

BRUNHILDS CINEMATIC EVOLUTION IN GERMAN FILM

by

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(Under the Direction of Christine Haase)

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the portrayal of Brunhild in three major films that retell the Norse and Germanic variations of the legends of Brunhild and Siegfried: Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen* (1924), Harald Reinl's *Die Nibelungen* (1966), and Uli Edel's *Die Nibelungen – Der Fluch des Drachen* (2004) (English title *Dark Kingdom: The Dragon King*, 2006). The emphasis will be on whether Brunhild is portrayed in keeping with the spirit of the Norse tradition, i.e. that of a strong woman with agency, by examining the decade the film was shot in, to include gender relations, the director and production team, the literary and other sources used for the film, and finally the plot of the film itself, coupled with the portrayal of the character by the respective actress. I will argue the portrayal of this epic figure does not correspond to the most successful and emancipated representation of Brunhild in the Norse tradition in Lang's and Reinl's films, whereas it does in Edel's film. An overview of the legend and sagas that have served as sources for these films will be required in order to support my analyses. A connection between the making of these films and the directors' choice of which literary Brunhild to portray will also be examined.

INDEX WORDS: Fritz Lang, Harald Reinl, Uli Edel, German Cinema, Fantasy, Brunhild, Brynhild, Siegfried, Sigurd, *Die Nibelungen*, *Die Nibelungen – Der Fluch des Drachen*, *The Ring of the Nibelungs*, *Dark Kingdom: The Dragon King*, *The Nibelungenlied*, *Völsunga Saga*, Feminism, Nationalism

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the most important people in my life who have had to patiently stand by while I pursued my Master of Arts degree in German - my husband, Bradley (a.k.a. BrunnHeld) and my parents. Without my husband's emotional support throughout this period, I don't believe I would have accomplished my goal; he has unwaveringly supported me in all my endeavors, never limiting my aspirations and dreams, and his love and dedication are priceless. He has patiently endured my constant pondering and discussing of Brunhild, The Nibelungenlied, and the Völsunga saga over the course of the last six months.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The literary treatment of Brynhild in both the Norse and German tradition has received close analysis over past decades and centuries (Andersson 6). The German Nibelungenlied, the Norse Völsunga Saga, and the Norse Poetic Edda, in addition to further lays and sagas, portray diverse forms of this character. Andersson claims Brynhild is the “paramount figure of Germanic legend, but she has been subordinated more often than not to the male object of her passion. Her story is thus normally referred to as the legend of Sigurd, or, in German circles, the legend of Siegfried” (5). Despite this fact, Andersson feels strongly that “no more important key exists to our understanding of Germanic literature than the legend of Brynhild” (19).

Who was Brunhild? Was she a mythical figure or a real person who inspired legends? Hoffmann attempted to answer this question in his research on the Nibelungenlied. A historical basis for the first part of the Nibelungenlied and for Brunhild in general is “much more difficult to ascertain” (Hoffmann 42) than it is for the second part of the epic, which concerns Kriemhild’s revenge and the downfall of the Burgundians. Hoffman believes the existence of a Siegfried-Brunhild story may be found in the Merovingian history of the 5th century (42).

According to Hoffmann, Brunhild (Brunichildis), the daughter of the Westgothic King Athanagild, married the Austrasian King Sigibert I in 566 or 567 (42-43). Brunhild was a Visigothic princess and Sigibert was the King of the Franks (Gentry 58). Sigibert’s half-brother Chilperic was married to Brunhild’s sister, Gailswintha (58). Chilperic’s concubine Fredegund instigated the strangling death of Gailswintha and then also the murder of King Sigibert in 575

(58). Gentry states that Brunhild is actually a source for Kriemhild (58). Brunhild was at odds with Chilperic after her husband's death; she became the ruler of Burgundy in 592, but was killed by Frankish nobles in 613 (58). Hoffmann believes it likely the historical Brunichildis thus became the literary basis for Kriemhild or Gudrun, whereas the literary Brunhild is historically connected to Fredegund (Hoffmann 43). He further believes we can trace Siegfried's origin back to that of the Merovingian King Sigibert (42-43). Scholars such as Helmut de Boor argued against this possibility, citing a contradiction in the Völsunga saga, wherein the Kriemhild character is named Gudrun and her mother is called Grimhild (43). However, De Boor does believe that all heroic poetry has its roots in historical personalities: the circumstances and stories may change, but the characters they are based on do not (43). Regardless of de Boor's and other scholars' arguments, Hoffmann feels the theory of Brunhild's, Siegfried's and Kriemhild's Merovingian origin is superior to others that have been posited to date (1982) (43), as it was during the time of the great *Völkerwanderungen* that most of the Germanic and Norse legends were born (Andersson, Gentry, Hoffmann).

Over the past century, three epic films have tackled the legend of Brunhild and Siegfried and they have resulted in three very different portrayals of Brunhild: Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen (Siegfried and Kriemhild's Revenge)* (1924), Harald Reinl's *Die Nibelungen* (1966) and Uli Edel's made-for-television version, *Die Nibelungen – Der Fluch des Drachen* (2004) (English title *Dark Kingdom: The Dragon King*, 2006). As in the German literary tradition, Brunhild has been somewhat neglected in comparison to the characters of Siegfried and his wife, Kriemhild. This occurs in both Fritz Lang's and Harald Reinl's films, and is similar to the denigration of character she undergoes in the Nibelungenlied. In examining several aspects of

each film, I will argue it is only Uli Edel who does this Germanic heroine's Norse image justice in his portrayal of her character, and will analyze why that is so.

It is curious that only one out of the three films portrays Brunhild to her strongest capacity, given the fact these films represent three very unique decades that share a similar trend: they were witness to an upheaval in social structures and in gender relations, from Germany's Weimar Republic to the student revolutions and sexual liberation of the 1960s, to the effects of the fall of communism, increased immigration and German reunification in the 21st century. How and why does Brunhild fall short in Lang's and Reinl's films, and not in Edel's? This requires first a look at the literary tradition of Brunhild, in order to understand why one might even feel this literary figure has suffered greatly in her filmic portrayals. Furthermore, by examining the decade each film was produced in, identifying the literary sources each film drew from, and exploring each film, I will be able to posit why Brunhild's portrayal is deficient in the first two films. A vital thought to keep in mind throughout this argument is that "the Brynhild who lives in popular imagination as the prototypical Germanic heroine does so only by virtue of her standing in Völsunga saga" (Andersson 236). It is the Völsunga saga that portrays a strong, independent Queen of Iceland, who finds a worthy king, only to lose him to deception and trickery. It is this powerful woman and queen whom I will be looking for as the ideal filmic portrayal of Brynhild.

It must be noted that scholars differentiate between the Brynhild of the Völsunga saga or Norse tradition and the Brunhild(e), Brünhild(e), or Brünhilt of the Nibelungenlied and the German tradition. Unless I am quoting Andersson or the Völsunga saga, the name Brunhild will be used to identify this character throughout this thesis.

Finally, it will be interesting to see what conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the Brunhild character and the filming of the Siegfried/Brunhild legend in decades that witnessed

significant social, economic, and political change, in addition to change with regard to womens' status in society. An emphasis will be placed on the relationship between the portrayal of Brunhild and the filmic occurrence of the Brunhild/Siegfried legend during times of great change in Germany.

CHAPTER 2

THE ORAL AND LITERARY SOURCES OF THE BRUNHILD LEGEND

A. INTRODUCTION

The primary reason for investigating the literary sources of Brunhild available to us is that they directly affect the three film's scripts, the directors' visions for their films, and ultimately, how the viewers perceive the way in which Brunhild has been portrayed in each movie. It is certainly not my intent to fully delve into these literary origins, as this complex process is best left to literary scholars such as Andreas Heusler, who was the authority on the Nibelungenlied research in the early 20th century, and Theodore M. Andersson, who has completed extensive research on the figure of Brynhild. The male figure of Siegfried, or Sigurd in the Norse tradition, tends to receive the most attention, whereas Kriemhild, called Gudrun in the Norse tradition, is the primary female figure alongside Siegfried in the German tradition. It is only in the Norse tradition that Brunhild occupies a central position as a strong and complex female character, whereas the later German tradition, beginning with the Nibelungenlied, allows her to fall into obscurity by the second half of the epic. The Norse tradition, which preserves older material, was actually written down after the Nibelungenlied.

B. MAIN LITERARY SOURCES

Theodor Andersson wrote an insightful book on the legendary sources of Brynhild. Of these, the Nibelungenlied and the Völsunga saga are of primary importance for this study, since they serve as the main sources for the three films being discussed. The primary and secondary literary sources assist in our understanding of the subsequent analyses of Brunhild's portrayal in

Lang's, Reinl's and Edel's films. According to Andersson, the "various forms of the Brynhild legend in Scandinavia and Germany invite comparison to the extent that they are both similar and different" (19). In his book, he has taken painstaking care to piece together the puzzle of the legend of Brynhild and its sources. Some of the seven main sources he identifies were written after the Nibelungenlied and the Völsunga saga, but have contributed to the overall legend and view of the Brynhild figure in literature.

Poetic Edda: It is also called the Elder Edda and was found in the latter half of the 13th century in an Icelandic manuscript known as the Codex Regius (Andersson 20). The Poetic Edda holds several chief sources of the legend of Brynhild, including The Old Lay of Sigurd (Forna), The Short Lay of Sigurd (Skamma), The Long Lay of Sigurd (Meiri), the three Lays of Gudrun, and Brynhild's Journey to the Underworld (20). Andersson has argued that the three lays of Sigurd (Forna, Skamma and Meiri) are actually about Brunhild; Andreas Heusler referred to Skamma as the Brünhildsage, and would later call the reconstructed original lay the Brünhild(en)lied, although most scholars have persisted in treating Siegfried as the main character (78). As Francis Gentry argues, The Lay of Sigrdrífa, which is also included in the Poetic Edda, was used by the scribe of the Völsunga saga to make a connection between Brunhild/Brynhild and Sigrdrífa (39).

Völsunga saga: This saga was presumably composed in the mid-13th century and has been found in a medieval manuscript from around 1400. It weaves together several heroic poems found in the Poetic Edda and contains details about Sigurd's (Siegfried's) ancestry, youth and great deeds; it also contains the story of Sigurd and Brynhild (21). According to Andersson, it is the most comprehensive story about Brynhild available (21).

Snorra Edda: Snorri Sturluson (1178/79 – 1241), a renowned medieval Icelandic scholar, composed this mythological work around 1220 (21).

Thidreks saga: The legendary figure of Theodoric (Dietrich von Bern in German) is the central figure in this Norwegian translation of a north German combination of heroic tales (21-22). Andersson believes it appeared no later than the beginning 13th century, but prior to the Völsunga saga (21-22).

The Nibelungenlied: This heroic epic was written by an anonymous author in southern Germany or in Austria around 1200 (21). Divided into two parts, it recounts the tale of Siegfried, Kriemhild and Brynhild first, followed by the downfall of the Burgundians by Kriemhild and Etzel's (Attila's) Huns, in a manner similar to the Poetic Edda, Völsunga saga and Thidrek's saga (21).

Das Lied vom Hürnen Seyfrid: This version of the Siegfried/Brunhild legend originates in the 16th century; although it does not include Brynhild, it contains several older features of the legend (22).

The Romance of Sigurd: This group of Faroese ballads contains The Ballad of Brynhild and was collected at the end of the 18th centuries and in the 19th century. The ballads provide insight into earlier forms of the Brynhild legend (22-23).

Andersson claims these sources are interrelated (23), as depicted in the diagram below:

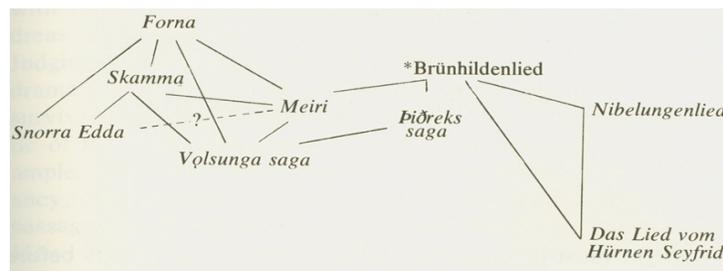


Figure 1 (Andersson 23)

C. ADDITIONAL SOURCES

Three further sources must be mentioned as having an impact on the filmic adaptations being discussed. According to Robert W. Gutman, the 19th nineteenth century saw a real vogue for the saga tales, with the works of the English William Morris and the German Richard Wagner representing the most important resurgence of the Eddic material and spirit [...] (Gutman, no page). Scholar Virginia C. Gildersleeve agrees and states Morris's poem Sigurd the Völsung primarily follows the Norse version more than Wagner's works do (24). According to literary scholar Dr. Jane Susanna Ennis, Morris translated the Völsunga Saga in 1870; his poem is a retelling of the Völsunga Saga and contains some elements from the Nibelungenlied." The second additional, major source is Richard Wagner's operatic trilogy Der Ring des Nibelungen; it was first performed in 1876 and was completed over a span of twenty-five years" (Gildersleeve 29). The trilogy is comprised of Das Rheingold (premiered 1869), Die Walküre (premiered 1870) and Siegfried (premiered 1876). According to Gildersleeve, Wagner drew some scenes and suggestions from the Nibelungenlied and the Thidreksaga, but the main line of his plot came from the Völsunga saga, with ideas from the Eddic lays and general Norse mythology also incorporated into the opera (29). She claims that Wagner had to modify and rearrange his source material and did so with a free hand (29). It is in Wagner's portrayal of Brunhild that she "is definitely placed in the ranks of the gods, as a divine valkyrie, favorite daughter of Wotan," (29) thus revitalizing the Norse warrior queen in character and stature. Christian Friedrich Hebbel's play Die Nibelungen (1861) is a German tragedy in three acts: Der gehörnte Siegfried, Siegfrieds Tod and Kriemhilds Rache (Gutenberg.spiegel.de). It is also considered a retelling of the Nibelunglied and thus the legend of Siegfried and Brunhild (Gutenberg.spiegel.de). Both Fritz Lang and Harald Reinl used Hebbel's play as inspiration for

their two-part films *Die Nibelungen*. Religion plays a significant role in Hebbel's play; he "emphasized the fading of one culture and the birth of a new one" (Jensen 47) and thus portrayed the conflict between paganism and Christianity (51). Hebbel's play has been cited by Gildersleeve and the Nibelungen scholar Winder McConnell as a literary source for Brunhild. All three sources are important, as Gildersleeve feels it is "in the great nineteenth-century versions of the Völsung legend, which often closely follow the Norse form, that Brynhild comes into her own" (24).

D. MAIN QUESTIONS CONCERNING BRUNHILD

Next we must examine the Nibelungenlied and Völsunga saga by comparing their plots and how they vary in their portrayal of Brunhild. Based on Andersson's information regarding the literary sources for Brunhild and other scholarly research, we know that there are many questions regarding these sources and, as stated previously, the intent here is not to delve much further into the convoluted maze of the Brunhild legend. However, two important questions arise in most literary investigations concerning Brunhild and thus have bearing on her filmic portrayal. The first question concerns Brunhild's identity and origin. Was she a mortal princess or queen, or possibly a valkyrie, the daughter of Odin? (Andersson 236-249). The second question concerns her prior relationship with Siegfried and whether such a relationship existed at all (236-249). Andersson claims these are the two main points concerning Brynhild on which scholars differ (236-249). He first asks whether Brynhild and Sigdrífa share the same origin, or if they are two different women who were later combined into one person (236-249). Eichtenberger and Mogk agree that Brynhild is the result of the union of two different legends, that of the valkyrie Sigdrífa and that of a mortal warrior, who was tricked into marrying someone less worthy; Sigdrífa's legend is associated with the 'sleeping beauty' theme (Gildersleeve 4). If in fact

Brynhild and Sigrdrífa are one and the same woman, then Brynhild is either a valkyrie or, at the very least, a shield maiden of Odin, and her character would thus follow the stronger, Norse tradition. Andersson claims the answer to the second question depends largely on the first (236-249). Depending on which Brunhild we meet in literature, on the stage or in film, one is then predisposed to believe she either did or did not have a prior relationship with Siegfried. This is a vital point not only for a literary analysis of Brunhild, but more importantly for our filmic analyses, as it explains Brunhild's actions once King Gunther arrives in Iceland with Siegfried to woo her. The resulting duality of Brunhild in the German versus the Norse tradition affects her filmic portrayal: Are her jealousy, envy and anger due to not having married the best and strongest king (Siegfried); or, due to being the jilted, previous lover of Siegfried, with whom she swore oaths and in some versions was married to; or is it due to the fact that Siegfried had the opportunity to have her and simply "stepped aside for Gunther" (Bekker 78)? Brunhild is a queen who is aware of power and status within society; she is concerned about the prestige of her own husband and his land (McConnell 47). As McConnell rightly observes "she did not relinquish sovereignty over Iceland to become queen to someone who is second-rate" (47).

Ultimately, Andersson states there is general agreement regarding Brynhild's origin: she was the warrior maiden named Sigrdrífa, who went against Odin's wishes and was awakened by Sigurd (236-249). The Völsunga saga's author is credited with identifying her as Brynhild (236-249). It is this Brynhild who, in the Norse legends and sagas, has more often than not been betrothed to Sigurd (Siegfried) prior to his wooing her for King Gunnar (King Gunther).

E. THE VARIANTS OF THE BRUNHILD LEGEND: NORTH AND SOUTH

An important distinction must be noted here. Andersson claims that the author of the Völsunga saga used Meiri (The Long Lay of Sigurd) as a source, but Meiri referenced a German version of the story (238-239). Due to the emphasis of a prior betrothal of Siegfried and Brunhild in the Völsunga saga and omission of the betrothal and prior meeting in the Nibelungenlied, it was often assumed the betrothal was a distinctly Norse element (238-239). However, it is a German motif that was adopted in the Norse versions of the legend, since the Völsunga saga's author accepted the Meiri poet's harmonization of the Norse and German variants of the betrothal motif (238-239). Andersson believes this results in the tendency of scholars to identify the two variations of the legend, the Norse variant in which Brunhild and Sigurd have been betrothed, and the German variant in which there is no prior betrothal (238-239).

It is unclear to Andersson why the Nibelungen poet omitted or suppressed the prior betrothal, providing only hints of a previous meeting or relationship, whereas the Völsunga saga's author's adaptation of Meiri keeps this prior betrothal intact (239). The German original, the Brünhildenlied, complicates the matter further, since it has reinterpreted our heroine in terms of the Norse Brynhild, whose character was taken from Forna (The Old Lay of Sigurd) (239). Andersson cites religion as a possible reason for the omission, due to the prominence of Christianity in southern Germany and Austria at the time both the Nibelungenlied and the Völsunga saga were written (248-249). I agree with Andersson that:

Germany bequeathed to us a vindictive Amazon subordinated to her rival Kriemhild, while Iceland bequeathed a spirited heroine with a clear consciousness of herself, equally impressive in the fullness of her ambition and the anguish of her disappointment, and object of wonder to all who told her story (248-249).

For simplification purposes, the term Norse will be used instead of northern, whereas German will be used in the place of southern.

F. VÖLSUNGA SAGA

The Völsunga saga is important to the filmic source and portrayal of the Nibelung legend and the character of Brunhild, because it “divulges the full story of Brunhild” (Andersson 236). Gildersleeve is correct when she states that Brynhild is perhaps the most striking figure in the old Völsung legend (1). The Völsunga saga was most likely written by an anonymous Norwegian or Icelandic poet in the 13th century during the reign of Norwegian king Hakon Hakonarson (1217-1263) (Gentry 44). It borrowed material from several sources, most of which are found in the Poetic Edda (44). The amalgamated work includes Germanic legend, fairy-tale motifs, historical sagas, Edda verse, and Scandinavian myth (43-46).

Brynhild-Plot Summary

The Völsunga saga primarily tells the legend of the Völsungs and their descendants, of the dragon-slayer Sigurd, of Odin’s shield-maiden Brynhild, of the demise of the Gjukungs (the Burgundians), and of Gudrun’s children’s fate. In this saga, Brynhild is the daughter of Budli, a king and also the father of Atli, and she is the foster daughter of Heimir, who is married to her sister Bekkhild. Brynhild is named such because she “takes up a mail coat and goes into battle” (Byock 73). She is a shield-maiden in Odin’s service; he pricked Brunhild with a sleeping thorn because she had displeased him. Sigurd slays the dragon and is told by the birds, whose language he understands, to ride to Hindarfell, where Brynhild sleeps. He awakens her from her sleep and Brynhild teaches him runes and gives him wise advice. Sigurd pledges to marry her. At her foster-father’s court, she weaves a tapestry depicting Sigurd’s deeds. Sigurd, who is visiting, spies her in the tower and asks to see her; he then learns it is Brynhild. He wishes to court her

and Brynhild accepts this courtship, but predicts that he will marry Gudrun, the Kriemhild of the Nibelungenlied. Sigurd claims he wishes above all else to marry Brynhild. Brynhild also wishes this; Sigurd gives her a ring and they swear oaths to each other yet again, before Sigurd leaves with his men. Brynhild later bears a daughter by Sigurd, named Aslaug. After his departure, Gudrun visits Brynhild and they discuss famous men. Brynhild praises Sigurd and interprets Gudrun's dream, in essence informing Gudrun that she will betray Brunhild due to Grimhild's intervention. Sigurd comes to the court of the Gjukungs where Gudrun's mother Grimhild gives him the ale of forgetfulness, causing him to forget Brynhild. He marries Gudrun and aids King Gunnar in winning Brynhild's hand. Once in Iceland, Sigurd, in the shape of Gunnar, rides through the wall of flames on his horse, and wins Brynhild. They sleep in the same bed with a sword between them for three nights. Brynhild and Gunnar wed. Later, at Gunnar's court, Gudrun and Brynhild quarrel over status, during which Gudrun reveals it was Sigurd who rode through the wall of flame and not Gunnar. Brynhild is shocked and sulks in her bed. She refuses Gunnar's attempts to reconcile her; in a dialogue with Sigurd, she tells him of her love and hatred for him. Sigurd says he will leave Gudrun for Brynhild, because he has remembered his prior love for her, but Brynhild says, "I will not have two kings in one hall" (Byock 87). She later urges Gunnar to kill Sigurd, yet she then laments Sigurd's death and stabs herself after making prophecies concerning the future of the Gjukungs. She asks to be burned on Sigurd's funeral pyre and dies.

Brynhild's Character

In this saga Brynhild is a strong warrior, but also a noble queen who conducts herself according to the rules of the nobility when at the court of the Gjukungs (the Burgundians in the Nibelungenlied). She does know some traditional womanly arts, such as weaving, but her interest

is primarily in going to war, which she also tells Sigurd. Brynhild does not require a ring, an armlet or a belt that bestows her with supernatural powers, because these are innate powers granted to her at one time by Odin. She is willing to accept Sigurd as her mate, because she sees in him her equal. A king of great stature who has performed great deeds, Brynhild praises him to Gudrun. In the end, knowing that fate has deceived her, she sees no point in living without the best and strongest king by her side, the man with whom she swore oaths. She takes the breaking of oaths very seriously, as evidenced by her unwillingness to betray Gunnar and Gudrun despite their betrayal of her. Sigurd is blameless in her situation because it is a magic potion that has wiped his memory clean.

G. THE NIBELUNGENLIED

The Nibelungenlied is considered the first and most significant of all heroic epics of Middle High German literature (Gentry 22). Written around 1200 by the anonymous German or Austrian poet, the legend of the Nibelungen was Germanic in origin and had survived several centuries as an oral tradition over the centuries. It was written at a time when Christianity had a progressively strong influence on all aspects of society, therefore the Nibelungenlied incorporates courtly tradition (22). In contrast to the Völsunga saga, the Nibelungenlied is full of courtly elements (McConnell 8). The epic is divided into two parts, the story of Siegfried is told first, followed by the fall of the Burgundians due to Kriemhild's revenge.

Brunhild-Plot Summary

Siegfried grows up at his parents' court in Xanten, a noble prince loved by all. Kriemhild lives with her brothers, King Gunther, Prince Giselher, and Prince Gernot, at the Burgundian court in Worms. Hagen of Tronje is King Gunther's loyal vassal. Siegfried learns of Kriemhild's beauty and goes to Worms to demand her hand in marriage. Hagen tells of Siegfried's deeds, of

how he slew the dragon and won the hoard of the Nibelungs. King Gunther diplomatically handles Siegfried and gains a loyal and trusted ally. He asks Siegfried's help in winning Brunhild's, the Queen of *Isenstein's*, hand in marriage as a prerequisite for marrying his sister Kriemhild. Brunhild is known as a queen of vast strength and surpassing beauty. Warriors who vie for her hand in marriage must win the challenges of the javelin, hurling a large stone and leaping against her. Siegfried advises against wooing Brunhild; he tells Gunther, "this queen has such terrible ways that it costs any man dear who woos her, so that truly you should forgo this journey" (Hatto 53). Although the story tells us nothing directly about a prior relationship between Brunhild and Siegfried, it is odd that Siegfried not only knows of her, but knows how to get to *Isenstein* and is acquainted with the customs at her castle. Furthermore, Siegfried identifies Brunhild on sight, and it is interesting that she addresses him first when he and King Gunther come to woo her. In addition, Siegfried has previously advised the retinue that Gunther should be known as his overlord and he, Siegfried, as Gunther's vassal. When Brunhild learns that a man resembling Siegfried has come, she says, "Bring me my robes; if strong Siegfried has come it is at peril of his life, since I do not fear him so much that I would consent to marry him" (Hatto 62) In Brunhild's hall, Siegfried informs her he is Gunther's vassal, and that it is King Gunther who courts her. In the ensuing challenges that Brunhild has set for all her suitors, Siegfried comes to Gunther's aid by wearing a cloak of invisibility, or appearing as Gunther in the challenge. After Brunhild is defeated, she orders her court to do homage to King Gunther. A defeated Brunhild returns to Worms to wed Gunther. Siegfried is sent ahead to bring news to the castle.

Upon the king and queen's arrival, Kriemhild welcomes Brunhild with all courtliness, and they share affection towards one another. Brunhild is stricken when she sees Kriemhild with

Siegfried, Gunther's vassal. Gunther dismisses her concerns, telling her Siegfried is a mighty king. Unfortunately, due to the belt of chastity Brunhild wears around her waist, Gunther is unable to enjoy his wedding night and spends it bound and trussed up. He asks for Siegfried's assistance; the loyal king once again assumes Gunther's shape and an explosive fight scene ensues in the bedchamber, with Siegfried almost cracking Brunhild's bones. Gunther has asked him to overpower her, but not sleep with her; it remains unclear if Siegfried has complied with the latter, although Gunther is hiding behind the curtains in the chamber. Brunhild gives in to Siegfried, promising not to withstand him anymore; Siegfried removes her belt and gold ring. After Gunther takes his wife's virginity, she is completely bereft of her powers. King Siegmund and Queen Sieglind travel to Worms, and shortly thereafter Siegfried and Kriemhild move to Xanten. Brunhild continues to be perturbed about the king's sister being married to a vassal and that Siegfried has not rendered them any dues. Ten years later, Siegfried and Kriemhild are invited to visit Worms for a feast. One evening, Kriemhild praises her husband's merits to Brunhild, who says her husband must take precedence over all kings. Kriemhild insists Siegfried is Gunther's equal, but Brunhild tells her Siegfried called himself Gunther's vassal. Their argument continues and they no longer bear each other good will; it also leads to a confrontation in front of the cathedral. Brunhild tells Kriemhild a liegwoman may not enter before the queen, but Kriemhild calls her a vassal's paramour. She claims Siegfried was the first to enjoy Brunhild's body and asks Brunhild why she let Siegfried love her. Brunhild promises to tell Gunther of this and begins to weep, while Kriemhild enters the cathedral. When Kriemhild exits again, Brunhild asks her for proof of her accusations. Kriemhild shows her the gold ring, which Siegfried had taken from Brunhild and given to her as a gift. Moreover, Kriemhild shows Brunhild the girdle as further proof. Brunhild complains to the king, and Siegfried denies

Kriemhild's claims before Gunther. Hagen of Tronje recommends Siegfried be killed for revealing the king's secret. Siegfried is later killed by Hagen during a hunt, because his only vulnerable spot has been innocently marked by his wife on his hunting garb. Hagen claims to have done this to avenge Brunhild's unhappiness. Brunhild hears Kriemhild's lamenting, but her weeping does not matter to Brunhild. The story says she never again extends loyal affection toward Kriemhild, who later marries Etzel (Attila the Hun) and takes revenge on Hagen and Gunther. Brunhild lives on in this tale, although she is barely mentioned in the second portion of the epic and falls into obscurity.

Brunhild's Character

We learn much of Brunhild from Siegfried's predominantly negative comments: "this queen has such terrible ways that it costs any man dear who woos her [...]," (Hatto 53) and "this queen has such dreadful ways that they (the Burgundian's army) would all have to die through her arrogance!" (54) In Isenstein, Hagen fears for them all: "We are done for – the woman whose love you desire is a rib of the Devil himself," (65) and "Mercy on us! What sort of a lover has the King got here? Rather should she be the Devil's drab in Hell!" (66) Although Siegfried calls her beautiful and adorable, the following comment made after Brunhild's defeat displays his distaste of her warrior-like qualities: "I am delighted to hear that your pride has been lowered in this way, and that there is someone alive who can master you." (68)

The Nibelungenlied's version of the old sagas and legends, which is a "strange mingling of epic plot and romance setting, is in nothing more unfortunate than in its portrayal of Brünhilt" (Gildersleeve 21-22). Gildersleeve states that Brunhild falls far below the Norse character both in interest and in dignity (21-22). Once she is overcome by Siegfried, nothing is left of the independence, lofty pride, or warrior-like tendencies portrayed in the Völsunga saga. Brunhild's

extraordinary strength, which has kept all suitors but Siegfried at bay, is overcome by the 'simple' removal of her belt and the loss of her virginity. The deception practiced upon her is tragic, but even King Gunther, when begging for Siegfried's help for the second time with Brunhild, says she is a terrible woman. It is as if the unknown author purposefully chose to scorn her legendary strengths and punish her for them, which can be surmised from Siegfried's callousness towards Brunhild after her defeat [...] (McConnell 44). As the Nibelungen author only hinted at Siegfried's prior relationship with Brunhild throughout the story, Brunhild's anger at being betrayed by both him and Gunther could well be due to the fact that "she was disdained by the only true, because strongest, king, who cheated her into marrying a second-rate king and caused her, the crownbearer of *Islant*, to become guilty of violating the code by which kings must live" (Bekker 78). Additionally, Brunhild does not demand Siegfried's death, although he and Gunther have greatly wronged her. She does commit suicide, as there is no concrete proof of a prior love between her and Siegfried. Her anger and grief seem primarily due to Siegfried's and Gunther's betrayal and deception.

It is thus not Brunhild's original character that is not in keeping with the Norse version, as she certainly seems to be powerful, terrible, fearless, and beautiful enough. It is how she is deceived and humiliated in the first part of the Nibelungenlied and later falls into obscurity in part two, and the lack of direct action on her part to exact revenge on her betrayers, that combine to make her a less imposing figure than the Norse version found in the Völsunga saga.

H. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON BRUNHILD IN LITERARY AND OTHER SOURCES

McConnell describes the Brunhild in the Nibelungenlied as "a monarch who reigns supreme in her castle by the sea, is exceedingly strong, and who is determined to assert her independence from, and superiority over, all suitors" (43). He claims that "for Gunther and for

Siegfried, Brunhild is a magnificent prize, the epitome of royal stature and power, a queen and potential partner without equal. She is there to be conquered, although her removal from the Other World at *Isenstein* is fraught with peril” (46). These observations can be mirrored in those of the Brynhild of the Völsunga saga. In analyzing her character and her “literary fortunes”, Andersson states:

Her element of will sets her legend apart from all other Germanic tales of forceful women. In other Germanic prose and poetry, action is a reflex of the social code, not of character, yet Brynhild is solely abandoned to her wishes. She appears to have no family, although she has one in the *Volsunga saga*. At some point in time, he believes a poet shifted the emphasis slightly and focused not on her abstract wish to fulfill herself, but on her desire for a particular man, thus transmuting her ambition into passion. Brunhild was no longer in control of her destiny and in a position to punish those who crossed her, but instead was a victim of erotic betrayal. On the one hand Brunhild is the most dominant and triumphant figure in Germanic legend, but on the other she is a hapless woman. It was the Norse variant which developed the dominant figure first, and the German variant developed the sexually betrayed woman and used the prior betrothal to emphasize her victimization. Ultimately, Norse poets chose to follow this lead (243-245).

McConnell seems to agree with Andersson; in the Nibelungenlied he finds the “wooing of Brunhild might be regarded by some as an attempt on the part of a male-dominated society to force the individualistic female who lives by her own rules into conformity with that society” (7).

It must be pointed out that Brynhild’s desire to wed Sigurd in the Völsunga saga should not be seen as a sign of weakness. As a strong and noble queen, Brynhild is willing to wed him, the strongest, most perfect and noble of all kings, since Sigurd is her equal. Although Sigurd is a perfect match for her, she reads in the runes he will forget her due to Grimhild’s “ale of forgetfulness” and marry Gudrun instead. Brynhild is of the old tradition in that she believes in fate and destiny. There is a conflict between the pagan Gods of the Norse peoples in the Völsunga saga and the newer Christian God of the Nibelungenlied. This conflict is portrayed in some of the filmic adaptations of her story. In any case, Brynhild foresees her own disaster, yet

accepts this destiny matter-of-factly. I feel this is a powerful statement about what kind of woman Brynhild is in the Norse tradition, and it is such a woman that we will be looking for as the ideal filmic portrayal of Brunhild. As we will see in Harald Reinl's *Die Nibelungen*, simply using the Völsunga saga more heavily as a source does not translate into the "stronger" Brunhild of the Norse tradition. Even Uli Edel's *Dark Kingdom*, which most heavily relies on the Völsunga saga in comparison to Lang's and Reinl's films, does not faithfully follow the saga's plot. However, he most clearly portrays the Brunhild of the Norse tradition and the Völsunga saga: a queen, strong and beautiful, who believes in the pagan Gods, is as noble and courtly as she is warrior-like, accepts her destiny as it is ordained, will love her equal without fear, and will ensure her king is worthy of her love, and this is most notably measured in his strength. She is also a queen who will avenge herself on those who betray and deceive her or, in Edel's film, who rob her of the man she loved. Finally, this Brunhild is a queen who would rather join her true love and most worthy king in the underworld than live without him in this world.

CHAPTER 3

THE FILMIC REPRESENTATION OF BRUNHILD

The three films dealing with the legend of Brunhild and Siegfried are as diverse as the decades they were produced in. Each director has put his stamp on his respective film and the three different actresses who play Brunhild are extremely varied in their looks and portrayal of this character. A host of factors will affect our perception of Brunhild in each film: the decade the film was shot in, to include gender relations, the director and production team, the literary and other sources used for the film, and finally the plot of the film itself, coupled with the portrayal of the character by the respective actress. A closer look at each factor is warranted in order to determine why the ideal, Norse characterization of Brunhild seems lacking in both Fritz Lang's and Harald Reinl's *Die Nibelungen* and why it is present and succeeds in Uli Edel's *Dark Kingdom*.

Despite the varying overall look and feel of each film and the very different character portrayals of Brunhild, the films all share one commonality in that none of them drew from one sole source for their screenplay and their idea of Brunhild. It is why neither Lang's nor Reinl's filmic version is called *Das Nibelungenlied*, but rather *Die Nibelungen*. Beginning with Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen* we see a progression in terms of sources used from a stricter adherence to the heroic epic Das Nibelungenlied with minor elements from the Völsunga saga, to a slightly more even combination of the German epic with the Völsunga saga for Harald Reinl's film, to a much greater dependence on the Völsunga saga in Uli Edel's version. Subsequently, it is not surprising that the best and most accurate presentation of the ideal Brunhild coincides with a film

that uses the Brunhild characterization found in the Völsunga saga as its primary source. Some of the directors were influenced by Wagner's, Morris's and Hebbel's retelling of the legend in their respective forms. All of the directors have used a free hand in inserting certain new elements and adapting the screenplay to suit their needs. One cannot underestimate the demands that film studios place on films, and how such demands may have caused a degree of deviation from original literary sources, as well. The following three sections will examine each film in detail.

A. FRITZ LANG'S 'BRUNHILD'

The Decade

The film era of the Weimar Republic can be seen as Germany's "Golden Age" of movie-making. In order to understand the developments and movements of film in the Weimar era, we must first look at the Weimar Republic politically and socially, and then at the two competing film styles of the time: Expressionism and New Objectivity, while not overlooking Max Reinhardt's contributions to Weimar Cinema and pre-Weimar cinema. Lastly, some of the genres and key movies of that period will be mentioned. On November 9, 1919, Germany's first democracy was born. The Weimar Republic lasted from 1919 until Hitler and his National Socialist Party took power in 1933. It was initially a very turbulent time for Germany. After the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles and the defeat in a war nobody thought could be lost, there were millions dead and tens of thousands of wounded. Unemployment, poverty and violence were rampant. It was also a time of great social change. Sexual identity and roles were being challenged, women were becoming more emancipated, a democracy was born, and the German cinema had an influx of talented directors, cameramen, set designers, writers and actors who would all be part of its "Golden Age". The crippling demands of Versailles eventually led to

rampant inflation and the French occupation of the Ruhrgebiet. Due to the implementation of the Dawes Plan in 1924, the currency stabilized and a relatively short-lived period of stability and progress resulted. This ended with the stock market crash of 1929, which would usher in a world-wide depression and pave the way for the National Socialists to take power in Germany. Numerous political parties fought for power during the Weimar era: communists, democrats, socialists, conservatives and nationalists. It was also a battle of old versus new, in that the old patriarchal, monarchist society of the Wilhelmine era clashed with new democratic ideals and post-war disillusionment. It was in this environment that German Expressionist film rose to prominence and Germany's cinematic *Blütezeit* was born.

The first period of film of the Weimar Republic was from 1919-1924 (Hake 26). Periods of Weimar Cinema by and large coincided with the economic phases, as this first period witnessed the birth of Expressionist cinema. During this time, especially in the years immediately after the war and before the censors passed laws banning them, a number of films about sexuality, prostitution, venereal disease and "loose" women were made, illustrating the changing and evolving new mores of the times. Additionally, this was the major phase of Expressionist film. From 1924 until approximately 1929 at the latest, the German film industry stabilized and enjoyed immense popularity, and it was also the only national cinema able to compete with Hollywood at that time (26). Ufa was the prominent film company in the Weimar Republic. The last phase of Weimar cinema, from approx. 1929-1933 (26), involved the advent of sound film and the increasing involvement of the government in the film industry. Although this had always been the case to a certain extent, it became more of a factor during this time, culminating in the takeover of the German film industry by the National Socialist Party not long after its rise to power. German sound film experimentations had failed initially, and only with the

success of Al Jolson's "The Jazz Singer" in 1927 did German film companies start pushing for the use of sound, resulting in a complete turnaround by the end of the Weimar Republic, with zero silent films produced by 1933.

During the Weimar Republic two styles of film predominated and competed with one another: Expressionism and New Objectivity. Although characteristics of what would become known as Expressionist film traits, such as acute lighting contrasts, dream-like, unrealistic sets, exaggerated make-up and actor movement, and extreme camera angles and shots, were already in use by 1915/1916, German Expressionist film was officially born February 1920 with the release of *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*. This movie is the first and most well-known German expressionist film of all time. Many movies of the Weimar Republic, from F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and *M: Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder*, all utilized Expressionist techniques, and Expressionist film has had a long and far-reaching influence on movies to this day. New Objectivity, on the other hand, required realism, modernity, and natural lighting and acting. Costumes were what people would normally wear in the street, and there was nothing fantastical or overdone in films using the style of New Objectivity. This style was dominant towards the latter half of the Weimar Republic, yet it was not uncommon for German films to display both styles within the same movie, as *Die Nibelungen*, *Metropolis* and *M: Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder* did to varying degrees.

Many genres were prominent during the Weimar Republic's film period: *Kammerspielfilme*, *Strassenfilme*, *Historienfilme*, *Horrorfilme* and *Bergfilme* (Hake 39-54). Big-budget movies such as *Metropolis* were de rigeur during the stabilizing phase of Weimar cinema. Max Reinhardt's theatre's contribution to Weimar cinema should also not be forgotten. By 1915, many of this Berlin director's talents had moved on to film. The talent, the actors and the lighting

techniques of Reinhardt heavily influenced German cinema initially, but also played a vital part in Expressionist and Weimar cinema as a whole. There were several great directors of Weimar cinema: G.W. Pabst, F.W. Murnau, Fritz Lang and Robert Wiene, to name a few. Germany's 'Golden Age' of film-making during the time of the Weimar Republic officially came to a close in 1933. The majority of the talent from the Weimar cinema either left for Hollywood early upon invitation, for career reasons, or, after 1933, by necessity, and many talented movie workers who did not leave in time eventually died in concentration camps. The Nazis' rise to power had a devastating impact on Weimar Cinema that would be felt for decades to come, but the period from 1919-1933 was without a doubt the *Blütezeit* for German cinema.

Feminism in the Weimar Republic:

One important notion that connects Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen* and Germany's loss in World War I, while simultaneously affecting the feminist movement, is the *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 homefront by the enemy within" (McCormick 20), whom McCormick identifies as "the socialists, Jews, and women" (20). From the perspective of feminist film theory, McCormick finds Weimar cinema strikingly misogynistic, with the castration anxiety of the male being a topic of crucial concern to psychoanalytical feminist film theory (18). This 'castration anxiety' is the psychoanalytical explanation for misogyny, the 'dread of woman', and is overtly thematized in many Weimar film narratives" (18). We have already pointed out that the Weimar Republic experienced significant social and political change, in addition to changing gender roles. As of 1908, German women were permitted to attend universities, and, as in the United States, World War I was a time of increased participation in the workforce by women, as the men were off at war. The Roaring Twenties brought about an

increased liberation of women, at least in thought. They increasingly became part of the white-collar workforce as secretaries, were actresses, and in general, experienced more liberal lifestyles. McCormick actually labels the ensuing male anxieties in Weimar culture a “discourse of castration” (21), to specify a “complex of anxieties around loss of power, control, and mastery, ultimately issues of social, political, and economic power, and not sexuality” (21). He argues further that there is a “tendency to blame women for any lack of social power experienced by men” (21). This changing role of women was obviously a problem for many men in the Weimar Republic, as they had been raised in a centuries-old tradition of patriarchy, but had also come home from the war as the defeated. This triggered numerous anxieties, especially when coupled with women’s suffrage and the alleged equality accorded the genders with the founding of the Republic. McCormick claims the mythical “New Woman” of the 1920s voted, used contraception, obtained illegal abortions and earned wages, was indeed a reality that existed in the office, factory, bedroom, kitchen, café and cabaret (24). He assesses the situation in the Weimar Republic as follows:

The two positions in the social debate - the “new” vs. the maternal woman - more or less reproduce an ancient patriarchal dichotomy in the representation of woman: virgin/Madonna vs. whore, idealization vs. disparagement. This is not surprising, given the long dominance of this dichotomy. And of course what was most unique to Weimar was the “blurring” of old dichotomies like this one with regard to feminine stereotypes, as well as others having to do with rigid conceptions of gender and sexual behavior (37).

Ultimately, the “New Woman” threatened the patriarchal, male-dominated society in the Weimar Republic, partly because the changing roles of women at the time created an upheaval in the traditional role of women as the nurturers, wives, and caregivers within their homes and families. McCormick states that “despite all of the changes and the progress, the pervasiveness of patriarchal stereotypes in that cinema (Weimar) cannot be undone” (37). We will refer back to

this point towards the end of the discussion on Fritz Lang's filmic portrayal of Brunhild in *Die Nibelungen*.

The Director and Film Information

Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen* was an UfA double-feature, produced by Decla-Bioscop, that "took two years of preparation time and seven months to shoot" (Kracauer 92). Part one of the film, *Siegfrieds Tod*, premiered on February, 14, 1924 (Frembs 89). The second part of the film, *Kriemhilds Rache*, debuted on April 26, 1924 (89). Filmed during the stabilized period of the Weimar Republic, Lang had all the resources of the studio supporting the making of this epic fantasy. Lang's second wife Thea von Harbou, whom he divorced after leaving Germany for the United States in the 1930s, wrote the film script (Gentry 291). Lang, whose original aspiration was to become a painter and who was influenced both by his architect father and his work for Max Reinhardt, became known in the 1920s and early 193's as a master of the *mise-en-scène*. Initially he worked as a writer for Erich Pommer's Decla studio. Lang brought to life the world of myth and legend, of medieval courtly society and knightly convention in *Die Nibelungen*. He was commended primarily for his sets, which incorporated the "'Jugendstil' and were inspired by the Bauhaus movement"(Frembs 91), and his use of heavy ornamentation, to include the positioning of the actors, and the wall coverings, curtains, ceilings and costumes (Kracauer 93-94). Anton Kaes states Lang's early work (which included *Die Nibelungen*) initially incorporated two poles: Thea von Harbou's *Kolportagephantasie* and Max Reinhardt's *Bühnenkunst* (Kaes 46). Critics praised his architectural style on the predominantly indoor set of *Die Nibelungen* at the studios in Babelsberg, as well as his "masterly use of chiaroscuro" (Eisner 158), but general reviews of the film were mixed (Frembs 90-93). While some critics decried the perversion of this great German heroic epic, calling "Harbou's kitsch version of *Die Nibelungen* a betrayal of a

national treasure” (Gunning 38), others, such as Axel Madsen in a 1967 interview with Lang called it “a national monument to Germania and to expressionist architecture” (Brunette 86). Film scholar Tom Gunning feels the film “must be seen within a context of a wide cultural revival of mythic material in Weimar (and even Wilhelmian) Germany, often trivialized or manufactured for contemporary taste” (38).

Gunning quotes Lang stating his intention to make the Nibelungen legend available to the masses through the medium of film: “In short, it seems to me, that precisely film’s specific qualities correspond to the “Märchen-like” aspects of the *Nibelungen* film, once one succeeds in mastering the technological difficulties – and they were legion” (38). Additionally, Lang stated “Above all in the *Nibelungen* film, I hoped to make the world of myth live again for the twentieth century, to live again and be believable” (37-38). In this Lang’s intentions were similar to Hebbel’s, who wanted to bring the “great national epic dramatically nearer to the public” (Jensen 48). Gunning concludes from Lang’s statements that Lang intended to “utilize film to bring about a national renewal through bringing a nation’s myths to life” (38). Von Harbou’s intent in writing the script seems in keeping with Lang’s:

Sondern plötzlich stand vor uns die Aufgabe, dem deutschen Volke und der Welt eine Herrlichkeit, die sie gemeinsam besitzen und kaum mehr in der Erinnerung kennen, in einer Form neu zu bringen, die dem Wesen unserer Jahrzehnte entspricht und keiner Übersetzung bedarf, um in Hammerfest ebensogut verstanden zu werden wie in Kapstadt. (Thea von Harbou: *Vom Nibelungen-Film und seinem Entstehen*. In: *Süddeutsche Filmzeitung*, Nr. 16, 1924) (Kaes 74).

Based on interviews with von Harbou and Lang, Kaes is not the only scholar to claim they “both had patriotic-mythical intentions in filming *Die Nibelungen*” (74). This becomes plausible in the opening shots of the film, which begins with a dedication in gothic writing: “*Dem deutschen Volke zugeeignet*”, or, “Dedicated to the German People.” Lang wanted to “offer something

strictly national, something that, like the Lay of the Nibelungs itself, might be considered a true manifestation of the German mind” (Kracauer 92). We can conclude that Lang’s focus in filming *Die Nibelungen* was to give the German people a renewal of pride, after a bitter defeat in World War I and during a time of great social change. He himself stated that, together with his wife, they “intended to depict Germany’s legendary past at a time of pressing political problems” (Gentry 295).

The Film’s Source

My focus will be on part one of *Die Nibelungen, Siegfrieds Tod*, as Brunhild lies dead at the end of this film. Part two, *Kriemhilds Revenge*, will not be included in this discussion. Some sources contend Lang’s film is based primarily on the medieval Nibelungenlied, but that it was also influenced by Wagner’s Ring cycle. (Gentry 295) I would argue that it is primarily in the set design and feel of the film that Wagner’s influence is felt, and that Lang’s film most closely adheres to the Nibelungenlied as its source, with some exceptions. Small elements of the Völsunga saga, such as the ring of fire surrounding Brunhild’s castle, are present. Von Harbou fashioned the script freely after ancient sources, and she was unable to utilize only one:

Es war nicht möglich bei einem Vorbild der Überlieferung zu bleiben, denn die eine oder andere im Bewußtsein des Volkes wurzelnde Erinnerung an den Drachentöter Siegfried, an die Nibelungen und Herrn Etzel hätte dabei zu kurz kommen müssen. Darum verzichtete ich auf die getreue Nachschöpfung einer Überlieferung und bemühte mich, aus allen – und es gibt mehr an Zahl, als man sich träumen läßt! – das Schönste herauszupflücken und wieder zu einem Ganzen zu verschmelzen (Voorwinden 198).

I feel that, aside from taking some poetic license in terms of adding a few scenes not based on any ancient legends or sagas, von Harbou did focus primarily on the Nibelungenlied. Lang borrowed the overall feel of Wagner’s opera to create his fantastic sets, and he additionally used Hebbel’s play as a source [...], although Lang ignored his focus on religion (Jensen 47).

Brunhild's strength, instead of coming from a ring and a girdle, as it does in Das Nibelungenlied, is found in her armlet. As in the Thidrek's saga, Siegfried apprentices with a blacksmith.

The Film's Plot

Structurally, Siegfried's *Tod* is divided into seven "Gesänge" (Cantos). Tom Gunning notes that "oral tradition and written legend intertwine, in that both Siegfried and Kriemhild learn of each other through other parties, via song or story, and it is Volker, the minstrel, who sings of Siegfried's deeds at the court of Worms (41). Lang uses a significant amount of parallel editing to tell the story of Siegfried and Kriemhild. Brunhild is portrayed in this movie as the strong and fierce Queen of Iceland, yet one cannot claim she is at the center of the plot. However, events surrounding the wooing of Brunhild, i.e. the deception practiced upon her by Siegfried and Gunther, are instrumental in causing Siegfried's death. Brunhild is portrayed here by Hannah Ralph, and appears strong in stature, with a head of fairly short, brunette hair and dark brown eyes that are often fiercely glaring from left to right and back again; her piercing eyes make her seem quite menacing. A complete summary of *Siegfrieds Tod* can be found in appendix A.

Prior Relationship: No proof exists within Lang's film that Siegfried and Brunhild have had a prior relationship. Siegfried neither mentions he is acquainted with Brunhild during the discussion of wooing her back in Worms, nor does he betray any romantic feelings towards her throughout the course of *Die Nibelungen*. Upon Gunther's and Siegfried's arrival at her hall, Brunhild appraises her suitors and finally approaches Siegfried. This can be easily explained, as she addresses him as a hero and not a king. Siegfried's deeds might either be well known to her, or she accurately assesses he is the strongest, most magnificent and most worthy amongst the men standing before her.

The Wooing of Brunhild: King Gunther uses Siegfried's desire to marry his sister Kriemhild as a bargaining tool; Hagen has persuaded him to enlist Siegfried's aid in winning Brunhild's hand in marriage. She is the Queen of Iceland and her invincible castle towers in the Northland are ringed by fire. Brunhild has set dangerous conditions: her suitors must best her three times in feats of strength, or else they die. Kriemhild's arrival convinces Siegfried to assist Gunther. They sail for the Northland, where the maiden of the runes predicts their arrival: "If he be strong enough and favored by the gods, the flames will consume themselves and die." Brunhild heads to the mountaintop where she can observe the approach of her guests. She holds her longbow, her hair is loose and wild, and she has a look of fierce determination. Brunhild puts on her armor and meets Siegfried and Gunther in her fortress. She welcomes the hero Siegfried, who informs her it is King Gunther who woos her. Outside, the triple battle consists of throwing the stone, leaping and throwing a spear at the other person. Siegfried appears as a pale ghost to help King Gunther overcome Queen Brunhild's overwhelming and supernatural strength. Gunther evades her spear throw, but his throw, combined with Siegfried's strength, shatters her shield and knocks her to the ground. Brunhild hangs her head in defeat.

Arrival in Worms: The passage to Worms does not bode well for Gunther's marriage. Gunther arrives at Brunhild's chamber to inform her of their arrival in Worms, and she fights him off, which rouses her suspicion at his lack of strength. Only Hagen's appearance saves Gunther from having his hands bound. Brunhild ominously tells Gunther she is his captive, but will never be his wife. After arriving in Worms, Brunhild sees Gunther place Kriemhild's hand in Siegfried's; she runs over and demands to know what a vassal is doing with the queen's sister. Gunther informs her Siegfried is a king, who will become his own blood brother. Brunhild does not display signs of kindness towards Queen Ute or the priest.

Brunhild's Wedding and Wedding Nights: At the dual wedding ceremony, Brunhild stares at Siegfried and appears upset when he exchanges vows with Kriemhild. That evening, Siegfried is persuaded to help Gunther one last time. He uses the wonder cap to assume Gunther's shape and enters Brunhild's chamber; a struggle ensues and Siegfried removes her armlet, while Gunther worriedly waits on his throne. Siegfried leaves the bedchamber, having defeated Brunhild a second time.

The Fight of the Queens: Kriemhild innocently discovers Brunhild's armlet in the chest in her room, and shows it to Siegfried, whom she meets outside. He tells her to put it away, as it guards an ugly secret. She insists on knowing the secret and Siegfried tells her, beseeching her to put away the armlet. Kriemhild and Brunhild meet in front of the cathedral, and Brunhild insists she should proceed before a vassal's wife. Kriemhild is incensed and shows Brunhild the armlet; she reveals that Siegfried defeated her, not Gunther. When Gunther is confronted by Brunhild, he hangs his head in guilt. Gunther's and Siegfried's guilt lies in their deception of Brunhild. Additionally, she may feel not only deceived by Siegfried, but also spurned because he did not take advantage of his proximity to her in her bedchamber.

Consequences: Brunhild attempts to throw herself off the drawbridge, but is saved by Hagen. She demands Siegfried's death, and Hagen supports this action. A royal hunt is organized with this in mind, but especially Hagen is also motivated by the desire to own the treasure. Gunther only agrees to killing Siegfried once Brunhild reveals it was Siegfried who took her maidenhead. Hagen convinces Kriemhild to mark Siegfried's vulnerable spot on his clothing, and kills him with a spear in the forest.

Brunhild's Fate: Brunhild is informed of Siegfried's death; she seems first triumphant, then sad, and finally hangs her head. Shortly thereafter she laughs hysterically and taunts

Gunther that he killed his most loyal friend due to a woman's lie. Gunther is utterly dejected and Brunhild gloats in her victory; yet after Gunther's departure she seems overcome by sorrow. When Kriemhild goes to the cathedral to be near Siegfried's dead body, she finds a cloaked figure kneeling at his feet. Kriemhild pulls back the figure's cloak to find Brunhild dead, a dagger sticking into her up to its hilt. The Brunhild plot ends with her inexplicable suicide. Given what we have seen of her character, it would be doubtful she ended her life out of remorse for having caused Siegfried's death.

Brunhild Analysis and Conclusion

In each film it is not possible to make a judgement regarding Brunhild's portrayal without looking at all of the factors mentioned above. It would also be too simplistic to argue that Fritz Lang's characterization of Brunhild should follow the Norse tradition, because the Weimar Republic was a turbulent decade in many ways and advanced (at least to a degree) gender equality. Despite the radical social and economic changes, as well as the transformation in gender roles the Weimar Republic witnessed, the decade ultimately failed in regard to its advancement of women. Instead, the new freedoms women experienced, their emancipation, further compounded male anxieties which were already high-strung due to the loss of World War I and the uncertain political and economic times they lived in. Due to the rights Weimar's constitution granted women, "the Republic was known for female emancipation and other democratic egalitarian reforms" (McCormick 22), yet "what was actually accomplished along these lines never lived up to the promises and hopes associated with the birth of the Republic" (22). This is evident in the "exaltation of the maternal type across the political spectrum throughout the decade" (32) and the culmination of the progressive Republic, which ended in a disastrous failure and a complete turn to National Socialism, which would in turn bring women's

roles back into the dark ages (36). In terms of the failure of German feminism in the face of the Third Reich, Bridenthal and Koonz suggest

the conservatism of Weimar women must be seen in the context of the fraudulence of their supposed emancipation - that is, the discrepancy between the opportunistic promises made to women by parties and the constitution and their actual social situation” (McCormick 36).

One could certainly argue that Kriemhild is portrayed as a strong woman in part two of Lang’s *Die Nibelungen (Kriemhilds Rache)*, but the focus here is on Brunhild, who unfortunately does not fulfill her Norse potential.

As mentioned above, the title of Lang’s movie, *Die Nibelungen*, suggests a hybrid film composed out of different versions of the Nibelung legend. Although Lang incorporates a few elements from the Völsunga saga, i.e. the ring of fire that must be crossed and Brunhild’s death at the end of the film, his focus was on the Aryan hero, Siegfried and his noble queen, Kriemhild, who are at the center of this tragedy. We know the movie has been dedicated to the German people and can conclude the focus of this film was not on Brunhild, as the film-going masses did not recognize her as a Germanic heroine in the 20th century. Lang and von Harbou even made a very demonstrative and telling gesture on the day of the premiere of *Die Nibelungen*: “they laid a wreath at the grave of Frederic the Great in the Potsdam Garnisonkirche” (Kaes 525). This further plays into the nationalistic intentions of Lang’s production. Frederick II of Prussia, known as Frederick the Great, reigned from 1740-1786. He was the King of Prussia and is credited with waging several victorious wars and increasing the size of Prussia, in essence turning it into a formidable kingdom to be reckoned with. Prussia became economically stronger and politically reformed under his guidance, and Frederick was known for his religious tolerance. Lang’s symbolic act might further signal his regressive yearning for the old patriarchal

order, a strong Germania and a simpler time with traditional and stable values. Without the strength of Prussia, it is questionable how successful the founding of the Second Kaiserreich would have been in the 19th century. Eisner states “structure is all,” and that “to portray this world (that of the Nibelungen) demanded a certain strictness of form” (Fritz Lang 73). Although Lang is known for his use of structure and form in *Die Nibelungen* and also in *Metropolis*, his penchant for it might have initially been due to a desire for a more structured time in which Germany’s society was inherently patriarchal and monarchistic. The popularity of *Bergfilme* in the Weimar Republic, which were the precursors to the popular *Heimatfilme* of the Fifties, might support this argument; clearly there was a portion of the German public that longed for a return to values, nature and traditional order. The very popular and influential Prussian films should also be mentioned, especially the Fredericus Rex series in four parts, which were produced between 1922 and 1923 (Hake 42). These films, according to Hake, “celebrated the authoritarian, paternalistic relationship between leader and nation and confirmed all-male groups as the true foundation of society” (42). She believes the “Prussian” films unabashedly glorified the absolutist state and its autocratic ruler: “In the figure of the Aryan, Prussian virtues like discipline, order, duty, and obedience found their most radical expression.” (82). Compounding the effect of these films was the striking resemblance born by actor Otto Gebühr to the actual Frederick the Great. Taken as a whole, many Germans in the Weimar Republic longed for the counterbalance to reality; they glorified the idea of Germania and Prussia’s past. Such tendencies would not allow for the glorification of a strong Brunhild in the Norse tradition.

The very plot of Lang’s film is proof that Brunhild was not a major focus of the production, but rather a means to a tragic end. Tom Gunning finds “Brunhild’s jealousy and rage certainly provide a complex motivation for much of the plot” (44). However, “she gains nothing

from her role in the destruction of Siegfried, as her suicide at his bier acknowledges” (44). We learn nothing about a prior relationship between Siegfried and Brunhild. The film begins with the story of Siegfried, how he learned of Kriemhild, slew the dragon and gained the treasure of the Nibelungs, and Kriemhild, who hears Volker extol Siegfried’s virtues in a song. As in the heroic epic Das Nibelungenlied, there are only hints throughout Lang’s tale that may signal either a prior relationship, or, at the very least, that Brunhild is in love with Siegfried. Her motivations, however, remain for the most part unclear. Why does she approach Siegfried as her suitor in Iceland? Why is she angry at seeing Siegfried and Kriemhild together, not only initially, but at the wedding and afterwards? Why does she exhibit signs of jealousy when seeing the happy couple together and thus ask Gunther when they will leave the court? Finally, why does she go to the cathedral when she does not really believe in Christianity and when it is likely that Kriemhild will be there? Certainly there are several plausible answers to each question, but taken as a whole, the resulting image of Brunhild is that of a noble, headstrong warrior queen who has been deceived and humbled by two kings, yet who is also exceedingly haughty, petty and jealous. Is it not also possible that Lang and his team are counting on the public’s knowledge of the Norse tradition of the Nibelungen saga, i.e. the Völsunga saga? This would have made the audience’s awareness of a prior relationship between Siegfried and Brunhild, or at the very least, an unrequited love on Brunhild’s part, likely, although neither existed in the film itself. Unfortunately, the few elements taken from the Völsunga saga or Norse tradition, coupled with an implied love, are not enough to justify the actions of Brunhild at the Burgundian court. She seems to accept her situation to a point, once the armlet is taken, although she does not care much for Siegfried or Kriemhild. This could be due simply to the fact that Siegfried is such a magnificent king and Brunhild feels she should have been matched with the best among all

kings. The death of Brunhild at the end of *Siegfrieds Tod* is nonetheless puzzling based on the story that has been portrayed on the screen. If Siegfried was her chief betrayer, the only two reasons she would have killed herself upon his murder was because she loved him, which is not evident in the overall plot, or, because she felt utter remorse at demanding his death, which is not likely. On the other hand, Voorwinden argues that it would have been impossible for Brunhild to stay with Gunther, since he allowed Siegfried to overpower her in her own bedchamber, and that divorce or a return to her homeland would have been out of the question in medieval courtly society (Voorwinden 200). Regardless, I believe Brunhild's suicide in Lang's film displays an active avoidance on his part to justly deal with her character; he portrays her as an erratic, love-lorn woman and then neatly kills her off when it is suitable, so that the plot can continue with Kriemhild's revenge. There are even less hints in *Siegfrieds Tod* of a prior relationship or love between Siegfried and Brunhild than in the actual Nibelungenlied.

Lang's longing to depict a stable, strong, patriarchal German society, as evidenced by his lack of focus on Brunhild and his use of strict, structural set composition, in addition to his use of the Nibelungenlied as the primary source for his film, lead me to conclude he did not wish to extol the virtues of a strong, idealized, Norse, version of the Brunhild character. Her unexplained sadness at Siegfried's death and her own suicide further relegate her to the role of an erratic and hysterical woman. Lang ultimately provides us with a conflicted Brunhild who inadequately lives up to our image of the Norse warrior queen.

B. HARALD REINL'S 'BRUNHILD'

The Decade:

The 1960s represent yet another decade of strong change, as the conservative, post-war values of the older generation clashed with those of the younger generation that followed. In Germany, it was the middle to the end of the decade that was most tumultuous. In some cases, such as the student revolution of 1968, it mirrored events or movements in the United States, while in other cases, i.e. the confrontation of the country's National Socialist past and the suffering from subsequent traumas, it did not. After years of failing to deal with the National Socialist past, the younger generation confronted its parents and wanted to know the truth. Where had all the Nazis gone and what role(s) had their parents played in the war? One of the consequences of this was the creation of the RAF (Red Army Faction), when a more violent and radical element split from the insistent, yet more peaceful, protests of its cohorts. In the United States the "free love" theme predominated after the mid-1960s, in terms of "loose" relationships and liberating experiences for many women. Women earned the right to have legal abortions and the civil rights movement was born. In both countries, a turn to anti-authoritarian parenting also occurred, although this was much more drastic in some ways in Germany, which was still a predominantly patriarchal society.

Defining itself against an oppressive bourgeois society, the counterculture pursued social and cultural alternatives that culminated in sexual liberation, social experimentation, and individual self-discovery, including with the help of drugs, music, therapy and alternative lifestyles. Participating in these larger developments, filmic practices after 1962 thrived on a number of oppositions: the fascination with American mass culture versus the critique of American cultural imperialism; the interest in formal experimentation versus the commitment to an alternative public sphere; the association with literature versus the search for other filmic traditions; and the opposition to existing definitions of German culture versus the demand for public funding and support (Petermann and Thoms 1988), (Hake 145-146).

German cinema witnessed the birth of the Junges Deutsches Kino (JDK) in 1962, which then transitioned into the second major era of German filmmaking, the Neues Deutsches Kino (NDK). According to Sabine Hake, the Oberhausen Manifesto (Feb. 28, 1962) had three goals: “to offer a critique of conventional genre cinema, to lay out the future of German film, and to present a list of demands on the government” (144). The “twenty-six filmmakers involved in the Manifesto also called for public policies and subsidies” (144) to enable the German cinema to produce quality films without having to focus exclusively on the competition with Hollywood due to the importance of funding. The majority of JDK films made after 1962 shared several characteristics, but they mainly “offered an implicit or explicit critique of genre cinema and its stabilizing functions within postwar society” (146). Young German Cinema and New German Cinema forged a dual-attack on “the repressive social and political structures in the Federal Republic and the conventional genre cinema associated with both the Hollywood studio system and the pre-Oberhausen era” (148). However, genre cinema, according to Hake, remained unwaveringly strong throughout the 1960s (152). Feature films of the decade were approached by scholars as:

a reflection of society as they focused on topics such as the crisis of the family and the conflict among the generations; the changes in public institutions and the workplace; the impact of the sexual revolution and female emancipation; and the problems of everyday life in the cities and the provinces (Hake 144-145).

The 1960s were radical and progressive, but they were not as economically, politically and socially extreme and volatile as the 1920s were in Germany. Furthermore, Hake claims that all German filmmakers of the decade “channeled their deeply felt alienation from the culture of economic liberalism and social conservatism into two equally important thematic concerns: the conflict among the generations and the battle between sexes” (148).

Throughout, the love-hate relationship between Germany and Hollywood persisted (153).

Hake states:

the mythical American West inspired romantic dreams about a reconciliation between good and evil through the figure of the noble savage. Produced for Rialto-Film, directed by Harald Reinl, and usually shot in Yugoslavia with lead actors Pierre Brice and Lex Barker, these Westerns allowed for a displacement of German history into the mythological spaces of the New World. The transposition of these regressive patterns into the world of Germanic myth and legend, as attempted by Reinl in the two-part *Die Nibelungen* (1966-67, *The Nibelungs*), proved much less successful (153).

She feels this is perhaps “an indication of the continuing need for a clear distinction between American popular culture and German high culture” (153). However, one may argue with her on this point, as Reinl’s *Die Nibelungen* was generally not well-received for a number of reasons.

The Director and Film Information

Director Harald Reinl was born on July 9, 1908 in Bad Ischl (Salzburg), in Austria-Hungary, now Austria. He was stabbed to death by his wife in 1986 in Spain. Karin Dor, who portrays Brunhild in his version of *Die Nibelungen*, was a well-known German actress and his first wife. Reinl began his career as an actor in Arnold Fanck’s *Bergfilme* of the 1920s. He was not involved in the JDK movement, as he focused primarily on genre films and was already much older. As mentioned above, Reinl is known mostly for his *Winnetou*-films, which were westerns that enforced stereotypical gender roles, even though gender relations were one of the foremost topics of the decade.

Reinl’s two-part film *Die Nibelungen* (1966) has been called an “unimpressive remake” (Gentry 295) by some critics. Gentry feels “it transformed the legend and Lang’s black-and-white original into a colorful and sometimes unintentionally ridiculous adventure movie” (295). In his 1967 interview with Axel Madsen, Lang “shakes his head in disbelief at the Berlin entrepreneur Artur Brauner’s folly of remaking the *Nibelungen*. “These young Germans are

frightfully insolent, but so were we. However, they lack self-discipline”” (Brunette 84). Lang did not approve of the remake, neither the intention to produce it nor the end result. Despite the mostly mixed reviews, it is obvious Reinl took many elements from Lang’s version, the most clear-cut being the film’s division into two parts: *Siegfrieds Tod* and *Kriemhilds Rache*. The acting in the film is quite mixed; the portrayal of Brunhild, King Gunther and even Volker, the bard, stand out nicely, whereas the performance of former decathlete Uwe Beyer as Siegfried leaves much to be desired and has received some scathing reviews. The music and dialog within the film tend to be stereotypically 1960s-oriented, with simplistic dialog and melodramatic music employed at inopportune moments; however, this seems in keeping with some other genre movies, particularly melodramas, of the 1960s. Filming of *Die Nibelungen* took place primarily in Yugoslavia, the scene for Reinl’s *Winnetou* movies, but outside shots were also filmed in Ireland and Spain. The magnificent scenery in the film is one of its strengths, and it does possess an enjoyable entertainment value. Despite adding in new elements from literary sources that differed from Lang’s, Reinl’s film fell short in its efforts to portray the legend of the Nibelungs.

The Film’s Source

The DVD version of part one of Harald Reinl’s *Die Nibelungen* consists of twelve episodes. The beginning of the second part of Reinl’s film, *Kriemhilds Rache*, is important to us, as Brunhild’s death occurs within the initial minutes of the movie. Harald Reinl’s *Die Nibelungen*, modeled in part after Fritz Lang’s version, draws more heavily on other literary sources than does Lang’s film. On the one hand, it seems to beautifully mirror the *Nibelungenlied*, as the establishing shot of the Rhine river, the magnificent castle at Worms and its surroundings shows Volker the bard introducing the characters in Worms via a metric rhyme:

“Uns sind aus alten Zeiten, Wunder viel gesagt.
Von Helden reich an Ehren, von Kühnheit unverzagt.
Von frohen Festes Zeiten, von Weinen und von Klagen.
Von kühner Recken Streit koennt ihr nun Wunder hören sagen.

As in Hebbel’s drama, religion is a more important element in Reinl’s film, with Christianity dominant throughout, as it was in the heroic epic Das Nibelungenlied. Brunhild, Siegfried, Frigga, Hagen von Tronje and Alberich represent the old ways of the pagan Gods. In reading through Hebbel’s play, one can find numerous similarities to the dialogue in Reinl’s *Die Nibelungen*. Reinl draws on more elements from the Völsunga saga. Siegfried also rides through the wall of flame, and in keeping with the Völsunga saga, we learn that Brunhild displeased Odin (*Wotan*) and was thus punished. She must now sleep until someone passes through the wall of flame and puts the ring of the Nibelungs on her hand. Here there is a slight variation from the Völsunga saga, and there are many such creative liberties taken throughout. By tying the ring of the Nibelungs to Brunhild, a valkyrie or shield maiden of Odin’s, Reinl shows us which Brunhild figure he is focusing on. Initially, it would seem that he favors the Norse tradition, but we will later see there are numerous contradictions to this. The ring motif is predominantly Wagnerian in origin.

Clearly Siegfried and Brunhild have a prior relationship, the exact extent of which remains unclear; after showing Siegfried her country, Brunhild offers him herself and her kingdom. Siegfried leaves to bring the hoard of the Nibelungen home, and Brunhild is dismayed that he may not keep his promise to return home. Suddenly, Odin’s warrior maiden is a tragic, forelorn and lovesick woman.

It is her belt (a girdle of silk in the Nibelungenlied) that gives Brunhild her supernatural strength. This belt is not found in either of the two major literary sources. There is also a double-

play on both the Nibelungenlied and the Völsunga saga that causes the tension between Kriemhild and Brunhild: not only does Brunhild love Siegfried, but she also thinks he is King Gunther's vassal. As in Lang's version Siegfried is an apprentice to a blacksmith (Mine), which also comes from neither major source, but rather, from the Thidrek's saga. This blacksmith further wishes him harm, as he instigates an attack on Siegfried's life and then also warns the dwarf Alberich that Siegfried is on his way to kill the dragon and win the Nibelungen hoard. Whereas Lang's version seems to predominantly draw from the Nibelungenlied, Reinl incorporates more of the Völsunga saga and takes some further liberties with the screenplay.

The Film's Plot

Part One: Siegfrieds Tod: The DVD version of part one of Harald Reinl's *Die Nibelungen* consists of twelve episodes. As mentioned above, only the beginning of the second part of Reinl's film, *Kriemhilds Rache*, is important to us, as Brunhild's death occurs within it. The full summary of Reinl's *Die Nibelungen* can be found in appendix B.

Prior Relationship: A prior meeting between Siegfried and Brunhild in Island is known even to the court at Worms, as they have learned this from Volker the bard's song. Siegfried hears of Brunhild from Alberich; he takes the ring of the Nibelungen to *Island* and manages to get through the ring of fire (*Waberlohe*) to reach Brunhild's castle. Inside, she lies sleeping on the steps to her throne. Siegfried carries her to the throne and places the ring on her finger. Brunhild awakens and Siegfried tells her she is free when the ring of fire subsides. An ensuing horseback ride of her country allows Siegfried to witness all its wonders. Brunhild tells him the land is his, as is she, but he wishes to bring his treasure back to Xanten. She predicts he will share the long night with a queen, implying it won't be her, and seems devastated when he

leaves, although he has promised to return. We do not learn if they have actually had sexual relations or not.

The Wooing of Brunhild: King Gunther uses the pretense that a ruler's siblings may not marry before the king to persuade Siegfried to woo Brunhild for him. Siegfried indeed does this with great callousness; upon seeing Brunhild again in *Island* she learns he is there on behalf of another, King Gunther. Siegfried gives Brunhild neither an apology nor an explanation. Brunhild offers to let Gunther still leave on the day of the challenge, but for him it is too late – he has seen her extraordinary beauty. For the first challenge, she touches her belt to the rock she then throws incredibly far, after which Gunther, aided by an invisible Siegfried, throws his rock farther. Before Siegfried aids him, he appears to have some trouble, and Brunhild mocks him openly. The next challenge, the spear throw, is also won by Gunther. Finally, they are face to face with shields and swords; despite her best efforts, Gunther remains standing with Siegfried's help. He is then able to cut her shield in half and knock her to the ground, her helmet tumbling off her head in the process. Brunhild is astonished and extremely disappointed at her own defeat, but must sail to Worms with King Gunther.

Arrival in Worms: In Worms, Brunhild will not smile, as she feels she is a prisoner. When Kriemhild greets her and says she hopes to be her sister, too, Brunhild retorts she hopes to be a queen to Kriemhild. Brunhild then asks why Kriemhild is being given to a vassal, but Gunther informs her Siegfried is a king and his friend.

Brunhild's Wedding and Wedding Nights: At the wedding in the cathedral, Brunhild frowns in displeasure and obvious pain when she sees the happy couple of Siegfried and Kriemhild across from her. Gunther takes note of this. On the wedding night, Brunhild sees Kriemhild on the balcony opposite hers, and seems more disturbed. Gunther enters her

bedchamber but is repelled by the strength and magic of Brunhild's belt; she is amazed he is no longer the strong king who defeated her and suspects trickery. Brunhild tells him she may be his wife, but she will never be his woman. The next day Gunther again asks Siegfried for his assistance. That night, an invisible Siegfried accompanies Gunther into his bedchamber. Gunther attempts to wrestle Brunhild onto the bed, and Siegfried removes her belt. Brunhild passionately kisses Gunther, but it is unclear whether she thinks it might be Siegfried or is simply finally convinced her king is indeed the strongest.

The Fight of the Queens: Siegfried does not betray Gunther, as he says nothing to Kriemhild about his assistance. Kriemhild has seen Siegfried come back into their bedroom and finds the belt on her own; she fears the worst, since she knows of Siegfried's prior meeting with Brunhild in *Island*, and goes to confront a now benign and friendly Brunhild. Kriemhild accuses Brunhild of being blind and the *Buhlin* of her husband, Siegfried. She proves this to Brunhild by showing her the belt, which Kriemhild is wearing around her waist. Brunhild drops the cross she is holding and leaves the cathedral steps in shock and anger.

Consequences: Brunhild complains to Hagen that she was a love-sick fool, and it is Hagen who feels her humiliation and also Gunther's must be avenged. After tricking Kriemhild into revealing Siegfried's one vulnerable spot, Hagen kills him in the Odenwald during the royal hunt.

Brunhild's Fate: Brunhild pretends all is well after Siegfried's death, even though she is filled with sadness when Hagen reports the deed has been done. King Gunther is confident they can now proceed with a happy marriage, but Brunhild is found dead that evening at Siegfried's bier with a self-inflicted stab wound.

Brunhild Analysis and Conclusion

The Sixties, despite witnessing significant changes in society and gender relations, were nonetheless not as radical as the Twenties in Germany. The absence of extreme political upheaval, a more stabilized and healthy economy, and the focus on genre cinema are proof of this. Obviously, the fact that a film or a character in a film was produced in a progressive decade does not automatically guarantee a progressive viewpoint or portrayal of our heroine, as already evidenced in Lang's *Die Nibelungen*. Although *Heimatfilme* experienced their greatest success in the 1950s in Germany, they continued to be popular throughout the Sixties, albeit on a smaller scale. There is a parallel here with the Weimar Republic and the popularity of its *Bergfilme*, and thus possibly between Lang and Reinl, in that Reinl also longed for the more rigid gender roles of the 1950s and the patriarchal society that Germany still was after World War II up until the Sixties. Although women were once again experiencing new freedoms, Reinl's films sought to put them back into their previous traditional and more restrictive roles. In emphasizing Siegfried's choice for the quiet, more demure beauty of Kriemhild, and not the strong, fiercely independent warrior queen of *Island*, Reinl reveals his longing for a return to a patriarchal societal order, which is further supported by the film's plot. During the fight of the queens, Kriemhild ironically says to Brunhild, "Du, die du so viele Wunden geschlagen hast, du bist empfindlich gegen Nadelstiche? Die Unnatur rächt sich also." Unlike any comment in Lang's or Edel's films, this one invokes a comparison between Brunhild and an unnatural quality in a woman, that she is a warrior queen and thus unwomanly. King Gunther, on the other hand, says "Schönheit und Stärke – gibt es eine bessere Königin für Burgund?" For Gunther, Brunhild is the ideal queen, yet his comment on her slender beauty later in the movie somewhat negates his

positive view of her strength. Furthermore, he is the less effective king, because Siegfried has to win this queen for him.

Harald Reinl primarily made genre movies during the Sixties, and *Die Nibelungen*, a fantasy epic, is no exception. His efforts to remake Lang's classic were unsuccessful, as the resulting movie does not hold a candle to Lang's. However, it tells a nice story, is visually beautiful from the actors to the scenery, and is entertaining. Based on a more equal combination of sources used, i.e. German and Norse versions, Brunhild is still, even as a valkyrie or Odin's shield maiden, reduced to a passionate, head-over-heels in-love queen who does not order Siegfried's death when she learns of his betrayal. Given the higher emphasis Reinl places on the Völsunga saga in comparison to Lang, his movie still seems to closely follow Lang's version, and ultimately portrays Brunhild inaccurately according to the ideal Norse sources. Upon first seeing Brunhild, Gunther remarks "Du hattest Recht mit deinem Lied, ich sah nie eine schönere Königin! Aber wie kann sie so stark sein, sie ist schlank und mädchenhaft!" Gunther's comment and Volker's subsequent reply that her strength is due to Odin's magic both diminish Brunhild's ability to be strong in and of her own right. These are typical outdated male stereotypes of women, that women cannot be very strong when they look slender and beautiful and that they cannot be strong without outside assistance. This would further mark Reinl as part of the more conservative, older majority of the Sixties. Reinl's intent, like Lang's, seems to have been the desire to stabilize a situation that seemed chaotic, by resurrecting pre-modern Germany and highlighting traditional gender roles.

There is a dichotomy between the Norse warrior queen and the beautiful, 1960s-type goddess that actress Karin Dor portrays in Harald Reinl's *Die Nibelungen*. The only influence of the tumultuous Sixties felt in Reinl's film are the semi-beehive hairdos of Brunhild and

Kriemhild, their make-up and some of the colloquial dialog; these factors combine to make the overall impact of the movie and of Brunhild less effective. Siegfried's dialog and acting at times are especially troubling, as it assists in turning the epic German hero into a trusting, dim-witted oaf. Overall, despite the societal conflicts and changes in gender roles the decade was witness to, it would be incorrect to say these achieved a positive effect on Brunhild in Reinl's *Die Nibelungen*.

Brunhild is a beautiful, brunette-haired, dark-eyed queen who is always shown at her most magnificent in red, gold and darker colors. Her beauty is certainly queen-like, yet she does not completely fit the image of the Norse Icelandic queen based on her looks alone. She has a regal bearing and conveys her strong emotions nicely; she even has a 'v' (for valkyrie?) on the front of her crown, and rides well on a horse. Although she was chosen by *Wotan*, her strength in this film is so clearly tied to the belt she wears that she must use it in her first challenge against King Gunther: Brunhild touches the belt to the rock she is about to pick up and throw. This implies the only strength she has truly comes from the belt, since it must be used in such an obvious manner. Later in Worms, she uses the belt to cause Gunther to stagger away from her. He tells her, "Du bist nicht die Tochter Wotans wie alle sagen," yet she does seem to be favored by Odin due to her possession of the belt. The belt is the symbol of Brunhild's strength, and without it she is lost. Such displays of its use further weaken the overall picture of Reinl's Brunhild.

There are several reasons why Brunhild has a right to be and is indeed angry at being deceived by Siegfried and by Gunther. Brunhild initially may have thought the ring of the Nibelungs that Siegfried gave her was a wedding ring; this, coupled with her desire to have the strong Siegfried as her king only to have him woo her for Gunther and instead choose Kriemhild

as his bride, make jealousy and envy a strong motive for her anger and shock when she comes to Worms. Yet the guilt of taking vengeance for Brunhild's and Gunther's humiliation after Brunhild's confrontation with Kriemhild falls on Hagen, the loyal uncle of Gunther, and not Brunhild. Although Brunhild asks him to be her knight and probably knows the consequences this will bring about, she does not directly demand of Gunther that Siegfried be killed. How are we to interpret this? Her reaction when she realizes the kings' betrayal and deception is one of sadness, indignation and anger. When Brunhild tells Hagen, "Eine Närrin war ich, eine verliebte Närrin," we cannot be certain whether she is referring to Siegfried or Gunther, as she does love Siegfried. However, her reaction towards Gunther the morning after her belt has been removed is finally one of tenderness. Brunhild seems content to have found the king that truly did defeat her with his strength. Regardless of this, she does not personally take vengeance or demand vengeance for herself; thanks to Hagen, she and Gunther are avenged. Contrarily, however, Brunhild does commit suicide at Siegfried's side, just when Gunther believes they will finally be happy together. Like the Brynhild of the Völsunga saga, this Brunhild finds life without her strongest king unfit to continue living, yet her unwillingness to act towards him directly in revenge for Siegfried's deceptions is puzzling and detracts from the Norse Brunhild figure. One could argue that Fritz Lang's Brunhild, who demands Siegfried's death, is the stronger and more appropriately portrayed Brunhild according to the Norse tradition.

Reinl's remake of Die Nibelungen during a decade of significant change might signal a desire similar to Lang's to resurrect Germanic myth and legend and reach back into history and recall a Germany (Prussia) that was strong, stable and patriarchal. His portrayal of a German Brunhild can therefore place his film in the same category as Lang's *Die Nibelungen*.

C. ULI EDEL'S 'BRUNHILD'

The Decade/Century

Beginning in the early Eighties, genre cinema became an even greater force on the German cinematic scene. Rainer Werner Fassbinder's death was one of the elements that brought to a close the period of the Neues Deutsches Kino, as did the change in political climate when the long-term reign of the SPD party was replaced with the government of CDU chancellor Helmut Kohl. In the United States, the first blockbusters, *Star Wars* and *Jaws*, appeared in the late Seventies and changed the industry of movie making forever. Germany would not be immune to this change and produced some of its own big genre productions, most notably *Das Boot* (Wolfgang Petersen) in 1981. German directors such as Wolfgang Petersen and Roland Emmerich would move to Hollywood to direct their own American blockbusters, such as *Independence Day* by the latter and *Troy*, *Air Force One* and *The Perfect Storm* by the former. Although Germany still produced small gems in the tradition of the NDK, it continued its strong tradition of genre cinema in the early Eighties and beyond, albeit on a smaller budget than Hollywood. This renewed focus on genre cinema and an increase in international coproductions, such as Uli Edel's 2004 made-for-television film *Dark Kingdom: The Dragon King*, have again become the standard in German film-making since the mid-1980s. The face of Germany has undergone changes since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and subsequently the communist states, and the reunification of East and West in 1990. An influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe, the continued establishment of the Turkish-German population, which has its roots in the *Gastarbeiter* who started coming to Germany in the 1950s, and a negative birth rate have created a different Germany from what it was until the late 1980s. Certainly the traditional, historic face of Germany still exists, but nowadays it coexists alongside immigrant cultures,

mosques, gangster rap and hip-hop, unemployment, and other social and economic concerns. Germany faces an even tougher challenge in creating a peaceful coexistence of such a multi-faceted society and reconciling its historic, and sometimes barbaric, past with the 21st century technologically advanced world than ever before. Not surprisingly, a version of the Siegfried and Brunhild legend once again reappears during such a time of social and economic challenges and change.

On the gender relations front of the 21st century in the West, we find women more empowered than ever before. In regard to visual entertainment, the end of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century has truly become the information age and has been dominated by reality television and the “American Idol/You Tube” generation.” Germany has not escaped these trends, either. Women are able to market their skills, their bodies and themselves online and on television, and are generally not disapproved of. Female athletes today are recognized for the beauty of their strengths and talents, and they are also able to market themselves more successfully than ever before. Nationally, women are pushing at the glass ceiling in the corporate world with some success. Enrollment of female students at colleges nationwide is at an all-time high. Nowadays, many women want a successful career and a family, and the demands of juggling both have brought a host of new stresses and challenges. On average, Western women are marrying at a later age than ever before and it has become commonplace for them to put off childbearing until their late Thirties and early Forties; in the case of Germany and other Western European countries, many women have simply opted not to have children at all. None of the above mean the double standard women have always faced has vanished. Women are still held to different principles than most men, but in this decade, women in the Western world are, on the whole, coming into their own. A new filmic adaptation of the Nibelung and Völsung legend

might thus be expected to portray its female protagonists, specifically Brunhild, in keeping with the stronger, Norse tradition.

The Director and Film Information

Uli Edel, the director of *Dark Kingdom*, has worked in both the television and film industry. One of his best known films is *Christiane F. - Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo*, produced by Bernd Eichinger and released in 1980. Edel was born in 1947 in Neuenburg am Rhein, Germany. Edel's 2004 filmic adaptation of the legend of Siegfried and Brunhild is a German, British, South African and Italian co-production and features an international cast of characters. Benno Führmann (Germany) plays the role of Siegfried, Max von Sidow (Sweden) plays his blacksmith foster father, Eyvind, Kristanna Lokken (U.S.A) portrays Brunhild, and Samuel West (U.K.) is King Gunther. Originally shown in two parts in the United States on the Science Fiction channel in 2006, the DVD version has been reduced in length, thus removing some of the finer details which would have made the entire story more complete. Overall, the movie is entertaining, has some accomplished special effects and provides an interesting contrast to Lang's and Reinl's *Die Nibelungen* films. The soundtrack is one of the highlights to Edel's film, as are the sweeping vistas. Unfortunately, a chief complaint from German critics and viewers has been the incorrect depiction of the Rhine valley. The movie was filmed almost entirely in South Africa, and the castle at Worms and the supposed Rhine valley clearly don't correspond to the real thing. Critics are perplexed that Edel would want to retell this Germanic legend, but then neglect to portray the landscape of Germany faithfully. A possible reason for this was the limited budget he and his production team had to work with. However, due to the efforts of the special effects directors who were also co-producers for this movie, special effects are dominant throughout the film; instead of building full sets, a partial castle was built and then filled out with

CGI. Entire landscapes were created: Iceland and Brunhild's fortress are almost completely CGI. Although some of the special effects are obvious, others, like the dragon, are very convincing. Edel's Fafnir is by far the most realistic and fear-inducing of the three films. The acting, as in previous Nibelungen films, is mixed, with some wonderful performances and some less notable ones. The lower budget for this production is evident in the relatively small cast; only a few scenes show more than a small group of people.

Edel grew up on the Rhine river and his father told him stories about Siegfried the dragon slayer while out fishing together. Edel's father also told him about the treasure of the Nibelungs lying at the bottom of the river even today, and that one could find the Nibelungenschatz somewhere in the Rhine. Edel had hoped since his time at film school in Munich to tell the story of Germany's greatest epos and myth, and he had prepared a storyboard for *Dark Kingdom* eighteen years prior to the making of this film. When he was approached by Rola Bauer and Tim Halkin, the producers, Edel was ready to make the movie.

He chose Kristanna Lokken to portray Brunhild because he had seen her in *Terminator 3* and thought to himself, "If she can be a real threat for Arnold Schwarzenegger, she will be my ideal cast for Brunhild, a woman whom no man in the world can defeat." Lokken herself was drawn to the strength of her character and the vulnerability of her, as well. The other actors felt the choice of casting Lokken as Brunhild could not have been better. Führmann calls her a beautiful, very strong woman and West admired her ability to fight Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Terminator 3*. Throughout the movie, Brunhild is seen with her weapons, fierce and magnificent. Edel specifically inserted a short sequence for Lokken, in which Brunhild, having just learned of Kriemhild's and Gunther's betrayal, gallops across the fields in fierce determination, finally

emitting a loud cry of desperation. In Edel's film there was a focus on casting a strong and magnificent actress to portray the legendary Norse figure of Brunhild.

The Film's Source

The Dark Kingdom DVD featurettes contain interview material that gives us direct insight into the sources used for this film. Executive producer Tim Halkin says "the saga spans many centuries. The first origins or roots of the saga you find in the 5th century as a Norse saga, the latest version of it, the most modern version of it from the 13th century Das Nibelungenlied, which was written by an anonymous Austrian poet" (*Dark Kingdom* DVD). His co-producer, Rola Bauer, states they combined the Nibelungen saga with the Edda and the Norse sagas. In reality, the Edda sagas and the Norse sagas are for the most part one and the same, but at least we know it was their intent to provide a combination of sagas with an emphasis on those of the Norse tradition. Bauer felt this would give the film a more universal appeal, rather than reducing it only to the German/Austrian myth. Another source for this film was Hebbel's play in three acts; Brunhild and Siegfried are part of the pagan world, whereas the court of Worms belongs to the Christian world. As in Hebbel's play, Brunhild carries a runic symbol on her forehead when she does battle in the film. The cast was also excited about the saga and was actually shown Fritz Lang's version and parts of Harald Reinl's "remake," as well. These two epic films were clearly on Edel's mind and certainly would have influenced the overall screenplay for *Dark Kingdom*, but of the three films, it not only combines the most sources, but also takes the most poetic license. The ring motif from Wagner is utilized: Siegfried takes possession of the ring of the Nibelungs, and thus is owner of the entire hoard. The Iceland of the previous two films has vanished, replaced by a harsh, stunning landscape of rock, water and ice. There is no ring of fire, as in the Völsunga saga, and Brunhild's belt is the source of her strength. One could argue this

filmic version is far removed from a faithful adaptation of the Völsunga saga, yet it does portray the most successful and convincing image of the strong Norse queen, Brunhild, better than Lang's and Reinl's films.

The Film's Plot

Brunhild is portrayed by Kristanna Lokken, who fittingly plays the Queen of Iceland, a Norse warrior queen. She is quite tall, has long blond hair and piercing blue eyes. Upon first sight she suits her role exceedingly well. In online reviews she is called the "Terminatrix" based on her appearance in Schwarzenegger's film *Terminator 3*, and this role provides us with a preconception of her in *Dark Kingdom* before we even see her in the film. She has also appeared in another German producer's (Uwe Boll) film, *Bloodrayne (2005)*, in which her character is half-human and half-vampire. Throughout *Dark Kingdom* she is noble and fair, fierce and warrior-like, but also beautiful, determined and vulnerable in her love for Siegfried. This love is not weakness, as Brunhild clearly sees Siegfried as her destiny, sent by the Gods. As a Norse queen, she follows the old ways and does not attempt to fight against her destiny as it is ordained by the Gods. The full summary of Edel's *Dark Kingdom* can be found in appendix C.

Prior Relationship: Siegfried and Brunhild meet as blacksmith and queen on the night a comet streaks out of the sky. Brunhild has been told by Halberra that she will meet the man who will best her in battle, although nobody has ever done this before. Siegfried and Brunhild meet at the impact site, where they do battle and Brunhild is defeated. Brunhild informs Siegfried they are destined to meet and they spend the night together in the forest. She reveals to Siegfried she is the Queen of Iceland, and it does not matter to her that he is a blacksmith. Siegfried promises her he will come to Iceland and find her. The next morning she has departed, but has left Siegfried some of the strange metal that fell out of the sky.

The Wooing of Brunhild: At the court in Worms, Siegfried earns great reknown by slaying the dragon Fafnir and winning the treasure of the Nibelungs. He then defeats the two Saxon kings single-handedly, finally learning he is the King of Xanten. Gunther wants him tied to the House of Burgund; Hagen brings Kriemhild a potion made by Alberich to give to Siegfried, so that he will forget his prior love. Siegfried not only forgets Brunhild, but the potion instantly makes him fall in love with Kriemhild. When Gunther asks Siegfried's assistance in wooing Brunhild, he remembers his encounter with her in the forest by the smithy. His recollection of what transpired after their battle seems hazy. Siegfried is persuaded to aid Gunther. When they arrive at Brunhild's Hall, she is initially overjoyed to see him. Hagen and Gunther, and Siegfried, seem confused at the attention she grants Siegfried. When she learns it is Gunther who woos her, and not Siegfried, she is distraught, but remains outwardly calm. Outside the hall, she and Gunther, who is really Siegfried wearing the *Tarnhelm*, do battle with shields and double-bladed axes. Although Brunhild succeeds at first, Gunther saves her life just as she is about to tumble over the deadly waterfall. She is dismayed at her defeat, but tells her people to bow to her future husband, the King of Burgund, who is now also the King of Iceland.

Arrival in Worms: In Worms, Brunhild is dismayed upon seeing Siegfried greet Kriemhild so lovingly. Prior to the wedding, Brunhild meets Siegfried on the battlements. She asks him what happened and confronts him, demanding to know the truth. Why did Siegfried love her then and not now? Siegfried claims he remembers things differently and never loved her. Brunhild retorts that she will never again know happiness until Siegfried remembers or she forgets. Throughout the wedding ceremony, she appears hesitant, resistant and confused. At the wedding feast, Kriemhild blurts out that Siegfried could beat Brunhild in combat, and Brunhild

offers him such an opportunity. Brunhild stalks off in anger after realizing Siegfried has let her win the ensuing fight.

Brunhild's Wedding and Wedding Nights: Gunther arrives in Brunhild's chamber to find out why she left the feast. She is angry, because her victory was a false one. When he gets too close to her, she pushes him away from her, taunting him to come and get his wife. Gunther tries again, but Brunhild ties him up at the foot of the bed for the entire night. In the morning, she releases him so the servants will not see him. Brunhild tells Gunther she may be a captive, but she will never be his wife. Gunther convinces Siegfried to take the belt from Brunhild. Although Siegfried is hesitant, he assumes Gunther's shape and overpowers Brunhild in her chamber. She comments on his strength, how it comes and goes, but when he removes her belt, Brunhild tells him he may now be her husband. For a moment he seems tempted to stay, but then rises and departs the room, telling her he wishes to get rid of the vile belt. Upon his return, he expects her to be his wife! Kriemhild is awake in her bedchamber when Siegfried returns; he is forced to show her the belt and she assumes the worst. Siegfried assures her it is not what she thinks and that he has sworn a vow of utmost secrecy; Kriemhild will not be quieted and orders him to reveal the secret.

The Fight of the Queens: At the cathedral, Kriemhild is incensed that Brunhild has had the doors to the cathedral barred until the Queen of Burgund has entered. She angrily tells Brunhild she is not her queen. Kriemhild reveals it was Siegfried who conquered Brunhild in Iceland and in bed the previous night, and she is surprised Brunhild could not tell. The truth of Siegfried's and Gunther's deception dawns on Brunhild, and she leaves the cathedral steps.

Consequences: Hagen informs Gunther of what has transpired, that Siegfried has revealed his secret and the queens have quarreled. Gunther simply wants to send Siegfried home to

Xanten, but Brunhild arrives and says that is not enough. She insists that as the Queen of Iceland and Burgund she will not be dishonored. Siegfried must die, and Gunther looks ill upon hearing this. It is agreed between the two men that Siegfried will be killed during a royal hunt; Hagen will take care of this. After the hunting party has left, Kriemhild visits Brunhild to apologize and return her belt. She learns from Brunhild that it was she whom Siegfried had loved, and she feels dreadful at having so wronged Brunhild and Siegfried. When Brunhild learns the truth of the potion, she is very distraught, as she has ordered the death of a blameless Siegfried. It is too late, as Siegfried is killed by Hagen with a spear in the back.

Brunhild's Fate: Siegfried's funeral bier is placed on a ship with the dragon's skull at its head and the treasure of the Nibelungs in the boat; archers set the boat on fire. With Kriemhild and the remainder of the court watching from the shore, Brunhild emerges on the boat; she stabs herself with a sword and her body falls onto Siegfried's. The burning boat breaks apart and sinks to the riverbed with their corpses and the hoard of the Nibelungs.

Brunhild Analysis and Conclusion

There are several points within *Dark Kingdom* that reveal Edel's intentions toward his characterization of Brunhild, in addition to Brunhild's overall appearance. In her castle in Iceland, the men standing before her complain her tests are an insult to the rank of her suitors, most of whom are kings and princes. However, Brunhild insists, "And I am queen, their equal, and I have a right in my own land to make whatever laws I please." She will not be swayed by convention or tradition, something almost unheard of for a woman in medieval times. Despite Brunhild's vow to love Siegfried forever, he too will be required to complete her challenge upon his arrival in Iceland. After Siegfried fights the Saxons and learns his identity, he visits his ruined castle in Xanten. There, he converses with Brunhild via her raven, and informs Brunhild he is a

king, who is hopefully worthy of a queen. Brunhild replies, “Come to Iceland, my love, and find out.” Although she expects Siegfried will be the only one who can defeat her in battle, as he had previously done, she will not become his queen without being beaten in combat by him. Additionally, her decorum when Siegfried arrives with Gunther is impeccable; although she expected Siegfried to be her suitor, he seems to no longer love her, and this must be a great shock to Brunhild. However, despite her glares and stunned expressions, she waits until she finds Siegfried alone in Worms to confront him. She conducts herself as befits a queen, even in dire circumstances. Brunhild is also haughty, as evidenced by her order to close the cathedral doors in Worms to all until she has entered. She has full understanding of her rank and does not shy away from exerting the power it bestows. She also taunts Gunther on their wedding night, and is very cold and dismissive in her treatment of him. A further example is her fury at Siegfried after her confrontation with Kriemhild. She storms into Gunther’s hall and tells him, “you may not care if men scorn you as a weakling and a cuckold, but what about me? I was betrayed by the dragon slayer and by you. I am the Queen of Iceland and Burgund, I will not be dishonored. I will be avenged. There is only one punishment fit for such a crime.” She tells him simply that Siegfried must die or else she will kill herself, rather than live as a dishonored, unavenged queen.

As seen from the plot summary, one of the greatest changes Edel has made in contrast to his predecessors and literary sources lies in the film’s Brunhild plot. Instead of allowing Kriemhild to take revenge on her husband’s murderers and once again “steal the show” from Brunhild, the ending of this film has been rewritten to refocus the viewers’ attention on Siegfried and Brunhild. It is Brunhild that comes out into the courtyard as the warrior queen who avenges the death of her true love, Siegfried. Brunhild kills Hagen and his supporters. As Siegfried’s

burning funeral pyre floats atop the Rhein, Brunhild appears among the flames and stabs herself with a sword, her dying body falling onto Siegfried's as they are both consumed by flames. Brunhild is the avenger; she chooses her fate after discovering Gunther's and Hagen's betrayal. Siegfried's guilt is removed by keeping him completely unaware of his prior love to Brunhild until he lies dying. It is Hagen, Gunther and Kriemhild who commiserated to use magic potion that caused Siegfried to forget his vows. Brunhild regrets her wish for Siegfried to die once she has learned the truth, but it is already too late. She is clearly the main female protagonist in *Dark Kingdom*. There is no need for a second part in this movie, as Kriemhild is no longer of importance. Brunhild has already taken vengeance on Hagen, who has just killed Gunther. Not only in her warrior-like nature and strength, but also in her beauty and nobility at the Court of Worms, does Brunhild most closely resemble the Norse valkyrie and queen of the Völsunga saga. Lastly, Edel's film also stands alone in that Siegfried does not come to Worms to see or woo Kriemhild; instead, he arrives full of love for Brunhild, and only a magic potion can rid him of this love.

It is interesting to note that Edel, like his predecessors, brought to life the legend of Brunhild and Siegfried at the beginning of the 21st century. Europe experienced tremendous political change in the early 1990s, the effects of which did not truly manifest themselves until the end of the 20th century and beyond. Can it be that we have another German male producer past his Fifties, who is longing for the Germany of a different age?

Germany's *Nationalgedanke*, having been suppressed in light of the horrors it committed in World War II, having been confronted head-on in the late 1960s, has once again reappeared. This is evidenced by the outpouring of German national pride during the last soccer World Cup, which has resulted in increased discourse on whether Germans can finally be proud of their

country again. What would have been unthinkable fifty years ago and still unlikely thirty years ago, i.e. waving a German flag from one's car or window, has become acceptable in today's Germany. This progressive reemergence of nationalism, which has been accompanied by the rising popularity of Prussia bumper stickers and the element of right-wing politics that exists in the former East, has been met with apprehension by some of Germany's neighbors. Even today, such renewed pride evokes bad memories for Europe and the remainder of the Western World, partly because it is accompanied by negative elements and partly due to Germany's aggressive militaristic past. Despite this resurgence of nationalism, Germany as a whole is still a very pacifistic nation today. In analyzing Edel's *Brunhild*, one might conclude the director is proud of his country and the positive aspects of its past. The legend of Siegfried and the Nibelungs evokes a proud, simpler time for him, reaching back to Germany's greatest national epic. Edel could have portrayed Brunhild as his predecessors did, in the German version, yet he chose the stronger Norse version. Here is a man not threatened by women's equality, as he takes this Germanic epic and rewrites its ending to focus on Brunhild, as opposed to Siegfried and Kriemhild.

Combining our image of the 21st century woman, Uli Edel's interest in bringing the Nibelungen/Völsung legends to life, the sources used for the screenplay and the somewhat drastic changes made to the traditional plot-based sources, we can conclude that Kristanna Lokken as Brunhild most accurately fulfills the image of the Norse tradition of her character.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in the film and character analyses, Fritz Lang's and Harald Reinl's Brunhild represents the German tradition, whereas Uli Edel has chosen to portray the most successful and emancipated representation of the Brunhild of the Norse tradition. The literary sources, film plot and Brunhild portrayal of each film have ultimately provided the substance for my argument and this conclusion. What do cinematic representations tell us about the culture in which they were produced? If Uli Edel chose the Norse Brunhild, why did he give her a belt as a symbol of her strength and power? Why did Fritz Lang's Brunhild commit suicide when the plot did not support this act? The answer to both questions may be as simple as Voorwinden's observation that film producers feel compelled to neatly introduce their main characters, but then promptly and neatly remove them from the story when they have served their purpose and are no longer needed (213). He also concludes Brunhild must die because *Die Nibelungen* is a tragedy (214). In addition, "editors (*Bearbeiter*) of the Nibelung legend in the 20th century always reach back for elements that the poet of the Nibelungenlied suppressed" (213-214), i.e. some of the Norse elements. An example of this would be Lang's and Reinl's uses of the ring of fire surrounding Brunhild's castle or fortress. Edel already utilized primarily Norse sources, but also adopted the narrative element of Brunhild's belt from the Nibelungenlied; as Voorwinden implies, the plot will be molded to have the highest entertainment impact (213-214), as the art of movie-making involves entertaining and enthralling audiences. In the end, however, Edel still

went against convention in choosing to show movie-goers the Brynhild of the Völsunga saga, or rather, the Norse tradition.

The directors' motivations for choosing the German versus the Norse tradition and vice versa cannot be conclusively defined. What is curious, however, is the fact that the legend of Siegfried and Brunhild has been filmically portrayed in three decades or eras in which Germany has experienced significant to radical economic, social and political change. The Weimar Republic was the most radical of the three timeperiods, as it suffered from upheavals in all three spheres, whereas the Sixties witnessed political and social changes, and Germany since the 1990s has faced economic, political and social challenges. The role of women during the time of each film has undergone noteworthy transformations. What aspect of the Siegfried-Brunhild legend is it that has so fascinated the three directors and compelled them to filmically portray it? Has each director's subsequent depiction of Brunhild either reinforced old stereotypes or displayed acceptance of an improved status and acceptance of strong women in society, and what can we conclude from this?

I have further posited in each filmic analysis that the respective decades experienced certain elements of nationalism, whether the decade ended with the takeover of the National Socialists, whether this nationalism persisted as an unspoken element in the decades following World War II, or, whether there has been a resurgence in nationalism, as during the 1990s. Lang, Reinl and Edel all display a tendency to reach back to the first heroic legend that is foremost in all Germans' minds – The Nibelungenlied. Hake comments on the “use of historical films to provide a vehicle for dissolving history into ostensibly eternal categories of nation and race” (82) in the Twenties and Thirties, yet this can be applied to the Sixties and the Nineties/21st century in terms of a longing for the greatness of either Germania, or simply a Germany with strong

traditions, honor and pride. There is an element of nationalism in the Nibelung legend that cannot be denied. The popularity of Lang's *Die Nibelungen* in the Third Reich especially proves this; the film was said to be one of Hitler's and Göbbels' favorite films, even moving them to tears when Siegfried is "stabbed in the back," as the German *Wehrmacht* had been in World War I. This yearning for the "old" Germany is connected to German nationalism, which in turn is often associated with the greatness of the idea of Germania, German militarism, German values, such as honor, duty, pride, and self-sacrifice, and a patriarchal society. In choosing to portray the German version of Brunhild, Fritz Lang and Harald Reinl reveal a certain level of nationalism and a yearning for a Germany untroubled by gender conflict and social and economic upheaval, in addition to a strong, stable governing body and a patriarchal society. However, Uli Edel is the only director to focus on the Norse Brunhild and allow her to appear both strong and womanly, and he shaped the plot to focus on her character, not on Kriemhild's. In doing so he has caused the myth of the Norse and German warrior queen to come alive on the big screen. By revealing his level of nationalism via the literary source and plot, each director has in effect chosen to either reinforce old stereotypes of women, as is the case with Lang and Reinl, or, in Edel's case, to embrace the new role of women and thus support it. We recall McConnell's comment on the wooing of Brunhild at the top of page nineteen. Lang and Reinl have chosen to force an otherwise fierce and individualistic Brunhild into conforming to societal norms for women of their time, whereas Edel has managed to preserve the ideal embodiment of the Norse Brunhild (McConnell 7).

In closing, the analysis of Brunhild in her filmic representations has not only provided us with insight into the directors, but it has additionally shed light on the interesting trend of the Siegfried/Brunhild legend's appearance during decades of change in Germany. These films

emerge as representations of culture and cultural history in the 20th and 21st centuries, reaching back 1500 years. The link between the filmic portrayals of the legend and nationalism emerged throughout the course of this analysis and necessitated mention, yet it is a topic that requires further exploration. If Andersson had investigated Brunhild's filmic portrayals, he might have concluded that Lang and Reinl bequeathed to us a vindictive Amazon subordinated to her rival Kriemhild, while Edel bequeathed a spirited heroine with a clear consciousness of herself, equally impressive in the fullness of her ambition and the anguish of her disappointment, and object of wonder to all who told her story (248-249).

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FRITZ LANG'S DIE NIBELUNGEN – PART I: SIEGFRIEDS TOD

FILM SUMMARY

Canto One – How Siegfried slayed the dragon: In the first canto we are introduced to the hero, Siegfried, who is at the cave of Mime, the blacksmith. Siegfried forges a fine sword and is told his apprenticeship is over, as Mime can teach him no more. Siegfried is identified as the son of King Siegmund of Xanten. Prior to leaving, the men outside the cave speak of the beautiful Kriemhild at the Burgundian court of Worms. We are also introduced to the impressive court at Worms and Kriemhild, who has long blond braids and great beauty, although she seems somewhat masculine in her appearance. Siegfried vows to go to Worms and win Kriemhild, and he demands to be told the way. For an unknown reason, Mime sends him off in the direction of the dragon, and the intertitles ominously convey: “Farewell, Siegfried, son of king Siegmund. You will never get to Worms!” Siegfried rides through the Odenwald and hears the roar of the dragon Fafnir. He jumps off his white horse and challenges him. After a brief battle the hero prevails and kills the dragon. Siegfried tastes Fafnir’s blood and can now understand the song of the birds. He learns that he will become invincible if he bathes in the dragon’s blood, which he prudently does. However, Fafnir’s tale twitches, stirring up the branches of a tree and causing a leaf to fall on Siegfried’s back, making him vulnerable in that spot only.

Canto 2 - The Bard’s Song: How Volker, the bard, sang of Siegfried in front of Kriemhild, and how Siegfried came to Worms: Volker continues to sing of Siegfried, how he slayed the dragon and entered the realm of the Nibelungen. Kriemhild is sitting in the hall by a window, listening intently. The dwarf Alberich lurks in a tree in a foggy wood. He puts on the

wonder cap, rendering himself invisible, and attacks Siegfried as he rides past. Siegfried nonetheless defeats him and Alberich begs for his life. He offers him the crown of the King of the Northland, which is being wrought nearby by the Nibelungen. Siegfried now possesses the wonder cap and is able to assume any form he wishes or turn completely invisible. He allows Alberich to escort him into a cave, and they come upon a huge cup full of gold and treasure. Its formidable weight is being supported dwarves, who are chained together around the cup. Siegfried takes possession of the sword *Balmung*, forged by the Nibelungen, but Alberich attempts to choke him. When Siegfried overpowers him again, both Alberich and the other dwarves all turn to stone, and Siegfried departs. Volker sings, "Siegfried became the dragon slayer, the lord of the Nibelungen treasure. Twelve kingdoms subdued the powerful. Twelve kings became his vassals." Kriemhild presents the cloak she embroidered to Volker in reward for his song. A herald arrives in the hall, announcing Siegfried has arrived. Although Hagen von Tronje advises King Gunther to send him on his way, Gunther wishes to extend his welcome to the hero. Kriemhild is then in her chamber and tells her mother, Queen Ute, of the awful dream she had the previous night. Siegfried enters Gunther's hall majestically, followed by the 12 kings. Gunther and Siegfried greet each other. Siegfried tells King Gunther he wishes Kriemhild's hand in marriage. Hagen and Gunther exchange looks, and Hagen informs Siegfried, "King Gunther, too, has marriage plans. He has set his heart on a bold and mighty maiden." We see Brunhild at her fortress in the North. She has brown curly hair, is wearing the head garb with a raven's shape on it and she also has on chainmail; her eyes are fierce. Hagen informs Siegfried it is Brunhild, the Queen of Iceland, whom Gunther wishes for his bride. "Ringed by fire, her invincible castle towers in the Northland." Gunther does not wish to hear of Brunhild: "Why must you speak of Brunhild? You know that she has set dangerous conditions: Thrice must the

suitor best her in feats of strength or die!” Hagen says, “Siegfried, the unique hero, has come to Worms at an opportune moment. He may help us win Brunhild for you!” Siegfried is incensed at Hagen’s presumptuousness. He has twelve kings for vassals, but he is vassal to no man, now and ever! A swordfight almost ensues, but it is prevented by Kriemhild, who has arrived to offer Siegfried some wine. He is completely besotted and agrees to aid Gunther in winning Brunhild.

Canto Three – Brunhild’s Fate: How Siegfried won Brunhild for Gunther. Brunhild, dressed in plain hunting garb and standing in front of a stone wall covered in runes, is watching the maiden of the runes, who is casting and reading the runes. Brunhild is holding her longbow when one of her maidens informs her of the arrival of a dragon ship. She reports on the visitors’ progress as they near the flaming sea. Brunhild’s castle fortress sits atop a mountain. The maiden of the runes says to her, “If he be strong enough and favored by the gods, the flames will consume themselves and die.” Siegfried tells the men to be patient as they approach the flames, which slowly die out. They ride towards the castle and a messenger informs Brunhild, who looks incredulous and rushes away. From the mountaintop she looks at the scene below, longbow in hand, her hair loose and a determined look on her face. As the herald sounds the arrival of the visitors, Brunhild pulls back in shocked indignation. She looks up, a manic expression on her face: “My maidens, help me put on my armor, this will be a fight I’ve never fought before!” She seems excited at the prospect of battle and certain victory. The doors to the castle open and Siegfried, Gunther and their retinue ride in. They enter Brunhild’s hall, where she is sitting on her throne, wearing her crown/helmet. Brunhild’s eyes narrow as she shifts them from left to right, judging each man. When her eyes rest on Siegfried, they open wide; she gets up quickly and looks at him directly, approaching him: “Welcome, hero, for the fight for life or death!” Gunther looks stunned, Siegfried shakes his head: “Neither life nor death do I desire from you,

Brunhild. It is King Gunther who woos you!” Brunhild turns towards Gunther and points to the shattered weapons on the wall: “Before it is evening, King Gunther, your smothered weapons will adorn my hall.” She calls for her spear and shield, while Siegfried grabs his magic cap and asks Gunther to give him leave to make the ship ready for his royal bride. Gunther gives him leave and Brunhild whips around in indignation; her gaze follows Siegfried and she proclaims, “Let the triple battle begin, King Gunther!” They exit the hall and meet outside, where Siegfried appears, invisible. Brunhild looks the part of the hard, blood-thirsty warrior queen. She stands with legs spread apart, her shield in front of her, and her spear in her right hand, whereas Gunther looks fearful. They walk down the stairs. Hagen tries to calm King Gunther and points out the shadow of another near him. The two combatants stare at each other and Brunhild shows no softness: “You have to defeat me three times, o king: with the stone, the spring and the spear.” The first task is the throwing of the stone. Brunhild looks ahead fiercely, talking, challenging Gunther. She carries a heavy rock and throws it far with just one arm. Then she leaps unnaturally far off the rock onto the ground, spreading her legs and arms in victory. Her maidens surround her with congratulations. Gunther looks worried, but Siegfried is barely visible to the viewer, just behind him: “Fear not, o king, make you the motions and my strength will win each contest. I’ll throw the stone for you and I’ll carry you in the jump.” Once Gunther’s rock flies farther than Brunhild’s and he jumps farther as well, the maiden of the runes is shown, aghast. Brunhild seems to be shocked, but she is turned away from the viewer. Her shield and spear are brought to her. Gunther takes his shield from Hagen and must fend off her spear throw. Siegfried appears as a pale ghost again and helps to hold the spear and the shield. Brunhild is framed by the earthy rock on which she stands and the icy mountains in the distance. With her crown, shield and spear, she looks formidable. King Gunther evades her spear and she is furious. He and

Siegfried hurl the spear at her, and Brunhild's shield is split apart; she falls to the ground, her crown falling off her head. She is a defeated woman and laments her loss, hanging her head dejectedly while on the ground.

Canto Four – Welcoming the Bride: How Brunhild enters Worms and how the kings celebrated their wedding. The king's ship approaches the castle at Worms. Brunhild is in her own chamber on board, and she is without her helmet. King Gunther enters and she looks angry as he timidly approaches. He informs her of their arrival and reaches out to her, but she rises up and forcefully pushes him away. Brunhild looks bigger and stronger than King Gunther. He tries several times to subdue her, but she wrestles him to the ground and begins to bind his arms together: "Are you really the man who defeated me threefold?" she demands. When Hagen enters both rise quickly, with Gunther grabbing his wrists in dejected pain. Before leaving the chamber, Brunhild claims, "I am your captive, but I shall never be your wife!" They make their way to the castle. The entrance to the cathedral is shown; Kriemhild walks down the steps with Queen Ute to greet them. King Gunther introduces Brunhild to his mother, the queen, who attempts to give her a welcoming kiss, but Brunhild closes her eyes and moves away, casting her head down. Ute looks at Gunther in quiet dismay. The priest comes down the steps of the cathedral and is introduced to Brunhild; as he raises a large cross over her, she jerks back as it comes close to her, looking defiantly at him and closing her eyes. Siegfried approaches Kriemhild and tells Gunther to keep his promise. Brunhild turns away from the priest in shock as Gunther takes his sister's hand and Siegfried's and places them together: "If Kriemhild gives her consent, o hero, we shall celebrate a double wedding today." Brunhild runs, her face displaying shock and fury, and she angrily asks, "Since when is it customary among Burgundians to give the king's daughter (this should read: sister) in marriage to a vassal?" Siegfried steps back in

indignation and Gunther replies, "Siegfried is no vassal. I love him as though he were my brother. We shall become blood brothers today!" Brunhild seems perturbed at his response.

In the cathedral, Gunther and Brunhild are dressed in dark colors and are kneeling on the right side of the priest, whereas Kriemhild and Siegfried, both dressed in white, are on his left. Brunhild first looks at Siegfried before she and Gunther are married. Brunhild hangs her head when Siegfried and Kriemhild are married. That evening, Gunther and Siegfried become blood brothers. Hagen says ominously, "Blood is mingling with red blood, the drops fuse inseparably, whoever forsakes loyalty to the blood brother will perish at the wayside, all honor lost!" Brunhild sits in the corner of her chamber with her crown on her head. Inside the castle, Gunther is in despair, Siegfried and Hagen at his side. Hagen asks, "Brunhild has been defeated, not cowed. Shall the King of Burgundy be scorned by an obstinate woman?" Siegfried shakes his head, as he does not wish to get involved further, but he does not want Gunther to suffer either. Hagen persists: "Damned be the deed half done! Will you forsake your friend who gave you his own sister?" Siegfried shakes his head again, but Hagen is persistent: "The magic cap will change you into what you wish. Take Gunther's form and break Brunhild's iron will!" Siegfried rushes off to Brunhild's bedchamber and puts on the magic cap, appearing now as King Gunther. He enters the bedchamber and Brunhild stands up defiantly. The camera intermittently cuts to a very worried King Gunther. Siegfried approaches the warrior queen, but her arms come up and she attacks him. They struggle and she is surprised at his strength; they push each other away, but Siegfried ultimately defeats her again and removes her armlet, which leaves Brunhild bereft of her supernatural power. Gunther approaches his bedchamber as Siegfried exits, so that suddenly two Gunthers are together on the screen. Siegfried removes his cap and departs, while Gunther enters the chamber to find a sad Brunhild, whom he attempts to console. Siegfried

returns to his own bedchamber, and he and Kriemhild approach each other. Their chamber is full of light, whereas Brunhild's and Gunther's chamber goes dark.

Canto Five – A Dangerous Trophy: Now, after half a year, Siegfried's gift to his bride, the Nibelungen Treasure, arrives in Worms and how the two queens quarrel with each other.

The treasure is being brought to Worms. Hagen and the king are in the hall, and Gunther is troubled. Hagen informs him, "O king, Burgundy's glory is waning; we need the Nibelungen Treasure." In Kriemhild's chamber, Kriemhild and her mother are going through a chest and find Brunhild's armllet, which has the form of a snake. Kriemhild does not know its origin and puts it around her arm. She meets him outside where Siegfried sits singing to the birds under a blooming tree. Brunhild sees the two from her window; she seems angry and discontented. Kriemhild shows Siegfried the armllet. Siegfried is angry: "Put away the armllet, Kriemhild, it guards an ugly secret. The Mistress of the Nibelungen Treasure has no need for it!" He looks away cryptically and Kriemhild begs him to tell her the secret. Siegfried acquiesces: "Listen, Kriemhild, at how I won the armllet: and keep silent!" Brunhild comes into Gunther's hall to ask, "How long, my lord king, will your sister and her husband tarry at the court of Burgundy?" He replies that they stay for the sake of his mother, and asks if she would be willing to take the role of daughter for Queen Ute? Brunhild does not respond. Siegfried has finished telling Kriemhild the secret: "Your brother's honor is entwined with this armllet. It never should be seen again by human eyes!" Kriemhild promises to keep the secret. Siegfried then goes to hand out treasure to the courtiers. Hagen and Gunther observe this from the window, and Hagen says, "It seems to me high time, lord King, that you send Siegfried back home to Xanten!" Gunther responds, "Never shall I bid him go. He must leave of his own free will!" A plan is hatching in Brunhild's

mind. She is sitting with her hands clenched in her chamber. She is angry the king has denied her request to bid Siegfried to take leave of the court.

The church bells ring and Queen Ute asks Kriemhild to join her for mass. Brunhild also hears them and rings for her servants: "I'll go to the cathedral in the regalia of the Queen of Burgundy!" As Kriemhild and her retinue, dressed in white, approach the cathedral from the left, Brunhild and her retinue, all dressed in dark colors, approach from the right. Brunhild calls out to Kriemhild, telling her to halt: "Stay, Kriemhild, the wife of a vassal may not precede the Queen of Burgundy." She seems to gloat over her superior position. Kriemhild retorts, "How did you dare refer to Siegfried my husband?" Brunhild in her regalia responds, "Siegfried introduced himself to me as Gunther's vassal and servant. He did servant's work for my husband!" Kriemhild is furious: "You, whom he disdained, you, whom he gave away, you dare to belittle Siegfried?" Brunhild laughs so loudly that Queen Ute can hear it in the cathedral. Kriemhild approaches her, but Brunhild, her lips pressed into a thin line, looks haughtier than ever. She looks Kriemhild up and down with disdain: "Make way for the Queen of Burgundy, vassal woman!" She goes to the cathedral entrance, but Kriemhild, now incensed, runs to face her head on, holding out the armlet: "You recognize this armlet, you Queen of Burgundy?" Brunhild steps towards her, furious: "How came that armlet into your hand?" Kriemhild answers, "The carrier of the magic helmet who, disguised as Gunther, defeated you three times: Siegfried my husband gave it to me!" Brunhild is furious and indignant. Gunther is approaching and sees all is not well. Brunhild runs down the cathedral steps to confront Gunther: "King, speaks your sister the truth?" Kriemhild is full of remorse as Queen Ute comes to her side. Gunther's silence and the act of hanging his head confirms Kriemhild's claims. Brunhild pushes him away and runs off, while Kriemhild weeps. Brunhild attempts to throw herself from the drawbridge, but Hagen stops her.

In a rage she demands, “Kill Siegfried!” King Gunther joins them, and she repeats the command and soon runs off. Kriemhild is walking down the cathedral steps when Siegfried runs to her side. She must confess her betrayal and Siegfried is shocked. Hagen comes to confront him: “Your babbling, hero, was worse than murder!” In their chamber, Gunther pleads with Brunhild, who sits in her chair, brooding. “Kill Siegfried,” she says again. Gunther responds that Siegfried is safe from her wrath, as none can kill the dragon slayer. Hagen, however, reminds him, “Save in one spot, where the linden leaf clung, is he vulnerable as other men!” Hagen offers to deal with the dragon slayer, but Gunther does not wish to break their pledge of brotherhood. Brunhild stares angrily at him, because this pledge seems more important than defending her honor. She rises and says, “The one who took the armlet from me made me his wife, took my maidenhood from me!” Gunther is deeply wounded: “Tronje, announce to the people of Burgundy that I invite everybody to a royal hunt to kill a mad dog and a ravening.”

Canto Six – A Weakness Revealed: How Gunther betrayed Siegfried. Kriemhild asks to speak to Hagen. Although he does not wish to do so, she implores him. Hagen asks cryptically, “Can you keep a secret, Kriemhild?” Kriemhild responds remorsefully, “I once broke the oath to be silent and never will do so again!” Hagen informs her that the upcoming hunt might easily turn into a chase for men. A secret message has warned him of war against Burgundy! Kriemhild is very worried, but Hagen reassures her because her husband, the dragon slayer, is invincible. Kriemhild is worried that in the heat of battle a blade may strike him where the linden leaf fell. Hagen states, “If you want me to protect him, I have to know the exact spot where the invincible could be hurt!” Although Kriemhild pulls away in suspicion, she then smiles trustingly: “You are good counsel, you truest of the true. I’ll mark the spot with a little cross myself!” In Gunther’s and Brunhild’s chamber, Gunther comes to take his leave: “We are starting for the hunt in the

Odenwald forest.” Brunhild retorts, “Mind my vow, King Gunther, I shall not eat nor drink until my disgrace has been vindicated!” Her eyes close as she ignores her husband’s departure. Kriemhild is shown sewing the cross on Siegfried’s hunting tunic. Hagen is shown in the weapons chamber, where he chooses a spear and hurls it into the ground. As Kriemhild helps Siegfried prepare for the hunt, she is worried. He departs from her in good cheer as the call for the hunt is made. She begs him not to go and recounts the bad dreams she had that previous night. Siegfried laughs, hugs her, and tells her not to worry. He kisses Kriemhild and says: “Today, Gunther and I will reconcile. Who else is my enemy?” Hagen waits in the courtyard as the heralds call to the hunt again. Kriemhild can’t persuade Siegfried to stay, and he kisses her again and leaves. She stands in her chamber and crosses to the window. She waves to him as he passes a flowering tree, he spreads out his arms and greets her, and they both wave. The men depart for the hunt, crossing the drawbridge. Kriemhild stands by the window and tells her mother, “Mother, I feel as if blood is draining from my heart!”

Hunter and Prey: The hunt in the Odenwald forest lasted from morning until sundown!

In the forest, the slain animals are carried back to the camp. Siegfried rides with his dogs across the river when the horn sounds. Gunther walks up the hill; he seems miserable and sits down. Hagen comes to him, holding the spear. Gunther is torn as Siegfried gallops in; everyone greets him, as he is well-liked. He asks the cook for white wine, but Hagen informs him, “A wheel broke from the wagon loaded with wine. But I know of a cool brook nearby!” He points to his left and Siegfried approaches him and Gunther. Hagen stops him from going straight to the brook: “I always heard of you as the fastest runner of all heroes. Let’s run, you and I, for the first draught!” Siegfried agrees to the contest, even when Hagen suggests they leave their shields and weapons behind. Siegfried turns to see an upset Gunther who cannot face him, especially

when Siegfried extends his hand to him: “Gunther, my brother, let us be friends again!” Gunther would like to reconcile, but cannot: “When you are back from the spring!” Siegfried nods his head, placing his hand on his heart. Hagen calls for the race to begin. He lets Siegfried get the head start and comes back to grab his spear. Hagen climbs up higher for a better vantage point of the brook, as Siegfried arrives first, holding his hand up in victory. As Siegfried bends down to drink, the dark Hagen throws the spear, and it pierces Siegfried’s body right through the cross on his back; Siegfried turns to see his attacker and tries to approach him; he is stricken, he stumbles and staggers back towards the hunting party. Gernot and Giselher come upon him and reach out to aid him. Siegfried is brought back to Hagen and Gunther. When he sees Hagen his face becomes defiant; he shrugs off the help of the two princes, stretches his arms out wide and approaches Hagen, who has stepped in front of King Gunther. Hagen menacingly and defiantly glares at Siegfried, who lifts his shield above his head, just steps away from Hagen, meaning to strike him with it, but then Siegfried falls at his feet. He reaches out towards something (possibly calling for Kriemhild), but falls back dead. Gunther has looked away the entire time, stricken. The two brothers reach their arms out towards Hagen, but then they all drop their heads, except for Hagen. “Grim Hagen spoke: “The hunt is over!””

Canto 7 – Siegfried’s Homecoming: How Kriemhild swears revenge to Hagen Tronje.

Kriemhild lies in her bed and is awakened by a wind blowing through her window, causing the curtains to flutter. A dog howls in the courtyard and Kriemhild seems filled with foreboding. The gates to the castle are shown and the wind is blowing strongly. The hunting party returns with torches, bearing Siegfried’s body. Meanwhile, Brunhild is sitting in the chair in her chamber. Kriemhild is worried and gets out of bed. Hagen is pounding on the main gate and the men are finally admitted and enter the castle walls. Kriemhild puts on her wrap and goes to the

window. She sees nobody at the gate, but the dog continues to howl. Someone runs down the hallway and discovers Siegfried's dead body in front of Kriemhild's door. Kriemhild runs to her door to find Siegfried on the floor. She has to first brace herself, and she then haltingly approaches him in utter shock. Kriemhild kneels at his head and touches the wound over his heart. She turns her hand over – it has blood on it. She thinks back to Siegfried's smiling farewell in front of the tree in full blossom, his arms outstretched; the tree's leaves die and the tree becomes a dead and lifeless husk; it begins to resemble a skull made of straw. The dead figure of the tree completes its transformation into a skull, and the background goes black. Kriemhild is stricken in her grief. She touches Siegfried's face, stroking it gently.

In Brunhild's chamber, a downcast Gunther approaches his queen. She is still seated, wrapped in a black cloak, and leans toward him eagerly for his news. Gunther informs her, "You may break your fast, Brunhild, Siegfried is dead." Brunhild closes her eyes as if in pain, while Gunther hangs his head. Brunhild then opens her eyes and laughs hysterically; Gunther is shocked. She stands up and leans against the wall: "Hail to you, King Gunther, for the sake of a woman's lie you have slain your most loyal friend!" She relishes telling him this, and looks evil in her happiness. Brunhild continues to torment him until he departs, her eyes wide with madness, her crazed laughter continuing. However, it is suddenly replaced by a quiet and deeply saddened look. Brunhild's eyes close once again, as she hangs her head and pulls her cloak tighter about her. Her shadow behind her on the wall makes her look much bigger than she is.

In front of Kriemhild's chamber, Queen Ute, Gunther and her other brothers have gathered. Gunther reaches out to Kriemhild, who continues to stroke Siegfried's face while looking down on it. Kriemhild ignores him, and the others shrink away from him. Gunther hangs his head. Hagen's terrible shadow appears in the doorway before he enters the room. Kriemhild

looks up at him with loathing in her eyes. She then looks towards Siegfried's wound and jumps, startled. Kriemhild pulls back his shirt and sees the wound has begun to bleed, marking Hagen as Siegfried's murderer. She sits up, staring at Hagen, and points at him accusingly; yet Hagen boldly and openly meets her stare.

An Appeal for Justice: Then Kriemhild stands and walks over to her brother, Gunther. Pointing at Hagen, she says, "I call to you for justice, King Gunther! Hagen Tronje has slain my husband!" Gunther hangs his head again and Kriemhild puts her hand on his chest, pointing at Siegfried. Gunther moves away from her over to Hagen. He looks back guiltily, but then puts his arm across Hagen's chest, as if he would defend him. Kriemhild looks sad, and her mother Ute, standing right behind her, also looks stricken. Kriemhild addresses the other men. One by one, her two brothers also go to stand in front of Hagen: "Loyalty for loyalty, Kriemhild. His deed is ours. His fate is ours. Our breast is his shield." Kriemhild, with tears in her eyes, is in utter disbelief. Men come to carry Siegfried's corpse to the cathedral and Queen Ute must restrain her daughter from following. She holds Kriemhild close to her.

The Death Knell: The cathedral bell rings. Brunhild hears it ringing from her chamber; she looks this way and that, pulling her black cloak more tightly up to her chin, and then slowly moves forward, her head down. Kriemhild pushes her mother's arms away. She pulls her white cloak closed in front of her and moves towards Hagen and Gunther: "You might try to hide among my clan, behind the altars of God, or at the end of the world: You cannot escape my vengeance, Hagen Tronje!" Kriemhild departs for the cathedral. She is engulfed in the massive archway as she enters the cathedral. Inside the cathedral, knights are posted on each side of Siegfried's corpse, which lies in front of the altar. To Siegfried's left at his feet, a figure in a black cloak is kneeling on the ground. Kriemhild slowly approaches the altar. She moves over to

the hunched figure and pulls back its hood: it is Brunhild! She has a dagger stuck in her heart and is hunched over, dead. Kriemhild turns and says, "Announce to King Gunther, my brother, the Queen of Burgundy is dead!" Two guards depart to deliver the news to Gunther. Kriemhild walks back to Siegfried and kneels down by his head. She pulls her white cloak more closely around her, and bows down further. "Thus ends the tale of Siegfried."

HARALD REINL'S DIE NIBELUNGEN

FILM SUMMARY

Part One: Siegfrieds Tod: Volker, the bard, introduces the major characters of the Burgundian court via song:

“Uns sind aus alten Zeiten, Wunder viel gesagt.
Von Helden reich an Ehren, von Kühnheit unverzagt.
Von frohen Festes Zeiten, von Weinen und von Klagen.
Von kühner Recken Streit könnt ihr nun Wunder hören sagen.”

“Zu Worms an dem Rheine, sie saßen mit ihrer Kraft.
Mit Knechten und Vasallen und stolzer Ritterschaft.
Dort bei den Burgunden, so war ihr Land genannt,
eine stolzere Burg in keinem Land stand.”

“Dort herrschte ein König, edel und reich.
An Klugheit und hohem Sinn, war keiner ihm gleich.
Gunther war sein Name, doch sein Thron blieb allein,
wer wird in Burgund einst die Königin sein?”

“Da waren des Königs Bruders, Gernot und Giselherr,
jung und stark mit Schwert und Speer.
Es wuchs in Burgunden ein Mädchen, jung und rein,
dass in allen anderen Landen, kein Schöneres mochte sein.
Die Schwester der drei Brüder, Kriemhild ward sie genannt.”

“Da war auch Hagen von Tronje,
Oheim des Königs am Rhein,
und Dankwart, sein Bruder,
auch Ortwin von Metz trat ein.”

Worms am Rhein: *Siegfrieds Tod* begins with Volker singing to the viewers about the Burgundian court at Worms am Rhein: King Gunther, his brothers Gernot and Giselher, as well as their uncle Hagen von Tronje, his brother Dankwart and Ortwin von Metz are all introduced. Queen Ute is going to mass and her daughter Kriemhild will follow. Hagen chastises Gunther for

not participating in the hunt, but Gunther does not wish to antagonize the Pope, especially since Attila (König Etzel) is at the Danube and heading towards the Rhine. Gunther announces Siegfried of Xanten is on his way to their court, and all want Volker to tell the tale of the dragon slayer. Hagen wants to also hear about Brunhild, for King Gunther's sake.

Siegfried: Volker tells the tale of Siegfried of Xanten, the son of a rich king. Siegfried finds a master blacksmith in Mine (Miene), who teaches him the art of sword making. Kriemhild stays behind to listen to Volker's story. Siegfried is almost killed by another blacksmith, yet he defends himself and wants to kill Mine, who orchestrated this. It suddenly seems Siegfried has forged his greatest sword. Mine excitedly has Siegfried put the sword to the test: Siegfried splits a feather with it and cuts iron with the sword, and he calls it *Notung*. The earth shakes and Mine says it is Fafnir the dragon. Siegfried can't believe it and claims he will kill the dragon and win the hoard of the Nibelungs. He rides off, but Mine runs to alert Alberich of Siegfried's intent. He states ominously: "Sein (Fafnir's) Giftauch wird dich erwürgen!" Siegfried rides through countryside full of large rock formations. He is attacked by the invisible dwarf Alberich, who has put on the *Tarnkappe* and said the magic words: "Nacht und Nebel, niemand gleich." Siegfried defeats him but Alberich runs away, invisible again. He calls out to Fafnir that one who wishes his death is coming. Siegfried enters the cave of Fafnir, and the dragon's sulfurous breath almost chokes him. The dragon looks fierce, but Siegfried stabs him to death. Fafnir's blood runs into a depression in the ground.

Kampf gegen die Alben: Suddenly it is daytime, where before it was dark. Siegfried tastes the blood on his sword and suddenly understands birdsong. The birds advise him to bathe in the dragon's blood so his skin will become hard as *Horn*. Siegfried follows their advice, but a leaf falls on his back, keeping him vulnerable in that one spot. Then he is dressed again and takes his

sword to explore the cave. The dwarf Alberich, wearing his crown, comes out: “Siegfried von Xanten, du stehst an der Mark von Nifleheim, und dort ruht der Nibelungenhort.” Siegfried claims it as his own inheritance. Alberich laughs at him and holds the sword *Balmung*. He puts on his *Tarnkappe* again and engages Siegfried in combat. Siegfried defeats him and his dwarf helpers, as well. He wins *Balmung* and the *Tarnkappe* from Alberich, who promises to take him to the Nibelungen hoard if Siegfried spares his life.

Die Befreiung Brunhilds: They walk further into the cave and come upon a pile of treasure. Siegfried will take the hoard and the service of Alberich, who will now be his servant. Siegfried picks up the ring of the Nibelungen and asks what it is. Alberich tells him of Brunhild, who had been chosen by Odin to guard this very treasure, but she fell asleep and it was stolen by the Nibelungen. Odin punished her by putting her to sleep in her fortress at *Isenstein* until someone would come and place the ring back on her finger. Siegfried wants to rescue Brunhild, but Alberich warns him of the *Waberlohe*, the wall of fire surrounding *Isenstein*. Siegfried is determined to travel to *Island*, and Alberich and his dwarves build him a Viking-style ship with a dragon’s head carved of wood adorning it. When they arrive in *Island*, Siegfried rides to the *Waberlohe*. He runs through the flames, and receives a painful burn on his back where the linden leaf fell. Siegfried opens the gates to the castle and finds Brunhild sleeping on the stairs leading up to her throne. She is dressed in a magnificent red cloak and is dark-haired and beautiful. Siegfried carries her to the throne and slips the ring on her finger. Brunhild awakens: she is a beautiful queen. Brunhild rises from her throne and Siegfried introduces himself. The fire outside has been extinguished.

Island: Siegfried proclaims, “Du bist frei, Brunhild, frei!” Brunhild looks happily out into the countryside: “Mein Land, geboren aus Feuer und Eis.” Siegfried and Brunhild ride together

across the countryside, she on a dark horse. Panoramic shots of the countryside follow: meadows, hills, rivers, mountains, volcanoes, geysers, waterfalls and thermal springs. Brunhild enjoys showing Siegfried her country. They continue on to the ocean and Siegfried claims he now knows the North and her country. Brunhild tells him the country belongs to him, but Siegfried says his ship is waiting. Brunhild responds that the Norns are waiting for the two of them to fulfill their destiny. She asks Siegfried to come back to Isenstein and make his decision then. It is sunset at the castle. Brunhild asks, "North or south?" She is angry, because Siegfried wants to bring the hoard to Xanten, to the South. Brunhild pleads with him to stay, but Siegfried promises to return. Brunhild foretells Siegfried will share the long night with a queen. He departs on his ship, with Brunhild looking on from atop the cliff. When Siegfried sees her, he feels compelled to turn back to her immediately, but the dwarf keeps him from doing so. He tells Siegfried a man such as himself does not hang on a woman. Brunhild looks tragically beautiful as Siegfried sails away. Volker ends his song: "Das ist die Maer von Siegfried, dem König von Xanten am Rhein. Sein Schiff, es fuhr nach dem Süden, dort sucht er die Königin sein." Gunther and Hagen look forward to the gold, and Brunhild. Gunther also repeats that Siegfried is looking for his queen, and he looks over to his sister Kriemhild, who has been listening in rapt attention.

Siegfried und Gunther: Kriemhild smiles and walks away with a dreamy expression on her face. The heralds announce a visitor; Siegfried has arrived at the castle of Worms. He is on his white horse wearing kingly blue. Alberich proclaims Siegfried's identity. He wishes to challenge the king to a knightly duel, and the victor will take control of the loser's lands and belongings. Gunther calls Siegfried a hothead and feels his true intention is to claim Kriemhild's hand. Gunther tells his brothers and friends this would be a good alliance and gives the orders to receive Siegfried with honor. Hagen goes outside and invites Siegfried to enter, but Alberich

says the king should come to Siegfried. Swords are drawn, but Kriemhild drops a gauzy handkerchief from her balcony and it flies right past Siegfried. He looks up at her and they both smile; Siegfried sheathes his sword and enters the castle with Hagen. From his window in the hall, Gunther laughs at his correct assessment of Siegfried's intentions. Gunther greets Siegfried warmly, telling him he will be honored and may take what he likes. Siegfried wants to win it with his sword, but Gunther won't be baited. He asks Siegfried if he is baptized, and Siegfried confirms this. Gunther invites him to the Easter mass, saying his sister never misses a church service. All go to the massive cathedral, but Alberich and Hagen remain outside. Siegfried enters and kneels down across the aisle from Kriemhild. They cast shy glances at each other. Kriemhild then departs the cathedral and Siegfried returns her handkerchief to her outside.

Sieg gegen Sachsen: Gunther is in good spirits at the prospect of the alliance between Burgund and the Netherlands when a soldier comes staggering in, warning of the enemy at their door - King Liudegast of Saxony. Siegfried informs Gunther he will ride out, accompanied by Gunther's brave knights, and bring him King Liudegast. The battlefields are shown, and the ensuing joust between Siegfried and Liudegast; they switch to swords and Siegfried defeats him. Liudegast states his life belongs to Gunther of Burgund. Back in Worms all are celebrating. Gunther allows Liudegast to return home after swearing fealty to him and Burgund. Meanwhile Kriemhild and Siegfried are walking by the river and Siegfried kisses her. Hagen arrives and wants Siegfried to tell him if there is a wish that Gunther might fulfill for him. Looking at Kriemhild, Siegfried says yes. Gunther says to his retinue he will fulfill Siegfried's wish if he helps him win Brunhild in marriage. The companions fear that a magic power protects her virginity. Beauty and strength, as well as the northern lands, are very appealing to Gunther. When Siegfried walks in Gunther informs him the siblings of the king may not marry before

him, but he wishes to win Brunhild as his queen and asks for Siegfried's aid. We do not see Siegfried's reaction to this request, but he clearly agrees, because they are next seen approaching Island. Brunhild is waiting on the cliff, looking out as if searching for Siegfried. When she spots the ship she smiles with joy and claims Siegfried has kept his promise and she will not defend herself against his strength. Frigga reads the runes and tells her men are coming, one of whom will fight against her, remove her belt of chastity and take her to a foreign land. Brunhild is willing to follow Siegfried, but is angry when Frigga informs her it will be another man. Brunhild awaits the men outside. Siegfried, Hagen, Gunther and Volker have come. Siegfried approaches her and Brunhild is overjoyed. Gunther tells Volker his song did her justice, as he has never seen a more beautiful queen. He asks how she can be so strong, when she is so thin and girl-like. Volker informs him it is Odin's magic that he gave her. Brunhild is angry, because she learns Siegfried is representing another. Siegfried is stony-faced and Brunhild asks him whether he is a king's vassal now.

Brautwerbung: Brunhild approaches Gunther who greets *Island's* beautiful queen. She asks if he is King Gunther and says Siegfried of Xanten is representing him for her hand in marriage. This means battle! Gunther replies that in Burgund they don't fight women, but rather love them. Brunhild retorts they are in *Island* and *Island's* queen will only follow the man who can defeat her in a challenge with stone, spear and sword. She storms off and is seen galloping across the landscape on her black horse. That evening in their cave, Hagen tries to persuade Gunther to leave. Gunther says he has seen Brunhild and does not wish to be king if he can't have her. Later Gunther reminds Siegfried that his marriage to Kriemhild is tied to Gunther's fortunes in *Island*. Siegfried assures him he will be invisible and will help Gunther. The next morning Brunhild is wearing a full iron helmet, chainmail and her red cloak. Gunther and his

retinue approach. Brunhild honors the king who boldly looks death in the eye. Gunther honors her for playing with her freedom. Siegfried is not present, and Gunther says he is guarding the ship. Brunhild walks to higher ground to toss the stone. Siegfried is at Gunther's side. Brunhild touches her belt to the stone and lifts it, hurling it far away. Gunther claims that was Odin's power. Gunther goes up to the higher ground and attempts to lift the rock. Brunhild mocks him, but the stone is lifted and flies past her stone. Volker yells excitedly and Brunhild's mouth is open in shock. She glares at Gunther, takes the spear and throws it incredibly far. Then she walks back to the other spear, picks it up and throws it to Gunther. With Siegfried's help, Gunther's spear flies farther than Brunhild's. An angry Brunhild goes to lower ground to get her shield and sword, as does Gunther. Brunhild attacks first, her eyes glaring. Three times she strikes his shield, denting it, but Gunther does not go down. Brunhild is incredulous. Now it is Gunther's turn and his first strike splits Brunhild's shield and knocks her unconscious to the ground. Brunhild sits up, looking at him in amazement and shock as he goes to her and helps her, calling her his queen. She is utterly perplexed and dazed as she looks at her ruined shield. They depart on the dragon ship and Brunhild no longer wears her chainmail, but still her crown and red cloak. She looks at her castle of Worms as they approach. Gunther walks over to her and puts his arm around her, an act she finds unpleasant. They arrive and ride towards the castle. Gunther asks Brunhild to favor her people with a smile. She retorts she cannot smile, as she is a prisoner. Kriemhild and Lady Ute run out of the castle to greet them all. Gunther helps Brunhild off her horse, when suddenly Brunhild spies Siegfried and Kriemhild happily reuniting.

Doppelhochzeit: Brunhild asks Gunther about the identity of the girl. He tells her it is his sister Kriemhild, Siegfried's bride. They will marry at the same time together with Gunther and Brunhild. Gernot und Giseler greet Gunther and Brunhild. Queen Ute comes to Gunther and

then greets Brunhild as her daughter. Kriemhild welcomes Gunther and then is introduced to Brunhild, who wishes to know since when it is possible that a king gives his sister to his vassal. Gunther informs her Siegfried is also a king who went to Island as his friend. Kriemhild tells Brunhild she would like to be a sister to her, to which Brunhild responds she would like to be a queen to her. Later at the cathedral the grooms await their brides, who both wear white, although Brunhild is wearing her runic belt. Siegfried and Kriemhild greet each other with loving looks, with Brunhild looking on angrily. Brunhild tells Gunther she will become his wife, but never his woman. Alberich and Hagen remain outside once again; it is the day of the summer solstice. Alberich states that a valkyrie goes to the altar and Odin gives his blessing. Inside the cathedral, the two couples are on opposite sides of the altar, with Brunhild facing Siegfried. She looks hurt and angry at Siegfried's and Kriemhild's happiness, and Gunther perceives this. The priest puts his cross-embroidered cloth around her and Gunther's hands and then blesses them with a cross. At this time Rüdiger arrives outside the cathedral with his daughter Hildegund and one of Etzel's brothers is with him. Hagen greets him and learns that Etzel would like to wed Kriemhild. Hagen informs Rüdiger he it is too late, as Siegfried of Xanten has beaten him to it. Later at the wedding celebration, Kriemhild and Siegfried chase each other like lovesick newlyweds. Siegfried shows Kriemhild the hoard of the Nibelungs, which now belongs to her. Etzel's brother gazes at Kriemhild and finds her incomparably beautiful. Gunther and Brunhild sit on their thrones.

Wotan's Kräfte: A messenger announces an envoy from the king of Norway, who comes bearing a golden harpoon for Queen Brunhild to remind her of her homeland. Brunhild smiles with pleasure at this thoughtful gift, until all cheer the queen of Burgund. Etzel's brother brings two horses, a white one for Kriemhild, a dark one for Brunhild. Siegfried walks over to Brunhild,

wishing to give her a necklace as a wedding gift. Looking at the ring on her finger, Brunhild responds angrily, "Gib sie Kriemhild, mich hast du schon überreich beschenkt!" She rises to depart and King Gunther joins her. Siegfried's and Kriemhild's balcony faces that of Brunhild and Gunther. Kriemhild comes out onto the balcony to close the windows and the queens see each other. Brunhild has a look of envy, anger and hurt on her face; Kriemhild meets and holds her gaze before drawing the curtains closed. The king and his friends are outside his chamber. Gunther enters Brunhild's chamber. She wishes to be left alone, although he comes to her in love. Brunhild challenges Gunther to embrace her and unfolds her arms to reveal her belt, taunting him to break it if he can. The belt causes Gunther to stagger back, as he insists he defeated and won her. Brunhild claims he is not the strong king who defeated her and accuses him and his retinue of betrayal. She is uncertain what spell she has fallen prey to, but she knows it was not his strength. Gunther staggers back again, and Brunhild says she is his wife, but will never be his woman.

The next day Etzel's brother departs. Volker says it was a stormy night. In Kriemhild's chamber, Siegfried is dressed and smiling, with Kriemhild still comfortably in bed. Siegfried calls her his beloved queen and tells her to get up. Kriemhild asks him if Brunhild has reason to hate him, to which Siegfried responds no. Kriemhild is curious why Brunhild treated her rudely and thinks that Brunhild either hates him or loves him. Hagen knocks on the door, telling Siegfried Gunther would like to see him. Gunther is pacing in his hall, saying their deception is now turning against them. Gunther asks him for one more favor, to help him, because Burgund has a queen but he does not have a wife. Siegfried agrees to help him. Brunhild is in her chamber, wearing her red gown. A storm is approaching. Alberich says Odin's ravens are flying and bringing *Unheil*. Gunther enters Brunhild's bedchamber. She gets off the bed and stands to

challenge him with her fists clenched. He comes towards her and grabs her hands. Kriemhild is shown sleeping in her bed and she awakens in fright as the thunder crashes, when Brunhild and Gunther clash. Kriemhild calls out for Siegfried, but he is not there. Gunther forces Brunhild onto the bed, with the assistance of an invisible Siegfried, who then pulls off her belt as Gunther tries to undo it. Brunhild then pulls Gunther to her, finally believing he is the man who defeated her. Whether she thinks it may be Siegfried is a good possibility, since she kisses him as passionately as he kisses her. Siegfried returns to his room and hides the belt in a chest, while Kriemhild secretly observes him. In the hall, Alberich pushes Hagen to the edge when he says Burgundy would be nothing without Xanten and Siegfried. Hagen swears to kill anyone who betrays his king.

Häuslicher Unfrieden: As Siegfried sleeps, Kriemhild gets up to find Brunhild's belt in the chest and she assumes the worst. The next day the entire sky is clear. Brunhild and Gunther sleep in their bed, but Brunhild wakes up, realizes what has happened and sits up in shock, staring at the king. A loving smile crosses her lips as she lies back down to look at him. In Kriemhild's chamber, it is Kriemhild who awakens Siegfried. She tells him he never answered her question the previous day, but Kriemhild has decided Brunhild loves Siegfried. She wants to know how Gunther defeated Brunhild if she has magical powers. Siegfried insists Gunther defeated Brunhild, yet Kriemhild remarks Brunhild still wore the belt yesterday, and wonders if she still has it. Kriemhild tells Siegfried she believes Brunhild still has the belt, because she loves Siegfried, but Siegfried denies this. Kriemhild is angry and goes to the cathedral. She waits there for Brunhild who arrives smiling:

Brunhild: "Alles Gute sei mit dir, liebe Schwester."
Kriemhild: "Plötzlich bin ich deine Schwester?"
Brunhild: "Sind wir nicht Schwestern, im Frauenlos?"

Kriemhild: “Seid wann bist du eine Frau? Kannst du denn kochen? Kannst du nähen?”

Brunhild: “Mit der Nadel verstehst du besser umzugehen, das merke ich. Ich reiche dir meine Hand in Freundschaft und du stichst mich.”

Kriemhild: “Du, die du so viele Wunden geschlagen hast, du bist empfindlich gegen Nadelstiche? Die Unnatur rächt sich also.”

Brunhild: “Wie meinst du das?”

Kriemhild: “Du hast der Liebe widerstrebt wie Keine, jetzt macht sie dich zur Strafe doppelt blind.”

Brunhild looks angry and perplexed.

Brunhild: “Ich bin nicht blind. In Islands Nacht lernt man auch im Dunkeln zu sehen.”

She walks up the steps, but Kriemhild will not back down. The court is watching.

Kriemhild: “Und trotzdem glaubst du, dass Gunther dich allein bezwungen hat, im Wettkampf und im Brautbett.”

Brunhild: “Du lügst!! Lass deine Königin vorausgehen. Aus meinem Weg, Verleumderin!”

Kriemhild: “Verleumderin nennst du mich? Hier, kennst du den Gürtel?”

She opens her cloak to reveal the belt around her waist.

Brunhild: “Wie kommst du zu meinem Gürtel?”

Kriemhild: “Siegfried nahm ihn dir, und schenkte ihn mir. Du Buhlin meines Gatten. Du darfst drei Schritte hinter mir gehen.”

Kriemhild sweeps past Brunhild into the cathedral.

The realization that she has been betrayed dawns on Brunhild. She drops the cross she is holding onto the steps of the cathedral and walks down the steps, stony-faced. She walks past Hagen, then back to Hagen, saying Tronje also lies in the north, and asking whether he wishes to be her knight. Hagen responds he has always been her knight. Brunhild tells him that Kriemhild carries her belt and that Siegfried has betrayed the king’s secret. In Kriemhild’s chamber, Siegfried is holding Kriemhild and asking where the belt is. He opens her cape and sees it around her waist. Siegfried steps back, aghast. Kriemhild confesses she saw him enter their room that night with Brunhild’s belt and that she was sick with envy. Kriemhild cries with remorse. Brunhild is in her own chamber, also suffering. In Gunther’s hall Hagen informs him what has transpired and that Siegfried has betrayed him. Gunther does not believe it and says that women’s fights should not be taken seriously, but Hagen tells him Kriemhild insulted Brunhild in front of the entire court.

Kriemhild is shown attempting to speak with Brunhild, but she does not allow her entry; Kriemhild seems inconsolable. Siegfried is talking with Gunther, assuring him he did not betray him. Gunther tells him not to worry and to go to Kriemhild, who needs him. Hagen tells Gunther Siegfried deserves death. Gunther does not wish to hear this, yet he is tempted by the treasure, although they are now related and Siegfried is invincible. Hagen reminds him of the one vulnerable spot on his back. Gunther is against Hagen's idea, but does realize only Siegfried could have betrayed him. Hagen is shown talking to Brunhild. Now Brunhild knows who defeated her and she feels like a lovesick fool. Hagen tells her that blood can wash away the dishonor. In the hall, Gunther announces a hunt, after which Siegfried and Kriemhild will depart for Xanten.

Der Verrat: Hagen is talking to Kriemhild, telling her there are still Saxons in the *Odenwald* and that Siegfried could be in danger. Kriemhild is not worried, as Siegfried is invincible. Hagen knows this, but reminds her of the spot on which the linden leaf fell. He would like to stay near Siegfried and protect this spot with his shield, if he knew where the spot was. Kriemhild tells him she knows its location because of Siegfried's burn scar. Hagen asks her if she could stitch a cross onto Siegfried's hunting garb. Kriemhild thanks him for his good advice, but then asks him if she can trust him. Hagen nods and Kriemhild stitches a white cross on Siegfried's clothing. Before the hunt, Siegfried waves to Kriemhild, who stands on her balcony looking concerned. Volker's voice narrates the hunt. All are in the *Odenwald* and Hagen asks where the invincible Siegfried may be. Siegfried's horse comes towards them, alone. But Siegfried is close behind, carrying a dead bear. Most of the party sighs with relief. Siegfried is tired and thirsty and asks for wine. Hagen says the wagon with the wine must have lost its way, but tells him of a spring nearby, within walking distance. Siegfried runs off, although Gernot and

Giselher implore him to stay. Gunther tells them to let him go, since he is thirsty. Siegfried comes to the spring, while Hagen rides there, positioning himself by a tree. Siegfried runs down to the spring. Hagen spots the white cross and throws the spear, hitting his mark perfectly. Siegfried turns to face him and lifts a rock to throw at Hagen, but he dies. Gunther's brothers come to the spring and look at Hagen, asking him what he has done. At the cathedral in Worms, Kriemhild is praying. Brunhild wrings her hands in her chamber. Hagen knocks on her door and informs Brunhild that Siegfried of Xanten is dead. Brunhild looks sorrowful and hangs her head. Siegfried's body is carried into the castle at night, and Kriemhild exits the cathedral and sees the dead body. It has been laid at the foot of the cathedral stairs. Kriemhild approaches slowly and weeps over Siegfried's body. The sun rises and people are crying. Kriemhild is still with Siegfried. Her two brothers approach and hug Kriemhild. Gunther also comes with Volker. Kriemhild looks at him, but his face is expressionless. Hagen approaches, not looking at Kriemhild, and Siegfried's wound begins to bleed, marking him as the killer. Kriemhild looks at him with hatred, accusing him of being the murderer. She swears on the life of the child she is carrying, that she will avenge Siegfried's death on the murderer and all those who are guilty with him. The camera focuses on Gunther and Hagen, and the sun sets.

Part Two – *Kriemhilds Rache*: Nine months later, after having avoided King Gunther for the entire time, Brunhild looks on as Frigga casts the runes. Brunhild asks what the runes say, but then says she knows what they will reveal. Frigga ominously pleads, "Tu's nicht!" Gunther is allowed into the chamber. Brunhild tells him all is forgotten and forgiven. Gunther wishes this would mean love, and Brunhild looks tragically sad. She tells him it does mean it is love and tries to walk away, but he kisses her. Gunther claims Burgund will have an heir. He tells Hagen of the change in Brunhild and wants to organize a festival for a second wedding celebration

between him and his wife. Brunhild visits Siegfried's tomb, while Gunther looks for her everywhere; he suddenly feels uneasy. While this is happening Kriemhild gives birth to a boy. Gunther and his retinue find Brunhild collapsed at Siegfried's tomb. Gunther is horrified and takes her in his arms; Brunhild is dead of a self-inflicted stab wound. The ring of the Nibelungs lies on top of the coffin and Hagen takes it. This chapter ends with Kriemhild promising her son will avenge his father's death. Brunhild's funeral is shown right before the baptism of Siegfried's and Kriemhild's son.

ULI EDEL'S DARK KINGDOM: THE DRAGON KING

FILM SUMMARY

Dark Kingdom: The Dragon King

In the establishing shot an old map of Europe is shown, with pagan sketches and names appearing and fading away; the camera eventually zooms in on Burgundia and then onto the skull of a dragonhead on a sunken Viking ship, with gold strewn all about the river bottom. During this time, a narrator is speaking:

“1500 years ago most of Europe had abandoned its old beliefs and turned to the Christian faith. Only in the North did the people hold on to the Gods of their ancestors, the most powerful of these Gods was Odin. He reigned among the stars in Valhalla, his ravens gave him wisdom and memory. But whilst the fire of the ancient powers faded, a wondrous tale arose that captured the hearts of the people. It told of a blacksmith who slew a mighty dragon and won a legendary treasure – the Dragon Gold.”

Start: The castle in Xanten is shown. Siegfried, a young boy, is asleep as his parents, the king and queen of Xanten, help defend their castle and their kingdom against an attack by the Saxon twin kings. Siegfried comes face-to-face with one of the twin kings, who calls him a “Xanten whelp”, but he is rescued by his father, who is then murdered by them. His mother attempts to escape with her young son. As they try to quietly pass the enemy in a marsh, his mother is shot in the back with an arrow and dies, just as she releases her son, who is holding on to a piece of driftwood. Siegfried’s mother is very much a “Brunhild-figure”, tall, blond, and dressed in battle gear. Siegfried is found by the old blacksmith, Eyvind, floating in the river.

Siegfried cannot recall his name nor what has happened. We learn later that Eyvind gives Siegfried the name Erec in order to safeguard him from possible harm.

Brunhild's Destiny: “12 Years Later”: One of Odin’s ravens watches as Brunhild’s companion - Hallbera - casts the runes. They are in a ship sailing down the Rhein. Brunhild asks, “What do you see?” Hallbera replies, “Patience, child, Odin’s powers are in the runes – they never lie.” This is our first encounter with Brunhild: she is beautiful, has long blond hair, and is dressed in warrior garb. Hallbera reads the runes: “Fire will reign down from the sky very soon.” Brunhild wonders, “So far from home, what destiny could I have here?” Hallbera predicts a man will come after the fire, a man as strong as Brunhild. This warrior’s strength will match her own. Brunhild looks incredulous as Hallbera continues, “He will even best you in battle.” Yet no one has ever done that before and, according to Hallbera, no one else ever will. Brunhild walks onto the deck of the ship, covered in furs. Her ship passes Siegfried’s foster father’s smithy as Siegfried comes to the river to fetch water. A look passes between him and Brunhild as they spot each other. Siegfried has been raised by the blacksmith, who has also taught him his trade.

The Blacksmith and the Queen: At nighttime the Icelanders have made a camp. Brunhild sits around the fire and looks up at the wondrous display of stars in the sky. Siegfried is also outside at the smithy with Eyvind. Eyvind says, “Look at that pale path of light. That’s the road to Valhalla – I wish I could see them sitting up there. All the great heroes at table with the Gods – they’re watching over us mortals.” Siegfried wishes to know why they care about mortals. Eyvind replies they need the mortals as much as the mortals need them. He states, “We’ll fight on their side when the evil powers attack us.” Siegfried wonders how mortals know what the Gods want them to do. His foster-father believes, “They map out our destinies and there are all the signs in the sky. And if they see from up there that we do something that’s bad for us, they,

they get furious.” When Siegfried mentions that the Christian God is all about forgiveness, Eyvind calls the Christians a strange cult. At that moment, a comet streaks out of the sky and lands with a large crash, a ball of fire in the forest. Eyvind thinks it is *Ragnarök*, the end of days, and warns Siegfried never to meddle with the Gods, but Siegfried decides to take a closer look. He runs to the site of impact, sees the large crater made by the comet, and finds some strange metal in its center. Brunhild rides up on her white horse, a cloaked and mysterious figure. Siegfried observes Brunhild’s approach as she goes to inspect the metal in the crater. He comes out of hiding, Brunhild draws her sword and they fight with poles and swords. At first Brunhild seems to be defeating Siegfried, until he flings her to the ground and holds a pole to her neck – her hood falls back to reveal her; both of them are in shock. Siegfried remembers her as the woman from the launch and Brunhild remembers him as the man from the smithy. She calls him the tamer of fire and the elements, and asks him what sort of substance they have found. Siegfried believes it is a kind of strange metal, whose like he has never seen before. Brunhild would like to see what kind of weapon one might forge from such a substance. She tells Siegfried that he is the reason she has come, however. She asks Siegfried if he believes in destiny. Brunhild continues, “We were both sent a sign that would bring us together here.” Siegfried states the entire country saw this sign, to which Brunhild responds they are the only two who are there. She says, “Today, the runes promised to lead me to a man whose strength would be as great as mine, and you defeated me.” Siegfried tries to shrug this off, but Brunhild informs him no one has ever done that before, until now. She tells him they were meant to meet. Brunhild seems to accept her destiny as foretold by the Gods and sees Siegfried as her equal. They kiss and make love. The raven nearby crows several times, and Hallbera hears it. Afterwards, Siegfried, known as Erec, asks why Brunhild cannot stay with him. Brunhild replies

she has duties to perform, but that she will wait for him. When Brunhild tells him she can be found in Iceland, she must then also reveal she is the only Brunhild in Iceland who is queen. Siegfried is amazed that she is the Queen of Iceland, and Brunhild asks if this makes a difference. Siegfried assures her it does not change his feelings. Brunhild replies, “Good, because no matter what happens, I will love you forever.” Siegfried promises he will come to her. In the morning Siegfried wakes up alone, and there is a raven in the tree again. Brunhild has left him some of the strange metal, which he picks up as the raven flies away. We see the dragon, which has just awakened.

The Burned Town: Siegfried returns to the smithy and tells Eyvind about his encounter. Eyvind says, “There have always been things that have been different about you, maybe she felt them too.” They are packing up the boat with goods for the Burgundian court and Siegfried asks to be taken along on his journey to Burgund this year. He thinks the river might hold an answer to what happened before Eyvind found him. He knows nothing about himself and has never left the smithy. The landscape is magnificent, though not similar to that of the Rhine river. From their boat, they see smoke and pass a burned village. They don’t know if a war is going on or who the enemy might be, as King Gunther is at peace with the Saxons. Siegfried has a flashback to the day his mother died.

The Dragon's Hoard: The dwarf Alberich is met by Hagen von Tronje in the forest. Alberich is Hagen’s father. They speak in Alberich’s tongue. He informs Hagen that the dragon Fafnir must be killed and tells him of the ancient treasure hoard of the Nibelungs. Hagen retorts that Alberich has been babbling about the hoard since he’s been cast out and cursed. Alberich has a rune on his forehead. Hagen does not wish to speak of his heritage, as he is ashamed of where he comes from, but his father has often helped him with his magic.

Not a Common Man: The Burgundian court: Siegfried and Eyvind arrive. Kriemhild and her brother Giselher are flying their falcon, Arminius. The falcon lands on Siegfried's arm and Giselher wants him back. Siegfried asks the falcon's name and then says, "Oh, like the great hero who chased the Romans out of the country." Giselher calls Siegfried a boy, but Siegfried teases him back, then pretends the falcon has spoken to him: "He says I'm no common man, but the tamer of fire and the elements, and that's what you should call me." Giselher pulls his sword, as does Siegfried. Eyvind breaks up the quarrel and Giselher gets his falcon back. Siegfried is quite self-confident though, and challenges some of the knights; he defeats them as Kriemhild looks on. Eyvind learns the dragon Fafnir has started killing and destroying some of Burgund's villages and the king is grateful for the weapons. Hagen lurks in the background. Gunther needs his best iron to fight the dragon. His brother Giselher is not permitted to aid Gunther. Siegfried also wishes to go, but Hagen says the task is only for those who are most honored and favored by the king. Siegfried remains behind and begins to forge the special metal into a sword. He thinks of Brunhild. The next day Gunther and his men ride to kill Fafnir. When Eyvind catches Siegfried looking at Kriemhild, he admonishes him not to stare. Siegfried responds it is Kriemhild who is staring.

"He Will Be Avenged": Kriemhild hears the sounds of the forging of the sword. Later, a wounded King Gunther returns with Hagen. The dragon's hide was as hard as iron, and their weapons were useless against it. Kriemhild is sorrowful. Siegfried promises her he will avenge Gunther and he finishes the forging of the sword. His foster-father sees the sword and says it is Siegfried's masterpiece. Eyvind wants to know what it will be named, and Siegfried asks why. Eyvind tells him, "A sword as great as this deserves a name." Siegfried decides to call the sword *Balmung*. Eyvind is surprised: "*Balmung?* *Balmung* is the sword of the last king of Xanten,

destroyed in battle. Why would you call it that?” Siegfried responds he isn’t sure, but that he liked the sound of it. He has a flashback to the death of his father, still unaware of his lineage.

Dragon's Blood: Siegfried rides off into a misty and barren wood to confront the dragon. Alberich follows him secretly and sees Siegfried go into the cave, which is littered with the bones of dead warriors. Siegfried challenges Fafnir to appear. The dragon comes out, and Siegfried battles and defeats him by stabbing him through the heart; Fafnir’s blood drips into his mouth. Siegfried tastes the blood and can suddenly hear everything around him – the insects who are crawling, creeping and talking; they all tell him to bathe in the dragon blood. One leaf falls on his back, thus making him vulnerable in that spot. Siegfried then goes to explore the cave.

Two Mistakes: Siegfried comes across the magnificent hoard of the Nibelungs, a vast treasure of gold and jewels. He looks at the gold and sees a ring resting on rock. A group of ghosts walks down the stairs; one of them warns Siegfried, “This gold is not for your kind. It belongs to us.” Siegfried feels differently, but the ghost informs him, “We are the keepers of the gold, gold only we can hold. The hoard was ours, until Fafnir stole it from us. Heed our warning or you too will pay.” Siegfried asks who they are. The ghost replies, “The Nibelungs, the people of mist and twilight. You gave the gold back to us by slaying Fafnir, and we thank you for it.” Siegfried feels he risked his life to kill the dragon and that should be worth something. The ghost responds, “It is not worth a single coin of this treasure, not when it comes with a curse.” Siegfried does not believe in curses and asks about the ring. The ghost tells him it is the ring of the Nibelungs, the oldest thing in the hoard, its heart. The one who possesses it is the treasure-keeper. Siegfried puts on the ring and says it is beautiful. The ghost warns him, “It’s deadly to you, as everything is here.” Siegfried is not frightened. He takes the ring and tells the ghosts he’ll be back for the treasure soon. The ghosts fade away as Siegfried leaves the cave. Outside, they

reappear: “When the curse begins to bite, beware, for it will find your weakness and through it, destroy you.” Suddenly another Siegfried appears to fight the real Siegfried. It is the dwarf Alberich; Siegfried overpowers him and also grasps his *Tarnhelm*. Alberich curses the skin that the dragon’s blood has made impenetrable. Siegfried agrees to grant Alberich his life because he offers him the *Tarnhelm*. With it, he can wear any shape he desires. Alberich shows him how to use it, by saying the words, “Shadows and vapors, all the same,” and thinking of the person whose shape he wants to take. Alberich then runs away and the ghosts reappear. They admonish Siegfried, “Another mistake, young mortal, now you own his enmity and the curse.” They tell him it was Alberich, who once was a Nibelung, but had tried to steal the treasure and was cast out, stripped of his immortality. Siegfried offers to take only half the treasure, but the ghost ominously says, “Half the treasure, all the treasure, or just that single ring, is enough to bring the whole curse down on you.” Siegfried responds it is all his then and leaves.

In Brunhild’s castle in Iceland, she sits magnificently on her throne. Men stand before her and a raven is perched nearby. The men complain, “Lady, you set tests for your suitors, such tests are almost an insult to their rank. These men who ask for your hand are royal kings and princes.” Brunhild, however, insists, “And I am queen, their equal, and I have a right in my own land to make whatever laws I please.” She cuts off one man, “Then tell them, that the queen of Iceland will only marry the man who passes the tests she sets, and who can defeat her in single combat.” Hallbera looks on. The man complains further, “But no man can hope to succeed in such tasks.” Brunhild responds confidently, “One man will succeed, one man will marry me, and I will know that man as soon as I see him. You may go.” Hallbera says to her, “You are thinking of the man you met on the night the stars fell, the blacksmith?” Brunhild replies, “I have thought of that man ever since and I will marry no one else, not a prince, not a king, not the Roman

emperor himself.” Brunhild is confident he will be strong and brave enough to pass whatever tests she has planned, as he has already defeated her once. She says the rune stones do not lie.

Hero of the Kingdom: Back at the Burgundian court, a celebration is in progress. The dragonhead is in the courtyard. There is wild revelry and feasting. Siegfried dances as the hoard is being transported to the court by warriors. Kriemhild is disguised by a mask and leads him away. She asks him what he will do now, to which Siegfried replies he will go home to his smithy. Kriemhild wonders why he will work when he has so much gold, but Eyvind has taught Siegfried a good trade. Kriemhild says, “Defeat dragons with fire, win maidens with gold.” Siegfried tells her his heart is already pledged to a high-born lady who lives far away. He asks Kriemhild to whom her heart is pledged and if she is married, to which Kriemhild responds, “No, I’m not. If I ever marry, it will only be for love.” She walks away and Hagen has overheard their conversation.

Broken Treaty: Cut to the dragon’s head, then to the hoard in the cellar of the castle, and finally to a landscape with burning cities, the twin kings and their warriors. Hagen reports they have burned their towns and taken the Burgundian people as slaves. Gunther says they have lived in peace with the twin kings for almost ten years. Hagen believes these hostilities are most likely due to the presence of Fafnir’s hoard in Burgund. Gunther and Hagen prepare for war. Hagen suggests Erec the blacksmith could be very useful to them, as his strength could encourage the Burgundian warriors. Gunther asks Hagen to request Siegfried’s assistance.

Siegfried versus the Twin Kings: The army of Burgund meets the army of the twin kings. Siegfried asks the king to allow him to talk with the kings, since he feels he is to blame for this situation. Hagen recommends Siegfried be allowed to go and that they will attack the Saxons should he fail. Siegfried rides out to challenge the twin kings as the lord of the dragon’s gold.

They will have to fight him for it. One king retorts, “Big words for a blacksmith. It takes more than gold to make a man worthy to fight a king,” to which Siegfried responds, “And it takes more than a crown to make a man be a king.” They all dismount and Siegfried fights the twin kings in battle. Siegfried recognizes the one who almost killed him that fateful night, who also called him a “Xanten whelp”. He also remembers the brother, who killed his father. The kings look far taller and mightier than Siegfried. The first king calls Siegfried, “Nothing but a Burgund whelp”. Siegfried now fully remembers him and his brother. We are shown flashbacks to the past. Siegfried yells, “You killed my father,” and wounds both kings in rage. He shouts at the fallen kings, “I am Siegfried, son of Sigmund, King of Xanten. You are beaten, and your kingdoms will be divided between the kingdoms of Burgund and Xanten. I should kill you both for what you did, but that wouldn’t give me any satisfaction. Just get out of my sight.” However, they try to murder him from behind, and he kills them both instead. The opposing army bows to Siegfried and Gunther. The Burgundians cheer.

Gunther tells Hagen he wants Siegfried tied to the house of Burgund forever. Hagen asks what his plan is, and Gunther responds his sister will marry Siegfried of Xanten, and that Hagen will surely not find this too difficult to arrange. Siegfried is shown at his burned-out castle in Xanten. He remembers standing on the ramparts and says, “Father, I’m awake at last.” A raven flies to him and lands on his arm. He looks into its eyes and sees his beloved Brunhild. Siegfried informs her, “I finally know who I am, a king, and worthier of a queen.” Brunhild responds, “Come to Iceland my love, and find out.” Siegfried promises her, “Soon my love, but I’ve won a mighty treasure and I want to bring home for you.” Brunhild tells him he is the only treasure she wishes for, and that he should hurry. The raven departs.

History of the Lost Son: In the forest, Hagen meets Alberich. He and King Gunther do not want Siegfried to take the treasure back to his castle in Xanten. Hagen asks Alberich for one of his cantric spells or potions to make Siegfried forget his old love and want to marry the Princess Kriemhild. Alberich wants the *Tarnhelm* back in return for this, and Hagen promises to bring that about once he has the potion. We then see Alberich performing the ritual for the potion of forgetfulness, using runes and incantations. Back at the smithy, Siegfried returns to find the fire has gone out. Eyvind is sick of old age. Siegfried assures him they now have all the gold they need, and calls him father. Eyvind reminds him his true father was a king. He tells Siegfried he suspected it when he found him as a boy with the mark of the royal house of Xanten on his clothing. Later he had heard that the twin kings were looking for the lost son of Xanten, but never found him. Siegfried realizes that is the reason he was given the name Erec, so that Eyvind could keep him safe, but also because Eyvind longed for a son. It was a joy for him to be Siegfried's father, and Siegfried responds, "Whatever I am, it's because of what you taught me." Eyvind advises him, "Listen, the world around us is in the throes of great change, and the new powers struggle with the old for domination. And I've done my part in that struggle. So when my time comes my body can descend to the Gods in the old way, of air, fire, earth, water. But you and your queen are children of the old world too, the Gods gave you wondrous powers – and you must fulfill your destiny together, wherever it leads you." Siegfried promises to bring his love to Xanten with him as his wife, but he will also take Eyvind along. Eyvind replies, "My best blade is forged, there is no need to bother with lesser ones." He asks Siegfried for a drink of water and is dead when he returns with it. Siegfried is shown on the banks of the river, watching the burning pyre with his father's body on it, floating in the water. In the old tongue he says "Beasts die, and men die, all who walk the earth must die. But the true hero never dies. In our memory he

will live forever.” We see Brunhild tossing in her sleep: “My love, so near to my heart and my mind, yet so far from my arms and my body, how much longer, how much farther?”

Kriemhild's Temptation: Siegfried returns to the Burgundian court to collect his treasure. Gunther greets him as King Siegfried of Xanten, and Siegfried thanks him for his hospitality. He apologizes for the misfortune and bloodshed he has caused. Hagen asks if King Siegfried would join them in a toast, while Kriemhild uses the special potion she has been given by Hagen. (The scene in which Hagen persuades Kriemhild to use the potion is omitted from the DVD-version of the film). Gunther tells him he is very thankful, as Siegfried has done the Kingdom of Burgund a great service. Kriemhild approaches him: “This is a special wine of Burgund, mixed with spices.” They all toast to Siegfried of Xanten, the hero who arrived a blacksmith and leaves a king. Siegfried drinks the wine; he looks into the cup and sees Brunhild’s face, which then fades away, and both he and Brunhild have troubled looks on their faces. Suddenly only Kriemhild and Siegfried are standing in the hall. Kriemhild must confess it was she at the dragon feast: “You told a masked girl that your heart was already pledged to someone else...I couldn’t say anything because...” Siegfried assures her, “Please, it doesn’t matter, because I love you, and I don’t know why.” Kriemhild tells him nothing matters now, except that they love each other. A raven hops into the room as Siegfried kisses Kriemhild. It then takes flight, but Hagen kills the bird so it cannot deliver its message to its queen in Iceland. At Brunhild’s icebound castle, she searches the skies: “Where might my raven be?”

To Win a Battle: Gunther is speaking to Siegfried, “I am proud that Burgund has won you as brother in law. Nobody could bring more honor to our kingdom than you, Siegfried of Xanten.” Siegfried wishes to make Kriemhild his queen before he returns to Xanten. Hagen informs him Burgundian law states a king must marry before any of his siblings. Siegfried asks

how long they will have to wait. Gunther tells him it is not so simple, as the queen he has chosen is a beautiful and powerful woman who challenges her suitors to single combat. Until now, nobody has proved strong enough to defeat her. Siegfried asks who this powerful woman is. Gunther confesses it is Brunhild, Queen of Iceland. A look of strange recognition crosses Siegfried's face. He tells them he has met her once. Gunther is astonished that Siegfried knows her. Siegfried tells him her ship sailed by the smithy one day. He could not forget this, as she is of extraordinary beauty. Hagen asks, "You said you've met her?" Siegfried recounts the night the star fell from the sky into the forest by the smithy, how he and Brunhild met by the crater and fought. Siegfried mistook her for a Saxon and wrestled her down. He says she was a little surprised. Siegfried does not seem to remember what happened afterwards. Gunther claims she is the woman he wishes to marry, and asks if Siegfried would help him win her for Burgund's queen. Siegfried asks how he could accomplish that. Gunther replies he could fight in his stead. Hagen reminds him of the *Tarnhelm*. Siegfried appears upset: "These powers shouldn't be misused." Gunther tells him he is the only one who can defeat her, and Hagen reminds him King Gunther has given Siegfried his only sister in marriage. Gunther says they could all marry on the same day. Siegfried still appears uneasy.

Wedding Gifts: In the treasure chamber, Siegfried shows Kriemhild the hoard of the Nibelungs. She is incredulous. "It's yours," he tells her. It is his wedding gift, and he gives her the ring of the Nibelungs as a symbol of their love: "Wear it until I get back from Iceland." Kriemhild tells him every day without him will be an eternity."

The King's Surrogate: The Burgundians and Siegfried approach Brunhild's fortress from the icy waters surrounding Iceland; Hagen, Gunther, Siegfried and Giselher are then admitted into the fortress. Siegfried is behind King Gunther, to his left, as they approach Brunhild in her

hall. She rises in happiness when she sees Siegfried and steps down from her throne: "Welcome to my country, tamer of the fire and the elements. At last you've found your way to me." Brunhild continues when Siegfried, Gunther and Hagen look puzzled: "The dragon slayer's fame reaches even to here." Siegfried responds, "It is not I who come to challenge you, great queen." Brunhild looks puzzled and shocked. Siegfried continues, "It is king Gunther of Burgund who seeks your hand, I only serve him." Now both Hallbera and Brunhild are stunned. Gunther says, "My queen, I come here to seek your hand in marriage." Brunhild looks searchingly at Siegfried, who attempts to evade her gaze; she turns away and then turns back with glazed eyes. To King Gunther she says, "We will fight a duel of double-bladed axes. If you win, I will wed you, if I win, it will cost you your life." Gunther tells her he will gladly die if he fails to make Brunhild his wife. She returns to her throne, with Siegfried looking strangely all the while. Brunhild declares, "The contest commences in one hour!" We see both Hallbera and Brunhild again, both of them not understanding what has happened to Siegfried.

The New King of Iceland: Outside Brunhild's castle, the ground is thick with snow and an icy river is close by. King Gunther comes at the head of his warriors with Hagen and Giselher. Brunhild is at the fore of her retinue, with Hallbera by her side; she is dressed in her warrior garb. A runic symbol in the shape of a 'V' is marked in red on Brunhild's forehead. She asks Gunther, "The dragon slayer does not join you?" Gunther replies he is already preparing the ship for their return. Brunhild calls for the axes, Hallbera removes her cloak. Brunhild offers Gunther the option of still sailing back to Burgund alive. Inside the castle, we see the real King Gunther peering out the window from behind the curtains at the battle that is about to commence. Siegfried has assumed Gunther's shape on the battlefield. The clanging of the axes rings loudly, as Brunhild and Siegfried utilize their strength to the fullest. Brunhild yells and grunts with

exertion and power. The two fighters end up on the ice right by the river. Brunhild demolishes Gunther's shield, as they both switch position to an ice floe on the river, but he then destroys her shield. Brunhild is now on a piece of ice that is headed towards the waterfall. Siegfried runs to her aid and she tries to reach for his arm, but the ice breaks him loose also. Siegfried uses his axe to catch them at the last minute as they go over the edge. A warrior helps them up. Brunhild has been defeated. Gunther sees the victory from his room. Brunhild addresses her warriors, "Bow to my future husband, the King of Burgund, now King of Iceland."

The Greatest Secret: During the return to Burgund by ship Gunther asks Siegfried if he will become his blood brother. Hagen watches from the outside as Siegfried tries to unsuccessfully cut his hand. Siegfried reveals the blood of the dragon made his skin hard as iron. He demonstrates his trust by cutting himself on the back in the only place he can be wounded. Hagen sees this. Siegfried tells Gunther and Giselher, "Now both of you share the greatest secret I have." Gunther raises the cup in toast: "This cup will hold no lesser drink than the blood of brotherhood. It will be raised in no lesser toast and may those who betray that trust die, dishonored and accursed." They all drink.

Two Weddings: Back in Burgund, the travelers are greeted by the court. Kriemhild cannot wait to see Siegfried. King Gunther goes ahead as Brunhild steps off the boat, followed by Hallbera; they seem to have remained separate from the men on the ship. King Gunther goes to her and takes her hand to lead her to the castle. Brunhild has an uncertain look about her. Gunther announces, "People of Burgund, your queen," and the crowd cheers. Gunther then presents his sister Kriemhild to Brunhild. Kriemhild tells Brunhild, "I hope I'll be a sister to you, as well," and she smiles in friendship, but then turns to follow Brunhild's gaze. Kriemhild sees Siegfried and goes to him, happily reuniting with him. Brunhild has a look of utter sorrow on her

face. Gunther states they will celebrate two weddings in one day, while Brunhild again glances at the happy couple.

Hagen seeks out Alberich, who asks for his *Tarnhelm*. Hagen says they are not yet done with the *Tarnhelm* and Alberich accuses Hagen of trying to cheat him. They speak in an old tongue and Hagen stabs his father in the back, killing him. Back at the castle, Brunhild goes to the castle walls, and finds Siegfried standing there. She approaches him hesitantly, looking at him. He greets her and asks if he can be of help. Brunhild begins, "I waited for you, as I said I would. Siegfried, what happened to you? Did you find that you couldn't love a queen as well as you did a passing stranger? Or was it the gold? That has turned many hearts cold before." Siegfried shakes his head and says he does not know. Brunhild wants to know whom she should ask, why he loved her then and no longer loves her now. Siegfried insists he did not love her. Brunhild is incredulous: "Don't lie to me. You cannot claim you didn't love me then. It was your first time, blacksmith, mine as well. And I knew then that the Gods had sent you to me, and me to you, and you knew too. Does that mean nothing?" Siegfried does not remember it that way. Brunhild's eyes get watery, but then her tender gaze turns to one of anger: "You never loved me? Even though you said you did?" Siegfried says he was a boy then. It is not clear whether Siegfried remembers the past or not. Brunhild responds, "If this is what manhood brings, I only wish I'd learned this lesson sooner. But it's too late now. Perhaps I should pray, that I too will remember our love so little, because I will never know joy again, til I forget or you remember." She storms away, leaving Siegfried deep in thought.

It is time for the wedding, as the kings await their brides on the steps of the cathedral. Brunhild wears white, and Kriemhild is dressed in an ivory gown. Gunther is dressed in red, whereas Siegfried wears white. The queens approach their kings, Brunhild hesitantly and sadly,

but Kriemhild glowing with happiness. Brunhild looks at the happy couple and says, “I do” with great difficulty. Siegfried and Kriemhild happily exchange vows. Brunhild barely allows a peck from King Gunther.

The Second Duel: At the wedding feast, Brunhild sits between Gunther and Hagen. She is stiff and looks over at Siegfried and Kriemhild, who catches her looking. Hagen speaks, saying the fine display of Burgund’s swordsmen could only be excelled by the strong Queen Brunhild and the extraordinary King Gunther. He says the few who traveled to Iceland witnessed a display of comparable skill and King Gunther was the only man who could match his beautiful Queen in her challenge. Kriemhild blurts out, “Siegfried could!” Uncomfortable glances are seen all around. Brunhild responds, “But Siegfried didn’t, would he like to try?” King Gunther nods his uncomfortable approval. Siegfried says it will be an honor, and they both remove their crowns. He asks what weapons they should choose. Brunhild suggests, “Weapons that were forged from the same ore and have never been crossed before, my spear and your sword.” Siegfried looks stunned, but agrees. Hagen and King Gunther exchange worried glances. Brunhild looks fierce and majestic as they begin to fight. She shows great strength and agility, but Siegfried cuts her spear in half and bests her. She angrily pushes away his sword and then relieves him of it. Brunhild bests Siegfried, who says, “Thank you, for this chance to recognize my limits.” Brunhild knows he has allowed her to win and storms off in anger.

The Belt of the Queen: The weather is stormy as King Gunther enters Brunhild’s bedchamber. She lies on the bed, resting. He asks her what happened and she claims she was tired and decided to lie down. Gunther says, “That’s not what I meant, why did you leave without me?” Brunhild responds, “Siegfried, this afternoon in front of everyone.” Gunther says she won, but Brunhild insists he let her win: “I’ve fought often enough to know a fake defeat

from an honest victory.” Gunther claims Siegfried was lucky and probably gave up so he didn’t go to his marriage bed covered with bruises. Brunhild seems very upset when as Gunther touches her face. He tells Brunhild she is the only woman he has ever really wanted. Brunhild responds, “And you have me, or do you?”, as she grabs his arms and throws him off the bed. She continues, “You want me, my strong husband, I’m waiting.” She senses she has been deceived. Gunther asks her to do away with this foolishness, as he has had too much to drink. Brunhild says the man who defeated her had not drunk too much. She continues, “Or then again, maybe you had been drinking, some magical potion to give you strength, perhaps? Well, I’ll let you in on a little secret – my strength is a gift from the Gods, and it lies in this belt, once you’ve removed it, you’ll find a yielding maiden in your arms.” Gunther attempts to grasp the belt, but Brunhild overpowers him and throws him down on the bed. Brunhild asks, “Can a man whose survived my challenge not even survive his own wedding night?” Gunther tries to grasp the belt again, but Brunhild throws him on the floor and binds his hands and legs behind his back. Gunther asks her to stop, but she tells him to be quiet, as she lies down and goes to sleep.

Siegfried and Kriemhild are lying happily in bed together. Kriemhild asks whether Siegfried does not find Brunhild beautiful. He says she is, but... Kriemhild comments he has also noticed her coldness, the angry way she looks at them. Siegfried feels she is certainly angry about being defeated by Gunther. Kriemhild doesn’t think Brunhild likes her very much. Siegfried suggests it might be because Kriemhild won her husband without having to fight him. They both laugh.

The next day is clear and beautiful. Gunther wakes up to a fully dressed Brunhild. He asks her to untie her so the servants won’t see him in that state and promises he will never try to

subdue her again. Brunhild cuts him loose, saying, “Then let this be a lesson to you. I might be captive in this gilded cage, but I will never be your wife.” Gunther stands up in pain.

In Gunther’s hall, Gunther is pleading with Siegfried, “I’m only asking you to take her belt, not substitute for me in some other way.” Siegfried is hesitant, but Gunther presses his issue: “You’d refuse to help the man who gave you his own sister?”

That evening, Siegfried, disguised as Gunther, enters Brunhild’s bedchamber. Brunhild is lying on the bed and Gunther attempts reconciliation: “I just want us to be happy together, to be man and wife.” Brunhild gets up off the bed, taunting him, “Look at you, my king, you are a match for me, are you not? After all, you defeated me in Iceland.” Siegfried grabs her hand with force, surprising her. Brunhild mocks him, “Well, well, my king regains his steel. Strange, how it comes and goes without warning.” Siegfried tells her he does not want to fight her, as he loves her. Brunhild tells him to prove it. Siegfried overpowers her and removes her belt. Brunhild states, “That’s what I needed to know.” Kriemhild wakes up to find Siegfried gone. She calls for him, but he is missing. In Brunhild’s chamber, Brunhild and Siegfried are sitting on the bed. “Now you can be my husband,” she tells him. Siegfried seems tempted, but leaves the room, telling Brunhild he is getting rid of the pagan witchery (her belt). When he comes back, he expects her to be his wife!

The Broken Vow: Siegfried returns to his chamber and attempts to put Brunhild’s belt in the chest. Kriemhild is sitting up waiting for him, asking where he has been. She tells him she could not get back to sleep without him. Kriemhild asks what is in his hand, then sees it is a woman’s belt. Siegfried tells her it’s not what she thinks, and she laments they’ve only been married one day. Siegfried can only tell her that her brother needed him. Kriemhild persists, but Siegfried will not reveal the secret and swears before all the Gods he remains her true and

faithful husband. Kriemhild will not let the matter rest and Siegfried tells her he would be breaking a vow of the utmost secrecy if he told her. Kriemhild orders him to break his vow.

The next day at the cathedral, Kriemhild attempts to enter but is told no one may enter before the Queen of the Burgunds. Brunhild walks up the steps and Kriemhild confronts her. Brunhild wears a magnificent white cloak. Kriemhild complains, “Brunhild, how dare you order the doors of this place closed to me. I am the king’s own sister.” Brunhild responds, “And I am the queen of all Burgund. It is only right that I should enter before other lesser royals. Step aside now and let your queen pass.” Kriemhild, with her feelings hurt, retorts, “You are no queen of mine, Brunhild, and how dare you refer to my husband as lesser than anyone?” Brunhild informs her he introduced himself in Iceland as Gunther’s servant. She walks past Kriemhild. Kriemhild reveals “He certainly served your husband well when he defeated you last night.” Brunhild turns around and asks what Kriemhild has just said. Kriemhild, enjoying her secret, responds “You heard me, and it was also my husband who conquered you in Iceland.” Hallbera looks enlightened, and Kriemhild looks pleased with herself, but Brunhild looks furious and approaches Kriemhild: “You insult the queen of Burgund in public with these lies.” Kriemhild is incensed further, and she parts her cloak revealing Brunhild’s belt: “Do you recognize this?” Brunhild is shocked and asks who gave Kriemhild the belt. Kriemhild tells her Siegfried gave the belt to her: “Do you believe me now? He took it from you last night in your own bedroom. It surprises me that you couldn’t tell, now get out of my way.” She moves past a stunned Brunhild with her cross-bearing servants. Brunhild’s ladies and Hallbera, who still has a rune on her forehead, are all dressed in dark colors and remain standing silently on the steps. Brunhild is shown riding across the countryside just in her warrior garb, angry at Siegfried’s and Gunther’s betrayal; she screams in rage and gallops on.

In Siegfried's and Kriemhild's bedchamber, Siegfried is angry with Kriemhild: "I just don't understand how you could reveal my most intimate secret and your brother's in front of the whole of Burgund. Kriemhild, I only broke my vow, because I counted on your discretion." Kriemhild is very sorry and asks him to forgive her, saying she loves him more than life. She is now terrified that something awful will happen and somehow they will be parted. Siegfried tries to comfort her: "No more tears. In two days we'll be far away from this place, far away from your brother and the complications of his marriage." Kriemhild feels Gunther was wrong to make Siegfried a part of this, and that he took advantage of Siegfried's loyalty. Siegfried reassures her, "But it's over now, I'll attend the hunt with them and we'll part as friends. And today I'll give orders for the gold to be loaded onto our ship, so as soon as the hunt is done we'll be on our way." Kriemhild wishes it could be done sooner and they could leave immediately. Siegfried does not wish to leave her brother with the impression they bear him ill will. Kriemhild nods in agreement and they kiss.

"Siegfried Must Die": Back in Gunther's hall, Hagen tells Gunther he said from the first Siegfried was not to be trusted. Gunther asks what justice he can possibly administer to put this right. Hagen feels a simple justice laid down in their books of law may not be sufficient in this case, as Siegfried has used magic to help King Gunther. He asks what further uses Siegfried may have made of the magic: "You've heard the people praise him more than you and now he has your sister's hand in marriage he has a legitimate claim to the throne of Burgund. What's he planning next my king, your downfall?" Gunther accuses Hagen of telling him the presence of the hoard in his chamber would bring nothing but good. Hagen says, "My king, even if the queen begets a child by you, every tongue in Burgund will wag with the gossip that it's really Siegfried's bastard. The kingdom is already rife with this scandal. It won't go away. It will taint

you and the House of Burgund until the end of your days. Unless something is done.” Gunther decides to end the alliance and send Siegfried away to live out his days in Xanten. Brunhild appears at the entrance to the chamber: “It’s not enough,” she claims, “you may not care if men scorn you as a weakling and a cuckold, but what about me? I was betrayed by the dragon slayer and by you. I am the Queen of Iceland and Burgund, I will not be dishonored. I will be avenged. There is only one punishment fit for such a crime.” Gunther asks her what she wants him to do. Brunhild calmly says, “It’s very simple, Siegfried must die.” Gunther looks ill, glancing at both Hagen and Brunhild: “You can’t mean it. He’s my friend, more than my friend, my blood brother. After what we’ve shared, a betrayal like that, I can’t just have him killed.” Brunhild gives him an ultimatum: “Either you kill him, or I kill myself.” She departs from the room. Hagen suggests Siegfried’s punishment could come about accidentally at the hunt the next day. Gunther mentions Siegfried’s invincibility, but Hagen reminds him of the one vulnerable spot. They prepare for the hunt and the hunters ride out. Siegfried, Gunther, Hagen and Giselher ride off, while Kriemhild watches them. She waves to Siegfried, who looks back again and smiles at her.

Kriemhild's Confession: Kriemhild seeks out Brunhild to return her belt to her. Kriemhild begs Brunhild to let her talk to her, saying she has something that is rightfully hers, which she wants to return. Brunhild sits in front of the fireplace as Hallbera admits Kriemhild. Brunhild comes out to see her. Brunhild says, “Indeed you have something that is rightfully mine, but it is far too late to return it.” She does, however, accept the belt. Brunhild continues, “Christians make much of forgiveness, don’t look for such in me.” Kriemhild humbly replies, “I don’t, Queen Brunhild. All I can do is say is how bitter my sorrow is for the way I treated you in front of the cathedral. I was jealous and when I thought of what seemed to be happening, I couldn’t

bear it.” Brunhild turns away, looking out the window: “Once I loved a man, whom I thought the Gods themselves had sent to me. I loved the whole world because he was in it; long we were parted, but, I could bear it, because I knew he would return one day, but when he came again, it was as if his heart had been wiped clean. I loved him as I had, but he did not love me.” Kriemhild is in shock as the truth dawns on her. Brunhild adds, “We were strangers, as before we had been lovers.” Kriemhild asks if it was Siegfried, and Brunhild nods. Kriemhild confesses, “Brunhild, I have done you a terrible wrong.” Brunhild does not wish to speak of it, but Kriemhild tells her it is not what happened at the cathedral, but something far worse. Brunhild questions her, “What are you talking about? You have done me no other great harm.” Kriemhild tells her, “Once I loved a man who did not love me and I could not bear it, for the world was an empty place without him. So when Hagen came to me with an unholy thing (flashback) that would banish the memory of old loves and plant a new one there, I blinded myself to what was right and gave it to that man to drink. It was Hagen’s magic; Siegfried knew nothing and even if he could there would be nothing he could do against it. That is my greatest sin against you and him.” Kriemhild cries, and Brunhild is in shock. Kriemhild says she will do penance for it for the rest of her life.

Betrayal: In the forest, Hagen arrives at Gunther’s side. Siegfried comes along carrying a wild boar and Giselher is with him. Siegfried is invited to have a drink, but he wants to wash the blood from his hands first. Hagen looks questioningly at Gunther, who nods. Hagen walks off with the spear. Siegfried runs to the stream to wash off, with Hagen close behind. Siegfried bends over to wash, as Hagen, a dark figure, comes up from behind and strikes him with the spear. Back at the court, Brunhild runs wildly across the courtyard looking for Siegfried, realizing he is gone and what is about to happen. Hagen throws and hits his mark. Siegfried

stands and turns to see Hagen. Brunhild stops as if she has been struck. The image of the Nibelungs comes into view. Brunhild weeps knowing she has demanded Siegfried's death. Siegfried attempts to reach Hagen but dies. We see images of the dragon dying. As Siegfried lies dying, he whispers Brunhild's name.

"Murderer": Kriemhild's bird Arminius flies off. She is filled with foreboding; then Arminius lets out a cry. The hunters return. Siegfried is born in on a pallet. Kriemhild comes out to see her dead husband, she cries at his side. Giselher is also incredibly sad. We see Brunhild in her chamber, back in her full Icelandic warrior gear and wearing her belt. Gunther says there was an ambush by a group of Saxons. Kriemhild and Giselher know he is lying. Kriemhild accuses him, "Murderer!" Gunther responds, "How can you accuse me, what reason would I have to kill a man who's done so much good?" Kriemhild answers in fury, "Envy, and guilt, and greed; with Siegfried dead you wouldn't have to face your weakness and your guilt, and with him dead you can keep the hoard for yourself, all of it. The hoard - I don't want it anymore." She removes the ring and throws it on the ground. Hagen and Gunther race to pick it up. Hagen draws his sword, as does Gunther. They fight, but are separated. Gunther accuses Hagen, "You always wanted the gold for yourself, that's why you slew him." Hagen reminds him they partnered together. Gunther tells him he'll never have the gold. Hagen insists the gold is his Nibelung birthright. It belongs to him! Gunther calls him an insolent son of a filthy dwarf. Hagen breaks free to kill King Gunther, who is wearing the ring. Hagen removes the ring and takes it. Giselher attacks him, but Hagen tells him to stay out of this. Giselher orders the guards to arrest him. Hagen promises those who ally themselves with him that they will be rewarded with gold from the hoard. Most of the men switch to his side.

The Fate Her Gods Have Chosen: Brunhild comes out into the courtyard: “And finally betrayed, as he betrayed me, Hagen of Tronje. Face the fates my God have chosen.” Hagen informs her, “Your Gods are dead.” Brunhild responds, “Soon we will know.” First the guards come at her, but she defeats them all. She wounds and then beheads Hagen, his head rolling down the steps to the ground.

Arminius, the falcon, flies through the air. Siegfried’s funeral bier is prepared and Kriemhild returns the ring of the Nibelungs to Siegfried’s body. Giselher is by her side. Hallbera looks on. The bier is placed on a Viking ship in the river, the dragon’s skull at its head. They all look on as flaming arrows are released to make it catch fire. Kriemhild speaks in the old tongue. Giselher sees Arminius flying above the boat. His girlfriend stands next to him. All look out to the boat, on which Brunhild suddenly appears. She grabs Siegfried’s sword and stabs herself in the stomach with it. Her body falls onto Siegfried’s. Giselher says, “Today the old Gods live again.” His girlfriend, however, claims, “No, Giselher, today the old Gods will die with them.” The boat sinks, the hoard of the Nibelungs in its belly; it breaks apart and the gold falls to the riverbed. The closing shot is a view of the boat at the river’s bottom, gold strewn all about.