

Power and Passion: The Role of Women (and Female Characters) in Homer and the *Nibelungenlied*

1. Homer and the *Nibelungenlied*

- deeply formulaic diction on the level of expressions and turns of phrase.
- Physical-based periphrases to refer to a character:
e.g. βίη Ἡρακλεΐη (*Il.* 11.690, etc.), “strength of Heracles” = Heracles¹
μένος Ἄλκινόοιο (*Od.* 7.178, etc.), “might of Alcinous” = Alcinous
Sivrides hant (NB 94.3, etc.), “Siegfried’s hand” = Siegfried²
des künec Guntheres lip (NB 396.3, etc.), “King Gunther’s body” = Gunther
- Common style and narrative strategies (Fenik).

2. The taming of a superhuman woman

| | Circe episode (<i>Od.</i> 10.133–399) | Brünhild episode (NB 325–481, 579–689) |
|----|---|--|
| 1. | Female figure with supernatural powers | Woman with superhuman strength |
| 2. | Remote island in the Far East (12.3–4) | Remote island in the North (326) |
| 3. | Social order: typical Homeric palace | Social order: typical Nibelungian court |
| 4. | Threat to the tamer’s male identity: potential to make Odysseus “unmanly” (10.301, ἀνήνορα) | Threat to the tamer’s male identity: a woman overpowering a man, both physically and sexually (443, 673) |
| 5. | Tamer’s predecessors vanquished: Odysseus’ companions (10.232–243) | Tamer’s predecessors are vanquished: suitors before the arrival of the Burgundians (327–328) |
| 6. | Supernatural helper: Hermes (10.275– 306) | Supernatural helper: Siegfried |
| 7. | Supernatural item: <i>moly</i> (10.305) | Supernatural item: <i>tarnkappe</i> |
| 8. | Violence and sex: sword-threat (10.321–4) and sex encounter after oath (10.347) | Violence and sex: Siegfried physically overpowers Brünhild (677), Gunther has sex with her (683) |

¹ All references to the Homeric poems follow the Monro-Allen 1920 (3rd) edition (*Iliad*) and the Allen 1917 (2nd) edition (*Odyssey*).

² All references to the *Nibelungenlied* follow the Bartsch-De Boor text (1979).

3. A Woman Bereft

| | Hector and Andromache (Il. 6.369–493, 22.437–515, 24.718–746) | Siegfried and Kriemhild (NB 917–925, 1009–1014) |
|----|--|---|
| 1. | Harmonious husband and wife: Hector and Andromache | Harmonious husband and wife: Siegfried and Kriemhild |
| 2. | Andromache tries to refrain Hector from risking his life on the battlefield | Kriemhild tries to refrain Hector from taking part in the hunt organised by her brother |
| 3. | Andromache cries (6.405), Hector caresses her (6.485) | Kriemhild cries (920), Siegfried embraces her (925) |
| 4. | Female intrusion into the male sphere: Andromache provides military advice (6.433–439) | Female intrusion into the male sphere: Kriemhild reveals Siegfried's weak spot to Hagen (891–905) |
| 5. | Hector is not persuaded and dies | Siegfried is not persuaded and dies |
| 6. | Andromache laments her husband, taking up his head in her hands (24.724) | Kriemhild laments her husband, taking up his head in her hands (1011) |

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