CHAPTER VI
SIGURD THE VOLSUNG

I

If Morris's tremendous poem of almost ten-thousand lines were to deal only with the hero from which it takes its name, it would consist of but two of the four books into which the poet divided his material. But Morris apparently wished to tell not only the story of Sigurd, but of all the Volsungs as well; he planned, as Heinrich Bartels has shown, to put the Völsunga Saga into verse, and so he has given us the Volsung history from the time of King Volsung to that of Gudrun's departure from the kingdom of Atli. But the Volsung story does not end here. It carries Gudrun on into still more tragedy, until she is forced to outlive the ghastly death of Swanilda, daughter of Sigurd and herself, at the hands of the jealous Jormunrek. Morris concludes the woes of Gudrun after the death of her brothers at Atli's court, and our last view of her shows her casting herself into the sea. From Morris's poem we infer that when the sea closed over Gudrun's head, the trials of the Volsungs and Niblungs came to an end; but the Saga tells us that the sea cast her up on Jonak's lend. If Morris wished to tell the whole legend of the Volsungs, he need not have stopped here; and on the other hand, if he desired merely

1 See his William Morris, the Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs, eine Studie über das Verhältnis des Epos in den Quellen, Münsterische Beiträge zur Englischen Literaturgeschichte (Münster [Westf.], 1906), p. 9, where Bartels says, "Im grossen und ganzen aber kann man sein Epos als freie dichterische Paraphrase der Völsungasaga bezeichnen." A more complete summary of Bartels' researches follows below.
to narrate the story of Sigurd, he was not obliged to go into
the hero's ancestry in Book I, nor into the troubles of the
hero's widow in Book IV. If we had only those books of *Sigurd
the Volsung* which Morris calls *Regin* and *Brynild* (Books II
and III), we should have all of Sigurd before us, though not
all of the *Volsungs*. The question is: why did Morris cut his
poem off at one end and not at the other? That question may
not be answered, but it does seem fairly logical, since the
title of the poem is *Sigurd the Volsung*, that the parentage of
Sigurd, as we find it in Book I is more important than the final
struggles of Gudrun. The present writer mentions these facts,
and points to the obviously misleading title of the poem, be-
cause he will presently be concerned with the actual proportions
of the poem, and he wishes to indicate at the outset that Morris's
decisions in the case of omission and accentuation of certain as-
pects of the story were not necessarily dependent upon the Saga
itself, but more upon his personal inclination.

The four books of the *Volsung* story in verse are *Sigmund*,
*Regin*, *Brynild*, and *Gudrun*. We may easily think of these as
representing four 'English Edda poems,' or the four divisions
into which Morris thought the prose *Völsunga Saga* might be divid-
ed were it to be rendered back into verse. In other words, the
poet may very possibly have conceived of his various books as
four English imitations of the Eddic lays. There are, indeed,
individual lays in the *Elder Edda* which are named after the four
characters from whom Morris takes the titles of his Books, al-
though none of these lays contains as much material as any single Book in Sigurd the Volsung. The first Book, Sig mund, deals entirely with the ancestors of Sigurd: King Vol sung, Sigurd's grandfather, Sigmund, his father, and Signy, his 'father-sister.' There is no reason for the extreme length of this Book if the central figure in the poem is to be Sigurd, but as a part of the Volsung story, it indicates the character of Sigurd in advance by showing the strength of his blood-lines. Sigurd's birth occurs in the second Book, Regin, and here we learn of King Elfd's fostering, of the teaching of Regin, and the forging of the great sword, 'Gram.' Sigurd grows to young manhood, kills Fafnir and Regin, and discovers Brynhild upon Míndfell. The parts of the poem which actually deal with the hero are the last four Chapters of Book II, and all of Book III. In these portions, Sigurd accomplishes his heroic deeds, woos Brynhild, goes to the Niblung court, marries Guðrun, is falsely murdered, and brings about the death of Brynhild and the woe of Guðrun. In the fourth Book, Guðrun marries Atli, and the Niblungs are slain by his men. She does not go to King Jonak, as we have mentioned above, but throws herself into the sea, as we suppose, in suicide.

We may see that not all of the poem is devoted to Sigurd. One-hundred and seventy-seven of the three-hundred and six pages treat of Sigurd, boy and man, but only one-hundred and sixteen pages, or about a third of the poem, deal with Sigurd...
the full-fledged hero. Examining more minutely the space
given over to Sigurd, we find that Morris devotes about one-
fourth of the parts in which Sigurd is concerned, or Chapters
6 to 9 of Book II, and Chapters 5 and 8 of Book III, to Sigurd's
prowess as a hero, and the rest to Sigurd the lover of Brynhild,
the wooer of Brynhild vice Gunnar, and the murdered husband of
Gudrun. It would appear that Sigurd the great lover interested
Morris more than Sigurd the great hero. In the Völsunga Saga
itself, of approximately fifty pages which concern Sigurd,
about one-half are devoted to his deeds, and about one-half
to his ill luck in love. The love story in Sigurd the Volsung
is paraphrased (and expanded) from Chapters XXIII-XXXII of the
Saga.

Dr. Bartels has already accurately demonstrated the rela-
tionship of Sigurd the Volsung to its source materials. Before
we continue with the English poet's treatment of his story, we
may perhaps profit by an examination of the essential conclu-
sions of Bartels' work. The story of the Volsungs and Niblings,
as is quite well known, is to be found in many pieces of litera-
ture. We are not so much concerned with the folk-loristic ele-
ments into which the legend may be synthesized; for our purposes
it is sufficient to know that the chief Old Norse sources for
this mythical material are the Völsunga Saga, the Prose Edda,
the second part of Heroic Cycle of the Elder Edda, and the

2 Of the twenty-one lays in this group, perhaps ten are of most
importance: Helgi Hundingsbana II, Sigdrifumál, Sigurðarkviða en
Moðreks Saga. Bartels shows in his Studie über das Verhältnis des Epos zu den Quellen, how Morris depended upon the Saga, the two Eddas (from the Old Norse), and the Nibelungenlied. The contributions of the Saga to Sigurd the Volsung are of paramount significance; those of the Elder Edda, the Prose Edda, and the German version of the story of decreasing importance in the order named. Our general concept of the material assumes that the poem is being considered as the poetic version of the Saga itself; exceptions to this are mentioned below.

Bartels makes a distinction between the influence of the Eddic lays themselves, and the incidental Eddic stanzas which appear between prose passages in the Saga; the latter he quite properly considers as part of the Saga itself. He adduces evidence to show the effect of the lays upon both the style and subject-matter of Sigurd. To the Prose Edda, Bartels devotes


3 In support of his statement that the English poem is for the most part a verse paraphrase of the Völsunga Saga, Bartels has drawn up a detailed table, indicating the correspondence of various parts of the Saga to parts of Sigurd, and showing the poet's omissions as well. Op. cit., pp. 9-11. See also Chapters I and II, pp. 1-28.

4 Ibid., pp. 28-56. A good example of parallelism between a line from an original lay and one from Sigurd is quoted under Bartels' discussion of the Fafnismál, op. cit., p. 31:

'Sveinn ok sveinni hverjum est. sveinni of borinn?
hverra'st menn gögr?' [Fafnismál, stanza 1.]

'Child, child, who art thou that hast smitten? bright child, of whence is thy birth?' [Sigurd, in Collected Works, XII, 111.]
but seven pages, wherein he points out a few inconsequential stylistic influences of Smorri's work upon Morris. With the conclusions in the first five Chapters of Bartels' monograph, the student of Morris can and must agree. But the discussion in Chapter VI, the Verhältnis des Epos zum Nibelungenlied, is more controversial. That the chivalric and romantic elements which Morris superimposes upon the heroic character of the Old Norse Volsung story may have come from the Nibelungenlied is open to question. Bartels' belief, in this connection, is that whereas the Old Norse documents influenced Morris's style and substance, the German poem affected the spirit of Sigurd the Volsung. The idea of quest and knightly accomplishment which we find in Morris's Sigurd (and not in the Saga), he avers, has its source in the Lied. If we remember that Morris was well versed in the romances of the Middle Ages, and if we believe that his ideas on socialism colored his conception of Sigurd, we may conclude without fear of grave error, that the courtly elements in the poem are not entirely (if at all) owing to the influence of the Nibelungenlied.

The basic plot of the story of the Volsungs and Niblungs has not been materially altered by Morris, as Bartels has quite satisfactorily proved. The prowess of Sigurd, the wooing of Brynhild by Gunnar and Sigurd, the fatal potion mixed by Grimhild,

5 Ibid., pp. 56-62.

6 Ibid., pp. 62-72.

7 This point is discussed below in connection with Sigurd's character.
the killing of Sigurd, — all these, and other traditional incidents of the legend are to be found in the English poem. But the amplification of various parts of the story, and the omission of others, as well as the poet’s treatment of the love-theme, are more important to our present discussion than are the rather obvious relations of the ‘stuff’ of the poem to its sources. It is by reason of such accentuation and omission that Morris parts company with the Volsung tradition in an effort to increase the dramatic effect of his poem. Where are all the heroic deeds of the great mythical hero of the North? Where is Aslaug, daughter of Sigurd and Brynhild, whose wardship Brynhild delegates to Heimir in the Saga? Where is Jonak, and what has become of the tale of Jormunrek and Swanhild? These queries will be made by the reader of Morris’s Sigurd the Volsung, especially if he carries in his mind the minute details of the Volsung stories. The tale of Aslaug might well have been included to heighten the jealousy of Brynhild and Gudrun; indeed one might expect Morris to place both Aslaug and Swanhild in the third Book to increase the "Contention Between the Queens." Although Morris considered the Aslaug (and

8 Brynhild says: "'Aslaug the daughter of me and Sigurd shall be nourished here with thee [with Heimir]." Völsunga Saga, Collected Works, VII, 354. The fact that Morris had already treated the Aslaug story in The Earthly Paradise may have caused him to omit it from Sigurd. See his attitude toward the relations of Sigurd and Brynhild in The Fostering of Aslaug, in Collected Works, VI, 21-22.

That Sigurd, while his youth was bright
And unstained, midst the first delight
Of Brynhild’s love— that him did gain
All joy, all woe, and very bane—
Begat on her a woman-child.
Ragnar's story, to be no part of the Volsung legend proper, he was aware that her existence was known to the Saga-writer, as was the whole Swanhild story. The former he neglected, the latter he omitted because he thought the grief of Guðrun had come to its logical conclusion at Æti's court.

Before we turn to a more detailed discussion of Morris's treatment of the love elements in Sigurd the Volsung, let us repeat, recalling the researches of Bartels, that the whole Volsung story as Morris tells it is essentially the same as that of the Saga, but that his emphasis and his treatment of detail are by no means identical with the methods of the Saga-man.

II

In discussing the love element in Sigurd the Volsung, we should first observe that Morris's attitude toward love is not entirely the heroic attitude. We have already seen how Randver, in the Swanhild tale, wished to accomplish heroic deeds before he looked for the love of women. This, in general, is true of Sigurd. In the Saga, the love of Brynhild comes to Sigurd after he has proved himself worthy in great deeds. As a lover he is equal to all occasions. But Morris's Sigurd is more than a successful wooer: he is a conqueror of women, sentimental,

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almost courtly. He swears oaths of eternal allegiance to his first love, and again to his second, and yet he knows the consequences of fated love almost from the beginning. George Tremaine McDowell objects to the fact that Morris gives us "a mass of decorous details" when he treats the love of Sigurd for Brynhild, and observes:

In the Saga, the matter-of-fact, incidental mention of Aslaug, daughter of Brynhild and Sigurd, indicates that the original characters were by no means lacking in passion. He thinks that Sigurd is too effeminate, too greatly lacking in heroism and passion. One may object to Morris's treatment of Sigurd as a romantic lover, but by no means upon those grounds. Indeed, where the Saga-man makes "incidental mention" of passion, whether it be the love of Brynhild and Sigurd, the consummation of which resulted in the birth of Aslaug, or the merest kiss of Sigurd, Morris goes into great detail. Our poet may be more complete, less subtle than the Saga-writer; but he is by no means more "decorous." The Saga says, for example, of the oaths and love of Sigurd and Brynhild:

Sigurd spake, 'None among the sons of men can be found wiser than thou; and thereby swear I, that thee will I have as my own, for near to my heart thou liest.'

She answers, 'Thee would I fearest choose, though I had all men's sons to choose from.'

10 McDowell considers the changes in the chief characters to be "softening and emasculating," owing largely to "romantic embroidery." Op. cit., p. 160. To be sure, the Norse Sigurd is a stalwart fellow; but the romantic additions of Morris scarcely 'emasculate' him. He is still recognizable as the man who stands above the sons of Giuki 'as the spear-leeke above the grass,' in spite of his courtliness.

And thereto they plighted troth both of them.

But when Morris treats the same material, he writes:

Then they turned and were knit together; and oft and
o'er again
They craved, and kissed rejoicing, and their hearts
were full and fain.13

Later he speaks of Sigurd and Brynhild who loved "Till both
their bodies mingling seemed one glory and the same." Morris's
failure to mention the result of the passion of Sigurd and
Brynhild (the child of their union) may be an oversight; but cer-
tainly his bald kennings for copulation leave no doubt in the
reader's mind that Sigurd and Brynhild were more than casually
acquainted. And this type of expression is typical of Morris's
attitude toward love throughout the poem. It is sentimental,
perhaps; it is romantic also, but more important than that,-
it is definitely sensual and openly sexual.

This is consistent with the poet's usual treatment of the
love element in his Old Icelandic poems. Therein, this writer
holds, the poet contributes something of extreme importance to
the idea of fatalistic love in the Norse adaptations. Love is
tragic enough, in these tales of the North, but Morris adds to
that tragedy by making the physical enjoyment of love perfectly
obvious and necessary; thus, when he treats of the eternal tri-
angle, the sexual element makes the conflict more terrible, deep-

12 Collected Works, VII, 341.

13 Sigurd the Volsung, in Collected Works, XII, 124. (Future
references will be made simply to "Sigurd," and page number.)

14 Ibid., p. 147.
ens the tragedy of the loss of love, and makes the jealousy of those concerned more comprehensible to the modern reader. This may not enhance the Norse atmosphere of the stories, but it gives them an added strenuousness which heightens the reader's interest. He who reads Morris's adaptation of the Völsunga Saga may not always 'behold her topp'd,' but he will know, when the sexual act is a part of the tragedy, that such an act has occurred: he will not have to guess at the creation of Aslaug. We will have occasion to refer to this below. Let us first examine a few details taken at random from Sigurd, which demonstrate Morris's sensual treatment of love. King Volsung, during the wooing of Siggeir, says to his daughter, Sigyn:

'A great king woos thee, daughter; wilt thou lie in a great king's bed,
And bear earth's kings on thy bosom, that our name may never die?'

After their wedding, we find that "soft on the breast of Sigyn 16 King Siggeir lay asleep." These passages combine the frank outspokenness of the Old Norse literature with a sensuality distinctly non-Norse. Sigurd, to cite another instance, finding Brynhild upon Hindfell, "toucheth her breast and her hands, and he loveth her passing sore...." In most of his descriptions of women, Morris adds sensuous or sensual details to the brief descriptive materials which he found in the Saga. Gudrun is con-

15 Ibid., p. 2.
16 Ibid., p. 10.
17 Ibid., p. 123.
stantly referred to as the "white-armed Gudrun" ("O white-armed Helen, Paris' prize"), or as the "white-armed Gjuki's child," till at length her white arms become almost a symbol for her sensual beauty. The women of the sagas are appealing and beautiful, but the English poet is not content with generalities; he speaks of their lovely hair, their shapely breasts, their intimacies in love. If he does not possess the Saga-men's restraint, Morris owns at least the older writer's frankness; and he adds to it a spirit of sensual love which is possibly taken for granted, but hardly dwelt upon, in the Saga proper.

The love of man for woman in Sigurd the Volsung cannot be indicated with the simple phrase, 'Sigurd loved Brynhild greatly'; more often we find words of quite another sort,- "they turned and were knit together...."

While the actors in Sigurd the Volsung partake of the love which means so much to their happiness, like the characters of the Gudrun and Hallbiorn stories, they are not unaware of its consequences. They realize that their lives are tangled with fate, that the Norms have already prepared tragedy for them, and that pain and hatred will mingle together ere they 'change their lives.' Morris's conception of fate has already been sufficiently discussed in some detail, but its connections with the love element must not be disregarded here. Mr. Elton and Mr. McDowell have both commented upon the force of fate in Sigurd the Volsung, the former stating that the "groundtone of the poem is the sense of doom," and that the chief characters of
the poem are able to 'half-foresee' their tragic ends.

McDowell says that we see:

Fate moving the human pawns about, blindly and pur-
poselessly [in Book I but that] in the books that
follow, man becomes more the master of his own fate,
although the Norns still dominate.19

It is fairly difficult for us to imagine how that paradoxical
situation might exist, for we find that every chief person
in Sigurd the Volsung,—Brynhild, Sigurd, Guðrun, Gunnar,—at
some time (and Sigurd often) confesses his own inadequacy in
the face of fate. They realize that they are 'pawns of the
Norns,' and that their future and change of life has long since
been determined. Brynhild, for instance, in her prophecy to
Guðrun, says:

'Thy dream is all areded; I may tell thee nothing more: Thou shalt live and love and lose, and mingle in
murder and war.
Is’t strange, O child of the Niblungs, that thy glory and thy pain
Must be blest with the battle’s darkness, and the unseen hurrying bane?'

The phrase, "live and love and lose," may be taken as a catch-
phrase by which one may explain the combined love and fate el-
ements in Morris's adaptations from the Norse. The Norse writ-
er shows his actors to be the victims of fate (and this is no
place for that recognized fact to be defended); he shows, as
well, the misfortunes of their loves. Morris is at all times
careful to combine these two motifs so that they are inextricable,

18 Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature, 1780-1880
(New York, 1920), IV, 43.
19 McDowell, op. cit., p. 164.
20 Sigurd, p. 138.
and the words which the present writer has already used to express the fatal "loving and losing" in the other adaptations is merely a paraphrase of the poet's own expression. Gudrun and Brynhild, Sigurd and Gunnar "live and love and lose," and what is more, they know well in advance of life's change that they will lose. This is not a new idea with Morris. In his treatment of the Old Norse stories, however, he accentuates it in such a way as to make it the ethical theory of the five poems which we are discussing in this part of our study. The prophecy of Brynhild is contained in the Volsunga Saga, and also in the Elder Edda, but in those documents, fate is merely an accepted and awful reality. In Morris's Sigurd, it is more than that, and more, it may be added, than a "groundwork": it is an actor in the drama. Sigurd struggles against Brynhild's memory of his love, and Gudrun's pride in being his wife, and against the fate which caused him to marry the wrong woman. It may be said, in opposition to this idea, that Grimhild brought about the tragedy when she mixed the wine for Sigurd, the potion which made him forget Brynhild and turn his love toward Gudrun. But this is not a complete argument, for even the act of Grimhild was foreknown by Brynhild, and by Gudrun after Brynhild prophesied for her the tragic events to come.

It would be impracticable, as it is unnecessary, to quote all the passages which show the attitude of each individual toward fate in Sigurd the Volsung, but selected lines may serve to emphasize this point. When Sigurd approaches Giuki's house
for the first time, having come lately from Brynhild, his keen sense of the future, his knowledge of the designs of the Norms, is at once apparent to him:

For he deemed that beyond that rock-wall bode his changed love and life
On the further side of the battle and the hope, and the shifting strife:

He knows, when he takes the cup from Grimhild, that "a tangle of strange love, deep guile, and strong compelling," are mingled in it, but nevertheless he drinks. He knows that Gudrun's life is "tangled in his," and he cannot do anything about it, so he follows, with fearless resignation, the destiny that is prepared for him.

It is not the tendency of Morris's Norse heroes to cry out against fate. Though they realize that it has caused their unhappiness, they accept whatever is in store for them. Brynhild knows that the Norms have taken Sigurd from her, but she does not think of them as meting out judgment without reason. After the "Contention betwixt the Queens," she says, "O Norms, fast

21 Ibid., p. 151.
22 Ibid., p. 166.
23 Ibid., p. 172.
24 See also Sigurd's words when he goes to the "fateful bride-bed" of Gudrun, Ibid., p. 180, and again his words to Brynhild when, disguised as Gunnar, he leaves her: "I have come where the Norms have led me...." Ibid., p. 193.
bound from helping, O Gods that never weep...." Gunnar is not aware of the working of fate until the grief of Brynhild manifests itself, and then he remembers the prophecy of his mother when she gave the wine to Sigurd.

Although Sigurd exemplifies best the consciousness of fate, it is Grimhild who seems to epitomize, in her character and in her actions, the awful truth of impending doom. She manipulates the love of Sigurd, Brynhild, and Gudrun; she prophesies the dis-

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25 Ibid., p. 213.

26 Gunnar's early innocence is attested by his saying, after Grimhild has told him to woo Brynhild:

'And I sit by my brother Sigurd, and no ill there is in our life,
And the harp and the sword is beside me, and I joy in the peace and the strife,
So I live, till at last in the sword-play midst the uttermost longing of fame
I shall change my life and be merry, and leave no hated name.' [Ibid., p. 184]

Morris makes Gunnar more than a mere accessory in the killing of Sigurd. Gunnar's disillusionment, his jealousy, his change of character after the troubles of Brynhild appear, are all real. Observe, for instance, his devotion and kindness when he says to Brynhild, during her great grief:

'Art thou smitten of God, unto whom shall we cast the prayer?
Art thou wronged by one of the King-folk, for whom shall the blades be bare?' [Ibid., p. 215.]

His killing of Sigurd is a deed of revenge and necessity; he says, after all has been done and Sigurd is dead: "But all this of the Norms was fore-ordered, and herein is Odin's hand...." [Ibid., p. 232.]
tressing days to come. When she gave Sigurd the love philtre, 27
"She looked and laughed at his laughter...." She smiles at
her own wickedness, and takes pride in the fact that she can
order men's lives to her purpose. But she is scarcely a human-
being as Morris pictures her... She moves about like a thing
supernatural, and yet we are not to believe that she alone can
fashion the lives of men. Behind her in the darkness are the
swift fingers of the Norns, and the "wrath of Odin the Goth";
she carries out on earth the purposes of the Gods, and the fate
she directs is theirs, not hers. She is not, in Sigurd the
Volsung, merely the Grimhild of old, the mother of Gunnar and
Gudrun who mixed the drink for Sigurd. She is like Shakespeare's
Margaret, in Richard III; she is like a Greek chorus. When
Sigurd, Gudrun, and Gunnar react to her devices, they realize
that they are motivated not by her alone, but by the decrees
of the Gods; and although men may not fully comprehend the sig-
nificance of her deeds, they are aware that she can work many
changes: "Men gazed and their hearts sank in them, and they
knew not why it was...." But Grimhild, helping the Gods to
dispense their unreasonable judgments, is herself unaffected:

But Grimhild looked and was merry: and she deemed her
life was great,
And her hand a wonder of wonders to withstand the
deeds of Fate: 30

27 Ibid., p. 166.

28 See Elton's remarks, in another connection, where he speaks
of the atmosphere of Sigurd as being "more Æschylean than
Homeric," op. cit., IV, 45.

29 Sigurd, p. 166.

30 Ibid., p. 166.
As we conclude our observations upon the material thus far presented, we find a greater emphasis on the physical side of love, in the Morris version of the Volsung legend, than we do in the original; and this love is interwoven and intertwined with the fate which pervades Northern tragedy. The combination of these two elements, the accentuation of the single purpose of both: tragedy, contributes to the Volsung story a conscious dramatic pattern which, as the frank, straight-forward, unadorned story of the North, it did not, in its original form, possess. Physical love and fate have always belonged to the Vol-

... the... sunge; but Morris, with almost a plan of a dramatist, employs them for artistic foreshadowing, for making the tragedy more terrible by impressing its imminence upon the consciousness of his actors. In short, he takes the devices of Old Norse and directs them toward the accomplishment of a modern design in a consciously artistic literary composition.

III

William Morris knew, when he composed Sigurd the Volsung, that he was writing for readers who were to a great extent unacquainted with Old Norse literature. Consequently we may assume that a large portion of the minute details of the poem were included for the sake of comprehensibility. The English reader of the Volsunga Saga in translation may be confused by the references to Aslæng, because the Saga-man has not dwelt upon the relations of Sigurd and Brynhild. Morris's treatment
of this subject in Sigurd has already been discussed above; he eliminated such confusion, in his story at least, by amplifying the actual circumstances concerning the love of Sigurd and Brynhild. The Norse student recalls that the Eddas and the Saga do not agree upon this matter, and the question as to whether Brynhild and the maid on the mountain are identical has given scholars considerable food for thought. But Morris treats Brynhild with definiteness, and he leaves virtually no room for doubt as to her love for Sigurd.

The two aspects of the early relationship between these two, which are rather vaguely dealt with in the Saga, are those of the love between them, and the exchange of rings, both so important to the later "Contention betwixt the Queens." Passages have been quoted above to indicate Morris's conception of the former. We know that "mighty and measureless" the tide of their mutual love arose, and that they "met and mingled." In the Saga, Sigurd swears he will have Brynhild and "no woman else," and gives her "a gold ring." But without ceremony or ado, he departs for the realm of the Niblungs, and the same token, which this time is identified as a ring from Andvari's hoard, he takes from her as a troth-pledge after he has lain with her three nights in the guise of Gunnar. But Morris dramatizes the giving and taking of the ring, and makes it a prophetic incident, foretelling the dim and desolate future:
Then he set the ring on her finger and once,  
if ne'er again.  
They kissed and clung together, and their hearts  
were full and fain. 

The man, the woman, the kiss, and the ring belong to the Saga;  
the inference contained in the phrase, "if ne'er again," and  
the expression "clung together," belong to William Morris. 

The modern reader, Morris probably thought, would be  
made uneasy by the imperfectly developed situations, and by  
the terseness of the Saga. The Old Norseman was perhaps not an-
noyed by these things, for he knew the details which the Saga-
compiler often omits or touches upon but lightly. Many of  
Morris's additions of small detail can be shown, upon examina-
tion, to be dedicated directly to smoothing the path for the  
English reader. Such a detail is the phrase, "if ne'er again;"  
it hints at the events which develop later: we soon learn that  
Sigurd never again shared the ecstasy of love with Brynhild.  
Another such expansion and addition of minutiae is found in the  
case of Grimhild's potion. In the Volsunga Saga, Grimhild  
sees that she must put an end to Sigurd's love for Brynhild,  
so she gives him the forgetful drink, saying, "Lo now, take  
this horn and drink thereof." We are not told what is  
in the drink, and we know only from Grimhild's later words  
that it has the power to make Sigurd love Gudrun. The

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1 Sigurd, p. 139.
2 Collected Works, VII, 350.
Gripisspa, in the Elder Edda tells us no more. But Morris did not expect his English readers to be acquainted with the tradition of the love-potion. When he brought it into Sigurd the Volsung, he explained in some detail exactly what it was

[Grimhild speaks]:

'I beseech thee hearken a little to a faithful word of mine,
When thou of this cup has drunken; for my love is blent with the wine,'
He laughed, and he took the cup: but therein with the blood of the earth
Earth's hidden might was mingled, and deeds of the cold sea's birth,
And things that the high Gods turn from, and a tangle of strange love,
Deep guile, and strong-compelling, that whoso drank thereof
Should remember not his longing, should cast his love away,
Remembering dead desire but as night remembereth day.

Morris tells us of the nature and power of the wine; where the Saga-man has asked his reader to take up the horn and drink, the English poet has virtually poured the vintage down the reader's throat. This method is not subtle, but neither is it obscure; and if it loses something because it is obvious, it gains much more because it is clear. Any number of minor examples of this clarifying practice may be discovered in Sigurd the Volsung. But one other instance of extreme importance, since it not only explains a major portion of the plot but also prepares the reader for a great dramatic situation, may be observed in the poet's handling of the trouble between Brynhild and Gudrun.

33 Sigurd, pp. 165-166.
As Morris "builds up" the love affair of Brynhild and Sigurd, he lays a solid and exact foundation for the jealousy which arises between the two women. "The Contention betwixt the Queens," an ever-apparent dissonance of which the reader of Sigurd the Volsung is aware even before the famous scene at the river, and which may scarcely be discovered in the Saga until the actual event of the bathing, has a two-fold nature in the poem. First there is the background of inharmonious love, created by the feeling which Morris so successfully instils in the reader,—that Sigurd is married to Gudrun, whom he loves by virtue of a potion, whereas he should have married Brynhild, whom he loves with a natural passion. Morris prepares the reader for the final rupture between the queens by dramatizing Brynhild's prophecy to Gudrun concerning the latter's tragic future, and by emphasizing the grief of Brynhild who knows she is married to a lesser man than Sigurd. The two queens, with the resigned acceptance of that fate which pervades Morris's poem, secretly know that sometime they will come to sharp words over Sigurd, and yet they try to cast such thoughts out of their minds. This first aspect of the inharmonious love is merely a foreshadowing of the actual contention, which is the second and more tangible conflict in the love triangle. Let us observe in the text these two phases of the jealousy which grows up between the queens. The love which had existed between

34 Ibid., p. 138.
Sigurd and Brynhild, and which later belongs to Sigurd and Gudrun, is the actual cause of the friction leading up to the "word-battle" of Brynhild and Gudrun. Morris uses balance and repetition of phrases in describing the love of Sigurd first for one woman, then for the other. To Brynhild, Sigurd says:

'O Brynhild, now hearken while I swear,
That the sun shall die in the heavens and the day no more be fair,
If I seek not love in Lyndale, and the house that fostered thee,
And the land where thou awakedst 'twixt the wood-land and the sea!'\textsuperscript{35}

Brynhild answers:

'O Sigurd, Sigurd, now hearken while I swear
That the day shall die forever and the sun to blackness wear,
Ere I forget thee, Sigurd, as I lie 'twixt wood and sea
In the little land of Lyndale and the house that fostered me!'\textsuperscript{36}

But in the 'forgetful spell' of Grimhild's drink, Sigurd professes his love to Gudrun also. The poet's balanced plan is at once apparent when we notice that Sigurd's oath, and likewise Gudrun's, are phrased in the same terms, and that they swear by the same tokens as did Sigurd and Brynhild. Sigurd says to Gudrun:

'O Gudrun, now hearken while I swear
That the sun shall die forever and the day no more be fair,
Ere I forget thy pity and thine inmost heart of love!
Yea, though the Kings be mighty, and the Gods be great above,
I will wade the flood and the fire, and the waste of war forlorn,

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 130.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 130.
To look on the Niblung dwelling, and the house where thou wert born.'

Gudrun answers:

'King, as for me,
If thou sawest the heart in my bosom, what oath
might better thee?
Yet my words thy words shall cherish, as thy lips
my lips have done.
--Herewith I swear, O Sigurd, that the earth shall
hate the sun,
And the year desire but darkness, and the blossoms
shrink from day,
Ere my love shall fail, beloved, or my longing
pass away!''

Another example of the same balance is found in "orric's description of the passion of Sigurd and Brynhild, and later of Sigurd and Gudrun. Concerning the former, as we have seen above, the poet writes:

Then they turned and were knit together; and oft
and o'er again
They craved, and kissed rejoicing, and their hearts were full and fain.

And of Sigurd and Gudrun, he says:

Strange, sweet, to cling together! as oft and o'er again
They crave and kiss rejoicing, and their hearts are full and fain.

This is not accidental reiteration. It is conscious and purposeful repetition, designed, it would seem, to accentuate the triangle, and to show that Sigurd, under the spell of Grimhild's wine and the foredoomed fate of the Gods, has forgotten Brynhild in his forced love for Gudrun, for:

37 Ibid., p. 174.
38 Ibid., pp. 174-5.
39 Ibid., p. 124.
The heart was changed in Sigurd; as though it ne'er had been
His love of Brynhild perished as he gazed on the Niblung Queen.41

After he has treated the love-triangle with this device of repetition, Morris prepares more carefully for a sharp "Contention betwixt the Queens" than does the Saga-writer. The fatal curse, charged with imminent conflict, hovers over the lives of Gudrun and Brynhild. Brynhild humbles herself before Sigurd's wife so that the "barren stark contention" which both of them feel should not too soon "mingle in their lives." When the clash does occur, Morris is able to make it more bitter than it might otherwise have been, for the tension has been so great that its breaking causes a resounding explosion of pent-up tragic forces. Morris's interpretation of the contention differs in certain details from that of the Saga-man. Where such variations occur, one sees that Morris has changed details in order to dramatize situations. The proof which Gudrun offers that Sigurd took Gunnar's place at Brynhild's side during the troth-plighting of Gunnar, is the ring of Andvari, which Sigurd first gave to Brynhild, and then, as Gunnar, again took from the Shield-Maid. In the Saga, Gudrun tells Brynhild in a straight-forward manner how she got it, but in Sigurd, she taunts Brynhild, and as Brynhild beseeches her to say that Gunnar gave it to her, Gudrun refuses to do so. Then follows the argument which precipitates the final tragedy. Besides expanding one small part of the Saga into a Section of considerable length, Morris accomplishes still another shift

41 Ibid., p. 167.
in emphasis through his changes in the characterization of
Gudrun and Brynhild. The Gudrun of the Saga can scarcely be
called a homogeneous character; she is not quite the same per-
son at the end of the Saga that she was at the beginning. We
see her first as a beautiful woman who is perturbed by a
strange dream. Up through the time when Brynhild counsels her
concerning the "fair hawk feathered with feathers of gold," she
seems a person of no particular character. But after Brynhild
prophesies that Gudrun will marry Sigurd, and bring disaster to
the Niblungs, saying, "'Him shalt thou have, and him shalt thou
quickly miss,'" Gudrun's reactions convince us that she is a
woman of definite character. Her cold, strangely unresponsive
manner is then apparent. During the 'Contention' scene she be-
comes vindictive, and when Brynhild's jealousy of Gudrun's pos-
sessing Sigurd forces the Shield-Maid to say, "'For this shalt
thou pay,'" Gudrun makes two spiteful remarks to Brynhild. If
the first is a hating woman's sharp-tongued vilification: "'Thou
art better matched than thou art worthy of,'" the second is her
dispraise of Brynhild because she is married to a lesser man
than Sigurd: "'Ganni would not abide the fire under Gunnar the
King, but Sigurd durst the deed and thy heart may-well abide
without mocking him.'" But after the death of Sigurd, the Saga-
Gudrun shows that her heart is not made of stone. Her grief for
Sigurd is as genuine as it is ample. The Hunnish princesses,

Giafthug, Herborg, and Gullrond, attempt to lessen her sorrow by telling Gudrun of the sadness of their lives; but her grief, she thinks, has a more moving source than theirs. She says:

'I miss from my seat,
I miss from my bed,
My darling of sweet speech.
Wrought the sons of Giuki,
Wrought the sons of Giuki,
This sore sorrow,
Yea, for their sister,
Most sore sorrow.'

Gudrun lives unhappily ever after her loss of Sigurd, — the Sagarman portrays her as an afflicted woman whose days of happiness are in the past. Upon marrying Atl, she says, "Better was life in those days when I had Sigurd...."

In summary of the character of the Saga-Gudrun we may say that she is at first cold and superstitious, fearful lest her dreams betide ill. After her marriage with Sigurd, she is more warm-souled and extremely affectionate to her husband,— yet she is spiteful of Brynhild. By Sigurd’s death she is mightily aggrieved, and although she no longer hates her husband’s murderers after drinking the potion of forgetfulness, nothing can keep from her the memory of Sigurd. The Sagar-man introduces the potion here in order to change the attitude of Gudrun toward

44 Ibid., p. 371. A much better translation of this passage is given by Henry Adams Bellows, in his translation of the Poetic Edda (New York, 1923), p. 417:

"In his seat, in his bed, I see no more.
My heart's true friend; the fault is theirs,
The sons of Giuki, for all my grief,
That so their sister sorely weeps." [Guðrúnarkviða I, stanza 19.]

45 Collected Works, VII, 376.
her brothers. In the Nibelungenlied, it is she who desires their deaths; in the Volsunga Saga, it is Atli who kills Gunnar and Hogni while Gudrun attempts to warn them, with runes, of his treachery. That the Saga-man was concerned with making Gudrun, long-suffering and pitiable character from the time of Sigurd's death onward is fairly well indicated by his remarks about her after she kills Atli: "But Gudrun had no will to live longer after this deed so wrought, but nevertheless her ending day was not yet come upon her."

Morris's Gudrun undergoes virtually the same changes in character. But the conscious artistry of the English poet is always more apparent than that of the Saga-man in Gudrun's reactions to the conditions and circumstances of her life. The poet dramatizes Brynhild's 'reding' of Gudrun's dream, for example, and draws it out to great length, through which expansion we see exactly how Gudrun is affected by the counsel of Brynhild. After marrying Sigurd, she is, like the Saga-Gudrun, loving and serene; but when she argues with Brynhild concerning the relative merits of their respective husbands, the poet tells us in advance that, "hard grew the heart of Gudrun...." She is more vindictive and vindictive, more anxious to show her superiority over Brynhild than is her prototype in the Old Norse original. We do not always have to depend upon the actions

46 Ibid., pp. 391-392.
of the characters in Sigurd to tell us what the characters are, or to hint to us what they may do: the poet often explains, in running commentary, much of the action of the story. Morris's Gudrun, after the death of Sigurd, is possessed of a great grief more crushing than that of the Saga-Gudrun. Her reactions to the sad tales of Giaflaug, Herborg, and Gullrond are quite in keeping with the nature of her sorrow: she is struck dumb upon seeing Sigurd dead.

The reasons for the poet's over-emphasizing these two points, the hauteur of Gudrun in the presence of Brynhild, and her lamentation after Sigurd's murder, seem to be quite obvious. The one increases the dramatic tension in the 'Contention' scene (which we discuss presently); the other creates a formidable beginning for the unremitting woe of the heroine. Morris has not actually altered the Saga-man's conception of Gudrun; he has simply defined more sharply the contrasting elements in her personality.

There are also two chief differences of character between the Saga-Brynhild and Gunnar's wife in Sigurd the Volsung. To the Saga-man she is a Valkyr, a Shield-bearer. When she first meets Sigurd, she says: "It is not fated that we should abide

48 Morris outdoes the Saga-man with his portrayal of the afflictions of Gudrun. The memory of Sigurd, the endless sorrow of his widow, and the importance which she attaches to her husband's greatness is discussed in some detail below, in Section V.

49 See Sigurd, pp. 233-235.
together; I am a shield-maid...[and] battle [does not] become loathsome to me." After her argument with Gudrun, she lies sick of disappointment and grief; her Valkyrie strength has been sapped by the broken love in her woman's heart. But what abjection she shows in this scene is quickly dissipated when Gunnar comes to her. She rises up, reclaiming her forgotten battle-strength, and threatens to kill him unless he will let her alone. Morris's Brynhild, on the other hand, is a character of less masculinity. Where the Shield-maid characteristics predominate in the poet's Brynhild, womanly traits are most in evidence. We observe that Morris has softened Brynhild. We cannot think of her as the mighty warrior-maiden who did battle with Odin; we look upon her, rather, as the first love of Sigurd, and as the unfortunate wife of Gunnar. In her affection for her husband (before the 'Contention') she resembles Gudrun; and after the bathing scene she is completely abject. Along with this softening goes a second change which Morris worked upon her. This has to do with her reason for wanting Sigurd killed. The Saga-Brynhild gives as her chief argument, when she orders Gunnar to murder Sigurd, that Gudrun is gleeeful over the fact that she (Gudrun) is married to a man who slept with the unwitting Brynhild, "'For now has he [Sigurd] told Gudrun all, and she is mocking me even now!'" But Morris's Brynhild is not jealous of Gudrun for that reason alone. She

50 Volsunga Saga, in Collected Works, VII, 345.
51 Ibid., pp. 362-363.
begs Gunnar to kill Sigurd, because, "Our garment is Shame," and because her love for him is so great that she cannot bear the thought of his living with another woman. When Gunnar asks what deed will remove their shame, she says:

'To slay...is the deed, to slay a King ere the morn, And the name is Sigurd the Volsung, my love and thy brother sworn.' 52

The words, "my love," testify to the source of her jealousy. We see her for a moment exhibiting some of the Valkyr spirit when she laughs as she learns of Gudrun's prostration over Sigurd's death. But she becomes asthenic again, and resigns herself serenely to suicide.

Although the facts of Old Norse tradition are not materially altered in Morris's adaptation, we have seen that the contrasting characters of Gudrun and Brynhild more sharply offset each other than do those of their prototypes in the Saga. During the 'Contention,' Gudrun is more hateful and vitriolic, Brynhild more abject. Gudrun continues to heap inventive upon the head of Brynhild, and Brynhild receives it with good grace, importuning Gudrun to say that Gunnar, not Sigurd, gave her Andvari's ring. This conflict, the actual contention of Gudrun and Brynhild, is effective in any version of the Volsung story,

52 Sigurd, p. 226.

53. If Morris's Gudrun continued in her role of a reviler after the death of Sigurd, and if she carried her hatred of Brynhild so far as to allow her to participate in the murder of Gunnar and Hogni at Atli's court, we could connect her with Kriemhild of the Nibelungenlied,—a distinctly bitter and hateful person. Book IV of Sigurd the Volsung, devoted to the pathetic life of Sigurd's wife after the hero's death, completely destroys this possibility. We cannot say, however, that Kriemhild was not in Morris's mind when he wrote the 'Contention' Section of his poem.
but Morris has so constructed the dramatic foreshadowing which leads up to it that it is the natural result of growing hatred rather than the incidental effect of an impetuous woman's jealousy. In the Saga, the contention itself is the most important part of the conflict; and even though Morris paints a background of dissonance so completely that the climax to the "Contention betwixt the Queens" is less startling, it is still, in his hands, artistically perfect. The change in Gudrun's character from the loving wife of Sigurd to the venomous reviler of Brynhild is better understood when we remember that the poet has told us that the women were long apprehensive "lest the barren, stark contention should mingle in their lives."

As Morris reconstructs the love story of Sigurd the Volsung, we find that his chief interest quite apparently lies in heightening the function of the triangle: Sigurd, Brynhild, and Gudrun. This he partly achieves, as we have observed, through a combination of the fatalistic elements with those of physical love. He is hence prepared, having established the inevitability of the tragedy and the terrible nature of its subject, to accentuate further the rivalry of Brynhild and Gudrun. If he emphasizes and explains inconsequential details which the Saga-writer left untouched, it is possibly because he knew his English readers to be none too well-versed in the Volsung tradition. But even more probably, he had his dramatic purpose in mind. He attempts to dramatize and accentuate where the Saga-man has left us to our imaginations. Unless we know the Volsung story from several
sources, we cannot always fill in the chinks of the Saga by guess-work. Morris's method of approach may not be the method of the Norseman, but it makes for a clearer and more dramatic treatment which detracts little from the original beauty of the Volsunga Saga.

IV

Morris realized that emphasizing the love story of Sigurd the Volsung would force him to make Sigurd a great lover, yet also a hero to whom love was a new delight. Sigurd confesses to Gudrun his inexperience with women on their bridal night, when he says, forgetting Brynhild: "The life of the kings have I conquered, but this is strange and new...." Sigurd and Gudrun both know that tragedy will result from their union, but they love nevertheless, and their acceptance of an hour's love for an unknown lifetime of pain, or sudden death, is another example of Morris's continually recurring idea of love and pain. They forget the future, and live for the moment:

She murmured words of loving as his kind lips
cherished her breast,
And the world waxed nought but lovely and a place
of infinite rest.55

But that does not explain Sigurd's prowess as a successful lover. When he woos Brynhild for Gunnar, we are not at all times

54 Sigurd, p. 161.

55 Ibid., p. 181. Morris of course adapted this idea from the love stories of the North, but a comparison of this doctrine with a similar one in a contemporary, Browning's "flashes struck at midnight," is not without interest.
aware of the fact that he is Gunnar. When Brynhild says:

'Hail Gunnar, King of the Niblungs! tonight shalt
thou lie by my side,
For thou art the Gods' beloved, and for thee was
I shapen a bride.'

we look upon him as Sigurd, and we remember that he wooed
Brynhild for himself a long time before. The Saga-man, how-never, does not keep us mindful of this. Later, when Brynhild comes to Gunnar, saying,

'And there to a gift I give,
The body of Queen Brynhild so long as both we live.'

we remember nothing of Gunnar, but recall instead, the earlier
oaths of Brynhild and Sigurd, of Sigurd and Gudrun. Morris
makes great and effective use of this situation from the time
of Sigurd's marriage to Gudrun until the hero's death. The later
meeting of Sigurd and Brynhild, upon her coming to marry Gunnar,
is especially ironic, for although Brynhild does not know she is
speaking with the man who rode through flames to lie in the
trothdal bed with her, Morris makes her words resound in the mind
of Sigurd, and startle his memory. She says:

'Hail, Sigurd, son of the Volsungs! hail, lord of
Odin's storm!
Hail, rider of the wasteland and slayer of the Worm!
If aught thy soul shall desire while yet thou livest
on earth,
I pray that thou mayst win it, nor forget its might
and worth.'

Between her salutation and Sigurd's answer, Morris dwells again
upon the tragedy to come:

56 Sigurd, p. 192.
57 Ibid., p. 199.
58 Ibid., p. 201.
All grief, sharp scorn, sore longing, stark death
in her voice he knew,
But gone forth is the doom of the Norns, and what
shall be answer thereto,\textsuperscript{59}

When he returns her greeting, however, he speaks with double
meaning. He makes compliment to a lovely woman, and yet echoes
the words of love he formerly spoke to Brynhild upon Hinfell:
\textquoteleft Hail, fairest of all things fashioned! hail, thou
desire of eyes!
Hail, chooser of the mightiest, and teacher of the
wise!
Hail, wife of my brother Gunnar! in might may thy
days endure,
And in peace without a trouble that the world's
weal may be sure!\textsuperscript{60}

Gunnar may have remembered this moment when he swore he would
avenge his wife's shame, and he possibly comprehended then,
as he certainly did not when the words were uttered, that
Sigurd spoke in riddles. But Gudrun understands the tragic
implication of her husband's speech; she gives no welcome to
Brynhild:
\textquoteleft But the cold fear rose in her heart, and the hate
within her stirred,
And the greeting died on her lips.\textsuperscript{61}

This formal ceremony, except for the casual mention of a feast,
is not contained in the Saga, which says, concerning the arrival
of Brynhild: \textquoteleft Brynhild and Gunnar sat together in great game
and glee, and drank goodly wine.\textsuperscript{62}

The reader of \textit{Sigurd the Volsung} may sometimes object to

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 201.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p. 202.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., p. 202.
\textsuperscript{62} Collected Works, VII, 354.
the final loss of Brynhild with too much stoicism; neither
does he spend his last moments with her in argument. He tells
her of his grief, he asks her, with typical saga frankness to
go to bed with him, and when she refuses all his attention, he
departs. If Morris's Sigurd had done that, he would have re-
moved from the mind of the reader some of the prejudice which
his earlier courtly and romantic love-making had there engender-
ried.

One other change which Morris made in Sigurd's character
has often been commented upon. Everyone who has ever read Sigurd
the Volsung has discovered that Sigurd, among other things, is
(once, at least) a bearer of peace. The particular passage
which critics are fond of citing in this connection, begins:

"For peace I bear unto thee, and to all the kings
of the earth,
Who bear the sword aright, and are crowned with
the crown of worth;" 66

and it may be shown through this passage alone that Morris has
changed the character of Sigurd. The present writer has discussed
67 Sigurd's 'social philosophizing' elsewhere, and he mentions this
famous passage here only that it may add to the changes in Sigurd's
character already referred to above.

66 Sigurd, pp. 154-155. This passage is generally taken as an
indication of Morris's growing interest in the peace of society.

67 "The Social Philosophy of William Morris and Ragna Rok"
[in press].
It is not the custom of the Saga-writer to "take sides" with regard to his characters. Though we are often told that such a hero is 'the bravest of all that were in Iceland,' or that such a woman was 'the most beautiful of all the women at that time,' we seldom find that the Saga-man intrudes himself so far into his story as to show a definite liking for one character in preference to another. The composer of the Volsunga Saga was no exception; if he pities Brynhild more than he does Gudrun, or if his sympathy is with Sigurd, at the expense of Gunnar, we do not know it. Morris differs from the Saga-man in this respect, as he does in many others. C. H. Nordby has stated that Morris was interested in the "careful discriminations of character," and that as a consequence of this the poet got away from the essential trait of the Old Norse writer's art, for "The sagaman was epic in his tone." One could wish (as he does for so many other things in Nordby's book) that he had expanded this idea, since it lies at the very heart of Morris's treatment of Sigurd, Gudrun, and Brynhild.

We have already disposed of Sigurd's case, and our interest now should be with Brynhild and Gudrun. Morris does not allow us to know definitely whether he deemed Brynhild or Gudrun the more unfortunate. He naturally shows more sympathy for both of them than does the Saga-man. But the poet's careful attention

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to the woes of Gudrun in Book IV (and his extremely sympathetic attitude toward her in The Wooing of Swanhild), as well as his entire omission of her final and terrible tragedy at the end of Sigurd the Volsung, will perhaps permit us to infer that her troubles were closer to his heart than were those of the Shield-Maid. Yet we must remember that Brynhild's death occurs long before Gudrun’s, and its circumstances are certainly as pitiable as those of the woman who marries Atli. But if we cannot discover with any certainty that the author is moved more by one heroine than by the other, we can determine what manner of respect he held for both of them. We find that the height of his sympathy for Brynhild and Gudrun is reached in the scene where the final realization comes upon them that they can have Sigurd no more. The 'great-souled' William Morris is in none of his writing more worthy of that epithet than in his description of Brynhild's woe as she comes to the inevitable conclusion that Sigurd can no longer live, and in the passages of Book IV where Gudrun, miserably married to a villain, looks back on the noble, lost husband who was once hers. Morris did not invent the idea of the queen's grief over the loss of Sigurd, but the expression, and the pathos are decidedly his. When the full import of Gudrun's possession of Andvari's ring becomes clear to Brynhild, she cries:

'O nameless, measureless woe,
To abide on the earth without him, and alone from earth to go!'69

She knows that the fearful deeds of men have been ordered by the Gods, and that her efforts 'may avail no whit.' Long before the death of Sigurd she feels that to her he is dead already. Morris prepares us for her demise by indicating the sudden death of her spirit. Her refusal of Sigurd's final proposal stands out like a burning brand, as she bravely gives the lie to herself and stifles, with honour and sacrifice, the desire of her heart. Morris paraphrases the Saga in the last scene between Sigurd and Brynhild. The hero says:

'O live, live, Brynhild beloved, and thee on the earth will I wed,
And put away Gudrun the Niblung--and all those shall be as the dead.'70

Her answer, which to the Saga-man is a plain statement of a woman who cannot alter the doom foreordained for her, is in Morris's poem the courageous speech of one resigned to her fate, a fate which, but for these words, might have been different. She says: "'I will not wed thee, Sigurd, nor any man alive.'" The Saga-Brynhild cannot wed Sigurd; Morris's Brynhild will not. She refuses to bargain with her pride.

69 Sigurd, p. 213. See also the passage, p. 217, which begins:

'O Sigurd, O my Sigurd, what now shall give me back
One word of thy loving-kindness from the tangle and the wreck?'

70 Ibid., p. 223.
71 Ibid., p. 224.
In contrast to this, it may be that the simple words of the Saga-writer, "And when the pyre was all ablaze, Brynhild went out upon it," tell the story of her death more effectively than do the many lines with which Morris disposes of Brynhild. He uses here not the version of the Saga, but that in the Elder Edda, where we find the Sigurðarkvípa en Skamma that Brynhild donned her gold byrny, killed herself with a sword, and was carried to Sigurd's death-pyre.

In the case of Gudrun's grief, also, the Edda story, rather than that of the Saga, is followed by Morris. Her esteem for the dead Sigurd, in the Saga, is attested by her description of his beauty and prowess, which the Saga-man rendered from one of the Gudrun Lays, where she says:

'So was my Sigurth o'er Gjuki's sons
As the spear-leek grown above the grass,
Or the jewel bright borne on the band,
The precious stone that princes wear.'

Morris's attempt to put this into hexameters is one of the less happy renditions of his poem:

'O ye, e'en such was my Sigurd among these Giuki's sons,
As the hart with the horns day-brightened mid the forest-creeping ones;
As the spear-leek fraught with wisdom mid the lowly garden grass;
As the gem on the gold band's midmost when the council cometh to pass.'

The immediate grief of Gudrun after Sigurd's death is to

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72 Guðrúnarkvípa I, stanza 17. (Bellows' translation, p.416.)
73 Sigurd, p. 235.
be found in a whole Section of Book III devoted to it: "Of the mighty grief of Gudrun over Sigurd dead," in which Morris uses material from the Saga, and from the Gudrun Layas and the Atli Layas of the Elder Edda. But Morris's portrayal of the lasting tragic effect of Sigurd's death upon Gudrun is found in the fourth Book. It is here that the poet shows her as constantly looking back on her happier days with Sigurd. As she remembers her noble first husband, so she exemplifies the pathetic condition of a woman who has lived with the man who rose above other men "like the spear-leek above the lowly grass," and is now forced to lie in the same bed with Atli, a traitorous murderer. But Gudrun's mind is preoccupied with thoughts of Sigurd, and so eager is she to think of him that she greets her kinsmen with questions when they visit her at Atli's court:

"What! bear ye tidings of Sigurd? is he new come back from the dead?"

O then will I hasten to greet him, and cherish my love and my lord,

"Though the murderous son[s] of Giuki have borne the tale abroad."74

In the Saga she often remembers the days when she and Sigurd were happy together, and in the Elder Edda, as she tells of her life, her mind turns eagerly back to her first and only real love. But her memory in neither Norse version of the Volsung legend is as vivid as Morris makes it. The tragic implications of Sigurd's being "new come back from the dead" are a part of

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74 Ibid., p. 251. This, of course, is in sharp contrast to the corresponding portions of the Nibelungenlied, where Gudrun wishes her brothers killed.
Morris’s ornamentation. Her memory of Sigurd is at one time so sharp that she dreams of him while sleeping beside Atli. She recalls his last words to her:

There oft in the bed she lieth, and beside her Atli sleeps,
And she seeth him not nor heedeth, for the horror over her creeps,
And her own cry rings through the chamber that along ago she cried,
And a man for his life-breath gasping is struggling by her side,
Yea, who but Sigurd the Volsung; and no man of men in death
Ere spake such words of pity as the words that now he saith,
As the words he speaketh ever while he riseth up on the sword,
The sword of the foster-brethren—and the Kings that swore the word.
Lo, there she lieth and hearkeneth if yet he speak again,
And long she lieth hearkening and lieth by the slain.

She refers to her husband’s death-bed words. In Chapter XXX of the Saga, Sigurd rises up in a pool of blood, after Gutrmorm has given him his mortal wound, and tells Gudrun that she shall live on, that her brothers will console her, and before dying, explains exactly what the relations were between Brynhild and himself. This speech is made even more reassuring in Morris’s version, and as we look back upon it with Gudrun, we find that what Sigurd has actually said is not so important as the manner of its saying. Sigurd looks up at his soon to be widowed wife,

75 Sigurd, p. 256.

76 And in stanzas 24-29 of Sigurðarkviða en Skamma (Bellows, op. cit., pp. 428-429).
and with the words of the Saga, but with the manner of a courtly gentleman, he assures her that with his death the troubles of the Niblungs will cease. Gudrun knows, at Atli's court, when her woes have never been lessened, that he meant his words well, even though they were not true. She comprehends, with the understanding of a loving woman, that Sigurd spoke to mitigate his wife's shock at his own death. His attitude reminds us not of the Saga-Sigurd, but of a hero of Browning's who, when he was stabbed, was more concerned that his blood should not soil his mistress' hair, than he was anxious for his own life. Sigurd gives no thought to himself, but only to Gudrun:

[He] rose up on the sword of Gutorm, and turned from the country of death,
And spake words of loving-kindness as he strove for life and breath:
'Wail not, O child of the Niblungs! I am smitten, but thou shalt live,
In rememberance of our glory, mid the gifts the Gods shall give.'

The "words of loving-kindness" carry Sigurd's solicitude too far, and if we are to pity Gudrun as the woman of the Northern story whose life, after Sigurd's death was still entwined in his, we are forced to forget this chivalrous Sigurd of the English poet, and call to mind the Sigurd of the Saga whose chronicler knew more of the art of restraint than did Morris.

And so Gudrun lives with Sigurd in her memory. The Saga-

77 Sigurd, p. 230.
Gudrun does not forget her husband, to be sure, nor does the 78
Gudrun of the Eddas fail to remember him. But the real Gudrun
is by no means a person who lives only to remember and avenge
her dead mate. She is a Niblung, a woman of bravery and fortu-
tude. She does not dwell entirely in the reflected glory of
Sigurd's deeds, nor does her pride at being the widow of the
great hero intrude harshly into her nobleness. Morris has de-
tracted slightly from her character, however. He was not un-
aware of her Niblung courage, for, "with all the might of the
Niblungs" his Gudrun 'thrusts Atli through.' But she cries out
on Sigurd, she swears by his name; she proudly hails herself as
the unfortunate widow of a great man. Her pride in Sigurd, and
her relying upon his memory diminish considerably her own
strength of character. It is all right that she should remem-
ber the great day when,

'I awoke and looked on Sigurd, and he rose on the
world and shone;
And we twain in the world together! And I dwelt with
Sigurd alone.' 79

But her attitude toward that great day is not dependent only
upon her love for Sigurd; she is possessed of a false pride
that does not actually belong to her. "He rose," is praise of
Sigurd; "I dwelt with Sigurd alone," is personal conceit. The
original Gudrun may have been proud, but she did not have to

78 See her cry to the dead Sigurd to come back and relieve her
543-544).
79 Sigurd, p. 304.
look to her husband's memory for glory: her glory was unreservedly her own. Morris's Gudrun cannot even die without calling Sigurd's name; when she beseeches the sea to take her troubled life "from the deeds and the longing of days," she speaks of herself not as Gudrun--Giuki's-daughter, not as the fair woman of the Niblunga, the sister of Gunnar, nor the wife and slayer of Atli; she says: "I who was Sigurd's wife!" Like the romanticized death-bed gaspings of Sigurd, this is 'too much.' We realize that the love of Gudrun for Sigurd was great; we cannot forget that she was proud to be called his wife. But we know also that her great spirit was unflinching, and that she would probably not, with her dying breath, babble of the importance of having been married to the last great Volsung. In other words, we do not need to have Sigurd paraded continually before us; he has long since been deed. But our objections on this score must be tempered somewhat by the artistic purpose of the poet. The poem is called Sigurd the Volsung; it is necessary that we remember him who is the hero, even though we have ceased reading about him by the time we reach the fourth Book. After all, Atli and Jonak, the later husbands of this Gudrun, meant as little to her as Thord, and the others, mattered to the historical Gudrun, daughter of Osvif. There was only one Sigurd, as there was but one Kiartan. In this instance, however, it would seem that Morris's direct purpose in writing

80 Ibid., p. 306.
Sigurd the Volsung is confused. In order to convince us that he is interested chiefly in Sigurd, he mentions Sigurd in connection with events which transpire long after the Volsung's death; likewise, in attempting to connect these later events with Sigurd himself, he points out to us that the grief of Gudrun over Sigurd's dead lasts through her second marriage. Since he cut short the sad life of Gudrun and spared the reader the pain of the Jonak episodes, why did Morris not go a step further, and eliminate the Atl material? That is a question which the poet himself could possibly not have answered. Yet we know the end of the Volsungs and the Niblungs was to come, in Morris's poem, with the death of Gudrun. Some readers will perhaps wish she could have put the quietus on herself and those two venerable families with less talk of Sigurd.

The conclusion which we may draw regarding Morris's attitude toward the two great women of the Volsunga Saga is that he showed more than ordinary sympathy for them. In the case of Brynhild he possibly succeeded more completely in conveying this sympathy to the reader, for the reason, perhaps, that the story itself calls for her quick disposal after the death of Sigurd. Although the poet's own sympathy is actually greater for Gudrun, the truth of this is somewhat obscured by the over-emphasis of her grief for Sigurd, and by the poet's allowing her to attach to herself, through this grief, a glamour that was her husband's. But if Gudrun is overdrawn, we may feel, nevertheless, that her character, her tragedy, and the fatal web of her life, and
Brynhild's as well, are made more comprehensible (to the English reader at least) through the medium of Morris's poetry.

VI

In summarizing the conclusions to our discussion of the love element in Sigurd the Volsung, let us recapitulate the points adduced above. We have observed the romantic and un-heroic sentimentality of Sigurd as a lover; and we have found, beyond this, that Morris's treatment of the love story tends, in general, to emphasize the sensual, and approaches sexual love in a way which is foreign to the sagas. We have discovered that Morris re-apportions the love scenes, and devotes more space to Sigurd as a lover than he does to Sigurd as a 'doer of deeds.' We may not conclude, in spite of this, that Sigurd is less a hero than he was in the Völsunga Saga; but we are forced to admit that he is not, in deeds at least, the genuine Saga-Sigurd who is a hero primarily.

We have seen that Morris uses expansion and emphasis to a great extent, and that in some cases, such as in "The Contention betwixt the Queens," his expansion by means of dialogue has made the jealousy of the Queens more apparent; hence the triangle in the love story itself more dramatic. But we have also noticed in other instances, such as Gudrun's emphasis on her dead husband, that this device is not always successful.

81 Concerning the whole poem, and for a more objective view of the material, see Bartels, op. cit., Chapter VI, "Der Gesamtcharakter der Sagenbehandlung," pp. 73-80.
But more important than any of these details of the love story is Morris's weaving together the Old Norse fatalism with his concept of physical love. The poem with this combination, is replete with the atmosphere of pre-determined destiny which the Saga-man put into his story. And yet it is also coupled with a variation in theme which makes the plot itself more painful, terrible, and of greater importance to a people unacquainted with the Norse tradition, more modern. In his treatment, the poem follows what we may almost call Morris's formula for a tragic love story of the North. Man falls in love with woman, but fate has decreed that their love shall not be happy. Jealousy and hatred are introduced with a triangle motif, and before the lovers 'change their lives,' they may enjoy the pleasures of love knowing that the threads of the Norns are tangled with their heart-strings, and that the love itself has foreordained for them pain, tragedy, despair, and death. But they live, while they may, and love. That is the theory of love which Morris follows in his Norse love stories, and its bases are fate and Viking courage. It is only necessary to add that the poet first learned of this 'joy amidst strife' when he read the Völsunga Saga. The changes which he made in the three other tragic stories of Northern love force them to follow more closely the theme of the "great story of the North," which narrates how Sigurd loved Brynhild, how Grimhild mixed a potion containing the love of Gudrun, how Sigurd married Gudrun, and how Gunnar killed Sigurd. This is the story, but its theme, more exact, artistic, and literary than we find it in the works
of the Saga-man, tells how fate has ordered the lives of men, how love lightens man's burden of pain, how he may "live and love and lose." Yet even love, like the strength of a hero defending Odin at ragna rok, at last succumbs to the long-promised doom.
PART IV

CONCLUSIONS
CHAPTER I

THE NORSEMAN IN ENGLAND