WILLIAM MORRIS' MYTHOLOGICAL ADAPTATIONS
IN SIGURD THE VOLSUNG

by

Luella Lowe

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, in the Department of English, in the Graduate College of the State University of Iowa

August, 1941
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer is indebted to Professor John W. Ashton for helpful criticism in the preparation of this study.
"The existence of art apart from life was inconceivable."

"... idle singer of an empty day."
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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

An endeavor is made in the following study to follow the exploits of the old Scandinavian gods which may have influenced William Morris, as evidenced in his mythological adaptations in *Sigurd the Volsung*.

We are concerned here with mythology; yet, through the Scandinavian mythology and lives of the Vikings, we approach, indirectly, a much more vital problem, one of which William Morris himself was cognizant—the realization of a well-organized, libertarian society for the promotion of man's happiness and progress. The socialism of William Morris is a problem in itself and has been ably examined by such critics as George Bernard Shaw, John Burnett, J. W. Mackail and Anna von Helmholtz-Phelan.¹ In his essay, "The State, Its Historic Role," Kropotkin writes as follows: "... in England, one finds a true comprehension of the twelfth century in the poet William Morris rather than amongst the historians."²


As we will have occasion to mention again, this return to mediaevalism, this familiarity with things of the far past, was not entirely a remote interpretation of history displayed in the citation of dates and events. This return of the mediaevalistic spirit of art, of happiness in life found in "the divine solace of human labor," was an adaptation to an epoch reaching on beyond the nineteenth century, which just now, in our present age, is beginning to emerge as the blossomed flower of socialism. Perhaps more significant again than the mere myth as myth is William Morris' conviction that "the existence of art apart from life was inconceivable," which is particularly reflected in the romantic, enchanted atmosphere of the Icelandic mythology as in contrast to the Old English or German mythical lore. The difficulty arising from the study of any mythology is to conceive association between the imagination and emotion on the one hand, and rationalization on the other.

In order to apprehend the adaptations William Morris has employed in Sigurd the Volsung, it has been found advisable to consider not only the mythology of the Scandinavian people, but also its relationship to the Teutonic and Old English ancestry. It has also been

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3Morris, Architecture, etc., p. 110.
considered feasible to establish a background in the Icelandic folk-lore and saga epochs, from which Morris derived his sources for the writing of his epic.

It has seemed reasonable then to consider, in orientation to this problem, first, the historical background of the Icelandic Saga, in order to relate the era of Norse mythology with the period of Morris; second, William Morris' interest in the Saga and Scandinavian myth, and the factors which may have influenced him to choose Icelandic literature as the medium for expression in his poetical avocation; third, the epic itself, Sigurd the Volsung, its sources, and mythological adaptations to the original sagas and folk-lore.
CHAPTER II
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ICELANDIC SAGA
AND FOLKLORE

Inasmuch as dreads and superstitions about
trolls, kobolds, evil and strong men, witches and noble
women, such silent woods as Hawkdale (Hawkadalr), lakes,
and long winter nights bewitched by the aurora borealis
pervaded the very lives of the Viking people following
the original colonization of Iceland, legend fused into
reality.

The settlement of Iceland marked the termina-
tion of the extensive Scandinavian emigration and closed
the era that had its inception in the westward conquests
of the Teutonic nations which had completely metamorphosed
the society of the old Roman Empire. During the half-
century following 874, which marks the Viking period and
the plunder and conquest of Harald the Fairhaired of
east Norway, Jämtland, Helsingland (in the present modern
Sweden), Shetland, Faeroes, Orkneys, Hebrides, and
Iceland were colonized by Norwegian gentry seeking
renewed independence in a commonwealth free from any
tribal system, holy orders, or abstruse reasoning either
religious or political. They wished to re-establish the
simple freedom they had known in their old patriarchial
society which had been destroyed under the centralized control of Harald. The sphere of their wants, and consequently their thoughts extended little beyond the needs of their homes and families. Prior to Norwegian colonization a few Celtic hermit monks had resided in Iceland. The first settlement was made at Ingolf in 874, and so constant was the immigration from Norway that King Harald imposed a tax on emigration.¹

At first the Icelander had a "Godwinian republic,"² but with increased emigration freedom was destroyed by the struggling human personality, selfish, reckless, proud, and arrogant, and people were compelled to organize for the determination and maintenance of right among themselves. Communities, which had been absolutely independent of one another, finally organized into colonies, which in turn united in 930 to establish a common seat of justice, known as the "Althing."³

It was at the Althnings, social gatherings, and

¹For further reference see W. A. Cragie, The Icelandic Sagas, p. 4.

²W. F. Ker, Sturla the Historian, p. 4. Ker remarks that "perfect pure anarchy is too good for this world, and is soon corrupted." He cites the Icelandic republic as approaching a kind of "Utopian romance" representing the ideas of a William Godwin or Percy Bysshe Shelley.

³F. W. Horn, Scandinavian Literature, p. 17.
banquets that the legends and sagas first received recognizable expression as a form of entertainment. Originally the legends were recited, but later, in the thirteenth century, they received their present literary form in Snorri Sturluson’s "emancipation of literature from religious prejudices," the Prose Edda. Most commentators on Scandinavian literature attribute the survival of mythology to the pride of the "sogumapr" or saga-man as he recited the heroic feats of his ancestors which they experienced both before and after their settlement in Iceland.

Although these freedom-loving, freedom-seeking souls, in all probability, suffered bewilderment in this volcanic land, yet because of a simple familiarity with the environment about them, because of an indomitable instinctive courage, they were able to meet, even to resist the foreboding fate that encompassed and overshadowed them as had the Niblungs:

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4W. P. Ker, The Dark Ages, pp. 45-47. Ker refers to the "progress of poetical mythology" as the "victory of imagination" over religious beliefs in which delightful imagination was harmonized and not obliterated by the Christian religion, as had been the result in the Celtic lands or more Latinized countries.
"What else is the wont of the Niblungs, why else by the gods were they wrought, Save to wear down lamentation and to make all sorrow nought?"^5

These primitive folk, unaware of mediaeval Christianity, were able to produce the legend in a permanent, intelligible form, and give evidence of their clear-minded understanding.

Should we question the effect of such plain, proseic living upon literary creation?

The Icelanders, not God-fearing men, conceived their gods as indigenous with their Norwegian ancestors, much as the old Greeks had done. These Northern people had welcomed these anthropomorphic gods into their homes, and in singular fashion imagined the pleasures of hunting and fishing with the superior immortals. In consideration of such a freed imagination as this, of a strength culminated from their own resistance in combating the rugged elements of their locale, of a natural pride gleaned from relating the fearless exploits of their predecessors, we can appreciate their own experiences as well as those of their ancestors. It is usually the modest, sincere, struggling hero, typified by Sigurd or Beowulf, who wins our sympathies.

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as a tragic character. And thus it is with these people when we read of them in the legend of the North. To borrow from what W. P. Ker has written:

"Whatever magnificence they (the epic stories) may possess comes mainly from the dramatic strength of the heroes, and in a much less degree from the heroic dignity of importance of the issues of the story, or from its mythological decorations. . . . Heroic poetry implies an heroic age, in which there is not any extreme organization of politics to hinder the individual talent and its achievements, nor on the other hand, too much isolation of hero through the absence of any national or popular consciousness."

The saga-man told his story without moralizing, without eulogizing his hero. He was an unbiased observer, delineating his characters through their words and actions. He recognized the value of permitting his auditor’s imagination to perceive its own setting and choose its own consequences in the judgement of a

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6W.P. Ker, Epic and Romance, p. 23.

7In The Prophecy of Gricer and the Third Lay of Guthrum included in the Poetic Edda (Hollander Edition) individual authorship may be perceived. See pages 240 ff. and 321 ff. for respective references. With the exception of the historical sagas, the saga-men seldom attached their names to their work.

8Halvdan Koht, The Old Norse Sagas, in his chapter on "The Art of Sagas," (pp. 11-33) gives a clear analysis of the saga. In Sæthre’s The Scandinavian Literature, compiled and edited by Frederika Blankner, page 243, we read: "These early writers of Iceland accomplished even more” than just writing the sagas; "they anticipated, indeed, in a degree developed, one of the most modern of literary forms—the novel."
wicked character. It is this recapitulation of the Icelandic character for which William Morris has been praised as the progeny of Chaucer.

Perhaps the most succinct definition of the saga may be found in The Icelandic Sagas in Sir William Craigie's comment:

"The general title of Icelandic Sagas is used to denote a very extensive body of prose literature written in Iceland, and in the language of that country, at various dates between the middle of the twelfth century and the beginning of the fifteenth; the end of the period, however, is less clearly marked than the beginning. The common feature of the works classed under this name, which vary greatly in length, value, and interest, is that they have the outward form of historical and biographical narratives, but the matter is often purely fictitious, and in many cases fact and fiction are inseparably blended."  

As has been mentioned before, the sagas were first recited at social gatherings, such as we read of in the banquet-hall scene in Sigurd the Volsung where around the Branstock, the "war-duke's tree," the marriage feast is celebrated in honor of Signy and Siggeir the Goth.

"Yet had they tales for songcraft, and the blossomed garth of rhyme,
Tales of the framing of all things and the entering
in of time
From the halls of the outer heaven."

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10William Morris, Sigurd the Volsung, Book I, p. 5.
The same halls of minstrelsy and feast are referred to in Beowulf where

"Bit by bit a thane of the kind, a vaunt-laden fellow exercised in lays, who recollected countless old traditions, framed a new story, founded upon fact; . . . the man began to reproduce with skill the deed of Beowulf, and fluently tell a well-told tale, to weave a web of words,"

before he relates the episode of Sigmund the Volsung.\footnote{John R. Clark Hall (trans.), \textit{Beowulf}, II. 868-874, p. 50.}

It is Professor Buggs's and Gudbrand Vigfusson's theory that there is a connection between \textit{Volsunga} and \textit{Beowulf} in respect to this banquet hall custom, which may be traced ultimately to Teutonic influence.\footnote{Schofield, \textit{Signey's Lament}, \textit{P.M.L.A.,} Vol. XVII, p. 269.}

This plausible assumption has also been accepted by other commentators, as Mr. Ker, who mentions a relationship of these Northern banquet hall customs to the halls of minstrelsy in the \textit{Odyssey}.\footnote{W. P. Ker, \textit{Ballad and Epic}, p. 93.}

Many of the Vikings who visited foreign markets occasionally were privileged to visit the royalty of those lands, as were Æthelhere and Wulfstan\footnote{Sir William Craigie, \textit{The Icelandic Sagas}, p. 6.} in King Alfred's court. The honor of being a guest
of royalty was by no means unwarranted by the trader for as a talented and experienced story-teller, he furnished entertainment for the court, thus relying upon his ability to relate brilliantly in verse the story of his travels, and the historic events of his notable family, delineating his characters and ornamenting his style through quick turns of dialogue.

The skill of verse-making was common among the Scandinavians, and as mentioned before, the simplicity, directness, and vividness of the saga style elicited the desired attention from the audience.\textsuperscript{15}

No doubt it was through such foreign contacts as these that the saga-man assimilated much new material and made adaptations from the old for his stories, since such adaptations may be readily noted in the Germanic Nibelungenlied story, and vice versa in respect to Scandinavian customs.\textsuperscript{16} There are indistinct connections

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\textsuperscript{15} W. A. Craigie, \textit{The Art of Poetry in Iceland}, pp. 1-2. Harald, the king of Norway, who fell at Stamford Bridge in 1066, listed in verse as first among his eight accomplishments in life, "I know how to make poetry," and is reported to have "promptly criticized an Icelandic poet for rhyming a short syllable with a long one in an extempore verse."
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\textsuperscript{16} Frank Edgar Farley, in \textit{Scandinavian Influences in the English Romantic Movement}, has listed references to Scandinavian religion as gleaned from the works of Paulus Diaconus, Adam of Bremen, and Saxo Grammaticus.
\end{flushleft}
between antitypes in historical stories, such as are dealt with in the sagas, and it is easy to believe that the Nibelung stories are all based on the same myth relatively, but vary according to structure because of the different narrators involved. This is most plausible in consideration of the oral saga. Like the ballad, these stories were more easily remembered in verse than in prose, which may account in part for the popularity of rhyme making during the saga epoch, as well as for conjectural authorship.  

Three types of literature stand out as significant in early Icelandic history: first, the Eddic poems, anonymously written, though generally attributed to Saemund Sigfusson (1056-1133), the father of historiography, who recorded these mythological and heroic lays which had probably been composed between the eighth and twelfth centuries in western Iceland; second, the scaldic or court poetry, a group of more elaborate verses celebrating the exploits of the kings and noblemen, which were attributed to the authorship of Egill Skallagrímsson (900-983), who was preceded in writing scaldic poetry by Bragi the Old, a Norwegian

17 Cf. ante, footnote 7, Chapter II, p. 8.
poet of the ninth century; third, the sagas, a development from the Eddic poems\textsuperscript{18} setting forth more definite historical and traditional material. The Volsunga Saga is the best example of myth and history in combination.

Are the Wise compiled his Icelandic sagas about 1130, which were not essentially sagas, but rather made up of the political and ecclesiastical history of Iceland.\textsuperscript{19} In consideration of the saga, this work "per se" is not significant, but Are, having awakened a dormant interest in the preservation of the old stories, was followed by Snorri Sturluson (1178-1241) and Sturla Thordarson (1214-1284) who lived during the "golden age" or "Sturlung age" of saga writing.\textsuperscript{20} Unlike the Volsunga

\textsuperscript{18}W. P. Ker, Epic and Romance, p. 207. Mr. Ker refers to the Edda as the "heroic dictionary," for it is from this source that every saga interpreter draws his mythical material relative to the Norse people.

\textsuperscript{19}A complete history of Are's Landnama Bock is given in the preface of Vol. I, Origines Islandicae, Powell-Vigfusson.

\textsuperscript{20}W. P. Ker, Epic and Romance, p. 320. "Snorri, with his stories of god's adventures, is the leader in the work of getting pure romance, for pure amusement, out of what was once religious or heroic myth. Even Ari the Wise, his great predecessor, had done something of the same sort in the Ynglinga Saga if it be his, an historical abstract of Northern mythical history—though his aim, like that of Saxo Grammaticus, is more scientific than Snorri."
which was composed from fragments of old Norse poems, most of Are's work was historic fact.

Snorri, in The Prose Edda or Younger Edda, has left us an account of the antiquated mythology which was rapidly becoming extinct and decadent with the advent of Christianity,\textsuperscript{21} as well as an understanding of the scaldic allusions in the kenning and alliterative metrical structure, which have more cultural and historical value as elaborated Germanic influence than literary value.\textsuperscript{22}

The Sturlung family were pioneer Icelanders, who had assisted in the struggle for the enjoyment of the commonwealth and had helped to destroy it through their reckless, lawless, and arrogant actions; therefore, it is apparent that the writings of Sturla would reflect the saga epoch without either mitigation or extravagance.

Just as all types of popular traditional literature, the saga, like the ballad, sought and demanded the expression achieved by the traditional

\textsuperscript{21}See Gylfaginning in the Prose Edda, pp. 13-35.

\textsuperscript{22}Sir W. A. Craigie gives a discussion of the influences of elaborate poetic forms in Icelandic literature in a Taylorian Lecture, The Art of Poetry in Iceland, L. M. Hollander, in his preface to the Poetic Edda, pp. xxii-xxviii, also cites the essential differences between scaldic poetry and old Germanic poetry.
work that we have. As suggested by Farley, it is clearly evident that the Icelander was not isolated entirely from European culture and literary influences, for we discern the acquaintance of the Old English chroniclers with Odin in a quotation from Bede's _Historia Ecclesiastica_ regarding Hengist and Horsa who "erant autem filii Uictgils, cuius pater Uitta, cuius pater Uecta, cuius pater Uoden, de cuius stirpe multarum provinciarum regium genus originem duxit." 23 Again there is similar reference from Nennius in his _Historia Britonum_ when tracing the lineage of the kings from the various districts in England to Odin he writes, "Geta, qui fuit, ut aiunt, filius Dei. Non ipse est Deus Deorum, Amen, Deus exercituum, sed unus est ab idolis eorum quae ipsi coelebant." 23 Alfred's ancestry is likewise traced through Woden to Geat in the _Annales Rerum Gestarum Aefredi Magni_, written in 849. In Layamon's _Brut_, Hengist speaks of Frea and Woden with Phebus and Saturnus. Mr. Ker also notes Latin influences as discovered from reading St. Gregory's _de Cura Pastorali_ and Ovid's _Epistolae_. 24


24 W. P. Ker, _Ballad and Romance_, p. 69.
It is noteworthy that Iceland alone, of the Scandinavian countries, has preserved its early literature in its native language not far different from that used today, particularly in cognizance of the fact that so much of the poetry written was secular. "Though the earliest of these poems are probably quite two centuries later than Beowulf, they are entirely free from Christian influence. Indeed it can hardly be doubted that a considerable portion of them date from heathen times." But it is obvious, as has been intimated before in regard to the Stadunga saga, that if the Icelandic "sogu", "pr" was only slightly aware of the principles of the Christian faith, he made up for it in his devotion to mythology.

Even in the seventeenth century Isaac de la Peyrere, having made an excursion to Iceland, wrote of the magic conceived by the Icelandic poet, whereby he

"could summon the Daemons from the Infernal Regions, and change the influence of the Planets. There Poets are Born, and not made such; for the most Ingenious Person among them cannot write a Verse without his Natural Genius prompts him to it; The Rules of their Poetry being most strict and sever; whereas such as are Endowed with this Qualification by Nature, write them with such Facility, that they can speak scarce anything but in Meter. They are commonly seized with this Poetic Frenzy in the New-Moon; when their

25 Chadwick, The Heroic Age, p. 10.
Faces appear dreadful, with a pale countenance, and hollow Eyes, not unlike as the Sybil of Cumoe is described by Vergil; at that time it is very dangerous to Converse with these furious Fellows, the wound given them by a Mad-Dog being scarce more dangerous than their venomous Satyrs."26

CHAPTER III

SOURCES OF MORRIS' KNOWLEDGE OF MYTHOLOGY

"'Tis the sunset of life gives me mystical lore,
And coming events cast their shadows before."

—Lochiel's Warning, Thomas Campbell
(1777-1844)

Both poets and prose writers have long appreciated the values of mythology, and some have even proved themselves devotees of classical mythology in their work; yet not until the seventeenth century did the old Norse mythology gain much recognition. It has been concluded, since few people are able to read the original Scandinavian literature, that most of these myths were first read in Latin. For two reasons, then, the Northern mythology has been regarded as subordinate to the classical myth; first, Latin and Greek were the academic languages of England until recent times; second, both Norse and Teutonic mythology are regarded as ramifications of the old classical myths.

Sir William Temple, George Hickes, Thomas Gray, Thomas Percy, Thomas Warton, and Sir Walter Scott were among the first to introduce the English reader to Scandinavian antiquity, their knowledge having been accumulated through reading Latin accounts. Later such
writers as Thomas Carlyle, Mathew Arnold, Charles Kingsley, George W. Dasent, H. W. Longfellow, and J. R. Lowell read or were interested in its original Scandinavian form, but it was William Morris who surpassed them all as master of the Norse myth. Not only was he intrigued by the legendary lore of enchanted Iceland with its midnight suns, not only did he manifest mere curiosity in the northern antiquities, but rather his primal passion was expressed in an attempt to rationalize the relationship of a vigorous humanity of the past to a more prosperous present and future society. Morris was not quixotic in his reversion to the middle ages; he adapted mediaevalism and the mystical spirit embodied therein to his philosophy, which in its resultant state may be determined as essentially Icelandic.

William Morris' retrospective interest in Norse mythology may be perceived in part through his own words,

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1 Conrad B. Nordby, The Influence of Old Norse Literature upon English Literature.

2 J. W. Mackail, The Life of William Morris, Vol. 1, p. 130: "It is one of the commonest criticisms made on the Greek stories in The Earthly Paradise, that the atmosphere and treatment are not Greek but mediaeval; that the feelings, incidents, and decoration are neither those of classical poetry, nor yet of the stories of ancient Greece as interpreted and modernized by the taste of the present day. This is precisely true, and precisely what Morris meant."
that "art apart from life was inconceivable,"3 which is the basis for his whole philosophy as found in a criticism by John Drinkwater:

"His philosophy becomes one of extraordinary directness and simplicity, and yet it retains everything by which the spirit and the body of man really have their being. To love, and if needs be to battle for love, to labor, and find labor the one unchanging delight, to be intimate with all moods and seasons of earth, to be generous alike in triumph and defeat, to fear death and yet be heroic in the fear, to be the heirs of sin and sorrow in so far as these things were the outcome of events that were permanent and not ephemeral in their nature--of such did he conceive the state of men to be in the earthly paradise that he was trying to create in his art."4

As a child in Epping Forest near his Woodford home, assuming the guise of a knight-errant in a toy suit of armor,5 William Morris evidenced very early


5This incident has been recorded by many of Morris' biographers. For further details see Alfred Noyes' William Morris, p. 1; J. W. Mackail's Life of William Morris, Vol. I, p 9; A.C. Rickett's analytical biography, William Morris, Poet, Craftsman, Social Reformer, p. 270; Gary's Life of William Morris, p. 6; and Aymer Vallance's in William Morris, His Art, His Writings, and His Public Life, pp. 2-4, in which he tells of Morris' delight in the environment of Epping Forest through letters written by Morris concerning his boyhood.
inclination toward the mythical spirit found in the
sagas and mediaeval romances. This pervasive passion,
a result of his youthful appreciation and feeling
for nature, finds expression in such lines as the
following:

"While the horned moon hangs in the heaven and the
summer wind blows soft
Then the yolk-beasts strained at the collar, and
the dust in the moon arose,
And they brushed the side of the acre and the
blooming dewy close;
Till at last, when the moon was sinking and the
night was waken late,
The warders of the earl-folk looked forth from
the Niblung gate,
And saw the gold pale-gleaming, and heard the
wainwheels crush
The weary dust of the summer amidst the midnight
hush."

While at Marlborough, Morris was known to his
schoolfellows as one who "invented and poured forth
endless stories, vaguely described as "about knights
and fairies," in which one adventure rose out of
another, and the tale flowed on from day to day over a
whole term." Legend was almost an instinctive
part of Morris in so far as he possessed a sense of
reality in his imagination—an imagination which had

6 William Morris, Siurul the Volsung, Book III, 
Brynhild, pp. 157-158.

I, p. 17.
ample opportunity to develop free from inhibitions in
the vicinity of Woodford. With this same free fami-
liarity we also feel the atmosphere and see the actual
panorama of the scenes portrayed in his poems.

It is in accord with this innate sensual
appereception of mythical lore that we expect Morris to
be fascinated by the fiction of Scott, a fascination
which never lessened for him. He was also interested
in, and derived much pleasure from reading mediaeval
chronicles, from reading Chaucer and Malory as well
as from reading his own contemporaries, Carlyle,
Ruskin, and Browning, but it was with most assiduity
that Morris read Thorpe's *Northern Mythology*, to which
he was introduced by Burne-Jones at Oxford. A new world
was opened to Morris, "which in later life became, per-
haps, his deepest love, that of the great Scandinavian
Epic."\(^8\) Morris must have felt an especial affinity
with Carlyle through reading "The Everlasting Yes" in
*Sartor Resartus*, in which Carlyle set forth his belief
that mankind must discover life's fulfillment in daily
working at the task at hand. Again in Carlyle's *Heroes*

\[^8\]J.W. Mackail, *Life of William Morris*, p. 39. Further references to literary influences on Morris may
be found in John Drinkwater's *William Morris—a Critical
Study*, pp. 29, 30, and 36, and A. C. Rickett's *William
Morris, Poet, Craftsman, and Social Reformer*.\[^7\]
and Hero Worship in the lecture on Odin he probably found sympathetic expression of the northern heroic temperament. In Ruskin's *Modern Painters* we can perceive Morris' accord in the passion for the beautiful, the indignation 'ante malum in se', besides a discovery and reinterpretation of mediaeval art.

This conjunction with and fondness for the art of the middle ages was sequential, at least in part, from intimate friendship with Edward Burne-Jones and other Pre-Raphaelites as Rosetti, Holman-Hunt, and Millais. We recognize something of the same leaning toward mediaevalism in Scott, Coleridge, and Keats, however, to them it was not the form of living or mental predisposition it was with Morris. Thus we may regard this background as a foundation on which Morris as a craftsman was able to build.

But, can the "idle singer of an empty day," the "Dreamer of dreams, born out of due time, . . . strive to set the crooked straight?"

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9 Sir Walter Scott made use of mediaevalism for his dramatic elements in *Marmion* where we find the Gothic romance element. Samuel Taylor Coleridge portrayed mediaevalism from a supernatural aspect in *Christabel*. John Keats gave us the pictorial richness of mediaevalism in *St. Agnes Eve*.

The phrase may be understood only in cognizance of Morris as an individual, a magnetic personality, who through his innate versatility and strength was able to comprehend with keen acumen and practical sagacity the common but vast experience of humanity. Already, we are confronted then with the correlation of Morris' philosophy of art and of life. Such correlation is generally considered unnecessary, for many sane and consistent people live and criticize according to two entirely different philosophies apropos of art and life; many critics of Morris evade the issue entirely, just as Douglas Bush accused Morris of doing in commensurating art with the modern world. "The poets who possessed a mythological interest were likely to hold the Apollonian creed, but the modern world seemed to require the Faustian; which was the truer faith, and could they be united?" Keats, he says, was "tormented by the question," whereas Morris tried to escape it.\(^{11}\) Bush intensifies this conviction further on in his text by regarding Morris' humanitarianism as "less earnest than Shelley's, yet more steady, effective, and rational, but his dream world, cut off

altogether from propaganda as well as from life, was
far more unsubstantial than Shelley's.¹² Mr. Bush is
indisputably right in so far as he sees indeterminable
difficulty in such a reconciliation, yet can he sub-
stantiate the assumption that Morris evaded this issue
entirely?

To one who was perpetually looking for beauty,
for inspiration, for something ideal to admire, in other
words, to "sing" about, the England of the Victorian era
was barren soil. "The glory that was Greece and the
grandeur that was Rome" with their traditional heritage
fixed in the myth had moved their poets to immortal
verse. The courage that was the Icelander's, resolutely
seeking his independence, the boldness of a Beowulf
defying Grendel's ravenous pestilence, the gallantry of
the knights of King Arthur's court had stimulated the
bards of the past. The blustery, colorful sixteenth
century England with its artful Queen Elizabeth and
band of chivalrous adventurers like Raleigh and Drake
provided the impetus of inspiration and literary material
for such as Shakespeare. And those who followed found
themselves in a world of exciting transition from the

¹²Ibid, p. 298.
custom-ridden past into an emancipated brotherhood of
man, but all this had proved itself as a mere dream by
the time William Morris had taken up his pen. What
was to have been a Godwinian Utopia in England evolved
into something even worse than the rationalistic re-
formers had inveighed against. Men were freed from
political serfdom, only to be enslaved again by econ-
omic serfdom. The fair flower that was Voltarian
rationalism blossomed as a weed of science scattering
the malific seeds that put dark, dingy factories where
once the old mill stood.

In a lecture at Burslemtown Hall, Morris said
of machines, "I myself have boundless faith in their
capacity. I believe machines can do everything, except
make works of art."\(^\text{13}\) Then again he pleaded for the sanity
of mankind:

"Why even the money and science that we ex-
pend in devices for killing and maiming our enemies,
present and future, would make a good nest egg
toward the promotion of decency of life if we could
make up our minds to that tremendous sacrifice... though money alone cannot do anything without the
will."\(^\text{14}\)

\(^\text{13}\)William Morris, Art and the Beauty of the
Earth, p. 18. Mr. Cary in his biography of William
Morris discusses Morris' hatred of mechanical methods,
p. 24.

\(^\text{14}\)Ibid., p. 29.
The dignity of man, a phrase to be conjured with when the heroic, the noble, and the human values were ascendant, had now become a part of the reviled past. Now the machine had replaced the hero in man’s affections. The world of imagination of myth had been stifled in the crass materialism of an age when men, obsessed with profits and losses, read the black economics of Ricardo with the avidity they had yielded only to the poets. The dominant freedom of the human spirit of the mediaeval humanists had knuckled under to the bullying of utilitarian philosophies, picturing man as the helpless victim of natural economic laws.

The color in life, the spontaneity of the less sophisticated past had been replaced by the standardization of a mechanical-minded society. Men, who once prided themselves on being the servants of God, who had a faith transcending mundane things of this infinitesimal universe, now juggled coins in their pockets and were satisfied temporarily as the servile tenders of machines. Emerson could well say of that day, "Things were in the saddle and rode mankind," and Morris, overlooking a panorama of industrialism, could aptly term himself "the idle singer of an empty day." In the Dream of John Ball Morris drew a contrast between the workmen of the nineteenth century and those, joyous and free, in a
feudalistic society in which happiness was found in daily performing the task at hand.

The "existence of art apart from life" was inconceivable to Morris. Art had true beauty if it was in accord with nature and beneficial to man, as he has emphasised: "Our street and town should be restful and beautiful as the woods."\(^\text{15}\)

"The idle singer" may be compared to the man who "has work to do which he despised, which does not satisfy his natural and rightful desire for pleasure, (whose) greater part of life must pass unhappily and without self-respect."\(^\text{16}\) He is "idle" and his day is empty for his efforts are futile when his civilized "art" is severed from virtue, wisdom, and religion.

Like Hawthorne, Morris may be called an idealist, but an idealist who tried to correlate the earthy with the sublime. In Love is Enough, Morris saw clearly the relationship between his life as a dreamer and a worker.

Love: "For ye—the sorrow that no words might tell,
Your tears unheeded, and your prayers made nought
Thus and no otherwise through all have wrought,

\(^{15}\text{William Morris, Hopes and Fears for Art, p. 84.}\)
\(^{16}\text{Ibid., p. 42.}\)
That if, the while ye toiled and sorrowed most
The sound of your lamenting seemed all lost,
And from my land no answer came again,
It was because of that your care and pain
A house was building, and your bitter sighs
Came nigher as toil-helping melodies,
And in the mortar of our gem-built wall
Your tears were mingled mid the rise and fall
Of golden trowels tinkle in the hands
Of builders gathered wide from all the lands."

Before Morris expended much time or energy on reconciling mythology and art with life in a literary manner, he merged his talent with the talents of four other men—Marshall, Faulkner, Rosetti, and Burne-Jones—to offer the public "real good taste at the price, as far as possible, of ordinary furniture." Chairs were designed for use, and ornamented with pictures often sketched to portray some scene from mythical lore.

Red House, residence of the Morris family around 1862, has been described by J. W. Mackail as having been a home distinctly adapted to a devotee of mythology:

"Life at the Red House in those years was indeed realized felicity for the group of friends to a greater degree than often falls to the lot of schemes deliberately planned for happiness. The garden, skilfully laid out amid the old orchard, had developed its full beauty, and the adornment of the house kept growing into greater

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17 William Morris, Poems by the Way and Love is Enough, pp. 331-332.

18 Cary, William Morris, p. 69.
and greater elaboration. A scheme had been designed for the mural decorations of the hall, staircase, and drawing-room, upon various parts of which work went on intermittently for several years. The walls of the spacious and finely-proportioned staircase were to be completely covered with paintings in tempera of scenes from the War of Troy, to be designed and executed by Burne-Jones. Below them, on a large wall-space in the hall was to be a great ship carrying the Greek heroes. It was designed, as the rest of the Troy-series were also to have been, in a frankly mediaeval spirit; a warship indeed of the fourteenth century, with the shields of the kings hung over the bulwarks. Round the drawing-room at a height of about five feet from the floor, was to be a continuous belt of pictures, the subjects of which were scenes from the fifteenth-century English romance of "Sir Degrevaint." In the hall, a second great cupboard began to be painted with scenes from the Nibelungenlied.

There were no paper-hangings in the house. The rooms that had not painted walls were hung with flower-embroidered cloth worked from his designs by Mrs. Morris and other needlewoman. Even the ceilings were decorated with bold simple patterns in distemper, the design being pricked into the plaster so as to admit of the ceiling being re-whitewashed and the decoration renewed. 'Top' (meaning Morris) 'thrive through bandy,' writes Burne-Jones in February, 1862, 'and is slowly making Red House the beautifullest place on earth.'

In his Kelmscott Manor was to be found "some thin thread of Tradition, a half-anxious sense of the delight of the meadow and acre and woodland river, a certain amount (not too much let us hope) of common-sense, a liking for making materials serve one's turn,

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and perhaps at bottom some little grains of sentiment." Rossetti described Kelmscott even more fancifully. 20

Such a living association with the art and mythology of the past made it natural for Morris to transplant the motives, scenes, and accessories alien to his contemporaries, as well as to our own modern period, producing renewed vitality with that mythical renaissance wherein we not only find a revival of the true spirit of the past, but also an additional spirit transcending the present.

William Morris' translations of classical literature were indeed relative to his mythological background. At the same time Morris was preparing the Aeneid translation (1875), he was also working on a set of Icelandic stories, a preparation for what he regarded as his greatest literary achievement, Sigurd the Volsung. It is the background in classical mythology which provided him with the theme for his Trojan cycle of twelve poems, only six of which were ever completed. The scheme of the unfinished manuscript follows:

1. Helen arming Paris

20 Cary, William Morris, p. 102. The quoted description is from an article published by Morris in The Quest for November, 1895.
3. The Defiance of the Greeks  
3. Hector's last battle  
4. Hector brought dead to Troy  
5. Helen and Paris  
6. Achilles' Love-Letter  
7. The Wedding of Polyxena  
8. The last flight before Troy  
9. The Wooden Horse  
10. The descent from the Wooden Horse  
11. Helen and Menelaus  
12. Aeneas on shipboard

The Life and Death of Jason, a poem in seventeen books which deals with the story of Jason, the ruin of Medea, himself, and their children, expressed the old Hellenic tradition in a more direct style of writing.

Twenty years after the publication of The Life and Death of Jason (1867) Morris published his translation of the Odyssey (1887), at which time he wrote, "I have now" (August 25th) "committed the irreparable error of finishing the Odyssey, all but a little of fair-copying. I am rather sad thereat." J. W. Mackail and Alymer Valance agree that Morris "strived to show us the Aeneid and the Odyssey as seen

21 May Morris, Collected Works of William Morris, Scenes from the Fall of Troy, Vol. 24, pp. xxvii-xxxi. The poem titles marked by "x" indicate the finished parts.

through Scandinavian spectacles. That is—he gave us the poem as it had reached him through the Eddas of the Viking Age." 23 Nevertheless, it is apparent that the classical mythology did influence Morris' appreciation of the northern mythology.

As we have noted, William Morris was first introduced to Scandinavian mythology by his old friend and confederate, Edward Burne-Jones, who encouraged him to read Thorpe's Northern Mythology. Sigurd the Volsung shows marked influence of the Nibelungenlied upon Morris, and there is indication that he was familiar with the old epic as early as 1856. In that year he contributed to the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine (instituted by him and a few friends in January, 1856, but discontinued after twelve months), 24 The Hollow Land, which he prefaced with the following quotation from the

23 Vaillant, Morris, His Art, His Writings, and Public Life, p. 212. J. W. Mackail notes Morris' inadequate training and unclassic taste in his translations. Lang has criticized his translations not as to the accuracy of the tale, but as to a faulty style, i. e. the Odyssey as typical of Sigurd the Volsung in its eagerness, and lacking in the proper dignity indicative of Homer. For further criticism see Cary's biography of William Morris, p. 122, or Mackail's Life of William Morris, Vol. I, pp. 310 ff. and Vol. II, pp. 164 ff.

Nibelungenlied:

"We find in ancient story wonders many told
Of heroes in great glory, with spirit free and
bold;
Of joyance and high-tides, of weeping and of woe,
Of noble Hagen striving, mote ye now wonders
know."  

It was likely due to Morris’ companionship that Burne-Jones, an associate in the magazine’s publication, painted that same year "a city background to a picture of the Nibelungenlied."  

In 1868 Morris met Mr. Eirikr Magnusson, an Icelandic scholar, whereupon Morris, with his characteristic enthusiasm, plunged into the study of Icelandic literature and mythology, comparatively unknown to the English scholars at that time.  

It was from this acquaintance with Mr. Magnusson that the studies in the sagas and the journeys to Iceland in 1871 and 1873 developed. The first journey was one of real adventure, one of delight, and one of hardship. There were four men in the party: Mr. Magnusson, who acted as guide; William Faulkner, who had been a friend of Morris since their days at Pembroke together;

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27 Cf. ante, footnote 1, Chapter III, p. 19.
Mr. W. H. Evans, another acquaintance who traveled for the enjoyment of traveling only; and Morris, himself, completed the party. Although there was question as to how well Morris could physically endure such a long jaunt, one that required months of outdoor living and inconvenience, still it was with the greatest of enthusiasm that Morris made preparation for this journey. For the first time in his life he kept a diary, which was later published by his daughter. This diary has given glimpses into the exotic wonderland, Iceland, as it is also described in Iceland First Seen, "all cloud-wreathed and snow flecked and gray."

On July 17, 1871, necessary preparations had been made and the party started their trek through Iceland, which had been planned to include many scenes of the greater sagas. Najal's and Gunnar's country on the southern coast near Lithend, Herdholt, and Bergthorsknoll were their first objectives. They then travelled northward through the geysir regions, the country of Grettir and Thorir Red-Beard, into Waterdale, on to Laxdale, the region of Gudrun, Gisli, Sigurd and Brynhild, then to Reykholt, and finally to Thingvalla, the center for the "Thing" assemblages during the heroic age.

From the time of Morris' return to England
after his six weeks in Iceland until the summer of 1873, Morris continued his studies in the Icelandic language, collaborating with Sigurdf the Volsung, and in the meantime assuming his regular duties connected with the Kelmscott Press.

The summer of 1873 Morris made a second trip to Iceland. That time he was accompanied by Faulkner again, and joined by an acquaintance made aboard ship who proved to be a lasting friend, Mr. John Henry Middleton, an archaeologist. However, this journey, unlike the first, included few places relative to the sagas, but it "deepened the impression," he writes, "I had of Iceland and increased my love for it. The glorious simplicity of the terrible and tragic, but beautiful land, with its well-remembered stories of brave men, killed all querulous feeling in me, and has made all the dear faces of wife and children and love and friends dearer than ever to me. I feel as if a definite space of my life had passed away now I have seen Iceland for the last time: as I looked up at Charles Wain tonight, all my travel there seemed to come back on me, made solemn and elevated, in one moment, till my heart swelled with the wonder of it: surely I have gained a great deal, and it was no idle
whim that drew me there, but a true instinct for what I needed."  

Emerging from such a background, Morris stands forth as one thoroughly permeated with the mythical heritage of Iceland. He, like Sigurd, was a protagonist of right and justice, of a true social order. He maintained his motto of "courage and hope," protesting with the Pre-Raphaelites against a mechanical, superficial art and intellectualism, pleading for a more imaginative life for his people, a life deeply imbued in the rhapsody of mythical lore.

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CHAPTER IV

SOURCES OF AND MYTHOLOGICAL ELEMENTS

IN SIGURD THE VOLSUNG

In the story of Sigurd the Volsung, derived from the legends of Germany during the seventh century, we have the occurrence of an eponymous ancestor appearing in the beginning of a poem which treats mainly of the fortunes and destinies of his descendants. These legends are to be found in their first written forms in the fragmentary lays of the Elder or Poetic Edda and the Sagas, which were preserved by the Icelanders. The same legends of the Nibelungs also appear, though in somewhat changed form, in the great mediaeval epic, the Nibelungenlied. In Sigurd the Volsung William Morris has recast the old Germanic legends dealing with the race of the Nibelungs and transmuted the northern mythology with remarkable adherence to the order and essence of the legend as originally gleaned from the Edda and Volsunga Saga and supplemented by the tales of Beowulf and Saxo Grammaticus' Danish History.

Sigurd the Volsung was known in old German nature mythology as Siegfried, and considered by some people¹ to be the sun-god and the god of springtime. By most

¹Karl Lachmann was the first to suggest the nature myth origin in 1829. The same view was also maintained by Richard von Muth in 1877.
myth commentators the nature myth interpretation of Siegfried has been very dubiously accepted as the origin of the Siegfried story. Brynhild (Brunhild) was a Valkyrie whom the All Father, Odin (Wotan), buried in sleep and surrounded with the wall of fire, called the Glittering Heath (Waberlohe). The sun-god released the virgin, the earth personified as she appears in the Volsunga Saga, and took her as his betrothed. However, the sun-god chanced upon a new love, whereupon Brynhild avenged herself by bringing destruction upon his race. The primitive version of the old pagan myth was shaped by the natural selection of a society which judged heroes like Sigurd, Siegfried, Odysseus, and Achilles in accordance with human standards. In other words, with the early audiences, anthropomorphic criteria of values prevailed. The allegory of the Sleeping Beauty wakened by the Prince re-echoes this old myth, as do the Eddic Lays. It has been suggested that the old Germanic epic Nibelungenlied and corresponding Eddic poems evolved from an "amalgamation of an essentially mythical story with historical traditions of Attila and the fall of the Burgundian kingdom."

—Chadwick, The Heroic Age, p. 140. This origin of the myth is considered the most probable by critics.
The first part of the Nibelung legend is recorded in the *Klage*, a group of mediaeval poems, which relate of Siegfried's childhood and its domination by the smith, of Siegfried's slaying a dragon, of his freeing Khriemhild, who had been carried off from her father's home, and at the same time of his taking possession of the Nybling's treasure, or the treasure of the dwarfs.

The *Nibelungenlied* treats of the last part of the legend. Siegfried wooed Khriemhild, the sister of King Gunther, then by means of his supernatural arts he won Brunhild's hand for King Gunther. The wooing is accomplished through deception when Siegfried assumes the guise of Gunther, and Brunhild discovers this deception when she quarrels with Khriemhild concerning the strength of their respective husbands. To prove Siegfried's superiority Khriemhild reveals the secret of the wooing by presenting as proof of her contention Brunhild's ring, which had been intrusted to Siegfried by Brunhild as a sign of devotion to the youth strong enough to win her affections. The only reparation for this affront acceptable to Brunhild is the death of Siegfried. On a hunting trip Hagen kills Siegfried, and Brunhild is avenged, though Khriemhild's
happiness is ruined, not only because she has lost Siegfried, but because the very treasure of Siegfried and the Nibelungs has been sunk in the Rhine by Hagen. She immediately becomes obsessed with the desire to avenge the murder of her beloved. In order to obtain power to accomplish her purpose, she marries King Etzel, King of the Huns. Hagen and Gunther, Gernot, and Giselher visit King Etzel. Upon their arrival, Khriemhild, maddened with rage, starts a quarrel which results in much bloodshed and the captivity and death of Gunther and Hagen. Thus Khriemhild destroys herself.

In the Germanic legends the actuating motive is loyalty. Man’s complete happiness is dependent upon this attribute, an attribute the gods themselves are subject to; for men, like the gods, subsist only so long as they are faithful to their covenants, and their downfall, like Khriemhild’s, necessarily follows the violation of their oath or fidelity. The same tradition of morality has been preserved in the Eddic poems.

In the Nibelungenlied, Khriemhild is endowed with qualities evidently superhuman, but yet inferior to those attributed to her in the older sagas. Khriemhild is the principal character; it is she around
whom the destiny of man centers, for she is the protagonist of right and loyalty.

The Nibelungenlied is less marked by supernatural elements than are the Norse versions, for no mention is made of Andvari's ring of magic potency, of the dragon as the transformed Fafnir, or of the understanding of bird language. It is a more human story.

In the lays of the Elder or Poetic Edda, snatches of the Sigurd story were set down by Saemunder, whose authorship is only theoretical, and from whose work Snorri Sturlason was able to write his survey of northern mythology as it is found in the first part of the Prose Edda, called Gylfaginning. The poems themselves and much of their mythological element undoubtedly originated in the Norwegian colonies, but the stories or essential parts of the Volsung and Nibelung legend harkened back to the old Germanic legend. It was in the Eddic poems that Morris found the key to many enigmas such as Ran, the avenger of Balder, and treacherous foe of the sea; the one-eyed ancient,

3 Hollander, Poetic Edda, p. xi.

4 Cf. Sigurd the Volsung, Book I, p. 9 and 12, with The Lay of Svipda, The Poetic Edda, Hollander, p. 185.
Odin; and the fountain of Mimir.\(^5\)

In the *Edda* we find a linking of *The Helgi Lay* and *The Lays of the Niblunga* effected by naming Helgi Hundingsbane or Hunding-Slayer the son of Sigmund; then the *Sigurth Lays* are connected with the *Lay of Regin*, *The Lay of Fafnir*, *The Lays of Guthren*, *Brynhild's Ride to Hel*, and *The Lays of Atli*. Therefore in pieces-meal, yet in a somewhat organized form, we have the story of the Volsungs recorded here.

In the *First and Second Lays of Helgi the Hunding-Slayer*, the story of Helgi is told, the son of Sigmund. Sigmund, having slain King Hunding, saved Sigrun, Hogni's daughter, from an unwilling marriage with "grim" Hothbrodd. Sigmund later married Sigrun. *Sinfjotli's Death* or *The Lay of Sigurth's Origin* gives the account of Sinfjotli, who incited the wrath of Borghild, Sigmund's wife, by killing her

\(^5\)Cf. *Sigurd the Volsung*, Book III, p. 134, with *The Prophecy of Seeress*, *Poetic Edda*, p. 7. "Under that root (of Yggdrasill) which spreads over the home of the frost giants there is the well of Mimir (or Mim) in which wit and wisdom are hidden; and he is hight Mimir who owns that well. He is full of knowledge because he drinks its water out of the Giallarhorn. Thither came Odin and asked for a draught from the well, but got it not before giving his one eye as a pledge." (Gylfaginning, chapter 15). The pledge referred to is Fiolnir's pledge.
brother; whereasupon she avenged her brother by poisoning Sinfjotli. Sigmund, having buried his son, wandered to Frankland, married Hiordis, who bore Sigurd. Here is related the occasion of Sigmund's death in battle against Hunding's sons, and the means by which Hiordis was carried to the court of Hialfrek by his son, Half. The Eddie poems draw a picture of Queen Grimhild which is closely followed by Morris in Sigurd the Volsung. Gripir speaks with Sigurd:

"A wicked woman's wiles will snare thee:
 will Queen Grimhild beguile thy mind
 and offer to thee her own daughter
 the lovely maiden, and lure thee on."

Morris has not used the prophecy, however, in his epic; Sigurd is blindly ensnared by Grimhild's charms.

In the next poem, The Lay of Regin, we have the story of Regin and Andvari's gold, how it was snatched from the Elf King by Loki, and cursed. The details of Fafnir's killing his father Hreidmar, Fafnir's turning into a serpent, and Regin's flight

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are also in the account. The story is resumed in
the Lay of Fafnir which tells how Sigurd, warned
by the birds of plotted treachery against him, killed
Fafnir, then slew Regin, and finally carried off the
Nibelung treasure. The Edda represents Brynhild as
a Valkyrie, who possessed all the power and wisdom of
the favored daughters of Odin; it is she whom Sigurd
rescues from the enchanted sleep of Odin by riding
through the flames of Hindar Fell.

In the following Eddic poems, Fragment of
Sigurth Lay, The First Lay of Guthrun, The Short Lay
of Sigurth, Brynhild's Ride to Hel, The Fall of the
Nibelungs, The Second Lay of Guthrun, The Third Lay
of Guthrun, The Lay of Atli, and Guthrun's Lament,
the rest of the story is told much as it is in the
old Middle High German epic, the Nibelungenlied. Yet
among these poems, there are several lays which relate
incidents that are absent from the Nibelungenlied.
In Brynhild's Ride to Hel ones sympathies are
thoroughly aroused as she tells the story of her life
to the giantess, and there is a similarity here to
the mediaevalistic idea in that she and Sigurth anti-
cipate a future life together after death. In The
Greenlandish Lay of Atli the story takes a different
turn from the Germanic legend. Atli is here, as in the *Volsunga Saga*, responsible for the deaths of Gunnar and Hogni, whereas Gudrun attempts to warn the brothers of the plot against their lives, but in vain. She takes vengeance on Atli, her husband, by killing him and their children. The concluding poems of the *Edda*, *Guthrun's Lament* and *The Lay of Hamthir*, by means of Gudrun's and Sigurd's daughter, Swanhild, connect the story of Atli's ruin with King Jormunrek's court, in which Swanhild had been reared. This last part of the story was not used by Morris in *Sigurd the Volsung*. The *Second Lay of Guthrun* from the *Edda* may be considered the prototype of the Gudrun stories, for it is in this lay that we perceive her reluctance to marry Atli; here we see Gudrun bringing about the downfall of the race that has been foreshadowed in a dream of Atli.

The *Eddic* poems differ from the German legend in the following respects: an account of Sigurd's ancestry is given and events leading up to and accountable for his heroic feats; Sigmund is killed in battle with the sons of Hunding before Sigurd's birth; Sigurd's wife is named Gudrun, her mother having the name Grimhild; Brynhild is Atli's sister, beloved by Sigurd before Sigurd and Gudrun were
married; Sigurd's affection for Gudrun resulted from a love-potion prepared by Grimhild; Brynhild kills herself and is burned with Sigurd; Hogni is the brother of Gunnar, although Hagen of the German version was not; Guthormr, not mentioned in the German legend, killed Sigurd; the death of Gunnar and Hogni is occasioned by Atli. 7

Much of the material preserved for us in the Eddas was put into its first connected and complete form in the prose version of the Volsunga Saga, which, although it was probably of Norwegian origin, was saved only in Icelandic literature. Since the story was given so completely in the saga, since Morris made a translation of this saga in collaboration with Erickr Magnusson, we know that it was to this source that he turned for his epic material.

According to the Volsunga Saga, the Volsungs were descendants of Volsung, a powerful monarch of miraculous birth, supposedly the grandson of Odin. Volsung's wife, a Valkyrie, who had carried out Odin's decree for Volsung's birth, bore to him ten sons and one daughter. Sigmund and Signi, the oldest, were

twins. Signi is the character around whom the first family conflicts are centered. Signi is married to the King of the Goths, Siggeir. The one-eyed ancient, Odin, appeared at the marriage feast and thrust his sword into a tree, proclaiming that whoever was able to wrest it from the tree was their greatest hero. Sigmund was the only one able to accomplish this feat. Siggeir became envious of Sigmund's superiority and offered the sword's weight in gold for its ownership; however, Sigmund refused to sell his honor. This refusal was the motive for Siggeir's rage and resulted in the death of all the Volsungs but Signy and Sigmund. Sigmund lived in the wood, and was provided for by Signy. Signy, who had two sons, sacrificed them in sending them as help to Sigmund. Finding them inferior to his standards, Sigmund slew them. As a last resort to help her brother, Signy, in the disguise of a fay, visited Sigmund for three days and nights. At this time Sinfiotli was begotten. Sinfiotli, a full-blooded Volsung, one of godlike attributes, was sent to Sigmund at the age of ten. He was able to prove his worth effectually and accomplished the purpose for which he had been trained, that of destroying King Siggier and his palace. This he did
by fire. Although provision was made for Signy's escape and safety, she welcomed death with her husband and openly admitted her seduction of Sigmund so that she might give birth to an avenger of her father and brothers' deaths.

Sigmund and Sinfiotli returned to the Volsung's kingdom where Sigmund married the treacherous Borghild. Borghild poisoned Sinfiotli, who, following a quarrel over the unfair portioning of some booty, had slain Borghild's greedy brother.

Soon afterward Borghild died, and Sigmund married Hiordis, King Eylimi's daughter, and was challenged to a duel for her by another suitor, King Lingvi. He was overcome, not by the suitor, but by the one-eyed ancient, whose spear broke his sword in two. And in this way Odin came to close his favorite's career and end for a time the career of the sword.

After the others had left the scene of battle, Hiordis, who had been watching from nearby, consoled Sigmund until his death. She saved the shards for the son of Sigmund, whom she was to bear. She was taken to the court of Halfrek, where Sigurd, Sigmund's son, was reared and taught by the smith, Regin. Regin encouraged and prepared him to slay the
dragon Fafnir and to take the hoarded gold, and he tells the boy of his own life according to the same details as were given in the Edda.

After hearing the prophecy of his life, reluctantly given by Gripir, Sigurd, with his sword fashioned by Regin from the shards of Gram, set forth with Regin to Fafnir's abode on the Glittering Heath. Regin fearfully hides out while Sigurd deals with Fafnir. Sigurd dug a ditch, and concealed himself until he was able to make the fatal thrust which would kill Fafnir. Before his death Fafnir warned Sigurd of the curse on the gold.

As Sigurd was baking Fafnir's heart to comply to the request of Regin, he accidentally tasted it. Thereupon he was able to interpret the language of the birds, which advised him to eat it himself, to kill his foe, Regin, to take the gold, and ride to Hinder where Brynhild would tell him words of wisdom.

Sigurd rode through the flames and delivered Brynhild from her charmed sleep. plighted his troth to her, and bestowed upon her Andvari's ring. However, he was later induced by the guile of Grimhild manifest in an oblivious potion, to marry Gudrun instead. But through power of disguise, Sigurd later wooed Brynhild
for Gunnar. Finally Sigurd fell victim to Brynhild's wrath, for Brynhild realized she had been deceived when Gudrun's possession of Andvari's ring was acknowledged. Brynhild induced Gunnar's brother, who had not pledged loyalty to Sigurd, to stab Sigurd in his bed chamber. After Sigurd's death, Brynhild acknowledged herself avenged and killed herself, confessing her devotion to Sigurd and requesting that she be burned with him.

Gudrun's story is resumed. In order that she might forget her sorrow, she retired to the mountains, but was soon solicited by her brothers, Holgi and Gunnar, to marry King Atli. After some hesitancy, she consented to become the wife of the merciless Atli, king of the Huns. Gudrun then aroused the jealousy and greed of Atli by telling him of the unavenged murder of Sigurd and the gold in Andvari's treasure. Immediately Atli, assisted by Gudrun, made arrangements to let the brothers meet death in a visit to the land of Atli. Their plans materialized, and Gunnar was the last to die in the bloody battle that ensued in Atli's Hall. The treasure, however, had been sunk in the Rhine.

Gudrun next married Jormunrek, and the closing chapters of the saga give the details concerning
Swanhild, who was trodden to death by horses. Gudrun's sons were slain in the attempt of revenging their sister. In Morris' epic Gudrun ends her life by jumping into the sea before her third marriage with Jormunrek.

In the saga, Fafnir is referred to as a dragon; but as a serpent, in the Eddas. As may be expected, the details are much more closely related in the Volsunga Saga.

Some connection between Beowulf and the Sigurd story may be pointed out. In the Sigmund tale, which was related at Hrothgar's court, both Sigmund and Sinfjotli, uncle and nephew, were regarded as heroic characters who sought adventure, but they were never werewolves as in the Volsunga Saga and the Eddic poems. There is similarity between Sigurd's dragon-slaying and Beowulf's slaying of Grendel and his mother. Both demonstrate superhuman strength, and wield swords unfamiliar to men. 8

Historical treatment of the Niebelung tale is to be found in Saxo's Danish History. Stories about many of the characters referred to in the heroic age are so thoroughly imbued in the supernatural that it is conjectural to whether a heroic character's actual historical existence can be authenticated. One of the most familiar of these stories is that of Sigurd. Since the character studies of Brynhild,

Hogni, and Gudrun have such similarity in the Norse and German versions, we may conclude that the Nibelung legend has its basis in fact; for if the story be assumed to be a fictitious one, then it must be concluded that the story had its origin in part (actually Atli and Etzel more than Attila) from one author, a fact which cannot be substantiated in consideration of the many lays which are found in the Poetic Edda.

Saxo referred to a sorceress, Gudrun, who had brought it to pass that a certain king's defenders were blinded and so fought against one another. Since Gudrun is a guileful sorceress here, she may be more closely related to Grimhild of the Norse versions.

There are several dragon-slayer stories in the Danish History, which correspond very well with the Norse versions. In one, the hero, Frithlaf, alone on an island, was cautioned in a dream to slay a dragon that guarded a golden treasure. As he awoke, the dragon emerged from his cave under the waves. Frithlaf, like Sigurd, realized how difficult it would be to penetrate the monster's adamant scales with his sword.

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9Saxo Grammaticus, Danish History, Chapter VIII, section 281, p. 338.
Thereupon he covered himself with animal skin as protection against the poison blood of the dragon, whereby he was able to pierce the dragon's soft viscera and strike its heart.\textsuperscript{10} The same story was repeated concerning a hero named Frode, Hadding's son. This story coincides more directly with the story as told in the Norse versions, in that the monster goes down to the sea for a drink.\textsuperscript{11}

Since Saxo Grammaticus was familiar to many English writers of this period, we may safely assume that William Morris was one of these.\textsuperscript{12}

Chadwick wrote concerning the identifications of legendary characters with historical ones:

"It was scarcely through the greatness of their power, much less through the effects of their achievements on after generations, that the characters of the Heroic Age acquired celebrity; it was far more through the impression made upon their neighbours and contemporaries by their magnificence and generosity, by their personality, and perhaps above all by the adventures and vicissitudes of fortune which fell to their lot."

William Morris in \textit{Sigurd the Volsung} has drawn his story almost directly from the \textit{Volsunga}.

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., Chapter VI, section 181, p. 222.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., Chapter II, section 38, p. 45.


\textsuperscript{13}Chadwick, \textit{The Heroic Age}, p. 167.
Saga, and has thrown due emphasis upon such parts as are significant to the story by omissions or by casting into comparative obscurity incidents which by their nature betray themselves to be arbitrary additions to the initial story. The structural omissions in Sigurd the Volsung from the Volsunga Saga may be cited as follows: Sigurd's avenging of Sigmund, the deeds of Helgi, Regin's plan for pits to catch Fafnir's venom, Brynhild's prophecy of Gudrun's marriage to King Atli, the pursuit of Hjalli, the coward, as a separate incident before Hogni's heart was demanded, Hogni's sons' assistance in Gudrun's vengeance, the escape of Gudrun, her marriage to Jormunrekk, the terrible fate of Swanhild, and the end of the "whole root and stem of the Giukings." Morris' first object seemed to be to tell a tale, to achieve dramatic effect through unity. The same story has been told by others but with less degree of literary success. Morris adhered more closely to the old Norse tradition, but the influence of the Nibelungenlied is quite discernible. Gudrun does not caution her brothers as to the intended treachery of Atli since she is deter-

mired to avenge Sigurd's death, and she incites Atli's greed to snatch the treasured gold; and Hogni advises throwing from the window of Atli's hall the corpses of the bloody battle.

William Morris alluded to the relationship of the Volsungs to Odin in the introduction to his epic when he called Volsung's sons "the fillers of Odin's hall." Another indication that these royal personages are connected with the deities as given in the saga and epic is seen in Sigmund's being chosen as the receiver of Odin's gift. This gift was a gleaming sword placed in the great oak Branstock by the one-eyed ancient in his cloak of blue, silver and grey, saying:

"Now let the man among you whose heart and hand may shift To pluck it from the oakwood e'en take it for my gift. Then ne'er but his own heart falter, its point and edge shall fail Until the night's beginning and the ending of the tale." 14

Morris stressed the divine relationship of his hero more as the epic progressed. Sigry's son by Sigmund, Sinfiotli, possessed the courage of the gods, as

14 Sigurd the Volsung, Book I, p. 5.
indicated by the test of Siggjór's son and himself, in which test Sinfiotli proved more excellent by performing the heaviest of labors and was unharmed by the deadliest of adders which he found in the flour when his father bade him to bake the bread. Further in Book I we find evidence of Sigmund's and Sinfiotli's superhuman strength through their resistance in the halls of Siggjór when their plot to kill Siggjór had seemingly failed. Having been taken as captives to the house of death, they were able to break out of the dungeon and fulfill their intended mission. Sigmund, too, a superman invulnerable to any drink of poison venom, was able to assail Queen Borghild's attacks on Sinfiotli's life; finally Sinfiotli drank the third cup of poisoned wine himself. It was Sigmund's invulnerability to danger of fire and water which was inherent in his son, Sigurd, as is demonstrated in Sigurd's feats which proved him to be the only earthly being capable of rescuing Brynhild from Hindfell.

Assuming that the principal character of Morris' epic is entirely of mythical origin, we decline to go so far as to assert the whole poem and all personages in it are mythical. Added to mythical legends there is, undoubtedly, at the root, a group
of historical events concerning one or a number of brave heroes, whose deeds were associated with the deeds of one man, and having passed through many years of legendary interpretation, the stories became more thoroughly permeated with supernatural elements. Conscious of this popular appeal of narrative, Morris used as his background the Norse and Teutonic mythology to indicate his admiration for strength, hope, and courage in mankind.

In the Volsunga Saga, Signy and Sigmund are twins, yet Morris made no apparent allusion in his epic to popular superstitions regarding twins. Such superstitions might be considered, however, as reasonable explanation for the incestuous relationship of Sigmund and Signy and the quick-tempered disposition of Sinfjotli.¹⁵ Morris has introduced no agent other that the fay's witchcraft to explain why Signy was able to assume disguise and visit Sigmund in his lonely dwelling, on which occasion Sinfjotli was begotten.¹⁶

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¹⁵Ref. to Sinfjotli's disposition may be found in the werewolf episode (Sigurd the Volsung, Book I, p. 33) wherein we read of Sigmund as having killed Sinfjotli, who "maddened only by temper."

¹⁶Thomas Mann, in his short story, The Blood of the Volsungs, has used the incest motif as the basis for his version of the Nibelungenlied tale, in which the twin brother and sister, Sigmund
William Henry Schofield has pointed out an agreement between the Arthurian romances in regard to the incestuous relationship of Sigmund and Signy. In the Vulgate Merlin he says, "the incest is represented as happening while Arthur is still a young man, before he has been crowned; and Arthur was then ignorant of his relationship to his paramour." \(^{17}\) The incest caused Modred, the child, to have an evil disposition and bring ruin to the land of Logres.

Signy and Gudrun are parallel characters, although Gudrun is a more historical character. Both were married against their wills, Signy to Siggier, Gudrun to Atli; both suffered remorse within themselves, Signy for the love of her people, Gudrun because of hate for her own people and love for Sigurd, for "She wept not like other women, yet her heart was nigh bursting with sorrow." \(^{18}\) In the Volsunga Saga, Gudrun burned the royal hall of Atli and witnessed its destruction just as Signy did to

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occasion the ruin of Siggier's hall. Gudrun assumed a different role than Signy when she refused help to her brothers who were cast into the death pit of serpents, which was similar to the dungeon into which Sigmund and Sinfjotli were confined. Morris does not assign the brutal character to Gudrun in his epic that one finds in the *Nibelungenlied*, but still she is more heartless than in the *Volsunga Saga*.

Chadwick, through his suggestion that the name "Hild" means war, assigns a Valkyrian relationship to Grimhild similar to that of Brynhild. Because of their mythical powers, the Valkyrie was able to cause "unceasing strife." Grimhild matched well with the Grimhild of the *Thiodrick Saga*, who put burning flames into the mouths of her brothers to test whether or not they were dead. She, however, received her just deserts as a result of King Thiodrick's plea to Atli that she, too, must be killed as a devil and witch.

William Morris told the Fafnir story in detail in the Book of Regin, wherein Sigurd's sympathies are thoroughly aroused to help the aged Regin

gain due vengeance. In this book, Morris used especially the Eddic mythology concerning Odin and the Aesir. The spoiling of the dwarf, Andvari, may be considered the common motif in the epic as it is in all northern tales. Loki was accredited with his characteristic craftiness and pernicious disposition. Loki borrowed Ran's net, in which to gather the gold, an allusion which was used by Morris to imply the dire consequences which were to evolve from the stolen gold here as elsewhere. Introduced in this episode is the famous ring of Andvari, the source of all wealth, reluctantly sacrificed by the Elf king who bears forth the following curse with the ring:

"There farest thou Loki, and Might I load thee worse
Than with what thine ill heart beareth, there shouldst thou bear my curse:
But for men a curse thou bearest; entangled in my gold,
Amid my woe abideth another woe untold.
Two brethren and a father, eight kings my grief shall slay;
And the hearts of queens shall be broken, and their eyes shall loathe the day." 21

21 Sigurd the Volsung, Book II. Regin, p. 83. The two brothers are Farnir and Regin; the other eight athelings, Sigurd, Gotthorm (son of Gjuki), Gunnar, Hogni, Atilla, and the three sons of Gudrun by Jormunrek.
In the Poetic Edda, Regin's sister, Lyngheith, who refused to avenge her father or her brother Fafnir, was introduced. Hollander suggested that "this duty devolves upon her son or, if she bear a daughter, on the son born in her wedlock." We may, then, with Grundtvig, say, "suppose that either Lyngheith, or her daughter, marries King Oylini. Their grandson, Sigurth, who slays Fafnir would thus be the avenger."^22

Morris, however, has not drawn such an outline for his mythological pattern. Through Regin we become acquainted with his father, Reidmar, and his two brothers, Fafnir and Otter, who had the superhuman power to transform themselves at will into any representation of the animal kingdom. The cunning Otter was slain by the "world's begrudger," Loki, while he tramped through the wood with the "heart-wise Odin" and Haenir, the "utter-blameless, who wrought the hope of man." Morris characterized these slothful gods and the mythical Regin with the human attributes which are in accord with his humanistic socialism, wherein he conceived man to be

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^22 Hollander, The Poetic Edda, p. 256.
happiest in a sphere of his own creation. Regin is pictured not as a specialist of one particular art, but as a specialist of "the whole," a Master of Masters, an aged one who has a deep perspective on life, one cognizant that it was the past which made him; yet his weakness is in his forgetfulness and in his lack of dedication to the future which he must nourish. He became obsessed with his own power. His mission was to become the teacher of men, a mission which he filled well, but his desire to experience the personal glory of these deeds, the capitalistic rationale of the self-sufficient ego, was to be stifled by Sigurd, the protagonist of right, in a tradition of social justice. Regin's lust for power, as cited by Morris, follows:

"And some day I shall have it all, his gold and his craft and his heart,
And the gathered and garnered wisdom he guards in the mountains apart.
And then when my hand is upon it, my hand shall be as the spring
To thaw his winter away and the fruitful tide to bring.
It shall grow, it shall grow into summer, and I shall be he that wrought,
And my deeds shall be remembered, and my name that once was nought.
Yea I shall be Frey, and Thor, and Freyja, and Bragi in one;
Yea the God of all that is,—and no deed in the wide world done,
But the deed that my heart would fashion: and the songs of the freed from the yoke
Shall bear to my house in the heavens the love and the longing of folk.
And there shall be no more dying, and the sea shall be as the land,
And the world forever and ever shall be young beneath my hand."23

Sigurd, designed to represent a Norse Achilles, rode Greyfell, descendant of Odin's tire-
less horse, Sleipnir.24 His conquests were rendered successful through his own dauntlessness and the
power of his sword, the Wrath of Sigurd.25

Morris followed the Norse myth in his treat-
ment of the dragon of Fafnir tale which includes the
rescuing of the Valkyrie Brynhild from the Glistening
Heath; in the German version we find that it was Fafnir
who took the sleeping girl as captive.

23Sigurd the Volsung, Book II, Regin, pp.
86-89.

24Sleipnir is derived from "sleipnir" meaning
"smooth or gliding." Odin's horse was white and is
described as having eight legs. Both Sigurd's horse
and Odin's were tested as superior to any other
through their ability to ford a swift-current-ged river.

25A similar theme was used by Ovid in the
myth of the Argonauts, in which the golden fleece was
recovered by Jason, who, although aided by Medea and
her magical skill, was reviled by her when she married
Creusa, princess of Corinth. Again in the story of
Perseus and Andromeda, the hero returned from slaying
the monster, Medusa, and the betrothed Phineus was
transformed to stone by means of the Gorgon's head.
Ovid, Metamorphoses, Book VII.
To Morris Sigurd was not only a heroic character, not only one of remarkable ability connected with the gods of myth, but he was a symbol of strength and courage, one willing to meet the fated consequences of his loyalty even though they lead to death. In the Nibelungenlied one considers Brynhild to be the protagonist of justice; in Sigurd the Volsung Sigurd is the leader of right and equity; Brynhild is but a factor in his leadership. There is an interesting parallel between The Lay of Sigrdrífa and the epic. In the lay, Brynhild indicated eleven precepts to be observed. Although not as solicitous in the epic, her advice was inclusive, "Love thou the Gods—and withstand them, lest thy fame should fail in the end."\(^{26}\) In the Book of Brynhild we are unaware of Brynhild's true force until the close of the book, when, following the realization that she has been deceived, she devised without deviation the means to meet her ends.

"The superior divinity of the woman is thus manifest in this case, . . . which makes the bridegrooms mere mortal men, while the brides have supernatural attributes and are termed 'valkyries' by

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the Iceland mythologists."  

Still Brynhild's power does not lessen for us the strength of character in Sigurd. Her wish to be united in death with Sigurd is merely a means to the end of justice and loyalty, and this is felt by Sigurd as much as Brynhild. Morris has intensified this symbol of goodness in Sigurd by centering his epic about Sigurd and his feats.

The question as to whether Gunnar and Hogni are mythical, fictitious, or historical characters, is inconclusive. The name "Niflungar," associated with these two characters in the Icelandic, is interpreted as "children of mist," or "darkness;" originally Gunnar was represented as an historical king of the Burgundians and Hogni became later associated with him. Hogni, in the Waldhere story, offers evidence that the character of the German version and the Norse versions was the same. In Sigurd the Volsung, Morris represented Gunnar and Hogni with no attributes indicative of mythical characters. Gunnar was brave, especially when the heart of Hogni

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28 Chadwick, The Heroic Age, p. 142.
was cut out before his very sight; having been cast into the pit of serpents, he and Hogni were strong and demonstrated exceptional skill in repelling the blows thrust upon them by Atli's men, but Morris has assigned no qualities of the superman to either of these characters. They are merely "Guiki's sons" and the brothers of Gudrun. 29

One remote mythical element introduced by Morris, affecting both Gunnar and Hogni, was that of the dreams of their wives, Glaumvor and Bera, respectively. To Bera was revealed the Eastland flood breaking over the Burg of the Nibelungs and filling the hall with blood, followed by the entrance of Atli, who laid the heart of Hogni upon the fire. 30

Dreams were used appropriately to insure the inevitable stroke of fate. Gudrun dreamed of her loss of Sigurd, before she had even met him, and as customary in Northern folklore, Morris represented the suitors as animals which were slain. Birds brought tidings of good or bad news.


30 Sigurd the Volsung, Book IV, Gudrun, pp. 264-266.
The falcon or the hawk, and the eagle or the erne were the bearers of prophecy. The birds which suggested to Sigurd the killing of Regin were presented as seven eagles and they reappeared later as an interesting motif in connection with the fated line of athelings, Sigurd himself having been representative of the eighth. 31

It was the food of the roasted heart of Fafnir which endowed Sigurd with the eloquence and knowledge of beast and bird speech. When Sigmund and Sinfiotli were in the wood as werewolves, two weasels demonstrated to Sigmund how he might bring Sinfiotli to life again with a three-leaved herb. 32

The incidents dealing with swords are undoubtedly of mythological origin. Even in the Grecian mythology Theseus drew the sword of Aegeus from under a rock, and thus proved himself able for the work of the gods; Arthur proved his right to the throne of England by drawing a sword from a stone and anvil. Thus Sigmund established his right and divine association by pulling Odin’s sword from Branstock.

31 Cf. ante, footnote 21, Chapter IV, p. 60.
32 Sigurd the Volsung, Book I, Sigmund, p. 34.
Moreover, Arthur's last battle was signalized by the return of the sword to its supernatural owner. Also, Sigmund, in his last battle, recognized Odin's hand when his sword fell broken before him. Hiordis, Sigmund's second wife, arranged for the preservation of the shards of Sigmund's sword, the gift of Odin, until such a time as supernatural agencies could be joined, and thus she was able to serve her son, Sigurd. The sword Regin fashioned for Sigurd was made from two cuts from the moon, and his father's shards—a sword with gemmed hilts and one that insured success.

Morris' feeling for "wyrd" was especially artistic. In Book I, "Sigmund," fate moved the human pawns about, blindly and without purpose. In the books that follow, "Regin," "Brynhild," and "Gudrun," man became more the master of his own fate, although in the Regin book the Norns were still authoritative. 33

33To the decrees of the Norns, Urd, Verandi, and Skullé (who was also a valkyrie), presiding respectively over the past, present, and future, the inhabitants of Valhalla are subject. The Norns, according to mythology, are older than the gods themselves, and in the beginning they resided among the most ancient race of giants. They dwelt by a sacred spring, Urd, past which, toward Midgard (Midworld's Mark in Sigurd the Volsung), the home of man, extended one of the roots of the great ash, Yggdrasil, the tree of life in whose branches sat an eagle who knew many things. The Norns faithfully watered the tree, and symbolically preserved the world. Traveling over a rainbow bridge,
In his adaptation of mythical elements Morris only partly subdued, only partly thrust aside the natural powers in order to let Odin and the Aesir rule. For he told the story of Sigurd with a realistic sense of the survival of the Volsung house—a survival which avenged itself not by blood, but by the feats in Sigurd's heroic life. There is not the devotion to the gods of fate in Sigurd the Volsung that one becomes cognizant of in the Eddic poems, for Sigurd, though destined for defeat and death in the end, reigned supreme as the protagonist of the social philosophy of which William Morris was representative.

the gods came daily to the spring to hold council, and they spun their webs and cast their threads of fate. Thorpe, Northern Mythology, Vol. I, pp. 12, 13, and 158. Similar fates, "weird sisters," may be recalled from Macbeth as carried over from mythological tradition.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

It is a science to know the contents and sources of myths, yet it is a greater science to know why the human race has produced them, and why such men as William Morris assigned some permanent and practical significance to them. In Morris's life and art, in Sigurd the Volsung, in his sound bourgeois sanity, we become aware of the significance of mythology. Morris was forever interested in the drama of real life—the life of vividness, of force, an emphatic, impetuous life of courage in which the Icelander strove to gain happiness even in the face of doom. Morris attempted to escape into the background of Scandinavian mythology from the hardness and sterility of mind of the nineteenth century, which he felt was bound to leave only an inheritance of vacuity behind it.

The growing materialism of the nineteenth century, the nationalistic outlook, the disintegration of accepted intellectual values, the doubts about the importance of man's spirit, the marks of Darwinism—all show how unfree man was becoming. Really, in man, problems were worked out only in the light of his membership in a certain class, or worked upon by his
natural force in his struggle for existence. The great advances in all sciences gave the scientific and materialistic viewpoints prestige, which only now, perhaps, is dwindling. The scientific nineteenth century firmly believed that man's life—its problems—awaited nothing but scientific solutions to bring about the redemption of man.

One aspect of romanticism shows us a passion of revolt against this rationalistic viewpoint. Rationalists warned men not to seek solutions to their problems in the literature, art, and philosophy of the past, but rather in the science of the future; romanticists, on the other hand, insisted that the materialists were unable to offer panaceas for the really fundamental and eternal problems of man.

The ages which created mythology, fairy tale, and saga, were, to be sure, ages when man was not as learned and clever, but in his naivete he was much wiser than he is now. Therefore, Morris' ideology was only the epitome of mythological viewpoint held by the other romanticists,¹ for they, too, saw in the saga and in the myth a primeval wisdom, valid

for all time.

The redemption of man, they believed would come, not through science, but through mythology—a new mythology, an art, a pious reverence for the past.

It is symptomatic of the strength of this romantic revolt that in the same decade that Morris wrote his *Sigurd the Volsung*, Wagner, in his *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, used the ancient Siegfried myth as an expression of faith in the redemption of mankind. This was more than a coincidence. Both poets were convinced that they were not doing any harm to the great ancient myth by interpreting it in the sense of their nineteenth century philosophy—Morris giving it a socialistic interpretation, Wagner imbuing the myth with his Schopenhauerian interpretation.

To Morris, Sigurd symbolized the heroic, untainted youth who in his perfection might be able to purge the world, not of dragons, dwarfs, and giants, as in old mythology, but of greed, the stifling power of rationalization of the nineteenth century. The religion of the Northmen would bring happiness to the man who could hold it, who could withstand the buffeting about by the world's evil forces, who could face the strife of life like heroes that die laughing as Gunnar laughed when his heart
was cut out. It is this heroic spirit only that can extinguish a part of the dread and misery that hovers over the imperfect earth. It is this courage which is the foundation stone of William Morris' philosophy—this courage only which can purge the world of those destructive elements that take away man's happiness.

In the heroic feats of the saga, in the art of the Middle Ages, Morris recovered the myth as one resource to guard against the decrepitude of civilization of his century, which was being cast into a kaleidoscope of superficiality. He reverted to a free Northern society, unbounded by political fetters.

Morris praised the art that was kept alive because of its vigorous triumph. As A. C. Rickett has remarked, it was not an "Art for Art's sake of the aesthete," nor an "Art for Ethics' sake of the moralist," but for Morris it was "Art for life's sake."

2A. C. Rickett, William Morris, a Study in Personality, p. 225.
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