THE TREATMENT OF THE VOLSUNGA SAGA
BY WILLIAM MORRIS

The two renderings of the Volsunga Saga by William Morris, the first a literal translation and the second a literary presentation in verse, afford an opportunity to compare an exact, objective rendering of a previously developed narrative and a versified, subjective version of the same material, from the same hand. A comparative study of the two is revelatory of the contrast between old Scandinavian and modern English ideals and of the transformation which results when more or less primitive folk material passes through the imagination of a conscious artist.

In presenting this comparison of the Volsunga Saga as translated by Eirikr Magnusson and William Morris under the title, The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs, and the poem, Sigurd the Volsung, by Morris, an account of the poet's attitude toward his subject matter is given first. The following topics are then discussed: treatment of the action, including omissions, additions, changes, and elaborations; descriptive passages, including landscapes, dwellings, and human figures; presentation of characters, with special attention to Sigurd; attitude toward life; style, including diction, metre, figures, and tone.

William Morris and Iceland

While it is evident that as early as 1860 William Morris was interested in Northern literature, it was not until the publication of The Earthly Paradise in 1867 that Northern influence appeared in his poetry. In that collection of tales, The Lovers of Gudrun was taken directly from an Old Icelandic saga. In the autumn of 1868 he took up the study of Icelandic with Mr. Magnusson and in a few months had gone through the bulk of Icelandic literature. In the next year Magnusson and Morris published a translation of the Grettis Saga and a year later, the Volsunga Saga, with which this paper deals.

151
Iceland was now a passion with Morris and in 1871 he realized his dreams of a journey to that island, being accompanied by Magnusson and two other friends. His diary reveals that his mood was little short of idolatry, for from now onward the gloomy beauty and terrible strength of the Icelandic landscape were sacred to him. "I have seen nothing out of a dream: * * * nothing I have ever seen has impressed me so much." He rages against tourists who picnic at hot springs but "who never have heard the names of Sigurd and Brynhild, of Njal or Gunnar, or Grettir, or Gisli, or Gudrun." Midway on the tour he writes in exaltation: "I have seen many marvels, * * * slept in the home-field of Njal's house, and Gunnar's, and at Herdholt. I have seen Bjarg, and Bathstead, and the place where Bolli was killed, and am now a half-hour's ride from where Gudrun died." Of Grettir's lair he wrote: "Such a savage and dreadful place that it gave quite a new turn in my mind to the whole story, and transfigured Grettir into an awful and monstrous being, like one of the early giants of the world." Nor did his interest decrease as the journey drew toward its end: "My heart beats, so please you, as we near the brow of the pass, and all the infinite wonder, which came upon me when I came up on the deck of the Diana to see Iceland for the first time, comes surging on me now." The experience so interested the poet that he returned in 1873.

Morris, with his usual whole-hearted vehemence, had become so devoted to the old sagas that Iceland was now to him what Greece is to many: Italy, visited in 1872, had no appeal. Stopford Brooke declared, "If Iceland was once started in conversation, Morris clung to it like ivy to the oak. Nothing else, for hours together, was allowed in the conversation. It was terrible, and he looked like Snorri Sturluson himself!"

The Northern hero tales Morris keenly delighted in, though reverence was mingled in large measure with his delight. The "Translator's (sic) Preface" to the Volsunga Saga contains these words: "For this is the Great Story of the North, which should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks—to all our race first, and afterwards, when the change
of the world has made our race nothing more than a name of what has been—a story too—then should it be to those that come after us no less than the Tale of Troy has been to us.”

It was in this spirit that Morris wrote Sigurd the Volsung. It is evident that had he felt upon its publication that he had not presented the saga fairly and in the old Northern heroic spirit, he would have considered himself of all men the most miserable, in that he had done despite to the greatest story in the world. A. Clutton-Brock thus describes the poet’s attitude: “He was so familiar with it, it had sunk into his mind so thoroughly, that he had no more thought of treating it romantically or of heightening its interest with ‘local color’ than Fra Angelico thought of introducing local color into his sacred paintings.” Morris himself pleads thus for guidance in “To the Muse of the North”:

O Muse that swayest the sad Northern song,
Thy right hand full of smiting and of wrong,
Thy left hand holding pity; and thy breast
Heaving with hope of that so certain rest;
Thou, with the grey eyes kind and unafraid,
Thy soft lip trembling not, though they have said
The doom of the world and they that dwell therein;

O Mother, and Love, and Sister all in one
Come thou; for sure I am enough alone,
That thou thine arms about my heart should’st throw,
And wrap me in the grief of long ago.

It is decidedly interesting to attempt an estimate as to how closely Morris adhered to the matter and the manner of the old saga and to what degree he was able to exclude romanticism and local color.

TREATMENT OF THE ACTION

A modern reader is struck by the looseness, at times almost aimlessness, of many of the old folk narratives, for the ancient story tellers frequently lack a sense of perspective as obviously as do cave-man and cubist artists. This tendency was increased in the Volsunga Saga by the purpose of one of its shapers or recorders—the presentation of the traditional ancestry of a Scandinavian house.
Thus William Morris was at the outset faced with the problem of what should be omitted on structural grounds, in retelling the story. Because of his devotion to the old Saga, *Sigurd the Volsung* contains so complete a version of the narrative that many critics have found it faulty in unity. Oneness of impression demanded that Morris omit Sigi and Rerir, but the deeds of Sigmund are presented in full, perhaps in order to stress the fact that to Sigurd, the last of the Vikings, was given a noble and glorious heritage, to which he must be faithful. Dramatic effect also forced the poet to omit the final incidents of the Saga—the escape of Gudrun, her marriage to Jormunrek, the terrible fate of Swanhild, and her tragic avenging.

Structural considerations also led to the omission of two digressions: one unimportant, the deeds of Helgi; the other more vital, Sigurd's avenging of Sigmund. Unnecessary and weakening details are omitted in such instances as that of the weasel which suggested to Sigmund a remedy for Sinfjotli when the two were werwolves, that of Regin's plan for pits to catch Fafnir's venom, that of the pursuit of Hjalli the coward as a separate incident before Hogni's heart is demanded, and that of Hogni's sons' assistance in Gudrun's vengeance. Two prophetic passages disappear, perhaps because they prevent suspense: Brynhild's forecast of Gudrun's marriage to Atli and the former's dying prophesy.

Such omissions do not particularly change the tone or the effect of the poem, but such cannot be said of a final group, omissions made in concession to modern conventions of life. Details dropped on these grounds are as follows: Sigmund's biting out of the wolf's tongue as he sits in the stocks, the possibility that this wolf is Siggeir's mother, the skin-flaying test of her sons made by Signy, Sigmund's killing of those sons at her command, the birth of a daughter to Brynhild and Sigurd, the urging of Sigurd's "taking of Brynhild's maidenhood" as a motive for the murder of the former, Gudrun's killing of Atli and her sons, and her giving him the terrible drink. A similar influence doubtless led Morris to allow Signy to remain in the forest with Sigmund, and Sigurd on the mountain with Brynhild, as brief a time as possible, only one night instead
A final case, the omission of a quaint archaic touch in the one uncovered muzzle hair of Otter, is hard to explain and although it is but a trifle, one somehow resents the disappearance of that little detail.

Complete changes in the action, involving omission and the substitution of wholly new material, are not frequent. Morris altered the occasion of the Sinfjotli-Gudrod fight and gave Sigurd different and more vital grounds for killing Regin, in each case with obvious intent of improving the motivation, which he accomplished without appreciably altering the tone of the story. Much more striking and significant is his handling of the relations between Atli, Gudrun, and her brothers. Gudrun forgets Sigurd only for a short time after drinking the magic potion, grieves for him constantly in Atli’s halls, and takes an altogether different part in the killing of her kindred. Gudrun is now seen as inflaming Atli’s greed with accounts of the Niblung hoard, bringing about the journey of her brothers to Hunland, and gloating in melodramatic fashion over their destruction, instead of warning them not to come and fighting by their side when they arrive. Morris has of course adopted the more dramatic Nibelungen Lied version of this portion of the story, to the improvement of Sigurd the Volsung as literature but to its detriment as a replica of the Icelandic saga. Artistically the change is justifiable but if Morris would reproduce his original, the alteration is unwise.

Distinctly more numerous than such omissions and changes are the insertions of new incidents, building up events already present in the narrative. For instance, Morris makes Siggeir, at his own request, the first to attempt to draw the magic sword from Branstock, thus heightening the effect of his failure. Signy warns Volsung of Siggeir’s treacherous nature even before she leaves her father’s home. The birds which suggest to Sigurd the killing of Regin are presented as eagles and they reappear later as an interesting motif. The suspense in the Niblung court as tension develops between Sigurd, Gudrun, Gunnar, and Brynhild is original with Morris, as are the public announcement of the death of Sigmund and of his first love, and the public mourning therefor. It will be noted that those details are based upon the original, but are psychologized.
Most frequent of all is the expansion, the elaboration, of incidents by the addition of numerous minute details, distinguishable from the alterations already discussed by the fact that no one of the many additions now referred to is of significance comparable to that of those already mentioned. That is, Morris takes a word, a passage, a hint, passes it through his imagination, and it comes forth increased a hundred or possibly a thousand fold—the same event, indeed, but elaborated at times almost beyond recognition. Instances are the version of Siggeir's attempt to buy the magic sword from Sigmund, Sinfjotli and Sigmund's revenge, the announcement of Sigurd's birth, Greipir's prophecy. Regin's account of the Otter-Loki incident grows from sixteen words to six pages, while the six page section entitled by Morris "Sigurd rideth to the Glittering Plain" is developed from the words, "Now Sigurd and Regin ride up the heath." Arrivals as Sigurd's at the Niblungs' court, departures as Gudrun's to Atli, journeys as Gudrun's to Brynhild, feasts as that in Siggeir's hall before his death, and such events as the marriage of Gudrun and Sigurd are expanded apparently *ad lib.* The Saga speaks thus of the journey to secure the widowed Gudrun for Atli: "There were five hundred men, and noble men rode with them. So they went into the hall of King Alf." From this Morris produces the following:

Then to horse get the Kings of the Niblungs, and ride out by the ancient gate;  
And amidst its dusky hollows stir up the sounds of swords;  
Forth then from the hallowed houses ride on these war-fain lords,  
Till they come to the dales deserted, and the woodlands waste and drear;  
There the wood-wolves shrink before them, fast flee the forest-deer  
And the stony wood-ways clatter as the Niblung host goes by.  
Adown by the feet of the mountains that eve in sleep they lie,  
And arise on the morrow morning, and climb the mountain-pass,  
And sunless hollow places, and slopes that hate the grass.  
So they cross the hither ridges and cross a stony bent  
Adown to the dale of Thora, and the country of content;  
By the homes of a simple people, by cot and close they go,  
Till they come to Thora's dwelling; but fair it stands and low  
Amidst of orchard-closes, and round about men win  
Fair work in field and garden, and sweet are the sounds therein.
Descriptive Passages

As in much folk literature, setting appears in the Volsunga Saga in less detail than in the productions of later literary artists, who are more conscious of the beauty and significance of inanimate life and are better aware of the value of setting. Here, more than in any of the matters previously discussed, Morris gets away from his original and romanticises his material. Essentially a decorative artist, whether in architecture, wall paper, or poetry, his inventiveness in the matter of elaboration is inexhaustible and he heaps splendors on splendors. Some of the most beautiful and poetic passages in the entire poem are these descriptive portions, but they are all too often romantic rather than heroic and more Southern than Northern in tone. Morris gives the impression, at times, of describing not Scandinavia but his own land of dreams.

Landscapes appear continually, based on the merest suggestion in the original or more frequently created entirely by the poet. Delightful as they are, they are often peculiarly vague and indistinct, as visions seen in a dream.

So he rideth higher and higher, and the light grows great and strange,
And forth from the clouds it flickers, till at noon they gather and change,
And settle thick on the mountain, and hide its head from sight;
But the winds in a while are wakened, and the day bettered ere the night,
And, lifted, a measureless mass o'er the desert crag-walls high,
Cloudless the mountain riseth against the sunset sky,
The sea of the sun grows golden as it ebbs from the day's desire;
And the light that afar was a torch is grown a river of fire,
And the mountain is black above it, and below is it dark and dun;
And there is the head of Hindfell as an island in the sun.

And again:

So the day grew old about them and the joy of their desire,
And eve and the sunset came, and faint grew the sunset fire,
And the shadowless death of the day, was sweet in the golden tide;
But the stars shone forth on the world and the twilight changed and died;
And sure if the first of man-folk had been born to that starry night,
And had heard no tale of the sunrise, he had never longed for the light;
But earth longed amidst her slumber, as neath the night she lay,
And fresh and all abundant abode the deeds of day.
Morris frequently refers to the seasons, both in narrative to indicate the passage of time and in description to add color: "Winter star-light," "on an eve of autumn," "the winter brought in spring."

So passeth the summer season, and the autumn of the year,
And the latter days of winter on toward the springtime wear.

The poet employs the passage of the seasons to indicate practically all the chief divisions of the narrative, with the result that there are noticeably more seasonal references that in any other modern poem not dealing chiefly with out-door themes. Devout worshippers of the seasons and the powers of the earth as they are, it can hardly be urged in defence of Morris that the old Scandinavians introduced them thus persistently into their literature.

The passage of day and night is even more an obsession with the poet. As the seasons indicate the time of the chief sections of the poem, so the sun and moon mark time for the minor incidents. Sigurd cannot travel, make love, or fight without astral accompaniment. The sun may be overclouded at dawn but day after day the Volsung lands, far away to the North, are blessed with the steadiest and most glorious sunshine, due, Mr. Morris might perhaps say, to the fact that Sigurd is a sun-god. The moon is equally generous and seems to be in her full splendor every night of the year, for Morris has a moon-complex as persistent of that of the German novelists. "The moon ariseth red," "the moon was low," "the dim white moon appears," "the moon lay white," "the white moon shone," "the midnight moon looks down," "the moon rode high," "the white moon climbeth," "the moon from the world is departed," "the moon is long since dead"—these are but a fraction of the occasions on which Luna appears.

In the Volsunga Saga, descriptions of interiors are limited to a few suggestive touches, no passages being so full as those in Beowulf, for instance. Sigurd finds Brynhild in "a shield hung castle" with "a banner of the topmost thereof," while the abode of Giuki and Atli's hall are introduced without details. But Morris presents neat little sketches of each as it appears, and adds further details passim. The hall of the Volsungs appeals
most fully of any building mentioned in the original saga: "King Volsung let build a noble hall in such a wise that a big oak tree stood therein, and that the limbs of the tree blossomed out over the roof of the hall, while below stood the trunk within it, and the said trunk did men call Branstock." From this Morris develops many details scattered through the first book of the poem, and on it he bases his opening description of the hall, which may serve as illustration of many similar passages throughout the poem.

There was a dwelling of kings ere the world was waxen old;
Dukes were the door-wards there, and the roofs were thatched with gold;
Earls were the wrights that wrought it, and silver nailed its doors;
Earls' wives were the weaving-women, queens' daughters strewed its floors,

And as in all other matters 'twas all earthly matters crown,
And the least of its wall-hung shields was a battle-world's renown,
So therein withal was a marvel and a glorious thing to see,
For midst of all its midmost hall-floor sprang up a mighty tree,
That reared its blessings roof-ward, and wreathed the roof-tree dear
With the glory of the summer and the garland of the year.

And when men tell of Volsung, they call that war-duke's tree
That crowned stem, the Branstock; and so it was told unto me.
So there was the throne of Volsung beneath its blossoming bower,
But high o'er the roof-crest red it rose 'twixt hall and tower,
And therein was the wild hawks dwelling, abiding the dole of their lord;
And they wailed high over the wine, and laughed to the waking sword.

The heroic characters of the ancient epics are frequently described in some detail, presaging the full and lovingly drawn portraits of the chief figures in the later romance. But few such touches appear in the Volsunga Saga, with the notable exception of the full account of the personal appearance of Sigurd, presented as Chapter XXII of the translation. Splendid as here he appears, Morris makes him even more golden and glorious in many passages, one of which is as follows:

Lo now, as they stand astonied, a wonder they behold,
For a warrior cometh riding, and his gear is all of gold;
And grey is his steed and mighty beneath that lord of war,  
And a treasure of gold he beareth and the gems of the ocean's floor:
Now they deem the war-steed wondrous and the treasure strange they deem,
But so exceeding glorious doth the harnessed rider seem,
That men's hearts are all exalted as he draweth nigh and nigher
And there are they abiding in fear and great desire:
For they look on the might of his limbs, and his waving locks they see,
And his glad eyes clear as the heavens, and the wreath of the summer tree
That girdeth the dread of the war-helm, and they wonder at his sword,
And the tinkling rings of his hauberk, and the rings of the ancient Hoard:
And they say: Are the Gods on the earth? did the world change yesternight?
Are the sons of Odin coming and the days of Baldur bright?

Morris gives the features and expression of the other characters little attention, save that he seizes upon an epithet for Gudrun which he iterates and reiterates until he has out-epitheted the epithet-loving ancients with his use of "the white armed Gudrun." Apparel, however, is frequently mentioned and occasionally pictured in detail.

But a woman sits on the high seat with gold about her head,  
And ruddy rings on her arms, and the grace of her girdle-stead;
And sunlit is her rippled linen, and the green leaves lie at her feet,  
And e'en as a swan on the billow where the firth and the outsea meet,  
On the dark-blue cloths she sitteth, so fair and softly made  
Are her limbs by the linen hidden, and so white is she arrayed.

PRESENTATION OF CHARACTER

The fundamental characteristics of the men and women in the Volsunga Saga are retained by William Morris in his poetic version, but here as in every other phase of the poem, the rugged Scandinavian material is overlaid with romantic embroidery. This softening and emasculating of the characters has already been suggested in discussing the poet's treatment of the action and the appearance of his figures, and only the chief actors require further comment.

Signy is in general unaltered, but through stress on motivation she becomes a better developed figure. This is accom-
plished by such touches as her loving warning to her father and
the supplying of the train of thought whereby she develops her
plan of going to Sigmund in the forest. Siggeir has been
“touched up” with the result that his assurance, his cunning,
his greed, his duplicity, and his savagery stand out more clearly.
Sigmund is not particularly altered but goes through a bit of
the same process of intensification. Regin appears more amiable
and benevolent at first, but soon assumes his true colors as
presented in the Saga. In brief, Morris is emotionalizing his
figures.

Sigurd, clearly drawn and unmistakably heroic, so dominates
the Saga that Morris inevitably preserves the main lines of his
character, though here again sentimentality weakens the poet’s
work. Sigurd’s youth is changed only in that Morris heightens
his joy and high spirits. The lad’s keen courage is finely exem-
plified in his quick response to Regin’s skillful goadings:

Tell me, thou Master of Masters, what deed is the deed I shall do?
Nor mock thou the son of Sigmund, lest the day of his birth thou rue.

When Brynhild enters the story, Morris alters her and
Sigurd decisively. Of their love on the mountain, the old
version says only, “And thereto they plighted troth both of
them,” from which Morris develops a highly emotional scene
between two characters whom one hardly recognizes as Bryn-
hild and Sigurd of the Saga.

Then she turned and gazed on Sigurd, and her eyes met the Volsung
eyes,
And mighty and measureless now did the tide of his love arise,
For their longing had met and mingled, and he knew of her that she loved.

After mutual rejoicing and congratulation,

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.

Then follows a long speech by Brynhild, notable because here,
as in other inserted orations, Morris introduces his own
thoughts. Ideas are placed in the mouth of Brynhild that
would never have occurred to her, a Valkyrie, or to Sigurd, a
Northern chieftain. An illustration:

Know thou, most mighty of men, that the Norns shall order all,
And yet without men’s helping shall no whit of their will befall.
And then, as if to counteract this heretical stress on the importance of man in the universe, she speaks as follows, still out of character:

Wilt thou do the deed and exalt it? then thy fame shall be outworn:
Thou shall do the deed and abide it, and sit on thy throne on high.

Thereupon

They kissed and clung together, and their hearts were full and fain. After Brynhild gives an account of her wisdom, where for once Morris is briefer than his original, their mood still appears to be the same:

They craved and kissed rejoicing, and their hearts were full and fain.

In the Saga, the matter-of-fact, incidental mention of Aslauth, daughter of Brynhild and Sigurd, indicates that the original characters were by no means lacking in passion and gives a far more virile, heroic impression of the two than does the poet's carefully wrought mass of more decorous details.

The emotional stress placed on this incident forces Morris to transform Sigurd in the hall of the Niblungs, when a terrible period of agony and uncertainty is invented to follow the drinking of the potion of forgetfulness. That loss of all memory of Brynhild should drive Sigurd almost into insanity is highly creditable to his character—and highly romantic as well, as is his wild ride through the night, knowing not what he did. This does not prevent Morris from picturing Gudrun and Sigurd in the familiar raptures and again appears the hard-working line:

They crave and kiss rejoicing, and their hearts are full and fain.

Finally, Sigurd is over-stressed as a peace-bringer and savior of his people. No hero of the Heroic Age consciously loved peace above all things nor did his warriors deliberately plan for a new age of rest and ease. Their conception of the ideal future existence was days filled with fighting and nights of feasting. Such a note is too modern. An illustration appears in Sigurd's announcement that he comes to bring a new day to the Niblungs.
For peace I bear unto thee, and to all the kings of earth
Who bear the sword aright, and are crowned with a crown of worth;
But unpeace to the lords of evil, and the battle and the death;
And the edge of the swords to the traitor, and the flame to the slanderous breath;
And I would that the loving were loved, and I would that the weary should sleep,
And that man should hearken to man, and that he that soweth should reap.

After his victories, Sigurd's mission as bringer of peace is fulfilled.

And they tell how the ships of the merchants come free and go at their will,
And how wives in peace and safety may crop the vine-clad hill;
How the maiden sits in her bower, and the weaver sings at his loom,
And forget the kings of grasping and the greedy days of gloom;
For by sea and hill and township hath the son of Sigmund been,
And looked on the folk unheeded, and the lowly people seen.

The chief alteration in the character of Gunnar is the introduction of his jealousy for Sigurd, a motivation for the murder which appears quite within the possibilities in such a situation and among such characters. Thus it is that Gunnar terms Sigurd

The foe, the king's supplanter, he that so long hath shone
Mid the honor of our fathers and the lovely Niblung throne,
Like a serpent midst the treasures that the day makes glorious.

Gudrun is sentimentalized throughout, as might be expected. She and Atli undergo changes in character when Morris adopts the Nibelungen Lied version of Gudrun's revenge. Her stony yet melodramatic pose as she watches the death of her brothers is more primitive than her wholly different bearing in the saga, and here at least Morris has barbarized rather than refined. The omission of the details of Gudrun's third marriage, drug-induced as it was, leaves the reader more favorably impressed as to the strength of her character than he would have been had her final adventures been presented in full.

Attitude toward Life

In way of life, in externalities, the details of Sigurd the Volsung correspond with those of the Volsunga Saga, save for
increased color, splendor, and richness, for in external detail the poet is usually historically accurate. Passing to the inner life, one finds that Morris frequently catches the Norse spirit grandly and effectively, and expresses it with a surge and a rush that carry the reader with him. Morris is perhaps at his best in the war scenes, as a few lines from one of them will suggest.

Then up the steep came the Goth-folk, and the spear-wood drew anigh,
And earth's face shook beneath them, yet cried they never a cry;
And the Volsungs stood all silent, though forsooth at whiles
O'er the faces grown earth weary would play the flickering smiles,
And swords would clink and rattle; not long had they to bide,
For soon that flood of murder flowed round that hillock side;
Then at last the edges mingled and if men forbore the shout,
Yet the din of steel and iron in the grey clouds rang about;
But how to tell of King Volsung and the valour of his folk!
Three times the wood of battle before their edges broke;
And the shield-wall, sorely dwindled and reft of the ruddy gold,
Against the drif of the war-blast for the fourth time yet did hold.

The poet's feeling for Wyrd is equally good. In Book I the reader sees Fate moving the human pawns about, blindly and purposelessly. In the books that follow, man becomes more the master of his own fate, although the Norns still dominate. This intervention of Fate appears in such incidents as Odin's placing the magic sword in Branstock and his taking Sigmund to himself in the hero's last battle.

That in other respects the ancient attitude of life has been sentimentalized by Morris has already appeared in this discussion. The unheroic attitude toward love may be given final illustration by the following words,—words which one cannot conceive as coming from the old Norse Sigurd, passionate as he doubtless was.

His kind arms clung about her, and her face to his face he drew;
"The life of the kings have I conquered, but this is strange and new
And from out of the heart of the striving a lovelier thing is born,
And the love of my love is sweeter, and these hours before the morn!"

A different type of sentimentalizing appears in the scenes of mourning. Primitive peoples undoubtedly feel acute sorrow for the loss of those they love and they are more uncontrolled in their expression of grief than are more sophisticated races.
But there is a touch of modern softness in the mourning of Morris's figures, as in the sorrow for the dead Volsung, in Sigmund's grief for Signy, and in the mourning for Sigmund himself.

Woe's me for the boughs of the Branstock and the hawks that cried on the fight!
Woe's me for the fireless hearthstones and the hangings of delight,
That the women dare not look on, lest they see them sweat with blood!
Woe's me for the carven pillars where the spear of the Volsungs stood!
And who next shall shake the locks, or the silver door-rings meet?
Who shall pace the floor beloved, worn down by the Volsung feet?
Who shall fill the gold with the wine, or cry for the triumphing?
Shall it be kindred or foes, or thief, or thrall, or king?

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Falsest of all is the golden haze which Morris casts over many scenes, much after the manner of certain Romantics in covering with glamor the Middle Ages. Active and practical as Morris was, he did his work in leisure and for so true a craftsman, he possessed a remarkably keen appreciation of ease and luxury. Thus it is that his dream world, his Tower of Ivory which he built for himself in the Heroic Age of the Norsemen, was at times a Castle of Indolence in the Land of Drowsyhood. This sweet land of languor and dreams is glimpsed in several passages already quoted and in the two below.

So blossom the days of the Niblungs, and great is their hope's increase 'Twixt the merry days of battle and the tide of their guarded peace:
There is many a moon of joyance, and many an eve's delight,
And many a deed for the doing 'twixt the morning and the night.

So the Niblungs feast glad hearted through the undark night and kind,
And the burden of all sorrow seems fallen far behind
On the road their lives have wended ere that happiest night of nights,
And the careless days and quiet seem but thieves of their delights;
For their hearts go forth before them toward the better days to come
When all the world of glory shall be called the Niblungs' home:
Yes, as oft in the merry season and the morning of the May
The birds break out in singing for the world's face waxen gay;
And they flutter there in the blossoms and run through the dewy grass
As they sing the joy of the spring-tide that bringeth the summer to pass;
And they deem that for them alone was the earth wrought long ago,
And no hate and no repentance, and no fear to come they know.
The poet faces a complicated task when he attempts to re-create the literature of another race. To create true poetry is sufficiently difficult, but to attempt in addition to convey the spirit of another race and age makes the undertaking even less possible of fulfillment. If to this be added the reproduction of form as well as content, the task is almost impossible of fulfillment. William Morris had not the genius completely to master it, nor does it appear that one race will ever succeed in perfectly reproducing the literature of another.

The diction of *Sigurd the Volsung* is admirably de-Latinized. The poet's work in translating had been good training and the wording of the prose version and of the poem are in good accord with the subject matter and its source. A rare word with a Latin or French ring, as "unsatiate" or "beleaguerment," only serves to draw attention to the remarkable purity of the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary which he employs. The customary archaisms are of course introduced to give the proper tone, as witness the following culled from one page: "bode," "rideth," "O'ertoppeth," "aforetime," "betwixt," "beleaguerment," "tilth," "burg," "balks," "clomb," "minish."

English versification includes no metre particularly adapted to heroic verse, as is the hexameter in Greek. Blank verse is too stately; the heroic couplet is too aphoristic. Morris invented a delightful form of rhymed hexameter with a slight and varied medial pause, possessing continuity, range, and music. Yet the tone of the verses is too reminiscent of the Land of Heart's Desire; the blood and iron of the Heroic Age sound but dimly through it.

The poem, from the very nature of poetry, is more figurative than its prose source. Yet Morris does not give himself free rein in this regard and page after page reveals few or no figures of speech. One of the rare similes in the original, "like unto swan on billow," is reproduced in "as a swan on the billow unbroken." Occasionally, however, several figures appear in close succession, as the following from one page: "As the rain in midmost April," "As the hart," "As the spearleck," "as the gem," "as the leaf."
The most unheroic aspects of the style are the hyper-poetic passages, characteristic of all of the work of Morris. These aspects appear in several of the quotations already given and in the lines below:

There through the glimmering thickets the linked mail rang out.
And a light wind followed the sun and breathed o'er the fateful place
As fresh as it furrows the sea-plain or bows the acres' face.
Forsooth no more may we hold thee than the hazel copse may hold
The sun of the early dawning, that turneth it all to gold.
And her face is a rose of the morning by the night-tide framed about.
And high above the tree-tops shone the sister of the moon,
And hushed are the water-ousels with the coming of the noon.

These lines are delightful in their Tennysonianism but they have, to say the least, a peculiar sound in a version of the deeds of ancient Scandinavian heroes.

Conclusions

Taking the material presented in some 30,000 words of the 35,000 which compose the Volsunga Saga, Morris has expanded them into a poem of over 127,000 words. In the process much of the story has been transformed. Morris is a Neo-Romantic, a Pre-Raphaelite, a sentimentalist in a vigorous, masculine way, and the poem bears the impress of his personality. Has it lost or gained by the transformation?

*Sigurd the Volsung* may be judged from two points of view; as an attempt to reproduce the Volsunga Saga in story and spirit, or as a piece of original creative work. That the view first mentioned has the support of the author's own attitude toward the Saga was suggested in discussing Morris and his love of Iceland, while the second view is that commonly accepted by critics.

Judged as creative work the poem, even though it has never won popular approval, is well conceived, excellent in tone, and admirable in workmanship. Only a few of its literary merits could be suggested in this discussion, and from this standpoint justice has not been done to the poem, for such an analysis is perforce apparently ungracious in tone. As original work of the later Victorian period, it therefore may be said to rank well.
As a re-creation of the Heroic Age and of Sigurd and the heroes, if the conclusions of this paper are to be accepted, *Sigurd the Volsung* is decidedly imperfect. Subjecting the tale to the influence of the personality and the imagination of an individual and unique a man as William Morris deprived it of a part, yet to be just, only a part, of its original vitality and crude strength. But over that virility and power the poet carefully laid a charming, delicately wrought gilding of sentimentalism which, though it may not hide the general outlines of what lies beneath, gives a misleading appearance to the whole. Apparently Morris could not avoid the temptation which Mr. Clutton-Brock insists never occurred to him in versing the story: the temptation "of treating it romantically or of heightening its interest with 'local color.'" Judged by his own aims, then, William Morris can hardly be termed a just or wholly trustworthy interpreter of the spirit of the Icelandic saga of the Volsungs.

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