INGELD AND CHRIST: A MEDIEVAL PROBLEM

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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?).[1] 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 idgenus portare [or, pro tempore] tractat."[2] 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.

[2] As quoted in Carl Erdmann, "Fabulae curiales," *Zeitschrift fur deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 63 (1936) 88-89.

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 rupis 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 misceret labra palato.
> Dentibus introrsum resolutis, lingua resectam
> Dilaniata gulam 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 increpitans, sint haec tibi fercula tandem
> Tristia praeteriti nimiis 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 showing 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 common predicament:

> Nam utique meliores, quia certiores, erant primae illae litterae, quibus fiebat in me et factum est et habeo, iilud, ut et legam, si quid scriptum invenio, et scribam ipse, si quid volo, quam illae, quibus tenere cogebar Aeneae nescio cuius errores oblitus errorum meorum 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-

[3] *Psychomachia* 417-431, ed. M. Lavarenne, *Prudence* 3 (Paris 1963) 65.
[4] *Ibid.* 12.
[5] *Confessions* 1.13, ed. Joseph Trabucco (Paris 1960) 30.

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. Lavarenne 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."[6] 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,[7] 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 partes ensem crepuisse minutas,
> Iam capulum retinente manu sine pondere ferri,
> Mentis inops ebur infelix decorisque pudendi
> Perfida signa abicit, monumentaque tristia longe
> Spernit, at ad proprium succenditur effera letum.
> Missile de multis, quae frustra sparserat, unum
> Pulvere de campi perversos sumit in usus:
> Rasile figit humi lignum, ac se cuspide 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, seque furendo
> 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

[6] Lavarenne (n. 3 above) 12; for an elaborate apology for Prudentius' technique, see Christian Gnilka, *Studien zur Psychomachia des Prudentius* (Wiesbaden 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 blatantly 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 Iudas 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 sage* (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:

[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.[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 tens n'i ad plus:
> Devers Espaigne est un pui agut,
> A l'une main si ad sun piz batud:
> "Deus, meie culpe vers les tues vertuz
> De mes pecchez, des granz e des menuz,
> que jo ai fait des l'ure que nez fui
> Tresqu'a 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 plusurs choses a remembrer li prist,
> De tantes teres cum li bers cnnquist,
> De dulce France, des humes de sun lign,
> De Carlemagne, sun seignor, kil nurrit;
> Ne poet muer n'en plurt e ne suspirt.
> Mais lui meisme ne volt mettre en ubli,
> Cleimet sa culpe, si priet Deu mercit:
> "Veire Patene, ki unkes ne mentis,
> Seint Lazaron de mort resurnexis
> E Daniel des leons guaresis,
> Guaris de mei l'anme 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;
Ensembl' od els sent Gabriel i vint.
L'anme 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."[12]

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*.[13] 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 Corinth. 11.26) *quotiescumque manducabitis panem hunc, et calicem bibetis, mortem Domini annuntiabitis, donce veniat.* Et ideo non competit eis occidere vel effundere sanguinem, sed magis esse paratos ad propriam sanguinis ef-

[11] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Garden City 1957) 96, 97, 104.

[12] Quoted in *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. T. A. Jenkins (Boston 1924) 173-174.

[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] Aquinas 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 militiae nostrae non carnalia sunt, sed potentia Dei" (2 Corinthians 10.4). In laisse 114, for example, the poet describes Turpin's charge (providing incidentally a miniature handbook of equitation), which results in the violent death of the pagan, Abisme:

> Turpins i fiert, ki nient ne l'esparignet,
> Enpres sun colp ne qui qu'un dener vaillet,
> Le cors li trenchet très l'un costet qu'a l'altre,
> Que mort l'abat en une voide place.
> Dient Franceis "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 Ingeld 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 proecces.
> Dist al paien: "Deus tut mal te tramette!
> Tel as ocis dunt al coer me regrette."
> Sun bon ceval i ad fait esdemettre,
> 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 conduct 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 tradition 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 beneissent,

[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.[16] 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 pius Aeneas tanta dabit indole dignum?
Arma, quibus 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 heofonhwealfe heardran drohtnoþ,
Þær ic dryntnes æ deman sceolde.
Sint me leoþu tolocen, lic sare gebrocen,
Banhus blodfag, benne weallaþ,
Seonodolg swatige. Hwæt, þu sigora weard,

[16] The comparison is developed by W. Tavernier, in *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* 36.76ff.

Dryhten hælend, on dæges tide
Mid Judeum geomor wurde
Þa þu of gealgan, god lifigende,
Fyrnweorca frea, to fæder cleopodest,
Cininga wuldor, on cwaede þus:
"Ic þe, fæder engla, frignan wille,
Lifes leohtfruma, hwæt forlætest þu me?"
Ond ic nu þry dagas þolian sceolde
Wælgrim witu. Bidde ic, weoroda god,
Þæt ic gast minne agifan mote,
Sawla symbelgifa, on þines sylfes hand.
Þu þæt gehete þurh þin halig word,
Þæt þu us twelfe trymman ongunne,
Þæt us heterofa hild ne gesceode,
Ne lices dæl lungre oþþeoded,
Ne synu ne ban on swaþe lagon,
Ne loc of heafde to forlore wurde,
Gif we þine lare læstan woldon.
Nu sint sionwe toslopen, is min swat adropen,
Licgaþ æfter lande locas todrifene,
Fex on foldan. Is me feorhgedal
Leofre mycle þonne þeos lifcearo.[17]

Andreas's suffering, as martyr and spiritual *heterofa*, 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

[17] *The Vercelli Book*, ed. G. P. Krapp (New York 1961) 42.

> 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.[18]

Passages with rich, vaguely archetypal elements such as the one Father McNamee is talking about lend themselves fairly easily to patristic exegisis, but the results of such exegisis 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 *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):

> Par Eneas puis droitement
> Noter le piteuz Rambeour,
> Le debonaire Sauveour.
> Le fil Dieu, qui deigne[r] venir
> Des cieulz en terre, et devenir
> Vrais homs, e enfers visiter,
> Pour ses amis d'enfer giter. (14.9)[19]

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

> Orpheus denote à delivre
> Jhesu Christ, parole devine,
> Le douctour de bone doctrine
> Qui par sa predicacion
> Avoit de mainte nacion
> La gent atraite et convertie. (11.1)

The *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-

[18] M. B. McNamee, "*Beowulf*—an Allegory of Salvation?" ed. Nicholson (n. 1 above) 341. For another extravagantly patristic exegesis see n. 44 below.

[19] References to *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.[20] 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*."[21] 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."[22]

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*."[23] 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."[24]

[20] F. A. Blackburn, "The Christian Coloring in the *Beowulf*," ed. Nicholson (n. 1 above) 1.

[21] Tolkien (n. 1 above) 78.

[22] *Ibid.* 70.

[23] R. E. Kaske, "*Sapientia et Fortitudo* as the Controlling Theme of *Beowulf*," ed. Nickolson (n. 1 above) 273.

[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):

þe þæt sweord ongan
æfter heaþoswate hildegicelum.
Wigbil wanian; þæt wæs wundra sum,
Þæt hit eal gemealt ise gelicost,
Þonne forstes bend Fæder onlæteþ,
Onwindeþ wælrapas, se geweald hafaþ
Sæla ond mæla; þæt is soþ Metod.[25]

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 worhte God, and dæghwamlice wyrcð, ac ða wundra sind swiðe awacode on manna gesihðe, forðon ðe hi sind swiðe gewunelice. Mare wundor is þæt God Aelmihtig ælce dæg getealne middangeard, and gewissað þa godan, þonne þæt wundor waere, þæt He ða gefylde fif ðusend manna mid fif hlafum.[26]

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:

[25] References to *Beowulf* are to Klaeber"s edition (New York 1950).
[26] *An Old English Anthology*, ed. W. F. Bolton (Evanston 1966) 75.

> 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 seolemnity 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.[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.[28] Alcuin sees a problem, where Gregory and the *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 *Beowulf* its unique quality. In the same speech, Hrothgar can say:

> Blaed is araered
> Geond widwegas, wine min Beowulf
> Ðin ofer þeoda gehwylce. Eal þu hit geþyldum healdest,
> Maegen mid modes snyttrum. (1703b-1706a)

and subsequently add:

> Nu is þines maegnes blaed
> Ane hwile; eft sona bið,
> Þaet þec adl oððe ecg eafoþes getwæfe,

[27] Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (Penguin 1960) 86-87.

[28] See Leo Spitzer, *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony* (Baltimore 1963) 32-33.

Oððe fyres feng, oððe flodes wylm,
Oððe gripe meces, oððe gares fliht,
Oððe atol yldo; oððe eagena bearhtm
Foriteð ond forsweorce; semninga bið
Þaet ðec, dryhtguma, deað oferswyðeð. (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 lobebaeren, von grozer arebeit,
Von frouden, 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 wîp. dar umbe muosen degene vil verliesen den lîp"—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 ritterscaft
Mit lobelîchen eren   unz an ir endes zît.
Si stûrben sît jaemerliche   von zweier edelen frouwen nît.

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 dô sagete   ir muoter Uotèn.
Sine kundes niht besceiden   baz der guoten:
"Der valke den du ziuhest,   das ist sin [e]del man.
In welle got behüeten,   du muost in sciere vloren hân."
"Waz saget ir mit von manne, viel liebiu muoter mîn?
Âne recken minne   sô wil ich immer sîn.
Sus scoen ich wil belîben   unz an mînen tôt,
Daz ich von mannes minne   sol gewinnen nimmer nôt."

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 *nôt* also echoes one of the central themes of the poem, the ineluctable workings of fate, the overwhelming force of Necessity. "*Nôt*" 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 *Nibelungennôt* has frequently been prefixed to it. In addition, one of the hypothetical sources of the *Nibelungelied* is a poem usually known as *Diu Nôt*.[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 nôt (stanza 1080)." Relentlessly, 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 êre   was dâ gelegen tôt.
Die liute heten alle   jâmer unde nôt.
Mit leide was verendet   des kuniges hôhgezît.
Als ie diu liebe leide   z'aller jungeste gît.
Ine kan iu niht beschieden,   waz sider dâ geschach:
Wan ritter under vrouwen   weinen man da sach,
Dar zuo die edeln knehte,   ir lieben friunde tôt.
Hie hât daz maere ein ende: daz ist der Nibelunge nôt.

[32] See Weber (n. 29 above) 245-249, for his excursus on *nôt*.

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, lûter une guot. . .
> Dâ der herre Sîfrit 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 wât.
> (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 audiences' 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 startingly 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 einer sprach dar inne: "wir müezen ligen tôt.
> Was hilfet uns das grüezen, daz uns der künec enbôt?
> Mir tuot von starker hitze der durst sô rehte wê,
> Des waen mîn leben schiere in disen sorgen zergê."
> Dô sprach von Tronege Hagene: "ir edeln ritter guot,
> Swen twinge durstes nôt, der trinke hie daz bluot.
> Daz ist in solher hitze noch bezzer danne wîn.
> Ez enmac an disen zîten et nû niht bezzer gesîn."
> Dô gie der recken einer da er einen tôten vant.
> Er kniete im zuo der wunden, den helm er ab gebant,
> Dô begonde er trinken daz vliezende bluot.
> Swie ungewon ers waere, ez dûhte in groezlîchen guot.
> "Nu lôn iu got, her Hagene", sprach der müede man,
> "Daz ich von iuwer lêre sô wol getrunken hân.
> Mir ist noch vil selten geschenket bezzer wîn.
> Lebe ich deheine wîle, ich sol iu immer waege 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 *minnecliche meide* into a Medea figure. Wealhtheow 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 *Nibelungelied* 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 gegenwartsnahe 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 be war, is ofte yleyed ful lowe.[35]

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

[33] Arthur Thomas Hatto, *The Nibelungenlied* (Baltimore 1965) 343.

[34] Weber (n. 29 above) 178.

[35] *Canterbury Tales* 7.2137-2138, ed. F. N. Robinson (Cambridge, Mass. 1957) 191.

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 Casibus* 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 iuch, muoter unde meit,
> Kunegin von himmelrich,
> Daz ir bedenket miniu leit![36]

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

> Die cristen dô 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 vertailet,
> Vil manige daz sâhen,
> Daz in die tievel nâmen,
> Si vuorten in in den berch ze Vulcân
> Daz gebôt in sancte Johannes der hailige man,
> Der brinnet er unz an dem jungisten tac,
> Daz im niemen gehelfen nemac.[37]

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

> "Und sint erstorben alle mîne man,
> Sô hât mîn got vergezzen, ich armer Dietrîch.
> Ich was ein künec hêre, vil gewaltic unde rîch."
> "Wie kinde ez sich gefüegen," sprach aber Dietrîch,
> "Daz si alle sint erstorben, die helde lobelîch,
> Von dem strîtmüeden, die doch heten nôt?
> Wan durch mîn ungelücke, in waere vremde noch der tôt. . .
> "Owê, lieber Wolfhart, sol ich dich hân verlorn,
> So mac mich balde riuwen daz ich ie wart geborn!

[36] George Zink, *Le Cycle de Dietrich* (Paris 1953) 112-113.
[37] *Kaiserchronik*, ed. Edward Schröder (Hanover 1892) 1.1.337.

Sigestap und Wolfwîn und ouch Wolfprant!
Wer sol mir danne helfen in der Amelunge lant?
Helpfrîch der vil küene, und ist mir der erslagen
Gêrbart und Wîchart, wie solde ich die verklagen?
Daz ist an mînen vreuden mir der leste tac.
Owê daz vor leide nieman sterben nemac!" (2319-2320, 2319-2323)

Like Andreas, Dietrich feels abandoned by God, like Charlemagne he articulates his grief in terms of *ubi sunt* rhetoric[38] (as he does in the passage from the *Battle of Ravenna* quoted above); in addition, he places himself in the *De casibus* tradition, wishes for death, like Job and Oedipus, and echoes the *Nibelungelied* 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 obwalten, dass die Dietrîch-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 Dîetrich von Bern zusammenwachsen sollten."[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:

Þá leituðu þeir Skarpheðins. Þar vísuðu heimamenn til, sem þeir Flosi hofðu vísuna heyrt kveðna, ok var þar ekjan fallin at gaflaðinu ok þaer maelti Hjalti, at til skyldi grafa. Sið an gerðu þeir svá ok fundu þar likama Skarpheðins, ok hafði hann staðit upp við gaflaðit, ok váru brunnir foetr af honum mjok svá neðan til knjá, en allt annat óbrunnit á honum. Hann hafði bitit á kampi sínum. Augu hans váru opin ok óþút in. Hann hafði rekit øxina í gaflaðit svá fast, at gengit hafði allt upp á mið jan fetann, ok var ekkidignuð. Síðan var hann ut borinn ok øxin; Hjalti tók upp øxina ok maelti: "Þetta er fágaett vápn, ok munu fáir bera mega." Kari maelti: "sé ek mann til, hverr bera skal øxina." "Hverr er sá?" segir Hjalti. "Þorgeirr skorargeirr," segir Kari, "er ek aetla ná mestan vera í þeiri aett." Þá var Skarpheðinn foerðr af klaeðum, því at þau

[38] See *Roland* 2402ff.
[39] Weber (n. 29 above) 169.

> varu ekki brunnin. Hann hafði lagit hendr sínar í kross ok á ofan ina hoegri, en tvá díla fundu þeir á honum, annan meðal herðanna, en annan á brjostinu, ok var hvárrtveggi brenndr í kross, ok aetluðu menn, at hann mundi sik sjálfr brennt hafa. Allir menn maeltu þat, at betra þoetti hjá Skarpheðni dauðum en aetluðu, því at engi maðr hraeddisk hann.[40]

Skarp-Hedin literally makes himself into a *figura* combining Christ and Ingeld, but in the light of Skarp-Hedin's past brutality, the *figura* seems grotesque. Of all the killers in the saga, Skarp-hedin seems the most cold-blooded, 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 *Njalssaga*. 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 Iceland, 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]

[40] *Brennu-Njals Saga*, ed. Einnar O. Sveinsenn (Reykjavik 1954) 343-344.

Then they looked for Sharp-Hedin. The servants showed them the place where Flosi 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. "Thorgeir Skorar-Geir," 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.

Njal's Saga, Trans. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Palsson (Penguin, 1960). Some of the delicate equivocation of "ok aetluu menn" is lost by translating "they came to the conclusion."

[41] Sveinsenn (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, "pais 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 kinghts rebukingly suggest a more fitting object:
> Be knyghtly 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 sweltes the swete kynge and in swoun fallis,
> Swafres vp swiftely, and swetly hym kysses,
> Till his burliche berde was blody beronnen,
> Alls he had bestes birtenede and broghte owt of life (3969-3972)

[42] Roger Sherman Loomis, *The Development of Arthurian Romance* (New York 1964).

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 deitate 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 Riwle*:

A leafdi wes mid hire fan biset al abuten, hire lond al destruet, ant heo al poure, inwið an eorðene castel. A mihti kinges luue wes þah biturnd upon hire, swa unimete swiðe þet he for wohlech sende hire his sonden. an efter oðer, ofte somet monie; sende hire beawbelez baðe feole ant feire, sucurs of liveneð. help of his hehe hird to halden hire castel. Hee underfeng al as on unrecheles, ant swa wes heardi-heortet þet hire luue ne mahte he neaver beo þe neorre. Hwet wult to mare? He com himseolf on ende; schawde 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 liue; wrahte feole wundres ant dude muchele meistries biuoren hire ehsihðe; schawde hire his mihte; talde hire of his kinedom; bead to makien hire cwen of al þet he ahte.

Al þis ne heold nawt. Nes þis hoker wunder? For heo nes neauer wurðe forte beon his þuften. Ah swa, þurh his deboneirte, luue hefde

[46] *Piers Plowman* C 20-24, ed. W. W. Skeat (Oxford 1886) 1.521, 523.

> ouercumen him þet he seide on ende: "Dame, þu art iweorret, ant þine van beoð se stronge þet tu ne maht nanesweis wiðute mi succurs edfleon hare honden, þet ha ne don þe to scheome deað efter al þi weane. Ich chulle, for þe luue of þe, neome þet feht upo me ant arudde þe of ham þe þi deað secheð. Ich wat þah to soðe þet Ich schal bituhen ham neomen deað es wunde; andt Ich hit wulle heorteliche, forte ofgan þin heorte. Nu þenne biseche Ich þe, for þe luue þet Ich cuðe þe, þet tu luuvie me, lanhure efter þe ilke dede dead hwen þu naldest lives." þes king dude al þus—arudde hire of all hire van, ant wes himseolf to wundre ituket ant islein on ende, þurh miracle aras þah from deaðe to liue. Nere þeos ilke leafdi of uueles cunnes 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 reoccurence 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]

[47] *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, ed. J. A. W. Bennett and G. V. Smithers (Oxford 1966) 239-240.

[48] Graham Hough, *A Preface to the Fairy Queen* (New York 1963) 165-166.

Department of English
Boston University
236 Bay State Road
Boston, Massachusetts 02215, U.S.A.