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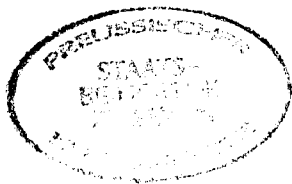
A COMPANION TO THE NIBELUNGENLIED

EDITED BY
WINDER MCCONNELL

CAMDEN HOUSE

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Edward R. Haymes

Heroic, Chivalric, and Aristocratic Ethos in the *Nibelungenlied*

The plot events of the *Nibelungenlied* take place in a field of tension among ethical patterns that is at least as important to the understanding of the work as the characters and their behavior as fictional individuals. Friedrich Neumann recognized what he called "Schichten der Ethik" in the epic in his classic essay, originally published in 1924.¹ He analyzed the events of the poem as taking place in a zone of tension between courtly and heroic values. Walter Haug has more recently explored the relationship between courtly and heroic under the rubric of "montage," but he still works within Neumann's bipolar scheme.² Haug sees the poem as essentially courtly with heroic elements "mounted" in it much as the individual elements of a photographic montage might be. As important as Neumann's essay has been to *Nibelungenlied* scholarship, I do not believe his scheme is sufficient to explain the ethical complexity of the poem.

The ethical patterns we can observe in the *Nibelungenlied* have connections to political and social history as well as being crucial to the understanding of the largely fictional world within the narrative. If we follow the usual dating of the *B-version at "around 1200," then we can see the poem arising at a time when aristocratic society was exposed to a number of different ideologies and enmeshed in several power struggles. We can observe the working out of the competition between the two major dynasties, Welf and Hohenstaufen, and we can observe a few aspects of a struggle along the horizontal fault lines between different layers of men who called themselves knights.

Our traditional pyramid image of feudal society fits fairly well as long as we are talking about hereditary nobility. The highest nobility received their fiefs from the king, the next group from them and from there on down.

¹ Friedrich Neumann, "Schichten der Ethik im Nibelungenliede," in F. N., *Das Nibelungenlied in seiner Zeit*, Kleine Vandenhoeck-Reihe 253 S (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967) 9–34. First appeared in *Festschrift. Eugen Mogk zum 70. Geburtstag 19. Juli 1924* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1924) 119–145.

² Walther Haug, "Höfische Idealität und heroische Tradition im Nibelungenlied," *Colloquio italo-germanico sul tema: I Nibelunghi* (Rome: Lincei, 1974) 35–50.

Medieval theorists reflected this structure in the *Heerschildordnung* (*clipeus militaris*) as pictured in such presentations of medieval order as the *Sachsenspiegel*. Each overlord was forced by dynastic rights to renew the enfeoffment to the next generation so that the system remained relatively stable as long as dynastic lines did not die out. The traditional hereditary power obligated the lord to the vassal as much as the other way around and it prevented overlords, including the king, from exercising power as freely as they would have liked.

In order to gain flexibility in the exercise of military and feudal power, kings and other higher nobles began entrusting critical castles and positions to men who were not free nobles but members of the lord's household. They owed their lords *servitium* ("service") rather than the more general *fidelitas* ("fealty"). Since the monumental work of Karl Bosl,³ we have been aware of this group of unfree knights known as *ministeriales* and of their struggle to establish themselves as a part of the nobility. Early on this struggle expressed itself in a desire to be legally declared free. Later *ministeriales* sought the rights and privileges of free nobles without seeking a patent of freedom itself. Gert Kaiser,⁴ Joachim Bumke⁵ and, most recently, W. H. Jackson⁶ have explored possible connections between the *ministeriales*, whose position in society was defined by service (*ministerium*), and courtly romance, which seems to preach an idealization of service — even on the part of royal princes. Kaiser suggested that the service ideal was preached by the *ministeriales* in order to legitimize their status and to provide a framework for social advancement. Bumke suggested that the service ideology could just as well have been created for the *ministeriales* in order to make them accept their lot as a respectable and noble one. There can be little doubt that much courtly literature treats at least marginally questions of service and of appropriate chivalric behavior. Hartmann identifies himself as a *ministerialis* (*dienstman*) and emphasizes the service aspects of the knightly adventures through which Erec and Iwein must pass in order to reach perfect knighthood. This is echoed to a greater or lesser extent throughout the German romances. The question of chivalric service itself is problematized in Wolfram's story of Sigune and Schionatulander, in which the knight meets his death carrying out a foolish errand of service for his lady.

³ Karl Bosl, *Die Reichsministerialität der Salier und Staufer*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–1951).

⁴ Gert Kaiser, *Textauslegung und gesellschaftliche Selbstdeutung: Die Artusromane Hartmanns von Aue* (Wiesbaden: Athenaion, 1978).

⁵ Joachim Bumke, *Studien zum Ritterbegriff* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1977).

⁶ W. H. Jackson, *Chivalry in Twelfth-Century Germany: The Works of Hartman von Aue*, *Arthurian Studies* 34 (Rochester: Brewer, 1994).

Minnesang presents the knight in service to a lady. The terminology remains that of feudal service, which provides the metaphorical framework within which the complexities of erotic relationships are played out. The knight's service may consist of deeds of prowess or song, or simply of constancy, but the service is always carried out in expectation of some kind of reciprocity. The knight serves and expects payment — a greeting, a kiss, or perhaps even more — from his lady in return. Ladies who refuse to pay are sometimes criticized. There is even a narrative, *Moriz von Craün*,⁷ which parodies exaggerated courtly love service and the right of a knight to take the payment due him. The lady who refuses to play by the rules of chivalric service and reward is left alone at the end of the poem.

There was thus what one might call a service ethic closely affiliated with literary genres imported from France. These ideas were probably associated in some way with the political and social aspirations of the *ministeriales*, and the (fictional) rise of knights errant like Iwein to full kingship as a result of their knightly prowess must have implied a flexibility in questions of status that would not have been welcome everywhere in German society of the period. Karl Bosl tells about the rise of some *ministeriales* to great power, wealth and prestige, sometimes at the expense of dynastic interests. Although he was not, strictly speaking, a *ministerialis*, Otto von Wittelsbach also represented this flexibility when he was promoted from count to the hereditary rank of Duke of Bavaria at the expense of Henry the Lion. Otto earned this promotion through unswerving and often reckless service to the emperor. The message of Otto's social rise will not have been lost on the *Reichsministerialität*, many of whose members will doubtless have seen a pattern they themselves could follow if their service was of a similarly exemplary nature. Chivalric service was thus both a literary pattern and a tantalizing model for social mobility in the real political life of Hohenstaufen Germany.

In sharp contrast to this, the *Nibelungenlied* contains a strain of old-fashioned heroic behavior that must have seemed almost atavistic in the refined atmosphere of thirteenth-century literature. Hagen's actions exemplify this clearly. His murder of Siegfried is certainly a piece of heroic tradition and such rough behavior as the killing of the ferryman before the crossing of the Danube and the "attempted murder" of the chaplain during the same crossing would seem to echo an ethos that was out of place in the relatively civilized world of thirteenth-century narrative. Words like *grimme* and *ungefuoge* are used to describe his behavior. At Etzel's castle it is Hagen who takes immediate vengeance for the murdered squires by beheading Etzel's

⁷ Stephanie Cain Van D'Elden, ed. and trans., *Moriz von Craün* (New York: Garland, 1990).

young son, an act which ends all possibility of peaceful resolution. Throughout the long siege he follows a warrior ethic that keeps him in the middle of the battle and prevents his ever giving in. The logical conclusion of this behavior is seen in the climactic scene in which Kriemhild offers the captured and bound Hagen his life in return for "what he had taken from her." He refuses, saying that he had sworn never to reveal the location of the treasure as long as any of his brothers were alive. She has Gunther slain and brings his head before Hagen, who breaks out in a lamentation ending with a total defiance of Kriemhild, in which he calls her a *vålandinne*, a she-devil, and says that the hoard will remain forever hidden from her. Kriemhild strikes off his head and Etzel laments the death of "der aller beste degen,/der ie kom ze sturme oder ie schilt getruoc!"⁸ Hagen's behavior is coherent within an old-fashioned warrior ethic, an ethic that can be associated with traditional heroic poetry, with the traditions that had preserved the Nibelung story until the beginning of the thirteenth century.

The two ethical patterns described already match approximately the traditional courtly and heroic ethical patterns observed by Neumann and Haug. They do not, however, adequately cover the ethical pattern represented by the Burgundians at the beginning of the epic and by Dietrich von Bern at the end. This pattern lacks a traditional label, since it has not been recognized as an ethic on the same level as the courtly and the heroic. In fact, most of its aspects have been attributed to the courtly, an attribution that clouds over the major differences between the attitudes it represents and those represented by courtly romance and *Minnesang*. If we could start from scratch, it would be useful to call this new ethical pattern "courtly" and the pattern associated with French chivalry "chivalric," but this would mean that most of what has been considered courtly in the epic would have to be shifted to the "chivalric" rubric and "courtly" would have to be newly defined. Perhaps we will be best understood if we leave the term "courtly" behind and call the traditional courtly values represented by Gunther's court "aristocratic" and those associated with the new literature "chivalric."

The term "heroic" can still be used to designate the ethical patterns we can associate with traditional heroic literature. This is problematic, though, because we do not have any unfiltered examples of the heroic literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and all attempts to reconstruct such literature are subject to question. There is, however, a genre of literature that seems to preserve many aspects of heroic behavior in a relatively unchanged form. I am referring here to the so-called *Spielmannsepen*, the bridewinning narratives

⁸ Karl Bartsch and Helmut de Boor, eds. *Das Nibelungenlied*, 21st revised ed. by Roswitha Wisniewski, *Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters* (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1979) 2374,2b-3.

that survive in versions from both the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. Theodore Andersson has shown the indebtedness of the *Nibelungenlied* to this genre in his *Preface to the Nibelungenlied* and it extends both to the ethical patterns followed by the figures in the stories and to the narrative patterns that structure them.⁹ It has long been a commonplace that the *Nibelungenlied* is structured around three bridewinning stories, but Andersson has shown us how thoroughly the traditional bridewinning pattern has informed our epic even down to the details of individual behavior. The *Fidreks saga af Bern* contains many episodes that portray heroic behavior in stories that are certainly derived from German narrative poetry.¹⁰ We thus have a range of literature that portrays the heroic ethos in traditional stories and can help us identify such behavior in the *Nibelungenlied*.

We can see that the two extreme ethical layers of the epic, the heroic and the chivalric, correspond to groupings of literary genres that would have been known to the Nibelungen poet. The one layer that does not have a literary formation is what I have called "aristocratic." There is no literary genre that corresponds closely to this pattern of behavior. I believe it is quite possible that this level, the one eventually idealized by the Nibelungen poet, was also his invention as a literary ethical pattern. Nelly Dürrenmatt noted in her oft-cited dissertation¹¹ that the *Nibelungenlied* actually has far more of what she considered "courtly" material than the courtly romances with which she compared it. This applies in particular to the presentation of "courtly" ceremonies, wealth, and finery, and to the infamous *Schneiderstrophem*. The "courtly" literature, into whose circle the *Nibelungenlied* was supposed to fit, presupposed all of this, wasting no time with what was, after all, everyday life for the audiences of the poems in question.

Stephen Jaeger has devoted a book to the question of the *Origins of Courtliness* and an article to anti-courtly attitudes in the *Nibelungenlied*.¹² His presentation shows the growth of courtly behavior and a clerical reaction to it. He quotes a number of vituperative reports of "courtly," "soft," and

⁹ Theodore M. Andersson, *A Preface to the Nibelungenlied* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

¹⁰ Edward R. Haymes, trans., *The Saga of Thidrek of Bern*, Garland Library of Medieval Literature 56, Series B (New York: Garland, 1988).

¹¹ Nelly Dürrenmatt, *Das Nibelungenlied im Kreis der höfischen Dichtung* (Berne: Lang, 1945).

¹² C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals 939–1210* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985). See also his "The Nibelungen Poet and the Clerical Rebellion against courtesy," in William C. McDonald, ed., *Spectrum Medii Aevi: Essays in Early German Literature in honor of George Fenwick Jones* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1983) 177–205.

even "effeminate" behavior on the part of those participating in "foreign" fashion at the courts of bishops and secular nobles alike. Perhaps the most damning voice in this chorus is the Danish cleric known to us as Saxo Grammaticus, whose *Gesta Danorum* contains round condemnation of courtly behavior alongside praise for an earlier, heroic way of life. The latter is portrayed most vividly through the old warrior Starcatherus, whose rough manner, dress, and eating habits provide a powerful contrast to the fine clothing, dainty foods, and effeminate behavior of the courtiers.

Jaeger sees traces of the same attitude in the *Nibelungenlied*, particularly in such scenes as Volker's striking down of the foppish Hun and Rumold's advice to the parting Nibelungs to remain home and enjoy the comforts of courtly life. Jaeger is unable to find an unequivocal negative portrayal of courtly elements throughout the *Nibelungenlied*, however, and is forced to postulate "a great deal of unspoken, implied criticism."¹³ If one realizes that the patterns of courtliness discussed in the poem are on at least two levels, then one can gain from Jaeger's observations without being drawn into the blind alley in which he finds himself as he tries to expand two or three useful observations to cover the entire epic. I cannot share his conclusion that the epic idealizes heroic behavior at the expense of courtly aberrations. The heroic attitudes finish the job begun by the chivalric as they draw the Burgundians to their destruction.

After introducing the theme of the fatal beauty of Kriemhild the poet wastes little time in establishing the Burgundian kings as of high birth ("von arde hoh erborn," 5,1b) and the orderly hereditary acquisition of their kingdom ("ir vater der hiez Dancrät der in diu erbe liez," 7,2). The orderly court is then introduced with the names of the holders of the four traditional court offices (plus the recently introduced *kuchenmeister*) along with the leading knights of the court: Hagen, Dancwart, Ortwin, Gere, Eckewart, and Volker. The image of an established and powerful court is strengthened in the third *Äventiure* when Siegfried arrives in Worms. His unprecedented challenge surprises everyone, including probably the original audience. He proposes to Gunther a single combat with nothing less than the combatants' kingdoms at stake. Critics have almost unanimously assigned this behavior on Siegfried's part to the level of a primitive heroic ethic. This seems logical until we look through heroic literature for any kind of precedent. Heroes often establish themselves at a new court through a duel or other feat of arms, but they do not challenge the ruler for his throne. The closest parallel is perhaps the story of Sir Samson at the beginning of the *Fidreks saga*. Samson must defend himself against his lord and his lord's brother, who is king, after kidnapping his lord's daughter and making her his wife. After killing both his

¹³ Jaeger, "The Nibelungen Poet" 194

lord and his king, he establishes himself in their place. There is, however, no evidence that this story is traditional and it may have more of a role in establishing the thematic role of bridewinning and violence in the saga than of providing a positive role model for the intended audience.¹⁴

Courtly romance, on the other hand, provides a possible model for Siegfried's challenge in the behavior of figures such as Iwein, who gains a kingdom through a duel fought as the result of a challenge. The response of the Burgundians makes it clear that Siegfried's behavior is not acceptable in polite society. Gunther points out that he has received the kingdom through orderly inheritance and that it would not be seemly to lose it "durh iemannes kraft" (112,3). Gernot responds to Siegfried's renewed challenge with a reference to the fact that their lands serve them "von rehte" (115,4). It may only be a bit of irony that the hospitality formula spoken by Gunther includes figuratively everything Siegfried had been demanding (127). Siegfried's challenge threatens not only the kingship of Gunther as occupier of the Burgundian throne, but also the entire structure on which that power is based. It is not appropriate to question dynastically established power in this world. This is not the world of the courtly romance in which power can easily be challenged by an Iwein or, for that matter, by a Siegfried. It is the real dynastic world of the twelfth century in which the Hohenstaufen kings of Germany are attempting to establish royal heredity as the guarantor of stability and peace. Challenges to this power are to be met through diplomacy and courtesy where possible and only when absolutely necessary through force and then through organized military force (as in the Saxon war) and not the chaotic force of single combat between knights errant.

Immediately after the failure of his knight-errant attack on the organized power structure of Worms, Siegfried falls into another role, this one determined not so much by courtly romance as by *Minnesang*. He moons about the court looking for all the world like a parody of Reinmar the Old, the *Minnesänger* we associate today most strongly with hopeless wooing in his poetry. His apparently hopeless love-longing for the woman he has not yet even seen leads directly to his first act of service. When the Saxons and Danes under their kings Liudeger and Liudegast declare war on the Burgundians, Siegfried is delighted at the opportunity to show his knightly prowess. His replacement of Gunther at the head of the army is an act of feudal servitude. There may also be a hint of blame directed at Gunther for

¹⁴ Edward R. Haymes, "The Bridewinning, Seduction, and Rape Sequence in *Thidrekssaga*," in Winder McConnell, ed., *in höherem prisse: A Festschrift in Honor of Ernst S. Dick. On the Occasion of his 60th Birthday, April 7, 1989*, GAG 480 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1989) 145-152.

remaining at home "bî den vrouwen." After all, even the emperor went into the field to meet his enemies himself.

Upon successful completion of the campaign, Siegfried is granted an opportunity to see Kriemhild. This scene is completely dependent on the language and imagery of *Minnesang*. The appearance of Kriemhild before the other ladies of the court is depicted "[s]am der liehte mâne vor den sternen stât" (283,1). The *Minnesang* lover Siegfried receives not only the "gruoz" from his beloved but also a ceremonial "kus."

The task Siegfried has to accomplish to win his beloved is nothing less than the winning of the supernatural princess Brünhild for Gunther. In accomplishing this task, Siegfried draws his hosts out of the safe world of Burgundian aristocracy and into the adventurous world of a bridewinning tale. The only trace left of the chivalric ethical patterns is the fact that Siegfried is rendering service in order to gain love. This fact is objectified in the public claim that Gunther is Siegfried's lord. Brünhild has no choice but to believe the claims that are made in word and deed before her. Her belief in this political relationship leads directly to the events that will end in Siegfried's death. Siegfried further demonstrates his feudal inferiority by fetching a thousand warriors to defend his "lord" in case of further resistance on Brünhild's part. During the return to Worms, Siegfried again lowers himself by playing the role of messenger to Kriemhild. She is confused by this performance and is initially unwilling to give Siegfried a reward for his service, thinking this beneath him. He insists on the reward and shows that he understands its symbolic meaning perfectly by passing it on down the feudal power chain. In the symbolic language of the aristocratic ethos, the giver is superior to the recipient. Siegfried plays fast and loose with social status, a major guarantor of domestic stability in Hohenstaufen Germany. In so doing he follows the service ideology of the chivalric romance while violating the aristocratic sense of social order called upon by Gunther and Gernot in Siegfried's arrival scene.

The traditional explanation of Brünhild's tears at the wedding is that the poet is reflecting a traditional version of the story in which Brünhild had expected to marry Siegfried and is thus brokenhearted with jealousy.¹⁵ This interpretation of the scene runs straight in the face of Brünhild's own explanation and her clear demand to know why her new sister-in-law is marrying a vassal. This demand is sufficiently strong to justify her denying Gunther his marital rights and later for her to use it as an unspoken reason for the invitation that leads to Siegfried's murder. There is no way to connect

¹⁵ Still implied by Joachim Heinzle, *Das Nibelungenlied: Eine Einführung*, rev. ed. (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1994) 72 and Theodore M. Andersson, *The Legend of Brynhild* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980) 158-177.

this concern with feudal status with either of the traditional poles of ethical layering in the poem. It arises clearly out of the aristocratic thinking that has been set off against both chivalric and heroic patterns throughout the poem. Brünhild stands for social stability as much as Gunther had done before. The pivotal altercation between the two queens hinges first on matters of feudal precedence and only later on the question of Siegfried's unspoken claim to have taken Brünhild's virginity. This is also a feudal concern, since the maintenance of clear dynastic bloodlines was a correlative of the dynastic solution to the problem of feudal stability. There could be no question of the paternity of an heir in this framework and this central question of the epic arises directly from the aristocratic dynastic interests of the ruling houses, including the Hohenstaufen emperors.

One of the cruxes of *Nibelungenlied* interpretation is the motivation for the murder of Siegfried.¹⁶ Opinions are about evenly divided on whether Siegfried actually carries out the oath so carefully worded as to allow him to swear it truthfully, but the problem seems to remain for Brünhild and Hagen and the latter pushes to have Siegfried killed. The enigmatic question "Suln wir gouche ziehen?" (867,1a) suggests that Hagen does not accept Siegfried's oath and that he questions the legitimacy of someone, presumably the child Siegfried of Brünhild and Gunther, but this point is dropped in favor of the economic one of the great riches that would fall to them if Siegfried were murdered. None of these reasons is sufficient and none is really developed to the point that the reader feels that the murderers had at least a good, villainous reason to kill him. Perhaps we can best understand Siegfried's murder as the result of a collision between the chaotic chivalric patterns adhering to Siegfried and the traditional aristocratic sense of order defended by Brünhild after Gunther has allowed himself to be drawn into the alien ethos of the bridewinning adventure.¹⁷

The destructive power of Siegfried's entrance into Burgundian society does not end with his death. The second half of the epic involves a struggle between the heroic as represented by Hagen (and to a lesser extent by Volker and Dancwart) and the aristocratic represented by Rüdiger, Dietrich, and — to a lesser extent — Etzel. As soon as the Burgundians, now called Nibelungs, set out on their trip to Etzelnburg, it is clear that Hagen is the leader.

¹⁶ See Theodore M. Andersson, "Why does Siegfried die?" in Stephen J. Kaplowitt, ed., *Germanic Studies in Honor of Otto Springer* (Pittsburgh: K & S Enterprises, 1979) 29–39.

¹⁷ Cf. Edward R. Haymes, *The Nibelungenlied: History and Interpretation*, Illinois Medieval Monographs 2 (Champagne, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986) esp. 63ff.

We have already discussed Hagen's behavior as an exemplar of the heroic ethos, but the persistence of the aristocratic is perhaps less obvious. Rüdiger's "courtly" reception of the Burgundians is often cited, but there is little to distinguish Rüdiger as host from Hrothgar in *Beowulf* or Sigurd the Greek in the *Pǫðreks saga*. His gifts are traditional and serve to bind the guests in the net of obligations that made up traditional dynastic aristocracy.

Etzel can also be seen as a defender of traditional aristocratic ethics. He is confused by the evidence of enmity among his guests and we are given an indication of his attitude prior to the outbreak of hostilities. In an astounding strophe we are told that if anyone had told Etzel "diu rehten mære" then he would have prevented "daz doch sît dâ geschach" (1865). Etzel is, like Gunther and his brothers at the beginning of the epic, concerned with the protection of the status quo. He would have prevented the violence because it was a threat to his power and status.

The last representative of aristocratic stability is the exile king Dietrich of Bern.¹⁸ Dietrich is a semi-permanent guest at Etzel's court and he is bound by his status as guest to support his host in matters of defense. Dietrich, however, takes a higher ground and is recognized on both sides as an independent power. When hostilities break out in the hall, it looks as if Kriemhild and Etzel will be among those falling to the demonic weapons of the Burgundians, but Dietrich is able to enforce a truce by the sheer force of his voice and personality long enough to lead Etzel and his queen from the hall under his protection. Etzel represents order in this situation and protecting him is the only way Dietrich can preserve hierarchical order in the chaotic situation that has arisen. The Nibelungs are now totally under the power of the heroic ethic. Hagen makes all of their decisions, including his personal decision not to fight Rüdiger. Kriemhild is equally bound to something like the heroic ethic in her thirst for revenge, even if it is attached to her husband rather than the more traditional vengeance for a blood relative.

The penultimate episode of the epic involves Dietrich in his last effort to salvage what little there is left of aristocratic order. He enters the fray with more justification for blood vengeance than anyone besides Kriemhild. The Nibelungs have killed not only his dear friend Rüdiger, but all of his men save Hildebrand, and Dietrich enters the battle filled with the rage brought on by these acts. He does not, however, kill his two remaining opponents, Gunther and Hagen. He accomplishes the infinitely more difficult task of binding them and delivering them as prisoners to Kriemhild, preparing the final atavistic confrontation between Hagen and the queen. Dietrich's

¹⁸ Cf. Edward R. Haymes, "Dietrich von Bern im Nibelungenlied," *ZfdA* 114 (1985): 159–165.

behavior is always directed toward the preservation of feudal power wherever it exists and we can see in his offer of safe conduct and in the delivery of the men as prisoners rather than as corpses a respect for such orderly power, even in a situation in which chaotic forces had destroyed virtually every shred of traditional structure.

In the *Fiðreks saga* it is Thidrek who dispatches the murderous queen, but his new role as a hopeless defender of public order and public peace forces the narrator to put the vengeance for Hagen in Hildebrand's hands. At the end Etzel, Dietrich and Hildebrand stand over the ruins of a civilization that has destroyed itself at least partially through a conflict of ethical patterns and, more specifically, through a blurring of clear aristocratic patterns of order involving lordship, kingship, and fealty.

Friedrich Neumann did a great service to *Nibelungenlied* scholarship by pointing out the ethical complexity of the poem. The uncritical acceptance of his bipolar pattern, however, has blinded us to the real complexity of ethical patterning in the epos. The gap between aristocratic and chivalric values is as great as that between either of them and the heroic patterns of the traditional matter. The great attention paid to political, social, and ethical concerns in this poem is more than a function of its "epische Breite." It is a major part of the Nibelungen poet's message to his contemporaries and it is an important element in any attempt to understand "Das Nibelungenlied in seiner Zeit."

Joachim Heinzle

The Manuscripts of the *Nibelungenlied*

I

The *Nibelungenlied* has been passed down to us in thirty-five manuscripts, eleven of which are complete, or virtually complete, twenty-three are fragments, while in one case (c), there are only a few surviving traces.¹ The oldest textual evidence (C and S) originates from the second quarter of the thirteenth century, the latest (d) was written down at the beginning of the sixteenth. To these should be added the fragment of a Dutch version (T) which dates from the second half of the thirteenth century.

With respect to both the content and the form of the text, the manuscripts tend to deviate from one another, in some instances, considerably so. In general, they can be put into two categories representing two versions of the epic: the *AB- or *nôt*-version, and the *C- or *liet*-version, designated in accordance with the signatures assigned to the most important extant manuscripts (A, B, C) or with the wording of the last verse: "daz ist der Nibelunge nôt" (Bartsch/de Boor 2379, 4); "daz ist der Nibelunge liet" (Hennig 2440, 4).²

The letters used to designate the manuscripts (A, B, C) were introduced by Karl Lachmann,³ who laid the foundation for subsequent scholarly

¹ The fragments include G and P, which only contain text from the *Klage*, but which probably originated in manuscripts also containing the *Nibelungenlied*. A complete list of the manuscripts appears in the appendix. Shortly after the present article had been submitted to the editor of this volume, another *Nibelungenlied* text (the thirty-fifth) was discovered by Dr. Christine Glaßner in the library of Melk Monastery, Austria. It is a fragment of a Bavarian-Austrian manuscript dating from the late thirteenth century, and belongs to the *J-tradition. The manuscript will be assigned the signature W. Dr. Glaßner will report on her discovery in a forthcoming issue of *PBB*.

² See Karl Bartsch and Helmut de Boor, eds., *Das Nibelungenlied*, 21st ed. by Roswitha Wisniewski, Deutsche Klassiker des Mittelalters (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1979); Ursula Hennig, ed., *Das Nibelungenlied nach der Handschrift C*, Altdeutsche Textbibliothek 83 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1977).

³ Karl Lachmann, ed., *Der Nibelunge Noth und die Klage nach der ältesten Überlieferung mit Bezeichnung des Unechten und mit den Abweichungen der gemeinen Lesart* (Berlin: Reimer, 1826) Vff.