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AN ANALYSIS OF THE ELEMENTS OF NORSE MYTHOLOGY IN HENRIK IBSEN'S THE MASTER BUILDER

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ABSTRACT

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ELEMENTS OF
NORSE MYTHOLOGY IN HENRIK IBSEN'S
THE MASTER BUILDER

By

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Throughout Henrik Ibsen's plays, certain elements of Norse mythology reoccur. It is contended that these elements comprise an integral part of Ibsen's world view, and form a basis for viable interpretation of his plays. Difficult plays, such as The Master Builder, may be more clearly understood through this approach.

The hypothesis is advanced that the Norse mythological elements present in The Master Builder, if investigated, may clarify some of the complexities present in the play; give one a point of reference and literary background from which to view certain characters and their relationships; and indicate that Solness' death on the tower is a positive, victorious, acceptance of fate, and, in effect, his salvation.

Death is the greatest evil known to man
but yet it can be overcome.
Live well and die bravely and
your repute will live after you.
Fate will decide how you will face it.
A brave death will be rewarded
not with pork and mead as in Valholl,
but with the esteem of your friends,
kinsmen and even your enemies.
They will tell how you lived
and how you died.
Your story will live,
as has that of many a Northern hero.

E.O.G. Turville-Petre. Myth and Religons of the North. (London, 1964), p. 274.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

It is generally accepted that Henrik Ibsen's works can be divided into three major chronological groups: 1.) early nationalistic drama - The Warrior's Barrow, Viking in Helgeland, 2.) middle social drama - League of Youth, Ghosts, 3.) later symbolic drama - Rosmersholm, The Master Builder. The distinction between these groups appears obvious.

The early nationalistic drama is straightforward, and can be dealt with on the level of Norwegian history, saga, and mythology. The social drama can be viewed in social, political, or psychological terms. The last period is obviously symbolic and the most difficult to deal with.

There are many varying interpretations of the later drama. However, these plays have not been investigated in terms of specific Norse mythology and folklore. This emphasis is present in Ibsen's early drama, and may help the prospective producer or critic select production details, or gain insight into the ethereal later drama.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The relationship of Norse mythology to Ibsen's drama is undeniable. Critics have been aware of the Norse mythological and folk influences in his early drama. Little evidence exists in the social drama, but in the later plays the presence of mythology and folklore resurfaces.

The later plays have often confounded the best attempts of some of the best critics. But it is in them that Ibsen's use of mythology and folklore is quite pronounced. The symbols of the later drama have been investigated on almost every conceivable level except that of Norse mythology. It seems logical that mythology obviously present in his other drama might be explored to clarify the later drama.

In such plays as The Lady From the Sea, The Master Builder, John Gabriel Borkman, Little Eyolf, and When We Dead Awaken, the world of the Norse gods is of vital importance to the structure and meaning of the drama. No longer are the old legends hidden (as in the social drama), or blatant (as in the nationalistic period). Here they are cast in fluctuating intensities and broad sweeping form to fill each play with depth and true Scandinavian symbolism. Ibsen seems to be most Norwegian in these later plays where he relies upon the symbolic values of the Norse cosmos and folklore of the people to bring the meaning of his plays into focus. While the use of mythology in the nationalistic plays can be dismissed as a function of plot,

it cannot be discarded as such in the later plays. In these symbolic dramas the plot is only servant to the larger purpose of the play.

To date, the only major critical analysis of Ibsen's work in terms of Norse mythology and folklore is Henri Logeman's study of Peer Gynt.[1] It is a comprehensive work detailing all references, connotations, and use of folklore, tradition, and language in Peer Gynt. The study is an attempt to establish the specific Norwegian aspects of Ibsen's most obviously Norwegian play. (Yet perhaps his most universal one.) Because of the power of Peer Gynt, and its accessability to critics, it has been the one work of Ibsen most critically evaluated. But despite the fact that most biographers emphasize Ibsen's relationship to Norway, most critics have overlooked this fact. A.M. Sturtevant's "Some Phases of Ibsen's Symbolism"[2] is one small study that does take aspects of folklore into account in analyzing Ibsen's symbolism.

In addition to these two studies, the only other major critical work concerned with Ibsen's use of mythology is Orley Holtan's Mythic Patterns in Ibsen's Last Eight Plays.[3] It utilizes the critical theory of Northrop Frye and the archetypal patterns of Maud Bodkin in its investigation, but ultimately explicates Ibsen's symbolic drama in very general

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[1]Henri Logeman, A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Norwegian Text of Ibsen's "Peer Gynt": It's Language, Literary Association, and Folklore. The Haugue, 1917.

[2]Sturtevant, Scandinavian Studies, II (1914-15), p. 25.

[3]Holtan, (Minneapolis, 1970).

terms. Holtan acknowledges an occasional Norse god, or troll, but uses equally Indian, Greek, or Christian figures in establishing patterns in the plays.

All three of these studies, although excellent in themselves, do not form a base of Norwegian/Ibsen mythological criticism. Logeman and Sturtevant's studies are primarily concerned with folk influences, rather than the direct links from Ibsen, through the folklore, back to Norse mythology. Holtan's work emphasizes overall cultural patterns rather than defining the plays in terms of specific Norse mythology. Thus there is no extant criticism which deals solely with Norse mythology and its relationship to Ibsen's later drama.

THE MASTER BUILDER

Of the later drama, one play has consistently baffled critics and audiences, and forced them into selective interpretations of the play.[4] That play is The Master Builder. A few of the problems which have baffled the critics are: the seeming lack of logic in the play, the ambiguous character of Solness, his confusing relationship with Aline and Hilde, the play's bizzare ending, the extensive use of symbolism, and the credibility of the characters. Not only are specific problems of the play unsolved, but the play as a whole continues to plague and confuse critics.

A sketch of the plot reveals little of the complexity of the play. Halvard Solness, an aging builder, is trying to

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[4]See footnotes 9-11, Chapter I. p.6.

maintain his grip on both his business and his sanity. His marriage has failed - his wife a walking corpse in grief over the death, years before, of their two sons. Hilde Wangel, a young woman, appears suddenly at his door to reinforce his fear of youth. She attempts to have Solness overcome his vertigo and climb the tower of his new house. By Act III, against the protest of his physician and wife, Solness decides to climb. He does so, while Hilde remains below in ecstasy, and the others in horror. Solness falls to his death.

The Master Builder is an excellent example of one of the later plays that has been interpreted on almost all levels, although none totally satisfactory. The initial reviews of the play indicate that it was misunderstood. An annonymous review in The Spectator called it "...quite the worst play that Ibsen has yet produced...",[5] and an equally annonymous review in Athenaeum claimed that the characters "...are, or should be, one and all, inmates of a lunatic asylum."[6]

The play has also been seen as a psychological study,[7] an exercise in Freudian sexual psychology, [8] the product of

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[5]Anon., "Ibsen's Last Play," LXX (Mar. 4, 1893), p. 286.

[6]Anon., "The Week," I (Feb. 25, 1893), p. 258.

[7]Harris Kaasa, "Ibsen and the Theologians," Scandinavian Studies, XLIII (1971), p. 368.

[8]Viva Schatia, "The Master Builder: A Case of Involutional Psychosis," International Journal of Psychoanalysis, XXXIII (Pt. 2), pp. 317-318.

a senile mind,[9] and, as Holtan views it, an expression of an archetypal pattern.[10] Solness, in this analysis, is an expression of the cyclical year king/god, and a victim of a ritual sacrifice. Ragnar, Solness' young apprentice, is the new king, the symbol of youth, and the old king, Solness, must die to make way for the new, all in a seasonally influenced pattern of events.

The Master Builder is much more than the reinteration of an archetypal pattern. Certainly this approach is valid. Of course there are sexual overtones, and psychological trauma in the play. But it exists on a level other than psychological, sociological, or anthropological, just as it is much more than an autobiographical account of Ibsen's relationship with Emilie Bardach, Hildur Anderson, or Helene Raff.[11]

While the plot is insubstantial, and while the characters are ambiguous and/or unbelievable, and while there is little to grasp amid the symbolism and subtext, there is one known fact. Solness does die in his fall from the tower. The play leads to, and is consumated in his death. Most of the difficulties with the play lie in interpreting this fact. Why, how, and when Solness dies are crucial issues. But most important; what does Solness' death mean? How is this destruction of the main character to be perceived? In order to understand the play

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[9]Anon., "Ibsen's Last Play," Spectator, LXX (Mar. 4, 1893), p. 286.

[10]Holtan, p. 106.

[11]Halvdan Koht, Life of Ibsen, (Trans. Einar Haugen & A.E. Santaniello), (New York, 1971), p. 431.

it is necessary to decipher Solness' death. Is Solness' death accidental, retribution by the gods, suicide, or simpley inevitable? This is what determines his worth as a character, and Ibsen's vision as a playwright.

DEATH

Any investigation of The Master Builder, mythological or not, must concern itself with the meaning of Solness' death, in order to determine how one is to perceive the world of the play. Death is a preoccupation of much of Ibsen's work, and it is necessary to isolate death in this particular work.

Roughly half of Ibsen's plays (sixteen of twenty-six) end with one or more deaths, or with impending or past death as a focal point. In Ibsen's last sixteen plays (Brand to When We Dead Awaken) eight plays end with one or more characters' deaths; Brand - Brand, Peer Gynt - Peer, Emperor and Gallalean - Julian, The Wild Duck - Hedvig, Rosmersholm - Rosmer and Rebecca, Hedda Gabler - Hedda, The Master Builder - Solness, John Gabriel Borkman - Borkman. Three of these last plays are considered political; League of Youth, Pillars of Society, An Enemy of the People.

Of the others, Ghosts leaves Oswald mad and dying, The Lady From the Sea ends with the Sailor's ghost being laid to rest, Little Eyolf centers around Eyolf's death near the end of the play, and When We Dead Awaken sends Rubeck and Irene, one would assume, to die on the mountaintop. Death also occurs

in at least four of the ten early plays; Cataline, Lady Inger of Ostrat, The Viking in Helgeland, and The Pretenders.

Recurrent mythological overtones in The Master Builder may point the way to understanding the quality of Solness' death. The frontpiece of this thesis provides a quotation from Turville-Petre which is most useful in capsulizing the importance of fate and the manner of death to the Viking. Since Hilde and Solness discuss the sagas and the 'robust conscience' of the Viking Age in Act II,[12] it should be useful to keep this manner of life and death in mind.

The Viking way of life demanded unflagging adhearence to the all-encompassing reign of death. Fate decided when and under what circumstances a man died. But it was most important to the individual to determine how he faced his own death. By facing it bravely, with sword in hand, a man might overcome death and gain immortality. He would live forever in the minds of men, and gain a seat in Valhalla.

The mythological elements within The Master Builder are especially obvious at the end of the play, and must be investigated before the quality of death can be determined. Since the play has not yet been totally explicated, it might prove valuable to examine the play in terms of Norse mythology. The roots of the characters of Hilde and Solness are deeply imbedded in the Scandinavian culture. The play is permeated with the use of

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[12]Eva Le Gallienne, Trans. The Master Builder, by Henrik Ibsen, in Six Plays by Ibsen, (New York, 1957), p. 481.

mythological symbols. Certain situations in the play (Hilde's entrance), aspects of language (the use of the word 'troll'), names (Hilde, Ragnar), and the connotative meaning of certain objects (mistletoe, the tower), can all be traced directly to Norse mythology. Through an investigation of The Master Builder founded upon Norse mythology, one may discover a framework in which to view the characters. This may lead to a better understanding of Solness' death, which, in turn, should shed light upon the play as a whole.

The purpose of this thesis, is to investigate The Master Builder within a Norse mythological context. Specific elements of Norse mythology will be discussed as relating to specifics in plot and character in the play. The mythological analysis culminates in an investigation of the end of the play. This should indicate how one is to view Solness' death, and thus how one should view the universe of the play.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE MYTHOLOGICAL APPROACH

IBSEN AS NORWEGIAN

Although he spent much of his life in self-imposed exile, Henrik Ibsen retained his Norwegian inheritance. He refused to become a citizen of Italy, Germany, Denmark, or any of the other countries in which he took up temporary residence. Throughout his life he continued to love Norway, even though he was disgusted with Norwegian politics, and was often disillusioned with the Norwegian people. Norway was, perhaps, the greatest influence in his life; the touchstone, and the love/hate object which gave him and his work impetus.

BIOGRAPHY

While critics often ignore the Norwegian roots of Ibsen's work in favor of a more universal concern, biographers generally tend to stress his nationality. In the first comprehensive biography of Ibsen, Halvdan Koht devotes his first chapter establishing the fact that Ibsen was Norwegian and not Danish.[13]

In his definitive biography, Michael Meyer agrees with Koht in one sense; he stresses the significance of Norway's impact on the dramaturgy of Ibsen.[14] Meyer enumerates specific nationalistic and patriotic aspects of Ibsen's life and character,

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[13]Koht, p. 33.

[14]Michael Meyer, Ibsen: A Biography, (New York, 1971).

but differs from Koht in that he is more concerned with the factors involved in Ibsen's development as a man and a dramatist. Both stress Norway as the primary influence upon Ibsen's growth.

Other biographers also emphasize Ibsen's Norwegian background. Georg Brandes,[15] A.E. Zucker,[16] Paul Botten Hansen,[17] and Henrik Jaeger[18], present, as a whole, a view of Ibsen as a distinctly Norwegian artist concerned with creating distinctly Norwegian drama.

CRITICISM

Sverre Arestad's criticism of Peer Gynt,[19] Carl Behrens' "Ibsen and Denmark",[20] and M.C. Bradbrook's Ibsen: The Norwegian, "A Revaluation",[21] are a few examples of critical attempts to examine Norway's impact on the art of Ibsen, and the general conclusions of these critics indicate that Ibsen's drama was profoundly influenced by the country of his birth.

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[15]Georg Brandes, Henrik Ibsen, (Copenhagen, 1898).

[16]A.E. Zucker, Ibsen: The Master Builder, (New York,1929).

[17]Paul Botten Hansen, "Henrik Ibsen," Illustreret Nyhedsblad, (Christiania), July 19, 1863.

[18]H. Jaeger, Henrik Ibsen: A Critical Biography, (Chicago, 1901).

[19]Sverre Arestad, "Ibsen's Portrayal of the Artist," Edda, LX (1960), pp. 86-100.

[20]Behrens, American Scandinavian Review, XVI, pp.229-31.

[21]Bradbrook, (London, 1966).

In 1910 Koht published an article entitled "Ibsen as a Norwegian",[22] in which he stresses that; "Norway saw him born. Norwegian society and history molded his genius. As a Norwegian poet he claims to be interpreted and understood."[23] One cannot disregard what seems to be the overwhelming concensus that Ibsen was first and foremost a Norwegian artist.

IBSEN AS POET

This is an important factor, for there had been no Norwegian literature written in Norway since the Middle Ages. Most cultural and artistic aspects of Norwegian life were imported from Denmark. This left a vacuum of native literature.[24] Ibsen, in his youth, and his contemporary, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, were at the forefront of a movement by artists to forge a Norwegian identity. Their efforts included poetry, drama, politics, language reform, and a nationalistic purge of all Danish influence from Norwegian society.

Ibsen began as a poet, not as a dramatist. Most of the poetry from his early period was nationalistic, incorporating Norwegian subject matter with colloquial language. And while many of these poems are not great, almost all show the control of rhyme and structure which would later emerge in his drama.

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[22]Koht, 19th Century, LXVII (Feb., 1910), pp. 346-55.

[23]Ibid., p. 355.

[24]Harald Beyer, A History of Norwegian Literature, (Trans. Einar Haugen), (New York, 1956), p. 141.

Besides forging new words, he helped to introduce colloquial Norwegian into the written language, which was, of course, Danish. Besides being literary innovation, this poetry reflects Ibsen's patriotism and conscious concern for the traditions and folklore of the country.

IBSEN AND FOLKLORE

Aside from the Norwegian influence on his poetry, Ibsen embarked on a semi-scholarly study of Norwegian folklore. In 1862 he obtained from the Norwegian Ministry of Church and Education the first of a number of small grants to be used to study and collect Norwegian folklore.[25] He never finished the projected work, but his research would have expanded his knowledge of specific Norwegian mythology and legend.

IBSEN THE DRAMATIST

There might be conjectures about his contact with Norse mythology and legend by his biographers, but the sources for some of Ibsen's dramas are undeniably Norwegian. Although his first play, Catiline, was based upon the historical Roman figure, his next seven plays were all Scandinavian. The use of Norwegian history, the sagas, and Norse mythology is quite evident in such plays as The Warrior's Barrow, Lady Inger of Ostrat, and The Viking in Helgeland. Ibsen's twelfth play, Peer Gynt, is

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[25]Meyer, pp. 196-7.

often considered the definitive example of Norwegian drama, and Peer is considered to be the definitive personification of the Norwegian character.[26]

Ibsen cultivated the aura of myth and legend surrounding the Norwegian people and the land itself in his early nationalistic drama. Although this aura seems to be hidden during the period of his social drama, it remained to emerge in the later drama.[27] The early work is often ignored in favor of the socially applicable drama of his middle period. Thus the impact of folklore and mythology is cast aside. However, some influence still exists within the social drama, and may be directly traced to its use in the early plays. For one to understand the social drama it is of importance to view it in relation to both the symbolic later drama, and the early drama. One must heed Ibsen's own words, that if we are to understand his drama, we must first understand Norway.[28]

Based upon this general concensus of the importance of Norway and her history and mythology, let us attempt to use the Norwegian culture as a tool to investigate briefly two plays from the middle social period. This will, perhaps, indicate the feasibility of using this critical tool to explore Ibsen's drama in depth, especially the difficult later drama.

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[26]Beyer, pp. 183-84.

[27]Holtan, p. 106.

[28]"Anyone who wishes to understand me fully must know Norway." Frontpiece to Meyer, Ibsen: A Biography, (New York, 1971).

BRAND

Brand was Ibsen's first successful break from his early nationalistic/historical period. It was initially seen by critics as an attack upon the clergy and social mores, but eventually the focus of attention was turned to the character of Brand. Though Ibsen is concerned with both social and philosophical questions, the Norwegian spirit is present throughout the play. It can be seen not only in the setting among the mountains and fjords, but also in Ibsen's reliance upon historical or mythological figures to create some of the characters.

Ibsen uses mythology in Brand to clarify meaning, or to add another level of meaning to the irony of the play, for example, the troll woman, Gerd, who haunts the mountain heights is a character of Norse mythology. She was the beautiful daughter of a giant (some of their offspring could be quite comely) who was personified as a seed frozen in an icy field. Frey, a god of fertility and peace, fell in love with her, and in his personification as sunshine, warm rain, and fair winds, melted her cold heart, and won her as his wife.[29]

There are ironic parallels between the Gerd-Frey relationship and the Gerd-Brand relationship. Whereas the Gerd of mythology succumbed to the power of love through Frey's gentle

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[29]Ingrid and Edgar D'Aulaire, Norse Gods and Giants, (New York, 1967), p. 27.

rain and warm sunshine. Brand is buried under an avalanche of ice and snow, caused by Gerd. Through the love of Frey and Gerd, the earth is fertilized and the seed thaws from winter to bloom in spring. But in Brand, Gerd is the means whereby Brand is buried by the avalanche and frozen forever. Brand's failure has been a failure to love, and thus he has been unable to melt the snow and fertilize the earth as Frey had done. This parallel to Norse mythology does little, perhaps, to clarify the last cryptic line of the play, "God is love."[30], but it intensifies the ironies of the play. Whether Brand is damned or saved is immaterial, his sin has been a lack of true love, and this is heightened by a knowledge of the Norse character Gerd.

AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

An Enemy of the People has no obvious mythological references. If we look closely at it, it is clearly a statement on social and political conditions; man's herd instinct, and the rule of the majority. Critics have maintained that of all of Ibsen's drama, this play deals least with Norwegian character and problems. But even here Ibsen makes use of a mythological background to frame the play. The crucial issue, the contamination of the baths, has definite origins in Norse mythology.

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[30]Michael Meyer, (Trans.), Brand, by Henrik Ibsen, (New York, 1960), p. 157.

In Norse mythology, there are three specific pools of liquid which are referred to again and again.[31] The first is a pool of pure healing water at the base of Yggdrasil, the Tree of Life. Yggdrasil was tended by the three Norns, keepers of the fates of men and gods. Since its roots were constantly gnawed by the dragon of the underworld, the Norns poured the healing water over it every day to replenish its vitality, and restore order to the Norse universe.

The second pool of liquid was collected from the udder of a magic goat which lived in a tree above Valhalla. The goat produced an undiminished supply of mead which daily quenched the thirst of the warriors and gods of Asgard. They drank, feasted, and being intoxicated with the mead, went out to Asgard's battlefields to sever each others' heads and limbs, and generally to keep in shape for the final battle at the time of Ragnarok. After the battle, the limbs would be replaced, and the men returned to Valhalla for more mead. It was a daily ritual.

The third pool of liquid was that of the poet's mead. This mead was made from the spittle of the two factions of gods; the Aesir, and the Vanir, as a sign of peace. The spittle gave birth to Kvasir, the Spirit of Knowledge. The pool was once stolen and Kvasir drowned in his own essence. The Aesir then recovered the pool, and anyone who drank of this liquid attained knowledge and the gift of poetry.

In a sense, the baths in An Enemy of the People are viewed

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[31]George T. Flom, "The Drama of Norse Mythology," Scandinavian Studies, XV (1938-39), p. 148.

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differently by characters in the play. To Mayor Peter Stockmann they are akin to the first pool at the base of Yggdrasil. The waters possess magical healing powers which will cleanse, not so much the people who come to bathe or drink them, but the economy of the towen. With these baths, the town will be healed, made fresh, and given another chance to live. And with the town, of course, the Mayor will secure a position of lifelong health in the eyes of his people.

The townsfolk view the baths in terms similar to the warriors of Valhalla, and the second pool. For them, the baths mean power, wealth, and an intoxicating life of plenty. The healing power the baths hold for them is in the drunken glory of their new economy. Their frenzy can be seen at their meeting in which Dr. Stockmann is renounced. Ironicly it is a true drunkard, from another town, who supports Stockmann at the meeting.

Dr. Stockmann sees the baths in terms of the third pool. He, in a sense, is Kvasir, the Spirit of Knowledge, who rises from the pool. It is the baths which give birth to his character, and his knowledge of the foulness of the baths arises from the baths themselves. The original Kvasir's pool was formed by the two factions of gods who mingled their spittle (the English translation of Kvasir) as a pact of peace. One must feel the same dichotomy in <u>An Enemy of the People</u>. The liberals and the conservatives have also made a pact of peace. They have agreed not to reveal the truth of the contaminated baths. Stockmann is their scapegoat. Stockmann's

true strength of character, his existence as a character in the play, is a result of the scorn, ridicule, and the humiliation (the spittle) of the political factions of the town. Just as Kvasir was drowned in his own essence, Stockmann is defeated by the very baths which gave him a cause to fight. Eventually the knowledge that Stockmann has brought to light will prove true, and thus he, as a Kvasir-like figure, has become the incarnation of the Spirit of Knowledge and the poet's mead.

It cannot be determined at this point whether this comparison is viable as a true parallel with Norse mythology, or whether it is an archetypal pattern, or simply a coincidence. But the parallel must be admitted and viewed in the broader sense of Ibsen's use of mythology which is more obvious in the later plays.

ROSMERSHOLM

In Rosmersholm, for example, mythology must be taken into account to clarify the many references to the white horse. The horse is a symbol of impending death or misfortune, found in Norwegian folklore, often ridden by an elf, or sent by a troll.[32] Koht indicates that Ibsen may have heard of this legend while gathering folklore at Maldegaard.[33] But the horse

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[32]Turville-Petre, p. 63.

[33]Koht, p. 98.

can also be traced to Norse mythology where it was ridden by one specific figure: Odinn.[34]

Aside from being the wisest god, Odinn was also the god of war and storm. His horse, Sleipnir (Glider), bore Odinn through the sky with its eight legs. Odinn would ride Sleipnir to earth just before battle to decide the victor and the vanquished. As the battle was fought, Odinn rode through the sky seeking the best warriors, and as they were slain, the Valkyries (fierce warrior maidens who accompanied him) would sweep the slain warriors away to Valhalla.

The white horse alluded to in Rosmersholm is a direct descendent of Sleipnir, and is present not just to indicate impending death, but how this death is to be perceived. Though the symbol tends to be obscured by the more recent connotations in folklore, (i.e., its use by elves, trolls, or other minor figures), it remains initially a symbol of victorious death and the attainment of freedom via Odinn's steed. Thus Rosmer and Rebecca are, in a sense, dying in battle, and the white horse indicates the probability of their acceptance into the universe of the gods.

The use of Norse mythology as a critical tool to investigate The Master Builder may provide some information useful to the producer of the play, or the general reader. It should, at least, bring to light some of the lesser known details founded in Scandinavian culture which may aid the English/American reader in appreciating the play and comprehending some of the difficult symbolism inherent to it.

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[34]Turville-Petre, p. 65.

LIMITATIONS AND VALUES

There are several limitations to this study. First, the author does not read Norwegian, Danish, or Old Icelandic, and thus all materials must be dealt with in translation. For the rest, the author must trust to a growing group of English-Scandinavian scholars who have done considerable work in translation and studies in English, such as; Michael Meyer, Brian Downs, Sverre Arestad, Rolf Fjelde, Georg Flom, A.M. Sturtevant, Ensaf Thume, Jere Fleck, and Einar Haugen.[35]

This language limitation is offset by the fact that a number of American universities (Wisconsin, Minnesota, Washington and Pennsylvania, for example) have been at the forefront of Ibsen and Scandinavian studies for some years. A number of periodicals (Edda, Scandinavian Studies, Scandinavica, Norwegian-American Studies and Records) concerned specificly with Scandinavian studies in literature, art, and philosophy are also available.

Since William Archer's translations first brought Ibsen's plays to a wide English-speaking audience, Ena-Ellis Fermor, Michael Meyer, Emlyn Williams, Peter Watts, and Eva Le Gallienne, among others, have considerably bettered the translations of the plays. Translations of most of Ibsen's original biographies

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[35]These works are contained in the Bibliography.

are also available, as well as a number of newer biographies in English (Georg Brandes, Edmond Gosse, Halvdan Koht's first and revised editions, Michael Meyer, Hans Heiberg, Montrose Moses, and A.E. Zucker). Since Shaw's The Quintessence of Ibsenism: G.W. Knight, Michael Egan, R. Ellis Roberts, J.W. McFarlane, Brian Downs, and Charles Lyons have produced critical work in English which is not only applicable, but much more concerned with Ibsen's work than Shaw's essay ever pretended to be.

The second limitation is also a strength. The study is concerned with only one play. Although it may be construed as too small a framework from which to speak with any authority on Ibsen's world view, or dramatic theory, it must be made clear that the intention of this study is simply to explore The Master Builder in terms of Norse mythology. This study is not to preclude any other interpretation of the play, but rather to demonstrate that this one play might be better understood by such an analysis.

Therefore, the strength in the approach lies in its very limited nature. Hopefully, this study will demonstrate the influence of Norse mythology on The Master Builder, offer an explication of the play, and show the feasibility of applying Norse mythology to other Ibsen drama.

SOURCES

NORSE MYTHOLOGY

The majority of Norse mythological material in this study has been taken from the following works: The Viking Achievement by Foote and Wilson, Northern Mythology: Scandinavian Popular Traditions and Superstitions by Benjamin Thorpe, and E.O.G. Turville-Petre's Myth and Religons of the North. W.H. Auden and Paul Taylor's translation of The Elder Edda, as well as Ibsen's contemporary Peter Andreas Munch's Norse Mythology, have also been invaluable. Various other works in Norse History and archeology, general mythology and symbolism, and early Norse literature and criticism have been consulted. An extensive listing can be found in the Bibliography.

The works cited above present a rather extensive view of Norse culture, although they span three major periods of Norwegian development: the Tenth and Eleventh Century, the Nineteenth Century, and the Modern view. They include, not only a wide variety of styles and interests, but a fascinating cross-section of the development of the Modern Norwegian culture.

THE MASTER BUILDER

The choice of translation of The Master Builder was difficult, because the quality of translation has improved greatly in the

last twenty years. Since William Archer's translations at the turn of the century, there have been dozens of translations, many of which suffered the same 'scholarly' approach to the play as did Archer's. Three recent translations by Michael Meyer, Rolf Fjelde, and Eva Le Galliene are excellent in that they not only provide a readable English version, but are written by authors who work in the theatre. Their contributions as directors or performers are quite appreciated in bringing the script of The Master Builder to a three dimensional fullness missing in earlier translations.

Eva Le Galliene's translation of the play has been used for this study for four reasons. First, she has established an international reputation as a translator, interpreter, and performer of Ibsen's plays. Secondly, she alone of the three above mentioned translators is a performer of Ibsen's plays, and therefore brings to her work that immediate and personal touch of an actress. Thirdly, the author of this study has found that her translation is a personal choice, based upon her rendering of certain phrases and images within the play. And finally, this translation stands as a production piece, as well as an example of readable drama. Eva Le Galliene's closeness to Scandinavian culture and the theatre is an asset as well, and reassures the reader of her fidelity to Ibsen's intentions.

OUTLINE

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

A statement of the problem, with background of Ibsen's development as a dramatist, and a brief analysis of three plays in terms of Norse mythology. Justification, Limitations and Values, Sources. A Brief outline of organization of Thesis.

CHAPTER II. MYTHOLOGICAL ELEMENTS IN THE PLOT OF THE MASTER BUILDER

An analysis of some parallels of mythology to the plot of the play. A discussion of the practice of Seidr, related to the exercise of will by Hilde and Solness throughout the play. Emphasis upon actions leading to and culminating in Solness' ascent of the tower, and a look at the resonances in mythology of the tower.

CHAPTER III. MYTHOLOGICAL DETAIL IN THE FINAL SCENE OF THE MASTER BUILDER

A detailed analysis of some specific elements of mythology which occur in the final scene of the play.

CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSION

Summary of the study, especially the impact of mythology in determining the quality and meaning of Solness' death. Possibilities for further study in this area.

CHAPTER II.

MYTHOLOGICAL ELEMENTS IN THE PLOT OF THE MASTER BUILDER

INTRODUCTION

The complexity of The Master Builder is belied by its seemingly simple plot. Halvard Solness is a successful builder who has reached the crucial middle-aged years of his life. His marriage has fallen apart. His wife is a wasted corpse-like character who appears to have lost all touch with life. His relationships with his employees (and mankind in general) are strained. He is consumed with fear of the younger generation, puzzled by his ability to will thought into action, and frustrated by his work. A young woman, whom he met years before, arrives as his door to confront him with an old promise. She displaces Solness' secretary as the center of his attentions. She incites him to climb the tower of his just completed home. He climbs the tower, and falls to his death as his wife and neighbors watch in horror. The young girl, who also remains below, watches his fall in ecstasy.

The plot of The Master Builder will be discussed in two major parts: 1.) the use of Seidr (a mythological correspondence to thought control/exercise of will) between Hilde and Solness, which leads to his decision to climb the tower, and 2.) Norse mythological parallels to the plot and action of his actual climb.

THE EXERCISE OF WILL: THE USE OF SEIDR IN THE MASTER BUILDER

As God of Witchcraft, Odinn was known for certain magical abilities including Seidr. These abilities stem from his renown as God of the Hanged. Earlier in his career, Odinn hung himself from Yggdrasil (the World Tree) for nine days and nights. This action, considered the epitome of self-sacrifice, put him in communion with the dead, and granted him knowledge of Runes. It was not enough for Odinn to demand death of warriors who wished to join him. As an example, he went so far as to sacrifice himself, to himself. This action symbolized the sacrifice necessary and expected of men.

As Lord of the Gallows, Odinn could obtain occult wisdom from hanged men. On one occasion, celebrated in the Voluspa, Odinn rode to the gates of hell, and summoned a long dead Sybil from the grave. He learned from her the origins of the universe, and the fate he would meet at Ragnarok. The poem begins;

> The Sybil calls for silence;
> her audience is world wide, gods and men.
> Then she speaks to Odinn alone;
> does he wish her to rehearse ancient lore,
> the remotest she can remember.[36]

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[36]Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, The Viking Achievment (London, 1970), p. 345.

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This ability to summon knowledge from the past, and of the future seems to be repeated in The Master Builder. Just as Solness says to Dr. Herdal "...one of these days the younger generation will come knocking at my door -",[37] there is a knock at the door, and Hilde Wangel enters.

Solness has just finished delving into the core of his soul, (much as Odinn had ridden to the depths of his universe to reach the Sybil). He has confessed to Dr. Herdal his innermost conflict of will, his guilt over Aline, his deceit to Kaja, and his 'madness'. He summons the younger generation, his darkest fear, and Hilde Wangel appears at his door. She is the personification of Youth that Solness fears. But she is not the younger generation in the same sense that Ragnar and Kaja are. Hilde is a mysterious being, more akin to the long dead Sybil than to the sweet young girl that she appears to be. She also possesses magical powers, as Solness' encounter with her ten years before has proved. She can practice Seidr. She can will her thoughts into action. She is possessed by the troll in man. She too is a combination of numerous attributes associated with Norse mythology.[38]

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[37] Eva Le Galliene, trans. The Master Builder, by Henrik Ibsen, in Six Plays by Ibsen (New York, 1957), pp.447-48.

[38] Hilde resembles numerous mythological, folk, and Saga characters. Among these are the mythological Loki, blood brother of Odinn who was of an asexual or bisexual nature, able to change form, and continually tied to Odinn in a creative and destructive aspect. Loki is the cause of Ragnarok, but thus allows Odinn to prove his worth and die valiantly. Hilde

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This section of the play has often bothered critics, directors, and audiences,[39] and her appearance is a mingling of many aspects of the attendant spirits of Norse mythology - Skadi, Freyja, the Valkyrie, the Huldafolk. Her appearance is sudden, unexpected, but justified by Solness' invocation of the younger generation. She enters with mixed motives.

Also resembles Idunn and Skadi as strong, masculine godesses (of skiers and youth) who had numerous adventures with the gods, especially Odinn. In turn Hilde also resembles Freyja, Odinn's Queen, a godess of fertility, but also Odinn's counterpart as Godess of War. She incited men to battle, seduced them, with Odinn, and was Queen of the Valkyries, fierce warrior maidens, who flew to battle with Odinn to choose the valiant in death to live with the gods. Of the names of the Valkyries preserved in Saga and Edda, Hild is common throughout. Anderson (Norse Mythology, Chicago, 1891) supports modern concensus that the Valkyrie is in fact part of the Disir, a group of attendant godesses attatched individualy to a single man, with their purpose being to lead the man to greatness, via death in battle. Freyja is called Vanadis (Disir of the Vanir, and Queen of the Disir). The Vanir and Aesir being the two benevolent factions of Norse gods. Hilde's roots can be traced from the godesses, to the Valkyrie, to the Disir, to the Huldafolk (in folklore) who were beautiful, seductive women who dwelt in the forest and drew men away from the world to death. This seduction was accomplished by playing a stringed instrument, or by singing. Note the re-occurence of the base name Hilde, in the Valkyrie, and the Huldafolk, Hulla, or Huldra. Eventually the Valkyrie, Disir, Huldafolk, degenerated in the common tradition to the Aasgaarderia, a band of drunken revelers (whose sins were not great enough for Hel, but virtue not enough for Valhalla) led through the air by Hild, a descendant of all of the above. Discussions of these various elements of mythology, folklore, and Saga can be found in Turville-Petre, Thorpe, Flom, Anderson, Munch, Foote, Ellis, and Boyesen, all cited in the Bibliography.

39. Harris Kaasa, "Ibsen and the Theologians," Scandinavian Studies, XLIII (1971), p. 368.

She wants her kingdom. She wants revenge. She comes to attend Solness' needs. She comes to spur him on to valiant action. But foremost, she comes to speak to Solness of the past, and to predict and precipitate the future.

Herdal and Solness are alone onstage when Hilde arrives. shortly thereafter, Aline is called and informed of Hilde's presence. Herdal and Aline immediately recognize Hilde: Herdal from the mountains, Aline from the sanatorium. Solness requires prompting to remember her. When alone, Hilde asks him, as did the Sybil, Odinn, if Solness wants her to rehearse ancient lore; "Have you a bad memory?...Well, aren't you going to talk to me about what happened up there?"[40] Then, in one of the strangest scenes in the play, Hilde relates what happened that day in Lysanger. Solness will not admit that he knows her, or that he remembers.

In the same way that Solness is able to will thought into action, Hilde wills the events of the past (or of her immagination), into reality. Solness accepts his role in her past, and gives Hilde's memory reality. He justifies this reality by his own ability to will thought into action.

> Solness: ...You must have dreamt these things - ...Or perhaps - wait a minute! There's some mystery behind all this - I must have thought about it. I must have willed it, wished it, longed to do it, and then - Perhaps that would explain it. Oh, very well then - damn it! - then I did do it, I suppose![41]

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[40] Le Galliene, p. 452.

[41] Ibid., p. 455.

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This transference of thought into reality is an aspect of Seidr. Solness' relationship with Kaja and the instigation of the fire that destroyed Aline's home are occurences that Solness attributes to his ability to will thought into reality. Hilde's arrival, and her almost immediate confrontation of Solness with the past, can also be explained by Seidr.

Hilde not only speaks of the past to Solness, she discloses the future, just as the Sybil forwarned Odinn. Hilde's arrival in the play reveals the future even before she sets foot on the stage. In his line just prior to her entrance, Solness says that when the younger generation comes knocking at the door, "that will be the end of Master Builder Solness. (There is a knock at the door on the left.)"[42]

An important element of the practice of Seidr was the ability of the wizzard to leave the body. The disembodied spirit could fulfill either good or evil intentions. This included harassing, possessing, or entering other persons. This is important to note since it reinforces the idea of the will operating independantly of the body, as in Solness' and Hilde's case.

In a sense, Hilde and Solness have both fallen under each other's spell. Solness treats Hilde differently from anyone else in the play. Their bond is based upon their meeting ten years before, when Hilde first became attatched to him. One aspect of the bond that holds them together is their apparent

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[42]Le Galliene, p. 448.

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mutual knowledge of, and practice of Seidr-like abilities. Their thoughts can take flight and formulate action independantly of their bodies. Hilde's recounting of the past becomes real by Solness' acceptance of the fact. The same use of Seidr holds true for Solness. His desire that Kaja remain to work for him, did become a fact.

EXERCISE OF WILL THROUGHOUT THE PLAY

Hints of the mutual paractice of Seidr between Solness and Hilde form one of the strongest ties in the play. At times, Hilde and Solness can almost read each others' minds. Hilde, especially, is able to fortell the future, and by articulating it, her will gives it reality, just as her will gives her past reality. The predominance throughout the play of "thought transferance" has puzzled many critics.[43] But the knowledge of Seidr greatly enhances the implications of the use of will by Solness and Hilde. Examples in the play occur at crucial moments, and build to a climax in Act III.

In Act I, just as Hilde and Solness are left alone, Hilde is examining papers and books on the desk.

> Hilde: So you write in this great ledger?
> Solness: No. That's for the accountant.
> Hilde: A woman?
> Solness: Yes, of course.[44]

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[43]W.M. Payne, "Bygmeister Solness," DIAL XIV (Feb. 1, 1893), pp. 68-71.

[44]Le Galliene, p. 451.

Hilde's guess is nothing extraordinary. The accountant must either be a man or a woman. Her guess, though, is correct, and perceptive. It comes early in the play, and indicates her powers of perception. It is also a clue to her ability to know without being told.

Her use of Seidr grows by exercising certain powers over Solness. The two prime examples that occur in Act II indicate her ability to see and instigate the future. The first concerns Ragnar's drawings for the couple who wish to build at Lovstrand. Solness refuses to evaluate them in Act I, and Ragnar enters in Act II to try to get Solness to write upon them. This action, Ragnar hopes, will allow his father to die in peace. But Solness will not even grant him this. "Solness: There's nothing I can do about it, Ragnar. ...don't ask me to do things that are beyond my power."[45]

But after the rejected Ragnar leaves, Hilde makes Solness write upon the drawings. It may not be in Solness' power to write upon them, but it is within Hilde's. The articulation of fate becomes reality.

> Hilde: What about these drawings, Master Builder?
> Solness: Put those things away! I've seen enough of them.
> Hilde: But you're going to write on them for him, you know.[46]

Hilde persuades Solness to write on the drawings, although Kaja, Ragnar, Brovik, and Herdal have all tried. The power lies not with them, nor with Solness, but with Hilde. With

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[45]Le Galliene, p. 477.

[46]Ibid., p. 483.

this action, Hilde eliminates, for all intensive purposes, the major sub-plot. Although too late for Brovik's appreciation, Solness does write upon the drawings. The plot then focuses on Hilde's second exercise of power. This she articulates as she prods the Master Builder to sign the drawings.

> Hilde: Do you want to rob me of what means more to me than life!
> Solness: What is that!
> Hilde: The need to see you great. To see you with a wreath in your hand - high, high up, upon a church tower.[47]

This desire is repeated in Act II. Here Hilde specificly applies her desire to Solness at the end of the Act.

> Solness: This evening we'll hang up the wreath - at the very top of the tower. What do you say to that, Miss Wangel?
> Hilde: It'll be wonderful to see you up there again - high up!
> Solness: Me![48]

Solness decides to climb the tower. This decision is a turning point for him. Previously he had exercised his powers of will in the past; the fire, his possession of Kaja. With Hilde's arrival, he begins to work in the present. He begins to use Seidr consciously. He will hang the wreath "over the new house - that will never be a home for me."[49]

In Act II Solness exercises his will with greater freedom, because he has accepted his fate; to climb the tower. He enters

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[47]Le Galliene, p. 484.

[48]Ibid., p. 487.

[49]Ibid., p. 488.

from the garden just as Aline exits. Aline and Hilde have just opened the Act with a lengthy discussion of the past, especially of the Solness children.

> Solness: (After a short pause.) Did you have a long talk with her? (Hilde doesn't answer but stands motionless.) Did you have a long talk I asked. (Hilde makes no reply.) What did she talk about, Hilde? (Hilde stands silent.) Poor Aline! I suppose it was about the little boys. (Hilde shudders and nods rapidly several times.) She'll never get over it. Never in this world. (He goes toward her.) Now, you're just standing there again like a statue; just as you did last night.
> Hilde: (Turns and looks at him with great serious eyes.) I must go away.
> .....
> Solness: No. I won't let you![50]

Solness knows what has been discussed, and is confident in the exercise of his power. Hilde, however, begins to have doubts. These doubts continue to grow. Later in Act III, when Ragnar returns, he tells Hilde that Solness "wanted to keep her (Kaja) with him."[51] Ragnar insinuates that Solness still intends to retain Kaja. He cites Kaja's possession by Solness' will;

> She said - that he had taken possession of her whole being - her whole being; she said. That all her thoughts were for him alone. She said she could never leave him. That she must stay here where he is -[52]

This reminder of Solness' past experience of will infuriates Hilde, and makes her quite jealous. She maintains

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[50]Le Galliene, p. 494.

[51]Ibid., p. 499.

[52]Ibid., p. 500.

that Solness has broken with Kaja permanently, and explains that Kaja was retained to keep Ragnar. She doesn't rely upon Solness' word for this, but upon her own will.

> Ragnar: Did he tell you that himself?
> Hilde: No, but it's true! It must be true! (Wildly.) I will - I will have it so![53]

Her frantic assertion of will continues as Ragnar further demeans Solness. He belittles Solness for his inability to "climb up a miserable bit of scaffolding...We'll neither of us ever see that!" Hilde replies; "(with passionate vehemence) I will see it! I will and I must see it!"[54]

At this point Hilde is frantic in her attempt to will her desire into action. Her worry is un-necessary, though, because Solness has already made the decision to climb the tower. In terms of dramatic construction, and character balance, though, her jealousy is very necessary. If Hilde and Solness operate on a level different from the others in the play, equilibrium must be maintained. Hilde has been in control up to this point. She tells Solness of the past, gets him to sign the drawings, and goads him to climb the tower. A reversal occured when Solness made the decision to climb. Now he has the upper hand. The jealousy that bothers Hilde is an indication of imbalance in their relationship.

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[53]Le Galliene, p. 500.

[54]Ibid., p. 501.

Hile is concerned with two problems that Ragnar has raised; 1.) Solness is afraid to climb the tower, and 2.) Solness wants to keep Kaja on. The first problem is solved when Solness returns a few moments after Ragnar raises the question. Hilde asks about his fear;

> Hilde: Then are you afraid of it?
> Solness: Yes I am.
> Hilde: Afraid of falling down and killing yourself?
> Solness: No - not that.
> Hilde: Of what then?
> Solness: I'm afraid of retribution, Hilde.[55]

The ensuing discusion assures Hilde that her will on this subject is to become real. Solness will climb. Her fear and jealousy of Kaja remain. But Solness tells her that he will climb to the castles-in-the-air with her alone.

> Hilde: Will there be no others?
> Solness: What others?
> Hilde: (With surpressed resentment.)
> That - Kaja - at the desk, for instance. Poor thing - don't you want to take her with you too?... Is it so, or is it not?
> Solness: I won't answer that question! You must believe in me wholly and completely!
> Hilde: For ten years I have believed in you so utterly - so utterly!
> Solness: You must go on believing in me!
> Hilde: Then let me see you again free and high up![56]

Once again Hilde and Solness attain equal footing. Both Hilde and Solness have a need, and the need encompasses each other. Hilde needs to have Solness to herself. As proof of this she must see him on the tower. Solness needs Hilde to

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[55]Le Galliene, p. 503.

[56]Ibid., p. 506.

trust him, and to gain her trust he will climb. In both their cases the need is primarily concerned with the freedom to exercise their individual wills, exercise their power over each other, and thus maintain a balance and a unity of need and dependance; of will and purpose. Solness will climb. Hilde will trust. Both will realize their needs and desires.

Just before Solness exits to climb the tower, the final reference to exercise of the will and mutual practice of Seidr-like control is made.

> Solness: Hilde - how have you become what you are?
> Hilde: How have you made me what I am?[57]

Two lines later the Master Builder exits to face his death. This last exchange is the final establishment of the relationship between the two characters. Hilde has been attendant upon Solness. By the powers that both exercise over each other, each has become what they are. Hilde has been totally shaped by living for Solness. At the same time, though, it is Hilde who incites Solness to greatness, thus finally giving his life meaning, and his existence reality.

What had begun as mutual practice of Seidr with Hilde's arrival, culminates in this scene. Hilde has exposed the past, and told the future. What began as a mystical and ambiguous relationship with her arrival, has now come to fruition as freedom of exercise of the will, and total possession of each other. The relationship between Solness and Hilde is indivisible

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[57]Le Galliene, p. 506.

as Solness leaves to climb the tower. It is the unifying force in their lives. Solness finds in Hilde the courage and commitment that he never found with Aline, or any other person. Solness, and Hilde too, in a sense, establish the ideal of a total love or ideal marriage, in their unity through the indissoluble ties of will and Seidr.

THE TOWER

SOLNESS' ASCENT

The development of Solness' and Hilde's exercise of will throughout the play is certainly not the most obvious use of mythology to reinforce the plot. It is ambiguous unless viewed within the context of the numerous mythological references within the play. The practice of Seidr culminates in Solness' ascent of the tower, which is the all encompassing act of The Master Builder. It is accomplished through the exercise of both Solness' and Hilde's wills. Concrete parallels in persons, places, and objects need now be detailed to compliment the exercise of will. This discussion will be concerned primarily with Saga, mythology, folklore, and archeological information necessary to clarify the ascent of the tower.

In Foote's description of the cult practice of Seidr, there are similarities to Solness' presence on the tower.

> It (Seidr) was performed by a wizzard aided by a group of other persons. The wizzard mounted a platform, where he was presumably free from undesireable influences, and there fell into a trance, helped in this by the chanting of the group. In his trance his spirit was freed, and if the purpose was evil, it could beset and harm a human mind or body; if the purpose was divinatory, the freed spirit seems to have been thought to learn from other spirits what the future held. The spirit

> might meet many difficulties before it regained its body, and the wizzard, usually exhausted, might be helped out of his trance by a special song.[58]

The raised platform, the chanting of the people below, the encounter with other spirits, the trance, and the use of the song are elements that occur at the end of The Master Builder. The raised platform can be related to the tower; the wizzard to Solness; the chanting to Hilde's cries; the encounter with spirits to Solness' grappling with God; the trance to Hilde's trance-like state; the song to the song that Hilde hears, and the harps in the air. The parallel to actual cult practice is obvious. But let us investigate the mythology and literature of the Norse to expand this correspondence.

THE TOWER AND THE TREE OF LIFE: THE MYTHOLOGICAL YGGDRASIL

One of the most obvious correspondences in Norse mythology is Yggdrasil, the World Tree. Yggdrasil was placed at the center of the Norse universe. Its branches held the worlds of the gods (Asgard and Vanaheim), and the world of the Elves (Alfheim). Its base was planted in the world of man (Midgard), and its roots grew to the depths of the universe (Hel and Niflheim). The tree was the symbol of health and stability of the universe. At its foot was the Well of Fate, tended by the Norns (Fates). As long as Yggdrasil stood, the

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[58]Foote, p. 404.

the Norse universe would remain intact. At Yggdrasil's roots lay Nidhogg, a dragon who gnawed at the tree. The tree suffered this and other abuse. But the balance of the universe was kept stable by the magic healing water the three Norns poured daily on the tree. The water healed the tree, and maintained the balance of nature. Thus Yggdrasil became the symbol of life and fate.[59]

As Jere Fleck states, Yggdrasil was not only the Tree of Life and Fate, but in a more general sense, symbolized the total unity of the Norse cosmos and the human situation. This is predicated upon its phallic symbolism as "the connecting axis between a masculine heaven and a feminine earth."[60]

In gerneral terms, the tower in The Master Builder resembles Yggdrasil. The description of the scene in Act III includes references to much foliage, and implies the great height of the tower.

> Tall, old trees in the garden spread their branches over the veranda and toward the house. Far to the right, in among the trees, a glimpse is caught of the lower part of the new villa, with scaffolding around so much as is seen of the tower.[61]

Solness' tower represents his attempt to unify heaven and earth. It is a home, but it has the tower of a church.

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[59]George T. Flom, "The Drama of Norse Mythology," Scandinavian Studies, XV (1938-39), p. 148.

[60]Jere Fleck, "Odinn's Self-Sacrifice - A New Interpretation: The Ritual Inversion, and the Ritual Landscape," Scandinavian Studies, XLIII (1971), pp. 400-401.

[61]Le Galliene, p. 489.

At the very root of this new home there is also an element of destruction. The sacrifices that Solness has made to build it are as destructive as the dragon at Yggdrasil's roots. Solness will soon attempt to build castles-in-the-air on a firm foundation. Raphael's analysis of the Master Builder's death (retribution for guilt over causing the fire), may be misleading, but it does point out the element of destruction that is inherent in the tower.

> ...if you are going to build towers - and it may be far better not to build any at all - then you certainly cannot go about building them in the way Solness does, without any foundation. Any successful self-realization, in fact, must start and end on the ground.[62]

Fleck's analysis of Yggdrasil as a phallic symbol also finds some correlation in The Master Builder. Solness climbs the tower. Hilde remains below. The seperate aspects of the male heaven (Solness) and the female earth (Hilde) are united by the tower. This is based upon the concept of Yggdrasil as the symbol of cosmic unity and fertility. The act of climbing and falling, is, perhaps, a sexual symbol of their attempt at total unity. Hilde points this out, just after Solness falls.

> Ragnar: ...So - after all - he couldn't do it.
> Hilde: (As though under a spell, with quiet triumph.) But he climbed to the very top. And I heard harps in the air...[63]

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[62]Robert Raphael, "From Hedda Gabler to When We Dead Awaken: The Quest for Self-Realization," Scandinavian Studies, XXXVI (1964), p. 40.

[63]Le Galliene, p. 510.

Solness' act of climbing is what is of importance. His fall is incidental, and,one could guess, expected. Solness has already said that he was not afraid of falling and killing himself, but only of retribution. Here too, Hilde's trance-like state is reminiscent of the trances involved in the ultimate practice of unity in Seidr.

A further discussion of Yggdrasil's importance as a symbol of fertility and creativity may clarify the final relationship established between Hilde and Solness.

THE TOWER AS A SYMBOL OF UNITY: ODINN ON YGGDRASIL

Odinn hung himself from Yggdrasil to obtain the title God of the Hanged.[64] While on the tree his side was pierced and his blood and semen were collected in Heimdallr's horn, Brumnr. By hanging on the tree, Odin; 1.) completed sacrifice to himself, 2.) was put in communion with the dead, and 3.) learned to read Runes, by discovering the secret of crossed twigs beneath him. According to Fleck, Odinn's self-sacrifice was accomplished by hanging by his feet, rather than from his neck.[65] This action was, in effect, a ritual inversion which put him in touch with the underworld, in which everything is reversed. The destructive aspects of Odinn's sacrifice are not as important as the creative potential he obtained.

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[64]Turville-Petre, p. 43.

[65]Fleck, p. 122.

The ritual inversion was, in fact, more than ritual death, but a symbol of rebirth. Man enters the world head first, and thus, upside down.[66]

Odinn's blood and seed were eventually mingled with Kvasir's essence to create Poet's Mead.[67] Odinn's sacrifice not only provided the knowledge (Runes), but was an essential ingridiant in making the mead of poetry. Both knowledge and poetry are creative aspects of the sacrifice.[68] The combination of sacrifce and creativity forms part of the Norse concept of destruction giving birth to creativity. It is as important to note aspects of this sacrifice as penance (for guilt), as it is to note that it is a search for knowledge, and as the securing of a kingdom. All three - guilt, knowledge, and kingdom - play a part in the motivation of Solness at the end of The Master Builder.

Odinn's sacrifice also echoes the destruction of the first giant, Yimir.[69] Odinn used the parts of the deceased giant (his father) to shape the various aspects of the world. As Fleck points out, the situation is not identical, but close enough to be articulated with ease. Both Yimir and Odinn are sacrificed to give birth to a new world of creativity.

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[66]Fleck, p. 125.

[67]Ibid., p. 127.

[68]Ibid., p. 130.

[69]Ibid., p. 129.

But it is not just Runes and poetry that Odinn gains. He creates and guarantees the life of the world by his action. Odinn's seed is stored in the horn Brumnr for the specific purpose of fertilization.

> Odinn's seed, preserved in the Brumnr, constitutes an assurance of the re-creation of the universe out of the waters after Ragnarok.[70]

The end result of Odinn's sacrifice is of importance in evaluating the action itself. Ultimately it is creativity and rebirth that the sacrifice heralds.

In The Master Builder, Solness' situation may be viewed as creative if the mythological parallel of Yggdrasil is admitted. The three motives for sacrifice (penance, knowledge, and the kingdom), and the result - a new world - find their way into the end of the play. Solness' death can be seen as retribution for guilt; as the result of the pursuit of ultimate knowledge; also as a sacrifice intended to secure Hilde's kingdom. Most important though, is the mythological emphasis on the constructive results of sacrifice. Along these lines, indications are that the sacrifice is not futile. Hilde has her kingdom. Solness faces death secure in Hilde's love and trust. Solness' death is the only possibility left him. The younger generation is left to build. But they will never duplicate the work of the Master Builder.

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[70]Fleck, p.402.

THE BUILDER IN ASGARD

A story similar to The Master Builder is the Gylfaginning, which relates the story of a builder who came to Asgard. He offered to build a wall to protect the gods from the giants, taking only one winter to complete it. If he was successful, his payment would be the sun and moon, and the godess Freyja. If he failed, he would be paid nothing. The gods, sure that he could not accomplish the feat by himself, agreed. Loki, however, arranged that the builder might use the horse that he had brought with him. With the aid of the incredibly strong horse, the builder rapidly completed the wall. He had almost finished by the end of the winter, and was sure to meet the deadline. The gods were infuriated over the bargain Loki had made, and with threats of death forced Loki to prevent the builder from meeting the deadline. Loki changed his shape to that of a mare, and seduced the builder's horse. When the builder discovered that he couldn't finish the wall, he flew into a rage. The gods recognized the builder as a rock-giant, and summoned Thor who destroyed the giant.[71]

The giant who comes to Asgard as a builder bears resemblence to Solness, especially as his character seems to contain aspects of the god Thor (or the human element, as opposed to Odinn's god-like element). Solness, beneath the

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[71]Turville-Petre, p. 135.

level of everyday life, feels the troll within himself, and at times is totally possessed by the troll in man.[72] His relationship to God also echoes the rock-giant's relationship to the Aesirgods. Solness gets along well with God while building churches, but once he rennounces the churches and God, he falls. Solness' last ascent up the tower is a repetition of his rennunciation at Lysanger. From his discussion with Hilde in Act III, one can assume that Solness reaches the top of the tower and says; "Listen to me Almighty Lord - you may judge me as you will. But from now on I shall build only the lovliest thing in all the world -"[73] When Solness flies into this 'rage' on the tower, he reveals his true self, just as the rock-giant's Jotunmodr (Giant rage) revealed his true identity, and doomed him to Thor's hammer.[74]

In applying the rock-giant story to The Master Builder, one must note the role played by Loki. Loki was responsible for the bargain with the giant. Thus Loki is responsible for the existing problem. He saves the day by seducing the giant's horse, and precipitating the giant's failure. Although Loki is responsible for the Aesirgod's problems, his bargain does have positive gain. In the end, the gods retain Freyja, the sun and moon, they have a new wall, Odinn has a new horse, and one more giant is dead.

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[72]Le Galliene, p. 481.

[73]Ibid., p. 506.

[74]Turville-Petre, p. 135.

Like Loki, Hilde is the one who strikes up the bargain with Solness to climb the tower. She is the one who leads Solness on, seducing him into climbing. She is responsible for his death. Hilde acts in a semi-destructive manner to Solness, as she incites him to his death. This action is very reminiscent of the character and actions of Loki in this story.

But Hilde is not a totally destructive character. Her resemblence to other mythological characters offsets the destructive aspects she obtains from Loki. Her role at the end of the play and indeed, throughout the play, is double-edged. Like Loki in this story, and like Thor's double-headed hammer, she provides destruction and creativity. Solness' death is compensated by the creative results of his ascent, culminating in his assertion of self.

Further clarification of Hilde's motives, and the positive ending of The Master Builder may be found by investigating two sagas with plot lines similar to the play. They are the Ynglinga Saga, and the Grimnismal.

YNGLINGA SAGA

A small section from the Ynglinga Saga translated by Turville-Petre sheds further light on Hilde's role, and the positive aspects of unity at the play's end.

> Adlis...was present at a sacrifice to the Disir, and as he rode his horse around the hall of the Disir, the horse stumbled and the King fell forward striking his head upon a stone. Hid skull was broken, and the King's brains were left upon the stone.[75]

As Turville-Petre discusses the Saga, he reveals that the King's death could have been an accident, as it appears, or it could have been a sacrifice. Whatever the case, the cause of death was the Disir Queen, generally equated with Freyja. She called the doomed King to her, and thus was responsible for his death, although it appeared accidental.[76]

Hilde resembles the Disir Queen Freyja on many points.[77] Here Solness resembles Adlis, as the king of his domain. Solness goes to the tower, as Adlis to the hall of the Disir. Solness' climb is an act intended to secure his place with Hilde. In effect, it is a sacrifice to Hilde. Solness apparantly falls accidentaly from the tower. He strikes his head on the rocks of the quarry, and as the voice of a workman announces; "His whole head is crushed in - he fell right into the stone quarry."[78]

The imagery of the fall, the brains being dashed out upon the rock, the presence of the attendant spirit (Disir)

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[75]Turville-Petre, p. 225.

[76]Ibid.

[77]Ibid., p. 177

[78]Le Galliene, p. 510.

in the Ynglinga Saga, seem to echo throughout the last scene in The Master Builder. Hilde calls Solness home to the kingdom of greatness, as does the Disir Queen in the Saga. Hilde goads Solness to greatness, as do the Valkyries and the Disir, only to reward him.

In the Ynglinga, motivation for Adlis' death is not supplied. According to Turville-Petre's comparison of the variations of the story, some conclusions can be reached. Evidently there is no doubt that the Disir caused the death as a fertility sacrifice.[79] It was not an act of retribution, but a potentially constructive act. Adlis was called to death. In return, he gains a place in the heavens, and fertility is granted his subjects.

Here too, Hilde's accomplishment in getting Solness to sign the drawings of Ragnar is echoed. With this action Hilde attempts to make Solness' domain fertile, by giving the younger generation the opportunity to grow and continue. Hilde calls Solness to greatness, but in return he must leave something for the younger gneration. To assume the aspect of greatness and immortality, he must pay the price of death, and resign his old kingdom, to possess the new.

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[79]Turville-Petre, p. 226.

GRIMNISMAL

The Grimnismal is concerned with the two sons of King Hrodung; Geirrod and Agnar. After the King's death, Geirrod assumed the crown. Once King, he cruelly mistreated Agnar, who suffered quietly, but called upon Odinn to aid him. Odinn became aware of the situation, and decided to intervene. He thus came to Geirrod's hall disguised as a wanderer. The sudden appearence of a stranger made Geirrod suspicious, and he subjected Odinn to cruelties, and inhospitable treatment. At length, Odinn revealed himself, and confronted Geirrod with his mistreatment of Agnar. Geirrod rose to assault Odinn, but tripped and fell from his throne to die upon his upturned sword. Odinn left the hall, and Agnar assumed the crown.[80]

Certain plot elements of this Saga resemble The Master Builder, such as the arrival of a stranger which precipitates the action of the play. Hilde arrives to find out how Solness lives and spur him on to greatness. In the Grimnismal, Odinn comes disguised in hopes that the stories of Geirrod are untrue, or, if true, that Geirrod will redeem himself. Hilde also arrives to have her faith in Solness restored.

Most important is the dual action that Hilde performs; 1.) she causes Solness' death, and 2.) perhaps allows Ragnar

[80]Foote, p. 339.

to assume Solness' kingdom. These two points parallel the major actions Odinn performs in the Grimnismal. In it, Geirrod's kingdom passes to his brother Agnar, and in The Master Builder, Solness' trade may pass on to Ragnar. The similarity in names may be coincidental, but certainly exists. As cited, Hilde gets Solness to write upon Ragnar's papers. Although the action is too late to satisfy Brovik, it does apparently allow Ragnar the commission at Lovstrand. This, then, may be his first step in assuming the trade of the builder. This opportunity is provided by Hilde. Of course, there is the final similarity between the two plots. Solness falls to his death from the tower; Geirrod falls from his throne upon his sword.

LIDSKJALF: ODINN'S TOWER

The structure of Solness' tower in The Master Builder is vague. Its shape and size are not known. However, there are certain tower-like structures in mythology which may be related to this tower.

Besides Yggdrasil, the other prominent tower structure in the world of the Aesirgods was Lidskjalf. This was an enormous tower built in the center of Asgard, from which Odinn could see into every corner of the universe. Lidskjalf was another of Odinn's physical aids in his attempt to gain knowledge and awareness of happenings within the Norse universe.

One of the most interesting factors about Lidskjalf is that Odinn was the only one allowed to climb it. It was his, as chief god. On occasion he allowed his wife Freyja to climb with him. Together they sat suspended above the whole Norse universe, and could see all that happened in every part of the nine Norse worlds. Only once was the tower ever climbed by anyone other than Odinn or Freyja.

On this occasion, the god Freyer climbed the tower, and spied Gerd, the beautiful daughter of a giant.[81] The Freyer/Gerd episode dealing with the tower has one major importance; the eventual unity of the two - Freyer, the masculine fertility god of the heavens (rain and sunshine of spring), and Gerd, the unsown, potential earth mother (the frozen winter field). There is an obvious parallel between Freyer and Gerd to Yggdrasil's use as a fertility symbol. Thus Lidskjalf is, as Yggdrasil, a symbol of unity and fertility. Yggdrasil, the axis of the universe between two poles; Lidskjalf, the unity of Odinn as chief god with his universe. And on one occasion it is a repetition of the theme of fertility and unity of heaven and earth.

There are two major resemblences in The Master Builder to the mythological Lidskjalf. The first is the mere existence of Lidskjalf defined as a tower. The second is the identity and importance of the gods known to have used Lidskjalf.

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[81] Ingrid and Edgar D'Aulaire, Norse Gods and Giants, (New York, 1967), p. 27.

The existence of Lidskjalf in Norse mythology is established in both Edda and Saga. The tower in The Master Builder is also a real object, although partially hidden offstage. Its existence as a physical object, like Lidskjalf, is predicated upon its use by Solness. The tower Solness has built on the church as Lysanger symbolized the seperation of Solness from God. The tower on the new house, though, symbolizes the real unity of Solness with God (fate, destiny), with himself, with Hilde, and ultimately, the unity of the new and old worlds.

When Solness climbed the tower at Lysanger, he spoke to God.

> Listen to me, Almighty one! From now
> on I will be a free master builder;
> free in my own sphere, just as you are
> in yours. I will never more build
> churches for you; only homes for human beings.[82]

This defiance of God exemplifies the lack of harmony within Solness, and his universe. Solness demands equality with God. It differs from what he will say to God as he climbs the new tower.

> Listen to me Almighty Lord -
> You may judge me as you will.
> But from now on I shall build
> only the lovliest thing in all the world.[83]

When Solness goes up the tower, he is in unity with God, in the sense that God may judge him as He will, but Solness will lead his own life. Rather than creating a chasm between

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[82]Le Galliene, p. 505.

[83]Ibid., p. 506.

himself and God by his defiance, Solness will seek mutual disregard. The unity occurs in the acceptance of his fate. God will judge as He will. Solness asserts his individuality in his acceptance of fate, while not fearing the results of his decision, i.e., death. This is the unity Solness will achieve with the universe. As Turville-Petre says of this Norse concept; no man knows when he will die, or how, but each can determine how he will face death.[84]

On the second point, only Solness climbs the tower in The Master Builder. It is as though the towers are Solness' domain, just as Odinn possessed Lidskjalf in mythology. In an exchange early in Act II, Hilde says;

> You're the only one who should be allowed to build. You should build everything yourself, Master Builder - you alone![85]

and Solness replies; "I myself am obsessed by that very thought."[86]

Solness' fear of youth, and his fear of giving way to others can be extended to his possessivness of his trade and tower. Not only does Solness want to be the only builder, but he makes sure that he is the only builder. He subjegates all others who threaten him, such as Ragnar and Brovik. It is only later in the play that he allows Ragnar the commission at

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[84]Turville-Petre, p. 274.

[85]Le Galliene, p. 470.

[86]Ibid.

Lovstrand. This possessivness may also be extended to the tower on the new house, where, like Odinn, Solness is the only one to climb to the top.

The only person allowed to climb the tower besides Solness, is Hilde. The discussion of castles-in-the-air emphasizes the fact that only Hilde and Solness will be allowed on the tower, seperated from all others.

> Hilde: I shall stand up there and look down at all the others - at those who are building churches. And homes for a mother and a father and a whole troop of children. And you shall come and look down at them, too.
> Solness: Will the Master Builder be allowed to come up to the princess?
> Hilde: If the Master Builder will come.
> Solness: Then I think he will come.
> Hilde: Yes. The Master Builder will come.[87]

And later at the end of the Act their ascent is described.

> Hilde: I'm afraid you'd grow dizzy before you got halfway up.
> Solness: Not if I were to climb hand in hand with you, Hilde.
> Hilde: With me alone? Will there be no others?
> Solness: What others?[88]

The tower belongs to Hilde and Solness, just as Lidskjalf was scaled only by Odinn and Freyja. In fact, though, Solness is the only person to scale the tower in the play. Hilde remains below to cheer him on. This situation is similar to the use of Lidskjalf by Freyer to find his future bride, Gerd.

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[87] Le Galliene, p. 497.

[88] Ibid., p. 505.

Hilde indicates her total possession of Solness after he falls, with her last line: "My - my Master Builder!"[89] This would indicate Solness' and Hilde's ultimate unity. In this case, Solness' fall could be interpreted as the falling of rain upon the earth. Solness' fall, the climactic moment of the play, could be interpreted as the unity of heaven and earth, or man and woman.

THE TROLL ON THE TOWER: THE ST. OLAF LEGENDS

Although the mythological roots of the plot of The Master Builder may appear somewhat coincidental, the roots in folklore evidence a great degree of similarity. The use of the troll and the similarities to the St. Olaf legends are prime examples.

As cited by Turville-Petre[90] and Bouquet,[91] some features of the Norse Odinn were transposed from folklore into the lives of major Christian saints. Odinn, for the Norse, became St. Olaf.[92] Odinn was such a major figure to the Norse that, when Christianity arrived, he could not be eradicated. In an effort to Christianize the people, the missionaries Christianized the Norse gods. Thus some of Odinn's traits were transfered

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[89]Le Galliene, p. 510.

[90]Turville-Petre, p. 136.

[91]A.C. Bouquet, Comparative Religion, (Baltimore, 1962), p. 91.

[92]Henning K. Sehmsdorf, "Two Legends About St. Olaf, The Master Builder: A Clue to the Dramatic Structure of Ibsen's Baumeister Solness," Edda LIV (1967), p. 263.

into the God-fearing, justified anger of St. Olaf, the warrior spirit of St. Michael, the generosity of St. Martin, and the wisdom and fertility of St. Nicholas.

By far the closest similarity to The Master Builder exists in the numerous accounts of St. Olaf's encounter with the troll builder. Two of the most popular stories are mentioned by Sehmsdorf in his brief comparison of St. Olaf to the character of Solness.[93] These stories run along the same lines as the giant builder in Asgard, where the troll poses as a workman, and offers to finish a church tower for a fixed price. The troll ascends the tower and begins work. At some point St. Olaf recognizes the builder as a troll. The only way to deal with the troll is to learn its name, which St. Olaf does. As the troll finishs the spire, Olaf calls the troll by name. The troll falls from the tower, either because of fear, anger, or the magic of being named. The troll is killed, and St. Olaf has another completed church.[94]

The parallel to the builder in Asgard is obvious. The giant has become a troll; and the wall - a church. The destruction of the troll is accomplished by calling its name, just as the destruction of the giant came about by recognizing his identity (by its giant-rage), and calling Thor to destroy it.

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[93]Sehmsdorf, p. 264.

[94]Ibid., p. 265.

The parallel to The Master Builder is fairly clear in terms of plot. From Koht's description of Ibsen's composition of the play, it also appears to be a conscious use of the legend.

> One day in April 1890, while he was walking with Helene Raff, she mentioned the story of the architect who had built the church of St. Michael in Munich. He had been so terrified by the thought that the great arch of the church might collapse that he had thrown himself off the tower. Ibsen listened carefully, and said: "That tale must have come from the North; at least we have one, or even more, similar stories." Helene replied that every famous cathedral in Germany has such a builder's legend. "Do you know why?" He asked her, and when she said no, he remained silent for a moment, then answered: "People are right to feel that no one can build so high and go unpunished."[95]

The similarities in The Master Builder cannot be overlooked. As far as the simple plot goes, there is strong resemblence. Solness admits that he is possessed by the troll within himself.[96] It is this troll within him that drives him, under Hilde's influence, to the top of the tower. Hilde is another who contains the troll as part of her nature.

> Hilde: ...Something within me urged me to come here - it was as though something beakoned to me and lured me on.
> Solness: That's it! That's it! Hilde! There's a troll in you just as there is in me; and it's the troll in us that summons the powers outside us; and then, whether we like it or not, we're forced to give in.[97]

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[95]Halvdan Koht, Life of Ibsen, (New York, 1971), p. 433.

[96]Le Galliene, p. 481.

[97]Ibid.

Hilde may be a personification of the external troll part of Solness' being which possesses and takes him to the top of the tower. She also resembles St. Olaf, who "(...shouts up to Solness) Hurrah for Master Builder Solness!";[98] and causes him to fall.

Although the play and the Olaf stories are similar, a detailed analysis of the end of The Master Builder in terms of the St. Olaf legends is extremely confusing. The similarities are clear; the conclusions, ambiguous. We can look at the ending of the play from two distinct vantage points. Solness' death represents triumph, or it represents failure. These two points can be extended to assume either the point of view of mythological or Christian interpretations of the play's end.

In the mythological context, Solness' death on the tower is (as is the giant builder story) a purification of the race. The troll within Solness represents the giant parentage of the gods, and is a totally destructive, animalistic force. In this case, Solness contains elements of both gods (Odinn and Thor), and giant (the troll nature which he himself admits). Thus, his battle on the tower - "There's someone he's striving with."[99] - is between his troll and his god-like natures. When Hilde names him as Master Builder Solness, the Thor nature in Solness appears to destroy the troll nature with the hammer

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[98]Le Galliene, p. 509.

[99]Ibid.

of the Master Builder. Thor's hammer (Mjollnir - the crusher) is responsible for the fact that Solness' "whole head is crushed in."[100] Hilde, in this case, is the figure of Loki who creates the bargain and seduces the giant. As a representative of the gods, on the other hand, she has the wall completed, and gives birth to something creative and useful (Odinn's steed, Sleipnir).

In this mythological aspect, the battle between Thor, and the troll within Solness, is symbolic of Ragnarok. At Ragnarok ("The Twighlight of the Gods")[101] the Norse universe is destroyed, the gods killed, and man emerges in the new Christian world. Note the repetition of Ragnar's name in this important Norse concept. At Ragnarok, Thor destroys the giants, but dies himself. His death is unfortunate, fated, (as is Odinn's), but its purpose is valiant and totally constructive. A new world without trolls and giants emerges. In The Master Builder Solness' death may allow Ragnar to assume the role of builder.

As Sehmsdorf indicates, Solness is positive that the demonic (the troll) is taking hold of his being. "He can only be rid of the troll at the price of his own death."[102] This raises an important question as to exactly when Solness dies.

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[100]Le Galliene, p. 510.

[101]Flom, p. 157.

[102]Sehmsdorf, p. 257.

Perhaps he dies on the tower, either from heart attack, a cerebral hemorrhage, suffocation, being struck by lightning, or some other physical phenomonon. In this case his dead body plunges to the ground. Or, perhaps, Solness commits a suicide of sorts by diving from the tower. The usual interpretation of his death, of course, is that he is killed accidentaly when he strikes the ground.

In terms of the mythological approach discussed, it is possible that he does die at the climax of his power on the tower. In this case Solness is dead before he hits the ground. It is also possible that his death is suicidal. This latter suggestion is based upon Sehmsdorf's insight into Solness' possession by the troll part of his nature. Solness' god-like nature kills the troll on the tower. Or, this god nature consciously throws the body (the physical, the troll) from the tower. The idea that Solness dies when he strikes the ground as a result of an accidental fall is essentialy based upon the concept of his death as retribution. In this case, the whole end of the play is viewed from the Christian standpoint.

If the end of The Master Builder is viewed from this Christian standpoint, Solness is indeed "asserting his freedom from God...by repeating the words of Lucifer: Non Serviam - I will not serve."[103] In this case, the play becomes one

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[103]Svere Arestad, "Ibsen's Concept of Tragedy," PMLA (1959), pp. 295-6.

essentially concerned with God's revenge on Solness. It becomes imbued with Christian overtones of guilt and sin. Solness is in no way seen as an admirable character, but as a human being justly punished, and deserving only our pity. Solness, in fact, receives justice, (i.e., death and hell), for his rennunciation of God. The premise of this interpretation is that if one has a vocation to build churches, but abandons it, he will be punished. Moral: God's will is not be be denied.

The focus of the play, in this light, shifts from Solness, to God and the character of Ragnar. Ragnar becomes the misused, long-suffering Job, who will eventually be rewarded. Solness, as a representative of the Norse paganism (possessed by the troll), is destroyed by Christianity (St. Olaf-Ragnar). It should be stressed that Ragnar takes no active part in the destruction of Solness. Hilde and Solness are responsible for his death. Hilde calls his name, not Ragnar.

Ragnar, in fact, emerges as a rather weak character in the play. He is terrribly shaken by Solness' death, whereas Hilde is ecstatic about it. Ragnar emerges as a figure much as Brack in Hedda Gabler, who can only say "people don't do such things."[104] For Ragnar can only say, "so after all, he couldn't do it."[105] Ragnar may succeed Solness, but he does

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[104]Le Galliene, (Hedda Gabler), p. 428.

[105]Le Galliene, p. 510.

not battle for the privledge to do so. In the Christian interpretation, he is given the kingdom because of his patience. In the mythological sense, he outlives Solness.

In light of this analysis of the ending, it would appear that the distinction between the two approachs can be taken as either positive or negative. This applies, likewise, to the attitude taken of death. In the mythological case, Solness' death is valiant and glorious. He dies in battle with the trolls and gods within himself. The ending is therefore positive. In the Christian sense, Solness is just another sinner, who has pridefully overstepped his human limitations and is justly punished.

CONCLUSION

The plot of The Master Builder has been investigated in terms of mythological correspondences to the details of the play. There are parallels to a number of Norse Sagas and stories in the plot. In most cases, the elements of mythology add to the ironic implications of the play, especially the ending on the tower. As a whole, they seem to indicate a positive feeling at the end of the play. We shall conclude the discussion of plot by investigating the development of the concept of kingdom. This may tie together the growth of mythological elements throughout the play, and the general feeling of the drama.

Hilde arrives in the play to demand the kingdom that Solness promised ten years before. Exactly what this kingdom is, is relatively indeterminate;

> Hilde: Perhaps, not an ordinary, everyday sort of kingdom -
> Solness: But something else just as good?
> Hilde: Oh, at least as good! I thought to myself - if he can build the highest church tower in the world, he must surely be able to raise some sort of a kingdom as well.[106]

In Act I Hilde's concept of kingdom is still not clear. She approachs the whole question rather playfully.

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[106] Le Galliene, p. 457.

> Solness: ...Why have you come here?
> Hilde: I want my kingdom - the time is up!...(Gaily) Out with my kingdom, Master Builder. (Raps on the table with her fingers) My kingdom on the table.[107]

As Charles Lyons points out, the quality of the kingdom that she demands changes during the course of the play.[108] It changes from this playful, abstract demand, early in Act I, to a serious commitment at the end of the Act. By Act II, the kingdom is no longer a fantastical place, but is a tangible reality; power over Solness.

The growth of the power and the practice of Seidr in the play clarifies Hilde's kingdom. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, Hilde and Solness are striving for an equilibrium, and a final unity. The balance is off-set when Hilde makes the first demand for a kingdom. She weilds the power over Solness, and exercises her will to get him to admit the past. Once Solness admits the past, Hilde's kingdom changes: "I'll have nothing more to do with that stupid kingdom! I'm determined to have quite a different one."[109]

This new kingdom is one that will unify Solness and Hilde. The first step to achieve it is the mutual recognition of need and power. Hilde needs Solness. That is why she has come. But she needs to be secure in Solness' need, otherwise

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[107]Le Galliene, p. 458.

[108]Charles Lyons, "The Master Builder as Drama of the Self," Scandinavian Studies, XXXIX (1967), p. 331.

[109]Le Galliene, p. 459.

her presence is useless. Thus the final exchange in Act I:

> Solness: You are the one being I have needed most.
> Hilde: But then - oh, how wonderful the world is!
> Solness: How do you mean?
> Hilde: Why then - I have my kingdom.
> Solness: Hilde!
> Hilde: Almost - I was going to say.[110]

Here the need is established, and Hilde almost has her kingdom. But the kingdom has shifted its meaning, and now, more needs to be done to secure it.

As pointed out in the discussion of Seidr, the exercise of will is the one element that ties Solness and Hilde together, and sets them off from the others in the play. In Act II, the drawings that Ragnar brings in are of major importance because Hilde gets Solness to write upon them, - by her exercise of will. No one else can convince Solness to do it. But Hilde wills him to sign, and he does. Just before he writes upon the drawings, he says;

> Solness: What have you come for, Hilde?
> Hilde: Don't waste time talking! The poor old man might go and die in the meantime.
> Solness: Answer me, Hilde. What do you want of me?
> Hilde: I want my kingdom.[111]

Solness then writes upon the drawings. This action is part of Hilde's kingdom. She has Solness under her power, and

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[110] Le Galliene, p. 461.

[111] Ibid., pp. 485-6.

she is a step closer to the ultimate kingdom; the tower. She mentions, just before Solness writes, that seeing him on the tower again means more to her than life. The next step in the changing kingdom is Solness' decision to climb the tower.

Once Solness has made the decision to climb, the reality of the act is all that is left to be accomplished. As pointed out in the Seidr discussion, Hilde and Solness attempt to reach a balance at the end of the play. Solness will climb. Hilde will trust. This is a part of the final kingdom. The final exchange between Hilde and Solness indicates the proximity of the kingdom.

> Solness: Hilde - how have you become what you are?
> Hilde: How have you made me what I am?
> Solness: The princess shall have her castle.
> Hilde: Master Builder! My lovely, lovely castle! Our castle in the air.
> Solness: On a firm foundation.[112]

Solness then ascends the tower, and falls to his death.

One must recall the constructive mythological implications of the end of the play, to place the concept of kingdom in perspective. Hilde demands a kingdom where Solness can live as Odinn and Thor did. She demands Ragnarok; Solness' final battle for the kingdom on the tower. Hilde demands that Solness unleash the giants and trolls, and do battle with them on the tower. Only in this way, in this kingdom, can Solness, as the

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[112]Le Galliene, pp. 506-7.

Viking gods, totally realize himself. Odinn's fate, decreed by the Norns, was to battle Fenis, and to perish. That is the inevitable kingdom of the Norse gods. That is the kingdom of Solness and Hilde.

They differ from the others in the play, by their use of will, their concern with helpers, servers, and trolls. They differ in their desire to live like "the Vikings who sailed to foriegn lands, and plundered, and burned, and killed all the men - and captured the women..."[113] The kingdom which they hope to rule is also different. It is not the passive, patient kingdom of Ragnar. Nor is it the long-suffering kingdom of Aline. It is a kingdom of active battle and pre-destined death. Thus the ultimate attempt to achieve the kingdom comes in the final scene as Solness faces his Ragnarok on the tower. He faces his fate as a Viking. He dies a glorious death in battle, and attains, perhaps, self-realization and the kingdom of the gods.

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[113]Le Galliene, p. 482.

CHAPTER III.

MYTHOLOGICAL DETAIL SURROUNDING THE FINAL SCENE OF THE MASTER BUILDER

INTRODUCTION

Additional mythological details can be found at the end of The Master Builder. They are not generally obvious from other interpretations of the play, but by investigating them, one may reinforce the mythological interpretation of the play, and provide additional elements which may be useful in production. The details to be investigated are the wreath, the harps in the air, the banner (Shawl), the high seat, and the extensive use of the word 'troll' in the play.

MYTHOLOGICAL DETAIL

THE WREATH: MISTLETOE

According to Price it was a popular Scandinavian tradition to place a wreath on a newly completed building.[114] It was an act of superstition, a preventative, but basicly an act of good luck. In Wolf-Rottkay's discussion of Baldr, the importance of the mistletoe is mentioned. It was the harmless plant that caused Baldr's death, and in folklore it was sometimes viewed as good, but more often as evil, or ambiguous, in nature.[115]

The practice of placing mistletoe on a building not only charms the building, but acts as a symbolic lightning rod. It attracts, protects, does both, or does neither. While remaining ambiguous, the mistletoe, the wreath, and lightning are closely linked together.

The wreath that Solness hangs upon the tower is simply described as "a large green wreath, decked with flowers and ribbons."[116] The wreath in The Master Builder may be composed

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[114] T.R. Price, "Solness," Sewanee Review, II (May, 1894), p. 257.

[115] W.H. Wolf-Rottkay, "Baldr and the Mistletoe," Scandinavian Studies, XXX (1967), p. 340.

[116] Le Galliene, p. 498.

of mistletoe, if we accept Wolf-Rottkay's description of mistletoe as a commonly used wreath material. Mistletoe's importance as a ritual aspect of Christmas celebrations even today stems from its Norse ritual use. There is another fact that would reinforce the possibility of the wreath containing mistletoe - the relationship of lightning to the god Thor.

Thor's hammer was originally evidenced by a flash of lightning.[117] When Thor hurled the hammer at a giant, it left a bolt of lightning as it crossed the sky. This was followed by the rumble of thunder as the hammer struck and killed the giant. The mistletoe either prevents or attracts lightning. Thus it directly attracts or defends against Thor's hammer.

In the St. Olaf legends, the troll carried a wreath, a vane, or the finishing touches of the tower. If the wreath were carried, Thor could not be far away, and when named, Thor's hammer (like lightning) would destroy the troll. In The Master Builder the two natures of Solness do battle. When Solness is named by Hilde, the proximity of the wreath attracts the lightning of Thor's hammer. This coincides with the death of Solness' troll nature, and his fall from the tower.

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[117] Turville-Petre, p. 81.

HARPS IN THE AIR

The Harps that Hilde hears when Solness reaches the tower's top can be traced to mythology, saga, and folklore. In mythology, the figure of Hod, son of Odinn, bears some investigation. Turville-Petre cites Saxo's account of Hod's place in mythology.

> He was early distinguished for his skill at sports, and especially on the harp. By the power of music he could turn men's heads and minds, and with it, he quickened love in the heart of Nanna, the daughter of Gwar.[118]

Hod's prowess on the harp clarifies a number of aspects of The Master Builder.

The first time Hilde and Solness met at Lysanger, Solness placed a wreath on the church tower. The young Hilde became obsessed with Solness, when she heard "harps in the air."[119] She explains her thrill at seeing him atop the tower and hearing him speak from it. The next event that occured at Lysanger was when, she says, "You took me in your arms, and bent my head back and kissed me - many times."[120] Solness' speech,[121] and the sound of harps in the air, captured Hilde's soul and being. Solness has indeed turned Hilde's mind

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[118]Turville-Petre, p. 112.

[119]Le Galliene, p. 453.

[120]Ibid., p. 455.

[121]Ibid. p. 505.

with his music, just as Hod was able to do with the harp in his courtship of Nanna.

In a complex parallel of actions and characters, the situation in The Master Builder echoes that of the death of Baldr. Baldr was killed by Loki and Hod. Hod, being blind, did not realize what was happening (since Loki aimed the bow), but was still responsible for the action, and paid with his life. Solness' children (Baldr) are killed by Solness, Aline, and the effects of the fire. In this case, Solness is unwitting, yet responsible, as was Hod. Hilde in some mysterious way, resembles Loki, and is also to blame for their death. This is impossible, realisticly, but in terms of the previous discussion of Seidr, and the Disir, it is feasible. Solness wills his thought into action. This is what causes the fire, he believes. He also wills Hilde to appear at the door. If she is an attendant spirit, she obeys his will, which in fact, she often does. But it is her resemblence to Loki that causes her part in the fire. Loki most often assumed the shape of a flame of fire, from among his many forms.

In this case, Hilde is the flame of fire, willed into being by Solness, which destroys the home. The children die. Solness is relatively innocent, but still responsible. And here Hilde returns to extract the ultimate price from Solness.

The harp also exists in Saga. Its most widely known use is in the Atlakvida, the Saga concerning Gunnar. Of this Saga

there are two important points; 1.) Gunnar was killed by being thrown into a tower filled with snakes,[122] and 2.) as he died, he played the harp.[123] In all the versions of the Saga, Gunnar plays the harp as he dies. There are, however, some distinctions in his motivations according to some versions. In the Oddrunargratr, Gunnar plays the harp to summon help. In the Atlakvida, he plays as an act of defiance.

In the brief discussion of Solness' affrontry with God on the tower, it has been established that the unity Solness seeks with God is a unity of co-existence. Solness acknowledges that God will judge him as He will. Nonetheless, Solness will act as he sees fit, and will build castles-in-the-air, if he can. The harps that Hilde hears are Solness' assertion of his individuality;his defiance. Solness, like Gunnar, faces death with dignity and self-reliance. He overcomes death by remaining calm in its face, and accepting it as the true gauge of his character. A man can become immortal by dying well.

The fact that Gunnar is thrown into a tower filled with snakes should be noted. Solness' tower is built upon the foundations of equal unpleasantness. The serpents in Gunnar's tower are not only the means of his death, but the symbol

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[122]Alexander Krappe, "The Snake Tower," Scandinavian Studies, XVI (1940-41), p. 22.

[123]Foote, pp. 350-53.

of the rotteness that exists in the tower. As previously discussed, Solness' tower is rotten at its base, and not planted on a firm foundation.

The impact of the harp exists in folklore as well. The Huldafolk used a song, or a stringed instrument to seduce their victims. The harps in the air indicate; 1.) the unintentional nature of Solness' death (the mythological account of Hod), 2.) the defiance of the powers of fate (the Saga of Gunnar), and, 3.) the use of the harps as a seductive tool (the Huldafolk of folklore). Applied to The Master Builder these parallels indicate that Solness is in a sense seduced to the top of the tower by Hilde, where his defiance brings about his unintentional death. The quality of his death, though, is not negative, but a positive affirmation of his individual will.

THE BANNER: THE RAVEN

On the two occasions in The Master Builder when harps in the air are heard, there is another action that occurs simultaneously; the waving of a banner, shawl, or flag. The banner and the harp are actually one image because of their simultaneous occurence in the play. The banner also has mythological roots which may explicate its use in The Master Builder.

Besides his numerous other titles, Odinn was known as the Raven God. He kept two ravens; Hugin (Thought), and Munin (Memory),[124] which he sent into the world to bring back information. The similarity between; 1.) Odinn's 'thought' taking shape as a raven, 2.) the practice of Seidr, and, 3.) Solness' ability to transfer throught into action, should be noted. The other raven, Memory, finds parallel in the character of Hilde. She recounts the past to Solness in Act I. She functions in the plot, not only as did the Sybil, but as the raven who provides Solness (Odinn) with memory of the past.

Hilde's parallel to the raven is supported by a number of points. First, the relationship of Odinn to the raven and the eagle was tremendously important to the Norse.[125] These birds were constantly with him, and attending upon him. Hilde is described in Act II as a "wild bird of the woods", or a "bird of prey".[126] Again in Act II, Hilde is called a wild bird who "must be free to hunt in the open air -", since "Birds of prey were meant for hunting."[127] Hilde's description

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[124]R.B. Anderson, Norse Mythology, (Chicago, 1891), p. 219.

[125]Turville-Petre, pp. 58-9.

[126]Le Galliene, p. 483.

[127]Ibid.

as a bird of prey is translated from the word 'Rovfugl', connoting the eagle and the raven.[128] Thus Hilde can be related to the raven, and thus to Odinn's ravens.

Warriors killed in battle were viewed as sacrifice to Odinn, but were also a gift to the scavanger raven. Thus the kinship between Odinn and the raven was cemented in the minds of men. Numerous examples exist of banners, embroidered with ravens, being carried into battle. If the raven appeared flying, the army would be victorious, but if it drooped, the outcome would be defeat.[129]

The banner (shawl, flag) is mentioned in three specific places in The Master Builder. In Act I, Solness recalls the waving of a flag (by Hilde) which made him dizzy atop the Lysanger tower.

> Hilde: ...we school girls were dressed all in white -
> Solness: Oh, yes! Those flags! I certainly remember them - ...one of those little devils dressed in white carried on so and kept screaming up at me - ...and then she kept brandishing her flag and waving it so wildly - the sight of it made me feel quite dizzy.
> Hilde: That particular little devil - that was I.[130]

At the close of Act I, the second mention of the banner is made. Solness and Hilde discuss the banner of youth that is marching against Solness. Solness decides that he and Hilde

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[128]Charles Lyons, "The Master Builder as Drama of the Self", Scandinavian Studies, XXXIX (1967), p. 337.

[129]Turville-Petre, pp. 58-9.

[130]Le Galliene, pp. 452-3.

shall carry the new banner of youth, and march youth matched against youth.[131]

The last mention occurs in Act III, when Solness is on the tower. He has climbed the tower, and Hilde says;

> I hear a song. A mighty song! (Shouts with wild joyful ecstasy) Look! Look! Now he's waving his hat! He's waving to us down here! Oh, wave - wave back to him - for now it is finished. (Snatches the white shawl from Dr. Herdal, waves it and shouts up to Solness) Hurrah for Master Builder Solness![132]

With this, Solness falls from the tower. When he is pronounced dead, Ragnar says that Solness couldn't do it after all, and Hilde replies;

> (As though under a spell, with a quiet triumph) But he climbed to the very top. And I heard harps in the air. (Waves the shawl and cries out with wild intensity) My - my Master Builder! (CURTAIN)[133]

It should be apparent from the previous discussion of harps, and the importance of the raven banner, that there is a victorious quality to Solness' death. Hilde herself speaks with "quiet triumph". Each time that Solness climbs the tower, Hilde waves the banner. As the banner is being waved vigorously back and forth, the image of the raven banner should come to mind. The raven banner waving in the air would indicate victory, because the raven would appear to be flying.

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[131]Le Galliene, p. 460.

[132]Ibid., p. 509.

[133]Ibid., p. 510.

Hilde is the raven who waves the banner in The Master Builder. And the action is indicative of victory; not just Hilde's, but Solness' as well. Solness does emerge victorious, as indicated by the second mention of the banner in the play. Solness indicates that he will march with Hilde under the new banner of youth. He is not coerced into it. He is not forced to climb. He chooses to do so. He must be considered an officer, or at least part of Hilde's army, in this case. Thus, Solness is victorious, by dying in battle. The harps in the air, and the flying raven both indicate his victory and acceptance into Valhalla.

THE HIGH SEAT: PILLAR

The correspondence of the spire on Solness' new home to Odinn's tower Lidskjalf has been mentioned in the previous chapter. Solness' tower, however, has further mythological and archeological background. The two main objects are 1.) the high seat and its pillars, and 2.) the stave churches of Norway.

The first area of investigation is the high seat and its pillars. According to Foote the high seat was an important part of the home, being the rightful seat of the owner. It was apparently a raised section of bench or seat elevated on a small platform. The high seat was flanked by the high seat pillars, which were objects of domestic veneration. The high

seat and its pillars were the most important feature of the Norse home. Whenever a move was made, the pillars were taken by the owner and installed in the new home. They were especially revered, as evidenced by the many Norsemen who settled in Iceland. The pillars were thrown overboard when the new land was sighted. Where they washed ashore, the new home was built.[134]

The high seat and pillars relate to the tower of Solness, as something not functional, not an integral part of the house, but revered for religious or personal reasons. Solness' tower seems to echo the spires of his old church building days, and is thus combined with the house to form a home and a church. The high seat pillars were originally of value as symbolic of Yggdrasil - supporting the universe. The resemblence of the tower to Yggdrasil has been established as linked to Odinn who hung there, and as the home of the Norns (Fates).

The second object of investigation is the example of stave churches still standing in Norway. All but two of the remaining churches in Scandinavia are in Norway, and none are found in Denmark or Sweden. These churches were erected to house the pagan gods, and were converted to Christian churches by the early missionaries. The churches are built of wood, supported by massive upright timbers. Very similar to oriental pagodas, their roofs rise roof on roof to an incredible

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[134]Foote, p. 160.

height at the peak. Illustrations can be found in National Geographic (Fantoff),[135] Turville-Petre (Borgund),[136] and Foote (Sogn).[137] About a dozen or so of these churches are left from the estimated nine-hundred built during middle ages.[138]

The stave church at Fantoff, as do many others, still retains many of the Viking figureheads (dragons, serpents) which originally adorned it. This particular church at Fantoff should be especially noted since it is but a few miles from Bergen, where Ibsen began his dramatic career in earnest. Here for six years, he was Instructor at the National Theatre. Since Ibsen received a number of grants to study the regional folklore at this time, once could safely assume that he was at least aware of the Fantoff stave church.

Certainly the existence of such a structure in the immediate neighborhood of Bergen could indicate that Ibsen might have had it partly in mind. At any rate, the tower of Solness' home can be compared to the stave churches for other reasons. Here the most important element is to note that both Solness' tower and the stave churches represent a certain inherent duality. The stave churches once held the pagan gods, but were later transformed into Christian churches. They have housed, or still do, the old and the new gods.

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[135]Edward J. Linehan, "Norway: Land of the Generous Sea," National Geographic, CXL (July, 1971), p. 33.

[136]Turville-Petre, illus. 6.

[137]Foote, p. 421.

[138]Ibid.

Solness' new home also combines elements of the two parts of his life; the home and the church. He has placed a spire from his church-building days on the home of his later building days. The combination helps to transcend both. At the dedication (Solness' death) both elements are left behind as Solness tries to create the firm foundation to build his new castles-in-the-air.

TROLL

Throughout The Master Builder, 'troll' is one of the words which is fairly frequent in use. The word conjures up vague images of misshapen creatures inhabiting the nether world. According to Norse mythology, at one point during the creation of the world, maggots crawling through the earth (the body of Yimir, Odinn's father), were changed into gnomes, who became synonomous with trolls. As a whole they dwelt underground, and were excellent craftsmen with metal, precious stones, and gems. The giants of mythology also became reduced in folklore to trolls, as they dwelt in rocky lands, and were horrible to see.

Wilbur discusses the etemology of the word 'troll', and reveals some pertinent aspects of the word. In general the word connotes magic or enchantment.[139] But Wilbur also cites traces from Danish and German. The Danish roots (the official language of Ibsen's Norway until language reform in the early

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[139]Terence Wilbur, "Troll, an Etemological Note," Scandinavian Studies, XXXIX (1967), p. 137.

to mid Nineteenth Century) mean "to roll, to roll around" based upon the folk experiences where trolls manifested themselves as fireballs during thunderstorms.[140] This obviously relates to Thor's function as the slayer of trolls and giants. His hammer was associated with this function, as were the lightning and thunder of the storm.[141]

From the German, the connotations of 'troll' include a development from one who enchants - to one who procures - to whore.[142] Thus the word comes to mean - "to cause to roll, to make cling, to confuse, or betray, or deceive,"[143] and, ultimately, to seduce.

The roots of the word indicate a certain sense in which the word should be viewed in The Master Builder. The troll is a part of both Solness and Hilde. The troll and the giant in mythology are regarded as manifestations of the physical nature of the universe, as opposed to the gods, who represent the intellectual and spiritual aspects. Thus Charles Lyons emphasizes this distinction in his discussion of the play. Solness feels that having his will answered is the work of the demonic (the troll), a "part of his nature; over which he has no rational control."[144]

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[140]Wilbur, p. 139

[141]Ibid.

[142]Ibid., p. 137.

[143]Ibid., p. 139.

[144]Charles Lyons, "The Master Builder as Drama of the Self," Scandinavian Studies, XXXIX (1967), p. 333.

The physical nature of the troll lends itself to the use of sexual or physical means of enticement. Solness flirts with Kaja and suggests to her a physical attraction in order to get her to remain. Hilde also seduces Solness to climb the tower, utilizing physical inducement of a sort. Solness accepts; climbs to secure a new kingdom where only they will live together. The aspects of this element of troll have been described in the previous chapter in terms of the exercise of Seidr.

One of the common beliefs surrounding trolls is, of course, one often related to the vampire. That is, the superstition, according to A.M. Sturtevant, that trolls bleed their victims. This applies to the use of troll especially in Peer Gynt and The Master Builder.[145] The troll within Solness sucks the life blood from him and leaves him a shell, until Hilde restores him to his glory on the tower. Hilde, too, is a vampire, since she sucks the physical life from Solness by pushing for his climb up the tower. However, his loss is only that of physical life, and is necessary for his triumph and hers.

Aline is the most obvious example of the results of Solness' vampirism. Solness has destroyed, sucked the life blood, from all around him as an artist, in order to create.

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[145]A.M. Sturtevant, "Some Phases of Ibsen's Symbolism," Scandinavian Studies, II (1914-15), p. 25.

(Ibsen tackles this specific problem in his last play, When We Dead Awaken.) Solness has not been the same since the fire destroyed Aline's home and the children died. This, perhaps, came about through the willed action of the troll within him. It has left him an accomplished builder of homes; it has left Aline a walking shell, and a constant reminder of the power of the troll. The concept of the walking corpse was widespread in Scandinavia during the Viking Age,[146] and reinforces one of her functions as a reminder of the past. She is the counterpart to what Solness is slowly becoming, as the troll sucks the life from him as well. His life is empty, and slowly becoming as meaningless as Aline's, until Hilde arrives, and the events of the play occur; a return to the robust conscience of the Viking, and the ultimate confrontation on the tower.

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[146] Turville-Petre, pp. 3-4.

CONCLUSION

The abundance of mysterious elements at the end of The Master Builder; the harps in the air, the songs, the wreath, the tower, all need explanation, since one can assume that Ibsen included them for specific reasons. The previous investigation of these seemingly random elements indicates that consciously, or unconsciously, they form a pattern rooted in Norse folklore and mythology. The occurence of so many elements at the Master Builder's final moments cannot be coincidental, but must have explanation.

Again, the intentional fallacy is not to be assumed, but what is to be assumed is that these elements were included by the playwright, and are therefore of importance. The tool of Norse mythology offers one explanation for these elements, and indeed, provides greater insight into the depth of meaning of The Master Builder. The following chapter will correlate various material presented thus far, to evidence the viability of the mythological interpretation of the play.

CHAPTER IV.

CONCLUSION

CONFLICTING FORCES

As Chieftan of the gods, Odinn lived head and shoulders higher than the secondary gods who surrounded him. This was due to the natural gap between a leader and his people. But his oath to Loki, and their foster brotherhood also separated Odinn from the other gods of Asgard. He was their chieftan, but was tied to Loki (the personification of evil), and was therefore alienated from the gods. This does not mean that he was held in contempt - but he was given a very ambiguous role. His adherence to his oath was respected, and admired, but, nonetheless, regretted by the gods. Instead of standing diametricly opposed to the forces of evil, Odinn himself was woven into the pattern of evil.

This ambiguity of Odinn's nature was equally responsible for the glory and the destruction of the gods. It was Odinn's magnanimity towards Loki, his constant effort to be true to his oath, which was part of creating the unusual respect and dread in which he was held. Odinn (as the power of good) was constantly rescuing or forgiving Loki (the power of evil). These actions formed the core of the Norse code of honor; a respect for the oath, and pursuit of honor no matter what the consequence.

Beside the specific conflict which fills The Master Builder is the overriding conflict of Christianity versus Norse paganism, and the future versus the past. In a real sense, Hilde and Solness are members of the ancient Viking era. They strive for the robust conscience and the all-encompassing and uncompromising life of action. The Master Builder is a chronicle of their final struggle. It is the Ragnarok of the Berserks and pagan gods, and their replacement by the secure Christian way of life.

Foote clearly indicates the conflicting forces of paganism and Christianity in his discussion of the Viking Age. Christianity, he says, demands that man rely upon God for everything. He contrasts this to the prevelant paganism.

> The Viking Age represents the last two centuries of paganism among the Scandinavians. It was characterized by shifting emphasis within the heathen cults, by the influence of Christianity, and by the fostering of a profane self-reliance as a result of success in war, exploration, and sea-faring.[147]

This "profane self-reliance" is one of Solness' most outstanding characteristics. His refusal to give way to the younger generation, his success in building, and his power over Kaja, Ragnar, and Brovik, all stem from his attempt to be self-contained. Whatever the psychological grounds for his self-assuredness are, they do not eradicate his aura of being a self-made man.

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[147]Foote, p. 387.

In an excellent discussion of the play, Jacobs indicates that Solness, in his self-reliance, is acting a part integral to Ibsen's full meaning of the play.

> From the purification and deepening of the soul through self-denial and rennunciation comes an objectivity, passionless and remote, which places the individual above and beyond society. Only from this position, where the individual has become greater than conventional morality is he free to place himself beyond the accepted standards of good and evil and become a law unto himself.[148]

Solness is, in fact, removed from the world, the people, and the morality of the other characters in the play. In the course of the play he transcends the provincial morality and passionate emotionalism of Brovik, Ragnar, and Kaja; the scientific objectivity of Herdal; the guilty despair of Aline.

These people exist on the general level of society. They represent the mass of common men - the farmers who worship Thor, the house god - the simple man seeking security - the audience. They are the Christians who exist in a world of divine order and tranquility. Theirs is a world where Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again. And when He arrives, justice will be meted out in the world without end. Thus Foote makes it clear that this was a very tantalizing option open to the Norsemen of the Viking Age;

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[148] E. Jacobs, "Henrik Ibsen, and the Doctrine of Self-Realization," JEGP XXXVIII, p. 423.

> The Christian account of the Creation and Redemption offered the Norsemen an ordered past, a temporal structure with which they did not otherwise posses, for which of them could say when the events of their myths had taken place?[149]

Many men abandoned the pagan way of life. It was an easy step from the degenerate worship of Thor as a god of protection, to the adoption of the Christian God of security. However, there were those who refused to adopt Christianity, and stayed with the pagan way of life.

> The idea of an inexorable fate with death as its instrument may exist in any period, but one can imagine that it might aquire paramount force in times of disruption and strife. The Viking Age saw many men plucked out of the secure corners and the steady round of toil and ritual and set down in strange places, and bewildered by conflicting notions of the purpose of this life, and the nature of the next. There must have been many who gave up thinking and stuck to what was known. And what was known for sure was, on the one hand, the fact of death - and on the other hand, the witness of brave men in one's own experience, and all the brave men who were famous in poems and stories.[150]

In the pagan belief, fate and death were determining factors. And, of course, death with a good name was all important.

For the Christian, a good life meant salvation. And salvation meant a time of peace in heaven. For the Viking, a valiant death was the only key to salvation. A man's life was relatively unimportant in respect to the manner of his death. And salvation was a continuing battle and feasting in Valhalla. All was done in preparation for Ragnarok - the ultimate battle.

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[149]Foote, p. 415.

[150]Turville-Petre, p. 274.

The overriding appeal of Christianity came from its offer of security, resolution, and ultimate justice. Man has his choice: the good go with God, the evil to Hel - for all eternity. The Vikings lived constantly in the face of death. They kept death foremost in their consciousness. Their individual fates would be death, but the specific workings of their fates were unknown. Thus a large degree of insecurity was a part of their way of life. There are many unanswered questions in Norse mythology. These tend to reinforce the reliance upon fate, and, of course, upon the individual.[151]

In a very real sense, Ibsen's dramaturgy operates on this pagan level of individual resolution of questions. As stated by Kaasa: "Christianity claims to offer atonement, resolution. It is no wonder that they (contemporary critics and audiences) were dissatisfied with Ibsen's 'My call is but to question, not to answer! The vocation of the dramatist is different from that of the preacher.'"[152]

Most of Ibsen's plays deal with questions that are unresolved by the final scene. The Master Builder is no exception. Jacobs points out, concerning the play;

> Many interpreters of Ibsen don't understand that Ibsen was seeking something infinitely higher than conventional happiness for his characters, and hence, when the play ends in suicide or death, they dismiss the drama as a tragedy on the grounds that it has an unhappy ending.[153]

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[151]Flom, p. 157.

[152]Kaasa, p. 384.

[153]Jacobs, p. 425.

He continues;

> Hilde standing below and watching the drama of Solness' life being reenacted before her eyes finds consumation of her long-cherished desire to see her Master Builder once again supreme, all powerful, omnipotent. It is a beautiful and a high adventure, and it is clearly a testament to Ibsen's faith in the ability of the human soul to achieve self-realization and ultimate freedom if one has the vision to see the glory of what might be.[154]

The mythological analysis of The Master Builder, if of any value, is most helpful in gaining this perspective of the play. Solness' death cannot be viewed as a totally destructive occurence. It must, to some degree, be seen as the working out of, and active acceptance of, fate.

While Ragnar, Brovik, Kaja, Herdal, and Aline choose to follow the common path of society, Solness and Hilde embark upon the Viking trail of adventure. Solness and Hilde live according to the Sagas, and understandably, face death as did the Vikings.

Solness and Hilde posses within themselves the troll, the giant, the evil forces of universal destruction. At the same time they are full of the vigor of the Aesirgods. Like Odinn, Solness exists in an ambiguous role. Odinn's being tied to Loki and his possesion of witchcraft, were elements of evil which colored his otherwise noble visage. Solness, while a great builder, is also possesed of dark character traits. Hilde is perhaps more ambiguous than Solness. The mystery of her arrival and her demands for her kingdom, balance her battle to see Solness once again great.

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[154]Jacobs, pp. 429-30.

Solness and Hilde recapture the conflicting forces of Odinn's nature - his demand for valor, and his demand for death. The play epitomizes the slow working out of Ragnarok, and the death of the pagan gods. Throughout the play Hilde prods Solness to leave the security of building houses, to recognize his role as a Viking. He must meet his fate with valor. Ragnar and Kaja assume the role of the long suffering Christians - awaiting the imminent destruction of the old order. It is youthful Christianity which Solness fears. It has entered his world, however, long before Hilde does. He fears the arrival of youth. But it has bogged him down since he built his last church at Lysanger. Ironicly it is Hilde's arrival that saves him from youth - from the debilitating effects of Christian security, - and drives him once more to a life of action. He is freed of houses - and goes to meet his destiny - to build castles-in-the-air.

When Solness dies, it is in glory. He has achieved, quite literaly, the impossible. His vertigo makes it physically impossible for him to climb the tower. However, he does it. On the tower he dwarfs the petty world around him, and conquers the physical restraints of that world. That is why at the moment of glory, death is inevitable. Solness has conquered himself. He does battle with the trolls within himself, just as Odinn faced the monsters that surrounded him. The battle is won. Fate is met head on. Death is inevitable. Solness dies as the last Viking in a world rapidly being lured into passivity.

The inability of Raganr, Herdal, or Aline, to comprehend his death is further evidence of the gap that exists between them. Solness exists with Hilde in a world of beauty and glory. They operate on the fields of Asgard. The others remain below in the world of man. The rainbow bridge to Asgard is destroyed at Ragnarok - severing all ties with man. Man, in the guise of Ragnar, remains below, uncomprehending.

Ragnar, as the younger generation, as Christianity, as the common man, remains below to watch the humiliation of Solness. At the end of The Master Builder Ragnarok is complete. The old gods are dead. Christianity survives. By passively waiting long enough, Christianity simpley outlives the Aesirgods. The pagan gods die as they lived, by the sword. Solness battles the trolls, defeats them, and dies as he ultimately lived; in action.

Ragnar suffers through the course of the play to achieve his ends. He makes no overt action to gain his independance as a builder. Like Job, he suffers, and waits. Like a Christian, he turns the other cheek. Eventually he may inherit the role of the Master Builder, but not the glory of Solness' reign. One can safely assume that Ragnar will build homes, not churches, not towers, and surely not castles-in-the-air. His first commission is to build a home for the couple at Lovstrand. His is the limited vision left to man at the passing of the gods.

At the end of the play, Hilde's role as a Valkyrie climaxes in Solness' ascent. She is the prime moving force behind Solness' climb, and the only witness to his glory. While the others view Solness' death, they do not understand it. But Hilde partakes in Solness' glory, and with him, ends the world of the gods.

One can project beyond the play, if necessary, the continued existence of Ragnar, Aline, Herdal, Kaja, the workmen, the chorus of women. But with Solness' death, Hilde's function ceases. She remains below, in an ecstatic trance-like state, like the Berserks of old, to bear witness to Solness' valor. She affirms his action as glorious and meaningful. With his death her role ceases.

The others will pick up the literal and figurative pieces, and continue their humdrum existence. They are common men, and common men merely live. What Hilde's next move may be is immaterial. She may continue to live, to tell how Solness lived and died. But in the Christian and common world, such a function is questionable. Her mysterious arrival may also indicate an equally mysterious departure at the end of the play. Perhaps she will seek other men of sickly conscience and restore them to robustness. This speculation, however, is unecessary. Her role is complete when Solness dies. She is finally united with him in the splendor of the gods. He is, as she says, "My Master Builder."[155]

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[155]Le Galliene, p. 510.

SUMMARY

Ibsen's background indicates a profound influence on his life and work by the culture and history of Norway. Any analysis of his work should take this factor into account. The obvious use of Norse mythology in early plays, and the parallels found in later plays provide us with an important tool to deal with his drama. This study has briefly touched upon some of the aspects of Norse mythology present in The Master Builder. The strongest image in the play is that of the events surrounding the final scene, which correspond to many mythological images. These images can be utilized in production to heighten the drama of Solness' last moments, and to provide a possible constructive through-line for the director or actor. Mythological elements can be used to emphasize the fact that Solness and Hilde are people set aside from common man, and that they are involved in a struggle not faced by most of us.

Although the mythological approach is not the only method that can be applied to the play, it appears to be as viable as many, and more useful than many more. Ultimately, this approach should not confine our analysis of the play to mythological elements, but free us to gain a deeper insight into the characters and lives Ibsen has brought to light in The Master Builder.

AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Two major areas of further study emerge from this analysis of The Master Builder. First, a detailed analysis of the characters within the play in Norse mythological terms may provide a more rounded view of the play. Preliminary research along these lines indicates many similarities and resonnances. The reuse of names; Ragnar, Hilde, and numerous parallels indicated in this text, point to a possible fruitful area of investigation.

The second area of possible study, would be an application of the Norse mythological elements to any of Ibsen's later plays. Mythological elements are present in Rosmersholm, The Lady From the Sea, Little Eyolf, and John Gabriel Borkmann, and could be expanded to ellucidate these plays. The Wild Duck, Hedda Gabler, and especially When We Dead Awaken are plays that have no overt mythological elements, but certainly do need additional study to round out their understanding.

These two areas are the most promising for further study in Norse mythological terms.

GLOSSARY OF NORSE NAMES AND TERMINOLOGY

Aasgarderia. A band of drunken revelers who haunt the earth in a purgatorial type of existence. Descendants of the mythological Valkyrie.

Adlis. King of Sweden, from the Ynglinga Saga, who fell from his horse in the hall of the Disir, and was killed.

Aesir. One of the two factions of Norse gods. This particular group was headed by Odinn.

Agnar. From the Grimnismal Saga, the son of King Hrodung, who was mistreated by his brother Geirrod, asked Odinn's intervention, and assumed the kingdom after Geirrod's death.

Alfheim. The world of the elves.

Asgard. The world of the Aesirgods, the major place-setting for Norse mythology, which contained Valhalla, Lidskjalf, etc.. Roughly synonomous with heaven.

Atlakvida. The Saga concerning the death of Gunnar, who was thrown into a tower filled with snakes. In this Saga he plays his harp as an act of defiance in the face of death.

Baldr. Son of Odinn, the beautiful, peaceful god, whose death precipitated Ragnarok.

Berserks. Vikings, followers of the cult of Odinn, who induced fanatical states of mind prior to battle.

Brumnir. The horn which held Odinn's semen and Kvasir's spirit; the poet's mead.

Disir. A group of attendant spirits, usually tied to one person, who guide, protect, seduce, and control the destinies of man.

Fenis. The giant wolf who battles and kills Odinn at Ragnarok. A child of Loki.

Frey/Freyer. God of fertility, manifested as sunshine, warm winds, gentle rain.

Freyja. Female aspect of Frey/Freyer, as godess of fertility. Odinn's chief wife, leader of the Valkyrie, the Disir Queen, a seductress of men to battle and death.

Geirrod. Son of Hrodung, brother of Agnar, who mistreated Agnar, and died at Odinn's visit. From the Grimnismal.

Gerd. Frigid godess, personified as a frozen field in winter, who represents potential rebirth.

Grimnismal. Saga containing the Agnar, Geirrod, Hrodung story.

Gwar. Father of Nanna, courted by Hod with his harp.

Hel. Hell, the world of the lost.

Hild. Common, re-occuring name of one of the Valkyrie.

Hod. Blind brother of Baldr, son of Odinn, who was known for his playing of the harp, and the fact that he un-wittingly killed Balder with a bow aimed by Loki.

Hrodung. King, father of Agnar and Geirrod.

Hugin. "Thought", one of Odinn's two ravens which scoured the world for knowledge, and brought it back to Odinn.

Huldafolk. A degeneration into folklore of the mythological Disir. These figures were seen as attractive men or women, with tails, who seduced young people by their song, or by playing a stringed instrument.

Jotmunmodor. "Giant rage", displayed by the giant (troll) builder in Asgard, a revelation of identity.

Kvasir. God of the Vanir tribe, offered as a hostage, beheaded, and his essence and head preserved by Odinn to provide knowledge and poetry.

Lidskjalf. Odinn's tower in Asgard, from which he viewed all corners of the world.

Loki. Progeny of a giant, foster/blood brother of Odinn, who could change his form, as a fish, horse, flame, many others as well, was known to participate in homosexual (ergi) activities, was viewed with dread, but also respect, because of his ties with Odinn. He was responsible for many problems by the Aesirgods, aimed the bow that killed Baldr, was finally captured and killed at Ragnarok, which he instigated.

Midgard. The middle world, the world of man.

Mjollnir. "The crusher", Thor's hammer.

Munin. "Memory", one of Odinn's ravens.

Nanna. Daughter of Gwar, courted by Hod.

Nidhogg. The dragon at the roots of Yggdrasil, which gnawed its roots.

Niflheim. The nether world, inhabited by gnomes, the underworld.

Norns. Three godesses who dwelt beneath Yggdrasil, and watered its roots everyday. The weavers of men's destinies, upon the loom of life. The fates.

Oddrunargratr. A Saga of Gunnar, similar to the Atlakvida, but differing in that Gunnar plays the harp, as he dies, to summon help.

Odinn. Chief of the Norse gods; God of War, Witchcraft, Poetry, Knowledge; an ambiguous character containing seeds of good and evil; known as a primary god of the warrior, rather than the common man.

Ragnarok. "Twighlight of the Gods", "Destiny of the Gods", "Fate of the Powers"; the final battle between gods and giants which ends the Norse world of mythology; precipitated by Baldr's death, all of the Norse gods pit themselves in battle against the giants and monsters, and all but a handful, including Baldr and Hod, are saved. This battle ends the Norse cosmos, and gives birth to a new world, Gimlie ("The High Heaven") which fosters a new race of men and a reign of peace.

Runes. Early Norse writing; discovered by Odinn as he hung upon Yggdrasil for nine days and nights, and deciphered crossed twigs lying below him.

St. Olaf. Early saint and missionary in Scandinavia; assumed traits of Odinn and Thor in Viking Age, and subsequently became a major literary and folk link between the Norse gods and modern Christianity.

Sleipnir. "Glider"; the offspring of Loki and the horse of the builder in Asgard; ridden by Odinn to battle, and to choose men for Valhalla; had eight legs.

Seidr. Witchcraft, especially thought transference and possession and exercise of the will.

Thor. Brother of Odinn; a chief god of fertility, protection (his hammer killed giants that threatened men, signified by lightning and thunder), and the home; a god of the farmer.

Troll. A degeneration of giants into folklore. See discussion in Chapter III.

Valhalla. "Hall of the Slain"; the eating and feasting house of warriors slain in battle and taken to Asgard to serve Odinn at the final Ragnarok.

Valkyrie. Warrior maidens attendant upon Odinn and Freyja; accompanied them to men's battles to transport the valiant slain to Valhalla; also known to seduce warriors to death, and thus, Valhalla.

Vanir. The faction of gods other than the Aesir.

Voluspa. A mythological Saga concerning the events of the Norse gods; contains Odinn's visit to the Sybil.

Yggdrasil. The world tree; the tree of life; the connecting axis between all nine of the Norse worlds.

Ynglinga. Saga containing the fate of Adlis, and Freyja the Disir Queen.

Yimir. A giant; Odinn's father; slain by Odinn; his parts used to fashion the elements of the Norse universe.

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