

# **Blood Vengeance and the Depiction of Women in *La leyenda de los siete infantes de Lara*, *The Nibelungenlied* and *Njal's Saga***

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## **Abstract**

Following a review of the primary sources *La leyenda de los siete infantes de Lara*, *The Nibelungenlied* and *Njal's Saga* the role of women and their role in exacting blood vengeance within a medieval context will be compared. The analysis is based upon the primary sources as well as some Spanish legal precedents and this is the basis for the comparative study and the roots in Germanic law of some aspects of medieval Spanish law.

*Keywords:* La leyenda de los siete infantes de Lara, The Nibelungenlied, Njal's Saga

## **Introduction**

Despite countless manifestations in literature of many traditions and cultures, the archetype of vengeance as a theme is a common and current one. It is present from very ancient traditions and up into the present age. Arising out of archaic or perhaps even primitive instincts law codes such as the Code of Hammurabi existed even within ancient societies such as in the Fertile Crescent. The theme of vengeance is a seemingly male-centered or male-motivated context particularly since in law codes and in history it has been linked to war which is not an area that women participated in when men left their homes to protect their lands. When laws were broken, they were to be dealt with, at times with extreme violence, depending upon the culture and its traditions and the violation of the law.

If a man be taken prisoner in war and there be no sustenance in his house and his wife go to another house and bear children; and if later her husband return and come to his home: then this wife shall return to her husband, but the children follow their father.

(Code of Hammurabi, 135, <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/MESO/CODE.HTM>)

If any one "point the finger" (slander) at a sister of a god or the wife of any one, and can not prove it, this man shall be taken before the judges and his brow shall be marked. (by cutting the skin, or perhaps hair.)

(Code of Hammurabi, 127, <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/MESO/CODE.HTM>)

If a man's wife be surprised (in flagrante delicto) with another man, both shall be tied and thrown into the water, but the husband may pardon his wife and the king his slaves.

(Code of Hammurabi, 129, <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/MESO/CODE.HTM>)

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These laws were written and carried out per the situation of the man not that of women even though these laws did affect women they demonstrate that women functioned more as property and as more as pieces on a chessboard moved by the laws of men depending on how the circumstances the men by whom they were surrounded rather than as citizens with rights unto to themselves

Because vengeance has been the realm of men since ancient times it is also reflected in literature as is the case with *La Chanson de Roland* and *Raoul de Cambrai*, which fall in the literary realm of *chanson de geste*. A *chanson de geste* is a written rather than oral epic (a genre of poetry which narrates the life of a mythical man or group of men such as *the The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The Shahnamah*, and *David of Sasoun*) of the Middle Ages which details the life, deeds, morals and virtues of a hero who embodies all that is important to a nation. An example of this is Roland in *La Chanson de Roland* in which Roland is the national hero par excellence of France. Before epics were written in one theory they were anonymously composed and orally transmitted in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries by *jongleurs* or minstrels who told and sang stories in courts and public squares and added and changed details upon each recounting. In the alternate theory the epics were composed by a single author and they did not vary much when they were transmitted.

Within both texts vengeance is directed and executed by men toward men because of violations to honor or the breaking of an oath. In both works, the roles of women are passive, since they never truly take an active role or position within the action, except perhaps Marsent in trying to save herself, her convent and her village, but even then she must depend upon a man to save her. Up until that point, in her discussion of her life as a young woman, she is depicted as the sexual property of Ybert who assumes her docile and non-action oriented role.

The role of women in *La leyenda de los siete infantes de Lara*, (*The Legend of the Seven Infantes of Lara*) *The Nibelungenlied* and *Njal's Saga* is markedly different since women take on a very active role in exacting blood vengeance as is commonplace within Germanic law and society. Germanic law as referenced in this work is the compendium of law codes compiled after they had contact with the Roman Empire. The law codes were called *Leges Baborum* and date from the fifth through ninth centuries. They are divided into four groups Gothic, Frankish, Saxon and Barbarian. For this study the Gothic *Codex Euricianus* is important but more specifically the *Lex Romana Visigothorum* (established in 506) is of concern for it was the law code of the Visigothic Kings of Spain. The established law was Germanic, though it was written in imitation of the Roman law codes, and written in Latin and they deal mostly with penal law and legal procedure setting forth how much was to be paid in damages for certain crimes and failure to pay would result in justifiable retaliation in kind against the offender and his kin. (<http://columbia.thefreedictionary.com/Germanic+laws>). The document was translated as the *Fuero juzgo* in 13<sup>th</sup> century Spain. *Fueros* were legal statutes of the Middle Ages in Spain that took into account the customs of each jurisdiction per the privileges given by kings to each locale and with the input of local nobility, clergy and vassals in each zone.

The epic of *La Leyenda de los siete Infantes de Lara* is based upon a lost *cantar de gesta* or an extant literary fragment with no known author that narrates the death and destruction of the siete *infantes* and the Lara family in the 10<sup>th</sup> century by Moors. It

was written between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries and the version examined here is a later version from the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

*The Nibelungenlied* is an anonymous epic poem dated to approximately 1200, written in Middle High German and details events in the lives of the Burgundian kings and incorporate elements of Teutonic and Nordic heroes of the pre-Christian era. Though it recounts grand moments as is expected in a national epic it also recounts the tragedy that befell the Burgundians.

*Njal's Saga* sometimes known as the *Story of Burnt Njal* is the most well-known Icelandic saga. It dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> century and details the blood feud of an Icelandic man, his friend, their families and assorted others over a 50-year period. The events depicted allegedly took place between 930-1020 during Iceland's conversion to Christianity in 1100.

### **Women and Blood Vengeance**

The characters in these three works, Doña Lambra, Kriemhild and Hallgerd, respectively, take the law into their own hands to reinstate the status quo and also to recuperate damaged honor for themselves or their families. The reader is presented with women who call for retribution through blood because solely by this means can their dishonor or the dishonor and treachery to their kin be rectified.

La injuria es un ataque a la honra, valor originariamente aristocratico, se extendiendo en Castilla y León a las otras capas de la sociedad. Entonces cobras difusión el tópico de que la verdadera nobleza es la del alma y de que la honra no se asocia al nacimiento, a la sangre, y menos aun a la riqueza. (Madero 11)

An insult is an attack to honor, originally an aristocratic value, that extended through Castille and Leon to other levels of society.

In effect the diffusion of this issue the true nobility is that of the soul and honor that is not associated with birth, blood and less even to wealth. (translation by T. Camacho)

In its first manifestations, honor was a concept or ideal that was reserved for those of noble birth or something that was passed on only through blood or wealth, but as time went on it came to mean something dealing with a person's soul or spirit; therefore by dishonoring someone, a person had corporally harmed another even if the insult was not physical. Blood vengeance was exacted when a person's honor was tarnished and had its basis in Germanic law. When an offense was committed the status quo had been disrupted and only through the shedding of blood could peace and tranquility be attained. This can be found in many Spanish *fueros*, which included many laws dealing with blood vengeance. It is especially evident in the century previous to the Muslim invasion of Spain under the leadership of the Visigoths. These laws delineated the different offenses for which one could take blood vengeance and most often it was due to injuries incurred, with or without mutilation; rape; stealing of women; abandonment of women by their husbands; offenses through action or word (de Hinojosa 35-36).

Many times also accompanying the blood vengeance, the offender was required to give monetary payment to the victim or the victim's family if he or she were dead, and also they were banished from their lands. Paying the monetary amount in no way diminished the possibility of blood vengeance (de Hinojosa 43-46).

Responsibility was also a very important aspect in the carrying out of blood vengeance, in that an offender's family was also implicated in the crime, because fathers were responsible for their children's' actions, as well as their wives' and also for the action of extended family members and all those living under their roof. The victim's family also could enlist the aid of many family members according to relation to the victim and carry out the appropriate punishment (de Hinojosa 48-49). Sanguinary imagery abounds in all three works and it is the unifying force to the drama of the texts. Blood carries with it several levels of imagery, as a sexual symbol, as a religious symbol and as the covenant of kingship (Bluestine 201-202).

### **Doña Lambra and Gonzalo**

The *Leyenda de los siete infantes de Lara* is a gripping tale of passion, revenge, and murder, which has as its central motif the multivalent imagery of blood (Bluestine 201). *Infante* is a Spanish title given to the children of nobility and is not always synonymous with prince. Only the eldest would be a prince if he were the son of the King and the heir-apparent of the throne. In our case the seven sons in the *Siete Infantes de Lara* are simply infants not princes since they are not the sons of a King but simply of noble birth. *La Leyenda de los siete Infantes de Lara* recounts the death and destruction of the Lara family in the 10<sup>th</sup> century by Moors with whom their maternal uncle, Ruy Velázquez, makes a treaty to rectify the insults to his honor and his wife's at his wedding when the youngest of the *infantes* Gonzalo Gonzales kills her cousin Alvar Sánchez and at then at the orchard of their new home by the seven young warriors who have been volunteered to escort his wife. The wedding where the series of events takes place in Burgos and is attended by Doña Sancha sister of Ruy, her husband Gonzalo Gustioz de Salas and their seven sons, the *siete Infantes de Lara* and it is in this very context which should be a joyous occasion that violence unfolds and only bring more violence later. Blood is shed several times during the wedding festivities but the violence is of a stronger and more sinister nature in the orchard and scene with the *siete infantes*, Doña Lambra and her servant.

The blood motif is present almost since the beginning of the story and can be dually interpreted as lust and anger since its onset. At the wedding scene which opens the *Siete Infantes*, a tablado contest in which the bridegroom, Ruy Velasquez, Gonzalo Gonzales and Alvar Sánchez participate, one sees the beginning of sexual imagery in the game itself. The tablado is a "mock castle loosely built of boards, set up for knights to knock down if they had skill and strength with javelins" (Spanish Ballads 116). This contest represents a test of the most virile man, in that the javelins are thrust into the castle and made to fall, therefore the man who wins the contest is the victor and best man for the job of a sexual nature. It would seem fitting that the bridegroom should be the victor in this affair, but he is not, and at first one sees Alvar Sánchez as the apparent victor in the contest, much to the approval of his cousin, Doña Lambra.

En verdat vos digo, señoras, que yo non vedaría mj amor a vn  
tan genty onbre como aqueste que tan bien lo fase, si mj  
pariente allegado non fuese (Lathrop 95)

(Truthfully, I tell you ladies that I would not refuse my love to such a  
gentleman like this who does this so well if he were not such a close relative)  
(translation by T. Camacho)

Doña Lambra's statement associates her as a prize for any man who possesses enough prowess and skill to lance and knock down the tablado. She even goes as far as stating that she would welcome Alvar Sánchez into her bed, were he not her relative, which further concretizes the apparent sexual motif in which Lambra will give herself to the winner. Lambra implies that being successful within the context of the game means being successful with a woman in bed. Within the context of the Leyenda, Lambra is never openly called a whore, but she is identified in this manner in the Romances which are octosyllabic poems with an alternating rhyming scheme which were recited by jongleurs in the Middle Ages) and it becomes quite evident that she is much more sexual and lustful.

Durng the tablado match an argument erupts between Alvar Sánchez and the *infante* Gonzalo Gonzales which furthers the sexual imagery of the scene. Alvar Sánchez insults Gonzalo.

Gonzalo replies:

Tan bien lançasted vos que ya la doñas no se pagaran de otro sy non de vós  
(You lanced so well that the ladies will pay no attention to anyone but you)  
(translation by T. Camacho)

To which Alvar replies:

Sy las doñas de mj fablaren, ciertamento derecho farán (Lathrop 95)  
If the ladies speak of me, certainly they have a right (reason) to do so  
(translation by T. Camacho)

The argument between the two men is about the unmerited praise of Alvar by the women, rather than about their skill in the tablado or their worth as knights. The argument becomes quite emotional and ends with Gonzalo's killing of Alvar Sánchez. Doña Lambra sees the killing and utters, "nunca donsella fuera tan deonrrada." Obviously an affront has been committed, one that has brought dishonor to her and her family and for this she will demand compensation.

With the killing of Alvar Sánchez, Gonzalo is the new victor of the tablado competition, or the man with the most sexual prowess. Lambra has succumbed already to Gonzalo's overpowering masculinity, and her lament is like that of a girl unmade (Burt 349).

Ruy Velazquez plays the jealous lover after being proven less manly, first by Alvar Sánchez and then by his nephew Gonzalo Gonzales. He lashes out violently at him and gives him a blow that draws blood from his body in several places. Gonzalo in turn, smashes his hawk on his uncle's face, spilling blood on his uncle's face and chest.

Already blood has been spilled twice, and it is quite obvious that the blood is representative of the sexually charged woman, who in this context is Lambra. Through her comments and willingness to offer her body as a prize, it is evident that the author wants to portray her in a negative sexual manner, in a manner that does not befit her honorable position or that of her honorable husband.

E quando fue asi desnudo fasta los paños menores, doña Lambra,  
Que todo veyá, llamo s sus donsellas allj, disiendo:  
'Mjrad agora todas la cortesía de aquel gentil onbre que, sabiendo  
que os todas lo mjramos, & porque ayamos voluntad en el, andase  
desnudo & tan desonesto come vedes. Et paresçeme que sera bueno  
quell véa quanto los presçiamos. (Lathrop 103)

And when he was in that way undressed to his underwear  
Doña Lambra who saw everything, called her ladies-in-waiting saying:  
All of you look with what courtesy (courtliness) of that gentleman who knows  
that we all see him and all have desire for him - he is nude and without  
honor/shame as you see. It seems good that he sees how much we appreciate  
him. (translation by T. Camacho)

In Lambra's statements it is obvious that she finds Gonzalo sexually alluring, especially at this point, when she is fully aware of his physical handsomeness, for she tells her ladies-in-waiting that they should let him know how and how much they value him. At this she has a servant go and fill a cucumber, in the place where the butcher slaughters the animals, with blood. He is then to fling the cucumber at Gonzalo, and he is to come to her for protection.

The blood with which the cucumber is filled and smothered in suggests menstrual blood, because the pool of the blood of slaughtered animals would surely contain tissue and old, thickened blood which would probably be foul-smelling considering it was just left exposed to the elements. The cucumber obviously suggests a phallus and the blood that fills it means an engorged or sexually excited penis and the blood that covers the outside of the cucumber/penis is menstrual blood. This all suggests that Lambra is trying to tell Gonzalo that she is consumed by desire for him that if he felt the same way about her and decided to succumb to desire she would give herself to him, even though she was menstruating. In succumbing to her desire and consummating a union with Gonzalo, Lambra would be guilty of adultery and would be having relations in an 'unclean' and or 'unholy' state.

Spaniards had a law that carried with it a fine of approximately 1000 maravedís, if one were to hurl eggs of a blood-filled cucumber at another individual. In this case it did not need to be paid because Gonzalo's brothers reinstated his honor by opting for blood vengeance in killing Lambra's servant.

Doña Lambra dishonored herself by offering her 'protection' to the servant who did her bidding and hid under her skirts. This scene suggests a more intimate relationship with her servant. A knight or gentleman would never fathom the idea to hide under an honorable woman's skirts, so why would her servant, except for the fact that they had shared an intimate moment previous to this episode. "(T)he ensuing death of the

servant at the hands of the Infantes is the surrogate murder of any child that might have issued as a result of sexual congress between Doña Lambra and Gonzalo. Gonzalo indeed is the only husband who might have provided her with children...When blood from the servant's death and dismemberment spills on her, it marks the moment when her love passion turns irrevocably to hatred" (Burt 95).

Another aspect of the blood motif would be in a religious context, that is, the martyrdom of the siete infantes. It occurs in several scenes, firstly at the wedding scene with Ruy Velasquez inflicting five wounds on Gonzalo paralleling those inflicted upon Jesus Christ on his way to the Crucifixion. Also, martyrdom is echoed in the ritualistic manner in which the siete infantes confess to one another when death is imminent and before their decapitation. A final glimpse into this motif is the cleansing and lament over their death by their father, Gonzalo Gustios.

Blood vengeance is exacted in the siete infantes upon the maturation of the illegitimate half Muslim child, Mudarra, whom their father Gonzalo Gustios fathered after her was captured by the Moors with the Moorish princess during his captivity. Ruy Velasquez' allegiance was with his family by marriage and he decided to exact blood vengeance upon his blood family rather than allowing for some other form of justice, because after all, the person killed was a servant. The first death was of a blood relative of Doña Lambra and by screaming, crying and demanding justice in the killing of her servant, she was still seeking justice for her cousin's death. After the death of her servant, Lambra dons mourning clothes which is a bit ridiculous since he was not a blood relative or even a relative by marriage. This action furthers the idea that Lambra still held a grudge due to her husband's inaction after Alvar Sánchez' death.

It would have been more appropriate to settle differences for the second killing, or that of Lambra's servant with the payment of a monetary sum, as was stated in the law and as is seen in several episodes of *Njal's Saga* in which Hallgerd and Bergthora kill several of each other's servants after a clash of egos, insults and arguments at a dinner with their husbands, Gunnar and Njal, respectively. The men, Njal and Gunnar settle the killings with monetary compensation for each of the servants killed and later for family members killed in the ongoing feud but the killing continues for several years with retribution after retribution.

### **Kreimhild and the Burgundians**

*The Nibelungenlied* commences on the Rhine in Worms where Kriemhild princess and sister of Gunther, Gernot and Giselher, the Burgundians dreams of eagles attacking a falcon which her mother interprets as an attack on her future husband. This future husband is a hero and prince, Siegfried who possess strength and has accomplished heroic feats including the stealing of the gold from the Nibelungen. Siegfried wants to marry Kreimhild and once he arrives in the court of the Burgundians, Kriemhild falls in love with him at first sight. His fame precedes him and all are captivated by Siegfried who forms a strong bond with Kriemhild's brother Gunther and because of it asks for Kriemhild's hand in marriage. Gunther agrees but on the condition that he help him the favor and hand of the Icelandic queen Brunhild.

Brunhild's beauty is equaled by her strength and she has decreed that she will not marry any man unless he can match her strength. Siegfried pretends to be Gunther's vassal on his quest and test to win Brunhild. Gunther is warned by Brunhild that if he

fails he dies. During the tests Siegfried advises Gunther to pretend to participate and he dons his invisibility cloak to ascertain that he is successful in every feat against Brunhild and thus she agrees to marry Gunther. Upon their return to the court of the Burgundians a double wedding ceremony is held for Gunther and Brunhild and Siegfried and Kriemhild.

Brunhild wants to know why Kriemhild her sister-in-law and a royal is marrying a vassal, someone so far beneath her and she interrogates Gunther who refuses to answer. As such, she hangs him from a peg and refuses to consummate the marriage. Gunther again enlists the aid of Siegfried the following night. In the dark as Siegfried dons his invisibility cloak he overpowers Brunhild annihilating her strength by taking her belt and gold ring. He gives the items to his wife as he explains why he has them as they leave to his court in Xanten to live.

Many years pass and Siegfried and Kriemhild return to Worms to visit Gunther and Brunhild for a feast. Brunhild mocks Kriemhild for marrying a vassal and the women argue and Kriemhild accuses Brunhild of adultery with her husband Siegfried who denies the episode, by showing her the belt and the ring. Brunhild enlists the aid of Gunther's friend Hagen to avenge her honor. Hagen kills Siegfried while he hunts by thrusting a spear through the spot that is his Achilles heel – spot between his shoulder blades.

Kriemhild wants to avenge the killing of her husband and the collusion of her own brothers in the act. She is portrayed as vindictive and unsympathetic for the rest of the story. Kriemhild remarries Etzel, King of Hungary and they have a child. She invites her brothers and Hagen to visit her and her husband for a feast. Hagen is hesitant to go but goes anyway and the death of the Burgundians is foretold by mermaids as they cross the Rhine. Violence ensues upon the arrival of the Burgundians in Hungary and is precipitated by the decapitation of the child of Kriemhild and Etzel by Hagen. After much bloodshed only Gunther and Hagen survive.

Kriemhild asks for the Nibelungen gold she had transported to Worms at the behest of her brother shortly after Siegfried's death and which was subsequently sunk in the Rhine by Hagen to be raised and split with Gunther at a later date. Hagen refuses to reveal the location of the Nibelungen gold unless Gunther is dead so Kriemhild arranges his death. Still Hagen refuses to give her the location and Kriemhild beheads him with Siegfried's sword. In the end Kriemhild is killed by a warrior named Dietrich who believes that it is only just to do so after she perpetuated so much violence.

In the *Nibelungenlied*, Kriemhild begins a series of events that lead to the downfall of her powerful family, the Burgundians. The cause of the tragedy commences through and insult from one woman to another. Brunhild, who is the wife of Gunther becomes disturbed because she does not deem Siegfried a loyal enough vassal. She begins by insulting Kriemhild's husband, claiming him as a vassal of hers and her husband's to which Kriemhild takes great offence since by uttering such a phrase not only is Siegfried of low status but by extension so is she. Kriemhild ironically turns the insult around and calls Brunhild the 'mistress of a liegeman,' of her husband Siegfried who had to subdue her in order for Gunther to take her virginity. Brunhild then demands proof and Kriemhild shows her the red-gold ring she had worn on that night as well as her cord. Because Kriemhild had been utterly affronted by her sister-in-law, she exaggerated the truth to inflict pain and dishonor on Brunhild, and in doing so incurred the hatred of Hagen who elects himself to reinstate his Lady Brunhild's honor.

By insulting Brunhild's honor, Kriemhild has in essence insulted her own brother and his lack of virility. Of course he calls forth Siegfried to clear up the misunderstanding and forgives him in front of many witnesses and warriors, without having him take an oath. Since Gunther is not half the warrior that Siegfried is, it falls on the shoulders of another man to reinstate the honor of Brunhild.

Perhaps because Kreimhild is attempting to correct her evil behavior, she gives Hagen the information he needs to 'protect' her husband. Kriemhild even signals the spot that is Siegfried's Achilles Heel by sewing a bright red cross on the area between his shoulders. After his death she must avenge the dishonor she has caused her husband and herself by her life and sets about reinstating their honor by killing her own blood kin, and therefore dishonoring herself once more. Even in reinstating her and her husband's honor, had she lived, she would have continued to live in a state of dishonor.

### **Hallgerd and the Njal Clan**

*Njal's Saga* is more difficult to summarize than the other two epics given its plethora of details and characters. At its most basic it is as follows. It is the story of Njal Thorgeirsson of Bergthorskknoll whose great friendship with the warrior, Gunnar of Hildarend is tested time and again through the feuds of their women Bergthora and Hallgerd and the webs of intrigue they weave through kinsmen and descendants in attempting to seek and acquire retribution. At points in the story it seems that all troubles are solved only to be renewed again time and time again even through the intervention of law and legal restitution for deaths incurred by the different families involved in the 50-year feud.

The reader is presented with the character of Hallgerd, of whom it is said, in her first appearance, "many will suffer for her beauty: but I cannot imagine how thief's eyes have come into our kin." Already she is portrayed in a negative light, with no actions yet committed and stated in the text unlike Lambra, who from the onset of *Los siete infantes de Lara*, makes statements which lead the reader to conclude she is not honorable. This is not the case with Hallgerd whose character does not utter or do anything but is accused immediately. The latter part of the citation is foreshadowing of her involvement in the stealing of cheese from Otkel's farm.

In the next description of her, she is described in sexual terms, solely through physical description and with the nickname, 'Long-legs.' "(A)nd her lovely hair was now so long that it could veil her whole body." (*Njal's Saga* 55). Hair has, since biblical times, held sexual connotations and here it is said to cover her whole body, which would imply sexual wantonness, firstly because it is not pinned and covered, rather it covers and envelops her and showing her as sexually charged and with no control, and secondly the sheer volume and length of her hair elicit images of wild women who are severely out of control and would not succumb to the law of men.

Another aspect of Hallgerd portrayed in a negative light, is her strong will and holds her own opinions and becomes angered when the will of the men in her life is imposed upon her. She is presented as an impetuous child because she disagrees with not being consulted in the marriage that has been arranged for her by her father and uncle in consultation with the prospective groom, Thovald Osvifsson, and father-in-law. To defy them she takes her foster father, Thjostof to live with her and her new husband in their new home.

It is because of her strong will that blood is first shed and after she insults her husband, Thovald, who in turn slaps her. This is the impetus for the first killing by her foster father, Thjostof who avenges her honor and leaves her a widow. This first spilling of blood occurs because she will not control herself and abide by the rules of being a good and passive wife. It is evident that she wants to become master of her life and destiny, in that she uses her winter food supplies wastefully until she depletes their store. In canceling her husband's economic clout she attempts to free herself of his hold on her and with his death she is free momentarily.

Because of her beauty and the need for men to hold onto it – she is married three times and it is implied that she has two adulterous liaisons. In being married thrice, she can also be viewed as excessively sexually charged. After the killing of her first husband, another man, Glum Olafsson seeks her hand in marriage and this time she is consulted before the marriage is sanctioned. Hallgerd agrees and lives happily for some time, until the arrival of her foster father who makes her a widow anew. The relationship she has with her foster father has a sexual undertone, in that she insists on taking with her to her second husband's home after the first tragedy. The relationship between Thjostof and Hallgerd calls to mind the relationship between a lady and her suitor, within the tradition of courtly love, in that the utmost allegiance and service was required under all circumstances, especially in saving a lady's honor. Hallgerd's honor was definitely reinstated in both instances because the offender was made to pay with his life and blood for the crime perpetrated against her.

These first two deaths are caused indirectly by Hallgerd, but after the affront from Bergthora at her wedding, she must take action to remedy the insult herself, because her husband, Gunnar will not exact vengeance upon the wife of his true friend Njal. Rather than killing Bergthora, Hallgerd sends one of her servants to kill one of Bergthora's servants, and this goes on until one of Hallgerd's kinsmen is killed. Halberd realizes that she cannot harm the Masson directly because her husband will certainly kill her, so she is forced to commit actions to hurt them indirectly, through slander and insults and is finally avenged many years later when the feuds she instigated, had grown to such a massive scale that the Masson are burned to death. She also avenges the death of her husband in that she refuses to cut off some of her hair so that he can fashion a bow-string out of it in order to continue to fight off those who want to kill him. Halberd is perfectly within her right to refuse him what he needs because he failed her in her hour of need since he would not reinstate her honor and as a result had to continue living in a constant state of dishonor until both the Masson and her husband were killed.

Blood vengeance is extremely important in all three works even though blood is seen differently in each text. In the *Leyenda de los siete infantes de Lara*, Ruy Velasquez chooses marriage over blood ties and exacts revenge against his own sister's seven children and husband not realizing the importance of blood ties, which by the end of the work are shown to be much more important than Ruy would have us believe. Mudarra returns and avenges his father, his brothers and his stepmother and reinstates honor to the Lara family. Within the context of the *Nibelungenlied* marriage is considered above blood ties and this leads first to a betrayal of siblings, specifically Gunther toward his sister Kriemhild. This in turn leads to betrayal against all blood kin for retribution for a husband, which in effect caused the full destruction of the Burgundian line, including the one who betrayed her own family. Finally, in *Njal's Saga*, friendship is considered above

marriage ties and this causes much spilling of blood, first solely of servants then of family members on both sides. In this work, blood ties are not as exalted as in the two other works, but relations between warriors or man, which are extremely important in this type of society are valued above the bickering of women.

The depiction of women has a misogynistic tone in all three works especially in the presentation of the female characters as sexual or powerful women. Doña Lambra is utterly sexual and is analogous to lust in *Leyenda de los siete infantes de Lara*, Hallgerd's portrayal implies that beauty and brains cannot and should not go together, while the portrayal of Kriemhild is that of a blood-thirsty bitch hell-bent on seeking retribution for a wrong she instigated.

The three women characters are forced to live under man's law and because they break with what is imposed upon them, they all suffer dire consequences. They are all representations of Eve in a metaphorical sense for cause the fall of their families though actions that could have easily been corrected and reinstated order and honor. The sexual aspect of the characters also presents a problem in that due to their sexuality they lead men to take actions they would not have taken otherwise.

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