst werden," "Die umstrittene Episode in der dritten Aventure des 'Nibelungenlied': Sîfrits 'widersage' an die Burgunden" *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 120 (2001): 361-380, here 375. Cavalié contends that Hagen's aversion (*haz*) of Siegfried is sublimated until it is brought to the surface by the *leit* perpetrated against Brünhild, a point at which Siegfried's effect on Burgundian culture has provided Hagen with the method needed to overcome a knight who would appear to be undefeatable.

überwiegt.”<sup>24</sup> Jan-Dirk Müller, on the other hand, argues for a structural reading of characters’ behaviors as the outgrowth of the multiple and complex bonds that join them: “Ein dichtes Netz personaler Beziehungen bestimmt das Handeln der Protagonisten.”<sup>25</sup> In this interpretation, external structures, in the form of cultural traits and knowledge of power, hierarchy, and relationships, provide a basis for the actions of characters. In view of what Haug states, it is true that the deeds of characters in the work have unintended consequences that spawn a continuous chain of actions and reactions. In the reading provided here, however, those chains of consequences never become “uncontrolled,” as Haug terms it, insofar as they do not elicit from characters wild and random actions. They are still influenced and guided by their own backgrounds and experiences: a seemingly desperate action like Kriemhild’s revenge is a response to all that she has experienced before. Therefore it would be most accurate to state that characters in the *Nibelungenlied* have a certain amount of latitude to respond to the previously unknown, to situations which their culture may not have informed them how to navigate. Or on the other hand they may even respond in contradiction to that structure, or cultural trait, and actively rebel against the precepts by which they would normally find themselves constrained.

Structures with which one is intimately connected can provide assistance in situations when one is outside of a native milieu, but they just as easily can cause difficulties. Siegfried’s knowledge of how to behave in a court setting, picked up during his adolescence in Xanten, allows him to make adjustments to his behavior in Worms when it becomes clear that he will not be able to gain Kriemhild through an act of violence, as will be discussed below. Thus when the Burgundians defuse his plan to best them by means of violence, he has the ability to fall back on trusted patterns of behavior that he has mastered in the past and which were likely unconsciously

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<sup>24</sup> Haug, “Konzeption,” 47-48.

<sup>25</sup> Müller, *Spielregeln*, 153.

ingrained into his being. After her arrival in Worms, Brünhild, to illustrate the opposite effect of grounding in a specific culture, suffers the consequences of a culture focused on the full correspondence between perception and reality. The wooing contest at Isenstein is meant to reveal the proper suitor through his performances, which are visually measured by her and her court. A man proves himself to her through what he shows her. Each throw and each jump can be measured unerringly against those which follow. But when she then enters a culture which employs visual and oral deception, as present in Worms where the bond between appearance, *Schein*, and truth, *Sein*, is beginning to be broken, her cultural alienation becomes apparent. Unable to orient herself in this strange and confusing culture, she cannot adjust to the new world in which she finds herself, triggering problems that prove to be insurmountable.<sup>26</sup>

### **Individuality and Cultural Structures**

Despite the fact that the *Nibelungenlied* centers on characters who move the narrative forward, the cultural backgrounds from which they emerge exert a major influence on them as well as the narrative. The work does not concern itself with purely autonomous figures defending their own self-interest, since many times over this very self-interest is channeled by cultural and social mores. These environmental inputs hold the capacity to shape behavior, while at times the essence, or disposition, of the individual character in question prevails over the strictures of his or her cultural situation. Of course, the *Nibelungenlied* is not an anthropological study and therefore lacks a critical analysis of the interaction between culture and individual as one finds in modern academic treatments of the subject, but it does encompass a range of behaviors that can be analyzed from an anthropological standpoint.

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<sup>26</sup> This problem will be discussed in depth below.

In the first two *Aventiuren*, the work reveals that the characters of the *Nibelungenlied* can be viewed on two planes: external and internal. Because the work is not a character study in the modern sense of revealing all that drives a character, no one figure in the *Nibelungenlied* is illuminated externally and internally to the extent that every decision constitutes a matter-of-fact occurrence for the audience, or that an unmistakable line can be drawn from an action to its cause. But as the first *Aventiuren* show, such clarity eludes the narrative not because the vocabulary for such a narrative strategy is unavailable to the author. Surely what impressed the contemporary audience are the bold actions narrated in the text, the external dealings of its actors: the verbal exchange between Kriemhild and Brünhild, the murder of Siegfried, the slaughter at the court of Etzel. The external, the active, provides the basis for much of the narrative's energy. And yet a second plane of characterization takes on a decided tone of interiority, which in the case of the *Nibelungenlied* means that particular internal mental processes within characters are described by the narrator, not all of which are relayed in their totality, or even at all, to the exterior by means of visible emotion or behavior that other *characters* can perceive. Interior states may be revealed to the audience at the same time that they, or at least their true natures, are hidden from fellow characters in the text, either intentionally or unintentionally.

Kriemhild is perhaps the best example of interiority in the work. Walter Haug has termed her "die erste wirklich individuelle Gestalt in der abendländisch-mittelalterlichen Erzählliteratur" on the basis of her ability to retain memories and act thereupon.<sup>27</sup> Kriemhild's emotions and inner turmoil are revealed by the narrator frequently, from her dream of the falcon's death to her

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<sup>27</sup> Walter Haug, "Montage und Individualität im *Nibelungenlied*" *Nibelungenlied und Klage. Sage und Geschichte, Struktur und Gattung. Passauer Nibelungengespräche 1985*, ed. Fritz Peter Knapp (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1987): 277-293, here 282 and 288.



sadness over Siegfried's murder that spills out into the public sphere, sometimes bursting onto the exterior, as when Etzel's men see her lamenting. The princess' falcon dream that opens the work functions as an important predictor for what will happen in the work and metaphorically signals the murderous end her husband will face: "The falcon dream is related at Kriemhild's first appearance in the narration (st. 13) and introduces the controlling narrative motif of part one of the work (i.e., Sîfrit's murder)."<sup>28</sup> For her own characterization it is also important because it opens a window into her mental activity. Before this stanza, she simply constituted the beautiful subject of men's desires (2-3). The description of her dream, however, issues from her inner being, as mediated by the narrator. This view into her own personality continues in the conversation with her mother about the meaning of the dream, which brings to light her hopes and her fears.

In addition, the exchange between Kriemhild and her mother illuminates the culture of the Burgundian court with respect to its expectations for women in her position, as elucidated by Ute: "soltu immer herzenlîche zer werlde werden vrô, / daz geschiht von mannes minne. du wirst ein scône wîp, / ob dir noch got gefüegeet eins rehte guoten riters lîp" (16,2-4). The connection between an inner world and the culture of the court comes to the forefront in the first line, that in order to live in bliss, she requires a husband. In the "werlt" of Burgonden, which encompasses the totality of her own life ("zer werlde"), the love of a man is the route to female happiness.<sup>29</sup> Reinforcing the normalcy of such a practice is the fact that no one in Burgonden opposes the stream of men that come to Worms to woo her.<sup>30</sup> Ute then responds to Kriemhild's concerns

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<sup>28</sup> Jerold C. Frakes, "Kriemhild's Three Dreams: A Structural Interpretation," *ZfdA* 113 (1984): 173-187, here 175-176.

<sup>29</sup> This is also a common motif in medieval literature, including *Minnesang*. Brünhild's happiness, however, is never linked to the love of a man.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. stanzas 45-46.

about maintaining her beauty by saying that a knight, God willing, will help her do so. Ute's responses to the dream cannot counter the worries of Kriemhild, who says she wishes to avoid the love of a knight because if she does become involved with a man, she will lose her beauty. She also maintains that the love of a man will cause torment, "nôt," for her. Kriemhild's qualms about her beauty and her happiness are completely intertwined, as becomes apparent when she disallows her mother's argument by using anecdotal evidence: "ez ist an manegen wîben vil dicke worden scîn, / wie liebe mit leide ze jungest lônên kan" (17,2-3).<sup>31</sup> Through this evidence she shows that she believes love opens the door to suffering and its physical aftereffects. The hope of Kriemhild to hold on to her physical attributes and her carefree life contrasts with her fear of ruination through relationships with knights. Thus strophe 18, which outlines how Kriemhild went for many days without finding someone that she loved, a situation visible to the court, receives the context necessary for its proper interpretation – we know why she avoids any thought of love, and understand how the lack of suitors could be so pleasant to a member of a culture that clearly advocates the marriage of its women. Without an interior view of her character, or at least public statements about her desire not to marry, the dichotomy between her culture and her actions would engender confusion in the recipients. A clear link is thus established by the author between her blissful state of singlehood shown in stanza 18 and the conversation with Ute. The preceding stanzas prepare the audience by indicating why she reacts so to the situation of the suitors. Thus in the first *Aventiure*, a chain of evidence leads to the explanation for a particular behavior or stance. In this instance, the connection between the basis

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<sup>31</sup> The Burgundian court, prior to the arrival of Siegfried, seems to be swayed by the power of visual evidence. However, this aspect of its culture changes with the integration of the foreigner from Xanten.

for a behavior and its enactment is clearly able to be established due to the proximity of cause and effect and the containment of both in a single textual unit.

### **The Complexity of Siegfried**

Besides Kriemhild and Hagen, who will be discussed below, Siegfried is one of the work's most complex characters in terms of behavioral patterns and therefore instructive as to how the *Nibelungenlied* author attempts to provide logical underpinnings for what initially appear to be chaotic choices and actions. As suggested in the example of the reputation of Xanten above, the connection between an action and its cause often disappears into textual gaps, which the audience is then required to navigate if it is to avoid the impression of a series of senseless and disconnected actions running through the work. The author normally does not hold the recipients' hands and guide them directly from a motivation to act, but rather provides background information that must be recalled to place a narrative moment in its proper context. Thus, in order to fully comprehend the text's present, one must be apprised of the foundations of this present, be it the emotional grounds for an act of revenge, as in the case of Kriemhild in the last half of the work, or a conundrum that results from altered depictions of reality, as in Brünhild's confusion about the status of Siegfried that results from the concerted effort to deceive her.

In contrast to the interior image of Kriemhild presented to the audience early in the *Nibelungenlied*, the depiction of Siegfried lies almost exclusively in the realm of the external. The description of him in *Aventiure 2* lingers on the knight's exterior, illuminating that which is perceptible to those surrounding him at court. Those activities in which he engages receive no detailed accounting as to his inner response to them, unlike what the audience learns of

Kriemhild's avoidance of romantic entanglement. We only discover two desires of the young knight,<sup>32</sup> in addition to the fact that his youthful behavior corresponds to the norms "ze hove" in Xanten. We do not learn his opinion of the process of his upbringing – he simply engages with the practices of court without comment by the narrator and without insight into his mind. When he begins to serve women of the court after he has taken up arms, his father reflexively calls for the Xanten court to sponsor the promotion to knighthood of his son and other young men. There is no mention of Siegfried's desire for this to take place, or that he wishes to have others join him. Siegfried here is completely couched in a culture in which he has no say or does not choose to have a say – all preparation of the celebration is directed by his parents and we learn nothing about his interior disposition towards this activity. He only exercises his own discretion in strophe 42, when he refuses to take over leadership of the kingdom as requested by the powerful men of the kingdom: "des engerte niht her Sîvrit, der vil wætlîche man" (42,1). Perhaps following the dictates of his parents' culture, he turns them down because his parents are still alive, although the wish of the magnates to see Siegfried crowned suggests that just as the culture in Worms is not rigidly monolithic and contains room for dissent, so too is that the case in Xanten.<sup>33</sup> The audience can understand why Siegfried plays a fairly passive role in *Aventiure 2*: his obeisance to his parents and their mandates, a reflection of his own respect for his parents as well as his rootedness in the particular culture that drives life in Xanten.

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. stanza 43, in which he refuses to take the crown of Xanten because his parents still live and expresses his desire to protect the kingdom from any threats.

<sup>33</sup> Another way of understanding the wish of the kingdom's greats is that this is not a condemnation of long-held Xanten traditions, but rather a pragmatic decision given the accomplishments of Siegfried abroad. Before this expression of their desire he has shown that he can face any challenge that may threaten the kingdom, a fact that is echoed by his own stated desire to do so. Again, this may be a function of the freedom that exists within the cultural structures envisioned in the work.

An important realization in any examination of Siegfried as a boundary-crosser is that the author does invest his characters with a certain degree of reason (i.e., they have grounds or motives that are enough to lead them to take or avoid certain actions), although it is normally character-specific and thus functions based on divergent motivations. When we see below the surface of Kriemhild in *Aventiure 1*, we see a woman who shies away from the love of a man for heartfelt reasons. In the following *Aventiure* we do not peer into Siegfried because it is unnecessary – he is a knight who acts according to his station. This part of the narrative describes the path this particular culture has chosen for him. An extrinsic view of him provides what the listener needs to know to understand the later permutations of his character. This is not to say that one should consider the *Nibelungenlied* a *Bildungsroman*. There is a significant difference between a character developing and the audience's developing greater knowledge of that character by means of further revelations.<sup>34</sup> Just as a cornerstone has been laid for the partial explication of Kriemhild in the first *Aventiure*, his time in Xanten highlights one side of his character that informs at least one portion of his most significant act of border crossing, that which he executes in Worms for the sake of the princess who wishes to keep her heart free.

Early in the work the author offers various models for how characters function in the larger world. In the case of the younger Kriemhild, the recipients are presented with the tension between the expectations of a culture and the wishes of the individual, a tension only resolved when individuals are swallowed up by the cataclysmic end of the cultures that existed in the work. As for Siegfried, while he is fully integrated into his society and it has full sway over his activities as a young man, he also has a core of individuality and must face decisions concerning

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<sup>34</sup> As will be discussed below, one can say that the author establishes the full outline of Siegfried by the end of the third *Aventiure* and that his future acts can be traced back to earlier delineations of his character.

his own place in the society of Xanten. And if Kriemhild is capable of individualistic thought and its communication, the awareness thereof opens up the possibility in the text that if it is silent in this area for a certain character, the audience must not think that motivation of the sort seen in Kriemhild is actually missing. Instead, it may simply not be verbalized.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the text is silent as to Siegfried's inner thought process due to the fact that *Aventiure 2* requires no such insight, since it would not reveal anything new about Siegfried's life as portrayed by the author. Furthermore, he does not act in contradiction to what the audience might expect. For example, if Kriemhild had said she was happy being alone without the conversation with Ute to contextualize it, this would have likely caused difficulties for the intended audience's sensibilities and would have moved the culture of Worms into the realm of the completely alien when judged by the recipients' own horizon of experience. Not that it would be beyond the imagination of the author or the material with which he worked to construct a courtly world in which women are expected to repel the advances of men. The threat Brünhild presents to her suitors demonstrates this possibility well. Indeed, the text's audience receives guidance from the author that disallows it from assuming that her disregard for men is *not* normal for the culture in Worms. Although the unusual forms culture can take in the text have not already been established at this early point, it is quite often the case that recipients cannot draw conclusions about the text with reference to their own world.

Siegfried's behavior, on the other hand, corresponds to the culture in Xanten – he does not refuse to take part in the knighting ceremony, for instance, so any contextualization would be superfluous. The presence of both planes of the character, the extrinsic and intrinsic, and the

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<sup>35</sup> The use of the terms “individuality” and “individualistic” in this context is intended to highlight those aspects of characters that diverge from the norms established by their indigenous cultures.

corresponding perspectives granted to the audience in the first two *Aventiuren* indicate a latent existence of interiority in the text that is not always voiced. In these first two *Aventiuren* the author also puts on display his ability to manipulate them for narrative purposes, in the case of Kriemhild to display a recurring theme of the text, the intertwining of *liep* und *leit*, and for Siegfried to lay the groundwork of a complex personality that is capable of navigating difficult situations by means of the knowledge and experienced garnered in the past.

The overall interpretation of Siegfried's character has undergone radical change over the span of *Nibelungenlied* research. According to Werner Hoffman's research summary from 1993, "[Siegfried] erscheint auch den meisten Interpreteten des Nibelungenliedes schon seit geraumer Zeit als viel komplexer und damit auch 'menschlich' interessanter denn zu der Zeit, als er überwiegend 'monolithisch' als ein Stück 'Urgestein' aus dem Mythos oder der historisch gebundenen Sage aufgefaßt wurde."<sup>36</sup> While there has been no agreement on the way to evaluate his character, it is wrong to label him as an enigmatic knight who seems to act randomly and whose next move cannot be predicted, or to deny that any underlying system which would make him a comprehensible actor in the eyes of the work's recipients steers his actions. One of the main controversies concerning Siegfried revolves around his entrance into the foreign realm of Burgonden. Interpretations of this scene have ranged from a clash of monolithic cultures, the courtly and the heroic, to the struggle between older ways of interaction among individuals – violence – and new ways – chivalric civility.<sup>37</sup> I would however like to recast the argument and focus on Siegfried as a character of a certain cultural sphere – whose knowledge of the world has

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<sup>36</sup> Werner Hoffmann, "Siegfried 1993. Bemerkungen und Überlegungen zur Forschungsliteratur zu Siegfried im Nibelungenlied aus den Jahren 1978 bis 1992," *Mediaevistik* 6 (1993): 121-151, here 123.

<sup>37</sup> For an excellent, and brief, summary of the various readings of this scene, see Cavalié's article on the third *Aventiure*.

been expanded through his adventures outside of that realm – clashing with a region that has been closed to change and outside influence since its narrative beginnings outlined in the text.

### **Siegfried's Past**

Just as Kriemhild's desire to disavow love arises from reasons sequentially detached from the actual behavior (although relatively speaking in the closest of proximities for the *Nibelungenlied*), Siegfried's actions can be linked to a narrative past, although it is one that is revealed only piecemeal. The reason for this may be for the narrative purposes of increasing the audience's suspense and interest, constraints present when reshaping older material into as organic a whole as possible, or for that matter some other reason. This requires establishing the narrative's biography of Siegfried in order to understand the knight's actions, a work of interpretation that has been a source of consternation for scholars in the past. For instance, Helmut de Boor insists that the fantastic elements of Hagen's report about the Xantener's youthful adventures are fully incongruent with his social status and upbringing.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, Gunther Eifler insists that "die Einheitlichkeit des vom Dichter sorgfältig gestalteten Erkenntnisvorganges duldet keinesfalls die Aufspaltung der Siegfriedfigur in einen höfischen Ritter und einen Vorzeitrecken."<sup>39</sup> It has been asked how exactly Siegfried was supposed to have carried out the adventures Hagen ascribes to him in *Aventiure* 3 and how such a life could be balanced with the world of constraint in which he was raised and functioned so well for many

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<sup>38</sup> de Boor, 20.

<sup>39</sup> Gunther Eifler, "Siegfried zwischen Xanten und Worms," *Sprache, Literatur, Kultur. Studien zu ihrer Geschichte im deutschen Süden und Westen. Wolfgang Kleiber zu seinem 60. Geburtstag gewidmet*, eds. Albrecht Greule and Uwe Ruberg (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989): 277-290, here 284.



years. But there are often overlooked, subtle cues in the text allowing a chronological account of Siegfried's life that encompasses all aspects of the text's early conception of the character.

Strophe 21 has been a main stumbling block for those trying to understand the knight's biography. This stanza functions as a glimpse into the future of Siegfried, one that establishes in part why Xanten was well known – the knight's military exploits in lands outside of his father's kingdom – and further serves to foreshadow his own clash with Gunther and his retinue:

Sîvrit was geheizten der snelle degen guot.  
 er versuochte vîl der rîche durch ellenthaften muot.  
 durch sînes lîbes sterke er reit in menegiu lant.  
 hey waz er sneller degene sît zen Burgonden vant!

This stanza provides the first opening into which the story of his youthful adventures can be situated in his biography. The only temporal adverb is “sît,” which appears in the fourth line and clearly indicates that his wide-ranging travels have taken place in the narrative time frame before *Aventiure 3*. One might even consider stanza 21 a summation of Siegfried's life beyond the boundaries of Xanten, of which one catches another glimpse in the final stanza of the *Aventiure* of mss. A and B,<sup>40</sup> and which receives greater contextualization in stanza 43 of ms. C:

In dorfte niemen schelten, sît dô er wâfen genam.  
 jâ geruowete vil selten der recke lobesame  
 suochte niwan strîten. sîn ellenthaftiu hant  
 tet in zallen zîten in vremeden rîchen wol bekant.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Stanza 43, which discusses Siegfried's wish to protect Xanten from external dangers and is cited and discussed below.

<sup>41</sup> All citations from ms. C are from Ursula Hennig, ed. *Das Nibelungenlied. Nach der Handschrift C* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1977).

And stanza 21 of that same manuscript only makes the link between Hagen's story and the Siegfried of Aventure 2 clearer:

Ê daz der degen küene vol wüehse ze man,  
 dô het er solhiu wunder mit sîner hant getân,  
 dâ von man immer mere mac singen unde sagen;  
 des wir in disen stunden müezen vil von im gedagen.

Nevertheless, strophe 21 in manuscript C does not consist of any significantly new material, but instead establishes an unmistakable bridge to the revelations about Siegfried in the third Aventure, despite the fact that attentive recipients would have likely seen echoes of Hagen's tale in strophe 21 of ms. B without requiring such an obvious connection. Mss. A and B are prime examples of the author laying a narrative groundwork and then returning to it after intervening narrative, thereby exhibiting a trust in the audience to recall the necessary prefatory, and indeed preparatory, material, that is, presumably if his intention is for them to experience a congruent narrative. Ms. C verbalizes the necessary input that the other two manuscripts would have required on the part of the recipients, that his travels into foreign lands were laden with the unusual and the fantastic. One other characteristic of this strophe should be noted: the substantive that stands in for Siegfried's name is "degen," as opposed to the term "kint," or young man, found in the following stanzas. The juxtaposition of these two terms as understood in their contexts indicates the occurrence of a temporal shift from a present-based rendering of the knight to a recollection of his earlier days.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> According to Lexer, the term *kint* can also refer to young men after their knighting and even to young married men and women, Matthias Lexer, ed. *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch*. 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 1992), here vol. 1, column 1575. On the other hand, some thirteenth-century texts employ *degen* to refer to boys (for example, Reinbot von Durne's *Der heilige Georg*),

The four stanzas following 21 clearly describe Siegfried's youth: stanza 22 speaks of his "jungen tagen" and describes his physical beauty and his disposition towards honor, here a biological assessment, while the following strophe (23,2) mingles more dispositional information with his place in the educational system of court. Stanzas 24 and 25 have perhaps caused the greatest difficulty for those trying to reconcile the story of his youth with the Siegfried the audience learns of in *Aventiure 2*. In this we learn that he has grown enough to take part in life at the court, but he was never allowed to ride without accompaniment. Strophe 26 is of central importance to his biography:

Nu was er in der sterke, daz er wol wâfen truoc.

Swes er dar zuo bedorfte, des lag an im genuoc.

Er begunde mit sinnen werben scœniu wîp,

Die trûten wol mit êren des kûenen Sîvrîdes lîp.

The temporal adverb "nu" sets this apart from the preceding description of his life as a "kint," as he was now able to carry arms. At the same time he began to serve ladies of the court. The actions described in 26 are of a continuous nature – he has reached the age to carry arms, and he engages with more than one woman indicated by the use of the plural form of the adjective before "wîp." This is the narrative gap that could be the opening needed for his adventures in the land of the Nibelungen to take place. Although unstated, his experience in the foreign world may have also been a factor in convincing the "herren" of the land to ask him to be king, even though Siegmund still ably leads his kingdom. This experience may also account for the seldom-discussed third and fourth lines of stanza 43: "doch wold'er wesen herre für allen den gewalt, / des in den landen vorhte der degen kûen' unde balt." Up to this point neither Siegmund

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although its most common definition is warrior or hero, Lexer, vol. 1, column 414. Despite this, the acts expressed through these terms cannot be confused in terms of their chronological order.

nor Sieglinde make mention of a threatening outside world – should one assume that Siegfried believes after all of his confrontations outside of Xanten that the foreign does not always consist of only like-minded young men who want to be knighted with him, and that it can pose a threat? Of particular note is the singular subject of *vürhten*, which indicates that Siegfried and Siegfried alone worries about dangerous incursions into *Niederland*. At least as far as the narrative reveals, he perceives something of which his fellow Xantener may not be aware or at least causes them no concern. By the time of his promotion, Siegfried has benefited from extensive training at the Xanten court and hard-fought experiences in the world outside the gates of his castle. He is thus well-prepared to face the challenges waiting for him in Burgonden, even if his parents worry about his well-being given the information that they possess about Gunther and his men. Siegfried has acquired all of the experience possible to engage with the unknown, and his experience and upbringing will gain him access to the world of the Burgundians, although the cascade of events he thereby triggers will ultimately consume him.

In the description of Siegfried's youth in *Aventiure 2* we have a picture of the knight emerging as a product not only of his own personal prowess and disposition, but also of his environment and training. Siegfried's essence is described in biological terms and thus seems to have an origin not wholly dependent on the world in which he grows up and receives his training. Rather there is an apparent natural process that makes itself observable in the development of his positive attributes. His origin alone as the son of a noble king, mentioned in the first line dedicated to him, signals his biological, genealogical origins as well as the social milieu in which he is located. This language of lineage is common in the *Nibelungenlied*, for example when the Burgundians are described as “von arde hōhe erborn” (5,1) and is a central

theme in medieval histories and chronicles and other textual traditions.<sup>43</sup> However, in the *Nibelungenlied*, this is not merely window-dressing, an attempt to speak to the audience about its own concerns about lineage, blood, and the resulting privilege, but rather it plays an important role in the text. Someone who is not “eins edelen küneges kint” (20,1) would likely not be the center of attention, not someone of whom people would be amazed “was êren an im wüehse und wie scœne was sîn lîp” (22,3).

*Êre* and *tugende* organically develop in the young man – they cannot be imprinted from without. His success at court requires an internal development that can only be accented by his environment, not generated by it. He can learn from “die wîsen” (25,3), but they cannot provide him with these inborn qualities that reveal themselves with his maturation. He therefore has access to honor and virtue, but he too possesses less positive qualities from the perspective of a peace-loving kingdom like Xanten. To what can one, for example, attribute his aggressive rides into foreign lands? The openness of Xanten to the foreign has already been explicated, but the peaceful interaction between that court and others does not suggest that Siegfried may have picked up such a desire for military perambulations from the culture of his own court. But in stanza C 43, not only does the text offer motivation and anticipation for the presentation of his life in *Aventiure* 3, but it also explains where Siegfried’s desire to test his mettle in foreign lands may have come from: an inborn aggressiveness and restlessness that explains his travels and his violent ways at the same time. While the scribe fills in a gap that he may have felt made the story of Siegfried’s journeys into the unknown seem too happenstance for the audience, he also

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<sup>43</sup> “Anyone following the chronicles and charters of one region from the ninth through the eleventh or twelfth century must be struck by the increase in the number of nobles found in the sources. In the ninth century the nobility formed a very small group; by the twelfth every region included dozens of noble lineages,” Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Those of My Blood: Constructing Noble Families in Medieval Francia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 13.

reinforces the overall fact that the work relies heavily on the notion of cause and effect, that events do not materialize out of a vacuum, but that precedents steer the action of the narrative. Although he likely had other intentions for this inclusion, it clearly adds support for the violent, restless Siegfried detailed in stanza 21 and seen in the young knight who willingly challenges the kingdom of Burgonden.

Moreover, one last inborn aspect of Siegfried lies behind his decision to test the Burgundians and explains the work's preoccupation with the interaction of foreigners: his gender. Without exception in the *Nibelungenlied*, the women who receive the attention of suitors do so at their own residences – it is the role of suitors in the work to initiate contact either through their own travels or by proxy. In addition, the attention of the work's suitors is always projected beyond their own borders, thereby setting the stage for numerous encounters between *vremden*. While such bridal quests are part and parcel of MHG literature (and here the *Nibelungenlied* follows contemporary conventions), it must be remembered that nothing should be assumed of a text not averse to challenging the audience's horizon of expectations as well as that it establishes precedents for behavior that do not fully overlap with its contemporary world. As Hans Robert Jauss puts it, "A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions [. . .] The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Jauss, 23. It is clear that such a notion complicates attempts to retrieve sentiments about the contemporaries' world from this fictional text, as this project seeks to do. The specific

Additional qualities accumulate in Siegfried over the length of his time in the narrative, ones which transform him and lend him fearlessness. The qualities of Siegfried established in the second *Aventiure* are supplemented by changes to his being not mentioned there, but which take place within the frame of that narrative. First and foremost is his bath in the blood of the dragon, which not only makes harming him all but impossible, but brings about a far more fundamental change: his transformation from a mortal to a near immortal. This near invincibility, coupled with his aggressiveness and prior successes in foreign lands, likely explains why his parents' concerns about his trip to Worms fail to worry him. He tells his worried mother: "ir sult niht weinen durch den willen min; / immer âne sorge sult ir mînes lîbes sîn" (69,3-4). In addition, the cloak of invisibility he gains in the land of the Nibelungen provides him with the power to alter his entire public being, which rests on his physicality and self-portrayal. Here we see the grounds for two themes that will dominate his depiction in the remainder of the work: a fearlessness reinforced by the knowledge of his own imperviousness to most dangers, and an ability to disturb the correspondence between perception and reality, a development that eventually creeps into the culture at Worms. He does not gain these personal qualities from his time in Xanten, but picks them up in foreign lands and therewith opens the way to his attempt at integration into another foreign court, this time in Worms. So although Siegfried as a member of the Xanten court was acclimated to the foreign in peaceful situations, his own aggression-filled experiences in the world of the alien and the reconstitution of his body support his sally into the foreign realm of the Burgundians.

### **Siegfried's Cultural Background**

We must remember, however, that Siegfried does not execute his entry into Worms solely based upon qualities like aggression and near immortality, but also thanks to a cultural background that allows him and the Burgundians to find a common ground and thus rescue the initial interaction from a breakdown, the source of which issues from a divergence of expectations generated by cultural and individual dissimilarities. Without the Xantener's ability to function in a court setting, the tension in the third *Aventiure* may have never been smoothed over and his eventual acceptance by the Burgundians doomed. How does the life the parents of Siegfried prepare for him foster his ability to find common ground with the Burgundians? Based upon his origins as the son of a king, he is raised according to his station: "Man zôch in mit dem vlîze, als im daz wol gezam" (23,1). Siegfried is a precious member of the community, the one who will be asked to take over the reins of the kingdom. In order to prepare him for the challenges he will have to meet, his upbringing is carried out with "vlîze." His training befits a future king, and his self-worth also increases by virtue of the great deal of attention devoted to him by the women of the court. Thus, at an early age he is linked to the desires of women and an awareness of his desirability on the part of the other sex, but at the same time his own uniqueness is inflated by their attention and his awareness thereof (24,4). But it is not only the women who are attracted to him, but also the court retinue in general, likely with the unstated result that he becomes comfortable with being the center of attention. His pampering extends to the protection he receives when riding, as he is not allowed to do so alone.



The education of Siegfried is handled by the wise men of the court: “Sîn pflâgen ouch die wîsen, den êre was bekant” (25,3).<sup>45</sup> In addition to being learned, they were also well acquainted with *êre*, a term here that has a different connotation than when used to describe the inborn quality of Siegfried. The following line assists in pinning down the connotation of the term: “des moht er wol gewinnen beide liut unde lant” (25,4). Due to the antecedent of “des,” he was able to take over the kingdom of Xanten, but the question remains as to the nature of the exact antecedent. The first two lines of the stanza discuss his constant accompaniment when at court and the wardrobe prepared for him. Both seem incomplete as any kind of preparation to rule a kingdom. So far as preceding stanzas are concerned, stanza 23 contains a “des” clause that refers to lines in its own stanza. This makes it seem unlikely that “des” in stanza 25 would refer to stanza 23, the significance of which has already been summed up its own “des” clause.<sup>46</sup> As for stanza 24, it describes how Siegfried is aware that “holt wurden im genuoge” from his visits to court (line 4). While this may be a candidate for the antecedent, it is unclear if the admiration of the people is enough of a qualification to govern the land. Instead, Siegfried possesses the admiration of his people, positive inborn qualities, and the appropriate wardrobe to become a king, but these are all reinforced by his instruction in *êre* as is known to his teachers, that is instruction in the ways of the court. So before his entry into the knighthood, Siegfried is the center of attention, heavily protected, and trained in the skills and knowledge necessary to take over and run a kingdom. These early experiences in Xanten have echoes in Siegfried’s confrontation with the Burgundians: the attention of the women translates into his desire to gain the one in the world who was “ze wunsche wolgetân” (44,3), and in the singular attention to his

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<sup>45</sup> Siegfried Grosse translates this line as “Es kümmerten sich auch erfahrene Lehrer um ihn, die den Sinn der höfischen Erziehung kannten,” 13-14.

<sup>46</sup> Stanza 23 outlines how he is brought up with effort and his inborn qualities, the result of which (“des”) graces his father’s land.

presence and his safety may be found an audacity to assume that the Burgundians would grant him similar attention, while his training by men who are masters in *êre* allows him to meet the Burgundians halfway after they get over the initial shock of his behavior. Other interpreters have found it surprising that the seemingly “heroic” Siegfried can engage in a discourse beyond violence and aggression as the showdown in Burgonden progresses, but the author has accounted for that capability of his in the second Aventiure. This is accomplished via the environment in which he was raised and specifically by means of his training by masters who are versed in inculcating a young prince with the knowledge and skills he needs to rule over lands and subjects.

The Siegfried of Aventiure 2 is a man who has received the best training for his station and is fully prepared to take over the kingdom of Xanten for his father. And the lords of the land are convinced that he can and should lead the realm after knighthood is conferred upon him. As has been discussed before, the audience may have realized in hindsight that this might be due to his time in Xanten as well as abroad. The incongruence of a brazen Siegfried in Aventiure 3 and a peace-maintaining one in Aventiure 2 is clarified by Hagen’s story about Siegfried presented before Gunther and the rest of the court converse with the Xantener for the first time.

### **Completing Siegfried’s Biography**

Hagen’s story about the life of Siegfried as he adventures in the land of the Nibelungen represents a sharp turn from the earlier depiction of the young man in the work. He is no longer the passive individual who allows his parents to run his education and yields to their grasp on power. Here in the story of Hagen we have Siegfried as an individual *recke* who moves outside of the strictures of his culture and engages with the foreign. Outside of Xanten he practices

violence in the land of the Nibelungen, where he became involved in the intrigues of Schilbung and Nibelung. The disagreement that breaks out among the three is not solved via “friwentliche” means as would be expected from a Xantener. The knight from Xanten is threatened by the “zornec” attitude of the two princes (93,4) and their retinue of twelve giants. Siegfried himself slides into “zorne” when he slays the twelve giants with the sword he had just been given. A further 700 men of the Nibelungen, as well as Schilbung and Nibelung, are killed by Siegfried, who survives the conflict with nary a scratch. During this briefly described confrontation, Siegfried is able to wrest control of the realm from its defenders: “daz lant zuo den bürgen si im taten untetan” (95,4). The narrator grimly sums up the havoc he has wrought with a curt statement: “die dâ torsten vehten, die lügen alle erslagen” (98,1). But the narrator fails to unequivocally express how this experience impacts the life of Siegfried thereafter, although a closer look at how it differs from his life in Xanten provides clues that are verified as the narrative unfolds.

His success in this undertaking not only garners him the cloak of invisibility, an object that allows him to transform his own presence later in the work, but also has a number of repercussions for his personal development beyond Worms. First, he has proven an ability to protect himself away from home, and has even found that he can change the will of others by resorting to violence. He also experiences foreign worlds containing strange people with behaviors he has never confronted before, including the lack of any civility and graciousness he knew as a child in Xanten. In addition he is exposed to a practice among strangers of exchanging material goods (the sword Balmung) for the rendering of services (division of the Nibelungen hoard). Up until this point in the text, the giving associated with Siegfried has been a one-sided affair in comparison. *Milte* has in essence served itself, increasing one’s fame for

*milte*. But in the scene in the land of the Nibelungen *milte* is associated with the violence of foreigners.

With the shift in perspective on his character provided by Hagen's story, the totality of Siegfried's character is revealed to the audience, thus allowing it to understand his actions in the conflict with the Burgundians. With the story of Hagen, Siegfried is revealed to be a composite character, one who has been conditioned by his domestic background but at the same time draws upon his experiences in foreign lands to successfully negotiate another foreign land, if only for a limited period before his hosts turn on him. Xanten's culture does not hold full sway over him, as he exhibits characteristics that are reminiscent of reasoning by analogy: if the Burgundians are dangerous foreigners, and violence has helped in new situations where his well-being has been at stake, then what has worked in a similar situation will work this time. Siegfried's path is not that of a *Bildungsroman* in which characters show maturation and development. Instead the author reveals key aspects of his character gradually. Upon his arrival in Worms, Siegfried's personality has been shaped by cultural influences from Xanten and his life in the wider world – and he utilizes the wisdom from both spheres in the remainder of the work, albeit not always perfectly. The basis of every action later in the work can be found in the influences described in *Aventiuren* 2 and 3.

The author lays a series of foundations in his depiction of Siegfried that shape the permutations of the knight's experiences and deeds in foreign lands. One can say that given his background of varied experiences, he is a person grounded in multiple worlds – he has access to the advantages of conciliatory behavior in addition to knowledge of how to cross boundaries of culture and engage with the unknown or at least imperfectly known. As will be discussed below, this cross-cultural capability of Siegfried sets him apart from figures like Brünhild and Gunther,

who remain fully informed by their own cultures and are buffered from the differences inherent in the wider world of the *Nibelungenlied*. These characteristics of Siegfried also generate his affinity with Hagen, another well-traveled figure who uses his experiences abroad to perceive, and sometimes counteract, the dangers that lurk in the foreign.

## CHAPTER TWO: KNOWLEDGE AND THE FOREIGN IN THE CONFRONTATION AT WORMS

### Introduction

Knowledge is a central aspect of the *Nibelungenlied*, and its dissemination, use and purpose has received increasing attention in the scholarly literature. Recent discussions of knowledge in the *Nibelungenlied* have focused on the political power of information and its centrality to the plot. As Ingeborg Robles puts it, “Wissen, Nicht-Wissen und Nicht-Wissen-Dürfen sind die entscheidenden Achsen, an denen entlang sich die Handlung des ‘Nibelungenliedes’ entfaltet.”<sup>1</sup> She reads knowledge as being critical for the plot because it is constricted and bound almost totally to male protagonists.<sup>2</sup> According to Bruno Quast, “Wissen garantiert Herrschaft. [...] Über Wissen zu verfügen kann eine Frage von Herrschaft und Unterwerfung, von Leben und Tod sein.”<sup>3</sup> Maren Jönsson maintains that “das Wissen der Protagonisten umeinander ist in der feudalhöfischen Wirklichkeit von größter Wichtigkeit, um beurteilen zu können, wem zu trauen und wem nicht. Wenn die Personen im NL einander kennen, so ist dies nicht nur ein ‘Wissen aus heroischer Zeit,’ sondern ebenfalls ein konkret-notwendiges, politisches Wissen.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ingeborg Robles, “Subversives weibliches Wissen im ‘Nibelungenlied’” *ZfdPh* 124 (2005): 360-374, here 363.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>3</sup> Bruno Quast, “Wissen und Herrschaft. Bemerkungen zur Rationalität des Erzählens im *Nibelungenlied*” *Euphorion* 96 (2002): 287-302, here 288.

<sup>4</sup> Maren Jönsson, “Vorwissen, Rückverweise und Erinnerungen im *Nibelungenlied*,” *Kleine Beiträge zur Germanistik. Festschrift für John Evert Härd*, eds. Bo Andersson and Gernot Müller (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1997): 133-177, here 137.

Without a question, knowledge plays a political role in the *Nibelungenlied*, for example as a tool for protecting those in power<sup>5</sup> or as an implement to undermine the powerful.<sup>6</sup> But knowledge impacts another area in the *Nibelungenlied*, that of dealing with the foreign and the unknown, which itself is often tangentially connected to issues of power. When crossing cultural borders in the *Nibelungenlied*, knowledge has the *potential* of smoothing one's transition into a world of different norms, expectations, and behaviors, for the stumbling blocks created by foreignness in the real world, as in the *Nibelungenlied*, have their origin in a lack of knowledge: "Fremdheit besagt nunmehr die Unvertrautheit oder Unverständlichkeit von Wahrnehmungsgestalten und Handlungssituationen, denen unser 'Wissensvorrat' nicht gewachsen ist."<sup>7</sup> This chapter examines the treatment and significance of information about the foreigner leading up to and during the confrontation in Worms between Siegfried and the Burgundian leadership.

Syntagmatic and paradigmatic readings of issues like the meaning of Hagen's report about Siegfried's youth and the Xantener's intentions in Worms will shed light on the role of information when confronting the unknown or imperfectly known, as it often determines how characters are apprehended, approached by, and dealt with by others. At the same time, this chapter will continue to argue for the overall narrative coherence of the *Nibelungenlied*, which is complicated by questions of the knowledge, or lack of knowledge, of the foreign, despite what scholars like Julian Stech maintain is the enigmatic nature of work: "Das Nibelungenlied ist ein

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, Hagen's use of knowledge about Siegfried's past to protect the Burgundian kingdom as discussed in this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> Here one might think of Hagen's information about Siegfried's vulnerable spot he uses to waylay the powerful knight.

<sup>7</sup> Waldenfels, *Vielstimmigkeit*, 91.

vielschichtiges, rätselhaftes Werk. Der epische Erzähler verharnt meist an der Oberfläche des Geschehens. Zusammenhänge erklärt er nicht, wichtige Handlungsmotive bleiben im Dunkeln.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Prelude to Conflict: Siegfried’s Knowledge of the Burgundians**

Unlike his interaction with the Nibelungen relayed by Hagen’s story of his youth, Siegfried has access to significant information about the Burgundians before he meets them. Nevertheless, this prior knowledge has the effect of magnifying the complications of his ensuing relations with the leaders of Worms. Whereas he stumbled upon a wholly foreign tableau in the bickering of the Nibelungen and relied upon quick thinking and strength to navigate the dire straits in which he found himself, his entrée into Worms is accompanied by information, much of it contradictory to what is revealed by the totality of the narrative, that makes a correct strategy for accomplishing his goal of gaining Kriemhild’s hand nearly impossible. Yet with his spectrum of past experience he can adjust an initially wrong approach and reach a position of agreement with the Burgundians, both sparing his life for the time being and allowing him to attain that which he desires before the culture of Burgonden dramatically changes.

The information to which Siegfried has access takes two forms: the hearsay surrounding Kriemhild, and that which his parents tell him about the Burgundians, with whom his father is “lange bekant” (56,4). That which Siegfried gleans from the gossip and hearsay ever-present in the world of the *Nibelungenlied* concerns the beauty of Kriemhild: she is a “scœniu meit” (44,2) who is more than that, as she is “ze wunsche wolgetân” (44,3). When word of the extraordinary beauty of the Burgundian woman reaches the ears of Siegfried, it convinces him that she would be worthy for him to take her as his wife, as his entourage wishes for him to do. She is so

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<sup>8</sup> Julian Stech, *Das Nibelungenlied. Appellstrukturen und Mythosthematik in der mittelhochdeutschen Dichtung* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993), 182.



beautiful, in fact, that he declares that her betrothal would suit an emperor, and of this he is convinced: “daz ist mir wol bekant” (49,2). Thus, of one thing concerning Kriemhild Siegfried is certain: her peerless beauty. But does he know anything else about Kriemhild that may color the manner in which he engages with the Burgundians? Further information circulates from region to region, that she is marked by “*hohgemüete*” (45,2) and that she never accepted a suitor (46). While the narrator directly links the *mære* about Kriemhild’s beauty in 44 to Siegfried’s perception of those tales, the insights revealed in the next stanza are not ascribed directly to Siegfried’s attainment of that news and they may have been reserved for the text’s recipients. This leaves the audience in an ambivalent situation to interpret strophes 45 and 46. Does Siegfried know that Kriemhild possesses *hohgemüete* in addition to her beauty, and that these qualities have attracted a stream of suitors, none of which she would marry? While the answer to this may seem at first to be insignificant, it is important in that it may influence the views of Siegfried about the foreigners he is to encounter before he ever sets foot in Worms. Two things are of significance here: Kriemhild’s personality and the success, or lack thereof, of her previous suitors.

In respect to Kriemhild, *hohgemüete* describes the joyous outlook and stance of one who is noble and proud of his or her station, but in all other instances of the word’s usage in the text, both adjectival and substantival, it appears in conjunction with male warriors, from Siegfried (292,1) to Rüdeger (1815,1), as well as male collectives. In those examples, the word appears in martial contexts. This is not to say that the masculine connotation of the word signals a negative propensity to engage in bloodthirsty combat, but rather reflects the pride and joy such

undertakings elicit from those trained to be warriors.<sup>9</sup> But how can one understand the use of that term in conjunction with Kriemhild? Grosse translates the term as “höfische Bildung,” an interpretation of major significance for the clash between Siegfried and Kriemhild’s brothers that is to follow.<sup>10</sup> Because, as will be discussed below, Siegfried approaches the Burgundians from the perspective of a warrior, his heroic stance matches what he knows about the men of Worms, that they are fit to face any physical challenge. If the young man from Xanten indeed knows that the Burgundians also function in more conciliatory, courtly ways indicated by the attribution of *hohgemüete* to Kriemhild, then his initial stance may have been quite different. Despite Siegfried’s hearing that Kriemhild exhibits courtly behavior he does not anticipate interacting with a Burgundian culture capable of functioning in a realm beyond violence and heroics. Thus a major clue to the possible behavior of the Burgundians eludes Siegfried, as he relies solely on the information about their culture he receives from his father.

As we have seen from the education of Siegfried, the training in courtly forms of behavior is a major undertaking and one that must be directed by an expert during the upbringing of the child. Hence, courtly values must exist somewhere in the court at Worms – historically these were at a minimum usually taught by clerical educators.<sup>11</sup> But the question of the

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<sup>9</sup> See stanzas 602 and 1506 for examples. In stanza 602 the participants in the tournament that follows the entry of Brunhild into Worms are described as “helde hohgemuote.” The Burgundian travel party heading for Etzel’s country is described similarly in strophe 1506. Although a peaceful mission, their choice armor and weapons are emphasized. Such positive judgment of violence is common in medieval epic literature, particularly the *chansons de geste*. According to Maurice Keen, “Through all the poems alike there rings the same grimly exultant joy of battle. The chivalrous cult of war and the cult of honour are enshrined in them together, und unassailably linked to one another,” *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986), 104.

<sup>10</sup> Grosse, 21.

<sup>11</sup> Thomasin von Zirclaere, author of *Der Welsche Gast*, urged the nobility to educate their children in “discipline and courtesy,” and the importance of educating nobles in courtliness is commonly found in medieval literature, C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness*:

ambivalence generated in stanzas 44 and 45/46 remains for the audience, at least until strophe 49. When Siegfried hyperbolically declares that Kriemhild is worthy of an emperor on the basis of her beauty alone (“durch ir unmâzen scœne” 49,2), he is leaving out what also would be of great value to such a man: a proper upbringing and training in the ways of the court, although his declaration may include the assumption that a powerful queen can properly function in the courtly realm of an emperor. What must be noted about his statement, however, is that only the beauty of the queen is mentioned as an attractive quality to the theoretical emperor.<sup>12</sup> The audience cannot be absolutely sure that Siegfried learns of any courtliness on the part of the Burgundian queen from the information he receives about her, but he never directly mentions that he does. Interestingly, when Siegfried declares his intention to marry Kriemhild, he does not cite her courtliness as a reason, only her beauty, once again indicating a complete lack of interest in her – and the Burgundian court’s – *hôhgemüete*. His behavior upon arrival in Worms, as will be argued later, seems to indicate that in fact Siegfried was unprepared for a world that functions along the lines of Xanten, i.e., one where graciousness and propriety are the norm.

While the hearsay he picks up on about Kriemhild can only pique his interest and not facilitate a smooth crossing into another cultural realm, the discussion with his father about the trip to Worms does give him insight into the Burgundian kingdom that is both detailed and assumedly what he believes to be reliable, given that he has no reason to distrust his father. And yet despite the talk with his father, Siegfried does not gain enough insight into Burgundian culture that will allow him to properly act during his initial contact with them. According to

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*Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals, 939-1210* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1985), 219ff.

<sup>12</sup> The one-sided focus of Kriemhild’s description is all the more interesting given the typical pairings of character attributes in the work, both social (or biological) and behavioral: “edel und küene,” “edel und rîch,” “starc und wol getân,” “biderbe unde guot,” etc.

Waldenfels, learning is central in successfully overcoming cultural boundaries: “Lebensweltliche und kulturelle Fremdheit lassen sich auflösen durch Prozesse des *Lernens* und der *Umgewöhnung*, die ein Verständnis der Sache herbeiführen.”<sup>13</sup> However, the narrative reveals the incompleteness of the information Siegmund imparts about the Burgundians, thereby complicating Siegfried’s approach to the Burgundians.

After learning of their son’s intentions, the narrator shares the concerns of Siegmund and Sieglinde about his plans. Siegmund divulges information about the Burgundians after he displays a resoluteness to follow through with his plan that verges on hubris: “swaz iemen reden kunde, des ist deheiner slahte rât” (52,4). His father’s response is instructive, and may be a further insight into the culture of Xanten. When he learns of his son’s steadfastness, he signals his pleasure and agrees to help him with the necessary preparations, just as his wife does in stanza 63. Despite their misgivings, both offer assistance, his father in the form of men to accompany him and his mother in the fulfillment of his sartorial requirements. After his pledge of help, Siegmund reveals the source of his own worries, which concern the outlook of the Burgundians: Gunther has “vil manegen hôhverten man” (53,4), among them Hagen, for whom “üermüete” increases the intensity of his “hôhvert” (54,2). According to Siegmund, Hagen threatens to cause the family “leit” if the plan is executed (54,3). By this point in the narrative, the image of the Burgundians available to Siegfried rests on two points. The first is the beauty of Kriemhild (at the expense of her familiarity with civility as shown above). The second is that the kingdom of Burgonden consists of men whose pride in their own abilities can cause “leit.” About this Sieglinde suffers from worry, giving the notion of “leit” a connotation of great

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<sup>13</sup> Waldenfels, *Vielstimmigkeit*, 92.

consequence: “si begunde trûren um ir liebez kint, / daz vorhte si verliesen von Guntheres man” (60,2-3).

### **Prelude to Conflict: The Burgundian Image of Siegfried**

It is not unusual for analyses of the *Nibelungenlied* to consider Hagen’s account of Siegfried’s youth a key point for understanding central textual motifs, as well as its origins.<sup>14</sup> An element of the text younger than the oldest substrate, it has been cited as an example of the bric-à-brac construction of the text, which generates inconsistencies and stands as a testament to the diverse strands of source material located within the extant manuscript versions.<sup>15</sup> As has been discussed above, Hagen’s story fleshes out the biography of Siegfried and lends his character a dimension of experience that is critical for understanding why he behaves as he does. For the text’s recipients, Hagen’s words before the showdown complete the Xantener’s

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<sup>14</sup> Göhler argues for the centrality of what is imparted in Hagen’s report: “Hagen teilt Taten aus dem Leben Siegfrieds mit, die für späteres Geschehen eine notwendige Voraussetzung sind (Horterwerb, Besitz der Tarnkappe, Unverwundbarkeit Siegfrieds),” 13. In one recent article, Kaaren Grimstad and Ray M. Wakefield argue that his recounting of Siegfried’s adventures is a textual example of the various streams in the Nibelungen tradition that flow into the broader channel of the *Nibelungenlied* as found in extant manuscripts. “There is no preparation for the German audience at this point when Hagen becomes the storyteller, and one must assume that the readers/auditors were able to adjust to this abrupt shift because they were already familiar with these variants in the narrative tradition,” “Monstrous Mates: The Leading Ladies of the *Nibelungenlied* and *Völsunga Saga*,” *Women and Medieval Epic: Gender, Genre, and the Limits of Epic Masculinity*, eds. Sara S. Poor and Jana K. Schulman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 235-252, here 239.

<sup>15</sup> “Die Ungereimtheiten und Widersprüche lassen sich fast immer auf die Kollision von nachweislich existierenden Erzählvarianten zurückführen. Sie müssen sich notwendig einstellen, wenn es solche Varianten gibt und wenn die Überlieferung prinzipiell verbindlich gilt. Mit anderen Worten: Die Widersprüchlichkeit ist, wie Hermann Reichert pointiert festgestellt hat, ein ‘wesentliches Gattungsmerkmal’ der Heldensage, zumal der verschriftlichten, in der sie, eben zufolge des Zwangs zur Synopse, dramatisch wird,” Joachim Heinzle, “Zum literarischen Status des *Nibelungenliedes*,” *Nibelungenlied und Nibelungenklage. Neue Wege der Forschung*, ed. Christoph Fasbender (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchhandlung, 2005): 106-121, here 112.

biography<sup>16</sup> and circumscribe the outline of his character. This descriptive backstory lays the groundwork for much of the narrative in the first half of the work, and provides at least part of the impetus for the destruction of the *Nibelungenlied* world at the work's conclusion. Without the special powers and magical items Siegfried garnered in his travels outside of Xanten, the quest to gain Brünhild for Gunther would have failed, stopping the main characters, and the narrative, dead in their tracks. And although the constant subject of debate as to its complicity in the catastrophic end of the work, the treasure Siegfried seizes in the land of the Nibelungen cannot be ignored as a factor therein.<sup>17</sup>

But what has the most significance in the story for this discussion is how it affects the border-crossing effort of Siegfried. Unlike the knowledge of Siegfried's family about the Burgundians, Gunther and his fellow kings are confronted by an individual of whom they initially have no information from a land that they curiously cannot identify or of which they have no information. Whereas Siegfried's journey does not commence until after he has received important details about his future antagonists, his arrival in Worms results in his opponents' hasty rush to ascertain anything about the stranger before his entry into the castle, contrary to Irmhard Gephart's interpretation that "Hagens Erzählung dokumentiert einen wissenden Abstand zum Phänomen Siegfried und die Wormser Könige setzten dieses Wissen in

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<sup>16</sup> Walter Haug sees Siegfried's youthful adventures as central to what happens when he arrives in Worms, a critical premise of the current study: "Meines Erachtens kann man die Szene nur verstehen, wenn man sie als bewußtes Handlungszeit aus jenem heroischen Komplex von Siegfrieds Jugendtaten faßt, von denen Hagen unmittelbar vorher den Burgunden berichtet," "Höfische Idealität und heroische Tradition im Nibelungenlied," *Colloquio italo-germanico sul tema I Nibelunghi*, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1974): 35-51, here 42.

<sup>17</sup> Theodore Andersson provides a general overview of the various interpretations of the meaning of the treasure to the larger work in *A Preface to the Nibelungenlied* (Stanford UP: Stanford, 1987) 150. As he shows, some scholars have seen it as central to Kriemhild's desire for revenge, while others have not assigned it any greater significance to the narrative.

sozial umsichtige Interaktionen um.”<sup>18</sup> While Siegfried has had time to learn and consider its value and repercussions on his goals, the Burgundian kings must quickly absorb what Hagen tells them. Their seemingly unreflective, hectic reactions, belying any sense of “umsichtige Interaktion,” are quite enlightening as to their own culture and method of dealing with adversity. In addition, it also reveals the heterogeneity within the court that recalls theoretical concepts of “everyday” or intracultural foreignness.<sup>19</sup> And it is this diversity of reactions that provided an access point through which Siegfried can enter the new world in which he has found himself.

Initially, the only thing Gunther knows about Siegfried and his party is derived from reports of their appearance and the assurance that they are unknown in Worms. It is repeated that they are knights bedecked in white armor and splendid clothing (79,2-3). Gunther is troubled by the unknown identity of the approaching visitors: “Den küene des hete wunder, von wannen kœmen dar / die hêrlîchen recken” (80,1-2). This formulation of the uncertainty about the identity of the men is notable because it is equated with their place of origin, thus clearly linking the notions of culture and person. Hagen also uses the variant “von swannen” twice when he first views the approaching party (85). On the basis of these questions, it appears that the individual is inextricable from the place where he has undergone enculturation, a relationship that would appear to be stable in the minds of Gunther and Hagen but is disturbed in the confrontation between them and Siegfried when the Xantener’s non-courtly tendencies and experiences come to the forefront.

Ortwin offers a solution to identify the strangers, announcing that Hagen may be able to determine their identity because “dem sint kunt diu rîche und ouch diu vremen lant” (82,1).

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<sup>18</sup> Irmhard Gephart, *Der Zorn der Nibelungen. Rivalität und Rache im ‘Nibelungenlied’* (Böhlau Verlag: Köln, 2005), 31-32.

<sup>19</sup> Wierlacher, 66 and Waldenfels, *Topographie*, 35.

Here a major divide in Burgundian culture appears, as the inward-focus of Gunther and his brothers is contrasted with the well-traveled fount of knowledge that is Hagen. What follows are knowledge-laden passages, and increasing one's knowledge of the stranger can begin to unlock the secrets of the foreigner in the *Nibelungenlied*, at least partially. Learning to speak the language of the cultural stranger in a metaphorical sense is necessary to successfully cross cultural bridges and truly join, and understand, the once foreign: "Die Aneignung beginnt damit, daß das Fremde, das uns *anspricht*, unterderhand zu etwas wird, das sich *besprechen* läßt, anfangs mit Zauberformeln, die wir aus Mythen und Märchen kennen, später dann mit Sprachformeln oder schließlich mit Rechenformeln. Das Unberechenbare wird berechenbar."<sup>20</sup>

When Hagen takes a look at the party of knights through the window, the narrator offers a look at his mental process and at the same time issues a curious assessment of his conclusions: "si wâren im vil vremde in der Burgonden lant" (84,4). Hagen here does not only feel that they are strangers, but that they are strangers in the land of the Burgundians: these are the kind of people who do not fit into the cultural landscape of the kingdom.<sup>21</sup> His initial perception cannot allow him to pinpoint their exact station (either princes or the envoys of princes), but he knows that they are warriors who display the quality described by the adjective *hohgemuot*. Wherever they came from and whatever they are, Hagen declares, they are of martial bearing, a point reflected in what he has to tell his lords about the newcomers.

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<sup>20</sup> Waldenfels, *Topographie*, 51.

<sup>21</sup> This is quite ironic since Siegfried later becomes the representative of Burgundian culture in foreign affairs such as in the war against the Saxons and Danes and the expedition to Isenstein. Günter Eifler describes the approach so: "Den gewappneten Siegfried bereits in Sichtweite – auf diesen unmittelbaren Situationsbezug ist Wert zu legen – haben Gunther und die ihn umgebenden Männer von der unvergleichlichen Stärke und Tapferkeit des Ankömmlings gehört. Jedem ist danach klar: Ein Kampf gegen ihn ist zwecklos," 288.



His report begins with what are famous and oft-discussed lines in *Nibelungenlied* scholarship. According to Hagen, “ich wil des wol verjehen, / swie ich Sîvriden nimmer habe gesehen, / sô wil ich wol gelouben, swie ez dar umbe stât, / daz ez sî der recke, der dort sô hêrlîchen gât” (86,1-4). According to Müller, this knowledge about Siegfried is collective knowledge “von dem, das alle angeht,” it is “Sagenwissen.”<sup>22</sup> What this assessment on Hagen’s part reveals is the close association between physiology and the experiences of an individual. Hagen would be lying to his fellow Burgundians if he claimed to have seen Siegfried before, and was therefore able to recall Siegfried’s appearance, but this is never indicated by the text. What an audience may have concluded is that Hagen, who has extensively traveled the fictional world of the *Nibelungenlied*, has picked up on some of the verbal information, or *mære*, circulating throughout the imagined world of the *Nibelungenlied*, some of which may have concerned the exploits of young Siegfried, or this may be an instance of supernatural awareness of another hero.<sup>23</sup> What he has heard, or perceived, about a certain individual he apparently can match up with that individual’s exterior, upon which is written the interior of the character, in terms of both lineage and subsequent deeds. At least this is the case in the early stages of the text.

It is later in the text that a shift takes place, whereby appearance and substance fall out of joint. Even at this early point in the text, the ambiguity of appearance is problematized, insofar as Siegfried has the exterior of a “prince,” which has the connotation of his status as coequal to the Burgundian kings and the accompanying mode of civil bearing, but Hagen’s story unveils a

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<sup>22</sup> Müller, *Spielregeln*, 126.

<sup>23</sup> “Der Heros [...] ist allein von seiner Erscheinung und Taten her bekannt. Deshalb kann er bei seiner Ankunft im Nibelungenland, obwohl er noch nie zuvor dort war, wie ein Bekannter als der starke Sîvrit begrüßt werden, als wäre er der einzige, der da heranreiten könnte,” Müller, *Spielregeln*, 234.

capacity for violence untempered by conciliation and civility. The method by which Hagen joins visual information with received oral information is afforded no direct explanation in the text,<sup>24</sup> which has led to diverse interpretations of the process of identification.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, he does not state definitively that the man he spies is Siegfried, but only maintains that he believes (“gelouben”) his identification to be accurate. This power of perception he possesses may be attributable to his connection with the supernatural and the other-worldly, which would support interpretations that he can tap into mythic knowledge.<sup>26</sup> But on the other hand, this could just as easily be a case of a process of perception similar to other instances of inductive reasoning, discussed below, found in the text which allow one to make suppositions about the unknown and the foreign.<sup>27</sup>

After establishing that the person approaching Worms is likely to be Siegfried, Hagen immediately launches into his description of Siegfried’s past and issues three general statements

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<sup>24</sup> However, a similar process of identification via inductive reasoning occurs when Liudeger matches the shield of Siegfried to the person of the warrior without ever having met him before (215). An apparent overlap between hearsay and visual evidence leads to the correct identification.

<sup>25</sup> Volker Mertens writes that Hagen has access to “mythisches Wissen” about Siegfried, but not where it comes from or how he can apply it to the person he perceives approaching Worms, “Hagens Wissen – Siegfrieds Tod. Zu Hagens Erzählung von Jungsiegfrieds Abenteuern,” *Erzählungen in Erzählungen. Phänomene der narration in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, eds. Harald Haferland and Michael Mecklenburg (Munich: Fink, 1996): 59-69, here 65. On the other hand, Günter Eifler finds in the text a process by which Hagen matches that which he knows about Siegfried to the impression the Xantener makes on him, and that impression of his possible identity is given credibility via that information about Siegfried’s youth, 284.

<sup>26</sup> This is often referred to in the literature as recourse to “mythic” knowledge unavailable to the other Burgundians. Claudia Brinker-von der Heyde maintains that Hagen functions in a world in which “Fabelwesen [the *merwîp*] und Magie” have an important place. In addition, she sees his gray hair and agitated glances (“swinden blicke”) as “physiognomische Umsetzung der Eigenschaften, welche in der Figur auch in anderen Nibelungensagen angelegt sind: ihrer Wildheit, ihres Zorns, ihres Mißtrauens, ihrer Ausgegrenztheit,” “Hagen – Ein Held mit vielen Gesichtern” *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 51 (1999): 105-124, here 113-114.

<sup>27</sup> The Saxon king’s recognition of Siegfried on the battlefield and Siegfried’s awareness of Brünhild are two examples of this.

about him. Two of these hold immediate significance for the situation the Burgundians face and the last functions as foreknowledge of the revolution in Burgundian culture he presages.

According to Hagen, Siegfried “bringet niuwemære her in ditze lant” (87,1). *Niuwemære* is a rare formulation in the *Nibelungenlied* and its formulation differentiates it from the very common term *mære*, which indicates that category of verbal utterances that carry news from place to place or simply indicates what one character can reveal to an unknowing second party. *Mære* can take many forms, from messages intended to specific parties (27) to general hearsay (44) and the equivalent of “information” (77). The common element in every meaning is that two positions relative to *mære* exist: those who know it and those who do not, a key component of foreignness in the text. The placement and lexicographic form of Hagen’s pronouncement lend it a prophetic air: first and foremost the warrior from Xanten brings with him not only news, as every stranger has the potential to do, but, as will be argued below, it presages an introduction of foreignness into Burgundian culture and the transformation that ensues, ultimately leading to the society’s downfall. The proclamation of Siegfried’s *niuwemære* is reminiscent of the common practice in the text of including narrative asides at the end of stanzas that lend the *Nibelungenlied* a sense of foreboding and impending doom. Its location at the beginning of this stanza, the first to introduce the past of Siegfried to the Burgundians, appears fitting as his past will dominate the future of the kingdom.<sup>28</sup>

### **Hagen’s Account of the Clash with the Nibelungen**

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<sup>28</sup> The only other use of the word also appears at a crucial juncture of the text where the fate of the Burgundians will take another dramatic turn: the arrival of Wärbel and Swämmel at Worms to communicate their invitation to the land of Etzel (1432,1). In another striking similarity, Hagen is again the character who utilizes the term.

Prescient of the Burgundian culture's extinction in battle, the first aspect of Hagen's account of Siegfried's past centers on the genesis of his belligerence. Single handedly he slew ("sluoc") the Nibelungen, conquering the land of Schilbung and Nibelung, who were the sons of a king (87,2-3).<sup>29</sup> And since that time, he has brought about "starkiu wunder" (87,4). Thus the first impression made on Gunther and the others listening to Hagen's tale is that the man from Xanten has a past filled with violence and manslaughter. What follows in the account is a detailed description of the slayings, from the unusual situation in which Siegfried found himself (an argument between brothers on how to divide the treasure of the Nibelungen) and his bearing when the killing ensues ("mit zorne" 94,3), to what he gained from his exertions (the treasure, the sword Balmunc, the Tarnkappe, and control of the Nibelungen kingdom). Beyond his willingness to engage in deadly violence, the intimidating nature of Siegfried is increased by mention of his possession of the Nibelungen sword and the cape of invisibility. On the other hand, his person may increase in attractiveness for the Burgundians through his attainment of the treasure and his status as the lord of the Nibelungen. These two aspects of Siegfried, his fearsomeness and worthiness of admiration, exemplify his complex nature. Siegfried is a container for seemingly contradictory traits and attributes when viewed from an external perspective. While martial prowess and the collection of power and riches are not mutually exclusive in the *Nibelungenlied* (Brünhild is another example of such a confluence of characteristics), they complicate others' relationships with those who are in possession of them.

Hagen also discusses the Xantener's later exploits, his defeat of the dragon and his bath in its blood, which results in physiological change. Siegfried's skin has cannot be cut because of

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<sup>29</sup> The first verb Hagen uses to describe Siegfried's past, "sluoc," sets the tone quickly: Siegfried is a fearsome slayer, or, in its other meaning, conqueror. An interesting parallel exists with the situation at Worms, as the Burgundian leadership is of course the offspring of a king as well.

the near-invincibility this has brought him. In addition to the change wrought by the blood of the dragon, the text implies that in conjunction with Balmunc the essence of his entire being has undergone a change: many of those battling Siegfried on behalf of the Nibelungen give up the fight because of the fear “die si zem swerte heten und an den kúenen man” (95,3).<sup>30</sup> Naturally the sword may amplify the effectiveness of another warrior who possesses it, but while in the hands of Siegfried it becomes a tool of unimaginable slaughter.

What could the Burgundians have taken from the incident in the land of the Nibelungen and the slaying of the dragon? One detail about Siegfried’s character that sticks out is the fact that Siegfried was motivated by *zorn*<sup>31</sup> when he killed, but the question must be asked whether the account of Hagen unmistakably presents him as a threat to the continued peaceful existence of the Burgundians. For the first time in the *Nibelungenlied*, Hagen’s account affixes non-courtly vocabulary and bloody deeds to the image of Siegfried, whose years at home in Xanten are portrayed in only the most idealistic and positive of terms. If the Burgundian leaders paid closer attention to the account, they would realize that the context of their usage absolves him from any objective judgment that he is a bloodthirsty knight bent on death and destruction.

Here it is necessary to closely follow the syntagmatic progression of the text to understand the relationship between Siegfried’s actions and the language which Hagen employs to describe his past – a close reading of Hagen’s account on the part of recipients reveals more than the Burgundians themselves actually glean. Of critical importance is the revelation that

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<sup>30</sup> Strangely, this detail is missing in ms. C, the more courtly manuscript, while the depictions of Siegfried’s slaughter remain. This strophe actually tempers the bloodiness of Siegfried’s killing because it indicates that some men survived the fight because he did not kill those who had yielded to his advantage.

<sup>31</sup> Jan-Dirk Müller offers *zorn* as a typical heroic reaction that goes back to Homer, and indicates that an individual is “grundsätzlich heroisch-gewaltbereit.” It is also “eine regelhaft Handlung steuernde Disposition,” *Spielregeln*, 204.

Siegfried's slaughter of the twelve giants follows the displeasure expressed by Schilbung and Nibelung after he fails to solve their argument over the division of the treasure hoard (93,4). The next event that leads up to Siegfried's rampage is depicted ambivalently. Hagen notes that the twelve giants of the Nibelungen were their "friunde" and present at the mountain where the treasure was being divided. Then a question is posed: "was kundefz si vervân?" (94,2), in other words, what good could the presence of the giants do for them? Less clear is the wider sense of the contracted pronoun "ez" in verse 94,2. This may refer either to the situation at hand, as in "what use could they be to the Nibelungen in the situation of Siegfried's inability to solve their treasure dispute," or have an anticipatory sense, as in "what could they do about the situation that they found themselves in, namely being killed by Siegfried." The first interpretation would suggest that Siegfried is blameless in the ensuing violence, as he was attacked by giants who were doing their lords' bidding and trying to solve the problem of his complicity in their continued failure to resolve the issue. The second would indicate that he initiated the carnage by slaying the giants without the provocation of violence directed at him, and that the presence of the giants was useless insofar as they could not properly defend the two princes. The answer to this question – whether Siegfried initiated or reacted to the violence – is a critical fact for Burgundians who need all the information they can gain if they wish to successfully interact with him.

Both interpretations of the rhetorical question fit the situation, meaning that Siegfried may very well have played the role of victim as opposed to a violent knight seeking slaughter. In fact, the first interpretation receives some support in the way that he conducted himself during the fighting, "mit zorne" (94,3). The Nibelungen only fell into *zorn* after Siegfried's failure at the dividing table – in other words their anger was generated by a failing or perceived slight. In

any case, his rage too is triggered by an external influence, whether it be in the attack of the giants or the sudden swing in the temperament of the Nibelungen. The first option would attest to a physiological response to danger, the latter a potentially unpredictable inclination towards hair-trigger responses to potential threats.

The source of Siegfried's *zorn*, internal proclivity or external stimulus, is therefore ambiguous in this passage, but other evidence helps us locate its source.<sup>32</sup> A clearly negative adjective applied to the knight from Xanten at the end of the struggle is found in the description of him as "der vreisliche man" (97,4). In MHG *vreislich* ranges in meaning from strong and dangerous to terrifying.<sup>33</sup> Besides Siegfried, this word is also used to describe Kriemhild's conduct when she summons her son to be killed (1912,4) and in connection with the violence of Brünhild's practice of testing her potential suitors. In the context of its usage, it signifies less a constant quality of Siegfried than a state he has entered through the rigors of a one-sided battle where he needed to fight for his life. A similar usage appears in conjunction with the knight during the battle with the Saxons and Danes: "der gewan in dem sturme einen vreislichen sit" (210,4). Again, this is a condition that overtakes Siegfried only in the heat of battle. This is a quality normally sublimated in his character, not one which propels him into violent situations, but one that rises to the surface when he finds himself in dangerous situations and extreme violence remains his only recourse. The episode of the dragon slaying provides an example of how Siegfried is even capable of violent action untinged by *vreislich* tendencies. Hagen's language in this one-stanza report about the fight with the creature contains none of the

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<sup>32</sup> While his discussion of *zorn* in *Spielregeln* is more than four pages long, Müller does not discuss it in conjunction with the character of Siegfried. While his definition of the term includes some generalizations noted above, his illustrations of its use suggest a wide range of connotations that are closely dependent on the context of their usage.

<sup>33</sup> Benecke, vol. 4, 396.

adjectival and adverbial coloration and judgment of the previous episode. Hagen's straightforward account simply delineates the slaying step by step. No anger, no horrifying behavior emerges in this scene.

The image of Siegfried as a knight able to turn off and on his capability of *vreislich* behavior and one who has fallen into the state of *zorn* that leads to a slaughter is further complicated by generalizations about his youthful exploits. Stanza 43 of ms. C, for example, states that he only sought confrontation and violence as a young man, while ms. B reveals that "er versuochte vil der rîche durch ellenthaften muot" (21,2). When questioning whether the Burgundians have correctly had summed up for them his character and his potential for violence, these statements would seem to suggest that *zorn* and *vreislich* action are the default stances for Siegfried, that he only speaks the language of aggression and death. But what one cannot forget is the genesis of the difficulties he faces in the land of the Nibelungen, the account of which is the only information received by the Burgundians.

### **Foreignness and the Land of the Nibelungen**

Instead of seeking to violently overthrow the Nibelungen, Siegfried unintentionally falls into trouble with them. The circumstances at the mountain of the Nibelungen correspond most clearly with stanza 21 in ms. B: "ê daz der degen küene vol wüehse ze man, / dô het er solhiu wunder mit sîner hant getân" (1-2). Strophes 21 (B), 20 and 43 (C), and 22 (A) indicate that he engaged himself in a number of different lands, but in that of the Nibelungen he did not expressly do so to look for a fight or to test his courage, although such a motivation was likely the case for his slaughter of the dragon. In the tale about Siegfried's fight against the princes and their warriors, the Burgundian leaders are not told that Siegfried is an impertinent barbarian.



Instead, the version of the conflict in the kingdom of the Nibelungen of which they learn is initiated by a chance encounter fueled by Siegfried's curiosity about the foreign scene he stumbles upon. The bloodshed itself arises from a recurring issue in the text: the misunderstandings and difficulties that crop up when characters cross into realms with which they are only imperfectly, if at all, familiar.<sup>34</sup> Siegfried is at once a victim and at the same time the beneficiary of a confusing situation which he has no time to correctly comprehend before it becomes dangerous for him. Clearly the young man from Xanten had no idea what he was stepping into when he stumbled upon a curious scene, a treasure being carried out of a hollowed-out mountain. But there is no question that he is in a place far-removed from the refined courtliness of Xanten: "vil seltsæniu mære er an den Nibelungen vant" (90,4). In its strangeness the land of the Nibelungen borders on the fairy-tale like, but the course of the narrative grants to it a role as a place of foreign experiences and a chance to learn how to adjust to the non-domestic. Despite its fantastical elements the land of the Nibelungen exhibits a foreignness of equal validity as that between Worms and Xanten and the lessons imparted by experiences there have force in the non-fantastical realms of the *Nibelungenlied*. The fantastical elements of the story (the dwarves, giants, and dragon) "[werden] keinesfalls als von der feudalen Ritterwelt abweichende Sondersphäre mit eigenen Gesetzen und eigener Wahrheit ausgestaltet." Thus, there is no reason to divide the *Nibelungenlied* into descriptions of "mythische" and

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<sup>34</sup> Had he understood the Nibelungen, one might argue, he would have never needed to engage in combat with them, a clear result of his naiveté and lack of knowledge: "Dies [the "Nicht-Wissen" of characters] dient teils als Erklärung für die Handlungsumstände und deutet teils hypothetisch darauf hin, dass das Geschehen im Falle des Wissens des Protagonisten anders verlaufen wäre," Jönsson, 233.

“geschichtliche” or “heroische” and “ritterlich-christliche” worlds, as these elements are present in all of the settings of the text.<sup>35</sup>

Siegfried’s ability to overcome the foreign and adjust to worlds outside of Xanten becomes clear in the events that follow his detection by the two Nibelungen. They identify him immediately as Siegfried,<sup>36</sup> and while he has no idea who or what they are, he will eventually “know” them: “die wâren im ê vremde, unz er ir künde dê gewan” (88,4). Several things at the mountain of the Nibelungen are novel to Siegfried. First, the transportation of the treasure and its division arouse his curiosity: “den helt es wundern began” (90,4), and apparently represent a new experience for him, given the manner in which the Xantener manage wealth through *milte* rather than hoarding. Second, the two brothers request that he divide the treasure for them – his hesitancy speaks for his unfamiliarity with acting as an intermediary for such a strange circumstance. And his inexperience shows when he cannot bring a resolution to the problem: “er’n kundez niht verenden” (93,4). Given Siegfried’s gaze upon the treasure, a remote possibility is that he *wished* to leave the division of the treasure unfulfilled so as to seize it for himself. This is a less fitting interpretation, however, since the verb *kunnen* plus the negative indicates his inability to complete the task, rather than his unwillingness to do so.

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<sup>35</sup> Eifler, 282.

<sup>36</sup> Here the difference between inductive reasoning on the part of the somewhat otherworldly Hagen and the Nibelungen’s access to an otherworldly realm of unerring perception becomes clear. This is one marker of the “culture” of the Nibelungen that sets them far apart from other realms in the work. However, one can argue that this culture is heterogeneous, especially in view of Alberich’s inability to recognize Siegfried at a later juncture in the narrative (499), a lapse scholars have tried to tackle. For instance, Joachim Bumke has suggested that his trip to retrieve the Nibelungen is a refashioned scene that originally depicted a contact between Siegfried and Brünhild. However, he admits that “Unsere Annahme bleibt Hypothese,” “Sigfrids Fahrt ins Nibelungenland. Zur achten Aventure des *Nibelungenliedes*,” *PBB* 80 (1958): 253-268, here 268. Another curious aspect of the “vision” of the Nibelungen lies in their inability to anticipate the future actions of the warrior from Xanten. A tantalizing explanation may be Siegfried’s own dichotomous nature (vacillating between courtliness and bellicosity) which might cause interference.

Another issue quite odd for the prince of Xanten is his role as an intermediary, a subordinate position for which he will be paid. This represents a sharp contrast to what he is accustomed to in Xanten, where his parents, as expected of their superior position and wealth, practiced largesse, *milte*. The offer of *miete*, on the other hand, places Siegfried in an equal position with the Nibelungen where goods are exchanged for services. A paradigmatic parallel is Siegfried's proposal with Gunther to exchange his sister Kriemhild for a successful wooing expedition to Isenstein. It could be argued that the idea for such a deal can be found in his (unsuccessful) service to the Nibelungen, as he would not have been engaged in such relationships at Xanten where he stood atop the hierarchy of service. And lastly, Siegfried encounters a martial and heroic state, a bearing from which he was likely shielded in Xanten: *zorn*. Every stage in the relationship between Siegfried and the Nibelungen is one of increasing distance from Siegfried's own cultural background and expectations and his entrapment in a system of behaviors with which he is not familiar, a typical phenomenon when dealing with the foreign: "Das Fremde *zeigt sich, indem es sich uns entzieht*. Es sucht uns heim und versetzt uns in Unruhe, noch bevor wir es einlassen oder uns seiner zu erwehren trachten."<sup>37</sup>

In very rapid succession, Siegfried has indeed been introduced to a wholly foreign environment. Unfortunately for the Nibelungen kingdom, the *künde* he attains about their culture remains at a fully superficial level: he sees that they function in a strange manner, but before he is put into a threatening situation he has no time to adjust his behavior in such a way that integration or common understanding could be initiated. Thus, what precedes the bloodshed is a comedy of errors, as Siegfried becomes involved in business he cannot comprehend and the Nibelungen involve themselves with one unable to resolve their differences. The impression

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<sup>37</sup> Waldenfels, *Topographie*, 42.

made by this episode in his youth seems at odds with the generalizations of stanzas 21 and 43 (C) – but in their totality they exhibit the richness of his experience and expand upon the specific biographical details elaborated by Hagen. Some places he boldly ventured into, while his youth and cultural inexperience led him into this less than “heroic” scenario at the mountain of the Nibelungen.

In summary, the Burgundians are exposed to two important facts about Siegfried by Hagen’s account, although one of these proves to be incomplete. The first is that his physical prowess is impressive, even before it is augmented by the transformations his body undergoes with the implements (the *Tarnkappe* and sword Balmunc) and the new invincibility he attains. During his struggles in the land of the Nibelungen, Siegfried’s agility and strength, as well as that of Alberich, resemble the power of fierce beasts: “alsam die lewen wilde si liefen an den berc” (97,2). Recapping the amazing deeds he accomplished against the Nibelungen, and seemingly without the intention of hyperbole in view of the preceding descriptions, Hagen declares: “also grôzer krefte nie mêr recke gewan” (99,4). After mention of the dragon, he reprises the notion: “er hât mit sîner krefte sô menegiu wunder getân” (101,4). Siegfried, Hagen’s story relates, is a spectacular physical specimen, who, when faced with danger, exhibits a strength like no one else. Even in their summation of Siegfried’s character when he approaches them, one of the Nibelungen princes declares: “hie kumt der starke Sîvrit, der helt von Niderlant” (90,3). This is a fully positive assessment of Siegfried and takes as his main characteristic his strength, and notably not his fearsomeness in battle, his *vreislich* potential. And this is the lesson the Burgundians take from Hagen’s report – that the stranger may be strong, but he is not a whirlwind of destruction that indiscriminately seeks out new targets on which to unleash his fighting spirit, his *zorn*. Of course, the audience would have realized that

this is not the complete picture of Siegfried given the indications of strophes 21 and 43 (C). One might say that the Burgundians possess an incomplete picture of Siegfried. They know he can carry himself in a fight, but they have not heard in an unmistakable fashion that he is an unmitigated aggressor against human foes. Furthermore, the open, dignified approach of Siegfried to Worms differs greatly from his stealthy approach to the home of the Nibelungen. While he may be strong and capable of slaughtering large numbers of humans and non-humans, his entry into Worms bespeaks no affinity with the terrifying actions he has taken in the past. While he may be someone to remain wary of, evident from discussion of the Burgundians after Hagen's story and the tale itself, his arrival is not taken by its inhabitants to presage the kingdom's annihilation. But although his hand does not bring an end to the land, ironically the responses to his presence initiate that very fate.

The reactions to Siegfried's approach indicate that the Burgundians will take a watchful but peaceful tack in dealing with the stranger and his entourage. Hagen's suggestion is that "wir suln den herren enpfâhen deste baz, / daz wir iht verdienen des jungen recken haz" (101,1-2).<sup>38</sup> He does not believe that Siegfried is approaching with violent intentions, but knows from the Nibelungen episode that his demeanor can change for the worse, an acknowledgment of Siegfried's sublimated *vreise*. The impression Gunther gains from the group from Xanten is less neutral and in essence more insightful than the assessment of the normally highly perceptive Hagen. The king agrees that caution should be taken, and points out the source of his concern, the bearing of Siegfried: "nu sich, wie degenlîch er stêt in strîtes vâ" (102,2). The king's assertion summarizes the form of the wooing party, dominated on the one hand by rich

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<sup>38</sup> "Haz" essentially indicates a state of enmity or hostility, not a psychological condition. In 866,2, Gernot states that Siegfried has not earned such "haz" as to be murdered, but his standpoint is ignored. See Jan-Dirk Müller's discussion of the related term "zorn" for more, *Spielregeln*, 203-208.

accoutrements, and on the other by the tools of war.<sup>39</sup> At the same time it ignores the possibilities of behavior that come with his social status, a result of Hagen's particular accentuations of Siegfried's past. Hagen "hält es [...] offensichtlich für ungleich wichtiger, über Siegfrieds archaisches Kräftepotential zu informieren, als über seinen königlichen Status."<sup>40</sup> According to the assessment of Gunther, the Xantener carries himself in a knightly manner that betrays intentness for battle. Hagen, after acknowledging the lineage of Siegfried, completes the foreshadowing of Siegfried's mission: "er stêt in der gebære, mich dunket, wizze Krist, / ez ensîn niht kleiniu mære, dar umb' er her geriten ist" (103,3-4). Hagen's statement encompasses the totality of Siegfried's significance for the Burgundian kingdom, while Gunther can only anticipate hostility from the Xantener.

### **The Role of Information in Siegfried's Preparations**

One of the most surprising and controversial aspects of the *Nibelungenlied* is Siegfried's behavior when received by Gunther and his men. Cavalié succinctly summarizes the broad themes of various interpretations of Siegfried's *widersage*, his violent challenge to the Burgundians, that have been put forth: "Erratischer Block, 'Anschwellung', epischer Ausbau als receptionsförderndes Zwischenspiel politisch-aktualisierender oder kontrapunktisch-ironischer Art, halb geglücktes schriftstellerisches Experiment, Heldenmuster oder Artusmotiv – die Ansichten gehen auseinander."<sup>41</sup> Siegfried's conduct appears astonishing to the text's recipient because it seems to contradict plans and goals that he outlined in Xanten. Arising from the incongruous relationships of plans and deeds like this in the text, one major strand of

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<sup>39</sup> They carry new shields (72,1), well-made helmets (72,2), long swords (73,1) and sharp swords (73,2).

<sup>40</sup> Gephart, 24.

<sup>41</sup> Cavalié, 363.

*Nibelungenlied* scholarship has argued that motivation remains an indecipherable aspect of a text that does not measure up to modern standards of narrative coherence.<sup>42</sup> The following analysis of the confrontation between the knight of Xanten and the upper echelons of Burgundian society represents an attempt to establish the coherence of the text in this one instance by suggesting that much of what initially seems unmotivated and confused does so due to the process involved: the crossing of a foreign cultural threshold and the trouble generated by a lack of understanding and knowing on the part of both parties. Not only are the characters themselves embroiled in confusion caused by cultural differences, but the audience also risks bewilderment if it fails to fully note the evidence about culture, motivation, and goals that came before.

The discussion Siegfried has with his father in Aventure 2 is one part of the text often cited by those scholars who find what they believe to be flaws in the chain of motivation for the confrontation in Worms as evidence of the text's muddled and irrational nature. As shown in Chapter One, the context for understanding an event in the *Nibelungenlied* often lies in preceding narrative. What these scholars have tried to do is show that an unbridgeable divide separates the young warrior's conversation with his father and the way he conducts himself upon his arrival in Worms.<sup>43</sup> It will be argued, to the contrary, that the exchange between father and son creates a

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<sup>42</sup>Joachim Heinzle in the past has argued against the interpretability of the work on the basis of the numerous readings of the *Hortforderung* scene: "Wenn man sich nicht mit der schieren Beliebtheit dieser Interpretationen zufriedengeben will, kommt man an der Einsicht nicht vorbei, daß sie nicht den historisch authentischen Sinn des Werks aufdecken, sondern es korrigieren und sich damit in die lange Reihe der Um- und Nachdichtungen stellen, die mit der 'Klage' und der C-Bearbeitung beginnt" *Das Nibelungenlied. Eine Einführung* (Munich: Artemis, 1987), 95. Heinzle sees two main types of interpretations that attempt to deal with incoherent passages: "Die Interpreten leugnen die Existenz von Brüchen im Werkgefüge [. . .], oder sie sehen gerade in ihnen den Sinngehalt verkörpert," 97-98. In more recent studies, Heinzle has softened his stance on the inability to interpret the text.

<sup>43</sup>Werner Schröder: "Die Herausforderung war von Sivrit im Grunde gar nicht so ernst gemeint gewesen; der Gedanke an den Zweck seiner Reise [. . .] genügte, ihn davon abzubringen," *Nibelungenlied-Studien* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1968), 89. According to Friedrich Neumann, the

context that illuminates Siegfried's tactics for trans-cultural journey and that the apparent failures of textual continuity are in fact the inherent gaps between expectation and reality opened up when one travels into the imperfectly known realm of the other in the *Nibelungenlied*.

As Hagen's story about his youth and narrative background reveals, Siegfried has traveled extensively in foreign lands and experienced the wide gulf that can separate cultures in the world envisioned in the text. He encounters cultural realms that do not follow the same rules of logic and behavior as the place with which he is intimately familiar, Xanten. He experiences this fact, but it is not revealed to the audience whether he actually processes the difference mentally and "learns" from it. However, the patterns of behavior that follow his introduction to new modes of interaction and conduct suggest a link between his past and his future that would at least encompass the process of imitation, or, from the viewpoint of cognitive anthropology, would even establish a cognitive schema that "satisfies as many of the constraints as possible in the situation" of foreignness in which he finds himself.<sup>44</sup> If we adopt the biographical chronology of his life laid out above, his discussion about the Burgundians with Siegmund represents a third instance of the delineation of cultural practices and Siegfried's place therein, the first being his natural fit within Xanten society and the second the quick lesson on the strange ways of the Nibelungen.

Siegmund depicts the Burgundians as a formidable group of men. Gunther surrounds himself with "vil manegen hôhferten man" (53,4) and Hagen, he says, "kan mit übermüete der

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clash is "grundlos," *Das Nibelungenlied in seiner Zeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 67. On the other hand, Cavalié's syntagmatic reading of this complex draws a clear connection between the discussion in Xanten and Siegfried's arrival in Worms: "So unlogisch Sifrits letzte Aufforderung zum Streit zuerst erscheinen mochte, so hat sie doch ihre Richtigkeit. Sie bezeugt wie der Rückverweis auf die Xantener Unterhaltung, dass der Epiker den Vorfall in Worms als Auseinandersetzung zwischen Helden geplant hatte und konsequent bis zum Ende durchführte," 370.

<sup>44</sup> Strauss and Quinn, 53.



*hôhverte pflegen*”(54,2). Two general senses are encompassed by *hôhvert*, the manner of living in courtly splendor and grace and the enjoyment that results, and the negative amplification thereof: arrogance and haughtiness.<sup>45</sup> The *hôhvert* of Hagen is even enhanced by *übermüete*, a second layer of pride.<sup>46</sup> The context of these statements makes it clear that these terms are to be understood as negative qualities, not the *joie de vivre* that makes a place like the court at Xanten attractive to foreigners. Even Siegmund’s pledge of assistance has much less than the tone of assuredness as to the openness of the Burgundians to a foreigner with a mission like Siegfried’s (and the prospects of its accomplishment): “[ich] wil dirz helfen enden, so ich aller beste kan. / doch hât der künec Gunther vil manegen hôhferten man” (53,3-4). Although the narrator does not mention that Kriemhild’s previous suitors were met with violence, Siegmund’s “doch” contains a tinge of doubt that reveals the significance that Gunther’s retinue includes “hôhverten man:” they may not approve of the young knight’s plans, and the consequences will be greater than just being sent home empty-handed like his predecessors. He even predicts dire consequences with the suggestion that they will suffer “leit” if they go through with Siegfried’s intended course of action. What Siegmund describes is a world in which suitors might suffer from the aggression of Gunther and his men, a questionable assertion given what the narrator reveals in stanzas 45 and 46. But due to his complete reliance on this picture of the foreigners provided by his father – the text nowhere indicates that he has any reason to doubt that which his father tells him – Siegfried makes a nearly fatal choice of action for all involved during his introduction to the Burgundian kingdom.

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<sup>45</sup> Lexer, vol. 1, column 1324.

<sup>46</sup> Georg Friedrich Benecke, Wilhelm Müller, and Friedrich Zarncke, eds. *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch*. 4 Vols. (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 1990), here vol 2, 264. Gernot’s call for silence during the fight with Siegfried seeks to end statements driven by *übermüete*, which could provoke the Xantener. Unmistakably, this is a concept of the inclination for confrontation and aggression.

Some scholars have clearly misunderstood Siegfried's response to his father's description of the Burgundians. The knight argues that he will do what it takes to possess Kriemhild despite the warnings of his father: "Waz mag uns daz gewerren?" sprach dô Sîvrit. / 'swaz ich friwentlîche niht ab in erbit, / daz mac sus erwerben mit ellen dâ mîn hant" (55,1-3). Some have understood Siegfried here to be laying out a strategy for accomplishing his goal that is twofold and is to follow a specific course of decision-making that depends on the outcome of Burgundian responses. This line of interpretation is represented nicely by Hatto's translation of the last two lines: "Whatever I fail to get from them by friendly requests, I shall take by my own valour."<sup>47</sup> (24). Helmut Brackert's translation is similar: "Was ich von ihnen nicht im Guten bekomme, das werde ich durch Tapferkeit erlangen."<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, Göhler believes that Siegfried's words in stanza 55 are "Ausdruck stolzen Selbstbewußtseins" and that they are only intended to allay his father's worries: "Sie ist nicht Aktionsprogramm, nicht Absichtserklärung."<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, Göhler admits that there is an affinity between these words and Siegfried's actions in Worms: "Wenn Siegfried König Gunther zum Kampf herausfordert, so mag sich der Hörer jener stolzen Bemerkung Siegfrieds erinnern."<sup>50</sup> Even if, as Göhler suggests, no clear plan emerges from stanza 55, his comments at the very least warrant close inspection because they offer a rare self-appraisal that echoes strongly in the way he carries himself at the gates of Worms.

But if one does take Siegfried's statement as an indication of his future intentions, as this reading does, then the crux of its proper interpretation lies in the context of the second line of the

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<sup>47</sup> *The Nibelungenlied*, trans. A. T. Hatto (New York: Penguin, 1969), 24.

<sup>48</sup> Helmut Brackert, *Das Nibelungenlied. Mittelhochdeutscher Text und Übertragung* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1970) 17.

<sup>49</sup> Göhler, 12.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

strophe and its meaning. Siegfried has just learned in the previous stanza that harm may come to him due to the aggressive proclivities of Hagen “der degen,” just one of many belligerent men with whom Gunther surrounds himself. Nowhere does Siegmund reveal that, despite their aggressive nature, they are willing or able to behave in a diplomatic, friendly manner such as that which prevails in the culture of their own homeland. Just as the Nibelungen act in a foreign manner not reminiscent of life in the Xanten, so too do the Burgundians as described by Siegmund.

As we have seen, the default behavior for Siegfried is *friwentlich*, perhaps best seen in what can only be described as his confusion in dealing with the angry and violent Nibelungen. If he were to woo a woman in a kingdom like that of his father’s, then he would likely resort to a non-aggressive approach. The atmosphere in which he was raised was one of openness and kindness toward non-Xanteners, and his willingness to help the Nibelungen was a symptom of that educational and experiential background. But, as his father leads him to believe, friendliness is not part of the lingua franca of the Burgundians, thus eliminating that as a possible mode of behavior. He does not, as Gernot Müller insists, prove his courtly education to have been worthless when he storms into Worms “mit der beleidigend barschen Aggressivität eines landfordenden Vorzeithelden, der eher der rauhen Wirklichkeit der Völkerwanderungszeit als der staufischen Epoche anzugehören scheint.”<sup>51</sup> In fact, line 55,2 reveals Siegfried to be a pragmatist who realizes that courtliness will not open any doors to Worms and the woman he wishes to marry. It can be understood as a generalized statement for the way he normally conducts himself: he would express his demands peaceably, but he has recourse to his own superior strength if circumstances remove that as an option. There is also grammatical support

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<sup>51</sup> Gernot Müller, “Zur sinnbildlichen Repräsentation der Siegfriedgestalt im Nibelungenlied” *Studia Neophilologica* 47 (1975): 88-119, here 98-99.

for the view that herewith he eschews the path of amicability even before setting foot in Worms. Such a reading suggests that he has concluded at that moment that he cannot carry out his mission peacefully, as opposed to the interpretation of “erbit” as a present tense verb with a future sense, which favors the readings of those who naysay the text’s coherence. However, the former interpretation does appear weakened by its lack of the auxiliary “mac,” which appears in the following line and could suggest that it is not a parallel construction. However, the pairing of “swaz” and “daz,” and the usage of “sus,” which here indicates an alternative (“auf andere weise”),<sup>52</sup> both suggest that the two statements are indeed parallel, and that “mac” is implied in the second line. Furthermore, as opposed to the translation by Hatto, which assumes that “mugen” in this context has a future tense, it is just as likely that it has a present tense meaning of “able to.” It follows then that this is more a statement of what Siegfried can and cannot do given what he thinks to be the prevailing attitude towards Kriemhild’s suitors. Given the information he receives from his father, he eliminates one possibility: dealing with them humanely. And since his past includes experiences in which the implementation of his strength has brought great achievement, Siegfried alternatively declares that this approach will be how he attains the sister of the Burgundian kings.

Siegfried’s subsequent refusal of a large accompanying army echoes the circumstances of his time at the land of the Nibelungen. With only the eleven men who travel with him, he becomes in effect a lone protagonist facing the Burgundians. After the impressive visual presentation before Worms to which they contribute, they no longer play a role in the actions of their leader, reminiscent of how he had to rely upon himself to navigate the clashes at the mountain of Schilbung and Nibelung. This similarity is important in view of the apparent

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<sup>52</sup> Benecke, vol. 3, 757.

incongruity of his objective (to secure Kriemhild) noted in Xanten and the course his introduction to the Burgundians takes. First, he relapses into the behavior noted in his biographical sketch: “durch sînes lîbes sterke er reit in menegiu lant” (21,2). Siegfried tells the assembled Burgundians that he has been told that present at the court are “die kûenesten recken . . . die ie kûnec gewunne; / dar umbe bin ich her bekommen” (107,3-4). In the next stanza, he goes on to say that he will not stand down until the factuality of this information has been proven (“unz ez mir werde bekant” 108,4). These statements correspond quite closely to the information provided by the narrator in stanza 21: he indicates to the Burgundians that he wishes to test their strength (and his). The final half-line of stanza 107 stands in direct contrast to his plans for Kriemhild and could appear to be a prime example of the inconsistency of the text: Siegfried has “forgotten” why he was there in the first place. But if he has forgotten, the lapse stems not from the incoherence of the text, but rather from his original plan: in his discussion with his father, he conflates what he has chosen as the only way to gain Kriemhild (her seizure through violence) with the aftereffects of a successful violent incursion (the submission of a defeated land).<sup>53</sup> The plan to win Kriemhild thus becomes a larger complex of issues in which the quest for Kriemhild is steered by incomplete knowledge of the Burgundians (that they are for the most part peaceable) to a violent option that will have wide-ranging consequences for the realm. In other words, to gain Kriemhild in the only way he believes he can, the Burgundians must fall. As a result, Siegfried states the truth to the Burgundians, but only one aspect of it: *how* he is going to

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<sup>53</sup> Also part of this complex of issues that take the form of his belligerent appearance is his desire to assert his independence from his parents in that he wishes to earn the right to rule Xanten (stanza 109), as opposed to inheriting the kingdom while his parents still lived, as mentioned in strophe 43. Engaging in adventures outside of Xanten proves his worthiness to rule his father’s land and so too provides him with occupation before he assumes the mantle of king upon the death of Siegmund.

woo Kriemhild, not that she is his target nor that their threatened destruction springs from that end.

Siegmund's expression of concern that his son would never even be allowed to visit Worms if the Burgundians knew what he was planning plays a key role in the confrontation at Worms. This concern of his father may also be connected to Siegfried's silence about Kriemhild when he arrives in Worms, possibly trying to avoid greater agitation of the Burgundians by leaving her out of his demands. While the words of his father come immediately after the determination of violence as his only choice in stanza 55 and therefore may be understood to mean that he should not broadcast his violent intentions, the first line of stanza 57 injects ambiguity into the discussion and further stresses the complexity of the relationship between violence and Kriemhild: "Mit gewalte niemen erwerben mac die maget." After all, she represents for Siegfried "hôhe minne," which does not represent an unattainability due to her perfection ("zu wunsche wolgetân"), but his desire for a woman "die außer Reichweite ist, wegen ihres überlegenen Status und der Macht derer, die über sie verfügen."<sup>54</sup> Line 57,1 adds detail to what Siegmund means by the word "mære" in his expression of concern: "Wan wurden disiu mære ze Rîne geseit, dune dörftest nimmer gerîten in daz lant" (56,2-3). The *mære* do not simply correspond to Siegfried's assertion that he will approach them violently and that he believes that he could take over their kingdom (55,4). It also refers to the fact that the Burgundians will not allow Kriemhild to be taken via hostility. As Müller puts it, "Sivrits *minne* für die ferne Königin ist der traditionelle Auslöser für eine gefährliche Brautwerbung [...]. Die Überlegungen der Eltern Sivrits und des Hofes richten sich darauf, solch hohe (d. h.

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<sup>54</sup> Müller, *Spielregeln*, 400.

unerfüllbare) Minne zu vermeiden.”<sup>55</sup> Whatever he intended to signify with 57,1, the possibility exists in the text that Siegfried paid heed to that portion of his father’s advice while unwilling to give up his plan in general. According to this reading, Siegfried does not reveal the connection between his belligerence and his amorous desire precisely because it would prevent him from ever gaining the access needed to carry out his plan.

### **Kriemhild and Foreignness in the Confrontation at Worms**

Even when Siegfried never mentions Kriemhild, his desire to possess her lies at the center of every facet of his behavior during the confrontation with the Burgundians. Although he could accomplish the goal of exhibiting his merit as a king willing to engage in struggle and so too a triumphant end to his campaign holds the promise of seizing Burgonden and its lands, the former is only an ancillary facet of his strategy, and the latter represents a mere possible consequence of its implementation. Andrew Cowell clearly misjudges Siegfried’s true priorities when he argues that the Xantener initially hopes to take Kriemhild as a secondary symbol of his honor, but he “ends up falling in love with her and pursuing her as an individual, in a fashion that recalls Courtly Love.”<sup>56</sup>

Between the discussion of Siegfried and Siegmund in Xanten and when the Burgundians first learn of his demands, the only significant details added to the Xantener’s character is Hagen’s recounting of his adventures for the sake of Gunther. This additional knowledge about him mirrors the threatening nature of his stratagem and foreshadows the concern he will elicit in Worms. It would be unlikely that a medieval audience might forget his plans and *why* he is

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 400-401.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Cowell, *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy: Gifts, Violence, Performance, and the Sacred* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007) 135.

acting thusly, weakening the argument that Kriemhild is not the locus of the confrontation.

When Siegfried thinks about Kriemhild for the first time, it is because he has had more pressing matters to present to the Burgundians in order to facilitate his goal. The shift in the confrontation from strong words to the silence ordered by Gernot allows the narrator, and Siegfried, and by extension the recipients, at last to *reflect* on the heart of the entire matter – Kriemhild – after a scene filled with amazing tension: “dô gedâhte ouch Sîvrit an die hêrlîchen meit” (123,4). The silence affords him the brief instant to think about, not recall, the object of all of his efforts, a brief insight into his mind that highlights the threat of the foreign that lurks throughout the *Nibelungenlied*: the inability to correctly interpret behavior due to impartial knowledge of the other. This interiorization of Siegfried’s true desire signals the first divergence of external behavior and internal motivation presented to the Burgundians, who will later trade in similar dissembling.

Despite his eventual marriage to Kriemhild, Siegfried’s initial interaction with the Burgundians suffers from the difficulties facing those who cross cultural boundaries in the *Nibelungenlied* and deal with the incalculability of those who are largely unknown because of their foreignness.<sup>57</sup> His approach to the Burgundian situation intermingles the experience he has picked up from his time as an adventurer, namely his battle with the Nibelungen, and the

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<sup>57</sup> Werner Hoffmann does not see Siegfried’s behavior vis-à-vis the Burgundians as the result of an “überlegten und überlegenen Plans.” But his notion of what happens in Worms suggests the kind of behavioral adjustments necessary when approaching the foreign, even with a plan in hand: “Siegfried konnte den Verlauf der ersten Begegnung mit den Burgunden nicht im voraus berechnen, auch nicht das Resultat, das vor allem Gernots geschickte Diplomatie ermöglicht hat,” “Siegfried,” 133. Eifler contends that Siegfried indeed follows a plan, but one which must yield to the realities in Worms: “Belangvoll für das Siegfriedbild des Nibelungenliedes ist der [...] konsequente Zusammenhang zwischen dem Handlungsziel Siegfrieds und der aggressive Strategie, die er plant und genau so auch handelnd befolgt, um es zu erreichen. Sie stößt auf die Wormser Könige, die bei der Begegnung mit Siegfried unter dem Eindruck des von Hagen Berichteten stehen,” 285.



information on the Burgundians provided by Siegmund and Sieglinde. His experience outside of Xanten has confirmed to him that bloodshed rewards the strong, who collect the spoils of battle, and his parents have depicted the Burgundians to be worthy opponents in such a test of brawn. Siegfried's decision to employ aggression against them to gain Kriemhild rests on these two facts, the second of which is a symptom of the incomplete knowledge of the Xantener with respect to Worms. While they maintain contact with an apparently wide range of foreign kingdoms, the king and queen never acknowledge that they have personally met with Gunther and his retinue. And because of the incompleteness of their information – namely, that they do not know that the Burgundians have the ability to act in a courtly manner – they unknowingly narrow down Siegfried's range of choices in how he can attain from them that which he seeks. The knight's parents elevate *hôhvert* and *übermüete* to the defining elements of Burgundian culture, a misrepresentation that does not take into account their peaceable existence and their courtly bearing. Especially telling in the issue of their courtliness is the Burgundians' honorable greeting of Siegfried immediately after having learned about his terrifying nature. Siegfried, who when at the land of the Nibelungen walked into a situation about which he knew nothing, thereby placing himself in great danger, now relies upon the advice of his parents to guide him in this new world. Despite the efforts of his parents to prepare him for his journey into a foreign land, the method by which he does so is based on false assumptions as to the actual nature of Burgundian culture. Although Siegfried has been told that violence will not help him achieve his goals, he chooses the path he feels most appropriate and one which his father, with his offer of an army for accompaniment, still supports despite his reservations.

As for the Burgundians, they may have responded in kind had they not had the benefit of Gernot's intellectual dexterity. The belligerence exhibited by Hagen, especially in view of the

calming presence of Gernot, points to the heterogeneity of the Burgundian culture, which during this emergency moves in the direction of courtliness. Gernot staves off the initial threat, but cannot stop the changes Siegfried heralds. But despite Gernot's successful defusing of Siegfried's menace, they also operate in a partial vacuum of knowledge when it comes to Siegfried's appearance on their threshold. Siegfried purports to know the cultural language of the Burgundians, their reliance on *hôhvert* and *übermüete* and the threat they pose to foreigners seeking to deal with them, all of which is a one-sided perspective on the court that focuses on the comportment of Hagen. The knowledge he possesses about the Burgundians represents a static view of their natures and culture: they are violent and will act accordingly if they learn about his plans. The same applies to their view of him: he has crushed the Nibelungen and has the potential to wreak the same havoc in Worms, despite Gunther's relative unconcern at the beginning. The flaw of the Burgundian perception of Siegfried lies in their assumption that past actions predict future actions, which however is not invalidated in this case of misinformation. Otfried Ehrismann points out the one-sided view of the "other" in this confrontation, one that is predicated on the violent proclivities of the other side and ignores other possible modes of behavior: "Man kennt voneinander nur die Bereitschaft zum Kampf und hält sein Gegenüber für den stärksten der möglichen Gegner. Man kennt nicht sein gewöhnliches Leben am Hof."<sup>58</sup> The introduction of the foreign, the imperfectly known into this equation complicates the matter in that additional determinants of behavior are inaccessible to foreigners, thus creating tension and difficulty at the point of interaction. As Wierlacher notes, "Wahrscheinlich können wir fremde Kulturen [...] sehr wohl *begreifen*, aber nicht in toto *verstehen*, wenn wir unter 'Verstehen' das

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<sup>58</sup> Otfried Ehrismann, "Siegfrids Ankunft in Worms. Zur Bedeutung der 3. Aventiure des Nibelungenliedes," *Festschrift für Karl Bischoff zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. Günter Bellmann, Günter Eifler and Wolfgang Kleiber (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1975): 328-356, here 343.

Nachvollziehen fremder Logiken verstehen. Es bleibt immer ein inkommensurabler Rest kultureller Fremdheit und Eigenheit.”<sup>59</sup>

The reaction of the Burgundians to Siegfried’s stance reveals how their task of navigating the challenge is made much more difficult by the fact that he has plans that cannot be predicted with the help of Hagen’s biographical sketch. They do not know that he wants Kriemhild because they have never heard that a link exists between the two. His foreignness, both in terms of his portrayed physiological advantages and his accomplishments against the Nibelungen and the dragon, becomes amplified when the inadequacy of its description becomes clear through unpredictable permutations of this image – the behavior is familiar, but much more complicated and murky. This is the source of Gunther’s shock when he learns which Siegfried they will be facing: not only the strong one of Hagen’s story, the dragon slayer who stumbled upon and then crushed the Nibelungen, but one who wishes to conquer the Burgundian lands.<sup>60</sup> What surprises him are neither the bravery nor the boldness of Siegfried – these have been made clear to him – but that he will be on the receiving end of them, as well as the idea that anyone should dare endanger his kingdom, a reaction that mixes the unpredictable nature of Siegfried’s appearance with Gunther’s utmost concern to preserve the land he inherited from his father.

### **Confrontation in Worms: Diversity of Response**

When Siegfried makes his intentions clear to the Burgundians, a momentary instance of shock and inaction results. But while Siegfried remains true to his original goal and represents this in his side of the discussion, the responses of the Burgundians evolve. They are, after all, the

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<sup>59</sup> Wierlacher, 48.

<sup>60</sup> Also missing is the restraint of Siegfried when he first stumbles on the scene before the mountain of the Nibelungen.

targets and not the aggressors in this situation, which is reflected in the disunity of their responses and strategies. The pressure of facing the unexpected and dangerous reveals the fractures within Burgundian culture, as well as the proclivities of the various individuals involved.

Although he has learned that the Burgundians tend towards hostility, their greeting of him is reminiscent of the treatment foreigners receive in Xanten. The narrator describes the behavior of the king and his retinue in highly laudatory terms: “Der wirt und sine recken enpfienge sô den gast, / daz in an ir zûhten vil wê nec iht gebrast” (105,1-2). Now Siegfried is the one who must react to their greeting the Xantener “sô reht scône” (105,4), as if their reception were so honorable that he could not avoid a response. Thus the Burgundians begin their portion of the confrontation in a conciliatory mood, no doubt trying to avoid “earning the hate” of Siegfried,<sup>61</sup> but without success, as Siegfried never veers from his course with the first four stanzas of his pronouncement.<sup>62</sup> In addition, his regal appearance and lineage as “eines rîchen kûneges sun” (103,2) also may have given them the impression, through the parallel example of their own

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<sup>61</sup> Eifler maintains that the Burgundians from the outset intended to give in to Siegfried due to his overwhelming strength: “Sie werden, was auch immer sich ereignet, nachgeben, weil sie nachgeben müssen,” 288. Expressions of surprise and willingness to engage him in combat suggest that while Hagen may have counseled such an approach because of Siegfried’s physical attributes and past violence, this did not constitute any such plan on their part.

<sup>62</sup> Their non-aggressive response to his provocation shows that Hugo Bekker is incorrect when he states that the Burgundians did not listen to Hagen’s story about the Xantener’s exploits, that they “hear but do not make the information received their own. It does not affect their words or actions,” *The Nibelungenlied: A Literary Analysis* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1971), 121. Bekker cites Hagen’s silence and Ortwin’s angry response to support this claim. Ortwin’s response would appear justified given the insulting behavior of Siegfried, while Hagen’s silence shows that information about another character cannot necessarily be of assistance when dealing with them. In a normal situation these threats would have to be met with a violent response, but Hagen’s story emphasizes Siegfried’s fearsomeness and ability to defeat great enemies. Thus he finds himself in a contradictory position – he should attack Siegfried but he knows he cannot defeat him, postponing his violent response until Siegfried is vulnerable. Had he known there was a way out of the difficulty through a turn to courtliness, he might have had more to say.

culture and status as the sons of a powerful king, that he would exhibit the same cultural idiom as they: mutual respect and an unwillingness to engage in combat. Gunther indicates that this fact, and his hostile bearing, are reason enough to embrace him: “er ist edel unde küene, daz hân ich wol vernomen. / des sol ouch er geniezen in Burgonden lant” (104,2-3).

Despite their best efforts to make Siegfried feel welcome, the knight from Xanten shocks Gunther with his desire to take over the lands of the Burgundians: “den küene hete wunder und sine man alsam / um disiu mære, die er hie vernam” (111,1-2). “Wunder” here captures the surprise Gunther and his court experience when they learn his objective, which, while in line with his past deeds, carries with it an amazing hubris in their eyes. But among the Burgundian entourage the shock quickly turns to “zürnen,” reminiscent of the battle between Siegfried and the Nibelungen (111,4). Gernot responds to Siegfried’s suggestion that they place control of Xanten and Burgonden on the line – winner take all – with the issue of their rightful rulership of the lands around Worms (115) that echoes the concern of his brother about losing what they have legitimately inherited. Furthermore, he steers the issue towards a peaceful solution with the comment that they do not wish to violently take over another land, especially if it means the death of someone, a correction of Gunther’s mounting anger as to the possible damage that Siegfried’s intentions could do to the court’s honor if unopposed: “wir liezen übele schînen, daz wir ouch pflegen riterschaft” (112,4). Honor is equated with self-defense according to Gunther, while Gernot steers him back to the peaceable nature of their culture by refusing to spill any blood. He turns down the offer of the contest on the basis of peaceful interaction and denies Siegfried the right to attack them at all on the basis of their proven leadership. Of the lands, he states, “ze niemen sint si baz bewant” than the court of Gunther (115,4).

The united front of the Burgundians, its fragility already revealed by the different interpretations of Siegfried's appearance by Gunther and Hagen, fractures when the unexpectedness of the Xantener's demands elicits various responses. Gunther experiences "wunder," his men "zürnen," and the confrontation becomes a display of the tensions that arise as the result of introducing a foreigner into a kingdom accustomed to the status quo. Gunther, perhaps because he is unaccustomed to the foreign or does not take the evidence about Siegfried into proper account, cuts short the courtly greeting that precedes the heated exchange of words. Rather than plying him with wine and kind words as occurs at the denouement of their communication, the king demands to know what Siegfried's purpose is. The resulting series of questions eliminates any possibility of immediate conciliation as they abruptly force Siegfried into revealing his intentions, thus setting the tone of the entire conversation.<sup>63</sup> Gunther's incapacitation, triggered by the threats issued by the Xantener, prompts his abdication to Hagen of the responsibility to improve the situation. Although Hagen has more expertise concerning Siegfried, he fails to transform his knowledge about the foreigner into a resolution of the affair: "daz der [Hagen] sô lange dagete, daz was dem kûnege leit" (119,3). When Hagen does not take up his cause, Gunther is shut out of the conversation fully. He only again partakes in the discussion when Gernot takes the lead and seems to have some success, allowing him to display the courteousness that was cut short by his demand of information from Siegfried. The serving of wine brings the dispute full circle in an echo of its auspicious beginning that emphasizes how

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<sup>63</sup> It is unclear why Gunther asks where Siegfried comes from, since he heard about his origin in Hagen's story. However, the inquiry as to the knight of Xanten's purpose in Worms, while valid, in its delivery belies Gunther's inexperience with the foreign comes to the fore. His surprise at such a person's appearance at his court elicits such a strong emotional reaction in Gunther ("mich wundert dirre mære" 106,1) that curiosity overrides the ideal welcome that had begun the meeting. Ingeborg Cavalié reads fear in the strange, repetitive question about Siegfried's land of origin, 371. Whether emerging from curiosity or fear, the question emphasizes the unusualness of his arrival at the gates of Worms.

far down the path of aggression it had traveled. Perhaps the juxtaposition of amicability and antagonism jolts the Burgundian king into the realization that things have gone horribly wrong since he posed his questions. But he also follows the lead of Gernot, who steps into the role Gunther had desired of Hagen, expanding the terms of his brother's offer of a fresh welcome: "wir sulen iu gerne dienen, ich und die mage mîn" (126,3). He sweetens this fairly ambiguous offer of *dienest* by offering a position within the court that gives the warrior from Xanten access to its advantages: a sense of privilege and receipt of the *milte* of the Burgundians (127).

Ortwin is the only member of Gunther's court whose behavior corresponds to the generalizations of Worms' culture that Siegmund provides to his son. Quick to anger, he accuses Siegfried of possessing the same characteristic that the Xantener believes dominates the Burgundians and convinces him to adopt an aggressive stance upon his arrival ("ich trûte wol erstrîten, daz der küene man / diz starkez *übermüeten* von wâren schulden müese lân" 117,3-4), an ironic illustration of the conflict and tension that an unawareness of another culture causes and the difficulties generated by differences in milieu and the resulting expectations and behaviors that are based thereupon. He responds to the threat of violence as Siegmund and his wife expect. On such a response Siegfried had calculated his own position. Ortwin represents the opposite pole of the civilized behavior to which Gunther and Gernot are accustomed and considers unacceptable the latter king's pacifistic response to the threats, based on an aversion to killing and the desire for peaceable interaction with guests of the court. Ortwin's presentation of himself in fact seems to mirror the Siegfried imagined in Hagen's story when he concludes that his military prowess would allow him to defeat an army led by the Xantener. But in keeping with the Burgundian kings' appeal to Siegfried's kinder side, Ortwin's own call to arms receives no backing, an indication of how peacemaking is the more influential aspect of Burgundian

culture. Most notably his relative Hagen does not support his belligerence, which Siegmund, unaware of Hagen's ability to control himself, apparently overemphasized to his son.

Why does Hagen wait so long to participate in the conversation with Siegfried? His long silence is symbolic of his moderate position in the court on this issue: he is angry that Siegfried has threatened them in an unprovoked manner and is unwilling to overlook the damage done to the court's reputation, but he does not wish to solve the problem immediately by means of arms. One may say that he deals with the intrusion of the foreign in a much more reasonable, aware, and cunning manner than Ortwin. He does not threaten action, but instead lets his opinion be known and predicts the eventual outcome of the situation: "uns mac wol wesen leit, / allen dînen degenen, daz er ie gereit / durch strîten her zu Rîne" (121,1-3). While unwilling to call for violent repulsion of the threat, he does not offer a solution as Gernot does. As scholars have stated, Hagen pushes his resolution of the problem into the future, likely given his clear understanding that Siegfried cannot be defeated at the moment, a lesson not taken to heart by Ortwin, who is driven by passion and not sound judgment of the evidence.<sup>64</sup> Ironically, it is Hagen who neither can defuse the situation nor represents the intemperate threat as portrayed by Siegmund. The text makes understanding his silence very difficult, as the narrator does not comment on it, nor are there any clear paradigmatic parallels that can shed light on it.

Gernot presents the "normal" culture of Burgonden to Siegfried. At every opportunity he tries to brake the escalation of the showdown, offering counterarguments to Siegfried's demands and threats. He is the only member of the court able and willing to maintain the *willekommen* first extended to Siegfried. Early on he tries to change the tone of the conflict by offering

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<sup>64</sup> "Indem der Dichter des 'Nibelungenliedes' Hagen die Kenntnisse von Siegfrieds mythischer Biographie in den Mund legt, zeigt er ihn als den Gegenspieler, der ihm gefährlich werden kann, weil er über seine Lebensgeschichte und damit über sein Leben verfügt," Mertens, 64.



friendship to Siegfried, but the first attempt is undermined by Hagen's statement of displeasure, which draws the attention of Siegfried away from the offer of conciliation (120). Sensing that Hagen's interjection has prevented Siegfried, who has become aggravated by his statement, from considering his offer, he tries to snuff out interference with his famous prohibition of further Burgundian discussion. Nevertheless, Gernot's pursuit of a reasonable resolution with him only elicits from the Xantener a direct challenge to Hagen and Ortwin, ratcheting up the slander that could eventually lead to combat. The response of Siegfried shows that this will not work, that even without provocation from the side of the Burgundians, he will not give up his plan.<sup>65</sup> Reasoning with him on the basis of violence does not succeed, so Gernot turns to the hospitality that the Burgundian leadership is more comfortable with than belligerence. And Siegfried, well-versed in such behavior from his youth in Xanten, changes his tune after Gunther extends the terms of Gernot's offer: "allez daz wir hân, / geruochet irs nâch êren, daz sî iu undertân, / und sî mit iu geteilet lîp unde guot" (127,1-3). The offer of wine, a sure sign of welcome, and Gunther's generous declaration of his eligibility to participate in the munificence of the court presents Siegfried with an alternative to violent resolution of the confrontation, which he in any case has been unable to spur.

### **Resolving the Showdown**

Siegfried's bearing, which remains consistent throughout the conflict, undergoes alteration immediately in response to the change in tone in Worms. According to the narrator,

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<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, Grosse comments that "die einzelnen Motive von Siegfrieds erstem Auftritt in Worms wurden nicht in einer kausalen Verknüpfung dargestellt," 756.

after Gunther's words, "dô wart der herre Sîvrit ein lützel sanfter gemuot" (127,4).<sup>66</sup> The narrative comment that his mind becomes "sanfter" signals a major change in the Xantener: the realization that the threat of violence has opened an alternative course to Kriemhild free of actual force. It is not the thought of Kriemhild that brings about a change in Siegfried's stance, as Bert Nagel has argued,<sup>67</sup> but the conciliatory words of Gunther. But still, the issue of Siegfried's violent plans seems to be resolved unsatisfactorily. It is quite obvious that the primary aspect of Burgundian culture pertinent to the situation, its unwillingness to engage in physical conflict, frustrates the plan Siegfried hatched in Xanten. The core of the failure of his plan lies in his proposal that the winner of any confrontation should take over the other side's land, meaning that both parties must agree to the terms of the contest. Siegfried surely could have engaged in unilateral aggression and attacked the Burgundians. But something holds him back from unprovoked physical attack, and that is possibly his experience with the Nibelungen paired with his upbringing in Xanten, all of which defines who he is: "Man kann darin zwei verschiedene Siegfriedfiguren sehen wollen, doch damit verlöre man zu sehr aus dem Blick, daß beide Identitäten Siegfrieds in einer Figur auftreten und handeln."<sup>68</sup> Siegfried has had experience of being dragged into struggle without his permission, and although the outcome was positive and

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<sup>66</sup> "Sivrit tritt wie im Brautwerbungsschema als Herausforderer der Königssippe auf; doch dann verfällt er wie in höfischer Minnewerbung in tatenloses Warten," Müller, *Spielregeln*, 405-406.

<sup>67</sup> Bert Nagel, "Gleichsam vor unseren Augen wandelt sich unter dem Einfluß der Minner der zuchtlos zornige Polterer zum formvoll züchtigen Menschen," "Das Nibelungenlied" *ZfdPh* 76 (1957): 268-304, here 300. Neither does Siegfried undergo a transformation into a courtly character, but rather accesses and uses that part of his background to correctly respond to the course of the confrontation.

<sup>68</sup> Bernhard Schmitz, "Rollenfiguren und Bedeutungsfelder im literarischen Spiel. Überlegungen zu den Aporien im Nibelungenlied" *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 56 (2002): 123-154, here 132.

affirmed his amazing prowess in battle, it was still not his primary intention or wish in his quest for Kriemhild. Thus it is not a blow to his plans that his entrance does not climax in combat.<sup>69</sup>

Why does Gernot resort to civilized resolution of the struggle? Because it is the manner in which the Burgundians carry themselves, perhaps best seen in the failure of support to materialize for Ortwin's call to arms. Furthermore, the Burgundians have everything to lose and nothing to gain, since they already have enough land and do not desire to expand it, especially through the death of knights: "wir haben rîchiu lant" (115,3). Most significantly, however, Gernot's recourse to the welcoming language of graciousness allows him to end the search for an approach that will halt the menace of Siegfried. He does not need to try any other method of assuagement because his words becalm Siegfried and neutralize the Xantener's *haz*. His calm is a positive sign after every statement the Burgundians made received a hostile retort. Gunther's immediate confirmation and expansion of Gernot's offer solidifies the success of his brother's new strategy of adopting courtly congeniality.<sup>70</sup>

How do both sides end such a heated, high-stakes fight? Neither side appears to the other to be willing to compromise. Siegfried wants violence, while the Burgundians seek to maintain peace. The anthropological theory of Geoffrey Samuel and the cognitive cultural theory of Strauss and Quinn can shed light on the process that take place on the way to conciliation between these two foreign parties. While Siegfried's father tells him that armed action will not win him the daughter of the Burgundian kings, he offers his son no alternative way of doing so.

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<sup>69</sup> According to Ehrismann, "Seine *übermüete* wird besiegt durch die höfische Konvention und die Liebe," 351. It would be more accurate to say that *übermüete* is repressed by Siegfried when he sees that turning to courtly conventions can help him achieve the love he has sought. In other words, he learns that he can indeed pursue Kriemhild through *friwentlîch* means and can drop his plans to do so "mit ellen."

<sup>70</sup> The peaceful characteristic aspect of Burgundian culture prevails, as neither Ortwin nor Hagen comment upon or argue with the invitation extended to Siegfried.

With no information about the Burgundians other than their capability to act violently, Siegfried must choose a mode of behavior without the full picture of their culture in hand.<sup>71</sup> Although it may make sense to meet them on their own turf, it is nevertheless an unexpected strategy given the way all foreigners act and are treated in Xanten. And from the perspective of cognitive cultural theory, his behavior upon setting foot in Worms can only cause consternation among the Burgundians because his life experiences differ so markedly from theirs, creating a divergence in the cultural meaning of such conduct between the adversarial groups. Siegfried has already experienced that violence can lead to reward, but the Burgundians themselves see violence as only a wasteful, threatening pursuit. In contrast, Siegfried's threatening approach to the Nibelungen mountain in *Aventiure 8* does not elicit surprise, but rather violence, as the denizens of the land of the Nibelungen are battle-hardened and live in a culture marked by belligerence and aggression.

Perhaps a kernel of true hubris lies in Siegfried's unwillingness to fall in with prevailing types of behavior that he knows to be successful and acceptable in his homeland. But then again, he does not know if the Burgundians can or are willing to function along such lines until Gernot indicates that they do, opening the door for him to choose another mode of behavior to fit a change in what Samuel calls the flow, the stream of experience to which one has to adjust one's perspective and activity. According to Samuel, "particular states [modal states] become more or less significant, and the overall character of the flow can change more or less gradually. The kind of process or agency that can take place at any point depends on the particular mix of states

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<sup>71</sup> This is not to say that he ponders the modal states available to him and then chooses the "correct" one. This kind of switching between individual modal states often functions in the subconscious and is a spontaneous response. Perhaps he does not even realize that he has access to two states, but he has at least one method (modal state) that he believes fits the situation.

at that point.”<sup>72</sup> Thus with a fuller picture of the Burgundian world, Siegfried now can drop the strategy that his father tells him will surely fail and adopts a more conciliatory stance that springs from his own upbringing and augurs success based on what he knows from Xanten. But the switch in Siegfried’s modal state from *haz* to *fride* is inhibited as long as the cues from his environment enable such a change in behavior, he must see that other individual modal states can accomplish what he had once thought was a goal limited to a single strategy. The harsh words of Ortwin and Hagen maintain a “flow” dominated by aggression, and while Gernot’s appeals to legality and humaneness may have a resonance in Siegfried’s past, they do not open up the possibility that he can gain Kriemhild through talk. On the other hand, the offer of wine, the promise of *dienest*, the invitation to become a part of the court all speak to the type of atmosphere in Xanten where he was raised, and offer the hope that the talk of placing what he wishes at his command includes the prospect of attaining Kriemhild. His immediate switch to behavior befitting a court is not an example of textual incoherence or a visible weakness of the author/editor. Much the opposite: it is the activation of a mode of behavior kept hidden from the Burgundians until they stumble on it.

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<sup>72</sup> Samuel, 43.

### CHAPTER THREE: CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AS SOURCES OF CONFLICT IN THE *NIBELUNGENLIED*: BURGONDEN AND THE FOREIGN

#### Introduction

The *Nibelungenlied* does not draw an explicit connection between the arrival of Siegfried and the Burgundian kingdom's sudden immersion in the foreign and affairs outside of its own sphere of influence. Nevertheless, a close reading of the text supports the contention that Siegfried's injection into the court introduces a central element of the work: the tensions engendered by individuals and realms facing that which is different from them and the manners in which these tensions are navigated and exploited.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the brushes with the foreign that follow Siegfried's appearance emphasize the ways in which his culture and background differ from that of the Burgundians, which is couched in a high-courtly provincialism and marked by a naïveté with respect to the worlds that lie beyond its borders. As will be discussed, the heterogeneity of the Burgundian leadership, although bound by a common culture, provides the window Siegfried needs to gain access to their court. Prior to the introduction of the Xantener, Burgundian culture is marked by changelessness. Afterwards, however, they are thrust into foreign relations, including a war against the Saxons and Danes that turns their attention outwards and results in the complication of the relationship with Siegfried. The *niuwemære* of Siegfried portends the fateful interlacing of the Burgundians and the foreign and the challenges that the Burgundian culture faces and responds to as a result. The inexperience of the Burgundians in dealing with the foreign comes to the forefront in the expedition to Isenstein, which nevertheless succeeds with the help of Siegfried's knowledge and special qualities. In

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<sup>1</sup> "In der Inkompatibilität einander fremder Welten, die aufeinanderprallen, liegt offenbar ein wesentlicher Grund für die unaufhaltsame Geschehensverkettung bis in den Untergang," Quast, 290.

addition, the scene at Isenstein presents a picture of a culture wholly different from those of Worms and Xanten and the challenges that come with crossing cultural boundaries in the *Nibelungenlied*. Finally, in addition to the meeting of the foreign outside of the boundaries of Burgonden as occurs in the war and the wooing mission, the foreign also exists within Worms. This domestic foreignness emerges from individuals' limited access to critical knowledge under the influence of gender roles and cultural separation.

### **The Stasis of Burgundian Culture**

Whereas Siegfried goes forth and secures his own land from the Nibelungen after refusing to take over the possessions of his still-living parents, the holdings of the kings of Burgonden fall to them by means of inheritance. Their comparatively passive receipt of the Burgundian lands is established in stanza 7. They have their father Dankrat to thank for their lands, who, in an interesting parallel to Siegfried, is noted for his youthful exploits: “der ouch in sîner jugende grôzer êren vil gewan” (7,4).<sup>2</sup> Gunther and his brothers are noted as fine stewards of their country, but the text describes no relationship between them and what lies beyond their wide sphere of influence (12,1) – nothing is added to their possessions nor lost during their tenure, reflected in their unwillingness to accept Siegfried's challenge and their shock at the threat of the Saxons and the Danes. This path to leadership does not lessen their right to rule when compared to Siegfried's gaining power over his vassals the Nibelungen, but it does strongly emphasize a level of self-assertion in Siegfried that is more difficult to detect in the Burgundians. Carola Gottzmann convincingly argues that Siegfried and the Burgundians

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<sup>2</sup> Siegfried's youthful reputation rests on his deeds in foreign lands, including the seizure of one kingdom. Although the text does not indicate whether Dankrat inherited or gained the land of the Burgonden, this “Leerstelle” does, through parallelism, open up such a possibility to an audience given the *Nibelungenlied*'s paradigmatic nature.

represent two different principles of rulership: the texts contrasts a “Herrschaft [...], die auf der Idoneität basiert und dem Königtum, das sich auf das Erbe und die Vasallität stützt.”<sup>3</sup> This is a prime example of foreign mentalities, or views of the world, interacting in the *Nibelungenlied* and the confusion that such a clash can create. Ortwin’s reaction, in her reading, is not understood by Siegfried, who “vermag nicht zu verstehen, daß das Königtum auch durch die Vasallität begründet werden kann, so daß aus seiner Sicht nur der König als Kontrahent in Frage kommt.”<sup>4</sup>

Of importance to the question of Burgundian passivity is the narrator’s statement while introducing the elite of Worms that they *will* accomplish great deeds in the course of the narrative: “si frumten starkiu wunder *sît* in Etzelen lant” (5,4). On the other hand, Siegfried’s biographical sketch at the beginning of Aventure 2 emphasizes what he has *already* accomplished: forays into foreign kingdoms (21,2-3). The passivity of the Burgonden – in contrast to the type of foreign excursions attributed to Siegfried – finds an echo in the description of their court: “Ze Wormez bî dem Rîne si wonten mit ir kraft” (6,1). In contrast to the active life depicted in Siegfried’s biography, “wonen” relates existence without action, a period of

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<sup>3</sup> Carola Gottzmann, *Heldendichtung des 13. Jahrhunderts. Siegfried – Dietrich – Ortnit* (Peter Lang: Frankfurt, 1987), 25.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 27. On the other hand, Gottzmann’s reading that the purpose of Siegfried’s appearance in Worms is to show that rule by virtue of power is superior to that of inheritance misses the mark: “Es geht bei dem Auftreten Siegfrieds in Worms gar nicht um den Anspruch des Xanteners, sich des Wormser Reiches zu bemächtigen, sondern vielmehr um den Erweis, daß das Idoneitätsprinzip der Form des Erbkönigtums überlegen ist,” *ibid.* Neither of these two motivations are the *purpose* of his trip. Rather, the former is a perception of the Burgundians of the means through which he is pursuing his desire to gain Kriemhild for himself, while the latter can be seen as a partial source of the misunderstandings that take place during the execution of the Xantener’s plan. In a critique of what he sees as Gottzmann’s forced reading of the *Nibelungenlied*, Hoffmann writes that the text is “keine Erzählung, deren Sinn im Kern in der Exemplifizierung einer herrschaftsideologischen, staats-theoretischen Auseinandersetzung bestünde,” “Siegfried,” 137.



stasis and unchanging being,<sup>5</sup> similar to the common heroic epic formulation of “was gesezzen,” which, Jan-Dirk Müller notes, “nimmt nicht den Abschluß einer (selbst narrative nicht entfalteten) Bewegung, sondern eine quasi statische Situation zum Ausgangspunkt des Erzählens.”<sup>6</sup> Of the four other occurrences of “wonen” in the text, two describe Kriemhild’s years spent in Xanten at the court of Etzel. Before she invites her brothers to Etzel’s kingdom, she gives birth to a son (1388,3), learns the customs of her new land (1389), and endears herself to her underlings (1390). Thus “wonen” in the case of stanza 1387 covers domesticity and the adjustments in life that accompany the responsibilities of a queen, but not radical deeds. This verb covers a period of placidity that ends when she acts to have the Burgundians invited eastward, an undertaking at odds with the connotation of “wonen.”<sup>7</sup> A third instance of the term describes the year Siegfried lives in Worms without ever beholding Kriemhild. That period of time, until he takes on a new role as confidante of Gunther in the face of the threat from Liudeger and Liudegast, fails to bring him any closer to his goal, Kriemhild, and he does nothing to bring

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<sup>5</sup> Defining the first two *Aventiuren* by “courtly” and “heroic” genre expectations, Haug sees the first being pronouncedly “heroic” due to the first strophe, the “heroic” epithets applied to Kriemhild’s brothers (“adelige Abkunft, Macht, Tapferkeit, Freigebigkeit, großes Gefolge”) and her falcon dream. The second *Aventiure*, on the other hand, wraps aspects of “heroic” literature into a “courtly” package, meaning “daß er [the poet] Siegfried gegen die Tradition offenbar programmatisch zum höfischen Ritter umstilisiert,” “Idealität,” 39. Haug’s categorization of the first two *Aventiuren*, while not incorrect from the perspective of genre standards, is quite ironic when viewed from the perspective of deeds presented by the narrative. The Burgundian kings are served by men who undoubtedly have performed remarkably in battle (8,4), and they themselves have recourse to their “küene” (5,2), but at the same time their main task has been to take care of their sister: “ir pflâgen drîe küenege” (4,1). As for Siegfried, he has tested his strength, “sînes lîbes sterke,” in foreign lands (21,2-3), or, as a literal reading of these two lines makes clear, the heroic aspects of his make-up have driven him to seek out heroic activities. While Siegfried’s biography may be wrapped in courtliness, the text relates him *actually* carrying out heroic deeds, unlike the passive Burgundians, who may display heroic attributes but are not depicted using them in the first *Aventiure*.

<sup>6</sup> Jan-Dirk Müller, *Spielregeln*, 106. He also notes that the formulation “nimmt die feste Fügung legitimer Herrschaft als Ausgangspunkt,” i.e. it refers to political and social stability – and in the terms of this study, cultural changelessness – as the status quo.

<sup>7</sup> 1142,2 and 1387,2.

about this end. It is only external deeds, the threat and resulting consternation on the part of Gunther, that facilitate his deeper integration into the Burgundian court, these being the antithesis of “wonen.” Additionally, except for its relationship to Etzel in the description of Kriemhild’s seven years in his kingdom, “wonen” describes no male domains in the text beyond that of the Burgundians, further setting it apart from a place like Xanten and its native son. Finally, in the case of stanza 1142, “wonen” indicates Kriemhild’s acquiescence to an unfavorable situation – her husband’s slaying – a sentiment that connotes passivity and inaction in the face of suffering and victimhood: “si wonte in manigem sêre driuzehen jâr, / daz si des recken tôdes vergezzen kunde niht” (2-3).

The use of the verb *wonen* in connection with the Burgundians is significant because the male figures in the *Nibelungenlied* are often depicted through verbs of movement, thus amplifying the term’s passive nature and by extension casting the Burgundians in the light of inactivity. In contrast, the behaviors of Liudeger and Liudegast are marked by verbs of action and venturing forth: *bringen* (140,4), *suochen* (143,4), and *rîten* (170,3). This recalls Siegfried’s own biographical arc, which, with the exception for the year of relative passivity in Burgonden, contains continual movement and development.<sup>8</sup> Before the conflict with the kings of the Saxons and Danes, the only travel undertaken by the Burgundians is when they “riten in ir lant” (137,1), “in” here signifying “within.” The borders of Burgonden define the experiential borders of its kings, for whom Hagen’s knowledge of the foreign stands at a premium. Although their holdings may be extensive, the text does not indicate that they know anything beyond them or wish to.

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<sup>8</sup> For example, see the repetition of the verbs “fuoren” (73,2, 74,1, 85,4) and “komen” (79,2, 80,1, 106,2, 107,4) in Siegfried’s approach to the land of the Burgonden,

A key indicator of the comfort the Burgundians find in the status quo is stanza 115, in which Gunther rejects Siegfried's offer of a contest that may either add to the holdings of the court in Worms, or cut away their lands in the case of a defeat. Although not expressly stated, this remark implies a contentedness with the current state of Burgundian possessions. Moreover, nothing of note occurs during those excursions "in ir lant," narrowing their activities, and their experience, to what happens at court – and besides the arrival of Siegfried, this consists of very little outside of knightly games.

### **The Isolation of the Burgundian Court and the Reaction to Siegfried**

One of the defining characteristics of the Burgundian court is its peaceful existence, as the narrative suggests it has avoided tests or threats from the outside world before the ascent of Siegfried. One should remember that the narrator indicates that Siegfried protects Xanten from outside threats, meaning that such a problem is of obvious concern in the world of the text. Here one can ask, does a connection exist between the openness of Xanten and its susceptibility to foreign threats, whereas Burgonden, seemingly hermetically sealed, has avoided such troubles? The text does not provide an answer to this question, but it would seem to indicate that just as the Xanteners have dealings with foreigners, they perceive the outside world as fostering the potential of threats to their well-being. As for the Burgonden, there have been no serious wooers willing to challenge Gunther and his brothers, and no military actions against their land, indicated in his reaction to Siegfried's arrival and the Saxon threat: "daz getâten uns noch degene her zuo disen landen nie" (158,4). Only with Siegfried's entrance into Worms do Gunther and his men begin to face significant interaction with the outside world. And this naiveté vis-à-vis the foreign lays the groundwork for radical changes heralded by Siegfried's presence. The

Xantener's place in Burgonden foretells wide-ranging changes in the behavior of the previously peaceful and static Burgundians. Signs of this transformation emerge in the experiences with the Saxons and most especially in the wooing mission to Isenstein.

An indication of the unusualness of a stranger like Siegfried appearing in Burgonden can be seen in the reaction of the townspeople when Siegfried and his men appear on the horizon: "daz volc si allenthalben kapfen an began" (74,3). This observation follows a description of the outstanding accoutrements of the party and its impressive appearance. Why do the people of Worms experience such a reaction to what they see? One possibility, that the crowd is astonished by the accoutrements and outfitting of the strangers, is rendered improbable since the text, which frequently employs causal links such as "des," does not grammatically join the possessions to the wonder of the residents of Worms.<sup>9</sup> No specific cause is given for the reaction. For example, the text does not state that the crowd stared at them because they are wearing beautiful clothes. But it follows that the crowd must be reacting in amazement to the totality of what they perceive: strangers who are carrying themselves impressively and at the same time are entering their land. While "geste" have been present before, the text is silent as to whether they received a welcome couched in such astonishment. In any case, the strength of the verb "kapfen" indicates that the perceptions of the people of Burgonden are not tempered by a constant stream of foreigners into their land, at least those exhibiting the striking qualities of Siegfried.<sup>10</sup> Although this may be hyperbole intended to elevate the impressiveness of

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<sup>9</sup> See 100,4, which describes Siegfried's new-found invincibility after a bath in the dragon's blood, for a prime example of grammatical causality that leaves no room for cognitive ambiguity on the part of the recipients.

<sup>10</sup> An example of another context for this verb can be found in *Der Gute Gerhard*, when the title character is subject to the "kapfen" of foreigners, who wish to know where the stranger is from (4552, 6385). See also stanza 1762, in which the Burgundians are stared at by the Huns as if they were "tier diu wilden," an emphasis of their strangeness and the fact that they do not fit into

Siegfried's appearance, it also indicates that contact with non-Burgundians, at least of the importance and impact of Siegfried, is no quotidian occurrence.

The brevity with which Kriemhild's decisions to turn away suitors is described in stanza 46 also supports this. The contacts to these people were brief and they were held at a distance from Kriemhild as befits courtly *Minnedienst*: they were perceived by eye, "sach," and rejected by the princess's senses, "sinne." Of note is the fact that no names or descriptions of the suitors are provided; all are subsumed under the very vague term "werbenden." In addition, the relative pronoun in "swaz der werbenden" further diminishes the particularity and significance of these wooers by concealing their actual number. This stanza strongly suggests that the contact with the suitors was quite limited, and that the final judgment of suitability could be arrived at solely via visual perception and the processing of that information.

But at what distance were her admirers held? Do they actually represent an incursion of the foreign that renders Siegfried's advent unusual only in comparison to previous guests? To be sure, the text notes no lasting impressions of these suitors, no matter their number, which raises the question of their actual relationship to the Burgundians. It is undeniable that none have provided such services to the kingdom or made such a positive impression as Siegfried as to earn them an audience with Kriemhild, noticeable in Gernot's words before Kriemhild and Siegfried meet for the first time: "diu nie gegruozte recken, diu sol in grüezen pflegen" (289,3).<sup>11</sup> But

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normal paradigms of life in Etzel's kingdom, but also due to their assessment as "übermüeten helde." The verb also occurs four times in *Tristan*, including when Tristan plays a harp before an astonished group at Mark's court: "der kapftete vil manegez dar / und nâmen sîner hende war" (3607-8). The foreigner Tristan amazes the crowd with his ability to play in a foreign manner, "in britûnisher wise" (3590).

<sup>11</sup> "Gruozen" indicates an act of acknowledgment of the admirer in the *Nibelungenlied*'s portrayal of *minnedienst*. While the audience does not learn whether the previous suitors were immediately sent away upon arrival and judgment by Kriemhild, or if they too had time at court under observation by the princess, none had reached this stage of a relationship with her.

does the process of judging Siegfried follow the evaluation process of previous suitors? In other words, is it possible that other knights actually joined the court, moving from the threshold of the court into its heart, as does Siegfried? The text does not reveal this, but any argument against his entry into Burgonden that may be lodged by Kriemhild – and evidence that she turned suitors away at the gates of Worms and thus blocked any entry of the foreign – becomes impossible since she has no choice in the matter. Instead, Hagen reveals information that renders compulsory his invitation into Worms. It is not mentioned that Kriemhild has seen Siegfried until stanza 132, after he has been allowed entry into the kingdom, so any chance of her judging him before entry is short-circuited. What is curious here is that Siegfried is not identified as a wooer: Gunther must inquire why he is there, and Siegfried's dissembling also denies Kriemhild the opportunity to pass immediate judgment upon him. Siegfried's appearance, temperament, and comportment, not to mention his hidden intentions, disrupt the normal process of visual arrest via Kriemhild and his judgment by her senses. These characteristics are revealed only in his close contact with the Burgundians, something the text insinuates had not occurred in the past exactly because it suggests a process of detached judgment. While the text does not state that foreigners *did not* join the court in the past before their rejection by Kriemhild, the reception of the party by the people of Worms, the abbreviated account of previous suitors, and Siegfried's eventual greeting of Kriemhild all point to the exceptionality of his approach and admittance to Worms, along with his ensuing residency.

Gunther's reaction to the approach of the party from Xanten further shows the unexpectedness of Siegfried's appearance, although this too is intensified by the look of the group and its equipment. Ortwin's suggestion that Gunther turn to Hagen for information signals that the appearance of Siegfried raises issues that the others of the court cannot resolve

themselves, namely dealing with a foreigner that no one else knows or can even identify. As Quast notes, “Am Wormser Hof ist es Hagen, der durch sein Wissen das Fremde begreifbar und dem Hof integrierbar macht.”<sup>12</sup> This raises one odd point in the identification of Siegfried: Why does Gunther not immediately call for Hagen to use his knowledge to determine who the stranger is? One might argue that this is a narrative method by which Hagen’s special knowledge could be relayed to the audience, although Gunther could have easily as well stated that “Hagen, who knows about foreign lands, should be brought to him for this duty.” However, the text should be taken at face value here, as the isolation of the Burgundians is broken by Siegfried for the first time and this novelty is greeted with Burgundians struggling to face it: there is nothing normal about Siegfried’s arrival in the mental world of the Burgundians. With the exception of one figure at court, no one can identify him nor does there exist any process by which the foreign and unknown can be assessed, as the Burgundians under Gunther have lived in virtual stasis and an unchanging world that encompasses only his court and the immediately surrounding lands.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the text reveals that Gunther’s ignorance of matters outside of his ken in contrast to Hagen’s knowledge of the foreign signifies a variability of experience and aptitudes amongst the Burgundians despite their shared cultural experiences and outlooks.

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<sup>12</sup> Quast, 288.

<sup>13</sup> One sign of this is the contrast between the depictions of Siegfried and Kriemhild at the beginning of the *Nibelungenlied*. While Siegfried, in *Aventiure 2*, matures and takes the sword, only later to decide to test his mettle by seeking the hand of Kriemhild, his counterpart turns away suitor after suitor. Xanten, represented by Siegfried, goes forth into new realms, while in Burgonden the introduction of the foreign does not take place because Kriemhild does not enter into a relationship with any over her earlier suitors.

## The Heterogeneity of the Burgundian Court

Some of the characteristics of the Burgundian court revealed in the third Aventure provide the audience with patterns of behavior that later will play important roles in the work. First and foremost, the reactions of the various actors in Worms to Siegfried reveal how fractious and heterogeneous the court truly is. On the other hand, it exhibits numerous common bonds that constitute a single culture. Nevertheless, the court cannot be considered fully monolithic as the individuals that are part of it still display differences of temperament, behavior, and experience. According to Strauss and Quinn, “To the extent people have recurring, common experiences – experiences mediated by humanly created products and learned practices that lead them to develop a set of similar schemas – it makes sense to say they share a culture.”<sup>14</sup> The fractiousness of the Burgundian court, despite linking its members through cultural bonds engendered by common experiences and constant interaction, is itself reflective of the centrality of difference and heterogeneity in the text. In this instance, every member of the Burgundian court is to a certain degree “fremd” vis-à-vis his or her counterparts: “Eine und dieselbe Person [kann] sich zugleich als einheimisch und fremdländisch, als vertraut und fremdartig entpuppen.”<sup>15</sup> According to Levinas, alterity or difference exists everywhere outside of the self, even in people from the same culture, but is overcome by day-to-day interaction: “The world I am living in is a world filled with objects which all differ from me, and which are therefore all characterized by a certain alterity. I encounter and handle these objects with different attitudes, practical as well as theoretical. But when I study them or consume them or utilize them in work, I am constantly transforming the foreign and differentness into the familiar and same, and

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<sup>14</sup> Strauss and Quinn, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Waldenfels, *Topographie*, 35.



thereby making them lose their strangeness.”<sup>16</sup> In the case of the Burgundians, the alterity that exists among the elite of Worms – only with the exception of Hagen as far as the text reveals – stems not from differences in external influences (i.e., experiences beyond Burgonden) but reveals itself in the way that they carry themselves and behave, while the “source” of these behaviors goes unmentioned (unlike the background provided about Siegfried’s personality and its impact on his future actions).

As has already been noted, with the exception of Hagen, an awareness of the world outside the bounds of Burgonden is completely lacking at the court of Worms.<sup>17</sup> The various reactions of the Burgundians reflect their ignorance of Siegfried, his background, and his possible mission, but also show that the court’s culture possesses no united front. The strategy which does function in the face of Siegfried’s aggressiveness, that suggested by Gernot – a conciliatory stance in the vein of courtliness – becomes the face of Burgundian practice until it is transformed in the presence of Siegfried.

The text bestows on each of the members of the Burgundian court particular behavioral patterns and characteristics during the confrontation with Siegfried. Ortwin, for example, represents brashness and aggressiveness. He is “heißspornig wie Wolfhart und hier dem jungen Siefrid verwandt.”<sup>18</sup> It is common to find in the literature the idea that Ortwin vocalizes the hostility of Hagen, who in comparison remains coolheaded: “Als Hagens Neffe verdeutlicht

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<sup>16</sup> Zahavi, 195.

<sup>17</sup> Hagen is an exception to Burgundians in many respects, the least of which being his position outside the immediate family of Dankrat. His ability to sense the ultimate downfall of the Burgundians and his second sight, i.e., the incident with the *merwîp*, are just two other examples of this. His appearance also sets him apart, as he is “gremelîch” (413,1) and his visage “eislîch” (1734,4). Fritz Lang’s film adaptation of the *Nibelungenlied* also sets Hagen apart from other characters by virtue of his dark and threatening appearance. According to Claudia Brinker-von der Heyde, “Von Anfang an [. . .] ist Hagen herausgehoben, ist der Einzelgänger, der mehr weiß als andere, dem mit Respekt und gleichzeitiger spürbarer Distanz begegnet wird,” 111.

<sup>18</sup> Ehrismann, 346.

Ortwin bei seinem ersten Auftritt den Standpunkt des Tronegers und zeigt durch seine Kompromisslosigkeit, dass der Skandal nicht weggeredet werden kann.”<sup>19</sup> His opposite pole is Gernot. During the clash with Siegfried, “the moderation of Gernot holds them [Hagen and Ortwin] in check.”<sup>20</sup> And it is Gernot whose order of silence and calm reasoning with Siegfried help reduce the tension and danger, at the same time giving Gunther an opening to change the dynamics of the confrontation: “Der Bruder des Königs ist zunächst der einzige, der das eigentliche Anliegen Siegfrieds durchschaut. Seiner überragenden Stärke ist nicht durch Aggressivität und Drohungen der Gegenwehr zu begegnen.”<sup>21</sup> Gunther, the nominal head of the Worms court, revels in courtly perfected behavior. Even though the Xantener has rattled the Burgundians to their foundation, the king opens his court to Siegfried as he would a friend or ally when the confrontation is defused, transforming his initial shock into courteousness at the prompting of his brother. This one-sidedness of Gunther’s behavioral idiom (the one-dimensionality of his character becomes particularly prominent when compared to a character like Siegfried, who can function in a variety of environments, be they courtly or martial) reaches a pinnacle in the build-up to the Saxon war, when he treats the envoys, who have come to announce the intent of Liudeger and Liudegast to war against his kingdom, with respect: “swie vient man in wære, vil scône ir pflegen bat / Gunter der rîche” (152,2-3).<sup>22</sup> Gunther reacts the same way to the foreign every time, with the utmost respect and courtliness. This represents an inflexibility of his character on the one hand, insofar as he cannot respond to unique threats and situations, but at the same his insistence on refined behavior earns praise from the narrator and

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<sup>19</sup> Cavalié, 377.

<sup>20</sup> Bernard Willson, “*Ordo* and *Inordinatio* in the Nibelungenlied” *PBB* 85 (1963): 83-101 and 325-351, here 89.

<sup>21</sup> Gottzmann, 28.

<sup>22</sup> The narrator escalates the courtliness of Gunther by indicating how the good treatment ordered by him trumps the shock and anger among the populace raised by the declaration of war.

exemplifies the impeccability of his courtliness.<sup>23</sup> And yet there is a present conservatism here that is absolutely striking, especially when compared to the multiple paradigms of behavior employed by Siegfried (warrior, refined courtier, deceiver).

Why is the heterogeneity of the court in Worms important? First and foremost it provides Siegfried with the opening he needs to gain entry into the court so he can eventually marry Kriemhild, his true goal. If warriors such as Hagen constituted all of Burgonden, Siegfried's miscalculation – attempting to force entry through the idiom of aggression – would have precluded success and led to a wholly different storyline. But this heterogeneity also presents Hagen as one receptive to the deception on Isenstein, something Gunther, who functions on a plane of matter-of-factness and the primacy of the visual, cannot himself employ since he lacks the capability of perceiving a split between *Sein* and *Schein*.

### **Siegfried as a Herald of Transformation**

Siegfried's arrival presages the introduction of change to the kingdom of the Burgundians as it has been portrayed up to this point in the text. Xanten is a place of growth and evolution – Siegfried becomes educated, he is knighted, and his parents and their followers even weigh the transfer of power to him. The second *Aventiure* is replete with growth and transformation, whereas stasis marks the culture of the Burgonden. Change in the land of Xanten is both voluntary and customary – customary insofar as Siegfried's development is accompanied by his

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<sup>23</sup> For example, see the narrator's response to Gunther's treatment of the enemy at the conclusion of the hostilities in the fourth *Aventiure*, particularly stanzas 251ff, and the description of the festival in the fifth *Aventiure*, specifically stanza 309. See also the second line of 801, which describes the festivities during the return of Kriemhild and Siegfried to Worms, the narrator notes, "jâ wart vremder geste baz gepflegen nie," here the emphasis on "foreign" participants and their treatment. Most striking is the dichotomy between Brünhild's fearsome nature, which he has just experienced, and his greeting, which befits his mission as suitor but is a jarring response to what has just befallen him: "Er gruoetzes' minneclîche, jâ was er tugende rich" (468,1).

introduction to the knighthood and his immersion in the ways of courtliness. The invitation of foreigners to his *Schwertleite* is both a voluntary invitation of the foreign into the kingdom and a custom, by which is meant something that has taken place in the past. From the standpoint of the background revealed by the narrative, the Burgundians consistently reject alteration of their situation, which could be initiated by the introduction of wooers into its culture, while Xanten is awash in new developments in the second Aventure. Even Siegmund's warning to Siegfried betrays a belief that challenges to Burgundian authority from without will not be countenanced, thus reflecting an impression of conservatism, albeit for the purpose of self-preservation, ingrained in the Burgundian court. Thus, when Siegfried arrives in Burgonden, we have a dynamic character from a dynamic background entering a land of changelessness. In addition, we have a character understood by the Burgundians to be dangerous who has in fact posed a threat to others during his youthful adventures, and yet they throw open their gates to him despite the possibility of tragic consequences, an example of Burgundian foolhardiness on the one hand and possibly Hagen's cunning on the other.

Nevertheless, the metamorphosis heralded by his accompanying *niuwemære* does not come immediately. The year that Siegfried spends in Worms is a departure from what the audience has learned about his immediate past: instead of challenging mythical creatures and traveling in foreign lands, he has become a passive actor at the court himself: "er [stuont] bî den helden ûf dem hove, / alsô noch die liute durch kurzewîle tuont" (135,1-2).<sup>24</sup> The pastime of the Burgundians consists of competitive games and showing themselves at court, a lifestyle that the once active Siegfried embraces, although it leaves him saddened because it does not bring him contact to Kriemhild. This emotion also reveals the tension between the sedentary nature of the

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<sup>24</sup> Of note here is the verb "stuont," which is reminiscent of the sense of inactivity captured by the verb *wonen*.

Burgundian court and the goal-driven character who left Xanten with a very specific goal in mind. Siegfried, who has been enveloped by the culture of the Burgundians, now thinks frequently about Kriemhild (“er gedâht ouch manege zîte” 136,1), who earlier in his challenge to Gunther and his brothers, in an instance of pure action, was only an afterthought.<sup>25</sup> Siegfried becomes bogged down in this unchanging land and falls into despair at the hopelessness of his situation.<sup>26</sup> Insofar as his failure to make an impact on Burgundian society goes, until his entanglement in the Saxon and Dane affair he follows the same pattern of previous wooers because he does not alter the culture of his new home, despite his continued physical presence in Worms.

The war against the Saxons signals the continuation of the change that seizes the Burgundian world after Siegfried’s introduction to their kingdom. Siegfried’s arrival does not *cause* Liudeger and Liudegast to declare war on the Burgundians. But the arrival of Siegfried signals a radical reorientation of the Burgundian court to one involved in protracted engagement with the foreign. And at the same time, each complication occasioned by additional foreign interaction provides Siegfried with a chance to act and thus impact the Burgundians’ own behavior with regard to the unknown. It is not coincidence that after Siegfried challenges the authority of Gunther and his brothers they are again confronted with the foreign in the form of the threatened invasion.

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<sup>25</sup> After the completion of the war in the fifth *Aventiure*, Siegfried acts in accordance with the idea that he has become fully integrated into the Burgundian court. He is about to leave, but he stays “durch vriwende liebe da” (323,1) and because of the continued pull of Kriemhild on him: “durch ir unmâzen schœne der here dâ beleip” (324,1). Both of these factors add up to his well-being in Worms: “jâ wær er in den landen ninder anderswâ / gewesen also sanfte” (323,2-3). “Sanfte” here expresses the carelessness of his existence in Burgonden and his feeling of well-being and belonging.

<sup>26</sup> This is expressed in the stanza 136 monologue, which provides a rare view into Siegfried’s psychological reaction to his own experiences.

The opening line of the fourth Aventure emphasizes the caesura between the past of the Burgundian empire – the occasional foreign visitor stops by to woo Kriemhild but no relationship blossoms – and a present that centers on protracted interaction with the foreign that begins with Siegfried and ends in the lands of Etzel: “Nu nâhten vremdiu mære in Guntheres lant / von boten” (139,1-2). Grosse translates this as “Plötzlich brachten Boten befremdliche Nachrichten in Gunthers Land.”<sup>27</sup> A more literal translation of “nu” is “now,” but in its location after the shocking arrival of Siegfried, it also carries the force of “then,” as it describes a parallel situation following Siegfried’s advent, which was also summarized as an expression of *mære*: the further injection of foreign affairs into the kingdom. And the chain of events triggered by Siegfried’s presence in the kingdom is impressive: first the Burgundians deal with an overzealous knight, then engage in a battle against massive forces, become involved with a warrior queen, commit a heinous murder, and finally lead a clash between the Christian and *heidenisch* halves of the *Nibelungenlied* world.

Hagen’s proclamation that Siegfried has brought *niuwemaere* anticipates the flood of foreign news to which Burgonden is opened up and the changes the foreign elicits in the kingdom. For instance, the “vremdiu mære” of the Danish and Saxon envoys result in a transformation of the relationship between Gunther and Siegfried. When the Xantener pledges his military assistance to Gunther, he moves into the circle of Gunther’s supporters and no longer plays the role of an auxiliary participant in the activities of the court, an unassimilated presence in Worms, a stranger looking in at that which he desires. Until the news from Liudeger and Liudegast, he shares their space in the household and at their knightly games (“kurzwîle” and “spilen”), but assumes the role of guest more than permanent resident: “wir sulen iu gerne

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<sup>27</sup> Grosse, 49.

dienen" (126,3). In stanza 127 Gunther receives the appellation "wirt des landes," encompassing both his role as the king and as a host vis-à-vis Siegfried. And as a host should, Gunther offers him that which he desires during his sojourn. The solution of the Siegfried problem amounts to taking him on as a houseguest staying indefinitely, although Ehrismann is incorrectly convinced that Siegfried should be an unhappy houseguest, because he suffered a "Demütigung" as "er wurde als ritterlicher Kämpfer abgelehnt."<sup>28</sup>

This arrangement changes radically when Gunther opens himself to help from Siegfried in the affair with Liudegast and Liudeger – whereas before he was an attractive participant in the non-critical courtly games, now he enters the power matrix of the kingdom,<sup>29</sup> quickly transforming himself into a wielder of influence due to Gunther's inability to deal with this unknown threat: "Der Angriff der Sachsen und Dänen gibt Siegfried Gelegenheit, den Burgunden einen Dienst zu erweisen."<sup>30</sup> Siegfried, as displayed in his mastery of the Nibelungen, exhibits the ability to seize and exercise control, although in the case of the Burgundians this is never complete and always in tension between the wishes and desires of the

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<sup>28</sup> Ehrismann, 349. Where Ehrismann sees defeat and shame, an interpretation that regards Siegmund's warnings about the Burgonden as critical to Siegfried's behavior and plans, the knight has actually ingratiated himself into a society that he was told would be unwelcoming to foreigners, a victory that removes a major barrier between himself and Kriemhild. At the same time, one might conjecture that Siegfried's pride was hurt, but the text does not explicitly suggest that this in fact takes place.

<sup>29</sup> Gottzmann correctly states that Siegfried's entrée into the court at Worms brought with it no power or obligations. The court "blendet [...] Siegfried durch überschäumendes, höfliches Entgegenkommen, das ihn aber in keiner Weise bindet und keine rechtlichen Konsequenzen nach sich zieht. Gunther kann Siegfried von Rechts wegen gar nicht an der Herrschaft beteiligen, da dieser nicht dem Wormser Geschlecht angehört," 29.

<sup>30</sup> Haug, "Idealität," 42.

king and Hagen, who will kill the Xantener after he helps his king attain what he himself wants.<sup>31</sup>

In a later incursion of the outside world into Burgonden, the news that reaches into the Rhenish kingdom about Brünhild at the beginning of *Aventiure 6* is “iteniuwe mære.” But then again, anything that reaches the gates of Worms concerning a foreign circumstance would be of great newsworthiness given its previous total isolation from the circumstances of the *Nibelungenlied* world. And the similarity to Siegfried’s “niuwemære” is striking and unlikely a coincidence. Siegfried has metaphorically opened the gates of Worms to the foreign, which now continually impinges upon the world of the Burgundians. Siegfried’s arrival constitutes *niuwemære* and signals future instances of how new und unprecedented events impact Burgonden – he is an attractor of *niuwemære* that buffet and transform Burgundian culture. While no cause and effect relationship is established between Siegfried’s presence in Worms and the arriving news about Brünhild, this information about a woman who has terrorized suitors for many years marks a significant change in Burgundian culture, which, thanks to Siegfried, is no longer shielded from the affairs of the larger world and the changes these interactions bring with them.

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<sup>31</sup> “Hagen ist [. . .] von vornherein als Gegenspieler Siegfrieds aufgebaut, der einen Grund und einen konkreten Anlaß braucht, um sein Wissen für Siegfrieds Tod zu nutzen. Der Grund ist Siegfrieds Mißbrauch seiner mythischen Gaben für den Werbungsbruch,” Mertens, 65. Mertens’ formulation suggests that the purpose of Hagen’s knowledge about Siegfried’s youth and his vulnerability is to use it in carrying out the Xantener’s death and that this knowledge *must* be used. While this may be one of the narratological purposes of his knowledge (Siegfried must die, and this knowledge facilitates that death), the text never indicates that Siegfried’s death is preordained. Instead, a syntagmatic reading of the text shows that Hagen uses his knowledge as a “tool” to fix a problem, that of the quarrel between the queens grounded in the fictions instigated by him in Isenstein. But insofar as a “misuse” of his mythic gifts is concerned, Hagen never criticizes the events on Isenstein, only the consequences of the fight between the two queens.



## The War against the Saxons and Danes

But before they can interact with the foreigner Brünhild, the Burgundians must take care of the second outside threat to face them, the conflict with the Saxons and Danes. The performance of the Burgundians in the battle against Liudeger's and Liudegast's forces has received little attention in literature on the *Nibelungenlied* and when the struggle is discussed it is usually seen in the larger context of Siegfried's integration (or entanglement) in Burgundian society and of no greater significance.<sup>32</sup> For this study, however, it is of great significance because it problematizes the difficulties of knowing the "foreign" and how assumptions about the unknown play themselves out.

During the war, characters like Sindold, Hunold, and Volker successfully stand up to thousands of opponents, a typical example of epic warfare hyperbole: "die kunden in dem strîte dem tôde manegen nider legen" (211,4). The envoy to Kriemhild does not answer her question whether many from the kingdom have fallen in the battle, but it is clear from the descriptions of the battle that not a single Burgundian is felled during the fight. The favorable results for the Burgundian side seem to be, despite the presence of hyperbole, extremely fanciful since this is the first time that the text notes that this current group of Burgundians has ever needed to repel an invasion or indeed fight a foreign enemy. This is an instance of a gap in the text that is not the result of older traditions being melded to newer material. And yet the gap can be closed in

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<sup>32</sup> Siegfried, as Jan-Dirk Müller notes, becomes a *staeter vriunt* of the kingdom due to his participation against the Danes and Saxons, "Motivationsstrukturen," 238. Göhler agrees with this assessment, focusing on the evolving relationship between the court and Siegfried: "Damit tritt Siegfried in ein neues Verhältnis zum burgundischen Königshaus," 83. In contrast, Gottzmann understands this to be the genesis of a lord-vassal relationship: "Was hier noch als Freundschaftsdienst erscheint, ist in Wirklichkeit der Anfang eines Vasallendienstes für das Burgundenreich, der einer Selbsterniedrigung Siegfrieds gleichkommt," 33.

much the same way as those that emerge from different strata of material being fused together: by close attention to the preceding, and in this case following, details in the text.

The foundation for Siegfried's impressive deeds on the battlefield<sup>33</sup> has already been explored by the text – he proved himself more than capable in his fights with the Nibelungen and the dragon, his quality as “der starke Sîvrit” is confirmed.<sup>34</sup> And yet the Burgundians' performance would appear contradictory to their inexperience in actual combat, given the fact that their lands have never been threatened and they do not attack other lands, as they tell Siegfried. But this must not be explained simply as a miraculous outcome intended to move the narrative forward and keep alive those who will slay the Xantener – the reasons for the Burgundians' success, like the reasons for Siegfried's ambiguous deeds and words in his Worms advent, are all mentioned in the narrative. These puzzle pieces, although their later significance is not explained at the point when they are introduced, lend the rout of the opposing forces a sense of credibility and rationality despite the fantastical, hyperbolic statistics of the outcome.

As Siegfried tells the Burgundians when he arrives in the kingdom, he has learned in his father's kingdom that Gunther's men are “die kûenesten recken . . . die ie kûnec gewunne” (107,3-4), and Siegmund states that his son will not be able to gain Kriemhild by means of

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<sup>33</sup> Walter Haug suggests that the war and following celebration indicate that a “höfische Perspektive” has begun to dominate the text with the lessening of the importance of the “heroische Sphäre,” because “Siegfried [zeigt] sich als höfischer Ritter,” “Idealität,” 42. But Siegfried's actions on the battlefield exhibit both heroic and courtly characteristics: he leads an army in a massive battle reminiscent of the *Chanson de Roland*, and yet engages in a “courtly” test against Liudegast. Siegfried's ability to excel as a leader and individual fighter mirrors the complexity of his background and his ability to function in varied situations, a flexibility that Gunther does not possess in the first half of the work.

<sup>34</sup> Until his death, only Hagen and Liudeger are described as “starc.” After the treachery of Hagen and Gunther, the term is applied to Burgundians like Volker, Gernot, and Giselher, a striking shift in appellation, although the word is once used to describe the totality of the underlings of the Burgundian kings 8.4. The physical essence of Siegfried has been transferred to the Burgundian warriors, a sign of the sweeping changes he has brought to the kingdom as will be discussed below in greater detail.

sword;<sup>35</sup> the likely reason for his concern is that Siegfried would be overcome by their force in a fight despite his own obvious strength. While the men of Burgonden do not have the experience of Siegfried in vanquishing enemies, they do have inborn qualities that would allow such a result (explicitly stated bravery and implied strength in battle). Siegmund's statement that Siegfried could not gain Kriemhild by violence would seem to be an extrapolation of their innate qualities to a combat situation in which they would rely upon them. One possible source of Siegmund's awareness of the Burgundian's courage found in the text is the mock warfare they engage in at home in Worms. Of course, the basis of Siegmund's information may not be found in the text, but the ambiguity of the text precludes any definitive solution of this issue. However, once again a paradigmatic interpretation of the *Nibelungenlied* offers a possible link between these two separate facts. Such a connection between the peaceful tourneying of Gunther's men and Siegmund's praise of them is furthermore supported by the preceding description of Burgonden as dominated by passivity and inward focus.

During these war games Gunther's men are able to pursue the physical and tactical side of fighting, relying upon their physicality and lack of fear to distinguish themselves as particularly brave, the information Siegfried has received about them. And thus the battle against Liudegast and Liudeger is a confirmation of the *mære* heard in Xanten, a more serious test, and confirmation of, their bravery. It too is a validation of Siegmund's stance that their power can stop outsiders from taking something from them, even though Siegfried does play a

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<sup>35</sup> According to Göhler, "Nirgends bestätigt sich die Sorge der Eltern Siegfrieds, daß die Burgunden einer Verbindung zwischen Kriemhild und Siegfried ablehnend gegenüberstehen könnten," 14-15. What is important about Siegmund's prediction is that it is never tested because of the path that Siegfried's introduction to the Burgundians takes. This does not mean that had the confrontation taken place as he forewarned his prediction would have been incorrect and it does not diminish the possibility of Burgundian violence. The threat of attack by Siegfried is quickly averted and Siegfried's desire for the Burgundian princess is never mentioned within the context of his threats.

major part in that validation. Perhaps this lack of experience against a true enemy and the first open conflict with the foreign explains in part Kriemhild's intense questioning of the envoy after the battle and the first piece of information that the messenger imparts to Kriemhild: "wir heten ninder keinen zagen" (226,4).<sup>36</sup> Siegfried is also her concern, of course, but it would be an overstatement to suggest that his well-being is her primary concern. Her indirect way of discovering his fate is of course proper because her desire for him has not yet been sanctioned by her brothers, but it does not mean that the direct questions have any less value or sincerity. If the men of Gunther are the bravest to be found serving a king, in the words of Siegfried, then why should their willingness to stand up against the opposition be of question? The answer can be found exactly in the lack of prior contact with the foreign and any subjection to real battle conditions.

The previously untested Burgundians prove themselves capable of adjusting to the new world in which they find themselves, one in which they must guard against outsiders, *vremden*, who desire to damage the stability and sovereignty maintained by Gunther and his brothers for so long. In this instance, the Burgundians evolve into true fighters, employing those biological and cultural traits that elicited apprehension in Siegmund and the custom of engaging in serious, yet simulated, warfare at home, which for them was a custom: "Dâ wart von guoten helden vil kleider ab geriten / von den hôchgemuoten nâch des landes siten" (602,1-2). Most significantly, this is an instance of cultural development shepherded by Siegfried. Without his guiding hand and extensive experience with the foreign and combat, the leap from tournament to battlefield

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<sup>36</sup> The term *zage* appears a second time in the second half of the work when Hagen destroys the boat that has ferried the Burgonden across the Rhein, which he justifies by saying that the river assures "ob wir an dirre reise deheinen zagen hân," (1583,2) that the coward will drown. This is a parallel to Kriemhild's questioning of the envoy, in that such a trip to a powerful king has never been undertaken by the Burgundians – it is another first-time experience for the men of Worms. Hagen questions whether they can handle this new adventure.

would have been impossible. And Siegfried's suggestion that Gunther stay at home for the war is a radical alteration of the hierarchical traditions of the Burgundians, rendering the king a bystander in a matter of great import for his kingdom and seizing from Hagen a responsibility he might have held had Siegfried never appeared in Worms.

The text suggests that neither Gunther, the king limited by the confines of courtliness, nor Hagen, intimidated by the threat facing the Burgundians, would have successfully led the Burgundian forces. Göhler interprets Siegfried's leadership of the Burgundian forces not as a reflection of weakness on the part of Gunther, but instead as a narrative chance to thrust Siegfried into the spotlight. He thereby ignores the omnipresent issue of power and leadership and the problematization thereof in the text that renders any inversion of hierarchical positions as meaningful.<sup>37</sup> While this is not the only cultural change wrought by Siegfried in Burgonden, it does provide his undertakings with a credibility that primes the Burgundians to adopt his own tactics and approaches to the foreign, ultimately to his detriment and theirs.

In addition to Siegfried's interactions with the Burgundians, the war declared by Liudeger and Liudegast fleshes out the image of the culture in Worms. First, the complete isolation of Gunther from the rest of the *Nibelungenlied* world becomes abundantly clear when the envoys of the two kings announce to him the impending invasion. Gunther is caught fully unprepared by the news and asks for time to think about their message (147,1-2) to which he has a strong negative reaction "Gunthere dem vil rîchen wart leide genuoc" (148,1) because of its implications for his kingdom.<sup>38</sup> Just as the arrival of a person of Siegfried's stature and

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<sup>37</sup> His argument that leaving Gunther at home leaves the power structures in Burgonden uncomplicated appears misguided as the *Stratordienst* in mss. B and C opens the door to that very issue, *Nibelungenlied*, 83-84.

<sup>38</sup> Müller stresses that modern readers must take into account the political connotation of the word such as *leit*, the byproduct of which is an emotional response on the part of Gunther. "Die

significance represents a novel experience for Gunther and his kingdom, this declaration of war profoundly affects him because he has never suffered such humiliation and his kingdom so much damage (*leit*) and he lacks experience in responding to such a challenge, thus the fact that he must ask his men for their advice in a matter. Gunther lacks any orientation in this case, since he cannot rely on past experience or ask his lieutenants for advice. Such was the case when Siegfried arrived and the king was surrounded by advisors who could parlay his initial helplessness into a peaceful resolution of the threat. Scholars have suggested that Gunther is the epitome of a weak, indecisive king, and this negative interpretation of his character is easily supported in the text. Until Siegfried arrives, Gunther faces no threats or internal problems. Only when the situation at the Burgundian court changes thanks to Siegfried does he face true conflicts and challenges. Lynn Thelen is among those who believe that Gunther is intentionally portrayed as a weak king: “We find that the author has hinted at Gunther’s impotence throughout the tale; we also discover that these suggestions become less subtle as the story progresses.”<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that those situations in which he looks weakest are novel ones for the whole of Burgonden. Siegfried’s appearance does not fit into the experiential template of the steady stream of wooers turned around by the disinterest of Kriemhild. And if one accepts the notion that the characters in the *Nibelungenlied* do change their behaviors and alter them based on past experiences,<sup>40</sup> Gunther’s recourse to the counsel of his entourage

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Kriegserklärung beschädigt das harmonische Gleichgewicht burgondischer Herrschaft,” *Spielregeln*, 213.

<sup>39</sup> Lynn Thelen, “The Internal Source and Function of King Gunther’s Bridal Quest,” *Monatshefte* 76 (1984): 143-155, here 151. Müller reminds us that Gunther’s personal failings must not be read to mean that his office is also weak, *Spielregeln*, 180.

<sup>40</sup> This is in itself evident from any number of perspectives. For example, Siegfried has observed, by which method will be discussed below, that Gunther cannot defeat Brünhild by natural strength alone. And Brünhild applies that which she sees in Isenstein – namely the *Stratordienst* of Siegfried – to the marriage of Kriemhild and Siegfried to determine that

would appear to be an intelligent move, as the situation is analogous to that of Siegfried's arrival, and the results of that consultation helped the kingdom to weather the Xantener's malice. While the situations that trigger these two consultations are similar, the responses to the *leit* inflicted in both circumstances indicate a curious inversion of expectations within the court. When faced with the insult of the Danes and Saxons, Gernot calls for the threat to be met with arms, but Hagen appeals for peace and by requesting Siegfried's help concedes the Xantener's advantages in matters concerning the extra-Burgundian world.

### Isenstein and Worms

For the Burgundians, Isenstein stands at great distance from Worms in terms of physical location and cultural detachment. Regardless of their affinity with the fantastic or mythic, the lands of Brünhild and the Nibelungen carry significance for the real-world narrative centering on Siegfried and the Burgundians. Thus, they may be considered as culturally heterogeneous to Worms and Xanten, further removed from those "courtly" societies than they are from each other. The differences among all of these places, whether "realistic" or "mythic" in quality and origin, all engender equally central difficulties and barriers to the characters trying to navigate them.<sup>41</sup> As for Isenstein, the fantastical elements of a land led by an Amazon-like woman of inordinate strength serve only to demarcate it as a place of cultural peculiarity, not render its

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something is amiss. In addition, Gernot, present during the conflict with Siegfried, tries another method to disarm him after he has seen that others failed. The past is instructive in the *Nibelungenlied*, despite the fact that the application of what the characters have learned may be flawed or based on an incomplete grasp of its true nature.

<sup>41</sup> *Nibelungenlied* scholars have repeatedly considered Isenstein, along with the land of the Nibelungen, to be elements of *Märchen* or myth inserted into the text. Hermann Reichert uses the term "Mythos" to describe Isenstein and the deeds of Siegfried's youth. *Nibelungenlied und Nibelungensage* (Cologne: Hermann Böhlau, 1985), 75. According to Göhler, the fairy-tale-like aspects of the work, such as the strength of Brünhild, "rücken das Geschehen [. . .] in eine märchenhafte Ferne von sozialer Unbestimmtheit," 53.

impact on the narrative inconsequential by virtue of its non-realism. Here the wooing party from Burgonden interacts with a strange, autochthonous culture that recalls Siegfried's first meeting with Gunther and his circle, although in that instance the meeting is initiated by two sides that are more in the dark as to the motivations and background of the other, further adding to the gulf between them and their cultures.

The concept of sailing to Isenstein evokes in Gunther a sense that the separation from his kingdom is great, and what lies on the other end of the expanses of sea and land they are to cross is a strange place, but nevertheless one that still requires proper courtly preparation. After speaking to Siegfried about the number of men that should accompany them on the journey,<sup>42</sup> he asks "waz wir kleider solden vor Prünhilde tragen, / die uns dâ wol gezæmen." (343,3-4).<sup>43</sup> The cultural relativism here is great, because the adverb "far" and adjective "foreign" does not suggest to Gunther that anything else but a courtly mission may be appropriate in this instance, despite Siegfried's insistence that Brünhild has brutally dealt with suitors in the past. His question suggests that his only uncertainty lies in the exact nature of what would constitute the proper clothing.<sup>44</sup> Siegfried's response indicates that Isenstein also functions with a courtly idiom, at least insofar as clothing is concerned. However, his proposition seems to give equal

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<sup>42</sup> He suggests a force of 30,000 men to accompany them, not for military purposes, but to increase the appearance of courtly magnificence: "daz wir mit vollen êren komen an den sê" (339,2).

<sup>43</sup> The so-called *Schneiderstroph*en in the sixth Aventure have frequently been passed over by researchers, who have considered them "lästig" and mere "Zufügsel," according to Marjatta Wis. She believes they have greater narrative significance, and sees the frequent foreshadowing of dark times mixed into discussions of clothing in the Aventure as a particular *Nibelungenlied* response to a common motif in courtly romances, "Zu den 'Schneiderstrophen' des *Nibelungenliedes*. Ein Deutungsversuch" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 84 (1983): 251-260, here 254 and 259-260. Yet another dimension to the *Schneiderstroph*en is added when one considers that discussions of the proper clothing to wear abroad brings up the question of how one is to fittingly (and successfully) approach the foreign in the *Nibelungenlied*.

<sup>44</sup> "Die prächtige Ausstattung gehört zu den 'äußeren Lebensformen' der höfischen Gesellschaft," *ibid.*, 254.



importance to the wider perceptions of the Burgundian expedition, and not just how it will deal with the culture of Isenstein.<sup>45</sup> The correct clothing will ensure that if news (*mære*) of their trip spreads, this aspect of their undertaking will not be an embarrassment to them (344,4), yet one more nod to the significance of verbal information in the world of the *Nibelungenlied*. Gunther here betrays some sensitivity to the existence of cultural differences, but general ignorance as to how they should be overcome, as he bows to Siegfried's greater knowledge of foreign lands and customs.

The rootedness of the Burgundians in their homeland, and the fear of such a foreign undertaking, prompt Kriemhild to inform her brother that he could find a suitable woman in the vicinity: "ir muget hie nâher vinden ein alsô hôchgeborn wîp" (372,4). In contrast, Gunther just does not seem to realize what he is getting himself into and remains oblivious to the advice provided by Siegfried: "Daz wil ich widerrâten" (330,1). He himself is wary of the task and only agrees to take part when he arranges to profit from his participation: "Gîstu mir dine swester, sô wil ich ez tuon" (333,2). But what does Kriemhild herself know about Isenstein and Brünhild? She asks him whom he is pursuing to which he answers Brünhild, but Kriemhild fails to respond to that information: neither does judgment of her brother's plans pass over her lips nor does the narrator note any physical reaction. Her silence indicates that she knows nothing of the woman he is pursuing, and especially her ability to inflict bodily harm upon her brother, or her country (355). Kriemhild, despite possessing no specific information about his goal, senses that the prospects of facing danger are high in a place which is far away and unknown to her brother and herself. The king's sister, aware of the sedentary nature of the Burgundians, would surely be

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<sup>45</sup> Siegfried seems less concerned about proper clothing allowing the Burgundian party to gain access to a foreign land than the broadcasting of shame emerging from a sartorial faux pas. He knows that the physical defeat of Brünhild, not clothing, is the key to success on Isenstein. Physical deeds and not physical appearance will grant Brünhild to the king of Burgonden.

aware that her brother has never visited Isenstein (the first step in “truly” knowing something in the *Nibelungenlied* is coming into physical contact with it) and is thus unaware and unprepared for the dangers of the unknown. Only belatedly does Gunther realize the danger of this undertaking that his sister had sensed before their departure. When he learns of Brünhild’s threatening nature, he insinuates that he would have never sought her love and stayed “ze Burgonden mit dem lebene mîn” (442,3). The king concedes that the dangerous situation in which he finds himself would have never come to pass if he had just stayed home, insulated by the safety of his own culture.

Kriemhild’s suggestion, to find a female befitting his stature in the area, proposes that he avoid the difficulties he will face crossing cultural boundaries in Isenstein. A turn to someone in the area would be smart “dâ iu sô sêre enwâge stüende niht der lîp” (372,3), an ambiguous statement that might express the inherent danger of stepping beyond the comfortable, fully-known boundaries of Burgonden, or it may also indicate that she has heard about the customs of Brünhild since Gunther announced his plans. But given her segregation from the political, and informational, center of the court this is not necessarily the case. This latter explanation as a motivation for her worry is weakened by the lack of detail about the threat to her brother she perceives in stanzas 372 and 374. In the latter Kriemhild asks Siegfried to protect her brother “daz im *iht* gewerre” – she does not identify a specific source of potential harm, just that he may suffer injury (3). The narrator’s aside that he believes “in sagt’ ir herze, daz in dâ von geschach” (373,1) emphasizes the general dread Kriemhild and her maidens sense about the fortunes of the wooing party, and its emphasis on emotion undercuts any notion that their worries spring from a clear knowledge of the dangers it will face. The prospect of their men dealing with the foreign in general, and not its specific nature, thus causes concern among the women.

Gunther's silence after her expression of concern illustrates the dilemma discussed above that faces the Burgundians: with the exception of Hagen they know nothing about the world around them, and he thus clings to a shred of information he has received by means of *mære*, that Brünhild's "gelîche enheine man wesse ninder mê" (326,2). On the other hand, he cannot counter his sister's proposition by arguing that an equal of Brünhild does not exist, because he does not have access to information about the outside world that would thereby justify his dangerous plan to her. Gunther is also so convinced that he is pursuing the right scheme that he only thinks of the benefits of the journey and fails to understand the sources of others' concern until he finds himself within a hair's breadth of death when fighting Brünhild. But if he were to look for a woman in the region around Burgonden, and if such a woman did indeed exist, the hazards posed by the foreign culture in which she lives might not be as great as one dominated by a woman who subverts all courtly and Burgundian expectations of female behavior. The cultural gap could be more easily crossed and thus less life-threatening.<sup>46</sup> Despite what he has heard from Siegfried about Brünhild and the concerns voiced by his sister, Gunther cannot be moved from his plan, which is to confidently approach the queen and people of Isenstein in a courtly manner, presumably because he expects to find in Isenstein a world largely analogous to his own.

By virtue of realizing that the unknown presents a danger to her brother, Kriemhild seeks to provide Gunther with all of the help he needs to survive what she finds to be a misadventure. For that reason she enlists Siegfried, himself quite familiar with foreign experiences, to watch

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<sup>46</sup> Gunther's awareness of Brünhild's separation from his own culture expresses itself when he commands his wife to welcome Kriemhild and Siegfried as she was first greeted after the journey to Worms. He instructs her on the proper way to receive friends – "alsam sult ir enpfâhen daz Sîfrides wîp" (783,3) – and informs her that such guests are to be met before they reach the castle.

out for Gunther's welfare. Since her brother will not give in to her warning, she does the next best thing: entrusting his fate to Siegfried, who does understand and has overcome the perfidy of the foreign. Only at the point when Gunther sees Brünhild's spear being carried by three men does he echo the concerns of Kriemhild and sing the praise of remaining in his own land, a place of familiarity and comprehensibility where no surprises or threats lurk in the structural foreignness of its inhabitants.

### **The Peculiarities of Isenstein**

The culture at Isenstein is unlike any other in the work. Even before the proclivities of its inhabitants are experienced by the wooing party, its uniqueness is telegraphed by the architectural details beheld by Gunther and described by the narrator. A question is elicited from Gunther when he "sô vil der bürge sach / und ouch die wîten marke" (383,1-2); he turns to Siegfried, his guide in this foreign realm and asks if he knows what they are seeing. What the Burgundian king observes piques his curiosity as the strangeness of his destination finally becomes evident to him. The narrator later points out the impressive appearance of Brünhild's own palace: "sechs unt ahzec türne si sahen drinne stân, / drî palas wîte unt einen sal wol getân / von edelem marmelsteine, grüene alsam ein gras" (404,1-3). While the *Nibelungenlied* frequently goes to great lengths to describe clothing and accoutrements, it pays much less attention to physical spaces, with neither Xanten nor Worms receiving such description. In this case, the physical description of Isenstein sets it apart from the other geographical locations in the text by emphasizing its grandeur and abundance. This account of the wooing party taking in the physicality of the kingdom establishes its own apartness from the other locales in the text, similar to the modern anthropological concept of location: "Places are not inert containers. They

are politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions.”<sup>47</sup> The unusualness of the architecture on Isenstein symbolizes the local particularity of its own culture, which is embodied in the person of its ruler.

Besides its material impressiveness, Isenstein is distinguished by the fact that Brünhild, a woman no less, rules over it with peculiar customs.<sup>48</sup> As Siegfried warns Gunther, “Jâ hât diu küneginne sô vreislîche sit” (330,1). Here the vocabulary of custom, *sit*, categorizes the behavior of this fearsome ruler. The competition with the queen that suitors must undergo would appear to be a normal feature of life in the kingdom, as Siegfried has knowledge of their existence in the past and Gunther is tested in the manner that Siegfried had outlined before their departure. The narrator indicates that such practices have come into play often: “des [the killing of unsuccessful wooers] het diu juncfrouwe unmâzen vil getân” (328,1). As for the actual nature of this competition, Siegfried judges that it is “vreislîch,” indicating that this practice of jeopardizing the lives of suitors goes beyond the bounds of appropriate behavior. The killing of an enemy does not in itself constitute *vreise* in the *Nibelungenlied*, as the battle against the Saxons and Danes clearly shows. What constitutes the inappropriateness of Brünhild’s custom is that a woman should take the life of a knight who wishes to pay her *Minnedienst*.<sup>49</sup> As Schausten notes, “‘Gender’ ist ausschließlich am Maßstab von Männlichkeit orientiert. Diese Kategorie

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<sup>47</sup> Margaret C. Rodman, “Empowering Place: Multilocality and Multivocality,” *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, eds. Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003): 204-223, here 205.

<sup>48</sup> Given the position of Kriemhild in Worms and Sieglinde in Xanten, such an arrangement of female rulership constitutes an aberration in the normal power structures. This is not to say that Kriemhild does not exercise any power in the work. After the death of Siegfried her influence grows and her range of possibilities expands insofar as she can manipulate the powerful men around her. Yet she never wields total command in any arrangement in the work.

<sup>49</sup> Compare this to the Burgundian historical approach to suitors, despite Siegmund’s warnings about their dangerous qualities: simply send them packing when they fail to arouse Kriemhild’s interest.

wird zum Indiz für ein vollwertiges Mitglied der menschlichen Gemeinschaft. Vor diesem Hintergrund läßt sich erkennen, daß die heroischen Tugenden als solche nur den männlichen Helden zugeschrieben werden.”<sup>50</sup> This is the basis of the custom’s strangeness to Siegfried and the Burgundians and its negative portrayal by the narrator. Since masculine attributes of strength and deadliness are inappropriate for a woman, they signal Brünhild’s contravention of the norms of the male-dominated cultures in the text when she uses those qualities to establish the customs of Isenstein. It is of note that not until the massacre at the end of the work does a woman again have the power of life or death over a male character, a clear indication of Brünhild’s own apartness and that of the culture shaped by her.

The image of Brünhild, decked out in excellent armor and weaponry, is typical of male warriors in the text: “gewâfent man die vant, / sam ob si solde strîten umb elliû küniges lant” (434,1-2). The seriousness of her preparation and the power of her appearance elicits from Hagen the realization that this is no normal woman, custom, or situation, as Gunther is facing “des tiuveles wîp” (438,4). Dankwart reinforces the notion that Brünhild’s threat is so unusual because it stems from a woman: knights should not lose their lives to a woman. And Siegfried accuses Brünhild of “hohverte,” because she has striven against those who would be her masters, in other words limit her own power as a woman and remove from her the authority over issues of life and death with regard to those aspirants of her love. The prospect of a dire ending to the trip negates the wooing party’s own status as true warriors: “nu hiezen wir ie recken: wie verliese wir den lîp, / suln uns in disen landen nu verderben diu wîp” (443,3-4). The massive spear of the queen brings to light for Gunther the enormity of the challenge facing him. The king, who is away from his homeland for the first time and thrust into a foreign environment, is much less

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<sup>50</sup> Schausten, 49.

perceptive of his surroundings than Hagen, who knows how threatening the world can be (i.e., his knowledge of Siegfried's youthful adventures). Until this point, Gunther, by virtue of his inexperience with the foreign, has failed to correctly evaluate all of the information provided to him by Siegfried and his own senses.

But even Hagen's reaction to Brünhild's challenge shows that the Burgundians truly have no understanding of what is going on – even he has never experienced such a culture or behavior and grants that he desires to learn about her contest, although he expresses that wish with the haughtiness of self-assuredness: “lât uns sehen / iuwer spil diu starcken” (424,1-2). At this point, Hagen does not take seriously that which he has ascertained about the queen of Isenstein. But upon actually experiencing her preparation for her test of the Burgundian king, Hagen and Dankwart realize that they are unprepared for the conduct to which they are witnesses: “wie ez dem künige ergienge, des sorgete in der muot” (430,3). Their transformation from confidence to concern speaks to the wide gulf between the cultures of Burgonden and Isenstein. Had a woman made such a threat in Worms, their awareness of their own culture would have permitted them to see that it was not earnest and spared them the realization that they were wrong in their initial assessment of the situation. While Hagen and Dankwart adjust their estimation of the culture in which they find themselves, Gunther's behavior during her preparations proves him to be just as oblivious to this land's culture as he was when he announced that he would be making a courtly trip to Isenstein: “Die zît wart diesen recken in gelfe vil gedreht” (430,1).<sup>51</sup>

A further indication of the foreignness of Isenstein for the Burgundians is the manner in which Brünhild hands over her kingdom to Gunther, a move that nearly causes a war between

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<sup>51</sup> The plural “recken” means that Siegfried boasted also, not out of ignorance but rather because he knows that his plan to assist Gunther will make them invincible against the strength of the queen of Isenstein.

the two groups. Brünhild responds to Siegfried's order to travel to Worms after her defeat with the words "des enmac niht ergân" (475,1). Joachim Bumke has read this as a refusal to follow Gunther to Worms and a direct contradiction to stanza 466, in which she proclaims her kingdom's fealty to the Burgundians.<sup>52</sup> Rather than turnabout concerning the pledge of her land to Gunther in stanza 475, her words are a reaction to the announced trip up the Rhine, before which she needs to put her lands in order by informing her people of her loss in the contest – the statement does not place into question the act of subjugation. But the request does cause concern for Hagen, who sees a threat in Brünhild's people streaming into town. Bumke comments that Hagen's anxiety represents another implausible aspect of the eighth *Aventiure*: "Die Burgunder waren an Brünhilds Hof von Anfang an in so hoffnungsloser Minderheit, daß es ihnen gleichgültig sein konnte, ob hundert Isländer mehr oder weniger sie umgaben."<sup>53</sup> However, the Burgundians, up until they see the appearance and arming of Brünhild, have no doubts that Gunther will defeat the queen and feel they have the situation under control (see stanzas 424 and 427), so the crowd in Isenstein had no impact on their belief in their security and superiority. It is only once Gunther almost loses the contest that the members of the Burgundian party finally realize what a threatening land in which they find themselves. After the scare during the wooing contest, any possible threat now seems quite significant. But Hagen misinterprets this aspect of Isenstein's culture as a possible ruse, and his worries stem from a lack of knowledge about the "true" intentions of Brünhild: "der küneginne wille ist uns unbekant: / waz ob si alsô zürnet, daz wir sîn verlorn?" (478,2-3). These words insinuate that Hagen ponders the possibility that Brünhild's internal thoughts are not being revealed on the surface of her person, the first

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<sup>52</sup> Joachim Bumke, "Siegfrieds Fahrt ins Nibelungenland. Zur achten *Aventiure* des *Nibelungenliedes*" *PBB* 80 (1958): 253-268, here 254.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*



acknowledgment in the text of the possibility of the divergence of *Sein* and *Schein*. Furthermore, his words serve to illustrate the difficulties when dealing with the structurally foreign – they have never spent time with the queen or in her culture, underscoring his unfamiliarity with her and her world and thus rendering her actions unintelligible and ambiguous.

Why does Hagen not take her gesture of fealty at face value and imagine that her call for her “mâge” and “man” could be a rejection of that act?<sup>54</sup> The Burgundians have never yielded to a threat from outside of their borders or handed their lands over to foreign powers, expressed best in stanza 112 and Gunther’s “trûren” because of the prospect that the Danes and Saxons will attack them. They never admit defeat in the entire *Nibelungenlied*, but in the eighth Aventure they see the queen doing so, a capitulation that goes against their understanding of bravery and knighthood. Does Hagen believe that the call for her people represents one last-ditch attempt to avoid Burgundian overlordship? Siegfried, in addition to Gunther, indicates that he sees the same threat and for that reason volunteers to fetch reinforcements from the Nibelungenland. When the narrative turns back to Isenstein after the description of Siegfried’s journey for the Nibelungen, the situation remains calm. No one has threatened the Burgundians with violence, proving that they had misinterpreted the intentions of Brünhild, just another difficulty that

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<sup>54</sup> Thorsten Gubatz correctly notes that Brünhild sends for her “mâge unde man” because “ein großer Teil ihrer *friunde* ja noch gar nicht weiß, daß sie nunmehr Gunthers Untertanen sind. Daß Brünhild sie *besendet*, hat also den Zweck, sie über die geänderten Verhältnisse zu informieren,” “‘waz ob si also zürnet, daz wir sîn verlorn?’ Zur Frage nach Kohärenz oder Inkohärenz der Motivationsstruktur in der siebten Aventure des Nibelungenlieds” *Euphorion* 96 (2002): 273-286, here 280. On the other hand, Jan-Dirk Müller writes, “Damit Gunther als gleichrangig auftreten kann, braucht er ein großes ritterliches Gefolge. Um es herbeizuholen, fährt Sivrit ins Nibelungenland,” *Spielregeln*, 172. Most importantly, however, when interpreting this scene one must take into account Hagen’s reaction to the call for her people, which centers on her interiority and Hagen’s lack of knowledge about her intentions. This is a fear from a deficit of knowledge, and the reliance on Siegfried to assist with the situation by retrieving the Nibelungen is a confirmation of Hagen’s confidence in dealing with unfamiliar situations. At the same time, Siegfried realizes that this fits in with the deception of Brünhild, so he asks Gunther to tell her that he has been sent by the Burgundian king.

springs from their interaction with a woman utterly foreign to them and even unpredictable to well-informed Siegfried.

### **Sex and Foreignness within Worms**

In the *Nibelungenlied*, contact with the foreign does not require traveling to a place with different customs and practices, as when the Burgundians venture to Isenstein. Foreignness of a lesser degree than the cultural alterity can rear its head within the confines of one place marked by a dominant culture, as Waldenfels conceives in his notion of “alltägliche Fremdheit” or the “socially foreign”: “Das sozial Fremde wird als Nichtzugehörigkeit bestimmt. Fremdheit bezeichnet in diesem Falle Distanz zu einer sozialen Einheit oder einer Gruppe bzw. zu einem Angehörigen dieser Gruppe. Sie kommt zustande durch eine besondere Art der Grenzziehung, nämlich die *Exklusion*, den Ausschluß oder die Ausgrenzung. Diese kann sich als Selbst- oder Fremdexklusion vollziehen, je nachdem, ob die Fremdheitszuschreibung von den Anderen oder von mir bzw. von uns selbst ausgeht.”<sup>55</sup> Non-structural foreignness emerges from the fact that all individuals have different life-experiences that then impact their own perceptions of the world around them: “To the extent that different subcultural groups have different typical experiences, their cognitive networks will develop differently, and the interpretations evoked in them by a given object or event will diverge.”<sup>56</sup> These individual experiences, however, do not eliminate the bonds that continue to tie members of these subcultures to larger cultural meanings: “a theme or ‘discourse’ can spread evenly across contexts separated by the boundaries of distinct subcultures [. . .]. This thematicity that culture exhibits, again, depends upon a complex interplay between properties of the culturally constructed world and properties of the mind.”

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<sup>55</sup> Waldenfels, *Vielstimmigkeit*, 92.

<sup>56</sup> Strauss and Quinn, 83.

Strauss and Quinn cite “honor” and “self-reliance” as examples of common themes or discourses.<sup>57</sup> The court at Worms has included one representative of subcultural foreignness (not to mention the general populace of the land, as will be discussed) from the time before Siegfried’s advent by virtue of her gender: Kriemhild. It is her isolation from the information available to the Burgundian leadership which in large part drives the narrative. As for the first foreign woman with which the Burgundians come into contact, Brünhild, she moves from one cultural milieu to another. And, as will be argued, she remains structurally alienated from Burgundian culture, also due to her sex and the fact that the male elite in Burgonden possesses power (and knowledge that it requires). And as seen in his integration into the courtliness of Worms, Siegfried exhibits a move out of structural foreignness with regard to Burgundian culture. But as will be discussed more fully in later chapters, he remains trapped in social foreignness (though of a lesser degree than Kriemhild) that leads to his downfall.

Kriemhild, kept in the dark about things like Siegfried’s biography and behavior, is alienated from events at the court, denied the common knowledge necessary to correctly assess circumstances. Although she too is a Burgundian and has a common history with her brothers and the others at court, her understanding of the world suffers as their paths and hers diverge, resulting in a breakdown in relations that ends in apocalypse. Her separation from the rest of the court has also been seen by Haug as symptomatic of her individualization, who refers to her as the “erste wirklich individuelle Gestalt in der abendländisch-mittelalterlichen Erzählliteratur.”<sup>58</sup> Jan-Dirk Müller reads the process of individualization as a separation from the surrounding culture not to be seen positively: “Wenn es richtig ist, daß ihre radikale Isolation als Zeichen eines Individualisierungsprozess zu deuten ist, dann bleibt dieser negativ bestimmt, eingekapselt

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>58</sup> Haug, “Montage,” 25.

in Sprachlosigkeit, vom Epiker wie seinen Figuren als ‘teuflisch’ gedeutet und bestraft.”<sup>59</sup> In terms of the theory of Samuel, as the multimodal framework she is part of receives less and less input from the Burgundian leadership because they are separated from it, she loses the ability to alter or adapt her modal states based on their influence of the MMF, placing her at a disadvantage when they are reintroduced to her MMF (as when Hagen approaches her about protecting Siegfried before the fateful hunting trip).

The separation of Kriemhild, Ute, and the unnamed women (attendants, for instance) in Worms from the culture of the male leaders of Burgonden is made clear in the text. For example, while the urge to attend church services applies to all members of the Burgundian court, the seating arrangements while attending mass illustrate that women and men have different places in its society, which of course is not an unusual circumstance for the period. Kriemhild stands under the protection of her brothers and is indeed kept tightly under wraps by them. Ortwin’s suggestion, after the threat of the Saxons and Danes has been ended, that Kriemhild and the other women of the court face those gathered to celebrate the victory shows that she frequents a separate, private world away from the hustle and bustle of the public space of the court. Ortwin’s language objectifies the women at court and reveals their lack of volition: “welt ir mit vollen êren zer hôhgezîte sîn, / sô sult ir lâzen scouwen diu wünneclîchen kint” (273,2-3). The excitement generated by her and her entourage’s approach and the hope that they could see her also points to her usual closeted existence away from the court – her only integration into the male world of the court is through her view of its goings on via her window (133). Ute, Kriemhild, and their ladies are revealed to the revelers as if they had just come in from out of town. Women are part of a different world, kept apart from the business at court, a

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<sup>59</sup> Jan-Dirk Müller, “Motivationsstrukturen,” 254.

circumstance of equal threat to them and the “true” foreigners in Worms. The *Nibelungenlied* is not unusual when compared to other medieval narratives in that it holds female characters in Worms in the background and away from most decision making, the exception being her rejection of earlier suitors. However, the portrayal of Brünhild wielding power on Isenstein and Kriemhild in the land of Etzel provides a sharp contrast to the “standard” treatment of women in Burgonden and other medieval texts, such as the *Spielmannsleben*.

The manner in which Kriemhild receives word of Siegfried’s state after the battle<sup>60</sup> in Aventiure Four illustrates her separation from the center of court – a messenger is sent specifically to her. She becomes visible in the text again at this point, after having been abandoned in terms of narrative and centrality. As Göhler notes, “Mit Siegfried’s Entschluß, um Kriemhild zu werben, setzt die Handlung ein. Kriemhild steht als Ziel von Siegfrieds Streben im Hintergrund. Zeitweise wird sie aber als Ziel des Geschehens aus dem Auge verloren, und zwar im Rahmen der Herausforderungsszene, und statt ihrer rückt die burgundische Herrschaftsspitze als Partner neben Siegfried ins Zentrum.”<sup>61</sup>

But the discussion with the envoy occurs “vil tougen,” revealing a mystery in the text: who sends the messenger to Kriemhild (“man hiez der boten einen für Kriemhilde gân”) and how, and why, is this done secretly? It is most likely that the impersonal pronoun “man” actually refers to Kriemhild, which is how the summons is kept secret. But the secrecy surrounding this inquiry shows how cloistered Kriemhild is, since she wished her questioning to not be publicly revealed “wan sie hete dar under ir vil liebez herzen trût” (224,4). Kriemhild

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<sup>60</sup> Now a great deal has been gleaned concerning foreign matters, albeit those involving the Burgundians directly. This amount of information is never collected by the Burgundians on purely foreign affairs, one more indication of the previous disinterest in the world outside of Burgonden.

<sup>61</sup> Göhler, 114.

cannot be seen working on her own behalf, as that would provide her with an agency not intended for a woman at the court, whose every move is regulated by the males of the society.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, while in the past she rejected other knights, a choice of her own making, the entire first meeting between Siegfried and Kriemhild is orchestrated by Gernot and Gunther, who determine that Kriemhild should learn how to finally greet a knight and thereby solidify his place within their court, “winning” him for their side.

The segregation of women from daily life at the court and the decisions made and information that is disseminated that affect them renders the females in Burgonden social (or in the case of Brünhild, cultural) *vremde*. As described above, foreignness can be generated by factors beyond simply growing up in different cultural milieus. The lack of full disclosure to the women at the Burgundian court restricts them from a full and accurate picture of their world based upon which they could make appropriate decisions. Robles states that knowledge can be categorized based on gender, and the female variety, typified by Brünhild, is a “Wissen, das machtlos ist, weil am burgundischen Hofe die Männer herrschen und die Frauen in ihren Kemenaten sitzen, aber auch weil dieses Wissen [Brünhild’s] entweder verborgene Ahnung ist [...] oder auf den Aussagen anderer beruht, die sie täuschen wollen.”<sup>63</sup> Kriemhild’s attempt to gain information about her beloved from the messenger shows how, despite her isolation from the power center of the court, she struggles to remain current and have a complete picture of

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas Kerth reads this scene too one-sidedly when he notes that Siegfried and Kriemhild “are united by a common gift for deception. Even though an inexperienced, innocent maiden, Kriemhild, too, knows how to get what she wants by pretending to be concerned with a different issue . . . [when she] summons to her chamber the messenger who brings news from the Saxon war,” “Siegfried’s Theatrical *liste*” *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 24 (1986): 129-161, here 140-141. Her concern lies in the fate of the entire war party, which necessarily conceals the depth of her worries about Siegfried.

<sup>63</sup> Robles, 364.

those things that concern her.<sup>64</sup> But these efforts are confounded by the fact that she has already missed so much, most particularly the initial confrontation between Siegfried and the court, an incident that sows the seeds of his ultimate demise at the hands of Gunther and Hagen.<sup>65</sup> She only knows that which she can spy from her window, or those bits of information she can glean from a messenger whisked away to her chamber. And these bits of information fail to add up to a complete picture she needs to judge the actions of others, as in the case of Hagen asking to know the location of Siegfried's vulnerability, or in her own deeds, as in her confrontation with Brünhild.

But it is not only Kriemhild who suffers from a deficiency of information and a resulting estrangement, foreignness, at her own court. Brünhild from the beginning of her dealings with the Burgundians suffers from a deficit of knowledge and the manipulation of reality by Siegfried, Gunther, and Hagen. She is a "vremde" who never becomes acclimated to her new culture because its true contours are never revealed to her. For Brünhild, that which she experiences in Worms is a complete sham, a world in which the visible proves to have no correlation to the reality it conceals, whereby she falls victim to her own foreignness and her inability to fully integrate, in other words assimilate those experiences and knowledge to which the inner circle of the court is privy.

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<sup>64</sup> Monika Schausten finds in the *Nibelungenlied* equal investment in the importance of men and women at the political level, although Brünhild and Kriemhild are not only not praised for such activity, but their political deeds are evaluated negatively: "Im mittelalterlichen Epos können wir . . . sehen, wie sowohl männliche als auch weibliche Körper als höfische, wie auch als durch physische Körperkraft ausgezeichnete, am politischen Geschehen aktiv teilhaben," "Der Körper des Helden und das 'Leben' der Königin: Geschlechter- und Machtkonstellationen im 'Nibelungenlied,'" *ZfdPh* 118 (1999): 27-49, here 45-46. While they do participate in court politics, it is always from a position of disadvantage because of their partial knowledge of that which is taking place around them.

<sup>65</sup> See the above discussion of Siegfried's infliction of *leit* on the Burgundians when he first appears in Worms.

With respect to Brünhild, there is no question that she remains separated from Burgundian culture, but the question is whether or not this is an issue of structural or social alienation. Brünhild becomes a member of Burgundian culture in name only: she assumes a position as queen and wife, and yet is kept distant from those things that matter in the culture. These include the attributes of the men at court and their machinations, all of which serve to confuse the former leader of Isenstein. She does not know what is “normal” in the Burgundian culture because she remains fully estranged from the culture of Worms, thus her questioning of Kriemhild’s *mésalliance* with Siegfried. While her physical presence at Worms brings her within the orbit of Burgundian culture, she never overcomes the structural foreignness that exists. She does not know if such a marriage is normal, and she tries to find out what expectations are for a vassal of Gunther, a “man.” Gunther’s smile not only shows the success of his and Siegfried’s ruse on Isenstein, but furthermore her complete lack of ability to orient herself in her new culture – her confusion derives from living in a new culture and at the same time suffering from perception tainted by others’ *list*.

As for Siegfried, he too occupies a weak cultural position himself at the beginning of his relationship with the Burgundians – that is until he learns what cultural idioms he needs to utilize to facilitate understanding with them, thus granting him nearly complete cultural awareness and tempering his foreignness, although he still is subject to the pitfalls of social foreignness. To take one example, because Siegfried does not understand the intricacies or customs of the Burgundians, the *leit* expressed by Hagen when he first challenges them has no apparent effect on the Xantener in the present.<sup>66</sup> Whether he does not know how to interpret this reaction or just

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<sup>66</sup> The implications of this term and Hagen’s reticence during the confrontation have received various interpretations in the literature. Bekker, for example, assigns it no particular meaning “Hagen’s cautious and neutral attitude is ambiguous,” 123. On the other hand, according to



does not worry about it, his ignorance about his impact on Hagen makes clear the dangers of dealing with the foreign in the text.

Finally, the reaction of the people of Burgonden to Siegfried's slaying illustrates the effects of being cut off from the full knowledge necessary to share in the cultural meanings of another subculture. Upon learning that Siegfried has been killed, the inhabitants of Burgonden cry. The narrator then adds a curious observation: "die Sîfrides schulde in niemen het geseit, / durch waz der edel recke verlür den sînen lîp" (1037,2-3). How is this remark immediately following the report of wailing Burgundians to be taken? The text, as usual, offers no direct connection between these two sentiments, but it would appear to suggest that the reaction to the Xantner's death may have provoked less despair had the people known about his own guilt.<sup>67</sup> Besides the crucial fact that the narrator has blamed Siegfried, stanza 1037 displays a significant information divide in the Burgundian populace: while the inner circle of the court (Gunther and Hagen) brought about the death of Siegfried and has been involved in all aspects of his actions at and on behalf of the court, the normal people of the land do not have a full picture of the Xantener's résumé. They were privy neither to what took place on Isenstein nor in the marriage bed of their king and thus lacked important evidence that may have permitted them to see Siegfried in another light. The people of Burgonden, by virtue of their distance from the center of power, are socially distant from the culture of the court. They have a different set of stimuli to guide their current perception of affairs and their judgments are thus flawed.

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Cavalié, "Beim ersten Zusammentreffen mit *Sîfrit* wird Hagens Standpunkt klargestellt; sein Hass auf den Helden und sein Verlangen nach Vergeltung haben in dieser Szene ihren Anfang," 375.

<sup>67</sup> This is the first time that the narrator at least indirectly blames Siegfried for his own death, but this viewpoint is foreshadowed in Hagen's own justification for the deed to Gunther in stanza 993, in which he celebrates the end of the Xantener's "hêrschaft" and the challenge he presented to the pre-arrival power structures.

## CHAPTER FOUR: (MIS)JUDGING THE FOREIGN: KNOWLEDGE, PERCEPTION, AND THEIR SUBVERSION THROUGH DECEIT

### Introduction

When characters in the *Nibelungenlied* venture into a foreign world or interact with strangers, knowledge and perception are key tools they can use to deal with the challenges and dangers that arise in such situations. And yet every such encounter at the same time problematizes issues of knowledge and perception, along with the characters' weaknesses and ability to be undermined and manipulated. Therefore, a critical look at these concepts and processes is necessary to understand how the *Nibelungenlied* represents the issue of foreignness and its challenges.

In the following chapter, examples of the use of knowledge and perception to support successful forays into unfamiliar worlds will be presented, demonstrating that they can prove very useful when confronting the foreign. But although knowledge and a keen sense of perception can help Siegfried in the Burgundians' quest to gain the hand of Brünhild for their king despite the enormous challenges and danger that faces them, the *Nibelungenlied* presents a counter-view that emphasizes the susceptibility of knowledge and perception to trickery that weakens their utility in foreign situations, or even makes such situations more precarious for those being duped.

Knowledge in the text can take the form of direct experience or perception, but also received information, usually referred to as *mære*, or a less tangible process of becoming aware of others tinged by the supernatural. This background awareness reveals important aspects of characters like Siegfried to foreigners once they identify who the stranger is, usually through a determination of his identity by virtue of heroic aura. While an identity, when matched with

*mære* or more ethereal awareness, can reveal important clues as to how someone should be approached, it does not illuminate to others the interior of the character, whereby goals, intentions, and plans might be disclosed. That level of penetration requires physical perception in a world where form and reality correspond, where the innermost aspects of characters can be understood to be revealed by what they do and what they say.

But a paradox exists in the *Nibelungenlied*: to understand how a foreigner wishes and plans to act, one must go beyond received knowledge and awareness and perceive that individual directly. But exactly because that foreigner is completely, or at least partially, unknown to the perceiver, that individual can easily falsify the visual and aural evidence received by the other party. One such fabrication of visual and aural details is carried out by Siegfried during the wooing mission. At the same time, the Isenstein deception is a critical step that leads to the Xantener's eventual death. Hagen later takes advantage of Siegfried's own "alltägliche Fremdheit" with respect to the Burgundian court to manipulate that which he perceives. Siegfried's disadvantaged position thereby opens him to assassination.

### **Negotiating the Foreign through Perception and Knowledge**

As outlined above, Siegfried's background at home in Xanten and abroad in his battles against the Nibelungen and dragon allows him to navigate the challenges in entering a hostile foreign court to gain its crown jewel, Kriemhild. These are examples of Siegfried's knowledge-gaining process and the *Nibelungenlied*'s interest in this subject. In addition to his catalog of information about the world of the *Nibelungenlied* and behavioral skills that assist him in Worms, so too does his perceptiveness of the emotional states of one of the foreigners in whose presence he finds himself provide him with further information about the world of the

Burgundians. In stanza 153 Siegfried sees Gunther's "sorgen" after the declaration of war by the Saxons and Danes.<sup>1</sup> It is ironic – and a clear indication of Siegfried's skills at wending his way through a foreign culture – that Gunther says that he can only tell "stæten vriwenden" about his troubles, while only Siegfried picks up on his emotional change: "wie habt ir sô verkêret die vrœlîchen sit, / der ir mit uns nu lange habt alher gepflegen?" (154,2-3). Whereas Gernot and Hagen when gathered together are informed by Gunther of the difficulties facing the kingdom and offer their own solutions, Siegfried, now having been steeped in the positive and high-spirited culture of the Burgundians for a year, senses<sup>2</sup> a change in the external state ("sit") of Gunther, and by extension Worms, determining that the change in outer custom and bearing must have a source ("wie").<sup>3</sup> This reveals an awareness on his part that visible bearing corresponds to interior causes: "der niht mohte wizzen, waz im was gescehen: / dô bat er im der mære den künec Gunther verjehen" (153,3-4). And this perceptiveness of Siegfried is successful despite Gunther's efforts to hide ("tougenlîche in mîme herzen tragen" 155,2) that which troubles him. The Xantener senses that an internal change has occurred based on an external change, and his inquiry into this transformation from happiness to sadness triggers his initiation into the state of the king and his kingdom about which he heretofore has been kept in the dark.

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<sup>1</sup> Gunther finds himself in a difficult situation and does not know how to deal with the threat – the advice of Gernot, to respond to any attack with force, is shown to be impractical by Hagen, who suggests that the only solution is to turn to Siegfried. Whereas he experienced "wunder" at the arrival of Siegfried, now he suffers "leide" at the declaration of war, a blow (and threat) to his courtly paradigm of behavior.

<sup>2</sup> "Mich nimt des michel wunder" (154,1), a strong formulation of his surprise about the new behavior of the ruler. Siegfried's time in Worms up to this point resembles a smooth flowing river, undisturbed by change reflective of the stability of Burgundian culture. Life for him has been a constant dose of courtly "kurzewîle" and thoughts wrapped up in the woman he loves, and he quickly perceives a disruption.

<sup>3</sup> "Die Frage zeigt, daß Sivrit nicht eine individuelle Gemütsregung Gunthers beobachtet, sondern den Zustand des Hofes (*sit*), der sich in der Haltung des Königs spiegelt," Jan-Dirk Müller, *Spielregeln*, 214.

The role of Hagen's suggestion that Gunther speak to Siegfried about the war declaration in this scene remains ambiguous. Does Gunther act sad to trigger Siegfried's inquiry, or does he ignore Hagen's advice to involve the Xantener, his dejection purely a consequence of what he sees as a hopeless situation? Gunther's assertion that Siegfried is not among his "stæten vriwenden" suggests that he never considered involving Siegfried in the issue, a clear statement of Siegfried's outsider status at court. On the other hand, one could state that the Burgundians have been waiting for Siegfried to pledge his service to Gunther and the kingdom and Hagen's suggestion might be an attempt to determine Siegfried's position within their society. Hagen's advice may also have as its source Siegfried's knowledge of the wider world and the hope that he can offer a more knowledgeable perspective on the threat and those behind it, or, as will be discussed below, it may be thought of as a trap. Nevertheless, these are suppositions that cannot be answered by the text itself and which are tenuous even with the assistance of paradigmatic and syntagmatic analysis. This is a prime example of a *Nibelungenlied* "Leerstelle."

When compared to an earlier outburst of emotion, however, the scene with the moping Gunther shows how Siegfried has become attuned to the culture and life in Worms – he knows what is "normal" in Burgonden and those behaviors that are deviations from the daily life of society. His perceptiveness has allowed him to gather knowledge upon which he bases his behavior that keeps him linked to the highest levels of the court. When he first approaches Worms, however, he acts based on his foreknowledge of the world he is about to enter as well as the counteractions of the Burgundians, but without the deep understanding of what motivates them from moment to moment. Thus, when he elicits "leit" on his arrival in Worms, he does not comprehend the damage he has inflicted on the pride of the Burgundians, which commentators

like Cavalié<sup>4</sup> have understood to be the root of his own murder. The perceptiveness of Siegfried improves when he becomes accustomed to life in Worms and has a greater understanding of the patterns of behavior that prevail there. Ultimately, however, his cultural acuity fails him and his social foreignness rears its head when life appears to continue normally after the Isenstein journey. External conditions remain unchanged, but the motivations that underlie those deeds have shifted and a chasm between appearance and reality opens up.

Hagen's response to the approaching crisis elicits his own special knowledge about Siegfried, and conversely acknowledges the Xantener's own peculiar awareness of the outside world. The text does not explicitly reveal why Hagen suggests to Gunther that he ask Siegfried for his advice about the declaration of war in strophe 151 of the fourth *Aventiure*. But there is a striking parallel to when Ortwin offers his relative Hagen as someone who could identify the approaching Siegfried for Gunther, even though the purpose of this suggestion is stated ("sît wir ir niht erkennen"). When the call for Siegfried goes out, the audience has already been introduced to the method of turning to those with special knowledge when foreigners are involved. And the figure that provided that local knowledge in the first instance, Hagen, appears to possess none in the case of Liudeger and Liudegast – his statement that "die tragent übermuot" can be traced back to the fact that they would even dare threaten the Burgundians, not a special source of knowledge, i.e., like the story of Siegfried's youth. This is not specific information pertaining to them and their kingdom, but rather to the threat to which he and the other Burgundians are exposed.

Hagen does not think the aggressive plan of Gernot is advisable because they could not marshal their forces in such short time, so the Burgundians find themselves in a situation from

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<sup>4</sup> See Cavalié, 375.

which Hagen sees no escape. Is the turn to Siegfried linked to hope that he can provide more information about this threat and provide the kingdom with better options? By calling into memory the similar situation in *Aventiure 3*, that is one possible way of interpreting Hagen's suggestion, especially given the Xantener's wide-ranging travels and knowledge of foreign lands of which Hagen has such great information. According to Siegfried Grosse's commentary, "Hagen ist der handlungsbestimmende Ratgeber am Wormser Hof."<sup>5</sup> However, he does not determine future actions, but makes them possible – his advisory role can be described as reactionary, not visionary. The decision to allow Siegfried into Burgonden, reached at his own prompting, leads to the collapse of the *Nibelungenlied* world, not his intended outcome. As for Hagen's suggestion that Gunther seek Siegfried's help with the Danes and Saxons, this goal is reached not because of his advice, but because of Siegfried's expression of concern and unforced pledge of assistance. Hagen indeed enables Siegfried's influence to grow, but he has no real control over its direction. At this early stage, Hagen functions as the loyal supporter of Gunther who only seeks to provide him with the resources he needs to find the way out of the gathering storm clouds of this war, a dynamic that later changes: "Die Unverfügbarkeit persönlichen Wissens für die Herrschaftsträger begründet die Einmaligkeit des ratgebenden Vasallen, bedingt jedoch auch zwangsläufig eine Konkurrenz der Wissensträger eines Herrschaftsverbandes."<sup>6</sup>

However, Siegfried's suggestion, to send out a small force against his opponents with himself at its head, betrays no knowledge of the two war-declaring kings on his part from which he could gain an advantage, thus illuminating the incompleteness of Hagen's knowledge about

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<sup>5</sup> Grosse, 760.

<sup>6</sup> Quast, 289. At this early stage, however, there appears to be no competition between Siegfried and Hagen for providing information to the king, and Hagen's suggestion to turn to the Xantener would appear to have no underhanded motivation and rest on his awareness of Siegfried's equally large body of foreign knowledge.

Siegfried. The advice to turn to Siegfried does not provide an informational advantage with respect to the oncoming armies. As Quast notes, this demonstrates “daß der anfangs in Worms um Rat gefragte Hagen keineswegs allwissend ist.”<sup>7</sup> But Siegfried’s proposal to meet the invaders with force does fit in with the image of a fearless fighter expressed by Hagen and made palpable when the Xantener threw down his gauntlet before the Burgundian leadership, a sign of Hagen’s perceptivity and ability to deal with evidence. Siegfried’s martial quality, beyond his being a source of the information about the world beyond the perimeter of Burgonden, may have motivated Hagen’s advice to engage him in this issue. Here textual silence leads to a suggestion by Hagen lacking clear motivation and intent. And yet the preceding characterization of Siegfried and description of his actions renders one of these possible motivations (Siegfried as knower or as warrior), or maybe both at the same time, as a plausible reason for Hagen’s advice to turn to the Xantener for the help that will benefit his lords. According to Gottfried Weber, Hagen takes his “Demütigung” with respect to Siegfried in stride and manipulates the Xantener “dank seiner tieferen Überlegenheit [...], wie es ihm zum Nutzen seiner Herren richtig schien.”<sup>8</sup>

In the same vein, Cavalié has argued that the narrator, since Siegfried’s “widersage” to the Burgundians, “kennzeichnet Hagen als den Kontrahenten und Feind des Helden und unterlegt seinem Tun und Streben eine wohlbegründete Motivierung [...] Hier setzt die klare Linie ein, die den Troneger zum ärgsten Gegner des Helden bestimmt.” Cavalié suggests that Hagen’s actions are guided by his “Verlangen nach Vergeltung,” casting a suspicious shadow on actions like the suggestion that Siegfried lead the Burgundian army, as if the wish for some kind of harm (physical, honor) to come to the Xantener is part of the decision.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, Jens

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<sup>7</sup> Quast, 289.

<sup>8</sup> Gottfried Weber, *Das Nibelungenlied. Problem und Idee* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1963), 45.

<sup>9</sup> Cavalié, 375.



Haustein sees Hagen's murder of Siegfried as nothing planned or wished for from the beginning of their contact: "Hagen ist nur der Täter, derjenige, der das ausführt, was anderswo – in Siegfrieds Stratedienst – verursacht wurde." Siegfried is the cause of his own death "indem er eine Wirklichkeit schafft, an die er sich nicht halten wird, von der aber Brünhild ausgehen muß."<sup>10</sup> The cause of Siegfried's death is the result of a complex chain of events, all of which problematize the issue of dealing with the foreign in the *Nibelungenlied*. While Siegfried's dealings with the Burgundians sowed the seeds of enmity, this hate finds expression in violence only after the collapse of the intricate deception begun on Isenstein and fatefully neglected in Worms.

### **Siegfried's Knowledge of Brünhild and Her Land**

Siegfried opens a crack in the isolation of the Burgundian world, and after his year-long presence at the court, a flood of experiences with the foreign hits the people of Worms. His arrival presages repeated contacts with the foreign, and in each of those instances he plays a crucial role. In the war against the Danes and Saxons he serves as the leader of Burgundian forces. In the case of Brünhild and Isenstein, he possesses local knowledge that smoothes the efforts of Gunther to attain her as his wife and to overcome the brutal rituals with which she challenges any potential suitors. And it is this special knowledge of Isenstein and Brünhild that presents one of the greatest challenges to the motivational unity of the work which is frequently cited by those who believe the *Nibelungenlied* to be an incomplete melding of textual traditions of varying ages. Christoph Fasbender has summarized the two major views about the origins of the *Nibelungenlied* that underlie research on the work as representing the notions of "Schalten"

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<sup>10</sup> Jens Haustein, "Siegfrieds Schuld" *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 122 (1993): 373-387, here 82.

and “Verwalten:” “Das ‘Schalten’ steht für eine in allen Punkten durchdachte und daher so und nicht anders beabsichtigte dichterische Formung des Stoffes.” On the other hand, “Verwalten” “deutete auf die weitgehende Abhängigkeit des Epikers vom Traditionsgut, eine Zusammenfügung von Aventiuren im ‘Bilderbogenstil,’ der es demgemäß an innerer Geschlossenheit mangle.”<sup>11</sup> While the material in the Isenstein scenes has various origins and ages, the narrative content from earlier points in the work allows an audience to take these scenes at face value and perceive a unified narrative due to the *Spielregeln* established in the manuscripts we have today as discussed above. In the terminology of Fasbender, the “author” of the text had the responsibility of “Verwalten” with respect to utilizing and referencing contemporary (and past) stories and materials in circulation, while aspects of “Schalten” were employed by author (i.e., placing the history of Siegfried’s youth immediately before he approaches Worms) and demanded of the audience (an awareness, and the implementation, of syntagmatic/paradigmatic readings).

A central point in this argument about the role of the “author” of the *Nibelungenlied* concerns the fact that Siegfried “knows” about Isenstein and Brünhild, whereas no other member of the Burgundian court has the faintest notion about her identity, her personality, her land or its culture. Now promoted to a position of influence within the Burgundian court after his success against Liudeger and Liudegast, he immediately opines about the foolhardiness of a trip to woo her, the possible consequences of which are immediately accessible information for the Xantener. There is no explanation of the source of his skepticism. But Hagen senses that what Siegfried has revealed to his king, and more like it, can only be provided by the Xantener. He acknowledges that the warrior has special local knowledge, which for Siegfried would appear to

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<sup>11</sup> Christoph Fasbender, “Einleitung,” *Nibelungenlied und Nibelungenklage* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005): 7-12, here 9.

be matter of fact, as he cites no specific experiences from which it was gathered. This is why Hagen considers him the most fitting guide to local customs in Brünhild's kingdom "sît im daz ist sô künde, wie ez um Prünhilde stât" (331,4). According to Grosse, Hagen's use of "künde" "deutet an, daß es eine frühere Begegnung zwischen Siegfried und Brünhild gegeben hat,"<sup>12</sup> an interpretation that is grounded by the concept of "Verwalten." In the case of Siegfried's clash with the Nibelungen, the dwarves were foreign to Siegfried until he gained *künde* of them, which means in that episode direct contact and interaction. However, recalling Quast's reminder that Hagen early in the text is "keineswegs allwissend," his pronouncement of Siegfried's knowledge in this area is in itself an act of induction, or paradigmatic thinking. Hagen never reveals that he is privy to any knowledge that Siegfried has specific information about Isenstein and its queen, but given the extensive travels of Siegfried and the paradigmatic relationships between unconnected passages in the text, it follows that Hagen *presumes* the Xantener knows more. What is critical here is that Siegfried's *künde* is not announced by the narrator, but is rather the opinion of a character to whom Siegfried's past is not a completely open book, signaling an awareness that knowledge of the foreign is in circulation in the larger world of the *Nibelungenlied* and available to some individuals.

It is true that the amount of knowledge Siegfried has about Brünhild is extensive, ranging from the appearance of Brünhild to his outline of the wooing contest. First and foremost, Siegfried has important insight into the wooing competition of Brünhild, its various components and the punishment that awaits those who fail it. His grasp of the deadly situation that awaits suitors in Isenstein lies behind the statement that "Sîvrit der muose fûeren die kappen mit im dan" (336,1). He must take the magic cape with him because he has promised to help bring back

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<sup>12</sup> Grosse, 772.

the queen of Isenstein to Worms, and in order to fulfill that assurance, assistance to Gunther under the camouflage of invisibility would be necessary to overcome the strength of Brünhild that Siegfried knows will come into play during the various games to be played. The warrior also can answer Gunther's inquiries concerning the proper attire for their trip to Isenstein and is familiar with the waterways leading to Isenstein and can thus properly guide the ship.

Furthermore, when the chamberlain asks that the Burgundians disarm themselves against the wishes of Hagen, Siegfried can inform the party that the demand is nothing unusual (not a trap, for example), but the normal practice in that location: "man pfliget in dirre bürge, daz wil ich iu sagen, / daz neheine geste hie wâfen suln tragen" (407,1-2). Siegfried realizes that he is speaking to individuals ignorant of the proper behavior expected in that particular castle and understands that he must act as a cultural intermediary in order to assure that his pledge to Gunther will be fulfilled (and making good on this agreement means first and foremost keeping the Burgundians alive).

And yet despite all of the information and help Siegfried provides to the Burgundians, not once does he inform them how he knows these things, nor do they ask why. This in itself generates much of the ambiguity in the text that stirs the debate about whether Siegfried and Brünhild knew each other before the arrival of Gunther and party in Isenstein, making it a central point in the issue of "Verwalten" and "Schalten." But perhaps this lack of attribution of the sources of the information satisfied those aware of older versions which outlined the relationship of Siegfried and Brünhild, an act of "Verwalten."<sup>13</sup> Certainly it does not deny that such a relationship existed by attributing the information to any means of knowledge transmission independent of personal interaction. At the same time, while not saying that this knowledge

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, versions related or similar to those contained in Eddic poetry.

stems from actual contact between the two characters, the narrative has an already-established channel through which the Xantener could have received this lore: that of *mære* and fame, which assists Hagen in identifying Siegfried, an example of paradigmatic narrative.

### ***Mære* and the Foreign**

How does Siegfried know about Brünhild and the practices in her kingdom? <sup>14</sup> No mention is made that they have ever had face-to-face contact in the past. A possible method of the transmission of this information, however, is found throughout the *Nibelungenlied* – that of oral communication, or *mære*. <sup>15</sup> In this way, Kriemhild becomes known to all of the suitors who file to Worms, word of Brünhild’s exceptionality reaches Gunther, the disposition of the Burgundians is clear to Siegmund, and Hagen can make an educated guess as to who is approaching the gates of Worms in Aventiure 3. When an individual displays exceptionality in the *Nibelungenlied*, it often generates fame then carried by word of mouth to those who inhabit this world. Quast offers the notion that “Helden erkennen einander,” but if they do, it may be

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<sup>14</sup> Siegfried’s cognizance of Brünhild and her customs has proven to be one of the major areas of controversy in scholarship on the *Nibelungenlied*, because it brings up several problems, including the text’s history of composition, its reputation as a prime example of incongruity and this claim’s ramifications for the interpretability of the *Nibelungenlied*, and the “mythical” nature of Isenstein itself. According to Bumke, Siegfried and Kriemhild have met in older versions of the material and this scene contains traces of this earlier one on one meeting: “So wird auch erst verständlich, warum sich Brünhild im Nibelungenlied allein an Sigfrid wendet: der Willkommensgruß war nicht für die Situation geschaffen, da die drei Burgunder neben Sigfrid standen, sondern galt einem Sigfrid, der alleine gekommen war,” “Siegfrieds Fahrt,” 264.

<sup>15</sup> Bruno Quast argues that “Siegfried partizipiert an einem kollektiven heldischen Gedächtnis. Insofern ist sein Wissen nicht ‘individueller’ Natur. Sein Status als Fremder in Worms bedingt indes eine Exklusivität heldischen Wissens in höfischem Umfeld,” 291. This may be the case, but the text also repeatedly problematizes the issue of knowledge transmission in the mention of *mære*, a concrete process of deeds and characteristics spreading by word of mouth.

because of their extensive experiences in the greater world of the text and their consequent absorption of *mære*.<sup>16</sup>

But it is important to note that *mære* is not the only possible source of information about characters that circulates in the world of the *Nibelungenlied*. The “mystique of superiority” can be communicated to perceptive characters in such a way that it is not made explicit or even explainable via the text itself. This is the world of the supernatural that falls outside of the bounds of the text itself but is a motif found in medieval literature: “Saints, prophets, and wise men have this gift, and if it perchance depends on acquired knowledge (but it usually doesn’t), then that knowledge itself has the aura of the supernatural.”<sup>17</sup>

And yet as has been discussed, the relative openness of different cultures in the *Nibelungenlied* determines the amount of information that enters that society. The one character in the work who has the greatest fame is Siegfried – there are few places he ventures to where he is an unknown quantity. For example, in stanza 168, Liudegast suffers dismay when he learns that Siegfried is part of the Burgundian army<sup>18</sup> – the text does not state how he knows the warrior from Xanten, but it does factor into his decision to add twenty thousand fighters to his side.<sup>19</sup> Just as Hagen knows that Siegfried is “der starke,” so too Liudegast has apprehended that fact in a past not included in the text, a process of learning buried somewhere in its pre-narrative

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<sup>16</sup> Quast, 289.

<sup>17</sup> C. Stephen Jaeger in correspondence from Oct. 15, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Upon hearing from his envoys that Siegfried stands among the Burgundians, Liudegast “leidete . . . als er daz mære rehte ervant” (168,4). Note the use of *mære* to indicate oral information about an immediate situation, but it also carries over to an awareness of who Siegfried is and the threat that he constitutes.

<sup>19</sup> The ambiguity of motivation again shines through in this passage: Liudegast requests more men when he hears the words about Siegfried’s presence among his enemies and also that the Burgundians have called up “vil manegen kúenen man” (168,1). The totality of this news elicits the response from the Danish king, but the relative weight of both facts in his response goes unnoted.

history. Do the two characters personally know each other? No such evidence can be located in the text, and Siegfried himself never acknowledges an acquaintance with the reputation of Liudegast. In his study of perception and identification in Middle High German literature, Armin Schulz has called the ability to identify a hero without resorting to specific characteristics or information an “asemiotic” process of identification: “Beim ‘asemiotischen’ Erkennen sind oder werden die Zeichen überflüssig, an denen eine Person identifiziert werden kann oder an denen ihre identitätsrelevanten Eigenschaften abgelesen werden können, weil sich das Bedeutete ohne den Umweg über solch potentiell manipulierbare Zeichen gewissermaßen ‘von selbst’ mitteilt.”<sup>20</sup> Asemiotic perception allows successful identification, but it is the resources of *mære* or supernatural awareness that flesh out the information one has about a person like Siegfried. This key example of how Siegfried is recognized throughout the world of the *Nibelungenlied* amplifies Gunther’s ignorance about the Xantener’s very existence, confirming the isolationism of the Burgundians that is suddenly rent asunder by Siegfried. In contrast, a lack of accomplishment in the text works the opposite way, checking the spread of one’s name and defining characteristics, as Gunther usually does not figure prominently in the deliberations of foreigners, unlike the strongest members of his kingdom: Hagen and Siegfried.

The actual battle against the Danes and Saxons likewise casts a light on Siegfried’s approach to the unknown, the foreign: Siegfried chooses the role of the scout to determine where the enemies lie, his desire is to “discover exactly” (“rechte ervinde” 179,3) their location. Before he and the Burgundians can successfully engage these foreigners on the battlefield, he feels they must size up their enemies, a suggestion that none of the Burgundians make, emphasizing his own preoccupation with the unknown and providing a glimpse into a proclivity that may explain

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<sup>20</sup> Armin Schulz, *Schwieriges Erkennen. Personenidentifizierung in der mittelhochdeutschen Epik* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer 2008), 17.

his own expansive knowledge about foreign individuals and their culture. And what is interesting is the outcome of his scouting mission – he does not learn of a weak point of the opposing forces, information that can help them win the battle, but he does learn the identity of Liudegast and his ability on the battlefield, thus equalizing the information each possesses of the other.

To return to Siegfried's awareness of Brünhild and her kingdom's practices and customs, as well as her familiarity with him, there is no question that this awareness of her and her kingdom constitutes the greatest amount of foreign knowledge he exhibits in the work to which no source is attributed. He has an idea of the Burgundian mentality through his father, and on his own he gleans as much as he can about the Danish and Saxon armies, while he stumbles into a wholly foreign situation in the land of the Nibelungen, about which he has no inkling. As has been discussed, some knowledge in the work (like that of Hagen's and Liudegast's awareness of Siegfried and Siegmund's of the Burgundians) is situated in the pre-narrative history of the *Nibelungenlied* world.

It has been argued that this pre-narrative history of the *Nibelungenlied* world included a meeting between the Xantener and Brünhild as occurs in the poems of the *Elder Edda* and the *Völsunga saga*.<sup>21</sup> However, a close reading of the text itself suggests that contemporaries being exposed to the *Nibelungenlied*, despite prior contact with the various narratives that dealt with encounters between Siegfried and Brünhild, would have had preconceived notions stemming

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<sup>21</sup> Joachim Bumke has argued that "Widersprüche" like Brünhild apparently knowing Siegfried, the betrayal of the Brünhild on her marriage night, and the argument between the two queens stem from the use of two different sources, which he admits we do not possess. More likely, these sources were oral: "Da man sich scheut, mit allzuviel verlorener Buchdichtung zu rechnen, ist eine mündliche Überlieferung wahrscheinlicher," "Die Quellen der Brünhildfabel im *Nibelungenlied*" *Euphorion* 54 (1960): 1-38, here 31. According to Jönsson, "Das Wissen der Protagonisten umeinander deutet auf die Stoffgeschichte der Dichtung und auf weitere Sagenkreise, wodurch ein intertextuelles Korrelationsgefüge etabliert wird," 136-7.



from these sources that would be challenged by the narrative presented in the Brünhild scenes of the work.

The process of identifying the newly-arrived Burgundians strikingly parallels that of Siegfried in Worms. While Hagen has never seen anyone like Siegfried in Burgonden, one of Brünhild's people ("ein ir ingesinde") tells the queen "ich mac wol jehen, / daz ich ir deheinen nie mêt habe gesehen," but continues to say that one of the party standing before the queen is "gelîche Sîfride" (411,1-3).<sup>22</sup> The Isensteiner cannot definitively state that Siegfried is among the Burgundians, because the advisor has never seen him – and since this is the only person to make a statement concerning their identity, that person would seemingly be in a position to make a correct statement, as neither are other opinions requested nor is an alternative possible identification offered.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, Gunther, Hagen, and Dankwart remain a mystery to both queen and people, another example of the comparative isolation of the Burgundians and the paucity of information regarding them in circulation.

Stanza 419 is a sticking point of any interpretation of the Siegfried and Brünhild encounter: she sees Siegfried and then welcomes him to her land. It may seem as if her sight of the warrior, reconciled with a past interaction with him, confirms the suspicion of her underling.<sup>24</sup> And yet, by analogy to Hagen's assessment of Siegfried's identity, she merely

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<sup>22</sup> Brünhild requests assistance in identification because the party from Worms is composed of knights who are "unkund" to the people of Isenstein (409,2 and 410,2).

<sup>23</sup> See the concern amongst the Burgundians to locate a person best able to identify Siegfried and his counterparts. These scenes in many respects are analogous, thus allowing recipients to draw conclusions based on the paradigm established earlier in the narrative.

<sup>24</sup> Göhler believes that Siegfried may have met Brünhild in older versions of the material, echoing Bumke's argument that this is how the scene should be interpreted, but insists that is a separate issue when reading the extant versions we possess: "Man ist m. E. nicht unbedingt auf eine solche Erklärung für den Verlauf der Begrüßung angewiesen, den auch der im Epos erzählte Vorgang ist in sich durchaus logisch: Siegfried ist eine Berühmtheit, ihn hat man erkannt, demzufolge begrüßt Brünhild zunächst ihn," 92.

accepts this statement, that one of the party is the Xantener (strengthening the analogous nature of both interactions of foreigners, the identification and greeting scenes are very similar). What she perceives from his external bearing and appearance, of which she herself would have also known through *mære* or supernatural awareness of Siegfried's fame, matches the report of her wise advisor. She does not state his name because she knows him intimately, but because his exterior matches his descriptions coursing through the world of the *Nibelungenlied*. And one of the things that Brünhild knows about the character of Siegfried is that commonly available via *mære*, that he is "starc," marked by inordinant strength, a characteristic noted by the Nibelungen and Hagen, who know stories that exemplified this trait. In the scenes featuring Brünhild and Siegfried, according to Jan-Dirk Müller, the latter's identity consists of three components: "Seine Oberfläche (die verschwindet), seine übrigen Körperzeichen (die nur von einigen wahrgenommen werden können) und seine Stärke (die unabhängig von Sichtbarkeit und Wahrnehmbarkeit sich behauptet)."<sup>25</sup> Müller's scheme rightly notes the immutability of the Xantener's biology, and the aura of that physical body allows its identification via asemiotic perception or even supernatural means. However, the ability of his mere physical presence to communicate his identity is not limited to contacts with Brünhild, since it provides instant signals to all those he encounters, whether or not they have had previous engagements. As for her concern that she might be subject to a wooing attempt on his part ("ist der starke Sîfrit komen in diz lant / durch willen mîner minne" 416,2-3), this may reflect a generalization of Siegfried as one who takes what he wants, reminiscent of his seizure of the hoard of the Nibelungen.<sup>26</sup> Brünhild has heard of Siegfried and is aware of his reputation, but she does not *know* him fully,

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<sup>25</sup> Jan-Dirk Müller, *Spielregeln*, 243.

<sup>26</sup> In addition, given her intimidating physical qualities, it is unlikely that any male would want to visit her land for any lesser purpose than trying to win her as a wife.

i.e., she has no *künde* of him exactly because they have had no direct contact. Because of this, she falls prey to his trickery concerning his social status as she lacks the insight required to determine that he lies to her when he says that Gunther is his overlord. He uses the incompleteness of her information to his advantage during his deception at the wooing competition.

Both *mære*<sup>27</sup> and preternatural awareness of other characters can act as a partial replacement for face-to-face, or local, knowledge available to those with the same cultural background. It allows Liudegast to identify Siegfried. On the other hand, naturally, neither the Burgundians nor the people of Xanten need such assistance concerning Siegfried, since they possess an understanding of the warrior that is explicit and tactile. They simply know who he is by virtue of daily interaction and contact, in the case of the Burgundians, and due to his blood ties in Xanten. These relationships that exhibit an inherent and intimate knowledge constitute strong cultural ties in the work, as there is a common background of information that allows characters to know each other and their motivations, and anticipate how they might act in the future. For example, Siegfried's participation in the knightly games at the court in Worms corresponds to the Burgundians' expectations of what a knight should be doing and creates expectations that he can perform on the battlefield. In the following sections, other means of knowing and understanding another character in the work beyond *mære* or actual cultural affinity (i.e., constant and regular contact) will be discussed.

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<sup>27</sup> *Mære* can also indicate rumor or hearsay, the truth of which is unclear. Gunther prefaces Brünhild's accusation against Siegfried with "mir hât mîn vrouwe Prünhilt ein mære hie geseit" (857,2)

### Knowing and Recognizing: *Erkennen* and the Act of Identifying the Foreign

As was discussed above, the court of Xanten is known (“bekant”) far and wide, and Siegmund has been aware (“bekant”) of the Burgundians for a long time, but has never personally engaged with them. In stanza 789 the first meeting between Siegmund and the Burgundians is portrayed and contains neither explicit mention of past contact nor any signs of recognition on either side’s behalf. Siegmund tells the Burgundians that ever since Siegfried had become associated with their court, he felt that he should “see” them, i.e., stand in their presence, a typical engagement with the foreign in the text. Siegmund’s expression of his desire to see the Burgundians demonstrates the centrality of physical perception, rather than abstract *mære*, for fostering an awareness and understanding of the foreign. He has been full of advice for his son, gathered through hearsay, but when the relationship deepens because of the marriage to Kriemhild, his “sinne” tell him that he should experience them without mediation: “dô rieten mîne sinne, daz ich iuch solde sehen” (790,3). “Sin” has a range of meanings, but its most significant meanings are the capacity for sensing and the concept of the mind, and while the usage in stanza 790 suggests the latter is the more valid concept, the tension between mind and body captures the connection between knowledge and physical perception.

A model of dealing with the foreign in the *Nibelungenlied* is established in Siegfried’s expedition to the Burgundians: gather information, *mære*, about those whom one will contact, and then initiate contact itself, which is to some degree governed by what is previously known, or “bekant.” Thus when they face each other for the first time, the meeting is influenced, at least in part, by that which is “bekant.” This is why Hagen advises Gunther to acquiesce to Siegfried’s desire to enter Burgonden, while the Xantener initiates contact via aggression. The *Nibelungenlied* repeatedly utilizes this model of contact with the foreign. After Liudeger has

recognized the shield of Siegfried<sup>28</sup> he infers that the person he is fighting has a connection to the tales (that Siegfried is “stark”) and information (that Siegfried is leading the Burgundian forces) about the Xantener, i.e., that Siegfried is engaged in combat with him. Because of this, he alters his behavior based on “knowing” his opponent.<sup>29</sup> Siegfried’s fame precedes him, and the king announces to his men that he has recognized (“bekant”) the Xantener and proceeds to give up the fight. In this instance, “erkennen” and “bekennen,” both of which are transitive verbs that reflect an active perceptual process, convey the sense of recognizing or identifying others on the basis of knowledge acquired in the past.<sup>30</sup>

With this in mind, how is one to interpret Siegfried’s statement that Brünhild and Isenstein are “mir wol bekant?” Grammatically, this is a participle expressing a passive instance of knowledge acquisition; it is not the result of “bekennen” or “erkennen” of a direct object, i.e. actual physical contact. Instead, it describes a set of information available to one that can be utilized in a situation where one does not have full information. It is what is known to someone precluding any active physical process of recognizing and identifying, in other words, it is an indicator for the past infusion of supernatural awareness or *mære*.<sup>31</sup> When Siegfried responds to Gunther’s inquiry about the nature of the many castles and lands he spies after they have sailed for twelve days (“ist iu daz bekant” 383,3), Siegfried answers with the same terminology of

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<sup>28</sup> Perception based on a “semiotic sign” in the parlance of Schulz.

<sup>29</sup> These two men remain structural foreigners to each other despite this contact, but the information he possesses about Siegfried allows Liudeger to make a smart decision about the duel and give up any hope of defeating the Xantener.

<sup>30</sup> Here stanza 43 of ms. C, discussed above, is very instructive in identifying the source of that information. In addition, the Danes and Saxons have displayed great knowledge of the *Nibelungenlied* world, threatening a kingdom with attack that itself does not know its challengers, making it easy for Liudeger to connect received information about the deeds (and heraldic symbol) of Siegfried with the fierce fighting skills of the knight with which he is engaged.

<sup>31</sup> In the instance of Siegfried’s knowledge of Brünhild, Jönsson sees two possible sources: “eine frühere Bekanntschaft oder ein Wissen aus dem Hörensagen,” 138-9.

knowledge: “ez ist mir wol bekant. / ez ist Prünhilde liute unde lant / und Îsenstein diu veste, als ir mich hôrtet jehen” (384,1-3). Similar to how Gunther has learned that a beautiful queen rules Isenstein, Siegfried has much information about Brünhild and her kingdom, which is to him “wol bekant.” But the model of matching what is “bekant” to what one “erkennt” seems to be missing in this instance, which may have given this scene a different sense for the work’s recipients who were aware of other versions of their relationship.

In another example of the active sense of “erkennen” or “bekennen,” what takes place during the approach to the shores of Isenstein is not immediate recognition that bypasses any need for inference or the calculations needed to reconcile *mære* and viewed reality, as would take place when actual contact in the past renders such mental processes unnecessary.<sup>32</sup> It is the process of perception of something foreign and never before seen that is explored in this episode. But in this instance, Siegfried’s process of “bekennen” is sublimated in Gunther’s own perception of this foreign land and his amazement at its architecture and the size of its territory. In the *mære* which informs Gunther’s first foray into the unknown, Brünhild’s beauty stands at the centerpoint and he appears to ignore what Siegfried tells him about the horrible strength of the queen and the ordeals through which she puts her suitors, not to speak of his inattention to Siegfried’s words on the cultural landscape of Isenstein.<sup>33</sup> The account of the initial Burgundian contact with this strange land combines wonder with geographical description that shares with the audience the great power of Brünhild. While Gunther and the audience take in the contours

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<sup>32</sup> To take a simple example, Siegfried must deal with issues of identification when he returns to the land of the Nibelungen to retrieve his forces – he knows who he is dealing with by virtue of his past contact with them.

<sup>33</sup> Gunther refers to Brünhild as “die minneclîchen,” ignoring what Siegfried has told him about her deadly customs and concentrating on the *mære* he has received from overseas referring to her unmatched beauty (332,2). What has been revealed about her both by the narrator and Siegfried and Gunther’s term of endearment, justified in part as it may be by her beauty, reveal a major problem in his assessment of the task that lies before him.

of Brünhild's land, Siegfried has the time needed to match received information about Isenstein with what he witnesses before him. That Gunther's own "sehen" does not lead to "bekennen," despite the fact that Siegfried has told him about what he should expect to experience, problematizes the work's model of perceiving the foreign. Whether it is Gunther's inexperience in all things foreign, or his preoccupation with the beauty of Brünhild that renders him incapable of applying what he has heard to what he observes, Siegfried's testy response to the king's query betrays his own proficiency at identifying that which he has never seen but about which he possesses lore. The Xantener has accomplished what Gunther has failed to do, namely apply all that he has heard about this place to the process of "sehen" (or "bekennen"). Siegfried, the explorer extraordinaire, succeeds where Gunther has failed in correctly perceiving the foreign.

### **Face-to-Face Aural Perception and Deception**

That which Siegfried tells Brünhild is the key to understanding her change of focus from Siegfried to Gunther during the introduction scene in Isenstein. His clothing suggests that he is at least an equal of Gunther (Hagen and Dankwart never come into consideration as wooers), but at the same time the *Stratordienst* clearly signals a position of subservience. Brünhild understands Siegfried to be the dominant one of the two men for the following reasons: his clothing does not indicate a lower status, while the exterior aura of his strength and its correspondence to *mære* circulating in the world of the *Nibelungenlied*. But a visually captured deed (*Stratordienst*) and evidence perceived aurally by Brünhild (Siegfried's insistence that he serves under Gunther) – both active projections on the part of Siegfried – outweigh the queen's perception of the passive party (simply standing before her) and the links established among *mære*, identity, and Siegfried's goal of gaining her. The Xantener, by means of what he does and

says, manipulates her, short-circuiting the powers of inference displayed when she first assumes that he is the one seeking her hand in marriage.

And yet on its own, the *Stratordienst* could be a source of trouble for Siegfried's plan, as Brünhild indicates when she still prefers the Xantener as a suitor even after witnessing him holding the horse for Gunther. The combination of oral information (naming Gunther, stating his station, and unequivocally expressing that the Burgundian is his lord) and the deed of the *Stratordienst* limit her possible interpretations of the scene to one single motivation, i.e., he is carrying out the requirements of his station. Brünhild, despite her attraction to the more suitable man, allows the words of the Xantener to establish the "facts" of these foreigners' relationship to each other and the purpose of their journey. While her initial hunch is correct, as the narrator and narrative indicate, visual manipulation and the corresponding oral lies draw her away from an interpretation solely dependent on visual evidence which she, with the help of her "gesinde," can correctly interpret on her own.

Trickery facilitated by oral deception plays a role in Siegfried's arrival in Worms as well – he dissembles, indicating that he wishes to deal with the Burgundians in terms of dominance, by seeking overlordship of the lands. Their assessment of this foreigner's motivations, influenced heavily by the words of Siegfried, turns out to be just as incorrect as Brünhild's false assessment of the plans of Siegfried on Isenstein. Just as what Gunther and Siegfried do and say forms the reality of the queen of Isenstein to the extent that she cannot see that underlying motives exist for the pair, the Burgundians believe, despite the radical risk of violence, that Siegfried's mission is straightforward in that he wishes only to conquer them. These episodes demonstrate how words play a powerful role in shaping realities and assessments when the foreign is involved, since penetrating into the interior of a foreigner can be blocked due to



ignorance or even active deception. Schulz notes that heroic epics play with the notion of the tension between reality and form: “Die Heldenepik [handelt] immer wieder von einer Inkongruenz zwischen dem Äußeren einer Person und ihren wahren Absichten, von einer Inkongruenz zwischen dem schönen Schein und dem wahren Sein.”<sup>34</sup> It is especially Siegfried who realizes the power of language, and his utilization of verbal misdirection on Isenstein, begun in stanza 385, is a masterpiece of oral manipulation. He has employed words to successfully enter Burgonden, but now demonstrates for the sake of the Burgundians the power of utterances when dealing with a person who has incomplete knowledge about their plans. His insistence that they communicate in a unified manner (“ir jehet gelîche”) counters any ambiguity that could arise in Brünhild with the visual presentation of the party (clothing and the attractiveness of Siegfried’s physical form).

The strength of the words of the Burgundians on Isenstein is expressed when Brünhild bases her uneasiness about Siegfried’s station while she is in Burgonden on their own communications during the wooing expedition. Carefully choreographed words and actions dupe her, overcoming the fact that Siegfried has drawn her attention and completely shaping her concept of the hierarchical relationships in place in Worms. What he has told her remains important for her interpretation of the hierarchy in Worms despite her internal reservations about the truthfulness of what she experienced in Isenstein, her perception of Siegfried’s superiority, and acts that support her sense of his preeminence (failure of rendering service to Gunther, marriage to the Burgundian king’s sister).

Until Hagen convinces Kriemhild to reveal to him the location of Siegfried’s vulnerable spot, Siegfried takes advantage of the power of words like no one else in the work. And words

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<sup>34</sup> Schulz, 49.

are something he can manipulate, since, despite his acceptance to the Burgundian court and close contact with its elite, he remains imperfectly known by virtue of his status as a *vremde*. The example of Siegfried demonstrates the inability of sources of awareness of the other to transmit the totality of any given character. But of course, the problem for the Burgundians as well as Brünhild is that although verbal information can help one “know” a foreign character, this information can be manipulated, adding ambiguity to those characters engaged in *list* and stripping relationships with foreigners of any certainty and imbuing the text with a strong sense of counterfactuality.

### **Deceit and the Foreign in the *Nibelungenlied***

In the *Nibelungenlied*, the manipulation of visual and aural reality<sup>35</sup> by characters like Siegfried and Hagen for the achievement of specific outcomes depends heavily on the foreign. To take a single example: had Kriemhild, in her “Alltagsfremdheit,” not been divorced from the consultations among Gunther’s inner circle, she would have never acceded to Hagen’s wish for her to indicate the location of Siegfried’s vulnerability. And at the same time, the foreign invites the use of deception because in the mysteries of the foreign lie a threat to one’s person and goals. That threat for Siegfried, when he arrives in Burgonden, is that he will be prevented from meeting Kriemhild. The danger for the Burgundian wooing party lies in the foreignness of Brünhild’s power and wooing contests. And what implicitly imperils the Burgundians after the

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<sup>35</sup> “Grundsätzlich lassen sich Täuschungshandlungen in verbale und non-verbale Vorgehensweisen einteilen, wobei der Stellenwert der nichtsprachlichen Zeichen gerade im Mittelalter bei der Dichtungsanalyse keineswegs unterschätzt werden darf,” *ibid.*, 33.

queens' argument (in their own estimation) is Siegfried's knowledge of the entire conspiracy that first brought the queen of Isenstein to Worms.<sup>36</sup>

Deception in the *Nibelungenlied* centers on a mistake, a mistake in visual and or aural cognition that transforms perception into *waenen*,<sup>37</sup> whether the character is aware of this fact or not, and what is at the center of such mistakes can be broadly described as difference, or more specifically cultural difference, be it structural or social. And these mistakes take place when perception is foiled by the manipulation of aural and visual cues, taking advantage of the fully foreign and weak cultural connections of characters in the *Nibelungenlied*. Brünhild, a foreigner with only rudimentary knowledge of Siegfried and none of the Burgundians, does not fit into their shared culture. She is unaware of the oral information exchanged among this group, but yet in the absence of sufficient background knowledge about their intentions and methods relies on the visual and aural cues presented to her, a process repeated throughout the *Nibelungenlied*. But even Kriemhild is a victim of the deception of Siegfried, Gunther, and Hagen because of her weak cultural connection to the rest of the court – she is not privy to the plans of these men,

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<sup>36</sup> With the exception of his initial contact with the Burgundians, the totality of the Burgundian leadership does not perceive the Xantener to be a threat and Hagen does not cite a possible revelation of the deceit on Isenstein to motivate his call for the knight's murder. However, his attentiveness about the deception and his mastery of Siegfried's ability to separate reality from appearance, and his understanding of the serious repercussions that may emerge from an unmasking of such a split, may be read as a factor in Hagen's desire to have him slain.

<sup>37</sup> *Waenen* has several meanings in the text, including instances which have nothing to do with the foreign. The term is used in instances of epic hyperbole or to open up to inspection the emotional states of characters, albeit with ambiguity, or as a marker for the prediction of future events. However, the term can also represent a judgment issued by the narrator to indicate that what the character believes to be true is really counterfactual. Or, on the other hand, it may stand for the process of successful cogitation, in other words it reveals that reality and the conjectures of a character overlap. Just the same, *waenen* can indicate that a character is in fact wrong in his or her assumptions, and is usually an assertion of the narrator's omniscience to divulge to the audience the reality of the text, despite the difficulties of its characters to determine that reality themselves.

which leads to further difficulties when the ignorance of Brünhild and Kriemhild ignites the clash between the two queens.

### **The Initial Deceptions: Siegfried's Arrival and Isenstein**

Foreignness fosters deception in the *Nibelungenlied*. And the differences of culture encompassed in foreignness create victims and perpetrators, with some manipulating those differences and others unaware of the disadvantageous position into which their foreignness places them. Siegfried demonstrates this situation in his approach to the Burgundians, but thereafter his advantage becomes a position of weakness when Hagen echoes his method of dealing with the *vremde*.

As discussed above, Siegfried's arrival in Burgonden is quite complex. But what shines through the first encounter between him and the people of Worms is his concealment of the reason for his trip. The key things to remember about this are the advice of his father, and his reliance on what he has been told by him, as well as his unwillingness to trigger the "leit" that would accompany an unveiled attempt to gain Kriemhild's hand in marriage. As noted above, Siegfried has had an introduction to deceit before his arrival in Worms when the Nibelungen, whose appeal for his help becomes a threat to his life. The image of Siegfried wrought by the narrator in the second and third Aventiuren is of a man conversant in the split between evidence in the world and the reality that lies behind that evidence.

After entering Worms, Siegfried engages in no further deceit beyond his silence as to his desire for Kriemhild until the landing on the shores of Isenstein.<sup>38</sup> This is a complex web of

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<sup>38</sup> According to Kerth, "Siegfried's deception of the court is successful; his costumes and his rehearsed lines are believed by his public. That which is real, his love for Kriemhild, remains hidden," 140.

deceit that has many aspects, including visuality, aurality, and questions of identity. First Siegfried orders the Burgundians to all voice the same information, namely that he is the “man” of Gunther (386,2-3). Although they never do carry out this order, it does prevent them from questioning his assertion to this effect in strophe 420. And the reason for this lie is made clear by the Xantener: “des er dâ hât gedingen, daz wirt allez getân” (386,4). “Dâ,” a shortened form of “dâr” meaning “there” (as in on Isenstein), establishes an explanation of the steps Siegfried has taken on the journey, linking everything he does to that which the Burgundian king hopes to achieve. No other options are provided by Siegfried, and no alternative plans are offered by the Burgundians – he is in his element as the expert on Isenstein, and they trust him there as they trusted him in the battle against the Saxons and Danes.

The message he wishes to impart to Brünhild, and thus achieve his goal of matching Gunther with the queen and win the hand of Kriemhild, is that he is a liege of Gunther. From this emerges a long chain of deceptions guided by Siegfried that aim to facilitate success on Isenstein. The claim of his subserviency, coupled with the *Stratordienst*,<sup>39</sup> are visual<sup>40</sup> and oral clues intended to overcome the strength of any awareness Brünhild may have of him and his appearance. Siegfried’s intuition proves to be correct: Brünhild addresses him first because her

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<sup>39</sup> The *Stratordienst* scene is one of the most important scenes missing from the A manuscript of the *Nibelungenlied*. In that version of the deception, Siegfried’s insistence that he is of lower social status than Gunther proves enough to convince Brünhild that the Burgundian is the appropriate suitor. Thus words trump appearance and identity (equal outfitting of Gunther and Siegfried, *mære* about Siegfried, and Siegfried’s exceptionality expressed by his body and bearing).

<sup>40</sup> Lynn Thelen correctly judges that the visual trickery engaged by Siegfried in the *Stratordienst* is later called into question by what Brünhild herself can see about his position at the Burgundian court: “The deception and deceit carried out under the guise of invisibility might well have gone unnoticed; but the open deception of vassalage could hardly have gone undetected.” As a result, this is “the only deception that could be revealed because of its visual nature,” “The Vassalage Deception, or Siegfried’s Folly” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 87 (1988): 471-491, here 491.

knowledge of Siegfried and the Burgundian tells her that the Xantener is the superior individual in the group, and only paragons of manhood and bravery dare seek her out for marriage: “Anders als in Worms berechtigt ja hier persönliche Stärke tatsächlich zur Herrschaft, zum Erwerb von Frau und Land. Angesichts seiner physischen Präpotenz muß Sîvrit, um nicht als Werber angesprochen zu werden, sich zum man erklären, was nach seinem wie Prünhilt Codex nur heißen kann, daß Gunther der Stärkere ist.”<sup>41</sup> Thus Siegfried’s heroic aura outweighs the visual evidence of his subservience when holding Gunther’s horse for him. Despite the initial failure of the deception of the *Stratordienst* to focus attention away from the Xantener, its message of Siegfried as a man of lesser status than the Burgundian does gain traction through repeated acts of delusion. Thorsten Gubatz sees the greeting of Siegfried before Gunther following the *Steigbügeldienst* as a motivational flaw, an “Inkonsistenz des Einschubs von 396-398 [Steigbügeldienst] mit der ursprünglichen Motivationsstruktur.” Brünhild treats Siegfried preferentially, “wie sie sich als Königin sicher nicht verhalten würde, wenn sie Siegfrieds Zügel- und Bügeldienst gesehen hätte.”<sup>42</sup> Instead, Brünhild’s disregard for this trick may be another example of foreigners interacting on the basis of different ways of understanding the world. Schulz convincingly argues that Brünhild’s initial ignorance of Siegfried’s subservient deed comes about because the text “[stellt] zwei unterschiedliche Modi des Erkennens gegeneinander.” Brünhild’s perception of Siegfried rests on an “asemiotic” judgment of his identity, while “die List der Brautwerber hat allerdings eine andere, die konventionelle Semiotik

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<sup>41</sup> Jan-Dirk Müller, “Sîvrit: *künec – man – eigenholt*. Zur sozialen Problematik des Nibelungenliedes” *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 7 (1974): 85-124, here 106.

<sup>42</sup> Gubatz, 276.

im Auge: Kleidung, Zeichen, Gesten und Reden. Damit jedoch weiß man auf Isenstein nur wenig anzufangen.”<sup>43</sup>

While the *Stratordienst* cannot overcome Brünhild’s focus on him, Siegfried’s consistent projection of Gunther’s superiority is the linchpin of the dissembling that is to lead to her move to Worms, and his verbal presentation of Gunther as his lord is the successful initiation thereof. Siegfried feigns embarrassment that the queen would greet him before the Burgundian “wand’ er ist mîn herre” (420,4). In this first stanza, he transforms the queen of Isenstein’s proper appraisal of the hierarchy of the two men, which she bases on accomplishments, bearing, and strength transmitted to which she has access into one dependent on their social status.

His rhetoric cleverly removes the superiority of a particular individual as the only one who can woo her from the equation (which can only apply to him) and redirects her attention to the individual with the highest social status. For Brünhild, the highest social status of a land is conferred upon the most able-bodied person therein (twelve of her best “helde” can barely carry the stone which she hurls in the contest). In this way Siegfried works with a good understanding of her culture’s emphasis on personal strength as a quality of leadership that the Burgundians do not demonstrate. According to this understanding of power, Gunther’s rank as king and leader of all those in the wooing party confirms his own physical superiority, thus qualifying him for a wooing attempt. They are two equal kings (signaled by their outfitting),<sup>44</sup> but he convincingly signals that he “wishes” he was worthy of such honors as Gunther. In stanza 421, Siegfried

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<sup>43</sup> Schulz, 67.

<sup>44</sup> However, Bettina Geier sees the kings’ white clothing as deception at the same time that it correctly registers the equality of their rank: “Weiß als symbolische Farbe für Reinheit, Unschuld und richtige Gesinnung ist der wahren Gesinnung Gunthers und Siegfrieds ja diametral entgegengesetzt. Die Kleidung fungiert somit als optische Desinformation,” *Täuschungshandlungen im Nibelungenlied. Ein Beitrag zur Differenzierung von List und Betrug* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1999), 24-25.

shifts the suspicions that Brünhild first applied to Siegfried, that he has sailed to Isenstein to woo her no matter the challenges, to Gunther. His formulation reinforces the idea that Gunther is a great and powerful warrior who could match her in the wooing games: “nu bedenke dichs bezête: mîn herre erlâzet dich es niht” (421,4). The following stanza reveals Gunther’s name to her, his actual station (“kunic”),<sup>45</sup> and his insistence that Siegfried accompany him on the journey. The Xantener stresses that he would have gladly avoided the trip: “möht’ ich es im geweigert han, ich het iz gerne verlân” (422,4). While there is some truth behind this statement, as he could not deny Gunther his help as his pledge of assistance was linked to his prospect of marrying Kriemhild, it too contains a crafty rhetorical purpose. In addition to his complete allegiance to Gunther, it shows that Siegfried realizes the danger inherent in wooing Brünhild and his own insecurity about surviving such an encounter. Ian Campbell has also pointed out that it supports the valor of Gunther, “implying that he would have been too afraid to come had not a braver man ordered him to do so.”<sup>46</sup> Contrasted to the decisiveness with which he paints Gunther, he appears a coward, forced into a situation that could prove to be deadly, undermining her perception of him being the most suitable wooer in the group. One might also interpret this statement as one which weakens for Brünhild the picture of Gunther that he has just painted, because according to the rules of the game, the party is safe as long as the Burgundian king emerges from the contest as a victor. However, she cannot assume that they know this, despite

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<sup>45</sup> Siegfried’s aside that Gunther was born on the Rhine and that such a fact speaks for itself seems to be a very curious statement, given the lack of Burgundian fame in the wider world of the *Nibelungenlied*. This information means nothing to someone like Brünhild, but Siegfried assumes it does, possibly because of the standard function of *mære* in the text, although, as has been discussed, that model of information dissemination does not apply to the static, insular Burgundians.

<sup>46</sup> Ian Campbell, “Siegfried’s Vassalage Deception Re-examined” *Neophilologus* 81 (1997): 563-576, here 567.



the fact that Siegfried may indeed know all the rules of the competition. It is only after Siegfried's expression of anxiety that she reveals this stipulation.

These carefully chosen words have the effect for which he aims. In the next line, she accepts his account of the Burgundian hierarchy and places the challenge squarely in front of Gunther, removing Siegfried from any further consideration that he may be the proper opponent in her games. Ambiguity, however, does lie in her response: "ist er dîn herre unt bistu sîn man" (423,1). She does not concede that what she has been told is the absolute truth, as indicated by the conditional clause. The slim bit of doubt expressed here could have been avoided with a causal sentence, but this formulation illustrates the struggle in which she finds herself to resolve the incongruities of evidence which lie before her and represents the fact that while she goes along with the charades crafted by the wooing party, she has serious reservations. These eventually rear themselves and trigger the fight with Kriemhild.

The next part of this elaborate deception consists of Siegfried's donning the cloak of invisibility and taking over the physical tasks Brünhild believes Gunther to be carrying out.<sup>47</sup> After the conclusion of the games, Siegfried stows away his *Tarnkappe* and pretends that he is unaware that the competition is already over: "sam ers niht enwesse, gebârte der listege man" (471,4). This is the first use of the adjective "listig" in the text, which neatly categorizes the general behavior of Siegfried from his arrival in Burgonden and especially during his dissembling on Isenstein. "Listig" here describes someone who takes advantage of the ability to sever *Sein* from *Schein* and profit from the harm it does to others. His words this time cover up a weakness in his visual drama prepared for Brünhild: his absence as the king and queen

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<sup>47</sup> "Erfolg hat er [. . .], weil er sich bei den Wettkämpfen jene zweite Haut des Tarnmantels über seine Kleider zieht. Mit der Oberfläche verschwindet für die Anwesenden die Person," *Spielregeln*, 258.

competed. But now Brünhild presses his story, she is in disbelief that he has missed the defeat of his lord. Siegfried does not have a chance to answer her query, because Hagen, in a first for his character, actively fosters deception by spinning a story about Siegfried's posting at the ship. This statement accomplishes two things: it provides a reason for the Xantener's absence and it once again reinforces the notion of his lower rank.<sup>48</sup>

After returning from the land of the Nibelungen, Siegfried again departs from Isenstein, this time for Worms to announce that Gunther would be returning with Brünhild. Siegfried takes leave from Brünhild, but the reason given for his trip differs in the manuscripts, which bears exploration to understand Hagen's new-found interest in generating deception (530-532). In manuscript B, the most detailed version of this scene,<sup>49</sup> Hagen tells Gunther that he would not be a good messenger and that Siegfried should carry out the task. Siegfried argues, but finally agrees when he is reminded that it will be a service to Kriemhild as well.<sup>50</sup> According to manuscripts B and C, Hagen refuses Gunther, who turns to Siegfried. There is no question that Hagen has the ability to carry out the mission, but his protest can be read as dissembling that leads Gunther to call on Siegfried to carry the message without eliciting any questions or confusion from the king. The Xantener also tries to avoid the trip, but Gunther's entreaties change his mind. As for manuscript A, Hagen immediately directs Gunther to Siegfried, who accepts the job without opening his mouth. These three versions strike amazingly different

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<sup>48</sup> This section of the deception is missing from manuscript A. Manuscripts B and C depict a perceptive, inquisitive, and ultimately suspicious queen, while she remains fully unaware of his absence in A.

<sup>49</sup> It contains two more stanzas than either the A or C manuscripts.

<sup>50</sup> "Dies ist ein Befehl, keine Bitte, und demgemäß lehnt Sifrit ab. Er ist seit der Fahrt ins Nibelungenland – auch wenn Brünhild anderes gezeigt wird – nicht mehr Gunthers Werbungshelfer, und die Funktion von Befehl und Weigerung liegt darin, Gunther eben diese deutlich zu machen," Peter Strohschneider, "Einfache Regeln – komplexe Strukturen. Ein strukturanalytisches Experiment zum 'Nibelungenlied,'" in Fasbender 60-62.

chords and place the characters of Hagen and Siegfried in varied lights, but the outcome of all three situations is the same: “Sifrit’s service as a messenger to Worms to announce the approach of Gunther and his bride has as a result that Sifrit’s subservient status, as far as Brünhilt is concerned, once again an observable fact.”<sup>51</sup>

Although Siegfried’s “widerreden” against the assignment is not countered with a reminder that his participation on the trip has been linked to his prospects to gain Kriemhild, Gunther’s “vlegen” makes implicit Siegfried’s awareness that their two fates are intertwined. Although this manuscript version relies much more heavily on a paradigmatic (Gunther has turned to Siegfried successfully before) and syntagmatic (the link between Gunther’s success and Siegfried’s chances to obtain Kriemhild has been established earlier in the text) understanding of the text to fill in the gaps, its general thrust follows that of manuscript B. As for manuscript A, Hagen explicitly names Siegfried as the best option for the job, and his acquiescence comes immediately, the one example among the three major manuscripts of Siegfried acting consequently in maintaining the deception until the Burgundian group leaves Isenstein, and at the same time serving as a *Minneritter*: “Die gesamte Szenerie [...], in der Siegfried als Bote entsendet und als Bote empfangen wird, zielt nicht auf eine tatsächliche Vasallität, sondern ist deutlich im Minnenbereich angesiedelt.”<sup>52</sup> But despite the differences in these three versions, all basically overlap insofar as Hagen directs the job towards Siegfried.

The later sequence of events present in manuscript B follows the precedent of Hagen’s explanation of Siegfried’s absence found in both B and C manuscripts. This is because Hagen, the true liege of Gunther, should be the one to act as an envoy to Worms, not a fellow king. But Hagen has seen the web of lies spun by Siegfried and emulates his behavior, first with his lie to

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<sup>51</sup> Bekker, “Eigenmann,” 8-9.

<sup>52</sup> Gernot Müller, “Siegfriedgestalt,” 108-109.

Brünhild, and now with the idea that Siegfried should carry the news to Burgonden, because it reinforces the words of the Xantener and his performance of the *Stratordienst*. Offering mixed signals to Brünhild at this point could still lead to danger for the wooing party. Here Hagen's worries when he sees the power of Brünhild and his panic caused by the assembly of her countrymen are absolutely essential to properly understand his suggestion that the Xantener sail back to Worms. Siegfried, on the other hand, argues against his mission. This is a key point for understanding the employment of deceitful methods by the Burgundians. The high point of Siegfried's life as a "listeg" man is the defeat of Brünhild – his maintenance of the massive structure of lies he has built up begins to wane even at this early point. Later steps in the dissolution of his deception include his marriage to Kriemhild and the seizure and divulgence of the belt and ring. On the other hand, Hagen here exhibits his adeptness at working with the split between *Sein* and *Schein*.<sup>53</sup> His first opportunity to do this was to keep Brünhild in the dark about Siegfried's time in the cloak of invisibility during the wooing contest, a subterfuge that, if exposed, could mean a fateful end to the journey. When paired with syntagmatic and paradigmatic interpretive strategies, manuscript C presents a similar picture of Siegfried's sudden disinterest in maintaining the deception, while Hagen's role as a deceiver is less pronounced.<sup>54</sup> Manuscript A delays the beginning of Siegfried's inattention to the fraud initiated on Isenstein until the return to Worms, but it preserves Hagen's role as a character willing and able to generate confusion in foreigners by undercutting visual and aural evidence.

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<sup>53</sup> According to Kerth, "They [the Burgundians] will profit from Siegfried's acting lesson at Isenstein and stage their own performance, a false declaration of war; Siegfried will volunteer to aid them, and he will die," 151. He sees Siegfried as a tragic figure because of "his inability to perceive that falseness even when it manifests itself in strategies he himself has created, perfected and unwisely revealed to his enemies," 159.

<sup>54</sup> The fact that he does not argue against Siegfried's choice as a messenger provides a strong impression that this is exactly who he thought should carry out the job.

### The Alienation of Kriemhild and Brünhild

Gunther's aborted wedding night constitutes the next stage in the deception of Brünhild. But why exactly does Siegfried assist Gunther with the domestication of Brünhild, since he has already married Kriemhild, and so reached his stated goal? Indeed, the reasons do revolve around the weakness of Gunther, but his feebleness has the potential to make a major impact on the life of Kriemhild and Siegfried as well. One deception serves to prop up another because the collapse of the Isenstein subterfuge would call into question the legitimacy of Gunther's marriage and possibly taint Siegfried in its dissolution. Gunther's weakness, now limited to the private sphere of his bedchamber, threatens to move into the public realm should he be seen by his chamberlains to be tied up by a woman. If it were to happen, he tells his wife, "daz wurd' iu übele bewant. / ouch het ichs wênic êre" (640,4-641,1). The leaking of details of his defeat by Brünhild would lessen his honor, and thus power, in Burgonden, call into question his suitability for the queen of Isenstein, possibly reveal the help given by Siegfried, and prematurely end the climax of the chain of deception illustrated by the text: "Diese Leistung [defloration of Brünhild] bildet unter den vorgetäuschten Idoneitätserweisen des Bräutigams (ständischer Vorrang, Sieg im Wettkampf, Überwältigung der Braut im Bett) am ehesten den Ausgangspunkt einer denkbaren Entwicklungsreihe."<sup>55</sup> The rupture between *Sein* and *Schein*, threatens to cause great consternation amongst the public of Worms, for whom there is no split between evidence (visual, aural) and reality.<sup>56</sup> In other words, for the Burgundians, Gunther's successful wooing attempt

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<sup>55</sup> Ursula Schulze, *Das Nibelungenlied* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1997), 193.

<sup>56</sup> This is evident in the belief of the Burgundians that Siegfried has purely aggressive intentions when he arrives in Burgonden, as well as when the lament over the death of the Xantener grows in intensity ("die ê dâ sêre klagen, des wart nu michel mê" (1045,2) when the bleeding corpse reveals that Gunther's statement that the hunting party "niht kunden âne des grôzen schaden sîn" (1041,2). In other words, he exculpates the group, only to have his statement of innocence be overturned by blood streaming from the body of Siegfried in stanza 1044. The crowd of

signifies that *he himself* prevailed, not someone else. Should the deception on Isenstein become public knowledge, Gunther, and by extension Siegfried, have much to lose – at the very least their *êre*.<sup>57</sup>

The bedchamber deception works, subjecting Brünhild to further ignominy by cutting short any chance of her adjusting to life in Burgonden because the very basis of her marriage, the superiority of Gunther in bed, is wrapped in illusion. She lands in Worms after being duped, and her confusion and state of unknowing continue after her wedding, ensuring that she will not become integrated into the culture of Burgonden, from which she is held because of her misunderstandings about choices made and deeds carried out by those in power. As the narrator points out ironically, “daz het ir allez Gunther mit sînen minnen getân” (682,4). The narrator expresses the folly of depending on evidence for the truth in a court moving further and further from any connection between the two.

But Brünhild is not the only victim this time: the net of subterfuge is cast even further in this scene, as Kriemhild herself remains in the dark about the deeds of her husband, as befits her estrangement from the inner workings of the court, i.e., her status as a social foreigner, separated as she is from the world (and thus the intrigues) of the Burgundian men by virtue of her gender. Kriemhild suffers from surprise and confusion when Siegfried disappears from her loving clasp.

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mourners reacts to what it sees as a lie or deception, whereby the reality of Siegfried's murder does not correspond to the oral evidence of innocence.

<sup>57</sup> Siegfried's attention to this possible threat to the deceit perpetrated on Isenstein does not contradict the need to persuade him to act as a messenger because of the new context. Gunther's failings in Worms would become apparent to the entire society, thus this is a very important step in maintaining the subterfuge. On the other hand, Brünhild had already been defeated when Siegfried is asked to return to Worms, meaning that the consequences were not as great as when the wooing party was threatened with death should Gunther lose to the queen. Similar to how he begins to slip in the continuity of the deception when the central act of deceit is over on Isenstein, he again displays a lack of follow through when he helps Gunther avoid public humiliation by Brünhild but decides to take the ring and belt, evidence that could expose the two king's switch on the marriage bed.

She asks his servants to point out where he has gone, but receives no answer. When Siegfried returns, he avoids answering her questions about his whereabouts: “er hal si sît vil lange, daz er ir hete brâht, / unz daz si under krône in sînem lande gie” (684,2-3). The reference is to the ring and belt of Brünhild. Kriemhild, then, has neither an awareness of what Siegfried did in Isenstein, nor what he accomplished for Gunther in Worms, nor the exact origins of the two items stolen from Gunther’s wife. Her ignorance about every step of the deception finds echoes in her fight with Brünhild, as does Brünhild’s delusional view of the events that surrounded her. While Siegfried, Gunther, and Hagen successfully trick Brünhild on Isenstein, Siegfried’s reference to his sleeping with the queen of Isenstein via the stolen items and his marriage to Kriemhild preclude a clean end to the deception, thus leaving loose ends that will eventually lead to his own murder.

### **Succumbing to Deception**

The marriage between Siegfried and Kriemhild elicits worry from Brünhild, because her status as a foreigner and lack of integration into the court at Worms shields her from the true relationship between Burgonden and Siegfried. What would appear to be common sense for the people of Worms (that Siegfried is neither a vassal nor of a lesser social status) remains hidden and strange for her, resulting in her displays of confusion and misunderstanding. Key among these scenes is her shedding of tears in stanza 618. Kriemhild sits next to Siegfried after their union and Brünhild’s declares, after Gunther’s inquiry about the cause of her distress, that she is troubled by Siegfried’s status: “die sihe ich sitzen nâhen dem eigenholden dîn. / daz muoz ich immer weinen, sol si alsô verderbet sîn” (620,3-4). The contemporary legal meaning of “eigen” and its related terms in the *Nibelungenlied* has been the source of much discussion. Ursula

Hennig has proposed that it means “Leibeigener, Höriger,” in other words an unfree person.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, Ursula Schulze’s study of the relationship of the *Sachsenspiegel* to the *Nibelungenlied* comes to the conclusion that the “eigen” formulations are synonymous with MHG *deinestman*, or ministerial, a particular type of “unfree” status, as to be distinguished from an unfree person like a peasant, and such a connotation of the term in Brünhild’s usage would give “eine Fallhöhe zu den Konstellationen der erzählten Geschichte, die nur psychologisch als abgehobene Beschimpfung, maßloses Übertreibung, erklärt werden kann.”<sup>59</sup> The source of her tears is a cognitive gap on her part opened when the subterfuge perpetrated on Isenstein masks the core of his being, his in-born high status and excellence, qualities that would not be found in an unfree ministerial (“die Verbindung mit einem adeligen Vasallen wäre unanstößig gewesen”<sup>60</sup>). On the other hand, Brünhild’s concern about the “schœne” and “zuht” (622,1) of Kriemhild suffering from the marriage with Siegfried indicates her concern about outside forces posing the potential of injury to her in-born qualities that would reveal themselves in her appearance.

However, she does not see visible evidence of a deterioration of Kriemhild’s exterior, and the mere thought of such a discrepancy causes great distress because it is for her unconscionable and unimaginable: it is an affront to her understanding of the world in which like belongs to like and interiority and exteriority fully overlap. The message she receives from Gunther that “jâ mac si mit dem recken immer vrœlîchen leben” (621,4) bears no relationship to that which she

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<sup>58</sup> Ursula Hennig, “Herr und Mann – Zur Ständegliederung im Nibelungenlied,” *Hohenemser Studien zum Nibelungenlied*, ed. Achim Masser (Dornbirn: Voralberger Verlagsanstalt, 1981): 349/175-359/185, here 356/182.

<sup>59</sup> Ursula Schulze, “Gunther sî mîn herre, und ich sî sîn man. Bedeutung und Deutung der Standeslüge und die Interpretierbarkeit des ‘Nibelungenliedes’” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 126 (1997): 32-52, here 44-45.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.



observed on Isenstein. Gunther's final explanation of the suitability of his sister for Siegfried guarantees that his wife, in addition to her cultural foreignness, will remain wrapped in structural foreignness while in Worms. When he informs her that Siegfried is a powerful king in possession of lands similar to his, his message has two effects based on its audience. For the Burgundians, he is simply restating the obvious and avoiding any complications that might arise from telling an obvious lie. His truthful account of Siegfried is a reminder that the prevalent Burgundian culture still functions on the assumption that essence and exteriority depend upon each other, as is the case in the culture of Isenstein. While when abroad Gunther and Hagen have acted contrary to this paradigm of understanding the world, the king does not introduce this split into his own culture.

Gunther's explanation of Siegfried's background on the one hand prevents his own people from being deceived but at the same time starts to unveil to Brünhild all the lies she has accepted about the Xantener, no matter how grudgingly. In stanza 623, Gunther confirms to the court that the two belong together by virtue of their common stations – that the excellence of prowess, in-born qualities, and comportment deserves a paragon of beauty and bearing: “er hât als wol bürge als ich unt wîtiu lant: / daz wizzet sicherlîche. er ist ein künic rich. / darumb gan ich im ze minnen die schœnen maget lobelîch” (2-4). He justifies the marriage of Kriemhild and Siegfried and at the same time creates greater confusion for Brünhild, who sensed the superiority of Siegfried in her asemiotic perception of his identity, but allowed oral and visual information to overcome her initially correct assumptions about the Xantener. This declaration that Siegfried is a king is the first inconsistency in the information that Gunther and Siegfried can control (oral), but the thing which convinced her that Gunther is the superior one, his victory on the field, is not contradicted by the proclamation of Siegfried's kingship. Despite the ever-shifting evidence to

the contrary, this is the one “fact” that anchors the crumbling deception. Because Gunther “overpowers” her in the bedroom, it ensures that his victory on Isenstein remains unquestionable and the basis of their marriage stays intact: “Gunthers Erfolg erscheint wohl nur aus Rezipientenperspektive kläglich. Für den Erzähler, für Gunther, ja gewissermaßen selbst für Brünhild ist die Welt wieder in Ordnung. Gunther nimmt ausdrücklich sein Recht wahr, und wenigstens im Bett, wenn schon nicht im Kampf, besteht an seiner Männlichkeit kein Zweifel.”<sup>61</sup>

Gunther’s swift affirmation of Siegfried’s kingly status in the face of Brünhild’s inquiries settles the issue for the public in Worms (and the audience of the *Nibelungenlied*), but represents a lapse in the subterfuge begun by Siegfried on Isenstein, because it contradicts what Brünhild has learned about the Xantener. At the same time, her overall confusion warrants a view into her emotions (“muot”) from the narrator: “swaz ir der künic sagete, si hete trüeben muot” (624,1).<sup>62</sup> This reaction provides interesting insight into the issue of foreignness and perception at this point in the text: for the sensibilities of Brünhild, a king’s subservience to another king does not fit into her understanding of the world – this is an impossibility, and it only feeds into the misgivings that have been present since the wooing party appeared before her residence. Given all of the oral and visual evidence provided to her on Isenstein, along with Gunther’s “conquest” of her in the bedchamber, Gunther is a rightful king, and Siegfried has served him in the capacity of an underling. But now she hears that the Xantener himself is a king, meaning that in Burgonden a king is doing the bidding of another regent. One can extrapolate from her uneasiness about that

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<sup>61</sup> Elisabeth Lienert, “Geschlecht und Gewalt im ‘Nibelungenlied’” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 132 (2003): 3-23, here 11. Will Hasty interprets Siegfried’s service in the bedchamber as a “specific form of a male camaraderie that views Brunhilde’s virginal strength as a dangerous provocation,” *Art of Arms: Studies of Aggression and Dominance in Medieval German Court Poetry* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2002), 110-111.

<sup>62</sup> “Gunthers Erklärung, daß Siegfried ein mächtiger König sei, beruhigt sie nicht, weil sie die Diskrepanz zu den Aussagen und Vorgängen auf Isenstein unerklärt bleibt,” Schulze, “Gunther,” 48.

which her husband has told her about the Xantener that on Isenstein rulers enjoy full sovereignty and independence of other kings. The Burgundian opinion on this issue, whether kings can serve other kings, is more ambiguous, as Siegfried does assist the king of Burgonden in his battle against foreign fighters and the trip to Isenstein. However, these acts do not rise to the level that Siegfried's declaration that he is Gunther's "man" can be considered anything other than a fabrication, let alone the designation that he is an "eigenhold."<sup>63</sup> As put by Hugo Bekker, "Couched in the form of a conditional clause serving as an introduction to her reminder that any wooer must subject himself to a test, the Eigenmann-reference is of little consequence. At most it constitutes the slightest of hints that Brünhild is somewhat surprised to find this famous Sifrit in vassalage to another man."<sup>64</sup>

But this also raises the question of the growing alienation of the people of Burgonden from the events at the center of the court: Gunther's explanation to Brünhild brings with it no new information, as it simply reveals that Brünhild herself has misunderstood something about Siegfried's background or is unaware of its full contours. So while at the one time the larger populace in Burgonden is unknowingly being disconnected from the intrigues at the court, it also is being made aware of the alienation of Brünhild.<sup>65</sup> But is this a lapse in the grand scheme begun by Siegfried on Isenstein? It is insofar as it aggravates the suspicions of Brünhild rather than putting them to rest – however, one must remember that once removed from her native soil, the queen only has recourse to her own personal strength, and Siegfried has shown her own

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<sup>63</sup> King Henry II was the nominal vassal of the king of France, suggesting that a vassal-lord relationship between two kings would not be unheard of for the audience of the *Nibelungenlied*.

<sup>64</sup> Hugo Bekker, "The 'Eigenmann'-Motif in the *Nibelungenlied*" *Germanic Review* 42 (1967): 5-15, here 7.

<sup>65</sup> No information is provided about the reception of Brünhild's tears among the Burgundians, but that she should be so shaken up by a marriage that would appear to be proper in all aspects remains inexplicable to them.

weakness and lack of invincibility. Although the physical threat presented by the woman from Isenstein has diminished once brought to Worms and separated from her people and her great strength,<sup>66</sup> Gunther mistakenly pays much less attention to the threat of verbal information that eventually leads to the unraveling of the deception and eventually the death of Siegfried.

Brünhild's call for the couple to return to Worms is predicated on two factors. These include her foreignness, both structural and social, that is aggravated by a failure to integrate herself into the court that might bestow upon her an understanding how Burgonden functions. Second, the intention of Gunther to keep her off balance, to not abandon the trickery fostered by her foreignness while in Isenstein, presents to her a version of reality that does not exist. Because she remains estranged from the culture of Burgonden, she does not understand its contours, while that which had been projected about Burgonden in Isenstein all is based on a falsehood.

The ensuing fight between the two queens is in essence a fight between two foreigners with respect to their positions in the Burgundian hierarchy. Brünhild is a foreigner twice-removed. First, she is structurally estranged from her new home in Worms, because she does not understand Burgundian culture *talis qualis*. And second, she is socially alienated because the image of Burgonden presented to her is of a false hierarchy, of which she is not aware because she is kept away from the deliberations of those spinning the web of deceit around her. As for Kriemhild, she is a social *vremde*, as discussed above. She has not been privy to two things which influence her behavior in the fight over Siegfried: the deception begun on Isenstein and

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<sup>66</sup> "Dass die zweite Überwindung Brünhilds in Worms zugleich den Verlust ihrer physischen Stärke bedeutet, kann als Normalisierung der Figur im Sinne einer Angleichung an höfische Geschlechterrollen verstanden werden," Tilo Renz, "Brünhilds Kraft. Zur Logik des einen Geschlechts im 'Nibelungenlied'" *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 16 (2006): 8-25, here 20.

Siegfried's conquest of Brünhild in the king's bedchamber.<sup>67</sup> Thus, their disagreement stems from a lack of information, a misreading of true circumstances engendered by their alienation from the court, Brünhild because of the origins of her move to Burgonden, and both Kriemhild and Brünhild because of their gender, since women in Burgonden do not have access to the inner workings of the court.<sup>68</sup> Even though stanza 587, in which the two women meet for the first time, can be seen to indicate a time of happiness, the blissfulness is cloaked in ignorance as they are equally misinformed: Brünhild has just been duped into accepting Gunther, while Kriemhild knows nothing about what happened on Isenstein, and never will as far as the text reveals. Only when they look at each other are they not confronted by a gap between reality and appearance: each sees a beautiful woman of high social status. It is in their paths to this point that they differ as far as the natures and processes of their respective alienations are concerned.

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<sup>67</sup> It is only after they have moved back to Xanten and Siegfried has become king that he gives her that which he has stolen from Brünhild, but she does not know the true story behind the theft (684).

<sup>68</sup> See especially Gunther's promise of her to Siegfried, for which she is never consulted. Only by personal intervention can Kriemhild gain information that has been withheld from her, either by chance or intention. Signs of this separation include the role of observers taken up by women at court and Ute's lack of significance to the text.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE *FRAUENZANK* AND THE ADOPTION OF SUBTERFUGE BY THE BURGUNDIAN CULTURE

### Introduction

Having subverted the strength of Brünhild through deception dependent on her, and their, foreignness, Siegfried and the Burgundians are forced by Brünhild to tackle the aftereffects of the ruse. She is troubled by the marriage of a purported “man” of Gunther and the king’s sister. The argument of the queens, or *Frauenzank*, which occurs after Siegfried and Kriemhild are invited to Worms after a long hiatus, builds to a climax due to the gaps in the knowledge of the two women brought about by their foreignness. Brünhild, disadvantaged by both her social and cultural foreignness, wrongly believes that Siegfried is an *eigen* of Gunther and her reference to this status forces Kriemhild to reveal that her husband had contact with her in the royal bedchamber. But so too is her accusation that Brünhild willingly slept with a man of lower status confused by her social alienation which precludes her from understanding the agreement between Gunther and her husband for taming the powerful Isensteiner. Despite their mistaken views of what has been going on with Gunther and Hagen, one argument emerges from the fight that does touch on reality, that Siegfried, regardless of his rank, is of higher standing in terms of his personal attributes (*tiwerr*) than Gunther. Kriemhild knows this to be the case based on the Xantener’s history in Worms, while the drawing of Brünhild’s attention to Siegfried on Isenstein also proves the point.

The *Frauenzank* concludes with Siegfried’s oath that he did not brag about having sexual relations with Brünhild, but that is just the beginning of his troubles. Despite his earlier attention to maintaining the artifice of lies he built when helping Gunther woo the queen of Isenstein, by this point he no longer bothers with prolonging the ruse. It is Hagen, enraged by the harm done

to his queen, who now becomes a master deceiver, taking advantage of Siegfried's alienation from the new culture of Burgonden which exploits an awareness that separating appearance from fact can bring with it great advantages. With the collapse of the Isenstein scheme precipitated by the fight between the queens, Siegfried is entrapped by the changing culture of Burgonden: he once took advantage of the Burgundians' ignorance of his true aims, but now he himself suffers from ever greater alienation, unaware of the plotting that will end his life. With the murder of Siegfried, the Burgundian culture has become so consumed by pursuing the split between *Sein* and *Schein* that Kriemhild, once severely alienated from her own culture, also perceives the benefits, once hidden from her, of deception. And the process repeats itself: the Burgundians are taken unaware by Kriemhild, crushed by the manipulation of their foreignness in an echo of Siegfried's demise.

### **The Consequences of Foreignness in the *Frauenzank***

As the two queens view the knightly games taking place below them at the beginning of Aventiure 14, Brünhild offers to Kriemhild an assessment of the relationship between Siegfried and Gunther based on the suitability of the two men to the task of ruling Burgonden. In stanza 816, Brünhild expresses that Siegfried could never rule Burgonden as long as Gunther lives in response to Kriemhild's contention that her husband should rightfully possess the kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

Both queens' statements make an assessment of the men's right to the position of king as well as their relative power and ability, although the seriousness of Kriemhild's assertion and desire to

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<sup>1</sup> "Ich hân einen man, / daz elliû disiû rîche ze sînen handen solden stân" (815,3-4). The scholarship has not found common ground on the meaning of Kriemhild's assertion. According to Ursula Schulze, "Über die Frage, ob Kriemhild mit ihrer Bemerkung einen provozierenden Machtanspruch erhebt oder ob sie Siegfried lediglich absichtslos mit einer Herrschaftsmetapher preist, gibt es in der Forschung keinen Konsens. Alle Annahmen bleiben psychologisierend spekulativ," *Nibelungenlied*, 207.

challenge Brünhild on the distinction of their respective husbands remains open to question.<sup>2</sup>

According to Brünhild's reasoning, Gunther, by virtue of his own essence and existence, can be the only rightful occupant of this position, and anyone else wearing the crown would simply be a usurper if he were alive. Siegfried and Kriemhild would only have a claim to the throne "ob ander niemen lebte wan sîn unde dîn" (816,2). But it is not only Siegfried to whom Gunther is superior. According to stanza 818, Gunther must stand above all kings in the estimation of his wife: "der muoz vor allen kûnege, daz wizzest wærlîche, sîn" (4).

This is a curious statement, and its possible source of motivation deserves some attention. Does this unveil a belief of Brünhild that Siegfried might be a king too and what appears to be a blanket statement of her husband's superiority aims to discount the Xantener's suitability for Gunther's job? Or is this a reflection of hubris on the queen's part, a feeling of self-worth that could derive from a belief that the man who defeats her must stand above all kings precisely because he has bested her, the paragon of female strength and prowess?<sup>3</sup> Although the latter is a psychological assumption at this point in the text, syntagmatic evidence reveals that it does play a role in her insistence on her husband's unquestionable superiority. However, the lack of any psychological insight as to the cause for her claim of Gunther's superiority must be linked to his current status as the ruler of Burgonden. Furthermore, her understanding of Gunther's eminence receives affirmation in Siegfried's pronouncement of the Burgundian's overlordship and the dissimulated amplification of his strength during the contest on Isenstein. Brünhild's confidence

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Bischoff, in an example of psychological interpretation, claims that the words slip out of her mouth in a moment of reverie sparked by her love and respect for Siegfried, "Die 14. Aventure des Nibelungenliedes" *Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse* 8 (1970): 531-551, here 533. While this cannot be proven in the text, this type of explanation seems viable given that Kriemhild's comments seem thoroughly unmotivated and unexpected.

<sup>3</sup> According to Jan-Dirk Müller, Brünhild's claim of Gunther's superiority comes from a "standesrechtlich" point of view, *Spielregeln*, 277.



of her husband's rightful claim to his position, then, rests in part on the deception on Isenstein. In addition, her foreignness, exhibited by the gaps in her experience otherwise available to "native" members of the court, who would know that Gunther's rulership is not beyond reproach in terms of his independence and strength as she insists it is, misleads her into believing the incontrovertible perfection of his leadership. Indeed, members of the court know that recently his leadership has depended heavily on the intervention and assistance of Siegfried.<sup>4</sup> If she were to have access to those facts, her perception of Gunther might be tempered since they reveal the limitations of his ability as a leader and the strength of his bravery. But given her experiences on Isenstein, one might even say that she has an idealized view of him that originates in an egocentrism that equates his victory against her with his position as regent and all of the assumptions that come with that role. What unmistakably reveals Brünhild's dependence on the Isenstein encounter to judge the nature of the hierarchy in Burgonden and the preeminence of her husband is stanza 821, in which Brünhild emphasizes how Gunther won her hand "sô ritterlîch."

Stanzas 820 and 821 provide the most detailed insight as to how Brünhild interprets the deeds of Gunther on Isenstein, and changing her perspective of him as being one with a lesser "presence" or "essence" (made clear when she addresses Siegfried first on Isenstein) to one whose physical accomplishments against her befit his position as the king of Burgonden. Brünhild's account of her dealings with the Burgundians confirms that she has accepted their manipulation of her perception despite his magnetism. She first tells how she has seen them for the first time: "do ich's aller êrste sach" (820,3). This recalls her notice of Siegfried's physiognomy, the juxtaposition of what she has observed to be true (that Siegfried is superior),

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<sup>4</sup> For this judgment she also depends on her sense of "sehen," by which she perceives the high rank of her husband and the allegiance pledged to him by all at court, with the exception of Siegfried.

and what the two men have told her (that Gunther is superior). But the next two encapsulated statements of the events on Isenstein and the bed chamber show the progression from her concentration on Siegfried during their first meeting to a conviction that Gunther, acting out his superiority, has bested her by means of “des küneges wille” (820,4), or to put it another way, his inner strength and drive that manifests itself in physical victory. Her defeat is tied intimately to his physical excellence, that which makes him man enough to master her unusual strength. Here, and in the following lines, the source of Gunther’s victory is inseparable from his identity as lord of Burgonden, recalling that Brünhild’s physical superiority overlaps with her position as the queen of Isenstein. Her acknowledgment of the link between his physical, and interior, exceptionalism and high station reinforces the credibility of Siegfried’s statement in her eyes. When she recounts the Isenstein scene, she states that the desire of the “king” defeated her before her retelling of Siegfried’s declaration that Gunther is his “herre.” She remembers this as the Xantener stating he is ““sküneges man” (821,2). Her choice of words, all connected through enjambment, gives the sense that the Xantener’s statement merely underscores that Gunther proved his recourse to prowess that befits his station as a sovereign.

Brünhild states not only that Gunther won her over through the power of his “wille,” but expands her description of that defeat, attributing to it the fact that he “mîne minne sô ritterlîch gewan” (821,1). Her use of the term *ritterlîch* marks a shift in its usage from Siegfried and Xanten in the work (stanzas 33, 66, 185) to Gunther, to whom it is not applied until it is used to describe the Burgundian wooing party (of which Siegfried is the most significant member). Its application to Gunther emphasizes his perceived physical attributes, his prowess as a fighter, further illustrating Brünhild’s confused commingling of the physical extraordinariness of Siegfried with what she experiences from his avowed leader. But despite her assertion that

Gunther is a king who dealt with her *riterlîch*, this assessment of his physical form as superior relies on a past tainted by the misdeeds of the Burgundians and Siegfried and which finds its only echo in his current station.

In the battle of words between the two queens, Kriemhild naturally argues on behalf of her own husband that he too deserves recognition for his own excellence. The palpable essence of Siegfried is addressed in stanza 817, in which Kriemhild comments that his bearing is “hêrlîch” and he is metaphorically placed above other competitors: “nu sihestu, wie er stât, / wie rehte hêrlîche er vor den recken gât, / alsam der liehte mâne vor den sternen tuot” (817,1-3).<sup>5</sup> In this metaphor, one of the few in the work, his lofty position represents a symbolic expression of his peerlessness. This assessment of Siegfried is of great importance, as it raises this encomium beyond the heroic and courtly hyperbole ubiquitous in the work. It is a résumé of all the great achievements in his life and the excellence of his being that his body projects outwardly. While these words are also a reflection of her love for and pride in Siegfried (“des muoz ich von schulden tragen vrœlîchen muot” 817,4), there appears to be an objective quality in them that recalls how Brünhild was not able to deny his corporeal aura on Isenstein.

Simply as he stands Siegfried reflects a superiority of bearing, which is brought into relief when he walks before other “recken.” Thus, on his own he is a sight to behold, Kriemhild indicates, but his true greatness becomes clear when one sees that no others can match him, that he outshines all others. In comparison, Brünhild’s lauding of Gunther centers on his status as the head of Burgonden. She does not provide examples of his own individual physicality or

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<sup>5</sup> Brünhild’s *gesinde* uses the adverb in conjunction with Gunther, but only after having first identified Siegfried. He also is seen standing “hêrlîche” with Hagen and Dankwart, not *before* them as with Siegfried in the metaphor strophe. His grouping with the other three members of the party is telling. In this context, the word emphasizes his natural leadership and his “brightness,” the superiority of his own physicality.

comportment, perhaps a reflection that all of the reputed accomplishments of his own body on Isenstein are intertwined with the effort of Siegfried and thus no longer perceptible to her after the ruse has ended and their joined bodies have been separated. In fact, she often does make reference to Siegfried's own physical appearance even when she is arguing against his suitability as Burgundian king. For example, in stanza 818 she mentions that no matter how "wætlich" and "schœn" he may be, for her these qualities do not place him above Gunther. Stanzas 817 and 818 are evidence not just of Kriemhild's adoration of Siegfried's impressive nature, but also show that Brünhild acknowledges that such an evaluation of him is justified. However, what must be clarified in her partial agreement with Kriemhild's praise is that his personal characteristics do not by default grant him regnal status in the eyes of Brünhild.

This stands in opposition to the melding of personal attributes and leadership embodied in the Isensteiner herself.<sup>6</sup> But in this foreign setting, she cannot or does not want to infer that the strengths of Siegfried may indicate that a position higher than a "man" who provides *Stratordienst* suits him. Stanza 818 stands as symptomatic of Brünhild's inability to reconcile conflicting visual and auditory evidence – she hears how Siegfried holds a position of supremacy over other men and sees that, yes, his physical presence exudes impressiveness. Brünhild's confidence that Siegfried holds a lower position in the Burgundian hierarchy has negated the merits of his corporeality in her eyes, rendering her initial focus on him on Isenstein a distant memory of her "uninformed" response to the wooing party and indicating that she has begun to ignore her sensitivity in matters of physicality. This is despite the fact that "Brunhild and

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<sup>6</sup> Her performance during the wooing contest bore "testimony to the validity of her claim to be the strongest in the realm and therefore the warranted bearer of the crown," Bekker, *Nibelungenlied*, 71.

Siegfried [...] share the view that the right to kingship depends on physical prowess.”<sup>7</sup> But her words during the *Frauenzank* signal that her critical perception of the foreign halted upon hearing that Siegfried yields to his lord Gunther and upon observing that the latter’s accomplishments in her kingdom support the uttered and acted out hierarchical arrangement (i.e. that strength corresponds to rulership). She wavers not in the slightest in her conviction that Gunther is a king above all kings and that no reason exists to compare the two men by virtue of their divergent statuses, despite Kriemhild’s adulation of Siegfried.

### **Foreignness and Siegfried as an *eigen***

Brünhild’s acceptance of the trickery on Isenstein as truth leads directly to her declaration that Siegfried is an *eigen* of the Burgundian king, triggering a series of events that eventually leads to Kriemhild and Siegfried being invited back to Worms so that he can carry out the services he believes he owes the court. Thus, the *eigen* episode of the *Nibelungenlied* hinges on misunderstandings engendered by foreignness.

The Xantener’s feigned subservience, Gunther’s apparent spectacular strength and physical skills, and his real position as king of Burgonden all support the manufactured primacy of Gunther over Siegfried and underscore the latter’s designation as Gunther’s “man.” But Brünhild recasts the “man” testimony to construct a relationship between the two kings which is that of “herr” and “eigen,” an exaggeration of what she hears and sees.<sup>8</sup> How does she come to this categorization of Siegfried’s status? It should be remembered that the other members of the wooing trip are not identified by the Isensteiner as the “man” of the Burgundian regent, although

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 72.

<sup>8</sup> Outside of accompanying his “lord” on the wooing trip and providing the *Steigbügeldienst*, and retrieving the Nibelungen and the act of being a messenger, no further actions serve as the basis for such an assumption.

their subservience to him is noted as well (Hagen in 424,3 addresses Gunther as “mîn herre,” and Dankwart’s relationship with the king is clarified by virtue of his passivity and inclusion in the wooing party with two other subordinates). If all three men have the status of “man” either through declaration or implication by association as “man,” how can Brünhild lower only Siegfried’s status to an “eigen?” What makes him different from the other wooers?<sup>9</sup> The only explanation explicit in the text is that Siegfried performs tasks his other compatriots do not: these are the *Steigbügeldienst* and the missions to retrieve the Nibelungen and bring word to Worms, all of which force him into a more subservient role than Hagen and Dankwart, of whom only their presence at the wooing contest appears to be demanded.<sup>10</sup> Thus, in this situation Brünhild appears to use the method of inference already established in the text and draws a connection between the self-reference of Siegfried as a “man” of the Burgundian king and her use of the term “eigen” to describe Siegfried (821,2-3), thus allowing her to equate the two terms without contradiction based on all to which she has been a witness: “In ihrer Auslegung des durch die höfisch inszenierten Körper dargestellten Unterwerfungszeichens und dessen verbaler Bestätigung ist Siegfried Gunthers Eigenmann.”<sup>11</sup> That is to say that his services to Gunther make him a certain type of “man,” circumscribed by the word “eigen,” in her eyes.

It is of note that without hesitation or an indication that she must think before choosing her words, she announces that the Xantener is an “eigen” of her husband: “dô jach des selbe Sîfrit, er waere sküneges man. / des hân ich in für eigen, sît ihs in hôte jehen.” (821,2-3). The way she grounds her assessment in stanzas 820 and 821 shows she is at pains *not* to make it

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<sup>9</sup> Unquestionably, this is a process of social lowering, as Dankwart and Hagen – equals of Siegfried on Isenstein – are never mentioned paying “zins,” as Kriemhild informs her rival that Siegfried should have been doing as an “eigen.”

<sup>10</sup> “Es war durchaus verständlich, daß sie von diesem Sifrid, dem solche Dienstleistungen abverlangt werden konnten, als von einem *eigen holden* gesprochen hatte,” Bischoff, 537.

<sup>11</sup> Schausten, 43.

sound like an insult: “jane solt du mirz, Kriemhilt, ze arge niht verstân, / wand’ ich âne schulde die rede nicht hân getân” (820,1-2). Brünhild truly believes that Siegfried is an “eigen” and expects him to behave accordingly. However, Kriemhild’s question as to why Siegfried has not been ordered to provide “dienest” (825), among other points in the text, indicates Brünhild’s complete misunderstanding of the relationships in Worms, most clearly illustrated in stanza 823, in which her illusions about the position and responsibilities of Siegfried come to a head.<sup>12</sup>

But it is not just the facts surrounding Siegfried that have the Isensteiner confused, as Brünhild is just as unsure about Kriemhild’s relationship to and awareness of the goings on at the court. Brünhild insinuates that Kriemhild herself is estranged from the business of the court and therefore does not understand the service owed by Siegfried. In her eyes, of the two women, only Brünhild knows his true station in life and feels that Kriemhild has been victimized by virtue of her marriage to someone of lower rank. Her reference to what the two men told her on Isenstein is her evidence that what Kriemhild tells her cannot be an accurate description of the situation, hence Kriemhild’s flabbergasted response: “wie heten sô geworben die edelen bruoder mîn, / daz ich eigen mannes wine solde sîn?” (822,1-2) For the first time in the text, Brünhild believes that she possesses an advantage over another character, and she utilizes it to proclaim her social rank higher than Kriemhild’s as though the Burgundian woman were unaware of the true nature of the relationship between the men. But of course, Kriemhild knows that she could not and would not have married an “eigen,” although the reason for this accusation by her opponent remains hidden from her. The *Frauenzank* episode reveals in both women the problem of suffering from what Waldenfels refers to as social foreignness created by their distancing from the male elites of Burgonden through “Ausgrenzung.”

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<sup>12</sup> “Zwiu sold ich verkiesen sô maniges ritters lîp, / der uns mit dem degene dienstlîch ist untetân?” (823,2-3)

Ironically, both women are simultaneously wrong and right because of the incomplete nature of what they know to be going on around them: “Der heftige Wortwechsel der Frauen [...] ist angestachelt von einem Halbwissen, das ihnen keine Ruhe läßt und zu den gegenseitigen Beleidigungen führt.”<sup>13</sup> Stanza 822 shows the incomplete grasp of the truth by both women: Kriemhild understands that Brünhild is implying that she has been tricked, and she has, but not in the way that Brünhild sees it. The strophe exposes the absurdity Brünhild’s suggestion, as it shows that what for her is plausible (a sister of kings marrying an underling) would be unthinkable and impossible in Worms in the eyes of Kriemhild.<sup>14</sup> Despite both queens suffering from gaps in their comprehension of events swirling around them, in this instance reality (the lack of a *mésalliance*) trumps the fictions perpetrated on Isenstein and highlights Kriemhild’s awareness of and solid grounding in her own culture (although not fully aware of how behaviors are changing) and Brünhild’s utter bewilderment about the customs of the kingdom and the actions of its denizens.

### ***Tiwer* and the Comparison of Gunther and Siegfried**

After Brünhild declares the subservience of Siegfried to Gunther, any further comparison of the two men is in her view rendered unnecessary given that rulership encompasses all of the positive characteristics one seeks in a man. Kriemhild challenges Brünhild’s conclusion by calling on the judgment of both men on the basis of the same aspect, their degree of being “*tiwer*.” With respect to his being “*tiwer*,” Kriemhild states, her husband is the “*genoz*” of Gunther, despite Brünhild’s perception of their inequality in status (819,1-4). According to

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<sup>13</sup> Robles, 367-8.

<sup>14</sup> The text allows no consideration given the difficulty of wooers to even make an impression on Kriemhild and the other Burgundians, a sign that high standards exist for possible suitors.



Ehrismann, Kriemhild concerns herself with proving that she is “vom Dynastenadel und Herrenstand” and that her husband “tiwerr, von höherem Ansehen als Gunther ist.”<sup>15</sup> “Tiwer” corrects the drift of their discussion based on the lies perpetrated on Isenstein by bringing the issue to its core: it indicates that Siegfried possesses greater individual value than his counterpart and has claims to the superiority of his own being regardless of his social position. The evoking of “tiwer” redirects a discussion that heretofore has touched on the issue of status inequality, with Gunther’s status as king supported by his victory against the queen, i.e. strength and political power are intertwined, and Siegfried’s lower status being confirmed by everything that Brünhild has observed about him, the sole exception being Kriemhild’s defense of her husband. This adjective hearkens back to the issue of the relative value of the two men illustrated when Brünhild was initially drawn to Siegfried and her judgment was not clouded by their acts of deception.

Kriemhild’s assessment that Siegfried is “tiwerr” than Gunther reverses the lowering of Siegfried upon which the Isensteiner insists: “er ist tiwerr danne sî / Gunther mîn bruoder, der vil edel man” (825,2-3). The Xantener exceeds the Burgundian’s degree of being “tiure.” Gunther’s own excellence is not in question and neither is his physicality nor his qualities as a leader. Instead, Siegfried’s standing in all of these areas is simply seen as greater in the eyes of Kriemhild. And the Burgundian woman is indeed correct, in that he exceeds Gunther’s physicality, comportment, and leadership abilities. But what is interesting is that it is a direct comparison of the two men, an exercise that Brünhild’s proclamation that the Xantener belongs to the realm of the “eigen” does not allow. And what supports Kriemhild’s estimation is empirical evidence that has not been falsified, from his success in the battle against the Saxons to

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<sup>15</sup> Ehrismann, *Epoche*, 143.

the invaluable assistance he provides on the trip to Isenstein (although Kriemhild only knows that it was successful, not *how* that success came to be, a critical difference). But again, both women arrive at judgments based on the slice of the world to which they have access: Brünhild can only rely on deception when her focus on the superior Siegfried appears to be a mistake, that Gunther is the only one who deserves her time, while Kriemhild has seen how her brother depends on the Xantener to maintain his kingdom, the most significant example of which is his leadership against the Saxons and Danes, who represented a threat unlike one ever seen before by Burgonden and one with which Gunther did not know how to deal. Both women are right based on their own powers of inference and given the evidence to which they have access, yet both are very wrong, most egregiously and obviously Brünhild. As for Kriemhild, her overestimation of her husband's position of power in Burgonden results from a failure to take into account that the culture in Worms itself is changing, that Siegfried's position is not as safe as it would appear given the forces moving against him. Thus both women are "right" and at the same time wrong because of their "foreignness," both social in the case of Kriemhild and structural/cultural in that of Brünhild.

These two women are in agreement that their counterpart incorrectly understands the roles of their men and themselves at the court, but it is Brünhild who suffers from the lingering effects of the Isenstein deception. But this is the heart of foreignness and its perils: one acts and speaks without full awareness of the cultural circumstances at hand. As for their husbands, neither man verbally compares himself to the other, instead they rely on each other, using the other's strengths to shore up their own weaknesses in acts of complicity that take advantage of their own foreignness. Their wives, on the other hand, engage in a debate on the respective merits of their men that springs from not knowing the superiority of omniscience granted to the

men of the court, both in the foreign locale of Isenstein and locally. As for Brünhild and Kriemhild, they try to understand their world in their act of comparison and the resulting disagreement, but the very way they carry out their discussion shows their hopeless separation from the world of their men and their social (in the case of Kriemhild) and cultural (in the case of Brünhild) foreignness.

### ***Kebsen* and the Foreignness of the Two Queens**

The *kebsen* remark gets to the heart of the matter in the queens' comparison of Gunther and Siegfried. It places the Xantener above the Burgundian in terms of prowess and strength, as well as sexual virility and also reveals Kriemhild's better access to knowledge, in the process revealing to Brünhild her own victimhood enabled by her estrangement from the culture of the Burgundian court.

As the two queens stand before the door of the cathedral and Brünhild once again refers to Kriemhild as an "eigen," the wife of Siegfried adds a new element to their quarrel, but this time it has to do with her own status as reaped by her actions, not one granted to her by virtue of her marriage to the king of the Burgonden: "du hâst geschendet selbe den dînen schœnen lîp: / wie möhte mannes kebse werden immer küniges wîp?" (839,3-4). The term reveals to Brünhild for the first time that she has had some kind of intimate encounter with Gunther's "man," Siegfried, and has thus damaged her own self worth because she has consorted with a lower-ranking man.<sup>16</sup> Kriemhild in the next strophe asks why Brünhild would knowingly have intercourse with a man beneath her station, which represents a critical point in the portrayal of the fact that both women are operating in a way that is alienated from reality: Kriemhild,

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<sup>16</sup> This establishes a parallel to Brünhild's concern that Kriemhild has become "verderbet" (620,4) due to the perceived mésalliance.

unaware of the actual details of the intimacy, only knows that something untoward has taken place between her brother's wife and her own husband.<sup>17</sup> Ehrismann insists that Kriemhild's accusation is "schamlos und übertrieben," which is true since she has not heard that to be the actual case.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, her lack of information provides her with the freedom to make an interpretation of the evidence she has seen (ring and belt) that is most advantageous in the current argument. On the other hand, Brünhild's query "wen hâstu hie verkebset?" emphasizes that she has been held completely in the dark by the scheming men since it shows her surprise at what she believes to be an outrageous accusation rather than a statement of fact. According to Haug, "Es ist eine bekannte Eigentümlichkeit des Nibelungenliedes, daß diese gegenseitigen Anschuldigungen keine reale Basis besitzen. Wenn Brünhild ihre Gegnerin als *eigen diu* bezeichnet, dann beruht das auf einer Lüge Siegfrieds, Kriemhilds Replike – *mannes kebse* – ist ebenfalls eine Lüge."<sup>19</sup>

But what remains unclarified is Kriemhild's suggestion that their rendezvous was an occurrence of "arger list," in other words an occasion of malicious deceit on the part of the two men. And yet at the same time she queries Brünhild "zwiu lieze du in minnen" (841,2). This is a suggestion that Brünhild knowingly allowed a man of lower status to sleep with her, which contradicts her attribution of the event to "list." This confusion illustrates Kriemhild's use of inference (she receives visible signs that Siegfried was with the Isensteiner, who is shocked by her accusation in front of the cathedral) to elicit the fact that all of this was an example of "list,"

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<sup>17</sup> Kriemhild does not know that the belt, a symbol of Brünhild's virginity, was not taken from her in a sexual act. "Kriemhild war der Sprache des Symbols zum Opfer gefallen – genau wie Brünhild auf dem Isenstein. Sie hatte dem Symbol mehr geglaubt als ihrem Mann," Bischoff, 547.

<sup>18</sup> Kriemhild "stiftet, gezielt und im Zorn, Verwirrung, sie befreit ihre Seele und demütigt ihre Gegnerin, mit der, wie sie wohl vermutet, Siegfried sie gedemütigt hat," Ehrismann, *Epoche*, 143-144.

<sup>19</sup> Haug, "Idealität," 44.

but it emphasizes her separation from the actual goings-on at the court and the incompleteness of her knowledge and her foreignness since she does not know *how* or *why* Siegfried slept with the other woman. But Kriemhild does not seem to care about the details of the incident; her only concern is finding something that will hurt Brünhild. Especially striking is the fact that she is not upset about Siegfried's unfaithfulness – this disagreement is all about winning the battle over who has the better man, triggered by the confusion engendered by the men themselves. Brünhild's blindness to her victimhood remains until she sees the physical evidence of Siegfried's deed, her gold ring that she maintains she "hân verlorn" and which "wart mir verstoln."

The combination of spoken information in the form of Kriemhild's accusation and visual proof in the stolen jewelry follows the model of deception by means of these two forms of reality instituted on Isenstein, but this time the verbal and visual evidence cannot overcome her skepticism and pride. Ironically, perception of what is now the truth is blocked by her distorted understanding of all that has occurred on Isenstein and afterwards. That she readily believes the men on Isenstein, but not Kriemhild, is evidence that she feels that Kriemhild, as a woman, does not possess full knowledge of the court, of course a correct assumption. It underlines the isolation of women from the world of men, and this perceived separation is notable because a woman is subscribing to that fact. Although she is a foreigner, she does correctly understand that even Burgundian women possess no perfect grasp of the world of their men.

As for Kriemhild, the gaps in her information about the background of the encounter in the king's chamber prevent her from understanding the importance of continuing the ruse, an echo of how Gunther and Siegfried themselves begin to slip up and relax once they have brought the queen back to Worms. The accusation, and Brünhild's demand that her husband must

“bereden” it, brings the hitherto hidden and secretive affair to a broader public (Brünhild’s tears upon seeing her stolen possessions “muose vreisichen Gunther und alle Burgonden man” 850,4) and thereby Kriemhild unknowingly causes severe repercussions for her husband. Curiously, Hagen does not witness Brünhild’s distress before the trial, nor the trial itself. It is only after the “trial” that Hagen enters the scene, an indication that he, too, is segregated from critical information, namely the complicity of Gunther in the wedding night betrayal of his wife. This signs the death warrant for Siegfried, who must pay for the public humiliation of the wife of the Burgundian king despite the service he has provided to Hagen’s lord, from whom he has been separated in terms of his awareness of the truth.

Kriemhild’s asserts that her husband and Brünhild have slept together on the basis of the ring and girdle,<sup>20</sup> which suggests that she may have an idea of the complex relationship between Siegfried and Gunther that the two men have kept from her,<sup>21</sup> although this is never expressed in subsequent words or actions. In the case of Kriemhild, the fact that her husband deflowers Gunther’s wife validates her assessment of her husband as “tiwerr” than Gunther, already proven under other circumstances noted above. But she does not learn that before he could act in a manner that would make him more valuable than Gunther, i.e., that he could break the strength of Brünhild, that he first had to lower himself below her brother’s status and declare Gunther to be his lord. This is a gap in her understanding of the events on Isenstein that creates at least

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<sup>20</sup> Kriemhild displays the stolen pieces to Brünhild so that the Isensteiner knows “daz ich niht enliuge” (849,4). As will be discussed below, Kriemhild still adheres to the full coincidence of *Sein* and *Schein*: She holds the possessions of Brünhild (symbols of her virginity) given to her by Siegfried (*Schein*) and thus infers that the truth, the *Sein*, is that Siegfried has gained the accoutrements via injury to the Isensteiner’s virginity. She is the last Burgundian to act and perceive the world according to this principle as far as the text divulges, but this too changes when she constructs her revenge.

<sup>21</sup> But she does not know about the dependency of the two men on each other, nor the deal that they entered to exchange Brünhild for Kriemhild.

some of the misunderstandings that drive her quarrel with the queen. At the same time, Brünhild does not adjust her assessment of Siegfried based on all she has taken in while in Isenstein to match what she sees (that he provides no service) and hears (the insistence of Kriemhild that Siegfried is in fact “tiwerr” than Gunther). The intelligence possessed by both women adds up to a complete picture of the deception and its consequences, but the suspicion each has of the other and their mutual assumption that the other is a “foreigner” and thereby separated from the truth puts them at cross-purposes that do not help them cut through the fog of their husbands’ plot, but rather further confuse it and bring it to a head.

### **The Aftermath of the *Frauenzank***

Siegfried’s reaction to the accusation of his wife proves to be very instructive when exploring the issue of the foreign, insofar as it is an indicator that he himself is being pushed out of the center of the court and away from the critical information that collects there. Siegfried’s arrival on the scene of the crying Brünhild and the assembled Burgundians represents a significant shift in his superiority of knowledge: he observes a scene, which the narrator notes he does not understand, because “er’n wesse niht der mære” (856,2) and he professes his curiosity about the cause of the tears with the prime term of perception, *erkennen*: “daz het ich gerne erkant” (856,3). He has been thrust into the middle of a situation about which he has no prior information, the first time in the text since his initial encounter with the Nibelungen.

Stanza 857, Gunther’s account of the accusation, follows in the vein of the Isenstein deception: the break between *Sein* and *Schein* is obscured by means of misdirection, of reinterpreting the issue to be addressed by Siegfried whether or not he bragged about such an act,

whether or not it actually took place.<sup>22</sup> However, this does not explain the items stolen by Siegfried and proffered as visual evidence by Kriemhild, the origins of which remain unexplained. Nevertheless, as following the model of Isenstein, verbal information again trumps visual evidence – Siegfried, brought up to speed on the accusation lodged against him by Brünhild and now possessing the information he needs to lie his way out of this difficult spot, cleverly denies only that he ever boasted of conquering her. Siegfried knows how convincing the spoken word can be from his success in lying to Brünhild. But this deceit impacts an even larger audience, as the Xantener's insistence on never making such a claim shifts attention away from the physical objects that indicate a more heinous act has been committed. However, Siegfried's reliance upon his words to cancel out other evidence of his guilt brings with it unintended consequences, since one person at court, Hagen, does not give in to Siegfried's lies and focuses on the damage to the honor of the queen caused by the alleged "rüemen" of the Xantener.<sup>23</sup> But the "trial" scene orchestrated by Gunther is successful insofar as they tamp down the suspicions of Brünhild and the rest of the court that anything untoward may have happened on the king's wedding night, preserving his own honor and the impression that the courtship quest was fully legitimate.

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<sup>22</sup> According to Grosse, it must be Gunther's intention to keep the truth hidden. That is why he treats Kriemhild's accusation as an act of slander, 817. There is no question that this is true, but why he feels the need to obscure the truth is less clear and will be discussed below.

<sup>23</sup> According to Theodore Andersson, "Hagen's advantage as an instrument of vengeance is that he does not know the truth and, unlike Gunther, is therefore free to institute revenge for Brünhild's humiliation with a total disregard for the facts of the case," "Why Does Siegfried Die?" *Germanic Studies in Honor of Otto Springer*, ed. Stephen J. Kaplowitt (Pittsburgh: K&S Enterprises, 1978) 29-39, here 30. According to Ingeborg Cavalié, "Prünhilt's Tränen bleiben das auslösende Moment [of the murder], aber die Burgundenkönigin rät nicht mehr zum Tod des Helden. Gunther selbst entscheidet nicht mehr; er willigt ein. Was Sîfrit ins Verderben stürzt, ist und bleibt die alte *leit*-Frage, doch jetzt erneuert sie die unverzeihliche Beleidigung von einst," 379.



Hagen too remains completely in the dark about the events in the king's bedchamber, as well as the argument between the two queens until he asks Brünhild why she is crying after the oath scene. Very ambiguously, the narrator reveals that the queen "sagte [...] im diu mære" (864,2). Does this mean she told him about the assault in the bedchamber, or the theft of her belongings, or Siegfried's denial of the accusations leveled against him, or perhaps all of the above?<sup>24</sup> While one may argue that what he learned about this crisis is not important, only his reaction ("er lobt' ir sâ zehant, / daz er erarnen müese der Kriemhilde man" 864,1-2), it does leave important questions. The vague formulation of the narrator offers a problem to the interpreter: does Hagen arrange Siegfried's murder due to the effects of his actions (Brünhild's loss of honor and public humiliation) or because of the action itself? The question can be answered syntagmatically by stanza 867, in which Hagen links Siegfried's fate with a loss of honor for Brünhild triggered by the Xantener's braggadocio. Thus a life and death decision about him is made without full knowledge of why the possessions of Brünhild came to light, a fact of which Gunther tries to convince Hagen. Gunther, with full knowledge of the background of the revelation of the ring and the belt, more correctly sees the Xantener as a benefit to the kingdom and does not want him harmed. In this case the kingdom is represented by Gunther and the personal benefits he has received from Siegfried are thus transferred to the totality of Burgonden society: "er'n hât uns niht getân / niwan guot und êre; man sol in leben lân" (868,1-2). With this vague formulation of the good that Siegfried has performed on behalf of the Burgonden, Gunther can conveniently leave out the service performed by him in the

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<sup>24</sup> Bischoff states that we do not learn any details of what she told him, but nevertheless "sie kann zu ihm nur von der ihr angetanen Beleidigung gesprochen haben," 549. This is quite contradictory, because she could have also spoken to him about her uneasiness about Siegfried's position, or any other issue linked to the Xantener and his wife.

bedchamber, alienating the public from the inner workings of the court, proving that he too can engage in deception.

One thing remains clear about the quarrel between the queens: it prepares an opening for Hagen to propose the slaying of Siegfried, whether he was planning to do so all along – as discussed in the issue of *leit* above – or whether in the tears of Brünhild he senses a harm done to the court that cannot be ignored, lest it suffer even more: “des habent lützel êre sô guote degene” (867,2).<sup>25</sup> For a study of the foreign in the *Nibelungenlied*, Hagen’s reaction to the confusion surrounding Siegfried’s involvement with Brünhild is of utmost importance, because it is the varying degrees of foreignness that contribute to the argument of the two queens, which itself elicits the planning of the Xantener’s final hours. More subtly, but just as significantly, Hagen’s scheming after the *Frauenzank* constitutes the first of two terrible incidents (the other being Kriemhild’s revenge) facilitated by what appears in the text as a shift in Burgundian culture away from straightforwardness to guile and trickery.

### **Hagen the Deceiver**

Hagen states that he is going to go about the planning of the murder in a secret manner that will arouse no one’s suspicions, the Xantener’s included: “ich getrûwez heinlîche alsô wol an getragen” (873,2). The adverb *heinlîche* is not common in the *Nibelungenlied*, occurring only three times, and this instance is the only one in which it describes a course of action and perfectly captures all of the duplicitous deeds that precede its usage. The word, in its adverbial

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<sup>25</sup> Jens Haustein believes that the murder of Siegfried is motivated primarily by the harm Brünhild suffers from the alleged *rüemen* of Siegfried: “Wer annimmt, Siegfried sei aus Furcht vor seiner Macht und Eroberungslust umgebracht worden oder mit neidischem Blick auf sein Reichthum, der zu den Burgunden zufallen wird, betont Motive der Sagentradition, die der Epiker zurückgedrängt hat und allenfalls noch als Sekundärmotivation bestehen läßt,” 384.

as well as adjectival and nominal forms, occurs in the context of discussions that take place in the private sphere (as in stanzas 726 and 1255) and when the subject of the discussion is not present (stanzas 132 and 726). In the case of the private discussions in which the term occurs, these signal important junctures in the text. Stanza 726 lays the groundwork for the return of Siegfried and Kriemhild to Worms and the clash between the two queens, and the discussion between Rüdeger and Kriemhild in strophe 1255 begins to awaken her plans to exact revenge upon her brothers. Other than the consequences of these two talks, however, there is nothing out of the ordinary about them except that the privacy of conferences in the work is not often emphasized but rather implied.<sup>26</sup>

As used by Hagen, *heinliche* (here the only time uttered by a character in its adverbial form) symbolizes a change in the way that the narrative portrays the relationship of the Burgundian court to knowledge, one in which motivations and actions are withheld from other characters in order to do those same people harm: “Das Mordkomplott gelingt, teils weil das Geschehen der Wahrnehmung entzogen ist [i.e. is carried out *heinliche*], teils weil ein falsches Bild für die Wahrnehmung arrangiert wird.”<sup>27</sup> Secrecy and plotting deception go hand in hand because, as has been established on Isenstein, successful dissembling occurs in an atmosphere in which full knowledge is kept hidden. Previous Burgundian patterns of behavior have been strikingly different insofar as they exhibit the complete overlapping of *Sein* and *Schein*. When Siegfried is welcomed by turns in an aggressive and courtly manner, the inconsistent acts of the Burgundians are not borne of deception but desperate attempts to calm him down. In another example, when those captured in the battle against the Danes and Saxons are well-provided for

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<sup>26</sup> For example, the discussion between Siegfried and Gunther about the threats made by Liudeger and Liudegast seems to take place in private, as Gunther declares that he cannot broadcast his worries.

<sup>27</sup> Müller, *Spielregeln*, 283.

by the Burgundians, this is not because Gunther and his men have any hidden agenda, but because this is simply how they act towards prisoners. And when Gunther sets out to take possession of Brünhild, that is his goal and all that he does supports its achievement. But with the character of Siegfried, a wholly different manner of existence is explored by the text, one based undermining perception, and eventually the Burgonden also begin to act in such a manner. Siegfried exploits the mystery that surrounds him by heeding patterns of behavior that divorce actions from their perceived ends, thus he presages a reorientation of the Burgundians' way of relating to the world as illustrated by the text.

Siegfried is a model of the success one can have when deceiving others, and he heralds a similar shift in the culture of the Burgundians explored by the text. Just as Siegfried learned about the advantages of deception in the episode of the Nibelungen as recounted by Hagen, it is only after the Burgundians interact with Siegfried during the Isenstein deception that they too split *Sein* and *Schein*. This is behavior Siegfried has picked up in foreign lands and carries out in another foreign land that, according to the text, has been marked by honest dealings and actions. His powers of deception are echoed by the Burgundians, who eventually perfect them. The Xantener's trickery begins at the very beginning of their relationship, when he declares that he wishes to take over the lands of the Burgundians, never does and never again expresses interest in such an undertaking, but thereafter bargains to gain the hand of Kriemhild. Although no characters reflect on a possible link between his original intentions and the eventual marriage to Kriemhild, they are dealing with a character who acts contrary to his stated intention.<sup>28</sup> But from them Siegfried clearly gains an advantage through lying and deceiving while on Isenstein, and

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<sup>28</sup> One of the great curiosities of the *Nibelungenlied*, a prime example of "forgetting" in the text, is the lack of inquisitiveness as to why Siegfried does not carry out what he says he will at the beginning of the work, the overthrow of the Burgundian kingdom.

with the exception of Gernot, the main core of Burgundian leadership observes every step of this. One can even assert that Siegfried deceives the Burgundians on this selfsame quest, as he reveals the totality of his plans only gradually. First, they are not aware that he will use subterfuge to defeat the queen of Isenstein. Second, the men of Burgonden have no idea that he has concrete steps to take on Isenstein. Third, his possession and use of the *Tarnkappe* remains concealed to all but Hagen. Most significantly, he denies his own qualities and personal aura, an amazing feat of negation that makes every other manipulation of reality seem possible. But the basic message imparted by Siegfried to the Burgundians, especially Kriemhild and Hagen, emerges from the Isenstein experience: say and do what is necessary to create a reality for the victim of the deception that cannot be revealed.

And Hagen, in his statement of revenge, now embodies that same exact way of splitting actions from accepted and expected consequences. He supervises the weaving of a story about an impending attack, a threat that Siegfried, himself susceptible to the same trickery he doles out, cannot see. Hagen for the first time shown in the text exploiting the tools of artifice that Siegfried himself displays. The pendant to *heinliche*, *tougen*, encapsulates a broadening of deception from Siegfried to the Burgundians, primarily Hagen.<sup>29</sup> It is mentioned in conjunction with Siegfried's use of the *Tarnkappe*, the basis of all of the deception on Isenstein, and the place where he displays to the Burgundians a way to sever reality from action, or intention from action.<sup>30</sup> There then follows Hagen's vow to revenge the tears of Brünhild, and to do so using

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<sup>29</sup> These two words form a doublet present in a few instances in the MHG corpus, which attests to their affinity. Examples include *Engelhard* (6251), *Frauendienst* (1,12), and *Der Trojanische Krieg* (17210).

<sup>30</sup> Not only does Siegfried bestow unnatural strength on Gunther via the cloak of invisibility, but in this instance he appears to control nature itself: "dar an sô stuont vil tougen daz Sigemundes kint. / er fuort ez [the ship he uses to retrieve the Nibelungen after the defeat of Brünhild] balde dannen, alsam ez waete der wint" (482,3-4).

the tool of *heinlich* acts, but at this point it is still only an expressed intention. This is carried out during the Saxon war ruse: “als er gesach daz bilde, dô schiht er tougen dan, / di sageten ander mære, zwêne sîner man: / mit vride solde belîben daz Guntheres lant” (908,1-3). He uses these two men as Siegfried does his *Tarnkappe*, they disorient the intended observer, Siegfried, with the passing of the fabricated war’s threat.

Prior to the betrayal of Siegfried, Hagen has not acted thusly, and there are no attributes in his character revealed to the work’s audience that can explain this shift from working above board to using underhanded methods to attain his goals and those of the court. According to one line of interpretation, Hagen’s suggestion that Siegfried take on the threat of the Saxons and Danes represents an attempt to rid the kingdom of the Xantener who had previously threatened it himself, an act of deception if true, although not nearly as elaborate as the ruses constructed by Siegfried. Similarly, Hagen’s devious plan for Siegfried might emerge in his suggestion that the Xantener announce the return of the wooing party, an attempt to socially debase the Xantener, to hurt his position in the circle.<sup>31</sup> Regardless of whether or not Hagen had in mind from the time of the first meeting between Siegfried and Burgundians that the Xantener was a threat to the kingdom (or the power of Hagen) that would need to ultimately be eliminated, nothing concrete is done in this respect, or even mentioned, until Hagen announces that he will make Siegfried pay for the tears of the Burgundian queen. The work does not reveal this to be a sublimated or repressed characteristic of Hagen or a characteristic of the Burgundians, noting Gunther’s reaction to Hagen’s words: “wie mac daz ergân?” (874,1).

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<sup>31</sup> Cavalié is representative of this line of interpretation. According to her, Hagen first set his sights on Siegfried when the Xantener so brusquely challenged the Burgundians on his arrival: “Mit seinem ersten Auftritt bei Sîfrits Ankunft wird der Troneger zum Ratgeber, der im Hintergrund gegen Sîfrit wirkt und den Lauf der Ereignisse stark beeinflusst,” 380.

Gunther wants to know how an important issue can be resolved secretly, without anyone realizing the surreptitious nature of the guiding motivation. With this question Gunther proves not as willing or able to act as Siegfried and Hagen do, evidence of which is his lackadaisical continuation of the deceit aimed at Brünhild, with the exception of his cover-up of the wedding night fiasco. On the other hand, Hagen, present for the impressive deception arranged by the Xantener on Isenstein, observes that trickery and wile works with little threat to those involved in the double dealing. The Hagen introduced in the early part of the *Nibelungenlied* is not a deceiver, but with the introduction of Siegfried's presence he too acts as a deceiver in a break with his previous modes of action and planning. And Gunther's role as an accessory in the murder of Siegfried and Kriemhild's later revenge demonstrate that the text's presentation of Burgundian culture, at least at the level of the court, has been transformed in the course of the narrative after the introduction of the foreign into its midst. The Burgundians, led by Hagen, now employ methods once solely embodied by Siegfried, but turn them to their own purposes in order that they may solve their own problems. From the deception of Isenstein onward, the breach between *Sein* and *Schein* will never be repaired in the Rhine kingdom. The introduction of the foreign has changed that world forever. While the text does not state that the Burgundians have *learned* deceit from Siegfried, its infusion into their planning and deeds after his arrival seems to be more than mere coincidence, although no statement of that fact can be made from textual analysis. The lack of explanation for this significant swing in behavior opens up another *Leerstelle* in the text, one which can be filled through both syntagmatic and paradigmatic interpretation.

### Gunther and Hagen as Practitioners of Deceit

The first introduction to the deception of which the Burgundian leadership is aware is Siegfried's insistence that all members of the wooing party lie to the Isensteiner and declare that Gunther is the Xantener's lord. Fully dependent on his ability to navigate in this foreign world, the Burgundians follow his will without question or hesitation ("des wâren si bereite, swaz er si loben hiez" 387,1). This comprises an understandable stance in a place where they are completely ignorant and unknowing. But then the narrator states that they did not turn down his request that they speak as one to mislead the queen about his actual station, and the narrator states that "durch ir übermüete" not a single person refused to speak as ordered, a phrase that Grosse translates as "selbstsicher." That translation may be accurate, in that they are confident in themselves because they are confident in Siegfried's ability to make the right calls while on Isenstein. But *übermuot*, as noted above, has a negative connotation, one that suggests that they followed his command in a way that goes against conventions and what is moderate, or right and measured. It is a judgment against the massive lie they are about to perpetrate. And yet they do not perceive it as *übermüetec* or anything that should be approached with caution or should even be rejected out of hand as an option for behavior. Here *übermuot* signals a change in the narrative depiction of the Burgundians. And yet at the same time, the Burgundians are forced into making this first step in the transformation of their culture as heretofore depicted because the wooing trip would not be a success without their full reliance on the Xantener and the guidance he provides. And while this is a dangerous tactic for the Burgundians overall, especially in view of the work's conclusion, it does pay early dividends. As the narrator notes, "dâ von [the acceptance of Siegfried's command to dissemble] in wol gescach, / dô der künec Gunther die scœnen Prünhilde sach" (387,3-4). The time adverb *dô* limits the benefits they reap



from guile to the immediate circumstances of Brünhild's wooing contest, suggesting that the advantage they receive does not, and cannot, bless the entire course of the change their culture undergoes: the advantages of trickery are only temporary for the people of Burgonden.

The moment of Siegfried's clear demonstration of the process and efficacy of deception for the Burgundians is the *Stratordienst* performance. Curiously, however, this elicits only a single reaction on the part of the Burgundians: Gunther experiences a heightened sense of value imparted by Siegfried assisting him to mount his horse. The narrator focuses on the visual perception of the service by the women of Isenstein, with no mention of the rest of the Burgundian party watching it. Here is a gap in the text left for the audience to fill in. For a highly symbolic event that has the focus of all the women in the vicinity, it would seem unlikely that the Burgundians themselves would not have seen it, especially since no note is made that they did not witness the service provided by Siegfried. It is as if the Burgundians simply absorb what they have witnessed, and the effects of this experience are fully felt long after the time when the Burgundian army is roused to counter the falsified threat of Liudeger and Liudegast.

Gunther, although cast into an unfamiliar role as an accomplice to deceit, plays along magnificently. He does not stumble in carrying out the plans hatched, nor does he ever voice opposition to what Siegfried says is their hierarchical arrangement.<sup>32</sup> Brünhild fails to catch on in part because he does not contradict what Siegfried says about their hierarchical arrangement, nor does he hesitate in acting as Siegfried's overlord. After the defeat of Brünhild, Siegfried begins to disregard the maintenance of his illusory subservience to Gunther. The first instance is when he initially refuses to carry word back to Worms that the wooing party soon would be

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<sup>32</sup> However, it should be considered that Siegfried's "man" deception, when used in addition to the *Steigbügeldienst*, may turn on concern that Gunther will act as needed on Isenstein, especially given his inability (or unwillingness) to pay close attention to what Siegfried says.

returning to Worms. This scene is interesting for several reasons: Gunther again would not appear to be operating as an effective king, because it is Hagen who must suggest that this customary mission be carried out at all. More importantly, however, Gunther suggests that Hagen carry out the duty, thus threatening to send mixed signals to Brünhild after the Xantener had tried to unite words and visual deeds to create a convincing image of his subservience. At this point, Hagen begins flirting with *list*, while Gunther apparently has not learned how to apply *list*. As for Siegfried, he no longer sees the urgency of continuing the deception, although the text does not divulge why.

This happens after a less-developed, but equally significant, instance of Hagen's dawning awareness of the tricks Siegfried is employing. When Siegfried returns from the ship after stowing away his *Tarnkappe*, Brünhild becomes alert to his absence during the contest. Hagen, instead of Siegfried as might be expected, proffers an explanation: "dô was bî dem schiffe Sîfrit der helt guot, / dô der vogt von Rîne diu spil iu an gewan; / des ist ez im unkûnde" (473,2-4). Hagen displays quick thinking on this occasion and even inventiveness, linking the absence to Siegfried's previously-established low rank. The way these two men interact in this situation is reminiscent of later in the text when Hagen advocates for the murder of Siegfried and Gunther eventually surrenders to the plan, both instances of Gunther's overall passivity and helplessness, but conscious acquiescence of the chicanery to be perpetrated.

When Siegfried learns that he would be sending a message not only for the sake of Gunther, but also Kriemhild, he is brought in agreement because, in essence, this service constitutes an extension of the task he must fulfill to gain her hand. Gunther's insistence that Siegfried carry the message to Worms "durch den willen mîn / unt ouch durch Kriemhilde" (535,1-2) is a reminder of his love for the Burgundian woman and the need for him to

continually serve her should he wish to marry her. Unclear, however, is whether or not this is a veiled threat suggesting that refusal to carry out the task may jeopardize a future marriage, but this threat never needs to become explicit because Hagen understands very well what motivates Siegfried by this point of the work, and his love for Kriemhild is one of the few weak points of Siegfried's character (along with his loyalty to the Burgundian kingdom) that can be exploited. While this may be an early expression of Hagen's disagreement and clash with Siegfried, it also is critical for understanding the development of Hagen's character because his insistence on the mission maintains the illusion that Siegfried initiated but has begun to neglect. Hagen insists that he should play the role of *kamerære*, a key court position typically held by ministerial closely linked to the king. Such a positioning of himself thus emphasizes Siegfried's lowliness by demonstrating that Hagen's high position.

Hagen's decision to act as *kamerære* and relegate Siegfried to *Botendienst* maintains the hierarchical situation originally played out by Siegfried, and at the same time it removes Siegfried from contact with Brünhild, thus potentially weakening his overall position in the structure of the reconstituted court: "Siegfried wird damit im Grunde genommen in eine Lage hineinmanövriert, die zur Folge hat, daß er etwas tut, was die Öffentlichkeit oder wenigstens Brünhild als Verpflichtung eines Vasallen auffassen kann."<sup>33</sup> At the same time, however, it is a clear instance of the employment of *list* and deceit and at the same time also an act of alienation, separating Siegfried from the rest of the party, as had already been done once before when he summoned the Nibelungen for protection. The text does not discuss what happens on the journey from Isenstein to Worms in the absence of Siegfried and does not mention any details

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<sup>33</sup> Göhler, 97.

about this trip in following scenes, suggesting that Hagen did not have any greater plan for separating Siegfried from the rest of the party.

While in Isenstein, Gunther plays the role of actor in the performance of deceit and underhandedness directed by Siegfried. He does everything that is asked from him flawlessly. Although he tacitly supports the deceit by taking part in it and helps it unfurl, he just once resorts to deception to hide his weakness in the bedroom, necessitated by his overall ignorance of the need to maintain the illusion begun on Isenstein. Hagen, on the other hand, assists Siegfried in his scam, supporting the Xantener at points when the whole structure of lies threatens to collapse and engulf the wooing party. His quick thinking after the contest and his insistence that Siegfried be the one to return to Worms both indicate a deep understanding of what the Xantener is engaged in. As well it reveals an awareness of how to effectively uncouple *Sein* (Siegfried helped Gunther and is no more suited to relaying the message to Worms than the other men) and *Schein* (Siegfried was at the boat and serves as messenger because he is the “man” of Gunther) when dealing with a foreigner lacking the background knowledge of the plotters.

### **The Collapse of the Isenstein Scheme**

The conclusion of the trip to Isenstein represents a significant shift in the portrayal of the prosecution of deception, as now the foreigner Siegfried not only manipulates his world to his own advantage, but the Burgundians, after having observed his method of shearing word and action from reality, now exhibit a completely different way of interacting with the world. Hagen is now shown to be a practitioner of the methods Siegfried has demonstrated and Gunther participates in the carrying out of these plans, even if sometimes unknowingly and haphazardly. For example, it would appear that Gunther’s only concern about the *Botendienst* goes back to

what Hagen tells him: “wir sūmen uns mit den mæren ze Wormez an den Rîn” (529,3). Gunther has failed to carry out an act important for Burgundian culture, preparing for a homecoming reception, and this remains his only concern. He does not care who actually carries out the task, just that it gets done. He does not understand that Hagen has ulterior motives, so he is an unwitting participant in this phase of the deception but he still props up the ruse, whereas he knew full well what was going on during the wooing contest.

As for Siegfried, two acts indicate that his ability, or at least willingness, to follow through with the deception he had begun when he first set foot in Burgonden has begun to wane, including his initial refusal to act as messenger and his offering of Brünhild’s possessions to Kriemhild. And yet Siegfried does assist Gunther in the bedroom, reprising his secret standing in for the king. The charade begins to break down, however, when Brünhild starts asking questions about Siegfried, to which Gunther has no real answer, unsurprising since he has always been a participant in, but not a dominant voice of Burgundian culture. He does not possess the ability to orchestrate deception, as this would require an ingenuity that he has lacked from the beginning of the *Nibelungenlied*.

The oath scene represents the last breakdown in the deception begun on Isenstein, since it directly leads to Hagen hatching a plot to murder Siegfried. None of the men, most importantly Siegfried, were present during the *Frauenzank*, and thus they do not understand the matter preceding the oath: “Diese Blindheit Siegfrieds ist das eigentliche Problem. Und sie ist ein Problem, denn sie ist die Voraussetzung dafür, daß Siegfried Hagen zum Opfer fällt.”<sup>34</sup> This fact, in addition to the lack of coordination – Gunther, after hearing the accusation from his wife,

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 109.

immediately approaches Siegfried in a public setting<sup>35</sup> – prevents them from arranging anything *tougenlîch*. The public situation of the disclosure of the accusation and Gunther's immediate response, in conjunction with Siegfried's lackadaisical attitude towards a subterfuge orchestrated in the past, sets the stage for a quick resolution that relies on two-way deceit. Siegfried has in fact not bragged about a sexual experience with Gunther's wife and the Burgundian king maintains the language of the accusation presented by Brünhild, which advantageously conceals the fact that Siegfried secretly overcame her. The trial scene, however, does not include the kind of grandiose machinations the two carried out earlier in the text. The scheme to shift the focus completely on Kriemhild and whitewash the events in the royal bedchamber does not work for two reasons: Brünhild remains upset, and Hagen, here more perceptive of Brünhild's emotions than Gunther, reads the problem on her face.<sup>36</sup> By this point in the text, the attention of Siegfried and Gunther on the original subterfuge targeting Brünhild has slipped, placing both of them in a precarious situation. Gunther barely fends off Brünhild's probing questions about Siegfried and her anger about his actions, thereby just saving his own reputation from an exposure of the falsehoods behind his marriage. And although Siegfried avoids a public airing of his exploits in the king's bedchamber, his spur of the moment response to the accusation of "rüemen" hastens his death, as Jens Haustein notes: "Er hat so Schuld an der Beleidigung der Königin, an einem Unrecht, für das es in einer epischen Dichtung nicht wie im Roman die Möglichkeit der Sühne gibt, sondern das gerächt werden muß."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "Dô der here Sîfrit die ungemuoten sach, / [. . .] wie balde er dô sprach" (856,1-2). The exchange between him and Gunther, in which they decide upon a trial by oath, follows immediately.

<sup>36</sup> This is a parallel scene to Siegfried's observation and reaction to the worries plaguing the king of the Burgonden.

<sup>37</sup> Haustein, 384.

### Siegfried's Entrapment in Burgonden's Altered Culture

Siegfried, whose *niuwemære* portended momentous change for the Burgundians, is himself swept up by its adoption of deception, unaware that he is becoming a victim of the cultural metamorphosis Burgonden is portrayed to be undergoing. From the standpoint of perception of *Schein* by characters in the work, the return of Siegfried to his normal station in life constitutes the biggest flaw of the deception perpetrated on Isenstein, because it should make clear to Brünhild that she had been lied to. However, given her status as a foreigner and her position outside of the inner workings of the court, she must struggle to reconcile the two versions of reality placed before her. And this process of reconciling truth and lie lures Siegfried back to Worms and eventually leads to his own demise.

Gunther's declaration that he does not dare invite Siegfried and Kriemhild back to Worms elicits an answer from Brünhild "in einen listigen siten" (727,4). While not a master deceiver in the mold of Siegfried, Hagen, and later Kriemhild, Brünhild believes that she is tricking him into inviting the couple by reminding him of a relationship she thinks exists but he has forgotten to take care of and pursue. But her desire to see Kriemhild and Siegfried is not predicated on deception, but rather a desire to see people who have been "vremde" to her (one of whom she really is impressed by and cares for, Kriemhild). This is not the type of deception to which she had fallen prey, in which word and visual information doctored by the deceivers fully contradicts reality. So it is not her own act of deception that brings Siegfried in, but his, causing the confusion that troubles her and which will not let go of her until she receives answers about the disjunction between events in the past and his status in the present.

Despite Siegfried's initial unwillingness to accept the invitation and travel to Worms,<sup>38</sup> he follows the advice of his men and gladly rides to Burgonden, with no sense that there is anything amiss in the land. But what is most interesting about the interconnection of Siegfried and Brünhild at this point in the work is what one might variously call the Xantener's naïveté, foolhardiness, general disinterest, or overestimation of himself with respect to his unawareness of any harm that may come to him in response to the deception he led against the queen of Isenstein. At least when it comes to Brünhild, the audience might expect him to be on his guard, waiting for the trickery to come to light, especially when he is now a king of Xanten fully independent of Gunther. Instead he suspects nothing, and his gift of the ring and belt to Kriemhild shows that he is not in the least concerned that his prior escapades will catch up to him. In contrast, when Gunther considers his sister's invitation to Etzel's land Hagen pleads with him to avoid the trip: "nu lât iuch niht betriegen [. . .] swes si jehen, / die boten von den Hiunen. welt ir Kriemhilde sehen, / ir muget dâ wol verliesen die êre und ouch den lîp" (1461,1-3). Hagen, now fully attuned to deception, sees a threat for past injuries where Siegfried sees none.

It should not be forgotten that Siegfried has been the perpetrator up until now, he has always been on the offensive, ranging from his arrival in Worms, his defeat of the Danes and Saxons, and his conquest of Brünhild – he has never been challenged and has never fallen into the role of the victim. A possible reading of the *Leerstelle* concerning why he is not wary of retaliation from Brünhild is that all of his successes seem to fill him with confidence and a sense

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<sup>38</sup> His excuse is the same as Gunther's, that the distance between the two lands is too great. These arguments against the trip additionally stress to the audience the complete independence of these two men, in contrast to Brünhild's insistence that they should be tightly bound, thus stressing her complete lack of knowledge about reality and the disadvantages placed on her by her foreignness.



of invincibility, although such a psychological process is not fully elaborated by the author or narrator.<sup>39</sup> He also takes no note of the times that he has sparked Hagen's displeasure or anger. Furthermore, the deception of Isenstein was aimed at a complete foreigner, and Siegfried's prior integration into the Burgundian court and his marriage to Kriemhild grants him membership in the culture of Worms and perhaps the comfort that accompanies being part of the inner circle of the court, although he does not realize how he has been sidelined from that group. Siegfried's indifferent attitude may also have to do with this renewed status as a foreigner: he is unaware of the effects his own presence has had on the Burgundians. Because of his physical separation from Worms and the resulting gaps in his knowledge after he and his wife move back to Xanten, he cannot react to the threat posed by Brünhild since he does not know that one exists: "Siegfried trifft auf Verhaltensweisen, die ihm völlig fremd sind, denen er nicht zu begegnen weiß, da er nicht imstande ist, sie zu erkennen."<sup>40</sup> Or, as Bernard Willson puts it, the separation of the couple from life in Burgonden means that the couple has moved away from its culture, or, in his terminology, the Burgundian "*mâze und fuoge* is no longer hers [and by extension her husband's]."<sup>41</sup> His physical separation from the Burgundian inner circle isolates him and leaves him vulnerable to the scheming of Hagen and his enablers.

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<sup>39</sup> There are brief glimpses of his pride, including in the application of adjectives like "stolz" and substantives like "übermüete" to the Xantener, but no in-depth exploration of this side of his character. Kriemhild voices her concern about Siegfried's remarkable self-assurance to Hagen before he deploys in the fabricated battle: "ich wære ân' alle sorge [. . .] / daz im iemen næme in sturme sînen lîp, / ob er niht wolde volgen sîner übermuot" (896,1-3).

<sup>40</sup> Göhler, 109.

<sup>41</sup> Bernard Willson, 96.

## The Execution of the Murder Plot

Gunther finally assents to the murderous plot only when he learns that Hagen has a plan that can take care of two issues: Siegfried's amazing strength and the maintenance of the secrecy of the murder plot. And of course Hagen offers a familiar method to achieve these ends: subterfuge in the form of a fake war. The resulting production rivals Siegfried's machinations on Isenstein in their intricacy and grandiosity.<sup>42</sup> The ruse includes a contingent of thirty men that declares war against Burgonden on behalf of the Saxons and Danes, a ploy to force Kriemhild to divulge the Xantener's one vulnerable point, Gunther and his men faking despondency,<sup>43</sup> two men who announce that peace again reigns, a hunting party that is missing the requisite wine, a race to a spring to cool the hunters' thirst, a story about robbers to cover it all up (again, the language here echoes that of Siegfried's command that the entire party on Isenstein should say that he is Gunther's "man"), and relentless claims of innocence on the part of the conspirators.<sup>44</sup> Just a glance at this list makes it unquestionable that Hagen is now the master of deception in the work and has completely surpassed Siegfried in guile: "Where Siegfried and his eleven fellow 'players' sufficed to challenge the collective might of Burgundy, Hagen, as befits the enormous gravity and difficulty of his deception, requires a cast of hundreds to betray the unsuspecting hero."<sup>45</sup> Every step is constructed to ensure that the true motivations of Hagen and the Burgundian inner circle remain concealed from Siegfried and all others, and as well to render

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<sup>42</sup> Peter Strohschneider's analysis of the wooing quest schemata illustrates the episodic and repetitive (with variation) nature of the text, which is quite visible in the relationship between the schemes to best Brünhild and to murder Siegfried.

<sup>43</sup> This is a mirror image of the "trûren" that attracted Siegfried's attention earlier in the work, a sign of their awareness of his tendencies and the impact of past events on current decisions and actions.

<sup>44</sup> "Si buten vaste ir lougen," 1043,1.

<sup>45</sup> Kerth, 154. Even after Siegfried's death, Hagen continues to utilize his wiliness, inventing a "site" of Burgonden that his lords bear arms during the first three days of a celebration (1863,2-3), but his real intention is to leave them prepared for an attack by Etzel's men.

Siegfried defenseless. Even more, all of Burgonden outside of the group of conspirators suffers alienation from the facts of this monumental development in its history. While the war and Isenstein deceptions may have the same ends, leaving the two intended targets helpless, their degrees of complexity differ greatly and trace the evolution of the presentation of deception in the work. Despite its intricacy, however, the war deception is no more successful in the long term than the one devised against Brünhild. The details of Siegfried's death, as well-planned as it is, come to light and exact a fearsome toll on the Burgundians, just as Siegfried suffers from the well-executed Isenstein scheme.

Siegfried has even less reason to suspect anything is amiss with the war declaration than with the invitation from the king and queen of Burgonden. The reason is that it appeals to attributes in him that the Burgundians know: he has proved his loyalty and honesty to Gunther and his men, he has consistently displayed boundless bravery, and he has shown a willingness to assist Gunther with any troubles. Hagen's scheme, and its success in the short term, once again illustrates that past behavior is an excellent predictor for future actions when Siegfried reacts exactly as expected. Gunther again plays along with the deception being perpetrated. In order to capture Siegfried's attention and get him concerned about the oncoming war, he and his co-conspirators feign sadness. Siegfried sees them and asks "wie gât sô trûreclîche der künic und sîne man?" (883,3) Gunther for the first time in the text, and since the shift in Burgundian culture, separates his internal state from his external appearance. He has again been asked to project a world that does not exist, and he plays his part perfectly, entrapping Siegfried in his resumed foreignness.

Hagen likewise preys upon Kriemhild's own social alienation in order to discover the point of vulnerable flesh on her husband's body. Protecting and watching out for loved ones or

associates is a normal and expected act in Burgonden, as seen when Kriemhild asks Siegfried to take care of her brother on Isenstein or when Hagen warns Gunther that he should not travel to Etzel's land. Taking advantage of this fact, Hagen prompts her by asking what he can do for Siegfried before combat, a fully expectable and welcome gesture on his part: "Wenn [...] Kriemhild Hagen das Geheimnis um Siegfried preisgibt, handelt sie nicht naiv, sondern baut auf das *triuwe*-Ethos des verwandtschaftlich strukturierten Personenverbandes."<sup>46</sup> Hagen then dissembles, telling Kriemhild she should fear for her husband's life. For that reason he insists that she reveal to him how he could safeguard the Xantener's life. Because mutual assistance is a marker of Burgundian culture and to be expected, his probing questions arouse no suspicion in Kriemhild, despite her recent fight with Brünhild and an awareness that it might awaken in her the desire for revenge: "er'n sol des niht engelten, hab' ich Prünhilde iht getân" (893,4). She experiences no surprise or suspicion, only gratitude. Her lack of suspicion may reflect the fact that Hagen has no reputation for deceit. But of course Kriemhild has remained socially alienated because she has not been exposed to the deliberations of the Burgundian inner circle. Thus the social disadvantages of her gender allow her to be duped, which leads to Siegfried succumbing to the practice of deception he modeled for the powerful of Worms.

After Siegfried is murdered, the attempt to maintain secrecy continues when Hagen orders his body brought back to Kriemhild's quarters: "er hiez in tougenlîchen legen an die tür" (1004,1). With that, the plot has ended, but not its consequences. For example, Gernot later tells a departing Siegmund: "got weiz daz wol von himele, an Sîfrides tô / gewan ich nie die schulde, daz ich daz hôrte sagen, / wer im hie vîent wære" (1097,2-4). This outright lie – Gernot was present at the discussion whether to murder Siegfried, along with Giselher and Ortwin –

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<sup>46</sup> Quast, 298.

demonstrates that reliance on subterfuge has impacted the highest rungs of Burgundian society: “Die Wormser sind offensichtlich eher gegen die Ermordung, werden aber durch ihr Nicht-Agieren zu Mitläufern.”<sup>47</sup> The ability of Gernot, previously the voice of reason during Siegfried’s advent, to utter this blasphemous fabrication without difficulty speaks to the complete transformation of Burgundian culture with respect to how it is initially presented in the text, which is especially striking after the narrator has just recounted how Gernot and Giseler empathize with Siegmund for the loss of his son: “in was sîn schade leit” (1096,3). The combination of this sentiment with that statement represents an unspoken implication of the highest rungs of Burgundian leadership in a murderous enterprise.

### **Kriemhild’s Revenge and the New Culture of Burgonden**

Kriemhild, as a woman and the wife of the man targeted for murder, is of course fully alienated from the plotting taking place within the highest reaches of Burgundian society. She knows very little about what has taken place since her brother and wooing party left Worms for the shores of Îslant. All she does know for sure is that there was some kind of contact between Siegfried and Brünhild. And she knows that Brünhild believes Siegfried to be an “eigen” of Gunther, but has no idea why she would think that. Hagen’s ability to fool her into revealing the one vulnerable point of her husband is the quintessence of her own alienation from the court, her own foreignness. Two factors are at work here: her sex prevents her from being privy to the deliberations of the male principals of the kingdom,<sup>48</sup> and the changes heralded by Siegfried, the

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<sup>47</sup> Maren Jönsson, “Verspielte Alternativen im Nibelungenlied” *Studia Neophilologica* 73 (2001): 223-237, here 232.

<sup>48</sup> This is reminiscent of the lack of illumination of the lies that Kriemhild and Brünhild in the oath scene. “Was eigentlich bestraft wird [in the beating of Kriemhild], ist der Versuch der Frauen, an ein ihnen verbotenes Wissen zu rühren” Robles, 368.

divorcing of reality from deed, have not yet come to her attention – she is the last member of the Burgundian court initiated into this transformation. Siegfried himself never becomes aware of the changes his own presence foretold until the moment of his death.

When Hagen dupes Kriemhild into disclosing her husband's weak point, *list* has turned to *meinrât*. The narrator comments: “ich wæne immer recke deheiner mêt getuot / sô grôzer meinræte, sô dâ von im ergie, / dô sich an sine triuwe Kriemhilt diu kûneginne lie” (906,2-4).<sup>49</sup> The term indicates an act of treachery, primarily sacrificing the trust (*triuwe*) inherent in the blood connection between Kriemhild and her brothers and the bond with the others at court, the *vriunde*.<sup>50</sup> Secondly, the disloyal act carried out by Hagen scorns the *triuwe* built up between Siegfried and the Burgonden by virtue of mutual *dienest* and marriage.<sup>51</sup> Prior to the targeting of Kriemhild and Siegfried, acts of subterfuge had been directed at cultural foreigners or affected members of the same culture incidentally. With this newly begun scheme, deception has ruptured the closest bonds in the text. And the narrator emphasizes this changed approach to guile with an expression of moral outrage<sup>52</sup> and other changes in tone, all reflective of an abhorrence of the destruction to the social fibers of Burgonden it brings in its wake. Emerging at the same as this word for the representation of deception are the terms “untriuwe” (76,2; 915,4; and 916,2) and “ungetriuwe,” the former a marker for deeds of disloyalty and the latter a word

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<sup>49</sup> This is one of only two instances of *meinrât* in the Nibelungenlied, the first time being an adjectival substantive describing the messengers who bring the news of the fake war declaration to Gunther. As for the entire MHG corpus, it is only also found in *Dietrichs Flucht* (2561, 2900, 4211). Lexer and Benecke also note its appearance in a twelfth-century sermon.

<sup>50</sup> “Unter den *vriunden* sind die *mâgen*, die Verwandten, besonders herausgehoben, ohne daß die Abgrenzung bei jeder Figur völlig klar ware,” Jan-Dirk Müller, *Spielregeln*, 154.

<sup>51</sup> In stanza 692 all three Burgundian kings pledge to Siegfried their service in “triuwe” until death. Siegfried echoes this verbalization of trust in stanza 748, stating that he trusts the Burgundian relatives “alsô man vriunden sol” (2). Of note is that Hagen is neither present for these exchange nor is his name mentioned.

<sup>52</sup> According to Grosse, “Der Dichter nimmt eindeutig negativ Stellung zu Hagens Tat, die ihm ungeheuerlich erscheint,” 823.

representing those acting disloyally, i.e. Gunther (887,3) and Hagen (911,4).<sup>53</sup> The narrator's persistent negative assessment of the behavior of Hagen and his accomplices in the latter part of the work represents a sweeping reevaluation of *list* in the *Nibelungenlied*. The climax of the negative aftermath when *Sein* and *Schein* are forced apart in the murder of Siegfried arrives when a woman who has been continually hampered and harmed by her separation from the court due to her sex gives the schemers their comeuppance by appropriating their own methods of oppression and deception.

Whereas the Burgundians engage in "meinrât," Kriemhild, when she uses the same methods, is depicted as a "valandîne," a term that Robles suggests signifies the purely negative results of female use of knowledge.<sup>54</sup> Her transformation from victim to perpetrator begins in stanza 1008, which depicts her process of inferring the connection between the body of her husband propped against her door and an earlier encounter with Hagen: "an die Hagenen vrâge denken sie began, / wie er in solde vristen/ dô wart ir êrste leit" (2-3). In the course of her reflection she fuses the reality and the appearance rent asunder by Hagen. For the first time in the text, she has access to all information about the deception, from the goal (Siegfried's death) to the artifice intended to deliver that goal without an implication of guilt (the revelation of Siegfried's vulnerable spot and manufactured war). Even without the confirmation of the bleeding body, Kriemhild recognizes who murdered her husband, but most importantly, how that murder was engineered, the first time she has been able to peek behind the curtain of an act of guile. This leads to the awareness of the effectiveness of deceit in Kriemhild, as it does when the

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<sup>53</sup> Earlier in the text, the flaws of the Burgundians are captured in the term "übermuot." Yet this word is much vaguer in terms of its communication of a judgment of the act on Isenstein than "meinrât" is in this context. What makes "meinrât" especially critical is its embedding in language that singles out its matchlessness in the annals of *Reckentum*.

<sup>54</sup> "Wissen, das nicht mehr Teil der männlich-heroischen Wissens- und Handlungseinheit ist, erweist sich nur noch als zerstörerisch oder nutzlos," Robles, 374.

Burgundians witness the power of dissembling on Isenstein. Two stanzas later, she has been able to trace the plot back to Brünhild and realizes by stanza 1046 that Gunther was also involved.<sup>55</sup> But it is Hagen from whom she wishes to exact revenge,<sup>56</sup> and to do so she herself develops an intricate plan: “Kriemhilt wird zur Handelnden, und sie will ihr Wissen in der öffentlich-männlichen Ordnung manifestieren.”<sup>57</sup> She garners the admiration of Etzel’s and her own men, all of whom will later battle the visiting Burgonden, and preys upon the good will of her husband to convince him to invite them for a visit. Etzel, untouched by a fear of deception, yields to her wishes, thereby delivering himself and the Burgundians into the hands of a now guileful Kriemhild. She has made Etzel a “social” foreigner in his own land because he cannot foresee the impending cataclysm for his ignorance of Kriemhild’s intentions. And with one exception the Burgundians, unaware of Kriemhild’s plans and her growing status in Etzel’s land, are fully alienated, both by the metamorphosis of Kriemhild and their ignorance about the world of Etzel. Their physical and informational separation from Etzel’s kingdom prevent them from realizing that “der Racheplan ist [...] bei allem, was Kriemhild tut, durchgängig präsent: bei der Einwilligung zur Heirat mit Etzel, beim perfekten Rollenspiel in der neuen königlichen Funktion, beim Aufbau der Macht über 13 Jahre hin.”<sup>58</sup>

Gunther welcomes the invitation to visit Kriemhild and her husband, an indication that he remains ignorant of the power of deceit and does not realize that it has infected Burgundian culture, spreading to his sister. Hagen, in his role as master deceiver and possessor of strong

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<sup>55</sup> Kriemhild still does not experience full enlightenment as to the plot against her husband. She accepts Gernot’s advice to stay in Worms rather than to travel to Worms, because, as he says, “si sint iu alle vremde” (1082,1). This is an exercise in grand irony, as Gernot was privy to the discussion to murder Siegfried. In truth, the Burgundians are foreign to her because of the ignorance of critical events to which she had been relegated.

<sup>56</sup> See 1396,4.

<sup>57</sup> Robles, 369.

<sup>58</sup> Haug, “Montage,” 280.



perceptive ability, can sense that Kriemhild may have something malicious planned. Hagen again uses inferences to predict the future, linking the murder of Kriemhild's husband to the proposed trip: "wie getorste wir gerîten in daz Etzelen lant?" (1459,4) But it is not only Gunther who is trapped by Kriemhild's ploy, ignorant of his own victimization: the king asks for advice from "die besten" of his kingdom, but it is only Hagen who has reservations.<sup>59</sup> But the warnings fail to convince Gunther to remain in Worms, and Kriemhild's plotting succeeds as the Burgundians are swept up in a grand scheme of portentous nature as Siegfried was before them.

### **Postscript: Etzel's Kingdom as a Mirror to Occidental Regionalism in the *Nibelungenlied***

Until the death of Siegfried, the *Nibelungenlied*'s action is set in regions that have some correspondence to Latin Christendom in terms of geography and an aspect of common culture, i.e., Christianity. Despite this, as has been shown, foreignness does impact and drive many important junctures of the text. But with Kriemhild's involvement with Etzel, a world is depicted that bears unmistakable characteristics of cultural foreignness. As Kragl puts it, "Der Osten [war] zweifellos die Heimat der meisten fremden Elemente mittelalterlicher Vorstellungswelten."<sup>60</sup> In the latter portion of the *Nibelungenlied*, foreignness is no longer portrayed implicitly but becomes a major topic for the narrator and a point of discussion for the characters. It also serves as a counterpoint to the courts portrayed in the first half of the work, relativizing their differences in the face of a world of marked exoticism. At the same time, Etzel's multicultural court shows the efficacy of people of different backgrounds peacefully interacting and integrating themselves in contrast to the fate of Siegfried (no mention is made of

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<sup>59</sup> Later the text's recipients learn that Rumold twice warns against the journey, one instance in a strange reintroduction of his character (1517-1518).

<sup>60</sup> Kragl, 107.

a Siegfried-like tragedy occurring in Etzel's land). Although Etzel's court is outwardly shown as quite foreign and culturally diverse with respect to Worms and Xanten, it is well-functioning until Western foreigners that avail themselves of deception are introduced into it and lead to its destruction and the fall of the Burgundians themselves.

The Burgundian court's dealings with Etzel's kingdom reveal that it is the epitome of the culturally foreign in the text and that all levels of cultural difference can be measured against it, casting a light on the first half of the work as depicting interactions of far less cultural distance. The dialectical opposition of the Burgonden and other courts to Etzel's is the work's primary example of Waldenfels' notion of structural, or cultural, foreignness.<sup>61</sup> The primary aspect that bonds the various centers of power in the first half of the work is religion – although not overly prominent, it is clear from depictions and from negative evidence (the word *heiden* does not appear in the first part<sup>62</sup>) that Christianity is the common religion of the region, as ironically is indicated in the setting of the disagreement between the two queens: the cathedral, the Christian place of worship. The irony is in the minimal influence of Christian ethics on their behavior, but the social/cultural statement remains. Etzel's world, however, is quite different in this aspect, and his heathendom is of such unusualness to Kriemhild that she nearly turns down his offer of marriage. And even Etzel himself acknowledges that the difference in religion is an issue, suggesting a strong awareness of a major divide between the Christian world and non-Christian Etzel's world.

Religion plays no real part in the first half of the epic poem, suggesting a cultural bond of the major characters – Brünhild, Siegfried, Kriemhild, and Gunther all attend church. But in the

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<sup>61</sup> Waldenfels, *Topographie*, 36.

<sup>62</sup> The only exception to this occurs in stanza 580 of ms. C, in which the clothing of Burgundian women is described as being from heathen lands.

second half of the work, the tension between Christianity and heathendom becomes a topic of conversation and concern. Etzel worries that Kriemhild will not want to marry him because he is not a Christian: “wie möchte daz ergân, / sît ich bin ein heiden unt des toufes niht enhân?” (1145,1-2). Because of his faith, i.e., the fact that he is not a Christian, Etzel’s first reaction that he marry Siegfried’s wife is that such a union would be “ein wunder” (1145,4) if it happened because she is a Christian and he is a heathen who has not been baptized, and for that reason he presumes she would not acquiesce. He rightly assumes that this major cultural difference could hamper any marriage to a Christian Kriemhild. This is an explicit discussion of cultural difference, and the difficulties it brings with it, not seen in the *Nibelungenlied* prior to Siegfried’s death. And indeed, it is a problem for Kriemhild, who reveals to Rüdiger that she would go if he were not a heathen. Interestingly, the knight tries to assuage her concern by stating that Etzel is surrounded by Christian men, so “daz iu bî dem künige / nimmer wirdet wê” (1261,1-2). Rüdiger here seems to suggest that the source of Kriemhild’s difficulty in accepting Etzel’s hand lies not so much in the fact that Etzel is a heathen, but that such a fact leads her to assume that the culture that surrounds him is completely heathen and thus quite unfamiliar to her. His counterargument calls on the fact that numerous exiled Christians who have found refuge there and might provide more familiar cultural surroundings for Kriemhild. But religion does count in the eyes of Kriemhild, since in stanza 1248 she says that if she gave herself to a heathen, it would be a “schande,” and only agrees to marry Etzel after the knight from Bechelaren has said he will assuage any injuries to Kriemhild and her brothers implore her to accept the proposal.

What is so striking in the mutual concerns of Etzel and Kriemhild about their religious differences is that no such worries come up when Siegfried considers wooing Kriemhild and Gunther Brünhild. They do not worry that there may be a cultural barrier that would complicate

a match, the only concern of the men is the excellence of their love interests' beauty, an individual trait free of any connection to culture.

The mutability of one's culture is expressed when Rüdiger suggests that she might convince Etzel to let himself be baptized. In such a way, cultural difference can be overcome, but it is nevertheless present and palpable in the interactions between the Burgundians and the easterners. One example of this is the religious practices of the two groups. When they attend services at the cathedral of Etzel – on its face a common activity – irreconcilable differences between the Christians and heathens are exposed in song: “Si sungen ungelîche, daz dâ vil wol schein, / kristen unde heiden, die waren niht enein” (1851,1-2).

Ironically, the western world, which has been portrayed in the work as being composed of different centers of power and riven by alienation fostered by distance and uneven levels of information and knowledge, is now, in the face of the radically foreign world of Etzel, totalized with the substantive “kristen.” A similar amalgamation of previously separate kingdoms occurs when the narrator refers to the Burgundians as Nibelungen in stanza 1523. Here previously separate groups are suggested to be blending into each other, just as Siegfried, a Xantener, became a part of the Burgundian court. According to Jan-Dirk Müller, this terminology suggests that the Burgundians have incorporated various elements of the first half of the text. The term Burgonden is used when the courtliness of the men of Worms is touted, but Nibelungen when they are engaged in combat: “Der Name bezeichnet sie als die Träger der heroischen Handlung.”<sup>63</sup> In this way, the text suggests that while difference exists in an occidental context, the cultural separation between East and West is of an order higher.

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<sup>63</sup> Jan-Dirk Müller, *Spielregeln*, 341.

In addition to the heathendom of Etzel, a multiculturalism exists in his land that is striking in comparison to the first half of the text, in which people from other realms live in Worms but not to the degree of Etzel's kingdom, where he is surrounded by many warriors from different regions. Ethnic differences become a very big part of this description of his land, lending it distinctiveness not found in the description of the other courts in the work. Fighters from many different lands have flocked to his kingdom because his court is so famous, resulting in Christian and heathen knights from places far and wide like Russia, Greece, and Walachia bringing with them a colorful array of languages and customs. The variety of cultures shows itself in the different riding styles of the different groups of men: "swaz si site hêten, der wart vil wênic vermiten" (1339,4). And while in Tulln, Kriemhild is exposed to many foreign customs with which she had not had contact: "dâ wart ir bekant / vil manic site vremede, den si ê nie gesach" (1341,2-3).

But for all of the aspects of foreignness presented in the second half of the *Nibelungenlied*, this is just a surface feature of the text, as the foreignness that counts in the second half is that which has developed between Kriemhild and the rest of the Burgundian kingdom. Being in a foreign land far away keeps secret her longings for revenge, and at the same time Etzel's separation from all that has taken place in the West allows him to become a weapon in her plan for revenge. Etzel's culture is just the scene of the destruction of the world of the *Nibelungenlied*, despite the fact that it is much more elaborately detailed and more exotic than the cultures that share aspects of Latin Christendom are in the first half of the work. While people who live in the East are involved in the fight against the Burgundians, they do not cause it. It is a westerner, Kriemhild, who has the ability to split *Schein* from *Sein*, who presents a threat to both spheres of the *Nibelungenlied* world. Characters such as Etzel do not engage in

such deception – he is a generous, kind lord who just wishes the best for his guests and his wife. Etzel, by virtue of his everyday alienation from the true wishes of Kriemhild, cannot perceive the harm which she conspires to commit against her relatives: “er niene wesse vil manigen argen list, / den sît diu küneginne an ir mâgen begie” (1754,2-3).

But while Etzel’s kingdom receives a much more traditional description of the foreign world of the eastern “Ökumene,” as Kragl terms the Orient (it is superficially reminiscent of the Gahmuret episode in *Parzival* in terms of its discussion of religious difference), it is not cultural foreignness that leads to the clash of the two worlds, but of social and the “alltägliche” foreignness that can occur within cultures and tear them apart as in the events that lead to the death of Siegfried. There is nothing specific in the multicultural, heathen culture of Etzel’s kingdom that causes the clash of civilizations that concludes the *Nibelungenlied*. Etzel’s kingdom has the trappings of the foreign, but it is the alienation of Kriemhild from Etzel and his men as well as the Burgundians that sets the stage for the massive bloodletting that follows. Kriemhild’s manipulation of Etzel and the Burgundians is a critical issue in the final half of the *Nibelungenlied*, and, not surprisingly, it emerges from foreignness.

## CONCLUSION

In a recent study of the Early Middle Ages, Christopher Wickham takes aim at the two main paradigms that have driven historical research on the period, lambasting them for their way of using the past rather than understanding it. The one seeks origins in the Middle Ages, be they of specific countries, or even the concept of Europe itself. The other interprets the period beginning in the late eleventh century as “a continuous succession of tides, advancing ever further up the beach of Progress.”<sup>1</sup> Wickham calls for a history free of such grand narratives, as “every period in history has its own identity and legitimacy, which must be seen without hindsight.”<sup>2</sup> Both are forms of Biddick’s concept of presentism, reading the past for the meanings it has for today.

This interpretation of the *Nibelungenlied* has attempted to eschew presentism insofar as it is possible to present a reading of the text on its own account in order to reveal how it depicts notions of foreignness. It is not an attempt to shed light on the present or understand how our present has come to be, but rather see the *Nibelungenlied* as a work from a particular time and period that has critical things to say about the subject.

At its most basic, the *Nibelungenlied* depicts how structural, but possibly more importantly, quotidian or everyday foreignness exists in a fictional world that recalls some aspects of the Latin Christendom where the text was produced and consumed. Quite clearly the text envisions a Christian world that is rife with foreignness at all levels. Regardless of the specific nature of the foreignness that separates characters in the *Nibelungenlied*, these instances of alienation all have a common result: a lack of a complete picture of the world for individual

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<sup>1</sup> *The Inheritance of Rome: Illuminating the Dark Ages, 400-1000* (New York: Viking, 2009) 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

characters and the prevention of close human connections that would allow intentions and motivations to be divined.

In the first half of the text, matters of the foreign are not described as obviously as in the clear contrast between Orient and Occident in the second half of the work. The move to Etzel's kingdom reveals a Western half of the *Nibelungenlied* world that is nominally unified under the banner of religion, a unity that nevertheless is undermined by social foreignness in the case of Kriemhild's deception of her brothers. While we cannot know how precisely the text's account of foreignness corresponds to conditions in contemporary Latin Christendom, it does show us that those involved in the development of the text considered the complications that arose from foreignness, although whether or not that was a conscious or subconscious process on the part of those who composed the text will never be known.

The *Nibelungenlied*'s vision of the occidental world is not marked by structural differences on the order of the East, where heathenism and multiculturalism reign, but important divisions did exist, and in this text that is expressed by individual characters and their inherent difficulties in crossing cultural borders and even in understanding their fellow humans. On the other hand, aspects of cultural universalism do exist in the West. The practice of Christianity by those from western courts is one of the things that becomes clear with the second half of the work, as heathendom is set against the Christian world. Christianity received quite limited attention in the beginning of the *Nibelungenlied* and acts as more of a cultural subtext than an important factor in everyday life. It exists in the background, but does not come into prominence until it is faced with its own "other," that of heathendom.

Despite the universalism of the Church in the first half of the text, the *Nibelungenlied* provides a medieval interpretation of the precarious position individuals are placed in when the



crossing of cultural boundaries is involved or even when gender or circumstances does not allow them to be privy to the intentions and plans of groups that may mean them harm. In the *Nibelungenlied*, foreignness and the ignorance it generates open the door to deception, which by the second half of the work has been negatively conceived as *meinrât* after having spread like a virus from character to character. In the work subterfuge aimed at foreigners develops from a method of achieving an end that receives little attention as to its morality to one that is a shocking crime of disloyalty. The first significant victim of Siegfried's guile, Brünhild, is ripped from her role as a legitimate ruler and placed in the position of a wife lied to by her husband and manipulated until she disappears from the text. But despite all of her suffering, neither the narrator nor any other character questions the methods used to subjugate the queen of Isenstein and use her for their own purposes, all of which indicates the corrupting power of splitting *Sein* from *Schein*. On the other hand, the narrator highly disapproves of Siegfried's murder, and what was once an acceptable practice becomes something morally reprehensible because it blatantly disregards his close bonds to the Burgundian court as a *vriund* and *mâge*. Kriemhild's employment of deception is depicted as equally shameful. Those who have been swept up in the new Burgundian culture heralded by the arrival of Siegfried fully lose their bearings as to the integrity and honor of their deeds.<sup>3</sup> By designating deception against relatives as *meinrât*, the narrator guides the audience's moral interpretation of deceit enabled by foreignness, since the

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<sup>3</sup> One sole voice speaking out against the treachery that is taking place is Siegmund: "sît daz uns untriuwe âne hât getân / hie in disen landen des iuvern edeln man, / des sult ir niht engelten" (1074,1-3). He is able to perceive the horror of what is taking place because of his separation from this new Burgundian culture.

agents of those lies do not perceive their own wrongs and their ignorance of these crimes threatens to cast a pall of moral ambiguity over the entire work.<sup>4</sup>

If the world of the *Nibelungenlied* portrayed a world in which structural foreignness did not exist, there would be far fewer gaps in knowledge and perception that could be exploited by creating a wedge between *Sein* and *Schein*. Despite the fact that the text is quite the opposite, the *Nibelungenlied* is no way a condemnation of cultural variation or a plea for homogeneity, as is evident in the contentment that prevails in the multicultural world of Etzel's court before Kriemhild's arrival. Instead, the injustices committed against foreigners in its verses stand as a warning of the dangers inherent in human difference. As Waldenfels notes, every human interaction carries with it the possibility of encountering the foreign. And in the *Nibelungenlied*, that means that every character has the potential to fully veil malicious intentions.

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<sup>4</sup> Siegfried never blames his murders for treachery, only referring denigrating them for their subterfuge because it makes them out to be "böesen zagen" (989,1).

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