CHAPTER V

THE LOVERS OF GUDRUN

I

It is a noteworthy as well as a fortunate circumstance that Morris turned the Laxdala Saga into English poetry before he composed Sigurd the Volsung. The general likeness of the Laxdala Saga and the Volsunga Saga, the one historical, the other mythical, has often been commented upon. The resemblance of the two plots was in no small way responsible for Morris's later composition of Sigurd, considered by most critics (and by the poet himself) to be his poetical magnum opus. The Lovers of Gudrun was Morris's first long, sustained treatment of a Norse story; in composing it he attained a facility for adaptation which made the writing of Sigurd the Volsung less difficult. The heroic couplets of The Lovers of Gudrun are much better adapted to the stern character of the Norse story than are the tetrameter couplets of The Fostering of Aslaug. Morris had greater success, however, with the hexameters which he employed in Sigurd the Volsung; although the variety of metrical patterns in which he composed his Norse poems is proof enough that he never did decide which meter was best suited for

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1 The most recent comparison of the two sagas has been made by Professor Halfdan Koht, who says, "It [the Volsunga Saga] is the parallel, you are tempted to think the prototype, of The Laxdalers' Saga..." The Old Norse Sagas (New York, 1931), p. 143. Similar remarks have also been made by Conrad Hjalmar Nordby, in The Influence of Old Norse Literature upon English Literature (New York, 1901), p. 40; and by others.
the transmission of the spirit of the sagas from Old Norse prose to English poetry.

The English narrative poem of the men of Lax-river-dale is, like the other poems which Morris adapted from the Old Icelandic, primarily a love story. The poet's omissions and inclusions show quite clearly what his intention was— to write a love story. And if in Sigurd the Volsung the poet tells (almost) all of the history of the Volsungs, and chiefly the story of Sigurd's loves, in The Lovers of Gudrun, as his title indicates, he is concerned not with a family history, but with the love affairs of Gudrun.

As in The Wooing of Hallbiorn, The Wooing of Swanhild, and Sigurd, the love-triangle here forms the nucleus of the plot. It is chiefly with Gudrun, Bodli, and Kiartan that the poem deals, although Morris does not omit Ingibiorg and Refna, the two other women in love with Kiartan, nor Thorvald, Thord, and Thorkell, the other

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2 See Henrik Ibsen's essay, On the Heroic Ballad (1857), in which he says that the iambic decasyllable is not suitable for the treatment of heroic Scandinavian themes. He indicates that such a meter, which corresponds to English blank verse, 'is foreign to Norwegian-Danish prosody, and a product of Christian influences.' (William Archer, The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen (New York, 1926), II, Introduction, p. ix.) He believes that ancient Scandinavian stories should be written only in pagan measures in modern Scandinavian poetry. We may perhaps assume that the hexameters of Morris's Sigurd, according to the Ibsen theory, are better adapted for the re-creation of the old prosody than are the (rhymed) 'decasyllables' of Gudrun. It would be interesting to know what Ibsen thought of Morris's attempts to reproduce the Old Norse themes in English verse, for Ibsen, more than Oehlenschläger, was concerned with the actual problems of such re-creation.

3 Morris does not call Thorkell by name until the last page of the poem, where Gudrun recalls her four husbands.
husbands of Gudrun.

The Lovers of Gudrun is divided into nineteen sections, and these correspond, roughly, to sixteen chapters of the Saga. The fact that there are seventy-eight chapters in the Saga will give some indication as to Morris’s omissions; and still another fact, that The Lovers of Gudrun is more than half as long as the Laxdala Saga, will show how extensive is the poet’s expansion. The parts of the Saga which the poet paraphrased deal chiefly with the history of the Laxdalers from the time just before Gudrun’s marriage to Thorvald, through her marriage with Thörkell. The chapters which the poet omits from consideration—about twenty-two which deal with the genealogies and land-settling of the Laxdalers, and about twenty-eight which tell of Gudrun’s life after the death of Bodli—are those which do not touch upon the loves and lovers of the heroine.

Morris also omits several incidental chapters of the Saga in the very group from which most of his material is taken; these

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4 In general, the table below shows the correspondence of the respective sections of the poem to various chapters or parts of chapters, in the Saga:

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also are in no tangible way related to the love stories proper.

The detailed source study of Tollef B. Thompson is a work which throws much light on Morris's use of the Laxdala Saga, although its author is perhaps too much concerned with the variations of the poem, from the Saga, when the reasons for such variations are the more important consideration. This writer's summary, more than the conclusion to his discussion of The Fostering of Aslaug, is accurate and informative. It says:


This is a much safer approach to the subject than that of Nordby, who finds that the Norse spirit is everywhere apparent. 'It is more apparent than first appearances indicate' is more accurate.


6 Nordby's remarks upon The Lovers of Gudrun are largely general, and effusively laudatory of Morris; they are not acceptable to the present writer. When he says, for instance, that in The Lovers of Gudrun, "All the tints in the persons and the things are grandly Norse," op. cit., p. 41, he scarcely states the case accurately.
II

The tale of the people of Lax-river-dale represents among the historical sagas the same thing which the Volsunga Saga does among those of mythical origin; that is, both are masterpieces of the Northern love story, of the love-triangle and its conflicts. But if The Lovers of Gudrun is a more complicated story than the Saga of the Volsungs, it is certainly less tragic. Eiríkr Magnísson, in this connection, has made a statement in his memoir concerning Morris, which is conducive to critical speculation; and which virtually forces us to make a comparison of the two stories. He says, in speaking of Morris's reading the Laxdala Saga and the Volsung Lays, that he suggested Morris write a poem on "the life of Gudrun Osvifr's daughter...and Sigurd Fafner's slayer...." Then he continues,

After a month, or perhaps more, in either case, I had the pleasure of finding the poet, one day, unexpectedly, in a state of fervid enthusiasm, declaring that he had made up his mind to write a new poem: 'The Lovers of Gudrun.'--'Sigurd the Volsung.' In each case the subject-matter had taken such a clearly definite shape in his mind, as he told me, that it only remained to write it down.

Magnísson speaks of "a new poem: 'The Lovers of Gudrun'--'Sigurd the Volsung.'" It would appear that perhaps Morris once had determined to write a single poem combining the best elements of each! The latter part of Magnísson's statement, "In each case the subject-matter had taken...shape..." does

not specifically indicate that the poet meant to write two poems, but that the materials of both sources were clearly in his mind. But let us compare the two.

The story of the Laxdalerers is that of one woman and two men: Gudrun, Bodli and Kiartan; the story of the Volsunga is that of one man and two women: Sigurd, Brynhild and Gudrun. The names of the chief women characters of each are identical, and the actual idea behind both plots is the same: an unfortunate match in marriage has taken place. But the force of fate is greater in the Volsung story. In the Laxdala Saga, fate is present, as it is in most pieces of Old Norse literature, and here, though it is over-powering and inevitable, though it is even inescapable, its effects are not so cruel nor so terrible as are those of the Norn's weaving in Sigurd's legend. The supernatural, also, is more important in the Volsunga Saga: there are no man-dragons, no evil-working smiths, no potions of love in the story of Osvif's Gudrun. This difference, like many others, is owing to the fact that the Volsung story is, after all, mythical, not historical; it may consequently rely more upon the awful unknown for its motivation.

The love-triangle of the Laxdala Saga is dependent upon the broken faith of two friends, Bodli and Kiartan, not upon faithlessness, in love, or what one character takes to be such. Extra complications are found in this history, and the drama of the triangle is supported and further involved by Kiartan's Ingibiorg and Refna; and the character of Gudrun is given a
strange cast by her four marriages. The sequent effect of
Bodli's telling Gudrun that Kiartan was 'much with Ingibjorg
in Norway,' is the marriage of Bodli and Gudrun; and the events
following after this marriage are tragic events. Fate has de-
signed that things shall come about in this manner, and the
prophecy of Guest, in its bearing-out, may be offered as proof
of fore-ordination; yet the tragedy of this Gudrun is not great
beside that of Gudrun Guiki's daughter, and the murder of
Kiartan is a 'little deed' when compared with the killing of
Sigurd. Perhaps the troubles of Gudrun Osvif's daughter should
be compared with those of Brynhild, rather than with those of
the mythical Gudrun, in this instance; for Brynhild, like the
wife of Bodli, knew the 'joyless days' of marriage with a man
who was inferior to him whom she really loved. But no matter
what comparisons we make, what likeness and what dissimilarity
we discover, we are forced to concede that the irrevocable doom
of fate presides over the destinies of the Volsungs in a com-
plete and damaging way: it holds the Laxdaler in a grip less
crushing.

Here let us take up again the assumption which Magnússon's
words make possible: that Morris may have wished to combine
these stories into one poem. This conjecture will forever re-
main a conjecture and nothing more, and even while we entertain
such a fanciful idea, we must be aware of the fact that Magnússon
may not have known of the double meaning in his words. But let
us suppose Morris intended to compose one poem which mingled
the essential features of the Laxdæla Saga with the chief elements of the Volsung legends. We cannot imagine what hybrid story would have resulted, but we may guess, in the light of other information, that such a poem would have exhibited many characteristics of the Old Norse literature, that it would have given complete freedom to the poet's imagination, and that it would probably resemble Morris's Prose Romances, The House of the Wolfings, The Glittering Plain, more than The Wooing of Swanhild. In stating this, we are actually making a simple distinction between Morris's Old Norse adaptations, and his original "Germanic" writings. All his poetical renditions of the Old Norse matter follow with reasonable faithfulness the actual stories of Old Icelandic writings; none of his Prose Romances depends upon any single document for its plot; yet the plan, the customs, the atmosphere, the courageous spirit which most of them exemplify, were born out of the same literature which inspired and guided the composition of The Lovers of Gudrun and Sigurd the Volsung. The combination of originally separate Old Norse stories was by no means unknown in Morris's time; Ibsen had attempted it in his Vikings at Heligeland, in 1850, and used the very materials which Morris may have purposed combining: the family, or historical sagas, and the mythical Völungs Saga.

8 The Vikings, incidentally, was begun in verse. (See Paul Botten-Hansen's information, quoted by William Archer, op. cit., II, Introduction, pp. viii–ix.) There are ideas and incidents in The Vikings taken from the Volsunga Saga, Njáls Saga, Egils Saga, and, of most interest here,-- the Laxdæla Saga.
All speculation is cut short by the fact that the Corpus poeticum of William Morris contains two poems: The Lovers of Gudrun, and Sigurd the Volsung. But if such a composite poem had been composed, it would doubtless have met with the same criticism which greeted Ibsen's Vikings, namely, that it sentimentalized the sagas, that it presupposed a naivete which modern readers and theatre-goers do not possess, for it placed real and imaginary characters side by side; and that it brought the great mythical figures of the heroic past down to the level of mere men. The Lovers of Gudrun comes from a source which is for the most part historical; but Sigurd the Volsung is based upon materials which everyone knows are mythical. A mixture of these conflicting elements in one poem would not have been challenged by the imagination and paganism of William Morris, but it would have created a work at which (as at the Vikings) modern sophistication would have directed its most cultivated sneers.

III

The love story of Gudrun, Kiartan, and Bodli, as it stands in the Laxdæla Saga, contains the elements which Morris seemed to think proper and necessary in a tale of Northern love. In that it is historical, it resembles, among the other Norse stories which Morris cast into English verse, the matter from Ari's book concerning Hallbiorn. But in Morris's treatment, it is very unlike the history of Hallbiorn, for in that poem the
English poet saw fit to alter the chief incidents of his original for dramatic effect. He introduced a love-triangle into Hallbjorn the Strong; whereas in *The Lovers of Gudrun* such a change was not necessary. The poet had only to disentangle the love story from a mass of facts not pertinent to it, and to emphasize and expand certain portions of that love story. It is perhaps odd that Morris allowed so much original material to remain in his poem, for, having taken the bare outline of his source in treating the Aslaug story, he may well have followed the same procedure in *The Lovers of Gudrun*. Morris probably supposed that the retention of Ingi-biorg and Refna provided the dramatic complication so requisite to his poem; but the inclusion of Gudrun's three other husbands is at least questionable in its wisdom. In *The Fostering of Aslaug* the poet omitted Ragnar's first wife, except for Ragnar's casual mention of her death; yet in *The Lovers of Gudrun*, he devotes more than a whole section to the men whom Gudrun married before she loved Kiartan and Bodli. In the Aslaug poem, he separated the love story from the heroic portions of the Saga, and then cut down the love plot itself, so that the whole poem, except for the 'fostering,' deals with virtually nothing but the love of Ragnar and Aslaug. *The Lovers of Gudrun* omits all material extraneous to the love story, but also includes certain parts of the love story which might well be dispensed with. A poem of great tragic power could have been
Norse adaptations) the traditional English, or more accurately, the distinctly non-Norse quality of the modern English versification.

In paraphrasing the Volsunga Saga in verse, he could, and did, insert references to fate, to the Norns, to Balder, to Odin, to ragna ráð, where they did not occur in the original. This over-emphasis and exaggeration is apparent to the Norse student, but it merely serves as atmosphere to the ordinary English reader. So, if the omnipresent 'atmosphere' in Sigurd may disturb the student of Norse mythology, who knows that the Saga-writer was more subtle about it then is Morris, the almost direct rendition of The Lovers of Gudrun, in which the Norse spirit is actually more evident than at first appears, will be caviar to the general reader as far as the Old Norse characteristics are concerned.

The characters, like details of the story, are not quite the same as in the Saga. Regarding the general changes which Morris made in the persons concerned, the conclusions of Thompson, rather than those of Nordby, are useful and enlightening: 9

Gudrun erscheint naiver und schuldfreier, Bodli mehr von Leidenschaft getrieben und mehr wissentlich schuldig, und die Brüder Gudruns boghafter also im Original, diese Personen werden überhaupt am meisten verändert. 10

Increasing the guilt of Bodli and the villainy of Gudrun's

9 See Nordby's remarks on Bodli, Gudrun, and Kiartan, op. cit., pp. 43-46, and see also below, Section VI.

10 Thompson, op. cit., p. 88.
brothers emphasizes, we shall observe, the jealousy between Bodli and Kiartan; it accentuates the avenging of Gudrun as well.

Having discussed the general characters of the story of the Laxdalers, the problems which faced Morris in adapting it into English, and certain aspects of the changes which he saw fit to make, we may now turn to specific passages in the text which are indicative of Morris's consistent method of treating the love stories of Old Norse in English poetry.

IV

The Laxdala Saga says of Gudrun, in speaking of the daughters Ósfirr and þóðis, "Gúdrún hét dóttr þeira; hon var kvæna vænest. er upp óru Íslendi, bræði at ástæðu ok vítsmunum." She was a goodly woman, fair, and open-handed, and one greatly to be desired as a wife. The Saga statement is amplified and expanded by the romantic imagination of the English poet. Morris, in his portrayal of the chief woman character in his poem, retains the facts of the Saga-man concerning her, but his portrait is more complete. When she was a young maiden, men looked at her and wondered "what roof-trees she might fire...what hearths she might leave cold..." And even

11 Laxdala Saga, Búið hefir til prontunar Benedikt Sveinsson (Reykjavík, 1920), p. 86.

at a tender age, according to the poet, while she was "low-bosomed yet," she was already so fair that she could scarcely grow more beautiful. But when Morris says of Gudrun, that before her first marriage,

Too dainty seemed her feet to come anear
The guest-worn threshold-stone.

he seems to forget that the Gudrun who married Thorvald was something of a shrew, and that her practical view of marriage does not fit well with any outward manifestations of 'dainty-ness.' After she marries Thorvald, she merely tolerates him. Morris says, of their impending separation:

For she who deemed nought worth so much of strife
As to say 'no' forever, being wed, found
How the chain galled whereeto she now was bound.

Then she marries Thord, "since the man was brisk and brave and fair," but Morris passes lightly over the events which lead up to this second marriage, possibly because he thought too much stress on the earlier love affairs of Gudrun would detract from the irony of the triangle: Bodli, Kiartan and Gudrun. In the Saga, Gudrun accompanied Thord to the Thing, and on the way she accused his wife of wearing breeches like a man; Thord in turn, indicted Aud, the wife, and got his divorce in due time. Then he married Gudrun. To be perfectly candid about Gudrun's actions up through the time of her second marriage, one must admit that she did not behave very prettily toward either Thorvald

13 Ibid., pp. 253-254.
14 Ibid., p. 270.
15 Ibid., p. 272.
or Thord; so, at least, the Saga would lead us to believe. But Morris's Gudrun is, in Old Norse terminology, a 'person of ill-luck,' and her first two failures at marriage, as Olaf tells us, were not owing to any fault of hers. He says:

'O Gudrun, ill has been thy fate,
But surely better days shall soon be thine,
For not for nought do eyes like thine eyes shine
Upon the hard world;'

The pain and torture which cause Gudrun's grief, when Thord is drowned, and her longing for better times and better luck, in the Morris version, are sadly out of tune with the real trouble; which is that she realizes Thord's child will be posthumous; that he will 'wax up' without a father. In the Saga, Gudrun seems, in her first two marriages, to be quietly and listlessly carrying out the prophecy of Guest (who said she would have four husbands); but Morris's Gudrun seems more to be living and waiting for marriage with Kiarton. Though that cannot come about,—though that is a 'deed that may not avail,'—the poet does not wish us to think, apparently, that Gudrun has been spoiled for Kiarton by marriage with Thord and Thorvald. If that were his desire, we might wish that he had left these weddings out altogether; for he took enough liberties with this part of the story as it is. He forces us to think that it was no desire for accuracy on the adaptor's part which urged him to bring the first two lovers of Gudrun in and out of the poem with such abandon. The Gudrun who weeps and

16 Ibid., p. 275.
sings to Kiartan as he takes his leave for Norway might just as well be an unmarried maiden for all the effect marriage has had upon her. In the Saga she is aged, matured, by her experience; in the poem, she knows only that real love has not yet come into her life. This, of course, is a romantic conception quite foreign to the nature of Old Norse literature.

The love between Gudrun and Kiartan is to Morris a passionate longing, an unfulfilled desire of their bodies. The English poet has here written into the story those characteristics which we find in all his poems in this group. The Saga tells us that a love grew up between Kiartan and Gudrun, that most men considered them a likely match; but it does not emphasize, to any great degree, the amorous incidents of their relationship. In The Lovers of Gudrun, however, we find the sensualness which is so typical of Morris's treatment of Old Norse love themes. We see Kiartan, for instance,

Gazing upon her with wild hungry eyes
And parted lips; 17

and learn that Gudrun trembled as "she reached her hand forth to him." The Saga says that when Kiartan departed for Norway, Gudrun desired to go with him, but he told her that could not be, and words passed between them. Morris's Gudrun lets her lover take leave of her while she behaves like a heroine of romance, and conquering her woman's frailty, she says between sobs:

17 Ibid., p. 275.
'Go forth, my love, and be thou not beguiled
By woman's tears.'\textsuperscript{18}

She is displeased with his refusal to take her as is the
Gudrun of the Saga, and yet she cannot refrain from weeping
at the thought of his loss. Before his departure she dedi-
cates herself to his love, saying:

'Men call me hard, but thou hast known me kind;
Men call me fair, my body give I thee;
Men call me dainty, let the rough salt sea
Deal with me as it will, so thou be near!
Let me share glory with thee, and take fear
That thy heart throws aside.'\textsuperscript{19}

But when we read the words of the Saga in this connection, we
learn that after Kiartan had told Gudrun she could not go with
him, and that she should promise to wait three years for his
return: "G\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r\r\u00f6\r

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 285.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 284.
\textsuperscript{20} Laxdöla Saga, p. 116.
her, as she cries:

'O love, come back, come back, delay no more
To ease thine aching heart that yearneth sore
For me,' 21

Although Morris's Kiartan is amused by Ingibiorg, he has no real love for her. He says, leaving Norway, that he will return some day with a 'wonder of a bride.' That he never does. The woman whose beauty and grace should have 'o'erpast those of Ingibiorg' (who was hurt by, but not astonished at Kiartan's return to Gudrun) had in the meantime been married to the conquest-companion and blood-brother of him who kept her memory fresh.

V

The relations of Bodli and Kiartan, and their position in the love-triangle which includes Gudrun, are treated by Morris in a faithful way, and with more dramatic effect than in the Saga. This part of the original informs us that Bodli and Kiartan often went together to visit Gudrun; it hints at a rising jealousy between them, and indeed when they bid each other farewell as Bodli goes back alone from Norway, Kiartan is not entirely sure of what Bodli intends to do. But in *The Lovers of Gudrun* the betrayal of Kiartan by Bodli is carefully built up, and the treachery which Bodli himself laments is definitely foreshadowed. There is no friction between them as they ride together on the plains of Iceland:

21 *Collected Works*, V, 304.
So as day by day
Went Kiartan unto Bathstead, still the way
Seemed shorter if his friend beside him rode;
Then might he ease his soul of that great load
Of love unsatisfied, by words, and take
Mockeries in turn, grown sweet for that name’s sake
They wrapped about, or glow with joy to hear

And laugh with joy and pleasure of his life,
To note how Bodli’s heart withal seemed rife
With love that his love kindled, though as yet
It wandered, on no heart of woman set.22

But when Bodli leaves him alone in Norway, when in the face of
his friend is written the joy of life, Kiartan suspects that
all is not well, saying that Bodli is glad to leave him. Bodli
answers:

"Thou art as glad to stay,
Belike...as I to go away.
What thinkest thou I plot against thee then?"23

Kiartan has the upper hand here, and his suspicion causes Bodli
some anxiety. In the Saga, on the other hand, Bodli tells Kiartan
that he, Kiartan, seems to be desirous of staying in Norway, for
Ingiborg is there. Kiartan answers: "Haf ekki síkt við; en
bera skeltu fremdum varum kveðju mín að sva vínum." Do not
tell tales on me, he says; but Bodli does tell tales, and there
begins the tragedy. The mounting jealousy of Bodli is much more
evident in Morris’s poem than it is in the original; the reader
is not positive as to what the Saga-Bodli intends to do. Con-

22 Ibid., p. 279.
23 Ibid., p. 302.
24 Laxdoela Saga, p. 129.
versely, he expects Morris's Bodli to go immediately to Gudrun and betray Kiartan. That is exactly what he does.

When Bodli approaches Gudrun, the poet confronts us with a situation of great dramatic tension. The woman, her heart hungry for news of her absent lover, tries to restrain her emotions, and calmly to ask concerning Kiartan's health. Bodli, with overpowering love for Gudrun urging him to declare himself, attempts to tell the truth. She speaks first:

'How goes it then, 
With him--thy kinsman, mid the Eastland men?'

He answers:

'Fear not, Gudrun, I bring Fair news of his well-doing--he is well.'

Then she calls him 'friend of my lover,' and beseeches him to give wings to his words and tell her everything he knows concerning Kiartan. Now when Bodli, in the Saga, mentions the name of Ingibiorg in connection with Kiartan's affairs in Norway, he does it in a casual sort of way, saying the King has great reputation with the king, and that men talk as though he were to marry the king's sister. Gudrun, says the Saga, did not 'take those to be good tiding.' Morris changes Bodli's approach to the situation so that Bodli tells Gudrun not so much of Kiartan's doings with the king as of his relations with Ingibiorg. He fairly blurts it out:

'But thou--O, hearken, Gudrun--he doth sit By Ingibiorg's side ever; day by day, 
Sadder his eyes grow when she goes away--

25 Collected Works, V, 305.
What I know I not the eyes of lovers then?—
Why should I tell thee of the talk of men;
Babbling of how he weds her, is made king.  

There is no doubt that Kiartan is friendly with Ingibjorg; the
Saga even states that he regretted leaving her; but Morris's
Bodli obscures the truth. More than that, he tells a palpable
lie, and his guilt enmeshes him in a tragic web which fate
alone did not weave.

Kiartan is innocent of the wrong done him by his friend,
and when he himself returns to Iceland and learns that Bodli
has married his own love, he cries out on his ill luck. Where,
he asks, was the protector of my fame and reputation, Bodli?
He discovers soon enough that Bodli, his blood-brother, could
not have interfered with the vows of Guðrun, for Bodli himself
was a giver and receiver of the truth. The anguish of Guðrun's
husband when he realizes what he has done, and the anger of
Kiartan when he learns that Guðrun is married to Bodli, are
Morris's contributions. They are a part of that dramatic manip-
pulation of the story which the English poet superimposed upon
the straight-forward narration of the Saga-man.

VI

The tragedy of the Laxdæla Saga lies in the fact that Guðrun
and Kiartan are prevented by the actions of Bodli from marriage
with each other. That situation, of course, constitutes the
love-triangle of both the original and the English poem, though

26 Ibid., p. 308.
in the verse paraphrase Morris has seen fit to accentuate certain aspects of the story, and has attempted to make the struggles of two men to attain one woman more dramatically perfect, hence more plausibly tragic. It is true, as Nordby has said, that Bodli is the great figure of the poem; but Morris has also centered some attention upon the two women (besides Gudrun) who came into Kiartan's life: Ingibiorg and Refna. The sister of Olaf Tryggvason is 'unwed and Fair'; and she loves Kiartan. But if Morris's Kiartan is more attentive to this lady of Norway, if Morris's Bodli has more reason for making a great thing of his friend's attentions to her, we know, at least, that whatever love Kiartan held for her was 'a strange love,' that is to say, a love which was not like that of man for woman. It was not the love he felt for Gudrun. Yet Ingibiorg loved him consumedly; she grew pale at their farewell, she spoke to him as her 'beloved,' and said:

'Love!—let me say love once—'

27 Nordby does not stop here, however, in his exaltation of Bodli; his most serious error lies in his comparison of Bodli to 'other great tragic figures in literature': Hamlet, Lear, Othello, and Macbeth, op. cit., p. 45. Nordby's Old Norse learning is beyond question, but his adulation of Morris is immoderate; for to place Bodli on a level with Hamlet and Lear is to allow critical values to be obscured by personal enthusiasm. Morris's greatness as a poet (and he is a poet whose real greatness has been blighted by uncritical adoration) cannot be furthered by this type of criticism. An admirer of Morris should be the first to recognize that fact.

28 Collected Works, V, 317.
But in the generous greatness of that love which Kiartan can never understand, Ingibiorg feels no evil toward her whom Kiartan goes to marry. It was suggested above that perhaps the poet may have done without her in his adaptation, but his treatment of her character is in no way objectionable.

One feels, however, that Refna, is a character of even more importance. Her resignation to that unfortunate predicament into which she is cast by fate is one of the most moving incidents in the poem. Her acceptance of the 'half-love' of the man whom she almost worships, her complete lack of ill-feeling toward Gudrun, her unquestioning love of Kiartan, evince a kindness, a tolerance which Gudrun herself did not possess. Besides being an excellent and a pitiable character, she is also a dramatic instrument. Her very existence causes Gudrun's jealousy, her affection inspires the false words of the gossips; and her goodness is rewarded by the unthinking and careless diffidence of Kiartan. She is of more importance in The Lovers of Gudrun than she is in the Saga. It is Refna, despite the inconsiderable nature of her role in the poem, who should be named to rank with Bodli as a character-creation. She does not understand the strangeness of Kiartan, nor does she question it. She says, out of a heart that is crying for love:

[I had hoped]
Thou wouldst not grudge to show me what a bliss
Thy whole love was, by giving unto me
As unto one who loved thee silently,
Now and again the broken crumbs thereof:
Alas! I, having then no part in love,
Knew not how nought, nought can allay the soul
Of that sad thirst, but love untouched and whole!
Kinder than e’er I durst have hoped thou art,
Forgive me, then, that yet my craving heart
Is so unsatisfied; 29

Khartan is so strongly moved by her almost incredible love for
him (he cannot but remember that he married her for spite of
Gudrun) that he hopes for what he knows can never come true:

'O poor lover, long may we
Live upon earth, till lover and beloved
Each is to each by one desire moved; 30

But the real and pathetic irony of Refna’s love is brought-
forth in a later passage wherein Khartan is shown attempting
to return to her the love which her affection merits:

For now kiss on kiss
Did Khartan shower upon her quivering face,
Yet, even as their arms did interlace,
Despite his love and pity, of past years
He needs must think, of wasted sighs and tears 
And hopes all fallen to nought, and vows undone. 31

He kisses Refna, and she thinks the love he has promised, the
whole love of him she adores, has come to her; but as his lips
touch her cheek, he turns his thoughts back to Gudrun. That
dramatic touch is a subtility which does not belong to the his-
tory of the Laxdaler, hence, we do not find it in the Saga.

Refna is one of the stones under Caesar’s feet; she is a
brief candle in a long night. To love greatly and taste a
little love in return,—that is the tragedy of her life. But
the part she plays in The Lovers of Gudrun is even more tragic

29 Ibid., p. 355.
30 Ibid., p. 356.
31 Ibid., pp. 358-359.
than this. She is the innocent direct cause of murder! Her living with Kiartan, in both the poem and the Saga, arouses the jealousy, on the part of Gudrun, which causes the death of Kiartan and the way-laying of his unwilling slayer, Bodli. Gudrun could not bear to see Kiartan touch Refna. She knew that a ghastly jest had been perpetrated upon her; yet if her jealousy is a vile thing, it does not lack a reasonable cause. Morris says of her:

Sour and sick-hearted Gudrun turned away,
Noting how Kiartan's hand on Refna's lay,
And how their cheeks were close each unto each.
And Refna's eyes that love did so beseech,
Her soft mouth, tremulous with longing sore
For yet more kisses.  

It is perhaps of little consequence, but worthy of attention nevertheless, that the jealousy of Gudrun in the Saga is caused primarily by Refna's possession of the coif which Ingibiorg sent to Iceland as a present for Kiartan's bride, thought then to be Gudrun; and that this situation is taken over into The Lovers of Gudrun, and further enhanced by the actual man-and-wife relationship of Kiartan and Refna. Morris's Gudrun is jealous of Refna's ownership of the coif; that is undeniable, but she is more quickly inflamed by the sight of her lost lover touching the body of his wife. The physical fact is a powerful and important thing here; we shall find it of still more consequence in Sigurd the Volsung. Gudrun's personality begins to disintegrate. She becomes cross, irritable. She comes to loathe Bodli, she thinks of Kiartan and wishes him dead; her

32 Ibid., p. 347.
jealousy of Refna mounts. It is in her changing character, or in that aspect of her character which we see brought out by the needless woe which has been thrust upon her, that the poet indicates to us the imminence of tragic conclusion. The Saga-man has prophesied that no good can come from the love of Guðrun and Kiartan; he has dwelt upon it from the beginning. Morris foreshadows the evil times of the Laxdaler with the prophecy of the Saga-man; but also with a method of his own: Guðrun is the central figure of the love-triangle, of the story itself, and in her collapse we see the inevitable end of tragic forces which have been too long held back. It is Refna's effect upon her which commences the dissolution of Guðrun's security.

VII

We have noticed above that fate does not enter so much into the Laxdale story as it does into the Volsung tale. In general, this statement holds true for Morris's poetical adaptation of these two Northern love stories. This does not mean, of course, that the Laxdala Saga is entirely devoid of the unknown and unknowable; that there is not a sinister power, however small, presiding over the destinies of Guðrun and her lovers. But the historical nature of the story exerted its influence over the Saga-men as well as over the English poet who found his subject in the Saga of the men of Lax-river-dale. Yet we find the poet has by no means neglected the weaving of the Norns; he has not omitted here that idea which is so important in his other poems
adapted from Norse originals. The lives of Kiartan and Gudrun are tangled. It matters not what events may pass, what deeds men shall do: they are bound each to each, and yet must never know the love they crave. "Fate shall work its will" on them as it does on all who live and love in this life of pain.

Kiartan understands better than Bodli that one cannot change the doom of the Gods. He tells Bodli not to strive with fate; he urges him to accept the destiny which he and the Norms have together made. Kiartan knows what is in store for him: ignominious shame, violent death. But Bodli has to be told, first, by Kiartan, and later by Ospak, that his wrongs cannot be atoned for with a mere gift of horses. Ospak tells him that he will have to 'fight for Gudrun yet'; and if he knows that already, he at least puts off the necessity of murder until Gudrun forces him to accomplish the final evil deed of his twisted life.

Inextricably bound up with the threads of fate, in all the Morris love poems adapted from the Norse, is the stout and sustaining cord of love; it is the warp, where fate is the woof, in the fabric of men's lives. But opposed to this terrible and destructive reality of fate and love there is another element in The Lovers of Gudrun so unlike those of the Norse stories that we must take cognizance of its presence. We may call it a reverie, - a reverie of love. It takes the form of a dream, haunting the minds of the persons concerned in the tragedy; and it

33 Ibid., p. 273. See also p. 286.
carries them away, while it lasts, from the real and certain tragedy which fate and love have ordained for them. The sleep that was so blessed and impossible to Macbeth comes to Bodli and Kiartan, and it banishes truth while it endures. Bodli sleeps with Gudrun's arms about him, and nothing disturbs his peace unless it be the dawn, which whispers to him and to Kiartan alike:

'Sleep on, lapse of time is here
Death's brother, and the very Death is near!' 34

And as long as he sleeps he escapes the 'very near Death.' This reverie of love comes also to Gudrun. While she contemplates her ill luck, she dreams of Kiarten:

Picturing,
As in the hopeful time, how arms would cling
About her, and sweet eyes, unsatisfied
E'en with the fulness of all bliss, would hide
No love from her—35

It matters not that this dream brings jealousy with it as the dreamer conjures up the image of Refna in Kiartan's arms. The dream tells her what might have been. Kiartan, too, remembers the past, and banishes the present for the moment, with a memory of Gudrun's kisses on his lips. He, like Gudrun, finds his jealousy thereby aroused; but that is a little thing to a man who can wish, in calm reverie, for things the Gods have foresworn.

34 Ibid., p. 323.
36 Ibid., pp. 338-339.
Such dreams, in The Lovers of Gudrun, do not impede the march of time; they do not change the lives of men. But they allow men to defy, with something of that memorable Norse courage, and with a device very apparently non-Norse, the onrush of destruction. Like love itself, the revery of love sweetens, yet shortens, the path to oblivion.

VIII

Before we conclude our discussion of The Lovers of Gudrun, let us examine some of those passages which speak, in a philosophical way, of love itself. Our oft-mentioned triangle appears in a new light when Kiartan speaks ironically, almost cynically, of the general course which love may run. He says:

’Lo! one more loved my love
Than I had deemed of—thus it oft shall prove!’

By 'one more' he means one more than himself; in brief, says Kiartan, there will often be two men who love one woman,—there will often be love-triangles. Previous to this, Kiartan has shown even more cynicism, when, in search for an escape, a rational philosophy with which to accept the loss of Gudrun, he says of Refna:

’All women are alike to me—’38

And the poet tells us that Kiartan was 'laughing wildly' when he spoke. The Saga-Kiartan does not brandish his sword and cry for blood when he learns he has lost his beloved to another;

37 Ibid., p. 332.
38 Ibid., p. 322.
but neither does he turn cynic. The Saga definitely states that when Kiartan heard of the marriage of Gudrun he did not 'trouble himself over it,' but with an impetuous and abandoned spirit he said, upon looking at Rœna with Gudrun's coif on her head, 'I think it best...that both coif and maiden be mine.' But in The Lovers of Gudrun, we may observe in the almost philosophical words of Kiartan: 'One more loved my love...thus it oft shall prove!' the insistence of the English poet on that particular complication of love, the triangle, which was so momentous and so tragic.

Thus, when Kiartan and Bodli come to a mortal reckoning over Gudrun, we are not surprised that this philosopher weighs well his words when he straightway tells Bodli:

'Bethink thee where by thine own deed thou art
Betwixt a passionate woman's hungry heart
And the vile envy of a dangerous fool;'

So the hungry heart of Gudrun brings woe into Lax-river-dale. Her love for Kiartan turns to hatred for Rœna, and Bodli's adoration of Gudrun forces him to kill his friend and his enemy, Kiartan, with one stroke. The helpless, pitiful wretch who has committed unwilling murder returns to his wife, and says:

'Thy will is done.
Is it enough? Art thou enough alone
As I am?'

But with those words of her detested husband, the anger and jealousy of Gudrun are dissolved: 'No hate was in her face now:' and

39 Ibid., p. 353.
Bodli continues:

"For thy sake
I did it, Gudrun." 40

The triangle which fate constructed, and which Bodli first made men aware of, has been destroyed. With it perishes the hate of Gudrun, the insecurity of Bodli, the life of Kiartan, the sorrow, and yet the prospect of happiness as well for all three. Love is dead in the flesh; love, which so long smouldered in the bosom of Gudrun and in the memory of Kiartan, has been forever stifled. When we look back into Morris's poem to ascertain what that love was, we find the same well known description, in different words, which we have seen before. It was something which

None can know
But those who know the torturer Love, the bliss 41
That heals the stripes those bear who still are his.

It is the same torturer, the same healer of wounds, the paradoxical tormentor which both inflicts and alleviates the most painful hurts that one may know in this life. Morris found this attitude toward love in certain stories of the North. He developed and accentuated it in his earlier adaptations, The Wooing of Hallbiorn, The Wooing of Swanhild. But when he had finished The Lovers of Gudrun, the Old Norse idea of love had ceased to be merely an implication of the Saga-men. It had transcended those immaterial bounds, and had become a beautiful and terrible reality, a major theme, in the Norse poems of an English poet.

40 Ibid., p. 383.
41 Ibid., p. 335.
CHAPTER VI
SIGURD THE VOLSUNG