

page 2 The Nibelungenlied. Penguin Classics, 1964

proved that the hero's name was in fact Sigifrid, though it must have contained the element Sigi - ('victory'). He and Brunhild are, or have been fused with, characters from a sphere other than that of Germanic princes.

p. 388 One strongly suspects that Hagen had the role of murdering Siegfried in this lay, without being able to prove it, for Norse tradition does not know him as Sigurd's murderer Did such a Hagen . . . originate in this more fabulous of the two lays? We can never know the answer to these questions. The only part which Hagen plays with any consistency in the southern and northern branches of the legend is that of the realist who warns his king.

The reader will have long since noticed a marked discrepancy between the German tradition on the Nibelungenlied on the one hand, and the Norse tradition on the other, concerning the motive for inviting the Burgundians to Hunland. The later tradition makes the invitation come from Atli According to the German tradition, however, it is K who inspires the invitation

In other words, in the Norse versions (this is true) whereas in the German versions the reverse is true. The early Norse versions of the Fall of the Niflungs ignore, or all but ignore, the existence of the lays which sang the death of Sigurd, whereas the German versions presuppose his death in corresponding lays.

p. 389 Since the whole legend of the Nibelungs grew from the historically attested destruction of the Burgundian kingdom on the Rhine by a Hunnish army, later identified in legend with the army of Attila, there can be no question but that the Norse version is the more and the German version the less archaic. There must have been a stage in the evolution of the legend in Germany, at which a poet or narrator substituted the later motive for the earlier, with all that this entailed, and in so convincing a manner that his version won the day.

This change must have been made by A.D. 1131. The original Burgundo-Frankish lay on the fall of the Burgundians was assimilated to the Austro-Bavarian cycle. The question when this assimilation took place . . . cannot be answered precisely. The great Swiss scholar Andreas Heusler favoured an eight-century date for this assimilation to the Austro-Bavarian cycle; but although this is not improbable, it cannot be proved. (Heusler acknowledged his debt to the Scottish scholar W. P. Kerr for his insight into heroic poetry. Heusler's work is in process of modification by a younger generation in the direction of a greater complexity, but on the whole with very little effect on fundamentals. Heusler knew that his reconstruction offered only the barest outline of how the legend grew).

p. 390 Whenever this great change took place in Germany, it is best interpreted as a brilliant feat of opportunism on the part of a discerning poet faced with the task of assimilating the lay to a tradition in which Attila was admired, and moreover a tradition in which cyclic tendencies were strong, so that glaring discrepancies like that of a woman siding with brothers who had wronged her, had, if possible, to be composed.

A further consequence of this change in motive is that Kriemhild's revenge on Etzel had to be jettisoned. But the poet who transformed the plot used what fragments of the old ending he could

No such fundamental break in development can be discerned in the case of the succession of most German lays that dealt with

Although the emergence of a Kriemhild who avenges a murdered husband on her brothers can be taken as some evidence of the mutual attraction of the two plots, there is as yet no sign that these plots were ever treated together in one and the same poem. Rather is there evidence that the lay of Siegfried and Brunhild was variously