Thesis written by

Katherine Bretz

Approved by

_______________________________________________________________, Advisor

_______________________________________________, Director, School of Music

Accepted by

__________________________________________________, Dean, Honors College
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.................................................................................. iv

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION........................................................................................................... 1

II. THE NIBELUNGENLIED IN ORAL TRADITION......................................................... 3
   Historical and Legendary Background....................................................................... 3
   Performance and the Oral Formulaic Theory............................................................ 5

III. THE RECITAL.......................................................................................................... 10
    The Text.................................................................................................................. 10
    The Music................................................................................................................ 13

IV. INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSION................................................................. 17

WORKS CITED.................................................................................................................. 21

APPENDIX

1. MELODY.................................................................................................................. 24
2. TEXT SELECTIONS PERFORMED........................................................................... 25
I have long cultivated a special interest in many subjects directly related to the project I have undertaken, including early history, medieval literature, the German language, theatre, and vocal performance. As the culmination of these interests, skills, and passions, I have investigated and recreated, to the best of my ability, the old practice of storytelling through a synthesis of knowledge of medieval German literature and early music performance by researching, preparing, and performing in a lecture recital one of the most widely-known and often-adapted epics from this time period: the *Nibelungenlied*. I have chosen to study and perform selections from this particular work for many reasons which include: the work’s familiarity in Germany combined with its relative obscurity in the United States; its many adaptations, the most notable being Richard Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, a four-part music drama in which I had the privilege of performing on a German stage; and a personal interest in the story itself and its many themes.

Having already studied such familiar medieval texts as Albert Leitzmann’s edition of Hartmann von Aue’s *Erec* and Friedrich Ranke’s version of Gottfried von Straßburg’s *Tristan*, I had already developed a basic knowledge of early German literature and of Middle High German. This investigation has provided me with even greater opportunity to better appreciate in a practical sense the morphological and phonological contributions
of Middle High German, which is the language of the *Nibelungenlied*'s surviving text, to modern German.

I began to take a particular interest in Medieval German literature while attending a course on that subject at the University of Leipzig in Germany. My professor encouraged me to select and research a topic about which I wished to learn more. While in Leipzig, I had access, through the university library, to a multitude of sources unavailable in the United States.

Music, especially its fusion with literature, has played an invaluable role in the development of civilization as we know it in that it can unite nations and cultures by preserving traditions, by enhancing a given text, and sometimes even by expressing that which words simply cannot. From origins both noble and common, from purposes both sacred and secular, song has long served as a means to express and enhance language, especially poetry. Preparing my performance of the *Nibelungenlied* has provided a practical application for all of my research regarding medieval German song traditions, characteristic sound, vocal technique, and diction, and I have employed this research and reflection by bringing this work to life on the stage.

The experience of completing this project has been a very enjoyable and rewarding experience, and I would like to thank a number of individuals who have helped me along the way. First, my sincerest thanks go to my advisor, Dr. Jay White, whose extensive knowledge and insight have proven invaluable to me throughout this process. My defense council also provided me with much detailed feedback, and many suggestions and new perspectives on my topic. I thank Dr. Jane Dressler, Dr. Geoffrey
Koby, and Dr. Don-John Dugas for their many contributions to my work and attendance at the lecture recital.

I would also like to express my thanks to Dr. Sanford and Mrs. Eleonora Marovitz, without whose generosity this project would not have been possible. I am deeply honored and grateful that they chose me as the recipient for the Honors Thesis Fellowship. I also thank Dr. Geraldine Kiefer for her sponsorship and reimbursement of my many thesis-related expenses.

Finally, I want to thank my family for their continual support throughout the course of this project, and for their constant encouragement of my musical and scholastic endeavors over the years.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Much of our cultural history is shrouded in mystery, as many records have been lost and cultures have changed over the years. On one hand, it is astonishing to consider just how many clues about past customs have stood the test of time; on the other, considering all that is known, there is still much about the past that remains uncertain. Literature and music are two closely related traditions that continue to be just as important to our culture today as they were centuries ago.

Some vocal music, especially medieval music, is so old that the language in which the text was originally written has developed just as much as the tradition of music itself. According to Peter Frenzel, scholars will never be able to replicate exactly how a “dead” language sounds, but dialectic clues, such as vowels, diphthongs, and consonants, allow the creation of at least a partial reconstruction (221). In his guide for the pronunciation of Middle High German (MHG), Frenzel mentions certain evidence used in such a reconstruction, including scribes’ use of Latin characters; the occurrence of MHG words in texts of other languages; rhyme and alliteration; written clues regarding vowel length; and modern dialects, some of whose sounds have likely existed since the time when MHG was originally spoken. According to Frenzel, although “it is clear that dialects, too, change, it is nonetheless possible to trace parallels in phonemic relationships which would appear to reflect certain phonemic similarities” (222). As in
music, one can still see clear similarities between past and present versions of a language, but also distinct differences, primarily in vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation.

In order to recreate as authentic a performance as possible, modern singers must exercise particular caution in correctly understanding and pronouncing the language of the text. Professionals usually accomplish this by researching a language’s attributes and by contacting coaches or experts in the languages themselves. Once a singer has developed familiarity with such a text, he or she must practice speaking it so as to decrease the likelihood that diction-related issues could arise during the performance.

The existence of oral poetry like the *Nibelungenlied* implies the existence of an audience, and since the delivery of oral poetry is not limited strictly to the contents on a page, as is written literature, an oral poet has additional modes of communication, such as body language, gestures, tone of voice, and perhaps even melody, at his disposal (Green 61). Live presentation thus encourages, and almost demands, between the performer and listener, a sort of dialogue, in which the poet presents his material, and the audience receives it. The poet then gathers from the audience either intentionally or unintentionally provided feedback, which in turn influences his performance. This increased freedom of expression that results from oral communication of literature suggests that oral poetry, even heroic poetry, was quite possibly sung rather than merely spoken aloud (Green 65).
CHAPTER II
THE NIBELUNGENLIED IN ORAL TRADITION

Historical and Legendary Background

Much of the subject material of epic stories is based on legends, myths, and even historical events. Time and again, the same themes and archetypes appear in these kinds of tales, namely, violence and war, good versus evil, heroism, chivalry, and courtly love.

The *Nibelungenlied*, or the “Lay of the Nibelungs,” is no exception. As George Henry Needler mentions in the introduction of his translation of the *Nibelungenlied*, the poem’s historical content is believed to be a fusion of Germanic and Norse legend and myth and certain historical events, including conflicts between the Huns and Burgundians, and the latter’s eventual downfall during the fifth century C.E. (viii).

One of the most interesting aspects of medieval literature, particularly the *Nibelungenlied*, is its historical roots. Similarities between historical accounts and literature of a given time period may often become apparent, because many of the arts, including literature and music, are often heavily influenced by the culture and time in which they are created, and vice versa. Songs like the *Nibelungenlied* were not only composed and performed to entertain, but also to preserve history, especially for commoners, many of whom were illiterate and probably did not have access to detailed historical records. According to Needler, the *Nibelungenlied* is widely thought to contain historical elements from the time of the *Völkerwanderung*, also known as the Great
Migration Period, which was a time of increased migration throughout Europe, especially of Germanic tribes, between the fifth and seventh centuries. During this time, the Burgundian kingdom was defeated and overtaken (vii).

In 413, the Burgundians, originally from the Baltic region, settled west of the Rhine near Worms, in what was referred to as *Germania prima*. They endured conflicts with the Romans in 435 and were all but wiped out two years later by the Huns, who were most likely enlisted by the Romans as mercenaries strictly for this purpose (Needler xix). In the year 532, after almost a century of conflicts and invasions, the Burgundians were finally defeated by the Franks at the battle of Autun, and their lands were incorporated into the Frankish kingdom (Jaques 84).

The *Nibelungenlied* not only shows significant historical influence, but also legendary. The most obvious contribution that Needler mentions is the Norse hero, Siegfried, famously depicted as a hero in Wagner’s ring cycle, and who was said to have killed a dragon and bathed in its blood. He was also believed to have conquered the Nibelungs and taken their treasure hoard (xvi).
Performance and the Oral Formulaic Theory

Much oral poetry of the middle ages was thought to be sung instead of merely recited (Green 84). Shorter songs may have been memorized, but longer epics such as the Nibelungenlied probably were not, at least not entirely. Milman Parry, a specialist in Classics with a particular interest in Homeric scholarship, and Albert Lord, his colleague who continued Parry’s work after his death, developed the “Oral Formulaic Theory,” which suggests that such epics were entirely improvised; however, this idea is rather unpopular among critics like Harad Haferland. Considering many sides of the argument, performance of these poems most likely involved a combination of both memorization and improvisation (Haferland 145).

After studying the oral traditions of a culture that is still primarily illiterate as well as by reading and analyzing the many “repetitions” and “stereotyped phrases” in Homeric and old English epics, Parry developed a theory that these were not mere repetitions, but formulaic tools for improvisation. In The Singer of Tales, Lord quotes Parry in defining a formula as “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea” (30). Jan-Dirk Müller describes typical formulae as “performed sets of words, syntactical elements, metrical units, situational patterns, narrative schemes, and so on, whose basic structure is identical, but whose concrete word fill is variable” (18). The following constructions are used quite frequently in the text selections I have planned to perform:
Dô sprach / sluoc .................................................. then spake / slew

Diu schœne / diu vrouwe Kriemhild ........................ the beautiful / the lady Kriemhild

Der künec Gunther / rîche ................................. the king Gunther / mighty

Der künic von Rîne ............................................. the king of the Rhine

Der herre / der starke Siegfried ......................... the lord / the strong Siegfried

Der grimme Hagene ........................................... the fierce Hagen

Hagen der hélt güot ............................................ Hagen the good hero

von Tronege Hagene ....................................... Hagen of Tronje

Von / üzer Burgonden lant ................................ from / out of the land of Burgundy

Dô was / wart im léidé genuoc ......................... he felt much sorrow

Lord and Parry concluded from the formulaic evidence they discovered in Homeric literature that poetry was not originally memorized, but improvised, and thus suggested that the singer or poet is also the composer of a work, not merely the performer (30). As an apprentice, a young singer repeatedly hears and retains certain words and patterns of thought, such as the naming of a person, in the works of his master. The singer does not consciously memorize these patterns, but “absorbs” them and, in so doing, develops the ability to create new formulae through continual listening and practice in an “unconscious process of assimilation” (Lord 33) from the work of his mentors and colleagues.
While Lord offers these kinds of patterns as evidence for his theory on improvisation, Haferland argues that, upon further examination, one sees that Homer composed his works with remarkably sophisticated artistic skill that he deems would not have been possible to achieve during improvisation. During an improvised performance, a singer simply does not have the time to choose the perfect word or compose the perfect phrase while keeping in mind such intricacies as end rhyme the number and pattern of syllables (Haferland 143). According to Parry, a singer “cannot think without hurry about his next word, nor change what he has made, nor, before going on, read over what he has just written” (qtd. in Haferland 144). Improvised performances are certainly not perfect in this regard, but the written manuscripts of old songs and poems that we study today were most likely composed with greater care and precision than would have been possible to achieve during a live performance.

When one ponders certain attributes of the Oral Formulaic Theory, such as how singers must study and practice for a very long time to perfect their art of improvisation, one might be reminded of the skills of jazz artists. When improvising a solo, these musicians draw from their own extensively developed knowledge and experience. They practice scales and “licks” and must become so well acquainted with their instruments that they can freely navigate the “pool” of notes in any given key. In *Jazz Pedagogy*, David Baker refers to the “materials of which musical statements are comprised (scales, chords, patterns, dramatic devices, etc.)” and how they are used “in numerous formulae, turnbacks, cycles, licks, [and] clichés” (2). He insists that “a player is lost without a working knowledge of these elements which comprise a common tradition or, as some
put it, ‘roots’” (2). Once a musician has committed such patterns to muscle memory, he or she is then allowed “considerably more freedom for creative thinking” (2). Thus, during performance, a jazz soloist does not merely regurgitate memorized lines, but carefully combines the familiar formulae that have become so ingrained in his or her mind that they can be recalled and used almost reflexively. Much like Lord’s theories on improvisation describe, the performer remembers material, but he or she does not actively memorize it in its entirety (Lord 36).

Oral poetry served many functions in society including entertainment, the teaching of lessons, and the preservation of history in a community’s collective consciousness. Many texts, especially heroic epics, existed primarily to be sung, either by a soloist or by a group, sometimes both. Singing of songs often fostered a feeling of community in that they were often sung or heard in a group setting (Green 63). Many “call-and-response” songs were performed as processional songs by pilgrims and knights during long journeys, as in Beowulf, when one of the hero’s followers composes a song while on horseback, praising Beowulf’s victory against Grendel (Green 70).

When the Nibelungenlied was originally performed during the Middle Ages, it was but rarely, if ever, performed all at once, due to its sheer length. In conversation with Dr. Geoffrey Koby, Associate Professor of German Translation at Kent State University, I learned that a singer would probably have chosen certain passages to perform, depending on who his audience was and how much time he was given to perform. A group of noble ladies may have wanted to hear selections, like the Schneiderstrophen, that include detailed descriptions of the characters’ clothing. Perhaps an audience of
knights would have preferred to hear about the battle scenes. Some audiences may even have enjoyed hearing certain comedic scenes, such as when Siegfried chases a bear around the dining hall or when Brünnhild overpowers Gunther on their wedding night and hangs him up on a hook.

According to Dr. Koby, singing selections from such a monumental work as the *Nibelungenlied* offered the oral poet the opportunity to tailor his performance to the preferences of the people for whom he was performing. Throughout time, and even today, some of the most successful entertainers have been those whose primary goal is to please their audience, especially if that audience is composed primarily of the wealthy upper-class.
CHAPTER III

THE RECITAL

The Text

Dozens of copies of various sections of the *Nibelungenlied* are known. Based on similarities in word choice and content, they can be categorized into one of three groups: A, B, and C. The C-group is often referred to as the *liet*-group, because its final lines of text read “daz ist der Nibelunge liet”, instead of “das ist der Nibelunge nôt”, as in groups A and B (Bartsch xxxix). I chose to work from Karl Bartsch’s edition of the St. Gall manuscript B, which the editor considers the most important of this nôt-group (L). This copy also happened to be the most accessible and legible version I could find.

Manuscript B contains almost 2,400 strophes, separated into 39 Åventiuren, or “adventures.” This being an impractical length, I chose the ones I would perform. Even during the middle ages, the entire text would not likely have been performed in one sitting. Indeed, according to Knud Seckel, an award-winning performer of early music, to perform all 2,400 strophes to music would take about twenty hours (7:38)!

When performing for an audience, a singer would tailor his performance to the preferences of his guests. Some popular scenes include the first adventure, Kriemhild’s dream; the sixteenth, how Siegfried was slain; and certain selections from the sixth adventure known as the *Schneiderstrophen*, in which the characters’ garments were described in elaborate detail. I decided to focus on the contents of four adventures: fourteen, “How the Queens berated each other”; thirty-three, “How the Burgundians
fought with the Huns”; thirty-six, “How the Queen Bade Set Fire to the Hall”; and thirty-nine, “How Gunther, Hagen, and Kriemhild were Slain.” I determined that these passages would be most entertaining to my audience because they include a high level of action and drama, character conflicts, and dialogue. I have included the textual selections that I performed in Appendix 2.

Because a significant portion of my recital was to be a lecture, I decided to limit the performance time to around thirty to forty minutes. In order to comply with such a time limit, I needed to make further cuts to the text I planned to sing, since to perform each line of all four of these adventures would take at least a few hours. I eliminated strophes that I thought superfluous and left only what was needed to convey necessary information and to maintain textual continuity. My final text selection included about seventy strophes, which I estimated would take roughly thirty-five minutes to perform.

Next came the issue of language. I speak modern German fluently, but the language of the text is Middle High German, which, while quite similar to its later counterpart, still contains some significant differences in pronunciation. I consulted Peter Frenzel’s chapter on Middle High German in Singing Early Music as a guide for these pronunciation differences. Despite having this concise and informative source at my disposal, I still faced a marked degree of difficulty in changing certain ingrained diction-related habits, including using [s] instead of [ʃ] in words with an initial ‘s’ such as “strîte” and “swért”; [s] instead of [z] as in “sagen”; [w] instead of [v] as in “wâfen”; and, perhaps the most difficult, [ei] instead of [ai] as in “weinen.”
Additionally, I found observing certain differences in vowel pronunciation rather troublesome, especially in the cases of long vowels, which were marked in my text with a circumflex, versus short vowels, which remained unmarked. One final aspect - that of the diphthongs - presented perhaps the greatest challenge. Unlike in English and in modern German, both vowels of a diphthong in Middle High German are clearly enunciated, even though the first vowel should be the more prevalent of the two (Frenzel 225). Words like “Kriemhilt” and “liep”, that contained the diphthong [ɪɛ] were rather easy for me to articulate correctly, but when pronouncing words such as “vrouwe” and “guot”, I found that I did not pronounce the second vowel of the diphthong distinctly enough.

Nevertheless, while my already deeply-ingrained speech habits from American English and modern German proved sometimes to be a hindrance, I believe that, by and large, they actually helped me considerably, and that written reminders in my text and careful practice in speaking the text were successful in helping me to prepare as accurate a presentation of the language as was possible.
The Music

Medieval music, in its simplicity, must have required the performer to exhibit remarkable dramatic skill, as the conveyance of the text and its meaning were of great importance, especially in sacred music. According to Timothy McGee, vocal style and techniques were quite different from those which singers employ today (16). McGee suggests the music of Eastern Mediterranean countries and of India as a potential model for what medieval European music may have sounded like. He mentions “ornaments, articulation demands, and the use of pitch and sound colour” as descriptive similarities between the two practices (120).

Many written copies of old songs and poems, both secular and sacred, in which the melody of the text was also often recorded, have survived and are still available today. Among these are the Greek poems, the Aeneid and Thebaid, many old French chanson de geste, and the neumes of St. Gall’s musical manuscripts (Bertau 253). These manuscripts and many like them often include instructions or descriptions referring to a sung performance, using such words as lied, “song” and singen, “to sing” (Bertau 254). Thus, many ancient epics, including the Nibelungenlied, were probably sung, rather than recited, when performed.

Scholars still debate the exact melody to which the Nibelungenlied was performed, as no written copy has survived. Theories stem from the structure of the text itself, which comprises of four long lines, each in two segments. Karl Bertau and Rudolf Stephan favor a structure that follows an (AB/AB) form, as in the Trierer Marienklage and in the Alsfelder Passionsspiel. Such a form would consist of a doubled two-line
melody. According to Bertau, although the melodies are probably not identical, a model for that of the *Nibelungenlied* must at the very least contain the same basic characteristics as those in this Trier-Alsfelder melody (Brunner 151). Siegfried Beyschlag suggests a melody in eight parts with many possibilities in sequence. Such a form may have contributed to that of the *Nibelungenlied’s* melody, considering the text’s proclivity for “rhythmic congestion at the ends of stanzas” (Brunner 152). He continues that its structure demands a “real, almost composed” melody, with a two-part (AB/CD) structure, as in the melody of the *Hildebrandslied*. He maintains that the *Nibelungenlied’s* melody almost certainly has the same structure to that of the *Hildebrandslied*, albeit slightly more fixed in nature due to the demands of the text’s structure (Brunner 152).

This melody, referred to commonly as the *Hildebrandston*, was first recorded in 1545, “als Weise des Jüngeren Hildebrandslieds,” or “in the manner of the later Hildebrandslied,” but the melody’s origins trace back as far as the thirteenth century (Brunner 152). This melody was popular among singers during between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, but whether or not it was used in the performance of many other heroic epics remains unclear. At the very least, a probable version of the *Nibelungenlied*, the “Lied von Hürnen Seyfrid” was performed during the sixteenth century, and prints of this indicate that it be performed “in Hildebrandes thon,” or, “in the melody of Hildebrand” (Brunner 152). Fortunately, later versions of this *Hildebrandston*, or fragments thereof, were recorded and preserved, often referred to in various terms as *Hunnenweise*, or, “in the manner of the Huns,” as this sort of melody was often played at Attila’s court (Brunner 152). This melody appears as “Hönweise Wolframs” in the
“Repertoire der Meistersinger” and also in a collection compiled in the early sixteenth century by Hans Sachs, among other manuscripts of the time (Brunner 153).

My first challenge, then, was to determine what exactly this melody sounded like. Horst Brunner discusses the different surviving versions, along with their histories, of this Hildebrandston, and includes short written samples. After examining these fragments, however, I found most of them either incomplete or inconclusive, so I turned to live recordings of the Nibelungenlied, as sung by two renowned contemporary scholars and performers of medieval music, Eberhard Kummer and Knud Seckel, from whose performances I directly transcribed the melody myself. I found later that the melody that Kummer and Seckel use in their performances of the Nibelungenlied are identical to Siegfried Beyschlag’s written version, in which he lays the text of the Nibelungenlied underneath the melodic structure of the Jüngere Hildebrandston (170). I have included Beyschlag’s version in Appendix 1.

The next hurdle I faced was that of the instrumentation. What sort of period-appropriate, yet realistically accessible instrument should I use to accompany myself? My ideal instrument would have been a stringed instrument, such as a medieval or Gothic harp, as this is what many poets of the time would have played during their performances (Kummer 5:20). However, not only would a satisfactory performance require considerable skill that I do not possess on such an instrument if I were to play it myself, but, even after a painstaking search, no such instrument could even be found.

At the recommendation of my advisor, I eventually decided upon an Appalachian dulcimer, a simple three-stringed instrument, which can trace its roots to the German
Scheitholt, a member of the drone zither family ("Zither"). Using a dulcimer still allowed me the ability to simultaneously play a drone and a melody and its parallel fifth or octave, as on a harp or another similar medieval instrument. Additional advantages to using the dulcimer were my already-established familiarity with the instrument and the fact that I had one of my own on which I could practice independently.

The last musical component I needed to consider was that of the performance itself. How would I make this performance dramatic and engaging? My first consideration was plot. To illustrate the importance of some lines or passages over others, I decided to speak some of the text rather than sing it, especially during the most intense moments, such as the murders of Gunther, Hagen, and eventually Kriemhild. I also used variations in volume, tempo, ornamentation, and accompaniment to introduce a greater degree of diversity, especially in dialogue. Each main character had in the accompaniment a sort of "leitmotif," or musical idea, which I played every time that character spoke. I also alternated strumming with the plectrum and with my fingers for further differentiation. Lastly, I considered the dialogue between the characters and decided to match different vocal timbres to the speech of characters in order to distinguish them from one another. I chose to manipulate vocal color through changes in resonance and placement.
CHAPTER IV
INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSION

Although the thirteenth-century setting of the *Nibelungenlied* is quite old and its source material even older, it still contains ideas that resound with audiences even today. The story explores dichotomy and transformation by conveying themes such as honor, duty and betrayal; the courtly and heroic; and the eventual degeneration of what is ideally a peaceful, orderly society into what Müller describes as a “blood orgy” with a “heroic passion for violence” (431).

Many modern adaptations, such as Wagner’s *Ring des Nibelungen*, depict Hagen as the villain and Kriemhild as the righteous exactor of justice. Other interpretations may consider these roles reversed, that Hagen is the hero carrying out his duties, and Kriemhild is the monstrous “valandinne,” or she-devil, with a single goal and a flagrant disregard for human life (Haymes 83). Who is really the “bad guy” here, or is does one even exist?

The poem’s themes themselves have occasionally fallen victim to misinterpretation and gross distortion- a prime example being the Nazi regime’s abuse of the concept of *Nibelungentreue* to encourage nationalistic pride and to instill in the people’s minds a sense of fervent loyalty and duty to country. Clearly, the *Nibelungenlied* leaves much room for interpretation. The story inspires a great many “what-if” questions and “if only” sentiments, but it does not assist its audience in their answering or analysis.
Even certain choices that characters make, which seem entirely correct in the beginning, can bring about devastating results. An example of this is Hagen’s unswerving loyalty and in whom he chooses to place it. After the queens’ argument, he remains true to Brünnhild and Gunther, and not to Kriemhild. In an effort to restore Brünnhild’s honor, Hagen murders the man who appears to have threatened it, thereby provoking Kriemhild’s rage and unwittingly setting in motion a series of intertwined events that ultimately end in catastrophe.

Kriemhild begins the story as an obedient, loving daughter, sister, and eventually wife. After Siegfried’s murder, however, her focus shifts from love to hate, and she becomes consumed with her need for revenge, such that she eventually severs all social bonds and causes the deaths of thousands of people. This is perhaps an illustration of the supposed chaos that can ensue when a woman steps outside her traditional role. Brünnhild’s story ends rather differently; she begins the tale as a seemingly unconquerable force, in that whoever wishes to marry her must first defeat her in three tests of strength or die trying. She is eventually subdued, albeit deceptively, and submits to the will of her husband, once again restoring the “natural” order of a male-dominated society. Additionally, when Kriemhild kills Hagen, her own husband, Etzel, orders that she, too, be killed, because, in his opinion, even a valiant adversary does not deserve to die at the hands of a woman.

Rigidly-defined gender roles were only a small part of what comprised the highly idealized medieval courtly social structure. The examples of Kriemhild and Brünnhild are simply the most obvious illustrations of what can happen when social order is maintained
or violated. In general, the entire epic can be viewed as a depiction of the consequences not of rebellion against an establishment, but of a complete disregard for structure, authority, duty, and family loyalty. This is perhaps a deeper reflection of the shift from values based on heroic strength and victory to a desire for an orderly society based on kinship and law. In this way, Siegfried and Gunther can be viewed as opposites. Whereas Siegfried represents the “false ideals of chivalric courtliness,” Gunther better understands “this world of stable structures and traditional values,” and he “bases his claim to power on heredity and not on the strength of his right arm” (Haymes 101-102). Siegfried Beyschlag summarizes the epic’s highly political message quite fittingly in his essay “Das Nibelungenlied als aktuelle Dichtung seiner Zeit”:

That which is called into question in the epic and through which the doom of this world is shown is the reversal of these [the feudal] relationships and along with them the order of the human community as a result of human fallibility due to the original sin of the destruction of established order. Such reversal is: that the free lord of royal birth enmeshes himself in the appearance of servility, that the vassal acts on his own in place of his lords and thereby nullifies their function of pax and justitia. Fateful disturbatio with a distortion of values, with injustice and suffering is the result. In these images we find the nagging questions of contemporary society. Where does the way lead when the functions of order are turned around? The Nibelungen epic answers: to destruction. (qtd. in Haymes 113)

All that I have learned about the Nibelungenlied and medieval poetry and music in general appears to be only the tip of a virtual iceberg of scholarly knowledge and opinion. I find this concept simultaneously intimidating and exhilarating when I consider just how much I still have not yet discovered. Indeed, one can research and ponder such topics for a lifetime without even knowing all there is to know. This propensity for an almost limitless capacity for learning, above all else, is what motivates me the most to
continue my study of the *Nibelungenlied*. In completing my thesis and lecture recital, I have formed an invaluable foundation for future studies, and I fully intend to expand and enrich my knowledge with the many opportunities I have yet to discover.


APPENDIX 1

Melody

From page 170 of Siegfried Beyschlag's "Langzeilen-Melodien"
APPENDIX 2

Text Selections Performed

From Karl Bartsch’s edition

14. ÂVENTIURE: WIE DIE KÜNIGINNE EINANDER SCHULTEN

838
Ze samne si dô kömen / vor dem münster wît.
ez tet diu hûsvrouwe / durch einen grôzen nît,
si hiez vil übellîche / Kriemhilde stille stân:
„jâ sol vor küniges wîbe / niht éigén diu gegân.“

839
Dô sprach diu schöne Kriemhilt / (zornec was ir muot)
„kündestu nóch geswîgen, / daz wêré dir guot.
du häst geschendet selbe / den dînen schoenen lîp:
wie möhte mannes kebse / worden immer küniges wîp?“
840
„Wen hâstu hie verkebset?“ / sprach dô des küniges wîp.
„das tuon ich dich“, / sprach Kriemhilt. „den dinen schönen lip
den minnet’ èrste Sîfrit, / der mîn vil lieber man.
jane wâs ez niht mîn bruoder, / der dir den magetuom an gewan.“

847
Dô sprach diu vrouwe Kriemhilt: / „ir möhet mich lâzen gân.
ich erziugez mit dem golde, / das ich ân der hende hân:
das brâhte mir mîn vriedel / do er èrste bî iu lac.“
nie gelebte Prûnhilt / deheinen léidéren tac.

848
Si sprach: „diz golt vil edele / daz wart mir verstoln
und ist mich harte lange / vil übele vor verholn.
ich kum es an ein ende, / wer mir es hât genomen.“
die vrouwen wâren beide / in grôz ungemüete komen.

849
Dô sprach aber Kriemhilt / „inte wils niht wesen diep.
du möhtes wol gedaget hân, / und wäre dir ère liep.
ich erzüugez mit dem gürtel, / den ich hie umbe hân,
daz ich niht enliuge: já wart mîn Sîfrit dîn man."

852

Der künige kom mit recken. / weinen er dô sach
di sînen triutinne. / wie güetlîch er sprach:
„saget mir, liebiu vrouwe, / wer hât iu iht getân?“
si sprach zuo dem künige: / „ich múoz unv्रœlîche stân.

853

Von allen minen êren / mich diu swester din
gerne wolde scheiden. / dir sol geklaget sîn,
si giht, mich habe gekebset / Sîfrit ir man.“
dô sprach der künec Gunther: / „sô hetes´ übele getân.“

855

Dô sprach der künige Gunther: / „er sól her fü´r gân.
und hât er sihs gerüemet, / das sol er hœren lân,
oder sîn muoz lougen / der helt ûz Niderlant.“
den Kriemhilde vriedel / den hiez man bringen sâ zehant.
856

Dô der herre Sîfrit / di ungemuoten sach,
(er’n wesse niht der maere) / wie balde er dô sprach:
„waz weinent disse vrouwen? / das het ich gerne erkant,
oder von weihen schulden / mich der künic habe besant.“

857

Dô sprach der künic Gunther: / „dâ ist mir harte leit.
mir hât mîn vrouwe Prûnhilt / ein mære hie geseit,
du habes dich des gerüemet, / daz du ir schœnen lîp
allerê’rst hábes geminnet, / daz sagt vrou Kriemhilt din wîp.“

858

Dô sprach der starke Sîfrit: / und hât si daz geseit,
è daz ich erwinde, / ez sol ir werden leit,
und wil dir daz enpfüeren / vor allen dînen man
mit mînen hôhen eiden, / daz ich irs niht gesaget hân.“

859

Dô sprach der kûnic von Rîne: / „daz soltu låzen sehen.
den iet den di då biutests / unt mac der hie geschehen,
aller valschen dinge / wil ich dich ledic lân.“
dô hiez man zuo dem ringe / die stolzen Burgonden stân.

860
Sifrit der vil küene / zem eide bôt die hant.
dô sprach der künic rîche: / „mir ist sô wol bekant
iuwer grôz unschulde; / ich wil iuch ledic lân,
des iuch mîn swester zîhet, / daz ir des niene habt getân.“

861
Dô sprach aber Sîfrit: / „geniuzet es mîn wîp,
daz si hât erträebet / den Prünhilde lîp,
daz ist mir sicherlichen / âne mâze leit.“
dô sâhen zuo zein ander / die guoten rittér gemeit.

863
Mit rede was gescheiden / manic schœne wîp.
dô trûret alsô sère / der Prünhilde lîp,
daz ez erbarmen mouse / die Guntheres man.
dô kam von Tronege Hagene / zuo sîner vróuwén gegân.
Er vrâgete waz ir wære, / weinende. Er si vant.
dô sagte si im diu mære, / er lobt‘ ir sá zehant
saz ez erarnen müese / der Kriemhilde man,
oder er wolde nimmer / dar umbe vrelîch gestân.

Sîn gevolgete niemen, / niwan daz Hagene
riet in allen zîten / Gûnther dem degene,
ob Sîfrît niht enlebte, / sô wurde im untertân
vil der kûnege lande. / der helt des trûrén began.

„Nein er“, sprach dô Hagene. / „ir muget wol stille dagen.
ich getrûwez heinliche / âlsô wol ân getragen:
daz Prûnhilde weinen / sol im werden leit.
jâ sol im von Hagenen / immer wesen widerseit

Dô sprach der kûnic Gunther: / „wie möhte daz ergân?“
des antwurte Hagene: / “ich wilz iuch hœren lân."
wir heizen boten rîten / zuo uns in daz lant
widersâgen offenliche, die hie niemen sîn bekant.

875
Sô jehet ir vor den gesten / daz ir und iuwer man
wellet herverten. / alsô daz ist getân,
sô lobt er iu dar dienen; / des vliuset er den lip.
so ervar ich uns diu mære / ab des küenen recken wîp.“

876
Der künic gevolgete übele / Hagenen sînem man.
die starken untriuwe / begonden tragen an,
ê iemen daz erfunde, / die ritter ûz erkorn.
von zweier vrouwen bâgen / wart vil manic helt verlorn.
33. ÄVENTIURE: WIE DIE BURGONDEN MIT DEN HIUNEN STRITEN

1960
Ich hân vernomen lange / von Kriemhilde sagen,
daz si ir herzen leide / wolde niht vertragen.
nu trinken wir die minne / und gelten's küneges wîn.
der junge vogt der Hiunen, / der muoz der aller êrste sîn.”

1961
Dô sluoc daz kint Ortlieben / Hagen der hélt güot,
daz im gegen der hende / ame swérte vlôz daz bluot,
unt daz der küneginne / daz hóubet spránc in die schôz.
dô huop sich under degenen / ein mort vil grimmec unde grôz.

1967
Ouch sprungen von den tischen / die drîe künege hêr.
si woldenz gerne scheiden, / ê daz scháden geschæhe môr.
sine móhtenz mit ir sinnen / dô niht understân,
dô Volkêr unde Hagene /sô sère wüetén began.
1972

Ouch werten sich vil sêre / die Etzelen man.
dô sach man die geste / houwende gân
mit den vil liehten swerten / durch des küneges sal.
dô hörte man allenthalben / von wuofe grœzlîchen schal.

1973

Dô wolden die dar üze / z'ir friunden sîn dar in.
die nàmen an den türen / vil kléinén gewin.
dô waeren die dar inne / vil gerne für den sal.
Dâncwart liez ir deheinen / die stiegen üf noch zetal.

1980

Dô von Tronege Hagene / die tür sah só behuot,
den schilt warf dô ze rucke / der mære degen guot.
alrêrst begond' er rechen, / daz im da^ was getân.
dô heten sîne viende / ze lébene dehéiner slahte wân.

1982

Der wirt het grôze sorge, / als im daz gezam,
(waz man im lieber vriunde / vor sînen ougen nam!)
wande er vor sînen vinden / vil kûme då genas.
er saz vil angestlichen: / waz half in daz er künec was?

1983
Kriemhilt diu rîche / rief Dietrîchen an:
“nu hilf mir, ritter edele, / mit dem líbe dan
durch aller forsten tugende / úz Amelunge lant!
wand’ erréichêt mich Hagene, / ich hân den tôt an der hant.”

1987
Mit kraft begonde ruofen / der degen úz erkorn,
daz sîn stimme erlûte , alsam ein wisentes horn,
unt daz diu burc vil wîte / von sîner kraft erdôz.
diu sterke Dietrîches / was unmæzlîche grôz.

1989
Ich sih' in úf dem tische; / er winket mit der hant.
ir friunt unde mâge / von Burgonden lant,
gehabt úf des strîtes, / lât hœren unde sehen,
waz hie dem degene / von mînen mannens sî geschehen.”
Dô sprach der herre Dietrich: / “mir ist niht getân.
lât mich ûz dem hûse / mit iuwerm vride gân
von disem herten strîte / mit dem gesinde mîn:
daz wil ich sicherlichen / immer dienénde sin.”

Dô sprach der künec Gunther: / “erlouben ich iu wil:
füeret ûz dem hûse / lützel oder vil
âne mine vînde; / die suln hie bestån.
    si hânt mir hie zen Hiunen / sô rehte léidé getân.”

Dô er daz gehôrte, / under árme er beslôz
die edeln küneginne; / der sorge diu was grôz.
dô fuort er anderthalben / Etzeln mit im dan.
ouch gie mit Dietriche / sehs hundert wætlîcher man.

Si heten, die si wolden, / lâzen für den sal.
dô huop sich innerthalben / ein grœzlicher schal.
die geste sère râchen, / daz in ê geschach.
Volkèr der vil küene, / hey waz er hélmé zerbrach!

2008
Swaz der Hiunen mâge / in dem sál was gewesen,
der enwás nu deheiner / dar inne mè genesen,
des was der schal geswiftet, / daz niemen mit in streit:
diu swert von handen legeten / die küenen recken gemeit.
36. ÄVENTIURE: WIE DIU KÜNIGINNE DEN SAL VERITEN HIEZ

2089
Etzel und Kriemhilt / die kômen beide dar.
daz lant daz was ir eigen, / des mèrte sich ir schar.
er sprach zuo den gesten: / "nu saget, waz welt ir mîn?
ir wænet vride gewinnen; / daz kunde müelîch gesîn

2095
Dô sprach der wirt zen gesten: / "mîn und iuwer leit
diu sint vil ungelîche. / diu michel arbeit
des schaden zuo den schanden, / die ich hie hân genomen,
des sol iuwer deheiner / nimmer lebende hinnen komen."

2096
Dô sprach zuo dem kûnege / der starke Gêrnôt:
"sô sol iu got gebieten, / daz ir fri’untli‘chen tuot.
sláhet uns éllénden / und lât uns zuo z’iu gân
hin nider an die wîte: / daz ist iu êré getân.
2103

“INE MÄC IU NIHT GENÄDEN: / UNGENÄDE ICH HÄN.

Mir hät von Tronege Hagene / sô grôziu leit getân,

Ez ist vil unversüenet, / die wîle ich hân den lip.

Ir müezet es álle engelten”, sprach daz Etzelen wîp.

2104

“WELT IR MIR HAGENEN EINEN / ze gîsel geben,

Sone wil ich niht versprechen, / ich welle iuch lázen leben,

Wande ir sît mîne bruoder unde éiner muoter kint:

Sô réde ich ez nách der suone / mit disen helden, die hie sint.”

2105

“NUNE WÉLLE GOT VON HIMELE”, / sprach dô Gërnôt.

“OB UNSER TÛSENT WÄREN, / wir lægen alle tôt,

der sippem dîner mâge, / ê wir dir éinen man

gæben hie ze gîsel: ez wi`rdet nimmér getân.”

2108

Dô sprach diu küneginne: + “IR HELDE VIIL GEMEIT,

Nu gêt der stiege näher / unde rechet míniu leit.”
daz wil ich immer dienen, / als ich von rehte sol.
der Hagenen übermüete / der gelôn ich im wol.

2111
Den sal den hiez dô zünden / daz Etzelen wîp.
dô quelte man den recken / mit fiwer dâ den lip.
daz hûs von einem winde / vil balde állez enbrán.
ich wæne, daz volc enheinez / grœzer angest ie gewan.

2112
Genuoge ruoften drinne: / “ôwê dirre nôt!
wir möhten michel gerner / sîn in sturme tôt.
ez möhte got erbarmen: / wie sîn wir alle vlorn!
nu richet ungefuoge / an uns diu kûeginne ir zorn.”

2114
Dô sprach von Tronege Hagene: / “ir edeln ritter guot,
swen twinge durstes nôt, / der trinke hie daz bluot.
daz ist in solher hitze / noch bezzer danne wîn.
ez enmác an disen zîten et nú niht bézzér gesîn.”
2115
Dô gie der recken einer / da er éénen tôten vant.
er kniete im zuo der wunden, / den helm er ab gebant.
dô begonde er trinken / daz vliezênde bluot.
swie ungewon ers wære, ez dühte in grœzlîchen guot.

2117
Do di ándern daz gehôrten, / daz ez in dühte guot,
dô wart ir michel mère, / die trunken ouch daz bluot.
dâ von gewan vil krefte / ir etesliches lîp.
des engált an lieben friunden / sît vil mánce wætlîchez wîp.

2118
Daz fiwer viel genôte / üf si in den sal,
dô leiten siz mit schilden / von in hin zetal.
der rouch und ouch diu hitze / in tâten beidiu wê.
ich wæne der jámer immer mèr an helden ergê.

2124
Der wirt der wolde wænen, / die geste wærën tôt
von ir arbeite / und von des fiwers nôt.
dô lebt' ir noch dar inne / sehs hundert küener man,
daz nie künec deheiner / bezzer degene gewan.

2128
Des tages wider morgen / grüezen man in bôt
mit hertem úrlüge; / des kömen helde in nöt.
dô wart zuo z'in geschozzen / vil manec starker gêr.
sich werten ritterlichen / die recken küene unde hêr.

2133
Waz mac ich sagen mêre? / wol zwélf hundert man
die versúochten ez vil sêre / wider unde dan.
dô kuolten mit den wunden / die geste wol ir muot.
ez móhte niemen geschéiden: / des sach man vliezén das bluot

2134
Von verchtiefen wunden, / der wart då vil geslagen.
ieslîchen nâch si’nen vriunden / hörte man dô klagen.
die biderben stúberen alle / dem rîchen künege hêr.
des heten holde mâge / nâch in gröezlichiu sêr.
Dô Dietrîch gehôrte / den grimmen Hagenen muot,
den schilt vil balde zuhte / der snelle degen guot.
wie balde gein im Hagene / von der stiege spranc!
Nibelunges swért daz guote / vil lûte ûf Dietrîche erklanc.

Ouch vorht er Balmungen, / ein wâfen starc genuoc.
under wîlen Dietrîch / mit listen wider sluoc,
unz daz er Hagenen / mit strîte doch betwanc.
er sluoc im eine wunden, / diu was tief unde lanc.

Hagenen bant dô Dietrîch / und fuort' in, dâ er vant
die edeln kûneginne, / und gab ir bî der hant
den kûnêsten recken, / der ie swert getruoc.
nâch ir vil starkem leide / dô wart si vrêlîch genuoc.
Dô hiez si Hagenen füeren / an sîn ungemach,
dâ er lac beslozzen / unt dâ in niemen sach.
Gûnther der kûnec edele / ruofen dô began:
“war kom der helt von Berne? / der hät mir léidé getân.”

Dô gie im hin engegene / der herre Dietrîch.
daz Guntheres ellen / daz was vil lobelîch.
done bêt och er niht mêre, / er lief her für den sal.
von ir beider swerten / huop sich ein græzlîcher schal.

Ir ellen und ir sterke / beider wâren grôz.
palas unde türne / von den sîegen dôz,
dô si mit swerten hiuwen / ûf die helme guot.
ez het der kûnec Gunther / einen hêrlîchen muot.

Sît twang in der von Berne, / sam Hagenen ê geschach.
daz bluot man durch die ringe / dem helde vliezen sach
von einem scharpfen swerte, / daz truoc Dietrich.

dô het gewert her Gunther / nâch müede lobelîche sich.

2362
Dietrich von Berne / der nam in bî der hant;
dô fuort' er in gebunden, / da er Kriemhilde vant.
dô was mit sinem leide / ir sorgen vil erwant.
si sprach: “willekomen Gunther / ûzer Burgonden lant.”

2364
Dô sprach der helt von Berne: / “vil edeles küneges wîp,

ez enwart nie gîsel mère / sô guoter ritter lîp,

als ich iu, vrouwe härê, / an in gegeben hån.

nu sult ir die ëllénden / mîn vil wol geniezen lân.”

2365
Si jach, si tæt' iz gerne. / dô gie her Dietrich

mit weinênden ougen / von den hélden lobelîch.

sit rach sich grimmeclîchen / daz Étzélen wîp.

den üz erwelten degenen / nam si béidén den lip.
Dô gie diu küneginne, / då si Hagenen sach.
wie rehte fientliche / si zuo dem heIdo sprach:
“welt ir mir geben widere / daz ir mir habt genomen,
sô muget ir noch wol lebende / heim zen Bürgónden komen.”

Dô sprach der grimme Hagene: / “diu rede ist gar verlorn,
vil edeliu küneginne. / ja hân ich des gesworn,
daz ich den hort iht zeige, / die wîle daz si leben
deheiner mîner herren, / sô sol ich in nieméne geben.”

“Ich bringez an ein ende”, / sô sprach daz edel wîp.
dô hiez si ir bruoder / nemen den lîp.
man sluoc im ab daz houbet; / bi‘ dem hârê si ez truoc
für den helt von Tronege. / dô wart im léidé genuoc.

Nu ist von Burgonden / der edel künec tôt,
Gîselher der junge, / unde ouch her Gêrnôt.
den schaz den weiz nu niemen / wan got unde mîn:
der sol dich, vålandinne, / immer wol verholn sin.”

2372
Si sprach: “so habt ir übele / geltes mich gewert.
sô wil ich doch behalten / daz Sîfrides swert.
daz truoc mîn holder vriedel, / dô ich in jungest sach,
an dem mir herzeleide / von iuwern schúldén geschach.”

2373
Si zôh iz von der scheiden, / daz kund er niht erwern.
dô dáhte si den recken / des lîbes wol behern
si huob ez mit ir handen, / daz houpt si im ab sluoc.
daz sach der künec Etzel: / dô was im léidé genuoc.

2374
“Wâfen”, sprach der fürste, / “wie ist nu tôt gelegen
von eines wîbes handen / der aller beste degen,
der ie kóm ze sturme / oder ie schilt getruoc!
swie vînt ich im være, / ez ist mir léidé genuoc.”
Dô sprach der alte Hildebrant: / “Ja geniuzet si es niht,
daz si in slahen torste, / swaz mir davon geschiht,
wicie er mich selben bræhte / in angestliche nôt,
idoch sô wil ich rechen / des küenen Tronegæres tôt.”

Hildebrant mit zorne / zuo Kriemhilde spranc,
er sluoc der küneginne / einen swären swertes swanc.
Jâ tet ir diu sorge / von Hildebrande wê.
waz mohte si gehelfen, / daz si sô græzlichen schrê ?

Dô was gelegen aller / dâ der veigen lip.
ze stücken was gehouwen / dô daz edele wîp.
Dietrich und Etzel / weinen dô began,
si klagten inneclîche / beide mâge unde man.

Diu vil michel êre / was dâ gelegen tôt.
die liute heten alle / jâmer unde nôt.
mit leide was verendet / des küniges höhgezît,
als ie diu liebe leide / z'aller jüngéste git.

2379
Ine kan iu niht bescheiden, / waz sider dâ geschach.
wan ritter unde vrouwen / weinen man dâ sach,
dar zuo die edeln knehte / ir lieben friunde tôt.
hie hat daz mære ein ende: / daz ist der Nibelunge nôt.