INGELD AND CHRIST: A MEDIEVAL PROBLEM

by Robert Levine

Students of Beowulf are familiar with the notion that the poem can be read as an attempt to answer Alcuin’s question, “Quid Hinieldus cum Christo?” (What has Ingeld to do with Christ?). More than two centuries later, a similar complaint was registered by a certain Meinhard against Bishop Gunter of Bamberg: “Numquam ille Augustinum, numquam ille Gregorium recolit, semper ille Attalam, semper Amalungum et cetera id genus portare [or, pro tempore] tractat.” Both Alcuin and Meinhard clearly see secular heroism and Christian principles as mutually exclusive ideals; for them, the physically active, pridefully and violently assertive, materialistic and frequently murderous pagan hero cannot be reconciled with the gentle, humbly submissive protagonist of the New Testament, whose most glorious act is to allow himself to be killed. Christ’s “passion” is, of course paradigmatically, as well as etymologically “passive.”

Not every medieval mind, however, found Christ and Ingeld irreconcilable; a variety of responses to Alcuin’s question may be seen imaginatively articulated in a number of medieval vernacular heroic works, ranging from the Nibelungenlied’s total rejection of the possibilities of a reconciliation between Christ and Ingeld, through the ambiguous, tentative, undogmatic resolutions made in Beowulf and Njal saga, to the naively positive assertion of reconciliation made, more devotionally than imaginatively, by the Roland poet.

Early in the fifth century, Prudentius combines Christ and Ingeld in his Psychomachia, in a way that would seem to have been designed explicitly to avoid offending the Alcuinian sensibility; in his poem Prudentius attributes heroic glory not to an individual human figure, but to blatantly labeled personifications of abstract virtues. Consequently, Sobriety can smash Luxury in the teeth, and add insult to injury by pointing out the poetic justice of

1 J. R. R. Tolkien is probably responsible for the currency of the notion; see his “Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics,” An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame 1963) 84.

her action, without leaving herself open to charges of *superbia*, since her
gab, or *beotword*, as well as her actions, do credit not to an Ingeld figure,
but to an abstract quality (lines 417-431):

Addit Sobrietas vulnus letale iacenti,
Coniciens silicem ripis de parte molarem,
Hunc vexilliferae quoniam fors obtulit ictum,
Spicula nulla manu sed belli insigne gerenti.
Casus agit saxum, medii spiramen ut oris
Frangeret et recavo miseret labra palato.
Dentibus introrsum resolutis, lingua resectam
Dilaniata gulum frustis cum sanguinis inplet.
Insolitis dapibus crudescit guttur, et ossa
Conliquefacta vorans removit quas hauserat offas.
“Ebibe iam proprium post pocula multa cruorem”,
Virgo ait inrectipans, sint haec tibi fercula tandem
Tristia praeteriti nimis pro dulcibus aevi:
Lascivas vitae inlecebras gustatus amarae
Mortis et horrifico sapor ultimus asperet haustu."³

In this passage, however, as well as in the *Psychomachia* as a whole,
Prudentius complicates the reconciliation of Christ and Ingeld both by show-
ing an elaborate interest in gore, and by coloring the passage with echoes
of Vergil; Lavarenne offers line 420 as an echo of *Aeneid* 8.683 and 12.289,
and he characterizes the *Psychomachia* generally as “ce pastiche du style
virgilien.”⁴

Vergil created difficulties for many Christian lovers of poetry; a passage
from Augustine’s *Confessions* is one of the more famous statements of a com-
mon predicament:

Nam utique meliores, quia certiores, erant primae illae litterae, qui-
bus fiebat in me et factum est et habeo, ilud, ut et legam, si quid
scriptum invenio, et scribam ipse, si quid volo, quam illae, qui-
bus tenere cogebas Aeneae nescio cuius errores oblitus errorum meo-
rum et plorare Didonem mortuam, quia se occidit ab amore, cum
interea me ipsum in his a te morientem, deus, vita mea, siccis oculis
ferrem miserrimus.⁵

For Augustine, then, at least in this passage, the study of pagan literature
is opposed to the study of the Bible; like Alcuin, he thinks in terms of ex-

⁴ Ibid. 12.
clusive, irreconcilable opposites, a *sens* emphasized in the above passage by the symmetrical rhetorico-syntactical structures Augustine chooses.

Augustine, of course, is only one of many early Christians for whom a choice between pagan and Christian literature seemed necessary; Jerome's problem, to choose between Christ and Cicero, is the other famous example. Prudentius, then, by combining Christ, Ingeld, and Vergil, created a problem at once doctrinal and aesthetic; recent critical response to the poem suggests that Prudentius's solution to the problem was not entirely satisfactory. Lavrenne speaks of "la terrible faute de gout qui consiste à représenter les vertus cruelles et bavardes," and his response substantially agrees with that of J. H. Thomson: "The zest with which Prudentius... dwells on the gruesome details of slaughter often obscures the fact that the poem has a religious purpose." Although he gives flesh and fleshly deeds somewhat too literally to his personified abstractions, Prudentius keeps his poem more in a devotional than in an imaginative mode, as the conclusion to the encounter between Patience and Wrath demonstrates; Patience literally infuriates Wrath to death (lines 145-161):

Ira ubi truncati mucronis fragmina vidit,
Et procul in partesensem crepusse minutas,
Iam capulum retinente manu sine pondere ferri,
Mentis inops eburs infelix decorisque pudendi
Perfida signa abicit, monumentaque tristia longe
Spernit, at ad proprium succeditur effera letum.
Missile de multis, quae frustra sparserat, unum
Pulvere de campi perversos sumit in usus:
Rasile figit humi lignum, ac se cuspidae versa
Perfodit, et calido pulmonen vulnere transit.
Quam superadsistens Patientia: "Vicimus," inquit,
"Exultans vitium solita virtute, sine ullo
Sanguinis ac vitae discimine; lex habet istud
Nostra genus belli, furias omnemque malorum
Militiam et rabidas tolerando extinguere vires.
Ipsa sibi est hostis vesania, sequre fuendo
Interimit, moriturque suis Ira ignea telis."

Unlike Sobriety, Patience has been able to keep her hands clean, but in the process, Prudentius has sacrificed the imaginative to the moral faculty. Seven

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6 Lavrenne (n. 3 above) 12; for an elaborate apology for Prudentius' technique, see Christian Gnilka, *Studien zur Psychomachia des Prudentius* (Wienbaden 1963) 51-81, in which Gnilka appeals to *das Vergeltungsprinzip*, *das Talionsprinzip*, and to Dante. Intellectual justification, however, does not always correspond with aesthetic justification.

7 The distinction between imaginative and devotional is C. S. Lewis's; *Allegory of Love* (Oxford 1958) 356.
hundred years later, in another battle of vices and virtues, Alanus de Insulis seems to have profited by Prudentius's folly; in the Anti-Claudianus, zeugma and asyndeton dispose of the task of describing the activities of the more blantly restrained virtues:

Pugnat in Excessum Moderantia, Sobria Fastum
Aggreditur Ratio, Poenam Tolerantia, Luxum
Sobrietas; sed pugna favet virtutibus, harum
Defendit partem victoria, vincitur ergo
Fastus, Luxus abit, cessat Gula, Crapula cedit.⁸

Prudentius's error seems to have been the decision to ignore a truth with which he shows himself to have been familiar toward the end of the Psychomachia: "Non simplex natura hominis [sc. est] . . . spiritibus pugnant variis lux atque tenebrae, Distantesque animat duplex substantia vires" (lines 904, 909-910).

Not every attempt to combine Ingeld and Christ produces even the complexity of the Psychomachia; in the ninth century, Angilbert’s lament for Lothair makes the combination for the purpose of simple panegyric:

Ecce olim velut Judas salvatorem tradidit,
sic te, rex, tuique duces tradiderunt gladio;
esto cantus, ne frauderis agnus lupo previo.⁹

The Christlike analogy that Angilbert is emphasizing here, however, concerns betrayal and death, without any element of triumph.

The most elaborate attempt to assert the validity of combining Christ and Ingeld is the Song of Roland, in which the hero is more complex than the personification of an abstract quality, and in which the poet chooses a genre more complex, at least in Aristotelian terms, than a lyric panegyric. In addition, Roland contains a notion of the duplex substantia of reality, if not of man; the opposition noticed most frequently by critics is a variation of the topos of sapientia et fortitudo, and occurs in the poem as a formula Rollant est proz e Oliver est soge (line 1093, inter alia). A contrast more specifically relevant to what I have been talking about is represented by another virtually formulaic line (1015): Paien unt tort e chrestiens unt dreit.¹⁰ This particular over-simplification, that pagans are categorically wrong and Christians categorically right, reflects a general characteristic of the poem which Auerbach has pointed out:

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⁸ PL. 210.512.
⁹ Ed. E. Dummler, Poetae latini aevi carolini 2.137.
¹⁰ All references to Roland are to Joseph Bédier’s edition (Paris 1937).
The subject of the *Chanson de Roland* is narrow, and for the men who figure in it nothing of fundamental significance is problematic. All the categories of this life and the next are unambiguous, immutable, fixed in rigid formulations. ... Temptation is there, to be sure, but there is no realm of problem. ... Rigid, narrow, and unproblematic schematization is originally completely alien to the Christian concept of reality. It is true, to be sure, that the rigidifying process is furthered to a considerable degree by the figural interpretation of real events, which, as Christianity became established and spread, grew increasingly influential and which, in its treatment of actual events, dissolved their content of reality, leaving them only their content of meaning. As dogma was established, as the Church's task became more and more a matter of organization, its problem that of winning over peoples completely unprepared and unacquainted with Christian principles, figural interpretation must inevitably become a simple rigid scheme.\textsuperscript{11}

Auerbach suggests that the poet has sacrificed a sufficiently complex sense of reality in order to convey a specific meaning; like Prudentius, then, the *Roland* poet has created a poem that is more devotional than imaginative. Certainly laisses 175-176 support Auerbach's suggestion, by presenting if not an abstract, at least a highly "figural" Roland:

Co sent Rollant de sun tenș n'i ad plus:
Devers Espaigne est un pui agut,
A l'une main si ad sun pis batud:
"Deus, meie culpa vers les tues vertuz
De mes pecchez, des granz e des menuz,
que jo ai fait des l'ure que nez fui
Tresqua cest jur que ci sui consout!"
Sun destre guant en ad vers Deu tendut.
Angles del ciel i descendent a lui.
Li quens Rollant se jut desuz un pin;
Envers Espaigne en ad turnet sun vis.
De plusieurs choses a remembrer li prist,
De tantes teres cum li bers cunquist,
De dulce France, des humes de sun lign,
De Carlemagne, sun seignor, kil nurrit;
Ne poet muer n'en plurt e ne suspirt.
Mai li meisme ne volt mettre en ubli,
Cleimet sa culpa, si priet Deu mercit:
"Veire Patene, ki unkes ne mentis,
Seint Lazaron de mort resurnexis
E Daniel des leons guaresis,
Guaris de mei l'amne de tuz perilz
Pur les pecchez que en ma vie fis!"
Sun destre guant a Deu en puroffrit.
Seint Gabriel de sa main l’ad pris.
Desur sun braz teneit le chef enclin;
Juntes ses mains est alet a sa fin.
Deus tramist sun angle Cherubin
E seint Michel del Peril;
Ensemb’ od els sent Gabriel i vint.
L’anne del cunte portent en pareis. (2366-2396)

In this passage, Roland begins his speech with the *mea culpa* of the *Confiteor*, sees himself prefigured both in the Old Testament and in the New, performs a series of gestures by means of which he seems to become iconographical before our very eyes, and is assumed, though not bodily, into heaven by three angels. Even Roland’s diction contributes to the devotional effect of the scene: *Patene* (line 2384) is usually glossed as *imago paterna*; Gaston Paris’s response to this line is relevant: “On pense à ces colossales images de Dieu le père, à ces ‘majestés’ en mosaïque, qui remplissent le fond des absides ou les voûtes des coupoles dans les églises byzantines.”

That Roland should receive a saint’s reward for his efficacy as a killer is a bit troublesome, though explicable in terms of what became Christian dogma. Patristic discussions of the justification for war continued uninterruptedly throughout the Middle Ages; going on a Crusade, of course, could be a way of doing penance. Perhaps the most formidable intellectual consideration of the problem is in Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa theologica*; the three requirements for a just Christian warrior are *auctoritas principis, causa justa*, and *intentio bellantium recta*. As the Old French poet presents him, Roland certainly fulfills all three of the Angelic Doctor’s requirements, although, as Auerbach suggests, he fulfills them in a way closer to the demands of dogma than to those of art.

One of the figures in the *Song of Roland*, however, cannot be disposed of with similar dogmatic neatness; Archbishop Turpin is troublesome. Aquinas deals at some length with the problem of clerical warriors, and concludes that Christ and Ingeld are unequivocally irreconcilable in the figure of a priest: “Onmes clericorum ordines ordinantur ad altaris ministerium, in quo sub sacramento repraesentatur passio Christi, secundum illud (1 Corin. 11.26) *quotiescumque manducabitis panem hunc, et calicem bibetis, mortem Domini annuntiabitis, donec veniat.* Et ideo non competit eis occidere vel effundere sanguinem, sed magis esse paratos ad propriam sanguinis ef-

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11 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Garden City 1957) 96, 97, 104.
13 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, Secunda Secundae, Quaestio 40, Articulus 1, n. 14, Articulus 2 (Bari 1868) 4.292 (also see n. 15).
fusionem pro Christo, ut imitentur opere quod gerunt ministerio."14 Aqui-

nas argues that the clergy may offer spiritual assistance to soldiers fighting

for a just cause; Turpin certainly offers such assistance in laisse 89 and 115,

but elsewhere he certainly violates the biblical injunction, "Arma militae

nostre non carnalia sunt, sed potentia Dei" (2 Corinthians 10:4). In laisse

se 114, for example, the poet describes Turpin's charge (providing inciden-
tally a miniature handbook of equitation), which results in the violent death

of the pagan, Abisme:

Turpins i fiert, ki nient ne l'esparignet,
Enpre sun colp ne qui qu'un dener vaillet,
Le cors li trenchet tres l'un costet qu'a l'altre,
Que mort l'abat en une voide place.
Dient Francenis "Ci ad grant vasselage!
En l'arcevesque est bon la croce salve." (1504-1509)

The battle humor of the fictional French in this passage suggests that they
are not troubled, but merely amused, by the combination of Christ and In-
geld in the figure of Archbishop Turpin. A bit later, when Malquiant kills
Anseis, Turpin avenges his peer:

Par le camp vait Turpin, li arcevesque.
Tel coronet ne chantat unches messe
Ki de sun cors feist tantes proeees.
Dist al paien: "Deus tut mal te tramette!
Tel as ocis dunt al coer me regrette."
Sun bon ceval i ad fait esdementre,
Si l'ad ferut sur l'escut de Tulette
Que mort l'abat desur l'herbe verte. (1605-1612)

Clearly, Turpin does not conform to Aquinas's notion of proper clerical con-
duct in battle, a notion, incidentally, which did not originate with Aquinas;
Vanderpol cites passages from Ambrose, Pope Nicholas I, Pope Innocent
I, the first Council of Toledo, and others, all of which indicate a strong tra-
dition of Catholic thought condemning killer priests.15

More difficult to accept than the contradiction inherent in the figure of
Turpin is that inherent in Charles's evangelical technique; having conquered
Sargossa, the emperor offers his vanquished foes a clear choice:

Li reis creit en Deu, faire voelt sun servise,
E si evesque les eves bencissent,

14 Ibid. 295-296.
15 Alfred Vanderpol, La doctrine scolastique du droit de guerre (Paris 1919) 121ff.
Meinent paien entesqu'al baptiserie:  
S'or i ad cel qui Carle cuntredie,  
Il le fait prendre o ardeir ou ocire.  
Baptizet sund asez plus de .C. milie  
Veir chrestien. (3666-3672)

Exactly how veir such chrestien could be presents no problem for the Roland poet.

The Song of Roland, then, offers a solution to the problem of combining Ingeld and Christ which is both intellectually and aesthetically less than satisfying, perhaps, as Auerbach suggests, because the poet lacked the sense that he was dealing with a problem at all. Although the poem has been called an epic, its racist, jingoistic, and hagiographic elements certainly create a poem entirely unlike the Aeneid, to which it bears some formal resemblances. Vergil never sees things as starkly categorically right or wrong as the Roland poet; his famous sense of lacrimae rerum is too strong for such oversimplifications, as the sorrowful words of Aeneas after he has killed Lausus, indicate:

Quid tibi nunc, miserande puer, pro laudibus istis,  
Quid plus Aeneas tanta dabit indole dignum?  
Arma, quiibus laetatus, habe tua; teque parentum  
Manibus et cineri, si qua est ea cura, remitto.  
Hoc tamen infelix miseram solabere mortem:  
Aeneae magni dextra cadis. (10.825-830)

Vergil’s awareness of the complexity of morality, and even his caritas, are greater than the awareness and caritas of the Christian poet of the Song of Roland.

Devotional poetry, however, need not necessarily lack a sense of the problematic in combining Ingeld and Christ. Composed in the ninth century, the Old English Andreas, deals with a recognized Christian saint, and yet provides a number of problematic moments for Andreas, during the most dramatic of which he compares himself to Christ (lines 1401-1428):

Næfre ic geferde mid frean willan  
Under heofonhwealf  heardran drohtnoþ,  
Pær ic dryntnes æ  deman sceolde.  
Sint me leofu tolacen, lic sare gebrocen,  
Banhus blodfag, benne weallæp,  
Seonodolg swatige. Hwæt, þu sigora weard,

16 The comparison is developed by W. Tavener, in Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur 36.76ff.
Dryhten hælend, on dæges tide
Mid Juedeum geomor wurde
Pa þu of gealgan, god lifigende,
Fyrnweorc wrea, to fæder cleopodest,
Cininga wuldor, on cwaede þus:
"Ic þe, fæder engla, frignan wille,
Lifes leohtfruma, hwæt forlaest þu me?"
Ond ic nu þry dagas þolian sceolde
Wælgrim witu. Bidde ic, weoroda god,
Pæt ic gast minne agifan mote,
Sawla symbelgifa, on þines sylfes hand.
Pu þæt gehete þurh þin halig word,
Pæt þu us twelue trymman ongunne,
Pæt us heterofo hild ne gesceode,
Ne lices dæl lungre oppeode,
Ne synu ne ban on swæpe lagon,
Ne loc of heafde to forlore wurde,
Gif we þine lare læstan woldon.
Nu sint sionwe toslopen, is min swat adropen,
Licgæp æfter lande locas todriene,
Fex on foldan. Is me feorhgedal
Leorfe mycle þonne þeos litearo.17

Andreas's suffering, as martyr and spiritual *heterofo*, is subsequently relieved by God, who sends a flood to drown his disciple's cannibal tormentors. Then, presumably to show the *duplex substantia* of divinity, which exercises *caritas* as well as *justitia*, God brings the dead men, at Andreas's request, back to life. Andreas's own double nature, as warrior and as a type of Christ, is explicitly, even blatantly present in the text of the poem.

A less explicitly Christian killer, in a poem whose resemblances to *Andreas* have often been noted, *Beowulf* is a good example of a nondogmatic, tentative, unschematic attempt to solve the problem of combining Ingeld and Christ. Not everyone, however, senses such ambiguities in *Beowulf*. Maurice McNamee has no difficulty in seeing *Beowulf* as Christ, particularly in the battle scene with Grendel's mother:

To an audience familiar with this symbolic meaning of immersion into emersion from waters infested by the powers of hell and purified by the powers of God, it would have been natural to see in Beowulf’s descent into the serpent-infested mere and his triumphant ascent from those waters purified of their serpents a symbolic representation of the death and burial and of the resurrection of

Christ, and, in the purification of the waters, a symbol of the redemption of man from the poisonous powers of evil... sufficient clue for such an interpretation would have been provided for such an audience by the explicit identification of Grendel’s dam and Grendel himself with the powers of evil.\textsuperscript{18}

Passages with rich, vaguely archetypal elements such as the one Father McNamee is talking about lend themselves fairly easily to patristic exegesis, but the results of such exegesis sometimes suggest that the poetry is functioning as a set of circus animals in the mind of the exegete. Some very attractive examples of such ringmastership present themselves in a fourteenth-century poem, the \textit{Ovide moralisé}, for example, and some of them are suggestively relevant to Father McNamee’s remarks.

When Aeneas descends to hell, the poet explains (14.978-984):

\begin{quote}
Par Eneas puis droitement  
Noter le piteuz Rambeour,  
Le debonaire Sauveour.  
Le fil Dieu, qui deigne[r] venir  
Des cielz en terre, et devenir  
Vrais homs, e enfers visiter,  
Pour ses amis d’enfer giter. (14.9)\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

When Orpheus descends to hell, the poet offers a similar explication: (11.178-183):

\begin{quote}
Orpheus denote à delivre  
Jhesu Christ, parole devine,  
Le doucтор de bone doctrine  
Qui par sa predicacion  
Avoit de mainte nacion  
La gentatraite et convertie. (11.1)
\end{quote}

The \textit{Ovide moralisé} poet offers a similarly ingenious explication for the descent of Pirithous and Theseus (7.2037ff.), and manages an extraordinarily violent yoking of opposites in 13.931ff. where Ajax and Ulysses are said to represent Saint John and Christ, respectively.

The poet’s ingenious ability to find any number of Ingelds to be Christ is a historical curiosity, and may produce some aesthetic pleasure for us, but his exegesis certainly cannot be considered to have much to do with the poem Ovid wrote. Similarly, Father McNamee seems to mistake a re-

\textsuperscript{18} M. B. McNamee, “\textit{Beowulf}—an Allegory of Salvation?” ed. Nicholson (n. 1 above) 341. For another extravagantly patristic exegesis see n. 44 below.

\textsuperscript{19} References to \textit{Ovide moralisé} are to C. de Boer’s reprinted edition, 5 vols. (Wiesbaden 1966).
semblance for an identity, possibly because his remarks were intended for a polemical context. Critics have occupied themselves for many years in a discussion of the extent to which Beowulf is a Christian or a pagan poem. Father McNamee's position represents one pole, F. A. Blackburn's "Beowulf is essentially a heathen poem" represents the other. Neither position seems compelling, however, since Beowulf is a poem, not an argument. Perhaps the most satisfying position is represented by J. A. A. Tolkien's remarks about the poem: "It is a poem by a learned man, writing of old times, who looking back on the heroism and sorrow feels in them something permanent and something symbolical. So far from being a confused semi-pagan—historically unlikely for a man of this sort in the period—he brought probably first to his task a knowledge of Christian poetry, especially that of the Caedmon school, and especially Genesis." Tolkien focuses his attention on the poem as an imaginative work, in which the poet attempts paradoxical combinations: "And in the poem I think we may observe not confusion, a half-hearted and muddled business, but a fusion that has occurred at a given point of contact between old and new, a product of thought and deep emotion." 

Other critics have also described Beowulf in terms of paradoxical combinations. Robert Kaske, for example, says: "I believe that in the sapientia et fortitudo theme itself we may find the "precise point at which an imagination, pondering old and new, was kindled"—that the poet has used this old ideal as an area of synthesis between Christianity and Germanic paganism. In a broad way, he seems first to draw on both traditions primarily as they relate to sapientia et fortitudo, and secondly, within this circumscribed area, he seems to emphasize those aspects of each tradition that can be made reasonably compatible with the viewpoint of the other—somewhat like Dante's more complex synthesis of classical and Christian morality in the Inferno. As a result of examining three sets of opposites, Herbert Wright concludes: "He [the Beowulf poet] has no meticulous design, worked out with mathematical precision from start to finish. The three groups of opposites that have been examined are seen to intersect but not to coincide; and though they contribute to a fundamental unity, as the poem advances, with the deepening of the elegiac strain, sorrow gets the upper hand, and all else is subordinate."

21 Tolkien (n. 1 above) 78.
22 Ibid. 70.
24 Ibid. 267.
Analyzing works of literature in terms of paradoxical combinations is, of course, by now a fashionable critical employment. The remarks of Tolkien, Kaske, and Wright, however, suggest that Beowulf offers particularly rich material for such analyses, principally, I think, because the Beowulf poet, unlike the Roland poet, does not sacrifice imaginative possibilities for devotional exigencies.

The lines that follow the slaying of Grendel’s mother illustrate the Beowulf poet’s ability to suggest rather than to schematize lines 1605b-1611):

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\begin{align*}
\text{þe þæt sveord ongan} & \quad \text{hildegicelum.} \\
\text{æfter heþoswate} & \quad \text{þæt wæs wundra sum,} \\
\text{Wigbil wanian;} & \quad \text{ise gelicost,} \\
\text{Þæt hit eal gemanlt} & \quad \text{Fæder onlæteþ,} \\
\text{Þonne forstes bend} & \quad \text{se geweald hafþ} \\
\text{Onwindeþ wælrapas,} & \quad \text{Sæla ond mæla;} \\
\text{þæt is sop Metod.} & \quad \text{þæt is sop Metod.}
\end{align*}
\]

In this striking combination of heroic, folk, and Christian elements, the poet suggests an analogy between the melting of the sword and the seasonal miracle God performs by seeing to it that spring follows winter. God’s presence in the universe, then, for the Beowulf poet can be felt in the course of natural events, but for the Roland poet God’s presence in the universe can only be represented by a literal break in the natural course of events, by making the earth quake, and by paralysing the sun. Aelfric’s remarks at the end of the tenth century on the tawdry sensationalism of miracles help illustrate the contrast between the two poets:

Fela wundra worhtæ God, and daeghwamlice wyrcð, ac ða wundra sind swiðe awacode on manna gesiðæ, forðon ðe hi sind swiðe gewunelice. Mare wundor is þæt God Aelmihtig ælce dag getealne middangeard, and gewissað þa godan, þonne þæt wundor waere, þæt He ða gefylde fif ðusend manna mid fif hlafum.

As a result of the Beowulf poet’s less schematic, less artificial notion of the nature of reality, no contradictions as blatant as those produced, for example, by the figure of Archbishop Turpin in Roland, exist in any of the characters in Beowulf. Although the characters and incidents are pre-Christian, the poet makes use of what has been called “Christian coloring,” and consequently manages, intentionally or otherwise, to follow Gregory’s advice about putting pagan material to Christian use:

- References to Beowulf are to Klabeur’s edition (New York 1950).
We have been giving careful thought to the affairs of the English, and have come to the conclusion that the temples of the idols in that country should on no account be destroyed. He is to destroy the idols, but the temples themselves are to be aspersed with holy water, altars set up, and relics enclosed in them. For if these temples are well built, they are to be purified from devil-worship, and dedicated to the service of the true God. And since they have a custom of sacrificing many oxen to devils, let some other solemnity be substituted in its place, such as a day of Dedication or the Festivals of the holy martyrs whose relics are enshrined there. On such occasions they might well construct shelters of boughs for themselves around the churches that were once temples, and celebrate the solemnity with devout feasting. They are no longer to sacrifice beasts to the Devil, but they may kill them for food to the praise of God, and give thanks to the Giver of all gifts for His bounty. If the people are allowed some worldly pleasures in this way, they will more readily come to desire the joys of the spirit. For it is certainly impossible to eradicate all errors from obstinate minds at one stroke, and whoever wishes to climb to a mountain top climbs gradually step by step, and not in one leap.\textsuperscript{27}

Gregory's practical advice suggests that one who has a strong feeling for the spirit can accommodate the possible ambiguities of the letter; Alcuin's response would then seem unduly rigid. Leo Spitzer has suggested that the difference between Ambrose and Augustine may be characterized roughly as a contrast between an inclusive and an exclusive sensibility; Alcuin and Gregory would seem to illustrate the same contrast.\textsuperscript{28} Alcuin sees a problem, where Gregory and the \textit{Beowulf} poet find a compassable ambiguity.

A very strong feeling for the positive aspects of heroic values, combined with an equally strong feeling for the transitoriness of the same values gives \textit{Beowulf} its unique quality. In the same speech, Hrothgar can say:

\begin{quote}
Blæd is araerδ
Geond widwegas, wine min Beowulf
Din ofer þeoda gehwylc. Eal þu hit gebyldum healdest,
Maegen mid modes snyttrum. (1703b-1706a)
\end{quote}

and subsequently add:

\begin{quote}
Nu is þines maegnes blaed
Ane hwile; eft sona bið,
Þæt þec adl oððe ecg eaþþes getwæfe,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{27} Bede, \textit{A History of the English Church and People}, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (Penguin 1960) 86-87.

\textsuperscript{28} See Leo Spitzer, \textit{Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony} (Baltimore 1963) 32-33.
Odde fyres feng, odde flodes wylm,
Odde gripe meces, odde gares flht,
Odde atal yldo; odde eagna hearhtm
Foriteð ond forsworçce; semninga bið
Daet ðec, dryghtguma, deð oferswyðed. (1761b-1768)

Like Chaucer in the Troilus, then, the Beowulf poet presents the phenomenal world with positive intensity, while simultaneously attempting to create a feeling in his audience (or to articulate his own feeling) for a structure that transcends and in a sense negates the values of the phenomenal world. Also like Chaucer in the Troilus, he creates a poem whose imaginative life cancels out, for many readers, the possible homiletic intentions.

At this point, the Nibelungenlied may provide, with its unequivocal rejection of the possibilities of a reconciliation between Ingeld and Christ, a contrast that will make clearer the extent to which Beowulf represents a tentative, ambiguous response to the problem of such a reconciliation.29 The opening stanza of the Nibelungenlied lays out a series of antinomies that create, instead of ambiguity, an explicitly articulated awareness of the limitations of the phenomenal world:

    Uns ist in alten maeren wunders vil geseit
    Von helden lobebæreren, von grozer arebeit,
    Von freuden, hochgeziten, von weinen und von klagen
    Von kuener recken striten muget ir nu wunder hoeren sagen.30

That joy is followed by sadness is of course the central commonplace of the De contemptu mundi tradition, which might be considered a series of variations on Proverbs 16: “Extrema gaudii luctus occupat.”31 In this particular stanza the Nibelungenlied poet has made use of prosodic and syntactical patterns to emphasize his Stoic horror of heroic activities. Several other examples of the expression of this commonplace, also reinforced by parallel prosodic and syntactical patterns, occur in the first Aventiure: in the second stanza the poet says about Kriemhild that “si wart ein scoene wip. dar umbe muosen degene vil verliesen den lip”—great physical beauty leads to great physical destruction. In the sixth stanza the poet connects heroic nobility with inevitable tragic destruction:

29 For the most precise argument of the sense in which the Nibelungenlied is a criticism of heroic values (among others), see Gottfried Weber, Das Nibelungenlied, Problem und Idee (Stuttgart 1963), and particularly his “Schlussmeditation” (195-198).
30 References to the Nibelungenlied are to stanzas in the edition by Karl Bartsch, revised by Helmut de Boor (Wiesbaden 1959).
31 For a convenient description of the De casibus tradition, see Willard Farnham, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (Berkeley 1936).
In diente von ir landen vil stolziu ritterschaft
Mit lobelchten eren unz an ir endes zit.
Si stürben sit jaemerliche von zweier edelen frouwens nit.

Toward the end of the first Aventiure, Kriemhild and her mother, Vote, discuss the meaning of Kriemhild’s first dream (stanzas 14-15):

Den troum si dò sagete ir muoter Uoten.
Sine kundes niht beseiden baz der guoten:
"Der valke den du ziuhest, das ist sin [e]del man.
In welle got behüiten, du muost in sciere vloren hân."
"Waz saget ir mit von manne, viel liebiu muoter min? 
Âne reccen minne sò wil ich immer sin.
Sus scoen ich wil beliben unz an minen tòt,
Daz ich von mannes minne sol gewinnen nimmer nòt."

Although Kriemhild’s response is to be taken as a dramatic statement, and not necessarily as a statement of the poet’s view of things, her sense of the connection between love and disaster proves to be accurate in the course of the poem. Her use of the word nòt also echoes one of the central themes of the poem, the ineluctable workings of fate, the overwhelming force of Necessity. "Nòt" is of course literally the last word in the text, as we have it, and such is the force of the notion of necessity in the poem, that the alternative title of Nibelungennòt has frequently been prefixed to it. In addition, one of the hypothetical sources of the Nibelungenlied is a poem usually known as Diu Nòt.32

Necessity is used in the poem in the sense of a universal limiting force, and in the sense of human compulsion; when Giselher offers to try to make up for the death of Sifrid, Kriemhild replies: "des waere Kriemhilde nòt (stanza 1080)." Helentlessly, the Nibelungenlied poet pursues his notion that heroic values necessarily lead to the destruction of human ones, as the concluding two stanzas and the final word of the poem clearly assert:

Diu vil michel ère was dà gelegen tòt.
Die liute heten alle jàmer unde nòt.
Mit leide was verendet des kuniges höhgezit.
Als ie diu liebe leide z’aller jungeste git.
Ine kan iu niht beschieden, waz sider dà geschach:
Wan ritter under vrouwen weinen man da sach,
Dar zuo die edeln knehte, ir lieben friunde tòt.
Hie hât daz maere ein ende: daz ist der Nibelunge nòt.

32 See Weber (n. 29 above) 245-249, for his excursus on nòt.
In addition to its diction and rhetoric, the poem's two central trap scenes emphasize the poet's sense of the compulsive destructiveness of heroic values; Sifrid's entrapment and death ends the first part of the poem, and the destruction of the Burgundians and most of their hosts ends the second part of the poem.

Trying for the darkest ironies possible, the Nibelungenlied poet shows Hagen killing Sifrid at a spring, conventionally a source of life:

Der brunne der was küele, løter une guot...
Dà der herre Sifrit ob dem brunnen tranc,
Er schôz in durch das kriuze, daz von der wunden spranc
Daz bluot im von dem herzen vaste an die Hagenen wàt.

(979, 981)

The kriuze is the mark Kriemhild has made to protect Sifrid, and possibly the poet also wants some of the resonance that would result from the audience's Christian associations with kriuze, a cross. The notion of violated nature is further emphasized when the poet tells us that flowers were wet with Sifrid's blood: "Die bluomen allenthalben von bluote wurden naz" (998).

Associating his death with violated nature also supports Sifrid's mythic overtones in the poem; the Burgundians are killed in a hall, traditionally symbolic of civilization, in a treacherous, most uncivilized encounter with Etzel's men. Thus, the Nibelungenlied poet has structured his poem to convey very vividly the sense that purely heroic values lead to the destruction both of nature and of civilization.

The most startlingly gruesome illustration of the destruction of civilized values is in the final trap, a dark parody of heroic Gemütlichkeit and possibly also of the Eucharist, represented by the Burgundian's enforced vampirism:

Ir elner sprach dar inne: "wir müezen ligen tôt.
Was hilfet uns das grüezen, daz uns der künc embôt?
Mir tuot von starker hitze der durst so rehte wè,
Des waen mën leben schiere in disen sorgen zergè."
Dö sprach von Tronege Hagen: "ir edeln ritter guot,
Swen twinge durstes nôt, der trinke hie daz bluot.
Daz ist in solher hitze noch bezzer danne wën.
Ez enmac an disen ziten et nû niht bezzer gesîn."
Dö gie der recken einer da er einen töten vant.
Er kniete im zuo der wunden, den helm er ab gebant,
Dö begone er trinken daz vliezende bluot.
Swie ungewon ers waere, ez dûhte in groezlichen guot.
"Nu lûn iu got, her Hagen", sprach der müede man,
"Daz ich von iuwer lère sô wol getrunken hân.
Mir ist noch vil selten geschenket bezzer wîn.
Lebe ich deheine wile, ich sol iu immer waage sîn." (2113-2116)
In addition to violating the decorum of nature, civilization, and the comitatus feast, the relentless pursuit of heroic values also perverts the erotic relationships in the poem: Brunhild is an amazon, Kriemhild metamorphoses from a minnetliche meide into a Medea figure. Wealthcweow or Alde la bele would not survive long in the world of the Nibelungs.

Despite the blatantly antiheroic attitudes that the poet expresses, not everyone agrees that the Nibelungenlied is a Christian poem. A. T. Hatto goes to what seem to me perverse lengths to deny Christianity to the poem: "Although we must assume that the Nibelungenlied was written by a Christian poet for Christian audiences, and that he leaves loose ends for thoughtful Christians to take up if they so please, the mood which the poem induced was not a Christian mood, and the result is not a Christian poem."33 His statement is reminiscent of the kind of statement occasionally made in the not too distant past about Shakespeare’s Lear, and suggests a rigidly narrow notion of what the possibilities of a Christian imagination are. Certainly the Nibelungenlied poet’s horror at the values of heroic society corresponds to Alcuin’s horror, and is intensified by the poet’s awareness of the relevance of his subject to his own time and place. As Gottfried Weber has said: "Was also der Nibelungenautor wunschmässig erstrebt, ist ganz gewiss nicht das spezifisch Heideische am Germanischen, ebensowenig aber etwa auch eine gegenwartnahe Art von mittelalterlichem Neuheidentum. Sondern seine Position wird klar bezeichnet durch eine höchst problematische Spannung zwischen dem Heldischen und dem für ihn im Nebelhaften bleibenden Christlich-Göttlichen."34

Like Beowulf, the Nibelungenlied has long supplied critics with material to argue for or against the notion that it is a Christian poem. Even without considering Weber’s formidable arguments, the poem seems obviously and utterly Christian. The overall movement from joy to grief, from the top of the wheel of Fortune to the bottom, certainly fits the notion of tragedy repetitively referred to by that repository of Christian clichés, Chaucer’s Monk:

For hym that folweth al this world of prees,
Er he he war, is ofte yleyed ful lowe.35

That the poet has substituted a church for a stream as the setting for the flying of Brunhild and Kriemhild also suggests a feeling for specifically Christian dark ironies.

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33 Arthur Thomas Hatto, The Nibelungenlied (Baltimore 1965) 343.
34 Weber (n. 29 above) 178.
In addition to the canibalistic parody of the Eucharist, the meeting of Brunhild and Kriemhild at church, and the general correspondance of the poem to the *De Caesibus* tradition, the figure of Dietrich von Berne, the historical Theodoric, may also have some Christian significance. Of the heroic figures in the poem, Dietrich survives in the most admirable fashion at the end of the poem. Theodoric, though an Arian, was associated with religious tolerance, a tradition that is reflected in a thirteenth-century poetic description of him piously lamenting his dead companions:

Ich bite ich, muoter unde mait,
Kunegin von himmelrich,
Daz ir bedenket minu leit.\[36\]

Another tradition, however, represents him as an enemy of the church; after Theodoric has imprisoned the Pope, the *Kaiserchronik* records:

Die cristen dö clageten
Daz si verlorn habeten
Ir maister alsô lieben,
Dô rach si got sciere,
Want er die cristen hête gelaidiget
Dô wart im vor gote vertaliet,
Vil manige daz sáhen,
Daz in die tievel námen,
Si vuorten in in den berch ze Vulcán
Daz gebôt in sancte Johannes der hailige man,
Der brinnet er unz an dem jungisten tae,
Daz im niemen gehellen nemac.\[37\]

Dietrich in the *Nibelungenlied*, however, is unambiguously decent, as the lament he recites for his fallen men indicates:

"Und sint erstorben alle mine man,
Sô hät mün got vergezen, ich armer Dietrich.
Ich waz ein künec hère, vil gewaltic unde rích."
"Wie kinde ez sich gefüegen," sprach aber Dietrich,
"Daz si alle sint erstorben, die helde loblich,
Von dem strittmüden, die doch heten nöt?
Wan durch mën ungelücke, in waere vremde noch der tôt...
"Owé, lieber Wolfhert, sol ich dich hän verlorn,
So mac mich balde riuwen daz ich is wart geborn!"

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Like Andreas, Dietrich feels abandoned by God, like Charlemagne he articulates his grief in terms of *ubi sunt* rhetoric\(^\text{38}\) (as he does in the passage from the *Battle of R Avaenna* quoted above); in addition, he places himself in the *De casibus* tradition, wishes for death, like Job and Oedipus, and echoes the *Nibelungenlied* poet's preoccupation with *nôt*. Dietrich is then an extremely complex figure, or *figura*, in a Christian poem, who nevertheless does not represent an attempt to combine Christ and Ingeld. Instead, Dietrich represents the *Nibelungenlied* poet's notion of an heroic paradigm, as Weber has asserted: "Denn kein Zweifel kann weiterhin darüber obwaltan, dass die Dietrich-Gestalt von ihrem Schöpfer als eine geschlossene und ganzheitliche gedacht ist, dass Ethos und metaphysisches Meinen letztlich in ihr zusammenstimmen, dass ritterliche Züge und heldische Geistesart zu neuer Einheit in Dietrich von Bern zusammenwachsen sollten."\(^\text{39}\) But the *Nibelungenlied* poet, as Weber points out, is careful not to give Dietrich any transcendent qualities, because, I think, he, like Alcuin, saw no possibilities for combining Ingeld and Christ.

The most violent combination of Ingeld and Christ in medieval literature is in *Njal-Saga*, when Kari and his men discover the partially burned body of Skarp-hedin, the saga's leading killer:

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\(^{38}\) See *Roland* 2402ff.

\(^{39}\) Weber (n. 29 above) 169.
varu ekki brunnin. Hann hafði lagit hendr sinar í kross ok á ofan
ina högrí, en tvá dila fundu þeir á honum, annan meðal herðanna,
en annan á brjóstinni, ok var hvártræggj brendr í kross, ok æt-
luðu menn, at hann mundi sæk sjálfr brent hafa. Allir menn mæltu
þat, at betra þeiti hjá Skarpheðni dauðum en ætluðu, því at
engi maðr hraeddisk hann.40

Skarp-Hedin literally makes himself into a figura combining Christ and
In
geld, but in the light of Skarp-Hedin’s past brutality, the figura seems gro
tesque. Of all the killers in the saga, Skarp-hedin seems the most cold-blood-
ed, least self-conscious, and certainly least guilt-conscious. Gunnar, on
the other hand, a kind of Dietrich figure, shows the kind of hesitancy about
killing that one might reasonably expect of a Christian, but he is exiled and
killed before Christianity enters either Iceland or Njálssaga. Skarp-Hedin’s
apparently self-inflicted stigmata suggest that Njala’s author had an ironic
awareness of the sense in which Christianity first came to Iceland. Earlier
in the saga, Thangbrand, the first successful Christian missionary to Ice-
land, demonstrates an evangelical technique roughly equivalent to that of
Turpin and Charlemagne. Instead of undergoing the passion of a martyr,
Thangbrand beats his pagan opponents to death, or, with the assistance
of white magic like an Old Testament prophet, he causes the earth to open
up and swallow them. The only element in the scene clearly drawn from
the New Testament is Thangbrand’s crucifix, which he uses quite literally
as a shield against the assaults of his enemies.41

Then they looked for Sharp-Hedin. The servants showed them the place where
Flósi and his men had heard the verse uttered. The roof had collapsed there beside
the gable wall, and that was where Hjalti told them to dig. They did so, and
found the body of Skarp-Hedin. He had himself upright against the wall; his legs
were almost burnt off below the knees, but the rest of him was unburnt. He had
bitten hard on his lip. His eyes were open but not swollen. He had driven his axe
into the gable with such violence that half the full depth of the blade was buried
in the wall, and the metal had not softened. His body was carried out, with the
axe. Hjalti picked up the axe and said, “this is a rare weapon. Few could wield
it.” “I know the man to wield it,” said Kari. “Who is that?” asked Hjalti. “Thor-
gerd Skorar-Gerli,” replied Kari. “He is outstanding member of that family now.”
They stripped Skarp-Hedin’s body, for the clothes has not been burnt off. He
had crossed his arms, with the right one over the left. They found two marks on
his body, one between the shoulders, the other on his chest, both of them burn
marks in the shape of a cross; they came to the conclusion that he had branded
them on himself. They all agreed that they found it less uncomfortable to see Skarp-
Hedin dead than they had expected; for no one felt any fear of him.

Njál’s Saga, Trans. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Palsson (Penguin, 1960). Some of the
delicate evocation of “ok ætluðu menn” is lost by translating “they came to the conclusion.”

41 Sveinsson (n. 40 above) chap. 101.
Other, less grotesquely ironic combinations of Christ and Ingeld occur in medieval literature, particularly in Arthurian material. In the thirteenth-century *Prose Lancelot*, a strikingly precise combination occurs, as R. S. Loomis has observed; when Galahad is introduced with the greeting, "pax soit o vous":

The author, let us observe, has subtly imparted a Christian flavor to the pagan myth by introducing details from the gospel of St. John. Twice, when the disciples were gathered together after the Resurrection, Jesus entered, though the doors were closed and stood among them; and greeted them with the words "Peace be with you!" By borrowing these two details from one of the most awe-inspiring appearances of Christ after His death, the author created precisely the right atmosphere for the arrival of the Christ-knight Galahad.\(^{42}\)

By the fourteenth century, the combination of Christ and Ingeld seems to offer no great difficulties; William Matthews points out such a combination in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*:

The poet chose to make both his Arthur and his Mordred regard Gawain dead as Christ crucified, and from his own bitterness over Gawain's self-immolation and the passionate lyricism of his own lament it may be suspected that he himself looked on his hero as a type of the Saviour. But if Mordred's fear that his part in the catastrophe has been a Judas role has the poet's support, the parallelisms between Joseph of Arimathea's proceedings and Arthur's do not make the king a type of Joseph. When Arthur finds Gawain's corpse, pierced through and stained with blood, his sorrow surpasses anything proper to the death of a mortal man, and his knights rebukingly suggest a more fitting object:

Be knygghtly of contenaunce, als a kyng scholde,
And leue siche clamoure for Cristes lufe of heuen (3979-3980)

But Arthur's grief is the passion of one who sees before him both an embodiment of Christ and the tragic result of his own guilt. Catching up the corpse, he kisses the leaden lips, fainting under the stress of his emotion:

Than sweltis the swete kynge and in swoun fallis,
Swafres vp swifteuly, and swetly hym kysses,
Till his hurliche herde was blody beronnen,
Alls he had bestes birteneede and broghte owt of life (3969-3972)

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Liberum-dei-arbitrium for love hath undertake
That this Jesus of his gentrice shal jouste in Pers armes
In his helm and in his haberjon, humana natura,
That Christ be nat yknowe for consummatus deus;
In Peres plates the Plouhman this prikiare shal ryde,
For no dynt shal hym dere as in deilate patris. 46

In this complex passage, Langland has combined Christ, Ingeld, Piers, and a number of theological abstractions without confusing imaginative and devotional categories: all the schemes and tropes of alta fantasia may be legitimately employed in the impossible task of describing divinity. A striking modern use of the Christ-Ingeld topos is Wilfred Owen’s “Soldier’s Dream,” in which Owen despairingly opposes God and Christ, suggesting a kind of ultimate biblical disharmony:

I dreamed kind Jesus fouled the big-gun gears;
And caused a permanent stoppage in all bolts;
And buckled with a smile Mausers and Celts;
And rusted every bayonet with His tears.
And there were no more bombs, or ours or Theirs,
Not even an old flint-lock, nor even a pikel.
But God was vexed, and gave all power to Michael;
And when I woke he’s seen to our repairs.

In addition to giving Christ Ingeldlike qualities, some medieval authors give him simultaneously the qualities of a courtly lover, as in the following passage from the thirteenth-century Ancren Riwe:

A lefdi wes mid hire fan biset al abuten, hire lond al destroyed, ant heo al pourre, inwidi an eordene castel. A mihti kinges luue wes pah biturnd upon hire, swa unimete swiðe þet he for wohlech sende hire his sonden. an efer oðer, ofte somet monie; sende hire beawbelez baðe feole ant feire, sucrs of liveneð. help of his hehe hird to halden hire castel. Hee underfeng al as on unrecheles, ant swa wes heardi-heartet þet hire luue ne mahte he neaver beo þe norre. Hwet wült to mare? He com himself on ende; schwade hire his feire neb, as þe þe wes of alle men feherest to bihalden; spec se swiðe swoteliche, ant wordes se murie, þat ha mahten deade arearen to luue; wrahtfe feole wundres ant dude muchele meistries biuren hire chshiðe; schwade hire his mihte; talde hire of his kinedom; head to makien hire owen of al þet he ahte.
Al þis ne heold naut. Nes þis hoker wunder? For heo nes neauer wurðe forte beon his þuften. Ah swa, þurh his deboneirte, luue hefde

ouercumen him þet he seide on ende: “Dame, þu art iweorret, ant þine van besð se stronge þet tu ne maht nanesweis wðute mi succurs edflæon hare honden, þet ha ne don þe to scheome deãð eftor al þi weane. Ich chulle, for þe luue of þe, neome þet feht upo me ant arudde þe of ham þi deãð sceðde. Ich wat þah to sode þet Ich schal bituhen ham neomen deãð es wunde; andt Ich hit wulle heorte-liche, forte ofgan þin heorte. Nu þenne biseche Ich þe, for þe luue þet Ich cuðe þe, þet tu luuviæ me, lanhaere eftor þe ilke deðe deãð hwæ þu naldest lives.” þes king dude al þus—arudde hire of all hire van, ant wes himselfe to wundre ituket ant islein on ende, þurh miracle aras þah from deaðe to liue. Nere þeos ilke leafdil of uue-les cunes kunde, 3ef ha ouer alle þing ne luuede him herefter? þes king is Jesu, Godes sune, þet al o þise wise wohede ure sawle þe deolfen hefden biset.47

Miss Woolf supplies other medieval examples in her article; the commonplace continued through the Renaissance—its most famous reoccurrence is probably “Batter my heart, three-personed God,” in which Donne intensifies the topos with a sense of urgent personal guilt, and with an hysterical sense of sexuality. The combination of Christ, Ingeld, and Eros, particularly in Tristan, Parzifal, and Troilus, however, deserves to be treated in a separate paper.

Merely combining Christ and Ingeld presented a considerable range of problems; successful solutions were achieved, I think, by the poets who intuited a notion of art articulated by Graham Hough: “Since the immediate conformity of the sensibility to the moral imperative is generally approved in our culture there is a strong critical inclination to make the poets conform in this way. I think we should be more willing to recognize unresolved tensions. It is one of the missions of the poet to retain them. It is not what Milton meant, but perhaps that is one of the reasons that they are better teachers than Scotus or Aquinas.”48


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