

The Ambiguity of Otherness in Adaptations of the Nibelungen Myth:  
*Das Nibelungenlied* and Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen*

by

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B.A., University of Victoria, 2008

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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**Abstract**

Over eight hundred years ago anonymous poets set the orally transmitted Nibelungen myth to parchment. This action started a trend of adapting the myth for contemporary audiences, a trend that has lasted since the High Middle Ages. Since then, the Nibelungen myth has become a sustaining element of the self-mythologization of German national identity. The problem, however, with adapting the Nibelungen myth for the purpose of creating a German identity, be it in the medieval epic, the *Nibelungenlied*, or Fritz Lang's 1924 film, *Die Nibelungen*, is that this model of identification is flawed – flawed because it consists of systematic binary divisions positing self-other dichotomies. What becomes evident is that in the adaptations of Nibelungen myth, the representations of alterity are contradictory and ambiguous, provoking the question: why is the Nibelungen myth an effective source from which one can project a national identity?

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# Introduction

Over eight hundred years ago anonymous poets set an orally transmitted epic tale to parchment. The *Nibelungenlied* describes the death of the dragon-slaying hero, Siegfried, the revenge of his death by his wife Kriemhild, and the downfall of the entire Burgundian clan – Kriemhild's own kin. There has been much speculation over where, by whom and when the story was transcribed.<sup>1</sup> However, we can make the educated estimation based on the surviving manuscripts that the texts originated in the vicinity of Lake Constance in the period around 1200 (Schulze, *Nibelungenlied* 34). But Nibelungen mythology is not limited to the German-speaking area; in fact, it has its roots in Nordic mythology as well, as evident in the *Eddalieder* and *Thiðrekssaga* (Martin 44-45). Whereas the Nordic tradition is comprised of individual elements appearing in multiple manuscripts,<sup>2</sup> the way in which the various branches of Nibelungen mythology are woven together into a cohesive whole makes the *Nibelungenlied* unique when compared to the non-Germanic strains of the myth. Moreover, in a period when the majority of German courtly literature was adapted from non-German written sources on the subjects of either King Arthur and his knights or the Trojan War,<sup>3</sup> the *Nibelungenlied* innovatively draws on orally transmitted indigenous material (Schulze, *Nibelungenlied* 19-20). Based on the sheer number of manuscripts containing the epic, it is presumed that the *Nibelungenlied*

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<sup>1</sup> These questions of authorship, location, and date of inception of the *Nibelungenlied* are addressed thoroughly by Nibelungen scholars such as Joachim Heinzle, in *Das Nibelungenlied*, Ursula Schulze in *Das Nibelungenlied*, and Hermann Reichert in *Nibelungenlied und Nibelungensage* among others.

<sup>2</sup> For a concise overview of the Nordic Nibelungen tradition see Otfried Ehrismann *Nibelungenlied: Epoche – Werk – Wirkung* (51-53) and Bernhard Martin *Nibelungen-Metamorphosen: Die Geschichte eines Mythos* (40-67).

<sup>3</sup> Examples of texts stemming from non-German sources can be seen in the Arthurian/Grail works *Erec and Iwein* by Hartmann von Aue, Gottfried von Straßbourg's *Tristan*, and Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* as well as Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneasroman*, which thematizes Greek and Roman antiquity.

enjoyed immense popularity following its inception. In fact, among surviving German manuscripts from the period, the *Nibelungenlied* is second only to Wolfram von Eschenbach's Arthurian works *Parzival* and *Willehalm* in quantity produced (Ehrismann 69). Furthermore, the *Nibelungenlied's* appearance in more than one version<sup>4</sup> during the period around 1200 testifies to the versatility of the myth to reflect the varying viewpoints of contemporary poets.

There have been many attempts to delineate the origins of the Nibelungen myth,<sup>5</sup> with the focus on finding, or reconstructing, what is considered the Holy Grail of Nibelungen research: the original Nibelungen text.<sup>6</sup> The motivation behind such efforts ultimately has been to explain what the scholarship calls "*Brüche*" – that is the gaps or inconsistencies in the narrative as a whole. One strategy to deal with the discrepancies in the narrative is to de-contextualize characters and/or plot lines by focusing on individual *Aventiure* or by focusing on structural elements.<sup>7</sup> I agree that some of these gaps can be attributed to the various sources of myth which make up the *Nibelungenlied*; however, I do not believe that this is the sole basis of textual contradiction, nor do I believe that the

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<sup>4</sup> The *Nibelungenlied* is categorized into two versions, demarcated by their last verses. A/B version: *daz ist der Nibelunge nôt* or C version: *daz ist der Nibelunge liet*.

<sup>5</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the various stages of the Nibelungen myth, see Andreas Heusler *Nibelungensage und Nibelungenlied*, Otfrid Ehrismann *Nibelungenlied: Epoche - Werk - Wirkung*, Bernhard Martin *Nibelungen-Metamorphosen: Die Geschichte eines Mythos*.

<sup>6</sup> Otfrid Ehrismann details the various *Nibelungenlied* stemmata set forth by Nibelungen scholars such as Karl Lachmann, Adolf Holtzmann, Karl Bartsch, and Wilhelm Braune in *Nibelungenlied: Epoche - Werk - Wirkung* (72-74).

<sup>7</sup> Jan-Dirk Müller argues that "[m]odern critics have generally reacted mostly selectively" (443). Peter Strohschneider, for example, focuses on the theme of courtship, reducing the characters involved to structural elements. Strohschneider argues that the breakdown of the structural model is the result of integrating the Gunther-Brunhild courtship into the overriding Siegfried stories (58). Lynn Thelen also approaches the bridal quests in the *Nibelungenlied* structurally: Thelen contrasts the third *Aventiure* with the sixth and seventh arguing that the "underlying structures are all but identical" but the human reactions differ producing alterity ("Bridal Quest" 146). However, the structure that Thelen suggests underplays the distinctions between the *höfisch* courtship done through *hohe minne* and archaic courtship undertaken in *recken wîse*. Both Strohschneider's and Thelen's observations of structural elements in the *Nibelungenlied* are in the right direction, but fail to address inconsistency and ambiguity.

"*Brüche*" show defects in the texts, but they rather point to an inherent, but necessary ambiguity in the myth itself.<sup>8</sup> It is in fact my contention that this ambiguity is responsible for the longevity of the myth, as it allows for creative literary license, which can at least in part account for the multiple adaptations and re-workings of the material since the High Middle Ages. In fact, the *Nibelungenlied* itself confirms this legacy of pliability as seen in the two diverging German versions of the myth, the *nôt* and *liet* versions, which emerged contemporaneously in the same geographical area.

My research deals with the following questions: Why myth? Specifically, why the Nibelungen myth? How is it that a myth that depicts death and destruction can be used as the basis for constructing national identity? What are the effects of ambiguity in adaptations of the Nibelungen myth? This thesis will address these questions and explore the ramifications of adapting the Nibelungen myth to fit certain socio-political milieus. I will focus in particular on two adaptations, those pertaining to the period around 1200 with respect to the *Nibelungenlied*, and the early twentieth century, up to and including the Weimar era in relation to Fritz Lang's silent film *Die Nibelungen*. I have chosen these two adaptations ultimately because they follow the German tradition of the myth, unlike Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, for example, which draws heavily on the Nordic tradition. Moreover, the *Nibelungenlied* was a major source for Lang's version of the Nibelungen story.<sup>9</sup> These two adaptations therefore follow a similar narrative structure, providing insight into the myth's evolution.

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<sup>8</sup> When discussing "*Brüche*," I am referring to gaps in the narrative and sections of the plot which are contradictory or illogical. Bernhard Martin notes that these gaps are a result of the combination of multiple "lays" ("*Liedern*") which make up the narrative in the first part of the *Nibelungenlied* (75). The gaps ultimately create ambiguity in the text because they undermine the binary model of identification put forward by the narrator/poet.

<sup>9</sup> Anton Kaes notes that the *Nibelungenlied* was canonical mandatory reading and was often illustrated for children. In fact, Lang based his design concept on a 1909 illustrated *Nibelungenlied* edition by Carl Otto

The *Nibelungenlied* (ca. 1200) begins with a reference to the "alten mæren" of a people in the process of nation building.<sup>10</sup> These "stories of old" intertwine both history and mythology and are presented in a light favourable to the societal norms and mores of the German aristocracy of the High Middle Ages. The collective nature of the cultural heritage intrinsic in the *Nibelungenlied* is markedly stressed from the first stanza on: "Uns ist in alten mæren wonders vil geseit" (NL 1, 1).<sup>11</sup> This emphasis on "Uns" highlights how a national "self" identity can be rooted in – and projected through – objects of cultural heritage. This is true of the period around 1200 as well as in more contemporary periods. In fact, for many modern European states, Germany included, national founding myths are rooted in the Middle Ages or notions of what the Middle Ages represent, and are often "accompanied by a literary work that was said to embody the national character like some kind of medieval national anthem *avant la lettre*" (Oostrom 6). If the Middle Ages evoke a sense of prehistory on which the fabric of modern nations is based, medieval literary works can be seen as an evocation of medieval societies' prehistory. Not only does the literature of the Middle Ages, specifically that stemming from the nobility, seek to situate medieval society within the broader history of its own development, it also depicts the past in a way that justifies its own existence. As

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Czeschka ("Shell Shock" 134-135). Lang's film culminates the transition of the myth from the oral-aural medium to the visual.

<sup>10</sup> Not only was this the period in which the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation was being founded, moreover this period saw the establishment of states, cloisters, and castles. One way in which nobility was able to control more land was to found cloisters (*Hauskloster*). From these cloisters came the majority of chaplains and other ecclesiastics, in addition to doctors, teachers, and architects (Bumke, *Höfische Kultur* 617), thus providing the apparatus for literary production. This period also saw an exponential rise in governmental declarations and documents indicating a sophistication of the governing administration. Bumke notes that correspondence from the *Reichskanzlei* (the imperial chancellery) grew from 300 documents between 1138 and 1152 to over 5000 documents between the years 1215 and 1250 (*Höfische Kultur* 625).

<sup>11</sup> I am citing *Das Nibelungenlied: Der Nibelunge Nôt* based on the text by Karl Bartsch and Helmut de Boor and translated into New High German by Siegfried Grosse. Hereafter, I will be citing Middle High German quotations by stanza and verse with the abbreviation "NL" and for New High German by stanza. "Uns wird in alten Erzählungen viel Wunderbares berichtet" (1).

Ursula Schulze notes, "[d]ie Literatur übernimmt in der aristokratischen Gesellschaft eine Reihe wichtiger Funktionen: Sie dient der Repräsentation, der Selbstdarstellung und Selbstreflexion, sie weist in die Geschichte zurück und stiftet Erinnerung"

(*Nibelungenlied* 13). The literary portrayal of courtly society thus offers a model of identification that justifies the nobility's way of life (Schulze, *Nibelungenlied* 13). In this way, literature, as a cultural product, serves as a tool to validate societies or nations. In the context of the *Nibelungenlied*, the Nibelungen myth was adapted to project or convey an idealized depiction of the societal norms of the German medieval nobility. What makes the Nibelungen myth so interesting in the German context is how often it is adapted and re-worked. A historically important moment of national renewal and crisis is the period following the First World War. As a product of this period, Lang's *Die Nibelungen* romanticizes this myth in order to situate Weimar Germany's origins in a mythological past. In fact, Lang's intention of making a Nibelungen film was to achieve national renewal by turning the "viewer's attention away from the nation's baleful recent history toward values enshrined in myth [...] *Nibelungen* would revive Germany's founding myth" (Kaes, *Shell Shock* 133).

I will discuss how the *Nibelungenlied* and the Nibelungen myth have been used to embody the notion that culture acts in a way that attempts to foster national identity. In the context of a German national identity, both past and present, the Nibelungen myth allows for fluidity in identification as there is no one fixed Nibelungen myth, but rather a multitude of variations. There is, however, similarity in how German medieval society shaped the Nibelungen myth to fit and articulate its value systems and social structure, as seen in the literary production of the *Nibelungenlied*, and how modern German

interpretations and adaptations shape the topic matter congruent to their contemporary norms and social transformations. This is the case with Wagner's *Ring der Nibelungen*, Lang's *Die Nibelungen*, or more recently in Michael Verhoeven's film *The Nasty Girl* (Levin 145)<sup>12</sup> and Uli Edel's 2004 production *Ring of the Nibelungs* (IMDB).<sup>13</sup> The problem lies herein: in the *Nibelungenlied* there are no unambiguous value systems, but rather projected idealizations of norms and values that ultimately prove to be unsustainable and contradictory. The multifarious nature of the Nibelungen myth, in conjunction with the discrepancy between the times in which the work is narrated (*erzählte Zeit*) and its narrative time (*Erzählzeit*), allows for inherent contradictions in its adaptations. For example, the *Nibelungenlied* is in itself a battleground in which the archaic content clashes with the courtly presentation. Moreover, in the *Nibelungenlied*, history collides with myth, the foreign encounters the familiar, and one gender rivals the other.<sup>14</sup> These diametrically opposed binaries lead to a model of identification based on alterity. However, in the context of the *Nibelungenlied*, these dichotomies are contradictory and ambiguous. The *Nibelungenlied* presents what is intrinsically Burgundian and yet conversely is ambiguous when describing what it is not: there is an overt emphasis on pitting the Burgundian "self" against an unstipulated "other."

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<sup>12</sup> For a fuller discussion on *The Nasty Girl* in relation to the *Nibelungenlied* see: David Levin, *Richard Wagner, Fritz Lang, and the Nibelungen: The Dramaturgy of Disavowal* (145-150). *The Nasty Girl* opens with the first stanza from the *Nibelungenlied*. The direct citation has a twofold effect: it not only evokes collective memory but furthermore ironically adapts the myth to a film that revolves around "German history during and after National Socialism, the mass psychology of denial, and individual as well as collective responsibility for the crimes of the past" (Levin 146). The irony lies in the fact that the National Socialists used the myth to project their superior identity and heritage. The implementation of these attitudes is evident in the atrocities of the Second World War and Holocaust, whereas in *The Nasty Girl*, the myth is used as a vehicle to address the National Socialist past and the heroization of resistance.

<sup>13</sup> *Ring of the Nibelungs* was released as a TV miniseries in Germany and Austria November 29-30, 2004, but has also been released in other formats under various titles worldwide.

<sup>14</sup> Gender and notions of gender will be discussed in fuller detail subsequently. I posit that there is tension between the idealization of gender and gender roles in addition to conflicts between male and female characters.

Moreover, the problem with adapting the Nibelungen myth for the purpose of creating a German identity, be it in the *Nibelungenlied* or Lang's *Die Nibelungen*, is that this model of identification is flawed – flawed because it consists of systematic binary divisions positing self-other dichotomies, which in the adaptations of the Nibelungen myth are incongruous and vague. It is my assertion that precisely because of the ambiguous nature of the binaries, the Nibelungen myth has been appropriated and adapted periodically since the Middle Ages to project a German national self identity – one that is inherently tragic and unstable.

I will focus on two examples of adaptation of the Nibelungen myth: the medieval epic, the *Nibelungenlied*, and the 1924 Fritz Lang film, *Die Nibelungen*. Prized as the German *Iliad*, the *Nibelungenlied* incorporates Nibelungen mythology along with historicity of location and civilizations, which becomes the material to ground the identity of, as well as justification for, the German medieval nobility. I will examine the *Nibelungenlied* with a special emphasis on how the temporal tensions between history and myth, and the corresponding disparity between the archaic and the courtly, affect the representations of alterity. A major part of my analysis will focus on gender and how notions of gender and gender roles are linked to the ambiguity in representations of alterity. The ambiguous nature of gender is created in part by the conflict between myth and history, on which the *Nibelungenlied* is based, and the societal views during the period in which it was put to parchment. I will analyze how the theme of alterity presented in the *Nibelungenlied* is then adapted and applied in the twentieth century with the example of Fritz Lang's film, *Die Nibelungen*.

In the wake of military defeat and capitulation in the First World War, a new German national identity was created out of the rubble of the failed Wilhelmian Empire in the form of the Weimar Republic. In this milieu, Fritz Lang turned to the Nibelungen myth, much like the poets of the *Nibelungenlied*, to root the identity of the newly founded Republic in the legendary "alten mæren." Lang's *Die Nibelungen* is a nostalgic romanticization of the myth, a living monument captured in film. By exploring Lang's film, I will reflect on the ramifications of adapting the Nibelungen myth for identification purposes during a period in which both national identity was being questioned and nationalist sentiment was peaking in Germany.<sup>15</sup>

The diverse dichotomies and unresolved ambiguities in the *Nibelungenlied* and Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen* require a combination of theoretical approaches. The Nibelungen myth is often approached from a structuralist standpoint that therefore assumes stable and unambiguously demarcated binaries that focus on singular instances of contradistinction (gender or time and space, for example). I believe that this is an inadequate means to address the ambiguity inherent in the adaptations of the myth.<sup>16</sup> As critics tend to emphasize individual aspects of self-other binarisms in isolation,<sup>17</sup> there is a need to address otherness as a broader category: I argue that the "other" category and treatment of such a category is not limited to any one "other," but includes all

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<sup>15</sup> See Martin, *Nibelungen-Metamorphosen* 148-49. Martin compares graphs outlining Nibelungen reception and adaptations/transcriptions of the material between 1800 and 1989. The graphs show peaks during periods when German national identity or nationhood was in question.

<sup>16</sup> Jan-Dirk Müller addresses this issue in a revised edition of *Rules for the Endgame*. However, his "deconstruction" chapter only scratches the surface and appears to be an afterthought, consisting of 19 pages of a 445 page analysis.

<sup>17</sup> Anton Kaes, for example, highlights the distinction between the "Aryan German" Siegfried and the "dark-skinned *Untermensch* Mime" (*Shell Shock* 138). Kaes contrasts the Burgundians with the Huns, whom he also describes as "*Untermenschen*" (156). However, Kaes does not adorn Alberich with the same degrading term as Mime and the Huns. In fact, his term "*Untermensch*" is only applied to these two individual "others" in the film and fails to take into account the projections of alterity in characters like Hagen, who is depicted as both foreign and familiar.

ontological, gendered, spatial, temporal, historical, and mythological others.<sup>18</sup>

Subsequently, I will discuss how the interpretations and adaptations of the myth try to either correct the ambiguities in the myth or reinforce them in an attempt to homogenize and situate a national/cultural identity in its mythological "alten mæren."

While numerous binaries and structural themes recur in the *Nibelungenlied* and film, I maintain that these structural elements are in fact only superficial. What we are faced with in the adaptations of the myth are overt attempts to project binarisms, the authors' intentions that are in fact contradicted by the unstable elements inherent in the material and myth itself. Through close examination of the instability of the binarisms in both the *Nibelungenlied* and *Die Nibelungen*, the overwhelmingly ambiguous nature of the epic poem and film becomes clear. First I will be using the frameworks of Orientalism developed by Edward Said to locate binaries and to assist in the overall discussion of alterity in the two adaptations of the myth that I am analyzing, and then I will use a deconstructive approach to closely evaluate how the structural units contradict – or undo – themselves (Carpenter 56). If the goal of a structuralist approach is to divide texts into binary oppositions such as light/dark, foreign/familiar, self/other, the goal of a deconstructive approach is to highlight the way in which binaries are "betrayed into inverting or collapsing themselves, or need to banish to the text's margins certain niggling details which can be made to return and plague them" (Eagleton 115-16), much like the way in which the gaps in the narrative and character constellations (the "*Brüche*") in *Nibelungen* adaptations are de-contextualized through analysis and interpretation of select sections and structural elements. Furthermore, the shift from a structuralist

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<sup>18</sup> My analysis is premised on a contradistinction of a Burgundian "self" with all that is non-Burgundian and therefore requires a broader category of what is deemed foreign.

criticism to deconstruction facilitates an analytical approach that views a text not as a "closed entity, equipped with definite meanings" but rather seeing it as "irreducibly plural" (Eagleton, 120). This deconstructive approach is extremely effective in examining representations of alterity in the individual adaptations of the Nibelungen myth, or what appear to be at face value, binary constructions through which alterity is presented. As I will argue, the binaries of self-other in the Nibelungen myth are actually contingent, and, therefore, require the plurality to be addressed.

To analyze these structural binaries, especially as they pertain to the representation of cultural or national alterity, Edward Said's concept of Orientalism becomes a valuable tool. The basic tenets of Said's concept of Orientalism that I will deploy are as follows: how language has a semantic function used to project alterity; how temporal and spatial distinctions are imagined and poetic constructs; how knowledge of the foreign is a means to gain authority; and how identity can be constructed negatively through contradistinction. Said offers a lens through which to view the construction of identity in the context of the binary opposition Orient-Occident. His model of how the Occident and the Orient interact can be applied to evaluate the relationship between notions of the foreign and the familiar in Nibelungen myth adaptations. In addition, I have chosen Said's approach based on the structural and semantic functions that Orientalism and mythology share: as Said writes, Orientalism "shares with magic and mythology the self-containing, self-reinforcing character of a closed system, in which objects are what they are *because* they are what they are" (Said 70). The models of identification offered in the adaptations of the Nibelungen myth adhere to the self-reinforcing and self-containing nature of Orientalism. Where they differ, however, is seen

in the closer analysis of how these closed systems ultimately are unstable, hence the need to supplement Said with deconstructive criticism.<sup>19</sup>

The fact that according to the orientalist approach, the language used to depict the Orient does not correspond to the Orient itself strengthens my usage of Said's theory in the context of the Nibelungen mythology. This will be of paramount importance when I discuss how character traits are presented in both the *Nibelungenlied* and the film. For Said the correspondence fails

[...] between the language used to depict the Orient and the Orient itself, not so much because the language is inaccurate but because it is not even trying to be accurate. What it is trying to do [...] is at one and the same time, to characterize the Orient as alien and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, manager, and actors are for Europe, and only for Europe. Hence the vacillation between the familiar and the alien. (71-72)

This is a crucial point, as the *Nibelungenlied*, whose language operates in a similar manner to Orientalism, presents a worldview which is intended only for the familiar side of the familiar-foreign binary while designating foreign aspects as foreign. The treatment of foreign (non-Burgundian) courts in the *Nibelungenlied* is one example of this, for in the *Nibelungenlied*, foreign locations and cultures are presented as *höfisch*. Moreover, the

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<sup>19</sup> Homi Bhabha argues that "binary, two-part identities function in a kind of narcissistic reflection of One in the Other" (72). Bhabha adds that "the Other bestows a degree of objectivity, but its representation [...] is always ambivalent, disclosing a lack" (74). Furthermore, when gender is employed, specifically from a female perspective, it "unsettles any simplistic polarities or binarisms in identifying the exercise of power – Self/Other – and erases the analogical dimension in the articulation of sexual difference" (76).

way in which characters are introduced provides analogy between the familiar and foreign.<sup>20</sup>

The fact that neither the *Nibelungenlied* nor other adaptations of the myth are set in the Orient may appear to be a potential flaw in my argument; however, as Said argues, geographical location is in actuality irrelevant as it is an invented distinction (54). What I am interested in is how Said's principles are useful in the analysis of the binary self-other in general, and how this binary is used in identity construction. Said notes that "[t]he construction of identity [...] involves the construction of opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from 'us'" (332) – in fact, us (“*Uns*”) is the first word in the *Nibelungenlied*. We must take into consideration the constant evolution of the binary self-other as it allows for the ambiguities of self-other dichotomies in adaptations of the Nibelungen myth to be contemporized. Since identity is constantly in flux, the notions of self and other are dynamic constructs involved in historical, social, intellectual and political re-interpretations "bound up with the disposition of power and powerlessness in each society" (Said 332).

The depiction of identity plays a crucial role in the power dynamics in the *Nibelungenlied*, as in Lang's *Die Nibelungen*, which will become evident in the following analysis. I will highlight how prestige in the hierarchical system within the *Nibelungenlied* is intrinsically tied to identity. Identity will be discussed according to notions of gender and gender relations, how the foreign is contrasted with the familiar, and how *höfisch* and *unhöfisch* traits represent characteristics of particular identities. In

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<sup>20</sup> See Tables 1 & 2 on pages 32 and 56 respectively: the characters in the *Nibelungenlied* are introduced in a very formulaic way which provides analogy between them. Furthermore, the characters are all introduced from the *höfisch* perspective undermining traits that would suggest alterity.

Lang's *Die Nibelungen*, the medieval *höfisch* value system is replaced with a contradistinction between nature and architecture appropriate to the *Zeitgeist*. Moreover, Lang overtly orientalizes the foreign as seen in how characters like Mime, Alberich, and Etzel are presented. The stark visual contrast in addition to the blocking of scenes emphasizes the power dynamics of identity in the film.

An argument in Said's *Orientalism* which sheds light on alterity in the adaptations of the Nibelungen myth revolves around the topic of knowledge: for Said, knowledge "means rising above immediacy, beyond self, into the foreign and distant" (32). Knowledge of an object in turn becomes fact – "fundamentally, even ontologically stable" regardless of whether that knowledge is developed, changes or transforms, as is often the case (Said 32). To possess such knowledge creates a power hierarchy in which having knowledge is a means to dominate and have authority, where "authority [...] means for 'us' to deny autonomy to 'it'" (Said 32). I will show how knowledge is utilized in the *Nibelungenlied* and *Die Nibelungen* to dominate foreign elements, most notably in the context of Hagen's power to control and manipulate the actions of Siegfried, the foreigner, and Kriemhild, the insider, in both adaptations of the myth. Additionally, in both the epic and film, knowledge of Brunhild's extraordinary strength permits the Burgundians to dominate her and deny her autonomy. But for now it should suffice to say that Said's notions of knowledge of the foreign are useful not only for the specific relation of the West to the Middle East, but can be applied to the analysis of the processes of domestication of the foreign in Nibelungen adaptations.

As the foreign symbolizes spatial differentiation, Said draws heavily on the notion of geography in relation to how identity is constructed. This is quite fitting when applied

to the adaptations of Nibelungen mythology. Said argues that "[m]en have always divided the world up into regions having either real or imagined distinction from each other" (39). The result of such distinction takes on a power dynamic or a discourse of "strength" and "weakness" (45). Said notes that "[s]uch strength and weakness are as intrinsic to Orientalism as they are to any view that divides the world into large general divisions, entities that coexist in a state of tension produced by what is believed to be radical difference" (45). In fact, the practice of dividing the world into geographically distinct parts is not limited to Orientalism but rather is a way in which "modern and primitive societies seem thus to derive a sense of their identities negatively" (Said 54). Said maintains that there is a "universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is 'theirs'" (54), where the actual geographical locations are arbitrary and imaginative. Geographical distinctions thus are variable, as the definitive outcome of such division is to classify both territory and mentality of others as different from one's own.<sup>21</sup> The argument can be made even further to include a temporal dimension: since "space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning," demarcation of time through vague temporal phrases, such as "long ago" or "at the beginning," are as much poetic constructs as the imaginative geography as far away (Said 55).<sup>22</sup> The temporal and spatial distinctions that are created in one's mind ultimately assist in identity creation: they "help the mind

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<sup>21</sup> Said goes on to say that "[it] is enough for 'us' to set up these boundaries in our own minds; 'they' become 'they' accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated different from 'ours'" (54).

<sup>22</sup> Said notes "[t]he same process occurs when we deal with time. Much of what we associate with or even know about such periods as 'long ago' or 'the beginning' or 'at the end of time' is poetic - made up. For a historian of the Middle Kingdom Egypt, 'long ago' will have a clear sort of meaning, but even this meaning does not totally dissipate the imaginative, quasi-fictional quality one senses lurking in a time very different and distant from our own" (55).

intensify its own sense of self by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away" (Said 55). The temporal and spatial aspects Said highlights will become important to my discussion of adaptations of the Nibelungen myth, as notions of space and time are frequently employed to project certain identities, particularly to articulate alterity. The Nibelungen myth creates an imagined geography; therefore mythological origins of a nation can be located spatially and temporally within the myth itself.

The memorialization of the mythological past, by both the *Nibelungenlied* poets and Fritz Lang, illustrates how the Nibelungen myth is used as the basis to project identity. Although the *Nibelungenlied* does not employ nationalistic jargon specific to a geo-political Germany, it does offer a model of identification exclusively for speakers of the German language in the form of the Burgundians-cum-Nibelungen, and therefore can be considered to be nationalistic.<sup>23</sup> Whereas the *Nibelungenlied* appropriates the Nibelungen myth for justification of the medieval nobility, Lang's *Die Nibelungen* not only openly equates "Nibelungen" with "German" but furthermore incites nationalism from its very first frame. For our present discussion, geographic demarcations such as Orient and Occident are irrelevant, as they are imaginative and arbitrary, as Said himself points out. What is important is the manner in which Said's concepts of Orientalism allow us to approach the *Nibelungenlied* and its subsequent adaptations in the context of a self-other dichotomy.

However, Said's arguments are not without flaws. For one, his approach is reductive, as it essentially only allows for binarisms. His approach, therefore, is not

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<sup>23</sup> Whereas other contemporary courtly literature stemmed from non-German sources, the "'national' origin and tradition of its material sets the *Nibelungenlied* apart from "the Latin-Mediterranean-West European tradition" (Müller 1).

sensitive to the potential instability and plurality of binarisms, as a deconstructive approach would reveal. Secondly, gender plays a far too insignificant role in his discussion on alterity. Notions of gender and gender roles disturb simplistic binaries of self-other. The articulation of sexual difference, therefore, problematizes the analogy of us-them (Bhabha 76). Gender, therefore, is extremely important in the discussion of alterity, and in fact forms a major part of my argument in respect to the *Nibelungen* myth. Not only is the gender dichotomy prevalent in the myth, but also the dichotomy, as presented in both the *Nibelungenlied* and film, itself is unstable. This will become particularly relevant to my chapter on Lang's film since the division of male-female/masculine-feminine became increasingly blurred in the early twentieth century when Lang captured the myth on film: during the Weimar period, traditional gender roles were changing and investigations into sexual and gender identities were conducted in Germany by sexologists like Magnus Hirschfeld, who coined the term third sex (McCormick 5) – in itself a frontal attack on traditional binary views of gender. This innovative standpoint on gender allows for notions of hybridity but also ambiguity in the way gender roles were performed and depicted.<sup>24</sup>

My methodology will follow this two-step approach of finding binaries through an Orientalist lens and subsequently looking for ambiguities inherent in the binaries. I will use this approach to analyze the *Nibelungenlied* and Lang's *Die Nibelungen*. This comparison will examine how the theme of alterity is transferred or changes from one work to the next and will take into consideration the shifting media in which the

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<sup>24</sup> The Weimar period saw egalitarian reforms such as female suffrage, in addition to a changing labour force. Emancipated women begot the nomenclature of "New Woman" and were often criticized politically and socially for disrupting traditional gender roles. For an in-depth analysis of transitioning gender roles during the Weimar period as presented in film and literature see: Richard McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity*.

Nibelungen myth is presented, most notably a shift from a strictly oral-aurally based presentation of the epic *Nibelungenlied* to the visual medium of film in *Die Nibelungen*. Ultimately I will explore why the Nibelungen myth has been appropriated in the context of a constantly evolving German self-mythologization since the Middle Ages. The point of departure of this analysis is the first recorded "German" adaptation of the Nibelungen myth: *Das Nibelungenlied*.

## **Chapter 1: *Das Nibelungenlied***

### ***Foreign versus Familiar: Spatial, Temporal, and Gender Tensions***

A main focus of this thesis is to investigate the ambiguous nature of the representations of alterity in the *Nibelungenlied*, how this ambiguity is addressed in subsequent adaptations of the material dealing with the Nibelungen myth, and the consequences of myth manipulation in the context of national identity and identity creation. Since there is no one underlying reason for ambiguities in the *Nibelungenlied* itself, a combination of factors cause the distinctions between foreign and familiar to become uncertain. One of the contributing factors can be traced back to the material upon which the *Nibelungenlied* is based. This can be seen as a direct catalyst for this ambiguity as the poets fused together two separate branches of the saga: the legend of Siegfried and his death, and the downfall of the Burgundians. These two strains of legend combined make up the *Nibelungenlied*. Not only do the historical and mythological roots – the material – create ambiguity in the *Nibelungenlied*, but, moreover, the contemporary perspective, that is the courtly-chivalric period of the high Middle Ages, is also at odds with the material. What we see is the chasm between the heroic-archaic depiction of the material, as present in the Nordic lore, and the chivalric-courtly domestication of the archaic past as depicted in the *Nibelungenlied*.

#### ***1.1: Temporal Aspects and Tensions***

In an attempt to fashion structural consistency, the poets modified two strains of existing mythology to create the *Nibelungenlied*: the story of Siegfried's death and the

story of the Burgundian downfall.<sup>25</sup> As a result of this modification of the myth, the *Nibelungenlied* appears to have a lack of cohesion in respect to its narrative time and narrated time. Bernhard Martin argues that it is assumed that the intended audience had knowledge of the previously established myths, and the poets therefore reintroduced the themes and stories under the new guise of the *Nibelungenlied*. Martin notes

[d]ie Handlung des *Nibelungenliedes* [spielt] in ferner Vergangenheit und gibt ihm damit einen fiktiven Wahrheitsanspruch, andererseits bekennt er [der Verfasser], daß die Zuhörer mit einem bekanntem Text rechnen müssen [...]. Der Verfasser selbst bleibt anonym, ein weiteres Zeichen dafür, daß er dem Publikum keine neue Erzählung vorstellte, sondern sich im Bereich der volkstümlichen Überlieferung bewegte. (74)

This becomes problematic within the *Nibelungenlied* itself when the figures from the one strain of myth interact with the figures from the other. It is especially notable when the courtly-Christian perspective is emphasized with the characters from the pre-Christian/pre-courtly myth (the archaic), resulting in a seemingly strong oscillation between two extremes. Hagen, for example, is able to shift fluidly between his affiliation with the archaic past, indicated in his knowledge of Siegfried's "jungen tagen" (NL 22,1), and his courtly role as vassal and most valuable confidant in the Burgundian court. Here we can apply Said's notion that there is a vacillation between the foreign and familiar.

This allows the foreign, the pre-Christian/pre-courtly, to be sensationalized and,

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<sup>25</sup> Bernhard Martin explains that the Nordic tradition, as seen in the *Völsungasaga*, also combines the two strains of myth, however the "Kernhandlung und vor allem deren Motivation blieben fast unverändert erhalten" (75). What sets the *Nibelungenlied* apart from the Nordic tradition is that the composer "verband die Ermordung Siegfrieds durch eine Umgestaltung der Figuren des Epos mit dem Untergang der Burgunden" (Martin 75). The shift is from a worldview based on fate/destiny to self-determined action. The *Nibelungenlied*-poet's task was to provide a medieval context to the material which was premised upon a different value system ("*Wertesystem*") (Martin 78).

normalized, that is, placed in the context of the *höfisch*. If we use Said's dichotomy of Orient-Occident as an overarching analogy for foreign-familiar with respect to the *Nibelungenlied*, the world is divided temporally into camps comprised of *alten mæren*, the immediate past/narrative time, and a more distant past: the pre-narrative past, which corresponds to the characters in the Siegfried-Brunhild category. Said argues further that there is a vacillation between an old world and a new world, which allows for a new median category "that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing" (58). Hagen knows who Siegfried is despite never encountering him before. This is a prime example of Said's argument of old world/new world vacillations. Said argues, that "[i]n essence such a category is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things" (59). In regard to the *Nibelungenlied*, I posit that rather than a new world being presented through the light of an already established point of view, the *Nibelungenlied* poets present the old world according to a new world view. This becomes evident, for instance, in the Burgundians' reaction to Siegfried's declaration that he intends to take Worms by force; Siegfried states:

Nu ir sît sô küene, als mir ist geseit,  
sone rúoch ich, ist daz iemen líep óder leit:  
ich wil an iu ertwingen, swaz ir muget hân:  
lánt únde bürge, daz sol mir werden undertân. (NL 110)<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Hereafter New High German translations will be referenced by stanza and are cited from *Das Nibelungenlied* based on the text by Karl Bartsch and Helmut de Boor, translated by Siegfried Grosse: "Da Ihr so tapfer seid, wie mir gesagt worden ist, so habe ich die Absicht, Euch, ganz gleich, ob es jemandem gefällt oder jemanden stört, alles abzuzwingen, was Ihr besitzt. Euer Land und Eure Burgen sollen mir untertan sein" (110).

Gernot, as a Burgundian representative, opposes Siegfried by stating "wir haben richiu lant; / diu dienen uns von rehte, ze niemen sint si baz bewant" (NL 115, 3-4).<sup>27</sup> The Burgundians dispute Siegfried's heroic intrusion – heroic indicating Siegfried's archaic Germanic nature – by invoking the feudal law of inheritance and hospitality, which indicates the new-world perspective *höfisch* (Martin 88-90). What this example indicates is a shift in perspective from the old world of "germanische[ ] Renegat[e]" (Martin 89) to the contemporary *höfisch* perspective of Worms. A further indication of the old world being presented in new-world terms is that certain characters in the *Nibelungenlied* are based on historical figures from the fourth to sixth centuries (Schulze, *Nibelungenlied* 60-64), Attila the Hun being the most prominent example. Ursula Schulze notes that "[h]istorische – meist an bestimmte Namen gebundene – Ereignisse mit Hilfe von Erzähl- oder Deutungsmustern erfaßt [werden], und diese Muster sind in der Heldensage und Heldendichtung verschiedener Völker und Zeiten zu finden" (*Nibelungenlied* 60). The *Nibelungenlied* poets incorporated historical events and figures. In establishing a perspective that is sympathetic to the norms of the courtly society of the High Middle Ages, they are in effect projecting a new world order that is legitimized through the manipulation of the foreign, which in this case is the heroic and archaic past. How the *Nibelungenlied* poets handle the character Siegfried highlights this: Siegfried is for the poets a model knight, a representative of the nobility but also a hero, whose "jungen tagen" – denoting his archaic pre-history – are merely alluded to by the narrator. Siegfried's magical-mythical side is only first introduced by Hagen, who also belongs in part to this archaic past. This is an important detail, as it allows the narrator/poet to

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<sup>27</sup> "'Wir haben nicht die Absicht', sagte da Gernot, 'uns irgendwelche Länder gewaltsam anzueignen, so daß jemand durch die Hand eines Helden fällt. Wir besitzen reiche Länder, die uns rechtmäßig dienen; niemandem gehören sie aufgrund eines weitergehenden Rechtes'" (115).

distance himself from this past which gives credence to the fact that the characteristics that embody the archaic are not the qualities worthy of propagation in a courtly society. For if Siegfried's archaic side were intended to be admired, or thought of as a quality compatible with the *höfisch* value system, the narrator himself would adorn Siegfried with the appropriate epithets, as is the case with chivalric and Christian character traits. The narrator would also not distance himself from the mythical archaic, in short, foreign, by having Hagen, who is also a flawed character<sup>28</sup> like Siegfried, report about it. Moreover, the narrator has ample opportunity to reveal Siegfried's archaic past in the second *Aventiure*. It is in this *Aventiure* that Siegfried's heritage is outlined in *höfisch* terms, providing analogy to the Burgundian court. In fact, Mahlendorf and Tobin argue that the poets projected contemporary ideals and realities into the past: "on the idealized level, the description of Siegfried's *swertleite* is obviously high medieval. The poet describes the knighting ceremonies as proceeding 'nâh riterlîcher ê' (33,3), thus implying knighthood had always existed. So, too, the romance of Kriemhild and Siegfried is depicted in courtly terms and mirrors courtly emotions" ("Legality" 226).

Although Hagen has never seen Siegfried, he can assert that it is Siegfried who has come to Worms based on his own knowledge of the foreign:

Alsô sprach dô Hagene: "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." (NL 86, 1-4)<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> For discussion on "flawed character" see: Martin "Metamorphosen" 94.

<sup>29</sup> "Deshalb sprach Hagen: 'Ich möchte dazu folgendes sagen; obwohl ich Siegfried noch nie gesehen habe, so möchte ich wohl annehmen, mag es sein, wie es will, daß er der Krieger ist, der dort so stolz auf and ab geht'" (86).

Siegfried's archaic and heroic escapades are then outlined in detail by Hagen over the subsequent 14 stanzas (NL 86-100). Hagen is able to project his knowledge of the foreign onto the foreigner and therefore make him familiar. In other words, Hagen is able to imbue Siegfried with the mythical by describing his archaic past. Moreover, I believe that it is indicative of the projection of *höfisch* identity by the poets/narrator that Hagen, and not the narrator, introduces Siegfried's archaic and mythological nature, as it places Hagen also into a category of ambiguity, a liminal space, as much as Siegfried or Brunhild. If we compare how the narrator/poets start the narrative with how Hagen recites the tale of Siegfried's past we see a subtle yet important shift from collective knowledge to an individual one. Hagen begins his revelation about Siegfried by saying, "daz ist mir wol geseit" (NL 88, 2), marking Hagen's personal intimate involvement with the archaic past, unlike the introduction which incorporates a collective involvement ("us"/"we") through the phrase "Uns ist in alten mæren wonders wol geseit" (NL 1, 1). Moreover, Siegfried's past is not described as an adventure or a series of events that occur, but rather is already a part of the Burgundian knowledge of the other. The motif of Hagen operating within a liminal space, somewhere between the two extremes of foreign and familiar, is continued in the second half of the *Nibelungenlied*, most notably during and after his encounter with the *merewîp* (NL 1533 et seq.). Here the fortune-telling water nymphs are a clear representation of the foreign and mythical/archaic, but is Hagen also a part of this realm, or does he belong to the familiar realm as highest-ranking vassal among the Burgundians? And why does Hagen use the knowledge gained from the foreign water nymphs to solidify rather than avert disaster? He in effect chooses to allow the familiar camp to be destroyed; in fact, he guarantees it. The difficulty of situating

Hagen into a clearly distinct camp of either us or them, foreign or familiar, only highlights the instability of binarisms in the *Nibelungenlied* and the extent to which a strictly binary approach will fail. What is evident is that there are varying degrees to which figures are cast as foreign or familiar, and that the characteristics which are employed to define foreign and familiar vacillate. One aspect of designating otherness is seen in the tension between the material (myth/history) on which the narrative is based and the cultural and socio-political light in which it is presented.

As mentioned above, there is a tension between the material and the perspective in which it is presented. I would argue that this too is a temporal clash, in that the ideals and norms under which the material was initially composed differ vastly from the times in which it was set to parchment. That said, the *Nibelungenlied* does belong to the grander category of *höfische Dichtung* ("courtly literature"), which is intended to present the ideals of, and justification for, the ruling classes. In this respect, as Ursula Schulze argues, the literary representations of the chivalric knight (*höfischer Ritter*) and the courtly gentlewoman (*höfische Dame*) offer a model of identification that justifies the nobility's way of life (*Nibelungenlied* 13). Schulze highlights the major functions that courtly literature fulfills in the context of the aristocratic society as the following:

Sie rechtfertigt die weltliche Lebensform des Adels, indem sie die Grundzüge der christlichen Ethik standesbezogen adaptiert und "emanzipatorisch" – z.T. unter Ausblendung kirchlicher Institutionen – die Unmittelbarkeit des adeligen Menschen zu Gott darstellt, der die Herrschaft sanktioniert und *sælde* (Glück und Heil) zu ihrer Ausübung verleiht. In dem höfischen Ritter und der höfischen Dame werden literarische Idealbilder von Mann und Frau entworfen, die

Handlungsmodelle und Identifikationsmuster anbieten und in einer Welt, in der gewaltsame Machtkämpfe herrschten, zur Humanisierung und Befriedung beitragen sollten. (13)

The courtly society followed a certain set of moral principles that closely reflected the notions of Christian virtues. These virtues are represented through a number of attributes, stemming from both Christian ethics and societal norms based on legally binding contracts of vassality. Joachim Bumke highlights some of these moral attributes as “*guot, reine, vrum, lobesam, tiure, wert, ûz erwelt*” in addition to “*triuwe,*” “*mâze,*” and “*staete*” (Bumke, “Höfische” 418). The notion of *triuwe* is a prime example of how the aristocratic society blended legal concepts with the religious. Bumke accentuates this conceptual blending with the example of *triuwe*:

Auch das Wort *triuwe* konnte eine sehr weite Bedeutung haben. *triuwe* war zunächst ein Rechtsbegriff und bezeichnete die Vertragstreue, auch die Bindung des Vassallen an seinen Herrn. Im weiteren Sinn war *triuwe* die Aufrichtigkeit und Festigkeit der Bindung zwischen Menschen überhaupt, die Liebe zu Gott und die Liebe Gottes zu den Menschen. (418)

Bumke grounds the connection between humans and God in the context of *triuwe* in a quotation from Eschenbach’s *Parzival*: “*sît got selbe ein triuwe ist*” (Eschenbach, *Parzival* 462, 19). Where the *Nibelungenlied* differs, from *Parzival* or other Arthurian stories, is that it is morally ambiguous, and in particular it puts the notion of loyalty into question.<sup>30</sup> What we see in the *Nibelungenlied* are the unresolved struggles of the

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<sup>30</sup> The question of loyalty as the cardinal “German” virtue will become explicit in political rhetoric before, during, and in the aftermath of the First World War, in fact a new term will evolve to describe “German” loyalty: the so called “*Nibelungentreue*” is in itself a problematic notion. Two characters that are closely associated with loyalty are Hagen and Rüdiger. Hagen’s course of actions is interpreted as the outcome of

characters involved. Ursula Mahlendorf and Frank Tobin argue that the distinction between other courtly literature and the *Nibelungenlied* is based on the fact that in other texts,

[t]he courtly hero is saved from ruin because he suddenly discovers an absolute system of values inherent in the order of the universe in the light of which he can redirect his strivings. But no new insight comes to Hagen nor, for that matter, to any of the characters in the poem. The three societies portrayed in the *Nibelungenlied* (Siegfried's, the Burgundians', and Etzel's) are absolutes in themselves. They place demands on their members which conflict with the values of the other societies involved. There is no transcendental superstructure by which the characters can orient themselves and resolve their struggles. ("Hagen" 139)

Moreover, the *Nibelungenlied* is comprised of a "heady mixture of violence, barbarity, and cruelty" in which the "resolution of moral conflicts [...] does not take place in an atmosphere of joy and reconciliation, but rather tragedy and tears" (Gentry 6). Despite the obvious idealizations of the aristocracy and their moral codes, the plot of the *Nibelungenlied* opposes these value systems, which creates a certain amount of ambiguity. Francis Gentry argues that the poets were dealing neither with an idealized atmosphere nor ideal characters when working with the *Nibelungenlied* but rather were operating "within a definable political structure which threatens [...] to hinder the moral decision-making ability of the individual on occasion" (11). Gentry maintains that the intention of the poet was to restructure the archaic subject matter according to the feudal system, which he then presented not as "an antiquarian conceit" but as the combination of

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his loyalty and/or betrayal of the Burgundian kingdom throughout the epic. In regard to the character Rüdiger, the notion of loyalty is especially problematic, as Rüdiger is torn between his oath to Kriemhild, his vassal obligations to Etzel and his bonds to the Nibelungen as both host and future family member.

entertainment and edification (11). Yet intention does not always match effect as the restructuring in fact creates ambiguity rather than clarity, as is also evident in relation to the virtue of *mâze*.

The virtue of *mâze* and its opposite *unmâze* is of utmost importance in the *Nibelungenlied*. *Mâze* can be explained on the one hand through the Christian notion of "*temperantia* (»Mäßigung«)" and "*medietas*, der richtigen Mitte zwischen zwei Extremen" (Bumke, *Höfische Kultur* 418). Yet when it comes to the *Nibelungenlied* there are numerous examples of *unmâze*, particularly in the context of Siegfried and Brunhild in the first half and Kriemhild in the second. Important to our present discussion, *mâze* has particular attributes of the feminine. It has been dubbed the "[m]other of all virtue" (Bumke, *Höfische Kultur* 419) and is particularly recommended to women: "*mâze diu hêre diu hêret lîp und êre. Ezn ist al der dinge kein, der ie diu sunne beschein, sô rehte saelic sô daz wîp, diu ir leben unde ir lîp an die mâze verlât*" (G. v. Straßburg 18017-23).<sup>31</sup> But if we consider both Kriemhild's and Brunhild's introductions (see Table 1), we see that *mâze* is not connected to the Christian value of temperance, but rather is used to mark excessiveness: Kriemhild is "*âne mâzen schœne*" (NL 3,3) and Brunhild is "*unmâzen scœne*" (NL 326,3). The ambiguity lies herein: the female figures are to be at one and the same time ideals of the courtly society yet they are idealized for their excessiveness, in this case excessive beauty, which stands in direct opposition to the *höfisch* value system. The inherent ambiguity of mores and values as a result of temporal tension as highlighted in the examples of the archaic material clashing with the courtly point of view is likewise mirrored in the geographical dimension of the *Nibelungenlied*.

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<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Bumke, *Höfische Kultur* 419: "Die edle *mâze* adelt Person und Ansehen. Nichts, was jemals die Sonne beschien, ist so beglückend wie die Frau, die sich und ihr Leben der *mâze* anheimgibt."

## 1.2: Spatial Tensions

As a means to explore the *Nibelungenlied* in terms of geographical/spatial alterity, I will again turn to Edward Said's notion of Orientalism as a theoretical basis. As outlined in the introduction, the intention of geographical distinctions is less the accurate portrayal of any real physical locality, but they are rather imperative for the construction and articulation of self and other identities. Although Said places a certain emphasis on colonization, which is certainly applicable to the *Nibelungenlied*, especially the recurring motif of *Brautwerbung* ("bridal quest"), I will focus initially on Orientalism as a discursive practise of constructing identity negatively. I will address the issue of colonization in terms of a domestication of otherness, using the analogy of a superior Occident (Burgundian-"us") at odds with the inferior Orient (non-Burgundian-"them").

Geographical markers are prevalent in the *Nibelungenlied*. Moreover, the geographical and cultural spheres from which the figures originate become an important aspect of identity construction. By characterizing an individual as having "come from," the narrator, or other characters imply that he/she is not native. That individual becomes in effect foreign based on these negatively constructed character attributes. Moreover, characters are described through stock signifiers of particular values and mores of which these individuals appear to embody. Knights are attributed with modifiers like *snel* or *kuen*, and the nobility is depicted as *rich und mild*, whereas those who break with the societal norms acquire demonic traits such as *tuivelisch*. In addition to the adjectival character trait modification, the figures are often associated with their geographical and cultural heritage. Hagen, for example, is regularly followed by "von Tronege" demarking

his heritage: "Er stammt aus Tronje und wird deshalb oft *Hagene von Tronege, der helt von Tronege* oder *der Tronegære* genannt."<sup>32</sup> This geographical demarcation has a twofold effect: for one it signifies that he is an "other," and secondly that his otherness is known: he is Hagen from somewhere other than Worms. Where or what "Tronege" actually is,<sup>33</sup> is irrelevant so long as the *von* attribute signifies that he is from somewhere else. A power dynamic then emerges in which knowledge of the foreign allows it to become familiar. Like Hagen, other characters are similarly described according to their heritage. Demarcating heritage differences (geographical/cultural/linguistic) is a known practice during the High Middle Ages: we can see in Hugo von Trimberg's *Der Renner* that the distinction between the different German dialects was known during the High Middle Ages, and furthermore that these distinct dialects also demarcate cultural and geographical elements. Hugo von Trimberg muses:

Swäben ir wörter spaltent,	(The <i>Swabians</i> split their words,
Die Franken ein teil si valtent,	The <i>Franconians</i> fold them,
Die Beier si zezerrent,	The <i>Bavarians</i> drag them,
Die Düringe si ûf sperrent,	The <i>Thuringians</i> open them wide,
Die Sahren si bezückerent,	The <i>Saxons</i> speak them rapidly,
Die Rînliute si verdrückerent,	The <i>Rhenish</i> press them,

<sup>32</sup> "Namenverzeichnis" in *Das Nibelungenlied: der Nibelunge Nôt*, 1030.

<sup>33</sup> Johannes Hoops outlines Hagen's heritage and heritage marker as follows: "H.s [sic] Herkunftbezeichnung von Tronege, von Tronje oder Tronegære hat Anlaß für viele Spekulationen gegeben. Die Forsch. identifizierte den Ort mit der Burg Troneck auf dem Hunsrück, mit Kirchberg in Elsaß, das im MA Tronje hieß, mit Troies an der Seine, mit Tournay und Tongres in Belgien und mit Trondheim oder Tronjen. Sichere Hinweise auf eine geogr. [sic] Verortung aber fehlen. Das Waltharius-Lied führt den Beinamen allein auf H.s [sic] tronjanische Abstammung zurück (*veniens germine Trojae*), wie sie den Franken im allgemeinen zugeschrieben wird" (347). This highlights the ambiguity of Hagen's identity as his marker "von Tronege" could signify various geographic locations or be a stock indicator of Frankish heritage in general. Since there are no evidence pointing to a real geographical location, it in fact locates Hagen in a distant mythical realm. The function "von Tronege" fulfils is that it indicates that Hagen is not from Worms, and, therefore, a foreigner.

Die Wetereiber si würgent,	The <i>Wetteravians</i> strangle them,
Die Mîsener si vol schürgent,	The <i>Meissen people</i> drive them out,
Egerlant si swenkent,	The <i>Egerlanders</i> wave them,
Oesterrîche si schrenkent,	The <i>Austrians</i> intertwine them,
Stîrlant si baz lenkent,	The <i>Styrians</i> optimize them,
Kernde ein teil si senkent, (22265-76) <sup>34</sup>	The <i>Carinthians</i> partially lower them) <sup>35</sup>

All these dialects, although different, are considered by Trimberg to belong to an overarching familiar German. In the following excerpt, Trimberg goes on to distinguish clearly between the familiar German dialects that "[i]n Tiutschen landen sint bekant, / Aleine si maniger zungen hant" (22295-6) and the foreign tongues:

Bêheim, Ungern und Lamparten	( <i>Bohemians, Hungarians and Lombardians</i>
Houwent niht mit tiutscher barten,	Do not use the German battleaxe,
Franzois, Walhe und Engellant,	The <i>French, The Welsh and England,</i>
Norweye, Yberne sint unbekant	<i>Norway and Ypern</i> are unknown
An ir sprâche tiutschen liuten;	To Germans as to their language,
Nieman kan ouch wol bediuten	No one can well explain to you
Kriechisch, jûdisch und heidenisch,	<i>Greek, Hebrew and Heathenish,</i>
Syrisch, windisch, kaldêisch	<i>Syrian, Wendish and Chaldeian)</i> <sup>36</sup>
(22277-22284)	

Trimberg makes the distinction between the foreign and the familiar and in fact identifies what is familiar through a process of negative identification: German is not

<sup>34</sup> Citation of Hugo von Trimberg: "Von manigerlei sprâch" in *Der Renner* will follow the G. Ehrismann edition. (Pg. 220-222).

<sup>35</sup> Translation into English by Wolfgang Näser, 16 May 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Translation into English by Wolfgang Näser, 16 May 2010.

French, Welsh, English, etc. He acknowledges that there are foreign languages and people out there, and in doing so is able to reinforce the German identity through his knowledge of their existence. This is also the case in the *Nibelungenlied*: identity is strengthened through contradistinction with foreign linguistic and cultural groups, especially when the foreign Hunnish court is being described. In the twenty-second *Aventiure*, the differentiation of cultural/linguistic groups becomes quite prevalent. The narrator explains:

Von vil maniger sprâche sah man ûf den wegen  
 vor Etzelen rîten manigen küenen degen,  
 von kristen und von heiden vil manige wîte schar. (NL 1338,1-3)<sup>37</sup>

This multicultural and multi-religious realm is made up of "Riuzen und von Kriechen" (NL 1339,1), people "[v]on dem lande zu Kiewen" (NL 1340,1), "den Pcelân unt den Wálachen" (NL 1339,2), and "die wilden Petschenære" (NL 1340,2) among others. And with the various groups identified, the hierarchical superiority of Christian "tuitsche" heritage is subtly highlighted in the description of a jousting tournament, a part of the greeting ceremony:

Wie rehte ritterlîche die Dietrîches man  
 die schefte liezen vliegen mit trunzûnen dan  
 hôhe über die schilde von guiter ritter hant!  
 von den tuitschen gesten wart dürkcl manic schildes rant. (NL 1354)<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> "Vor Etzel sah man auf den Straßen viele kühne Ritter ganz unterschiedlicher Sprachzugehörigkeit reiten, eine große Menge Christen und Heiden" (1338).

<sup>38</sup> "Wie ritterlich ließen die Gefolgsmänner Dietrichs die Speere mit ihren Splittern hoch über die Schilde fliegen, geschossen von der Hand vorzüglicher Ritter! Von den deutschen Gästen wurden viele Schilde durchsiebt" (1354).

The characters and people are often identified in the *Nibelungenlied* by their geographic heritage, but moreover, this spatial alterity is also represented by linguistic differences as seen in the example of how Dietrich's men are described as "den tiutschen gesten" (NL 1354,4). "tiutsch" does not refer to any one geographic location, but is a cultural/linguistic marker used in the same fashion with the same result as spatial markers like "von Ruezzen und von Kriechen" (NL 1339,1). Spatial alterity is one means in which identity is negatively constructed in the *Nibelungenlied*, gender is another.

### **1.3: The Alterity of Gender**

In the *Nibelungenlied* there are many prominent characters who fulfill the functions of courtly literature set out by Ursula Schulze. I would further argue that no one character is symbolic of a particular function, but rather they fluidly are made to represent certain character traits dependent on the situation. The figures become in effect archetypes of character traits, whether positive or negative. To explore this notion further I will contrast the two main female protagonists from the first part of the *Nibelungenlied*, Kriemhild and Brunhild.

In the context of the afore-mentioned functions of courtly literature, the manner by which characters are introduced has a significant impact, in that it often undermines the narrator's overt intention with unintentional ambiguity. This is especially evident in the remarkably similar introductions of Kriemhild, in the first *Aventiure*, and Brunhild, in the sixth *Aventiure*.

Table 1

Kriemhild's Introduction	Brunhild's Introduction
<p>Ez wuohs in Búrgónden ein vil édel magedîn,  daz in allen landen niht schœners mohte sîn,  Kriemhilt geheizen: si wart ein scœne wîp.  dar umbe muosen degene vil verliesen den lîp.  (2, 1-4)</p>	<p>Ez was ein kûeginne gesezzen über sê,  ir gelîche enheine man wesse ninder mê.  diu was unmâzen scœne, vil michel was ir kraft.  sie scôz mit snellen degenen umbe mínné den  -scaft (326, 1-4)</p>
<p>(Es wuchs im Burgundenland ein junges  Edelfrâulein heran,so schön wie keine andere auf  der Welt. Kriemhild hieß sie. Später wurde sie eine  schöne Frau, um derentwillen viele Krieger ihr  Leben verlieren sollten)</p>	<p>(Es lebte jenseits des Meeres eine Königin, und  man hätte keine nennen können, die ihr  gleichgekommen wäre. Sie war unbeschreiblich  schön, und ungewöhnlich groß war ihre Kraft. Mit  kampfschnellen Männer maß sie sich im  Speerwerfen, wenn diese ihre Liebe gewinnen  wollten.)</p>
<p>Der minneclîchen meide triuten wol gezam.  ir muoten küene recken, nieman was ir gram.  âne mâzen schœne sô was ir edel lîp.  der juncvrouwen tugende zierten ándériu wîp.  (3, 1-4)</p>	<p>Des het diu juncfrouwe unmâzen vil getân.  daz gehôrte bî dem Rîne ein riter wolgetân,  der wande sîne sinne an daz scœne wîp.  dar umbe muosen helede sît verliesén den lîp.  (328, 1-4)</p>
<p>(Dieses liebenswerte Mädchen mußte man gern  haben, Tapfere Männer umwarben sie, niemand  konnte ihr böse sein. Ihre unbeschreibliche  Schönheit und ihre Vorzüge ehrten zugleich auch  alle anderen Frauen.)</p>	<p>(So etwas hatte die junge Herrin schon sehr oft  getan. Das hörte am Rhein ein vortrefflicher Ritter,  der sich Hoffnungen auf diese schöne Frau machte.  Deshalb sollten später Helden ihr Leben lassen.)</p>

When the introductions of Kriemhild and Brunhild are compared, there are striking similarities between the two. Both Kriemhild and Brunhild are described in terms of unmatched beauty: Kriemhild is described as "âne mâzen schœne" (NL 3, 3) and "niht schœners mohte sîn" (NL 2, 2), while Brunhild is described as "unmâzen scœne" (NL 326, 3) and as a "scœne wîp" (NL 328, 3); both are designated as "juncvrouwe," indicating not only their status as young, unmarried noble women, but also projecting the notion of virginity as symbolic of the pure and immaculate; both are described as *femme fatales* as they are associated with the downfall of heroes: "dar umbe muosen degene vil verliesen den lîp" (NL 2, 4) and "dar umbe muosen helede sît verliesén den lîp" (NL 328, 4). Peter Strohschneider analyzes the *Nibelungenlied* based on the narratological structure

of the "gefährlichen Brautwerbung" ("dangerous bridal quest") (48). Strohschneider describes the female characters' function according to their prescribed roles within the structural units of "der Werber-die Braut" (48) and "[der] Beste[-]die Schönste" (73). This distinction highlights the ambiguity of having more than one character being described using the superlative. That the female characters are in fact the most beautiful, which is emphasized hyperbolically, is inherent to the role of a potential bride, moreover, it is a projection of the *höfisch* ideal.<sup>39</sup> Within the framework of courtly culture external beauty is a reflection of "inneren Vollkommenheit" (Bumke, *Höfische Kultur* 423). However, since both Brunhild and Kriemhild are introduced as the most beautiful, it undermines the use of the superlative.

We can interpret the introduction and depiction of Kriemhild as a function of self-reflection of the *höfisch* society, in which the *Nibelungenlied* was transcribed, as her character traits parallel those associated with contemporary Christian cardinal virtues (Bumke, *Höfische Kultur* 418). It is important that Kriemhild is presented as the ideal courtly gentlewoman ("*Dame*") especially when her attributes are compared to those of Brunhild.<sup>40</sup> Kriemhild's introduction in the first *Aventiure* immediately sets up an implied dichotomy between native and foreign. We are told of how in the Burgundian realm there was a young woman of nobility, whose beauty was unsurpassed in any other land: "Ez wuohs in Búrgónden ein vil édel magedîn / daz in allen landen niht schœners mohte sîn" (NL 2, 1-2). Not only is her beauty highlighted, the narrator emphasizes that she is more beautiful than any other woman in or outside of the Burgundian sphere. The literary

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<sup>39</sup> The role of the "ideal" courtly *Dame* ("gentlewoman") changes throughout the narrative, which I will expand upon further on in this chapter.

<sup>40</sup> I am focusing here on the initial portrayal of each character as it is my conjecture that both Kriemhild and Brunhild undergo transformations from operating within the realms of *höfisch* to *unhöfisch* and *unhöfisch* to *höfisch* respectively.

portrayal of Kriemhild has on the one hand an extradiegetic function in that it reinforces the norms of the aristocratic society in which the *Nibelungenlied* was transcribed; on the other, it intradiegetically symbolizes the literary Burgundian society of Worms. This becomes evident in the third stanza, where Kriemhild is described as *the* ideal woman: "âne mâzen schoene sô was ir edel lîp. / der juncwrouwen tugende zierten ándériu wîp" (NL 3, 3-4). Kriemhild's indescribable beauty in combination with her virtue and virginity is the basis on which she becomes the idealization of femininity for both the literary Burgundian sphere and the contemporary intended audience of the *Nibelungenlied*. However, the virtues which Kriemhild embodies are problematic: the theme of virginity and the notion of *mâze* are negative attributes outside the Burgundian realm when applied to Brunhild.

The problem lies herein: although Brunhild and Kriemhild share characteristics, the characteristics are depicted as either positive or negative depending on whom they are attributed to. The most striking example is present in the theme of virginity. As discussed previously, virginity is one of Kriemhild's positive attributes which is intrinsically linked to her idealization (NL 3, 4). In the context of the *Minnethematik* ("theme of courtly love"), Kriemhild wants to remain a virgin, yet in the Burgundian society it is seen as a transgression of the societal norms. This transgression is first highlighted in the first *Aventiure*, when Kriemhild describes her dream to her mother. Kriemhild's mother is able to decipher the dream, which highlights how Kriemhild's reaction is "[e]ine Abwehr von einer vorgezeichneten Lebensbahn und daher ein Normverstoß gegen den *ordo*" (Jönsson 225). The transgression is that Kriemhild wishes to abstain from *mannes minne* ("man's love"). The *Minnethematik* is a part of the virtue of woman. She is to be an object

of love and admiration, which invokes piety and virtue in man. By neglecting this role as object of *mannes minne*, Kriemhild shows a character flaw and therefore, a flaw in her virtue. Here we see an example of how the *höfisch* value systems that are constructed in the *Nibelungenlied* are at odds with themselves and therefore create ambiguity on the character development level. Kriemhild is to be both virgin, symbolic of purity and virtue, and bride, a sexual object, which are mutually exclusive. This indeed points out the paradoxical nature of the poetically constructed value system which clashes with the reality of the gender hierarchy in the Christian *höfisch* society. By bringing into play the notions of *hohe Minne* ("courtly love"), the poets in effect create a "Gegenentwurf zu der übermächtigen Tradition christlicher Frauenfeindlichkeit," which only finds women the object of admiration "in der Gestalt unberührter Jungfräulichkeit [...] im Schmuck ihrer Keuschheit und Reinheit" (Bumke, *Höfische Kultur* 454). Kriemhild's initial refusal of her role as a sexual being conforms to the Christian tradition of idealizing undisturbed virginity but breaks with the poetic projection of the *höfisch* ideal of femininity. In fact, after Kriemhild describes her dream, she is indoctrinated with the more favourable societal values by her mother,<sup>41</sup> which is an example of how Kriemhild's undesirable character traits are corrected or suppressed.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> In Kriemhild's dream, Kriemhild raises a beautiful, strong, wild falcon that is suddenly mauled by two eagles (NL 13). Kriemhild describes the dream to her mother Ute, who interpreted the falcon as a nobleman who Kriemhild would lose if God didn't protect him (NL 14). Kriemhild states "âne recken mînne sô wil ich immer sîn / sus scœn' ich wil belîben unz an mînen tôt, / daz ich von mannes minne sol gewinnen nimmer nôt" (NL 15,2-4) ("Auf die Liebe eines Kriegers will ich immer verzichten. Denn ich will so schön bis an meinen Tod bleiben und niemals aus Liebe zu einem Mann Leid erfahren"). Ute responds by saying "Nu versprîch ez niht ze sêre [...] / soltu immer herzenlîche zer werlde werden vrô, / daz gesçht von mannes minne" (NL 16,1-3) ("Nun widersprich nur nicht zu heftig [...] wenn du jemals im Leben glücklich wirst, so geschieht dies allein durch die Liebe eines Mannes").

<sup>42</sup> This can also be argued in terms of a domestication of a foreign value system – foreign, because retention of virginity, according to the Burgundian worldview, is seen as an alien notion. In fact the emphasis on bridal conquest is present throughout the epic and drives a considerable amount of the plot. We see a further domestication of Kriemhild after her involvement in the "Frauenstreit" in the 14th *Aventiure*. In this *Aventiure*, Kriemhild is scolded by Siegfried for "ûppeclîche sprûche" (übermütiges Gerede) (NL 862,2).

The ambiguous nature of the gender relations in the *Nibelungenlied* is further exemplified particularly in the context of *Brautwerbung*. The recurring theme in female courtship is the longing for a foreign prize. In the three *Brautwerbungen*, the male courter vies for the marriage of a foreign female: Siegfried's ultimate reason for entering the Burgundian sphere is to court Kriemhild; Gunther travels to Island to court the mythical figure Brunhild; after Siegfried's death, Etzel seeks his foreign bride Kriemhild in Worms. In the first two examples that occur in the first half of the *Nibelungenlied* in which the plot revolves around Siegfried's involvement in the Burgundian realm, both Kriemhild and Brunhild symbolize the male protagonist's desire of the foreign and their subsequent domestication of their objects of desires.

Although Etzel's courtship of Kriemhild follows the pattern of seeking out a foreign bride, Etzel is a passive player in comparison to Gunther's and Siegfried's active<sup>43</sup> domestication of the geographically foreign, female gender. This said, I would like to focus on both Siegfried and Gunther as male suitors. The actions of the male characters in the *Nibelungenlied* are in accordance with a world-view of male and cultural superiority when dealing with prospective brides. However, the means by which Gunther and Siegfried perform their superiority differs: Siegfried in effect acts within the framework of *hohe Minne* whereas Gunther assumes an imperialist command and conquer (colonization) approach.<sup>44</sup> If we look at Kriemhild, who initially rejects emphatically the prescribed societal norm of being the object of *mannes minne*, we see cause for Siegfried

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<sup>43</sup> I argue here that Gunther can be considered an active player in the courtship since he takes part in the courtship itself, although he is successful only with Siegfried's assistance. I believe, despite Siegfried's overwhelmingly dominant presence, that Gunther uses Siegfried as a tool in which to enact his own agency. Whereas Gunther initiates and is a member of the expedition to Isenstein, Etzel is persuaded by his council to woo Kriemhild and the courtship is done by proxy.

<sup>44</sup> Siegfried initially attempted to win the Burgundian realm through a feat of strength, which was resolved through the evocation of *höfisch* feudal law and hospitality. Gunther's expedition is done according to Siegfried's initial model of "recken wîse," symbolising an act of the heroic-archaic nature.

to restore order. Siegfried's courtship of Kriemhild is an extension of *hohe Minne*. Not only does it restore Kriemhild's role of serving as an object of desire but furthermore it allows Siegfried to adhere to the *Dienst-Lohn* ("service-reward") paradigm. As Siegfried enacts the *Dienst-Lohn* role, he is able to situate himself within the Burgundian society: not only does Siegfried offer his service to the Burgundian Kings, he also volunteers his service to protect the Burgundian realm. *Hohe Minne* has a twofold effect: first it places Kriemhild into the socially appropriate role and secondly it integrates Siegfried into the Burgundian society. A prime example of this is detailed in Siegfried's actions when Luidiger and Luidegast, the Saxon and Dane, threaten war. Siegfried offers his service out of friendship (*triuwe*) to the Burgundian realm (NL 156), but his true motivations can be ascribed to an act of *hohe Minne* (NL 260,1) and the two are not mutually exclusive. A second act of *Dienst* which ultimately leads to *Lohn* for Siegfried is the contract between Siegfried and Gunther. This contract specifies that if Siegfried can successfully help Gunther win Brunhild as his bride, Kriemhild will become Siegfried's wife (NL 333). The contractual aspect is in accordance with medieval courtly society, in which the male members of society decided the fate of eligible brides. In this fashion, as well as in the literary notion of *hohe Minne*, Siegfried is able to domesticate Kriemhild. Siegfried is in turn domesticated by the Burgundian society. Siegfried's initial approach to courtship was an antagonistic show of strength. The Burgundians countered Siegfried by evoking *höfisch* culture. Siegfried's non-Burgundian, hostile, strength-based approach shifted to the *höfisch* approach of *hohe Minne*. This shift is reflected in how the narrator describes the encounter between Siegfried and Kriemhild. For example, stanza 293 describes how Siegfried and Kriemhild steal a longing glance at one another: "wie rehte minneclîche er

bî der frouwen gie! / mit lieben ougen blicken ein ander sâhen an / der herre und ouch die frouwe" (NL 293,2-4).<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the archaic is placed discursively into the *höfisch* framework when Siegfried advises Gunther against pursuing Brunhild as a bride: Siegfried emphasizes Brunhild's "vrieslîche sit" ("schreckliche Angewohnheiten") (NL 330,2), which Gunther transposes into "den mînneclîchen" ("die Liebenswerte") (NL 332,2). These two examples show how the *höfisch* framework of *hohe Minne* is used to transform/domesticate foreign elements in the Burgundian society. Whereas Kriemhild subscribes to the societal and literary norms and becomes the object of Siegfried's desire and furthermore willingly consummates the marriage (NL 629), the same cannot be said about Brunhild.

Gunther's courting of Brunhild is much more complex than the seemingly straightforward (although drawn out) courtship of Kriemhild by Siegfried. Gunther must venture into the foreign realm of Island to woo Brunhild. The spatial dimension which signifies Brunhild's otherness is indicated in the description of her geographic location: "gesezzen über sê" (NL 326, 1).<sup>46</sup> Brunhild is spatially detached from Worms. Further indications of this foreignness can be seen in how information about her is related. The sixth *Aventiure* begins with news from outside of the Rhine area: "Itenuwe mære sich huoben über Rîn" (NL 325,1).<sup>47</sup> Information about Brunhild is also reported as hearsay or tale. The narrator recounts that there may be many beautiful maidens in this foreign realm: "man sagte, daz dâ wære manec scêne magedîn. / der gedâht' im eine erwerben

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<sup>45</sup> "Ach, wie so liebvoll ging er neben der jungen Herrin! Sie sahen sich mit dem Blick verliebter Augen an" (293).

<sup>46</sup> "jenseits des Meeres" (326). The translation "beyond the sea" has a symbolic function as it separates Isenstein even further from Worms. It indicates that this is a great distance that must be overcome.

<sup>47</sup> "Ganz neue Nachrichten gelangten von weithin an den Rhein" (325).

Günther der kúnec guot" (NL 325,2-3).<sup>48</sup> With the use of the subjunctive, the reliability of the information is thrust into the legendary and mythical. Moreover, this passage highlights that Isenstein is an exceedingly desirable object of colonization, with not just one beautiful woman but many beautiful maidens. Furthermore, Gunther's response to the news of this alleged haven of beautiful maidens is "im eine erwerben" (NL 325,3): he is of the mindset to win one for himself.<sup>49</sup> If we compare the opening lines of the *Nibelungenlied* with the opening lines of the sixth *Aventiure*, we can see that the poem as a whole is presented as a true account of things that transpired, or at least as a narrative that is plausible.<sup>50</sup> The use of the subjunctive can also be seen as a form of foreshadowing in that it indicates a state of irreality, which corresponds to the irreality of the *Brautwerbung* highlighted by elements of deceit and magic.<sup>51</sup> The trip to Isenstein additionally can be seen as a departure from the contemporary courtly Burgundian realm into the archaic and mythical pre-courtly. In fact, the manner in which the expedition is undertaken marks the shift from a *höfisch* mode to an archaic: they travel in "recken wîse" (NL 341, 1).<sup>52</sup>

Whereas Kriemhild's beauty and virtues are indicative of her role as the model noble maiden, the focus on Brunhild is her gender-specific ambiguity in addition to her foreignness. As discussed before, Kriemhild is the *höfisch* ideal of femininity, so much so

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<sup>48</sup> "Man sprach davon, es gäbe dort viele schöne Mädchen. Gunther, der vorzügliche König, faßte den Entschluß, eine von ihnen zur Frau zu nehmen" (325).

<sup>49</sup> The MHD verb *erwerben* is translated "durch tätiges handeln zu ende bringen, ausrichten oder erlangen, erreichen, gewinnen" (Lexer 51).

<sup>50</sup> *maeren* describes news/information without differentiating between fact and fiction as opposed to *Märchen* for example. *maeren* could be story or history. The entry in Matthias Lexer's *Mittelhochdeutsches Taschenwörterbuch* for *maeren* is as follows: "kund, nachricht, bericht, erzählung, erzählende dichtung; erdichtung, märchen; gegenstand der erzählung, geschichte, sache, ding" (134).

<sup>51</sup> For example: the Tarnkappe ("cloak of invisibility") and Standeslüge ("lie about rank at court").

<sup>52</sup> "Wir werden wie einst die alten Krieger als kleine Gruppe rheinabwärts fahren" (341). This is a direct shift from the courtly mode to the heroic-archaic. This shift is further emphasized when one contrasts Etzel's courtship of Kriemhild (vis-à-vis Rüdiger) which follows *höfisch* formalities of addressing the court and nobility before approaching the prospective bride.

that her virtues bestow honour on all other women (NL 3,4). These virtues however are all categorically feminine. Brunhild conversely does not share Kriemhild's unambiguous femininity. As we can see in the comparison of the two female protagonists' introductions, Brunhild is described in terms of unmatched beauty *in addition to* her extraordinary strength: "diu was unmâzen scône, vil michel was ir kraft" (NL 326, 3). While beauty is a quintessential feminine attribute, strength is the quintessential masculine trait. In this respect Brunhild is not only a geographical other, she also embodies both masculine and feminine traits. The paradox of Brunhild is that she negates the masculine-feminine binary. Ursula Schulze argues that Brunhild is depicted as "ein androgynes Wesen" and that she "vereint Schönheit und übermäßige Körperkraft" attributed to her "vorhöfische, archaische Dimension," which is shared with the figure Siegfried (Schulze, "Gunther" 35). Peter Strohschneider takes Schulze's androgyny argument one step further and argues that the character Brunhild structurally fulfills multiple roles simultaneously: "Prünhilt ist die Schönste, zugleich ist sie überstark. Das heißt, sie aggregiert die Funktionen der Braut und des Brautvaters" (Strohschneider 50). The argument can be made that this is an example of presenting gender as a performative action, which therefore makes Strohschneider's analysis of Brunhild hold true. Her gender identity is unclear because she is performing conflicting gender roles as both bride and father/protector of the bride. In fact, the *Nibelungenlied* poet emphasizes the masculine side of Brunhild at length, specifically through the description of the *Freierprobe* ("the test of the suitor"). Brunhild's strength is described in terms of how many men it takes to carry certain objects required for the competition. The first object described in terms of man power is Brunhild's shield:

Der schilt was under buckeln, als uns daz ist gesaget,  
 wol drier spannen dicke, den solde tragen diu maget,  
 von stahl unt ouch von golde; rich er was genouc,  
 den ir kamerære selbe vierde kûme truoc. (NL 437)<sup>53</sup>

Here we see the first indication of Brunhild's strength. It is not only described in terms of man power but more literally in men power. Her strength surpasses that of men, in that it takes multiple men to perform a feat that this one woman can. This theme is continued with the description of Brunhild's spear:

Von des gêres swære hæret wunder sagen,  
 wol vierdehalbiu messe was dar zuo geslagen.  
 den truogen kûme drê Prünhilde man. (NL 441, 1-3)<sup>54</sup>

The spear is so heavy that three of Brunhild's men can barely carry it. Brunhild's strength is once more emphasized with a description of the stone used in the competition; in fact, her strength appears to grow:

Diu Prünhilde sterke vil græzefîche schein.  
 man truoc ir zuo dem ringe einen swæren stein,  
 grôz unt ungefüege, michel unde wel.  
 in truogen kûme zwelfe, helde küene unde snel. (NL 449)<sup>55</sup>

These examples highlight Brunhild's otherness in terms of gender. She is a woman with hyper-masculine strength and male-identified weapons. Tilo Renz comments "aus der

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<sup>53</sup> "Der Schild, den Brünhild tragen sollte, war unter den Buckeln, wie uns überliefert ist, etwa drei Spannen dick. Er war mit Stahl und Gold so reich beschlagen, daß ihn ihr Kämmerer zusammen mit drei Rittern kaum schleppen konnte" (437).

<sup>54</sup> "Hört Wunderliches vom Gewicht des Speers: Wohl drei-einhalb Maß Beschläge waren dazu verarbeitet worden. Den konnten drei Gefolgsleute Brünhilds kaum fortbewegen. Der edle Gunther fing an, sich große Sorgen zu machen" (441).

<sup>55</sup> "Brünhilds Stärke schien gewaltig zu sein. Man brachte ihr zum Kampfplatz einen schweren Stein: groß und ungefüge, gewaltig und rund. Ihn konnten kaum zwölf tapfere und erfahrene Helden schleppen" (449).

Beschreibung des Transports der Waffen ist ablesbar, dass Gradmesser von Brühilds Stärke männliche Körper sind. Um den weiblichen Körper zu charakterisieren, wird er auf den männlichen bezogen" (17). This is problematic, since despite her strongly emphasized masculinity, in the end Brunhild is still a *female* object of desire occupying *the feminine* function of the "Schönste."<sup>56</sup> By using the male body as the unit of measurement and reference point, the poet/narrator effectively solidifies the view of masculine prestige in the gender hierarchy. This emphasis is reinforced by having both masculine and feminine characters being attributed lexically with the same descriptors. However, when terminology is used that designates specific chivalric ideals, it is only applied to the masculine figures, thus drawing a gender-specific boundary (Renz 19). Moreover, the descriptors that are attributed to both masculine and feminine characters have opposing connotations based on the gender of the figure, as with the example of strength.

Brunhild's strength is extraordinary, a character trait which can be interpreted as a display of *unmâze*.<sup>57</sup> Brunhild's excessive strength is then literally demonized rather than praised as is the case with male characters.<sup>58</sup> When Hagen sees Brunhild's display of might he responds by calling her the devil's bride:

Alsô der starke Hagene den schilt dar tragen sach,  
mit grímmígem muote der helt von Tronege sprach:

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<sup>56</sup> Strohschneider develops a model for the courtships in which the category of the best man/the prettiest woman ("der beste Mann/die schönste Frau") corresponds to wooer/bride (*Werber/Braut*). He argues that due to other versions of the myth, in the *Nibelungenlied* Siegfried supersedes Gunther as wooer (*Werber*) (58), because "die Braut ist hier die Schönste, aber der Werber ist ein anderer als der Beste, und der Beste, Sîfrit, ist nicht der Werber" (52).

<sup>57</sup> This display of *unmâze* can be attributed to both the masculine and feminine aspects of Brunhild's character make-up as she is fulfilling the role of both protector and potential bride during this *Aventiure*.

<sup>58</sup> With the exception of Siegfried who is said to have been "sent by the devil himself" during the war with the Saxons and Danes: "in hât der übele tiuvel her zen Sâhsén gesant" (NL 216,4).

"wâ nû, kúnic Gunther? Wie vliessen wir den lîp!

der ir dâ gert ze minnen, diu ist des tíuvéles wîp." (NL 438,1-4)<sup>59</sup>

Hagen, however, is not alone in demonizing Brunhild's displays of unnatural vigour. Gunther himself reinforces this demonizing theme when he exclaims, "waz sol díz wésen? / der tiuvel ûz der helle kúnd'er dâ vór genesen?" (NL 442,1-2).<sup>60</sup> Gunther doesn't explicitly call Brunhild the devil; rather, he radically states that she is even worse than the devil. Moreover, Gunther is able to link Brunhild with this reference to the supernatural realm in terms of the demonic. Brunhild's alterity is once more pointed out by Hagen as he questions Gunther's choice of Brunhild as a future bride: "'wâfen', sprach Hagene, 'waz hât der künic ze trût! / jâ sol si in der helle sîn des übeln tiuvels brût'" (NL 450,3-4).<sup>61</sup> These examples highlight how Brunhild is viewed by the Burgundians as an "other" in many ways: she is culturally different as a female sovereign and physically different as she has hyper-masculine traits as a woman, which ties into her other-worldliness as seen in her supernatural strength and her implied associations with the demonic. These demonic associations can be put into the Christian context as the notion of the devil is in direct opposition to the Christian notion of the divine. Since the moral code and societal norms of the courtly nobility are based on the Christian ethic, we can infer that Brunhild and her realm are viewed by the Burgundians as non-Christian, and therefore *unhöfisch*.

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<sup>59</sup> "Als der starke Hagen sah, wie man den Schild dorthin trug, fragte der Held von Tronje bissig: 'Wo sind wir bloß hingelassen, König Gunther? Wie verlieren wir das Leben! Die Dame, die Ihr lieben wollt, ist die Frau des Teufels'" (438).

<sup>60</sup> "Was soll das sein? Wie könnte selbst der Teufel aus der Hölle hier heil davonkommen?" (442).

<sup>61</sup> "'Um Gottes willen', sagte Hagen, 'was hat sich der König für eine Frau ausgesucht; ja, sie sollte sehr viel eher in der Hölle die Braut des bösen Teufels sein'" (450).

Yet Isenstein is also described as courtly. Despite the obvious difference of a female sovereign, the greeting ceremony, along with the structure of the court is presented no differently than that of Worms. When Siegfried and the Burgundians arrive in Brunhild's court they are presented with a welcoming drink and shown hospitality: "Man hiez den gesten schenken unt schuof in gemach" (NL 408,1).<sup>62</sup> Moreover, one of Brunhild's advisors plays the role Hagen had when Siegfried arrived in Worms. In fact, the formulation is almost verbatim: one of her vassals states,

[...] vrouwe, ich mac wol jehen,

daz ich ir deheinen nie mêt habe gesehen,

wan gelîche Sîfride éiner darúnder stât.

den sult ir wol enpfâhen, daz ist mit trúwén mîn rât. (NL 411,1-4)<sup>63</sup>

After Brunhild is defeated and relinquishes her holdings to her uncle in keeping, Brunhild departs Isenstein in "tugentlîchen zúhten" (NL 526,1).<sup>64</sup> This would suggest that the narrator's intention of setting up a binary opposition is undone by the actual content, creating ambiguity in whether Isenstein is actually *unhöfisch*. Additionally, this foreign realm is designated as different but is presented as familiar. If the narrative intention is to create alterity through contradistinction, then this intention is undermined by presenting the material in a *höfisch* manner: everything is ultimately familiar in virtue of being *höfisch*.

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<sup>62</sup> "Man ließ den Gästen einen Begrüßungstrunk ausschenken und sorgte für ihr Wohlbefinden" (409).

<sup>63</sup> "Da sagte einer ihrer Gefolgsleute: 'Herrin, ich kann wohl sagen, daß ich keinen der vier jemals gesehen habe; aber einer unter ihnen sieht Siegfried ähnlich. Den sollt Ihr ehrenvoll empfangen, das ist mein getreuer Rat'" (411). Compare Hagen's response when Siegfried is the unknown arrival in Worms: "Alsô sprach dô Hagene: 'ich wil des wol verjehen, / swie ich Sivriden nimmer habe gesehen, / sô wil ich wol gelouben, swie ez dar umbe stât, / daz ez sí der recke, der dort sô hêrlîchen gât'" (86,1-4). ("Deshalb sprach Hagen: 'Ich möchte dazu folgendes sagen; obwohl ich Siegfried noch nie gesehen habe, so möchte ich wohl annehmen, mag es sein, wie es will, daß er der Krieger ist, der dort so stolz auf und ab geht'").

<sup>64</sup> "Mit höfischem Zeremoniell verließ die Königin ihr Land" (526).

The premise of the courtship-competition must not be overlooked. The reason why Brunhild's physical strength is even called into question can be reduced to the most basic gender conflict of all: man versus woman. The Burgundians travel to Isenstein to win Brunhild as Gunther's wife. This courtship is placed in context of a physical competition between the genders as opposed to a *Dienst-Lohn* dynamic, more common to the period in which the *Nibelungenlied* was written, as seen in the Siegfried-Kriemhild courtship. Here the role of *hohe Minne* is replaced by physical conquest, a corporal colonization. In fact the *Brautwerbung* ("bridal quest") can be seen in its entirety as an act of colonization and subsequent domestication. Anna Mühlherr states, "Isenstein liegt am Ende der Welt und hat als mythischer Ort nach Brünhilds Bezwingung ausgedient; er wird von der höfischen Wormser Welt 'gewissermaßen kolonisiert'" (466). The *Brautwerbung* in Isenstein then can be viewed in terms of Ursula Schulze's notion that the aristocratic society adapted Christian ethics to justify their own sovereignty. Analogous to the Crusades during the period in which the *Nibelungenlied* was set to parchment, but instead of a crusade regaining the holy lands from the heathens, we can interpret the *Brautwerbung* in terms of a crusade to restore the natural hierarchical order of the dominance of man over woman. As Brunhild, a woman, is an autonomous sovereign, the courtship can be seen as a manoeuvre to situate woman back within her subordinate role in the gender hierarchy, while also expanding the Burgundian realm.<sup>65</sup>

The courtship competition is taken out of the *Dienst-Lohn* thematic and placed into one of conquest/subordination/domestication. We can expand this argument even further to include marriage. The role of marriage among the aristocratic society during

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<sup>65</sup> The theme of Christianization is more prevalent in the second part of the *Nibelungenlied*, as one of the supposed motivations/justifications for Kriemhild accepting Etzel's marriage proposal is to Christianize the Hunnish King, which I will expand upon subsequently.

the High Middle Ages was predominately based on dynastical political interests (Bumke, *Ehebruch* 28). Bumke argues that theoretically, a marriage would only be valid if both partners gave their consent. In practice, however, the woman's consent was most often a formality (Bumke, *Ehebruch* 28). Bumke further explains how the terms and conditions of marriage/marriage contracts were often set out by the fathers of the future couple or between the groom and the father of the bride (*Ehebruch* 29). In the context of the *Nibelungenlied*, none of these conditions exist. Kriemhild is promised to Siegfried through a contract based on the *Dienst-Lohn* model as prescribed by *hohe Minne* (Siegfried promises to help Gunther court Brunhild in exchange for Kriemhild's hand in marriage), while Brunhild conversely is the prize won through physical defeat. The terms in which Brunhild marries are not set out by a representative of a patriarchal society, but rather, she sets her own requirements and in doing so acts out both male and female roles, as mentioned above. The implications of this support the view of Brunhild as an androgynous figure: her gendered identity is ambiguous.

The *Brautwerbung* can also be seen as a military conquest not unlike the failed conquest of the Saxons and Danes in the *Aventiure* leading up to the *Brautwerbung*. In a military conflict, to the victor go the spoils: the strongest party will win precisely because it is the strongest, which in turn justifies its victory and position in the hierarchical structure of the world. Although the Burgundians were outnumbered, they were able to defeat the Saxon and Danish intruders with Siegfried's help, an important theme that is repeated in the *Brautwerbung*. The natural order is disrupted by Siegfried's intervention in both the Saxon war and the *Brautwerbung*: the militarily stronger intruders according

to the natural order should have defeated the Burgundians.<sup>66</sup> However, Siegfried lends his supernatural strength and devices to the Burgundians' defence, which results in the capture and capitulation of the intruding forces. This break with the natural order is repeated in the *Brautwerbung*.

Peter Strohschneider views the *Brautwerbungen* in the *Nibelungenlied* as following this structural scheme:

Der Erzähltyp der gefährlichen Brautwerbung läßt sich einerseits als eine konventionalisierte Matrix narrativer Elemente verstehen: ein spezifisches Raumprogramm, das zwei Machtbereiche durch eine allermeist als Meer erscheinende Schwellenwelt voneinander absetzt und aufeinander bezieht; eine distinkte Figurenkonstellation sodann mit Werber, Werbungshelfer, Braut und Brautvater; schließlich ein Set von Episodenmustern wie Ratsszene, Werbungsfahrt, Freierprobe, Kemenatenszene, Heimführung der Braut, über deren Abfolge die Handlung sich aufbaut. Andererseits ist diese Geschichtenmatrix als Ausfaltung ihrer Basisregel zu begreifen, wonach der Werber die Braut bekommt. Der Erzähltyp der gefährlichen Brautwerbung versteht sich demnach als Möglichkeit, das dieser Regel zugrundeliegende elementare Gesetz narrativ zu garantieren, daß nämlich in einem gegebenen Weltausschnitt stets nur der beste Mann und die schönste Frau zusammengehören. (48)

Strohschneider ultimately sets up binary units that consist of suitor-bride and the best-the most beautiful (52). However, these binaries are ambiguous specially in the case of

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<sup>66</sup> The Saxon/Danish invasion allows for the theme of rightful rule based on dynastic principles to be reinforced. This theme was first introduced in the narrative when Siegfried threatened to overthrow the Burgundians by force, which was countered by referencing the claim to power based on inheritance, indicative of the emphasis on the *höfisch* perspective.

Brunhild, in which there are two eligible suitors: Gunther as the king from Worms and Siegfried the strongest hero. In fact, upon the Burgundians' arrival in Isenstein, Siegfried is received by Brunhild as the intended suitor. It is only through deception that Siegfried relinquishes his status as suitor to Gunther and imposes the irreality of his position in the hierarchy (the *Standeslüge*). To test whether the suitor is apt to court Brunhild, the suitor must defeat Brunhild in a series of physical feats. This would suggest a confirmation of the natural order, as highlighted above in terms of military conquest. In this respect, Brunhild was correct in her initial estimate of Siegfried as the appropriate suitor, since it is his strength and affinity to the supernatural which correspond to Brunhild's own ties to the supernatural and otherworldliness. Indeed, the logical match for Brunhild is Siegfried: they both inhabit the magical-mythical sphere outside of the courtly realm of Worms as a consequence of the fusing and adaptation of previous myth by *Nibelungenlied* poets.

Strohschneider notes:

Er [Siegfried] ist es, der die Braut "schon immer" kennt, er war schon früher in Isenstein und er ist der Stärkste – nicht offensichtlich aber faktisch: im Dreikampf wie in Prünhilts zweiter Brautnacht. Sîfrits Verfügung über den nicht nur unsichtbar machenden, sondern zudem *zwelf manne sterke* (337,3) verleihenden Tarnmantel versteht sich auch als Markierung dieses Vorrangs. Das Requisit verkoppelt die aktuelle Funktion des Werbungshelfers mit seiner heroischen Vorgeschichte ... (51)

The fact that Brunhild and Siegfried have a history together in previous versions of the myth is overridden by an alternate emphasis of the courtship which focuses on a

Burgundian-centric world view created by the poets.<sup>67</sup> Although Siegfried's role as *Werbungshelfer* ("assistant to the courter") helps further the plot and is an example of his *Dienst* in the *Dienst-Lohn* thematic, his involvement causes inherent ambiguity in the structure of a *Brautwerbung*. Siegfried is at one and the same time, according to Strohschneider's *Brautwerbungsschema* ("model of courtship"), a subordinate helper to the suitor and also an accentuated mythical hero whose own genealogy antecedes King Gunther's (Strohschneider 52). According to the model of courtship, Brunhild and King Gunther are compatible mates; however, according to his function as a hero, Siegfried is also meant to win Brunhild as a bride. The ambiguity lies herein: the bride is the most beautiful but the wooer is not the best.<sup>68</sup> Despite the intended result of the expedition to Isenstein being accomplished, that is Gunther winning a bride, the consequence of Siegfried's involvement is one that disrupts any binary cohesiveness as far as character constellation is concerned.<sup>69</sup> The overt binary of Siegfried-Kriemhild/Gunther-Brunhild is undermined by Gunther's inferiority to Siegfried as a compatible match to Brunhild. This example highlights how the binaries that appear on the surface are in fact destabilized by the underlying ambiguities in the text. We can take this one step further: the binaries which result from the courtships and subsequent marriages are indicative of

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<sup>67</sup> Jan-Dirk Müller argues that Siegfried's knowledge of Brunhild is an expression of his affinity to the "outside" world and for "him to have known Prünhilt before is therefore completely unnecessary within the narrative logic of the *Nibelungenlied*" (62).

<sup>68</sup> See Strohschneider: "Gemäß dem Prinzip des Werbungsmodells wird Prünhilt zwar dem Wormser König zugeführt, doch zugleich hätte nach der Grundregel des Heldenschemas auch Sifrit die Braut zu bekommen, denn die Braut ist hier die Schönste, aber der Werber ist ein anderer als der Beste, und der Beste, Sifrit, ist nicht der Werber" (52).

<sup>69</sup> Müller argues that Brunhild's courtship follows the paradigm that the strongest individual must rule. He states that in "Isenstein, the strongest rules, even though she is a woman, whereby it follows that the strongest man must also be a ruler, otherwise there would be someone stronger still. If the deception of Prünhilt is to succeed, then the equation of strongest = ruler = suitor must be upheld" (68). However, this is not the case. The strongest is Siegfried, but he fulfills the role of subordinate to King Gunther and he is not the suitor.

the domestication process in the *Nibelungenlied*. Take Brunhild for example: Brunhild's physical defeat along with the stripping of her power accompanied with losing the courtship competition is reinforced by the scene in which Gunther and Brunhild's marriage is consummated. Brunhild loses her social and political autonomy as a sovereign, resulting from a physical defeat: by being physically conquered, Brunhild relinquishes her instruments of power, namely her treasury, her throne, and her land. Although she has lost her political autonomy, she retains corporal autonomy. Brunhild's social standing is reduced through another act of physical defeat. Her extraordinary physical strength, however, is connected to her virginity. Brunhild's virginity and her struggle to maintain her undomesticable sense of self is problematic for the Burgundian king and society on the whole. As long as Brunhild retains her virginity, she retains her status as "other." Her virginity, unlike Kriemhild's which invokes the notion of *hohe Minne*, is linked to her "masculine" and mythical character traits, represented by depictions of her quasi-Amazonian strength and her role as an autonomous ruler.<sup>70</sup> The loss of her virginity then demarcates the completion of the domestication process which rids her of her foreignness. Consummation of marriage allegorically repeats the act of dethroning Brunhild. Her power is stripped from her in Siegfried's act of taking her virginity, and it is in this act of domestication that she again loses her status as other and becomes fully integrated into the Burgundian sphere. Her loss of virginity places her in a subordinate role in the gender hierarchy and, moreover, stabilizes her gender identity.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Stephen Wailes argues that the battle in the bedroom symbolizes the "archetypal struggle for power between husband and wife" (371). Here he notes Siegfried's concern of losing this battle. For if Brunhild were to gain control she would set an example for all wives to be insubordinate (371), and therefore unsettle the gender hierarchy.

<sup>71</sup> Siegfried plays a critical role in this domestication, as he uses his magical elements such as the cloak of invisibility to combat Brunhild's supernatural side. Furthermore, the theme of deception is accentuated by the fact that Siegfried has to fulfill this role on more than one occasion on Gunther's behalf.

She becomes a woman and wife through the consummation of her marriage, reifying the model of gender identity in the *Nibelungenlied* as a performed identity rather than a strictly anatomical/biological function.<sup>72</sup>

In regard to the female figures we can see how, on the one hand, they are a necessity of the courtly custom of *hohe Minne* whereby they are placed in a role of veneration and, on the other, they are hierarchically subordinate in the male-dominated society. This paradox is explored by Ingrid Kasten in regard to poetic representations of *hohe Minne* in the contemporary medieval genre of *Minnesang*. She notes that the Minnesingers project woman in "Anlehnung an lehnsrechtliche Vorstellungen," and transform woman "zur *domina*, zur 'Herrin'," which in effect places woman in a dominant role over man (Kasten 165). Kasten argues further that this is done all the while through formal analogy, but in opposition, to the Christian mindset of a "summum bonum" (165). In the *Nibelungenlied* this paradoxical treatment of the female characters is palpable. We see in Kriemhild's reluctance as a child to fulfill the role prescribed to woman as an object of *mannes minne* as, on the one hand, an acceptance of her subordinate role in the male-dominated Burgundian and, on the other, an act considered to be in direct defiance of the societal norms. When we examine Brunhild, we see someone who has accepted the role of "*domina*" and is subsequently forcibly removed from this position of sovereignty and domination. Brunhild in the end conforms to the Burgundian notions of gender and

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<sup>72</sup> I make this argument with regard to Kriemhild as well. She is ultimately beheaded because she took up the sword and performed a "male" task: "wie ist nu tôt gelegen / von eines wîbes handen der aller beste degen" (NL 2374,1-2). "Wie liegt nun der allerbeste Ritter hier, erschlagen von den Händen einer Frau" (2374). Bettina Bildhauer argues from the Freudian perspective that "[m]en kill and woman die" and therefore Kriemhild disrupted "this comfortable binary of men who kill and woman who die" by killing Hagen (62). When Hildebrand in turn decapitates Kriemhild he is restoring the gender binary of men who kill and woman who die, "turning Kriemhild back into a victim of a male affront" (Bildhauer 62).

gender roles. After Kriemhild and Brunhild argue, Siegfried and Gunther agree on a plan to discipline ("erziehen") their wives in order to avoid any future confrontations:

"Man sol sô vrouwen ziehen," sprach Sîfrit der degen,

"daz si ûppeclîchen sprûche lâzen under wegen.

verbuit ez dînem wîbe, der mînen tuon ich sam.

ir grôzen ungefüege ich mich wærlîche scham."

Mit rede was gescheiden manic schœne wîp. (NL 862, 1-863,1)<sup>73</sup>

What this agreement really shows is the way in which the gender hierarchy can be maintained. With the means through which to deal with Brunhild in place, she is no longer a threat to the gender hierarchy. In fact, she disappears from the narrative almost entirely after the fourteenth *Aventiure*. But gender is not the only source of alterity in the *Nibelungenlied*; in fact, there is a category of other "others."

#### **1.4: Other "Others"**

The culture clash between the Huns and the Burgundians often is seen as the most manifest element of alterity in the *Nibelungenlied*. However, the problem of classification of the characters on the whole can be, and is, a daunting enterprise as the characters are not easily categorized into groups of foreign and familiar. And precisely because of their ambiguous nature, the characters are able to be shifted and moulded at the poets' whim. As mentioned above, the *Nibelungenlied* (as an adaptation of the Nibelungen mythology) is presented in such a way that it projects the ideals and mores of the society in which it

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<sup>73</sup> "'Man soll Frauen so erziehen,' sagte Siegfried, der Ritter, 'daß sie übermütiges Gerede bleiben lassen. Untersag dies deiner Frau, mit meiner will ich es ebenso halten. Wirklich, ich schäme mich wegen ihres ausgesprochen ungehörigen Benehmens. Mit dieser Unterredung waren die vielen schönen Frauen in zwei Lager geteilt" (862-863).

was transcribed, and as such, there are inherent tensions between these ideals and mores and the material itself.

If we consider the characters on a level other than the male-female dichotomy we find that here too they are cast into varying degrees of foreign and familiar. A summary division of the Burgundian, the representatives of the courtly-Christian, "familiar" world view, with the non-Burgundian, archaic, mythical, and foreign others, allows for certain figures to be categorized based on their temporal and spatial heritage, especially in the first half of the *Nibelungenlied*. We have in the one camp the kings and queens from Worms (Gunther, Giselher, Gernot, Ute, Kriemhild etc.); in a second we find the mythical-archaic Siegfried-Brunhild; in the third we have the Hun Etzel. However, there is not a clear-cut distinction between the three camps, and in fact, there are characters, most notably Hagen, who fit into more than one of the three categories, which I will address subsequently.<sup>74</sup>

I would like to first focus on the Siegfried-Brunhild category, as they are only present in the first half of the *Nibelungenlied*, the part which deals with Siegfried's death. As stated above, the *Nibelungenlied* is comprised of two branches of lore/myth. Whereas

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<sup>74</sup> Rüdiger is also a prime example of belonging to more than one category as he has ties both to the Huns and the Burgundians and is himself an exile. This situates Rüdiger in a liminal space in which he is both foreign and familiar, which as, Francis Gentry notes, is highlighted in the fact that Rüdiger is torn between personal bonds and feudal ties: On the one hand, he has personal bonds with the Burgundians, in addition to obligations as host and guide to provide safe passage, and on the other, he is bound by oath to Kriemhild and vassalage to Etzel (Gentry 9). This dilemma is more than a moral one, as his feudality is a legally binding contract. If he were to break his bond with the Burgundians, he would be disavowing "society's first rule that *fröide* must prevail" (Bekker 239). Moreover, cutting his ties to the Burgundians would result in a loss of "all his virtue such as *êre*, *triuwe*, and *zuht*" as well as his soul (Gentry 9). Conversely, to disavow his feudal obligations to Etzel and his sworn oath to Kriemhild would result in an expulsion from society. In fact, Rüdiger attempted to release himself from Etzel's service through the act of *diffidatio* (Gentry 9). Rüdiger's ties to both the Burgundians and Huns causes an identity crisis in which he must decide between feudal law and *höfisch* virtues, a dilemma that consists of 32 stanzas out of the 100 stanzas in the *Aventiure* (Thelen, "37th *Aventiure*" 389).

the second half is for the most part based on a single myth, the first half is made up of multiple sources. Bernhard Martin credits this to the fact that

der erste Teil des *Nibelungenliedes*, der mit Siegfrieds Tod endet, aus mehreren Liedern zusammengesetzt wurde, und daß der 2. Teil, die Rache Kriemhilds, seinen Vorläufer in einer *Älteren Not* hatte. Als Beweis für diese Hypothese wurde angeführt, daß der erste Teil des Epos in stärkerem Maße erzählerische Brüche aufweise, der zweite jedoch zielgerichtet und relativ bruchlos auf den Untergang der Burgunden zusteure. (75)

Martin's argument that the *Brüche* are a result of the multiple sources used to compose the first part of the *Nibelungenlied* does not, however, entirely explain the inconsistency of character traits. Rather, it is through the combination of both the multiple sources of material and the manner in which certain ideals and societal norms are emphasized by the poets to further the process of self-mythologization by the courtly society around 1200 that results in ambiguity in the *Nibelungenlied*.<sup>75</sup>

The actions of certain characters can be interpreted as a means to contrast the virtues in high regard with those thought to be *unhöfisch*. Friedrich Neumann comments on this point noting that, "über Brünhild, die den Weitsprung wagt und den Stein stößt, die mit Gunther und Siegfried ringt, haben Kleriker, Ritter und Ritterfrauen gelacht. Gerade der Gegensatz zum herrschenden Ideal der Frau mußte erheiternd wirken" (15).

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<sup>75</sup> See Roland Barthes *Mythologies*: Barthes' semiotic approach to the construction of myth is relevant here. He assigns myth a semiotic function in which myth as a signifier is a sign by virtue of already containing meaning. This meaning, the content, is then distorted by the form, the way in which the myth is presented (Barthes 122). I argue that this is a source of ambiguity in *Nibelungen* adaptations since the myth itself already contains meaning which is distorted by the manipulation of the content to adhere to different socio-political milieus and zeitgeists. This is true of the *Nibelungenlied* as well as Lang's *Die Nibelungen*. The figures Brunhild and Siegfried in the *Nibelungenlied* highlight the most severe effects of the new form on myth: their archaic nature conflicts with their *höfisch* depiction and mode of being. This is caused because the form only distorts, rather than removes, the content of the myth, therefore, the new perspective (form) conflicts with the previous meaning (content). Their ambiguity is inherent in the adaptation.

The outcome of presenting Brunhild comically further stresses her alterity.<sup>76</sup> Brunhild is denigrated to an object of comic relief which contradicts her status as an eligible bride to be befitting Burgundian royalty. Furthermore, the actions and character traits which are in opposition to the societal norms not only act as a sort of comic relief, but rather can be interpreted as means to further plot development. Neumann argues that "Kriemhild, die mit Brünhild streitet, ist keine höfische Dame. Die unhöfische Kriemhild bleibt, weil von ihrem Tun der Fortgang der Geschichte abhängt" (16). Neumann touches on an important facet of the *Nibelungenlied*, that is, that the characters are not bound by any one set of character traits, but rather don certain traits depending on the situation or on plot requirements. Neumann states, "[d]ie Gestalten des Nibelungenliedes behalten ihre alte Art, soweit dies durch die Grundfabel verlangt wird. Sie nehmen die Haltung der höfischen Ritter und Ritterdamen an, wenn ihnen die Kernhandlung nicht die Gebärden vorschreibt" (16-17). Although I agree with this statement, it can also be argued that the figures that are presented as "höfische Ritter und Ritterdamen" conversely revert to their archaic and magical traits only when the plot dictates. Siegfried, for example, is initially introduced as part of the courtly-knightly class, I would argue even, the ideal male model of knightly virtue. In fact the parallels between how the characters are introduced in the first and second *Aventiure* emphasize this point:

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<sup>76</sup> Stephen Wailes notes that the comedic aspects of the bedroom scenes are "narratively unified with the chivalric ceremonies which introduce, connect, and terminate them" (367). The intentional comedy reinforces the contrast between Brunhild and the rest of *höfisch* society of Worms. Moreover, Brunhild's reluctance to consummate the marriage mimics Kriemhild's earlier refusal of *mannes minne*, the distinction being that role in *mannes minne* Kriemhild was to fulfill her duty to become the object of desire and admiration (an idealization), whereas for Brunhild, she is to become a sexual object (a practical application).



(NL 23, 2-4). These parallels suggest a comparable status, age, social standing, and in fact, even imply that these two figures are compatible based on how similar they are. This one-to-one compatibility is called into question, however, when Brunhild enters the narrative. This can be attributed to the poets' amalgamation of multiple sources of material which according to previous myth places Siegfried as the most suitable suitor for Brunhild and is indicated by Brunhild addressing Siegfried first and not Gunther upon their arrival in Isenstein, but also draws on the fact that Siegfried is a multifaceted and ambiguous character, who personifies the characteristics and virtues of opposing value systems (heroic/archaic/mythical versus *höfisch*/contemporary/Christian).

Despite the structural and content-based parallels between Siegfried and Kriemhild in their introductions, Siegfried's tendencies towards the heroic are clearly discernible. We are made aware of his "jungen tagen" in which "michel wunder" are told about him. In fact, in the stanza in which he is named, the focus is on his "ellenhaften muot" (NL 21, 2) and his "lîbes sterke" (NL 21, 3). The narrative oscillates between Siegfried the courtly knight and Siegfried the archaic hero: he is either/or and both heroic and *höfisch*.

In a similar fashion to Brunhild, Siegfried too is domesticated, that is, Siegfried's aggressive heroic side, the side which demands he use his strength to force "lânt únde bürge" (NL 110, 4) into subjugation, is countered by the Burgundians with the courtly virtue of "Gastrecht" (Martin 90), which inevitably neutralizes Siegfried's *unhöfisch* behaviour. Martin explains that Siegfried's attitude and conduct are actually more indicative of a "germanischen *recken*" than a chivalric knight (88-89). Gunther responds

accordingly to Siegfried's conduct by referring to the practice in the medieval feudal system where a claim to power is based on inheritance (Martin 90).<sup>77</sup> Martin adds:

Gunther, im *Nibelungenlied* ganz höfischer König, repräsentiert in dieser Szene ein anderes Wertesystem als Siegfried, der an dieser Stelle aus der Rolle des höfisch erzogenen Königssohns fällt und sich wie ein germanischer Renegat verhält. (89)

As a result of Gunther neutralizing this foreign threat, Siegfried is integrated into the Burgundian society and even starts fulfilling the functions of a vassal (Martin 90). Jan-Dirk Müller argues that Siegfried is never "completely accepted because of his origins," but conversely he "belongs to the same kind of world as the Burgundians" (62). Because Siegfried cannot be situated totally within the foreign category, nor be categorized as totally familiar, his arrival in Worms works contrary to the "cultural myth in which a developed civilization is confronted with what lies beyond its borders, something it both needs and fears" (Müller 62). The approach the Burgundians take to their fear and need of Siegfried is integration. Precisely because of his liminal position, Siegfried has an affinity to the customs of the Burgundian society. An indication of this can be seen in his adoption of the rituals of *hohe Minne*, which the narrator presents as the underlying cause for his active involvement in all things Burgundian: this is seen in him giving council at court; foremost defence against the Danes and Saxons; leading the expedition to Isenstein; and in his duties as "*officium stratoris et strepae*" (Martin 91). The expedition to Isenstein is a key event in the *Nibelungenlied* as it is a point in the plot where

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<sup>77</sup> Mahlendorf and Tobin argue that both Siegfried and the Burgundian kings invoke the law, the problem is that law has two different meanings in the *Nibelungenlied*: "For Siegfried ruling *von rehte* means having won one's position by being the strongest [...] The kings feel they rule *von rehte* because they are in accord with the accepted norms of inheritance and long undisputed possession. Fulfilling these legal norms is the condition for legitimate kingship" (Mahlendorf and Tobin, "Legality" 228).

Siegfried's blurred persona is highlighted. Martin argues that because the expedition is undertaken in "*recken wîse*" Siegfried is driven back into position in which his *unhöfisch* character traits become paramount. The Burgundians integrate Siegfried as an archaic/heroic figure in order for him to be able to perform within the courtly framework. It is his archaic qualities the Burgundians need both in the military conflict and in the *Brautwerbung*. However, the consequence of this collision of irreconcilable worlds of *höfisch* and *unhöfisch* culminate in Siegfried's murder (Martin 90). Not only are Siegfried's mythical traits used to further the plot, as Neumann argues is the case with Kriemhild (16), Siegfried's archaic-magical side is exploited positively by the Burgundians to further their own goals.<sup>78</sup> The Burgundian knowledge of the foreign, which in this case is Siegfried's archaic past, is utilized to their advantage. If we recall Said's notion that knowledge of the other is in fact domination over it, this holds true when the Burgundians use Siegfried to battle another foreign element, namely Brunhild. An example of this is that Hagen, the one who knows Siegfried's archaic past, is the one who recommends that Siegfried lead the expedition (NL 331, 1-4) knowing full well the impact of Siegfried's involvement. There is a slight but profound difference between Siegfried's involvements in matters concerning Brunhild than with events that threaten the Burgundian realm such as the Saxon-Danish invasion. Although Siegfried's motivations for involving himself in the Burgundian affairs can be reduced to a service provided for reward in the context of *hohe Minne*, the means in which Siegfried becomes involved differ. During the invasion Siegfried acts in a manner that resembles vassal obligations, and is done so along the lines of a chivalric knight. The expedition to

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<sup>78</sup> Müller maintains that Siegfried saves the existing order in Worms only to threaten it himself (62). I argue further that the Burgundians thrust Siegfried into a position that threatens their world order by manipulating his archaic side.

Isenstein, conversely, is undertaken through the guise of trickery and magic, that is, it transpires in an *unhöfisch* manner. The argument can be made that Isenstein lies outside of the *höfisch* Burgundian sphere, and therefore must accordingly be addressed with an element of foreignness. Yet Siegfried continues to act *unhöfisch* after they have returned to Worms, as seen in the rape of Brunhild. In contrast to the war with the Saxons and Danes, in which combat is man-to-man and therefore clearly *höfisch*, the struggle between Siegfried (and Gunther) with Brunhild becomes a question of how to deal with the other gender. The fact that the female foreigner is handled with subterfuge and deceit confirms this point. Furthermore, the scene in which Hagen tricks Kriemhild into revealing Siegfried's metaphorical Achilles heel reiterates that deceit is *the* approach to deal with the female gender. But not only does this form of trickery correspond to gender hierarchy, moreover it has an affinity to the archaic: "*grôzen listen*" (337, 4) exemplifies *unhöfisch* virtues.<sup>79</sup> Like the *Brautwerbung*, the Burgundians exploit this archaic side of Siegfried to their own ends. Siegfried is called into action to perform the final act of domestication of Brunhild. It is consequently this act which starts the chain reaction leading to his eventual murder. We can infer here that, although Siegfried was acting as an agent of the Burgundian King, his foreign attributes – his magical strength

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<sup>79</sup> Holger Homann argues that Hagen uses deceit at "crucial points of the plot" (763). His lies know no bounds, which Homann supports with examples of deception throughout the entire epic: in Isenstein he gives Siegfried an alibi for his absence during the courtship competition; after Kriemhild publicly shames Brunhild he invents a fictitious war to premise Siegfried's murder; he deceives Kriemhild into revealing Siegfried's spot of vulnerability; he bears false witness in order to gain passage with the ferryman; and lies at Etzel's court stating it is the Burgundian/Nibelungen custom to bear arms during *hohgezîten* (763). Homann maintains that Hagen even becomes a part of the demonic world after his encounter with the water nymphs: "This first personal encounter with forces beyond human capabilities expands Hagen's existence. Henceforth, Hagen will live and act on two levels, with twofold responsibilities and loyalties. He will continue to protect his lords [...]. But this loyalty is no longer absolute, for it is now subordinate to a greater purpose: namely to see the predicted future come about" (766).

and invisibility<sup>80</sup> – are ultimately deemed unfit or undesirable amongst the Burgundians' courtly society and therefore must be eliminated. The trend of domestication of the other in Siegfried is clear from the outset: his aggressive heroic attempt at conquering the Burgundian kingdom is subdued through the evocation of the *höfisch* "Gastrecht" in conjunction with the incitation of the feudal practice of inheritance; Siegfried abides by the rules of *hohe Minne*, in which he provides services (*Dienst*) for a future reward (*Lohn*); he takes up arms at the defence of the Burgundian dominion in manner that resembles vassal obligation; he leads an expedition which includes "*Zügel- und Bügeldienst*" (Schulze, *Nibelungenlied* 190) and he fulfills the role of messenger. However, as the Burgundians themselves returned Siegfried to his archaic, pre-courtly state, they find a solution for his alterity in murder.<sup>81</sup>

Whereas Siegfried and Brunhild border on the extremes of either "outsider" or "insider" in Burgundian society as discussed above, Hagen occupies a much more ambiguous position in the *Nibelungenlied*. Hagen is neither entirely foreign nor is he entirely familiar, but rather fits into a category of both. The scholarship around the character Hagen is probably the most varying and controversial of all the characters in the *Nibelungenlied* (Gentry 6). He ranges from the extremes of "der grimme Hagene" to "trôst der Nibelunge" (Gentry 10), from murderer to defender, from villain to hero. In fact, within the *Nibelungenlied* itself, the range of epithets used for Siegfried is rivalled only by Hagen (Mahlendorf and Tobin, "Hagen" 126), indicating how diverse and

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<sup>80</sup> In fact, Müller notes that magical attributes such as the invisible cloak are important because they indicate something "strange," whose "origins lie[] in the 'legend' of a 'wild' world" (63).

<sup>81</sup> It should be noted that although Gunther initially agrees that Siegfried be eliminated, he recoils from this position. Hagen then takes control of the situation and carries out the murder. This is just one instance among many where Hagen is responsible for the actions of the Burgundian court. In fact, his influence increases throughout the epic, especially after Siegfried's death, when Hagen takes on the role of arbiter of fate, as Ian Campbell notes, Hagen "pursues his own independent courses of action and can be very much a law unto himself" (24).

ambiguous these characters are. If we look at the common interpretation of Hagen,<sup>82</sup> he is most notably described as cunning and full of guile, when in fact these attributes better fit Siegfried (Mahlendorf and Tobin, "Hagen" 126). In the context of the courtly society, "Siegfried can be handled only if he is integrated into the court" (Mahlendorf and Tobin, "Hagen" 131), whereas, "Hagen is a vassal not merely by accident of birth but by nature and outlook" (Mahlendorf and Tobin, "Hagen" 128).

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Hagen are his actions in the second part of the poem. It is here that Hagen operates on two levels and his ambiguity is most prevalent. In opposition to the first half of the *Nibelungenlied*, where Hagen is the guardian of Burgundian supremacy as the highest ranking vassal, in the second half he assumes an "affinity to the demonic world" (Homann 766). I will examine Hagen's actions after his encounter with the *merwîp*, for as I have alluded to above, this encounter links Hagen to the archaic supernatural realm. While Hagen is looking for a ferry crossing en route to the Hunnish court, he stumbles upon bathing water nymphs. In keeping with his cunning side, he steals their clothes (NL 1534) and demands they reveal how to cross the river (NL 1543). After the water-nymphs divulge the tragic fate of the Nibelungen's downfall (NL 1539 and 1542), Hagen himself becomes "an agent of destiny" (Homann 766). As an agent of destiny, Hagen "will live and act on two levels,

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<sup>82</sup> Hagen is characterized by Campbell as attaining "undeniably demonic proportions, committing acts of unparalleled ferocity" (27). Similarly, Thelen considers Hagen "the dark hero, the embodiment of cunning and deception *par excellence*" (386). Others see Hagen as a character acting legally just but morally wrong (Gentry 7). Homann conversely sees Hagen as undergoing a metamorphosis (761-2). Francis Gentry goes so far to say that scholarship surrounding Hagen is fragmented, citing opinions of Hagen ranging from Hagen as the German hero, to the antithesis of the Christian knight, to a representative of God, and even as a latent homosexual (6). This suggests that just as the opinions and interpretations are fragmented, so is the character itself, highlighting the ambiguity in situating Hagen in a model of identification based on a self-other dichotomy.

with twofold responsibilities and loyalties," in which his responsibilities as vassal are subordinate to his new role of arbiter of fate (Homann 766).

While acting in this fragmented manner as both agent of fate and vassal, the paradox of these opposing roles becomes evident. How can Hagen fulfill his duties to both king and country while ensuring their total annihilation? How can he remain "the quintessential vassal if he imperils his kings' safety by withdrawing his protection at the moment it is most needed" (Thelen 393)? Indeed, Hagen's actions would point to the exact opposite: he is the quintessential portrayal of *untriuwe*. When Hagen is thrust into this demonic otherworldly realm his agency over and impact on the Burgundian-cum-Nibelungens becomes increasingly more pronounced. Lynn Thelen points out that Hagen is truly only motivated by self preservation and egotism as seen in the thirty-seventh *Aventiure* in which he requests Rüdiger's shield:<sup>83</sup>

The focus is on self-preservation when Hagen begins his request with the word 'I' not 'we': "Ich stên in grôzen sorgen" (2194,1). His repeated use of the first personal pronoun singular (*ich*: 2194,1; 2194,4; 2195,2; 2195,4 and *mir*: 2194,2; 2194,3) confirms his egotism. He thinks of his own survival, not that of his kings.

(391)

On more than one occasion Hagen chooses not to avoid disaster by enabling the water nymphs' prophecy to come true. In fact, he had the power to avert the downfall of the Burgundians had he not taken part in the journey to Etzel's court. Moreover, Hagen could have decided against throwing the priest overboard (NL 1575-1576) or destroying the ship after the Nibelungen had crossed the river (NL 1581), which would have allowed the

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<sup>83</sup> Hagen's request can also be put in a positive light, as it allows Rüdiger an opportunity to demonstrate his *höfisch* character traits. This selfless act of generosity therefore preserves Rüdiger's honour.

Nibelungen a chance to return. These actions only solidified the nymphs' fatal prophecy. A final opportunity Hagen had to avert the Nibelungen's downfall was to fight Rüdiger. Had he fought Rüdiger and lost, Kriemhild's thirst for revenge would have been satisfied. In essence, Hagen's decision to guarantee the prophecy's fatal conclusion is one that forces everyone to own and embrace an heroic-archaic identity.<sup>84</sup> Yet despite these clear examples of Hagen's disloyalty and individualistic mentality he is praised in the end as "den kúenéstén reckén, der íe swert getrouc" (2353, 3)<sup>85</sup> and "der aller besten degen / der íe kóm ze sturme oder íe schílt getrouc!" (2374, 2-3).<sup>86</sup> A possible reason for this praise is the connection between Hagen and Etzel's court: Hagen served under Etzel as a hostage and his father was knighted by Etzel (NL 1754-1757). Hagen has a connection to all three categories. He is a vassal of the Burgundian kings (and possible relative), he has ties to the heathen Huns, and he has ties to the archaic past. Hagen is neither totally foreign nor totally familiar. Like Siegfried, who occupies a liminal position in the *Nibelungenlied*, Hagen's identity shifts between an affinity with the archaic-heroic and the *höfisch*. And precisely because of this liminality, he is able to become fully immersed in the archaic-heroic mode of being. I would argue even that this is indicative of a reconciliation of his own fragmented identity, which is supported by his individualistic attitude throughout the second half of the narrative.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> By murdering Etzel's son (NL 1961), Hagen guarantees that the conflict between the Nibelungen and the Huns will continue: Prior to Ortlieb's death, only Kriemhild was engaged in soliciting an attack on the Nibelungen troops. When Hagen kills Etzel's only heir, it in effect forces Etzel's involvement in the carnage.

<sup>85</sup> "den edelsten Ritter, der jemals ein Schwert getragen hat" (2353).

<sup>86</sup> "der allerbeste Ritter [...] der je zum Kampfe angetreten ist oder einen Schild getragen hat" (2374).

<sup>87</sup> The fact that he is praised does not necessarily indicate that his conduct is condoned, but rather premises Kriemhild's own execution: By shifting the perspective onto how valiant Hagen was, Kriemhild's execution of Hagen becomes emphatically more heinous.

Rüdiger is situated in a particularly compromising position in the *Nibelungenlied*. As a vassal of Etzel he has direct ties to the foreign Hunnish realm. However, he is a personal acquaintance of Hagen, which does not rid him of his foreign status, but does provide an affinity to the *höfisch* Burgundian realm. However, his mode of being would suggest that he is the paradigm of the *höfisch* value system.<sup>88</sup> Rüdiger's identity is multifaceted to say the least. Like Hagen, he has connections to more than one side of the familiar-foreign binary. Yet contrary to Hagen, who represents a foreign element in the familiar camp, Rüdiger is the quintessential *höfisch* knight from the most overtly foreign realm. Moreover, the theme of loyalty (*truiwe*) affects Rüdiger as a matter of life or death: his loyalties and affinity to the various groups have moral and legal consequences. The theme of loyalty is muddied further by the *höfisch* value system within the *Nibelungenlied*: his loyalty to the Burgundian-cum-Nibelungen is a result of adhering to the social mores of *Gastrecht*. Furthermore, Rüdiger, upon Hagen's advice, agrees to the betrothal of his daughter to Giselher.<sup>89</sup> Although it evokes legality, the role of a host is predominantly a social norm, whereas his vassal ties are legally binding. His moral dilemma occurs because he is torn between upholding his *höfisch* loyalties and his feudal duties as vassal. Ultimately Rüdiger is able to partially reconcile this impasse by offering his shield to Hagen (a *höfisch* act) and facing the Nibelungen in battle (fulfillment of feudal obligation). Because of Rüdiger's affinity to the various camps in the

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<sup>88</sup> Lynn Thelen argues that "[i]f Rüdiger emerges [as] the paragon of vassalage in *âventiure*, then Hagen appears [as] his diametric opposite" ("Hagen" 395). Furthermore, according to Thelen, Hagen represents self-preservation ("Hagen" 396) which is contrasted to Rüdiger's selflessness.

<sup>89</sup> Hugo Bekker argues that Rüdiger as an exile cannot rely solely on his actions and *ere* and *tugend* to be passed on to his offspring. Bekker argues that within the framework of the *Nibelungenlied* honour "is transmitted from one generation to the next as a precious heirloom. Each generation adds to it, and it is meant to adorn each member of the dynasty" (240). As Rüdiger has no sons, the honour of his house can only be transferred to his progeny if his house is linked to one with honour. Therefore, Bekker argues, that Rüdiger sees an opportunity for future honour of his house in a marriage between his daughter and a Burgundian king (240).

*Nibelungenlied* his identity is fragmented. The consequence of reconciling his fragmented identity of host, vassal, in-law, and *höfisch* knight is death: suicide by combat.

Another "other" I have only briefly touched upon as of yet is Etzel and the Huns. The narrator/poet sets up probably the most clear-cut dichotomy of self and other through the introduction of Etzel into the narrative, particularly through the evocation of a religious distinction. Yet if we examine Etzel's courtship of Kriemhild vis-à-vis Rüdiger we see a trend of the Burgundian-centric world view of the foreign depicted in terms of the familiar. The first indication of this is when Rüdiger is persuading Kriemhild to accept Etzel's marriage proposal. Kriemhild ponders the sheer practicality of marrying a heathen, which echoes Etzel's earlier scepticism towards wooing Kriemhild (NL 1145):

Si gedâhte in ir sinne: "und sol ich mînen lîp  
 geben einem heiden (ich bin ein kristen wîp),  
 des muoz ich zer werlde immer schande hân." (NL 1248, 1-3)<sup>90</sup>

For Kriemhild, and therefore from a Burgundian perspective, the idea of marrying a heathen is a shameful act. Kriemhild emphasizes this point hyperbolically along the lines of: 'all the money in the world wouldn't change my mind': "gæb' er mir elliu rîche, ez ist von mir vil ungetân" (NL 1248, 4).<sup>91</sup> In fact the scene plays out amongst a highly Christianized backdrop to sharpen the contrast between the Burgundian representatives of the Christian West and the Huns from the heathen East. In the twentieth *Aventiure*, Etzel's marriage proposal is coupled with a mass/religious service. This is indicated as the narrator sets the first meeting between Kriemhild and Rüdiger occurring after mass is

<sup>90</sup> "Sie dachte im stillen: 'Wenn ich mich einem Heiden vermählen soll, obwohl ich Christin bin, bleibt das vor der Welt für immer eine Schande' (1248).

<sup>91</sup> "Selbst wenn er mir alle Königreiche schenkte, so ist mir das ganz unmöglich" (1248).

sung: "Des andern morgens vruo, dô man die messe sanc, / die edeln boten kômen (dô wart dâ grôz gedranc)" (NL 1224, 1-2).<sup>92</sup> Kriemhild spends the night with teary eyes after coming to the conclusion that it is impossible for her as a Christian to marry a heathen. It is only after she has gone to church that she stops crying:

Dâ mit siz lie belîben. die naht unz an den tac  
 die vrouwe an ir bette mit vil gedanken lac.  
 diu ir vil liechten ougen getrúckénten nie,  
 unz daz si aber den morgen hin ze mettîne gie. (NL 1249)<sup>93</sup>

A further instance in which Kriemhild is persuaded to marry similarly transpires directly after mass (although this time within the framework of the Burgundian Kings exercising their power of persuasion):

Ze rehter messezîte die künige wâren komen.  
 si heten aber ir swester únder hénde genomen.  
 ja rieten si ir ze minnen den künec von Huinen lant.  
 die vrouwen ir deheiner lützel vrœliche vant. (NL 1250)<sup>94</sup>

A final indication of Kriemhild's reluctance of entering into a marriage with Etzel based on religious differences is seen when Kriemhild states outright, that if she knew with certainty that Etzel was not a heathen, she would willingly become his bride:

Si sprach ze Ruedegêre: "het ich daz vernomen,

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<sup>92</sup> "Früh am nächsten Morgen kamen nach der Messe (wobei ein großes Gedränge entstand) die edlen Boten, die mit Rüdiger zum Hof gehen wollten" (1224).

<sup>93</sup> "Damit blieb sie bei diesem Entschluß. Die ganze Nacht bis zum Tagesanbruch lag Kriemhild mit schweren Gedanken im Bett. Ihre so strahlenden Augen wurden nicht trocken, bis sie am Morgen wieder zur Frühmesse ging" (1249).

<sup>94</sup> The associations with mass and church also point to a domestication and colonization of Kriemhild as they represent the "our"/"familiar" space. But moreover, the moral ambiguity of Worms is highlighted as Kriemhild alone has a morally adverse reaction to the possibility of entering into marriage with a "heathen", whereas her kin openly encourage the marriage despite Etzel's religion.

daz er niht wære ein heiden, sô wold' ich gerne komen,  
 swar er hete willen, und næm' in z'einem man." (NL 1261, 1-3)<sup>95</sup>

Rüdiger, however, counters Kriemhild with the argument that Etzel is religiously tolerant, attributed to the fact Etzel has dominion over such a vast number of subjects who practice Christianity. Kriemhild therefore would not feel out of place religiously. Rüdiger states:

Er hât sô vil der recken in kristenlîcher ê  
 daz iu bî dem künige nimmer wirdet wê.  
 waz ob ir daz verdienet, daz er tóufet sînen lîp?  
 des muget ir gerne werden des künec Étzélen wîp. (NL 1262).<sup>96</sup>

Rüdiger's statement has the following effects: first of all, the foreign heathen realm is described here in such a way that it no longer is foreign: the presence of practicing Christians within Etzel's realm familiarizes this foreign territory; secondly, Rüdiger offers the possibility of Kriemhild converting Etzel, which has direct ties to the spirit of the crusades (at its height when the *Nibelungenlied* was transcribed), but more importantly offers a way in which Etzel can be made familiar: by literally converting, he metaphorically would lose his "other" status; thirdly, by asserting that Etzel's realm is religiously tolerant, Rüdiger undoes the Christian-heathen binary which is replaced by a third space, one in which there are *both* Christians and heathens.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup> "Sie sagte zu Rüdiger: 'Wüßte ich nur, daß er kein Heide wäre, so würde ich gern überall, wohin er wünschte, kommen und ihn zum Gemahl nehmen'" (1261).

<sup>96</sup> "Es dienen ihm so viele Männer christlichen Glaubens, daß Euch in der Nähe des Königs niemals Heimweh überkommen wird. Vielleicht auch erreicht Ihr, daß er sich taufen läßt? Deshalb könnt Ihr gern die Frau des Königs Etzel werden" (1262).

<sup>97</sup> The binary can also be explained in terms of cultural pluralism versus courtly singularity. However, this binary is unstable since Etzel is both intrinsically tied to the archaic heathen world and also to the courtly Christian. Much like Siegfried, the Huns should occupy the role of the foreign outside world, which the familiar needs to confront, but are unable to fulfill this function entirely due to their plurality. In fact, the Huns become increasingly more familiar as the narrative progresses. An indication of this is seen in the constellation of Etzel's court. Among the top members of court are Dietrich and Hildebrand, both who are

Staying with the theme of describing the foreign elements through a familiar lens, Kriemhild's trip to the Hunnish kingdom highlights this even further. An indication of homogeneity can be seen in the introduction of the Bishop of Passau. The Bishop not only is a symbol of the Christian Church, but moreover is placed in the heart of the Hunnish territory, legitimizing Rüdiger's earlier claim of religious tolerance and the prospect of Christianizing/converting Etzel – or the Huns in general. A further indication is seen in the voyage itself. Kriemhild's journey takes place amongst a plethora of ceremony and ritual not unfamiliar to the Burgundians. The consistency between the descriptions of feasts and fests in the first half, or the part of the narrative set in Burgundian land and the second half which is set in the foreign Hunnish realm, in effect homogenizes the foreigners and the foreign realm. The *höfisch* cultural aspects and formalities such as the greeting ceremonies, clothing, and feasts to all intents and purposes act as a cultural equalizer. This is true of all the non-Burgundian courts, from Xantes, Isenstein, to Gran (Etzelburg). The foreign realms become familiar through their courtly culture.

### **1.5: Summary**

The *Nibelungenlied* is replete with ambiguity when it comes to the self-other dichotomy. This ambiguity allows characters to take on traits and play roles that would normally be foreign to them. The ambiguity is partly due to the multitude of sources upon which the poem is based and partly because the material and the *höfisch* perspective are at odds with each other. What the *Nibelungenlied* does accomplish is to offer varying

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legendary in status, moreover, they represent a "German" identity: In the 22nd *Aventiure* Dietrich's men are identified as "tiutschen gessen" (NL 1354,4) (German guests). The cultural pluralism of Etzel's court emphasizes the ambiguity of a binary model of identification as presented in the *Nibelungenlied*.

modes of being which then prove to be unsustainable and contradictory. The model of identification that the *Nibelungenlied* offers is one based on self-other dichotomies. However, because the epic is presented in a courtly-Christian context, notions of foreign and familiar are blurred. If we look at Fritz Lang's adaptation of the myth, we see a similar model of identification as the one presented in the *Nibelungenlied*, which too proves to be unstable and ambiguous.

## Chapter 2: Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen* (1924)

In the period leading up to and in the aftermath of the First World War, the Nibelungen myth held a prominent position in evoking a national German(ic) identity. Most notable are the themes of loyalty and betrayal (*Treue* and *Verrat*): Specifically, the notion of *Nibelungentreue* was used in combination with an appropriation of the character Siegfried to symbolize a German national body. In fact, dating even further back than the First World War, the Nibelungen myth, in form of the *Nibelungenlied*, attained the status of a *Nationalepos* during the Napoleonic Wars. The *Nibelungenlied* was meant to highlight German virtues, above all, loyalty became "der Inbegriff des deutschen Wesens" (Heinzle, *Deutscher Wahn* 8) used to incite national sentiment.

In the following century, in 1909, Reichskanzler von Bülow coined the phrase *Nibelungentreue* in a speech which emphasised the need to maintain strong ties between Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Heinzle, *Deutscher Wahn* 33). Later, in November of 1914, Franz von Liszt expanded this notion of *Nibelungentreue* to include concrete associations between the figures from the Nibelungen myth and the national bodies of Germany and Austria-Hungary: "Der waffengewaltige, stolze, grimme Hagen [...], das Sinnbild Preußen-Deutschlands; und der heitere Spielmann [...], der in Kampf und Lied gewandte Volker, das Sinnbild des sangesfrohen und kampfeslustigen Österreich-Ungarn" (Heinzle, *Deutscher Wahn* 34). In this instance Hagen takes on positive connotations in the Germany-Nibelungen analogy. Yet as in the *Nibelungenlied*, this is indicative of only one aspect of Hagen's multifarious nature: the Hagen that is alluded to is the Hagen from the second half of the *Nibelungenlied*, the one who is

mourned as "der aller beste degen" (NL 2374, 2). However, Hagen plays another part in this Germany-Nibelungen transfiguration; in particular the Hagen from the first half of the *Nibelungenlied*, although acting out of loyalty, stabs Siegfried in the back. This is significant, as in the overall analogy, Siegfried's wounded body became an allegory for a wounded national body and Germany's military defeat would be explained through the stab in the back legend – the so-called *Dolchstoßlegende* (Heinzle, *Deutscher Wahn* 35-36), a later tenet of the National Socialists' rhetoric in their struggle for political ascendancy. McCormick explains that "[t]he *Dolchstoßlegende*, the legend of the 'stab in the back,' according to which Imperial Germany had been humbled in World War I not on the battlefield, but on the home front by the enemy within – that is, by socialists, Jews, and women (and implicitly by other 'others' such as homosexuals)" helped fuse psychological and ideological tendencies that arose during the Weimar period (20). Here we see the direct tie to the Nibelungen myth, in which the hero Siegfried was speared in the back by Hagen. The problem with this analogy is that Hagen is not a clearly definable enemy from within, but rather an ambiguous figure that has ties to both the foreign and the familiar. His slaying of Siegfried is less an act of treason than it is one that guarantees the prestige of the Burgundian kingdom, whereas his actions during the downfall of the Burgundians resemble more closely the acts of an enemy from within, to which the *Dolchstoßlegende* refers, and therein lies the ambiguity of using Hagen to symbolize unwavering loyalty. What we are shown is how the binary of loyalty-betrayal is extremely problematic when only singular aspects of the myth are decontextualized for identification purposes. Hagen, according to the *Dolchstoßlegende* and the notion of *Nibelungentreue*, embodies both sides of the binary: he is both loyal and traitorous.

In 1924, Fritz Lang released *Siegfried*, the first half of his two-part film adaptation of the Nibelungen myth. The film opens with a dedication to the German people: "Dem deutschen Volke zu eigen" (Lang, "Siegfried"). If we compare this dedication with Kaiser Wilhelm II's 1916 dedication of the Reichstag – "Dem deutschen Volke" – we can clearly see how Lang's film adopts a politically motivated slogan to pull on the nationalistic heartstrings of the German people. Lang, however, shifts literally away from an overtly political arena and focuses on "bringing a nation's myths to life" (Gunning 38). Much as the *Nibelungenlied* poets were able to inscribe the myth onto parchment, leaving a permanent marker of the previously exclusively orally transmitted folk memory, the setting of the Nibelungen myth to film was to create a living monument of the myth itself. The monumental proportions of the film mimic this intention. In fact, Lotte Eisner emphasises this point, noting that Lang's theme needed to be expressed monumentally as the "monumental proportions [were] seen as befitting the German mind" (Eisner, *Haunted Screen* 160). Eisner further argues that "German *Kultur* was wrought in granite, from which material it was impossible to carve anything but massive shapes, which is why the Germans' ultimate aim was to 'monumentalize'" (Eisner, *Haunted Screen* 160). If we understand the adaptations of the myth, the embodiments of "German *Kultur*," as being monuments, the importance of the myth invoking nationalistic sentiment becomes paramount. Monuments are indeed important in building collective national identities, as James Young elucidates:

In suggesting themselves as the indigenous, even geological outcrops in a national landscape, monuments tend to naturalize the values, ideals, and laws of the land

itself. To do otherwise would be to undermine the very foundations of national legitimacy, of the state's seemingly natural right to exist. (270)

Lang is aware of how his adaptation of the Nibelungen myth could evoke a "national renewal" (Gunning 38) and his film acts as a means by which to monumentalize the mythological heritage on which a new German identity could be rooted. Lang himself in a program book to the film describes the Nibelungen myth as "the spiritual shrine of a nation" (Levin 97) and considered the film as "a national document fit to publicize German culture all over the world" (Kracauer 92). The monumentalization "of a national past aims to affirm the righteousness of a nation's birth, even its divine election" (Young 270), and accordingly the monumentalization of a cultural myth, in this case the Nibelungen myth, in turn fulfills the function of validating national existence. Young notes "[t]he matrix of a nation's monuments traditionally emplots the story of ennobling events, of triumphs over barbarism, and recalls the martyrdom of those who gave their lives in the struggle for national existence" (270). This holds true of the Nibelungen myth, as it recounts: ennobling events "von helden lobebæren, von grôzer arebeit, / von frôuden, hôchgezâten, [...] / von küener recken strîten" (NL 1, 2-4); triumphs over barbarism, most evident in defeating the Danes and Saxons in battle<sup>98</sup> and winning the threefold courtship battle with Brunhild; and martyrdom as seen in the acts of bravery and loyalty in the carnage between the Huns and Nibelungen. When invoked politically, as was the case especially in the early twentieth century, the heroes in the Nibelungen myth embody a monumentalization of the founding fathers of a German nationhood – an

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<sup>98</sup> The war between the Danes and Saxons and the Burgundians does not appear in the Lang's *Die Nibelungen*. In the *Nibelungenlied* this war allows Siegfried to engage in an act of service following the paradigm of courtly love (*hohe Minne*). In the film this function is not required as the courtship between Siegfried and Kriemhild is presented as love at first sight (for Siegfried).

"*aide memoire*, reminding them [the German people] of a heroic past that had been lost in the war" (Kaes 133).<sup>99</sup> However, in the Nibelungen myth these "German" heroes all die and the progeny of the fallen heroes are actually the product of cultural cross pollination: In the *Nibelungenlied*, Kriemhild has a child with both Siegfried and Etzel, and Brunhild with Gunther. These children are in fact the offspring of foreigners mating with natives. The heterogeneous nature of the marriages and subsequent progeny highlights the ambiguity of appropriating the Nibelungen myth to project a homogenous national identity. Thus the model of identification that the Nibelungen myth offers is not one based on a separation of self and other, but rather one of hybridity. Rooting German origins in this tragic mythological past is understandable in regard to the bloody and incredibly destructive recent past of Weimar Germany. The problem with basing a German heritage on being the progeny of the Burgundians-cum-Nibelungen is that according to the myth the survivors are in fact hybrids, a mix of Burgundian, Icelandic, and Dutch "cross contamination." Furthermore, not only are the offspring a result of native and non-native partners (highlighting the geographic alterity); the parents are representatives of clashing ways of life and epochs (highlighting the cultural and temporal alterity). On the surface, Lang's adaptation of the Nibelungen myth projects a binary model of identification, in actuality we are presented with a model of identification based on hybridity and heterogeneity.

To fully understand how the Nibelungen myth fits into the context of rousing nationalism, the process of negatively defining identity through contradistinction must be

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<sup>99</sup> Kaes argues that the film *Siegfried* acts as a memorial to the fallen soldiers of the First World War. He suggests that while in the other combatant countries, memorials to the "unknown soldiers" were erected, in Germany this did not take place until almost a decade after the war, leaving *Die Nibelungen* to fulfill this function (*Shell Shock*, 148).

taken into consideration. Much like the *Nibelungenlied* itself, contradistinctions of space, time, gender, and ontology are key components of the identity creation process in Lang's *Die Nibelungen*. The geographical dimension of this contradistinction throughout the film is best discussed in the terminology of the Orientalist approach.

In reference to the earlier discussion on Orientalism and geography, Edward Said maintains that geographic boundaries are arbitrary when used in negatively constructing identity through a self-other dichotomy. These boundaries are in fact constructs, denoting a distinction between the "familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is 'theirs'" (54). Said argues that this arbitrariness of imagined geography is due to the fact that those who inhabit the unfamiliar space are not required to acknowledge what is "ours" and what is "theirs," but rather it is the act in and of itself of the familiar creating these boundaries which results in the foreign becoming foreign (54). This argument can be extended to include a temporal dimension, as "imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of self by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away" (55). If we apply Said's principles of imagined temporality and geography to Lang's *Die Nibelungen* we can see how Lang is able to produce identity negatively by contrasting spatial and temporal distinctions.<sup>100</sup>

## **2.1: Geography, Nature, and Architecture**

Much as a stark contrast between light and dark are present throughout the film, Lang and Harbou established four distinct realms in which the film is set: (1) The

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<sup>100</sup> In fact, the characters themselves become a part of these geographical and temporal depictions of alterity as I will explain in detail later in this chapter.

primordial Odenwald, the closest representation of nature of quite literally mythical and magical proportions; (2) Brunhild's "Amazonian"<sup>101</sup> realm of ice and fire, which similarly has ties to the supernatural; (3) Worms, which symbolizes the symmetrical and rigid realm of man-made architecture; and (4) Etzel's Kingdom, the Huns' realm, a chaotic and primitive sphere which offers a counterpoint to the organized and static Worms.

Although these appear to be clearly defined, distinct, geographical spaces, upon closer analysis they are not the bastions of mutual exclusivity as they first appear. Tom Gunning notes that despite the fact "Lang and Harbou differentiated these four separate realms through differing meanings, characters and dominant visual designs, the film tells the story of their mutual contamination" (Gunning 39). In other words, the distinction between the foreign and the familiar collapses. Foreign elements become neither totally foreign, nor do they become totally familiar but rather occupy an ambiguous space of both foreign and familiar. As was the case with the *Nibelungenlied*, a similar process takes place throughout the film, most notably when the characters Siegfried and Brunhild interact with Burgundian society. Although there is contamination between the realms which leads to ambiguity in the self-other dichotomy, there is a deliberate attempt on the part of Lang and Harbou to establish discernable differences between the geographic centers. Compare, for example, the architecturally symmetric Worms with the naturally formed fortress of Isenstein or Etzel's muddy hovel of a court. Undeniably, the symbolic

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<sup>101</sup> Jerold Frakes argues that the Amazonian legend in the Greek tradition "seems almost a blueprint of the province of both male and female" (145). Frakes notes that the invention of the legend banishes the Amazon woman to "the margins of civilization, where she lives in an 'alien' society that, from a conventional patriarchal perspective, is turned on its head" (145). Furthermore, the Amazon women are warriors that rule, "they act for their own desire and will," "refuse any sexual relationship that subordinates them" and "they fight to preserve their independence" but ultimately "they are defeated in battle, disempowered, despoiled, raped, abducted, and incorporated into the patriarchal system" (Frakes 145). Especially in the case of Brunhild this holds true, which is why "the term Amazon occurs relatively frequently in the scholarly literature in the *Nibelungenlied* as a designation of Brunhild" (Frakes 145-146).

imagery is quite effective in presenting what appears to be an orientalized portrayal of the non-German, here non-Burgundian, others; however, the interaction between the realms undermines the intentional attempt to separate the foreign from familiar elements.<sup>102</sup>

Siegfried illustrates effectively how contamination between realms uncouples the foreign-familiar binary: Siegfried is the mythical hero who slays dragons; however, upon his arrival in Worms, his persona shifts from representing his dragon-slaying heritage to assuming an identity mimicking that of the Burgundians. This transition is highlighted by his wardrobe change: Siegfried assumes a Burgundian-style tunic in lieu of the fur loincloth which is the traditional dress in the forest.

If we maintain the premise that the Burgundians-cum-Nibelungen ultimately represent "German-ness," Siegfried then becomes an idealized transmutation of the mythical past. Siegfried evokes a pre-civilized era in which humans and nature coexist, a time when humans can understand the language of the forest and wildlife, a quasi-naturalistic pantheism, or at least that is what appears to be the case superficially. The film initially presents Siegfried half-naked working in a smithy located in the hollows of an enormous tree: the structural edifice is made by Nature and used by man. However, the affinity between man and Nature becomes increasingly unstable. The depiction of Nature as idyllic transforms into Nature as a place of death and destruction, which

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<sup>102</sup> The encounter between Siegfried and Alberich is an indication of how contamination between realms ultimately destabilizes the distinction between foreign and familiar established through the contradistinction of geographical spheres. The trees in Siegfried's realm are monolithic, straight, and tall, whereas Alberich's forest (mimicked by his posture) is hunched over, dwarfed and crooked. As the scene unfolds Alberich is shown on two occasions of using trickery and deceit, in addition to a magical device, to attempt to overtake Siegfried. Siegfried is able to overpower Alberich through physical superiority. Where this becomes ambiguous lies in the fact that after Siegfried defeats Alberich, he in turn retains Alberich's traits of trickery and deceit which are utilized in both the bridal quest in Isenstein and the bridal night in Worms. Although the visual contrast between Alberich's and Siegfried's realms is quite stark, the elements of these realms can be transferred through contact, thus signifying the instability that contamination creates in a model of identification based on a self-other dichotomy. In fact, Siegfried gains two magical elements in his encounter with Alberich: the *Tarnkappe* ("cloak of invisibility") and the *Hort* ("treasure") ultimately bring about Siegfried's own destruction.

becomes evident throughout the first half of film. The first example is highlighted in Siegfried's ability to communicate with nature. This ability is the direct consequence of death, as Siegfried is only able to discern the language of the birds after he has slain the dragon and tasted its blood. Furthermore, as Siegfried bathes in the dragon's blood which transforms his naked body into impenetrable armour, an element of Nature betrays Siegfried: the dying dragon nudges the linden tree which releases a single leaf, landing between the hero's shoulder blades. It is not by chance that the leaf creates a spot of vulnerability but rather it is a deliberate reaction to Siegfried's illusionary domination over Nature. We can interpret this in terms of hubris as opposed to fate.<sup>103</sup> Just as Siegfried's *unmâze* is a detrimental characteristic in the *Nibelungenlied*, his aggressive and antagonistic nature in the film also ultimately factors into his undoing. The intended portrayal of Siegfried's affinity with nature is veritably contradicted by Nature itself: Nature and death are intertwined in *Die Nibelungen*. For it is in nature (in the forest) that Nature's prodigal son is stabbed in the back.<sup>104</sup> The spring where Siegfried is murdered is transformed from a symbol of life to one of death,<sup>105</sup> much like the blossoming tree in the

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<sup>103</sup> In the film, Siegfried himself originates in the same mythical/natural realm as the dragon. It is paradoxical for Siegfried then to slay the dragon in order to become a hero, for in order for Siegfried to attain hero status he must break with his origins, in this case represented by the dragon. Moreover, this scene points at the inherent contradiction between the geography and the inhabitants of the distinct realms. Mime and the forest dwellers are meant to be human markers symbolic of their environment. The dragon in this context fulfills a similar function, in that it represents an aspect of the forest realm, specifically the mythical nature of the Odenwald. Siegfried conversely is shown to undergo a transformation from forest dweller to hero as a direct result of slaying the dragon (the progression is seen in its conclusion at his arrival in Worms as conqueror of twelve kingdoms).

<sup>104</sup> Siegfried is speared in the back by Hagen. Hagen is a representative of the Burgundian interests which is linked in the film to Apollonian symmetry and architecture that reinforces the contradistinction between architecture-Nature projected by Lang.

<sup>105</sup> The occasion for Siegfried's return to Nature is a hunt. A hunt represents a total break in the affinity between Siegfried and Nature: Siegfried's origins are completely replaced with his acquired identity of hero and the act of hunting can be seen as a direct offense against Nature. Siegfried is both the subject and object of the hunt.

Burgundian courtyard which transforms into a death's head, an instance of Lang's visual symbolism.

However, the physical locations are not the only means by which Lang and Harbou symbolize nature. In fact, throughout the film the physical locations are coupled with living beings to emphasize their distinct temporal and spatial boundaries. As evident in the first "Gesang," Siegfried is portrayed as originating in the natural realm.<sup>106</sup> For identification purposes, however, he is contrasted, in the black-white metaphor maintained throughout the entire film epic, with a negative object. David Levin argues that the introduction of Siegfried "provides us with an elaborate and unintentionally comical view of who Siegfried is *not*. Put bluntly: Siegfried is not Mime" (Levin 102). Kaes follows Levin, noting that Siegfried acts as a "bodily foil to Mime" highlighting the distinctions between "tall versus stunted, erect versus crouching, groomed and taut versus unkempt and slovenly" (136). Here we see how Lang and Harbou are able to highlight alterity through contradistinction, and furthermore employ Orientalist elements to do so: through the running allegory of white versus black, Mime is the "wild and dark" (Levin 102) other to which Siegfried's whiteness is amplified.<sup>107</sup> As Eisner observes, "Lang places his actors in these landscapes with a precise feeling for space, transforming them into points of reference in the design" (Eisner, *Haunted Screen* 155). The actors become in essence a part of the landscape, which becomes increasingly evident as the film progresses. Mime and his fellow primitive-appearing companions then represent the primitive and wild essence of Nature. But if Mime is meant to symbolize Nature, where

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<sup>106</sup> The hierarchy of this relationship is not the focus of my current argument, however, it does play an important role in explaining contradiction and ambiguity in Siegfried's character.

<sup>107</sup> See Eisner: "Apart from the obvious symbolism - good and evil, light and dark - it helps to clarify the *mise en scène*: the whole becomes a kind of chess board where black and white become formal adversaries" (Fritz Lang 80).

does that leave Siegfried? Is Siegfried not also a representation of man's affinity with Nature? Does he not evoke "a nostalgia for an older, purer, less complicated time" (Levin 103)? Siegfried is both one and at odds with Nature. He is both a positive and negative object of identification. As a positive object of identification we see Siegfried as the white, luminously lit, athletic hero. He is able to communicate with nature (after all, he can understand the language of the birds). But his actions towards Nature point to Siegfried as a negative object of identification.<sup>108</sup> How do we reconcile these opposing traits? Essentially, despite the dichotomy between self and other being on the surface, literally and visually, black and white, in all actuality it is a spectrum of varying shades of grey.

The mounted, half-naked Siegfried is contrasted with the slovenly, dishevelled forest inhabitants. Mime and his fellow forest dwellers are visual markers for the wild and primitive temperament of Nature itself: They are an embodiment of Nature's characteristics. We can see a continuation of the Orientalist contradistinction between Siegfried and the dark others in his encounter with Alberich, the Nibelungen King. Alberich, the Huns, and Mime and the other forest dwellers are all depicted in a similar fashion. They are shown to be dark, hairy and occupy a low position highlighted by their posture. The archaic and mythical attributes of Alberich also correlate to his surroundings: his magical underground cave is a site where unfathomable treasure can be stored, moreover, where a crystal ball can illuminate and project visions onto walls (or make walls translucent). After he is subdued by Siegfried, Alberich and the Nibelungen

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<sup>108</sup> Siegfried becomes estranged from his origins in nature in direct proportion to his status of hero, culminating in his return to the forest for a hunt as a blood-brother and in-law of the Burgundian nobility. As the foremost hunter and hero Siegfried threatens the realm and therefore can be considered a negative object of identification.

dwarves quite literally become stone monuments of the mythical past, thus demarcating a break from the supernatural as an active force and its transition into nostalgia for a mythical past. The shift from Siegfried as a half-naked forest dweller to a courtly member of society is indicative of this clear transition from what are described in the *Nibelungenlied* as his "jungen tagen" (NL 22, 1) to a contemporary Germanic hero, which is signified by a wardrobe change: Siegfried abandons his fur loincloth in favour of an ornamental Burgundian tunic.

Lang's depiction of Siegfried's departure from the forest continues to use this symbolic visual language to imbue figures with the characteristics of their surroundings: the setting is shifted to the rigid, geometric and symmetrical, Burgundian court. Kaes correctly notes that in Worms, "[g]eometric patterns cover costumes as well as wall hangings, jewelry, and furnishings, and thus often blur the distinction between figure and background as they share the same ornamental decor" (144). Similar to how the natural figures in the forest are synonymous with their natural surroundings, the Burgundians' geometrically ornamental clothing and geometric, symmetric architecture correlate. The contradistinction here is most notably the difference between Nature and architecture, which is an innovative motif inserted into the myth by Lang. By having Nature oppose architecture, Lang provides the viewer with a nostalgic romanticization of being one with Nature. This is problematic, since Lang's adaptation of the Nibelungen myth as a whole ultimately situates Nature as inherently destructive: Nature as a setting is a place of death, but so too are settings representing architecture, specifically Etzel's hall in which the Burgundian-cum-Nibelungen clan is exterminated.

The contradistinction between Nature and architecture is not as clear-cut as it may appear. On the one hand, the Burgundian court is the reference point to which all other depictions of architecture in the film are contrasted. Worms champions symmetric straight lines and geometric ornamentalization. On the other hand, the non-Burgundian architecture does have similar features as Worms. For example, when Worms is contrasted with Isenstein, both fortresses essentially form the same geometric design. The difference is that Worms is clearly a man-made edifice, whereas Isenstein seems embedded in nature. An additional example is seen in Etzel's court. Although his building is man-made, consisting of timber and stone, his floors are made of mud, in other words, the floors are left in their natural state. In fact, there is a strong affinity between architectural structures outside of the Burgundian sphere with Nature: Mime's smithy is in a hollow beneath a monolithic tree; Alberich's lair is a hole in a tree and his treasury is an underground mine; Brunhild's castle is built amongst crags and cliffs. Although Worms is presented as the quintessence of architecture in the film,<sup>109</sup> traces of man-made design are found in non-Burgundian spheres. Conversely, Nature is seemingly absent from Worms, with one important exception: the courtyard houses a blossoming tree.<sup>110</sup> The attempt to portray alterity through the contradistinction between architecture and Nature proves to be less unambiguous than intended. However, this is not the only manner in which alterity is presented in *Die Nibelungen*.

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<sup>109</sup> The symmetry of the Burgundian architecture invokes an Apollonian aura in which order is supreme. This can also be seen in the static nature of the Burgundian realm as opposed the hectic dynamism that pervades both Isenstein and Hunnish realm. Another indication of the Huns' affinity to the Dionysian is seen in the presence of feasting and drinking wine, which the Burgundian court does without (except for the ceremonial welcome drink offered to Siegfried by Kriemhild and during the blood-brother ceremony, a ritual that foreshadows the link between loyalty and death).

<sup>110</sup> The significance of the blossoming tree is that it is transformed into a death's head. Again we see the correlation between Nature and death, however, this time Nature is set in architecture. Moreover, this image is used later in the film to segue a close-up on Etzel on his throne. Contact with Etzel and the Huns in this context foreshadow the death and destruction to come.

## 2.2: *Orientalizing the Other*

If we shift to the second film of *Die Nibelungen, Kriemhilds Rache*, we are confronted with a particularly overt orientalizing of the myth. The self-other dichotomy is clearly expressed by two camps, with the Huns on the one side and the Nibelungen (formerly known as the Burgundians) on the other. This stark contrast between the cultures is emphasized not only geographically and architecturally, but through costume and make-up. The difference between the overly civilized Burgundian/Nibelungen and primitive Huns is evident as they are depicted as "Untermenschen, living in caves, huts and tents, soiled with mud and dirt" whose ruler is "a visibly exoticized non-Western despot" (Kaes, 156-57). Not unlike the mythic and archaic realms in *Siegfried* that showcased dragons, dwarves, and supernatural heroes and heroines, *Kriemhilds Rache* also makes use of imagined geography to highlight the self-other dichotomy. We see a pseudo-incarnation of Worms in the form of Etzel's court. But instead of stone architecture and decorative geometrical ornamentation, Etzel's court is a primitive muddy hovel, suggesting the predominance of the Burgundian original and inferiority of the Huns' imitation.

The arbitrary nature of where or what the other is can be seen in Lang's usage of props and costumes. As Eisner explains: "[f]or documentary accuracy Lang again consulted Umlauff of the Hamburg Ethnographical Museum. Umlauff supplied the barbaric Huns with native African and Asiatic weapons, and dressed them in rags and furs which were strapped to their bodies with leather thongs" (*Fritz Lang* 79). This authenticity is clearly fictionalized. Although Lang intended to achieve realistic (documentary) portrayals of the "barbaric Huns," his use of "native African and Asiatic

weapons" shows how arbitrary the historically accurate geography of the Huns is. Lang is able to orientalize them through the use of "oriental" artefacts, regardless of their actual origin. Having discussed the alterity of geography, nature, and architecture above, I shall now turn to the question of how the characters are orientalized.

Despite the fact that the parts of the Nibelungen myth which revolve around the mythical and archaic do not take place in a place located in what is normally termed the Orient, Lang depicts elements of Orientalism in his settings and characters. In fact, the first figures to appear on screen initiate what becomes a broader category of foreign other in the film. *Siegfried*, the first part of *Die Nibelungen*, begins with a hairy, half-naked, primitive-looking man working the bellows of a forge in a cave co-occupied by a relatively hairless, upright, Siegfried. The smith Mime then appears on screen. It is in this scene that we encounter our first glimpses into the binary world of contradistinction: the slovenly, hairy, dark others are contrasted by the erect, clean, Greek-statuesque white Siegfried. The black and white/ light and dark symbolism is reinforced with the characters positionality. The superior white Siegfried towers over the "depraved and fallen" dark others. Even when appearing to join the group, the hero occupies a superior position in relation to the others. Yet despite the dissimilarity between them, this diametrically opposed binary is not as strong as it appears: Siegfried in contrast with the Burgundians has strong ties to the forest folk, especially with respect to his attire. Before Siegfried joins the culture of the Burgundians, who contrast with the forest people, he has a pivotal encounter with Alberich.

Lang's depiction of Alberich is frequently designated as anti-Semitic or pro(to)-fascist. Alberich undeniably assumes the visual markers of stereotypical Jewish features

during the Weimar period: "his shiftiness, deformity, and scheming all correspond to reigning German stereotypes of the Jewish body and Jewish nature" explains David Levin (123).<sup>111</sup> Conversely, Eisner, in defence of Lang, explains how Alberich's costume was influenced by "the grotesque character make-up used by the Russo-Jewish Habimah ensemble" that was on tour at the time *Die Nibelungen* was being filmed (*Fritz Lang* 79).<sup>112</sup> The question is not whether the application of these "Jewish make-up" techniques lends a Semitic style to Alberich's depiction, nor is the question if he is reminiscent of portrayals of reigning Jewish stereotypes, but rather whether Alberich's features are homogeneous with the other foreigners in the film. The openly depicted Jewish features indeed emphasise the contradistinction between a known foreigner, the Jew, with a sympathetic familiar object of identification, the Germanic hero Siegfried. Alberich, like the other "others," is clothed in black, occupies a low position, and is hunched over and weak, in direct contrast to Siegfried, the beacon of upright, clean, strong, whiteness. The physical location of Alberich reinforces this distinction: if we compare Siegfried's native forest with the forest Alberich calls home, we are met with monumental, straight – phallic – trees corresponding to Siegfried. This forest is contrasted with a hunched over, dwarfed – impotent – crooked tree symbolic of Alberich. In fact when Alberich is introduced he is shown hiding inside a hollow of one such dwarfed and crooked tree as if he were a part of it. Alberich's realm too is inhabited not by markedly "Jewish" characters, but rather stunted hairy dark dwarves, which furthers my argument that Alberich's Semitic features

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<sup>111</sup> Moreover, Alberich can become invisible, suggesting that foreign elements can go unnoticed yet still pose a threat. In fact, Alberich as an invisible force does attack the unsuspecting Siegfried.

<sup>112</sup> In fact, the actor Georg John played both Mime and Alberich, which speaks to the significance of heavily disguising the actor in order to create two distinct characters.

are less symptomatic of anti-Semitism than an extension of one belonging to the broader category of foreign other in the film.<sup>113</sup>

The way in which the foreign is depicted, especially Isenstein, Brunhild's stronghold, evokes Said's description of how the Occident describes the Orient. Said states that "[t]he Orient and the Oriental, Arab, Islamic, Indian, Chinese, or whatever become repetitions – pseudo-incarnations of some great original [...] they were supposed to have been imitating" (Said 62). This holds true in *Die Nibelungen*. If we compare Isenstein with Worms we see some striking similarities. The foreign realm of Island is depicted in the same symbolic language of film that is used to show Worms. If we look at the silhouette used to introduce the Burgundian court, we see a geometric and symmetric (square and monolithic) castle backlit by an ephemeral mist and light combination, hinting at a quasi-divine aspect of the court itself. This motif of mist and backlighting is also employed to depict Isenstein. But instead of geometric symmetry, Brunhild's castle fortress is built among rough and natural crags and cliff-faces. What this repetition of theme with slight variation does is to allow the viewer to see a wholly new thing through images of that which is already known. The foreign is therefore cast as familiar. The problem lies herein: by perceiving the foreign in this way, it intrinsically implies a hierarchy in which the new objects then are inferior because they are considered to be mere imitations of a superior original.<sup>114</sup> Isenstein is depicted as the imitation of Worms;

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<sup>113</sup> Mime's disheveled appearance in addition to his awkward and slow gait resembles Alberich. The Huns are also depicted in a similar way. In one scene they are shown to be squatting and crawling around a fire and another shows them leaping from a tree. Moreover, the skin tone of the non-Burgundian, especially male, figures is distinctly darker than the Burgundians (with the exception of Siegfried who is a counterpoint to the forest dwellers). When female characters are meant to evoke foreign traits, dark clothing is utilized, which is particularly evident in the contradistinction between Kriemhild in white and Brunhild in black in *Siegfried*, and Kriemhild in black in *Kriemhilds Rache*.

<sup>114</sup> This is also present in the *Nibelungenlied*, in which according to tenets of *hohe Minne*, women are transposed into "*domina*" (Kasten 165). Women who are the object of courtly love then represent a pseudo-

and Brunhild the imitator of King Gunther. If we compare the throne rooms of the respective Kingdoms, we again see the Isenstein "pseudo-incarnation" of the Burgundian "original." Brunhild is perched upon a throne in the middle of a room with two guards/advisors on either side. Her court is decorated with depictions of animals and ornate designs much like Worms. The difference is that in Isenstein the décor is primitive and exotic where as the Burgundian court is stylistically geometric and symmetrical, in short modern, Christian, more European. Instead of a symmetrical cathedral and Christian priest, Brunhild has a natural cave with runes painted on the wall and a sibyl<sup>115</sup> reading bones. The most noticeable difference between the two realms, however, does not exist in the structural edifices or decoration, but rather in the contradistinction between a state of stasis and dynamism:<sup>116</sup> as Brunhild is preparing to fight the threefold contest, the battle field comes alive with frantic action, with women running and jumping haphazardly. This in fact is the first scene in which large scale dynamism takes place. With the exception of the scene when Siegfried fights the dragon, the figures are either totally static or move at a snail's pace up to this part of the film. If we examine the film as a cohesive whole, we see a consistent tension between the static monumental, Apollonian realm of Worms and the dynamic, Dionysian realms of the others.<sup>117</sup> This is symbolized by the hectic frenzy that pervades both Brunhild's court in the first half and the Huns' Asiatic steppes in the

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incarnation of the patriarchal norm. In this case, as with the *Nibelungenlied*, the traditional gender hierarchy follows a patriarchal model in which the "original" ruler (*dominus*), represented by Gunther, is contrasted with an inferior incarnation (*domina*), represented by Brunhild. The fact that Brunhild is frequently designated as Amazonian in Nibelungen scholarship (Frakes 146-47) strengthens the contrast between an accepted original (patriarchy) and its foreign counterpart (the Amazonian model).

<sup>115</sup> It should be noted that the religious representative is a woman, mimicking Brunhild's position of matriarch. Both the sacred and profane are headed by women in Isenstein.

<sup>116</sup> This could also be read as a distinction between Apollonian order and Dionysian chaos, a distinction between form and formlessness.

<sup>117</sup> Feasting and drinking wine, along with anarchic dance and music, associated with the Dionysian, is the province of the Huns.

second half of the film. The ultimate contradistinction between the dynamic movements of the others with the static nature of Worms can be seen in how the Burgundian figures become rigid architectural objects.<sup>118</sup> Eisner notes: "In *Die Nibelungen* [...], the isolated human body is treated as a decorative element, absolutely static, deprived of individual life and frozen in its symmetry" (*Haunted Screen* 163-166). The prime example of this is illustrated in the scene in which a row of soldiers make up the pillars behind which a court procession methodically meanders by. A further instance is when Brunhild arrives in Worms: the Burgundian soldiers literally form a bridge between ship and shore. In short, the inhabitants of Worms become a part of their surroundings; their ornamental costumes stand in for decorative patterns on the wall (Eisner, *Fritz Lang* 70).

### **2.3: Colonization/Domestication and Courtship**

The motif of colonization/domestication in the film goes hand in hand with the Orientalism in Lang's adaptation of the myth. I will highlight two primary scenarios involving acts of colonization, both of which revolve around the courting of an exoticized foreign object of desire.<sup>119</sup> I will first address the expedition to Isenstein: Gunther's courtship of Brunhild. Although it occurs after the Siegfried-Kriemhild courtship, it is the more overt of the two.

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<sup>118</sup> The contrast between stasis and dynamism is also present in Siegfried's murder: the premise of his death is a foot race to the spring. By engaging in this race and excelling Siegfried reinforces his own alterity. In a similar fashion as Alberich, death brings Siegfried to a halt.

<sup>119</sup> Etzel's courtship of Kriemhild, however, is presented as a reversal to the colonization and domestication of the foreign present in Gunther's courtship of Brunhild and Siegfried's courtship of Kriemhild. Although Etzel's courtship retains aspects of courting a foreign object of desire present in the other two bridal quests, the theme of colonization is transposed into an anti-colonization, whereby Kriemhild undergoes a character transformation inversely opposite to Brunhild's in *Siegfried*: Kriemhild leaves the familiar Burgundian realm for the foreign Hunnish Kingdom; in favour of the white Burgundian dresses, Kriemhild dons a black wardrobe; Kriemhild's demeanor and positionality change from subservient to authoritative; and Kriemhild assumes the role of ruler, which is exemplified by her command of the hunnish troops.

Brunhild and her realm full of maidens are presented as an object desired by the Burgundian court. However, they are unable to conquer and colonize this territory single-handedly. With Siegfried's assistance in a three-fold courtship battle, Brunhild is defeated and becomes the property of the Burgundian King and Kingdom. Brunhild according to the light/dark allegory of the film is clothed in dark armour including an ominous black winged helmet.<sup>120</sup> Despite the Burgundian victory in the battle, Brunhild retains her supernatural strength and openly opposes her subjugation: Brunhild binds Gunther with a belt in response to his sexual advances. This Brunhild is not the armour clad warrior that the Burgundians faced in Isenstein, but someone in the process of conforming to the Burgundian sphere. This is indicated by her robes: although still black, they are of the same ornamental style as is the fashion in Worms.<sup>121</sup> As the film progresses we encounter a scene in which Brunhild is literally converted: a priest blesses her with a crucifix at the steps of the Cathedral. However, despite her wardrobe change and superficial (or symbolic) conversion to Christianity, Brunhild still maintains her supernatural strength. In order to fully domesticate, tame and subjugate her, Hagen enlists Siegfried to pose as Gunther and subdue the defiant Brunhild. Following the myth, Siegfried uses his magic *Tarnhelm*<sup>122</sup> to disguise himself as Gunther and physically overpowers Brunhild, in the process relieving her of an armband. In Lang's *Die Nibelungen*, as in the *Nibelungenlied*,

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<sup>120</sup> Brunhild is depicted wearing a black winged helmet. Hagen also is adorned with a similar helmet. The symbolic importance of these helmets is captured in Kriemhild's dream, in which two black birds attack and destroys a white bird, foreshadowing Hagen and Brunhild conspiring to murder Siegfried. Following the colour contrast in the film that presents white as familiar and black as foreign, these helmets in addition to the dream sequence, moreover highlight Brunhild's and Hagen's affinity to the foreign.

<sup>121</sup> In Isenstein Brunhild is presented wearing pants and leather vest or in chain-mail body armour. However, aboard the ship to Worms she is shown wearing a black dress adorned with ornamental designs. Her gown resembles Kriemhild's but differs in colour: Brunhild's alterity is maintained in the darkness of her clothes, which also marks a shift from foreign to familiar in *Kreimhilds Rache*, when Kriemhild dresses in black garments.

<sup>122</sup> *Tarnhelm* refers to a magic helmet which grants the wearer invisibility or the ability to assume someone else's form.

removing Brunhild's ring or armband symbolizes the loss of autonomy as the armband is one symbol for Brunhild's source of supernatural power.<sup>123</sup> Without the supernatural strength imbued in the ring, Brunhild can be deflowered: therefore, when she is relieved of this talisman she is in effect relieved of her own agency. She can be physically and symbolically colonized. Later in the film this theme is reiterated when Hagen sinks the Nibelungen treasure in the Rhine beneath the Worms castle. The Nibelungen treasure is to Kriemhild as the ring is to Brunhild: the treasure symbolizes autonomy and agency. Wealth would free Kriemhild from the ties of the patriarchal hegemony of Worms, much like the supernatural strength of the armband allowed Brunhild her sovereignty.

The motif of colonization is slightly different when it comes to Siegfried and Kriemhild. Siegfried arrives in Worms with twelve vassal kings from twelve kingdoms he has conquered. Clad all in white, he proclaims his intention of marrying the pride of the Burgundian realm, Kriemhild. Colonization in this scene is expressed in terms of feudality and vassality. Siegfried is in the process of colonial expansion, to which the Burgundians object. The Burgundians already have an established realm, as is alluded to in their monumental architecture. Here Lang breaks away from the *Nibelungenlied* and offers an alternative depiction of the traditionally solitary hero. By having Siegfried shown as conforming to the practices of colonial expansion, he is in effect offering a version of Siegfried analogous to the Burgundians.<sup>124</sup> This innovation weakens the

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<sup>123</sup> The scene in the *Nibelungenlied* depicts Brunhild being stripped of "guldin vingerlîn" (NL 679,3) and "gürtel" (NL 680,1). While the ring symbolizes an exterior source of power the loss of the belt implies the loss of virginity, an interior virtue. It is a visual token of her bodily integrity.

<sup>124</sup> The ability of Siegfried to adapt to and excel in new environments could be seen as an indication that he is the ideal conqueror. However, this is not the case in *Die Nibelungen* nor the *Nibelungenlied*. Lang presents Siegfried transforming from a primitive, albeit superior, forest dweller to a formidable king whose subjects include twelve vassal kings. The fact that Siegfried assumes the traits of his vanquished foes during his metamorphosis undermines the position that he is the ideal king and conqueror: his superhuman strength in addition to his propensity towards trickery and deceit are not positive attributes. In fact, they do

juxtaposition between Siegfried the foreigner and the native Burgundians, blurring the self-other dichotomy. Moreover, Siegfried has left his foreign-primitive fur loin cloth and adopted a decorative, Burgundian style tunic. And when Kriemhild comes into frame, she is not an exotic dark other, but rather an innocent white counterpart to Siegfried. While he appears to fit naturally into this setting, the stark contrast between black and white occurs again between Hagen and Siegfried. Hagen dressed in black, hairy, and dishevelled, evokes characteristics of the orientalized other which were first introduced in the supernatural forest realm.<sup>125</sup> Hagen, however, does not fully fit into the category of "foreign other" either, but rather he espouses characteristics of both the foreign and familiar. He is fully clothed; he stands upright, is physically imposing, and radiates an ominous authority rivalled only by Siegfried. Hagen is the quintessence of the ambiguousness of the foreign in the myth. He is visibly an outsider, an other, who occupies the innermost position; I would argue that he even has more influence/agency than King Gunther<sup>126</sup> himself as Hagen is the one who drives the action, particularly in the first half of *Die Nibelungen*. Rather than Siegfried colonizing and domesticating Kriemhild, it is in fact Siegfried who is domesticated and conforms to the Burgundians rule. The first indication of this occurs when Hagen advises King Gunther to allow Siegfried to court Kriemhild only if Siegfried agrees to assist Gunther in the Burgundian bridal expedition to Isentstein. Although the film follows the plot lines of the *Nibelungenlied* insofar as Siegfried provides a service for reward (the *Dienst-Lohn* model

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not provide Siegfried with agency. To the contrary, his foreign non-Burgundian traits are exploited by the Burgundian nobility to further their own realm. Siegfried becomes a pawn of the Burgundian kingdom. However, he betrays Gunther's secret.

<sup>125</sup> Moreover, Hagen's eye-patch correlates to the slain Dragon's own wounded eye, thus situating Hagen visually as an adversary of Siegfried.

<sup>126</sup> Gunther is feminized in the film. Evidence of this is seen in his powerlessness against Brunhild aboard the ship and in Worms before Siegfried is able to overpower Brunhild. Additionally, he is indecisive about murdering Siegfried.

of *hohe Minne*), the consequences of his service are less symbolic of the romanticized notions of medieval *hohe Minne* as it is indicative of the Burgundian court asserting its power and dominance over an outsider. Siegfried is a pawn used to expand the Burgundian realm's influence and prestige.

## **2.4: Traditional and Transitioning Gender Roles**

I have mentioned in the previous sections the associations between the Nibelungen myth and German nationalism. I have not yet, however, touched upon other socio-political aspects such as the enfranchisement of women in Weimar Germany, which affected how the myth was adapted by Lang. Lang's *Die Nibelungen* offers insight into the ramifications of adapting the Nibelungen myth to film during a period in which feminism, suffrage, and the enfranchisement of women were contested topics of debate. To this end, Richard McCormick offers insight on the role of film and literature on society during the Weimar period with a particular emphasis on gender and sexuality. Although Lang's *Die Nibelungen* is not an example McCormick thoroughly addresses in his analysis, he does provide an appropriate lens one can use to look at *Die Nibelungen*. The premise of McCormick's *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity* is to evaluate the evolution of gender constructs and sexuality and their effects on the socio-political milieu. McCormick identifies how a blurring of traditional gender roles and identification, along with misogynistic attitudes and male castration anxiety, are represented in film and literature of the period.

Women's suffrage in Germany was born with the Weimar Republic. As more women entered the work force and demanded suffrage and other egalitarian reforms

during the Weimar period, identity crises manifested themselves: "[t]he 'shock of modernity' in Germany was often experienced as a crisis of traditional male authority, agency, and identity. But traditional conceptions of female identity were undergoing just as much strain – if not more" (McCormick 3).<sup>127</sup> This "shock" consequently led to a sort of male hysteria – a conservative backlash against modernity.<sup>128</sup> As part of this backlash, traditional value systems were propagated by both the Left and Right: on the left, the blurring of traditional gender roles was seen to threaten the "romanticization of a muscular, vital, proletarian masculinity," and the "invocation of a suffering, maternal – and constantly pregnant – working-class femininity" (McCormick 24). And on the Right, the emancipated woman of any type was categorically opposed: McCormick explains,

(...) in the German fascist imagination, all such distinctions between factions of feminists and between older feminists and emancipated younger women were meaningless. All independent-minded women were collapsed into one generalized image to be attacked. This misogynistic strategy was combined with anti-Semitism and anti-Marxism in the construction of a monolithic "other" that threatened the "fatherland." (24-25)

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<sup>127</sup> Helen Boak's article "Women in Weimar Politics" expands on the topic of suffrage to describe the extent of women's involvement in the political arena during the Weimar era. Boak notes that women were at the mercy of their political parties to participate in decision-making bodies, noting that men were often reluctant to forego positions of power (371). Moreover, women were unable to make any serious reform to these practices due to their lack of election support and political experience (371). Another example of how traditional gender roles were being questioned during the Weimar era can be seen in what Alan Lareau terms the "anything goes" period (15). Lareau investigates the role of cabaret and music in Weimar Germany in presenting gay and lesbian identities. He notes that during this period "prostitution, sadism, gambling, drugs, transvestitism, nudism, homosexuality, jazz, alcohol—any form of sensual and sexual excess found its niche" (15), which was then presented in popular culture, most notably in cabaret, "a pivotal site of experimentation, taboo-breaking, and moral and intellectual revolution" (15-16). Transitioning gender roles was not limited to the political arena or work force but also was largely intertwined with sexual experimentation and emancipation regardless of gender or sexual preference.

<sup>128</sup> Barbara Hales notes that the backlash of traditionalism was caused by "unprecedented advances and political and social life" (317).

As noted earlier, an overarching category of "other" in *Die Nibelungen* is comprised from a variety of "foreign" elements such as dwarves, Jews, Huns, and women. On the surface, *Die Nibelungen* operates within a dichotomy of self-other relations. The historical context in which the film was shot is highly relevant, especially concerning the gender roles, which occupy such a prominent position in the plot. Previously I have discussed how Lang uses a black/white contrast throughout the film to signify the distinction between foreign and familiar, and this binarism is furthermore emphasised through costume and positionality (clothed versus unclothed, hairy versus clean-shaven, clean versus dirty, upright vs. hunched over etc.). The female characters in *Die Nibelungen* are therefore also chief "others," although they may appear to be incorporated into the Burgundian-cum-Nibelungen society.<sup>129</sup> If we take Brunhild as an example, her loss of autonomy can be otherwise viewed as emancipation from the burdens of performing a non-traditional gender role as a sword-bearing female warrior. Evidence of this is seen in the way that she is systematically stripped of her armour until she is left with flowing Burgundian dresses symbolic of the Burgundian perspective of femininity. The predominant occupation of the male figures in *Die Nibelungen* is to be courtly knights. The allegory of Brunhild as the "New Woman" of the Weimar period helps explain Brunhild's integration in Worms. Just as the working women, embodied in the notion of the "New Woman" are seen as threat to patriarchic society in Weimar Germany,<sup>130</sup> Brunhild occupies the position of other in *Die Nibelungen* based on her clothing, as they are the symbol of her

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<sup>129</sup> Although the female characters fluctuate in their affinity to the Burgundian realm, their gender alone sets them apart from the male characters. By definition they are eternally "other" which is only subtracted from or added to through their deeds, positionality, costume, and location.

<sup>130</sup> Hales describes the ambiguous nature of the "New Woman," which leads to new demarcations of traditional gender roles and identifications: "New Women were at once described as careerists, mothers, sexual predators, an/or homosexual. This confusion led to an attempt to define perceived manifestations of woman to make sense out of her ambiguous status" (322).

"occupation." Therefore, in order to restore traditional gender roles, Brunhild needed to be re-clothed. Kriemhild, conversely, undergoes a transformation opposite to that of Brunhild. Kriemhild begins as the ideal feminine figure in *Die Nibelungen*: she is clothed in appropriate dress for traditional gender roles; she is submissive in posture and action; and she occupies herself with needlework, the quintessentially feminine craft. However, as the film progresses, she becomes increasingly more active, upright, and authoritative. She trades her needlework for military strategy and command. In this sense, Kriemhild's emancipation is from the domestic in favour of the public. And for this she is symbolized as the enemy, as the black/white contradistinction dictates.

As noted in my discussion in Chapter 1, female characters that perform "male" gender roles are demonized in the *Nibelungenlied*. Eight centuries later, Lang's depiction of Brunhild and Kriemhild as others echoes this sentiment. Female characters who act in opposition to traditional gender roles are visually marked as different through dark attire. This is the case with Brunhild, the Amazonian queen in the first half of the film, and Kriemhild, as she performs the authoritative role as the Hunnish Queen and exacts her revenge in the second half. Lang presents two examples of transitioning gender roles: Brunhild undergoes a transformation from the non-traditional, that is to say, an anti-patriarchal position, to a subservient, "traditional" gender role.<sup>131</sup> Kriemhild conversely is shown to transition from the traditional female role as subservient woman, signified by her posture and white costume, to a non-traditional role of authority figure in command of the Hunnish troops. Her white costume is replaced with a dark dress, coupled with an erect body posture and superior position in relation to others, most notably while she

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<sup>131</sup> It should be noted that Brunhild never fully loses her status as other as indicated by change of wardrobe in style but not shade: Brunhild dons an ornamental dress befitting a Burgundian queen yet her persistent alterity is signified by the blackness of her robes.

stands on a staircase during the barrage of the Burgundians.<sup>132</sup> Kriemhild in this respect fulfills an analogous non-traditional gender role to Brunhild before she was defeated in Isenstein. By drawing on the Nibelungen myth in this way to romanticize traditional gender roles, Lang unintentionally offers a contradictory option. Specific versions of femininity are either glamorized or demonized in the film, echoing the contemporary attitudes of traditional gender roles of the Weimar period, and can be interpreted as either positive or negative depending on the viewer.<sup>133</sup> As such, the portrayals of the characters Brunhild and Kriemhild offer an ambiguous social commentary on the transformation of gender roles during a period of emancipation.

McCormick notes that part of the destabilizing nature of the Weimar period was the "popularization of much older, bourgeois ideals of romantic, heterosexual love, directed through mass culture more at the lower than at the middle classes" (1).

McCormick continues:

this particular destabilization is especially ironic, given that those romantic ideals were originally meant to reinforce the concept of a stable, intimate private sphere that was 'timeless', immune to the changes that the rise of the bourgeoisie and capitalism were instigating in the public realm of modern life. (1-2)

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<sup>132</sup> Although Kriemhild's wardrobe change from white to black can be interpreted as an act of mourning, the function shifts to a symbolic marker of otherness.

<sup>133</sup> McCormick emphasizes with regard to Weimar Cinema that the interpretation of films must take into consideration "the actual presence of women in the cinemas as spectators—they too must have reacted to films that thematized destabilized gender roles, no matter how patriarchally determined the ideology underlying most of the films may have been" (17). With this in mind, I would argue that although Lang presents the female characters positively performing traditional gender roles and negatively when not, interpretation of the film is inherently intertwined with the gender of the spectator.

If the intention of Lang's film adaptation of the Nibelungen myth was to bring an "elitist" story to the masses (Levin 97),<sup>134</sup> the evocation of this *Ur-Germanic* material has the effect of hegemonic legitimization of value systems and gender roles captured in the *alten maeren* of a nation's past. Lang is able to draw on the social milieu and offer a version of the Nibelungen myth which reifies patriarchal gender roles in the battle against what McCormick terms male castration anxieties (21). McCormick notes:

Male "castration" anxieties, in psychological and social terms, are obviously not unique to Weimar Germany, but they were bound up with a specific crisis of modernization that was distinctly the product of German political history. Women represented one of the groups most marginal, most archetypally "other," to a German national identity understood traditionally in authoritarian (and patriarchal) terms. (21-22)

The Nibelungen myth in this regard is a vehicle to reify traditional gender roles and offers a means to negatively construct identity through contradistinction of self and other. Furthermore, the wounded hero's body becomes an allegory for a wounded national body: in other words, "[e]quating German national identity with manhood, this collective male consciousness was obsessed with the supposed loss of male power and authority. And this obsession can be found throughout Weimar cinema" (McCormick 25). It is my assertion that Lang's *Die Nibelungen* follows this paradigm. As the film was not created in a vacuum, the film incorporates misogynistic elements of the *Zeitgeist*. McCormick describes the socio-political effects of this misogyny as follows:

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<sup>134</sup> Lang considered the medieval epic elitist, belonging "to a relatively small number of privileged and cultivated minds" (Levin 97). Film, conversely, is in and of itself a mass-medium.

In the turbulent economic, political, and social chaos of the Weimar Republic, emancipated women (often grouped together in the image of the so-called New Woman) were blamed for social instability, especially by anti-democratic forces on the right, who also blamed socialists, Jews, and other groups who played new and more prominent roles in the republic. All of these groups were scapegoated as "other" in keeping with ominous ideological and psychological tendencies that would become all too clear after the Nazis came to power in 1933. (20)

If we view Lang's *Die Nibelungen* as an indicator of this socio-political milieu, the second part of the film becomes crucial in understanding the attitudes towards changing gender roles. The figure Kriemhild, who espouses a traditional submissive gender role in the first part of the film, implicitly represents the "New Woman," and is demonstratively demonized or glamorized depending on the viewer. Moreover, the moral ambivalence in the myth is used to highlight social inequalities and can be seen as a warning of the possible consequences of transitioning gender roles from a authoritative patriarchic society to one in which women and other marginalized groups have increasingly more power and involvement in society: the downfall of the Burgundians happens because the "others" – Kriemhild fulfilling a traditionally male gender role, and Hagen the foreigner – in effect control the Hunnish and Burgundian societies, respectively.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> A major difference between *Die Nibelungen* and the *Nibelungenlied* is how Kriemhild dies. In the *Nibelungenlied* she is beheaded because she performs a non-traditional gender role, namely she takes up the sword herself. In *Die Nibelungen* Kriemhild's death is much less violent: in fact, she simply fades away, dying of a broken heart. Although she dies in each instance, the assertive action of Hildebrand in the *Nibelungenlied* symbolizes a restoration of gender roles and hierarchy, whereas in the film Kriemhild's death points less to a restoration of traditional gender roles but more a failure of the new woman to cope with a change in gender roles.

## 2.5: *The Medium of Film*

Film as a medium adds to the ambiguity in Lang's adaptation of the Nibelungen myth. Lang's film utilizes stark symbolic imagery to depict its characters and their traits. We see this starkness in the way that an overarching alterity is created through repetition of symbolism: the status of the other becomes increasingly more solidified as the imagery is repeated. This additive approach to create the binary of self-other is especially effective in strengthening the separation of the other from the self. That is, through the repetition of certain traits, such as being hairy, hunched over, semi-nude, and dark, the other is easily identifiable. However, this approach is not as successful where characters that have more than one persona are concerned. In *Die Nibelungen*, not all of the characters retain their individual traits throughout the film. The way in which these characters are portrayed from scene to scene offers contradictory and subversive models of identification. The symbolism, along with the symbolic function of their depictions, therefore becomes increasingly fragmented as the film progresses. This is less a product of the dynamic nature of the characters as it is indicative of their plurality. Because the characters are portrayed as having more than one identity throughout the film, their identities become ambiguous. Is Siegfried the dragon slayer of the forest different from the courtly knight at the Burgundian court? Is Brunhild the Amazonian warrior and sovereign the same as the domesticated wife of King Gunther? Throughout the film we are confronted with models of identification that rely on the either/or binarism. However, by presenting more than one image by which to identify the characters, the film actually allows certain characters to appear ambiguous. To approach this with reference to the orientalist paradigm: the characters become pseudo-incarnations of their original selves.

For example, the image of Kriemhild as the quintessential German maiden is the great original that is incarnated by the images of her as Etzel's wife and foreigner. Although her attitude, dress, location, and positionality all change, the image of her as a submissive model of femininity remains. Kriemhild is both submissive and aggressive, light and dark, domestic and foreign. Although the material calls for transformation of character, as noted in my discussion of Brunhild and Kriemhild in the *Nibelungenlied*, the medium of film further shakes the stability of the binary mode of identification.

## **2.6: Summary**

As Orientalism largely stems principally from the literature of contact with "Orientals" and the "Orient" from the crusades and extensive periods of exploration, the knowledge of the Orient is often *a priori* rather than *a posteriori*. The consequence of this type of knowledge is that the Orient often becomes an exoticized fictional projection. The West's perspective is then manifested through actual contact with others – a self-fulfilling prophecy, so to speak. This holds true in Lang's *Die Nibelungen*, in which oral depictions evoke exoticized images of the foreign, which then are realized as the film progresses: the *a priori* projections of the foreign are substantiated *a posteriori*. Take Brunhild, for example: she is shown from the Burgundian point of view, dressed in black armour and crowned in a feathered helmet, shooting a bow and arrow. However, when the Burgundians arrive in Isenstein she is not wearing any armour at all, nor does she wear her feathered helmet. It is only when she becomes aware of the Burgundian threat to her sovereignty that she readies herself for battle by calling for her armour, and by doing so, in effect legitimizes the earlier portrayal of her as an Amazonian warrior.

In the first part of *Die Nibelungen*, the viewer is shown a world in which the Burgundian self subdues the mythic and supernatural other. We see this in Siegfried's slaying of the dragon, in Alberich and the Nibelungen dwarves turning to stone, in Siegfried's own murder and finally in Brunhild's subjugation and eventual suicide. The representatives of the archaic and mythic realms are survived only by the Burgundians in the first part of the film epic. In the second part of the film we see the total annihilation of both sides of the self-other binary: the Nibelungen and the Huns literally self-destruct.

Lang's *Die Nibelungen* offers a prime example of how the Orientalist approach can be applied to non-Oriental geographies and peoples, and used to solidify a negatively constructed identity based on a process of contradistinction. However, the distinct realms which are depicted in the film are not mutually exclusive or secluded, but rather the film shows their "mutual contamination" (Gunning 39) as is manifested in the Burgundians adopting the Nibelungen identity, Kriemhild becoming the dark female authority much like Brunhild was in *Isenstein*, as well as Hagen's shifting between roles of both hero and villain. What appears to be on the surface an attempt to present the most German of the German through contradistinction of self and other, in the end is a stylistic portrayal of appropriated foreignness used to create a hybrid self-identity.

## Conclusion

The Nibelungen myth has long been appropriated to project identity based on a self-other dichotomy. Through the lens of Orientalism I have shown how these binaries are constructed in adaptations of the Nibelungen myth, and how these binaries are inherently unstable and unsustainable. The apparent models of identification that are presented in the *Nibelungenlied* and *Die Nibelungen* are ultimately flawed as they are reliant on a system of explicit contradistinction, which I have shown is not the case. To premise a national/German(ic) identity on an inherently ambiguous myth contradicts the intended result: instead of one homogenous identity, the *Nibelungenlied* and *Die Nibelungen* offer varying and contradictory identities of both self and other.

The *Nibelungenlied* presents the myth according to the socio-political milieu in which it was transcribed. A justification for the nobility is projected through the examples of courtly gentlewomen and knights, kings and queens, and clerics. Moreover, a sense of a German heritage is evoked in the historically-based mythology surrounding the downfall of the Burgundians, the nobility from the middle Rhine area. Why myth seeks its foundations in history, Roland Barthes explains, is because "myth is a type of speech chosen by history" (110). Moreover, it is not the object of its message that defines a myth, but rather the "way in which it utters this message" (Barthes 109). We see in the *Nibelungenlied* that accepted social norms and practices are described at length not only to provide an analogy to the contemporary audiences at the time *Nibelungenlied* manuscripts were being produced, but moreover, the manner in which the myth is presented reifies the social hierarchy and gender constellations of their patriarchal

society. Despite the moral ambiguity and tragic nature of the epic, the *Nibelungenlied* attempts to testify to an enduring essence of the German identity through myth: in the face of tragedy and destruction the German spirit remains through the virtue of *Treue*. But again, this holds true only if one takes the notion of loyalty out of context, for loyalty is a subjective quality that changes throughout the narrative. Moreover, it is perpetual loyalty which solidifies tragedy: Hagen's loyalty to the Burgundian realm is inversely proportional to how detrimental he is to the realm. It poses the question whether it is actually loyalty that he espouses, or if any concept evoked in the *Nibelungenlied* is without uncertainty. Barthes argues that "the knowledge contained in a mythical concept is confused, made of yielding, shapeless associations. [...] it is not at all an abstract, purified essence; it is a formless, unstable, nebulous condensation, whose unity and coherence are above all due to its function" (119), the function being its social usage: mythical concepts are "to be *appropriated*" (Barthes 119). With this in mind, it is clear to see how the Nibelungen myth has served its function throughout the ages. If the social usage of myth in the *Nibelungenlied* was to provide justification for the courtly-Christian nobility during the High Middle Ages, this function would no longer be fitting to later evocations of the myth, be it nineteenth-century nationalists, nor Wagner, Hebbel, or Lang for that matter – in fact anyone who adopts the myth to his/her own ends only provides a new social usage to the myth as seen in my analysis of Lang's *Die Nibelungen*. For Lang saw in the myth an opportunity renew the German spirit after the devastation of the First World War and looming uncertainty of the Weimar period. Ultimately, the reason why the Nibelungen myth can be appropriated to provide a context in which to

create identity (or attempt to provide meaning) lies in its ambiguity: the vaguer a concept is the more meaning can be interpreted from it (Barthes 132).

I started this analysis with the questions: why myth and why specifically the Nibelungen myth? How is it that a myth that depicts death and destruction can be used as the basis for creating national identity? What are the effects of ambiguity in adaptations of the Nibelungen myth? What makes a tale of death and destruction so attractive that it has been adapted periodically since the Middle Ages up to as recently as 2004 in the film production *Ring of the Nibelungs*?<sup>136</sup> The answer is that myth's function is to be appropriated. To be appropriated means to fulfill a social usage. In the case of the *Nibelungenlied*, the myth is used to offer a model of identification for and justification of the Christian-courtly ethics of the nobility in the German-speaking area around Lake Constance during the High Middle Ages. In the wake of the Napoleonic wars, the myth was once again invoked, however, not to justify an outdated medieval socio-political system but rather to incite nationalistic sentiment. If we take Richard Wagner's appropriation of the myth in his Ring Cycle, we can see how Wagner traces the divine election of the German people by the Nordic gods and depicts the transition from the predominance of the old gods in favour of the chosen race: the Burgundians. Fritz Lang on the other hand, follows more closely the myth as presented in the *Nibelungenlied*. The emphasis on the death and destruction of the Burgundian clan is indicative of the tragic nature of the German people Lang was able to project, but moreover his intention was to

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<sup>136</sup> Uli Edels' *Ring of the Nibelungs* revolves around the Siegfried-Brunhild branch of the saga which inherently shies away from the downfall of the Burgundians and some of the more destructive aspects of the mythology; however, it does retain the tragic nature of Siegfried's death. The characters in the film are divided according to the archaic/pagan versus modern/Christian divide also seen in the *Nibelungenlied* and *Die Nibelungen* but emphasises the death and departure of those associated with the archaic "old gods" and most importantly the survival of the Christian Burgundians.

cause national renewal by bringing to the masses the nation's myths to life (Gunning 38).<sup>137</sup> Perhaps the answer to why the Nibelungen myth is used in regard to identity creation can be answered with what the myth represents: the myth is inherently ambiguous, tragic, and geographically relevant to the German cultural sphere. In times when national identity was being called into question or threatened, especially since the 1800's, the Nibelungen myth took a prominent position in restructuring or reifying the legitimacy of nationhood and cultural identity. In fact, there is a direct correlation between the frequency and quantity of material based on the Nibelungen myth and the historical developments that affected the German-speaking area (Martin 148). Precisely because the Nibelungen myth is inherently ambiguous, it allows for periodic adaptation for the purpose of German self-mythologization. On the one hand, because the myth is ambiguous in nature and therefore open to interpretation and adaptation, the ambiguity, on the other hand, is never fully reconciled. The myth, specifically in the *Nibelungenlied* and *Die Nibelungen*, is used in order to project identity. The model of identity that is offered in these two examples is based on contradistinction between self-other, which has proven to be inconsistent as the binaries ultimately contradict themselves, offering, instead of stable identities of mutual exclusivity, a German identity that reflects a certain amount of hybridity. Given the current state of debate on what comprises the German identity, the hybrid model seems to reflect reality closer than the self-other distinction. Perhaps we will see the Nibelungen myth adapted yet again but with a model of

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<sup>137</sup> In a letter to Lotte Eisner in October 1968, Lang revised his opinion of the *Nibelungenlied*. Lang states "It is a 'heroic' poem of the ruling upper class! Where is there any reference to the people?! I saw the Burgundian kings with their magnificent robes as a decadent social class which was already on the decline" (Aurich, et al 97-98).

identification based not on the division of self and other, but one that celebrates hybridity as opposed to alterity.

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