Cloak and Cruentation: Power, (In)Visibility and the Supernatural in the *Nibelungenlied*

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Abstract

The Medieval epic poem the 'Nibelungenlied' makes use of two supernatural elements. There is a cloak that renders a character invisible, and the phenomenon of cruentation is trial by ordeal, which supposedly reveals who the murderer of a victim is. Although critics have stated the importance of these two elements to the narrative, the questions of how and why these elements are crucial remain under-analysed. This paper seeks to fill this gap in current research by assessing each supernatural phenomenon's narrative function. I argue that their supernatural qualities are not the only aspects that link them, and that it is their power to alter what is (in)visible that makes them a catalyst for changing socio-cultural power dynamics in the text, ultimately leading to the tragic ending of the poem.

Keywords: Nibelungenlied; invisibility cloak in the Nibelungenlied; cruentation in Medieval literature; Bahrprobe in German Medieval literature; cruentation in Nibelungenlied

Introduction

As one of the most well-known texts in Medieval German literature, the *Nibelungenlied* (*NL*) (Edwards, 2010; Schulze, 2011)[1] is an epic poem written by an anonymous poet, most likely around *c.*1200 – the high point of Middle High German (MHG) literature – in the region of Passau, a town in modern-day lower Bavaria. Scholars have suggested that the poem is loosely based on the Old Norse *Poetic Edda*, and we know that Richard Wagner's *Der Ring der Nibelungen* took inspiration from the *NL*, but only very broadly (Haymes, 2009: p. 218 ff.).

The *NL* has undergone plentiful analyses of power structures between the characters in the text. Less researched, however, are the two main supernatural elements in the text: cruentation (a phenomenon where the wounds of a murdered corpse bleed if the murderer approaches it) and the cloak of invisibility. Within the relatively little research that has been

produced on the cloak, academics have noted its importance to the narrative (cf. Bekker, 1971: 106; Selmayr, 2015: 69), with Sieburg stating: 'ohne die Tarnkappe ließe sich das *Nibelungenlied* nicht erzählen' ['the *Nibelungenlied* could not be told without the invisibility cloak'] (Sieburg, 2017: 193).[2] Nevertheless, there is a need to know what *precisely* makes the invisibility cloak so vital, as previous studies have somewhat assumed its power at face value.

Furthermore, there is even less research on cruentation in the Middle Ages, as the *Nibelungenlied* and Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein* (also written in the early thirteenth century) are the earliest representations of cruentation in German literature. As a result, most of the focus is on the phenomenon in Early Modern literature (cf. Dawson, 2018) and the literary representations of Early Modern legal proceedings and medicine (Ceglia, 2020: 24). I seek to address this gap in Medieval research by asking: how do both supernatural elements move from mere symbolism to becoming crucial to the entire narrative of the *NL*? I shall also build on previous analysis to argue that not only are the cloak and cruentation vital to the narrative but that they are also linked by what they can manipulate to be (in)visible, thus changing socio-political hierarchies in the *NL* and, in turn, changing how the characters perceive each other.

For both elements, I shall explain how and when they are used in the text and the consequences they hold for the characters. I shall also argue that the unique nature and consequences of both supernatural elements mean that they are cornerstones of the *NL* narrative. To achieve this, I shall highlight the germane and surrounding narrative moments and chapters (called 'Adventures') where the invisibility cloak and cruentation appear, demonstrating how consequential they are within the poem, and also help to fill the gaps for a general audience. To that end, I shall also be focusing on some of the main characters of the poem, namely Siegfried (the main hero of the *NL* and owner of the cloak of invisibility), Gunther (king of the Burgundians), Kriemhild (Siegfried's wife and Gunther's sister), Hagen (Gunther's **vassal**) and Brünhild (the queen of Isenstein and Gunther's wife, who has supernatural strength). In both cases, it will become apparent that both supernatural elements inherently rely on the dichotomy of the visible/invisible – hence (in)visible – to change power structures within the text: the cloak is required to make Siegfried unseen and unknown, and cruentation is required to make God's judgement visible.

The qualities of the invisibility cloak

From its introduction, the invisibility cloak is deeply associated with (in)visibility and power. The cloak's holder, Siegfried, is also the owner of a large treasure hoard, for which he had to fight off giants, a dwarf named Alberich and a dragon (92–101). Even before the cloak's invisible qualities are mentioned, the fact that Siegfried had to defeat the dwarf Alberich 'mit sorgen' ['with hardship'] (336: 1–3) to win the cloak highlights that it is a prize that demonstrates the victor's existing physical power in the form of strength. This symbolism also implies that 'wer die Tarnkappe besitzt, ist zugleich Herrscher über den Hort' ['whoever owns the invisibility cloak is also master of the hoard'] (Selmayr, 2015: 68), thus giving the owner of the cloak even more power than before.

Further, Siegfried gains two main supernatural advantages when wearing the cloak: the strength of 12 men and the ability to turn invisible. Unlike the factual description of the strength Siegfried gains when wearing the cloak (337: 1–3), the narrator elaborates on the benefits of invisibility to the audience: '*Ouch was diu selbe tarnhût also getân,/ daz dar inne worhte ein ieslicher man,/ swaz er selbe wolde, daz in doch niemen sach*' ['Moreover, the cloak of invisibility was of such a nature that anyone wearing it could do whatever he wanted without anyone seeing him'] (338: 1–3). This explicitly confirms the importance of (in)visibility in the narrative and shows the audience that it affords the wearer supernatural power as a result of manipulating what is (in)visible.

The invisibility cloak's function within the narrative

The narrator's explanation also states the cloak's primary supernatural function, which is to create a power imbalance in the form of knowledge. In the 7th Adventure*,* Siegfried uses this utility to great effect by helping King Gunther win over the Queen of Iceland, Brünhild, and secure her hand in marriage after striking a deal with the Burgundian king. If Siegfried helps Gunther secure Brünhild's hand in marriage, the king will, in turn, give his permission for Siegfried to marry Kriemhild (332–34). Siegfried takes Gunther and his entourage to Isenstein, introducing himself not as a knight but as Gunther's vassal. While seeking Brünhild's hand in marriage, Gunther finds himself challenged by Brünhild to a contest of strength, which owing to her supernatural strength, she is convinced she will win. If he *alone* is successful throwing stones and javelins better than her, she will marry him. If not, she will kill them all (423–27).

Siegfried dons the cloak to aid Gunther in this contest without Brünhild's knowledge and, as a result, they win.

Indeed, with the narrator emphasising the fact that 'wan diu Tarnkappe, si wæren tote dâ bestân' ['were it not for the cloak of invisibility, they would have died on the spot'] (457: 4), the invisibility cloak takes on a pivotal role in this passage in two main ways. Firstly, it allows Siegfried to successfully fool Brünhild into thinking it is just Gunther competing (465: 2). Brünhild is not aware of Siegfried's presence during the combat (which directly contradicts the rules she set out in strophes 423–27) and believes Siegfried and Hagen's lie that he missed the competition entirely because he went back to the ship to guard it (472–73). Consequently, there is a power imbalance due to differing levels of knowledge in this scene caused by the ability to become invisible. I agree with Albrecht Classen here, who states that 'in reality, Brünhild has not lost either to Gunther or Siegfried, because both receive illegitimate outside help: Gunther from Siegfried, and Siegfried from his [invisibility cloak]' (Classen, 1992: 102). The fact that Brünhild is tricked into *thinking* she lost the competition is ultimately the unique and exclusive result of the strength and invisibility afforded to Siegfried by the cloak. Without this knowledge imbalance, Gunther would never have been able to marry Brünhild.

Secondly, the use of the cloak's additional strength-giving qualities is also used here. It is the only reason that Siegfried can match Brünhild's strength, with which she can throw a spear that three men can barely lift (441: 1–3), with Hagen saying of her: '[»]der ir dâ gert ze minnen, diu ist des tîvels wîp«' ['["]She whom you desire to woo there is the very Devil's wife!"'] (438: 4). Indeed, this evidence further solidifies the idea that this contest could not be won without Siegfried and the invisibility cloak. The unique nature of the contest requires both advanced strength and the advantage of anonymity that only the invisibility cloak can provide.

As a result of Siegfried and Gunther winning this contest, all promises are kept. Brünhild takes Gunther's hand in marriage, Siegfried is offered Kriemhild, and they have a double wedding to celebrate (10th Adventure). However, Siegfried lying to Brünhild about his status (that he is a vassal rather than a king) poses problems. As Brünhild becomes more aware of the Burgundian **courtly society** in which Gunther, Siegfried and Kriemhild operate (Newman, 1981: 72), she becomes increasingly preoccupied with Siegfried's marriage to Kriemhild. As far as Brünhild is concerned, Siegfried is Gunther's vassal and thus should not be marrying into royalty (*NL* 620; Campbell, 1997: 563 ff.). In other words, Brünhild takes umbrage at Siegfried and Kriemhild's

marriage due to Siegfried's deception, a deception ultimately caused by the competition in which he used the invisibility cloak.

Brünhild's anger at this perceived mixing of social status leads to a problem for Gunther: she will not consummate the marriage. She verbally refuses him when he initially attempts consummation, which leads to Gunther becoming angry. When he tries to force her by tearing her clothes apart, she does the following: '*Di fuoze unt ouch di hende si im zesamne bant. | si truoc in zeinem nagel unt hienc in an di want*' ['She bound together his feet and hands; she carried him over to a nail and hung him up on the wall'] (637: 1–2). As has been noticed by commentators such as Renz, this use of physical strength in reaction to Gunther's forceful sexual advances is problematised by the poet because Brünhild uses force to defy Burgundian social codes (Renz, 2006: 23). Indeed, considering that the 'later Middle Ages […] witnessed violent forms of misogyny' (Classen, 1992: 92), this defiance thus causes Gunther to respond in kind. Feeling humiliated and emasculated by the previous night's experience, Gunther wants to get the upper hand again. For this, he needs to display dominance to Brünhild, and Siegfried offers to help him do so.

What follows is yet another situation that would be impossible to achieve without the invisibility cloak. Siegfried offers to don the cloak and force Brünhild into submission when the lights are extinguished. On the condition that Siegfried does not make love to her (651–55), Gunther agrees, and 'an sîner vrouwen minne stuont aller sîn gedanc' ['[a]ll his thoughts were bent on the love of his lady'] (657: 4). As Lienert notes: 'Minne hier meint nur Sexualität, und Sexualität ist wesentlicher Bestand der Gewalt über Frauen' ['courtly love here means exclusively sexuality, and sexuality is an essential element of violence against women'] (Lienert, 2003: 10). Brünhild tries to tie up whom she assumes to be Gunther once more (671), almost succeeds (674), but ultimately Siegfried is victorious. The battle ends, and Siegfried (still wearing the invisibility cloak) takes Brünhild's ring and belt (679: 2–3). As far as the narrator is concerned, the outcome is clear: 'dô wart si Guntheres wîp '['then she became Gunther's wife'] (677: 4).

As far as Siegfried is concerned, he is thus successful on two counts. Firstly, he overcomes Brünhild with the cloak's strength-giving powers, neutralising the perceived threat of her strength and 'disobedience'. Secondly, he achieves anonymity with the invisibility the cloak provides, thereby also tricking Brünhild again into thinking his actions were, in fact, Gunther's. In both instances of battling Brünhild, Siegfried's use of the invisibility cloak is an

absolute necessity; he requires it to be stronger than her and not to be seen so that the marriage consummation is seemingly legitimised.

Nevertheless, Siegfried suffers the consequences of his actions. When he takes Brünhild's ring and belt, he decides to give them to Kriemhild (679: 3–680: 3), and they return to their kingdom in Xanten (714: 2). Ten years after the assault on Brünhild, both couples have had children and are thriving in their respective kingdoms. One day, Brünhild and Gunther invite Siegfried and Kriemhild back to their kingdom. When they arrive, the queens have an almighty argument (14th Adventure), which is about whether Siegfried is a vassal or a king. Kriemhild attempts to settle the argument by stating that Siegfried deflowered Brünhild (840–42), and she produces the ring and belt taken from Brünhild to back up her claim. This causes significant problems for Siegfried, not only because this act would be seen as adultery, but also because '[i]n a **patrilineal** system it is crucial to know the identity of the father', especially when concerning kingship and Brünhild's son's claim to the Burgundian throne (Nelson, 1992: 126). For this, it is decided by Hagen that Siegfried must die (870), and he sets about convincing Gunther to betray Siegfried (916). Hagen asks Kriemhild where Siegfried's vulnerable spot is, feigning interest in protecting him (897). The vulnerable spot refers to the fact that Siegfried bathed in a dragon's blood after slaying it to make himself supernaturally invulnerable to standard weapons. While he was bathing, a linden leaf fell onto his back between his shoulder blades, thus creating a vulnerable spot (899–902). They invite Siegfried out hunting, and Hagen stabs him in the back, killing him (981–1002). Thus, for his actions undertaken with the anonymity of the invisibility cloak, Siegfried pays with his life.

Both uses of the cloak have a significant effect on the narrative, to the extent that Siegfried dies due to his actions. Further, he lies to Brünhild in one instance, and his later actions can be construed as rape – quite possibly by Medieval standards and certainly by contemporary standards (Edwards, 2018: 12–14; Nelson, 1992: 124). The invisibility cloak's use becomes as morally questionable as it does crucial and consequential to the narrative. In fact, it is by recognising the consequences of that violence (ultimately, Siegfried's death) that we can historically contextualise and understand the violence against women in the *NL* (Sterling-Hellenbrand, 2018: 72–73), and, furthermore, the invisibility cloak's critical role in that violence. It is clear, therefore, that the invisibility cloak is vital to the overarching *NL* narrative. To be sure, two of the most crucial points in the narrative – Gunther's wooing of Brünhild and the consequent consummation of the marriage – cannot happen without it, due

to the inherent need for the anonymity required to trick Brünhild in both narrative conundrums.

Cruentation and its qualities

Having established the importance of what is (in)visible in the *NL*, let us now analyse one of the defining sections of the *NL*: the 17th Adventure. This is the part in which Siegfried is found murdered and is buried. Marking the second half of the text, it is in this scene where Kriemhild accuses Gunther and Hagen of killing Siegfried and begins to plot her revenge accordingly. Although there has been much research done on this Adventure, one of the most substantial research gaps is that of the lack of attention paid to cruentation (*ius cruentationis*; *Bahrprobe*): the phenomenon of a murdered corpse's wounds bleeding afresh when the murderer approaches it (Dawson, 2018: 152). As with other trials by ordeal, cruentation was a ritual to elicit God's judgement (*iudicium Dei; Gottesurteil*) on a person accused of a crime in the Medieval and Early Modern periods (Bartlett, 2008: 28). Even though they were banned by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), the practice of and belief in trials of ordeal remained very much present in Medieval society (Birkhan, 2010: 15).

In this section, I shall argue that cruentation's inherent links with invisibility, the supernatural and power structures within the *NL* mean that the narrative is dependent on cruentation to the extent that it acts as a catalyst to narrative progression. The qualities of cruentation from textual evidence will be analysed to demonstrate how it functions in the *NL*. To that end, I shall demonstrate its stated importance and its links to the supernatural, (in)visibility and power in the text. Secondly, I shall apply this analysis to demonstrate how cruentation is crucial to the narrative. I shall argue that it gives Kriemhild the power of societal validation to blame Hagen and Gunther for the death of Siegfried.

From its introduction, cruentation is portrayed as an essential phenomenon within the 17th Adventure. The first explicit mention of it is in strophe 1044: 1–3, in which the poet explains to the audience what cruentation is: 'Daz ist ein michel wunder, vil dicke ez noch geschiht:| swâ man den mortmeilen bî dem tôten siht,| sô bluotent im di wunden, als ouch dâ geschach' ['This is a great marvel – it still happens many a time today. Whenever a marked murderer is seen alongside a dead man, then the corpse's wounds will bleed – as also happened here']. In addition to Schulze's analysis of this strophe as being a plain description of what cruentation is (Schulze, 2013: 224), there is a further significance to the narrator's explanation. The poet

of the *NL* relied on the cultural context of the audience to be effective in creating a visual representation of the narrative in their minds (Wenzel, 1992: 324f.). The best way to achieve this visual representation is, therefore, to explain what this phenomenon is. The explanation not only makes sure everyone has the same base knowledge of the phenomenon, but it also indicates that the audience should pay attention to it. Strophe 1044, thus, is there to indicate that the audience should consider cruentation carefully when assessing the 17th Adventure.

In addition to its established importance, the idea that cruentation was God's verdict is very much present in this text. Nevertheless, any reading of cruentation as God's judgement hinges upon the idea that Christian religious practice is taken seriously in any given text. This means that a brief assessment of the NL's religiosity must happen if we are to factor in the aspect of God's judgement.

Although the NL (especially manuscript B) is a less religious text (Kuhn, 1965: 280), this does not mean that Christian religious practice is not present in it. Indeed, the temporal structure of the entire 17th Adventure is encoded in Christian practices. For example, Siegfried's body is discovered at Mass time (1005:1). Then, a day passes, and everyone wakes in the morning once again for Mass, where the singing of many clergymen can be heard (1040: 2). After the cruentation scene, Siegfried's funeral is held where everybody must donate something towards the salvation of Siegfried's soul. Interestingly, the poet clarifies that the financial gain typically expected from the donations are unimportant in this case. In strophe 1060, it becomes apparent that even the people who could not afford it were told to take money from Siegfried's personal wealth and give it back to him as a token for safe passage into the afterlife. The result is that the salvation of Siegfried's soul is prioritised over the financial process of donation. Thus, religious practice is heavily inculcated into the 17th Adventure.

This is strong evidence to suggest that the act of cruentation is tied to the Christian religious idea of the miraculous, which Jacob Grimm identified as a source of the supernatural, which typically causes just and good results to occur (Grimm, 1875: 861). Indeed, I am inclined to agree with Sieburg, who notes that the word 'marvel' ('wunder') in strophe 1044: 1 should be considered 'tatsächlich im christlichen Sinne' ['very much in the Christian sense'] (Sieburg, 2017: 187). Furthermore, this also proves the fact that cruentation is 'not pagan, but Christian "magic" deeply rooted in a religious pattern of thought' (Willson, 1960: 41). This means that the idea of cruentation as a supernatural intervention representing God's judgement can and should be taken seriously within the *NL*.

Moreover, the other crucial element to cruentation is that it is a visible phenomenon. This is present not only explicitly in 1044 with the conjugations of 'sehen' ['to see'] (lines 2 and 4), but also implicitly in Kriemhild's invitation asking anyone who wished to approach Siegfried's corpse to do so: '»swelher sî unschuldige, der lâze daz gesehen.| der sol zuo der bâre vor den liuten gên.| *dâ bî mac man di wârheit harte schiere verstên«*' ['"Let he who is innocent have it be beheld! Let him approach the bier before all the people! *The truth will soon be shown then*"'] (1043: 2–4, my emphasis). The fact that this strophe directly precedes the explanation of cruentation indicates that everyone present in the room was ready for the trial by ordeal to happen after Kriemhild's invitation. That means, therefore, that everyone was watching the body. The nature of cruentation thus becomes a way to deliver God's verdict, which relies on manipulating what is visible to have any weight.

Likewise, the idea that cruentation is an exclusively visible event, combined with the relatively short amount of time the poet spends describing the physical act itself (1045: 1–2), also indicates a somewhat unique phenomenon. Temporally, it happens relatively suddenly and is the result of God rendering His judgement *visible*. This evidence is very much in line with the idea that '[l]ike ghostly apparitions and bizarre coincidences, cruentation reveals God's hand in uncovering sin [...]' (Dawson, 2018: 152). Rather than hiding what is visible (as with the cloak of invisibility), cruentation is designed to render the truth visible – both literally and metaphorically – with God's aid (Ehrismann, 1987: 152). Therefore, cruentation is a phenomenon by which an omnipotent, omnipresent and invisible supernatural being (God) uses His power to render His judgement visible.

Cruentation's function within the narrative

To be sure, the qualities of cruentation are of vital narrative importance as they act as a catalyst to the second half of the narrative structure. By tracing Kriemhild's suspicions, and accusations, it is possible to see that cruentation validates her inner thoughts and beliefs. This validation, in turn, gives her the social and legal power to blame who she thinks is responsible for Siegfried's murder – Gunther and Hagen.

A good example of why the cruentation is vital to this affirmation is explained earlier in the text; Kriemhild may have strong suspicions about who killed Siegfried, but she cannot publicly accuse anybody. After giving Hagen vital information regarding Siegfried's only vulnerable area – between his shoulder blades – in the 15th Adventure (902–06), Kriemhild then has a

prophetic dream during which Siegfried is hunted down by two wild boar and killed. As a result, she tries to warn Siegfried not to go hunting (921–22). By the time Siegfried is found, Kriemhild already suspects that the information she gave Hagen was used against Siegfried: 'Ê daz si reht erfunde, daz iz wære ir man, | an di Hagenen vrâge denken si began, | wi er in solde vristen. dô wart ir êrste leit' ['Even before she found out for certain that it was her husband, she began to think of Hagen's question about how he should protect him'] (1008: 1–3). Importantly, the word 'think' ('denken') suggests a rare interiority of thought. While Kriemhild usually speaks her thoughts, this one she kept to herself. This interior suspicion turns to a proclamation in the relatively private sphere of the hallway outside her chambers. It is just her servants who hear her say: '»ez ist Sîfrit, der mîn vil lieber man.| ez hât gerâten Brünhilt, daz ez hât Hagen getân«' ['"It is [Siegfried], my dearest husband. [Brünhild] has conspired to have Hagen do this deed"'] (1010: 3–4). However, when asked by Siegfried's father, Siegmund, in a more public sphere, Kriemhild pretends not to have any clue who did it, but makes her intentions towards the murderer(s) very clear: '»Hey, sold ich den bekennen [...]| ich geriete im alsô leide, daz di friunde sîn| von den mînen schulden muosen weinende sîn«' ['"Oh, if I were to know who did it, [...] I would cause him such harm as would make his friends weep because of me"'] (1024: 1, 3–4). This inconsistency in verbally exclaimed beliefs and interior thoughts leads me to agree here with Robles, who states that in the *NL:* '[d]a die Frauen machtlos sind, ist auch ihr Wissen ohne Macht' ['because women are powerless, their knowledge is equally so'] (Robles, 2005: 366). Despite Kriemhild's social status as queen, she cannot openly accuse anyone without some societal backing in the courtly society in which she lives. In other words, she lacks enough firm proof to accuse anybody openly and justifiably.

Cruentation provides precisely this proof, and this perceived evidence gives Kriemhild the power of societal validation. For example, Kriemhild's invitation to all who think themselves innocent to approach the funeral bier in 1043 affirms that this is a trial that should be taken seriously and will begin to provide closure to Siegfried's death. As the cruentation happens, one possible interpretation of God's judgement is revealed, as described by the narrator in 1044: 4: 'dâ von man di schulde dâ ze Hagene gesach' ['Thus Hagen's guilt was beheld there']. This description is also reiterated and explicitly states that cruentation took place: 'Di wunden vluzzen sêre, alsam si tâten ê' ['The wounds flowed as freely as they did before'] (1045: 1). This evidence confirms and explains Hatto's footnote on strophe 1024 in his prose translation: 'Kriemhild needs firm legal proof, which, in medieval eyes, she will soon obtain beside the

bier' (Hatto, 1965: 134). In a similar way to which God shifts His judgement from invisible to visible (and therefore *publicly* visible), Kriemhild can now carry forwards her accusations in an equally public manner.

With this substantiation, Kriemhild dramatically changes her approach and outwardly accuses Hagen and Gunther of killing Siegfried, contrary to 1044: 4, in which the poet explicitly states that the guilt lay with Hagen. This public accusation also proves that, while cruentation serves as legal proof, it is equally up to interpretation; people listening to or reading this tale could well be inclined to agree with Kriemhild's *or* the author's interpretations (Bildhauer, 2006: 43). Even when Gunther attempts to deceive her into thinking that it was ambushers, and not Hagen, who killed Siegfried, Kriemhild refuses to believe him from the outset: '»Mir sint di schâchære […] vil wol bekant.| nu lâz ez got errechen noch sîner vriunde hant.| Gunther und Hagene, jâ habt ir iz getân.«' '[The ambushers […] are very well known to me. Now may God have [Siegfried's] allies' hands avenge it yet! Gunther and Hagen, it was you who did this!']' (1046: 1–3). Furthermore, Kriemhild's mention of God in line 2 has a dual meaning here. The first interpretation is more literal, with Kriemhild expressing her wish to take revenge. However, the combination of Kriemhild's evident preoccupation with Christianity (Raffel, 2008: 337f) and the usage of 'now' ('nu') in 1045: 2 also implies a logical following-on from previous events. Now that God has revealed Hagen and Gunther's act to Kriemhild, the natural progression would be for Him to let her take revenge on those who killed her husband. Thus, as a direct result of cruentation providing substantiation within the narrative, Kriemhild is given the power to turn her interior suspicions into exterior accusations that are now considered valid in the considerably more public, courtly society in which she operates (Gephart, 2010: 25f.).

With this accusation now validated and public as a direct result of cruentation, Kriemhild then sets about planning her revenge in the form of a blood feud on Hagen, Gunther and all the Burgundians for Siegfried's murder (cf. Bildhauer, 2006: 75–76). After Siegfried's burial and her return to Worms, Kriemhild requests the hoard of the Nibelungs be brought to her (1116). She then uses it to amass military power (1127) and, to Hagen's dismay, begins to assemble a considerable force behind her (1128). In response to Kriemhild amassing so much power, Hagen puts the treasure in the river to stop Kriemhild from using it. He remembers the location of the hoard so that one day he may use it again. However, the poet emphasises in the last line of 1140: 'sine kunden ins selben noch niemen ander gegeben' ['In time they could

neither give it to themselves nor to anyone else']. This prophetic line foretells the narrative's ending, which is the eventual – and near-genocidal – downfall of Gunther, Hagen and almost all of the Burgundians (Schulze, 2013: 94).

After amassing this force, Kriemhild eventually takes another husband – King Etzel – and moves with him to Gran, which is now Esztergom in present-day Hungary (22nd Adventure). Seven years pass, and she invites Gunther, Hagen and all the Burgundians to her castle in Gran under the guise of offering them an olive branch (23rd Adventure). Almost all the Burgundians arrive and, shortly afterwards, the guise of diplomacy is dropped on both sides (29th Adventure), and a war begins. The battles are a bloodbath that result in the deaths of all the main characters, excluding Etzel and some of his entourage. Almost all of the Burgundians are slain, too (39th Adventure). Therefore, we see that the phenomenon that catalysed Kriemhild's revenge is the societal and legal validation cruentation gave her. It is cruentation that ultimately serves as a narrative catalyst, leading to the downfall of the Burgundians at the end of the poem.

Conclusion

To conclude, then, both the invisibility cloak and cruentation provide significant narrative development in the *NL*. The fact that both the invisibility cloak and cruentation appear at crucial narrative points is no coincidence. That both supernatural elements inherently rely on the (in)visible dichotomy to function; the invisibility cloak hides and cruentation brings to light.

The invisibility cloak only appears when no other tool or plan would solve the 'problems' Siegfried and Gunther face. Siegfried and Gunther use the extra strength given to the wearer to overcome Brünhild and the invisibility element to provide the veil of anonymity required to fool Brünhild into thinking it was just Gunther present during both the competition and the assault.

As we have seen, Siegfried's uses of the cloak have consequences. Siegfried lies to Brünhild, setting up her discomfort with his marriage to Kriemhild. That discomfort then leads to her refusing to consummate her marriage to Gunther, leading to the second use of the cloak. Taking the ring and belt from Brünhild and then giving them to Kriemhild means that Siegfried is ultimately accused of sleeping with Brünhild himself, for which he pays dearly. The

invisibility cloak is used to hide people, which shrouds the narrative in mystery for the characters and ultimately leads to Siegfried's death as a direct result.

On the other hand, cruentation is about rendering potential evidence visible for the characters to interpret. From the introduction of the phenomenon to the narrative implications, it is also clear that the qualities of cruentation make it so unique to the narrative. It is a supernatural power created by God to convey His judgement onto a murderer, which is effective insofar as it is visible. It was believed that God made visible his judgement to give societal and legal validation to what would have ordinarily remained an unsubstantiated claim, thus giving the accuser power. By tracing the development of Kriemhild's thoughts, suspicions and accusations, it is possible to see that cruentation is the catalyst to a crucial narrative progression: Kriemhild's revenge, or in other words, the beginning of the downfall of the Burgundians.

Acknowledgements

Endnotes

[1]Any primary text citations of the NL will be further presented as strophe and line numbers (strophe; line(s)) from the B manuscript (St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, cod. 857). I shall use a Middle High German (MHG) edition paired with an English translation, as cited before this endnote in the main text body. Any italicised quotations are in Middle High German, any non-italicised German quotations are in modern German. For primary text usage I shall present citations like this: (strophe(s): verse(s)). If there is no colon, strophes are assumed.

[2]Any English translations of secondary sources in this article are my own.

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Glossary

Courtly society: A specific set of values, beliefs and codes that nobles, royalty and knights had to follow as part of their lives. This includes not marrying someone of lower status, for example.

Der Ring der Nibelungen: Wagner's epic opera composed from 1848-74, which is loosely based on the NL. The entire opera takes place over four evenings.

Lateran Council: An ecclesiastical council made up of senior Catholic Church members who took decisions on doctrine(s), administration, discipline and how best to apply all of their decisions to everyday life. The first Lateran Council was held in 1123, and the final one (the Fifth Lateran Council) from 1512-17.

Patrilineal: The notion that power or riches are passed down to exclusively male heirs. In this case, the continuation of Gunther's dynasty required a male heir.

Poetic Edda: Old Icelandic poetry written in the Early Middle Ages (*c.* tenth century, although precise dating is still the subject of scholarly debate). Important for this article is that they certainly predate the NL.

Vassal: A servant of the feudal nobility who pledged allegiance to their lord in return for land and protection.